

**Romania seeks EU-wide solution to address shortage of doctors**

By [Catalina Mihai](https://www.euractiv.com/authors/catalina-mihai/) | [EURACTIV.ro](https://www.euractiv.com/content_providers/euractiv-ro/)   2023. g. 5. maijs (updated:  2023. g. 5. maijs)

Currently, there are around 65,000 doctors in Romania, more than in 2018 when the country decided to substantially increase health workers' wages, according to the National Institute of Statistics (INS).

This article is part of our special report [*Health workers’ intra-EU migration causes headaches*](https://www.euractiv.com/section/health-consumers/special_report/health-workers-intra-eu-migration-causes-headaches/).

Despite massive migration to the West, Romania has seen an increase in the number of doctors, but the current ratio (346 doctors per 100,000 inhabitants) is still not enough, and stakeholders say EU-wide solutions should be found with the proper implementation of the post-pandemic Recovery Fund.

“Over the last five years, there has been an increase in the number of doctors in Romania, now we are closer to the European average – we currently have 346 doctors per 100,000 inhabitants – but this is not enough”, Health Minister Alexandru Rafila said in March during a high-level WHO Europe Regional Office meeting on human resources in healthcare, in Bucharest.

Rafila said that Romania had an extended period, ”which we hope had ended,” when over 10,000, probably 15,000 doctors from Romania generally emigrated to other countries in the European Union and the US and Canada.

The number of nurses who left the country is even higher – over 21,000.

Currently, there are around 65,000 doctors in Romania, more than in 2018 when the country decided to substantially increase health workers’ wages, according to the National Institute of Statistics (INS).

However, the authorities do not know exactly how many doctors have left the country since joining the EU in 2007.

In 2019 and 2020, 5,188 health workers requested certificates of good standing issued by the Romanian College of Physicians and necessary to work abroad: 2,173 in 2020 and 3,015 in 2019, according to the Ministry of Health.

However, these figures include doctors, dentists and pharmacists who are citizens of Romania, other EU member states, and third countries.

## **No doctors in many rural areas**

The President of the College of Physicians in Romania, Daniel Coriu, claims that there are two ”countries”, one with an excess of doctors and the other without doctors.

Over 50% of doctors are concentrated in the university areas, i.e. Bucharest, Dolj, Timiş, Cluj, Mureş and Iasi.

“In these university areas, there are enough doctors, but not in the rest of the country. We have a big, big problem”, said Coriu.

Three counties have less than 300 doctors, and ten counties have less than 500.

With the support of the WHO, Romania adopted in 2022 its first strategy regarding health workforce development. The health minister expressed hopes that the regional problems related to the health care human resources will be solved by 2030.

Among other initiatives, a pilot project will soon be developed to improve living conditions and accessibility in rural areas to attract health workers.

“The drive for doctors to work in the countryside is given not only by the fact that they have an equipped office, but we have to find solutions that address their families as well, which means access to education for the children of these families of doctors or nurses and, last but not least, a living standard that will allow them to practice without worries”, Rafila said.

Along the same lines, Romanian PM Nicolae Ciucă recognises the country’s health infrastructure issues.

“The hospital infrastructure in Romania needs investments and equipment at the highest standards. Citizens need quality medical services and safer hospitals,” said Ciucă on 25 April after visiting a hospital in Iaşi.

Many hospitals in the country also face a shortage of basic materials and essential medicines, including for cancer, and doctors are forced to send more severe cases to hospitals in university cities. About 25 counties currently have no radiotherapist, and others have only one oncologist per tens of thousands of inhabitants, according to an investigation of Digi24.

Ciuhodaru proposes modular multifunctional medical centres with EU funds to readdress the lack of facilities and professionals. [European Parliament]

Doctor Gindrovel Dumitra, a Romanian College of Physicians member, says that the deficit is increasing in the case of ATI and surgery specialists. One of the reasons young people don’t choose these specialities is the prospect of a malpractice suit, he says.

The shortage of health professionals ultimately means longer waiting times for patients, Romanian MEP Tudor Ciuhodaru, vice-chair of the Subcommittee on Public Health and member of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health, and Food Safety, told EURACTIV Romania.

“From an economic point of view, the lack of access to medical care means more days of sick leave, more drugs, more days of hospitalisation”, he added, pointing at the costs of not having enough medical facilities.

## **EU-level solutions**

Ciuhodaru proposes modular multifunctional medical centres with EU funds to readdress the lack of facilities and professionals.

“I propose an EU standard for quality health. A European citizen, whether in Iași, in Bacău, Brussels or Paris, to benefit from the same health care, same access to investigations or advanced medical procedures,” said Ciuhodaru.

He added, “Even if the healthcare systems lie within member states, some programmes for mothers and children, cardiovascular pathology, strokes, etc..… could be financed through EU funding”.

He concluded that the EU’s support in member states’ health systems could resemble the European civil protection mechanism, but it would be permanent rather than only activated when a crisis arises.

## **Long-term planning needed**

The health minister approved in March 2023 sectoral action plans for human resources for health development over 2023–2030.

These plans follow the approval of the Multiannual Strategy for the Human Resources for Health Development over 2022–2030 in June 2022, which aims to attract health professionals to underserved areas and improve education, recruitment, retention, and motivation of the workforce. The strategy is part of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP).

One of the primary measures of this strategy includes enhancing the quality of healthcare facilities and the essential infrastructure required for ensuring safe medical practices with European funds.

Another measure is collaborating with local authorities to motivate healthcare professionals to work in local medical facilities. This aim can be accomplished by offering monetary and non-monetary benefits, such as covering commuter transportation costs, providing housing options, or assisting with relocating the families of healthcare professionals.

The long-term strategy also aims to collaborate with medical and pharmacy universities to ensure the delivery of high-quality medical education that meets the needs of patients. Additionally, addressing the challenge of coordinating the number of students with the number of residents and available positions within the healthcare system is another crucial aspect to consider.

Other measures mentioned are to create a national platform to advertise all available positions within the healthcare system publicly and to increase the number of open positions in regions and specialities where there is a shortage of medical personnel.

[Edited by Sofia Stuart Leeson and Max Griera]