



## EFN Policy Statement on Recognition of Qualifications of Third Country Nationals in line with Directive 2013/55/EU

The President of the European Commission, Ursula Von Der Leyen (2024), stated in the [Political Guidelines for the Next European Commission 2024–2029](#) that the Commission “*will make it easier to attract the right talent with harmonised rules on the recognition of qualifications*”. As such, the European Commission will seek to develop harmonised EU rules on the recognition of qualifications of third country nationals, particularly for those sectors with the most pressing labour shortages, which include the long-term care and the nursing care sector (EU Commission, 2023). While stressing that the only sustainable long-term solution to the EU nursing shortages is domestic nursing workforce capacity-building, the EFN and EFN Members welcome the development of EU legislation that regulates the recognition of qualifications of third country nationals in line with Directive 2013/55/EU. However, the EFN is concerned that if the harmonised rules do not align with the EU education and qualifications standards for nurses set in the [Directive 2013/55/EU](#), they will have harmful effects on the nursing workforce, as well as harm patients safety and quality of care in the EU and Europe.

In 2023, the European Commission issued a [recommendation](#) to EU countries to simplify the recognition of qualifications for third-country nationals. While a good starting point, these are non-binding. Building on this Recommendation, with the new harmonised rules, the European Commission will aim at facilitating the recruitment of third-country nationals by giving them the right to apply for recognition of professional qualifications which until now is only awarded to EU nationals. Furthermore, the European Commission also aims at making it possible for them to be informed on what documents they are missing, as well making it mandatory for Member States to provide the applicants with a response within a 3–4 month deadline. In addition, the European Commission aims at supporting Member States in gaining access to any missing document or information regarding the applicants, as well as supporting and facilitating the cultural integration of third country nationals in the EU.

As such, while this is not a long-term sustainable solution, at a time of pressing nursing shortages, EU legally binding harmonised rules for the recognition of qualifications of non-EU educated and trained nurses could support EU and European Member States in tackling the shortages in the short term. However, for these to be effective in upholding safety and quality of patients’ care in the EU and Europe, several important factors must be taken into account.

Therefore, the EFN recommends the European Institutions and the Member States to:

1. Invest in the EU domestic nursing workforce capacity-building in line with the Directive 2013/55/EU and the [updated Annex V](#). While recruiting highly skilled nurses from abroad might help reduce the pressure on healthcare ecosystems caused by nursing shortages in the short term, [this is not a sustainable long term solution!](#)
2. Integrate in the new EU harmonised rules on the recognition of qualifications of third-country nationals an enforceable mechanism to support the source countries in developing their own domestic, sustainable nursing workforce. Otherwise, EU recruitment of foreign skilled labour will harm international efforts towards Universal Healthcare Coverage (UHC).
3. Ensure that nursing education in European Countries currently negotiating EU accession complies with the Directive 2013/55/EU before formally joining the EU, so that registered nurses can benefit from EU freedom of movement without delay!
4. Invest in [Safe Staffing Levels](#), [Advanced Practice Nursing \(APN\)](#), and high quality [Clinical Mentorships](#) as concrete and tangible solutions to tackle the shortages of skilled labour in the EU nursing workforce by improving recruitment and retention!
5. Protect patient safety and quality of care in the EU and Europe by embedding in the new harmonised rules the education standards set in the Directive 2013/55/EU (at least 3 years of study or 4600 hours of which at least a third must be theoretical education and half must be clinical education) and the 8 competencies for nurses listed in article 31 of the Directive. This will ensure that third-country nurses have the same qualifications and competencies of EU nurses. Furthermore, language barriers and cultural awareness should be taken into consideration when embedding the new harmonised rules as they are directly related to the care offered to patients and people within the EU.
6. Improve coordination and close-collaboration with both the National Nurses' Associations in the EU and European Member States as well as those of source countries. Through their expertise they can support in determining which documents are missing, as well as finding those, and ensure that the education and training of third country nurses aligns with the EU standards, thus facilitating the recognition of qualifications while upholding safety and quality of patients' care in the EU and Europe
7. Improve the working conditions and salaries of nurses in the EU. It is useless to recruit foreign educated and trained nurses if once they come in the EU they are faced with unbearable, unsatisfying, and unsafe working conditions, as well as unfair salaries that do not match their responsibilities! Otherwise, they will just look for better opportunities outside the EU.
8. Develop a monitoring and enforcement mechanism to ensure that under these new harmonised rules, foreign recruited nurses will be given the same professional treatment and opportunities as EU educated and trained nurses. Furthermore, provide adequate investments to facilitate their integration in the EU and to prevent any form of

discrimination against them. Employers must support foreign recruited nurses with adequate opportunities for Continuous Professional Development (CPD) and Life-Long Learning (LLL), as well as appropriate orientation processes and high quality mentoring.

#### **Further readings:**

- EFN Policy Statement on Ethical Recruitment and Empowering Domestic Nursing Workforce Development (2024). Accessible at: <https://efn.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/EFN-Policy-Statement-on-Ethical-Recruitment-Oct.-2024.pdf>
- EFN Policy Statement on EU Nursing Workforce within a Global Safe Staffing Levels Context (2024). Accessible at: <https://efn.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/EFN-Policy-Statement-on-EU-Nursing-Workforce-within-a-Global-SSL-Context-April-2024.pdf>
- EFN Policy Statement on Safe Staffing Levels (2023). Accessible at: <https://efn.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/EFN-Policy-Statement-on-Safe-Staffing-Levels.pdf>
- EFN Policy Statement on Safe orientation process for newly graduated nurses (2024). Accessible at: <https://efn.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/EFN-Policy-Statement-on-Safe-orientation-process-for-newly-graduated-nurses-April-2024.pdf>
- EFN Policy Statement on EU Advanced Practice Nursing (2022). Accessible at: <https://efn.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/EFN-Policy-Statement-on-APN-April-2022.pdf>
- EFN Policy Statement on Nurses Mentorships (2021). Accessible at: <https://efn.eu/wp-content/uploads/EFN-PS-on-Nurses-Mentorship.pdf>
- COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION of 15.11.2023 on the recognition of qualifications of third-country nationals. Accessible at: [https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/document/download/01187cba-6407-4afa-add0-296b29f0dcfa\\_en?filename=C\\_2023\\_7700\\_1\\_EN\\_ACT\\_part1\\_v9.pdf](https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/document/download/01187cba-6407-4afa-add0-296b29f0dcfa_en?filename=C_2023_7700_1_EN_ACT_part1_v9.pdf)

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