

The Recognition of Qualifications in the EU

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Valorisation addendum

1. Societal Relevance

Over the course of this research, it has become apparent how vast and extensive the topic of the recognition of qualifications actually is. In this research alone, 14 instruments for recognition (or contributing thereto) were the subject of analysis. Considering the magnitude of the topic, it is unsurprising that systems related to recognition of qualifications are often accused of lacking transparency and of being complex. Much is to be gained by clarifying what the European system for recognition looks like. Indeed, one of the core objectives of this research was to provide clarity in an area clouded by legal instruments and policy initiatives. The societal relevance of this research therefore lies in informing stakeholders of the particularities of the European system for the recognition of qualifications, in providing an encompassing overview, and ultimately in creating order from multitude.

The origins of the research itself are strongly rooted in practice. Although the selection of the instruments and initiatives included partly followed from a review of the existing literature, legislation, and policy, it also followed from experience gained in transnational policymaking. The author's 2016 secondment at the Benelux Secretariat-General allowed for further specification and determination of the scope of the research. For example, it showed the importance of including vocational education and training (VET) and not focusing exclusively on higher education, since – contrary to VET – so much has already been done for higher education. Furthermore, this secondment instilled an awareness of the dynamics and challenges related to transnational policymaking on recognition. Practice also fed into this research through analysis of obstacles experienced by EU citizens. Throughout the research, legislative and policy phenomena were supplemented with case examples originating from practice. The same is true for the four case studies included to show the national dimension of the recognition of qualifications. All of the case examples as well as the four case studies arose from practice and were submitted for analysis to the Institute for Transnational and Euregional cross border cooperation and Mobility / ITEM²¹⁸¹ where they were analysed by the author. Inclusion of these practical perspectives ensures that the research is in tune with societal needs.

²¹⁸¹ Cases can be consulted on the ITEM Cross-border Portal through the Case database. See ITEM, 'ITEM Cross-border Portal', <https://itemcrossborderportal.maastrichtuniversity.nl/p/homepage>.

2. Target Groups

Accordingly, this research should not only be considered as adding to the academic debate on the recognition of qualifications, but also to societal discussions on free movement of persons, EU citizenship, and mobility. Stakeholders for whom this research may be particularly beneficial are national, regional, and European policymakers and legislators involved in creating and adopting new laws and policy on recognition and related topics. Another category of professionals benefiting from this research are practitioners such as lawyers representing clients and first line support service providers who are tasked with providing information on recognition processes directly to citizens.²¹⁸² Individuals working at educational institutions, competent authorities or other organisations with expertise on education and recognition-related matters may also benefit from the observations made in this research. The different audiences for whom this research could be of added value was taken into account during the writing process. Whereas practitioners may be most interested in the instruments and initiatives (Chapters 3 and 4) and their effects in practice (Chapters 6 and 7), policymakers may focus on how instruments and initiatives interrelate and where, why, and how convergence is to be enhanced and what solutions may be proposed to improve recognition (Chapters 5 and 8).

3. Innovation

The innovative potential of this research was already addressed earlier in Chapter 1 Section 3. In particular, much of the available literature focuses on one branch of the topic of recognition. Research focuses on professional recognition as featured under the EU's Professional Qualifications Directive or on academic recognition as featured predominantly in the Council of Europe's Lisbon Recognition Convention. Although authors have previously addressed interlinkages between instruments and between the realms of professional and academic recognition, there has not yet been a work aiming to provide a comprehensive overview of the European system for recognition taking into account both worlds of professional and academic recognition and related instruments and initiatives. As much as the distinction between professional and academic recognition has been maintained in scientific literature, the same is all the more so for more practical aspects connected to the topic. Information on recognition that is generally available is divided depending on the instrument one is seeking information on. Therefore, little attention is paid to the interlinkages between

²¹⁸² An example of these professionals are employees of the *Grensinfopunten* located along the Dutch/German and Dutch/Belgian borders. See Grensinfopunten, 'Dat zijn wij', <https://grenzinfo.eu/nl/dat-zijn-wij/>.

instruments in information provision on recognition. Similar developments occur in the field of policymaking. As Chapter 5 of this research has shown, the interrelationships between instruments could be enhanced, as they often range from weak to non-existent.

Furthermore, by approaching instruments and initiatives for professional and academic recognition holistically, this research was able to identify points of overlap between the two recognition types and their respective competences. Ultimately, these points of overlap sustain the existence of divergent national and European-level practices that increase the complexity and pluriformity of the policy and practice concerning recognition of qualifications. This diversity of practices was emphasised throughout the research via the inclusion of the four profession-specific case studies each originating from practice and analysed by the author during research projects conducted at ITEM. The different nature of these case studies supports the plea for profession- and study-specific research and solutions. Therefore, this research has shown that – in light of the complexity of the European system for recognition – more could be achieved by undertaking targeted action and identifying solutions at a lower level of government. In particular, the author recommends Member States and/or regions to examine their respective practices for recognition for professions or courses of study with a high propensity for mobility. Taking such targeted action ensures that solutions “hit” where they are most necessary.

4. Activities & Products

In order to take targeted action on specific professions and courses of study, several activities and products can be proposed. As a first step, it is important to devote attention to enhancing the understanding of national recognition systems and practices through structural research on the topic of the recognition of qualifications. At the moment, there is a lack of recurrent research into administrative practices at national level that include both the application of European instruments as well as national procedures. Such research activities serve a dual goal. On the one hand, they are able to enhance understanding of national recognition systems thus benefiting interactions between them. On the other hand, they help to identify recognition-related obstacles thereby providing the basis for targeted action to be taken.

Once professions and courses of study have been identified that are in need of targeted action in relation to recognition of qualifications, a number of other activities and products may be developed. First, based on the “mapping” research suggested in the previous paragraph, a common approach may be adopted on how to interpret key concepts in EU, regional or national legal instruments on recognition thereby leading to small-scale streamlining of recognition practices. Second, the mapping exercise

above could provide a basis for a comparative exercise of two matching courses of study and/or corresponding professions. Where such a comparative exercise results in a finding of sufficient comparability, such an exercise can institute a degree of automation in the recognition process. In this case, a specific mark, seal or label could be developed that would be attached to a certain qualification and that would indicate convergence and the possibility of direct recognition. By contrast, if differences exist action can be undertaken to mitigate them, thereby also enabling further comparability and automation.

Apart from the monitoring and comparative exercises proposed above, some other structural measures can be implemented. First, qualifications may be issued in multiple languages thus requiring educational institutions to translate the qualifications they issue. The other side of the coin is to ensure that competent authorities and educational institutions have means available to accept qualifications in multiple languages. Second, improved information provision on recognition ensures that citizens are better informed thus taking away the likelihood that unexpected obstacles may arise. In this respect, documents such as those developed in the context of the B-solutions project “Roadmap and Factsheet for the Recognition of Qualifications for Highly Demanded Professions” which the author coordinated can serve as examples for tailor-made profession-specific information.²¹⁸³ Whereas roadmaps are aimed at first line supporters and help them better inform citizens, factsheets are aimed directly at citizens and provide them with in-depth information on recognition and access procedures when looking to work cross-border in designated regulated professions.

A final category of activities and products following from this research has a more *ad hoc* nature. For example, depending on the particular scope of certain events, this research can also lead to presentations at conferences and seminars. Similarly, it can provide as a basis for articles to be published in relevant professional or scientific journals. Finally, the research may also inspire training activities to be provided to professionals who advise clients on matters related to recognition of qualifications.

5. Planning and Implementation

Over the course of the research, activities such as the ones proposed above were already undertaken by the author. For example, the research has been presented on multiple occasions at academic and policy-oriented workshops, seminars, and conferences. Contributions related to the research were also published in professional

²¹⁸³ ITEM Cross-border Portal, ‘Roadmaps and Factsheets: Practical Documents Boosting Cross-border Mobility by Facilitating the Recognition of Qualifications’, <https://itemcrossborderportal.maastrichtuniversity.nl/link/id/nzudxZdokeAmZWjL>.

and scientific journals.²¹⁸⁴ Furthermore, information documents such as the roadmaps and factsheets mentioned above have already been developed and are currently employed in practice. Similarly, two of the case studies taken up in this research have already been published as reports.²¹⁸⁵ As far as the activities and products mentioned above are concerned, the continuation such activities and products can (continue to) be implemented in the short-term. The fragmented and highly individualised nature of issues related to the recognition of qualifications means that plenty of opportunities are likely to arise in the future to implement the recommendations, activities and products proposed in the context of this research.

²¹⁸⁴ L. Kortese, 'Exploring Professional Recognition in the EU: A Legal Perspective', 4 *Journal of International Mobility* 1 (2016), p. 43-58; L. Kortese, 'Vele wegen leiden naar Rome: Trajecten tot erkenning van kwalificaties in Nederland op verschillende momenten', 4 *Journal Vreemdelingenrecht* (2017).

²¹⁸⁵ L. Kortese, *De Grensoverschrijdende Mobiliteit van Gespecialiseerde Verpleegkundigen IC – Nederland/België*, (ITEM, March 2018); L. Kortese and H. Schneider, *Setting up a Tri-Member State Paediatric Surgery Centre in the Netherlands, Germany and Belgium: The Cross-border Mobility of Paediatric Surgeons in the Meuse-Rhine Euregion*, (ITEM, December 2018).