

WHA57.19 International migration of health personnel: a challenge for health systems in developing countries

The Fifty-seventh World Health Assembly,

Recalling United Nations General Assembly resolution 2417 (XXIII) of 17 December 1968;

Recalling United Nations General Assembly resolution 58/208 on International migration and development, and the decision therein that, in 2006, the General Assembly will devote a high-level dialogue to international migration and development;

Further recalling resolutions WHA22.51 (1969) and WHA25.42 (1972);

Noting that the African Union declared 2004 “Year for Development of Human Resources in Africa”;

Taking note of the Commonwealth Code of Practice for the International Recruitment of Health Workers, which was adopted at the meeting of Commonwealth health ministers (Geneva, 18 May 2003);

Noting the work in progress on international labour migration in the International Organization for Migration, the Global Commission on International Migration, and in other international bodies;

Recognizing the importance of human resources in strengthening health systems and in successful realization of the internationally agreed goals contained in the United Nations Millennium Declaration;

Noting with concern that highly trained and skilled health personnel from the developing countries continue to emigrate at an increasing rate to certain countries, which weakens health systems in the countries of origin;

Being aware of the work undertaken in United Nations organizations and in other international organizations with a view to strengthening the capacity of governments to manage migration flows at national and regional levels, and the need for further action to address, at both national and international levels, as an integrated part of the Sector Wide Approaches and other development plans, the issue of migration of trained health-care personnel;

Noting further that many developing countries are not yet technically equipped to assess adequately the magnitude and characteristics of the outflow of their health personnel;

Recognizing the significant efforts and investment made by developing countries in training and development of human resources for health;

Further recognizing the efforts made to reverse the migration of health personnel from developing countries and aware of the need to increase these efforts;

Concerned that HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and other such communicable diseases are placing additional burdens on the health workforce;

1. URGES Member States:

- (1) to develop strategies to mitigate the adverse effects of migration of health personnel and minimize its negative impact on health systems;
- (2) to frame and implement policies and strategies that could enhance effective retention of health personnel including, but not limited to, strengthening of human resources for health planning and management, and review of salaries and implementation of incentive schemes;
- (3) to use government-to-government agreements to set up health-personnel exchange programmes as a mechanism for managing their migration;
- (4) to establish mechanisms to mitigate the adverse impact on developing countries of the loss of health personnel through migration, including means for the receiving countries to support the strengthening of health systems, in particular human resources development, in the countries of origin;

2. REQUESTS the Director-General:

- (1) to establish and maintain, in collaboration with relevant countries, institutions or organizations, information systems which will enable the appropriate international bodies to monitor independently the movement of human resources for health;
- (2) in cooperation with international organizations within their respective mandates, including the World Trade Organization, to conduct research on international migration of health personnel, including in relation to trade agreements and remittances, in order to determine any adverse effects and possible options to address them;
- (3) to explore additional measures that might assist in developing fair practices in the international recruitment of health personnel, including the feasibility, cost and appropriateness of an international instrument;
- (4) to support Member States in strengthening their planning mechanisms and processes in order to provide for adequate training of personnel to match their needs;
- (5) to develop, in consultation with Member States and all relevant partners, including development agencies, a code of practice¹ on the international recruitment of health personnel, especially from developing countries, and to report on progress to the Fifty-eighth World Health Assembly;
- (6) to support efforts of countries by facilitating dialogue and raising awareness at the highest national and international levels and between stakeholders about migration of health personnel and its effects, including examination of modalities for receiving countries to offset the loss of health workers, such as investing in training of health professionals;
- (7) to mobilize all relevant programme areas within WHO, in collaboration with Member States, in order to develop human-resources capability and to improve health support to developing countries by setting up appropriate mechanisms;

¹ It is understood that, within the United Nations system, the expression “code of practice” refers to instruments that are not legally binding.

- (8) to consult with the United Nations and specialized agencies on the possibility of declaring a year or a decade of “Human Resources for Health Development”;
- (9) to declare the theme of World Health Day 2006 to be “Human Resources for Health Development”;
- (10) to include human resources for health development as a top-priority programme area in WHO’s General Programme of Work 2006–2015;
- (11) to report on implementation of this resolution to the Fifty-eighth World Health Assembly.

(Eighth plenary meeting, 22 May 2004 –
Committee A, third report)