



Centralised Support to the Network of Higher Education Reform Experts (HERE)

HERE Seminar

Towards the 2024 Tirana Ministerial Conference: Implications and points of interest for higher education systems in Partner Countries neighbouring the EU


Parallel workshop 2: Recognition of Qualifications

7-8 November 2023



Recognition for and of what?

- Recognition of a **qualification issued in another country** may have several purposes
 - Academic recognition
 - access to further studies
 - use of an academic title, subject to the laws and regulations of the country in which recognition is sought
 - Professional recognition
 - facilitate access to the labour market
 - not covered by the LRC & Bologna Process
 - regulated professions – a case of their own!
 - European Union: European level regulation (single market)
 - EU Treaty: European Parliament and the Council shall “issue directives for the mutual recognition of diplomas, certificates and other evidence of formal qualifications”
 - Directive 2005/36/CE
 - Regulated Professions Database
- Recognition of **study periods** (credit recognition – ECTS or equivalent)
- Recognition of **prior learning**
- Recognition of **informal learning**



1997 Lisbon recognition Convention (LRC)

- LRC - Pre-Bologna
- Developed by the Council of Europe and UNESCO and adopted by national representatives
- Legal document, today ratified by 54 countries (not Greece)
- Complemented since by various recommendations and subsidiary texts (most recently on article VII on refugees)
- https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/recognition/lrc_en.asp
- Recognition is
 - a key commitment under the Bologna Process (3-study cycles, ECTS, mobility)
 - a priority for the EU – which aligns with Bologna Process and is part of it (EC + all 27 Member States), but also develops on policy approaches

Key principles

1) applicants have right to fair assessment

2) there is recognition if no substantial differences can be proven

3) legislation or guidelines encourage comparing of learning outcomes rather than programme contents

4) in cases of negative decisions the competent recognition authority demonstrates the existence of substantial difference

5) applicant's right to appeal of the recognition decision

All countries shall:

- 1. appoint a national information centre (ENIC) – one task is to offer advice on the recognition of foreign qualifications to students, graduates, employers, higher education institutions and other interested parties or persons**
- 2. provide information on the institutions and programmes they consider as belonging to their higher education systems**
- 3. encourage their higher education institutions to issue the Diploma Supplement to their students in order to facilitate recognition**
- 4. develop procedures to assess whether refugees and displaced persons fulfil the relevant requirements for access to higher education or to employment activities, even in cases in which the qualifications cannot be proven through documentary evidence**

1998 Bologna Declaration called for the introduction of “easily readable and comparable degrees”

- Ministerial Communiqués have repeatedly called for the implementation of LRC
- Today recognition in line with the LRC ‘considered one of the key commitments in the Bologna Process’
 - Peer-support activity focused on this launching this year



'Automatic recognition' introduced in 2012 as a long term goal

All higher education qualifications issued in other EHEA countries are recognised *at system level on an equal level with comparable academic qualifications in the home country* and give the right to be considered for entry to a programme of further study at the next level. The following conditions are also met:

- National legislation has been reviewed and, if necessary, modified to ensure that the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC) are respected.
- Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) or recognition bodies receive clear guidance on properly implementing the principles of the LRC.
- Recognition decisions are taken within a four month limit.
- Appeals procedures are in place and decided within a clear and reasonable time limit.
- Recognition practice in HEIs is monitored by external Quality Assurance (QA) in line with the ESG 2015.



Automatic recognition in practice

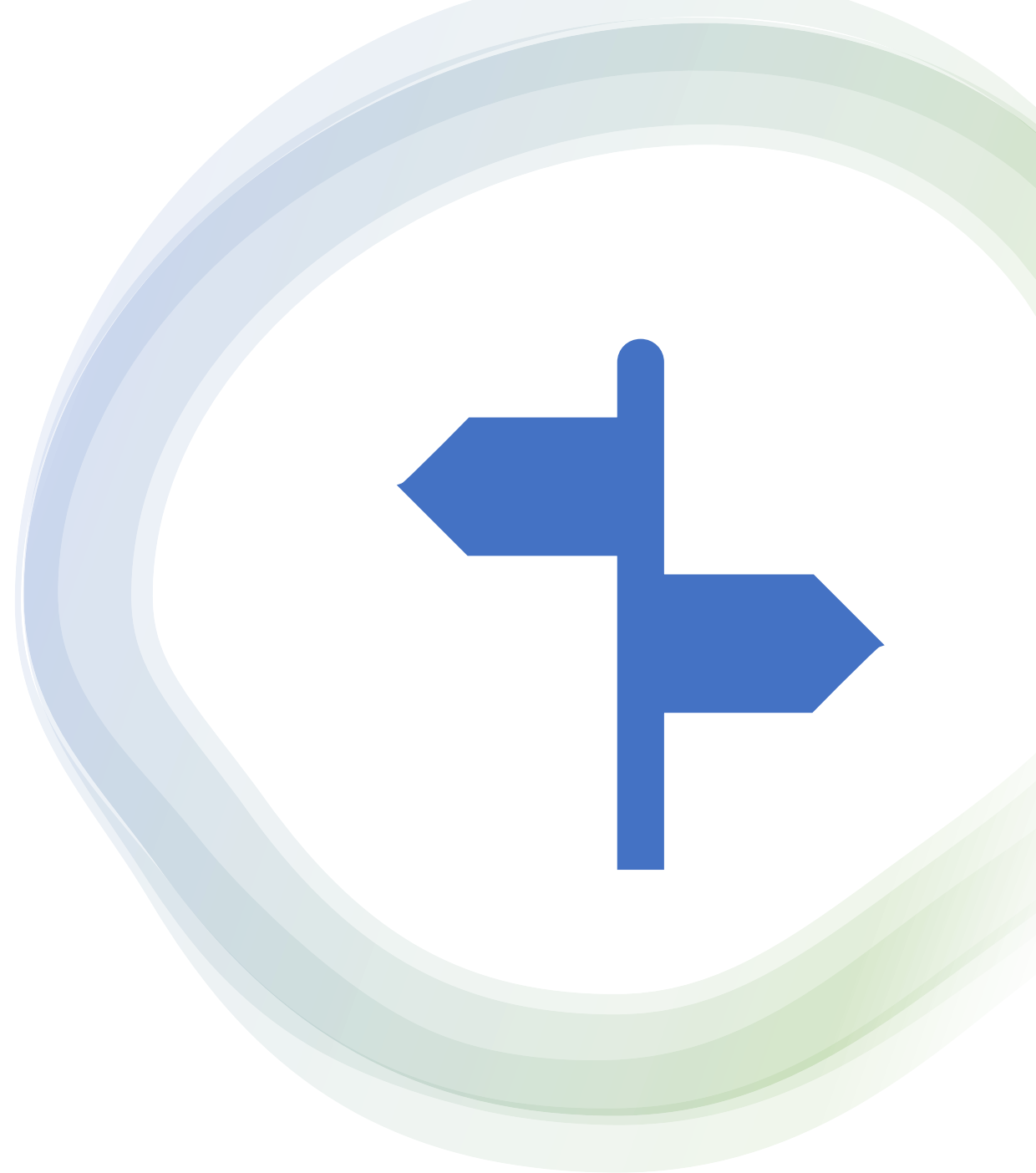
- EHEA Pathfinder Group on Automatic Recognition (2013-2015)
 - System- level recognition
 - ‘bachelor = a bachelor’, ‘master = a master’
 - accepts the level, quality and workload of a qualification
 - no intervention of a credential evaluator
- Automatic recognition does not mean foreign students are automatically admitted to higher education institutions
- Current discussion in EHEA and EEA on how to implement: does it need one national level structure, or every university recognises (degree from a recognised HEI in an EHEA country), and then decide on admission.
- Programme-level recognition includes profile and learning outcomes and still requires a credential evaluation

Regional initiatives & many projects

- ENIC/NARIC projects co-funded by EC (EUA partnering in some of them) resulting in e.g.
 - European Area for Recognition Manual
 - European Recognition Manual for HEIs
 - Improved recognition: A self-assessment tool
- Regional automatic recognition agreements: Nordic countries, Benelux, Baltic countries, etc

European Commission's latest actions

- In May 2018 'Proposal for a Council recommendation on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education diplomas and the outcomes of learning periods abroad'
- 'Improving procedures for the mutual recognition of qualifications in EU Member States is a cornerstone of establishing a European Education Area by 2025'
- REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE COUNCIL on the implementation of the Council Recommendation on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad, February 2023



The background features a light blue-to-green gradient. On the left side, there are several overlapping, wavy, light blue shapes that curve upwards and to the right. On the right side, there are similar wavy shapes in a light green color, curving upwards and to the left.

How does the Bologna Process
currently address recognition?

Rome Communiqué 2020

- “We will strengthen the implementation of the Council of Europe/UNESCO Lisbon Recognition Convention and apply its principles to qualifications and periods of study outside the EHEA...”
- “We will ensure automatic recognition of academic qualifications and periods of study within the EHEA [...]. We will make the necessary legislative changes to guarantee automatic recognition at system level for qualifications delivered in EHEA countries...”
- “We commit to reviewing our own legislation, regulations, and practice to ensure fair recognition of qualifications held by refugees, displaced persons and persons in refugee-like situations...”

Thematic Peer Group A on Qualifications Framework (TPG A on QF)

Thematic orientation

- self-certification of the national qualification frameworks the overarching Qualifications Framework of the EHEA,
- complete implementation of the ECTS User's Guide,
- short cycle higher education,
- multiple purposes and use of the qualifications frameworks by the stakeholders,
- study programmes outside of the Bologna three-cycle structure,
- relationship between the qualifications frameworks and quality assurance.

Thematic Peer Group B on the Lisbon Recognition Convention (TPG B on LRC)

Thematic orientation

- establishing the legal framework to allow the implementation of the LRC,
- establishing the distribution of work and responsibilities among the competent institutions that have the right knowledge and capacity to carry out recognition procedures,
- achieving automatic recognition,
- recognition of alternative pathways,
- qualifications held by refugees,
- optimising the potential of digital technology for the recognition agenda and the Diploma Supplement.

P.S. Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education

- Adopted in 2019 by UNESCO members – 22 countries ratified (state: May 2023)
- An umbrella agreement for regional recognition conventions, such as LRC
- Recognition actors still to refer primarily to their regional convention
- Once ratified, it means LRC principles are to be applied to applicants from any other region as well
- <https://en.unesco.org/about-us/legal-affairs/global-convention-recognition-qualifications-concerning-higher-education>

Benefits of recognition

- Promoting mobility and lifelong learning
- Supporting international cooperation/internationalisation

Obstacles

- Lack of knowledge of LRC principles
 - Need for capacity-building and professionalisation of recognition at HEIs
- Unwillingness to recognise
 - Lack of tradition
 - Lack of trust
 - Focus on study content instead of learning outcomes - insufficient understanding of “substantial difference”
 - Learning outcomes inadequately developed
 - Confusion between “access” and “admission”



Thank you!

Questions

- How relevant are the BP discussions/approach on this topic to your context? Does it address the main challenges of your system? Please elaborate.
- How important is this topic on the system-level policy discussions in your country?
- Does (automatic) recognition work among the universities in your country or in your region?
- What are the barriers for implementing (automatic) recognition in your system?
- Are there any developments in regards to recognition of prior learning?
- Relevance of regional & global recognition convention?