



EFN Policy Statement on EU Advanced Practice Nursing

As stated in EFN Workforce Matrix 3+1, Advanced Practice Nursing (APN) has a key role to play in building the resilience of the health and care system in the EU and Europe.

EFN endorses the International Council of Nurses (ICN) definition and guidelines (2020) for the development of APN in the Europe. The ICN guidelines are based on solid evidence, providing clear definitions, and acknowledging that there are national differences when it comes to APN implementation.

Advanced Practice Nursing (APN)

Advanced Practice Nursing, as referred to in this paper, is viewed as advanced nursing interventions that influence clinical healthcare outcomes for individuals, families and diverse populations. Advanced Practice Nursing is based on graduate education and preparation along with the specification of central criteria and core competencies for practice (AACN, 2004, 2006, 2015; Hamric & Tracy, 2019).

(ICN, 2020)

Advanced Practice Nurse (APN)

An Advanced Practice Nurse (APN) is a generalist or specialised nurse who has acquired, through additional graduate education (minimum of a master's degree), the expert knowledge base, complex decision-making skills and clinical competencies for Advanced Nursing Practice, the characteristics of which are shaped by the context in which they are credentialed to practice (adapted from ICN, 2008).

The two most commonly identified APN roles are Clinical Nurse Specialist (CNS) and Nurse Practitioner (NP).

(ICN, 2020)

Advanced practice sits at the apex of the nursing care continuum and promotes high-quality evidence-based care, while having health expenditures spent in a more efficient way. It includes direct and indirect healthcare services, such as comprehensive healthcare practice, health promotion, autonomous examination and assessment of patients, providing leadership in advancing nursing practice including research and interdisciplinary education. Work settings cover hospitals as well as acute care, primary health care and other out of hospital settings, also digital services.

In addition to improving the quality of care, avoiding unnecessary complications and hospitalizations, development of advanced nursing roles can lead to improving access to care by reduced hospital length and readmissions and health care-associated infections. It can also help to increase recruitment and retention rates in nursing, through enhanced career prospects at a time when provider burnout is running high. There are clear patient benefits, since high-quality healthcare relies on a highly educated, dedicated and skilled nurse.

Advanced practice nursing roles have made an enormous difference on the governance and management of healthcare, and shown to improve efficiency, enhance patient centred care and improve health outcomes, contributing ultimately to the sustainability of health and care systems.

Implementing APN roles in Europe, with new and innovative models of care, and enabling nurses to work to the full scope of their education are among the key factors to achieve universal health coverage (WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2021). However, progress towards the establishment of the roles has been slow: only 30% of countries in the European Region report having regulation in this area for nurses (WHO, 2020).

The EFN members see the need for development of APNs in the Europe as pressing, given the current and future pandemic context which is stretching health systems and leading to increasing health needs among Europe's citizens, who demand better and more efficient ways of health care being organised and delivered. Within the pandemic context of tighter health budgets and rising demand for high-quality and safe care, advanced roles for nurses are central to improve outcomes, most probably also when dealing with the long COVID-19 symptoms.

Therefore, the EFN calls upon the European Commission, Parliament and Council policymakers and other health stakeholders to join efforts and make rapid progress in developing advanced practice nursing in the EU and Europe by:

- Promoting evidence-based nursing, patient safety, universal health coverage (UHC), sustainable development goals (SDGs), high quality care, nurse retention and recruitment by fostering APN roles in EU area;
- Facilitating member states to develop nationally agreed-upon, as a minimum, master's level standards for preparation programmes for advanced practice nursing;
- Facilitating member states to establish formal recognition and licensing (protected title) of APN nurses at the national level; and
- Exploring the potential for a European framework for advanced practice nursing, that can be used at national level to enable regulation, mobility, national and international comparison, cooperation in research and development and sharing of expertise.

National Governments should work collaboratively towards:

- a system of registration/credentialing underpinned by legal recognition (protected title) to ensure transparency and reliability of advanced roles and practice as well as effective mobility of advanced practice nurses without risking public safety, and;
- a robust quality assurance system for APN programs on minimum Master´s level;
- a commitment to ensuring that APNs are able to work to the full scope of their education and potential;
- a commitment to ensuring continuing professional development for both the two most common Advanced Practice Nursing (APN) roles: Nurse Practitioners (NPs) and Clinical Nurse Specialists (CNSs);
- a system which is flexible enough to respond to future workforce needs.

At a European level, it seems that consistency in APN development would benefit from a more aligned education pathway. APN is a clinical career pathway; to become an APN is a career within nursing (EFN Matrix 3+1, 2015). Therefore, a clear strategy is needed to guide Member States towards the development of a common training framework in line with the Professional Qualifications Directive (2013/55/EU). There needs to be a clear articulation and understanding of the line of accountability between the three categories of nursing care: General Care Nurses (DIR 2013/55/EU), specialised nurses, and APNs.

As ever, and especially now with Europe fighting its way out of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important to remember that making timely progress in the development of advanced practice nursing will rely on genuine collaboration between policymakers, educators, employers, and frontline nurses to ensure that any initiatives are fit for purpose. Engaging frontline staff and advanced practice nurses will be fundamental to the journey forward.

Further readings:

1. International Council of Nurses (ICN) (2020). Guidelines on Advanced Practice Nursing. Available at: https://www.icn.ch/system/files/documents/2020-04/ICN_APN%20Report_EN_WEB.pdf
2. International Council of Nurses (ICN) (2008). The scope of practice, standards and competencies of the advanced practice nurse. Monograph, ICN Regulation Series. Geneva.
3. ENRF Policy Brief on APN
4. Canadian Nurses Association (CNA) (2019) Advanced Practice Nursing: A Pan-Canadian Framework. Author: CNA, Ottawa, Canada.

5. Finnish Nurses Association (2016). New roles for nurses – quality to future social welfare and health care services.
Available at: <https://sairaanhoitajat.fi/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/new-roles-for-nurses.pdf>
6. Hamric A.B., Tracy M.F. (2019). A definition of Advanced Practice Nursing. In M.F. Tracy & E.T. O’Grady (eds) Advanced Practice Nursing: An integrative approach, 6th Edition, St. Louis: Elsevier, pp. 61 – 79.
7. Maier C., Aiken L. and Busse R. (2017). Nurses in advanced roles in primary care: policy levers for implementation, OECD Health Working Paper no. 98.
8. EFN Workforce Matrix 3+1 (2017).
Available at: <http://www.efnweb.be/wp-content/uploads/EFN-Workforce-Matrix-31-Executive-Summary-May-2017.pdf>
9. Directive 2005/36/EC on the recognition of professional qualifications, amended by the Directive 2013/55/EU.
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10. Rosa W.E. et al. (2020). Leveraging nurse practitioner capacities to achieve global health for all: COVID-19 and beyond. International Nursing Review first published: 02 October 2020.
Available at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/inr.12632>
11. World Health Organisation, Regional Office for Europe (2021). Building better together. Roadmap to guide implementation of the Global Strategic Directions for Nursing and Midwifery in the WHO European Region.
12. World Health Organisation (2020). State of the world’s nursing 2020: investing in education, jobs and leadership.

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