



**Fédération Européenne  
des Médecins Salariés**  
European Federation  
of Salaried Doctors

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### 1. Medical training evaluation

In Austria the biggest ever medical training evaluation took place and ended with a high response rate (44%). 6 out of 9 regions had a higher response-rate than 50%. The evaluation of medical training started on 27 February and lasted until 12 May 2023. It was carried out by the Austrian Medical Chamber (*Österreichische Ärztekammer – ÖÄK*) as the representative body for physicians, in cooperation with the ETH Zurich (Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich), a world-renowned institution known for its expertise in research and evaluation methodologies, which also conducts such quality controls in Switzerland and Germany.

The nationwide survey was aimed at doctors in training (*Turnusärzte*), who were asked to assess their current training institutions on an anonymous basis. In Austria, the term "Turnusarzt" is used to describe a doctor in training to become a general practitioner or a doctor in training to become a specialist. The purpose of the survey was to evaluate the quality of training but also to find out how satisfied the doctors are in various categories (for example communication, learning and corporate culture).

The final evaluation is available from the 12<sup>th</sup> of September and it can already be said that training in Austria is rated worse than in Switzerland. Medical Departments with a lower number of doctors in training are rated a lot better than bigger departments. The results of the survey, which was conducted by means of questionnaires on eight topics - from company culture to learning culture to evidence-based medicine - will be published in the autumn. The evaluation encompassed a wide range of aspects related to medical training, aiming to provide a comprehensive overview of the strengths and areas for improvement in the training institutions. Each training centre will receive feedback on how it was assessed.

The results of the evaluation can also be found on the website of the Austrian Medical chamber.

In a press release on the evaluation, Dr Michael Sacherer, Finance Officer of the Austrian Medical Chamber and President of the Styrian Medical Chamber stressed the importance of a high level of medical training: *"we know that training is extremely important for young doctors and that they are always ready to go to another country if the training and career opportunities are better there. Training must be used to acquire medical competence. Furthermore, it must be taken seriously."*

### 2. Negotiations on financial equalisation

In Austria currently the negotiations on financial equalisation (*Finanzausgleich*) are taking place. "Finanzausgleich" in Austria refers to the system of fiscal equalization among the federal government, the nine federal provinces (*Bundesländer*), and the municipalities within the country. This system is designed to ensure a fair distribution of financial resources,

primarily through tax revenue sharing, in order to promote balanced development, social welfare, and public service delivery across different regions.

The negotiations regarding the Finanzausgleich take place periodically, typically every five years, to determine the allocation of funds for various functions such as education, healthcare, transportation, and social services. Financial equalisation should also ensure the funding of the planned health reform, which the Federal Minister of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection, Johannes Rauch announced in January 2023. The health reform plans additional vacancies for the panel doctors, the expansion of primary care, more stocks of essential medicines, new digital services and improvements in psychosocial care.

The Austrian Medical Chamber also participates in the discussion about the distribution of financial resources. On 23 June 2023, the ÖÄK adopted, within the framework of the 147<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Medical Chamber, a resolution on the upcoming financial equalisation negotiations with concrete suggestions for improvement. This postulates for constructive solutions in health care have finally been presented to the representatives of the federal government and the federal provinces.

The resolution contains advices and postulates in the following areas: prevention and screening, patient management, digitalisation, financing, professional image and professional conditions. The Austrian Medical Chamber demands increased funding of the health sector and hiring more medical staff. Other important points are also: greater resources for prevention and screening, introduction of digitalisation with solutions that rid the doctors of unnecessary bureaucracy and an efficient patient management strategies.

Effective patient steering can be achieved by expanding the number of panel doctors (the ÖÄK recommends the creation of at least 1,300 new vacancies). Moreover, a nationwide 24/7 health care provision should be ensured (also by telemedicine, telephone). The following procedure in the patient steering has to be followed: the first contact should be with the self-employed doctor. The next level of provision should be extramural care (health care institutions other than hospitals and then outpatient departments of hospitals). Intramural care (hospitals) should be the last step in the whole process of guiding patients towards appropriate medical care and treatment options.

Furthermore, the Austrian Medical Chamber proposes that all services in the outpatient sector and the services in the hospital outpatient departments should be financed by the social insurance system. This means, in contrast, hospital costs - i.e. the entire inpatient sector - are to be borne by the federal states. The resolution emphasised that this approach means clear responsibility and traceability for the respective financing.

The federal government will provide up to 10 million euros over the next five years for the reforms in health and care. The exact amount depends on further negotiations on the reforms. According to the political agreements, the legal implementation are expected to take place in autumn 2023.

### **3. Personnel shortage**

Austria, like many other countries, is facing challenges related to the supply and distribution of healthcare professionals, including physicians. The personnel shortage can occur due to

various factors, such as population growth, aging populations and difficulties in recruiting and retaining healthcare professionals.

One of the main problems is that many medical graduates choose not to pursue a career as a physician in Austria. Between 2008/09 and 2018/19, almost one third of medical graduates chose a different career path or decided to take up a medical profession anywhere abroad. Furthermore it is expected that by 2027 at least 21 percent of the currently working physicians will reach retirement age. This is why attracting and retaining young doctors within the country is especially important.

Austria's healthcare system also faces a big challenge as the number of panel doctors continues to decline, leaving many unable to afford private healthcare services. In contrast to this, the number of elective doctors is growing. While there were about 8000 elective doctors in 2011, the number was already almost 11,000 in 2021. At the beginning of 2023, there were 300 vacancies for panel doctors in Austria: 176 vacancies of general practitioners and 124 specialists: especially paediatrics (29 vacancies), gynaecology (23) and ophthalmology (16). In order to fill the rural panel doctor positions, Austrian health insurance fund (*Österreichische Gesundheitskasse - ÖGK*) funds in 2023 special scholarships for 50 medical students. In return, the medical students must commit to work for a period of at least five years in under-served medical-shortage areas. They undertake to work as a panel doctor in general medicine, paediatrics and adolescent medicine, child and adolescent psychiatry, gynaecology and obstetrics or psychiatry and psychotherapeutic medicine in a region in which the ÖGK has posted a panel doctor position. The scholarship recipients will receive 923 euros per month for up to three and a half years.

Another problem is that the proportion of the workforce working in health and social care in Austria is too small. In contrast to Germany and Switzerland, where this share is over 13 percent, in Austria it is just over ten percent, which means, for example, that there are seven more nurses per 1000 inhabitants in Switzerland and four more in Germany than in Austria.

The shortage of healthcare professionals could result in strikes of the healthcare workers as one of the means of demanding better working conditions, higher pay, or other benefits. This already was the case with the Klinik Ottakring (a public hospital in Vienna). On 30 June 2023, physicians working in the emergency room held a one-hour warning strike. The doctors' demands were based on the problems that are common to almost all hospitals in Austria: too few staff, salaries not in line with the market, massive organisational as well as infrastructural deficiencies. The Curia of Salaried Doctors of the Austrian Medical Chamber expressed in a press release its solidarity with the striking doctors.