Creating more jobs for health workers holds the potential to bolster health and health security, spur inclusive economic growth, and empower women and youth, WHO Director-General Dr Margaret Chan said today after the first meeting of the Commission on Health Employment and Economic Growth Lyon, France.

Growing populations, changing disease patterns and economic trends are projected to lead to the creation of about 40 million new health sector jobs by 2030, mostly in middle and high-income countries. Conversely, there will be a projected shortage of 18 million health workers to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, mostly in low- and lower-middle income countries.

This mismatch poses a threat not only to human health, but to health security and the global economy, as West Africa's Ebola outbreak demonstrated.

"The Commission calls for a change in the way policy-makers look at the health sector, not as a drain on resources but as a source of opportunities," said Dr Chan. "Employment in the health sector can operate as a counterforce to the world's growing inequalities in income levels and opportunities."

Over the next six months, the Commission will study new actions through which governments, professional associations, trade unions, the private sector and other stakeholders can leverage health employment to unlock social and economic gains and better health for all.

The Commission will deliver its final report in the margin of the seventy-first regular session of the United Nations General Assembly in September.

The Commission is co-chaired by Mr François Hollande, President of France, and Mr Jacob Zuma, President of South Africa. They will be assisted by three vice-chairs: Dr Chan; Mr Guy Ryder, Director-General of the International Labour Organization; and Mr Angel Gurría, Secretary-General of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

The Commission was established following United Nations General Assembly resolution A/RES/70/183, which recognized that "investing in new health workforce employment opportunities may also add broader socioeconomic value to the economy and contribute to the implementation for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" and requested the Secretary-General to "explore steps to meet the global shortfall of trained health workers".