



EUROPEAN
Higher Education Area



Introduction to the EAR Manual

The EAR manual has been developed as part of the European Area of Recognition Project (EAR) and is a practical interpretation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention Criteria & Procedures.

The manual contains standards and guidelines on all aspects of the recognition of foreign qualifications and aims to provide the credential evaluators from the European National Information Centres network and National Academic Recognition and Information Centres network (ENIC/NARIC networks) with a hands-on tool to assist them in their daily recognition work.

Although the manual is in the first place meant for the credential evaluators of the ENIC/NARIC networks, the manual makes the recognition procedures transparent to all stakeholders directly or indirectly involved in recognition: credential evaluators, higher education institutions, students and policy officers.

In general the EAR manual aims to create more clarity about the recognition practices in all European countries and to contribute to a joint recognition area of higher education, in which all European countries practice a similar methodology in the recognition of diplomas, based on commonly agreed standards and guidelines. A more harmonized and transparent recognition practice is essential for (the quality of) student mobility in Europe and plays as such a key role in the European Higher Education Area. This is also true for the global dimension of the Bologna Process, for which the recognition of qualifications has been identified as a key area of co-operation.

BACKGROUND

The EAR manual builds further on initiatives resulting from major developments over the last decades which worked as a catalyst for developments in recognition. One major development has been the creation of the National Academic Recognition and Information Centres (NARIC) network by the European Commission in 1984 and the European National Information Centres (ENIC) network by the Council of Europe and the, in 1994. The networks have played a key role in keeping alive a continuous dialogue and to work together towards tackling recognition issues on European level in numerous projects, working groups and conferences.

Another major milestone has been the creation of an international 'legal' framework, the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region (also referred to as the Lisbon Recognition Convention), established in 1997 by the Council of Europe and UNESCO. In 1999 a Committee was established which later adopted various recommendations. By now almost all countries of the Council of Europe ratified the convention and the convention is widely considered within the networks as the basis for fair recognition procedures.

Finally, the Bologna Process which started in 1999 played a major role in setting the issue of recognition on the European agenda, since recognition was considered essential in creating the European Higher Education Area. This led to many initiatives, including the establishment of the Bologna Working Group on Recognition.

Despite all the important work that has been done and the progress that has been made, one of the major obstacles for recognition currently to be tackled is the divergence of recognition practices between the different countries. In other words, while there is general consensus on what should be done, this good practice is not always implemented or implemented in different ways.

The recognition manual itself is a new and innovative tool: there have been various projects, publications and agreements in the past on the different aspects and issues of recognition (including recommendations on good practice), but there has never been one general recognition manual, combining all the efforts of past results and setting clear and uniform standards for recognition. Such a tool will have multiple uses - serving as a starting point for policy makers in order to review and improve national regulations and institutional procedures, as a manual for credential evaluators and admissions officers, and as an informative tool for foreign students, higher education institutions and other stakeholders.

The EAR manual aims to improve the consistency in European recognition practice, by bringing together all the major recommendations of the last decades in one single manual, which focuses on the practical use of good practice.

STRUCTURE OF THE MANUAL

The first chapter is a schematic outline of the recognition procedure. The following 16 chapters each cover a particular recognition topic and follow the order of the recognition procedure outlined in the first chapter.

These 16 chapters all follow a similar structure. Each of the chapters starts with a summary of the recommendations in a flow chart, followed by an introduction to the topic. The core of each chapter are the recommendations on how to deal with the topic and these are illustrated with examples where applicable. At the end of each chapter the sources are provided on which the recommendation is based, including the relevant Articles of the Criteria and Procedures of the Lisbon Recognition Convention and for some topics a reference to further reading.

The manual also includes a glossary of terms used and a list of the sources used in the manual.

METHODOLOGY

The content of the EAR manual is based on the Criteria and Procedures in the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications and its explanatory memorandum. These are subsidiary text to the Lisbon Recognition Convention. From these texts the topics for the chapters of manual have been identified and they form the foundation for the content of each chapter. The content of each chapter is further based on the recommendations from selected sources, including international recommendations, results of projects, working groups and studies carried out within the ENIC/NARIC networks and studies by recognition experts.

The manual has had various rounds of testing. It has been tried out within the offices of the project team and within the ENIC/NARIC networks, on board meetings, conferences and through an extensive questionnaire. Throughout the EAR project there has been a close cooperation with the experts of the Bologna Working Group on Recognition to seek advice and synergies. External stakeholders will be consulted at the Stakeholders' Conference on Recognition in the European Higher Education Area, organized by the BFUG Working Group on Recognition in Riga in April 2011.

PROJECT TEAM

The project team consists of 8 ENICs/NARICs from different regions of the European Union (The Netherlands, UK, France, Poland, Denmark, Lithuania, Flanders and the Czech Republic). The project team is assisted in her work by a Steering Group consisting of the President of the ENIC Bureau and the President of the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee.