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Ageing is Living – A Strategy for Promoting a Lifetime of Health and Well-Being in the WHO European Region 2026–2030

Statement by
International Organization for Migration (IOM)

Honourable Chair, Director-General, Regional Director, Excellencies, distinguished delegates,

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) commends WHO EURO and its Member States for the development of the new Strategy *“Ageing is Living – A Strategy for Promoting a Lifetime of Health and Well-Being in the WHO European Region 2026–2030.”* This strategy comes at a critical moment for rapidly changing Europe’s demographic and health landscape and offers a coherent framework for protecting health and dignity across the life course.

Europe is undergoing one of the fastest demographic transitions in the world. By 2030, one in every four people in the Region will be aged 60 or older. This remarkable achievement reflects decades of public health progress, but it also presents complex social and economic challenges. The population of working age is shrinking while demand for long-term and community-based care continues to increase. National health systems—already strained by the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, fiscal constraints, and climate-related shocks—are struggling to adapt to the dual challenges of an ageing population and an ageing health workforce.

The WHO projects that the European Region may face a shortage of more than 1.2 million health and care workers by 2030, with the greatest deficits in nursing, primary care, and long-term care services. These shortages are intensified by migration, early retirement, and unequal distribution of staff between urban and rural areas. Without coordinated policy responses, these gaps will jeopardize equitable access to care and achievement of universal health coverage.

IOM emphasizes that migration and mobility, when properly governed, can and must be part of the solution. Health workforce migration is not a new phenomenon. It is a structural feature of today’s globalized labour market. The challenge is to ensure that migration takes place safely, ethically, and in ways that strengthen rather than weaken health systems in both origin, transit and destination countries.

In this context, IOM promotes regular and mutually beneficial mobility schemes, including Mobility Skills Partnerships (MSPs). These partnerships link skills development in countries of origin with fair recruitment and professional opportunities abroad, creating a virtuous cycle of training, circular mobility, and knowledge exchange. Aligned with the WHO Global Code of Practice on the International Recruitment of Health Personnel, MSPs enable countries to respond to labour market demand while safeguarding the rights of migrant workers and ensuring that origin countries benefit from reinvestment in their health sectors.

IOM’s recent initiatives in the Western Balkans and Central Asia illustrate how inter-ministerial coordination, health workforce observatories, and bilateral/multilateral cooperation frameworks can

support balanced retention and mobility. By building data systems, strengthening forecasting capacity, and promoting dialogue between ministries of health, education, and labour, these programmes help governments plan their workforce sustainably while opening safe and regular pathways for health professionals.

At the same time, healthy ageing cannot be achieved without ensuring inclusiveness for all population groups. Many older migrants and displaced persons in the Region face specific barriers to accessing health and social care including but not limited to language, digital literacy, administrative obstacles, and social isolation. As migration and ageing are increasingly intersected, policies must ensure that health systems are both migrant-inclusive and age-friendly.

The *“Ageing is Living”* Strategy provides a valuable opportunity to embed these principles into national and regional health planning. IOM encourages the Member States to integrate mobility governance, ethical recruitment, and skills partnerships into their workforce strategies under this framework.

In conclusion, IOM reaffirms its strong commitment to working with WHO EURO, its Member States, and partners to build resilient, people-centred, and inclusive health systems that value health workers as the foundation of healthy ageing and sustainable development. By linking demographic foresight, health workforce planning, and humane migration governance, the Region can ensure that ageing truly means living productively, safely, and with dignity for all.

Thank you.

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