

Mobilizing human resources

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The COVID-19 pandemic has confronted health systems with extraordinary changes in demand for health services, which magnified underlying disparities in the health workforce. Initial health workforce capacities were critical, as health systems only have two options to increase workforce level: increasing capacity among the existing workforce or mobilising/recruiting additional personnel. Workforce capacity became a limiting factor in an effective pandemic response, particularly in countries with acute workforce shortages. Countries in Europe have pursued various strategies to rapidly surge the numbers of health workers and using their existing human resources differently, including by introducing or expanding on alternative and flexible approaches such as task shifting and other skill-mix changes. The pressure to provide services across the continuum of care, from prevention and vaccination to specialist and inpatient care, led several countries to re-evaluate the distribution of tasks among the health workforce. In the best cases, multidisciplinary team-based staffing models combined the skills of multiple health professionals, enabling provision of the right care at the right time. This presentation will provide an overview of strategies to increase capacity for surges in human resources requirements, as well as supporting measures that help recognise the key role of health workers in the pandemic response. A brief overview of key metrics to assess resilience in the area of human resources will also be provided.