



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

Evaluation Report

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Directorate B— Youth, Education and Erasmus+
Unit B.1 — Higher Education / B.2 – Schools and Multilingualism

E-mail: EAC-UNITE-B1@ec.europa.eu, EAC-UNITE-B2@ec.europa.eu

*European Commission
B-1049 Brussels*

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Study team: Manuel Souto-Otero, Michael Richardson, Valentina Musso, Julia Fellingner, Sigrid Mannsberger-Nindl, Karin Luomi-Messerer, Janine Wulz, Barend van der Meulen



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Main abbreviations

(2018) CR: (2018) Council Recommendation on automatic mutual recognition

AMR: Automatic mutual recognition

AR: Automatic recognition

BFUG: Bologna Follow-up Group

CoVE: Centre of Vocational Excellence

DG EAC: Directorate General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture

DS: Diploma Supplement

EC: European Commission

ECTS: European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System

ECVET: European credit system for vocational education and training

EEA: European Education Area

EFIL: The European Federation for Intercultural Learning

EHEA: European Higher Education Area

ENIC: European Network of Information Centres

EQAVET: European Quality Assurance in Vocational education and training

EQF: European Qualifications Framework

ESCO: European Skills, Competences, and Occupations

ESF: European Social Fund

EU: European Union

EUI: European Universities Initiative

HE: Higher Education

HEI: Higher Education Institution

IVET: Initial vocational education and training

KP: Key Principle (of the 2018 CR)

LO: Learning Outcome

LRC: Lisbon Recognition Convention

NARIC: National Academic Recognition Information Centre

NQF: National Qualifications Framework

QA: Quality Assurance

QF-EHEA: Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area

SE: Upper secondary education and training

SEI: Secondary Education Institution

VET: Vocational education and training

Country abbreviations used according to the [European Union interinstitutional style guide REV 23 / 1.2.2020](#).

1. Introduction

This evaluation report provides an analysis on the state of play in the implementation of the **Council Recommendation** of 26 November 2018 on **promoting automatic mutual recognition** of higher education (HE) and upper secondary education and training (SE) qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad (hereafter: 2018 CR or CR), which covers:

- automatic mutual recognition of qualifications acquired anywhere in the EU for the purpose of granting access to further studies in another Member State;
- the automatic recognition of outcomes obtained during a temporary learning experience abroad within the EU.

The evaluation reviews the situation regarding implementation of automatic mutual recognition as per the principles and provisions of the CR and provides a comparative analysis of the situation throughout the EU27 Member States. The evaluation report concludes with the formulation of recommendations to improve the implementation of the CR.

2. Intervention logic

2.1 The Council Recommendation

The academic recognition of diplomas and periods of study abroad is one of the central aims of European cooperation in education, as defined in Article 165 of the TFEU. Automatic mutual recognition (AMR) for the purposes of further learning is also a core element of the European Education Area (EEA), which Member States committed to establish by 2025, and a priority in the Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European Cooperation in education and training 2021-2030. Various initiatives, in particular the 1997 Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC), which has been ratified by all EU Member States except Greece, and the development of supporting tools – notably in the areas of quality assurance (QA) and credit transfer – as well as associated initiatives such as the 2002 Copenhagen process in vocational education and training (VET) or the 2012 Bucharest Communiqué in higher education and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) had enabled progress towards automatic mutual recognition.

It is in this context that the 2018 CR was adopted. As noted in its title, the 2018 CR focuses on two levels of education (higher education and upper secondary education and training) and on recognition with regards to two different elements: qualifications obtained (with the purpose of furthering one's education in another Member State) and learning outcomes of learning periods abroad. The 2018 CR defines **automatic mutual recognition of qualifications** as the right for holders of a qualification of a certain level issued by a Member State and giving access to higher education in the home country, to be considered for access to a higher education programme or entry to the next level in any other Member State without having to go through any separate recognition procedure (e.g. general access to HE = general access to HE; Bachelor = Bachelor; Master = Master), and without the intervention of a credential evaluator because the level, quality and workload of a qualification are automatically accepted¹.

In the case of learning periods abroad in **upper secondary education and training (SE)**, it means that the outcomes from a learning period of up to one year abroad in a Member State are recognised in other Member States, with the learner not being required to repeat the 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 (CR 444/3). In relation to **higher education (HE)**, it means that the outcomes from a learning period abroad at higher education level in one Member State are automatically and fully recognised in the others, as reflected in a learning agreement and confirmed in the Transcript of Records, in line with the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS).

The CR is premised on the benefits of international mobility for individuals, in terms of the development of knowledge, skills and competences, personal development, social and labour market activation and European identity². At the education system level, international mobility is expected to contribute to quality enhancement and cooperation and enable students to *"make the best possible use of all learning opportunities across Europe"* (CR 444/2).

Automatic mutual recognition of qualifications does not affect the independence of higher education institutions (HEIs) or other competent authorities in making admission decisions.

¹ For this evaluation, we differentiate between automatic mutual recognition (AMR) – which is the CR's aim applying to the entire EU – from automatic recognition (AR) – whereby a specific Member State automatically recognises qualifications and learning outcomes obtained in any other Member State regardless of reciprocity with AR in the 26 other Member States.

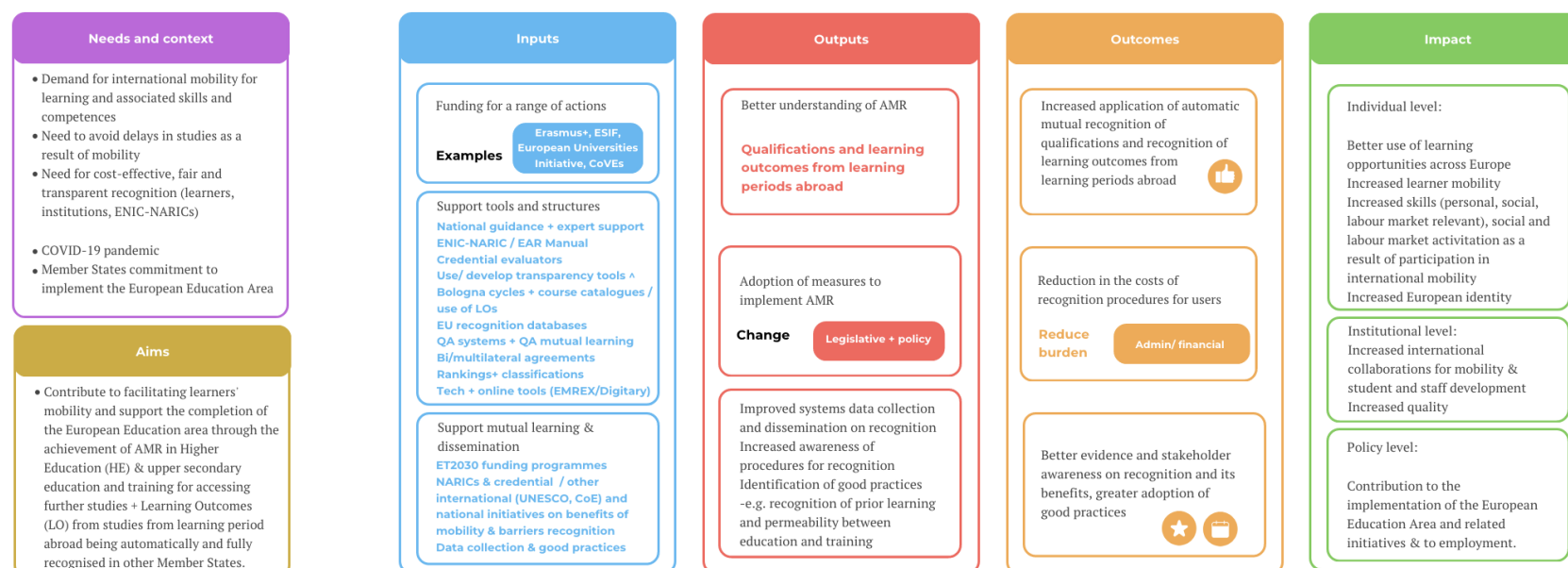
² See for example ICF and CHE (2019) Erasmus+ Higher Education Impact Study. Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union.

The Council Recommendation applies to qualifications, credits and learning outcomes acquired in the EU, regardless of whether the holder of the qualification is an EU or third-country national, in line with the requirements of the EU legal migration directive.

2.2 Intervention logic

The Council Recommendation's intervention logic, as presented in the CR and associated documents and contrasted during evaluation interviews, is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Intervention logic of the Council Recommendation



^ Tools for mobility and transparency include DS, CTS & ECTS users' guide (HE), ECVET (VET), EQF-LL, EQAVET, EQF-EHEA, Europass, ESCO, European Vocational Core Profiles.

The CR's central aims are to facilitate the mobility of learners and thereby support the completion of the European Education Area (EEA). Various inputs support the implementation of the CR. National Academic Recognition Information Centres (NARICs) are central support structures for the Recommendation. Multiple other EU activities, such as European funding programmes (like Erasmus+ or ESF), and initiatives such as the European Universities initiative or Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs), act as facilitators to the CR in the sense that they enable relevant related activities by educational institutions, such as joint degrees in the case of the European Universities initiative or exchange of knowledge and the development of curricula and tools that can help facilitate recognition in the case of CoVEs. The 2018 CR is also supported by a range of pre-existing tools and systems, such as EU transparency tools, the Bologna cycles in HE, Europass, the European Digital Credential Infrastructure Standards, and work undertaken in the adoption of the learning outcomes approach (both in HE and in SE), course descriptions³ and recognition databases, QA systems and mutual learning on these, as these can inspire trust, and support automatic mutual recognition.

Finally, a set of support measures are in place to facilitate mutual learning towards AMR as well as dissemination of information, including international actions through the Strategic Cooperation Framework, funding programmes, NARICs, follow-up actions by the Bologna Follow-Up Group on compliance with the Lisbon Recognition Convention as established in the 2018 Paris Communiqué and reiterated in the 2020 Rome Communiqué, or work with international organisations – amongst which the CR underlines the Council of Europe and UNESCO- as well as national initiatives to disseminate the benefits of mobility and learn more about barriers to recognition and how to address them.

The expected outputs from the CR are the development of a better understanding of AMR, as explained in the Recommendation itself, the stimulation of measures to implement AMR within and between Member States through policy and legislative changes and the enhancement of systems for data collection and dissemination on recognition. Related to better understanding of recognition is the development of greater awareness of procedures for recognition.

The outcomes expected from the CR encompass the full implementation of automatic recognition of qualifications in HE and learning outcomes (LOs) from learning periods abroad both in SE and HE and an associated reduction in the burden for users. These outcomes would imply that qualifications from other Member States are considered valid, trustworthy and of the same level as equivalent qualifications from the own country, and the learning outcomes of periods of study abroad are automatically and fully recognised with the learner not being required to repeat the year, or achieved learning outcomes, in the country of origin, provided that the learning outcomes achieved abroad are broadly in line with the curricula in the country of origin. A further expected outcome is increased collaboration and increased permeability between VET and HE, as VET upper secondary qualifications are expected to enable access to HE.

The main expected impacts of the CR at the individual level refer to greater assurance on the recognition and visibility of their knowledge, skills and competences, and a better use of the learning opportunities offered across the EU. The CR potentially contributes to the free movement of learners who indeed would no longer be restricted in their choices by a lack of recognition of qualifications and learning outcomes acquired in different countries. Thus, there would be an increase in interest in international mobility for learning. Associated with the mobility that well-functioning recognition systems facilitate is the development of a range of skills (personal, academic, labour market relevant), which contribute to greater social and labour market activation. In addition, as a result of international mobility, learners are also expected to enhance their

³ The term is often used as equivalent for course catalogue or a list of courses including their description, both in HE and in Upper secondary education and training
(See http://fs.ncaa.org/Docs/eligibility_center/OVN/What_Is_A_Course_Catalog.pdf).



European identity. At institutional level, work on recognition initiatives (including in the context of joint programmes) will increase trust and collaboration for the mobility of students and staff, leading to improvements in the quality of education. These developments will contribute to the achievement of the European Education Area, and better functioning labour markets.

While the intervention logic for the CR is in comprehensive and ambitious and would bring about substantial benefits to its target groups, it does not reflect the full range of outcomes that AMR would bring about. In particular, the intervention logic does not reflect explicitly on the benefits that increased mobility would generate in terms of a more diverse student population and the advantages that this can bring in terms of exposure to new ideas and student experiences.

3. Evaluation framework and methodology

The evaluation framework for the evaluation focused on the examination of the extent to which AMR of qualifications and learning periods abroad has been implemented through the 27 Member States of the European Union. The CR sets out a series of principles to support the CR's main goal, and the evaluation examined the extent to which these key principles are being put into practice.

The evaluation is based on a mixed methods approach combining the collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data from primary and secondary sources, as described below in this chapter.

3.1 Analytical framework

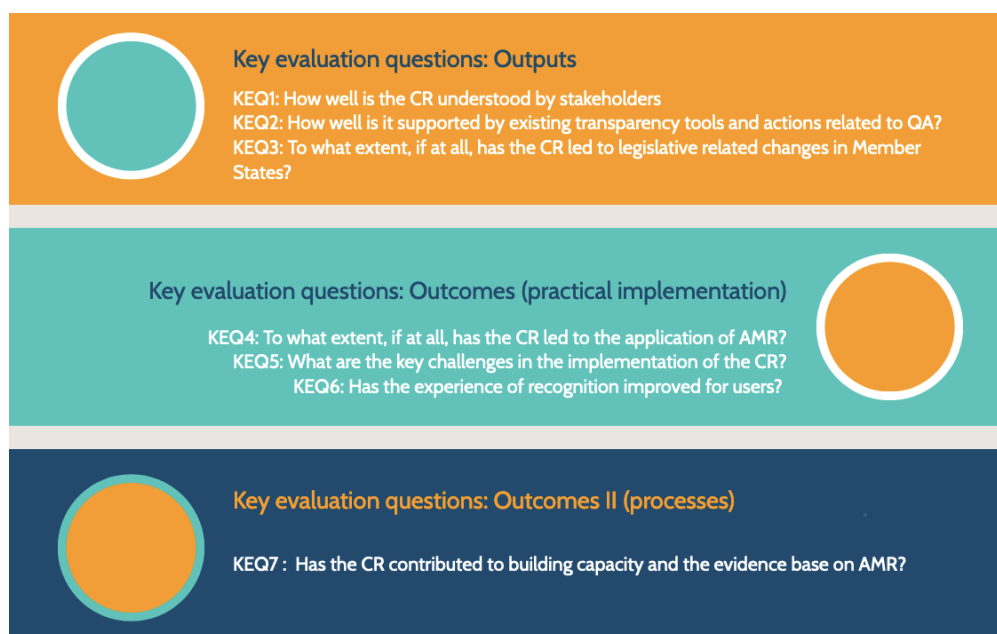
The 2018 CR defined 10 key principles for implementation. Key principle 1 represents the main goal, which is supported by the other nine key principles. The principles cover a range of central aspects included in the intervention logic for the CR, as inputs and outputs that will contribute to the achievement of the expected outcomes and impact. Together they focus on the extent of implementation of the CR, and the achievement of its expected outputs and results⁴. Since the initiative is recent and implementation is still on-going, the evaluation does not aim to assess the long-term impacts of the CR but reflects at various points on how valuable policymakers and other stakeholders have found the CR.

⁴ The evaluation thus did not include other evaluation criteria such as relevance or coherence, for example.

Figure 2. Key Principles (KPs) of the Council Recommendation

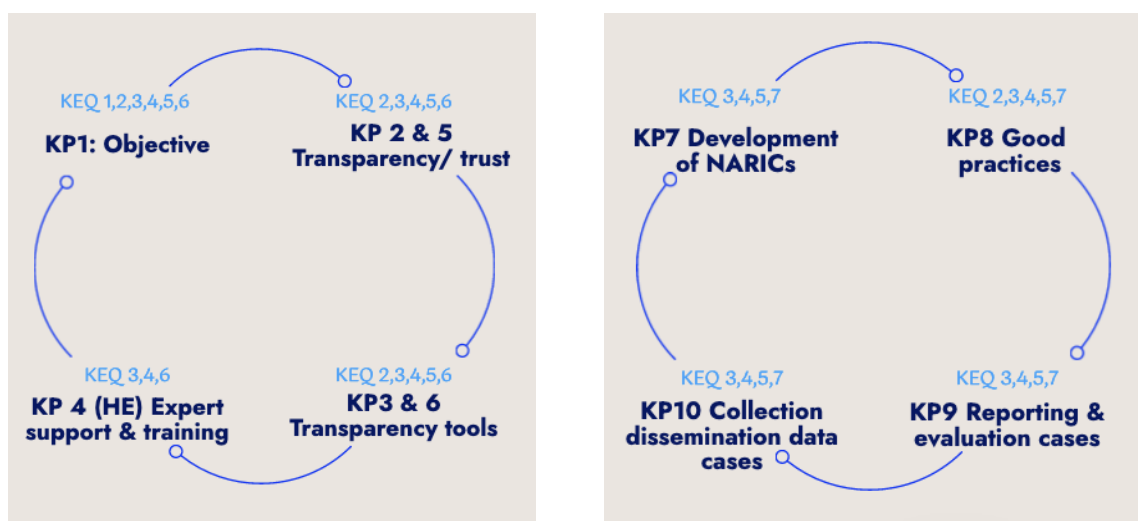


Figure 3. Key evaluation questions



The illustration below links the key evaluation questions and the Key Principles of the country recommendation to help readers interested in certain Key Principles to locate where they are covered in the report, which is structured around the key evaluation questions.

Figure 4. Relation between evaluation questions and key principles in the CR



It should be noted that the relationship presented is one of 'greater affinity' in the sense that additional connections could be established between key evaluation questions and key principles.

3.2 'Traffic light' assessment framework

In addition to the analytical framework, a 'traffic light' assessment framework was developed in collaboration with DG EAC to summarise Member States' progress towards key aspects of AMR as per the CR.

The 'traffic light' assessment framework comprises seven criteria. The connections between these criteria, the KEQs and CR's Key Principles are presented in the following table.

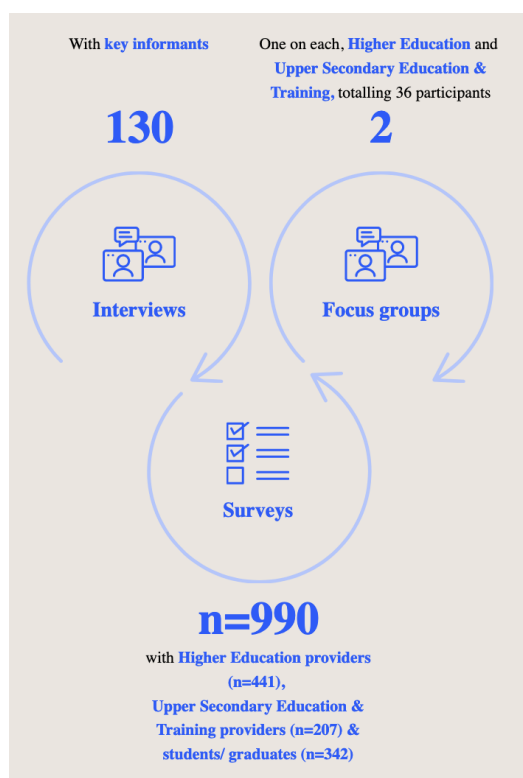
Table 1. Relation between traffic light assessment criteria and KEQs

'Traffic light' assessment criterion	Link to KEQs
1. Compliance with European and Bologna transparency tools	KEQs 2 & 3
2. Measures for capacity building and support for institutions and agencies	KEQs 7
3. Monitoring end evaluation	KEQs 7
4. Automatic recognition of higher education qualifications	KEQs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
5. Automatic recognition of upper secondary education qualifications	
6. Automatic recognition of learning periods abroad – higher education	
7. Automatic recognition of learning periods abroad – upper secondary education	

3.3 Methods used and work undertaken

The methods used in this evaluation combine the collection of secondary data, through a review of the literature and data on recognition available at the national level (when available), with the generation of primary data through a series of consultation activities, as shown at a glance below.

Figure 5. Primary data collection



The table below provides detail on the stakeholder categories taking part in each of the different primary data collection activities.

Table 2. Overview of stakeholder categories taking part in the consultation activities

	Interviews	Surveys	Focus groups
1. National ministries	✓		HE – Up. Sec. Ed.
2. National credential evaluators	✓		HE
3. NARICs	✓		HE
4. Erasmus+ national agencies	✓		HE
5. Policy experts*	✓		HE – Up. Sec. Ed.
6. HEIs - staff	✓	✓	HE
7. SEIs and VET providers	✓	✓	Up. Sec. Ed.
8. Teacher organisations	✓		Up. Sec. Ed.
9. Social partners			Up. Sec. Ed.
10. Students and graduates		✓	

*includes members of the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG), Cedefop, EUA, EURASHE, ENQA, EQAR, ECA

The main objective of data collection was to assess the situation in the Member States regarding the implementation of the CR. While efforts were undertaken to obtain equivalent data in all the Member States, the responsiveness of stakeholders varied across countries. It should also be noted that the availability of information from secondary sources also varied per country, making interview needs vary between them.

At Member State level (EU27), the country researchers were tasked with carrying out a literature review and a series of semi-structured interviews with relevant national stakeholders based on the analytical framework's Key Evaluation Questions. NARICs were then asked to verify and comment on the results of the traffic light assessment for their respective countries.

3.3.1 Literature review

Desk research was undertaken to obtain information on the state of play on the implementation of the CR on automatic mutual recognition of qualifications and learning periods abroad across the 27 Member States and the impact of the CR's implementation on education and training systems and institutions, as well as on learners.

As a first step, a review of EU-level and international publications was carried out covering:

- Studies on institutional level practices from relevant European projects (e.g. financed by the Erasmus+ Programme);
- Studies/policy documents related to AMR of qualifications, EU transparency and mobility instruments;
- Reports from the European Parliament Preparatory Action Expert Network on Recognition of outcomes of learning periods abroad in general secondary education – including the national information packs on the recognition of learning periods abroad in general secondary education;
- Reports from the Bologna Follow-up Group, particularly in relation to extensive literature produced as part of the Thematic Peer Group B on the Lisbon Recognition Convention;
- Publications from International/European bodies: e.g. Council of Europe, UNESCO, European Consortium for Accreditation, European University Association, European Association of Institutions in Higher Education, European Students Union, OBESSU, ENQA, EQAR;
- Publications from ENIC-NARICs;
- Publications and studies from European networks (EFIL, ESN) including a recent publication on mobility in Secondary Education across Europe;
- Eurydice national reports for quality assurance in higher education; and

- Publications from the EuniQ network.

In preparation for the country-level research, the following types of literature were reviewed at Member State level:

- Publications from National Ministries of Education, including reports on policy developments, legislation relating to mutual recognition and learning mobility abroad (covering HE and SE, including IVET);
- Publications from national Quality Assurance agencies;
- Publications from national credential evaluators; and
- Other publications (by national teacher organisations, VET associations, student unions/representative bodies, third sector organisations).

Finally, country researchers were asked to identify databases of recognition decisions during the interviews that they conducted at the national levels and then to analyse data on recognition decisions for their respective country where these data were available and accessible.

The literature sources reviewed provided some initial insights on the implementation of the 2018 CR on AMR, which were further explored in the consultation activities carried out for this evaluation.

3.3.2 Primary data collection activities

The bulk of the research consisted of primary data collection activities (key informant interviews, and two focus groups) to fill the information gaps identified during the literature review. **Key informant interviews** were undertaken with various relevant stakeholder groups. The main aim of the interviews was to gather in-depth information and specialist insights on:

- the understanding, adaptation, and implementation of the 2018 CR in the national context; and
- the most challenging aspects and barriers to full implementation of the 2018 CR encountered by different stakeholders across the Member States.

The interviews followed a qualitative semi-structured approach, guided by the key evaluation questions. An overview of the stakeholders targeted for interviews is provided in Table 3. Interviews were conducted in priority with specific stakeholder groups in each of the 27 Member States. On average around 4 interviews per country were undertaken.

Table 3. Overview of stakeholder groups interviewed

Area	Targeted interview partners	Priority interviews
Higher Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministry representatives for HE • Competent bodies active in ENQA and EQAR networks • ENIC-NARIC network members • Credential Evaluators • Quality assurance agencies • HEI staff • Policy experts at EU level (e.g. BFUG national members) • Other possible interview partners: university networks, students' unions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ENIC/NARIC staff/credential evaluator • Policymaking expert (Ministry representative, HEI staff)
Upper secondary education and	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministry representatives school education • Ministry representatives for VET 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy making expert school education • Policy making expert VET

Area	Targeted interview partners	Priority interviews
training including VET	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Erasmus + National agency for mobility at VET and school levels Educational researchers Other potential interview partners: teacher unions and NGO/third sector organisations, school networks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Erasmus+ National agency member (VET or school mobility)
Learning mobility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Erasmus + National agency for HE and secondary education learning mobility University international exchange office Higher education researchers Upper secondary Education providers (General education and VET) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Erasmus+ National Agency HEI staff

Two thematic **focus groups** were held to reflect on and validate the findings from the country research:

- one on higher education (31 May 2022)
- one on upper secondary education and training including VET (8 June 2022)

The aim of the focus groups was to enable practitioners, experts and policy makers in education and training to provide information on their experiences with the implementation of the Council Recommendation and share their insights on AMR more generally. The focus groups allowed for additional insights from a conversation among researchers, representatives from diverse institutions and practitioners, coming from diverse countries. One of the advantages of focus group discussions is their suitability for pointing out unexpected aspects of a social phenomenon, not considered by the researchers or individual participants⁵.

The discussions focused:

- (1) on the current state of implementation of the 2018 CR;
- (2) the advantages and challenges experienced by practitioners and institutions; and
- (3) proposed recommendations for further improvements of automatic mutual recognition.

Various topics linked to the implementation of the 2018 CR were discussed, including national legislation, funding, QA and verification of qualifications, EU transparency tools and digitalisation processes.

Participants were experts and practitioners in the topics under discussion. In the selection of participants, the aim was to strike a balance between homogeneity (in terms of avoiding power imbalances that could inhibit discussions) and heterogeneity (to give voice to different groups and include participants that could add different perspectives to the discussions). Table 4 provides an overview of the stakeholder types and types of organisations who contributed to each of the focus groups and the lists the countries they represented.

⁵ Acocella, I., (2012) 'The focus groups in social research: advantages and disadvantages' *Quality & Quantity*, 46(4), pp.1125-1136.

Table 4. Overview of contributors to the focus groups

Higher Education	Upper secondary education and training including VET
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Education ministries (BE, CZ, HR, PT) - NARIC (ES, FI, HR, IE, NL, PL) - HEI representatives (CY, HU, LV, NL) - National agency for Erasmus+ (IT) - European Association for Quality Assurance - European Quality Assurance Register - European Erasmus Student Network - European University Association 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Associations for the international mobility of learners (AT, IE) - Upper secondary education and training schools (AT, PL) - NARIC (MT) - National VET Institute (DE) - Education and examination boards (IE, PL) - Further education and training / adult learning institutes (IE) - HEIs (HU) - European Federation for Intercultural Learning

Three **online surveys** were run as part of this study. Two of the surveys targeted **Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)** and **Upper Secondary Education and Training Institutions (SEIs)** respectively, with questions on the practical implementation of the 2018 CR and on issues around recognition. The third survey targeted **students and graduates**, asking their views on automatic mutual recognition, whether they had ever studied abroad and experienced AMR procedures.

The institutional surveys registered 648 responses in total, of which 68% (441) were from Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and 32% (207) were from Upper Secondary Education and Training Institutions (SEIs).

Figure 6. Responses by type of institution



Source: ICF/3s survey, N=648

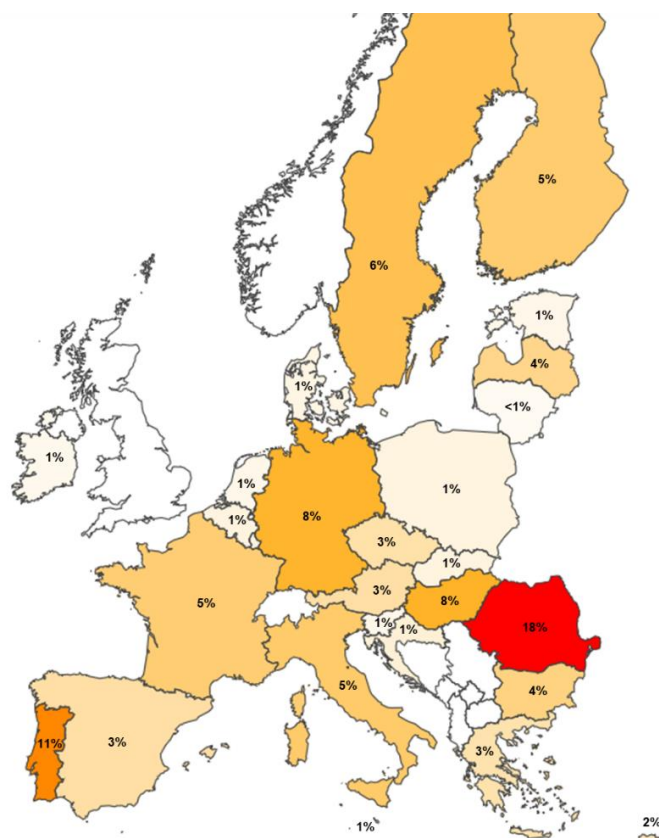
Among the respondents from SEIs, over half cover both general education and Vocational Education and Training (VET), around a third only cover VET, and 17% general education only.

Figure 7. Breakdown of responses by type of SEI



Source: ICF/3s survey, N=207

Romania was the most represented Member State (18%; 114 respondents), followed by Portugal (11%; 67), Hungary (8%; 48) and Germany (8%; 47).

Figure 8. Percentage of survey respondents by country (EU Member States)⁶

Source: ICF/3s survey, N=626

The following table provides the breakdown of HEI and SEI respondents by country.

Table 5. Overview of HEI and SEI respondents by country

Country	HEI	Percentage	SEI	Percentage
Austria	18	4%	2	1%
Belgium	6	1%	1	0%
Bulgaria	24	5%	4	2%
Croatia	3	1%	6	3%
Republic of Cyprus	14	3%	1	0%
Czech Republic	18	4%	1	0%
Denmark	6	1%	0	0%
Estonia	3	1%	2	1%
Finland	23	5%	9	4%
France	21	5%	10	5%
Germany	46	10%	1	0%
Greece	16	4%	2	1%
Hungary	8	2%	40	19%
Ireland	3	1%	1	0%
Italy	29	7%	4	2%
Latvia	8	2%	18	9%
Lithuania	3	1%	0	0%
Luxembourg	4	1%	3	1%
Malta	3	1%	1	0%
Netherlands	4	1%	1	0%
Poland	4	1%	3	1%
Portugal	30	7%	37	18%
Romania	70	16%	44	21%
Slovakia	3	1%	4	2%
Slovenia	4	1%	1	0%
Spain	14	3%	6	3%
Sweden	37	8%	2	1%
Outside of the EU	19	4%	3	1%

⁶ The surveys registered responses from all Member States and 22 responses from outside the EU. These may include respondents from the UK (EU member until 1/1/ 2021), and other Bologna process countries.

The survey targeting students and graduates, both of upper secondary education and training and higher education, registered a total of 342 responses, 284 from current students and 58 from recent graduates (graduating in or after 2018), the majority being from higher education students and graduates. It should be noted that the survey of students and graduates was used to explore potential issues around AMR, and not as a main source of evidence for the evaluation, given the relatively limited number of student responses. The breakdown of respondents by country is provided in the following table.

Table 6. Responses to the survey targeting students and graduates by country

Country	Number of responses
Italy	131
Malta	99
Germany	31
Hungary	13
Spain	12
Belgium	9
Outside of the EU	6
Romania	5
France	4
Greece	4
Austria	3
Croatia	3
Denmark	3
Ireland	3
Poland	3
Portugal	3
Finland	2
Sweden	2
Cyprus	1
Czech Republic	1
Estonia	1
Latvia	1
Lithuania	1
Netherlands	1

Source: ICF/3s survey, N=342

A nonprobability sampling method was applied to the evaluation surveys, whereby they were disseminated within relevant European/national stakeholder networks of HEIs and SEIs. Student organisations and NARICs were contacted to disseminate the survey within their networks. Participation in the dissemination and in the completion of the evaluation surveys was voluntary basis, and the technical character of the topic may have deterred some potential participants, in particular if they did not have a direct interest in recognition. The results of the evaluation surveys should thus be taken as indicative and not fully representative of the views of the population (of HEIs, SEIs, and students/ graduates within the EU, respectively) in a statistical sense. They nevertheless provide valuable information from central stakeholders and beneficiaries of AMR.

3.3.3 Synthesis and triangulation

The evidence and data gathered during this evaluation underwent **synthesis and triangulation** to produce the findings, 'traffic light' assessments, conclusions and recommendations. This process can be summarised as follows:

- Documentation: secondary data gathered from various literature sources in the desk research.
- Experiences and perspectives: first-hand information evidence gathered from the primary data collection activities involving different stakeholder groups in the field and across EU27 to fill in the gaps identified in the secondary data.
- Validation: review of the consistency in messages between primary and different types of secondary data, collected and analysed by the researchers.
- Joint review and validation: of the 'traffic light' assessments of the state of play with regards to the CR, undertaken by the researchers, NARICs and/or national education ministries for their respective country.

4. Findings

This chapter presents the evaluation findings on the implementation of the 2018 CR based on the Key Evaluation Questions (KEQs) set out in analytical framework presented in Chapter 3.

The sections in this chapter are as follows:

- 4.1 Defining Automatic Mutual Recognition and its understanding by stakeholders
KEQ1: How well is the CR understood by stakeholders?
- 4.2 Progress in the use of tools to support transparency and trust: EU transparency tools, Quality Assurance and Automatic Mutual Recognition
KEQ2: How well is the CR supported by existing transparency tools and actions related to quality assurance?
- 4.3 Implementation of legislative changes in the Member States since the introduction of the CR
KEQ3: To what extent, if at all, has the CR led to legislative changes in Member States?
- 4.4 Current state of play on Automatic Mutual Recognition: institutional practices across EU Member States
KEQ4: To what extent, if at all, has the CR led to the application of Automatic Mutual Recognition?
- 4.5 Challenges to progress in the practical application of Automatic Mutual Recognition
KEQ5: What are the key challenges in the implementation of the CR?
- 4.6 Improvements in users' experience of recognition
KEQ6: Has the experience of recognition improved for users?
- 4.7 Improvement of the evidence-base and capacity building towards achieving Automatic Mutual Recognition
KEQ7: Has the CR contributed to building capacity and the evidence base on Automatic Mutual Recognition?

4.1 Defining Automatic Mutual Recognition of qualifications and its understanding by stakeholders

The implementation of measures necessary to achieve AMR for the purposes of further learning, as intended by the CR, will lead to a situation where:

- A higher education qualification acquired in one Member State is automatically recognised at the same level in any other Member State, for the purpose of granting access to further studies, without having to go through any separate recognition procedure. Higher education institutions remain free to set specific evaluation and admission criteria to their specific programmes, or to check the authenticity of documents.
- All credits gained during a period of study or during the virtual mobility in another Member State, as agreed in the Learning Agreement and confirmed by the Transcript of Records (compulsory in the context of Erasmus+), should be transferred without delay and counted towards the student's degree without any additional work or assessment of the student.

- An upper secondary qualification giving access to higher education in one Member State is automatically recognised in any other Member State, for the purpose of granting access to higher education.
- Learning outcomes at upper secondary level from a learning period abroad in another Member State are automatically recognised in any other, provided that the learning outcomes are broadly in line with those in the national curricula of the country of origin.

The situation with regards to recognition prior to the adoption of the CR on AMR (i.e. the baseline) included a wide range of approaches for qualifications within the EU. These can be summarised into four models⁷:

- Model 1: Automatic recognition arranged in bilateral and multilateral agreements.
- Model 2: Automatic recognition based on a list of countries or degrees to be decided by a competent recognition authority (unilateral).
- Model 3: Non-legal recommendations (such as the Baltic-Nordic manual⁸, which is a transparency and recognition tool for admissions officers for 8 countries in that region).
- Model 4: *De facto* application of automatic recognition, accepting for many countries that in practice MA=MA, BA=BA, and quickly verifying qualifications, without formal or legal agreements.

All these approaches to recognition, however, are more limited than AMR as defined in the CR:

- Models 1 and 2 do not entail automatic recognition of qualifications and learning outcomes acquired in any other Member State, as stipulated in the CR, but only in certain countries.
- Models 3 and 4 equally show limitations since non-legal recommendations and *de facto* recognition do not guarantee that the recognition of the qualification will necessarily be automatic.

These four models, however, may serve as useful steps towards AMR.

Similarly, the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC)⁹, which predates the CR (the LRC was adopted in 1997), sets out the bases for the recognition of qualifications concerning higher education in the UNESCO European Area, but differs from and is more limited than the CR in various ways. For example, the LRC refers to "*recognition of qualifications concerning higher education*" but does not put the same emphasis on the recognition of learning outcomes from learning periods abroad as the CR and does not entail AMR. Instead, it aims to streamline and facilitate the process of recognition so that it takes place in a fair manner and within a reasonable period of time, noting that recognition can be refused if the qualification is "*substantially different*"¹⁰ from that of the host country. The concept of "substantial difference" is not specifically defined.

Research has found that the four models described above and the LRC continue to shape stakeholders' understanding of AMR.

Stakeholders in various countries reported confusion with regards to the meaning of AMR as defined in the CR, an issue that is posing a challenge to its correct interpretation and implementation. This resulted in stakeholders in some Member States believing that the country is in compliance with the CR even when the

⁷ See *A short path to automatic recognition - 4 models*, Nuffic Policy paper #1, 2018 and *The Triangle of Automatic Recognition*, Nuffic 2020

⁸ <https://norric.org/nordbalt/>

⁹ <https://www.coe.int/en/web/higher-education-and-research/lisbon-recognition-convention>

¹⁰ This concept implies that qualifications must be recognised unless there is evidence that there are substantial differences between the foreign qualification to be recognised and its domestic correspondent.

characteristics of AMR described in the CR are not in place, as noted later on in this report, and negatively impacts the extent to which the implementation of the CR can be effective.

Educational institutions, both at **upper secondary and higher education levels**, have a central role in the implementation of the CR. Therefore, their understanding of the concept and its value is fundamental. The evaluation focus groups, interviews, and survey results revealed that stakeholders, including educational institutions, remain unclear about the definition of AMR and the differences between automatic and non-automatic recognition. The 2018¹¹ and 2020 Bologna process implementation reports both also note that automatic recognition remains a confusing concept for many in the sector, affecting the progress of its implementation.

In a majority of the Member States, the stakeholders consulted for this evaluation stated that their country had implemented legislation or systems towards automatic recognition (or were using systems of *de facto* recognition) already before the CR was adopted (AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, FI, FR, IT, LU, LV, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE). However, they often directly referred in these discussions to the Lisbon Recognition Convention or the Bologna process and made reference to concepts such as '*substantial differences*' used in these policies.

Stakeholders participating in the evaluation focus groups also reported a lack of understanding of the concept of AMR as set out in the 2018 CR among staff in education and training institutions, and confusion with other principles such as those of the Lisbon Recognition Convention (reported in BE, BG, DE and FI). In Germany, discussions about the term 'automatic' revolve around the interpretation of differences between 'automatic as per the LRC' and 'automatic as per the CR'. In Belgium, Bulgaria and Finland, it was reported that confusion around the use and meaning of the term AMR created complications in adapting national legislation, with detrimental effects on the efficiency of automatic recognition.

The distinction between 'automatic recognition' as defined in the CR and procedures that seem more or less 'automatic' was not always clear to the stakeholders interviewed: some referred to 'simplified' and more 'automated' recognition procedures as 'automatic' (while they are still recognition procedures). Others understood 'automatic' as a form of digitized recognition, yet still involving a certain 'process', or related the concept to the period of time that takes to obtain a decision. For instance, in Bulgaria, recognition procedures are completed within a month or slightly more for both higher and upper secondary education and this duration of procedures is seen by national stakeholders as '*de facto*' system level implementation of automatic recognition¹².

A further point of confusion refers to the difference between recognition of qualifications and admission. This results in uncertainty around institutional responsibilities for recognition, as procedures for admission into HEIs are generally the responsibility of HEIs themselves. In some cases, educational institutions collaborate with other organisations during the admissions process.

- In Denmark (DK), recognition of qualification types is made by the Ministry of Higher Education and Science both for upper secondary and higher education qualifications, with HEIs then applying their own admission criteria to qualifications already recognised.
- In Germany (DE), many HEIs have outsourced their recognition and application procedures to non-profit associations (uni-assist), which do

¹¹ European Commission/ EACEA/ Eurydice (2018) the European Higher Education Area in 2020: Bologna Process Implementation Report. Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union.

¹² q-ENTRY (2022). Project document 'Automatic recognition in practice – examples and tools from the project partner countries' <https://www.q-entry.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/automatic-recognition-in-practice.pdf> p. 23

the document-checks for them, relying on the database provided by the German NARIC (Anabin). This means that, as part of the admission process, a certificate is checked for authenticity and the qualification is compared to the Anabin database, and automatically recognised / approved whenever the NARIC recommends doing so.

The Anabin database

Germany uses a comprehensive public database to inform about possibilities of (automatic) recognition: the Anabin database. (<https://anabin.kmk.org/>).

It is run by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs' Central office for foreign educational systems (ZAB). The database includes information on various foreign certificates and degrees. It does not separate EU or non-EU countries, but simply lists all countries for which certificates / diplomas have been evaluated at some point in the past.

The database provides information on access to higher education, higher education degrees, and the education system. It assists in the evaluation of foreign qualifications and supports authorities, employers and private individuals in classifying foreign qualifications in the German education system.

The database also includes restricted access for authorised recognition officials, where recommendations on previous cases are stored.

The difficulty to separate the processes of recognition and admission is evidenced by results from the consultation activities with educational institutions:

- Some of the remarks in the survey hinted at problems some HEIs have in separating recognition and admission in practice: their answers included 'language skills' as recognition criteria, while these are part of admission procedures, rather than recognition of qualifications.
- In both country-specific interviews and the focus groups, some national stakeholders (e.g. HEIs) were confused about the possibilities to still apply additional admission procedures. For instance, in Belgium, stakeholders at the institutional level were unaware that AMR refers only to the recognition of level and does not grant direct admission to their institutions.

4.2 Progress in the use of EU tools and common standards for transparency and trust to facilitate Automatic Mutual Recognition of qualifications and learning periods abroad

There is a range of EU tools and initiatives that are meant to stimulate transparency and trust and to facilitate the understanding and delivery of AMR, namely:

- EQF and the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA)
- Three-cycle HE system under the Bologna process,
- Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the EHEA (ESG)
- European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) and European credit system for vocational education and training (ECVET)
- Europass

Various Key Principles in the CR make reference to the promotion of the use of such transparency tools and initiatives, as well as the need for national guidance, for HEIs (KP3) and upper secondary education and training institutions (KP6) on how to implement them.

In addition, Key Principle 2 of the CR refers to the (periodically reviewed and updated) linkage between National Qualification Frameworks (NQFs) and the EQF (in the case of both HE and upper secondary education and training) and self-certification to the QF-EHEA (in the case of HE).

Evidence shows that the use of European transparency tools for AMR has gradually expanded in the last ten years, but mostly in **higher education**.

- A recurrent observation from stakeholders is that the alignment of National Qualification Frameworks (NQFs) with the EQF and the QF-EHEA across the EU has improved since 2012. Referencing to both the EQF and the QF-EHEA has been completed in most Member States. In Member States where ECTS is not fully used and alignment with EQF is limited, automatic mutual recognition is more difficult (see country comparative assessment in Chapter 5).
- In addition, Bologna implementation reports show that the Diploma Supplement (to be issued to every graduate, automatically, in a widely spoken language and for free) is widely adopted in EU countries, although still not universal.

Further developments to expand the use of transparency tools to facilitate AMR have taken place at EU level, although they do not derive directly from the introduction of the CR. Besides the digitalisation of the Diploma Supplement for Higher Education via Europass in 2017-2018, a major development was the overhaul of the Europass platform in July 2020¹³ to enhance synergy and interoperability between EU transparency tools. The Europass platform now integrates the NQFs of most Member States referenced to the EQF, allowing for users to compare qualifications across different European countries. It also integrates the Learning Opportunities and Qualifications Portal and offers web-based tools such as the Diploma Supplement and Certificate Supplement (for VET) to facilitate the automatic recognition of qualifications and learning outcomes of mobile students and learners. Further projects are currently underway to expand the use of digital credentials via the new Europass platform.

The Europass platform provides guidance for NARICs and educational and training institutions on the tools it offers (digital credentials, Diploma Supplement, Certificate Supplement, EQF database). The extent to which NARICs and education and training institutions will make use of these tools depends on the full referencing of NQFs to the EQF and the integration of the concept of learning outcomes in national curricula.

Yet, stakeholders consulted for this study evidenced that more efforts are required at **upper secondary education and training level** to raise awareness and to provide training on using transparency tools for the recognition of learning outcomes and on ECVET principles.

The consulted stakeholders also documented the rigid nature of national education and training systems, **particularly at upper secondary education and training level**, with the approach remaining course-based rather than focused on learning outcomes. This makes the implementation of AMR more difficult. In very few instances, the Europass Mobility Document and Certificate Supplement was reported to be used for the automatic recognition of VET and learning outcomes – for example in Belgium-Flanders and Luxembourg. For the area of VET, in Poland, Europass and ESCO were reported to be only used in cases of mobility funded by Erasmus+.

The 2018 CR is closely related to quality assurance (QA)¹⁴ to ensure that:

¹³ The 2018 CR makes direct reference to the Europass Council Decision of April 2018. Decision (EU) 2018/646

¹⁴ Šeščilienė & Sutkutė, 2018.

- educational institutions follow certain standards in the recognition of qualifications, certifications, learning outcomes and credits;
- standards of awards of qualifications are safeguarded and enhanced.

Actions related to QA – referred to in the CR's Key Principle 3 for HE – include external QA being carried out in line with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area by independent quality assurance agencies registered with the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) and allows for the application of the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes. Key Principle 5 (for secondary education) refers to the European Framework for Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) and its further developments.

In this area it is worth noting that in its standard 1.4, the ESG refers to "*fair recognition of higher education qualifications, periods of study and prior learning, including the recognition of non-formal and informal learning*". This requires institutional practices in line with the principles of the LRC and cooperation with other institutions, quality assurance agencies and the NARIC with a view to ensuring coherent recognition across the country. EQAR launched the Database of External Quality Assurance Results (DEQAR) in 2018 to ensure direct access to the reports and decisions of EQAR-registered agencies, as a direct action resulting from the 2018 CR. At present, there are no national QA agencies registered with the EQAR in the following Member States: CZ, EL, IT, LU, MT, SK¹⁵. Nevertheless, some of them, such as the Czech National Accreditation Bureau for Higher Education (NAB) and the Italian NARIC (CIMEA) consider the integration into ENQA and EQAR a priority and are taking steps towards it. In Luxembourg, the Ministry of Higher Education and Research commissions a foreign EQAR-registered agency to perform QA in HE, as there is no national QA agency in the country¹⁶. This procedure is fully compliant with the ESG.

The two good practice examples in the area of quality assurance presented in the box below underline the important connection between AMR and QA.

Linking Academic Recognition and Quality Assurance (LIREQA)¹⁷

This Erasmus+ project aimed at contributing to fair recognition of qualifications by developing recommendations to relate academic recognition and both internal and external quality assurance. Outcomes of this project are related with the implementation of the revised Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European of Higher Education Area (ESG) endorsed by Ministers of Education in Yerevan in May 2015, which contained a clear expectation to align institutional recognition with principles of the LRC, and to foster cooperation with other institutions, quality assurance agencies, national ENIC/NARIC centres.

DEQAR CONNECT

The Erasmus+ project DEQAR CONNECT "Enhancing the Coverage and Connectivity of QA in the EHEA through DEQAR": in 2018, EQAR developed a Database of External Quality Assurance Results – DEQAR – with an aim to enhance the transparency and accessibility of quality assurance results. The database also makes visible to what extent EHEA countries have realised the EHEA Key Commitment that all HE institutions be subject to regular external QA in line with the ESG. Following its launch in 2018, DEQAR has continued to grow, and currently makes available over 30 000 external QA results covering over 2,000 higher education institutions from 39 EHEA countries. The aim of DEQAR CONNECT was to focus on two of the EHEA key

¹⁵ <https://www.eqar.eu/register/agencies/>

¹⁶ Cedefop (2021). European Inventory of NQFs 2020 – Luxembourg:

https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/luxembourg_-_european_inventory_on_nqf_2020.pdf

¹⁷ <https://www.skvc.lt/default/en/projects/completed-projects#LIREQA>

commitments, supporting QA and recognition inside the EHEA. It consisted of two strands:

Expanding the coverage to EHEA countries currently under-represented in DEQAR, by supporting the participation of agencies that could not join DEQAR in the first stage.

Enhancing connectivity by exploiting existing synergies and exploring new opportunities to use DEQAR data directly in the recognition workflow, digital credentialing and elsewhere.

It should be noted, however, that country-level researchers and experts consulted for this study have revealed that the CR has almost no effects on the production of new guidance by NARICs to encourage education institutions to use EU transparency tools more efficiently for the purpose of AMR as it defines it.

4.3 Implementation of legislative changes in the Member States since the introduction of the CR

Member States have followed different paths in their implementation of the CR. Much of this can be explained by relevant national-level stakeholders' understanding of AMR which in turn influences Member States' interpretation of the CR (see section 4.1).

Regarding the extent of legislative changes towards the implementation of AMR since the introduction of the CR, Member States can be categorised into three groups:

- Group 1: Member States where changes in the legislation to move closer to implementation were introduced.
- Group 2: Member States where the CR is expected to lead to impact after transposition into national legislation: in these countries legislation has so far remained unchanged, but further steps towards facilitating AMR have been introduced, for example starting the process of developing new policies and legislation.
- Group 3: Member States where stakeholders reported that the country already complied with the CR.
- Group 4: Member States where there was no transposition into national legislation of the CR; or stakeholders reported softer effects, such as increased awareness about AMR.

Thus, in relation to the first two groups, the CR led to a process of adoption of new measures for implementation. However, no implementation measures were carried out in the third and fourth group of Member States.

Group 1: Member States where the CR led to changes in legislation to move closer to compliance (AT, BE, EE, ES, FR, HR, HU, IT, LV)

Countries in this group adopted legislation to comply with the CR, or adapted existing legislation to further comply with the CR.

- Austria (AT): there is *de jure* automatic recognition implemented in upper secondary education (for learning mobility) and in higher education, both regarding access to undergraduate (SE qualifications) and graduate programmes (HE qualifications). The CR provided an impetus for the amendment of the Higher Education law: most principles of the CR and LRC had already been implemented before 2018, but recent legislative changes (2021) aim to further accommodate the CR. Implementation of these legislative changes began academic year 2022/23 and can thus not yet be assessed. HEIs were included in the law-making process, represented by the university association (UNIKO) and through individual HEIs, which formed part of working groups. Even though previous legislation had already incorporated most principles around automatic recognition, the latest changes have modernised the

legislation, notably making it learning outcomes-oriented and extending the opportunities for the recognition of prior learning (within a Bachelor programme of 180 ECTS: up to 90 ECTS, of which 60 ECTS can stem from non-formal or informal experience (e.g. work experience) and 60 ECTS from previously passed exams at certain formal educational institutions (e.g. upper secondary schools). Recognition procedures in HEIs have had to be amended accordingly, with some HEIs combining this step and with the introduction of more digitalised processes for recognition.

- Belgium (BE): is part of the 2021 Baltic-Benelux Treaty (BE, EE, LT, LU, LV, NL), which guarantees automatic mutual recognition for all Higher Education degree levels. While not fully meeting the expectations of the CR on AMR (see section 4.1) this type of agreement helps countries develop further understanding and mutual trust and is a step towards the implementation of AMR. However, when not governed by the Benelux Treaty and the Baltic & Benelux Multilateral treaty on automatic recognition, the recognition of HE qualifications remains a competence of either individual HEIs – for access to further education – or of the NARICs/relevant ministries (in the linguistic communities) – for official recognition of qualifications for access to the job market and for access to specialised studies, such as nursing, specialisations in paediatrics or upper secondary education teacher training. In summary, there is no harmonisation of recognition rules and procedures in Belgium.
- Croatia (HR): A new Act on Recognition of Foreign Educational Qualifications was adopted in June 2022, which integrates automatic recognition as per the 2018 CR. The corresponding procedures were already in place in HE for the 2022/23 academic year (recognition for the purpose of further education continues to be the responsibility of HEIs while the NARIC is only responsible for recognition for the purpose of access to the labour market). Nevertheless, it is not yet clear whether the new 'recognition procedures', conditions for the recognition and appeal procedures are 'automatic' as described in the CR.
- Estonia (EE): Is part of the Baltic-Benelux Treaty. Legislation regulating the recognition of qualifications was issued in 2006 (*Riigi Teataja*, 2006), updated in 2018 and 2020. The 2018 change focused on the qualifications of asylum seekers and people under international protection, granting them the opportunity to apply for the assessment of qualifications even if they are unable to submit all documents required by the legislation. Interviewed stakeholders did not consider these changes as substantial developments. Mutual recognition agreements for HE qualifications between the Baltic states in 2018 and between the Baltic and Benelux states in 2021 are regarded as the most significant developments in the area.
- France (FR): has recognition procedures that are primarily aligned with the LRC and the EHEA and limited to higher education. Regarding upper secondary education, outcomes from learning periods abroad are not automatically recognised in general education. However, recent reforms in VET¹⁸ have aimed to facilitate the mobility of VET students, with recognition based on learning agreements between VET schools prior to mobility. Part of a training period required to take the examination for a professional diploma to be carried out in a professional environment can be carried out in professional organisations abroad, in particular within the framework of EU programmes, and there is now a national legal framework for the examination and recognition of learning outcomes obtained during such mobility periods. In addition, an optional 'mobility unit' has been created, which makes it possible to validate general and transversal professional achievements assessed during a mobility period abroad and which leads to a so-called *MobilitéPro* certificate being attached to the learner's diploma. Stakeholders recognise the importance of the CR and hope for positive impacts on other countries' efforts.

¹⁸ See <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news/france-new-vet-reform-launched>

- Hungary (HU): while the CR has not been implemented there have been developments since 2018 towards bi- and multilateral agreements for automatic mutual recognition with other countries both within the EU (e.g. CZ, PL, SK) and outside the EU (Russia, Serbia, Ukraine). Furthermore, in theory, all upper secondary qualifications from EU countries, which give access to HE in the home country, also give access in Hungary. A Working Group of the Hungarian Rectors' Conference developed detailed proposals and comprehensive implementation recommendations for the improvement of recognition and crediting practices, outlining several development models to frame the different intentions, taking into account the diversity of Hungarian higher education, and based on the Council Recommendation.
- Italy (IT): the 2018 CR is considered to have played a supporting role in strengthening AMR. Formal implementation of the CR through a set of procedural guidelines has led to new initiatives being adopted at national level to facilitate AMR. In accordance with the autonomy of HEIs and their competence to recognise HE and SE qualifications as well as outcomes of learning periods abroad, the institutions were invited to implement tools to facilitate the admission of students as set out in the CR (MUR 2022/23¹⁹). In addition, an initiative was undertaken by CIMEA to address the 2018 CR call to use new technologies such as blockchain to facilitate automatic mutual recognition.
- Latvia (LV): is part of the Baltic-Benelux Treaty. Stakeholders consider the multilateral recognition agreements between the Baltic and Benelux countries being inspired by the CR and reflecting its key approaches.
- Spain (ES): adapted a Royal Decree in October 2022 in response to the CR²⁰. There is now an 'automatic academic recognition procedure' for HE diplomas from EEA countries, except for those that give access to regulated professions. The new law is expected to simplify the recognition procedure, enhance student mobility and have a positive impact on the Spanish labour market. Another of the main new features is the digitisation of procedures.

Group 2: Member States where the CR is expected to impact on automatic mutual recognition through legislation (CZ, EL, LT, LU, NL, SI, SK)

- Czech Republic (CZ): the CR has not been transposed into national legislation, but the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports has committed to change legislation to enable HEIs to adjust to the CR's principles in their 2021 Internationalisation Strategy for Higher Education. The Strategy devotes one of its six chapters to recognition, mentions the 2018 CR explicitly and explains that recognition processes are complicated, include unnecessary administrative obstacles, and this results in

¹⁹ According to the procedural guidelines of the Italian Ministry of University and Research: *"institutions of higher education are invited to adopt useful tools for the verification of qualifications that can facilitate the entry of candidates with foreign qualifications, in line with the provisions of the recent "Recommendation of the Council of the European Union to promote automatic mutual recognition of higher education and higher secondary school qualifications and the results of study periods abroad", including the use of new tools and new technologies made available internationally, including blockchain technology and the statements of verification of qualifications by the ENIC-NARIC centres"*.

²⁰ Gobierno de España. (2021) Real Decreto por el que se establecen las condiciones y los procedimientos de homologación, de declaración de equivalencia, de convalidación de enseñanzas universitarias de sistemas educativos extranjeros y el procedimiento para establecer la correspondencia a nivel del Marco Español de Cualificaciones para la Educación Superior de los títulos universitarios oficiales pertenecientes a ordenaciones académicas anteriores. Boletín Oficial del Estado.

<https://www.educacionyfp.gob.es/dam/jcr:e2a853df-a442-4d74-b320-5ad304d2e356/homologacion-convalidacion.pdf>

low attraction of international students. The CR is considered valuable and relevant for promoting transparency across the EU. The country is making efforts to fulfil the ESG standards and integrate ENQA and EQAR. The document calls for further simplification and the introduction of AMR. Additionally, there are equivalence agreements in place with DE, HU, PL, SI, SK, of which the one with SK is the only agreement on automatic recognition that applies both at the higher education and upper secondary education levels.

- Greece (EL): has not implemented legislative changes as a consequence of the CR, but a new draft law is being developed in close alignment with its principles relating to HE qualifications²¹. According to the stakeholders interviewed, HEIs have for long requested changes consistent with the CR's. The Ministry of Education is finalising a new legal framework with the aim of putting an end to the delays and bureaucracy involved in the recognition of foreign university degrees by the Greek state. The academic recognition of degrees under this new legal framework will be granted automatically based on a registry of foreign universities that will be officially recognised by the Hellenic National Academic Recognition and Information Centre (D.O.A.T.A.P.). The system will entail the introduction of an electronic platform for recognition process. The period of adaptation to the new legislative framework is likely to be long.
- Lithuania (LT): is part of the Baltic-Benelux Treaty, but it has not ratified it yet. Steps towards the adoption of the CR principles are also taking place via Erasmus+ funded projects (e.g. STACQ, I-AR)²².
- Luxembourg (LU): is part of the Baltic-Benelux Treaty, but it has not ratified it yet. The added value of the CR is seen in that it facilitates the creation and expansion of such regional recognition agreements.
- Netherlands (NL): is part of the Baltic-Benelux Treaty, but it has not ratified it yet. The CR is seen to have had limited impact in the higher education system, due to automatic recognition already being in place, in the eyes of the relevant stakeholders. The added value of CR appears mainly to relate to greater information being made available by HE institutions on aspects of automatic recognition. No such impacts have been reported at the level of upper secondary education and training.
- Slovenia (SI): the CR has not led to changes in legislation, but the inclusion of automatic recognition into Slovenian legislation and in practice in educational institutions is seen by stakeholders as a route to reduce costs and time for applicants. There are bilateral agreements for automatic mutual recognition in place with neighbouring countries and former Yugoslavian countries and equivalence agreement with the Czech Republic. Slovenia plans to adopt a new law on recognition and enrolment procedures. Nevertheless, currently there is a well-defined recognition process that the foreign students coming from other countries are required to follow. The intention is to combine recognition and enrolment procedures into one in the future (saving costs, time, and the reducing the presentation of documentation).
- Slovakia (SK): although the CR has not been formally implemented in the legislation, the benefits of automatic mutual recognition are recognised particularly in the context of mobility programmes in higher education. A semi-automatic version of 'fast-track' recognition is available for learners from EHEA countries, and several bilateral agreements support recognition procedures (including CZ, HU, DE, HR, PL, RO, Ukraine, Russia, China). Furthermore, a national ENIC-NARIC was established,

²¹ New Horizons for HEIs: Enhancing their quality, operation and links with society (<http://www.opengov.gr/yppeph/?p=5958>)

²² List of Erasmus+ projects in LT: <https://www.skvc.lt/default/en/projects/current-projects>

and the country aims to join ENQA. The country is currently under ongoing EQAR review.

Group 3: Member States where legislation on automatic recognition was already applied before the adoption of the CR (DE, DK, FI, MT, PL, PT, RO, SE)

Several countries in this group already considered that they had overall coherent legislation or arrangements in place which did not conflict with the CR and did not require changes to align to it (e.g. DE, DK, FI, MT, PL, PT, SE), in particular in the higher education sector, including the recognition of upper secondary qualifications for undergraduate studies. Nevertheless, the CR was generally perceived as valuable, as it provided a coherent framework for communication within or between ministries and HEIs (e.g. DK). When it comes to recognition of mobility in upper secondary education, however, most countries did not have systems of AMR in place and are not planning to introduce any major changes in the near future either.

- Germany (DE): has implemented automatic recognition for EU Member States in HE at federal level since 2007 and did not adapt its legislation specifically to the CR. Furthermore, the country has several bilateral agreements in place regarding automatic recognition of qualifications, which are filled into a database managed by the German NARIC. Stakeholders are aware that automatic recognition still faces problems 'on the ground', yet the CR is not perceived as particularly relevant at federal level.
- Denmark (DK): automatic recognition was already implemented *de facto* before the 2018 CR (since 2014), and legislation and practices supporting automatic recognition were already in place. The CR it is not seen as having had an impact on these elements. However, the CR is seen to have positively impacted on awareness raising activities, as organised and managed by the Ministry of Higher Education, which also operates the NARIC office. Following the introduction of the 2018 CR, the notion of automatic recognition has been further emphasised as part of awareness raising activities, such as training sessions co-organised on a regular basis by the Agency of Higher Education and Research and the Danish NARIC.
- Finland (FI): no legislative changes were required following the CR, since national law was perceived to be already in line with it. However, Finland recognises the key role of the EU work on automatic recognition. The CR is perceived positively by stakeholders, confirming their process is on the right track.
- Malta (MT): did not introduce changes in legislation following the CR. Degrees and qualifications are recognised automatically, if they are featured on their list of accredited higher educational institutions and recognised courses across the EU. Stakeholders consider the CR in general 'supportive'. Some stakeholders report that HEIs use the NQF for recognition procedures and tools provided by the UK NARIC. However, further action would be needed to make recognition 'automatic' as per the 2018 CR.
- Poland (PL): in HE, automatic recognition of diplomas from other EU, OECD, and EEA countries was introduced with the 2011 amendment of the Law on Higher Education (*ustawa Prawo o szkolnictwie wyższym*). In 2018, a new Law on Higher Education (with the same provisions regarding automatic recognition) was introduced and is the current legal basis for the automatic recognition of HE diplomas from EU, OECD, and EEA countries in Poland (Article 326). In 2018, a Ministerial Decree laying out the specific conditions (incl. paperwork to be submitted, and deadlines for recognition) for automatic recognition of HE diplomas also entered into force (Regulation of the Minister of National Education, 2018).
- Portugal (PT): legislation on recognition based on lists of qualifications dates back to 2007 with the latest changes implemented in 2019, . Nevertheless, the CR is seen

by the NARIC as useful to instigate collaborations between NARICs across Europe to develop a mutual understanding of AMR, deepening trust between countries and HEIs. The Portuguese NARIC also reports that close collaboration with QA agencies has also been taking place to improve the implementation of AMR.

- Romania (RO): in the view of national stakeholders, some forms of 'automatic' recognition procedures were already implemented prior to 2018 for HE as well as for upper secondary education and training qualifications. Automatic recognition of HE and SE qualifications is applied in the same way: the Romanian NARIC (CNRED) automatically recognises HE and SE qualifications obtained in EU Member States and EFTA countries. A system-level automatic recognition for qualifications issued by all EU Member States is ensured, with decision-making responsibility delegated to a competent system-level body. Admission to HE is kept as a separate process from recognition: CNRED collaborates with HEIs to fulfil the specific admission criteria. Other than that, the CR has led to a consolidation of the partnership between the NARIC (CNRED) and Romanian HEIs. Overall, the CNRED has set itself the objective of promoting the principles of the CR in partnership with other NARICs because they give a European dimension to the CNRED's pre-existing commitments and support the development of the European Higher Education Area.
- Sweden (SE): did not implement legislative changes, as a system for automatic recognition for access to higher education as well as for upper secondary education are seen to be already in place. The CR is considered a useful tool for policy makers and HEIs as a 'source of further inspiration'. Nevertheless, the stakeholders consulted indicated that a distinctive/separate process for automatic recognition is in place with regards to HEI access. The Swedish NARIC is using the CR as a starting point to discuss which further steps could be taken to facilitate AMR and to make it more comprehensive and transparent through its own Qualifications Assessment Tool. The added value of the CR is also seen around its communication potential, allowing the Agency of Higher Education to engage with higher education institutions and other stakeholders on the importance of the notion of AMR – to improve understanding of the concept, support student mobility and enhance the attractiveness of Swedish universities to students in the rest of Europe. This shows that recognition is not automatic in the sense outlined in the CR.

Group 4: Member States where the CR led to no changes (BG, CY, IE)

- Bulgaria (BG): legislation was not changed to accommodate the CR. Some elements, such as the recognition of levels obtained in other countries were in place before 2018 but, according to national stakeholders, automatic recognition would be most effective 'in synergy with other tools, procedures and mechanisms affecting international academic mobility'. Impacts of the CR are expected by national stakeholders when it comes to the promotion of academic mobility. There seems to be some uncertainty how to understand the term 'automatic', as rather lengthy recognition procedures are in place, meaning that recognition is not implemented automatically.
- Cyprus (CY): has not taken legal steps to implement the CR but automatic recognition is considered to be in place. A stakeholder consultation on this topic took place in 2022, but no concrete policy initiatives were planned as a result.
- Ireland (IE): did not implement new policies or legislation as a consequence of the CR but does consider having de facto automatic recognition of school leaving qualifications from EU and EFTA Member States, as well as system level automatic recognition of HE qualifications issued in all Member States. The Irish review of entry criteria into Higher Education (produced yearly by the Technological Higher Education Association, Irish University Association and the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland) specifies entry requirements criteria for EU/EFTA applicants into undergraduate Higher Education. This is based on a combination of information available from international qualifications recognition databases, historical data for

admissions standards for entry in the past and examination performance statistics where available. The document aims to enable applicants' understanding of the minimum entry requirements (what qualifications are accepted) and the competitive entry requirements that equate with achievements in the school leaving certifications in their country. It is interesting to note that a way in which consistency in the evaluation of EU qualifications is sought in Ireland is that HEIs may share the work of evaluating those qualifications. This means that one HEI may, for example, evaluate applicants presenting qualifications from a specific country (e.g. HEI A to evaluate all French qualifications).

4.4 Current state of play on Automatic Mutual Recognition: institutional practices across EU Member States

This section analyses the situation resulting from the patterns of adoption of change described in the previous discussion and reviews the extent to which the CR has been adopted in practice and could therefore contribute to the achievement of its expected outcomes. The presentation of the analysis is based on the different elements of AMR outlined in the CR. It covers, first, AMR of qualifications for granting access to further studies and, second, AMR of the learning outcomes of a learning period abroad, differentiating between the situation in higher education and in upper secondary education and training.

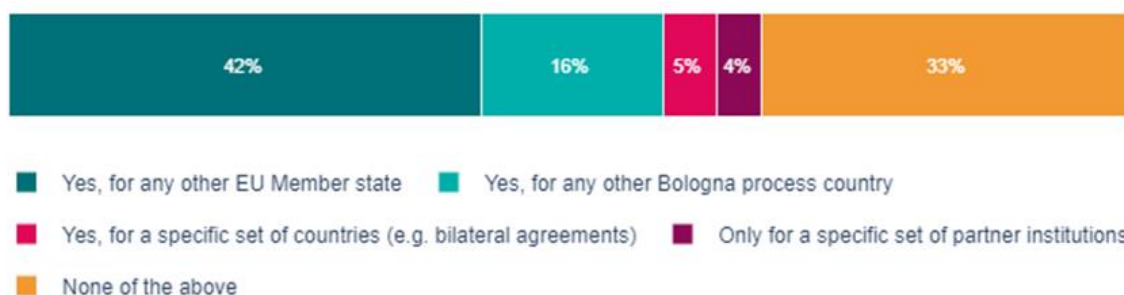
4.4.1 Automatic Mutual Recognition of qualifications for the purpose of access to further studies in another Member State

This section elaborates on the extent of implementation of AMR for the purposes of access to Bachelor's, Master's and Doctoral programmes. Qualifications from upper secondary/non-tertiary education and training (SE) are the reference point in order to access Bachelor level programmes ('undergraduate programmes'), while for access to master's and PhD programmes, the qualifications needed are from the higher education sector (HE).

4.4.1.1 Access to bachelor's level programmes (recognition of upper secondary education qualifications)

The evaluation survey results suggest that many HEIs still fall short of applying AMR for qualifications obtained within the EU. In the survey of HEIs, 58% of respondents stated that they give automatic recognition to education qualifications (e.g. upper secondary level leaving certificates) obtained either in 'any other EU Member State' or 'any other Bologna process country' for the purpose of access to Bachelor's level programmes. A total of 42% do so for any other EU Member State, 16% for any other Bologna process country, 5% for a specific set of countries, and 4% for a specific set of partner institutions. While caution needs to be exercised when interpreting these results in light of the reported complexities regarding where recognition is actually made (as noted earlier in this chapter), HEIs could be expected to have an understanding of the existence of AMR for their degrees, if this is in place.

Figure 9. Does your HEI give automatic recognition to education qualifications obtained in other countries for the purpose of access to bachelor's level programmes?



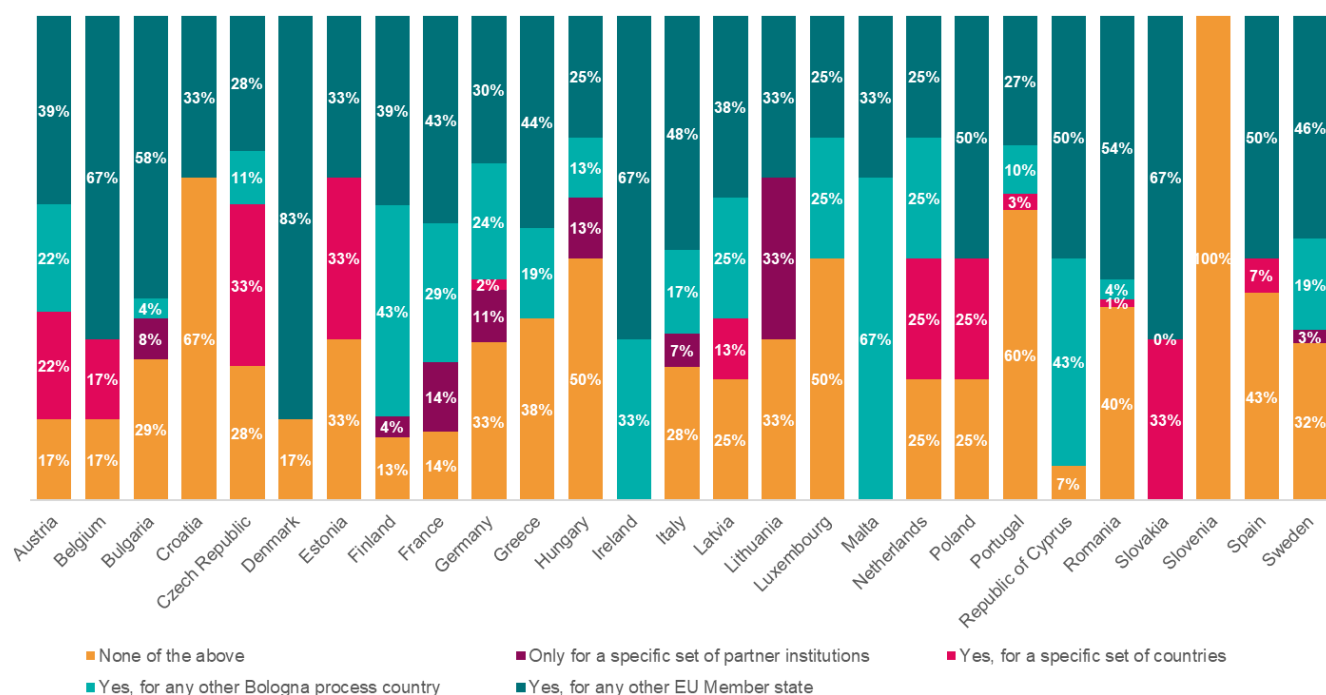
Source: ICF/3s survey, N=441

Disaggregation by country shows that within almost all countries there are differences in how HEIs use automatic recognition to qualifications for access to bachelor's, master's and doctoral programmes. For access to **bachelor's level programmes**, there are 13 Member States where HEIs reported to give automatic recognition (AR) to qualifications from any EU Member State at above the overall average rate for this survey (42%)²³. Ireland and Malta were the only countries where all respondents reported to give automatic recognition (AR) to qualifications from any other EU Member State. There are eight Member States where participant HEIs selected the 'None' option for automatic recognition at a higher-than-average rate (33%)²⁴. Spain and Greece are the only Member States where HEIs were above average in both giving automatic recognition to education qualifications for any EU Member State and selecting 'None' suggesting that in these countries there is greater polarity between HEIs in this area.

²³ BE, BG, CY, DK, EL, ES, FR, IE, IT, PL, RO, SE, SK

²⁴ EL, ES, HR, HU, LU, PT, RO, SI

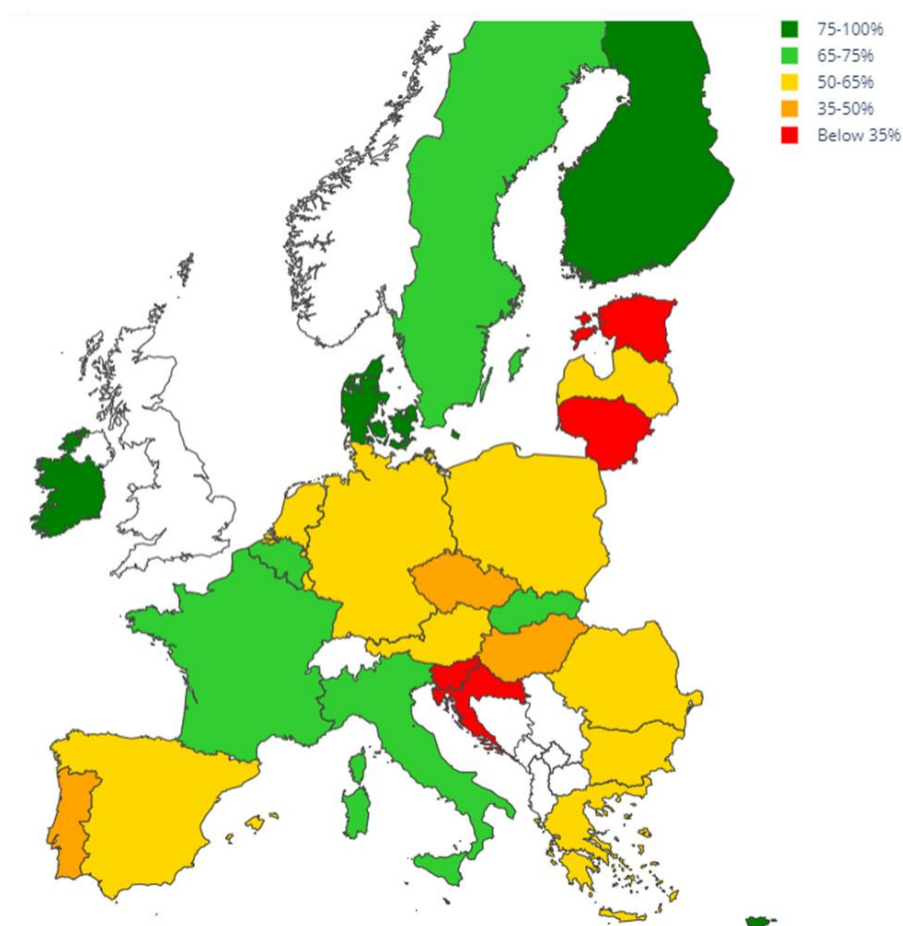
Figure 10. HEIs: automatic recognition of education qualifications for access to bachelor's level programmes by country



Source: ICF/3s survey, N=422

The following heatmap (Figure 11) shows overall trends on automatic recognition (AR) by country, grouping together respondents who indicated AR applying to any other EU Member State and those who indicated AR applying to any other Bologna process country.

Figure 11. Heatmap: Automatic recognition of secondary education qualifications for access to bachelor's level programmes applying to any other EU Member State or Bologna process country



Source: ICF/3s survey, N=422

These results show that there are discrepancies between legislation and practical implementation, which are also reflected in the following examples:

- Austria (AT) has bilateral agreements with all EU Member States regarding the recognition of upper secondary qualifications giving access to HE, but the survey results suggest that this does not result in all institutions providing automatic recognition for qualifications from other EU countries. For most of the countries, this implies automatic recognition irrespective of any possible '*significant differences*'. However, for certain countries some qualifications may still be excluded.
- Germany (DE) also has agreements in place with all EU countries, but due to the nature of the German differentiation of HE access, many qualifications only give restricted (though automatic in theory) access to HE, i.e., access is limited to a certain field of study, or only to programmes of Universities of Applied Sciences. This is in line with the German law ratifying the LRC which stipulates automatic recognition except for cases of '*substantial differences*' between the education systems.

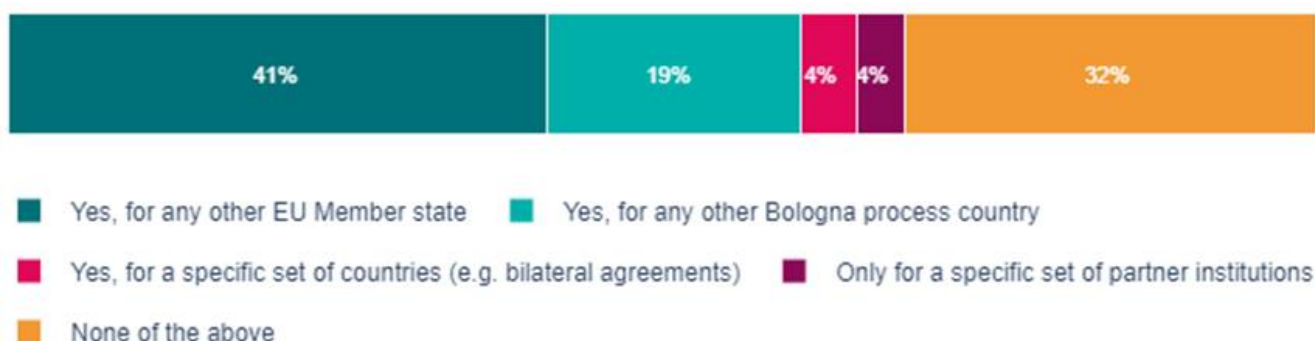
4.4.1.2 Access to master's level programmes (recognition of HE qualifications)

Many of the bilateral and multilateral agreements currently in place in Europe are limited to the mutual recognition HE qualifications (see 'Traffic light assessment', Chapter 5 for detailed information).

- The 2021 mutual recognition agreement between the Baltic (EE, LT, LV) and Benelux states (BE, LU, NL) on higher education (Treaty on the automatic recognition of Higher Education Qualifications) can be seen as a consequence of the CR. It stipulates that HE qualifications obtained in any of the signatory countries can be used to pursue higher education degrees in any other state falling under this agreement²⁵. The Treaty was signed on 25 November 2021, but at the time of writing had only been ratified by Belgium-Flanders, Latvia and Estonia, which means that it is not in effect yet. Delays with ratification of this treaty are due to governmental procedures and/or administrative backlogs in the process of ratifying international treaties. In the future, other EEA Member States could join the agreement if they adhere to the EQF, ratify the LRC, and have a quality assurance system in place.
- In Slovakia, a fast-track procedure for recognizing HE qualifications has been developed, where a detailed assessment of documents (apart from verifying their authenticity) is not necessary anymore and is considered de facto automatic recognition by stakeholders. The same is true for unilateral decisions ('lists'): In Malta and Portugal, HE degrees and qualifications are recognised automatically, if they are featured on their list of accredited higher educational institutions and recognised courses across the EU.

Survey results show that around two thirds (68%) of respondents reported that their institutions give automatic recognition to **bachelor's degree qualifications** obtained in other countries for the purpose of **access to master's level programmes** with regards to at least some countries or institutions. A total of 41% reported that this is the case for bachelor's degrees from any other EU Member State, 19% for those from any other Bologna process country, 4% for those from a specific set of countries, and 4% for those from a specific set of partner institutions. Around one third, on the other hand, reported not to give automatic recognition to bachelor qualifications.

Figure 12. Does your HEI give automatic recognition to bachelor's degree qualifications obtained in other countries for the purpose of access to master's level programmes?

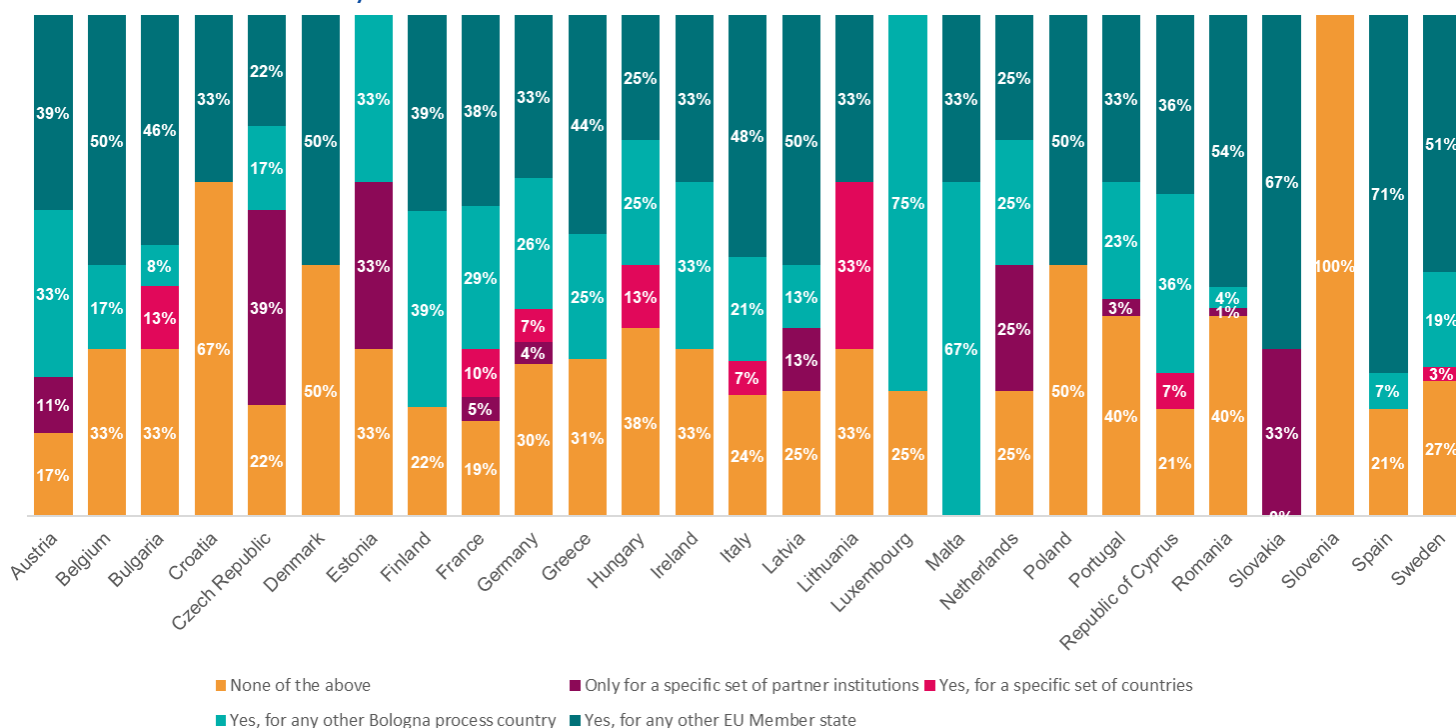


Source: ICF/3s survey, N=441

²⁵ <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/330084-treaty-on-the-automatic-recognition-of-higher-education-qualifications>

Disaggregation by country shows that there are differences within almost all countries in how HEIs give automatic recognition to bachelor's degree qualifications for the purpose of access to master's level programmes. There are 11 Member States where HEIs give automatic recognition for any other EU Member State at above the overall average rate (41%). All these Member States, with the exception of Latvia, also give automatic recognition at above the overall average to education qualifications for the purpose of access to bachelor's level programmes. Only in the case of Malta all respondents reported to give automatic recognition to bachelor's degree qualifications from any other EU country.

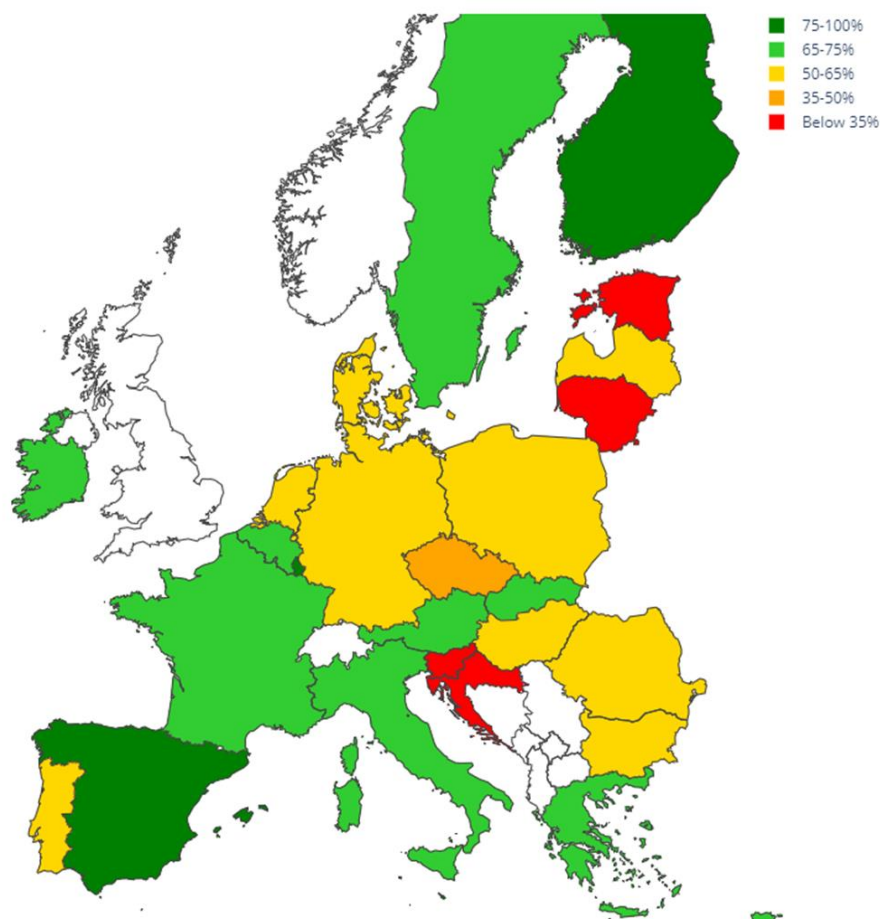
Figure 13. HEIs: automatic recognition of bachelor's degree qualifications by country



Source: ICF/3s survey, N=422

The following heatmap (Figure 14) shows overall trends on AR by country, grouping together respondents who indicated AR applying to any other EU Member State and those who indicated AR applying to any other Bologna process country.

Figure 14. Heatmap: Automatic recognition of bachelor's degree qualifications for access to master's level programmes applying to any other EU Member State or Bologna process country

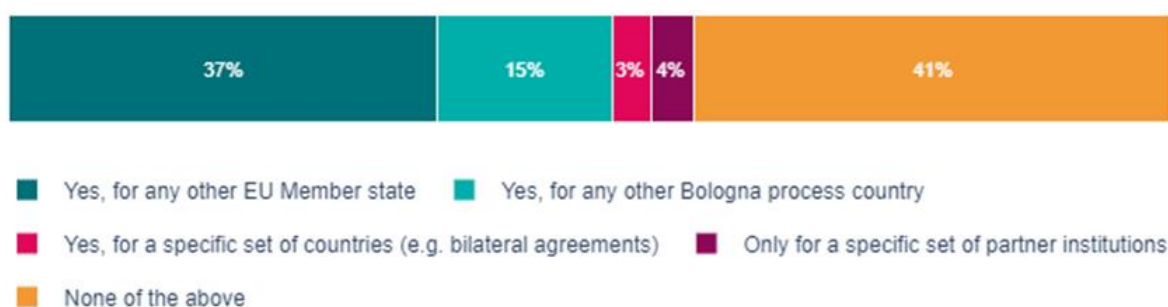


Source: ICF/3s survey, N=422

4.4.1.3 Access to doctoral level programmes (recognition of HE qualifications)

Regarding access to doctoral level studies, 59% of respondents reported that their institutions give automatic recognition to **master's degree qualifications** obtained in other countries for the purpose of **access to doctoral level programmes**. This is 9 percentage points lower than in the case of automatic recognition of bachelor's degree qualifications for access to master's level programmes.

Figure 15. Does your institution give automatic recognition to master's degree qualifications obtained in other countries for the purpose of access to doctoral level programmes?

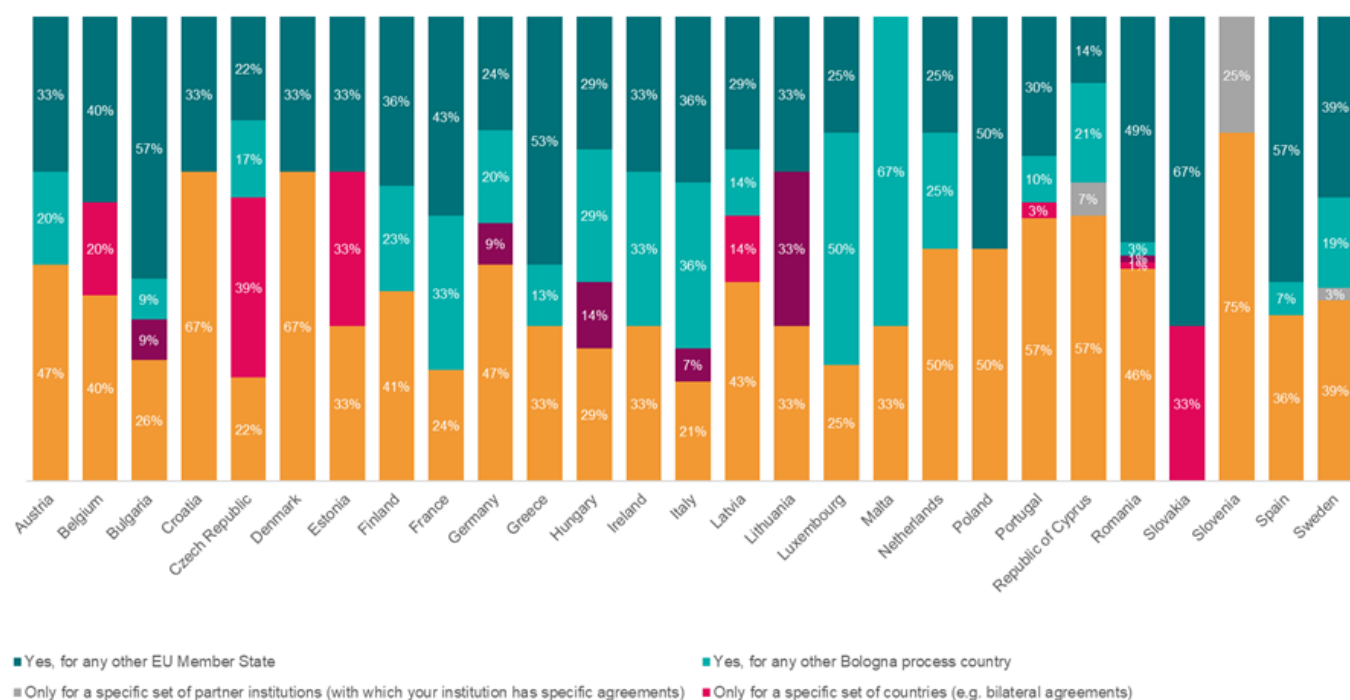


Source: ICF/3s survey, N=441

A total of 41% of respondents reported that their institutions give automatic recognition to master's degree qualifications from any other EU Member State, 19% for master's degrees from any other Bologna process country, 4% for master's degrees from a specific set of countries, and 4% for master's degrees from a specific set of partner institutions. A total of 41% of respondents offer none of these options, which is a higher proportion compared with automatic recognition to other qualifications (those for access to bachelor's level programmes and those for access to master's level programmes).

Disaggregation by country shows that, again, there are differences within almost all countries in how HEIs give automatic recognition to foreign qualifications for access to Doctoral level programmes. There are nine Member States where HEIs give automatic recognition for any other EU Member State at above the overall average rate (37%)²⁶. There are 11 Member States where 'None' was selected by respondents at a higher-than-average rate (41%)²⁷. No country registered all respondents reporting that their institution provides automatic recognition of master's degree qualifications from any other EU Member State for access to doctoral level programmes.

Figure 16. HEIs: automatic recognition of master's degree qualifications by country



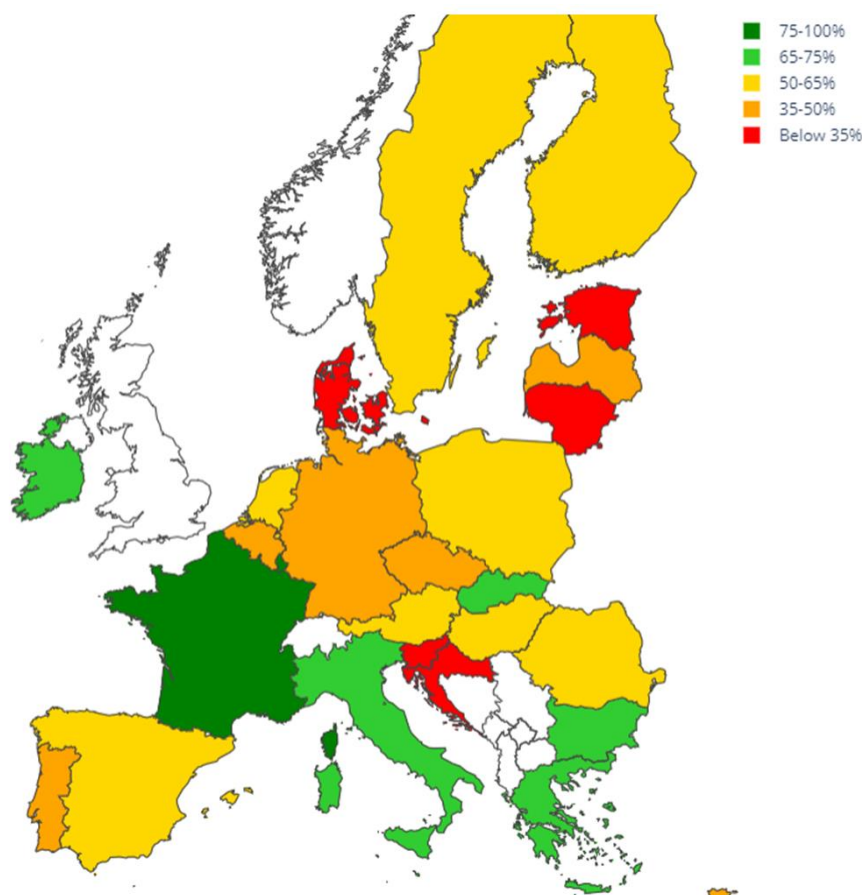
Source: ICF/3s survey, N=422

The following heatmap (Figure 17) shows trends overall trends on AR by country, grouping together respondents who indicated AR applying to any other EU Member State and those who indicated AR applying to any other Bologna process country.

²⁶ BE, BG, EL, ES, FR, PL, RO, SE, SK

²⁷ AT, CY, DE, DK, HR, LV, NL, PL, PT, RO, SI

Figure 17. Heatmap: Automatic recognition of master's level qualifications for access to doctoral level programmes applying to any other EU Member State or Bologna process country



Source: ICF/3s survey, N=422

Respondents who indicated that their institutions do not give automatic recognition to qualifications from any other EU Member State or Bologna process country – whether for access to bachelor's, master's or doctoral level programmes – were asked to indicate the criteria they applied for the recognition of qualifications from other EU Member States. This concerned 233 HEIs respondents in total. The most reported criterion was workload (ECTS) (selected by 65%), followed by confirmation that the learning outcomes of the programme align with those of their country in the same subject (51%), and EQF level of the qualification (42%). In general institutions apply a combination of these criteria when making recognition decisions.

Figure 18. Criteria applied by respondent institutions for the recognition of qualifications from other EU Member States



Source: ICF/3s survey, N=233

Among the same group of 233 HEIs, almost half (46%) indicated that the recognition of qualifications is separate from the admission processes. A total of 38% selected that they were handled together while 15% of the respondents did not know if the processes were handled together or separately.

Figure 19. Overview of how recognition and admission processes are handled



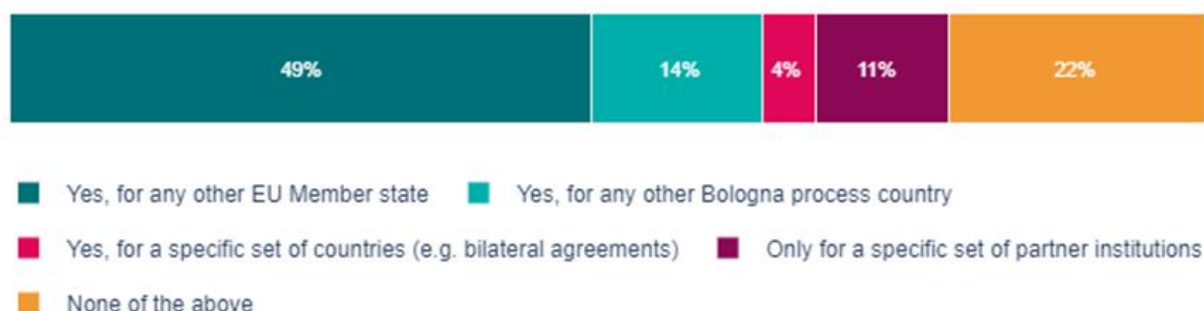
Source: ICF/3s survey, N=233

The results presented above show that in nearly all countries, there are no consistent systems in place for AMR in practice, even in countries where the relevant regulations exist.

4.4.2 Automatic Mutual Recognition of learning outcomes achieved during a learning period in another Member State

Results from the survey targeting Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and Secondary Education Institutions (SEIs) show that almost half of all institutions (49%) give automatic recognition to credits and learning outcomes obtained in any other EU Member State. A further 14% give automatic recognition to those when they were obtained in any other Bologna process country, 4% when they were obtained in a specific set of countries, and 11% when they were obtained in specific set of partner institutions.

Figure 20. Does your HEI / SEI give automatic recognition to credits and learning outcomes obtained in other countries?



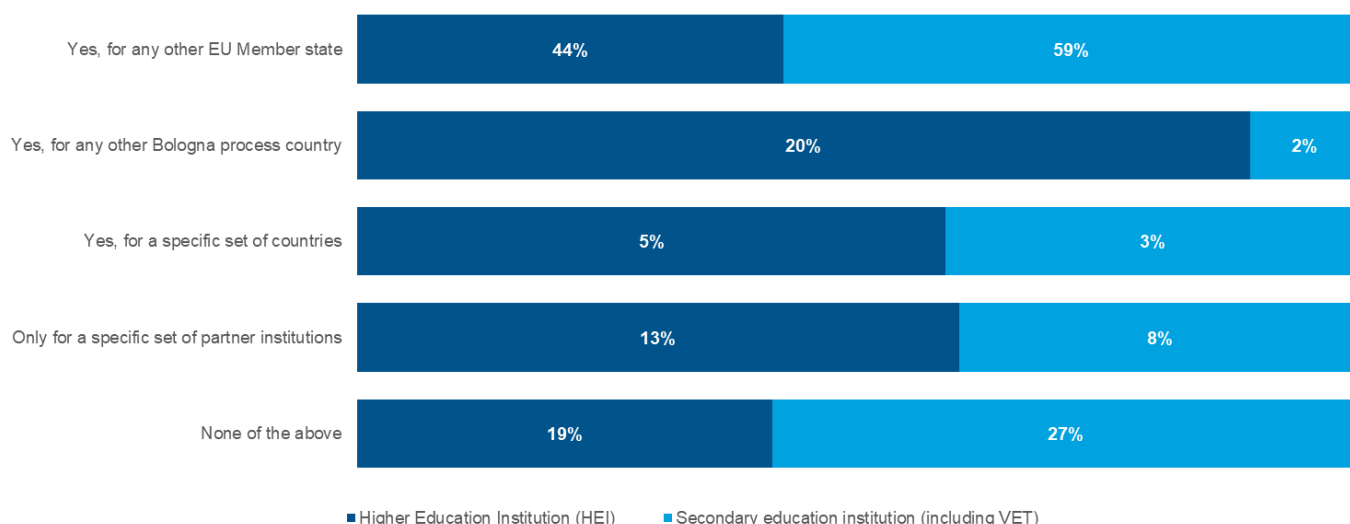
Source: ICF/3s survey, N=637

Comparing the responses from HEIs and SEIs:

- 61% of SEIs give automatic recognition to credits and learning outcomes obtained in any other EU Member State or Bologna process country. However, more than a quarter of SEIs (27%) do not give automatic recognition to learning outcomes achieved abroad at all.
- 64% of HEIs give automatic recognition to credits and learning outcomes obtained in any other EU Member State or Bologna process country. On the other side of the scale, 19% of respondents reported that their HEI does not give automatic recognition to learning outcomes achieved abroad at all.

HEIs thus give automatic recognition to credits and learning outcomes acquired abroad more often than SEIs (81% of HEIs compared with 73% of SEIs).

Figure 21. Automatic recognition to credits and learning outcomes obtained in other countries, by level of education (HEI/SEI)

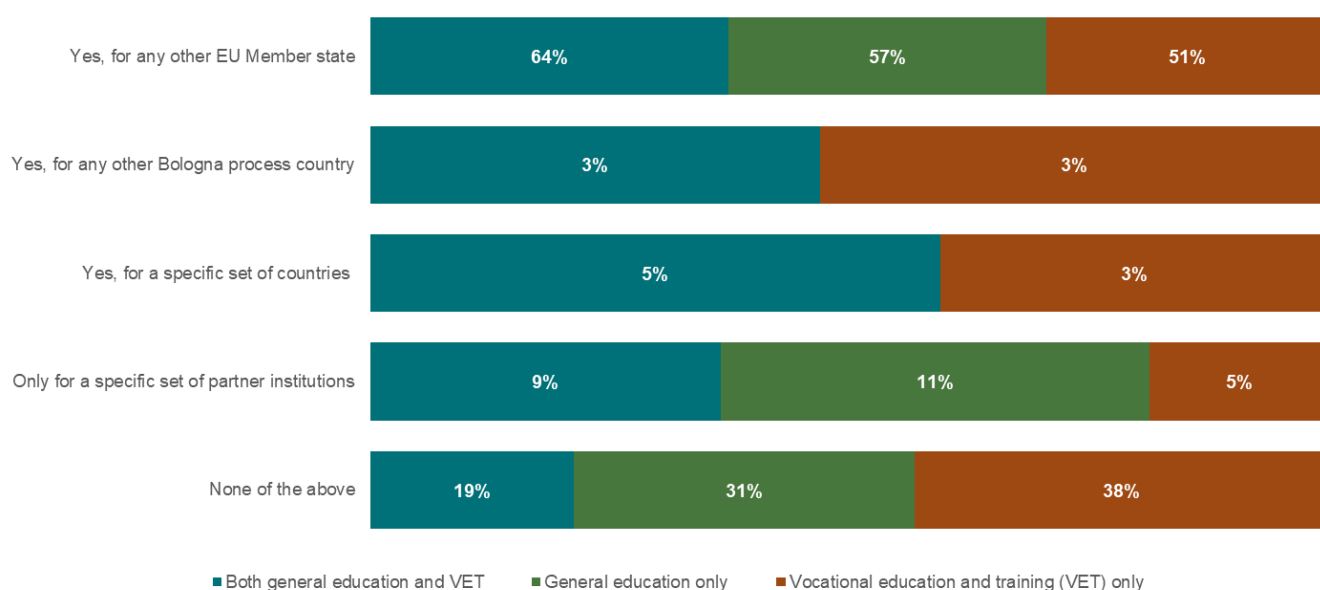


Source: ICF/3s survey, N=637

Looking at **differences within SEIs** (between institutions that provide general education, those that provide VET and those that provide both) recognition to credits and LOs obtained in any other EU Member State was reported more frequently in the case of institutions which cover both general education and VET. Institutions which offer VET only were those that most often report not to give automatic recognition to credits and LOs obtained in other countries (38%). In a few countries, automatic recognition

procedures are in place for mobilities in upper secondary general education (AT, LV), upper secondary VET (HR) or both upper secondary general education and VET (FI). In other countries, the extent to which learning periods abroad are recognised by secondary education institutions is unclear, as it is the responsibility of institutions. Differences between recognition in general upper secondary education and VET were reported included: in Poland, processes for recognition in general upper secondary education are in place, while this is not the case in VET, resulting in learners often repeating the year, as reported by some student organisations; in Austria, automatic recognition is in place for general upper secondary education, school-based VET and within certain work-based periods in dual VET.

Figure 22. Automatic recognition to credits and learning outcomes obtained in other countries by type of SEI



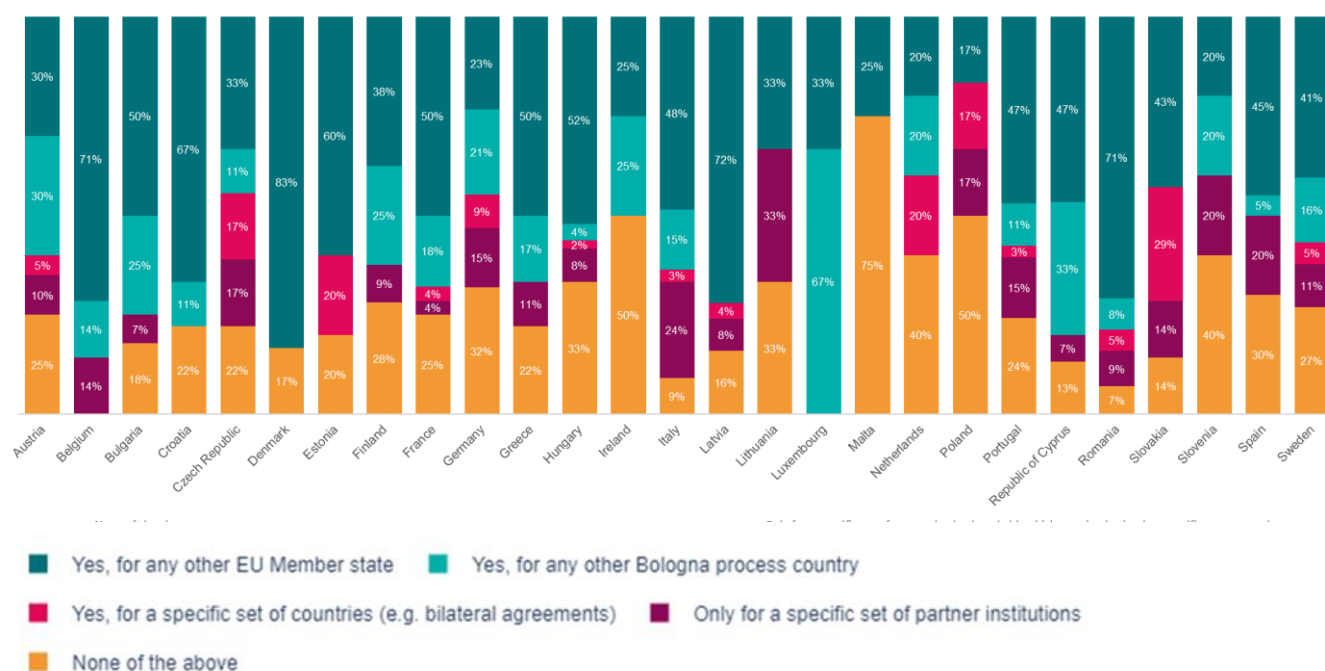
Source: ICF/3s survey, N=202

Note: types of SEI include SEIs providing both general education and VET, SEIs providing general education only, SEIs providing VET only

Looking at an analysis by country for HEIs and SEIs combined, there are 11 Member States in which institutions reported to give automatic recognition above the overall average²⁸. Five of these Member States (BE, BG, EL, ES, RO) also registered above average levels of automatic recognition to access further studies (as described in the previous section above), indicating high levels of automatic recognition, compared to other countries.

²⁸ BE, BG, HR, DK, EE, FR, EL, HU, LV, RO, ES.

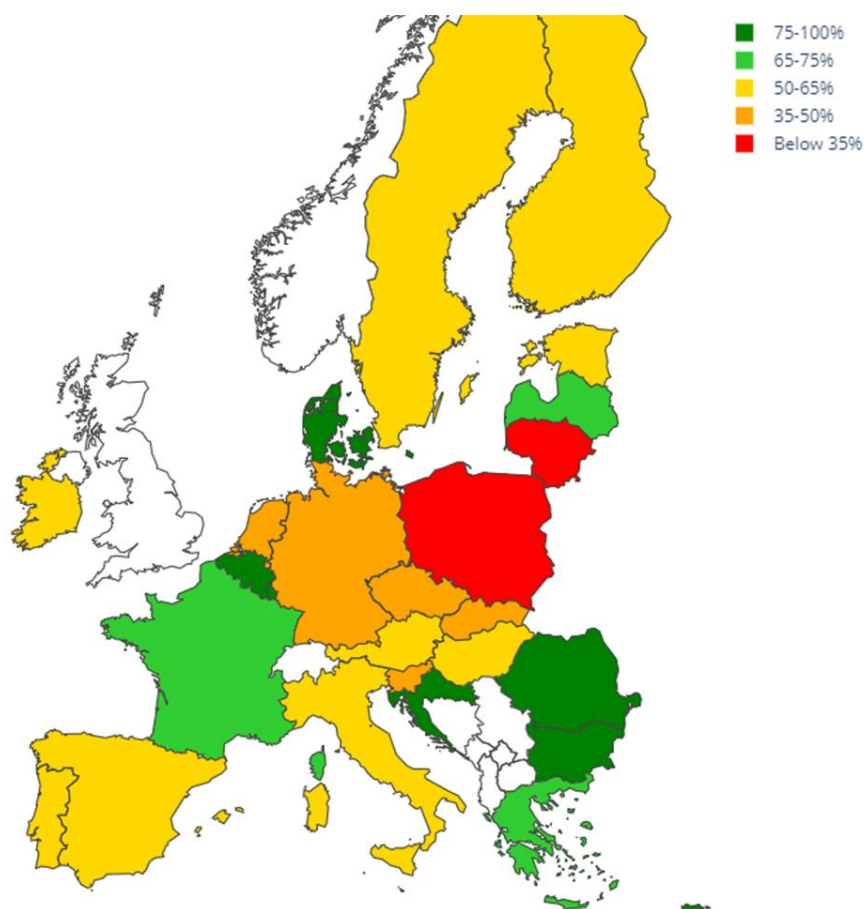
Figure 23. Automatic recognition of credits and learning outcomes obtained as part of a learning period abroad, by country (HEIs and SEIs)



Source: ICF/3s survey, N=615

The following heatmap (Figure 24) shows overall trends on AR with regards to credits and learning outcomes obtained as part of a learning experience abroad (both at higher education level and upper secondary education level) grouping together respondents who indicated AR applying to any other EU Member State or Bologna process country.

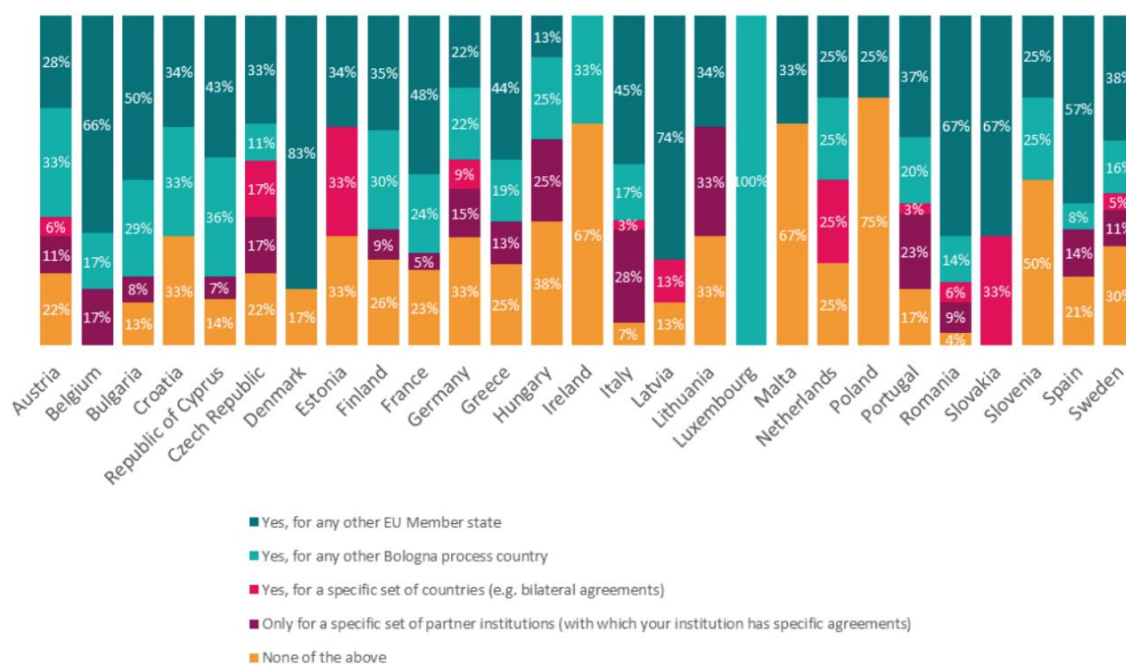
Figure 24. Heatmap: Automatic recognition of credits and learning outcomes obtained in any other EU Member State or Bologna process country (HEIs and SEIs)



Source: ICF/3s survey, N=615

Disaggregation by HEIs and SEIs shows that, within all countries, there are differences in how institutions in these two sectors of education give automatic recognition to credits and learning outcomes obtained in other countries, as the next two charts show (Figure 25, Figure 26).

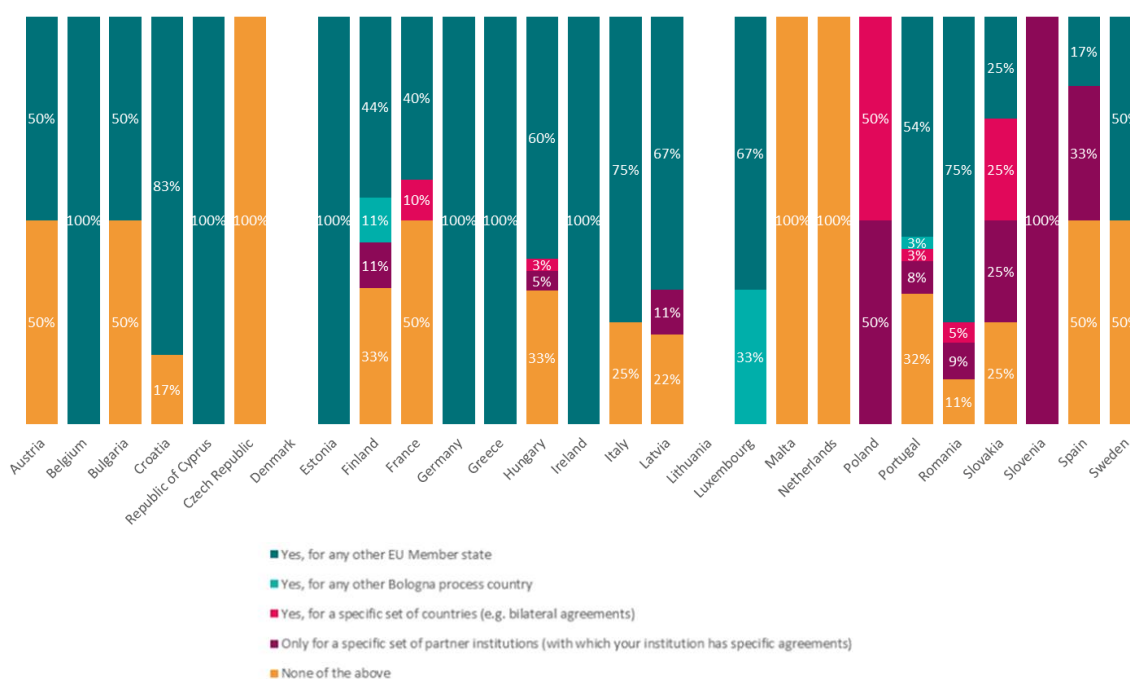
Figure 25. HEI: Automatic recognition to credits and learning outcomes obtained abroad, by country



Source: ICF/3s survey, N=422

All respondents for Luxembourg indicated automatic recognition at HE level of learning outcomes obtained abroad. Aside from that, Denmark and Belgium registered the highest shares of respondents reporting this type of automatic recognition. More than half of HEI respondents in Ireland, Malta and Poland indicated not applying any AR to credits and learning outcomes obtained abroad, regardless of the country.

Figure 26. SEI: Automatic recognition to credits and learning outcomes obtained abroad, by country



Source: ICF/3s survey, N=204

Note: no responses received from DK or LT respondents

While the sample size of SEI respondents was small, all SEI respondents from BE, CY, DE, EE, EL, IE and LU indicated applying AR to credits and learning outcomes obtained in any other EU Member State or Bologna process country. All SEI respondents from CZ, MT, and NL indicated not applying any AR to credits and learning outcomes obtained abroad, regardless of the country.

Among the 236 respondents on behalf of HEIs and SEIs who indicated no AR of credits and learning outcomes acquired in any other EU Member State or Bologna process country, less than a third (28%) reported the existence of differences regarding recognition processes for Learning Outcomes obtained abroad within the EU and those obtained at other institutions within their country. A total of 72% of the respondents selected that there are no differences.

Figure 27. Are there any differences regarding recognition processes for Learning Outcomes obtained abroad (within the EU) and those obtained at other institutions within your country (nationally)?



Source: ICF/3s survey, N=236

- Among the 156 responding HEIs, 120 (77%) indicated no such differences.
- Among the 80 responding SEIs, 50 (63%) indicated no such differences.

Among the HEI/SEI respondents indicating no AR for either any other EU Member State or Bologna process country, a total of 131 respondents provided details on the number of applications for recognition (of qualifications or learning outcomes acquired abroad) and the percentage of rejections that their institution gives on average in a given academic year. The average number of applications was 383 with an average rejection rate of 8%. The range of application numbers given were between 1-4000 and the rejection range was between 0-75%.

The main points worth raising at country-level:

- Within this sample, there were frequent replies from German HEIs regarding rejections of applications for recognition, with variation in the share of rejections (from 1% to up to 50%) while the most frequent response given was around 10% of rejections.
- Austrian HEIs in the sample: reported wide variation in the share of rejections (from none to 30%), but the most frequent response given was 1-2% of rejections.
- There were several respondents on behalf of SEIs in Hungary who indicated little or no rejections (1-2%).

4.5 Implementation challenges

This section presents the main challenges affecting the progress reported towards the implementation of the CR.

4.5.1 Understanding of Automatic Mutual Recognition

A recurrent challenge mentioned in several Member States, as discussed in-depth at the start of this chapter (see section 4.1), was a lack of a clear understanding of AMR as it

is defined in the CR. This is visible from the results of the survey whereby educational institutions within the same Member State gave different responses regarding the extent and conditions of application of AMR.

Various stakeholders representing educational institutions also reported in the focus groups to be unclear about AMR under the LRC and the CR, and how they relate to and differ from each other. They also noted the existence of ambiguity regarding the legal implications surrounding automatic recognition (i.e., they reported that there was some lack of clarity in HEIs and SEIs as to the actual rights of access it gives to applicants).

Among those stakeholders, some suggested that action should be taken for the verification of credentials – an aspect that the CR does not include within its remit – and pointed to a lack of a joint European database that admission officers can use to validate foreign education credentials (e.g. to check if an applicant has attained a bachelor's degree qualification from a specific institution).

A solid and shared understanding, on the other hand, is an enabler of and precondition for progress in the implementation of the CR. Discussing the challenges of finding a common language on AMR during focus groups led some of the participants advocating a new terminology, as for example 'automatic equivalence of qualifications' – in terms of their level and function. The evaluation focus groups also underlined that synergies with the Erasmus+ programme can be further enhanced, especially as the documents supporting applications for Erasmus+ mobilities can facilitate the dissemination of the CR to education providers.

4.5.2 Level of political priority

An important contextual factor is that shortly after the approval of the CR in November 2018, the COVID-19 pandemic strongly affected the volume of international mobility activities in Europe²⁹ and worldwide and shifted the priorities for action of education policymakers and educational institutions. In the COVID-19 context, the political priority placed on AMR decreased, although for a momentary period, as interest in international mobility has picked up again and emergency measures related to COVID-19 have eased, which may result in further progress in the years ahead.

Stakeholders reported during focus groups, that educational policies in some countries (e.g. in DE) are prioritising joint qualifications and sectoral qualifications at the moment. These topics are currently receiving more attention than initiatives related to automatic mutual recognition of HE and SE qualifications and learning periods abroad.

In addition, participants in the focus groups also noted that some Member States see the CR's stated 2025 deadline for implementing automatic recognition as being too distant in the future and recognised low levels of activity while expecting to make more decided progress in the implementation of the CR as this deadline approaches.

Associated with a lack of political priority, stakeholders reported in the evaluation focus groups a lack of sufficient financial resources to advance actions in this area. In relation to this, some stakeholders pointed that the information provided by some NARICs is not up to date and is not in tune with changes to programmes and curricula.

4.5.3 Decision-making levels

There is considerable complexity associated with procedures around recognition decisions across the Member States while there exist bilateral and multilateral recognition agreements that do not meet the requirements of AMR as defined in the CR. These bilateral and multilateral recognition agreements can either relate to upper secondary education qualifications, higher education qualifications, or both. They often

²⁹ Allinson K., Gabriels W., (2021). Maybe it will be different abroad; student and staff perspectives on diversity and inclusion in student exchanges. SIEM Research Report, siem-project.eu

involve neighbouring countries or countries with historical or economic ties. In addition, there are formal unilateral decisions ('lists') regarding qualifications from certain given countries that can be automatically recognised. These agreements and lists are independently administered by national education ministries or their agencies, such as NARICs.

In the majority of Member States (AT, BE, BG, CZ, CY, DE, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HR, IE, IT, LT, LV, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, SI), however, recognition decisions of foreign qualifications for the purpose of accessing further studies lie primarily with educational institutions.

Only in a handful of countries are ministries and agencies (including NARICs) directly involved in issuing recognition decisions for access to further studies, often in close collaboration with educational institutions. This is the case for Romania (CNRED / Romanian NARIC), Sweden (Council of Higher Education – hybrid model) and Slovakia (Ministry of Education for level-recognition, regional school district offices for upper secondary qualifications). In Bulgaria, HEIs may delegate their recognition procedures to the NARIC for a fee.

A few national specificities are nevertheless worth highlighting:

- In the Czech Republic (CZ), the Ministry of Education is entitled to make decisions in disputable situations. It is an appeal body in case an application is rejected by the HEI. Moreover, it makes a decision on the recognition itself if there is no public university with a similar study programme.
- In Denmark (DK), recognition decisions are undertaken by the Danish Agency for Higher Education and Science under the Ministry of Higher Education and Science, which also operates as the NARIC. The assessment is binding, and it must be used by educational institutions, who are responsible for executing decisions related to recognition when making decisions on admission.
- In Germany (DE), the recommendations by NARIC form the basis of decision-making by HEIs, even though they are not legally binding. An extra layer of complexity is added through the federal system: legal recommendations regarding educational policy at federal level (by the KMK – Standing Conference of Ministers of Education and Culture) have to be transferred into regional (Länder) laws to come into effect. This may happen using slightly different wording, which may further lead to inconsistencies in the interpretation of recognition matters. While carrying out the survey, it became evident that some German HEIs interpret NARIC's recommendations on the recognition of foreign qualifications as being legally binding, while others do not. Legally, the recommendations are not binding, but the underlying bilateral agreements and laws, are. Thus, legally, automatic recognition is possible, although its definition is related to that in the LRC rather than the CR.
- In Sweden (SE), there is a hybrid model whereby an HEI and the Swedish Council for Higher Education (the central admission unit) firstly assess jointly the extent to which students meet the general and specific entry requirements for the course/programmes they have applied. While this process results formally in an individual HEI decision, it is not the individual HEI taking decisions on recognition in practice, but HEIs (collectively and collegially) and the Council taking common decisions for all applicants. Applications with foreign qualifications will be assessed by experts within HEIs – where the expert for one country will deal with all applicants for that country, irrespective of the HEI for which they have applied. The process is coordinated by the Ministry of Education, also contributing to ensuring consistency between legislation and practice.

Of the 233 HEIs indicating no automatic recognition either for qualifications from other EU Member States or Bologna process countries – regardless of the level of accession – 27% indicated that a central national service (e.g. ENIC-NARIC) is responsible for making the decision on the recognition of qualifications obtained abroad. A further 24% reported that the university central service/coordinator was responsible and 22% reported that subject-specific such as professors and committees were responsible.

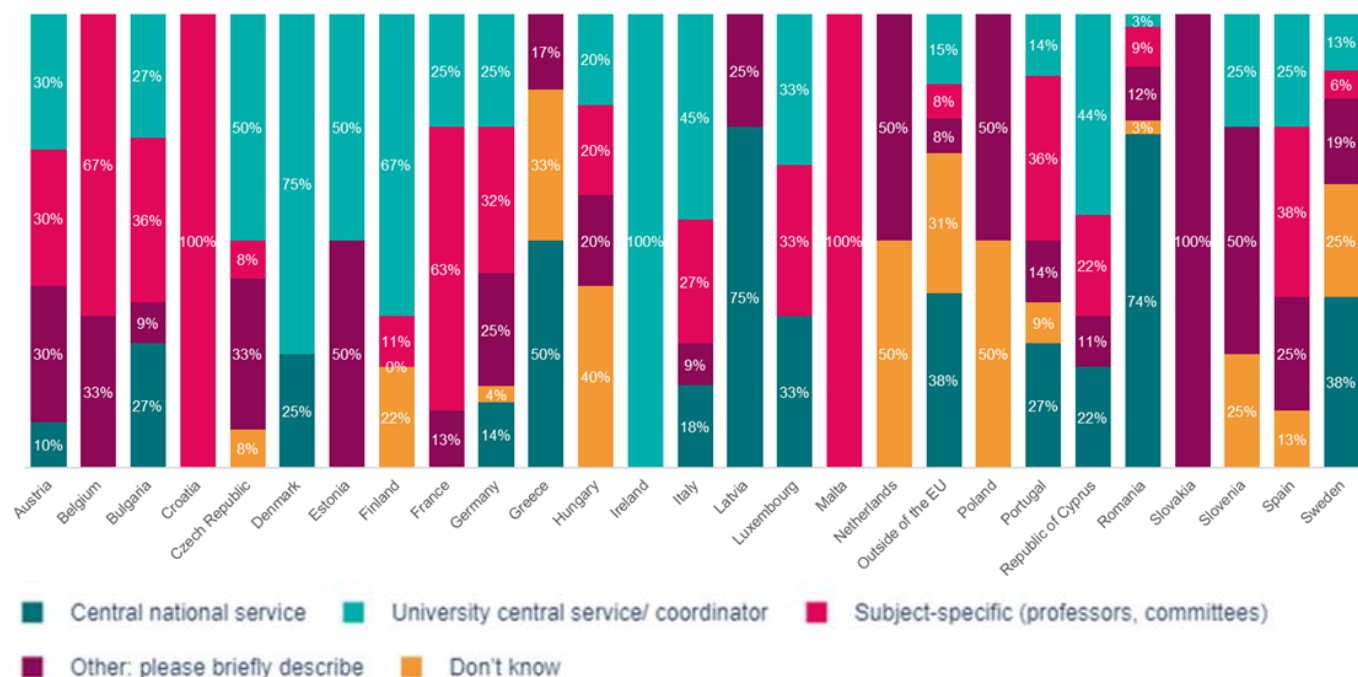
Figure 28. Who makes the decision on the recognition of qualifications obtained abroad?



Source: ICF/3s survey, N=233

Disaggregation by country shows that within almost all countries there are differences in who makes the decision on the recognition of qualifications obtained abroad in HEIs. Within Greece, Latvia and Romania, a central national service does in 50% or more of cases, whereas in Belgium, Croatia, France, and Malta, in over 50% of cases subject specific professors or committees do³⁰.

Figure 29. Overview decision-making entity on the recognition of qualifications obtained abroad, by country



Source: ICF/3s survey, N=233

There were 39 responses from HEIs who reported that there were other entities involved, besides those offered in the survey. Some of these entities included:

³⁰ Results with limited statistical significance.

- Technical and scientific councils
- Combination of the central office (administrative paper) and faculty admission board
- In-house international mobility coordinator / scientific committee
- National commission for the recognition of foreign degrees

Among this group of 233 HEIs, 178 reported that no arrangements have been set up to enhance automatic recognition of upper secondary education qualifications and higher education qualifications in their respective country since the introduction of the CR.

To summarise, it is often unclear to stakeholders 'on the ground' who is ultimately in charge of recognition decisions in practice. For example, in Denmark, as already mentioned, recognition decisions are actually taken by the Danish Agency for Higher Education. Still, in the survey, 75% of survey respondents for Denmark stated that their university is the decision-making body.

Furthermore, there are strong risks of inconsistency in the decision making concerning recognition of qualifications. The evaluation focus groups revealed that recognition at the provider level can depend on the familiarity of the staff examining the case with the country where the foreign qualification was obtained. This can potentially lead to lack of consistency and inequalities in the treatment of applicants. In many systems, external QA does not review institutional decisions. It should be noted, however, that for many HEIs, substantial national or institutional databases build the foundation of recognition decisions.

The above findings underline the existence of a complex array of arrangements, procedures and allocation of decision-making for the recognition of qualifications obtained abroad, leading to issues around transparency, efficiency, consistency and equality in decision-making. An unmet need, discussed in both the Higher Education and upper secondary education focus groups, exists for practical tools (including ICT-based tools) and systems that can make the recognition process simpler.

4.5.4 Differences in levels, types and duration of qualifications

According to the CR, if a qualification gives access to the next level of education in the EU Member State where the qualification was issued, the same rights should apply in any other Member State. This may however be more challenging where there are difficulties in establishing equivalence for programmes and qualifications straddling on ISCED Level 5 (Short-cycle tertiary education) and ISCED level 6 (bachelor's degree or equivalent level). Such programmes and qualifications exist in FR, MT, PT and SE³¹.

An example of issues regarding duration of qualifications can be found in the Nordic countries, one-year master's degrees awarded in Finland and Sweden, are not recognised in Norway and Denmark, who only award two-year master programmes within their ordinary education systems, as equivalent to their own master and thus giving direct access to PhD level studies in their systems.

Both the upper secondary and higher education focus groups consulted for this study identified the recognition of partial qualifications and of micro-credentials as potential fields for future development³².

³¹ Eurydice (2021): The Structure of the European Education Systems 2021/22: Schematic Diagrams

³² See Heriard et al. (2021)

4.5.5 Challenges and enablers in the recognition of learning outcomes achieved during a learning period in another Member State: higher education

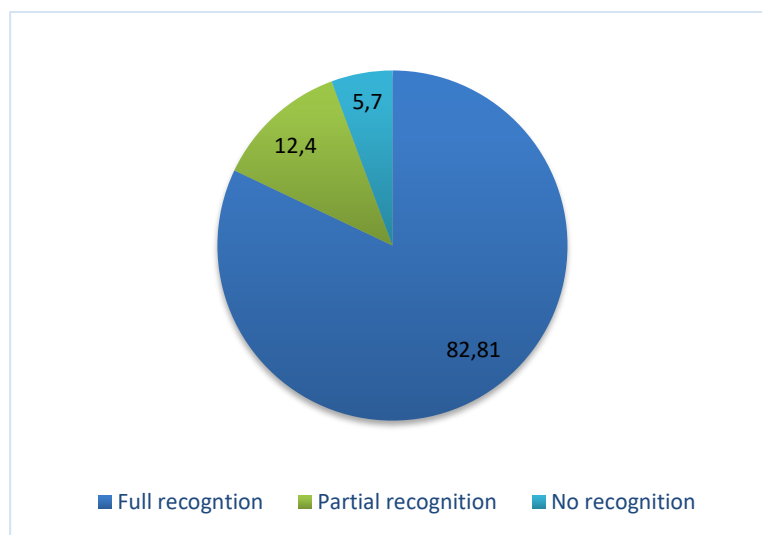
Most transfers of credits relating to learning periods abroad are recognised within the framework of Erasmus+ mobilities. The Erasmus+ quality framework requires a pre-approval of courses that a student wants to take abroad. The use of learning agreements prior to the departure of the learner should ensure the recognition of the LOs acquired during the period abroad. The student needs to submit course descriptions, LOs and requirements, to be matched with their home institution curriculum. Once approved, the courses are recognised automatically when the student submits their grades (Transcript of Records) after the learning mobility.

Some countries consider the recognition of LOs from study periods abroad outside Erasmus+ difficult due to a high diversity of recognition procedures (e.g. CY, EL) and lack of formalisation (e.g. standardised application forms or guidelines) (e.g. SE).

Similar procedures are described for students transferring from another country. Institutional procedures require documentation of courses taken at another institution and a decision is made based on content evaluation (e.g. ES, PT).

Data gathered via the Erasmus+ participants survey and shared by the European Commission, provide evidence that full recognition of study periods abroad in the context of the Erasmus+ among Programme Countries is implemented in most cases, but not always. The recognition rate of HE student mobility for studies under the Erasmus+ programme 2014-2020, is high on average although still far from universal (82%), and significant differences among countries remain. The data refer to Programme Countries, including those outside of the EU.

Figure 30. Recognition rate of HE student mobility for studies between programme countries (KA103)



Source: Erasmus+ Participant Survey dashboard (2014 to 2020 calls)

Several enabling factors for the recognition of learning outcomes obtained during learning periods abroad in HE were identified during the evaluation, including:

- A structured system of pre-approval before mobility, making use of tools such as learning agreements ensures de-facto automatic recognition.
- Mobility windows foreseeing recognition of credits obtained.
- Flexibility in curricula, as electives can allow for easier recognition.

- Provision of examples, guidelines and databases for HEIs to enhance their recognition procedures.
- Provision of guidelines, information and databases for students.
- Institutional learning and exchange through Erasmus+ projects.
- Development of policies and recognition procedures together with stakeholders.

Barriers identified in the research included:

- Institutional culture and philosophy against recognition.
- Lack of guidelines and regulations for practical implementation of credit transfer.
- Lack of a systemic approach towards the implementation of Learning Outcomes.

4.5.6 Challenges and enablers in the recognition of Learning Outcomes achieved during a learning period in another Member State: upper secondary education and training

Differing approaches between countries have resulted in uncertainty about recognition of learning outcomes from learning periods abroad in upper secondary education and training. Barriers identified include the fragmented nature of recognition policies and practices, poorly aligned assessments, limited access to opportunities for recognition and other disincentives³³.

In **general upper secondary education and training**, the evaluation focus group identified the recognition of longer periods abroad as a major challenge. Recognition of longer periods abroad is often undertaken on a case-by-case basis by teachers. Indeed, LOs from mobilities outside of Erasmus+ are often recognised by individual education institutions based on a case-by-case basis (in BE, DE, DK, LU, PL, PT, SE) or are sometimes based on bilateral agreements with other educational institutions (in ES, SE), but the situation cannot be considered automatic mutual recognition. In many cases, the principal and/or teacher examines the individual case and takes recognition decisions.

Moreover, mobility in upper secondary education is more frequent in the form of shorter mobility periods. In the case of short periods of study abroad, recognition is more straightforward since the period abroad does usually not substantially impact the achievement of Learning Outcomes specified in the programme being completed in the home country and is not recognised in the qualification obtained.

The CR points to the particular challenges faced in the recognition of periods abroad between three months and one year. Long mobility periods could become part of an already specified module and an integral part of a qualification, which reduces the challenges for recognition within the programme by embedding learning abroad periods in it.

In **VET**, company-based training periods abroad often face lower barriers for recognition, provided that some requirements are met, for example in terms of appropriate specification of tasks, technologies or hours of practice³⁴. However, some countries put a limit on the share of the training component of a qualification that can be undertaken abroad.

The discussions in the focus groups referred to how differences in local needs, technologies used by companies and educational institutions for the practical components of courses (particularly in VET), or pedagogies may point towards the

³³ Briga & Looney, 2021, p. 98

³⁴ See Cedefop (2021). *Cross-border long-term apprentice mobility*. Luxembourg: Publications Office.

benefits of partial recognition (complemented by additional assessments, as applicable, in the home country) rather than full recognition in some cases.

Moreover, the evaluation focus groups highlighted that recognition in upper secondary education and training is resource-intensive and does not rely on the same type of shared standards as in the case of HE. This presents challenges for the achievement of the objectives of the CR. Staff training is one way in which countries and organisations try to mitigate these challenges. For example, EFIL is providing training to teachers in Poland on how to assess the LOs achieved during periods abroad.

The Erasmus+ programme is key in establishing a trusted framework for recognition. In France, no automatic recognition of learning periods abroad in general upper secondary education and training is possible outside the Erasmus+ programme and the OFAJ³⁵ programme (between France and Germany).

In summary, factors enabling the recognition of learning outcomes at upper secondary level include:

- Mobility done as part of the Erasmus+ programme
- Implementation of the Learning Outcomes approach in school education and VET
- Use of credits or modules allowing for flexibility
- Mobility windows (described in more detail below)
- Online application and recognition processes and information for learners
- The use of learning agreements to ensure a framework for recognition of learning mobilities.

Whereas hindering factors include:

- Insufficient stakeholder involvement in the development of strategies, guidelines and training to support schools in their recognition procedures
- Lack of shared standards and guidelines for school and training institutions to implement recognition procedures
- Lack of mobility in specific grades due to insufficient demand from learners and rigidity of curricula
- Insufficient robust use of the LOs approach
- Insufficient outreach and communication about benefits of mobility
- Lack of resources for implementing automatic recognition; insufficient trust and transparency among countries³⁶
- Students sometimes have to take exams when they come back from mobilities or have difficulties passing the final year of studies/ university entrance exams (e.g. in Greece and Poland); in some cases this results in repeating a whole school year (e.g. Poland or Portugal)
- Lack of data on the recognition of Learning Outcomes achieved during learning periods abroad

Finland: a mobility window in VET degrees

Finland has updated legislation for VET and upper secondary education in recent years to ensure better recognition prior learning, including learning acquired abroad. As a part of these reforms, new regulation came into force in August 2022: VET degrees will now include a 15-credit window to be used for academic or professional

³⁵ Office franco-allemand pour la Jeunesse (OFAJ): <https://www.ofaj.org/jeunes-adultes/participer-a-un-echange.html>

³⁶ See also Briga & Looney, 2021, p. 108

aspirations. This window can be used for study or training abroad and therefore integrates a possible mobility window in the curriculum, as emerged from the interviews with EDUFI and QAA. Additionally, the Finnish National Agency for Education (EDUFI) introduced guidance for recognition of prior learning in VET in 2021.

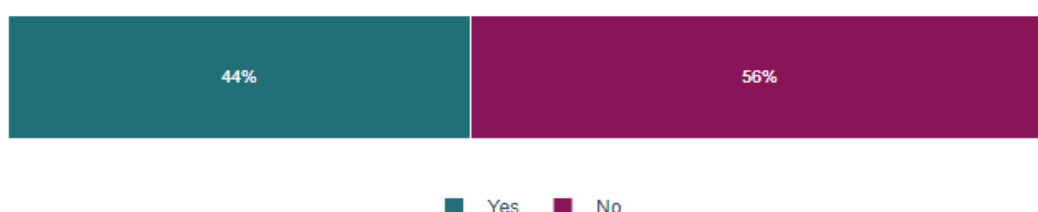
4.6 Improvements in users' experience of recognition

This section reviews the experience of users with regards to recognition, looking at both institutions and learners.

4.6.1 Improvement in recognition practices among educational institutions

Among the 648 educational institutions responding to the survey, 44% indicated that there have been improvements in their institution's recognition practices in the last 3-4 years, i.e. since the introduction of the CR in 2018. On the other hand, more than half of the respondents (56%) selected they have not seen improvements in their institution's recognition practice over the same period.

Figure 31. Has anything improved in your institutions' recognition practice over the last 3-4 years?



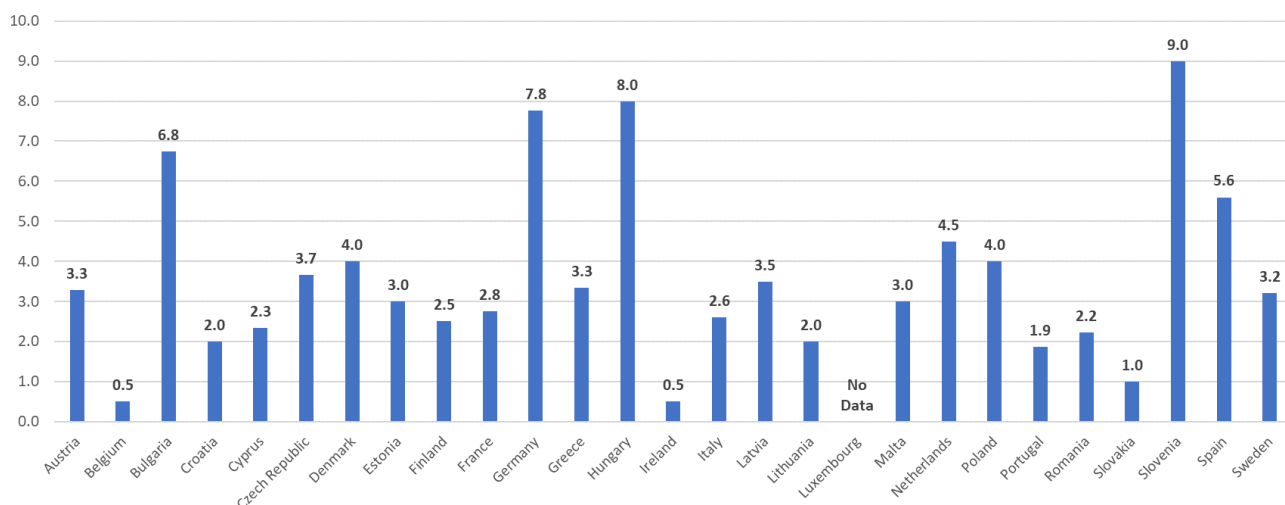
Source: ICF/3s survey, N=648

There were 189 respondents who gave details on the areas where they have seen improvements. The most commonly cited areas were **the move to online/digital practices** which has enabled quicker and more efficient recognition, the **implementation of training**, for example, with representatives of admission commissions, and the **streamlining of processes** which has enabled greater clarity, simplicity, and speed of recognition.

4.6.2 Time to issue a decision on recognition

The survey of institutions asked these to report on the average length of recognition processes for recognition procedures regarding other EU Member States, and also how this differed in the case of recognition regarding other countries. The results in Figures 32 and 33 concern exclusively institutions who indicated not applying automatic recognition for either qualifications or learning outcomes acquired abroad. In 8 countries those were equal to or exceeded four weeks, reaching more than 6 weeks in four countries. These are, thus, substantial periods of time. The vast majority of respondents indicated that there is no difference in the length of the recognition process between EU27 Member States and third countries – only one respondent in Austria and one in Cyprus indicating that recognition processes are quicker and easier for EU27 Member States compared to third countries. As such, when no AMR exists, there is little advantage in terms of obtaining a decision for holders of qualifications obtained or learning periods undertaken within the EU compared to those obtained or undertaken outside.

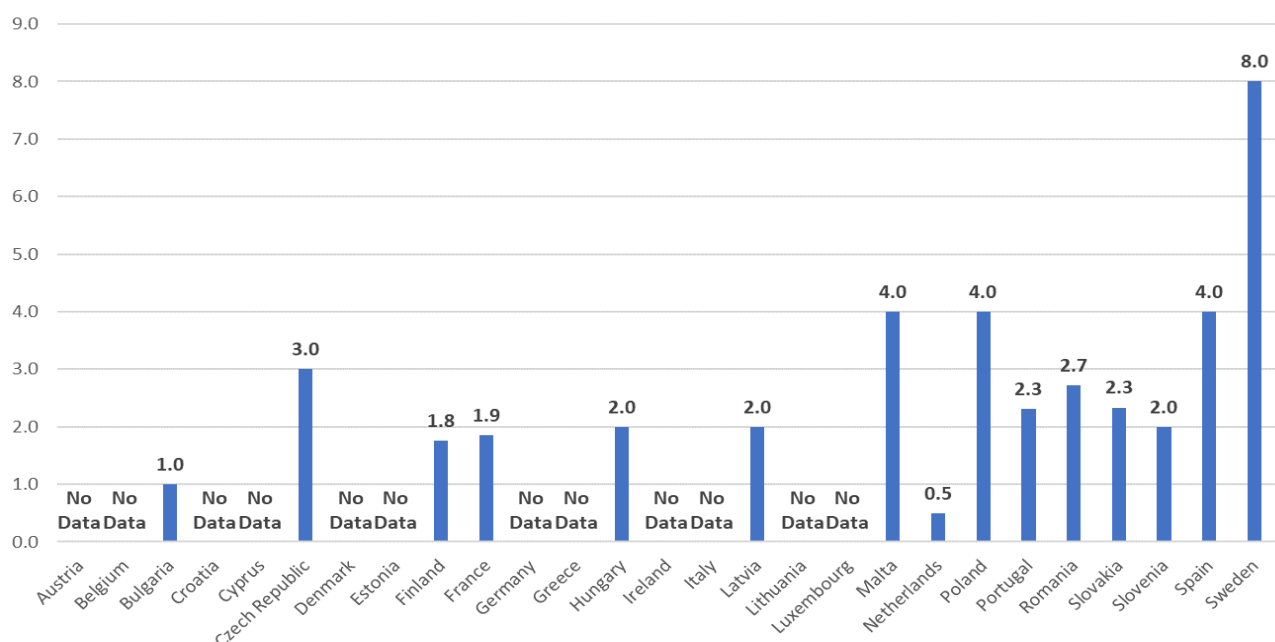
Figure 32. HEIs: average time of recognition procedures in weeks



Source: ICF/3s survey, N=144

Note: results for BE, DK, HR, IE, MT, NL, SI, SK are not statistically significant (1 or 2 respondents)

Figure 33. SEIs: average time of recognition procedures in weeks



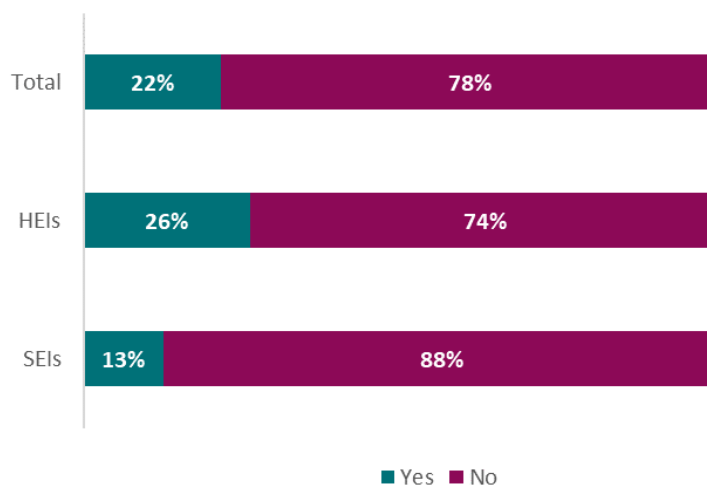
Source: ICF/3s survey, N=80

Note: results for BG, CZ, MT, NL, PL, SE, SI are not statistically significant (1 or 2 respondents)

4.6.3 Payment for recognition

A majority of respondents on behalf of HEIs and SEIs (78%) indicated that recognition processes were free of charge despite not being automatic for qualifications or learning outcomes from other EU Member States. However, this means that over a fifth of respondents reported a requirement for applicants to pay for non-automatic recognition processes.

Figure 34. Whether (non-automatic) recognition processes require payment from the applicant



Source: ICF/3s survey, N=237

None of the respondents from HEIs in the following countries indicated that non-automatic recognition processes require payments from applicants: BE, DE, DK, EL, FI, IE, LT, LU, MT. In CZ, HEI respondents more frequently indicated payment for recognition is requested. At least one SEI from the following countries indicated recognition processes require payments from the applicants: AT, HR, HU, LV, NL, PT, RO.

4.6.4 Learners' experience of recognition

With regards to learners, in 2018, at the time of adoption of the CR, a Eurobarometer survey³⁷ of young people aged 15 to 30 (EU28 Member States) on the EEA underlines the relevance of the CR by showing that³⁸:

- 91% of respondents to the survey agreed that a system for the automatic recognition of qualifications would be very or somewhat useful – and similar levels of support were given to the idea of automatic and electronic transfer of credits obtained whilst studying abroad to the home university. Highly educated respondents and employees (e.g. excluding those self-employed or not working) showed stronger support compared to other groups.
- 13% of those respondents who had had experiences working or studying abroad reported problems (a lot/some difficulties) in the recognition of qualifications, degrees, credits or learning outcomes obtained during their experience abroad. This figure was over a 25% in Italy and Hungary. A further 16% reported to have experienced “not many” difficulties. This provides a baseline of the situation at the time of the adoption of the CR, but no similar data collection has been undertaken since.

Regarding the survey of students and graduates conducted as part of this evaluation, interpretation of its results should be made with caution given the relatively low number of responses obtained. Nevertheless, results of this evaluation survey provide an initial indication of the value of recognition for student and graduate users:

³⁷ European Commission & TNS Political & Social (2018): Flash Eurobarometer 466. The European Education Area. Brussels.

³⁸ This provides baselines at the time of the introduction of the CR, but there is no equivalent data available from EU representative surveys (such as the Eurobarometer) to assess progress against these baselines.

- In terms of the characteristics of the survey sample, of the 342 responses received, only 98 respondents (29%) indicated having studied in another European country in the last three years.
- Disaggregation by respondent type shows that slightly more graduates (36%) had studied in another European country in the last three years compared to current students.
- In terms of level of education, 77% of respondents who had studied in another European country in the last three years did so at tertiary level. The countries where respondents studied abroad at a non-tertiary level were Finland, France, Ireland, Italy, Portugal, and Spain.

Of the 98 respondents who indicated having studied abroad in the last three years, 81% (79 respondents) reported to have obtained qualifications or credits as a result of studying in another European country. Of those respondents who indicated having obtained qualifications or credits from their studies abroad:

- 73% indicated their qualification or credits obtained abroad were recognised in their home country or current country of residence.
- 8% indicated this had not been the case.

Figure 35. Survey of students and graduates: Were the qualification(s) or credits you obtained abroad (in another European country) recognised in your home country or current country of residence allowing you to pursue your studies?



Source: ICF/3s survey, N=79

Disaggregation by respondent type shows that an even greater proportion of graduates (13%) found that their qualification or credits obtained abroad were not recognised in their home country or current country of residence, which suggests some progress over time in this respect.

Figure 36. Survey of students and graduates: To what extent was the recognition process rapid and easy?



Source: ICF/3s survey, N=58

4.6.5 Need for improvement in recognition processes

Several studies suggest students experience challenges when going abroad. Results from the ESN 2021 survey show that over 10% of students at HE level remain (very) dissatisfied with the process of recognition of the ECTS achieved during their mobility and a slightly higher share with the information and support offered by their home institution on grade transfer and ECTS. It should be noted that the complementary

elements to ECTS (such as timely course catalogues expressed in terms of learning outcomes) are not sufficiently widespread^{39 40} – an issue that is in some respects linked to the existence of different academic calendars within the EU⁴¹. As a result of experiencing difficulties with the recognition of ECTS achieved abroad, a 2021 ESN study on the topic of social Inclusion and engagement in mobility⁴², found out that 26% of respondents participating in mobility (over 8,000 students) reported that extending their programme was a practical barrier to mobility.

Existing evidence that many students who are non-mobile – a group which is often overlooked in discussions on learning mobility in Higher Education – continue to have a negative view of recognition procedures. In the recent ESN study (2021), 4,000 non-mobile students were interviewed to learn about reasons for not going abroad. 30% of respondents (strongly) agreed that lack of recognition for time spent abroad was a barrier for mobility. A similar share reported that they were unable or unwilling to extend the duration of their degree, which suggests that they would expect not to achieve full recognition for the learning outcomes they obtained abroad – with 12% of respondents specifically citing expected difficulties in the recognition of credits. An even higher share (42%) of the responding non-mobile students expressed concerns with the impact of mobility on their academic achievement. The report also notes that students need clearer information about how credits would be transferred.⁴³

Regarding the survey of students and graduates conducted as part of this evaluation, among the 79 respondents who had undergone a recognition process:

- The vast majority (72%) reported that there is a need for improvements to the current recognition processes.
- 35% felt that improvements were needed to 'a moderate extent' and 37% felt they were needed to 'a great extent'; results were similar among the responding students and graduates.
- A similar share of students and graduates reported that there was 'no need for improvements' (overall trend 18%).

Figure 37. Survey of students and graduates: From your experience to what extent, if any, is there a need for improvements to the current recognition processes?



Source: ICF/3s survey, N=79

³⁹ See also EACEA (2020) The European Higher Education Area in 2020. Bologna Process Implementation Report. Luxembourg, Office for Official Publications of the European Union. p.43; Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (2021) Modernisation of European Higher Education in a European Context 2021 <https://www.erasmusplus.nl/sites/default/files/2021-11/EN%20%20Modernisering-van-het-hoger-onderwijs-in-Europese-context-anno-2021.pdf> p.5.

⁴⁰ See also NARIC annual survey (2020 and 2021 editions).

⁴¹ See Eurydice (2021) The organisation of the academic calendar in Europe 2021/22. Luxembourg, Office for Official Publications of the European Union.

⁴² Allinson K., Gabriels W., (2021). Maybe it will be different abroad; student and staff perspectives on diversity and inclusion in student exchanges. SIEM Research Report, siem-project.eu

⁴³ *Ibid.*

Of the 79 respondents to the above survey question, 15 made some suggestions for improvements, the most recurrent ones being as follows:

- Simplification of the recognition procedure overall, implying it is not automatic
- Clear indications on guidelines to follow for grading scale conversion and/or implementation of similar marking systems
- Reduction in bureaucracy
- Increased information on module compatibility

Of the 58 responses to the question on the extent to which the recognition process had been rapid and easy, the majority (83%) agreed 'to a great extent' or 'to a moderate extent'. Disaggregation by respondent type shows that a greater proportion of students (19%) found that it was 'neither rapid nor easy' compared to graduates (9%). The share of respondents reporting that recognition had not been rapid nor easy is broadly in line with the Eurobarometer results provided above in this section, suggesting limited improvement in the recognition experience for users.

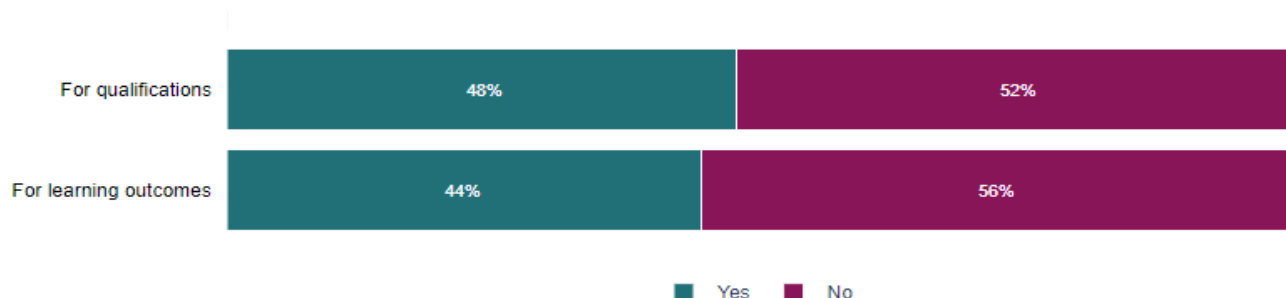
4.7 Improvement of the evidence-base and capacity building towards achieving Automatic Mutual Recognition

Enhancement of the evidence base through better monitoring and dissemination of AR cases and trends is part of the expected outputs of the CR and is covered in KP9. These activities can be important in terms of raising awareness of AMR. At the same time, greater evidence provides a valuable resource to NARICs and relevant national ministries in their awareness raising activities.

4.7.1 Systems for collection and analysis of data on recognition decisions

The CR aims to stimulate the enhancement of systems for data collection to improve the evidence base on the extent and nature of recognition cases. This entails enhancement of such systems at educational institutions, which could then be aggregated to obtain a picture of levels of recognition at the country level. The survey of HEIs and SEIs, suggests that several years after the adoption of the CR, monitoring of recognition is not yet a widespread practice. Of the 648 respondents, only 48% indicated that their institution keeps records of recognition decisions for EU27 countries in the case of qualifications. Regarding learning outcomes, 44% of the respondents reported that their institution keeps records of the recognition decisions for the EU27.

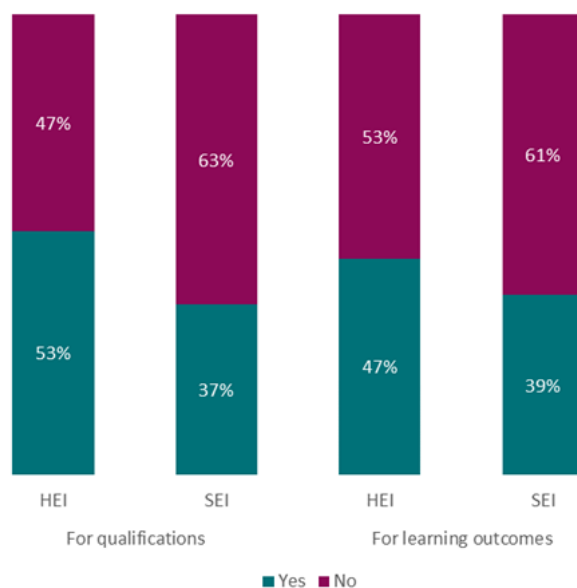
Figure 38. Record keeping for recognition decisions on qualifications and on learning outcomes obtained abroad (HEIs and SEIs combined, EU27)



Source: ICF/3s survey, N=648

Around half of the responding HEIs (53%) indicated keeping a record of recognition decisions for qualifications compared to 37% of SEIs. For learning outcomes, 47% of the responding HEIs indicated keeping a record of recognition decisions compared to 39% SEIs.

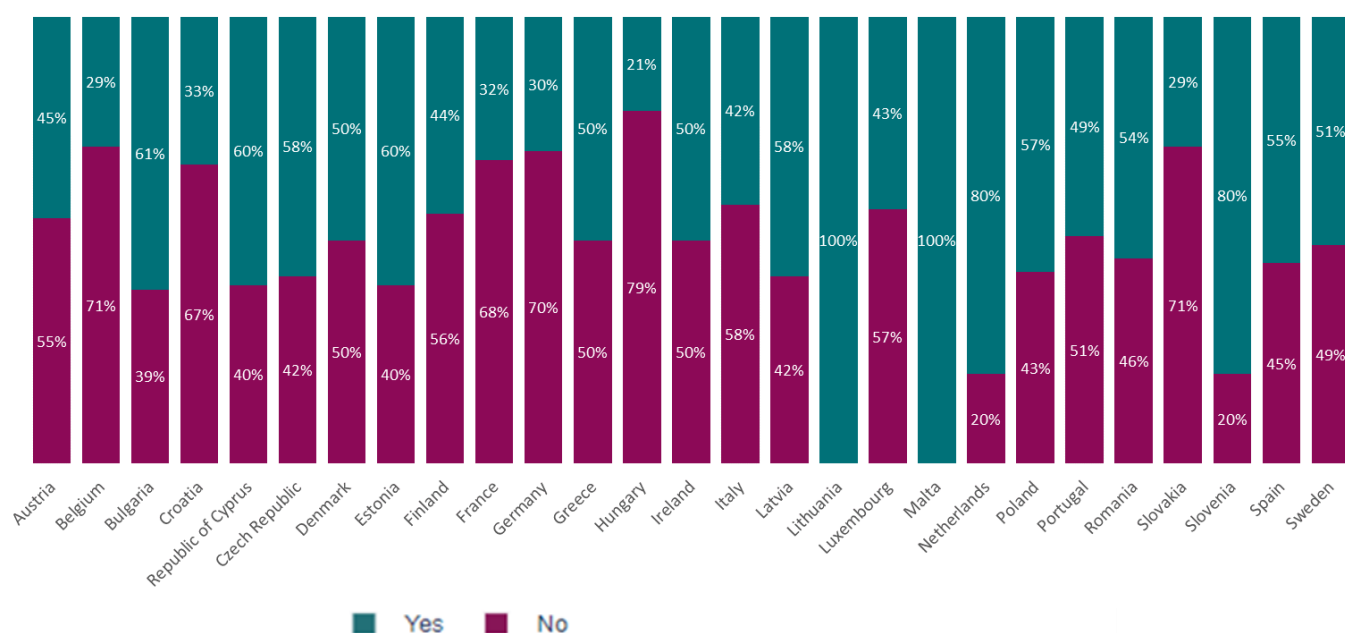
Figure 39. Record keeping for recognition decisions on qualifications and on learning outcomes obtained abroad at HEIs and SEIs (EU27)



Source: ICF/3s survey, N=648

While the above figures show a rather even split between those institutions that keep a record of decisions on the recognition of qualifications obtained in other EU Member States and those that do not, disaggregation at the country level show marked variations at this level. As such, all respondents from Lithuania and Malta selected 'yes'⁴⁴ whereas respondents from Belgium, Hungary and Slovakia selected 'no' at a rate of over 70%.

Figure 40. Recognition of qualifications: record keeping of decisions on recognition for qualifications from other EU countries (HEIs and SEIs combined), by country

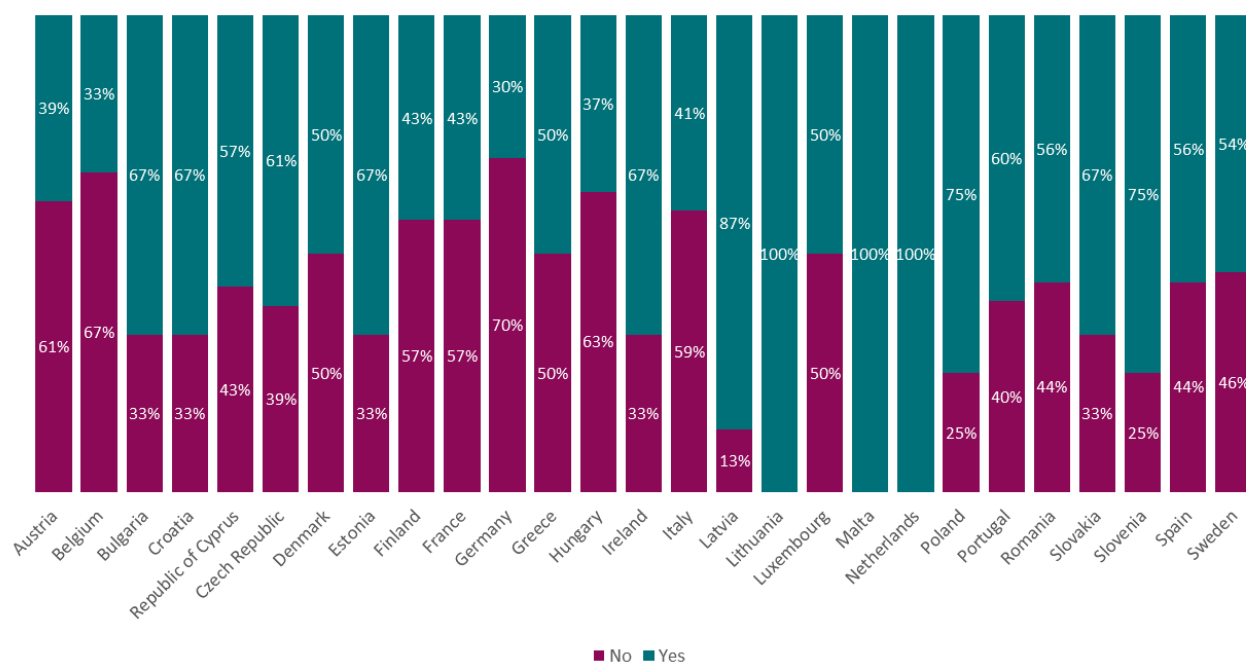


Source: ICF/3s survey, N=626

⁴⁴ However, these data may lack representativeness due to low number of respondents: Lithuania (N=3), Malta (N=4)

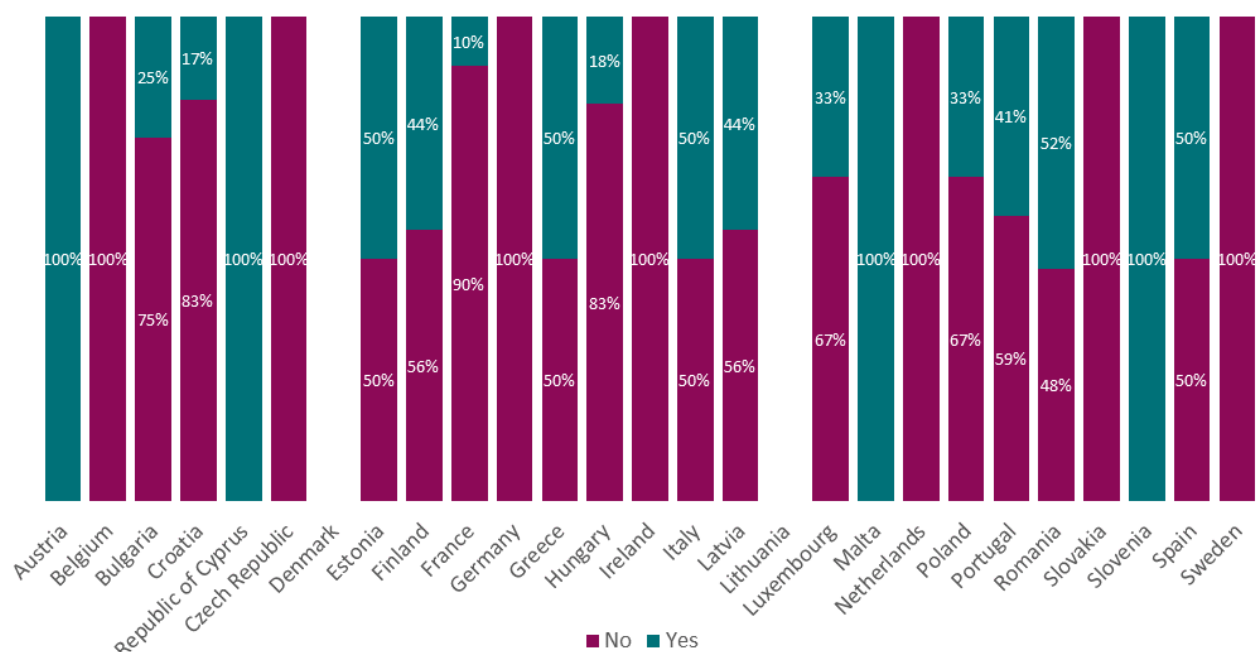
The following charts cover the results by country as to whether HEIs on the one hand and SEIs on the other keep a record of recognition decisions for qualifications obtained abroad in any other EU Member State.

Figure 41. Recognition of qualifications obtained abroad and HEIs: overview of whether institutions keep a record of the recognition decisions for EU27, by country



Source: ICF/3s survey, N=422

Figure 42. Recognition of qualifications obtained abroad and SEIs: overview of whether institutions keep a record of the recognition decisions for EU27, by country

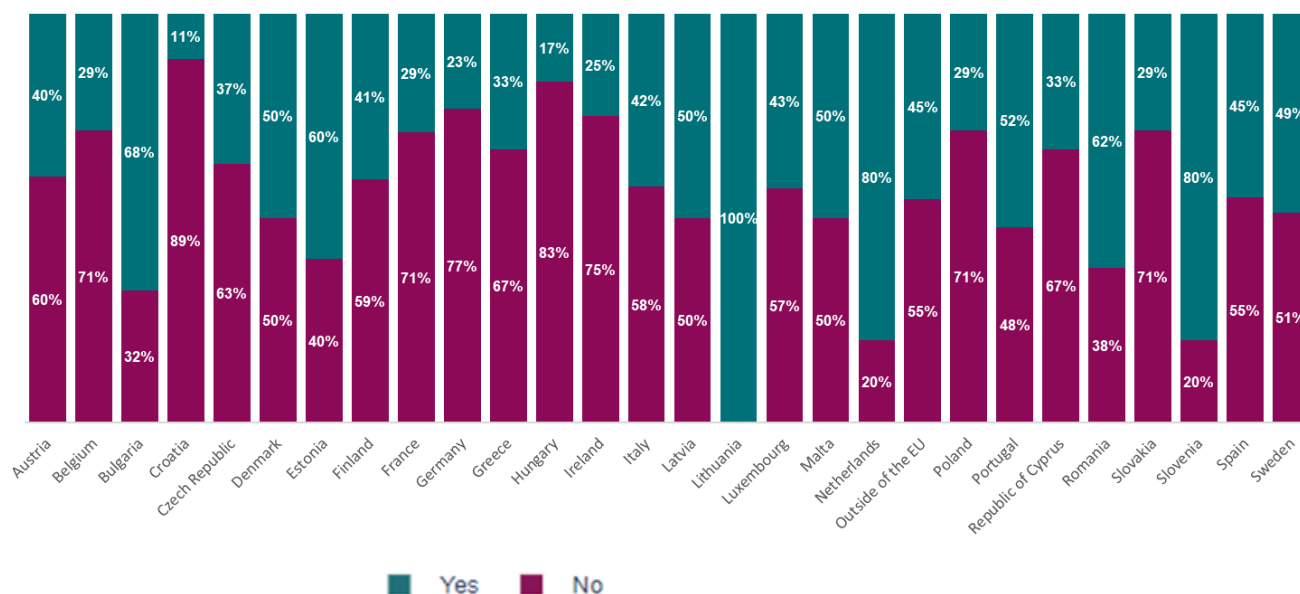


Source: ICF/3s survey, N=204

Note: no responses received from DK or LT respondents

Similarly for learning outcomes, disaggregation by country shows some country-level results are substantially different from the overall trend. For example, Lithuania selected 'yes' exclusively and respondents from Croatia and Hungary selected 'no' at a rate of over 80%.

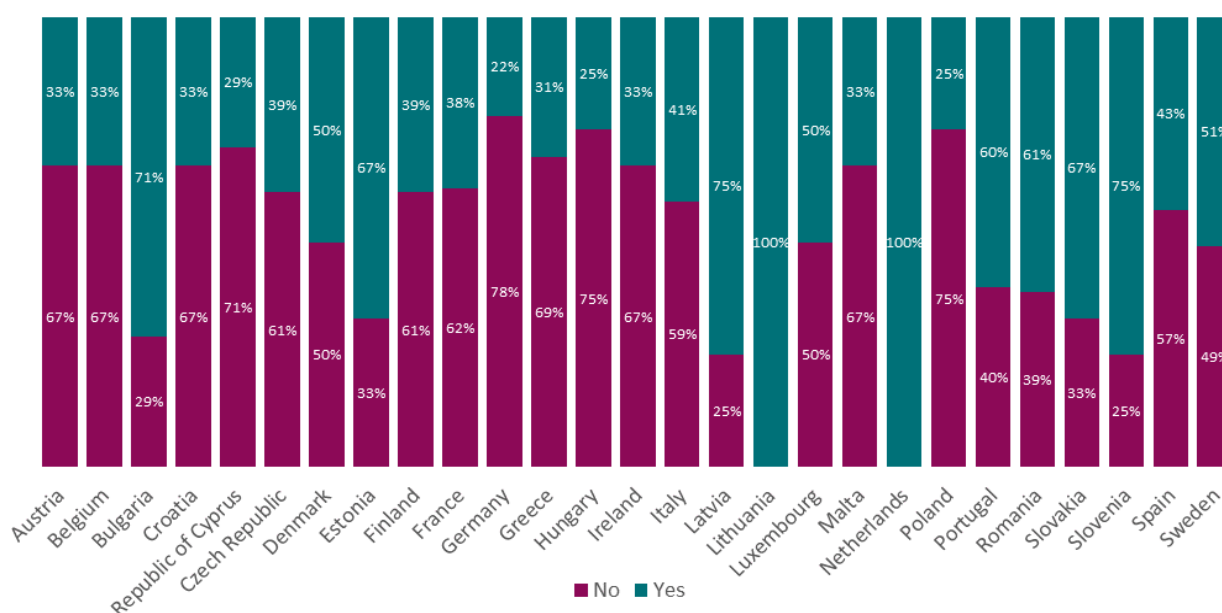
Figure 43. Recognition of learning outcomes obtained abroad: overview of whether institutions keep a record of the recognition decisions for EU27 (HEIs and SEIs combined), by country



Source: ICF/3s survey, N=626

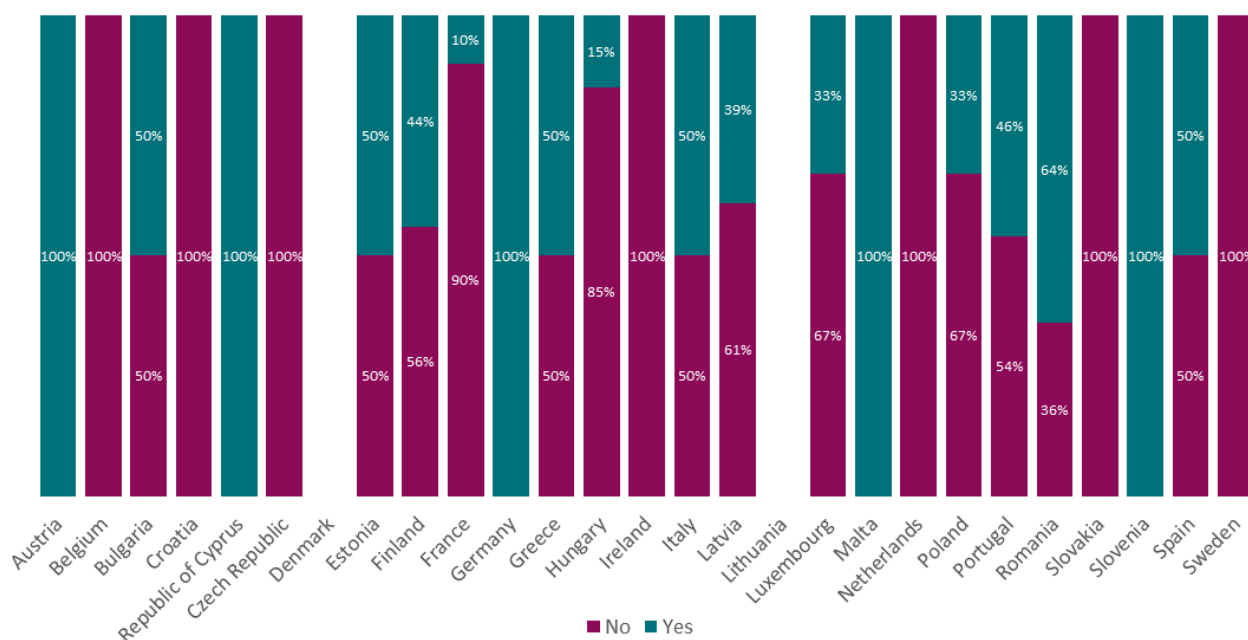
The following charts cover the results by country as to whether HEIs on the one hand and SEIs on the other keep a record of recognition decisions for credits and learning outcomes obtained abroad in any other EU Member State.

Figure 44. Recognition of learning outcomes obtained abroad and HEIs: overview of whether institutions keep a record of the recognition decisions for EU27, by country



Source: ICF/3s survey, N=422

Figure 45. For learning outcomes obtained abroad and SEIs: overview of whether institutions keep a record of the recognition decisions for EU27, by country



Source: ICF/3s survey, N=204

Note: no responses received from DK or LT respondents

Around 20% of respondents (142) from HEIs and SEIs provided details on the rate of positive decisions in the case of no automatic recognition. Of these responses, 107 contained a quantifiable rate, and the large majority of them (89%) reported the rate as 90% or higher. The remaining 11% reported rates ranging from 60-89%. There were no marked differences at country level as for all countries a majority of respondents reported rates of 90% or higher.

In very few Member States (BG, IT, NL, PT, RO, SK), data on recognition decisions are at the national level in a central database. The centralisation of data collection at the national level by the NARICs or national ministries can be considered as good practice in that they comply with the spirit of the CR and its KP9.

However, while there may be databases of recognition decisions in certain countries, the data they contain **do not specify whether automatic recognition, as defined in the 2018 CR, was applied**. The term “automatic” as interpreted by the Member States in their legislation in most cases does not reflect the definition of AMR set out in the Recommendation.

National recognition databases – overview of good practices

BG: Publicly accessible national recognition database from NACID (Bulgarian NARIC) available via website, containing a number of modules and functionalities, including all recognition decisions of NACID and Bulgarian HEIs (as example for transparency and sustainability of LRC implementation).

Available data on recognition of foreign HE qualifications shows that the overall number of completed procedures for 2021 was 1,970, most of which (92%) resulted in a positive outcome i.e. granted access to further studies in higher education (NACID, 2021). Germany is among the top five countries (the rest being non-EU countries) where the foreign qualifications were issued (NACID, 2021).

IT: CIMEA (NARIC) has an internal statistical database of recognition decisions which allows for the evaluation of recognition trends. CIMEA maintains a separate repository of all the statements of comparability issued and has a (public) database on national education systems of other Member States and their qualifications.

NL: Data on recognition decisions are collected at the national level, used for evaluation purposes and published in NARIC reports (e.g. [incoming mobility trends in HE from 2006 to 2022](#)). In fact, this is an online tool for system-level recognition for more than 90 countries. The implementation of AR is not formally monitored by the NARIC. An interesting remark is that one of the barriers to automatic mutual recognition is the fact that there is no joint European database that officers in education institutions can use to recognise or validate foreign education credentials to check if an applicant has attained a bachelor qualification from a specific institution.

PT: While the CR has not been formally implemented in Portugal, the NARIC keeps a central database of recognition decisions. However, the NARIC only extracts statistical data that are relevant to a given subject and extractions are made on a monthly or bi-monthly basis to serve for the production of specific reports on Automatic Recognition. That is because as the platform has a huge database in the background, it turns out to be impractical to have a statistics page or to make a report that contains all the information available on the platform. Automatic Recognition in Portugal is not limited to the European Area. In the future, the NARIC may apply the 'EU-EHEA country or not' variable to extract data on Automatic Recognition decisions.

According to data delivered by the NARIC team it is possible to state that between 2019 and 2021, 51,966 requests for Recognition (automatic, level and specific) were submitted. During these 3 years analysed, among the 20 countries that submitted the highest number of requests for recognition, Brazil stands out (32,417), followed by the United Kingdom (3,460) and Spain (3,240). Within this list, the remaining applications were submitted by the following countries (descending order): Italy, Venezuela, France, Iran, USA, Ukraine, Angola, Russian Federation, Germany, India, Netherlands, Cape Verde, Mozambique, Belgium, Colombia, Turkey and Cuba.

Out of these 51,966 requests for recognition, 14,055 were granted between 2019 and 2021 and 62,22% of these approved requests were for Automatic Recognition. The request for recognition (whether automatic, level or specific) is always made by students by completing an online form loaded with a database of all countries, degrees and diplomas that have automatic recognition, as well as all Portuguese HEIs and their offer. Therefore, in the case of a country with which protocols for Automatic Recognition already exist, the request can be forwarded to NARIC or the chosen HEI. If it is a country with which there are no protocols for Automatic Recognition and based on the information that the student enters on the form, the request will be forwarded to the HEI chosen by the student that is available on the database. In these cases (level and specific), recognition requests take longer, as they depend on the decision of each HEI, and have much higher costs for the students who request them. In short, recognition requests are simpler and faster as HEI will check the authenticity of the request only, but this still involves the payment of a fee. In the other cases, recognition requests are evaluated case by case by a HEI of the student's choice and costs are significantly higher for them.

RO: CNRED (NARIC) has reported that it keeps a database on recognition cases that distinguishes between:

- Cases of automatic recognition as per the 2018 Council Recommendation – applying to the European Union Member States only
- Cases of automatic recognition as per the Lisbon Recognition Convention – applying to European Higher Education Area member countries only
- Cases of recognition involving countries outside the European Union

CNRED keeps an open database for on its website for interested parties (e.g. applicants, higher education institutions, employers) to check the status of diplomas obtained abroad that were subject to recognition requests. However, the database

does not show aggregates of positive and negative decisions on recognition cases, the country where the qualification or credit was obtained or the year it was obtained. People accessing the database need to enter personal details to obtain information on a specific recognition case.

SK: Since 2020, the Ministry of Education has been collecting data on the number of recognitions awarded by them at the higher education level. The data on the recognition cases awarded by the higher education institutions are not collected centrally, therefore are not available.

Since 2020, there has been the following number of recognition cases awarded by the Ministry of Education:

- In 2020, the Ministry approved 228 requests from EHEA countries and 288 from countries with equivalency agreements.
- In 2021, it was 196 requests from EHEA countries and 336 from countries with equivalency agreements.

Applicant who submit a document for recognition that does not meet conditions for recognition (e.g. unrecognised university, completed lifelong/professional education program) will have their application returned. There are fewer than 10 such unsuccessful requests per year. However, the Ministry of Education only keeps statistics on successful issued decisions.

From 2022, the Ministry of Education is also in charge of recognition of qualifications obtained from countries outside of EHEA, however, the data on recognition cases is not yet available.

4.7.2 Dissemination of recognition data and information relating to Automatic Mutual Recognition

Activities to enhance the knowledge of educational institutions in relation to AMR were reported DK, IT, PL and RO. These activities are provided mainly by NARICs and aim to engage staff within educational institutions and specialists in education and training in a reflection on improving and promoting automatic mutual recognition in consideration of the 2018 CR:

- In Denmark (DK), the NARIC (Danish Agency for Higher Education and Science) is engaged in training seminars on AMR targeting educational institutions, credential evaluators, assessors of foreign qualifications. It also provides national guidance in the form of an online Country handbook with general recognition standards for all qualification types⁴⁵ and an online Country handbook (Exams handbook) for upper secondary access qualifications covering more than 140 countries including all EU countries, as well all EEA countries, those participating in the Bologna Process and all signatory countries to the Lisbon Recognition Convention⁴⁶.
- In Italy (IT), the NARIC (CIMEA) provides regular training to credential evaluators in the context of the APICE⁴⁷ – a community enabling the sharing of best practices and organisation of training dedicated to specific topics, including AMR. It has issued methodological guidance on evaluation methods for recognition, although these methods are primarily based on the Lisbon Recognition Convention principles. CIMEA also provides information to Italian HEIs on different elements of a foreign qualification such as the foreign grading system, list of recognised HEIs,

⁴⁵ <https://ufm.dk/uddannelse/anerkendelse-og-dokumentation/find-vurderinger/landehaandbogen/slaa-op>

⁴⁶ <https://ufm.dk/uddannelse/anerkendelse-og-dokumentation/find-vurderinger/eksamenshaandbogen/lande-og-eksaminer>

⁴⁷ APICE: Italian Professional Association of Credential Evaluators
<https://www.cimea.it/EN/pagina-associazioni-e-reti>

qualifications frameworks, overview of the main post-secondary qualifications, and details on the national quality assurance agencies of different countries. The DiploMe portal allows for individuals to ask for statements of comparability including information on recognition of the level and correspondence with the qualification in Italy⁴⁸.

- In Romania (RO), the NARIC (CNRED) is planning information campaigns to encourage a reflection on the 2018 CR, not only among HEI representatives but also among representatives of the **upper secondary education and training** sector. The National Alliance of Student Organisations in Romania (ANOSR) is committed to improving students' awareness of the principles and procedures of automatic mutual recognition, while continuing to support the development of digital practices in automatic mutual recognition in line with the 2018 CR.

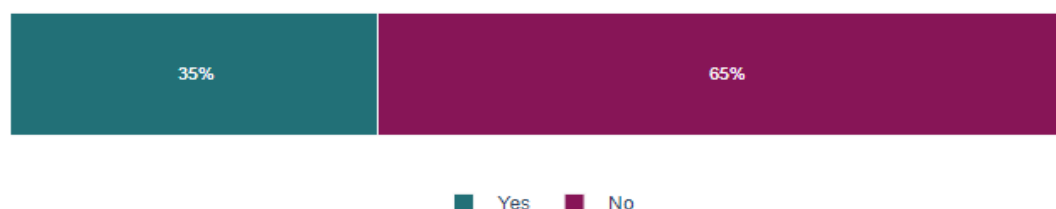
EU funding has also been used for raising awareness of AMR among educational institutions. More specifically, the Erasmus+ funded project SeARCh ENGINE (Strengthening Educational and Awareness Campaign in Automatic Recognition for Higher Education Institutions) which ran in 2020-2022 enabled NARICs, HEIs and other stakeholders to share experiences and best practices in the application of European instruments in the field of automatic recognition of secondary and higher education/qualifications via webinars, conferences and publications. Ultimately this resulted in a set of guidelines, a communication strategy to enhance awareness on automatic recognition, and dissemination materials such as videos for admission/recognition officers and students. The consortium partners of this project were the NARICs from CZ, IT, LV and NL⁴⁹.

Despite these positive developments, NARIC representatives and other national-level stakeholders consulted in EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, RO for this study highlighted that there is a lack of visibility of the topic of AMR and thus limited knowledge and understanding of the 2018 CR overall among educational institutions. For example:

- In Romania, the NARIC (CNRED) highlighted that communications on AMR have mostly been limited to HEIs – the CNRED is now taking action to ensure availability of information on AMR for prospective mobile students and staff in SEIs.
- In Spain, it was reported that students are not sufficiently aware of the concept and opportunities for AMR.

Evaluation survey results confirm that the visibility of the notion of AMR among educational institutions is rather limited: only 35% of the responding HEIs and SEIs indicated that they had heard about the 2018 CR prior to starting the survey, while 65% responded that they had not heard about it prior to starting the survey.

Figure 46. Had you ever heard about the Council Recommendation on automatic recognition prior to this survey?



Source: ICF/3s survey, N=648

⁴⁸ <https://www.cimea.it/EN/pagina-attestat-di-comparabilita-e-verifica-dei-titoli> and DiploMe portal

⁴⁹ Information on SeARCh ENGINE project hosted by MŠMT (CZ NARIC): <https://www.msmt.cz/areas-of-work/tertiary-education/project-search-engine-strengthening-educational-and>

There were 137 respondents who provided detail on the context in which they heard about the 2018 Council Recommendation on automatic recognition prior to the survey. The most frequently mentioned contexts were conferences and seminars at European or international level which institutions attended, through newsletters such as from national recognition institutions, and through the Erasmus+ programme or Erasmus+ centred meetings.

4.7.3 Capacity and role of NARICs

While NARICs play an important role in the delivery of the CR, their role in AMR is in most cases limited to the provision of information or training to education and training institutions who broadly remain responsible for issuing recognition decisions. For example:

- In Belgium (BE), the NARIC for Wallonia only acts as an information service for universities and students. The Flemish NARIC is more active on automatic recognition, offering training to Flemish universities and having taken part in projects coordinated by Nuffic (the Dutch NARIC) in this area.
- In Finland (FI), the NARIC provides training and advice to education and training institutions on the recognition of qualifications but does not issue recognition statements or maintain a database of recognition cases. There is no national reporting, collecting, monitoring or disseminating of the recognition decisions as these are part of the admission services provided by HEIs.
- In Spain (ES), similarly, the NARIC provides information about recognition processes and contacts to the institutions conducting these processes.

The stakeholders and experts taking part in the study's focus groups agreed that the current level of staffing in NARICs working on automatic recognition is insufficient to ensure the delivery of the activities expected by the CR. These findings on insufficient investment over the period under evaluation are consistent with the results of the 2021 NARIC survey: of the 22 NARICs responding to the survey, 18 indicated no change in recognition practices since 2020⁵⁰.

A further capacity-related issue is the level of resourcing going into the NARICs to ensure the functionality of digital systems for automatic recognition and the building of central databases on recognition decisions – aspects which are otherwise critical to improve the efficiency of recognition process. As an illustration: while some NARICs offer online (and offline) services and guidance to assist with the assessment of equivalence, both to HEIs and to individuals (AT, BE, BG, DE, EE, ES, FI, IE, IT, NL, PL, PT, SI), the information provided are not always updated regularly – which links back to the lack of systematic data collection, analysis and dissemination on recognition cases at the national level.

Other various challenges around NARICs capacity to deliver on the principles of the CR have also been reported, for example:

- In Latvia, the NARIC's lack of capacity for information dissemination is deemed persistent and no new or up-to-date materials have been developed or promoted since the introduction of the CR; it was argued that there was insufficient methodological guidance and support from the EU Commission and its agencies on the CR (in the form of support material, seminars etc.) compared to other tools and initiatives (e.g. EQF) to streamline recognition processes to reduce administrative and financial burdens for both the NARIC and its service users.

⁵⁰ NARIC Survey 2021

- In the Netherlands (NL), it was highlighted that NARICs need to have sufficient capacity to assist in credential evaluations and sufficient resources to provide up to date information to higher education institutions. Some Dutch higher education institutions have (paid) subscriptions to foreign (NARIC) databases.
- In Belgium (BE), the NARIC for Wallonia reported staff shortages.

Acknowledging these various challenges and limitations, NARICs in CZ, LT, LV, PL, SK have indicated that project-based EU funding constitutes a major help to develop capacity to implement new actions related to AMR. As an example, the Czech internationalisation strategy for Higher Education 2021 notes the importance of further mobilising access to EU funding to support its NARIC centre and enable research and development activities.

As such, there is still considerable progress to be made in the implementation of Key Principle 7 of the CR on the development of the capacity of NARICs and credential evaluators in the dissemination and use of online tools to improve efficiency, transparency and consistency and reduce the administrative and financial burden for users. While some investments in these areas are envisaged, their impacts are yet to be fully realised.

4.7.4 Digitalisation

Initiatives around the digitalisation of recognition processes, which not only play a role in developing institutional capacity but also in reducing the administrative burden for users, are nevertheless likely to generate progress in the implementation of Key Principle 7 of the CR.

This potential progress is mostly attributable to EU funding programmes. A NARIC call for proposals under Erasmus+ was launched in Spring 2022, with a total budget of € 3 million (compared to only € 2 million under the 2018 call) to fund projects focusing on the digitalisation of credentials and qualifications, especially in **upper secondary education and training** with the aim of further facilitating AMR. The next round of Erasmus+ funded projects will therefore give the NARIC network a greater role in promoting automatic mutual recognition using digitalisation⁵¹.

Besides that, there are already several noteworthy examples of digitalisation to facilitate automatic recognition based on EU-supported project work or national policy initiatives:

- In Croatia (HR), the PIKASO platform developed by the Croatian Agency for **VET** and **adult education** with EU funding support allows for the online submission of applications for recognition⁵². The scope of application is however restricted to the recognition foreign upper secondary general or VET qualifications.
- The Czech Republic (CZ) has committed further investments into online management systems with the aim of automatising the academic recognition of diplomas from other EU Member States⁵³.
- Nuffic, the NARIC for the Netherlands (NL), is working with other NARICs on pilot projects in the field of automatic recognition. Nuffic recently led the I-AR project, which support automatic mutual recognition towards the completion of the European Higher Education Area⁵⁴, with the involvement of other NARICs (AT, BE, EE, FR, IT, LT, PL).

⁵¹ EACEA Annual Work Programme 2022:

https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/eacea_awp_2022_en.pdf

⁵² <http://www.pikaso.asoo.hr/EN/index.html>

⁵³ See CZ Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (2021)

https://www.msmt.cz/uploads/odbor_30/DH/SZ/internationalisation_strategy_2021_.pdf

⁵⁴ <https://www.nuffic.nl/en/subjects/recognition-projects/i-ar-2020-2022>

- In France (FR), the NARIC's *Cybèle* chatbot, launched in 2021, aims to automate responses to users in terms of recognition of qualifications, including an online training programme on processes and assessment criteria for foreign qualifications, mainly targeting staff responsible for admissions to higher education institutions
- CIMEA, the NARIC for Italy (IT), coordinates the Erasmus+ funded project Q-Entry (International Database on Higher Education Entry Qualifications). Launched in 2018, the Q-Entry online database aims to facilitate AMR in **higher education** across the EU, in line with the principles of the 2018 CR. The Q-Entry database allows all NARICs and organisations dealing with the recognition of qualifications to access up-to-date information for upper secondary school leaving qualifications recognition. This online resource is free of charge, available to the public and aims to benefit students, NARICs, HEIs, and credential evaluators. The database is work-in-progress, and it is subject to continuous improvement. The second phase of the project (qENTRY+) entailed further dissemination and communication activities about automatic mutual recognition⁵⁵.
- In Lithuania (LT), a platform called EPE - Electronic recognition area for the automatic recognition of foreign HE qualifications – has been set up and will be operated by the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC) with the aim to provide e-services related the recognition of foreign qualifications. EPE provides the following services: academic recognition of foreign qualifications of higher education, provision of recommendations on the evaluation of foreign qualifications to HEIs, employers and other legal persons, provision of information statements on Lithuanian higher education qualifications, grades conversion, consideration of appeals against academic recognition decisions⁵⁶. In addition, the KAPRIS-2 (2015-2022) ESF project in **higher education** aims to create a platform of electronic recognition services accessible to all Lithuanian institutions involved in recognition. This is expected to speed up recognition processes, to facilitate cooperation between recognition bodies, and to raise public awareness of automatic recognition of qualifications.
- In Poland (PL), thanks to the ESF, NAWA was able to create the online tool (KWALIFIKATOR) enabling automatic recognition, firstly at the **higher education** level and now at the **upper secondary education and training** level as well. The KWALIFIKATOR database⁵⁷ allows users to automatically check how different types of HE diplomas obtained abroad are recognised in Poland. Implementation of the 2018 CR is also taking place under several Erasmus+ projects under Key Action 2 that aim to increase efficiency of recognition processes (e.g. digitalisation through the I-AR project led by the Dutch NARIC⁶¹).

Like with KWALIFIKATOR in Poland, there exist online qualification assessment tools provided by NARICs that are available to applicants in several other countries (BG; DE; EL; ES; FI – via the Studyinfo portal; FR; HU; NL; PL and SE), thus raising awareness of AMR and where it applies.

⁵⁵ <https://www.q-entry.eu/the-projects/qentry-project-20-22>

⁵⁶ <https://epe.skvc.lt/en/about/>

⁵⁷ <https://kwalifikator.nawa.gov.pl/>

5. Country comparative overview

This chapter provides a comparative overview of developments in the form of a traffic light assessment. The chapter builds on the evidence already presented in the report, grouped thematically into a set of 7 criteria, together with other information collected for the evaluation.

5.1 Criteria for the traffic light assessment

For evaluating each country's progress towards the main aims of the 2018 CR, the following seven criteria were defined:

- Criterion 1: Compliance with the EU and Bologna transparency tools
- Criterion 2: Measures for capacity building and support for institutions and agencies
- Criterion 3: Monitoring end evaluation
- Criterion 4: Automatic recognition of higher education qualifications
- Criterion 5: Automatic recognition of upper secondary education qualifications
- Criterion 6: Automatic recognition of learning periods abroad – higher education
- Criterion 7: Automatic recognition of learning periods abroad – upper secondary education

For visualisation purposes, performance, or the extent of completion of the aims of the 2018 CR, are shown as:

- Green: Full completion
- Light green: Near completion (only applies to Criteria 1, 4 and 7)
- Yellow: Moderate completion
- Orange: Limited completion
- Red: (Almost) no progress towards completion

Table 7. Overview of criteria and colour codes for the traffic light assessment

Assessment criterion	Full completion	Moderate completion	Limited completion	(Almost) no progress
1. Compliance with European and Bologna transparency tools.	The country implements fully the EU and Bologna transparency tools (NQF referenced to EQF; ESG applied; QA agency is member of EQAR; three-cycle system in place, ECTS is in use) Near completion: one of the tools is not fully implemented	Two of the tools are not fully implemented	More than two of the tools are not fully implemented	No implementation of the tools
2. Measures for capacity building and support for institutions and agencies	All three following measures are applied: • National guidance in place for institutions • NARICs disseminate information and provide training for all institutions • applicants request and receive a decision on system-level recognition through online tools	Two of these three measures are applied	One of these three measures are applied	None of these measures are applied
3. Monitoring and evaluation	There is a central, system-level database for collecting and disseminating data on recognition cases. It is regularly updated.	There is systematic collection of data on recognition cases by a central body from HEIs/upper secondary education institutions, but no central, system-level database.	Data on recognition cases are available from some HEIs/upper secondary education institutions, but there is no collection and dissemination of data at system level.	No data available
4. Automatic recognition of higher education qualifications	System-level automatic recognition for qualifications issued by all EU Member States with decision-making responsibility delegated to a competent system-level body (e.g. ENIC/NARIC) Near completion: System-level automatic recognition for qualifications issued by all EU Member States with decision-making responsibility delegated to higher education institutions	System-level automatic recognition for qualifications issued by a subset of EU Member States with decision-making responsibility delegated to a competent system-level body (ENIC/NARIC)	System-level automatic recognition for qualifications issued by a subset of EU Member States with decision-making responsibility delegated to higher education institutions	No automatic recognition
5. Automatic recognition of upper secondary education qualifications	The qualifications from upper secondary education (both general education and VET) are automatically and fully recognised for all EU Member States (over 75% of Member States)	The qualifications from upper secondary education (both general education and VET) are automatically and fully recognised for a large majority of other EU Member States (between 50% and 75% of Member States)	The qualifications from upper secondary education (both general education and VET) are automatically and fully recognised for a minority of other EU Member States (under 50% but more than 0% of Member States)	No automatic and full recognition of qualifications from upper secondary education (both general education and VET) of other EU Member States exists (recognition process in place, but not automated)

Assessment criterion	Full completion	Moderate completion	Limited completion	(Almost) no progress
6. Automatic recognition of learning periods abroad – higher education	<p>The outcomes from a learning period abroad are automatically and fully recognised for all other EU Member States</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • either as agreed in the Learning Agreement and confirmed in the Transcript of Records (over 95 % full recognition rate reported by Erasmus+ students) • or according to the learning outcomes of the modules completed abroad. <p>Internal and external quality assurance in place to ensure the full implementation of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) Users' Guide 2015 principles.</p>	<p>The outcomes from a learning period abroad are automatically and fully recognised as agreed in the Learning Agreement and confirmed in the Transcript of Records in principle with some exceptions (over 85 % full recognition rate reported by Erasmus+ students).</p> <p>And/or:</p> <p>Internal and external quality assurance in place to ensure the full implementation of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) Users' Guide 2015 principles but it is not systematically applied (only for some programmes or levels, for example).</p>	<p>The outcomes from a learning period abroad are automatically and fully recognised as agreed in the Learning Agreement and confirmed in the Transcript of Records in principle with several exceptions (over 70 % full recognition rate reported by Erasmus+ students).</p> <p>Or (in case full recognition rate is over 70%):</p> <p>No quality assurance measures are in place to ensure the full implementation of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) Users' Guide 2015 principles.</p>	<p>The outcomes from a learning period abroad are not recognised automatically and fully as agreed in the Learning Agreement and confirmed in the Transcript of Records (below 70 % full recognition rate reported by Erasmus+ students).</p> <p>No quality assurance measures are in place to ensure the full implementation of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) Users' Guide 2015 principles.</p>
7. Automatic recognition of learning periods abroad – upper secondary education	<p>The outcomes from a learning period abroad are automatically and fully recognised from all EU Member States and for almost all learning periods up to one year through equivalence.</p> <p>Near completion: Outcomes from learning periods abroad are recognised after an official procedure established at system level, based on learning outcomes determined to be broadly in line with the sending institutions' curriculum and confirmed in the Transcript of Records</p>	<p>Most outcomes from a learning period abroad are automatically and fully recognised but some additional exams might be necessary for a number of subjects, for learning periods of up to one year.</p>	<p>The outcomes from a learning period abroad are recognised after an official procedure based on curriculum matching by a national body or the educational institution, as confirmed in the Transcript of Records.</p>	<p>The outcomes from a learning period abroad are not automatically nor fully recognised from any Member States, with the exception of school-to-school partnerships.</p>

5.2 Traffic light assessment results

The results of the assessment of countries' progress towards the 2018 CR are presented for each of its aims.

The assessment proceeded following four steps:

1. The country researchers provided initial ratings based on their findings from desk research.
2. These initial ratings were validated on the basis of interviews with stakeholders and ministerial representatives.
3. A further validation step took place, in which evidence from the expert focus groups was considered.
4. Final reviews were undertaken on the basis of the results of a survey of HEIs/SEIs and interviews with NARICs and relevant ministries undertaken in September 2022.

Table 8. Comparative assessment of Member States' progress towards meeting the 2018 CR

Member State	1. Compliance with transparency tools	2. Measures for capacity building and support	3. Monitoring and evaluation	4. Automatic recognition of Higher Education qualifications	5. Automatic recognition of upper sec. education qualifications	6. Automatic recognition of learning periods abroad – Higher Education	7. Automatic recognition of learning periods abroad: upper sec. education
Austria							
Belgium (FR/NL)*							
Bulgaria							
Croatia							
Cyprus							
Czech Republic							
Denmark							
Estonia							
Finland							
France							General VET
Germany							
Greece							
Hungary							
Ireland							
Italy							
Latvia							
Lithuania							
Luxembourg							
Malta							
Netherlands							
Poland					General VET		
Portugal							
Romania							
Slovakia							
Slovenia							
Spain							
Sweden							

Colour code: green = full completion/implementation, light green = near completion/implementation, yellow = moderate completion/implementation, orange = limited completion/implementation, red = no completion/implementation

Criterion 5 (PL) and Criterion 7 (FR): traffic light assessment differs for general upper secondary education and VET.

*Belgium (FR/NL): FR for Wallonia-Brussels and NL Flanders. The German-speaking community is included in Wallonia.

5.3 Assessment by criterion across the Member States

This section provides comments were necessary to support the assessments by criterion.

Criterion 1 refers to the implementation of EU and Bologna transparency tools (NQF being referenced to EQF, ESG – Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area – applied and the quality assurance agency being member of the EQAR; three-cycle system in place). Across EU27, criterion 1 reached a good level of completion, the recurring issue or barrier to completion was registration of national organisations involved in QA with EQAR and ENQA, self-certification to QF-EHEA and/or Diploma Supplements not being issued automatically. Among the EU27 Member States, Greece is the only country in which the LRC is not ratified yet.

Table 9. Assessment criterion 1: Compliance with transparency tools – assessment and comments

Member State	Assessment & comments
Austria	Full compliance with EU and Bologna process transparency tools: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - NQF is referenced to EQF. - ESG is applied and the quality assurance agency is member of EQAR. - Three-cycle system is in place. - Correct use of ECTS based on ECTS Users' Guide 2015, and application of ECTS is monitored by external quality assurance.
Belgium	Full compliance with European and Bologna process transparency tools: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - NQF is referenced to EQF. - ESG is applied and the quality assurance agency is member of EQAR. - Three-cycle system is in place. - Correct use of ECTS based on ECTS Users' Guide 2015, and application of ECTS is monitored by external quality assurance.
Bulgaria	Full compliance with EU and Bologna process transparency tools: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - NQF is referenced to EQF. - ESG is applied and the quality assurance agency is member of EQAR. - Three-cycle system is in place. - Correct use of ECTS based on ECTS Users' Guide 2015, and application of ECTS is monitored by external quality assurance.
Croatia	Full compliance with EU and Bologna process transparency tools: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - NQF is referenced to EQF. - ESG is applied and the quality assurance agency is member of EQAR. - Three-cycle system is in place. - Correct use of ECTS based on ECTS Users' Guide 2015, and application of ECTS is monitored by external quality assurance.
Cyprus	Full compliance with EU and Bologna process transparency tools: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - NQF is referenced to EQF. - ESG is applied and the quality assurance agency is member of EQAR. - Three-cycle system is in place. - Correct use of ECTS based on ECTS Users' Guide 2015, and application of ECTS is monitored by external quality assurance.
Czech Republic	Moderate compliance with EU and Bologna process transparency tools: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - NQF does exist, but further steps for its implementation and self-certification to QF-EHEA are required. - ESG is applied. Quality assurance agency is not registered in ENQA and EQAR yet. - Three-cycle system is in place.
Denmark	Full compliance with EU and Bologna process transparency tools:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - NQF is referenced to EQF. - ESG is applied and the quality assurance agency is member of EQAR. - Three-cycle system is in place. - Correct use of ECTS based on ECTS Users' Guide 2015, and application of ECTS is monitored by external quality assurance.
Estonia	<p>Full compliance with EU and Bologna process transparency tools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - NQF is referenced to EQF. - ESG is applied and the quality assurance agency is member of EQAR. - Three-cycle system is in place. - Correct use of ECTS based on ECTS Users' Guide 2015, and application of ECTS is monitored by external quality assurance.
Finland	<p>Full compliance with EU and Bologna process transparency tools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - NQF is referenced to EQF. - ESG is applied and the quality assurance agency is member of EQAR. - Three-cycle system is in place. - Correct use of ECTS based on ECTS Users' Guide 2015, and application of ECTS is monitored by external quality assurance.
France	<p>Sufficient compliance with EU and Bologna process transparency tools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - NQF is referenced to EQF. - ESG is applied and the quality assurance agency is member of EQAR. - Three-cycle system is in place. <p>Remark: While legislation explicitly mentions Diploma Supplements should be issued (<i>décret du 8 avril 2002 portant application au système français d'enseignement supérieur de la construction de l'espace européen de l'enseignement supérieur, article 2, alinéa 4/ code de l'éducation, article D123-13</i>), Diploma Supplements are not always issued when diplomas are not related to mobilities.</p>
Germany	<p>Full compliance with EU and Bologna process transparency tools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - NQF ("DQR" = German NQF) is referenced to EQF. - ESG is applied and the quality assurance agency is member of EQAR. - Three-cycle system is in place. - Correct use of ECTS based on ECTS Users' Guide 2015, and application of ECTS is monitored by external quality assurance.
Greece	<p>Insufficient compliance with EU and Bologna process transparency tools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - NQF is completed and referenced to EQF, self-certification to QF-EHEA. - Quality assurance agency is not registered in EQAR yet, but the registration process is underway. - Three-cycle system is in place. - Diploma Supplement is not issued automatically. <p>Remark: LRC not ratified yet but there is compliance with most of it.</p>
Hungary	<p>Full compliance with EU and Bologna process transparency tools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - NQF is referenced to EQF. - ESG is applied and the quality assurance agency is member of EQAR. - Three-cycle system is in place. - Correct use of ECTS based on ECTS Users' Guide 2015, and application of ECTS is monitored by external quality assurance.
Ireland	<p>with EU and Bologna process transparency tools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - NQF is referenced to EQF. - ESG is applied and the quality assurance agency (QQI) is a member of EQAR. - Three-cycle system is in place across all HEIs. - The Diploma Supplement is not yet universally issued.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ECTS application is not monitored by external quality assurance agency.
Italy	<p>Sufficient or near compliance with EU and Bologna process transparency tools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - NQF is referenced to EQF. - ESG is applied and the quality assurance agency. However, EQAR registration is currently in progress. - Three-cycle system is in place. <p>Remark: Italy complies with all Bologna transparency tools. Recognition of qualifications is already part of the quality assurance process in line with ESG 1.4, and CIMEA is the only ENIC-NARIC member of DEQAR, and the only centre that integrates the DEQAR database results in its statements of comparability.</p>
Latvia	<p>Sufficient compliance with EU and Bologna process transparency tools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - NQF is referenced to EQF. - ESG is applied and the quality assurance agency is member of EQAR. - Three-cycle system is in place. - ECTS introduced in 2022, but application is not monitored by external quality assurance agency
Lithuania	<p>Full compliance with EU and Bologna process transparency tools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - NQF is referenced to EQF. - ESG is applied and the quality assurance agency is member of EQAR. - Three-cycle system is in place. - Correct use of ECTS based on ECTS Users' Guide 2015, and application of ECTS is monitored by external quality assurance.
Luxembourg	<p>Full compliance with EU and Bologna process transparency tools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - NQF is referenced to EQF. - ESG is applied. The Ministry of Higher Education and Research commissions a foreign EQAR-registered agency to perform quality assurance in Higher Education, as there is no national quality assurance agency in Luxembourg. The University of Luxembourg is evaluated every four years, with the focus of evaluation alternating between research and learning and teaching. - Three-cycle system is in place. - Correct use of ECTS based on ECTS Users' Guide 2015, and application of ECTS is monitored by external quality assurance. <p>Remark: The Grand Duchy of Luxembourg does not have a national quality assurance agency, but EQAR-registered agencies are commissioned by the Ministry of Higher Education and Research. This was rated also as full compliance.</p>
Malta	<p>Sufficient or near compliance with EU and Bologna process transparency tools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - NQF is referenced to EQF. - ESG is applied, but the quality assurance agency is not registered in EQAR yet. - Three-cycle system is in place.
Netherlands	<p>Full compliance with EU and Bologna process transparency tools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - NQF is in place and referenced; the self-certification process of the Dutch QF-EHEA was finalized in 2009. - ESG is applied and the quality assurance agency is member of EQAR - Three-cycle system is in place. - Correct use of ECTS based on ECTS Users' Guide 2015, and application of ECTS is monitored by external quality assurance.
Poland	<p>Full compliance with E and Bologna process transparency tools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - NQF is referenced to EQF.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ESG is applied and the quality assurance agency is member of EQAR. - Three-cycle system is in place. - Correct use of ECTS based on ECTS Users' Guide 2015, and application of ECTS is monitored by external quality assurance.
Portugal	<p>Full compliance with EU and Bologna process transparency tools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - NQF is referenced to EQF - ESG is applied and the quality assurance agency is member of EQAR. - Three-cycle system is in place. - Correct use of ECTS based on ECTS Users' Guide 2015, and application of ECTS is monitored by external quality assurance.
Romania	<p>Full compliance with EU and Bologna Process transparency tools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - NQF is referenced to EQF. - ESG is applied and the quality assurance agency is member of EQAR. - Three-cycle system is in place. - Correct use of ECTS based on ECTS Users' Guide 2015, and application of ECTS is monitored by external quality assurance.
Slovakia	<p>Limited compliance with EU and Bologna process transparency tools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Slovakia's NQF (SKKR) is referenced to EQF since 2017. The EQF level is also stated on the Diploma Supplement since 2019. (Sources, including the referencing report are available at: (https://europa.eu/europass/en/document-library/eqf-referencing-report-slovakia https://www.minedu.sk/slovensky-kvalifikacny-ramec-a-narodna-sustava-kvalifikacii/) - Quality assurance agency is not member of EQAR yet, but in the process of becoming one; ESG is not applied yet. - Three-cycle system is in place. - ECTS application is not monitored by external quality assurance agency
Slovenia	<p>Sufficient compliance with European and Bologna process transparency tools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - NQF is referenced to EQF. - ESG is applied and the quality assurance agency is member of EQAR. - Three-cycle system is in place. - ECTS application is not monitored by external quality assurance agency.
Spain	<p>Moderate compliance with EU and Bologna process transparency tools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - NQF is referenced to EQF. - ESG is applied and the quality assurance agency is member of EQAR. - Three-cycle system is in place. <p>Remark: Diploma Supplements are not issued automatically, but upon holders' request.</p>
Sweden	<p>Sufficient compliance with EU and Bologna process transparency tools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - NQF is referenced to EQF. - ESG is applied and the quality assurance agency is member of EQAR. - Three-cycle system is in place. - ECTS application is not monitored by external quality assurance agency.

Criterion 2 focuses on measures for capacity building and support for institutions and agencies, i.e. if national guidance is in place for institutions, if NARICs disseminate information and provide training for all institutions and/or if applicants request and receive a decision on system-level recognition through online tools. There is greater variation on

criterion 2 even though all Member States have reported progress on support to capacity building. For those countries where recognition decisions are made autonomously by educational institutions, some NARICs offer initial assessments of equivalence or 'statements of comparability', which however do not replace the recognition procedure undertaken by educational institutions.

Table 10. Assessment criterion 2: Measures for capacity building and support for institutions and agencies – assessment and comments

Member State	Assessment & comments
Austria	Moderate completion of this criterion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - National guidance for institutions is in place (provided by NARIC). - NARICs disseminate information and provide (limited) training opportunities for all institutions. - No online tool for applicants to request and receive a decision on system-level recognition is implemented yet, however a self-assessment tool for applicants who request a decision system-level recognition with the goal to further digitalise the process is being developed.
Belgium	Limited completion of this criterion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - National guidance for institutions is in place provided by NARICs in BE-FR and BE-NL. - NARICs disseminate information in both communities, training for HEIs is available in the BE-NL community. - No online tools for applicants requesting and receiving a decision on system-level recognition is available.
Bulgaria	Full compliance with this criterion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - National guidance for institutions is in place (provided by ENIC/NARIC). - NARICs disseminate information and provide full-scale training opportunities for all institutions. Efficient online tool for applicants requesting and receiving a decision on system-level recognition is available: NACID has an integrated National Register for Academic Recognition built in place since more than ten years, presented on a number of ENIC-NARIC meetings and other forums, with modules for physical applicants, HEIs and other institutions, with full functionality for electronic submission, processing and recognition decisions.
Croatia	Limited completion of this criterion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - HEIs use processes developed by NARIC as a guideline for developing internal recognition regulations. - NARIC provides statistical data on recognition decisions, but no proof of provision of training. - No online tool for applicants requesting and receiving a decision on system-level recognition is available.
Cyprus	Moderate completion of this criterion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - National guidance in place for HEIs. Decisions on recognition are made by NARIC. - Events provide space for discussion and learning among stakeholders, including HEIs. - No online tool for applicants requesting and receiving a decision on system-level recognition is available. NARIC is currently in the process of developing an electronic system (online application platform) and digitalising its documents.
Czech Republic	Limited completion of this criterion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Czech NARIC was involved in the Erasmus+ funded project SeARCh ENGINE to promote and communicate guidelines on automatic recognition. Besides that, no further evidence for guidance in place for institutions. Decisions on recognition are made by public HEIs in most cases. - The Czech NARIC provides information to students, researchers and cooperates with institutions.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No online tool for applicants requesting and receiving a decision on system-level recognition is available
Denmark	<p>Full completion of this criterion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - National guidance is in place (provided by the Danish Agency for Higher Education and Science): written guidance - NARICs disseminate information and provide training seminars and a hotline for admission officers at HEIs (target group: institutions, actors offering assessment of foreign qualifications) - An online Country handbook for with general recognition standards for all qualification types (https://ufm.dk/uddannelse/anerkendelse-og-dokumentation/find-vurderinger/landehaandbogen/slaa-op) - An online Country handbook (exams handbook) covering recognition standards for upper secondary access qualifications covering more than 140 countries including all EU and EEA countries as well all countries, which are participating in the Bologna process and all signatory countries to the Lisbon Recognition Convention (https://ufm.dk/uddannelse/anerkendelse-og-dokumentation/find-vurderinger/eksamenshaandbogen/lande-og-eksaminer)
Estonia	<p>Full completion of this criterion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - National guidance is in place (provided by NARIC). - NARIC provides training for HEIs. - HEIs request and receive information on assessment of qualifications through online tools.
Finland	<p>Full completion of this criterion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - National guidance for institutions is in place via written publications (provided by ministry/NARIC) - NARIC disseminates information to stakeholders and provides a remote training program for institutions. - National portal Studyinfo (https://opintopolku.fi/konfo/en/) is maintained by the Finnish National Agency for Education; applicants with foreign educational background may apply using this portal
France	<p>Full completion of this criterion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - National guidance for institutions and agencies relating to mutual recognition is in place via written publications. - NARIC disseminates information to stakeholders and provides a remote training program for institutions. - NARIC online tool delivering comparability statements for foreign diplomas according to LRC principles.
Germany	<p>Full completion of this criterion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - National guidance is in place (provided by German ENIC/NARIC = ZAB). - German ENIC/NARIC disseminates information through conferences and provides training for HEIs. - Applicants can request and receive information on assessment of qualifications through online tools.
Greece	<p>Full completion of this criterion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There is national guidance in place for institutions. - NARIC disseminates information and support to HEIs. - Online tool for applicants requesting and receiving a decision on system-level recognition is available.
Hungary	<p>Moderate completion of this criterion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - National guidance and advice are in place for institutions provided by NARIC on request. - No evidence of NARICs disseminating information and providing training found. - Applicants do have the possibility to submit their application for recognition to NARIC Hungary electronically (online) and to receive the decision electronically. Decisions made by NARIC Hungary are binding on each HEI.
Ireland	<p>Moderate completion of this criterion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The policy informing NARIC recognition decisions is published. - National legislation sets out terms for recognition decisions.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - NARIC provides information and advice including for a range of national and international stakeholders, professional regulatory bodies, recruitment agencies, higher and further education and training institutions and individuals. - HEIs share information through collaborative networks. - Applicants can receive advice on the comparability of complete major award qualifications to those on the Irish NFQ through an online database listing over 1600 qualifications from over 60 jurisdictions, but ultimately decisions on recognition for employment, training or other purposes are made by the relevant competent authority.
Italy	Full completion of this criterion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - National guidance is in place (provided by NARIC for institutions). - NARIC provides information and frequent training on AMR e.g. in the context of APICE – a community enabling the sharing of best practices and organisation of training dedicated to specific topics, including AMR. - CIMEA supports HEIs by providing authoritative advice through statements of comparability. HEIs are the competent authority for academic recognition but take into account the statements from CIMEA. The DiploMe portal allows for individuals to ask for statements of comparability including information on recognition of the level and correspondence with the qualification in Italy.
Latvia	Limited completion of this criterion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - National guidance is in place, provided by the Academic Information Center (AIC), established by the Ministry of Education and Science and University of Latvia, which also serves as the ENIC/NARIC. - NARIC has a lack of capacity for information dissemination and no new materials have been developed or promoted. In future, training and support will be needed for HE institutions to implement the transition of recognition from AIC to HEIs. - No online tool for applicants requesting and receiving a decision on system-level recognition is available.
Lithuania	Moderate completion of this criterion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - National guidance is in place, provided by SKVC (Lithuanian NARIC) - NARIC provides information and training for HEIs and promotes automatic recognition. - Within an ESF project an online recognition tool is being developed but not implemented yet.
Luxembourg	Moderate completion of this criterion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No information on national guidance available. However, the one (1) HEI is involved as a stakeholder. - No information on the provision of information and training for HEIs available. However, the one (1) HEI is involved as a stakeholder. - Quasi-automatic recognition via online tool at system level by the Department for Diploma Recognition.
Malta	Full completion of this criterion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Malta Qualifications Recognition Information Centre (MQRIC), the ENIC-NARIC and the competent body within the MFHEA that recognises qualifications against the Malta Qualifications Framework (MQF), provides recognition and comparability of both academic and vocational qualification. - Recognition statements can be automatically downloaded from the online portal for courses that have been accredited and listed.
Netherlands	Full completion of this criterion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - National guidance is in place for institutions provided by NARIC. - NARIC disseminates information and maintains a database to use for HEIs. - No online tool for applicants requesting and receiving a decision on system-level recognition is available. - Country profiles published on the website of the Dutch ENIC/NARIC contain tables with system-level evaluations of the main qualifications. This is in fact an online tool for system-level recognition for more than 90 countries.
Poland	Full completion of this criterion:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - National guidance is in place, provided by national NARIC (information, support and trainings for HEIs). - NARIC disseminates information and provides training for institutions. - Online tools for automatic recognition, based on national database KWALIFIKATOR.
Portugal	<p>Moderate completion of this criterion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - National guidance is in place provided by NARIC, producing regulation and orientation and guides the actions of the education institutions; also provides information, guidance and support for applicants. - NARIC disseminates information. No evidence for trainings provided. - Application through online tool for all cases, including level and specific recognition in HE. Some degrees/diplomas are not eligible for automatic recognition and must be assessed by HEIs.
Romania	<p>Full completion of this criterion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - NARIC provides information and guidance for institutions. NARIC is responsible for recognition decisions. - No evidence on providing direct training for HEIs, but there are plans to run information campaigns on AMR targeting HEIs as well as SEIs. - Applicants can request and receive a decision on system-level recognition through online tools and can check at all times the status of their application. - The National Alliance of Student Organisations in Romania (ANOSR) is committed to improving students' awareness of AMR procedures while continuing to support the development of digital practices in AMR in line with the 2018 CR.
Slovakia	<p>Moderate completion of this criterion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - National guidance in place: NARIC instructs the institutions, provides support, ensures singular approach by introducing legislation (including admissible application attachments), common application forms (including their electronic form) and methodology. - NARIC disseminates information and provides training on an occasional basis. - The SAAIC (Slovak Academic Association for International Cooperation) organises peer learning activities around automatic recognition. - Applicants request and receive a decision on system-level recognition through online tools (online application services are available to eIDAS holders – via this process, applicants receive an electronically-signed decision). More application services are in the process of being digitalised (more information available from: https://www.slovensko.sk/en/eidas/information-about-login-via-ei)
Slovenia	<p>Limited completion of this criterion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The NARIC centre consults ENIC-NARIC recognition tools and instruments. List of databases available on the ENIC-NARIC secretariat website. - NARIC provides information for HEIs, initial set of training courses carried out. - Applicants can submit an application and receive a recognition decision at institutional, but not at system-level.
Spain	<p>Full completion of this criterion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - National guidance is in place for institutions provided by NARIC. - NARIC provides information and advice for institutions. No evidence for trainings provided. - ACCEDA, is the digital tool for the applicants to request and receive the decision on their process: ACCEDA - Ministerio de Universidades (sede.gob.es)
Sweden	<p>Full completion of this criterion:</p> <p>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - National guidance is in place by NARIC and other national institutions - NARIC provides information for HEIs, training for HEIs is organised by the Swedish Council for HEI. - Qualification Assessment Tool for applicants to receive instant information to what a foreign qualification compares to in the Swedish system. The tool

	contains about 1 000 qualifications from 77 countries. Application for recognition at ENIC-NARIC Sweden (and application for admission to HE of which recognition is a part) can be done with online tools.
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Criterion 3 focuses on the monitoring and evaluation of recognition decisions. Full completion applies to countries where a centralised, system-level database on recognition cases exists (at the level of the NARIC or relevant national ministry). Full completion of this criterion also relates to the accessibility or analytical use of data on recognition cases for dissemination and evaluation purposes. Moderate completion relates to the existence of a centralised database, whereby recognition decisions from different educational institutions are systematically communicated to and aggregated by the NARIC/at national level but with no dissemination or evaluation of the data taking place (database not accessible to educational institutions). Limited completion applies to countries where there is no centralised database, limiting perspective for dissemination and evaluation of recognition cases at the national scale – in such setups, educational institutions will have their own database and still communicate recognition decisions to the NARIC in a systematic way. Low or no completion relates to countries with no available data, or no evidence of a systematic process the collection or communication of recognition decisions at the level of educational institutions or central level. Progress on the monitoring and evaluation of recognition decisions is overall limited. In countries where a central database on recognition decision exists, the data provide no detail on whether the recognition was automatic as per the 2018 CR. Many countries do not have a central database, especially when recognition decisions are decentralized and delegated to educational institutions, who then may keep data on recognition (or not). Very few national databases are accessible to the public, they remain internal to the NARICs, or their access is restricted to educational institution networks. Similarly, limited analytical use of the data on recognition decisions is made for evaluation and dissemination purposes at the national level.

Table 11. Assessment criterion 3: Monitoring and evaluation – assessment and comments

Member State	Assessment & comments
Austria	Central database for recognition at national level exists, but with no regular monitoring or updating, as candidates can also directly apply for recognition at the HEIs.
Belgium	BE-FR/BE-NL: No centralised/NARIC databases of recognition decisions for access by educational institutions exist. Each institution keeps their own recognition information internally.
Bulgaria	Publicly accessible national recognition database from NACID on website containing a number of modules and functionalities. Including all recognition decisions of NACID and Bulgarian HEIs, which is an example of good practice in terms of transparency and sustainability of LRC implementation.
Croatia	No publicly accessible central database, but data on recognition decisions must in principle be collected and stored by NARIC and HEIs for ensuring equivalency in future decisions. Recognition decisions on HEI level.
Cyprus	No central database, and no evidence of systematic collection and communication of data on recognition decisions by educational institutions to the NARIC.
Czech Republic	Data on recognition cases, appeals and rejections are collected since 2017 as per the 2016 amendment to the Higher Education Act § 90b. Database on recognition decisions made at the ministry level (only for initial decisions at HEI level). Database is not publicly accessible, but anonymised data can be accessed.
Denmark	Central monitoring system, data is recorded by national authorities on decisions regarding equivalence and recognition of foreign qualifications never assessed before, to set “precedents” for same initial decisions by all education institutions. These are gathered in a database that can be consulted by applicants, HEIs and SEIs who can applications without the need to refer to the Danish NARIC. There

	is however no reported central database on the number of recognition decisions updated annually or in real time; data are kept by individual institutions which are autonomous regarding recognition procedures.
Estonia	There is a centralised database of recognition decisions, but it is internal to the NARIC – data is not broken down by level of education or training or by procedure used for recognition. The recognition process is decentralised to educational institutions; decisions are systematically communicated to and aggregated by the NARIC.
Finland	Recognition is decentralised to HEIs or upper-secondary education providers who may keep data on recognition. There is no central database of recognition decisions, implying recognition decisions are not systematically communicated by educational institutions to the NARIC and data on recognition decisions are not aggregated at the national level.
France	Currently an internal database of recognition cases exists from ENIC/NARIC, including 6,000 institutions and 2,000 foreign qualifications, but does not cover automatic recognition as per the 2018 CR. ENIC-NARIC plans to update, expand and promote this database to universities through the creation of a dedicated platform.
Germany	No central database on number of recognition decisions. The anabin database contains publicly available evaluations of degree and degree types by country, but no data on number of recognition decisions by country or by year.
Greece	Under Law 4957/2022, educational institutions have autonomy for assessing degrees for the purpose of further academic studies. Currently there is no central database of assessments being systematically communicated by educational institutions to the NARIC
Hungary	There is no evidence of data on recognition decisions being collected systematically at the national level, and the NARIC is not aware of any best practices where institutions are collecting these on their own. NARIC has the power to make binding recognition decisions, as well as HEIs.
Ireland	Recognition decisions are made by education and training institutions and professional regulatory bodies (PRB); while collected at institutional /PRB level within their own frameworks, they are not yet centrally monitored or reported. NARIC Ireland collects annual data on volumes of queries, case management and Comparability Statement downloads. Summary data is published in Annual Reports. An International Education Mark “Code of Practice for the provision of programmes to international students” will provide an additional mechanism for monitoring and evaluation of HEI recognition practice in the near future, which does not mean Automatic Recognition but will enhance visibility and transparency. Admissions to HE are centrally administered through a Central Applications Office (CAO) to agreed arrangements across the HEIs, with commonly agreed arrangements for the recognition of a wide scope of international qualifications. These arrangements and the subsequent progression and pastoral care of students are internally monitored within the HEIs.
Italy	CIMEA (NARIC) has an internal statistical database of recognition decisions. CIMEA maintains a separate repository of all the statements of comparability issued and has a (public) database on national education systems of other Member States and their qualifications (similar initiatives are found in the projects Q-ENTRY and AdREN – Adriatic Recognition Network – http://www.adren.info/). CIMEA is in the process of building a common repository to provide for more systemisation of the data.
Latvia	Register of applications for the recognition of foreign education documents. Include recognition statements but no further information available. This Register is part of the State Education Information system (VIIS).
Lithuania	SKVC as the NARIC monitors all HEIs which have authorisation to perform recognition for their own admission purposes. This is done in line with the Order No. V-443 of 25 March 2020 (last emended on 8 June 2022) of the Ministry of

	Education, Science and Sports, point 6. The system for recognition procedures is devolved to various bodies and education institutions depending on the level of education acquired, whether it is qualifications or credits, and the objective pursued (further education, access to labour market). There is no central database gathering recognition cases from these various bodies and institutions.
Luxembourg	There is a central database of recognition decisions maintained by the NARIC but it is an internal one (but it is understood the data on recognition decisions is aggregated and evaluated and analysed).
Malta	Procedures for recognition are decentralised to education institutions. However, there is no evidence that these decisions are communicated to the NARIC as there is no central database of recognition decisions.
Netherlands	The recognition process is devolved to education institutions. It is understood that data on recognition decisions are aggregated at the national level. While the database is not available to the public, data on recognition is used by the NARIC for evaluation purposes and published. However, implementation of AR is not formally monitored by the NARIC.
Poland	The recognition process is devolved to education institutions. The NARIC's central database KWALIFIKATOR provides information on how a given credential is recognised for the purpose of further studies and information on the level recognition. It is not a database of decisions in individual cases, but it is based on the recognition decisions made by NARIC. The recognition is based on the national legislation which determines how a given qualification can be recognised. The role of recognition bodies (NARIC or HEIs) is to check whether a given qualification fulfils requirements stipulated in the legislation to be recognised before making a decision. The legislation guarantees that the recognition decision regarding a given type of qualifications should always be the same. In this sense the recognition decision is made at system level by the legislation and is a legally binding decision. KWALIFIKATOR also helps holders of foreign qualifications to appeal if the decision of a HEI does not comply with what is written in KWALIFIKATOR.
Portugal	NARIC keeps a central database of recognition decisions. 2007 an electronic platform was created for the centralized management of recognition requests (Simplex+2016 Programme). NARIC only extracts statistical data that are relevant to a given subject and extractions are made on a monthly or bi-monthly basis to serve for the production of specific reports on automatic recognition.
Romania	CNRED (NARIC) keeps a central database of recognition decisions. An open database is available for interested parties (e.g. applicants, HEIs, employers) at the website, providing general information (cases of automatic recognition, status of diplomas obtained abroad which were subject to recognition requests).
Slovakia	Since 2020, the Ministry of Education has been collecting data on the number of recognitions awarded by them at the higher education level. The data collected on recognition decisions is evaluated and published in ministerial reports.
Slovenia	No publicly accessible central database of automatic recognition cases. Procedures for recognition are decentralised to HEIs and education institutions.
Spain	Recognition decisions are devolved to educational institutions. There is a central database of recognised qualifications that competent authorities can check if they need to, which is constantly updated. They need to be granted access. Data on recognition decisions by educational institutions not monitored or aggregated at the national level.
Sweden	The formal decision on admission to HE lies with the educational institutions. But the process of recognising their foreign qualifications is done in a joint coordinated admissions service. And the HEI's develop the principles for recognition jointly. Since 2020, the Swedish Ministry of Education collects and publishes annually the number of positive recognition decisions it has awarded annually, allowing for evaluation of trends. However, data on recognition decisions made by individual education institutions are not collected and aggregated at the national level.

Criterion 4 relates to whether system-level automatic recognition of HE qualifications in different variations is in place or not. Full completion (dark green) of this criterion refers to system-level automatic recognition (e.g. distinct legislation, or through bilateral/multilateral agreements covering all EU Member States) for qualifications issued by all EU Member States with decision-making responsibility delegated to a competent system-level body (e.g. Ministry or NARIC). Near completion (light green) refers to system-level automatic recognition for qualifications issued by all EU Member States with decision-making responsibility delegated to HEIs. Moderate completion (yellow) refers to system-level automatic recognition for qualifications issued by a subset of EU Member States with decision-making responsibility delegated to a competent system-level body. Limited completion (orange) refers to recognition for a subset of EU Member States with decision-making responsibility delegated to HEIs, and red refers to no system-level automatic recognition in place in the country. Overall, the trend is that automatic recognition is still primarily governed by the LRC and multilateral agreements, independently of the 2018 CR.

Table 12. Assessment criterion 4: Automatic recognition of higher education qualifications – assessment and comments

Member State	Assessment & comments
Austria	System-level automatic recognition for qualifications issued by all EU Member States with decision-making responsibility delegated to HEIs. Remark: Automatic recognition through bilateral agreements and LRC, for all EU Member States. Execution of Recognition for other countries either through Ministry/NARIC or HEIs.
Belgium	System-level automatic recognition for qualifications issued by all EU Member States with decision-making responsibility delegated to HEIs.
Bulgaria	System-level automatic recognition for qualifications issued by all EU Member States with decision-making responsibility delegated to HEIs. State of the art-described in details in the qENTRY+ project publication from 2022 Automatic recognition in practice – examples and tools from the project partner countries, with Bulgaria being one of the project partners (https://www.q-entry.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/automatic-recognition-in-practice.pdf).
Croatia	System-level automatic recognition for qualifications issued by all EU Member States with decision-making responsibility delegated to HEIs.
Cyprus	System-level automatic recognition for qualifications issued by all EU Member States with decision-making responsibility delegated to HEIs. Remark: Cyprus has signed Agreements on the Mutual Academic Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications for the access and continuation of studies to Higher Education Institutions with Germany, Italy, Romania, and a number of non-EU-countries.
Czech Republic	System-level automatic recognition for qualifications issued by all countries with decision-making responsibility delegated to public higher education institutions (Czech Republic does not have a different system of higher education qualifications recognition for EU and non-EU countries). In case some Czech public higher education institutions issues recognition decision that does not respect system-level automatic recognition, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports changes that decision. With Hungary, Poland, Slovenia and Slovakia there are mutual equivalence agreements meaning that qualifications issued by these countries are recognised without necessity of any application or official act.
Denmark	System-level automatic recognition for qualifications issued by all EU Member States with decision-making responsibility delegated to a HEIs. Remark: central decision, executed by HEIs.
Estonia	Automatic Recognition for a subset of EU Member States.

	Remark: Mutual recognition agreements between Baltic countries and Benelux. Decision-making responsibility delegated to higher education institutions, NARIC only assesses.
Finland	System-level automatic recognition for qualifications issued by all EU Member States with decision-making responsibility delegated to a HEIs. Remark: Automatic recognition is embedded in admission procedures that apply to the study programme.
France	System-level automatic recognition for qualifications issued by all EU Member States with decision-making responsibility delegated to a HEIs.
Germany	System-level automatic recognition for qualifications issued by all EU Member States with decision-making responsibility delegated to HEIs. Remark: Germany has implemented automatic recognition in higher education at federal level since 2007, official recognition decisions are taken by individual HEIs.
Greece	Limited automatic recognition, for example when evaluating similar to past cases
Hungary	Automatic Recognition for a subset of EU Member States. Remark: Multilateral agreements for automatic mutual recognition with other countries both within the EU (e.g. CZ, PL, SK) and outside the EU (Russia, Serbia, Ukraine).
Ireland	At system level, there is in principle automatic recognition for qualifications issued by all EU Member States delegated to HEIs, professional statutory bodies and competent authorities.
Italy	System-level automatic recognition for qualifications issued by all EU Member States HEIs remain responsible for admission, but there is general agreement at national level in Italy that the level of qualifications from other Member States is recognised at the corresponding level in Italy. Remark: no additional decision-making on level since the level is recognised automatically (as per the CR: without having to go through a separate procedure).
Latvia	Automatic Recognition for a subset of EU Member States. Remark: Agreement on the automatic recognition of higher education qualifications between the Baltic states and Benelux countries.
Lithuania	Automatic recognition is available for a subset of qualifications without any additional procedures. Information regarding automatic comparability is provided by SKVC, the central body, and also HEIs.
Luxembourg	System-level automatic recognition for qualifications issued by all EU Member States with decision-making responsibility delegated to HEIs. Remark: Validation of diplomas still takes place; Multilateral agreements for full automatic mutual recognition (without validation process) with BE and NL.
Malta	Automatic recognition is restricted to HE qualifications from accredited providers and programmes. However, it is not applied in the sense of the CR.
Netherlands	System-level automatic recognition for qualifications issued by all EU Member States with decision-making responsibility delegated to a competent system-level body. AMR is based on overviews provided by Nuffic, comparing foreign qualifications with Dutch qualifications on system level. Remark: Multilateral agreements with Belgium, Luxembourg and the Baltic States.
Poland	Member States System-level automatic recognition for qualifications issued by all EU Member States with decision-making responsibility delegated to a competent system-level body in cooperation with HEIs.
Portugal	System-level automatic recognition for qualifications issued by all EU Member States. Decision-making or case-by-case evaluations are delegated to HEIs.
Romania	System-level automatic recognition for qualifications issued by all EU Member States, with decision-making responsibility delegated to a competent system-level body. Remark: CNRED automatically recognises higher education qualifications obtained in EU Member States, EEA and CH, and 'prestigious universities' in third countries.

Slovakia	System-level automatic recognition for qualifications issued by a subset of EU Member States exists in principle, but in practice higher education institutions make the assessment. Remark: 'Fast-track' recognition is available for learners from EHEA countries, and several bilateral agreements support recognition procedures (including DE, HU, HR, PL, RO, Ukraine, Russia, China).
Slovenia	Automatic Recognition for a subset of EU Member States. Remark: Bilateral agreements for automatic mutual recognition with neighbouring countries and former Yugoslavian countries.
Spain	Royal Decree 889/2022 of 18 October, 2022 establishes an automatic academic recognition procedure for diplomas from EEA countries which do not lead to regulated profession. Furthermore, some third countries' diplomas, that have been granted measures, can benefit from this procedure as well. With the absence of a reference to the CR, it appears that arrangements for automatic recognition under Royal Decree 889/2022 diverge from the CR's principles.
Sweden	System-level automatic recognition for qualifications issued by all EU Member States with decision-making responsibility delegated to a competent system-level body in cooperation with HEIs. Remark: Hybrid model: Swedish Council of Higher Education (Council decides in cooperation with HEIs)

Criterion 5 relates to the existence of automatic recognition of upper secondary education and training qualifications. Completion of the criterion is measured by the number of other Member States, to whose qualifications a Member State applies Automatic Recognition. Progress on automatic recognition of upper secondary qualifications is overall limited. Considerable autonomy is given to HEIs to develop and apply recognition procedures.

Table 13. Assessment criterion 5: Automatic recognition of upper secondary education and training qualifications – assessment and comments

Member State	Assessment & comments
Austria	Automatic and full recognition of upper secondary education and training qualifications for all Member States. There are bilateral or multilateral agreements in place with all EU Member States (and beyond), and there are lists available to check which certificates give direct access and which (in some of the countries) are restricted.
Belgium	No automatic and full recognition of upper secondary education and training qualifications of Member States. BE-FR: Qualifications from upper secondary education awarded in other Member States are rather fully recognised. The right for holders of a qualification of a certain level that has been issued by one Member State to be considered for entry to a higher education programme in the next level in any other Member State is given. There is no automatic recognition, but a procedure of recognition. BE-NL: If an individual has recognised their qualification by the ENIC/NARIC centres / the ministries for the purpose of accessing the job market and later decides they want to study in a higher education institution in Belgium, they can use the official recognition and skip the higher education internal recognition process.
Bulgaria	System-level automatic recognition for qualifications issued by all EU Member States of upper secondary education and training qualifications of Member States with decision-making responsibility delegated to Regional Departments of Education (RDE), which are territorial structural units of the Ministry of Education and Science (MES). There seems to be some uncertainty how to understand the term 'automatic', as rather lengthy recognition procedures are in place, meaning that recognition is not implemented automatically.
Croatia	Automatic and full recognition of upper secondary education and training qualifications for most Member States.

	Recognition takes place through diverse competent institutions, as Education and Teacher Training Agency (ETTA) for foreign secondary school education and AVETAE for VET qualifications. Qualifications are automatically recognised, without a procedure if the qualification was acquired in a country with a National Qualifications Framework. Bilateral agreements with neighbouring countries (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, North Macedonia, Montenegro) facilitating automatic recognition are in place.
Cyprus	Automatic and full recognition of upper secondary education and training qualifications for all Member States. Recognition of foreign qualifications requires official/certified translation of the certificate.
Czech Republic	Automatic and full recognition of upper secondary education and training qualifications for some Member States (under 50% but more than 0% of Member States). There are Equivalence Agreements with Hungary, Poland, Slovenia, Germany, and Slovakia. Automatic recognition only exists with Slovakia.
Denmark	Automatic and full recognition of upper secondary education and training qualifications for all Member States. Anyone with foreign educational qualifications has right of assessment, based on learning outcomes, undertaken by the appointed national public authority, which currently is the Danish Agency for Higher Education and Science under the Ministry of Higher Education and Science. It is considered <i>de facto</i> automatic.
Estonia	Automatic and full recognition of upper secondary education and training qualifications for some Member States (under 50% but more than 0% of Member States). Multilateral agreement for AMR among Baltic states since 2018.
Finland	Automatic and full recognition of upper secondary education and training qualification for all Member States (but with recognition procedure assessing details of the qualification to allow admission for certain degrees).
France	Automatic and full recognition of upper secondary education and training qualifications for all EU Member States. (Registration via ' <i>parcoursup</i> ', not applicable for all subjects).
Germany	Automatic and full recognition of upper secondary education and training qualifications for all Member States (and other countries in addition). HEIs can check the equivalence of qualifications for admission purposes in a database; some restrictions apply to some certificates (e.g. subject-restricted access; often: general access to all study programmes except engineering).
Greece	No automatic and full recognition of upper secondary education qualifications. Full recognition of upper secondary education qualifications only in some cases. Remark: centralised application procedure ⁵⁸ .
Hungary	Automatic and full recognition of upper secondary education and training qualifications for all Member States. Hungary recognises all secondary education qualifications granting access to HE in another Member State as an equivalent of the Hungarian secondary education leaving exam (" <i>érettségi</i> ") for the purpose of granting access to further studies in Hungary.
Ireland	There is <i>de facto</i> automatic recognition of school leaving qualifications from the UK (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) as evidenced in the 'Qualifications can cross boundaries' document, and for qualifications from EU and EFTA Member States, as evidenced in the Entry requirements criteria for EU/EFTA Applicants for 2023 Entry' publication (see www.cao.ie).
Italy	Automatic and full recognition of upper secondary education and training qualifications for all Member States. HEIs remain responsible for admission, but there is general agreement at national level in Italy that the level of qualifications from other Member States is recognised at the corresponding level in Italy.
Latvia	Automatic and full recognition of upper secondary education and training qualifications for some Member States (under 50% but more than 0% of Member States). Qualifications are recognised by institutions based on national guidelines

⁵⁸ <https://studyingreece.edu.gr/studying/studies-taught-gr/plan-your-studies/how-to-apply-bachelors/>

	and laws. Multilateral agreement with other Baltic states (EE, LT) in place since 2018.
Lithuania	Automatic and full recognition of upper secondary education and training qualifications for some Member States (under 50% but more than 0% of Member States). Framework for validating and recognizing of foreign Upper secondary qualifications. Automatic recognition with other Baltic states (EE, LV) since 2018.
Luxembourg	No automatic and full recognition of upper secondary education and training qualifications.
Malta	No automatic and full recognition of upper secondary education and training qualifications.
Netherlands	Automatic and full recognition of upper secondary education and training qualification for all Member States. AMR in secondary education is based on overviews provided by Nuffic, comparing foreign secondary qualifications to Dutch secondary education qualifications on system level (which may exclude qualifications very different to the Dutch system).
Poland	Automatic and full recognition for all Member States – for general upper secondary education qualifications only via Kwalifikator. Automatic recognition of diplomas from other EU, OECD, and EEA countries for upper secondary schools. Learners who obtained VET qualifications abroad and who wish to have them recognised in Poland must take an extramural exam organised by the Regional Examination Boards and organised by the Central Examination Board.
Portugal	Automatic and full recognition of upper secondary education and training qualifications for EU Member States.
Romania	Recognition of upper secondary education and training qualifications is automatically granted similar to the recognition of HE qualifications. It means that a system-level automatic recognition for qualifications issued by all EU Member States is ensured, with decision-making responsibility delegated to a competent system-level body. CNRED automatically recognises upper secondary education qualifications obtained in EU Member States and EFTA countries. For admission to higher education in Romania - according to Order of the Minister of National Education no. 3630/2 May 2018 regarding the approval of Methodology for the recognition and equivalence of upper secondary qualifications obtained abroad - CNRED collaborates with higher education institutions in order to fulfil the specific admission criteria and recognises the upper secondary qualifications giving access to Higher Education.
Slovakia	Automatic and full recognition of upper secondary education and training qualifications for some Member States (under 50% but more than 0% of Member States). Recognition bodies are Regional School Offices which are responsible for executing the recognition process for equivalency to Slovak qualifications. Bilateral agreement with Czech Republic. Process of mutual recognition is simplified for Hungary, Germany, Croatia, Poland, Romania, Ukraine, Russia and China.
Slovenia	Automatic and full recognition of upper secondary education and training qualifications for some Member States (under 50% but more than 0% of Member States). Guidance for recognition of qualifications obtained in Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro, UK, Russia, Ukraine because the Ministry has the Register of all secondary education qualifications from those countries followed by interpretation how those qualifications translate to equal qualifications in the Slovenian education system. Foreign students coming from other countries are still required to follow the recognition process at HEIs.
Spain	Automatic and full recognition of upper secondary education and training qualifications for all Member States. It is a competence of the Ministry of Education and Vocational Education and Training to validate the upper secondary education degree. The degree holder needs to request digitally an equivalence of the foreign degree to the degree in

	Spain. Degrees originating from an EU Member State do not need to present an apostille legalisation, but they are required to present the requested documents.
Sweden	Automatic and full recognition of upper secondary education and training qualifications for all Member States. NARIC makes system level assessments for qualifications, that are usually followed, but not legally binding. Qualifications are assessed towards their authenticity.

Criterion 6 relates to the automatic recognition of outcomes of learning periods abroad in higher education. With regard to the automatic recognition of learning periods abroad for HE, mobilities within Erasmus+ partnerships include learning agreements that are used as a basis for recognition decisions. Most HEIs have internal procedures implemented, that follow the Erasmus+ procedures. However, not all learning achievements in other countries are recognised automatically, as often additional documentation is required. For learning mobilities outside Erasmus+, recognition is reported to be more difficult. Procedures in HEIs often vary and are not consistent, information about QA of recognition for mobility periods abroad is not available in most countries.

Table 14. Assessment criterion 6: Automatic recognition of learning periods abroad – higher education – assessment and comments

Member State	Assessment & comments
Austria	Outcomes from a learning period abroad are automatically and fully recognised with some exceptions (over 85% full recognition rate): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - According to Erasmus+ statistics 'Student mobility for studies between Programme Countries': 86.3% full recognition rate (2020). Recognition is high for students of Universities of Applied Science, which foresee mobility windows. It is also high for students using their 'free electives' to take any classes they deem interesting, and many universities offer 'course catalogues' to see which classes have previously been recognised for which subjects/courses; new legislation further encourages mobility windows and a very flexible approach to recognition of learning outcomes from mobilities. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ECTS User' Guide 2015 principles included in legislation, with nearly full monitoring.
Belgium	Outcomes from a learning period abroad are automatically and fully recognised with some exceptions (over 85% full recognition rate): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - BE-FR/BE-NL: According to Erasmus+ statistics 'Student mobility for studies between Programme Countries': 91.3% (BE-FR) and 92,4% (BE-NL) full recognition rate (2020). Recognition of study abroad periods is a competence of higher education institutions based on cooperation partnerships and learning agreements established within and outside the Erasmus+ programme. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ECTS User' Guide 2015 principles included in legislation.
Bulgaria	Outcomes from a learning period abroad are not recognised automatically and fully (below 70% full recognition rate): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - according to Erasmus+ statistics 'Student mobility for studies between Programme Countries': 66.5% full recognition rate (2020). Automatic recognition is possible within Erasmus+ mobility projects. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ECTS User' Guide 2015 principles included in legislation.
Croatia	Outcomes from a learning period abroad are automatically and fully recognised with several exceptions (over 70% full recognition rate): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - according to Erasmus+ statistics 'Student mobility for studies between Programme Countries': 78.9% full recognition rate (2020). Higher education institutions have developed their own legal provisions in line with the former Act on the Recognition of Foreign Educational Qualifications from 2011. Recognition of study abroad periods is a competence of higher education institutions based on learning agreements. Conditions laid down by the national ENIC/NARIC for recognition for employment purposes. Following the 2011 Act on Recognition, the Agency for

	<p>Science and Higher Education has developed an Ordinance on the Evaluation of and Criteria for Evaluation of Foreign Higher Education Qualification.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ECTS User' Guide 2015 principles included in legislation.
Cyprus	<p>Outcomes from a learning period abroad are automatically and fully recognised with some exceptions (over 85% full recognition rate):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - according to Erasmus+ statistics 'Student mobility for studies between Programme Countries': 87.9% full recognition rate (2020). <p>Recognition within the framework of Erasmus+ mobilities, competence of HEIs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ECTS User' Guide 2015 principles included in legislation.
Czech Republic	<p>Outcomes from a learning period abroad are automatically and fully recognised with several exceptions (over 70% full recognition rate):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - according to Erasmus+ statistics 'Student mobility for studies between Programme Countries': 76.99% full recognition rate (2020). <p>Recognition of study abroad periods is a competence of HEIs based on cooperation partnerships and learning agreements.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Partial embedment of ECTS User' Guide 2015 principles (monitoring of one of the three indicators). The new HE strategy calls for the implementation of mobility windows.
Denmark	<p>Outcomes from a learning period abroad are automatically and fully recognised with some exceptions (over 85% full recognition rate):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - according to Erasmus+ statistics 'Student mobility for studies between Programme Countries': 91.96% full recognition rate (2020). <p><i>De facto</i> automatic recognition, based on a structured system of learning agreements.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ECTS has been implemented in national legislation since 2003. All HEIs are legally obliged to follow and use and the principles for implementing ECTS. All HEIs are also obliged to give full recognition for all structured and agreed learning periods abroad. Free movers on non-previously agreed learning periods abroad may experience that not all ECTS are recognised if the credits taken abroad does not match the programme at the Danish institutions.
Estonia	<p>Outcomes from a learning period abroad are automatically and fully recognised with some exceptions (over 85% full recognition rate):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - according to Erasmus+ statistics 'Student mobility for studies between Programme Countries': 87.1% full recognition rate (2020). <p>Recognition based on Erasmus+ learning agreements. Students report issues with automatic recognition of learning outcomes from temporary learning periods abroad.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ECTS User' Guide 2015 principles included in legislation, with nearly full monitoring.
Finland	<p>Outcomes from a learning period abroad are automatically and fully recognised with some exceptions (over 85% full recognition rate):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - according to Erasmus+ statistics 'Student mobility for studies between Programme Countries': 86.6% full recognition rate (2020). <p>Recognition of study-abroad periods in HE is a competence of HEIs based on cooperation partnerships and learning agreements.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ECTS User' Guide 2015 principles included in legislation, with nearly full monitoring. QA is in place to ensure implementation of the ECTS Users' Guide 2015 principles.
France	<p>According to Erasmus+ statistics 'Student mobility for studies between Programme Countries': 89.8% full recognition rate (2020).</p> <p>Recognition of study abroad periods is a competence of higher education institutions based on cooperation partnerships and learning agreements established within and outside the Erasmus+ programme.</p> <p>The ECTS User' Guide 2015 principles included in French legislation. ECTS are used for the recognition of mobility stays abroad by all universities.</p>
Germany	<p>Outcomes from a learning period abroad are not recognised automatically and fully (below 70% full recognition rate).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - according to Erasmus+ statistics 'Student mobility for studies between Programme Countries': 67.0% full recognition rate (2020).

	- ECTS User' Guide 2015 principles included in legislation.
Greece	<p>Outcomes from a learning period abroad are automatically and fully recognised with several exceptions (over 85% full recognition rate):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - according to Erasmus+ statistics 'Student mobility for studies between Programme Countries': over 85% full recognition rate (2022). - ECTS User' Guide 2015 principles included in legislation, with nearly full monitoring. Recognition of study periods abroad (through credit transfer), especially outside the Erasmus+ or other similar programmes, is very difficult.
Hungary	<p>Outcomes from a learning period abroad are not recognised automatically and fully (below 70% full recognition rate).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - according to Erasmus+ statistics 'Student mobility for studies between Programme Countries': 61.5% full recognition rate (2020). <p>Hungary follows the Bologna process system and recognises credits obtained abroad, but credit recognition is not systematically done and varies across institutions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ECTS User' Guide 2015 principles are not required to be used by quality assurance as basis to assess implementation of ECTS.
Ireland	<p>Outcomes from a learning period abroad are automatically and fully recognised with some exceptions (over 85% full recognition rate):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - according to Erasmus+ statistics 'Student mobility for studies between Programme Countries': 86.6% full recognition rate (2020). <p>Recognition is based on learning periods in context of Erasmus or Swiss exchange programme, where students have an approved study programme before they go.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ECTS typically apply
Italy	<p>Outcomes from a learning period abroad are automatically and fully recognised with some exceptions (over 85% full recognition rate):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - according to Erasmus+ statistics 'Student mobility for studies between Programme Countries': 87.2% full recognition rate (2020). <p>Reported to take place swiftly due to existence of learning agreements concluded prior to mobility and application of the ECTS system.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ECTS User' Guide 2015 principles included in legislation.
Latvia	<p>Outcomes from a learning period abroad are automatically and fully recognised with several exceptions (over 70% full recognition rate):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - according to Erasmus+ statistics 'Student mobility for studies between Programme Countries': 84.3% full recognition rate (2020). <p>Recognition of foreign diplomas and periods of study abroad, there are internal regulations in place for each educational institution.</p> <p>International (regional) agreements – regarding the automatic recognition among the Baltic countries (Saeima, 2019b) and between the Baltic and Benelux countries.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ECTS User' Guide 2015 principles are not required to be used by quality assurance as basis to assess implementation of ECTS.
Lithuania	<p>Outcomes from a learning period abroad are automatically and fully recognised with some exceptions (over 85% full recognition rate):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - according to Erasmus+ statistics 'Student mobility for studies between Programme Countries': 89.3% full recognition rate (2020). <p>Automatic recognition of learning outcomes acquired in the Erasmus+ exchanges in HE.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Partial embedment of ECTS User' Guide 2015 principles (monitoring of one of the three indicators).
Luxembourg	<p>Outcomes from a learning period abroad are automatically and fully recognised with some exceptions (over 85% full recognition rate):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - according to Erasmus+ statistics 'Student mobility for studies between Programme Countries': 87.1% full recognition rate (2020). - ECTS User' Guide 2015 principles included in legislation.
Malta	<p>Outcomes from a learning period abroad are automatically and fully recognised with some exceptions (over 85% full recognition rate):</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - according to Erasmus+ statistics 'Student mobility for studies between Programme Countries': 94.8% full recognition rate (2020). - ECTS User' Guide 2015 principles included in legislation. <p>Applications for postgraduate courses involve assessment of the degree transcript by the HEI.</p>
Netherlands	<p>Outcomes from a learning period abroad are automatically and fully recognised with some exceptions (over 85% full recognition rate):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - according to Erasmus+ statistics 'Student mobility for studies between Programme Countries': 90.98% full recognition rate (2020). <p>Recognition of study periods abroad is done by study programmes based on learning agreements filled out prior to the mobility.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ECTS User' Guide 2015 principles included in legislation.
Poland	<p>Outcomes from a learning period abroad are automatically and fully recognised with some exceptions (over 85% full recognition rate):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - according to Erasmus+ statistics 'Student mobility for studies between Programme Countries': 87.3% full recognition rate (2020). <p>The recognition of learning periods abroad is governed by inter-institutional agreements signed between the sending and receiving HE institutions / secondary schools, such as Erasmus+ partnership agreements.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ECTS User' Guide 2015 principles included in legislation.
Portugal	<p>Outcomes from a learning period abroad are automatically and fully recognised with some exceptions (over 85% full recognition rate):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - according to Erasmus+ statistics 'Student mobility for studies between Programme Countries': 85.2% full recognition rate (2020). - ECTS User' Guide 2015 principles included in legislation.
Romania	<p>Outcomes from a learning period abroad are automatically and fully recognised with some exceptions (over 85% full recognition rate):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - according to Erasmus+ statistics 'Student mobility for studies between Programme Countries': 87.8% full recognition rate (2020). <p>Recognizing credits obtained during a period of study mobility, higher education institutions must design and publicize their own procedures. Thus, the practice differs slightly from institution to institution.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ECTS User' Guide 2015 principles included in legislation.
Slovakia	<p>Outcomes from a learning period abroad are automatically and fully recognised with several exceptions (over 70% full recognition rate):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - according to Erasmus+ statistics 'Student mobility for studies between Programme Countries': 80.9% full recognition rate (2020). <p>Publicly available procedure for the recognition of results from mobility programmes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ECTS User' Guide 2015 principles are not required to be used by quality assurance as basis to assess implementation of ECTS.
Slovenia	<p>Outcomes from a learning period abroad are automatically and fully recognised with some exceptions (over 85% full recognition rate):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - according to Erasmus+ statistics 'Student mobility for studies between Programme Countries': 88.5% full recognition rate (2020). <p>Recognition procedures are implemented by HEIs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ECTS User' Guide 2015 principles are not required to be used by quality assurance as basis to assess implementation of ECTS.
Spain	<p>Outcomes from a learning period abroad are automatically and fully recognised with some exceptions (over 85% full recognition rate):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - according to Erasmus+ statistics 'Student mobility for studies between Programme Countries': 89.6% full recognition rate (2020). <p>For the outcomes of learning periods abroad, Spanish universities are flexible recognising these credits, universities are completely autonomous in this case.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ECTS User' Guide 2015 principles included in legislation.
Sweden	<p>Outcomes from a learning period abroad are automatically and fully recognised with some exceptions (over 85% full recognition rate):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - according to Erasmus+ statistics 'Student mobility for studies between Programme Countries': 87.5% full recognition rate (2020).

	Students at HEIs in Sweden are entitled to transfer the credits awarded for a course or study programme at another higher education institution (unless there is a substantial difference between these courses or study programmes). - ECTS User' Guide 2015 principles are not required to be used by quality assurance as basis to assess implementation of ECTS.
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Criterion 7 relates to automatic recognition of learning periods abroad in upper secondary education. The criterion is assessed in the way the recognition is performed. Progress with regard to automatic recognition of learning periods abroad in secondary education is limited – there is no automatic nor full recognition in countries like BE, CZ, EE, EL, IE, LU, MT, NL, PL or SE, and only limited recognition, mainly based on provider-level decisions, in CY, DE, ES, HR, HU, LV, LT, SK, and SI. France (FR) has introduced automatic recognition for VET only. In AT, BG, DK, FI, IT, PT or RO outcomes from a learning period abroad are in many cases automatically and fully recognised if certain conditions apply (e.g. Learning agreement, transcript of records, school-based decisions/assessments). In BG, DK, FI, IT and RO this is based on learning outcomes (light green), while in AT and PT it is fully automatic, based on equivalence (green).⁵⁹

Table 15. Assessment criterion 7: Automatic recognition of learning periods abroad – upper secondary education and training – assessment and comments

Member State	Assessment & comments
Austria	Outcomes from a learning period abroad are automatically and fully recognised for EU Member States and for almost all learning periods up to one year: automatic recognition of stays abroad in upper secondary education for lasting 5 to 12 months, based on equivalence of school attendance, stated in the school law (SCHUG §25(9)). Attending a foreign school corresponds to successful school attendance in Austria. Confirmation of attendance needs to be provided, but not a transcript of marks.
Belgium	Outcomes from a learning period abroad are not automatically nor fully recognised from any Member States (except school-to-school partnerships): BE-FR: Learning periods abroad are recognised by the class council through the Expedis framework on basis of the same procedures for all countries (EU or non-EU). In case of a mobility within a school-to-school partnership (e.g. Erasmus+) the procedure of Expedis framework applies, a possible learning agreement between sending and hosting schools needs to be developed accordingly. Hosting school proposes a programme which is as close as possible to programme of sending school; sending school verifies afterwards if conditions of agreement have been met or if further exams or repetition of the learning period are required. BE-NL: No official recognition of learning periods abroad. Class councils decide on conditions under which pupils are re-admitted, with big differences between schools (e.g. recognition, some/all exams need to be taken at home school, taking addition remote courses etc.).
Bulgaria	Most outcomes from a learning period abroad are automatically and fully recognised, but some additional exams might be necessary: Recognition of learning periods abroad is based on the need of evidence-proofing that the requirements of the national curriculum were fulfilled, by passing required subjects while abroad or by passing exams upon return from mobility abroad. The Regional Management of Education body is responsible for decision regarding the recognition of the learning period abroad or if one needs to pass equivalence exams. They have their own recognition procedures in place, which are based on the national approach of recognizing outcomes of learning periods abroad based on learning outcomes rather than matching curriculum subjects.

⁵⁹ EFIL Report

Croatia	Outcomes from a learning period abroad are recognised after an official procedure based on curriculum matching: Recognition of the period of primary or secondary school education spent abroad for the purpose of continuing education is carried out by the educational institution where the applicant intends to continue his/her education, based on the correspondence of subjects between the sending and host school curricula.
Cyprus	Outcomes from a learning period abroad are recognised after an official procedure based on curriculum matching: There is a recognition process for upper secondary education (Lykeio/Lyceum) pupils who wish to go abroad for learning purposes. Here, they may need to take additional exams, based on curriculum matching. Bilateral agreements do exist with Greece for automatic recognition of outcomes of learning periods abroad. In Erasmus+ school-to-school partnerships the learning agreements between sending and host school can be used as recognition instrument.
Czech Republic	Outcomes from a learning period abroad are not automatically nor fully recognised from any Member States: Recognition is a competence of provider level; a school principal decides if pupil continues in following grade after return. If there is no recognition of the learning period abroad, knowledge on the curriculum is assessed in form of an exam. Procedures for the exam can change each year, guidelines are not available for that.
Denmark	Outcomes from a learning period abroad are recognised after an official procedure based on curriculum matching: Decisions on recognition of outcomes from a learning period in another Member State are taken by the educational institutions. The system for recognition is defined in the Executive Order on individual competence assessment in relation to subjects in general adult education and in the general upper secondary educations (IKV Executive Order). Thus, while the recognition itself is the competence of the provider, there are system-level guidelines in place.
Estonia	Outcomes from a learning period abroad are not automatically nor fully recognised from any Member States (exception: school-to-school partnerships): No automatic or full recognition, pupils must often repeat the term/year at the home institution, transfer from one school to another complicated even within the country.
Finland	Outcomes from a learning period abroad are automatically and fully recognised from all EU Member States and for almost all learning periods up to one year: Secondary education institutions are obliged by law to examine, identify and recognise prior learning that corresponds to the goals and contents of the curriculum (in general upper secondary education) / the vocational competence requirements or key competence requirements in the national qualification requirements or education and training requirements (in VET). This applies to the recognition of learning periods completed abroad or elsewhere in Finland, and it is stipulated by law (Act on general upper secondary education 714/2018 section 27). Recognition of study-abroad periods in upper-secondary education is a competence of the provider and governed by interinstitutional agreements between the sending and the receiving institution. Recognition is based on study points: upper secondary school is not based on year levels but study points, pupils can get recognition for curriculum matching parts of their studies abroad in form of study points.
France	For general upper secondary education, outcomes from a learning period abroad are not automatically nor fully recognised from any Member States (exception: school-to-school partnerships). Recognition of learning periods abroad during upper secondary education (general and technological) is possible only in the framework of the Erasmus + and OFAJ programmes. For pupils participating in exchange programmes which take place outside of these two programmes, there is as yet no possibility for recognition of the learning period abroad.

	Recent reforms in VET in 2019 have aimed to facilitate the mobility of VET students, with recognition based on learning agreements between VET schools prior to mobility. Part of a training period required to take the examination for a professional diploma to be carried out in a professional environment can be carried out in professional organisations abroad, in particular within the framework of EU programmes, and there is now a national legal framework for the examination and recognition of learning outcomes obtained during such mobility periods. In addition, an optional 'mobility unit' has been created, which makes it possible to validate general and transversal professional achievements assessed during a mobility period abroad and which leads to a so-called MobilitéPro certificate being attached to the learner's diploma.
Germany	Outcomes from a learning period abroad are recognised after an official procedure based on curriculum matching: Automatic recognition 'on probation' does exist in many 'Länder'. School-based decisions are based on curriculum comparison and matching. A student's ability to follow classes at the next higher level is taken into account. There is the possibility to voluntarily 'stay in the lower-class level' upon return, not classified as 'repeating the class', however (more like 'gap year').
Greece	Outcomes from a learning period abroad are not automatically nor fully recognised from any Member States (exception: school-to-school partnerships): Programmes are not offered, even in the context of school-to-school partnerships, including Erasmus+ school-to-school partnerships, unless there is a governmental level bilateral agreement, learning outcomes of learning periods abroad in secondary education are not recognised. However, schools at all levels have been participating in the Erasmus+ programme and, as such, have been involved in both educational staff and pupil mobility.
Hungary	Outcomes from a learning period abroad are recognised after an official procedure based on curriculum matching: Recognition of learning periods is based on curriculum matching: Knowledge from learning period abroad is assessed in comparison to national curriculum. In case of a mobility within a school-to-school partnership (e.g. Erasmus+) learning agreements can be used as tool for recognition (but are not necessarily recognised successfully).
Ireland	Outcomes from a learning period abroad are not automatically nor fully recognised from any Member States with the exception of school-to-school partnerships, typically in an IVET context where ECVET applies. National guidelines and policies are available for ECVET for credit and Erasmus+ exchange programmes as for HE arrangements and are recognised including for awards purposes. Regulations for studying abroad and for recognition are made therefore on Institutional level. Within general education it is acknowledged that the informal learning outcomes derived from cultural and mobility exchanges are strongly acknowledged and highly valued while not formally documented or recognised.
Italy	Outcomes from a learning period abroad are automatically recognised provided they are coherent with the learning objectives specified in the National Guidelines for upper secondary education (<i>Licei</i>): Students may still be required to take exams for certain subjects, which is at the discretion of the educational institutions.
Latvia	Outcomes from a learning period abroad are recognised after an official procedure based on curriculum matching: Recognition of foreign degrees and of periods of study abroad. In case of school-to-school partnerships (e.g. Erasmus+) the learning agreement between sending and hosting institution can be used as recognition tool for programmes with a duration up to one school year. There are internal regulations in place for each educational institution.
Lithuania	Most outcomes from a learning period abroad are automatically and fully recognised but some additional exams might be necessary for a number of

	subjects, for learning periods of up to one year – Based on the Order No. ISAK-556 of the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports dated 5 April 2005 (with subsequent amendments, the latest valid version of 1 January 2023), points 10-11.
Luxembourg	Outcomes from a learning period abroad are not automatically nor fully recognised from any Member States (exception: school-to-school partnerships): There are currently no agreements or mobility programmes for pupils in upper secondary education. Learning periods abroad are not automatically recognised, although the national qualifications framework does indicate the possibility of recognising 'experiential learning'. In upper secondary education recognition procedures for this kind of experience take place at the institutional level – if necessary, in collaboration with an expert commission from the national Ministry for Children, Education and Youth.
Malta	Outcomes from a learning period abroad are not automatically nor fully recognised from any Member States (exception: school-to-school partnerships): There is no legislation regulating the mobility of pupils. If pupils go abroad, it is up to them to ensure that they will be able to catch up and pass the annual exams. There is no information available whether learning agreements between sending and hosting institution can be used as tool for recognition.
Netherlands	Outcomes from a learning period abroad are not automatically nor fully recognised from any Member States (exception: school-to-school partnerships): Recognition decisions are made individually by schools and not automated. Therefore, not much is known about recognition of study abroad periods in secondary education in the Netherlands (e.g. which procedures are followed by secondary education institutions). NL NARIC is starting a project on this (i.e. how is it done in practice, and can lessons from higher education practices be useful?).
Poland	Outcomes from a learning period abroad are not automatically nor fully recognised from any Member States (exception: school-to-school partnerships): Recognition of learning periods abroad is based on institutional decisions (by the principal), often including additional assessment. Some decisions are based on inter-institutional agreements, as in Erasmus+ partnerships. However, there are no national, standardised regulations or guidelines available.
Portugal	Outcomes from a learning period abroad are automatically and fully recognised from all EU Member States for learning periods of one year: Recognition by the Directorate-General for Education (DGE) or directly by a public secondary school. The DGE recognises and certifies the equivalence of the learning period abroad. An average mark is attributed, based on the transcript of results received abroad. The system is not based on curriculum matching but acknowledges that school curricula are different across countries. This only applies to learning periods abroad of one school year. For shorter periods, the procedure is up to the individual school.
Romania	Most outcomes from a learning period abroad are automatically and fully recognised, but some additional exams might be necessary: Either the applicant or the school where the applicant wants to continue their studies can apply to the county school inspectorate in order to get learning periods during upper-secondary education recognised. When it comes to recognizing a mobility period in upper secondary education, Romania recognises the level, i.e., for every year of study abroad one year of studies is recognised. In some cases (about 25%) students are required to be assessed on subjects they have not studied abroad.
Slovakia	Outcomes from a learning period abroad are recognised after an official procedure based on curriculum matching: Learning periods abroad are recognised based on an individual basis (results transcript). Assessment on basis of curriculum matching of subject studied abroad with national curriculum.

Slovenia	Outcomes from a learning period abroad are recognised after an official procedure based on curriculum matching: Learning periods abroad are individually recognised by the school council and teachers' board, based on curriculum matching/comparison with the curriculum. A personal education plan is developed for students being abroad between 6 months and a year. Students might have to be reassessed in some or all subjects. Learning agreements in Erasmus+ mobilities projects between sending and the host organisation (secondary schools) can be used as tools for the recognition of learning periods abroad.
Spain	Outcomes from a learning period abroad are recognised after an official procedure based on curriculum matching: Recognition of periods abroad is based on bilateral agreements, mobility programs or, where this is not applicable, a comparison between sending and host school curricula and transcripts.
Sweden	Outcomes from a learning period abroad are not automatically nor fully recognised from any Member States (exception: school-to-school partnerships): Learning periods abroad outside of school partnerships are not recognised. In case of a mobility within a school-to-school partnership (e.g. Erasmus+) learning agreements can be used as tool for recognition (learning outcomes can potentially be recognised, but this is not necessarily the case).

6. Conclusions and recommendations

This chapter presents a summary of the main findings of the evaluation and associated recommendations.

6.1 Understanding of the CR (KEQ1)

A solid understanding of the meaning of AMR is required for an appropriate implementation of the CR. While understanding on the level of national authorities improved significantly, institutions both in **higher education** and **upper secondary education and training** lack a clear grasp of the meaning of AMR as per the CR and how it differs from other models of recognition that currently exist in the EU. This is particularly the case for AMR of qualifications, where the meaning of 'automatic' is not well understood and the difference between recognition and admission is not always appreciated by stakeholders, many of whom have a central role in recognition practices. There is also confusion among stakeholders regarding the legal implications around automatic recognition and the rights it gives to applicants or the possibilities to apply additional admission criteria. Some stakeholders in fact mistook 'simplified' and faster or digitalised recognition procedures for 'automatic'.

Stakeholders, particularly in **higher education**, also reported to be unclear as to how different developments around recognition, such as the Lisbon Recognition Convention, the Bologna process, and the CR fit together.

The above situation leads to lack of clarity regarding the measures that need to be put in place to implement AMR as defined in the CR, and to inconsistent decisions between, institutions and even between study programmes within the same institution. This, in turn, affects the level of effectiveness in the implementation of the CR.

Recommendation (HEIs and SEIs, European institutions, National Ministries, NARIC - short term):

To increase the effectiveness of the implementation of the CR, further efforts should be placed on clarifying to stakeholders at institution level a) the meaning of AMR, as defined in the CR, its legal implications, and b) how the CR relates to other policy developments in the area of recognition. The value of AMR (for example, in terms of facilitating mobility and thereby a more diverse student population, the development of employability and intercultural skills, exposure to new ideas and the promotion of the values of diversity, tolerance and democratic participation) and the specific value of AMR vis-à-vis other models of recognition need to be communicated also to institutions and learners. Particular progress is required at the **upper secondary level**, where some of the benefits of AMR can be more difficult for institutions to identify, as they have fewer incentives to attract international students than is the case for HEIs. Whether the use of new terminology, as for example 'automatic equivalence of qualifications' – in terms of their level- could contribute to improve stakeholders' understanding should also be explored.

6.2 Supporting tools for transparency and trust (KEQ2)

The CR makes reference to the role of supporting tools, in particular transparency tools and related initiatives (such as the European credit transfer systems, Diploma Supplement, course catalogues, the EQF, the use of the Learning Outcomes approach, ESG – Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area) and QA systems, in increasing mutual trust and facilitating AMR. The CR also notes the need for provision of national guidance for the use of these tools to HE and upper secondary institutions. The use of European transparency tools has gradually expanded in the last

five years, particularly in the area of **higher education**. The evaluation surveys show that amongst these tools, the use of credit systems is particularly high.

Various positive developments have taken place in recent years. The alignment of National Qualification Frameworks (NQFs) with the EQF and the QF-EHEA across the EU has improved; there have been developments such as the overhaul of the Europass platform in 2020 to enhance synergy and interoperability between EU transparency tools (and allow users to compare qualifications across different European countries), or the digitalisation of the Diploma and Certificate Supplement via Europass. Further projects are currently underway to expand the use of digital credentials via the new Europass platform.

Overall, the implementation of transparency tools across EU27 has reached a good level of completion. As a direct action resulting from the Recommendation, the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) launched the Database of External Quality Assurance Results (DEQAR) in 2018 to ensure direct access to the reports and decisions of EQAR-registered agencies. At present, most but not all Member States have at least one national quality assurance agency registered with the EQAR. The rigid nature of national education and training systems means that they can remain course-based rather than focused on learning outcomes – particularly in **upper secondary education and training**. Often, internal and external quality assurance systems do not cover recognition.

Recommendation (European institutions - short term): As European transparency tools evolve it is important that they take awareness raising and facilitation of AMR into account. For example, the Europass platform can explicitly link the mapping of qualifications in different countries to “how to” get your qualification recognised in different EU countries, where AMR is in place and provide information on what this means for undertaking further studies abroad within the EU.

Recommendation (National QA agencies, HEIs and SEIs - short term): The links between recognition and internal and external QA need to be enhanced, so that recognition procedures become a more important and visible part in regular QA processes. In some countries, there is a need to ensure the registration of national organisations involved in QA with EQAR, and more needs to be done to ensure the correct use of ECTS (in line with the 2015 ECTS Users’ Guide).

Recommendation (National Ministries, HEIs and SEIs - medium term): There is a need to ensure that AMR is supported by well-functioning and swift verification systems. Unduly long verification processes would be incoherent with and even defeat the purpose of Automatic Mutual Recognition.

Recommendation (European institutions, National Ministries, HEIs and SEIs - medium term): Further action is required to ensure the implementation and a more robust use of transparency tools and the Learning Outcomes approach. This may take the role of provision of guidance (on Learning Outcomes) but also regulatory incentives (for example in the context of programme and module approval or renewal processes) to ensure implementation of these tools.

6.3 Implementation of the CR: legislative changes, state of play in the application of Automatic Mutual Recognition and ongoing challenges (KEQ 3, 4 and 5)

The evaluation documented legislative and policy initiatives associated with the implementation of the CR. Its results show that stakeholders find the CR to be valuable, and that educational institutions consider that it has contributed to improving their approach to recognition. However, Member State activity has varied substantially, with just under half of EU countries not having made significant changes after the adoption of

the CR. There is also variation with regards to the implementation of the CR between sectors in education (higher education and upper secondary education and training) and type of recognition (qualifications or outcomes from learning periods abroad).

While some progress has been made in the implementation of system-level automatic recognition of **higher education qualifications**, recognition is still primarily governed by bilateral and multilateral agreements, unilateral lists or 'de facto' recognition, which are not aligned with the requirements of the CR. The evaluation traffic light assessment shows that no EU country has implemented all of the requirements stated in the CR. The evaluation also documented discrepancies between legislation of recognition and practical implementation by institutions. For applicants considering studying in more than one EU country, the existence of different national system and allocation of responsibilities between different bodies is confusing. Fear of problems with recognition continues to deter some learners from participation in mobility activities.

In relation to AMR of **upper secondary education qualifications** HEIs have considerable autonomy in the development and application of recognition procedures. Institutional practices vary and it is often difficult to determine whether the recognition practice is in fact "automatic"⁶⁰. Institutional variations can potentially lead to lack of consistency and inequalities in the treatment of applicants. Only 58% of HE institutions responding to the evaluation surveys stated that they give automatic recognition to education qualifications (e.g. upper secondary level leaving certificates) obtained in any other Member State for the purposes of accessing Bachelor's level programmes. The recognition of **higher education qualifications** (bachelor's and master's degrees) for further studies, is also far from being fully automatic in many cases.

The evaluation surveys of HEIs and SEIs show that under two thirds of **HEIs** and **SEIs** give automatic recognition to credits and LOs obtained in any other Member State. Automatic recognition emerged as particularly limited in 'VET only' among **SEIs**.

The situation regarding automatic recognition of outcomes from learning periods abroad in **higher education** is positive within the Erasmus+ programme. However, not all learning achievements in other countries are recognised automatically, even within the context of the programme. Outside of the Erasmus+ programme, the situation is more problematic, as procedures in HEIs often vary, and around a fifth of HEIs surveyed for the evaluation reported that their institutions do not give automatic recognition to learning outcomes achieved abroad at all.

In the case of automatic recognition of outcomes from learning periods abroad in **upper secondary education and training**, progress has been limited. There is generally no automatic nor full recognition or only limited recognition, mainly based on provider-level decisions. More than a quarter of SEIs surveyed for the evaluation do not give automatic recognition to LOs achieved abroad under any conditions. The recognition of longer periods abroad is particularly under-developed.

The implementation of the CR has faced a number of challenges, in addition to lack of understanding -mentioned earlier in this chapter-, including low levels of political priority in Member States during the COVID-19 crisis that emerged shortly after the adoption of the CR. This temporary lack of political priority resulted in limited financial resources to advance actions in this area, as reported by stakeholders during the evaluation focus groups. There is also lack of clarity on the level of decision-making, which can be nationally centralised, centralised at the level of the institution (admissions, mobility coordinators), decentralised to departments or individual professors. The decision-making level can be different within the same country. These differences can lead to lack of transparency,

⁶⁰ See also European Education Culture Executive Agency & Eurydice, 2020b, p. 66

consistency and trust. Recognition can depend on factors such as the familiarity of the academic staff examining the case with the country where the foreign qualification was obtained.

The above findings show that substantial progress is still required in both **HEIs** and in **SEIs** in relation to both qualifications and learning outcomes obtained abroad (although particularly so in relation to periods abroad in **upper secondary education and training**) before AMR is a reality in the EU. At the current rate of progress deadline in the CR 2025 is unlikely to be achieved.

Recommendation (HEIs and SEIs, National Ministries, NARICs - medium term): The option of centralising AMR processes and procedures, e.g. along the lines of established practices for the Directive on mutual recognition of professional qualifications, merits consideration in order to improve the level of implementation of the CR and clarify decision-making responsibilities. NARICs may play a more central role than they currently do in such a system. From an efficiency point of view a more centralised system (where an institution such as NARIC deals with the recognition of foreign qualifications) would also be preferable. This system would not detract from the autonomy of educational institutions to make admission decisions but would facilitate the provision of AMR decisions to them, to inform their judgements on admissions.

Recommendation (European institutions, National Ministries, SEIs - medium term): Prioritise the introduction of actions and tools to improve the recognition of longer periods abroad in **Secondary Education Institutions** in particular **VET** institutions. These could include greater involvement of the sector in discussions around recognition, further support for mobility actions to develop mutual trust, better embedding of this type of periods within their curricula, more intensive guidance (including on the use of LOs) and further staff development.

6.4 Improving users' experience with recognition (KEQ6)

Lack of recognition continues to be a substantial barrier to mobility. In 2018, at the time of adoption of the CR, a Eurobarometer survey⁶¹ of young people in the EEA found that 91% of respondents agreed that a system for the automatic recognition of qualifications would be very or somewhat useful and a similar level of support was given to the idea of automatic and electronic transfer of credits obtained whilst studying abroad to the home university.

Less than half of the institutions surveyed for this evaluation indicated improvements in their recognition practices since the adoption of the CR. Those who did, mentioned improvements related to digitalisation, better training, and simplification of recognition procedures. Respondents to the evaluation survey of students and graduates reported a need for improvements to current recognition processes, including greater simplification and reduction in bureaucracy, indicating that recognition is not yet automatic.

The evaluation also found that in those institutions where automatic recognition is not applied, the average time to obtain a decision on recognition requests was equal to or exceeded 4 weeks in eight Member States countries and reached more than 6 weeks in four Member States. These are, thus, substantial periods of time. The majority of respondents indicated that there is no difference in the length of the recognition process between EU27 Member States and third countries, when no AMR is applied. As such, in those cases, there is little advantage in terms of obtaining a decision for those who

⁶¹ European Commission & TNS Political & Social (2018): Flash Eurobarometer 466. The European Education Area. Brussels.

obtained their qualification in or undertook a learning period within the EU, compared to those who did it outside. Over a fifth of respondents reported a requirement for applicants to pay for non-automatic recognition processes, although this is always free in some countries.

Recommendation (European institutions, National Ministries, HEIs and SEIs - medium term): There is a need to make young people, in particular those who are not mobile, better aware of where opportunities for AMR are in place, in order to stimulate mobility and reduce the burden of its preparation. Education institutions should take more decisive collective action to move towards AMR, to achieve greater efficiency in the recognition of qualifications and periods of study abroad, as standardisation of AMR, operating at the system level, can help to mitigate the workload implications for individual education providers.

6.5 Improving the evidence base and capacity building to facilitate Automatic Mutual Recognition (KEQ7)

The CR underlines the importance of improving the evidence base and building capacity in relation to AMR, in particular on the extent and nature of recognition cases. The evaluation shows that progress on the monitoring and evaluation of recognition decisions is limited. There is scarce information on the extent and nature of recognition cases. In the countries where a central database on recognition decision exists, the data generally provides no detail on whether the recognition was automatic, as defined by the CR, or not. Robust data on access granted through AMR or number of appeals relating to recognition decisions is lacking. Many countries do not have a central database, especially when recognition decisions are decentralized and delegated to educational institutions, who may or may not keep data on recognition. Results from the survey of **HEIs** and **SEIs** suggest that monitoring of recognition is not yet a widespread practice: less than half indicated that their institution keeps records of recognition decisions for EU27 countries, in the case of both qualifications and regarding LOs obtained abroad. There are, however, very marked differences in terms of the collection of monitoring data by institutions, whereby in some countries this is a very widespread task and whereas in others it is very rare. Monitoring is somewhat higher in **HEIs** than in **SEIs**. The evaluation also found that often it is not sufficiently clear whose responsibility it is to collect data on the implementation of the CR, what systems should be used to collect data and for what purposes. Very few national databases are accessible to the public -they remain internal to the NARICs, or their access is restricted to educational institution networks- and their data are rarely used for evaluation and dissemination purposes.

Capacity building in NARICs and educational institutions is important, since they are central players in the implementation of the CR. There was evidence of dissemination of AMR and the CR in conferences and training seminars targeting educational institutions, credential evaluators, assessors of foreign qualifications, webinars or references in newsletters from national institutions, amongst other channels. In some countries students' unions also contributed to dissemination activities. Yet, knowledge of AMR and the CR is not sufficiently widespread: only around a third of the **HEIs** and **SEIs** surveyed for the evaluation indicated that they had heard about the 2018 CR.

NARICs are key players to help in building capacity at educational institutions, and in many countries offer online (and offline) services and guidance to assist with the assessment of equivalence, to both **HEIs** and to individuals. The evaluation found little evidence of increases in the resources allocated to NARICs in order to meet the additional communication activities envisaged for them in the CR. The resources devoted to the implementation of the CR are insufficient to deliver on its objectives. The evaluation focus groups evidenced that the current level of staffing in NARIC centres working on automatic

recognition is insufficient to ensure the delivery of the activities expected in the CR (in relation to gathering data, regular updating of qualification databases and information on AMR or further dissemination activities). Some NARICs noted that they lacked capacity for information dissemination and the production of new guidance and materials for institutions.

The Europass platform provides guidance for NARICs and educational and training institutions on the tools it offers, such as the Diploma Supplement, Certificate Supplement or the EQF database. Projects driving progress on AMR are mainly EU-funded, and these have provided opportunities for networking, cooperation, and exchange of experiences between stakeholders on AMR. However, some NARICs noted that greater methodological guidance and support from the EU on AMR, commensurate with the support provided in relation to initiatives such as the EQF, would provide a valuable input for their capacity building activity. They also noted that synergies with the Erasmus+ program can be further enhanced for building awareness among education providers, as the documents supporting applications for Erasmus+ mobilities can facilitate the dissemination of the CR, and that closer monitoring by the Commission on the implementation of the 2018 CR (e.g. by requiring Member States to submit implementation progress reports) could spur national authorities, NARICs and education and training institutions to better coordinate the monitoring of AMR in Member States.

Capacity building is also linked to better use of technology. Digitalisation can contribute to increasing transparency and consistency, reduce the administrative burden on users and increase efficiency in the delivery of the CR in the long term. An issue with the development of digital systems to support AR, such as online recognition databases or chatbots, is the level of resourcing required to ensure the continuing functionality of the systems.

Recommendation (European institutions, National Ministries - short term):

There is a necessity to increase investment in the capacity of NARICs to develop Automatic Mutual Recognition services and thus better contribute to the implementation of the CR. NARICs capacity did not increase substantially from the adoption of the CR and the current levels of staffing in NARICs working on automatic recognition is often insufficient to fulfil the responsibilities allocated to them by the CR in terms of guidance, data gathering and regular monitoring and dissemination on AMR. There is evidence of NARICs not being able to respond to EU funded calls related to AMR due to lack of capacity in terms of staff.

Recommendation (European institutions - short term): Study possibilities for the provision of greater methodological guidance and support on AMR to NARIC centres and to exploit synergies with the Erasmus+ programme to build awareness among education providers.

Recommendation (European institutions; National Ministries - short term):

Work towards the centralisation of data collection systems at the national level and agree on key indicators at EU level for monitoring data on recognition cases, e.g. such as the number of AMR cases by education sector and type of recognition or complaint procedures.

Recommendation (National Ministries; NARICs; HEIs and SEIs - short term):

Continue the process towards greater digitalisation in recognition to increase efficiencies in the delivery of the CR, e.g. enabling digital submission and management of documentation and underlying data, providing information advice through the use of chatbots based on advanced language models. Ensure sufficient capacities at national level to fully exploit the resources available at European level to improve recognition of qualifications and learning outcomes.

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