



Joint Action Health Workforce  
Planning and Forecasting

[www.healthworkforce.eu](http://www.healthworkforce.eu)

# Joint Action

# Health Workforce

Joint Action Health Workforce Planning and Forecasting

## LAYMEN TECHNICAL REPORT



Funded by  
the Health Programme  
of the European Union

# PLANNING FOR TOMORROW'S HEALTH WORKFORCE IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

The healthcare sector is critical for the health and wellbeing of our populations and it is also one of the most significant sectors in the EU economy. It represents approximately 10% of GDP overall and employs one in every ten workers. But the health sector is facing many challenges due an ageing population and workforce, changing patient expectations as well as adapting to and utilising technological innovations.

## ■ What do we mean by the “health workforce”?

The health workforce consists of all individuals who are engaged in actions whose primary intent is to promote health and prevent illness, improve and maintain physical and mental health as well as cure sickness and provide assistance to palliative patients. This includes professions, such as doctors, nurses, midwives, pharmacists, dentists and many others.

## ■ The importance of investing in future health workers

Health workers are the core of health systems; without health workers there is no health care service delivery. Investment in our health workforce is one of the best buys in public health and our collective good. Evidence is starting to emerge on the broader socio-economic impact of investment in health workforce in terms of improving synergies with education, facilitating decent employment in the formal sector and fuelling economic growth. (WHO, A global strategy on human resources for health 2015).

Our health systems need the right numbers of workers, with the right skills and in the right places. Health workforce planning helps achieve this by looking at how the future may unfold and what workforces we need.

European collaboration allows to identify these challenges, through the sharing of expertise and knowledge.

## ■ The role of workforce planning in the healthcare system

Workforce planning is an essential process to solve and prevent costly disparities in health and care workforce capacity and capability. Effective workforce planning is a critical part of the management process which strives to analyse the current situation and to anticipate the future one for finding a good match between actual workforce and the population's needs.

A lack of precision in planning the health workforce threatens the effectiveness of a country's health system and can lead to too few health workers available to deliver effective health and care services. Furthermore it can result in an imbalanced health and care workforce or in risk of oversupply leading to an inefficient, costly and ineffective health system.

# JOINT ACTION HEALTH WORKFORCE PLANNING & FORECASTING CONTRIBUTION AND MAIN FINDINGS

## ■ What is the objective of the Joint Action and how does it relate to the health workforce planning?

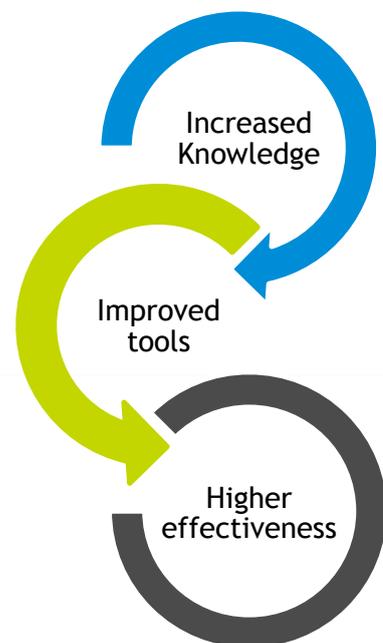
The Joint Action on Health Workforce Planning and Forecasting (2013-2016), co-funded by the EU Health Programme, and coordinated by the Belgian Federal Public Service of Health, aims at improving the health workforce planning and forecasting in European countries. Bringing together over 90 partners, it provides a platform for collaboration and exchange between European countries to help them improve and implement health workforce planning systems with a special focus on tracking mobility (movement of health workforce) flows. The migration of health professionals, in fact, is affecting access to health care in rural and remote areas.

The Joint Action partners have shared lessons learnt, disseminated good experiences and knowledge on improving data collection, putting planning methods in place to be able to plan the future health workforce.

## ■ What does one need for implementing or improving planning of the health workforce?

The Joint Action helped countries to understand opportunities and challenges of their future health workforce by:

- summarising the planning methods used across EU and testing best practices within selected member states;
- analysing the essential data needed for planning health workforce and enable international comparisons;
- looking at common future trends applying to the health workforce labor market,
- proposing indicators to measure imbalances and mobility flow, while initiating a dialogue on ethical recruitment.



## CORRECT AND TIMELY DATA

### ■ What did Joint Action do in the field of health work force data?

One of the cornerstones of a quality health workforce planning system is available and comprehensive data. In order to know how many health workers a country will need in the future, it is essential to know how many are currently active.

Based on the research, evidence and the experiences of project partners, the Joint Action discussed a minimum data set. This proposed 'Data Set' is the minimum of parameters and data necessary to start or continue the planning of health workforce. The document is available at: <http://healthworkforce.eu/work-package-5/>.

The Joint Action contributed to the analysis of the available health workforce planning data within the Member States participating in the project. Recommendations were formulated to help countries solve difficulties concerning the reporting to international data collections. This also enables the comparison of data across EU countries.

### ■ Why is correct and timely data important?



Data on cross-border mobility of health workforce is especially important, as such mobility can lead to shortage or surplus of health workforce. If no data is available on these movements, planning at country level is very difficult. The project also proposed indicators to improve the measurement of inflow and outflow of professionals, and advised countries to share their data with each other on practicing foreign workforce since such inflow data provide much more accurate results than outflow data. Collecting the right data will help EU countries and regions supported by international organisations, and also professional organisations feed the planning models at the first place. Furthermore, this will enable them to run an analysis of health workforce and projections for the future health care needs, e.g. how the changing health care will impact jobs, whom they hire, and how employees do their jobs or deliver patient care.

## PLANNING METHODS IN PLACE

### ■ What did Joint Action do to improve planning?

Having a planning system in place can support countries in improving the sustainability of their health workforce. For this purpose, the Joint Action gathered relevant existing literature, surveys, reports and best practices on planning methodologies from selected European countries. The features and the crucial parameters of those planning methodologies were analysed and described using questionnaires, interviews and workshops, and involving stakeholders, authorities and experts participating in the project.

### ■ Our Handbook of Health Workforce Planning in use

Guidelines and recommendations were formulated and listed for countries who would like to implement a health workforce planning system or improve the system already in place. Results and findings are included in the '[Handbook of Health Workforce Planning Methodologies across EU countries](#)'.

The Joint Action's proposal on how to build or improve planning methodologies is completed and integrated through guidelines on methods how to gather qualitative information and also through an evaluation toolkit for the assessment of the system planning capacity. The toolkit helps planners to identify weak points and addresses the specific improvements.

### ■ Where and how did we pilot tested our results?

Finally, the Joint Action tested this knowledge in practice by conducting three pilot projects in Italy, Portugal and Belgium, along with two feasibility studies, one **in Germany** and the other **in Romania together with Moldova**. In particular, the three pilot projects worked on improving the national planning system.

**In Italy**, thanks to the pilot project, there is now a new planning method for dentists, doctors, midwives, nurses and pharmacists, whereby it is possible to establish the yearly appropriate admission number of students to medical universities on the basis of 25-years' forecasts.

**In Portugal**, the pilot project improved the quality of their forecasts and now there are future projections of the NHS health workforce and scenario which will be useful to set diverse policy actions. This project goes beyond the Joint Action and Portugal aims at expanding their planning system for dentist and pharmacist in the near future.

**In Belgium**, the pilot project gave the opportunity to experiment new techniques to gather useful information about future trends affecting the general practitioners' workforce, thus improving the quality of the planning outputs.

All the knowledge and practical experience of this research and findings are gathered on 'The Future Health Workforce' [web portal](#) and Joint Action [website](#).

## WHAT SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES DO WE NEED IN THE FUTURE?

### ■ The importance of the driving forces for the future

The Joint Action has carried out research into the driving forces influencing the future skills and competences of the health workforce in the European Union out to the year 2035.

To better understand the future skills and competences required from the health workforce, we need to take into account the driving forces for the future that will shape our health systems and our workforce. Examples include an ageing population and workforce, patient empowerment, new discoveries and level of technology adoption, changes to health care funding and the changing the roles of health professionals.

### ■ What skills and competencies do we need for future?

These driving forces cause change over time and can radically alter what skills and competences our workforces need for the future, such as increases in prevention skills, technology use as part of care delivery, multidisciplinary working, coaching and enabling patients as they increasingly take control of their own care. In order to ensure better planning and preparedness, countries should be aware of these driving forces and the implications for their health systems and workforce.

As a next step, to ensure our workforces have the appropriate skills and competences to address future patient needs, these driving forces and their potential effects should be taken into account by using the learning from the Joint Action and recommended planning methodologies and approaches to improve.



## WHAT DO WE DO TO MAKE OUR RESULTS SUSTAINED?

### ■ Network of experts

The Joint Action prepared a platform of experts to foster further collaboration and exchange of knowledge, experience, exchange and good practices among Member States and various stakeholders, international organizations and academia in the field of health workforce. This network of experts was developed during the runtime of the Joint Action and will continue to exist afterwards. In the development phase, a list of experts was developed, gathering experts with different levels of competences in data and modelling; healthcare system development; policy making; education and training, and labour market and employment. The list has been drawn from well-known experts in the field, participants in meetings and events organized within the Joint Action as well as representatives of stakeholders and partners of the project.

### ■ Sustainability business plan

The Joint Action has produced a 'Sustainability Business Plan' listing a range of future projects and other collaboration options - at the EU, national and regional levels - through which policy makers, technical experts and other relevant stakeholders can further improve their health workforce planning systems. Moreover, suggestions are provided on how to integrate the Joint Action results in other related international and national projects and initiatives.

### ■ Policy and technical recommendations

The project has developed a set of recommendations available at <http://healthworkforce.eu/work-package-7/> for improving various aspects of health workforce with regards to data collection, planning method, estimating the future, tackling mobility of health workforce, education and training, including the future generations of health professionals. The recommendations provide the framework for strategic directions as well as operational action to take in order to build a healthy national planning system. The recommendations are targeted at various actors at international, EU, national, regional and professional organization level. All these have a role to play. While the Joint Action, through its Network of Experts, will support the implementation of these recommendations, it also calls upon all relevant actors to take up their part of the task to further improve health workforce planning and forecasting.



# LEARN MORE ABOUT US

If you are interested in more specific information on what we have done, take a look at our Final Guide available on our website under Results/ Final Guide that includes Information sheets tackling various topics of health workforce management and planning aspects. If you are interested in the project's results, please visit our website [www.healthworkforce.eu](http://www.healthworkforce.eu).



## CONTACT INFORMATION

- Michel Van Hoegaerden, programme manager
- Tina Jacob, project manager
- Joint Action Health Workforce Planning and Forecasting on behalf of FPS Public Health, Food Chain Safety and Environment Belgium  
[EUHWForce@health.belgium.be](mailto:EUHWForce@health.belgium.be)

[www.healthworkforce.eu](http://www.healthworkforce.eu)