



## **IMO response to the European Commission Green Paper on the European Workforce for Health**

The Irish Medical Organisation welcomes the European Commission's Green Paper on the European Workforce for Health and recognises the importance of this work for future workforce planning in the development of a sustainable health workforce that can deliver quality healthcare for all Europeans.

The IMO also commends the European Commission for highlighting the importance of factors such as demographic shifts and continuing training and education, and in turn recommending actions to influence future workforce capacity. These issues have particular significance in the adaptability of the current European health workforce to one that is efficient and sustainable. The evolution of the health workforce is one of the most critical issues in health care provision in the modern era. The need for targeted investment, particularly in these economically challenging times, into health structures by each member state is essential to introduce measures facilitate change responding to pressures effecting the health workforce highlighted throughout the Green Paper.

However, the IMO also believes that there are other areas within the Green Paper that may need to be further developed or addressed in order to deliver a better health workforce for Europe.

### **4.1 Demography and the promotion of a sustainable health workforce**

The changing demographics of the health workforce require each member state to organise their health care systems to support their workforce and implement changes to assure its sustainability and effectiveness. The IMO acknowledges Article 152 of the EC Treaty, and that all member states are responsible for the organisation and delivery of health services and medical care and that the needs and challenges of individual member states are often unique and should therefore be handled independently. Action at an EU level on this issue could be one of determining principles around the provision of care and workforce arrangements which would provide a foundation for member states to develop appropriate operating frameworks or to assess existing structures.

The IMO also reinforces the view of the CPME in their response to the Green Paper regarding the attractiveness of the health care workforce. To ensure that people are attracted to the variety of health professions, an appropriate work life balance needs to be addressed and protected in the often very demanding health care professions. Further to the implementation of the European Working Time Directive, closer examination of current working conditions and innovations that could be woven into current health care systems should be undertaken as a solution to meet the challenges of a shrinking and ageing health workforce.

### **4.2 Public Health Capacity**



The IMO supports the identification of public health and its function throughout the EU as one of the key areas to improve the overall health of EU citizens. Identifying the shortfalls in the public health workforce may do much in working towards solutions for public health issues. The role of the public health professional, and their ability to work in the areas of health promotion and disease prevention are critical in planning for a sustainable workforce, and to prevent or reduce strain on the health care workforce. The role of public health professionals should be given more visibility, and like the Green Paper identifies, more work needs to be done to attract people into the various occupations within public health, to ensure a complete and capable network of public health workers in the EU.

#### **4.3 Training**

Education and Training should be seen as a future investment in the workforce, be it in pre or post qualifications, in order to deliver a quality workforce. The IMO supports the Green Paper recommendation for the development of a tool that would assist in the planning of future workforce capacity and training needs. This Observatory, if well developed, would provide for each member state, regardless of size, the ability to better assess their health workforce requirements and to allocate resources accordingly, and hopefully bridge the gap in health inequalities experienced throughout the EU. This in itself requires resources to ensure its effectiveness.

The Directive on the Recognition of Professional Qualifications (**2005-36-EC**) came into force in October 2007. It is a major disappointment that the opportunity to amend the text was not grasped to reflect the several recommendations relating to promoting high quality medical education and training as outlined in the Fourth Report of the statutory Advisory Committee on Medical Training (1997).

#### **4.4 Managing mobility of health workers within the EU and 4.5 Global Migration of Health Workers.**

The IMO commends the Commission on its recommendations to better manage the mobility of health workers in the EU, especially in calls for the retention of home trained health workers, be it through direct retention or through 'circular' movement throughout the EU. With better workforce planning by each member state and improved coordination between EU states on labour requirements, these combined would provide a better balance of health care workers within the EU.

Such issues are also evident in the global migration of workers, but have particular significance when discussing developing countries that do not have the benefits of belonging to the EU. The IMO fully supports measures to be developed that will guide ethical recruitment of health workers, along with the work of WHO in developing a global code of conduct for this process. Not only is this issue important to manage on a global and EU scale, but it is vital that individual member states take responsibility for their recruitment actions to ensure the sustainability of vulnerable health care systems.

#### **4.6 Data to support decision-making**



The IMO supports the Green Paper and its recommendations to create a common reporting tool to capture data on workforce indicators and movement. This information will assist in dealing with the workforce issues and planning as mentioned in previous sections.

#### **5 The impact of new technology: Improving the efficiency of the health workforce.**

While the IMO recognises the potential impact that new technology has at improving the efficiency of the health workforce, it should be reiterated that doctors should be constantly involved in the development and implementation of the technology to ensure its practical use. When developing such technologies, training in usage and the cost of hardware need to be identified and made available to countries throughout the EU, to ensure the equality in the provision of healthcare.

*The IMO supports many of the actions that are listed in the Green Paper that may improve the standards and sustainability of the health care workforce in Europe. However, resourcing and investing in the health care workforce is vital to ensure its efficiency and equality in standards, be it through European wide initiatives or member state responsibilities. Without such commitment, many of these areas will continue to disintegrate and the ability to adapt to such changes will be even further out of reach.*

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