



## EFN MEMBERS ACTIONS AND CONCERNS REGARDING THE H1N1 FLU PANDEMIC

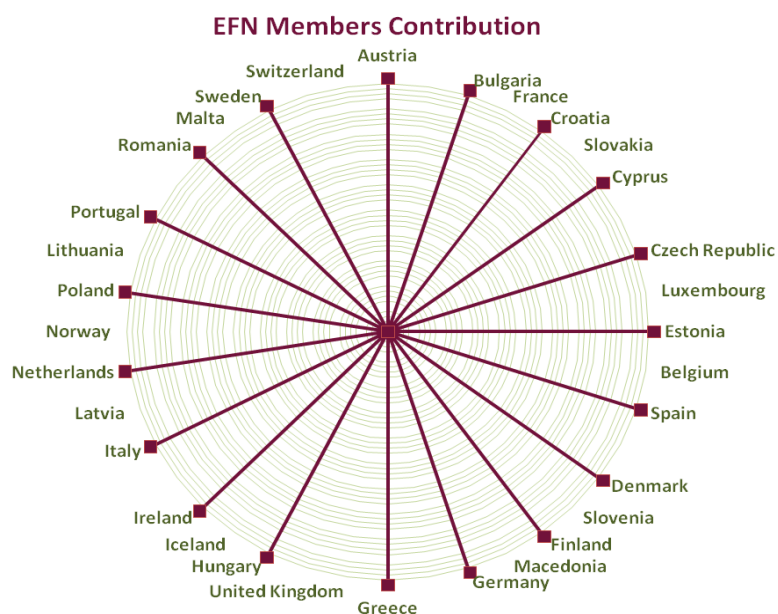
### I. Background

The **European Federation of Nurses Associations (EFN)** was established in 1971 and is the independent voice of the profession. The EFN consists of National Nurses Associations from 32 EU Member States, and its work has an effect on the daily lives of 6 million nurses throughout the European Union and Europe. The mission of EFN is to strengthen the status and practice of the profession of nursing for the benefit of the health of the citizens and the interests of nurses in the EU & Europe.

In response to the H1N1 Flu Pandemic, EFN has been collating information about relevant health measures and actions at Member State level, particularly with regards to Nursing and nurses. EFN Members have been very active in engaging with relevant authorities and supporting their National healthcare systems in addressing this crisis.

### II. Introduction

EFN has issued a call to its Members to feedback relevant information at MS level and has been active in collecting and analysing its Members responses. This document has been devised to present a synthesised image of the current state of play. 19 National Nurses Associations responded to this consultation, representing a 65% response.



EFN Members have demonstrated a commitment in supporting local action to combat the pandemic with views converging at EU level with regards to main issues and concerns. Five thematic areas have been identified and are presented next.

### **III. Converging issues and concerns**

- **Involvement in policy making**

The H1N1 pandemic has been recognised by EFN Members as a great source for concern especially when considering its health and illness as well as cost implications. Therefore at National level there has been substantial Nursing involvement in advisory boards and other committees to support the respective Health Departments/Ministries in organising and setting in place action plans such as vaccination programmes. For instance, in Ireland there is close collaboration amongst Nursing and government in supporting Centres of Nursing and Midwifery Education (CNME) to develop educational programmes to prepare nurses and midwives with the skills required to work in vaccination clinics. However, clearly such actions are all accompanied by associated costs.

- **Cost implications**

Cost implications of the H1N1 pandemic can be substantial but so are costs associated with prevention and containment of the virus. Specifically, EFN Members are concerned with the associated costs of purchasing and delivering vaccination. For example, the Estonian government has not yet decided on a national vaccination strategy since cost calculations are ongoing. Moreover, concern exists regarding vaccination coverage and the extent to which there will be capacity for all vulnerable or at-risk individuals to be covered by vaccination. However, all EFN Members explain that Nurses are among the priority high risk group and thus it is expected they would be receiving free coverage. Furthermore, besides the costs associated with purchasing the vaccines themselves, costs are also expected in terms of staffing especially in times of health workforce shortage.

- **Staffing**

Although a vaccination strategy appears to be a most effective measure in dealing with the H1N1 pandemic, this raises serious issues especially for Nurses. EFN Members report that of course nurses would be employed in various vaccination clinics and centres to organise, administer, and oversee the vaccination process. In addition, Nurses would be utilised in screening the general population for signs of H1N1 presence, public education and overall health promotion activities. Characteristically, in Poland the NNA has been active in offering guidance to health professionals and patients regarding personal protection, hygiene, and measures for when coming into contact with individuals affected by H1N1. Within a climate of workforce shortage it is important to plan this massive nurse deployment cautiously in order not to endanger patient safety in hospitals and other healthcare facilities.

- **Side effects**

Timely with EMEA recommending the use of three vaccines for marketing authorisation, EFN Members express concerns regarding possible side-effects of the vaccination. It is appreciated that the development of the vaccines has gone through a rigorous process and under the watchful eye of the Commission, however longer-term effects of the vaccines are not yet known as our Austrian Members remind. For instance, it is known that very common side-effects include Headache; Tiredness; Pain, redness, swelling; Fever; Aching muscles and joint pain. Additionally, the vaccine should not be administered to people who have had an anaphylactic reaction (severe allergic reaction) to any of the components of the vaccine such as egg or chicken protein. Moreover, one of the sources of concern is that by vaccinating all front line staff, such as nurses, there is a risk that if an adverse event does occur then the healthcare systems' defence lines would collapse.

- **Voluntary vaccination**

Reflecting on the above issues all EFN Members report that vaccination for Nurses would in fact be freely and readily available, but on a voluntary basis. Discussions concerning obligatory vaccination are rarely mentioned however there is a strong drive from governments to encourage uptake of vaccination by healthcare workers and of course nurses. For example, the DH in Ireland argues that *"Healthcare staff has a moral and ethical obligation to be vaccinated to protect themselves and their patients and are strongly encouraged to avail of both pandemic and seasonal influenza vaccine when they become available."* Moreover, in Portugal although healthcare professionals are not required to be vaccinated, they must sign a declaration of refusal if they do not accept the vaccination. Nevertheless, MS recognise that it is nurses' personal responsibility to take up the offer of the vaccine since as our members from the Netherlands explain: *"nurses are trained healthcare professionals and thus very capable of making their own professional choices"*.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

In conclusion, the EFN recognises that the H1N1 Pandemic is a serious matter that must not be taken lightly and therefore aims to continue fostering its Members' actions at National Level while also supporting the Commission in their endeavour. During the current pandemic flu crisis Nurses represent the healthcare systems' first line of defence since in 80% of cases they are the public's first point of contact. The success in the fight against the flu pandemic is highly reliant on the skills and motivation of the Nursing workforce and thus timely support is of the essence.

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