



## **BFUG meeting LXXI (Croatia, 25 June 2020)**

# **UNESCO Higher Education Activities 2019-2020**

This document gives an overview of UNESCO higher education activities in 2019-2020 of relevance for members of the European Higher Education Area, with a particular focus on the recognition of higher education qualifications.

Before this, however, a few words on UNESCO's action in response to the COVID-19 outbreak and the 1.2 billion students and youth across the planet who are affected by school and university closure.

UNESCO launched the Global Education Coalition that seeks to facilitate inclusive learning opportunities for children and youth during this period of sudden and unprecedented educational disruption. Detailed information on the Global Education Coalition and UNESCO's action in response to COVID-19 is available at <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse/>, including the recently held webinar on Implications for the Global Higher Education Campus, the Report of which is attached for reference.

### **UNESCO Conventions on the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications**

#### **The Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region (Lisbon Recognition Convention)**

UNESCO and the Council of Europe, as co-secretariats to the LRC Committee, are currently supporting the LRC Bureau to undertake a new monitoring of the implementation of the Convention. The survey will be sent shortly to LRC States Parties. Its results will be tabled with the LRC Committee meeting in 2022.

The first monitoring of implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention was done in 2014-2015 and was presented during the Lisbon Recognition Committee meeting in 2016. Fifty States Parties contributed to the report (available at <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000368036>). The survey covered the ten main provisions of the Convention. Questions focused primarily on how the Convention requirements are regulated at national level; to what extent the rules are reflected in national legislation; and, where some or all of the provisions are not regulated at national level, how national authorities oversee the implementation of the principles of the Convention at institutional level.

## Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education

After eight years of preparation process, the text of the Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education was unanimously adopted by UNESCO's Member States at the 40th session of the General Conference on 25 November 2020. The text of the Convention was certified and transmitted to all Permanent Delegations to UNESCO and National Commissions in June 2020. The Convention is available in the six UNESCO's official languages on the webpage of UNESCO's Conventions ([http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=49557&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=49557&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)). The Convention will enter into force after the deposit, with the Director-General of UNESCO, of the 20th instrument of ratification, acceptance, approval or accession. UNESCO is currently preparing to launch a series of activities aiming to promote the ratification of the Convention and its entry into force.

## Other Regional Recognition Conventions

- The **Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education (the Tokyo Convention)**. As of to date 8 countries have ratified/acceded to the Convention (Australia, China New Zealand, Japan, Republic of Korea, Holy See, Mongolia, Turkey). The 2<sup>nd</sup> Meeting of the Convention Committee was held in Bangkok (September 2019) that also launched the new APNNIC Network of Information Centres (<https://apnnic.net>). The 3<sup>rd</sup> Committee Meeting will take place in Japan in spring 2021 (postponed from 2020). Further information can be found at: <https://bangkok.unesco.org/content/promoting-fair-recognition-qualifications-asia-pacific>
- The 2014 **Revised Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Certificates, Diplomas, Degrees and Other Academic Qualifications in Higher Education in African States** (the Addis Convention) has received six new ratifications in 2019. With these ratifications, the Convention entered into force in 15 December 2019 with twelve States Parties (Burkina Faso, Congo, Djibouti, Gambia, Guinea, Holy See, Mauritania, Mauritius, Senegal, Seychelles, South Africa and Togo). The first meeting of the Convention Committee, which will be composed of a representative of each State Party is foreseen to be held before December 2021.
- On 13 July 2019, the Latin America and Caribbean region adopted by consensus a new **Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education**. Thirteen Member States from the region signed the Convention. The "Buenos Aires" Convention will support academic and student mobility and will strengthen the recognition of qualifications in a fair and transparent manner across the region and serve as a powerful regional tool to strengthen inter-university cooperation. UNESCO's [International Institute for Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean](#) (IESALC) in Caracas, Venezuela will serve as the Secretariat for the new Regional Convention.

## The UNESCO Qualifications Passport (UQP) project

The UQP is piloted in Zambia since 2019 together with the Ministries of Education in Norway and Zambia and local authorities. So far qualifications of 11 candidates have qualified to hold UQP. Both the Zambian Commissioner for Refugee and the local refugee officers from Zambian Ministry of Home Affairs have voiced their confidence in the value of the UQP as a

tool for refugees to recommence their lives. A full-scale operation of the UQP project is underway in Zambia and two pilots initiated in the Arab States and the Latin America and Caribbean. Outreach and advocacy events organized during the UN General Assembly in New York and the UNESCO General Conference in Paris last year have raised the value of tools for recognizing the qualifications of refugees. Various global actors have expressed their interest and support to use the UQP methodology.

### Policy, technical support, global dialogue

UNESCO is preparing a brief on **policies and strategies to expand access to quality post-secondary pathways to higher education** that aims to advocate for increased support to ensure affordable, equitable and quality post-secondary education and training to promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. The findings from this project will be disseminated in the UNESCO Third World Conference on Higher Education (WCHE III), planned in Barcelona in late 2021 and other occasions and networks. The discussion paper is expected in the 3rd quarter of 2020 and the policy brief will be ready in the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of 2021.

UNESCO is working on an updated reference framework on the main challenges facing cross-border higher education and recommendations for improved use of a revised version of **UNESCO-OCDE Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-border Higher Education**. The document will be available for competent authorities and other stakeholders. The document will include a state-of-the-art, challenges, trends and general recommendations for Cross-border Higher Education.

UNESCO will organize the **3<sup>rd</sup> World Conference on Higher Education (WCHE III): Reinventing the role and place of higher learning for a sustainable future**, October, 2021 (TBC). The WCHE III main purpose is to provide directions regarding areas in which political will, policy dialogue, capacity building, and sectoral plans in higher education are required by Member States at national, regional and international levels. The III Global Conference will be organized and its contents will create the basis from which UNESCO will give technical advice in favour of 2030 Agenda. An enlarged and reinvigorated coalition of the higher education international community in favour of 2030 Agenda for Development should emerge. Higher education institutions, leaders and concerned actors will reinforce their capacities and adapt institutional policies/programmes following conference's recommendations.

Last February, UNESCO launched a **Survey for Policy Makers "Information on the contribution of Higher Education to the SDGs and to the "leaving no one behind" mandate**. A similar survey had been carried out with universities hosting UNESCO Chairs coordinated by UNESCO HED Section. The survey addresses the interplay between Higher Education and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This instrument aims to map the landscape, to identify promising practices and provide recommendations for research and actions for UNESCO, Member States, higher education institutions, international organizations and others. The survey will contribute to identify gaps in information, knowledge, data, norms, and actions in two senses. First, regarding leaving no one behind in higher education. Second, to better connect universities with policy makers and other stakeholders toward the achievement of all the SDGs. The survey will collect information on: 1) normative frameworks, and institutional and financial structures; 2) political priorities and national plans; 3) local, national and international actors; and 4) knowledge and data production.

UNESCO is currently programming Phase III of the **China Funds-in-Trust Project: Higher Technical Education in Africa for a Technical and Innovative Workforce**, following the signing of an agreement between UNESCO and China in October 2019. The 48-month project with a budget of USD 7.5 million aims at enhancing the capacity of higher education institutions to respond to the skill needs for national development by enhancing labor market-oriented teaching, and strengthening competence-based learning. The project will support the six beneficiary countries (Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Gabon, Senegal, Tanzania, and Uganda) to tackle youth unemployment, address skills mismatch, and strengthen linkages between higher education and the industry.

### UNITWIN Programme

Launched in 1994, the UNITWINUNESC Chairs Programme promotes international inter-university cooperation through twinning and other linking arrangements among higher education institutions and academics throughout the world. The Programme aims to enhance institutional capacities through knowledge sharing, collaborative work, and increased faculty and student mobility. It supports the establishment of UNESCO Chairs and UNITWIN Networks in key priority areas in all of UNESCO's fields of competence as a means of reinforcing higher education institutions worldwide, bridging the knowledge gap, and mobilizing university expertise and cooperation to work towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

A collection of think pieces contributed by UNESCO Chairs and UNITWIN Networks to the UNESCO Futures of Education Initiative was published this year in a volume titled, ***Humanistic futures of learning. Perspectives from UNESCO Chairs and UNITWIN Networks.*** The publication is available online at <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000372577>. The UNITWIN network has 843 members in more than 110 UNESCO Member States. Forty-four UNESCO Chairs have been established worldwide since June 2019, 19 of which hosted at European universities.

A survey of UNESCO Chair host institutions' responses to the covid-19 pandemic was conducted in the late April 2020. A synthesis report of which is also attached for information.

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