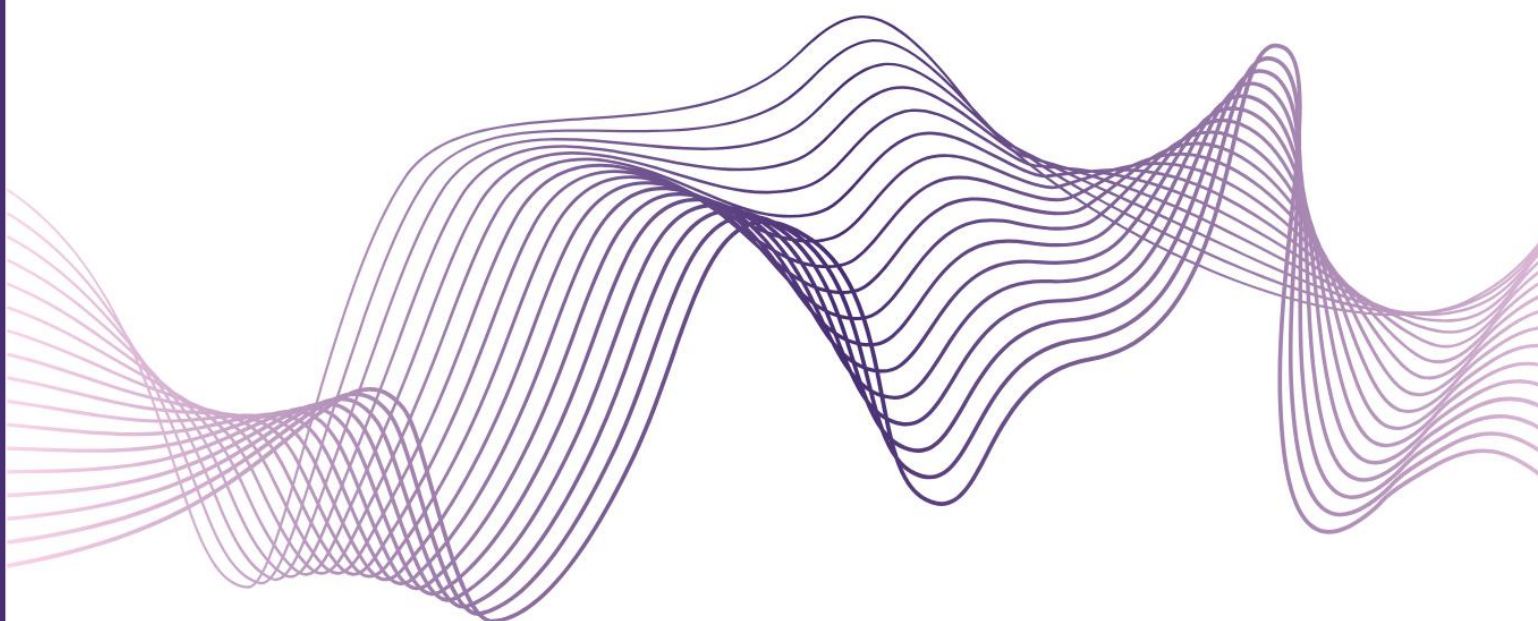


T2.1 Comprehensive literature review and legal framework analysis

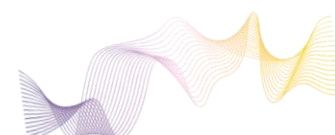
WP 2 Analysis of existing data and practices



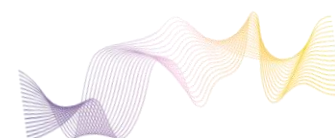
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Introduction

The academic recognition of diplomas and study periods abroad is a key objective of European cooperation in the field of education, as outlined in Article 165 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU)¹. Automatic mutual recognition (AMR) for the purpose of further learning is also a cornerstone of the European Education Area (EEA), which EU Member States have pledged to establish by 2025. It is further highlighted as a priority in the Council Resolution on the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training for 2021–2030.

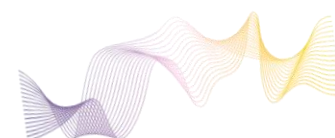
“Wide recognition was a major policy aim accompanying the increase of student mobility and graduate mobility in Europe since the 1950s. The Council of Europe and subsequently UNESCO and the European Union set more ambitious goals over the years. The 1997 Lisbon Convention calls for recognition of entry requirements, study periods, and degrees, ‘unless substantial differences can be shown’ by country, institutional type or individual institution, and programme (Teichler, 2003).”

More than 20 years have passed since then, and the issue of recognition in mobility programs is still significant: nearly 20% of mobile students must retake exams or complete additional studies after returning to their home university (European Commission, 2023). This creates a burden for students, increases workload for academics, and may deter students from pursuing mobility opportunities. Efforts to address this issue have intensified since the 2018 EU Council Recommendation (CR) on automatic mutual recognition of qualifications and learning periods abroad. The Erasmus+ Learning Agreements now include an "automatic recognition" checkbox, signalling its importance. However, uneven implementation of the CR persists among member states.

Why do we tend to discuss matters of recognition and to undertake steps aiming to facilitate recognition? Recognition is still an unsolved issue because:

- Higher education institutions want to have certified evidence of prior learning achievements of incoming students,
- Lack of harmonization in National and Institutional Frameworks,

¹ Article 165 of the TFEU became legally binding when the Treaty of Lisbon entered into force on December 1, 2009.



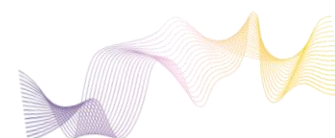
- Curricular incompatibilities,
- Implementation Gaps in Learning Agreements,
- It is difficult to measure equivalent knowledge and competence.

Nevertheless, since the early 2000s, significant developments have taken place; yet regulatory frameworks and individual recognition decisions continue to be influenced by a sense of national pride in domestic systems and a desire to shield national students from international competition (Teichler, 2003).

The Automatic Recognition Assessment Project (AUREA) aims to support automatic recognition for credit mobility students by identifying barriers, analysing existing options, and providing policy recommendations for the future of automatic recognition. By assessing the state of play in recognition for mobile students undergoing credit mobility, creating a shared understanding of (full) automatic credit recognition on a European level, providing higher education institutions with the necessary tools and information to assess their readiness for implementation of automatic credit recognition and fostering evidence-based policy making, AUREA seeks to address challenges and promote unobstructed mobility within the Erasmus+ community, thereby advancing the goal of automatic recognition.

The objective of work package 2 “Analysis of existing data and practices” of the project AUREA is to achieve better understanding of the current state of automatic recognition of the credits acquired during learning periods abroad, what bottlenecks emerge and what practices related to recognition of international credit mobility are conducive or restrictive in the path to seamless and full recognition of credits, respectively automatic recognition. In order to answer these questions, the consortium conducted desk research based on available data and experiences. The analysis encompasses a holistic view on the (automatic) credit recognition procedures, combining the current state of play data from students, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and Higher Education (HE) practitioners.

The literature review and legal framework analysis aims to gather the most relevant policy and academic resources regarding automatic recognition, with a special focus on the recognition procedures in the Erasmus+ Programme and explore to what extent similar practices exist in other credit mobility programmes, such as the Swiss-European Mobility Programme (SEMP), or the Turing Scheme.



Purpose and Scope

Automatic credit recognition is central to the success of student mobility programmes like the Erasmus+ Programme, as it ensures that students' academic achievements abroad are fully acknowledged by their home institutions.

Full academic recognition in the Erasmus+ Programme refers to the guaranteed acceptance, by a student's home institution, of the credits, courses, and learning outcomes achieved during an approved period of study or traineeship abroad, as fully equivalent to those that would have been completed at the home institution.

This recognition encompasses the formal validation of ECTS credits, grades, and learning outcomes agreed upon in advance and during the mobility via Learning Agreements (LAs). Full recognition is not only an administrative issue but a key position of trust and transparency in European Higher Education, closely tied to the principles of the Bologna Process, the Lisbon Recognition Convention, and the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS).

Objectives

The literature review and legal framework analysis of the AUREA project aims to

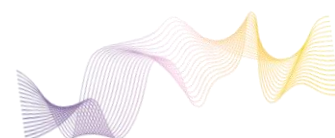
- Examine the **current** recognition practices in the Erasmus+ Programme.
- Analyse the **legal and policy frameworks** that govern credit recognition in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and beyond.
- Identify the main **barriers and challenges** to full recognition, including inconsistencies in national policies, institutional practices, and the experiences of students.

Methodology Overview

The methodology for this literature review is based on desk research approach and on contribution of project partners.

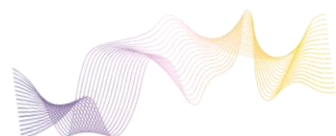
The desk research approach includes a wide range of sources: policy documents, official reports and academic papers. The data sources used for this review include:

- Mobility Scoreboard (Eurydice): A comparative tool that tracks national-level recognition frameworks across EU countries.



- Erasmus+ Implementation Reports: Detailed reports published by Erasmus+ National Agencies, providing insights into the implementation of academic recognition practices.
- ESN Surveys: Surveys conducted by the Erasmus Student Network, capturing students' experiences with credit transfer and academic recognition during their mobility periods.
- ESU's Bologna With Student Eyes: Publications from the European Students' Union that assesses how ESU's member national student unions perceive the implementation of the Bologna Process, with a focus on automatic recognition.
- EUA's 2024 Trends publication about Europe's higher education sector's response to ongoing European policy reform developments, such as the Bologna Process.
- Reports from Erasmus+ projects which provide best practices and policy recommendations for improving academic recognition.

The literature and data selected for this review will be analysed using a comparative approach, focusing on both policy frameworks and the practical realities of academic recognition. By synthesizing these sources, the review aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the current landscape of academic recognition within Erasmus+ and similar programmes.



A Short Historical Overview

A social Europe: [...] a Union where young people receive the best education and training and can study and find jobs across the continent; a Union which preserves our cultural heritage and promotes cultural diversity. (Rome Declaration, 2017)

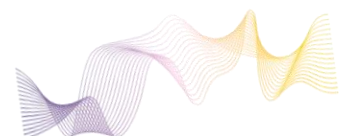
The quote is from the Rome Declaration (which marked the 60th anniversary of the Treaties of Rome), signed on 25 March 2017 by the leaders of the 27 EU member states (excluding the UK, which was preparing to leave the EU after the Brexit vote) and the presidents of the EU institutions.

In reaction to what Teichler calls “credentialism” or “degree-ocracy” (Teichler, 2003), a shift toward increasingly regulated systems of education and certification, the Council of Europe played a leading role in developing conventions to support academic recognition in democratic (non-Communist) European countries in the early post-WWII years. Three key conventions were adopted in the 1950s:

1. 1953: The European Convention on the Equivalence of Diplomas, which required signatory states to recognize secondary school diplomas for university admission across borders.
2. 1956: The European Convention on the Equivalence of Periods of Study, which focused on recognizing study periods abroad (initially for modern languages, later extended to other disciplines).
3. 1959: The European Convention on the Academic Recognition of University Qualifications, which ensured academic recognition of degrees between universities for further study or degree equivalency.

The practical influence of these conventions declined, as countries developed more specific bilateral agreements and newer multilateral conventions emerged. The Warsaw Pact countries also worked out bilateral treaties and the 1972 Prague Convention. Meanwhile, the Nordic countries signed a regional cooperation treaty in 1962.

In the 1970s, UNESCO began working on regional conventions instead of global ones, leading to the 1979 Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in the Europe Region. This convention built upon earlier Council of Europe efforts and introduced more



flexible criteria, promoted better information exchange, and encouraged professional recognition of credentials, though not always explicitly.

The Helsinki Final Act of 1975, part of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, also emphasized academic mobility and mutual recognition of qualifications as tools for reducing Cold War tensions and promoting cooperation across the political divide.

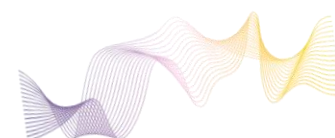
In 1997, the Lisbon Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region was signed under the Council of Europe and UNESCO. It aimed to improve and standardize recognition of higher education qualifications across countries, requiring recognition of foreign qualifications unless significant differences exist. The convention covers recognition of qualifications giving access to higher education, qualifications awarded by higher education institutions and study periods. It has been ratified by 55 states, including several non-European countries (such as the United States, Canada, Australia, and Israel), and organizations like the European Union as a party.

The European Union's early predecessors played little role in higher education cooperation or recognition. This changed in the 1970s, when the European Community began actively promoting student mobility and cross-border academic recognition. Initial efforts included the 1976 Joint Study Programmes (JSP), which supported collaborative networks among universities. These programs emphasized cultural diversity and study recognition across institutions.

The turning point came in 1987 with the launch of the ERASMUS programme, providing scholarships and institutional support to encourage student exchange and curricular coordination. In the 1990s, following the Maastricht Treaty (1992), ERASMUS was integrated into the broader SOCRATES programme, while support for vocational training fell under LEONARDO DA VINCI. ERASMUS expanded to support not only students but also faculty exchange and curricular innovation, focusing on a stronger "European Dimension" in education.

Additionally, the EU initiated the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System from 1989, first as a pilot and later as a standard for recognizing study abroad.

Since the early 1980s, the EU has supported various initiatives to improve the recognition of academic qualifications across Europe. These include funding handbooks, creating the NARIC network (National Academic Recognition Information Centres, 1984) for academic recognition,

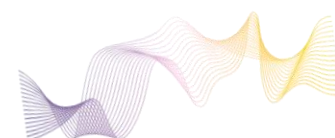


and, with UNESCO and the Council of Europe, forming the ENIC network (European Network of Information Centres in the European Region, 1994). In 1998, the Diploma Supplement was promoted to help international recognition of graduates' achievements.

The EU can also issue legally binding directives for professional recognition across member states. Over 60 such directives have been issued, mainly for regulated professions like medicine and architecture. A key 1988 directive guaranteed recognition of higher education diplomas (3+ years), shifting from harmonization to mutual trust among member states. However, full implementation of some directives has been delayed. From the 1950s to the late 1990s, European intergovernmental bodies promoted mutual trust and flexible recognition of student qualifications to support mobility, despite national differences in higher education systems. However, globalisation introduced new pressures, leading to a shift away from this trust-based model. Countries like the UK, Greece, and Germany expressed scepticism about EU-led harmonization. The 1999 Bologna Declaration marked a turning point, emphasizing structural convergence in response to global competition and placing more scrutiny on recognition standards across Europe (Teichler, 2003).

The European Commission has taken several steps to strengthen implementation, and the current EU and Bologna policies point toward greater harmonization, digitalization, and student-centred practices:

- Digital tools: Erasmus Without Paper (EWP) and the Online Learning Agreement aim to streamline the process and reduce administrative errors.
- Institutions are encouraged to adopt a culture of automatic recognition with the help of capacity-building initiatives and policy recommendations supported by EU institutions.



Conceptual Background and Current Practices

Credit recognition is a cornerstone of the EHEA and the heart of student mobility. It enables students to receive formal acknowledgment of learning outcomes they complete abroad. This process also facilitates educational innovation and contributes to institutional trust among higher education systems and partner universities.

Formal and Full Recognition

Credit recognition is the formal acceptance of learning outcomes acquired in a different institution by a student's home institution or competent authority.

The concept of credit recognition is officially defined by several international legal and policy instruments, particularly under the frameworks of EHEA and the Erasmus+ Programme.

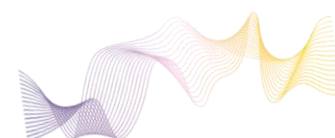
The legal backbone of credit recognition in the EHEA is the **Lisbon Recognition Convention** (Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region) in the year of 1997.

Article I says: "Recognition: A formal acknowledgement by a competent authority of the value of a foreign educational qualification with a view to access to educational and/or employment activities."

Article V.1 says: "Each Party shall recognize periods of study completed within the framework of a higher education programme in another Party".

The **ECTS Users' Guide of the European Commission** underlines in Section 4.2 of the document, specifically under "Credit mobility" and "The golden rule of recognition of credit mobility within the framework of interinstitutional agreements": all credits gained during the study abroad period, as agreed in the Learning Agreement and confirmed by the Transcript of Records, should be transferred without delay and counted towards the student's degree without requiring additional work or assessment (European Commission, 2015).

The **Council Recommendation on Automatic Recognition** defines automatic recognition as the acceptance of a qualification, or its level, without requiring the individual to undergo a separate recognition procedure. It also outlines the automatic recognition of learning outcomes from a period abroad—commonly referred to as automatic credit recognition—as the right to have



those outcomes recognised, provided they were agreed upon in advance through a learning agreement and validated in the Transcript of Records using ECTS credits (Council of the European Union, 2018).

In the **Rome Ministerial Communiqué** (2020) we can read: "We will ensure automatic recognition of academic qualifications and periods of study within the EHEA so that students, staff and graduates are able to move freely to study, teach and do research. We will make the necessary legislative changes to guarantee automatic recognition at system level for qualifications delivered in EHEA countries where quality assurance operates in compliance with the ESG and where a fully operational national qualifications framework has been established."

The **Erasmus+ Programme Guide** (2023) underlines that full academic recognition means that the sending institution recognises studies (including exams or other forms of assessment) undertaken at the partner institution abroad as counting towards the degree, as previously agreed in the Learning Agreement (European Commission, 2023).

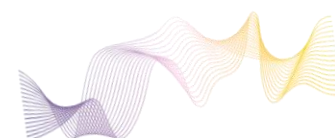
The term **formal recognition** refers to any official acknowledgment of studies or qualifications, whether full or partial, and may include recognition for the purposes of further study, or employment.

Full academic recognition is a central commitment within the Erasmus+ Programme and is explicitly required of all higher education institutions holding the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education (ECHE). As the European Commission defines: The sending institution recognises studies (including exams or other forms of assessment) undertaken at the partner institution abroad as counting towards the degree, as previously agreed in the Learning Agreement (European Commission, 2023).

It means that all credits and learning outcomes achieved during a mobility period (as agreed in advance through a Learning Agreement) are accepted automatically and without modification by the home institution as counting fully toward the student's degree.

Full academic recognition is not merely a technical requirement, it is a student right and a structural foundation of quality mobility.

The distinction between formal and full recognition is important: while formal recognition merely refers to the implementation of formal recognition procedures, only full recognition implies that no additional coursework or assessments are required upon return. It is an

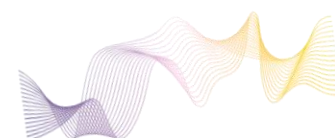


institutional commitment embedded in the ECHE and supported by EU-level guidance and policy frameworks.

Mechanisms and Key Elements of Recognition

- **Learning Agreement (LA):** The contract between the student, sending institution, and receiving institution that defines the courses or learning activities to be undertaken and ensures alignment of academic expectations. It also should be the basis of automatic recognition. They outline the proposed study or training programme and serve as a formal guarantee that the credits earned abroad will be recognized (European Commission, 2022).
- **European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System:** The ECTS is the primary tool for enabling transparent and consistent credit recognition across Europe. It provides a standardized measurement of student workload and learning outcomes, where 30 ECTS credits represent the workload of a full-time student over one semester. ECTS is designed to be outcome-oriented, rather than only hours of instruction (European Commission, 2015).
- **Learning Outcomes and Competency-Based Recognition:** Learning outcomes refer to the knowledge, skills, and competences students are expected to acquire after completing a particular course or programme.
- **Transcript of Records (ToR):** The receiving institution provides a transcript confirming the student's performance. The home institution is obliged to incorporate this into the student's academic record without delay.
- **Diploma Supplement:** Standardized documents that accompany diplomas, offering comparable information on qualifications (European Commission, 2021b).
- **European Qualifications Framework (EQF):** Though not unique to Erasmus+, the EQF underpins the recognition of learning outcomes by providing a translation grid between national qualification systems (European Union, 2017).

The ECTS User's Guide and Bologna Process communiqués emphasize the shift toward competency-based education and recognition frameworks built around learning outcomes.



Review of EU-Level Policy and Legal Frameworks

The Erasmus+ Programme 2021–2027 cycle is the European Union's leading initiative to support European higher education mobility. It is based on previous programme periods, such as the original Erasmus (1987) and the Lifelong Learning Programme (2007–2013). The main aim of Erasmus+ is fostering mobility, improving educational quality, and supporting the European Education Area, which unlike the EHEA is limited to EU member states. One of its key pillars is the facilitation of academic credit recognition and the comparability of qualifications across member states (European Commission, 2021a).

Legal Foundations

The legal framework for the current Erasmus+ period is established by **Regulation (EU) 2021/817** of the European Parliament and of the Council, adopted May 2021.

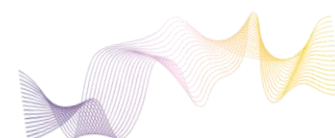
According to **Article 1** of the Regulation, one of the programme's principal objectives is to support learning mobility and enhance the international dimension of education and training systems.

Erasmus+ 2021–2027 focuses on promoting inclusive and high-quality education, fostering European identity, and supporting digital and green transitions. It seeks to empower individuals through lifelong learning opportunities, facilitate transnational partnerships, and contribute to building cohesive and resilient societies.

EU Policy Objectives

Erasmus+ is strongly aligned with the objectives of the **Bologna Process** (1999), which aims to create an EHEA through harmonization of degree structures, quality assurance, and credit recognition.

The European Commission contributed ideas to the European Union leaders' meeting at the Social Summit in Gothenburg, to stimulate discussion on the future of education and culture. The document **"Strengthening European identity through education and culture"** (European Commission, 2017) was presented as part of its vision for a more united and resilient European Union by 2025. It emphasizes the central role of education and culture in building a shared sense of European identity, fostering social cohesion, and preparing citizens for the challenges of the future.



The European Education Area focuses on three main strands: boosting cross-border mobility, investing in people and their education, and strengthening European identity and cultural heritage awareness. It supports the development of multilingualism, mutual recognition of diplomas, and the strengthening of European universities through joint programs and cooperation.

The Council Recommendation on the Automatic Mutual Recognition of Qualifications and Learning Periods Abroad encourages member states toward automatic mutual recognition of qualifications and study periods abroad, especially in the context of building the European Education Area by 2025, reducing the administrative burden on students spending an Erasmus+ semester in one of the partner universities of their home institutions (Council of the European Union, 2018).

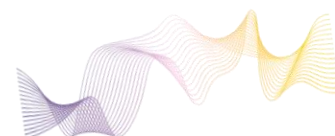
The document addresses two levels of education (higher education and upper secondary education and train) and focuses on the recognition of two key aspects: qualifications obtained and the learning outcomes of study periods abroad. It defines automatic recognition as the right of individuals holding a qualification awarded in an EU Member State, which grants access to higher education or progression to the next educational level in their home country, to have that qualification recognized in any other Member State without the need for a separate recognition procedure (Implementation Report of the 2018 Council Recommendation, 2023).

The Recommendation aims to support:

- Student mobility and the idea that students can move freely with their qualifications automatically recognized,
- Transparency and trust between national education systems,
- The Bologna Process and ECTS-based learning mobility.

The 2018 CR defined 10 key principles for implementation. The main goal is to achieve automatic mutual recognition for the purpose of further learning without having to go through a separate recognition procedure which is supported by the other key principles, such as:

- Fostering transparency and trust
- National guidance transparency tools
- Expert support to HEIs



- Facilitate mobility and recognition
- Develop capacity
- Collecting and disseminating good practices
- Improve evidence base
- Reporting and evaluating.

Institutions have the autonomy to set their own admission criteria. The qualification and the learning outcome itself should be accepted as equivalent in terms of level and content. It recommends the member states to work out implementation plans, to promote it for their institutions and to use the EU wide developed policy tools and support the idea of a European Education Area by 2025.

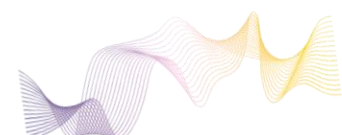
The European Area of Recognition (EAR) Manual has been developed as part of the European Area of Recognition Project. It contains standards and guidelines on all aspects of the recognition of foreign qualifications and aims to provide credential evaluators with a practical tool to assist in several recognition procedures.

The Manual was first published in 2012, later updated in 2016 and 2023. It is a comprehensive practical guide supporting fair and consistent recognition of foreign qualifications in line with the Lisbon Recognition Convention (1997). It provides standardized procedures, principles, and best practices to ensure transparency, comparability, and reliability in academic recognition processes. The use of the EAR manual was already encouraged by the European Ministers for Education in the EHEA Communiqué.

The EAR Manual outlines principles, criteria, and procedures that should guide recognition processes, such as

- Recognition decisions must be transparent, timely, and based on clear criteria.
- Recognition decisions should also consider learning outcomes and the level of the qualification within national or European frameworks.
- Use of ECTS and Diploma Supplement are essential for understanding the context and content of a qualification.

The EAR Manual plays a vital role for mobile students participating in Erasmus+ or other international programmes. It emphasizes the recognition of periods of study abroad as part of



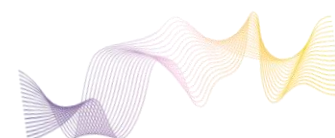
a complete qualification, underlining that credit transfer should be based on learning outcomes rather than strictly on input measures (e.g., contact hours).

The Council Recommendation on Automatic Recognition and the EAR Manual are complementary instruments:

- The Recommendation sets policy-level goals for automatic recognition across Member States.
- The EAR Manual provides the operational and procedural guidance needed to implement those goals effectively at the institutional and national level.

Additionally, the **Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027** is an EU policy initiative that sets out a common vision of high-quality, inclusive and accessible digital education in Europe, and aims to support the adaptation of the education and training systems of Member States to the digital age. It promotes the digital transformation of Erasmus+ tools, including the introduction of digital learning agreements and transcripts, further facilitating timely and accurate credit recognition (European Commission, 2021c).

The **Erasmus+ Learning Agreement for Studies** provides guidance to ensure transparency, efficiency, and full academic recognition for students undertaking study mobility abroad. By 2027, all higher education institutions must implement digital learning agreements using systems connected to the Erasmus Without Paper (EWP) Network. Students are required to fill in general information and specify whether their mobility is long-term (2–12 months) or short-term (5–30 days with a mandatory virtual component). They must also meet or work toward the recommended language proficiency for their host institution. The agreement must be digitally approved by the student, sending and receiving institutions before departure, with digital signatures encouraged to support paperless processes.



Comprehensive Analysis of Current Practices

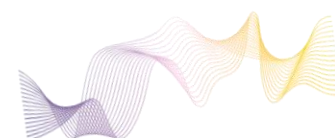
The analysis of Erasmus+ implementation and academic recognition practices provide critical insights into how effectively the programme supports student mobility across Europe. It evaluates policies, tools, and institutional behaviours that influence the recognition of learning outcomes acquired abroad. By examining national frameworks, institutional practices and the experiences of participants, the analysis highlights both the progress made and the persistent challenges.

Erasmus+ Implementation Reports

The Erasmus+ Implementation Reports provide detailed assessments of the Erasmus+ Programme's performance, focusing on both the 2014–2020 and 2021–2027 cycles. These reports evaluate the programme's effectiveness in promoting mobility, cooperation, inclusion, and innovation in education, training, youth, and sport across Europe.

Mid-Term Evaluation of Erasmus+ 2014–2020 (2018): It assesses the programme's effectiveness, relevance, coherence, efficiency, and European added value, based on extensive data collection, stakeholder consultations, and analysis. The report recognizes strong performance of the programme, calls for simplification and better data tracking, and addresses automatic credit recognition as a key component of the objectives related to student mobility and the Bologna Process principles. The report emphasizes the need to enforce existing rules on credit recognition, encourages further support and guidance for higher education institutions to streamline recognition processes and calls for monitoring and quality assurance mechanisms to ensure compliance with credit recognition commitments.

The **Report on the implementation of the Erasmus+ Programme 2021–2027** underlines that “according to a survey of the Erasmus Student Network, almost a third of respondents reported they did not receive full credit recognition, which is far from the objectives laid out in the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education. The Rapporteur, therefore, asks the Commission to work towards greater recognition of credits earned during mobility periods, making it easier for students to transfer credits between institutions and ensuring the academic value of their experiences. In addition, the feasibility of and need for a ‘Joint European Degree’ should be explored” (European Parliament 2023).



Annual Reports published by the European Commission provide a comprehensive overview of the implementation, achievements, and challenges of the Erasmus+ Programme each year. Covering areas such as education, training, youth, and sport, the reports highlight key statistics, success stories, and policy developments related to mobility, cooperation projects, and inclusion.

The **2023 Erasmus+ Annual Report** showcases the programme's achievements in supporting lifelong learning and cooperation, with a strong focus on social inclusion, green and digital transitions, and the promotion of EU values. The document ensures the programme's dedication to facilitating learning mobility, it aims at making learning mobility an integral part of all education pathways, to boost the share of people in the EU benefiting from a learning period abroad. According to the findings of the report, 86% of mobile individuals obtained academic recognition for their mobility experience.

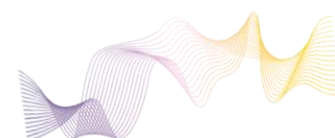
EU policy paper on Automatic Recognition in Credit Mobility

This paper by the European University Foundation (2019) discusses how recognition issues in the context of credit mobility could be superseded by automatic recognition mechanisms. Key recommendations are informed by recent technological and political developments and comprise workflow, documental support and quality assurance elements.

The four key recommendations put forward in the paper address: an enforceable learning agreement (LA) for recognition purposes; a more robust approach to quality assurance (QA); a strengthened role for Erasmus+ National Agencies (NAs) and establishing a closed and transparent information loop.

Resolution on the Development of Automatic Recognition Processes in Europe

In this report (2022) the European Students' Union asserts that the recognition of qualifications and study periods is a fundamental student right essential to achieving a fully functional EHEA. Despite progress such as regional treaties, and Council recommendations on automatic recognition, implementation remains inconsistent and often bureaucratic. ESU calls for ratification of the Global Convention, stronger links between recognition and quality assurance, adaptation of procedures to current developments like micro-credentials and digitalisation, and the evaluation of overlapping recognition frameworks from a student-centred perspective. They stress that recognition processes must be fair, transparent, free of charge, and accessible



in multiple languages to ensure mobility, social inclusion, and access to education, especially in times of crisis.

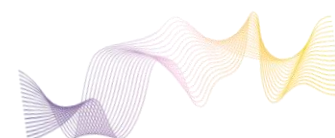
Implementation Report on the 2018 Council Recommendation

The Implementation report on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad of the European Commission (2023) provides a comparative analysis of the implementation of the Council Recommendation across EU27 and concludes with suggestions on how to improve the processes and practices for automatic recognition. It also analyses the progress in the use of EU tools and common standards for transparency and trust to facilitate automatic recognition, such as the implementation of legislative changes in the Member States since the introduction of the Council Recommendation, the understanding of the concept of automatic recognition and the challenges to progress in the practical application.

One of the most significant **findings** of the report is the need of defining automatic mutual recognition of qualifications and its understanding by stakeholders: The Lisbon Recognition Convention laid the foundation for recognizing higher education qualifications in the UNESCO European Area, however, it is more limited than the CR on automatic mutual recognition: The LRC focuses on recognising qualifications but does not include AMR or place equal emphasis on recognising learning outcomes from study periods abroad. Its goal is to simplify and make recognition fair and timely, but it allows for refusal if a qualification is deemed "substantially different"—a vague and undefined concept.

"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 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."

Lack of a clear understanding of AMR as it is defined in the CR is a recurrent challenge in several Member States. It is also 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



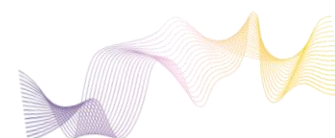
the focus groups to be unclear about AMR under the LRC and the CR, and how they relate to and differ from each other.

Results of the report 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. 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.

Most transfers of credits relating to learning periods abroad are recognised within the framework of Erasmus+ mobilities. 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 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.

The report's recommendations are:

- More effort is needed to clarify the meaning and legal implications of AMR, and connection to other recognition policies—especially at the institutional level.
- Transparency tools and national guidance should be developed to raise awareness and trust of AMR.
- Strengthen the link between recognition and quality assurance (QA).
- Ensure proper use of ECTS.
- Develop efficient and fast verification systems and provide guidance.
- Centralizing AMR processes and develop National Recognition Centres.
- Focusing on longer study periods abroad.
- Improve data collections, working toward centralized national data systems and agree on EU-wide indicators for monitoring.



Quality Assurance Fit for the Future - Students' Perspective

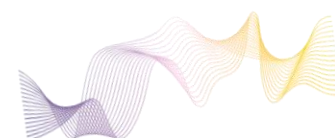
The European Students' Union study (2023) highlights students' evolving expectations and critical role in shaping the future of quality assurance in higher education. The report emphasizes that QA systems must adapt to changing learning environments, digitalization, and increasing diversity among students. It argues that while existing frameworks like the ESGs (Environmental, Social, and Governance) have provided a solid foundation, they must be updated to ensure greater student engagement, transparency, and responsiveness to contemporary challenges. The study advocates for QA processes that go beyond compliance and instead foster meaningful learning experiences, student-centred education, and inclusive governance. Ultimately, the ESU calls for a forward-thinking, flexible QA system that upholds quality while remaining relevant to students' needs and the dynamic higher education landscape.

Mobility Scoreboard

The Mobility Scoreboard, developed by Eurydice, is a monitoring tool that evaluates and compares the progress of European countries in promoting and supporting student mobility across higher education. One of its primary focuses is on the recognition of academic achievements gained abroad, including the legal frameworks, policy commitments, and institutional practices that influence recognition. The scoreboard assesses whether countries have clear legal obligations for automatic recognition, whether national qualifications frameworks are in place, and to what extent the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System is implemented and used effectively.

The Mobility Scoreboard highlights significant differences between countries. While some have advanced legal guarantees ensuring the automatic recognition of qualifications and study periods abroad, others still rely on case-by-case decisions by individual institutions. The scoreboard emphasizes the importance of transparent, fair, and timely recognition procedures that are aligned with the Bologna Process and European standards, such as the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

The legal frameworks across Europe vary in maturity and scope. Countries with solid legislation tend to offer better recognition outcomes, especially where recognition is mandated by law and supported by national agencies. However, even where legal provisions are established, comprehensive and strategic implementation at the institutional level is crucial as institutional



autonomy, limited resources, and lack of awareness frequently constitute implementation challenges. This often causes a gap between formal policy and actual practice, which have crucial effects on the success of credit recognition.

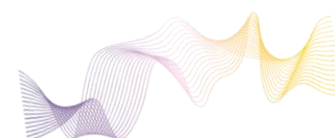
The Mobility Scoreboard underscores the importance of institutional practices. On the other hand while many institutions claim to use ECTS and learning agreements, the practical interpretation of these tools can differ widely. The scoreboard serves as both a diagnostic tool and a call to action for countries to strengthen legal and institutional mechanisms to support student mobility and academic recognition.

“The Mobility Scoreboard: Higher education background report 2022/2023” (2023) is the third edition of the “Mobility Scoreboard - Higher education background report” and it invited member states to implement structural reforms to remove obstacles to learning mobility, and to monitor the progress made by European countries in facilitating learning mobility. The most recent study tracks the advancements European countries have achieved in enhancing and eliminating obstacles to mobility in higher education studies, feeding into a new European learning mobility framework. The report is based on qualitative data gathered by the Eurydice Network on top-level policies and measures, mainly in tertiary education.

ESN Surveys

The ESN survey conducted by the Erasmus Student Network represents the voice of Erasmus+ and international students and supports them before, during and after their mobility period. Above all, it represents the experiences and challenges of the hundreds of thousands of students who undertake an international mobility every year. Its first edition was launched in 2005, and thirteen more editions have been published since. The ESN survey has become one of the most relevant research publications in the field of student mobilities and the Erasmus+ Programme, and over the 20 years of its existence, ESN surveys have gathered more than 200,000 responses.

The **XV edition** titled “**Making Quality Mobility a Reality for All**” (2023), is a pivotal resource for understanding and enhancing international student mobility within the Erasmus+ Programme. This survey gathered insights from approximately 23,000 students across Europe, including exchange students, full-degree students, and non-mobile students. The report evaluates preparation, institutional support, financial concerns, and recognition of credits after mobility, moreover inclusion, sustainability, civic engagement, and digitalisation. This edition is



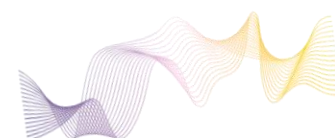
particularly important, considering the current mid-term evaluation of the Erasmus+ Programme and the beginning of negotiations related to the Erasmus+ Programme 2028-2034.

15 key findings were explored regarding participation, duration, knowledge and attractors for exchange students; events and support given by HEIs; grants distribution and credit recognition; sustainability and digitalisation during exchange programmes; and, finally, Erasmus+ students' citizenship:

1. Pre-Higher Education International Experience
2. Duration of Mobility
3. Motivations for Going Abroad
4. Awareness of EU Mobility Initiatives
5. Pre-Departure Support Needs
6. Social Engagement Patterns
7. Participation in Local Activities
8. Challenges Faced Abroad
9. Means of Transportation and Their Influencing Factors
10. Digital tools used as part of the Erasmus+ journey
11. Respect for the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education
12. Overall satisfaction with the Sending and Host Institutions
13. Timing of Grant Distribution
14. Credits taken and Credits Recognised
15. Before and After Mobility – Erasmus+ Students' Citizenship

Over half (52.8%) of the students reported automatic recognition of their qualifications, while 37% underwent formal procedures and 10% used other recognition methods. Among those requiring recognition, timelines varied: 44.2% received immediate recognition, 24% within a month, 23% in one to three months, 5.1% up to six months, and 3.7% waited over six months.

Key Finding 14: Credits taken and Credits Recognised assures says: Upon returning to their home university, students had an average of 28 ECTS credits recognised, reflecting a discrepancy of 2 credits from their total earned credits. While the average recognition rate stands at 28 ECTS, 2.6% of respondents reported that none of their credits were recognised upon their return. Only 22.45% of respondents indicated that their mobility procedures were conducted online and 22.25% reported that the recognition process was handled digitally.

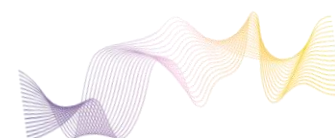


Recommendations:

- National Agencies should strengthen monitoring of the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education (ECHE) to ensure that:
 - Course catalogues are published in advance
 - Recognition procedures fully align with ECHE commitments

This would support smoother student reintegration after mobility and preserve trust in the Erasmus+ Programme. Additionally, targeted support should be provided to underperforming institutions to help them improve the academic experience and meet their ECHE objectives.

- Higher Education Institutions should formally recognise students' volunteer work and civic engagement through tools like ECTS credits and the diploma supplement. European University Alliances, by supporting and recognising student board activities, can lead efforts to embed these practices institutionally. This would not only encourage greater student involvement but also promote sector-wide adoption of civic engagement recognition in higher education.
- The European Commission should guide National Agencies and Higher Education Institutions in using Bologna tools to support the recognition of informal and non-formal learning during mobility exchanges. This includes:
 - Promoting flexible learning paths
 - Aligning with emerging practices in other mobility programmes
 - Ensuring Erasmus+ evolves to reflect diverse learning experiences
- A revamp of the Learning Agreement is recommended for Erasmus+ 2028–2034 to reduce bureaucracy and better integrate recognition of informal learning, fostering more innovative and student-centred mobility experiences.
- National governments and Higher Education Institutions must enhance efforts to ensure automatic recognition of learning outcomes from Erasmus+ mobility. Despite EU-level recommendations from 2018 and 2022, recognition remains inconsistent, leading to student mistrust and academic disruptions post-mobility. To address this, national authorities should:
 - Provide clearer guidance to institutions
 - Conduct assessments to identify recognition gaps



- Align improvements with the revised ECTS Users' Guide adopted by the Bologna Follow-up Group

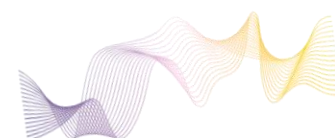
Bologna with Student Eyes

Bologna with Student Eyes is the flagship publication of the European Students' Union (ESU) reflecting students' views and perception on the implementation of the Bologna Process. It gathers input from ESU's members, national unions of students (NUSes), to highlight student priorities and offer recommendations. The publication is supported by the European Commission, in partnership with other stakeholders like ENQA, EUA, EURASHE. The core data comes from nine extensive surveys on topics such as student participation in higher education governance, academic freedom, social dimension, quality assurance, mobility and internationalisation, and public responsibility and financing of higher education. These surveys were redesigned for relevance, statistical clarity, and alignment with Bologna Process goals and past communiqués. Input was collected from 37 NUSes across 33 EHEA countries, with some non-EHEA participants included for continuity. The publication also compares results with the 2020 edition and draft 2024 Bologna Implementation Report.

The **Bologna with Student Eyes 2024**, as part of the EU co-funded project BWSEFOR2030, serves as a critical reflection on the implementation of the Bologna Process from the student perspective, highlighting areas of progress and identifying persistent challenges. It calls for concerted efforts by policymakers, institutions, and stakeholders to address issues in academic recognition, student participation, and social equity, ensuring that the goals of the Bologna Process are fully realized for all students across Europe.

The document claims that the Bologna Process must prioritize effective and transparent implementation, with stronger oversight, stakeholder engagement, and accountability at both national and institutional levels to realize its full potential. Despite progress in embedding the principles of the EHEA into national systems, the full and meaningful implementation of the key commitments remains inconsistent. Given the time and support already provided, further delays by countries are no longer justifiable.

Although normative integration—such as the use of ECTS or national qualifications frameworks—has improved, implementation is often superficial or misaligned with EHEA guidelines. For instance, the ECTS system is widely used but often calculated in ways that do not align with actual student workload. Similarly, national adaptations of degree structures or recognition



processes may not fully reflect EHEA principles, leading to rigid programs and unreliable recognition of qualifications.

According to the report the most important issues are:

- Incomplete or poorly translated implementation of commitments.
- Lack of trust between systems, shown by reluctance toward automatic recognition and the growth of regional agreements.
- Insufficient stakeholder engagement and weak accountability in implementation mechanisms (e.g., peer groups, Bologna Implementation Coordination Group).
- Recognition processes remain overly strict and inconsistent.

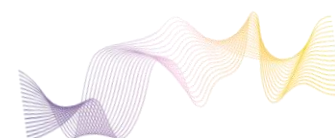
Key recommendations include:

Degree Structure: It is essential to ensure that bachelor's and master's programmes are coherent and provide flexibility to support diverse student learning pathways. Short-cycle programmes should be better integrated into the overall degree structure, with improved information provided to students regarding their purpose and value. Additionally, the timelines for completing degrees should be reassessed.

Qualifications Frameworks & Learning Outcomes: Stakeholders should be actively involved in the design and application of National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) to ensure their relevance and usability. Higher education institutions should receive support in formulating learning outcomes that align with NQF descriptors and are effectively used for assessment; emerging tools such as artificial intelligence may help improve consistency and efficiency in this process. Furthermore, systems should better recognize informal and prior learning, and micro credentials should be more fully embedded into the qualifications framework.

ECTS & Diploma Supplement:

The ECTS User's Guide should be updated to incorporate practical experiences and accommodate emerging trends, including the use of micro credentials. ECTS credits must be calculated based on actual student workload, with enhanced monitoring through external quality assurance and tools like the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education. Diploma Supplements should be standardized across countries to reflect both formal and non-formal learning and be implemented in accordance with European Higher Education commitments.



Recognition:

Recognition procedures should be simplified and made more transparent, including the provision of information in widely spoken European languages. Efforts should be made to promote automatic recognition and generic, system-level recognition of qualifications. Authorities should collect and analyse more data on recognition practices, including the reasons for denied recognition and the outcomes of appeals. The use of tools such as the European Qualifications Passport for Refugees should be expanded to support displaced learners and facilitate their access to higher education.

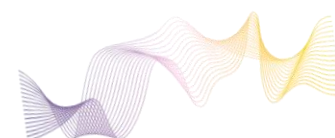
EUA Trends publications

The European University Association's Trends 2024 report provides comprehensive analyses of how HEIs across Europe are implementing Bologna Process reforms and examines the adoption of key Bologna objectives such as the three-cycle degree structure (bachelor's, master's, doctorate), the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System and quality assurance mechanisms. It also covers HEIs' evolving practices in areas like learning and teaching practices, institutional autonomy, and the social dimension of higher education. The report notes that issues such as inconsistent recognition of qualifications, varying levels of student and staff participation in governance, and disparities in resources continue to affect the uniformity of implementation across institutions and countries.

Trends 2024 provides an overview of how European higher education institutions experienced changes over the past five years, due to higher education reforms, and in the wider context of societal, political, economic and technological changes, marked among others by the implications of Covid-19 pandemic and Russia's war against Ukraine.

In Chapter 6.2 on student mobility, the report indicates that 81% of surveyed institutions identify financial barriers—such as the absence of scholarships or insufficient funding—as a major obstacle preventing students from participating in mobility programs. Additionally, discipline-specific constraints (69%) and mismatched academic calendars (68%) are frequently mentioned as significant challenges. Credit recognition is a problem in 45% of surveyed institutions.

It is also worth highlighting that only a small percentage of institutions (6%) appear to face significant challenges with credit recognition affecting a substantial number of students (more



than 10%). In contrast, at half of the institutions, such issues impact no more than 10% of students. However, it is concerning that over a quarter of institutions (26%) lack data on this matter, making it uncertain whether this reflects a lack of institutional monitoring or simply limited access to the information by the respondent.

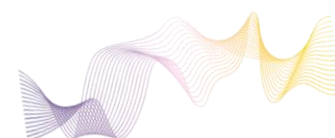
Moreover, many institutions face challenges in integrating credit mobility periods into specific study programmes. This is reported by:

- 53% of institutions for master's programmes (41% to some extent),
- 49% for bachelor's programmes (40% to some extent), and
- 69% disciplines, such as those leading to regulated professions (46% to some extent).

While these issues may appear structural or organisational in nature, they often reflect a deeper problem: the principles of credit recognition are not being fully implemented. In many cases, the study period abroad is not accepted—or only with difficulty—as a valid substitute for the corresponding period at the home institution. Consequently, students in certain programmes are either discouraged from participating in credit mobility or excluded altogether.

To meet both existing and future mobility targets, the report recommends several key actions:

- Mobility must be made more inclusive, ensuring that students' social and economic backgrounds do not hinder their participation. Beyond financial support, this demands the development and implementation of appropriate policies and strategies, with clear prioritisation not only at the institutional level but especially within national systems. The challenges are well known, and there are promising initiatives at both institutional and national levels that can serve as models for progress.
- As mobility grows, institutions must strengthen their organisational frameworks and ensure they have adequate capacity to support student exchanges. This includes improving student services and guidance, as well as investing in international offices and related infrastructure. Moreover, functional Erasmus+ tools and procedures are essential, yet currently lacking in effectiveness.
- Credit recognition must become a greater priority, both within institutions and across national systems. Although the Lisbon Recognition Convention and Erasmus+ guidelines are widely understood, they are not consistently implemented. This inconsistency negatively affects students and contributes to staff frustration, as long-standing problems persist despite years of effort.



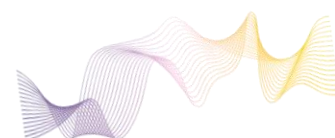
- A broader reconsideration of mobility models is needed, one that reflects students' social realities and expands the concept of internationalisation. This includes integrating virtual exchanges, promoting internationalisation at home, and moving beyond the current mobility-centric approach to embrace more flexible, inclusive forms of international learning.

Critical Review of Implementation Practices

The analyses and reports show that there are obvious variations between countries and institutions in areas such as academic recognition, quality assurance, and student support.

The gap between policy and implementation in the Bologna Process is one of the most determined challenges. Although most countries have formally adopted the Bologna tools (the three-cycle degree structure, ECTS, diploma supplements, and commitments to automatic recognition) the effective application at the institutional level often remains underdeveloped. Policies intended to ensure smooth credit transfer and qualification recognition are undermined by inconsistent practices, unclear procedures, or lack of enforcement.

This gap is largely due to a combination of institutional autonomy, varying levels of resources, and differing national interpretations of Bologna commitments. Universities may struggle with adapting internal processes, providing adequate staff training, or aligning curricula with mobility requirements. Bridging the gap between high-level policy and ground-level implementation requires stronger monitoring, better coordination between national authorities and institutions, and a genuine commitment to putting student mobility and recognition at the heart of institutional strategies.



Comparative Analysis between Erasmus+ and other Credit Mobility Programmes

The Erasmus+ Programme is known as the most developed regional mobility initiative. However, several other credit mobility programmes—national, bilateral, and regional—provide alternative frameworks, often with differing structures, objectives, and standards for credit recognition. This chapter compares Erasmus+, the Swiss-European Mobility Programme (SEMP), the Turing Scheme, and other major international credit mobility programmes, with a particular emphasis on the policies and practices surrounding automatic full credit recognition.

Erasmus+ Programme

Erasmus+ enables mobility within Europe and selected partner countries, built upon interinstitutional agreements, recognition and credit transfer.

- Credit Recognition Mechanism: Mandated automatic recognition of credits based on Learning Agreements.
- Utilizes ECTS for comparability.
- Incorporates Transcript of Records and increasing digital standardization via the Erasmus Without Paper (EWP) initiative.

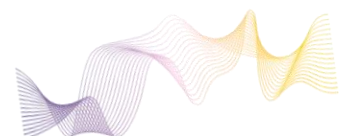
Swiss-European Mobility Programme (SEMP)

SEMP was established after Switzerland's temporary exclusion from Erasmus+ in 2014. It continues to enable academic mobility with European institutions under similar standards (University of Zurich. *In Europe | Global Student Experience*).

- Credit Recognition: Uses ECTS and Learning Agreements, following Erasmus+ templates.
- Recognition is encouraged but not legally enforced, leading to institutional variation.

Turing Scheme (UK)

After Brexit the UK introduced the Turing Scheme, with a global rather than European focus. It provides funding for outgoing student mobility (Turing Scheme Programme Guide, 2022).



- Credit Recognition: no centralized credit system or mandated recognition mechanisms.
- Recognition depends on the institution, with no uniform practice.
- Lacks legal obligations for automatic full credit recognition.

Other Major Credit Mobility Programmes

Fulbright Program (USA)

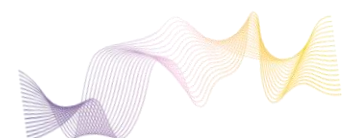
- Primarily a prestigious scholarship scheme for academic exchange between the USA and other countries, managed by the U.S. Department of State.
- Credit Recognition: focused on research and graduate-level study, not designed for structured undergraduate credit mobility.
- Credit recognition is not standardized, left entirely to individual institutions.
- Lack of automated or central frameworks for recognition. (Fulbright Foreign Student Program)

Campus France Mobility Programmes

- Administered by the French government, supporting both inward and outward mobility.
- Credit Recognition: France uses ECTS and aligns with Bologna Process principles.
- Recognition of credits is supported, especially when moving between institutions under bilateral agreements, but is not always automatic.
- Administrative burden and language barriers may complicate recognition. (Studying in France: Mobility programmes)

DAAD (Germany – German Academic Exchange Service)

- DAAD offers a range of mobility schemes for students, researchers, and academic staff worldwide.
- Credit Recognition: Strong institutional and government support for mobility.
- ECTS-compatible when partnering with European institutions.
- No binding requirement for automatic recognition, but institutional culture strongly supports it. (DAAD. Funding programmes)

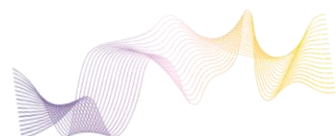


ELAP (Canada – Emerging Leaders in the Americas Program)

- Promotes mobility from Latin America and the Caribbean to Canadian institutions. Host institutions provide non-degree mobility experiences.
- Credit Recognition: No standard credit transfer system; recognition depends entirely on home institution discretion.
- Students often require pre-approval for credit validation, but no centralized enforcement exists. (EduCanada. Emerging Leaders in the Americas Program)

Among all reviewed programmes, Erasmus+ remains the most systematic and legally enforceable scheme with regard to automatic full credit recognition. The ECTS framework, learning agreements, and EU policies underpin a reliable mobility infrastructure.

Turing, Fulbright, and ELAP, while valuable in fostering global engagement, suffer from decentralized recognition practices, often placing undue burden on students to ensure credit transfer. DAAD and Campus France offer strong frameworks but similarly rely on institutional interpretation rather than centralized mandates.



Digital Tools and Innovations in Credit Recognition

The EHEA has significantly advanced the digitalisation of academic mobility processes. These innovations are not merely technical upgrades but structural reforms that aim to simplify, enforce, and scale up credit recognition across borders. Among the most prominent tools are **Erasmus Without Paper (EWP)**, the **Online Learning Agreement (OLA)**, and the **European Student Card Initiative**.

Erasmus Without Paper (EWP)

This is the Erasmus+ Programme's flagship digital infrastructure project replacing paper-based exchanges with secure, interoperable digital workflows, connecting higher education institutions across Europe (European Commission, 2023a). By integrating institutional student information systems, EWP enhances transparency of mobility data and supports the automatic recognition of credits as mandated by the Erasmus+ legal framework. It aims to reduce administrative workload and ensure that Learning Agreements, course catalogues, and transcripts are exchanged in real-time.

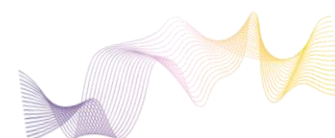
Online Learning Agreement (OLA)

The Online Learning Agreement is a component of EWP that allows students, home, and host institutions to manage learning agreements entirely online. The OLA supports alignment with ECTS and makes the recognition process transparent (European Commission, 2022). The European Commission plans to integrate OLAs in other digital services (EWP and institutional portals), ensuring compliance with recognition commitments as set out in the ECTS Users' Guide (European Commission, 2015).

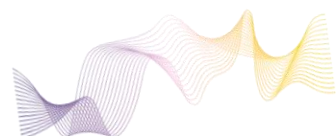
European Student Card Initiative

The European Student Card Initiative (ESCI) complements EWP and OLA by offering a unified digital identity for mobile students. With the student card, learners can access campus services (e.g., libraries, accommodation, discounts) across participating institutions, but it also serves an academic governance role. It allows institutions to verify student status, mobility pathways, and credentials, thus supporting secure recognition practices (European Commission, 2021b).

Together these innovations represent a paradigm shift in how student mobility and credit recognition are managed. They do not only ease the technical burden but are instrumental in



enforcing recognition policies laid out by the Council Recommendation on Automatic Recognition (Council of the European Union, 2018). Their continued rollout is crucial for reaching the EHEA's goal of frictionless academic mobility and recognition.



National Practices and Analyses

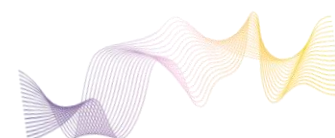
The AUREA project also reviews national legislative frameworks, practices and barriers regarding automatic full credit recognition within the Erasmus+ Programme of partner universities of the consortium. Based on partner contributions this chapter provides a short overview of relevant national literature discussing the current state of play and plans for further developments.

Belgium (Ghent University, UGent)

Belgium / Flanders national legislative frameworks

As education is a regional competence in Belgium, there is no national legislative framework on education. For this, UGent follows European regulations and, where applicable, regional Flemish regulations:

- **Decree of the Flemish Government (2013)** on the conditions and procedure for the recognition of foreign study certificates issued in higher education: the Flemish Government's decree outlines the conditions and procedures for recognizing foreign higher education qualifications in Flanders. It defines key terms, establishes the recognition authority, and details the application process, including required documents and assessment criteria. The decree also specifies the possible outcomes of the recognition process and provides guidelines for appeals. Its goal is to ensure a transparent and consistent evaluation of foreign qualifications, facilitating their acknowledgment within the Flemish higher education system.
- **Codex Higher Education (Art. II.242 §3)**: When taking a decision on granting exemptions on the basis of a foreign diploma or period of study abroad, the institution's management applies the provisions and principles of the Council of Europe-Unesco Convention on the Recognition of Higher Education Diplomas in the European Region, drawn up in Lisbon on 11 April 1997, approved by decree of 15 December 2006 and ratified on 22 July 2009 insofar as the country of origin has also ratified the convention.
- **Decree of the Flemish Government 4.3**: establishes the form of the higher education diploma and the content of the accompanying diploma supplement, where international exchange stays, such as Erasmus are also explicitly mentioned.



Belgium / Flanders - level of implementation

- **Mobility scoreboard**

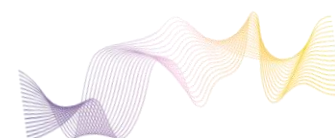
The **ECTS Users' Guide 2015** principles are required to be used by external QA as a basis to assess the implementation of ECTS in higher education institutions in the context of international credit mobility. All the five elements of the indicators are monitored:

1. ECTS credits are allocated on the basis of learning outcomes & student workload.
2. ECTS supporting documents (Course Catalogue, Learning Agreement, Transcript of Records, and Work Placement Certificate) are used appropriately.
3. All credits gained during a period of study abroad – as agreed in the Learning Agreement and confirmed by the Transcript of Records – are transferred without delay and count towards the student's degree without any additional work by or assessment of the student.
4. The HEI has an appropriate appeals procedure to deal with problems of credit recognition.
5. The HEI uses statistical grade distribution tables in each field of study.

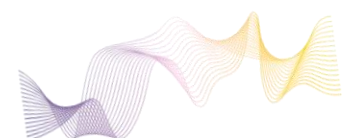
Germany (University of Marburg, MU)

National legislative frameworks

- German federal law regarding recognition of academic achievements is based on the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC)
- „Gesetz zu dem Übereinkommen vom 11. April 1997 über die Anerkennung von Qualifikationen im Hochschulbereich in der europäischen Region“ (Act on the Convention of April 11, 1997 on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region) was passed in Germany in 2007
- The law led to a paradigm-shift: recognition of credits is not to be based on equivalence, but on the absence of a significant/substantial difference in learning outcomes. Following the reversal of the burden of proof, a significant difference in learning outcomes has to be established by the higher education institution.



- The higher education laws of the federal states constitute the legal basis for recognition at universities, which are based on the Lisbon Convention and the corresponding federal law.
- Every German state has adopted state regulations for recognition and accreditation in higher education institutions. The legal texts of Germany's 16 states show some conceptual variations, but most state regulations specify that
 - a. universities should regulate recognition in the framework of the examination regulations;
 - b. the principle of a significant difference is the core test criterion for recognition;
 - c. the burden of proof is reversed and students are required to be involved in the process.
- Most state higher education laws grant universities the right to anchor recognition regulations and processes within the framework of their study and examination regulations.
- Recognition processes are to be: legally compliant, consistent and reproducible, efficient, transparent and comprehensible.
- Other relevant national legislature that affects credit recognition
- The Online Access Act (Onlinezugangsgesetz = OZG) requires German universities to explore and initiate processes to digitalise recognition and credit transfer procedures.
- Recognition procedures are administrative procedures and are therefore subject to the regulations of administrative law. For recognition, this results in the following conditions:
 - a. Recognition is granted upon application; decisions must be made within a reasonable period of time (according to § 75 Administrative Court Regulations (Verwaltungsgerichtsordnung = VwGO), a maximum period of three months is permitted, after which a complaint for failure to act can be filed.
 - b. An administrative act must be confirmed in writing, e.g., the recognition decision is delivered in writing.
 - c. Rejections must be justified.
 - d. The applicant has the right to file an objection or appeal.
 - e. Rejections should be accompanied by information on legal appeal.



Level of Implementation

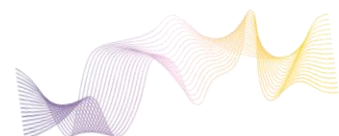
- In 2021/2022 the MODUS project (see above) published an evaluation of German universities surveyed on the status quo of recognition in higher education institutions: [Auswertungsbericht_Hochschulbefragung_2021_WEB_03_06_22.pdf](#)
- Pertinent results are:
 - a. The majority of university board members consider recognition to be highly important.
 - b. “The need for change and the willingness to change with regard to recognition processes are rated as moderate” (p. 5).
 - c. “Overall, the need for uniform and standardised criteria as well as guidelines across all respondents is considered high” (p. 5).
 - d. Flexibility in recognition processes is seen as important.
 - e. Digitisation of information and processes is desired.
 - f. “The students express primarily the need of digital and easily accessible information, simple and transparent procedures, and (in contrast to staff) more clearly communicated responsibilities” (p. 6).
- There is no standardised way or process for German higher education institutions to implement the federal and state regulations. Therefore, HEIs routinely accrue (project) funds for a designated individual or team to develop institution-specific recognition guidelines and other university-wide support services to achieve a more standardised and transparent recognition culture. Unfortunately, these contracts are most often temporary.

Achievements and Obstacles

According to the MODUS evaluation of 2021/2022:

National Achievements

- Roughly a third of the surveyed universities are part of a network that strategically shares resources regarding the improvement of recognition processes.
- The majority of relevant actors in the recognition process are satisfied with the communication and coordination of and within their processes.



- Students are overall content with the provided information and support services at their university.

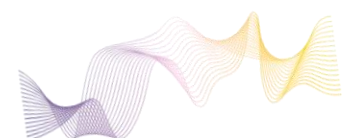
National Obstacles

- Digitalisation of administrative recognition processes is still in its initial stage.
- A lack of university-wide standardisation of decision-making criteria which also leads to a lack of transparent information and guarantee of equal treatment. Yet some evaluation participants point out that “overregulation” is not a desired consequence either. A successful balance will have to find the middle ground between providing university-wide standardised regulations, while keeping the administrative processes as decentralised and flexible as possible.
- A lack of standardised grade conversion, particularly outside the ECTS area.
- A lack of resources to hire staff and consequently overworked staff who have to handle recognition “on top” of their other responsibilities.
- A mindset change: Initiating change in university recognition culture when outdated standards (e.g., equivalence of course content) continue to be practiced.

National practices and relevant literature

The **NEXUS** (2014-2020) and **MODUS** projects of the German University Rectors Conference are the most comprehensive national resources for the German status quo of recognition at higher education institutions. The **MODUS project** (2020-2025) aims to further improve recognition and credit transfer practices at universities in order to enable greater transparency and flexibility as well as mobility and permeability. The focal points of the project include:

- Coordination and dissemination of common, quality-assured standards for recognition and credit transfer at universities
- Increased use of digital processes and infrastructures for better and simpler recognition and credit transfer procedures
- Information and advice for universities on all issues relating to recognition and credit transfer



Further relevant national documents and studies:

- NEXUS (2014): „Anerkennung gestalten! Anerkennungspraxis nach Lissabon“ (German University Rectors Conference)
- NEXUS (2015: Flexibilisierung und Mobilität im Europäischen Hochschulraum (German University Rectors Conference, University Konstanz)
- Germany's national agency's (DAAD) website for the recognition of credits
- Renate Penßel (2020): "The Recognition of Higher Education Diplomas and Qualifications: An overview of the legal framework and discussion of prevailing obstacles for „automatic“ academic recognition from the perspective of German law"
- Handbuch Qualität in Studium, Lehre and Forschung, G4.1. and G4.2 are relevant publications (not openly accessible)
- Handbook on the "Qualifications Framework for German Higher Education Degrees": the chapter "Facilitating mobility- the design of academic recognition and recognition of prior learning" (Chapter 5, page 33) reiterates the Lisbon Convention's specification that learning outcomes take precedence over course content in recognition decisions. The core question in the decision-making process ought to be whether the success of the study program is endangered with the recognition of the achievement.

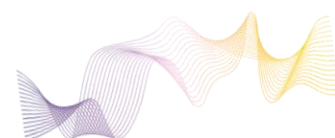
Hungary (Eötvös Loránd University, ELTE)

National legislative frameworks

In Hungary, the following legislation is relevant to the issue of credit recognition:

- **Act CCIV of 2011 on National Higher Education (Nftv.)**
- **Government Decree 87/2015 (IV. 9.)** on the implementation of certain provisions of Act CCIV of 2011 on National Higher Education (hereinafter: Vhr.).

Article 42 Act CCIV of 2011 (hereinafter: Nftv.) (2) says: " (...) The completed course or module may be validated in accordance with the rules of credit transfer."



Article 49 (5-7) of Nftv. says:

(5) (...) Credits shall be recognised if there is a seventy-five percent or closer match between the learning outcomes compared. The comparison of learning outcomes shall be carried out by a committee set up for that purpose (hereinafter referred to as “credit transfer committee”) by the higher education institution.

(6) The credit transfer committee may recognise prior non-formal and informal learning, as well as work experiences, for the purpose of the fulfilment of academic requirements, as set out in this Act and the applicable government decree.

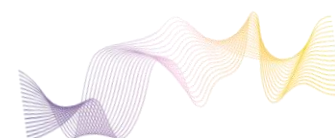
(7) Issues related to the application of paragraphs (3) to (6) shall be regulated in the study and examination rules, with the stipulation that the number of credits required under the study and examination rules for obtaining a final certificate (absolutorium), but at least two thirds of the credit value of the programme, shall be collected at the given higher education institution, even where previous studies at the institution or elsewhere or prior learning are recognised as having credit values.

Article 108 (24) says: “*credit*: a unit for measuring students’ academic work which expresses in respect of a course or curriculum unit the time estimated to be necessary for acquiring the defined learning outcomes and meeting the requirements; one credit represents thirty academic hours on average, and the value of a credit does not depend on the assessment of the learning outcome acquired by the student, provided that the student’s performance was accepted;”

National Achievements and Obstacles

In Hungary, the practice of credit recognition faces numerous challenges and has become one of the most sensitive aspects of student mobility, as highlighted by the 2019 report of the Hungarian Rectors' Conference (MRK report), the 2011 research symposium at the University of Szeged, and the study by Tózsér and Péterfi (2020).

To gain a better understanding of domestic higher education perspectives and practices related to academic recognition and to identify appropriate solutions, MRK established a Working Group. Nearly thirty individuals from domestic higher education institutions joined this group, including vice-rectors and vice-deans for education and international affairs, faculty members with experience in credit transfer committees, heads of academic departments, Erasmus



coordinators, and quality assurance officers. The MRK Working Group was further supplemented by representatives and staff from the National Union of Students in Hungary (HÖÖK), the Hungarian Accreditation Committee (MAB), the Educational Authority (OH), the Tempus Public Foundation (TKA), and the Ministry of Human Capacities (EMMI).

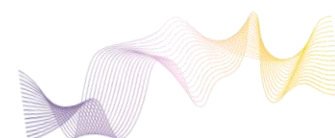
According to the MRK report, Hungary ranks among the lowest in Europe in terms of the recognition of credits earned abroad by returning students from their Erasmus mobility. The document emphasizes that credit recognition follows an overly subject-centered and formal approach, relying on course equivalency instead of valuing the learning outcomes the student gets from studying a semester abroad. This often results in very low subject recognition ratio and significantly discourages student mobility as well as undermines the principles of European educational integration.

In October 2018, the Ministry of Human Capacities (EMMI) issued an **official interpretation for higher education institutions regarding the provision set out in Section 49 (5) of Act CCIV of 2011 on National Higher Education (hereinafter: Nftv.)**: “Credit must be recognized if the compared knowledge is at least seventy-five percent equivalent.” It became apparent that, in institutional practice, this provision was not being viewed as a regulation intended to protect students. Instead, it was being treated as a kind of lower threshold for recognizability, automatically excluding the recognition of equivalence below this level. This approach does not align with the international consensus on the purpose of academic recognition.

Reforming Hungary’s credit recognition system is not only a matter of academic policy but also of national strategic importance and requires complex, systemic reforms. A learning outcome-based approach, the institutionalization of validation, and the harmonization of credit transfer practices are all essential. Creating a student-centered, flexible, and transparent system of recognition can yield significant educational, social, and economic benefits, such as increasing students' willingness to study abroad and strengthening the international competitiveness of Hungarian higher education. Improving student information, sharing best practices, and harmonizing institutional regulations are all critical to achieving these goals.

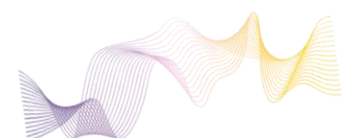
Further national relevant literature

- A **symposium organized by University of Szeged in 2011** highlighted that credit recognition practices vary significantly between institutions. The studies revealed that the comparison of course syllabus is common, resulting in considerable administrative



burden and often not leading to full credit transfer. Most students reported experiencing partial or complete credit loss, which can result in longer study durations or even the loss of scholarships.

- The study by **Tőzsér and Péterfi (2020)** focused on student mobility in the Carpathian Basin and confirmed that, while the proportion of incoming students has increased, significant barriers remain for outgoing students - particularly due to the uncertainties surrounding credit recognition. The mobility programs (such as Erasmus+) coordinated by the Tempus Public Foundation aim to enhance students' competencies and international employability. However, the efficiency of mobility is hindered if students are uncertain whether their credits will be recognized. The study places special emphasis on analysing students' willingness to participate in mobility, their attitudes, and the perceived obstacles. The report concludes that legal and institutional uncertainties, lack of information and fear of study prolongation are major discouraging factors. These findings reinforce the conclusions of the MRK report (2019) and the 2011 symposium of University of Szeged, asserting that without reforming recognition practices, international mobility goals cannot be fully achieved.
- It is also essential to mention the validation of the knowledge students bring back home from their mobility. According to **Derényi and Tót (2011)**, validation - the formal recognition of knowledge acquired through formal, non-formal, and informal learning - can play a key role in creating a more flexible higher education system. Recognition procedures based on learning outcomes can reduce curricular redundancies and support lifelong learning.
- **Mariann Móri (2014)** also concluded that the recognition of knowledge acquired through diverse learning paths is still developing in Hungary. While Western Europe has adopted practices such as portfolios, observation, and simulations for recognition, Hungarian higher education institutions remain cautious. Institutionalized validation procedures not only boost students' self-esteem but also broaden access to higher education.



Kosovo (Public University "Kadri Zeka", UKZ)

In order to align with European standards and improve recognition processes, Kosovo's public universities, including UKZ, provide students with opportunities to succeed in both local and international contexts.

Recognition of Foreign Grades and Studies at UKZ

Currently, the Public University "Kadri Zeka" (UKZ) does not have a formal, university-level regulation that specifically governs the recognition of academic grades and studies completed abroad. However, in response to the increasing mobility of students and the growing number of international academic exchanges, UKZ has implemented a practical interim solution through its International Relations Office.

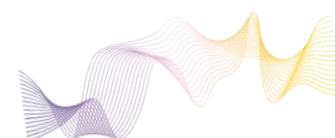
To facilitate the recognition process for UKZ students who have studied abroad, as well as for international students continuing their studies at our university, a Consent Form is administered at the International Relations Office. This administrative mechanism has served as a temporary measure to ensure academic continuity and fairness in the absence of a formal regulatory framework.

Recognizing the importance of student mobility and the need for consistent academic standards, UKZ has prioritized the development of a comprehensive institutional framework for the recognition of foreign studies and grades. This new regulation is currently in development and aims to formalize procedures, ensure transparency, and align with European higher education standards.

This initiative reflects our university's strategic commitment to promoting academic exchange and building institutional capacity through partnerships with European universities. We aim to enhance the academic and professional growth of our students and contribute to the internationalization of higher education at UKZ.

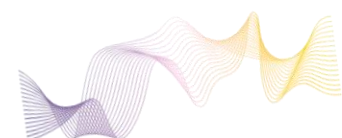
Selected Relevant National Literature

- Law on Higher Education (No. 04/L-037): This law is the foundation for Kosovo's higher education system and outlines the structure of higher education, academic standards, and the recognition of qualifications within Kosovo. The law aims to ensure that qualifications obtained at public universities such as UKZ are recognized nationally and



comply with the standards set by the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology, and Innovation (MESTI).

- Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA): The KAA is responsible for the accreditation of higher education programs in Kosovo, ensuring that all public universities, including UKZ, adhere to national and international quality standards. Accreditation by the KAA is a key element for the recognition of degrees and grades obtained at these institutions.
- Kosovo National Qualifications Framework (NQF): The NQF is a reference tool used to describe and compare the qualifications and learning outcomes at different levels of education in Kosovo. It helps in recognizing academic degrees and grades, both domestically and internationally, by providing a clear description of each qualification level.
- EHEA and Bologna Process: Kosovo's public universities, including UKZ, are aligned with the EHEA and the Bologna Process, which aims to harmonize higher education across Europe. This alignment facilitates the recognition of grades, degrees, and qualifications between Kosovo's public universities and institutions in EU member states.
- Lisbon Recognition Convention: Kosovo's legislative framework on the recognition of foreign qualifications is largely in line with the Lisbon Recognition Convention, which aims to ensure fair recognition of academic qualifications obtained abroad. While Kosovo has not fully ratified the Convention, its policies are largely compatible with its principles, which aid in the recognition of qualifications earned by students at UKZ and other Kosovo public universities.
- Mutual Recognition Agreement under Berlin Process (2022) Signed by Kosovo and Western Balkans states to enable automatic recognition of higher education qualifications within the region.
- KAA Revised Accreditation Standards (2023): Introduces updated criteria to reflect EHEA goals including transparency, digitalization, and mobility.
- Erasmus+ Kosovo Annual Reports (2018–2024): Provides data on outgoing and incoming mobility, credit recognition rates, and institutional participation in automatic recognition initiatives.



- EU Progress Report on Kosovo (2023) – Education Chapter: Evaluates Kosovo's alignment with EU education standards and identifies reforms toward automatic recognition
- NARIC Monitoring Report (Jan–Dec 2022) – Key Findings- The National Academic Recognition and Information Centre (NARIC) is a key quality-assurance body for Kosovo higher education. All graduates from abroad seeking academic or professional roles in Kosovo must have their foreign diplomas formally recognized by NARIC. In practice, NARIC vets these diplomas – guarding against low-quality or fraudulent credentials – and then issues equivalence or non-recognition decisions. It comprises an Office and a State Council for Recognition (SCR) which reviews cases; the Centre also provides official information on recognition procedures and explains Kosovo's higher-education system to foreign authorities.

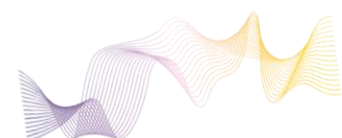
At the national level, the recognition of foreign qualifications is guided by the Law on Higher Education in the Republic of Kosovo and various administrative instructions issued by the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology, and Innovation (MESTI). These include directives on the principles and procedures for recognizing diplomas and study programs obtained outside Kosovo.

Regional Cooperation: The 2022 Berlin Process recognition agreement offers Kosovo access to automatic recognition within the Western Balkans, opening mutual pathways for students and institutions.

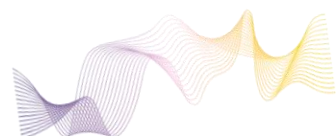
National Obstacles to Automatic Recognition

While progress has been made, several obstacles hinder the full implementation of automatic recognition in Kosovo, including:

- Political Status of Kosovo: Kosovo's political recognition is still not fully recognized by some EU member states, which hinders the recognition of academic qualifications and limits opportunities for Kosovo students to participate in some EU programs.
- Insufficient Awareness and Training: Many academic staff and administrative personnel in universities, including UKZ, are not fully aware of the complexities of the recognition process, and training is needed to ensure proper implementation.



- **Infrastructure Gaps:** Kosovo's universities, including UKZ, are still in the process of developing the digital infrastructure needed to facilitate seamless recognition of qualifications. This includes online platforms for degree verification and credit transfer systems.
- **Financial Constraints:** Implementing automatic recognition systems requires investment in digital tools and staff training, which can be limited due to the financial constraints of universities.



Conclusions and Gaps in the Literature

Key Gaps in the Literature

Lack of Longitudinal Data on Recognition Outcomes

While short-term satisfaction surveys are common, detailed mobility statistics should be improved. Only few studies track recognition outcomes over time or measure the academic and professional impact of partial or failed credit recognition. This absence makes it difficult to evaluate the systemic effects, institutional accountability or regional tendencies.

Insufficient Focus on Non-EU Programmes

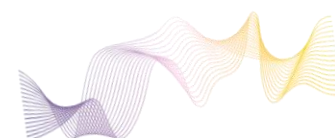
Much of the literature focuses on Erasmus+ and the Bologna Process, leaving limited comparative analysis with non-EU schemes.

Underexplored Institutional Practices

Institutional-level practices are rarely documented systematically. Most studies rely on student self-reports or national policy summaries, rather than in-depth analysis of how universities interpret and implement recognition principles (Teichler, 2003; EUA, 2024). Understanding these practices is crucial because universities exercise significant discretion in recognition decisions. Factors such as internal governance structures, faculty autonomy, and institutional culture can produce wide variations in recognition outcomes even when Learning Agreements or national guidelines exist. This underexploration constrains the development of evidence-based recommendations for improving consistency, transparency, and fairness in credit recognition.

Challenges

Despite the strong legal and policy framework, credit recognition remains an area with notable implementation challenges. These include discrepancies in ECTS application across institutions, variations in grading systems, and administrative delays in credit transfer (Bracht, 2006; Huisman & van der Wende, 2004). Nonetheless, Erasmus+ has significantly enhanced the consistency, transparency, and trust needed for effective recognition of academic achievements within the EU.



Inconsistencies practices among countries and partner universities:

- Varying interpretations of recommendations and guides
- Differences in grading systems, curricular content, or course duration
- Uneven application of ECTS

Administrative and Procedural Barriers

- Recognition processes may be opaque, slow, or under-documented
- Learning Agreements are often ignored or re-negotiated upon return
- Fragmentation of responsibilities between international offices and academic departments causes misunderstanding among students
- Students are often not informed of their rights regarding recognition
- Recognition decisions may lack justification or documentation

Legal Ambiguity: The non-binding nature of Council recommendations leads to slow implementation, and many national systems lack enforcement or penalties for non-compliance.

Autonomy vs. Accountability: Higher Education Institutions often prioritize curricular integrity over harmonized credit recognition, creating inconsistent practices even when Learning Agreements are signed.

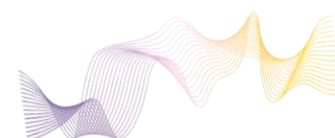
Digital Integration Gaps: While tools like Erasmus Without Paper and Online Learning Agreements exist, their uptake is uneven, and technical issues persist (European Commission, 2024).

Recommendations

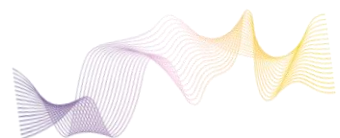
Enforceable Guidelines and Auditing

Expand Comparative Research: More funded collaboration between research centers (e.g., INCHER-Kassel) could address this.

Improve Institutional Training and Accountability: Develop standardized training modules for academic staff and mobility officers, emphasizing the legal obligations of recognition and the role of digital tools.



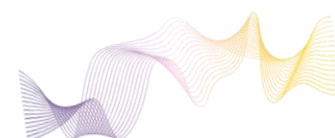
Intensive Digital Interoperability: Accelerate the integration of digital platforms across all partner institutions through Erasmus Without Paper.



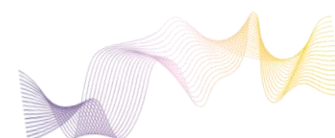
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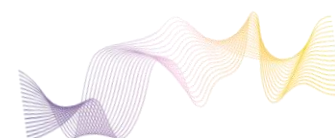
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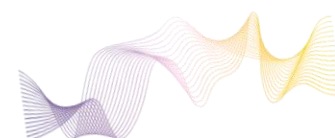
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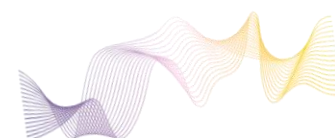
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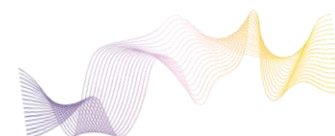


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Hungary

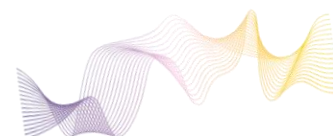
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Abbreviations

Acronym	Full Form
AUREA	Automatic Recognition Assessment
AMR	Automatic Mutual Recognition
DAAD	Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst
DG EAC	Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (European Commission)
EAR	European Area of Recognition
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
ECHE	Erasmus Charter for Higher Education
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
ELAP	Emerging Leaders in the Americas Program
ELTE	Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem (Eötvös Loránd University)
ENQUA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
ESG	Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area
ESN	Erasmus Student Network
ESU	European Students' Union
EU	European Union
EUA	European University Association
EURASHE	European Association of Institutions in Higher Education
EEA	European Education Area
ESCI	European Student Card Initiative
Erasmus	Erasmus Without Paper
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
JSP	Joint Study Programmes
LLP	Lifelong Learning Programme
MU	Philipps-Universität Marburg (University of Marburg)
NARIC	National Academic Recognition Information Centres
NUS	National Union of Students
OLA	Online Learning Agreement
QA	Quality Assurance
SEMP	Swiss-European Mobility Programme
ToR	Transcript of Records
UGent	Universiteit Gent (Ghent University)
UKZ	Universiteti Publik "Kadri Zeka" (Kadri Zeka Public University)
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

