

Recognition without Borders

ESN's statement on the Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education

The [Erasmus Student Network](#) (ESN) welcomes the convening of the Second Session of the Intergovernmental Conference of the States Parties to the [Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education](#). The Convention establishes a shared international commitment to **fair, transparent, and non-discriminatory recognition of qualifications**, with the aim of making academic mobility more accessible and reliable. It addresses long-standing procedural gaps and supports the rights of learners by creating space for stronger cooperation between countries, reflecting the growing complexity of higher education systems and the need for inclusive approaches to recognition.

As one of the largest student-led organisations in Europe and worldwide, supporting international students and advocating for accessible and fair academic mobility, ESN recognises the Global Convention as a pivotal step towards making recognition practices more just, inclusive, and globally coherent.

In line with the Convention's emphasis on fair and non-discriminatory recognition, we highlight the urgent need to reduce the legal, administrative, and information-related barriers that continue to hinder the recognition of qualifications for students engaged in cross-border education. While the Convention reaffirms that qualifications "*shall be recognised unless substantial differences can be demonstrated*," our data and experience show that this principle is not yet fully implemented in practice.

Recent findings from the [XV Edition of the ESNsurvey](#), which gathered responses from over 1,856 full-degree international students, illustrate the persistence of several systemic obstacles. Among those who underwent recognition procedures, 37.08% reported having to initiate a specific process for their qualifications to be accepted, while 52.87% experienced automatic recognition. More critically, among students that encountered difficulties in the recognition of their degree, over 80% of affected students took no formal action, with just 3.92% contacting recognition authorities such as [ENIC-NARIC centres](#). This highlights not only procedural complexity but also a significant gap in access to information and support. **It is essential to invest in outreach strategies that involve student and youth organisations in disseminating clear, accessible information about recognition pathways and available resources.**

Additionally, 13.68% of respondents who encountered difficulties reported burdensome administrative procedures and high costs. These are precisely the types of barriers that the Convention seeks to eliminate. Financial and bureaucratic burdens disproportionately affect

vulnerable learners, including those affected by displacement and conflict. **We therefore call on States Parties to fully implement the Convention's provisions by simplifying recognition procedures, removing unnecessary financial and legal obstacles, and ensuring that all administrative requirements are proportionate, transparent, and accessible to learners.**

We also call attention to the Convention's recognition of diverse forms of learning—including formal, non-formal, and informal education, as potentially valid grounds for recognition. As education delivery continues to evolve, especially through micro-credentials, online programmes, and blended learning formats, the international community must act to ensure that recognition systems adapt accordingly. These emerging modes of education can expand access, yet students continue to face inconsistencies in how such learning is valued across borders.

These challenges are mirrored in the recognition of interdisciplinary and internationally collaborative programmes, which similarly fall outside traditional academic frameworks and often encounter comparable barriers. In an increasingly interconnected and complex world, interdisciplinary education and international collaboration are essential to advancing knowledge and addressing global challenges. Fields such as engineering and social sciences, which frequently combine technical, societal, and policy dimensions, often involve diverse academic structures and evolving professional standards. These characteristics can lead to additional scrutiny in recognition processes, particularly when national requirements differ. To address this, **we encourage States Parties to strengthen cooperation in aligning quality assurance systems and qualifications frameworks to accommodate the interdisciplinary and cross-border nature of such programmes, thereby facilitating fair and consistent recognition.**

Furthermore, we stress the need for recognition systems to be inclusive and responsive to the needs of refugees and displaced persons. As outlined in Article VII of the Convention, procedures must accommodate those who lack full documentation, and assessments must be flexible and fair. While our survey does not specifically isolate the experiences of displaced learners, the broader findings indicate that procedural rigidity has significant exclusionary effects. We welcome the Convention's commitment to developing subsidiary texts on these matters and support further research into complementary pathways, gender equity, and recognition for marginalised groups.

The implementation of the Convention's principles is also important to the success of new models of transnational education. For example, recent efforts to develop joint or integrated degrees across countries, such as the [European Degree](#) highlights the need for consistent and reliable recognition procedures. These initiatives aim to support cross-border cooperation between institutions, but they rely on qualifications being automatically and fairly recognised in different national systems. **Making this possible will require the full application of the Convention's**

provisions, especially around improving trust, aligning quality standards, and reducing the uncertainty learners often face when their qualifications cross borders.

Finally, we recognise the unique opportunity and responsibility that come with the coexistence of global and regional conventions. As discussions progress on harmonising the Global Convention with existing regional frameworks, **we encourage a learner-centred approach that prioritises the most favourable recognition outcomes for individuals, as well as legal clarity for all stakeholders involved.**

In conclusion, ESN reaffirms its commitment to promoting academic mobility and equitable access to higher education worldwide. We support the implementation of the Global Convention's principles not only as policy goals, but as enforceable standards that empower learners, uphold academic integrity, and foster inclusive international cooperation. By involving youth voices, simplifying recognition systems, and upholding the Convention's legal and moral obligations, we can collectively ensure that mobility is a reality for all.