



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization

Education  
Sector

# A practical guide to recognition

**Implementing the Global Convention on the Recognition  
of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education**



## UNESCO Education Sector

Education is UNESCO's top priority because it is a basic human right and the foundation on which to build peace and drive sustainable development. UNESCO is the United Nations' specialized agency for education and the Education Sector provides global and regional leadership in education, strengthens national education systems and responds to contemporary global challenges through education with a special focus on gender equality and Africa.



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UNESCO, as the United Nations' specialized agency for education, is entrusted to lead and coordinate the Education 2030 Agenda, which is part of a global movement to eradicate poverty through 17 Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. Education, essential to achieve all of these goals, has its own dedicated Goal 4, which aims to ***“ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.”*** The Education 2030 Framework for Action provides guidance for the implementation of this ambitious goal and commitments.



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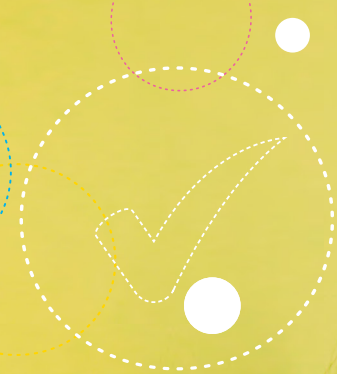
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# Introduction

The Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education was adopted at the 40th session of the UNESCO General Conference in November 2019, as the first United Nations treaty on higher education with a global scope.

This new Convention establishes universal principles for the recognition of studies and qualifications to improve access to, and mobility between higher education institutions worldwide. This is universally acknowledged as a facilitator to accelerating knowledge sharing, knowledge circulation and international research cooperation in higher education within the context of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

More than five million students worldwide are currently enrolled in higher education institutions outside of their home countries both physically and virtually, with this number expected to double within the next ten years.

The Global Convention establishes the rights of individuals to have their foreign qualifications assessed in a fair, transparent and non-discriminatory manner.

This Guide provides a step-by step practical approach to recognition of foreign qualifications both for credential evaluation practitioners and for individuals seeking recognition of their foreign qualifications.

The overarching principle of the Global and Regional Conventions is to promote a spirit of recognition for all types of learners, academics and knowledge on the move.

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5

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A smiling man with a beard and dark hair, wearing a grey zip-up jacket over a white t-shirt, is holding an open book. He is standing in front of a blurred bookshelf filled with books. The background is a soft-focus library or bookstore setting.

1.

# Frequently asked questions about recognition

## 1. What is recognition?

Recognition is a formal acknowledgement by a competent recognition authority regarding the validity and academic level of a foreign education qualification, of partial studies or prior learning.

## 2. What is the purpose of recognition?

Recognition aims to provide an applicant with outcomes, including, but not limited to, the right to apply for admission to higher education and the possibility to seek employment opportunities.

## 3. Who seeks recognition?

Individuals who have acquired a qualification, partially completed a higher education programme or gained prior learning in another country.

## 4. Why seek recognition?

Individuals seek recognition for many reasons, for instance, to begin or continue studies in higher education, to use an academic title to seek access to a specific profession or to ease transition into the labour market.

## 5. What are the benefits of recognition?

Recognition is a powerful tool to facilitate mobility from one country to another to study, research, teach or work. Through processes of recognition, a qualification from one education system is acknowledged in another education system.

## 6. What is the role of the national authorities in recognition matters?

The national authorities are ultimately responsible for the legislation regulating recognition. In many countries, ministries of education also play a role in the assessment

and recognition of qualifications, either directly or by delegating authority to another entity, e.g. the National Information Centre or a similar entity.

## 7. Who is responsible for recognition?

Recognition is undertaken by a **competent recognition authority**, which is an entity mandated to assess qualifications and/or make decisions on the recognition of qualifications by laws, regulations, policies or practices of a country. Recognition authorities are often public institutions, such as individual higher education institutions, but they may also be organised as private companies, foundations or non-governmental organizations.

In some countries, there will be more than one competent recognition authority, each with a responsibility for different types of recognition.

## 8. What is the role of the competent recognition authority?

Recognition authorities serve as door openers and gatekeepers. Their roles must be balanced carefully.

Recognition authorities can open the door for mobility and inclusion in the academic world or labour market of another country. They can also provide a public trust service in protecting national education and labour markets from fake diplomas and substandard qualifications.

## 9. How should the recognition process be conducted?

Recognition authorities should conduct the recognition assessments in good faith, giving clear reasons for decisions. Their decisions must be based on appropriate, reliable, accessible and up-to-date information on higher-education systems, institutions,

programmes and quality assurance mechanisms and with due respect for the diversity of higher-education systems worldwide.

Trust, transparency, fairness, timeliness and non-discrimination are principles that must be considered during the recognition process. Information exchange between higher education systems must be encouraged during the recognition process and respect of the global diversity of education systems must also be kept in mind.

#### 10. What is the role of the higher education institutions in recognition matters?

Higher education institutions often play a central role in recognition matters. In most countries, they have the power to make decisions regarding admission to education programmes, the right to use an academic title and the recognition of entire qualifications or partial studies. Higher education institutions may also be involved in recognition of prior learning.

#### 11. How can recognition be expressed?

The form of recognition may vary, depending on the purpose of the recognition and the national context. In some contexts, recognition is a formal legal decision,

whereas in other contexts recognition is given in the form of an advisory statement.

#### 12. How can recognition bodies justify the non-recognition of qualifications?

Non-recognition is the exception and must be duly explained and justified.

Recognition authorities may do so by demonstrating that the differences between the applicant's qualification and comparable qualifications in their own system would prevent the applicant from succeeding in the desired activity, e.g. that **the differences are so significant** that the applicant would be unable to successfully complete a programme of higher education or succeed in work.

#### 13. How can recognition bodies assess whether the differences of qualifications are significant?

The significant differences or substantial differences are differences that would have a negative impact on the purposes that are being pursued. This differs from an equivalence-based approach, where the aim is to establish that the foreign qualification is essentially similar to a domestic one. It is desirably to phase out the equivalence-based approach as this hinders the advancement of best practices in recognition.



2.

Why is recognition  
important?

## Enhance the right to access to education

The recognition of qualifications enhances the right to access education since it may give the opportunity to individuals to begin or continue studies in higher education. Holders of a qualification have the right to an assessment of their qualification.

It facilitates the academic mobility, the exchange between higher education institutions, enhances the quality assurance of study programmes and the quality and reliability of qualifications, which are recognised by the competent authority of a foreign country.

## Trust in quality

Recognition of qualification represents a trust in quality.

Good structures for quality assurance of education are crucial for enabling trust in a qualification. Quality assurance mechanisms provide a solid basis for competent authorities to recognize the qualifications awarded by foreign higher education institutions. In this sense, quality assurance provides a foundation upon which trust can be built and from which recognition is possible.

## Contribute to quality of education institutions

There is also a great number of ways in which recognition in itself can contribute to the quality of educational institutions. First, recognition is a prerequisite for mobility and internationalisation of research and studies. The circulation of researchers and students helps to spread new perspectives and ideas between education systems, and this aids

in safeguarding the quality and relevance of teaching and research. Recognition is also a prerequisite for attracting international talent to higher education systems.

Secondly, the establishment of structures for the recognition of qualifications and prior learning help the education institutions conceptualise what it means for a student to be ready and prepared for studies and research. Structures for recognition help to secure quality in admission of students.

Thirdly, there is an inherent social commitment in recognition, enhancing the cultural and social significance of higher education systems in line with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 4. Good recognition practice is an important factor in creating a fair and just system for qualifications.

## Promoting international understanding of higher education systems

Finally, the ability and capacity of an education institution to recognize and understand qualifications and learning outcomes from other institutions and the quality assurance that supports them, reflects the institution's ability to understand the quality and quality assurance processes of its own qualifications.



3.

# Key terms and definitions

## *The following terms and their definitions were adopted in 2019 for the UNESCO Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education.*

**Access (to higher education):** the right provided to any individual holding a qualification to apply and be considered for admission to a level of higher education.

**Admission (to higher education institutions and programmes):** the act of, or system for, allowing qualified applicants to pursue higher education at a given institution and/or in a given programme.

### **Applicant:**

- (a) an individual submitting to the competent recognition authority a qualification, partial studies, or prior learning for assessment and/or recognition; or
- (b) an entity acting with consent on behalf of an individual.

**Assessment:** the evaluation of an applicant's qualifications, partial studies, or prior learning by a competent recognition authority engaged in the evaluation of qualifications.

**Competent authority:** an individual or entity that has the authority, capacity, or legal power to perform a designated function.

**Competent recognition authority:** an entity which, in accordance with the laws, regulations, policies, or practices of a State Party, assesses qualifications and/or makes decisions on the recognition of qualifications.

**Cross-border education:** all modes of educational delivery which involve the movement of people, knowledge, programmes, providers and curriculum across States Parties' borders, including, but not limited to, quality-assured international joint degree programmes, cross-border

higher education, transnational education, offshore education and borderless education.

**Displaced person:** an individual forced to move from his or her locality or environment and occupational activities to another locality or environment.

**Formal education system:** State Party's education system, including all officially recognized entities with responsibility for education, as well as public and private education institutions at all levels recognized by a State Party's competent authorities and authorized thereby to deliver instruction and other education-related services.

**Formal learning:** learning derived from activities within a structured learning setting, leading to a formal qualification, and provided by an education institution recognized by a State Party's competent authorities and authorized thereby to deliver such learning activities.

**Higher education:** all types of study programmes or sets of courses of study at the post-secondary level which are recognized by the competent authorities of a State Party, or of a constituent unit thereof, as belonging to its higher-education system.

**Higher education institution:** an establishment providing higher education and recognized by a competent authority of a State Party, or of a constituent unit thereof, as belonging to its higher-education system.

**Higher education programme:** a post-secondary programme of study recognized by the competent authority of a State Party, or of a constituent unit thereof, as belonging to its higher-education system

and the successful completion of which provides the student with a higher-education qualification.

**Informal learning:** learning which occurs outside the formal education system and which results from daily life activities related to work, family, local community, or leisure.

**International joint degree:** a type of cross-border education degree; a single degree recognized and/or authorized and conferred jointly upon completion of an integrated, coordinated and jointly offered programme, by two or more higher education institutions belonging to more than one country.

**Learning outcomes:** a learner's acquired knowledge and skills upon completion of a learning process.

**Mobility:** the physical or virtual movement of individuals outside their country for the purpose of studying, researching, teaching, or working.

**Non-formal learning:** learning achieved within an education or training framework which places an emphasis on working life and which does not belong to the formal education system.

**Non-traditional learning modes:** formal, non-formal and informal mechanisms for the delivery of educational programmes and learning activities not primarily relying on face-to-face interaction between the educator and the learner.

**Partial recognition:** the partial recognition of a full and completed qualification which cannot be fully recognized on account of the demonstration of substantial differences by a competent recognition authority.

**Partial studies:** any part of a higher-education programme which has been evaluated and, while not a complete

programme in itself, represents a significant acquisition of knowledge, skills, attitudes and competencies.

**Prior learning:** the experience, knowledge, skills, attitudes and competencies which an individual has acquired as a result of formal, non-formal, or informal learning, assessed against a given set of learning outcomes, objectives, or standards.

### **Qualification:**

- (a) **Higher education qualification:** any degree, diploma, certificate, or award issued by a competent authority and attesting the successful completion of a higher education programme or the validation of prior learning, where applicable.
- (b) **Qualification giving access to higher education:** any degree, diploma, certificate, or award issued by a competent authority and attesting the successful completion of an education programme or the validation of prior learning, where applicable, and giving the holder of the qualification the right to be considered for admission to higher education.

**Qualified applicant:** an individual who has fulfilled relevant criteria and is considered eligible to apply for admission to higher education.

**Qualifications framework:** a system for the classification, publication and organization of quality-assured qualifications according to a set of criteria .

**Quality assurance:** an ongoing process by which the quality of a higher-education system, institution, or programme is assessed by the competent authority/authorities to assure stakeholders that acceptable educational standards are continuously being maintained and enhanced.

**Recognition:** a formal acknowledgment by a competent recognition authority of the validity and academic level of a foreign education qualification, of partial studies, or of prior learning for the purpose of providing an applicant with outcomes including, but not limited to:

- (a) the right to apply for admission to higher education; and/or
- (b) the possibility to seek employment opportunities.

**Requirements:**

- (a) **General requirements:** conditions which must be fulfilled for access to higher education, or to a given level thereof, or for the obtaining of a higher-education qualification at a given level.
- (b) **Specific requirements:** conditions, in addition to the general requirements, which must be fulfilled for admission to a particular higher-education programme, or for the obtaining of a specific higher-education qualification in a particular field of study.

**Substantial differences:** significant differences between the foreign qualification and the qualification of the State Party which would most likely prevent the applicant from succeeding in a desired activity, such as, but not limited to, further study, research activities, or employment opportunities.



4.

# Evaluation for recognition

*There are many available resources on recognition and on the process of evaluating qualifications and credentials. The more important ones are listed in chapter 5. Please consult these sources for a detailed, in-depth description of how evaluation for recognition could be approached. This chapter will give a broad outline of the main steps of the recognition procedure.*

## General principles

Holders of a qualification have the right to an assessment of their qualification. The assessment must be based on criteria that are transparent, fair and non-discriminatory, and performed without undue delay. To ensure this, it is recommended that the competent recognition authorities establish written

procedures and criteria that are consistently adhered to.

If the result of the assessment is denial of recognition, the right to appeal must be clearly stated, along with an explanation on how to appeal. The following provides basic steps in the recognition process.



### STEP 1

#### Provide information on recognition processes to applicants

##### Key questions

1. Do applicants know where and how to apply?
  2. Do applicants know the criteria for the evaluation?
- 
- Responsibility for providing information about recognition is shared between the National Information Centre or similar entities, higher education institutions and the competent recognition authority. Consistency in recognition procedures and criteria is critical for transparency.
  - Well-formulated, easily accessible information about the criteria for recognition and the documentation should be provided to all applicants to keep processing time at a minimum.
  - The applicant should be notified that the application has been received and when a decision can be expected.



## STEP 2

### Determine the purpose for recognition

#### Key questions

Is the applicant seeking:

1. academic recognition for further study?
2. recognition for access to the non-regulated professions?
3. professional recognition/licence/authorisation?

Recognition procedures may vary with the purpose of the application.

#### → **Academic recognition (subject based)**

will mainly be for two different purposes, which should be reflected in the relevant procedures:

- **Subject-specific academic recognition** refers to both the placement of a qualification in an education system, and the subject content. This could lead to admission to a specific study programme/ supplementary studies, credit transfer, or an application for the right to use an academic title.
- **Credit transfer** allows a potential student to enrol in a programme of study without having to take comparable courses twice. An academic title is often conferred based on the completion of a certain degree programme.

#### → **Academic recognition (system based)**

is mainly aimed at helping applicants' **access non-regulated professions**.

This is a general recognition of a qualification, based on a comparison of education systems. The foreign qualification is compared to national qualifications based on their placements in the respective education systems. Qualifications Frameworks can be important transparency tools for this purpose. System-based recognition can be very flexible regarding the subject content of a qualification – or disregard it altogether.

The outcome of the assessment process could be a recognition decision stating a general degree or level recognition.

- #### → **Professional recognition** is to obtain **the right to work** in a legally regulated profession. Such schemes usually consider both the academic achievements and professional skills of an applicant. Professional recognition lies outside the scope of the Global Convention and will most often be safeguarded by professional bodies and associations in each country.



## STEP 3

### Request the necessary documentation

#### Key question

1. What documentation is required to assess a qualification?

For a complete overview of the applicant's academic background, it is usual to ask for all pertinent documents. Typically these would be:

- **a qualification giving access to higher education** (usually the upper secondary school leaving certificate) and degree diplomas with the transcripts or grade sheets.
- **documents should be submitted both in the original language** and – if different – translated to a common spoken language or a language of the country undertaking the assessment. Documents could mean diploma,

transcript or mark sheet or similar, in line with transparent document requirements.

- **where possible transcripts and grades should be sent directly from the issuing institution** to the competent recognition authority undertaking the assessment.

Original documents are only required for verification, and the evaluator will be responsible for documents lost or damaged. When available, other trusted sources for verification of documents should be employed.



## STEP 4

### Establish the official status of the institution awarding the qualification(s)

#### Key questions

1. Is the awarding institution accredited or otherwise recognized as part of the national education system?
2. Is the programme accreditation sufficient?
3. Was the qualification awarded by a private education institution?
4. Was the qualification earned via on-line provision?
5. Was the qualification earned via a transnational education arrangement?

- **Only qualifications that are quality assured by the competent authority in the issuing country should be recognized**, since quality assurance and recognition of qualifications are

interlinked. Since different countries have chosen different approaches to accreditation, the minimum requirement is that the institution issuing the qualification and/or the degree is

confirmed to belong to the system of higher education of the issuing country. It is worth noting that even recognized institutions can award degrees/ qualifications that do not belong to the official, national degree-system. These will normally not be recognized outside the country of origin.

- **Institutions that are accredited will often have the power to accredit their own programmes**, since accreditation is a formal process of quality control. Some countries will only have systems for programme accreditation. The accreditation status of the institution as such will in this case not be important.
- **Accreditation should be done by – or on behalf of – the national authorities of the issuing country**. There are also independent accrediting organizations that do not work on behalf of national authorities.
- **If a country lacks a formal, external quality assurance mechanism**, it should as a minimum, maintain a list of institutions of higher education that belongs to its education system.
- **Many countries allow for the establishment of private education institutions alongside public institutions**. These institutions may operate as for-profit or not-for-profit organizations. As long as the private institutions are quality assured through the same mechanisms as public institutions, the difference in formal status should not be considered a substantial difference.

- **Online provision of education can vary greatly in quality from one provider to another**. They can span from *bona fide* open institutions that provide quality assured programmes and have full degree awarding powers, to unaccredited course providers with no clearly defined quality assurance procedures. Again, it is important to look at the quality assurance of the course provider and determine if the provider and the programme of study is defined as belonging to the system of higher education of the country in question.
- **Cross-border education provision, often referred to as transnational education**. It is education where the learner and the degree awarding institution are located in different countries. Sometimes it can be difficult to determine the “home country” of the awarding institution and the competent authority responsible for quality assurance of the institution and/or the programme.
- **International joint, double or multiple degree programmes are programmes of study offered jointly or in collaboration by institutions in different countries**. Students usually move between the universities to complete different parts of the programme. Recognition of such degrees should be contingent on establishing that all institutions involved are duly quality assured.



## STEP 5

### Verify the authenticity of the qualification

#### Key questions

1. Is the qualification authentic?
2. Are supporting documents authentic?
3. Is the applicant the rightful holder of the qualifications?

→ **Trustworthy recognition schemes are necessary to maintain confidence in qualifications** in a society from abroad, and decisions on recognition must signal a high degree of certainty that the qualification is genuine and that the applicant is the rightful holder of the qualification.

→ **Not feasible to seek a complete verification of every document**, A combination of interview with the applicant to understand their complete educational history together with verification of documentation directly with the administration of the issuing university or other official sources can however confirm authenticity.

→ **Standardised forms or letters requesting verification**, if possible in the language of the recipient, should ask for confirmation that these are genuine certificates issued to the person in question and that this person actually was a student at the university. It is acceptable to deny recognition if verification is unsuccessful.

→ **Avoid recognition of fraudulent documents** because it may lead to a lack of trust in recognized foreign qualifications, and both applicants and society will suffer.



## STEP 6

### Assess the five elements of a qualification

#### Key questions

1. What is the level of the qualification?
2. What was the workload for completing the qualification?
3. Was the study programme and/or institution quality assured?
4. What is the profile of the study programme?
5. What are the stated learning outcomes of the qualification?

→ The **level** of a qualification in the formal education system of the issuing country is often defined by a set of level descriptors

in relation to a national qualifications framework. Such frameworks, where available, are useful transparency tools for

determining the level of a qualification. Common level terms are:

- First cycle / undergraduate / xxx; the corresponding degree name could typically be *Bachelor's*<sup>1</sup>
- Second cycle / (post)graduate / xxx; the corresponding degree name could typically be *Master's*
- Third cycle / doctorate / xxx; the corresponding degree name could typically be *PhD* or *Doctoral degree*.

→ **The workload** is often quantified in terms such as hours, credits, credit hours, ECTS<sup>2</sup>, CATS<sup>3</sup>, semester hours, semesters, years, academic years. Comparing workload across different systems of description can be a challenge, but the transcript or the National Information Centre or similar entity will usually have the information needed to compare workload from different systems.

→ **The quality of a qualification** primarily relates to whether the institution or programme has undergone external quality assurance. Depending on the education system, external quality assurance may be obligatory or voluntary. Quality assurance is a key to building trust between the partners in the field of higher education.

→ **The profile of a qualification** can refer to either the purpose of the qualification (e.g. preparation for employment or preparation for further academic study) or its content (e.g. covering a broad range of subjects or strongly specialized).

This can be relevant, depending on the purpose of the recognition. For a general system-based recognition, profile may be irrelevant, but for admission to further studies and credit transfer, it may be. Some questions may be raised:

- Is the profile of the qualification in question suitable for the purpose for which recognition is sought?
- For example, is a Bachelor's degree in sport science a suitable background for admission to Master's programme in biology?

→ **A distinction regarding learning outcomes** is often made between subject-specific learning outcomes, which are related to the subject discipline, and generic learning outcomes, which are transferable from one academic discipline to another. Various systems for describing learning outcomes are in use in different education systems, and learning outcome statements are frequently used to describe anything from an individual course unit, a programme of study to a qualification level in a qualifications framework.

An open approach to recognition, focussing more on whether the learning outcomes of a qualification are broadly fit for the purpose for which recognition is sought, rather than a detailed counting of workload quantifiers, will help enable mobility through recognition. Such an approach is in line with the intentions behind both the Global Convention, and the revised regional recognition conventions.

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1 The first cycle may also include short cycle degrees that are typically of shorter duration than the full first-cycle qualification. These are qualifications in their own right, and should usually be recognized as such. First cycle qualifications will normally give access to the second cycle, and the second cycle will often give access to the third cycle

2 ECTS: The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System.

3 CATS: Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme.



## STEP 7

### Comparison of qualifications at the appropriate level

#### Key question

1. Are there substantial differences between the foreign qualification and that of one issued in the country where recognition is requested?

→ **Substantial differences are significant differences** between the foreign qualification and the domestic qualification that would most likely prevent the applicant from succeeding in the desired activity, such as further study, research or work.

**Not every difference should be considered substantial**, and even a substantial difference should not automatically lead to non-recognition. To do so, the difference must be substantial both in relation to the function of the qualification and the purpose for which recognition is sought. The difference should be considered substantial **only**

**if the differences would prevent the applicant from succeeding in the task** that was the purpose of the recognition.

**If recognition is denied, this must be justified** in terms of substantial differences between the foreign and domestic qualification. It is, however, also important to consider if the qualification can qualify for partial recognition, which is described under Step Eight.

The burden of proof rests on the competent recognition authority.

Two examples of **non substantial differences**:

1. **Non evidence of qualifications.**

Consider that an applicant has been awarded a PhD in country A and seeks recognition in country B. The degree is genuine and verified. However, the applicant cannot prove the preceding Bachelor's and Master's degrees, because the university awarding these two qualifications, with all its archives, has been destroyed. Although an applicant normally should be able to document the entire educational path leading to the PhD qualification, this

should not be seen as a substantial difference. The final degree proves the applicant's competency.

2. **The age of the qualification.**

It cannot be considered a substantial difference in itself, as a qualification/degree is earned for life. However, if the knowledge, skills and competencies obtained are not maintained and kept up to date through work experience or subsequent education, admission to next cycle could be refused due to a substantial difference between actual and required knowledge and skills.



## STEP 8

### Final evaluation outcome and recognition decision

#### Key questions

1. What is the final recognition decision for each qualification or combination of qualifications?
2. Has the decision been communicated to the applicant?
3. Does the applicant understand how to appeal the decision?

→ **Combining qualifications for recognizing.** As educational systems differ, a recognition decision will sometimes give a separate recognition statement for each qualification for which recognition is sought. Sometimes, however, it is appropriate to combine qualifications if it would result in a more understandable recognition statement.

As an example, a four-year bachelor's degree and a one-year master's degree from country A could be recognized in country B as comparable to its three-year bachelor's degree and two-year master's degree.

- **Partial recognition.** If a qualification cannot be fully recognized, or is only partially completed, partial recognition should be considered. Any substantial acquisition of knowledge should be acknowledged through recognition. Recognition could be granted by course unit or as a lump-sum quantity described in terms of credits, semesters or year.
- **Communication of the decision.** When the assessment of a foreign qualification has been made, the result should be communicated to the applicant. The recognition statement should clearly describe the possibilities and procedures for appealing the recognition decision.

→ **Recognition of Prior Learning.** This method assesses and acknowledges the experience, knowledge, skills, attitudes and competencies that learners may have acquired from any part of their professional or personal life, including learning in a non-formal or informal setting, professional experience or unfinished studies that did not lead to a formal qualification.

Foreign qualifications awarded through recognition of prior learning should be evaluated using the same criteria as similar qualifications awarded in a traditional manner. It is also recommended that each country establish fair, transparent and non-discriminatory procedures to recognize documented prior learning obtained in another country.

→ **Recognition for Refugees and Displaced Persons.** Refugees and displaced persons often have additional difficulties in accessing recognition, as many lack all or parts of the required documentation to prove their qualifications, partial studies or prior learning. In some cases, institutions and archives may no longer be in operation, making verification impossible. Some refugees and displaced persons are also faced with a situation where the

trustworthiness of their documentation is questioned due to the situation in their home country. This makes it necessary to find alternative ways to establish the veracity of their qualifications.

Recognition plays a key role for refugees and displaced persons as it may increase the possibility to access education outside their home country. For host societies, the recognition of qualifications held by refugees and displaced persons may help identify talent and lead a more rational use of the human resources in the society.

For cases where qualifications, partial studies or prior learning cannot be proven through documentary evidence, various approaches to recognition have been successfully developed and tested in different parts of the world. The Toolkit for Recognition of Refugees' Qualifications describes various approaches that could be explored. One proven approach is the issuing of a Qualifications Passports based on available documentation, analyses of the education system, written self-assessment by the individual and a structured interview with professional recognition experts.

“ Recognition plays a key role for refugees and displaced persons as it may increase the possibility to access education outside their home country. For host societies, the recognition ... may help identify talent and lead to a more rational use of the human resources (...). ”



5.

## Useful sources/links

## Global resources:

Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education's webpage

- <https://en.unesco.org/themes/higher-education/recognition-qualifications/global-convention>

Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education's Text

- [http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=49557&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=49557&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)

What is the Global Convention?

- <https://en.unesco.org/news/what-global-convention-higher-education>

Why do we need a Global Convention?

- <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000372970>

Regional Conventions and Recommendations in higher education

- <https://en.unesco.org/themes/higher-education/recognition-qualifications/conventions-recommendations>

## Africa:

Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)

- <https://www.ecowas.int/validation-of-draft-ecowas-framework-on-recognition-and-equivalence-of-degrees/>
- <https://www.aau.org/haqaa/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/ARUSHA-CONVENTION-Global-Forum-on-International-QA-Accreditation-and-the-Recognition-of-Qualifications-in-HE.pdf>

Verification in Qualifications in Africa

- <http://www.saaq.org.za/docs/genpubs/2015/Verification%20of%20Qualifications%20in%20Africa.pdf>
- <https://www.ecowas.int/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Convention-equivalence-des-diplomes1.pdf>
- <https://immigrechoisi.com/reconnaissance-diplomes-africains-en-france/4848/>

Cartographie des références et des lignes directrices en matière d'assurance qualité à l'œuvre dans les pays d'Afrique

- [https://haqaa.aau.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Mappingreport\\_FR\\_FINAL.pdf](https://haqaa.aau.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Mappingreport_FR_FINAL.pdf)

## Pan-Africa

African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ASG-QA)

- [http://haqaa2.obsglob.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/ASG-QA\\_Manual\\_en\\_09.FINALE-with-License-1.pdf](http://haqaa2.obsglob.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/ASG-QA_Manual_en_09.FINALE-with-License-1.pdf)

Agenda 2063: The African We Want

- <https://au.int/en/agenda2063/overview>

## Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 16-25)

- <https://edu-au.org/strategies/185-cesa16-25>

## Declaration and Action Plan from the 1st African Higher Education Summit on Revitalizing Higher Education for Africa's Future

- <http://www.trustafrica.org/en/publications-trust/books-and-ebooks?download=410:african-higher-education-summit-revitalising-for-african-s-future>

## East Africa

### Principles and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education in East Africa

- <https://www.iucea.org/guidelines/>

## ECOWAS

### General Convention on the recognition and equivalence of degrees, diplomas, certificates, and other qualification in ECOWAS member states

- <https://www.aau.org/haqaa/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/ECOWAS-HIGHER-EDUCATION-HARMONIZATION-General-Convention-on-the-Recognition-and-Equivalence-of-Degrees-Diplomas-Certificates-and-other-Qualifications.pdf>

### Quality Assurance Programme – CAMES

- <https://www.lecomes.org/programmes/a-q/>

### Vers l'assurance qualité de l'enseignement supérieur dans les pays d'Afrique francophone de l'Ouest : Expériences récentes et perspectives d'évolution

- [https://www.wathi.org/debat\\_id/enseignement-superieur/wathinote-enseignement-superieur/vers-lassurance-qualite-de-lenseignement-superieur-pays-dafrique-francophone-de-louest-experiences-recentes-perspectives-devolution/](https://www.wathi.org/debat_id/enseignement-superieur/wathinote-enseignement-superieur/vers-lassurance-qualite-de-lenseignement-superieur-pays-dafrique-francophone-de-louest-experiences-recentes-perspectives-devolution/)

## Arab States:

### UNESCO Regional Bureau for Education in the Arab States in Beirut

- <https://en.unesco.org/fieldoffice/beirut/higher-education>

### Association of Arab Universities

- <http://www.aaru.edu.jo/En/English/Home.aspx>

### Arab Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ANQAHE)

- <http://www.anqahe.org/>

## Asia-Pacific:

Asia-Pacific Network of National Information Centres (APNNIC)

- <https://apnnic.net/>

Guidelines on Developing and Strengthening Qualifications Frameworks in Asia and the Pacific - Building a Culture of Shared Responsibility

- [https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000265652\\_eng](https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000265652_eng)

## Europe and North America:

*European Recognition Manual for Higher Education Institutions*

- <https://www.nuffic.nl/en/publications/european-recognition-manual-higher-education-institutions>

*TACIEP Guide to Credential Evaluation*

- <https://www.taicep.org/taiceporgwp/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Guide-to-Credential-Evaluation-5.pdf>

*NOKUT et al., 2018, Toolkit for Recognition of Refugees' Qualifications*

- [https://www.nokut.no/globalassets/nokut/artikkelbibliotek/utenlandsk\\_utdanning/veiledere/toolkit\\_for\\_recognition\\_of\\_refugees\\_qualifications.pdf](https://www.nokut.no/globalassets/nokut/artikkelbibliotek/utenlandsk_utdanning/veiledere/toolkit_for_recognition_of_refugees_qualifications.pdf)

European Network of Information Centres

- [www.enic-naric.net](http://www.enic-naric.net)

*European Higher Education Area and Bologna Process*

- [www.ehea.info](http://www.ehea.info)

## Latin America and the Caribbean:

*Preliminary draft of the Regional Agreement on the International Recognition of Studies and Higher Education Degrees in Latin America and the Caribbean (1971)*

- [https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000000523\\_spa?posInSet=2&queryId=93b927a5-cb95-4195-a7d4-a66be9264758](https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000000523_spa?posInSet=2&queryId=93b927a5-cb95-4195-a7d4-a66be9264758)

*Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (as adopted in 1974)*

- <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000122457.page=18>

*New Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean, Buenos Aires, 13 July 2019*

- <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000371721/PDF/371721eng.pdf.multi.page=19>



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization

Education  
Sector

## A practical guide to recognition

### Implementing the Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education

The Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education was adopted in November 2019 as the first United Nations treaty on higher education with a global scope.

The Global Convention establishes universal principles for the recognition of qualifications, fosters mobility between higher education institutions worldwide and ensures the rights of individuals to have their foreign qualifications assessed in a fair, transparent and non-discriminatory manner.

Aiming to facilitate the implementation of the Convention, this Guide provides a step-by-step practical approach to recognition of foreign qualifications for credential evaluation practitioners and for individuals seeking recognition of their foreign qualifications.

## Stay in touch



<https://on.unesco.org/globalconvention>



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