

Promoting Global Dialogue on Recognition

Evolution of Principles
in Regional and Global Conventions

02

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Preface



Luca Lantero



The promotion of international mobility can only be achieved through greater cooperation between regions and an enhanced integration of the existing regional and global legal frameworks. Effects of the high momentum of collaboration among different actors involved in higher education at national level, as well as in the regional and international arenas, can be found reflected in the latest data on internationally mobile students, which confirms the increasing trend in numbers.

The present publication “Promoting Dialogue on Recognition: Evolution of Principles in Regional and Global Conventions” offers a comparative overview on the fundamental principles of recognition of qualifications, as well as on the evolving topics which are currently high on the higher education agenda, as expressed in the different regional perspectives, and in the Global Convention.

The choice of the authors of taking the Lisbon Recognition Convention as the benchmark for carrying out a comparative analysis on the evolutions of the concepts included in the regional recognition Conventions constitutes a significant exercise in building the ground for an interregional and global dialogue towards common steps to be taken at the international level. Indeed, the Lisbon Recognition Convention, chronologically the first Convention of the second-generation Conventions, is still very relevant today. The Lisbon Recognition Convention represents a unique case if compared with the other

regional Conventions and the Global Convention: the fact that its text was developed not only by UNESCO but also by the Council of Europe makes it impossible to be replaced by any global convention. Looking at its text, it is easy to notice the absence of words such as “transnational education, lifelong learning, recognition of prior learning”, which may originate doubts among policy makers and professionals working in the field. Despite this, the fact that the Convention is grounded on broad principles is to be recognised, which still makes it a relevant text considering how much time has passed since its adoption, and which is able to offer a suitable perspective for the contemporary challenges of higher education.

What makes these principles still valid and shared today is the right of everyone – clearly expressed in the Lisbon Recognition Convention and also included in the other Conventions – to have their educational qualifications assessed and, related to this, the prohibition of any form of discrimination, lying at the basis of the work to support recognition of higher education qualifications. As stated in the preamble of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, the principle of fair recognition of qualifications is a key element of the right to education and a responsibility of society.

Major steps have been taken in the last years to support cooperation since the adoption of the regional and the Global Conventions, in terms of awareness, peer learning and knowledge sharing. Yet so much work still needs to be done to fully implement the principles enshrined in their texts. Despite not pretending to be exhaustive, this document offers a contribution to continue the work to promote dialogue on recognition, for the next steps to come.

Luca Lantero, President of the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee

CHAPTER 1

Introduction and methodology

Elisa Petrucci



The present work was initiated within the framework of the IN-GLOBAL project¹ and developed in line with reflections and contributions carried out in the framework of the Coordination Group on Global Policy Dialogue of the BFUG mandate 2021-2024, in the perspective of further contributing to the discussion on recognition within EHEA and in dialogue with other regions.

The aim of this study is to compare the five regional recognition Conventions and the Global Convention, beginning with the European context with the Lisbon Recognition Convention. Through a comparative analysis of the six texts, the study intends to provide an overview of their key concepts and their evolution, illustrating how they reflect broader political and cultural development in the fields of higher education, internationalisation, mobility and recognition.

The implementation of legislative frameworks to support the recognition of qualifications at both regional and global levels is influenced by a number of factors. On one side, the growth in the number of internationally mobile students encourages national systems to adopt mechanisms that promote fair recognition, both for incoming international students and for domestic students pursuing education abroad. According to available data, global student mobility has steadily increased, more than tripling between 2000 and 2022, rising from 2.1 million to 6.9 million internationally mobile students². Estimates from the Institute of International Education (IIE) indicated that the number of internationally mobile students would reach ten million by 2023³. On the other side, in the European context, enhancing

¹The project “Enhancing Internal Knowledge and Global Dialogue of EHEA” (IN-GLOBAL) was co-funded by the European Union under the Erasmus+ programme and aimed to support the institutional activities of the Task Force on Enhancing Knowledge Sharing in the EHEA community and the Coordination Group on Global Policy Dialogue of the BFUG mandate 2021-2024 (Bologna Follow-Up Group). IN-GLOBAL was coordinated by CIMEA. More information is available on the project website: <https://www.in-global.eu/> [last view 18 July 2025].

²UNESCO, *Higher education: figures at glance*, 2025, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000394112> [last view 18 July 2025].

³Allan E. Goodman, Mirka Martel, *Outlook 2023 Brief. The U.S. and International Education*, Institute of International Education, 2024: https://www.iie.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/IIE_Outlook-2030_March-2024-1.pdf [last view 18 July 2025].

transparency and mutual understanding in higher education systems and the recognition of qualifications has been considered pivotal for supporting integration among European countries, ensuring the free movement of citizens, and fostering the development of a “Europe of knowledge”⁴. An additional aspect that must be taken into consideration is the protection of both students’ and professionals’ rights, as well as the need to safeguard the quality and the integrity of higher education systems.

The study begins from an overview of the historical background in order to highlight how mobility flows, shaped by specific historical phases, have influenced the drafting and adoption of the regional recognition Conventions. This analysis was carried out through desk research based on official documents and scholarly publications. A timeline was developed to help readers navigate the connections and interrelations between the various stages and processes that led to the adoption and entry into force of the Conventions (see page 78).

The following section presents a comparative and descriptive analysis of the texts of the five regional recognition Conventions in chronological order of adoption, as well as the Global Convention:

-  *Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region*, Lisbon, April 1997, hereafter Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC)⁵.
-  *Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education*, Tokyo, November 2011, hereafter Tokyo Recognition Convention (TRC)⁶.
-  *Revised Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Certificates, Diplomas, Degrees and Other Academic Qualifications in Higher Education in African States*, Addis Ababa, December 2014, hereafter Addis Recognition Convention (ARC)⁷.
-  *Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean*, Buenos Aires, July 2019, hereafter Buenos Aires Recognition Convention (BARC)⁸.

⁴ European Higher Education Area, *The Bologna Declaration of 19 June 1999*, 1999: https://ehea.info/media.ehea.info/file/Ministerial_conferences/02/8/1999_Bologna_Declaration_English_553028.pdf [last view 18 July 2025].

⁵ Council of Europe, *Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region*, Lisbon 1997: <https://rm.coe.int/168007f2c7>, [last view 18 July 2025].



⁶ UNESCO, *Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education*, Tokyo 2011: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000217670/PDF/217670eng.pdf.multi.page=31> [last view 18 July 2025].

⁷ UNESCO, *Revised Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Certificates, Diplomas, Degrees and Other Academic Qualifications in Higher Education in African States*, Addis Ababa: <https://www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/revised-convention-recognition-studies-certificates-diplomas-degrees-and-other-academic> [last view 18 July 2025].

⁸ UNESCO, *Regional Convention on the recognition of studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean*, Buenos Aires 2019: <https://www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/regional-convention-recognition-studies-diplomas-and-degrees-higher-education-latin-america-and-0> [last view 18 July 2025].

-  *Revised Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in the Arab States*, Paris, February 2022, hereafter Arab States Recognition Convention (ASRC)⁹.
-  *Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education, Paris, November 2019*, hereafter Global Convention (GC)¹⁰, complementing the five UNESCO regional Conventions on the recognition of higher education qualifications.

The comparative analysis was conducted on the full texts of the Conventions and focuses on the evolution of the following main areas:

-  Fundamental principles:
 - Right to appeal
 - Information provision
 - Substantial differences
 - Qualifications held by refugees and displaced persons.
-  Evolving topics:
 - Transnational education
 - Lifelong learning
 - Countering education fraud

The analysis of how these areas are addressed in the various Conventions has taken the LRC as benchmark. This is due to the fact that the study is conducted within the framework of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), and also because the LRC can be considered a highly dynamic text for two main reasons: it expresses principles, rather than specific concepts, which makes it adaptable to different time periods and geographical contexts. This dynamic nature has also been supported by the subsidiary texts of the LRC, as well as by the work of the LRC Committee and the two Networks of information centres and recognition at the European level: the European Network of National Information Centres (ENIC) and the National Academic Recognition Information Centres in the European Union (NARIC) - ENIC-NARIC Networks. The area identified as “evolving topics” refers to themes that though not explicitly mentioned in the LRC, have been included in the following Conventions or appear

⁹ The Arab States Recognition Convention was officially adopted on 2 February 2022. Nevertheless, in accordance with its Article VII.2, the Convention will enter into force one month after the date on which five of the States referred to in Article VII.1 give their consent to be bound by the Convention, and at present, a total of 3 State Parties have given their consent. More information available at the following webpage.

UNESCO, *Revised Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in the Arab States*, Paris 2022: <https://www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/revised-convention-recognition-studies-diplomas-and-degrees-higher-education-arab-states> [last view 18 July 2025].

¹⁰ UNESCO, *Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning higher education*, Paris 2019: <https://www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/global-convention-recognition-qualifications-concerning-higher-education?hub=70286> [last view 18 July 2025].

in various recommendations and monitoring reports issued by the LRC governance bodies¹¹, as the result of the work of its Parties in recent years. This comparative approach has been adopted to explore the evolution of these recognition principles across the different texts. Another topic of interest in the regional Conventions concerns the governance mechanisms and implementation structures described in each document. However, as a result of an editorial decision, this topic falls outside the scope of the present study and is left open for future research.

The analysis presented in this document seeks to offer a perspective on how to promote global dialogue on recognition, engaging various stakeholders at national, regional and global levels, including national competent authorities, recognition bodies, higher education institutions, and experts in the higher education sector. Rather than providing ready-made solutions, this document aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on higher education and the recognition of qualifications by encouraging further research and fostering potential cooperation initiatives.

¹¹ An example of this can be represented by the following (non-exhaustive) group of documents: Council of Europe, UNESCO, *Monitoring the Implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention*, Paris 2016: https://www.enic-naric.net/Upload/Documents/Monitoring_Implementation_LRC_Final_Report_ENGLISH.pdf [last view 18 July 2025]; Council of Europe, UNESCO, *Guidelines for Online National Information Systems*, Paris 2019: https://www.enic-naric.net/Upload/Documents/Guidelines_National_Online_Information_Systems_ENGLISH.pdf [last view 18 July 2025]; Council of Europe, UNESCO, *Monitoring the Implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention*, Paris/Strasbourg 2022, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000383465.locale=en> [last view 18 July 2025].

CHAPTER 2

From the first to the second-generation recognition Conventions

Chiara Finocchietti



One of the driving factors behind the establishment of common principles for the recognition of qualifications through Conventions at regional level is the growing mobility in higher education at both regional and global levels, which began to increase significantly in the aftermath of World War II. The diversity among the national education systems prompted international organisations to promote a shared understanding of the various qualifications in place, in order to support their recognition, and, consequently, to facilitate the mobility of individuals.

In this context, Europe took an early lead in promoting recognition instruments. During the 1950s and beyond, several Conventions were adopted at the European level to make the “intellectual resources of members freely available to European youth”:

 *European Convention on the Equivalence of Diplomas leading to Admission to Universities* (1953)¹².

 *European Convention on the Equivalence of Periods of University Study* (1956)¹³.

 *European Convention on the Academic Recognition of University Qualifications* (1959)¹⁴.

 *European Convention on the General Equivalence of Periods of University Study* (1990)¹⁵.

In the preceding years, discussions at the international level initially focused on the need to work on a global convention. However, further reflections concluded that «the issue could be addressed more successfully at the regional level in this initial phase, while still maintaining the ultimate objective for a universal standard-setting instrument»¹⁶.

¹² Council of Europe, *European Convention on the Equivalence of Diplomas leading to Admission to Universities*, Paris 1953: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list?module=treaty-detail&treaty-num=015> [last view 18 July 2025].

¹³ Council of Europe, *European Convention on the Equivalence of Periods of University Study*, Paris 1956: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list?module=treaty-detail&treaty-num=021> [last view 18 July 2025].

¹⁴ Council of Europe, *European Convention on the Academic Recognition of University Qualifications*, Paris 1959: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list?module=treaty-detail&treaty-num=032> [last view 18 July 2025].

¹⁵ Council of Europe, *European Convention on the General Equivalence of Periods of University Study*, Paris 1991: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list?module=treaty-detail&treaty-num=138> [last view 18 July 2025].

¹⁶ UNESCO, *Evaluation of UNESCO's Regional Conventions on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education*, 2016: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000245223> [last view 18 July 2025], p. 20.

CHAPTER 3



First-generation Conventions

Chiara Finocchietti



The first-generation regional Conventions, adopted between 1974 and 1983, were drafted to strengthen the recognition of qualifications, promote international cooperation in higher education and reduce barriers to the mobility of teachers and other highly skilled workers, students and graduates¹⁷. Indeed, the period following World War II was characterised by a significant increase in the number of international mobile students, as higher education systems became increasingly accessible to learners from diverse social backgrounds.

The *Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean*, adopted in July 1974 and entered into force in June 1975¹⁸, was the first of its kind. In the following years, additional regional conventions were adopted, marking a significant step forward in the harmonisation of recognition practices in higher education worldwide. These include:


-  *Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in the Arab and European States Bordering on the Mediterranean* (1976)¹⁹.
-  *Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in the Arab States* (1978)²⁰.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ UNESCO, *Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean*, Mexico City 1974: <https://www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/regional-convention-recognition-studies-diplomas-and-degrees-higher-education-latin-america-and> [last view 18 July 2025].

¹⁹ UNESCO, *International Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in the Arab and European States bordering on the Mediterranean*, Nice 1978: <https://www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/international-convention-recognition-studies-diplomas-and-degrees-higher-education-arab-and-european> [last view 18 July 2025].

²⁰ UNESCO, *Convention on the recognition of studies, diplomas and degrees in higher education in the Arab States (with final act). Concluded at Paris on 22 December 1978*, Paris 1978: <https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%201248/volume-1248-I-20367-English.pdf> [last view 18 July 2025].

-  *Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees concerning Higher Education in the States belonging to the Europe Region* (1979)²¹.
-  *Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Certificates, Diplomas, Degrees and other Academic Qualifications in Higher Education in the African States* (1981)²².
-  *Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in Asia and the Pacific* (1983)²³.

The joint initiative promoted by UNESCO and the Council of Europe for the so-called “second-generation Conventions” aimed to enhance transparency and harmonisation within the wide diversity of existing legal instruments. This objective was facilitated by the growth in international cooperation, exchange and mobility in higher education. While the Conventions promoted by the Council of Europe focused on “recognition outcomes”, the 1979 UNESCO Convention included a shift toward the “recognition process”.

As will be discussed in the following sections, another fundamental element in the context of the second-generation Conventions is the role played jointly by the Council of Europe and UNESCO in the development of the Lisbon Recognition Convention. Their collaboration gave the text particular strength and legitimacy, as it represents a unique example of a convention jointly supported by two secretariats and open to ratification by countries beyond the European region.

²¹ UNESCO, *Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees concerning Higher Education in the States belonging to the Europe Region*, Paris 1982: <https://www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/convention-recognition-studies-diplomas-and-degrees-concerning-higher-education-states-belonging> [last view 18 July 2025].

²² UNESCO, *Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Certificates, Diplomas, Degrees and other Academic Qualifications in Higher Education in the African States*, Arusha 1981: <https://www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/regional-convention-recognition-studies-certificates-diplomas-degrees-and-other-academic> [last view 18 July 2025].

²³ UNESCO, *Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in Asia and the Pacific*, Bangkok 1983: <https://www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/regional-convention-recognition-studies-diplomas-and-degrees-higher-education-asia-and-pacific> [last view 18 July 2025].

CHAPTER 4

Second-generation Conventions

Luca Lantero, Francesco Sanasi, Emanuela Gitto



The revision process of the regional Conventions began with the adoption of the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region, commonly known as “Lisbon Recognition Convention” (LRC), in 1997 (entered into force in 1999). The LRC represented a joint effort by the Council of Europe and UNESCO to synthesize the previously existing European Conventions, thereby avoiding redundancy and duplication.

Chronologically, the following Conventions were also adopted:

-  *Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education*, known as “Tokyo Recognition Convention” (TRC), adopted in 2011 (entered into force in 2018).
 -  *Revised Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Certificates, Diplomas Degrees and Other Academic Qualifications in Higher Education in African States*, known as “Addis Recognition Convention” (ARC) adopted in 2014 (entered into force in 2019).
 -  *Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education*, known as “Buenos Aires Recognition Convention” (BRC), adopted in 2019 (entered into force in 2022).
 -  *Revised Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in the Arab States* (ASRC), adopted in 2022 (and not in force yet).
-

In order to identify the core priorities underlying each Convention, a comparative analysis of the Preambles of the five second-generation Conventions and the Global Convention was conducted. Using the preamble of the LRC as a benchmark, the following terms were identified as general descriptors of its priorities: higher education, human rights, peace, cooperation, diversity, access, educational resources, recognition, mobility, autonomy, fair recognition, exchange, and implementation mechanisms.

These keywords served as the basis for comparison with the other preambles. Additional keywords emerging from the other Conventions were also included, and all terms were used to create the tag cloud below²⁴, offering a visual representation of their frequency and providing insight into the evolving priorities across the conventions over time.



Figure 1. Keywords describing the preambles of the Conventions (25-07-2025)

Building on the priorities identified in the preambles, it is also important to examine the formal objectives outlined in each convention, as they provide insight into the strategic vision underlying the recognition frameworks at both regional and global levels. In this context, from UNESCO's perspective,

²⁴ The keywords describing the preambles of the Conventions were chosen by the authors of this document; Chat-GPT was used for the counting in the preambles of the Conventions and for the tag-cloud image generation.

international student mobility is considered a political instrument to advance the multilateral agenda for higher education, both in terms of fostering global citizenship and supporting the construction of global knowledge. The following paragraphs introduce this dimension through an analysis of the objectives reported in the text of each Convention.

For the LRC and the TRC, which do not contain a dedicated section on objectives, reference has been made to the LRC's Explanatory Report and the TRC's Explanatory Remarks, whereas for the other Conventions, the specific section on the objectives of the text has been analysed.

4.1. Lisbon Recognition Convention

Luca Lantero

The Lisbon Recognition Convention is the only recognition instrument currently in force that is jointly supported by two international organisations, the Council of Europe and UNESCO, in their functions as Co-Secretariats. It is also an open Convention, meaning that it is open to ratification by all countries. As mentioned in the Explanatory Report of the LRC²⁵, a joint Convention among the two organisations was expected to contribute both to include the newly participating countries in the Council of Europe's higher education initiatives, and to establish stronger links between the European region and other UNESCO regions. This was especially relevant at the end of the XX century, when, as the Report states, there were «no longer substantial differences between the number of countries involved in the Council of Europe's programmes of educational and cultural cooperation and the UNESCO Europe Region» (Council of Europe, 1997)²⁶.

After the adoption of the first-generation Convention in 1979, higher education in the European context underwent significant transformations. By that time, the State-run traditional universities of the 1950s were no longer the only type of higher education institution in the region. The emergence of non-

²⁵ Council of Europe, *Explanatory Report to the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region*, Lisbon 1997: <https://rm.coe.int/16800ccde6> [last view 18 July 2025].

²⁶ In fact, as mentioned in the Explanatory Report of the LRC, the main difference concerning the two organisations at the end of the '90s was that the UNESCO Europe Region also included such non-European countries as Canada, Israel and the United States of America. Considering this, Council of Europe and UNESCO decided to cooperate by coordinating their activities in the field of academic recognition and mobility. Ibid.

university institutions offering short-cycle and vocational programmes, as well as the introduction of non-traditional programmes of professional education within universities, reflected the growing diversification of the European higher education landscape. In response to this diversification and to the rapid evolution of national higher education systems, one of the key objectives of the LRC was to establish new provisions to ensure the quality of the new qualifications resulting from the above-mentioned courses and institutions.

Furthermore, academic mobility within the region saw a sharp increase, involving periods of study not only in modern languages, which had traditionally been the main driver of student mobility, but also a broader range of academic disciplines. At the same time, the substantial increase in the number of countries participating in the Council of Europe's higher education programmes, as well as the expansion of UNESCO memberships, led to greater diversity among the education systems of potential signatory states to the European higher education Conventions.

In this context, as noted in the Explanatory Report, recognition practices also evolved significantly since the adoption of the 1979 Convention, shifting from a concept of equivalence, which required «a detailed comparison of curricula (*nostrification*) and lists of materials studied», to “recognition”, thus emphasising a «broader comparison of the qualifications earned»²⁷.

The rapid adoption and implementation of the LRC was also facilitated by the existence of well-established cooperation mechanisms active among the NARIC and ENIC Networks, established respectively in 1984 and 1994. These Networks emerged as a result of the initiative undertaken by the Council of Europe, the European Commission and UNESCO. In 1994, the first joint meeting was convened, bringing together the NARIC Network, having the European Commission as secretariat, and the ENIC Network, which arose from the merge of the NEIC (established under the initiative of the Council of Europe) and the NIB Networks (promoted by UNESCO in the European region).

The institutional activity of these Networks and their centres proved essential in fostering the epistemic and normative consensus that underpinned the Convention's development. Experts from ENIC centres played an active role within the *ad hoc* working groups tasked with drafting the Convention's provisions. The extensive work carried out on the recognition of qualifications, supported by a shared commitment to common principles across Europe, contributed decisively to the articulation and formalisation of those principles within the Convention. Consequently, the LRC was conceived not only as a synthesis of prior legal instruments but also as a contemporary and responsive framework capable of addressing the evolving needs of the European higher education sector.




²⁷ Ibid.

4.2. Tokyo Recognition Convention

Emanuela Gitto

The first-generation recognition Convention in the Asia-Pacific region was adopted in Bangkok in 1983. Since that time, the landscape of higher education has undergone substantial transformation. This includes the expansion of both public and private providers, a marked increase in student enrolment, and the development of new modalities of teaching and learning such as cross-border and distance education. The integration of information and communication technologies into educational delivery and access had exerted a significant impact on the sector.

In this context, alongside the emergence of lifelong education, there arose a pressing need to establish recognition practices capable of assessing learning outcomes achieved through non-traditional forms of education. This also entitled the development of quality assurance guidelines and mechanisms for facilitating communication across diverse education systems within the region. These considerations formed the foundation for the revision of the Bangkok Convention. As clearly stated in the Explanatory Remarks of the Tokyo Recognition Convention, to update the principles and contents agreed upon in Bangkok in 1983, the recognition Convention of the Asia-Pacific region focused on the achievement of the following main objectives:

-  Facilitate the establishment of mechanisms to recognise academic mobility as a major strategy to promote mutual understanding and solidarity across Asia-Pacific.
-  Reinforce cultural identity to achieve fruitful regional cooperation in higher education.
-  Recognise the unique nature and diversity of academic programmes offered in the various countries across the region and the complexity of establishing comparability of competencies and qualifications to promote lifelong learning²⁸.

²⁸ UNESCO, *Revised Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education – Explanatory Remarks*, Tokyo 2011: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000217670/PDF/217670eng.pdf.multi.page=31> [last view 18 July 2025], pp. 5-6.

4.3. Addis Recognition Convention

Francesco Sanasi

The Revised Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Certificates, Diplomas, Degrees and Other Academic Qualifications in Higher Education in African States, also known as the “Addis Convention” was adopted in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on 12 December 2014, under the aegis of UNESCO and the African Union, and entered into force in December 2019.

It represents the revision of the Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Certificates, Diplomas, Degrees and other Academic Qualifications in Higher Education in the African States, known as the “Arusha Convention”, adopted in 1981 in Tanzania. Its contribution goes in the direction of harmonising higher education systems and recognition of qualifications across the continent.

The aims of the ARC are listed in Section II – *Aims of the Convention*, Article II, and they mainly refer to 4 main clusters:





-  Strengthen and promote inter-regional and international cooperation in the field of recognition.
-  Improve information sharing and exchange among the Parties and contribute to the harmonisation of their qualifications, also considering the global trends.
-  Encourage and promote the human resources available in the African region and the diaspora, to facilitate the exchange and mobility of students, teachers and researchers in the view of the development of the continent and of the limitation of the African brain-drain.
-  Establish high-level joint research programmes between higher education institutions in the region.

4.4. Buenos Aires Recognition Convention

Emanuela Gitto

The Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education, known as “Buenos Aires Recognition Convention” (BARC), was adopted in 2019 under the auspices of UNESCO. Building upon the above-mentioned 1974 Mexico City regional Convention (Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean) on recognition, the BARC updated its principles in order to harmonise with the current trends impacting on higher education, especially for what regards international mobility of students, fair and equitable recognition.

Section II – *Objectives of the Convention* lists the objectives of the recognition Convention of the Latin America and Caribbean region, which can be summarised as follows:

-  Promote both interregional and intraregional cooperation to facilitate recognition of qualifications, and to facilitate academic mobility among State Parties. All of this is to be done through shared resources and by upholding the principles of transparency, quality and mutual trust.
-  Support the harmonisation of higher education systems of the region through the recognition of their qualifications, to facilitate the conditions for the admission to courses in institutions located in the region.
-  Encourage inclusive and equitable access to quality higher education and to support lifelong learning opportunities for all.
-  Establish a holistic vision of education by facilitating recognition of qualifications both to enable the pursuit of studies, and for the labour market, by taking into account knowledge, skills and competences acquired through previous studies and other forms of prior learning.

4.5. Arab States Recognition Convention

Francesco Sanasi

The Revised Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in the Arab States, known as “Arab States Recognition Convention” (ASRC) was adopted in 2022, in Paris, France, building on the above-mentioned first-generation recognition Convention of 1978 (Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in the Arab States). The ASRC, currently not yet entered into force, is open for signature by the countries members of the League of Arab States and by the countries belonging to the UNESCO Arab region. The ASRC groups its priorities in Section II – *Aims of the Convention*, Article II – *Aims*, which can be grouped as follows:

- U Promote cooperation at the regional and international levels in the field of recognition of qualifications, and commit to do so by sharing relevant, up-to-date, transparent and reliable information among the Parties.
- U Support the development and coordination of joint programmes between higher education institutions encouraging the awarding of joint qualifications and facilitating academic mobility within the region through recognition.
- U Fostering the widest and most efficient use of human resources in higher education is highlighted. In fact, the Convention aims to create a stimulating environment for students, professors and researchers, under the principle of academic freedom and autonomy of institutions, by also keeping working to halt the brain-drain from the Arab States.
- U Improve study programmes and education planning methodologies, by considering the Arab identity and by keeping up with the economic, social and cultural developments.

The final paragraph of Article II further clarifies that the Convention's provisions also apply to qualifications awarded by higher education institutions operating under the authority of a State Party, even if located outside its national territory.

CHAPTER 5

Global Convention

Luca Lantero



The initial debate concerning the adoption of a global convention (starting in 1963 and concluded in 1993) was resumed in 2011, during the International Conference of States to adopt amendments to the 1983 Bangkok Regional Recognition Convention, held in Tokyo, Japan. The formal process began in 2013 on the occasion of the General Conference on a global Convention²⁹.

The Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education was adopted on 25 November 2019 and entered into force on 5 March 2023. It aims to encourage the harmonisation of educational standards at a global level, by «proposing a set of global principles for fair recognition of qualifications»³⁰. The GC «establishes universal principles for the recognition of qualifications, fosters mobility between higher education institutions worldwide and ensures the rights of individuals to have their foreign qualifications assessed in a fair, transparent and non-discriminatory manner»³¹, upscaling the principles enshrined in the regional Conventions.





²⁹ UNESCO, *Evaluation of UNESCO's Regional Conventions*, op. cit., p. 26.

³⁰ David Mills, *Academic Mobility in Higher Education*, UNESCO, 2022: https://unesdoc.unesco.org/in/documentViewer.xhtml?v=2.1.196&id=p::usmarcdef_0000389878&file=/in/rest/annotationSVC/DownloadWatermarkedAttachment/attach_import_d988cddf-f9c9-44ce-a9e5-6b0845671a86%3F_%3D389878eng.pdf&updateUrl=updateUrl1295&ark=/ark:/48223/pf0000389878/PDF/389878eng.pdf.multi&fullScreen=true&locale=en [last view 18 July 2025].

³¹ UNESCO, *A practical guide to recognition: implementing the Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education*, Paris 2020: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000374905> [last view 18 July 2025].

The novelty of the adoption of the Global Convention stands in the provision of «a legal framework for inter-regional student mobility and higher education collaboration, which is not covered by the regional treaties»³².

The GC outlines its objectives in Section II – *Objectives of the Convention*, Article II. These objectives respond to the four main priorities:

-  Strengthen cooperation in higher education at the global level. In this light, the Convention aims to foster trust and confidence among the Parties and to promote integrity and ethical practices. Considering the diversity among the higher education systems of the Parties to the Convention, which is considered as a value, the Convention also has the objective to develop and share accessible, up-to-date and transparent information and practices in the field of recognition among the Parties, thus contributing to facilitating the global mobility of qualification holders and to the mutual benefit of all higher education stakeholders.
-  Contribute to the development of capacities in State Parties necessary to ensure consistency and complementarity in quality assurance, qualifications framework and recognition practices, to support international mobility.
-  Enhance inclusive and equitable access to quality higher education thanks to recognition of qualifications, as well as support lifelong learning opportunities for all, including refugees and displaced persons. In the light of this, the GC also aims to foster the global use of human resources towards sustainable development, as well as to contribute to the structural, economic, technological, cultural, democratic and social development of societies.
-  Improve higher education systems of the State Parties, and the respect and protection of their autonomy and diversity.

³² Nuffic, *The Global Recognition Convention going local? Analysis of the GC & LRC to support the GC's implementation in the ENIC-NARIC Networks*, 2023: <https://www.nuffic.nl/sites/default/files/2023-08/2.%20The%20Global%20Recognition%20Convention%20going%20local.pdf> [last view 18 July 2025], p. 4.

CHAPTER 6


Key concepts in recognition: an overview of their evolution


Luca Lantero, Elisa Petrucci,
Francesco Sanasi, Emanuela Gitto



This section presents the findings of a comparative analysis of how the core principles of recognition are addressed across the so-called “second-generation” recognition Conventions. The analysis is primarily based on the provisions of the Lisbon Recognition Convention which serves as a reference framework. Starting from the articles and key concepts established in the LRC, this chapter provides the reader with references from the other regional Conventions.

The comparative analysis focuses on two main areas:

-  Fundamental principles
 - Right to appeal.
 - Information provision.
 - Substantial differences.
 - Qualifications held by refugees and displaced persons.

 -  Evolving topics
 - Transnational education.
 - Lifelong learning.
 - Countering education fraud.
-

6.1. Fundamental principles

Emanuela Gitto

Articles		Key points
Lisbon Recognition Convention		
Art. III.1,2	No discrimination shall be made in this respect on any ground such as the applicant's gender, race, colour, disability, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status, or on the grounds of any other circumstance not related to the merits of the qualification for which recognition is sought. In order to assure this right, each Party undertakes to make appropriate arrangements for the assessment of an application for recognition of qualifications solely on the basis of the knowledge and skills achieved.	No discrimination Make appropriate arrangements for the assessment Knowledge and skills
Art. III.2	Each Party shall ensure that the procedures and criteria used in the assessment and recognition of qualifications are transparent, coherent and reliable.	
Art. III.3,1	Decisions on recognition shall be made on the basis of appropriate information on the qualifications for which recognition is sought.	See paragraph "Information Provision"
Art. III.3,4	The Parties shall instruct or encourage, as appropriate, all education institutions belonging to their education systems to comply with any reasonable request for information for the purpose of assessing qualifications earned at the said institutions.	See paragraph "Information Provision"
Art. III.4	Each Party shall ensure, in order to facilitate the recognition of qualifications, that adequate and clear information on its education system is provided.	See paragraph "Information Provision"

Articles		Key points
Lisbon Recognition Convention		
Art. III.5	Decisions on recognition shall be made within a reasonable time limit specified beforehand by the competent recognition authority and calculated from the time all necessary information in the case has been provided. If recognition is withheld, the reasons for the refusal to grant recognition shall be stated, and information shall be given concerning possible measures the applicant may take in order to obtain recognition at a later stage. If recognition is withheld, or if no decision is taken, the applicant shall be able to make an appeal within a reasonable time limit.	See paragraph "Right to appeal"
Tokyo Recognition Convention		
Art. III.1,1-2	<p>1. Holders of qualifications issued in one of the Parties shall have adequate access, upon request to the competent recognition authority to an assessment of these qualifications in a timely manner.</p> <p>2. In order to assure this right for holders of qualifications, each Party undertakes to make appropriate arrangements for the assessment of an application for recognition of qualifications with the main focus on knowledge and skills achieved.</p>	<p>Adequate access</p> <p>Make appropriate arrangements for the assessment of an application</p> <p>Knowledge and skills</p>
Addis Recognition Convention		
Art. IV.2,1-3	<p>1. Parties shall take appropriate measures to ensure that holders of qualifications issued by a higher education institution of other Parties shall have adequate access, upon request to the appropriate body, to an assessment of these qualifications in a timely manner.</p> <p>2. Parties undertake to make appropriate arrangements for the assessment of an application for recognition of qualifications solely on the basis of knowledge, skills and competences achieved.</p> <p>3. Parties commit to adopt measures to eradicate all forms of fraudulent practices regarding higher education qualifications.</p>	<p>Adequate access [...] to an assessment of these qualifications in a timely manner</p> <p>Knowledge and skills and competences</p> <p>Eradicate all forms of fraudulent practices</p>
Buenos Aires Recognition Convention		
Art. III.1,9	Establish or strengthen fair and transparent mechanisms for the recognition of studies, diplomas and degrees, without any form of discrimination .	<p>Fair and transparent mechanisms for the recognition</p> <p>Without any form of discrimination</p>
Art. III.2,2	The recognition referred to in the preceding paragraph shall be granted without discrimination with respect to the acquisition of formal or informal learning , or the method of learning, whether traditional or not, including open and distance education , by which the studies were undertaken or the degrees or diplomas obtained, subject to the quality assurance established by the competent authority.	<p>Formal and informal learning</p> <p>Non-traditional method of learning, including distance education</p>

Articles		Key points
Arab States Recognition Convention		
Art. V.1,3	Recognition by a State Party of a certificate or degree awarded by another State Party requires that each State uphold all the obligations necessary to achieve the aims of this Convention. To this end, each State Party undertakes to:	
	(a) Take the necessary measures to assess and evaluate requests for the recognition of all qualifications and of all grades, without discrimination ;	Without discrimination
	(b) Seek to ensure that the procedures and criteria used to evaluate and recognize qualifications are transparent, coherent, reliable and fair , in accordance with the decisions governing such recognition, and on the basis of information which is relevant to the qualifications whose recognition is sought;	Procedures transparent, coherent, reliable and fair Respond to reasonable requests for information submitted
	(c) Instruct all institutions within the higher education system to respond to reasonable requests for information submitted for the purpose of evaluating the qualifications awarded by those institutions, or encourage such institutions to do so if necessary.	
Global Convention		
Art. III.2-3	2. Recognition of qualifications should be transparent, fair, timely and non-discriminatory in accordance with the rules and regulations of each State Party, and should be affordable .	Transparent, fair, timely and non-discriminatory Affordable
	3. Recognition decisions are based on trust, clear criteria, and fair, transparent and non-discriminatory procedures , and underline the fundamental importance of equitable access to higher education as a public good which may lead to employment opportunities.	Fair, transparent and non-discriminatory procedures Equitable access to higher education as a public good

The concept of «fair recognition» represents a transformative element introduced by the LRC, which has subsequently been incorporated by all later Conventions. It establishes a clear and fundamental rule: the «assessment of an application for recognition of qualifications» shall be made «solely on the basis of the knowledge and skills achieved» (LRC), implying that no discriminations should be made concerning the «applicant's gender, race, colour, disability, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status, or on the grounds of any other circumstance not related to the merits of the qualification for which recognition is sought» (LRC).

Article III.1,2 introduces two major changes in the recognition sector: the first is the acknowledgment that everyone has the right to access a fair assessment of their qualification; the second is the emphasis on learning outcomes, reflecting a shift from the input to the output of a learning path (assessment based on knowledge and skills). This concept captures and crystallises the cultural shift from the notion of “equivalence” to that of “recognition”, already mentioned in the paragraph on the “Lisbon Recognition Convention”.

These two major principles are present in each Convention and are reiterated in other articles, such as in the LRC, where fair recognition is mentioned in relation to admission to higher education institutions (Art. IV.6, LRC)³³ and the recognition of qualifications held by refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation (Art. VII, LRC). Similarly, in the GC, the principle is linked to additional requirements for admission to higher education programmes (Art. XI, GC).

An analysis of the key elements summarised across the regional and the global Conventions also reveals certain differences. The ARC, in Article IV.2, commits the Parties to eradicate all forms of education fraud.

The BARC includes references to both formal and informal learning, as well as to distance learning. The ASRC further establishes that State Parties shall instruct higher education institutions to «respond to reasonable requests for information submitted». The GC provides a synthetic version of the article specifying that assessment should be granted in a «timely» manner, that recognition should be «affordable» and underling the importance of «equitable access to higher education as a public good», thereby reinforcing the reference to the right to higher education.

³³ «Without prejudice to the provisions of Articles IV.1, IV.2, IV.3, IV.4 and IV.5, admission to a given higher education institution, or to a given programme within such an institution, may be restricted or selective. In cases in which admission to a higher education institution and/or programme is selective, admission procedures should be designed with a view to ensuring that the assessment of foreign qualifications is carried out according to the principles of fairness and non-discrimination described in Section III. », Council of Europe, *Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications*, *op. cit.*, Art. VI, p. 6.

6.2. Right to appeal

Francesco Sanasi

Articles		Key points
Lisbon Recognition Convention		
Art. III.5	Decisions on recognition shall be made within a reasonable time limit specified beforehand by the competent recognition authority and calculated from the time all necessary information in the case has been provided. If recognition is withheld, the reasons for the refusal to grant recognition shall be stated, and information shall be given concerning possible measures the applicant may take in order to obtain recognition at a later stage. If recognition is withheld, or if no decision is taken, the applicant shall be able to make an appeal within a reasonable time limit.	Reasons for the refusal to grant recognition shall be stated Information shall be given To make an appeal within a reasonable time limit
Tokyo Recognition Convention		
Art. III.5	Decisions on recognition of qualifications shall be made within a reasonable time limit specified beforehand by the competent recognition authority and calculated from the time all necessary information in the case has been provided. If recognition is withheld, the reasons for the refusal to grant recognition shall be stated, and information shall be given concerning possible measures the holder of the qualification may take in order to obtain recognition at a later stage. If recognition is withheld, or if no decision is taken, the holder of the qualification shall be entitled to make an appeal through appropriate procedures in each Party within a reasonable time limit.	Reasons for the refusal to grant recognition shall be stated Information shall be given Make an appeal through appropriate procedures in each Party within a reasonable time limit

Articles		Key points
Addis Recognition Convention		
Art. IV.6	Decisions on recognition of qualifications shall be made within a reasonable time limit specified beforehand by the competent recognition authority and calculated from the time all necessary information in the case has been provided. If recognition is withheld, the reasons for the refusal to grant recognition shall be stated , and information shall be given concerning possible measures the holder of the qualifications may take in order to obtain recognition at a later stage. If recognition is withheld, or if no decision is taken, the holder of the qualifications shall be entitled to make an appeal within a reasonable time limit .	Reasons for the refusal to grant recognition shall be stated Information shall be given To make an appeal within a reasonable time limit
Buenos Aires Recognition Convention		
Art. III.4,2	Decisions on recognition shall be made within a reasonable time limit specified beforehand by the competent authorities in the area of recognition and calculated from the time all necessary information in the case has been provided. If recognition is withheld, the reasons for the refusal to grant recognition shall be stated, and information shall be given concerning possible measures the holder of the qualification may take in order to obtain recognition at a later stage. If recognition is withheld, or if no decision is taken, the holder of the qualification shall be entitled to make an appeal within the time limit established in the national legislation .	Reasons for the refusal to grant recognition shall be stated Information shall be given To make an appeal within a reasonable time limit
Arab States Recognition Convention		
Art. V.1,6	The competent authority must determine in advance how long the recognition process will take. An applicant must be informed of the reasons why his or her certificates have been refused recognition and advised of any additional terms and conditions he or she may need to meet to obtain recognition at a later date.	Be informed of the reasons why his or her certificates have been refused Advised of any additional terms and conditions
Global Convention		
Art. III.6-7	6. Competent recognition authorities undertaking recognition assessments shall do so in good faith, giving clear reasons for decisions, and have mechanisms for appealing recognition decisions . 7. Applicants seeking recognition of their qualifications provide adequate and accurate information and documentation on their achieved qualifications in good faith, and have the right to appeal .	Giving clear reasons for decisions, and have mechanisms for appealing recognition decisions Applicants [...] provide adequate and accurate information and documentation on their achieved qualifications in good faith, and have the right to appeal

The right to appeal has remained largely unchanged over the years. This is evident in the comparison among the different Conventions, in which the concepts are linked to transparency on the part of the competent recognition authorities and entitlement to appeal on the part of applicants.

The LRC «does not specify whether the right to appeal should be implemented in specific legislation on recognition or internally by the competent recognition or assessment authorities», but according to the monitoring exercise, it has been implemented in all the State Parties, most commonly through regulation at national level³⁴. The explanatory report specifies that:

[...] arrangements and procedures for such appeals are subject to the legislation in force in the Party concerned, even though the handling of the appeal should be subject to the same requirements of transparency, coherence and reliability as those imposed on the original assessment of the application. Information should be given on the ways in which an appeal could be made, and on the time limits for such an appeal³⁵.

This element has been recalled also in the TRC, where it is specified that appeals may be lodged by applicants “through appropriate procedures in each Party” (Art. III.5, TRC). The right to appeal is also present in the GC, precisely in Art. III.6-7, where it is stated that both «competent recognition authorities undertaking recognition assessments» (Art. III.6, GC), that «applicants seeking recognition of their qualifications» (Art. III.7, GC) should act «in good faith» and that recognition authorities should «have mechanisms for appealing recognition decisions» (Art. III.6, GC) to let applicants enforce their «right to appeal» (Art. III.7, GC).

The ASRC differs from the other Conventions, as the right to appeal is not explicitly mentioned as in the other texts. Article V.1.6 specifies that «applicants must be informed of the reasons why his or her certificates have been refused recognition and advised of any additional terms and conditions he or she may need to meet to obtain recognition at a later date». No reference is made regarding the possibility to appeal this recognition decision.

In cases where «recognition is withheld, the reasons for the refusal to grant recognition shall be stated» (Art. III.5, LRC and Art. III.5, TRC), together with needed information by the applicant regarding possible measures to get recognition at a later stage. In such cases, or if no recognition decision is taken, applicants should have the opportunity to «make an appeal within reasonable time limit» through dedicated procedures.

³⁴ Council of Europe, UNESCO, *Monitoring the implementation of the Lisbon recognition Convention: monitoring report*, op. cit., p. 11.

³⁵ Council of Europe, *Explanatory Report to the Convention*, op. cit., pp. 13-14.

6.3. Information provision

Emanuela Gitto

Articles		Key points
Lisbon Recognition Convention		
Art III.2	Each Party shall ensure that the procedures and criteria used in the assessment and recognition of qualifications are transparent, coherent and reliable.	Criteria used in the assessment and recognition
Art III.3,1-3	<p>1. Decisions on recognition shall be made on the basis of appropriate information on the qualifications for which recognition is sought.</p> <p>2. In the first instance, the responsibility for providing adequate information rests with the applicant, who shall provide such information in good faith.</p> <p>3. Notwithstanding the responsibility of the applicant, the institutions having issued the qualifications in question shall have a duty to provide, upon request of the applicant and within reasonable limits, relevant information to the holder of the qualification, to the institution, or to the competent authorities of the country in which recognition is sought.</p>	<p>Elements of the decision</p> <p>Responsibility of the applicant and of the institutions</p>
Art. III.4	Each Party shall ensure, in order to facilitate the recognition of qualifications, that adequate and clear information on its education system is provided .	Adequate and clear information

Articles		Key points
Lisbon Recognition Convention		
Art. VIII.1	<p>Each Party shall provide adequate information on any institution belonging to its higher education system, and on any programme operated by these institutions, with a view to enabling the competent authorities of other Parties to ascertain whether the quality of the qualifications issued by these institutions justifies recognition in the Party in which recognition is sought. Such information shall take the following form:</p> <p>a) in the case of Parties having established a system of formal assessment of higher education institutions and programmes: information on the methods and results of this assessment, and of the standards of quality specific to each type of higher education institution granting, and to programmes leading to, higher education qualifications;</p> <p>b) in the case of Parties which have not established a system of formal assessment of higher education institutions and programmes: information on the recognition of the various qualifications obtained at any higher education institution, or within any higher education programme, belonging to their higher education systems.</p>	<p>Adequate information on:</p> <p>Any institution belonging to its higher education system, and on any programme operated by these institutions</p> <p>Quality of the qualifications issued</p> <p>Formal assessment of higher education institutions and programmes: information on the methods</p> <p>(No formal assessment) information on the recognition of the various qualifications</p>
Art. VIII.2	<p>Each Party shall make adequate provisions for the development, maintenance and provision of:</p> <p>a) an overview of the different types of higher education institutions belonging to its higher education system, with the typical characteristics of each type of institution;</p> <p>b) a list of recognised institutions (public and private) belonging to its higher education system, indicating their powers to award different types of qualifications and the requirements for gaining access to each type of institution and programme;</p> <p>c) a description of higher education programmes;</p> <p>d) a list of educational institutions located outside its territory which the Party considers as belonging to its education system.</p>	<p>Maintenance and provision of:</p> <p>Overview of the different types of higher education institutions</p> <p>List of recognised institutions</p> <p>Description of higher education programmes</p> <p>List of educational institutions located outside its territory belonging to its education system</p>
Art IX.1	<p>In order to facilitate the recognition of qualifications concerning higher education, the Parties undertake to establish transparent systems for the complete description of the qualifications obtained.</p>	<p>Transparent systems</p> <p>Complete description of the qualifications</p>

Articles		Key points
Lisbon Recognition Convention		
Art. IX.2,1-3	1. Acknowledging the need for relevant, accurate and up-to-date information, each Party shall establish or maintain a national information centre and shall notify one of the depositories of its establishment, or of any changes affecting it.	National information centre
	2. In each Party, the national information centre shall:	Facilitate access to authoritative and accurate information
	a) facilitate access to authoritative and accurate information on the higher education system and qualifications of the country in which it is located;	Information on higher education systems
	b) facilitate access to information on the higher education systems and qualifications of the other Parties;	Advice or information on recognition matters.
	c) give advice or information on recognition matters and assessment of qualifications, in accordance with national laws and regulations.	
	3. Every national information centre shall have at its disposal the necessary means to enable it to fulfil its functions.	
Tokyo Recognition Convention		
Art. III.4	Each Party shall ensure, in order to facilitate the recognition of qualifications, that adequate and clear information on its education system is provided.	Adequate and clear information
Art. VIII.1	Each Party shall provide adequate information on any institution belonging to its higher education system , and on its quality assurance system , with a view to enabling the competent recognition authorities of the other Parties to ascertain whether the quality of the qualifications issued by these institutions justifies recognition in the Party in which recognition is sought. This includes:	
	(a) description of its higher education system;	Adequate information on:
	(b) an overview of the different types of higher education institutions belonging to its higher education system, and of the typical characteristics of each type of institution;	Any institution belonging to its higher education system
	(c) a list of recognised and/or accredited higher education institutions (public and private) belonging to its higher education system, indicating their powers to award different types of qualifications and the requirements for gaining access to each type of institution and programme;	Its quality assurance system
	(d) an explanation of quality assurance mechanisms; and	
	(e) a list of educational institutions located outside its territory which the Party considers as belonging to its education system.	

Articles		Key points
Tokyo Recognition Convention		
Art. VIII.2	Each Party shall provide relevant, accurate and up-to-date information in order to facilitate the recognition of qualifications in higher education by: (a) facilitating access to authoritative and accurate information on its higher education system and qualifications; (b) facilitating access to information on the higher education systems and qualifications of the other Parties; and (c) giving advice or information on recognition matters and assessment of qualifications, in accordance with national laws and regulations.	Facilitating access to: Authoritative and accurate information on higher education systems and qualifications Information on the higher education systems Giving advice or information on recognition matters and assessment of qualifications
Art. VIII.3	Each Party shall take adequate measures for the development and maintenance of a national information centre that will provide higher education information. The form of the national information centre could vary.	Development and maintenance of a national information centre Providing higher education information NIC's form could vary
Addis Recognition Convention		
Art. IV.3	Each Party shall ensure that the procedures and criteria used in the assessment and recognition of qualifications are transparent, coherent, reliable, fair and non-discriminatory, in particular, by making public such procedures and criteria.	Transparent, coherent, reliable, fair and non-discriminatory
Art. IV.5	Each Party shall ensure, that in order to facilitate the recognition of qualifications, adequate and clear information on its education system is provided.	Adequate and clear information on its education
Art. IV.8,5	Parties, in order to reinforce exchanges of information on recognition of qualifications in higher education, agree to have a system to collect and disseminate information and successful experiences as regards recognition of qualifications, as well as mechanisms for quality assurance and accreditation of institutions and programmes. This may take the form of a national information service. Parties agree to make available to all other Parties complete, reliable and regularly updated data and information about level of enrolment, recognized higher education institutions, programmes, subjects, studies, degrees, qualifications, as well as the recognition of higher education qualifications and diplomas in their territories.	Have a system to collect and disseminate information and successful experiences Recognition of qualifications Mechanisms for quality assurance and accreditation of institutions and programmes National information service Reliable and regularly updated data and information

Articles		Key points
Addis Recognition Convention		
Art. IV.10,1	A network of national implementation structures providing information on mobility and recognition shall be established to assist the practical implementation of this Convention by the competent recognition authorities by facilitating the exchange of information among the Parties relating to recognition and mobility, as well as counter-fraud measures.	<p>National implementation structures</p> <p>Providing information on mobility and recognition</p>
Buenos Aires Recognition Convention		
Art. III.1,5-6	<p>5. Develop and maintain national repositories and/or centres for disseminating and sharing information on higher-education systems, institutions, assessment and accreditation systems and criteria, and opportunities for academic mobility;</p> <p>6. Establish or strengthen national qualifications frameworks as tools for the recognition of studies, diplomas and degrees</p>	<p>Develop and maintain national repositories and/or centres for disseminating and sharing information on higher-education systems, institutions, assessment and accreditation systems and criteria, and opportunities for academic mobility</p>
Art. IV.2	A network of national implementation structures shall be established so as to provide information on mobility and recognition in order to assist with the practical implementation of this Convention by the competent authorities in the area of recognition by facilitating the exchange of recognition and mobility information among the States Parties.	<p>National implementation structures</p> <p>Provide information on mobility and recognition</p> <p>Facilitating the exchange of recognition and mobility information among State Parties.</p>
Arab States Recognition Convention		
Art. IV.1, 1-2	<p>1. The States Parties endeavour to adapt their national laws to the provisions of this Convention with a view to evaluating their higher education systems and ensuring the transparency and credibility of those systems, and of their institutions, programmes and certificates;</p> <p>2. Each State Party shall provide clear and accurate information on their higher education systems to other States Parties in order to facilitate the process of recognizing qualifications; to this end, each State Party undertakes to:</p> <p>(a) Publish and update full information on its national higher education system and make available to the other States Parties a list of institutions recognized by the national body responsible for licensing the establishment of institutes of higher education;</p> <p>(b) Provide a detailed description of state-recognized programmes and certificates enabling students to pursue their studies, have access to employment, and practice a profession;</p> <p>(c) Publish and disseminate accreditation decisions on higher education institutions and programmes after the competent national body has conducted a periodic evaluation of these institutions and programmes.</p>	<p>Ensuring the transparency and credibility of those systems</p> <p>Clear and accurate information</p> <p>National higher education system</p> <p>A list of institutions recognized</p> <p>State-recognized programmes and certificates</p> <p>Accreditation decisions on higher education institutions and programmes</p>

Articles		Key points
Arab States Recognition Convention		
Art. IV.3	Each State Party undertakes to make available to other States Parties the methodologies and criteria it uses to evaluate the institutions of higher education, as well as the results of such evaluation.	Methodologies and criteria it uses to evaluate the institutions of higher education
Art. V.4.4	Each State Party undertakes to inform the other States Parties of its decisions concerning recognition of certificates and skills, while maintaining the confidentiality of personal information.	Decisions concerning recognition of certificates and skills, while maintaining the confidentiality of personal information
Art. VI.1,1-3	<p>1. Each State Party undertakes to establish a new national information centre or to entrust a similar existing entity with collecting, analysing, disseminating, classifying and updating useful information on its higher education system, recognized institutions of higher education established in its territory, programmes of higher education and fields of specialization, as well as studies, degrees and certificates. The centre shall be the sole national authority permitted to release official information, especially concerning the recognition of certificates.</p> <p>2. To obtain comprehensive information on the application of the Convention and to monitor requests for recognition, the centre will collect full information on legislation, standards, procedures, measures and decisions pertaining to the recognition of certificates by the competent national authorities.</p> <p>3. A State Party which has not established an information centre or similar entity undertakes to provide Member States, in timely fashion and on a regular basis, with full, reliable and up-to-date information on the recognized institutions of higher education established in its territory, on higher education programmes, fields of specialization and studies, and degrees and certificates, as well as on the recognition of higher education qualifications and certificates.</p>	<p>National information centre</p> <p>Collect, analyse, disseminate, classify, update useful information on higher education systems</p> <p>Full, reliable and up-to-date information on the recognized institutions of higher education established in its territory</p>

Articles		Key points
Global Convention		
Art. VIII.1-5	<p>1. Each State Party shall establish transparent systems for the complete description of the qualifications and learning outcomes obtained in its territory.</p> <p>2. Each State Party, to the extent feasible based on its constitutional, legislative and regulatory situation and structure, shall put in place an objective and reliable system for the approval, recognition and quality assurance of its higher-education institutions in order to promote confidence and trust in its higher-education system.</p> <p>3. Each State Party shall establish and maintain a national information centre or similar entities to provide access to relevant, accurate and up-to-date information about its higher-education system.</p> <p>4. Each State Party shall encourage the use of technologies to ensure easy access to information.</p> <p>5. Each State Party shall:</p> <p>(a) Provide access to authoritative and accurate information on its higher-education systems, qualifications, quality assurance, and qualification frameworks, if applicable;</p> <p>(b) Facilitate the dissemination of and access to accurate information on the other States Parties' higher-education systems, qualifications, and qualifications giving access to higher education;</p> <p>(c) Give advice and information, where appropriate, on recognition matters, including criteria and procedures for the assessment of qualifications, and the development of materials for good recognition practices in accordance with the laws, regulations and policies of the State Party; and</p> <p>(d) Ensure the provision, within a reasonable time, of adequate information on any institution belonging to its higher-education system, and on any programme operated by such institutions, with a view to enabling the competent authorities of other States Parties to ascertain whether the quality of the qualifications issued by these institutions justifies recognition in the State Party in which recognition is sought.</p>	<p>Transparent systems for the complete description of the qualifications and learning outcomes obtained in its territory</p> <p>Reliable system for the approval, recognition and quality assurance of its higher-education institutions</p> <p>Access to information on the higher education systems</p> <p>Use of technologies to ensure easy access to information</p> <p>Authoritative and accurate information on higher-education systems, qualifications, quality assurance, and qualification frameworks, if applicable</p> <p>Give advice and information, where appropriate, on recognition matters</p> <p>Ensure the provision, within a reasonable time, of adequate information on any institution belonging to its higher-education system, and on any programme</p>
Art. XI.4	<p>With respect to paragraph 3 of the present article, admission procedures shall be designed with a view to ensuring that the assessment of foreign qualifications is carried out according to the principles of transparency, fairness and non-discrimination described in Article III.</p>	<p>Transparency, fairness and non-discrimination</p>

From the comparative analysis of the evolution of the principle of information provision in the different Conventions, it emerges that the concept has evolved from the initial focus on the provision of essential information for carrying out recognition, such as the quality and typologies of higher education institutions (LRC), towards a broader understanding. This broader perspective includes information related to recognition procedures and mechanisms (TRC), the transparency of procedures and criteria (ARC), and an emphasis on learning outcomes and the use of technology to support recognition (GC).

All Conventions require the provision of «adequate and clear information» on the education systems. Notably, the choice of adjectives is consistent across all texts, highlighting a shared commitment to facilitating the recognition of qualifications. Each Convention outlines the information that must be provided, typically including the higher education system, lists of recognised institutions, and the mechanism of quality assurance, among others. Moreover, all Conventions describe the measures through which such information should be made available, such as through maintaining national information centres.

The LRC is the only Convention that presents information provision from a dual perspective, addressing both the applicant and the parties; the Article III.3 states that «in the first instance, the responsibility for providing adequate information rests with the applicant, who shall provide such information in good faith». Following this, the LRC states what the liability of States Parties lies on. Thus, both applicants and State Parties share the responsibility of providing «adequate information» for recognition purposes. A further distinctive element in the LRC is that it is the only Convention requiring the provision of information about domestic educational institutions located outside the national territory.

In all the Conventions national information centres (or «national implementation structures», as in the ARC and BARC) are indicated as the bodies called to facilitate access to «adequate and clear information» regarding both national and foreign higher education systems, in the forms and modalities previously described. LRC, TRC and GC also include the «form of national information service» among the provisions for offering advice and information (Art. IX.2, LRC; Art. VIII.2.c, TRC; Art. VIII.5.c, GC). Moreover, the BARC includes a call to «develop and maintain national repositories and/or centres for disseminating and sharing information on higher-education systems, institutions, assessment and accreditation systems and criteria, and opportunities for academic mobility» (Art. III.1.5, BARC). The diversity in the forms of national information centres allows space for further comparative analysis on governance mechanisms and implementation structures, which are not a specific object of this analysis.

Information provision, in the BARC, is also linked to the right to appeal, as mentioned earlier (Art. III.4). One important point concerns the shift from the provision of information related solely to qualifications to also including information on certificates and skills. In relation to this, the GC mentions the provision of information on learning outcomes (Art. VIII.1). The GC, unlike other Conventions, introduces the «use of technology to ensure easy access to information» (Art. VIII.4).

6.4. Substantial differences

Francesco Sanasi

Articles		Key points
Lisbon Recognition Convention		
Art. IV.1	Each Party shall recognise the qualifications issued by other Parties meeting the general requirements for access to higher education in those Parties for the purpose of access to programmes belonging to its higher education system, unless a substantial difference can be shown between the general requirements for access in the Party in which the qualification was obtained and in the Party in which recognition of the qualification is sought.	General requirements for access to higher education Unless a substantial difference can be shown
Art. IV.3	Where a qualification gives access only to specific types of institutions or programmes of higher education in the Party in which the qualification was obtained, each other Party shall grant holders of such qualifications access to similar specific programmes in institutions belonging to its higher education system, unless a substantial difference can be demonstrated between the requirements for access in the Party in which the qualification was obtained and the Party in which recognition of the qualification is sought.	Access to similar specific programmes in institutions [...], unless a substantial difference can be demonstrated
Art. V.1	Each Party shall recognise periods of study completed within the framework of a higher education programme in another Party. This recognition shall comprise such periods of study towards the completion of a higher education programme in the Party in which recognition is sought, unless substantial differences can be shown between the periods of study completed in another Party and the part of the higher education programme which they would replace in the Party in which recognition is sought	Recognise periods of study completed within the framework of a higher education programme

Articles		Key points
Lisbon Recognition Convention		
Art. VI.1	To the extent that a recognition decision is based on the knowledge and skills certified by the higher education qualification , each Party shall recognise the higher education qualifications conferred in another Party, unless a substantial difference can be shown between the qualification for which recognition is sought and the corresponding qualification in the Party in which recognition is sought.	Knowledge and skills certified by the higher education qualification
Art. VI.2	Alternatively, it shall be sufficient for a Party to enable the holder of a higher education qualification issued in one of the other Parties to obtain an assessment of that qualification upon request by the holder, and the provisions of Article VI.1 shall apply mutatis mutandis to such a case.	To obtain an assessment of that qualification
Tokyo Recognition Convention		
Art. IV.1	Each Party shall recognise, for the purpose of access to each of its higher education programmes, the qualifications issued by the other Parties that meet the general requirements for access to these respective higher education programmes, unless a substantial difference can be shown between the general requirements for access in the Party in which the qualifications were obtained and those in the Party in which recognition of the qualifications is sought.	Access to each of its higher education programmes General requirements for access Unless a substantial difference can be shown
Art. V.1	Each Party shall recognise, where appropriate, or at least assess partial studies completed within the framework of a higher education programme in another Party. This recognition shall consist of taking such partial studies into account for the purposes of the completion of a higher education programme in the Party in which recognition is sought, unless substantial differences can be shown between the partial studies completed and the part and/or all of the higher education programme in the Party in which recognition is sought.	Assess partial studies
Art. VI.1	To the extent that a recognition decision is mainly based on the knowledge and skills certified by a qualification in higher education , each Party shall recognise the qualifications in higher education conferred in another Party, unless a substantial difference can be shown .	Knowledge and skills certified by a qualification in higher education
Art. VI.2	Alternatively, it shall be sufficient for a Party to enable the holder of a qualification in higher education issued in another Party to obtain an assessment of that qualification , upon request by the holder of the qualification, and provisions of Article VI.1 shall apply mutatis mutandis to such a case.	To obtain an assessment of that qualification
Addis Recognition Convention		
Art. III.2,1	Each Party shall recognize, for the purpose of access to each of its higher education programmes, the qualifications issued by the other Parties that meet the general requirements for access to these respective higher education programmes, unless a substantial difference can be shown between the general requirements for access in the Party in which the qualifications were obtained and those in the Party in which recognition of the qualifications is sought.	General requirements for access to these respective higher education programmes, unless a substantial difference can be shown

Articles		Key points
Buenos Aires Recognition Convention		
Arab States Recognition Convention		
Art. V.2,1,4	1. For the purpose of admission to subsequent stages of education in institutions of higher education in its territory, each State Party undertakes to recognize the secondary school certificates or equivalent thereof of other States Parties, in accordance with national legislation and under the same conditions as apply to holders of national certificates, provided that there are no fundamental differences between the knowledge acquired in the country awarding the certificate and the country where recognition is sought.	Admission to subsequent stages of education Secondary school certificates or equivalent thereof of other States Parties, [...] provided that there are no fundamental differences between the knowledge acquired
	4. For the purpose of continuing studies directly and being admitted to subsequent stages of higher education in institutions located in its territory, each State Party undertakes to take the necessary measures to recognize the qualifications awarded by an institution of higher education located in the territory of another State Party and recognized by it, under the same conditions as apply to holders of national certificates. Each full or partial stage of higher education study must be completed according to the procedures established by the competent authorities, unless it can be established that there is a fundamental difference between the general conditions of enrolment in the country where the certificate was awarded and the country where recognition is sought.	Admitted to subsequent stages of higher education Full or partial stage of higher education study must be completed General conditions of enrolment
Art. V.4,1	Each State Party undertakes to facilitate the procedures for recognition of higher education certificates awarded by another State Party unless it is established that there is a fundamental difference between the certificate whose recognition is sought and its equivalent in the country where the request for recognition is submitted.	Education certificates [...] unless it is established that there is a fundamental difference
Global Convention		
Art. IV.1,3	1. Each State Party shall recognize, for the purposes of access to its higher-education system, the qualifications and documented or certified prior learning acquired in other States Parties which meet the general requirements for access to higher education in those States Parties, unless substantial differences can be shown between the general requirements for access in the State Party in which the qualification was obtained and those in the State Party in which recognition of the qualification is sought. Alternatively, it shall be sufficient for a State Party to enable the holder of a qualification issued in another State Party to obtain an assessment of that qualification .	The qualifications and documented or certified prior learning General requirements for access to higher education Unless substantial differences can be shown
	3. Where a qualification gives access only to specific types of institutions or programmes of higher education in the State Party in which the qualification was obtained, each State Party shall grant holders of such qualifications access to similar specific types of institutions or programmes belonging to its higher-education system, if available, unless substantial differences can be shown .	Obtain an assessment of that qualification

Articles	Key points
Global Convention	
<p>Art. V.1,5</p> <p>1. Each State Party shall recognize a higher-education qualification conferred in another State Party, unless substantial differences can be shown between the qualification for which recognition is sought and the corresponding qualification in the State Party in which recognition is sought. Alternatively, it shall be sufficient for a State Party to enable the holder of a higher-education qualification issued in another State Party to obtain an assessment of that qualification, upon request of the holder.</p> <p>5. Where a competent recognition authority can demonstrate substantial differences between the qualification for which recognition is sought and the corresponding qualification in the State Party in which recognition is sought, the competent recognition authority shall seek to establish whether partial recognition may be granted.</p>	<p>The competent recognition authority shall seek to establish whether partial recognition may be granted</p>
<p>Art. VI.1</p> <p>Each State Party may recognize, for the purpose of the completion of a higher-education programme or the continuation of higher education studies, where appropriate, and taking into account the legislation of the States Parties regarding access, documented or certified partial studies or documented or certified prior learning acquired in another State Party, unless substantial differences can be shown between the partial studies or prior learning and the part of the higher-education programme they or it would replace in the State Party in which recognition is sought. Alternatively, it shall be sufficient for a State Party to enable an individual who has undertaken documented or certified partial studies or documented or certified prior learning in another State Party to obtain an assessment of these partial studies or this prior learning, upon request of the individual concerned.</p>	<p>Documented or certified partial studies or documented or certified prior learning</p>

The LRC includes the expression «substantial differences» in the three sections containing articles concerning, respectively, recognition of qualifications giving access to higher education (section IV), recognition of periods of study (section V), and recognition of higher education qualifications (section VI). In all these cases, the presence of a substantial difference could prevent the applicant from having their qualifications recognised. Moreover, the LRC also clarifies that the condition of the absence of substantial differences also applies to the knowledge and skills certified by a higher education qualification (Art. VI.1), specifying that if recognition is not possible due to the presence of substantial differences, the holder of the qualification still has the right for an assessment of that qualification.

The TRC can be considered on the same line with the LRC, with the main difference being terminological regarding what is defined as «periods of study» in the LRC, which becomes «partial studies» in the TRC (Art. V.1), a term that is subsequently adopted in the following regional and global Conventions.

The LRC and TRC represent a common set of characteristics featuring the concept of substantial differences, which are instead described differently in the other regional Conventions. The ARC does not make specific reference to substantial differences in relation to either partial studies or the knowledge and skills certified by qualifications. Instead, it mentions substantial differences as a condition affecting the recognition of higher education qualifications meeting the «general requirements for access» to higher education in another country. It is important to note that the ARC also does not mention the possibility for an assessment of the qualification in case substantial differences emerge.

The ASRC refers to substantial differences as «fundamental difference» and, as the above-mentioned Conventions, it does not provide a definition. It is not mentioned with regards to the access to higher education, but regarding the admission to subsequent stages of higher education: the concept of admission is defined in the ASRC as the «procedures allowing qualified candidates to enrol in institutions or programmes of higher education», thus very different from the definition of access to higher education in the (e.g.) LRC: «the right of qualified candidates to apply and to be considered for admission to higher education». In this context, it is important to note that the concept of access could be associated, in the ASRC, to the term enrolment:

Qualification allowing enrolment in higher education: any academic degree, certificate or other document awarded by a competent authority, confirming successful completion by the holder of the certificate of a course of study and granting him/her the right to be considered for admission to institutions and programmes of higher education³⁶.

Therefore, despite the difference in terminology, it could be argued that also the ASRC is in line with the previously mentioned Conventions addressing the topic of substantial differences, both with reference to secondary school certificates and to higher education. This is also true for the concept of «partial studies», which are referred to as partial stage of higher education study in the ASRC (Art. V.2) and that can be recognised unless «it is established that there is a fundamental difference» between the general conditions of enrolment in the countries involved.

The GC is the only Convention providing a definition of substantial differences, intended as: «significant differences between the foreign qualification and the qualification of the State Party which would most likely prevent the applicant from succeeding in a desired activity, such as, but not limited to, further study, research activities, or employment opportunities».

³⁶ In relation to fundamental differences, beside the above-cited definition, the terms “qualification” and “certificate” are defined as follows in the ASRC:

- **certificate of higher education:** any academic degree or qualification awarded by an institute of higher education, indicating successful completion of a particular programme of higher education
- **qualification of higher education:** any academic degree, certificate or other document awarded by a competent authority, confirming successful completion by the holder of the qualification of a programme of higher education.

According to this definition, the GC moves forward in the cultural evolution of the concept of recognition, by clarifying the idea that substantial differences are linked to the learning outcomes³⁷ underlying the qualification that if absent or different would prevent the possibility of «succeeding in a desired activity». As the LRC and TRC, the GC refers to substantial differences in three different articles, respectively relating to recognition of qualifications giving access to higher education (Art. IV), recognition of higher education qualifications (Art. V) and recognition of partial studies and prior learning (Art. VI). In particular, the GC synthesises the principles connected to the notion of substantial differences in the other regional Conventions and further enriches it with other new principles. Substantial differences are still connected to the general requirements for access to higher education in the State Parties to the Convention, as well as to partial studies and to the right to the assessment of qualifications in case substantial differences make their recognition impossible. Nevertheless, the GC also disciplines the cases in which substantial differences emerge with reference to documented or certified prior learning (Art. IV. And Art. VI) and it also introduces the concept of partial recognition, defined as «the partial recognition of a full and completed qualification which cannot be fully recognised on account of the demonstration of substantial differences by a competent recognition authority».

Once again, with the inclusion of prior learning, the GC demonstrates the evolution from an exclusive focus on qualifications and formal learning to the inclusion of informal and non-formal learning, thus driving the attention to the outcomes of the learning path.

³⁷ The term «learning outcomes» is explicitly connected with the concept of substantial differences in the draft Operational Guidelines for the implementation of the Global Convention, adopted in the second session of the Intergovernmental Conference of State Parties to the Global Convention held in Paris on 24-25 June 2025.

UNESCO, *Adoption of the draft Operational Guidelines for the implementation of the Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education*, Paris 2025 <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000393780> [last view 18 July 2025].

6.5. Refugees and displaced persons

Emanuela Gitto

Articles		Key points
Lisbon Recognition Convention		
Art. VII	Each Party shall take all feasible and reasonable steps within the framework of its education system and in conformity with its constitutional, legal, and regulatory provisions to develop procedures designed to assess fairly and expeditiously whether refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation fulfil the relevant requirements for access to higher education, to further higher education programmes or to employment activities, even in cases in which the qualifications obtained in one of the Parties cannot be proven through documentary evidence .	<p>Assess fairly and expeditiously</p> <p>Refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation fulfil the relevant requirements for access to higher education</p> <p>Cannot be proven through documentary evidence</p>
Tokyo Recognition Convention		
Art. VII	Each Party shall make all reasonable efforts within the framework of its education system and in conformity with its constitutional, legal, and regulatory requirements to develop procedures, including recognition of prior learning , designed to assess fairly and expeditiously whether refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation fulfil the relevant requirements for access to higher education programmes or for recognition of qualifications for employment activities, even in cases in which the qualifications obtained in one of the Parties cannot be proven through documentary evidence .	<p>Develop procedures, including recognition of prior learning</p> <p>Refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation fulfil the relevant requirements for access to higher education</p> <p>Cannot be proven through documentary evidence.</p>

Articles		Key points
Addis Recognition Convention		
Art. III.2,5	Parties, through competent recognition authorities, agree to establish appropriate procedures to assess whether refugees and internally displaced persons respectively fulfil relevant requirements to access higher education through recognition of prior learning and qualifications for employability and integration.	<p>Refugees and internally displaced persons</p> <p>Through recognition of prior learning and qualifications for employability and integration</p>
Buenos Aires Recognition Convention		
Art. III.5	Each State Party shall take all reasonable measures within the framework of its higher-education system and in accordance with its national constitutional and legal provisions, in the case of refugees or displaced persons , to develop procedures, including the recognition of prior learning , to enable the fair and expeditious assessment of eligibility for access to higher-education programmes or for the recognition of studies, diplomas and degrees, even in the absence of the necessary documentation for recognition .	<p>Refugees or displaced persons</p> <p>Develop procedures, including the recognition of prior learning, to enable the fair and expeditious assessment of eligibility for access to higher-education</p> <p>Absence of the necessary documentation for recognition</p>
Arab States Recognition Convention		
Art. V.6	<p>Recognition of certificates in special cases</p> <p>Each State Party undertakes, in a manner consistent with its constitutional, legal and administrative provisions, to take all the necessary measures within its educational system to adopt appropriate procedures permitting the evaluation of the certificates of refugees and displaced persons who meet the conditions for enrolment in higher education.</p>	<p>Recognition of certificates in special cases</p> <p>Refugees and displaced persons who meet the conditions for enrolment in higher education</p>
Global Convention		
Art. VII	Each State Party shall take the necessary and feasible steps, within its education system and in conformity with its constitutional, legislative and regulatory provisions, to develop reasonable procedures for assessing fairly and efficiently whether refugees and displaced persons fulfil the relevant requirements for access to higher education, to further higher-education programmes, or to the seeking of employment opportunities , including in cases where partial studies, prior learning , or qualifications acquired in another country cannot be proven by documentary evidence .	<p>Refugees and displaced persons</p> <p>Fulfil the relevant requirements for access to higher education, to further higher-education programmes, or to the seeking of employment opportunities</p> <p>Partial studies, prior learning</p> <p>Cannot be proven by documentary evidence</p>

All the Conventions (both regional and the global) address the principle of recognition of qualifications held by refugees, even though it can be featured differently in each of them. As the LRC and unlike all the other Conventions, the TRC has a dedicated section on this topic (Section VII), in which Article VII affirms that State Parties shall take all the reasonable steps to assess whether refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation fulfil the relevant requirements for access to higher education or employment activities. Unlike the LRC, the TRC further specifies that each Party should develop procedures to assess qualifications held by refugees and displaced persons including recognition of prior learning. Moreover, two common elements are worth noting, peculiar only to the LRC and the TRC: the expression «persons in a refugee-like situation» is present only in the LRC and the TRC; regarding the absence of documentary evidence, the LRC and the TRC refer to «qualifications obtained in one of the Parties», thus formally limiting the geographical area of application of this article³⁸.

This may be connected to the fact that by the time both Conventions entered into force, there had not been a major refugee crisis involving populations coming from different regions. For example, Art. VII of the LRC developed in the context of the conflicts of the former Yugoslavia, when refugees from the European region itself were seeking refuge in other European countries. This does not prevent the application of Article VII in such occasions as, for example, the major refugee crisis that saw over one million refugees arriving in Europe in 2015.

Except for these two elements, the BARC is quite similar in the text (Art. III.5). Like the TRC, it also references to recognition of prior learning among the possible procedures to be developed in this context. Nevertheless, as already mentioned above, the BARC mentions only «refugees or displaced persons». Moreover, another common element with the LRC and the TRC is the clear reference to the recognition of qualifications of refugees and displaced persons also in absence of documentation, thus highlighting the role of State Parties to create the necessary conditions ensuring the right of a fair and expeditious recognition for all.

The text is slightly different in the ARC (Art. III.2,5), in which no specific mention is made for the absence of documentation. This is true also for the ARSC. This is the main element that mostly differentiates these two Conventions from the others. Despite this, the ARC, as the TRC and the BARC, also connects the concept of prior learning to recognition of qualifications held by refugees and displaced persons, both relating to the access to higher education, and for employability and integration. In the ASRC, Article

³⁸ In the 2017 "Recommendation on the Recognition of Refugees' Qualifications under the Lisbon Recognition Convention and Explanatory Memorandum" it is written that "While the Recommendation is adopted within the framework of the Lisbon Recognition Convention and applies to the Parties to this Convention, the principles and practices described can also be applied to the recognition of qualifications in countries other than the Parties to the Lisbon Recognition Convention".

Council of Europe, UNESCO, *Recommendation on the Recognition of Refugee's Qualifications under the Lisbon Recognition Convention and Explanatory Memorandum*, Strasbourg 2017: https://www.enic-naric.net/Upload/Documents/Recommendation_Recognition_Qualifications_Refugees_ENGLISH.pdf [last view 18 July 2025].

V.6 is titled «Recognition of certificates in special cases», referencing to recognition of qualifications held by refugees and displaced persons as belonging in the category of «special cases», unlike the other Conventions. Besides, where the other Conventions mention «access to higher education», the ASRC mentions «enrolment in higher education».

The GC (Art. VII), like the LRC, TRC and BARC, clearly refers to the absence of documentary evidence, but further integrates it: the role of this article is much wider than the other Conventions, as it reflects the developments in higher education worldwide. In fact, it can apply not only to traditional qualifications obtained in other countries, but also to **partial studies** (thus confirming the possibility to access higher education to complete studies) and to **prior learning** (thus opening the way to all the alternative pathways that refugees might have taken in their learning paths from non-traditional providers of education, or in formal, non-formal or informal ways of education).

6.6. Transnational education³⁹

Francesco Sanasi

Articles		Key points
Lisbon Recognition Convention		
Art. IV.9	For the purpose of admission to programmes of higher education, each Party may make the recognition of qualifications issued by foreign educational institutions operating in its territory contingent upon specific requirements of national legislation or specific agreements concluded with the Party of origin of such institutions.	Admission to programmes Foreign educational institutions operating in its territory Contingent upon specific requirements [...] or specific agreements
Art. VI.5	Each Party may make the recognition of higher education qualifications issued by foreign educational institutions operating in its territory contingent upon specific requirements of national legislation or specific agreements concluded with the Party of origin of such institutions.	Recognition of higher education qualifications Foreign educational institutions operating in its territory Contingent upon specific requirements [...] or specific agreements

³⁹ For the purpose of this document, only the text of the LRC was considered in the framework of the comparative analysis with the texts of the other regional Conventions. Nevertheless, it has to be specified that the concept of transnational education was addressed in the following 3 subsidiary texts of the LRC, issued in the first 10 years of its life: Council of Europe, UNESCO, *Code of Good Practices in the Provision of Transnational Education*, Strasbourg 2002: https://www.enic-naric.net/Upload/Documents/Code_Good_Practice_Provision_Transnational_Education_2001.pdf [last view 18 July 2025]; Council of Europe, UNESCO, *Explanatory Memorandum to the UNESCO/Council of Europe Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education*, Riga 2001: https://www.enic-naric.net/Upload/Documents/Explanatory_Memorandum_Code_Good_Practice_Provision_Transnational_Education_2001.pdf [last view 18 July 2025]; Council of Europe, UNESCO, *Revised Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education*, 2007: https://www.enic-naric.net/fileusers/REVISED_CODE_OF_GOOD_PRACTICE_TNE.pdf [last view 18 July 2025].

Articles		Key points
Tokyo Recognition Convention		
Art. IV.8	For the purpose of admission to higher education programmes , each Party may make the recognition of qualifications issued by foreign educational institutions operating in its territory contingent upon specific requirements of national legislation or specific agreements concluded with the Party of origin of such institutions.	Admission programmes Foreign educational institutions operating in its territory Contingent upon specific requirements [...] or specific agreements
Art. VI.6	Each Party may make the recognition of qualifications in higher education issued by foreign higher education institutions operating in its territory contingent upon specific requirements of national legislation or specific agreements concluded with the Party of origin of such institutions.	Recognition of higher education qualifications Foreign educational institutions operating in its territory Contingent upon specific requirements [...] or specific agreements
Art. VIII.4	The Parties shall promote, through their national information centres or otherwise, the use of the: (a) "UNESCO Diploma Supplement" or any other comparable qualification supplement; and (b) the UNESCO/OECD Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-border Higher Education and/or any comparable document produced by the Parties' respective higher education institutions, subject to their respective national laws and regulations.	UNESCO/OECD Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-border Higher Education
Addis Recognition Convention		
Buenos Aires Recognition Convention		
Arab States Recognition Convention		
Global Convention		
Art. V.3,6	2. Higher-education qualifications acquired through cross-border education with international joint degrees or through any other joint programme undertaken in more than one country , of which at least one is a State Party to this Convention , shall be assessed according to the rules and regulations of the State Party in which recognition is sought, or of the constituent unit thereof, using the same criteria as those applied to qualifications acquired through programmes undertaken in a single country. 6. Each State Party may make the recognition of higher-education qualifications acquired through cross-border education or through foreign educational institutions operating in its jurisdiction contingent upon specific requirements of the legislation or regulations of the State Party, or of the constituent unit thereof, or upon specific agreements concluded with the State Party of origin of such institutions.	Cross-border education International joint degrees or through any other joint programme undertaken in more than one country, of which at least one is a State Party to this Convention Contingent upon specific requirements [...] or specific agreements

The way transnational education (hereinafter TNE) is addressed in the Conventions clearly reflects the developments that have characterised this concept over the years. In fact, among the first features coming up when analysing the above-cited articles, the terminology used to describe this phenomenon expresses a clear change in the various texts. As mentioned above regarding the LRC, for the purpose of the comparison among the regional and global Conventions only the texts of the Conventions themselves have been analysed. Nevertheless, the definition provided in the Revised Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education (that at the time of the drafting of this document was under revision by the Bureau of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, Council of Europe and UNESCO) is useful in order to define how the concept is addressed in the LRC:

All types and modes of delivery of higher education study programmes, or sets of courses of study, or educational services (including those of distance education) in which the learners are located in a country different from the one where the awarding institution is based. Such programmes may belong to the education system of a State different from the State in which it operates, or may operate independently of any national education system⁴⁰.

The LRC do not identify TNE with a specific term but refers to foreign educational institutions operating in the territory of the State Parties. In this light, these articles remain generic in their definition, describing this phenomenon in a very extensive way. The TRC, being characterised by a very similar text, goes slightly further in setting up a theoretical reference for TNE providing a reference to specific tools and guidelines on this topic: the UNESCO Diploma Supplement and the UNESCO/OECD Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-border Higher Education, besides any further document produced by the Parties (Art. VIII.4).

TNE is not present in all the analysed texts: the BARC and the ASRC do not mention it, whereas the ARC includes it in the section dedicated to the definitions of the various concepts addressed by the Conventions and in its Preamble⁴¹, where clear reference is made to the need to develop quality assurance mechanisms and to improve teaching and learning through (among others) cross-border education. Moreover, the ARC is the first Convention that references to TNE as the just-mentioned «cross-border education», defining it as «higher education that takes place in situations where the teacher, student, programme, institution/provider or course materials cross national jurisdictional borders»⁴². This definition, despite not further developed in the subsequent articles of the Convention, thanks to the general reference provided with the words «cross national jurisdictional borders», is applicable to a wider range of cases.

⁴⁰ Council of Europe, UNESCO, *Revised Code of Good Practice*, op. cit.

⁴¹ The text of the Preamble referencing to cross-border education is as follows: "The Parties to the present Convention, [...] Conscious of the need for quality, and to encourage institutions and national accreditation bodies to develop internal and external quality assurance mechanisms, and to take advantage of the Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to improve teaching and learning through Open and Distance Learning (ODL), Cross-Border Education (CBE), and the use of Open Educational Resources (OERs); [...].

⁴² Addis Ababa Recognition Convention (ARC), Section I: Definitions, Art. 1.

The definition provided by the GC includes transnational education in its text. Moreover, the GC clearly differentiates these concepts from the «foreign educational institutions operating in its jurisdiction», as demonstrated by the GC definition of cross-border education:

All modes of educational delivery which involve the movement of people, knowledge, programmes, providers and curriculum across States Parties' borders, including, but not limited to, quality-assured international joint degree programmes, cross-border higher education, transnational education, offshore education and borderless education.

In line with this definition, Article V.3 includes international joint degrees, or any other joint programme undertaken in more than one country Party to the Convention among the qualifications to be assessed as per the rules of the Party in which recognition is sought. Moreover, the GC is in line with the contingency principle of the LRC and the TRC, but it further develops it, as highlighted in Article V.6, adding the generic term «cross-border education» to the foreign educational institutions operating in the countries signatories to the Convention, so as to include all the different above-mentioned cases.

6.7. Lifelong learning

Elisa Petrucci

Articles		Key points
Lisbon Recognition Convention		
Art. IV.8	In the Parties in which access to higher education may be obtained on the basis of non-traditional qualifications, similar qualifications obtained in other Parties shall be assessed in a similar manner as non-traditional qualifications earned in the Party in which recognition is sought.	Non-traditional qualifications
Art. V.1	Each Party shall recognise periods of study completed within the framework of a higher education programme in another Party. This recognition shall comprise such periods of study towards the completion of a higher education programme in the Party in which recognition is sought, unless substantial differences can be shown between the periods of study completed in another Party and the part of the higher education programme which they would replace in the Party in which recognition is sought.	Periods of study
Tokyo Recognition Convention		
Art. IV.7	Qualifications obtained through non-traditional modes which allow access to higher education in one Party shall be assessed in a fair manner in other Parties.	Non-traditional modes which allow access to higher education

Articles		Key points
Tokyo Recognition Convention		
Art. V.1	Each Party shall recognise, where appropriate, or at least assess partial studies completed within the framework of a higher education programme in another Party. This recognition shall consist of taking such partial studies into account for the purposes of the completion of a higher education programme in the Party in which recognition is sought, unless substantial differences can be shown between the partial studies completed and the part and/or all of the higher education programme in the Party in which recognition is sought.	Partial studies
Addis Recognition Convention		
Art. III.3	Recognition of Partial Studies Each Party agrees to recognize the level of learning outcomes / competences , provided that it corresponds to the equivalent studies of a higher education programme whose recognition is requested.	Level of learning outcomes / competences, provided
Art. III.4	Validation of Acquired Relevant Experience and Prior Learning Parties agree, with a view to promoting adult education and life-long learning , to adopt procedures, criteria and standards that allow the validation of acquired relevant experience and prior learning for access to higher education programmes.	Validation of Acquired Relevant Experience and Prior Learning Adult education and lifelong learning
Buenos Aires Recognition Convention		
Art. III.2,1-2,5	1. For the purpose of the pursuit of studies in higher education, States Parties shall grant recognition of studies, diplomas and degrees obtained in other States Parties, in accordance with current national legislation. This will require that such certificates relate to completed periods of studies or to periods certified under a programme of higher education , and which are expressed in academic credits or the respective units of measurement used in each State Party.	Periods of studies or to periods certified under a programme of higher education
	2. The recognition referred to in the preceding paragraph shall be granted without discrimination with respect to the acquisition of formal or informal learning , or the method of learning, whether traditional or not, including open and distance education , by which the studies were undertaken or the degrees or diplomas obtained, subject to the quality assurance established by the competent authority.	Formal or informal learning, or the method of learning, whether traditional or not, including open and distance education Level of competency or learning outcomes
	5. Each State Party whose national legislation so permits agrees to recognize the level of competency or learning outcomes , if said level corresponds to equivalent studies in a higher-education programme for which recognition is required.	

Articles		Key points
Arab States Recognition Convention		
Art. V.3,1-2	<p>1. Each State Party shall facilitate recognition of an incomplete period of study, in terms of duration or of content, under a programme of higher education in another State Party, on condition that it meets the conditions and qualifications required of a programme of higher education in the State where recognition is sought.</p> <p>2. The States Parties shall facilitate recognition of periods of study in cases where a prior agreement has been concluded between institutions of higher education in two States Parties or where a certificate or report card indicates that the conditions for a particular period of study have been met.</p>	Period of study
Art. V.5	<p>The States Parties undertake to consider the formulation and development of criteria permitting the recognition of knowledge acquired and personal skills of good quality and credibility demonstrated in a professional environment, with a view to continuing studies in higher education, on condition that this is consistent with national legislation.</p>	Recognition of knowledge acquired and personal skills of good quality and credibility demonstrated in a professional environment
Global Convention		
Art. IV.1,3	<p>1. Each State Party shall recognize, for the purposes of access to its higher-education system, the qualifications and documented or certified prior learning acquired in other States Parties which meet the general requirements for access to higher education in those States Parties, unless substantial differences can be shown between the general requirements for access in the State Party in which the qualification was obtained and those in the State Party in which recognition of the qualification is sought. Alternatively, it shall be sufficient for a State Party to enable the holder of a qualification issued in another State Party to obtain an assessment of that qualification.</p> <p>3. Where a qualification gives access only to specific types of institutions or programmes of higher education in the State Party in which the qualification was obtained, each State Party shall grant holders of such qualifications access to similar specific types of institutions or programmes belonging to its higher-education system, if available, unless substantial differences can be shown.</p>	Certified prior learning
Art. V.2	<p>Higher-education qualifications acquired through recognized non-traditional learning modes which are subject to comparable quality assurance mechanisms and which are considered a part of the higher-education system of a State Party will be assessed according to the rules and regulations of the State Party in which recognition is sought, or of the constituent unit thereof, using the same criteria as those applied to similar qualifications acquired through traditional learning modes.</p>	Non-traditional learning modes which are subject to comparable quality assurance mechanisms

Articles	Key points
Global Convention	
<p>Art. VI.1-2</p> <p>1. Each State Party may recognize, for the purpose of the completion of a higher-education programme or the continuation of higher education studies, where appropriate, and taking into account the legislation of the States Parties regarding access, documented or certified partial studies or documented or certified prior learning acquired in another State Party, unless substantial differences can be shown between the partial studies or prior learning and the part of the higher-education programme they or it would replace in the State Party in which recognition is sought. Alternatively, it shall be sufficient for a State Party to enable an individual who has undertaken documented or certified partial studies or documented or certified prior learning in another State Party to obtain an assessment of these partial studies or this prior learning, upon the request of the individual concerned.</p> <p>2. Documented or certified partial completion of higher-education programmes delivered by recognized non-traditional learning modes which are subject to comparable quality assurance mechanisms and which are considered a part of the higher-education system of a State Party shall be assessed according to the rules and regulations of the State Party, or of the constituent unit thereof, using the same criteria as those applied to partial studies delivered by traditional learning modes.</p>	<p>Partial studies and prior learning</p> <p>Documented or certified partial studies or documented or certified prior learning</p> <p>Certified partial completion of higher-education programmes delivered by recognized non-traditional learning modes</p>

Even though lifelong learning is not specifically addressed by all the Conventions, each of them has different concepts and principles enshrined within their articles through which it is actually present in all texts. The LRC, the oldest of the analysed Conventions, can be considered to address this concept by using the expressions «non-traditional qualifications» and «periods of study».

The LRC states that non-traditional qualifications in one Party should be assessed in a similar manner as non-traditional qualifications earned in the Party in which recognition is sought (Art. IV.8)⁴³. The definition of period of study in the LRC is as follows: «any component of a higher education programme which has been evaluated and documented and, while not a complete programme of study in itself, represents a significant acquisition of knowledge or skill».

In particular, Article V.1 states the possibility of recognition of periods of study, which can be also a way towards lifelong learning for the prosecution of studies at any point in life, especially considering the specific reference to «knowledge or skill» obtained within these periods of study, which also further contributes to the focus on the outcome of the study path rather than on the qualification.

⁴³ This article is further clarified in the Explanatory Report of the LRC: «The term "non-traditional qualifications" is taken to mean qualifications other than secondary school leaving qualifications traditionally accepted as a basis for access to higher education [...], such as a specified work or life experience. Non-traditional qualifications may give general access to higher education or access only to specific types of higher education».

Similarly to the LRC, the TRC, clearly asserts, in Article IV.7, that qualifications obtained through non-traditional learning modes (defined as learning modes referring to «qualifications obtained through alternative delivery mechanisms») allowing access to higher education in one Party should be assessed in a fair manner also in other Parties. The TRC and the LRC are aligned also with regards to the second point, except for the already-mentioned difference in terminology: recognition of partial studies in substitution of recognition of periods of study.

Partial studies are also addressed in the ARC, which is particularly detailed regarding the object of this recognition. In fact, the ARC refers to recognition of the level of learning outcomes/competences that should be recognised if equivalent to the studies carried out in a higher education programme in the State Parties. This article (Art. III.3) is very innovative, as it explicitly considers not the actual qualification, but the competences acquired. The text is also quite open with reference to this acquisition: it does not specify whether these learning outcomes or competences shall be acquired in a higher education programme or in non-traditional modes or, for example, in professional contexts, thus opening the way to a much wider range of possibilities. Moreover, the ARC is the first Convention dedicating a specific article to lifelong learning: Article III.4 is titled «Validation of Acquired Relevant Experience and Prior Learning», and it specifically mentions lifelong learning in connection with recognition of prior learning. The innovation represented by the ARC also relates to the fact that it explicitly cites adult education and the validation of relevant experience and prior learning for the purpose of the access to higher education.

The concept is further developed in the BARC, which not only contains, as the other Conventions, the reference to recognition of periods of study or periods certified under a programme of higher education, but also addresses lifelong learning by referring to formal, non-formal, informal learning and learning outcomes. The BARC specifies that recognition for the purpose of pursuing studies in higher education should be granted without discrimination for the acquisition of formal or informal learning, or for the method of learning, whether traditional or not, including open and distance education (Art. III.2,1). This is further complemented by the following paragraph, expressing, similarly to the ARC, the agreement of the Parties to recognise the level of competency and learning outcomes corresponding to the higher education programmes for which recognition is required.

The ASRC, as the above-mentioned Conventions, can also be considered to develop the concept of lifelong learning with reference to periods of study. In fact, Art. V.3 specifies that State Parties shall facilitate recognition of periods of study, also in such cases as when there are certificates indicating that the conditions for a particular period of study have been met. Moreover, the ASRC further addresses this concept through another nuance, by using the words «knowledge acquired and personal skills». This concept is present in Article V.5, titled «Recognition of knowledge gained and personal experience». It has to be stressed that also the ASRC is quite innovative in this regard. In fact, it specifically refers to those knowledge and skills demonstrated in a professional environment, that could be recognised for the purpose of continuing studies in higher education.

Lastly, the GC dedicates much space in Articles IV and V for these concepts, stating that recognition of certified prior learning should be carried out for the purpose of access and continuation of higher education studies, unless substantial differences can be shown⁴⁴. This is complemented in paragraph 2 of Article V, in which Parties agree that higher education qualifications obtained through non-traditional learning modes and subject to comparable quality assurance mechanisms among the Parties should be recognised according to the same criteria as those applied to similar qualifications obtained in another Party acquired through traditional learning modes. Furthermore, Article VI is specifically dedicated to recognition of prior learning and partial studies. The Convention applies the same categories of completed studies (Art. IV and V) and highlights the role of quality assurance and the possible presence of substantial differences. Art. VI further develops the concept of lifelong learning by stating that State Parties may recognise certified or documented partial studies or prior learning for the purpose of completion of higher education programmes or higher education studies, by also addressing the case of documented or certified partial completion of higher-education programmes delivered by recognised non-traditional learning modes. Therefore, the GC opens to new types of qualifications (such as micro-credentials) that can be used for the recognition of prior learning and that could also cover the wide range and typologies of qualifications coming from the various geographical contexts represented in the Convention.

⁴⁴ For the comparison of the concept of substantial differences in the various Conventions, see pages 51-56 of this document.

6.8. Countering education fraud

Luca Lantero

Articles		Key points
Lisbon Recognition Convention		
Tokyo Recognition Convention		
Addis Recognition Convention		
Art. IV.2,3	Parties commit to adopt measures to eradicate all forms of fraudulent practices regarding higher education qualifications.	Eradicate all forms of fraudulent practices
Buenos Aires Recognition Convention		
Arab States Recognition Convention		
Global Convention		
Art. III.8	States Parties commit to adopting measures to eradicate all forms of fraudulent practices regarding higher education qualifications by encouraging the use of contemporary technologies and networking activities among States Parties.	Eradicate all forms of fraudulent practices Contemporary technologies and networking

Only two of the six analysed Conventions address the topic of education fraud: the ARC and the GC. The first one clearly addresses this topic in Art. IV.2, by highlighting the commitment of State Parties in striving to eradicate all forms of fraudulent practices regarding higher education. The second also connects to technology and networks. In fact, Art III.8 of the GC affirms, similarly to the ARC, that Parties commit to eradicate all forms of fraudulent practices in higher education, but it goes further by specifying that this is to be done by the use of new technologies, and also by valuing the importance of networking among Parties in this field.

Despite the fact that the other Conventions do not explicitly mention education fraud, the concept is implicit in the principles of fair recognition and transparency of information, as the quality of institutions and qualifications awarded is mentioned among the elements to be considered before granting recognition and is also at the base of such activities as verification of authenticity of qualifications which is fundamental for the purpose of these two articles.

CHAPTER 7

Final remarks

Chiara Finocchietti



This study aims to contribute to the discussion on how key recognition principles and concepts have evolved and are shaped within the different regional and in the global recognition Conventions. Starting with the main areas covered in the LRC, it compares it with the regional and global recognition Conventions, identifying similarities and differences, and offering an overview on how the discourse on recognition of qualifications has evolved at international level across almost 30 years, as captured in the text of international Conventions on recognition. By doing so, the study would offer a perspective on the ongoing debate on interregional and global dialogue on recognition, stimulating new research and potentially encouraging cooperation initiatives.

As the first of the second-generation Conventions and the result of joint efforts by the Council of Europe and UNESCO, as well as a synthesis of the work carried out by the ENIC and NARIC Networks, the LRC is primarily a text of principles. This is evident in the right to fair recognition, which is a transformative principle *per se* and also represents the basis for guaranteeing the fair assessment of qualifications held by refugees even in case of missing or absent documentation, as stated in all the recognition Conventions in accordance with Article VII. Conversely, the principle of fairness can be considered the basis for countering fraud when documentation and qualifications are available but are fraudulent and therefore do not certify competences. One initial consideration that emerges from this study is

that the LRC formalises basic recognition principles that are recalled and elaborated upon in the other Conventions, of course influenced by geographical differences and experiences developed in the field over the years.

Further considerations can be made regarding principles that are defined in a general way in the LRC, such as in the case of TNE, which is not explicitly referred to by this term or defined with specific terminology, but is described as “foreign educational institutions operating within the territory of the State Parties”. In this case, the LRC broadly identifies a concept that will later be explicitly defined as transnational education in subsequent regional recognition Conventions, eventually leading to the Global Convention, which adopts the term “cross-border education”, within which TNE is included as one of the modes of implementation. The different Conventions capture the evolution of recognition principles, and crystallises the level of consensus on a certain topic, providing ground for further elaboration. In this sense, it would be interesting to explore practices of implementation, such as with monitoring exercise in the case of the LRC, that shows how general principles are translated into concrete daily practice.

Finally, the recognition Conventions reflect the shift in the assessment of qualifications from an input-based approach (i.e. workload and contents) to an output-based approach (i.e. knowledge and skills). This shift is represented by the centrality of the learning outcomes and reflected in a change in the understanding of what constitutes a substantial difference in the assessment of a foreign qualification. In other words, differences in workload or transcript do not constitute high-risk factors in identifying substantial differences if the attention is focused on the competences, skills and responsibilities acquired by individuals during their learning paths. More broadly, the shift towards learning outcomes has effects on the concept of qualification itself, which seems to evolve from degrees that document academic achievements of students to credentials that certify competences and skills acquired by the holder. This evolution is well captured in the GC which explicitly includes certifications and awards attesting the completion of prior learning within the concept of qualification, and more in general different forms of learning.

The final consideration is related to what could be framed as the social impact of recognition. In all the Conventions’ texts, there is reference, while in different forms, to why recognition is important for individuals and for society at large. This concept, that in the LRC is seen in the perspective of the right to fair recognition as a part of the broader right to education, resonates in all Conventions, with different nuances. This would be, together with other aspects highlighted in this text, another relevant dimension to be further explored and studied, to keep recognition Conventions relevant and consistent for societies and individuals.

ANNEX

Global and Regional Conventions: chronological developments



- 11/12/1953
Europe
CoE Convention
European Convention on the Equivalence of Diplomas leading to Admission to Universities **adopted**
- 20/04/1954
Europe
CoE Convention
European Convention on the Equivalence of Diplomas leading to Admission to Universities **entered into force**
- 15/12/1956
Europe
CoE Convention
European Convention on the Equivalence of Periods of University Study **adopted**
- 18/09/1957
Europe
CoE Convention
European Convention on the Equivalence of Periods of University Study **entered into force**
- 14/12/1959
Europe
CoE Convention
European Convention on the Academic Recognition of University Qualifications **adopted**
- 27/11/1961
Europe
CoE Convention
European Convention on the Academic Recognition of University Qualifications **entered into force**

● 17/07/1974

Latin America and Caribbean

UNESCO First generation convention

Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean **adopted**

● 14/06/1975

Latin America and Caribbean

UNESCO First generation convention

Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean **entered into force**

● 17/12/1976

Mediterranean

UNESCO First generation convention

International Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in the Arab and European States bordering on the Mediterranean **adopted**

● 06/03/1978

Mediterranean

UNESCO First generation convention

International Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in the Arab and European States bordering on the Mediterranean **entered into force**

● 22/12/1978

Arab States

UNESCO First generation convention

Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in the Arab States **entered into force**

● 07/08/1981

Arab States

UNESCO First generation convention

Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in the Arab States **adopted**

● 21/12/1979

Europe

UNESCO First generation convention

Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees concerning Higher Education in the States belonging to the Europe Region **adopted**

● 05/12/1981

Africa

UNESCO First generation convention

Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Certificates, Diplomas, Degrees and other Academic Qualifications in Higher Education in the African States **adopted**

● 19/02/1982

Europe

UNESCO First generation convention

Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees concerning Higher Education in the States belonging to the Europe Region **entered into force**

● 01/01/1983

Africa

UNESCO First generation convention

Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Certificates, Diplomas, Degrees and other Academic Qualifications in Higher Education in the African States **entered into force**

● 16/12/1983

Asia-Pacific

UNESCO First generation convention

Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas, and Degrees in Higher Education in Asia and the Pacific **adopted**

● 23/10/1985

Asia-Pacific

UNESCO First generation convention

Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas, and Degrees in Higher Education in Asia and the Pacific **entered into force**

● 06/11/1990

Europe

UNESCO First generation convention

European Convention on the General Equivalence of Periods of University Study **adopted**

● 01/01/1991

Europe

UNESCO First generation convention

European Convention on the General Equivalence of Periods of University Study **entered into force**

● 11/04/1997

Europe

UNESCO Second generation convention

Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region ("Lisbon Convention") **adopted**

● 01/02/1999

Europe

UNESCO Second generation convention

Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region ("Lisbon Convention") **entered into force**

● 26/11/2011

Asia-Pacific

UNESCO Second generation convention

Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education ("Tokyo Convention") **adopted**

● 12/12/2014

Africa

UNESCO Second generation convention

Revised Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Certificated, Diplomas, Degrees and Other Academic Qualifications in Higher Education in African States ("Addis Convention") **adopted**

● 01/02/2018

Asia-Pacific

UNESCO Second generation convention

Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education ("Tokyo Convention") **entered into force**

● 13/07/2019

Latin America and Caribbean

UNESCO Second generation convention

Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education ("Buenos Aires Convention") **adopted**

● 25/11/2019

Global

UNESCO Global convention

Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education **adopted**

● 15/12/2019

Africa

UNESCO Second generation convention

Revised Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Certificated, Diplomas, Degrees and Other Academic Qualifications in Higher Education in African States ("Addis Convention") **entered into force**

● 02/02/2022

Arab States

UNESCO Second generation convention

Revised Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in the Arab States

● 23/10/2022

Latin America and Caribbean

UNESCO Second generation convention

Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education ("Buenos Aires Convention") **entered into force**

● 05/03/2023

Global

UNESCO Global convention

Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education **entered into force**

Brief biographies of editors and authors



Chiara Finocchietti is Director of CIMEA–NARIC Italia. A geographer, she comes from the world of research, is an expert in the field of recognition of qualifications and higher education systems, and is the author of various publications on the subject of credential evaluation, internationalisation of higher education, ethics in education, recognition of refugees' qualifications, micro-credentials, transnational education, digitalisation and artificial intelligence. She is a member of various international groups on higher education policies and practices, and is currently co-chair of the EHEA Thematic Peer Group on the Lisbon Recognition Convention and President of the ENIC Network.

Emanuela Gitto's research interests focus on the topics linked to recognition of qualifications, Lisbon Recognition Convention and its implementation, with contributions in research papers and publications on transnational education, fraud in education, artificial intelligence. Gitto currently is the Deputy Head of International Cooperation and Policy Development Department at CIMEA, the Italian ENIC-NARIC. She has worked on projects supporting the implementation of the Bologna Process priorities in the EHEA, as well as on NARIC projects to support the implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention and automatic recognition. She is also part of the Research and Training Unit active within the International Cooperation and Development Department of CIMEA, thus working on different research projects and publications in the field of international cooperation on recognition of qualifications and higher education.

Luca Lantero is the Director General of CIMEA, the Italian Information Center for Academic Mobility and Equivalence. He is one of the main experts at Italian and international level on higher education systems, on bogus diplomas and accreditation mills, transnational education, accreditation, and the digitalization of processes applied to recognition, particularly with the advent of blockchain and AI. From 2018 to 2020 he was the Head of the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG) Secretariat of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). He is currently President of the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee and Head of the ASEM Education Secretariat. In 2022, Luca was elected a member of the Bureau of the Ethics, Transparency, and Integrity (ETINED) platform of the Council of Europe. In 2024, he was appointed Associate Professor of the European Law & Governance School (ELGS) and Director of the Institute for Higher Education Law and Governance (IHELGO) housed by the European Public Law Organization (EPLO). He is the Director of the Centre for preventing and countering fraud in education and one of the expert participating in the Recognition and AI Working Group, both initiatives established by the Council of Europe. His scientific output is extensive and he participates in national and international research projects and programmes in the field of higher education studies. He is currently the Editor-in-Chief of Rivista Universitas.

Elisa Petrucci's research interests focus on lifelong learning, and especially on design, issue and recognition of micro-credentials, information provision in line with the Lisbon Recognition Convention. She is also expert in project management and participatory methods. She is currently carrying out her PhD focused on lifelong learning in the era of micro-credentials at the European law and governance school, an International University School by EPLO. Petrucci is Head of the International Cooperation and Policy Development Department at CIMEA and coordinates the Research and Training Unit active within the Department, thus leading different research projects and publications in the field of international cooperation on recognition of qualifications and higher education. She currently serves as the Co-Chair of the Coordination Group on Global Policy Dialogue for the BFUG mandate 2024–2027.

Francesco Sanasi has an academic background in languages and politics of East Asia carried out in Italy and in the People's Republic of China and background studies in geopolitics and international security focusing on the Indo-Pacific region. He is involved in studies and research activities on the impact of Artificial Intelligence in recognition, on the international conventions on recognition and on the new developments in the field of higher education and recognition. Francesco Sanasi is a Senior Policy Officer in CIMEA's International Cooperation and Policy Development Department and part of its Research and Training Unit, thus working on different research projects and publications in the field of international cooperation on recognition of qualifications and higher education. He is member of the ASEM Education expert group on digitalisation and artificial intelligence.

