

COUNTERING EDUCATION FRAUD: PROMOTING ETHICS, TRANSPARENCY, AND INTEGRITY

” FACTS AND FIGURES

The fake degree industry grew significantly with the internet, valued at \$1 billion USD in 2014 and over \$7 billion USD by 2022.¹

Diploma mills contribute to immigration scams and credential abuse, with thousands of fake degrees issued annually. This impacts students, employers, and legitimate educational institutions² and has a negative impact on the financing of education worldwide.

Educational fraud can lead to severe mental health issues, such as depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts among victims.³

WHAT IS EDUCATION FRAUD⁴

- ▶ Behaviour or action occurring in the field of education intended to deceive and obtain an unfair advantage. It includes the activities of diploma mills, accreditation mills, visa mills, essay mills and essay banks;
- ▶ Impersonation by undertaking in whole or in part any work or assessment required as part of a programme in the place of an enrolled learner;
- ▶ Illegal or irregular use of authentic documents;
- ▶ Plagiarism;
- ▶ Production or use of forged, plagiarised or counterfeit documents; and
- ▶ The offer of unrecognised or unaccredited qualifications with the intention of deceiving another.

TERMS AND DEFINITIONS⁵

- ▶ **Accreditation Mill:** Unrecognised organisation misleadingly providing education accreditation.
- ▶ **Diploma Mill:** Unrecognised institution falsely issuing academic qualifications.
- ▶ **Essay Mill:** Services completing assignments for students for financial gain.
- ▶ **Visa Mill:** Unrecognised organisation falsely representing itself to aid immigration fraud.

- ▶ **Plagiarism:** Using work, ideas, content, structures or images without giving appropriate credit or acknowledgment to the original source(s), especially where originality is expected. The term “plagiarised” applies to the ideas, content, structures or images in question.
- ▶ **Fraudulent education service providers:** Include accreditation mills, diploma mills, essay mills, essay banks and visa mills, whether stand-alone or part of larger undertakings.

Key Threats of Education Fraud

- ▶ Threatens the full enjoyment of the right to education
- ▶ Compromises quality education and equal learning opportunities for all learners
- ▶ Undermines trust in education systems, international mobility, and employability
- ▶ Impacts economically on member States and on the financing of education
- ▶ Diminishes credibility of regulated professions and public-service employment
- ▶ Damages international reputation and national security



1. In Eaton S.E., Carmichael J. J. and Pethrick H. (edited by), Fake Degrees and Fraudulent Credentials in Higher Education, Springer 2023, p.5-17.
 2. Cohen, E. B., & Winch, R. (2011). Diploma and accreditation mills: New trends in credential abuse. Bedford: Verifile Accredibase.
 3. Network for Public Health Law. (n.d.). Struggling in the Shadows: The Mental Anguish of Educational Fraud. Retrieved from <https://www.networkforphl.org/news-insights/struggling-in-the-shadows-the-mental-anguish-of-educational-fraud/>
 4. The definition of education fraud can be found in the Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)18 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on countering education fraud
 5. The main terms relating to fraud in education are listed in the Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)18 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on countering education fraud

Recommended actions for member States

- ▶ **Develop and Promote Quality Education:** Governments should eliminate activities contributing to education fraud at both national and transnational levels.
- ▶ **Protect Against Fraudulent Education Services:** Measures should be taken to shield students, researchers, and educational staff from fraudulent education services marketed through various media.
- ▶ **Support Preventative Measures:** Provide support for educational institutions and stakeholders to implement preventative and protective measures, ensuring equality of opportunity across all education and training sectors.
- ▶ **Monitor Technological Developments:** Regularly review technological advancements that could contribute to education fraud.
- ▶ **Facilitate International Cooperation:** Encourage international cooperation and peer learning through the Council of Europe Platform on Ethics, Transparency, and Integrity in Education (ETINED).
- ▶ **Disseminate the CM/Recommendations:** Ensure the Recommendations are translated and widely disseminated in the official languages of member countries.

COUNCIL OF EUROPE STANDARDS

Recommendations and resolutions of the Committee of Ministers on transparency, ethics and integrity

CDEDU⁵ and ETINED⁶

- ▶ CM/Rec(2022)18 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on countering education fraud
- ▶ CM/Rec(2019)9 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on fostering a culture of ethics in the teaching profession
- ▶ CM/Rec(2012)13 on ensuring quality education, defines a quality education as being, among other things, 'free of corruption'

Other sectors

- ▶ CM/Rec(2014)7 on the protection of whistleblowers
- ▶ CM/Rec(2012)7 on the responsibility of public authorities for academic freedom and institutional autonomy
- ▶ CM/Rec(2000)10 on codes of conduct for public officials
- ▶ CM/Res(1997)24 on the twenty guiding principles for the fight against corruption

5. CDEDU: Steering Committee for Education of the Council of Europe

6. ETINED: Council of Europe Platform on Ethics, Transparency and Integrity in Education

* All references to Kosovo, whether to the territory, institutions or population, in this text shall be understood in full compliance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 and without prejudice to the status of Kosovo.

Standards, legal instruments and norms addressing education fraud

- ▶ Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms
- ▶ European Cultural Convention
- ▶ European Social Charter
- ▶ Lisbon Recognition Convention
- ▶ Education strategy 2024-2030: Learners First
- ▶ Reykjavik Principles for Democracy

PROJECTS ON ETHICS, TRANSPARENCY, AND INTEGRITY IN EDUCATION

- ▶ Strengthen Integrity and Combat Corruption in the Higher Education in Armenia
- ▶ Strengthen Integrity and Combat Corruption in the Higher Education in Montenegro
- ▶ Strengthen Integrity and Combat Corruption in the Higher Education in Serbia
- ▶ Strengthen Integrity and Combat Corruption in the Higher Education (HF 19) in Kosovo*

PUBLICATIONS

- ▶ Volume 1: 7th Session of the Prague Forum
- ▶ Volume 2: Ethical principles
- ▶ Volume 3: Ethical behaviour of all actors in education
- ▶ Volume 4: Codes of conduct for teachers in Europe: A background Study
- ▶ Volume 5: South-East European Project on Policies for Academic Integrity
- ▶ Volume 6: Project on Academic Integrity in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan and Turkey, 2021
- ▶ Best practice programme in promoting academic integrity – A compendium of best practices
- ▶ Volume 7: Means to Counter Education Fraud: Legislation, practices and instruments
- ▶ Glossary of terms related to ethics and integrity in education

COUNCIL OF EUROPE WEBSITES

Council of Europe Platform on Ethics, Transparency and Integrity in Education (ETINED):

www.coe.int/etined

Group of States against Corruption (GRECO):

www.coe.int/greco

Parliamentary Assembly's anti-corruption platform:

<https://pace.coe.int/en/pages/anti-corruption-platform>

