

Easier admission of nursing staff from third countries

Austria

| GENERAL INFORMATION | |
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| Name of the organisation | Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection |
| Type of organisation | Ministry |
| Address | Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection, Stubenring 1, 1010 Vienna, Austria |
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| Topic of the good practice | Labour and skills shortages in the health and care sector |
| Geographical focus | Nation-wide |
| Duration | 7/1/2022 - ongoing |
| Summary of the good practice | <p>A shortage of qualified nursing staff is already evident throughout Austria. Due to demographic changes and a decline in family care options, it is expected that demand for nursing staff will continue to increase in the coming years. To address this, qualified nursing staff from other countries will be permitted to immigrate to Austria permanently via the Red-White-Red Card scheme, which grants residence and work permits.</p> <p>Since 2019, qualified nursing staff have been on the list of shortage occupations and can obtain a Red-White-Red Card as a 'skilled worker in a shortage occupation', provided they have an Austrian employer and meet all the requirements, such as achieving the minimum number of points in the points system. However, as healthcare professions are regulated in Austria, the admission process is more complex than that for other professional groups. Applications for a Red-White-Red Card can be</p> |

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| | <p>submitted once qualifications acquired abroad have been formally recognised (nostrification) and a professional licence has been obtained in Austria.</p> <p>In 2022, the federal government introduced changes to make it easier for nursing staff to obtain a Red-White-Red Card. Applications can now be submitted during the nostrification process, and the nostrification certificate is accepted as proof of professional qualification (regardless of any additional measures that still need to be completed). Typically, a Red-White-Red Card is initially issued for the lower-level nursing profession in which nursing staff are already permitted to work for a limited period of two years during the nostrification procedure in accordance with the professional regulations (Health and Nursing Care Act, GuKG). After completing the nostrification process, it is possible to switch to the desired nursing profession without changing the RWR Card.</p> <p>The same applies to nursing staff from third countries who come to Austria for further training. The approval for further training issued by the provincial governor confirms that the applicant has the relevant nursing training and is proof of qualification and thus the basis for the Red-White-Red Card.</p> <p>The measures taken make it easier for nursing staff to be admitted to employment.</p> <p>The significant increase in the number of Red-White-Red Cards issued shows that the measure is working. While the Public Employment Service issued just 315 positive assessments for Red-White-Red Cards for care workers in 2022, this figure had risen to 1,228 by 2024.</p> <p>In 2023 and 2024, the facilitations for the RWR Card were also expanded to other healthcare professions, e.g. doctors, surgical assistants and radiographers.</p> |
| OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES | |
| Background/context What challenge, need or gap were you trying to solve or respond to? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Austria is facing a shortage of professional nursing staff while simultaneously dealing with an ageing population. |

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| Why was this issue relevant or urgent in your context (sector, region, country)? | |
| Objectives What were the main goals of this practice (e.g. better compliance, faster processing, improved worker protection)? (Please limit to three) Who or what were these goals intended to help or change? (Please limit to three) | ► The objectives are to facilitate employment opportunities for professional nursing staff during the formal recognition of their healthcare qualifications and to offer them clear prospects for long-term residence in Austria. |
| Main activities What were the main steps or actions you carried out to put the practice into effect? Were any tools, materials, partnerships, or processes created? | ► A necessary legal step was the amendment of the Health and Nursing Care Act (GuKG), which permitted individuals to work in lower-level healthcare positions while their qualifications were undergoing nostrification. ► In the framework of the points-based system, administrative practice was also revised: a nostrification notice was accepted as proof of qualification in shortage occupations without the need for further detailed assessment. These adjustments streamlined the procedure and contributed to a faster process. |
| Funding/organisational resources | The legislative and administrative adjustments were implemented without the need for additional financial resources. |
| PARTICIPATION | |
| Stakeholders involved Organisations or entities actively contributing to the design, implementation, monitoring, or support of the good practice (e.g. labour inspectorates, social security institutions, trade unions, employers' associations, or other). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Austrian Public Employment Service (AMS) - the competent authority responsible for assessing labour market requirements for issuing the Red-White-Red Card. • Contact Points for Persons with Qualifications Acquired Abroad (AST) & the Austrian Business Agency (ABA) - a key supportive role, provide guidance and assistance to foreign nursing professionals seeking recognition of their qualifications and offer support to employers in the healthcare sector. <p>► These institutions are instrumental in raising awareness among qualified professionals and employers about the legal pathways and opportunities for employing skilled</p> |

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| | nursing staff from abroad, thereby enhancing the visibility and accessibility of Austria's labour migration schemes. |
| Target groups Main groups or categories that the practice is directly aimed at, who should receive its services or who engage with it (e.g. employers, mobile or posted workers, labour inspectors and social security officers, or other). | ► The measure is aimed at all nursing staff from third countries seeking employment in Austria. However, the measure is intended to support the labour market integration of nursing staff recruited from focus countries with which Austria has a Memorandum of Understanding on the recruitment of professionals and skilled workers (e.g. the Philippines and Indonesia). |
| Final beneficiaries Individuals or groups that ultimately benefit from the outcomes of the practice, even if they are not the direct target or user (e.g. mobile or posted workers, vulnerable workers at risk of exploitation, employers benefiting from clearer rules or reduced admin burdens, or other). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employers, including hospitals and care facilities - benefit indirectly from the measure if employment in Austria becomes more attractive for nursing staff from third countries. • Patients and care recipients - gain from an improved staffing situation. • The existing nursing staff, who are facing a high workload, will benefit from the faster integration of foreign nurses. |
| GOOD PRACTICE CRITERIA | |
| Achievements and outcomes What specific results did the practice achieve? (e.g. How many workers or employers were reached, number of publications created? What processes became faster?) What kind of broader benefits did it bring? (e.g. Did it improve understanding of rights and obligations, enhance cooperation between authorities, or reduce legal uncertainty and inconsistent application of rules?) | ► While the Public Employment Service issued just 315 positive assessments for Red-White-Red Cards for care workers in 2022, this figure had risen to 1,228 by 2024. |
| Cost effectiveness How did you keep costs low while still achieving results? (e.g. Did you reuse existing tools, automate processes, or share resources across teams?) Can you show that the outcomes were worth the investment? (e.g. Did small | ► No investment was needed for this measure. |

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| <p>changes lead to big improvements, or were expensive tools avoided?)</p> | |
| <p>Transferability</p> <p>What are the key features that make this practice work well? (e.g. a digital platform, clear guidelines, a joint inspection process, or strong coordination)</p> <p>What would another country or organisation need to make this work for them? (e.g. certain laws, IT systems, or staff training)</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ The key features were clear guidelines for the Public Employment Service. ▶ In Austria, the legal requirement was changed to enable nursing staff to practice while their foreign qualifications undergo formal recognition (nostrification), and this may also be the case elsewhere. |
| <p>Sustainability</p> <p>How is the practice sustainable from a social, financial or environmental perspective?</p> <p>What makes this practice able to continue over time? (e.g. It is now part of regular work or has been built into law or procedures?) and how are you making sure it lasts beyond the pilot or project phase?</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ The measure was designed from the very beginning to be permanent. |
| <p>Innovativeness</p> <p>What makes this practice new or different in your field or country? (e.g. Is it the first of its kind, or does it combine actors who don't usually work together, or activities not performed before?)</p> <p>How does it improve older or less effective approaches? (e.g. By reaching more people, using data better, or simplifying complex procedures)</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ The measure has made the Red-White-Red Card application process easier for nursing staff. The Public Employment Service received clear guidelines to evaluate foreign health-care qualifications. |
| <p>Digitalisation</p> <p>What kind of digital tools or platforms were used in this practice? (e.g. online portals, automated case tracking, data sharing, digital databases or other)</p> <p>How did these tools help in reaching your goals? (e.g. Did they save time, facilitate access to data in real time, reduce errors, help detect fraud, or improve coordination between authorities?)</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ To date, there are no digital tools specifically designed or deployed for nursing staff. Nevertheless, plans are currently underway to create an option for submitting all Red-White-Red Card applications online. |