

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

DGII/EDU/RECO(2026)06  
Strasbourg, 26 February 2026

Implementation of the Council of Europe Higher Education programme in 2025

Report to the Bologna Follow Up Group

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## Introduction – organisational context

The higher education programme of the Council of Europe is guided by the **Council of Europe 2030 Education Strategy “Learners First”**. The Strategy not only provides the vision for the Council of Europe work in the field of education in general and higher education in particular but also includes a Roadmap for its Programme of Activities 2024-2027.

The 27<sup>th</sup> Session of the Council of Europe Standing Conference of Ministers of Education will take place on 3-4 December 2026 in Montenegro under its Presidency of the Committee of Ministers, at the mid-point of implementing the Council of Europe Education Strategy 2024–2030, “Learners First.” The Conference will serve both as a mid-term evaluation of progress achieved and adjust course for 2027–2030, and a European forum to chart clear commitments for the years beyond 2030.

**The proposed theme of the Conference will be “Empowering Educators for a Democratic and Digital Europe”**

The Ministers will hold a focused discussion on how Europe can strengthen, protect and modernise the teaching profession across schools, VET and higher education. Throughout, learners and the wider education community remain the main focus, with enhanced support for teachers as a core driver of democratic, inclusive and digitally responsible education systems.

## The Council of Europe Higher Education Programme

The Higher Education programme is part of the 2024-2027 Education Programme. The higher education programme comprises the programmes related to the implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, including its Co-Secretariat, running (jointly with UNESCO) of the ENIC Network, work on academic freedom, recognition of qualifications, artificial intelligence, the democratic mission of higher education, Platform on Ethics, Transparency and Integrity in Education (ETINED) and the European Qualifications Passport for Refugees.

At the end of 2025 the Council of Europe published [a brochure](#) containing an overview of its higher education projects.

The work in the field of higher education is overseen by the Sub-Group on higher education policy of the Steering Committee for Education (CDEDU). The CDEDU Sub-Group on Higher Education has 25 members, comprising representatives of Ministries, in charge of higher education, as well as academic representatives and international NGOs. To ensure better coordination of work with the Bologna Process, a representative of the EHEA is among the Sub-Group members.

The CDEDU Sub-Group reports to the Council of Europe Steering Committee for Education, which comprises representatives of public authorities responsible for education from the 46 member States of the Council of Europe, Holy See and Kazakhstan and a number of observers.

In November 2025 the Terms of Reference of the Steering Committee for Education were revised (alongside Terms of Reference of other Committees) and adopted by the Committee of Ministers. **The new subordinate Committee on Artificial Intelligence and Education** has been established and had its first meeting in January 2026.

The Council of Europe [higher education website](#) is also regularly updated.

## Higher education projects

### 1. Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee

#### Overview

Together with UNESCO, the Council of Europe ensures the Secretariat of the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC). The Lisbon Recognition Convention is one of the most ratified Conventions in the Council of Europe and remains the only legally binding text in the European Higher Education Area. Adopted in Lisbon in 1997 and now ratified by 57 States, it is the main legal instrument for the fair recognition of qualifications in the Europe.

The Convention Committees are convened at least every three years, with the Work Programme implemented between sessions by the LRC Bureau.

The tenth session of the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee (LRCC) took place on 22 October 2025 at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris.

At this meeting the new LRC Bureau was elected. It currently comprises:

- Allan Bruun Pedersen (Denmark), President
- Jenneke Lokhoff (the Netherlands), 1st Vice-President
- Michael Ringuette (Canada), 2nd Vice-President
- Elisa Petrucci (Italy), Rapporteur

The LRC Committee meeting adopted a new Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education.

The LRC Committee also adopted an updated ENIC-NARIC Charter (by written procedure).

#### Key priorities in 2025-2026

In 2025-2026 the Lisbon Recognition Convention Bureau is pursuing its work on:

- Implementing the newly adopted Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education which was approved at the tenth session of the Committee
- Drafting a new text on digital and AI-enabled recognition in line with the Council of Europe's Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence and Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law
- Drafting a new guidance under the [UNESCO Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education](#), helping to clarify the relationship between global and regional legal instruments on recognition

### 2. Contribution to the ENIC-NARIC Networks

#### Overview

Since 1994 the Council of Europe has been actively involved in running jointly with UNESCO the European Network of National Information Centres (ENIC). It is run jointly with the National Academic Recognition Information Centres (NARIC) network, which was established in 1984 with the European Commission as Secretariat.

The ENIC-NARIC networks have joint initiatives, linked to supporting exchange on qualifications-recognition information on policies and practices and providing an opportunity for capacity building activities, as well as participating in consultative processes on international normative instruments related to qualification recognition.

For the efficient functioning of both the Lisbon Recognition Convention and the ENIC and NARIC Networks the renewal process is constantly required, given new developments in the field of higher education, such as the digitization, automatic recognition, micro-credentials, recognition of non-formal and informal education and recognition of prior learning, transnational education.

### **Developments in 2025**

The 32nd annual joint ENIC-NARIC meeting took place on 25–27 May 2025 in Tirana, Albania. This major event gathered more than 150 representatives from the ENIC and NARIC networks and served as a key forum for exchanging best practices and strengthening cooperation in qualification recognition. The programme included a plenary session and 12 parallel workshops.

The Council of Europe contributed to three workshops: “Unveiling the potential of AI in recognition – optimising benefits, mitigating risks”; “Advancing the automatic recognition of academic qualifications across Europe: way forward”; and “Spotting the fake: navigating education fraud in a digital age”. Another session highlighted the results of ENIC projects supported by the Council of Europe in 2024, with contributions from Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Ukraine. The evaluation report of this session is available [here](#).

The current composition of the ENIC Bureau is as follows:

- Chiara Finocchietti (Italy) – ENIC President
- Dženan Omanović (Bosnia and Herzegovina) – ENIC Vice-President
- Hanna Reczulska (Poland) – Vice-President

The current composition of the NARIC Advisory Board is as follows:

- Gunnar Vaht (Estonia)
- Helén Sophie Haugen (Norway)
- Gianina Chirazi (Romania)

The 33rd annual ENIC-NARIC meeting will take place on 24-26 May 2026 in Athens (Greece).

### **3. Automatic Recognition**

In 2023, the Council of Europe set up an Ad Hoc Working Group on automatic recognition of qualifications. Its terms of reference for 2024-2025 were adopted by the CDEDU Bureau at its meeting in February 2023. In October 2024 the Steering Committee for Education renewed the mandate of the Working Group and extended its membership, including more key stakeholders, including public authorities in charge of higher education, as well as representatives of the European Commission and UNESCO. Through consultations and discussions with key stakeholders, the Working Group has advanced the understanding of automatic recognition, underlining the differences and divergencies in approaches and identified the necessary steps to move forward. The Working Group identified and designed the necessary building blocks to ensure clarity, build trust and establish the preconditions required for the successful implementation of automatic recognition.

At its 8th Plenary session in September 2025, the Steering Committee for Education (CDEDU) examined the document prepared by the Working Group and approved the commencement of the drafting process

for a new Convention, provisionally titled the “*Convention on the Conditions of Transparency and Quality Assurance for Automatic Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications in Europe*”, subject to a decision by the Committee of Ministers in early 2026.

In January 2026 the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe took a formal decision, giving the mandate to the Steering Committee for Education to start the drafting process.

The future Convention is designed to enable automatic recognition rather than establish it directly. It will set out binding commitments for States parties to ensure that their higher education systems meet essential requirements, including:

- Robust and transparent quality assurance aligned with European standards;
- National qualifications frameworks self-certified against the QF-EHEA and referenced against the EQF;
- Reliable public registers of recognised institutions and qualifications
- Effective use of core Bologna tools such as the ECTS and the Diploma supplement
- Safeguards for academic freedom, institutional autonomy and integrity

The Convention will commit State Parties to the prerequisites and framework conditions necessary to enable automatic recognition, which may be implemented through bilateral, regional or multilateral agreements.

The new legal text will complement existing instruments, including the Lisbon Recognition Convention and regional agreements, without interfering with admission decisions, professional recognition regimes or institutional autonomy.

#### **4. Recognition of refugees’ qualifications:**

In 2005 a new policy text - the Draft CM Recommendation on “Valuing the Academic and Professional Skills of Refugees in Europe, which was adopted by the Committee of Ministers.

The [European Qualifications Passport for Refugees \(EQPR\)](#) is a Council of Europe initiative aiming at facilitating the recognition of refugees’ qualifications even in the absence of full documentation.

The EQPR project is developing synergies and cooperates with the UNESCO Qualifications Passport for Refugees and Vulnerable Migrants, which is targeting countries outside the European Region. The coordination is carried out both at the strategic level, as well as on a technical level.

#### **Latest developments**

By 2025, 24 countries were participating in the EQPR: Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, Croatia, France, Germany, Georgia, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, San Marino, Serbia, Spain (joined in 2025) and the United Kingdom. To date, over 1000 EQPRs have been issued.

More than 100 credential evaluators from 24 participating ENICs are now trained on the interview-based EQPR methodology which increases the capacity of the project to promote the EQPR as a valid and trustful tool to assess qualifications of refugees without sufficient documentation.

In 2025, the Council of Europe conducted a survey on EQPR use among over 1200 EQPR holders. The responses were received from 336 passport holders representing more than 40 nationalities. Most qualifications holders came from Ukraine, Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq and Cameroon.

Full version of the report on the survey results is available [here](#).

In 2025 the Council of Europe updated the brochure on the EQPR and published a brochure "[Portraits of Refugees](#)", which follow life stories of seven refugees – recipients of the EQPR.

On 28 April 2026, under the Moldovan Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe an event entitled "Supporting refugees' participation in higher education and labour market – European Qualifications Passport for Refugees (EQPR) as an international instrument to address national challenges.

The aim of the awareness raising event is to discuss the recognition of refugees' qualifications as a tool for the successful integration of refugees in higher education and in the labour market, with a focus on the Republic of Moldova.

During this event, participants will be able to learn more about the challenges and tools on recognition of qualifications in case of missing documents, with a focus on the European experiences. In addition to that, representatives from the academic sector and the labour market are invited to discuss and consider how to adjust and implement the potentiality given by the EQPR in the academic and professional sectors. Finally, participants will learn and have insights about the EQPR methodology and how a non-documented or partially documented qualification can be assessed and recognised.

The awareness raising event is organised by the Council of Europe (Education Department), the Ministry of Education and Research and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs under the Presidency of the Republic of Moldova of the Council of Europe.

## 5. Democratic mission of higher education

### Latest developments

The work on the democratic mission of higher education is strongly linked to the fundamental values of the Council of Europe, respecting human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

With the launch of the new project "Academic Freedom in Action", the Council of Europe Education department continues its work on the protection and promotion of the values of academic freedom, the premises of which were given in the Recommendation CM/Rec(2012)7 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the responsibility of public authorities for academic freedom and institutional autonomy.

The new Working Group on the Democratic Mission of Higher Education was set up at the end of 2023 with eight prominent academic experts.

The second Academic Freedom in Action 2025 conference took place in Strasbourg on 24-25 November 2025. The Conference featured high-level sessions highlighting political, legal and institutional responses. It reinforced academic freedom as a core pillar of democracy, one that must be defended with renewed urgency and sustained action, including by legal means. The [Report on the Erosion of Academic Freedom in Europe](#) prepared by experts within the framework of the Council of Europe's Working Group on Democratic Mission of Higher Education was presented at the conference.

The collaboration between the Council of Europe and the International Consortium for Higher Education, Civic Responsibility, and Democracy also continues and the eighth Global Forum on Higher Education took place on 3-4 June 2025 at Charles University in Prague. The Forum reaffirmed the democratic and civic mission of higher education.

By promoting collaboration between public authorities, universities, and international bodies, the project will produce actionable recommendations, guidelines, and tools to strengthen the democratic transformation of higher education institutions in line with the Council of Europe Education Strategy 2024–2030.

[The Academic Freedom Insights Series](#) comprising ten policy briefs, builds upon the work of the Council of Europe Expert Working Group on the Democratic Mission of Higher Education. It explores key challenges, opportunities, and threats related to academic freedom, serving both as an awareness-raising tool and a resource for policy development. Each brief addresses a specific dimension of academic freedom, reflecting priority areas identified by the Expert Working Group.

Beyond raising awareness, the series is a key resource for the Council of Europe’s work on policy development and for partners across Europe and beyond. By promoting dialogue on academic freedom, the Insights series aims to support concrete action to strengthen democratic societies.

## **6. The Pan-European Platform on Ethics, Transparency and Integrity in Education(ETINED) An overview and main developments**

[ETINED](#) is a network of specialists appointed by member states of the Council of Europe and States Parties to the European Cultural Convention.

Since its launch in 2015, the ETINED Platform has been dedicated to promoting a culture of ethics and integrity within the education sector. The Platform has produced guidelines aimed at ensuring ethical practices in the teaching profession and has developed targeted recommendations on academic integrity based on assessments and exchanges with stakeholders in the field.

The 9th Plenary Meeting of the ETINED Platform, held on 5–6 November 2025 in Valetta, brought together representatives of states parties, NGOs and experts from across Europe to address key challenges in promoting integrity and transparency in education.

The plenary included an in-depth exchange on open school data, exploring how transparency initiatives can empower communities while safeguarding privacy and equity. Discussions also focused on innovative approaches to preventing and countering education fraud, including the use of artificial intelligence to support academic integrity and legal measures against degree mills, contributing to the work of the Centre for Preventing and Countering Education Fraud. The meeting concluded with a forward-looking exchange on ETINED’s future priorities, reaffirming the platform’s commitment to co-operation, knowledge-sharing and strengthening trust in European education.

In April 2025, the ETINED Platform hosted an online moderated talk - EduTalks@CoE - [“Ensuring Quality and Integrity in Transnational Education”](#) (TNE). The EduTalk explored how institutions can maintain academic integrity and quality while expanding transnational education opportunities in an increasingly globalised world.

## Launch of TNE Online Series

Following the EduTalk in April 2025, a co-authored article titled “[In addressing TNE governance challenges, students are key](#)” featuring contributions from UNESCO, ENQA, CIMEA, TNE Hub and the Council of Europe, was published in [University World News](#), highlighting the need for robust quality assurance, cross-border cooperation, and the protection of student interests. To complement the article, a series of short expert video clips have been published on the Education Department’s dedicated [LinkedIn page](#), addressing key questions about TNE, including its risks, opportunities, and governance challenges.

## New Publication: Student Perceptions and Awareness of Education Fraud

Based on a Europe-wide survey of over 5,000 higher education students across 40 countries, the report – developed in partnership with CIMEA (Information Centre on Academic Mobility and Equivalence) and the ETINED Platform – sheds light on how students perceive, experience, and understand education fraud.

- ETINED Volume 10: [Student Perceptions and Awareness of Education Fraud](#)

### Education information notes

- [Open school data in European education systems](#)
- [Student Perceptions and Awareness of Education Fraud](#)

## 7. Centre for Preventing and Countering Education Fraud

The initiative to establish a Centre for Preventing and Countering Education Fraud is a multilateral project, aimed at enhancing the capacity of States to effectively prevent, monitor, and address education fraud. Its activities encompass secure information exchange, systematic data collection, awareness raising, and capacity-building for stakeholders across Europe and beyond. The Centre will serve as a hub for international co-operation on combating fraudulent educational practices, including those involving diploma mills, fake credentials, and contract cheating.

The Centre was launched under a Memorandum of Understanding between the Council of Europe and CIMEA (Information Centre on Academic Mobility and Equivalence) in June 2025.

The first awareness-raising event of the Centre is currently in preparation.

## 8. Council of Europe Students’ Rights Charter

The development of the Council of Europe Students’ Rights Charter is part of the main actions proposed in the 2030 Council of Europe Education Strategy “Learners First”. The Charter aims to safeguard equality, inclusion and democratic participation for students across the continent, reinforcing higher education as a public good and a cornerstone of democratic culture.

In line with the decisions of the Council of Europe Steering Committee for Education (CDEDU), the drafting of the European Student Rights Charter is co-led by the Council of Europe and ESU, with extensive consultation involving a wide range of stakeholders.

The Working Group was set up to steer this work. Initial findings were reported to the CDEDU already in September 2025. Namely, the Group agreed that establishing a European Student Rights Charter would enable the Council of Europe to ensure that a core set of student rights—including access to affordable education, academic freedom, and meaningful student participation in governance—are recognised, guaranteed, and protected across all member states.

Subsequently, a series of stakeholder consultations took place throughout the remainder of 2025 to clarify expectations and ensure that the Charter would modernise and standardise protection mechanisms for students, guaranteeing that high-quality education is accessible to all.

Consultation outcomes highlighted that the development and endorsement of a European Student Rights Charter would strengthen the consistency and protection of student rights across Europe, further advancing the democratic principles and human rights enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR).

A concept note on the European Student Rights Charter will be presented to the next meeting of the Steering Committee for Education in March 2026 for endorsement. It is expected that the text of the Student Rights Charter will be ready in the first half of 2027.

#### Education information note

- [Development of the Student Rights Charter](#)

### 9. Artificial Intelligence and Recognition

The Council of Europe has launched a new three-year programme (2025-2027) on Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the Recognition of Qualifications to explore how AI can support, transform and safeguard higher education credential evaluation. A dedicated Working Group of Experts has been created to guide this work, ensuring alignment with the values of the Council of Europe Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence and the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

The programme will focus on:

- Opportunities and risks: exploring AI's potential to automate recognition processes, verify authenticity and detect fraud, and support international academic mobility while mitigating risks like bias and inequality;
- Capacity development: training stakeholders on the ethical and effective use of AI in recognition workflow/ map the current use of AI in ENIC-NARIC centres and identify best practices
- Policy and Frameworks: drafting a White Paper addressing AI's role in qualifications recognition and a Code of Practice tailored to AI-enhanced credential evaluation
- Digital Transformation: piloting AI-based tools for credential evaluation and fostering international cooperation in building data repositories

This Programme started in October 2025 and to date two meetings of the Group of Experts have taken place. A survey on the use of AI in recognition has been conducted and the results will be available soon.

### 10. Knowledge Hub and Resources

In 2025 the Council of Europe Education Department developed a "[Knowledge Hub](#)", a digital library which contains over 4000 resources, including 600 publications, produced in the framework of the Council of Europe Education Programme.

### 11. European Education Notes

In order to provide comprehensive information on different projects implemented within the Council of Europe Education Programme, the [Education Information Notes](#) have been produced.