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Implementation of the Council of Europe Higher Education programme in 2022-2023 and priorities for the future programme 2024-27

Report to the Bologna Follow Up Group

DGII-Democracy and Human Dignity (Directorate of Democratic Participation/Education Department)
Secretariat contacts: catherine.dreyer@coe.int ;

Introduction

This document is intended to update the Bologna Follow Up Group on all areas of work of the Council of Europe directly related to higher education (in addition to its direct involvement in the EHEA). Supported by the new structure of the Education Department, the intergovernmental work and capacity building projects in the field of higher education are more closely aligned.

The higher education programme of the Council of Europe comprises the projects related to the implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention (including its Co-Secretariat, running (jointly with UNESCO) of the ENIC Network; democratic mission of higher education, ETINED Platform, European Qualifications Passport for Refugees and the Joint EU/CoE Project 'Supporting an efficient national mechanism of recognition of refugees' qualifications in Italy'.

The work in the field of higher education is overseen by the CDEDU Sub-Group on higher education policy, comprising representatives of Ministries, in charge of higher education, as well as academic representatives and international NGOs. The CDEDU Sub-Group reports to the Council of Europe Steering Committee for Education, which comprises representatives of public authorities responsible for education from the 46 member States of the Council of Europe, Holy See and Kazakhstan and a number of observers.

The paper is structured in the following way:

For each of the projects an overview is provided, followed by an update on the current activities in 2022-2023 and key priorities for 2024-2027.

The identified key priorities contribute to the implementation of the Council of Europe Education Strategy 2030, which is expected to be adopted at the 26th session of the Standing Conference of Ministers of Education "The transformative power of education: universal values and civic renewal" in Strasbourg (28-29 September 2023)

1. Implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee

Overview

Together with UNESCO, the Council of Europe ensures the Secretariat to the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC). The Lisbon Recognition Convention is one of the most ratified Conventions in the Council of Europe and it remains the only legally binding text in the European Higher Education Area. To date it has been ratified by 54 countries. The ratifications of the Convention by Monaco and Turkmenistan (entry into force on the 1st May 2023) will bring the number of contracting Parties to 56. Last year was the 25th anniversary of the LRC.

Developments in 2022-2023

The 9th session of the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee took place in Strasbourg on the 15 November 2022.

One of the main items on the agenda was the second monitoring report on the implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, which focuses on the implementation of the three following LRC principles

- Right to appeal (Article III.5)
- Information provision (Articles III.4 ; VIII.1 ; IX.2.2)
- Transnational education (Articles IV.9 ; VI.5)

Additionally, the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee Bureau decided to collect details

on topics not directly mentioned in the Convention, but highlighted repeatedly in recommendations, declarations, protocols, models of good practices and other instruments:

- Automatic recognition
- Digital solutions

The follow up to the monitoring report will be carried out within the Workplan 2023-2025 by the Lisbon Recognition Convention Bureau.

The Committee adopted the Terms of Reference of the Working Group on the revision of the ENIC/NARIC Charter. The Charter will be revised by the end of 2023 and will be sent to the Convention Committee for adoption through the written procedure.

The meeting report figures in the document DGII/EDU/LRC(2023)01

At the meeting the President of the LRCC informed the Committee that, on November 11, 2022, he received a written communication from one of the Parties to the Lisbon Recognition Convention. This message recalled the decisions of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe [CM/Del/Dec\(2022\)1438/2.3](#) from the 30 June 2022 and [CM/Del/Dec\(2022\)1445/10.4](#) from the 5 October 2022 inviting, where relevant, each body representing all the Parties of treaties to which the Russian Federation and Belarus remain a Party, to decide, on the basis of its rules of procedure, on the modalities of participation of the Russian Federation and Belarus in the respective body, and requested to add an additional item to the agenda of the 9th session of the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee on 15 November 2022 to discuss arranging a special meeting to discuss these points.

This communication was brought to the attention of the Bureau at its meeting on 14 November. After the discussion with the Bureau members and with the purpose to ensure the continuation of the ninth session of the LRC Committee, acting in accordance with Rule 3.4. of the Rules of Procedure, the President decided to convene an extraordinary session of the Committee.

The extraordinary session of the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee took place on the 28 February 2023. The meeting adopted a declaration on restricting the participation of the Russian Federation and Belarus. The text of the declaration can be found in Appendix 2 of DGII/EDU/LRC(2023)03.

Key priorities in 2024-2027

The Lisbon Recognition Convention Bureau will focus its attention on the following texts:

- Update the 'Revised Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education' (2007)
- Draft a new text on 'digital solutions', taking into account the existing 'Guidelines for national online information systems' (2019);

2. The Council of Europe work on recognition of qualifications

Overview

Since 1994 the Council of Europe has been actively involved in running jointly with UNESCO the European Network of National Information Centres (ENIC). It is run jointly with the National Academic Recognition Information Centres (NARIC) network, which was established in 1984 with the European Commission as Secretariat.

The ENIC-NARIC networks have joint initiatives, linked to supporting exchange on

qualifications-recognition information on policies and practices and providing an opportunity for capacity building activities, as well as participating in consultative processes on international normative instruments related to qualification recognition.

For the efficient functioning of both the Lisbon Recognition Convention and the ENIC and NARIC Networks the renewal process is constantly required, given new developments in the field of higher education, such as the digitization, automatic recognition, micro-credentials, recognition of non-formal and informal education and recognition of prior learning, transnational education.

In 2023 the Council of Europe set up an Ad Hoc Working Group on Automatic recognition of qualifications. Its terms of reference were adopted by the CDEDU Bureau at its February 2023 meeting.

Developments in 2022-2023

The activities of the Networks are organised around the EB/NAB (ENIC Bureau/NARIC Advisory Board) 2021-2023 workplan, according to five dimensions.

The focus of the ENIC and NARIC Networks activities is the annual meeting that provides an update to credential evaluators on the relevant higher education topics. The 2022 meeting took place in Dublin and its 2023 meeting will take place in Stockholm. Each event has plenary sessions and hosts twelve parallel workshop on topical issues of recognition.

The Networks also focus on enhancing the quality culture of the recognition centres. Throughout 2022-2023 numerous workshops and other events were organised, including: face-the-case seminars on qualifications from Afghanistan, Sub-Saharan Africa, India, Iran, Ukraine; a workshop on microcredentials; mini-conversation on digitization and others. The networks also monitor recognition related issues both within the Bologna Process, as well as on a Global scale.

The activities report of the Networks will be submitted in June 2023.

In 2023 for the first time the Council of Europe launched a call to support ENIC centres, which are not eligible for the NARIC call and are part of the CoE Education Programme.

As a result of the call for pilot projects, nine applications were received for funding. Out of these applications the evaluation board decided to support six projects from the following countries: Albania, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Ukraine, United Kingdom. The projects will be implemented until the end of 2023.

The Council of Europe Ad Hoc Working Group on Automatic Recognition of qualifications chaired by the CDEDU Vice-Chair will have its first meeting in the beginning of May 2023 in Brussels. The purpose of this Group will be to:

- Exchange views on the current developments, related to establishing the right to automatic recognition, making good use of the trial-and-error experiences across Europe;
- Advise the Council of Europe Steering Committee on Education on different possibilities and prepare an option paper to establish a legally binding text on automatic recognition.

Key priorities in 2024-2027

Organise the 2025 annual ENIC-NARIC meeting in a non-EU country
Develop and adopt a possible legal instrument on automatic recognition

Build up the capacity of the ENIC centres, which are part of the Council of Europe Education Programme through projects.

3. Recognition of refugees' qualifications:

There are currently two initiatives implemented in this field: the European Qualifications Passport for Refugees (EQPR) and the joint European Union and Council of Europe project 'Supporting an efficient national mechanism of recognition of refugees' qualifications' in Italy.

3.1. The European Qualifications Passport for Refugees (EQPR)

An overview

The European Qualifications Passport for Refugees is a Council of Europe initiative supported by twenty-two countries¹ and the UNHCR aiming at facilitating the recognition of refugees' qualifications even in the absence of full documentation. The EQPR and the methodology on which it is based are used by the national information centres on recognition of qualifications (ENICs/NARICs) and higher education institutions in States Parties to the Lisbon Recognition Convention to assess qualifications held by refugees that cannot be adequately documented, in accordance with Article VII of the Lisbon Recognition Convention and the Recommendation on Recognition of Qualifications Held by Refugees, Displaced Persons and Persons in a Refugee-like Situation.

The EQPR is used by local authorities, employers, higher education institutions and NGOs for better integration of refugees into their new societies through employment and access to higher education.

Developments in 2022-2023

The project developments in 2022-2023 were strongly influenced by the war in Ukraine and subsequent increase in the overall number of refugees in Europe.

In March 2022 the EQPR held an extraordinary Project Coordination Group meeting to discuss common actions to undertake in connection with the Ukrainian refugee crisis.

A Task Force on Ukrainian qualifications was established and one of its objectives was to note the recent developments and analyse the effects of the war in Ukraine on its educational sector. The working group consisted of experienced colleagues from the ENIC-NARIC offices of France, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Ukraine and Educational Credential Evaluators from the US. The EQPR 5ecognizi special trainings, in March and in September 2022 on Ukrainian qualifications for the EQPR evaluators and ENIC-NARIC networks.

The final report prepared by the experts from the task force will be made available to support credential evaluators in their work on 5ecognizing Ukrainian qualifications. Moreover, in Italy, the authorities have issued a [decree](#) in which people under temporary protection in Italy can use the EQPR to work in certain health related fields. In 2022, 91 Ukrainian refugees have been awarded the EQPR following the EQPR assessment.

Overall, by the end of 2022, 874 candidates had been interviewed (out of which 493 online). As a result, 741 EQPRs had been issued (420 awarded following the online interviews).

¹ Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, Croatia, France, Germany, Georgia, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Monaco, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Serbia, United Kingdom

More than 60 credential evaluators from 22 participating ENICs are now trained on the EQPR methodology, which increases the capacity of the project to promote the EQPR methodology as a valid and trustful tool to recognise qualifications of refugees without sufficient documentation.

The number of countries participating in the EQPR has been continuously growing. In 2022 seven new countries i.e. Albania, Andorra, Ireland, Latvia, Moldova, Poland, and Portugal joined the project. San Marino and Georgia are the latest countries to join the project in January and March 2023 respectively, bringing the overall number of participating countries to 22.

A [new video](#) showcasing how the EQPR positively impacts on the lives of its holders has been produced and issued on the UNHCR World Refugee Day. The video has also been projected within the framework of the « RDV du Cinéma européen des droits de l'homme » and thanks to the Permanent Representation of Luxembourg to the Council of Europe and in cooperation with the Office of the Special Representative on Migration and Refugees of the Council of Europe. The video has also been projected during the meeting of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe held on 11 October 2022. The EQPR was shown as one best practice in the refugees' integration process as a tool that benefits to all parties and not only refugees.

The EQPR project is developing synergies and cooperates with the UNESCO Qualifications Passport, which is targeting countries outside Europe. The coordination is carried out both at the strategic level, as well as on a technical level.

3.2. The Joint European Union/Council of Europe project 'Supporting an efficient national mechanism of recognition of refugees' qualifications.

Italy became the first country in which the Council of Europe is upscaling the use of the EQPR methodology, through the joint European Union and Council of Europe project "[Supporting an efficient national mechanism of recognition of refugees' qualifications](#)". This project is co-funded by the European Union via the Technical Support Instrument and implemented by the Council of Europe in co-operation with the European Commission Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support.

The general objective of the project is to support Italian authorities in their efforts to design and foster reforms for recognising refugees' qualifications through the development of a national coordination mechanism within public sectors, in and beyond academia.

Through tailored activities, this technical support will contribute to improving the capacity of public administration bodies to process applications for recognising refugees' qualifications and to increasing pathways for refugees in regulated professions.

The project is implemented from 1 September 2022 through 31 August 2024

Key priorities from 2024 through 2027

In order to implement the CoE Education Strategy, in particular one of its priority themes '**Enhancing education's social responsibility and responsiveness**', it is important to upscale the implementation of the EQPR as an important instrument for ensuring opportunities for equal access at all levels of education for all learners, including vulnerable groups, migrants and refugees.

This could be done in several ways:

At a policy level: by developing a Council of Europe legal instrument. This could take form of a Committee of Ministers Recommendation on Valuing the Academic and Professional Skills of Refugees in Europe, containing principles and guidelines. For this purpose an Ad Hoc Drafting Group has been set up by the Steering Committee for Education at its last meeting

on the 3-5 April 2023.

- on a practical level: by increasing the number of the EQPR countries. This could be done through promotion efforts and by targeting the ENIC and NARIC networks, as well as through support of the projects through the ENIC calls. The target could be to have by 2027 at least 50 % of the CoE member States on board.
- through developing in co-operation with the European Commission new projects, based on the model of the Italian project.
- through close co-operation with UNESCO to promote the EQPR as an important instrument for the implementation of the UNESCO Global Convention

4. Democratic mission of higher education

Overview

The work on the democratic mission of higher education is strongly linked to the fundamental values of the Council of Europe, respecting human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

For the last twenty years this work has been mainly carried out through the cooperation of four pillar organizations: the Council of Europe; the International Association of Universities; the International Consortium for Higher Education, Civic Responsibility, and Democracy; and the Organization of American States, jointly forming the Global Cooperation for the Democratic Mission of Higher Education.

The Global Cooperation for the Democratic Mission of Higher Education works to build a global movement to fulfill higher education's democratic mission and strengthen the role of higher education in developing, maintaining, and sustaining democracy on campus, in the community, and the wider society.

Since 2011 the topical issues linked to the democratic mission of higher education were debated at the Global Fora. A series of books, containing proceedings of the Fora, were also published in the Council of Europe Higher Education series.

Developments in 2022-2023

The [2022 Global Forum](#) on "Higher Education Leadership for Democracy, Sustainability, and Social Justice" took place on the 16-17 June in Dublin. It is the seventh Global Forum and the first gathering officially co-hosted by the partners of the Global Cooperation for the Democratic Mission of Higher Education and will result in a volume in the CoE higher education series, which is currently in preparation.

Closely linked to the work on the democratic mission of higher education is the Council of Europe strong contribution to the European Higher Education Area, through participation in the Bologna Follow Up Group and Bologna Board as well as Peer Groups. The Working Group on Fundamental Values, which is currently developing draft statements, linked to public responsibility for and of higher education, institutional autonomy, student and staff participation in higher education governance and academic integrity for the 2024 Bologna Ministerial meeting in Tirana is of particular relevance to this work

In 2022 the Council of Europe got involved in the topic of Internationalisation of higher education by contributing to the 6th Global Survey on Internationalisation, carried out by the International Association of Universities. While internationalization policies should not neglect the economic aspects of higher education, they should also take account of the need to provide graduates with the ability to conduct international dialogue, to consider an issue from various points of view and to develop a democratic culture. Higher education graduates must be provided with linguistic skills and other competences for dialogue, without which internationalization policies aimed at improving economic performance in a narrow sense cannot be successful.

In 2023 the Council of Europe in cooperation with the Coventry University (UK) and Aarhus University (DK) are launching a fully funded cotutelle doctoral research programme focusing on the role of universities in creating a democratic Europe. This programme will start in September 2023. The cotutelle includes a secondment to the Council of Europe to review its work on higher education over the last 20 years. The project will explore the role of universities in creating a democratic Europe and the role of the Council of Europe in (re)conceptualising the EHEA fundamental academic values.

The Council of Europe is currently looking into developing new action lines in its work, such as digital dimension and artificial intelligence in higher education from the human rights perspective in order to explore the complex relationship between digitalization and democratic culture.

Key priorities from 2024 through 2027

The democratic mission of higher education will remain a priority topic in the coming years. In line with the Council of Europe Education Strategy, particularly noting the focus on Learners First, the following activities both at the levels of policy and practice could be undertaken:

- developing the Council of Europe Students' Rights Charter;
- to organise the next Global Forum in 2025, taking into consideration the priorities of the Education Strategy in defining the topic;
- further develop relations with interested European universities in order to maintain a regular Cotutelle PhD programme on the topics related to democratic mission of higher education

5. The Pan-European Platform on Ethics, Transparency and Integrity in Education (ETINED)

An overview and developments in 2022-2023

The [Platform](#) has produced guidelines for ensuring a culture of ethics in the teaching profession. It has developed targeted recommendations on academic integrity following assessments and exchanges with the actors on the ground. Through its working group on Education Fraud the ETINED Platform has been working on the topic of education fraud. On the 13 July 2022 the [Recommendation](#) CM/Rec (2022) 18 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on countering education fraud was adopted.

At its last plenary meeting on 17 and 18 November 2022, the Platform identified three priority areas for further development of activities, issuing from the Recommendation. They touch respectively upon raising awareness (through a publication of research studies based on a baseline questionnaire submitted to the ETINED delegates; drafting a glossary on education fraud; holding video talks on relevant issues); prevention, and monitoring.

The Council of Europe has also launched the Best Practice Programme to reward institutions and academics whose promotion of academic integrity can serve as an example and inspiration for others. The first cycle of the Best Practice Programme identified [10 best practices](#)

The main award went to the [Dilemma Game App](#), Erasmus University Rotterdam, which is intended for researchers, including those who find themselves faced with dilemmas, and through critical dialogue helps in further developing and strengthening their own 'moral compass'.

On the 5 October 2022 the Erasmus University Rotterdam (EUR) in partnership with the Council of Europe organised a conference on promoting academic integrity. The conference concluded by a presentation of [Compendium of Best Practices](#) identified through the [project's](#)

first call. The compendium aims to encourage and inspire all European higher education institutions to work towards building cultures of academic integrity.

Key priorities in 2024-2027

- Set up an Observatory or Monitoring Mechanism on Countering Fraud in Education
- Disseminate the results of the Best Practice Programme

Summary of key priorities for 2024-2027 in higher education

- Develop the Council of Europe Students' Rights Charter;
- Update the 'Revised Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education' (2007)
- Draft a new text/guidelines of the LRC on 'digital solutions', taking into account the existing 'Guidelines for national online information systems' (2019);
- Develop a new legal instrument on the EQPR (Committee of Ministers Recommendation on Valuing the Academic and Professional Skills of Refugees in Europe).
- Develop a standard-setting text on automatic recognition
- Set up an Observatory or Monitoring Mechanism on Countering Fraud in Education
- Build up capacity of the ENIC Centres through a projects' support scheme
- Organise the 2025 annual ENIC-NARIC meeting in a non-EU country