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European Commission's Green Paper on the European Workforce for Health

On this 10th of December the European Commission has finally published its Green Paper on 'the European Workforce for Health'.

This document does reflect in its majority the draft Green Paper which had been distributed to you some weeks ago by the FEPI Secretariat through the contacts of CEPLIS within the European Commission's DG SANCO.

Some days later, the 17th of December, Mr. **Martin Dorazil**, Policy Officer at the Unit 'Health Strategy and Health Systems' of European Commission's DG SANCO has attended CEPLIS' Permanent Committee as invited guest speaker, in order to inform the participants of the main issues tackled by the Green Paper. As member of CEPLIS and Chair of the CEPLIS Health Working Group, FEPI was of course present at this meeting, represented by its Policy and Press Officer, Mr. Louette.

Mr. Dorazil informed the audience that the paper in question focuses on three main topics:

- the factors influencing the workforce for health in the EU and the main issues to be addressed
- the impact of new technology
- the role of health professionals entrepreneurs in the workforce

The Green Paper enumerates in fact 6 factors that can influence the workforce for health in the EU:

- 1) Demography and the promotion of a sustainable health workforce

- 2) Public Health Capacity
- 3) Training
- 4) Managing mobility of health workers within the EU
- 5) Global migration of health workers
- 6) Data to support decision making

1) *Demography and the promotion of a sustainable health workforce*

Under this item, the Green Paper is tackling the issue of the **ageing of population** and the **feminization of the workforce**. For the European Commission, the key to maintaining a sufficient workforce, in the face of the impending retirement of the "baby boom" generation, is "to educate, recruit and retain young practitioners while reinvesting in mature workforce".

To achieve this objective, the European Commission proposes some areas for possible actions, such as **Ensuring better working conditions for health workers, increasing staff motivation and morale** and **Considering recruitment and training campaigns, in particular to take advantage of the growth in the proportion of over-55s in the workplace and those who no longer have family commitments**.

Our feeling is that opening discussion on this so important topic is indeed a very good idea. It is interesting to note however that the European Commission mentions the possibility of "return to practice" campaigns to attract those who have left the health workforce. Along with the proposed policy of investing in the recruitment of sufficient health personnel to achieve self-sufficiency at EU level, proposed under the issue of Mobility Management within the EU, the idea seems to be pointing towards a 'Fortress Europe' pattern, aiming at closing the doors to healthcare workforce from overseas.

2) *Public Health Capacity*

According to the paper, the public health function consists of a range of diverse activities to protect and to improve the level of health and well being of the general population, tackle health inequalities, and address the needs of disadvantaged and vulnerable groups.

To face this issue, the European Commission advances some areas for possible actions, as strengthening capacity for screening, health promotion and disease prevention and collecting better information about actual and potential population health needs in order to plan the future development of the public health workforce.

3) *Training*

On this very important point, the Green Paper proposes to ensure that training courses are designed to take into account the special needs of people with disabilities, to focus on health professionals' continuous professional development and to provide management training for health professionals.

4) Managing mobility of health workers within the EU.

Once again the European Commission is tackling the issue of the mobility of health-related issues within the EU, after its Directive proposal last July, now the European Commission, through this Green Paper puts on the table a number of actions to be considered on the issue of mobility of health workers.

Several of these actions require the active collaboration of regulatory bodies, and nurses are specifically mentioned in a proposal to fasten 'bilateral' agreements between Member States to take advantages of any surpluses of doctors and nurses. One can only regret that the issue of language-knowledge which constitutes one of the main concerns in several Member States welcoming health-care workforce across the EU does not figure within the European Commission's preoccupations.

5) Global Migration of Health Workers

On this issue, the Green Paper brings forward a number of proposals as 'Supporting the WHO in its work to develop a global code of conduct for ethical Recruitment', that can only be welcomed by the stakeholders.

6) Data support to decision making and the role of EU healthcare workforce

The European Commission proposes a series of possible actions, such as Ensuring the availability and comparability of data on the health workforce, in particular with a view to determining the precise movements of particular groups of the health workforce.

It is interesting to note that the European Commission enumerates a number of professions under item number 6 of the Green Paper, 'the role of health professionals' entrepreneurs in the workforce', among which nurses do not figure. The Green Paper mentions in fact the physicians, psychologists, dentists, podiatrists, physiotherapist and occupational therapists but seems to ignore that nurses are the more and more acting as entrepreneurs in several medium-sized enterprises all over the EU.

FEPI's Executive Board is going to discuss our Council's reaction to the Paper at its first meeting of the year. The Consultation of stakeholders launched by the Green Paper on 'the European Workforce for Health' will be open till the 31st of March 2009.

President Sasso, The Executive Board and all of us in the Brussels office would like to wish you and your beloved-ones the Merriest of Holidays and a 2009 full of energy, health, happiness and love

