



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Organisation
des Nations Unies
pour l'éducation,
la science et la culture

Organización
de las Naciones Unidas
para la Educación,
la Ciencia y la Cultura

Организация
Объединенных Наций по
вопросам образования,
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منظمة الأمم المتحدة
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、
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CONSOLIDATED REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 1993 RECOMMENDATION ON THE RECOGNITION OF STUDIES AND QUALIFICATIONS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

OUTLINE

Background: In accordance with the procedures adopted in 2007 for the monitoring of the implementation of UNESCO conventions and recommendations for which no specific institutional mechanism is provided (177 EX/Decision 35 (I)), the Executive Board has adopted a multi-stage procedure for the monitoring of the implementation of these standard-setting instruments, including the Recommendation on the Recognition of Studies and Qualifications in Higher Education (1993).

Purpose: Pursuant to 36 C/Resolution 12 and in compliance with the timetable for 2014-2017 of work of the Committee on Conventions and Recommendations of the Executive Board (CR) on the implementation of these standard-setting instruments (195 EX/Decision 15) and 197 EX/Decision 20(VI), the Director-General submits to the 38th session of the General Conference the consolidated report on the implementation of this Recommendation and the comments of the Executive Board thereon.

Decision required: Paragraph 7.

I. Background

1. In accordance with the procedures adopted in 2007 for the monitoring of the implementation of UNESCO conventions and recommendations for which no specific institutional mechanism is provided (177 EX/Decision 35 (I)), the Executive Board has adopted a multi-stage procedure for the monitoring of the implementation of these standard-setting instruments, including the Recommendation on the Recognition of Studies and Qualifications in Higher Education (1993).
2. Pursuant to 36 C/Resolution 12 and in compliance with the timetable for 2014-2017 of work of the Committee on Conventions and Recommendations of the Executive Board (CR) on the implementation of these standard-setting instruments (195 EX/Decision 15) and 197 EX/Decision 20 Part VI, the Director-General submits to the 38th session of the General Conference the consolidated report on the implementation of this Recommendation and the comments of the Executive Board thereon.
3. At the 196th session, the Executive Board decided to defer to its 197th session discussion of this item, upon a recommendation by the CR Committee, which did not have the time needed for its consideration.

II. Comments of the Executive Board

4. The Executive Board at its 197th session examined the document 'Application of the 1993 Recommendation on the Recognition of Studies and Qualifications in Higher Education' (197 EX/20 Part VI annexed hereto) which reports on the implementation of this international framework which addresses interregional issues relating to recognition of higher education qualifications and quality assurance in the global context.
5. The Executive Board highlighted the importance of recognition of qualification in higher education. The Regional High-Level Ministerial meeting on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education in the Latin America and the Caribbean region (Brasilia, 8-9 October 2015) was highlighted by a number of members of the Board as a positive initiative on the way forward to revitalizing the regional convention. An inquiry was made on the process of modernizing the regional Convention in the Arab States.
6. A number of members of the Executive Board expressed their support to the possible global convention on the recognition of higher education qualifications. It was highlighted that such global convention should be flexible and be inter-connected with the existing regional conventions.

III. Proposed Resolution

7. The General Conference may wish to adopt a resolution along the lines of the recommendation of the Executive Board (197 EX/Decision 20 (VI) annexed hereto):

The General Conference,

Recalling that at its 27th session (Paris, 1993) it adopted the Recommendation on the Recognition of Studies and qualifications in Higher Education,

Also recalling that by means of 34 C/Resolution 87 it identified the Recommendation on the Recognition of Studies and Qualifications in Higher Education as a priority to be monitored by the UNESCO Secretariat,

Further recalling 36 C/Resolution 12,

Recalling 177 EX/Decision 35 (I), 195 EX/Decision 15, 196 EX/Decision 20 and 197 EX/Decision 20 (VI),

1. *Takes note* of the consolidated report on the implementation of the 1993 Recommendation on the Recognition of Studies and Qualifications in Higher Education contained in 38 C/72;
2. *Welcomes* the progress made in the revision of the regional conventions on recognition in higher education;
3. *Invites* all Member States to strengthen their efforts to ensure the full and comprehensive implementation of the 1993 Recommendation;
4. *Invites* the Director-General to:
 - (a) continue to promote the development of successful infrastructure for implementation of the 1993 Recommendation through the six conventions on recognition in higher education;
 - (b) provide technical support to Member States to facilitate recognition across all regions; and
 - (c) continue monitoring as a priority the 1993 Recommendation, particularly in the context of the revisions to the regional conventions on recognition in higher education,
5. *Invites* the Director-General to transmit to it at its 40th session, the next consolidated report on the implementation of this recommendation and *decides* to inscribe this item in the agenda of its 40th session.

Decision 197 EX/20 (VI)

**Application of the 1993 Recommendation on the Recognition
of Studies and Qualifications in Higher Education**

The Executive Board,

1. Having examined document 197 EX/20 Part VI,
2. Invites the Director-General to transmit document 197 EX/20 Part VI to the General Conference at its 38th session, together with the Executive Board's observations and any observations or comments that the Director-General may wish to make;
3. Recommends that the General Conference adopt the following draft resolution:

The General Conference,

Recalling that at its 27th session (Paris, 1993) it adopted the Recommendation on the Recognition of Studies and Qualifications in Higher Education,

Also recalling that by means of 34 C/Resolution 87 it identified the Recommendation on the Recognition of Studies and Qualifications in Higher Education as a priority to be monitored by the UNESCO Secretariat ,

Further recalling 36 C/Resolution 12,

Recalling 177 EX/Decision 35 (I), 195 EX/Decision 15 and 196 EX/Decision 20,

1. *Takes note* of the consolidated report on the implementation of the 1993 Recommendation on the Recognition of Studies and Qualifications in Higher Education;
2. *Welcomes* the progress made in the revision of the regional conventions on the recognition of studies and qualifications in higher education;
3. *Invites* all Member States to strengthen their efforts to ensure the full and comprehensive implementation of the 1993 Recommendation on the Recognition of Studies and Qualifications in Higher Education;
4. *Invites* the Director-General to:
 - (a) continue to promote the development of successful infrastructure for implementation of the 1993 Recommendation on the Recognition of Studies and Qualifications in Higher Education through the six conventions on the recognition of studies and qualifications in higher education;
 - (b) provide technical support to Member States to facilitate the recognition of studies and qualifications across all regions;
 - (c) continue monitoring as a priority the 1993 Recommendation, particularly in the context of the revision of the regional conventions on the recognition of studies and qualifications in higher education;

5. *Also invites* the Director-General to transmit to it at its 40th session, the next consolidated report on the implementation of the 1993 Recommendation on the Recognition of Studies and Qualifications in Higher Education and *decides* to inscribe this item in the agenda of its 40th session.



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Executive Board

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197 EX/20 Part VI

PARIS, 10 August 2015
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IMPLEMENTATION OF STANDARD-SETTING INSTRUMENTS

PART VI

APPLICATION OF THE 1993 RECOMMENDATION ON THE RECOGNITION OF STUDIES AND QUALIFICATIONS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

SUMMARY

In accordance with the procedures adopted in 2007 for the monitoring of the implementation of UNESCO conventions and recommendations for which no specific institutional mechanism is provided (177 EX/Decision 35 (I)), the Executive Board has adopted a multi-stage procedure for the monitoring of the implementation of these standard-setting instruments, including the Recommendation on the Recognition of Studies and Qualifications in Higher Education (1993).

Pursuant to 36 C/Resolution 12 and in compliance with the timetable for 2014-2017 of work of the Committee on Conventions and Recommendations on the implementation of these standard-setting instruments (195 EX/Decision 15), the Director-General submits to the Executive Board the consolidated report on the implementation of this Recommendation, before its transmission to the 38th session of the General Conference.

At the 196th session, the Executive Board decided to defer to its 197th session discussion of this item, upon a recommendation by the CR Committee, which did not have the time needed for its consideration.

The financial or administrative implications related to this document are covered in document 37 C/5.

Action expected of the Executive Board: Proposed decision in paragraph 25.

Introduction

1. Adopted by UNESCO's General Conference at its 27th session in 1993, the Recommendation on the Recognition of Studies and Qualifications in Higher Education (hereinafter referred to as the "1993 Recommendation" or "the Recommendation") is an international framework to address interregional issues relating to recognition of higher education qualifications and quality assurance in the global context.

2. The 1993 Recommendation underscores the fundamental principle that knowledge is universal and part of the common heritage of humankind, and it promotes greater accessibility to knowledge and learning. It calls for mutual recognition of studies and qualifications in higher education by all competent authorities and institutions and provides opportunities for continued engagement of and cooperation among various stakeholders of higher education. It also recalls the responsibility of Member States to provide education as a human right and emphasizes the need for concerted policy and planning.

3. The "1993 Recommendation" contains provisions for establishing mechanisms and procedures to harmonize degrees, qualifications and standards, ensure quality, and to carry out fair and expeditious assessments of skills and competencies. The 1993 Recommendation recalls that five regional conventions and one interregional convention on recognition in higher education have already been established under the auspices of UNESCO. A total of 139 Member States are signatory to at least one regional convention on recognition in higher education, while 30 Member States are Parties to more than one regional or interregional convention. In compliance with 34 C/Resolution 87, the UNESCO Secretariat monitors the 1993 Recommendation as a matter of priority, and assesses it primarily through monitoring of the implementation of the regional and interregional conventions on the recognition of studies, diplomas and degrees in higher education.

4. To keep pace with the rapidly changing global higher education landscape, UNESCO has collaborated closely with Member States, key partners and other relevant higher education stakeholders to revise the regional conventions. To date, three regional conventions have been revised and adopted, namely (i) the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region ("Lisbon Recognition Convention") which was conducted jointly with the Council of Europe (Lisbon, Portugal, 1997); (ii) the Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education (Tokyo, Japan, 2011); and (iii) the Revised Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Certificates, Diplomas, Degrees and Other Academic Qualifications in Higher Education in African States (Addis-Ababa, Ethiopia, 2014).

5. This "new generation" of recognition conventions integrates several key principles, namely a shift in favour of applicants; the development of transparent, coherent and reliable procedures; granting recognition unless substantial differences are identified; information-sharing and networking at the expert level; and development of codes of good practice or recommendations and guidelines, in addition to a solid legal framework.

Implementation of the 1993 Recommendation

6. **The Revised Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Certificates, Diplomas, Degrees and Other Academic Qualifications in Higher Education in African States:** The Revised Convention for the African States was adopted at the International Conference of States (Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, December 2014). Organized with the support of the Kingdom of Norway and the People's Republic of China, the conference brought together representatives from 48 Member States, of which 42 from the African region. At the close of the conference, 15 African Member States and the Holy See signed the Revised Convention.

7. The Revised Convention integrates elements and sections dealing with competent recognition authorities; basic principles related to the assessment of qualifications; partial studies,

validation of acquired professional experience and prior learning; and implementing structures and mechanisms. It will enter into force after 10 Member States of the African region have expressed their consent to be bound by it, and in this regard the African Union Commission and UNESCO are collaborating closely to raise the awareness of countries in the region to the Revised Convention and to launch internal processes leading to its ratification.

8. Through the implementation of the Revised Convention, African countries will be able to facilitate greater exchange and mobility of students, as well as of teachers and researchers; promote more effective use of human resources throughout the continent; strengthen effective quality assurance and accreditation mechanisms at the national, regional and continental levels; and contribute to the construction of an African higher education and research area.

9. UNESCO is developing a strategy to support the implementation of the Revised Convention. Work towards implementation started at the conference in Addis Ababa with the organization of a workshop focusing on experiences and good practices from other regions regarding key implementation aspects, and with a pre-conference event to promote dialogue, networking and the sharing of knowledge and good practices on quality assurance.

10. **The Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in the Arab States:** Adopted in 1978, the Regional Convention has to date been ratified by 14 Member States.

11. Meetings of the Convention Committee are instrumental in raising awareness of the importance of quality assurance and the need to nurture a culture of quality in higher education within the region. The Convention Committee has initiated work to revise the Regional Convention. However, while recognizing that it is a valuable mechanism in coordinating regional efforts on recognition in higher education, quality assurance, and enhanced networking and sharing of knowledge and good practices, Member States have not been able to commit themselves to provisions included in the proposed revised text of the Regional Convention. Current regional implementation mechanisms for recognition of qualifications in higher education are mostly bilateral in nature. Since several countries still lack the appropriate national bodies to carry out the task, the need for recognition of higher education diplomas, studies and degrees has become even more pronounced in view of the current regional context.

12. To support policy and practice recognition-related fields, UNESCO has been developing a *Regional Higher Education Policy Framework and Resource Pack* to be finalized in 2015. It aims to provide conceptual clarification with regard to higher education and quality assurance in the context of the Arab countries, with emphasis on the overall linkages between different higher education components. The issue of recognition of qualifications in higher education is addressed both in the conceptual part, as well as in the Resource Pack, through comparisons of existing regional conventions and recommendations, and implementation mechanisms to ensure that these instruments help enhance higher education quality. The Framework and Resource Pack also provide information on promising practices and is a starting point to identify and discuss new trends, challenges and obstacles towards enhancing the quality of higher education in the region.

13. UNESCO's work in this region also includes supporting Member States to establish national information centres on recognition and providing training on recognition principles, procedures and practices. Furthermore, UNESCO contributes to relevant regional initiatives in focusing on the recognition of refugees' qualifications and the harmonization of quality assurance and quality outcomes as a prerequisite for more effective and reliable recognition processes.

14. **Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in Asia and the Pacific:** Adopted in 1983, the Regional Convention was ratified by 21 Member States. The Revised Regional Convention, which was adopted in Tokyo, Japan in 2011, will enter into force after five Member States of the Asia-Pacific region have expressed their

consent to be bound by it. To date, only Australia and the People's Republic of China have deposited the related ratification instrument with UNESCO.

15. The Convention Committee monitors the implementation of the 1983 Convention notably through the annual collection and analysis of reports submitted by State Parties and Non-State Parties on progress achieved and obstacles encountered. The Committee follows closely progress made at the country level regarding the ratification of the 2011 Revised Regional Convention and helps to raise awareness of Member States on the importance of establishing a common academic infrastructure to support the implementation of the 1983 Regional Convention. Moreover, the Committee examines and adopts tools to support Member States' implementation and serves as a platform for sharing information on policies and good practices relevant to the recognition of qualifications in higher education such as the development of national qualifications frameworks, subject benchmarks or programme specifications and quality assurance.

16. The Convention Committee acknowledges that, with the growing cross-border mobility of students in the Asia and the Pacific region, a fair process is needed to evaluate foreign credentials in a consistent manner. Recognizing the substantial diversity that exists within the region, Parties and Non-Parties to the 1983 Convention work together to advance the implementation of the norms and principles embodied in the text. To facilitate this process, quality tools have been developed to support cross-border mobility of students across the region. The latest such tool, which was discussed and adopted at the 2014 Convention Committee meeting (Colombo, Sri Lanka, August 2014), is the *Guidelines for the Establishment of National Information Centres*. Other regional tools under consideration include guidelines on national qualifications frameworks; guidelines for developing national subject-specific quality standards; guidelines on study programme development; or guidelines on credit transfer and accumulation systems.

17. The **Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region** (Lisbon Recognition Convention) was adopted in 1997. To date, 53 Member States have ratified the Convention, thus achieving almost full regional coverage.

18. UNESCO is co-secretariat of the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC) together with the Council of Europe and supports the work of the Convention Committee. Concretely, this collaboration helped finalize a subsidiary text on the use of qualifications frameworks for recognition purposes, which was subsequently adopted by the LRC Committee in June 2013. For the period 2013-2015, the LRC Committee decided to focus on reviewing the subsidiary text on recommendation on the recognition of joint degree, and on monitoring the implementation of the LRC through a survey built around specific provisions in the Convention.

19. Together with the Council of Europe, UNESCO is also co-secretariat of the European Network of Information Centres (ENIC) in the European region, while the European Commission is secretariat to the National Academic Recognition Information Centres in the European Union (NARIC). The ENIC-NARIC network comprises information centres of all States Parties to the Lisbon Convention and is an essential implementation tool to the LRC. These centres are generally responsible for providing opinions and information on documents of higher education obtained abroad, information on recognition procedures and the higher education system, and assisting applicants seeking recognition of higher education qualifications. UNESCO supports the work of the ENIC-NARIC networks, in particular the organization of their joint annual meetings, development of tools, as well as interregional cooperation in the field of recognition. With support from UNESCO, a new section entitled "UNESCO Regions" was included in the new ENIC-NARIC website launched in 2014.

20. The **Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean** was adopted in 1974, and to date, it has been ratified by 19 Member States. The Regional Convention represents a step forward towards the gradual harmonization of education systems in the region. Its implementation was hindered by issues, such as provisions regarding recognition for professional purposes, the lack of specific

terminology in assessing qualifications, and differences in evaluating skills and competences developed outside higher education institutions.

21. The level of ratification may be considered as an indication of regional Member States' interest for a supranational normative instrument on recognition in higher education. Most countries in the region favour bilateral agreements, though not all countries have signed agreements on the mutual recognition of academic qualifications with each other. In this regard, the Convention Committee worked to find common solutions to these issues and to foster further ratifications, and subsequently drafted a revised convention at its 12th Ordinary Meeting in El Salvador in 2006.

22. The International Institute for Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (IESALC) is the Secretariat to the Regional Recognition Convention for Latin America and the Caribbean. The Institute has put in place a strategy to collaborate closely with governments of the region to solicit their input and support for the future development of the Regional Convention, which includes a roadmap to update this policy instrument. It has also conducted a survey of recognition mechanisms adopted by governments in the region, and as of October 2014, 31 countries have contributed to the survey. The data will serve to generate a database of reliable information to enable academic users access information on various internationalization processes, including on the variety of mechanisms used.

23. In acknowledging the importance of the internationalization of higher education in Latin America and the Caribbean, the Brazilian Government, in close collaboration with UNESCO, will host a high-level meeting of Education Ministers from Latin America and the Caribbean on the recognition of qualifications in higher education, foreseen to take place in the second half of 2015.

Future monitoring of the 1993 Recommendation

24. UNESCO will continue to support networking and the sharing of knowledge and good practices across regions. The Organization will also further develop the Portal on Recognized Higher Education Institutions and support the revisions of the regional conventions for Latin America and the Caribbean and the Arab States in a timely and appropriate manner. As the only existing normative instrument with a global coverage, the 1993 Recommendation is the sole instrument connecting all regions and serving all Member States. UNESCO will continue to monitor it as a priority via the six regional conventions on recognition in higher education. The revised conventions will serve as interregional instruments to support the global mobility of students and graduates in addition to the 1993 Recommendation. UNESCO will continue to encourage Member States to re-assess and reconfirm their commitment to fair recognition in higher education through ratification of these revised conventions.

Proposed decision

25. In light of the above, the Executive Board may wish to consider the following decision:

The Executive Board,

1. Having examined document 197 EX/20 Part VI,
2. Invites the Director-General to transmit document 197 EX/20 Part VI to the 38th session of the General Conference together with the comments of the Executive Board's observations, and any observations or comments that the Director-General may wish to make;

3. Recommends that the General Conference adopt the following draft resolution:

The General Conference,

1. Recalling that at its 27th session (Paris, 1993) it adopted the Recommendation on the Recognition of Studies and qualifications in Higher Education,
2. Recalling that at its 34th session (Paris, 2007) it identified the Recommendation on the Recognition of Studies and Qualifications in Higher Education as a priority to be monitored by the UNESCO Secretariat (34 C/Resolution 87),
3. Also recalling 36 C/Resolution 12,
4. Further recalling 177 EX/Decision 35 (I), 195 EX/Decision 15 and 196 EX/Decision 20,
5. Takes note of the consolidated report on the implementation of the 1993 Recommendation on the Recognition of Studies and Qualifications in Higher Education;
6. Welcomes the progress made in the revision of the regional conventions on recognition in higher education;
7. Invites all Member States to strengthen their efforts to ensure the full and comprehensive implementation of the 1993 Recommendation;
8. Invites the Director-General to:
 - (a) continue to promote the development of successful infrastructure for implementation of the 1993 Recommendation through the six conventions on recognition in higher education;
 - (b) provide technical support to Member States to facilitate recognition across all regions; and
 - (c) continue monitoring as a priority the 1993 Recommendation, particularly in the context of the revisions to the regional conventions on recognition in higher education,
9. Invites the Director-General to transmit to it at its 40th session, the next consolidated report on the implementation of this recommendation and decides to inscribe this item in the agenda of its 40th session.