The Recognition Landscape – Where We Stand

EHEA Recognition Reality (2024-2026)

Progress Made:

The EHEA currently has 49 members.

The Lisbon Recognition Convention remains the principal international legal framework for recognition of higher-education qualifications in the European region. However, there are also regional agreements in place such as the Baltic Automatic Recognition Agreement (2019) - Nordic-Baltic Admission Manual (NORRIC).

Persistent Gaps:

Implementation varies considerably between jurisdictions.

Formal legal provisions do not always guarantee consistent application in individual cases.

Our Challenge: Bridge the gap between LRC principles and everyday practice

Qualifications Frameworks for trust, transparency and diversity – TPG A 2
(QUATRA – TPG A 2)
01.09.2025 – 31.08.2028

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Recognition Practices – Current Models - Automatic Recognition

Recognition Depends On	Recognition Approaches	Automatic Recognition (Nuffic Models)	What It Does Not Guarantee
Purpose of recognition	Case-by-case assessment	Bilateral/multilateral agreements	Admission to every programme
Qualification type & level	Bilateral/multilateral agreements	Unilateral legal lists	Access to regulated professions
Competent authority	Legally defined lists	Non-legal agreements	Recognition for all employment purposes
National legislation	System-level automatic recognition	De facto automatic recognition	
Institutional autonomy	De facto institutional practice		

Reality: Most EHEA countries still use case-by-case assessment for non-listed qualifications

Who Decides? – Decision-Making Authority Across EHEA

Decision-maker	Possible role
Higher-education institutions	Admission, recognition of periods of study and academic decisions within institutional competence
ENIC-NARIC centres	Information, advice, credential evaluation and, in some systems, formal recognition decisions
Ministries or national authorities	Legal decisions, national policy, appeals or recognition in defined categories
Professional authorities	Recognition for regulated professions
Employers	Decisions about suitability where no regulated-profession procedure applies

- There is no single EHEA-wide allocation of responsibility.
- The decision-maker may differ according to:
- Academic admission.
- General employment.
- Regulated professions.
- Immigration.
- Access to a protected title.
- “Advisory,” “comparability,” “recognition” and “legally binding decision” must be distinguished.

Implication: Our influence extends beyond formal mandate through expertise and relationships

ENIC NARIC Core Functions - Revisited

What We're Mandated to Do (LRC Article IX.2)

Facilitate access to information on national HE systems and qualifications

Facilitate access to information on other countries' systems

Provide advice/information on recognition matters

What We Actually Do (varies by centre):

Evaluate individual qualifications (advisory or binding)

Support HEIs in LRC-compliant practices

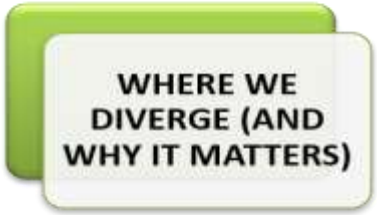
Promote automatic recognition policies

Maintain databases of recognized qualifications (some centres)

Question: Which of these functions does your centre perform? Which should be prioritized?

National Approaches to Recognition





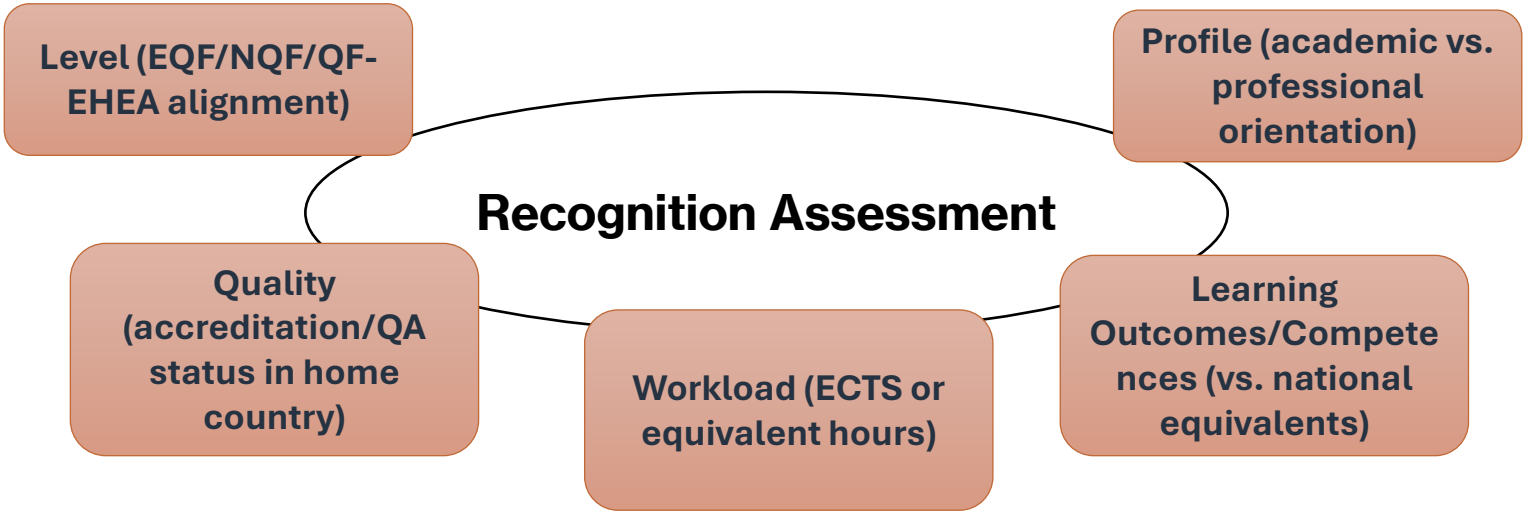
- The competent decision-maker.
- The legal status of recognition decisions.
- The use of NQFs and EQF information.
- The role of higher-education institutions.
- The use of quality-assurance information.
- Documentation requirements.
- Appeal procedures.
- Processing times.

- Further study.
- Employment.
- A regulated profession.
- Immigration.
- Access to a protected title.
- These differences do not automatically indicate non-compliance with the Lisbon Recognition Convention.
- The Convention permits different national arrangements, provided that recognition procedures are fair, transparent and non-discriminatory.

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Implication: Same qualification can receive different treatment across borders

Common Considerations in Recognition Assessment



Assessment Principle (LRC):

- Recognize as similar **unless substantial differences** exist
- Burden of proof on assessing body to demonstrate differences
- Differences assessed relative to **purpose** (further study vs. employment

Tools We Use:

- Diploma Supplement (8 sections)
- ECTS Users' Guide
- EAR Manual (recognition procedures)
- National/international databases

Question: Do HEIs in your country use all five elements consistently?

NQF/EQF/QF-EHEA – Frameworks in Practice - Are Qualifications Frameworks Enough?

Short Answer NO – but they're essential building blocks

Framework	Main scope	Main function
QF-EHEA	Higher education within the Bologna Process	Describes cycles and overarching learning-outcomes expectations
EQF	Education and training across participating European countries	Provides a common reference structure for comparing national levels
NQF	National or subnational education and training system	Organises national qualifications and relates them to national descriptors and, where applicable, the EQF

What HEIs/Employers Also Need:

Qualification frameworks enhance transparency, comparability, mobility and information exchange. EQF referencing and QF-EHEA self-certification are separate processes, and participation in the EQF does not imply EHEA membership. Frameworks support recognition but do not replace quality assurance, authentication, assessment of learning outcomes, or purpose-specific recognition decisions.

Finding: EQF Level alone is rarely the deciding factor

Our Role: Help HEIs understand how to use frameworks alongside other criteria

Country Examples – Which Countries use NQF, EQF or Both?

Key Considerations

The **EQF** includes all EU Member States and several participating non-EU countries.

The maturity of **NQFs** and the status of EQF referencing vary between countries.

All 27 EU Member States have completed EQF referencing.

EQF participation is **not identical to EHEA membership**; therefore, these should be recorded separately.

QF-EHEA self-certification should be captured as a distinct indicator

To support recognition decisions, each jurisdiction should be assessed against both EQF and EHEA indicators, while also documenting the development and practical use of its National Qualifications Framework.

Key Insight: Frameworks enable comparison but don't replace detailed assessment

Country Examples – Data Fields for Each Jurisdiction

- ✓ NQF title/name
- ✓ NQF development status
- ✓ Number of framework levels
- ✓ EQF referencing status
- ✓ EQF referencing year
- ✓ QF-EHEA self-certification status
- ✓ EHEA membership status
- ✓ Use of the framework in recognition practice
- ✓ Additional recognition considerations or criteria

Key Insight: Frameworks enable comparison but don't replace detailed assessment

Country Examples – NQF/EQF Usage - How Frameworks Are Applied (or Not)

Ireland (NFQ/EQF):

- Foreign qualifications interpreted through comparison with the NFQ, which is referenced to the EQF.
- NARIC Ireland provides award-type and level-comparability guidance to support HEI admissions and employer recognition decisions.

Greece (HQF/EQF):

- HQF referenced to the EQF in 2015; the 2024–2027 action plan provides for updating the referencing report and initiating QF-EHEA self-certification
- Aims to enhance the transparency and comparability of Greek qualifications within the EU

Countries with Incomplete EQF/QF-EHEA Referencing

- Level-matching is less straight-forward
- Recognition often requires enhanced document review

Most EU States:

- Dual-referenced NQFs to EQF and QF-EHEA
- But HEIs still require additional documentation (DS, transcripts, QA evidence)

Key Insight: Qualifications frameworks facilitate comparability, but recognition decisions still require academic and quality assurance assessment.

Challenges – The Trust Deficit

Why Isn't Recognition More Consistent?

Trust	Autonomy	Implementation	Terminology
Lack of Mutual Trust • Primary barrier to automatic recognition • QA systems perceived differently across EHEA • Use of EQAR-registered agencies is widespread, although national QA arrangements vary.	**HEI Autonomy vs. Consistency:** • Decisions left to HEIs create inconsistencies • Variations even within same country/institution • No systematic monitoring of recognition decisions	**Diverse LRC Implementation:** • Legal compliance ≠ practical compliance • HEIs often unaware of LRC principles • Limited training on recognition practices	**Confusion:** • "Automatic recognition" vs. "access" vs. "admission“ • Partial qualifications, formal, informal/non-formal • Terminology and legislative implementation continue to vary across countries.

Discussion: Which of these challenges is most acute in your country?

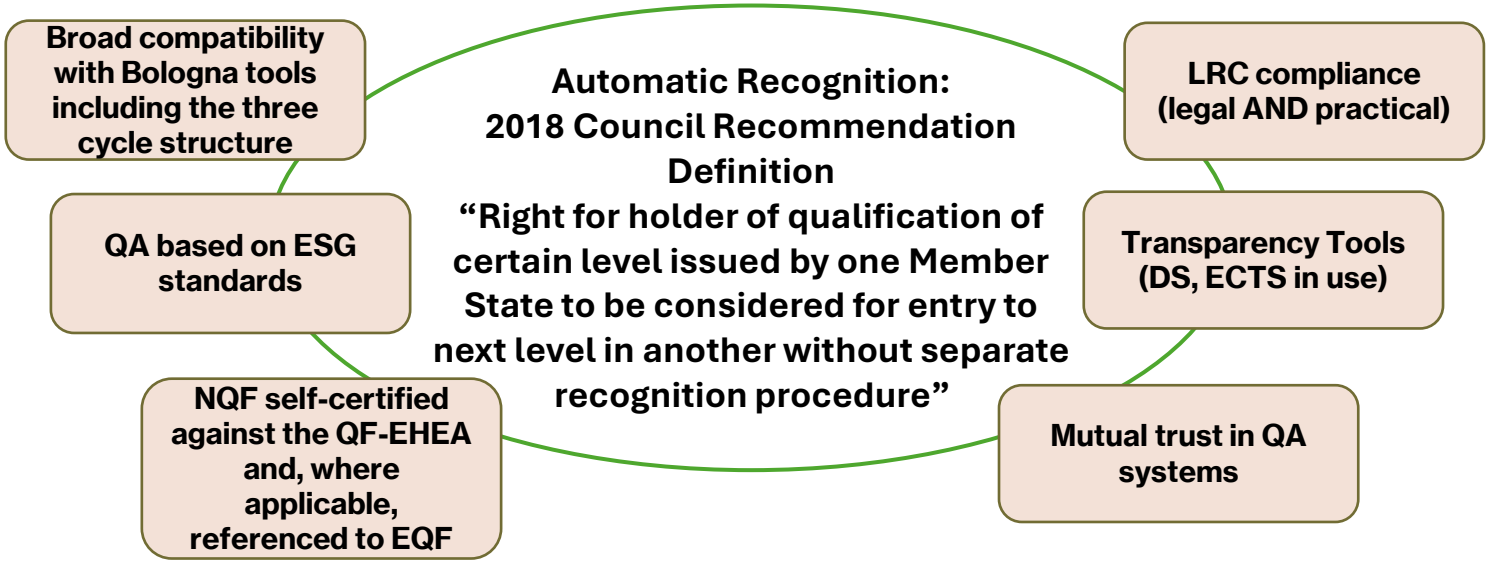
Challenges – Operational Barriers

Day-to-Day Obstacles We Face

Transparency - Incomplete Transparency Tool Usage:	**Resources - Limited Resources:**	**QA - Quality Assurance Gaps:**	**HEI Resistance - Quality Assurance Gaps:**	**Monitoring - No Systematic Monitoring:**
Diploma Supplement not universally issued/used	ENIC-NARIC centres understaffed or underfunded	Not all EHEA countries have robust, transparent QA	Academic autonomy concerns	Difficult to ensure consistency or identify problems
ECTS implementation inconsistent (especially outside EU)	Cannot provide individual assessments at scale	Difficulty assessing qualifications from unknown institutions	Lack of familiarity with recognition principles	Limited data on recognition outcomes
Some countries still use rigid course-based systems	Limited capacity for HEI training/outreach	Risk of recognizing degrees from "diploma mills"	Preference for traditional, course-based assessment	

Automatic Recognition – Models and Prerequisites

What Does "Automatic Recognition" Require?



Four Models in Practise

- **Legally binding bilateral/multilateral Agreements**
- **National Lists of Recognised Qualifications**
- **Mutual Declarations (non-binding)**
- **De facto recognition by HEIs**

Progress Report – Where We've Improved

Gains Since 2018 Council Recommendation

Achievements:

NQF-EQF-QF-EHEA alignment significantly improved

Many countries have completed EQF referencing and QF-EHEA self-certification

But:

Actual recognition practices still fall short of LRC expectations

Transparency, consistency, fairness not fully achieved

Limited systematic QA of recognition/admission practices

Recognition of learning periods abroad remains uneven across the EHEA

Progress is real. Consistent implementation remains the challenge.

Legal and policy frameworks

Council of Europe and UNESCO (1997).

Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region (Lisbon Recognition Convention), Lisbon, 11 April 1997. Article IX.2. https://rm.coe.int/168007f2c7

Council of the European Union (2018).

Council Recommendation of 26 November 2018 on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad (2018/C 444/01), Official Journal of the European Union, C 444, 10 December 2018, pp. 1–8.

Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee.

Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee (2010). *Revised Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications*. Sèvres, 23 June 2010).

Council of the European Union (2017).

Council Recommendation of 22 May 2017 on the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning and repealing the Recommendation of 23 April 2008 (2017/C 189/03), Official Journal of the European Union, C 189, 6 June 2017, pp 15-23

Legal and policy frameworks

European Higher Education Area (EHEA)

Qualifications Frameworks in the EHEA and QF-EHEA self-certification information. https://www.ehea.info

Recognition practice and guidance

Nuffic (2018).
A Short Path to Automatic Recognition: Four Models. The Hague: Nuffic.

Nuffic (2023).
European Area of Recognition Manual. The Hague: Nuffic.

European Commission, Council of Europe and UNESCO-CEPES.
Diploma Supplement model and accompanying explanation. https://education.ec.Europa.

ENIC-NARIC Networks.
Academic Recognition. https://www.enic-naric.net/page-academic-recognition

Recognition practice and guidance

ENQA, EUA, EURASHE and ESU.
Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). Current education. https//www.enqa.eu

ENIC-NARIC Networks
Academic Recognition and Recognition Conventions and Supplementary Texts. https://www.enic-naric.net

Networks, national information and further reading

Regional agreements and Nordic-Baltic tools

- Government of the Republic of Estonia, Government of the Republic of Latvia and Government of the Republic of Lithuania. *Agreement among the Government of the Republic of Estonia, the Government of the Republic of Lativa and the Government of the Republic of Lithuania on the Automatic Academic Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education* Signed in Vilnius, 8 June 2018; entered into force 7 January 2019
- Nordic Recognition Information Centres (NORRIC). *Nordic-Baltic Admission Manual*. https://norric.org/nordbalt/
- Nordic Recognition Information Centres (NORRIC). *Automatic Recognition in the Nordic Region*. https://norric.org

National examples

- Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI). *Policy and Criteria for Facilitating the Academic Recognition of Foreign Qualifications*. https://www.qqi.ie
- Hellenic National Action Plan 2024-2027, version dated 9 April 2025.
- EOPPEP/Ministry of Education, Greece (2016). *Hellenic Qualifications Framework: Qualifications without Borders for Work & Learning*.

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- ENIC NARIC Networks. *About the ENIC-NARIC Networks*. https://www.enic-naric.net/page-about-ENIC-NARIC-Networks (accessed 14 October 2026).
- Council of Europe and UNESCO (1997). *Lisbon Recognition Convention*. https://rm.coe.int/168007f2c7 (accessed 14 October 2026)*ers for Work & Learning*