

Supporting the Health Workforce in Developing Countries Subcommittee Topic Briefing

Topic Overview

Properly trained healthcare workers with the necessary medical equipment, are a crucial ingredient in ensuring the health and well-being of a country's population. Healthcare workers not only diagnose and treat patients, they also promote policies that improve people's health, and draw the attention of political leaders to the everyday health problems that confront millions around the world. Additionally, they help address and act on the **social determinants of health**, which can be defined as the aspects of our environment and our living conditions, that determine our health.¹

The health workforce plays a large role in preventing both communicable and noncommunicable diseases as they treat patients in hospitals, clinics, or community centers. A country's health workforce is made up of doctors, surgeons, nurses, primary care physicians, pharmacists, midwives, among many others, who are dedicated to improving the health of all people. Many developing countries lack the adequate number of healthcare workers needed to properly treat their citizens and sometimes lack the robust education systems needed to properly train healthcare workers. Investment in education and health systems in developing countries is a critical step in reaching the ratio of 4.45 healthcare workers per 1,000 people needed to achieve universal health care.²

Target 3.C - Supporting the Health Workforce in Developing Countries

SDG Target 3.C aims to substantially increase health financing and the recruitment, development, training and **retention** of the health workforce in developing countries, especially in the least developed countries and small island nations. Adequately training and developing a healthcare workforce is very expensive, and requires strong education systems and training facilities.

Health workers are unevenly distributed across the globe and even within countries. Regions that have the highest burden of disease and low health standards among their populations are also the regions that have the lowest number of healthcare workers. It is estimated that about 18 million additional healthcare workers will be needed globally by 2030 to ensure good health and well-being for all. Almost 40% of all countries have fewer than 10 medical doctors per 10,000 people. This ratio has only slightly improved from 2010 to 2015, indicating the need for a greater focus on the goal of increasing trained healthcare workers in developing countries.³ In addition, as the global population continues to grow, and as the average age of the global population rises, additional healthcare workers will be needed throughout the world.

The United Nations (UN) and the World Health Organization (WHO) must work together with their member countries to encourage the implementation of government policies in the health, education,

¹ Health Workers and Services - Action SDG <https://actionsdg.ctb.ku.edu/health-workers-services/>

² Strengthening the Health Workforce to Achieve the SDGs - Frontline Health Workers Coalition <https://www.frontlinehealthworkers.org/blog/strengthening-health-workforce-achieve-sdgs>

³ SDG 3 - UN Stats <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2019/goal-03/>



WORLD AFFAIRS COUNCIL of Philadelphia

finance, and labor sectors in order to train effective healthcare workers in developing countries. In addition, developing countries must also find solutions to retain more healthcare workers, as many seek to migrate to other countries where social and economic conditions are more favorable for work and living.⁴



Healthcare workers in Haiti are trained to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic (Source: Pan American Health Organization)

Programs such as Doctors Without Borders have realized the need for additional healthcare workers in developing countries, and seek to meet this need by sending qualified healthcare workers abroad. These healthcare professionals are often tasked with serving communities in significant need, such as people fleeing injustice, war and conflict, or those suffering the consequences of a natural disaster such as a hurricane or earthquake. Although these programs are important and vital to millions around the world, international organizations, such as the UN and WHO, should advocate for the development of medical professionals from developing nations to meet the needs of their community for a more sustainable, long-term solution.

Experts suggest that developing countries first identify their individual health-related needs and areas of health where their country struggles most. This can help tailor healthcare worker training programs and policies to directly address the specific needs of each developing country. For example, developing countries with high **Maternal Mortality Ratios (MMR)** can develop programs and policies that incentivize the training of professional midwives who can then help pregnant women and mothers receive the proper healthcare they need for themselves and their children.

Supporting healthcare workers, ensuring that they are trained properly, and encouraging governments to enact policies and programs that incentivize their citizens to choose the healthcare profession are sustainable, long-term solutions that can greatly contribute to breaking the cycle of social and economic inequalities in developing countries. Not only will an increase of trained, effective healthcare workers improve the good health and well-being of those living in developed countries, but it will also contribute to making positive gains in education, economic growth, and sustainable development. Finally, although this subcommittee focuses specifically on supporting the health workforce in developing countries, this issue affects all countries of the world. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown the world that good health and well-being is an interconnected issue; diseases do not stop spreading according to country borders. When healthcare workers are supported in developing countries, therefore improving good health and well-being, everyone benefits.

⁴ Health Workers and Services - Action SDG <https://actionsdg.ctb.ku.edu/health-workers-services/>

Quick Facts

Find at least three quick facts on supporting the health workforce in developing countries from this briefing paper. Quick facts should be about one sentence long and provide useful information on the subcommittee topic. A good example of a quick fact is a statistic related to the topic.

1. Quick Fact:
2. Quick Fact:
3. Quick Fact:

Questions to Consider

Use the information provided in the briefing paper above, as well as your own research on your assigned country, to answer the questions below.

1. Why is the support of healthcare workers important in achieving the overall goal of Ensuring Healthy Lives and Promoting Well-Being for All?
2. What other areas of healthy living impact the accessibility of the general public to healthcare workers and medical services?
3. Does your assigned country have an adequate number of professional healthcare workers? Why or why not? What social and economic factors in your assigned country contribute to the availability of healthcare workers for your country's population?
4. How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected your country's health workforce?

Glossary

| Term | Description |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) | The number of maternal deaths during a given time period per 100,000 live births during the same time period. |
| Retention | Maintaining possession or use of something. |



Social determinants of health

Conditions in the environments in which people are born, live, learn, work, play, worship, and age that affect a wide range of health, functioning, and quality-of-life outcomes and risks.