



European Commission
Rue de la Loi, 200
B – 1049 Brussels
Belgium

Brussels, Wednesday 14 September 2005

Concern: EFN input to the consultation on health investment in the EU

Dear Mr/ Ms,

The European Federation of Nurses Associations (EFN), former Standing Committee of Nurses of the EU (PCN) represents more than one million nurses at European level and is the independent voice of the nursing profession. EFN provides a broad platform for developing health and social EU policy by supporting the European Union decision making process on all areas which affect the nursing profession.

Nurses provide 80% of direct patient care and it is essential, when designing new policy in the social and health area, to include nurses and nursing to obtain a full picture of care. This is why the EFN welcomes with great interest the Commission proposal for Community Strategic Guidelines on Cohesion, adopted on 5 July. We believe that these draft guidelines will encourage Member States and regions to use the Structural Funds to invest in Health. They will also contribute to raising awareness on the health gap and on the need to invest in health prevention and promotion.

Very especially, EFN endorses the guidelines on ‘More and better Jobs’ (4.3 Guideline; page 23), which will also improve the conditions of the nursing profession.

- First of all, the guidelines represent a good approach to the problems of *recruitment* and *retention*, which, given the ageing nursing workforce in Europe, the EFN had repeatedly called on European stakeholders and institutions to concentrate on.
- With regard to the improvement of the flexibility of the labour market, the proposal is in line with the EFN statement regarding nursing workforce: that competences and mobility are essential elements within a single market, but need to be related to the quality of care and the safety of patients. On the other hand, it is important to ensure that the concepts of “flexibility” and “mobility” are not used as an excuse to water down the rights of the employees. We must highlight the problems posed by rights offences to nurses when they are obliged to work under low wages and poor conditions. Indeed, the EFN continues to stress that pay in nursing is generally too low and does not reflect realistically the workload responsibilities that it implies. Moreover, we believe that the quality of care would improve if nurses were given

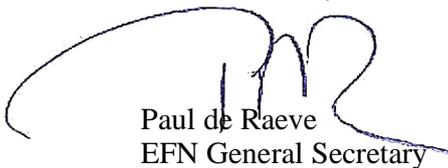
control over their workload. In general terms, the EFN would want to see both *public* health and *employees'* health more clearly addressed as key factors in ensuring effective and sustainable economic growth.

- EFN particularly welcomes the proposal to increase investment in human capital through better education and skills. EFN believes that continuing professional development needs to be seen as a key means for encouraging nurses to stay in nursing and creative ways to assist nurses to undertake further study need to be exploited, for example through study leave and the reimbursement of fees and other costs of study.
- In terms of the enhancement of capacity building, EFN has repeatedly favoured the funding of more career opportunities and ongoing education for all nurses, especially older nurses, in order to maximise their contribution and motivation. On the other hand, systematic information is needed about nursing practice, which is featured by a diversity of patient population and variation in terms of care (different nursing care, medical treatment). A real human resources policy can only be made when there are comparable data available. Therefore, Member States should be encouraged to collate accurate and comparable quantity and quality of data. The EFN is concerned about the fact that there are quite different levels of investment in education and training in nursing depending on each Member State. Sufficient funding and coordination mechanisms are two necessary requirements to enhance the capacity building of nurses in Europe.
- Finally, the EFN members have participated in a number of partnership projects that seek to help maintaining a healthy labour force that runs parallel to its mobility, by favouring information and knowledge-transfer campaigns among countries, especially towards Central and Eastern Europe.

We believe that investing in social rights, such as health, will have a beneficial side effect of creating more jobs and economic growth and it is a necessary recipe for the success of the Lisbon Agenda. Free markets on the whole are not concerned with economically unproductive members of society, although in the long run they cannot function without decent levels of social cohesion and public health. Therefore a range of measures are needed to ensure participation in society outside as well as inside the world of work. This means investment in public services and their infrastructures, not just in the interests of economic exchange and mobility.

The EFN would like to take this opportunity to congratulate and to thank you, as well as your department and collaborators, for all the hard work you have been achieving in this area during the last five years, for implementing good health for all citizens in the European Union, as well as for being so involved in EFN work and concerns.

Yours Sincerely,



Paul de Raeve
EFN General Secretary