

**Opening remarks by Deputy Director General Ms Marjeta Jager,
Directorate International Cooperation and Development (DG
DEVCO) at the workshop: "Working for a healthier future. Promoting
sustainable employment in the health sector"**

01 April, 2019, from 9:30 to 9:40 a.m.

Hotel Bloom, Rue Royale 250, 1210 Brussels

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, distinguished speakers, dear colleagues.

It is a pleasure to welcome you today on our technical workshop devoted to the future of work in the health sector. We want to discuss today on how to promote sustainable employment in the health sector in developing countries.

I am particularly grateful to you Marisol [Touraine, a former French Minister for Social Affairs, Health and Women's Rights] who agreed to moderate this workshop which comes at the right time.

We also warmly welcome speakers from other organizations, including the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the World Health Organization (WHO), the Science Po School of Public Affairs and the Institute for Interdisciplinary Innovation in Healthcare.

This year, as you all know, the International Labour Organisation is celebrating its centenary under the theme of the future of work. We believe that the world of work has the capacity to eliminate poverty, to provide decent work and living standards universally, and to extend social protection to all.

The European Union shares these values of social justice and promotes them not only in Member States through its social market economy model, but also through its development cooperation policy with its partners. This workshop is a contribution to the celebration of the 100th birthday of the International Labour Organisation with a special focus on a sector that is key to achieve the 2030 Agenda, the health sector.

Please let me say few words on the three important elements that motivated us to organise this workshop: I mean 1) employment, 2) the future of work and 3) the health sector.

Elements 1) Employment and 2) Future of work

Let me begin with employment and future of work

Economic growth and employment are important priorities of the EU development cooperation. However, they may not be enough as such. We need to achieve sustainable inclusive growth and to create decent jobs. This means jobs in which labour rights are respected, and that give access to social protection and social dialogue.

Fostering decent work is one of the key EU objectives explicitly formulated in the 2017 EU New Consensus on Development, which is our response to the United Nations 2030 Agenda.

The New Consensus embeds employment into a broader context of intervention around 5 key themes: people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership. It reflects our conviction that prosperity, eradication of poverty and higher living standards directly depend on decent jobs creation.

EU initiatives in the field of development cooperation reflect this approach. The European External Investment Plan, and the Africa – Europe Alliance for Sustainable Investment and Jobs, keep job creation as a major objective of investments.

For example, the EU External Investment Plan and its Investment Programmes dedicated to small and medium-sized enterprises shall create 3.2 million jobs in Africa. They will also contribute to promote decent jobs and the empowerment of women and young people. The EU is also supporting the decent work agenda in Global value chains.

However, the nature of work is changing. Demographic change, globalisation and technological progress are affecting job quantity and quality. The European Union with its partners, in the G7 and G20, and with the World Bank, the OECD and the International Labour Organization, nurtures a cross-sectoral reflexion on potential drivers for this change.

We need therefore to foresee the impact of the changing nature of work and adapt our policies accordingly to take advantage of opportunities and prevent potential drawbacks.

Element 3) – the Health sector

Today's meeting is part of this reflexion. We invited you to focus on one specific sector that according to the International Labour Organisation belongs to one of the leading areas of employment growth – the health sector. The same conviction led the World Health Organisation to launch the Five-Year Action Plan for Health Employment and Inclusive Economic Growth.

Healthy lives and well-being for all are not only sustainable development goals. Health is also an economy sector with

encouraging perspectives for generating decent skilled jobs, especially for women and young people.

The current estimated shortage of professionals in the health sector primarily in low- and middle-income countries amounts to 18 million health workers, according to the OECD's Skills for Job database.

What does this shortfall mean in practice? It means that a country such as Belgium provides approximately 1100 nurses per 100.000 inhabitants, whereas for that same population, Burkina Faso, can only come up with 55 nurses, which is clearly too little to ensure sustainable health services to reach universal health coverage.

This is why the EU has committed itself and the Member States in the New Consensus on Development to support developing countries in health workforce training, recruitment, deployment and continuous professional development.

We will continue to promote investment in and empowerment of frontline healthcare and social workers, who play a critical role in ensuring coverage of healthcare services in remote, poor, underserved and conflict areas.

To achieve this goal, the European Union entered into a long standing cooperation in 2011 with the World Health Organization through the EU-WHO Universal Health Coverage Partnership. Through the UHC Partnership, the EU supports the WHO to strengthen health systems, including the health workforce in currently 40 countries. And, we are preparing a follow up programme with the WHO for 118 million EUR to continue our support to these 40 countries and in addition in all

ACP countries, with a particular focus on the strengthening of human resources for health.

Therefore, there are definitely needs and opportunities for job creation to grasp, but we need to better understand the current changes in the world of work, in order to shape right policy answers, and ensure that the demand for a quality health workforce will be met.

All countries, in and outside the EU, face similar challenges in terms of health workforce and the sustainability of their health systems. Many face health workforce shortages, primarily driven by demographic changes in the population, an increasing demand for healthcare, a workforce exposed to recruitment and retention problems.

In addition, a lot of countries are confronted to the migration of young health professionals, but also to imbalances in the geographical distribution of health workers in rural and remote areas.

Last but not least, there are often skills mismatches within the workforce, also in view of the new care requirements due to demographic changes.

Conclusion

This meeting is the occasion to progress on all these fronts. We propose to structure the discussion around three topics.

The first topic relates to the opportunity of creating decent jobs requiring skilled workforce.

The second topic refers to how demographic evolution could affect health sector perspectives.

The third topic invites to analyse contribution of innovations – both technological and social – to boost the potential of health sector for jobs and especially decent jobs creation.

I am sure that many other important aspects will arise during the panel discussions for the benefit of our reflexion. They could refer to the issue of financing the health services, providing specific health services for people with disabilities or use health services for local development.

I wish you all success in your deliberations today and look forward to receiving meaningful conclusions that will help us to contribute to the current policy debates, and provide us with concrete ideas towards the creation of more and better jobs in the health sector.

Thank you for your attention!