



EFN Policy Statement on the Union of Skills

The European Commission has unveiled the [Union of Skills](#), a new flagship initiative and strategy designed to enhance upskilling, reskilling, and the development of high-quality, inclusive and flexible education and training for all. EFN welcomes this flagship initiative, in particular the key components “Regular upskilling and reskilling” and “Helping the free movement of workers”, as they support the aims and objectives of the [Directive 2013/55/EU](#) on the recognition of professionals qualifications in the EU.

However, the EFN is concerned with regards to the key component “Attracting, developing, and retaining talent”, as the only planned initiatives under this component concern attracting third-country professionals to the EU, failing to put forward any concrete proposal to improve the retention and recruitment of the EU domestic nursing workforce.

Moreover, the EFN members are clear: under all the components, we need concrete objectives, clear outcomes and implementation, otherwise this flagship initiative will remain an empty promise.

Nurses, as the largest healthcare profession, are a Target Group of the Union of Skills. As such, frontline nurses should be consulted and engaged in the activities that have an impact on their daily work. Despite this, the proposed initiatives under the component “Attracting, developing, and retaining talent” include only the [EU Talent Pool](#), a visa strategy, and a ‘choose Europe’ initiative, showing a clear gap between the EU’s strategy to tackle the nursing shortages, and the real expectations and needs of the EU domestic nursing workforce. Instead, the nurses are being increasingly left alone, with deteriorating working conditions, lack of recognition and respect, and enrolment rates in nursing schools falling year after year. As a result, more and more nurses are leaving the profession, and there are not enough graduates substituting them. As such, it is concerning that the European Commission’s strategy for recruiting and retaining skilled staff aims at supporting the Member States’ demand for international recruitment, a counterproductive solution to shortages, rather than tackling its structural causes.

Furthermore, as we are already in a crisis, the European Commission should learn from the unclear achievements of previous flagship initiatives, like the [Year of Skills 2023](#), and move towards concrete frontline deployment of the Union of Skills, co-created with the nurses themselves. This is the case not only for the initiatives launched under the Attracting, developing,

and retaining talent” component, but also for those under the “Regular upskilling and reskilling” and “Helping the free movement of workers” components. These include initiatives such as reinforcing the Pact for Skills, a skills portability initiative, and European School alliances.

Therefore, the EFN is calling on the EU Institutions and the EU and European Member States to:

1. Learn from past mistakes by ensuring that the Union of Skills is translated into to concrete, effective, frontline deployment benefitting frontline nurses. Otherwise, it will remain an empty promise with European Commission flagship recommendations having no frontline impact.
2. In the development and implementation of initiatives under the Union of Skills, consult and coordinate closely with the nurses themselves and their representatives, including EFN and the National Nurses’ Associations, EFN Members. Ensuring co-creation is key to a successful implementation and frontline deployment.
3. Through the Union of Skills, especially under such initiatives as the European School alliances, invest in high quality [Clinical Mentorships](#), and the development of qualified nurse educators, as concrete and tangible solutions to tackle the shortages of skilled labour in the EU nursing workforce by improving retention and recruitment!
4. Protect patient safety and quality of care in the EU and Europe by embedding in the new initiatives launched under the Union of Skills, especially in the EU Talent Pool, in the visa strategy, and in the ‘choose Europe’ initiative, 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.
5. Take into consideration language barriers and cultural awareness when implementing the EU Talent Pool, as they are directly related to the care offered to patients and people within the EU, and impact on the frontline nurses’ daily work.
6. Improve the working conditions and salaries for all nurses in the EU. Recruiting foreign educated and trained nurses is useless 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!
7. To support the frontline deployment of the Union of Skills, the EU and the Member States must put forward adequate funding levels, otherwise these costly initiatives will not be translated into concrete results, and the trust of the nurses towards the EU and national institutions will keep on falling, resulting in their lack of support towards future initiatives.

Further readings:

- EFN Policy Statement on Recognition of Qualifications of Third Country Nationals in line with Directive 2013/55/EU (2025). Available at: <https://efn.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/EFN-PS-on-Recognition-Qualifications-Third-Country-Nationals-April-2025-1.pdf>
- EFN Policy Statement on Micro-Credentials (2025). Available at: <https://efn.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/EFN-Policy-Statement-on-Micro-Credentials-1.pdf>
- EFN Policy Statement on Transferring CPD Credits across the EU (2024). Available at: <https://efn.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/EFN-Policy-Statement-on-Transferring-CPD-Credits-across-the-EU-Oct.-2024.pdf>
- EFN Policy Statement on Lifelong Learning and Continuous Professional Development (2023). Available at: <https://efn.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/EFN-Policy-Statement-on-LLL-CPD-Oct.-2023.pdf>
- International Council of Nurses (2025). International Nurses Day 2025: Caring for nurses strengthens economies. Available at: https://www.icn.ch/sites/default/files/2025-04/ICN_IND2025_report_EN_A4_FINAL_0.pdf

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