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Norwegian Ministry
of Education and Research

REPORT BY THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

Introduction

As an active consultative member, the Council of Europe believes it makes a substantial contribution to the development of the European Higher Education Area, in particular through:

- Its commitment to democracy, human rights and the rule of law.
- Its insistence that all education systems need to address the full range of purposes of education¹:
 - Preparation for employment;
 - Preparation for life as active citizens in democratic societies;
 - Personal development;
 - The development and maintenance of a broad, advanced knowledge base.
- Its commitment to quality education, as defined and outlined in Recommendation CM/Rec(2012)13² on ensuring quality education. Among other things, this recommendation underlines that quality must be assessed in relation to the purposes of education, that it must be considered at the level of education systems as well as of individual institutions, and that it must be inclusive: no education system can be of high quality unless it offers adequate opportunities for all students.
- Its work on defining the public responsibility for and the role of public authorities in higher education, as exemplified in particular through recommendations CM/Rec(2007)6³ on the public responsibility for higher education and research and CM/Rec(2012)7⁴ on the public responsibility for academic freedom and institutional autonomy.
- Its work on establishing a platform for ethics and transparency, covering all kinds and levels of education and including higher education, see below.
- Its work to develop Competences for Democratic Culture, see below.

Within the EHEA, the Council of Europe is:

- A consultative member of the BFUG and Board;
- A member of three Advisory Groups: on the Belarus Roadmap, on non-implementation, and on the review of the Diploma Supplement;
Chair of the Network of national correspondents for qualifications frameworks. In this area, the Council of Europe cooperates closely with the European Commission, through the EQF Advisory Group and the National Coordination Points;
- With UNESCO, the custodian of the only legal treaty of the EHEA, the Council of Europe/UNESCO Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in the European Region (Lisbon Recognition Convention). The Council of Europe and UNESCO provide the Secretariat for the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee and the ENIC Network of national information centres on academic mobility and recognition; the latter cooperates very closely with the NARIC Network of the European Commission.

¹ Recommendation CM/Rec(2007)6 on the public responsibility for higher education and research

² https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectId=09000016805c94fb

³ https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectId=09000016805d5dae

⁴ https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectId=09000016805ca6f8

Conference of Ministers of Education

The 25th Session of the Standing Conference of European Ministers of Education⁵ was held in Brussels on April 11 – 12, 2016 at the invitation of the Belgian authorities. The conference focused on Education for Democracy and it had three sub-themes:

- The development of competences for the strengthening of the culture of democracy;
- The effectiveness of current education policies, curricula and training programs on democratic culture and citizenship, in particular with regard to the fight against violent extremism and radicalization leading to terrorism;
- European vs. global challenges in citizenship education – implementation of the UN Agenda for Education 2030 “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”.

The Ministerial conference is also a part of the Action Plans referred to above. The conference adopted a final declaration⁶, including the adoption of the Framework of Reference of Competences for Democratic Culture (see below).

On March 22 – 23, 2017, a Chairmanship Conference⁷ organized as part of Cyprus’ Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers reviewed the Council of Europe’s programs on:

- Competences for Democratic Culture;
- “Safe Spaces”: Schools and universities as places of free speech for all
- Education provision for refugees, with an emphasis on tools for language learning and recognition of qualifications.

The Council of Europe’s 2016 – 17 program for education

The Council of Europe’s main mission is to foster democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. With this in mind, the Council of Europe’s Education program for 2016 – 17 focuses on Education for Democratic Citizenship, Democratic Governance, and Building Inclusive Societies. The 2016 – 17 continues the development launched already in the previous program period of building a more transversal program that combines elements from various levels of education.

The Council of Europe’s activities in and of relevance to higher education are located within these broad priorities. In addition to the direct contribution to the EHEA, these include following up the Recommendation on ensuring quality education. The ETINED (Ethics, Transparency, and Integrity in Education) platform⁸ was established in October 2015, at the Prague Forum. The full platform had its first regular meeting in Strasbourg on November 24 – 25, 2016. ETINED covers all areas of education, but the situation in higher education is particularly challenging, and higher education will therefore play a strong role in the further development of the ETINED Platform⁹.

An *ad hoc* group on higher education policy was set up under the Steering Committee on Educational Policy and practice (CDPPE) to advise the CDPPE on higher education policy.

Competences for democratic culture

The Council of Europe has developed a reference framework for competences for democratic culture¹⁰, which was adopted by the Standing Conference of Council of Europe Ministers of Education in Brussels on April 11 –

⁵ <http://www.coe.int/en/web/education-minister-conference>

⁶ http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/Source/MED25/MED_25_Final-Declaration_en.pdf

⁷ <http://www.coe.int/en/web/education/-/council-of-europe-conference-of-the-cyprus-chairmanship-of-the-committee-of-ministers-securing-democracy-through-education->

⁸ <http://www.coe.int/en/web/ethics-transparency-integrity-in-education>

⁹ https://www.coe.int/t/DG4/EDUCATION/etined_en.asp and https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/Source/resources/FSCor_EN.pdf

¹⁰ http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/competences_en.asp

12, 2016. The framework brings together the values, attitudes, skills, as well as knowledge and critical understanding needed for the exercise of democratic citizenship and intercultural dialogue

This initiative arises from the Chairmanship conference organized by Andorra in February 2013 and it acts on the Council of Europe's conviction that preparation for life as active citizens in democratic societies is one of the major purposes of education. It was given added political importance in 2015 by being included as a flagship project in the Action Plan on the fight against violent extremism and radicalization leading to terrorism adopted by the Committee of Ministers in May 2015¹¹ as well as in the draft Action Plan on Building Inclusive Societies¹², adopted in spring 2016.

The descriptors that will be part of the reference framework underwent a first testing phase in 2015. A large scale piloting is now being concluded and support documents are being developed. The Prague Forum, organized on October 26 – 27, 2017 as part of the Czech Chairmanship of the Council of Europe, will review the full Reference Framework, consisting of the CDC model, the descriptors, and the support documents.

The democratic mission of higher education

The Council of Europe has cooperated with the US Steering Committee of the International Consortium for Higher Education, Civic Responsibility and Democracy since the late 1990s and the cooperation now also includes other partners. A major thematic conference is held in Europe every 3 – 4 years. The latest conference, on Higher Education for Democratic Innovation, was organized at Queen's University Belfast on June 25 – 27, 2014¹³.

The next major conference will be held in Rome on June 15 – 16, 2017 on Higher Education for Diversity, Social Inclusion, and Community: A Democratic Imperative. The conference will be preceded by two separate pre-conference events on June 14: an invitational meeting on the role of higher education institutions in their local and regional communities, organized in cooperation with the International Consortium and the Anchor Institutions Task Force, and a pre-conference event focusing on higher education and refugees.

Recognition of qualifications

With UNESCO, the Council of Europe is the depository of the Lisbon Recognition Convention¹⁴, which sets the European standards for the recognition of higher education qualifications as well as qualifications giving access to higher education. 53 States have ratified the Convention, and another two have signed and are in the process of ratification¹⁵. The Council of Europe and UNESCO also serve the ENIC Network, which works closely with the NARIC Network of the European Commission¹⁶.

The Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee met at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris on February 29, 2016. The Committee meeting was followed by a conference on the recognition of qualifications held by refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation on March 1.

The Lisbon Recognition Convention includes provisions to this effect in Article VII:

Each Party shall take all feasible and reasonable steps within the framework of its education system and in conformity with its constitutional, legal, and regulatory provisions to develop procedures designed to assess fairly and expeditiously whether refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation fulfil the relevant requirements for access to higher education, to further higher education programmes or to employment activities, even in cases in which the qualifications obtained in one of the Parties cannot be proven through documentary evidence.

¹¹

[https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?Ref=CM\(2015\)74&Language=lanEnglish&Ver=addfinal&BackColorInternet=C3C3C3&BackColorIntranet=EDB021&BackColorLogged=F5D383](https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?Ref=CM(2015)74&Language=lanEnglish&Ver=addfinal&BackColorInternet=C3C3C3&BackColorIntranet=EDB021&BackColorLogged=F5D383)

¹² https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectId=09000016805c1a1f

¹³ <http://www.qub.ac.uk/sites/HigherEducationforDemocraticInnovationConference>

¹⁴ <http://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/treaty/165>

¹⁵ <http://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/treaty/165/signatures>. This overview is updated on a daily basis.

¹⁶ <http://www.enic-naric.net/>

Even if this may appear to be a technical issue, the fair recognition of qualifications held by refugees is an important political issue. Formal recognition is essential for access to further studies, and it is often also important for access to the labor market. Nevertheless, refugees often face serious obstacles to having their qualifications recognized. A survey on the implementation of the Convention¹⁷ conducted in late 2015 and early 2016 indicates that 70 per cent of the States party have taken few or no measures to implement Article VII. The Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee Bureau is therefore now developing a draft recommendation on the recognition of qualifications held by refugees. The draft will be submitted to the annual meeting of the ENIC and NARIC Networks in Copenhagen on June 26 – 27 and then to the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committees, which will meet in Strasbourg, most likely on November 14.

A pilot project is being carried out by the Council of Europe and the Greek authorities with the participation of the ENICs of Greece, Italy, Norway and the United Kingdom to test a specific format – called the European Qualifications Passport for Refugees – for describing refugees' qualifications where these cannot be adequately documented. Experienced credentials evaluators will use a combination of structured interviews, any documents the refugees can produce, and knowledge of the education system, society and language(s) of the refugees' home country to assess whether it is likely the refugees have the qualifications they claim.

The European Qualifications Passport for Refugees¹⁸ is not a formal act of recognition and it cannot fully replace a missing diploma. By describing the highest qualification(s) achieved as well as job experience and language proficiency when these can be substantiated it will, however, support applications for further study as well as employment, and it is vastly preferable to the alternative: giving no recognition at all and asking the refugees to start all over again. One key idea behind the European Qualifications Passport for Refugees is that it should be transferable. If the refugees move to a new country, there is no reason why the assessment should be redone. That would be waste of public resources as well as of the refugees' time and effort.

The Steering Committee for Educational Policy and Practice (CDPPE)

As of 2016, the CDPPE will hold two annual plenary sessions. In 2016, these were held on March 15 – 17 and October 18 - 19. In 2017 the first session was held on April 19 – 21 and the second will be held on December 7 – 8.

Etienne Gilliard (Belgium) was elected Chair of the CDPPE at the April 2017 plenary session, while Maria Fassari (Greece) was elected Vice Chair. The Secretary to the CDPPE is Stefania Kruger of the Council of Europe's Education Department

Secretariat

The Council of Europe's Education program is part of the Directorate of Democratic Citizenship and Participation (encompassing Education and Youth), whose Director is Matthew Johnson.

Sjur Bergan is Head of the Education Department, which is made up of the Education Policy Division (headed by Villano Qiriazzi), the Cooperation and Capacity Building Division (headed by Sarah Keating), and the European Centre for Modern Languages, a Partial Agreement based in Graz and headed by Sarah Breslin.

Council of Europe Higher Education Series

A full overview of the 21 volumes published so far in the Council of Europe higher Education Series will be found on the online Council of Europe bookstore: <https://book.coe.int/eur/en/112-higher-education-and-research>

¹⁷ http://www.enic-naric.net/fileusers/Monitoring_the_Implementation_of_the_Lisbon_Recognition_Convention_2016.pdf

¹⁸ <http://www.coe.int/en/web/education/recognition-of-refugees-qualifications>