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MONITORING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE LISBON RECOGNITION CONVENTION

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MONITORING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE LISBON RECOGNITION CONVENTION

The Committee of the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region

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Educational,
Scientific and Cultural
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Foreword

In accordance with the Lisbon Recognition Convention, the Committee of the Convention shall oversee its implementation and guide the competent authorities in implementing the convention and in their consideration of applications for the recognition of foreign qualifications. The Rules of procedure (adopted by the Committee in Vilnius in 1999)[1] reiterate this role – the function of the Committee is to promote the application of the convention and oversee its implementation.

Article II.1 of the convention states that where the central authorities of a party are competent to make decisions in recognition cases, that party shall be immediately bound by the provisions of the convention and shall take the necessary measures to ensure the implementation of its provisions on its territory. Where the competence to make decisions in recognition matters lies with individual higher education institutions or other entities, each party, according to its constitutional situation or structure, shall transmit the text of this convention to those institutions or entities and shall take all possible steps to encourage the favourable consideration and application of its provisions.

The provisions of Article II.1 are central to determining the obligations of the parties to the convention. This article places upon these parties an obligation to make sure that information on the provisions is disseminated to all competent recognition authorities, and that these institutions are encouraged to abide by the convention (Explanatory report to the convention).[2]

The objective of this monitoring exercise has been to oversee the implementation of the main provisions of the convention and to report to parties on the outcome of this monitoring, presenting the main findings and recommendations. This monitoring report is also a contribution to the commitment set out in the Yerevan Communiqué (2015) to review national legislation to ensure full compliance with the convention, and to ask the Convention Committee, in co-operation with the ENIC (Council of Europe and UNESCO European Network of National Information Centres on academic recognition and mobility) and NARIC (EU Network of National Academic Recognition Information Centres) networks, to prepare an analysis of the national legislation reports by the end of 2017, taking due account of this monitoring report.

1. Rules of procedure, available at www.aic.lv/meeting/conv_com/eng/c_it_3.htm (accessed 31 October 2017).
2. Explanatory report to the Convention, available at www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/treaty/165 (accessed 31 October 2017).

This is the first monitoring of implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC) since its signature in 1997. The questionnaire used for the monitoring exercise was drawn up by the Bureau of the Convention Committee, namely Gunnar Vaht, President of the Committee, Gayane Harutyunyan, Vice-President, Allan Bruun Pedersen, Vice-President, and Baiba Ramina, Rapporteur, together with the joint Council of Europe/UNESCO Secretariat. The monitoring covers the 10 main provisions of the convention and comprises 22 questions relating to implementation of the main principles. The questions focus primarily on how the convention requirements are regulated at national level and to what extent the rules are reflected in national legislation. In cases where some or all of the provisions are not regulated at national level and where the higher education institutions have total autonomy in establishing the principles of the convention, the aim has been to discover how national authorities oversee implementation of the principles of the convention at institutional level.

As stated above, the objective of this monitoring report is to monitor implementation of the convention by the parties to the convention. The executive summary focuses on the key findings and the conclusions focus on the recommendations made by the Convention Committee Bureau, which will require political decisions from the Convention Committee and from national authorities for follow-up action. The various chapters of the report elaborate further on both the key findings and the recommendations.

The questionnaire was sent to 53 states parties to the LRC, and replies were received from 50 countries. The initial deadline given was 15 February 2015, but this was extended to June 2015. The analysis by the members of the Convention Committee Bureau took place from June to November 2015 and was assisted and reviewed by the Council of Europe and UNESCO, the joint Secretariat of the LRCC Bureau.

Gunnar Vaht

President of the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee (LRCC)

Country codes

AL – Albania
AD – Andorra
AM – Armenia
AU – Australia
AT – Austria
AZ – Azerbaijan
BY – Belarus
BE-NL – Belgium – Flemish Community
BE-FR – Belgium – French-speaking Community
BA – Bosnia and Herzegovina
BG – Bulgaria
HR – Croatia
CY – Cyprus
CZ – Czech Republic
DK – Denmark
EE – Estonia
FI – Finland
FR – France
GE – Georgia
DE – Germany
VA – Holy See
HU – Hungary

IS – Iceland
IE – Ireland
IL – Israel
IT – Italy
KZ – Kazakhstan
LV – Latvia
LI – Liechtenstein
LT – Lithuania
LU – Luxembourg
MT – Malta
ME – Montenegro
NL – The Netherlands
NZ – New Zealand
NO – Norway
PL – Poland
PT – Portugal
RO – Romania
RU – Russian Federation
SM – San Marino
RS – Serbia
SI – Slovenia
ES – Spain
SE – Sweden
CH – Switzerland
MK – "The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia"
TR – Turkey
UA – Ukraine
GB – United Kingdom

Executive summary

This executive summary is an overview of the key findings of the monitoring exercise. The review also includes recommendations for improving implementation of the convention. These recommendations are presented in the conclusions of the report.

Access to an assessment

The Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC) states that holders of qualifications shall have adequate access, upon request to the appropriate assessment body, to an assessment of those qualifications. Access to an assessment is crucial. The parties to the convention are obliged to provide a fair assessment of all applications for the recognition of qualifications obtained in another party, and the parties have an obligation to provide such an assessment on a non-discriminatory basis. In 36 countries, access to an assessment is regulated at national level by a legal act, by virtue of which the holder of a foreign qualification has access to an assessment. In seven countries, access to an assessment is not regulated at national level, mainly because nothing concerning the assessment and recognition procedures is regulated at national level on account of the autonomy of higher education institutions (HEIs), which in these countries have their own admission policies and procedures. However, some of these countries, where access to an assessment is not regulated at national level, have a form of monitoring or access is considered in the broader context of quality assurance in the sector, which is periodically reviewed.

Assessment and recognition criteria and procedures

In 31 out of the 50 countries, the assessment and recognition criteria and procedures are regulated. There are some countries where there are rules either for criteria or for procedures but not for both. In 13 countries the criteria and procedures are established by HEIs, and in most of these countries there is no oversight of the implementation of the LRC provisions at national level.

In the countries where criteria and procedures are regulated at national level, the nature, content and level of the rules vary considerably. In most countries the procedures are detailed and clear, but the criteria, in most cases, are general or missing; 32 countries reported that criteria are regulated at national level, but we found that only in 12 countries were the criteria really reflected in national legislation. Interestingly, more countries use input criteria (such as nominal duration and list of courses and content) than output criteria (such as formal rights and learning outcomes). In countries which use a nostrification procedure as their assessment method, the detailed content and other input elements are the main criteria for recognition of a foreign qualification. In some countries assessment and recognition are based on seeking equivalence between the qualifications. Our analysis focused on what are regarded as substantial differences: nominal duration, including nominal duration of a previous level of education (for example in assessing higher education qualifications, the length of general education is also taken into account) is still used in some countries as the main or sole recognition criterion. Just two countries reported that outcomes (i.e. learning outcomes and/or formal rights/functions of the qualification) were the sole or most decisive criterion in their assessment of foreign qualifications.

In general, in most countries some or all of the relevant procedures are regulated at national level. These relate primarily to time limits, fees and the required documents. Some countries also have detailed rules regarding the translation, verification and legalisation of documents (*apostille* or certification).

In those countries where the assessment criteria and/or procedures are not regulated at national level, the HEIs have rules on acceptance procedures. Criteria regulated at institutional level are not transparent and generally not made available to applicants.

The admission procedure may include time limits, the documents required and fees, but generally speaking there are no rules governing access criteria and procedures, or the latter are not published and are not available to applicants. Most national authorities (national ENIC offices) organise training courses, prepare guidelines or refer to the European Area of Recognition manual for HEIs (EAR-HEI manual), but in principle there is no regular oversight nor a source of examples of best practice for assessment and recognition that can be followed by HEIs.

The quality of information on criteria and procedures varies considerably. In 25% of countries, the assessment criteria and procedures are transparent, meaning that the information is easily available to applicants. The majority of countries have a link from the website of the national ENIC office or ministry to the relevant legislation, which in most cases is in the national language but without any translations in widely spoken languages. Moreover, the legal texts are difficult for applicants and, because the laws in question are lengthy, it is not easy to find the relevant articles.

Only six countries replied that rankings are also used as a criterion in the recognition of foreign qualifications. Among these, three have included rankings as an assessment criterion in their national legislation, while only one country uses rankings as a non-regulated criterion for qualifications outside the convention area.

Time limit

There is a time limit for assessment and recognition (or for all administrative services, including for recognition) laid down in 36 countries. Overall, the time limit in these countries varies from one to six months, but in the vast majority (35 out of 36 countries) it is within the four-month limit recommended by one of the subsidiary texts to the LRC.

The LRC states that a decision on recognition shall be made within a reasonable time limit. The Revised Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications[3] calls for applications to be processed as promptly as possible, and this processing time should not exceed four months. It was noted that the time taken to assess foreign qualifications is relatively long (between two and four months), because the number of applications increases every year and there is a shortage of staff in the relevant departments. However, a time limit should not be an obstacle for applicants in admission to HEIs or in applying for employment.

Right to appeal

In general, all countries have overarching national administrative procedures which include a right to appeal. Consequently, the individual's right to appeal is provided for in all countries. Some countries did not provide evidence of existing legislation. The right to appeal is regulated both nationally and internally; however, greater recourse is had to national procedures. The general practice is the national legislation on administrative procedures which includes an article on the right to appeal. Several countries have national regulations on recognition or higher education which include an article on appeal procedures.

All online links provided by the countries are active and information is available, but the quality of that information varies considerably. Some countries provide information in the national language(s) and in English. It is not always easy to find the information on the right of appeal, and 15 countries failed to provide any online links that would supply evidence that information on the right of appeal is included in the recognition statement.

Substantial differences

Only seven countries replied that they had a nationally regulated definition of substantial differences. Of these, only five submitted documentation in this respect, and only in two countries can it be said that the definition of substantial differences is very detailed, in compliance with the principles and procedures of the convention text.

Furthermore, the vast majority of countries replied that they have no definition of the term. The explanatory report to the LRC, under Article VI.1 concerning recognition of Higher Education Qualifications, states that "it is underlined that the difference must be both substantial and relevant as defined by the competent recognition authority."

3. Available at www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/recognition/Criteria%20and%20procedures_EN.asp (accessed 1 November 2017).

This clearly implies that the competent recognition authorities must have definitions of what may be considered to be a substantial difference between a foreign qualification and a similar/comparable national qualification. The LRC does not clearly indicate that these criteria should be regulated at national level, but rather that applicants should have clear information on what may be considered to constitute a substantial difference, if their qualifications are not fully recognised by the competent recognition authorities.

The survey has shown that, in many cases, the member countries have a relatively common understanding of which criteria may be considered as substantial differences and, accordingly, a reason for non-recognition or partial recognition. However, it also becomes clear that for some of the most significant and debated criteria among the competent recognition authorities the situation is less uniform. Examples are criteria such as differences of more than one year in the nominal duration, differences in access requirements and the fact that there is no final thesis.

Several countries have pointed out that the final decision on a finding of substantial differences between the foreign programme and a similar national programme cannot be reduced to a single criterion but is taken when the competent recognition authority, after comparing the programmes, can establish a combination of criteria which are found to be substantially different.

A number of countries replied that the criteria used for examining possible substantial differences must be weighed against the purpose of the recognition. The LRCC has on several occasions emphasised the need to evaluate foreign qualifications in the light of the purpose of the recognition process. This clearly indicates that, when comparing qualifications, the competent recognition authorities should carefully weigh the purpose of the recognition when deciding or advising on full, partial or non-recognition. As an example, the lack of a thesis in a master's programme may be considered a substantial difference if the purpose of the recognition is access to doctoral studies, while it may not be considered a substantial difference if the purpose of the recognition is for access to the labour market.

The LRC text dates back to 1997. Obviously developments within higher education since then are not reflected in the LRC text. One of the most notable changes in higher education is the paradigm shift from a focus on learning inputs to outputs in terms of learning outcomes. Several countries referred to a comparison of learning outcomes as a vital component in the assessment of foreign qualifications.

In 28 countries different access requirements are considered to be a possible substantial difference. Other countries focus on the formal rights of access and make decisions or advisory statements on access based on the formal rights attached to the applicant's qualifications. It is an important feature of a qualification whether, for example, an upper secondary qualification gives direct access to bachelor programmes or if a foreign master's programme gives direct access to doctoral programmes; this must be reflected in the final recognition decision or statement. Conversely, a professionally oriented bachelor qualification may not give direct access to research-based master's programmes in the country of origin. This could legitimately be considered a substantial difference in countries where the bachelor programme is more research-based and gives direct access to master's programmes.

In 35 countries a shorter nominal duration of study of more than one year was considered to be a substantial difference. A comparison of the nominal duration of studies has been and is still today considered a key element in assessing foreign qualifications. However, the picture becomes a bit blurred when one compares the achieved learning outcomes and the fact that the nominal duration may be considered differently from one country to another. The concepts of nominal duration and full-time studies may vary from country to country even though the Bologna countries do have a common benchmark in terms of ECTS (the European Credit Tranfer System). Achieved learning outcomes may also show fewer differences than a purely quantitative comparison and, as described and recommended above, recognition should also be weighed against the purpose of the recognition process.

In 18 countries the lack of final thesis is regarded as a substantial difference, while only four countries stated that a less demanding final thesis is a substantial difference. Again it can be argued that the lack of a final thesis must be weighed against the purpose of the recognition process.

When considering a less demanding final thesis as a substantial difference it must be carefully considered whether or not the foreign programme contains other ways of achieving research skills such as courses in research methods, exhibitions in fine arts programmes or a combination of several smaller projects. It should also be taken on board that legal requirements for a certain number of credits in a national system cannot automatically be applied to foreign qualifications; rather, differences among educational systems call for flexible approaches to recognition.

In 35 countries (over two thirds of the countries that responded) differences in programme content/courses were considered to be a substantial difference. It is not clear if this leads to non-recognition. Such differences may be taken into consideration for the purposes of recognising the level of the programme, e.g. recognising a bachelor degree in physics as a bachelor degree in natural sciences rather than recognising it as comparable to a bachelor degree in physics if the content of the programme is substantially different. This type of recognition may give the holder some professional rights within the labour market or academic rights in terms of access to master's programmes, where admission can be based on a broad range of different bachelor programmes.

Replies from 13 countries said that online studies may be considered a substantial difference, and six countries stated that part-time studies might be regarded as a substantial difference. The LRC does not distinguish between the different ways of delivering programmes. Rather, if the online or part-time programmes are fully accredited they should be treated no differently from other programmes at the same level. However, one country explained that certain professional programmes, such as programmes within the field of medicine, cannot be offered online or only part of them can be offered online, and the delivery of online programmes in subjects with an emphasis on professional and practical aspects and skills may indeed be considered a substantial difference.

Ten countries consider the fact that there is no similar programme in their national systems to be a substantial difference. However, as in the case of different

content of programmes and courses, a recognition decision/advisory statement could be considered by making a comparison with the level of the programme or within a larger subject area (such as the sciences or humanities) to secure the applicants' professional and academic rights. For instance, a bachelor's degree in mining engineering may be recognised as comparable with a bachelor's degree in engineering in a country which does not offer programmes in mining engineering.

Regarding qualifications offered by private institutions and institutions not listed in international databases, only a very small minority of countries – in one case only one country – will consider this to be a substantial difference. Here it must be argued that if it can be established that the institution/programme is accredited/officially recognised there are really no grounds for refusing recognition based on the fact that the institution is unknown to the competent recognition authorities or is not listed in international databases.

Regarding the evaluation of teaching staff requirements, some competent recognition authorities are venturing into the field of quality assurance and are conducting a small selective quality assurance process, which very few competent recognition authorities are equipped to perform. The basic principle of trust in other countries' quality assurance systems within the LRC area should be upheld.

In question 21, countries were asked to provide any other reasons for refusing recognition. Only a few reasons were mentioned and most of them are very specific to the responding country. One reason stands out, which is the recognition of joint degrees, where several countries replied that in the case of joint degrees the qualifications awarded must be accredited/recognised by all participating countries and that the programmes must be legally established in all countries. This is mentioned by four countries. These conclusions follow the recommendations of the subsidiary text to the LRC, Recommendation on the Recognition of Joint Degrees[4] from 2004 and the Code of good practice in the provision of transnational education[5] from 2001, revised in 2007.

Refugees' qualifications

The general conclusion regarding procedures for recognising the qualifications of refugees and displaced persons without documentary evidence of their qualifications is that implementation is obviously lacking: 70% of the countries which responded say they have not implemented Article VII of the LRC and so have no regulations at any level concerning the recognition of refugees' and displaced persons' qualifications.

A few of the 15 countries which reported having national regulations mentioned only procedures relating to the submission of documents, or to recognition for admission to bachelor-level studies only.

4. Recommendation on the recognition of joint degrees, available at www.enic-naric.net/fileusers/recommendation-joint-degrees-2004.en.pdf (accessed 1 November 2017).
5. Code of good practice in the provision of transnational education, revised 2007, available at www.enic-naric.net/fileusers/REVISED_CODE_OF_GOOD_PRACTICE_TNE.pdf (accessed 1 November 2017).

Of the countries which have introduced regulations, six stated that they issue formal decisions. Obviously a formal decision carries greater weight and authority than an advisory statement or an explanatory report, but there are no requirements in the convention regarding the status of the various possible outcomes of a recognition decision for refugees without documentation.

Six countries issue a "background paper" describing the content and function of, and the formal rights attached to, refugee qualifications. A "background paper" modelled on the diploma supplement is adopted as good practice both within the Revised Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications and in the European Area of Recognition manual (EAR manual), which was endorsed by the Bologna ministers in the 2012 Bucharest Communiqué.

Some countries issue an advisory statement without having produced a background paper. This, nonetheless, is in full compliance with the obligations set out in Article VII on refugees' qualifications.

Information on education systems

Most countries include information on their school education system, the higher education legal framework and administration, access qualifications, types of HEIs, higher education qualifications and quality assurance system/accreditation. Around 75% of countries include information on their national qualifications framework and credit and grading system. Only 20% of countries include examples of credentials in online information sources.

Not all of the links provided to online sources are usable and the information can not always be found. It is recommended that the LRC Committee set minimum requirements for information on the education system included in online sources. The information provided should be systematically described. Information should be accessible within a single information source or via a single entry point to ensure the best use of information.

In 20% of countries online information on their national education system is provided only in the national language, which cannot be considered as good practice. Accordingly, countries should also provide information in a widely spoken language, preferably English.

Information on higher education institutions

While all the countries have lists of institutions available online, 24% provide information only in the national language(s). This cannot be regarded as good practice as information provided only in the national language(s) complicates the task of the credential evaluators.

The way in which institutions and programmes are reflected in the online tools varies from country to country, with the result that users are not always able to find the institution or programme they are looking for.

National information centres should improve online information, based on the premise that any institutions and programmes mentioned in the national online sources are quality assured and recognised.

Countries and HEIs should provide a minimum of information on study programmes (level, degree awarded, credit points etc.).

National information centre

All 50 parties to the LRC who replied to the questionnaire have established a national information centre (national ENIC office). The legal structure of these centres varies: some were created as a sub-structure of the national ministries or bodies responsible for higher education; others are more independent. Regardless of the type of organisation, the national information centres mostly function at national level.

In accordance with the provisions of the LRC, the tasks and responsibilities of national information centres should be set out at national level. Only 32 countries have confirmed in their replies that they comply with the requirements of Article IX of the LRC. A further 15 countries do not have national rules governing tasks and responsibilities. In all cases the parties' national information centres provide information on recognition and give advice to both institutions and individuals on foreign qualifications.

For some countries, the descriptions of tasks and activities set out in the reference documents are very general, whereas others have very comprehensive descriptions including other significant tasks that the national information centres are expected to perform.

It is difficult to assess the level of awareness of individuals and institutions regarding the national information centres and their main activities. According to the findings of "The European Higher Education Area in 2015: Bologna Process Implementation Report", in one third of the EHEA countries recognition of qualifications and study periods (credits) is carried out without consulting the national information centres. Accordingly, it is important to enhance co-operation between the national information centres and the HEIs in order to improve HEIs' knowledge and practice of recognition.

Whereas 43 countries reported having websites, four countries have no such site. A large number of countries do not have a separate website. The information regarding recognition of foreign qualifications is hosted on the website of the national ministry responsible for higher education or on the website of an agency or university. Separate websites are usually created by the national information centres which have a more independent status.

Most countries have bilingual websites where information is provided in the national language and in English. A small number of countries provide information in more than two languages and seven countries have websites only in the official language of the country/community concerned.

The quality of the information included in websites varies. Usually, the websites contain detailed information on their tasks and activities, procedures and criteria for recognition of foreign qualifications, the LRC and its subsidiary texts, a description of their education systems, recognition tools, etc. Many of the websites are not user-friendly and it can be rather complicated to find the necessary information.

National information centres and resources to fulfil the function of the national ENIC office

The number of staff employed by each national information centre varies from one to 65 and depends on a variety of factors. For the vast majority of countries, credential evaluators make up the core staff. In some cases, the national information centres also employ administrative, financial and IT staff and legal experts. Two countries do not have credential evaluators in their staff since they merely provide information.

It is difficult to assess whether the number of staff working in each centre is adequate. Nevertheless, on comparing the figures for staff and the number of applications received by the national information centres it is clear that the greater the number of applications and other requests, the greater the number of staff employed. In some instances, this is not the case, suggesting that the centres in question are understaffed.

Generally speaking, the technical facilities of the national information centres are sufficient to enable them to function properly; 34 countries expressed satisfaction with the technical facilities, while nine countries believe that there is room for improvement. Only one country rated the facilities inadequate. Similarly, the funding received by the national information centres is deemed sufficient to enable them to perform the main tasks and activities. The vast majority of the national information centres are financed out of the state budget. Some of the centres try to diversify their funding sources. The funding comes from their own resources derived from application fees or other sources.

Despite the diversity of situations, it is obvious that the public authorities should provide adequate support to the national information centres. The resources and staff allocated to the centres should be sufficient to ensure that high quality services are delivered in a timely fashion.

Chapter 1

Criteria and procedures

Each Party shall ensure that the procedures and criteria used in the assessment and recognition of qualifications are transparent, coherent and reliable (Article III.2).

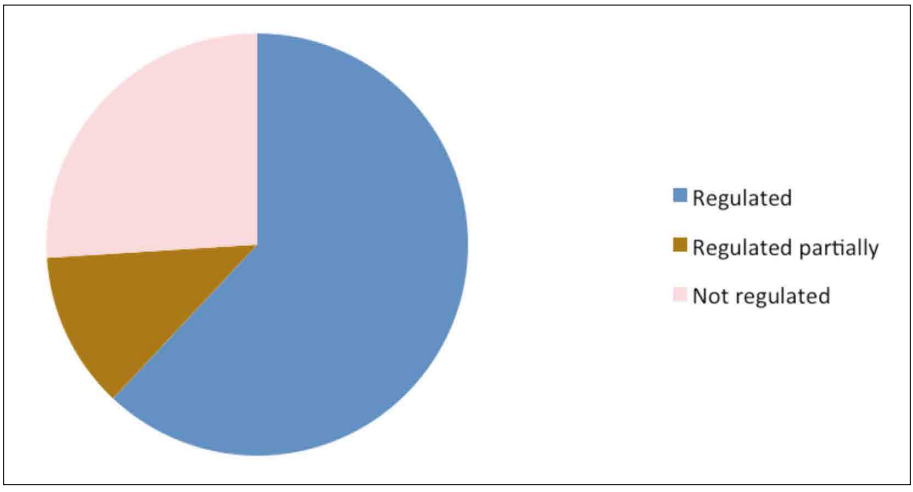
This article underlines the importance of instituting proper procedures for the handling of applications for the recognition of qualifications. These procedures apply to the assessment of qualifications, regardless of whether the qualifications are ultimately recognised or not. The assessment should be based on adequate expertise and transparent procedures and criteria, and it should be available at reasonable cost and within a reasonable time (Explanatory report).

QUESTION: Are the assessment criteria and procedures regulated at national level (national law, government regulation, any other legal act)?

Answered: 50 countries

Not answered: 3 countries

Figure 1 – Regulation of criteria and procedures at national level



Regulated at national level (31): AL, AM, AZ, BY, BE-NL, BE-FR, BG, HR, CY, CZ, DK, EE, FR, GE, HU, IL, KZ, LT, LU, MT, ME, PL, PT, RO, RU, RS, SI, ES, MK, TR, UA

Both criteria and procedures are regulated at national level in 31 countries. The criteria and procedures are most often regulated by a national law or regulation (order, decree, ordinance, or similar act). Some countries have a package of regulations governing general principles, criteria and procedures, and also with regard to different types of higher education institution (AL, BE-FR, PL) and may also include instructions or guidelines adopted by the government or ministry (AL). Armenia has a regulatory document drawn up by the National Information Centre of Academic Recognition and Mobility endorsed by its Board of Trustees.

The level of regulation varies from country to country. The procedures and criteria may be formulated in a very general way and may be part of the universities act or a law on higher education, or they may be set out in a separate law or regulation governing the recognition system including detailed rules on criteria and procedures.

Regulated partially at national level (6): AD, FI, IS, LV, LI, SE

Six countries reported that they have regulations but only either for criteria or procedures, not for both. In Finland and Liechtenstein, the principle of assessing foreign qualifications is regulated at national level, and there is no special national legislation setting standards for recognition procedures. In Andorra, Latvia and Sweden the recognition procedure is regulated by national legislation, but assessment criteria are not. Sweden reported that general procedures concerning time limits, transparency and administrative costs are regulated in the Administrative Procedure Act, which also applies to HEIs.

In Iceland, the criteria and procedures are not regulated by a national legal act; however, in accordance with the Higher Education Institution Act the HEIs must comply with international agreements on the recognition of studies, including procedures and criteria.

Not regulated at national level (13): AU, AT, BA, DE, VA, IE, IT, NL, NZ, NO, SM, CH, GB

In 13 countries the criteria and procedures are not regulated at national or subnational level; they are regulated by the individual HEIs. These countries reported that HEIs have full decision-making authority and total autonomy to set up their own criteria and procedure.

Bosnia and Herzegovina reported that, even though the criteria and procedures are regulated at institutional level, the national authorities oversee the implementation of national acts and international treaties. In Switzerland, as the national ENIC office is a department of the Swiss Rectors' Conference, it collaborates closely with the Swiss HEIs, and oversees the regulations and implementation. In Ireland, the policies for recognition adopted by individual HEIs are considered in the broader context of quality assurance in the sector which is periodically reviewed by Quality and Qualifications Ireland. In Italy, the national ENIC office, in collaboration with the Conference of Italian Rectors on the basis of an internal agreement between the two entities, oversees the implementation of the LRC, indicating different criteria and instruments in line with LRC principles (i.e. the EAR manual), training courses on recognition issues, national seminars, etc.). HEIs are obliged to establish and list academic recognition procedures within their institutional teaching regulations and publish those procedures on their websites: the Ministry of Education, University and

Research oversees each set of institutional teaching regulations. A similar procedure to oversee implementation at national level takes place in San Marino where national authorities ratify assessment regulations in HEIs.

In most of the countries where criteria and procedures are not regulated at national level and there is no oversight of the regulations by national authorities, there are other measures to assist HEIs in adopting criteria and procedures in accordance with the spirit of the LRC. For example, in Australia the Department of Education and Training provides information support services to HEIs on the comparability of overseas qualifications with Australian qualifications. This includes country information and assessment guidelines, professional development and advice on individual qualifications as required. The Netherlands also reported close contact between the HEIs with the national ENIC office overseeing implementation of the LRC by actively providing HEIs with information on best recognition practice. The HEIs' recognition criteria and procedures can be found in their academic and examination regulations. Furthermore, almost all HEIs have signed the code of conduct for international student higher education and comply with its obligations. By signing this code, the HEI is obliged to comply with the obligations set out in the code of conduct. In practice, this guarantees fair assessments of foreign qualifications by the relevant institutions.

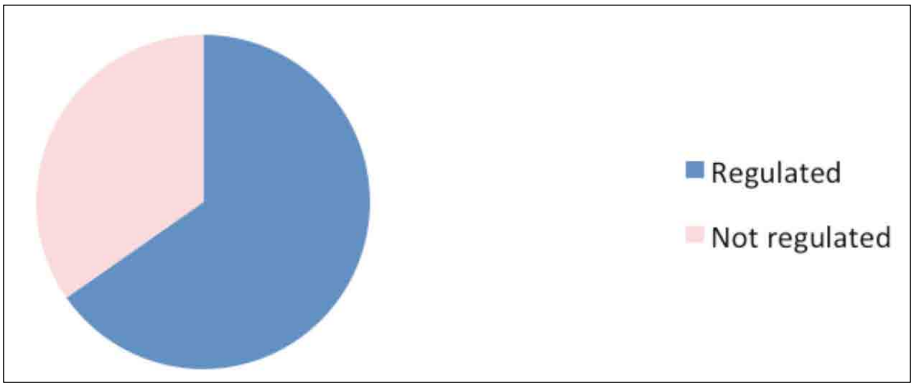
In New Zealand, there is a high level of co-operation between the education sector, employers, industry training organisations and registration bodies. The New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) has its own assessment procedure and criteria that can be found on its website. All competent recognition authorities accept the NZQA's assessments, so regulation at national level has not been necessary.

In the United Kingdom, the criteria and procedures are not regulated at national level, and the United Kingdom did not indicate any oversight of regulations and implementation.

QUESTION: If the assessment and recognition criteria are regulated at national level, does the regulation list the criteria to be used in the assessment and recognition of foreign qualifications?

Answered: 50 countries
Not answered: 3 countries

Figure 2 – Regulation of assessment criteria at national level



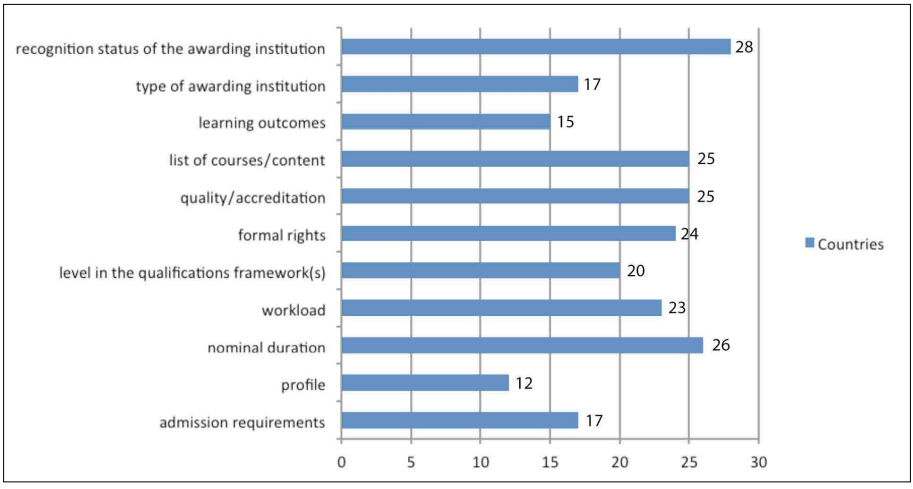
Countries in which the criteria are regulated (32): AL, AM, AZ, BY, BE-NL, BE-FR, BG, HR, CY, CZ, DK, EE, FI, GE, HU, IL, KZ, LI, LT, LU, MT, ME, PL, PT, RO, RU, RS, SI, ES, MK, TR, UA

The criteria for the assessment of foreign qualifications are regulated at national level in 32 countries. A number of countries (11) reported that there are at least some criteria that are listed and regulated by a national legal act, but in point of fact this was not reflected in the legal texts of all countries. The potential criteria were listed in the questionnaire (see Table on page 24).

According to the replies, the main criteria listed in national legislation to be used in the assessment and recognition of foreign qualifications are: recognition status of the awarding institution (28 countries); nominal duration (26 countries); list of courses/content (25 countries); quality/accreditation (25 countries); formal rights (24 countries); workload (23 countries).

Only 15 countries reported that learning outcomes are considered as a criterion in accordance with the legislation, and 20 countries confirmed that the level in the qualifications framework(s) was a criterion. The profile of the qualification or learning is a criterion in 12 countries. The type of awarding institution is a criterion in 17 countries, and admission requirements in 17 countries.

Figure 3 – Assessment and recognition criteria



In addition to the criteria listed in Figure 3, in some countries additional criteria are taken into account in assessing foreign qualifications. For example: previous qualification (level) required for access to the programme (EE); the date of completion of the educational programme (DK); relationship between theory and practice in the programme (DK); previous assessment made by the competent assessment authorities (DK); the age of the holder of the qualification (SI); outstanding performance (SI).

It is not always the case that what is regulated by law is the same as what is used in day-to-day practice. For example, in Estonia there is a long list of criteria that should be taken into account in the assessment of foreign qualifications. However, the main criteria are: level, workload, profile, quality, learning outcomes and formal rights,

and most importantly and decisively, formal academic rights (function of the qualification) – making the applicant eligible to continue studies in the home education system. The Flemish Community in Belgium uses four key elements: learning outcomes, quality/accreditation, level in the qualifications framework(s) and workload, but other elements also play a role in the assessment and recognition of foreign qualifications. Under the terms of the Consolidation Act on the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications in Denmark, assessment focuses on a comparison of the learning outcomes evidenced by the foreign and the Danish qualifications respectively.

Two countries (BG, UA) reported that learning outcomes and the level in the qualifications framework(s) are not specified in national legislation as assessment criteria but the legislation is due to be amended shortly to include these, and they are already used in practice.

Interestingly, in Croatia, Finland, Liechtenstein and Malta the recognition status of the awarding institution is not a factor under national legislation, but in practice the status of the institution is taken into account.

Some countries look very closely at learning inputs; for example, in the Czech Republic academic recognition involves a detailed comparison of the study plans and whether or not the content of the plan is equivalent to the education provided in the Czech Republic. In Malta, nominal duration is the only criterion.

In Finland, the principle of assessing foreign qualifications for the purpose of student admissions is applied nationwide: a person who has formal rights to access higher education in the country where his or her qualification was obtained is eligible to apply for higher education studies also in Finland.

Countries in which the criteria are not regulated (17): AD, AU, AT, BA, DE, VA, IS, IE, IT, LV, NL, NZ, NO, SM, SE, CH, GB

Where HEIs are autonomous in their recognition decision-making, they are also autonomous in determining the criteria used for the assessment and recognition of foreign qualifications (AU, NL). The Holy See stated that due to the plurality of higher education systems where HEIs of the Holy See operate, it would be unfair to apply restricted criteria. However, this does not mean that these criteria are not applied in a practical assessment.

The national ENIC office may hold a list of criteria for the assessment of qualifications but these are criteria which are applicable only at national level (LV, NO, GB).

Most countries reported that, even though the criteria are not regulated by national legislation, information on them is nevertheless centralised and these criteria are widely used in practice. For example, even though the Andorran regulation does not list the criteria used in assessment and recognition, it states the following: "The process of recognition is based on the recommendation on criteria and procedures for the assessment of qualifications approved at the 5th meeting of the Lisbon Recognition Convention in 2010". Credential evaluators in Andorra use the following criteria: recognition status of the awarding institution, type of awarding institution, learning outcomes; list of courses/content, quality/accreditation, formal rights, level in the qualifications framework, workload, nominal duration and admission

requirements. In Ireland, HEIs are considered autonomous bodies and hold responsibility for recognition policy. Ireland ratified the LRC in 2004; consequently, HEIs are expected to follow the principles and guidance contained in the LRC and subsidiary texts.

Table 1 – Assessment and recognition criteria regulated at national level, by country

	1*	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
AL	+	+		+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
AM	+	+		+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
AZ	+			+	+	+		+	+		
BY	+		+		+	+		+		+	
BE-NL	+		+		+		+	+			
BE-FR	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
BG	+		+	+	+	+		+	+	+	+
HR			+			+	+	+	+		+
CY	+	+		+	+		+	+	+		
CZ	+	+		+	+	+	+	+	+		+
DK	+		+	+	+	+	+	+	+		+
EE	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+		+
FI						+					
FR			+				+	+			
GE	+		+	+		+	+	+			
HU	+	+		+	+	+		+	+	+	+
IL	+	+			+				+		+
KZ	+			+			+	+	+		
LI				+		+			+		
LT	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
LU	+	+	+	+	+	+	+				+
MT									+		
ME	+	+		+	+	+	+		+	+	
PL	+		+	+	+	+			+		
PT	+	+		+					+		
RO	+			+	+			+	+	+	
RU	+	+			+	+		+	+		+
RS	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
SI	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
ES	+	+		+	+	+	+	+	+		+
MK	+	+		+	+		+				
TR	+		+	+	+	+	+		+		+
UA	+			+	+	+		+	+	+	

*1 – recognition status of the awarding institution; 2 – type of awarding institution; 3 – learning outcomes; 4 – list of courses/content; 5 – quality/accreditation; 6 – formal rights (function of the qualification in the home country; e.g. access to further study); 7 – level in the qualifications framework(s); 8 – workload; 9 – nominal duration; 10 – profile; 11 – admission requirements

National ENIC offices publish criteria in accordance with the LRC and also subsidiary texts that are recommended for use by HEIs in their countries (LV, NZ, NO); in CH there is a national consensus. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the national ENIC office has published three recommendations both to harmonise recognition procedures within the country and, in particular, to ensure that recognition criteria are in accordance with the LRC and its subsidiary documents. The criteria are listed in Recommendations on Criteria for Assessment of Foreign Higher Education Qualifıcations in the Recognition Procedure for the Professional Purpose and Further Education (2013), and used, in principle, for assessment and recognition of qualifications in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

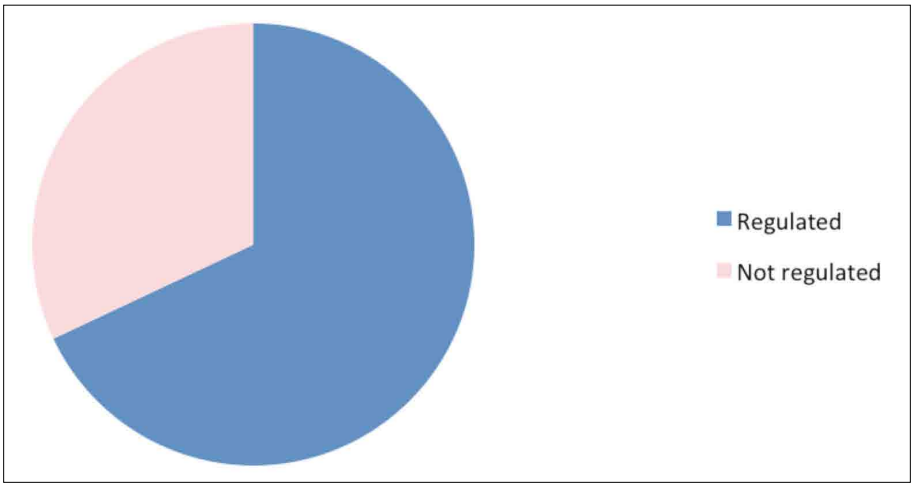
In the Netherlands, the national ENIC office promotes a flexible approach to recognition procedures, taking into account the purpose of recognition, stipulating that the assessment should focus on establishing whether or not substantial differences exist. All of the criteria listed in Table 1 may be used to some extent in the assessment and recognition of a foreign qualification by an HEI, with the aim of obtaining information on the level, quality, workload, profile and especially learning outcomes of the qualification. In Sweden, the national ENIC office is also used by HEIs as the expert authority on recognition methodology. The methodology adopted by the ENIC is based on the EAR manual, and training and information modules are provided to the institutions. HEIs have also drawn up joint guidelines for admission officers. A working group in the Association of Swedish Higher Education Institutions (SUHF) has agreed on more detailed rules concerning the application of the Administrative Procedure Act and the Higher Education Ordinance. This is to facilitate the transparency and smooth handling of applications in the voluntary joint admissions process.

QUESTION: If the assessment and recognition procedures are standardised and regulated at national level, does the regulation list the elements of the procedure?

Answered: 50 countries

Not answered: 3 countries

Figure 4 – Regulation of assessment and recognition procedures at national level



Countries in which procedures are regulated (34): AL, AD, AM, AZ, BY, BE-NL, BE-FR, BG, HR, CY, CZ, DK, EE, FR, GE, HU, IL, KZ, LV, LT, LU, MT, ME, PL, PT, RO, RU, RS, SI, ES, SE, MK, TR, UA

Assessment and recognition procedures are regulated at national level in 34 countries. In four countries (BE-Fl, EE, LT, RU, UA) there is a detailed regulation governing procedures at national level, including all the relevant elements of the assessment and recognition procedure. Most of the countries have some elements regulated at national level and have clear and transparent provisions in their national legislation. The potential elements of procedures were listed in the questionnaire (see Table 2).

Table 2 – Assessment and recognition procedure regulated at national level, by country

	Time limit	Fee charged or not	Documents required	Description of the assessment process	Status of recognition or assessment report
AL	+	+	+	+	+
AD	+	+	+		+
AM	+	+	+	+	+
AZ	+	+	+	+	+
BY	+	+	+	+	+
BE-NL	+	+			+
BE-FR	+	+	+	+	+
BG	+		+	+	+
HR	+	+	+	+	
CY	+	+	+	+	+
CZ	+	+	+	+	+
DK			+	+	+
EE	+	+	+	+	+
FR			+	+	
GE	+	+	+	+	+
HU	+	+	+	+	+
IL			+		+
KZ	+	+	+	+	+
LV		+	+		+
LT	+		+	+	+
LU		+	+		+
MT	+				+
ME	+	+	+	+	+
PL	+	+	+	+	
PT	+	+	+		
RO	+	+	+		+
RU	+	+	+	+	
RS	+	+			+
SI	+	+	+	+	+
ES	+	+	+	+	+
SE	+	+	+	+	
MK			+	+	
TR	+		+	+	+
UA	+	+	+	+	+

In Malta, for example, the documents required for the assessment of a qualification are not listed in the regulations, but appear on the website. The application form includes the list of supporting documents that are required. In Poland, with regard to the statement issued by the national ENIC office, only the time limit is regulated by legislation and the statement is free of charge. In the case of the nostrification procedure, all elements are regulated.

In Denmark, the time limit is not regulated by law. However, one of the principles in the code of good administrative behaviour is that a citizen's request should be answered within a reasonable amount of time. There is also no regulation governing the fee charged. This does not necessarily mean that there is no fee; however, there is no clear indication that the assessment and recognition of qualifications is indeed free of charge. (The latter may also apply in the case of other countries which did not indicate any regulation on the fee charged.)

Sweden reported that the national ENIC office's assessment and recognition procedures are not regulated at national level, but general procedures concerning time limits, transparency and administrative costs are regulated in the Administrative Procedure Act. This act also applies to HEIs.

Two countries reported that, as well as the elements of the procedure listed in Table 2, there are some additional elements regulated at national level, such as the results of the assessment procedure (ES) and the competence of authorities (EE).

Countries in which procedures are not regulated (16): AU, AT, BA, FI, DE, VA, IS, IE, IT, LI, NL, NZ, NO, SM, CH, GB

The assessment and recognition procedures are not regulated at national level in 16 countries. Two countries reported that there is no special national legislation setting standards for the recognition procedures, but the Lisbon Recognition Convention and its subsidiary texts are regarded as relevant to the procedure used by national ENIC offices, HEIs and other competent recognition authorities (DE, LI, NO, IE).

In Australia, the national Threshold Standards against which institutions are approved by the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Authority include generic requirements for appropriate admission procedures, but again, due to the autonomy of HEIs, it is not deemed necessary to introduce national rules on this matter.

In Iceland, the procedures are not regulated, but the national ENIC office is responsible for regulating the required documents. In Switzerland, the procedures are regulated by each HEI. However, there is a national consensus concerning the procedure.

In Italy, some criteria are established at national level while others are related to the autonomous status of the HEIs. One example is the time limit: this element is established by law. In other recognition procedures not involving HEIs, a presidential decree lists the required documents and the procedure to be followed.

In the Netherlands, the individual procedures implemented by HEIs are set out in their Academic and Examination Regulations which can be found online. In addition, the preamble to the Code of conduct for international students in higher education stipulates that all HEIs should provide information on the services and provisions offered to international students.

The Holy See reported that, because of the large number of higher education systems where HEIs of the Holy See operate, the criteria indicated at national level have to be very general.

QUESTION: Are there assessment and recognition criteria and procedures available online?

Answered: 50 countries

Not answered: 3 countries

Information about assessment and recognition criteria and procedures varies and is provided at very disparate levels of quality and quantity. In most cases, the websites of the competent authorities provide a link to the legal acts in the national language(s) only, without any explanation or further instructions in English or other widely-spoken languages. In some cases, there is no additional information or excerpt from the legal act on the websites in the national language(s).

Information on criteria and procedures is expected to be readily understandable and available in a widely-spoken language. In 11 countries (AZ, BE-NL, BE-FR, BG, DK, EE, HU, IL, LT, MT, PL, SI) the criteria and procedures are introduced separately on the website, which provides links to the relevant legal acts. Information is provided in the national language(s) and in English (in the French Community in Belgium in French only; in Malta in English only). Information from these 11 countries is clear, available, transparent and readily understandable. In Russia and Ukraine, the description of the procedure is also detailed and explained in a user-friendly way, but there is little about the assessment and recognition criteria. In Finland, the procedure is not regulated at national level, only the criteria. The criteria are presented together with links to the legal acts. In Latvia, the criteria are not regulated at national level, and the relevant procedures are described on the site.

There are countries that provide a link to the legal acts and an overview of the assessment procedure in English and/or in other languages, but provide no information about criteria (CY, CZ, GE, PT, RO). The criteria are available in the legal texts and only in the national language. In France there is only a link to the legal text in French.

In Albania, Andorra, Croatia, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Montenegro, Portugal, Romania, Spain, "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia"[6] and Turkey there are links to the legal acts; however, these texts are available only in the national language. In Belarus and Kazakhstan, the legal texts are also available in Russian.

6. For UNESCO, the name of the country does not take quotation marks.

However, the legal texts are very good and detailed, and straightforward for applicants who have a real need of this information.

Germany confirms that the procedures are available online, but there is a link to the LRC in German only. (This link is to a note that the LRC does not regulate the procedures either in general or at national level.)

Armenia has some information about procedures, mainly the functions of the Armenian ENIC office and links to the relevant international legal instruments, together with information on recognition in general. In Italy, the criteria and procedures are not regulated at national level, but the Italian ENIC office has some information about the procedure generally followed by universities.

In the countries in which the criteria and procedures are not regulated at national level, the national ENIC office has its own criteria and procedure, and this information is user-friendly and available (in total or in part) on their websites. For example, the Norwegian ENIC office lists both the criteria and the procedure. The information is clear and transparent. Sweden has an application form with information on procedures, but no details of the criteria. Iceland lists the required documents. In the United Kingdom, the national ENIC office has its own procedure with regard to the required documents and fee. The Holy See has no information online, but hard copies are available for applicants. The Netherlands reported that the criteria and procedures are available on the HEI websites, but our research has shown that the HEIs provide information mainly on the procedure for admission, not on the criteria used for the assessment of qualifications. There are other countries which replied that the criteria and procedures are not regulated at national level and that they were presented on each HEI website. However, we were unable to confirm this in the course of this monitoring exercise.

In general, specific criteria and procedures are not available on institutional websites in Ireland. However, best practices for HEIs are presented in the European Recognition Manual for Higher Education Institutions (EAR-HEI manual).

KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The assessment and recognition criteria and procedures are regulated in 31 out of the 50 countries. In six countries there are regulations either for criteria or for procedures, but not for both. In 13 countries the criteria and procedures are under the full autonomy of HEIs, and in most of these countries there is no oversight of the implementation of LRC criteria and procedures at national level.

In the countries where criteria and procedures are regulated at national level, the nature, content and level of regulation vary considerably. In most countries the procedures are detailed and clear, but in the majority of cases the criteria are very general or missing, or are difficult to deduce from the legal acts, even in the countries which replied that the criteria were regulated at national level. Just a few countries have a detailed list of criteria and the rules set out in legislation.

Of the 32 countries which reported that criteria are regulated at national level, only in 12 countries could we confirm that the criteria were indeed reflected in

national legislation. Interestingly, more countries use input criteria, such as nominal duration (26 countries) and list of courses/content (25 countries) than output criteria, such as formal rights (24 countries) and learning outcomes (15 countries). In countries which use a nostrification procedure as their assessment method, the detailed content and other input elements are the main criteria for recognition of a foreign qualification. In some countries, assessment and recognition are based on seeking equivalence between the qualifications. Our analysis identified substantial differences: nominal duration, including nominal duration of a previous level of education (for example in assessing higher education qualifications the length of general education is also taken into account) is still used in some countries as the main or sole recognition criterion. Just two countries reported that outcomes (i.e. learning outcomes and/or formal rights/functions of the qualification) were the sole or most decisive criterion in their assessment of foreign qualifications.

Most countries reported that criteria are regulated at national level, but this was not reflected in their national legislation. The rules are mainly very general, which means that it is for the HEIs themselves to decide on the details and practical aspects of the criteria applied.

In general, in most countries some or all of the relevant procedures are regulated at national level. These relate primarily to time limits, fees and the required documents. Some countries also have detailed rules regarding the translation, verification and legalisation of documents (*apostille* or certification).

In those countries where the assessment criteria and/or procedures are not regulated at national level, the HEIs have rules on acceptance procedures.

In general, assessment and recognition criteria are not regulated at national level. Where the criteria are regulated at institutional level, they tend not to be transparent and in many cases are not made available to applicants. It is important that where the criteria and procedures are not regulated at national level on account of the independence of the HEIs, there should be regulations on the assessment and recognition criteria and procedures at institutional level in accordance with the principles of the LRC. In addition, the national authorities should oversee implementation of the LRC.

The admission procedure may include time limits, the documents required and fees, but generally speaking there are no rules governing access criteria and procedures, or the latter are not published and are not available for applicants. Most national authorities (national ENIC offices) organise training courses, prepare guidelines or refer to the EAR-HEI manual, but in principle there is no regular oversight and nor are there examples of best practice for assessment and recognition that can be followed by HEIs.

The quality of information on criteria and procedures varies considerably. In 25% of countries, the assessment criteria and procedures are transparent, meaning that the information is easily available for applicants. The majority of countries have a link from the website of the national ENIC office or ministry to the relevant legislation, which in most cases is in the national language but without any

translations into widely-spoken languages. Moreover, the legal texts are difficult for applicants and, because the laws in question are lengthy, it is not easy to find the relevant articles. The assessment and recognition criteria may be a part of a university act or higher education act, and this makes it more difficult for applicants to find the relevant information. It is important and recommended that criteria and procedures are transparent and that they are available online, in a widely spoken language.

Chapter 2

Time limit

Decisions on recognition shall be made within a reasonable time limit specified beforehand by the competent recognition authority and calculated from the time all necessary information in the case has been provided. If recognition is withheld, the reason for the refusal to grant recognition shall be stated (Article III.5).

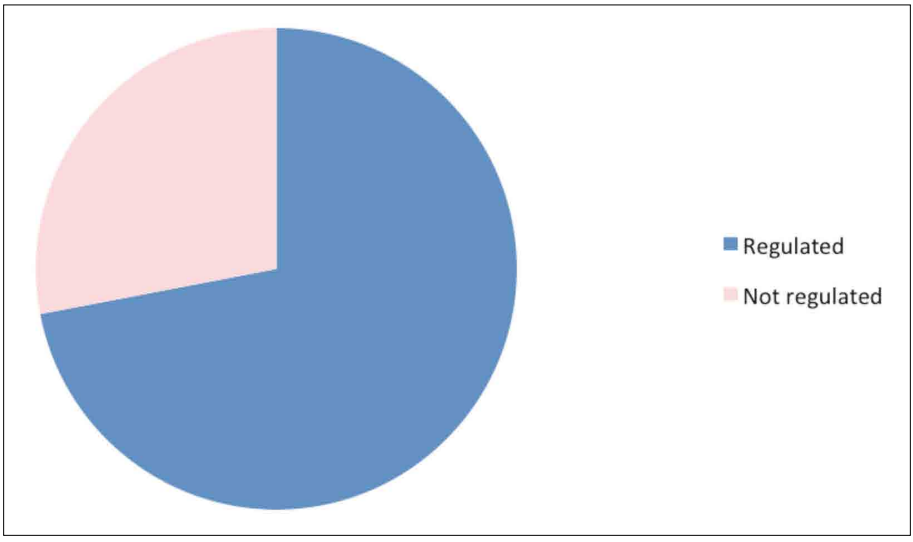
The concept of an applicant's right to receive a reply within a reasonable time is central to good practice and of particular importance for applicants who apply for recognition in order to pursue further studies or to use their qualifications as the basis for gainful occupation. Parties are encouraged to make public, and inform applicants of, what they consider to be a "reasonable time limit" (Explanatory report).

QUESTION: Is the time limit regulated at national level (national law, government regulation, or any other legal act)?

Answered: 50 countries

Not answered: 3 countries

Figure 5 – Regulation of time limit at national level



Countries in which the time limit is regulated at national level (36): AL, AD, AM, AT, AZ, BY, BE-NL, BE-FR, BG, HR, CY, CZ, EE, FR, GE, DE, VA, HU, IT, KZ, LV, LT, LU, MT, ME, NL, NO, PL, PT, RO, RU, RS, SI, ES, MK, UA

Table 3: Time limit regulated at national level

1 month or 30 days	8 countries	AZ, BY, HR, CZ, EE, GE, LT, ME
1.5 months or 45 days	4 countries	AL, RO, RU, UA
2 months or 60 days or 8 weeks	8 countries	AD, BG, FR, HU, NL, RS, SI, MK
3 months or 90 days	9 countries	AT, CY, DE, VA, IT, LU, MT, NO, PL
4 months or 16 weeks	6 countries	AM, BE-NL, BE-FR, KZ, LV, PT
6 months	1 country	ES

In nine countries (HR, CZ, DE, FR, LV, LU, NL, NO, VA) the time limit for the recognition process is not regulated by a special act on the assessment and recognition of foreign qualifications, but the rules are the same for all services regulated by administrative or similar legislation. For example, in Latvia the Administrative Act stipulates that if an administrative matter is initiated on the basis of a submission, an institution shall take a decision regarding the issue of an administrative act or termination of the matter within a month from the day the submission is submitted, provided that a shorter term is not prescribed in a regulatory text.

In the Czech Republic the time limit is 30 days, but in complex issues the time limit may be extended to 60 days.

Countries in which the time limit is not regulated at national level (14): AU, BA, DK, FI, IS, IE, IL, LI, NZ, SM, SE, CH, TR, GB

The time limit for the assessment of foreign qualifications is not regulated in 14 countries. As is the case for other assessment criteria, the reason for this is the autonomy of HEIs. In some countries, even though there is no specific national legislation setting out time-limit standards, the LRC subsidiary text Revised Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications is expected to be complied with (IE, LI) or there is a national consensus (CH). In New Zealand the time limit is not regulated, but is contained in the Statement of Intent that the NZQA has concluded with the current government.

In some countries where the time limit is not regulated, one of the principles in the code of good administrative conduct is that a citizen's request should be answered within a reasonable time (for example, the average processing time in Denmark is approximately 30 days), or cases should be decided as quickly as possible and an authority must stipulate a deadline for the submission of an opinion (IS). Sweden replied that each matter, to which an individual is a party, must be handled as simply, rapidly and economically as possible without jeopardising legal security.

In Finland, the application periods and deadlines are determined annually by the Ministry of Education and Culture in the form of a decision. Bosnia and Herzegovina

reported that, even though the time limit is not regulated at national level, the time limit in HEIs is 60 days.

In Turkey each application is evaluated on a case-by-case basis. There is no specified time period.

KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The LRC states that decisions on recognition shall be made within a reasonable time limit. The LRC subsidiary text (the Revised Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications) recommends that applications should be processed as promptly as possible and the processing period should not exceed four months. It was noted that the time taken to assess foreign qualification is relatively long (between two and four months), because the number of applications increases every year and there is a shortage of staff in the relevant departments. However, a time limit should not be an obstacle for applicants regarding admission to HEIs or in applying for employment.

There is a time limit for assessment and recognition (or for all administrative services, including for recognition) laid down in 36 countries. Overall, the time limit in these countries varies from one to six months, but in the vast majority (35 out of the 36) it is within the four-month limit recommended by one of the subsidiary texts to the LRC. In 14 countries the time limit is not regulated. Furthermore, for applicants it is important that the national recognition authorities clearly state their case-processing time and that a time limit is regulated by national legislation.

Chapter 3

Right to appeal

If recognition is withheld, or if no decision is taken, the applicant shall be able to make an appeal within a reasonable time limit (Article III.5).

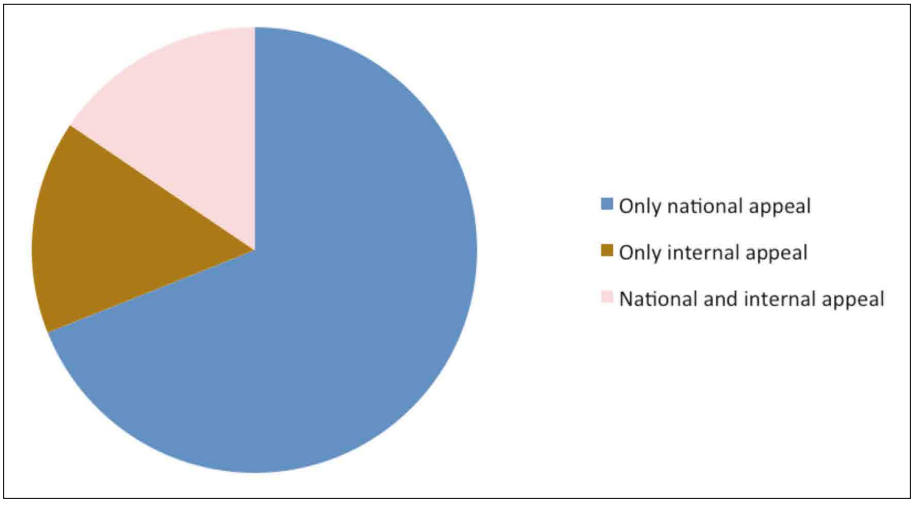
The provision that it is up to the authority evaluating the application to show that the applicant does not fulfil the requirements for recognition is closely linked to the applicant's right to appeal. Arrangements and procedures for such appeals are subject to the legislation in force in the party concerned, even though the handling of the appeal should be subject to the same requirements of transparency, coherence and reliability as those imposed on the original assessment of the application. Information should be given on the ways in which an appeal could be made, and on the time limits for such an appeal (Explanatory report).

QUESTION: In cases where recognition is withheld, or if no decision is taken, is there a possibility for an applicant to appeal?

Answered: 50 countries

Not answered: 3 countries

Figure 6 – Right to appeal



Regulated at national level (40): AL, AD, AM, AT, BY, BE-NL, BE-FR, BA, BG, HR, CY, CZ, DK, FI, FR, GE, DE, VA, HU, IS, IT, KZ, LV, LI, LT, LU, MT, ME, NL, NO, PL, PT, RO, RU, SI, ES, SE, MK, TR, UA

The applicant has the right to appeal in 49 countries out of 50. The right to appeal is usually (in 40 out of 50 countries) regulated at national level; 33 countries have exclusively national regulations. In most cases, the matter is regulated by the code on administrative procedure which includes an article on the right to appeal. Several countries (AL, BY, HR, CY, DK, IT, KZ, LT, RO, RU, MT, SI, UA) have national rules on recognition which include an article on appeal procedures. In Kazakhstan, the Recognition and Nostrification of Education Documents state service standard (approved by the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan in 2014) stipulates that applicants may submit their complaints to the Head of the Ministry.

Some countries (IS, NO, PT, SM, SE) organise their appeal procedures on the basis of the Higher Education Act. In Poland appeals are regulated by the higher education legislation, the regulation of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education on the Nostrification of Higher Education Diplomas Obtained Abroad and the code of administrative proceedings. In the case of attestations issued by the Polish ENIC office, the first level of appeal is the Ministry of Science and Higher Education, and the second level is the administrative court. With regard to nostrification, the first level of appeal is the senate of the HEI, and the second level the administrative court.

Regulated only at internal level (9): AU, EE, IE, IL, NZ, SM, RS, CH, GB

Nine countries stated that the applicant's right to appeal is regulated internally by the competent recognition or assessment authority. On account of the autonomy of HEIs in Australia, it is not deemed necessary to implement national rules on this matter. HEIs in Australia publish appeal policies and the national information centre routinely undertakes professional development training to ensure they consider the equity, timeliness and transparency of their policies. In Ireland the policies for recognition adopted by individual HEIs are considered in the broader context of quality assurance in the sector which is periodically reviewed by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI).

Right to appeal at both national and internal level (9): DE, FI, FR, IS, IT, LI, NL, NO, RO

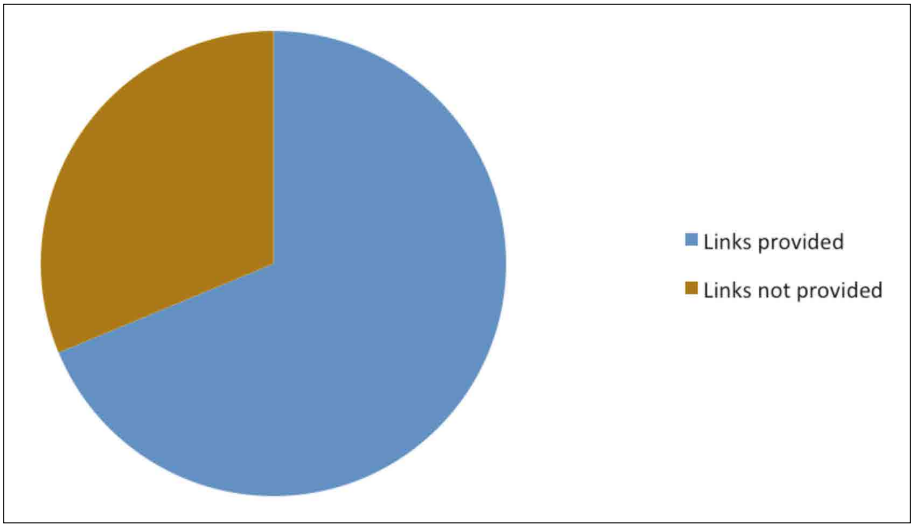
In eight countries applicants can appeal at both internal and national level. Internal appeal procedures are part of the internal regulations of the ENIC office or the HEI. For example, Italy has a national procedure but it is also possible to submit an internal appeal to the HEI in question. Each HEI has its own internal procedure, of which the rector is the final guarantor. In Iceland, in accordance with the Higher Education Institution Act, each university council, following consultation with the students' association, issues a regulation concerning students' rights and duties, including rules for appeals within the institution. In addition, the Minister of Education, Science and Culture appoints an appeals board to deal with Higher Education Institution students' complaints.

QUESTION: Is the information on the applicant's right to appeal published and available online?

Answered: 50 countries

Not answered: 3 countries

Figure 7 – Links to online appeal information



From all the replies, 33 countries (66%) provided evidence that information was available online (AL, AD, AM, AT, BY, BE-NL, BE-FR, BG, CZ, DK, EE, FI, FR, DE, VA, HU, IS, IT, KZ, LV, LI, LT, NO, PT, RO, RU, RS, SI, ES, SE, MK, UA, GB), and 15 of these 31 countries (AM, AT, CZ, DK, EE, FI, HU, IS, IT, LT, NL, PT, SE, TK, UA) provided links to information which is easy to find and which also is given in English. In some countries (FI, IE, RS) the relevant information is available on the universities' websites.

Some information on the right to appeal, especially on national proceedings in the national language (AD, AT, BG, LV, RO), is difficult to find.

However, 15 countries (34%) did not provide any links (AU, BA, CY, HR, GE, IE, IL, LU, MT, ME, NZ, PL, SM, CH, TK), although some of these provided guidance on where information on the right to appeal could be found. Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Malta, Montenegro, New Zealand, Poland and Switzerland provided evidence that information on the right to appeal was an integral part of the recognition statement. Luxembourg replied that the information was to be found in national legislation, but did not provide any link. The French Community in Belgium stated that every decision on recognition contains information on the possibility/right to appeal, governed by administrative procedure legislation. Croatia indicated that the right to appeal is published as an integral part of the laws themselves, in the Official Gazette and on the websites of the recognition authorities, but did not provide any link.

KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In general, all countries have overarching national administrative procedures which include a right to appeal. Consequently, the individual's right to appeal is provided for in all countries. Some countries did not provide evidence of existing legislation. The right to appeal is regulated both nationally and internally; however, greater recourse is had to national procedures. The general practice is to follow the national legislation on administrative procedures which includes an article on the right to appeal. Several countries have national regulations on recognition of higher education which include an article on appeal procedures.

All online links provided by the countries are active and information is available, but the quality of that information varies considerably. Some countries provide information in the national language(s) and in English. It is not always easy to find information on the right of appeal.

There were 15 countries that did not provide any online links to confirm that information on the right to appeal is included in the recognition statement.

From our assessment of the information available on the right to appeal, it is clear that there is need for improvement in order to implement the provisions of the LRC. These areas of improvement are the following:

- information on the right to appeal should be included on the website of the national information centre. A link to a national law only in the national language cannot be considered as good practice as such information is practically unusable for foreigners;
- information on the right to appeal should be noted in the text of the recognition statement;
- information on the right to appeal should be provided also in a widely-spoken language, preferably English;
- information on the right to appeal should be supplemented with information on how to appeal;
- ratification of the LRC also encompasses HEIs. Institutional autonomy is therefore not an excuse for failing to provide for transparent appeal procedures.

Chapter 4

Substantial differences

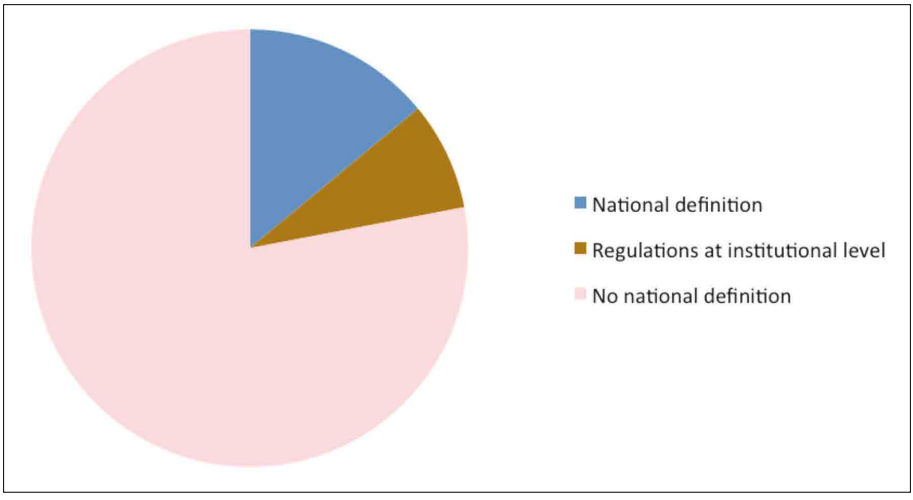
Each Party shall recognise the higher education qualifications, periods of study and qualifications giving access to higher education conferred in another Party, unless a substantial difference can be shown between the qualification or period of study for which recognition is sought and the corresponding qualification or period of study in the Party in which recognition is sought (Articles IV.1; V.1 and VI.1).

QUESTION: Is there a definition of the term "substantial difference" at national level?

Answered: 50 countries

Not answered: 3 countries

Figure 8 – National definition of substantial differences



The vast majority of countries replied that they have no national definition of the term "substantial differences".

Seven countries replied that they do have a national definition of substantial differences. However, only the Flemish Community in Belgium, Belarus, Hungary, Liechtenstein and Israel have submitted documentation in support of this.

National definition	7 countries	BE-NL, BY, HU, IL, LI, LT, UA
Regulations at institutional level	4 countries	VA, IT, MN, PL
No definition	35 countries	AL, AD, AM, AU, AT, AZ, BE-FR, BA, BG, HR, CY, CZ, DK, EE, DE, FI, FR, GE, IE, IS, KZ, LU, LV, MT, NL, NZ, PT, RO, RU, SM, RS, SL, ES, SE, CH, MK, TR, GB

Hungary has implemented an act stating primarily that foreign degrees can be recognised based on a minimum duration comparable with the duration of similar Hungarian degrees. In the case of Liechtenstein, the definition of substantial differences is restricted to admission to bachelor programmes and states that if a foreign access qualification from the convention area is based on fewer than 12 years of schooling or does not constitute a sufficient general education programme the applicant can take supplementary exams or spend no more than one further year of education to be admitted to bachelor-level programmes.

In the case of Israel, the definition of substantial differences is related to a pay grading scale for employees with foreign qualifications. The definition of substantial differences relates only to the nominal duration of the studies: "The duration and scope of the study programme for a bachelor's degree will not be less, or will be only slightly less than the duration and scope of the studies for an identical or similar degree at recognised Israeli institutions of higher education, and in any event no fewer than three years of academic study – six full semesters." The same criteria are applied to master's-level studies.

Belarus has submitted documentation indicating that fraudulent documents, failure to comply with the instructions relating to applications for recognition and substantial differences in the level and content of studies are grounds for not recognising foreign qualifications.

The Flemish Community in Belgium has provided a very clear national and legal definition of the term substantial differences. The Flemish definition states: "A substantial difference can cover only four aspects":

(1) Level of the foreign qualification;

(2) Learning outcomes;

(3) Study workload;

(4) Quality of the programme leading to the higher education degree.

Only the Flemish Community in Belgium and Belarus have provided a definition of substantial differences which covers recognition of study periods and recognition for both academic and professional purposes for foreign higher educational qualifications at all levels.

Four countries replied that there are regulations at institutional level. This is not backed up by documentation and it is unclear whether this answer applies

to definitions concerning all HEIs or the internal definitions of individual institutions. One country replied that national regulation of substantial differences is foreseen in a new legal text. However, since at the time of collecting answers there is no legal implementation of the act, the country in question is considered to be without a national definition.

QUESTION: Please provide a list of what may be considered a substantial difference between a foreign qualification and a corresponding national qualification.

Answered: 50 countries

Not answered: 3 countries

Of the 50 responding countries, the tables show the number of countries which consider each criterion to be a possible substantial difference.

With regard to the replies to this question, it must be taken into account that in some cases countries have responded that, although they may (for example) consider the absence of a final thesis to be a substantial difference, the actual decision or advisory statement is based on a combination of criteria, where the foreign qualification is not comparable to and substantially different from the similar national qualification. The French Community in Belgium replied that all of these items are weighed up, bearing in mind the nature of the corresponding national degree. Denmark replied that several factors were taken into consideration when deciding whether there were substantial differences. A decision of partial or no recognition was therefore based on a combination of the criteria referred to above. Similar comments were made by Germany and a number of other countries.

Below are the countries' answers as to whether a single and specific criterion may be considered a substantial difference.

Different access requirements	28 countries	AL, AD, AM, BY, BE-FR, BA, CZ, DK, EE, DE, FR, HU, IS, IE, IL, IT, KZ, LV, LI, MT, NL, NO, RO, SM, SL, ES, TR, UA

The majority (almost two thirds) of countries consider differences in access requirements to be a substantial difference in the recognition process. Some countries emphasise the formal rights to access to the next level as a substantial difference, where the foreign qualification does not give the holder the same rights of access as a similar qualification in the host country. Estonia replied that if a bachelor degree does not give access to a master's programme or if a master's degree does not give access to a PhD programme in the country of origin, the qualifications are not recognised as corresponding to a bachelor degree or a master's degree in Estonia respectively. Georgia and Sweden provided similar comments.

Nominal duration of study is shorter by more than one year	35 countries	AL, AM, AT, AZ, BE-NL, BE-FR, BA, BG, CY, CZ, DK, EE, DE, FR, HU, IS, IL, IT, KZ, LV, LI, ME, NO, PL, PT, RO, RU, SM, RS, SL, ES, SE, CH, MK, TR, GB

The majority of countries consider a shorter nominal duration of study of more than one year compared with a similar national qualification to be a substantial difference. The question of duration can also be weighed against the purpose of the application for recognition. This is the case in Italy where nominal duration can be considered differently depending on whether the purpose is access to further studies or access to the labour market.

Slovenia replied that bachelor programmes of 165 ECTS are not comparable to Slovenian bachelor degrees.

Institution or a programme is not accredited (quality assured)	49 countries	AL, AD, AM, AU, AT, AZ, BY, BE-NL, BE-FR, BA, BG, HR, CY, CZ, DK, EE, FI, DE, FR, GE, VA, HU, IS, IE, IL, IT, KZ, LV, LI, LT, MT, ME, NL, NZ, NO, PL, PT, RO, RU, SM, RS, SL, ES, SE, CH, MK, TR, UA, GB

There is an almost unanimous position with regard to accreditation and quality assurance. Only Luxembourg replied that this is not considered a substantial difference. Hungary emphasised the need for flexibility in this matter and replied that the lack of accreditation (quality assurance) was considered a substantial difference if it was a legal requirement in the home country. If there is no accreditation or quality assurance system in the home country or the qualification is a historic one, the lack of accreditation is not considered a substantial difference.

No final thesis	21 countries	AM, AT, AZ, BE-NL, BE-FR, CY, CZ, DK, DE, FR, IS, IL, IT, KZ, LV, NL, NO, SE, CH, MK, GB

A large minority of countries replied that the lack of a final thesis is considered to be a substantial difference. In many countries, e.g. Denmark, this is weighed against the national legal requirements that all master's programmes must include a thesis.

Less demanding final thesis	5 countries	BE-FR, DE, NO, SE, MK

Only five countries consider the requirements for the final thesis as a substantial difference. Germany stated that less demanding requirements are taken into account depending on the extent of the differences (for example two weeks v. six months).

Differences in programme content/courses	35 countries	AD, AM, AU, AT, AZ, BE-FR, BA, BG, CY, CZ, DK, FI, DE, VA, HU, IT, KZ, LV, LI, LU, MT, ME, NL, NO, PL, PT, RO, SM, RS, SE, CH, MK, TR, UA, GB

The majority of countries consider differences in the content of the programmes/courses to be a substantial difference. However, interpretations as to what is considered a substantial difference in content seem to vary. Hungary replied that "Obviously there are differences e.g. between the content of a current IT engineering programme and a similar historic one, but we may not consider them substantial. On the other hand, there are cases when we consider the differences in the content of the foreign and the home programme substantial. For example, the differences in content are considered substantial when we compare the content of a 4-year programme leading to the qualification of "general special needs teacher

and psychologist" and the content of two separate programmes of nominal duration of 4-5 years leading to two separate qualifications of "special needs teacher (with a given specialisation)" and "psychologist".

Bulgaria considers differences in content as substantial only in the case of online programmes and programmes leading to a regulated profession. Italy replied that decisions depend on the purpose of the recognition and on different procedures: i.e. in order to access PhD courses, students need to have learning outcomes in research activities, in which case it would be a substantial difference; in other cases it is not.

The Netherlands emphasised that different learning outcomes may derive from different content of the foreign and similar national programme and also pointed out that differences in orientation/profile (applied v. research-based programmes) can be considered a substantial difference.

Cyprus has the most specific requirements for the compliance of content. Cyprus replied that: "Equivalence and correspondence are awarded if, in addition to the prerequisites for recognition of equivalence, the specific programme of studies includes at least two thirds of the required subjects including the compulsory subjects of the corresponding programme of the institution which is used as the basis for evaluation."

Online studies	13 countries	AL, AZ, BY, BE-FR, BG, CY, CZ, DE, GE, VA, IL, RO, TR

In 13 countries online studies may be considered as a substantial difference. Overall, the replies do not indicate why online studies may be considered a substantial difference. However, Bulgaria replied that foreign full-time programmes studied online may conflict with their national requirements insofar as for certain majors/subjects this was not possible in Bulgaria. This could indicate that some countries have legal requirements restricting the provision of online programmes.

Part-time studies	6 countries	BY, BE-FR, CY, IL, TR, UA

A small minority of six countries consider part-time studies to be a substantial difference. There are no supporting comments to indicate why or when part-time studies may be considered a substantial difference.

Qualification is awarded by a private educational institution	1 country	BE-FR

Only the French Community in Belgium replied that a qualification awarded by a private institution may be considered a substantial difference. Otherwise, there was unanimity in not considering this to be a substantial difference.

The programme is not provided in the home country	10 countries	AM, AZ, BY, BE-FR, VA, KZ, RU, SM, SL, CH

In this case, 10 countries considered this to be a substantial difference insofar as no similar programme was offered in their own country.

The institution is recognised in the home country, but it is unknown to us	3 countries	BA, SM, MK

Only three countries considered this criterion to be a substantial difference.

The institution is recognised in the home country, but is not listed in the international databases	4 countries	BA, MT, NO, SM

Again only a small minority of countries considered the fact that the institution was not listed in international databases to be a substantial difference.

Teaching staff do not have the same qualifications as those required in the home country (for example, fewer professors have a PhD-level degree)	3 countries	CY, DE, VA

Three countries take the qualifications of teaching staff into consideration in their recognition processes.

QUESTION: In addition to the case of substantial differences between the corresponding qualifications please provide any other reason why a foreign qualification is not recognised in your country by a competent academic recognition authority or why it is not recommended that it be recognised.

The criteria in question 20 seem to have covered the most frequent reasons for considering differences in a foreign qualification to be substantial. Only a small number of countries added further criteria which may be considered substantial differences.

A handful of countries stated the obvious criterion that qualifications issued by diploma mills are not recognised and that the whole "degree" in itself is a substantial difference.

Some countries commented that in the case of joint programmes and in transnational education the qualifications awarded must be accredited/recognised by all the participating countries and that the programmes must be legally established in all the countries concerned. This was mentioned by Andorra, the French Community of Belgium, Bulgaria and Georgia. These conclusions follow the recommendations of the subsidiary text to the LRC, Recommendation on the recognition of joint degrees from 2004 and the Code of good practice in the provision of transnational education from 2001, revised in 2007.

Qualifications from non-recognised territories were also mentioned as a potential substantial difference. For example, the host country may not recognise qualifications from a specific territory, e.g. Northern Cyprus, Crimea and other territories.

Slovenia replied that "courses and small degrees of 30 ECTS and fewer should not be assessed".

Finally, Turkey replied that an applicant's language score could be considered a substantial difference.

QUESTION: Do the competent recognition authorities take rankings into account when assessing foreign higher education qualifications?

Answered: 50 countries

Not answered: 3 countries

Ranking regulated at national level and used as an assessment criterion	3 countries	RO, RU, MK
Ranking not regulated at national level but used as an assessment criterion	4 countries	AZ, BA, DE, MT
Ranking not used	43 countries	AL, AD, AM, AU, AT, BY, BE-NL, BE-FR, BG, HR, CY, CZ, DK, EE, FI, FR, GE, VA, HU, IS, IE, IL, IT, KZ, LV, LI, LT, LU, ME, NL, NZ, NO, PL, PT, SM, RS, SL, ES, SE, CH, TR, UA, GB

Only Romania, Russia and "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" have passed legislation in which ranking is used as a criterion in the recognition of foreign qualifications. In Romania the ENIC Office uses a list of institutions recognised by the ministry. The list of approved universities is based on their positions in rankings and these institutions should have their degrees automatically recognised.

Similarly, Russia keeps a list of the top 300 foreign educational institutions, which have been or continue to be included among the top 300 positions of each of the Academic Ranking of World Universities, the *QS World University Rankings* and *The Times Higher Education World University Rankings*. In "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia", *The Times Higher Education World University Rankings* and the *Shanghai Jiao Tong Ranking* are used for automatic recognition.

Four countries (Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Germany and Malta) replied that the use of rankings as a criterion in the recognition process was not regulated in national legislation but used by the competent recognition authorities as an assessment criterion. In the case of Malta, rankings were used as a criterion for recognition of qualifications obtained outside the convention area. Malta replied that: "The ranking of institutions in third countries reflects the quality of the institution and the quality of the qualification."

Of the 50 countries which responded, 43 do not use rankings in their assessment. The French Community of Belgium replied that: "Ranking is not used in our evaluation process of foreign qualifications. Ranking should be distinguished from quality concerns. The quality of a foreign higher education degree is always considered and is assessed based on the documents provided by the applicants (e.g. quality of the thesis written by the applicant) or by reference to the national qualification framework (if available)."

KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The concept of substantial differences constitutes the key concept in the recognition of foreign qualifications. The convention states that each party shall recognise the higher education qualifications, periods of study and qualifications giving access to higher education conferred in another party, unless a substantial difference can be shown between the qualification or period of study for which recognition is sought and the corresponding qualification or period of study in the party in which recognition is sought.

However, the LRC itself does not provide a definition of substantial differences. A group of ENIC offices has completed a NARIC project attempting to define the term "substantial differences", but the project definitions have not been agreed upon and implemented in any legal texts. The subsidiary text to the convention Revised Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications of 2010 and the European Area of Recognition manual (EAR manual) of 2011, which was endorsed by the Ministers of the Bologna Process in the Bucharest Communiqué in 2012, provide more detailed discussions and debates about the concept of substantial differences. However, these have also not been implemented in legal texts and remain recommendations, albeit important recommendations.

This means that for the purposes of this monitoring, which seeks to investigate the implementation of the LRC in national legislation, the conclusions and recommendations with regard to the overall implementation of the principles and procedures of the convention must be based on the convention text itself and those texts relating to substantial differences from which clear conclusions as to the definition of the term can be drawn.

The following recommendations, however, may go beyond the scope of the convention text itself, given that the principles and procedures of the LRC can be considered as mandatory, but imposing other principles and procedures in the spirit of the LRC (the reverse burden of proof whereby the competent recognition authorities must recognise foreign qualifications unless substantial differences can be proven) is of course optional, though it can foster fair recognition.

It should be noted that the following recommendations are addressed to the relevant public authorities responsible for the legal implementation of the LRC, to be passed on to the competent recognition authorities, responsible for recognition decisions and advisory statements, such as ENIC offices and HEIs.

Definitions of substantial differences

Only seven countries replied that they had a nationally regulated definition of substantial differences. Of these, only five submitted documentation in this respect, and only in two cases (the Flemish Community of Belgium and largely also Belarus) can it be said that the definition of substantial differences is a more extensive one, in compliance with the principles and procedures of the convention text.

Furthermore, the vast majority of countries replied that they have no definition of the term substantial differences. The explanatory report to the LRC, under Article VI.1 concerning recognition of Higher Education Qualifications, states

that: "It is underlined that the difference must be both substantial and relevant as defined by the competent recognition authority."

This clearly implies that the competent recognition authorities must have definitions of what may be considered to be a substantial difference between a foreign qualification and a similar/comparable national qualification. The LRC does not clearly indicate that these criteria should be regulated at national level, but rather that applicants should have clear information on what may be considered to constitute a substantial difference, if their qualifications are not fully recognised by the competent recognition authorities.

Given that only two countries/one community have provided documentary evidence of having a clear definition of what may be considered as substantial differences for the purpose of access to higher education programmes, for recognition of study periods and for employment, it is recommended that all competent recognition authorities clearly disseminate information to applicants on what may be considered as substantial differences in the recognition decisions or advisory statements, if full recognition is not granted.

Criteria which may be considered as substantial differences by member countries

The survey has shown that, in many cases, the member countries have a relatively common understanding of which criteria may be considered as substantial differences and, accordingly, a reason for non-recognition or partial recognition. However, it also becomes clear that for some of the most significant and debated criteria among the competent recognition authorities the situation is less uniform. Examples are criteria such as differences in nominal duration of more than one year, differences in access requirements and lack of final thesis.

The conclusions and recommendations for the use of criteria which may cause the competent recognition authorities to refuse full recognition on the grounds of substantial differences between the foreign programme and a similar national programme can be divided into general and specific conclusions and recommendations.

General conclusions and recommendations

Regarding the use of a single criterion for the purpose of examining substantial differences

Several countries have pointed out that the final decision on a finding of substantial differences between the foreign programme and a similar national programme cannot be reduced to a single criterion but is taken when the competent recognition authority, following a comparison of the programmes, can establish a combination of criteria which are found to be substantially different.

It is recommended that the competent recognition authorities carefully consider whether a single criterion in the recognition decision can constitute a substantial difference which is sufficient to justify withholding full recognition.

The role of the purpose of recognition

A number of countries replied that the criteria used for examining possible substantial differences must be weighed against the purpose of the recognition. The convention has several references outlining the need to evaluate foreign qualifications in the light of the purpose of the recognition process. The "Revised recommendation on criteria and procedures for the assessment of foreign qualifications" are more explicit and states that: "The assessment should take due account of the purpose(s) for which recognition is sought, and the recognition statement should make clear the purpose(s) for which the statement is valid".

This clearly indicates that, when comparing qualifications, the competent recognition authorities should carefully weigh the purpose of the recognition when deciding or advising on full, partial or non-recognition. As an example, the lack of a thesis in a master's programme may be considered a substantial difference if the purpose of the recognition is access to doctoral studies, while the lack of thesis may not be considered a substantial difference if the purpose of the recognition is access to the labour market.

It is recommended that the competent recognition authorities carefully weigh up their decisions and advisory statements against the purpose of the application for recognition and whether established substantial differences should on all occasions and for all purposes be considered a factor.

Regarding learning outcomes

The LRC text dates back to 1997. Obviously developments within higher education since then are not reflected in the convention text. One of the most notable changes in higher education is the paradigm shift from a focus on learning inputs to outputs in terms of learning outcomes.

Several countries referred to a comparison of learning outcomes as a vital component in the assessment of foreign qualifications. The Revised Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications states that: "Recognition of foreign qualifications should be granted unless a substantial difference can be demonstrated between the qualification for which recognition is requested and the relevant qualification of the state in which recognition is sought. In applying this principle, the assessment should seek to establish whether the differences in learning outcomes between the foreign qualification and the relevant qualification of the country in which recognition is sought are too substantial to allow the recognition of the foreign qualification as requested by the applicant."

It is recommended that the competent recognition authorities carefully weigh up the importance of quantitative criteria such as nominal duration, credits, length of thesis and different access requirements in terms of previous years of schooling against the importance of achieved learning outcomes of the conferred degree.

Key findings on specific criteria

Different access requirements

In 28 countries, different access requirements are considered to be a possible substantial difference. Other countries focus on the formal rights of access and make decisions or advisory statements concerning access based on the formal rights attached to the applicant's qualifications. It is an important feature of a qualification whether, for example, an upper secondary access qualification gives direct access to bachelor programmes or a foreign master's programme gives direct access to doctoral programmes, which must be reflected in the final recognition decision or statement. Conversely, a professionally-oriented bachelor qualification may not give direct access to research-based master's programmes in the country of origin. This could legitimately be considered a substantial difference in countries where the bachelor programme is more research-based and gives direct access to master's programmes.

It is recommended that the competent recognition authorities take into account the formal rights attached to a qualification when making recognition decisions or advisory statements for admission to the next level of study and not solely consider previous years of schooling as the decisive assessment criterion.

A shorter nominal duration of study of more than one year

Replies showed that 35 countries consider a shorter nominal duration of study of more than one year to be a substantial difference. The comparison of nominal duration of studies has been and is still today considered a key element in assessing foreign qualifications. However, the picture becomes a bit more blurred when one compares the achieved learning outcomes and the fact that the nominal duration may be considered differently from one country to another. The LRC text states that: "The length and content of a completed programme may vary considerably from one country to another, from one institution to another and from one level of study to another". This is further elaborated upon in the Revised Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications, which states that:

> The concept of "length of study" is somewhat problematical because, while generally expressed in terms of years or semesters of study, there may be differences, between countries and between individual institutions, in the number of weeks which make up a semester or a year of study…. "Length of study" should therefore not be considered a uniform concept, and it should not be used as the sole criterion in the assessment of foreign qualifications.

The concepts of nominal duration and full-time studies may vary from country to country even though the Bologna countries do have a common benchmark in terms of ECTS. Achieved learning outcomes may also show fewer differences than a purely quantitative comparison and, as described and recommended above, recognition should also be weighed against the purpose of the recognition process.

It is recommended that the competent recognition authorities carefully consider whether the nominal duration alone is sufficient to claim substantial differences when assessing foreign qualifications. Nominal duration should be examined

together with a comparison of achieved learning outcomes, considered within a flexible definition of study workload, as this may vary from country to country and be assessed in relation to the purpose of the recognition process.

Regarding no final thesis or a less demanding final thesis

In 21 countries, the lack of final thesis is regarded as a substantial difference, whereas only five countries stated that a less demanding final thesis is viewed as a substantial difference.

Again it can be argued that the lack of a final thesis must be weighed against the purpose of the recognition process. It may be a substantial difference when deciding on admission to doctoral studies but this may not automatically be treated as a substantial difference if the purpose is access to the labour market.

When considering less demanding requirements for a final thesis as a substantial difference – whether or not the foreign programme contains other ways of achieving research skills such as courses in research methods, exhibitions in fine arts programmes or a combination of several smaller projects – it should also be taken on board that legal requirements for a certain number of credits in a national system cannot automatically be applied to foreign qualifications; rather, differences among educational systems call for flexible approaches to recognition.

It is recommended that the competent recognition authorities should consider whether the lack of a final thesis is a substantial difference in relation to the purpose of the application for recognition. Furthermore, a less demanding final thesis must be evaluated in a flexible way without strictly imposing national legal requirements on foreign qualifications, and consideration should be given as to whether the programmes contain other ways of achieving the expected learning outcomes obtained from writing a thesis.

Regarding differences in programme content/courses

In 35 countries (over two thirds of the countries that responded) this was considered to be a substantial difference. It is not clear if this leads to non-recognition. Such differences may be taken into consideration for the purposes of recognising the level of the programme, e.g. recognising a bachelor degree in physics as a bachelor degree in natural sciences rather than recognising it as comparable to a bachelor degree in physics if the content of the programme is substantially different. This type of recognition may give the holder some professional rights within the labour market or academic rights in terms of access to master's programmes, where admission can be based on a broad range of different bachelor programmes.

It is recommended that the competent recognition authorities investigate whether a more generic recognition decision/advisory statement on the level of a foreign qualification could be given if substantial differences in the content of the programme/courses cannot lead to a comparison with a similar specific degree in the national system.

Regarding online studies and part-time studies

Of the countries that replied, 13 said that online studies may be considered a substantial difference and six countries stated that part-time studies might be regarded as a substantial difference.

The LRC does not distinguish between the different ways of delivering programmes. Rather, if the online or part-time programmes are fully accredited they should be treated no differently from other programmes at the same level.

However, one country explained that certain professional programmes, such as programmes within the field of medicine, cannot be offered online or only part of such programmes can be offered online, and the delivery of online programmes in subjects with an emphasis on professional and practical aspects and skills may indeed be considered a substantial difference.

Some countries may have legal restrictions on delivering online or part-time programmes. However, national legal requirements should not be applied to foreign qualifications; rather the competent authority should take the status and level of the foreign programme into account in its recognition decisions or advisory statements.

It is recommended that the competent authorities in general not attach importance to the mode of delivery but rather treat accredited/officially recognised online and part-time programmes as any other degree from the country of origin at the same level offered as ordinary full-time higher education programmes.

Regarding the criterion that the programme is not provided in the country of the competent recognition authority

Some 10 countries consider the fact that there is no similar programme in their national systems as a substantial difference. However, as in the case of different content of programmes and courses, a recognition decision/advisory statement could be considered by making a comparison with the level of the programme or within a larger subject area (such as the sciences or humanities) to secure the applicants' professional and academic rights. For instance, a bachelor's degree in mining engineering may be recognised as comparable with a bachelor's degree in engineering in a country which does not offer programmes in mining engineering.

It is recommended that the competent recognition authorities examine the possibility of generic recognition of the level of programme not offered in the national system.

Regarding qualifications offered by private institutions, institutions not listed in international databases and institutions where the teaching staff do not have to meet the same qualifications standards

Only a very small minority of countries will consider these criteria as substantial differences – in one case only one country. Here it must be argued that, if it can be established that the institution/programme is accredited/officially recognised, there are really no grounds for refusing recognition on the basis that the institution is unknown to the competent recognition authorities or is not listed in international databases.

Regarding the evaluation of teaching staff requirements, some recognition authorities are venturing into the field of quality assurance and are conducting a small selective quality assurance process, which very few competent recognition authorities are equipped to perform. The basic principle of trust in other countries' quality assurance systems within the convention area should be upheld.

It is recommended that the competent recognition authorities uphold the principles of mutual trust concerning the accreditation and quality assurance processes of countries within the convention area and do not attempt very detailed examinations of institutions or programmes, a task which is normally carried out by quality assurance agencies. Furthermore, it is recommended that the competent recognition authorities acknowledge the status of foreign qualifications, once it has been established that the institution and/or programme is accredited/officially recognised in the country of origin.

Regarding recognition of joint degrees

In question 21, countries were asked to provide any other reasons for refusing recognition. Only a few reasons were mentioned and most of them are very specific to the responding country. One reason stands out, which is the recognition of joint degrees, where several countries replied that in the case of joint degrees the qualifications awarded must be accredited/recognised by all participating countries and that the programmes must be legally established in all countries. This was mentioned by Andorra, the French Community of Belgium, Bulgaria and Georgia. These conclusions follow the recommendations of the subsidiary text to the LRC, the Recommendation on the Recognition of Joint Degrees from 2004 and the Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education from 2001, revised in 2007.

However, it should be noted that the ministers of the Bologna countries in the Yerevan Communiqué in May 2015 adopted the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes. The European standards call for countries to open up their legislation to include cross-border quality assurance mechanisms and recognise joint programmes which are accredited/quality assured in a single cross-border quality assurance process.

Furthermore, the LRCC Bureau is in the process of drafting a revised subsidiary text to the convention as its Recommendation on the Recognition of Joint Programmes. The draft calls for recognition of the status of joint degrees which are accredited/quality assured in a single cross-border quality assurance process. The Bureau has, at the time of writing, submitted a draft of the revised subsidiary text to the ENIC offices for initial comments.

It is recommended that the competent recognition authorities recognise the status of joint programmes which are accredited/quality assured in a single cross-border quality assurance process, provided they are legally established in the participating countries.

Rankings

Only seven countries replied that rankings were used as a criterion in the recognition of foreign qualifications. Among these seven countries, only Romania, Russia and "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" have implemented rankings as an assessment criterion in national legislation, while Malta uses rankings only as a non-regulated criterion for qualifications outside the convention area.

The convention text itself does not explicitly outline any principles or procedures concerning rankings. Article III.1 on Basic Principles Related to the Assessment of Qualifications outlines the obligation of all parties to provide for a fair assessment of all applications for the recognition of studies, qualifications, certificates, diplomas or degrees undertaken or earned in another party.

It has been argued that rankings are not a fair assessment criterion on which to base recognition decisions or advisory statements. Rankings are selective and arbitrary; there are a great number of rankings which use different methods and criteria. It has also been argued that rankings favour universities in countries where programmes are offered in a widely-spoken language, giving publications and citations from those university researchers an advantage over researchers who publish in smaller national languages. Publications and citations from researchers are important criteria in many rankings.

Furthermore, using rankings as a criterion can be considered unfair to persons applying from universities that are not listed in the rankings used. For example, a top-scoring graduate with a master's degree from a university not highly ranked will not be treated equally with a low-scoring graduate from a highly ranked university of the same country, even though in their own country they have both earned degrees which are considered equal in level, are referenced to the same level in the National Qualifications Framework and give the holders the same academic and professional rights.

Although rankings may be used to give prioritised and automatic recognition to holders of degrees from highly ranked institutions, their use will also result in unequal treatment of holders of the same qualifications from the same country, even though this distinction is not made in the applicant's home country.

As one country argued, quality is based on the content of the programme and reference to national qualifications frameworks, not by rankings.

It is recommended that rankings not be used as an assessment criterion for recognition, as this can be considered contradictory to the principle of an applicant's right to fair recognition. In addition, rankings can be used to treat similar qualifications from the same country differently, regardless of the fact that there is no academic or professional distinction between the qualifications in the applicant's home country.

Chapter 5

Refugees' qualifications

Each Party shall take all feasible and reasonable steps within the framework of its education system and in conformity with its constitutional, legal, and regulatory provisions to develop procedures designed to assess fairly and expeditiously whether refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation fulfil the relevant requirements for access to higher education, to further higher education programmes or to employment activities, even in cases in which the qualifications obtained in one of the Parties cannot be proven through documentary evidence (Article VII).

This article underlines the importance of instituting proper procedures for the handling of applications for the recognition of qualifications. These procedures apply to the assessment of qualifications, regardless of whether the qualifications are ultimately recognised or not. The assessment should be based on adequate expertise and transparent procedures and criteria, and it should be available at reasonable cost and within a reasonable time (Explanatory report).

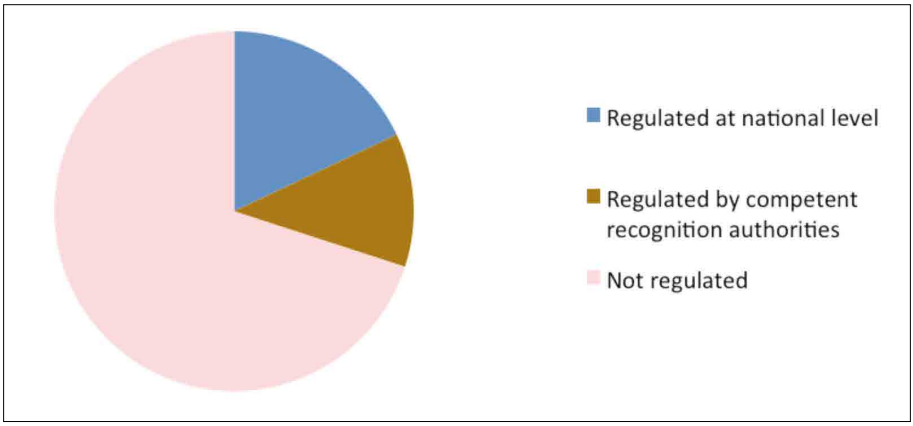
Article VII commits the parties to showing flexibility in the recognition of qualifications held by refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation, within the limits of each party´s constitutional, legal and regulatory provisions (Explanatory report).

QUESTION: Do the competent recognition authorities have procedures for recognition of qualifications from refugees and displaced persons without documentary evidence of their qualifications?

Answered: 50 countries

Not answered: 3 countries

Figure 9 – Regulation of procedures for recognition of refugees' qualifications



Regulated at national level (9): BE-NL, HR, CZ, DE, DK, FR, HU, LT, MT

Only eight countries reported having national regulations on procedures for recognition of qualifications from refugees and displaced persons without documentary evidence of their qualifications. Some countries indicated that the procedures encompass recognition statements or decisions as well as flexible procedures for submitting documentation, while the Czech Republic said it had introduced flexible procedures for the submission of documents. The same is true for Lithuania, which states that "when establishing requirements for documents and their submission, account should be taken of the differences between education systems and/or extraordinary circumstances (for example for refugees) without setting requirements which are impossible to meet". Lithuania also states that: "SKVC [the Lithuanian ENIC office] did not have any cases involving refugees without documentation. However, the description of the procedure is currently being prepared".

Germany has implemented procedures for admission to bachelor-level studies but has not submitted any evidence of the implementation of procedures for recognition of refugees' higher education qualifications. In France the system of recognition of prior learning as outlined in national legislation can be used to documents refugees' qualifications.

Regulated by competent recognition authorities (6): AU, FI, NL, NZ, NO, SE

In most cases where countries indicated that procedures had been introduced for recognising qualifications from refugees and displaced persons without documentary evidence of their qualifications, the procedures are regulated by the national ENIC office. This is the case in the Netherlands and New Zealand. Both countries refer in their answers to general legislation on integration, which does not specifically address the issue of recognising refugees' or displaced person's qualifications, but have within their ENIC offices procedures for issuing advisory statements about the qualifications of such persons. In 2015 Sweden's ENIC office introduced procedures for refugees with higher education credentials, while refugees with access qualifications can have their academic competences validated through the adult education system.

In other countries, the establishment of procedures refers to procedures within HEIs. This is true for Australia and Finland.

Norway has the most comprehensive system for recognising refugees' qualifications. In 2014, the Norwegian ENIC office introduced a Recognition Procedure for Persons without Verifiable Documentation (UVD-procedure), which involves evaluation of the available documentation, interviews and tests conducted by experts.

Not regulated (35): AL, AD, AM, AT, AZ, BE-FR, BA, BG, BY, CY, EE, GE, VA, IS, IE, IL, IT, KZ, LV, LI, LU, ME, PL, PT, RO, RU, SM, RS, SL, CH, ES, MK, TR, UA, GB

By far the largest group of countries (70%) reports having no formal procedures at national or any other level. Armenia states that, although there are no formal procedures, the Ministry of Education deals with any problems in this area on a case-by-case basis. Austria reports having national procedures but the supporting documents refer only to ratification of the convention itself and contain no evidence of specific procedures within Austrian legislation. Bosnia and Herzegovina replied that they have no formal procedures but have adopted a recommendation on a recognition procedure for people with undocumented foreign higher education qualifications. Ireland states that the ENIC office advises Irish HEIs on the recognition of refugees' qualifications according to the procedures in the subsidiary text to the LRC, the Revised Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications. This cannot be deemed to constitute a formal procedure, however. Italy also reports having no procedures, but indicates that flexible procedures are in the process of being introduced. Poland likewise refers to new legislation being prepared in the course of 2015. Romania and Russia said they had national regulations on procedures for recognition of refugees' qualifications, but the documentation submitted makes no reference to any procedures, as described in the convention. "The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" replied that it has provisions related to primary and secondary education for refugees or asylum seekers but no legal procedures for the recognition of qualifications from refugees without documented higher education qualifications.

The following questions were put to countries which reported that the recognition of qualifications from refugees and displaced persons without documentary evidence of their qualifications was regulated either at national level or by the competent recognition authorities:

- Is there a "background paper" or any other procedure covering recognition of qualifications without full documentary evidence?
- What are the possible outcomes of such a procedure: a) formal decision; b) advisory statement; c) explanatory document about the qualification without any form of recognition; d) other (please specify)?

The "background paper" refers to the subsidiary text to the LRC on the Revised Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications:

> In cases where refugees, persons in a refugee-like situation or others for good reason cannot document the qualifications they claim, competent recognition authorities are encouraged to create and use a "background paper" giving an overview of the qualifications or periods of study claimed with all available documents and supporting evidence.

The "background paper" is intended to be a tool for: a) the competent recognition authorities to reconstruct the educational background of the refugee in order to facilitate the assessment; b) the refugee to affirm his or her academic achievements for other evaluating bodies, like universities and employers, in order to gain access to further studies or appropriate employment.

Applications from persons in a refugee-like situation or others who for good reason cannot document their qualifications should be treated in the same way.

The "background paper" itself is not an assessment, but an authoritative description or reconstruction of the academic achievements linked to the available documents and supporting evidence. The "background paper" is:

1. An overview of the claimed educational background with the available documents and supporting evidence;
2. A checklist, based upon the model of the diploma supplement, used by the competent recognition authorities to add more relevant information.

In this respect a "background paper" is an authoritative description from a competent recognition authority intended to assist refugees in progressing to the labour market or within the higher education system. The "background paper" is not a formal requirement within the convention itself but is adopted as good practice and thus thoroughly described in the subsidiary text.

The answers relate to the 14 countries which reported having regulations on the recognition of qualifications from refugees and displaced persons without documentary evidence of their qualifications at either national or competent recognition authority level.

Six countries (DK, DE, FR, HU, NL, SE), out of the 15 which said they had introduced procedures at national or competent recognition authority level, issue background papers for refugees without documentary evidence of their qualifications. As indicated above, Norway has developed a more comprehensive recognition system for refugees without documentation. The other eight countries (out of the 15) make decisions or issue recognition statements or explanatory reports without creating a background paper.

The 15 countries stated that, where procedures exist, the outcome may be a formal decision (AU, BE-NL, DE, FR, HR, Fi, HU, NO), advisory statement (AU, DK, FR, NL, NZ, NO, SE) or explanatory document about the qualification without any form of recognition (DK, SE). The answers show that, in some countries, several outcomes are possible. In Norway and Australia, the procedures can result in both formal decisions and advisory statements, while in Denmark and Sweden both an advisory statement and an explanatory report may be issued.

In Australia and Finland, formal recognition decisions are taken by the HEIs. It is possible that the number of formal decisions taken by HEIs has not been correctly documented in this monitoring exercise. Decisions about recognition in terms of admission and credit-transfer decisions taken by HEIs must, for obvious reasons, have the status of formal decisions, since they will lead to either admission to a specific programme or credit transfer within a programme.

Germany reports having national regulations for admission to bachelor programmes and it is assumed that the formal decisions relate only to admissions of this kind.

The Czech Republic, Malta and Lithuania all report having introduced procedures but have not answered the questions about the status of the various possible outcomes of the recognition procedures. In the case of Lithuania, this is due to the fact that there is no record of any cases involving refugees without documentation. The Czech Republic has submitted documentary evidence of flexible procedures concerning the submission of documents but not concerning actual recognition decisions.

KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It must be accepted that the recognition of credentials which are not documented, or not fully documented, is a very difficult exercise. Competent recognition authorities will have to base their decisions on a thorough knowledge of the principles and procedures governing recognition and on evidence drawn from previous evaluations of similar or comparable documented qualifications. As the number of refugees and displaced persons around the world grows, however, the need to introduce procedures for fair recognition has never been more urgent.

The general conclusion regarding procedures for recognising the qualifications of refugees and displaced persons without documentary evidence of their qualifications is what implementation is obviously lacking: 70% of the countries which responded say they have not implemented Article VII of the LRC and so have no regulations at any level concerning the recognition of refugees' and displaced persons' qualifications.

A few of the 15 countries which reported having national regulations mentioned only procedures relating to the submission of documents or to recognition for admission to bachelor-level studies.

Of the countries which have introduced regulations, six stated that they issue formal decisions. Obviously a formal decision carries greater weight and authority than an advisory statement or an explanatory report, but there are no requirements in the convention regarding the status of the various possible outcomes of a recognition decision for refugees without documentation.

Six countries issue "background papers" describing the content and function of, and the formal rights attached to, refugee qualifications. A "background paper" modelled on the diploma supplement has been adopted as good practice both in the Revised Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications and in the European Area of Recognition manual (EAR manual), which was endorsed by the Bologna ministers in the Bucharest Communiqué in 2012. Using the established and legally implemented system of recognition of prior learning (as is the case in France) is another model of assessing the qualifications of refugees with undocumented qualifications.

Some countries issue an advisory statement without having produced a background paper, which is in full compliance with the obligations set out in Article VII on refugees' qualifications.

On the basis of the data collected, the LRCC Bureau recommends that, by the end of 2017, countries introduce regulations on procedures for the recognition of qualifications from refugees and displaced persons without documentary evidence of their qualifications.

The LRC does not prescribe any specific legal procedures for the recognition of refugees' qualifications, so there is ample scope to introduce flexible procedures leading to a formal decision, an advisory statement or an explanatory report, which can then be used as a basis for decisions about admission to further studies, credit transfers or access to the labour market.

Creating a "background paper" could be something for countries to aim for when developing their regulations on procedures for recognition of qualifications from refugees and displaced persons without documentary evidence.

Establishing a common tool for assessing undocumented qualifications could be identified as an objective and described in a new subsidiary text to the convention prepared by the LRC Bureau.

Chapter 6

Information on education systems

Each Party shall ensure, in order to facilitate the recognition of qualifications, that adequate and clear information on its educational system is provided (Article III.4).

This article underlines the importance of making higher education systems, as well as the education giving access to higher education, clear to the academic community, and especially to academic recognition experts and credentials evaluators in other parties. The article underlines the responsibility of the parties for giving adequate information on their own education systems (Explanatory report).

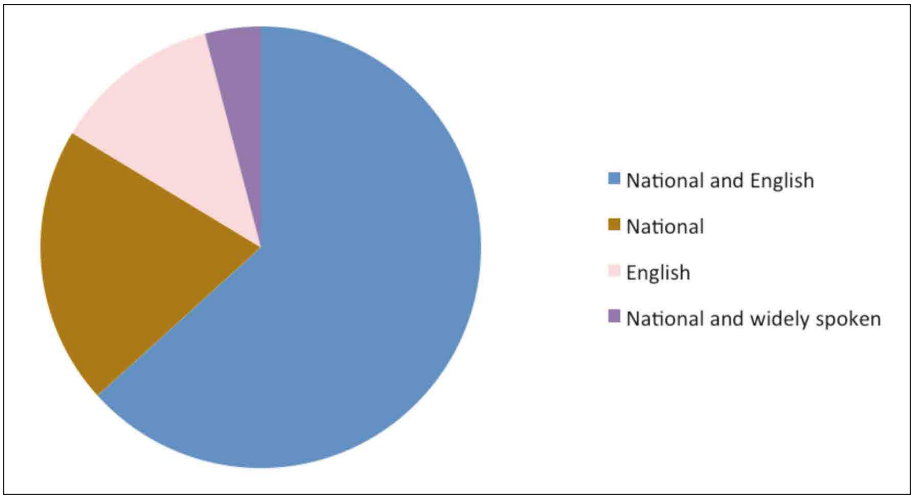
It is expected that adequate and regularly updated information on the higher education system and the education giving access to higher education (secondary education) of relevance to recognition experts and credential evaluators will be available on national authorities' websites.

QUESTION: Is information on the national education system available online?

Answered: 50 countries

Not answered: 3 countries

Figure 10 – Use of languages



The LRC requires countries to make available all information on the recognition of institutions and programmes as it exists in the party in question.

The LRC states that each country is to provide adequate information on any institution belonging to its higher education system, and on any programme operated by any such institution, with a view to enabling the competent authorities of other parties to ascertain whether the quality of the qualifications issued by the institution justifies recognition in the country in which recognition is sought (Article VIII.1).

Each country shall make adequate provision for the development, maintenance and availability of an overview of: the different types of HEI belonging to its higher education system, with the typical characteristics of each type of institution; a list of recognised institutions (public and private) belonging to its higher education system, indicating their powers to award different types of qualifications and the requirements for gaining access to each type of institution and programme; a description of higher education programmes; and a list of educational institutions located outside its territory which the country considers as belonging to its education system. (Article VIII.2).

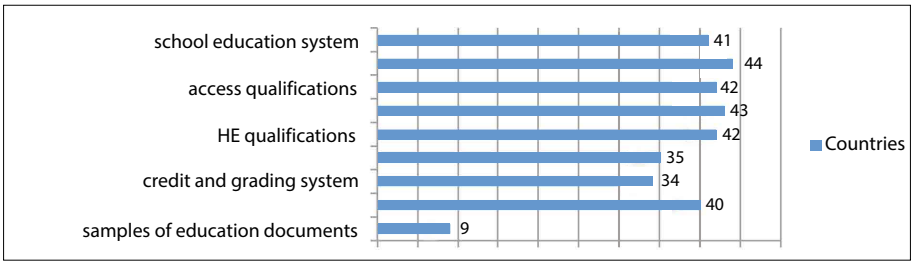
Almost all countries (48 out of 50) confirmed that information on the national education system is available online. Serbia mentioned that information on the education system is not published online or elsewhere, because the information itself needs updating. Liechtenstein gave information about online sources but did not provide any links.

Whereas 20% of the countries (AL, AD, BY, VA, LU, ME, RO, SM, ES, MK) provide online information about the national education system in the national language only, 64% of countries (AM, AT, AZ, BE-NL, BE-FR, BA, BG, CY, CZ, HR, DK, FI, FR, DE, GE, HU, IS, IL, KZ, LV, LI, LT, NL, NO, PL, PT, SI, SE, CH, TK, UA) provide online information about the national education system in both the national language(s) and English. Information provided in English language by France is very limited.

Two countries (IT and RU) provide information in the national language, English and other widely-spoken languages. Italy provides information in Spanish, French, German and Chinese while Russia provides information in French, German and Spanish. Six countries (AU, EE, IE, MT, NZ, GB) provide information only in English, although, of these, only Estonia does not have English as a national language.

Countries were asked to give more detail about online availability of information on: a) the school education system (including description of qualifications giving access to higher education); b) higher education legal framework and administration; c) access qualifications; d) types of HEIs; e) higher education qualifications; f) national qualifications framework; g) credit and grading system; h) quality assurance system or accreditation; i) examples of educational credentials.

Figure 11 – Online information provision



Of the 48 countries that confirmed online provision, all provided more detailed information except Bosnia and Herzegovina and "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia".

Five countries out of 46 or 11% (AL, FR, VA, IL, PL) reported that online sources **do not** include information about the school education system (education system with description of qualifications giving access to higher education). Only Luxembourg and France reported that online sources **do not** include information about the higher education legal framework and administration.

Belarus, Israel and San Marino stated that online sources **do not** include information on access qualifications. Luxembourg and San Marino said that online sources **do not** include information about types of HEI. Luxembourg, Montenegro and San Marino reported that online sources **do not** include information about higher education qualifications.

Also, 12 countries out of 46 or 26% (AD, AT, BY, BG, CY, FR, IL, LU, PL, SM, SI) have **not** included information about the national qualifications framework. Half of those were among the 12 countries out of 46 or 26% (AL, AU, BY, CY, HR, CZ, FR, GE, IL, LU, MT, SM) which stated that information about the credit and grading system **is not** published online. Five or 9% (LU, FR, PT, SM, SI) said that information about the quality assurance system/accreditation **is not** published online. Finally, 10 countries or 22% (FR, GE, IS, LT, NL, NO, RO, RU, TR, UA) reported that examples of credentials **are included** in the online information sources.

KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Most countries include information about the school education system, higher education legal framework and administration, access qualifications, types of HEI, higher education qualifications and quality assurance system/accreditation. Around 75% of countries include information about the national qualifications framework and the credit and grading system. Only 20% of countries include examples of credentials in the online information sources.

Not all of the links provided to online sources are usable and the information is not always to be found. It is recommended that the LRC Committee set minimum requirements for information on the education system that is included in online sources. The information provided should be systematically described. Information should be accessible within a single information source or via a single entry point to ensure the best use of information.

It must be noted that 20% of countries provide online information on their national education system only in the national language, which cannot be considered as good practice. Accordingly, countries should also provide information in a widely-spoken language, preferably English.

Chapter 7

Information on higher education institutions

Each Party shall provide adequate information on any institution belonging to its higher education system, and on any programme operated by these institutions ... (Article VIII.1).

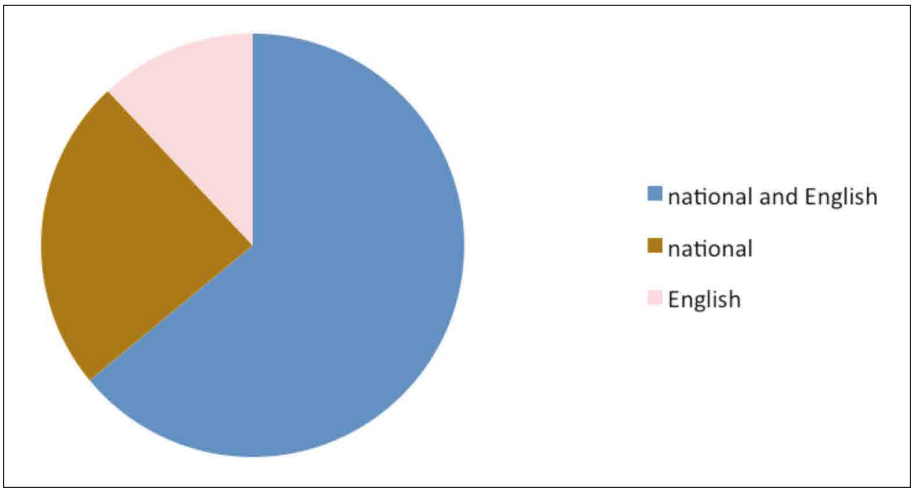
This article requires the parties to provide adequate information on any HEI belonging to their higher education system, and on the programmes operated by any such institution, in order to give other parties the necessary background knowledge to decide whether any given qualification should be recognised (Explanatory report).

QUESTION: Is the list of institutions that belong to the national higher education system published and available online?

Answered: 50 countries

Not answered: 3 countries

Figure 12 – Language for information on HEIs



The LRC requires countries to make available all information on the recognition of institutions and programmes as it exists in the country in question.

The LRC states that each country is to provide adequate information on any institution belonging to its higher education system, and on any programme operated by such an institution, with a view to enabling the competent authorities of other parties to ascertain whether the quality of the qualifications issued by these institutions justifies recognition in the country in which recognition is sought (Article VIII.1).

Each country is to make adequate provision for the development, maintenance and availability of an overview of: the different types of HEI belonging to its higher education system, with the typical characteristics of each type of institution; a list of recognised institutions (public and private) belonging to its higher education system, indicating their powers to award different types of qualifications and the requirements for gaining access to each type of institution and programme; a description of higher education programmes; and a list of education institutions located outside its territory which the country considers as belonging to its education system (Article VIII.2).

All 50 countries (100%) reported that their lists of institutions belonging to the national higher education system are published and available online. All the links provided in answer to the questionnaire were active.

Of those 50 respondents, 32 countries or 64% indicated that the lists of institutions are available online in the national language(s) and English; 12 countries or 24% (AD, BY, VA, KZ, LU, RO, RU, SM, SI, ES, MK, TR) said that the list of institutions published online is available in the national language(s) only; and 6 countries or 15% (AU, DK, IE, MT, NZ, GB) stated that all information is available in English. Of these, only Denmark is not an English-speaking country.

QUESTION: Is information on the programmes operated by the recognised HEIs which belong to the national higher education system published and available online?

Answered: 50 countries

Not answered: 3 countries

There were 43 countries that reported that information on the programmes operated by recognised HEIs which belong to the national higher education system is published and available online. The national authorities do not provide a list of higher education programmes but there is a link from the national authority's website to the programmes operated by the HEIs in the case of France, San Marino, Ukraine and the United Kingdom.

In Sweden, the database provided by the Swedish Higher Education Authority contains information about the HEIs' right to award degrees. The rest of the databases provided are search tools for admission/information purposes.

The current list of study programmes on the IL website has not been fully updated, and the country is working on a new updated database, including the creation of the "Study in Israel" website.

In Finland, HEIs provide education leading to higher education degrees in accordance with what the Ministry of Education and Culture has decided with regard to the educational responsibility of the HEI in question. There is no separate accreditation procedure for Finnish degree programmes, therefore.

Even where countries have confirmed that information about study programmes is available online, some of the links provided failed to find the appropriate study programmes, some web pages did not contain direct links to programmes and some of the links did not work.

The degree of information provided varies. Some countries include detailed information about the programmes, while others merely list the programmes available.

KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Although all the countries have lists of institutions available online, 24% provide information only in the national language(s). This cannot be regarded as good practice as information provided only in the national language(s) complicates the task of the credential evaluators.

The way in which institutions and programmes are reflected in the online tools varies from country to country, with the result that users are not always able to find the institution or programme they are looking for.

National information centres should improve online information, based on the premise that any institutions and programmes mentioned in the national online sources are quality assured and recognised.

HEIs should provide a minimum of information about study programmes (level, degree awarded, credit points etc.).

Chapter 8

National information centres

Each Party shall establish or maintain a national information centre (Article IX.2.1). In each Party, the national information centre shall facilitate access to information on the higher education systems and qualifications of the other Parties (Article IX.2.2).

The articles in question commit the parties to establishing and maintaining a national information centre and describe the functions of the national information centres at the national level. The NICs shall, in accordance with national laws and regulations, give advice and information on: recognition matters and assessment of qualifications, to both individuals and institutions, including students; HEIs; staff members at HEIs; ministries responsible for higher education; parents; employers; national information centres of other parties and other international partner institutions; any other interested parties (Explanatory report).

QUESTION: Has a national information centre (national ENIC office) been established and are its responsibilities regulated at national level?

Answered: 50 countries

Not answered: 3 countries

A national information centre has been established and its tasks and responsibilities are regulated at national level in the case of 34 countries: AL, AM, AT, AZ, BE-NL, BA, BG, HR, CY, DK, EE, FI, FR, GE, DE, VA, HU, IS, IE, KZ, LV, LI, LT, LU, MT, ME, NO, PT, RO, RU, SL, CH, UA, GB

All 50 countries which replied to the questionnaire have established national information centres[7] and in 34 of these countries the centre's tasks and responsibilities are covered by a national regulation. The legal status of the centres varies from country to country and their tasks and responsibilities are either covered by a national regulation, in one form or another, or not regulated nationally.

In most cases, the national information centres operate as a department of a national ministry responsible for higher education or as a sub-structure of an agency/national institute/board for higher education or quality assurance agency. In Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cyprus, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Switzerland and the United Kingdom, the national information centres have been established as independent bodies.

In Iceland, the national information centre is based at the University of Iceland under an agreement between the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture and the universities. Its tasks and responsibilities are regulated by national legislation, namely the Higher Education Institutions Act.

The tasks and responsibilities of national information centres in this group are described in varying degrees of detail in national laws or governmental decrees and are in line with those specified in the LRC. In the case of Iceland, the Higher Education Institutions Act sets out in broad terms the centre's main obligations to comply with international agreements on the recognition of studies, which means that all the principles, procedures and criteria contained in the LRC are to be upheld, including where the tasks and activities of the national information centre are concerned.

A national information centre has been established but its tasks and responsibilities are not set out in a national regulation in 16 countries: AD, AU, BY, BE-FR, CZ, IR, IT, NL, NZ, PL, SM, RS, ES, SE, MK, TR

In 16 countries the tasks and responsibilities of the national information centres are not covered by a national regulation. Their tasks and activities are defined in charters or in the internal documents of certain bodies or authorities. Belarus has defined the tasks and responsibilities of the national information centre at the institutional level, while the criteria and procedures for recognition of foreign qualifications are regulated at national level.

In some countries, the description of the tasks and activities provided in the reference text is very general, whereas in others it is extremely comprehensive and includes details of other significant obligations which the national information centres are expected to perform.

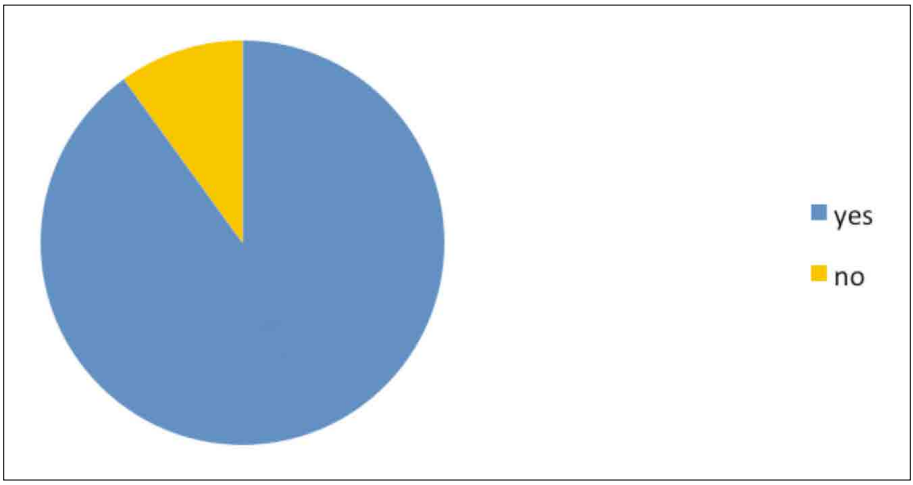
7. Russia and Israel each have two centres, which share the responsibilities between them.

QUESTION: Does the national information centre have a website?

Answered: 50 countries

Not answered: 3 countries

Figure 13 – National information centres with a website



The national information centre has a website in 45 countries: AL, AD, AM, AU, AT, AZ, BE-NL, BE-FR, BA, BG, HR, CY, CZ, DK, EE, FI, FR, GE, DE, VA, HU, IS, IR, IE, IT, KZ, LV, LI, LT, LU, MT, ME, NL, NZ, NO, PL, PT, RO, RU, SM, SL, SE, CH, UA, GB

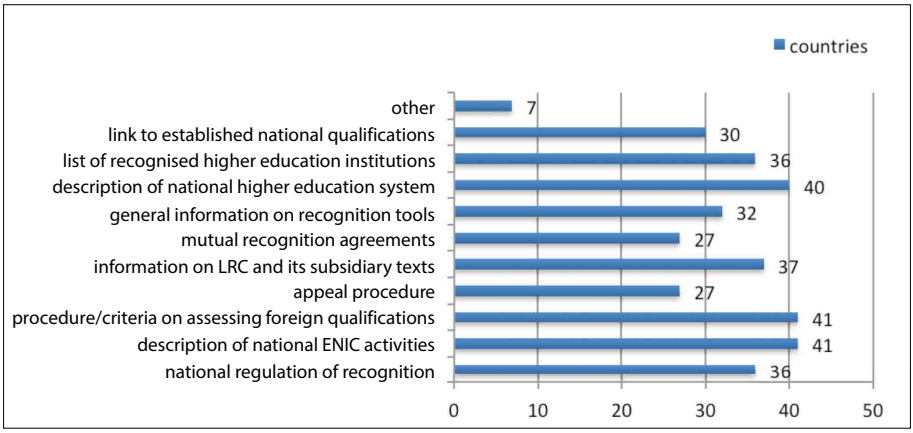
In 45 countries the national information centre has a website. In most of these countries, information about the national information centre is posted on the official website of the national ministry or the body where the centre is based. Otherwise the centres have a separate website.

The majority of the websites are bilingual and a few of them have more than two languages. Albania, Andorra, Belgium's French Community, Cyprus, the Holy See, Luxembourg and San Marino have websites in the national language(s) only.

Germany has a bilingual website although the only information in English is a description of the education system. Israel claims to have a website in six languages but only Arabic and Hebrew are visible. Poland has a website in two languages and summaries are available in eight other languages.

The quality of the information posted on the websites varies. Usually, the websites contain detailed information about the centre's tasks and activities, the procedures and criteria for recognition of foreign qualifications, the LRC and its subsidiary texts, the Bologna Process, a description of education systems, recognition tools, qualifications frameworks, etc. For more information, see Figure 14.

Figure 14 – Type of information on website



National regulation on recognition of foreign qualifications (36): AL, AD, AT, AZ, BE-NL, BA, BG, HR, CY, DK, EE, FI, FR, GE, DE, HU, IS, IE, IT, KZ, LV, LI, LT, LU, MT, ME, NL, NO, PL, PT, RO, RU, SL, CH, UA, GB

All the countries that have national regulations on the tasks and activities of national information centres have posted the relevant document on the website. In many cases, no official translation is provided and documents are available in the national language(s) only.

Description of national ENIC office's activities, tasks and responsibilities (41): AM, AU, AT, AZ, BE-NL, BE-FR, BA, BG, HR, CY, CZ, DK, EE, FI, FR, DE, VA, HU, IS, IR, IT, KZ, LV, LI, LT, LU, MT, ME, NL, NZ, NO, PL, PT, RO, RU, SM, SL, SE, CH, UA, GB

In 41 countries, a description of the activities, main tasks and responsibilities of the national ENIC office is available on its website.

P**rocedure and criteria for assessment of foreign qualifications (41):** AL, AD, AM, AU, AZ, BE-NL, BE-FR, BA, BG, HR, CY, DK, EE, FI, FR, GE, DE, HU, IS, IR, IE, IT, KZ, LV, LI, LT, LU, MT, ME, NL, NZ, NO, PL, PT, RO, RU, SL, SE, CH, UA, GB

It is common for countries to include information about the centre's main activities, tasks and responsibilities on the website as well as information about the procedures and criteria for assessing foreign qualifications. The activities listed are usually in line with those specified in the LRC. In many cases, the activities performed by the centres are much wider and include qualifications frameworks, recognition of professional qualifications in regulated professions, professional qualifications, the Bologna Process, etc. The procedures and criteria for recognition are well described in most cases. In some countries, the national standards for recognition are based on those specified in the LRC.

Appeal procedure (27): AM, AU, AZ, BE-NL, BG, HR, CY, CZ, DK, EE, FI, FR, HU, IS, IR, IT, KZ, LT, LU, NL, NZ, NO, RO, RU, SM, SL, GB

Only half of the countries have included a description of appeal procedures on their websites and there is no indication whether applicants are properly informed about the right of appeal. Appeal procedures are linked to the national regulations and vary in duration and in how they operate. In every instance, applicants should be informed that any appeal should state the reasons why the decision is being contested and must be supported by the necessary documentation.

Information on the LRC and its subsidiary texts (37): AL, AD, AM, AT, AZ, BE-FR, BA, BG, CY, CZ, DK, EE, FI, FR, GE, DE, HU, IS, IR, IT, KZ, LV, LI, LT, MT, ME, NL, NZ, NO, PL, RO, RU, SL, SE, CH, UA

Only two thirds of the countries have published the LRC and its subsidiary texts on their websites or provided a link to the Council of Europe website. And only a few of these have translated the LRC into the national language(s). The revised subsidiary texts are not always updated on the websites.

Mutual recognition agreements (27): AD, AU, AT, BE-NL, BA, HR, CY, CZ, DK, EE, DE, HU, IS, IR, IT, KZ, LI, LT, NL, NZ, NO, PL, RO, RU, SL, CH, GB

Only half of the countries have information about mutual recognition agreements on their websites.

General information on recognition tools (e.g. diploma supplement; ECTS) (32): AD, AM, AT, AZ, BE-FR, BG, HR, DK, EE, FI, FR, GE, VA, HU, IS, IR, IT, KZ, LV, LI, LT, MT, ME, NL, NZ, NO, PT, RO, RU, SL, SE, CH, GB

In 32 countries, the website contains general information about the diploma supplement and ECTS or other recognition tools, or a link to the relevant sections of other sites.

Description of the national higher education system (or link to the relevant website) (40): AL, AD, AM, AU, AT, AZ, BE-FR, BA, BG, HR, CY, CZ, DK, EE, FI, FR, GE, DE, VA, HU, IS, IR, IT, KZ, LV, LI, LT, MT, ME, NL, NZ, NO, PT, RO, RU, SL, SE, CH, UA, GB

The vast majority of countries have an up-to-date description of the national education system on their website or provide a link to another site. Usually, the description covers all levels of education and progression paths from one level to another. It also includes details of academic and professional study programmes.

List of recognised HEIs and programmes (or link(s) to the relevant website(s)) (36): AL, AD, AM, AT, AZ, BE-FR, BA, BG, HR, CY, CZ, DK, EE, GE, DE, VA, HU, IS, IR, IT, LV, LI, LT, MT, ME, NL, NZ, NO, PT, RO, RU, SL, SE, CH, UA, GB

In two thirds of countries, either information about recognised institutions and programmes appears on the website or there is a link to the relevant websites.

Link to established national qualifications framework (30): AL, AM, BE-FR, BA, HR, DK, EE, FI, GE, DE, VA, HU, IS, IR, IT, LV, LI, LT, MT, ME, NL, NZ, NO, PT, RO, SL, SE, CH, UA, GB

Thirty countries reported that the website of the national ENIC office contains a link to the national qualifications framework, or itself provides a description of the framework.

Other (please specify) (7): AD, AT, BE-FR, EE, LI, NZ,GB

Lichtenstein is the only country to indicate that the website provides other information, related to the competent bodies for professional recognition.

The national information centre has no website (5): BY, RS, ES, MK, TR

Belarus, Serbia, Spain, "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" and Turkey reported that they do not have a website for their national information centre. Except for "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia", these countries have published a very brief outline of the centre's tasks and responsibilities and the procedures and criteria for recognising foreign qualifications on various websites. The information is very limited and difficult to find through the links provided. Also, there are no links to the ENIC-NARIC website. In the case of Belarus, the information is available only in Belarusian and Russian. The link provided by Spain was not found.

KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

All 50 parties to the LRC which replied to the questionnaire have established a national information centre. The legal structure of these centres varies: some were created as a sub-structure of the national ministries or bodies responsible for higher education; others are more independent. Regardless of the type of organisation, the national information centres mostly operate at national level. In Belgium there are two centres for the two language communities: Flemish and French.

According to the LRC, the tasks and responsibilities of the national information centres should be set out at national level. Only 34 countries have confirmed in their replies that they are in compliance with Article IX of the LRC. A further 16 countries do not have national regulations on tasks and responsibilities. In all cases, the parties' national information centres provide information about recognition and give advice to both institutions and individuals on foreign qualifications. In Russia and Israel, these functions are split between two centres.

In the case of some countries, the description of tasks and activities set out in the reference text is very general while others have a very comprehensive description, including details of other significant tasks which the national information centres are expected to perform

It is difficult to assess the level of awareness of individuals and institutions regarding the national information centres and their main activities. According to the findings of The European Higher Education Area in 2015: Bologna Process Implementation Report, in one third of the EHEA countries recognition of qualifications and study periods (credits) is done without consulting the national information centres. It is important therefore to improve co-operation between the

national information centres and the HEIs in order to improve HEIs' knowledge and practice regarding recognition.

Although 45 countries reported having websites, five countries have no such site. A large number of countries do not have a separate website and the information on recognition of foreign qualifications is hosted on the website of the national ministry responsible for higher education or on the website of an agency or university. Separate websites are usually created by national information centres which have a more independent status.

Most countries have bilingual websites where information is provided in the national language(s) and in English. A small group of countries have information in more than two languages and seven countries have websites only in the official language of the country/community.

The quality of the information posted on the websites varies. Usually, the websites contain detailed information on their tasks and activities, procedures and criteria for recognition of foreign qualifications, the LRC and its subsidiary texts, a description of their education systems, recognition tools, etc. Many of the websites are not user-friendly and it can be rather complicated to find the necessary information. It is therefore recommended that the national information centres regularly update the websites and make them more user-friendly. Where the national information centre's website is part of a larger site, it is further recommended that the information be made more easily accessible.

Chapter 9

Resources to enable the national information centre to fulfil its functions

Every national information centre shall have at its disposal the necessary means to enable it to fulfil its functions (Article IX.2.3)

In order to fulfil a party's obligation under the convention, it is important that the national information centre be given adequate resources with which to fulfil its functions. These resources include an adequate number of competent staff, technical facilities and a sufficient budget to allow adequate contacts with HEIs in the country in which the centre is located as well as with national information centres of other parties (Explanatory report).

QUESTION: How many staff (full-time equivalents) work for the national information centre?

Answered: 49 countries

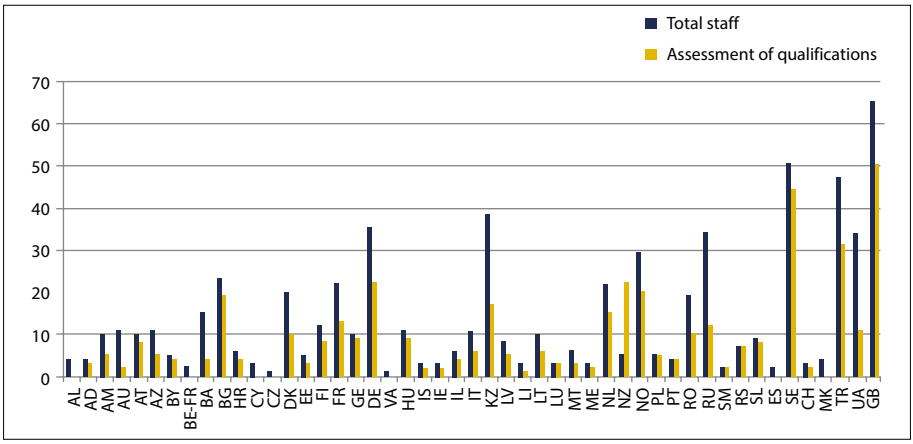
Not answered: 4 countries

The number of staff employed by each national information centre depends mainly on the range of tasks and activities performed, as well as the size of the country and its education system. The number of staff reported by the centres varies from one (CZ, VA) to 65 (GB). The total number of staff also depends on other significant responsibilities which the national information centre may be expected to perform, such as policy development, national qualifications framework and engagement in mobility, migration support, etc. Credential evaluators make up the core staff in the centres, however.

Two national information centres (BE-FR, ES) merely provide information and do not have credential evaluators on their staff. "The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" does not specify the number of its credential evaluators.

In many cases, the national information centres also employ administrative, financial and IT staff. Some countries also have legal advisers, dealing mainly with issues related to professional recognition. Bulgaria uses external consultants as credential evaluators.

Figure 15 – The number of staff (full-time equivalent) working for national information centres



QUESTION: How many applications were received in 2013?

Answered: 49 countries

Not answered: 4 countries

The number of applications for assessment of qualifications or requests for information varies enormously. The information reported by the centres is thus shown in three charts: up to 3 000, between 3 000 and 10 000 and more than 10 000. The first group includes 20 countries. No data are available for Finland.

Figure 16 – The number of applicants (up to 3 000 enquiries) for 2013

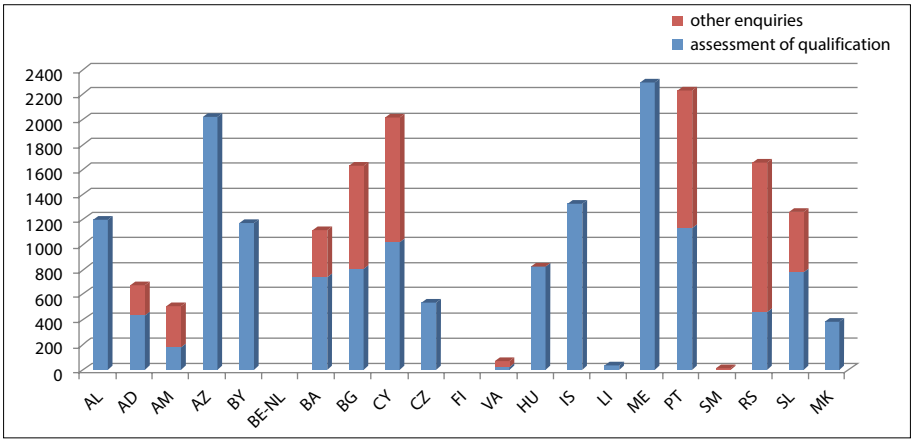


Figure 17 – The number of applicants (from 3 000 to 10 000 enquiries) for 2013

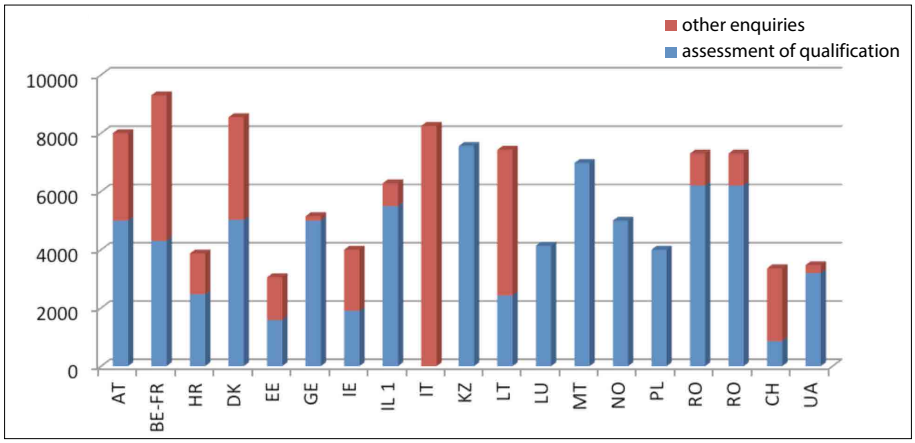
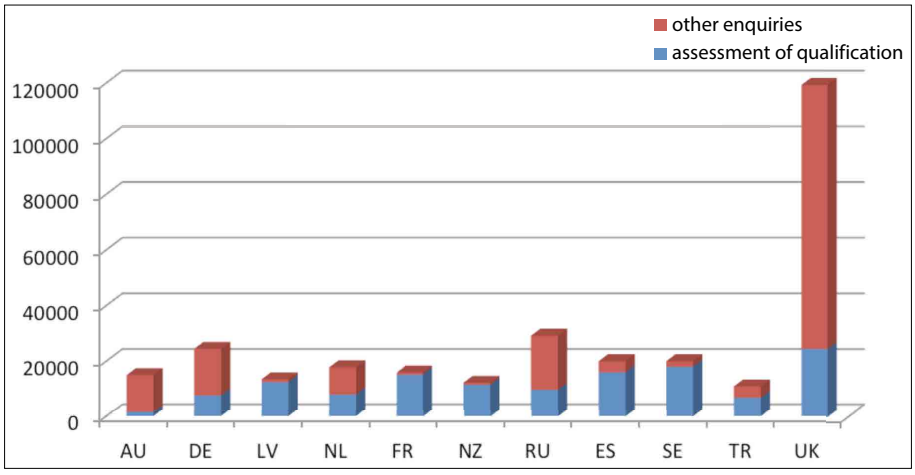


Figure 18 – The number of applicants (more than 10 000 enquiries) for 2013



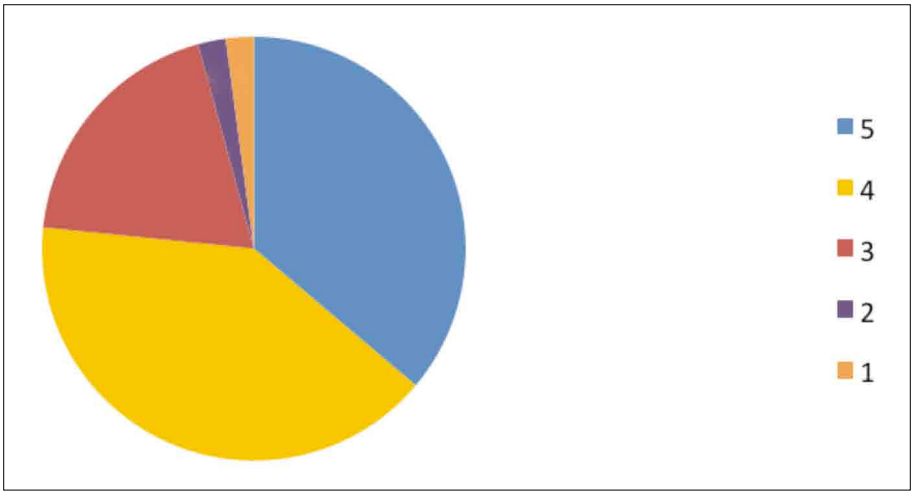
The second group is the biggest and includes 19 countries whereas the third group includes only 11 countries. Other enquires usually include requests received electronically or by telephone and are not always counted by the centres. The data presented are not always accurate, therefore.

QUESTION: Are there adequate technical facilities for the national information centre (please rate on a 5-point scale)?

Answered: 48 countries

Not answered: 5 countries

Figure 19 – Adequate technical facilities



In order to meet its responsibilities, besides adequate human resources, each national information centre should also be technically equipped. A 5-point scale ranging from 1 (not adequate) to 5 (adequate) was used to rate the technical facilities available to national information centres.

Of the 48 countries that reported, 17 were fully satisfied with the national information centre's technical facilities and rated them as "5 – adequate": Andorra, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Kazakhstan, Liechtenstein, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway and Switzerland.

A further 19 countries rated their satisfaction as "4": Azerbaijan, Belgium (FR), Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cyprus, France, the Holy See, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, Montenegro, Portugal, Romania, Russia, San Marino, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and Ukraine.

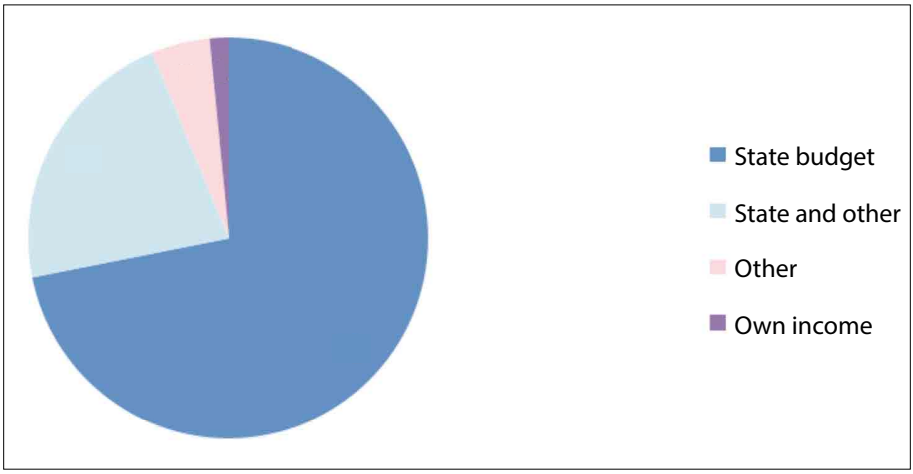
Just 9 countries rated their satisfaction as "3": Albania, Belarus, Czech Republic, Georgia, Iceland, Latvia, Luxembourg, Poland and Turkey. Only "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" ("2") and Israel considered that the technical facilities for the national information centres were not adequate ("1").

QUESTION: How is the national information centre funded?

Answered: 49 countries

Not answered: 4 countries

Figure 20 – Funding sources



Appropriate funding should be secured for national information centres to enable them to operate properly.

State budget (46): AL, AD, AM, AU, AT, AZ, BE-FR, BA, BY, BG, HR, CY, CZ, DK, EE, FI, FR, GE, DE, VA, HU, IS, IE, IL, IT, KZ, LV, LI, LT, LU, MT, ME, NL, NO, PL, PT, RO, RU, SM, RS, SL, ES, SE, CH, MK, TR

In the vast majority of countries, the national information centres are financed out of the state budget and in 14 countries (AM, AZ, BY, BG, HR, GE, DE, FR, HU, KZ, NL, NZ, RO, UA), they have income from other sources as well. The GB centre is the only one that is funded from its own income. Bulgaria, the Holy See and Lithuania reported that funds were raised from other sources and only Lithuania mentioned EU structural funds under "other" sources of funding.

KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The parties to the LRC undertake to provide the national information centres with the necessary means to enable them to function properly. The number of staff employed by each national information centre varies from one to 65 and depends to a large extent on the size of the country, the size of the higher education system and the number of mobile students as well as the range of activities and tasks assigned to the centre. In the vast majority of countries, credential evaluators make up the core staff. In some cases, the national information centres also employ administrative, financial and IT staff and legal experts. Two countries do not have credential evaluators on their staff as they merely provide information.

It is difficult to assess whether the number of staff working in each centre is adequate. On comparing the figures for staff and the number of applications received

by the national information centres, however, it is clear that the greater the number of applications and other requests, the greater the number of staff employed. In some cases, this is not the case, suggesting that the centres in question are understaffed.

Generally speaking, the technical facilities available to the national information centres are sufficient to enable them to function properly: 36 countries expressed satisfaction with the technical facilities while nine countries believed that there was room for improvement. Only two countries rated the facilities as inadequate. Similarly, the funding received by the national information centres is deemed sufficient to enable them to perform their main tasks and activities. The vast majority of the centres are financed out of the state budget. Some of the centres try to diversify their funding sources. The funding comes from own resources derived from application fees or other sources. In addition, there are countries that raise funds from other sources such as EU structural funds, etc.

Despite the diversity of situations, it is obvious that the public authorities should provide adequate support to the national information centres. The resources and staff allocated to the centres should be sufficient to ensure high-quality services are delivered in a timely fashion.

Conclusions

The main aim of the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC) is to facilitate the recognition of qualifications between the parties and, in so doing, support mobility and ensure the fair recognition of qualifications. The LRC established the committee which is responsible for promoting the application of the LRC and overseeing its implementation. The questionnaire was therefore sent to all the parties to the LRC.

All 50 countries which replied to the questionnaire satisfied the conditions for implementation of the LRC to one degree or another. It is clear, however, that not all the components are being implemented successfully and in the correct manner, and that countries should endeavour to improve implementation of the LRC principles.

The present monitoring report contains general recommendations of relevance to all countries and stakeholders.

All the recommendations are addressed to the LRC Committee, the parties and their national authorities. Also targeted are the national information centres, recognition authorities and HEIs. Some of the recommendations concern the provision of information – to ensure that appropriate, easy-to-read and well-structured information is available in widely-spoken languages – and the development of national information centres in each country. Others are aimed at improving the fair recognition of qualifications and the quality of recognition statements through a common understanding of requirements and the use of defined criteria for substantial differences.

Assessment criteria and procedures

Assessment criteria and procedures are important for the fair recognition of qualifications, and the LRC requires the parties to ensure that the criteria and procedures used in assessment and recognition are transparent, coherent and reliable (Article III.2). In practice, more than 50% of the countries surveyed have regulations on the criteria and procedures in question. In some of them, however, the criteria and procedures are entirely a matter for the HEIs. Most countries reported that the criteria are regulated at national level, but this was not reflected in the national legislation. In most cases, the regulations are rather general and it is for the HEIs themselves to decide on the detailed criteria to be applied. Unfortunately, some countries still use nostrification or seek equivalence when making recognition decisions.

The recommendations regarding criteria and procedures are as follows, therefore:

- The parties' national authorities should oversee the implementation of the LRC and related regulations on criteria and procedures at national and institutional level.
- The national authorities, national information centres, recognition authorities and HEIs should adopt the recognition approach used in the LRC and avoid using nostrification or seeking equivalence in the assessment and recognition of qualifications.

Furthermore, only a few countries have demonstrated that the comparison of achieved learning outcomes between foreign and similar national qualifications is regulated at national level or even used as an important criterion in recognition assessments and statements. Instead, there is evidence to suggest that quantifiable criteria such as the nominal duration of programmes, credits and the number of years of schooling prior to admission are used as the main criteria.

- National authorities and HEIs should make sure that educational programmes are described in terms of learning outcomes and clearly state the achieved learning outcomes in documents such as diploma supplements and transcripts.
- Furthermore, national authorities should ensure that qualitative criteria such as achieved learning outcomes are identified as important criteria in national legislation on recognition.

The quality of the information about criteria and procedures varies from country to country. There are a few countries where assessment criteria and procedures are transparent, meaning that the information is readily available to applicants. The majority of countries have a link from the website of the national ENIC office or ministry to the relevant legislation, which in most cases is in the national language(s), but without any official translations into widely spoken languages.

- The national authorities should provide information about criteria and procedures in a structured way and in a widely spoken language in order to help applicants find what they are looking for.

The LRC text itself does not explicitly outline any principles or procedures concerning rankings. Article III.1 on Basic Principles Related to the Assessment of Qualifications outlines the obligation on all parties to provide a fair assessment of all

applications for the recognition of studies, qualifications, certificates, diplomas or degrees undertaken or earned in another party.

- The national authorities should recommend that recognition authorities and HEIs refrain from using rankings as an assessment criterion in the recognition process, as this can be considered contradictory to the principle of an applicant's right to fair recognition.

Time limit

- The LRC states that decisions about recognition are to be made within a reasonable time limit. The subsidiary text to the LRC recommends that applications should be processed as promptly as possible, and that the processing period should not exceed four months. The time limit for assessment and recognition or any other administrative services, including for recognition, is regulated in most of the countries surveyed.
- The national authorities should ensure that a time limit is not an obstacle for applicants in seeking admission to HEIs or applying for jobs.
- The maximum time limit for processing applications should be stipulated in national legislation.

Right to appeal

It is clear from the information provided by the parties about the right to appeal that there is room for improvement in terms of the performance of the tasks set out in the LRC: if recognition is withheld or if no decision is taken, the applicant must be able to make an appeal within a reasonable time limit (Article III.5). In general, all countries have overarching national administrative procedures which include a right to appeal. Consequently, the individual's right to appeal is provided for in all countries. The right to appeal is regulated both nationally and internally at institutional level, but greater recourse is had to national procedures. It is not always easy to find the necessary information on the right to appeal as some countries provide information in the national language(s) only or merely a link to legislation in the national language(s), with the result that the information is practically unusable for foreigners.

- National information centres and HEIs should ensure that information on the right to appeal is available on the website of the national information centre. Information on the right to appeal should also be provided in the text of the recognition statement.
- National information centres and HEIs should ensure that information on the right to appeal is also provided in a widely spoken language, preferably English, and accompanied by information on how to appeal.

Substantial differences

Substantial differences are a challenge when it comes to the fair recognition of qualifications. The LRC itself does not provide a definition of substantial differences. The survey has shown that, in many cases, the member countries largely share common understanding of which criteria may be considered as substantial

differences and, accordingly, a reason for non-recognition or partial recognition. Substantial differences are always a subject of debate, however. The understanding of and approach to substantial differences can influence recognition decisions to a significant degree, so considerable attention is given to this subject in recognising qualifications.

One conclusion to emerge with regard to national recognition authorities´ interpretation of substantial differences is that many countries take the view that where the foreign programme and a similar national one differ on only one of the criteria used to compare qualifications, this cannot be construed as a substantial difference. In most cases, substantial differences between qualifications should be a bar to full recognition only in cases where the national recognition authorities conclude that the programmes differ on more than one criterion.

- It is recommended that the recognition authorities carefully consider whether a single criterion in the recognition decision can constitute a substantial difference sufficient to justify withholding full recognition.
- Furthermore, and in the same vein, it is recommended that the competent recognition authorities carefully consider whether nominal duration alone is sufficient to claim substantial differences when assessing foreign qualifications. Nominal duration should be examined together with a comparison of achieved learning outcomes, considered within a flexible definition of study load, as this may vary from country to country and be assessed in relation to the purpose of the recognition process.

Many respondents pointed out that substantial differences must also be interpreted in the light of the purpose of the recognition process. A recognition decision or statement may have different outcomes depending on whether the assessment is to be used for access to the labour market or access to further education. The absence of a thesis or a less demanding thesis in a master's-level programme may not be a substantial difference if the purpose of the recognition process is access to employment, but it may be considered a substantial difference if the purpose is access to doctoral studies.

- The competent recognition authorities should carefully weigh up their decisions and advisory statements against the purpose of the application for recognition and reflect on whether established substantial differences should on all occasions and for all purposes be considered a factor.
- The competent authorities should treat accredited/officially recognised online and part-time programmes as any other degree from the country of origin at the same level, offered as ordinary full-time higher education programmes. The mode of delivery of a programme is not a substantial difference in itself.
- It is recommended that recognition authorities uphold the principles of mutual trust concerning quality assurance in countries within the LRC area and refrain from undertaking very detailed examinations of institutions or programmes, a task which is normally carried out by quality assurance agencies. It is further recommended that the competent recognition authorities acknowledge the status of foreign qualifications, once it has been established that the institution and/or programme is accredited/officially recognised in the country of origin.

- It is recommended that the competent recognition authorities recognise the status of joint programmes which are accredited/quality assured in a single, cross-border quality assurance process, provided they are legally established in the participating countries.
- The recognition authorities should provide applicants with clear information on what may be considered to constitute a substantial difference in the recognition decisions or advisory statements, if full recognition is not granted.

The LRC dates back to 1997. Obviously developments within higher education since 1997 are not reflected in the convention text. One of the most notable changes in higher education is the paradigm shift from a focus on learning inputs to outputs in terms of learning outcomes.

- The recognition authorities should carefully weigh up the importance of quantitative criteria such as nominal duration, credits, length of thesis, and different access requirements in terms of previous years of schooling against the importance of achieved learning outcomes of the conferred degree.
- At the same time, the parties' recognition authorities should take into account the formal rights attached to a qualification when making recognition decisions or issuing advisory statements for admission to the next level of study, and not solely consider previous years of schooling as the decisive assessment criterion.

Refugees' qualifications

Nowadays more attention is being paid to Article VII of the LRC regarding refugees' qualifications, especially in the light of recent developments. Each party is required to take all feasible and reasonable steps within the framework of its education system and in conformity with its constitutional, legal and regulatory provisions to develop procedures designed to assess fairly and expeditiously whether refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation fulfil the relevant requirements for access to higher education, to further higher education programmes or to employment activities, even in cases where the qualifications obtained in one of the parties cannot be proven through documentary evidence.

The general conclusion on procedures for recognising the qualifications of refugees and displaced persons without documentary evidence of their qualifications is what implementation is obviously lacking: 70% of the countries which responded said they had not implemented Article VII of the LRC and so have no regulations at any level on the recognition of refugees' and displaced persons' qualifications.

- The LRC Committee should recommend that the parties introduce, by the end of 2018, regulations on procedures for recognition of qualifications from refugees and displaced persons without documentary evidence of their qualifications.
- The national authorities should consider setting the creation of a "background paper" as a goal for countries when developing their regulations for procedures for recognition of qualifications from refugees and displaced persons without documentary evidence.

Information on education systems and HEIs

The LRC states that each party is to ensure, in order to facilitate the recognition of qualifications, that adequate and clear information on its education system is provided (Article III.4). Most of the countries surveyed have online information on the education system, higher education legal framework and administration, access qualifications, types of HEI, higher education qualifications and any quality assurance/accreditation system. In practice, however, the information provided varies in terms of quality, level of detail and structure, and is sometimes available in the national language only.

- The LRC Committee should therefore set minimum requirements for information on the education system, HEIs and study programmes, to be included in the online sources.
- National information centres should review the information provided, bearing in mind that the information should be systematically described and accessible within a single information source or via a single entry point to ensure best use of the information. The information should also be provided in a widely spoken language, preferably English.
- The national authorities should improve online information, based on the premise that any institutions and programmes mentioned in the national online sources are quality assured and recognised. In addition, the national information centres and HEIs should provide a minimum of information about the study programmes offered (level, degree awarded, credit points, etc.).

National information centres

The LRC states that each party is to establish or maintain a national information centre (Article IX.2.1). In each party, the national information centre must facilitate access to information on the higher education systems and qualifications of the other parties. All 48 parties to the LRC have established a national information centre. The legal structure of these centres varies: some were created as a sub-structure of the national ministry or body responsible for higher education while others are more independent. Regardless of the type of organisation, the national information centres mostly operate at national level. According to the LRC, the tasks and responsibilities of the national information centres should be set out at national level.

- All the parties, therefore, should make sure that there are regulations on the tasks and responsibilities of national information centres.
- Despite the diversity of situations, it is obvious that the public authorities should provide adequate support for the national information centres. The resources and staff allocated to the centres should be sufficient to ensure high-quality services are delivered in a timely fashion.

The quality of the information posted on national information centre websites varies. Usually, the websites contain detailed information about the centre's tasks and activities, the procedures and criteria for recognition of foreign qualifications, the LRC and its subsidiary texts, a description of the education system, recognition

tools, etc. Many of the websites are not user-friendly and it can be rather complicated to find the necessary information.

- It is accordingly recommended that the LRC Committee initiate a project to set minimum requirements for the information provided on the websites of national information centres.
- With regard to information provision, national information centres should regularly update the websites and make them more user-friendly. The websites should also be available in a widely spoken language, preferably English.

Most of these recommendations apply to all the parties and stakeholders involved. Implementation of the recommendations by all parties to whom the recommendations are addressed will improve the quality of the information provided and the quality of the recognition procedures and will contribute to the goal of fair recognition of qualifications. Countries' response to the recommendations should be monitored, however, in order to determine to what extent they have managed to implement the LRC.

The monitoring exercise described in this report clearly shows that, in many respects, the national recognition authorities have implemented the principles of the LRC. This applies to assessment criteria and procedures, the interpretation of substantial differences and information provision on national education systems and recognised HEIs.

It is also clear, however, that implementation of the LRC is still rather uneven across the different parties and that none of the countries have implemented the LRC in full. In some cases, the survey has shown that, when it comes to the interpretation of substantial differences, the assessment criteria used in recognition and provision of the appropriate information to applicants in widely spoken languages, the LRC is not being observed.

Clearly, therefore, the national authorities must reflect and take action to secure full implementation of the principles and procedures which they undertook to uphold on ratifying the convention.

Plainly, too, the regular monitoring carried out by the Bureau of the LRC Committee is a vital and necessary means to further the goal of fair and smooth recognition within the convention area for the benefit of all the stakeholders: applicants, labour market organisations, HEIs, students, national governments and the public at large.

- The LRC Committee should task the Bureau of the LRC Committee with carrying out regular monitoring of the implementation of the LRC to ensure that the parties fulfil the obligations set out therein.

Appendices

APPENDIX 1 – QUESTIONNAIRE

According to the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC), the Committee of the Convention is to oversee its implementation and guide the competent authorities in their implementation of the LRC and in their consideration of applications for the recognition of foreign qualifications. The Rules of Procedure (adopted by the Committee in Vilnius, 1999) reiterate the fact that the role of the Committee is to promote the application of the LRC and oversee its implementation.

Article II.1 of the LRC states that, where central authorities of a party are competent to make decisions in recognition cases, that party shall be immediately bound by the provisions of this convention and shall take the necessary measures to ensure implementation of its provisions on its territory. Where the competence to make decisions in recognition matters lies with individual HEIs or other entities, each party according to its constitutional situation or structure shall transmit the text of this convention to these institutions or entities and shall take all possible steps to encourage the favourable consideration and application of its provisions.

The provisions of Article II.1 are central to determining the **obligations of the parties to the convention**. The article places upon these parties an obligation to make sure that information on the provisions is disseminated to all competent recognition authorities, and that these institutions are encouraged to abide by the convention (Explanatory report to the convention).

PLEASE ENTER YOUR DETAILS:

Name:

Position:

Organisation:

Country:

Date the questionnaire was completed:

Please return the completed questionnaire by **15 February 2015** to Mr Gunnar Vaht, Bureau of the LRC Committee (gunnar.vaht@archimedes.ee), Ms Joana Kashi, Council of Europe (joana.kashi@coe.int) and Ms Liliana Simionescu, UNESCO (l.simionescu@unesco.org).

QUESTIONS ABOUT COMPETENT AUTHORITIES AND THE STATUS OF THE NATIONAL ENIC OFFICE

Who is (are) the competent authority(ies) for academic recognition in your country?

Ministry of Education	☐
National information centre (national ENIC office)	☐
Higher education institutions	☐
Other (please specify)	☐

COMMENTS:

What is the status of the statements or reports produced by the national information centre (national ENIC office)?

Information only	☐
Recommendation or advice	☐
Binding decision	☐
Other (please specify)	☐

COMMENTS:

PROVISION 1 – Access to an assessment

Holders of qualifications issued in one of the Parties shall have adequate access, upon request to the appropriate body, to an assessment of these qualifications (Article III.1.1).

This article states the obligation on all parties to provide for a fair assessment of all applications for the recognition of studies or qualifications undertaken or earned in another party. The assessment is to be given upon request by the individual concerned for the qualifications included in the request. The article sets out the obligation on parties to provide for such an assessment on a non-discriminatory basis. Recognition cannot be denied for the sole reason that the qualification is a foreign and not a national one and circumstances unrelated to the academic merits of the qualifications may not be taken into consideration (Explanatory report).

QUESTION 1 – Is access to an assessment regulated at national level (national law, government regulation, other legal act)?

YES, access to an assessment is regulated at national level ☐

If YES, what is the title of the relevant legal act?

- in the original language:
- in English:

Please provide a LINK to or COPY of the article(s) which regulate(s) access to an assessment

NO, it is regulated by the individual HEIs for their internal use ☐

If it is regulated at institutional level, how do the national authorities oversee the internal regulations and implementation?

COMMENTS:

PROVISION 2 – Criteria and procedure

Each Party shall ensure that the procedures and criteria used in the assessment and recognition of qualifications are transparent, coherent and reliable (Article III.2).

This article underlines the importance of instituting proper procedures for the handling of applications for the recognition of qualifications. These procedures apply to the assessment of qualifications, regardless of whether the qualifications are ultimately recognised or not. The assessment should be based on adequate expertise and transparent procedures and criteria, and it should be available at reasonable cost and within a reasonable time (Explanatory report).

QUESTION 2 – Are the assessment criteria and procedures regulated at national level (national law, government regulation, any other legal act)?

YES, the criteria and procedures are regulated at national level ☐

If YES, what is the title of the relevant legal act?

- in the original language:
- in English:

Please provide a LINK to or COPY of the article(s) which regulate(s) the criteria and procedure

NO, it is regulated by the individual HEIs for their internal use ☐

If it is regulated at institutional level, how do the national authorities oversee the internal regulations and implementation?

COMMENTS:

QUESTION 3 – If the assessment and recognition criteria are regulated at national level, does the regulation list the criteria to be used in assessment and recognition of foreign qualifications?

YES ☐

If YES, what are the criteria:

- recognition status of the awarding institution ☐
- type of awarding institution ☐
- learning outcomes ☐
- list of courses/content ☐
- quality/accreditation ☐
- formal rights (function of the qualification in the home country: e.g. access to further activities) ☐
- level in the qualifications framework(s) ☐
- workload ☐
- nominal duration ☐
- profile ☐
- admission requirements ☐
- other (please specify) ☐

NO ☐

If NO, please state why the assessment criteria are not listed in the regulation

COMMENTS:

QUESTION 4 – If the assessment and recognition procedures are standardised and regulated at national level, does the regulation list the elements of the procedure?

YES ☐

If YES, do the elements include:

- time needed ☐
- fee charged ☐
- documents required ☐

- description of the assessment process ☐
- status of recognition/assessment report ☐
- other (please specify) ☐

NO ☐

If NO, please state why the procedure is not detailed in the national regulation.

COMMENTS:

QUESTION 5 – Are there assessment and recognition criteria and procedures available online?

YES ☐

If YES, in which language(s):

If YES, please give the website address:

NO ☐

If the criteria and procedure are NOT available online, can applicants find details of the criteria and procedures in other publications? If so, please give the names of the publications.

PROVISION 3 – Time limit

Decisions on recognition shall be made within a reasonable time limit specified beforehand by the competent recognition authority and calculated from the time all necessary information in the case has been provided. If recognition is withheld, the reason for the refusal to grant recognition shall be stated (Article III.5).

The concept of an applicant's right to receive a reply within a reasonable time is central to good practice and of particular importance for applicants who apply for recognition in order to pursue further studies or to use their qualifications as the basis for gainful occupation. Parties are encouraged to make public, and inform applicants of, what they consider to be a "reasonable time limit" (Explanatory report).

QUESTION 6 – Is the time limit regulated at national level (national law, government regulation, or any other legal act)?

YES, the time limit is regulated at national level ☐

If YES, what is the time limit?

If YES, what is the title of the relevant legal act?

- in the original language:
- in English:

Please provide a LINK to or COPY of the article(s) in which the time limit is stipulated

NO, it is regulated by the individual HEIs for their internal use ☐

If it is regulated at institutional level, how do the national authorities oversee the internal regulations and implementation?

COMMENTS:

PROVISION 4 – Right to appeal

If recognition is withheld, or if no decision is taken, the applicant shall be able to make an appeal within a reasonable time limit (Article III.5).

The provision that it is up to the authority evaluating the application to show that the applicant does not fulfil the requirements for recognition is closely linked to the applicant's right to appeal. Arrangements and procedures for such appeals are subject to the legislation in force in the party concerned, even though the handling of the appeal should be subject to the same requirements of transparency, coherence and reliability as those imposed on the original assessment of the application. Information should be given on the ways in which an appeal could be made, and on the time limits for such an appeal (Explanatory report).

QUESTION 7 – In cases where recognition is withheld, or if no decision is taken, is there a possibility for an applicant to appeal?

YES, there is a national regulation on the applicant's right to appeal in cases where recognition is withheld or if no decision is taken ☐

If YES, please name the body and procedure for the appeal:

Please give the title of the relevant legal act:

- in the original language:
- in English:

Please provide a LINK to or COPY of the article(s) establishing the right to appeal

YES, the applicant´s right to appeal is regulated internally by the competent recognition or assessment authorities. ☐

If it is regulated at institutional level (internally), how do the national authorities oversee the internal regulations and implementation?

NO, the applicant has no right to appeal ☐

If NO, please specify the reason

COMMENTS:

QUESTION 8 – Is information about the applicant's right to appeal published and available online?

YES ☐

If YES, please give the website address:

NO ☐

If NO, is it published in other sources? If so, please specify.

NO, the applicant has no right to appeal ☐

COMMENTS:

PROVISION 5 – Information on the education system

Each Party shall ensure, in order to facilitate the recognition of qualifications, that adequate and clear information on its educational system is provided (Article III.4).

This article underlines the importance of making higher education systems, as well as the education giving access to higher education, clear to the academic community, and especially to academic recognition experts and credentials evaluators in other parties. This article underlines the responsibility of the parties for giving adequate information on their own education systems (Explanatory report).

It is expected that adequate and regularly updated information on the higher education system and the education giving access to higher education (secondary education) of relevance to recognition experts and credential evaluators will be available on the national authorities' website(s).

QUESTION 9 – Is information on the national education system available online?

YES ☐

If YES, to whom does the website(s) belong (name of institution)?

In which language(s) is the information is available:

If YES, please give the website address(es):

If YES, does it include information on:

- the school education system (education system with description of qualifications giving access to higher education) ☐
- higher education legal framework and administration ☐
- access qualifications ☐
- types of HEIs ☐
- higher education qualifications ☐
- national qualifications framework ☐
- credit and grading system ☐
- quality assurance system/accreditation ☐
- examples of educational credentials ☐

NO ☐

If NO, is information on the education system published in other sources? If so, please specify.

COMMENTS:

PROVISION 6 – Information on Higher Education Institutions

Each Party shall provide adequate information on any institution belonging to its higher education system, and on any programme operated by these institutions ... (Article VIII.1).

This article puts an obligation on the parties to provide adequate information on any HEI belonging to their higher education system, and on the programmes operated by these institutions, in order to give other parties the necessary background knowledge to decide whether any given qualification should be recognised (Explanatory report).

QUESTION 10 – Is the list of institutions that belong to the national higher education system published and available online?

YES, the list of HEIs is published by the national authorities and is available electronically (website) ☐

If YES, please provide the address of the website where the list appears:

If YES, in which language(s) is the list available?

NO, the list of HEIs is not available online ☐

If NO, is it published in other sources? If so, please specify.

COMMENTS:

QUESTION 11 – Is information on the programmes operated by the recognised higher education institutions which belong to the national higher education system published and available online?

YES, a list of the higher education programmes is available on the site(s) of the national authorities (national ENIC office; accreditation agency; ministry of education; etc.) ☐

If YES, please name the institution on whose website the list appears:

If YES, please give the address of the website containing the list (database):

NO, the higher education programmes are not listed on the national authorities' website(s), but there is a link from the website of a national authority to other sites where the programmes operated by the HEIs are listed. ☐

If NO, please provide a link to the website of the national authority:

COMMENTS:

PROVISION 7 – National information centre

Each Party shall establish or maintain a national information centre (Article IX.2.1). In each Party, the national information centre shall facilitate access to information on the higher education systems and qualifications of the other Parties (Article IX.2.2).

The articles in question commit the parties to establishing and maintaining a national information centre and describe the functions of the national information centres at the national level. The national information centre shall, in accordance with national laws and regulations, give advice and information on recognition matters and assessment of qualifications, to both individuals and institutions, including students; HEIs; staff members at HEIs; Ministries responsible for higher education; parents; employers; national information centres of other parties and other international partner institutions; any other interested parties (Explanatory report).

QUESTION 12 – Has a national information centre (national ENIC office) been established and are its responsibilities regulated at national level?

YES, a national information centre has been established and its tasks and responsibilities are regulated at national level ☐

Please give the title of the relevant legal act?

- in the original language:
- in English:

Please provide a LINK to or COPY of the article(s) establishing the national information centre and regulating its tasks and/or responsibilities:

YES, a national information centre has been established, but its tasks and responsibilities are not regulated at national level ☐

NO, a national information centre has not been established yet ☐

COMMENTS:

QUESTION 13 – Does the national information centre have a website?

YES, the national information centre has a website ☐

If YES, please provide the address of the website:

If YES, in which language(s) is it:

If YES, what type of information does it contain:

- national regulation on recognition of foreign qualifications ☐
- description of the activities, tasks and responsibilities of the national ENIC office ☐
- procedure and criteria for assessment of foreign qualifications ☐
- appeal procedure ☐
- information on the LRC and its subsidiary texts ☐
- mutual recognition agreements ☐
- general information on recognition tools (i.e. Diploma Supplement; ECTS) ☐
- description of the national higher education system (or link to the relevant website) ☐
- list of recognised HEIs and programmes (or link(s) to the relevant website(s)) ☐
- link to the national qualifications framework ☐
- other (please specify) ☐

NO, the national information centre has no website ☐

If NO, is there any other site where information about academic recognition is available (if so, please provide the website address):

COMMENTS:

PROVISION 8 – Refugees' qualifications

Each Party shall take all feasible and reasonable steps within the framework of its education system and in conformity with its constitutional, legal, and regulatory provisions to develop procedures designed to assess fairly and expeditiously whether refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation fulfil the relevant requirements for access to higher education, to further higher education programmes or to employment activities, even in cases in which the qualifications obtained in one of the Parties cannot be proven through documentary evidence (Article VII).

This article (Article VII) commits the parties to showing flexibility in the recognition of qualifications held by refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation, within the limits of each Party's constitutional, legal and regulatory provisions (Explanatory report).

Question 14 – Do the competent recognition authorities have procedures for recognition of qualifications from refugees and displaced persons without documentary evidence of their qualifications?

YES, there are procedures regulated at national level ☐

YES, there are procedures regulated by the competent recognition authorities ☐

Please provide a LINK to or COPY of the article(s) which regulate(s) the procedure for recognition of qualifications from refugees and displaced persons without documentary evidence of their qualifications:

If YES, is there a background paper or any other procedure covering recognition of qualifications without full documentary evidence? ☐

If YES, what are the possible outcomes of such a procedure?

- formal decision ☐
- advisory statement ☐
- explanatory document about the qualification without any form of recognition ☐
- other (please specify) ☐

NO, the recognition of qualifications held by refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation is not regulated and there are no procedures. ☐

COMMENTS:

PROVISION 9 – Resources to enable the national information centre to fulfil its functions

Every national information centre shall have at its disposal the necessary means to enable it to fulfil its functions (Article IX.2.3)

In order to fulfil a party's obligation under the convention, it is important that the national information centre be given adequate resources by which to fulfil its functions. These resources include an adequate number of competent staff, technical facilities and a sufficient budget to allow adequate contacts with HEIs in the country in which the centre is located as well as with national information centres of other parties (Explanatory report).

QUESTION 15 – How many staff (full time equivalents) work for the national information centre?

- Total number of staff:
- Number of staff employed as credential evaluators:
- Other staff (please specify):

COMMENTS:

QUESTION 16 – How many applications were received in 2013?

Applications for assessment of qualifications:

Other enquiries or requests for information (if counted):

COMMENTS:

QUESTION 17 – Are there adequate technical facilities for the national information centre? Please rate on a 5-point scale.

Not adequate Adequate

1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐

COMMENTS:

QUESTION 18 – How is the national information centre funded?

- State budget ☐
- Public foundation(s) ☐
- Private foundation(s) ☐
- International organisation(s) ☐
- Own income ☐
- Other (please specify) ☐

COMMENTS:

PROVISION 10 – Substantial difference

Each Party shall recognise the higher education qualifications, periods of study and qualifications giving access to higher education conferred in another Party, unless a substantial difference can be shown between the qualification or period of study for which recognition is sought and the corresponding qualification or period of study in the Party in which recognition is sought (Articles IV.1; V.1 and VI.1).

QUESTION 19 – Is there a definition of the term "substantial difference" at national level?

YES, there is a nationally regulated definition ☐

NO, it is up to the competent recognition authorities to interpret the term ☐

NO, but there are regulations or rules at institutional level ☐

COMMENTS:

QUESTION 20 – Please provide a list of what may be considered a substantial difference between a foreign qualification and a corresponding national qualification.

	NO	YES
Different access requirements	☐	☐
Nominal duration of study is more than one year less	☐	☐
Institution or programme is not accredited (quality assured)	☐	☐
No final thesis	☐	☐
Less demanding final thesis	☐	☐
Differences in programme content/courses	☐	☐

Online studies	☐	☐
Part-time studies	☐	☐
Qualification is awarded by a private educational institution	☐	☐
The programme is not provided in our country	☐	☐
The institution is recognised in the home country, but it is unknown to us	☐	☐
The institution is recognised in the home country, but is not listed in the international databases (e.g. IAU-WHED)	☐	☐
Teaching staff do not have the same qualifications as those required in our country (for example, fewer professors who have a PhD-level degree)	☐	☐
Other (please specify)	☐	☐

COMMENTS:

QUESTION 21 – In addition to the case of substantial differences between the corresponding qualifications, please provide any other reason why a foreign qualification is not recognised in your country by a competent academic recognition authority or why it is not recommended that it be recognised.

COMMENTS:

QUESTION 22 – Do the competent recognition authorities take rankings into account when assessing foreign higher education qualifications?

YES, this is regulated at national level ☐

If YES, what is the title of the relevant legal act?

- in the original language:
- in English:

Please provide a LINK to or COPY of the relevant article(s)

YES, it is not regulated at national level, but the competent recognition authorities use ranking as an assessment criterion ☐

NO, ranking is not used when assessing foreign qualifications, and it is not an assessment/recognition criterion ☐

COMMENTS

APPENDIX 2 – LIST OF INSTITUTIONS WHICH REPLIED TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE

ALBANIA
Ministry of Education and Sport

ANDORRA
Ministry of Education and Youth

ARMENIA
Ministry of Education and Science

AUSTRALIA
Australian Government Department of Education and Training

AUSTRIA
ENIC-NARIC Austria

AZERBAIJAN
Ministry of Education

BELARUS
Ministry of Education

BELGIUM – Flanders
Ministry of Education and Training

BELGIUM – French
Ministry of the Wallonia – Brussels Federation

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA
Ministry of Civil Affairs and Centre for Information and Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education

BULGARIA
Ministry of Education and Science

CROATIA
Ministry of Science, Education and Sport

CYPRUS
Ministry of Education and Culture

CZECH REPUBLIC
Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport

DENMARK
Danish Agency for Higher Education

ESTONIA
Ministry of Education and Research

FINLAND
Ministry of Education and Culture

FRANCE
Ministry of Education, Higher Education and Research

GEORGIA
Ministry of Education and Science

GERMANY
ENIC-NARIC Germany

HOLY SEE
Congregation for Catholic Education

HUNGARY
Ministry of Human Capacities

ICELAND
ENIC-NARIC Iceland

IRELAND
Department of Education and Skills

ISRAEL
Ministry of Education and the Council for Higher Education

ITALY
Ministry of Education, Universities and Research

KAZAKHSTAN
Ministry of Education and Science

LATVIA
Academic Information Centre

LIECHTENSTEIN
Office of Education

LITHUANIA
Ministry of Education and Science

LUXEMBOURG
Ministry of Higher Education and Research

MALTA
National Commission for Further and Higher Education

MONTENEGRO
Ministry of Education

The NETHERLANDS
Ministry of Education and Science

NEW ZEALAND
New Zealand Qualifications Authority

NORWAY
Ministry of Education and Research

POLAND
Ministry of Science and Higher Education

PORTUGAL
Ministry of Education and Science

ROMANIA
National Centre for Recognition and Equivalence of Diplomas

RUSSIAN FEDERATION
Ministry of Education and Science

SAN MARINO
Department of Education

SERBIA
Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development

SLOVENIA
Ministry of Education, Science and Sport

SPAIN
Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport

SWEDEN
Ministry of Education and Research

SWITZERLAND
Swiss ENIC office

THE FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA
Ministry of Education and Science

TURKEY
Council of Higher Education

UKRAINE
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This report summarises the results of the first round of monitoring of the implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention since its signature in 1997.

It presents the key findings and conclusions of a survey on the recognition of qualifications in higher education and lays out the recommendations made by the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee. These recommendations will require further political decisions on follow-up action from the committee and from the national authorities.

PREMS 027919

ENG

The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It comprises 47 member states, including all members of the European Union. All Council of Europe member states have signed up to the European Convention on Human Rights, a treaty designed to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The European Court of Human Rights oversees the implementation of the Convention in the member states.

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