

## Retention

### What will motivate health workers to stay in rural areas?

While half of the world's population lives in rural areas, they are served by less than a quarter of doctors and only 38% of nurses, according to the World Health Organization. Doctors, nurses, and other health workers are often not motivated to work or remain at posts in rural and remote areas. Who can blame them? Jobs in urban settings—or in richer countries—typically offer higher pay, better working and living environments, more social amenities, and better educational opportunities for families.



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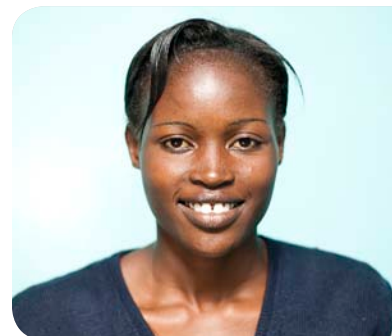
### What does this mean?

- People living in rural areas have less access to health workers—and fail to receive vital preventive, curative, and life-saving services. The problem is especially acute in countries with predominately rural populations.
- Investment in the development of doctors and nurses is wasted if countries cannot place or keep them in the areas where they are most needed.
- With a large part of the population lacking access to quality health care, countries cannot achieve their Millennium Development Goals.



### What can be done?

- Understand and test the factors and incentives that influence health workers' decisions to accept and remain in rural posts, and develop tailored retention schemes.
- Prioritize rural retention schemes and strategies in national health workforce plans.
- Involve professional medical and nursing associations in retention advocacy.
- Strengthen and streamline human resources management (HRM) systems that can affect retention—e.g., deployment, payroll, supportive supervision, professional development, work environment, and safety.
- Address gender discrimination in HRM and gender-based violence in health facilities.
- Recruit primary health workers from their own communities and from rural backgrounds.
- Locate health professional schools in rural regions.
- Subsidize health worker education in return for service in rural areas.



## Key considerations

- Stronger HRM systems need to be in place to enable successful implementation of many kinds of retention schemes.



- Health worker shortages and imbalances are not always due to high turnover: other factors can include absenteeism and hiring system problems.
- Health worker motivations are complex, and salary is only one part of the picture. Many other financial and nonfinancial incentives can be important factors in retention. Offering tailored “bundles” of financially-sustainable incentives is likely the best strategy.

## CapacityPlus resources

- The **Rapid Discrete Choice Experiment Tool** is used to systematically poll health workers (or students in health professional schools) to assess the relative importance of different factors related to choice of employment and determine the most effective incentive packages for attraction to and retention in rural areas.
- **iHRIS Retain**, part of the iHRIS Suite of free, Open Source software, costs retention strategies to be implemented at the district, regional, or national level.
- The **HRM Rapid Assessment Tool** assists policy-makers, managers, and human resources practitioners to address underlying HRM issues and challenges that can impact health worker retention.
- The **HRH Global Resource Center** offers research, best practices, and country-based examples on the topic of retention to support evidence-based decision-making.

## Additional resources

- In 2010, the World Health Organization published global policy recommendations, Increasing access to health workers in remote and rural areas through improved retention. CapacityPlus is partnering with the WHO to apply these recommendations in country-specific settings.

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