

**European Higher Education Area – Bologna Follow-Up Group
Coordination Group on Global Policy Dialogue – Africa Sub-Group**

EHEA-Africa Conversations on Academic Recognition

Conversation nr. 1

**“How do we do academic recognition?
Instruments, tools and practices at regional and national level”**

Background Note

Academic recognition in the European Higher Education Area

Achieving easier and fairer recognition of academic qualifications, based on the [Council of Europe’s Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region](#) (so-called “Lisbon Recognition Convention” - LRC), is one of the objectives of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), established through the so-called “Bologna Process”. The LRC aims to facilitate the recognition of qualifications granted in one Party in another Party. Over time, the EHEA has catalysed structural reforms and the development of recognition and quality assurance systems, and has stimulated student mobility and internationalisation.

The priorities of the EHEA cooperation include recognition of alternative learning pathways; achieving automatic recognition; establishing the distribution of work and responsibilities among the competent institutions in charge of carrying out recognition procedures, and ensuring the fair recognition of qualifications held by refugees.

An overarching *framework of qualifications* sets the parameters within which the 49 EHEA countries develop national qualifications frameworks. Qualification frameworks are intended to help learners to move within an education system and between different systems. They support higher education curriculum development and implementation by the competent national authorities. They enable transparency by encompassing the diversity that is one of the strengths of European higher education, and help to promote national and international learning mobility.

A structured peer support approach is intended to facilitate progress towards the three key commitments of the Bologna Process – degree structures, quality assurance and *recognition*.

The EHEA countries have taken action to ensure that all aspects of the LRC are covered in national legislation. However, some challenges remain. For example, EHEA countries have been progressing towards system level or ‘automatic recognition’. However, improvements are still needed to allow qualified learners automatic access to higher education in other countries. Also, procedures designed to assess whether refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee like situation fulfil the relevant requirements for access to higher education are not yet a legal requirement in a majority of EHEA countries.

The implementation of reforms in the EHEA has also been raising new questions. For example, how can recognition of short-cycle degrees be achieved when countries have different understandings of such qualifications? Does the increasing variety of master degrees pose new challenges?

A *European Qualifications Framework* established by the European Union also serves as a translation tool between the different national qualifications frameworks in the EU Member States, the European Economic Area countries (Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway), Albania, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey (candidate countries), Bosnia & Herzegovina, Kosovo (potential candidates) and Switzerland. It thus helps to improve transparency, comparability and portability of qualifications.

Academic recognition in Africa

Just under half a million of the world's 6 million internationally mobile students come from Africa – a figure lower than in most regions, but on a steady rise. Strengthening and connecting Africa's higher education systems is key to widening opportunities and advancing socio-economic development, putting equity at the core.

The [Revised Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Certificates, Diplomas, Degrees and Other Academic Qualifications on Higher Education in African States](#) (*'Addis Convention'*) complements the African Union's developmental goals contained in its *Agenda 2063*¹, supports multilateralism and international cooperation and ensures credible and reliable recognition of qualifications. It has the potential to improve employability of graduates, internationalisation of higher education programmes, and boost student and faculty mobility.

The Convention, which entered into force in 2019, has so far been ratified by the following countries: Togo, Burkina Faso, Congo, Djibouti, Gambia, Guinea, Liberia, Mauritius, Mauritania, Senegal, Seychelles, South Africa, and the Holy See.

The Agreement establishing the [African Continental Free Trade Area](#) (AfCFTA) also sets a frame for mutual recognition of education.

In 2022, an *African Network of National Implementation Structures* was launched. The network brings together recognition authorities from the States Parties of the Addis Convention, with the aim to promote exchange of information, capacity development and peer learning in order to strengthen recognition and academic mobility on the continent. Similar networks also exist in Europe ([ENIC/NARIC](#)).

The [Protocol to the Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community relating to Free Movement of Persons, Right of Residence and Right of Establishment](#) ('AU Free Movement Protocol'), and the African Union's [Continental Education Strategy for Africa 2016–2025](#) ('CESA 16–25') include a continental qualifications framework among their goals.

Pan-African Quality Assurance and Accreditation Framework (PAQAF)

The *PAQAF* is an overriding framework for a number of commitments related to quality assurance activities in Africa, which the African Union Commission has endorsed. The implementation of the Addis Convention and an *African Quality Rating Mechanism (AQRM)* are part of it, as are commitments to develop *African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance*, an *African Credit Transfer System* and a *continental register* for quality assurance agencies and national bodies.²

African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF)

An [ACQF](#) is being developed since 2019, based on the principles of inclusiveness of all types of learning and levels of qualifications; openness to learners' and stakeholders' needs, to

¹ [Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want. | African Union \(au.int\)](#)

² [PAQAF, the ASG-QA and the AQRM – An overview | HAQAA Initiative \(aau.org\)](#)

policy learning and lessons from other qualifications frameworks; and innovation-readiness. Its objectives are: to contribute to comparability, quality and transparency of qualifications and support lifelong learning; to facilitate recognition of diplomas and certificates, and support mobility (learners, workers, services); to work in cooperation and complementarity with National and Regional Qualifications Frameworks and support the creation of an African education and qualifications space; to promote cooperation, referencing between national and regional qualifications frameworks in Africa and worldwide.

African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ASG-QA)

The *ASG-QA* are a set of standards and guidelines for internal and external quality assurance in higher education. They are developed to bring added value to higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies by providing a unified framework applicable to all quality assurance processes, allowing an enhancement-led approach for institutional and educational quality.³

Harmonisation of African Higher Education, Quality Assurance and Accreditation (HAQAA)

[HAQAA](#) is an initiative that supports the development of a harmonised quality assurance and accreditation system at institutional, national, regional and Pan-African continental level. It supports PAQAF and ACQF amongst [other action lines and tools](#).

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³ [African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education \(ASG-QA\) - HAQAA2 \(obsglob.org\)](#)