



SUPPORT FOR THE HEALTH
WORKFORCE PLANNING AND
FORECASTING EXPERT NETWORK

SEPEN CLOSING EVENT SUMMARY REPORT

28 October 2020



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The contract is signed with the joint tender led by Semmelweis University (SU), and further partners are KU Leuven (KUL), the Italian National Agency for Regional Health Services (AGENAS), the Italian Ministry of Health (MDS) and the Standing Committee of European Doctors (CPME).

INTRODUCTION

On 28 October 2020, the joint tender '[Support for the Health Workforce Planning and Forecasting Expert Network](#)' (SEPEN) organised its closing event to look at the achievements of the past years and explore opportunities for future EU level cooperation in initiatives for health workforce planning. The webinar was moderated by Dr Miklós Szócska from Semmelweis University as leader of the SEPEN joint tender consortium.

OPENING

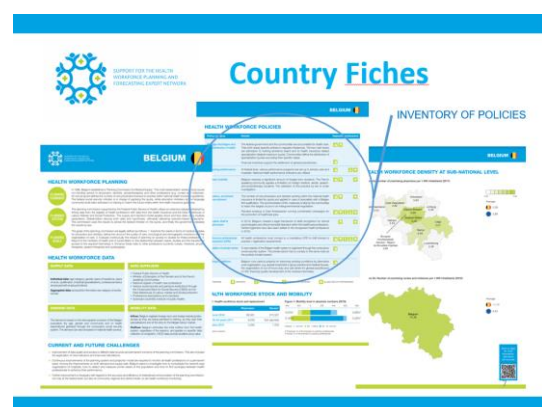
The event was opened by Dr Szócska. He welcomed the opportunity to present the outcomes of SEPEN, highlighting its relevance and timeliness. He then invited Dr Andrzej Rys, Director for Health systems, medical products and innovation at DG SANTE, to comment on the policy context of SEPEN. Dr Rys confirmed the importance of health workforce policy, in particular since the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the essential contribution of health services and health professionals to the well-being of societies. The European Commission is therefore committed to continuing action on this and is contemplating structures for a sustainable cooperation. The digital transformation and skills development are priorities for health workforce policy and are being coordinated across EU policies.

PRESENTATION OF SEPEN RESULTS

Following this introduction, the SEPEN partners presented some of the key achievements and questions which the joint tender delivered. With the SEPEN expert network as the foundation of all activities, Ms Sarada Das presented its evolution from stakeholder mapping and recruitment to the active community it is today. Counting more than 380 members, the experts in the network represent all EU Member States and the United Kingdom, more than 30 non-EU countries as well as a large number of European and even international organisations. The ambition was to create more than an address book of expertise, therefore communication was key. Besides the SEPEN website and newsletter, webinars dedicated to high-priority topics and the SEPEN online forum proved effective fora for mutual exchange and learning. This has resulted in clear recommendations on how to maintain engagement with the SEPEN expert network, i.a. continuing the webinars. One of the achievements which the SEPEN expert network contributed to is the development



of an eBook describing the health workforce planning systems and policies of all EU Member States and the United Kingdom. Mr Michel Van Hoegaerden presented the country sheets and supporting online appendices which summarise information on national planning systems, data sources used, challenges which the countries' systems are facing, and relevant policies. Three quarters of EU Member States now have workforce planning systems in place, albeit at different levels of complexity and often focussing on only one or two professions. The country sheets also contain infographics on mobility and density of doctors and nurses. While data on the 'supply' of health workforce is well-



established, data on healthcare 'demand' is less commonly collected and processed. The analysis shows certain trends, including shortages of health workforce, as well as frequent imbalances of its distribution, both interlinked with mobility of health professionals. Looking ahead, many countries are expecting the ageing of the population as well as the digital transformation to have a significant impact.

With EU Member States looking to address such challenges, SEPEN's national exchanges offered opportunities for national policy-makers to directly connect with other experts. Mr Paolo Michelutti presented the national exchanges in Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia which had been facilitated by SEPEN. Following detailed scoping of policy needs and technical challenges by ministries, the SEPEN expert network was carefully screened for expertise on the specific questions posed. In Lithuania for example, a combination of workshops and an online 'boot camp' were organised to review the planning model, discuss planning objectives and propose improvements, e.g. in relation to data coverage and the introduction of qualitative variables to planning. The national exchanges in Latvia and Estonia were also tailored to tackle questions on the local agenda, e.g. the development of a new health workforce strategy or the evolution of the planning model to multi-professional planning.

The exchanges consolidated an analytical framework which starts with a situation analysis and needs assessment, followed by the consideration of key elements of a health workforce planning system, that is its goals, the forecasting model, data collection, links to policy and its organisation. Finally, it is recommended to embed all action in a stakeholder dialogue and a sustainability mechanism.

To conclude the presentation of SEPEN's achievements, Dr Eszter Kovacs recapped the policy background of the joint tender and gave an outlook on emerging issues. She provided an overview of SEPEN's objectives and the interplay of its different activities, with references to the progress EU health workforce policy has made since the 2012 European Commission Action Plan for the EU health workforce.



To demonstrate the evolved understanding of factors affecting health workforce planning and policy, Dr Kovacs highlighted emerging issues which had been raised during SEPEN activities by placing them in the framework of transversal skills of health professionals and new professions, as developed in the 2018 OECD Feasibility study on health workforce

skills assessment. The first key challenge is maintaining the mental health and well-being of the health workforce, since working environments, even before the COVID-19 pandemic, were causing high rates of mental illness and consequent dropouts. A second emerging issue is task-shifting, both between health professionals and in relation to patients or new occupations in the care geometry. Alongside related models such as task-sharing, substitution, skill-mix or delegation, such approaches are considered to tackle shortages, for example. However, Dr Kovacs argued that i.a. the clear definition of tasks and responsibilities be ensured when considering not only individual but also team competences. The final emerging issue she identified as a key trend is the impact of the digital transformation on the health workforce.

The management of this process is a common challenge at national level, both in term of using digital tools in patient care, but also in the organisation and education of the health workforce, including the creation of new professions.

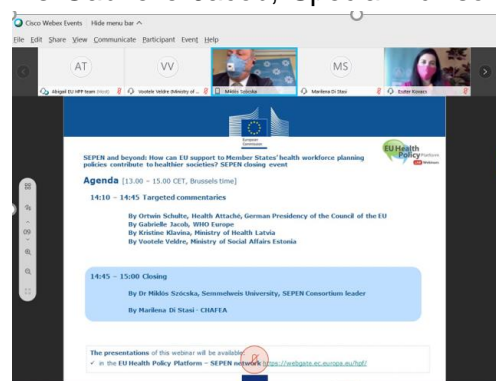
The SEPEN partners' thanks went to the experts who had contributed to actively to all of the discussions and events.

TARGETED COMMENTARIES

Following the presentations by SEPEN partners, Dr Szócska invited some of the experts who had been closely involved in SEPEN's activities to comment how SEPEN's achievements can be used in their work and where future EU-level action could have the most value.

Health Attaché Mr Ortwin Schulte was on the panel to share the view of the German Presidency of the Council of the EU, but was unfortunately not able to comment due to logistic problems.

Ms Gabrielle Jacob, Special Advisor on Transformation and Organization Development as



well as Programme Manager a.i. on human resources for health at WHO-Europe argued that the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic shows “the future is now” and there is an urgency to tackling the challenges highlighted. She agrees health workforce shortages, imbalances and the situation of the nursing profession are of particular importance. She underlined that planning and forecasting policies must be aligned with recruitment and retention efforts for effective solutions. Ms Jacob welcomes future action at

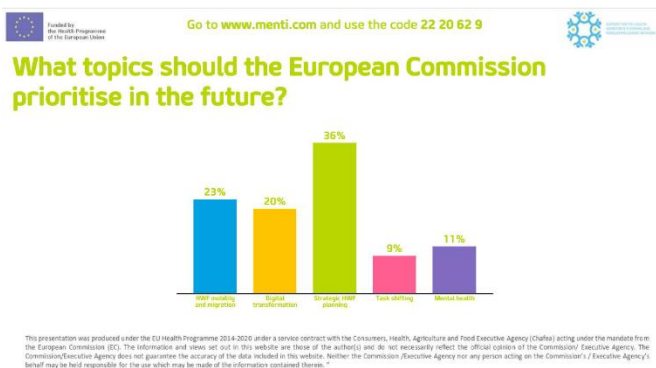
European level and the opportunities for cooperation this brings.

As one of the experts participating in a national exchange, Mr Vootele Veldre of the Estonian Ministry of Social Affairs confirmed that receiving experts' feedback on their national situation had facilitated the development of a new planning model, including milestones and legislative proposals regarding data exchange and collection. He appreciated the productive atmosphere of the national exchange and thanked all parties involved.

Representing the Latvian Ministry of Health as a further host of a national exchange, Ms Kristīne Kļaviņa reported how their ambition was to build capacity in administration and governance to manage health workforce planning more effectively. The preparation of input to a new strategy for the health system had been greatly aided by the SEPEN activity, in particular by focusing attention on accessibility, quality and governance. She reflected that an important part of the process is to find gaps and 'mistakes' so solutions can be targeted, therefore the opportunity provided by SEPEN was much appreciated.

PARTICIPANTS' FEEDBACK ON KEY QUESTIONS

To capture more experts' views on the achievements presented and the future outlook, the participants of the closing event were invited to provide feedback to a series of questions throughout the event.



In response to the European Commission's opening remarks, participants were asked to prioritise topics for future action. A majority supported activities on health workforce planning, followed by health workforce mobility and migration, with the digital transformation ranking third. Task-shifting and mental health were considered less urgent areas for action.

However, participants do not only expect action from the European Commission. In response to the question if they would personally be interested in participating in activities sustaining and improving SEPEN's results, 94% of responses were positive.

Participants were also invited to comment what they considered as the main benefit of the country sheets produced in the SEPEN mapping exercise. Their feedback was processed into a word cloud which underlined the comparability of information collected as a key win. In addition, the knowledge and best practices which are captured in the country sheets are much appreciated. Lastly participants suggested that the awareness raised through such an exercise is a benefit in itself.



A further participants' poll asked which topics they had received the most updates on during the three years of SEPEN activities. Health workforce policy as well as health workforce planning methodology were ranked highest, with health workforce mobility and migration ranking lower, as did digital transformation. In response to the final question on whether SEPEN workshops and webinars added real value to national and international health workforce developments, 75% of responses reported that a lot of value had been added.

CLOSING

To conclude the discussion, Ms Marilena Di Stasi from the European Commission's Consumers, Health, Agriculture and Food Executive Agency expressed her thanks to all who contributed to SEPEN's achievements for the successful conclusion of activities. She invited participants to continue to monitor SEPEN's website, also confirming that eBook of country sheets would be published soon. Lastly, she emphasised the importance of continued cooperation between the European Commission, Member States and stakeholders on health workforce policy and hoped to build on SEPEN in future.

Dr Szócska and Dr Kovacs closed the event, thanking all those involved for their contributions and continued commitment on this important topic.