



**EUROPEAN COMMISSION**  
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR HEALTH AND FOOD SAFETY

Health systems, medical products and innovation  
**Performance of national health systems**

Brussels,  
sante.ddg1.b.1(2020)2885041 AT/LG/SG

Mr Mircea Timofte  
President of European Nursing Council ENC  
President of the The Order of Nurses and  
Midwives of Romania  
Chief Nursing Officer, Ministry of Health of  
Romania  
European Nursing Council  
Coudenberg 70 B  
B-1000 Brussels  
secretary-enc@enc-eu.org

Dear Mr Timofte,

Thank you for your letter addressed to the President of the European Commission Mrs Ursula von der Leyen on behalf of the European Nursing Council, highlighting the context and the challenges of nurses in the healthcare sector.

President Ursula von der Leyen asked me to thank you for your letter and to reply on her behalf.

In your letter, you explained the challenges faced by the nursing profession and stressed the need for initiatives, including at the European Union level, to better focus on the nursing education, training and continuous professional development, as well as for more EU funded projects in the area.

First, let me take this opportunity to thank all the nurses that you represent for the work they perform and their effort, which is of major importance for our society. At this particular moment of major crisis due to COVID19 pandemic, it becomes even more evident that your effort is crucial in safeguarding public health.

The nursing profession requires undoubtedly a high level of knowledge, professional competences and interpersonal skills to deal with challenging situations.

The Commission acknowledges that a fundamental element for the effectiveness, accessibility and resilience of health systems across the EU is to employ a health workforce in sufficient numbers, with the right skills and in the right places<sup>1</sup>.

This is also analysed in the State of Health in the EU knowledge cycle<sup>2</sup>.

More concretely and regarding your concern, the Commission's latest two State of Health companion reports suggested to:

- Proactively forecast future skills and competences and mitigate the gaps between supply and demand;
- Promote continued upskilling through Continued Professional Development (CPD);
- Raise the attractiveness of the profession- as also touched upon in your letter;
- Look at possible redistribution of roles and task-shifting in the health workforce.

We are in total agreement, in the context in which the current health workforce will be responsible for meeting healthcare demands over the next 20 years, that investment in continuous professional development and lifelong learning is crucial and helps to safeguard patient safety and quality of care. Europe needs the right number of health professionals, with the right mix of skills, in the right place at the right time.

In accordance with the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union<sup>3</sup>, Member States are responsible for the definition of their health policy and for the organisation and delivery of health services and medical care. Therefore, sustainable health workforce requires primarily initiatives at the national level regarding education, training and continuous professional development.

However, the Commission supported via various instruments<sup>4567</sup>, including EU funded ones<sup>89</sup>, and will continue to support the national authorities to address the similar challenges they face in the area, and to share experience and learn from each other.

---

<sup>1</sup>[https://ec.europa.eu/health/sites/health/files/systems\\_performance\\_assessment/docs/com2014\\_215\\_final\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/health/sites/health/files/systems_performance_assessment/docs/com2014_215_final_en.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/health/state/summary\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/health/state/summary_en)

<sup>3</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:12012E/TXT&from=EN>

<sup>4</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32013L0055&from=EN>

<sup>5</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/health/workforce/overview\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/health/workforce/overview_en)

<sup>6</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/health/workforce/key\\_documents/recruitment\\_retention\\_nl](https://ec.europa.eu/health/workforce/key_documents/recruitment_retention_nl)

<sup>7</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/health/workforce/key\\_documents/continuous\\_professional\\_development\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/health/workforce/key_documents/continuous_professional_development_en)

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.oecd.org/els/health-systems/Feasibility-Study-On-Health-Workforce-Skills-Assessment-Feb2018.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.oecd.org/health/recent-trends-in-international-migration-of-doctors-nurses-and-medical-students-5571ef48-en.htm>

Some recent examples have been the funding from the EU Health programme of a “Joint Action on Health Workforce Planning and Forecasting”<sup>10</sup> followed by the setting up of the health-workforce planning and forecasting expert network (SEPEN)<sup>11</sup>.

A study called ‘‘ The mapping and assessment of developments for one of the sectoral professions under Directive 2005/36/EC – nurses responsible for general care’’ has been commissioned by the European Commission and is currently ongoing.

The Commission launched this year a call for projects to support initiatives focusing on also on the reorganisation of care delivery between hospitals and other community and primary healthcare centres through task shifting and interpersonal coordination.

Regarding your call for more EU funded projects, it is important to mention that, during the current Multi-annual Financing Framework, nearly €1 billion has been invested from the European and Structural Investment Funds in more than 270 health workforce related projects in 20 Member States. These projects aim also to provide support for new and innovative curricula and educational approaches.

The EU will continue to invest in health, including in health workforce, in the 2021-2027 Multi-annual Financing Framework.

Yours sincerely,

(e-signed)  
Sylvain Giraud  
Head of Unit

---

<sup>10</sup>[http://healthworkforce.eu/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/WP2\\_FINAL\\_GUIDE\\_final\\_version.pdf](http://healthworkforce.eu/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/WP2_FINAL_GUIDE_final_version.pdf)

<sup>11</sup><http://healthworkforce.eu/>