

Exploring Remits

ENIC-NARICS and recognition of study periods in upper secondary education

April 2025

Nuffic
meet the world



Table of contents

Executive Summary	3
1 Introduction	5
2 Methodology	6
3 General observations	8
4 Main findings	11
5 ENIC-NARICs and the LRC	28
6 Conclusions and Recommendations	30
7 About the AR25 project	32
Annex 1 - Mapping questions	33



**Co-funded by
the European Union**

EU Disclaimer:

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.



Executive Summary

In November 2018, the Council Recommendation called for the automatic mutual recognition of upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad among its member states.

However, in contrast to recognition of study periods in tertiary higher education, recognition of learning periods in upper secondary education is an area where there is little transparency and harmonisation. Each education system has its own set of rules and guidelines, often leaving it up to the individual secondary education institution to handle.

In order to support the ambitions of the Council Recommendation, the AR25 project aimed to explore under the Erasmus+ NARIC call, how recognition of study periods in upper secondary education can be supported and secondly, what the role of the ENIC-NARIC centres could be in this context (if any).

To achieve this, the project first identified how the (mutual) recognition of learning periods in upper secondary education is currently organised in the following countries represented in the consortium: The Netherlands, France, Italy, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Sweden and Ukraine.

The project focussed on mapping the recognition of study periods in upper secondary education followed abroad. For this purpose, a division was made between two types of modalities: pre-agreed, structured mobility (exchange programmes), and unstructured mobility (such as immigration). The mapping centred on the identification of all the actors engaged in the recognition process, communication strategies, and the existing good practices and existing frameworks.

The mapping resulted in an analysis of the current recognition infrastructure of study periods, including its obstacles and good practices. Based on the findings and the discussions within the project team, the following elements were highlighted regarding the possible application of the Lisbon Recognition Convention and the role of the ENIC-NARIC centres:

1. Article V of the LRC - Recognition of periods of study- applies to recognition of study periods abroad and should be used as a departing point for the development of clear guidelines for upper secondary education;
2. Structured mobility could be pre-arranged in a way that facilitates automatic recognition of the learning periods followed abroad;



3. The essence of the LRC “recognise unless there is a substantial difference”, and in that spirit support the student to succeed, should be considered when reflecting on solutions to improve the situation of structured and unstructured mobility. This foundational principle should also inform attempts to improve the governance of mobility and recognition in upper secondary education. Additionally, other articles of the LRC, such as the right to appeal may also apply here;
4. ENIC-NARIC centres have a lot of information on qualifications in upper secondary education and could disclose this information to those dealing with recognition in upper secondary education, e.g. regarding decisions made by a headmaster. Realistically, ENIC-NARICs cannot be involved in recognition decisions on a case-by-case level. Instead, the focus should be on enhancing transparency and information sharing on matters such as school level, recognition, grade conversion and examination systems;
5. With regard to unstructured mobility, the mapping has shown a variety of national frameworks, legislation, or ministerial guidance. Transparency of responsibilities in the national context is key and the ENIC-NARIC centres could offer this transparency, in line with the LRC;
6. ENIC-NARICs could engage in developing communication strategies to improve their information provision towards schools, within the scope of their national role and remit;
7. Review the ENIC-NARIC and centres’ websites to, improve visibility for schools and offer services such as hotlines for inquiries on the subject.

This report was prepared in the framework of the AR25 project by the following ENIC-NARICs: The Netherlands (Nuffic, coordinator), France, Italy, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Sweden and Ukraine.



1 Introduction

1.1 Context

The AR25 project responds to the 2018 Council Recommendation calling for the (automatic) recognition of learning periods abroad in upper secondary education:

“Make substantial progress towards the automatic mutual recognition for the purpose of further learning, so that... the outcomes from a learning period of up to one year abroad in another Member State during upper secondary education and training are recognised in any other, with the learner not being required to repeat the programme year or achieved learning outcomes in the country of origin, provided that the learning outcomes are broadly in line with the national curricula in the country of origin”. [Council Recommendation on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad: [Council Recommendation of 26 November 2018 on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad \(europa.eu\)](#)]

However, contrary to the recognition of study periods in tertiary higher education, recognition of learning periods in upper secondary education is an area where there is little

transparency and harmonisation. Each education system has its own set of rules and guidelines, often leaving it up to the individual secondary education institution to handle.

1.2 Goal

The objective of the AR25 project, therefore, is to follow up on the call of the Council Recommendation and explore the recognition of learning periods in upper secondary education for the first time systematically within the ENIC-NARIC Networks. Specifically, the project focussed on answering the following two questions:

1. How can the Council Recommendation of 2018’s ambition of automatic mutual recognition of learning periods in upper secondary education be supported? What good practices can be identified?
2. What could be the role of ENIC-NARICs?

This report contains the results of a mapping exercise in the ENIC-NARIC Networks and its analysis, as well as recommendations. It is intended for all ENIC-NARIC centres and any other recognition specialists and policy makers in upper secondary education.



2 Methodology

Given the aforementioned goals and specific context of the recognition of learning periods in upper secondary education, the following methodology was selected:

- Map the national arrangements for recognition in upper secondary education;
- Conduct an analysis based on the mapping;
- Produce a report highlighting the main findings from the mapping and analysis.

This will be further elaborated on in the next paragraphs, after elaboration on the scope of “upper secondary education”.

2.1 Scope

While upper secondary education can be offered both by vocational education training (VET) and secondary education providers, the scope of “upper secondary education” in this project is limited to education providers preparing for access to higher education.

The rationale for this was to bring the scope of the mapping in line with the intention of the 2018 Council Recommendation. Additionally, a practical consideration was that study periods in VET have unique characteristics that would significantly widen the scope of the mapping. Since this concerns an exploratory mapping for which no previous research has been conducted,

the description in the Council Recommendation was taken as a premise for the mapping exercise. Nevertheless, the project team acknowledges the synergies, which could be further explored in the future, especially in light of the recently launched Union of Skills.

2.2 Map national arrangements

There is limited information available on European level regarding how different European countries handle recognition of learning periods in upper secondary education. Therefore, the AR25 project first aimed to create a better understanding of the situation by mapping the national arrangements for recognizing learning periods in upper secondary education across a set of countries.

The mapping consisted of two parts, which together formed the basis of the analysis. The analysis focussed on answering the two main questions of this project:

Part 1: Desk Research and Initial Mapping

This phase involved desk research, including a review of the work done by the “Expert Network on Recognition of outcomes of learning periods abroad in general secondary education”,



notably their analysis¹ of national recognition procedures and recommendations for improvement.

This formed the basis of an initial brainstorm by the project team about the differences between recognition in higher education and upper secondary education, the organisation of higher and upper secondary education in the selected countries and definitions for upper secondary education and mobility (see Chapter 2. General Observations).

Based on these findings, the project team designed a template that each ENIC-NARIC of the project team used to conduct a detailed mapping of the national situation (see Annex 1). This resulted in a concise yet comprehensive description of how the recognition of upper secondary education is organised de facto and/or de jure in each country. Additionally, the project team members made flowcharts that illustrate how their countries structured the recognition of foreign learning periods in upper secondary education. In other words providing an overview of the student journey in the recognition process. These flowcharts reflect the main steps of the learners journey to have their learning experience recognised.

The project team represented a diversity of centres in terms of e.g. size, mandate, embeddedness and legal systems and can therefore be considered as a representative sample for a first exploration of the two main questions.

Part 2: Summarise the Mapping

Based on the initial mapping that the project team created, each description was accompanied by a flowchart summarizing the description and providing an overview of the student journey in the recognition process.

2.3 Conduct analysis

In preparation of the analysis, the partners reflected upon the following questions:

- Looking at your countries' recognition infrastructure for learning periods in upper secondary education, what is working well (good practice), and where is support needed?
- Reviewing all mappings from all countries in this WP, what constitutes "good practice" in recognition when it comes to upper secondary education? What do you consider to be the major challenges?
- To what extent are the principles of the LRC applicable?
- Which of the LRC principles and good practices could support recognition in upper secondary education?

¹ Expert Network on Recognition of outcomes of learning periods abroad in general secondary education, "Member state analysis" (2021). Link: <https://school-education.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-02/RLPA-member-states-analysis2.pdf>



3 General observations

The following segment contains a selection of general observations made by the project team regarding the role of ENIC-NARICs, the differences between learning periods in upper secondary and higher education, the context of mobility and overall scope. These observations were made during the desk research phase and were used to inform the approach and methodology.

Role ENIC-NARICs in exploring recognition in upper secondary education

In line with the LRC, the current role of ENIC-NARIC centres is primarily to serve the recognition of foreign qualifications and periods of study in higher education for the purpose of academic mobility (access to higher education and/or the labour market). This includes “access qualifications”² from upper secondary education since they provide access to higher education and as such serve academic mobility. Yet, recognition of study periods in upper secondary education is mostly beyond the scope of the Lisbon Recognition Convention and therefore also the work of

the ENIC-NARIC Networks. At the same time, both the principles of the LRC as well as the general role of the ENIC-NARIC networks to inform about the national education system, may inspire further support for the recognition of study periods in upper secondary education.

² An access qualification is a qualification that gives access to higher education in the country of origin. Therefore, when dealing with the recognition of a foreign qualification providing access, the first step is to check if the access qualification gives access to specific types of higher education institutions or programmes in the country of origin. If so, access to comparable institutions or programmes in the country recognition is sought should be granted, unless there is a substantial difference (source: EAR-HEI manual).





About the LRC and ENIC-NARIC Networks

The Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC, 1997) is a joint UNESCO/Council of Europe treaty, setting the principles for recognition of foreign qualifications in higher education. Being the first of the modern UNESCO treaties on recognition, it has been highly successful over the past decades supporting fair recognition. Widely considered to contribute to its success are its principles that are fit for practice, the operational structure of the ENIC-NARIC Networks and the adoption in policy frameworks such as the European Higher Education Area. The ENIC-NARIC Networks are the national information centres on academic recognition. They were founded in 1994 and 1984 respectively, yet building on earlier cooperation mechanisms connected to older treaties. One of the core tasks of the ENIC-NARIC centre is to provide information about the own education system for the purpose of academic mobility. The ENIC-NARIC centres closely work together to find joint solutions to joint recognition obstacles and over decades developed a substantial evidence base for recognition of all types of learning. While mostly known for recognition of full qualifications, the recognition of study periods is part of the LRC. In fact, the founding of the NARIC Network (1984) has strong roots in the Erasmus exchange programme of the current European Commission.

Differences in curricula, language and grading

When exploring recognition of learning periods in upper secondary education, it is important to keep in mind that there are fundamental differences with higher education. This also impacts the extent to which recognition instruments developed within higher education are applicable.

While it is common practice to accept the level of the access qualification to higher education, the routes towards achieving the qualification are very diverse between and even within national education systems. This impacts the recognition of study periods. To exemplify the wealth of differences between national curricula, we note that subjects are taught at different levels, and in different years, and often follow a carefully planned path to achieve the final learning outcomes. Here it should be noted that the Council Recommendation asks for automatic recognition “provided that the learning outcomes are broadly in line with the national curricula in the country of origin”.



Mobility and its modalities

The project team considers it essential that guidance about the recognition of study periods is based on a solid understanding of the modalities of mobility in upper secondary education.

The project team identified two types of modalities:

1. **“Structured mobility”**: This is pre-agreed, structured mobility organised in the context of exchange programmes. For example, a pupil from country x goes on a pre-arranged exchange to country y for a while, and then returns to country x. This can be organised by schools (e.g. through Erasmus+, direct exchanges), or organised by private organisations (e.g. non-profits or for-profits, some involving the sending school in preparing the exchange and recognising its outcomes and others leaving it completely up to the learner).
2. **“Unstructured mobility”**: a pupil moves from country x to country y not taking part in such an exchange scheme, which for example is the case with migration. In this case, it may be that the pupil does not return to country x or has no immediate plans to return (or the situation does not allow to plan for a return (i.e. extended time, plans unknown). It should be noted that this type of mobility is not addressed in the Council Recommendation, however, it is highly relevant for the students and their families, as well as for ENIC-NARICs, and may pose an even bigger challenge for fair recognition.

Furthermore, in addition to physical mobility between countries and education systems, mobility between education systems also occurs within the boundaries of the same country/ city. This is for example the case when a student transfers from a national school to an international one (e.g. offering International Baccalaureate programme) or vice versa. In this case, recognition of study periods may also be needed. This type of mobility could be considered a type of unstructured mobility.



4 Main findings

This chapter presents the main findings of the analysis of the national mappings. They are selected based on their relevance with regard to the Council Recommendation and the role of ENIC-NARICs in its implementation.

4.1 National frameworks and guidance

The project aimed to create transparency in the existing frameworks that regulate the recognition of study periods in upper secondary education. Examples of legislation, guiding policy and other frameworks are included in this paragraph.

4.1.1 Legislation

Legislation on the recognition of study periods in upper education was identified as an element of importance since a legal framework determines practices. The mapping showed that the legal frameworks governing the recognition of study periods in upper secondary education vary across countries. Some countries have established laws and regulations, while others rely on decentralised decision-making at the school level.

Example 1: Italy

In Italy, the recognition of study periods in upper secondary education and permanent mobility is regulated by the Nota MIUR 10 aprile 2013, “Guidelines on Individual International Student Mobility” (“Linee di indirizzo sulla mobilità studentesca internazionale individuale”). This includes the rules and guidelines for the recognition of the informal and formal learning periods abroad of the national students, the role of class councils and the responsibility they have in the recognition process of the mobility experiences, the activities and skills that must be recognised after an exchange and the regulatory framework for class councils to deliberate the placement and the admission of foreign students in their institutions are all included in this legislation.

Example 2: Poland

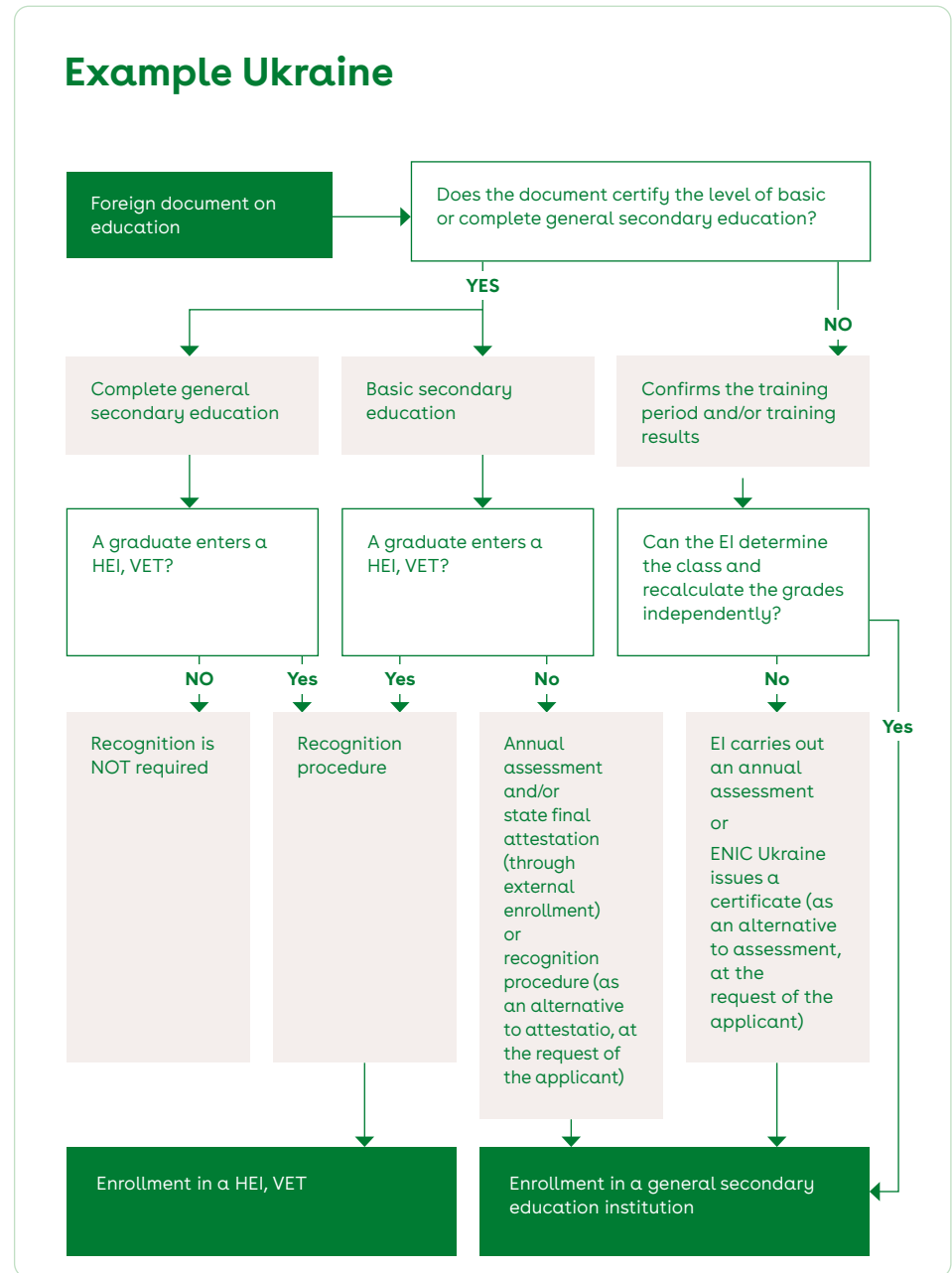
In Poland, rules for recognition of secondary education and permanent mobility, as well as the admission of incoming students from abroad are established by three major legislative documents: the Act of 14 December 2016 - Education Law (Ustawa Prawo oświatowe); the School Education Act of 7 September 1991 (Ustawa o systemie oświaty) and the “Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 23 August 2017 on the education of persons who are not Polish citizens and persons who are Polish citizens who have received education in schools operating in the educational systems of other countries” (“Rozporządzenie Ministra Edukacji Narodowej z dnia 23 sierpnia

2017 r. w sprawie kształcenia osób niebędących obywatelami polskimi oraz osób będących obywatelami polskimi, które pobierały naukę w szkołach funkcjonujących w systemach oświaty innych państw”).

Example 3: Ukraine

While Ukraine has no legislation in place, currently there are so-called methodological recommendations for education institutions (EI) regarding student assessment, crediting the results of studies, and the enrolment in education institutions under martial law conditions. These were approved by the Order of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine in 2023.

Illustration recognition of learning periods in upper secondary education in Ukraine





Example 4: France

In France there is no overarching national legal framework for recognition of study periods in upper secondary education. However, Decree No. 2022-1129 (2022) and related ministerial orders govern recognition of study periods under structured mobility programs such as Erasmus+ and the French-German Mobility Program. Practices to support recognition are study contracts, mobility reports, and oral evaluations.

4.1.2 Guidance and information provision

Across the mapped countries, there is no single “national contact point” for the recognition of study periods in upper secondary education. Generally, information sources are distributed among various institutions and organisations involved in the recognition of study periods in upper secondary education; schools, municipal education departments, educational inspectorates and ministries.

Similarly, the responsibility for handling inquiries related to the recognition of study periods in upper secondary education reflects how recognition is organised. In some cases, national ministries or specialised agencies respond, while in others responses are handled at the school level or through decentralised bodies.

In the analysis it was found that various types of guidance are provided, depending on how the recognition of upper secondary

education is arranged for in the national context. Sometimes guidance is provided for specific groups (i.e. refugees).

Furthermore, the analysis found that ENIC-NARIC centres in several countries receive inquiries related to study periods in upper secondary education. However, the volume and nature of these inquiries are not always systematically recorded, resulting in a lack of structured data collection on the topic.

Example 1: Ukraine

Recognition inquiries are handled by individual secondary education institutions, which operate autonomously in assessing and recognizing study periods. ENIC Ukraine provides consultations, particularly regarding the recognition of final qualifications and grade conversions.

Example 2: Lithuania

The Ministry of Education, Science and Sport provides general information, while each municipality has an education department that can be contacted for advice on enrolment of a child returning back from abroad.

Starting from 2019, there is a network of educational institutions of various levels (from pre-primary to secondary education), coordinated by “Vilnius Lithuanian House”, which includes institutions which self-identify as those where foreigners,



including Ukrainians, would be more readily accepted and better integrated.

The main aim of the network is to share practical experience on how to ensure the holistic (educational, social and emotional) integration process of those returning children at school, and to help other Lithuanian schools to educate such children. Vilnius Lithuanian House offers methodological support and guidance in various formats, including topical seminars and direct consultations by email. As of data of the beginning of 2024, such a network included 97 institutions throughout the country.

Example 4: Netherlands

ENIC-NARIC Netherlands receives a relatively low number of inquiries for credential evaluation from secondary education institutions and provides information, but does not process formal recognition cases since this is done at school level.

Example 5: Sweden

In Sweden, no specific national authority is appointed to manage inquiries, leaving decisions to individual schools. The Swedish ENIC-NARIC centre does receive daily inquiries on study periods, with most questions relating to unstructured mobility cases, particularly unfinished upper secondary education abroad.

4.2 Structured mobility

The term structured mobility was defined by the project team as the pre-arranged exchanges of pupils (pupil country x goes on a pre-arranged exchange to country y for a while, and then returns to country x). These are usually exchanges organised by external providers, through bilateral agreements or through international cooperation programs, such as [Erasmus+](#) or [Nordplus](#).





Erasmus+ and other learning agreements

In the mapping, some partners noted the possibilities for structured mobility through broader cooperation programs, such as the Erasmus+ or Nordplus programs, or through bilateral agreements and external providers.

The Erasmus+ program is a good example of structured mobility in various stages of education, and includes individual as well as group mobility. Imperative to an Erasmus+ exchange, as well as to most other types of structured mobility (e.g. Norway's situation under 'Recognition'), is a learning agreement or other type of pre-agreed learning approval. In terms of the Erasmus+, this agreement sets out the programme of the studies that will be followed and should ensure "that students receive recognition for the activities successfully completed abroad." ([Learning Agreements - Erasmus+](#))

However, whether the study results of the exchange during upper secondary education are (fully) recognised, depends on the national situation of the student's home country.

Example 1: Norway

In Norway, a structured mobility component is integrated into the Norwegian high school diploma. Local county municipalities are responsible for the recognition of exchange programs, whereas the Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education

and Skills (HK-dir) recognises the exchange organisations or partnership programs.

Exchanges can take place in the second year of upper secondary education. Exchange students, including those in secondary education, have the right to student funding. To be eligible for funding the organisations must be recognised by [HK-dir](#), and the organisations must be approved on a yearly basis.

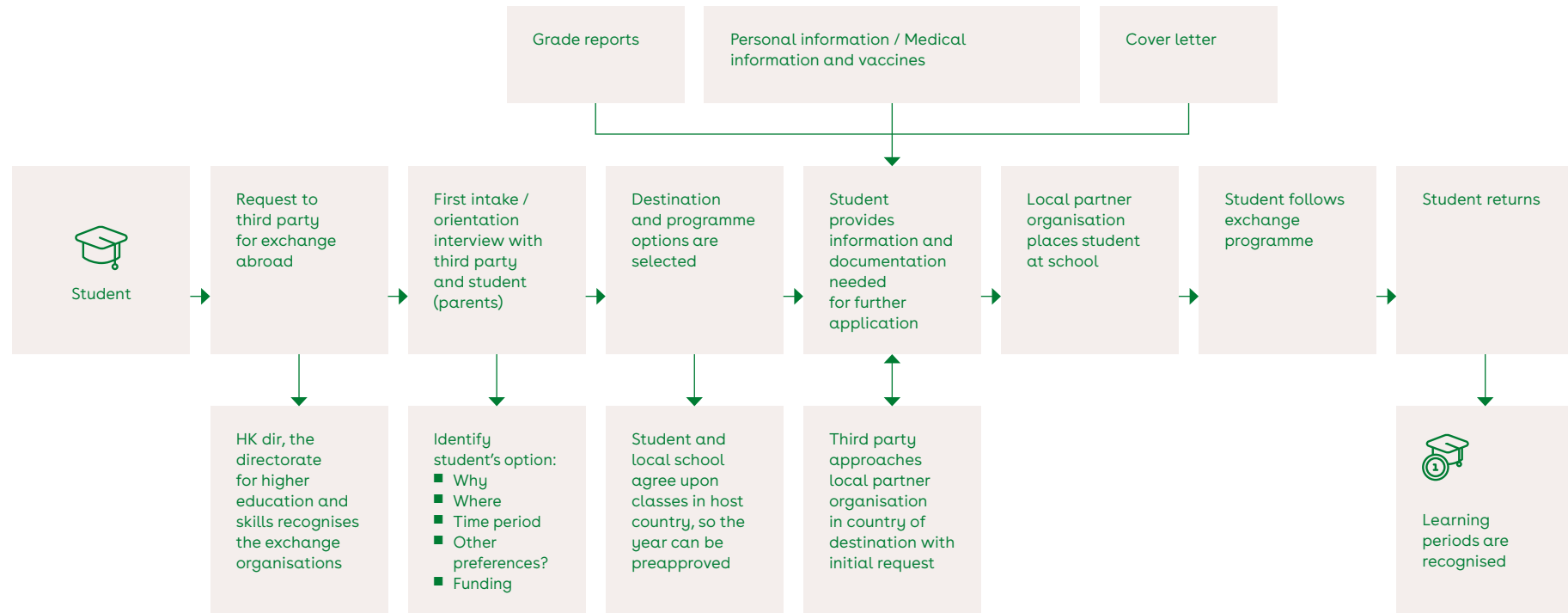
The recognition of the study periods abroad is easier to apply due to the prior learning approval and the integration of the exchange period into the Norwegian high school curriculum. The learning approval ensures that subjects will get recognised by the responsible municipality, and the subjects followed abroad will not be included in the student's GPA. In combination with the available funding, it is more attractive for Norwegian students to study abroad during upper secondary education.

Other exchanges include three years of upper secondary education in France or the final two years at United World College, but in these cases the final secondary school diploma will be different from the Norwegian qualification.



Illustration of the student journey in a structured mobility situation in Norway

Exchange program structure in Norway





Example 2: France

In France, several bilateral agreements offer a form of structured mobility. Next to the beforementioned Erasmus+ program, there are agreements such as the French-German mobility program, French-American cooperation, French-British cooperation, French-Canadian cooperation, French-Spanish cooperation, French-Portuguese cooperation and French-Japanese cooperation (Colibri). In regard to these exchanges, there is always a study contract or learning agreement in place which allows for the partial recognition of the study periods.

Example 3: Italy

In Italy a Learning Agreement, signed by the class council of the home institution, the parents and the student, is available to facilitate the recognition upon return. In addition, upon return, the class council carries out a general assessment based on documentation provided by the host school to verify the skills obtained compared to the ones listed in the Learning Agreement.

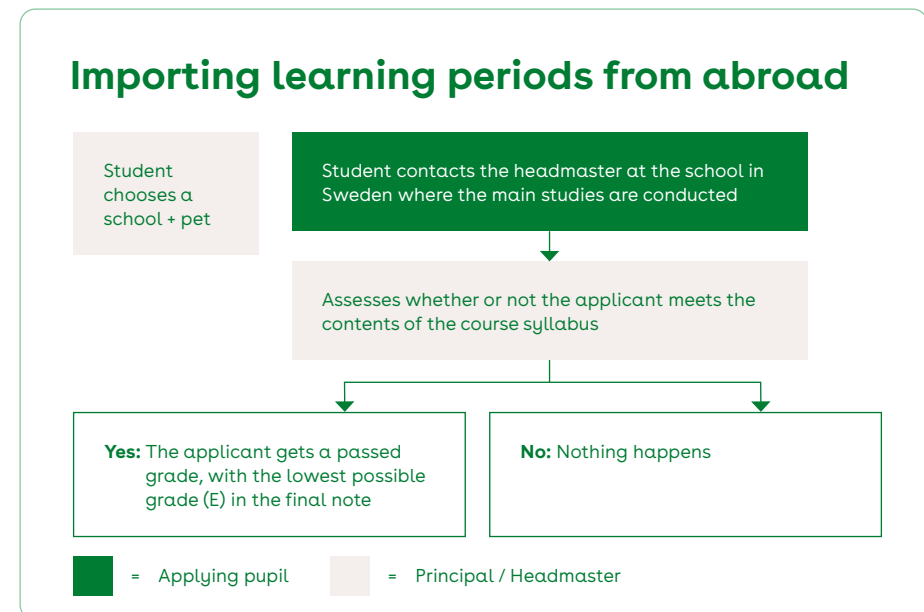
Example 4: Sweden

National guidance or a framework for the recognition of learning periods is not in place, but the headmaster of a Swedish school has some legal room to act. A pupil that has followed studies abroad, is left with three options: taking the examination of the Swedish course, take the course or year in the Swedish education system, or have the foreign course recognised by the

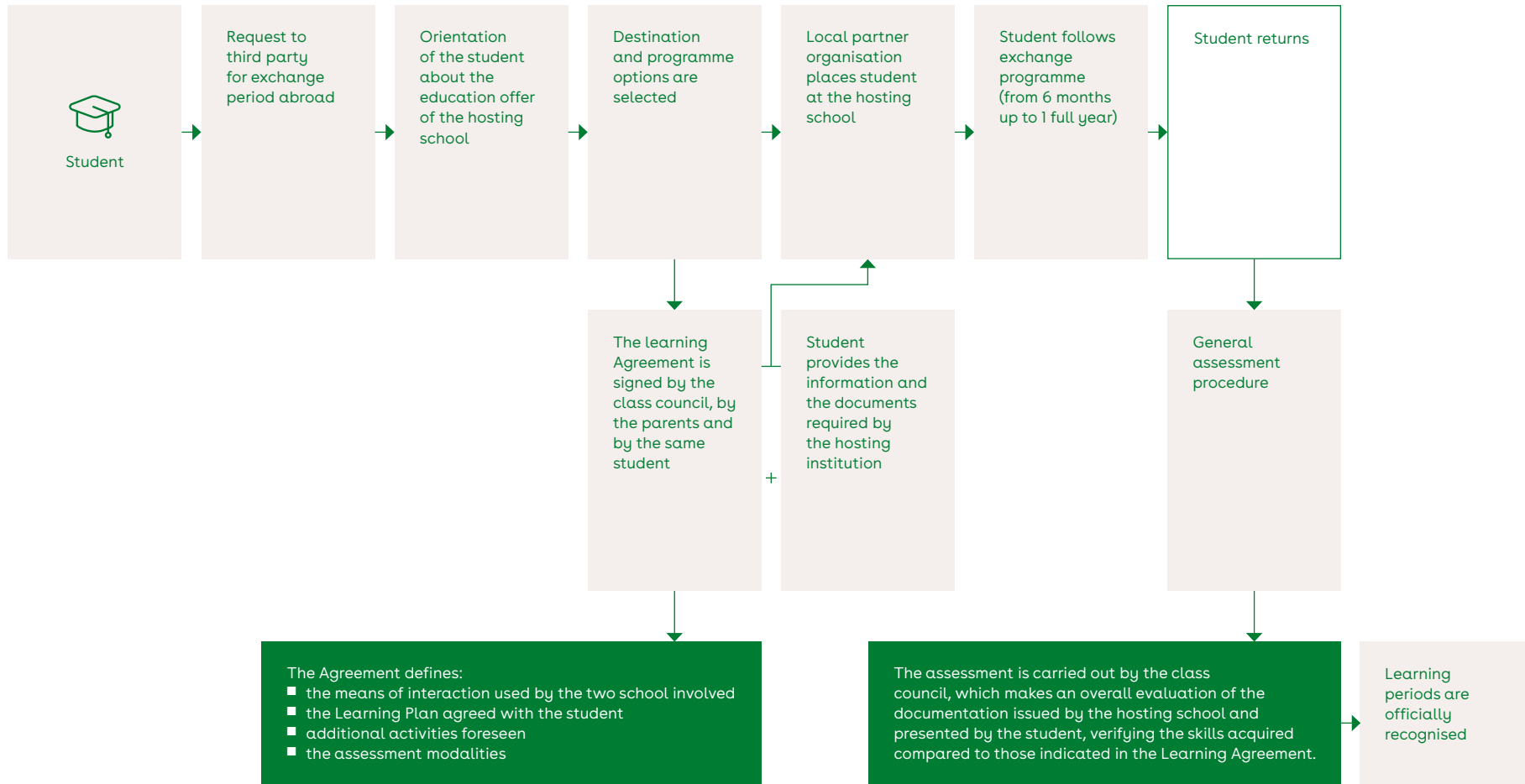
school's headmaster, which directly leads to the lowest passing grade of 'E'.

However, the Swedish upper secondary school system is currently undergoing a reform which will likely change this way of grading. In the new system, learners will typically be graded according to the results of the last concluded course.

Illustration of mobility in Sweden



Exchange program structure in Italy - Structured mobility



4.3 Unstructured mobility

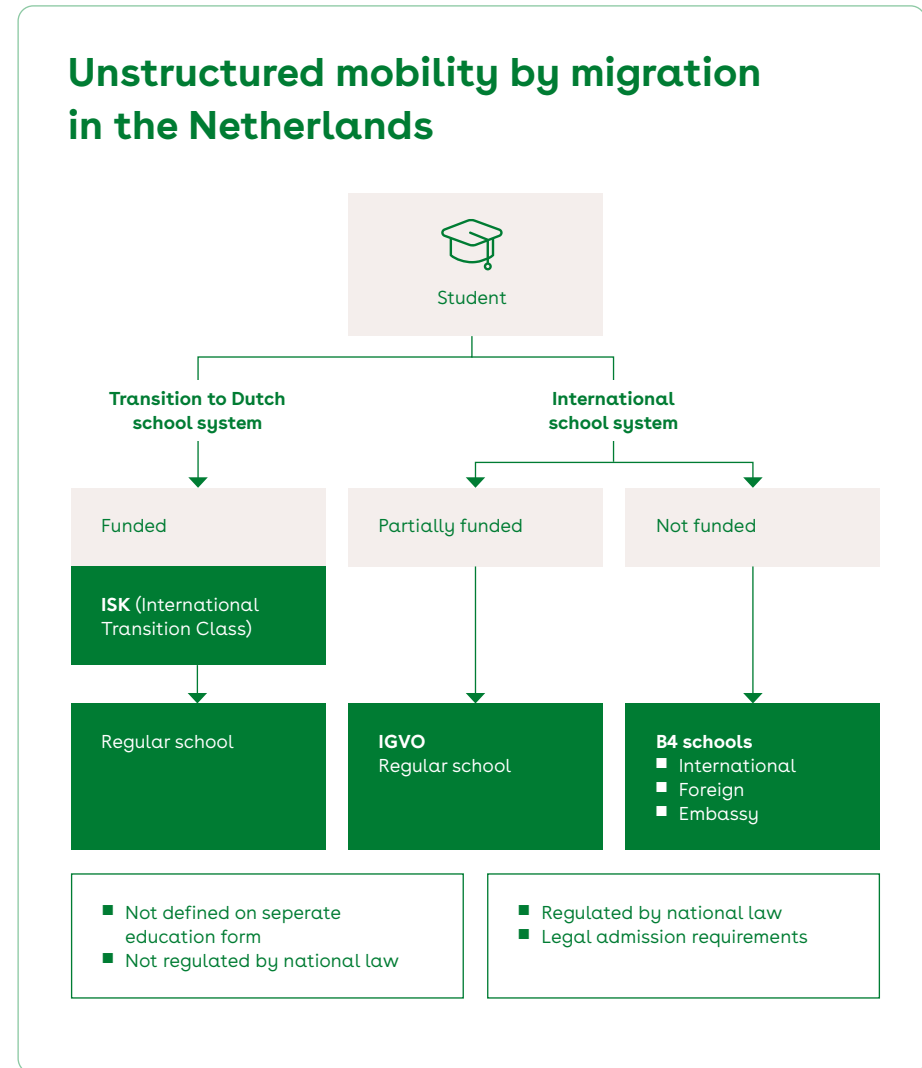
The term unstructured mobility was defined by the project team as “a pupil with foreign study periods who did not take part in an exchange scheme”, which in most cases relates to incoming migration. Most partners noted that in the case of unstructured mobility, certain formal processes were in place to appropriately take in foreign students. However, in regard to placement and recognition, these processes can become very personalised, down to the level of case-by-case basis decisions by a school’s headmaster or a school council.

Example 1: the Netherlands

Incoming foreign students can be placed in an international education system (e.g. IB school) or in the Dutch school system. Placement in the international system, however, is not available to all students, only to certain categories of expats or repatriates. There are no binding principles or regulations on recognition and placement within the national system.

Students with insufficient command of the Dutch language to succeed in the Dutch system are placed in the international transition class. Otherwise, they are placed in the regular school system.

Illustration of unstructured mobility in The Netherlands





Example 2: Lithuania

Schools have three approaches to organise the education of migrant children who do not speak Lithuanian: an intensive programme through bridging classes, while making sure that other subjects are followed together with peers, through intensive teaching of the Lithuanian language for up to one year and support of other needs if necessary, and through the placement of the pupil among peers in a designated classroom, providing the extra support in agreement with the child's parents or guardians.

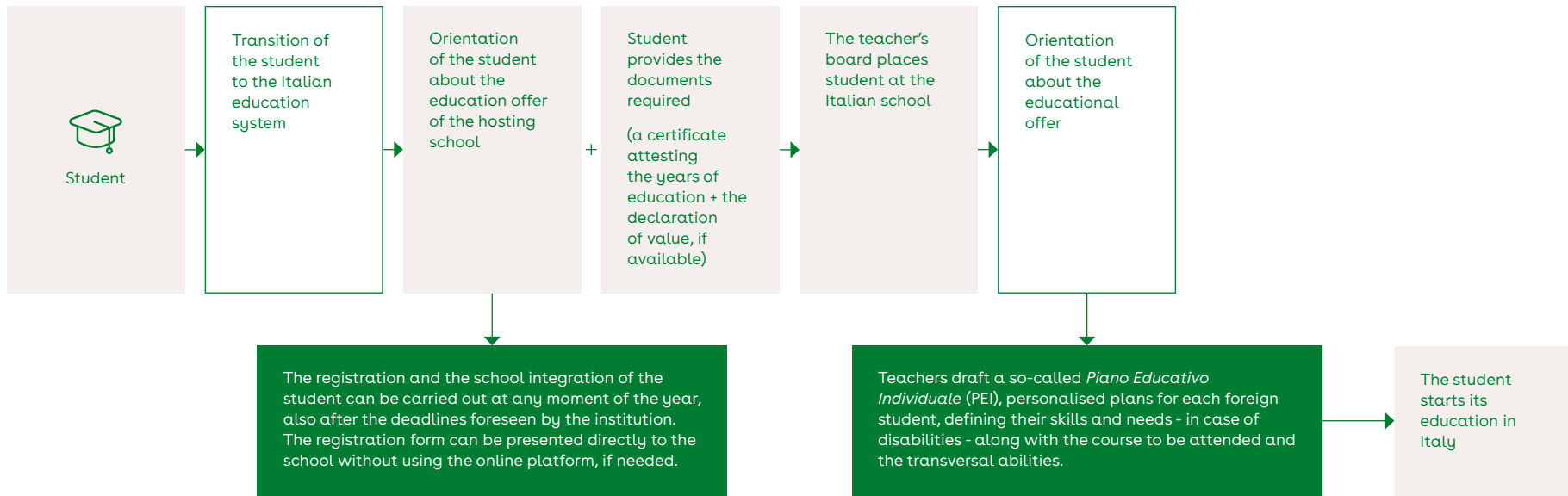
Example 3: Italy

International students under 16 years old are automatically placed in the class according to their age (age group placement). 16 years and up are subject to age group placement as well, but can be placed in a lower or higher grade by the school committee based on the education system in the country of origin, assessment of competences, abilities and level of preparation, assessment of the study programme attended in the country of origin, and the qualification eventually awarded by the student. The final placement is the headmaster's responsibility.





Unstructured mobility in Italy



In Italy, the admission and registration procedures of foreign students are up to the regional school's bodies and committees, ensuring the autonomy and their decision making. The fact that pupils can enter immediately into the national education system in the same level (age group), without compulsory requirements as concern the language level, demonstrates the inclusive approach of the Italian education system.

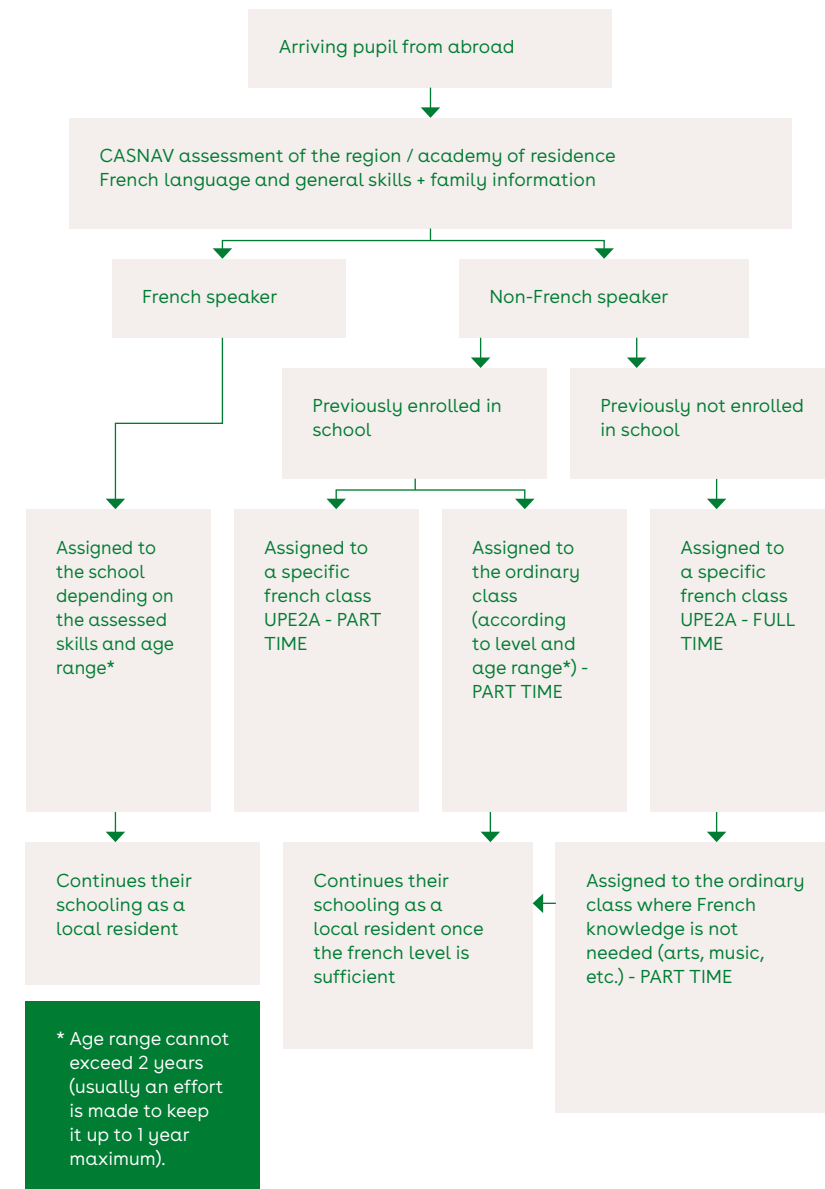
- Other competent bodies**
1. **MIM** - *Ministero dell'Istruzione e del Merito*. The Italian Ministry provides updated information on the national regulation, on the training courses available for the teaching staff and on useful guidelines for foreign students and their families.
 2. **USR** - *Ufficio Scolastico Regionale*. These regional offices has the role to coordinate all the practices among the regional institutions, and to standardise them.
 3. **CPIA** - *Centri Provinciali per l'Istruzione degli Adulti*. These centres provide the possibility to foreign students to attend language courses, in order to achieve a minimum level of A2 in Italian.

Example 4: France

Regional centres for the education of new arrivals in the “education authority’s catchment area and traveller’s children” (CASNAV) are responsible for the intake of foreign students. A psychologist from the Ministry of National Education will assess the student on certain skills (e.g. level of French language, foreign languages, writing, academic skills), but there is no standardised assessment. After this, the pupil is assigned to a school. The headmaster and student’s family decide on the student’s placement.

Illustration of a student journey in an unstructured mobility situation in France

Unstructured mobility (upper secondary education in France)



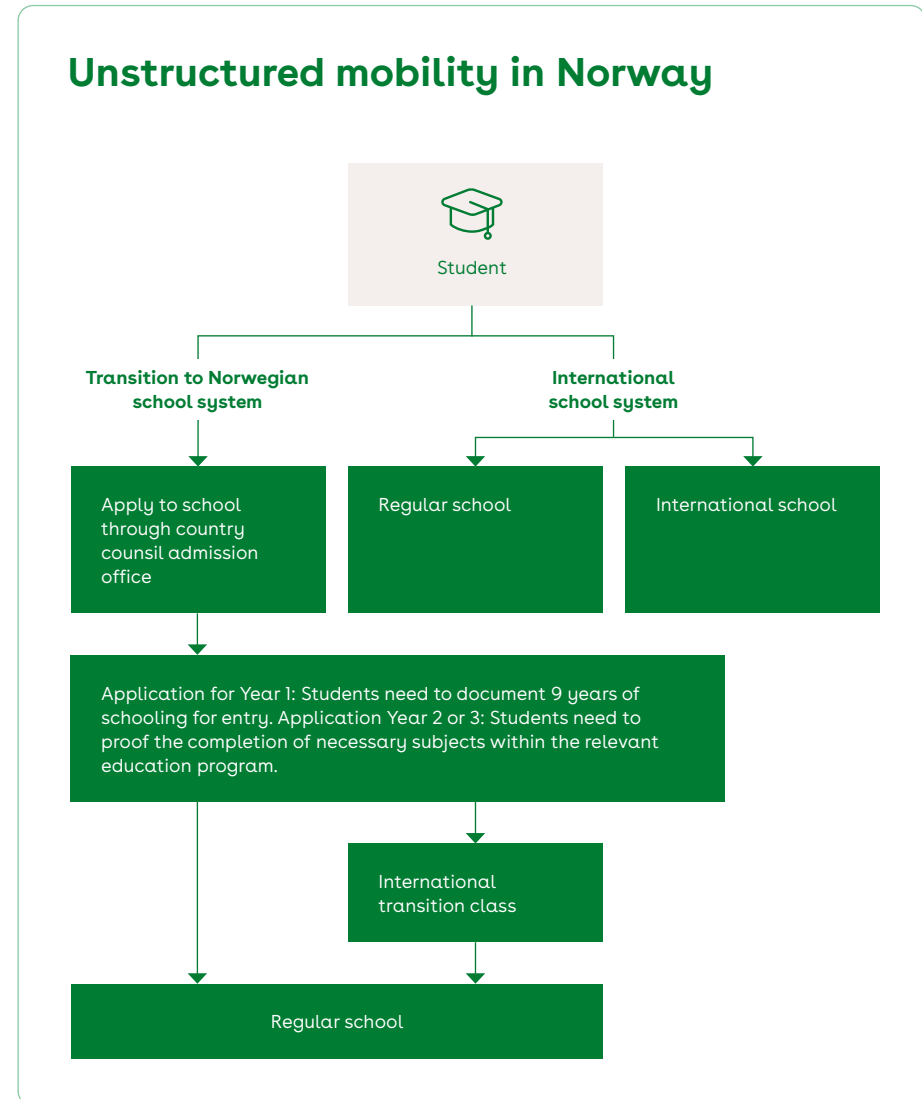
Example 5: Norway

Enrolment in the Norwegian school system occurs via the county council admission, which operates under supervision of the Directorate for Education and Training. Depending on the demonstrated previous experience, the pupil is either first placed in a transition class or directly enrolls in the school.

Example 6: Poland

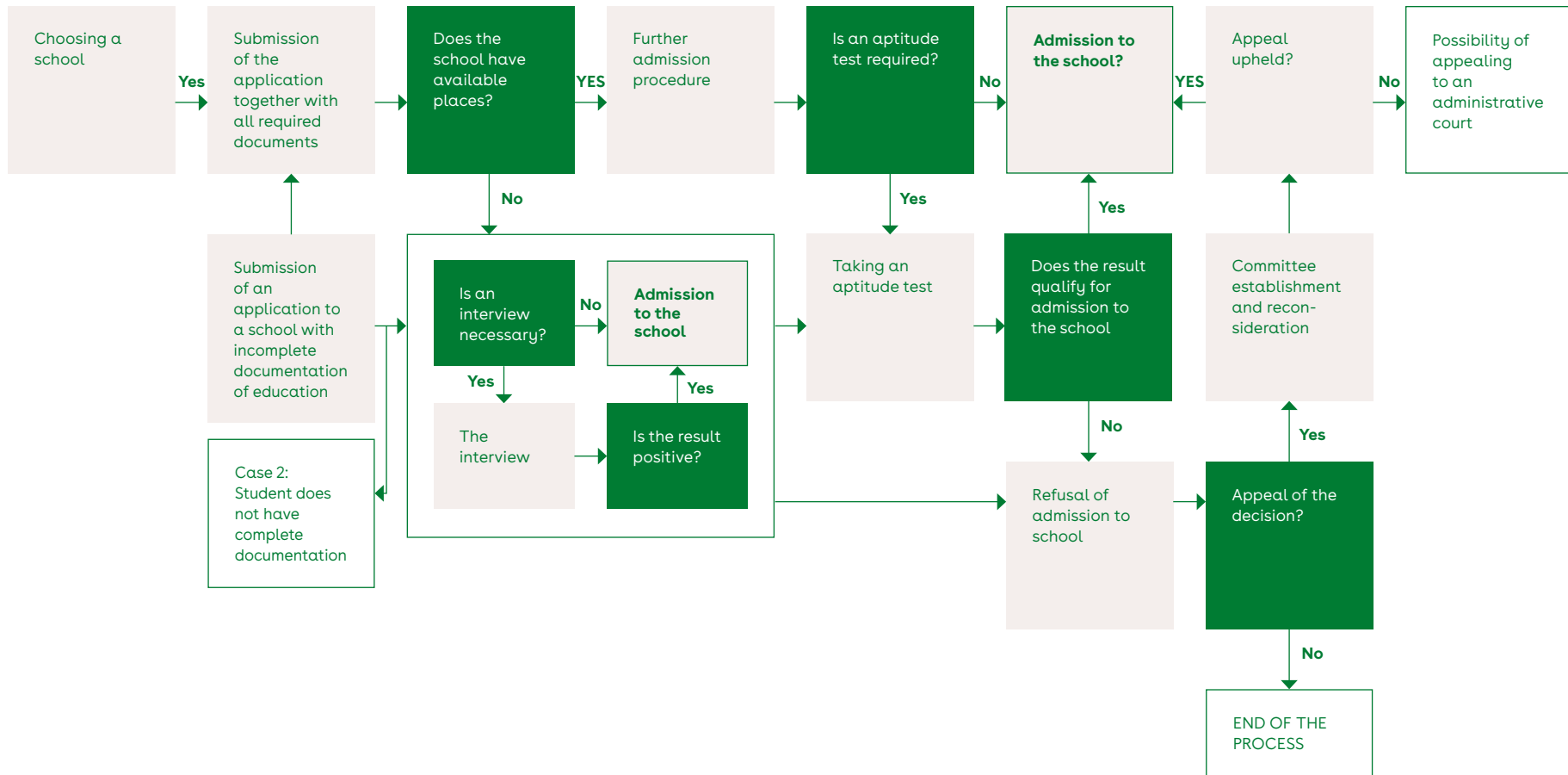
In Poland the students and legal guardians can check the availability of places in a secondary school on the public websites of the regional education superintendencies or by contacting the school of their choice directly. Foreigners do not take part in the general admission process (with the exception of art schools). In order to be admitted to a school, a student must submit an application along with the required documentation. The school principal conducts an interview with the student. If the student successfully passes the interview, he/she is admitted to the school. A refusal decision may be appealed to the Headmaster of the school and, if the appeal is not upheld, a complaint may be lodged with the administrative court.

Illustration of unstructured mobility in Norway



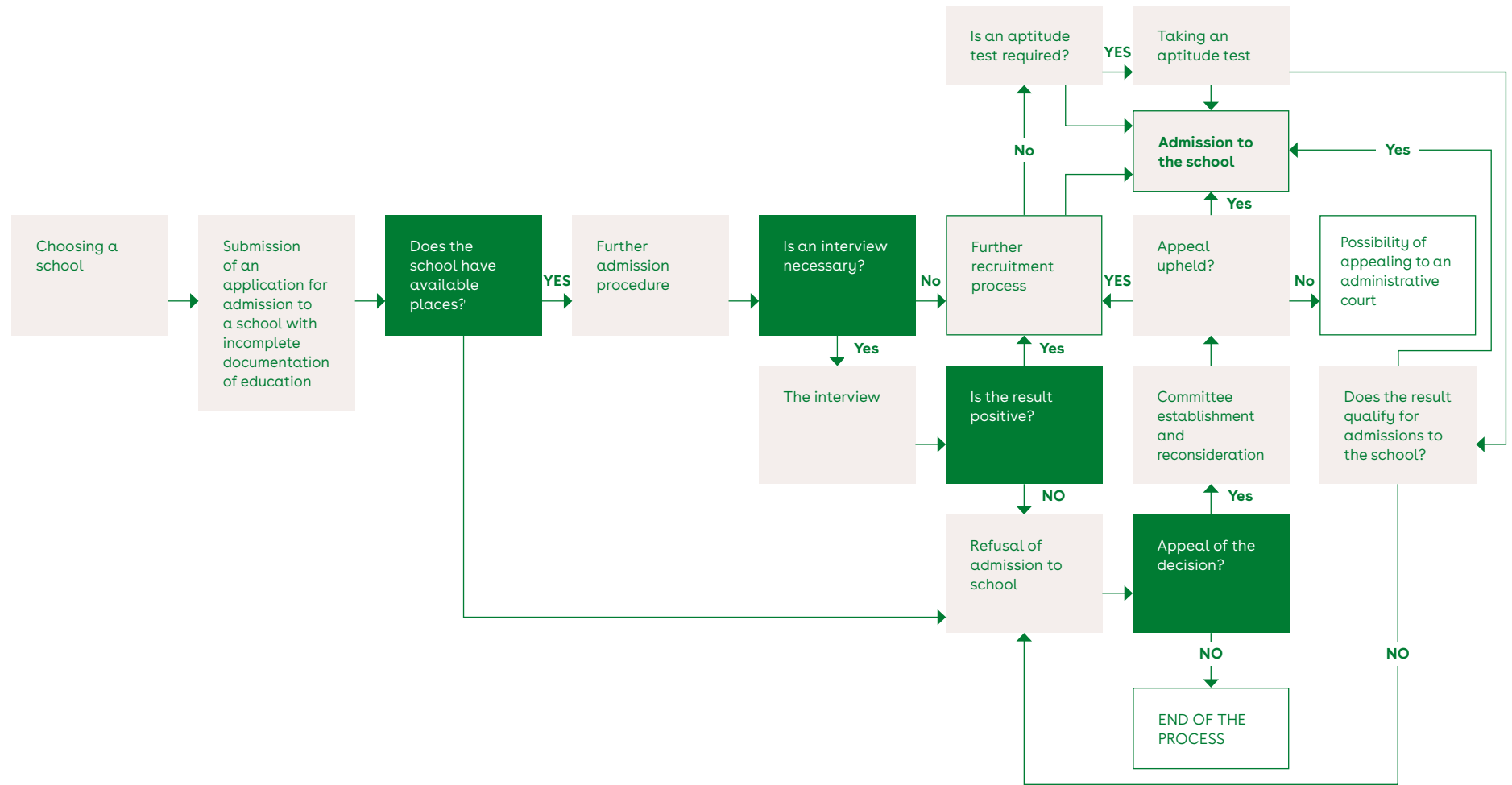


Unstructured mobility in Poland: student with a complete set of documents





Student does not have a complete set of documentation, and an additional competency test is required (for bilingual, sports, special aptitude schools)





4.4 Challenges

While various challenges have been highlighted in the previous segments, this paragraph aims to provide a concise overview of the main challenges encountered.

At times, schools and/or other responsible authorities struggle with a lack of information on foreign education systems, knowledge of where to find reliable sources of information, or the knowledge to correctly interpret the level of different subjects within foreign curricula and grading. Ultimately, these challenges make it harder for foreign pupils to be accurately placed in the new education system, as well as for returning students to have their results from abroad properly recognised.

Furthermore, the mappings and analyses paint a landscape of decentralisation; varying approaches and processes, in which different actors have the authority to decide on recognition

of study periods and placement of incoming students. These actors, according to the mapping, range from an individual headmaster to municipal councils and up to ministries. However, the role for ENIC-NARICs (due to their mandate) is limited despite the expertise that some centres have on upper secondary education, including grade conversion, recognition and examination systems. Nonetheless, the general consensus among the partners was that the organizing principle of the LRC, namely aiming for the qualification to be recognised unless there are substantial differences, would be useful to apply for secondary education as well.

There are also systems where, when a mobility exchange is pre-arranged for (“structured mobility”), the recognition of the study periods is not arranged for per se.

Example 1: the Netherlands

Various external providers facilitate exchange programmes, but this happens outside the Dutch educational system with no official affiliations to Dutch secondary schools. These exchanges are between the student and external provider (student's initiative) and seldomly lead to recognition of the study results by the school the student attended.

Structured mobility in The Netherlands

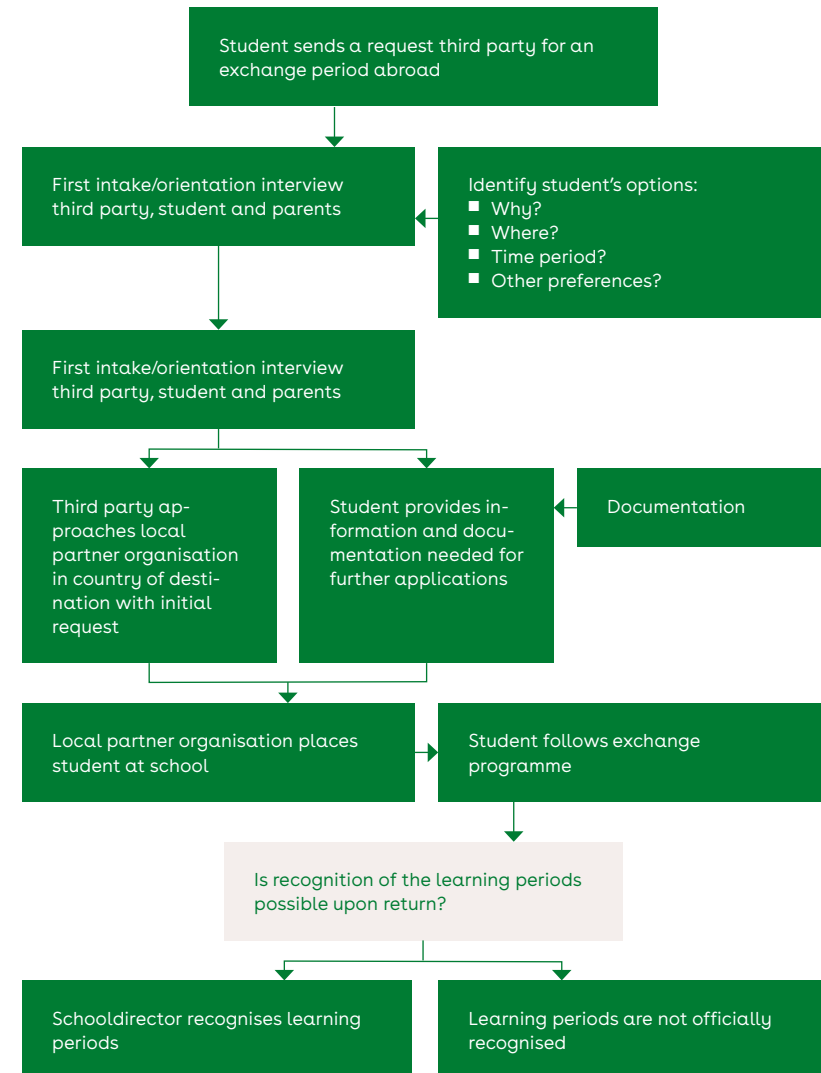


Illustration of structured mobility in The Netherlands



5 ENIC-NARICs and the LRC

This chapter highlights the outcomes of the analysis on what the role of the ENIC-NARIC centres could be. Because the centres' role is rooted in the Lisbon Recognition Convention, the project team also explored to what extent its principles could be useful for upper secondary education.

Role ENIC-NARIC centres

It was highlighted that the recognition of study periods or RPL in upper secondary education, is not an easy topic, and not the essence of the LRC nor a primary responsibility of the ENIC-NARIC centres.

Yet the participants agreed there is a clear role stemming from the current remit of the ENIC-NARIC centres, to provide information on the recognition of study periods in upper secondary education. This is even more relevant since recognition and placement decisions are made at a local level, with higher chances of uneven outcomes. Information provision on foreign upper secondary education can be helpful:

- ENIC-NARIC centres have a lot of information on qualifications in upper secondary education and could disclose this information to those dealing with recognition in upper secondary education. Local decisions (at the school) are a challenge. The ENIC-NARICs should have a role, but is it not realistic to take care of all individual cases. Instead, the focus could be on enhancing transparency and information

sharing regarding level, recognition, grade conversion and examination systems;

- Regarding unstructured mobility, the mapping has shown a variety of national frameworks, legislation, or ministerial guidance. Transparency of responsibilities in the national context is key and the ENIC-NARIC centres could offer this transparency, in line with the LRC;
- ENIC-NARICs could engage in developing communication strategies to improve their information provision towards schools. or example review their centres' websites, improve visibility for schools and offer services such as hotlines for inquiries on the subject. Specifically offer information to those that make the final placement decisions (i.e. headmasters), on the system and where possible the assessment and subject;
- In regard to the challenges, the team only discussed some preliminary recommendations, since there is still a large diversity among the different countries in their approaches to recognition of study periods abroad. The mapping showed that recognition of structured mobility tends to be easier since it is more organised, while unstructured mobility has more diversity and more challenges. Therefore, structured mobility should or could be pre-arranged in a way where automatic recognition of learning periods is easier to apply. The mapping also showed that placement is almost always done by the school. As previously discussed, ENIC-NARIC centres are knowledgeable in the recognition of secondary education.



Role LRC

The following elements from the LRC could provide a starting point to support recognition of study periods in upper secondary education:

- Article V of the LRC - Recognition of periods of study- applies to recognition of study periods abroad in higher education and could be used as a basis to develop clear guidelines for recognition of study periods in upper secondary education. This Article states that “Each Party shall recognise periods of study completed within the framework of a higher education programme in another Party”, the exception being a “substantial difference”, which is a difference so substantial that the student would not succeed in the purpose recognition is sought for. Acknowledging the unique differences between upper secondary education and higher education (see chapter 2), still the attitude of article V could be useful to find solutions and improve the current situation;
- The concept of “Substantial Differences” (Article IV.1) is the essence of the LRC. A substantial difference is a difference so significant that it would likely prevent the student from succeeding. The same principle could be applied as

an approach or attitude when it comes to recognition of study periods in upper secondary education. Furthermore, Article V states that it is sufficient for a student to obtain an assessment of its studies to seek recognition at home;

- The right to appeal (Article III.5) is another key concept from the LRC that could be applied as a principle in the context of the recognition of study periods in upper secondary education. Such a right, rooted in general and shared principles for fair recognition (like the LRC offers) would provide a system to settle recognition disputes and offers a type of quality assurance with possible pre-emptive effects on the recognition of mobility arrangements in upper secondary education;
- The obligation under the LRC to “provide adequate information on any programme operated by its higher education institutions” (Article VIII.1) could be applied to upper secondary education and mobility arrangements, and by extension, inform about the recognition of study periods. This would support the right to recognition in the current situation where information is patchy;



6 Conclusions and Recommendations

The findings showed that there is a wide variety of practices in the recognition of study periods abroad. They indicate that structured mobility is generally better facilitated, especially where learning agreements are in place. However, at the same time there is room for improvement to make this standard practice. Unstructured mobility poses greater challenges due to the often unclear nature of recognition frameworks within countries. There is not always a legal framework, nor policy guidance in place. For both it generally appears that information about recognition procedures is generally patchy. Limited information on foreign education systems, and decentralisation of recognition decisions contribute to uneven outcomes.

The analysis highlighted that ENIC-NARIC centres have expertise in upper secondary education qualifications, but their role in supporting recognition is limited due to their primary focus on higher education. The principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC) - recognition of study periods unless substantial differences exist, the right to appeal, and the obligation to provide adequate information - offer a potential basis for strengthening recognition practices in upper secondary education.

To address these challenges, the report proposes enhanced transparency, clear guidelines for recognition, and stronger coordination between schools, national authorities, and ENIC-NARIC centres.

Key recommendations include to:

- establish national recognition frameworks, promoting the use of learning agreements in structured mobility;
- create clear procedures for unstructured mobility, and improving communication and information-sharing mechanisms. Monitoring and evaluation systems should be implemented to assess the effectiveness of recognition practices, ensuring alignment with the broader goals of fair and transparent recognition in the European Education Area.

Reflecting on an analysis of the mappings, this chapter revisits the two main questions of the project and considers these against the outcome of the mapping:

1. How can the Council Recommendation of 2018's ambition of automatic mutual recognition of learning periods in upper secondary education be supported?
2. What is the role of the ENIC-NARIC centres?



The following elements were highlighted:

- Structured mobility could be pre-arranged in a way where you should be able to apply automatic recognition of the learning periods, notably via the use of learning agreements. A common format or general principles (based on LRC principles), could be helpful for this purpose. Ideally, automatic recognition should be applied for all structured mobility with pre-agreed content of the study period – unless the pre-agreed arrangements of studies undertaken abroad have not been met;
- National education authorities in the EU should adopt legal frameworks and policies for recognizing structured and unstructured mobility experiences;
- The mapping showed absence of legislation are an obstacle for recognition of study periods in upper secondary education. Since countries have agreed to the 2018 Council Recommendation on recognition of learning periods abroad, there should be room in national legislation for putting the recommendation in practice;
- It would benefit recognition if countries commit to develop clear guidelines for recognizing study periods completed through unstructured mobility (e.g., immigration) in order to streamline recognition processes for students who relocate due to personal circumstances. This would also support the EU internal market principle of free movement of persons;
- The LRC has various articles that can support recognition in upper secondary education. The principle of substantial

differences should be applied in unstructured mobility and in the cases where pre-agreed arrangements of studies undertaken abroad have not been met for various reasons. The articles on information provision and right to appeal are also useful to be considered to improve the recognition;

- ENIC-NARIC centres have a lot of information on qualifications in upper secondary education, grade conversion and examination systems, and could disclose this information to schools, pupils and providers. Additionally, ENIC-NARICs could serve as an information point offering transparency on how recognition of (un)structured mobility is organised in the national context. The ENIC-NARICs could have a role but is it not realistic nor desirable to take care of all individual cases;
- Promote transparency by making recognition requirements and processes easily accessible to students, parents, and schools;
- Given the variety and decentralisation, consider organizing peer learning among national stakeholders to create best practices. Use common principles - i.e. as formulated in LRC- as a standard for the discussion. Bring together the key actors in the national ecosystem for the recognition of upper secondary education.



7 About the AR25 project

This report is produced as part of the Automatic Recognition in the European Education Area 2025 (AR25) project. The objective of AR25 is to support the creation of the European Education Area by 2025 through a variety of actions:

- Support Lisbon Recognition Convention compliant admissions practices in higher education institutions by promoting the use of the Spotlight Self-Assessment tool, strengthening LRC via quality assurance in line with ESG 1.4.
- Recognition of study periods in upper secondary education (outcomes reflected in this paper).
- Facilitate flexible learning paths through recognition via promotion of the Micro-Evaluator.
- Streamlining recognition practices in admissions via the update of the European Area of Recognition manual - higher education institutions (EAR-HEI) manual.
- Update the EHEA qualifications table.

The AR25 consortium is composed of the following representatives from the ENIC-NARIC network: NARIC The Netherlands (Nuffic, coordinator), NARIC Austria, NARIC Croatia, NARIC Denmark, NARIC Estonia, ENIC-NARIC France, NARIC Ireland, NARIC Italy, NARIC Lithuania, NARIC Malta, NARIC Norway, NARIC Poland, NARIC Sweden, ENIC UK and ENIC Ukraine. Additionally, the consortium included representatives from the European Association of Distance Teaching Universities (EADTU), The European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA) and The European University Association (EUA).

AR25 started in April 2023 with a duration of two years. The project is co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme, Key Action 3, NARIC call, of the European Union.



Annex 1 - Mapping questions

For the mapping, the ENIC-NARICs are asked to answer the following questions. Note this may include desk research and interviews of stakeholders and providers.

Note that upper secondary education refers to programmes leading to access qualifications for higher education in that country.

1.1 National guidance

- What national guidance is in place for the recognition of study periods in upper secondary education and permanent mobility?
- What legal framework encompasses the recognition of study periods in upper secondary education? Please describe and include the name and the link.
- Is there policy guidance? Please describe and include the name and the link.
- Is there a national contact point for the recognition of study periods?
- Which national authority is appointed to deal with inquiries about study periods in upper secondary education?
- Do you as ENIC-NARIC receive inquiries of study periods in upper secondary education? If so, please describe the nature and numbers.

You can decide to answer this question after answering the questions in the next paragraph 1.2.

1.2 Mobility context

i. Pre-agreed/planned, not permanent, structured mobility, i.e. organised in the context of exchange programmes.

For this type of mobility, list the types and the specific programmes for exchanges offered to upper secondary education students in your country and describe for each:

- The name of the cooperation (include a link if possible). If generic, please describe the type of collaboration.
- The (range of the) duration.
- Identify the target / age group (i.e. certain levels, or age groups?).
- The provider: identify if the exchange is organised by the school (i.e. collaboration between schools without an external provider), the individual (via an external provider), or a combination of the two.
- Are there any entry requirements (i.e. in terms of level, language proficiency) for the student to participate in the exchange?
- Are there fees attached to the exchange? If so, please specify.
- How many students in your country take annually part in this type of exchange (if known)?



Recognition:

- Who decides on the placement in the host country where the learning period will take place? Are there any conditions for the placement?
- Who decides on the recognition of the learning period?
- To what extent does the learning abroad lead to compensation in the home system?
- Do any conditions apply to achieve full compensation?
- Are there any “instruments” used to support the recognition/ compensation (i.e. learning agreements, assessments?) and if so, to what extent are these standardised?
- Can you highlight any good practices?

In general: reflect on the enablers and the obstacles for recognition in your system, based on the mapping of structured pre-agreed mobility in upper secondary education.

ii. **Other, “unstructured” mobility, including immigration, from one or more systems are used to continue studies in: 1) national system or, 2) an international system (i.e. IB, French or Ukrainian schools).**

Please describe:

- How are students in upper secondary education placed in the (inter)national system?

- Are there national or regional policies / guidelines in place as how to place students / how their previous learning counts in the home system?
- Who is responsible for the final placement?
- What are the general and/or specific criteria in place to determine the placement of the student? General would refer to a principle (such as the LRC: to have the student succeed in the goal recognition is sought for). Specific would refer to any learning related criteria.
- Is there an assessment of the student? If so, who conducts the assessment? What are the criteria used? To what extent is the assessment standardised? (Please include a link if possible).
- Any other procedures?
- Are there obstacles to have a student continue on the same level (age group) as in the home system? If so, please list.
- Are there any measures/initiatives to support continuation on the same level?
- Are there numbers available of how many students enter the school system annually?
- Any good practices available?
- Any other observations?

In general: identify the enablers and the obstacles for recognition in your system, based on the mapping of non-structured mobility into your system.



1.3 Communication about recognition of learning periods in upper secondary education

Please describe:

- Where can students and parents find information about the recognition of learning periods (or RPL) in upper secondary education? Please list the different channels.
- What is the information provided and who are the target group?

1.4 Appeal

- To whom can a student or parent appeal against the recognition decision, in case of 1) structured mobility, 2) non structured mobility?

1.5 Principle underlying the recognition practice

- What is the explicit or implicit goal pursued in your national context when dealing with the recognition of foreign learning periods in upper secondary education for 1) pre-structured mobility 2) unstructured mobility? (for example, in the LRC this would be for the student to succeed in the goal recognition is sought for). Explicit would be a formulated guideline, and implicit what you derive from practice.

Colofon

NUF2025/04

Authors:

ENIC-NARICs from:

Denmark:	Allan Bruun Pedersen
France:	Roxane Hindié
Italy:	Elise Petrucci, Emanuela Gitto
Lithuania:	Aurelija Valeikiene
Netherlands:	Merlijn van Dierendonck, Jenneke Lokhoff, Merel Eimers, Bas Wegewijs
Norway:	Silje Molander, Tonje Tangen Kemp
Poland:	Hanna Reczulska, Paulina Dobosz
Sweden:	Maria Tiger, Per-Anders Stensson, Simon Jugström Skott
Ukraine:	Tetiana Vahina

Design

OSAGE