



## SUPPORT FOR THE HEALTH WORKFORCE PLANNING AND FORECASTING EXPERT NETWORK

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## EU Health Workforce Network Update

10th final edition

### Latest news from the “EU Health Workforce Network Update”



#### **Farewell message**

Closure. If we check this word in the dictionary we find different interpretations of it. A process of closing something or a procedure for ending. Let us use the third interpretation, which is a sense of conclusion at the end of a work. Now this is the time to gather together all the experiences, evidence, expertise and knowledge, data and methods, practices and tools that were covered or mentioned in the last three years.

SEPEN managed to create an active community and a vivid dialogue in health workforce planning and policy, therefore with the support of all experts we can conclude SEPEN has contributed and added value to the health workforce planning and policy

field. When we look back to the last decade, we can see that the European Union dedicated attention to health workforce development, and all EU Member States were supported to participate in several activities in various levels. SEPEN also aimed to maintain and sustain keeping HWF planning on the agenda and address essential issues for a widespread pool of stakeholders. Let us see some examples:

- Some of you helped us to find the right HWF experts in different countries and identify the important knowledge hubs and relevant networks to increase the accumulating expertise of HWF planning.
- Some of you attended plenty of SEPEN online webinars on the EU Health Policy Platform, and expressed interest or opinions in different topics.
- Some of you showed the enthusiasm towards the SEPEN mapping study and highly contributed to producing the latest overview and evidence on health workforce planning and policies in the EU.
- Some of you travelled to the face-to-face SEPEN workshops in Belgium and/or Hungary, and could exchange views in person regarding HWF skill needs, HWF planning and mobility data requirements.
- Some of you explored the online conversations at our final online workshop in the topic of enhancement of digital health in HWF planning.
- Some of you were eager to execute actions and implement HWF planning and policy development at national level, so we provided a channel to foster tailored guidance in different Member States.
- And finally, some of you were delighted to take part in knowledge sharing and writing pieces of news or guest articles to SEPEN newsletters and the [healthworkforce.eu](https://healthworkforce.eu) website.

It is our turn now to show appreciation and thank you for these many activities and your invaluable and fruitful contribution, that has been achieved by the SEPEN network. Without you the field of HWF planning and policy could have not been advanced this much.

As a goodbye gift, SEPEN prepared you a brief summary video of the SEPEN Closing event: [HERE](#)

On behalf of the SEPEN team, I do hope you can utilise the conclusions of the last three years in your own work and open new chapters for HWF development. Finally, I do wish to see you all and continue the dialogue on HWF planning and policy in the future, as we have more things to do!

Eszter Kovacs from Semmelweis University

## **Overview of the achievements of the SEPEN joint tender (2017-2020)**

### **The European Network of Health Workforce (HWF) experts**

The aim of WP1 of the joint tender ‘Support for the Health Workforce Planning and Forecasting Expert Network’ (SEPEN) was “to design, create and put in place an effective mechanism to coordinate and manage the sharing of knowledge and ideas across all dimensions of health workforce planning and policy among the Network members and to stimulate collaborative linkages to facilitate knowledge uptake in EU countries.”

It can be concluded, that 38 months after the launch of the tender, this objective has been successfully achieved.

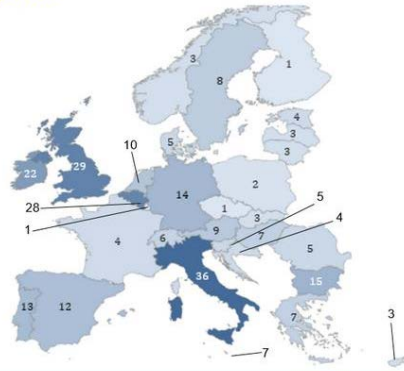
Today, the SEPEN expert network is composed of



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## The expert network

▪ Today 384 experts



close to four hundred experts from all EU Member States and the United Kingdom, representatives from 30 non-EU countries, 39 representatives from European and 12 from international organisations. Currently the SEPEN network members represent a great variety of expertise, ranging from health policy to health professional education and data analysis, comprising

representatives of doctors, nurses, dentists, pharmacists, midwives, allied health professionals, and patients. The expert network therefore provides a pool of expertise, especially with the involvement of the 43 senior experts who have been sharing their knowledge throughout the tender activities, including webinars, workshops, and national exchanges.

To ensure the active and interconnected nature of the SEPEN expert network communication was a key element. 11 webinars were organised during the three-year period to provide opportunities for discussions on issues as diverse as planning baselines, interprofessional education, and health workforce planning in international politics. Possibilities also emerged to focus on the impact of recent events affecting HWF, including Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic. Meanwhile, experts also had the opportunity to stay up-to-date about relevant events via the dedicated SEPEN online forum on the European Commission's European Health Policy Platform. This was updated with regular posts and publications to ensure SEPEN expert network members' had constant input to their work.

To build on this achievement and continue the fruitful dialogue, we conclude with the following recommendations:

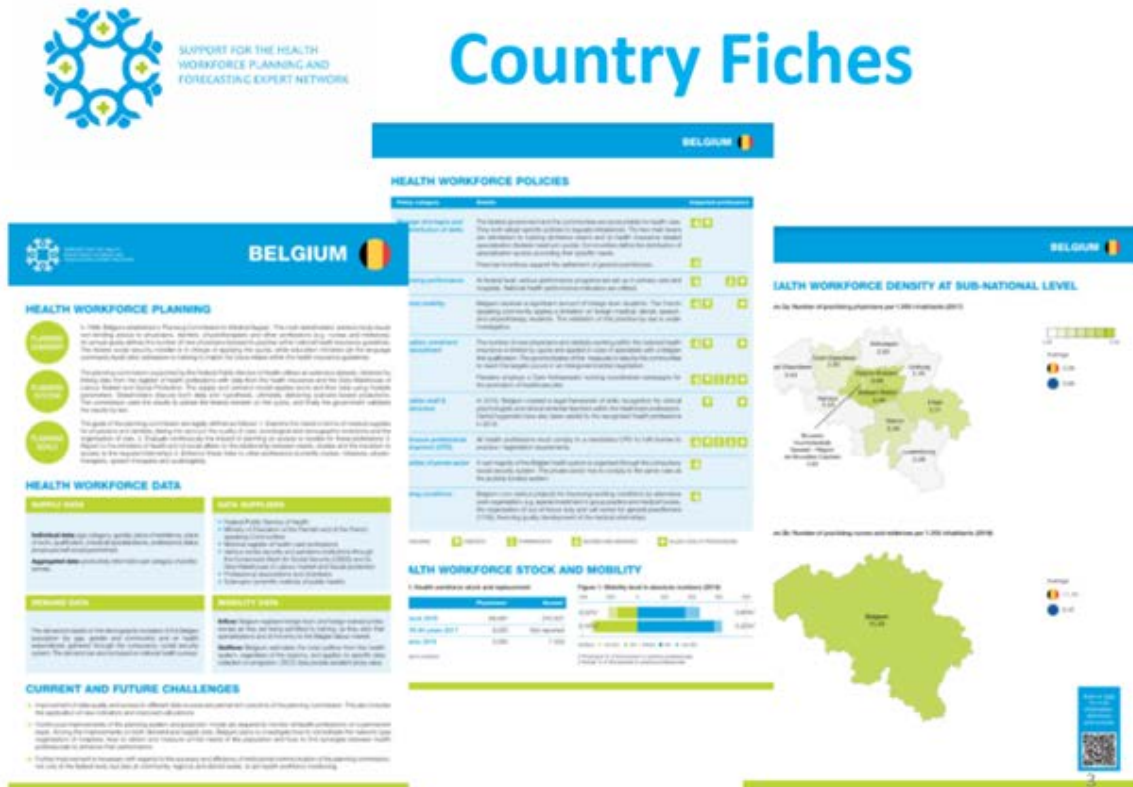
- While it is useful to keep the SEPEN online forum alive after the joint tender, it is also recommended to create a single distribution mail address comprising all experts' contacts to ensure both data protection and accessibility.
- It is also worth considering to sustain and enhance the SEPEN network, and establish thematic sub-networks. There was a significant degree of interest from non-EU countries in joining the SEPEN expert network and webinars. Since there is much to learn from other regions, e.g. on mobility or digital transformation, this angle should be explored further.
- The webinars have been a very successful format of exchange, and therefore should be continued if possible. Events on health workforce policy, planning and forecasting are still scarce, and the low-threshold format of a one-hour webinar adds significant value. SEPEN suggests to keep on supporting events focusing on the discussion of HWF planning and policies

### Mapping study of EU 28 health workforce planning and policies

The main objective of the SEPEN Mapping Study on HWF planning and policy developments in the EU was to provide a general overview, a detailed description and an updated summary of the health workforce planning systems and policies in the 28

EU Member States. The mapping study is an essential tool for supporting evidence-based health workforce planning and policies across the EU.

The study now takes the form of an online e-book containing 28 country fiches. As the country fiches are brief to contain the rich references identified in the mapping exercise, each fiche is therefore connected to an online appendix on the SEPEN website.



Country fiches of each MS include a summary of the national planning system in place, an overview of data sources, and a prioritised selection of the top three current and future challenges. The fiches also include a summary of most policies in place related to health workforce. Finally, each fiche proposes infographics on the stock and flow of physicians, nurses and midwives, and density maps highlighting the subnational variations.

The online appendices offer a list of the latest international publications, specific sources, data and statistics, as well as references to data providers and stakeholders involved in the planning process. As a special feature of the mapping study, the appendices also link the various legal policy references in national languages along with a summary in English.

Regarding the situation of HWF policy and planning across the EU previous to the SEPEN mapping study, the 2012 Feasibility Study of EU level Collaboration on Forecasting Health Workforce Needs, Workforce Planning and Health Workforce Trends gave an excellent overview. According to the SEPEN results currently 75% of the EU Member States have some health workforce planning system in place. Nevertheless, development of national planning systems is still varied among MS and the possible comparability is currently not in sight. The four main planning systems found in MS include:

- Planning of subsidized education – setting training quotas,
- Resource planning of NHS supply,
- Geographic strategic planning of (public) health facilities including, staff
- Planning of health insurance systems including the health care providers.

Still, HWF planning is still mainly focusing on medical professions and using education funding, namely training quota as leverage. Only a few Member States are planning with inclusion of disruptive factors, or looking at performance, working conditions, or more system outputs.

The 2012 Feasibility study highlighted the need for data to be collected, and to be as accurate and comparable as possible. According to the result of the SEPEN mapping study, currently more supply data is available for more professions, of better quality and timeliness, mostly as a result of mandatory registrations. The regular publication of OECD mobility survey greatly improved the retrospective view on mobility, and now more real-time data are available on the outflows of health professions. However, the evaluation of demand-side is still poorly supported by specific data and modelling.

The main trends regarding current and future challenges are quite common across the EU. Currently, shortages (mainly of nurses, GPs and some medical specialties), and imbalances (mainly geographical) are acute concerns. Also the need to transform health care systems considering the current and future challenges remains worrisome, while migration and mobility flows pose negative effects on planning and sustainability. Regarding future challenges, it is mostly agreed upon that the disruptive impact of demographic changes and opportunity of digital transformation are to be urgently considered.

The SEPEN consortium identified the regular update of the study as the main challenge, to ensure its durability in these ever changing times. On the one hand, the SEPEN network can provide great support for this activity, aligning the publication and updates with the relevant international publications.

Finally, the SEPEN consortium recommends the study to be used for supporting additional comparative studies on some burning topics, vital issues of HWF planning, including the shortage of nurses, the influences of the eHealth policies on HWF, and the alternative organisation of health systems. The COVID-19 pandemic clearly reinforces these notions, as it forces all Member States to reinvent patientcare and face the challenges of insufficient numbers health and care staff.

SEPEN intended to present and disseminate the latest findings on European HWF planning and policy in a user-friendly format, therefore a webplatform was dedicated to the “SEPEN HWF Planning and Policy Repository”. We are glad to launch and share this platform with all the experts in the field: <http://healthworkforce.eu/countrysheets/>

## Organising European workshops

As the main activity of WP3, the SEPEN workshops consisted of a series of 5 workshops gathering a target group of about 200 experts in total during the three years. Participants with relevant expertise were identified and invited to discuss different topics of HWF planning, representing various Member States, as well as a variety of professional background, including policy makers, academics and health professions representatives.

The objectives of the workshops were to combine networking and exchange of expertise with learning objectives to foster the spreading and implementation of good practices across the EU and practice co-creation during knowledge transfer and exchange of experiences. The workshops intended to contribute to building knowledge on current health workforce planning issues and emerging challenges.

The selected topics were:

- HWF Skills needs: Planning for Health Professions: How to act on skills need?
- HWF Planning Data: Dialogue on key health workforce planning data definitions



- HWF Mobility: Health workforce mobility matters - Aggregated data and individual pathways hidden behind
- Quality of care: Health Workforce Planning, Quality of Care, Patient Safety and Working Conditions
- and Digital transformation of care: Digital health: what are the implications for supply, demand, Monitoring and organisation of health workforce?

Interactive techniques were used to stimulate the activity and interaction of participants. Due to the COVID19 pandemic, the Workshop 5 was held in an online format, split into three sessions over a three-month duration. As part of the workshop, a side activity was delivered in the form of an online, Delphi-style survey, concerning the prognosis of experts regarding the adoption of robots to support elderly care. A common desire among the HWF community appears to be the sustaining of interactions, not only in the form of “informative” events but also events to “foster action”.

According to the outcomes of the workshops, different kinds of needs were identified:

- First of all, tangible knowledge sharing is needed, fostering the practical implementation of health workforce planning. Good practices supported by analysis of the return on investment of policies would be appreciated mostly, as well as technical meetings among peers to share experiences.
- There is a need to give voice to the individuals behind the numbers, building on real-life cases to solve as a tangible activity.
- Moreover, together with all stakeholders, there is also a need to, reevaluate health workforce planning in a renewed health care context, especially in the post-COVID era, as lessons of the pandemic can provide valuable sources of workshops in the future. Nevertheless, other disruptive changes are also on the discussion table.

The role of the network of experts is also important in future workshop-like activities. Alternative channels could be beneficial for the network in formal events in the form of brief discussions on recent publications (webinars or video capsules).

Finally, as a conclusion of the Delphi opinions survey, there is a significant need to examine the upcoming disruptions further, particularly the influence of digitalisation. SEPEN recommends to continue facilitating dialogues and knowledge transfer by maintaining diverse communication channels and supporting follow-up publications and support experts fill the possible knowledge gaps regarding mid- and long term forecast.

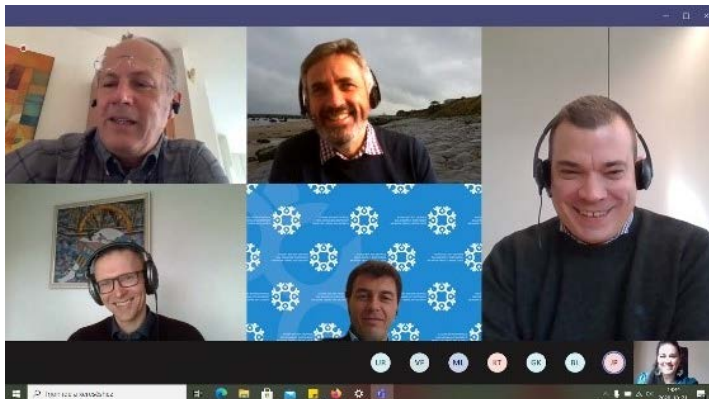
### **Organising national exchanges of expertise**

The mission of WP4 was to provide tailor-made country specific support to EU Member States on the national implementation of health workforce planning, and to help EU MS to improve their health workforce planning capacity with the support and advice of external expertise (i.e. experts selected and engage from the SEPEN network). This general objective was then deployed in operational objectives on the base of the specific needs expressed by each beneficiary Member States.



The target of the SEPEN tender was to perform at least two national exchange of expertise. WP4 received a total number of nine expressions of interest from EU Member States but eventually, three exchanges were managed to be executed. As a result of the tender activities, WP4 eventually managed to deliver the national exchanges, respectively in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia.

Each national exchange began with an analysis of the needs of the beneficiary Members State, a situation analysis and then setting of the operational objectives of the national exchange, including the definition of the type of intervention were identified (workshop, peer review, training course, etc.).



This process was followed by the implementation phase, comprising the organisation of the national exchange, from the selection of the experts to the involvement of the SEPEN network. The beneficiaries also received support for the logistic organisation of the intervention, which were performed both in person and online, as a result of the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

After delivering each of the national exchanges, follow up activities were carried out, reporting on the outcomes of the exchange and assessing the impact and the sustainability of activities.

Beneficiary EU Member State	Lithuania 	Latvia 	Estonia 
<i>Main findings of the expertise exchange</i>	Proposals for a plan to bridge the gap between the health workforce stock, the future health needs of the population and the national health policies to be implemented.	Suggestions and proposals, based on a situation analysis, submitted to stakeholders' consultation, used by the Ministry of Health to draft the national health strategy for the next 7-year planning period (Public Health Strategy 2021-2027).	Tailored advice and suggestions to draft a masterplan of the health workforce planning based on 3 main pillars: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- a framework of collaboration among stakeholders;</li> <li>- a new planning model;</li> <li>- a sustainability plan.</li> </ul>

From the WP4 experience following interlinked future implications can be driven:

At national level	At international level
1) To strengthen <b>stakeholder stewardship</b> by keeping them engaged and building co-accountability.	a) To inform key stakeholders on how international data collections and projection models can support MS in <b>data-driven healthcare</b> .
2) To design <b>national health workforce strategies</b> and prepare the governance centred to those strategies.	b) To create a knowledge and good practices <b>repository</b> .
3) To facilitate a <b>continuous improvement and fine tuning cycle</b> of the methodological tools and of the projections models.	c) To continue the sharing of practices, experiences and knowledge with the health workforce planning <b>community</b>

Case studies and good practices can be collected from these experiences and insert to the online HWF planning and policy repository. SEPEN also concluded a beneficial formula to tailor MS needs, which can be utilised for further HWF planning developments in other EU MS.

## Communication and dissemination

The overall objective of WP5 was to facilitate a coherent, effective and sustainable communication and dissemination of the tender and to ensure that its objectives, activities, results and deliverables are known to the wide audience of stakeholders. WP5 disseminated information on ongoing projects and initiatives, new publications and events that cover HWF policy and planning with a potential relevance to the work of the stakeholders of the tender. Liaising with relevant networks was also working efficiently, exchanging information with editors of newsletters of various networks was regular.

In the first months of the work SEPEN created the visual presentation of the SEPEN website, using a newly designed logo and the new website healthworkforce.eu was launched. The SEPEN website was continuously updated during the three years, with new content of information on events, publications, workshops and webinars. Information on the newsletters were also regularly updated. The number of visitors on the website was also regularly monitored, keeping close track of the growing number of visitors coming from five continents. The website was a valuable tool not only for the opportunity to continuously provide information to our network but also to provide an opportunity for experts to subscribe to our quarterly Newsletter, thereby receiving the most up-to-date information about health workforce planning and forecasting.





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EXPLORE ACTIVITIES

SEPEN Newsletter series, the 10 editions of the “EU health workforce network update” followed a strict structure, providing information about the tender work, main activities of work packages, and widespread information on the interesting upcoming events. Finally, guest articles were also inserted, choosing topics of the most interest of experts.

As part of communication activities, expanding the network and increasing visibility, members of the SEPEN consortium actively participated in professional online and personal conferences and events throughout the whole duration of the tender. The strong collaboration between WP1 and WP5 resulted in a wide network of experts who are active members of the area of European health workforce planning and forecasting.

On behalf of the SEPEN consortium - Semmelweis University, the University of Leuven (Katholieke Universiteit Leuven), the Italian Ministry of Health (Ministero della Salute), the Italian National Agency for Regional Health Services (AGENAS), and the Standing Committee of European Doctors (CPME), we warmly thank all our colleagues for their continuous co-operation and fruitful dialogues. Needless to say, the improvement of knowledge increase in HWF planning and policy in Europe would have not been possible without your passion, professionalism and commitment. Keep those values alive for the benefits of patients and the health workforce planning within the EU and beyond.

Further information is available on our website: <http://healthworkforce.eu/>. Despite the ending of the tender, please do not hesitate to contact us at:

healthworkforce@emk.sote.hu.

Find our previous newsletters on our [website](#).

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