



Confédération des Organisations Familiales de l'Union européenne
Confederation of Family Organisations in the European Union

COFACE Response to the Green Paper on the European Workforce for Health

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Investing in a quality professional workforce for health and care

The Confederation of Family Organisations in the European Union (COFACE) welcomes the European Commission's initiative on the European workforce for health. Quality social and healthcare services are crucial elements of the European social model. A well trained and qualified workforce in sufficient number is instrumental in ensuring the quality of healthcare and long term care in the EU

Long-term care and health care services are key sectors of investment for Member States in the context of ageing of the population, but also in the context of the economic crisis as long-term care and health care services are sectors where new jobs are needed. Both the Commission and national governments should prioritise these sectors in their economic recovery plans and in their long-term strategies on ageing.

The Green Paper correctly points out the need to ensure better working conditions for health workers, and to increase staff motivation and moral. Jobs in the health and care sectors should be quality jobs, with decent pay, good working conditions, possibilities to reconcile family life, private life and professional life, and training opportunities. In respect with training, COFACE welcomes the special focus on the needs of people with disabilities, and on new technologies.

European social partners should engage in a dialogue on quality employment in the health and care sectors. The EU should pursue its work in favour of reconciliation of work life and family life: COFACE calls for a EU directive encompassing all types of reconciliation measures (including a leave to care for dependent relatives) and for EU targets for availability of quality long-term care (building up on the model of the Barcelona targets for childcare). COFACE agrees with the green paper on the enhanced use of EU structural funds for the training of the health and care workforce. Funding for the development and use of new technologies in the field of health and long term care should also be made more widely available, in extension of the programmes already implemented by DG RTD and DG INFSO.

Promoting knowledge of health determinants and preventive care

COFACE agrees that the public health workforce should be equipped to carry out health promotion and disease prevention activities. Better knowledge of health determinants, such as the role of a harmonious family life, and preventive care are essential to achieve a reduction of health inequalities¹.

The EU has an awareness raising role in this respect. The EU can also foster coordination of health care policies through the health and long-term care strand of the OMC on social protection and social inclusion.

A professional workforce for health and care respecting territorial cohesion

COFACE believes that the Green Paper fails to acknowledge sufficiently the negative effects of an increased mobility of health and care professionals within Member States and within the EU. The territorial distribution of health care is a real issue in terms of health inequalities, especially in rural areas.

There should be some measures to foster the settlement of health and care workers (doctors, nurses, ...) in deprived areas, and these measures could benefit more widely from EU structural funds.

Integrating family carers in the workforce debate

COFACE welcomes the acknowledgement of the role of family carers within the workforce for health in the introduction of the Green Paper (Graph 1 Scope of the Workforce for Health). However, the rest of the Green Paper completely fails to address the concerns of family carers. COFACE believes that the place of family carer within the health system should be recognised and as such taken into consideration in all health and care policies, including policies relating to the workforce. The Green Paper points to deinstitutionalisation as a possible area for action for the promotion of a sustainable health workforce: this move towards home-based or community-based care has to go hand in hand with greater support to family carers, as acknowledged by the Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2009.

There is a need both for alignment between family carers and the professional workforce, and for increased and better cooperation and coordination between them.

In particular, alignment is needed in terms of continuous training (including as regards the use of new technologies), periodical free medical check ups, psychological support, and right to respite, but also in terms of assessment of the quality of care.

Better articulation between professional services and family carers implies the development of flexible formal home care services, awareness raising of professionals on the role and concerns of family carers, better access to information for family carers, and exchange of experience and mutual learning between professional and family carers.

¹ COFACE Response to the consultation of the European Commission on EU action to reduce Health Inequalities : <http://coface-eu.org/en/upload/WG%20CONSO/WG3-2009-ConsultationHealthInequalitiesEN.pdf>

EU funding, and in particular the European Social Fund, should be used to develop such support programmes and services for family carers. Policies supporting family carers should also be further encouraged and disseminated in the framework of the OMC on social protection and social inclusion.

Increased official recognition of prior experience of family carers in their caring role would foster recruitment in the health and care sectors. Validation of non-formal learning should be further promoted in the EU in the field of health and care, using the European Qualifications Framework.

Finally, development of EU-wide comparable data on the health workforce should include a chapter on family carers, in order to better assess their importance and their needs and give clearer orientations to policy-makers.

For more on the issue of family carers, please refer yourself to COFACE-Handicap European Charter for Family Carers, which has also been endorsed by COFACE:

<http://www.coface-eu.org/en/basic435.html>

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