

WHO's regional directors discuss international mobility challenges of health professionals

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Regional directors of the World Health Organisation for the Eastern Mediterranean, Europe and South-east Asia, Dr Ahmed Al-Mandhari, Dr Hans Kluge and Dr Poonam Khetrpal Singh initiated a virtual tri-regional policy dialogue to review trends and policy responses in the area.

The movement of health workers across WHO regions is particularly prominent. As the top countries of origin for migrant doctors working in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries and six of the top countries of origin for migrant nurses were the Member States of the three regions.

The policy dialogue is a significant part of the activities marking 2021 as the International Year of Health and Care Workers. This unique event aims to discuss challenges, opportunities, policy responses and innovations in WHO regions concerning ethical international recruitment, fair and effective employment and integration of foreign health workers, and approaches to harness the contribution of diaspora health workers.

The international mobility of health workers has been increasing and, with an estimated global shortage of 18 million health workers by 2030, this trend is expected to continue. Strengthened management of mobility – through improved information, policy and international cooperation, framed by the WHO Code on International Recruitment of Health Personnel – is necessary to ensure that escalating health worker mobility contributes to, rather than compromises, advancing universal health coverage and health security across WHO's the Member States.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has in many ways brought health workforce mobility to the fore. It is time that all stakeholders together chart the path forward, towards increased cooperation between health systems, and strengthened health system capacity in both sending and receiving countries. For far too long, the health sector has been side-lined in discussions on health workforce mobility, despite the significant impact this mobility has had and continues to have, in low- and middle-income countries globally. The health sector must actively promote WHO’s ‘health-in-all-policies’ approach, coordinating with ministries of labour, education, trade and other relevant ministries to inform policy and achieve health-positive outcomes,” said Dr Singh, Regional Director, WHO South-East Asia Region.