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**The recognition of qualifications of refugee healthcare professionals in the  
European Union**

*A comparison of European practices*

**AUSTRIA**

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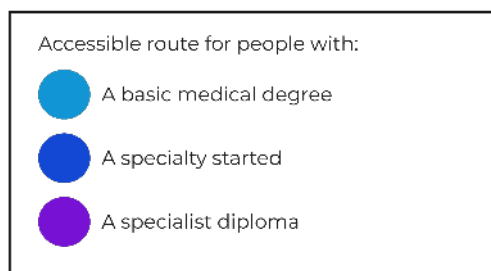
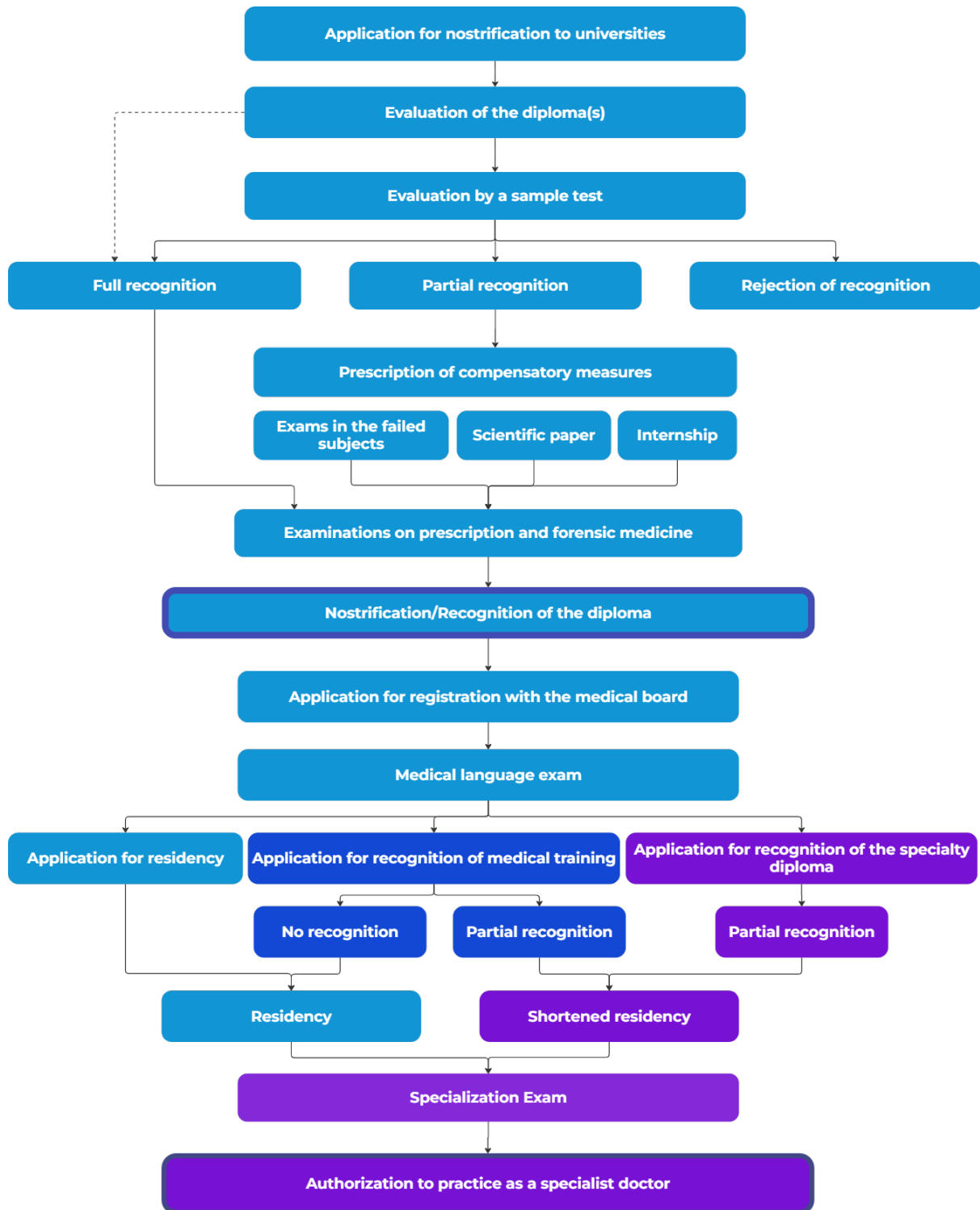


Figure 1: Scheme of the procedure for obtaining a license to practice as a medical doctor in Austria

According to the OECD 2024 “Health at a Glance” study, Austria reported shortages across a wide range of categories of health and long-term care workers during the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>1</sup>. It is for this reason that the healthcare and nursing professions, alongside many other skilled workers, are on the nationwide lists of understaffed professions.<sup>2</sup>

Although the number of practising doctors<sup>3</sup> and nurses in Austria have risen over the past decades and are above average density per population in the EU<sup>4</sup>, the increasing demand for health and long-term care still results in shortages of healthcare professionals. Indeed, the Austrian Institute of Economic Research (WIFO) expects an increase of around 80 percent in demand for nursing services by 2030 and to over 300 percent by 2050.<sup>5</sup> According to the *Austrian Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection*, additional and replacement requirements therefore amount to around 76,000 additional people needed in the care sector between 2017 and 2030. For nurses, this corresponds to an annual requirement of between 3,900 and 6,700 additional staff (depending on demographic trends)<sup>6</sup>.

In 2017, the share of foreign-trained doctors in Austria was 4.8 percent of active doctors working in health care. This share is below the EU average (9.6). Among foreign-trained doctors, 64.1 percent of the immigrating doctors obtained their professional qualifications in Germany, Hungary and Romania. The share of foreign-trained nurses is 19.6 percent of active nurses working in health care, above the EU average (4.6 percent).<sup>7</sup>

## A) Information and guidance on diploma recognition

### An information and guidance platform: [Berufanerkennung.at](https://berufanerkennung.at)

The [Berufanerkennung.at](https://berufanerkennung.at) platform provides information on how to obtain recognition for university degrees and professional qualifications acquired abroad. It was set up by the Austrian Integration Fund (ÖIF). It is available in **6 languages in addition to English and German**.

The portal features a personalized **search engine** to find the recognition procedure best suited to each individual (by country, profession, place of residence, etc.). The platform provides details about the recognition authority, fees, processing times, required documents, language level. It also refers to the AST contact points for further counseling and help with the application. This search engine is available in 8 different languages as well.

### Information and orientation center : AST contact points

The AST (Anlaufstelle) contact points are free advisory centers that provide information and guidance services for the assessment and recognition process of qualifications obtained abroad. These centers also assist in preparing the necessary documents for the procedure and cover partly the costs of certified translations. The services are available in more than 15 languages.

<sup>1</sup> OECD/European Commission (2024), *Health at a Glance: Europe 2024: State of Health in the EU Cycle*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/b3704e14-en>. Figure 1.10.

<sup>2</sup> Austrian Government (2024), *Skilled Workers in Shortage Occupations*. Migration.gv.at

<sup>3</sup> OECD/European Commission (2024) Figure 1.3

<sup>4</sup> OECD/European Commission (2024) Figure 1.5

<sup>5</sup> WIFO (2024), *Projektionen des öffentlichen Pflegeaufwands bis 2050*, <https://www.wifo.ac.at/publication/pid/31407854>

<sup>6</sup> Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection (2019), *Pflegepersonal-Bedarfsprognose für Österreich*, Vienna

<sup>7</sup> European Institute of Health and Sustainable Development (2022), [Health workforce demand and supply : Austria](https://www.eihd.europa.eu/en/health-workforce-demand-and-supply-austria)

These centers are managed by various NGOs and coordinated by the CCfM (Counselling Centre for Migrants in Vienna). They are funded by the Federal Ministry of Labor and Economics (BMAW). The AST counselling office in Vienna receives additional funding by the Department of Integration and Diversity of Vienna and the Vienna Employment Promotion Fund (WAFF). The staff at these centers work closely with the Austrian public employment service (AMS), recognition authorities, and assessment offices. They are part of a regional network that includes regional governments, social partners, higher education institutions, and NGOs.

### A project dedicated to the healthcare professions: Check-in Plus

The Check in Plus (CIP) project assists qualified professionals who want to utilize their professional qualifications on the Austrian labour market. The Project is funded by the Austrian Public Employment Service Vienna (AMS Vienna). It welcomes mainly beneficiaries from non-EU countries educated in regulated professions, such as healthcare professionals (e.g. medical doctors, nurses). The goal of the project is to “build on prior qualifications and skills, and to search for and finance tailor-made measures (compensatory measures, bridging courses, internships, etc.) which will supplement the individual recognition process.” The CIP project was established by the NGO CCfM simultaneously with the creation of the AST contact points.

### “Berufsinformationscomputer” website: information on regulated professions

The "Berufsinformationscomputer" website is an interactive portal that provides information on all professional qualifications, occupations, and sectors in Austria. The content is available in eight languages and can be searched using various criteria. This online portal is publicly accessible. The search engine also guides people wishing to compare or resume education or are looking for vocational training.

## B) Prior to recognition

### Language level

#### For medical practitioners

In order to initiate a recognition procedure in Austria, it is necessary to have reached a **B2 (C1 in Vienna) level in German** beforehand. A language proficiency certificate must be provided at the time of submitting the application (by any means). It is important to have the correct level of German because the language level is not taken into account when grading the exams. However, dictionaries are allowed during the exams.

Moreover, it is mandatory at the end of the procedure, when obtaining a license to practice, after the nostrification.

#### For nurses

To work as a nurse with a degree in Health and Nursing Care in Austria, applicants need a **B2 level of German** when submitting their recognition application. After achieving this level, additional courses, such as those focused on medical terminology or healthcare communication, may be required.

To work as a nurse assistant, a B1 level is sufficient.

## Language education initiatives

German language courses in Austria are offered by private and public providers, but there are numerous funding opportunities and initiatives available to support learners:

- Austrian Integration Fund (ÖIF): The ÖIF provides German language courses up to level B1 for individuals who benefit from international protection (up to level C1). The ÖIF also offers free online German courses, including medical language courses for all. In addition, there is individual funding for German courses up to level C1 for individuals who benefit from international protection. The funding request must be made before starting the course.
- Public Employment Service (AMS): The AMS covers and provides language training for job seekers registered in its programs, including German courses. This aid is based on an individual assessment of needs.
- The MORE project: This project offers free German courses to asylum seekers, recognized refugees, individuals with subsidiary protection, and those with temporary residence permits ("Duldung"). The courses are supported by several Austrian universities and aim to integrate students into the higher education system. However, this program is not yet available at medical universities.
- City of Vienna: The city finances German courses for young people aged 15 to 25. Specific programs are organized to encourage their social and professional integration. The Integration and Diversity Department of the City of Vienna provides vouchers for German courses for newly arrived migrants.
- Organizations like Caritas also offer free German courses. These initiatives are often part of their broader support for refugees and vulnerable populations.
- Other private providers, such as IKI Vienna and ActiLingua, also offer certified and subsidized courses for various language levels, often in collaboration with partners like ÖIF or AMS.

## C) Diploma recognition procedure for physicians

### Application

In Austria, the recognition procedure is called "**Nostrifizierung**". The application for recognition must be made to one of the country's three medical universities, i.e. Vienna, Graz or Innsbruck. Nostrification applications can only be submitted to one university at a time.

In addition to the usual documents, proof that the recognition procedure is indispensable must be submitted: "proof of the necessity of nostrification for the practice of the profession or the continuation of training in Austria". This certificate is issued by the Austrian Medical Chamber.

In principle, certification and translation of diplomas are compulsory. However, there are exceptions for individuals entitled to asylum, subsidiary protection and displaced persons, for whom it is impossible or unreasonable to obtain the necessary certificates or documents of training.

The fee for submitting the file is 150€. Reimbursement of costs incurred during the procedure can be requested from the Austrian Integration Fund. There are two programs in particular: Förderung Berufsanerkennung (Promotion of professional recognition) and Refundierung von Studienbeiträgen für Nostrifizierende in Gesundheitsberufen (Reimbursement of tuition fees for students enrolled in the health professions, recognizing their diploma).

**Asylum seekers can submit their application.**

## Recognition method

Universities review the structure, content, and duration of previous studies based on the submitted documents. A program is deemed **principally comparable** if:

- By comparing the curricula, it is established that the foreign degree program is equivalent to the domestic degree program in regard to the result of the overall training.
- AND if the following fields are covered in a scope comparable to Austrian national standards: internal medicine, pediatrics, neurology, surgery, gynecology, dermatology, otorhinolaryngology, psychiatry, ophthalmology, emergency medicine, and intensive care.

If the previously completed curriculum obtains a principle comparability, the applicant normally must take a "**sample test**" that allows for a more reliable and accurate assessment of their knowledge. The test is part of a common investigative procedure shared by the three universities and helps determine whether exams are necessary and, if so, how many and which ones. In this regard, it can only be taken once. This test is conducted three times a year. It covers 10 subjects and consists of 250 questions.

There are some initiatives, such as student associations or even doctors from the chamber of doctors, who may offer advice to candidates.

The "WNWmed-NOST" program at the University of Vienna offers peer support for individuals wishing to begin the process of recognizing a foreign medical degree in Austria. It encourages interested candidates to network in study groups, work on the material, and practice the German language in preparation for the sample test and potential future exams. Medical students organize and supervise the study groups. Accredited colleagues or those about to be accredited provide additional insights on the topics covered in the study groups. WNWmed-NOST is supported by the rectorate of MedUni Wien.

## Decision

At the end of this sample test:

- If more than 5 subjects are successfully passed (6 or more), the **failed subjects must be retaken**. For example, if 7 subjects are passed, the 3 failed ones must be retaken. A subject is considered passed when more than 60% of the questions are answered correctly. In some universities, specific exams are also mandatory regardless of the test results (these are the fields of prescription/pharmacology and forensic medicine). Once all exams are passed, and possibly a **scientific paper** was written the diploma is fully recognized.
- Those who pass 5 subjects or fewer, have to **pass exams in all subjects** which are rejoined in summative exams and possibly **write a scientific paper**.

In both cases, for the completion of the exams, enrollment in an Austrian extraordinary study program is required. The tuition fees for the extraordinary degree program are €388,06 (2025) per semester. Upon successful completion of these supplementary measures within the allotted timeframe, a certificate confirming the equivalence of the foreign diploma with the Austrian medical degree will be issued.

Recognition of a foreign qualification can be denied if the training is deemed fundamentally non-equivalent to the full course of studies and/or if the additional measures required to achieve equivalence are considered unreasonable. Nevertheless, applicants can still apply for admission to a human or dental medicine program, though such admissions are extremely rare, if not impossible.

## D) Authorisation to Practice and Specialization

To practice medicine after obtaining the equivalence of the Austrian medical degree (a basic diploma certifying that you are a "physician"), a **professional license to practice** is required. This license is obtained by registering with the Austrian Medical Chamber (*Österreichische Ärztekammer*).

Whether practicing general medicine or pursuing a specialization, the Medical Chamber has the authority to evaluate professional experience (gained during internships, residencies, or professional practice), mandate additional internship periods if necessary, and ultimately grant authorization to practice.

To register with the Medical Chamber, applicants must submit a file, including the proof of the qualification and the recognition in Austria, a proof of passing the medical language exam at the Austrian Medical Chamber at C1 level, a criminal record check, and a certificate of good standing from their country of origin.

The Medical Chamber offers advisory services for any questions regarding specialization and the application for authorisation to practice.

### Medical Language Exam

After obtaining the equivalence of the Austrian medical degree, candidates must pass the **C1-level medical language exam** administered by the Medical Chamber at the Austrian Medical Academy.

The exam costs €1,138,66 (2025) and can be reimbursed by the Immigration Office (OIF) and the Austrian Employment Agency (AMS).

### Recognition of Professional Specialization Experience

In Austria, after obtaining a medical degree from a university program, a residency in a university hospital must be completed. For example, to become a general practitioner, a 3-year specialization is required, while for other specialists, the specialization lasts a maximum of 6 years.

If a person has already gained professional experience as a general practitioner or specialist, they can apply for **recognition of this experience**. As a result, the residency may be shortened by several months. It applies to those with a specialization degree and those who started their residency without obtaining theirs.

For graduate students who did not start any residency as a general practitioner or specialist, the residency begins with a common year for all students, during which they will work in various departments and specialties (Basisausbildung).<sup>8</sup>

The certificates and other documents verifying this experience are analyzed by the "Training Commission" of the Medical Chamber. Depending on the case, the Commission may consult experts

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<sup>8</sup> As part of the basic training, you will go through the following specialist areas:

- Block introductory month (one month)
- Block Surgery (three months): General and visceral surgery or trauma surgery
- Internal Medicine Block (three months): Internal Medicine 1, 2, 3 or 4
- Block elective subject (two months): Depending on availability, elective subjects are possible in all specialist departments of the Kepler University Hospital.
- During the entire basic training: Assistance in the emergency room on admission days

for a more detailed review of the file. Generally, the recognition process for specialization takes around 4 months for non-EU nationals. This recognition procedure costs €410,15 (2025).

Students are then invited to apply to the department of the specialisation in which they wish to train.

A final exam must be taken by everyone. It differs depending on whether the path is general medicine or specialization.

### Licensing exam

The final exam for the license to practice ("Ärztliche Basisprüfung") is divided into two parts:

- The written part tests the candidate's knowledge in various medical disciplines, applying their knowledge to clinical cases. This can include multiple-choice questions, short-answer questions, and even more extensive essay-type questions.
- The practical part assesses the candidate's clinical skills and competencies in performing medical procedures: conducting routine exams, diagnosing, determining treatments, and communication with patients and colleagues.

The exam costs €764 (2025) for general medicine and €1,395 (2025) for specialists (the fee for examinations of special internal medicine subjects is € 697,5 per partial examination).

## E) Recognition for specialist nurses

Like doctors, nurses with non-European qualifications have to go through the nostrification procedure to have their foreign qualifications recognized.

There are several different levels and professions under the term 'nurse' in Austria (example: qualified nurse and assistant nurse). Depending on the profession, nostrification procedures are carried out either by the Austrian universities of applied sciences or by the local regional government offices responsible.

A portfolio of documents must be compiled to provide evidence of previous training and professional experience.

The decision may grant:

- Full recognition, meaning the foreign diploma is equivalent to Austrian qualifications.
- Conditional recognition, requiring several complementary measures. These measures may include undertaking an internship in the profession, pursuing additional training, or passing examinations. The decision depends on the individual's professional background. A temporary work permit at a lower level of up to two years may be granted while completing the required measures. For example, in cases where nostrification is granted as a qualified healthcare and nursing professional with compensatory measures, temporary employment as a nursing assistant is possible.
- Recognition at a lower level, which may be either full recognition or subject to complementary measures. It requires applying again at the recommended level.

This process can take up to 18 months.

Applying generally costs between €150 and €300, depending on the recognition authority, but the full procedure, including additional measures, is generally estimated between €1,000 and €3,000.



## F) Resuming studies

### For medical practitioners

#### Information et orientation

The advice centres mentioned above directly transfer students to the right university.

There is also the '[study in austria](#)' website, which explains the resumption of studies procedure for refugees in regulated professions."

#### Recognition of qualifications

In theory, there are two options for resuming medical studies, depending on the number of university credits that can be recognised. Continuing medical studies requires German language skills at C1 level in all cases.

- If you have fewer than 180 credits<sup>9</sup>, i.e. less than 3 years of study, you will need to take the MedAT admission test (MCQ) to gain entry to one of the universities. It is then possible to obtain credit for some of your prior learning. MedCampus, an online platform, in German only, help to prepare the various MedAT tests.
- If you have more than 180 credits, you can apply for a 'lateral entry' with a transfer to a higher semester if there are free places at the university concerned. You must then take a 'transversal test' comprising 200 multiple-choice questions on all the areas covered by the study of human medicine. Once you have passed the test, you must apply for recognition of your prior learning. Recognition can take up to 2 months. It follows the content of each university's study plans. This may mean that, despite the results, you are not allowed to take courses from the 2nd study cycle onwards without having completed the 1st study cycle.

In practice, **it is actually very difficult to join a university medical program**. There have been no available places at the universities for several years.

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<sup>9</sup> One ECTS point (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System) represents 25 hours of 60 minutes each of real workload for students. The workload per semester is measured at 30 ECTS points. 180 ECTS points correspond to the completion of approximately 6 semesters.