



# Understanding health labour markets in the Western Pacific Region



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# Introduction

Health systems that aspire to universal health coverage for their populations need to develop enabling policies and plans for human resources for health (HRH). These policies must be based on a sound understanding of the demand and the supply of staff, as well as on assessments of the investments needed to sustain current and future supply. This cannot be achieved without consideration of the dynamics of health-care labour markets.

No health sector workforce is static. The “stock” of health workers in the labour market is always subject to “inflows” and “outflows”. There is a constant flow of new workers entering the health-care sector, whilst others are leaving it, permanently or temporarily, or moving between jobs, organizations, sectors and countries. If health workforce planning is to be effective, it must be able to assess and take these patterns of mobility into account, just as HRH policies must take into account the dynamic nature of labour markets.

Labour markets in the health sector cover a broad range of workers, from highly qualified medical specialists to unskilled locally employed staff, such as cleaners and porters. Different occupational groups have varying levels of health-sector-specific skills and qualifications, and different labour-market behaviour patterns. To be effective and responsive, HRH policy must also reflect this diversity across labour markets and, in some cases, be tailored to the needs of specific occupations or geographical regions, within the broader national labour market.

There are a number of aspects of HRH policy and planning that can be informed by labour market analyses. These include:

- assessing output from training and other sources of supply of new health workers;
- optimizing the mix of different health-worker skills and competencies;
- planning for the future workforce;
- responding to changes in service demand, and the emergence of new care requirements; and
- developing effective strategies for recruitment and retention.

The aim of this report is to provide policy-makers with an understanding of the health-care labour market context in the Western Pacific Region. It sets out a framework to assist them in conducting labour market analysis that will inform more effective policy development and planning.

The report comprises three main sections: section 1 describes and defines labour markets; section 2 examines labour market characteristics in the Western Pacific Region; and section 3 describes the development and application of a framework to understand health-care labour markets in the Region.

Annex 1 gives further information on sources and resources for health-care labour market analysis; annex 2 lists the countries and areas that make up the Western Pacific Region; and annex 3 provides additional figures on the density of the health workforce in the Region.

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