



**THE COMMITTEE OF THE CONVENTION ON THE RECOGNITION OF
QUALIFICATIONS CONCERNING HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE EUROPEAN REGION**

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**GUIDELINES FOR
NATIONAL ONLINE INFORMATION SYSTEMS**

Introduction

The [Lisbon Recognition Convention \(LRC\)](#) states that, in order to facilitate the recognition of qualifications, each Party shall ensure that adequate and clear information on its educational system is provided (Article III.4). This article underlines the importance of making higher education systems, as well as the education giving access to higher education, clear to the academic community, and especially to academic recognition experts and credential evaluators in other Parties. The article underlines the responsibility of the Parties for giving adequate information on their own education systems. The national information centre on recognition and mobility should play a key role in providing such information.

Each Party shall provide adequate information on any institution belonging to its higher education system, and on any programme operated by these institutions (Article VIII.1). This article requires the Parties to provide adequate information on any higher education institution belonging to their higher education system, and on the programmes operated by these institutions, in order to give other Parties the necessary background knowledge to decide whether any given qualification should be recognised.

The LRC Committee Bureau and the ENIC and NARIC Networks have focused on the provision of relevant and reliable information as a key function of national information centres:

- The LRC Committee adopted on June 9, 2004 the [Joint ENIC-NARIC Charter of Activities and Services](#), which detailed the tasks and activities of national information centres and reinforced their role in the provision of information.
- In 2001, the ELCORE group was created as a forum for facilitating the development, use and improvement of ENIC and NARIC Networks' information systems and strategic communication. ELCORE is responsible to oversee the ENIC and NARIC Networks' information systems, ensure regular updating, continual development and monitoring. These information systems include the ENIC-NARIC.net website, electronic listservs and social networking accounts. It often facilitates the organisation of workshops at the ENIC and NARIC Networks Annual Joint Meetings to support the adoption of best practices by national information centres.
- In June 2004, the 11th Joint Meeting of the ENIC and NARIC Networks adopted the [Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Information on Recognition](#). The document provided guidance to national information centres in properly fulfilling this task. Given the rapid technological developments, there is a need for revision of the code.
- The [EAR Manual](#) has been developed as part of the European Area of Recognition Project (EAR) that contains guidelines of the recognition of foreign qualifications. In 2012 in Bucharest the education ministers of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) endorsed the EAR Manual as a practical tool also for higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies.

[The Monitoring Report](#) (2016) on the Implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention analysed websites of the national information centres of the 53 Parties to the Convention that replied to the questionnaire and identified a set of key problems. These include: quality and scope of information provided, languages used, difficulties with finding necessary information even in national languages, limited information on education systems, limited information on tasks and activities of the centres, and out-of-date information. Moreover, five Parties still lack a national information centre website¹.

The main findings and recommendations of the Monitoring Report are also important in relation to the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and the commitments of the [Yerevan Communiqué \(2015\)](#) where issues of recognition, mobility and internationalization are highlighted.

In this context, the LRC Committee Bureau is requested to explore the possibility of using minimum common standards that will facilitate setting up or improving national information systems providing information on recognition, education systems and related issues.

Purpose, structure of information

These recommendations are addressed in the first place to the heads of ENIC/NARIC centres, as well as information systems managers and communication specialists. They encourage the creation or improvement of information systems (such as websites) targeted to graduates and students with foreign qualifications, higher education institutions, employers, national recognition authorities, professional organisations, and other stakeholders. It is up to the ENIC/NARIC centres to adapt the approach to their national circumstances and they can be useful for the website developers as well.

These recommendations rely on the existing extensive good practice in the development and maintenance of information systems to improve recognition and facilitate mobility and internationalization of national education.

Moreover, they intend to provide a set of common standards and principles by offering guidance for the type of information that should be included in national information systems to facilitate exchange of information and advice among countries, thus improving the quality of information. The information provided by every national information centre should be of high quality and follow a stakeholder-oriented approach, facilitating useful provision of information to potential interested parties. Thus, designing and structuring information systems and the communication strategy should be targeting stakeholders. It should allow for informed decisions by universities, employers, professional organisations, and others when dealing with foreign qualifications.

¹ National website refers to websites maintained by a national information centre.

Furthermore, the information should be accessible in terms of the technological platform, content, language and style, be accurate and up to date. It should be based as far as possible on the information provided by competent sources. Effectiveness of the national information system and its communication strategy should be based on clear messaging, user friendly and straightforward construction, especially for website navigation.

National ENIC/NARIC information systems: Purpose, content and technical platform

Typically information systems (including websites) of the national information centres provide information on the national higher education system and legislation, recognition of qualifications — including the Lisbon Recognition Convention and its subsidiary texts —, various transparency tools, other types of information depending on the tasks of the centers. In the majority of cases, this information is provided in the national language and in English. As mentioned above, the information provided should target the relevant stakeholders. Since the remit of the ENIC/NARIC centres varies significantly, this chapter will not offer detailed guidance on which information is relevant for the different stakeholders but rather concentrate on providing guidance on the minimum requirements of relevant content. Thus, it is at the discretion of centres to organise the content according to the needs of their relevant stakeholders, as well as their communication strategy. National information systems should provide information or links to information at least on the following:

1. General information about the ENIC/NARIC centres:

- *Mission and main functions;*
- *Legal status and competences of the national information centre and its place in the structure of the governance of national education system;*
- *Contact details (e.g. location, telephone number, e-mail, social networking account if applicable).*

This part should briefly describe the status of the national information centre, its mission and main functions. It should provide either regulatory documents (e.g. charter, government acts) related to their legal status or the corresponding links. It should be explicit on the competences and responsibilities carried by the national information centre (e.g. binding decisions and/or advice). Since the scope of functions and tasks carried by the national information centres varies considerably, this part can be more inclusive. It may contain information on the organisation structure and its governance, staff, development strategy, etc.

The relation to the ENIC and NARIC Networks as the main international platform for exchange of information and practices on the recognition of qualifications between the ENIC/NARIC centres should be described.

2. Information on the recognition of qualifications should include:

- *Lisbon Recognition Convention;*
- *Subsidiary texts to the Convention;*

- *National legislation on recognition and information on general procedures and criteria for the assessment of foreign qualifications;*
- *Information on application procedures with application forms, documentation and translation requirements, expected case processing time, appeal procedures;*
- *Academic and professional recognition;*
- *National regulations for regulated professions, list of regulated professions and competent recognition bodies and/or national assistance centres for EU Directive 2005/36/EC.*

Even though many ENIC/NARIC centres have no specific role regarding the recognition of qualifications in regulated professions, information systems should provide information and links to relevant competent authorities.

It should provide complete information on the methodology and procedures in the recognition of qualifications based on commonly agreed standards and guidelines. More coherent and transparent recognition practices are important in facilitating student mobility within and outside UNESCO Europe Region. National information centres should carefully reflect on the needs of the stakeholders and, as far as possible, adapt the information provided to the individual groups as well as the selected technological platform used to disseminate the information. Taking into account the diversity of national situations, the key target groups are likely to include individuals seeking recognition of their qualifications or planning to study/work abroad, public authorities, quality assurance agencies, higher education institutions, employers, professional organisations, competent recognition bodies, ENIC/NARIC centres in other countries, etc.

Taking into account the number of refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation who seek recognition of their qualifications in the convention area, many centers include brief information on recognition issues for refugees. In cases where individuals are unable to provide documentary evidence to support the qualification recognition process, there should be more specific information on how to proceed for the assessment and recognition procedures, as well as the policy in place. The information should include how to apply, alternative documents required, applicable fees (if any), expected timelines for processing, criteria for assessment and appeal procedures.

Information systems can also include reporting on activities of the centers, with key figures in main areas of activity to highlight service delivery standards and promote public accountability. They should also include key publications on recognition issues that are endorsed by the ENIC and NARIC Networks. Information regarding projects and initiatives that the ENIC/NARIC centres are leading and/or are taking part in should be included as well.

Links to national or sub national education bodies, quality assurance agencies, and the ENIC and NARIC Networks should be provided, with reference to other national and international sources of information:

- Publications, other relevant information, capacity-building resources;
- Frequently asked questions;

- Useful links to various stakeholders;
- Information system search functionality, offering users the possibility to easily locating information.

3. Information on education systems and higher education institutions

Information on the education system of a country and its higher education institutions has a two-fold purpose: on the one hand, it is an overview of the present education system; on the other hand, a majority of the ENIC/NARIC centres are using the information to promote studying in their countries.

This part should describe the national system and preferably include its diagram. The information should include both access qualifications and higher education qualifications. Existing education pathways should be clearly reflected.

The information should comprise:

- Legal regulatory framework for higher education system;
- Types of higher education institutions and programmes;
- National and/or sub-national qualifications frameworks;
- Types of awarded qualifications including joint degrees;
- Diploma Supplement or similar documents;
- Types of access qualifications and information on access requirements;
- Education pathways for each level;
- Credit system(s);
- National grading system(s);
- Quality assurance system;
- List of recognised higher education institutions;
- List of accredited programmes where relevant;
- Transnational education and list of institutions.

The information provided should be systematically described and updated. It should be accessible within a single information source or via a single entry point to ensure its best use. It is recommended to include information on previous education system and qualifications.

4. Other important considerations

ENIC/NARIC centres should follow international best practices recommendations for making their online content more accessible to targeted audiences, including wider range of people with disabilities.

New technological solutions enhance the quality and efficiency of their services. Some best practices using new information technologies by some national information centers are outlined below. For applicants seeking a qualification assessment:

- An online electronic application system to request an assessment;
- An electronic payment system for services (if fees are applied);

- Obtain information on qualifications previously assessed and placed within their respective education system, if applicable.

For the community of credential evaluators and other recognition experts involved in qualification assessment and recognition at the national level:

- Electronic mailing list (listserv) or online forums to enable the exchange of information;
- Password-protected section of the national website, providing access to additional tools and resources to support the community; the development and delivery of online training.

To support the ENIC/NARIC centres' efficient internal processes:

- *internal systems to digitalise, store, process and archive applicants' documents in a format respecting national legislation;*
- *internal database to compile and provide the ability to search the list of qualification assessment decisions previously processed by the national centre, which can support decision consistency for newly submitted applications;*
- *internal customer relationship management (CRM) system to track and respond to enquiries from applicants, stakeholders and the general public. The CRM system could be used to track applicants' general satisfaction and comments on service improvement for future applicants.*

With the increasing impact of the social economy, ENIC/NARIC centres can also adopt the use of social networking platforms (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc.) as additional tools for the dissemination and exchange of information in public and/or in private fora. ENIC/NARIC centres may also create their own social networking solution and provide access to specific national subject-matter experts.

Some ENIC/NARIC centres may also need to abide by legislation that requires explicitly consent from its users to store, retrieve or share private information with other parties and/or on an electronic device.

Furthermore, the advancement of information technologies at an increasingly rapid pace and the wider internet connectivity enable new innovative approaches for ENIC/NARIC centres in the dissemination of information, data collection, its processing and storing.