



AUTOMATIC RECOGNITION IN THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA



Policy developments, tools
and future perspectives





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This document was developed within the TPG-LRC Plus – Fostering LRC Implementation in the EHEA (TPG-LRC Plus) project, which aims to support 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).

Within the project, a working group on automatic recognition, composed by CIMEA, Govern d'Andorra, Danish Agency for Higher Education and Science and Stichting Nuffic, was established to develop a joint document in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, the Information and Image Center in Ukraine and the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) for the sections related to digital transition, as transversal topic.

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Kazakhstan	Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan (MES-KZ)
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/ EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The publication **“Automatic Recognition in the European Higher Education Area. Policy developments, tools and future perspectives”** is the result of the cooperation established within the EU co-funded project “Fostering LRC Implementation in the EHEA (TPG-LRC Plus)”, which supports the institutional activities of the Thematic Peer Group B on Lisbon Recognition Convention (TPG B on LRC) for the period 2024-2027.

It provides a comprehensive overview of the concept of automatic recognition and its implementation, examining the key policy developments and regulatory frameworks that have shaped its evolution over the past two decades.

The publication analyses the state of play across EHEA countries, drawing on data from the monitoring exercises conducted in the recent years at the European level. While significant progress has been achieved, findings show that full and consistent implementation has not yet been reached.

Challenges at institutional level are further explored through insights gathered from focus group activities conducted across higher education institutions in TPG-LRC Plus project partner countries. These also highlight the importance of strengthening cooperation among competent authorities, ENIC-NARIC centres, working structures of the Bologna Follow Up Group (BFUG) and higher education institutions, to make automatic recognition a full-implemented reality.

Adopting a practice-oriented approach, the publication also presents an overview of the most common tools and resources developed to support credential evaluators and recognition experts in the implementation of automatic recognition.

In conclusion, focus is given to the growing role of digital transformation and digital tools in the field of qualifications recognition. Rather than enabling full automation, these developments are framed as part of a broader and more critical revision of existing processes which must remain aligned with the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, ensuring that case-by-case assessment by credential evaluators remains central to the decision-making process.

Keywords: automatic recognition, qualifications recognition, Lisbon Recognition Convention, European Higher Education Area, ENIC-NARIC centres, higher education institutions (HEIs), digital transformation.

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/ INTRODUCTION

The concept of “automatic recognition” of qualifications is being developed since almost twenty years. Its evolution, uphold by several policies and initiatives at the European level, has made significant progress. At the same time, implementation of automatic recognition still faces challenges at institutional and national level. Nevertheless, cooperative efforts at the European level, among competent authorities, ENIC-NARIC centres, working structures of the Bologna Follow Up Group (BFUG) and higher education institutions demonstrate the desire to make automatic recognition a full-implemented reality.

This publication is the result of the cooperation established within the EU co-funded project “Fostering LRC Implementation in the EHEA (TPG-LRC Plus)”, which supports the institutional activities of the Thematic Peer Group B on Lisbon Recognition Convention (TPG B on LRC), with the aim of providing a comprehensive and accessible resource offering an in-depth overview of the concept of automatic recognition and initiatives supporting its implementation so far.

In this context, the publication begins by outlining the process through which the concept of automatic recognition has been defined, presenting the relevant regulatory framework and the key policy developments that have shaped its evolution over the past decade.

The second chapter examines the implementation of automatic recognition looking at the data of the monitoring exercises conducted in the recent years at the European level.

The third chapter aims to explore the implementation of automatic recognition through the perspectives of higher education institutions (HEIs). It draws on the insights gathered from focus group activities conducted across partner countries of the TPG-LRC Plus project, highlighting the experiences and perceptions of automatic recognition among HEIs' representatives.

Adopting a more practice-oriented approach, the fourth chapter finally showcases initiatives implemented in recent years to support credential evaluators and experts in recognition in the implementation of automatic recognition at national and institutional level, presenting additional resources for the practical application of recognition principles and procedures, developed within European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

In conclusion, the relation between automatic recognition, digital transformation and the use of digital tools in the field of qualifications recognition is addressed. In this sense, the publication leaves the reader with forward-looking reflections on the future of automatic recognition, sharing some considerations and open questions for its continued development and implementation.

/ POLICY AND NORMATIVE FRAMEWORK OF AUTOMATIC RECOGNITION

In order to outline the pathway that led to the definition of automatic recognition, an initial overview of the preparatory processes and policy developments that laid the groundwork for its definition is provided in the following section.¹ These developments created the context in which the need to define the concept of “automatic recognition” of qualifications became increasingly evident.

The first discussions and preparatory work of experts and policy makers on the recognition of higher qualifications in Europe date back to the 1990's. In this context, in October 1994, the Council of Europe organised a conference in Malta to explore the possibility of drafting and adopting a new convention on the recognition of qualifications across European countries.

The conference provided an important opportunity for experts and policy makers to reflect on the type of recognition that this convention should promote. Two main approaches were considered. The first, “absolute and automatic recognition”, envisaged the complete removal of all obstacles for mobile students, graduates and professionals. The second, “fair and accessible recognition”, was ultimately identified as the most appropriate approach, as it allows for a balance between preserving the richness of the cultural and educational diversity in Europe and respecting the specificities of each national system.

¹ The content of this section is based on that of the Chapter 4.2 of the Universitas Quaderni, volume 1 (2025): “Crossing Bridges between Education Systems. The History and Relevance of The Lisbon Recognition Convention.” Edited by: Sjur Bergan, Chiara Finocchietti, Kees Kouwenaar, Luca Lantero and Stamenka Uvalić-Trumbić. In <https://rivistauniversitas.it/en/quaderno-universitas-01-2025-crossing-bridges-between-education-systems/>.

The Malta conference and the discussion that emerged from it laid the groundwork for what would later become “The Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region”, commonly known as the “Lisbon Recognition Convention” (LRC)² signed in 1997 in the Portuguese capital. Already at that time, during the preparatory work for the LRC, the concept of automatic recognition emerged.

Building on the approach identified in Malta, the Convention proclaims the right of every individual to have their qualifications assessed and aims to ensure that holders of a qualification from a signatory country can have adequate access to an assessment of the qualification in another country in a fair, flexible, and transparent way.

Within this evolving and increasingly structured policy context, Ministries responsible for higher education signed the Sorbonne Declaration in 1998 in Paris³. Building on the principles set out in the Magna Charta Universitatum⁴ (signed by rectors and head of European universities on 18 September 1988), the Declaration reaffirmed the importance of academic freedom and institutional autonomy, while at the same time encouraging mobility among teachers and students. The Sorbonne Declaration also highlighted the relationship between the establishment of comparable qualifications frameworks and their relevance for enhancing recognition and facilitating mobility.

This process was further advanced with the Bologna Declaration, signed in 1999, which set the overall goal of supporting a greater compatibility and comparability of the higher education systems. This objective was supported by national reforms aimed at aligning qualifications with the introduced three-cycle system of the Bologna Process. The Lisbon Recognition Convention and the Bologna Process contributed to creating the conditions for renewed discussions and reflections on the concept of automatic recognition.

A key milestone was then reached in 2012, when the term “automatic recognition” was explicitly introduced in the Bucharest Communiqué. On that occasion, Ministers committed to supporting the work of a specific Pathfinder Group, facilitated by the European Commission. This Group presented its final report at the Yerevan Ministerial Conference in January 2015, including the

² “Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region”, Lisbon (1997). In <https://rm.coe.int/168007f2c7>.

³ Find further information about the Declarations and Ministerial Communiqués in the EHEA website: <https://ehea.info/ministerial-conferences-and-communiques/>.

⁴ The Magna Charta Universitatum (1988): <https://www.magna-charta.org/magna-charta-universitatum>.

definition of “automatic recognition” that in its essence continues to be used today⁵.

From the Bucharest Communiqué (2012) onwards, the concept of automatic recognition has been constantly included in subsequent Ministerial Communiqués, starting with the one adopted in Yerevan (2015), then in Paris (2018), in Rome (2020), and most recently in Tirana (2024).

A few years after the Yerevan Ministerial Conference, the European Commission adopted in November 2018 the “Council Recommendation on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education diplomas and the outcomes of learnings periods abroad”⁶. With this Recommendation, the scope of automatic recognition was extended to include upper secondary school qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods, leading to the broader concept of “automatic mutual recognition of a qualification”.

The Recommendation also clarifies the distinction between access and *admission* in the context of access to further learning. While access refers to the automatic recognition of a qualification in terms of its workload, quality and level, *admission* is based on the assessment of the profile and learning outcomes, relying on the institutional decision-making.

The Council of Europe launched, at the beginning of 2026, the drafting process of a new Convention to strengthen automatic recognition of higher education qualifications⁷. This initiative aims to establish a shared, binding framework capable of ensuring trust, transparency and quality assurance in the recognition of qualifications across Europe.

Since the 1990s, recognition of qualification has become an increasingly central priority in discussion among higher education experts and policy makers. With the official introduction of the term “automatic recognition” in 2012, the concept has gained further prominence and continues to evolve in response to diverse national contexts and policy developments. At the same time, both in the initial conceptualisation and in its current applications, automatic recognition remains grounded in the fundamental principle of safeguarding the value of each qualification, which is “automatically” accepted across participating countries.

⁵ For the definition of “automatic recognition” see the following section of this first chapter.

⁶ 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, at [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)).

⁷ Further information about the drafting process of the Convention can be found at the following webpage: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/education/-/council-of-europe-launches-drafting-of-a-new-convention-to-strengthen-automatic-recognition-of-higher-education-qualifications>.

/ WHAT IS AUTOMATIC RECOGNITION? CLARIFYING THE CONCEPT

As abovementioned, automatic recognition as a concept has been cited for the first time in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) at the Bucharest Ministerial Conference in April 2012⁸. The ministerial communiqué spelled out that:

“We are determined to remove outstanding obstacles hindering effective and proper recognition and are willing to work together towards the automatic recognition of comparable academic degrees, building on the tools of the Bologna framework, as a long-term goal of the EHEA”⁹.

This Communiqué called for the establishment of a **Pathfinder group on Automatic Recognition**, whose findings were the basis for the ambition in the Yerevan Communiqué (2015)¹⁰ to achieve automatic recognition by 2020.

The original definition of the EHEA Pathfinder Group on Automatic Recognition, is still the basis for the current use of automatic recognition both in the EHEA and EU:

“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)”.

The underlying idea of automatic recognition was summarised as: “*a Bachelor = Bachelor = Bachelor*”. A degree at a given level within the EHEA framework should, in principle, be recognised as equivalent in other EHEA countries, subject to verification of its authenticity. It required to accept and recognise the quality and level of Bachelors and Masters issued in the EHEA framework as equal to. In other words, automatic recognition meant a renewed focus on trust in, and trusting the system, which is at the heart of the EHEA.

⁸ The Bucharest Communiqué is available at the following link: https://ehea.info/Upload/document/ministerial_declarations/Bucharest_Communique_2012_610673.pdf.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ The Yerevan Communiqué is available at the following link: https://ehea.info/Upload/document/ministerial_declarations/YerevanCommuniqueFinal_613707.pdf.

Automatic recognition has been a central part of the Bologna Ministerial Communiqués since 2012. At the same time, the European Commission put automatic recognition at the centre of their political attention.

In this sense and as anticipated, on 26 November 2018, 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**¹¹ was adopted, which used a definition based on that of the Pathfinder Group.

The 2018 Council Recommendation offered an operational framework that translates the aspiration into measures which should be implemented at the national level: improved transparency tools, cooperation between authorities, more consistent use of qualifications frameworks, and articulation with quality assurance. It also offered a useful practical distinction for institutions: what is expected to be "automatic" (level and access), and what can remain subject to assessment against specific requirements (additional admission criteria).

Moreover, the Council Recommendation broadened the scope of automatic recognition to vocational educational training (VET), credit mobility in higher education and learning periods abroad in upper secondary education. Automatic recognition became a core ambition of the European Education Area (EEA). In this sense, the definition of "Automatic mutual recognition of a qualification" cited is:

*"the right for holders of a qualification of a certain level that has been issued by one Member State to be considered for entry to a higher education programme in the next level in any other Member State, without having to go through any separate recognition procedure. This shall not prejudice the right of a higher education institution or the competent authorities to set specific evaluation and admission criteria for a specific programme. It does not prejudice the right to check, if the qualification is authentic and, in case of an upper secondary education and training qualification, if it really gives access to higher education in the Member State of issuance or, in duly justified cases, if the granted qualification meets the requirements for accessing a specific higher education programme in the receiving Member State"*¹².

¹¹ Council Recommendation of 26 November 2018 (ibid.).

¹² Council Recommendation of 26 November 2018 (ibid.).

In line with the policy trajectory established over the past decade in the field of automatic recognition, the Council of Europe has launched, in January 2026, the drafting of the new **Convention on the conditions of transparency and quality assurance for automatic recognition of higher education qualifications in Europe**.

To support this process, the Council of Europe Steering Committee for Education (CDEDU) conducted extensive consultations between 2023 and 2025, involving students, higher education institutions (HEIs), public authorities, ENIC centres and regional partners. The conclusion was the need of common standards of transparency, quality assurance and data reliability to support functioning of automatic recognition at the system level.

Misconceptions

The misconceptions around the concept of automatic recognition forced to better explain and create a common understanding of automatic recognition, by outlining key elements to understand automatic recognition:

- **Only for qualifications that fulfil the EHEA criteria:** the requirements of being referenced to the EHEA or EQF qualifications framework (to ensure the level), being issued in accordance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), and from countries that ratified the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC).
- **Only entails to be considered for the next level.** Here access rights play an important role: if a qualification in the home does not qualify for access to the next level, automatic recognition to be considered to the next level does not apply.
- **Only concerns general access.** Automatic recognition is not automatic admission to a programme. After automatic recognition, the other three levels shall still be considered under the LRC: profile and learning outcomes. Moreover, additional admissions criteria may apply, as established at national and institutional level, including the verification of its authenticity.

/ IMPLEMENTATION MODELS

4 models

Over time, **four models** for automatic recognition emerged in the EHEA that are still existent to date:

1. Legal bilateral and multilateral agreements

Even before the 2015 Yerevan Communiqué, legally binding bilateral and multilateral agreements on automatic recognition of qualifications were already being developed and implemented. Such treaties were often established with neighbouring countries, resulting in a number of bi- and multilateral treaties. One of the earliest examples of such cooperation is the Bilateral Cultural Agreement of 1952 concluded between Italy and Austria (Law 9 n.844, of August 1954¹³). This agreement aimed to promote the mutual recognition of the validity of certain degrees and University diplomas between the two countries, by reducing barriers and facilitating mobility.

The strength of such agreement is that it provides a clear legal framework, creating certainty for all parties involved. Recognition outcomes are known in advance, and this transparency benefits HEIs, students and other stakeholders engaged in recognition processes. Procedures are simplified, leading to faster recognition decisions.

At the same time, given the long and arduous negotiation and adoption processes for such agreements, their scope is typically limited to a small group of countries. Furthermore, legally embedded agreements can be less flexible, since adapting to educational reforms or the introduction of new qualifications may require formal legislative revision. Finally, the autonomy of HEIs to take independent recognition decisions may be constrained under a binding framework established by the agreement.

Recently, a de jure initiative for automatic recognition within an EHEA wide range of countries have been gaining momentum: the **Baltic Benelux Multilateral Treaty** on automatic recognition¹⁴.

In 2015 the Benelux countries (Belgium, Netherlands, Luxembourg) concluded a treaty to arrange automatic recognition of bachelor's and master's degrees. In 2018 associate and doctoral degrees

¹³ Law 9 n.844, of August 1954, in https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/1954/09/18/054U0844/sgj;jsessionid=J3j6ybs8bmWIXopjomFQsQ__ntc-as4-guri2a

¹⁴ Treaty on the Automatic Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications, in <https://www.benelux.int/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/TREATY-reconnaissance-diplomes-14.09.2021-all-languages-with-names.pdf>.

were added. In 2019 the Benelux and Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania) signed a Declaration of intent to join efforts, which resulted in the signing of the Baltic Benelux on automatic recognition in 2021, which officially entered into force in 2024.

This Baltic Benelux treaty provides that qualifications obtained in one of the signatory countries are automatically recognised in the other participating countries. The Baltic Benelux Multilateral Treaty is currently open for other countries within the EHEA to join.

2. A legally binding unilateral list of degrees

Another legally binding model is automatic recognition based on a list of countries. In this model countries can decide unilaterally which qualifications from which countries to include.

For example, in Portugal a [country list](#) was introduced as early as in 2007, which stated the qualifications and countries which were qualified for automatic recognition. The list was established by a commission including representatives from the Ministry of Higher Education and HEIs¹⁵.

The advantages and disadvantages are similar to the first model with the addition that the scope of the arrangement remains limited to a defined group of countries or a selected set of qualifications, which may create the perception that qualifications not included on the list are, by definition, unsuitable for automatic recognition, which in practice may not always be the case.

3. Non-legal bilateral and multilateral agreements

In addition to the two “de jure models” above, another option is to reach “de facto” agreements on the mutual recognition of other qualifications. These are informal “de facto” agreements between two or more countries.

An example are the Nordic-Baltic countries that jointly developed an admission manual in response to the call of the abovementioned Pathfinder Group on Automatic Recognition to seek regional cooperation¹⁶.

¹⁵ Find more information about the Decree-Law n.º 341/2007, which established the national country list at the following webpage: https://www.dges.gov.pt/en/pagina/decreto-lei-no-3412007-12-outubro-novas-decisoes#:~:text=In%20order%20to%20overcome%20obstacles%20from%20the,This%20update%20can%20be%20found%20here:%20www.dges.mec.pt/en/files/naric/academic_recognition/Decisions_DL341_2015_EN.pdf.

¹⁶ More information about the Nordic-Baltic admission manual is available here: <https://horric.org/nordbalt/nordbalt-about/>.

A trust-based, non-binding model is generally easier to establish than a formal treaty. The process can strengthen mutual understanding of education systems, reinforce system-level trust, and increase transparency for HEIs, students, and other stakeholders. Because it is not legally binding, HEIs retain full autonomy over their recognition decisions. However, precisely because the agreement is not legally binding, a certain degree of ambiguity may persist regarding its interpretation and application, potentially affecting consistency in practice.

4. 'De facto' automatic recognition

This model is to apply automatic recognition on the basis of a set of criteria to qualify for automatic recognition such as those presented in the 2018 Council Recommendation. These are simply applied in practice.

There are plenty of examples of “de facto” automatic recognition tools, including the [Kwalificator](#), the [NARIC Ireland Foreign Qualification database](#) which issue comparability statements of the foreign qualification to the home system, and the [Swedish Qualifications Assessment tool](#). The [ARDI \(Automatic Recognition Database – Italia\) tool](#), which allows holders of qualifications from the 55 signatory countries of the LRC to obtain an automatic correspondence of their qualification. The [Q-ENTRY database](#) supports automatic recognition of final-secondary education qualifications giving access to higher education.

In this context, useful tools have been recently developed in the framework of EU co-funded projects, such as the [EHEA qualifications table](#) which provides an overview of the qualifications currently issued in the EHEA. For the comparison of qualifications from the countries participating in the Baltic-Benelux automatic recognition agreement, the [AR-GO comparability tool](#) has been recently developed. Similarly, in the Adriatic and Mediterranean regions, the Adren and Maren [Table of comparison](#) and the [Match your qualification tool](#) facilitate the identification of correspondences between qualifications issued in the partner countries involved.

This fourth model is relatively easy to apply; everybody can start automatic recognition instantly. Other, it has similar benefits as model 3. However, it requires ongoing guidance, while the absence of a binding framework may lead to ambiguity and less consistent application.

In conclusion, each model has its own advantage, and models can co-exist within a country. What works best largely depends on the way recognition is organised within a country and at the institutional level.

/ STATE OF ART OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AUTOMATIC RECOGNITION LOOKING AT THE MOST RECENT MONITORING EXERCISES

As previously mentioned, the concept of automatic recognition has now been at the very core of political discussions on recognition since the Bologna Ministerial Conference in Bucharest 2012.

In many ways, the concept of automatic recognition was a development and result of the establishment of a European Higher Education Area (EHEA). It is indeed hard to argue that a successful EHEA has been established if qualifications are not recognised across borders and if educational barriers to student and labour mobility have not been removed.

With the high political attention and differences in countries' approach, focus has been on the actual implementation of automatic recognition. This attention resulted in some recent monitoring exercises which this second publication chapter aims at presenting.

The **Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee Bureau (LRCCB) has completed a monitoring report**¹⁷ on the implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC), which was presented at the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee meeting in 2022 in Strasbourg. This report focuses on monitoring the implementation of the LRC articles related to the right to appeal, information provision and transnational education, as well as automatic recognition and digital solutions which are not directly part of the Convention. As for the methodology used to gather first-hand information, the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee established a questionnaire which was sent to all State Parties to the LRC. The monitoring report is so based on survey data from 2020 and provides a set of recommendations for national recognition authorities

¹⁷ Monitoring the implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention: monitoring report, Paris/Strasbourg 2022, in <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000383465.locale=en>.

and education policymakers on how to improve these areas. In particular, the quantitative and qualitative analysis is based on the 53 replies received from 52 State Parties to the LRC.

In the same light, in 2023 the European Commission published the results of a first monitoring exercise of the 2018 Council Recommendation implementation, which was set out in the related report **“Implementation of the 2018 Council Recommendation on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad”**.¹⁸ The evaluation has been based on a mixed research methods, combining the collection of secondary data from existing literature with the generation of primary data through a series of consultation activities. Respondents included NARIC's, national authorities (Ministries), credential evaluators, sectoral organisations, student's organisations, labour market organisations, Erasmus national agencies and learners totalling a number of 950 respondents. The surveys among the different stakeholders were followed by 130 key informant interviews and backed by literature studies.

The Commissions survey has a much wider scope both in relation to respondents but also the different levels of implementation of automatic recognition, including upper secondary level qualifications, as well as automatic recognition of learning periods abroad. The findings generated from these research activities have undergone triangulation to produce a 'traffic light' assessment on the state of implementation of the Council Recommendation in each of the 27 EU Member States.

Another relevant monitoring exercise is the one outlined within the **Bologna Process Implementation Report (BPIR)**¹⁹, focused on the monitoring of the implementation of the key commitments of Bologna. Following the Bucharest Communiqué, the commitment to automatic recognition has been high on the agenda on all the following Ministerial communiqués, lastly in the Tirana Communiqué of 2024²⁰. In this sense, the BPIR has both in 2020 and 2024 monitored the implementation of automatic recognition through a questionnaire sent by the BPIR working group to national authorities in the BFUG Member States. Data builds mainly on official evidence-based information about legislation, regulations and national policies.

¹⁸ Implementation of the 2018 Council Recommendation on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad. Executive Summary (2023). In <https://education.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2023-02/Study%20on%20implementation%20of%20the%20Council%20Recommendation%20on%20automatic%20mutual%20recognition%20of%20qualifications%20and%20learning%20periods%20abroad%20-%20Executive%20Summary.pdf>.

¹⁹ European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice, 2024. The European Higher Education Area in 2024: Bologna Process Implementation Report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. In <https://ehea.info/Immagini/the-european-higher-education-area-in-2024-EC0224018ENN.pdf>.

²⁰ The Tirana Communiqué (2024) is available at the following link: <https://ehea.info/Download/Tirana-Communique.pdf>.

Finally, it has been recently published the report from the European Students' Union (ESU) in conjunction with the Ministerial Bologna Conference in Tirana in 2024, titled **“Bologna with Student Eyes (2024)”**²¹. Among the different topics presented in the report, there is a chapter on the key commitments of Bologna (namely, degree structures, quality assurance and recognition), including the implementation of the LRC in the Member States. The report also reports the perception of the state of play of implementation of automatic recognition among student organisations.

The main source for the publication is the data received from the National unions of students (NUSes), obtained through nine surveys covering both quantitative and qualitative information, with questions about the state of play of implementation of automatic recognition and the unions' perceptions. The information from NUSes has been complemented, where relevant, by data from other ESU publications or further materials, including the draft Bologna Process Implementation Report 2024.

Starting from this first overview of the different monitoring exercises under consideration in this publication, as also resumed in the table below, the following section of the chapter intends to draw some conclusions from each monitoring exercise.

²¹ European Students' Union, 2024. Bologna with Student Eyes 2024. Brussels, May 2024. In <https://esu-online.org/publications/bwse-2024/>.

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

Table 1: Overview of the monitoring exercises

/ MONITORING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE LISBON RECOGNITION CONVENTION, 2022

As anticipated, the fourth section of the questionnaire sent to all the States Parties of the LRC in 2019, which results were gathered in the related monitoring report on the implementation of the LRC (2022), focused on automatic recognition and it was based on the commonly accepted understanding that there are 4 different modes of applying automatic recognition, as outlined in the first chapter of this publication.

The monitoring report, which presented the collected survey data, addressed both the actual implementation of automatic recognition and the different modes of its implementation. In this context, it is important to notice that the responses were followed by documentation in terms of links to legislation, pages on ENIC-NARICs' websites and further resources, accordingly checked by the LRCCB.

The question posed to the States Parties were as follows:

Have any measures been implemented to establish automatic recognition?



The definition of automatic recognition to which countries responded followed the one developed by the Pathfinder Group on Automatic Recognition adopted in the Bologna Ministerial Conference in Yerevan 2015 (see chapter 1 of this publication).

All 53 Parties to the Convention responded. The answers were divided in the following way:

Countries having implemented AR regardless of modes	31
AR implemented by Competent Authority	20
AR implemented nationally	13
AR implemented nationally by the competent authority	7
No measures implemented	11
Not specified	6

Table 2: Answers from the Monitoring report of the LRC (2022)

As indicated in the table, the main conclusions of the monitoring exercise were that 31 of 53 responses documented implementing automatic recognition in one of the 4 modes. The majority of countries (20 States Parties) have implemented automatic recognition by the competent recognition authority, while 11 countries had not taken any action to implement it by 2022.

13 States Parties specified that automatic recognition was implemented either nationally or by the competent recognition authority (the ENIC-NARIC centres) or in a mixed combination of both. Competent authorities from 7 countries had implemented automatic recognition in national legislation, where this legal implementation was related to bilateral or multilateral agreements. In the last row of the table is highlighted as 6 countries could not specify and provide further information to the question posed.

Therefore, based on these data, the monitoring report provided the following recommendations:

- full and fair implementation of all the LRC principles is the fundamental basis for any automatic recognition procedure.
- The remaining 11 countries which have not implemented AR should examine the possibilities of implementing one of the four modes of AR.
- Countries should examine the possibility to expand the area for which AR is granted.
- Countries and ENIC-NARIC centres should ensure that AR is implemented nationally, and AR applies to all recognition authorities.
- Countries should disseminate information on AR to all national recognition authorities including the distinction between access and admission.

/ THE COMMISSION'S EVALUATION OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION ON PROMOTING AUTOMATIC MUTUAL RECOGNITION OF QUALIFICATIONS AND LEARNING PERIODS ABROAD

Overall, the main conclusion of the report published by the European Commission, "Implementation of the 2018 Council Recommendation on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad"²² is that progress at implementing automatic recognition resulted more

²² Implementation report of the 2018 Council Recommendation (ibid.).

advanced in higher education than in the upper secondary educational sector.

In this sense, in the vast majority of countries involved in this monitoring exercise, the pre-requisites for implementing automatic recognition were in place, such as the three-cycle system, quality assurance in line with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), national qualifications frameworks referenced to the EQF and the use of ECTS. However, the report also noted that a number of countries still needed to implement legislative changes in order to comply with the 2018 Council Recommendation.

Another central conclusion of the report was the lack of consistency in implementing automatic recognition at central level and at institutional level. It was concluded that the implementation was hampered by decentralised decision-making and a lack of common understanding of the concept of automatic recognition at the national level. In particular, this lack of understanding that automatic recognition refers to recognition at the degree level and the right to apply for admission (access rights) and not the right to be admitted to a specific programme may have called for misunderstandings among both learners and HEIs responding to the survey. In relation to information provision, only a few countries have central databases on recognition decisions and the NARICs play a central role in informing HEIs on automatic recognition.

To sum up, the report concluded with the presentation of the following challenges in terms of implementing automatic recognition:

- “diversity in decision-making processes across Member States with regard to recognition, partly explained by the autonomy given to educational institutions in issuing recognition decisions in nearly all Member States;
- Lack of clarity about automatic recognition at institutional level, including lack of differentiation between access to higher education and admission to a specific programme;
- Cultural resistance within educational institutions;
- Limited use of learning agreements ensuring recognition of learning periods abroad among educational institutions from different Member States outside of the Erasmus+ programme; and
- Lack of monitoring and evaluation of recognition decisions”.²³

²³ Implementation report of the 2018 Council Recommendation (ibid.). Page 9.

/ THE BOLOGNA PROCESS IMPLEMENTATION REPORT 2024

The BPIR²⁴ covered a total of 49 responses on the implementation of automatic recognition in the EHEA.

The main conclusions of the 2024 report were that:

- 19 countries had fully implemented automatic recognition for all EHEA qualifications.
- 16 countries had implemented automatic recognition for a subset of countries, mainly through bilateral or regional agreements.
- 13 countries could not document any implementation of automatic recognition, while 1 country did not provide any data on this topic.

The number of countries with full implementation of automatic recognition “had slightly increased since the 2020 edition of the Bologna Process Implementation Report”. Indeed in 2020, 10 countries documented full implementation of automatic recognition. 16 countries applied automatic recognition for a subset of countries, and 24 countries could not present any evidence of automatic recognition within their recognition systems.

The BPIR also concluded that there was evidence of countries with bachelor’s degrees of 240 ECTS which were less likely to implement automatic recognition for bachelor’s degree consisting of 180 ECTS.

To resume, in relation to recognition, the report concluded that formal compliance with the LRC is well established across the EHEA. However, despite the overarching legal framework established and the progress reported, many countries still need to take action to ensure that all aspects of the Convention are properly implemented in national legislation.

/ BOLOGNA WITH STUDENT EYES

According to the results reported in the Bologna Students Eyes publication, a total of 62% of respondents to the survey report that automatic recognition has been implemented in their educational system.

²⁴ Bologna Process Implementation Report – BPIR (ibid.).

Among the student organisations which have responded that automatic recognition is not implemented, ESU has asked about the perception of barriers for implementation of automatic recognition. In this regard, the main barriers reported are the lack of trust (in foreign educational systems), the fact that automatic recognition is not implemented for all EHEA countries and the lack of political interest in automatic recognition. Furthermore, there are concerns about the level of implementation of key Bologna tools, such as ECTS and the ESGs, which are pre-conditions for implementing automatic recognition and need to be broader implemented.

Another aspect reported is about the rise of regional agreements on automatic recognition, which is on the one hand perceived as a positive progression of the implementation on automatic recognition. On the other hand, this has been perceived as a token of lack of trust of educational systems, which countries have not made agreements on automatic recognition with.

As for recognition processes, they are often perceived as complicated by students, given the variety of actors involved. In some countries, recognition is carried out by central authorities, while in others, the responsibility lies with HEIs. In any case, a general satisfaction has been reported by the National student organisations regarding the transparency of recognition processes.

Another obstacle outlined is that, in some countries, students face a barrier to recognition due to high fees for recognition processes, and respondents also reported perceiving discrimination based on the educational system to which the qualifications for recognition belong.

Hence, the overall conclusions outlined by the ESU's publication are as follows:

- automatic recognition is essential for students' rights within EHEA, and its implementation should be high on the political agenda;
- information on automatic recognition should be clear and transparent for both students and for admission officers in the European HEIs;
- simplicity of recognition processes and further implementation of automatic recognition could be enhanced by a clearer distribution of responsibility among central authorities (ENIC-NARICs) and admission officers.

/ COMPARATIVE CONCLUSIONS OF THE MONITORING EXERCISES

From the results of the 4 monitoring exercises outlined above, a common conclusion can be drawn: considerable progress in the implementation of automatic recognition has been achieved

since the concept surfaced a political priority within the EHEA in 2012.

That said, all monitoring reports also conclude that an evenly significant progress is yet to occur before full implementation of automatic recognition is achieved within the EHEA. To some extent implementation remains uneven, partial, and unclear in practice, especially at institutional level.

From a juridical point of view, legal implementation only covers smaller regional and bilateral agreements and not automatic recognition of all higher education qualifications from the EHEA countries.

At central level a significant number of countries have implemented “de facto” automatic recognition as the main mode of implementation. While, at the institutional level, the reports show that few countries are monitoring institutional recognition practices and central databases are scarce. Noteworthy is though, that ENIC-NARIC centres report close cooperation with their national HEIs in terms of supporting institutional recognition, including automatic recognition.

To conclude, all the reports suggest that even though political commitment to automatic recognition has been clear and consistently addressed in all Ministerial Bologna Communiqués since 2012, there is still room for improvement.

/ PERCEPTION OF AUTOMATIC RECOGNITION IMPLEMENTATION AMONG HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS AT NATIONAL LEVEL

Following the presentation of the results of the policy-level monitoring exercises, the third chapter of this publication aims to examine the experiences and perceptions of higher education institutions (HEIs) at the national level in the implementation of automatic recognition.

The following paragraphs present an overview of the insights on automatic recognition emerged from the focus groups activity conducted in the nine partner countries of the TPG-LRC Plus project: Andorra, Denmark, France, Georgia, Italy, Republic of Kazakhstan, Netherlands, San Marino, and Ukraine.

The main objective of the focus groups was to gain insights into the level of understanding and implementation of automatic recognition from the perspective of HEIs from the nine partner countries. This activity also helped identifying the practices implemented at the institutional level, including the tools currently in use to support the daily implementation of automatic recognition. This objective was reached by 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 this context, in recent years, also previous activities conducted in the framework of other Erasmus+ projects, aimed at exploring the level of understanding of the automatic recognition concept, such as at monitoring its implementation.

Within the framework of the project Thematic Peer Group on the implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC). in EHEA countries (TPG-LRC), a [public seminar on automatic](#)

[recognition and information provision](#) was organised in June 2020, primarily targeting HEIs. In the same light, during the subsequent mandate, a [public seminar on automatic recognition](#) was organised in Tirana in April 2023, within the framework of the project TPG-LRC Constructing Recognition in the EHEA (TPG-LRC CoRE). This event included a session for the presentation of national experiences, as well as presentations focused on the use of digital solutions for the verification of authenticity and quality assurance.

Another example which is worth mentioning is the Peer Learning Activity (PLA) conducted in 2020 within the [I-Comply project](#). The PLA held in Kyiv aimed to identify the major obstacles to automatic recognition and to provide concrete strategies for national authorities in the EHEA to move forward on the matter. In particular, a group of about 30 experts identified strategies and models of good practice to achieve a common understanding of automatic recognition, as well as its implementation in the EHEA.

A further study in this field was carried out, between 2020 and 2022, in the framework of the project International Database on Higher Education Entry Qualifications (qENTRY+). The study aimed gaining insight on common challenges and gather possible solutions to foster the implementation of automatic recognition, drawing on the perceptions of the stakeholders directly involved in the recognition process. These insights were gathered through national focus groups, and the outcomes of this study informed the related publication "[Automatic recognition in practice – examples and tools from the project partner countries](#)", produced by the project consortium.

/ BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

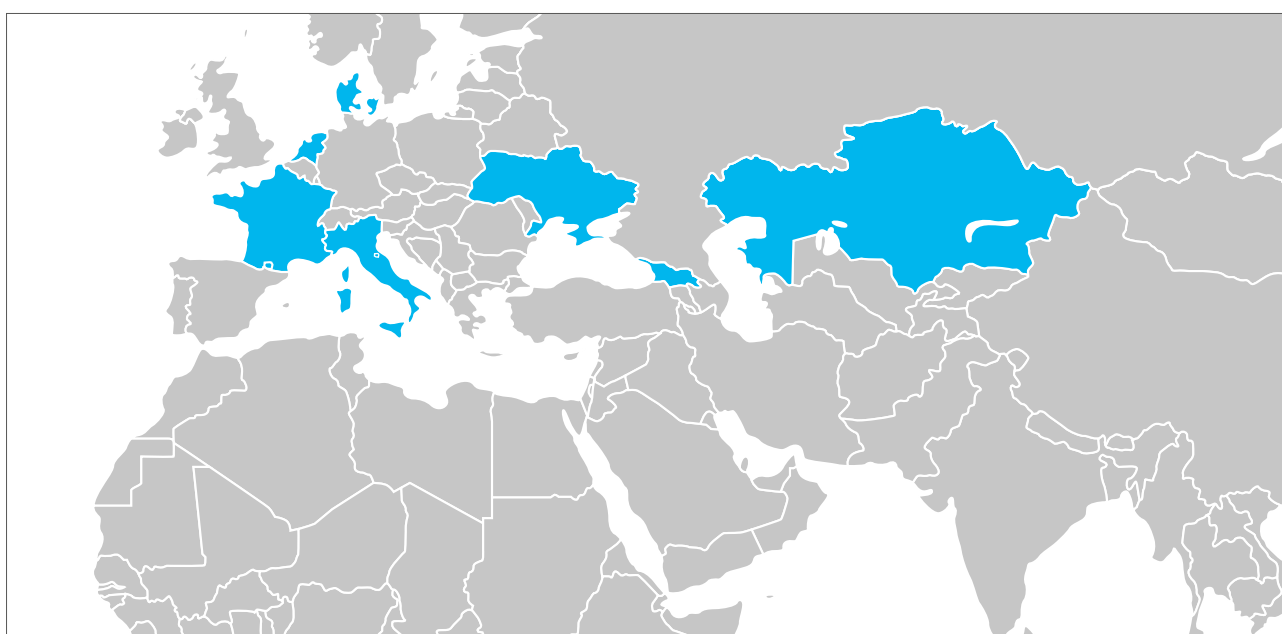


Figure 1: Map of the TPG-LRC Plus partner countries

The format used for the focus groups has been developed by drawing on the experiences gained from the previous activities of the Erasmus+ project qENTRY+ – *International Database on Higher Education Entry Qualifications*.

Discussions were based on a set of questions pertaining to the following areas:

- a.** Background and methodology of the questionnaire.
- b.** Understanding of the concept of automatic recognition.
- c.** Practices for the implementation of automatic recognition.
- d.** Digitalisation.
- e.** Challenges and benefits of automatic recognition.
- f.** Suggested responses to challenges.

Since the ecosystem surrounding the recognition of qualifications differs considerably in each country, the questionnaires have been subject to adaptations by partner institutions as deemed necessary. A sample of the standard questionnaire is available in the **Annex** of this publication.

The focus groups activities took place at national level between February and April 2026.

It is worth noting that the landscape of automatic recognition implementation that emerges from the focus group activities shows considerable variety across all surveyed areas. An important difference to consider is the institutional framework surrounding automatic recognition. As a matter of fact, the role of HEIs is not the same in all countries, with differences in the level of autonomy. Furthermore, HEIs are not always the competent institution for automatic recognition, which in certain cases falls under the remit of a national centralised authority.

All the content presented in the following sections originates from the information shared by the participating HEIs in the focus groups.

/ UNDERSTANDING OF THE CONCEPT OF AUTOMATIC RECOGNITION

As outlined in the first chapter of this publication, the concept of automatic recognition is far from obvious, as it lends itself to possible misconceptions. From the focus group activity conducted within the TPG-LRC Plus framework, it emerged that most HEIs are familiar with the concept of automatic recognition. More specifically, according to some HEIs, automatic recognition is linked to the simplification of recognition procedures and to the recognition of a qualification's level and quality. In particular, in two countries, HEIs linked automatic recognition to the absence of the need for individual expert examination of qualifications. HEIs from one country stressed the misleading nature of the term, which might lead to the false belief that no evaluation procedures are performed by credential evaluators in the context of automatic recognition. In another country, HEIs expressed limited knowledge of the concept of automatic recognition; nevertheless, in practice, automatic recognition is widely applied by HEIs.

From the focus group activities, it emerges that the awareness about 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”*²⁵ should not be taken for granted. In fact, only HEIs from two countries seem to be fully familiar with this Recommendation. HEIs from other countries stated to have no familiarity or only partial familiarity with the Council Recommendation, with some cases with only the staff directly involved in credential evaluation being familiar.

²⁵ Council Recommendation of 26 November 2018 (ibid.).

/ PRACTICES FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AUTOMATIC RECOGNITION THAT ARE IN PLACE

Regarding the implementation of automatic recognition, the majority of HEIs reported that it is in place. However, based on the collected inputs, the level of implementation reported by HEIs varies across countries. Similarly, when asked about the perception of the implementation of the Council Recommendation of 26 November 2018, in most of the countries, HEIs observed that the Recommendation is partially implemented.

With regard to the practices that are in place to support automatic recognition, cooperation among universities is considered an important element to take into consideration, particularly when it translates into formal cooperation agreements.

In addition, participants mentioned using existing tools, such as databases, country profiles, and country lists from ENIC-NARIC centres, as valuable support in their daily work on recognition procedures. Alongside exchanges within networks, as well as institutional procedures and standardised frameworks, are also additional valuable resources.

In this context, the involved HEIs expressed a shared demand for access to databases. This demand was accompanied by a desire to develop digital tools to support recognition processes, a need for professional training for staff, and increased coordination between HEIs and national authorities to ensure better consistency in recognition procedures.

In four countries, HEIs also expressed the necessity for some degree of change in the legislative framework or official guidelines. Specifically, the support for clearer provisions and specific criteria was shared by the HEIs of five countries. In one case, there seems to be no need to amend specific legislation, but some HEIs do support discussions to clarify or simplify certain legislative provisions.

/ ROLE OF DIGITALISATION IN SUPPORTING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AUTOMATIC RECOGNITION AT THE HEI LEVEL

Nowadays, digitalisation is a fundamental consideration in every domain, and automatic recognition is no exception. The integration of digitalisation into automatic recognition processes, not only as a tool but also as an approach to all the operations involved, has the potential to

introduce considerable changes in the recognition workflow. In this regard, the vast majority of participants agreed that digitalisation can support the implementation of automatic recognition practices at the national level. In most cases, digitalisation helped reduce the number of paper documents and streamline recognition procedures. In addition, HEIs use a range of digital tools to support their recognition activities, such as QR codes and calendar converters.

Two more aspects of digitalisation emerged: its contribution to transparency and the inevitability of human involvement in the recognition process. With regard to the former, a HEI's representative stressed that digitalisation improves transparency for both institutions and applicants, while another HEI highlighted the potential of digitalisation in ensuring transparency and reliability of information via updated information on official websites. As regards the latter, HEIs from two countries stressed the importance of not over-relying on digitalisation. The total automation of admission decisions would risk overlooking important nuances in complex cases, and digital verification is not always sufficient as it needs to be supported from a series of procedures to be performed by credential evaluators and further verified by human intelligence.

/ BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES PERCEIVED REGARDING THE CONCEPT AND THE IMPLEMENTATION PROCEDURES OF AUTOMATIC RECOGNITION

In light of the considerations outlined in the previous paragraphs, HEIs identified a series of benefits connected to the implementation of automatic recognition. Most of HEIs recognised that implementing automatic recognition facilitates student mobility and streamlines the related processes, through a simplification of procedures and a reduced administrative burden for the recognition competent authorities. Moreover, automatic recognition is seen as benefitting also the development of trust among institutions, in the education system and in countries signatory of the LRC.

According to HEIs, automatic recognition also enhances uniformity of procedures and alignment with standards of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). In this light, transparency and greater clarity of information are two additional positive improvements resulting from automatic recognition.

On the other hand, discussion about the challenges to the implementation of automatic recognition has also been addressed by participants during the focus groups. The most shared

challenge is identified in the lack of updated information and data on some education systems and the related qualifications, a difficulty which is in line with the expressed need for databases. Additional challenges concern the difficulty of interpretation of foreign qualifications, such as procedural and administrative uncertainties and lack of harmonisation which can result in some cases in inconsistency practices.

/ KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM FOCUS GROUPS

To conclude, the inputs gathered from the focus groups show a variety of nuances across the countries with regard to the implementation of automatic recognition. Discussions show that there is a certain degree of awareness about the concept of automatic recognition; nonetheless, there is still room to improve implementation practices.

Despite these diversities in institutional frameworks, commonalities emerged in multiple areas. Looking at the future and at the necessary elements to enhance the implementation of automatic recognition, cooperation and coordination among the involved actors emerged as a central element. Furthermore, data sharing and professional training activities also figured as relevant for the improvement of the implementation of automatic recognition at the national and institutional level.

Overall, the focus groups provided a valuable opportunity for HEIs to share their perspectives with other colleagues and to be informed about the current state of implementation of automatic recognition in the country and within their own institution.

/ TOOLS TO SUPPORT IMPLEMENTATION OF AUTOMATIC RECOGNITION

Building on the insights presented in the previous chapter, related to the experiences of HEIs from the nine partner countries involved in the TPG-LRC Plus project, this chapter moves the analysis forward by focusing on the practical dimension of implementation.

Drawing on these results, it explores a range of tools, databases, and initiatives that can support credential evaluators and recognition experts in navigating the implementation of automatic recognition across the diverse education systems of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

The chapter first presents a selection of tools and databases developed within the framework of international networks, Erasmus+ projects, agreements, and national initiatives, thereby equipping credential evaluators with key resources to support their work. It then examines relevant manuals, standards, and guidelines aimed at strengthening and stabilising recognition practices.

/ TOOLS AND DATABASES FOR AUTOMATIC RECOGNITION

International tools drawing on official and primary sources from countries

1.

ENIC-NARIC Networks country pages

The [ENIC-NARIC network country pages](#) are relevant sources for official and first-hand information on the recognition of qualifications. Indeed, each national information centre is responsible for maintaining its country page up to date, by providing reliable information regarding the own national education system and the bodies of reference. In particular, they provide structured information on the education system in each country, the competent authorities, recognised higher education institutions, national qualifications frameworks, quality assurance systems, recognition procedures, sources of verification and the use of the diploma supplement.

In addition to providing an overview of the system, these pages refer to official sources, such as Ministries or quality agencies' webpages, where recognised or accredited higher education institutions can be consulted. In the context of automatic recognition, these country pages contribute primarily by generating administrative certainty. When a qualification comes from an officially recognised institution and is part of a structured national education system, the recognition of the qualification level is easier to substantiate and, where appropriate, to automate.

In admission processes, the information obtained can be integrated into internal verification lists or case management systems, which helps to reduce evaluation times and reinforce consistency in decision-making. Its official status and the fact to be updated by the competent authorities constitute the greatest strength of this source of information.

2.

Qualifications frameworks and comparability tools

Information on qualifications frameworks are provided by competent national authorities and European structures. These frameworks are comparability and transparency tools that help compare levels based on learning outcomes. National qualifications framework can be referenced and/or self-referenced against the

European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and the European Higher Education Area Qualifications Framework (EHEA-QF).

They provide level references that allow a qualification to be mapped to a set of shared descriptors. This is particularly useful when a qualification comes from an unfamiliar system but is referenced to a level recognised in a national framework and, in turn, aligned with the so-called meta-frameworks, such as the European Qualification Framework and/or the Framework of Qualifications for the EHEA.

In order to have further detailed information regarding European and National Qualifications Frameworks, please consult the following webpages as reference (non-exhaustive list):

- <https://www.enic-naric.net/page-qualifications-frameworks-level-qualifications>
- <https://ear.enic-naric.net/manual/Chapter7/Recommendation.aspx>
- <https://ehea.info/bologna-policy/three-degree-cycle/>
- <https://europass.europa.eu/en/compare-qualifications>.

3.

Q-ENTRY

The [Q-ENTRY database](#) has been developed by CIMEA (NARIC Italy) in the framework of the related Erasmus+ project Q-ENTRY, in collaboration with the project consortium composed by the ENIC-NARIC centres of France, Ireland, Latvia and Norway. It contains samples and authoritative information from competent bodies on school-leaving qualifications, providing access to higher education within the national education system. The information contained in the database is uploaded and updated directly by the competent authority of the concerned country.

The database is open and can be used by students, admission officers, guidance practitioners, ENIC-NARIC centres, ministries, and funding agencies.

Q-ENTRY provides an international, systematic overview of access qualifications. It includes 120 qualifications, 77 of which are accompanied by samples, from 54 different countries. Its public and up-to-date nature makes it a practical tool for admissions offices, recognition authorities and students seeking mobility.

4.

NUFFIC country modules and the EHEA Qualifications table

The Dutch ENIC-NARIC (Nuffic) centre carried out a [cataloguing work](#) regarding the most relevant information and data of the country modules and education systems of more than 100 countries. These are detailed descriptions of education systems and qualifications, with guidance on comparability with Dutch qualifications and notes on structure, access and level.

It provides context and speeds up the reading of files, especially when it is necessary to understand the logic of an education system and translate it into a decision on access by level. Its principal asset, as an informational resource, is its broad geographical coverage, considering more than 100 countries.

As anticipated in the first chapter of this publication, another relevant tool recently developed by Nuffic is the [EHEA Qualifications table](#). In particular, the table provides an overview of the qualifications currently issued in the EHEA, and it provides, per each country compiled in this tool, an overview whether the general criteria for automatic recognition are fulfilled: namely compliance with the ESG, reference to the EQF or QF-EHEA and signed the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC).

5.

AR-GO online platform

The [AR-GO online platform](#), which stands for "Automatic Recognition To GO", has been developed within the framework of the DIGI-AR project to support the implementation of the six-party agreement between the Baltic States and the Benelux countries on the mutual automatic recognition of higher education qualifications.

The portal functions as a central access point to standardised information on national qualifications, their status, associated rights and comparability, and allows comparability statements to be generated for qualifications covered by the treaty. In terms of implementation, the portal is a key element for information provision. Indeed, it makes visible to universities, employers and graduates what is automatically recognised and under what conditions.

The AR-GO contributes to greater transparency, mobility, and trust in the automatic recognition process within the Baltic and Benelux regions.

6.

"Automatic Recognition Networks" website

In the framework of two regional co-funded Erasmus+ projects, namely AdReN – *Automatic Recognition in the Adriatic Region* and MAREN – *Mediterranean Automatic Recognition Network*, the "[Automatic Recognition Networks](#)" website has been developed. Starting from the main aim of both projects of promoting automatic recognition in the Adriatic and Mediterranean regions, this website acts as an umbrella for the results and tools developed throughout both projects lifetime. Examples are the Table of comparison and the Match your qualification tool.

The [Table of comparison](#) is comprehensive of Pre-Bologna and Bologna qualifications, academic and giving access to higher education in the Adriatic and Mediterranean regions, allowing for a comparability and referencing of each qualification from partner countries to the EHEA Qualifications Framework and the European Qualifications Framework. The [Match your qualification tool](#) allows users to select a country of origin and a national qualification and see how it corresponds to the European Qualifications Framework, national frameworks and qualifications of the same level in the countries of the Adriatic and Mediterranean regions.

National tools

1.

ARDI - Automatic Recognition Database Italy

The [Automatic Recognition Database – Italia \(ARDI\)](#) has been developed and officially launched in 2023 by CIMEA in line with the European requirements for automatic recognition. It contains description of over 400 qualifications from 55 Member States, signatories of the LRC.

It establishes correspondence between the two qualifications and provides specific evaluative notes for each type of qualification, in line with the typical elements of the foreign reference system. The correspondence provided by ARDI is not based on individual cases, it is based on the foreign qualification as a whole.

In addition to the possibility of viewing online information about foreign qualifications in ARDI, a Statement of Correspondence is automatically generated by the system for each qualification, instantly and free of charge, and is immediately available for download.

This database can support preliminary and consistent decisions when an institution receives recurring cases. In an automatic recognition approach, it can serve as auxiliary evidence to confirm level matching and the right of access to the Italian system, thereby avoiding repetitive reconstructions.

2.

NAWA Kwalifikator

The [Nawa Kwalifikator](#) has been developed by the Polish NARIC centre, NAWA (Narodowej Agencji Wymiany Akademickiej). It is a search engine and guidance tool that helps to place foreign qualifications within the Polish higher education system, with useful references for level and access to further studies.

It is useful for speeding up the initial analysis of applications with qualifications issued outside the country of admission, providing a reference for building internal precedents. Its added value lies in offering a clear reading from the perspective of the Polish system and enhancing transparency. The output remains indicative; it does not replace a formal institutional decision nor necessarily cover all cases.

3.

NARIC Ireland Foreign Qualifications tool (QSearch)

The [NARIC Ireland Foreign Qualifications tool \(QSearch\)](#) is a public search engine developed by the Irish NARIC centre, Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI). It includes comparisons of foreign qualifications against the Irish National Qualifications Framework, including, where available, downloadable comparative statements.

It serves to support classification by level and consistency in access decisions. The tool's strengths include transparency and ease of consultation. Coverage is not exhaustive and, as the previous tools presented, the results provided are informative rather than binding.

4.

Swedish Council for Higher Education Qualifications Assessment Tool

The ENIC-NAIRC centre in Sweden, Universitets-och högskolerådet (Swedish Council for Higher Education), developed an online search engine, namely the [Qualification Assessment Tool](#), that provides indicative correspondences between foreign qualifications and Swedish degrees, with the option of generating a downloadable summary.

It provides a quick and documentable reference in admission and credential evaluation processes when a qualification needs to be placed in the Swedish context. Its main benefits are speed and transparency. Even there, it does not substitute for a formal assessment when a legally binding decision is required or when the qualification is used for regulated purposes.

Secondary sources of information

1.

World Higher Education Database (WHED)

The [World Higher Education Database \(WHED\)](#) is a global database developed by the International Association of Universities (IAU), with support from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). It includes information on recognised higher education institutions and education systems, used as a reference to verify official institutional status.

It serves to reinforce an essential prior check in automatic recognition: before recognising the level of a qualification, it is advisable to confirm that the issuing institution belongs to an education system and that the issuing HEI is officially recognised.

2.

European Higher Education Sector Observatory (EHESO)

The [European Higher Education Sector Observatory \(EHESO\)](#) is a user-centred data and information platform on the higher education sector in Europe. It is an initiative by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport, and Culture, funded under the Erasmus+ programme²⁶.

The Observatory enables the comparison, analysis, and showcasing of the sector's performance across multiple levels, actors, and themes. By consolidating and integrating in a single place various data sources, EHESO provides a transparent view of European higher education systems, institutional profiles and indicators on activities, organisation and outputs.

Institutions and governments are able to strengthen their evidence base on key topics such as transnational mobility and cooperation, digital, green and entrepreneurial skills, technology transfer, inclusion and academic values, graduate employability and international cooperation.

EHESO covers the full higher education cycle, from institutional performance and student experience to graduate outcomes and labour market integration.

²⁶ For further information, find the EHESO leaflet at the following link: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/ba726895-3946-11f1-be39-01aa75ed71a1>.

QA information tools

1.

EQAR Knowledge Base

The [European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education \(EQAR\) Knowledge Base](#) is a transparency tool that offers structured information on quality assurance (QA) requirements, cross border QA, and the use of the European Approach for Joint Programmes and agencies operating in line with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) in each of the EHEA member countries.

Looking at its use for automatic recognition, the Knowledge Base illustrates the stage of implementation of the Bologna key commitment on external Quality Assurance across the EHEA and enables users to learn whether the national systems from which a qualification is coming from is aligned with the ESG.

The Knowledge Base is currently being revised to include information on QA of transnational education, micro-credentials and other relevant areas. The database is open source, meaning it enables users to retrieve the data and incorporate in their own (recognition focused) databases and systems.

2.

DEQAR – Database of External Quality Assurance Results

The [Database of External Quality Assurance Results \(DEQAR\)](#) has been developed by the EQAR. It is an official database containing reports and decisions from external quality assurance agencies operating in line with the ESG.

DEQAR provides access to verified information on higher education institutions and programmes that have undergone external quality assurance procedures carried out by EQAR-registered agencies. The database includes accreditation decisions, evaluation reports and institutional reviews from countries across the EHEA.

In the context of automatic recognition, DEQAR represents an important transparency and trust-building tool, providing openly accessible and standardised quality assurance information directly linked to recognised agencies operating within the EHEA framework. It supports credential evaluators and higher education institutions in verifying whether a qualification has been issued by an institution or programme subject to recognised quality assurance procedures in line with the ESG. This contributes to reinforcing confidence in the reliability and quality of qualifications and facilitates recognition decisions based on shared European standards.

/ MANUALS, STANDARDS, AND GUIDELINES FOR STABILISING RECOGNITION PRACTICE

European Area of Recognition Manual (EAR Manual, 2023)

The [EAR Manual](#) (second edition, 2023) provides standards and guidelines on key aspects of the recognition process of foreign qualifications. Its aim is to help credential evaluators and experts involved in recognition processes to apply the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC) in their daily work, providing a common methodology and examples.

It offers different thematic chapters (namely accreditation, authenticity, credits, qualifications, substantial differences, qualifications frameworks, recognition of refugees, transnational education), structured with recommendations and practical guidance. In automatic recognition, this manual represents a valuable support in order to reduce interpretative differences, and it allows for the writing of consistent internal rules on what is meant by "substantial difference" and how a decision is communicated.

The EAR Manual might also be a valuable tool for initial and ongoing staff training, for designing workflows and for substantiating institutional criteria in audits or appeal processes.

Its main strengths are methodological coherence and the richness of practical examples. It does not replace national regulations or institutional autonomy in admissions. Rather, it supports the translation of principles into structured procedures with controlled margins of discretion.

European Recognition Manual for Higher Education Institutions (EAR Manual for HEIs, 2020)

The [EAR Manual for HEIs](#) (third edition, 2020) makes the principles of the LRC "translatable" to contexts of admission and internal credit recognition.

It offers guidance on the following subjects: accreditation, authenticity, credits, qualifications, substantial differences, qualifications frameworks and the processing of applications from refugees without complete documentation. Its emphasis is on transparent procedures and consistent decisions.

It is considered a useful resource for developing institutional recognition policies that favour automatable decisions by separating what should be "systemic" (level recognition, status verification) from what should be "programmatic" (specific requirements). So, its main advantage is its direct focus on admissions practices.

/ DIGITALISATION

The final section of this publication addresses a highly relevant topic that is increasingly prominent in discussions on automatic recognition, namely the process of digital transformation and the use of digital tools in the field of qualifications recognition.

In this context, digital transformation should not be understood merely as the adoption of digital technologies to improve or automate analogical recognition workflows. Rather, it entails a broader and more critical revision of existing processes. Simply automating procedures that are inconsistent and ineffective risks reinforcing pre-existing inefficiencies by embedding them in rigid technological systems. Therefore, true innovation lies in rethinking processes in light of defined objectives, available resources, internal expertise and users' needs²⁷.

In the latest years, the fast development of AI technologies added new challenges in the sector and made the need for defined regulations in the European context. In this sense, in 2024 it has been adopted the AI Act²⁸ as the first-ever legal framework on AI. With the aim of fostering trustworthy AI in Europe, this policy document sets out a risk-based rules for AI developers and deployers regarding specific uses of AI, by defining four levels of risks: unacceptable risk, high risk, limited risk, minimal and no risk²⁹.

²⁷ Find more information in the publication "Trasformazione digitale, innovazione e cooperazione. Ridisegnare il riconoscimento dei titoli nella prospettiva delle istituzioni italiane", edited by Luca Lantero, Chiara Finocchietti, Elisa Petrucci, Serena Spitalieri. Universitas Quaderni 03/2026 (6 February 2026). In <https://rivistauniversitas.it/en/universitas-quaderni-03-2026-trasformazione-digitale-innovazione-e-cooperazione/>.

²⁸ Regulation (Eu) 2024/1689 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 June 2024: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:L_202401689.

²⁹ Artificial Intelligence and Recognition of Qualifications: Opportunities and Risks from an ENIC-NARIC Perspective (DOC CIMEA 141, November 2023). In https://www.cimea.it/Upload/Documenti/Artificial_Intelligence_and_Recognition_of_Qualifications.pdf.

In recent years, in light of the policy developments regulating this domain, digital technologies have been increasingly integrated into recognition processes across many educational systems in EHEA countries. This development reflects the growing need to support a digital transition that can improve not only the efficiency and effectiveness of recognition procedures, but also their quality, transparency and consistency.

In particular, four key areas in which digitalisation contributes to automatic recognition can be identified. First, digital tools support the speediness of recognition procedures by reducing administrative burdens and streamlining the daily tasks of credential evaluators. Second, digital technologies also enhance access to reliable and verifiable information, ensuring that up-to-date data is available to a wide range of users, through digital databases and platforms. Third and fourth, digitalisation facilitates the cross-border exchange of data and information, by ensuring and strengthening comparability and systemic trust among international stakeholders involved in recognition processes. An example of such cooperation can be observed in the shared efforts of stakeholders in developing common platforms, databases and digital comparability tools that bridge different education systems. This was also highlighted by HEIs participating in the focus groups.

In this context, it is worth mentioning the data collected from the Peer Learning Activities (PLAs) organised within the [TPG-LRC CoRE project](#) in 2023 and addressed to members of the Thematic Peer Group B on the Lisbon Recognition Convention (TPG B on LRC). In particular, the activities focused on exploring the use of digital tools in the different phases of the recognition process: input, throughput and output, based on the methodological framework suggested by the publication “[Digital Student Data & Recognition](#)”, produced in the framework of the [DigiRec project](#), co-funded by the European Union under the Erasmus + programme³⁰.

In this evolving landscape, digital transformation and its implications are not neutral developments. Digitalisation has the potential to reshape recognition procedures and the broader framework within which they operate, acting as a catalyst for change.

This drive towards wider institutional innovation, closely linked to the adoption of new digital tools, is also reflected in ongoing discussions within HEIs across the EHEA. As reported by representatives from the nine partner countries of the TPG-LRC Plus project, these topics have emerged clearly

³⁰ Mapping Digital Tools for Recognition in EHEA. Practices from peer support approach (CIMEA, March 2025). In https://www.cimea.it/Upload/Documenti/TPG-LRC%20CoRE_Mapping%20digital%20tools%20for%20recognition.pdf.

in institutional contexts. In particular, during the national focus groups on automatic recognition, participants were invited to reflect on the role of digitalisation and on the digital transformation processes currently under development or under consideration at the institutional level (see Chapter 3).

In this context, the real threat associated with the use of digital tools lies in the potential for full automation of recognition processes without appropriate safeguards to control them. Without intentional design and clearly defined standards developing and regulating the use of digital technologies, such developments may compromise the principles of fair recognition as established by the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC), particularly if human oversight is not adequately ensured. In this sense, the use of Artificial Intelligence technologies without an adequate control from recognition experts, may lead to the adoption of erroneous decisions. So, maintaining the possibility for human intervention, including final decision-making and accountability, remains essential in the recognition of qualifications.

This section addresses the role of Artificial Intelligence and digital transformation, not as mechanisms for full automation, but as tools to support recognition processes, in alignment with the principles of the LRC and ensuring that case-by-case assessment by credential evaluators remains central to the decision-making process.

Within this context, three guiding questions can help frame the discussion on automatic recognition, highlighting the balancing act between the opportunities and risks of digitalisation.

1.

Can we streamline procedures without losing the ability to assess complex cases fairly?



First, it is important to consider whether digital tools can be designed to streamline recognition procedures and reduce administrative burdens for credential evaluators, while preserving flexibility to address more complex cases. In this sense, the role of human expertise remains essential to ensuring fairness in assessing individual cases and safeguarding learners' fundamental right to have their qualifications fairly recognised.

2. *How do we scale data-driven systems while strictly protecting personal data?*



As recognition systems increasingly rely on large-scale data sharing and faster information exchange, it becomes crucial to protect personal and sensitive data. Future digital tools should therefore be developed in an ethical and responsible manner, guaranteeing data privacy and minimising the risks of algorithmic bias, while maintaining user trust.

3. *As automation increases, how do we ensure that accountability remains clearly human?*



With the growing automation of recognition procedures, there is a need to ensure that human oversight and accountability remain central to decision-making processes. This includes maintaining human control over final decisions and ensuring that responsibility remains on credential evaluators and recognition experts.

In conclusion, the key challenge is no longer whether to digitalise recognition processes, but how to do so without undermining the automatic recognition principles, as defined in the relevant policy frameworks and documents outlined in this publication. That's not mean that a suitable approach should rely only on strict regulatory controls, but it rather requires the clear definition of human-centred design principles guiding the development and use of digital tools.

This approach to define recognition processes should be based on a balanced combination of digital integration and human oversight. In this perspective, a sustainable architecture for automatic recognition would rest on three core pillars: human-centred design, effective human oversight and accountability, and robust data governance and privacy protection³¹.

Finally, as highlighted by representatives of HEIs participating in the focus group activities conducted in the framework of the TPG-LRC Plus project, digitalisation can effectively support

³¹ "Digital Transformation and Artificial Intelligence in the Recognition of Qualifications: Perspectives from CIMEA's Experience", co-editors Luca Lantero, Chiara Finocchietti, Serena Spitalieri, DOC CIMEA 144 (2025). In https://www.cimea.it/Upload/Documenti/Digital_transformation_and_AI_2025.pdf.

the implementation of automatic recognition at both national and institutional levels. To promote this process, further staff trainings, digital literacy of employees and additional involvement of financial resources should be required. Digital transformation should therefore be understood not as a substitute for human evaluation, but rather as an enabling factor that can strengthen and enhance recognition processes, in which humans and credential evaluators always have the final say.

/ FINAL REMARKS

The publication was conceived to offer an in-depth overview of the concept of automatic recognition and its implementation, looking at the policy developments and regulatory frameworks that have shaped its evolution over the past decade. What while also examining its implementation at both national and institutional levels across EHEA countries, including an overview of the most commonly used tools supporting this process.

Building on the evidence and insights presented, it can be concluded that considerable progress in the implementation of automatic recognition has been achieved since the concept surfaced a political priority within the EHEA in 2012. However, this progress is not yet sufficient to ensure a full implementation of automatic recognition across the EHEA. Legal frameworks, in some cases, remain limited in scope and institutional practices are not always supported by centralised national databases or clearly defined workflows.

Looking ahead, strengthening the cooperation among the key stakeholders that are involved in recognition processes emerged as a central priority. In particular, closer collaboration between ENIC-NARIC centres with their national HEIs can play a decisive role in supporting institutional recognition practices, including the effective implementation of automatic recognition.

This cooperation could be further enhanced through the promotion of targeted professional training courses for the competent authorities involved in recognition processes, with the aim of promoting a broader understanding of the concept of automatic recognition and facilitating the exchange of good practices among EHEA countries.

At the implementation level, another key step forward lies in the continued development of updated tools and databases to support recognition practices. In this context, a highly relevant and increasingly prominent topic in the current discussions on automatic recognition must be considered: the process of digital transformation and the use of digital tools in the field of qualifications recognition.

Digital transformation, including the use of Artificial Intelligence, should not be understood as a pathway towards full automation. Rather, it should be framed as part of a broader and more critical revision of existing processes, being instruments to support recognition processes, in alignment with the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC) and ensuring that case-by-case assessment by credential evaluators remains central.

In this perspective, future reflections on digitalisation and the adoption of AI tools should address some key questions: how digital tools can be designed to streamline recognition procedures and reduce administrative burdens, while preserving the role of human expertise in ensuring fairness in assessing individual cases and safeguarding learners' fundamental right to have their qualifications fairly recognised. How these tools can be developed in an ethical and responsible manner, ensuring data protection, minimising the risks of algorithmic bias, and maintaining users' trust. Finally, how, with an increasingly automated sector, human oversight and accountability can remain central to decision-making processes.

Against this background and building on the current state of art of policy development and implementation process of automatic recognition across EHEA countries, as outlined in this publication, the path forward becomes clearer. In this evolving landscape, progress will depend on the ability to combine trust, cooperation, and digital innovation, while ensuring that human expertise and responsibility remain at the core of the decision-making process.

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/ ANNEX

TPG-LRC PLUS PROJECT NATIONAL FOCUS GROUP WITH HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

/ QUESTIONS

1. Who are you and what is the role of your organisation in access and/or admission procedures?
2. What is the level of your understanding of the concept of automatic recognition?
3. What are your thoughts about the level of implementation of automatic recognition at the national level? How would you define and evaluate its implementation within your institutional practices (e.g., challenging, beneficial, or otherwise)?
4. 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”³² sets automatic recognition as one of the objectives to be achieved. How familiar is your institution with this recommendation?
5. In relation to the previous question, what is your perception of the current level of the Council Recommendation implementation both at the national and institutional levels? Do you believe it has been adequately implemented, or are there still areas that require further attention?

³² 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)).

6. Do you 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?
7. Do you cooperate with other institutions/organisations to implement automatic recognition? Is the cooperation formalised or “self-organised”? If applicable, please provide additional details and examples of the types of cooperation your institution engages in.
8. Think about your or your colleagues’ daily job. What are the most useful tools to support automatic recognition you have at your disposal? What do you would need in terms of “capabilities”, training, motivation, guidelines, technological tools (e.g., databases, software, websites, etc.) For your organisation and generally speaking for the national sector?
9. Do you identify any law or official guidance that needs to change to enable your institution to better apply automatic recognition? Does your institution have any impact on its shape?
10. In the light of what we have discussed so far, what are the main benefits of implementing automatic recognition? And what are the main challenges?
11. What are the main steps needed to better apply automatic recognition in your institution and more in general in the national sector?



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