

ERASMUS+ PROJECT 2023-1-RS01-KA220-HED-000156660

## **EPIR** | E-Procedure of Institutional Recognition of Foreign Higher Education Documents

### Progress Report on Quality Assurance and Internal Evaluation Plan

EPIR project partners:



UNIVERSITY  
OF NOVI SAD



UNIVERSITÀ  
POLITECNICA  
DELLE MARCHE



ROMANIA  
1 DECEMBRIE 1918  
UNIVERSITY OF ALBA IULIA



50 years of  
University  
of Split



REPUBLIC OF SERBIA  
Qualifications Agency

## Introduction

The project KA220-HED Project- E- procedure of institutional recognition – EPIR aims to revolutionize the recognition process of foreign higher education documents, facilitating access to continuing education at partner universities.

The following activities will be implemented: development of new and upgrading of existing IT tools for the recognition procedure of HE documents; creation and adaptation of appropriate institutional legal provisions and organizational structures in line with both the innovative e-approaches and national frameworks; trainings of students and staff for IT skills in the field; dissemination of the advantages of e services in higher education through recommendations and exchange of best practices.

The project is expected to create outcomes that will be used on a daily basis for years to come. Through the development and improvement of information systems used in the recognition procedure of HE documents and the creation of well-informed institutional environments underpinning digital transformation, project results will advance the recognition process by increasing efficiency of work flows and access to HE and reducing costs, stress, and complexity of admission of international students.

This comprehensive progress report provides insights into the advancements made in quality assurance and the internal evaluation plan.

## Motivation and Justification for the Project

The motivation behind the project stems from the fundamental necessity of acknowledging the validity of foreign qualifications in higher education, a crucial aspect of internationalization efforts. In today's globalized world, where mobility and cross-border education are increasingly prevalent, ensuring that individuals can seamlessly transfer their academic credentials across borders is paramount.

The traditional process of recognizing foreign qualifications often involves cumbersome paperwork, lengthy procedures, and significant costs, posing barriers to students seeking educational opportunities abroad. By digitizing this recognition process, the project aims to streamline and modernize the procedures, making them more efficient, accessible, and environmentally sustainable.

Digitization offers numerous advantages over traditional paper-based systems. It allows for the automation of administrative tasks, reducing the time and resources required to process recognition applications. Moreover, digital platforms can be accessed remotely, eliminating the need for physical presence and enabling students to initiate and track their recognition process from anywhere in the world.

Prioritizing efficiency means optimizing the recognition process to minimize delays and bottlenecks, ensuring timely responses to applicants. By leveraging digital technologies, such as workflow management systems and online portals, the project seeks to expedite the evaluation and validation of foreign qualifications, benefiting both students and educational institutions.

Accessibility is another key consideration, especially for students from underrepresented or marginalized communities who may face additional barriers to accessing higher education. By offering digital pathways for recognition, the project aims to level the playing field and provide equal

opportunities for all students, regardless of their geographic location or socioeconomic background.

Furthermore, environmental sustainability is a core value driving the project. By transitioning from paper-based to digital processes, the project reduces the consumption of paper, ink, and other resources, contributing to conservation efforts and minimizing the carbon footprint associated with administrative tasks.

## Overall Approach and Values

The overall approach of the project is rooted in a set of core values that guide its implementation and objectives. These values include efficiency, accessibility, environmental sustainability, and legal compliance, each playing a crucial role in shaping the project's direction and outcomes.

Efficiency is prioritized throughout the project, aiming to streamline processes, reduce administrative burdens, and optimize resource utilization. By leveraging digital technologies and automation tools, the project seeks to expedite the recognition process, minimize delays, and enhance overall workflow efficiency. This focus on efficiency ensures that both students and educational institutions benefit from timely and effective recognition procedures.

Accessibility is another fundamental value driving the project, emphasizing the importance of providing equal opportunities for all individuals to access higher education. By offering digital pathways for recognition, the project aims to remove geographical barriers and enable students from diverse backgrounds to initiate and track their recognition process seamlessly. This commitment to accessibility ensures that educational opportunities are accessible to everyone, regardless of their location or socioeconomic status.

Environmental sustainability is a core principle guiding the project's approach to digital transformation. By transitioning from paper-based to digital processes, the project reduces the environmental impact associated with administrative tasks, such as paper consumption, printing, and transportation. Embracing digital technologies not only enhances efficiency but also contributes to conservation efforts and minimizes the project's carbon footprint, aligning with broader sustainability goals.

Legal compliance is essential to ensuring the integrity and validity of the recognition process. The project adheres to relevant national and international regulations, standards, and guidelines governing the recognition of foreign qualifications. By ensuring legal compliance, the project upholds the credibility and trustworthiness of the recognition process.

## Evaluation Responsibilities

The evaluation responsibilities within the project are carefully distributed among the project partners to ensure comprehensive oversight and accountability throughout the implementation process. Regular quality assurance assessments are conducted to monitor progress and identify areas for improvement, thereby facilitating continuous enhancement of project outcomes.

Each project partner is assigned specific evaluation tasks aligned with their expertise and resources, enabling a collaborative approach to monitoring and evaluating project activities. These evaluation responsibilities encompass various aspects of the project, including but not limited to:

- Partners are responsible for monitoring the progress of their respective work packages, tracking milestones, and ensuring adherence to timelines and deliverables. This involves regular reporting on project activities, achievements, and challenges encountered.
- Quality assurance assessments are conducted at predefined intervals to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of project outputs and outcomes. Partners systematically review project deliverables against predefined quality criteria, seeking feedback from stakeholders and end-users to identify strengths and areas for improvement.
- Partners actively engage with stakeholders, including students, faculty members, administrative staff, and external experts, to gather feedback on project implementation and outcomes. Stakeholder feedback is collected through surveys, focus group discussions, interviews, and other feedback mechanisms, providing valuable insights into the impact and relevance of project activities.
- Partners analyze evaluation data collected from various sources to assess the performance and impact of project interventions. Data analysis involves both qualitative and quantitative methods, allowing partners to identify trends, patterns, and emerging issues. Comprehensive evaluation reports are prepared to document findings, highlight key achievements, and propose recommendations for future action.
- Based on the findings of quality assurance assessments and stakeholder feedback, partners collaborate to implement corrective actions and improvement initiatives. This may involve refining project strategies, adjusting implementation plans, or introducing new measures to address identified challenges and optimize project outcomes.

By distributing evaluation responsibilities among project partners, the project ensures comprehensive oversight and accountability, fostering a culture of continuous improvement and learning. Regular quality assurance assessments enable partners to monitor progress effectively, identify areas for enhancement, and optimize project outcomes to maximize the impact and value delivered to stakeholders.

## Methodological Approach

The methodological approach adopted for project evaluation employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods. This comprehensive approach ensures a thorough assessment of project activities, outcomes, and impacts, allowing for a holistic understanding of the project's effectiveness and performance. The key components of the methodological approach include:

- Continuous monitoring of project activities is conducted to track progress, identify bottlenecks, and ensure adherence to project timelines and deliverables. This involves regular review of project plans, milestones, and outputs, enabling timely intervention and corrective action as needed to address emerging issues.
- Stakeholder feedback is actively solicited throughout the project duration to capture diverse perspectives and insights on project implementation and outcomes. Feedback mechanisms such as surveys, focus group discussions, interviews, and feedback forms are employed to gather input from various stakeholders, including students, faculty members, administrative staff, project partners, and external experts.

- Key performance indicators (KPIs) are established to measure the achievement of project objectives and outcomes. These KPIs are defined based on project goals, targets, and expected results, providing quantitative benchmarks for assessing project performance. Regular reviews of KPIs enable partners to track progress, identify areas for improvement, and make data-driven decisions to optimize project outcomes.
- Qualitative data collection methods, such as interviews, focus group discussions, and case studies, are employed to gather in-depth insights into the processes, experiences, and perceptions of stakeholders involved in the project. Qualitative data complement quantitative data by providing rich contextual information and nuanced perspectives on project implementation and impact.
- Quantitative data collected through surveys, questionnaires, and performance metrics are analyzed using statistical techniques to identify patterns, trends, and correlations. Quantitative analysis enables partners to quantify project outcomes, assess the effectiveness of interventions, and evaluate progress towards predefined targets and benchmarks.
- Periodic reviews and evaluation exercises are conducted at predefined intervals to assess the overall performance and impact of the project. These reviews involve comprehensive analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data, stakeholder feedback, and KPIs to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Evaluation findings are used to inform decision-making, prioritize actions, and enhance project effectiveness.

By employing a mixed-methods approach to evaluation, the project ensures robust data collection, comprehensive analysis, and meaningful interpretation of findings. Continuous monitoring, stakeholder feedback, and periodic reviews of key performance indicators facilitate quality assurance throughout the project lifecycle, enabling partners to optimize project outcomes and maximize impact.

## Evaluation Time Plan

The evaluation time plan is meticulously designed to align with project milestones, ensuring that evaluation activities are strategically scheduled to monitor progress and address challenges promptly. The evaluation time plan includes the following key components:

- Before project implementation begins, a baseline assessment is conducted to establish the initial status quo and identify areas for improvement. This assessment informs the development of evaluation metrics and indicators.
- Throughout the project duration, regular monitoring activities are conducted to track progress against predefined milestones and objectives. Monitoring involves ongoing data collection, analysis, and reporting to identify emerging issues and trends.
- A mid-term evaluation is conducted at a predetermined point in the project timeline to assess progress and effectiveness. This evaluation provides an opportunity to review achievements, challenges, and lessons learned, allowing for adjustments to project strategies and approaches if necessary.
- Periodic stakeholder feedback sessions are organized to gather input and insights from project stakeholders, including students, faculty members, administrative staff, project

partners, and external experts. These sessions provide valuable perspectives on project implementation, impact, and areas for improvement.

- Regular review meetings are scheduled with project partners to discuss evaluation findings, address challenges, and make data-driven decisions to optimize project outcomes. These meetings serve as forums for collaborative problem-solving and decision-making.
- Towards the end of the project, a final evaluation is conducted to assess overall project performance, outcomes, and impact. This evaluation synthesizes findings from previous monitoring and evaluation activities, providing a comprehensive assessment of project effectiveness and sustainability.
- Evaluation findings and reports are documented and shared with project stakeholders to ensure transparency, accountability, and learning. Reports include recommendations for future actions and best practices for similar projects.

By adhering to the evaluation time plan, the project ensures that evaluation activities are systematically integrated into project management processes, enabling timely feedback, course correction, and optimization of project outcomes. This proactive approach enhances project effectiveness, sustainability, and stakeholder satisfaction.

## Progress Update

### Project Management and Coordination by UNS:

- UNS has set up coordination committees to monitor progress and ensure effective communication.
- UNS provided guidelines for Local Expert Teams, ensuring task realization within work packages.
- Regular meetings ensure effective coordination among partners.
- WP1 activities are on track, with milestones achieved according to the project plan.

### Quality Assurance by ENIC/NARIC Center:

- The ENIC/NARIC Center has implemented a comprehensive Quality Plan to ensure adherence to standards.
- Continuous quality reports provide insights into project progress and identify areas for improvement.
- Regular meetings of the Quality Board ensure continuous improvement.
- All identified challenges in data management and stakeholder engagement are being addressed through targeted strategies.

### Development of Dissemination Plan by UAB:

- UAB has developed a robust plan to raise awareness and engage stakeholders.

- Dissemination events have been organized to promote project outcomes.
- Materials have been distributed to raise awareness about the project and its objectives.
- Stakeholder feedback has been collected to refine dissemination strategies and improve effectiveness.

#### System Analysis, Design, and Implementation:

- Activities are underway to determine specific requirements for new/upgraded systems.
- Software development and testing are ongoing to ensure functionality and usability.
- Planning has been initiated to ensure a smooth transition to the new digital system.
- Pilot testing of the new system is scheduled to begin next month to identify any issues before full implementation.

#### Training and Capacity Building:

- Sessions have enhanced digital skills among staff and stakeholders.
- Staff and beneficiaries have gained competencies to utilize IT systems effectively.
- Participants have gained a deeper understanding of IT systems, enhancing their ability to utilize digital tools effectively.
- Participant feedback has been integrated to tailor future training sessions to specific needs and challenges.

#### Challenges Faced and Mitigation Strategies

Despite our diligent efforts, several challenges may emerge during the implementation of the project. These challenges, however, will be met with proactive mitigation strategies to ensure minimal impact on our progress. The following are some of the key challenges and the corresponding mitigation strategies:

##### Data Management Challenges

**Challenge:** Ensuring effective data management to maintain the accuracy, integrity, and accessibility of project-related information.

**Mitigation Strategy:** Implementing robust data management protocols, including regular backups, data encryption, and access controls. Training sessions are conducted to educate team members on proper data handling practices, ensuring compliance with data protection regulations such as GDPR.

##### Stakeholder Engagement

**Challenge:** Enhancing stakeholder engagement and maintaining active involvement throughout the project lifecycle.

Mitigation Strategy: Employing targeted communication strategies tailored to the needs and preferences of different stakeholders. Regular progress updates, workshops, and feedback sessions are organized to foster collaboration and transparency. Additionally, establishing clear channels of communication and appointing dedicated liaison officers facilitate effective stakeholder engagement.

## Technical Issues

Challenge: Addressing technical issues promptly to prevent disruptions to project activities.

Mitigation Strategy: Implementing proactive monitoring systems to detect technical issues early on. A dedicated IT support team is available to troubleshoot and resolve issues in a timely manner. Regular maintenance schedules and contingency plans are in place to minimize downtime and ensure the smooth operation of project-related systems and tools.

## Next Steps

In the next phase of the project, several key steps will be undertaken to ensure its continued success and impact:

- The development and refinement of information systems will continue to ensure their functionality and effectiveness. This includes ongoing testing, debugging, and optimization to address any issues or challenges that may arise. Regular updates and improvements will be implemented based on user feedback and evolving needs.
- Additional training sessions will be conducted to further enhance the digital skills and competencies of staff and students involved in the recognition process. These training sessions will focus on maximizing the utilization of digital tools and systems, as well as promoting best practices in digital workflows and processes.
- The dissemination of project outcomes will continue to raise awareness and promote the adoption of digital solutions in the recognition of foreign qualifications. This will involve sharing success stories, lessons learned, and best practices with a wider audience, including other higher education institutions, policymakers, and relevant stakeholders. Various dissemination channels, such as conferences, workshops, publications, and online platforms, will be utilized to reach diverse audiences and maximize impact.
- Feedback from stakeholders will be actively solicited and integrated into project activities to ensure continuous improvement and alignment with stakeholder needs and expectations. Feedback mechanisms, such as surveys, focus groups, and user feedback forms, will be utilized to gather insights and suggestions for enhancing project outcomes and user experiences.
- Ongoing evaluation and monitoring will be conducted to track progress, assess impact, and identify areas for further improvement. Key performance indicators will be regularly reviewed, and adjustments will be made as needed to ensure that project objectives are met effectively and efficiently.

10. Conclusion

## Conclusion

This progress report underscores the unwavering dedication of project partners towards achieving excellence in the digitization of the recognition process for foreign qualifications. Through collaborative endeavors and continuous evaluation, our collective goal of enhancing accessibility, efficiency, and sustainability in higher education remains steadfast.

The journey towards digital transformation is not without its challenges, yet our commitment to quality assurance and internal evaluation ensures that we remain vigilant in addressing any obstacles that may arise. By adopting a systematic approach guided by best practices and stakeholder feedback, we are confident in our ability to overcome hurdles and achieve meaningful progress.

As we move forward, our focus remains on fostering innovation, inclusivity, and environmental responsibility in higher education. Through the diligent implementation of our objectives and the proactive pursuit of excellence, we are poised to make a lasting impact on the recognition process for foreign qualifications.

In closing, we express our gratitude to all stakeholders for their unwavering support and commitment to this endeavor. Together, we will continue to push the boundaries of what is possible, driving positive change and transformation in the higher education landscape.

## ANNEX 1: Evaluation Form

Event Title: EPIR Project Evaluation Meeting

Event Date: [Date]

Event Location: [Location]

Please take a couple of minutes to complete this evaluation form and to rate various aspects of the meeting (1 poor, 2 satisfactory, 3 average, 4 good, 5 excellent).

### 1. ORGANIZATIONAL ISSUES

1.1. Overall, how satisfied were you with the organization of this event?

1 Poor | 2 Satisfactory | 3 Average | 4 Good | 5 Excellent

1.2. Overall, how satisfied were you with the content of this event?

1 Poor | 2 Satisfactory | 3 Average | 4 Good | 5 Excellent

1.3. How satisfied were you with the preparatory information provided by the organizers sufficient?

1 Poor | 2 Satisfactory | 3 Average | 4 Good | 5 Excellent

1.4. How satisfied were you with the facilities (venue, technical equipment)?

1 Poor | 2 Satisfactory | 3 Average | 4 Good | 5 Excellent

1.5. How satisfied were you with the refreshments and meals?

1 Poor | 2 Satisfactory | 3 Average | 4 Good | 5 Excellent

Any further comments?

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## 2. QUALITY OF THE EVENT

2.1. How clear and informative were the inputs (e.g., presentations, handouts, etc.) of the speakers?

1 Poor | 2 Satisfactory | 3 Average | 4 Good | 5 Excellent

Comments:

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2.2. How satisfied were you with opportunity for everyone to contribute?

1 Poor | 2 Satisfactory | 3 Average | 4 Good | 5 Excellent

Comments:

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2.3. What did you find most useful?

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2.4. What did you find not so good / annoying / unsatisfactory?

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2.5. Any further comments?

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THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONTRIBUTION

## ANNEX 2: Questionnaire on Quality Issues

Please indicate to which extent you agree with the statements in the table below. Please tick a score from 1 to 5, whereby:

1 = Do not agree at all

2 = Do not agree

3 = Neither agree nor disagree

4 = Agree

5 = Fully agree

Statement	1	2	3	4	5	I do not know
Objectives of the EPIR project						
The project supports the digital transformation of the recognition process in higher education.						
The project contributes to enhancing accessibility, efficiency, and environmental sustainability in higher education.						
The management of my institution recognizes the importance of and supports the goals of the EPIR project.						
Development of Strategies and Policies						
The analysis and assessment reports provided relevant insights into the current national framework.						
The study visits and consortium meetings were well organized and achieved their objectives.						
Quality Plan, Dissemination, Management						
The evaluation of project activities was presented in a clear and understandable way.						
The project website is functional and well-organized.						
Staff and students at my institution are aware of the EPIR project.						

The project has been made visible to the public (in our country and abroad).						
Information about the project is well delivered and easily available to project participants.						
Project management is well organized.						
Project coordinators are successful in their work.						
The financial management support is sufficient.						

THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONTRIBUTION!