Ireland’s new initiative to facilitate training for health professionals from low- and middle-income countries

Prior to the 3rd Global Forum on Human Resources for Health, the Irish Government was already working towards HRH related goals, but the commitments they made at the conference helped strengthen the country’s resolve, for instance contributing to Ireland’s actions in support of the implementation of the WHO Code. The five commitments made by the Government of Ireland included: implementing the WHO Code through collaborative efforts by the Department of Health, Department of Foreign Affairs, and the Health Service Executive; pledging up to €1,500,000 over the next three year to implement the GHWA Strategic Plan (2014-2016), as well as continued bilateral support of Ireland’s partner countries; introducing an International Medical Graduate Training Initiative for doctors in low/middle income countries; developing a program for institutional partnership with less developed countries; and providing funding for research to evaluate the migration of doctors to and from Ireland.

In line with the WHO Code provisions, one of Ireland’s initial steps toward implementation was to establish an international medical graduate program through which doctors from low and middle-income countries are able to work in specialist training posts in Ireland under a structured arrangement ensuring that they go back to their countries once they have completed their posting. This program has grown rapidly, scaling up from 27 last year to 112 doctors in 2014. Having begun with Pakistan, the program is continuing to expand to include doctors from other countries facing significant HRH challenges, such as Sudan. Ireland also strives to retain and grow domestic health workers, so as to reduce its dependence on imported health workers, and has now increased production of nurses and doctors to the level required for self-sufficiency. Ireland’s outstanding efforts in the area of health workforce development - and HRH migration in particular - were also recognized at the Third Global Forum on HRH through an award given by the Health Worker Migration Policy Council.

As they continue to improve upon the regulation of supply and demand of health workers, communication and collaboration has become a key element. The Department of Health has managed to include several constituencies and sectors in the planning and implementation of health workforce policies, such as the involvement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Also an independent OECD review highlighted inter-sectoral collaboration as a very positive aspect of the efforts by the Irish Government. This collaboration between ministries has also allowed Ireland to introduce a programme of institutional partnerships aimed at assisting developing countries. A concrete result of this program was a Statement of Intent agreed with the Government of Mozambique in June 2014 to collaborate on a capacity building initiative in health care quality and patient safety.

Finally, Ireland has dedicated significant funds to research groups working to collect data and information on the migration patterns into, out of, and across regions of, Ireland. This information will be crucial to the Ministry of Health as they plan to match supply and demand for a future healthcare workforce for the country.

Ireland’s efforts towards implementation of their HRH commitments showcase what can be accomplished through partnerships and intersectoral collaboration; cooperation and synergy are key to unlocking the full potential of the WHO Code.