About

Under EU law, EU citizens can live and work in another EU country. This is one of the direct benefits of the single market.

However, EU countries can limit access to some professions. For instance, they may require certain specific qualifications.

Rules on qualifications vary between EU countries. Your may be fully qualified in one country, but encounter difficulties practicing your profession elsewhere. Getting your qualifications recognised can be complicated, expensive, and time-consuming.

This may hold people back from setting up a business and/or providing services in another EU country. It also reduces the number of skilled workers potentially available to businesses across the EU. In short, it hinders the free movement of services and people.

The Professional Qualifications Directive (Directive 2005/36/EC as amended in 2013/55/EU) is designed to overcome these problems. It lays down rules on recognising the qualifications of professionals who are fully qualified in one EU country and wish to practise elsewhere in the EU. The Directive sets out the following systems of professional recognition for people wishing to work long-term in another EU country.

- a general system (with potential 'compensatory measures')
- automatic recognition (based on harmonised 'minimum training requirements' or professional experience).

General system

Professionals wishing to work in another EU country need to apply to the competent authority in the country where they are moving to have their qualifications recognised.

The relevant authorities examine the duration and content of the professional training attested by their diploma(s), and any accompanying documents. The issue is whether there are any significant differences between their training and the qualifications required for the profession concerned in the host country.

If there are any major differences, the authorities can impose 'compensatory measures' on the applicant. For instance, this means they might have to take a test or complete an adaptation period.
Automatic recognition

This system, which does not allow for compensatory measures, covers a **limited number of professions**:

- **health professions** (doctors, nurses responsible for general care, dental practitioners, pharmacists, veterinary surgeons)
- **architects**

Applicants form either category must meet the minimum training conditions set out in the Directive.

Professionals in the fields of trade, industry and business can also have their qualifications recognised automatically – if they meet minimum professional experience requirements.
Performance

Performance is assessed in terms of recognition rates across EU countries.

These statistics refer to decisions taken by host country authorities on professionals who, having qualified in another EU country, apply for their qualifications to be recognised in the host country so that they can practise there long-term.

The data in this section (from the Commission’s database on regulated professions) refer to 2015–2017. As it is the national authorities that record recognition decisions, the Commission receives these statistics at different times, with a delay of a year or even longer. For instance, when this report was being drafted Greece had no data for 2015-2017, while Bulgaria’s data was insufficient. Thanks to the 3-year reporting period, the Commission can - to some extent - even out anomalies arising from delays in providing statistics.

2 indicators based on these data are particularly important:

1. Positive recognition decisions as a proportion of all decisions taken in the host country in 2015–17.
2. Positive recognition decisions without compensatory measures, as a proportion of all decisions taken in the host country in 2015–17.

![Chart 1: Proportion of positive decisions as a proportion of all decisions: overall & without compensatory measures](image)

Source: Regulated professions database (validated up to 1 February 2019).

Based on statistics recorded by national authorities. (Over 2015-2017, Greece recorded no data, while Bulgaria’s data was insufficient.)

Each EU country’s performance on the 2 indicators is calculated by scoring each indicator in chart 1 as follows:

- **GREEN** – countries significantly above the EU average (*higher than the average +½ standard deviation*).
- **YELLOW** – countries close to the EU average (*within the average ±½ standard deviation band*).
- **RED** – countries significantly below the EU average (*lower than the average −½ standard deviation*).

The average recognition rate in the EU (indicator 1) is 92.8%, with a standard deviation of 7.1% and the
average recognition rate without compensatory measures (indicator 2) is 35.7%, with a standard deviation of 20.4%. This means indicator 2 has a far wider dispersion (spread) than indicator 1.

The map below (chart 2) shows how each EU country performs on the first indicator (positive recognition decisions).

**Chart 2: Proportion of positive decisions**

Source: Regulated professions database (validated up to 1 February 2019).

Based on statistics recorded by national authorities. (Over 2015-2017, Greece recorded no data, while Bulgaria's data was insufficient.)

**Recognition rates** vary widely between EU countries. Several factors may be involved including:

- the resources available to manage applications and the attention given to them
- the number of applicants
- the complexity of the rules concerned

However, a **relatively high response and recognition rate** generally means it is **easier and/or cheaper** for professionals to have their qualifications recognised.
In 2015–17, of the **174,667 cases** recorded in the regulated professions database:

- **85.8%** (149,794) were concluded by a decision – either recognition (138,949) or non recognition (10,845),
- the remaining **14.2%** (24,873 cases) were either unsettled (no decision taken), under examination or subject to appeals.

**Chart 3: Indicator [1] – Positive recognition decisions**

This indicator shows **positive recognition decisions** as a percentage of total decisions in each host country (149,794).

EU averages:

- Recognition – **92.8%**
- Non recognition – **7.2%**

**Highest** recognition rates — Croatia (100.0% of 184 decisions) and Estonia (100.0% of 105 decisions), by Slovakia (99.8% of 1075 decisions), Czechia (99.7% of 2713 decisions) and Germany (99.7% of 15,105 decisions). **Lowest** recognition rates — the Netherlands (67.6% of 6109 decisions), Italy (81.0% of 13,533 decisions) and Spain (85.1% of 1953 decisions), as shown in Chart 3.
This indicator shows, for each host country, **decisions to recognise qualifications without compensatory measures** (e.g. a test or a traineeship) as a percentage of total decisions using the general system. Automatic recognition is not included.

**EU average: 35.7%.**

- Highest recognition rates without compensatory measures — Cyprus (89.2% of 83 decisions), Portugal (68.1% of 702 decisions) and Estonia (62.9% of 105 decisions).
- Lowest rates — Italy (11.3% of 13,533 decisions), Belgium (14.0% of 13,579 decisions) and Hungary (17.4% of 856 decisions) — see Chart 4.
Facts and Figures

Chart 5 summarises the findings on the number of decisions taken by host countries in 2015–2017.

Chart 5: Total number of decisions by host country

Source: Regulated professions database (data validated up to 1 February 2019).

Based on statistics recorded by national authorities. (Over 2015-2017, Greece recorded no data, while Bulgaria’s data was insufficient.)

Variations in number of decisions reported

Numbers differ from country to country for several reasons:

- the country’s size – the bigger it is, the more decisions are taken (usually);
- some countries attract more professionals than others and so receive more requests proportionally than those the same size or larger;
- not all EU countries report their statistics on recognition decisions in the same detail or as often – this can distort the true picture.
Positive recognition decisions in 2015–2017

138,949 decisions were taken to recognise qualifications (taking into account only data for 2015-2017). The highest numbers recorded were:

By profession:
1. Nurses: 32,455.

By country (2015–2017):
1. The UK, with 51,607 professionals hosted, including nearly 19,000 nurses (around 5,500 from Romania, 4400 from Italy and 3900 from Spain), followed by secondary school teachers (14,100) and doctors (6700).
2. Germany, with 15,062 professionals hosted, including 7600 nurses (largely from Romania) and nearly 4000 doctors (largely from Romania).
3. Belgium, with 13,067 professionals hosted, including nearly 2300 doctors (largely from the Netherlands, France and Romania) and 1500 nurses (largely from France).
Main country-to-country flows in a range of professions

This part of the analysis focuses on those professions that recorded the highest numbers of decisions to recognise qualifications in recent years: dental practitioners, doctors of medicine, nurses, architects and secondary school teachers.

In 2015–2017, the host countries recording most arrivals of professionals active in these 5 professions were the UK (over 43,300), Germany (about 12,700), Sweden (5883), Belgium (5877) and Italy (3570).

The countries with the largest number of professionals leaving to practise in another EU country are Romania (over 15,000), Spain (about 14,500), Italy (9344), Greece (5460) and Poland (5425).

Source: Regulated professions database (data validated up to 1 February 2019).

Based on statistics recorded by national authorities. (Over 2015-2017, Greece recorded no data, while Bulgaria’s data was insufficient.)
Achievements

- The EU is a **global pioneer** in the systematic mutual recognition to professional qualifications among its Member States.

- Directive 2005/36/EC on the Recognition of Professional Qualifications, the cornerstone of the EU mechanism for mutual recognition, was amended in 2013 by Directive 2013/55/EU. EU countries were required to implement the 2013 Directive by 18 January 2016.

- The 2013 Directive has simplified recognition processes through digitalisation. It introduced the **European professional card** (EPC), the first electronic recognition procedure harmonised at EU level, which helps people get their professional qualifications recognised more quickly and easily. The card is supported by the internal market information system (IMI) and by the EU budget. It became available in January 2016 for general care nurses, physiotherapists, pharmacists, real estate agents and mountain guides.

- The revised Directive also introduced an **alert mechanism** in specific sectors (health and education of minors). This flags up individuals who are barred from practising their profession or who have used fake qualifications.

- Over 2013-2016 the Commission and the Member States conducted a **transparency and mutual evaluation exercise**, based on the amended Directive, in which Member States reviewed the regulation of over 5500 regulated professions. The review resulted in sector reports on selected professions. Member States have so far produced 24 national action plans.

- In January 2017 the Commission followed this up by issuing **recommendations on reform needs** for each EU country. These indicate possible ways to reform specific professional regulations, based on a qualitative and quantitative assessment of national regulation.

- To support such regulatory assessments, the Commission has developed a **composite restrictiveness indicator** for comparative analysis of barriers across Member States. The indicator measures how restrictive national regulation is in 7 key professions. It thus enables benchmarking of regulatory differences across Member States, by category of professions.

- Finally, the transparency and mutual evaluation exercise demonstrated the need for a clearer and more consistent approach to regulating professions in the EU. To address the issue, a new Directive (2018/958/EU) on a **proportionality test before adoption of new regulation of professions** was adopted in June 2018. The Directive states that before new professional requirements are introduced or existing ones amended, Member States should assess the impact of these measures against clear criteria and should ensure they are suitable for achieving legitimate general policy objectives. Member States are required to implement the Directive by 30 July 2020.
Priorities

- Ensuring that Member States and their competent authorities transpose and implement the Professional Qualifications Directive and its recent amendments in full.

- Ensuring that Member States and their authorities transpose and enforce the Proportionality Test Directive in full. Implementation will be supported by a new online form in the regulated professions database and later on via the internal market information system (IMI).

- Following up the reform recommendations and the way the national authorities are implementing them.