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This report provides an overview of UNESCO's higher education activities since fall 2023 which are of relevance to the European Higher Education Area.

## 1. Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education

The [Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education](#) entered into force on 5 March 2023, three months after the deposit of the 20<sup>th</sup> instrument of ratification. To date, [28 countries](#) have ratified it, of which 16 are in Europe. More than 30 UNESCO Member States report to be at an advanced stage in the ratification process.

The extraordinary session of the Intergovernmental Conference of the States Parties to the Global Convention convened on 7 March 2024, adopting the treaty's first [interim work programme](#). It focuses on four key areas – the development of operational guidelines for the Global Convention, a recommendation on the relationship between the Global Convention and regional conventions, research and capacity development as well as advocacy and communications.

The work programme will run until June 2025, when the next ordinary session of the Conference takes place. It was elaborated by a working group of States Parties, including the Bureau, that convened for three sessions in the last quarter of 2023.

The research agenda of the work programme has two main components – quality assurance, including transnational education, and the recognition of refugee qualifications. To inform UNESCO's work on the former, a [side meeting on transnational higher education](#) took place on the margins of the Conference, bringing together stakeholders from governments, universities and quality assurance agencies.

In preparation for the Conference, on 6 March 2024, UNESCO also brought together the heads of the four regional convention committees and president of the Intergovernmental Conference to share developments, priorities and chart the way forward for further cooperation.

UNESCO's regional conventions are implemented in complementarity with the Global Convention, catering to the specificities of their regions, and the involvement of their governing structures is also foreseen in the implementation of the work programme. The vast majority of States Parties to the Global Convention (26 out of 28) are also States Parties to one of more regional recognition conventions. Together they host one fourth of the world's 6.4 million internationally mobile students.

## 2. Regional Recognition Conventions and UNESCO Qualifications Passport

In Africa, the Revised Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Certificates, Diplomas, Degrees and Other Academic Qualifications in Higher Education in African States (**Addis Convention**), saw the second session of its Convention Committee in October 2023 in Saly, Senegal. The Convention Committee elected a Bureau, with Senegal as President, Mauritania and Mauritius as Vice-Presidents

and South Africa as Rapporteur. It also reviewed the implementation of the roadmap adopted at its first session in December 2021 and committed to reinvigorate the African Network of National Implementation Structures launched in 2022.

Similarly, the fifth session of the Committee of the 2011 Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education (**Tokyo Convention**) and Plenary of the Asia-Pacific Network of National Information Centres (APNNIC) took place in Bangkok, Thailand, in November 2023. The Bureau was elected, with New Zealand as President, Australia and Japan as Vice-Presidents and the Holy See as Rapporteur. A new workplan was adopted, looking at enhancing both regional and global cooperation on academic recognition and mobility, and a decision taken on expanding APNNIC membership beyond States Parties.

The second session of the Committee of the 2019 Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education for Latin America and the Caribbean (**Buenos Aires Convention**) took place in Havana, Cuba, in February 2024 in the framework of the Universidad 2024 Congress. Uruguay was re-elected as President and the regional network of national information centres (CINLAC) was launched. High on the agenda were also the feasibility of a diploma supplement for the region, digitization, and the recognition of qualification for refugees. In January 2024, Ecuador deposited the instrument of accession to the convention, becoming the sixth State Party.

In the lead-up to the next ordinary session of the 1997 Committee of the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region (**Lisbon Convention**) in 2025, the Bureau is focusing on revising the text on transnational education and ENIC-NARIC Charter. Preparations are also underway for the next annual meeting of the ENIC-NARIC networks in Naples, Italy, in June 2024.

The Revised Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in the **Arab States** (2022) was ratified by Yemen in November 2023, and requires three more ratifications to enter into force. UNESCO continues to engage with Member States in the region to accelerate ratifications and provide guidance.

The **UNESCO Qualifications Passport (UQP)** is being implemented in Kenya, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. More than 30 new evaluators have been trained, 14 passports have been issued, some 30 UQP holders have been admitted to universities and more than 200 scholarships have been identified to support further learning of the UQP holders. A Joint Statement on [Transforming Higher Education in Emergencies](#) was launched in November 2023, as an outcome of a session on the topic at the World Innovation Summit for Education.

### 3. 3rd World Higher Education Conference Follow-up

The UNESCO World Higher Education Conference (WHEC 2022) took place in Barcelona, Spain in May 2022, attracting more than 14,000 of higher education stakeholders in person and online. It called for higher education institutions to firmly act in favour of social justice and as a pillar of local ecosystems for innovation, while producing knowledge that anticipates and informs global solutions towards sustainable development.

The roadmap, "[Transforming Higher Education. A roadmap to advance towards 2030 and beyond](#)", was launched at the conference, expressing an urgent call for renewed thinking, dialogue and transformative action. It sees higher education as an integral part of the right to education and public good, and sets key principles and transitions to guide its transformation in the decade ahead. As the roadmap is a living document – serving as a reference framework to feed and enrich policy and

actions and encourage thinking and debate – UNESCO organized an open call for contributions to enrich it between November 2022 and June 2023. More than 1,500 contributions were received and the final, enriched version of the roadmap will be launched in the coming weeks.

#### **4. Higher Education Data**

On the margins of the first [UNESCO Conference on Education Data and Statistics](#), which took place in February 2024, UNESCO brought together key stakeholders to discuss challenges and opportunities facing higher education data, both in terms of coverage and availability, and how to best pool efforts.

On 1 March 2024, the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) launched the [2024 Survey of Formal Education](#), with a deadline of 30 April 2024. The survey comprises four questionnaires from which 21 SDG 4 global and thematic indicators are produced, including on higher education.

Three higher education data-based initiatives were also launched in recent months. The most notable of these is the [UNESCO Higher Education Policy Observatory](#), which provides detailed country profiles, comparisons and global and regional overviews on this topic. In addition, the [Internationalizing Higher Education](#) report showcases data from 63 States on recognition and mobility, international cooperation as well as policies and practices in higher education. To complement this, a [factsheet](#) with the most recent UIS data on global and regional enrollments, mobility and gender parity was produced.

#### **5. Campus Africa**

UNESCO's Campus Africa flagship programme, launched in 2022, aims at strengthening higher education systems in Africa by enhancing the research capacity of African tertiary institutions and strengthening inter-university research collaboration; to facilitate academic mobility and support doctoral programmes by facilitating access to scholarships and study grants; and to strengthen higher technical education and improve its relevance through youth skill development and employability.

On the third component, the UNESCO-China Funds-in-Trust Phase III project promotes youth employability by enhancing the quality and relevance of technical higher education in Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Gabon, Senegal, Tanzania and Uganda. Since 2022, partner universities of the project have completed labour market analyses and student tracer studies, launched competency-based curriculum reforms, and developed new programmes tailored to labour market demands and skills forecasts. The project has reached over 13,000 youth through awareness-raising campaigns, capacity-development workshops, entrepreneurship challenges, with some 1,500 graduates benefiting from substantial skills development opportunities in STEM subjects. Additionally, over 500 educational staff received training in competency-based pedagogy.