



Mapping recognition of foreign vocational qualifications

A presentation of the findings from a survey of recognition of vocational qualifications
in the ENIC-NARIC network

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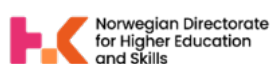


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1. Executive Summary

The Norwegian ENIC-NARIC centre has, since it added vocational qualifications to its portfolio of recognition services for foreign qualifications, frequently experienced that there are generally less resources containing information about vocational qualifications and systems of vocational education and training than there are about higher education. There is furthermore no dedicated network for organisations that work with recognition of foreign vocational qualifications to turn to in support.

The *Bridging a European Network for Recognition of Vocational Qualifications* (BRAVO) project was consequently started to investigate solutions to the abovementioned issues. The Norwegian ENIC-NARIC centre found project partners who were equally engaged with the topic in the Swedish ENIC-NARIC centre, which also has long experience with providing assessment services for foreign vocational qualifications, and ENIC-NARIC Lithuania who are in the process of making provisions to set up a service for recognition of foreign vocational qualifications due to increased demand.

The project's aim is to explore the need and possibility for a dedicated network for recognition of foreign vocational qualifications and discuss how such a network may operate and be organised. The project plan includes several targets to be achieved through various activities over a period of two years. These activities are:

- Map policies on recognition of vocational qualifications through desk research;
- Map which offices assess vocational qualifications today, or plan to do so in the future through a survey;
- Map practices on how vocational qualifications are assessed today through the survey;
- Facilitate best practice sharing on vocational recognition through workshops;
- Initiate discussions on the need and possibility for a network based on the results of a survey and output from the workshops;
- Submit recommendations in the second project report.

This report has been produced halfway through the BRAVO project and presents the results of a survey of the ENIC-NARIC network, and selected other recognition authorities, and their practices in the area of assessing foreign vocational qualifications. The results are presented together with the project team's own research to show the connections to European policies

on recognition and vocational education and training. The report provides a description of the results, which is designed to lay the foundations for further discussions, workshops and analysis leading to recommendations during the second half of the project.

Notable findings from the research and survey are summarised briefly below:

56% of organisations assess vocational qualifications at EQF level 4 and 56% say they assess EQF level 5 vocational qualifications from abroad.

ENIC-NARICs were established with the original purpose of recognising foreign higher education qualifications to assist with access to higher education study in another country. Several ENIC-NARICs have now extended their service to also include recognition services for foreign vocational qualifications according to our survey.

Only 2 of the ENIC-NARIC offices that don't assess vocational qualifications are currently considering adding a service for recognition of foreign vocational qualifications.

One of the reasons this is not on the agenda for many ENIC-NARICs is that there are other authorities responsible for this service in their countries. A central source with links to these responsible authorities does not appear to exist.

Recognition schemes for foreign vocational qualifications are mainly used in the process of gaining access to employment

The survey respondents report that the use of their schemes for recognition of foreign vocational qualifications are threefold and facilitate access to the labour market (86%), improve chances for employment (76%) but also help when applying for further study (76%).

More than half of the respondents who assess foreign vocational qualifications do not directly collaborate with relevant stakeholders.

Stakeholder collaboration is mentioned in the ENIC-NARIC Charter, but this Charter doesn't cover vocational qualifications. Organisations with stakes in vocational qualifications are also not necessarily the same as those in the higher education sector. Cooperation methods for those who do collaborate with stakeholders include involvement in the recognition process (60%) and procedure development (30%), in addition to raising awareness, developing national-level policies, and collaborating with educational institutions for compensatory measures.

As many as 80% of the respondents apply the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention also when assessing vocational qualifications.

The Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC) has been ratified by 55 European and non-European countries to ensure that recognition procedures adhere to certain commonly agreed principles for increased fairness and transparency. The LRC is specifically designed to apply to higher education qualifications within the European Higher Education Area and no similar agreement exists for vocational qualifications. It is therefore interesting that a high number of respondents experience that the LRC principles can be transferred to assessment of vocational qualifications.

Most offices apply the same recognition criteria for assessing vocational qualifications as for higher education.

While the LRC sets out some general principles for how the ENIC-NARICs should operate, each country and recognition authority determine their own specific criteria for recognition of foreign qualifications. Different criteria and types of recognition services therefore exist within the network, but it seems that the criteria often can be reused for different types of qualifications.

Little information sharing of recognition statements of foreign vocational qualifications.

One of the benefits of the ENIC-NARIC network is that the member organisations share information about their education system and assessment of foreign qualifications with each other through specific requests and written, public material. However, only 26% of the survey respondents maintain a publicly available database of statements for recognition of foreign vocational qualifications.

2/3 of the respondents are positive to joining a network for recognition of vocational qualifications.

One of the reasons for instigating the BRAVO project was a lack of a dedicated network concentrating on recognition of foreign vocational qualifications. It is encouraging to hear that there is an interest in taking part in such a network.

2. Introduction

Bridging a European Network for Recognition of Vocational Qualifications (BRAVO) is a cooperation project by the NARIC-offices in Norway, Sweden and Lithuania, co-funded by the European Commission. The project focuses on mapping recognition practices internationally and exploring the possibilities for an international network for recognition of foreign vocational qualifications, primarily focused on EQF levels 4 and 5.

2.1. Project Consortium

The project consortium consists of ENIC-NARIC Norway, ENIC-NARIC Sweden and ENIC-NARIC Lithuania.

The Norwegian ENIC-NARIC office has been working with recognition of vocational education and training since 2016, and with tertiary vocational qualifications since 2019. Both recognition schemes are developed in close relationship with the social partners. The Norwegian ENIC-NARIC office was formerly a part of NOKUT but was moved to the Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Skills (HK-dir) in 2023. The tasks and mandates remain the same.

The Swedish ENIC-NARIC office has many years of experience of assessing all types of qualifications on all levels. They issue an advisory statement, which is a comparison to the closest qualification or education level in the Swedish education system. The statement is not legally binding, but is meant to facilitate access to the Swedish labour market.

The Lithuanian ENIC-NARIC office does not have the authority to recognise vocational qualifications as of yet. Legislative reforms are being carried out and plans are being made to be able to recognise vocational qualifications soon. There is currently increasing demand for recognition of vocational qualifications, which is why these processes were initiated. The methodology is being developed and pilot evaluations are being conducted.

2.2. The ENIC-NARIC networks: recognition of foreign qualifications

The ENIC (European Network of Information Centres in the European Region) and NARIC (National Academic Recognition Information Centres in the European Union) networks are participating in an ongoing collaboration between the national information centres on

academic recognition of qualifications of in total 55 countries. Many organisations are involved in recognition of foreign qualifications, from universities and colleges to chambers of trade and professional organisations, but in the 55 ENIC-NARIC countries there are dedicated centres in each country that are responsible for recognition of foreign qualifications or for coordination of this service. The centres collaborate with national stakeholders and operate in accordance with national regulations and demand but have agreed to apply a common set of principles for recognition of foreign qualifications as per the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC).

The ENIC and NARIC network are two different networks with similar mandates and that work closely together. The status and mandate of the ENIC centres should abide by LRC provisions and facilitate access to authoritative and accurate information on the higher education system and qualifications of the country in which it is located. ENIC centres should also facilitate access to information on the higher education systems and qualifications of other countries and give advice or information on recognition matters and assessment of qualifications, in accordance with national laws and regulations. ENIC centres can also be mandated to evaluate qualifications held by individuals, and thus issue recognition advice or legally binding recognition decisions. The ENIC Network was established in 1994. The network upholds and assists with the practical LRC implementation by competent national authorities, serves as a multilateral cooperation mechanism within the UNESCO Europe and North America region, and links with other UNESCO regions.

The NARIC Network was established in 1984 with the European Commission as secretariat. The NARIC Network has a similar mandate to the ENIC Network, but in the context of the European Union. Erasmus+ Programme countries from outside the European Union are also eligible to appoint a NARIC centre. A NARIC centre can also be an ENIC centre, which is generally the case. There are 34 centres, known as ENIC-NARICs, and all are eligible to take part in all Actions of the Erasmus+ Programme.

2.3. The BRAVO project and its aim

When the recognition schemes for foreign vocational qualifications on EQF levels 4 and 5 were established in Norway, the Norwegian ENIC-NARIC office often experienced challenges accessing the information needed to assess these types of qualifications. When dealing with a Bachelor- or Master's degree, one can always find best practices in the EAR manual, guidance in the LRC and now also in the Global Convention. There is also the

possibility of reaching out to the ENIC-NARIC network for advice. But when it came to assessing vocational qualifications, there was far less such support. Therefore, the motivation for the BRAVO project was a perceived need for better international cooperation on recognition of vocational qualifications, both in terms of information on educational systems and on recognition practices.

The aim of the BRAVO project is to explore the need and the possibility for a network for recognition of vocational qualifications, and what form such a network should take. As part of this exploration, the project aims to map policies on recognition of vocational qualifications through desk research, and to map practices on how vocational qualifications are assessed today through a survey. These findings will create the base for this report. The project will also facilitate best practice sharing on vocational recognition through workshops. Based on the results from the survey and output from the workshops, the project will initiate discussions on the need and possibility for a network and submit recommendations in the second project report.

2.4. Desk Research

One of the first project activities was the desk research, where policies on recognition of vocational qualifications were mapped. The research is structured around the following key aspects: relevant policy developments, international agreements, tools for recognition and European organisations and networks. It also discusses varying definitions of vocational qualifications.

As this report will show, the policy framework concerning recognition of vocational qualifications is characterised by non-binding agreements and recommendations, initially aimed at developing and promoting access to high quality vocational qualifications in the EU (and other parts of Europe). In recent years, however, more emphasis has shifted towards mobility and recognition. Although we have seen major developments in terms of tools and resources for comparing qualifications, such as the EQF (European Qualifications Framework), they are still voluntary to use and provide little guidance for the actual recognition of foreign vocational qualifications.

Even voluntary cooperation and the sharing of best practices in recognition face challenges, due to the diverse nature of the organisation of vocational qualifications between countries, as well as the various meanings and definitions applied to the concept of vocational

qualifications. These challenges need not be a hindrance to further development of recognition of vocational qualifications but may rather be seen as aspects to be aware of while seeking further transferability of vocational qualifications across borders.

2.5. The BRAVO Survey

While the desk research was conducted, the project team also designed the BRAVO survey. The survey intended to map which ENIC-NARIC offices work with recognition of vocational qualifications, and how their recognition schemes for vocational qualifications are organised. The offices who do not assess vocational qualifications, were asked whether they knew of other such authorities in their countries, and whether their offices are considering extending their current recognition schemes to include vocational qualifications. Finally, the survey asked whether offices would be interested in taking part in an international network for recognition of vocational qualifications.

The survey was sent to the 55 ENIC-NARIC offices and other relevant stakeholders and was closed for responses 01 July 2023. There were 30 respondents to the survey. As many offices did not respond to the survey, they were followed up with a shorter questionnaire later on. The findings from the desk research, the BRAVO survey, and the short questionnaire will be presented in the following chapters.

3. Recognition practices of foreign vocational qualifications

The BRAVO project team wanted to map existing recognition practices relating to foreign vocational qualifications as one of the initial activities of the project. The survey was distributed to the ENIC-NARIC network in May 2023, and stayed open until the 1st of July. The aim of the survey was to identify relevant recognition offices and stakeholders who are working with, or are planning to work with, recognition of vocational qualifications. The findings from the survey are used to describe recognition of vocational qualifications today in this project report and will be used to explore the need and possibility for a network for recognition of vocational qualifications.

3.1. Survey Respondents

By the time the survey was closed for entries, 30 NARIC offices had completed the BRAVO survey:

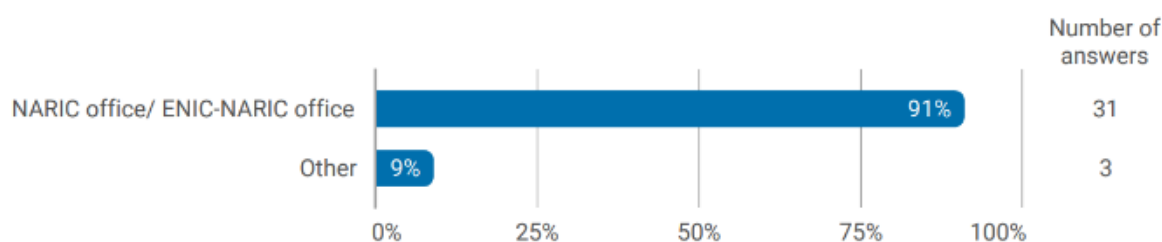
Figure 1: Survey respondents



In addition, two offices have filled in most of the answers without completing the survey. A few non-ENIC-NARIC organisations who work with vocational qualifications also filled in the survey.

The invitation to respond to the survey was initially exclusively sent to member organisations in the ENIC-NARIC network, but the invitation was later extended to other recognition authorities after suggestions from some of the ENIC-NARIC offices of other relevant authorities to extend the survey to. The survey responses came, as a consequence, mainly from ENIC-NARIC offices, but four respondents were not a member of this network with Greece as an example. This means that some countries have replied to the survey twice through two different organisations.

Figure 2: Type of office

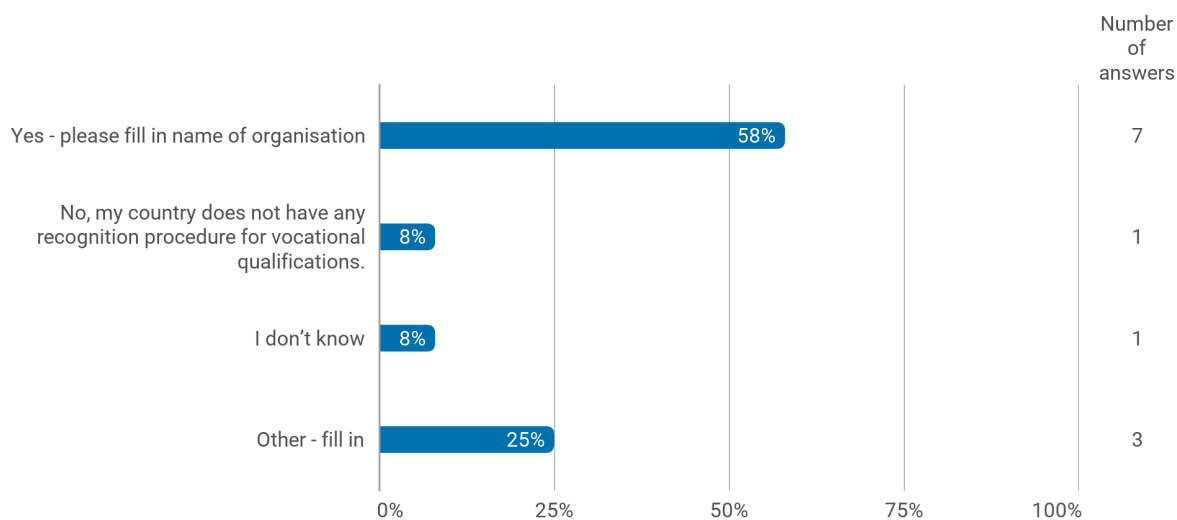


Survey responses identified further authorities who have not taken part in the survey, ranging from professional branch organisations to national ministries, who are responsible for recognition of vocational qualifications outside of the ENIC-NARIC network. More than half of the offices which do not offer a recognition service for foreign vocational qualifications explained that another authority was responsible for this. In some countries the service was decentralised. This shows that vocational recognition also occurs outside of the network.

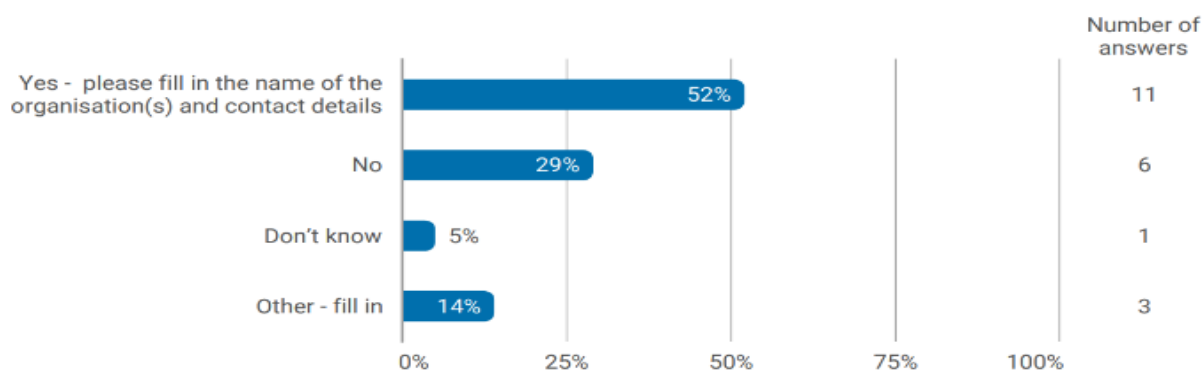
Figure 3 and 4: Other organisations responsible for recognition of foreign vocational qualifications

The question was asked both to offices who do assess vocational qualifications and to offices who do not. Therefore, there are two separate graphs.

Offices who do not assess vocational qualifications provided these responses regarding whether any other national authorities work with recognition of vocational qualifications:

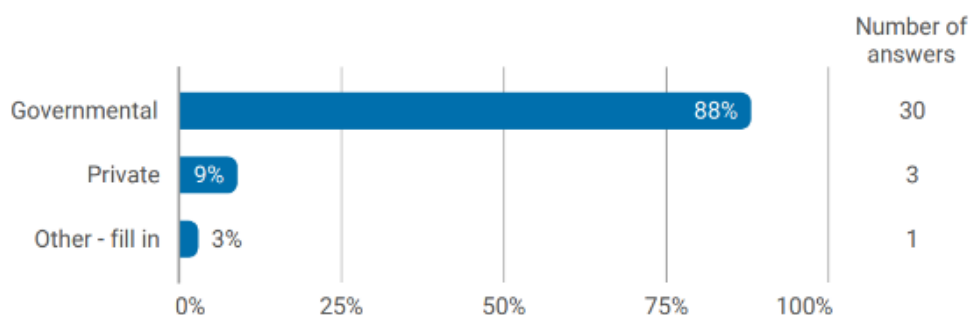


Offices who do assess vocational qualification provided these responses on the question of whether there are any other national authorities that are working with recognition of vocational qualifications:



Close to 90% of the respondents reported to be parts of governmental organisations, but the ENIC-NARIC network also includes private organisations.

Figure 5: Type of organisation



3.2. The challenge of defining vocational qualifications

When looking at the educational landscape in Europe, we find various definitions and limitations of vocational qualifications, depending on the context. The question of defining vocational qualifications therefore requires a short review in order to understand the focus of the BRAVO project and to highlight the different terms used to describe vocational qualifications, as well as mentioning that variations exist in the provision of vocational qualifications. Different understandings of the term vocational qualifications may have influenced how the survey questions were answered by the different respondents.

The general term vocational qualifications is in this report used as a collective term for all vocational education, training and qualifications, although the project's focus is singled in on EQF level 4 and 5 qualifications. Therefore, when referring to more specific types or levels of education, this is specified through the use of other terms.

The concept of Vocational Education and Training (VET) is used in a wide range of settings at the EU/European, national, and regional levels. The term VET has, in the past decades of policy development in the field of education, mainly been used in the sense of a tool or strategy for reducing unemployment and promoting lifelong learning, rather than in the sense of defining a specific form of education. At the same time, national VET systems have proven to be very diverse, often tied to national and local context.

In 2020, the Council adopted a definition of VET (initially introduced by Cedefop in 2014), stating that “*vocational education and training is to be understood as the education and training which aims to equip young people and adults with knowledge, skills and competences required in particular occupations or more broadly on the labour market*”. It may be provided in formal and in non-formal settings, at all levels of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), including tertiary level, if applicable (Council Recommendation 2020/C 417/01).

Furthermore, the terms initial VET (IVET) and continuing VET (CVET) are commonly used to define different types of vocational education and training. According to the distinction made by the European Commission, IVET is usually carried out at upper secondary level and post-secondary level before students begin working life, while CVET takes place after initial education and training or after beginning working life. The term VET may also be used interchangeably with Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) (European Commission, 2023). For example, TVET is the term used by UNESCO to define vocational

education, training and skills development taking place at secondary, post-secondary and tertiary levels (UNESCO, 2015).

There is no generally adopted definition of VET for the purpose of recognising foreign qualifications. It also remains difficult to make a clear distinction between vocational qualifications at the higher levels and professional higher education. For example, the Convention on the recognition of qualifications concerning higher education in the European Union (Treaty No. 165, also called the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC)) defines the term Higher education as *“All types of courses of study, or sets of courses of study, training or training for research at the post-secondary level which are recognised by the relevant authorities of a Party as belonging to its higher education system”* (Article I). This means that forms of education typically described as “post-secondary vocational education, Technical and Vocational Education and Training” (TVET) or “higher vocational education and training” (HVET) may, or may not, belong to a country’s higher education system.

This issue of defining VET, and particularly post-secondary/higher VET (HVET), was raised by the European Commission in a study published in 2016. Given the great variation of HVET programmes and qualifications in the Member States, the study proposed two approaches and definitions. The broader definition of higher VET covers all vocational qualifications at EQF level 5 and above, including those covered by the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), while the narrower definition only covers those vocational qualifications that are fully outside the EHEA and the scope of the LRC (European Commission, 2016).

The link between VET and HE (higher education), and particularly short cycle in higher education (SCHE), was also closely examined by the European Commission supported project Level 5-The Missing Link (EURASHE, 2011). The study focused on the diversity of qualifications at EQF level 5 and concluded that, while in most countries level 5 programmes are SCHE, some countries offered level 5 education and training (of a professional nature) that was not considered to be SCHE.

The challenges in defining VET for the purpose of recognition are not limited to HVET. At the EQF levels 3-4, the term VET sometimes includes both upper secondary vocational education as well as all other forms of formal and non-formal vocational education and training, for example adult education and CVET. At EQF level 4, there may be qualifications of purely vocational nature as well as qualifications combining access to higher education

with a vocational orientation, the latter being prevalent in the Western Balkans for example. In other countries, VET only refers to qualifications awarded in a sector separated from the regular upper secondary vocational programmes.

Finally, the variety of definitions and the, sometimes, blurred distinctions between VET and higher education, mirror not only the variety of vocational education systems but also the growing practices of creating flexible learning pathways, including bridges between vocational qualifications and higher education, as outlined in a recent UNESCO-IIEP study (UNESCO-IIEP, 2022). Improved permeability of vocational qualifications is seen as one way of increasing its attractiveness. However, Member States have different policies on permeability between sectors and access to higher education. While some countries offer different types of bridging programmes, educational systems in other countries provide less flexibility.

The scope of the project

The BRAVO project has limited its scope to formal vocational qualifications at EQF levels 4 and 5, outside the area of higher education. When referring to vocational qualifications, the report will use the following terms:

- Vocational qualifications – all vocational qualifications
- Vocational upper secondary education - EQF level 4
- Vocational post-secondary education - EQF level 5
- The report will also refer directly to the EQF levels

The various definitions and different interpretation of vocational qualifications as explained above, may have resulted in a slightly different understanding of how to answer the questions in the survey that the BRAVO project distributed to the ENIC-NARIC network. The analysis of the results does, despite this, indicate that the trends shown are likely to be largely correct and representative of the network members' assessment of foreign vocational qualifications.

The BRAVO survey did not seek to investigate the practise of recognising regulated professions. In fact, regulated professions in the EU are already subjected to “de jure recognition” under the Professional Qualifications Directive 2005/36/EC. However, it is evident that the respondents to the survey are to a certain extent involved in the process of giving access to regulated professions in their countries. For that reason, it proves

challenging to make a clear distinction between recognition of vocational qualifications in general, and recognition of vocational qualifications in terms of practicing a regulated profession. Content-based assessment can be used for access to a specific profession, but not necessarily meaning that the profession is regulated by law or under the Directive 2005/36/EC. In some cases, the ENIC-NARIC office offers a binding or non-binding level assessment of a qualification that prepares for work within a regulated profession, even though the professional qualification is recognised by a separate competent authority.

To find some common ground and a starting point for sharing best practises, the BRAVO project has limited its scope to recognition practices primarily aimed at giving access to the non-regulated labour market. This enables the project to investigate the diversity of recognition schemes whilst taking into consideration the discrepancies between EU member states regarding which professions are regulated and how.

3.3. Recognition of foreign vocational qualifications

The ENIC-NARIC networks were originally established to assist with mobility and specifically with recognition of higher education study and admission to higher education, but there are also ENIC-NARIC members and other organisations that provide assessment of vocational qualifications for further study and work purposes. There is, however, a lack of a central source of information about which organisations provide assessment of foreign vocational qualifications. At the start of the survey, the BRAVO project was therefore interested in finding out which, or how many, recognition offices assess vocational qualifications. This information will be useful for individual applicants, employers, and other organisations, but also for fellow recognition offices that could benefit from information sharing and capacity building within a network.

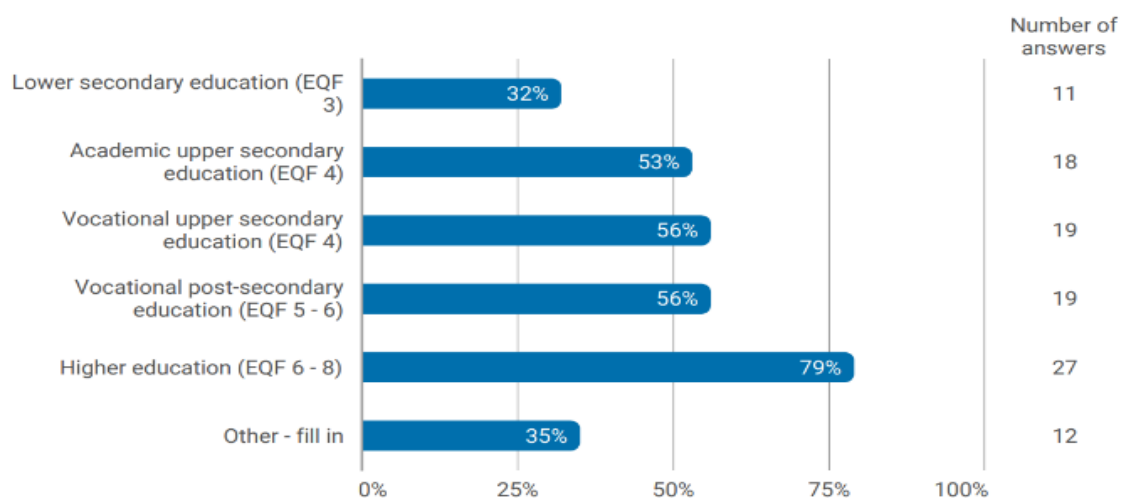
The map below shows whether the ENIC-NARIC offices that responded to the survey assess foreign vocational qualifications or whether it is assessed by another authority. This is a simplified overview of the countries that responded, which doesn't show where there is more than one organisation responsible for assessment of foreign vocational qualifications, as in Germany where multiple authorities perform this function.

Figure 6: Recognition of foreign vocational qualifications



Out of the respondents, 56% answered that they assess vocational upper secondary education, and 56% answered that they assess vocational post-secondary education. In comparison, 79% of the respondents assess higher education qualifications.

Figure 7: Recognition of foreign vocational qualifications at education level



The map below shows the distribution of the same information across the countries that responded to the survey.

Figure 8: Recognition of foreign vocational qualifications at education level by country



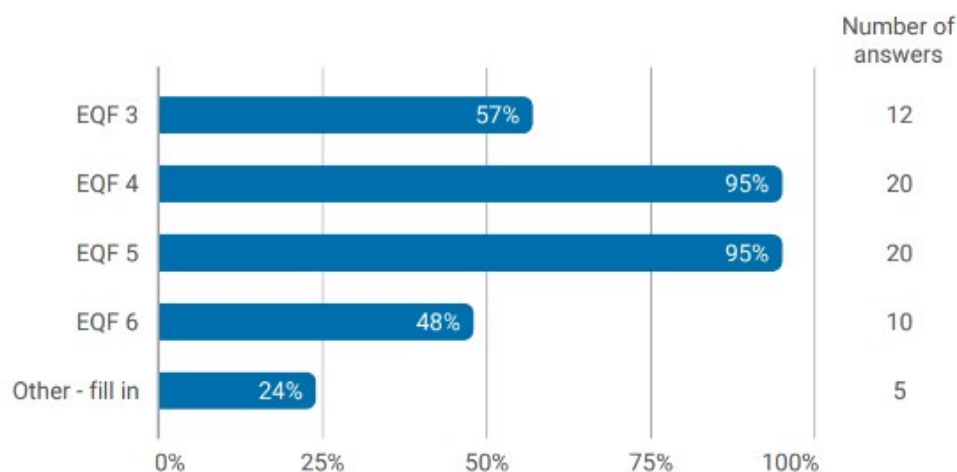
This division into education levels inevitably posed a challenge to the respondents, as EQF levels are not applicable in every country, and the graph below indicates EQF level 5 as post-secondary vocational education. As discussed in the previous chapter, higher education at EQF level 5 may also be defined as “vocational education”, depending on the education system and recognition scheme. Therefore, the survey recipients were asked to select both options for these types of qualifications, in order to receive the relevant questions later in the survey.

A total of 12 offices (35%) chose to answer “other” in order to explain further. Three of them clarified that they only assess EQF level 5 when they assess higher education qualifications (short cycle). One office stated that they provide advisory statements only at all levels of the EQF (1-8), and a few offices reported that they assess vocational qualifications from EQF level 2 and upwards. The “other” category also includes offices that only issue

recommendations for other competent recognition authorities or has a purely advisory role related to academic recognition.

Out of the offices that do have recognition schemes for vocational qualifications, 95% assess vocational qualifications at EQF level 4 and 95% assess vocational qualifications at level 5. The graph shows that vocational qualifications at other EQF levels are also assessed by some offices. When focusing on the EQF levels only, as in this question, the result does not specify the precise education level being assessed, be it secondary, post-secondary or higher education. As discussed in the previous chapter, it should be kept in mind that the category “vocational education” may be defined differently by the respondents. For example, a broader definition of “higher VET” covers all professional qualifications at EQF level 5 and above, including higher education.

Figure 9: Recognition of foreign vocational qualifications at EQF levels

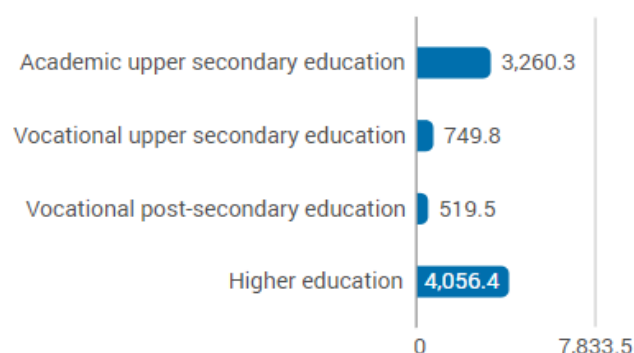


Regardless of the education level, the graph still clearly demonstrates that almost all offices that are assessing vocational qualifications are familiar with the EQF levels 4 and 5. The reason for asking about benchmark levels is that recognition procedures may also include the assessment of non-referenced foreign qualifications. These qualifications might be compared to EQF referenced qualifications in the country where the assessment is made.

The recipients of the survey were asked to provide statistics of applications of recognition of foreign vocational qualifications to give an indication of the number of applicants who apply for recognition, and to show the numbers compared to applications of recognition of academic qualifications. Notably some respondents did not provide these numbers, as they

do not have these statistics or access to these statistics. The respondents that did respond to this question are represented in the graph below (15 – 17 respondents on each level).

Figure 10: Number of requests for recognition of academic qualifications vs. vocational qualifications



3.4. Follow-up questionnaire to non-respondents

Some ENIC-NARIC offices did not respond to the survey before it was closed. The BRAVO team decided to follow up these non-respondents by sending them a short version of the survey in the shape of an e-mail, hoping that this would contribute to making the information about offices who assess vocational qualifications more complete. The responses to this simplified survey have not been included in the graphs and statistics of the report, but a short summary of the responses is inserted below.

The following two questions were sent to ENIC-NARIC offices:

1) *Is your office responsible for assessing vocational qualifications (and at which EQF levels)? (NB! we are only asking about vocational qualifications that are not regulated professions)*

- *If yes, what kind of recognition procedure do you have (e.g. general assessment of scope and level or assessment of the content?)*
- *If no, who, is any other organization in charge of recognition of vocational qualifications in your country?*

2) *Would your office be interested in being a part of a network on vocational qualifications?*

- *If yes, what benefits do you see in such a network?*
- *If no, please elaborate on the reason?*

Answers to this e-mail were received from 13 ENIC-NARIC offices plus two other responsible authorities for recognition of foreign vocational education in Portugal and Switzerland. Seven ENIC-NARIC offices answered that they offer recognition services for foreign vocational qualifications and six offices do not as they are not the responsible authority to do so. A couple of the offices referred to the responsible authorities for vocational qualification recognition in the respective countries. The authority responsible for recognition of VET in Portugal is ANQEP (National Agency for Qualification and Vocational Education and Training) and in Switzerland it is SERI (State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation), and neither of these are ENIC-NARIC offices. Their answers are also included in the *table 1* below.

Of the six offices that are not responsible for recognition of vocational qualifications, three (Bulgaria, Cyprus, Slovakia) advised that there is no authority in their country for recognition of foreign vocational qualifications.

As can be seen in *table 1*, a larger number of the offices who assess vocational qualifications provide general assessment of scope and level rather than a content assessment. The EQF levels that the recognition services cover vary, and some answers did not indicate an EQF level.

Regarding the respondents' interest in being part of a network, only three out of 15 organisations responded positively. The remaining respondents either did not answer the question or did not see benefits of being part of such a network, because they are not involved with recognition of vocational qualifications.

Table 1: Responses to the simplified survey

Country	Responsible for assessing vocational qualifications	EQF level	Type of the recognition procedure
Albania	Yes	Level 5	Did not answer
Armenia	Yes	Level 4-5	General assessment
Bulgaria	No	-	-
Canada	No	-	-
Cyprus	No	-	-
Macedonia	Yes	Did not answer	Did not answer

Malta		Yes	Level 1-5	General assessment
New Zealand		Yes	Did not answer	General assessment
Portugal	ENIC-NARIC	No	-	-
	ANQEP	Yes	Did not answer	Both, general and content assessment
Slovakia		No	-	-
Slovenia		Yes	All levels	General assessment
Switzerland	ENIC-NARIC	No	-	-
	SERI	Yes	Level 3-8	General assessment
Ukraine		Yes	All levels	General assessment

3.5. Policy framework developments

The present-day EU policy framework on vocational qualifications is mainly defined by the Osnabrück Declaration (2020), the renewed “European Skills Agenda” (2020), as well as the 2020 Council Recommendation on vocational education and training (VET) (2020/C 417/01). The European Skills Agenda is a five-year plan, which includes ensuring social fairness of access to education, training, and learning. In the Osnabrück Declaration, the Ministers have agreed on new policy actions on vocational qualifications for the period 2021-2025. These actions were set out to complement and operationalise the visions and objectives in the 2020 Council Recommendations. In addition, the European Commission has recently outlined the “European Education Area” (COM (2020) 625) - based on six dimensions; quality of education and training, inclusion, green and digital transitions, teachers and trainers, higher education, and the geopolitical dimension. The European Education Area is designed to allow learners to move between countries in the EU/EEA.

Historically, vocational training is mentioned already in the Treaty of Rome in 1957, establishing the European Economic Community (EEC). It is also important to mention the EEC Council Decision of 2 April 1963, laying down general principles for implementing a common vocational training policy. The eighth principle of the decision emphasised that “...*harmonisation of the standards required for success in final examinations should be sought, with a view to the mutual recognition of certificates and other documents confirming completion of vocation training*” (63/266/EEC). It is the Maastricht Treaty, officially establishing the European Union in 1993, that first recognised education (as such) as an EU area of competence and cooperation between Member States (Education and Vocational Training, 2022). In 2000, the EU embarked on the Lisbon Strategy in which education and training were identified to play key roles in the development of the European labour market.

EU's role in promoting education and training is later expressed in the Lisbon Treaty in 2009, that came into force along with the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (CFR). The CFR not only articulated the right to education, but also to having access to continuing and vocational training (Article 14). The concept of Vocational Education and Training (VET) was more widely introduced in the “Copenhagen Process”, initiated as an integrated part of the Lisbon strategy. The process aimed at enhancing cooperation in the field of vocational qualifications between Member States, candidate countries, EFTA/EEA countries and European Social partners. The first agreement, The Copenhagen Declaration (2002) responded to a request to take similar steps to those taken under the Bologna declaration in higher education (1999). In addition to promoting access to high quality vocational education, the Declaration also addressed the need for transferability and recognition of vocational qualifications for the purpose of supporting mobility of European citizens. The Copenhagen Process evolved through further agreements such as The Helsinki Communiqué (2006), The Bruges Communiqué (2010), the Riga Conclusions (2015) and finally the Osnabrück Declaration (2020). One of the European Pillars of Social Rights (2020) gives everyone the right to education, training and life-long learning in order to maintain and acquire skills that enable them to participate fully in society and manage successfully transitions in the labour market.

On the topic of EU policies for recognition, the Council also adopted non-binding recommendations in 2018, promoting “automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad” (2018/C 444/01). Actions related to this are implemented in approximately half of EU countries with more work in progress. The Council is hoping for full implementation in 2025.

In Europe and all over the world, there is also an increasing interest in shorter forms of learning opportunities such as micro-credentials. The rapid development of micro-credentials has been addressed by the EU in different ways. For example, there is a common definition that encompasses both higher education and vocational education, including non-formal providers (Micro-credentials brochure 2021). In addition, the Council has recently adopted a Recommendation on a “European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability”, that also aims at supporting recognition (2021/0402).

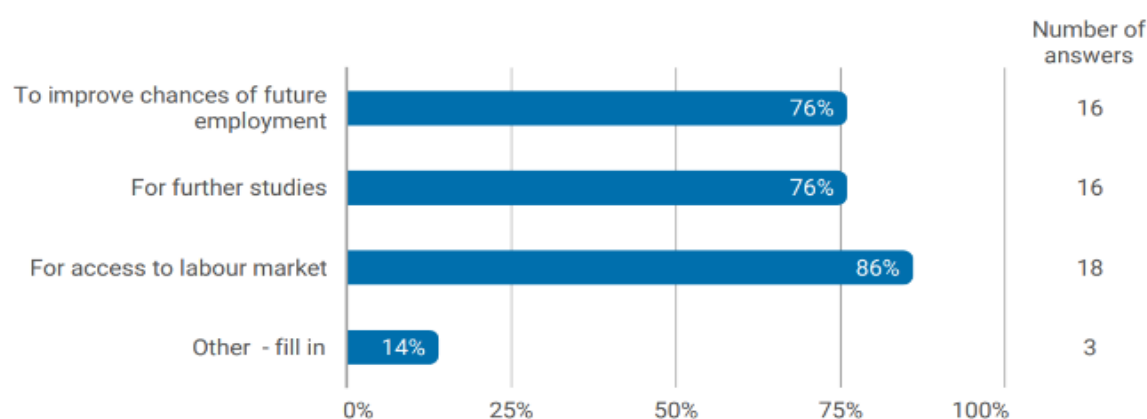
3.6. Purpose and added value of recognition schemes

Recognition of foreign qualifications is an important step in the learning mobility process that some of these EU policies cover. Permeability to further study is a recommendation in EU policy, but vocational qualification policies mainly focus on developing the skills needed in the labour market. NARIC centres have investigated how ENIC-NARIC centres' services have changed to serve a larger target audience, also directed towards the labour market, than what is described in the original Charter (CHARONA I and II, 2016). The BRAVO survey collected information related to the recognition schemes and stakeholder involvement in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of their purpose, value and impact.

Questions below aim to explore how recognition schemes can be improved and optimised to better support individuals with foreign vocational qualifications seeking work or further study opportunities. By evaluating the effectiveness of vocational recognition schemes and identifying areas for improvement, the BRAVO project also seeks to enhance the outcomes and experiences of individuals who go through the recognition process. The findings from answers about the evaluation of recognition schemes can benefit from further discussions of how development of policies and practices can promote mutual trust, collaboration, and effective stakeholder engagement.

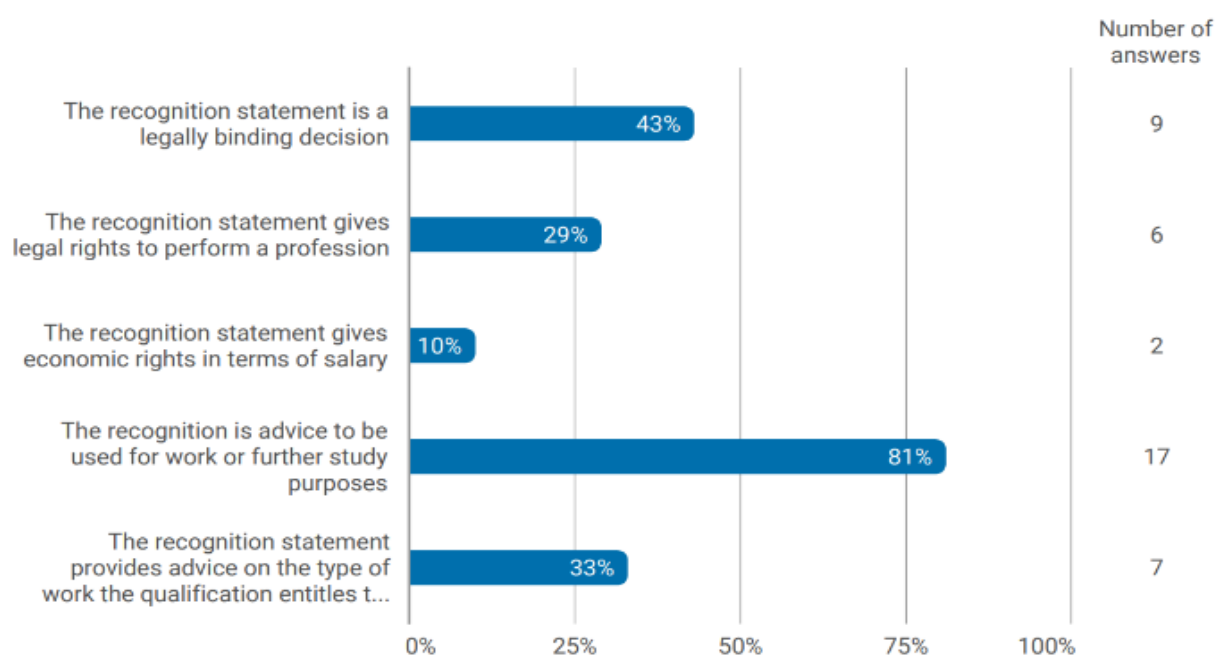
The BRAVO team wanted to know what the primary purposes of the various vocational recognition schemes are and which groups of applicants they aim to serve. The figure below tells us that the respondents believe that the schemes for recognition of foreign vocational qualifications to a large extent facilitate access to the labour market (86%), improve chances for employment (76%) and help when applying for further study (76%).

Figure 11: What the recognition schemes are useful / necessary for



Recognition schemes encompass, according to the survey responses, a broad spectrum of purposes and values. They primarily provide guidance for work and further study, serve as legally binding decisions for many, grant legal rights for professional practice, and offer career- or other advice. The responses under show the diverse impacts of recognition schemes.

Figure 12: The added value of the recognition schemes



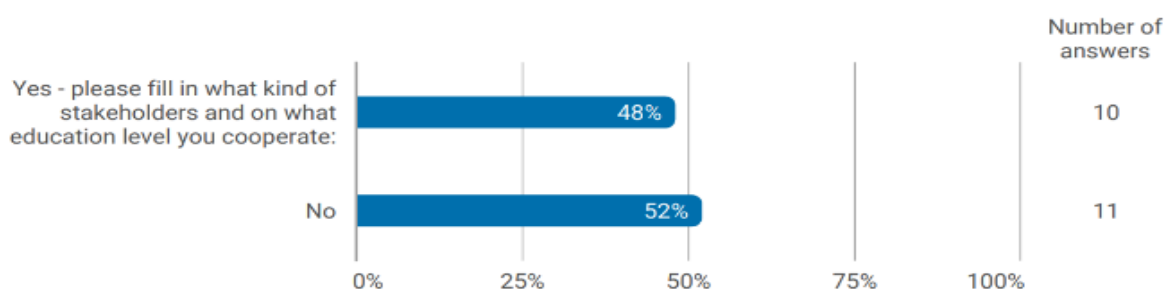
The added value of recognition schemes and decisions is primarily in providing advice for work or further study purposes, with 81% (17) of responses emphasising this aspect. Additionally, 43% (9) of the respondents state that recognition as a legally binding decision, while 29% (6) answer that recognition statements are granting legal rights to perform a profession and providing advice on the type of work a qualification entitles the holder to pursue. Only 10% (2) of the respondents, consider recognition statements to have implications for economic rights such as salary.

Stakeholder involvement in recognition schemes

The ENIC-NARIC Charter includes collaboration with stakeholders, but this Charter does not extend to vocational qualifications. The BRAVO project is therefore interested in discovering how recognition authorities collaborate with stakeholders in relation to recognition of vocational qualifications. Half of the respondents (52%) do not collaborate with other

stakeholders in their recognition assessments or recognition procedures, whereas the other half (48%) do, indicating a diversity of partnerships involved in the recognition processes.

Figure 13: Cooperation with stakeholders on assessment and recognition procedures

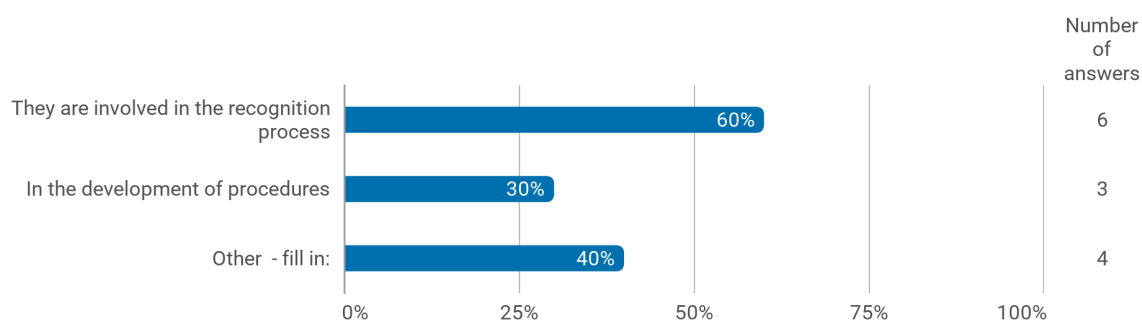


Some of the relevant collaboration stakeholders that were identified are healthcare organisations, the ENIC-NARIC network, the Ministry of Health, labour organisations, compensatory measures in partnership with educational institutions, regulated professions placed at EQF levels 5, 6 and 7, academic and professional purposes, employer involvement, expert opinions at EQF level 4, and recognition recommendations from competent authorities.

Recognition authorities cooperate with stakeholders in various ways when it comes to the recognition process. Involvement in the recognition process is the primary form of cooperation, with 60% of respondents selecting this option. Another significant aspect of cooperation is in the development of the recognition procedures, chosen by 30% of respondents. Additionally, 40% of respondents provided other responses, including:

- Raising awareness of the recognition scheme;
- Issuing recognition decisions based on recommendations;
- Engaging with stakeholders at the national level, involving industry and representative bodies in policy development related to standards and recognition;
- Collaborating with educational institutions to implement compensatory measures as part of the recognition process.

Figure 14: Ways to cooperate with stakeholders



These findings reflect a wide range of stakeholder engagement approaches and highlight the varying nature of recognition procedures across organisations.

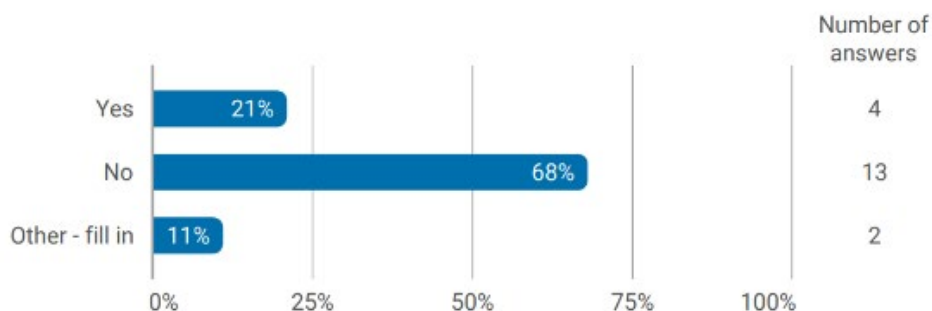
Evaluation of vocational recognition schemes

The respondents have indicated that an assessment of foreign qualifications adds value for individuals, employers, and for the society where the qualification is recognised. In the EU context, learning opportunities and mobility, including recognition of qualifications, were identified as some of the main areas for improvement during the European Year of Skills 2023 (European Commission, 2023). As for recognition of vocational qualifications, this report confirms that the conditions and possibilities for assessing these qualifications vary from country to country, depending on the mandates given by governments and national legislation. In some cases, vocational recognition procedures are still under development or limited to certain qualifications. Given these circumstances, it proves helpful to share experiences from different contexts and learn from evaluations of recognition procedures. The ENIC-NARIC network has developed a voluntary peer review concept for recognition of higher education qualifications to improve compliance with the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC) (“Standard and Guidelines Protocol”, 2019). Since 2012, more than half of the ENIC-NARIC centres have participated in this quality assurance project, which involves both a self-evaluation and an external peer-review. To some extent, when the recognition procedures are integrated, this also applies to vocational qualifications. There is, however, no comparable instrument for evaluation of recognition procedures for vocational qualifications.

The quality of assessment and the service provided to the applicant are important aspects of recognition schemes. Another important aspect is the impact that recognition has on the labour market.

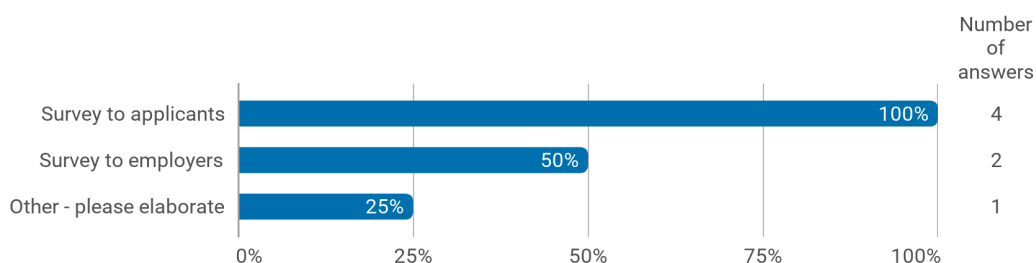
The survey investigated whether the effects of vocational recognition schemes had been evaluated externally and/ or internally.

Figure 15: Have the effects of the recognition schemes been evaluated?



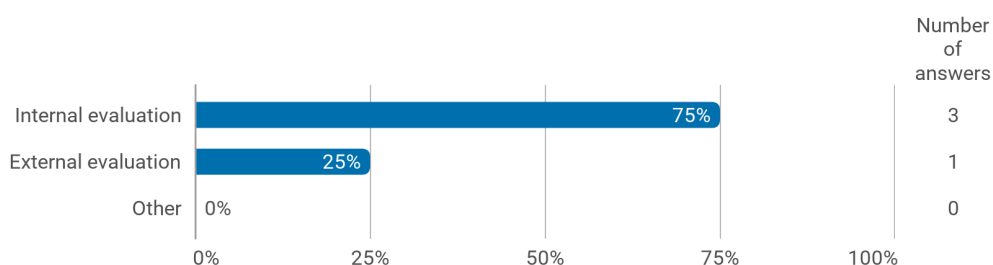
Four out of nineteen respondents answered that they had conducted some type of evaluation of their vocational recognition scheme. One ENIC-NARIC office explained that while they had not made an actual evaluation, recognition of foreign professional qualifications is followed-up by national statistics.

Figure 16: Target groups of the evaluation or analysis



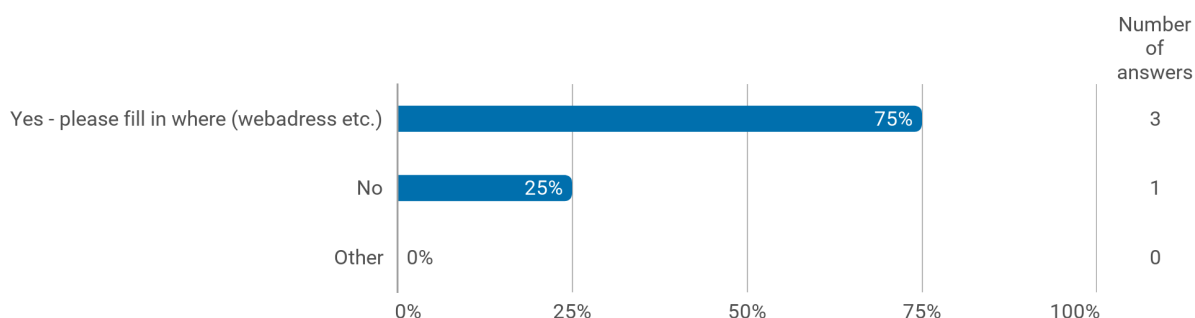
All of the four respondents that had conducted an evaluation of the recognition schemes had contacted the applicants to hear their opinions, while only two respondents had asked employers about their experience of the service.

Figure 17: Internal or external evaluation



It is noted from the survey that out of the four evaluation exercises, only one was subject to evaluation by an external agency.

Figure 18: Availability of the results to the public



Three of the evaluations of the respondents' vocational recognition schemes are available to the public to view and learn from.

The ENIC-NARIC offices in Norway and Sweden have recently conducted different types of evaluations of the impact of their recognition schemes. Their experiences are shared below.

Measuring the impact of recognition - The Norwegian and the Swedish cases

The vocational recognition schemes in Norway for upper secondary vocational education - EQF level 4 (established in 2016) and post-secondary vocational education - EQF level 5 (established in 2019) are relatively new, and therefore it was considered important to gain information regarding the impact of the recognition schemes and the possibilities to make adjustments. The evaluation of the EQF level 4 scheme states that the proportion of recognition statements is limited when seen in relation to the volume of the total labour immigration. The agency that conducted the evaluation found that it would be difficult for the scheme to contribute significantly to the efforts to combat social dumping, labour market crime, unregistered work and other challenges that it was intended to help rectify. At the

same time, the study found it highly likely that individuals with qualifications approved by the recognition scheme were more attractive in the Norwegian labour market. The main finding from the evaluation of the EQF 5 scheme is that the recognition scheme is relatively little known in the Norwegian labour market and many employers may until recently not have felt a need to make use of the scheme. The low use of the scheme may also be explained by the fact that post-secondary vocational education is not well known in the Norwegian labour market, and that there are not many positions that currently require the applicant to document such qualifications. The study finds no difference in labour market outcomes between the applicants who had their education recognised and those who had not. Based on the survey responses, there is nevertheless reason to believe that the scheme may have had a positive impact on the working conditions of some of those who have received recognition statements. The Norwegian office's findings from dialogue with stakeholders at both EQF levels 4 and 5 further indicate that there is a need and desire in the industries to have mutual trust in each other's education. There is a great need for qualified personnel in several industries as requirements for public tenders, to carry out assignments, and also for the survival of small and protected professions. A common denominator is the need for sufficient information and knowledge about relevant education and the education systems to gain better knowledge and trust in the foreign qualifications. This seems to correspond both with the feedback from Norwegian stakeholders about the cooperation that already exists internationally, especially within the construction industry.

The ENIC-NARIC office in Sweden, the government agency Swedish Council for Higher Education, has evaluated its assessment procedure in a series of publications (Universitets- och högskolerådet, 2022-2023). The study focused on different aspects of the recognition statement, including a statistical analysis of labour market entry and educational matching for individuals who received an assessment during a five-year period. This group was compared to a group of individuals who immigrated to Sweden during the same years and had a self-reported foreign education at the levels of upper secondary education, post-secondary education or higher education. The results proved a positive correlation between an assessment and educational matching at all assessed levels of education. Individuals who received an assessment before entering the workforce and were not educationally matched one year prior to the assessment, had a greater chance of entering the labour market and being educationally matched two years later, compared to the group of comparison. This was especially the case for individuals with a post-secondary non-tertiary

vocational qualification. The study also investigated the importance of the recognition statement among employers recruiting individuals with upper secondary education and post-secondary vocational education. The vast majority of employers who had seen a statement from ENIC-NARIC Sweden stated that it had been important for their employment decision, mainly at the beginning of the recruitment process. The two aspects of the assessment that most employers considered important were information about what level the qualification corresponded to in Sweden, and that the qualification documentation had been confirmed as authentic by the agency. Assessment of foreign qualification is only one piece of a larger puzzle when it comes to access to the labour market. Subsequently the Swedish study cannot make any definite conclusions about the impact of the recognition statement itself. However, it serves as a valuable knowledge base for developing recognition schemes and the services provided to applicants and other stakeholders invested in the recognition process.

3.7. International agreements

Recognition authorities, such as ENIC-NARIC offices, operate autonomously and adhere to national laws, regulations and guidelines in their work with recognition of foreign qualifications. International agreements for the recognition of qualifications across borders have in addition been developed and ratified by many countries in order to facilitate easier access to work and study in other countries on a more equal, fair and transparent basis.

One example of such an agreement is the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC) (Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region) which was developed by the Council of Europe and UNESCO in 1997. Since then, it has been signed and ratified by 57 countries in Europe as well as by Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and Israel. The Lisbon Recognition Convention includes key principles such as transparency of recognition decisions, and provision of reliable information on recognition procedures and criteria.

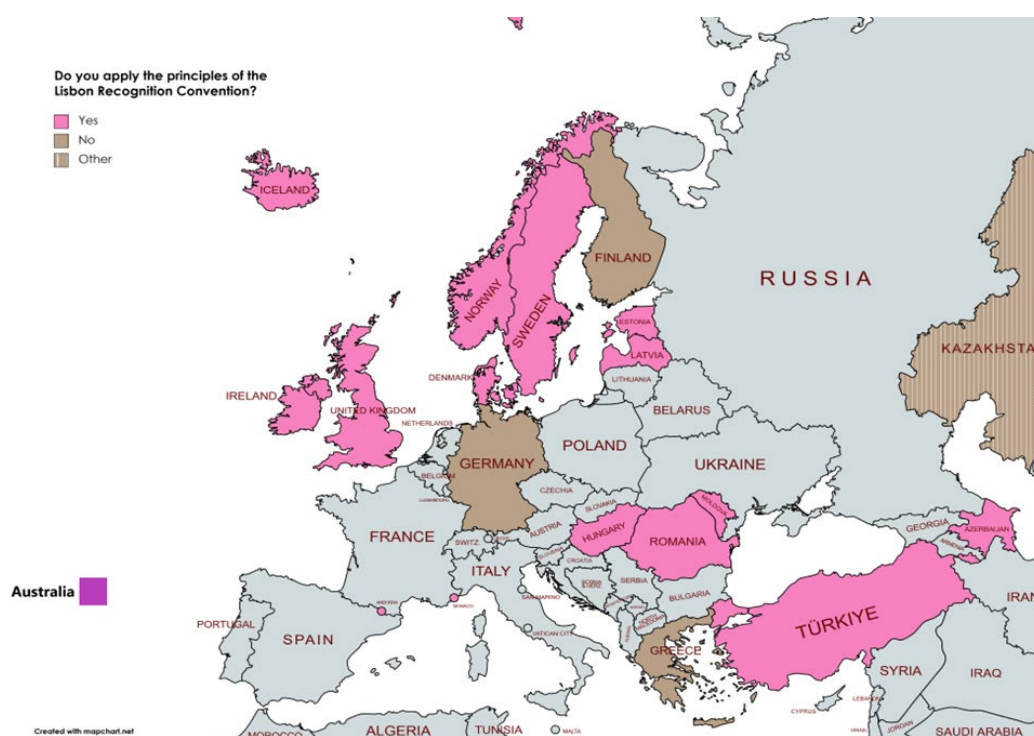
In addition to international agreements, some countries have enforced regional intergovernmental agreements and market treaties to facilitate recognition of foreign qualifications. In the European region, the Nordic countries signed an agreement in 2004 on mutual recognition of qualifications concerning higher education, called the Reykjavik Declaration. Since then, similar agreements have been signed between the Baltic countries as well as between the Baltics and the Benelux Member States. Another example is a long-

standing treaty between the social partners in the construction industry in Norway and Sweden, ensuring mutual recognition of upper secondary vocational education qualifications in selected construction professions, for the purpose of accessing the labour market on the same terms as national skilled workers.

The Lisbon Recognition Convention and recognition of vocational qualifications

The BRAVO survey asked whether the Lisbon Recognition Convention’s (LRC) principles are being applied to recognition of foreign vocational qualifications. This is interesting in the eyes of the project as these principles were developed specifically for the recognition of higher education and access to higher education and do not address the recognition of vocational qualifications aimed at the labour market. The survey responses show that the large overlap between methodology for assessing vocational qualifications and higher education seems to be related to the principles of the LRC, even if the LRC regulates recognition of higher education qualifications and qualifications giving access to higher education. As the graph shows, as many as 80% of the respondents apply the LRC for recognition of vocational qualifications. Those who answered “other” mostly did so because there is a separate national legal basis for recognition of the different types of qualifications.

Figure 19: Use of the Lisbon Recognition Convention principles in assessment of foreign vocational qualifications



Recognition of qualifications from third countries

A third country is a country which is not a member of the European Union as well as a country or territory whose citizens do not enjoy the European Union right to free movement. The Global Convention was adopted at the 40th session of the UNESCO General Conference in November 2019 and entered into force on 5 March 2023. It has been ratified by 22 countries so far. The convention marks a shift from previous agreements in that it is the first UN global treaty on higher education, complementing the five regional UNESCO conventions (the Lisbon Recognition Convention being one of them).

The Commission Recommendation on the recognition of qualifications of third country nationals, adopted 15 November 2023, similarly advocates for simplified and quicker recognition of third country nationals' skills for the purpose of filling vacant positions in the EU. This recommendation is different in that it has focus on the labour market and views recognition of qualifications as important in matching people with the right jobs in terms of their skills. Several member states in the EEA have been reporting increasing difficulties in filling vacancies. This could signify a growing need for third country nationals in the EEA labour market.

Respondents' top 5 application countries

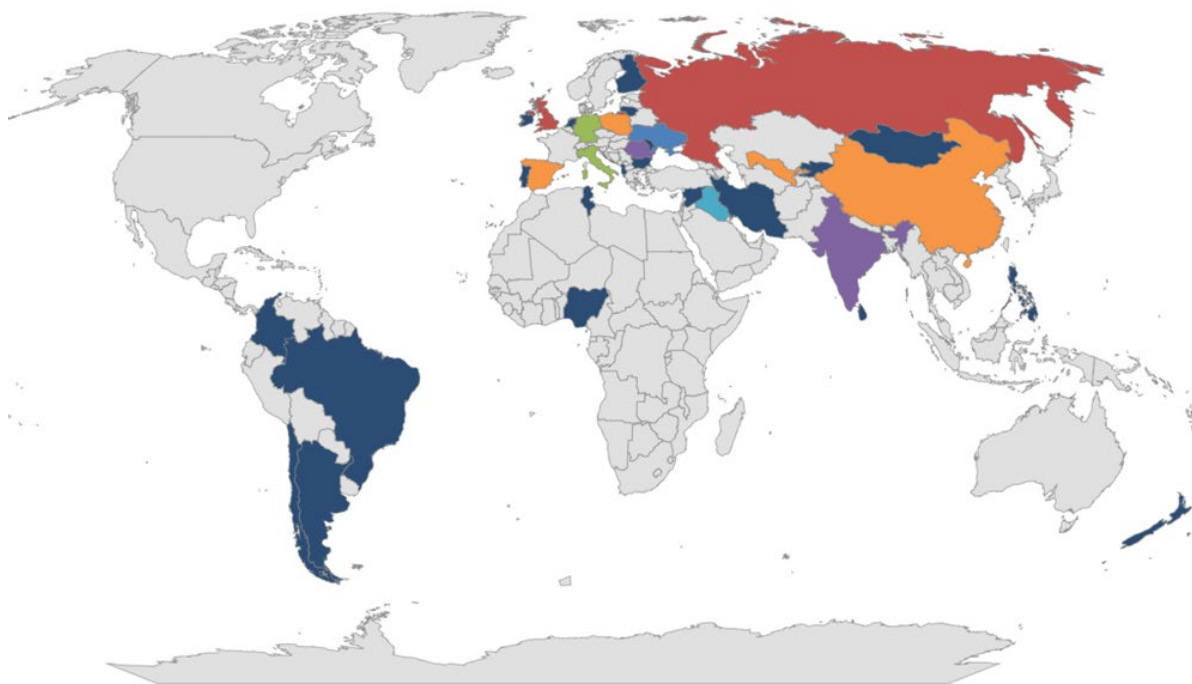
The purpose of the survey question about the top 5 application countries in 2022 is to learn more about from which countries there is most demand for recognition of vocational qualifications. This data, which shows the nations that contribute the most in terms of application submissions, offers insightful information on the demand for vocational qualifications to be recognised globally. A deeper comprehension of the global reach and significance of vocational qualification recognition can be attained by examining the geographic distribution of these applications. This data is very important as it provides contextual information. In 2022, institutions received applications for recognition of vocational qualifications from a diverse set of countries, with Ukraine, the UK, Russia, Germany, and Italy being the top applicant countries. This demonstrates that the demand for the recognition of vocational qualifications also reaches outside of the EU/EEA.

The respondents listed 38 different top 5 countries in 2022 for vocational qualifications recognition, with Ukraine leading with seven mentions, followed by the UK and Russia.

Germany and Italy appear five times, while India, Romania, and Iraq are mentioned four times each.

The full list shows a global demand for recognition as it also includes China, Mauritius, Poland, Spain, and Uzbekistan, all mentioned twice. Single mentions about Albania, Argentina, Brazil, Bulgaria, Chile, Colombia, Finland, France, Iran, Ireland, Hong Kong, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nigeria, Philippines, Portugal, Syria, Sri Lanka, Soviet Union, and Tunisia being a top 5 country for applications completes the list from the survey.

Figure 20: Popular countries where applications for recognition of vocational qualifications originate from



The respondents provided their top 5 application countries. From these numbers, we have divided the countries into five groups. Countries may appear in several groups, depending on where on the top 5 list they were placed by each respondent.

- First group – Countries appearing first on the list of application countries.
- Second group - Countries appearing second on the list of application countries.
- Third group - Countries appearing third on the list of application countries.
- Fourth group - Countries appearing fourth on the list of application countries.
- Fifth group - Countries appearing fifth on the list of application countries.

First group: Russia and Ukraine, with two mentions each, are notable contributors. The list encompasses a broad geographic spectrum, from Europe (Germany, Italy, Poland, United Kingdom) to Asia (India, Hong Kong), and even South America (Argentina, Brazil).

Second group: Russia, the United Kingdom and Italy have each been mentioned twice. Additionally, other EU countries, including Bulgaria, Poland, and Lithuania, have been referenced. Other countries are from various continents: India, Iran, Iraq, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Ukraine.

Third group: Ukraine leads the list, mentioned three times, while China, India, and Romania each appear in answers twice. The data showcases a global presence, encompassing countries from diverse continents, including Chile, Finland, Iraq, Italy, Mauritius, and the former Soviet Union.

Fourth group: Romania and Germany emerge as significant contributors with two mentions each. Additionally, several countries, including Colombia, Italy, Iraq, Kyrgyzstan, Mauritius, Nigeria, Russia, Spain, the UK, and Uzbekistan, are each mentioned once.

Fifth group: Germany and the United Kingdom emerge as notable contributors, each with two mentions. Furthermore, a variety of countries, including France, Ireland, Latvia, Mongolia, Netherlands, New Zealand, Portugal, Russia, Tunisia, and Ukraine, are each mentioned once.

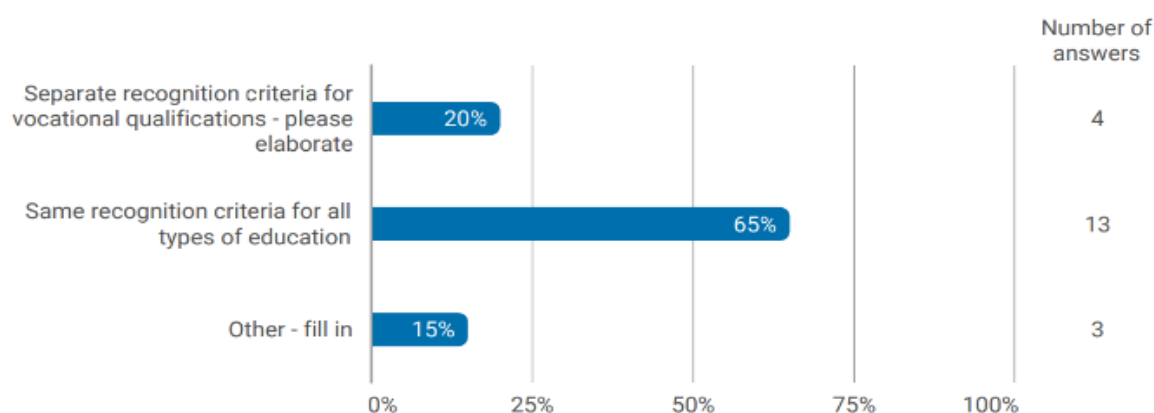
Table 2: Top 5 application countries

1	2	3	4	5
Uzbekistan 1	Ukraine 1	Soviet... 1	Uzbekis... 1	Ukraine 1
UK 1	Sri Lanka 1	Maurice... 1	UK 1	Tunisia 1
Poland 1	Spain 1	Italy 1	Spain 1	Russia 1
Syria 1	Poland 1	Iraq 1	Russia 1	Portugal 1
Moldavia 1	Philippi... 1	Finland 1	Nigeria 1	New... 1
Hong Kong 1	Lithuania 1	Chile 1	Maurice... 1	Netherl... 1
Italy 1	Iraq 1	Romania 2	Kyrgyzs... 1	Mongo... 1
India 1	Iran 1	India 2	Iraq 1	Latvia 1
Germany 1	India 1	China 2	Italy 1	Ireland 1
Brazil 1	Bulgaria 1	Ukraine 3	Colombia 1	France 1
Argentina 1	Italy 2		Germany 1	United... 2
Albania 1	UK 2		Romania 1	Germany 2
Ukraine 2	Russia 2			
Russia 2				

3.8. Vocational Recognition Criteria

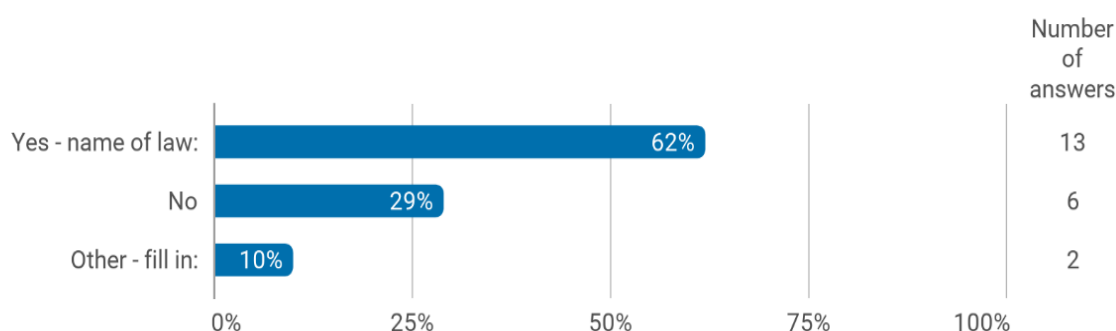
As this report discusses, the systems used to recognise vocational qualifications are less internationally integrated than those that recognise higher education (HE) qualifications. The hope is that the BRAVO project will contribute to better knowledge about national vocational recognition schemes, and how they relate to recognition of HE qualifications. So, accordingly, the project seeks to find out more about the actual requirements for recognising a foreign vocational qualification. As for the survey, the respondents were asked to indicate what criteria are used for assessing vocational qualifications. This question focused on the methodology for assessment, and to what extent it overlaps with the procedure for recognising higher education qualifications. What is interesting is that most offices do apply the same recognition criteria for assessing vocational qualifications as for higher education. This has to be seen in connection with the fact that many offices use the principles of the LRC to assess vocational qualifications, as outlined above. The reasons for applying the LRC to recognition of vocational qualifications may be that it is natural to use principles and methods that the offices already have and are familiar with, and the lack of guidelines like the LRC for recognition of vocational qualifications. One office pointed out that although the same methodology is applied, vocational education is distinguished from higher education because the providers operate under different quality assurance arrangements. Among the offices that answered that they apply separate criteria for vocational education, some explained that this was because the criteria are linked to separate laws and regulations in their country.

Figure 21: Recognition criteria



Recognition procedures for vocational education are regulated differently depending on the country and sometimes not regulated at all. Therefore, the BRAVO survey aimed at finding out more about the legal context in which vocational qualifications are assessed. The respondents who do assess vocational education were asked to specify if their recognition procedure is regulated by law and if so, what specific legislation. The graph demonstrates that 62 % have national legislation in place for recognition, for example “Law on Education” or “The Assessment of Foreign Qualifications Act”. Among the respondents who checked the “other” box, one explained that the regulation in place only refers to higher education and qualifications giving access to higher education. Other respondents have an ordinance in place, giving authority to the recognition agency to assess foreign education.

Figure 22: Vocational recognition schemes regulated in law



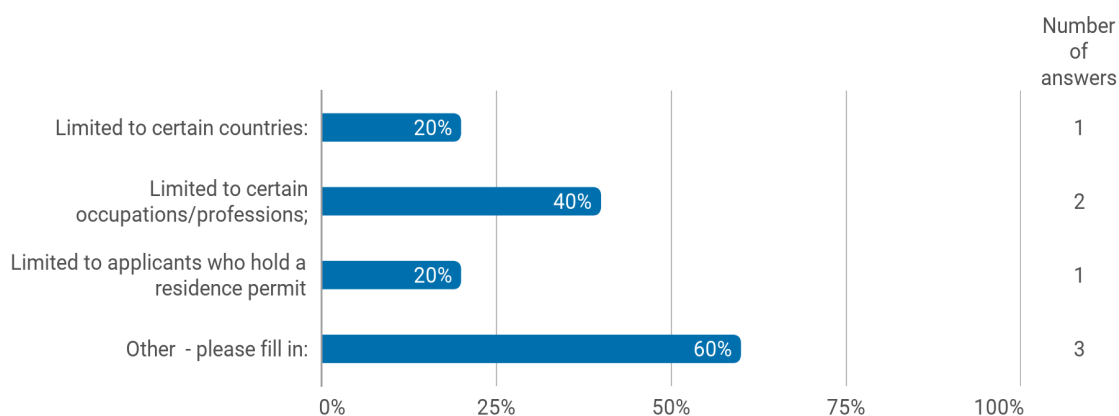
The project team also wanted to find out whether the recognition schemes are open to everyone or limited in any way. Most of the recognition schemes are open for everyone. However, a smaller number of offices answered that they have limitations in their recognition schemes.

Figure 23: Countries with limitations to who can apply for recognition



Two offices answered that the recognition schemes are limited to certain occupations or professions, while one scheme is limited to certain countries. Those who checked the box “other” reported that their schemes are limited to citizens from the EU/EEA, residence permit holders, work permit holders or asylum seekers.

Figure 24: Type of limitations to applicants

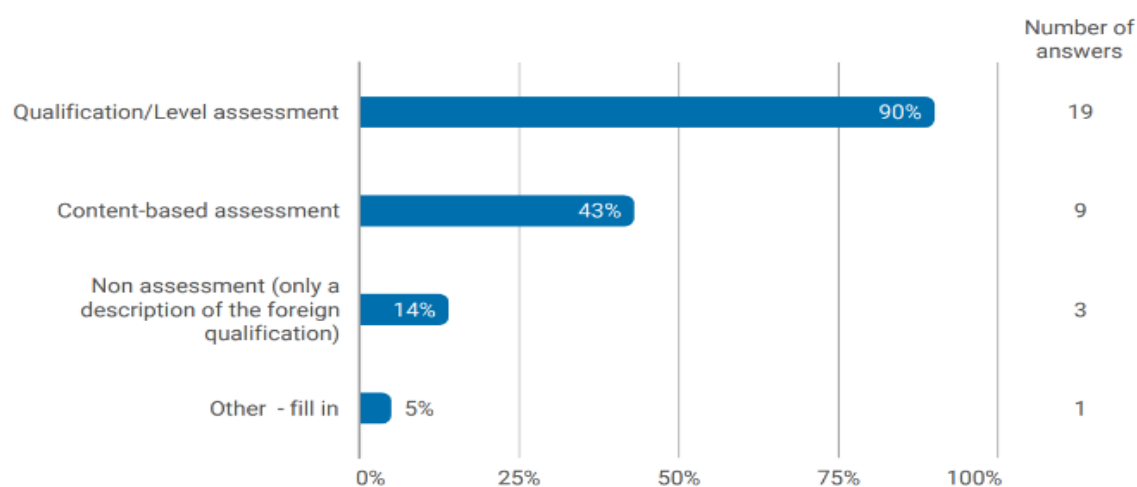


Type of assessment

ENIC-NARIC offices have pledged to apply certain shared principles in recognition agreements such as the Lisbon Recognition Convention mentioned earlier in the report, however, the exact types of assessment vary according to national demand and regulations. The BRAVO project is therefore interested in knowing whether vocational recognition schemes assess the content of an education programme against the occupational standards for specific occupations in their country or if the service just compares the generic level of the foreign qualification to a level within a national education system. The responses provide an indication on how close the recognition service is connected to the occupational sectors in the respective countries.

On the question of what kind of recognition assessment is offered, 90% answered that they do level assessments. However, content-based assessment is also quite common with 41% of respondents offering this as a part of their service. As one respondent pointed out, content-based assessment can be applied for different purposes, for example the practising of a certain profession or admission to specific programmes. For that reason, it should be emphasised that respondents may apply this type of assessment for some types of cases or qualifications, but not in all cases. Also, the division of roles between recognition offices and competent authorities for the regulated professions varies from country to country, making it difficult to define “content-based assessment” in a way that applies equally to all recognition schemes. A few respondents (14 %) also reported that they don’t actually issue formal assessments, but instead provide a description of the qualification.

Figure 25: Type of assessment



Level- and content-based assessment in practice

In this survey and throughout the BRAVO project, the concepts of level and content-based assessment are used to distinguish two types of practices commonly applied in vocational recognitions schemes. The division is not clear-cut but nevertheless helpful to understand how vocational qualifications are recognised and for what purpose. The recognition schemes of Sweden and Norway serve as two illustrative examples of the different types of assessment practices.

Case study

Sweden

The Swedish ENIC-NARIC office, at the Swedish Council for Higher Education, offers recognition of vocational qualifications at upper secondary and post-secondary level. The aim is mainly to facilitate access to the Swedish non-regulated labour market and to provide guidance for individuals and employers. The assessment criteria are not regulated by national legislation but are developed in line with the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, as well as other international recommendations and best practices. The recognition statement briefly describes the foreign qualification and the closest comparable diploma, or education level, in the Swedish education system. The foreign qualification is not recognised as equivalent to a specific profession or education in Sweden. For that reason, this procedure can be described as a “level assessment”.

Norway

The Norwegian ENIC-NARIC office, at the Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Skills, has separate procedures for dealing with vocational qualifications at the EQF levels 4 and 5. At EQF level 4, foreign qualifications are assessed against a specific Norwegian craft and journeyman certificate. In a two-step process, credential evaluators make a more general assessment before occupational experts determine whether the vocational content of the foreign qualification can be recognised as equivalent to the Norwegian qualification, for example hairdresser or carpenter. The foreign curricula are therefore compared to the Norwegian curricula, making it a type of “content-based assessment”. However, Norway has another legal basis for recognition of post-secondary vocational qualifications at EQF level 5. This recognition scheme does not assess the vocational content of the foreign qualification. Like the Swedish case, it gives

information about the level and scope of the education and describes shortly what the qualification prepares for in the country where it was completed.

Comparison and description of Nordic vocational recognition schemes

Further, the NORRIC ad hoc working group, mandated by the Nordic Council of Ministers, has compared and described how the Nordic offices deal with recognition of vocational qualifications on EQF levels 3-5. As table 3 and 4 show, the recognition schemes for vocational qualifications vary in the Nordic countries. The ad hoc working group recommends strengthening the cooperation between Nordic ENIC-NARIC offices regarding recognition of qualifications on EQF levels 3-5.

Table 3: Descriptions and comparison of the Nordic ENIC-NARIC office’s recognition schemes EQF 3 and 4 (source: *Recognition of vocational education and training (EQF-levels 3 to 5) in the Nordic countries - NORRIC ad-hoc group, 2023*)

	Scope of education	Scope of practical training	Type of statement	Level criteria	Official status (in home country)	Countries	Qualifications	Law regulated professions	Cooperation with social partners
Sweden	11/12 years	Not required	Advisory statement - comparison to the closest Swedish qualification or educational level	Vocational qualifications at upper secondary school level. EQF/NQF 3 and 4.	Recognized and fully completed vocational qualifications falling within the formal educational system in the country of origin.	Universal	Universal	The licence required to work in a regulated profession is issued by the competent authority and not the Swedish-Enic Naric.	Not formally involved in assessment of foreign qualifications.
Denmark	Open. But the Danish Enic-Naric do not assess short courses or incomplete programmes	Open	General assessment	Use EQF as a guideline	Fully completed vocational qualifications falling within the official system of education of the country	Universal	Universal	The licence required to work in a regulated profession is issued by the competent authority and not the Danish Enic-Naric. However, the Danish Enic-Naric is the competent authority for the teaching profession.	Not formally involved in the assessment of foreign qualifications.
Iceland	Open	Open	General assessment	1 to 5	Must be recognized by educational authorities	Universal	Universal	Law reg. prof. and not reg. prof.	Yes
Finland	Open	Open	Description of the qualification’s level, extent and content	Vocational qualifications and professionally-oriented HEI qualifications that cannot be recognised as comparable to a HEI degree completed in Finland	Fully completed vocational qualifications falling within the official system of education of the country	Universal	No limitations / not applicable. The advisory statements do not include comparisons with a Finnish qualification	Field-specific competent authorities decide on eligibility for regulated professions.	Yes, but with no influence on the assessment process and outcome
Norway	3 years	1 year	Assessment of vocational content- compared to the current Norwegian curriculum	Only use EQF a guideline. Must be considered as vocational secondary education in home country	Must be adequate quality assurance and be publicly recognized upper secondary qualification	Poland, Germany, Lithuania, Latvia, (Gradual expansion in European area)	22 qualifications (Gradual expansion)	The licence required to work in a regulated profession is issued by the competent authority and not the Norwegian Enic-Naric. However, the Norwegian Enic-Naric is the competent authority for the teaching profession	Yes, and they have been involved in the development and evaluations of the scheme

Table 4: Descriptions and comparison of the Nordic ENIC-NARIC office’s recognition schemes EQF 5
 (source: Recognition of vocational education and training (EQF-levels 3 to 5) in the Nordic countries - NORRIC ad-hoc group, 2023)

	Scope of education	Scope of practical training	Type of statement	Level criteria	Official status (in home country)	Countries	Qualifications	Law regulated professions	Cooperation with social partners
Sweden	6 months - upwards No scope required for non formal qualifications referenced to EQF level 5, 6 and 7	Not required	Advisory statement - comparison to the closest Swedish qualification, educational level or SeQF-level.	Vocational qualifications at - post secondary level. EQF/NQF level 5, 6 and 7. Level 4 and 5 (ISCED 2011) and level 4B and 5B (ISCED 97).	Recognized and fully completed vocational qualifications falling within the formal/non formal educational system in the country of origin. And also education recognised by international ed. organizations	Universal	Universal	The licence required to work in a regulated profession is issued by the competent authority and not the Swedish-Enic Naric.	Not formally involved in assessment of foreign qualifications.
Denmark	Open. But the Danish Enic-Naric do not assess short courses or incompletd programmes	Open	General assessment	Use EQF as a guideline	Fully completed qualifications falling within the official system of education of the country	Universal	Universal	The licence required to work in a regulated profession is issued by the competent authority and not the Danish Enic Naric. However, the Danish Enic-Naric is the competent authority for the teaching profession.	Not formally involved in the assessment of foreign qualifications.
Iceland	One semester and upwards	Not necessary	General assessment	No requirement	Must be recognized by educational authorities	Universal	Universal	If asked for we do evaluate education for regulated professions although professional recognition takes place elsewhere	We serve them when asked, but they have no influence on assessment process or outcome
Finland	Open	Open	Description of the qualification’s level, extent and content	Vocational qualifications and professionally-oriented HEI qualifications that cannot be recognised as comparable to a HEI degree completed in Finland	Fully completed qualifications falling within the official system of education of the country	Universal	No limitations / not applicable. The advisory statements do not include comparisons with a Finnish qualification	Field-specific competent authorities decide on eligibility for regulated professions.	Yes, but with no influence on the assessment process and outcome
Norway	6 month. - 2 years	None - But need to have a professional profile	General assessment	Only use EQF a guideline. Must be considered as vocational post secondary education in country of origin	Must be adequate quality assurance and be publicly recognized as above upper secondary education, but not higher education	Universal	Universal	Yes – But the licence required to work in a regulated profession is issued by the competent authority , not NOKUT.	Yes

3.9. Tools for recognition of vocational qualifications

Several tools have been developed to assist with recognition of education across borders in the EU/EEA. They serve various purposes and types and levels of education, but some can be used in the recognition of foreign vocational qualifications.

The Copenhagen Declaration in 2002 paved the way for important developments of tools aimed at facilitating mobility and recognition, such as the Europass Decision (2004), the EQF recommendation (2008) and EQAVET and ECVET recommendations (2009). The mentioned tools partially encompass qualifications and education structures beyond vocational qualifications, such as the European Qualifications Framework (EQF to NQF) and Europass, where the purpose is both to facilitate international mobility and progression horizontally and vertically.

Europass is a set of free online tools and information introduced by the European Commission in 2005, amended in 2018 (Decision 2018/646 of the European Parliament and of the Council, repealing Decision No 2241/2004/EC). Europass is intended for citizens, employers and education institutions in the EU, EEA and candidate states for accession. The basic idea was to provide a common framework for the provision of improved services for skills and qualifications to facilitate cross-border individual employment mobility within Europe.

As the only Europass tool focused specifically on vocational qualifications, the Certificate Supplement provides information aimed at employers and educational institutions, describing the purpose, level, learning outcomes of a vocational qualification and information about the education system in which it was obtained. It can be obtained at country level through a national database or from the actual education institution, by the individual qualification holder. Whilst the Europass Diploma Supplement (DS) is intended for the higher education sector, it is in practice also occasionally used in the recognition process of foreign vocational qualifications as the DS include some qualifications at EQF level 5. Some of these EQF level 5 higher education qualifications may be vocational in nature, so the recognition authority may choose to assess them in a recognition scheme for foreign vocational qualifications.

Within Europass, the European digital credentials infrastructure (EDCI), first launched in 2021, is being developed to further facilitate mobility across Europe through digitally verified credentials, including vocational qualifications.

The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) was initially launched by the European Commission in 2008 (revised in 2017) in cooperation between the EU, EEA and Switzerland, candidate countries like Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey as well as potential candidate countries like Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo. The purpose of the EQF is to make a wide range of qualifications more understandable and comparable across countries and education systems in the mentioned area, by means of linking national qualification frameworks in a structured way to the European regional qualification framework.

The European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) was developed through a Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council in 2009. ECVET is meant to facilitate the accumulation and transfer of vocational learning. The

system is based on units of learning outcomes as part of vocational qualifications at all levels of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), thus complementary to the concepts and principles of the EQF, Europass and EQAVET. However, whilst some of the tools developed in the ECVET model remain, the implementation of the credit system is no longer pursued.

The European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) has been developed by the European Commission in parallel with ECVET since 2009 and is considered a priority at EU level, according to one of the main EU agencies in this field, Cedefop. The idea is to improve quality of vocational qualification systems across Europe, building mutual trust, mobility of workers and learners within the paradigm of lifelong learning by means of increased transparency of developments on vocational qualifications in Member States. The shift to focus on “learning outcomes and diverse forms of learning” has opened for a variety of learning pathways to maybe a greater extent than in more established higher education structures. It is intended as a flexible framework where quality assurance of both the various pathways and the achievement of learning outcomes become important, as outlined in the 2020 Council Recommendation on on vocational education and training .

ESCO stands for European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations and is a more recent EC project (DG EMPL) since 2020. It can be described as a European multilingual, online taxonomy with classification of more than 3000 professional occupations and almost 14000 skills related to the European labour market, as well as education and training. It is intended to help matching jobseekers to relevant jobs and training across Member States to promote mobility and “a more integrated and efficient labour market” in Europe, according to the ESCO website.

The learning outcomes principle introduced at European policy level in 2004 is the foundation for many of these European recognition tools, particularly the EQF. Learning outcomes are defined as statements of what an individual should know, understand and/or be able to do at the end of a learning process, which are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and responsibility and autonomy. The principle shifts the focus in recognition terms from how an individual achieved a qualification to which skills and knowledge an individual is expected to have when a qualification has been completed. The monitoring report on the implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention (2019) shows that a number of ENIC-NARIC offices are using learning outcomes as a recognition criterion.

European Vocational Core Profiles is a concept with the aim to, in the future, define a common set of learning outcomes. This carries with it the possibility of being used in the development of joint vocational curricula and qualifications, which in turn could be important for recognition work as profiles are intended to support mobility and automatic recognition of vocational qualifications, including learning abroad.

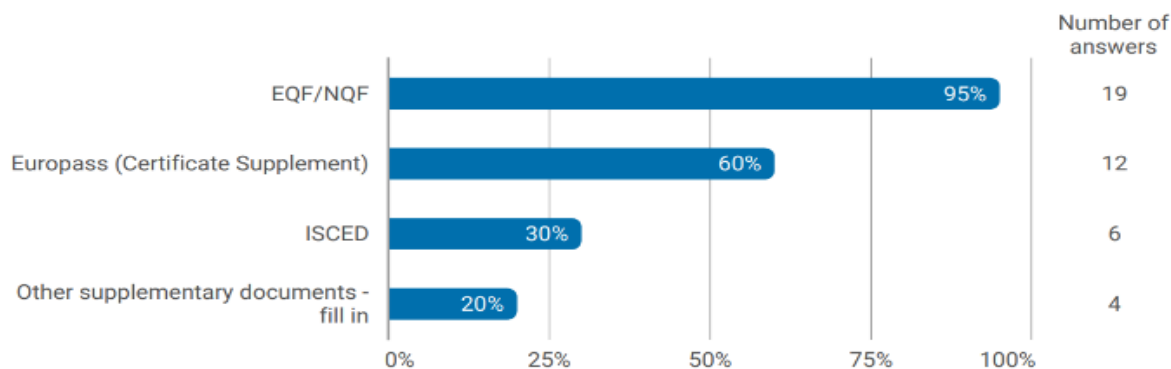
The Professional Qualifications Directive (PQD) (Directive 2005/36/EC as amended in 2013/55/EU) was adopted in 2005 and aims to make it easier for individuals to work in a regulated profession in an EU / EEA country. EU Member States are, in principle, required to recognise professional qualifications as equivalent. Although vocational qualifications are covered by this directive too, PQD has de jure recognition instead of the facto recognition (that is practiced outside the scope of regulated professions).

In addition to these European tools for recognition, the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) is a global framework that offers internationally agreed definitions to facilitate comparison of education systems. It was first created in the 1970s and revised in 1997. In November 2011, the current classification (ISCED 2011) was adopted by the UNESCO General Conference (UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2023).

The tools and sources used by respondents to assess vocational qualifications

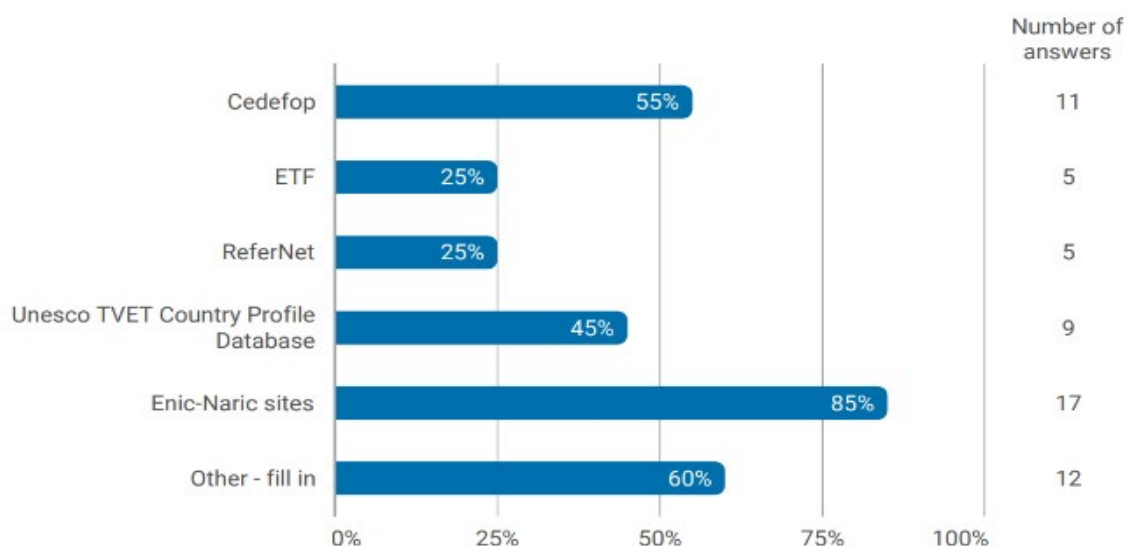
The recipients of the BRAVO survey were asked to report which tools they use to assess vocational qualifications, by choosing from the most common tools outlined in the desk research. The BRAVO project wanted to collect this information to understand and share with the ENIC-NARIC network, how vocational recognition work is conducted at present and to get an indication of how useful the existing EU tools are for the recognition authorities. As expected, most of them use National Qualifications Frameworks (NQF) and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) to understand and compare vocational qualifications. Quite a few also benefit from the information provided in the Europass Certificate Supplement (when applicable). However, only 29 % use ISCED classifications. Some respondents provided additional explanations, for example that all tools can be part of the recognition procedure but only as guidance and in combination with the assessment criteria. Another office clarified that they use the same tools for vocational qualifications as for general and higher education. Country profiles were also mentioned as a tool for assessment.

Figure 26: Tools used in the evaluation process



When evaluating foreign vocational qualifications, organisations rely on resources such as ENIC-NARIC websites (17 mentions), Cedefop (11 mentions), the UNESCO TVET Country Profile Database (9 mentions), the European Training Foundation (ETF) (6 mentions), and ReferNet (5 mentions). Additionally, they use a range of other sources, including national databases and international organisations or dedicated platforms.

Figure 27: Resources used when assessing foreign vocational qualifications



12 respondents selected “Other” resources, indicating the diversity of sources frequently tapped into during assessments. These resources include:

- Local resources: respondents emphasise the significance of seeking information from the country of origin, utilising relevant resources such as national databases, national qualifications registers, official agency websites, VET provider websites and local country pages;
- Country of qualifications” origin authorities and government ministries;
- International organisations, like TAICEP, ECE, and WES;
- Dedicated platforms, websites, such as Europass, Eurydice, BQ portal, the Australian Department of Education's Country Education profiles (CEPs) and Nuffic.nl.

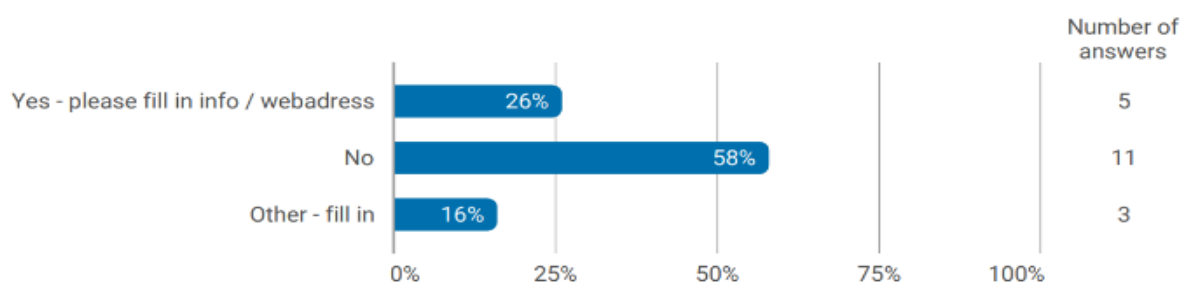
ENIC-NARIC databases with recognition statements

The ENIC-NARIC offices often contact each other for information and advice on assessing foreign qualifications. Databases containing information about education systems and qualifications developed by certain ENIC-NARICs are valuable tools when assessing foreign qualifications. The BRAVO project wished to know how many ENIC-NARIC offices share the results of their recognition statements on vocational qualifications with the public or with the network. According to the survey responses, only a minority of institutions maintain public databases of vocational recognition statements, and accessibility varies, with some databases being restricted and others requiring subscription or fee-based access.

Out of the 29 institutions who responded on whether they keep a database of recognition statements for vocational qualifications available to the public, the results are as follows:

- Yes: 5 answers (26%);
- No: 11 answers 58%);
- Other: 3 answers (16%).

Figure 28: Respondents that have a database of recognition statements that include vocational qualifications



Among the institutions answering “Yes”, one source is not open to the public, but the other web addresses provided are:

- www.cnred.edu.ro;
- <https://www.qqi.ie/what-we-do/the-qualifications-system/national-academic-recognition-information-centre>;
- <https://hkdir.no/utdanning-fra-utlandet/lister-og-databaser/landdatabase-utdanning-fra-landet>;
- www.ufm.dk/vdb.

The respondents who selected "Other," provided varying responses:

- Electronic registry internally in the organisation;
- Database available to members on a subscription basis;
- Country education profiles available with fee for subscription.

Most frequent fields of study in applications for recognition of vocational qualifications

The purpose of the question about which fields of study applications for recognition of vocational qualifications contain was to explore whether applicants holding qualifications in some fields of study applied more often than others, as well as to identify the sectors that receive the highest number of applications for recognition. By obtaining this information, it is possible to better understand which areas require foreign vocational qualifications to be recognised in different countries, and which types of applications credential evaluators are likely to see most often.

The regulations surrounding qualifications for certain professions and occupations can vary from country to country. This means that the requirements and standards for practicing certain professions and occupations may differ depending on where you are. For example, professions such as healthcare or teaching are regulated in some countries, meaning that individuals must meet specific education, training, and licensing requirements to practice in those fields.

On the other hand, these professions and occupations may not be regulated in other countries, meaning that individuals do not need to fulfil specific requirements or obtain licenses to work in these fields. This can lead to differences in the recognition and acceptance of foreign vocational qualifications in these countries.

Some countries may, furthermore, have a more open approach, accepting qualifications from other countries without strict evaluation or additional requirements, while others may have stricter regulations and evaluation processes to ensure the equivalence of the foreign qualifications.

According to the answers provided, the key fields of study producing the most requests for the recognition of foreign vocational qualifications are health, welfare, and sport, along with science, other vocational and technical fields. Some of these fields may be regulated in different countries. A significant number of applications are also made in several other sectors, including business and administration, teacher preparation, and pedagogy.

Figure 29: Applications for recognition of vocational qualifications per most frequent field of study



The organisations that responded to the survey receive the most applications for vocational qualifications in health, welfare and sport, as well as science, vocational and technical subjects, at 65 and 50 percent respectively.

Business and administration follow closely at 45% requests, and teacher training and pedagogy at 40%.

Other fields with fairly large application numbers are primary industries with 30%, social sciences and law with 25%, followed by general subjects and humanities and arts both at 20%.

Meanwhile, transport, communication, safety, security and other services have 15%.

Data availability is limited in certain “Unspecified other” categories due to the recognition system limitations, reflecting the institution's focus on assessing vocational qualifications primarily for academic purposes, regardless of field of study.

4. Network for recognition of vocational qualifications

One of the reasons for initiating the BRAVO project was a perceived lack of a dedicated network concentrating on recognition of foreign vocational qualifications. The project set out to investigate the need and value of such a network and consequently gauge the interest in joining a network for recognition of vocational qualifications. Exploring the possibility of extending an existing network to form a sub-network focusing on vocational qualification recognition is also on the BRAVO agenda. A few networks exist in the EU already that work with vocational qualifications.

4.1. European organisations and networks

The European Commission (EC) is the main policy-driving entity in the field of recognition of vocational education and training at European level and across EU Member States, as many of the policies being implemented in EU Member States originate from Council decisions and recommendations.

The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) is one of the EU decentralised agencies, founded already in 1975 and based in Thessaloniki, Greece, since 1995. Its task is to support the development of European vocational education and training (VET) policies and to contribute to their implementation, according to its website. Cedefop cooperates with the European Commission (EC), Member States and social partners monitoring and supporting the implementation of earlier mentioned tools such as ECVET and ESCO.

ReferNet is the network that brings together national institutions for the purpose of providing information on vocational education systems and policies. The network was created by Cedefop in 2002 and consists of partners from the EU Member States, Norway and Iceland. One important outcome of the network is the VET in Europe database that gathers information about the vocational education system in each country. The database can be used as a tool for assessing foreign vocational qualifications, as it provides details on qualification levels and diplomas/ certificates provided for vocational programmes.

The European Training Foundation (ETF) is another well-established EU agency based in Turin, Italy, and operational since 1994. ETF has the task to support countries immediately surrounding the EU, i.e., South-eastern Europe and Turkey, the Southern and Eastern

Mediterranean, the Eastern Partnership, Central Asia, and Russia to reform their education, training, and labour market systems.

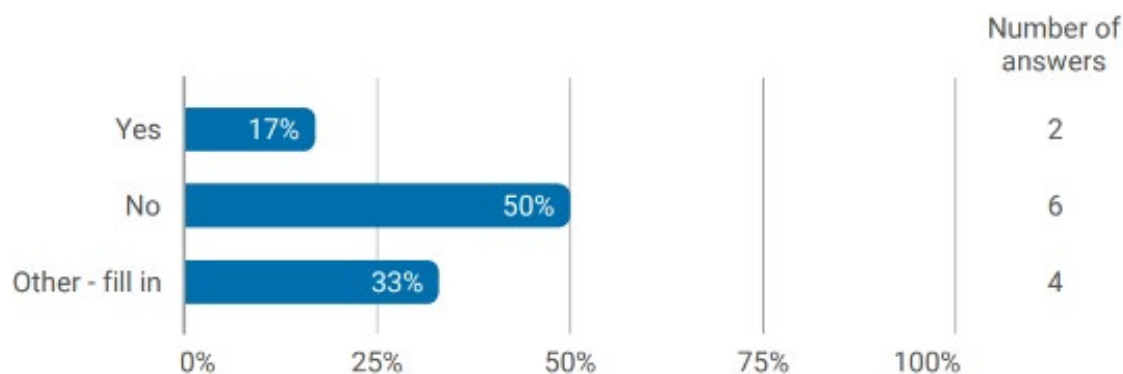
The Chain5 is an international network for the international stakeholders and policy actors involved in the developments of level 5 of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). The Chain5 was founded in 2013 in the Netherlands and consists of about 690 members from 37 countries. Some examples of members are national and international associations, networks for vocational qualifications and higher education and other qualifications at level 5, student's organisations, universities/colleges, vocational institutions, experts, and researchers.

The well-established ENIC-NARIC network is related primarily to the Lisbon Recognition Convention concerning recognition of qualifications pertaining to higher education and access to higher education. The network's website provides limited information about post-secondary non-university education and does so primarily by linking to the competent authorities on such education in the respective countries. The page on recognition tools and projects does not make any specific references to vocational qualifications (Recognition Tools and Projects - ENIC-NARIC), although there may be examples of such instruments in the web-linked content. There is to this date no sub-network within the ENIC-NARIC structures for the purposes of vocational recognition.

4.2. Offices considering developing a vocational recognition scheme

According to survey results shown earlier in the report, recognition schemes for foreign vocational qualifications exist in a few countries. Joining a vocational recognition network is likely to be of higher interest if an organisation is already offering a vocational recognition service or are planning to develop one, than for those offices who are not. The BRAVO project asked those survey respondents that did not at present have a vocational recognition scheme whether they saw a need for such a scheme and were thinking of extending their service to include recognition of foreign vocational qualifications. The survey responses show that only two offices which don't have a scheme for vocational recognition, are currently considering adding foreign vocational qualifications to their portfolio of work.

Figure 30: Interest in adding a recognition scheme for foreign vocational qualifications



Reasons for not wanting to include vocational qualifications are that other competent authorities have this responsibility, lack of capacity and expertise in the field and that, in the case of small countries, there may not be a need for this type of recognition.

Case study

In Lithuania the legal act, which provides for academic recognition of foreign vocational training qualifications is being amended. This will be delegated to the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (Lithuanian ENIC-NARIC centre) as a new function.

As the demand for qualified personnel grows in Lithuania, it is necessary to evaluate and/or recognise foreign qualifications that correspond to levels I-V of the structure of Lithuanian qualifications. The current system of recognition of such qualifications is fragmented in that different institutions operate within it, and not all of them have experience in this field and/or appropriate methodologies. It is noticeable that the requests for recognition from people with vocational qualifications acquired abroad is growing, because a significant part of Lithuanian citizens who have been abroad return to the country having acquired vocational training qualifications abroad. The general demand for a qualified labour force in Lithuania is growing at the same time. The absence of a suitable qualification recognition system means that the holders of vocational qualifications cannot fully use the rights associated with the relevant qualification, such as to continue their education or studies, as well as the level of foreign vocational training qualifications being unclear to the receiving institutions, such as employers or educational institutions.

Currently, foreign vocational qualifications are only subject to recognition of the profession, when the profession is regulated (implementation is coordinated by the Ministry of the Economy and Innovation), and the competency assessment system (supervised by the Qualifications and Vocational Education and Training Development Centre). No official body exists at present to determine the value and level of such a qualification.

Do offices see benefits of taking part in a vocational recognition network?

Joining a network may not be relevant for all ENIC-NARICs for various reasons, but with several organisations being active in the area of recognition of vocational qualifications, a network could benefit many organisations in their work.

Two thirds of the respondents are positive to joining a network for recognition of vocational qualifications according to the survey.

Figure 31: Interest in joining a network for recognition of foreign vocational qualifications



The reasons why some respondents don't consider being part of such a network to be relevant is because they may lack the mandate to recognise vocational qualifications or that the service is already offered by another office. A lack of capacity and funding is furthermore cited as a hurdle as well as a lack of competence of vocational qualifications. The reasons why taking part in a network is not relevant are similar to the reasons why some offices are not interested in extending their recognition schemes to include vocational recognition. It makes sense that the offices who are not involved in vocational recognition today do not see the benefits for them in such a network.

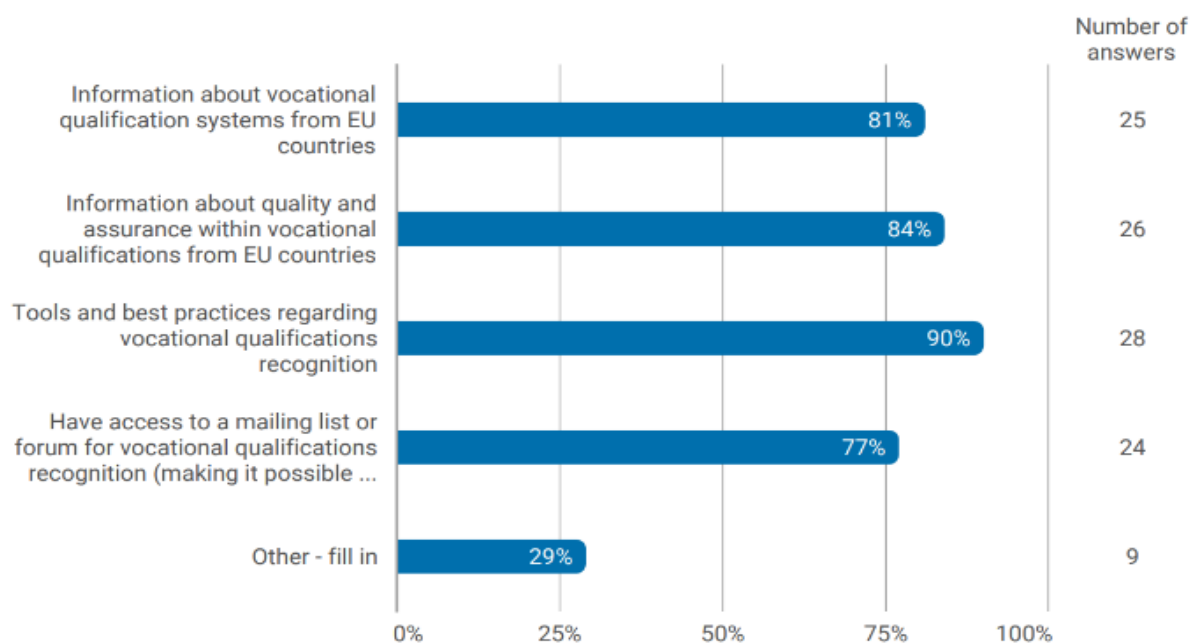
Not all countries report a need for a vocational recognition service according to the survey. But in contrast, one respondent stated that intermediate level skills are in demand nationally and that migration flows are strong, and others continue with expressing interest in information from third countries not only EU. This indicates that a dedicated network for recognition of foreign vocational qualifications is more relevant in some countries than others.

Suggestions of topics to cover in a recognition network for foreign vocational qualifications include sharing of sources that include information of vocational education in different countries, recognition tools, peer learning and sharing of recognition processes and best practices from the different offices. One response mentions that vocational qualifications and vocational recognition is challenging. We can see interest in harmonisation of recognition processes and using the network to raise the profile of recognition of vocational qualifications. It is mentioned earlier in the report that only 26 of the respondents maintain databases with publicly available vocational recognition statements, which also indicates a demand for information sharing within the network.

Specific information about recognition tools and quality assurance systems concerning vocational qualifications score highly amongst the responses, whilst other specific topics include access to qualification registers and verification databases.

Nearly 80% register an interest in a type of forum or mailing list to discuss and ask for advice relating to vocational qualifications and recognition issues. One respondent would also like to develop automatic recognition in accordance with the EC recommendation.

Figure 32: Information or topics a vocational recognition network should cover



5. Challenges with conducting the survey

This report is assembled from the project team's desk research and information collected through an online survey. Among the different methods of data gathering for research purposes, the survey method is preferred by many researchers due to its various advantages, strengths, and benefits. The BRAVO team believed the relevant authorities could be contacted most efficiently through a survey developed and distributed through a dedicated online survey tool. Sufficient reliable data was collected from the survey responses to be presented in this report; however, surveys also have their disadvantages and weaknesses which must be taken into consideration.

General problems that can arise when creating and conducting a survey are among others survey design, administration, and analysis, and may lead to inaccurate or unreliable data. These issues can stem from biased sampling methods, poorly worded questions, respondent biases, errors in data entry, and more. The challenges that we encountered in conducting our survey are summarised in this chapter.

The lack of a common language for vocational qualifications and recognition of vocational qualifications posed challenges in formulating the questions and may also have resulted in some survey questions being interpreted in different ways. Examples are a different understanding of vocational qualifications and regulated professional qualifications and the fact that not the same professions and occupations are regulated in every country. There may also have been some confusion around the topic of assessing vocational qualifications as access-giving qualifications to higher education according to the ENIC-NARIC Charter vs. recognition of vocational qualifications at the same level for the purposes of labour in another country. In addition, there can be different understandings of the levels of the qualifications, for instance, countries define EQF level 5 differently and offices may subsequently have answered survey questions differently accordingly. Recognition authorities work slightly differently with recognition of foreign vocational qualifications due to national demand and regulations relating to the recognition process and education in general. Respondents organising their work along different definitions of vocational qualifications and what is subsequently covered in different recognition schemes may have influenced replies to survey questions. The project team is aware of the member organisations of the network operating in different ways and did adjust the survey questions accordingly as much as possible. Still, it was not possible to cover all scenarios. For

example, one office may have two different recognition schemes for vocational qualifications, as demonstrated in the example of Norway, and therefore it could be difficult to answer in a way that represents all recognition schemes.

One of the goals of the BRAVO project is to find out who is responsible for recognition of vocational qualifications at which level in the various countries. The fact that the project team did not possess a full list, somewhat ironically, means that it is difficult to know to which extent the survey reached all the relevant recognition authorities. A few recognition authorities outside of the ENIC-NARIC network responded, but there are a number of organisations that were not contacted either due to a lack of time or because the project team were not made aware of them.

A common issue for survey methods is gathering a sufficient number of responses. The project team reached out to potential respondents twice in general, and then followed up with more individual requests. Some countries did not respond to the survey request, for example, due to a lack of mandate for assessing vocational qualifications. The survey results therefore do not display the complete picture, but there is still sufficient information to see the main trends. In addition, the project team followed up with the additional questionnaire in order to gather more responses.

A final challenge was analysing the results of the survey. As the system was new to several of the team members, it took a while to understand which functions were available. Some reports and graphs were generated automatically, while others were created manually. Even if the system was very helpful with the analysis, everything had to be double checked and adjusted several times. For instance, “test” responses had to be removed and double responses had to be merged.

6. Final reflections

This is the first report of two planned reports in the BRAVO project that runs until 2024. This report presents the results of the survey on recognition practices in the ENIC-NARIC network as well as selected other recognition authorities in the area of foreign vocational qualifications. The results are described alongside the project team's own research which together lay down the foundations for further discussions, workshops and analysis during the second half of the project.

The overview of existing policies and tools for vocational recognition at EU level has made it clear that this is still much work in progress, with mostly non-binding “soft policy” enjoying limited coordination and harmonisation between EU Member States. Most policy documents focus rather on the promotion of access to vocational education, while recognition can be discerned indirectly through such policy text in more recent years.

The findings of the desk research raise some outstanding issues for further exploration within the ongoing BRAVO project. For example, in our efforts to promote cooperation and the sharing of best practices in recognition of foreign vocational qualifications, the use of different definitions should be addressed to avoid confusion. Although this project has limited its scope to formal vocational qualifications at EQF levels 4 and 5, within that limited frame there may still be a variety of qualifications with both single and dual purpose, as well as differing national education systems and recognition practices. For that reason, it also needs to be clarified that our limitation to formal VET (defined in the narrow sense), means that both Bologna short cycle qualifications and micro-credentials fall outside the scope of this project. The survey results should be interpreted with this definition issue in mind, yet it is possible to see clear trends from the survey results. Recognition schemes for foreign vocational qualifications now exist in many countries and quite a few of them are operated by ENIC-NARIC member organisations.

The current state of implementation of certain vocational-specific recognition tools at national level would benefit from further clarification. It might be useful for the project to ask further questions on tool implementation aspects to ENIC-NARIC offices and to invite key representatives from EU institutions such as the EC, Cedefop and ETF, with an expected overview of monitoring and implementation in Member States, to understand the opportunities and challenges ahead for formal recognition of vocational qualifications more closely. The survey results signal high use of European tools in recognition work and

indicate that the Lisbon Recognition Convention concerning higher education qualifications in Europe is transferable in practice to recognition schemes for foreign vocational qualifications. Despite this, the differing recognition practices beg the question whether harmonisation and also automatic recognition is a possible reality in the near future, especially without a drive from international organisations such as the EU.

In conclusion, the research shows that little EU policy exist on vocational recognition itself, which has resulted in a variety of different practices. This, in turn, underlines even more the need for a new network to coordinate this area of recognition, which, along with other challenges brought up in this report and the takeaway from the best-practice sharing workshops organised by the project, will be further discussed in the second project report. The project team takes encouragement from many survey respondents showing an interest in joining a future network and will continue to analyse and develop the findings in this report into recommendations for further action during the remainder of the project.

Annex I: List of respondents to the survey

Country	Organisation name	ENIC-NARIC member
Andorra	Ministry of Education and Higher Education	Yes
Australia	Australian Government Department of Education	Yes
Azerbaijan	Education Quality Assurance Agency	Yes
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Centre for Information and Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education	Yes
Croatia	Croatian ENIC/NARIC office, Agency for Science and Higher Education	Yes
Denmark	Danish Agency for Higher Education and Science	Yes
Estonia	Education and Youth Board	Yes
Finland	Finnish National Agency for Education	Yes
Georgia	National Center For Educational Quality Enhancement	Yes
Germany	The Secretariat of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (KMK); Central Office for Foreign Education – ENIC NARIC Germany	Yes
Greece	EOPPEP	No
Hungary	Educational Authority, Hungarian Equivalence and Information Centre, ENIC/NARIC Hungary	Yes
Iceland	ENIC/NARIC Iceland	Yes
Ireland	SOLAS	No
Ireland	Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)	Yes
Israel	Ministry of Education	Yes
Italy	Associazione CIMEA	Yes
Kazakhstan	Higher Education Development National Center	Yes
Latvia	Academic Information Centre	Yes
Liechtenstein	Schulamt Liechtenstein	Yes
Lithuania	Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC)	Yes
Luxembourg	Ministry of Higher Education and Research	Yes
Moldova	Ministry of Education, Culture and Research	Yes
Monaco	Centre d'Information de l'Education Nationale	Yes
Netherlands	Nuffic	Yes
Norway	Directorate for Higher education and Skills (HK-dir)	Yes
Poland	NAWA	Yes
Romania	Ministry of Education, National Centre for Recognition and Equivalence of Diplomas	Yes
Romania	National Qualifications Authority	No
Spain	NARIC Spain	Yes
Sweden	Swedish Council for Higher Education	Yes
Türkiye	The Council of Higher Education (CoHE/YÖK) / ENIC-NARIC Office	Yes
United Kingdom	UK ENIC	Yes
United States	U.S. ENIC (U.S. Department of Education)	Yes

Glossary

BRAVO Bridging a European Network for Recognition of Vocational Qualifications

Cedefop European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training

CS Certificate Supplement

CVET Continuing Vocational Education and Training

DS Diploma Supplement

EC European Commission

ECE Education Credential Evaluators

ECVET European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training

EDCI Europass Digital Credentials Infrastructure

EEC European Economic Community

EFTA/EEA European Free Trade Association/European Economic Area

ENIC European Network of Information Centres in the European Region

EQF European Qualifications Framework

EQAVET European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training

ESCO European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations

ETF European Training Foundation

EU European Union

GC Global Convention

HE Higher Education

HEIs Higher Education Institutions

HVET Higher Vocational Education and Training

ISCED International Standard Classification of Education

IVET Initial Vocational Education and Training

LRC Lisbon Recognition Convention

NARIC National Academic Recognition Information Centres in the European Union

NORRIC Nordic Recognition Information Centres

NQF National Qualifications Framework

PQD Professional Qualifications Directive

SCHE Short Cycle in Higher Education

TAICEP The Association for International Credential Evaluation Professionals

TVET Technical and Vocational Education and Training

VET Vocational Education and Training

WES World Education Services

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