

TPG-LRC Plus project

Report of the national focus group with higher education institutions

Andorra

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduce the focus group activity

This focus group is organised in the framework of the Erasmus+ co-funded project TPG-LRC Plus – Fostering LRC Implementation in the EHEA, which aims at supporting the implementation of the Bologna Process focusing on the key commitment 2 on national legislation and procedures compliant with the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC) in the countries being part of the Thematic Peer Group B (TPG B)¹.

This project activity brings together national institutions dealing with academic recognition of qualifications, focusing on access and/or admission procedures.

The format of the focus group has been developed by drawing on the experiences gained from the previous activities of the Erasmus+ project qENTRY+ – International Database on Higher Education Entry Qualifications².

1.2 Aims and general objectives

The main aim of the focus group is to gain an insight into the level of understanding and implementation of automatic recognition from the perspective of the higher education institutions. This activity also helped identifying the practices implemented at the institutional level, including the tools currently in use to support the implementation of automatic recognition in the daily work of national institutions.

1.3 Specific objectives

This general aim of the focus group has been reached through the following specific objectives:

- investigating the level of awareness of the concept of automatic recognition;
- collecting useful information on the practices for the implementation of automatic recognition that were in place;
- exploring how digitalisation transformation processes influenced internal policies and institutional practices.

In the section below, please provide any additional information concerning further objectives achieved at the national level as a result of this activity, taking into account any specific features of the national background and context.

¹ Please, find further detailed information about the TPG-LRC Plus project at the following webpage: <https://www.cimea.it/EN/pagina-TPG-LRC-Plus>.

² Please, find further information regarding the focus groups' outcomes at the qENTRY+ publication *Automatic recognition in practice. Examples and tools from the project partner countries* (2022). In <https://www.q-entry.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/automatic-recognition-in-practice.pdf>.

The national context is quite specific. ENIC Andorra, which is part of the Ministry responsible for higher education, is responsible for recognising foreign higher education qualifications for the purposes of accessing higher education or entering the labour market.

Higher education institutions are responsible for the admission and recognition of periods of study.

Apart of one public university, the rest of Andorran universities are private, online institutions that are created recently and are currently in a phase starting their activity or in a phase of development and growth, so there are virtually no admission restrictions. Therefore, once it has been verified that a prospective student is eligible for higher education in Andorra, it is unlikely that they will be refused admission.

In this context, Andorra has not achieved any objectives beyond those originally set for the activity.

2. Background and methodology

2.1 Selection process of participants

In the box below, please provide further details on the selection process of participants at the national level, including information about the exact number of participants, their background, role within their institution, and the geographical balance considered during the selection. To support you in completing this section, here are some guiding questions:

- *When were the focus groups organised?*

18th March 2026

- *How were the participants selected?*

A representative from each of the higher education institutions authorised in Andorra that are currently offering accredited degrees was invited to participate. Six invitations were sent. Four participants confirmed their participation and attended.

- *How was the activity conducted, and who facilitated the focus groups?*

The meeting, lasting one hour and twenty minutes, was held online. Ms. Mar Martinez facilitated the activity.

The questions proposed for this activity were discussed. All participants were given the floor and were able to freely express their views and describe the standard practices at their institutions.

The group agreed on the content of the meeting summary.

- *Were any specific digital tools (e.g., Padlet, Mentimeter, etc.) used to support the development of the activity?*

No.

Participants' list

Participant <i>(please include just initials of name and surname)</i>	Role	Institution
MRA	Head of Academic Area	Universitat Carlemany
MBE	Secretary General and Professor	Universitas Europaea IMF
AD	Admissions officer	Universitat d'Andorra
MCM	Secretary General	UNIPRO Universitat Digital
MM	Higher education officer and Credential evaluator (facilitator of the activity)	Ministry of Institutional Relations, Education and Universities

2.2 National adaptations

Considering the initial proposal for the focus group format shared among the project consortium, the following section has been dedicated to outline any adaptations made at the national level to ensure the activity was tailored to the specific context and to gather reliable data on the topics discussed. If your case involves such adaptations, please provide additional details, addressing the following guiding questions:

- *Were all the questions in the provided list presented to the participants?*

Yes.

- *Has your institution modified the structure of the focus group at the national level? If so, in what way? Please specify any adjustments made to the questions in the box below.*

Given the size of the country, the criteria for selecting participants and their response to the invitation, the final number of participants was four. Consequently, there was only one person acting as the facilitator for the activity.

Enclosed with the invitation, a brief questionnaire was sent out via Google forms to collect quantitative data. Four participants who answered the questionnaire were the same who attended the meeting.

- *Did you encounter any challenges in delivering this activity? If so, which ones?*

No, because the Andorran context was clear and the aim of the activity was obvious, as were the guiding questions. It was a small discussion group, so it was easy to express opinions.

3. Understanding of the concept of automatic recognition

In the following section, please provide an overview of the main insights gathered from the answers collected to the guiding questions provided below:

- *What is the understanding of the concept of automatic recognition?*

The participants were quite familiar with the concept. They described it as a recognition process that is predefined because an official equivalence has already been established. It is a regulated procedure designed to facilitate the integration and mobility of university students by avoiding the need for individual evaluation of academic records. Additionally, it serves as a way to streamline the recognition of official qualifications within a more integrated European Higher Education Area (EHEA), promoting inter-university cooperation and enhancing student mobility.

- *From a general point of view, what do the institutions in question think about the level of implementation of automatic recognition at the national level? How would participants define and evaluate its implementation within their institutional practices (e.g., challenging, beneficial, or otherwise)?*

From a general perspective, participants consider automatic recognition to be still poorly implemented both in Andorra and across Europe. While they tend to trust the education systems of countries they are more familiar with, they also acknowledge that all systems may involve situations or practices that can affect the quality of qualifications.

At the institutional level, Andorran institutions do not yet apply automatic recognition in a systematic way. They mainly deal with the recognition of study periods and admission processes on a case-by-case basis. Automatic recognition is typically only applied when it is explicitly included in agreements with other institutions.

Overall, while automatic recognition is seen as a positive and necessary development, it is still at an early stage and may be perceived as complex within current institutional practices.

- *Are there any particular experiences reported by participating institutions on implementation of automatic recognition that you would like to mention?*

No. At the institutional level, Andorran institutions do not yet apply automatic recognition in a systematic way.

- *The “Council Recommendation on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad”³ sets automatic recognition as one of the objectives to be achieved. How familiar are the institutions involved with this recommendation?*

In general, the Andorran participants have heard of it but are not familiar with its content. One of the participants is unaware of this recommendation.

4. Practices for the implementation of automatic recognition that are in place

In the following section, please provide an overview of the main practices for the implementation of automatic recognition that are in place at the national level as described by the institutions involved, as well as practical examples of the existing tools at disposal. Find the related questions below:

- *Do institutions involved cooperate with other institutions/organisations to implement automatic recognition? If so, is the cooperation formalised or “self-organised”? If applicable, please provide additional details and examples of the types of cooperation the institutions engage in.*

Automatic recognition is typically only applied when it is explicitly included in formal agreements with other institutions. In practice, these institutions do not collaborate with others and organise themselves instead.

- *What are the tools in place to support implementation of automatic recognition at the institutional level, mentioned by participants?*

Where an agreement has been made with another institution, the agreement itself is the primary tool. Since institutions have not yet generally implemented automatic recognition, participants referred instead to the tools used for case-by-case recognition processes.

³ 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. In [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H1210\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H1210(01)).

These include ECTS, the Diploma Supplement, national frameworks, and the European Qualifications Framework, among others.

- *What did participants expressed as a need in terms of “capabilities”, training, motivation, guidelines, technological tools (e.g., databases, software, websites, etc.) for their organisation and generally speaking for the national sector, to fully implement automatic recognition?*

The participants did not express any specific needs, as ENIC Andorra is responsible for the academic recognition of foreign higher education qualifications for the purposes of accessing or continuing higher education studies.

- *Did participants mention any law or official guidance that needs to change to enable their institution to better apply automatic recognition? Do the institutions involved have any impact on its shape?*

They did not identify any specific legal changes and consider this to fall under the responsibility of the ministry, although they believe that the legal framework in Andorra limits their autonomy.

5. Digitalisation

Regarding digitalisation processes, please provide an overview of the perception of institutions involved about the support digitalisation might provide to promote the implementation of automatic recognition at the national level. Find the related questions below:

- *Do institutions involved think digitalisation could support the implementation of automatic recognition at national level? If so, what steps have been taken to digitalise the recognition procedures at the institutional level?*

Higher education institutions use digital tools in their recognition processes, such as internal management systems, digital documentation and process automation systems. Just as they believe that digitalisation has helped to improve them, they also consider that digitalisation is important if they apply automatic recognition processes.

6. Challenges and benefits perceived regarding the concept and the implementation procedures of automatic recognition

In the following section, please provide an overview of the main insights gathered from the answers collected to the guiding questions aimed at exploring the challenges perceived regarding the concept of automatic recognition and the barriers arose with its implementation. Find the related questions below:

- *What is the perception – among the institutions involved – of the current level of implementation of the Council Recommendation, both at the national and institutional levels? Do participants believe it has been adequately implemented, or are there still areas that require further attention? If so, which ones?*

The participants were not aware of the status or level of implementation of the recommendation and therefore do not have a formal opinion on the matter.

- *In the light of what discussed so far, what are the main benefits of implementing automatic recognition?*

Despite their limited experience, participants consider automatic recognition of diplomas and study periods beneficial because it streamlines procedures and reduces the administrative burden associated with individual assessments. By relying on previously established equivalences, institutions can process applications more efficiently and consistently.

It also promotes student mobility by making it easier for learners to move between countries and institutions without unnecessary delays or uncertainty about the recognition of their qualifications. In addition, it strengthens trust and cooperation among higher education systems, contributing to a more integrated and transparent European Higher Education Area.

Finally, automatic recognition helps institutions focus more on academic quality and learning outcomes rather than procedural evaluation, while still ensuring that standards and equivalence are maintained.

- *What are the main challenges outlined by institutions involved?*

Participants view automatic recognition as both desirable and beneficial. However, several barriers hinder its practical implementation, including a lack of experience, as well as insufficient tools and data. Key challenges identified include ensuring and maintaining equivalence between qualifications and addressing legal constraints, which are perceived as potentially limiting the academic autonomy of universities.

7. Suggested responses to the challenges emerged

In this section, please provide further details regarding the possible responses suggested by the institutions involved to the challenges emerged during the activity. Find below the related guiding question:

- *What are the main conditions needed to better apply automatic recognition in the institutions involved and more in general in the national sector?*

Participants believe that the ministry should lead the shift towards automatic recognition. They also consider collaboration between the ministry and institutions to be essential, and that implementation will improve over time. However, they are sceptical about the possibility of a country recognising a foreign qualification without any administrative

procedures or necessary checks. They would, nevertheless, consider this more feasible with neighbouring countries whose education systems are well understood in Andorra.

8. Any other comments

Please use this section to share any further comments, or to share additional further sources used for the activity (e.g., Padlet, Mentimeter, etc.).

TPG-LRC Plus project

Report of the national focus group with higher education institutions

Denmark

1. Background and methodology

1.1 Selection process of participants

In the box below, please provide further details on the selection process of participants at the national level, including information about the exact number of participants, their background, role within their institution, and the geographical balance considered during the selection. To support you in completing this section, here are some guiding questions:

- *When were the focus groups organised?*

The Danish Agency for Higher Education and Science, the Danish ENIC-NARIC Office, has for at least 15 years established networks of admission officers from all higher education institutions. Automatic recognition has been a topic for presentations and discussions several times during meetings in the networks. There is a network for University officers and another one for university colleges and academy professions institutions.

- *How were the participants selected?*

Members from all HEIs were invited to select their participants

- *How was the activity conducted, and who facilitated the focus groups?*

The Danish ENIC-NARIC office invites to meetings, webinars with a proposed agenda asking HEIs to contribute with suggestions for the agenda

- *Were any specific digital tools (e.g., Padlet, Mentimeter, etc.) used to support the development of the activity?*

Webinars may include Mentimeter.

Participants' list

Participant <i>(please include just initials of name and surname)</i>	Role	Institution
1-2 participants from all HEIs		

1.2 National adaptations

Considering the initial proposal for the focus group format shared among the project consortium, the following section has been dedicated to outline any adaptations made at the national level to ensure the activity was tailored to the specific context and to gather reliable data on the topics discussed. If your case involves such adaptations, please provide additional details, addressing the following guiding questions:

- Were all the questions in the provided list presented to the participants?

There has not been a particular meeting related to the project the last year. Automatic recognition has been presented and discussed several times over the last 10 years.

- Has your institution modified the structure of the focus group at the national level? If so, in what way? Please specify any adjustments made to the questions in the box below.

N/A

- Did you encounter any challenges in delivering this activity? If so, which ones?

N/A

2. Understanding of the concept of automatic recognition

In the following section, please provide an overview of the main insights gathered from the answers collected to the guiding questions provided below:

- What is the understanding of the concept of automatic recognition?

In general the concept of AR is thoroughly understood by Danish HEIs. A common response from institutions when presenting AR is "but this is what we have always done".

- *From a general point of view, what do the institutions in question think about the level of implementation of automatic recognition at the national level? How would participants define and evaluate its implementation within their institutional practices (e.g., challenging, beneficial, or otherwise)?*

Fully implemented.

- *Are there any particular experiences reported by participating institutions on implementation of automatic recognition that you would like to mention?*

N/A

- *The “Council Recommendation on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad”¹ sets automatic recognition as one of the objectives to be achieved. How familiar are the institutions involved with this recommendation?*

Fully familiar.

3. Practices for the implementation of automatic recognition that are in place

In the following section, please provide an overview of the main practices for the implementation of automatic recognition that are in place at the national level as described by the institutions involved, as well as practical examples of the existing tools at disposal. Find the related questions below:

- *Do institutions involved cooperate with other institutions/organisations to implement automatic recognition? If so, is the cooperation formalised or “self-organised”? If applicable, please provide additional details and examples of the types of cooperation the institutions engage in.*

In Denmark AR is implemented in the legislation in an indirect manner. The Danish legislation on recognition. The legislation states “(4) The assessment shall be binding on the following decisions: (i) The decision on admission by a publicly recognised educational institution”.

This means that HEIs must base their decisions on admission on the Danish ENIC-NARICs level assessments of foreign qualifications. The recognition standards for the majority of all higher qualifications from EHEA—countries are published at the ENIC-NARICs website and all qualifications are fully recognised at degree level. This means that HEIs must base their decisions on these standards and they cannot ignore that e.g. all bachelor degrees from EHEA-countries are fully recognised and listed at the website.

¹ 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. In [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H1210\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H1210(01)).

End of spring 2026 qualifications from the last EHEA-countries will be encompassed in the online list. In this respect HEIs are legally bound to follow the recognition standards set and posted by the ENIC-NARIC Office and all candidates holding an EHEA-qualification are fully eligible to apply for admission to a programme at the next level.

- *What are the tools in place to support implementation of automatic recognition at the institutional level, mentioned by participants?*

Our legislation and the online list mentioned above.

- *What did participants expressed as a need in terms of “capabilities”, training, motivation, guidelines, technological tools (e.g., databases, software, websites, etc.) for their organisation and generally speaking for the national sector, to fully implement automatic recognition?*

As described, we hold webinars, post the list of our recognition standards, have a hotline for admission officers who can send in questions about recognition of qualifications from their applicants.

- *Did participants mention any law or official guidance that needs to change to enable their institution to better apply automatic recognition? Do the institutions involved have any impact on its shape?*

4. Digitalisation

Regarding digitalisation processes, please provide an overview of the perception of institutions involved about the support digitalisation might provide to promote the implementation of automatic recognition at the national level. Find the related questions below:

- *Do institutions involved think digitalisation could support the implementation of automatic recognition at national level? If so, what steps have been taken to digitalise the recognition procedures at the institutional level?*

5. Challenges and benefits perceived regarding the concept and the implementation procedures of automatic recognition

In the following section, please provide an overview of the main insights gathered from the answers collected to the guiding questions aimed at exploring the challenges perceived regarding the concept of automatic recognition and the barriers arose with its implementation. Find the related questions below:

- *What is the perception – among the institutions involved – of the current level of implementation of the Council Recommendation, both at the national and institutional levels? Do participants believe it has been adequately implemented, or are there still areas that require further attention? If so, which ones?*

Some HEIs have raised questions about the ENIC-NARIC Office recognition standards for some countries. However, this mainly relates to qualifications from non-EHEA countries, where recognition standards for qualifications from a number of countries are also listed.

- *In the light of what discussed so far, what are the main benefits of implementing automatic recognition?*

Less procedures. Better understanding of the cooperation within the Bologna Process

- *What are the main challenges outlined by institutions involved?*

Some HEIs may previously have had tougher recognition standards not recognising all EHEA-qualifications at degree level. Now, they have to examine all applications from these few countries individually to see if they meet the specific admission requirements for being selected to the sought programme in a system with numerus clausus.

7. Suggested responses to the challenges emerged

In this section, please provide further details regarding the possible responses suggested by the institutions involved to the challenges emerged during the activity. Find below the related guiding question:

- *What are the main conditions needed to better apply automatic recognition in the institutions involved and more in general in the national sector?*

As described AR is implemented indirectly in our recognition legislation.

8. Any other comments

Please use this section to share any further comments, or to share additional further sources used for the activity (e.g., Padlet, Mentimeter, etc.).

TPG-LRC Plus project

Report of the national focus group with higher education institutions

France

1. Background and methodology

1.1 Selection process of participants

In the box below, please provide further details on the selection process of participants at the national level, including information about the exact number of participants, their background, role within their institution, and the geographical balance considered during the selection. To support you in completing this section, here are some guiding questions:

- *When were the focus groups organised?*

In March 2026

- *How were the participants selected?*

We sent an invitation to 258 higher education institutions in France which we had already contacted during different steps of our Tour de France to promote the automatic recognition.

We received 25 responses and divided them into 3 focus groups. The 3rd group will be launched in the beginning of April.

- *How was the activity conducted, and who facilitated the focus groups?*

For each focus group, we sent Teams meeting invitations to small groups of participants after verifying their availability. We aimed to diversify the groups in order to include a variety of higher education institutions across France.

On the day of each session, we requested participants' permission to record the meeting to facilitate notetaking. Each session was organized with a dedicated team: one person responsible for taking notes and managing the distribution of surveys, one person in charge of presenting our centre, the TPG-B project, and automatic recognition, and a third person leading the questions and discussions on the topic.

The focus groups lasted between 1 hour 15 minutes and 1 hour 30 minutes.

- Were any specific digital tools (e.g., Padlet, Mentimeter, etc.) used to support the development of the activity?

We created Microsoft Teams polls during the meeting in order to engage all participants.

Participants' list

Participant <i>(please include just initials of name and surname)</i>	Role	Institution
N. C	international relations service of the Faculty of Economics	Université Grenoble Alpes
M. P	international relations department	Université de Nîmes
B. L	administration center	Université de Nîmes
G. M	Head of the training tools and management support service (éco gestion)	Aix-Marseille Université
N. B	doctoral support manager	Université de Reims Champagne-Ardenne (URCA)
G. K	Validation/Qualification Manager (LLL)	Université de Rennes
A. G	Head of the university technical institute (IUT) of Saint Malo	Université de Rennes
A. P	Manager of the training and research Unit of mathematics and computer science	Université de Strasbourg

1.2 National adaptations

Considering the initial proposal for the focus group format shared among the project consortium, the following section has been dedicated to outline any adaptations made at the national level to ensure the

activity was tailored to the specific context and to gather reliable data on the topics discussed. If your case involves such adaptations, please provide additional details, addressing the following guiding questions:

- *Were all the questions in the provided list presented to the participants?*

Almost all questions were covered, and those that were missed in group 1 were addressed during group 2. This is one of the advantages of running multiple groups and sessions.

- *Has your institution modified the structure of the focus group at the national level? If so, in what way? Please specify any adjustments made to the questions in the box below.*

Yes, we adjusted the structure to foster engagement and facilitate interactive discussion. We began with a brief round of introductions, then opened the conversation with each institution's own practices in terms of credential recognition, which helped ease participants into the first part of the discussion.

We then moved on to the topic of automatic recognition, starting with the polls to gauge participants' initial impressions before moving into a broader exchange, explaining the concept and posing our questions on automatic recognition.

The focus group was designed to flow naturally, allowing participants to ask questions at any point throughout the session.

- *Did you encounter any challenges in delivering this activity? If so, which ones?*

We did not encounter any significant difficulties; however, some participants did not attend the focus group, which was something we had anticipated.

2. Understanding of the concept of automatic recognition

In the following section, please provide an overview of the main insights gathered from the answers collected to the guiding questions provided below:

- *What is the understanding of the concept of automatic recognition?*

The concept is still not very well understood by the participants, even though our discussions showed that, in most cases, automatic recognition is already being applied in their admission processes. The main challenge appears to be the harmonisation of practices across higher education institutions, and even within the same institution, practices may vary significantly.

- *From a general point of view, what do the institutions in question think about the level of implementation of automatic recognition at the national level? How would participants define and evaluate its implementation within their institutional practices (e.g., challenging, beneficial, or otherwise)?*

Automatic recognition is being implemented by all institutions, even if it is not explicitly stated as such. The foreign and French candidates follow the same admission procedure.

- *Are there any particular experiences reported by participating institutions on implementation of automatic recognition that you would like to mention?*

Each institution is free to set its own admission policy, with procedures varying depending on the program level and specialization.

The decision made by some HEIs depend largely on the country profiles provided on the website of Campus France*. If they can't find the degree on the list, they don't know how to evaluate the degree. They highlighted the importance of encountering similar types of qualifications on a recurring basis: the more familiar they are with a given qualification, the easier it is to implement automatic recognition — conversely, the more uncommon or unfamiliar a qualification is, the more complex the process becomes.

**Campus France: a public institution under the supervision of the ministries responsible for Foreign Affairs and Higher Education and Research, the French Agency for the promotion of higher education, international student services, and international mobility.*

- *The “Council Recommendation on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad”¹ sets automatic recognition as one of the objectives to be achieved. How familiar are the institutions involved with this recommendation?*

The participants who have attended our “Tour de France on AR” are more familiar with the concept of AR. The majority of the focus group stated that they weren't familiar with the Council's recommendation.

3. Practices for the implementation of automatic recognition that are in place

In the following section, please provide an overview of the main practices for the implementation of automatic recognition that are in place at the national level as described by the institutions involved, as well as practical examples of the existing tools at disposal. Find the related questions below:

- *Do institutions involved cooperate with other institutions/organisations to implement automatic recognition? If so, is the cooperation formalised or “self-organised”? If applicable, please provide additional details and examples of the types of cooperation the institutions engage in.*

¹ 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. In [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H1210\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H1210(01)).

Only a limited number of the participating higher education institutions reported cooperating with other institutions or organizations to implement automatic recognition. Where cooperation exists, it does not appear to be formalized, but rather self-organized and informal in nature.

The main external reference used by institutions is the country profiles provided on the Campus France website, which significantly shapes the decisions made by HEIs when evaluating foreign qualifications. If a degree cannot be found on this list, institutions reported facing difficulties in assessing it. Beyond this, no structured or formalized inter-institutional cooperation mechanisms were mentioned by participants.

- *What are the tools in place to support implementation of automatic recognition at the institutional level, mentioned by participants?*

Participants identified very few dedicated tools to support the implementation of automatic recognition at the institutional level. The primary resource relied upon is the country profiles available on the Campus France website, which serves as the main reference point for evaluating foreign qualifications.

In terms of procedural frameworks, European and non-European applications are processed through distinct pathways: European qualifications are handled directly via Parcoursup (for upper secondary holders) or Mon Master (for bachelor's degree holders), while non-European qualifications may be routed through Campus France or referred to the ENIC-NARIC centre for an opinion.

Regarding European tools more broadly, ECTS was recognized as a practical instrument for making studies and courses more transparent within the EHEA. However, participants reported limited familiarity with Europass, and the Diploma Supplement is only issued upon student request, limiting its proactive use in recognition procedures.

Institutions also refer to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and find it straightforward to apply automatic recognition for qualifications that map clearly onto it (a bachelor is a bachelor; a master is a master). However, they find it more complex to rely on the EQF when a qualification does not appear in the framework or falls within an intermediate level.

It is also worth noting that automatic recognition has already been implemented in practice across most participating institutions, even where it is not explicitly labelled as such, with no distinction made between degrees from EHEA countries and other regions.

- *What did participants expressed as a need in terms of “capabilities”, training, motivation, guidelines, technological tools (e.g., databases, software, websites, etc.) for their organisation and generally speaking for the national sector, to fully implement automatic recognition?*

Participants expressed a preference for technological tools, such as databases, software platforms, and dedicated websites, both at the institutional level and across the national higher education sector, as key enablers for the full implementation of automatic recognition.

They also highlighted the need for a dedicated contact point within the French ENIC-NARIC center, to whom they could direct questions when needed.

Participants responded positively to the focus group format, noting that the small group setting facilitated open exchange and the sharing of experiences. Ideally, they suggested that such sessions should be held at least once a year, to keep pace with current developments and evolving evaluation practices.

- *Did participants mention any law or official guidance that needs to change to enable their institution to better apply automatic recognition? Do the institutions involved have any impact on its shape?*

No

4. Digitalisation

Regarding digitalisation processes, please provide an overview of the perception of institutions involved about the support digitalisation might provide to promote the implementation of automatic recognition at the national level. Find the related questions below:

- *Do institutions involved think digitalisation could support the implementation of automatic recognition at national level? If so, what steps have been taken to digitalise the recognition procedures at the institutional level?*

Most participating institutions already receive application files through various digital platforms, including Parcoursup (national), Mon Master (national), and eCandidat (institutional). These files are subsequently reviewed by dedicated academic commissions, whose admission decisions are largely based on accumulated institutional experience and established practice.

HEIs also shared that no artificial intelligence tools are currently used in the processing of application files. While digitalization has streamlined the submission and management of applications, the evaluation and decision-making process remains entirely human-led at this stage.

5. Challenges and benefits perceived regarding the concept and the implementation procedures of automatic recognition

In the following section, please provide an overview of the main insights gathered from the answers collected to the guiding questions aimed at exploring the challenges perceived regarding the concept of automatic recognition and the barriers arose with its implementation. Find the related questions below:

- *What is the perception – among the institutions involved – of the current level of implementation of the Council Recommendation, both at the national and institutional levels? Do participants believe it has been adequately implemented, or are there still areas that require further attention? If so, which ones?*

Only at an institutional level

Only the staff working in international relations is familiar with the recommendation.

- *In the light of what discussed so far, what are the main benefits of implementing automatic recognition?*

This question did not generate significant discussion among participants, which may itself be telling automatic recognition has already been implemented in practice across most of the participating institutions, even where it is not explicitly labelled or formalized as such.

The primary benefit identified is the facilitation and streamlining of student mobility, removing unnecessary barriers and making the recognition process more fluid for incoming students.

- *What are the main challenges outlined by institutions involved?*

- **Lack of information on certain countries and qualifications:** A recurring concern was how to evaluate qualifications from countries where very little reliable information is available. Participants questioned which databases or reference tools to consult when documentation is scarce and expressed a clear need for more comprehensive and accessible resources to support their assessments.
- **Ambiguity in the evaluation of foreign degrees:** Institutions highlighted the difficulty of interpreting foreign qualifications in terms of credit loads, contact hours, and eligibility criteria for access to doctoral studies. These ambiguities can lead to substantial inconsistencies in the level of access granted to doctoral programs across institutions, raising broader equity concerns.
- **Procedural and administrative uncertainties:** Participants also raised several procedural challenges, including:
 - Uncertainty around whether an apostille is required on translated documents, and under what circumstances;
 - Questions surrounding the authentication of foreign qualifications, specifically, which authority or body to approach when verification is needed.

7. Suggested responses to the challenges emerged

In this section, please provide further details regarding the possible responses suggested by the institutions involved to the challenges emerged during the activity. Find below the related guiding question:

- *What are the main conditions needed to better apply automatic recognition in the institutions involved and more in general in the national sector?*

- Data sharing
- Training
- More exchange and communication with the ENIC-NARIC center.

8. Any other comments

Please use this section to share any further comments, or to share additional further sources used for the activity (e.g., Padlet, Mentimeter, etc.).

Minutes of the focus groups on the automatic recognition of qualifications conducted with French higher education institutions

Introduction:

As part of the European project TPG-LRC Plus (Thematic Peer Group on the Lisbon Recognition Convention), the ENIC-NARIC France centre conducted a series of focus groups with French higher education institutions (HEIs). These discussions, held on March 24, March 27, and April 9, 2026, aimed to assess the implementation of the automatic recognition of foreign qualifications and to identify the needs and practices of HEIs. The exchanges contributed to a report on the implementation of automatic recognition by French HEIs.

The TPG-LRC Plus project aims to support the effective implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC) within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Adopted in 1997 and ratified by 57 countries, the Lisbon Convention is the key legal framework for the recognition of qualifications in the EHEA. As part of the project, member countries of Thematic Group B, including France, organize exchanges on national policies and practices for qualification recognition, as well as public seminars. This project is funded by the European Commission under the Erasmus+ programme.

1. Recognition of foreign qualifications

A) European and non-European degrees

European and non-European qualifications are not processed in the same way. In general, European degrees follow the same procedure as that applied to French degrees, thanks to the harmonisation of university systems within the European Higher Education Area. The LMD system (Bachelor/Master/Doctorate) and in particular ECTS credits facilitate the interpretation of a degree's level. However, differences may arise regarding access to the doctoral level, as well as in the recognition of the doctorate itself, since level 8 of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) is not associated with ECTS credits.

Non-European degrees, for the most part, follow the "*Études en France*" procedure via the *Campus France* platform, which issues a favourable or unfavourable opinion on the application. However, an unfavourable opinion from *Campus France* does not in itself constitute a sufficient ground for refusal: French higher education institutions must be able to justify the rejection of a foreign application based on their own evaluation criteria. It is generally for non-European degrees that the comparability statement (or recognition of study periods) from the ENIC-NARIC centre is required to help HEIs evaluate the degree. In some institutions (particularly for doctoral schools), holders of non-European master's degrees are subject to a derogation procedure overseen by the university president.

B) Quality assurance in higher education

The concept of quality assurance in the higher education systems of foreign countries is generally unfamiliar to French HEIs. The question of whether a degree is recognised by the state of the education system to which it belongs is rarely raised, even though this is one of the two eligibility criteria for the processing of a recognition application by the French ENIC-NARIC centre. The second criterion is the status of the awarding institution in the country of origin.

Quality assurance in an education system – which aims to ensure that an institution fulfils its missions

and that its degrees attest to skills and knowledge consistent with established standards – is the cornerstone and indispensable prerequisite for any reliable assessment of a foreign degree. In general, the recognition of the degree and the awarding institution is carried out by the relevant local authorities.

C) Challenges in harmonising practices

The challenges related to the harmonisation of practices remain the most significant. Each HEI approaches the recognition of foreign qualifications according to its own procedures, and differences in practices can even be observed within the same institution. Each HEI is free to apply its own admissions process, with its own rules. Decision-making relies primarily on the expertise of the examining teachers within the pedagogical committee responsible for evaluating applications, or on external resources and databases, such as the Campus France database listing qualifications classified at level 4 worldwide.

The recognition of foreign qualifications also depends on the familiarity of the teaching staff with the degrees being assessed: the more well-known a degree, the easier it is to implement automatic recognition; conversely, a rare or poorly documented degree significantly burdens the process.

The issue of document translation also varies between institutions. Some require no translation, others accept translations into English or French, and others require them exclusively in French, without necessarily mandating the use of a sworn translator.

Finally, the digitalisation of admissions processes is now a common feature across all HEIs in France: nearly all foreign applications are now submitted digitally. A few paper applications still exist (green and white DAP* forms), but they represent only a tiny fraction of the applications processed.

*DAP: The Preliminary Admission Application is a mandatory registration procedure for all foreign students from outside the European Union, holding a foreign secondary school diploma, residing in France or in a foreign country.

D) Authentication of degrees

The HEIs present during the focus group indicated that they do not systematically address the issue of degree authentication. The lack of partnerships with foreign institutions limits the possibilities for direct verification with the issuing institution.

This situation exposes HEIs to a greater risk of documentary fraud, which is steadily increasing. The absence of suitable verification tools, particularly databases listing identified fake degrees, prevents them from carrying out rapid and reliable authentication of foreign qualifications.

To address this challenge, the ENIC-NARIC centre is involved in the European project Fraud-Act, which aims to create a collaborative database listing all fake degrees already identified by the ENIC-NARIC network. This project is currently in the development phase.

2. Automatic recognition of foreign qualifications

The term “automatic recognition” first appeared in 2012, in the Bucharest communiqué. An initial definition was provided by the working group on automatic recognition in 2015 (Yerevan, Armenia): « Automatic recognition of a degree leads to the automatic right of an applicant holding a qualification of a certain level to be considered for entry to the labour market or a programme of further study in the next level in any other EHEA-country (access). »

Discussions showed that, while the term itself remains little known, the principle of automatic recognition is already widely applied within HEIs. European degrees are handled in the same way as French degrees through platforms such as Parcoursup (post-secondary school), Mon Master (post-first-cycle programs), or e-candidat. This approach also applies to admission to doctoral programs for European students. In practice, master's degrees awarded within the EHEA are generally recognised as

equivalent to their French counterparts.

The discussions highlighted a lack of tools available to HEIs for implementing automatic recognition. While the ECTS has been recognized as a useful tool for making study programs and courses more transparent within the European Higher Education Area, other European tools such as the Europass and the Diploma Supplement are used only to a very uneven extent across HEIs. The Diploma Supplement, although mandatory, is in most cases issued only upon the student's request, which limits its proactive use in recognition procedures. Furthermore, some institutions that issue it to their own students do not take it into account when a foreign applicant applies to their institution.

Higher education institutions also refer to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and consider that automatic recognition is easier to apply for degrees that are clearly aligned with it: a bachelor's degree is recognized as a bachelor's degree, a master's degree as a master's degree.

3. The role of the French ENIC-NARIC Centre

The automatic recognition of foreign degrees is a key lever for facilitating student mobility and enhancing the attractiveness of the French university system. To support HEIs in the implementation of automatic recognition, the ENIC-NARIC France centre aims to position itself as a reference and knowledge-sharing centre to promote gradual harmonization at the national level.

In this regard, a dedicated point of contact with the ENIC-NARIC France centre is currently being established. Discussions have indeed shown that HEIs need a dedicated point of contact. Institutions may contact the centre at the following address: reconnaissanceautomatique@france-education-international.fr.

TPG-LRC Plus project

Report of the national focus group with higher education institutions

Georgia

1. Introduction

1.1 Specific objectives

This general aim of the focus group has been reached through the following specific objectives:

- investigating the level of awareness of the concept of automatic recognition;
- collecting useful information on the practices for the implementation of automatic recognition that were in place;
- exploring how digitalisation transformation processes influenced internal policies and institutional practices.

In the section below, please provide any additional information concerning further objectives achieved at the national level as a result of this activity, taking into account any specific features of the national background and context.

An additional objective of this focus group was to explore how automatic recognition could be introduced in the Georgian context, where no automatic recognition procedures currently exist at either the national or institutional level. The discussion also aimed to understand how the centralised recognition system operated by ENIC Georgia could evolve to support a semi-decentralised model of automatic recognition, and to identify the specific legislative and infrastructural prerequisites needed in the Georgian national context.

2. Background and methodology

2.1 Selection process of participants

In the box below, please provide further details on the selection process of participants at the national level, including information about the exact number of participants, their background, role within their institution, and the geographical balance considered during the selection. To support you in completing this section, here are some guiding questions:

- *When were the focus groups organised?*

The focus group was organised and held on 10.03.2026, in the framework of the TPG-LRC Plus project activities. It was conducted as a single online session bringing together representatives from multiple Georgian higher education institutions.

- *How were the participants selected?*

Participants were selected from among Georgian higher education institutions that are actively involved in international student mobility and credential recognition processes. The selection aimed to include a mix of large technical universities and internationally-oriented institutions, ensuring both geographic and institutional diversity. Representatives included vice-rectors, quality assurance officers, and staff members involved in recognition and internationalisation.

- *How was the activity conducted, and who facilitated the focus groups?*

The activity was conducted as a moderated discussion session. The focus group was facilitated and co-facilitated by representatives of ENIC Georgia. The session followed a semi-structured format with guiding questions on automatic recognition, digitalisation, and institutional practices, allowing for open discussion among participants.

- *Were any specific digital tools (e.g., Padlet, Mentimeter, etc.) used to support the development of the activity?*

No specific digital tools were used. The session was conducted in a Zoom Meeting format.

Participants' list

Participant <i>(please include just initials of name and surname)</i>	Role	Institution
A. K.	Facilitator, Senior Credential Evaluator	ENIC Georgia
S. A.	Co-facilitator, Head of ENIC Georgia	ENIC Georgia
N. P.	Respondent, Vice-rector	European University
S. P.	Respondent, Quality Assurance Head	Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University
K. Mk.	Respondent, Quality Assurance Deputy Head	Georgian Technical University
M. G.	Respondent, Quality Assurance Head	Caucasus International University
V. Gh.	Respondent, Quality Assurance Head	Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University

2.2 National adaptations

Considering the initial proposal for the focus group format shared among the project consortium, the following section has been dedicated to outline any adaptations made at the national level to ensure the activity was tailored to the specific context and to gather reliable data on the topics discussed. If your case involves such adaptations, please provide additional details, addressing the following guiding questions:

- *Were all the questions in the provided list presented to the participants?*

Yes, all the questions from the provided list were presented to the participants. The discussion naturally flowed between topics, with participants often addressing multiple questions simultaneously, particularly when discussing the relationship between automatic recognition, credit transfer, and institutional autonomy.

- *Has your institution modified the structure of the focus group at the national level? If so, in what way? Please specify any adjustments made to the questions in the box below.*

No significant structural modifications were made to the focus group format. However, given that Georgia currently has no automatic recognition procedures in place at any level, additional emphasis was placed on exploring participants' understanding of the concept itself and their views on what model (centralised, decentralised, or semi-decentralised) would be most appropriate for the Georgian context.

- *Did you encounter any challenges in delivering this activity? If so, which ones?*

The main challenge was that automatic recognition is an entirely new concept for most Georgian higher education institutions. Since no automatic recognition procedures exist in Georgia, participants sometimes found it difficult to discuss implementation experiences. The discussion naturally gravitated toward the broader topic of credit recognition in mobility contexts, which is a more familiar practice.

3. Understanding of the concept of automatic recognition

In the following section, please provide an overview of the main insights gathered from the answers collected to the guiding questions provided below:

- *What is the understanding of the concept of automatic recognition?*

Participants demonstrated a general awareness of the concept of automatic recognition as outlined in the Lisbon Recognition Convention, though their practical understanding varied. Most participants associated automatic recognition with the idea that qualifications from

signatory countries of the Lisbon Convention should be recognised without requiring individual expert examination of each diploma. However, there was notable uncertainty about the operational details, specifically regarding who should be responsible for the process, what the scope of automatic recognition should cover (school-leaving certificates only, or also higher education qualifications), and how it would interact with the existing centralised system managed by ENIC Georgia. Several participants distinguished between recognition of completed qualifications and recognition of credits/learning periods abroad, noting that these require different approaches.

- *From a general point of view, what do the institutions in question think about the level of implementation of automatic recognition at the national level? How would participants define and evaluate its implementation within their institutional practices (e.g., challenging, beneficial, or otherwise)?*

Participants unanimously acknowledged that automatic recognition has not been implemented at the national level in Georgia, and that even concrete steps toward implementation have not yet been taken. The current system relies entirely on individual case-by-case evaluation conducted by ENIC Georgia, where each diploma undergoes detailed expert examination. Participants viewed automatic recognition as both beneficial in principle and challenging to implement in the Georgian context. Several described the current centralised system as providing a certain comfort and protection from risks, while also recognising that it creates bottlenecks. All participating institutions confirmed that no institutional-level automatic recognition mechanisms exist.

- *Are there any particular experiences reported by participating institutions on implementation of automatic recognition that you would like to mention?*

While no institution reported experience with automatic recognition per se, several shared relevant experiences with credit recognition in mobility contexts. One participant described challenges with recognising credits earned by Erasmus exchange students, including uncertainty about maximum recognisable credits. "One participant noted cases where students began their studies abroad (for example in India), then decided to finish in Georgia and brought in about 280 ECTS credits so that, if most are recognised, they would be awarded the qualification of a 300-credit programme in Georgia; where, in that case, is the maximum limit for recognisable credits?"

- *The "Council Recommendation on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods*

abroad”¹ sets automatic recognition as one of the objectives to be achieved. How familiar are the institutions involved with this recommendation?

Participants showed limited but growing familiarity with the 2018 Council Recommendation. When directly asked about it, the facilitator noted that the Recommendation set objectives to be achieved by 2025, and participants acknowledged that Georgia, like many other countries, had not met this target. Participants were aware that Scandinavian countries and some other European nations had made more progress, but noted that Georgia's situation was comparable to many other countries that are still in the early stages. The focus group itself served as an important awareness-raising exercise, with several participants indicating that the discussion helped deepen their understanding of the Recommendation's implications for Georgian institutions.

4. Practices for the implementation of automatic recognition that are in place

In the following section, please provide an overview of the main practices for the implementation of automatic recognition that are in place at the national level as described by the institutions involved, as well as practical examples of the existing tools at disposal. Find the related questions below:

- *Do institutions involved cooperate with other institutions/organisations to implement automatic recognition? If so, is the cooperation formalised or “self-organised”? If applicable, please provide additional details and examples of the types of cooperation the institutions engage in.*

Institutions involved cooperate primarily through the centralised recognition system managed by ENIC Georgia. Cooperation between universities themselves on recognition matters is largely informal and limited. In the context of joint programmes and dual degree arrangements, cooperation is formalised through bilateral agreements. Participants expressed interest in developing more structured cooperation, to create shared guidelines and common practices.

- *What are the tools in place to support implementation of automatic recognition at the institutional level, mentioned by participants?*

The main tool in place is the centralised recognition system operated by ENIC Georgia, which serves as the primary reference point for all recognition decisions. Universities rely on ENIC Georgia's expertise, its access to international information centre databases, diploma supplement analyses, and qualifications framework comparisons. At the institutional level, tools are limited; recognition decisions for mobility students are typically handled by programme leaders and faculty members, with no digital tools specifically designed for recognition. Some institutions mentioned using electronic management systems for general student administration, but these are not specifically configured for recognition processes.

¹ 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. In [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H1210\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H1210(01)).

- *What did participants expressed as a need in terms of “capabilities”, training, motivation, guidelines, technological tools (e.g., databases, software, websites, etc.) for their organisation and generally speaking for the national sector, to fully implement automatic recognition?*

Participants identified several key needs: development of guidelines or a practical handbook for implementing automatic recognition tailored to the Georgian context; training for university staff on the concept and procedures of automatic recognition; access to international databases and digital tools for verifying qualifications and comparing learning outcomes more efficiently; development of standardised procedures for credit recognition during mobility, including clear rules on maximum/minimum credit thresholds; informational sessions involving international experts who could share concrete models and experiences from other countries; and financial and human resources to build the necessary digital infrastructure at the institutional level.

- *Did participants mention any law or official guidance that needs to change to enable their institution to better apply automatic recognition? Do the institutions involved have any impact on its shape?*

Participants noted that current Georgian legislation does not provide a framework for automatic recognition, and that legislative changes would be necessary to enable its implementation. The discussion highlighted the need for clear legislative provisions defining the scope of automatic recognition, the roles and responsibilities of institutions versus the national centre, and threshold rules for credit recognition. Participants indicated willingness to actively participate in the legislative drafting process and consultations. They emphasised that any changes should build incrementally, starting with the improvement of existing procedures before introducing automatic recognition, to avoid creating systemic gaps.

5. Digitalisation

Regarding digitalisation processes, please provide an overview of the perception of institutions involved about the support digitalisation might provide to promote the implementation of automatic recognition at the national level. Find the related questions below:

- *Do institutions involved think digitalisation could support the implementation of automatic recognition at national level? If so, what steps have been taken to digitalise the recognition procedures at the institutional level?*

Participants agreed that digitalisation could significantly support the implementation of automatic recognition. However, they reported that the current state of digital infrastructure at Georgian institutions is limited. Most institutions still rely on paper-based documentation for processing foreign credentials and recognition decisions. Some universities have electronic management systems, but these are not configured for recognition-specific workflows. Participants noted two main options in current practice: requesting original paper documents or using digital platforms for document exchange. The preference is moving toward digital solutions, but the financial and human resources required to build appropriate digital

infrastructure were identified as significant barriers. A state-level digital infrastructure initiative would be necessary to support automatic recognition at scale, as individual institutions lack the resources to develop such systems independently.

6. Challenges and benefits perceived regarding the concept and the implementation procedures of automatic recognition

In the following section, please provide an overview of the main insights gathered from the answers collected to the guiding questions aimed at exploring the challenges perceived regarding the concept of automatic recognition and the barriers arose with its implementation. Find the related questions below:

- *What is the perception – among the institutions involved – of the current level of implementation of the Council Recommendation, both at the national and institutional levels? Do participants believe it has been adequately implemented, or are there still areas that require further attention? If so, which ones?*

Participants assessed the current level of implementation of the Council Recommendation in Georgia as being at a very early stage. No automatic recognition procedures exist at either the national or institutional level. Participants compared Georgia's situation to that of many other European countries, noting that only a handful of nations (primarily Scandinavian countries) had achieved meaningful implementation. They acknowledged that Georgia should select an appropriate model and begin implementation incrementally, potentially starting with the automatic recognition of school-leaving certificates from Lisbon Convention signatory states before extending to higher education qualifications. Areas requiring further attention include legislative framework development, digital infrastructure, institutional capacity building, and establishment of mutual trust between institutions.

- *In the light of what discussed so far, what are the main benefits of implementing automatic recognition?*

Participants identified several benefits: simplification and acceleration of the recognition process, reducing bureaucratic burden for both institutions and students; presenting Georgian graduates and qualifications more clearly and understandably in the international context; greater facilitation of student mobility, both incoming and outgoing; enhanced institutional competitiveness in attracting international students; alignment with European Higher Education Area standards and commitments; reduction of duplicated functions between the national centre and universities; building mutual trust between institutions and countries within the Lisbon Convention framework; and more efficient use of resources currently devoted to individual case-by-case evaluation.

- *What are the main challenges outlined by institutions involved?*

The main challenges identified include: absence of a legislative framework for automatic recognition in Georgia; lack of established procedures, standards, or guidelines at the institutional level; limited digital infrastructure for processing recognition decisions electronically; the complexity of comparing qualifications across different national systems, given variations in programme duration, credit systems, and qualification structures; determining appropriate credit recognition thresholds and managing the tension between institutional autonomy and system-wide consistency; the quality assurance and trust dilemma (without quality, there is no trust; without trust, automatic recognition cannot function); questions of accountability and liability; insufficient financial and human resources; concerns about maintaining quality standards while simplifying procedures; and the need to balance competition between universities with cooperation on recognition matters.

7. Suggested responses to the challenges emerged

In this section, please provide further details regarding the possible responses suggested by the institutions involved to the challenges emerged during the activity. Find below the related guiding question:

- *What are the main conditions needed to better apply automatic recognition in the institutions involved and more in general in the national sector?*

Participants suggested the following conditions and responses: a phased, incremental approach, starting with improving existing procedures, then moving toward automatic recognition, beginning possibly with school-leaving certificates from Lisbon Convention signatory states; development of a semi-decentralised model where ENIC Georgia retains a supportive and oversight role while universities gain more autonomy in recognition decisions; legislative initiative to create a clear legal framework, with active participation of universities in the drafting process; development of practical guidelines and road maps for institutions; international expert consultations and sharing of concrete models from other countries (particularly Baltic states, Scandinavian countries, and neighbouring states); investment in digital infrastructure at both state and institutional levels; capacity-building and training for university staff; establishment of standardised procedures within institutions for recognition of credits and qualifications; fostering inter-institutional trust through shared databases and qualifications framework alignment; and regular consultations and working meetings between ENIC Georgia and universities to build consensus on the direction of reform.

8. Any other comments

Please use this section to share any further comments, or to share additional further sources used for the activity (e.g., Padlet, Mentimeter, etc.).

The focus group served as an important first step in introducing the concept of automatic recognition to Georgian higher education institutions. The discussion revealed that while automatic recognition is a new and unfamiliar concept in the Georgian context, there is

significant institutional interest and willingness to engage with the reform process. Participants emphasised the importance of continuing these discussions with concrete models and international expertise. The idea of a semi-decentralised system, where ENIC Georgia maintains a supportive role while universities take on more recognition responsibilities, emerged as the preferred direction.

TPG-LRC Plus project

Report of the national focus group with higher education institutions

Italy

1. Background and methodology

1.1 Selection process of participants

In the box below, please provide further details on the selection process of participants at the national level, including information about the exact number of participants, their background, role within their institution, and the geographical balance considered during the selection. To support you in completing this section, here are some guiding questions:

- *When were the focus groups organised?*

The focus group was organised on 25 February 2026, online, from 11:00 to 13:00 CET.

- *How were the participants selected?*

The selection process of participants was carried out by launching a call for application among members of the Italian Association for Credential Evaluators (APICE). Participants that have applied were hence selected with the aim of gathering a heterogeneous sample of Italian higher education institutions, both in terms of geographical variety, as well as looking at the size of institutions. A total of five representatives from five Italian higher education institutions participated in the focus group.

It should be taken into consideration the fact that all participants to focus groups are members of APICE association; this could represent a bias to the research analysis, as they have often taken part in training activities linked to the topic object of the focus group and do have access to additional resources on automatic recognition. Therefore, the initial level of awareness of the representatives from higher education institutions involved has to be considered medium-high.

- *How was the activity conducted, and who facilitated the focus groups?*

The activity was conducted online via MS Teams. It was facilitated by CIMEA: one staff member moderated the session, while the other two staff members took notes and populated a Padlet board with the key information and insights gathered from participants' discussion. This information was then displayed at the end of the session in order to resume what discussed

and to eventually collect further comments from participants. Both this report and the Padlet board was sent to participants as a follow-up, for final check.

- *Were any specific digital tools (e.g., Padlet, Mentimeter, etc.) used to support the development of the activity?*

The digital tool Padlet was used to collect information in real time and share it with participants both at the end of the session and afterwards as a follow-up. The Padlet board collected the main insights and points highlighted by participants during the discussion.

Participants' list

Participant <i>(please include just initials of name and surname)</i>	Role	Institution
E. G., M.T., F.S.	International Cooperation and Policy Development Department	CIMEA
E. C.	Employee at the International Student Admissions Office	Università degli Studi di Brescia
E. R.	Employee at the networking unit responsible for international recruitment and promotion, as well as credential evaluation for the admission of international students	Università degli Studi di Messina
D. M.	Admission Office Responsible	Università degli Studi di Pavia
G. D.	Employee at the International Students Section	Università degli Studi di Torino
S. D.	Assistant at the International Students Office	Università degli Studi della Tuscia

1.2 National adaptations

Considering the initial proposal for the focus group format shared among the project consortium, the following section has been dedicated to outline any adaptations made at the national level to ensure the activity was tailored to the specific context and to gather reliable data on the topics discussed. If your case involves such adaptations, please provide additional details, addressing the following guiding questions:

- *Were all the questions in the provided list presented to the participants?*

Yes, all the questions were translated in Italian and presented to participants.

- *Has your institution modified the structure of the focus group at the national level? If so, in what way? Please specify any adjustments made to the questions in the box below.*

The structure remained unchanged, and the activity has been supported by the use of a digital tool, namely a Padlet board.

- *Did you encounter any challenges in delivering this activity? If so, which ones?*

None.

2. Understanding of the concept of automatic recognition

In the following section, please provide an overview of the main insights gathered from the answers collected to the guiding questions provided below:

- *What is the understanding of the concept of automatic recognition?*

Participants generally understand the concept of automatic recognition primarily as recognition of the level of a foreign qualification, and related rights for qualifications holders. Participants also emphasised that the effects produced by a qualification in the country where it was awarded should be maintained within the Italian system, ensuring that holders of foreign qualifications are not subjected to additional administrative or academic burdens, provided there are no substantial differences. In this regard, reducing documentation requirements was considered a central aspect of the topic. While respecting the students' right to have their qualification recognised, such recognition process is intended to speed up the procedures for accessing further study programmes for which students apply and reduce the bureaucratic burden on students. However, most of the participants noted that the term “automatic” may be misleading, as recognition, intended in the traditional process of recognise an academic title, still involves further evaluation processes by credential evaluators that cannot be avoided.

- *From a general point of view, what do the institutions in question think about the level of implementation of automatic recognition at the national level? How would participants define and evaluate its implementation within their institutional practices (e.g., challenging, beneficial, or otherwise)?*

From a general perspective, efforts are being made to streamline procedures and reduce administrative burdens for applicants, for example by limiting requests for additional certification to specific cases or by relying on online verification mechanisms (namely, blockchain platforms) and direct contact with awarding institutions. Nevertheless, while recognition of the qualification level may be facilitated, documentary and procedural checks continue to play a central role. In fact, participants consistently emphasised that recognition cannot be fully automatic in practice, as verification of the authenticity of qualifications remains an essential procedure, undertaken directly by credential evaluators.

At the institutional level, several participants shared that procedures are periodically reviewed within their own offices and departments with the aim of simplifying requirements and enhancing transparency. However, concerns were raised about limited coordination and cooperation at the national level, also regarding communication with foreign embassies, which may lead to a longer process in order to obtain the information required to support recognition procedures. This situation may be at odds with the objective of automatic recognition, which aims to accelerate recognition processes, by reducing the administrative burden for both applicants and credential evaluators.

Moreover, most participants indicated that they often lack adequate instruments and tools to assess the level of implementation of automatic recognition. For the purposes of the analysis, this aspect has been considered, also in light of the fact that the implementation of automatic recognition at the EHEA level is monitored through the Bologna Process Implementation Report.

Overall, the implementation of automatic recognition was viewed as a beneficial but still developing process, requiring procedural simplification but maintaining rigorous attention to the verification of qualification authenticity, which requires time and effort by credential evaluators.

- *Are there any particular experiences reported by participating institutions on implementation of automatic recognition that you would like to mention?*

From a broader perspective, participants shared information that could also be used to draw insights from their internal experiences with the implementation of automatic recognition. These included the use of formal agreements with foreign universities for double or joint degrees, which allow qualifications to be recognised without requiring additional documentation from students.

Institutions also described efforts to streamline internal procedures, such as requesting comparability statements selectively or using online reliable verification tools where possible.

- *The “Council Recommendation on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods*

abroad”¹ sets automatic recognition as one of the objectives to be achieved. How familiar are the institutions involved with this recommendation?

Participants indicated that familiarity with the Council Recommendation of 26 November 2018 is generally limited to staff directly involved in credential evaluation and recognition procedures, working on the related offices and departments. Knowledge of the policy was described as largely confined to administrative offices responsible for handling foreign qualifications, often supported by targeted professional development initiatives such as training courses or sector-specific events (for example CIMEA training course for Credential Evaluators or the Annual Conference of the APICE Association). Within these units, awareness was considered adequate, although it does not typically extend to the wider institutional community.

3. Practices for the implementation of automatic recognition that are in place

In the following section, please provide an overview of the main practices for the implementation of automatic recognition that are in place at the national level as described by the institutions involved, as well as practical examples of the existing tools at disposal. Find the related questions below:

- *Do institutions involved cooperate with other institutions/organisations to implement automatic recognition? If so, is the cooperation formalised or “self-organised”? If applicable, please provide additional details and examples of the types of cooperation the institutions engage in.*

As mentioned in the previous sections, participants reported several cooperation examples with external institutions, which is primarily formalised through bilateral or multilateral agreements with foreign higher education institutions, particularly in the context of double degree and joint degree programmes. For example, the Università degli Studi di Brescia mentioned the International cooperation agreement with the University of Hanoi, which considers scholarships for its students for master’s programmes, or with the Italian institute at Addis Abeba, where students, after obtaining their high school diploma, have the possibility to directly enrol at the Italian university, with the support of a specific scholarship.

Within these arrangements, the concept of “automatic recognition” is typically embedded in the institutional agreement made with other institutions, such as double degrees programmes, which enable students to obtain a double recognised qualification (one for each institution where they studied) at the end of their university career, or joint degree programmes, which are curriculum offered by two or more higher education institutions, resulting in a single diploma, or separate diploma from each institution.

Other agreements mentioned enable students to obtain or use qualifications across systems without being subject to standard additional documentation requirements. For example, as

¹ 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. In [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H1210\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H1210(01)).

reported by the representative from the Università degli Studi della Tuscia, these types of agreements focus on the recognition of prior qualifications in order to allow students to continue their studies directly at the partner institution and to progress to the next academic carrier at that same partner institution. Other examples mentioned include structured partnerships that combine recognition procedures with targeted support measures such as scholarships for incoming students (once the qualification has been obtained, students enrol in their institution with a scholarship).

Double degree and joint degree programmes, as well as similar types of partnership among institutions are always based on prior evaluation of both the institutions and the learning path. Participants emphasised that trust in partner institutions is not unconditional but is built through prior evaluation during the establishment of agreements, including assessment of admission procedures and academic standards. However, approaches to cooperation vary across institutions. Some participants highlighted that their institutions maintain additional documentation requirements even within partnership arrangements. For instance, at the Università degli Studi di Messina, formal certification or comparability statements issued by CIMEA are still required at the enrolment stage, even for double degrees programmes implemented with foreign universities.

- *What are the tools in place to support implementation of automatic recognition at the institutional level, mentioned by participants?*

Participants cited a set of relevant databases, information platforms and online verification tools to support traditional recognition processes. Among those, the following were mentioned:

- Materials and databases made available through APICE (Italian Association of Credential Evaluation), seen as sector-specific information and professional resources.
- Institutional verification tools such as the World Higher Education Database (WHED).
- National education systems' databases, such as those from Nuffic, Anabin, and the ARDI database (Automatic Recognition Database Italia), which are used when clarification of the qualifications level is needed.
- Information provided by the ENIC-NARIC networks is also consulted.
- For verification of accreditation status, the database DEQAR (Database of External Quality Assurance Reports) is considered.
- Consultation of primary sources published by competent national authorities has been outlined as a standard practice.
- Further online tools, such as Wayback Machine to check information provided in websites no longer available online, are also used.

Informal professional exchange was also highlighted as further completing these tools, including peer-to-peer consultation through professional forums and communication channels among credential evaluators. In this context, reference was made to the value of

professional discussion spaces such as the WhatsApp group created at the end of the Professional Courses for Credential Evaluators developed by CIMEA and APICE, in collaboration with the European University of Rome (UER). This was outlined as a good practice to consider and that should be better formalised at institutional and national level.

- *What did participants expressed as a need in terms of “capabilities”, training, motivation, guidelines, technological tools (e.g., databases, software, websites, etc.) for their organisation and generally speaking for the national sector, to fully implement automatic recognition?*

A recurrent theme throughout the discussion was the need to keep developing communities of practices and structured platforms for knowledge exchange, such as dedicated forums where credential evaluators can pose questions and share expertise among colleagues. Participants also expressed interest in developing shared institutional or inter-institutional knowledge databases, such as collaborative digital repositories, to promote consistency on knowledge acquired on different education systems. In this regard, the Università degli Studi di Torino, reported that they have already started thinking about creating an “University Wiki” to support their work as credential evaluators and develop an inter-university resource.

- *Did participants mention any law or official guidance that needs to change to enable their institution to better apply automatic recognition? Do the institutions involved have any impact on its shape?*

Participants reflections suggest a perceived need for more deeply rooted national coordination and shared procedural tools to support consistent implementation at national level. The topics discussed were:

- 1) The creation of a national-level mechanisms through which an applicant’s qualification could be evaluated once and then recognised across institutions, avoiding multiple parallel assessments by different universities.
- 2) Institution of a national-level centre responsible for verifying applications through a national database accessible to universities. However, the autonomy of universities should be guaranteed, in order to preserve the heterogeneity of regional and local education systems at national level.
- 3) The need for clearer and more consistent regulation concerning access to higher education in relation to pre-university educational pathways at national and EU level and the required years of schooling.

On these topics, while participants recognised the potential efficiency gains of centralisation, they also emphasised the need to balance such measures with institutional autonomy, particularly regarding admission decisions. In fact, they stressed that admission procedures should remain within the competence of individual institutions, while common procedural standards and databases could be established at national level.

4. Digitalisation

Regarding digitalisation processes, please provide an overview of the perception of institutions involved about the support digitalisation might provide to promote the implementation of automatic recognition at the national level. Find the related questions below:

- *Do institutions involved think digitalisation could support the implementation of automatic recognition at national level? If so, what steps have been taken to digitalise the recognition procedures at the institutional level?*

Digital tools were described as facilitating the recognition procedures of qualifications, especially where verification features, such as blockchain validation systems, are present. At the same time, some institutions emphasised that reliance on digital verification alone should not be always considered sufficient, since additional specific procedures and verification process still needs to be carried out by credential evaluators.

At the institutional level, steps towards digitalisation have primarily focused on reducing paper documentation and expanding the use of digital tools and platforms for internal offices and departments' procedures. For examples, participants also reported the use of practical digital tools to support documents analysis, such as QR code readers, online date converters for non-Gregorian calendars (such as the Ethiopian calendar) and image-based translation applications (such as Google Lens).

Pre-admission procedures were described as largely digital. Most of the participants reported efforts to minimise requests for physical documents wherever possible. Although original paper certificates are still commonly required for some more specific cases.

The Università degli Studi di Torino underlined the role of digitalisation in ensuring transparency and reliability of information provided via websites and official institutional webpages. This ensures that students, academic and administrative staff have always access to up-to-date information on automatic recognition procedures.

5. Challenges and benefits perceived regarding the concept and the implementation procedures of automatic recognition

In the following section, please provide an overview of the main insights gathered from the answers collected to the guiding questions aimed at exploring the challenges perceived regarding the concept of automatic recognition and the barriers arose with its implementation. Find the related questions below:

- *What is the perception – among the institutions involved – of the current level of implementation of the Council Recommendation, both at the national and institutional levels? Do participants believe it has been adequately implemented, or are there still areas that require further attention? If so, which ones?*

Participants highlighted that, within specialised administrative units, efforts are being made to adapt procedures in ways consistent with automatic recognition principles, particularly by

reducing documentation requirements and administrative burden for applicants, by streamlining evaluation processes wherever possible. In this context, some institutions periodically review their practices to determine when requesting for some more specific documents is necessary and when it may be avoided. However, participants emphasised that recognition cannot be fully automatic in practice, as verification of the authenticity of qualifications remains an essential component of the process which needs additional check and assessment by credential evaluators.

At the national level, as explained also in the above sections, participants identified limited coordination among national higher education institutions, as difficulties in obtaining timely responses from external authorities (such as embassies), which were seen as factors that may delay recognition processes for applicants.

- *In the light of what discussed so far, what are the main benefits of implementing automatic recognition?*

Participants highlighted several benefits of automatic recognition, as detailed below, in the perspective of:

- Guaranteeing of students' right to education and to have its qualification evaluated.
- Enhancing transparency towards students, ensuring that holders of foreign qualifications understand how their credentials will be considered and evaluated in Italy thanks to information provided also on official and institutional websites.
- Increasing opportunities for student mobility, by facilitating level recognition across different education systems.
- Reducing administrative and documentary burden for applicants, since automatic recognition enable faster processing and clearer expectations for students.
- Improving speedy recognition procedures and efficiency seen as potential advantages, given also the growing application volumes and limited administrative capacity.
- Promoting shared and useful online tools for the comparison of qualifications, to facilitate the evaluation process among national higher education institutions.

- *What are the main challenges outlined by institutions involved?*

Participants identified the following challenges associated with automatic recognition:

- The misleading nature of the term “automatic”, which does not exclude the evaluation processes and the additional assessment of credential evaluators that are needed in practice.
- The variety between national systems require additional assessments and make it complicate to have centralised recognition procedures.

- Ensuring the accuracy of evaluations and verifying the authenticity of qualifications remains a challenge, particularly while attempting to make procedures faster.
- Dual nature of benefits and challenges, noting that simplification and optimisation must be balanced with rigorous verification to maintain reliability in recognition decisions.

7. Suggested responses to the challenges emerged

In this section, please provide further details regarding the possible responses suggested by the institutions involved to the challenges emerged during the activity. Find below the related guiding question:

- *What are the main conditions needed to better apply automatic recognition in the institutions involved and more in general in the national sector?*

Among the conditions discussed, emphasis was placed on professional trainings, sharing of knowledge and procedures, and active information exchange between universities. Internal and external communication sharing was emphasised as an important element in order to have access to updated information, both for students and for institutions' offices and departments.

Participants highlighted the value of structured communities of practice, working groups, trainings, and national meetings or further initiatives, such as those organised by CIMEA and APICE, while noting that dialogue between internal offices should be improved within some institutions.

Consistent coordination of procedures and shared platforms was also considered necessary, along with accessible and well-archived information to collect and store specific details regarding individual cases. Moreover, the development of centralised procedures at national level was also discussed in order to avoid requesting additional unnecessary documentation and so being aligned at the national level.

8. Any other comments

Please use this section to share any further comments, or to share additional further sources used for the activity (e.g., Padlet, Mentimeter, etc.).

An online Padlet board has been used throughout the focus group to collect the insights gathered from participants' discussions. The link to the board is shared just below:

<https://padlet.com/associazioneCIMEA/tpg-lrc-plus-focus-group-italia-vqh45pn0p98fdfja>.

TPG-LRC Plus project

Report of the national focus group with higher education institutions

Republic of Kazakhstan

1. Introduction

1.1 Specific objectives

This general aim of the focus group has been reached through the following specific objectives:

- investigating the level of awareness of the concept of automatic recognition;
- collecting useful information on the practices for the implementation of automatic recognition that were in place;
- exploring how digitalisation transformation processes influenced internal policies and institutional practices.

In the section below, please provide any additional information concerning further objectives achieved at the national level as a result of this activity, taking into account any specific features of the national background and context.

At the national level, the focus group also aimed to collect feedback from higher education institutions regarding the practical implementation of recognition procedures for foreign qualifications in Kazakhstan, where the formal recognition of foreign educational documents is carried out centrally by the Higher Education Development National Center under the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

In Kazakhstan, foreign applicants may be admitted to higher education institutions based on their educational documents, while the formal recognition procedure is completed through the national recognition authority. In practice, universities often require students to complete the recognition process during the first semester of study according to articles 40 and 5 of standard rules for admission to training in educational organizations implementing educational programs of higher and postgraduate education (*Order of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated October 31, 2018 No. 600*, <https://adilet.zan.kz/rus/docs/V1800017650>).

Given this specific institutional framework, the activity also aimed to:

- identify challenges faced by universities in the admission of international students whose documents are undergoing national recognition procedures;
- explore institutional perspectives on the potential introduction of automatic or simplified recognition mechanisms;
- collect suggestions from universities regarding possible improvements to national recognition policies, including digital verification tools and clearer guidance for admission procedures.

The activity also contributed to the broader discussion on the implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention principles in Kazakhstan, particularly regarding transparency, fairness, and the simplification of recognition procedures in line with the objectives of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

2. Background and methodology

2.1 Selection process of participants

In the box below, please provide further details on the selection process of participants at the national level, including information about the exact number of participants, their background, role within their institution, and the geographical balance considered during the selection. To support you in completing this section, here are some guiding questions:

- *When were the focus groups organised?*

The national focus group was organised on 25 February 2026 in an online format (Zoom) by the Higher Education Development National Center under the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

- *How were the participants selected?*

Official invitation letters were sent to ten higher education institutions across Kazakhstan, representing different regions of the country (north, south, east, west and capital city) and including both public and private universities.

The invitation requested that participating institutions nominate representatives not lower than the level of head of department or equivalent, preferably staff members responsible for admission procedures, academic affairs or international cooperation.

This approach aimed to ensure that participants had sufficient institutional authority and practical experience with recognition procedures and the admission of international students. As a result, the focus group included senior academic administrators, heads of departments, directors of academic offices, and representatives of international relations offices.

- *How was the activity conducted, and who facilitated the focus groups?*

The focus group was conducted in an online format via Zoom on 25 February 2026. The activity was organised by the Higher Education Development National Center under the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan within the framework of the Erasmus+ project TPG-LRC Plus.

The discussion was facilitated by E.T. Irgebayev, Deputy Director of the Higher Education Development National Center, who acted as the moderator of the focus group. The moderator introduced the objectives of the activity, explained the structure of the discussion and guided participants through a series of predefined thematic questions related to the understanding, implementation and challenges of automatic recognition.

The session was conducted as a structured expert discussion, allowing representatives of higher education institutions to share their institutional practices, experiences and perspectives regarding recognition procedures and the potential implementation of automatic recognition mechanisms in Kazakhstan.

- *Were any specific digital tools (e.g., Padlet, Mentimeter, etc.) used to support the development of the activity?*

No additional digital tools such as Padlet, Mentimeter or similar platforms were used during the activity. The focus group was conducted through an online meeting via Zoom, which allowed participants from different regions of Kazakhstan to join the discussion. The session followed a moderated discussion format, where participants responded to guiding questions and shared their institutional experiences related to recognition procedures and the implementation of automatic recognition.

The online format facilitated active participation and exchange of experiences among representatives of higher education institutions from different regions of the country.

Participants' list

Participant <i>(please include just initials of name and surname)</i>	Role	Institution
R.K.	Vice-Rector for Academic Affairs	Taraz Regional University named after M.Kh. Dulaty
S.A.	Director of Academic Affairs Department	Taraz Regional University named after M.Kh. Dulaty
A.K.	Head of Strategic Development and Accreditation	Shokan Ualikhanov Kokshetau University
G.M.	Head of Admission Office	Pavlodar Pedagogical University named after A. Margulan
G.S.	Head of Admission Office	Pavlodar Pedagogical University named after A. Margulan
E.N.	Director of Academic Affairs Department	East Kazakhstan Technical University named after D. Serikbayev
A.K.	Head of International Cooperation Office	East Kazakhstan Technical University named after D. Serikbayev
N.A.	Head of Registrar Office	M. Narikbayev University

U.T.	Head of International Office	M. Narikbayev University
A.N.	Vice-Rector for Academic Affairs	North Kazakhstan University named after M. Kozybayev
M.V.	Director of Academic Affairs Department	North Kazakhstan University named after M. Kozybayev
G.O.	Head of Admission Office	North Kazakhstan University named after M. Kozybayev
K.S.	Head of Service Center	Caspian University of Technology and Engineering named after Sh. Yessenov
F.S.	Head of Admission Office	Caspian University of Technology and Engineering named after Sh. Yessenov
A.D.	Head of International Department	Caspian University of Technology and Engineering named after Sh. Yessenov
K.S.	Head of Administration Office	Tashenev University

2.2 National adaptations

Considering the initial proposal for the focus group format shared among the project consortium, the following section has been dedicated to outline any adaptations made at the national level to ensure the activity was tailored to the specific context and to gather reliable data on the topics discussed. If your case involves such adaptations, please provide additional details, addressing the following guiding questions:

- *Were all the questions in the provided list presented to the participants?*

Yes, the guiding questions provided by the project consortium were presented to the participants and served as the basis for structuring the discussion. The moderator introduced the questions sequentially and invited participants to share their institutional experiences and perspectives related to recognition procedures and the implementation of automatic recognition.

In addition to the guiding questions, participants were encouraged to provide examples from their institutional practices and to discuss specific challenges related to the national context, particularly the centralized recognition procedure for foreign educational documents in Kazakhstan and the interaction with national digital services used in the recognition process.

- *Has your institution modified the structure of the focus group at the national level? If so, in what way? Please specify any adjustments made to the questions in the box below.*

While the focus group followed the general structure and guiding questions provided by the project consortium, a minor adaptation was made during the discussion to better reflect the national context of Kazakhstan.

At the beginning of the discussion, it became clear that several of the questions were closely related and often generated similar responses from the university representatives. This was mainly due to the fact that in Kazakhstan the formal recognition of foreign educational documents is carried out centrally by the Higher Education Development National Center under the Ministry of Science and Higher Education, rather than by higher education institutions themselves.

As a result, the moderator grouped several related questions and guided the discussion toward the institutional experiences of universities interacting with the national recognition system, including admission procedures for international students, verification of foreign educational documents, and the practical implications of the centralized recognition process.

This adaptation allowed the discussion to remain focused and ensured that participants could provide more relevant and context-specific insights regarding the implementation of recognition procedures and the potential development of automatic recognition mechanisms in Kazakhstan.

- *Did you encounter any challenges in delivering this activity? If so, which ones?*

No significant organisational challenges were encountered in delivering the activity. The online format allowed representatives of higher education institutions from different regions of Kazakhstan to participate in the discussion.

However, one methodological challenge emerged during the discussion. Because the recognition of foreign educational documents in Kazakhstan is carried out centrally by the Higher Education Development National Center, universities themselves do not conduct the formal recognition procedure. As a result, some of the questions originally designed for institutions that directly perform recognition procedures required clarification or adaptation during the discussion.

In addition, participants highlighted that institutional experiences related to automatic recognition are still limited, as the concept is not yet fully implemented at the national level. Therefore, much of the discussion focused on current recognition practices, administrative procedures and possible future developments rather than on fully established automatic recognition mechanisms.

3. Understanding of the concept of automatic recognition

In the following section, please provide an overview of the main insights gathered from the answers collected to the guiding questions provided below:

- *What is the understanding of the concept of automatic recognition?*

Participants generally understood automatic recognition as a process that simplifies and accelerates the recognition of qualifications and learning outcomes obtained abroad, while still ensuring the verification of the authenticity and quality of educational documents.

Representatives of higher education institutions noted that elements of automatic recognition already exist in their institutional practices, particularly in the context of academic mobility programmes. In these cases, the recognition of study periods and credits obtained at partner universities is usually carried out automatically, as the courses and learning outcomes are agreed in advance through a signed Learning Agreement between the home and host institutions.

Because the Learning Agreement defines the courses to be taken and their equivalence within the home institution's curriculum, the results of the mobility period are normally recognised without additional academic evaluation upon the student's return.

However, participants also noted that outside the framework of academic mobility, the concept of automatic recognition is not yet fully implemented at the national level in Kazakhstan, particularly because the formal recognition of foreign educational documents is carried out centrally by the national recognition authority.

- *From a general point of view, what do the institutions in question think about the level of implementation of automatic recognition at the national level? How would participants define and evaluate its implementation within their institutional practices (e.g., challenging, beneficial, or otherwise)?*

From a general point of view, participants considered that automatic recognition is not yet fully implemented at the national level in Kazakhstan. Universities noted that recognition procedures for foreign educational documents are primarily conducted through the centralised national recognition system, managed by the Higher Education Development National Center. Therefore, higher education institutions themselves have limited authority to apply automatic recognition mechanisms for foreign qualifications.

Within their institutional practices, participants described the current situation as partially implemented and still evolving. While some elements of automatic recognition exist, particularly in the context of academic mobility and credit transfer based on previously approved Learning Agreements, the recognition of full qualifications obtained abroad still requires a formal national recognition procedure.

Participants generally viewed the potential implementation of automatic recognition as beneficial, particularly for facilitating international student mobility and simplifying admission procedures. However, they also emphasised that several conditions must be met for its effective implementation, including reliable mechanisms for verifying foreign educational documents, clear national guidelines, and the establishment of lists of recognised institutions or countries.

Institutions described the current level of implementation as developing but limited, with automatic recognition functioning mainly in specific academic cooperation frameworks rather than as a comprehensive national policy.

- *Are there any particular experiences reported by participating institutions on implementation of automatic recognition that you would like to mention?*

Participants shared several practical experiences related to the implementation of automatic recognition within their institutional practices. The most common example mentioned was the recognition of learning outcomes obtained during academic mobility programmes. Universities reported that credits earned by students during exchange periods are usually recognised automatically when the mobility is based on a Learning Agreement signed in advance by both partner institutions. This agreement defines the courses to be taken abroad and their equivalence within the home university's curriculum, allowing institutions to recognise the results without additional academic evaluation.

At the same time, participants highlighted several situations where recognition procedures remain more complex. For example, difficulties may arise when students transfer from foreign universities during their studies, as institutions need to verify the status, accreditation and academic standards of the sending institution before recognising previously completed courses.

Another experience reported by participants concerns the verification of foreign educational documents. Universities noted that identifying the accreditation status of foreign institutions and confirming the authenticity of diplomas may sometimes be challenging, particularly in cases where information is not easily accessible or when institutions encounter potentially fraudulent or unreliable documents. These situations highlight the need for improved international cooperation and digital verification tools to support recognition processes.

Participants emphasised that while certain elements of automatic recognition already function effectively in the context of academic mobility, broader implementation at the national level would require stronger verification mechanisms and clearer regulatory frameworks.

- *The "Council Recommendation on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad"¹ sets automatic recognition as one of the objectives to be achieved. How familiar are the institutions involved with this recommendation?*

Participants demonstrated a general awareness of the broader European policy discussions related to automatic recognition and the facilitation of academic mobility. However, the level of familiarity with the specific Council Recommendation on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad varied among institutions.

In preparation for the focus group, this document was shared with participating universities together with the official invitation letter and supporting materials, allowing participants to review the policy context prior to the discussion.

During the discussion, participants noted that their understanding of automatic recognition is mainly shaped by their practical experience with international cooperation and academic mobility programmes, particularly through partnerships with foreign universities. In these

¹ 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. In [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H1210\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H1210(01)).

cases, recognition practices are often based on institutional agreements and established academic procedures rather than direct application of the Council Recommendation.

Institutions expressed interest in the objectives of promoting automatic recognition and simplifying recognition procedures. Participants noted that further dissemination of information, guidance and best practices at the national level could help increase awareness of European policy developments and support the gradual implementation of automatic recognition principles in Kazakhstan.

4. Practices for the implementation of automatic recognition that are in place

In the following section, please provide an overview of the main practices for the implementation of automatic recognition that are in place at the national level as described by the institutions involved, as well as practical examples of the existing tools at disposal. Find the related questions below:

- *Do institutions involved cooperate with other institutions/organisations to implement automatic recognition? If so, is the cooperation formalised or “self-organised”? If applicable, please provide additional details and examples of the types of cooperation the institutions engage in.*

Participants reported that cooperation between institutions mainly occurs within the framework of academic mobility programmes and international partnerships between universities. In these cases, cooperation is typically formalised through bilateral or multilateral agreements, which regulate student exchanges, recognition of study periods abroad and credit transfer procedures.

Within such partnerships, universities commonly rely on Learning Agreements signed before the mobility period begins. These agreements specify the courses to be taken by the student at the host institution and their equivalence within the home university’s curriculum. As a result, the learning outcomes achieved during the mobility period are usually recognised automatically upon the student’s return.

Participants also noted that cooperation related to the recognition of foreign educational documents involves interaction with national authorities, particularly the Higher Education Development National Center, which is responsible for the official recognition of foreign qualifications in Kazakhstan. In this regard, universities primarily cooperate with the national recognition authority by providing information or advising applicants during the admission process.

Participants indicated that while cooperation between universities in the field of academic mobility and credit recognition is well established, broader cooperation mechanisms specifically aimed at implementing automatic recognition at the national level are still developing.

- *What are the tools in place to support implementation of automatic recognition at the institutional level, mentioned by participants?*

Participants identified several tools and mechanisms that support recognition practices at the institutional level. One of the main tools mentioned was the use of Learning Agreements within academic mobility programmes. These agreements are signed in advance between partner universities and specify the courses to be taken during the mobility period and their equivalence

within the home institution's curriculum. As a result, the learning outcomes obtained abroad are usually recognised automatically when the student returns to the home university.

Participants also noted the role of institutional admission procedures and academic evaluation processes, which allow universities to review foreign educational documents during the admission process and determine whether applicants meet the academic requirements for enrolment.

In addition, institutions highlighted the use of national digital services, such as the eGov.kz portal, which allows verification of Kazakhstani educational documents. While this system supports verification of national diplomas, participants noted that similar digital tools for verifying foreign educational documents are currently limited.

Participants also referred to the centralised national recognition system, managed by the national Higher Education Development National Center, as an important element supporting the recognition of foreign qualifications. Universities interact with this system when advising applicants and verifying whether foreign educational documents have undergone the official recognition procedure.

These tools contribute to facilitating recognition practices; however, participants noted that further development of digital verification systems and international databases would significantly strengthen the implementation of automatic recognition.

- *What did participants expressed as a need in terms of “capabilities”, training, motivation, guidelines, technological tools (e.g., databases, software, websites, etc.) for their organisation and generally speaking for the national sector, to fully implement automatic recognition?*

Participants identified several areas where additional support and development would be necessary to facilitate the broader implementation of automatic recognition in Kazakhstan.

First, participants emphasised the need for clear national guidelines and regulatory frameworks that would define the conditions and criteria for automatic or simplified recognition of foreign educational qualifications. In particular, universities highlighted the importance of developing national lists of recognised countries or universities, which could allow diplomas from certain institutions to be recognised through simplified procedures.

Second, participants underlined the importance of technological tools and digital solutions to support the verification of foreign educational documents. Several participants noted the absence of a unified system that would allow universities to verify the authenticity and accreditation status of foreign diplomas. In this regard, institutions suggested the development of a national digital platform or integration with international databases that would facilitate verification procedures and reduce the risks associated with fraudulent documents.

Third, participants indicated the need for greater institutional capacity and guidance for staff involved in admission and recognition processes. This includes training opportunities, clearer procedural instructions, and improved communication between universities, national authorities, and other stakeholders involved in recognition procedures.

Finally, participants emphasised the importance of greater coordination between higher education institutions, national authorities, and public service centers (TsON) to ensure consistent application of recognition procedures and to reduce administrative barriers for international applicants.

Participants agreed that strengthening digital infrastructure, regulatory clarity, and institutional cooperation would be essential steps toward the effective implementation of automatic recognition mechanisms in the national higher education system.

- *Did participants mention any law or official guidance that needs to change to enable their institution to better apply automatic recognition? Do the institutions involved have any impact on its shape?*

Participants noted that the broader implementation of automatic recognition in Kazakhstan would require certain adjustments to national regulations and procedural guidelines related to the recognition of foreign educational documents. In particular, participants suggested reviewing the existing rules governing the recognition of foreign qualifications in order to introduce clearer provisions for automatic or simplified recognition mechanisms.

One of the suggestions discussed during the focus group was the possibility of introducing criteria for automatic recognition of diplomas issued by universities accredited by recognised national or international quality assurance agencies. Participants also highlighted the potential value of developing national lists of recognised countries or higher education institutions, which could allow for simplified recognition procedures under defined conditions.

Participants also noted the need to ensure greater consistency between different procedures related to recognition, for example regarding the treatment of diplomas obtained at the same foreign universities but under different circumstances, such as graduates of international scholarship programmes.

With regard to institutional influence, participants indicated that universities themselves do not directly shape national recognition regulations, as the formal recognition of foreign educational documents is conducted by the national recognition authority. However, institutions can contribute to the development of policy through consultations, expert discussions, and participation in national and international projects, such as the TPG-LRC Plus initiative.

5. Digitalisation

Regarding digitalisation processes, please provide an overview of the perception of institutions involved about the support digitalisation might provide to promote the implementation of automatic recognition at the national level. Find the related questions below:

- *Do institutions involved think digitalisation could support the implementation of automatic recognition at national level? If so, what steps have been taken to digitalise the recognition procedures at the institutional level?*

Participants generally agreed that digitalisation could significantly support the implementation of automatic recognition at the national level. Digital tools were seen as an important mechanism for improving transparency, efficiency and reliability in recognition procedures.

At the national level, participants noted that Kazakhstan has already introduced several digital services that support the recognition process. In particular, the eGov.kz portal allows applicants to submit requests for recognition of foreign educational documents and provides access to information about the status of the application. In addition, digital systems allow verification of Kazakhstani educational documents through national databases.

At the institutional level, universities have also introduced internal digital tools to support admission procedures and the management of academic information. These systems facilitate the collection and preliminary evaluation of educational documents submitted by international applicants and support the processing of student data.

However, participants highlighted that digital tools for verifying foreign educational documents remain limited. Universities currently lack access to a unified digital platform that would allow them to confirm the authenticity and accreditation status of foreign diplomas. Participants therefore emphasised the importance of developing integrated digital verification systems or connecting national systems with international databases, which could help reduce administrative workload, shorten processing times and minimise the risks associated with fraudulent documents.

Participants considered digitalisation to be a key enabling factor for the future development of automatic recognition mechanisms in the national higher education system.

6. Challenges and benefits perceived regarding the concept and the implementation procedures of automatic recognition

In the following section, please provide an overview of the main insights gathered from the answers collected to the guiding questions aimed at exploring the challenges perceived regarding the concept of automatic recognition and the barriers arose with its implementation. Find the related questions below:

- *What is the perception – among the institutions involved – of the current level of implementation of the Council Recommendation, both at the national and institutional levels? Do participants believe it has been adequately implemented, or are there still areas that require further attention? If so, which ones?*

Participants generally considered that the principles of the Council Recommendation on promoting automatic mutual recognition are not yet fully implemented in Kazakhstan, either at the national or institutional levels. While some elements aligned with the Recommendation are present, particularly in the context of academic mobility and automatic credit recognition based on Learning Agreements, a comprehensive system of automatic recognition of foreign qualifications has not yet been established.

At the national level, participants noted that the current system is still based on a centralised recognition procedure, which requires formal evaluation of foreign educational documents by the national recognition authority. As a result, automatic recognition is not widely applied as a standard practice for full qualifications.

At the institutional level, universities indicated that their ability to implement automatic recognition is limited, as they do not have the authority to formally recognise foreign diplomas. Instead, they depend on national procedures and timelines, which may affect admission processes for international students.

Participants identified several areas that require further attention in order to move towards the objectives of the Council Recommendation. These include:

- the development of national lists of recognised countries or higher education institutions;

- the introduction of clear regulatory frameworks for automatic or simplified recognition;
- the establishment of reliable mechanisms for verifying the authenticity and accreditation of foreign educational documents;
- further development of digital tools and international data exchange systems.

Participants agreed that while initial steps have been taken, significant policy, regulatory and technological developments are still needed to achieve full implementation of automatic recognition in line with European recommendations.

- *In the light of what discussed so far, what are the main benefits of implementing automatic recognition?*

Participants identified several key benefits associated with the implementation of automatic recognition at both the institutional and national levels. First, automatic recognition was seen as a way to simplify and accelerate admission procedures for international students, reducing the time required for document evaluation and decision-making.

Second, participants noted that automatic recognition would significantly support academic mobility, making it easier for students to move between countries and institutions without facing administrative barriers related to the recognition of qualifications and learning outcomes.

Third, automatic recognition was perceived as a means to increase transparency and predictability of recognition procedures. Clear and standardised rules would help both universities and applicants better understand the requirements and reduce uncertainty in the admission process.

Participants also highlighted the potential to reduce administrative workload for higher education institutions, as fewer resources would be needed for individual assessment of foreign qualifications, particularly in cases where recognition could be granted based on predefined criteria.

Finally, automatic recognition was seen as an important step towards strengthening international trust and cooperation in higher education, contributing to the alignment of national practices with the principles of the European Higher Education Area and the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

- *What are the main challenges outlined by institutions involved?*

Participants identified several key challenges that currently limit the broader implementation of automatic recognition in Kazakhstan.

One of the main challenges is the verification of the authenticity and accreditation status of foreign educational documents. Universities reported difficulties in accessing reliable and up-to-date information about foreign institutions, as well as concerns related to fraudulent or unreliable diplomas, which require additional checks and increase the complexity of admission procedures.

Another significant challenge is the absence of a national list of recognised countries or higher education institutions, which could serve as a basis for automatic or simplified recognition. Without such a framework, recognition procedures must be carried out on a case-by-case basis.

Participants also highlighted technical and administrative barriers related to the current recognition process. These include the need for foreign applicants to obtain national identification numbers (IIN), digital signatures and SIM cards, as well as the time required to complete recognition procedures through state services.

In addition, institutions pointed to inconsistencies in the application of procedures by Public Service Centers (TsON), where different interpretations of document requirements may occur, leading to delays and confusion for applicants.

Finally, participants noted that the centralised nature of the recognition system limits the ability of universities to independently apply automatic recognition mechanisms, making them dependent on national procedures and timelines.

These challenges indicate that further development of regulatory frameworks, digital infrastructure and international verification mechanisms is necessary to enable the effective implementation of automatic recognition.

7. Suggested responses to the challenges emerged

In this section, please provide further details regarding the possible responses suggested by the institutions involved to the challenges emerged during the activity. Find below the related guiding question:

- *What are the main conditions needed to better apply automatic recognition in the institutions involved and more in general in the national sector?*

Participants identified several key conditions that would be necessary to support the effective implementation of automatic recognition at both the institutional and national levels.

First, participants emphasised the importance of developing a clear regulatory framework that would introduce provisions for automatic or simplified recognition of foreign qualifications. In particular, it was suggested to establish national lists of recognised countries and/or higher education institutions, including those accredited by recognised national or international quality assurance agencies, which could serve as a basis for streamlined recognition procedures.

Second, participants highlighted the need for the development of digital infrastructure, especially the creation of a national digital platform for the verification of foreign educational documents or the integration with international verification systems and databases. Such tools would help ensure the authenticity of documents, reduce processing times and minimise the risks associated with fraudulent diplomas.

Third, participants underlined the importance of ensuring consistency and coordination across different actors involved in the recognition process, including higher education institutions, national authorities and Public Service Centers (TsON). This includes the development of clear guidelines, standardised procedures and training for staff involved in document processing.

In addition, participants pointed to the need to ensure coherence in recognition policies, particularly in cases where diplomas issued by the same foreign universities are treated differently depending on the source of funding (for example, graduates of international scholarship programmes). Addressing such inconsistencies would contribute to a more transparent and fair recognition system.

Finally, participants emphasised the importance of capacity building and awareness-raising, including training for university staff and dissemination of information on international recognition standards and practices, in order to support the gradual implementation of automatic recognition in line with the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

8. Any other comments

Please use this section to share any further comments, or to share additional further sources used for the activity (e.g., Padlet, Mentimeter, etc.).

The focus group provided valuable insights into the current state of recognition practices in Kazakhstan and highlighted the perspectives of higher education institutions on the implementation of automatic recognition. The discussion confirmed that while certain elements of automatic recognition are already in place, particularly in the context of academic mobility, further development of regulatory frameworks, digital tools and institutional coordination is required.

No additional digital tools (such as Padlet or Mentimeter) were used during the activity. The discussion was conducted through an online meeting format, which allowed for active participation and exchange of experiences among representatives of higher education institutions from different regions of Kazakhstan.

The results of the focus group will contribute to the development of recommendations within the TPG-LRC Plus project, supporting the implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention principles and the advancement of automatic recognition practices in the national higher education system.

TPG-LRC Plus project

Report of the national focus group with higher education institutions

San Marino

1. Background and methodology

1.1 Selection process of participants

In the box below, please provide further details on the selection process of participants at the national level, including information about the exact number of participants, their background, role within their institution, and the geographical balance considered during the selection. To support you in completing this section, here are some guiding questions:

- *When were the focus groups organised?*

The focus group was organised on Monday 30th March 2026.

- *How were the participants selected?*

The participants were selected among institution involved in recognition of qualification in the education area.

- *How was the activity conducted, and who facilitated the focus groups?*

The activity was conducted as an open discussion on the argument.

- *Were any specific digital tools (e.g., Padlet, Mentimeter, etc.) used to support the development of the activity?*

No.

Participants' list

Participant <i>(please include just initials of name and surname)</i>	Role	Institution
R. M.	Head of Centre	CINERTA – ENIC San Marino
M. C.	Evaluator	CINERTA – ENIC San Marino
L. G.	General Director	University of San Marino
M. M.	Head of the Student Administration Office	University of San Marino

1.2 National adaptations

Considering the initial proposal for the focus group format shared among the project consortium, the following section has been dedicated to outline any adaptations made at the national level to ensure the activity was tailored to the specific context and to gather reliable data on the topics discussed. If your case involves such adaptations, please provide additional details, addressing the following guiding questions:

- *Were all the questions in the provided list presented to the participants?*

Yes.

- *Has your institution modified the structure of the focus group at the national level? If so, in what way? Please specify any adjustments made to the questions in the box below.*

Due to the small size of San Marino, the composition of the focus group was limited to representative of CINERTA, the ENIC centre, and the University of San Marino.

- *Did you encounter any challenges in delivering this activity? If so, which ones?*

None. The collaboration between the two organisations is close and continuous.

2. Understanding of the concept of automatic recognition

In the following section, please provide an overview of the main insights gathered from the answers collected to the guiding questions provided below:

- *What is the understanding of the concept of automatic recognition?*

The concept of automatic recognition is already well established. CINERTA and University of San Marino collaborate closely in order to adopt it for prosecution of studies.

- *From a general point of view, what do the institutions in question think about the level of implementation of automatic recognition at the national level? How would participants define and evaluate its implementation within their institutional practices (e.g., challenging, beneficial, or otherwise)?*

Both institutions regard automatic recognition as beneficial.

- *Are there any particular experiences reported by participating institutions on implementation of automatic recognition that you would like to mention?*

None.

- *The “Council Recommendation on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad”¹ sets automatic recognition as one of the objectives to be achieved. How familiar are the institutions involved with this recommendation?*

Institutions are well aware of the Council Recommendation.

3. Practices for the implementation of automatic recognition that are in place

In the following section, please provide an overview of the main practices for the implementation of automatic recognition that are in place at the national level as described by the institutions involved, as well as practical examples of the existing tools at disposal. Find the related questions below:

- *Do institutions involved cooperate with other institutions/organisations to implement automatic recognition? If so, is the cooperation formalised or “self-organised”? If applicable, please provide additional details and examples of the types of cooperation the institutions engage in.*

The cases occurred so far were resolved without the need of cooperation with other organizations.

¹ 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. In [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H1210\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H1210(01)).

- *What are the tools in place to support implementation of automatic recognition at the institutional level, mentioned by participants?*

Several tools of the ENIC-NARIC Network such as:

- CIMEA ARDI - Automatic Recognition Database-Italia (<https://ardi.cimea.it/it>)
- AdReN and MArEn automatic recognition networks (<https://automaticrecognitionnetworks.info/>).

- *What did participants expressed as a need in terms of “capabilities”, training, motivation, guidelines, technological tools (e.g., databases, software, websites, etc.) for their organisation and generally speaking for the national sector, to fully implement automatic recognition?*

Firstly, a common database and then specific training.

- *Did participants mention any law or official guidance that needs to change to enable their institution to better apply automatic recognition? Do the institutions involved have any impact on its shape?*

The institutions do not see the need of additional laws on automatic recognition, but they asked for better defined procedures which make automatic recognition smoother. CINERTA ENIC San Marino has already the power to issue legally binding rulings in the field of recognition.

4. Digitalisation

Regarding digitalisation processes, please provide an overview of the perception of institutions involved about the support digitalisation might provide to promote the implementation of automatic recognition at the national level. Find the related questions below:

- *Do institutions involved think digitalisation could support the implementation of automatic recognition at national level? If so, what steps have been taken to digitalise the recognition procedures at the institutional level?*

So far, San Marino had a very small number of cases annually, therefore the digitalization of processes was not needed.

However, since the HE system is extending, digital instruments for automatic recognition are under study.

5. Challenges and benefits perceived regarding the concept and the implementation procedures of automatic recognition

In the following section, please provide an overview of the main insights gathered from the answers collected to the guiding questions aimed at exploring the challenges perceived regarding the concept of automatic recognition and the barriers arose with its implementation. Find the related questions below:

- *What is the perception – among the institutions involved – of the current level of implementation of the Council Recommendation, both at the national and institutional levels? Do participants believe it has been adequately implemented, or are there still areas that require further attention? If so, which ones?*

The institutions evaluate that the current level on implementation of automatic recognition is almost in line with the Council Recommendations.

- *In the light of what discussed so far, what are the main benefits of implementing automatic recognition?*

Many benefits such as simplification of procedures for students and offices. Moreover, better understanding of other educational systems and improvement of mobility.

- *What are the main challenges outlined by institutions involved?*

More coordination between countries.

Evaluation instruments for micro-credential recognition.

7. Suggested responses to the challenges emerged

In this section, please provide further details regarding the possible responses suggested by the institutions involved to the challenges emerged during the activity. Find below the related guiding question:

- *What are the main conditions needed to better apply automatic recognition in the institutions involved and more in general in the national sector?*

Main conditions are trust and transparency.

8. Any other comments

Please use this section to share any further comments, or to share additional further sources used for the activity (e.g., Padlet, Mentimeter, etc.).

N/A.

TPG-LRC Plus project

Report of the national focus group with higher education institutions

The Netherlands

1. Introduction

1.1 Specific objectives

This general aim of the focus group has been reached through the following specific objectives:

- investigating the level of awareness of the concept of automatic recognition;
- collecting useful information on the practices for the implementation of automatic recognition that were in place;
- exploring how digitalisation transformation processes influenced internal policies and institutional practices.

In the section below, please provide any additional information concerning further objectives achieved at the national level as a result of this activity, taking into account any specific features of the national background and context.

These types of conversations always help to deepen and strengthen the dialogue with admissions officers, and to better understand their needs. This will show from the next sections.

2. Background and methodology

2.1 Selection process of participants

In the box below, please provide further details on the selection process of participants at the national level, including information about the exact number of participants, their background, role within their institution, and the geographical balance considered during the selection. To support you in completing this section, here are some guiding questions:

- *When were the focus groups organised?*

10 April 2026.

- *How were the participants selected?*

We circulated a call for interest and next followed up with individual institutions. The latter was necessary since it's the middle of the admissions season and staff of HEIs were crammed with work.

- *How was the activity conducted, and who facilitated the focus groups?*

The activity was conducted online to reduce travel distance. The group was moderated by the HoC Bas Wegewijs, and Jenneke Lokhoff.

- *Were any specific digital tools (e.g., Padlet, Mentimeter, etc.) used to support the development of the activity?*

Given the number of participants, we opted to not use digital tools (except for the TEAMS set up).

Participants' list

Participant <i>(please include just initials of name and surname)</i>	Role	Institution
I.W.	Senior admissions officer	Leiden University
M.G.	Senior admissions officer	The Hague University of Applied Sciences
S.v.R.	Senior admissions officer	University of Amsterdam

2.2 National adaptations

Considering the initial proposal for the focus group format shared among the project consortium, the following section has been dedicated to outline any adaptations made at the national level to ensure the activity was tailored to the specific context and to gather reliable data on the topics discussed. If your case involves such adaptations, please provide additional details, addressing the following guiding questions:

- *Were all the questions in the provided list presented to the participants?*

Yes.

- *Has your institution modified the structure of the focus group at the national level? If so, in what way? Please specify any adjustments made to the questions in the box below.*

No.

- *Did you encounter any challenges in delivering this activity? If so, which ones?*

The only challenge was to organise this amidst the admissions season.

3. Understanding of the concept of automatic recognition

In the following section, please provide an overview of the main insights gathered from the answers collected to the guiding questions provided below:

- *What is the understanding of the concept of automatic recognition?*

Across all participating higher education institutions (HEIs), there is a broad and largely consistent understanding of the concept of automatic recognition. Institutions generally agreed that automatic recognition entails the acceptance of the quality, level, and workload of a qualification, the three of the five key elements assessed at the system level. All HEIs were familiar with the widely referenced principle that “a Bachelor is a Bachelor”, indicating a shared conceptual foundation.

Several HEIs referred to the concept of “substantial differences” as defined in the Lisbon Recognition Convention. They noted that automatic recognition assumes that no substantial differences exist in terms of quality, level, or workload.

At the same time, it was addressed that sometimes quality or level of specific qualifications is perceived lower based on experience (i.e. when these students systematically underperform), and this leads to tension whether such cases should still lead to admission.

Institutions expressed an interest to expand their knowledge about which qualifications can be admitted by default, with the aim of applying more consistent practices.

Some institutions highlighted the Baltic–Benelux Multilateral Agreement as a promising example to legally cement automatic recognition and expressed hope that such multilateral frameworks could be used or expanded to support broader implementation of automatic recognition.

Furthermore, the HEIs emphasised the importance of integrating automatic recognition principles into national systems and digital infrastructures, such as linking recognition decisions with Studielink. They expressed interest in expanding the scope of recognition to include clearer indications of which international recognition conventions apply to which qualifications.

- *From a general point of view, what do the institutions in question think about the level of implementation of automatic recognition at the national level? How would participants define and evaluate its implementation within their institutional practices (e.g., challenging, beneficial, or otherwise)?*

The HEIs indicated that elements of automatic recognition are present in Dutch practice, mainly because Nuffic's evaluations are routinely adopted in admissions procedures.

One institution highlighted near-complete reliance on Nuffic's advice, with deviations only in cases where certain qualifications are assessed as higher than indicated nationally. Another noted that, despite existing guidance, uncertainty about the practical meaning of automatic recognition remains widespread, contributing to unnecessary procedural complexity.

Participants expressed interest in clearer national frameworks what to adhere to, and called for stronger involvement of HEIs in shaping recognition conventions and implementation guidelines.

Overall, institutions see automatic recognition as beneficial, but note that both national coordination and internal awareness must improve to achieve more consistent application.

- *Are there any particular experiences reported by participating institutions on implementation of automatic recognition that you would like to mention?*

See previous response.

- *The "Council Recommendation on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad"¹ sets automatic recognition as one of the objectives to be achieved. How familiar are the institutions involved with this recommendation?*

The HEIs reported varying levels of familiarity with the Council Recommendation on promoting automatic mutual recognition. Some indicated that the Recommendation is likely to appear frequently in their work, while others stated that they rely on its principles insofar as these are reflected in national evaluations and Nuffic's advice. One institution noted that it was not familiar with the Recommendation at all.

Participants generally understood that the Recommendation is primarily targeted at EU Member States and applies to both higher education and upper secondary education. They also

¹ 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. In [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H1210\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H1210(01)).

recognised that its scope does not extend uniformly to all qualifications, as certain bachelor's or master's degrees may fall outside its intended application.

4. Practices for the implementation of automatic recognition that are in place

In the following section, please provide an overview of the main practices for the implementation of automatic recognition that are in place at the national level as described by the institutions involved, as well as practical examples of the existing tools at disposal. Find the related questions below:

- *Do institutions involved cooperate with other institutions/organisations to implement automatic recognition? If so, is the cooperation formalised or "self-organised"? If applicable, please provide additional details and examples of the types of cooperation the institutions engage in.*

There is the structure of the national admissions officers network (one for research universities, and another one for universities of applied science), LAO. In addition, institutions reported engaging in peer learning through site visits to observe how other institutions apply their recognition procedures in practice, including automatic recognition.

- *What are the tools in place to support implementation of automatic recognition at the institutional level, mentioned by participants?*

Beyond tools discussed elsewhere (e.g., Nuffic advice and relevant databases), participants highlighted the European University Association's Spotlight tool as a particularly valuable resource. It supports the systematic review of admissions procedures and thereby facilitates the institutional implementation of automatic recognition. Finally, the use of standardized evaluation frameworks was considered beneficial in ensuring consistency and efficiency in automatic recognition processes.

- *What did participants expressed as a need in terms of "capabilities", training, motivation, guidelines, technological tools (e.g., databases, software, websites, etc.) for their organisation and generally speaking for the national sector, to fully implement automatic recognition?*

In general, there is/remains a need for information and training sessions by Nuffic.

- *Did participants mention any law or official guidance that needs to change to enable their institution to better apply automatic recognition? Do the institutions involved have any impact on its shape?*

The law on higher education could be more transparent and uniform about admissions requirements. Additionally, an interesting note was that HEIs felt there would be an added value in being consulted by the ENIC-NARIC regarding the development of new treaties (i.e. the Benelux Baltic Multilateral treaty and the new CoE treaty).

5. Digitalisation

Regarding digitalisation processes, please provide an overview of the perception of institutions involved about the support digitalisation might provide to promote the implementation of automatic recognition at the national level. Find the related questions below:

- *Do institutions involved think digitalisation could support the implementation of automatic recognition at national level? If so, what steps have been taken to digitalise the recognition procedures at the institutional level?*

Institutions generally agreed that digitalisation can support the implementation of automatic recognition at the national level, although the degree of digitalisation and its practical effects differ across institutions.

At some Dutch HEIs, all applications enter a single system where they are reviewed manually, regardless of applicant background. Automated routing of specific applicant groups (e.g., holders of the International Baccalaureate) is not always developed. Digital processes are also fragmented across faculties, limiting standardisation.

Other institutions reported more advanced digital systems. One institution noted that since 2017 applicants can upload all required documents, including passports, language certificates, and immigration documents, directly into the admissions platform. This system, first introduced in 2009, is continuously updated and has improved procedural consistency. Clear deadlines structure the workflow, although the volume of applications remains substantial.

Another institution emphasised ongoing efforts to process recognition decisions digitally, link relevant information across systems, and increase the use of online verification. Digitalisation is seen as a means to enhance transparency for both institutions and applicants. However, it was noted that full automation of admissions decisions may risk losing important nuance, particularly in complex individual cases.

Overall, institutions view digitalisation – depending on the system - as beneficial for transparency, efficiency, and consistency, but they also emphasise the need to maintain expert oversight to avoid overly mechanical decision-making in recognition procedures.

6. Challenges and benefits perceived regarding the concept and the implementation procedures of automatic recognition

In the following section, please provide an overview of the main insights gathered from the answers collected to the guiding questions aimed at exploring the challenges perceived regarding the concept of automatic recognition and the barriers arose with its implementation. Find the related questions below:

- *What is the perception – among the institutions involved – of the current level of implementation of the Council Recommendation, both at the national and institutional levels? Do participants believe it has been adequately implemented, or are there still areas that require further attention? If so, which ones?*

In general AR is implemented in institutions due to the advice from Nuffic, which is generally followed by admissions officers. So, the general perception is, it is implemented.

- *In the light of what discussed so far, what are the main benefits of implementing automatic recognition?*

Participants in the focus group identified greater uniformity and transparency as the main benefits of implementing automatic recognition. They noted that significant developments have taken place since 1996, leading to improvements in recognition practices and a higher overall level of coherence across systems.

According to the HEIs these developments result in clear advantages for students, particularly by providing greater clarity about recognition outcomes. Automatic recognition is seen as facilitating the explanation and application of the Bachelor - Master structure, thereby improving students' understanding of study pathways, although the binary system in The Netherlands with an applied and research focus needs additional explanation.

In addition, focus group participants highlighted that automatic recognition contributes to confidence and trust in education systems, including in the context of transnational education. This trust was perceived as an important condition for smoother recognition processes and consistent decision-making.

- *What are the main challenges outlined by institutions involved?*

The implementation.

7. Suggested responses to the challenges emerged

In this section, please provide further details regarding the possible responses suggested by the institutions involved to the challenges emerged during the activity. Find below the related guiding question:

- *What are the main conditions needed to better apply automatic recognition in the institutions involved and more in general in the national sector?*

Some elements:

- Awareness of AR and the LRC beyond the admissions officers in an institution, think of examination commissions or faculty. The admissions team may advise faculty, but if faculty makes the final decision and they are not aware of the LRC (or AR), there may be deviating decisions made.

8. Any other comments

Please use this section to share any further comments, or to share additional further sources used for the activity (e.g., Padlet, Mentimeter, etc.).

We had a very fruitful, frank and inspiring discussion with the admissions officers. While talking about AR, institutions kept referring to the framework of the LRC which we considered as a positive element.

TPG-LRC Plus project

Report of the national focus group with higher education institutions

Ukraine

1. Background and methodology

1.1 Selection process of participants

In the box below, please provide further details on the selection process of participants at the national level, including information about the exact number of participants, their background, role within their institution, and the geographical balance considered during the selection. To support you in completing this section, here are some guiding questions:

- *When were the focus groups organised?*

March 13, 2026.

- *How were the participants selected?*

The competent authorities for recognition in Ukraine are the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine and higher education institutions (for their students). Therefore, higher education institutions are not required to carry out the recognition procedure independently; institutional representatives or students may choose which competent authority will conduct the recognition procedure — the Ministry or the institution. Universities that independently carry out the recognition procedure for their students were selected for the focus group.

The selection of higher education institutions was also carried out with consideration for institutional diversity: universities from different regions of Ukraine were represented, including both public and private institutions, as well as institutions varying in number of students.

- *How was the activity conducted, and who facilitated the focus groups?*

The focus group was conducted online. The moderators were:

from the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine: Maryna Mruha;

from ENIC Ukraine: Tetiana Vahina and Anna Bakhlukova

- *Were any specific digital tools (e.g., Padlet, Mentimeter, etc.) used to support the development of the activity?*

No.

Participants' list

Participant <i>(please include just initials of name and surname)</i>	Role	Institution
H. L. V.	Leading Specialist at the Educational and Research Center for International Students	West Ukrainian National University
I. O. L.	Senior Academic Coordinator	Kharkiv National University of Radio Electronics
H. M. M.	Director of the Education Directorate	Private Higher Educational Institution Kyiv Medical University
K. O. A.	Head of the Organizational Department for International Students	Odesa National Polytechnic University
V. O. E.	Leading Specialist at the Educational and Research Center for International Cooperation	Admiral Makarov National University of Shipbuilding

1.2 National adaptations

Considering the initial proposal for the focus group format shared among the project consortium, the following section has been dedicated to outline any adaptations made at the national level to ensure the activity was tailored to the specific context and to gather reliable data on the topics discussed. If your case involves such adaptations, please provide additional details, addressing the following guiding questions:

- *Were all the questions in the provided list presented to the participants?*

Yes, all questions were presented.

- *Has your institution modified the structure of the focus group at the national level? If so, in what way? Please specify any adjustments made to the questions in the box below.*

No, the structure of the focus group remained unchanged.

- *Did you encounter any challenges in delivering this activity? If so, which ones?*

No, no difficulties were encountered.

2. Understanding of the concept of automatic recognition

In the following section, please provide an overview of the main insights gathered from the answers collected to the guiding questions provided below:

- *What is the understanding of the concept of automatic recognition?*

Focus group participants show a good understanding of the concept of automatic recognition and its criteria. When working with foreign qualifications, the selected higher education institutions apply automatic recognition where possible. However, as most educational documents handled by participants originate from other regions, their practical experience remains limited.

- *From a general point of view, what do the institutions in question think about the level of implementation of automatic recognition at the national level? How would participants define and evaluate its implementation within their institutional practices (e.g., challenging, beneficial, or otherwise)?*

The implementation of automatic recognition at the national level was assessed by participants as adequate, since the definition and criteria of automatic recognition are incorporated into national legislation governing the recognition of educational documents. In addition, a number of agreements on the mutual recognition of educational documents have been concluded with various countries. Focus group participants emphasized that increasing the number of such agreements would significantly facilitate their work.

The implementation of automatic recognition at the institutional level was assessed by participants as insufficient or low, as the vast majority of educational documents encountered by respondents do not originate from the European region and therefore cannot be subject to automatic recognition.

Participants also mentioned specific cases where the provisions of concluded agreements were applied in the automatic recognition of qualifications.

- *Are there any particular experiences reported by participating institutions on implementation of automatic recognition that you would like to mention?*

-

- *The “Council Recommendation on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad”¹ sets automatic recognition as one of the objectives to be achieved. How familiar are the institutions involved with this recommendation?*

Most focus group participants are fully familiar with the above-mentioned Recommendations.

3. Practices for the implementation of automatic recognition that are in place

In the following section, please provide an overview of the main practices for the implementation of automatic recognition that are in place at the national level as described by the institutions involved, as well as practical examples of the existing tools at disposal. Find the related questions below:

- *Do institutions involved cooperate with other institutions/organisations to implement automatic recognition? If so, is the cooperation formalised or “self-organised”? If applicable, please provide additional details and examples of the types of cooperation the institutions engage in.*

Some focus group participants indicated that their institutions cooperate with higher education institutions in other countries to support the mutual recognition of qualifications.

Other participants indicated that their institutions currently do not cooperate with other institutions on issues related to the automatic recognition of qualifications.

All participants involved in recognition issues also cooperate with ENIC Ukraine and the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine.

- *What are the tools in place to support implementation of automatic recognition at the institutional level, mentioned by participants?*

Participants actively use profiles of national education systems (from various sources), the ENIC-NARIC network website, and the Europass qualification framework comparison tool.

- *What did participants expressed as a need in terms of “capabilities”, training, motivation, guidelines, technological tools (e.g., databases, software, websites, etc.) for their organisation and generally speaking for the national sector, to fully implement automatic recognition?*

¹ 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. In [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H1210\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H1210(01)).

Participants unanimously noted that the availability of a unified database or information system enabling quick verification of information could contribute to the full implementation of automatic recognition. They also indicated that the development of digital tools and training for specialists would have a positive impact on their work.

- *Did participants mention any law or official guidance that needs to change to enable their institution to better apply automatic recognition? Do the institutions involved have any impact on its shape?*

No specific provisions requiring amendment were mentioned. However, some participants expressed support for discussing the clarification or simplification of certain legislative provisions. The institutions involved have the opportunity to influence the development of legislation through public consultation.

4. Digitalisation

Regarding digitalisation processes, please provide an overview of the perception of institutions involved about the support digitalisation might provide to promote the implementation of automatic recognition at the national level. Find the related questions below:

- *Do institutions involved think digitalisation could support the implementation of automatic recognition at national level? If so, what steps have been taken to digitalise the recognition procedures at the institutional level?*

Yes, as noted above, the development of digitalisation could contribute to the implementation of automatic recognition. Currently, participants note that the availability of electronic document management in Ukraine, online communication with applicants, the Unified State Electronic Database on Education (EDBO), and the unified interagency information system for international students have a positive impact on recognition procedures at the institutional level. It is also noted that the further development of digital tools and expanded access to international document verification databases would positively affect the implementation of automatic recognition.

5. Challenges and benefits perceived regarding the concept and the implementation procedures of automatic recognition

In the following section, please provide an overview of the main insights gathered from the answers collected to the guiding questions aimed at exploring the challenges perceived regarding the concept of automatic recognition and the barriers arose with its implementation. Find the related questions below:

- *What is the perception – among the institutions involved – of the current level of implementation of the Council Recommendation, both at the national and institutional levels? Do participants believe it has been adequately implemented, or are there still areas that require further attention? If so, which ones?*

Participants consider that the EU Council Recommendation has been partially implemented at the national level. At the institutional level, many procedures still require individual assessment.

- *In the light of what discussed so far, what are the main benefits of implementing automatic recognition?*

Faster decision-making, simplified procedures for applicants, reduced bureaucracy, savings in human and time resources, and a more streamlined workflow for credential evaluators.

- *What are the main challenges outlined by institutions involved?*

Differences between education systems, lack of information, and trust in foreign qualifications.

7. Suggested responses to the challenges emerged

In this section, please provide further details regarding the possible responses suggested by the institutions involved to the challenges emerged during the activity. Find below the related guiding question:

- *What are the main conditions needed to better apply automatic recognition in the institutions involved and more in general in the national sector?*

Among the key conditions mentioned by participants were the development of digital tools, access to databases, training for specialists, and enhanced cooperation between institutions.

8. Any other comments

Please use this section to share any further comments, or to share additional further sources used for the activity (e.g., Padlet, Mentimeter, etc.).

-