Health workers bear brunt of COVID-19 infections

(3 July 2020) More than 150,000 healthcare workers have been infected by the COVID-19 virus according to data from just nine countries – Denmark, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Russia, Spain, Turkey and Ukraine. This suggests that, on a conservative estimate, a total figure for Europe will be well above 200,000.

Regrettably, there has also been a high death toll with more than 620 fatalities among health workers in Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Russia, Spain, Turkey Ukraine and the UK.

In several countries, COVID-19 has hit the care sector – particularly eldercare – very hard and statistics from four countries show that over 11,000 social care workers have been infected. Again, this is likely to be only a fraction of the total infections across Europe.

EPSU and its affiliates have been lobbying for Covid-19 to be recognized as an occupational disease and classified in the highest risk group according to the

Biological Agents Directive and EPSU has asked affiliates to provide figures and statistics on how workers in our sectors have been affected.

Cross-national comparisons of the spread of Covid-19 are difficult to make, due to large differences between countries in how to categorize and classify the victims. The totals for infected healthcare workers include more than 3,400 in Denmark, more than 13,400 in Germany, 576 in Hungary, 8,130 in Ireland, more than 28,000 in Italy, over 52400 in Spain, 12,832 in Russia, over 30,000 in Turkey and 6,828 in Ukraine. The countries with the most reported deaths among healthcare workers were Russia (186), Spain (63), Italy (85), and the UK (106). More than 600 healthcare workers have been hospitalized in Germany.

There are some statistics for care workers with 9,671 infections, 412 hospitalisations and 48 deaths in Germany among workers caring for the elderly, disabled and other groups. Just under 1,300 eldercare workers in Denmark have been infected and 142 social care workers in Hungary. The figure of 131 care worker infections in the UK is likely to be a significant underestimate of the real impact.

So far, data for other sectors is limited but the French electricity and gas sector reports 1988 infections.

Statistics broken down by occupation have only been available in a few cases. In Denmark, 1183 nurses, 333 doctors, and 1584 healthcare assistants have been reported infected by the Covid-19 virus while in the UK 58 nurses, 6 ambulance staff, and 69 workers with other occupations in the hospital sector have died.

EPSU will continue to collect data from affiliates to try to get a more comprehensive and accurate picture of the impact of COVID-19 on health and social care workers and the many other committed workers who have continued to deliver our public services during this challenging period.

Links to information provided by EPSU affiliates:

FOA, Denmark: https://www.ssi.dk/sygdomme-beredskab-og-forskning/sygdomsovervaagning/c/covid19-overvaagning

Ver.di, Germany:
https://www.rki.de/DE/Content/InfAZ/N/Neuartiges_Coronavirus/Situationsberichte/Gesamt.htm

FP-CGIL, Italy: https://www.epicentro.iss.it/coronavirus/bollettino/Bollettino-sorveglianza-integrata-COVID-19_3-giugno-2020.pdf

RCN, UK:
https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/causesofdeath/

In addition, CCOO-Sanidad, CFE-CGC Energies from France, BDDSZ from Hungary, and INMO from Ireland have also contributed to the survey. The results will be continuously updated as more responses are received.

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