

# The health workforce (HWF) in EU: main challenges and possible solutions

EESC public hearing on  
Health Workforce and Care Strategy for the future of  
Europe

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# NUMBERS

## What's the state of art of the HWF in EU

Figure 7.11. Practising doctors per 1 000 population (2018, nearest year)

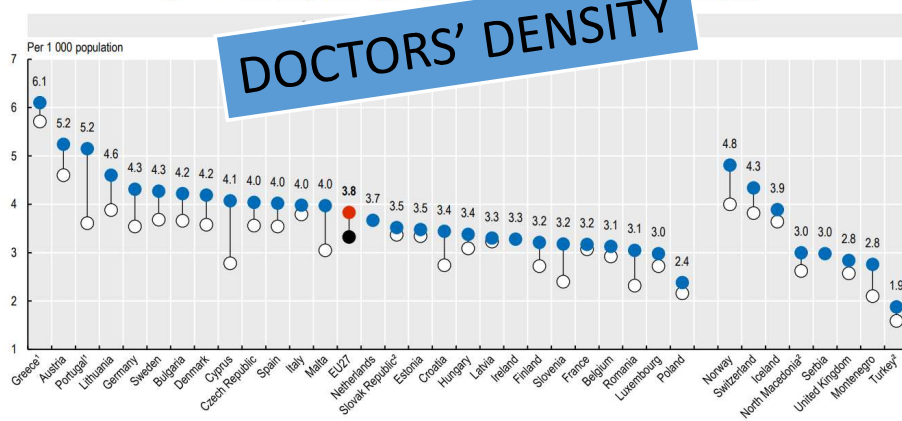
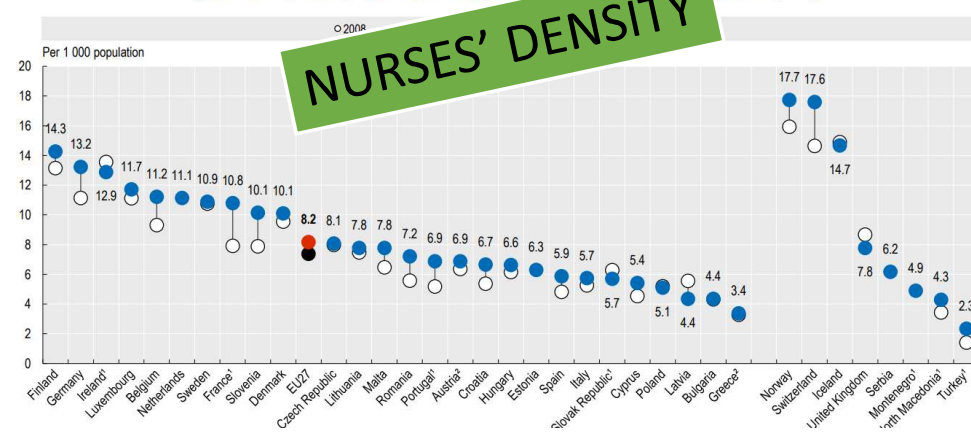


Figure 7.18. Practising nurses per 1 000 population (2018, nearest year)



### NURSES-DOCTORS' MIX



### Main evidences from the numbers:

- Great discrepancies among countries, especially for nurses
- The EU average is not a standard ("below/above the average" does not mean "HWF shortage/surplus")
- Anyway for some countries the reported numbers most probably disclose lack of HWF / inappropriate use of HWF

Reporting  
from the  
SEPEN HWF  
network of  
experts

## What's the state of art of the HWF in EU

- Managing shortages and maldistribution of skills is a high priority in many Member States.
- A majority of countries report on shortages of general practitioners and of some medical specialists, mainly in remote and rural areas, as well as a persistent shortage of nurses.
- Imbalances in geographical distribution or skill-mix.
- In some EU countries HWF mobility outflows are an obstacle for the UHC.
- In some EU countries HWF mobility inflows are a solution to guarantee the UHC.



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## (some of the) HWF challenges

- Ageing workforce in an ageing population
- Change / increasing of the demand.
- HWF mobility.
- Emergencies (as Covid-19 pandemic).
- Financial constraints.
- Lack of attractiveness of the HWF labor market
- Ineffective and unfit-for-purpose skill-mix

## (some of the) possible solutions

- To improve HWF working conditions and investing in retention policies
- To shift to prevention and primary care and adapt the skill-mix accordingly, eventually investing in new professions, patient empowerment and self-care management and telemedicine.
- To analyse the HWF mobility factors
- To develop a more flexible HWF through a different education and training paradigm and exploiting the task shifting potentialities.
- To invest in the HWF because it guarantee a healthy and productive population.
- To improve job opportunities and career paths for the health professionals
- To implement and improve **HWF planning systems** in all the EU countries

# HWF planning: technical and political activity useful to guarantee the UHC for the future population

## State of art of HWF planning in EU:

- 75% of EU Member States have HWF planning systems in place.
- HWF planning objectives and systems tend to differ significantly in the EU (including the time horizon of forecasting).
- The focus is on medical professionals (GPs, medical specialists), but some countries are enlarging the focus on other health professions (dentists, nurses, midwives, pharmacists).
- A few countries expanded their focus to include all health professions in the planning models.
- HWF planning is mostly a separate planning system, but there is a trend to shift towards a more comprehensive and integrated planning (regional-national, mono-multiprofessional, health-social, etc.).

# **HWF planning: technical and political activity useful to guarantee the UHC for the future population**

## **HWF planning challenges in EU (some of the):**

- To better understand the current HWF stock (not only headcount, but also productivity and skills) and its geographical distribution.
- To better understand the current demand and the current population needs (epidemiology).
- To better estimate in the long period the changes on the population needs.
- To move to a multi-professional and integrated planning system instead of a mono-professional and sectoral system.
- To improve the link between the planning system' evidence/results and the policy actions / policy decision making system.

# Some of the EU projects on HWF planning



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## EU Joint Action on Health Workforce Planning and Forecasting

- 2013-2016
- Agenas as WP5 leader, delivered a HWF planning minimum data set, an Handbook on planning and forecasting methods, implementing best practices in Portugal and Italy



## EU SEPEN joint tender

- 2017-2020
- Agenas as WP4 leader, delivered tailored advice and guidance to EU MSs to improve their HWF planning capacities



## OASES: promoting evidence based reforms on medical deserts

- 2021-2024
- Agenas as WP1 leader (coordinator)



## TASHI: Empowering EU health policies on Task Shifting

- 2021-2024
- Agenas as WP5 leader, managing 7 pilots studies in 5 EU countries on HWF task shifting



## EU Joint Action **HEROES**

*Health Workforce to  
meet Health  
challenges*



For more information please visit [www.healthworkforce.eu](http://www.healthworkforce.eu)