

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

**EPIR | E-Procedure of Institutional Recognition of
Foreign Higher Education Documents****WORK PACKAGE 2****TASK 2.1. IN-DEPTH ANALYSES OF EXISTING REGULATORY INSTITUTIONAL
FRAMEWORKS, AND EU STANDARDS AND POLICIES****Recognition of Foreign Higher Education Qualifications in Croatia**

Recognition of foreign higher education qualifications in Croatia is regulated by legislation that is continuously adapted to meet European and international standards. The qualification recognition process is conducted by the Agency for Science and Higher Education (AZVO) through the National ENIC/NARIC Office, which serves as the central body for this purpose. Here is a detailed overview of the existing legal framework and procedure:

Legal Framework

1. **Law on Recognition and Evaluation of Foreign Educational Qualifications:** The main law governing the recognition of foreign higher education qualifications is the "Law on Recognition and Evaluation of Foreign Educational Qualifications" (National Gazette 69/2022). This law defines the criteria, procedure, and jurisdiction of the bodies responsible for recognizing qualifications. It replaces the previous law (National Gazette 158/03, 198/03, 138/06, 45/11) and is aligned with relevant European directives and conventions, including the Lisbon Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education.
2. **Bylaws:** Regulations and guidelines that further define the recognition process, required documentation, and evaluation criteria. Among them are the "Regulation on Recognition of Foreign Higher Education Qualifications" and the "Regulation on the Evaluation of Foreign Educational Qualifications."
3. **International Agreements and Treaties:** Croatia is a signatory to numerous bilateral and multilateral agreements that facilitate the recognition of foreign qualifications. The Lisbon Convention is a key document at the international level.

**Recognition of Prior Educational Qualifications for the Purpose of Continuation
of Education at Croatian Higher Education Institutions (Academic Recognition)**

Recognition of prior educational qualifications is a crucial part of the enrollment procedure for both undergraduate and graduate programs at Croatian higher education institutions. The process is regulated by the Law on Recognition and Evaluation of Foreign Educational Qualifications (National Gazette 69/2022), which outlines the procedures and criteria for recognizing foreign qualifications. Here is how the process works depending on the level of study:

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1. Undergraduate (Bachelor) Study Programs: Applicants who hold a foreign secondary school qualification and wish to enroll in undergraduate study programs must submit a request for the recognition of their educational qualification. This request should be submitted along with all necessary application documents to the Agency for Science and Higher Education (AZVO). Detailed instructions, request forms, and a list of required supporting documents are available on the official website: <https://www.studij.hr/recognition>.

2. Graduate (Master) Study Programs: Prospective students aiming to enroll in graduate (master) or postgraduate study programs, who possess a foreign higher education qualification or degree, must undergo the academic recognition process for the continuation of education in Croatia. This process can be conducted by:

- The Agency for Science and Higher Education (AZVO), following the standard procedure for recognition, as outlined in the new law.
- Croatian higher education institutions, particularly in cases where specific program requirements or institutional policies apply.

It is highly recommended that prospective students directly contact their desired higher education institution to obtain detailed information on the recognition procedure, required documentation, and any institution-specific requirements.

Recognition Procedure

1. Undergraduate (Bachelor) Study Programs:

Step 1: Submission of Application

- Applicants holding foreign secondary school qualifications must submit a request for recognition along with their application for admission to the chosen study program.
- The application is submitted to the Agency for Science and Higher Education (AZVO).
- Necessary documents include certified copies of the diploma, transcript of records, and a translation of the documents into Croatian or English by an authorized translator.

Step 2: Document Review

- The Agency reviews the submitted documents to ensure they are complete and meet the requirements for recognition.
- If any documents are missing or incomplete, the applicant will be notified and asked to provide the additional required documentation.

Step 3: Qualification Evaluation

- AZVO evaluates the foreign qualification to determine its equivalence to the Croatian secondary school qualification.
- This includes verifying the authenticity of the documents, comparing the study program with Croatian educational standards, and assessing the accreditation status of the foreign educational institution.

Step 4: Issuance of Decision

- Based on the evaluation, AZVO issues a decision:

- **Full recognition:** The foreign qualification is recognized as equivalent to a Croatian secondary school qualification.
- **Partial recognition:** The qualification is recognized with conditions, such as additional exams.
- **Rejection:** The qualification is not recognized due to lack of equivalence or authenticity.
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- The decision is communicated to the applicant, and in case of rejection or partial recognition, the decision will include explanations and instructions for further steps.

Step 5: Enrollment

- Once the qualification is recognized, the applicant can proceed with the enrollment process at the chosen higher education institution.

2. Graduate (Master) Study Programs:

Step 1: Submission of Application

- Applicants holding a foreign higher education qualification (Bachelor's degree) must submit a request for recognition along with their application to the graduate study program.
- Depending on the institution, the application may be submitted to either the Agency for Science and Higher Education (AZVO) or directly to the higher education institution.

Description of the Process for the Recognition of Foreign Higher Education Qualifications and Periods of Study for the Purpose of Continuing Education at One of the University of Split's Constituent Units:

Regarding the higher education institution, the Competent Office at the University of Split plays a crucial role in the recognition process of foreign higher education qualifications, particularly for the purpose of continuing education (e.g., enrollment in graduate or postgraduate studies). The process of recognizing foreign higher education qualifications and periods of study for the purpose of continuing education at one of the University of Split's constituent units (faculties/departments) (academic recognition) is initiated by submitting a request and application documentation to the competent office of the University of Split.

- After the request is reviewed and the documentation is found to be in order, it is forwarded to the constituent unit of the University of Split (faculty/department) where the applicant wishes to continue their studies for further processing.
- All information related to the study program the interested party wishes to enroll in (enrollment process, requirements, deadlines, etc.) can only be obtained from the constituent unit of the University of Split (faculty/department) where they wish to continue their education.
- Based on the University of Split's Regulations on the Academic Recognition of Foreign Higher Education Qualifications and Periods of Study, the University of Split, within 15 days of receiving a complete application, forwards it to the competent constituent unit of the University of Split (faculty/department). The competent body of the constituent unit (faculty/department) then issues a final decision on the request within 60 days from the date of receipt of the request from the University of Split. This decision is sent directly to the applicant and to the University of Split for their records.

- The University of Split and its constituent units (faculties/departments) maintain proper records of the processes for the recognition of foreign higher education qualifications and periods of study for the purpose of continuing education and, upon request from competent authorities and agencies, can provide this documentation for informational purposes.

Step 2: Document Review

- The receiving institution or AZVO reviews the submitted documents to ensure they meet the requirements for recognition.
- Necessary documents include certified copies of the degree, transcript of records, study program details, and a translation of the documents into Croatian or English by an authorized translator.

Step 3: Qualification Evaluation

- The institution or AZVO evaluates the foreign qualification to determine its equivalence to the corresponding Croatian qualification.
- This includes verifying the authenticity of the documents, assessing the comparability of the study program with Croatian standards, and evaluating the accreditation of the foreign educational institution.

Step 4: Issuance of Decision

- Based on the evaluation, a decision is made:
- - **Full recognition:** The foreign qualification is recognized as equivalent to a Croatian Bachelor's degree.
 - **Partial recognition:** The qualification is recognized with conditions, such as additional coursework or exams.
 - **Rejection:** The qualification is not recognized due to lack of equivalence or authenticity.
- The decision is communicated to the applicant, and in case of rejection or partial recognition, explanations and further steps are provided.

Step 5: Enrollment

- Upon recognition, the applicant can proceed with the enrollment process at the graduate level.

These steps outline the recognition procedure for both undergraduate and graduate programs, ensuring that foreign qualifications are appropriately evaluated before continuing education in Croatia.

Cases of Automatic Recognition

Automatic recognition of qualifications in Croatia is provided for by law (National Gazette 69/2022) and is applied in specific cases to facilitate and expedite the process for certain categories of qualifications. Cases of automatic recognition include:

1. Undergraduate (Bachelor) Studies:

- **Automatic recognition of secondary school qualifications** for enrollment in undergraduate studies is possible without conducting a formal recognition procedure if the qualification was obtained in a country whose national qualifications framework is linked to the European Qualifications Framework or in accordance with an international agreement on the mutual recognition of foreign educational qualifications.

2. Graduate and Postgraduate Studies:

- **Automatic recognition of higher education qualifications** for enrollment in graduate and postgraduate studies is possible if the following cumulative conditions are met:
 - The qualification was obtained in a country whose national qualifications framework is linked to the European Qualifications Framework and the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area.
 - The external quality assurance of the higher education institution was carried out by an agency registered in the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR).

3. Case of an International Agreement:

- **Automatic recognition** can also be applied in cases where there is an international agreement on the mutual recognition of foreign educational qualifications.

In all these cases, automatic recognition facilitates and speeds up the process for candidates, as it removes the need for a detailed evaluation procedure, except in cases where there is doubt about the authenticity of the documentation.

SWOT Analysis of the Legal Framework for Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications in Croatia

Strengths

1. Compliance with International Standards:

- Croatian regulation is aligned with European directives and international conventions, such as the Lisbon Convention, facilitating the mobility of students and professionals.

2. Transparency and Clear Procedures:

- The recognition process is clearly defined through laws and regulations, ensuring transparency and predictability for applicants.

3. Existence of a Specialized Body:

- The Agency for Science and Higher Education (AZVO) and the National ENIC/NARIC Office ensure expertise and specialized support in the recognition process.

4. Advisory Board:

- The Advisory Board, which includes experts from various fields, provides an additional level of expertise and reliability in the evaluation process.

Weaknesses

1. Lengthy Process:

- Although the recognition procedure has been updated in accordance with the provisions of the Law on Recognition and Evaluation of Foreign Educational Qualifications (National Gazette 69/2022), the recognition process may still be lengthy, which can be frustrating for candidates and affect their professional or academic plans.

2. Complexity of Documentation:

- Documentation requirements can be extensive and require certified translations, which can be costly and time-consuming.

3. Dependence on External Evaluations:

- The process can be complicated if it is difficult to obtain information on the accreditation of foreign educational institutions.

4. Limited Digitalization:

- The lack of fully digitalized procedures can slow down the process and make it difficult to submit applications.

Opportunities

1. Digitalization of the Process:

- Introducing fully digitalized systems for submitting and processing applications can speed up the process and reduce administrative burden.

2. Strengthening International Cooperation:

- Increasing cooperation with foreign ENIC/NARIC offices can facilitate the verification of accreditation and comparability of qualifications.

3. Education and Information for Candidates:

- Improving the availability of information and educating potential candidates about the recognition process can reduce the number of incomplete or incorrect applications.

4. Flexibility in Assessment:

- Developing more flexible criteria for recognizing non-formal and non-specific qualifications can increase the system's adaptability.

Threats

1. Changes in Foreign Educational Systems:

- Variable quality of foreign educational systems can make it difficult to assess the actual value of qualifications.

2. Increased Mobility and Number of Applications:

- An increase in the number of students and professionals seeking recognition can overload the system and extend processing times.

3. Economic Uncertainty and Resources:

- Financial constraints and lack of resources for administration and evaluation can negatively impact the quality and speed of the process.

4. Lack of Adaptation to Technological Changes:

- If regulation does not keep pace with technological changes, the system may become outdated and less efficient.

The legal framework for the recognition of higher education qualifications in Croatia has solid foundations and many advantages, including compliance with international standards and transparency of the process. However, there are challenges in the form of lengthy procedures and complexity of documentation. Opportunities for improvement include digitalization and strengthening international cooperation, while threats come from changes in the global education system and economic constraints. Proactive management of these elements can further enhance the qualification recognition system.

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