



IOM International Organization for Migration
OIM Organisation Internationale pour les Migrations
IOM Internationale Organisatie voor Migratie

Comments on the Green Paper on the European Workforce for Health

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) welcomes the initiative of the European Commission to launch the Green Paper on the European Workforce for Health on 10 December 2008. Recognizing that global migration patterns and the mobility of health workers within the European Union significantly impact the workforce for health, IOM would like to submit the below comments with reference to issues raised in the document:

General Comments

Within the expressed aim of the Green Paper to increase the visibility of the issues facing the EU health workforce and to provide a basis for areas of EU action, IOM supports greater emphasis on the rights of health workers. While reference is included to the fundamental right of mobility and recognition of professional qualifications for EU citizens in Section 4.4, IOM considers it important that the EU's human rights approach is more fully integrated into the remaining sections.

IOM recalls the principles of the Common Immigration Policy for Europe, in which integration is identified as the key to successful immigration. In this regard, IOM would propose that reference be made in the Green Paper to this Communication's aim of supporting policy that ensures a social ladder for all workers in the EU, guarantees fundamental social rights and favours good labour standards and social cohesion. The importance of non-discriminatory and effective access of immigrants to health care and social protection should further be highlighted.

4.3 Training

IOM welcomes the inclusion of training capacity within the possible areas for EU action. With regard to the assessment of training needs, IOM believes that given the diversity and changing demography of the EU population that the strengthening of intercultural training should be prioritized.

In support of the concept of circular movement and migration, IOM considers that access to national-level training should be offered to other EU nationals and third-country nationals.

4.4 Managing Mobility of Health Workers within the EU

IOM supports the Green Paper's promotion of the circular movement of staff to take advantage of any surpluses of health workers within the EU and foster skill development. Cross-border agreements and an EU mechanism (such as the proposed Observatory) could further contribute significantly to the planning and monitoring of such actions.

4.5 Global Migration of Health Workers

International labour migration is a transnational phenomenon and therefore cannot be effectively managed or addressed solely at a national or regional level, and also needs to be addressed at bilateral and international levels. IOM, therefore, believes that potential EU actions to regulate the international migration of health workers should be considered within the wider context of development. Steps such as linking the support of health systems to strategies encouraging the retention of health professionals are potential areas for joint action.

IOM welcomes the commitment of the EU to develop a Code of Conduct for the ethical recruitment of health workers from non-EU countries and the collaboration with the WHO on the global code of practice. As previously indicated in the IOM comments to the WHO consultation on the draft code, IOM proposes increased emphasis on the interests of source countries and attention to the need for the development and implementation of human resources for health policies that take into consideration the global code of practice.

IOM notes that any policy aiming at the sound management of health workers should be consistent and coherent with the EU external and internal policy and, in particular, with the EU development policy as spelled out by the Policy Coherence for Development as well as the Renewed Lisbon Strategy. Within this context, IOM considers that circular migration can contribute positively to the EU health workforce policy, when taking into account the interests and needs of countries of origin and destinations as well as of migrants themselves. Multilateral agreements and mechanisms monitoring the effectiveness of circular migration of health professionals should further be established.

IOM supports the foreseen provision in the Blue Card scheme to ensure that legally residing professionals from third countries should be given the possibility to return to their countries of origin, or to other developing countries, and to work there for a certain period. IOM's Migration for Development in Africa (MIDA) Programme is one such structure that facilitates circulation of health professionals.

As a complement to EU actions on ethical recruitment and circular migration, IOM considers it important to address in the Green Paper the problem of de-skilling of migrant health workers within the European Union. Recognition of qualifications and ensuring employment commensurate to qualifications contributes to the reduction of "brain waste".

IOM recalls the principle of "Solidarity and Immigration: Partnership with third countries" in the Common Immigration Policy for Europe and further suggests that the Green Paper refer to the importance of the principle of equal treatment and provisions on social security coordination between the EU, its Member States and third countries.

4.6 Data Collection

IOM welcomes the Green Paper proposals to standardize health workforce indicators and set up monitoring systems of flows of health workers. IOM acknowledges the significant challenges in data comparability and considers it important to support reliable data collection on flows, incentive schemes and de-skilling effects both within the EU and in source and destination third countries. IOM's partnership with WIAD in the Mobility of Health Professionals Project, funded by DG Research, aims to contribute to this evidence base on health worker movements into, within and out of the European Union.

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