

# A call for urgent action: Recognition of the Specialised and Advanced nursing profession in Europe



Specialised and advanced nursing plays a pivotal role in the provision of quality healthcare across Europe. However, these **essential healthcare workers** who are caring for our lives and are the backbone of the European healthcare systems face a lot of challenges in their everyday lives at work. Unequal **working conditions, salary standards, overstretched working hours and unsafe working environments** are just the tip of the iceberg that Specialised and Advanced nurses face every day. But the biggest challenges lie in the organisation of the profession itself within the EU in the areas of **education, recognition, and certification**.

This position paper emphasizes the urgent need for a harmonised minimal standard of certification

## Certification Harmonisation:

The current landscape of Advanced and Specialised nursing<sup>3</sup> certifications in Europe is marked by significant differentiation and fragmentation. This lack of standardisation diminishes the credibility of certifications, making it imperative to establish a **European Standardisation of Certification for**

## Lifelong Learning:

A cornerstone of a robust nursing workforce is the commitment to lifelong learning<sup>4</sup>. Nurses should be provided with opportunities to **continually educate themselves, advance their skills<sup>5</sup>, and stay updated**

## Challenges in Education and Training:

The diversity in objectives, systems, schemes, and education methods for Specialist and Advanced Nurses among EU Member States hampers the efficient use of resources and contributes to an ineffective integration in national education and training systems. Lack of regulation has adversely

affected the **availability of qualified specialist nurses** and the **provision of advanced nursing personnel in key healthcare positions**. Addressing these challenges is crucial for the overall effectiveness of healthcare systems.

for nurses in Europe, addressing the current issues of **differentiation, fragmentation, and the lack of credibility in existing certification programs<sup>1</sup>**. Another identified but not recognised problem is the absence of a mechanism for **recognition on education and certification related to specialist and advanced nurses** in the European context.

These circumstances contribute to a further outflow of these essential professionals, which is an effect that we must avoid by all means. Strengthening the nursing profession is indeed fundamental to building a **resilient and effective healthcare workforce**, ensuring the provision of **high-quality care and optimal patient outcomes<sup>2</sup>**.

**nursing specialisations**. Criteria for certification must be developed to ensure **consistency** and a **defined set of minimal standards** to establish a **harmonised baseline level of education and competency** for healthcare professionals across member states.

**on digital and green technologies**. By prioritising continuous professional development, we empower nurses to adapt to evolving healthcare landscapes and deliver the highest standards of care.

## Declaration of Priorities:

The **Declaration of the Specialist and Advanced Nurse<sup>6</sup>** highlights key priorities for enhancing the role of professional nurses in European Healthcare towards 2030. A survey conducted by ESNO on the declaration revealed that healthcare professionals urgently demand the **enhancement of specialist nurses' professional education**, the **establishment of a European framework for automatic recognition of specialist nursing qualifications**, the

**development of a harmonised framework for the recognition of certificates, diplomas, and degrees**, **improvement of financial conditions for nurses**, and the **creation of positive and supportive work environments**. These priorities, recognized also by ICN NP/APNN, are seen as fundamental pillars for the adoption of establish a **European Standardisation of Certification**.

## Call to Action:

For these reasons ESNO and ICN NP/APNN urgently call on European politicians to address the pressing issues faced by specialised and advanced nursing staff within our healthcare systems:

- We jointly appeal to policymakers to adopt a **harmonised definition<sup>7</sup> of specialised and advanced nurses<sup>8</sup>** that would be used in a harmonized way for all European Specialised and Advanced nurses.

- We collectively demand the **harmonisation of certification, career pathways, continuous education, and improved working conditions**. These measures are paramount to shape the future of professional nurses in Europe.

- We call on the European policy makers to urgently **revise and adapt the Annex V of the Directive on the Recognition of Professional Qualifications<sup>9</sup>**.

- We call for a thorough implementation by the European institutions of the WHO Bucharest declaration<sup>10</sup>.

Our healthcare systems are under immense strain, with **high turnover rates** and **escalating mental health concerns** among healthcare professionals.

That's why we urge European policy makers to take these demands with utmost seriousness and to incorporate them in their working programs in a way to fortify our healthcare systems, enhance patient care, and support the dedicated nursing professionals who are at the forefront of delivering essential services to our communities.

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