



8 February 2021

Minister Robin Swann
Department of Health
Castle Buildings
Stormont
Belfast BT4 3SQ
by email: private.office@health-ni.gov.uk

Re: Urgent measures to meet NHS staffing needs

Dear Minister Swann,

As you will know better than anyone, a year into the greatest health crisis our generation has ever known and as we endure what our health officials have said are the most difficult weeks so far of the pandemicⁱ, the need to 'Protect our NHS' is more urgent than ever.

NHS spokespeople have pleaded for off-duty staff to return to work in the face of extreme pressures on the service hereⁱⁱ.

At the same time, we know that staff are exhausted and have already given so much. New data on deaths from Covid-19 by profession, released earlier this week, show in stark detail what we all knew to be true -- that health and social care workers are at significantly greater risk than the rest of us.ⁱⁱⁱ Numerous groups have called urgently for more mental health support for them.

In light of this situation, we call on Northern Ireland authorities to follow the example of other countries and grant non-nationals who are health care professionals but currently face obstacles to practicing their profession here the right to support their colleagues in the NHS.

For some, like refugees and others with the right to work, the barriers are mainly to do with recognition of their qualifications. Others, such as asylum seekers, face additional restrictions around the right to work itself.

Different countries, confronting the same obstacles, have found varying mechanisms for overcoming them in order to support their health systems:

- In France early in the pandemic, the Inter-ministerial Delegation for the Reception and Integration of Refugees granted authorisation to refugee and other foreign

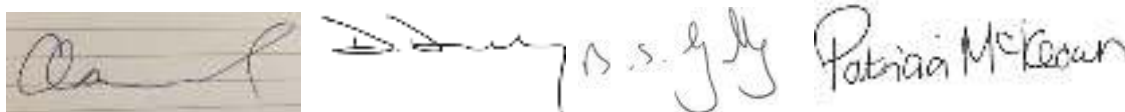
national doctors, dental surgeons and pharmacists, with diplomas from outside the European Union, to work in French public institutions on a temporary basis and under the supervision of an accredited doctor^{iv}.

- In Germany, Saxony's regional medical board advertised for migrant doctors to help meet acute staffing need and waived its usual licensing requirements to bring them on board^v.
- In US states such as Colorado^{vi}, Massachusetts^{vii} and New York^{viii}, state governors issued timebound Executive Orders to waive licensing requirements for foreign-qualified doctors and other health professionals. These were extended as needed.

We call on the Department of Health to do everything in its power to support the HSC by giving non-nationals who are qualified health professionals the right to work under supervision during this emergency.

Thank you, Minister, for your time, and please know that you have all of our best wishes and support during this difficult period.

Signatories:



Osamah Atheer Ali Al-haddad - Member, Lift the Ban

Dessie Donnelly - Director, Participation and the Practice of Rights

Brian Gormley - Director, Committee on the Administration of Justice

Patricia McKeown - Regional Secretary, UNISON Northern Ireland

cc: Chief Medical Officer Michael McBride

Chief Nursing Officer Charlotte McArdle

Chief Social Worker Sean Holland

ⁱ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-55773107>. Also <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-55668225>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.belfastlive.co.uk/news/health/northern-ireland-chief-medical-officer-19600466>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/causesofdeath/bulletins/coronaviruscovid19relateddeathsbyoccupationenglandandwales/deathsregisteredbetween9marchand28december2020#deaths-involving-covid-19-among-men-and-women-health-and-social-care-workers>

^{iv} <https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/24291/if-france-needs-us-we-re-ready-migrant-healthcare-workers-want-to-aid-the-fight-against-covid-19>

^v <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-germany-refugees/refugees-to-the-rescue-germany-taps-migrant-medics-to-battle-virus-idUSKBN21C2IG>

^{vi} <https://www.colorado.gov/governor/sites/default/files/inline-files/D%202020%20038%20Medical%20Surge.pdf>

^{vii} <https://www.bostonherald.com/2020/04/09/baker-cuts-red-tape-to-allow-foreign-doctors-nursing-students-to-practice-on-front-lines-of-pandemic/>

^{viii} <https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/no-20210-continuing-temporary-suspension-and-modification-laws-relating-disaster-emergency>

FROM THE MINISTER OF HEALTH



Department of
Health

An Roinn Sláinte

Máinnystrie O Poustie

www.health-ni.gov.uk

Osamah Atheer Ali Al-haddad - Member, Lift the Ban
Dessie Donnelly - Director, Participation and the
Practice of Rights
Brian Gormley - Director, Committee on the
Administration of Justice
Patricia McKeown - Regional Secretary, UNISON
Northern Ireland

Castle Buildings
Stormont Estate
BELFAST, BT4 3SQ
Tel: 028 9052 2556
Email: private.office@health-ni.gov.uk

Your Ref:

Our Ref: CORR-0612-2021

Date: 12th March 2021

Dear *Colleagues,*

Re: Urgent measures to meet NHS staffing needs

Thank you for your letter dated 8 February 2021 regarding refugees and asylum seekers right to work in the UK.

The various healthcare regulators who operate on a UK wide basis have the statutory responsibility to ensure that every health care professional has the necessary skills and knowledge to enable them to practise safely in the UK. I am aware of several initiatives they have undertaken to support refugees and asylum seekers.

The Nursing and Midwifery Council has measures in place through their registration process to recognise and support applicants who are refugees. This includes assigning an individual case worker to applicants identifying as refugees to support them through the process.

The General Medical Council has an appointed Refugee Liaison Officer who work closely with individuals and community groups to identify and resolve issues that could delay a doctor's registration. They also offer refugee doctors discounted registration and exam fees. I support these proactive initiatives by the healthcare regulators.

Yours sincerely

Robin Swann MLA
Minister of Health

