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WHO/Europe Report: Health and care workforce in Europe: time to act

10 November 2022

Forty per cent of medical doctors are close to retirement age in one third of countries in Europe and central Asia, finds new WHO/Europe report

All countries of the WHO European Region – encompassing 53 Member States across Europe and central Asia – currently face severe challenges related to the health and care workforce, according to a recent report by WHO/Europe. An ageing workforce is chief among them. The analysis finds that 13 of the 44 countries that reported data on this issue have a workforce in which 40% of medical doctors are already aged 55 years or older.

An ageing health and care workforce was a serious problem before the COVID-19 pandemic, but is even more concerning now, with severe burnout and demographic factors contributing to an ever-shrinking labour force. Adequately replacing retiring doctors and other health and care workers will be a significant policy concern for governments and health authorities in the coming years. WHO/Europe is urging countries to act now to train, recruit and retain the next generation of health and care workers.

Another key finding of the report is the poor mental health of this workforce in the Region. Long working hours, inadequate professional support, serious staff shortages, and high COVID-19 infection and death rates among frontline workers – especially during the pandemic's early stages – have left a mark.

“All of these threats represent a ticking time bomb which, if not addressed, is likely to lead to poor health outcomes across the board, long waiting times for treatment, many preventable deaths, and potentially even health system collapse,” said WHO Regional Director for Europe, Dr Hans Henri P. Kluge. “The time to act on health and care workforce shortages is now.”

In addition to comprehensive data on all 53 countries in the WHO European Region, the report offers 10 recommendations for governments to take forward to address these challenges.

“Countries will need to rethink how they support and manage their health workforce. They will need to design strategies that reflect their own contexts and needs, because there is no one-size-fits-all approach,” said Dr Natasha Azzopardi-Muscat, Director of the Division of Country Health Policies and Systems at WHO/Europe.

“The Region is at a critical juncture: strategic planning and smart investment are crucial next steps to make sure our health workers have the tools and support they need to care for themselves and their patients. Society will pay a heavy price if we fail to rise to this challenge. This new report and the data it includes about each of our Member States offer solutions and opportunities we shouldn’t miss.”

The report will be presented at a lunch symposium ‘Health and care workforce in Europe: Time to act’. Thursday 10 November, 12:45 - 13:45 CET, room Beta 1. Read more:

<https://ephconference.eu/2022-lunch-symposiums-programme-517>

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More information:

- Full Report: [Health and care workforce in Europe: time to act](#)
- Website of WHO Regional Office for Europe: <https://www.who.int/>
- Press Registration: <https://ephconference.eu/press-information-128>

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