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This report provides an overview of UNESCO higher education activities in 2022 and 2023 which are of relevance to the European Higher Education Area. The focus is on recognition, quality assurance and the 3<sup>rd</sup> World Higher Education Conference (WHEC2022).

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

The [Global Convention](#) entered into force on 5 March 2023, three months after the deposit of the 20<sup>th</sup> instrument of ratification (Andorra), becoming binding for its States Parties. To date, [22 countries](#) have ratified, of which 12 are in Europe. More than 20 UNESCO Member States in all regions report to be at an advanced stage in the ratification process. [Invitations to the First session of the Intergovernmental Conference to the States Parties to the Global Convention on 4-5 July were sent to all UNESCO Member States on 4 May 2023.](#)

The Drive to Ratify campaign has increased the visibility of the Global Convention and improved Member States engagement and capacity building. In this context, a total of 12 [Higher Education Conversations](#) took place between November 2021 and January 2023 in the leadup to the entry into force of the Global Convention, addressing issues of relevance to the convention and the broader higher education agenda. This is complemented by widespread dissemination of the [Practical Guide to Recognition](#), primarily aimed at competent recognition authorities and credential evaluators.

On 18 May 2023, in the framework of the 3<sup>rd</sup> World Higher Education Conference (WHEC2022), a high-level session on the Global Convention brought together representatives of the States Parties, as well as voices of academia, students and industry.

Following the entry into force, UNESCO will convene the First Session of the Intergovernmental Conference of the States Parties to the Global Convention on 4-5 July 2023 at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris. The Intergovernmental Conference's mandate is to promote the application of the Global Convention and oversee its implementation by adopting recommendations, declarations, models of good practices, or any relevant subsidiary text at the global or interregional level. The objective of the first session will be to elect a bureau and adopt the rules of procedure of the intergovernmental conference and the first work programme up until the next session. Non-states parties may participate as observers, while also the heads of the regional recognition conventions and relevant higher education organizations will be invited to participate in an observer capacity.

## 2. Regional Recognition Conventions

A first joint meeting of the bureaux of the regional convention committees took place on 20 September 2022 to enhance inter-regional cooperation in anticipation of the Global Convention's entry into force. The meeting resulted in an [outcome statement](#), committing to improve coordination of actions at the regional level with a view to ensuring complementarity and increasing inter-regional cooperation and to supporting implementation of the Global Convention.

The second monitoring report on the **Lisbon Recognition Convention** was launched at the 9<sup>th</sup> ordinary session of the LRC Committee on 15 November 2022, focusing on (a) the right to appeal, (b) information provision and (c) transnational education as well as (d) automatic recognition and (e) digital solutions which are not directly mentioned in the Convention, but repeatedly highlighted in declarations and other instruments. The Committee also adopted the Terms of Reference of the Working Group on the revision of the ENIC/NARIC Charter. The Charter will be revised by the end of 2023 and will be sent to the Convention Committee for adoption through written procedure. An extraordinary session of the committee took place at the Paris office of the Council of Europe on 28 February 2023, adopting a declaration on the consequences for higher education of the aggression by the Russian Federation, with the involvement of Belarus, against Ukraine. The ratifications of the LRC by Turkmenistan and Monaco (entry into force on 1 April and 1 May, respectively) has brought the number of States Parties to 56.

In Africa, the 2014 Revised Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Certificates, Diplomas, Degrees and Other Academic Qualifications in Higher Education in African States (**Addis Convention**), saw its first Convention Committee meeting on 9 and 10 December 2021, hosted by the Government of Togo in Lomé. The Committee defined the workplan for the implementation of the Convention for the next two years and lay the building blocks for initiating a network of national information centres in the region, launched in September 2022.

The Committee of the Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education (the **Tokyo Convention**) convened for its 4<sup>th</sup> session on 30 November 2022, electing new officers, with Australia as President, New Zealand and Mongolia as Vice Presidents and the Holy See as the Rapporteur. The plenary of the Asia-Pacific Network of National Information Centres (APNNIC) was held in conjunction to discuss shared priorities and a common framework of good practice.

The 2019 Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education for Latin America and the Caribbean (**Buenos Aires Convention**) entered in force on 23 October 2022, and the first meeting of the convention committee was convened in Colonia del Sacramento, Uruguay, on 13-14 April 2023. Uruguay was elected chair with Cuba as vice-chair and Grenada as rapporteur. UNESCO's International Institute for Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean ([IESALC](#)), the Secretariat of the Convention, has developed an online course in four languages to support its implementation and is working towards a regional network of national information centres.

An International Conference of States held at UNESCO Headquarters on 1 and 2 February 2022 adopted the revised text of the 1978 Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in the **Arab States**. The revised convention is the result of a broad revision process which began in 2017 and culminated in its final endorsement at a regional expert group meeting on 17 June 2021. The Arab States are the last UNESCO region to adopt a “second generation” convention, reflecting developments in higher education in the region over the last five decades. Palestine became the first State Party in November 2022.

### 3. Quality Assurance in Higher Education

With growing internationalization and demand for higher education, and in the context of the entry into force of the Global Convention, UNESCO is expanding its work on quality assurance, with a focus on developing Member States' capacities to establish robust quality assurance agencies/mechanisms. Efforts are targeted towards developing countries, especially Africa.

With UNESCO’s support, national quality assurance agencies have been established in Cabo Verde, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Mali, Niger and Senegal, while the process is ongoing in Benin and Côte d’Ivoire. In Togo the decree is issued by the parliament and the NQAA is under official establishment. In October 2021, a new project was launched in six African countries, to enhance the capacity of higher education institutions to respond to the skill needs for national development by facilitating collaboration between higher education and the industry, enhancing labor market-oriented teaching and strengthening competence-based learning.

#### 4. 3rd World Higher Education Conference

The 3<sup>rd</sup> World Higher Education Conference (WHEC2022) took place from 18 to 20 May 2022 in Barcelona, Spain, focusing on reinventing the role and place of higher learning for a sustainable future. WHEC2022 was organized by UNESCO with the generous support of the Government of Spain, the regional Government of Catalonia, the City Hall and Regional authority of Barcelona in partnership with GUNi/ACP (Global University Network for Innovation/Catalan Association of Public Universities).

The conference was able to bring together relevant stakeholders to share information, knowledge, ideas and concerns for a new era of higher education, looking both at higher education systems and institutions. Focus was placed on the 10 themes below. Organizations, networks, and alliances were invited to produce and share knowledge, research, practices or impactful ideas to enhance higher education, locally and internationally. More information can be found at the [website](#).

WHEC had 2,400 in-person attendees and more than 10,000 participants in total (in-person and online combined); the event’s reach was widespread across the globe. More than 120 round tables and side events, 86 HED Talks, and 5 youth-led activities took place, with around 390 main event speakers. Around 300 knowledge products were collected also from diverse higher education stakeholders and are available in a [dedicated platform](#) jointly with the conference sessions, background documents, videos and other relevant materials.

UNESCO presented the document “Beyond Limits, New Ways to Reinvent Higher Education”, after several consultations with experts worldwide. It was presented as a **roadmap**, a reference framework to feed and enrich policy and actions and encourage thinking and debate to transform higher education. It was conceived as an input to deepen a global conversation to transform higher education and was presented as a working document to be enriched by ideas and practices that became available before, during and after the conference. Thus, UNESCO organized an open call for contributions to enrich the roadmap (November 2022 to February 2023). More than 1,500 contributions were received. The final version of the Higher Education Roadmap has been significantly enriched over the last months and will be launched soon (July 2023) to nurture ongoing and future efforts to transform tertiary education institutions and systems in the coming years.

