

Building capacity for equitable healthcare workforce policy, learning from migrant healthcare workers: a qualitative study with Romania physicians working in Germany during COVID-19

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Abstract

Background. Attention to the healthcare workforce has increased, yet comprehensive information on migrant healthcare workers is missing. This study focuses on migrant healthcare workers' experiences and mobility patterns in the middle of a global health crisis, aiming to explore the capacity for circular migration and support effective and equitable healthcare workforce policy. **Material and methods.** Romanian physicians working in Germany during the COVID-19 pandemic served as an empirical case study. We applied a qualitative explorative approach; interviews (n=21) were collected from mid of September to early November 2022 and content analysis was performed. **Results and discussion.** Migrant physicians showed strong resilience during the COVID-19 crisis and rarely complained. Commitment to high professional standards and career development were major pull factors towards Germany, while perceptions of limited career choices, nepotism and corruption in Romania caused strong push mechanisms. We identified two major mobility patterns that may support circular migration policies: well-integrated physicians with a wish to give something back to their home country, and mobile cosmopolitan physicians who flexibly balance career opportunities and personal/family interests. Health policy must establish systematic monitoring of the migrant healthcare workforce including actor-centred approaches, support integration in destination countries as well as health system development in sending countries, and invest in evidence-based circular migration policy.

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