

***Project From Brain Gain Policies to Practices – Dissemination of Best  
Institutional Practice in the WB region***

**CASE STUDY  
ON THE BEST BRAIN GAIN PRACTICE IN CROATIA:  
PRACTICE OF THE CROATIAN AGENCY FOR SCIENCE AND  
HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE RECOGNITION OF FOREIGN  
HIGHER EDUCATION QUALIFICATIONS**

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## INTRODUCTION

The aim of this case study is to summarise the experience and knowledge of Croatian ENIC/NARIC office's national and international work in order to facilitate the access to educational and professional opportunities and international mobility in Western Balkans (WB) region. Case study will describe how Croatian ENIC/NARIC office developed efficient process of professional recognition of foreign higher education qualifications, explain who is responsible for recognition procedure, how the Office recognises diplomas, how Croatia created legal framework for making the process efficient, what are the obstacles to recognition and how to overcome them, etc.

This Case study is developed as part of *From Brain Gain Policies to Practices – Dissemination of Best Institutional Practise in the WB region* project, founded by the Balkan Trust for Democracy. Project aims to develop institutional framework for brain gain in WB countries through dissemination of best identified practices and lessons learnt in the WB region. Two good practices have been identified – in Albania and Croatia – and their lessons should be spread in other countries of the WB region – Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia and Serbia.

Despite all the important work that has been done and the progress that has been made since the signing of the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC<sup>1</sup>) in April, 1996, one of the major obstacles for recognition that has to be tackled is the divergence of recognition practices among different countries. In other words, while there is a general consensus on what should be done, this good practice is not always implemented, or is interpreted differently.

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<sup>1</sup> The full name of the LRC is the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education in the European Region, signed at Lisbon, Portugal on April 11, 1997 and entering into force on February 1, 1999.

That is why this document also aims to strengthen cooperation between countries in WB region and improve the exchange of good practices and knowledge in the recognition of foreign qualifications.

The goal is not only to achieve a more transparent recognition process of foreign higher education qualifications, but also to acknowledge different educational systems and traditions of the countries in the WB region.

### **STRUCTURE OF THE DOCUMENT**

The first chapter is an introduction to the role of European Recognition Networks (ENIC and NARIC), to European higher education policy framework, Lisbon Recognition Convention and the Bologna process. The following chapters cover legal framework and criteria for the recognition of higher education qualifications in Croatia, institutional capacity for recognition procedures in Croatia, and the role of Croatian ENIC/NARIC office. One chapter deals with the recommendations and examples of dealing with the evaluation of qualifications. Sources of the recommendations are provided at the end of document, including the relevant Articles of the Criteria and Procedures of the LRC and a reference for further reading for some topics.

The document also includes a glossary of terms and a list of sources used in this document.

## **1. European policy context**

In last decades major developments were achieved in the recognition practice. One major development has been the creation of the National Academic Recognition and Information Centres (NARIC) network by the European Commission in 1984 and the European National Information Centres (ENIC) network by the Council of Europe and UNESCO/CEPES in 1994. These networks have played a key role in keeping alive a continuous dialogue and working together towards tackling recognition issues on the European level in numerous projects, working groups, conferences and annual meetings.

Another major milestone has been the creation of an international „legal“ framework, the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region, also referred to as the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC), established in 1997 by the Council of Europe and UNESCO, which entered into force on 1 February 1999. Under this convention, an Intergovernmental Committee was established with a mandate to make decisions on behalf of the parties to the LRC. Since 1999, this Committee has adopted various recommendations. By now 53 countries have ratified the Convention and within the networks, the LRC is widely considered to form the basis for all recognition procedures.

The Bologna process, which started in 1999, has played a major role in placing the issue of recognition on the European agenda – recognition being considered essential to creating the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). At its inception, the Bologna process was meant to strengthen the competitiveness and attractiveness of the European higher education and foster student mobility and employability through the introduction of a system based on undergraduate and postgraduate studies with easily

readable programmes and degrees. Quality assurance in higher education also played an important role from the outset. It is certain that credential evaluators have to use the results of quality assurance procedures, which is something of a challenge because policy and practice with regard to quality assurance varies considerably. However, with the adoption of the European Quality Assurance Standards and Guidelines (ESG) in 2005, members of EHEA have taken an important step towards providing reliable information on the quality of higher education institutions. Other important measures were the establishment of the European Register of Quality Assurance Agencies (EQAR) in 2007, and the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), operating successfully since 2000.

Various Bologna ministerial meetings that have been taking place since 1999 broadened this agenda and gave greater precision to the developed tools. The undergraduate/postgraduate degree structure has been modified into a three-cycle system, which now includes the concept of qualifications frameworks, with an emphasis on learning outcomes. The concept of higher education's social dimension has been introduced and recognition of qualifications is now clearly perceived as central to the European higher education policies.

Within the Bologna process, the LRC is regarded as the main international legal text which aims to further fair recognition of qualifications concerning higher education in the European Region. The Bologna process has resulted in many initiatives to improve transparency and recognition of qualifications, such as the establishment of the Bologna Working Group on Recognition etc. Different Bologna strategic documents adopted by EHEA ministers since 1999 confirm the crucial role of fair recognition in facilitating mobility to, from and within EHEA. That is why, in the European as well as global

context, recognition is far more than just a technical element – it is a policy element of key importance. We cannot aim to attract more students/professional from other parts of the world if we are not willing to consider their qualifications fairly. Stated very simply, European institutions and credentials’ evaluators must be willing – and able – to assess qualifications from other countries with the same fairness and openness of mind with which they would like others to approach their own qualifications. Furthermore, in addition to the key role of ENIC and NARIC Networks, strategic Bologna documents underline the importance of the shift of emphasis from procedures and formalities to learning outcomes, and it links this to the need to develop a better understanding of the concept of „substantial differences“. No legal text can adequately describe what the term „substantial differences“ means in practice, so it is important to develop a common understanding among credential evaluators, and it is important that this common understanding be fairly generous. Finally, the strategies underline the need to intensify policy dialogue in the area of qualification recognition.

### **1.1. The Lisbon Convention**

The context of the Convention is provided by the related ideals of (i) labour mobility within the European Union and (ii) the single European academic area of the Bologna Declaration. The latter ideal is of a single trans-European academic community within which both students and professors can move freely. The intention of the Lisbon Convention is that mobility be made easier by removing all possible obstacles to the mutual recognition of qualifications.

Since the LRC is an international treaty, after a country becomes Party to the Convention, i.e. ratifies it, the Convention becomes superior to national legislation. In

reality, however, the information gathered within ENIC and NARIC networks in the past few years, demonstrates something else (and the same is often heard at international meetings where recognition is being discussed): the superiority of the international legislation over the national in practice does not work so smoothly in all countries. Two difficulties are mentioned most often: the first one is related to those cases where the national legislation contradicts the legal framework of the LRC. This typically happens if the contradictory clauses already existed in the national legislation before the country in question joined the Convention. In those cases, the natural solution would be to amend the national legislation and bring it in the line with the LRC. There is a large group of countries that have done so or are planning to do so. However, there are also examples of the opposite - i.e. cases where national legislation has been amended or replaced with new generation legislation without respect to the international legislation – in which case the contradictions may become even deeper (e.g. contradiction with the *spirit* of the Convention and its subsidiary texts).

One way in which national practices diverge from the spirit of LRC is in the usage of outdated terminology linked to concepts that are not compatible with the principles of the Convention. It is self-evident that a given national legislation is not in compliance with the LRC legal framework if the legislation uses terms „nostrification“, as is the case in some Bologna countries, or „equivalence“, which is the case in many more countries, especially those that have not made amendments to legislation concerning recognition after they acceded to the Convention.

In whatever meaning the terms may be used locally, in the international context the words „nostrification“ and „equivalence“ have connotations originating from the assessment procedures from the past which were relevant under the old international



conventions and agreements on recognition and which are not compatible with the Lisbon Convention. They indicate a much stronger requirements for similarity between qualifications if foreign qualifications are to be recognised than what is understood by „recognition“ and is the key provision of the LRC: that foreign qualifications shall be recognised unless the competent authority can demonstrate that there is a substantial difference between the foreign qualification for which recognition is sought and the corresponding qualification of the host country.

So, it is important to stress that terminology does matter: if the terminology actually denotes outdated procedures that do not ensure „fair recognition“ in the letter and spirit of the Lisbon Convention, the terminology should be changed.

The other type of hindrances to the implementation of the Convention seem to be linked to the interpretation (or rather misinterpretation) of institutional autonomy. The autonomy of higher education institutions certainly does not mean that higher education institutions have the liberty to ignore the laws or international treaties signed by the state - and the LRC is one. Still, where this type of interpretation takes place, the various formulations have approximately the same overall meaning: since the recognition decisions are taken by the higher education institutions, and these institutions are autonomous, the state cannot ensure that the principles or procedures stipulated in the legal framework of the LRC are followed. Such information shows that, in most cases, countries actually do not fulfil the requirements of the Convention which oblige the central authorities of the state party of the Convention to take all possible steps to encourage the favourable consideration and application of the Convention provisions in higher education institutions.

The international guidelines on the Convention's implementation stress the importance of legal frameworks, both international and national, being used in a flexible way, facilitating rather than hindering the mutual recognition of qualifications. The Countries party to the Convention are urged to give careful attention to the amendment of any national laws which might conflict with the spirit of the Convention.

It is important to note that the Convention and subsequent international recommendations for its implementation do not suggest that all foreign qualifications should go through a formal process of “recognition” before they can be considered to be of value. The idea is that, if there is any doubt on the matter (e.g. because little is known about the qualification or the foreign institution which awarded it), then the process of recognition (or non-recognition) should be well-informed, objective and transparent.

It also means that, once it is established that the qualification (diploma) is a genuine document and has been awarded by an authorised (e.g. accredited) institution and study programme in the country concerned, any further consideration should necessarily be based upon the study programme's final level and learning outcomes, and not upon whether or not it matches study programmes in the country where the recognition is at issue.

Such a recognition process may be necessary under three kinds of circumstance, and the particular circumstance (the purpose of the recognition) will determine the appropriate procedure and the depth to which it will need to be taken.

These three purposes are:

- (a) Academic recognition, where the holder of the qualification (or a student who has completed elements of a study programme abroad) wishes this to be recognised as a basis for further study. (e.g. the holder of a foreign Bachelor's degree may want to be registered for a Master's study programme in Croatia, but the value of the Bachelor's degree is not known to the Croatian university.)
- (b) *De jure* professional recognition, where the holder of a foreign qualification wishes to enter a regulated profession such as medicine. The final decision in this case is in the hands of the professional body.
- (c) *De facto* professional recognition, where a potential employer feels the need to know more about a foreign qualification which is being offered by a potential employee. The outcome in this case should be providing sufficient information for the potential employer to make a final decision on the person's employment.

Various instruments have been developed on a trans-European basis to facilitate both the informal and formal recognition of qualifications by making the qualifications more transparent (“readable”). These instruments include a standardized Diploma Supplement, the use of ECTS credits and the move towards a common cycle of levels of qualification (part of the Bologna process).

As mentioned, another important instrument in this development is the establishment of ENIC/NARIC offices in each country. The primary function of these offices is (a) to provide information on foreign higher education systems, higher education institutions and qualifications, so as to facilitate the recognition of the latter, and (b) to provide the same sort of information for foreign ENIC/NARIC offices concerning qualifications in the

office's home country. ENIC/NARIC offices thus operate as a mutually supportive information network.

ENIC network (European Network of National Information Centres on academic recognition and mobility) was founded by the Council of Europe and UNESCO with the purpose of academic mobility and quality application of principles of the LRC. The network consists of information centres of the member states of European Cultural Convention or UNESCO Europe Region, with government bodies as their founders. The Network is made up of national information centres of the Countries party to the European Cultural Convention or the UNESCO European Region. An ENIC office is a body set up by the national authorities to provide information on national recognition policies and practices pertaining to foreign qualifications, national education system, mobility and information on studying abroad.

NARIC network (National Academic Recognition Information Centres) was founded on the initiative of European Commission with the purpose of improving academic recognition of qualifications in member states of the European Union, European Economic Community (European Economic Area, EEA) and Turkey. The aim of the Network is to encourage academic mobility. The network is part of the Community's Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP), which stimulates the mobility of students and staff between higher education institutions in these countries.

Both networks remain independent and collaborate very actively. Many ENIC and NARIC members have been and still are active in different Council of Europe and UNESCO issues, such as translation education, methodology of credential evaluation in the light of LRC, the creation of the international Diploma Supplement, consequences of the Bologna

process for international recognition, professional recognition – diversity of methods and many more.

## **1.2. The EU Single Market - policy framework**

European Union believes that a significant obstacle to the mobility of professionals within Europe is the result of unjustifiably rigid requirements erected for *de jure* professional recognition by professional bodies (sometimes through national laws which embody these requirements). It has therefore issued a series of EU Directives concerning regulated professions, and in 2005 integrated them and improved with Directive 2005/36/EC for recognition of professional qualifications. The EU has reformed the system for recognition of professional qualifications in order to improve the flexibility of labour markets, further liberalise the provision of services, encourage more automatic recognition of qualifications, and simplify administrative procedures. On 20 October 2007, at the end of the transposition period, this Directive replaced fifteen existing Directives in the field of the recognition of professional qualifications, providing the first comprehensive modernisation of the EU system since its introduction over 40 years ago. But continued efforts are necessary in order to maintain the dynamism created by this Directive. The current system must be periodically evaluated in order to verify whether full use has been made of all the opportunities offered by the Directive. The system must also take into account the considerable changes that have occurred in the Member States' educational and training systems.

However, the EU preference for legal solutions is less applicable in the field of *de facto* professional recognition – the recognition of non-regulated professions on the labour market. In this field especially there is a tremendous need for reliable information on

foreign qualifications, study programmes leading to it and possible additional requirements. The fact that the labour market is increasingly international only emphasises the urgency of this issue. Governments have to take up this challenge. The national recognition and information centres and their networks are already working on it.

All EU candidate countries as well as EU member states are expected to make their practices conform to the EU Directives. In many countries, the ENIC/NARIC office is an important provider of information on these Directives.

## **2. Policy and legal framework for recognition of foreign qualifications in Croatia**

### **2.1. Higher education policy context**

When the Government of the Republic of Croatia signed the Bologna Declaration in 2001, the first step in the reform of higher education in Croatia has been the reform of undergraduate, graduate and professional study programs in line with the Bologna cycles in 2005, when first students were enrolled into Bologna programs. In the period from 2005-2009 the postgraduate programs were also restructured. With the aim of quality assurance and improvement in higher education, procedures of external quality assurance of higher education institutions have been launched. Croatian Agency for Science and Higher Education, independent public institution established in 2005, is responsible for external quality assurance in higher education.

Among other activities, the Agency is responsible for professional recognition of foreign higher education qualifications which is under the purview of its constituent, the Croatian ENIC/NARIC office.

The Croatian Agency for Science and Higher Education (ASHE) was modelled after the best European practices in quality assurance in science and higher education. By becoming a full member of ENQA (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education) and being listed in EQAR (European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education) in 2011, the Agency proved its reliability as a quality assurance agency working in the European Higher Education Area.

In recent years, Croatia saw an increase in the number of newly established higher education institutions: 30 higher education institutions, mainly colleges, and a large number of polytechnics, mostly in areas of special state care, were established in line

with the strategic orientation of the Republic of Croatia towards polycentric development of higher education. First private universities were also founded during this period.

The development of the Croatian Qualifications Framework (CROQF) began in 2006; July 2007 saw the adoption of the Basic Concepts of CROQF and the establishment of CROQF Committee, which together with the Operational Team has the task of creating and implementing the Croatian Qualifications Framework by 2012.

In the academic year 2009/2010, two significant changes were introduced to the Croatian education system – the State Matura for the completion of a four-year secondary education and an information system for applications to higher education institutions. When candidates are ranked for enrolment, the results of the State Matura exam are taken into account (i.e. State Matura exams have replaced the old entrance exams at higher education institutions).

Also, Agency for Science and Higher Education started to develop the project of the National Information System for Higher Education and Science (NISSHE), to be funded by the European union IPA programme (Human Resources Development). The NISSHE system aims to include a significant number of parameters for generating analyses and statistics in the field of higher education and science, the lack of which is currently preventing informed decision-making in the area. NISSHE should lead to the coordination of decisions and guidelines adopted by various bodies, making them more transparent and based on realistic norms and standards, as well as more objective criteria and assessments.



These comprehensive activities should contribute to the alignment of the Croatian higher education with the European systems and its integration into the European Higher Education Area, improve the quality of study programmes and their delivery, increase mobility, recognisability and reliability of Croatian higher education qualifications, improve access of people with foreign higher education qualifications to the Croatian labour market and assure equitable access to the Croatian higher education system.

## **2.2. Legal and institutional framework for recognition**

Croatia was one of the original signatories of the Lisbon Convention, in April 1997. The Convention was ratified by Croatia in October 2000, and came into force in December 2004 by direct implementation on national level. According to the Convention, Croatia established Croatian ENIC/NARIC office as an information centre for academic mobility and recognition of foreign higher education qualifications.

Since 2004, the recognition of foreign higher education qualifications has been conducted in accordance with the Act on Recognition of Foreign Educational Qualifications (Official Gazette 158/2003, 198/2003, 138/2006 and 045/2011) which follows the principles of the Lisbon Convention. With this Act coming into force, previous legislation, i.e. the Act on Recognition of Equal Values of Foreign School Certificates and Diplomas (pursuant to which *nostrification/equivalency* was done), was annulled.

According to Croatian law, recognition is a formal acknowledgment of the value of a foreign education qualification or period of study, issued by the competent authority, for the purpose of the continuation of education or employment. Croatian citizens, foreign

citizens and persons without citizenship are entitled to the recognition of foreign education qualifications.

Croatia has divided the recognition procedures for different types of qualifications to different competent authorities.

1. Recognition of primary and secondary school qualifications:

a) Recognition of qualifications attesting to the completion of primary education and general, gymnasium and artistic secondary education programmes (for the purpose of employment or continuation of education) – under the authority of Education and Teacher Training Agency.

b) Recognition of qualifications attesting to the completion of vocational secondary education programmes (for the purpose of employment or continuation of education) – under the authority of Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education.

c) Recognition for the purpose of continuation of primary or secondary education – under the authority of the school at which the applicant wishes to pursue his/her education.

d) Recognition of primary education for the purpose of access to secondary education – under the authority of the secondary school at which the applicant wishes to pursue his/her education.

2. Recognition of higher education qualifications and periods of study:

a) For the purpose of the continuation of education in Croatia (academic recognition and recognition of periods of study) – under the authority of Croatian universities, polytechnics and colleges

b) For the purpose of employment in Croatia (professional recognition) – under the authority of the Agency for Science and Higher Education, Croatian ENIC/NARIC Office.

3. Recognition of specializations and professional examinations – under the authority of relevant ministries and professional organizations.

Recognition of foreign higher education qualifications is carried out for the purpose of employment (professional recognition), or continuation of education (academic recognition) in the Republic of Croatia, and is based on the Act on Recognition of Foreign Educational Qualifications.

With the Act on Recognition of Foreign Educational Qualifications coming into force, The Act on Recognition of Equal Values of Foreign School Certificates and Diplomas – the so-called Act on Validation, is annulled (Official Gazette, no. 57/1996).

In December 2006, the Act on Amendments to the Act on Recognition of Foreign Educational Qualifications (Official Gazette 138/2006) was passed and the academic recognition was placed under the jurisdiction of appropriate higher education institutions, resulting in additional harmonisation with the principles of the Lisbon Convention.

Agency for Science and Higher Education, or rather Croatian ENIC/NARIC office, conduct professional recognition for the purpose of employment in the Republic of Croatia. In accordance with the current regulations, it is possible to recognize each foreign qualification which is: considered as higher education qualification in the country which issued it, obtained upon successful completion of a higher education programme and issued by a foreign competent authority which is recognised/accredited by a competent accrediting government body wherein the qualification is acquired. Outcome of

recognition procedure conducted by Croatian ENIC/NARIC is a legally binding document – decision on recognition.

Croatian ENIC/NARIC office is an information centre for academic mobility and recognition of foreign higher education qualifications which operates within the independent public institution, Agency for Science and Higher Education, responsible for quality assurance in higher education and science. The Office is a member of ENIC and NARIC networks.

Main activities of Croatian ENIC/NARIC office are related to the professional recognition of foreign higher education qualifications and to providing information on foreign education systems as well as national education system.

Within the process of professional recognition, Croatian ENIC/NARIC office conducts the evaluation of foreign qualifications on the basis of the Criteria for the evaluation of foreign higher education qualifications, which are based on LRC and its subsidiary texts. Through the years, these criteria have been improved in order to become more clear and transparent.

In addition to activities related to the professional recognition of foreign higher education qualifications, Croatian ENIC/NARIC office gives recommendations within the process of academic recognition and recognition of periods of study to the Academic recognition offices of each higher education institution. All these procedures are administrative procedures conducted in accordance with the *General Administrative Procedure Act*.

Croatian ENIC/NARIC office, apart from providing professional expertise in administrative procedures, also provides information to national and international legal entities and individuals on daily basis and by all means of communication.

Office receives approximately 1500 applications for professional recognition per year (almost 10 000 since its establishment), which are resolved within maximum 2 months, and in cases of analogy within a few weeks or even days. Moreover, the office also receives approximately 200 requests per year for recommendations from higher education institutions and over 1500 e-mail queries related to national or foreign qualifications and education systems.

In order to assist individuals and employers, on their request Croatian ENIC/NARIC office issues opinions and recommendations about foreign qualifications and their comparison to Croatian levels of higher education. This is one way in which the Office assists employers in making the final decision on an individual's employment and higher education institutions on accepting applicants to their study programmes.

Aiming towards a more efficient and contemporary operation, Office upgraded existing information system which will enable easier data input and output as well as statistical analyses concerning the recognition of foreign higher education qualifications.

Generally, Croatian ENIC/NARIC office helps businesses, academic institutions, recruitment and employment services and government departments from all over the world to understand more about qualifications. This in turn helps these organisations improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the processes and systems they use to process applications (for employment or study in Croatia) from individuals with international qualifications

In the view of international cooperation, Croatian ENIC/NARIC office participated in the activities of international working group "Global dimension of recognition", together with the representatives of a few other ENIC and NARIC centres as well representatives of UNESCO, European Commission and Council of Europe. Also, during the last few years, the Office took active part in many initiatives and activities conducted within ENIC and NARIC networks.

Within the framework of the EU CARDS 2002 programme, Croatian ENIC/NARIC office implemented the project on the recognition of education qualifications, *Higher Education Mobility: Diploma Recognition Policy and Legislation*. The implementation of the project was based on the *Terms of Reference* approved by the European Commission Delegation in the Republic of Croatia in February 2003. The legal framework for the project implementation was the Act on Recognition of Foreign Educational Qualifications (Official Gazette 158/03, 198/03) and the institutional framework represented Croatian ENIC/NARIC Office established within the Agency for Science and Higher Education with the purpose of recognition of qualifications. The project started in May 2004 and was finished in March 2006.

During a 2-year period, from 2006 to 2008, Office carried out a MATRA project, "Strengthening the Role of Croatian ENIC/NARIC Office", in cooperation with the Dutch government and Dutch ENIC centre (Nuffic). The project aimed to contribute to the accession of Croatia to the European Union, in particular to assist Croatia with the implementation of the European directive 2005/36/EC dealing with professional recognition.

On the basis of the Act on regulated professions and recognition of foreign professional qualifications (124/09 and 45/11), Croatian ENIC/NARIC office was appointed as a National contact point in the sense of Directive 2005/36/EC for recognition of professional qualifications in European union.

At this moment, the Croatian ENIC/NARIC office employs seven persons of which five persons are responsible for assessment of foreign higher education qualification and providing information by e-mail and phone , one person is responsible for administration and one person is head of Office. Every of five credential evaluators in Office is responsible for assessment of foreign qualifications from particular countries.

All credential evaluators in Office have higher education diplomas and they are trained (through different nationally and internationally organized trainings) for the recognition procedure. Office employees regularly and actively participate in work of ENIC and NARIC networks and share good practice with colleagues from other countries in world.

### **3. Recognition procedure of foreign higher education qualifications in Croatia**

#### **3.1. Basic steps in recognition procedure**

Croatian ENIC/NARIC office uses the recognition criteria and procedures which are in compliance with the Council of Europe/UNESCO Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures.

Over the past years, Croatian ENIC/NARIC office considerably developed new recognition practices with the aim of shifting from „equivalence“ to a broader comparison of the earned qualification– „recognition“. This period also witnessed an increased tendency of formal national regulation to emphasize the procedures and criteria applicable to the process of recognition of foreign qualifications rather than list defined degrees and diplomas that can be recognized under the regulation.

The Agency for Science and Higher Education, Croatian ENIC/NARIC Office, conducts the professional recognition procedure. Professional recognition is an official authorisation to practice a particular profession. It deals with the assessment of knowledge and skills of a specific person.

Optimal duration of the procedure for professional recognition of foreign higher education qualifications is two months.

Procedure comprises several steps:

1. After receiving and processing the application, Croatian ENIC/NARIC Office sends a notification of required supplementation if the application is not complete.
2. Croatian ENIC/NARIC Office examines the accreditation of institution wherein a foreign higher education qualification was acquired, accreditation of study



programme in question, authenticity of the foreign higher education qualification for which recognition is applied, rights and possibilities that the qualification ensures in the country of issue.

3. The Agency for Science and Higher Education issues a decision (legally binding document) on professional recognition of a foreign higher education qualification. Decision clearly state that the purpose of the recognition is to enter the Croatian labour market.
4. The decision on professional recognition of a foreign higher education qualification is sent by post to the applicant's address specified in the application form.

Agency for Science and Higher Education, Croatian ENIC/NARIC Office, also issues clarifications of foreign and national higher education qualifications.

Clarification of higher education qualification is a document containing the information on the (accreditation) status of the higher education institution and study programme in question, the level of the qualification within the higher education system of the issuing country, assessment of generic learning outcomes and, in case of foreign qualification, the comparability to Croatian higher education level (if possible).

Croatian ENIC/NARIC office ensures applicants get the most accurate, clear and reliable information on recognition procedures and criteria followed in Croatia. The provision of clear and accessible information on recognition procedures and criteria plays a key role in making the recognition process more understandable, clear and successful. In that sense, the Office has developed clear and publicly accessible information on recognition procedure and criteria which plays a key role in making the recognition process more understandable, transparent, clear and successful. All information is easily accessible,

provided in Croatian and English language on the Agency's web site ([www.azvo.hr](http://www.azvo.hr)) and regularly updated. In addition to the web site, this information is also provided in a variety of forms – by telephone, e-mail, face-to-face, brochures, fact sheets etc.

In order to strengthen procedure transparency, the Office can, for example, provide a description of the assessment procedures and criteria in Croatian or English language, make sure that all information is clear enough so that applicants will have realistic idea of the decision, draw up an inventory of typical recognition cases, establish anti-discriminatory mechanisms (each application is dealt in same way and fair evaluation is granted to all applicants).

During the application procedure, the Office provides all applicants with an acknowledgment of the receipt of their applications. Then, if necessary, it indicates documentation and/or information that are lacking, using the terminology of the applicant's country of origin, provides informal advice to the applicant on how to obtain the required documents and/or information, informs the applicant about any updates to the status of the application, indicates a deadline, informs applicants on delays or issues encountered while dealing with their application and ensure that information is always accessible to the applicants by any means (in printed or electronic form or by telephone). Office staff cooperates with the applicants and provides all the required information that is within the Office's sphere of competence with respect to the confidentiality of applications, not disclosing any personal data without the applicant's consent.

Credential evaluators in Croatian ENIC/NARIC office also check the authenticity of documents using international information, collect examples of qualifications with their

validity dates and security features where appropriate to use as reference material for future applications, collect samples of fraudulent documents as a reference for common fraudulent practices, identify contexts where fraudulent practices may be encountered more frequently, etc.

All recognition decisions taken by the Office are supplemented with the information on reasons for the recognition, information on the appeal procedure, including the path to follow and deadline, and measures that applicant may undertake in order to obtain recognition at later time. The appeal procedure is defined by Croatian legislation.

### **3.2. Different purposes of recognition**

Recognition of foreign qualifications in Croatia may be sought for different purposes - for access to further education and training (academic recognition) and/or for the access to the labour market (professional recognition).

Academic recognition focuses on the recognition of periods of study or qualifications issued by an educational institution with regard to a person wishing to continue or to begin studying, and, as it is already mentioned, it is within jurisdiction of higher education institutions (e.g. universities). Croatian universities established offices for academic recognition which deal with academic recognition of foreign qualifications and provide all relevant informations for students with foreign qualifications who wants to continue their higher education in Croatian universities. Universities developed their own procedures of assessment of foreign higher education qualifications based on LRC principles and guidelines and they usually ask the Croatian ENIC/NARIC office for all relevant information regarding particular foreign qualification which is in the procedure

of academic recognition, such as the status of foreign higher education system, foreign qualification institution and another additional information which might be helpful.

Administrative fee for academic recognition is 400 KN (four hundred kunas) or approximately 65 € (sixty five Euros) and for recognition of period of study is 200 KN (two hundred kunas) or approximately 30 € (thirty Euros). All information for academic recognition of foreign higher education qualifications and period of study are available on web pages of Croatian universities.

Professional recognition in Croatia (within jurisdiction of the Agency for Science and Higher Education, namely its Croatian ENIC/NARIC office) is an official authorisation for entering the Croatian labour market and practicing a particular profession, especially if it is for the purpose of working in particular regulated professions.

Commonly, for the „general“ purpose of entering a labour market in Croatia, professional recognition by the Croatian ENIC/NARIC office ends with a legally binding decision („rješenje“), which includes formal authorisation of foreign higher education qualification without precise details of assessment of learning outcomes which person acquired during his/her education.

In accordance with applicable regulations in Croatia, decision on recognition does not give the right to use Croatian professional and academic titles or academic level, but formally confirms the value of foreign educational qualification for the purpose of general access to the labor market in Croatia. If employment in a particular profession requires the fulfillment of specific conditions (e.g. in regulated professions such as medicine, attorney, etc.), they are regulated by the competent authority for each profession.

When there is a need for more detailed information, the Croatian ENIC/NARIC office issues non-legally binding document called Clarification of higher education qualification („pojašnjenje”) which is a document containing the information on the status of the higher education institution and study programme in question, the level of the qualification within the higher education system of the issuing country, the comparability of foreign higher education qualification to a Croatian higher education level (if possible) and assessment of generic learning outcomes (knowledge and skills) of a specific person/qualification. This document can be issued upon request from the applicant, employers, higher education institutions, professional organizations etc. Administrative fee for professional recognition which ends with a decision is 400 KN (four hundred kunas) or 65 € (sixty five Euros), and for the Clarification of higher education qualification 200 KN (two hundred kunas) or 30 € (thirty Euros). The applicants who have already paid administrative fee for the recognition of higher education qualification are not required to pay fee for the clarification of the same higher education qualification.

So, where Croatian ENIC/NARIC office provides a Clarification of higher education qualification, it is for guidance purposes only and is non-binding. Croatian higher education institutions and professional bodies are independent organisations that make their own decisions on admission, taking into account a variety of factors, of which qualifications are only one.

In case of professional recognition for regulated professions, Croatian ENIC/NARIC office also issues clarifications of higher education qualification (together with formal decision on recognition) to help professional organizations (e.g. chambers, associations, ministries etc.) issue decision upon which a person can/cannot/or must meet additional compensation measures for performing activities in particular regulated profession in

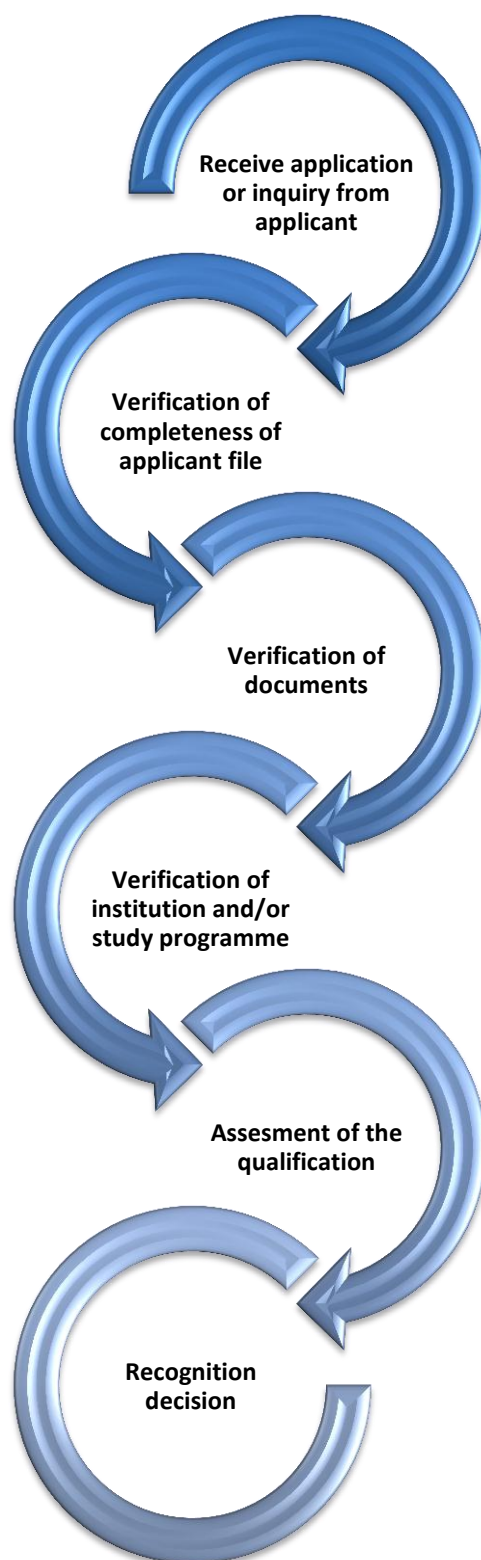
Croatia. Professional organizations are competent authorities for the regulation of regulated professions, which are over 300 in Croatia.

It is important to emphasize that Croatia, currently in the European Union accession process, finalized the implementation process of the Directive 2005/36/EC on recognition of foreign professional qualifications for regulated professions in EU, as part of a negotiation process in Chapter 3: Right of establishment and freedom to provide services. In year 2009, Croatia passed the *Act on regulated professions and recognition of professional qualifications*, aligned with the provisions of the Directive, which set out rules to regulate, among others, three major points regarding regulated professions and recognition of professional qualifications process:

1. Number and type of professional qualifications required for pursuing regulated professions in accordance with Directive; this action was and is directly linked to a directive and its annexes - to a list of qualifications in EU countries which will make EU citizens eligible for a process of automatic recognition after Croatian accession to EU.
2. The minimum training conditions for access to and pursuit of the profession of medical doctors with basic training, specialized doctors of medicine, doctors of dental medicine, specialized doctors of dental medicine, nurses responsible for general care, midwives, pharmacists, veterinary surgeons and architects.
3. Procedure for the recognition of foreign professional qualifications and the structure of system for the recognition of foreign professional qualifications for the pursuit of professions regulated in Croatia, with a view to achieving the right of establishment, provision of services on a temporary and occasional basis in Croatia on the basis of foreign professional qualifications.

According to the Act, the ministry responsible for economy and labour is designated to perform the activities of the national coordinator, and Croatian ENIC/NARIC office of the Agency for Science and Higher Education is appointed as the national contact point tasked with providing information on the recognition of foreign professional qualifications, in line with the provisions of the new Act, to citizens and contact points in other EU and European Economic Area contracting countries.

Croatia will accept these obligations upon accession to EU in 2013.





### **3.3. Assessment of foreign higher education qualifications**

During the procedure of foreign qualifications assessment, Croatian ENIC/NARIC office uses the common principles such as defining (asking) the precise purpose for recognition, examines different aspects of the qualification such as level, workload, quality of study programme and institution, profile and learning outcomes of the programme leading to applicant's qualification. In order to acquire this information, the Office consults different documents sent by the applicant (for example, the diploma supplement), national qualification frameworks, web pages, information and advice from other ENIC's and NARIC's, information from foreign higher education institutions which issued the qualification, information from quality assurance agencies etc.

A foreign qualification cannot be properly evaluated without taking into account the official status of the institution awarding the qualification and/or the programme taken. In that sense, the Office established a procedure for verifying the status of higher education institution/study programme as obligatory part of assessment of foreign higher education qualification. The fact that an institution and/or study programme is recognised or accredited by official authority indicates that the qualification in question represents an appropriate minimum level of education in that particular country.

Depending on the country, different terms may be used in reference to the status of the institution or study programme. The two most common are „recognition“ (meaning official status granted by national legislation and official degree-granting authority) and „accreditation“ (meaning a formal decision by a recognised authority which has verified whether the institutions and/or study programme meet the predefined minimum quality standards). The differences in the way accreditation is applied in different countries may depend on government involvement and the extent to which the

procedure is conducted voluntarily. There is another term, „licensing“, which is not equivalent to accreditation and does not necessarily require demonstration of quality. To be granted accreditation, a licensed institution has to go through the accreditation procedure. It is the accreditation that grants the institution the right to award officially recognised qualifications and gives it access to public funding.

Quality assurance is another term used in the discussions of the recognition and accreditation of institutions and programmes. Quality assurance in higher education includes policies, procedures and practices that are designed to achieve, maintain or enhance the quality of the institution and/or the study programme.

Generally, qualifications awarded by recognised institutions are considered to be recognised in the Croatian recognition procedure.

However, in some countries recognition/accreditation of a programme is separate from the recognition/accreditation of an institution. In other words, it is possible for recognised institutions to offer programmes that are not officially recognised and for non-recognised institutions to offer recognised programmes.

The information helpful for establishing the status of an institution and/or study programme can be found in the documentation provided by the awarding institution such as „qualification“ (for example, in countries with an official format for qualifications, only fully recognised institutions (public and private) are allowed to issue an official (state) qualification (e.g. Ukraine, Russian Federation)), then „statement“/“certificate“ issued as temporary proof of completion (when the qualification is awarded after the actual end of the study programme), also „transcript“ which may contain information regarding the accreditation status and the name of the accreditation agency, and the „Diploma supplement“ which usually contains information

about the status, accreditation and quality assurance system in a given country. Additional sources of information can be the website of the awarding institution, website of the national accreditation/quality assurance bodies, website of the ministry of education, websites of the associations of accreditation/quality assurance agencies, e.g. the website of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation of United States of America ([www.chea.org](http://www.chea.org)), websites of international organisations, like UNESCO ([www.unesco.org/en/education](http://www.unesco.org/en/education)), websites of credential evaluator networks, like the ENIC and NARIC Networks ([www.enic-naric.net](http://www.enic-naric.net)), the International Association of Universities ([www.iau-aiu.net](http://www.iau-aiu.net)), also websites of international organisations and information tools regarding quality assurance and accreditation, such as the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, ENQA ([www.enqa.eu/](http://www.enqa.eu/)) and the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education, EQAR ([www.eqar.eu/register.html](http://www.eqar.eu/register.html)).

National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) are another tool which can help the assessment procedure. NQF is an instrument for establishing qualifications acquired in a certain country, laying the basis for transparency, access, award and quality of qualifications. NQF coordinates and links all parts of the National Qualifications System, paying attention to the needs of individuals and society, including the needs and tasks of the economy. A national qualifications framework introduces a set of criteria, creating the basis for acceptable transparency, access, progression (in terms of developing competences), award and reliability of the entire qualifications system.

There are several types of qualification frameworks: national qualification frameworks referring to a country's educational system, international overarching frameworks such as the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF-LLL), which

provides a common European reference framework, and the framework of qualifications for the European Higher Education Area also known as the Bologna framework or the EHEA-QF. The EQF-LLL and the EHEA-QF are overarching frameworks whose goal is to facilitate the mutual understanding of qualifications within the European Economic Area and the EHEA countries respectively, enabling an easier comparison of systems and levels of education. NQFs may be referenced against the international frameworks, thus describing which levels in the national and international frameworks correspond to each other.

Credential evaluators in Croatian ENIC/NARIC office always view the foreign qualification within its national system. If an NQF exists, the Office takes its position within this framework into consideration. If a country does not have an NQF, this fact should not prejudice the evaluation of a qualification from such a country.

Adequate information on the learning outcomes of a specific qualification, where available, also helps to understand the place of a qualification within a framework and compare qualifications on the basis of learning outcomes.

Qualification frameworks are not an instrument leading to automatic recognition of foreign qualifications, but they should be regarded as an important transparency tool and the foundation for comparing qualifications on the basis of learning outcomes.

Learning Outcome may be described as a statement of what a learner is expected to know, understand and be able to demonstrate after completion of a learning process. Learning outcomes may be written for a single module or programme component, for a complete specific programme, qualification level, or anything in between. Learning outcomes are often divided into subject-specific learning outcomes, which are related to

the subject discipline, and generic learning outcomes, transferable from one academic discipline to another.

In practice, the expression „learning outcome“ is also widely used in a more general sense to indicate the overall output of a programme, rather than in the narrow sense of a technical statement.

In practice, usually there is no direct information on learning outcomes in the accompanying documentation of the qualification, such as the list of subjects or transcript. Even the Diploma Supplement, intended to provide "details of learning outcomes, knowledge, skills, competences", does not always contain a clear list of learning outcomes.

In the absence of information on learning outcomes, the Croatian ENIC/NARIC office tries to infer the output of a qualification from other, more readily available information, such as the qualification's place in the national education system or qualifications framework, the purpose of the programme, its contents, compulsory elements (such as a thesis or dissertation), the rights attached to the qualification and workload of the programme.

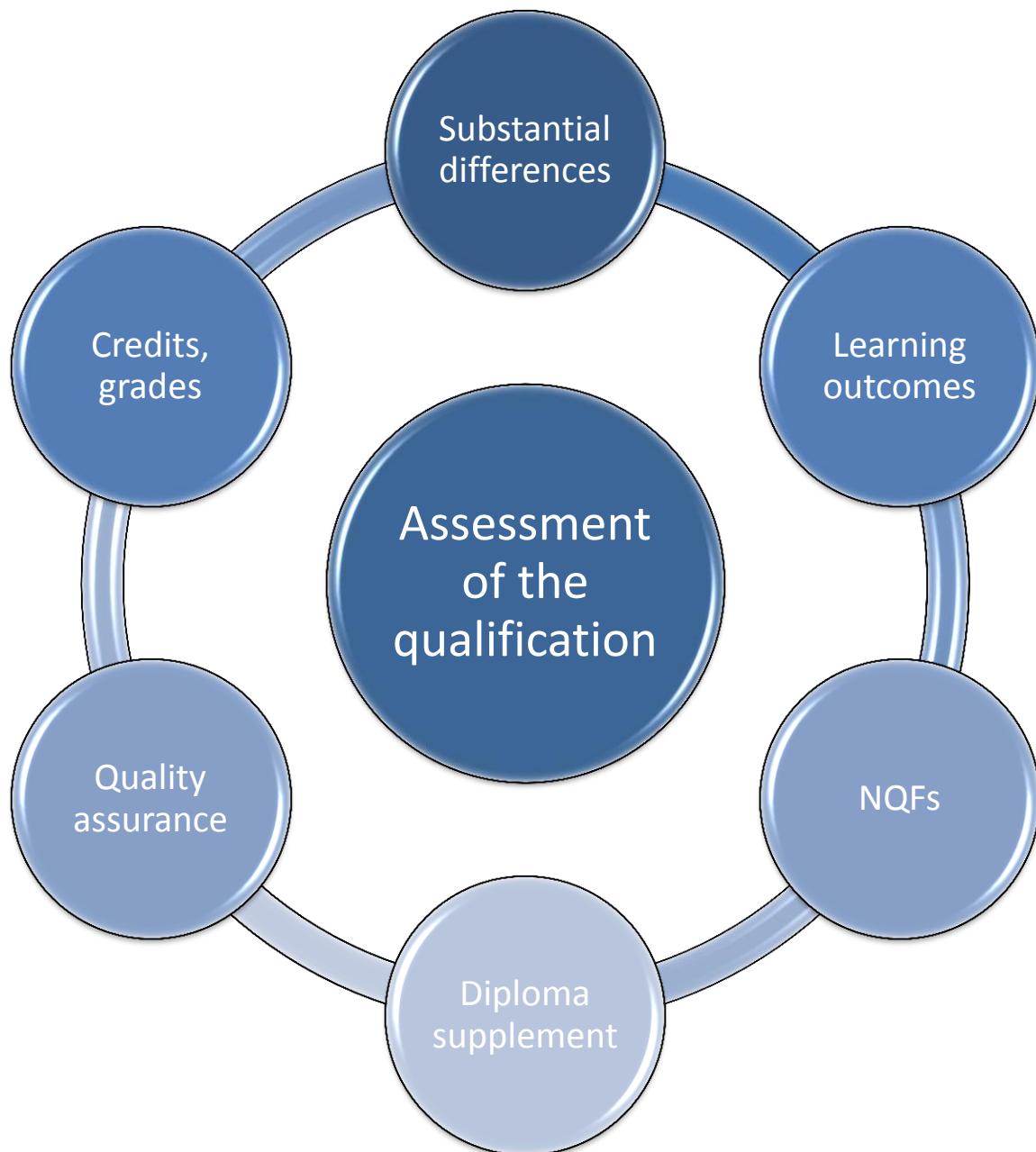
The professional recognition procedure in Croatia, which ends with a legally binding decision, does not include a comparison of the foreign qualification in question with the relevant qualification in the host country. Croatian system has moved away from requiring that the foreign qualifications must be equivalent to the relevant home qualification in all aspects, towards comparing only those aspects relevant to the right which the holder of the qualification is trying to exercise in Croatia. Recognition, or rather the assessment of foreign higher education qualifications in Croatia, is carried out

in a more general way, meaning that there is no comparison of foreign qualification to particular Croatian qualification. Comparison is only conducted in aspects relevant to the level of qualification, e.g. in a sense of generic learning outcomes, and stated in a non-binding document called Clarification of higher education qualification. This is a document containing the information on the (accreditation) status of the higher education institution and study programme in question, the level of the qualification within the higher education system of the issuing country and, in case of foreign qualification, the comparability to Croatian higher education level (if possible).

By focusing on five key elements that make up a qualification (level, workload, quality, profile and learning outcomes) and taking substantial differences in qualifications into account, Croatian ENIC/NARIC office transformed its approach from expecting foreign qualifications to be almost the same as those offered in their own country, to focusing on "recognition" by accepting non-substantial differences.

The interpretation of substantial differences is very much linked to the overall outcome of a qualification, programme and/or programme components, since this determines whether the applicant has been sufficiently prepared for the desired activity. A difference which relates only to input criteria (such as workload and structure of the programme) is not likely to have a direct effect on the abilities of the applicant, and should therefore not be automatically considered as a substantial difference. Finally, the Office is guided by the principles that not every difference should be considered "substantial", that the existence of substantial differences does not entail an obligation to deny recognition to the foreign qualification, and that the difference should be substantial in relation to the function of the qualification and the purpose for which recognition is sought.

## Schematic outline of qualification assessment



## **4. Croatian Qualifications Framework (CROQF)**

Development of the Croatian Qualifications Framework (CROQF) has been taking place since year 2007 as a response to the need for a national framework of qualifications encompassing all awards for all aspects of education and training into a single transparent qualifications framework.

In 2011, groups of experts and stakeholders gathered together with the objective to propose a Law on the CROQF and to reference CROQF to the European Qualification Framework (EQF) and to the Qualification Framework of European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA). At the moment, the Proposal of the CROQF Law is undergoing an exhaustive consultation process with all relevant stakeholders (public discussion) and by the end of year 2012 Law should be passed. The CROQF Law will establish the necessary legislative and institutional framework for the further development and implementation of the CROQF.

The CROQF has been defined as a single national framework through which all learning achievements may be measured and compared in a coherent way, defining the relationship between all education and training awards. It has 12 levels and sublevels described in terms of learning outcomes (8 main levels). CROQF has tables of learning outcomes ascending from level 1 to level 8 as referenced to the EQF and the QF-EHEA in order to facilitate a better understanding of the qualifications being awarded in Croatia and to demonstrate the link between CROQF level descriptors and EQF level descriptors. The CROQF constitutes the basis for understanding the existing qualifications and their interrelations and for the development of new qualifications. It is important to underline that the comprehensive systematization of qualifications is to encompass all qualifications that a person possesses, regardless of the way in which they have acquired



them. Thus a stronger link is created between the labour market and the educational supply and the validation of educational outcomes.

The introduction of a competence-based approach and placing the emphasis on learning outcomes is a novelty that presents a shift in the approach to the current educational process planning and programming, and provides the foundation for introducing each and every qualification. Learning outcomes in the CROQF are expressed and validated as knowledge and skills and the associated autonomy and responsibility. Four qualification characteristics are also introduced: reference level, volume, profile and quality as the measure of its reliability.

The aims of the CROQF are:

1. Understanding different types of qualifications and their interrelations
2. Enhancing cooperation among various stakeholders in education
3. Lifelong access to the education system
4. Providing a clear outline of educational accomplishments for employers, learners and parents
5. Creating a single quality assurance and enhancement system for the existing and new qualifications
6. Sustainable employability
7. Setting up a system for validation and recognition of competences acquired at the workplace and through other pathways
8. Simplicity of validation and recognition of foreign qualifications
9. Recognition of Croatian qualifications abroad
10. Promotion of education in Croatia.

The CROQF provides basis for the transparency, access, progression, award, and quality of qualifications, taking into consideration interests and the needs of the labour market, individuals and society as a whole. All the listed specific aims spring out of this main goal.

Understanding different qualification groups, especially types and classes of qualifications, as well as their interrelations, is one of the key preconditions for the transparency of the entire qualifications system. It is therefore clear why it is essential to meticulously and systematically introduce each and every type and class of qualifications, and to name them adequately. This is in turn possible only if their basic elements and characteristics have been recognized and carefully chosen.

Enhancing cooperation among different stakeholders in education is directly arises from the general goal of the CROQF – coordination and linking together of all parts of the qualifications system.

Lifelong access to the education system to all is also pointed out as one of the specific aims of the CROQF. The CROQF is designed and built up exactly in order to serve as the cornerstone for the development of an acceptable, imperative and just accessibility of the education system.

A clear outline of education accomplishments is achieved once a clear and simple representation of all characteristics of qualifications is put into place, and the CROQF is the instrument that is responsible for that.

Creating a single quality assurance and enhancement system for the existing and new qualifications is a specific aim that is realized by the implementation of the CROQF.

The general goal of the CROQF is to ensure interrelation and coordination of all parts of the qualifications system, with the labour market being one of them. This makes sustainable employability a specific goal whose realization is a direct consequence of the

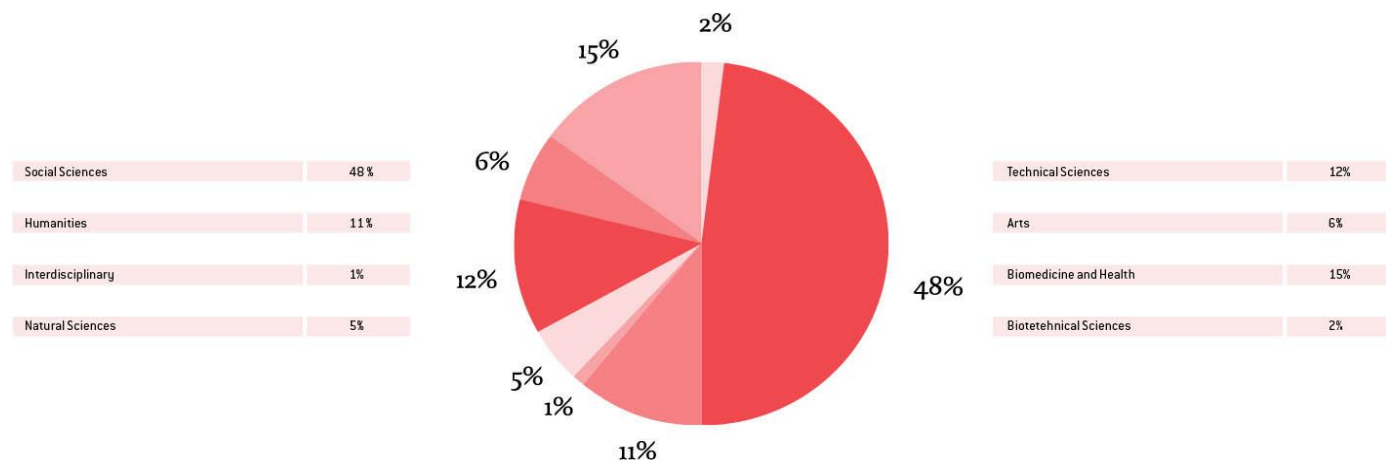
realization of the general goal of the CROQF in the process of the CROQF implementation.

Setting up a system for validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning is one of the specific aims of the CROQF, and it is justified primarily by new demands and volatility of the labour market. Acquisition of new competences is not achieved exclusively through the formal pathways, but through all others.

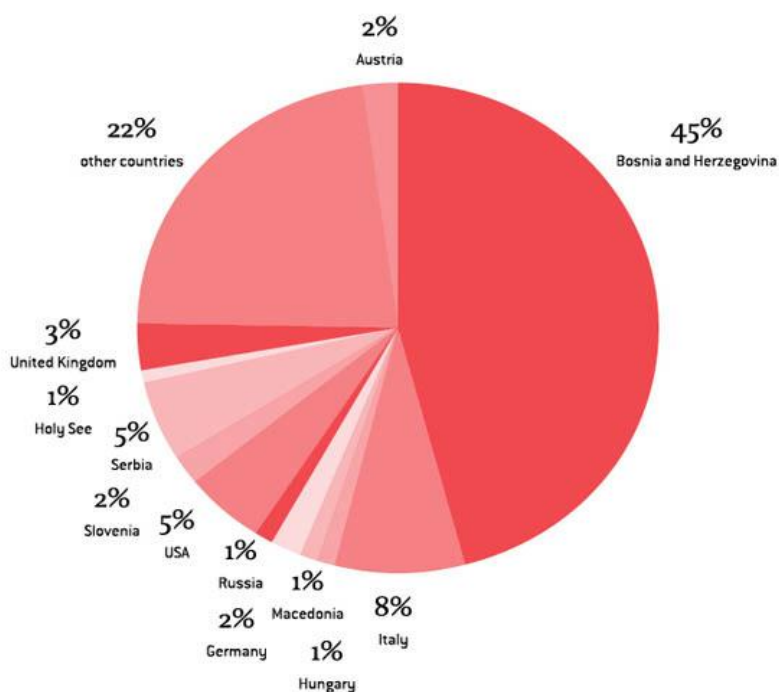
Simplicity of validation and recognition of foreign qualifications will be an immediate result of the implementation of the CROQF, EQF and other national qualifications frameworks. It will be very helpful additional toll to enhance the recognition of foreign qualifications procedures. Also, recognition of Croatian qualifications abroad will be facilitated by the implementation of the CROQF.

## 5. Statistics

Scientific fields of foreign higher education qualification recognised in 2011



Countries in which the foreign higher education qualifications recognised in 2011 were issued



In 2011 the Croatian ENIC/NARIC Office:

- Finished the professional recognition procedure for 1654 individual qualifications (99,64% of all requests received)
- Replied to 127 requests to provide guidelines for academic recognition of foreign higher education qualifications
- Issued 131 explanatory notes for higher education qualifications
- Replied to more than one thousand e-mails asking for information on recognition of higher education qualifications in Croatia and abroad, as well as Croatian and foreign education systems, study programmes and qualifications.

## GLOSSARY

1. **Academic recognition** - Approval of courses, qualifications, or diplomas from one (domestic or foreign) higher education institution by another for the purpose of student admission to further studies. Academic recognition can also be sought for an academic career at a second institution and in some cases for access to other employment activities on the labour market (academic recognition for professional purposes). As regards to the European Higher Education Area, three main levels of recognition can be considered: (i) recognition of qualifications, including prior learning and professional experience, allowing entry or re-entry into higher education; (ii) recognition of short periods of study in relation to student mobility, whose main instrument is ECTS (European Credit Transfer System); (iii) recognition of full degrees, the main instrument being the Diploma Supplement.
2. **Accreditation** - The process by which a (non-)governmental or private body evaluates the quality of a higher education institution or a specific educational programme in order to formally recognise it as having met certain pre-determined minimal criteria or standards. The result of this process is usually the awarding of a status (a yes/no decision) of recognition, and sometimes of a license to operate within a time-limited validity. The process can imply initial and periodic self-study and evaluation by external peers.
3. **Competence** - A dynamic combination of cognitive and metacognitive skills, knowledge and understanding, interpersonal, intellectual and practical skills, ethical values and attitudes. Fostering competences is the aim of all educational programmes. Competences are developed in all course units and assessed at

different stages of a programme. Some competences are subject-related (specific to a field of study), while others are generic (common to any degree course). Usually, the case is that competence development proceeds in an integrated and cyclical manner throughout a programme.

4. **Credential evaluation** – Comparing and assessing foreign qualifications.
5. **Credit** - Quantified means of expressing the volume of learning based on student workload needed to achieve the expected outcomes of a learning process at a specified level.
6. **Credit system** - A credit system makes it possible to divide a qualification into units or partial objectives of a programme of vocational and educational training. Each unit is defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competences (KSC), and can be characterised by the relative level of the learning outcomes involved, which in turn may be defined by a reference level and their volume which may be expressed in points or other factors. Each unit may or may not be awarded separately.
7. **Diploma Supplement** - The Diploma Supplement is an annex to the official degree/qualification, designed to provide a description of the nature, level, context, content and status of the studies that were pursued and successfully completed by the holder of the degree/qualification. It is based on the model developed by the European Commission, Council of Europe and UNESCO/CEPES. The purpose of the supplement is to provide sufficient independent data to improve the international 'transparency' and fair academic and professional recognition of qualifications (diplomas, degrees, certificates, etc.).
8. **Directive 2005/36/EC** - European Union Directive 2005/36/EC on the recognition of professional qualifications aids mobility by obliging Member States

to consider the qualifications acquired elsewhere in the Community to allow access to a regulated profession in their territory.

9. **ECTS** - European credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) is a learner-centred system for credit accumulation and transfer based on the transparency of learning outcomes and learning processes. It aims to facilitate planning, delivery, evaluation, recognition and validation of qualifications and units of learning as well as student mobility. ECTS is widely used in formal higher education and can be applied to other lifelong learning activities.
10. **European Qualifications Framework (EQF)** - The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) acts as a translation device that makes national qualifications more readable across Europe, promoting workers' and learners' mobility between countries and facilitating their lifelong learning. The EQF aims to relate different countries' national qualifications systems to a common European reference framework. Individuals and employers will be able to use the EQF to better understand and compare the qualifications levels of different countries and different education and training systems.
11. **Learning outcome** - Statements of what a learner is expected to know, understand and be able to do after successful completion of a process of learning.
12. **National Qualifications Framework (NQF)** - An instrument for the development and classification of qualifications (e.g. at national or sectoral level) according to a set of criteria (e.g. using descriptors) applicable to specified levels of learning outcomes.
13. **Professional recognition - *de facto*** - Refers to situations of unregulated recognition for professional purposes, such as where no national legal



authorisation to practice a particular profession exists or is required. This is the most problematic area of professional recognition.

14. **Professional recognition - *de jure*** - Refers to the recognition of the right to work in a specific country in a regulated profession (e.g. medical doctor) in the European Union or European Economic Area. These situations are subject to the European Union Directive 2005/36/EC whereby, if a citizen is a fully qualified professional in one Member State, he or she has the right to exercise that profession and be recognised as a professional in another Member State.
15. **Qualification** - Any degree, diploma or other certificate issued by a competent authority attesting to the successful completion of a recognised programme of study.
16. **Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA)** - The QF-EHEA is an overarching framework for qualifications in the European higher education area, comprising three cycles (including, within national contexts, the possibility of intermediate qualifications), generic descriptors for each cycle (Dublin Descriptors) based on learning outcomes and competences, and credit ranges in the first and second cycles. The overarching framework sets the parameters for each Bologna country to develop its own national framework. QF EHEA is also known as the Bologna Qualifications Framework.
17. **Quality assurance** - The process or set of processes adopted nationally and institutionally to ensure the quality of educational programmes and qualifications awarded.
18. **Recognition centres** - ENIC: European Network of Information Centres in the European Region. A network under the European Council and UNESCO. NARIC:

National Recognition Information Centres in the European Union. A network under the European Commission. Network of national centres providing information, advice and assessment of foreign qualifications. Created to help improve the academic recognition of international awards and facilitate the integration of national education systems.

**19. Regulated professions** - A profession is said to be regulated when access and exercise is subject to the possession of a specific professional qualification.

**20. Substantial Differences** - The term "substantial difference" clearly indicates that minor differences between qualifications do not provide sufficient reason for non-recognition. It takes into account the diversity of higher education systems and traditions and recognises that there are usually differences between corresponding qualifications in different education systems. Thus the existence of differences between qualifications alone does not provide sufficient reason for non-recognition.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. Is it possible to make an equivalence of a foreign qualification to Croatian one?

No. Recognition of foreign education qualifications in the Republic of Croatia, from July 1st 2004, is conducted in accordance with the Act on Recognition of Foreign Education Qualifications and should not be identified with the previous Act on equivalence of qualification, which ceased to apply upon entry into force of this Act.

2. Which foreign higher education qualifications can be recognized in Croatia?

It is possible to recognize each foreign qualification which is: considered as higher education qualification in country which issued it, obtained upon successful completion of a higher education programme and issued by a foreign competent authority which is recognised/accredited by a competent accrediting government body wherein the qualification is acquired.

3. What is accreditation of higher education institution and study programme?

Accreditation is a result of a review/evaluation of the education programme or institution which monitors realization of standards previously agreed upon. It can be defined as recognition of a programme or institution if it meets set standards. Most countries have established a system of formal evaluation of its higher education institutions, that is, the issuing of a license for a certain study programme. Considering the ever wider range of higher education institutions, the establishment of a great number of private higher education institutions in many countries and significant differences in laws and practice for evaluation and recognition of higher education institutions, qualifications cannot be suitably estimated unless the accreditor takes into account the institution that issued the qualification and whether that institution occupies a recognized position in the national higher education system.

In the Republic of Croatia, accreditation of a higher education institution implies that the institution is registered as a higher education institution and listed in Register of Higher Education Institutions. For a study programme to gain accreditation, the institution which organizes it needs a license for performing the study programme, issued by the competent accreditation government body. The license is a certificate which determines that a public scientific institute or a higher education institution meet the standards and terms for organization of a particular programme. In the Republic of Croatia, the competent accreditation body is the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports.

4. How can I find out if a higher education institution has accreditation?

In the Republic of Croatia, the Register of Higher Education Institutions is available on the web pages of the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports. It contains a list of all higher education institutions in the Republic of Croatia with accreditation, that is, a license to work issued by the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports. There are similar lists of higher education institutions abroad, of which some are available on the Internet while others are not. More information about a particular country can be found on the web pages of the ENIC/NARIC Network.

5. Is it necessary to recognize qualifications acquired in the area of former Yugoslavia?

The date of issue of a foreign higher education qualification is the deciding factor in whether recognition is necessary or not. All foreign higher education qualifications issued up to October 8, 1991 in educational systems of former Yugoslavian states are legally equal to higher education qualifications of educational institutions of the Republic of Croatia and are therefore not subject to recognition procedure.

#### 6. What does the recognition procedure consist of?

The recognition procedure comprises several steps. After receiving and processing the application, Croatian ENIC/NARIC Office sends the information on required supplement if the application is not complete. As soon as the application documentation is complete, the recognition procedure may commence. Croatian ENIC/NARIC Office examines the accreditation of institution wherein a foreign higher education qualification is acquired, accreditation of the study programme in question, authenticity of the foreign higher education qualification for which recognition is requested, and the entitlements and possibilities which the qualification ensures in the country of issue. Agency for Science and Higher Education makes a final decision and issues a Decision on Recognition of Foreign Higher Education Qualification.

#### 7. What is evaluation?

Evaluation is a procedure conducted within the recognition process which refers to the assessment of the level of an individual's higher education qualification, in accordance with the Criteria for evaluation of foreign higher education qualification.

#### 8. Is it possible to obtain a Croatian academic title in the process of recognition?

In accordance with the provisions of the Act on Recognition of Foreign Education Qualifications, professional and academic titles as well as academic degrees are not awarded in the process of professional recognition, but the value of a foreign education qualification is acknowledged formally for the purpose of accession to the labour market of the Republic of Croatia.

9. Does the Decision of the Agency give me the right to access the labour market or do I have to fulfil any additional requirements?

Decision of the Agency enables the access to the labour market; but if the fulfilment of additional requirements is requested for the purpose of employment in a specific profession (e.g. regulated professions as doctors, lawyers, etc.), the same are decided by the competent authorities for each profession.

10. What is the length of the procedure of recognition of foreign higher education qualifications?

Optimal length of the process of recognition is up to two months from the date of receipt of complete documentation.

11. Is it possible to obtain confirmation that I submitted documents for recognition?
- On your formal request, and if the application is complete, Croatian ENIC/NARIC Office will issue a formal confirmation that the process of recognition is in progress. If the application is incomplete, you will be informed in writing regarding the required supplementary documentation.

12. Can I get back my original documents, which were required for the recognition of higher education qualification?

At the end of the procedure, if you decide not to appeal the Decision on Recognition of Foreign Higher Education Qualification, you may submit written request by E-mail, Fax or Post for returning the original documents with the information of the address to which you want documents to be delivered.

13. Can I pay the administrative fee for recognition via the Internet?
- Yes. It is only important that all the required data for payment are visible (payer, purpose of payment). You can submit the payment printout as payment proof.

14. Do I have to recognise a lower education degree in order to obtain recognition of a higher degree?

Recognition of lower education degrees acquired abroad is not a requirement for recognition of a higher degree. For example, to recognize a Doctoral degree it is not necessary to have a Master's degree recognized in the Republic of Croatia.

15. I wish to have my Master's degree and Doctoral degree issued by a foreign institution recognized. Is it possible to submit one application for recognition of both qualifications?

No. Each foreign higher education qualification is recognized individually, meaning that for each qualification a separate application must be submitted and administrative fee paid. If you simultaneously submit more applications it is not necessary to submit documentation for each one separately, but you can refer to the documentation submitted in one application.

16. I finished studying in Croatia under the old programme and acquired the title of graduate economist. How can I acquire a new title in accordance with the titles acquired by completion of studies introduced by the so-called Bologna process?

In accordance with Article 14 of the Act on Academic and Professional Titles and Academic Degree and Article 120 of the Act on Scientific Activity and Higher Education, you are entitled to request that the institution which issued your qualification issues a confirmation of a new title which you can use.

17. I want to recognise my qualification obtained in the Republic of Croatia in a foreign country. Who do I need to address?

For information about recognition of Croatian qualifications abroad, we suggest that you address ENIC/NARIC Office in the country in which you wish to have your qualification

recognized, or the embassy of that country in Croatia, should one exist. Further information on whom to address for recognition of your qualification in a particular country may be found on the web pages of the ENIC/NARIC Network.



## ANNEXES

1. Application for the recognition of foreign higher qualification for the purpose of employment in Croatia - professional recognition
2. Application for the clarification of higher education qualification
3. Example 1 of applicant's file
4. Example 2 of applicant's file
5. Example 3 of applicant's file
6. Act on Ascertaining of the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region (Official Gazette, IT 9/2002 and 15/2002)
7. Act on Recognition of Foreign Educational Qualifications (Official Gazette, 158/2003, 198/2003)
8. Act on Amendments to the Act on Recognition of Foreign Education Qualifications (Official Gazette, 138/2006)
9. Act on Amendments to the Act on Recognition of Foreign Education Qualifications (Official Gazette, 45/2011)
10. Criteria for Evaluation of Foreign Higher Education Qualifications by the Agency for Science and Higher Education.

## CONTACTS



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