

NATIONAL ACTION PLAN FOR RECOGNITION

Slovenia

Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology
ENIC/NARIC

1. Legislation

1.1 Lisbon Recognition Convention

The Lisbon Recognition Convention has been ratified by Slovenia in 1999. Its principles and guidelines have also been implemented in the national legislation concerning recognition and are observed by all the relevant recognition authorities in Slovenia.

1.2 Review of national legislation relevant to recognition

Act on Recognition and Assessment of Education (Off. Gaz. RS, No. 73/04), regulating all the procedures for the recognition of foreign school qualifications, entered into force in July and started to apply 1. 1. 2005. The act is in compliance with the international documents, relevant for recognition, especially the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education in the European Region, which was ratified by the Slovenian Parliament in 1999 and its subsidiary texts.

Other legislation, relevant for recognition is all the acts regulating the school system in the Republic of Slovenia. The last amended was the Act on Higher Education.

1.3 Bilateral or regional recognition agreements

Slovenia has bilateral agreements on recognition of school qualifications with the following countries: Algeria, Austria, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Croatia, Iraq, Italy, Libya, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Russian Federation and Slovakia. All the agreements except with Hungary, Slovenia inherited from the previous Former Yugoslavia.

The agreements are very prescriptive with the regards to the individual qualifications equivalence, especially those with the list of equivalent documents (Italy, Austria) and therefore need revision. It has been observed that the provisions of the Lisbon convention can be sometimes more applicant friendly and accurate as regards the criteria for recognition and the procedure observed can lead to more agreeable results of the recognition procedure.

2. Recognition practice

2.1 Criteria and procedures

The Act on Recognition and Assessment of Education (Off. Gaz. RS No. 73/04) introduces a modern system of recognition of foreign certificates and diplomas and assessment of certificates and diplomas obtained in Slovenia and abroad, taking into account the procedures and criteria of the principles of education system reforms as well as respecting and continuing the tradition of transparency provided for by the previous Act regulating the recognition of foreign school certificates (*Zakon o nostrifikaciji v tujini pridobljenih šolskih spričeval*).

International conventions ratified by the Republic of Slovenia, in particular the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region (Lisbon 1997), and the Bologna process creating a single European higher education area, form a new and more efficient basis for international academic cooperation processes and exchanges and thus also for the recognition of education.

The establishment of an efficient and transparent recognition system for a quick and efficient exercise of individual rights arising from certificates and diplomas is facilitated by unified and openly designed criteria and frameworks, making it possible to take into account individual legal interests and enable the holders of certificates and diplomas to exercise their individual rights arising from such certificates and diplomas at the national and international level. This in particular concerns two fundamental rights resulting from education: the right to continue education at a higher or the same level as proven by the certificate or diploma and the right to enter the labour market.

As a result of the above-mentioned “double nature” of recognition, the new Act introduces two procedures. The recognition procedure with a view to access to education enables applicants to exercise their right to education or retraining, while the procedure of recognition with a view to access to employment gives applicants a possibility to enter the Slovene labour market and use their foreign vocational and technical education titles or their professional and academic titles. Assessment of education is envisaged by the Act to facilitate the exercise of any other possible rights based on certificates and diplomas or an individual’s educational achievements.

The subject of recognition under this Act is education forming part of the education system of a particular country or several countries and leading to some level of education or its part.

The common principle of recognition is definition of the level of qualification (generic academic degrees according to Bologna process) and the allowance to use the obtained title.

a. Measures to improve recognition

Due to the strongly regulated labour market in Slovenia, social partners are still used to very precise statements in a recognition decision. The foreign qualification was formerly compared to a specific qualification in Slovenia, which is obviously not possible in all respects and was increasingly causing partial recognition. Therefore in the new system of recognition the purpose for the recognition of an individual foreign qualification must be stated by the applicant and is crucial in the process of the recognition. Thus it is possible to identify the right, which the holder of the qualification is trying to exercise in Slovenia. The purpose then defines the competent authority the competent authority is able to give the statement of the recognition for that specific purpose.

The Slovenian ENIC/NARIC offers competent help and advice to other recognition authorities in the matters of recognition. Such advice could also be an Internet site or publication on characteristics of a certain foreign qualification.

b. Overview of the time required to process applications for recognition and measures to improve this time.

Act on Recognition and Assessment of Education stipulates that the decision on recognition should be issued and handed to the applicant within two months after the date of receipt of a complete application at the latest (a half of all cases are finished in the prescribed time).

The practice indicates that difficult cases cannot be recognized in the prescribed time, especially if the applicants apply for equivalences of the foreign title to the Slovenian one, which requires inclusion of a higher education institution in the process of the recognition.

Nevertheless the recognition procedure is finished in majority of cases within four months, which is the reasonable time prescribed by the European Union General Directive on professional recognition (80%).

Measures for improving time needed for recognition:

The time for recognition of qualifications for the purpose of further studies has already been improved. There are more competent recognition authorities (each school and higher education institution).

Measures for improving time needed for recognition for the purpose of employment, on the other hand, are very complex. Increased mobility of students and workers is resulting in more and more qualifications or their parts obtained abroad. Yet most of the professions in Slovenia are still regulated and the regulation is based on Slovenian qualifications. The employers are therefore forced to require legal recognition of the foreign qualification.

One of the measures for long term improving the time of recognition is definitely deregulation of certain professions, which is in the competence of the ministry of labour or labour associations or other state authorities regulating professions.

The legal procedure of recognition is as simplified as possible, taking into account all the necessary steps and evaluation of criteria through comparison of both education systems. It would help having more staff especially in the area of delivering individual information.

2.2 Joint degrees

- a. Overview of the legal provisions concerning the recognition of joint degrees.**
- b. Amendments to remove legal obstacles or to establish legal provision favouring the recognition of joint degrees.**
- c. Beyond legal provision, suggestion of policy measures to ensure the recognition of joint degrees.**
- d. Overview of double and multiple degrees and policy to encourage the recognition of such degrees,**

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2.3 Overview of institutional practice

The Slovenian NARIC organizes seminars where the persons in charge of recognition of qualifications at the HE institutions are informed and instructed about the relevant national

and international documents in the area of recognition. The Slovenian NARIC also keeps records of all the recognition statements in Slovenia.

2.4 Transparency tools for recognition

European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS).

The implementation of ECTS started in 1998 and became obligatory in 2002. Thus, all study programmes (old and new ones) are using ECTS in study year 2006/2007.

ECTS is by law and obligatory part of each study program. Without the allocation of a student workload into credit points (KT), which correspond to ECTS points, the study program could not enter the accreditation procedure at Council for Higher Education.

Diploma Supplement

In accordance with the Higher Education Act 1999 the Diploma Supplement is a part of each higher education diploma, issued by Slovenian higher education institutions. Diploma Supplement is issued automatically in Slovene language and in one of the official languages of the European Union. It is issued free of charge.

The components of the Diploma Supplement form are stipulated by the minister, responsible for higher education, suggested by the Council of Higher Education. Slovenian Diploma Supplement corresponds to the EU/CoE/UNESCO Diploma Supplement format.

An update of Diploma Supplement form is currently being prepared to accommodate the recent changes in the Slovenian higher education system (point 8 – description of the national education system). The new form should be published as soon as possible in year 2007.

European qualification framework in connection with the national qualification framework could be a very useful recognition transparency tool. There are some recognition cases where the level of education could not be determined; the national and European qualification framework would offer the positive output for formal and informal education and training.

2.5 Borderless/transnational education

There is a lack of experience with the borderless and transnational education in Slovenia. The Slovenian higher education legislation includes provisions on transnational education considering Lisbon Recognition Convention and the Unesco/OECD Guidelines for Quality Provision of Cross-border Higher Education. The Slovenian higher education institution may open their branches abroad, but in order to be still in the Slovenian education system, the branches should be accredited by the Slovenian Council for Higher Education according to regulations.

Foreign transnational education in Slovenia is quite invisible. No register of all transnational providers/institutions, operating in Slovenia is available. Diplomas, issued by foreign higher education institutions, not belonging to any national system or not being accredited by any national accreditation body, are not recognized in Slovenia. Credits could be recognized for

the recognition for the purpose for further education at the Slovenian higher education institutions through the mechanisms of recognition of prior or informal learning.

3. Information provision

3.1 Provision of information on recognition

The Slovenian ENIC/NARIC is operating under an umbrella of the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology offering public services to citizens, therefore the Slovenian ENIC/NARIC website has to be a part of the common public/state website "outlook".

Information on the website is available in Slovene and English and is updated regularly. The Slovenian ENIC/NARIC website is linked to the ENIC/NARIC Web site and other relevant national and international websites. Information on recognition is available also in a publication and other paper version material.

A lot of information especially on recognition for the purpose of further education is available at higher education institutions. In order to ensure the fair recognition at higher education institutions and to improve cooperation and exchange of information, each higher education institution nominated a contact person, responsible for recognition at the institutional level.

In 2007 the structure of information at the website should be examine closely in order to provide information in a more accessible and users friendly way with a possibility of printing particular information on different recognition matters (e.g. printed information sheets).

The special working group should be established to improve databases on previous recognition and evaluation cases in 2007.

3.2 Information package for applicants

The information offered to the applicants and other interested are as follows:

- documentation required, requirements regarding authentication and translation;
- description of the assessment process, role of the national information centre, other assessment agencies and higher education institutions (on websites and publication);
- naming (and a brief description) of the assessment criteria;
- prescribed time for making a decision;
- administrative fee charged;
- a list and texts of bilateral recognition agreements and international recognition conventions signed by Slovenia;
- procedure for appealing against a recognition decision.

Information on a recognition procedure, documents needed for a procedure and a special instruction are available on Internet and in a special publication. There is a telephone number, where basic information on recognition and contacts are available in a Slovene language and English. Basic information is available at the main/central office, where applications are evidenced.

Eleven hours there is an open telephone number for all individuals interested in recognition to discuss about the assessment and recognition. It is a possibility for individuals to make an appointment with the recognition officials.

With regard to the fact that professional recognition according the EU Directives are in the authority of the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs, the basic information concerning professional recognition is offered at the main/central office at the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology.

The Act on Recognition and Assessment of Education envisaged the written opinion on particular cases published on Internet in order to ensure the informal advise/direction to the individuals and employers about particular qualification. The Slovenian ENIC/NARIC should promote to the social partners the possibility of the informal advise of the ENIC/NARIC in order to reduce increasing the number of written applications for formal recognition of qualifications.

Normally the recognition procedure takes less than four months at the ENIC/NARIC and at the higher education institutions. The Slovenian General Administrative Act stipulates the maximum time limit of two months for handing the decision to the applicant for all administrative procedures in the state.

4. Structures

4.1 National information centre

The Slovenian ENIC/NARIC – Education Recognition Unit is one of the units at the Directorate of Science and Higher Education at the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology. The legal basis for operating is the Act on Recognition and Assessment of Education.

With regard to above described the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology is the competent authority for the recognition of the level of foreign qualification in Slovenia for the employment purpose. The decision, prepared by the ENIC/NARIC, is legally binding and signed by the competent minister.

The Education Recognition Unit - Slovenian ENIC/NARIC is also an advisory body and issues the non-obligatory advice to higher education institution, which make decisions on the entry requirements into the higher education study programmes.

Advice on foreign or Slovenian qualification is issued also for all interested.

The Slovenian ENIC/NARIC has eight employees, two employees are dealing with recognition of higher education qualifications, five with secondary education qualifications, and one offers the administrative support.

With regard to the Slovenian ENIC/NARIC as a part of the ministry, financially operates under the umbrella of the ministry and has no independent budget.

Cooperation among all institutions, dealing with recognition is on a high level, especially with higher education institutions and the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs as a competent institution for a *de jure* professional recognition according to the EU Directives. The Slovenian ENIC/NARIC daily cooperate with other institutions, with are connected to recognition e.g. students' organizations, employment office, professional associations, other ministries, etc.

4.2 Cooperation recognition/quality assurance bodies

In the time of establishment of the European Higher Education Area the close cooperation to the quality assurance body is extremely important. The Slovenian ENIC/NARIC is closely cooperating with the Council of Higher Education, in charge for accreditation and evaluation of higher education institutions and programmes. The exchange of information is currently on the daily work basis. The cooperation between the two has also led to the extension of the criteria for accreditation of study programmes and now also includes joint study programmes. The common actions thus exceed exchange of information and results in system improvements.