

## UNESCO Higher Education Activity Report for the Bologna Follow-up Group Meeting

February 2025

This report provides an overview of UNESCO's activities since September 2024 which are of relevance to the European Higher Education Area.

### 1. Major UNESCO's Education Events in late 2024

- **International Forum of UNESCO Chairs and Partners** (Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 25 – 27 September), aimed to strengthen knowledge sharing, partnership building and interdisciplinary and collaborative research capacity in Africa, including through more inclusive and effective South-South and South-South-North research partnerships. More information [here](#).
- **World Teachers' Day** (Paris, France, 4 October). The 2024 celebrations focused on "Valuing teachers' voices: towards a new social contract for education." The event emphasized the importance of integrating teachers' perspectives into educational policies and fostering a supportive environment for their professional development. More information [here](#).
- **Global Education Meeting** (Fortaleza, Brazil, 31 October – 1 November), brought together Ministers of Education and Finance as well as some 800 key stakeholders to review SDG 4 advancements, highlight transformative actions, and foster multilateral engagement. The meeting focused on equity, inclusion and on boosting education investments and innovative financing, culminating in the [Fortaleza Declaration](#) which reaffirmed the commitment to international cooperation in education. During the Meeting, a session on equitable access, quality, and mobility in higher education was organized. More information [here](#).
- **UNESCO International Forum on the Futures of Education** (Suwon – Gyeonggido, Republic of Korea, 2- 4 December) emphasized the need for higher education institutions to play a pivotal role in addressing global challenges such as the climate crisis, the rise of artificial intelligence, and increasing social inequalities. The forum advocated for a renewed social contract for education, urging universities to foster lifelong learning, promote interdisciplinary research, and strengthen their commitment to social responsibility to build more just, inclusive, and sustainable futures. More information [here](#).

The **2024/5 Global Education Monitoring Report** was released on 31 October during the Global Education Meeting. Entitled "[Leadership in Education](#)," this edition of the flagship report underscores the pivotal role of effective leadership at all levels, including higher education, in enhancing learning outcomes. It emphasizes the necessity for identifying, selecting, training, and supporting individuals with the requisite skills and vision to lead educational institutions.

Lastly, on **24 January 2025** UNESCO organized a major event in Paris for the International Day of Education, under the theme of [AI and Education: Preserving Human Agency in a World of Automation](#). As part of this, a panel discussion was organized on "How are human agency and AI being navigated in higher education classrooms". The panel explored how AI is impacting teaching and learning in HED, its implications for skills trajectories and how to support students in their interactions with AI for learning.

## 2. Higher Education

### Update on activities - September 2024 – February 2025

Thirty-six (36) countries have now ratified the [Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education](#) which entered into force in 2023, with San Marino and Djibouti being the latest to join. This represents over 25% of the world's 6.4 million internationally mobile students. About twenty UNESCO Member States report to be at an advanced stage in the ratification process and it is hoped that we will see an exponential growth in ratifications by end 2025.

The implementation of the [interim work programme](#) (2024-2025) of the Global Convention adopted by the Intergovernmental Conference of the States Parties in 2024 is underway, in particular related to the development of operational guidelines for the Global Convention, research studies on quality assurance, including transnational education, and the recognition of refugee qualifications. These documents will be discussed during the next ordinary session of the Intergovernmental Conference to be held on 24-25 June 2025 in Paris. It is hoped that during this conference the new Operational Guidelines will be adopted. Work on a new recommendation on the relationship between the Global and regional conventions will also kick off in 2025.

At the regional level, Greece ratified the **Lisbon Recognition Convention** in September 2024, allowing the treaty to reach nearly universal ratification within the region. The LRC Bureau continues to meet regularly, and in 2025 will be working towards the organization of the Committee in October in Paris, hosted by UNESCO. The Bureau has also recently approved the new ENIC-NARIC charter, and this will be submitted to the States Parties during Q1 2025 for final adoption.

A series of regional meetings were organized in late 2024/early 2025.

- 11-12 November – [ASEAN Policy Forum on Higher Education](#) was held in Lao PDR to discuss a common space for higher education, also reaffirming their commitment to implement the ASEAN-EU Strategic Partnership (2023-2027).
- 3-4 December – [4<sup>th</sup> Asia-Pacific Network of National Information Centres](#) (APNNIC) Plenary meeting was organised by the APNNIC Secretariat to foster dialogue to promote the fair and transparent recognition of educational qualifications across the Asia-Pacific region, with a focus on credential fraud, AI and transnational education.
- 10 – 12 December - States Parties and Observers gathered for the 3rd session of the [Buenos Aires Convention Committee and CINALC](#) (Network of National Information Centres in Latin America and the Caribbean) [Network](#) meeting in Montevideo
- 12 December – A special event was convened during the Nairobi Forum (see below) to mark the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the [Addis Convention](#) and convene the meeting of the African Network of National Implementation Structures to discuss the current work plan.

**Campus Africa Flagship:** The UNESCO Chairs and Partners Forum included two Campus Africa side sessions presenting the Flagship and facilitating a dialogue on the Future of Work in Africa. This was followed up by two online dialogues reconvening the UNESCO Chairs to arrive at a road map for moving forward. Day 1 of the [2024 UNESCO Forum on higher education in Africa: A driver for sustainable development](#) took place in Nairobi, Kenya from 10 - 11 December focused on Campus Africa. The forum gathered some 250 participants from all over Africa to discuss how the higher education sector can drive green and digital solutions supporting more sustainable and inclusive development on the continent, and the ways in which higher education could be even more closely aligned with labour market needs while

empowering youth with future-ready skills. Participants also examined the critical role of strategic funding in higher education to drive innovation, close skills gaps and foster economic growth.

During this event, some 40 participants from the **UNESCO-China Funds-in-Trust Phase III** project also met to discuss the progress and share innovative flagship solutions in enhancing the quality and relevance of technical higher education in the 6 countries participating in the project (Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Gabon, Senegal, Tanzania and Uganda).

By the end of 2024, the **UNESCO Qualifications Passport (UPQ)** had been implemented in 11 refugee-hosting areas<sup>1</sup>, including both refugee settlements and urban areas. Collaboration is ongoing with 11 national qualifications/recognition authorities. To date, UNESCO has received 464 applications from these 11 refugee hosting areas. A total of 216 interview evaluation sessions have been conducted, resulting in 160 Qualifications Passports being issued. Out of these 160 UQP recipients, approximately 22% are female.

### Looking ahead for 2025

With its focus on “Reinventing Higher Education”, the [Word Higher Education Conference III](#) in 2022 mobilized an iterative global process of collaborative agenda-setting and action for transforming higher education systems and institutions to unleash higher education’s transformative potential to contribute to social and human development. **In 2025, this work will advance through a WHEC III+3 follow-on publication.** This publication will spark conversations with regional stakeholders and feed into WHEC III+5 convenings envisioned for 2027. In addition, UNESCO will advance **thematic work related to WHEC III+3 recommendations** (e.g. on academic freedom, the transformation of higher education teaching and pedagogy, and strengthening the university research-innovation nexus).

In its WHEC follow-up work, UNESCO will also be focusing attention on **higher education financing**, inclusive of innovative financing modalities, with commissioned mapping and research work as an initial step.

Additionally, in 2025 UNESCO will launch a new strand of work on **scholarships** in cross-border / transnational higher education. This will commence with a commissioned mapping of scholarship modalities, actors and trends; and be followed by the organization of an expert group consultation with the possibility of developing new UNESCO recommendations in this area, both for immediate dissemination and to inform post-2030 planning around academic mobility.

Scholarships and intracontinental mobility are a particular focus of work within **Campus Africa**. It has a dedicated line of work intended to catalyze international cooperation in **scholars, researcher and student mobility**. In 2025, the programme will extend its support in higher education to refugees and learners in emergency contexts.

During 2025, the **CFITIII** project will further improve the quality of its flagship products through capacity building and related research, generate shareable and actionable results, strengthen international cooperation among the higher education institutions that are part of the project.

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<sup>1</sup> Ongoing implementation countries for the UPQ include Zambia, Kenya, Uganda, Democratic Republic of Congo, Togo, South Sudan. Countries where mapping and/or dialogue is ongoing are: Zimbabwe, Ethiopia, Egypt, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Peru, Uruguay, Iraq, Qatar.

In 2025 UNESCO will be working on the revision process of the **1997 UNESCO Recommendation Concerning the Status of Higher Education Teaching Personnel**, anticipated to be approved at the UNESCO General Conference in November 2025. UNESCO will develop a complementing line of work specifically on academic freedom and institutional autonomy.