



Monitoring progress on the implementation of Code – fifth round reporting  
**Independent Stakeholder Reporting 2024**

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Network Medicus Mundi Switzerland

**Name of entity submitting the report:**

Civil Society

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**Description of the entity submitting the report:**

MMS represents around 50 Swiss organisations and academic institution working in the field of international health cooperation. Together with their partners they are engaged in strengthening the Right to Health and the access to health services. The lack of qualified health personnel is a major issue for achieving health for all. This is why we advocate in Switzerland for ethical recruitment and the full implementation of the Code.

**1 Initial situation in Switzerland**

As a civil society actor, we recognise that the competent national authorities, in particular the Federal Office of Public Health (FOPH) and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), have always taken a supportive stance towards the WHO Code on the Recruitment of Health Personnel (WHO Code). At the same time, it must be emphasised that due to the federal system in the Swiss healthcare system, the control ability of the national authorities is limited.

Since the last, 4th report on the implementation of the WHO Code, the situation has become even more acute. The shortage of healthcare professionals continues to increase. The number of advertised vacancies in the nursing sector averaged 9,282 in 2021, 12,312 in 2022 and 13,765 in 2023 ([Obsan Nursing Monitoring](#), 6.8.2024) This corresponds to an increase in vacancies of around 48% within three years - a clear sign of a worsening staff shortage in the nursing sector.

This shows that the pressure within various healthcare facilities in Switzerland to recruit the necessary staff is high. As a result, we are increasingly finding that various players in the healthcare sector are recruiting directly from abroad. For example, the (public) cantonal hospital of the Canton Basel-Landschaft has started a recruitment programme in the Philippines. (<https://www.srf.ch/news/schweiz/spital-baselland-kantonsspital-engagiert-pflegefachkraefte-aus-den-philippinen>). According to media reports, various hospitals, again including public hospitals, are actively recruiting abroad by means of castings in Rome and Berlin, for example, and by placing adverts abroad. (SonntagsBlick, 30 April 2023,

[https://www.medicusmundi.ch/assets/uploads/files/resources/2023/2023\\_04\\_30\\_SonntagsBlick\\_Rekrutierung%20im%20Ausland.pdf](https://www.medicusmundi.ch/assets/uploads/files/resources/2023/2023_04_30_SonntagsBlick_Rekrutierung%20im%20Ausland.pdf)).

Medicus Mundi Switzerland has noticed an increase in active recruitment by Swiss healthcare providers. Until now, they have relied on passively receiving applications from neighbouring countries due to the higher salary level. This trend is again underlined by the figures from the Swiss Health Observatory Obsan. Institutions are recruiting healthcare professionals from abroad to fill their vacancies. In 2022, 33 per cent of qualified nurses (tertiary level) working in Switzerland were trained abroad. ([Obsan Nursing Monitoring](#), 13.8.2024). According to a report in the *SonntagsZeitung* 2023, three out of four newly licensed doctors come from abroad. After Germany, France and Italy, Romania is now the fourth most important country of origin. (*SonntagsZeitung*, 12 February 2023,

[https://www.medicusmundi.ch/assets/uploads/files/resources/2023/2023\\_02\\_12\\_Gesucht%20Grundversorger.pdf](https://www.medicusmundi.ch/assets/uploads/files/resources/2023/2023_02_12_Gesucht%20Grundversorger.pdf)).

Switzerland is not yet in breach of the WHO Code in these specific cases. However, by widening the gap between the number of healthcare workers trained in Switzerland and the recognised need for healthcare workers, Switzerland is violating the spirit of the WHO Code.

## 2 Consequences of increased recruitment on countries of origin

Overall, the increased recruitment practice means that the international game for the "scarce commodity" of healthcare personnel is further intensified. Even if Switzerland primarily relies on personnel from neighbouring countries, this means that these countries are also dependent on additional personnel from abroad - to the detriment of countries with already weak healthcare systems. As the neighbouring countries try to retain their own trained staff, Switzerland must rely firstly on recruiting more actively in neighbouring countries and secondly on recruiting in more distant countries such as Romania. This puts a strain on healthcare provision in these countries with weaker resources.

Of course, these countries of origin benefit from the remittance of funds by healthcare staff working abroad. These funds do indeed have a certain potential to strengthen development in the region of origin, but they can also exacerbate inequalities in the population. From a health system perspective, however, the funds are negligible. To compensate for the loss of self-trained healthcare personnel, the country of origin would have to be compensated for the training costs by the destination country.

As a country that relies on foreign healthcare personnel, Switzerland must fulfil its responsibility at least to the extent that it continues to invest more in strengthening healthcare systems in middle- and low-income countries.

## 3. Political developments

The healthcare system remains under pressure - particularly in terms of its financing. According to a recently published study by PWC Switzerland, hospitals will need an estimated CHF 1 billion per year in the coming years in order to be able to make investments

(<https://www.pwc.ch/de/insights/gesundheitswesen/spitalstudie-2024.html>). It is to be feared that this pressure will also have an impact on healthcare staff.

At the same time, the adoption of the so-called nursing initiative by the Swiss population on 28 November 2021 has strengthened the nursing profession in the constitution. On the one hand, the training of qualified nursing professionals must be expanded in line with demand. Investments totalling 1 billion Swiss francs are planned for this (Umsetzung Verfassungsartikel Pflege, erste Etappe, [Gesundheitsdirektorenkonferenz, 7. Mai 2024](#)). On the other hand, the quality of care should also be increased by improving the working environment and working with needs-based staffing at the health provider level. Implemented correctly, the nursing article in the constitution should ensure that the implementation of the WHO code is advanced in at least one area of the healthcare professions.

#### 4. Demands from Swiss civil society

To summarise, after fourteen years and one pandemic, Switzerland is not fulfilling its responsibility to the WHO Code and is recruiting more than ever abroad. At the same time, the number of countries affected by extreme shortages of health workers has increased from 48 to 55 (WHO 2023).

For this reason, various organisations and trade unions from Swiss civil society published an urgent appeal on 28 May 2024 with the following demands:

“The right to health is a global right for all and health workers are not a commodity. Therefore, together with 28 other organisations, we demand

- Consistent compliance with the WHO Code by all Swiss actors in the Swiss healthcare system: Confederation, cantons, hospitals, nursing homes...

- Cantons and employers must invest in a high-quality working environment in the healthcare sector to prevent more healthcare staff from leaving hospitals, care homes and other healthcare institutions. The proposals for this have long been on the table (SBK 2022).

- The allocation of resources in the healthcare system must be more strongly focussed on healthcare staff - i.e. on the people who provide healthcare to the population on a daily basis.

- Training: Quality in training is important and the cantons are responsible for ensuring that the necessary funds are allocated.

- Switzerland's international cooperation must be strengthened. Financial cutbacks affect various areas of society that are important for health. Switzerland must become more involved in strengthening the healthcare system and training healthcare personnel.

- Switzerland should act as an international pioneer in the implementation of the WHO Code and work within the WHO to make the Code more binding.”

([https://www.medicusmundi.ch/assets/uploads/files/resources/2024/2024%2005%2027%20Dringender%20Aufruf%20Gesundheitspersonal\\_finale%20Version%20dt.pdf](https://www.medicusmundi.ch/assets/uploads/files/resources/2024/2024%2005%2027%20Dringender%20Aufruf%20Gesundheitspersonal_finale%20Version%20dt.pdf))

MMS/ml, 15.08.2024