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**LABOUR SHORTAGES IN THE HEALTH CARE SECTOR: INCREASING BETTER  
STAFF RECRUITMENT & RETENTION AND ACHIEVING PATIENT-STAFF RATIOS**

**MANIFESTO OF CESI'S EXPERT  
COMMISSION 'HEALTH SERVICES'**

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*The European Confederation of Independent Trade Unions (CESI) is a confederation of more than 40 national and European trade union organisations from over 20 European countries, with a total of more than 6 million individual members. Founded in 1990, CESI advocates improved employment conditions for workers in Europe and a strong social dimension in the EU. Most of CESI's affiliates are employed in the different fields of the European, national, regional and local public services, as well as in privatised services of general interest. As such, CESI also represents numerous unions of nurses, physicians and care professionals across Europe. Eurofound's last representativeness studies on the local and regional government sector and social services<sup>1</sup> as well as on the human health sector<sup>2</sup> confirmed that CESI fulfils all conditions to be/become a fully recognised European social partner for these sectors.*

On January 23 CESI co-organised a high-level meeting in the European Parliament on 'Better Working Conditions for Health Care Professionals'.<sup>3</sup>

As a follow-up, this manifesto sets out recommendations to improve health care service delivery in Europe through better employment conditions for the sector's personnel, which must above all address the root causes of staff shortages.

The recommendations are general and stem from trends and challenges which are common to most countries in Europe, albeit individually to differing degrees.

Europe is facing a health care workforce crisis. The following measures should improve recruitment and retention in the sector:

- 1. Pay attractively:** Review compensation structures by evaluating and adjusting the pay scale for health care professionals to reflect the demanding nature of their work. Competitive and fair compensation is crucial for retaining talent and attracting new professionals to the sector. It must be a policy objective to minimise relevant salary gaps between different geographical areas of the EU in order not to favour unbalanced migratory flow of professionals between from one area to another.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef\\_publication/field\\_ef\\_document/ef20019en.pdf](https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef_publication/field_ef_document/ef20019en.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef\\_publication/field\\_ef\\_document/ef20020en.pdf](https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef_publication/field_ef_document/ef20020en.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cesi.org/posts/european-parliament-meeting-addresses-urgent-need-for-better-working-conditions-in-the-health-care-sector/>

## 2. Improve working conditions

- a. **Reduce work intensity:** Implement policies to better manage work overloads – this includes a respect for reasonable working hours, adequate breaks, flexible working arrangements and measures for the personnel to prevent burnout and ensure their physical and mental health.
- b. **Guarantee work-life balance:** Encourage flexible work arrangements and family-friendly work practices that promote work-life balance for the personnel to increase job satisfaction of health care professionals. This should above all include flexible scheduling and telemedicine options – to be agreed on together with staff/staff representatives/the applicable social partners.
- c. **Combat third-party violence:** Ensure safe workplaces for the personnel by developing and enforcing policies to prevent and manage violence against health care professionals. This should include above all improved security measures and legal measures against perpetrators. Occupational risk prevention tools should be used to detect areas at risk of attacks; sanctions should be put in place in accordance with legal penal codes.
- d. **Establish quality employment frames:** Conduct regular assessments on working conditions in health care facilities, identifying and rectifying factors contributing to deplorable working conditions. This should span at least to aspects relating to the availability of state-of-the-art facility infrastructure and equipment, appropriate staffing levels, and safe and supportive work environments.

The assessments should ensure that the recommendations of the World Health Organisation (WHO) contained in the [Bucharest Declaration on the Health and Care Workforce](#) and the [Framework for action on the health and care workforce in the European region for 2023-2030](#) are implemented. They should also ensure that specific talent retention programmes are developed and enforced.

The assessments should be underpinned by evidence-based reports on the current and future workforce needs in the health care sector in order for national and EU policies to address the real short-to-long term needs of the EU population.

- e. **Enhance engagement:** Establish open communication workplaces where health care professionals can voice their concerns and ideas, schedule regular feedback sessions to involve health care professionals in decision-making processes affecting their work, and grant more autonomy to health care professionals, allowing them to influence decisions directly impacting their work and work environment. Overall, enhanced engagement opportunities are a vital component of quality working conditions and thus the attractiveness of employment in the sector.
- f. **Cultivate supportive teams:** Establish strong and cohesive teams by implementing mentoring programmes for new professionals and prioritising the well-being and support of each team member. This reduces stress and enhances a sense of belonging, contributing to a positive work environments and thus employment attractiveness in the sector.

- g. Reduce administrative burden and ensure interoperability of health services:** Involve health care professionals in reducing administrative burden by simplifying processes, leveraging technologies to streamline administrative tasks, and revising policies and procedures to alleviate unnecessary administrative burdens. This drives work effectiveness and efficiency and contributes to attractive employment in the sector.
- h. Encourage collaboration:** Establish networks, forums, and platforms for health care professionals to share knowledge, experiences, and resources, and encourage collaboration through joint research projects, cross-border training programmes, and international conferences. These initiatives facilitate collaboration, innovation and mutual support within the health care community and contribute to quality employment in and thus attractiveness of the sector.

### 3. Invest in skills, facilities and equipment

- a. Invest in medical school spots and high-quality medical education:** Ensure that sufficient and well equipped training facilities are available in order to ensure the 'supply' of health care professionals needed for the labour market. For those embarking on the educational journey to a medical degree, the curricula should be adapted so that the new generation of health care workers acquire the green and digital health competencies needed on the job.
- b. Provide more and better professional further training:** Allocate more resources to continuous professional training programmes for health care professionals which enable staff, in particular older staff, to adapt to new skills needs, in particular those that arise from the deployment of new technologies and digitalisation in health care.
- c. Assure modern facilities and equipment:** Invest in modern facilities and equipment for optimal work of staff and better care for patients. This ensures not only better and safer working conditions but also more effective and efficient health care service delivery.

### 4. Ensure high staffing levels

- a. Implement patient-staff ratios:** Guide recruitment & retention and balanced labour migration efforts by the development and realization of patient-staff ratios – and patient-nurse ratios in particular. This serves as a benchmark to ensure adequate numbers of personnel in the sector, and as a quality benchmark to patient health outcomes and eventually reduced morbidity rates too.
- b. Update the EU's Professional Qualifications Directive 2005/36/EC:** Revise the directive so that the recognition of qualifications EU-wide is in line with the current advancements on the labour market (the green, digital transitions) but also the existing skills shortages and different training models. The current conditions under 2005/36/EC Directive to equate studies and health care positions across European space need to be improved in order to take into account the new needs (technological requirements) and for the mutual academic recognition of diplomas in the European space to be unified, in compliance with Member States' legislation.
- c. Foster balanced health labour migration:** Facilitate cooperation between EU Member States to address health care talent drain away from less advantaged countries and regions to more advantaged ones. While the mutual recognition of qualifications across EU Member facilitates



cross-border mobility, efforts to achieve a more balanced labour migration in Europe should include mechanisms for sharing best practices to incentivise health care professionals to work in underserved areas, the further harmonisation of professional regulations for mutual recognition of diplomas, and the promotion of cross-border collaboration in health care provision and policies which facilitate circular migration. All measures should be guided by evidence-based and differentiated reports on the current and future workforce needs in the health care sector in order for national and EU policies to address the real short-to-long term needs of the EU population.