
This report provides an overview of UNESCO higher education activities in 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](#) entered into force on 5 March 2023, three months after the deposit of the 20th instrument of ratification, becoming binding for its States Parties. To date, [24 countries](#) have ratified it, of which 14 are in Europe. More than 20 UNESCO Member States in all regions report to be at an advanced stage in the ratification process.

The Drive to Ratify, launched at the end of 2021, has increased the visibility of the Global Convention and enhances Member States' engagement and capacity development. In this context, a total of 12 [Higher Education Conversations](#) took place between November 2021 and January 2023 in the leadup to the entry into force of the Global Convention, addressing issues of relevance to the convention and the broader higher education agenda. This is complemented by widespread dissemination of the [Practical Guide to Recognition](#), primarily aimed at competent recognition authorities and credential evaluators.

The [Intergovernmental Conference of the States Parties to the Global Convention](#), mandated with promoting the application of the Global Convention and overseeing its implementation, convened in July 2023. It elected its Bureau – Norway (President), Côte d'Ivoire, Lithuania, Nicaragua, Japan, Tunisia, United Kingdom (Vice Presidents) and the Holy See (Rapporteur) – adopted its Rules of Procedure and examined progress on regional recognition conventions. The Conference also established a working group to further elaborate the draft interim work programme on the implementation of the Convention, which would run until its next ordinary session in June 2025. The work programme will be considered at an extraordinary session in March 2024 (date tbc).

2. Regional Recognition Conventions

A second joint meeting of the bureaux of the [regional convention committees](#) took place on the margins of the Intergovernmental Conference of the States Parties to the Global Convention in July 2023, resulting in commitments to improve inter-regional cooperation and to support the implementation of the Global Convention.

Two countries joined the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region (**Lisbon Convention**) in 2023 – Monaco and Turkmenistan – bringing the total number of States Parties to 56. An extraordinary session of the Lisbon Convention Committee took place at the Council of Europe in February 2023, adopting a declaration on the consequences for higher education of the aggression by the Russian Federation, with the involvement of Belarus, against Ukraine. In the leadup to the next ordinary session of the Committee in 2025, the Bureau is focusing on developing and updating subsidiary texts related to transnational

education, digitalization and digital solutions, automatic recognition and educational fraud. UNESCO also supported the convening of the ENIC/NARIC Annual meeting in Stockholm in June 2023.

In Africa, the 2014 Revised Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Certificates, Diplomas, Degrees and Other Academic Qualifications in Higher Education in African States (**Addis Convention**), saw its second Convention Committee meeting in October 2023 in Saly, Senegal. The Committee elected its Bureau for the next two years, with Senegal as President, Mauritius and Mauritania as Vice Presidents and South Africa as the Rapporteur. It also reviewed the implementation of the [roadmap](#) adopted at its first session in 2021 and committed to reinvigorate the [African Network of National Implementation Structures](#) launched in September 2022.

The fifth session of the Committee of the Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education (**Tokyo Convention**) will take place in Bangkok, Thailand from 22 to 24 November in conjunction with Third Plenary of the Asia-Pacific Network of National Information Centres (APNNIC). Discussions will focus on the workplan, regional synthesis report on the implementation of the Tokyo Convention and the readiness of Member States to ratify and implement the Tokyo and Global Conventions, and a regional statement promoting ratification and mobility within the region. With UNESCO's support, several countries in the region have launched national information centres and received technical assistance funds with a focus on recognition.

The Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education for Latin America and the Caribbean (**Buenos Aires Convention**) held its first Convention Committee meeting in Colonia del Sacramento, Uruguay, in April 2023. The Committee elected its Bureau, with Uruguay as Chair, Cuba as Vice-Chair and Grenada as the Rapporteur. It also adopted its Rules of Procedure, a [declaration](#) on commitments and priorities and the workplan for 2023-2014 focusing on coordination, capacity development and networking. The establishment of a regional network of national implementation structures is underway to ensure the practical implementation of the convention, with four meetings held in 2023.

An International Conference of States in February 2022 adopted the revised text of the 1978 Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in the **Arab States**. The Convention, which requires five ratifications to enter into force, has been ratified by Palestine and Yemen to date. UNESCO continues to engage with Member States in the region to accelerate ratifications and carry out preparatory work for a regional network of information centres.

3. UNESCO Qualifications Passport for Refugees and Vulnerable Migrants

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 and 24 evaluations have been scheduled before the end of 2023. The UQP has been recognized as a valid official document for admission by governments and higher education institutions, more than 30 UQP holders have been admitted to universities and more than 200 scholarships have been identified to support further learning of the UQP holders.

4. 3rd World Higher Education Conference Follow-up

The decennial UNESCO World Higher Education Conference (WHEC 2022) took place in Barcelona, Spain in May 2022, attracting more 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 pillars 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.

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.

With regard to latter, funded through the China Funds-in-Trust, the quality and relevance of technical higher education is being enhanced in six countries. Over the past year, labour market analyses and tracer studies were completed, competency-based reforms launched and new programmes developed based on labour market needs and skills forecasts. Awareness-raising campaigns and activities on skills development in STEM subjects reached over 9,000 youth, some 1,500 graduates accessed substantial skills development opportunities, and close to 700 educational staff were engaged in capacity development.