

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

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

### **System analysis and system design with regards to the digitalisation of the process of recognition of foreign HE documents**

On July 16th, in Ancona, the EPIR ERASMUS+ project was presented, focusing on developing an efficient, digital procedure for recognizing foreign higher education documents. This project is particularly relevant to the Polytechnic University of Marche, a key educational institution in central Italy that serves approximately 17,000 students. Although the university primarily attracts students from the Marche region, it also draws from nearby areas such as Abruzzo, Molise, and Puglia.

The university, however, is facing significant demographic and economic challenges, which are increasingly affecting student enrollment. Like much of central and southern Italy, the Marche region is experiencing a decline in population due to low birth rates and economic stagnation. High unemployment, limited industrial growth, and reduced investment have led to a less dynamic economy, and this has direct consequences for the university's enrollment numbers. As the population shrinks, so does the pool of potential students. This decline in enrollment is a serious issue, especially considering that the university's funding is partially tied to the number of students enrolled, with reductions in enrollment potentially leading to less financial support from the Ministry of Education.

In addition to these local challenges, the Polytechnic University of Marche faces stiff competition from universities in northern Italy, particularly in regions such as Lombardia, Piemonte, and Emilia-Romagna. These areas benefit from stronger economies, a more vibrant industrial base, and better employment prospects. As a result, many students from central and southern Italy choose to pursue their studies in these regions, further exacerbating the enrollment issues at the university in Marche.

To address these challenges, the university is considering several strategic initiatives. First, it plans to strengthen its engagement with local industries to better tailor its programs to the needs of the regional economy. This effort aims to make the university more attractive to students from the local area. Additionally, the university is exploring the creation of innovative, specialized academic programs that will distinguish it from competitors and attract students interested in niche fields of study. To appeal to non-traditional students, including those unable to relocate for their education,

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the university is also looking into expanding its online and flexible learning options. Lastly, a broader recruitment strategy, particularly one targeting international students, could help mitigate the demographic decline currently affecting the university's primary regions.

At the heart of this project is the digital platform "Elix Form," which has been developed to facilitate the submission and evaluation of foreign higher education documents. Elix Form offers several key advantages. For one, it was specifically designed to meet the university's unique needs, and its developers are available to implement any required modifications quickly. The platform is also fully compliant with GDPR regulations, ensuring that all applicant data is handled securely. Additionally, Elix Form is integrated with the university's existing protocol and document archiving systems, making it efficient for managing and storing application materials. Importantly, the platform is cost-effective, saving the university a considerable amount of resources. There is also the potential to integrate an application fee system via PagoPA if the university decides to introduce one.

However, Elix Form is not without its limitations. One issue is that each form can only be assigned to a single group of evaluators, meaning that either separate forms must be created for each degree program or all professors must receive every application—both of which are inefficient. Furthermore, the platform does not integrate with the university's student management system or with the University portal used for visa issuance, resulting in redundant data entry and an increased workload for administrative staff.

To address these issues, the university has devised a solution that involves using a two-platform approach. Elix Form will continue to serve as the primary interface for students submitting their applications, leveraging its familiarity and the advantages of its existing integration with the university's systems. However, for the evaluation process, a new internal platform has been developed specifically for the evaluation committees. This platform will ensure that each application is reviewed by the appropriate group of professors without the inefficiencies previously encountered.

The platform has been designed with both user and administrative functionality in mind. For professors, the system provides a homepage where they can view a list of applications, apply filters, and search through submissions. There is also a feature for massive import of results from Excel files. For administrative staff, the platform offers a comprehensive back-office interface that includes system configuration, mail management, user association with study courses, and the ability to edit applications. The platform also features background server tasks, such as downloading new applications via API, managing the evaluated applications, and creating archives of documents.

In conclusion, while the demographic and economic challenges facing the Polytechnic University of Marche are significant, the ERASMUS+ EPIR project offers a forward-looking solution to at least one aspect of the university's administrative challenges. By improving the process of recognizing foreign higher education documents and streamlining administrative workflows, the university can better position itself to face its broader strategic challenges in the years ahead.