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

Report to the Bologna Follow Up Group

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The Council of Europe Higher Education Programme

The higher education programme of the Council of Europe is guided by the **Council of Europe 2030 Education Strategy “Learners First”**. The Strategy not only provides the vision for the Council of Europe work in the field of education in general and higher education in particular, but also includes a Roadmap for its Programme of Activities 2024-2027.

The new Education Programme 2024-2027 was adopted by the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers in November 2023. At the end of 2023 the Terms of Reference of the Steering Committee for Education were adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe.

The higher education programme comprises the programmes related to the implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, including its Co-Secretariat, running (jointly with UNESCO) of the ENIC Network; democratic mission of higher education, Platform on Ethics, Transparency and Integrity in Education (ETINED) and the European Qualifications Passport for Refugees. '.

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

Through the adoption of its new terms of reference in October 2023, the CDEDU Sub-Group on Higher Education has been reinforced and its membership has been enlarged from 13 to 25 members, comprising representatives of Ministries, in charge of higher education, as well as academic representatives and international NGOs. To ensure better coordination of work with the Bologna Process, a representative of the EHEA is among the Sub-Group members.

To date the new CDEDU Sub-Group on Higher Education had two meetings - on the 14-15 February 2024 in Strasbourg and on 18-19 September 2024 in Paris. The next meeting of the Sub-Group on Higher Education Policy will take place on 6-7 March 2025 in Strasbourg.

At the end of 2024 the Council of Europe published a brochure containing an overview of its higher education projects, which can be viewed on the newly updated [higher education website](#).

Higher education projects

1. Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee

Overview

Together with UNESCO, the Council of Europe ensures the Secretariat of the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC). The Lisbon Recognition Convention is one of the most ratified Conventions in the Council of Europe and it remains the only legally binding text in the European Higher Education Area.

Key priorities in 2024-2027

In 2025 the Lisbon Recognition Convention Bureau is pursuing its work on:

- Finalising the update of the ENIC- NARIC Charter
- Updating the 'Revised Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education'(2007)

The workplan also foresees drafting a new text on 'digital solutions', taking into account the existing 'Guidelines for national online information systems' (2019).

The LRC Bureau started its work on the Revised Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education. The workshop on this topic was held in the framework of the next annual ENIC-NARIC meeting, which took place in Naples on 23-25 June 2024.

The next meeting of the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee will be held in autumn 2025 and will be hosted by UNESCO in Paris.

2. Contribution to the ENIC-NARIC Networks

Overview

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

The ENIC-NARIC networks have joint initiatives, linked to supporting exchange on qualifications-recognition information on policies and practices and providing an opportunity for capacity building activities, as well as participating in consultative processes on international normative instruments related to qualification recognition.

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

Developments in 2024

The current composition of the ENIC Bureau is as follows:

- Chiara Finocchietti (Italy) – ENIC President
- Dženan Omanović (Bosnia and Herzegovina) – ENIC Vice-President

The elections for the second ENIC Vice-President will be held at the next ENIC-NARIC meeting in Tirana (Albania) in May 2025.

The current composition of the NARIC Advisory Board is as follows:

- Gunnar Vaht (Estonia);
- Helén Sophie Haugen (Norway);
- Gianina Chirazi (Romania).

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

As a result of the call for pilot projects, nine applications were received for funding. Out of these applications the evaluation board decided to support six projects from the following countries: Albania, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Ukraine and United Kingdom. The projects were implemented until the end of 2023 and the projects' results were presented in the framework of a workshop at the last annual ENIC-NARIC meeting in June 2024.

The topics range from the recognition of refugees' qualifications to combatting education fraud to stepping up the capacity of the National Information Centres through enhanced training of credential evaluators.

The second call for ENIC projects was launched at the end of 2023 and currently three projects are being implemented from the following countries: Armenia (on refugee qualifications), Bosnia and

Herzegovina (on automatic recognition), Ukraine (on recognition of qualifications from temporarily occupied territories and on education fraud).

The 2025 annual ENIC-NARIC meeting will take place in Tirana, Albania, organised with the financial support of the Council of Europe.

3. Automatic Recognition

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

According to its terms of reference, the purpose of this Group was to:

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

In 2023-2024 the Council of Europe Ad Hoc Working Group on Automatic Recognition of Qualifications held five meetings. From November 2023 through March 2024, the Working Group organised consultations with the key stakeholders, notably students, higher education institutions and public authorities in charge of higher education.

Through its consultations and discussions with key stakeholders, the Working Group has advanced the understanding of automatic recognition, underlining the differences and divergencies in approaches and identified the necessary steps to move forward.

The Working Group presented its findings and proposals for the work ahead at the last Plenary session of the Steering Committee for Education in October 2024

The Steering Committee for Education renewed the mandate of the Working Group and extended its membership, including more key stakeholders, including public authorities in charge of higher education, as well as representatives of the European Commission and UNESCO.

The primary objective of the Working Group is to identify and design the necessary building blocks to ensure clarity, build trust, and establish the preconditions required for the successful implementation of automatic recognition.

The Group will advise the Steering Committee for Education on the development and implementation of a common framework for automatic recognition of higher education qualifications. An essential aspect of the Group's work is establishing a triangular, mutually reinforcing relation between the new legal instrument, Multilateral Treaty and the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

4. Recognition of refugees' qualifications:

There are currently two important initiatives implemented in this field: Draft CM Recommendation on "Valuing the Academic and Professional Skills of Refugees in Europe and the [European Qualifications Passport for Refugees \(EQPR\)](#)," in Italy.

4.1.Draft CM Recommendation on "Valuing the Academic and Professional Skills of Refugees in Europe".

In order to implement the CoE Education Strategy, in particular one of its priority themes 'Enhancing education's social responsibility and responsiveness', the Council of Europe started to work on the

Committee of Ministers Recommendation on Valuing the Academic and Professional Skills of Refugees in Europe (provisional title), containing principles and guidelines.

The draft Recommendation was discussed by the Sub-Group on Higher Education at its meeting at the end of September 2024 and passed its first reading at the last session of the Steering Committee for Education in October 2024.

The revised text of the Recommendation will be presented at the next meeting of the Steering Committee for Education on 17-19 March 2025.

4.2. The European Qualifications Passport for Refugees (EQPR)-

An overview

The European Qualifications Passport for Refugees (EQPR) is a Council of Europe initiative aiming at facilitating the recognition of refugees' qualifications even in the absence of full documentation.

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

Latest developments

There are 23 countries currently participating in the EQPR: Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, Croatia, France, Germany, Georgia, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Monaco, Montenegro (joined in October 2024), the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Serbia, United Kingdom. To date, over 100 EQPRs have been issued.

More than 80 credential evaluators from 22 participating ENICs are now trained on the EQPR methodology, which increases the capacity of the project to promote the EQPR as a valid and trustful tool to assess qualifications of refugees without sufficient documentation.

In June 2024 the event 'Hand in hand to support the integration of refugees-education, training and recognition of qualifications' co-organised by the Council of Europe and France Education International and the University of Lyon 2, supported by NGOs, explored practical tools and programmes helping refugees to continue their studies. The event was followed by an evaluation session, where 8 out of 22 countries were represented among the evaluators's team.

The EQPR evaluation session took place in Bonn, Germany from 23 to 27 September 2024.

In 2025 the EQPR will undergo an evaluation in order to assess its progress, achievements and identify ways of further advancing the work.

5. Democratic mission of higher education

Latest developments

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

With the launch of the new project "Academic Freedom in Action", the Council of Europe Education department continues its work on the protection and promotion of the values of academic freedom, the premises of which were given in the Recommendation CM/Rec(2012)7 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the responsibility of public authorities for academic freedom and institutional autonomy.

To new Working Group on the Democratic Mission of Higher Education was set up at the end of 2023 with eight prominent academic experts. To date the Working Group has held four meetings.

The [conference “Academic Freedom in Action” took place in on 13-14 November 2024 in Strasbourg.](#)

The collaboration between the Council of Europe and the International Consortium for Higher Education, Civic Responsibility, and Democracy also continues and the eighth instalment of the Global Forum on Higher Education is currently being prepared to take place at the Charles University in Prague, on 3-4 June 2025.

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

An overview and main developments

The ETINED [Platform](#) is a network of specialists appointed by member States of the Council of Europe and of States Parties to the European Cultural Convention. Its mission is to:

- Share information and good practices in the field of transparency and integrity in education;
- Contribute to the development of adequate answers to challenges that corruption poses to the sector of education and higher education;
- Create a virtuous cycle in education, whereby all actors commit to fundamental positive ethical principles;
- Develop capacity-building for all actors.

Latest developments

The [ETINED](#) Platform is currently working on the following initiatives:

6.1. Setting up a Centre for Preventing and Countering Education Fraud

The Steering Committee for Education recognised establishing a Centre on Preventing and Countering Education Fraud as a key initiative.

The CDEDU took note of the strong support received from the Italian delegation to the CDEDU, which indicated, on behalf of the Minister of Universities and Research of Italy, that the country was also prepared to offer logistical support, including hosting the structure of the future Centre in its territory.

6.3. FraudS+ “Student Awareness on Fraud in Education”

Following the endorsement by the CDEDU in March 2024, the Council of Europe launched the survey on “Student awareness of fraud in education”, building on the previous research from the Erasmus+ project “FraudS+ - False Records, Altered Diploma, and Diploma Mills Qualifications Collection”.

The survey targets higher education students and its objectives are to:

- Understand the knowledge of students on fraud in higher education.
- Raise awareness about this issue and enhance their ability to address it.
- Support the creation of tools that promote ethics and transparency in higher education.

Currently, the survey replies are being collected and assessed by CIMEA, who are the partners in this project.

7. Council of Europe Students’ Rights Charter

The development of the Council of Europe Students’ Rights Charter is part of the main actions proposed in the 2030 Council of Europe Education Strategy “Learners First”.

This work on the Charter has been launched at the start of the 2025 with the production of a report providing an overview of existing charters related to students rights at international, regional and national levels. The report will highlight the main objectives, scope and specific features of each selected instrument and will identify any impact and implementation gaps that the Council of Europe Students' Rights Charter could fill.

The report will be presented at the next meeting of the Sub-Group on Higher Education Policy on 6-7 March 2025 and the Steering Committee for Education meeting on 17-19 March, together with the proposed Terms of Reference for the Drafting Group.

8. Artificial Intelligence and Recognition

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is transforming education and the recognition of qualifications, offering both opportunities and challenges. Recognising these developments, the Council of Europe would like to launch a new initiative aimed at understanding and addressing the intersection of AI with higher education credential evaluation.

The project proposal on artificial intelligence and recognition will be presented at the next meeting of the Sub-Group on Higher Education Policy and the Steering Committee for Education meeting in March 2025.