

Disclaimer: This factsheet has not been subject to the full Eurofound evaluation, editorial and publication process.

Factsheet for case **IE-2020-12/822**

Measures to deploy a larger workforce in public healthcare and allow for the reassignment of public sectors staff and teachers to other duties

Factsheet generated on 08 May 2020, 07:49

Country	Ireland, applies nationwide
Time period	Temporary, started on 20 March 2020
Type	Legislation or other statutory regulation
Category	Support for essential services – Mobilisation of a larger workforce
Case created	06 May 2020 (updated 07 May 2020)

Background information

As demand in the health and care sector increased as a result of COVID-19, a variety of measures have been taken to increase the supply of labour in these sectors. Pre-empted by some of the registration bodies for doctors and nurses, the possibility for former health care staff to return to the register was enacted as part of the 'Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (COVID-19) Act 2020 on 27 March 2020.

Medical and nursing schools in Ireland are fast tracking students to qualifications to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic.

A deal has also been reached between unions and the Health Service Executive to allow health care staff to be redeployed to private nursing homes.

The Health and Safety Executive has launched a call to encourage the return of health care workers to return to the service, as well as attracting health care workers from other countries currently in Ireland to assist with the effort to deal with COVID-19.

In addition, it has also been made possible for public sector staff and teachers to be reassigned to other duties as required during the pandemic.

Content of measure

The Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (COVID-19) Act passed in the Irish Parliament on 27 March 2020 introduces amendments to existing legislation in the context of the COVID-19 crisis. The temporary provisions are intended '[...] to provide for the registration of certain health and social care professionals to fulfil the need for medical resources to alleviate the risk from Covid-19 to human life and public health and for those and related purposes to amend the Dentists Act 1985, the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005, the Pharmacy Act 2007, the Medical Practitioners Act 2007, and the Nurses and Midwives Act 2011; [...] to enable the re-enlistment of formerly enlisted persons; [...]'].

Prior to this (17 March), this Health Service Executive (HSE) launched the 'Be on call for Ireland' recruitment drive. This was aimed at the recruitment of additional qualified healthcare workers including medical, nursing and therapy personnel as well as healthcare assistants. On 10 April, the HSE announced that there will be an increase in the annual intake of medical interns this year, from 734 to approximately 1,100. The Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland (NMBI) and the Irish Medical Council also took steps to make it easier for nurses and doctors to return to the register (e.g. by waiving registration fees).

The COVID-19 Act provides for health and social care professionals who want to return to work to have their applications to be registered with their regulatory bodies accelerated and returned to the register without paying a fee until 30 July 2020 (with possibility extend this date).

Medical and nursing schools have also been fast-tracking students to qualification to deal with the pandemic.

The Act also offers some protection to healthcare professionals, other than doctors, who may practise medicine during the pandemic (normally prohibited). They can do so under the direction and control of a registered medical practitioner, or in accordance with directions in writing given by a registered medical practitioner.

With regard to other public servants and teachers, the Department of Education issues a circular to school managers on 27 March 27 indicated that all public servants 'must be available to carry out work either to deliver services within their own sector or for temporary assignment within the wider public service...'. The possibility to reassign public service staff is set out in Circular 7/2020, issued by the government on 17 March 2020.

Use of measure

A few days after the measure was enacted (1 April) the Irish Times reported that around 540 nurses and 140 doctors had rejoined the register. This famously includes the Irish Prime Minister, Taoiseach Leo Varadkar -

who agreed to return to work to his former profession as a medical doctor for one day per week during the pandemic.

Actors, target groups and funding

Actors	Target groups	Funding
National government	Other workers & citizens Sector specific set of companies	Companies National funds

Social partners

Role of social partners	Consulted
Form of involvement	Direct consultation

Social partners were consulted on the Bill. In addition, a deal has also been reached between unions and the Health Service Executive to allow health care staff to be redeployed to private nursing homes.

Sectors and occupations

This case is sector-specific.

Economic area	Sector (NACE level 2)
O - Public Administration And Defence; Compulsory Social Security	O84 Public administration and defence; compulsory social security
Q - Human Health And Social Work Activities	Q86 Human health activities

This case is occupation-specific.

Occupation (ISCO level 2)
Health associate professionals
Health professionals

Sources

- 17 March 2020: Possibility to reassign civil and public service staff
- 28 March 2020: The Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (COVID-19) Act 2020-Important Employment Law Changes (employmentrightsireland.com)

- 10 April 2020: Medical students fast-tracked to assist with COVID-19 (www.hse.ie)
- 22 April 2020: Measures introduced to increase the number of healthcare workers in Ireland (www.mhc.ie)