

The Entry into Force of UNESCO's Global Convention on Higher Education: A Milestone for Recognition and Quality Assurance Internationally

By Andreas Snildal and Dounia Abderrahman, UNESCO Section of Higher Education

With the [entry into force](#) on 5 March of UNESCO's [Global Convention on the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications](#), the first worldwide treaty on higher education has become legally binding for its States Parties. The Global Convention, establishing universal principles for the recognition of foreign qualifications, aims to improve equitable access to quality higher education, and enhance physical and virtual academic mobility everywhere. Its provisions provide a solid infrastructure for strengthening student mobility and inter-university cooperation across regions, complementing the scope of UNESCO's five [regional recognition conventions](#).

For the first time, also quality assurance is addressed in an global treaty, and the Global Convention will have substantial repercussions for quality assurance and accreditation internationally. By reaffirming quality assurance mechanisms as indispensable for any higher education system and promoting "a culture of quality assurance in higher-education institutions and systems", it will boost quality in higher education worldwide.

Accreditation of programs and institutions together with quality assurance mechanisms are crucial elements of the implementation of the Global Convention, as recognition relies on mutual trust between higher education systems. By ratifying the Global Convention, countries commit to recognizing degrees from other ratifying countries and can only deny recognition if competent authorities can prove substantial differences between a foreign degree and the corresponding national one. If a foreign degree is not recognized, the Global Convention puts the burden of proof on recognition authorities and gives individuals the right to appeal recognition decisions.

The Convention also takes into account the rapid evolution of online learning and digital credentials, as well as the difficulties and opportunities associated with joint degrees, including principles for their recognition abroad. These and related topics will be further addressed through recommendations and guidelines issued by the Intergovernmental Conference of the Global Convention in the coming years, starting with the first session of the Intergovernmental Conference already this year.

The Global Convention will undoubtedly pose challenges for ratifying countries, as it will require them to implement procedures that comply with the Convention's principles and obligations. Additionally, countries will need to establish, if not done already, a national information center to provide accurate and up-to-date information about their higher education systems and quality assurance mechanisms. This will help to ensure that recognition decisions are made fairly, transparently, and without any form for discrimination.

Ultimately, the successful implementation of the Global Convention will be possible only with a sustained commitment from all stakeholders, including governments, higher education institutions, and accrediting agencies, to work collaboratively towards the shared goal of enhancing the quality, accessibility, and recognition of higher education qualifications around the world.