

# Spotlight on the power of self assessment

Institutional recognition practices

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meet the world





This publication is developed within the Automatic Recognition in 2025 (AR25) project, aiming to support the Council Recommendation 2018 ambitions regarding recognition, especially the implementation of fair (automatic) recognition.

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# Executive summary

Higher education institutions (HEIs) play a key role to implement the 2018 Council Recommendations' ambitions for (automatic) recognition, because they are responsible for the vast majority of recognition decisions in the European Education Area (EEA) and European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

However, recognition processes in HEIs do not always comply with the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC). This is confirmed in the Bologna Process Implementation Reports of 2018 and 2020. These highlight that actual recognition practices in HEIs fall short of expectations with regard to transparency, consistency and fairness. One of the identified causes is that HEIs not always follow all the required principles of good recognition practice.

In 2015, the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG) aimed to improve institutional recognition by integrating compliance with the LRC into the accreditation process via Standard 1.4. However, various Erasmus+ projects found that this aspect of Standard 1.4 is often overlooked in external quality assurance reviews, reducing its effectiveness. One issue identified was that there is no common approach on how to achieve compliance.

In this context, the European University Association led the development of a self-assessment tool as part of the Erasmus+ co-funded 'Spotlight on recognition' project (Erasmus+ Key Action 3) in 2022. This resulted in a self-assessment tool, which enables higher education institutions to self-assess actual compliance of procedures with the LRC and benchmark them against international good practice.

In the AR25 project, a total of 43 HEIs used the tool. From those institutions, 22 conducted part of the exercise as part of a mandatory monitoring exercise. In addition, 21 institutions joined voluntarily. Three peer-counselling sessions were offered over a period of 4 months. The participating institutions had the option to complete a full self-assessment or, alternatively, choose a "light" version of the exercise. Many decided the latter, mostly due to limited capacity (lack of time and resources).

In terms of the number of allocated staff members, most of the participating institutions set up small self-assessment teams (max. 5 people). A smaller number of institutions decided to set up bigger, cross-departmental teams. With regard to staff allocation, lessons learned included to create mixed teams, including both people in leadership positions as well as those with hands-on responsibilities.

The results of the exercise showed there are several persisting challenges: an insufficient awareness of international



frameworks and tools among staff members (e.g. LRC, European Qualifications Passport); an absence of a common definition of substantial differences or an inconsistent application of such a definition; issues regarding information provision; and challenges in communication across departments and services.

Moreover, the exercise confirmed the existence of a structural capacity problem many HEIs have in admissions and recognition, both in terms of staff available to implement recognition practices in line with the LRC, as well as funds available for staff training and development. These issues also put a burden on the time and resources available to execute the self-assessment itself.

In general, institutions responded positively to the self-assessment exercise. Identified follow-up actions were geared to improve: internal policies and procedures, and aligning them with (inter)national legislation; institutional collaboration, engaging departments and staff across the institution; investing in staff training; and increasing transparency and information management.

Recommendations include to further embed the self-assessment tool in institutional recognition practices and for ENIC-NARICs to promote implementation. ENIC-NARICs could provide support, preferably on a structural basis, so that HEIs can plan their participation ahead of time. Another major recommendation was to review the user-friendliness of the tool, and consider developing more templates and guidance in the process.



# 1 Introduction

This report is produced as part of the Erasmus+ Key Action “NARIC Automatic Recognition in 2025” (AR25) project, which aimed to support implementation of the 2018 “Council Recommendation on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad”.

It contains the outcomes of the first major structured use by HEIs of the ‘Spotlight on recognition’ self-assessment tool, geared to support institutions in improving their institutional recognition and admissions practices.

In this introduction the ‘Spotlight on recognition’ self-assessment tool and its objectives will be presented, as well as the goals and methodology for its usage as explored in the AR25 project.

## 1.1 Background

Fair and smooth recognition according to the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC) is a pre-condition for the implementation of automatic recognition. However, consecutive Bologna Process Implementation Reports show there is still work needed to achieve compliance with the LRC, especially in HEIs which make the overall majority of recognition decisions within the European Education Area (EEA) and European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

In short, HEIs are crucial for achieving fair and automatic recognition, and therefore achieving the EHEA and EEA ambition’s related to the two.

One of the solutions to improve institutional recognition was already introduced in 2015, with the inclusion of Standard 1.4 in the updated version of the Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). By including recognition as part of the quality assurance (accreditation), recognition practices and procedures were expected to improve. Yet various Erasmus+ projects such as FAIR, I-Comply, LIREQA and TPG-LRC, revealed that in practice, the recognition part of standard 1.4 is in many cases not specifically covered by external quality assurance reviews, and therefore less effective.

In this context, the European University Association, together with Spanish Rectors Conference Crue, the German Rectors Conference HRK and Nuffic, developed the “Spotlight on recognition” self-assessment tool, in the eponymous project conducted between 2020 - 2022 as part of the Erasmus+ Key Action 3. The tool is available in English, French, German and Spanish.



## 1.2 About the 'Spotlight on recognition' self-assessment

The Spotlight self-assessment tool is the first instrument allowing HEIs to systematically analyse compliancy of their recognition procedures with the LRC, and make adjustments accordingly. In doing so the tool explicitly aims to enhance recognition capacities within HEIs.

The recognition processes covered by the tool include procedures to evaluate and recognise qualifications granting access to three academic cycles (Bachelor's, Master's and PhD). It addresses the recognition of qualifications giving access to higher education, recognition of periods of study, recognition of higher education qualifications, and recognition of qualifications held by refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation.

An essential feature of the tool is that it is user-led. The intended users of the tool are staff at HEIs who are responsible for recognition processes and decisions. These can be admissions officers at centralised or faculty level, but also other staff, given that admissions responsibilities vary across institutions and education systems.

In general, the tool is intended to be mindful of the institutional setting of recognition, which is part of an admissions procedure and as such organised differently across institutions and education levels in Europe.

### 1.2.1 Plan-Do-Check-Act in line with LRC

The core of the self-assessment tool involves four different sections that contain key and sub-questions based on a Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle, all in accordance with the provisions of the LRC. Each section includes references to the European Recognition Manual for Higher Education Institutions (EAR-HEI) for benchmarking and further reading, and is intended to be adaptable to each institution's specific needs and focus areas.

The sections in the tool are:

1. Policies and Guidelines (Plan)
2. Implementation processes (Do):
  - Organizational aspects;
  - Information provision;
  - Special procedures and decisions;
  - Tools and resources;
3. Capacity building (Check)
4. Monitoring and improving (Act)



The introduction of the tool provides guidance on how to complete these different sections. It states it is recommended to establish a self-assessment team that agrees on the planning and approach and works together to conduct the self-assessment, analyses the data and conducts a SWOT analysis to identify the most urgent areas for improvement.

### **Compliance with quality assurance (ESG)**

Furthermore, the Spotlight tool also supports HEIs to respond to the requirements of standard 1.4 of the Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), “Student admission, progression, recognition and certification”.

This standard states that “Appropriate recognition procedures rely on: institutional practice for recognition being in line with the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention; cooperation with other institutions, quality assurance agencies and the national ENIC/NARIC centre with a view to ensuring coherent recognition across the country”.

## **1.3 Goal**

When the Spotlight tool was launched in 2022, no HEI had used the ‘Spotlight on recognition’ self-assessment tool in practice yet. Therefore, the AR25 project aimed to support the promotion and implementation of the tool. In doing so, the project aimed to contribute to the overall goal to improve institutional (automatic) recognition practices in the EEA and EHEA.

The promotion of the tool itself also provided the opportunity to promote existing good practice in implementing the LRC, notably instruments such as the European Area of Recognition - Higher Education Institution’s (EAR-HEI) manual.

This report contains an analysis of the findings of the first time use of Spotlight by HEIs, while identifying good practices and considerations for further implementation of the self-assessment tool.



## 2 Methodology

Two types of activities were organised to achieve these goals: virtual national seminars, and peer counselling sessions.

### 2.1 Virtual national seminars

First, virtual national seminars were held in the following countries, to inform a wide group of stakeholders about the Spotlight self-assessment tool and create an interest in its use:

- France (24 March 2024);
- Ireland (11 July 2024);
- Italy (24 April 2024)\*;
- Lithuania (26 April 2024);
- Netherlands (2 July 2024);
- Norway (7 June 2024);
- Poland (21 May 2024);
- Sweden (9 - 10 October 2024)\*.

\*) Italy and Sweden organised sessions on the tool as part of a larger physical conference, bringing together the admissions officers of their countries.

While all events had a “core element” in the programme that was similar to all, the national events were tailored to the recognition priorities in the national context in order to show how the tool could be adapted and contribute to the challenges of specific contexts. The core elements consisted of explaining the use of the tool and supporting instruments such as the EAR-HEI manual.

During the events, the admissions officers were informed about the benefits of the self-assessment tool. They were invited to commit to use the self - assessment tool and participate in the peer counselling sessions to supported its use and implementation.



## 2.1 Organised peer counselling

Second, the use of the tool was facilitated via a series of three peer counselling sessions. These sessions were organised by the ENIC-NARICs that were partner to the AR25 project, for the HEIs that announced their intention to using the tool. The goal of these sessions was to offer support in using the tool, while at the same time facilitating a systematic reflection between peers on their practices.

The idea to organise the peer counselling sessions on a national level stems from the fact that recognition is organised differently between systems. Within a country all admissions officers operate in the same national framework and therefore a reflection and an exchange of practices - “peer counselling” - amongst experts from different countries can be very valuable.

The peer counselling process consisted of three structured sessions:

- A first meeting to launch the self-assessment exercise, recapping the key elements from the national seminars, providing practical instructions on how to complete the tool, agreeing on a timeline, and clarifying initial questions.
- A second, mid-term session focused on progress. HEIs shared a first draft on how they completed the tool. They were asked to submit any questions they had for their peers to further support completion of the tool in advance of the meeting, which focused on peer exchange regarding practices and solutions related to the identified questions. The emphasis was on sharing institutional experiences, with reference to LRC-compliant practices where relevant.
- The final session reviewed the final outcomes of the self-assessments. HEIs presented their main findings and received peer feedback on their selected topics for discussion. The session also allowed for discussion on how ENIC-NARIC centres could better support institutions, especially regarding challenges requiring national-level solutions.



# 3 Participation

## 3.1 Participation

Before the project started it was unknown how many institutions would participate. To attract participants, the abovementioned national seminars were organized. These events were well attended, and the call for participation during the event was followed-up by a call via email.

Essential to this strategy was that the participating ENIC-NARIC centres are all engaged in a continuous structured dialogue with their national admissions officers. Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Poland, Sweden and Norway all have a direct link with their national admissions networks, and France and Ireland have more informal connections via previous activities. As such, they are well positioned to disseminate the tool and engage in a conversation about its use.

In total 43 institutions from 7 countries participated in the peer counselling sessions:

Country	Institutions
France	CNAM (Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers), Paris; L'Université de Reims Champagne-Ardenne (URCA), Reims.
Ireland	Atlantic Technological University, various campuses in the west of Ireland; Holmes Institute, Dublin.
Italy	Università degli studi di Bari Aldo Moro, Bari; Università degli studi di Camerino, Camerino; Università degli studi di Milano-Bicocca, Milan; Università degli studi di Milano, Milan; Università luav di Venezia, Venice.
Lithuania	22 higher education institutions whom had authorisations during 2024 to perform academic recognition.
Netherlands	Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam; Leiden University, Leiden.
Poland	Politechnika Gdańska, Gdańsk; Politechnika Śląska, Gliwice; Uniwersytet Papieski Jana Pawła II w Krakowie, Kraków; Uniwersytet Przyrodniczy we Wrocławiu, Wrocław; Uniwersytet WSB Merito w Poznaniu, Poznań.
Sweden	Stockholm University, Stockholm; Malmö University, Malmö; Kristianstad University, Kristianstad; Chalmers University of Technology, Göteborg; Dalarna University, Falun/Borlänge.



In Lithuania, the use of the self-assessment tool was merged with the annual monitoring exercise of higher education institutions authorised to perform academic recognition (those authorisations are issued by the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport)<sup>1</sup>. In practice this meant that 22 Lithuanian HEIs used 8 standards from the tool, all from the part pertaining to implementation processes – information provision (2.5; 2.6; 2.7; 2.8; 2.9) and tools and resources (2.14; 2.15; 2.16) as part of this exercise. In coming years Lithuania (SKVC) intends to include different parts of the Spotlight tool incrementally as part of this annual monitoring process. It should be noted that the self-assessment tool is in principle a voluntary exercise, and that monitoring of recognition decisions is a particular feature of the Lithuanian context and not mainstream across European systems.

In Norway, despite many efforts by the ENIC-NARIC, none of the institutions was able to commit to conduct the exercise.

### Reasons to (not) participate

In an attempt to better understand the reasons behind why institutions chose to participate (or not), the ENIC NARICs sent a short survey to the admissions officers between July and October 2024, which was completed by 44 respondents. The survey contained the following questions:

- | **Q1.** In what country is your higher education institution located?
- | **Q2.** How useful do you consider the self-assessment tool for evaluating the admissions process within your institution?  
Please rate on a scale from 1 to 10.
- | **Q3.** Did you decide to participate in the three peer counselling sessions offered by your ENIC-NARIC to complete the tool with your peers? Yes or No.
- | **Q4.** What are the main reasons for your decision (please select all that apply).

<sup>1</sup> See the link to this SKVC piece of legislation on the register of legal acts (TAR), in Lithuanian: <https://e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/98957b50a74511ef90b5ee8931e5ce5e>



Institutions from the following countries replied: France (2), Ireland (7), Italy (7), Netherlands (3), Norway (4) and Poland (17). The usefulness was scored 61 on a scale from 1 to 100, with those who were participating scoring it at an average of 69, and those not participating at 53.

From the 22 institutions that opted to participate at the time, the following incentives for joining (Q4) were provided: Compliance with (inter)national standards (11), Exchange with peers from other institutions (12), Identify strengths and areas for improvement (10), Increase visibility of admissions' needs within my institution (10), Alignment with my institutions' policy & priorities (6), Timing of the sessions (1), Staff available to complete the tool (1), Capacity building of staff and/or office (5), Opportunity to innovate (12). Recommendation by a colleague (0). In the comments section, the following three comments were given:

“As a credential evaluator I wish to improve my skills and abilities to develop techniques for evaluating the credentials of our international refugee students”.

“Primarily to gain insight into where our strengths lie but also where we need to develop. In addition, the current developments (especially the last 2-3 years) within the institution”.

“ We want to make sure that our recognition process yields correct results, is fair to the applicants, and compliant with all relevant regulations. The opportunity to do it in workshop format will also allow us to benefit from the knowledge and experience of our colleagues”.

After the exercise institutions were again asked about their initial reasons to participate, and the reported answers were similar to those provided to the first survey.

From those that opted **not** to participate, 16 respondents answered Q4 as follows: Language of the tool and resources (1), Added value to admissions in my institution (3), Alignment with my institutions' policy & priorities (1), Timing of the sessions (3), The way admissions is organised in my institution (4), Staff available to complete the tool (9), Time investment of the tool (9), No management commitment for staff to participate (2).

In the comments section, four respondents replied. One addressed that “The admission process is sufficiently good and we cannot justify investing time in making possible minor improvements to something which already works well”. Another indicated that the decision to participate lies elsewhere. A third pointed out that there were already various national and institutional commitments pending, and there was insufficient capacity to participate. The respondent highlighted the tool should be periodically offered so that institutions can plan their



participation ahead. One respondent mentioned “Chaotic national policy on international student’s admission”, without further explanation.

### **Full and partial participation**

To join the self-assessment peer counselling, institutions were given the option to either complete the full exercise, or partially complete the self-assessment by selecting sections of their choice.

Indeed, many institutions chose for partial participation, engaging with selected standards rather than the full exercise, mainly due to the perceived time demands of the tool. The way institutions organised their recognition responsibilities also played a role. Especially where these responsibilities were spread across departments or not clearly assigned to a single role, it appeared hard to identify and engage the right stakeholders. Others focused on specific areas, such as policy implementation, or selected focus areas that aligned with their priorities or available resources. Overall, engagement was influenced by internal capacity, clarity of roles, and the tool’s relevance to the institution’s immediate context.

Apart from selecting standards, reported ways to “partially” complete the exercise also included limited engagement of other departments, for reasons similar to those mentioned in the previous paragraph. In many cases only recognition procedures

for admissions to a specific level (i.e. bachelor or master) were included, since these are separate procedures.

### **Drop outs**

After signing up, four institutions from the Netherlands (1) and Poland (3) revoked their decision to participate in the exercise, thereby reducing the number from 25 to 21. They cited reasons limited time and institutional capacity, including competing priorities, and insufficient resources. These institutions are not listed above.

In some cases, specific teams within institutions dropped out, while the institution as a whole stayed involved. Reasons mentioned were sudden operational challenges (including unexpected staff shortage) and shifting institutional priorities, which impacted participation.

This report reflects the outcomes based on the final situation, unless otherwise mentioned.

## **3.2 Establishing the self - assessment team**

All institutions started the exercise with setting up a self-assessment team. The self-assessment protocol suggests forming a team as small as possible but covering the four key areas to be self-assessed: policy development, implementation



of recognition processes, internal quality assurance, and applicant appeals (if not already covered by the previously mentioned areas). For efficiency, larger teams should appoint a chair to lead discussions and a secretary to manage documentation and follow-up.

Upon review, some institutions opted to set up their teams in a different way as recommended by the tool, resulting in different approaches to the team size, coverage of the recommended roles, and the absence of supporting positions like chair and secretary.

Reported obstacles to comply with all guidelines from the protocol included limited time, insufficient staff availability, and difficulties in identifying or engaging relevant stakeholders, especially in institutions where recognition functions are spread across units. Informal consultations with other departments were sometimes used to address these gaps. Institutions reported that going through the exercise helped gain experience in how to conduct the self-assessment.



# 4 Outcomes self-assessment

The following paragraphs discuss the main findings of all self - assessments combined. They are organised by the four main sections of the Spotlight self-assessment tool, and every sub-paragraph contains the questions of the tool. Note not all questions are always answered by all institutions.

The reporting is based on the input from the institutional reports, but is deliberately kept general in nature since the objective of the peer counselling was to support institutions in their compliance with the LRC, and do this on a confidential basis.

In addition, some outcomes are reported with the purpose to support further improvement of the self-assessment tool, as well as to support the ENIC-NARICs in their role to facilitate implementation of the LRC in the national context.

## 4.1.1 Section 1: Policies and Guidelines

This section consisted of three questions:

**Question: 1.1.** What kind of national and/or institutional regulations and guidelines for recognition procedures does your institution follow?

**Question 1.2.** At your institution, do you have a commonly applied definition of what a “substantial difference” is?

**Question 1.3.** Which elements of a qualification do your staff consider during the recognition procedure in order to establish whether there is a substantial difference, and to what extent are these considered as a basis for a substantial difference?

While most institutional procedures referenced national regulations, explicit reference to international legal guidelines, notably the LRC and other treaties, was not always included. This latter point may be due to an alignment of national legislations with the Lisbon Recognition Convention. Furthermore, gaps were found in how these policies were applied internally. In some cases, there was an absence of internal policies altogether.

There were institutions where no common definition of substantial difference was in place, yet the concept was reported to be applied in practice. Similarly, in general institutions confirmed that the five elements of a qualification - level, workload, quality, profile, and learning outcomes - were considered. However, these elements were not always explicitly included in the procedure and often lacked formal criteria. Further, some institutions identified issues in formulating and interpreting learning outcomes.

Additionally, some institutions identified a lack of formalised procedures for evaluating refugee qualifications and flexible procedures for cases where standard documentation is unavailable.



## 4.1.2 Section 2: Implementation of Processes

### Section 2: Organisational Aspects

**Question 2.1.** Bearing in mind the distinction between recognition and admission, is your institution responsible for processes and decisions on both recognition and admission?

**Question 2.2.** If your institution is engaged in both recognition and admission processes and decisions, is the same unit involved or do two separate units handle these two processes?

**Question 2.3.** Which organisational units at your institution are involved in recognition processes and decisions: a central admissions office, decentralised admissions offices, faculties, others?

**Question 2.4.** When processing recognition applications, how do your staff ensure that a consistent approach is being applied, both with regard to similar qualifications and across the years?

Institutions reported varied internal organisational models for handling recognition and admissions. Some institutions merged recognition within the admissions process, while others maintained a clear separation. Within this variation, some organised their procedures at a central level, and sometimes decentral at faculty level. This often depended on the programme level (bachelor or master), which could also be organised differently within an institution.

While divisions of tasks over various departments do not necessarily compromise procedural coherence, the data indicates that institutions lacking centralised processes and/or procedures seemed more frequently to have challenges to ensure consistency and fairness across departments.

Unified platforms and documentation systems to record recognition decisions were identified as ways to ensure consistency, but at the same time it was concluded that these were not always in place.



## Section 2: Information Provision

**Question 2.5.** How user-friendly and exhaustive is the information for potential applicants that is available online, e.g. on the institutional website?

**Question 2.6.** To what extent is the general information provided online complemented by more individualised information provision (e.g. email exchange or in-person meeting)?

**Question 2.7.** Throughout the entire course of information provision, either online or in person, how do you ensure that the applicant is always informed about the exact steps ahead and about what to expect, e.g. in terms of the time until a decision is taken?

**Question 2.8.** Do your staff have guidelines on the maximum amount of time that should pass between the submission of an application and the communication of the recognition decision?

An identified common area for improvement was the information provided to applicants. While some institutions maintained well-structured and updated communication channels - including websites, automated notifications, and timelines - others reported outdated or incomplete resources. Another aspect mentioned was the provision of information in accessible language (i.e. avoiding technical terms and other jargon). The latter created barriers for applicants, particularly in understanding timelines, documentation requirements, and decision criteria.

Many institutions identified a need for further streamlining communication and better coordination between departmental workflows to keep all communication consistent and updated.

As for appeals procedures, gaps were identified in the provision of information and the formal steps to be followed in case of negative decisions.



## Section 2: Special Procedures and Decisions

**Question 2.10.** Which procedures are in place at your institution for applicants in a refugee-like situation with insufficient or missing documents?

**Question 2.11.** To what extent does your institution use the full range of recognition decisions, including partial, alternative and conditional recognition?

**Question 2.12.** To what extent does your institution apply automatic recognition?

**Question 2.13.** How does your institution ensure a proper balance between applying consistent evaluation criteria on the one hand, and taking an applicant-centred, flexible approach that focuses on the requirements that are relevant for the specific recognition purpose on the other?

In only a few cases, tailor-made procedures were in place for refugees or applicants in a refugee-like situation. These included one-on-one assessments and acceptance of alternative forms of evidence such as sworn statements or comparability certificates.

The concept of partial or conditional recognition created some confusion for some institutions. Most institutions focused on full recognition, but did recommend alternative pathways if needed.

In general, most institutions had knowledge of the concept of automatic recognition and how to apply it in practice. However, many had no formal internal guidelines governing automatic recognition and the conditions under which it should apply.



## Section 2: Tools and Resources

**Question 2.14.** How frequently do your staff receive support from your national ENIC-NARIC centre in the form of advice or training?

**Question 2.15.** How do your staff verify the legitimacy, authenticity and quality of a qualification?

**Question 2.16.** Where do you seek information about the level, workload, profile, quality and learning outcomes of a qualification?

Access to verification tools and staff training were uneven across institutions. Some institutions had limited engagement

with their national ENIC-NARIC centre, while others actively participated in training sessions and collaborative events to enhance internal expertise.

Approaches to verifying the legitimacy, authenticity and quality of qualifications varied. Some institutions relied on information provided by the ENIC-NARIC. Others conducted the accreditation checks themselves. In several cases, the accreditation status of the issuing institutions or the timing of the awarded credentials was not systematically verified.

Clear procedures for verifying institutional accreditation and qualifications were not always in place.



Furthermore, practical checklists and internal knowledge repositories were not always accessible and available.

The conversion of credits, particularly from non-EU systems, was noted as an ongoing challenge, prompting some to consider the development of their own conversion tools.

### 4.1.3 Section 3: Capacity Building

**Question 3.1.** How does your institution ensure that its staff have the relevant knowledge and skills to perform recognition procedures?

**Question 3.2.** How often are your staff in contact with peers from other institutions or countries, e.g. in an online forum or annual seminars?

Institutions reported a range of practices related to training and capacity building in the field of recognition. However, while some training opportunities exist, there is often no systematic approach to training administrative personnel or academic staff involved in recognition procedures. Training is often delivered informally or reactively, rather than as part of a broader strategic plan to ensure continuous professional development processes. Entities such as deans or programme coordinators, whose involvement in recognition decisions is critical, often have no training.

Some staff was found to participate in national or international training networks and professional associations. There were examples of institutions that benefitted from cooperation with peers as part of projects. In this respect the example of a European University Alliance was mentioned. Overall, institutional engagement with such opportunities is uneven.

Other institutions reported uneven knowledge levels across departments regarding recognition and credit transfer. Both central and faculty staff was not always trained, affecting the accuracy and efficiency of recognition decisions.

### 4.1.4 Section 4: Monitoring and Improving

**Question 4.1.** How does your institution ensure that its recognition processes are up to date and fit for purpose?

**Question 4.2.** To what extent does your institution collect and analyse data (e.g. number of applications, number of negative recognition decisions) on recognition?

**Question 4.3.** How does your institution monitor whether its recognition procedures are in line with institutional regulations and applied consistently?

**Question 4.4.** How regularly are these procedures reviewed and revised with a view to enhancing their quality?



Several institutions reported that they do not have any form of data collection, monitoring system, or quality indicators specifically related to foreign qualification recognition. The main reason is limited capacity (time or resources) to regularly review and revise recognition data and procedures, hindering the development of internal databases or evidence-based improvements. In general it was reported that the number of qualified staff was insufficient compared to the volume and complexity of requests received.

Furthermore, responsibilities related to recognition were not clearly assigned, suggesting a need for improved clarity and alignment across offices involved in the student lifecycle. Additionally, fragmented communication between offices slowed down turnaround time and impacted consistency.

In one country, the absence of a national legal framework for recognition procedures was identified to contribute to inconsistency and institutional uncertainty.

## 4.2 Main follow-up actions

The following is a selection of internal follow-up actions formulated by the participating HEIs on the above mentioned identified gaps. Similarly to the findings from above, the listed examples have been generalised to secure confidentiality.

The following actions are aimed at improving:

- Internal policies and procedures.  
This ranged from establishing procedures to revising existing ones, further fine-tuning concepts and how they are implemented across the institution. This included references to relevant (inter)national frameworks and adopting formal definitions (e.g. “substantial difference”) from the Global Recognition Convention and the EAR-HEI manual. In some cases the distinction between recognition and admissions needed to be more clearly articulated. Some institutions created new procedural checklists to guide the recognition of foreign qualifications.
- Intra-institutional collaboration.  
Actions included internal follow-up meetings with relevant departments in the process, and the creation of working groups to improve the internal process in identified areas. Examples included academic staff, faculties, legal staff and examination commissions. Part of the efforts entailed



clarifying and creating a shared understanding of the division of responsibilities in recognition procedures.

- Strengthening of staff training and capacity building. Most institutions highlighted the need for training, notably in topics like substantial differences and automatic recognition. Various ideas were shared as how to organise this, including in-house training sessions across the institution, and integrating recognition principles into onboarding processes for new staff. Furthermore, the need for continuous training and expertise-building was identified.
- Institutions, particularly in one country, expressed a desire to collaborate with peer institutions within their regions to support shared learning. This included using the self-assessment tool to initiate peer counselling sessions and harmonise recognition practices.
- External communication and transparency. Several institutions planned to update their information provision to applicants, both on the website as well

as in their communication from the application towards the final decision, ensuring these were in line with the recommendations of the LRC.

- Information management and monitoring. Some institutions identified the need to build or improve internal databases to track recognition decisions to support consistent monitoring over time. These databases would serve multiple purposes, including identifying trends and addressing recognition challenges.

Follow-up actions also included institutionalizing the self-assessment process itself - embedding it in strategic planning and reporting outcomes to academic governance bodies to support the admissions in the institution.

In some countries, the intention was expressed to continue the dialogue and cooperation on national level, as well as the use of the tool as a framework.



# 5 Conclusions

This concluding chapter focusses on the reported benefits, areas of improvement and formulates some recommendations.

## Benefits

After the exercise, institutions reported the following aspects of the self-assessment tool to be particularly beneficial:

- Institutions appreciated to be able to dedicate time to reflect on internal procedures with a tool that was rooted in their own recognition practice and provided the standards of the international legal framework in which they operate;
- A better understanding of what compliance with the LRC in practice encompasses;
- It helped uncover areas for improvement and supported the implementation of changes that streamline and enhance procedures. Using the tool shed light on important elements that were sometimes hidden before. This included clarifying the role of other actors in the institution (i.e. exam commissions, academic staff, communication staff) as well as the need for procedures (and the aspects that need to be covered), capacity building in terms of information management and training;
- The self-assessment approach was seen as requiring honesty and introspection, which allowed institutions to identify areas in need of change without the pressure to present themselves in the best possible light. This supported a culture of openness to improvement;
- The exercise also sparked internal conversations across departments. It provided space and an opportunity for discussions that moved beyond day-to-day tasks. This helped to initiate new internal collaborations and networks focused on recognition issues;
- Many institutions valued the opportunity to engage in peer exchange on national level under guidance, particularly around common challenges. It sparked ideas on how to strengthen the national dialogue tool;
- The tool was viewed as a productive investment of time, contributing to (ideas for) administrative simplification and the development of consistent methodologies across teams;
- At the national level, the exercise helped advance discussions on recognition and strengthen understanding of the LRC and EAR manual - particularly among newer staff.

## Lessons learned

With regard to the tool itself, common concerns among HEIs hindering the implementation of the (full) self-assessment concerned the tool's length and perceived complexity and, in some cases, the language used. This latter point concerns the current availability of the tool in a limited number of national languages as well as its use of technical terms, which was unfamiliar to some users.



However, at the same time it appeared that solutions offered to address this reality were helpful. One example is offering flexibility by using parts of the tool, which supported participation by institutions who otherwise would not have participated. Another approach that worked well were experiences from other HEIs in how to complete the self - assessment despite this situation. In one case it was reported that a HEI with a substantial number of international student enrollment, had completed the initial concept report in a day together with a colleague, providing inspiration to others.

One of the suggestions offered by institutions to support the process is to develop reporting templates and sharing of good practices from other institutions on how to use the tool.

### **Recommendations**

In addition, ENIC-NARIC centres also identified several lessons learned that could help improve future implementation of the self-assessment tool:

- A common challenge across countries was engaging HEIs. The proposed 30-day timeframe was considered too short to conduct a thorough analysis, particularly given the need to review multiple layers of regulation and documentation;
- Tailored guidelines. Support materials, such as reporting templates, explanatory documents, sample responses, videos, or argument-based briefs, could be developed to support further implementation;
- Tuning structured interaction. The peer-learning component faced some limitations, particularly when institutions selected different focus areas within the tool, making it difficult to identify shared challenges or topics. This limited the depth of exchange in some cases, although institutions still appreciated the opportunity to learn from other practices.



It should be noted that already during the project various initiatives were made to support the implementation of these lessons. Apart from the instruction webinars and peer counselling sessions, these included the development of reporting templates for the final report. Additionally, both Poland and Lithuania translated the tool into their local languages which supported the implementation.

Overall, the implementation of the self-assessment provided a wealth of information for the future implementation of the tool.

The experience of the HEIs that participated is unanimously positive and shows tangible results for institutions to work further. While there are suggestions for improvements, these build on the tool; the tool and its structure as such were appreciated.

One of the findings standing out when it comes to LRC compliant recognition procedures is that capacity issues persist, even in institutions that have a strong base for recognition. This includes both number of qualified staff available, as well as in terms of expertise, and material capacity such as information management and communication. This is also reflected in that there were institutions that were interested but a lack of capacity prevented them from participation.

In general, the follow up project, AR2030, is encouraged to provide further guidance and consider developing templates and collecting more examples of good practice for each section of the tool to support institutions. In addition, further translations can be considered into national languages where English may be a barrier for the implementation.

It should be taken into account that those HEIs that did participate, had already a certain level of recognition in place in order to conduct the analysis. Future efforts should consider how institutions that have less or no capacity can be involved to start the exercise.

Further synergies could be sought with other actors and organisations to disseminate the tool, notably accreditation and student organisations, since the tool offers a practical solution.

# Colophon

The content was prepared by ENIC-NARIC The Netherlands - Nuffic - in its role as coordinator of AR25, by Jenneke Lokhoff , Bas Wegewijs, Merel Eimers and Merlijn van Dierendonck, and the European University Association as the coordinator of the project that developed the Spotlight self- assessment tool, based on contributions of the following ENIC-NARIC's.

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