Economic and Social Council

Determining measures for improving the ease of international recognition of diplomas and qualifications

Research Report

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Forum: *The Economic and Social Council*

Issue: *Determining measures for improving the ease of international recognition of diplomas and qualifications*

Position: *President*

Introduction

As the world tends to become more globalized, new opportunities appear in many fields, such as those of labor and economy. More and more people seek either educational or occupational opportunities in various parts of the world, where their contribution is, at many times, necessary. However, in order for the members of the international community to be able to contribute with their knowledge and experience in a foreign country, their degrees and qualifications must meet the appropriate standards set out by that country. The minimum requirements that one must meet, in order to be eligible to apply to an institution or working space, are not always of the same tier. The level of ability that each position requires and obligations that it entails, are determined by the standards set out by the institution or, at many times, the country itself.

Individual degrees and qualifications also differ from one country to another, resulting in confusion and time-consuming procedures when applications are being evaluated. Therefore, the procedure of inspection and comparison of degrees and standards usually delays the acceptance of students in academic institutions and of professionals in working environments. This ultimately causes disturbance both to the person applying and to the institution examining whether they meet the necessary requirements. Economic repercussions of this disturbance may be significant when there is an immediate need of working individuals in a certain field at the time.

Remarkable attempts to resolve this issue have been made in previous years. One major contribution was that of UNESCO's Convention on The Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education, The Bologna Process and The Lisbon Recognition Convention. Still, the issue of the differing qualifications and degrees around the world and the adversity in recognising them remains, while many are also the professions that are widely needed, but do not require a degree or certification of qualification.

Definition of Key Terms

Recognition of a foreign certificate, diploma or degree of higher education:

"its acceptance by the competent authorities of a Contracting State and the granting to the holder of the rights enjoyed by persons possessing a national certificate, diploma or degree with which the foreign one is assessed as comparable by competent authorities within the Contracting State. Such rights extend to either the pursuit of studies or the practice of a profession, or both, according to the applicability of the recognition." [1]

Degree

"a course of study at a college or university, or the qualification given to a student after he or she has completed his or her studies" [2]

Qualification

"an official record showing that you have finished a training course or have the necessary skills, etc"[3]

UNESCO

"UNESCO is the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. It contributes to peace and security by promoting international cooperation in education, sciences, culture, communication and information. UNESCO promotes knowledge sharing and the free flow of ideas to accelerate mutual understanding and a more perfect knowledge of each other's lives"[4]

Bologna process

"The Bologna Process is an important process of harmonizing various systems of European higher education that has the objective to create a European Area of Higher Education and to promote the European system of higher education on a worldwide scale in order to increase its international competitiveness."[5]

The Lisbon Recognition Convention

"The Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC) aims to ensure that holders of a qualification from a signatory country can have adequate access to an assessment of the qualification in another country in a fair, flexible, and transparent way."[6]

The ERIC-NARIC Network

"The European Network of National Information Centres on Academic Mobility and Recognition (ENIC Network) was set up by the Council of Europe and UNESCO. It works in close collaboration with the European Union's Network of National Academic Recognition Information Centres (NARIC Network). The ENIC Network brings together the national centers responsible for the recognition of academic qualifications at national level."[7]

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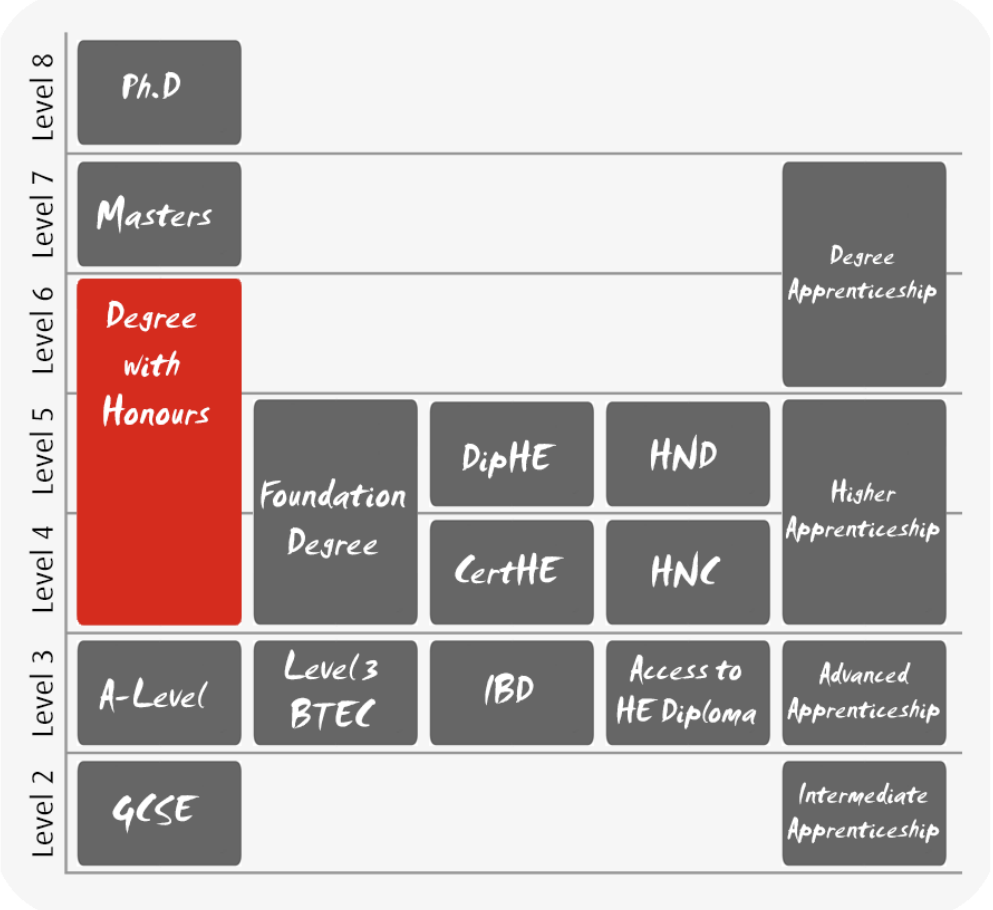

Figure 1: Most prestigious degrees divided by level

General Overview

The major issue in hand is the fact that degrees and qualifications must be recognised by a foreign country within a limited time to assure the maximum benefits in regards to the development of labor and economy. This task often causes turbulence since the required qualifications for acceptance, both in occupation and education, vary from one country to another. The obtained degrees themselves also tend to exhibit differences. Another factor that heavily interferes with the topic is the level-gap between the qualifications that an individual has and the ones he should obtain in order to be eligible to offer their knowledge in another context. These requirements are often relevant to the economical state of each country, as well as its development plans and other factors. Lastly, there is a sufficient number of professions that are strongly needed in many countries, which are not verified by a degree, the qualifications of which are complicated to recognise.

Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees concerning Higher Education

Despite the rise in demand for universities during the previous century, the enrollment ratios have been disproportionate, while the distribution of students in countries has been uneven.

UNESCO has for a long time been a firm supporter of the reinforcement of Higher Education international studies. Having promoted this belief, since 1976, UNESCO has managed to convince many major parties to become members of its international Conventions on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees concerning Higher Education. In total there are currently 5 Higher Education Regional conventions for the regions of Africa, Asia-Pacific, Europe, Latin America and Caribbeans and the Arab States .

The ultimate goal of these conventions is ensuring that, due to the need for academic mobility, foreign higher education credentials will be recognised in other member states. This would create a flow of knowledge and talent, which would strengthen economic, as well as social, development on the international level.

Because of these conventions, academic mobility has been highly empowered, contributing to many social and economical alterations. Some of these alterations seem to be migrations, demographic transformations and technological developments amongst others. The convention also encourages the bilateral cooperation of countries through universities, further strengthening international relations.

The Bologna Process and the European Higher Education Area (EHEA)

The Bologna Process is the main voluntary organization that concerns itself with the EHEA. It aims to make the Higher Education system in Europe more coherent. Since its beginnings in 1999, following the Bologna Declaration, the voluntary initiative has so far been implemented by 49 states that form the EHEA.

Starting in 2001, the main focus of the process is offering both academic staff, as well as, students and graduates mobility and fair access to high quality higher education, whilst making the European Higher Education Area more competitive in the global scope. Hence, the EHEA was officially recognised in 2010 by the European Ministers.

The countries participating in the Bologna process are also accompanied by organizations such as UNESCO, EUA, ESU, EURASHE, ENQA, Education International and BUSINESSEUROPE, which play the role of consultants to the task.

Once in the span of 2 or 3 years, in order to evaluate the so far progress of the EHEA and to implement a new course of action for the following years, a Ministerial Conference is organized. Some of the subjects discussed are the actions that will be implemented by member countries and future developments. Finally a communiqué is adopted that outlines the Ministerial decisions. After the Conference, the Bologna Follow-Up Group supports the Bologna Process to ensure the fulfillment of the decisions.

The Bologna Process is key to achieving learning mobility, bilateral academic cooperation and mutual recognition of degrees and study periods earned abroad. Enhancing the

procedures and relevance of teaching and learning are also fundamental goals. However, the application of these implementations is uneven across member states.

The Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC)

The Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC) has been in effect since 1997 and has been signed by 55 countries. Its main focus is ensuring that all individuals originating from countries that are parties to the convention can have equal opportunities for an assessment of their degrees or/and qualifications in another country. During this procedure of recognition no discriminations will be allowed on any basis. People of any gender, race, holding any political views, coming from any ethnic origin should all be evaluated in a transparent, fair and flexible manner by the country where they desire to work or study.

Every country, party to the LRC, shall create their own regulatory authority, which would ultimately see to the recognition of qualifications and degrees. Additionally, each country must develop a procedure that would inspect whether refugees and displaced individuals fulfill the standards to access higher education or occupational opportunities, even if the relevant documents that prove their qualifications can not be accessed.

In general, according to the Convention, all foreign applications should be recognised unless the examining authority can prove that the qualifications essentially differentiate from the national requirements. The responsibility of disproving an application due to lack of qualifications lies within the body undertaking the assessment. When an individual is recognised as eligible in a foreign country there must be consequences such as: the usage of an academic title, access to the labor market or to higher studies.

All countries should create a national information center, responsible for informing and advising foreign interested citizens on the procedure of recognition of qualifications undertaken by the country. Finally, countries are in charge of informing all programs and institutions that are part of their higher education system about the procedural matters of recognition, while encouraging them to issue the Diploma Supplement to their students in order to ease recognition of qualifications.

Job Title	Minimum		Maximum	
	Qualification	Experience (years)	Qualification	Experience (years)
Project Managers	BSc	3	MSc	5
Systems Analysts	Higher Diploma	3	MSc	3
Network Managers	BSc	3	MSc	3
Programmers	Diploma	2	MSc	2
Quality Assurance	BSc	1	MSc	2
Consulting	MSc	5	-	-
Implementing Executives	BSc	2	-	-

c. Obstacles faced

Figure 2: Approximate requirements of qualifications by job category

The European Network of Information Centers and National Academic Recognition Information Centers/ The ERIC-NARIC network:

The ENIC-NARIC network is an international collaboration, formed between the national information centers and the national academic recognition information centers of countries, which focuses on the academic recognition of qualifications in the countries that are parties of the Lisbon Recognition Convention. This network is easily accessible to the people and provides specific information that enhances the understanding of recognition procedures in countries part of the LRC. It also provides information in regards to UNESCO's Conventions on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees concerning Higher Education. The website assists individuals to find information relevant to professional and academic mobility, sourcing from the ENIC-NARIC member organizations, the respective competent bodies in each country for the information of citizens.

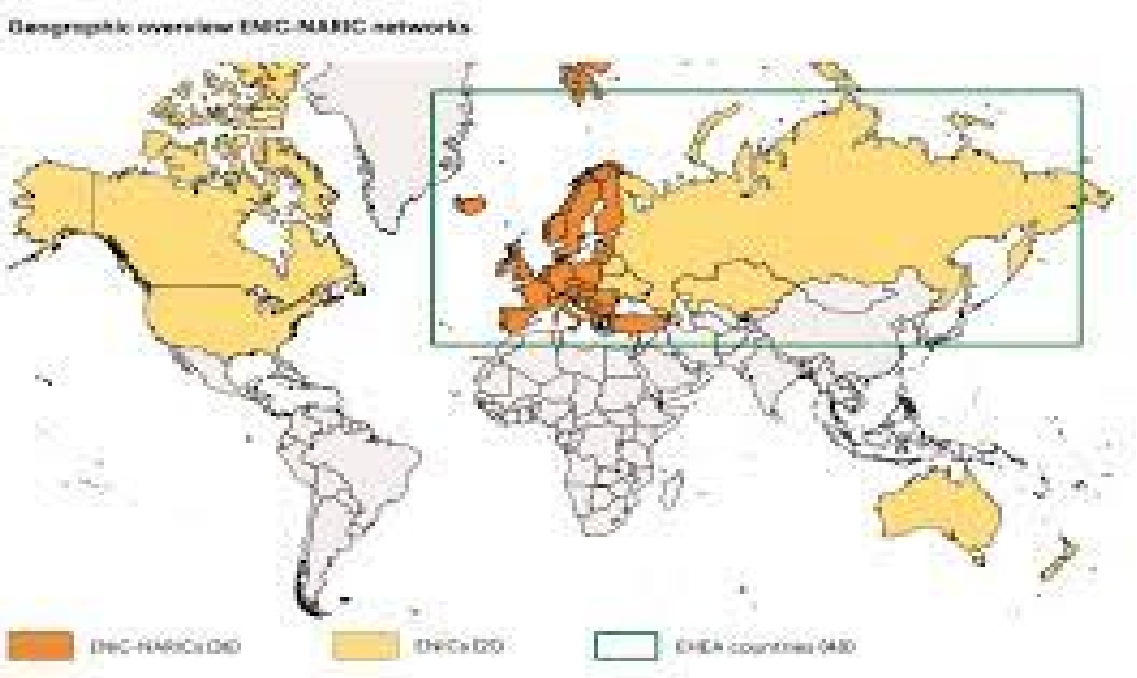

Figure 3: Visualization of the designated area of the ENIC-NARIC network

Techniques that ease the recognition of qualifications and degrees

In most countries, when seeking for the recognition of a degree or a qualification, an individual can find themselves appertaining to two different categories. According to the tier of one's degree or qualifications, in comparison to those set out by the country where the application is being made, it can be inspected by either the standard of level or automatically.

In the scenario of recognition by level, the degree is being compared to that of the country where the applicant wishes to enter in order to check the correspondence between the two. Automatic recognition is used, mostly in the EHEA, when examining higher education degrees of foreign education which are certified to belong at the same level as the ones in the country of reception. Once a degree is recognised automatically the person holding it can promptly enter the labor market or a program of further study in the EHEA. Although automatic recognition comes without a separate recognition procedure, it does not entail the immediate acceptance of the applicant to a Higher Education Institution where their profile and credentials are assessed to determine whether they fulfill set out requirements.

In order to ease all procedural matters in regards to recognition the European Union (EU) has developed the following certifications:

1. The diploma supplement is an educational title attached to that of higher education studies designed to assist the recognition of academic qualifications. It contains a description of the degree facilitating educational institutions and employers to recognise it with more ease. All graduates from countries that are parties to the Bologna process can receive the Europass Diploma Supplement (EDS).

2. The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) is used in the EHEA to increase the transparency of studies, as well as, assist students in moving between countries for their studies, while having their qualifications and study periods recognised.
3. The European Professional Card (EPC) is an electronic procedure through which one might choose to apply for the recognition of their professional qualifications if their occupation is a regulated one. It can only be used and obtained within the EU and applies only to the professions of nurse responsible for general care, pharmacist, physiotherapist, mountain guide or real estate agent

Major Parties Involved

The European Union (EU)

The European Union is an international organization consisting of 27 countries which share common governing, economic and security policies. In the field of education and occupation the European Union plays a major role in the global picture. All EU Member States have their individualized higher education system but they are all part of the EHEA as stated in the Bologna Process.

The European Union seeks to sustain the maximum transparency in Higher Studies, ensuring that educational systems of member states are compatible, in order to assist students, researchers but also multilateral collaboration. This phenomenon of transparency has been further reinforced by the creation of diplomas, such as the ECTS, the EPC and the EDS that assure degrees and qualifications meet the standards of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF)

The European Union also collaborates closely with the ENIC-NARIC network to inform citizens about the authorities responsible for the credential evaluation in each country, but also for other significant procedural matters.

The United States of America (USA)

The USA is widely known for its Higher Education institutions. The recognition of foreign degrees is not regulated by one liable authority. This procedure is rather done at the state level with each state setting out its own requirements and processes.

In order for an individual to have their credentials evaluated, they can hire services such as the National Association of Credential Evaluation Services (NACES) or the Association of International Credential Evaluators (AICE).

In some professions practitioners need to obtain a new license that would meet the necessary requirements on a state level, after being tested and verified by the territorial licensing board. After that, they are either examined by the hiring employer or the state itself respectively to the occupation which they seek to practice.

When a student is seeking to apply to the United States in either a school or a higher education institution they are presenting their credits and qualifications to the institution where they are applying

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

UNESCO is a United Nations initiative that aims to strengthen international cooperation in the fields of Education and Sciences. The organization's attempts to unify Higher Education Institutions throughout the continents has been remarkable in previous years. Through the creation and continual expansion of the "Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees concerning Higher Education" UNESCO has seeked to enhance the mobility of students and the cohesion between countries. The ultimate goal of this organization is providing individuals with equal opportunities to learning and bring peace to the world.

Qatar

The nation of Qatar has in recent years become an international destination for those who seek Higher Education and a place in the labor market. In terms of degree recognition, Qatar's government operates under a system of equivalency, which examines the qualifications of all various applicants. Before becoming a student, professional or a citizen in the nation you have to apply for an equivalency certificate. This certificate plays a key role for both the individuals seeking employment but also for the employers themselves, who have the option to finance the procedure of examination. Once the equivalency certificate has been awarded the degree of the applicant is validated and they can therefore legally occupy themselves.

Timeline of Events

1978	UNESCO's UNESCO's convention on the recognition of studies diplomas and degrees concerning Higher Education in the Arab States was signed
1979	UNESCO's convention on the recognition of studies diplomas and degrees concerning Higher Education in the States belonging to the European Union was signed
1983	UNESCO's convention on the recognition of studies diplomas and degrees concerning Higher Education in Asia and the Pacific was signed
1994	Establishment of the ENIC-NARIC network, which provides information on citizens about the recognition procedures for their degrees in each country
1997	The Lisbon Recognition Convention was signed by the first member states, strengthening the movement of students and professionals between the parties
1999	The Bologna Declaration was signed, leading to the Bologna process and ultimately the recognition of the EHEA
2014	UNESCO's convention on the recognition of studies diplomas and degrees concerning Higher Education in African States was signed
2022	UNESCO's convention on the recognition of studies diplomas and degrees concerning Higher Education in Latin America and the Carribean will be put into effect

Possible Solutions

It would be applicable to say that countries which manage to easen their recognition procedures will benefit both economically and socially. The faster examination and reception of individuals would ultimately lead to a better circulation of population, new working hands and ideas. Therefore each country should seek to form their national standards for acceptance in a way that most of the degrees obtained globally could be similar, to ensure that examinations are completed in a rather timely manner.

Another major field of the inspectional procedure are new methods of confirmation. Following the example of the European Union and the EHEA, other parts of the world could possibly seek the creation of similar supplements to a degree that would confirm the qualifications that accompany the obtained degree.

Investing in technological applications and A.I. to make automatic recognition and comparison of degrees by level faster could also prove to be beneficial. Not only would A.I. technology improve the time within which the examinations are being performed, but it would also exclude any signs of discrimination.

Finally, encouraging all countries that are not members of UNESCO's "Convention on the Recognition of studies diplomas and degrees concerning Higher Education" would be of the essence. Countries that have not signed the Lisbon treaty could also sing it or attempt to form different alliances that would have a similar outcome.

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Bucharest Communique from 2012, issued by the parties of the Bologna Process

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Information about the next meeting of the members of the EHEA in rome 2020

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