UNESCO Higher Education Activity Report for the Bologna Follow-up Group Meeting

September 2026

This report provides an overview of UNESCO's activities since February 2026 which are of relevance to the European Higher Education Area.

1. A new Roadmap for Higher Education transformation

In March 2026, UNESCO released a new roadmap for higher education transformation that grows out the World Higher Education Conference (WHEC) dynamic and process. Under the title *Transforming higher education: Global collaboration on visioning and action*, this new flagship publication advances UNESCO's vision of higher education as a critical part of the right to quality education throughout life and a global common good. Seeing the teaching, research and community engagement missions of higher education as mutually interdependent, the roadmap offers guiding principles and a set of lines of transformation designed to ensure the ongoing relevance and effectiveness of both higher education institutions and systems in delivering transformative change that supports peace, prosperity, sustainability, as well as inclusive and just social and human development.

This agenda and action plan for higher education transformation frames UNESCO's work addressing issues such as higher-education financing, greening, digital / AI transformation, academic freedom and the status of higher education teaching personnel. A key aspect of this new roadmap is its emphasis on the importance of international cooperation, dialogue between regions, and strengthening the public mission of higher education in the face of contemporary global challenges.

UNESCO-IESALC also released in May 2026 the Higher Education trends report which includes a chapter examining international mobility trends.

2. Qualifications Recognition and Quality Assurance

Forty-two (42) countries have now ratified the Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education which entered into force in 2023, Ireland being the latest to join in July 2023. This represents nearly one-third of the world's 7.3 million internationally mobile students according to the most recent data. Some 20 other countries are in the process of ratifying either the Global or the respective regional Convention or both.

In line with the adopted work programme for the Global Convention, three new texts subsidiary texts are being prepared for adoption in 2027. These are:

a) the relationship of the Global Convention to the regional recognition conventions;

b) quality assurance in higher education, including that of cross-border higher education; and

c) the recognition of refugees' and displaced persons' qualifications and the development of complementary pathways.

As part of the development of these three new subsidiary texts, the Bureaux of all the regional conventions, as well as the States Parties of the Global and regional conventions, will be consulted on these draft texts. The States Parties of all recognition conventions will receive these three texts as part

of an official consultation process in the final months of 2026.

Capacity-building webinars on the Global Convention on Higher Education

In line with the adopted work program, UNESCO began a series of webinars in 2025 to build capacity and accelerate the ratification and implementation of UNESCO's recognition conventions. These webinars target higher education officials, admissions officers, policymakers, credential evaluators, and national implementation centers, with the aim of engaging a community of practice and other relevant stakeholders in the recognition landscape.

UNESCO organized three webinars in 2026. The first was held on 27 January on the theme *What does it mean to be part of a regional network for qualifications recognition?* A second webinar on 17 March was on *Different kinds of learning: Ensuring fair recognition.* A third session on 8 July covered the topic of *Combatting academic fraud through technology and international cooperation.* Participation and engagement have remained strong, with an average of around 200 participants joining from across the world for each edition.

Regional recognition conventions

UNESCO's regional conventions are implemented in complementarity with the Global Convention, catering to the specificities of their respective regions. The vast majority of States Parties to the Global Convention (38 out of 42) are also States Parties to one of more regional recognition conventions. Together they host about one third of the world's 7.3 million internationally mobile students.

Convention	Adoption	In force	States Parties
Lisbon Convention (European region)	1997	1999	57 – last ratification in 2024
Tokyo Convention (Asia-Pacific)	2011	2018	13 – last ratification in 2026
Addis Convention (Africa)	2014	2018	14 – last ratification in 2022
Buenos Aires Convention (LAC)	2019	2022	7 – last ratification in 2026
Arab States Convention	2022	2026	5 – last ratification in 2026

Arab States Convention

Following the ratification of Egypt and Lebanon in the first half of 2026, the Arab States Convention entered into force on 18 April 2026. This marks an important milestone for the region, and UNESCO will be convening a first Committee meeting in November 2026.

Lisbon Recognition Convention

The newly elected LRC Bureau has already met several times in 2026. As part of the workplan for 2025 – 2028 period, a monitoring exercise on mapping substantial differences is foreseen. The Bureau held a consultation meeting during the Annual ENIC-NARIC meeting in May 2026 to further elaborate on its plans for the coming three years.

UNESCO continues to work with different partners to foster closer cooperation between the different structures of the LRC and European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and the other regional recognition conventions. UNESCO joined the Coordination Group on Global Policy Dialogue as co-Chair with Italy and Moldova. UNESCO is also a member of the Working Group on Internationalisation and Mobility and the Thematic Peer Group B on Key Commitment 2: National legislation and procedures compliant with the LRC. It is also a member of the Council of Europe's Drafting Group for the planned new Framework Convention on establishing the conditions for Automatic Recognition.

Monitoring the 1993 Recommendation

The UNESCO Recommendation on the Recognition of Studies and Qualifications in Higher Education was adopted by all UNESCO Member States in 1993. As part of UNESCO's regular monitoring of existing recommendations, a survey has been sent to all UNESCO Member States for completion, and should also provide important information on the regional and Global Conventions. The results will be presented in 2027 and will help inform the new monitoring process of the Global Convention.

3. Standard-setting on the status of academic staff

UNESCO is currently engaged in revising the **1997 UNESCO Recommendation Concerning the Status of Higher Education Teaching Personnel**. As a reference on some of the new and emerging developments being taken into account, we invite you to consult the five technical briefs:

The changing landscape of academic freedom
The changing landscape of academic work
The changing landscape of digital transformation in higher education
The changing landscape of higher education teaching personnel in emergencies and conflict-affected settings
The changing landscape of institutional autonomy

An Independent Expert Group (IEG-97) composed of 12 members was established to support the revision process, taking into account gender balance, geographical representation, and diverse areas of expertise. Information on the revision process is available here. A revised draft and preliminary report will circulated to all UNESCO Member States (October-December 2026). Based on this input, a second draft and final report will be submitted to a Special Committee Meeting of all UNESCO Member States (July 2027) which will then forward its recommendation to the General Conference (November 2027).

4. Other Key Initiatives

Campus Africa Flagship: The Campus Africa Flagship, launched in 2022 as part of UNESCO's Operational Strategy for Priority Africa 2022-2029, aims to support more inclusive, quality-assured, equitable and gender-responsive higher education systems in Africa. In 2026, Campus Africa has continued to strengthen digital and AI capacities and higher education data systems across Africa. Under the Flagship, UNESCO supported the AI4EAC Innovation Challenge within the East African Community (EAC) AI Alliance and led its education track on youth-developed AI solutions linking skills and careers, promoting digital inclusion and reaching close to 4,000 registered students and young innovators across East Africa. Moreover, in partnership with OBREAL under HAQAA III, Campus Africa supported the development of a continental capacity-building course on higher education data collection and management, with the first regional cohort launched in Southern Africa.

The **UNESCO-China Funds-in-Trust Phase III (CFIT III)** held its closing event, with the title: *Higher Technical Education in Africa for a Technical and Innovative Workforce.* This event, held on 11 and 12 May 2026, brought together CFIT III project key stakeholders, including representatives from higher education institutions in six countries, ministries, development partners, private sector actors, and youth, to reflect on the CFIT III project results and achievements, showcase innovative solutions developed by partner institutions, and chart a roadmap for sustaining its outcomes beyond the current project cycle.