

An Environmental Scan of United States Recruitment Agencies Serving Spanish-Speaking Internationally Educated Nurses

Higinio Fernández-Sánchez

`higinio.fernandezsanchez@uth.tmc.edu`

The University of Texas Health Science Center Houston

Jhan Carlos Manuel Fernández-Delgado

National University of Cajamarca

Ingrid Stephanie Vásquez-Ventura

University of Guanajuato

Julio Rodríguez-Araujo

The University of Texas Health Science Center Houston

Jacobo Cambil-Martín

University of Granada

Patrick Chiu

University of Alberta

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Abstract

Background:

The global shortage of nurses has increased the demand for internationally educated nurses (IENs) in the United States. Recruitment agencies play a critical role in facilitating the migration and workforce integration of Spanish-speaking IENs; however, the quality, transparency, and professional support offered by these agencies remain largely unexplored. This study aimed to systematically identify and evaluate international recruitment agencies serving Spanish-speaking IENs seeking employment in the United States.

Methods:

An environmental scan (E-scan) of international nursing recruitment agencies was conducted using a 7-phase framework, with elements adapted from the PRISMA 2020 statement to guide identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. The initial search identified 267 agencies across websites and social media; after applying predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria, 20 were included. Agencies were assessed using a dichotomous questionnaire developed for this study and based on International Council of Nurses recommendations, evaluating four dimensions: information access, reliability, professional support, and visual design. Preliminary evidence supported content validity (Aiken's $V = 1.00$; three experts), internal consistency was high (KR-20 = 0.90), and inter-rater reliability was near-perfect (Cohen's $\kappa = 0.947$).

Results:

Of the 267 agencies initially identified, 20 met the eligibility criteria and were included in the final review. Considerable heterogeneity was observed among agencies. Interstaff and PRS Global achieved the highest overall quality scores (0.885), followed by Global American Nurses (0.846). These agencies demonstrated consistently high performance in information accessibility, reliability, professional support, and visual design. In contrast, ANP Health and Global Nursing Recruiters obtained the lowest overall scores (0.154), followed by CareerKnacks International (0.269), mainly due to deficiencies in reliability, professional support, and digital platform quality. Visual design represented the strongest-performing dimension among high-quality agencies, whereas reliability was the weakest dimension among lower-ranked agencies.

Conclusions:

Substantial variability exists in the quality of recruitment agencies serving Spanish-speaking internationally educated nurses seeking employment in the United States. Agencies with higher ratings demonstrated greater transparency, institutional credibility, professional guidance, and well-structured digital platforms. Establishing quality standards for recruitment agencies may support informed decision-making among internationally educated nurses and promote ethical, transparent, and effective international nurse recruitment practices.

BACKGROUND

The nursing shortage in the United States (U.S.) has generated a growing demand for nursing professionals. It is estimated that more than 275,000 nurses will be needed between 2020 and 2030, with projected employment growth of 9% over that period [1]. This situation has favored the incorporation of internationally educated nurses (IENs) as a strategy to help meet the care needs of the health system [1, 2]. In addition, nurses are often compelled to migrate for work because of limited training capacity, regulatory barriers to professional practice, high staff turnover, and widespread burnout [2, 3]. This global challenge arises from a complex interaction of individual, educational, organizational, managerial, and public-policy factors. Although global in nature, such challenges require specific interventions at both the national and transnational levels [4].

Employers in the U.S. increasingly turn to external recruitment agencies to attract IENs to fill vacancies in hospitals, long-term care facilities, and home health services [5, 6]. It is well documented that nurses tend to emigrate because of low wages, limited professional opportunities, and systemic inequities in their countries of origin, particularly in Latin America, the Philippines, Africa, and the Caribbean [5–8]. These difficulties are further compounded by gender inequalities and by the structural undervaluation of the nursing profession [9].

Although ethical recruitment frameworks exist through the International Council of Nurses (ICN) and the World Health Organization (WHO), there is currently no standardized mechanism for evaluating the quality, transparency, and accountability of recruitment agencies serving Spanish-speaking IENs. Some agencies impose excessive fees, misrepresent working conditions, or establish coercive contracts [10]. These practices reflect global trends in which recruitment methods facilitate the labor exploitation of migrant professionals, increase their vulnerability to unfavorable working conditions, and constrain their bargaining power, affecting their labor rights as well as their personal and professional well-being [9, 11].

In this regard, the International Council of Nurses [12] has condemned these forms of unethical recruitment and has urged the establishment of regulations consistent with the WHO Global Code of Practice. Moreover, from a human-rights perspective, insufficient oversight of international recruitment practices may expose migrant nurses to exploitation, discrimination, and the undermining of their capacity to make free and informed decisions about their employment and working conditions [13].

Accordingly, despite the growing prominence of IENs in the U.S. health workforce, there is limited evidence on the quality and transparency of the agencies that facilitate their recruitment, which must be evaluated to ensure compliance with fair and transparent practices [14]. Furthermore, given the presence of

private labor-recruitment agencies for nurses, these actors intervene increasingly in international migration, and some resort to ethically questionable practices that may contribute to irregular migration and harm migrants [14, 15].

Research has focused on migratory flows, working conditions, and the ethical implications of international recruitment, whereas the quality characteristics of recruiting agencies have received limited attention [16, 17]. This gap hinders the identification of practices aligned with the principles of ethical recruitment and the protection of migrant workers. The present study seeks to contribute to this gap by evaluating U.S.-based IEN recruitment agencies. The objective of the E-scan was to assess the quality of international recruitment agencies that recruit Spanish-speaking IENs to work in the U.S.

To our knowledge, no previous study has systematically evaluated the quality, transparency, and professional support characteristics of recruitment agencies specifically prioritizing Spanish-speaking internationally educated nurses seeking employment in the United States.

METHODS

Study design

An environmental scan (E-scan) was conducted to identify and characterize international recruitment agencies targeting IENs. The methodological design was grounded in the procedural framework [18], applying seven sequential phases for the search, evaluation, and selection of the agencies included in the analysis. E-scans allow for the systematic examination of information available in digital and institutional environments to identify characteristics, trends, and opportunities for improvement related to a phenomenon of interest. Elements adapted from the PRISMA 2020 statement were used to organize the process of identifying, selecting, and including the agencies analyzed [19]. The screening of the selected agencies was represented through a flow diagram adapted for E-scans, in accordance with the recent methodological recommendations [18]. The same framework has been applied previously in published environmental scans of digital health resources, including E-scans of mobile applications for HIV and sexually transmitted infection prevention conducted across Canada, Mexico, and the United States [20].

Phase I: Formulation of the research question.

This study was structured around the following central question: *What are the quality characteristics of international recruitment agencies targeting Spanish-speaking nurses to work in the U.S.?* Quality was operationally defined through the dimensions of information access, institutional reliability, professional support, and visual design of the digital platforms evaluated. The evaluation criteria of these four dimensions were identified and adapted from prior literature based on the recommendations of the International Council of Nurses' [12] position statement on the ethical recruitment of nurses and were subsequently refined and methodologically structured to strengthen the analytical rigor and reproducibility of the E-scan.

The E-scan also addressed several sub-questions intended to provide a comprehensive evaluation of the agencies analyzed: (1) *What is the quality of the agencies according to the criteria of information access and institutional transparency?* (2) *What level of reliability do the agencies present in terms of accreditation, institutional presence, and contact mechanisms?* (3) *What type of professional support do they offer to Spanish-speaking nurses during recruitment, migration, and workforce integration in the U.S.?* and (4) *What is the perception of the visual design of the digital platforms used by the agencies?* Complementary variables were considered, including agency name, location of origin, year of update, overall rating (proportion of the 26 instrument items met by each agency), social media presence, and the recency of institutional information. Together, these elements provided a broader understanding of the accessibility, credibility, and relevance of the international recruitment agencies targeting Spanish-speaking nurses.

Phase II: Selection criteria

Inclusion criteria

International employment and recruitment agencies were included if they met the following criteria: (1) recruited only Spanish-speaking IENs to work in the U.S.; (2) maintained a public and verifiable digital presence through institutional websites and social media platforms, including Facebook (FB), Instagram (IG), LinkedIn (LI), and TikTok (TT); (3) provided institutional content in English and/or Spanish; and (4) offered labor-intermediation processes oriented exclusively toward nursing practice in the U.S.

Exclusion criteria

The following were excluded from the E-scan: (1) agencies recruiting exclusively for destinations other than the U.S.; (2) agencies without publicly accessible or verifiable digital content; (3) organizations focused primarily on academic preparation programs, English courses, or NCLEX-RN examination training; (4) agencies dedicated to recruiting multiple health professions or labor areas other than nursing; and (5) platforms oriented exclusively toward travel nursing or temporary clinical-mobility contracts.

Phase III: Search strategy and information sources.

A structured and systematic search was carried out across multiple digital sources with the aim of identifying international labor-recruitment agencies targeting Spanish-speaking nurses for the U.S. Information sources included general search engines (Google), websites, social media (FB, IG, LI, and TT), nursing-specialized job boards, directories related to the NCLEX-RN licensing process, and institutional websites of international recruitment agencies. The search strategy combined controlled terms and free keywords in Spanish and English to maximize the sensitivity and specificity of the results. Terms used included: "agencias de enfermería," "reclutamiento internacional de enfermeras," "trabajo de enfermería en E.E.U.U.," "enfermeras hispanohablantes," "NCLEX

agencies," "international nurse recruitment," "foreign nurses jobs USA," "nursing agencies for international nurses," "visa sponsorship nurses," "Hispanic nurses' recruitment," "registered nurse jobs USA," and "international nursing employment."

Specific search equations were designed using Boolean operators (AND and OR) to optimize the retrieval of relevant information across the different digital platforms evaluated. For example, combinations such as ("international nurse recruitment" OR "foreign nurses jobs USA" OR "international nursing employment") AND ("United States" OR USA) were used to identify job opportunities for international nurses; ("nursing agencies for international nurses" OR "NCLEX agencies") AND ("visa sponsorship nurses" OR sponsorship) to locate agencies offering support with certification and visa-sponsorship processes; and ("agencias de enfermería" OR "reclutamiento internacional de enfermeras") AND ("enfermeras hispanohablantes" OR "trabajo de enfermería en E.E.U.U") to identify organizations focused on recruiting Spanish-speaking professionals. These equations were adapted to the characteristics and requirements of each platform, enabling a more exhaustive and precise search for information.

Agency data were collected between June 2025 and December 2025. Three members of the research team, composed of researchers and nursing professionals experienced in the E-scan methodology, independently conducted the search, selection, and verification of the identified agencies from their respective countries of residence (Peru, Mexico, and the U.S.). Discrepancies in selection were resolved through group consensus. The search and evaluation of the digital platforms were carried out using mobile devices and computers with internet access, allowing the accessibility, functionality, and presentation of the information to be assessed across different technological environments.

Phase IV: Screening and selection

The screening and selection phase was carried out between January and February 2026 by the three reviewers, who examined all digital sources identified during the search process to determine their eligibility according to the previously established inclusion and exclusion criteria. Agencies that met the inclusion criteria were considered for analysis. Both institutional websites and official social media profiles were collected to identify and verify the digital presence of each agency. However, the quality assessment was performed exclusively on the content available on institutional websites, so that information from social media did not contribute to the total score obtained by the agencies. All included digital content was archived and documented to ensure the traceability of the process and to allow verification of the analyzed data. The review process followed the recommendations of the PRISMA 2020 statement to organize the stages of identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion of the selected agencies. The screening process was also represented through a flow diagram adapted for E-scans. Discrepancies among reviewers regarding the eligibility or selection of agencies were resolved through consensus meetings. In addition, inter-rater agreement was verified using Cohen's kappa coefficient, yielding a value of 0.947, which indicates an almost perfect level of agreement among the raters. The kappa coefficient was calculated prior to the final consensus process among the raters.

Phase V: Data extraction.

Data extraction was carried out using Microsoft Excel version 2021 as the main tool for organizing, systematizing, and analyzing the information collected. The research team designed a structured data-extraction matrix developed specifically for this environmental scan, to ensure uniformity and traceability in recording the information obtained. The extraction matrix was preliminarily reviewed and adjusted by the research team before the start of definitive data collection. The data-extraction matrix included variables related to the general characteristics and quality of the identified agencies, such as agency name, country or location of origin, year of update of the digital platform, presence on social media (Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and TikTok), and institutional currency, verified by their recent activity. This last variable was classified dichotomously (yes/no) and determined from evidence of recent activity in the posts made on their official digital platforms and social media accounts.

Quality indicators were also included, grouped into four dimensions: (1) information access, assessing aspects such as the availability of information on the steps to obtain the Registered Nurse (RN) license (and other nursing designations), the processes for securing employment in the U.S., guidance on visas, documents, and procedures, and the existence of direct contact or communication channels; (2) reliability, considering the absence of unrealistic promises, the consistency of information published across different media, the authenticity of testimonials, and evidence of alliances or registrations with official entities related to nursing practice; (3) professional support, through aspects such as the provision of advisory services for the migration process, preparation for the NCLEX-RN licensure examination and for credential evaluation by CGFNS International (renamed TruMerit in 2025), support in the job search, and accompaniment during workplace adaptation in the U.S.; and (4) visual design, such as website updating, ease of navigation, the presentation of content in inclusive and respectful language, the visibility of institutional social media, and the adequate representation of nurses and their work environment.

An overall rating was also recorded for each agency and for each indicator, derived from the previously established evaluation criteria. Three reviewers performed the data extraction in parallel for each of the included agencies. Subsequently, a process of cross-verification and methodological consensus was carried out through the systematic comparison of the extracted data with the institutional websites to confirm the accuracy and integrity of the information collected. Finally, once the extraction and verification phase was completed, the principal investigator, who created the E-scan, performed a final consistency and accuracy check of the consolidated database to ensure the methodological quality and reliability of the data included in the analysis.

Phase VI: Quality and transparency assessment.

To evaluate recruitment agencies, a structured dichotomous instrument was developed specifically for the present E-scan and based on the recommendations of the International Council of Nurses' position statement on the ethical recruitment of nurses in International Career Mobility and Ethical Nurse Recruitment [12]. The instrument was adapted and modified by the research team to ensure scientific rigor and methodological relevance in accordance with the objectives of the study.

The development of the instrument followed an iterative process. The ICN position statement served as the primary conceptual framework and was complemented by a review of scientific literature on international nurse recruitment and ethical recruitment practices. Based on this evidence, the principal investigator developed an initial pool of 32 items, which was reviewed by the research team. Through iterative discussions, redundant or overlapping items were removed or merged by consensus, resulting in a final 26-item instrument organized into four domains.

The content validity of the instrument was determined through expert judgment using the Delphi technique. Three specialists with experience in nursing research and management participated in this process, evaluating the relevance, clarity, and coherence of the items through a structured evaluation rubric. The results showed favorable agreement among the experts, yielding an Aiken's V coefficient of 1, which indicates total agreement regarding the relevance and clarity of the items included in the instrument.

The reliability of the instrument was assessed using the Kuder-Richardson coefficient (KR-20), appropriate for dichotomous instruments, yielding a value of 0.90, which indicates high internal consistency. These results indicate that the instrument presents adequate psychometric properties, showing favorable preliminary evidence of content validity and reliability for its application in the E-scan.

The instrument was composed of four dimensions: information access, comprising 8 items; reliability, comprising 6 items; professional support, comprising 5 items; and visual design, comprising 7 items.

Each item received equal weight because no empirical evidence currently exists to justify differential weighting of website characteristics in recruitment agencies. Dichotomous scoring (YES = 1; NO = 0) was selected because all indicators represented observable website characteristics that could be objectively verified, thereby reducing evaluator subjectivity and facilitating reproducibility.

Each item was scored dichotomously, assigning 1 point to a "Yes" response and 0 points to a "No" response, which allowed a total score to be obtained for each agency evaluated.

The total score represented the extent to which each agency's publicly available website content aligned with the predefined criteria established for the environmental scan.

The quality assessment was carried out independently by the same three reviewers who conducted the search and data extraction. Each reviewer scored every included agency against all 26 items, and any discrepancies were resolved by consensus among the three before the final database was consolidated.

Because the instrument was developed specifically for this environmental scan, the psychometric results should be considered preliminary and require external validation in independent samples.

The 26 items included in the instrument are presented in Additional file 1, including operational definitions and scoring criteria for each dimension.

Phase VII: Analysis and synthesis.

Descriptive statistics were used for data analysis, applying measures of central tendency, specifically the arithmetic mean, as well as measures of dispersion, such as the standard deviation, to describe the behavior of the scores obtained in each of the dimensions evaluated. The scores obtained made it possible to comparatively describe the quality levels observed among the agencies evaluated. Statistical processing and analysis were performed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27. Microsoft Excel version 2021 was used to construct the stacked bar chart representing the quality levels identified. In addition, Microsoft Word version 2021 was used to build the descriptive tables related to the characteristics of the nursing agencies targeting Spanish-speaking professionals in the U.S. and to construct the PRISMA flow diagram.

RESULTS

Selection of Agencies Evaluated

Figure 1 presents the PRISMA flow diagram of the study selection process. The initial search identified a total of 267 agencies across multiple online platforms, including websites (n = 192), Instagram (n = 12), TikTok (n = 6), LinkedIn (n = 10), and Facebook (n = 47). Prior to screening, 23 agencies were removed because their links were inaccessible or generated errors at the time of data extraction, despite subsequent manual verification attempts. Consequently, 244 agencies underwent screening. During the screening process, 93 duplicate agencies were excluded. In addition, agencies that were not specifically related to nursing recruitment (n = 52) and those focused on nursing travel services rather than employment placement (n = 79) were excluded. Overall, 224 agencies were excluded across screening and eligibility assessment (93 duplicated and 131 ineligible agencies). As a result, 20 agencies met the inclusion criteria and were included in the final review.

General characteristics of the Recruitment Agencies

Of the 20 agencies included in the review, 18 were based in the United States and two operated from Mexico. Within the United States, agencies were concentrated in Florida (n = 4), California (n = 3), and Georgia (n = 3), with the remainder located in Tennessee (n = 2), New York (n = 2), Texas (n = 1), Ohio (n = 1), Utah (n = 1), and Puerto Rico (n = 1). Website currency varied considerably, with 10 agencies reporting updates in 2025 or 2026, three in 2024, one in 2022, and six with no identifiable update date. All agencies maintained at least one social media account. Facebook was the most frequently used platform (20/20 agencies), followed by Instagram (18/20), LinkedIn (17/20), and TikTok (7/20). The number of followers varied substantially across agencies, ranging from fewer than 100 followers to more than 2 million followers. Eighteen agencies demonstrated evidence of recent activity on at least one social media platform

and were classified as active, while two agencies had no evidence of recent activity. These descriptive characteristics provide context regarding agency visibility and digital presence but were not included in the quality scoring process.

With respect to quality indicators, substantial heterogeneity was observed among agencies (Table 1). The highest overall quality ratings, expressed as the proportion of the 26 items met corresponded to Interstaff and PRS Global (0.885; SD = 0.319), followed by Global American Nurses (0.846; SD = 0.361). These agencies were characterized by consistently high values across the dimensions of information access (0.75), reliability (0.833–1.00), professional support (1.00), and visual design (0.857–1.00), reflecting greater transparency in the information offered, evidence of institutional backing, comprehensive accompaniment during the migration process, and visually structured and up-to-date digital platforms. In contrast, ANP Health and Global Nursing Recruiters recorded the lowest overall scores (0.154; SD = 0.361), followed by CareerKnacks International (0.269; SD = 0.443). In these agencies, the main limitations were concentrated in the reliability dimension, where insufficient evidence of institutional alliances, verifiable sources, or mechanisms supporting the credibility of the published information was identified. They also showed low scores in professional support and visual design, suggesting a less robust digital offering for guiding international nurses interested in working in the U.S. When the dimensions were analyzed independently, visual design was one of the best-performing areas among the higher-quality agencies, reaching maximum values of 1.00 in Interstaff, Enfermera en E.E.U.U, and Nurse Bridge USA. In contrast, reliability was the most critical dimension for the lower-rated agencies, revealing substantial differences in the transparency and verifiability of the information provided.

Table 1
Characteristics and quality scores of recruitment agencies serving Spanish-speaking IENs in the U.S.

Agency name	Location of origin	Last website update	Overall website quality scoreM (SD)	Information access	Reliability	Professional support	Visual design	Social media (followers)				Active account
				M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	FB	IG	LI	TT	Yes
1. Connetics USA	San Diego	2025	0.615 (0.487)	0.50 (0.50)	0.667 (0.471)	0.40 (0.490)	0.857 (0.350)	15k	N/A	N/A	N/A	
2. Global Nurse Force	Los Angeles	2025	0.808 (0.394)	0.75 (0.433)	0.833 (0.373)	0.80 (0.40)	0.857 (0.350)	190k	34.2k	45k	225	X
3. USA Healthcare Staffing	Mexico	N/A	0.769 (0.421)	0.875 (0.125)	0.667 (0.471)	0.80 (0.40)	0.714 (0.452)	356	92	437	N/A	X
4. Enfermera en E.E.U.U	Georgia	2025	0.808 (0.394)	0.625 (0.484)	0.667 (0.471)	1.00 (0.000)	1.00 (0.000)	2k	4,738	118	3,133	X
5. Interstaff	Texas	2025	0.885 (0.319)	0.75 (0.433)	0.833 (0.373)	1.00 (0.000)	1.00 (0.000)	56k	6,851	2k	4,333	X
6. PRS Global	Tennessee	2025	0.885 (0.319)	0.75 (0.433)	1.00 (0.000)	1.00 (0.000)	0.857 (0.350)	48k	2,588	3k	N/A	X
7. Valley Medical Staffing	California	2024	0.385 (0.487)	0.625 (0.484)	0.333 (0.471)	0.20 (0.40)	0.286 (0.452)	810	N/A	305	N/A	X
8. CareerKnacks International	Florida	N/A	0.269 (0.443)	0.50 (0.50)	0.125 (0.331)	0.40 (0.490)	0.00 (0.00)	10k	477	283	N/A	
9. Wayne Staffing	New York	2024	0.346 (0.476)	0.25 (0.433)	0.125 (0.331)	0.40 (0.490)	0.571 (0.495)	5.6k	1.4k	343	N/A	X
10. O Grady Peyton International	Georgia	2026	0.346 (0.476)	0.50 (0.50)	0.125 (0.331)	0.40 (0.490)	0.286 (0.452)	2.3k	16.9k	195k	17.6k	x
11. Sharewater Health	Tennessee	2025	0.269 (0.443)	0.50 (0.50)	0.125 (0.331)	0.20 (0.40)	0.143 (0.350)	23k	6.1k	21.3k	N/A	X
12. Passport USA	Ohio	2025	0.346 (0.476)	0.50 (0.50)	0.333 (0.471)	0.40 (0.490)	0.143 (0.350)	2.1 Million	51k	7.8k	N/A	x
13. Mediant	New York	2024	0.385 (0.487)	0.625 (0.484)	0.125 (0.331)	0.60 (0.490)	0.143 (0.350)	38.8k	3.9k	3k	N/A	x
14. ANP Health	Florida	2026	0.154 (0.361)	0.25 (0.433)	0.00 (0.00)	0.20 (0.40)	0.143 (0.350)	1.8k	72.6k	788	16.8k	x
15. Global Nursing Recruiters	Georgia	2025	0.154 (0.361)	0.25 (0.433)	0.00 (0.00)	0.20 (0.40)	0.143 (0.350)	2.2 thousand	300	1	N/A	x
16. US Nurses	Florida	N/A	0.769 (0.421)	0.875 (0.125)	0.667 (0.471)	0.80 (0.40)	0.714 (0.452)	1.9 thousand	35,9k	461	4702	x
17. RDC Nurses	Puerto Rico	2022	0.692 (0.462)	0.75 (0.433)	0.50 (0.50)	0.60 (0.490)	0.857 (0.350)	9.2 thousand	341	244	-	x
18. Nurse Bridge USA	Florida	N/A	0.692 (0.462)	0.75 (0.433)	0.50 (0.50)	0.40 (0.490)	1.00 (0.00)	258	73	.	.	x
19. IsoMed	Utah	N/A	0.769 (0.421)	0.75 (0.433)	0.50 (0.50)	1.00 (0.000)	0.857 (0.350)	3.5 thousand	1823	203	5071	x
20. Global American Nurses	Mexico	N/A	0.846 (0.361)	0.75 (0.433)	0.833 (0.373)	1.00 (0.000)	0.857 (0.350)	287	87	-	-	x
Total, M (SD)				0.744 (0.436)	0.467 (0.499)	0.59 (0.492)	0.571 (0.495)	-	-	-	-	-
Note: Mean (M); Standard deviation (SD); N/A = Not available. *Data as of March 2026. Follower counts and social media activity were reported descriptively and were not incorporated into the agency quality score because digital popularity does not necessarily indicate transparency, reliability, or ethical recruitment practices.												

Overall quality and dimension-specific performance

Figure 2 summarizes agency performance using two complementary perspectives. The first presents the overall quality score, expressed as the absolute number of criteria met across all 26 items of the evaluation instrument, providing an overall assessment of each agency. The second presents dimension-specific scores, illustrating agency performance in each of the four evaluated domains (access to information, reliability, professional support, and visual design).

Based on the overall absolute scores, PRS Global and Interstaff achieved the highest performance, each meeting 23 of the 26 evaluation criteria, followed by Global American Nurses with 22 of 26 criteria fulfilled. These agencies consistently performed well across all dimensions, achieving maximum scores in professional support (5/5) and high scores in reliability (5–6/6) and visual design (6–7/7), reflecting comprehensive digital services that facilitate the recruitment and professional integration of Spanish-speaking internationally educated nurses in the United States.

In contrast, ANP Health and Global Nursing Recruiters obtained the lowest overall scores, each meeting only 4 of the 26 evaluation criteria, followed by CareerKnacks International and Sharewater Health with 7 of 26 criteria fulfilled. Their weakest performance was observed in the dimensions of reliability (0–1/6), professional support (1–2/5), and visual design (0–1/7), indicating limited availability of verifiable information, fewer professional support resources, and less developed digital platforms.

Although Interstaff, PRS Global, and Global American Nurses ranked highest in the overall evaluation, none of the agencies fulfilled all 26 evaluation criteria, highlighting opportunities for improvement across the recruitment sector.

Professional support services offered by agencies

Agency support extended beyond job placement and included multiple forms of assistance throughout the migration process. The most frequently identified services were guidance on visa and immigration procedures, support with credential evaluation through TruMerit (formerly CGFNS International), preparation for the NCLEX-RN licensure examination, assistance with employment placement, and orientation related to relocation and workforce integration in the United States. High-performing agencies generally offered support across all stages of the migration pathway, whereas lower-rated agencies provided only limited information regarding these services or focused primarily on job placement. These findings suggest that substantial variability exists not only in the quality of information provided by agencies but also in the breadth of support available to Spanish-speaking IENs during recruitment, migration, and professional integration.

DISCUSSION

Importantly, this study evaluated publicly available digital content rather than actual recruitment practices. Consequently, the findings should be interpreted as indicators of transparency, accessibility, and organizational presentation rather than direct measures of agency performance or ethical conduct.

The findings of this E-scan reveal marked heterogeneity in the quality of the recruitment agencies targeting Spanish-speaking IENs in the U.S. Of the 20 agencies that met the inclusion criteria, overall ratings ranged from 0.885 (Interstaff and PRS Global) to 0.154 (ANP Health and Global Nursing Recruiters), which reveals an internally fragmented sector rather than a homogeneous field of practices. These results respond directly to the objective of the E-scan, namely, to assess the quality and transparency of the agencies that mediate the recruitment of Spanish-speaking nurses, and they make it possible to distinguish empirically the platforms that offer verifiable information and structured accompaniment from those whose digital presence is insufficient to guide an informed migration decision. By focusing specifically on agencies targeting Spanish-speaking professionals, this study provides evidence on a segment of international recruitment that is scarcely documented in the literature, which has privileged other migratory corridors and linguistic groups [21].

The variability observed in agency quality can be explained by the sector's limited regulation and by the diversity of business models in international recruitment. In the U.S., the labor intermediation of nurses operates in a fragmented and weakly monitored environment, in which agencies with disparate standards coexist without a common framework to standardize their practices [10, 17]. In this context, high-performing agencies tended to combine greater informational transparency, evidence of institutional backing, and verifiable contact mechanisms (Interstaff, PRS Global, and Global American Nurses each scored 0.833 or above on reliability dimension and met all five professional support criteria), whereas low-performing agencies presented systematic information gaps and lower institutional legitimacy, without sources that would allow their claims to be corroborated. This asymmetry is relevant because agency opacity does not constitute a mere communicative deficit: it shifts the cost of verifying information onto the nurse and exposes them to structural risks associated with labor migration, such as accepting contracts under disadvantageous conditions or being recruited through unsupported promises [10, 11]. The quality of the digital environment may reflect broader organizational practices; however, this relationship requires empirical verification through studies involving nurses who have completed the recruitment process.

Reliability emerged as the most deficient dimension among the lower-rated agencies, which raises significant concerns in terms of transparency and ethics. In these agencies, the main shortcomings were concentrated in the absence of evidence of alliances or registrations with official entities, the lack of verifiable sources, and the limited consistency of the information disseminated across different channels. These gaps are particularly problematic because reliability is the dimension that allows a nurse to distinguish a legitimate offer from a potentially misleading one; its absence favors the circulation of misinformation and of unrealistic promises about salaries, timelines, or employment conditions, which the literature describes as a precursor to abusive recruitment practices [12]. This concern aligns with the ethical-recruitment principles promoted by the ICN and with the WHO Global Code of Practice on the International Recruitment of Health Personnel, which emphasize transparency, the accuracy of information, and the protection of those recruited [12]. Taken together, the weakness in reliability suggests that nurses who turn to these agencies could be exposed to unfavorable working conditions and to a diminished capacity to make free and informed decisions about their employment [11, 13]. This concern has gained salience since the 79th World Health Assembly adopted a resolution amending the Code in May 2026. The amendments extend its provisions to health personnel recruited internationally for employment as care workers, clarify the applicability of its recommendations during health emergencies, and encourage co-investment in health systems so

that international recruitment produces proportional benefits for source and destination countries [22]. The Code, however, remains voluntary and is addressed principally to Member States rather than to the private intermediaries examined here, which is precisely the regulatory space that the transparency deficits documented in this E-scan occupy.

Professional support constitutes a key differentiating element between high- and low-quality agencies. This dimension captured the accompaniment offered along the migratory itinerary, which includes advice on visa procedures and documentation, preparation for the NCLEX-RN licensure examination and credential evaluation by TruMerit (formerly CGFNS International), support in the job search, and accompaniment during workplace adaptation in the U.S. These are the points in the process at which the nurse faces the greatest uncertainty. The best-rated agencies achieved the maximum score in this dimension (5/5), reflecting a comprehensive offering, whereas the lower-quality agencies provided fragmentary or limited support (1–2/5). Professional support can be interpreted as an indicator of the agency's institutional commitment to the nurse's trajectory, and not solely to their placement: an offer of sustained accompaniment suggests a relationship oriented toward the complete process of integration, whereas its absence points to a model centered on one-off intermediation. This distinction is especially relevant given the complexity of the professional migration process and the structural vulnerability of Spanish-speaking IENs, for whom linguistic and administrative barriers can deepen dependence on the agency [9, 13].

The quality of the digital environment, including visual design and the accessibility of information, plays a fundamental role in the perception and functionality of the agencies. Visual design received the highest scores among high-performing agencies; however, high visual-design scores did not consistently correspond with high reliability scores. These results reflect platforms with better navigability, clarity in the presentation of content, and the use of inclusive and respectful language, attributes that make it easier for the nurse to locate and understand relevant information. Digital platforms operate as a gateway to the migration process, insofar as they often constitute the first, and sometimes the only, point of contact between the nurse and the agency [23]. Agencies with strong recruitment practices but limited online documentation may have received lower scores, while agencies with highly developed websites may not necessarily provide higher-quality recruitment experiences. Nevertheless, it is worth emphasizing that a polished visual presentation is not equivalent to a guarantee of ethical practices; design can project professionalism without this implying transparency or institutional backing, so that an attractive platform could coexist with low reliability. This dissociation has implications for the digital literacy of users, since the capacity to discriminate between substantive and merely aesthetic quality signals conditions the possibility of an informed decision [24, 25].

Alternative explanations for agency variability include differences in organizational size, available resources, market reach, and technological capacity. Therefore, lower scores should not automatically be interpreted as evidence of unethical recruitment practices but rather as indicators of limited transparency based on publicly available information.

Implications for practice, policy, and research

The results have direct implications for professional practice and for the decision-making of Spanish-speaking nurses interested in migrating to the U.S. It is recommended that candidates evaluate agencies on the basis of explicit criteria of transparency, reliability, and professional support before initiating any recruitment process, paying particular attention to the existence of verifiable information and institutional backing. Within this framework, structured instruments such as the one developed in this E-scan can guide such evaluation by offering a set of observable indicators for systematically comparing agencies. Likewise, educational institutions and professional nursing organizations play an important role in disseminating reliable information and in preparing those who are considering migrating, thereby helping to reduce the information asymmetries that characterize the sector [12].

At the level of public policy, the findings reinforce the need to strengthen the regulation and oversight of international recruitment agencies. Responsibility for such oversight should primarily rest with governmental agencies responsible for labor regulation, immigration, and healthcare workforce planning in destination countries, while professional nursing organizations and accrediting bodies can play complementary roles by establishing ethical recruitment standards and voluntary certification mechanisms. International organizations such as the WHO and the International Council of Nurses may provide normative guidance and monitoring frameworks, but implementation and enforcement ultimately require national regulatory authorities. It is pertinent to move toward the implementation of regulatory standards and certification mechanisms that attest to compliance with minimum criteria of transparency and ethical recruitment, similar to the fair-recruitment certification schemes adopted in other countries, such as Germany [26]. These frameworks should align with the WHO Global Code of Practice on the International Recruitment of Health Personnel and with the recommendations of the International Council of Nurses [12]. Ultimately, the purpose of these measures is the protection of the labor and human rights of migrant nurses, particularly those in situations of greater vulnerability [13].

This E-scan opens new lines of research aimed at deepening the understanding of the quality, impacts, and experiences associated with international recruitment. Qualitative studies with Spanish-speaking nurses and longitudinal evaluations are suggested, allowing the information disseminated by the agencies to be contrasted with the real experiences of the professionals throughout the migration process. External validation of the instrument in different samples and contexts is also needed, as well as comparative studies with agencies targeting other linguistic groups, to determine the extent to which the patterns identified here are specific to the Spanish-speaking segment or express broader dynamics of the international recruitment of nurses.

Strengths and limitations

This E-scan presents several methodological strengths that lend rigor and relevance to the findings. First, it is a systematic environmental scan, which examines in a structured manner the information available in digital environments in accordance with an established procedural framework [18]. Second, the process of identifying, screening, and including the agencies was organized following an adaptation of the PRISMA 2020 statement for E-scans, which favors the traceability and reproducibility of the study [18, 19]. Third, the evaluation instrument showed adequate psychometric properties, with optimal content validity (Aiken's $V = 1$) and high internal consistency ($KR-20 = 0.90$). Finally, the evaluation process achieved almost perfect inter-rater agreement (Cohen's $\kappa = 0.947$), which supports the reliability of the assessments performed. However, the E-scan also presents limitations that must be considered when

interpreting the results. The analysis was based exclusively on publicly accessible digital information, so it did not include the direct evaluation of nurses' experiences with the agencies, a dimension that exceeds the scope of this design. The quality assessment was limited to institutional websites and excluded social media content from the score, which may have underestimated the activity and reach of some agencies. Furthermore, given the dynamic nature of websites, the information may have been modified after the extraction date, which limits the temporal validity of the findings. Finally, the E-scan was restricted to agencies that recruit Spanish-speaking nurses, so the results are not directly generalizable to other linguistic groups or to international nurse recruitment.

CONCLUSIONS

This E-scan assessed the quality and transparency of 20 international recruitment agencies targeting Spanish-speaking IENs bound for the U.S. The results reveal a markedly heterogeneous sector, in which agencies with a comprehensive digital offering, one that is transparent, institutionally backed, and oriented toward accompaniment, coexist with agencies whose limited reliability and scarce verifiable information are insufficient to support an informed migration decision. Reliability emerged as the strongest differentiating dimension among agencies, suggesting that transparency and verifiability may be particularly useful indicators when evaluating recruitment organizations. By empirically characterizing a scarcely documented segment of international recruitment, the study provides evidence on the conditions under which Spanish-speaking nurses access pre-migration information and makes available an instrument with adequate psychometric properties for systematically assessing the quality and transparency of agencies. These findings offer nurses, educational institutions, and nursing organizations operational criteria for discriminating between legitimate offers and potentially misleading practices.

At the level of public policy, the results underscore the need to strengthen the regulation and certification of recruitment agencies, in keeping with the principles of ethical recruitment and with the protection of the labor and human rights of migrant nurses. Nevertheless, the evaluation was limited to publicly accessible digital information; determining the extent to which the quality declared online corresponds to the real experiences of nurses will require qualitative and longitudinal research, as well as external validation of the instrument in other contexts and linguistic groups. If the gap between digital presentation and actual practice persists, agency transparency will continue to constitute both an indicator of quality and a condition for the exercise of informed and safe professional migration. Future studies should compare agency ratings with the lived experiences of internationally educated nurses to determine whether web-based indicators of quality correspond with actual recruitment outcomes, workplace integration, and employment satisfaction.

Abbreviations

BON(s)
Board(s) of Nursing
CGFNS
Commission on Graduates of Foreign Nursing Schools International (renamed TruMerit in 2025)
E-Scan
Environmental scan
FB
Facebook
ICN
International Council of Nurses
IEN(s)
Internationally educated nurse(s)
IG
Instagram
KR-20
Kuder–Richardson Formula 20
LI
LinkedIn
M
Mean
NCLEX-RN
National Council Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses
PRISMA
Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses
SD
Standard deviation
SPSS
Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
TT
TikTok
U.S.
United States
USCIS

Declarations

Ethics approval and consent to participate

Not applicable. This environmental scan analyzed only information that recruitment agencies made publicly available on their institutional websites and social media accounts. The study involved no contact with, recruitment of, or data collection from human participants, and therefore did not require review by an institutional review board.

Consent for publication

Not applicable.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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Author Contribution

HFS conceived and designed the study, developed the environmental-scan methodology, supervised the research process, participated in data acquisition and interpretation, and served as principal investigator and corresponding author. JCMF-D participated in data collection, screening of recruitment agencies, data analysis, and preparation of the initial manuscript draft. ISV-V contributed to methodological development and interpretation of results. JR-A participated in data acquisition, environmental-scanning procedures, and qualitative assessment of the recruitment agencies. JC-M contributed to conceptualization of the study and methodological supervision. PC contributed to interpretation of the findings and provided expert feedback on the international nursing workforce context. All authors critically revised the manuscript for important intellectual content and read and approved the final manuscript.

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Availability of data and materials

The datasets supporting the conclusions of this article are included within the article and its additional file(s) (Table 1 and Additional file 1). The full list of recruitment agency websites reviewed is available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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Figures

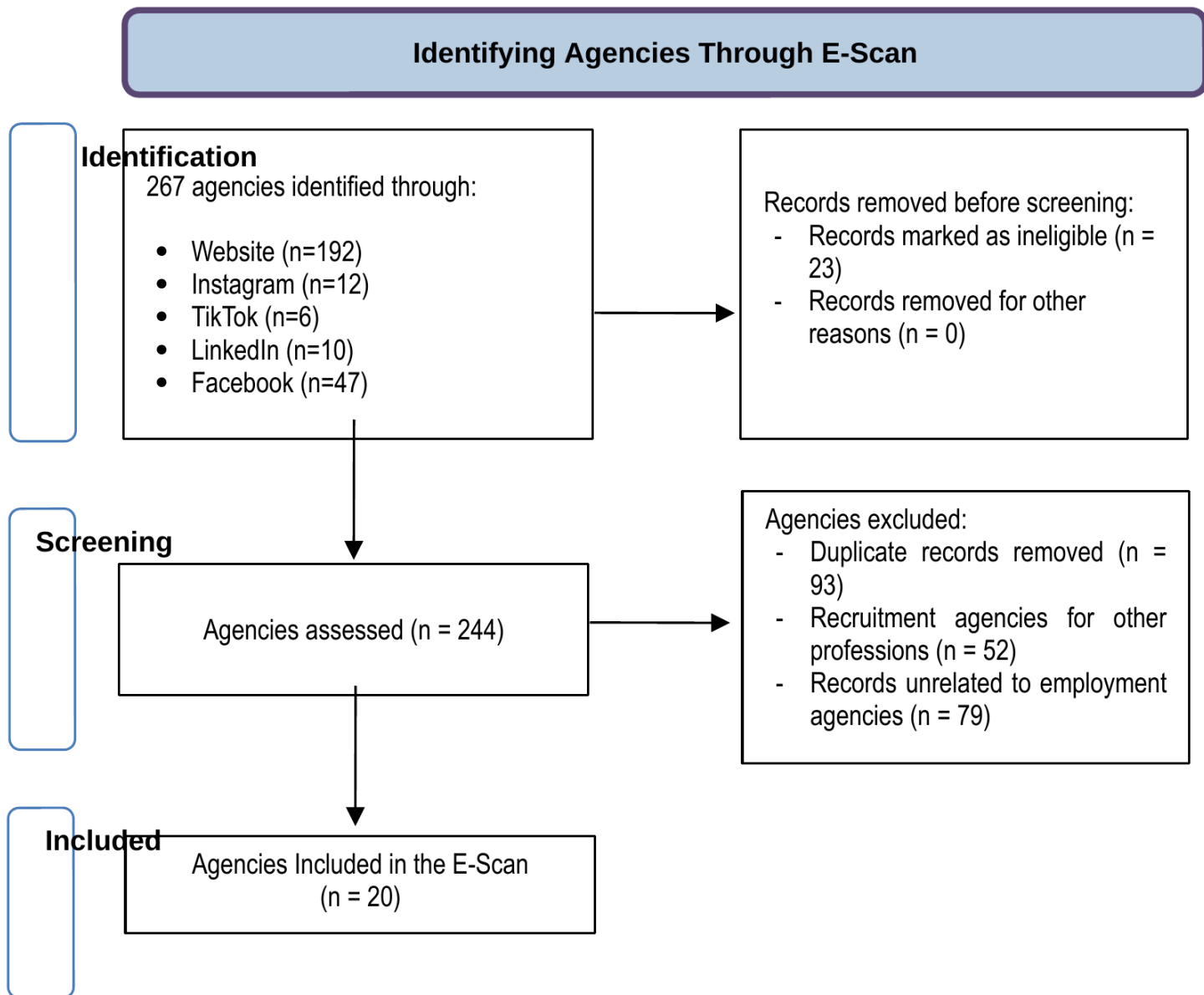


Figure 1

PRISMA flow diagram of the environmental scan selection process.

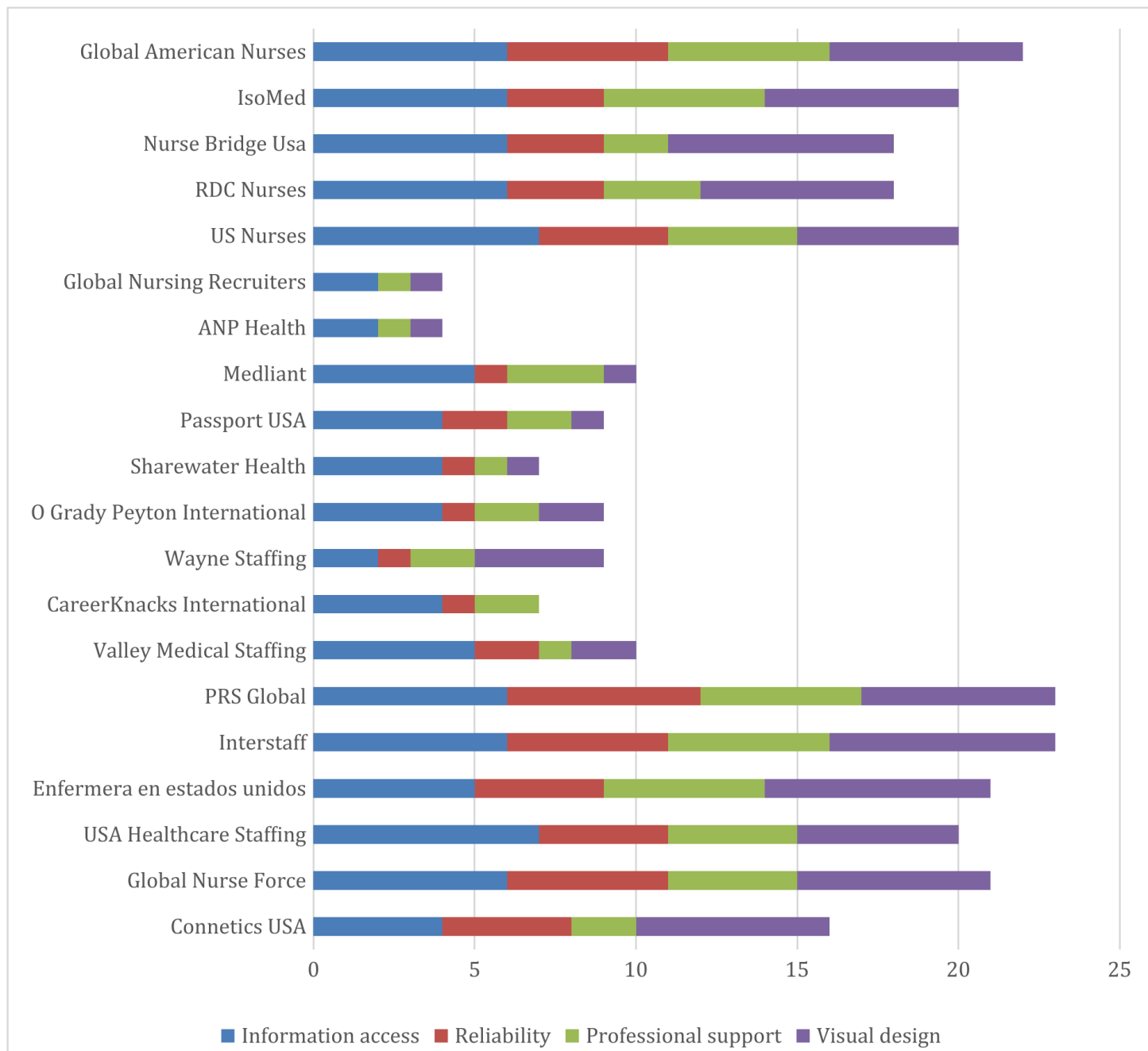


Figure 2

Distribution of scores across the four domains of the Recruitment Agency Website Assessment Instrument.

Supplementary Files

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