

The Lisbon Convention - What is it?

The Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region was developed by the Council of Europe and UNESCO and adopted by national representatives meeting in Lisbon on 8 - 11 April 1997. This Council of Europe/ UNESCO Convention – usually referred to as the Lisbon Convention – has since been ratified by most European countries. The full text and a continually updated list of signatures and ratifications may be found at <http://conventions.coe.int> (ETS 165).

Among the main points of the Council of Europe/UNESCO Convention are the following:

- Holders of qualifications issued in one country shall have adequate access to an assessment of these qualifications in another country.
- No discrimination shall be made in this respect on any ground such as the applicant's gender, race, colour, disability, language, religion, political opinion, national, ethnic or social origin.
- The responsibility to demonstrate that an application does not fulfil the relevant requirements lies with the body undertaking the assessment.
- Each country shall recognise qualifications – whether for access to higher education, for periods of study or for higher education degrees – as similar to the corresponding qualifications in its own system unless it can show that there are substantial differences between its own qualifications and the qualifications for which recognition is sought.
- Recognition of a higher education qualification issued in another country shall have one or both of the following consequences:
 - a. access to further higher education studies, including relevant examinations and preparations for the doctorate, on the same conditions as candidates from the country in which recognition is sought;
 - b. the use of an academic title, subject to the laws and regulations of the country in which recognition is sought.

In addition, recognition may facilitate access to the labour market.

- All countries shall 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.
- All countries shall provide information on the institutions and programmes they consider as belonging to their higher education systems.
- All countries shall appoint a national information centre, one important task of which is to offer advice on the recognition of foreign qualifications to students, graduates, employers, higher education institutions and other interested parties or persons.
- All countries shall encourage their higher education institutions to issue the Diploma Supplement to their students in order to facilitate recognition. The Diploma Supplement is an instrument developed jointly by the European Commission, the Council of Europe and UNESCO that aims to describe the qualification in an easily understandable way and relating it to the higher education system within which it was issued.