

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

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

WORK PACKAGE 3

WP3 - Development and improvement of IT systems for the recognition process of foreign students' HE documents

Progress Report	
Project:	E- procedure of institutional recognition – EPIR
Work Package 3:	Development and improvement of IT systems for the recognition process of foreign students' HE documents
Focus Activity:	System analysis and design
Prepared by:	Università Politecnica delle Marche – EPIR Team

Introduction

The main objective of the EPIR project is to enhance and develop digital and green capabilities within the higher education systems of Serbia, Romania, Italy, and Croatia. This goal will be pursued by enabling the recognition of foreign higher education documents to be conducted digitally in a user-friendly, accessible, and sustainable way. The project focuses on four specific objectives:

- Implementing the digital transformation of the recognition process at partner institutions by introducing new or upgraded IT solutions;
- Adapting and innovating institutional regulations, policies, and structures to support the digitalized recognition process;
- Developing the digital skills and competencies of staff and students involved in the recognition process;
- Raising awareness of the benefits of using modern technologies in delivering higher education services, including improved access, efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and environmental sustainability.

Specifically, the primary goal of Work Package 3 (WP3) is to develop new or enhance existing IT systems that support the recognition of foreign higher education documents at partner institutions.

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

This entails the full cycle of system development, including analysis, design, programming, testing, and implementation of digital tools. WP3 aims to ensure that each partner institution successfully completes the digital transformation of their recognition procedures, tailored to their specific needs and level of digital maturity.

The activities under WP3 follow a structured sequence of information system development phases, each adapted to the specific requirements and technological readiness of the partner institutions.

The process begins with the System Analysis phase, in which system analysts collaborate closely with stakeholder groups to clearly identify and define both functional and technical requirements for new systems or upgrades to existing ones. This phase relies on documentation, interviews with key users, and a detailed analysis of data requirements to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the system's objectives.

In the System Design phase, the information collected during analysis is translated into technical specifications. Designers define the architecture of user interfaces, databases, data input/output mechanisms, and reporting functionalities. The outcome of this phase is a comprehensive system design document, serving as a blueprint for software developers in the subsequent programming phase.

During the Programming phase, developers use the design documentation to create the initial version of the software. This phase involves writing the code, performing unit tests to verify each module, and conducting structured testing, including integration and system tests. The process concludes with User Acceptance Testing (UAT) to ensure the system meets operational needs and user expectations.

Following successful testing, the project enters the Implementation phase. The system is deployed across the partner institutions, accompanied by training sessions for end users, distribution of user documentation, and, where applicable, migration of data from legacy systems to ensure a smooth transition to the new IT infrastructure.

EPIR WP3 Meeting

The Università Politecnica delle Marche (UNIVPM), as the leader of WP3 in the ERASMUS+ EPIR Project (“E-Procedure of Institutional Recognition of Foreign Higher Education Documents”), hosted the WP3 meeting on July 16–17, 2024. The focus was on the development and enhancement of IT systems for the recognition of foreign higher education documents.

The first day of the meeting was held at the Faculty of Engineering in Ancona, Italy. Silvia Mangialardo, Head of the International Relations Office of UNIVPM, delivered the opening remarks. Each partner institution provided updates on their current IT development progress and shared future plans.

Silvia Mariotti, Head of the International Students Admission Office, and Patrizia Moretti, Head of the Student Career Management Service, presented the university’s pre-evaluation platform, developed in 2021 to standardize and centralize the management of applications from international students. They outlined the platform’s development, key functionalities, achievements, and current challenges due to the increasing volume of applications. They concluded by presenting strategies for future enhancements.

In the afternoon, participants visited the Department of Information Engineering. After the visit, Professor David Scaradozzi, Internationalization Delegate for the Faculty of Engineering, and researcher Benedetta Castagna presented methodologies and developments related to IT solutions.

The second day of the meeting took place at the Faculty of Economics "G. Fuà". Tatjana Tomic and Tatjana Zubic from the University of Novi Sad's Centre for Information Technology proposed a draft template for the project report related to the first WP3 activity. The meeting concluded with a final discussion on the next implementation steps for WP3 objectives.

System Analysis – Local Context

On July 16th in Ancona, the EPIR ERASMUS+ project was presented, highlighting its goal of developing an efficient, digital procedure for the recognition of foreign higher education documents. This initiative holds particular importance for the Università Politecnica delle Marche, a key educational institution in central Italy serving approximately 17,000 students.

Although the university primarily attracts students from the Marche region, it also draws learners from nearby regions such as Abruzzo, Molise, and Puglia. However, it currently faces demographic and economic challenges affecting student enrollment. As with much of central and southern Italy, the Marche region is experiencing a population decline due to low birth rates and economic stagnation. High unemployment, limited industrial growth, and reduced investment have contributed to a less dynamic local economy, which, in turn, diminishes the pool of prospective university applicants. Since university funding is partially tied to student numbers, a decline in enrollment may lead to reduced financial support from the Ministry of Education.

Additionally, the university faces stiff competition from institutions in northern Italy—particularly in regions such as Lombardia, Piemonte, and Emilia-Romagna—which offer stronger economies and more employment opportunities. As a result, many students from central and southern Italy choose to study in these northern areas, compounding the enrollment challenges faced by UNIVPM.

To respond to these difficulties, UNIVPM is exploring several strategic actions. These include strengthening collaborations with local industries to align academic offerings with regional economic needs, developing innovative and specialized programs to distinguish itself from other universities, expanding online and flexible learning opportunities to reach non-traditional students, and implementing targeted international recruitment strategies to mitigate the demographic downturn.

System Design – Elix Form

Central to the project is the digital platform Elix Form, developed to facilitate the submission and evaluation of foreign higher education documents. Elix Form offers several notable advantages. It is specifically tailored to the university's requirements, with developers available to make rapid customizations. The platform is fully compliant with GDPR, ensuring secure data handling, and is seamlessly integrated with the university's protocol and document archiving systems, thus improving the management and storage of applications. Its cost-effectiveness is also significant, and the university has the option to integrate an application fee system via PagoPA.

However, Elix Form does have limitations. A key drawback is that each form can be assigned exclusively to one evaluator group. As a result, institutions must either create separate forms for each degree program or require all evaluators to assess every application, both of which are inefficient. Elix Form is also not integrated with the university's student information system or with the University portal for visa processes, leading to duplicated data entry and additional administrative effort. Most notably, the remarkable 385% increase in applications over just two years highlighted a critical issue: the platform could no longer accommodate the growing volume of data, meaning older files had to be deleted due to memory constraints. This limitation in Elix Form's capacity to manage such a sharp rise was the key factor that led UNIVPM to seek a more scalable and reliable alternative.

Programming – Move-In Platform

During the programming phase, the Università Politecnica delle Marche chose to adopt the Move-In platform to enhance the efficiency of its application and evaluation procedures. This decision was based on the platform's demonstrated success across other Italian universities, its user-friendly interface, and its high degree of configurability. Move-In allows for the creation of customized evaluation workflows, automation of communication processes, and streamlining of administrative tasks. It also provides adaptable views, integrated payment handling, and is more cost-effective than alternative systems.

A key strength of the Move-In platform is its ability to manage personalized workflows based on degree programs and applicant nationalities. The system also offers efficient document handling, automatic messaging, role-based access control, interview scheduling, and dedicated communication tools to facilitate interaction between university staff and prospective students.

Despite its strengths, the platform presents certain limitations. A significant issue is its lack of integration with UNIVPM's Esse3 student management system, which may hinder seamless data exchange. Other challenges include the potential for incorrect document uploads and the substantial effort required for initial configuration. Moreover, the platform's current version imposes restrictions on the number of applications, courses, users, templates, and forms, raising scalability concerns.

Nonetheless, Move-In presents strategic opportunities for UNIVPM. These include automation of evaluation processes, improved application quality, and enhanced efficiency in pre-enrolment procedures. To fully realize these benefits, it is essential for course coordinators to collaborate and clearly define application filtering criteria.

Conclusion

The full implementation of the Move-In platform is planned for the 2025/2026 academic year, with distinct evaluation workflows established for undergraduate and master's programs, differentiated by EU and non-EU applicants. To maintain high standards, certain prerequisites will be introduced, such as a pre-assessment fee and minimum GPA requirements for applicants from specific countries. A simplification of the overall procedure is also recommended, including the acceptance of selected standardized tests and language certificates as part of the evaluation process.