



World Health  
Organization

# USER'S GUIDE

The WHO Global **CODE** of Practice  
on the International Recruitment of  
Health Personnel

**User's Guide to the WHO Global  
Code of Practice on the International  
Recruitment of Health Personnel**



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# **The WHO Global Code of Practice on the International Recruitment of Health Personnel<sup>1</sup> at a glance**

## **1. Objectives**

The Code aims to establish and promote voluntary principles and practices for the ethical international recruitment of health personnel and to serve as a reference for all Member States.

## **2. Scope**

The Code is global in scope, and sets out to guide governments of all Member States and interested stakeholders in matters relating to the international recruitment of health personnel.

## **3. Ethical international recruitment**

The Code discourages the active recruitment of health personnel from developing countries facing critical shortages of health personnel.

## **4. Fair treatment of migrant health personnel**

The Code emphasizes the importance of equal treatment for migrant health workers and the domestically trained health workforce. All health personnel should have the opportunity to assess the benefits and risks associated with different employment positions.

## **5. Health personnel development and health systems sustainability**

Countries should implement effective health workforce planning, education, training and retention strategies to sustain a health workforce that is appropriate for the specific conditions of each country and to reduce the need to recruit migrant health personnel.

## **6. International cooperation**

The Code encourages collaboration between destination and source countries so that both can derive benefits from the international migration of health personnel.

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<sup>1</sup> The WHO Global Code of Practice on the International Recruitment of Health Personnel shall hereafter be referred to as either the “WHO Code” or “the Code”.

**7. Support to developing countries**

Member States are encouraged to provide technical assistance and financial support to developing countries or countries with economies in transition that are experiencing a critical health workforce shortage.

**8. Data gathering**

Member States are encouraged to strengthen or establish health personnel information systems, including information on health personnel migration, in order to collect, analyse and translate data into effective health workforce policies and plans.

**9. Information exchange**

Member States should periodically collect and report to the WHO Secretariat data on laws and regulations related to health personnel recruitment and migration, as well as data from health personnel information systems. Member States are encouraged to promote information exchange on international health personnel migration and health systems both nationally and internationally.

**10. The Code's implementation**

For purposes of international communication, each Member State should, as appropriate, designate a national authority responsible for the exchange of information regarding health personnel migration and the implementation of the Code.

**11. Monitoring of the Code's implementation**

Member States are encouraged to implement the Code in collaboration with all stakeholders. All parties should strive to work individually and collectively to achieve the objectives of the Code.

**12. Monitoring the implementation process**

With regard to implementing the Code, Member States should periodically report measures taken, results achieved, difficulties encountered and lessons learnt to the WHO Secretariat. The WHO Director-General will subsequently report to the World Health Assembly on the effectiveness of the Code in achieving its stated objectives and make suggestions for improvement.

# Introduction

Reaching the health-related Millennium Development Goals will be impossible without strong and adequately staffed national health systems.

Nevertheless, 57 countries still experience critical shortages of appropriately trained health personnel. One reason for these shortages is that health personnel continue to leave their homes in search of better career opportunities and living conditions elsewhere. Sometimes this means leaving remote and rural areas for urban ones. Sometimes it means travelling abroad. Indeed, the numbers of migrating health personnel have significantly increased in recent years and patterns of migration have become increasingly complicated and involve more countries (see Box 1 below). While all countries can be affected by the international and national migration of their health workforce, it is particularly challenging for those with already fragile health systems.

## BOX N° 1

### Health workforce migration and the global health workforce crisis

Numbers of migrating health personnel have increased significantly in recent decades. Patterns of migration have also become more complicated and involve more countries. Migration between developed countries is well established and migration between developing countries is increasing. But it is migration from developing to developed countries that dominates global attention. This is because of the numbers of health

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