



EFN Policy Statement on the European Care Strategy

When developing a European Care Strategy, focused on accessible, affordable, and sustainable quality health and social care services, the crucial role and contribution of 3 million EU nurses in the European Union must be central to its design. The delivery of quality care services, which includes advancements in digital technologies and changing support needs of people, requires a highly skilled, highly educated, well-trained and motivated nursing workforce. To achieve affordable, accessible and high-quality care services, a European Care Strategy must address and anticipate workforce needs and challenges in long-term care.

The COVID-19 pandemic has clearly shown that the healthcare systems in the EU and Europe experienced major difficulties in terms of staffing levels, recruitment and retention and resilience of the nursing workforce. The nursing workforce shortages are now present in all Member States, and in all different sectors of the healthcare ecosystems.

Therefore, the EFN believes the European Care Strategy, accompanied by Council Recommendations, should take into account the following issues:

1. An integrated approach to long-term care, integrating health care and social care, informal and formal care, residential and home & community-based care. An integrated approach is needed, which looks at the experiences and unmet needs of the providers and receivers. The shift towards home and community-based care requires strengthening community nursing care. An integrated care approach, taking into consideration preventive care as a key factor, requires proper conditions, including favourable frameworks in terms of legislation.
2. Healthy and safe workplaces with optimal working conditions for frontline nurses, especially now EU is confronted with a shortage of nurses in all Member States. Regular assessments of health and safety risks at work accompanied with positive remuneration strategies are essential and concrete actions that need to be taken to address the challenges in long-term care. Better salaries for frontline nurses is a precondition to retain and recruit nurses to the long-term care sector. Therefore, it is important the EU puts in place an EU recruitment and retention strategy as the nursing

workforce shortages and use the Recovery and Resilience funds to support all Member States.

3. Re-skilling and upskilling of frontline nurses are important to meet the unmet needs of the population, especially related to the community-based care services in long-term care. Nurses are part of the solution for the digital and green transition and therefore digital skills need to be boosted (Pact for Skills, 2020) to reduce the existing gap between digital technology trends and their effective use for direct patient care, especially for patients with multiple chronic conditions. Renumerated Continuous professional development and the development of APN are important career paths to strengthen long-term care.
4. Measures to ensure adequate and safe staffing levels through existing mechanisms like the European Semester. The European Care Strategy should contain concrete objectives, implemented by an action plan, and a mechanism for follow-up, including timeframes and indicators. This will allow to track developments in the Member States on how they tackle the shortage of nurses within the EU Member States. The European Semester is a well-established mechanism but need adjustments, new indicators to increase its validity and reliability (Trustworthiness).
5. And last but not least, funding for the health and social care services through the recovery and resilience funds allocated to the Member States will be essential to address the unmet needs of nurses and citizens they provide services to. As such, Member States can ensure sufficient funding that allows employers to provide higher wages that match the crucial contribution of nurses to society. This will only become more important as the demand for elderly care grows. The recovery and resilience funding is crucial for career path development, continuous professional development and lifelong learning, and the digital and green transition of the health and social care sector. Optimal funding mechanisms will make the long-term sector more attractive and will therefore help addressing the huge recruitment and retention challenges.

The EU Care Strategy, accompanied by Council Recommendations on Long-term care will need to address the nursing workforce key challenges: labour shortages, due to difficult working conditions and low wages, compounded by an ageing workforce and an increased demand for care services. The proposal for a Council Recommendation on long-term care needs to facilitate the design of a framework for policy reforms to steer the development of sustainable long-term care that ensures better and more affordable access to high quality and safe services, necessitate adequate social protection for long-term care needs and improvement of working conditions in the sector.

Further Readings:

- European Commission – Pact for skills
<https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1517&langId=en>
- Social Protection Committee and the European Commission [2021 Long-term Care Report](#) : key common challenges in long-term care
- EFN Policy Statement on Nurses Digital Competencies (2019)
<http://www.efn.eu/wp-content/uploads/EFN-Policy-Statement-on-Nurses-Digital-Competencies-Nov.2019.pdf>
- European Commission – Recovery and Resilience Facility
https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/recovery-coronavirus/recovery-and-resilience-facility_en

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