

Empowering Nurses through Education, Recognition, and Autonomy: A Strategic Contribution to Health Workforce Stability in the EU

Introduction:

The European Specialist Nurses Organisation (ESNO) recognizes the evolving health landscape of the European Union (EU), particularly in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing workforce challenges. As the European Parliament's SANT Committee transitions into a full-standing body dedicated to public health, ESNO is positioned to contribute to critical policy discussions on workforce retention, education, and sustainable healthcare systems, and in parallel, connecting with the European Commission, in shaping the policies into practice. This briefing outlines how ESNO can collaborate with EU institutions to enhance nurse education, ensure professional mobility, and secure long-term workforce stability.

Key Objectives:

1. **Support Harmonized Nurse Education and Certification Across the EU.**
2. **Advance Professional Autonomy and Leadership Roles for Nurses.**
3. **Contribute to Health Workforce Retention and Mental Well-Being.**
4. **Promote Nurses as Drivers of Climate-Health and Sustainability Initiatives.**
5. **Ensure Recognition of Advanced Nursing Practice and Specialist Competencies.**

Policy Recommendations:

1. **Certification and Education:** Advocate for the development of an EU-wide competency framework for specialist nurses in critical areas such as infection prevention, vaccination, antimicrobial stewardship (AMR), and digital health. Align ESNO's ongoing Nurse Curriculum in Vaccination with EU educational directives to facilitate mutual recognition of nurse qualifications across Member States. Develop partnerships with the EU4Health program and Erasmus+ to scale up specialized postgraduate education and continuing professional development (CPD).
2. **Recognition of Nurse Autonomy and Leadership:** Collaborate with SANT to promote policies that empower advanced practice nurses (APNs) to lead care teams, prescribe medication, and manage patient pathways independently, particularly in rural and underserved areas. Support legislation that formalizes advanced practice roles, reducing administrative barriers that prevent nurses from practicing at the top of their license.
3. **Retention and Workforce Sustainability:** Contribute to EU actions addressing nurse burnout and workforce shortages by advocating for policies that enhance working conditions, flexible career pathways, and fair remuneration. Propose the establishment of EU-funded mental health programs tailored to frontline healthcare workers, addressing psychological impacts post-pandemic.

- **Nurses as Climate-Health Leaders:** Position nurses as key actors in implementing sustainable healthcare practices, reducing hospital waste, and enhancing energy efficiency within medical settings. Collaborate with EU climate-health initiatives to train nurses in climate resilience and green healthcare practices.
- **Mutual Recognition of Competencies:** Advocate for revisions to the Professional Qualifications Directive to simplify the cross-border recognition of nurse specialist certifications. Promote digital platforms for knowledge exchange, fostering collaboration and harmonization of best practices in specialized nursing fields.

Engagement Strategies:

- **Stakeholder Collaboration:** Engage with the SANT Committee, DG SANTE, and key MEPs to ensure nurses' voices are represented in policy dialogues.
- **Public Awareness Campaigns:** Launch initiatives highlighting the indispensable role of nurses in healthcare sustainability and resilience.
- **Position Papers and Consultations:** Submit detailed position papers and responses to EU public consultations on health workforce strategies.

Funding Opportunities and Pilot Projects:

Pursue EU4Health, Horizon Europe, and Erasmus+ funding to develop pilot projects addressing nurse shortages, engage with Education and preparedness policies, and specialized CPD programs. And in addition, collaborate with academic institutions to propose projects on training nurse leaders in AMR, infection prevention, and vaccination practices.

Conclusion:

ESNO stands ready to contribute to the European Parliament's efforts to strengthen the health workforce. By investing in nurse education, leadership, and professional recognition, the EU can build a resilient, equitable, and sustainable healthcare system that meets the needs of patients and communities across Europe.

Contact Information:

Ber Oomen, Executive Director, ESNO

Email: secretariat@esno.org

Website: www.esno.org

About ESNO: The European Specialist Nurses Organisation (ESNO) is a non-profit organisation and the goal is to facilitate and provide an effective framework for communication and co-operation between the European Specialist Nurses Organisations and its constituent members. ESNO represents the mutual interests and benefits of these organisations to the wider European community in the interest of the public health. Members of ESNO consist of individual European specialist nurses organizations. Contact: www.esno.org – secretariat@esno.org ESNO is registered with the European Commission Transparency: Registration 70183498905-52