Supporting access to healthcare in Europe by knowing where health workers are going

Within Europe, health workers are moving to other countries in search of better working conditions, career prospects and work-life balance. Unfortunately, this worsens health worker availability and increases the chances of vulnerable communities in need of care being left behind.

Destination countries must therefore be cautious in recruiting health workers from abroad. At the same time, source countries should make their own health sector more attractive to retain sufficient health workers. This way, European countries can increase and improve access to healthcare for their citizens.

Understanding how health workers move in Europe is key to addressing these challenges. However, our current knowledge is hindered by lack of data. Quantitative and qualitative research are important to offer insight into mobility patterns as well as the motivations, experiences and needs of health workers in Europe.

Why health workers migrate

- "I moved because of unemployment in my country, due to the economic crisis and open frontiers." - Spanish female nurse in the UK
- "The workload was too high during a long period without the expectation that it would become better." - German female nurse in the Netherlands
- "Relationship; better standard of living; better work-life balance." - UK female nurse in the Netherlands

Magnitude of mobility

- 26% of medical doctors in Romania intend to work in another country
- 25.6% of nurses working in Switzerland are foreign-trained

RECOMMENDATIONS

To improve our understanding and monitoring of health worker mobility, we recommend that the European Commission uses existing or future mechanisms to:

- Facilitate regular reporting and data integration
- Standardize indicators for health worker mobility
- Ensure comprehensive and disaggregated data are available

By doing so, the Commission can increase our understanding of health worker mobility, informing policy-making and decision-making, and improve access to healthcare.