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The Italian and international legal frameworks for Automatic Recognition of qualifications

ARAQUA2
Tools of automatic recognition of Higher Education access qualifications

Peer Learning Activity, Rome, Italy
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Historical and political background

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Malta, October 1994: which kind of recognition?

Absolute and automatic recognition

"completely removes all obstacles for mobile students, graduates and professionals"

The first option

Fair and accessible recognition

"lowers existing obstacles to an acceptable and affordable level, while respecting existing differences between qualifications and their roots in the various countries of Europe"

The option on which the LRC was built

MALTA CONFERENCE RECOMMENDATIONS

- seeing the right to fair recognition of qualifications as a cultural right (see also Halimi 1996);
- stating that the States Parties to the Cultural Convention should encourage mobility (and regional mobility in particular; see also Stenbäck 1996);
- underlining that recognition of foreign qualifications should be considered a process for assessing the competence, experience, and knowledge acquired, while respecting differences between programs and teaching methods;
- avoiding all forms of discrimination and concentrating on an assessment of the candidate's academic and professional competence;
- replacing "equivalence" with the concepts of "fair recognition" and "acceptance";
- ensuring that recognition procedures be transparent, coherent, and reliable.

Why not "automatic"?

The term 'automatic' was perceived as too restrictive considering the variety of systems, qualifications, and features of each education system

Source: Crossing Bridges between Education Systems. The History and Relevance of The Lisbon Recognition Convention, 2025, https://rivistauniversitas.it/quaderno-universitas-01-2025-crossing-bridges-between-education-systems/

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The Lisbon Recognition Convention (1997)

The Convention “intended to move from the narrow view of the comparability of qualifications that the term ‘equivalence’ implies to the broader view implied by ‘recognition’”.

11 April 1997

adoption in Lisbon

1 February 1999

entry into force

57

ratifications as of February 2025

Art. III.1

“Holders of qualifications issued in one of the Parties shall have adequate access, upon request to the appropriate body, to an assessment of these qualifications”

Substantial differences: “the guiding principle of the whole LRC”

Recognition “unless a substantial difference can be shown between the general requirements for access in the Party in which the qualification was obtained and in the Party in which recognition of the qualification is sought.” (Art. IV.1, with similar wording in Art. V.1 and VI.1)

Art. VIII.1

“Each Party shall provide adequate information on any institution belonging to its higher education system, and on any programme operated by these institutions”

Subsidiary texts (Art. X.2.5)

The LRC Committee “may adopt subsidiary texts”; it met for the first time in June 1999

Source: Crossing Bridges between Education Systems. The History and Relevance of The Lisbon Recognition Convention, 2025, https://rivistauniversitas.it/quaderno-universitas-01-2025-crossing-bridges-between-education-systems/

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The Bologna Process and the EHEA

1988	1998	1999	2005	2008	2010
Magna Charta Universitatum	**Sorbonne Declaration**	**Bologna Declaration**	**Bergen**	**EQAR and EQF**	**EHEA**
388 rectors and heads of European universities: academic freedom and institutional autonomy	France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom; the LRC mentioned explicitly	29 countries; a “Europe of Knowledge”	ESG and QF-EHEA adopted; third cycle added	EQAR established; EQF adopted by the European Union	Established in 2010; 49 members in 2020

Source: Crossing Bridges between Education Systems. The History and Relevance of The Lisbon Recognition Convention, 2025, https://rivistauniversitas.it/quaderno-universitas-01-2025-crossing-bridges-between-education-systems/

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Bologna key commitments: the LRC at the heart of the EHEA

Paris Communiqué (2018): compliance with the LRC established as one of the key commitments “crucial to reinforcing and supporting quality and cooperation inside the EHEA”.

Three-cycle system

“a three-cycle system compatible with the overarching framework of qualifications of the EHEA and first and second cycle degrees scaled by ECTS”

Lisbon Recognition Convention

“compliance with the Lisbon Recognition Convention”

Quality assurance

“quality assurance in compliance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area”

Thematic peer groups since 2018, based on “solidarity, cooperation and mutual learning”. The TPG on the LRC supports full implementation “on a scale of topics that ranges from full legal implementation to recognition of alternative pathways to recognition of refugee qualifications”.

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Source: Crossing Bridges between Education Systems. The History and Relevance of The Lisbon Recognition Convention, 2025, https://rivistauniversitas.it/quaderno-universitas-01-2025-crossing-bridges-between-education-systems/

Automatic recognition in the Ministerial Communiqués

BUCHAREST COMMUNIQUÉ, 2012

"…willing to work together towards the automatic recognition of comparable academic degrees, building on the tools of the Bologna framework, as a long-term goal of the EHEA." (Bologna Process 2012a:4)

2012 **Bucharest**

Referred to for the first time; a pathfinder group of countries

2015 **Yerevan**

"automatically recognized at the same level as relevant domestic qualifications"

2018 **Paris**

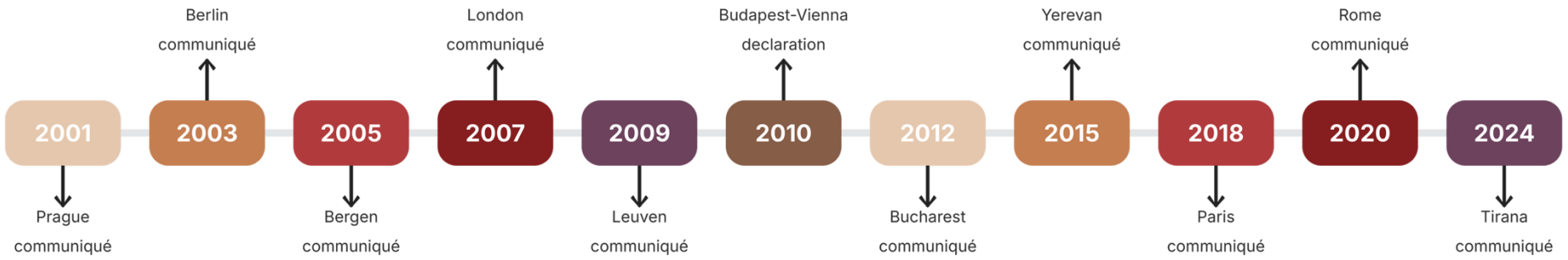
"for the purpose of accessing further studies and the labour market"

2020 **Rome**

Digital certification "such as blockchain" and DEQAR

2024 **Tirana**

Reviewed EAR Manual and other ENIC-NARIC tools welcomed



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Implementation models: four models

1 Legal bilateral and multilateral agreements

Baltic Benelux Treaty: signed in 2021, “officially entered into force in 2024”

“provides a clear legal framework, creating certainty”

2 A legally binding unilateral list of degrees

Portugal: “a country list was introduced as early as in 2007”

“may create the perception that qualifications not included on the list are, by definition, unsuitable”

3 Non-legal bilateral and multilateral agreements

Nordic-Baltic countries: “jointly developed an admission manual”

“HEIs retain full autonomy over their recognition decisions”

4 ‘De facto’ automatic recognition

Criteria “such as those presented in the 2018 Council Recommendation… simply applied in practice”

“relatively easy to apply… However, it requires ongoing guidance”

Italy and Austria

1946: Gruber and De Gasperi, within the Paris Treaty of Peace, “vouched to find an agreement for the mutual recognition of the validity of certain degrees and university diplomas”

1952: Cultural Agreement (Law 844/1954)

“a safeguard to protect minorities and an important element of peace and dialogue between two countries after the Second World War”

Source: Crossing Bridges between Education Systems. The History and Relevance of The Lisbon Recognition Convention, 2025, https://rivistauniversitas.it/quaderno-universitas-01-2025-crossing-bridges-between-education-systems/

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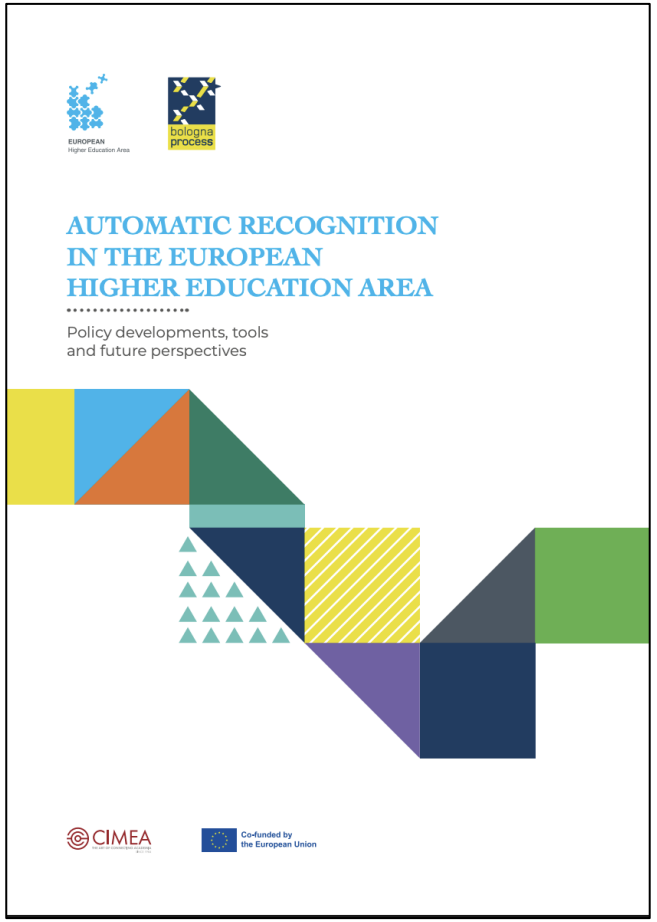


The latest developments: towards a Council of Europe Convention

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State of the art: the most recent monitoring exercises

Monitoring exercise	Author	Year of publication	Scope	Target group	Methodology used
Monitoring the implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention	Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee Bureau	2022	Monitoring the level of implementation of the LRC, including the articles related right to appeal, information provision and transnational education, automatic recognition and digital solutions.	Central authorities, ENIC-NARIC centres and Ministries.	Questionnaire sent to all State Parties to the LRC.
Implementation of the 2018 Council Recommendation on promoting automatic mutual recognition	European Commission	2023	Monitoring the level of implementation of the 2018 Council Recommendation on promoting automatic mutual recognition, including upper secondary level qualifications, as well as automatic recognition of learning periods abroad.	NARICs, national authorities (Ministries), credential evaluators, sectoral organisations, student's organisations, labour market organisations, Erasmus national agencies and learners.	Mixed research methods, combining the collection of secondary data from existing literature with the generation of primary data through a series of consultation activities (i.e. Interviews).
Bologna Process Implementation Report	European Commission/ EACEA/ Eurydice	2024	Monitoring of the implementation of the key commitments of Bologna (namely, degree structures, quality assurance and recognition).	Central authorities, ENIC-NARIC centres and Ministries.	Questionnaire sent by the BPIR working group to national authorities in the BFUG member states. Data builds mainly on official evidence-based information about legislation, regulations and national policies.
Bologna with Students Eyes (2024)	European Students' Union (ESU)	2024	Exploring the perception of implementing the Bologna Process amongst ESU's members (national unions of students), by bringing attention to the students' priorities and recommendations for the future of the Bologna Process.	Erasmus national agencies, credential evaluators, National unions of students (NUSes).	Data received from the National unions of students (NUSes), obtained through nine surveys covering both quantitative and qualitative information of different policy areas within the Bologna Process.



Source: Automatic Recognition in the European Higher Education Area, 2026, https://www.cimea.it/Upload/Documenti/TPG-LRC%20Plus_Publication%20on_AR.pdf

Ad hoc Working Group on Automatic Recognition and drafting

2022

LRC monitoring report

"it is recommended that a new subsidiary text of the LRC on automatic recognition should be drafted"

2022

Working Group set up

For the period from 2 February 2023 through 31 December 2024; renewal and enlargement until 31 December 2026

2023–2025

CDEDU consultations

Involving students, higher education institutions (HEIs), public authorities, ENIC centres and regional partners

January 2026

Drafting launched

"Convention on the conditions of transparency and quality assurance for automatic recognition of higher education qualifications in Europe"

COMPOSITION OF THE WORKING GROUP

- Lisbon Recognition Convention Bureau
- ENIC Bureau / NARIC Advisory Board
- Public authorities' representatives
- ESU · EUA · EURASHE · EQAR · EHEA · EURODOC
- Experts in the recognition field
- European Commission
- UNESCO

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Conclusions of the Working Group

There is a scope for a CoE legal text to ensure:

- The right of students to automatic recognition
- System level recognition only: automatic recognition applies to the system-level recognition only and shall not apply to the recognition of the qualifications of the specific programme or field of study.
- Harmonise across Europe the definition, key principles and concepts and avoid confusion (e.g. access and admission)
- Set new common standards (preconditions and requirements) that lead to automatic recognition
- Set common standards on the use of AI technologies and for data collection and sharing, including education fraud
- Reinforce the cooperation through the establishment of a common institutional framework with the Multilateral Treaty and enlarge the scope for European legal space of automatic recognition

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Automatic recognition in practice: tools and the way forward

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Tools to support implementation of automatic recognition

International tools drawing on official and primary sources

- ENIC-NARIC Networks country pages
- Qualifications frameworks and comparability tools
- Q-ENTRY
- NUFFIC country modules and the EHEA Qualifications table
- AR-GO online platform
- “Automatic Recognition Networks” website
- Training and community of practice (e.g. MAReN, AdReN training)

National tools

- ARDI – Automatic Recognition Database Italy
- NAWA Kwalificator
- NARIC Ireland Foreign Qualifications tool (QSearch)
- Swedish Council for Higher Education Qualifications Assessment Tool

Secondary sources of information

- World Higher Education Database (WHED)
- European Higher Education Sector Observatory (EHESO)

QA information tools

- EQAR Knowledge Base
- DEQAR – Database of External Quality Assurance Results

Manuals, standards and guidelines

- European Area of Recognition Manual (EAR Manual, 2023)
- European Recognition Manual for HEIs (EAR Manual for HEIs, 2020)

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Source: Automatic Recognition in the European Higher Education Area, 2026, https://www.cimea.it/Upload/Documenti/TPG-LRC%20Plus_Publication%20on_AR.pdf

Training, peer support and community of practice

Involvement of HEIs has been the natural evolution of the peer support among centres, to strengthen the capacity of the entire HE system towards the implementation of automatic recognition, in the perspective of:

Training at international and national level

- ENIC-NARIC Networks
- AdReN and MAReN Training
- APICE* as community of practice at national level
- Network of admission officers (professional course for credential evaluators)

Capacity development for HEIs

“De facto” automatic recognition stimulated by day-by-day cooperation.

Peer support approach and EHEA

Work carried ut in the framework of the Thematic Peer Group B

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*Associazione Professionale Italiana dei Credential Evaluator

Way forward

Progress

Considerable progress has been achieved since the concept surfaced a political priority within the EHEA in 2012.

Cooperation

Closer collaboration between ENIC-NARIC centres with their national HEIs can play a decisive role

Training

Targeted professional training courses for the competent authorities involved in recognition processes

Tools

The continued development of updated tools and databases to support recognition practices

Digital transformation

Not “a pathway towards full automation”; case-by-case assessment by credential evaluators “remains central”. New technologies and AI can support automatic recognition, but be careful on **AUTOMATIC VS AUTOMATED**.

“Progress will depend on the ability to combine trust, cooperation, and digital innovation, while ensuring that human expertise and responsibility remain at the core of the decision-making process.” (p.60)

Source: Automatic Recognition in the European Higher Education Area, 2026, https://www.cimea.it/Upload/Documenti/TPG-LRC%20Plus_Publication%20on_AR.pdf

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Thank you

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This presentation was drafted with the support of AI tools: Claude