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Commission report finds labour and skills shortages persist and looks at possible ways to tackle them

The 6th of July, the **Commission's Employment and Social Developments in Europe (ESDE)** report for 2023 highlighted the resilience of EU labour markets in the face of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, leading to a 3.5% real-term economic growth in 2022. The report indicates positive employment rates, reaching a record high of 74.6% with 213.7 million people employed, and a historic low in unemployment at 6.2% in 2022

Despite these successes, challenges remain. Certain groups, such as women and people with disabilities, still have low representation in the labour market. Youth unemployment, though decreasing from 16.7% to 14.5% in 2022, continues to be a concern. Moreover, companies face labour shortages, particularly in sectors like construction, **healthcare**, and STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics). The report emphasizes the **need for both employers and workers to adapt to evolving skill needs**, especially in the context of green and digital transitions. Labour shortages are expected to persist in various sectors and occupations across all skill levels, driven by new job creation and the replacement of retiring workers.



To tackle these issues, the report proposes several policy measures, including investing in adult learning and skills development, addressing gender employment gaps, providing accessible early childhood education and care, improving working conditions and pay, enhancing financial incentives for work, and promoting targeted labour migration from non-EU countries to fill specific skills gaps.

Key findings on skills and labour shortages:

- Labour shortages exist in various sectors and occupations across all skills levels and are set to increase. They are expected to persist in both high skills and low skills occupations, driven by the creation of new jobs and the need to replace workers who retire. Sectors such as construction, healthcare, and STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics).
- At the same time, structural drivers contributing to persistent labour shortages vary by occupation and sector. For some **professions like doctors, nurses, carers, and drivers, challenging working conditions or difficulties in human resource management contribute to the difficulties of employers to retain and attract workers.**
- Labour shortages in some occupations might also be exacerbated by evolving skills and employment needs due to the necessary green transition. Employment growth is expected in some sectors/occupations that are already experiencing labour shortages, or are likely to do so in the future

- In the context of the green transition, the investment needs for retraining, reskilling and upskilling in manufacturing of strategic net-zero technologies are estimated between €1.7 billion and €4.1 billion up to 2030.
- As regards the digital transition, the report finds it contributes to persistent labour shortages among ICT professionals but does not seem to be a key driver of shortages in other occupations.
- The lower labour market participation of women, lower-educated people, people with a migrant background, as well as older and young people also contributes to labour shortages. Most shortage occupations are dominated either by men or by women – 86% of occupations with labour shortages are not gender-balanced. This also mirrors gender segregation in the respective field of studies leading up to a certain occupation, limiting the pool of people to fill vacancies.

Measures to address persistent shortages and skills gaps

The ESDE 2023 report also looks at possible policy measures to tackle labour shortages and bridge skills gaps. These include:

- Investing in adult learning and skills development and training programmes, as well as better job matching with people's education, experience, and skills.
- Addressing the gender employment gap and boosting labour market participation of young people, older people, people with a migrant background, and people with lower educational attainment to tackle labour shortages.
- Removing barriers to entering the workforce, such as providing accessible, affordable, high-quality early childhood education and care. The Commission put forward the European Care Strategy to support both carers and care receivers.
- Improving working conditions and pay in certain jobs to attract and retain workers. Member States have adopted the EU Directive on **adequate minimum wages**, and are required to transpose it into national law.
- Improving the financial incentives for work, such as reviewing taxes and benefits systems targeting low-income earners, and promoting active inclusion to support the labour market participation of those who can work, for instance also through inclusive education and training and individualised support.
- Promoting targeted labour migration from non-EU countries to reduce labour shortages in specific skills groups. The Commission has launched an EU Talent Pool pilot, helping to match people's skills with job offers.
- Enhancing social dialogue and involving social partners in training, improving working conditions, and facilitating adult learning opportunities.

You may find more information on this article [here](#).

Study: why many nurses and doctors quit their job (and how to make them stay)

The 21st of July, the **Project METEOR** researchers have published a paper on the reasons behind the high turnover of nurses and doctors in hospitals proposing solutions to retain them. The researchers conducted a systematic review of papers published between 2012 and 2022, analyzing interventions aimed at retaining health workers.



Their paper identifies 12 key areas where hospital management can focus its efforts. These areas include onboarding, mentorship programs, stress management mechanisms, social support, and technology innovations, among others. **The study found that onboarding and mentorship programs significantly reduced nurse outflows from hospitals, especially among recent nursing graduates experiencing culture**

shock. Stress management tools have also been shown to be effective in supporting healthcare professionals.

“Many studies have demonstrated that support in the form of onboarding and mentorship is particularly important for nurses at the beginning of their career path, as more than 50% of newly graduated nurses leave their job within the first year due to culture shock,” says co-author Neeltje De Vries, an expert in nursing science from Spaarne Gasthuis. *“Several studies also emphasized that new generations require more support in their workplace compared to previous ones.”*

The authors confirmed earlier findings that, **salary is not the primary reason for leaving healthcare jobs** in high-income countries.

The analysis also demonstrates that there is **no one-size-fits-all intervention**. Nevertheless, studying success stories can help hospital managers design their programmes. When doing so, they should ensure that deliberate action matches their healthcare workers' needs and is in line with the hospital's mission and vision.

You may find more information on this article [here](#).

The challenge of "greening" medical technologies

The 20th of July, the website *healthcare in Europe* has published an article about new emerging technologies to implement sustainable practices in medical laboratories. **The in vitro diagnostic (IVD) industry, which is involved in medical laboratory testing, has a big impact on the environment. It produces a lot of waste, especially plastic, and uses harmful chemicals that can harm the environment. To address this, the European Commission is encouraging the IVD industry to adopt sustainable practices. The European Green Deal, adopted in 2019, aims to make Europe climate-neutral by 2050. As part of this effort, the EU wants the medical technology sector, including IVD, to follow eco-friendly guidelines. In response, the industry is developing new technologies to be more environmentally friendly.** For example, they are working on using biochips and improving recycling processes. This way, they can reduce waste and lessen their impact on the environment. By making these changes and embracing sustainable practices, the IVD industry and medical laboratories can contribute to a greener and healthier future for everyone.

Sustainable biochip technologies

Sustainable biochip technologies allow **detecting multiple biological targets at once on a single chip**, making sample analysis faster and more efficient. Advances in these technologies aim to **reduce the environmental impact of the machines used**. For example, Agilent Technologies, a US-based company, designed the SurePrint G3 biochip technology using synthetic DNA for long-term use, extending the lifespan of the print head and consumables. This reduces material consumption by 80% compared to previous platforms and cuts material costs by 40%. Agilent also offers a recycling program for used microarray plates to further reduce waste.

Recyclable materials and eco-design of in-vitro diagnostic medical

The sustainable development of the IVD industry requires diagnostic tests to have a **low environmental impact**. The goal is to reduce the environmental impact of diagnostic tests. The use of recyclable materials for IVD test packaging and components is growing. Roche Diagnostics announced in March 2021 that it would use 100% recycled plastic for its product packaging. Similarly, the Greiner Bio-One Group committed to using biobased and recyclable materials for their products.

Eco-design technologies are also contributing to sustainability. There are three main trends in this area. First, the use of biobased and biodegradable materials like corn starch, polylactic acid, cellulose, and chitosan aims to reduce the environmental impact of plastic waste. Second, microfabrication processes such as deep immersion lithography and 4D printing are employed to reduce energy consumption during IVD device production. Lastly, the

development of portable and rechargeable diagnostic systems helps reduce waste generated by disposable consumables.

You may find more information on this article [here](#).

Opportunities galore as Kerala nurses head to Europe

The 23th of July, the newspaper *onmanorama* published an article about nurses from Kerala who are witnessing a whole world of opportunities being unfold before them. Many of them are taking the initiative to learn new languages and explore job prospects abroad. While traditionally, nurses used to migrate to Gulf countries, there has been a notable shift with an increasing number of nurses now preferring European and American destinations. The allure of excellent pay and a high standard of living in these countries is drawing them in significant numbers.



One such nurse, Anju C Babu, exemplifies the dreams and aspirations of many Kerala nurses. She now resides in Bruges, Belgium, and proudly greets her loved ones back home in Dutch. Anju's decision to learn the language came after stumbling upon an advertisement calling for nurses in Belgium. But to pursue this opportunity, she needed to master the Dutch language, a challenge she took head-on. After completing a B-1 level course at a training institute in Kochi, she embarked on her journey to Belgium in January, where she currently works as a nurse in a hospital in Bruges. Anju's optimism shines as she plans to bring her husband and son to join her in the future.

Anju's story is just one among hundreds of Kerala nurses who are now flying to Europe in search of greener pastures. The trend of migration has undergone a significant shift in the post-Covid period, with European nations becoming the preferred destination for Kerala nurses. The benefits offered by European countries have enticed these nurses. They include opportunities to become permanent citizens, the ability to bring their families along, opportunities to purchase a house, free education for their children, and more. **This shift in migration patterns has led to an increased demand for trained nurses across the globe.**

You may find more information on this article [here](#).

European governments urged to invest in primary care nursing

On the 3th July, nurse leaders from across Europe have urged governments to invest in the primary care nursing workforce.

Representatives from national nursing organizations in Europe gathered at the International Council of Nurses Congress 2023 in Montreal, Canada. The main focus of the discussion was the **crucial role of primary care in delivering universal health coverage**. During the session, Professor Nicola Ranger emphasized the significance of investing in the nursing profession, particularly in primary care. She highlighted the need for **more funding** dedicated to primary care nurse education and professional development. The Royal College of Nursing (RCN) **actively lobbied for greater educational opportunities for primary care nurses** to become nurse prescribers and contribute effectively to disease prevention.

Universal health coverage was a central topic, aiming to ensure equitable access to comprehensive health services without financial hardship. Professor Ranger argued that governments worldwide should invest in the primary care nursing specialty to support the delivery of universal health coverage. Ana Cavaco, president of the Portuguese Order of Nurses, stressed the importance of primary health care and urged the Portuguese government to focus on increasing the number of nurses providing home-based care rather than prioritizing hospitals or nursing homes. Aristides Chorattas, vice-president of the European Federation of Nurses Associations, called for **strong leadership and political activism** among chief nursing officers and nursing associations to address workforce issues and deficits in primary care. He emphasized the need for unity and collective efforts to promote and strengthen primary care nursing.



For more information on this article [here](#).