



New Challenges in Recognition
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First glance at the National Action Plans for Improving Recognition

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Recognition of higher education qualifications or of a period of studies acquired abroad is an integral part of the right to education and the promotion of the freedom of movement.

About the National action plans

- The documents are rather reports on *status quo* in recognition than action plans
- Many countries have recently amended their legislation with regard to recognition
- Not all countries have answered all questions
- Interesting collection of best practice and not so good practice, should be further analyzed and used for improvements
- Not many countries have answered about time before statement is issued, possibilities to appeal, just one about the cost





The main principles of the legal framework of the Lisbon Recognition Convention

- Applicant's right to fair recognition,
- Recognition of qualification if no substantial differences are can be proved,
- Burden of proof – on the recognition authority
- Mutual trust – information provision

The legal framework of the LRC



- The Lisbon Recognition Convention,
- Recommendation on recognition criteria and procedures, 2001
- Code of Good practice in the provision of Transnational Education, 2001
- Recommendation on the Recognition of Joint degrees,
- Recommendation on the Recognition of international Access qualifications



General comments on implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention

- Many countries feel that more information on the Convention principles and especially training in their practical application is still needed and therefore plan more dissemination and training seminars for HEIs, employers and others involved in recognition
- Some of the countries that have not ratified the LRC actually disseminate its principles and practices - some others plan to inform the HEIs only after ratification
- Some countries state they are applying Convention principles to all applicants from countries including those that have not ratified
- Several countries refer to databases of recognition decisions with a view to simplify procedures in future

Bilateral agreements

- Not all countries are involved in bilateral agreements on recognition
- The number of agreements a country may have most countries 3-4, maximum 11
- Often with countries in the same geographical region
- Most countries say agreements are in conformity with the Lisbon Convention, some say the agreements are older and should be updated
- One country currently plans to establish more bilateral agreements to facilitate export of its HE services





Review of legislation – nearly all countries

- Nearly all those countries that have ratified the Lisbon Recognition Convention and most of those that have not ratified it state that their legislation is already in conformity with it and with the subsequent legal texts on recognition
- However, when reading about the criteria and procedures sometimes leaves questions of whether the compliance is sought with the letter of the Convention (*i.e. "It is not stated one should not do like this"*) or with the spirit of the legal framework of the Convention



Mechanisms for (ways of) implementation of LRC legal framework

- **Typical:** ENIC/NARIC issues a recommendation, universities make autonomous decisions but being well informed are expected to follow LRC principles
- **Hopeless:** autonomous Universities take decisions and don't have to inform about their decisions, so ...
- **Centralised:** ENIC/NARIC or HEIs or ad-hoc committees prepare decision and minister/ ministry/ central body decides, so LRC implementation ensured



Mechanisms for (ways of) implementation of LRC legal framework (II)

Power play (hard): HEIs have no mandate or competence in recognition

- **Power play (moderate):** ENIC/NARIC + autonomous HEI decisions - but HEIs have to obey a laws and LRC is one, so inspectorates (can) check
- **Legal:** universities ARE autonomous but they have to obey law therefore LRC principles are transposed into national laws
- **Quality-related** - Fair recognition of qualifications is a part of quality so LRC implementation is checked at accreditation



Compliance of national legislation with the LRC legal framework - real or formal?

Example 1.

- the foreign higher education institution is reviewed to determine whether it is essentially equivalent to the ones in the country in question
- Further, assessment of the particular Department and the program the student attended

Criteria used - number of PhDs, teaching procedures and examination procedures



Compliance of national legislation with the LRC legal framework - real or formal?

Example 2.

- *If there is no substantial difference between the programmes student who has successfully completed a certain programme shall be entitled to credit for this programme*

Example 3

- *compatibility of foreign programme with programmes in host country's institution is established*

Joint degrees

- In at least 12 countries laws explicitly address award and recognition of joint degrees, some have established procedures for joint quality assurance

Obstacles mentioned: no legislation on JDs; law regulates what should be written in the diploma, more international cooperation in quality assurance of joint programmes needed

Conditions for recognition of foreign joint degrees:

- **most typical:** all parts of joint degree must be in some way quality assured,

Other:

- if all participating HEIs are recognised,
- all parts of JD belong to an educational system
- on condition that similar program exists in their country



Transnational/ borderless education

- **Typical:** recognition of TNE based upon principles of UNESCO/CoE Code of Good practice
- UNESCO/CoE Code of Good practice adopted into national legislation,
- aim to avoid discrimination of high-quality TNE institutions,
- TNE institutions operating in the country must undergo national accreditation/ become alike to national private institutions



Conditions for recognition of Transnational qualifications from outside

- if both the awarding and the providing institution is recognized or accredited.
- recognised/accredited in the exporting country + legally established and respect regulations of the host country
- accredited separately from the mother institution
- international institutions if the degree is recognized in the country where the programme is provided
- franchised degrees if a corresponding programme is also provided at the “mother” institution
- accreditation and the recognition of qualifications **still not geared** to addressing cross-border provision
- qualifications awarded under borderless/ transnational education provision **are not recognised**



New(er) issues

- Some countries mention emphasis on comparing learning outcomes (modification – denial of recognition is based on substantial differences in learning outcomes)
- Some countries are either already practicing recognition of prior/experiential learning or intensively preparing for that



2 stages in recognition?

Stage I	Stage II
ENIC/NARIC statement (recommendation)	recognition decision by HEIs or employers
formal recognition	recognition for continuation of studies
recognition of level	recognition of comparability
recognition positioning in home system	recognition statement establishing equivalence
recognition for further studies	Establishing equivalence with issuing host country's degree
establishing equivalence	establishing comparability (with all legal rights)

ECTS

- There seems to be a major progress – but stocktaking may show it clearer
- It seems that in most cases “full implementation” actually means applying 60 credits per year accumulation system.
- A clear reference to linking credits to learning outcomes only in a few reports
- A bit worrying wordings
 - ECTS is adapted,
 - credit system is based upon ECTS
 - ECTS is implemented in all bachelor and master programmes



Diploma Supplement

- Definitely a huge progress
- Again, there are wordings requiring further investigation
- Some countries automatically issue in one language,
- Some countries issue DS to doctoral graduates others not
- Some seem to issue to bachelors only on request
- Some issue to all graduates in the two-cycle system (but still have a huge amount not transformed to 2-cycles)



Other transparency tools

Most often mentioned:

- National Qualifications frameworks
- Europass



Competent authorities for recognition

Most typical: competent recognition authorities are HEIs and employers depending on the purpose (often upon ENIC/NARIC advice)

Other possibilities

- ENIC/NARIC centre (upon advice of HEIs)
- Minister upon advice of
 - a) ENIC/NARIC centre
 - B) Ad-hoc committee
 - C) HEIs
- Different competent authorities for formal recognition and for further studies or
- Same authorities grant recognition in both cases
- Different authorities depending on type of degrees





In some countries ENIC/NARIC prepares

- recognition manuals or
- admissions manuals
- based upon previous recognition cases of particular foreign qualifications

Status of the ENIC centres

- Most typical: government - established and government funded independent bodies – or parts of such bodies

Other options (much more seldom):

- Departments of ministries,
- Parts of Rectors' Conferences
- Agencies (or parts of) established by HEIs
- Private companies



The logo for the Bologna Process, featuring a blue square with white and yellow arrows pointing upwards and to the right, and the text 'bologna process' in white on a yellow background below it.

Summary of European best practices

- There has been found a nationally acceptable solution for ensuring that the HEIs in their recognition practices follow the principles set in the legal framework of the Lisbon Recognition Convention
- The implementation of the legal framework of the Lisbon Recognition Convention is according to the spirit of the documents, not formal compliance with the letter
- The LRC legal framework is applied also at recognition of qualifications from countries that are not parties to the Convention
- At assessment of foreign qualifications there is a clear emphasis to identify and compare learning outcomes not programme details
and it is also applied at recognition of study periods

Summary of European best practices

- Assessment of prior and experiential learning has become an integral part in assessment of qualifications,
- A qualification is assessed also in those cases where it is difficult to provide a full documentary support Where applicable, the national qualifications frameworks and the overarching EHEA framework is used as a basis for comparing qualifications
- If substantial differences are indicated, it leads to partial recognition rather than non-recognition



Summary of European best practices

- ENIC/NARIC centres supply HEIs (and employers) with information on foreign educational systems and recommendations for recognition of most frequently appearing qualifications as well as previous experiences,
- HEIs trust ENIC/NARIC centre and intensively cooperate with it including providing feedback on the recognition decisions they make
- There are mechanisms established for identifying mistakes in the recognition practice are
- Clear procedures for appeal against a recognition decision have been established



Summary of European best practices

ENIC/NRIC centre provides information (on request/on the website/ in printed versions)

- on the home country's qualifications framework/system for use by credential evaluators abroad
- Information on the quality assurance status of the institutions/programmes in the home country
- Information package for the applicants: application forms, information on criteria/ procedures applied, information on possibilities for appeal





What further actions with the national plans on recognition?

The wide information provides basis for further discussion with a view of

- Moving towards more coherent recognition criteria and procedures across Europe,
- Clarifying terminology,
- At national level - identifying the cases where the criteria and procedures used should actually be adapted to be in line with the principles of LRC legal framework and improve national recognition practices

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Thanks for your attention!