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WEEKLY EU HEALTHCARE NEWS UPDATE

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EU CONSIDERS OPENING NEW HUMAN-ORIGIN SUBSTANCES COORDINATION BODY TO PRIVATE COMPANIES AND CIVIL SOCIETY

EU lawmakers in the European Parliament are considering opening up the new EU rules on human-origin substances to private companies and civil society, according to a preparatory document obtained by EURACTIV.

The European Commission proposed an overhaul of the current legislation on tissues, blood, and cells in July, broadening the scope of the regulatory framework to include all substances of human origins. The Parliament's rapporteur is now in negotiations with the shadow rapporteurs to hash out compromise amendments from 874 amendments filed by all MEPs in the leading parliamentary committee on the file.

The main tweaks being discussed are on the SoHo Coordination Board, which will promote coordination between member states concerning the implementation of the new rules. MEPs are considering allowing the Board to invite representatives of the industry, consumers, patients, health professionals and researchers to participate in certain aspects of the Board's work. To mitigate concerns of impartiality, the Board members must not have financial or other interests in related industries.

Once Parliament agrees on tweaks to the Commission's text, they will start negotiations with EU ministers for final approval. This timeline makes the SoHo revision one of the last health files to be discussed before the current legislative mandate ends in spring 2024.

Source: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/health-consumers/news/parliament-mulls-broad-stakeholder-access-to-key-eu-body-in-new-human-substances-rules/>

MEMBERS OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT WARN OF HEALTHCARE WORKER SHORTAGES ACROSS EUROPE

Green lawmakers in the European Parliament have written to EU leaders warning of a shortage of healthcare professionals across Europe. The letter comes as healthcare workers in several European countries are striking to protest their working conditions, with the most prominent case being the ongoing strike by UK National Health Service (NHS) workers.

In Madrid, over one million people marched to defend the public health system in February, and healthcare workers went on strike in November to fight for better working conditions and salary increases. Belgium, Greece, and Luxembourg are also facing difficulties in recruiting healthcare professionals, with staff fleeing to more attractive countries or professions.

The shortage of personnel can be explained by under-investment in public health care, austerity measures, and privatisation of health systems, according to the MEPs. They have called on the European Council to address the problem of shortages of care workers and to support the European Commission's proposal for a directive on psychosocial risks at work. The MEPs have also urged the EU to use funds allocated to programs like EU4Health, Digital Europe Programme, or Horizon Europe to fill the investment gap in public health systems. The shortage of healthcare workers is not new, with a survey by the WHO in September 2022 revealing that all European and Central Asian countries surveyed were "facing serious problems regarding health and care workers". The WHO report also highlighted the mental health of caregivers, which has deteriorated significantly due to the pandemic.

Source: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/news/swiss-pharma-exports-to-russia-soar-despite-sanctions/>

UNICEF REPORT SHOWS COVID-19 PANDEMIC HAS LED TO A DECLINE IN PUBLIC CONFIDENCE IN CHILDHOOD VACCINES

According to a new report from UNICEF, people around the world have lost confidence in the importance of routine childhood vaccines against killer diseases like measles and polio during the COVID-19 pandemic. The survey conducted by UNICEF revealed that the public perception of vaccines for children declined between 2019 and 2021 in 52 of the 55 countries surveyed.

The report further revealed that 67 million children missed out on one or more potentially lifesaving vaccines during the pandemic, and efforts to catch up have so far stalled despite increasing outbreaks. The decline in confidence was particularly concerning as it comes after the largest sustained backslide in childhood immunisation in a generation during COVID-19 disruptions. Vaccine confidence varied globally, with some countries reporting a decline of up to 44% in agreement that vaccines are important for children.

Despite the fall in confidence, more than 80% of respondents in almost half of the countries surveyed still said childhood vaccines were important. The report stressed that vaccine confidence can easily shift and the results may not indicate a long-term trend. Nonetheless, The data is a "worrying warning signal" of rising vaccine hesitancy amid misinformation, dwindling trust in governments, and political polarisation. UNICEF has warned that this change in perception could lead to more deaths of children with measles, diphtheria, or other preventable diseases.

Source: <https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/people-lost-faith-childhood-vaccines-during-covid-pandemic-unicef-says-2023-04-20/>

Thank you for your attention!

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