



EFN MEMBERS' REPORT ON THE IMPACT OF THE FINANCIAL CRISIS

1. Background

Twenty-eight Members of the European Federation of Nurses Associations (EFN) reported during the 90th General Assembly, held in Brussels in April 2009, on the impact of the economic and financial crisis on health and social services in the EU Member States. The EFN perceives as important that Members share their experiences with colleagues within the EU, learn from each other ongoing developments at National level, and how they can provide support to each other.

This initiative fits within Objective 3 of the EFN Strategic Plan "*Strengthening EFN representation in the EU and Europe and develop EFN key role as bridge between NNA and decision-makers in the EU institutions*".

2. EFN Members' synthesised report

2.1 Summary

The EFN Members presented a bleak picture of the current state of Nursing and healthcare in Europe, confirming concerns for serious negative impacts on health as a result of the financial crisis.



Figure 1: Areas of Reported Impact of the Financial Crisis

Health budgets in many countries are reduced by an average of 6% (e.g. Iceland, Ireland, Lithuania) consequently leading to loss of Nursing posts - by up to 4.000 in some instances - and halt on recruitment efforts (e.g. Cyprus, Italy, Slovenia, Sweden). Moreover, in attempts to further save money nurses in many countries are currently not being paid for their overtime or for their specialist knowledge (e.g. Latvia, Poland, and Portugal). At the same time we are witnessing a substantial increase in the Nursing workload due to an increase in social deprivation as well as because of reduced staffing levels (e.g. Croatia, Czech Republic, France, and Spain). Inevitably, this has led EU nurses fleeing their countries for cross-Atlantic opportunities as in Canada, or even leaving the profession of Nursing all together (e.g. Bulgaria, Ireland).

The situation is critical and it is therefore imperative that immediate action is taken to safeguard the future of Nursing and Healthcare in Europe.

2.2 Narrative analysis

a. Budget Cuts

The narrative of the current state of Nursing and healthcare in the EU begins with unprecedented health budget cuts across Europe by an average of 6% despite numerous efforts for health to be safeguarded. Some of the countries hardest hit include Iceland where health costs would be cut down by 10% before the end of the year and then a further 10% for the coming two years; that amounts to a total cut of 30%. Similar difficulties are encountered throughout the EU including Ireland and particularly Lithuania where a 6% decrease in healthcare budgets has already taken effect.

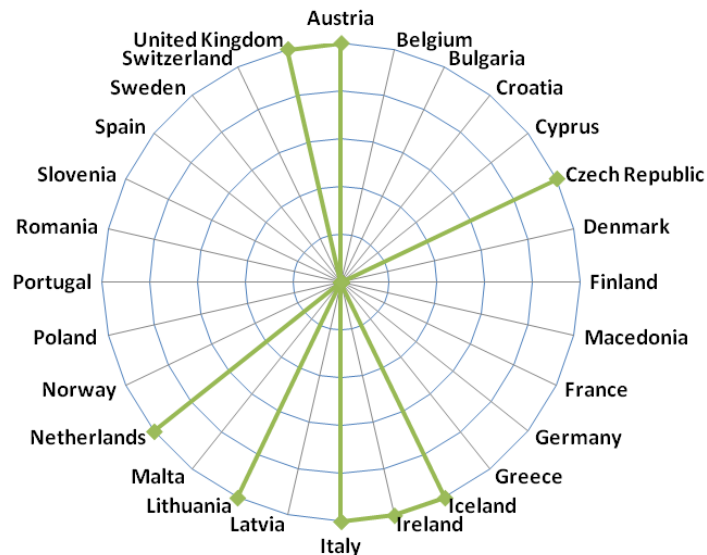


Figure 2: Countries Reporting Impact on Budgets

b. Loss of Nursing Posts

Inevitably numerous Nursing posts have been sacrificed in rushed attempts to contain expenditure. Therefore, at this time where Nursing services are needed most in Ireland 4,000 Nursing posts have been lost. This discouraging phenomenon is witnessed across Europe from Cyprus in the Southeast to Sweden in the Northwest, including Slovenia and Italy. Needless to say that all recruitment efforts have ceased, such as in Malta and Portugal, which is incomprehensible when considering that just half a year ago the shortage of nurses was of the highest concern.

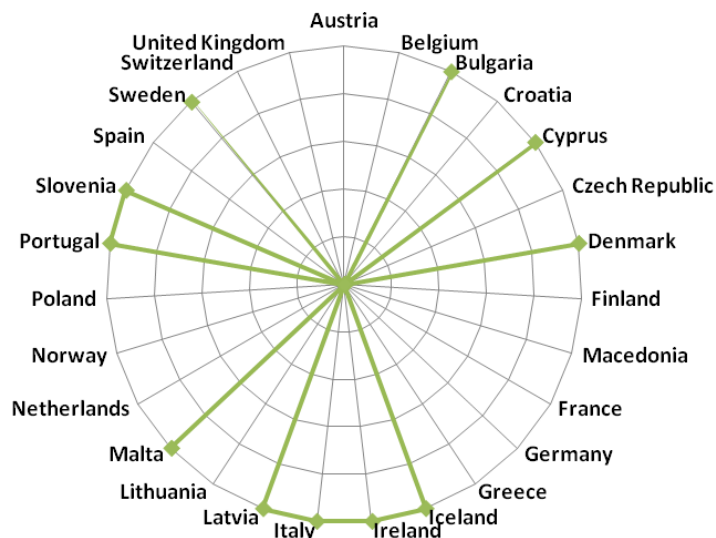


Figure 3: Countries Reporting Impact on Nursing Posts

c. Loss of Pay

Subsequently, things are looking poorly for the remainder active nurses in the workforce who are faced with working overtime without remuneration or recognition of their specialist knowledge and skills. This results in significant and direct reduction of nurses’ pay evident in many countries including Finland, Latvia, and Poland. It is particularly upsetting when the real life effects are considered such as in the United Kingdom where nurses are struggling to make their mortgage payment with arrears and repossessions becoming imminent. Naturally it is not just nurses who are suffering but quality and safe care is also in great jeopardy since at the same time when the EU Commission and Parliament are calling for more specialist nurses to tackle infection control, specialisation is not supported at Member State level. This endangers patient safety and quality standards when they are most important.

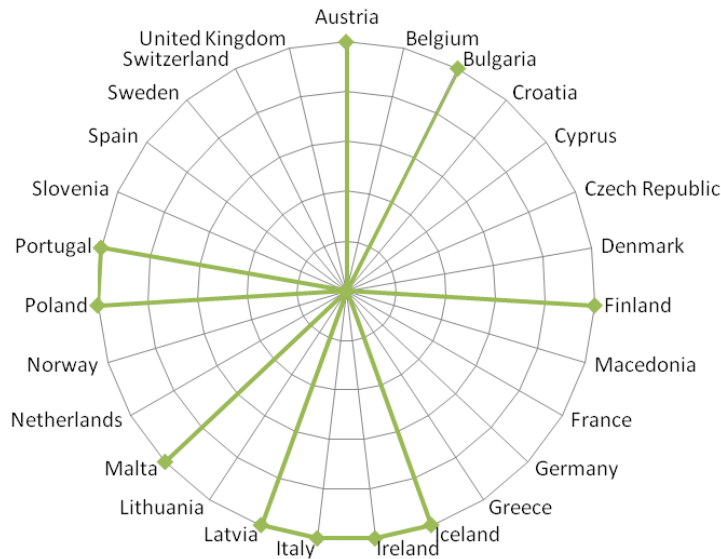


Figure 4: Countries Reporting Impact on Nurses' Pay

d. Workload increase

Amongst all of these disappointing circumstances for our nurses, there are reports of a rise in social deprivation issues that combined with the emerging influenza pandemic result in a steep increase of the Nursing workload as more and more EU citizens are desperately turning to healthcare providers for assurance. This is already clear in many countries such as Croatia, Czech Republic, France, and Spain. The EFN Members remain anxious about this development since an increased workload and overburden nurses are catalysts for a rise in failure to rescue and medication error incidents; fundamental elements of patient safety.

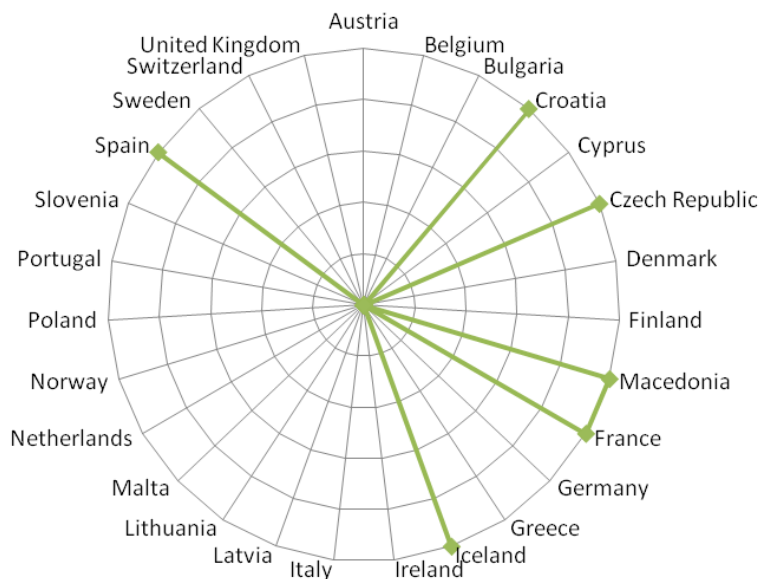


Figure 5: Countries Reporting Impact on Nursing Workload

e. Loss of Workforce

Finally, as a catastrophic result of the aforementioned tragic phenomena EU nurses are fleeing Europe and even worse, are fleeing the profession. Sadly, EFN members are noticing how in light of the deteriorating working circumstance for nurses in the EU, cross-Atlantic opportunities such as in Canada or USA are becoming difficult to resist. However, particularly upsetting are news coming from countries such as Bulgaria where approximately 10.000 nurses have given up Nursing as a career altogether in search of alternative occupational pathways. This is alarming since it appears that Europe is being dragged in a direction opposite of the Commission's Green Paper direction of building and maintaining our health workforce towards EU sufficiency.

3. Conclusion

The efforts towards developing a high quality and sustainable health workforce able to deliver the highest standards of safety and quality in healthcare must not be sacrificed for short term gains; vision must prevail short-sightedness.

EFN Report on Financial Crisis – April 2009

European Federation of Nurses Associations (EFN)
Registration Number 476.356.013
Clos du Parnasse 11A, 1050 Brussels, Belgium
Tel: +32 2 512 74 19 Fax: +32 2 512 35 50
Email: efn@efn.be Website: www.efnweb.eu