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科学及文化组织

## **Draft Preliminary Report Concerning the Preparation of a Global Convention on the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications**

Paris, 2015

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## 1. Background

The recognition of qualifications in higher education was discussed for the first time within the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) at the 2<sup>nd</sup> session of the General Conference in 1947 when the higher education programme was constituted. A resolution supporting the programme 'Work with universities' was adopted at this session of the General Conference and one of six objectives was to '*consider the problem of equivalence of degrees*'. In 1963, at its 66<sup>th</sup> session, the Executive Board invited the Director-General to study the technical and legal aspects of developing normative instruments on the equivalence of secondary school certificates, diplomas and university degrees (66 EX/Decision 4.2.5).

### 1.1. The Birth of the First Generation of Recognition Conventions

While still maintaining the ultimate objective of a universal standard-setting instrument, the governing bodies of UNESCO concluded that the issue could be addressed at the regional level in this initial phase. Consequently, between 1975 and 1983 six regional recognition conventions were developed to regulate the mutual recognition of qualifications in higher education as follows:

Adoption	Region	Official name
Mexico City, 19 July 1974	Latin America and the Caribbean	Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean
Nice, 17 December 1976	Mediterranean	Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in the Arab and European States Bordering on the Mediterranean
Paris, 22 December 1978	The Arab States	Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in the Arab States
Paris, 21 December 1979	Europe	Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees concerning Higher Education in the States belonging to the Europe Region
Arusha, 5 December 1981	Africa	Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Certificates, Diplomas, Degrees and other Academic Qualifications in Higher Education in the African States
Bangkok, 16 December 1983	Asia and the Pacific	Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in Asia and the Pacific

While focusing on the development of the above-mentioned conventions, the ideal of inter-regional or worldwide recognition is mentioned in the preamble of most of the regional

recognition convention texts. For instance, Parties to the 1979 European Convention are “Mindful that the ultimate objective set by the General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization consists in preparing an International Convention on the Recognition and the Validity of Degrees, Diplomas and Certificates issued by establishments of Higher Learning and Research in all Countries”. Moreover, Parties to the 2014 Addis Convention express “... the belief that this Convention will constitute a major element towards a more wide-ranging action leading, on the one hand, to the construction of an African higher education and research area and, on the other hand, to a possible global convention on the recognition of qualifications in higher education”.

### **1.2. The First Steps towards a Global Convention**

The first real attempt at the development of a global normative instrument on the recognition of qualifications in higher education was made in 1992. A joint meeting of the six regional recognition convention committees was convened in Paris with a mandate to explore the feasibility of adopting a Universal Convention on the Recognition of Studies and Degrees in Higher Education. A consensus was not reached and the joint meeting concluded that the process should continue at regional level. However, the initiative was not futile since it did lead to the adoption by the UNESCO General Conference at its 27<sup>th</sup> Session of an international normative instrument, the *1993 Recommendation on the Recognition of Studies and Qualifications in Higher Education*.

Later, UNESCO and Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) jointly developed the “Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-border Higher Education” which sets out to provide an international framework to protect students and other stakeholders from low-quality provision and disreputable providers. These guidelines were adopted by the 33<sup>rd</sup> session of the UNESCO General Conference (2005) and still hold relevance for the possible future work to develop a global convention on the recognition of higher education qualifications.

### **1.3. The Second Generation of Regional Conventions**

The adoption of the 1993 Recommendation coincided with UNESCO and the Council of Europe collaborating to begin the process of elaborating a modernised and strengthened joint convention on the recognition of degrees in Europe. This process was clearly linked to political changes in Europe and stronger European integration in most aspects of society, including higher education. The adoption of the *Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region* (Lisbon, 11 April 1997) marked a significant shift towards a second generation of recognition conventions which was better tuned towards addressing the challenges faced by States of that particular region. Subsequently, this Convention came to play a significant role in the *Bologna Process*, a unique regional higher education reform. The 1997 Lisbon Convention is currently the only normative instrument used within the Bologna Process. As of 1 March 2015, the 1997 Lisbon Convention has 53 Parties.

The second regional convention to undergo a modernisation process was the 1983 Bangkok Convention. The process commenced in 2005 when Member States of the Asia-Pacific region acknowledged that renewing the convention would provide a unique opportunity to reflect changes in their higher education systems and to put in place practical measures to support improved information provision, as well as quality recognition and assurance measures. The Asia-Pacific region also acknowledged the existence in the region of a

greater diversity of education systems in operation as compared to other regions. Therefore, recognizing the need for a revised convention to manage such differences, the convention aimed at replacing the 1983 Bangkok Convention was adopted at an International Conference of States (ICS) in Tokyo, Japan in November 2011. The 2011 Tokyo Convention has received 11 signatories and has two ratifications as of 1 March 2015. Several more national ratification processes are in the pipeline.

The third regional convention to undergo a modernization process was the 1981 Arusha Convention. Through a fruitful cooperation between UNESCO, the African Union and the Member States, a convention revising the 1981 Arusha Convention was developed and then adopted at an International Conference of States held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in December 2014. The African Union has stated that the 2014 Addis Convention will be an important tool for optimizing the use of human resources in Africa and for Africa to be better positioned in the global economy. As of 1 March 2015, the 2014 Addis Convention has received 17 signatories.

UNESCO is prepared to fully support revision processes of the other regional recognition conventions. A High-level Meeting on the Recognition of Studies, Titles and Degrees in Latin America and the Caribbean, will take place in October in Brasilia, organized jointly by the Government of the Federative Republic of Brazil and UNESCO to see whether the regional convention should be revised.

There has also been preliminary dialogue with regard to a revision of *the Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in the Arab and European States Bordering on the Mediterranean*, adopted in Nice, France, in 1976.

## **2. Current Global Trends in Higher Education**

The modernisation of regional conventions was, and still is, inspired by both regional and global trends in higher education. A possible global convention must be forward-looking, take into account the current global trends in higher education and seek to meet the challenges which the new dynamics of higher education raises. If one were to try to capture the new dynamics in higher education with one word, that word would be '**diversification**'. Higher education is experiencing an explosion of diversification in almost all aspects: diversification of providers, of provision, of student demographics, of institutional orientation and so on. The main driving factor of this diversification is the massification of higher education and the technologies which make this possible.

### **2.1. The Massification of Higher Education<sup>1</sup>**

The huge growth in student numbers worldwide is one of the most striking trends in higher education in the past few decades and it has coincided with the affirmation of higher education as a public good. In 1970, there were only 28.5 million students in tertiary education worldwide, of which approximately 62% were males. In 2000, the number had grown to almost 100 million students. Since the turn of the new millennium, the world has

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<sup>1</sup> All statistics in this section are from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS). UIS data is classified by levels of education, for higher education, the classification (revised ISCED) has four levels of tertiary education reflecting the tertiary education structure (Bachelor, Master and Doctorate) that is found around the world but also has been more recently introduced across Europe following the Bologna Process in 1999.

experienced the most notable period of massification in the history of higher education. The global number of students grew to 139 million in 2005 and further to 181 million in 2010. As of 2012, there were 196 million students in tertiary education worldwide. At the regional level, Asia has seen the strongest growth: from 41 million in 2000 to 105 million in 2012, a growth of 155%. Asia is followed by Latin America with 117% growth in student numbers and Africa with 92%. Europe has seen the lowest regional growth of only 27% in the last 12 years, and even a small tendency of declining numbers in the most recent few years leading up to 2012.

Projections made by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics expect the global student population in tertiary education to expand to 263 million students in 2025. If these numbers are made into percentages of the total global population, the number of students amounted to 2.38% of the global population aged 15-79 in 2000, 3.38% in 2009 and it is projected to reach 4.77% by 2020. It is important to note that these projections do not include what is commonly referred to as “Higher Education-like learning providers”, often being online providers.

Increasing age diversity in higher education is worth noting as well. The trajectories for adult students and the articulation between adult education and higher education within the framework of lifelong learning are important aspects to take into consideration when developing procedures for the recognition of qualifications.

## **2.2. Diversification of Higher Education Provision**

It will not be possible to meet the rising demand for higher education by relying solely on traditional delivery models. Traditional as well as new providers are exploring how technology can be used to reach an even larger number of students. Though distance learning has been a mode of provision for more than two centuries, internet has been the triggering factor for its massive growth over the past two decades.

Another recent development, Open Educational Resources (OERs), has significantly contributed to expanding access to higher education content. The term OER was first coined at the ‘2002 Forum on the impact of Open Courseware for Higher Education in Developing Countries’. The 2012 UNESCO World Declaration on OER designated it as,

*teaching, learning and research materials in any medium, digital or otherwise, that reside in the public domain or have been released under an open license that permits no-cost access, use, adaptation and redistribution by others with no or limited restrictions. Open licensing is built within the existing framework of intellectual property rights as defined by relevant international conventions and respects the authorship of the work.*

The most recent development in technology-based delivery of higher education are the Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs). MOOCs differ from traditional university programmes firstly by their open access. Basically, the only prerequisite for participation is access to the internet. Secondly, MOOCs are characterised by scalability as the courses are designed to be provided on a very large scale. The introduction of MOOCs may offer great opportunities for the democratisation of education. More broadly, the European Union projects that e-learning will account for 30% of all higher education provision within 10 years.



Challenges will undoubtedly emerge for cross-border recognition of qualifications with the growth of MOOCs and online provision of higher education in general.

The increased use of technology in higher education is not only affecting the delivery of higher education but it is also heavily influencing the administration of higher education. In that respect, the 2012 Groningen Declaration calls for a feasibility study on the worldwide exchange of digital student data and the phasing out of paper-based documents and paper-based authentications where practicable. It is not for this report to discuss such issues in detail, but it is prudent to point to the fact that the use of ICT affects most aspects of higher education, including procedures for recognition of qualifications.

Corporate structures of higher education are also changing. Private higher education is a fast-growing sub-sector and the percentage of students enrolled in private higher education institutions is now close to 40%. Private higher education includes both non-profit and for-profit institutions. Private providers are not always operating only on a national level. Cross-border higher education institutions are increasing in numbers and scale.

### **2.3. Changes in the Paradigm of Learning**

Over the last decade there has been a noticeable shift towards more focus on learning instead of teaching. There has been a shift from input-orientation to output-orientation. One concrete example of this is the introduction of qualifications frameworks in a steadily growing number of countries. More attention is now given to the knowledge, skills and competencies that students must acquire. This can also be described as a shift towards increasingly focusing the teaching on the learner, which is one prominent aspect of the Bologna Process within the European region.

Another shift in the paradigm of learning has been the increased attention given to informal and non-formal learning, both inside and outside of higher education; the enhancement of creativeness; and entrepreneurship. A fourth aspect is the shift towards increased attention to relevance, which encompasses a wide range of topics, from preparation to the labour market, to valorisation of scientific research and the contribution of higher education to equitable and democratic societies.

### **2.4. Employability**

In recent years, governments and employers have increasingly focused on the employability and the entrepreneurial skills of higher education graduates. Traditionally, employability in the world of work has not been a very influential consideration in higher education. However, the race for increased productivity, economic growth and competitiveness on the global markets have led businesses to become increasingly involved in higher education in order to improve the employability and the entrepreneurial skills of higher education graduates.

The increasing concern for the level of unemployment of university graduates constitutes a driving force to vocationalize higher education and promote linkages between universities and employers.

### **2.5. Quality and Quality Assurance**

Increased attention is being given now to quality and quality assurance in the global higher education community. The rapid growth in the number of students and higher education institutions has put pressure on the quality of the education provided. A further new trend is



the internationalisation of quality assurance. Having been mainly a national<sup>2</sup> issue until recently, more and more stakeholders see the huge potential for quality improvements through internationalisation of quality assurance. Connected to the developments mentioned above is the ongoing proliferation of national qualifications frameworks and the development of regional or meta-qualifications frameworks, as part of the quality assurance agenda. A comprehensive system of national and regional qualifications frameworks has the potential to further facilitate cross-border recognition.

The development of successful instruments for the cross-border recognition of qualifications fundamentally depends on functional quality assurance systems, both on the national level and cross-border. There will always be a need for a certain amount of trust between the Parties and between the higher education institutions. Strong, reliable, and transparent quality assurance systems are needed to reach such a level of trust. The ongoing developments in recognition, quality assurance and qualifications frameworks will greatly benefit from being seen as complementary actions within the same agenda.

## **2.6. Internationalisation of Higher Education**

Internationalisation of higher education is increasingly a policy objective for governments. Internationalisation is often seen as a contributor to educational quality, educational diversity and the general exchange of education resources across borders.

Outward academic mobility is perhaps the most common form of internationalisation of higher education. However, the term also includes an increased attention on “internationalisation at home”, i.e. internationalisation of the curriculum, international lecturers, international student population on campus. Internationalisation of higher education also implies a shift in scale, scope and culture. In this framework, higher education institutions are increasingly defining their missions and values in more global terms, not only in local or national terms.

## **2.7. Academic Mobility<sup>3</sup>**

In 2012, at least 4 million students studied outside their home countries. Countries in Central Asia have the most mobile students. Statistics from UIS show that in 2012, five destination countries hosted nearly half of the total number of mobile students worldwide: the United States of America (hosting 18%), United Kingdom (11%), France (7%), Australia (6%), and Germany (5%). But these countries also saw their share of international enrolment decline from 55% in 2000 to 47% in 2012.

Australia and Japan, traditional destinations in East Asia and the Pacific, are rivalled by newcomers: the People’s Republic of China, Malaysia, the Republic of Korea, Singapore and New Zealand hosted 6% of the global share of mobile students in 2012.

In the Arab States, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are major destinations for higher education studies. These three countries hosted 4% of the global share of mobile students.

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<sup>2</sup> The term “national” is in this report meant to include also the federal level in Member States where the federal level has authority for higher education. It is meant to signify the domain of higher education authorities within and in accordance with rules and procedures for the individual Member State.

<sup>3</sup> All statistics in this section are from UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS).

Internationalisation strategies result in strong competition to attract mobile students. This is partly due to the strengthening of higher education systems and institutions in all regions. The number of students choosing to study abroad in a country close to home is growing in some regions. In the Arab States, the share of mobile students studying within the region increased from 12% to 26% between 1999 and 2012. The increase in Central and Eastern Europe is from 25% to 37%, and that in sub-Saharan Africa is from 18% to 28%. The United Arab Emirates now outpaces the United Kingdom in attracting students from the Arab States and has become the third most popular destination (after France and the United States) for students from the Arab region. South Africa attracted 22% of mobile students from sub-Saharan Africa in 2012, and Ghana and Uganda hosted more students from the region in 2012 than ever before.

Although the share of mobile students who stay within their home region is increasing, the vast majority of students studying outside their home country are doing so in a country outside their region of origin. Only in North America and Western Europe do the majority of mobile students stay within the region.

## **2.8. Internationalisation of Research**

As is the case for higher education, research is also going through an intensified process of internationalisation, facilitated by the establishment of regional research areas and the international competition for research funding. Many of the great challenges of our time such as the climate change and pandemic diseases are global and call for global solutions. Researchers are increasingly getting connected across borders in order to advance our knowledge societies.

## **2.9. Financing of Higher Education**

Higher education is increasingly viewed as a major engine of sustainable economic, social and cultural development. Government tax revenues are not keeping pace with rapidly rising costs of higher education. The expansion of student numbers and/or the deterioration of public sector finance have presented major challenges for systems where the tradition has been to provide access to free or highly subsidised higher education. The sustainability of this model has been challenged, placing pressure on systems to fundamentally restructure the 'social contract' between higher education and society at large. Thus, the funding of higher education requires both public and private resources. While the role of the state remains essential, other sources of funds are often needed for sustaining the higher education sector, including those drawing on the public-private partnership model. Policy solutions on the revenue side include cost-sharing - generally associated with tuition fees and 'user charges'. Much of the costs of expanded participation are shifted to parents and students through the encouragement of a growing private higher education sector or the introduction or increase of fees in public institutions. Finding ways to sustainably finance quality provision of higher education without increasing inequalities remains a matter requiring high policy attention.

## **3. The Revitalisation of the Process towards a Global Convention**

Taking into account all these global trends in higher education, the feasibility of a global convention was again raised at the ICS in Tokyo in November 2011. At the same time, the momentum gained through the "second generation" of recognition conventions stimulated the debate and the 2011 Tokyo Convention represented a particular landmark in this

respect, stemming from the most populous region in the world with fast rising student and academic mobility both to and from the region. All Member States of UNESCO were invited to this ICS and representatives of all regions supported the initiative.

The debate supported the idea of a global standard-setting instrument as long as regional specificities would continue to be respected. The discussion concluded with a proposal that the UNESCO Secretariat undertakes a feasibility study on the technical and legal aspects relating to the desirability of a global standard-setting instrument on the recognition of higher education qualifications. The Secretariat proceeded with such a study through both a questionnaire to all Member States and deliberations at various regional meetings in Seoul (May 2012), Toledo (June 2012), Abidjan (September 2012) and Nanjing (October 2012). The questionnaire resulted in 145 inputs from Ministries, recognition agencies, higher education institutions and other relevant stakeholders from 77 Member States.

The outcome of the feasibility study was discussed at the UNESCO Executive Board at its 191st session in April 2013. Furthermore, the feasibility study was submitted to the 37<sup>th</sup> session of the General Conference in 2013 which adopted the following resolution (37 C/Resolution 15):

*The General Conference,*

*Taking note of 191 EX/Decision 42,*

*Having examined the preliminary study of the technical and legal aspects relating to the desirability of a global standard-setting instrument on the recognition of higher education qualifications (37 C/45),*

1. *Recognizes* the benefits of a global normative instrument that will improve academic and professional mobility, enhance international cooperation in higher education, and represent a significant step forward towards global recognition and trust;
2. *Acknowledges* that such an instrument will provide a mechanism for assisting Member States to improve the quality of their higher education systems, in the context of contemporary transformations;
3. *Invites* the Director-General to initiate, in accordance with the applicable rules, the process of elaborating a global convention on the recognition of higher education qualifications, ensuring that its development will build upon and complement the regional conventions;
4. *Requests* the Director-General to undertake further comprehensive consultations with Member States and relevant stakeholders, in order to consider further key issues relating to the establishment of a global convention on the recognition of higher education qualifications;
5. *Also requests* the Director-General to continue to assist Member States in revising the existing regional conventions, as appropriate;
6. *Also invites* the Director-General to submit a preliminary report to Member States at its 38<sup>th</sup> session for consideration and decision on further action.

Pursuant to this resolution, UNESCO convened an Experts' Meeting on the issue in Paris in July 2014. A second Experts' Meeting was held in April 2015. All participants were invited in their personal capacity as experts.

### **3.1. Comparison of the Regional Conventions**

The degree of implementation of the regional conventions varies. Some key factors of success could be identified by analyzing the similarities and differences between the regional conventions.

#### **3.1.1. Similarities**

All of the conventions, both first and second generation, are built on a set of common principles. These principles in particular acknowledge that:

- the right to education is a human right and that higher education represents an exceptionally rich asset from the cultural and scientific point of view for both individuals and society.
- the conventions will contribute towards preservation and strengthening of the cultural identity and diversity of their people, and respecting the specific character of their education systems.
- recognition constitutes one of the conditions necessary for enabling means of education existing in their territories to be used as effectively as possible for the common good.
- the conventions will promote lifelong learning, the democratisation of education and the adoption and application of educational policies allowing for structural, economic, technological and social change.

The first generation of conventions all followed a common structure where the preamble places the conventions in the framework of UNESCO's mission as set out in its Constitution. The terminology makes a shift from 'equivalence' to 'recognition'; the objectives focus on granting recognition of qualifications both for the purposes of further study and research and for professional purposes; and the scope focuses on recognition of qualifications attained through the formal education systems.

The shift from 'equivalence' to 'recognition' is worth noting. Ever since the first regional convention in this field was adopted in 1974, there has been a clearly defined principle of all the conventions to only aim at recognition of qualifications. The direct aim of the conventions has not been to harmonise higher education systems or to develop a framework for automatic recognition based on equivalence.

#### **3.1.2. Differences**

There are also a number of differences between the first generation conventions, mainly due to acknowledged differences in the recognition challenges faced in the different regions. When comparing the first and second generation conventions, one can identify at least eight important differences which might help in the search for key factors for success:

1. A shift in focus in favour of the applicant: In the second generation of conventions, the applicant is entitled to fair recognition of their qualifications within a reasonable time limit, according to transparent, coherent and reliable procedures; the reasons for refusal have to be stated; the applicant has the right to appeal; and the principle of substantial differences is introduced. The principle of substantial differences dictates

that recognition should be granted unless substantial differences apply. The principle will also help bring visibility and mutual understanding to real and acknowledged differences between national education systems, which will help both the applicants and the Parties.

This shift in focus is important because it brings forward more clearly the overall aim of equity and non-discrimination. The applicant will always be the weaker party of any recognition process and it is therefore important to secure the rights of the applicants. Without a recognition convention regulating such rights, an individual can be easily rejected without having his/her qualifications evaluated at all.

2. More consciousness of the wide diversification between systems of higher education: Relating to the principle of substantial differences, the second generation conventions are more aware of the importance of respecting the diversity of systems. This rich cultural, social, political, philosophical and religious diversity represents an exceptional asset which must be fully respected.

This shift is important because it helps protect the rich heritage of a higher education system. There can be a number of good reasons for adopting harmonisation strategies within higher education, but a balance is needed between harmonisation and preserving the rich assets of diversity. Easy recognition is not necessarily a decisive argument for harmonisation. It is important that recognition conventions take diversity into account and create a legal framework for the respect of diversified higher education systems.

3. The importance of access to reliable information: Reliable, comparable and accessible information is perhaps the most important key to the promotion of recognition practices. While first generation conventions urged for improving systems for the exchange of information, the second generation states that national information services must be established, either through National Information Centres (NICs), or through other dedicated bodies. The networks of dedicated experts from these bodies are also an important innovation in the second generation conventions which promotes mutual understanding and trust.

Accessible, comparable and reliable information on higher education systems, higher education institutions and higher education degrees and diplomas of other Parties has, through the 1997 Lisbon Convention in particular, proven to be one of the most central enablers of a functional cross-border recognition system. Access to such information will not only raise the quality of recognition processes, it will also significantly contribute towards reducing the time that has to be spent on such procedures by the competent recognition authority and/or higher education institutions in the Parties to the convention.

4. Academic qualifications vs. professional qualifications: While first generation conventions also specifically included recognition for professional purposes, i.e. access to the labour market, the second generation deals with academic recognition only. The exception is the 2014 Addis Convention, which has a broader scope. It includes a formulation on employment, though the main focus of the convention is

the recognition of qualifications for further learning or research. This is not to say that the 1997 Lisbon Convention or the 2011 Tokyo Convention cannot be used for recognition with the purpose of entry into the labour market. Competent recognition authorities may provide recognition of academic qualifications irrespective of whether recognition is sought for further study or for employment purposes. The issue at stake is primarily that the conventions do not concern the recognition of qualifications for access to and the right to the pursuit of regulated professions and secondly, that legal instruments on academic recognition should not interfere with, or conflict with, national labour market legislation.

5. Links to regional policy developments: The trend towards the harmonisation of higher education at regional level, for instance through the establishment of regional higher education areas, relies on recognition conventions and regional quality assurance networks. Examples of such policy developments are the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (AQRF) in the Asia-Pacific, the Bologna Process in Europe, the Latin American and the Caribbean Area for Higher Education (ENLACES) or the African Higher Education and Research Space (AHERS).
6. The development of operational guidelines: In order to implement conventions and to adapt them to the ever-changing dynamics of higher education, Parties find it useful to develop directives guiding their implementation. These can be operational directives (or guidelines) concerning specific topics which the Parties find it useful or necessary to elaborate on further than the actual convention text. Such texts were introduced, for example, through the implementation of the 1997 Lisbon Convention. They are referred to as “subsidiary texts” and have served as an important tool for the successful implementation of the Convention. The implementation of the possible global convention could be guided by such texts to be developed by (an) organ(s) established by the convention.
7. More attention to quality, quality assurance and qualifications frameworks: The first generation conventions were for the most part dealing with access to higher education, while the second generation also brings quality, quality assurance and qualifications frameworks into the picture.

Recognition of qualifications relies on the trust between countries. Such trust requires that effective quality assurance systems and mechanisms are in place. When qualifications frameworks are also compiled at the regional level, the level of trust is further enhanced. It is important to note here that a national qualifications framework is not necessary for recognition to take place within a country. Such a country, and its qualifications system, would benefit from participation in recognition conventions just as a country that has an operational national qualifications framework.

8. More comprehensive systems and structures for implementation: While the first generation only established one formal body for implementation, the second generation establishes a much wider range of implementation structures on both political and technical levels.



Cooperation between the European Network of Information Centres (the ENIC Network) and the network of National Academic Recognition Information Centres (NARIC Network) has been a key factor for the successful implementation of the 1997 Lisbon Convention. The field of recognition consists of a wide range of rather specific issues and challenges. Through these networks, the European region has managed to form an arena for recognition practitioners discussing and solving such issues without the involvement of the political level. The networks have also contributed substantially to policy developments. Moreover, the networks help building mutual understanding and knowledge sharing between practitioners, thus enhancing efficiency in the national recognition systems. The practitioners participating in the networks become a highly valuable resource for the whole community of recognition practitioners within their respective countries.

If the decision is made to engage in the process of developing a global convention for the recognition of qualifications in higher education, there would be a need to further examine the above and other lessons drawn from the second generation conventions. This would enable to adapt existing recognition structures or create new ones required for a successful implementation of the convention. However, it is worth noting that the differences in the degree of implementation of the regional conventions are not only due to different provisions but also largely result from regional differences in higher education policies and systems, and in political commitment to comprehensive implementation.

#### **4. Aims and Limits of a Possible Global Convention**

The current global trends in higher education and the figures presented above should leave no doubt that there is a need for normative instruments which can secure cross-border recognition of qualifications in a fair, transparent and non-discriminatory manner. The dedication and effort made in the modernisation processes of the recognition conventions is a clear sign of the importance of these instruments to States. The existing conventions fulfil specific needs; however trends in higher education coupled with increasing globalization call for a global framework for recognition. A global convention would have facilitated the recognition of qualifications for 2.5 million students studying outside their home region today; and this number is expected to grow in the years to come.

The general aim of a global convention would be to serve as an international normative instrument involving all States. It would cover practices for recognition, by Parties, of qualifications in higher education awarded by a diverse range of providers. The convention would define terms such as higher education, tertiary education, post-secondary education and types of recognition. The global convention could endeavour to improve the definitions where the regional conventions have fallen short, or where issues have arisen, thus creating barriers to recognition which are contrary to the spirit of the convention. It would also define the different types of higher education provision and providers. In short, a global convention would include the development of a global glossary of terms relevant to the recognition of qualifications. This glossary, reflecting the new dynamics in today's lifelong learning systems, would build on existing national, regional and international glossaries.

The global convention will be carried out in synergy with other relevant normative instruments, and based on the key principles of the regional recognition conventions and the



1993 Recommendation on the recognition of qualifications. However, it will go beyond the scope of these instruments by:

- addressing challenges of inter-regional rather than intra-regional mobility; and
- responding to the challenges of the rapidly evolving and diversified higher education sector .

In addition to this, there are several more specific aims which a global convention could address, some of which are outlined below. The specific aims that a global convention should seek to address will be discussed and agreed upon during the process of developing the convention text.

#### **4.1. Higher Education and the Post-2015 Agenda**

The Incheon Declaration adopted in May 2015 reaffirms that education is a fundamental human right. Education is a part of the foundation for human fulfilment, peace, sustainable development, economic growth, decent work, gender equality and responsible global citizenship. The worldwide Education for All (EFA) movement has seen unprecedented progress particularly within basic education since the beginning of the millennium. The next era, as defined in the Sustainable Development Agenda adopted in September 2015, includes the democratisation of higher education (Goal 4, target 4.3). Higher education is expected to play a pivotal role in sustainable development, economic growth, decent work, gender equality and responsible global citizenship in all regions.

The challenge of meeting the rapid growth in demand for higher education will not be possible without promoting and facilitating the mobility of students and academics. Through academic mobility, more students will be able to access higher education, while academic exchanges will contribute to enhance the quality of higher education.

The lack of qualified and professionally trained teachers was one of the major constraints in achieving the EFA goals. Through the democratisation of higher education by increased access and facilitation of academic mobility, teacher training systems can be expanded, diversified and improved so that larger numbers of trained teachers be available for primary and secondary education. Such improvements can be another major benefit of a global convention.

#### **4.2. Promotion of International Cooperation in Higher Education**

As indicated above, research is also part of the trend towards internationalisation. Agreed principles and procedures for recognition of qualifications in higher education will be in line with the growing internationalisation of a diversified academic community and the intensification of international flows of knowledge and skills.

#### **4.3. Promotion of Lifelong Learning and the Democratisation of Education**

Society in general, and more specifically the world of work, is rapidly changing, which calls for nurturing the ability to learn throughout life and promoting access to lifelong learning. Combined with global migration trends, the need for structures which can secure the recognition of qualifications across borders and regions become increasingly evident. Denying individuals access to higher education and lifelong learning opportunities due to the lack of non-discriminatory practices for recognition would be inconsistent with the goal of democratisation of higher education as a public good.

The age diversification of higher education learners is an important aspect concerning the promotion of lifelong learning and the democratisation of education. Professional development through opportunities for the recognition of lifelong learning will benefit both individuals and societies.

Another important issue with regard to the promotion of lifelong learning is the recognition of non-formal and informal learning. It should be a matter for consideration within the process of developing a global convention.

#### **4.4. Promotion of Coherence between Quality Assurance, Qualifications Frameworks and the Recognition of Qualifications**

In order to succeed in providing all youth and adults with relevant knowledge and skills for decent work and life, quality in education must be ensured. At the same time, relevance and employability will be promoted through the creation and implementation of qualifications frameworks. A global convention on the recognition of qualifications will not necessarily and directly lead to increased quality and relevance; however, it can promote increased capacity-building in higher education administration, including the development of stronger quality assurance systems and of qualifications frameworks. The implementation of a global convention will facilitate progress towards a global referential on quality assurance in higher education. Moreover, a global convention can also significantly promote the coherence and synergies between procedures for recognition, and those for quality assurance and articulation with qualifications frameworks. Cross-border structures and procedures for recognition have been operational for four decades, while international structures for quality assurance and qualifications frameworks have been more recently introduced. There is therefore a need for mechanisms to achieve coherence on a global level.

If it is deemed appropriate by Member States, a global convention could even go one step further and define the relationship between quality assurance, qualifications frameworks and recognition. This would establish the global convention as an instrument for cross-policy collaboration and cooperation in the field of higher education.

In any case, it should be emphasised that trust, quality, quality assurance and qualifications frameworks are important for recognition. The implementation of a global convention should therefore be conducted in collaboration with the relevant official quality assurance bodies and those bodies responsible for the relevant qualifications frameworks. Most quality assurance bodies are found at the national level; however, there are important international quality assurance networks such as AfriQAN in the African region, ANQAHE in the Arab region, APQN in the Asia-Pacific region, ENQA in the European region and INQAAHE at global level.

#### **4.5. Development of Overarching and Agreed Principles and Values Common to All Regions**

The existing regional recognition conventions have similarities and share many of the same aims and principles. Such aims and principles are interpreted and operationalized in different manners in different regions. Obviously, there can be good reasons for such differences, but even so, working with a common set of agreed principles and values would strengthen the international recognition of qualifications. The lack of a global convention is a hindrance for the calibration of the regional conventions. A common set of agreed principles and values

would strengthen transparency and non-discrimination in the procedures on a global level. Examples of such basic principles are elaborated on in Section 5 below.

#### **4.6. Promote and Support International and Regional Developments in Higher Education Policies**

Governments and higher education practitioners find it increasingly difficult to keep pace with innovations and new developments in higher education practices. A global convention would support stakeholders in updating their thinking on traditional concepts of students and modes of learning and facilitate more accurate recognition of innovative higher education. This could include for instance more awareness of, and trust in, higher education innovation and more demand for recognition of partial study.

As mentioned above, there are initiatives in most regions to develop cross-border policies such as the regional higher education areas. These initiatives are strengthened by the existing recognition conventions. A normative instrument on procedures for inter-regional recognition of qualifications would also support and strengthen regional higher education policies since it would regulate one area of interaction with other regions.

#### **4.7. Recognition of the Fast Growing Diversity of Higher Education Providers**

The traditional higher education institutions, often public universities, have for centuries been the sole arena for higher education and higher learning. These institutions are still the main providers of higher education, but there are now a number of other providers that are increasingly responding to the needs of a fast growing student population worldwide. Such providers include private for-profit and non-profit institutions, institutions funded through private-public partnerships, shorter cycle institutions, and formal and informal online higher education providers. There is a need to develop instruments for determining recognition procedures for the growing diversity of providers and types of learning.

#### **4.8. Improved Rights to Recognition of Qualifications for Refugees and People in a Refugee-like Situation**

There is a need to strengthen the opportunities for higher education for individuals living in a fragile context. The current refugee situation, the largest since World War II, has forced many students to seek opportunities in other countries, often without having the possibility to bring with them diplomas and other educational documentation. In such a situation, exclusion from both continued education and labour is imminent. In line with the recognition conventions of the second generation, a global convention could include rules and procedures for the recognition of qualifications of refugees and internally displaced persons.

#### **4.9. The Scope of a Possible Global Convention**

Recognition in higher education cannot be viewed as completely separate from a number of other issues concerning higher education and the labour market. While acknowledging the wide range of issues impacting higher education in general and recognition practices specifically, there is a need for some sobriety regarding the number of issues a global convention can address directly. It would thus be important for the successful development and implementation of a possible global convention to identify clearly its scope, what it aims to do, as well as what the convention is not aiming to achieve. A few important aspects or limits are listed below:

- A global convention will be an instrument for the development and implementation of agreed recognition principles and procedures. It will not be an instrument for the implementation of automatic recognition. The final decisions on recognition will still be done on the national level and/or by the appropriate authorities in accordance with national rules and legislation. A global convention will also fully recognize the sovereign nature of higher education policies and thus the sovereignty of State Parties to award diplomas, degrees and certificates in all fields of higher education within their systems. Therefore the convention will not weaken in any way the autonomy of academic institutions. Since the convention will focus on recognition principles and good practices rather than on specific rules for actual recognition as such, the challenges of mobility across regions or sub-regions with significantly different higher education systems will not influence the feasibility of the convention. UNESCO recognizes the fact that some countries and/or regions are in the process of elaborating tools for automatic recognition. Belgium, Netherlands and Luxembourg have even signed an agreement on the implementation of such practices. UNESCO supports such initiatives when initiated and deemed feasible by Member States themselves, but no provisions for the automatic recognition of qualifications are envisaged in the suggested global convention.
- Higher education is a sub-sector in the education and training systems across the world. All sub-sectors within these systems for lifelong learning are interconnected and interdependent. It should be an aim to design systems and instruments which enable movement within the systems in accordance with personal, societal and labour needs. This is an important aspect to remember when developing tools which are specific to one or more sub-sectors, such as the recognition conventions. A global convention will be operational within the field of higher education. It is not within this proposal to include traditional technical and vocational education and training (TVET) in the convention. However, if deemed appropriate by Member States, the global convention could encourage Parties to consider broader application beyond higher education recognition. In some countries, the existing regional conventions are considered as applicable to tertiary education, which sometimes include both higher education and TVET.
- As mentioned in Section 3.1.2 above, a key lesson from earlier experience and a relevant factor for success will be to concentrate on academic recognition. Hence, the global convention will not be designed to regulate recognition for the purpose of entry into a profession. Although recognition for labour market entry is an important field, it would severely complicate both the development and the implementation of this normative instrument if recognition for the purpose of pursuing certain professions were to be included as a binding modality within the convention. Notwithstanding, it is important to note that rules and regulations for different types of recognition should all work in concert to provide streamlined recognition, and the principles and practices established through a global convention can voluntarily be used by Member States to facilitate professional recognition if deemed appropriate by the individual Member State.

- A global convention will not be a tool for quality assurance in higher education. The right to education also entails the aspiration of providing quality education for all. The issue of quality in higher education is of huge importance and both national governments and international organisations like UNESCO are allocating significant amounts of resources into this field. Although the field of quality assurance is closely linked with recognition, the global convention cannot in itself be a direct tool for quality assurance, though it can potentially define the relationship between recognition and quality assurance.
- A global convention will primarily be aimed at inter-regional cooperation. It will not diminish the strengths of well-functioning regional conventions or bilateral recognition agreements.
- A global convention will not interfere with or hinder bilateral mobility agreements between countries or higher education institutions. A global convention will respect and strengthen national, bilateral and regional agreements. The aim of a global convention will also be to provide more equitable mobility opportunities than what might be possible to reach through bilateral agreements. Many countries have entered into bilateral mobility agreements with other countries. Most higher education institutions have bilateral exchange programmes with other higher education institutions. Such agreements will not be hindered by a global recognition convention. If anything, a global convention will promote and facilitate bilateral agreements since basic procedures for recognition will already be agreed upon and established by the Parties.
- A global convention will not seek to exclude countries that are not able or willing to ratify the convention. The aim is to include as many Member States as possible and the convention will include language urging Parties to the convention to co-operate with non-Parties. It will then be up to the Convention Committee to decide on the practicalities for inclusion and co-operation with non-Parties to the convention in a manner which is fruitful for all.

## 5. Basic Principles

There are a number of important principles which can be incorporated into a global recognition convention in order to strengthen the political will, trust and understanding of recognition procedures and practices across regions. The following serves as suggestions of such basic principles which could be included in a global convention on the recognition of qualifications in higher education.

### 5.1. Acknowledgement of Education as a Human Right and Higher Education as a Public Good

Education is acknowledged as a human right worldwide. Recognition of learning and qualifications on all educational levels should be acknowledged as a key element of the right to education.

A global convention should be an instrument for the global acknowledgement of higher education as a public good and a public responsibility. In that acknowledgement lies the

notion that quality higher education should be accessible to all and provide students with the knowledge and skills needed for decent work and life. In that sense, higher education will also be acknowledged as a tool for personal, social and national development as well as for promoting global citizenship. The implementation of a global convention will contribute to the fulfilment of this goal, for instance by reducing obstacles for access outside the home country, by contributing to capacity building in national quality assurance systems, by reducing obstacles to the mobility of academics and, last but not least, building more cultural understanding on the global level through the facilitation of inter-regional mobility of students and researchers.

## **5.2. Respect and Recognition of the Diversity of National Higher Education Systems and Academic Autonomy**

As seen in the European region, a convention on the recognition of higher education qualifications can be linked to processes aiming at harmonizing higher education (the Bologna Process). Although the established regional conventions and the possible global convention are not directly aiming at harmonisation, it is a fact that recognition is facilitated by harmonisation and is therefore often linked to harmonisation initiatives. At the same time, a possible global convention should also be an instrument for establishing respect for the diversity of national higher education systems and a normative recognition of the diversity in societies both within regions and between them. The principle of substantial differences is one concrete example of how this can be operationalised in a convention. A global convention would act as an instrument for improving recognition practices, while also establishing respect for the autonomy of higher education institutions to make recognition decisions, and thereby protecting their academic and institutional autonomy. Academic autonomy must be recognized and respected in a global convention and in its implementation.

A global convention should also recognize the importance of and foster innovation, creativity, diversity, and international information-sharing and capacity-building in higher education, as well as promote responsiveness to learners and other stakeholders' needs.

## **5.3. The Role of Trust and Ethics in Recognition Practices**

The role of a global convention would be to establish commonly agreed principles and procedures for the recognition of qualifications in higher education. Successful practice of such procedures will depend on the trust and ethics within the system. Mobility relies on trust in the quality of education, and the diversity of education systems often affects the level of trust. The existing conventions and systems build trust at the regional level. The importance of making available reliable and updated information through established national information centres or national information services is a common measure included in the revised recognition conventions in order to facilitate transparency and build trust between the Parties.

Measures to establish trust are also needed between regions. The development, dissemination and sharing of guidelines, toolkits and codes of good practice for international and cross-regional recognition practices should be a basic principle for a global convention as a means to build mutual trust and understanding.

The global higher education community also needs to create measures to fight the growth of fraudulent qualifications practices that are negatively affecting recognition in higher



education worldwide. Through commitment from the Parties to the convention, a global convention could be an important instrument in the global fight against such fraudulent and unethical activities which severely threaten the trust in the global higher education community. The only regional convention which presently has such measures imbedded is the 2014 Addis Convention.

#### **5.4. The Right to Non-Discrimination and Appeal**

Access to higher education should be based on fair and transparent recognition practices in accordance with established rules and regulations. Such practices should acknowledge that access to higher education should primarily be based on fair and transparent principles. As of today, there is no global normative instrument of a legally binding nature securing the right to non-discrimination and the right to appeal for students and academics moving between regions. Non-discrimination is not only an issue for the individual, but just as much needed for the global society to optimize the use of human resources within and across regions.

#### **5.5. Promotion of Educational Policies Allowing for Structural, Economic, Technological and Social Change**

Acknowledged theories of economic growth emphasise the role of human capital, research and innovation as key drivers. The level of education attained by a population is recognised as a key factor for the ability of that population to incorporate new technologies into society. Societal change, social justice, equity and the development of civil society are also closely linked to education, knowledge and skills. In this sense, the promotion of higher education through policies for international mobility will contribute to economic, technological and social change worldwide.

### **6. Main Challenges**

As this report indicates, there are a number of reasons in favour of continuing the process towards the development of a global convention. But there are also some important challenges which need to be taken into consideration. In this chapter will outline these, though it does not aim to suggest concrete solutions. The solutions to these issues need to be found through wide consultations with stakeholders in all regions during the process of developing the global convention, should such a process be initiated.

#### **6.1. The Relationships between the Regional Conventions and the Global Convention**

Perhaps the most obvious challenge for a global convention would be to determine how the relationship between the regional conventions and a global convention should be organised. Regional conventions are valuable means of addressing recognition and mobility issues in higher education specific to each region. Significant advances have been made through the regional conventions and Parties to those regional conventions have invested large amounts of time and resources in making them operational and well-functioning. This gain must be protected and utilised as strength for a possible global convention. It is the clear view of most stakeholders, including the UNESCO Secretariat that the possible global convention needs to build on the regional conventions and that overlapping must be avoided. It is difficult to see how a global convention can function optimally without a solid foundation in the regional conventions.



A possible global convention must be balanced. It must be detailed enough to have a value on its own, but at the same time it must not be written in a manner which diminishes the role of the regional conventions.

The first Experts' Meeting on the possible global convention held in Paris in July 2014 highlighted some options, which are not mutually exclusive, for the relationship between the global convention and the regional convention:

- The articulation between regional and global conventions could incentivise participation in both the global convention and the relevant existing recognition conventions.
- The global convention could reference the concepts common to the regional conventions and summarise additional principles of the revised regional conventions, such as national information centres, networks and substantial differences.
- The global convention could review what is effective and ineffective in the regional conventions, in a comparative perspective, and work with the bureaux of the regional conventions in order to build capacity and improve implementation worldwide. The notion of founding the global convention on the regional conventions is most of all a notion of taking advantage of the experiences of the regional conventions and utilising the capacities and expertise gained through their development and implementation.

These ideas would need to be further examined throughout the process of development of the convention.

In UNESCO's view, the revision and updating of regional conventions do not necessarily have to be a prerequisite for starting the development of a global convention. These processes can be done in parallel. Notwithstanding, solid efforts should be made by all regions to have functional regional conventions as a basis for the implementation of the global convention. Since the global convention should be built on the regional conventions and the expertise and experiences gained through their development and implementation, it would be a great asset for the implementation of the global convention if all the regional conventions were revised, or engaged in a revision process. The current gap in the recognition of qualifications in higher education should be remedied and the coordination among the regions should be strengthened. UNESCO will continue to provide support to the regions wishing to enter into such revision process.

The effective implementation of regional conventions raises the issue of resources and institutional capacities. As the first Experts' Meeting emphasised, it will be imperative that the global and the regional conventions have clearly defined parallel purposes to ensure sustainability and strength of both.

## **6.2. The Relationship between Quality Assurance, Qualifications Frameworks and Recognition of Qualifications**

Although there are significant regional differences, huge changes have taken place during the past two decades with regard to quality assurance mechanisms and the development of qualifications frameworks. Such instruments represent an important tool for reliable recognition practices. During the process of developing a possible global convention on recognition, it will be important to clearly define the interconnectivity of these policy domains,

as qualifications frameworks and quality assurance do not, in themselves, guarantee recognition.

The possible global convention should not be regarded as an instrument for quality assurance at the national level. Even so, there is an obvious need to define the relationship between quality assurance, qualifications frameworks and recognition. Optimal mobility outcomes are achieved when recognition is supported by quality assurance and qualifications frameworks; however, a global convention must take into account the fact that national systems for quality assurance vary substantially and that qualifications frameworks are not yet in place worldwide. Therefore, having an operational national or regional qualifications framework should not be a prerequisite for participating in a global recognition convention.

Within this issue, there will also be a need for discussion on possible links between existing regional and sub-regional harmonisation processes such as the Bologna Process in Europe, the African Higher Education and Research Space and the Space of Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (ENLACES).

### **6.3. The Recognition of Partial Studies and Informal and Non-formal Learning**

In line with the massification of higher education and the increased focus on lifelong learning, the recognition of partial studies, of informal and non-formal learning is becoming increasingly important on the global higher education agenda. This is also related to the blurring divide between higher education and technical and vocational education.

Principles and procedures for the recognition of partial studies, of informal and non-formal learning will have to be discussed further during the possible development of a global convention. It will be important to distinguish between the recognition of full degrees, diplomas or certificates and the recognition of partial studies or of informal or non-formal learning.

### **6.4. Implementation Challenges**

Any convention needs formal structures for its implementation, such as an Intergovernmental Committee, or a Convention Committee. However, as the second generation of regional conventions indicates, a more comprehensive structure for implementation is needed in order to fully achieve the goals of the convention. The Convention Committee is the main implementation body of the recognition conventions, but experience indicates that it will not be sufficient for the successful implementation of a recognition convention, be it regional or global. The networks of information centres and networks of quality assurance agencies have proven most valuable for the European regional convention. So have the development of subsidiary texts and the sharing of good practices. Interaction through such networks has helped to build mutual understanding and trust, stimulate discussion, capacity-building and reforms. Due to the fact that most of the concrete implementation of a recognition convention is of a technical character, these aspects must be handled by the technical agencies such as national information centres or quality assurance agencies. It must be recalled that the implementation of a recognition convention is not a process completed within a given period of time. Rather, the implementation is a continuous process which will go on as long as the convention is operational.

The role of a global convention for capacity-building should be highlighted. A global convention can help build capacity at both national and regional level in order for Member States to align with regional and global recognition conventions. Quality assurance is one possible area where specific projects aiming at capacity building could be incorporated.

It is a fact that some regions are more advanced in their systems for the recognition of qualifications. It is thus important to incorporate into the global convention standards which are reachable for the less advanced systems and at the same time comparable and productive for the more advanced regions. Finding this balance will be a challenge and it might be beneficial to all Parties to incorporate concrete measures and activities for capacity-building into the convention and its implementation. Such measures might include capacity-building in quality assurance, qualifications frameworks and national information structures.

Important obstacles to the successful implementation of a global convention on the recognition of qualifications in higher education include differences in quality; the lack of recognition infrastructure such as national information centres; and the human and financial resources that Parties to the convention will require for the implementation process. These issues must be investigated, discussed and solved through the process of developing the convention text and its implementation modalities.

The formal implementation structures of the possible global convention might consist of the two following bodies:

- An Intergovernmental Committee bringing together the representatives of Parties to the convention and Presidents of Regional Committees. The nomination of the Presidents of the Regional Convention Committees to the Intergovernmental Committee for the global convention will contribute to achieving a fruitful relationship between the regional and the global conventions. The Intergovernmental Committee should meet at a biennial or triennial frequency;
- An international network of national information centres and their websites, linking the existing networks through internet-plus means and discussion forums, and involving newly created centres as they develop.

Further networks of recognition practitioners and policy-makers should also be established in accordance with the two formal bodies mentioned above.

This section has not mentioned or discussed all practical challenges which will occur during the implementation of a global convention. UNESCO recognizes the existence of additional challenges and the need for further elaborations on these during the development phase. If deemed appropriate by Member States, it is suggested that a Global Convention Implementation Framework is developed and included as an appendix to the possible global convention. Such a framework might include language on the context of implementation, implementation priorities and a suggested timeline for implementation.

#### **6.5. The Role of UNESCO in the Implementation Phase**

The definition of normative work established by the Task Force on Evaluation of Normative Work at the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Annual General Meeting (in 2012) includes three main categories of normative work:

- a) the development of norms and standards;
- b) the support to governments and others to integrate the norms and standards into legislation, policies and development plans; and
- c) the support to governments and others to implement legislation, policies and development plans based on the international norms, standards and conventions.<sup>4</sup>

UNESCO's normative action in general, and in the field of education in particular, focuses on the following areas:

1. The elaboration of standard-setting instruments, as set out by UNESCO's Constitution (Articles I and IV).
2. The monitoring of the implementation of the instruments: UNESCO periodically monitors the implementation of its normative instruments and more generally the right to education and promotes normative action.
3. The support to Member States to implement the norms and standards through advocacy and technical assistance.
4. The depositary of the convention.

Once the global convention has been drafted and adopted, the first task of UNESCO will be to encourage and support ratifications of the convention. When the convention enters into force with the required number of ratifications, UNESCO may then take the role as secretariat for the Intergovernmental Committee mentioned above, and convene the meetings of the Committee. UNESCO will also play a major role in establishing, facilitating and supporting strong regional and global networks and communities of both recognition practitioners and policy-makers which will facilitate the implementation of the recognition principles at national and institutional levels. Thirdly, UNESCO will provide the necessary support on the national level, including capacity building, to countries wishing to participate actively in the implementation of the convention. Last but not least, UNESCO will also help Parties to the convention to monitor its implementation and regularly report on progress in such a manner that will be determined by the convention, the Convention Committee and the UNESCO governing bodies.

Partnerships with other intergovernmental structures such as the European Union, the African Union, the Council of Europe, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation and the Association of South East Asian Nations should be sustained to promote implementation and synergies and to avoid duplication. The leadership and ownership of the convention will remain with UNESCO.

Successful implementation of a global convention requires UNESCO to take the lead in this process, in close consultation with a wide range of stakeholders in all regions, both governmental and non-governmental. An inclusive preparatory process will ensure the wide ownership needed for successful adoption and implementation.

The leadership of UNESCO in the implementation process aims to address some challenges, for instance:

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<sup>4</sup><http://www.uneval.org/document/detail/1484>.

- Secure the convention to operate within the values of human rights, peace, global citizenship, gender equality, sustainable development, transparency, fairness, and reciprocity;
- Secure that the convention does not unfairly advantage some Member States or regions at the expense of others;
- Secure that the convention becomes a tool for the circulation of brain-power where it is most needed globally; and
- Secure that the convention contributes to countering the commercialisation of education and training, while at the same time maximising opportunities for modern provision of higher education by both public and private providers.

#### **6.6. Ownership and Engagement**

The feasibility study for the possible global convention conducted in 2013<sup>5</sup> shows the existence of regional differences in the perception of the need for a global convention. In all five UNESCO regions (Africa, Arab States, Asia and the Pacific, Europe and North America, and Latin America and the Caribbean), the majority of the respondents and stakeholders support the development of a global convention, although some with more reservations than others. Among the concerns and reservations are the position of regional specificities and priorities, financial implications of the implementation, the treatment of refugees and the difference in capacities.

It is not surprising that the regional differences in the perception of a possible global convention on recognition in higher education should be a challenge. As the first Experts' Meeting clearly expressed, the support of all regions is an essential precondition for a strong and meaningful global instrument.

#### **6.7. Ethical and Political Challenges**

There is a need to be mindful of possible ethical issues arising during the development of a global convention on the recognition of higher education qualifications. Some stakeholders have raised the issue of how a global convention might influence brain drain. This needs to be taken into consideration in order to make sure that the convention becomes a tool for brain circulation in a much better manner than is the present situation rather than increasing brain drain. Currently, regions deeply engaged in regional recognition conventions are well prepared to absorb formal qualifications from other regions. For instance, most European countries have on a national level decided to treat all applicants according to the provisions of the 1997 Lisbon Convention. Reciprocity is an important principle for the global convention. A global convention should not be set up in an imbalanced manner. A global recognition convention must be based on mutual trust, mutual gain and mutual opportunities for the mobility of individuals.

Other ethical issues that have been raised concern cultural and linguistic differences, national sovereignty and the implications for small island development states (SIDS) and least developed countries (LDCs). They need to be taken adequately into account in the development of a global convention. Creating enabling environments for the promotion of mutual trust and understanding seems to be an important key to these ethical concerns.

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<sup>5</sup> Please consult UNESCO Document 191 EX/42 for further details on the feasibility study.

## **6.8. Social and Economic Context**

It is not possible to determine the future political and economic context under which the convention would operate, but some factors might be worth mentioning for the general future of recognition, although their nature and effect on recognition is one of uncertainty. Political and economic factors which might result in challenges for the development and implementation of a global convention on recognition include the following:

- The decrease in public funding for higher education may influence the behaviour of higher education institutions and result in more competitive/protectionist practices in recognition rather than collaboration and cooperation.
- The commercialisation of higher education and its effects on access.
- The emergence of a global market in higher education and the increasing competition between higher education systems and institutions.

## **7. Administrative Issues**

### **7.1. Time Frame**

In accordance with 37 C/Resolution 15, this preliminary report will be presented to the 38<sup>th</sup> session of the General Conference (2015), along with the comments of the 197<sup>th</sup> session of the Executive Board thereon. Having examined this preliminary report, the General Conference may wish to request the Director-General to undertake further steps in elaborating a global convention with the aim of presenting the final draft of the convention text for examination and possible adoption by an International Conference of States (ICS) in 2018 or 2019, or by the General Conference at its 40<sup>th</sup> session (2019), pursuant to the decision of the General Conference at its 39<sup>th</sup> session (2017).

In accordance with the Rules of Procedure concerning recommendations to Member States and international conventions covered by the terms of Article IV, paragraph 4, of the Constitution, the further steps would include:

- A drafting committee (category VI) consisting of international experts, which may also include smaller theme-specific sub-committees, will be convened by the Director-General. A final report including a draft convention will be communicated to all Member States.
- Regional consultations of Member States, NGOs and other stakeholders will be conducted by the Director-General.
- If the General Conference decides, at its 39<sup>th</sup> session, that the draft convention will be adopted at its 40<sup>th</sup> session, the Director-General's final report will be examined by a special committee consisting of technical and legal experts appointed by the Member States. All Member States will be invited as full participants in the special committee. The final draft convention approved by the special committee will then be submitted to the 40<sup>th</sup> session of the General Conference.

In the lead up to the final draft of the convention, the General Conference may wish to request the Director-General to submit a progress report with a preliminary draft of the convention to the 39<sup>th</sup> session of the General Conference (2017).

## **7.2. Funding of the Process**

Developing a new normative instrument in the field of recognition of higher education qualifications will require adequate human and financial resources. While it would be the intention of the Director-General to meet the associated costs, it might be challenging to absorb this cost in the regular programme budget in the current financial context of the Organization. Extrabudgetary resources would be required to meet the needs to develop this instrument. Throughout the implementation, sustainable funding is required for UNESCO to support the convention committee and the network of practitioners.

At the national level, the implementation of a global convention will require resources for quality assurance agencies, national information services, recognition agencies and the like. These structures are required, regardless of the status of ratification to the global convention. For Member States which have already ratified a regional convention, the national structures which are already in place can be utilized.

UNESCO is ready to facilitate and provide technical support to Member States for capacity development needed for full implementation at national, regional and global level. The funding for such activities cannot rest upon UNESCO alone but also based on political commitment and financial contributions from Member States.



## **Draft Outline of the Possible Global Convention on Higher Education**

### **Recognition**

In the view of the above-mentioned Expert Group, the global convention could take any of the three forms below:

- A global convention could be an instrument aiming mainly to support the development of mobility within and between regions, while not entering too much into details of the difficulties encountered. In this form, the global convention would be a kind of a general declaration.
- A global convention could aim at bridging the regional conventions through proposing articulations between the existing regional conventions which can be used by the regions for both inter- and intra-regional mobility.
- A global convention could aim at being an instrument for the time of globalisation. It will deal with global higher education issues such as MOOCs and other forms of online provision, authentication of qualifications, education as a human right, international qualifications, transborder education and will take into account non-formal and informal education.

The following Draft Outline is included for information only and to provide an example of how the actual text of a possible global convention on recognition of qualifications in higher education might be structured.

#### ***Preamble***

- The Convention and education as a human right
- The Convention and higher education as a public good
- The Convention and the Post-2015 Education Agenda
- Education and the promotion of peace, mutual understanding and cultural dialogue
- Higher education and its role in optimizing the use of human resources worldwide
- The new global context in higher education

#### ***Section II. Definition of terms***

#### ***Section III. Aims of the Convention***

- Promote international cooperation in higher education
- Strengthen and promote international mobility in higher education
- Strengthen and promote lifelong learning and the democratisation of education
- Promote coherence between recognition quality assurance and qualification frameworks
- Promote and support regional developments in higher education
- Recognize the growing diversity in higher education

#### ***Section IV. Basic Principles Related to the Assessment of Qualifications***

- Respect and recognition of the wide diversity of higher education systems and the rich asset this diversity represent

- The role of trust and ethics in higher education recognition
- The right to non-discrimination
- Promotion of education policies allowing for social, technological, economic and structural change

#### ***Section V. Obligations of the Parties***

- The Competence of Authorities
- Recognition of Qualifications Giving Access to Higher Education
- Recognition of Periods of Study
- Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications
- Recognition of Qualifications Held by Refugees, Displaced Persons and Persons in a Refugee-like Situation
- Information on Recognition Matters, and on the Assessment of Higher Education Institutions and Programmes

#### ***Section VI. Implementation Mechanisms***

- National implementation structures
- Convention Committee
- Networks of practitioners
- Regional organisations
- Operational guidelines

#### ***Section VII. Final Clauses***

## List of State Parties to the Regional Conventions

### Africa

#### **Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Certificates, Diplomas, Degrees and other Academic Qualifications in Higher Education in the African States**

Signed: 5 December 1981, Arusha

Entry into force: 1 January 1983

- |  |                                 |
|--|---------------------------------|
| 1. People's Democratic Republic of Algeria | 12. Kingdom of Lesotho          |
| 2. Republic of Benin                       | 13. Republic of the Niger       |
| 3. Burkina Faso                            | 14. Federal Republic of Nigeria |
| 4. Republic of Burundi                     | 15. Rwandese Republic           |
| 5. Central African Republic                | 16. Republic of Senegal         |
| 6. Republic of Côte d'Ivoire               | 17. Republic of Seychelles      |
| 7. Arab Republic of Egypt                  | 18. Republic of the Sudan       |
| 8. Republic of Equatorial Guinea           | 19. Kingdom of Swaziland        |
| 9. Gabonese Republic                       | 20. Togolese Republic           |
| 10. Republic of Guinea                     | 21. United Republic of Tanzania |
| 11. Holy See                               | 22. Republic of Zambia          |

#### **Revised Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Certificates, Diplomas, Degrees and Other Academic Qualifications in Higher Education in African States**

Adopted: 12 December 2014, Addis Ababa

Not yet entered into force

Signatories:

- |                             |                                 |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. Republic of Burundi      | 10. Republic of Mozambique      |
| 2. Central African Republic | 11. Republic of Namibia         |
| 3. Union of the Comoros     | 12. Federal Republic of Nigeria |
| 4. Republic of Djibouti     | 13. Republic of Senegal         |
| 5. Arab Republic of Egypt   | 14. Republic of South Sudan     |
| 6. Gabonese Republic        | 15. Republic of the Sudan       |
| 7. Holy See                 | 16. Togolese Republic           |
| 8. Republic of Madagascar   | 17. Republic of Uganda          |
| 9. Republic of Mali         |                                 |

## Arab Region

### Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in the Arab States

Adopted: 22 December 1978, Paris

Entry into force: 7 August 1981

1. People's Democratic Republic of Algeria
2. Kingdom of Bahrain
3. Arab Republic of Egypt
4. Republic of Iraq
5. Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan
6. State of Kuwait
7. Libya
8. Kingdom of Morocco
9. Sultanate of Oman
10. State of Qatar
11. Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
12. Republic of the Sudan
13. Republic of Tunisia
14. United Arab Emirates

## Asia-Pacific

### Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in Asia and the Pacific

Adopted: 16 December 1983, Bangkok

Entry into force: 23 October 1985

1. Republic of Armenia
2. Australia
3. Republic of Azerbaijan
4. People's Republic of China
5. Democratic People's Republic of Korea
6. Holy See
7. Republic of India
8. Republic of Indonesia
9. Republic of Kazakhstan
10. Kyrgyz Republic
11. Lao People's Democratic Republic
12. Republic of Maldives
13. Mongolia
14. Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal
15. Republic of the Philippines
16. Republic of Korea
17. Russian Federation
18. Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka
19. Republic of Tajikistan
20. Republic of Turkey
21. Turkmenistan

### Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education

Adopted: 26 November 2011

Not yet entered into force

Signatories:

1. Republic of Armenia
2. People's Republic of Bangladesh
3. Kingdom of Cambodia
4. People's Republic of China
5. Holy See
6. Lao People's Democratic Republic

7. Republic of Korea
8. Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste

9. Republic of Turkey

## Europe

Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region

Adopted: 11 April 1997, Lisbon

Entry into force: 1 February 1999

1. Republic of Albania
2. Principality of Andorra
3. Republic of Armenia
4. Australia
5. Republic of Austria
6. Republic of Azerbaijan
7. Republic of Belarus
8. Kingdom of Belgium
9. Bosnia and Herzegovina
10. Republic of Bulgaria
11. Republic of Croatia
12. Republic of Cyprus
13. Czech Republic
14. Kingdom of Denmark
15. Republic of Estonia
16. Republic of Finland
17. French Republic
18. Georgia
19. Federal Republic of Germany
20. Holy See
21. Hungary
22. Republic of Iceland
23. Ireland
24. State of Israel
25. Italian Republic
26. Republic of Kazakhstan
27. Kyrgyz Republic
28. Republic of Latvia
29. Liechtenstein
30. Republic of Lithuania
31. Grand Duchy of Luxembourg
32. Republic of Malta
33. Montenegro
34. Kingdom of the Netherlands
35. New Zealand
36. Kingdom of Norway
37. Republic of Poland
38. Portuguese Republic
39. Republic of Moldova
40. Romania
41. Russian Federation
42. Republic of San Marino
43. Republic of Serbia
44. Slovak Republic
45. Republic of Slovenia
46. Kingdom of Spain
47. Kingdom of Sweden
48. Swiss Confederation
49. Republic of Tajikistan
50. The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
51. Republic of Turkey
52. Ukraine
53. United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

## Latin America and the Caribbean

**Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean**

Adopted: 19 July 1974, Mexico City

Entry into force: 14 June 1975

1. Plurinational State of Bolivia
2. Republic of Colombia
3. Republic of Cuba
4. Republic of Ecuador

5. Republic of El Salvador
6. Holy See
7. United Mexican States
8. Montenegro
9. Kingdom of the Netherlands
10. Republic of Nicaragua
11. Republic of Panama
12. Republic of Peru
13. Republic of Serbia
14. Republic of Slovenia
15. Republic of Suriname
16. The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
17. Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela

## **Mediterranean Region**

### **Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in the Arab and European States bordering on the Mediterranean**

Adopted: 17 December 1976

Entry into force: 6 March 1978

1. People's Democratic Republic of Algeria
2. Bosnia and Herzegovina
3. Republic of Croatia
4. Arab Republic of Egypt
5. Italian Republic
6. Republic of Malta
7. Montenegro
8. Kingdom of Morocco
9. Republic of Serbia
10. Republic of Slovenia
11. The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
12. Republic of Turkey