Making Integration Work

ASSESSMENT AND RECOGNITION OF FOREIGN QUALIFICATIONS



OECD

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Foreword

This booklet is the second of a new series of OECD publications entitled "Making Integration Work". The series summarises the main lessons from the OECD's work on integration policies. The objective is to summarise in a non-technical way the main challenges and good policy practices to support the lasting integration of immigrants and their children in the host countries.

After a first booklet on the integration of refugees and others in need of international protection, this second booklet takes stock of the experiences of OECD countries in the assessment and recognition of foreign qualifications. It summarises this along ten main policy lessons with supporting examples of good practice. It also provides a comprehensive comparison of the policy frameworks that govern policy strategies for the assessment and recognition of foreign qualifications in OECD countries. Information about the different policy frameworks was gathered through a questionnaire sent to all the countries.

Further booklets will cover the integration of young people with a migrant background, the integration of family migrants and language training for adult migrants.

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Introduction

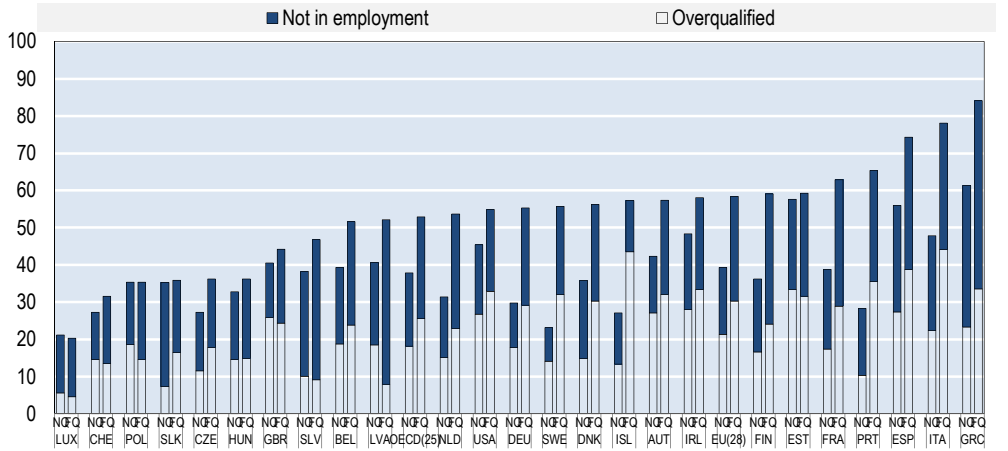
Why is the assessment and recognition of foreign qualifications an important issue?

OECD-wide, almost two out of three immigrants have obtained their qualifications abroad. At the same time, a substantial body of research shows that immigrants with foreign qualifications face significant barriers to unfolding their skills potential. Highly educated immigrants with foreign qualifications have lower returns to their education in terms of employment prospects and wages than the native-born with domestic qualifications, regardless of age, gender and field of study. On OECD average, 27% of highly educated immigrants are not in employment and a further 26% are formally overqualified for their job, meaning that they work in jobs that require a lower level of formal education than what they were educated for.[1] Among highly educated immigrants with domestic qualifications, only 20% are not in employment and 18% are overqualified for their job (see Figure 1).

Part of the observed lower return to foreign qualifications is due to differences in the performance of education systems. For example, data from the OECD Survey on Adult Skills (PIAAC) shows that there are large cross-country differences in skills at given education levels (OECD, 2016b). Likewise, the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) has shown that the outcomes of students at age 15 vary across countries. This and other evidence suggests that the quality of education systems differs widely, especially between high- and low-income countries. However, recent OECD work has shown that a discount is observed even after accounting for such differences (OECD/EU, 2014).

Figure 1. Highly educated foreign-born either overqualified or not in employment, by country of qualification, 15-64 years old, 2013-15

Percentages (excluding people in education)



Note: FQ stands for foreign qualification; NQ for native (host-country) qualification; data for Germany is based on 2012-2013. Overqualified are persons who are tertiary-educated (levels 5 and 6 in the International Standard Classification of Education) but work in low- or medium-skilled jobs (levels 4-9 in the International Standard Classification of Occupations); see OECD/EU (2015).

Source: European Union Labour Force Surveys (Eurostat); US Current Population Surveys, March supplement.

An important distinction must be made between regulated and non-regulated occupations. In regulated professions and trades, where a specific registration, certificate or licence awarded by the relevant professional licencing body is generally required to protect public health and safety, holding a foreign qualification constitutes a particular barrier. Foreign qualifications are usually not accepted because training curricula and certification requirements vary strongly across countries. As a result, immigrants trained abroad cannot exercise these regulated professions unless they obtain a formal assessment and recognition of their qualification from the relevant licencing body.

In occupations that are not formally regulated, immigrants with foreign qualifications are formally eligible to apply. However, holding a foreign qualification presents an informal barrier even in these segments. Foreign credentials often do not send the same positive signals as domestic qualifications as employers are not familiar with the education and training system that they originate from. In addition, immigrant applicants are more likely than the native-born to lack domestic references or work experience, which adds to employers' uncertainty about their skills and competencies. To improve their chances to be hired for a

non-regulated job, immigrants can seek informal assessment of their qualifications in most countries.

Finally, having foreign qualifications assessed is generally required if migrants seek to pursue further studies in the host country or to carry an academic title.

There are various types of assessment processes and recognition outcomes

OECD countries offer a variety of assessment types and possible outcomes, depending on the type of qualification and the purpose of the assessment (see Table A.1 in the annex for an overview of the outcome of recognition procedures in OECD countries).

- An *assessment* usually involves a review of a foreign qualification against a range of criteria including level and type of learning implied by the qualification; duration of a training or study programme; status of the issuing institution (or system); authenticity of supporting documents and equivalence with comparable domestic courses of training or study (see e.g. Guo, 2009). Specific criteria may vary across countries, professions and academic fields, or even provinces within one country.
- The term *recognition* generally refers to the formal acknowledgement that a foreign qualification is equal to a domestic study or vocational training diploma. Where the recognition process is regulated by law the outcomes can be legally binding (i.e. in the case of regulated professions). Where the recognition process is not regulated by law, recognition usually takes the form of a non-binding evaluation that generally places the foreign diploma within the context of the domestic education or training system. Instead of a formal recognition, applicants obtain a certificate of equivalence indicating which domestic qualification their diploma/training corresponds to. Such certificates are usually issued without further requirements and can be presented to potential employers in non-regulated professions. Where recognition of higher education diploma is not sought for professional purposes but in order to pursue further studies, recognition is generally carried out by higher education institutions, who may decide to admit foreign students or exempt them from parts of a study programme based on qualifications obtained abroad. Higher education institutions tend to be largely autonomous in making this decision, although their verdicts may be informed by a previous assessment through a central recognition body or a central database.
- If immigrants do not fulfil all requirements of a full recognition, they may be able to obtain a *partial recognition*, certifying present skills and identifying

gaps. A partial recognition may recommend that the applicant passes an examination or participates in a bridging course in order to acquire the missing skills. A partial recognition can also mean that the applicant obtains certification of a lower-level degree.

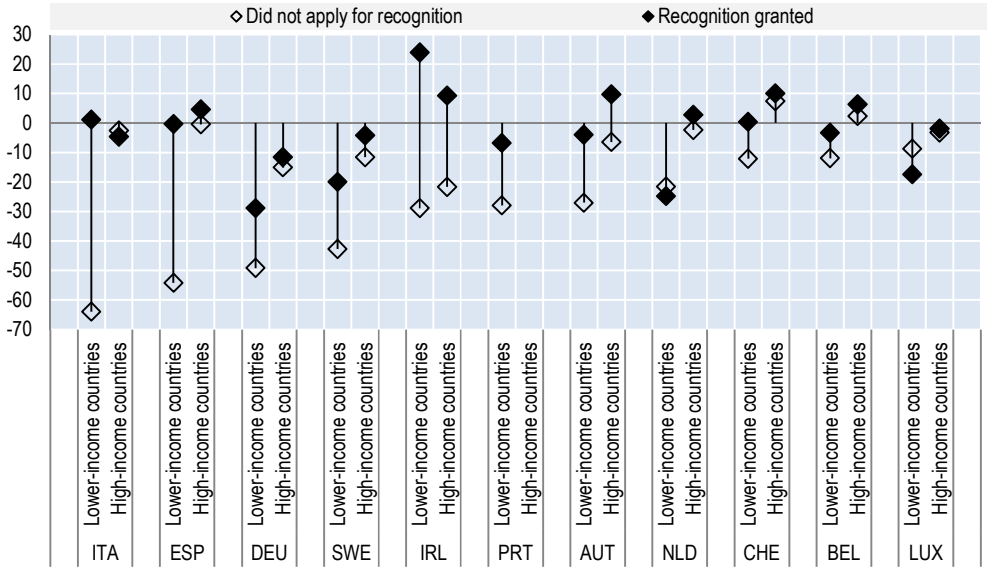
- Finally, some OECD countries offer measures for the *Recognition of Prior Learning* (RPL). RPL measures complement procedures for the assessment of formal qualifications by focusing on non-formal and informal competencies, that is knowledge and skills gained outside of structured programmes in the contexts of short courses, work experience, leisure time activities or volunteering. RPL often leads to a certificate that appraises and validates the applicants' skills and strengths, and identifies areas for improvement (see Table 4c for an overview of the outcome of RPL procedures in OECD countries).

There are evident benefits to having a foreign qualification recognised

Recognition improves the labour market prospects of immigrants, regardless of their migration category, field of expertise, or the origin of their degree (Damos de Matos and Liebig, 2014; Liebig and Huddleston, 2014; Brücker et al., 2015). Data from selected European OECD countries suggest that immigrants who obtained formal recognition are more often employed and work in better jobs than their peers whose applications were not successful, or the large majority of migrants who never underwent an assessment process in the first place. The observed differences in over-qualification rates between the native-born and foreign-born are significantly lower for immigrants who applied for recognition (see Figure 2). The improvement associated with recognition is particularly pronounced for immigrants from lower-income countries, where education systems often tend to perform less well. At the same time, employers may face higher levels of uncertainty when assessing the value of qualifications from such countries, making an official recognition particularly informative of the real value.

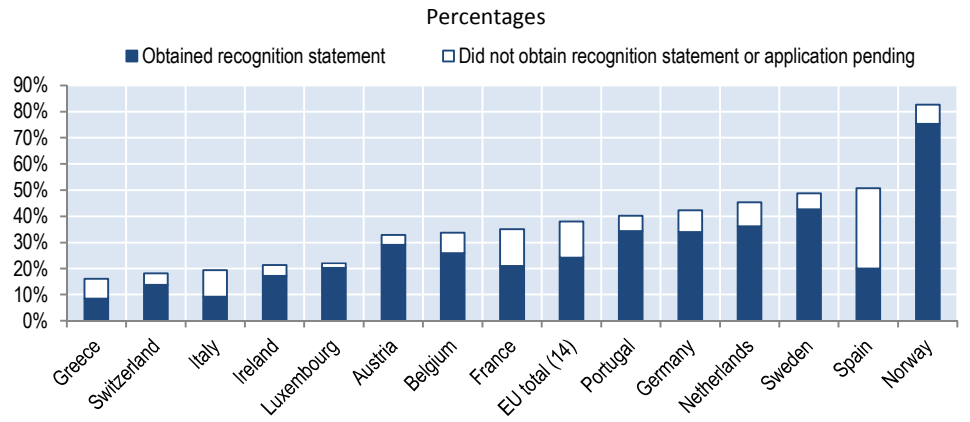
The majority of immigrants who apply for recognition succeed in obtaining either full or partial recognition (see Figure 3). Nevertheless, only few immigrants use existing recognition mechanisms. Among immigrants with tertiary education in European OECD countries merely 38% have applied to have their qualifications recognised in the host country (Figure 3). Overall, immigrants who came to the host country to study are more likely to apply for recognition than labour, family and humanitarian migrants. Among those who apply, those with qualifications in the health and welfare sector are clearly overrepresented, followed by persons with qualifications in teaching, training and education.

Figure 2. Difference between foreign-born and native-born in the percentage of high-educated workers who hold a job at least corresponding to their qualification, by place of birth and qualification recognition process, selected European OECD countries, 2008



Source: Liebig and Huddleston (2014) based on Labour Force Surveys (Eurostat) 2008 ad-hoc module on the labour market situation of migrants and their immediate descendants.

Figure 3. Foreign-born workers with foreign tertiary education qualifications who applied for recognition by outcome of recognition procedure, 2008



Note: 100% refers to the total number of tertiary educated foreign-born with foreign qualifications.

Source: Labour Force Surveys (Eurostat) 2008 ad-hoc module on the labour market situation of migrants and their immediate descendants.

The purpose of this publication

The issue of recognition of foreign qualifications has received considerable attention in recent years. Across the OECD, much has been done to facilitate the transferability of foreign qualifications and skills including, most recently, for educated refugees arriving from war-ridden zones in the Middle East and Africa (OECD, 2016a). The possibility to have foreign qualifications recognised now exists almost everywhere in the OECD. However, in many member countries the process can be a long one and, involving many actors, can be off-putting in its lack of transparency. Recent policy development in the field of qualification recognition has therefore focused on speeding up the process, streamlining the recognition system and raising awareness of recognition procedures.

Nevertheless, a range of barriers to existing recognition mechanisms remain, explaining why still only relatively few immigrants use assessment offers. This booklet identifies these barriers and presents ten lessons about effective tools and components of recognition policy that policy makers can use to raise the benefits of recognition for immigrants, employers and origin countries. The policy tools presented in this booklet tackle issues of recognition whilst addressing other related factors at the same, thus providing a comprehensive and holistic approach to recognition and integration policy. Although assessment and recognition procedures are often undertaken for the purpose of further education in the host country, the focus of this publication is on the labour market.

Lesson 1
Establish a right to the assessment of foreign qualifications

WHAT and WHY? Recognition procedures have been established in almost all OECD countries but not everywhere *all* immigrants have access to them. Eligibility to recognition procedures may depend on the legal status of a person. Alternatively, the right to recognition may be determined by the type of qualification or by the country in which a qualification was obtained. Establishing a universal right to the assessment of foreign qualifications in regulated and non-regulated professions opens up recognition procedures to all migrants.[2]

WHO? A legal claim to the assessment of foreign qualifications should extend to any holder of a foreign diploma, regardless of their country of origin and training, place of residency, field of study or type of training. This is commended by principles of equal treatment and by the fact that qualifications (alongside informal skills) should be the only valid and decisive factor regulating access to the domestic labour market.

HOW? The right to an assessment of foreign qualifications should be integrated into a comprehensive recognition law to ensure that assessment procedures and criteria are transparent, that the responsibilities of different assessment authorities are well co-ordinated, and that the processing time for applications is limited. It is worth noting, however, that with any such law, there is a risk that the right to an assessment may be confused with the right to actual recognition. Therefore, it is important to manage public expectations and to clarify what a recognition act can do and what it cannot do.

Across the OECD, it is possible to have at least certain types of foreign qualifications recognised.[3] Moreover, the vast majority of countries have established a legal right to such an assessment. However, this right is frequently limited to particular groups of immigrants or types of qualifications (see Table 1). This is for example the case where the right to an assessment of foreign qualifications derives mainly or entirely from international acts, such as the Directive 2013/55/EU of the European Parliament and the Council of 20 November 2013 on the Recognition of Professional Qualifications.[4] The directive, which facilitates recognition of foreign qualifications among EU and EEA member countries, is limited to regulated professional qualifications and does not cover non-EU qualifications, except for those already recognised in another EU/EEA country when their holder has worked at least three years in the other EU/EEA country. A further common legal source is the Lisbon Recognition Convention, which has been ratified by 53 countries

including Australia, Israel, New Zealand and all European OECD countries except Greece. The Convention establishes a right to an assessment of higher education that was obtained in one of the signatory countries or is held by refugees. In reverse, it generally does not cover most types of non-tertiary education qualifications and does not apply to migrants with qualifications from non-signatory countries, who migrated for other than humanitarian reasons.

Some countries have attempted to close these gaps by putting in place comprehensive national legislation on recognition. A case in point is Germany. Before the German *Recognition Act* came into force in 2012, access to recognition procedures was often restricted to German nationals, EU citizens, or Ethnic Germans. The recognition process was fragmented and lacked offers for holders of foreign vocational diploma. The "Recognition Act" established a legal right to the evaluation of approximately 350 qualifications in non-regulated professions (i.e. skilled trades in Germany's dual system according to the Vocational Training Act, and craft trades), and of regulated professions under the auspice of the federal government, covering everybody regardless of nationality. The Act, whose implementation has been monitored on an annual basis since 2012,[5] thus made assessment and recognition offers more accessible and equitable.

Likewise, in Denmark, the *Assessment of Foreign Qualifications Act* entitles all holders of foreign qualifications to an assessment through the central recognition agency. Even immigrants who do not formally require recognition (i.e. because they intend to work in a non-regulated profession) are encouraged to use this offer. Austria has recently put in place a similarly comprehensive legal framework for the assessment of foreign qualifications (see Table 1).

Canada, on the other hand, which lacks national legislation on recognition, features a Pan-Canadian Framework, under which federal, provincial and territorial governments work together and in collaboration with regulatory, credential assessment bodies and educational institutions to improve the fairness, transparency, timeliness and consistency of recognition processes in targeted regulated occupations. In addition, some Canadian provinces have established "Fairness Commissioners" through legislation, who work to ensure fair access for qualified individuals to regulated occupations and trades (see Lesson 6).

Table 1. Legal right to an assessment of formal foreign qualifications in OECD countries, 2016

	Legal right to an assessment of foreign qualifications				
		If yes, legal source …			
	Yes / No	Lisbon Recognition Convention	EU Directive 2013/55/ EU	Other	Limitations with regards to migrant category or type of qualification
Australia	Yes	✓	✓	Asia-Pacific Regional Convention	Yes[1, 2]
Austria	Yes	✓	✓	Comprehensive national Recognition Act	No
Belgium	Yes	✓	✓	-	Yes[2, 3](restricted to academic education in Wallonia)
Canada	No (but fairness commissioners ensure access to recognition procedures in regulated professions in four provinces)	/	/	/	/
Chile	Yes	-	-	National legislation; bilateral treaties with ARG, BRA, COL, ECU, ESP, PER, URY); México Convention on practice of liberal professions[4]	No
Czech Republic	Yes	✓	✓	-	Yes[2, 3]
Denmark	Yes	✓	✓	Danish Consolidation Act on the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications	No
Estonia	Yes	✓	✓	Estonian Education Act §28/1; 2006 lower level government regulation	
Finland	Yes	✓	✓	-	Yes[2, 3]
France		✓	✓	-	Yes[2, 3]
Germany	Yes	✓	✓	Federal German Recognition Act; Federal German Expellees Act; Regional Recognition Acts	No

Table 1. Legal right to an assessment of formal foreign qualifications in OECD countries, 2016 *(cont.)*

	Legal right to an assessment of foreign qualifications				
		If yes, legal source …			
	Yes / No	Lisbon Recognition Convention	EU Directive 2013/55/ EU	Other	Limitations with regards to migrant category or type of qualification
Greece	Yes	-	✓	Act 3328/2005 for academic titles; P.D 38/2010 for professional qualifications; Ministerial Decision no 27514 for technical and vocational training	No (covers all migrants with a legal status)
Hungary	Yes	✓	✓		No
Iceland	Yes	✓	✓	-	Yes[2, 3]
Ireland	Yes	✓	✓	Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act	Yes (limited to recognition of academic qualifications)
Israel	Yes	✓	-	National law	Yes (right only applies for academic degrees for the purpose of salary grading)
Italy	Yes	✓	✓	National Law DPR 394/99, DPR 334/04	Yes (restricted to EU/EEA nationals and non-EU/EEA nationals with a valid residence permit and a statement of validity[5])
Japan	Yes	-	-	EPAs with Indonesia, Philippines, and Vietnam	Yes (only for nurses and care takers covered by EPAs and doctors and dentists)

Table 1. Legal right to an assessment of formal foreign qualifications in OECD countries, 2016 *(cont.)*

	Legal right to an assessment of foreign qualifications				
		If yes, legal source …			
	Yes / No	Lisbon Recognition Convention	EU Directive 2013/55/ EU	Other	Limitations with regards to migrant category or type of qualification
Korea	Yes	-	-	National Technical Qualifications Act	Yes (only for verification of foreign qualifications and for recognition of qualifications covered by mutual recognition agreements with other countries)
Latvia	Yes	✓	✓	National Law on Regulated Professions and Recognition of Professional Qualifications; National Education Law	No
Lithuania	Yes	✓	✓	-	Yes[2, 3]
Luxembourg	Yes	✓	✓	-	Yes[2, 3]
Mexico	Yes	-	-	Federal Labour Law; General Education Law	Yes (restricted to employed persons if recognition is for employment purposes)
Netherlands	Yes	✓	✓	Law on Higher Education and Research; Code of Conduct for International Student in Higher Education; Administrative Law	No
New Zealand	Yes	✓	-	-	Yes[2]

Table 1. Legal right to an assessment of formal foreign qualifications in OECD countries, 2016 *(cont.)*

	Legal right to an assessment of foreign qualifications				
		If yes, legal source …			
	Yes / No	Lisbon Recognition Convention	EU Directive 2013/55/ EU	Other	Limitations with regards to migrant category or type of qualification
Norway	Yes	✓	✓	Norwegian Act relating to Universities and University Colleges	Yes (assessment of international vocational college education (ISCED levels 4 and 5) started in 2017; recognition of vocational qualifications at the upper secondary level is currently possible for some craft and journeyman certificates from Poland and Germany and will be extended to include more countries and qualifications)
Poland	Yes	✓	✓	National legislation and international agreements	n.a.
Portugal	Yes	✓	✓	-	Yes[2, 3]
Slovenia	Yes	✓	✓	-	Yes[2, 3]
Spain	Yes	✓	✓	National Legislation on VET	Yes[2, 3] (except for assessment of VET qualifications to which there is a universal right)
Sweden	Yes	✓	✓	-	Yes[2, 3]
Switzerland	Yes	✓	✓	-	Yes[2, 3]
Turkey	Yes	✓	-	National legislation	No
United Kingdom	Yes	✓	✓	-	Yes[2, 3]

Note: "n.a." = information not available; "/" = not applicable.

1. The Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education seeks to ensure that studies, diplomas, and degrees in higher education are recognised as widely as possible, considering the great diversity of educational systems in the Asia-Pacific region. It covers higher education qualifications and qualifications giving access to higher education that were obtained in one of the signatory countries. Australia, China and New Zealand have ratified the Convention.

2. The Lisbon Recognition Convention establishes a right to an assessment of higher education that was obtained in one of the signatory countries or is held by refugees. In reverse, it generally does not cover non-tertiary education qualifications and does not apply to migrants with qualifications from non-signatory countries who migrated for other than humanitarian reasons. The Convention applies to recognition of qualifications required for admission to higher education and to recognition of part of (units or courses constituting part of) higher education study programmes.

3. Directive 2013/55/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 November 2013 amending Directive 2005/36/EC on the recognition of professional qualifications facilitates recognition of foreign qualifications among EU and EEA member countries. It covers regulated EU/EEA professional qualifications held by EU/EEA nationals and their families. Under certain conditions, specific groups of non-EU/EEA migrants, such as scientific researchers, EU Blue Card holders, long-term residents and refugees enjoy the same rights as EU nationals with regard to the recognition of diplomas, certificates and other professional qualifications.

4. The México Convention on practice of liberal professions was signed by Bolivia, Chile, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Perú.

5. In Italy, a Statement of validity (Dichiarazione di Valore - DV) is an official document in Italian language that provides a short description of a given academic or professional qualification awarded by an institution located outside of Italy and belonging to an educational system different from the Italian one. A DV may also provide information about the validity of the qualification concerned in the awarding country. DVs are issued by the competent Italian diplomatic authorities abroad, i.e. the Italian Embassy/Consulate closest to the city or town where the awarding institution is located.

Source: OECD questionnaire on the assessment and recognition of foreign qualifications 2016.

Lesson 2
Make sure that recognition procedures are quick and provide opportunities to assess foreign qualifications prior to arrival

WHAT and WHY? The earlier immigrants get their foreign qualifications assessed and recognised, the earlier they can enter those segments of the labour market where their skills are most needed. Where recognition procedures are too long migrants remain out of employment or overqualified for long periods. This bears the risk of scarring effects and depreciation of their professional skills.

Several OECD countries have therefore taken steps to speed up the recognition procedure, including through the introduction of statutory processing times for the assessment of foreign qualifications (see Table 2a). Most even offer prospective migrants the possibility to have foreign qualifications assessed prior to arrival, although in the few countries where such data are available the share of applicants who uses this option is relatively low (see Table 2c).

WHO? Fast recognition procedures are beneficial for all migrants with foreign qualifications. They are also appreciated by employers, many of which need to fill shortages quickly. Prior to arrival recognition is important in regulated occupations if recruitment of foreign workers is to play a role in responding to skills shortages. In countries with long-standing skilled migration schemes, such as Australia and Canada, but also in New Zealand, assessment of qualifications is in fact a prerequisite for labour migrants who intend to apply through the points-based systems.

HOW? The vast majority of OECD countries have fixed the maximum admissible processing time for recognition of foreign qualifications in legislation. In the European OECD countries such legislation usually derives from the Directive 2013/55/EU on the Recognition of Professional Qualifications and the Lisbon Recognition Convention. In line with these instruments, the maximum period is commonly set between three and four months and applies to those types of qualifications and persons that are covered by the two legal instruments, respectively (see Lesson 1 and Table 2a).[4, 6] In addition to this, a few countries have introduced limits at the national level, ranging from seven days for recognition of qualifications covered by mutual recognition agreements in Poland to six months for recognition of certain targeted regulated professions in Canada (see Table 2a).

Comprehensive information about actual processing times is not always available. In those countries where it is available average processing times differ significantly across level of qualifications, type of professions and institutions that carry out the

recognition procedure. While the bulk of recognition procedures take between one and three months, processing times may range from less than a week in some specific professions to almost a year in certain regulated professions in the health sector (see Table 2b). Generally, recognition of qualifications in regulated professions is more time-consuming than recognition in non-regulated job segments due to the fact that full recognition in regulated professions frequently requires applicants to complete competence tests or additional training periods.

A novel approach to speed up recognition procedures in such cases is the Swedish fast-track scheme, which was developed to accelerate the entry of skilled immigrants into shortage occupations such as engineering, teaching, technical occupations and the medical profession. The goal of the fast-track initiative is to combine recognition of foreign credentials and prior learning with trade customised bridging education − including vocational Swedish − to provide an occupational certificate. Tripartite fast-track discussions are currently ongoing in 14 sectors covering 20 different professions (see Lesson 5 for further detail).

Where foreign qualifications are assessed prior to arrival, skilled-migration systems can prioritise applicants whose qualifications are transferable and meet the skills needs of domestic employers. Disposing of a recognised diploma upon arrival means that skills can be activated without delay, which fastens labour market integration of new labour migrants. Where immigrants fail to obtain full recognition prior to arrival, they can invest in targeted additional training or work experience to obtain critical missing skills, before reapplying for recognition at a later point. Evidence from Australia suggests that pre-migration screening of credentials improves the chances of being employed within six months of admission, especially for nationals of developing countries (Schuster et al., 2013).

Australia pioneered the pre-arrival assessment of foreign qualifications in 1999. Key providers have since included Trade Recognition Australia (TRA) which runs the Australian Offshore Skills Assessment Programme and VETASSESS, Australia's leading vocational education and training (VET) assessment provider with dependencies in more than 20 countries. A range of regulatory bodies for individual professions such as engineering, accounting or health also carry out pre-arrival assessments. Canada, too, attempts to speed up recognition procedures by providing relevant information, self-assessment tools and exam preparation material to internationally trained individuals prior to arrival. To accelerate the licensure process in Canada, many occupations have offshore exams capacity. Moreover, several regulated occupations (e.g. physicians, nurses, architects) have taken a further step and introduced or are in the process of preparing not only

pre-arrival assessment procedures but also pan-Canadian, pre-arrival registration systems.

In New Zealand, prospective labour migrants must pass through a two-tiered system for the recognition of their foreign qualifications prior to arrival. In order to enter New Zealand's Skilled Migration Scheme, applicants first submit an "expression of interest" including a pre-assessment of educational credentials. If they receive a job offer under the scheme, applicants may submit a full application and pass a full International Qualifications Assessment that compares their qualification with the New Zealand Qualifications Framework (NZQF). The result of this assessment contributes to the selection process and the number of points they are awarded under the points-based system.

A prime example of an innovative approach to assess qualifications prior to arrival is provided by Norway which, in 2014, launched a "turbo evaluation" to help employers evaluate job applicants with foreign higher education credentials in non-regulated professions (see Box 1).

Several further countries now provide options to have foreign qualifications assessed prior to arrival, although this option is sometimes subject to certain conditions. In most countries where data is available only a relatively small share of applicants uses this channel. An exception is New Zealand, where about half of applications come from offshore. In Switzerland, where the option to apply for recognition prior to arrival is restricted to EU/EEA nationals, prior to arrival assessment is the norm, with 95% of all requests being filed from abroad (see Table 2c).

Box 1. Norway's turbo evaluation for employers

Norway has established a fast track "turbo evaluation" for employers in 2014, helping them to evaluate job applicants with foreign higher education credentials in non-regulated professions. Interested employers fill in an online application form containing the applicant's education credentials, his or her CV and written authorisation. The online-based procedure is free of charge and verifies within five working days the discipline of the applicant's qualification, whether or not the education is accredited in the country in question and whether or not the qualification is equivalent to a Norwegian degree. The evaluation is not legally binding and only for the respective job.

Source: http://www.nokut.no/en/Foreign-education/Case-officer--counsellor--employer/NOKUTs-turbovurderinger/Turbo-assessment-for-employers/

Table 2a. Statutory processing times for assessment of foreign qualifications in OECD countries, 2016 or latest available year

	Statutory processing times for the assessment of foreign qualifications	
	Yes/No	Maximum period fixed in legislation
Australia	No (but a target value)	90 days (target period)
Austria	Yes	• 90 days for assessment of all formal qualifications according to national law • 90-120 days for EU/EEA professional qualifications in regulated professions and higher education credential covered by the Lisbon Recognition Convention • 120 days for formal recognition of third-country qualifications not regulated in other legislation
Belgium	Yes (in Wallonia and German-speaking community)	• 160 days in Wallonia • 90-120 days for EU/EEA professional qualifications in regulated professions in German-speaking community
Canada	No (except for 24 occupations)	182.5 days for 19 targeted regulated occupations and 5 trades
Chile	Yes	183 days for Argentinian nationals
Czech Republic	Yes	• 30 – 90 days for basic, secondary and higher vocational qualifications • 30-61 days for higher education • 61 - 90 days for professional qualifications
Denmark	Yes	• 90-120 days for EU/EEA professional qualifications in regulated professions • 120 days for higher education credentials covered by the Lisbon Recognition Convention
Estonia	No	/
Finland	Yes	90-120 days for EU/EEA professional qualifications in regulated professions
France	Yes	• 90-120 days for EU/EEA professional qualifications in regulated professions • 120 days for higher education credentials covered by the Lisbon Recognition Convention
Germany	Yes	• 90 days in general • 120 days for some professional and vocational qualifications
Greece	Yes	• 90-120 days for professional qualifications • 60-90 days for academic qualifications
Hungary	Yes	60 days
Iceland	Yes	• 90-120 days for EU/EEA professional qualifications in regulated professions • 120 days for higher education credentials covered by the Lisbon Recognition Convention
Ireland	Yes	84 days
Israel	Yes	120 days for higher education qualifications covered by the Lisbon Recognition Convention
Italy	Yes	• 120 days for professional qualifications • 90 days for academic degrees
Japan	No	/
Korea	No (except for professional engineers)	/

Table 2a. Statutory processing times for assessment of foreign qualifications in OECD countries, 2016 or latest available year *(cont.)*

	Statutory processing times for the assessment of foreign qualifications	
	Yes/No	Maximum period fixed in legislation
Latvia	Yes	• Up to 30 days with possibility to exceed to 120 days for further studies and work in non-regulated professions • 90 days for automatic recognition of sectorial professions according to the EU Professional Qualification Directive • 120 days in all other regulated professions
Lithuania	Yes	• 30 days for foreign higher education qualifications • 90 days for all other foreign qualifications
Luxembourg	Yes	90 days for EU/EEA professional qualifications in regulated professions
Mexico	Yes	15 days (but up to 90 days if a technical opinion from a university is required)
Netherlands	Yes	• 60 days for all public requests • 28 days for recognition procedures in non-regulated professions carried out by SBB and EP-Nuffic
New Zealand	No	/
Norway	Yes	30-120 days, depending on the type of recognition
Poland	Yes	• 7 days for confirmation of recognition based on international agreements • 90 days for equivalence through nostrification procedure and for refugees with missing documentation • 21 days for qualifications from EU/EFTA or OECD countries
Portugal	Yes	• 30 days for automatic recognition procedures under Decree Law 241/2007 • 90-120 days for professions covered by the EU Professional Qualifications Directive • 98 working days for non-tertiary education and professional qualifications in non-regulated professions under Order 13584/2014 • No statutory processing time for decisions about equivalence awarded by higher education institutions under Decree 283/83
Slovenia	Yes	60 days
Spain	Yes	90 days
Sweden	Yes	• 90-120 days for professional qualifications covered by the EU Professional Qualifications Directive • 120 days for higher education credentials covered by the Lisbon Recognition Convention)
Switzerland	No	/
Turkey	Yes	90 days
United Kingdom	Yes	15 working days

Note: "n.a." = information not available; "/" = not applicable.

Source: OECD questionnaire on the assessment and recognition of foreign qualifications 2016.

Table 2b. Average duration for assessment of foreign qualifications in OECD countries, 2015 or latest available year

	Average duration of an assessment procedure, starting from submission of a complete application
Australia	n.a.
Austria	• 21 days for an assessment certificate in academic non-regulated professions • 14-21 days for an assessment certificate in non-tertiary, non-regulated occupations • 60 days for an official notification for academic qualifications in regulated professions
Belgium	• 90 days in Wallonia *In German-speaking community:* • 14-21 days for recognition of non-academic diplomas and generic (=level-based) equivalence of academic diplomas • 120-182 days for full (=mentioning a specific training) equivalence for academic diplomas
Canada	n.a.
Chile	n.a. (6 - 24 months at University of Chile)
Czech Republic	n.a.
Denmark	29 days for non-regulated professions
Estonia	30 days
Finland	43 days [at the Finnish National Board of Education which is responsible for both regulated (although not all) and non-regulated professions]
France	n.a. (90% of files are processed in less than 1 month, maximum 4 months)
Germany	59 days
Greece	n.a.
Hungary	60 days
Iceland	90 days
Ireland	n.a.
Israel	45 days (for salary grading purposes)
Italy	n.a.
Japan	n.a.
Korea	• 7 days for qualifications covered by mutual recognition agreements with other countries • 1-3 months for other qualifications
Latvia	14-21 days if recognition is for the purpose of further studies or work in non-regulated professions
Lithuania	20 working days
Luxembourg	Approximately 10-90 days depending on the kind of recognition
Mexico	n.a. (usually less than 15 days for tertiary education)
Netherlands	n.a.
New Zealand	35 working days
Norway	1.7 months for general recognition of foreign higher education qualifications
Poland	14 days (for issuing non-legally binding recognition statements for academic qualifications from EU, EFTA, OECD countries)
Portugal	n.a.
Slovenia	40 days
Spain	n.a.

Table 2b. Average duration for assessment of foreign qualifications in OECD countries, 2015 or latest available year *(cont.)*

	Average duration of an assessment procedure, starting from submission of a complete application
Sweden	• 50 days for upper-secondary education • 100 days for post-secondary vocational education • 150 days for academic degrees • 360 days for assessment of educational qualifications in the health sector
Switzerland	About 120 days (more in certain fields)
Turkey	n.a. (usually between 15-30 days; 5 days for teachers in private education institutions)
United Kingdom	10 days for applications for academic recognition processed by the NARIC Office

Note: "n.a." = information not available; "/" = not applicable.

Source: OECD questionnaire on the assessment and recognition of foreign qualifications 2016.

Table 2c. Prior to arrival assessment of foreign qualifications in OECD countries, 2015 or latest available year

	Possibility to assess foreign qualifications prior to arrival	
	Yes / No	Share of applications filed prior to arrival
Australia	Yes	n.a.
Austria	Yes	n.a.
Belgium	Yes (generally possible in Wallonia and subject to certain conditions in the German speaking part, such as German language knowledge, diploma from a German-speaking country, having a prospective employer or family living in the area)	10% in the German speaking part
Canada	Yes (for most targeted regulated occupations except for teachers)	n.a.
Chile	No	/
Czech Republic	Yes (for basic, secondary and higher vocational qualifications and professional qualifications)	n.a.
Denmark	Yes	12.5%
Estonia	Yes	n.a.
Finland	Yes	0.2% at the National Board of Education
France	Yes	6%
Germany	Yes	11.8%
Greece	No	n.a.
Hungary	Yes	n.a.
Iceland	Yes	Approximately 4% of applications for recognition of professional qualifications
Ireland	Yes (if generic downloadable statement of comparability is available for the qualification)	
Israel	Yes	n.a. (but very few, approx. 1-2 per year)

Table 2c. Prior to arrival assessment of foreign qualifications in OECD countries, 2015 or latest available year *(cont.)*

	Possibility to assess foreign qualifications prior to arrival	
	Yes / No	Share of applications filed prior to arrival
Italy	Yes (only academic degrees for enrolment at university and highly qualified EU-Blue Card workers)	n.a.
Japan	Yes (only higher education degrees for the purpose of further studies)	n.a.
Korea	No	n.a.
Latvia	Yes for recognition of academic qualifications if the application is submitted by a higher education institution or an employer	n.a.
Lithuania	Yes	n.a. (Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education reports to receive quite a few applications prior to arrival)
Luxembourg	Yes	n.a.
Mexico	Yes	n.a
Netherlands	Yes	n.a
New Zealand	Yes	Approximately 50%
Norway	Yes	Estimated at a minimum of 13% for general recognition of foreign higher education qualifications
Poland	Yes	n.a
Portugal	Yes	n.a
Slovenia	Yes	n.a
Spain	Yes	n.a
Sweden	Yes	Less than 1% at the Swedish Higher Council for Education
Switzerland	Yes (for EU/EFTA nationals)	Approximately 95%
Turkey	Yes	n.a
United Kingdom	Yes	Yes (approximately 10% of applications at UK NARIC are filed from abroad)

Note: "n.a." = information not available; "/" = not applicable.

Source: OECD questionnaire on the assessment and recognition of foreign qualifications 2016.

Lesson 3

Facilitate information and application through one-stop-shops for the assessment and recognition of foreign qualifications

WHAT and WHY? Recognition systems can be opaque and difficult to navigate. In many OECD countries, recognition of foreign qualifications involves a range of actors and authorities. Procedures often vary across different regulated professions, levels and types of qualification and regional or provincial legislations. "One-stop-shops" offer multiple services related to the assessment and recognition of foreign qualifications in one place. They reduce the complexity faced by applicants as they manage and co-ordinate assessment processes "behind the scenes". In doing so, one-stop shops improve the accessibility and transparency of the system and reduce procedural barriers.

WHO? By nature, one-stop-shops should serve the needs of anybody seeking to apply for assessment and recognition of a foreign qualification, regardless of the type and level of qualification and of whether a person seeks recognition to facilitate job search, to gain access to a regulated profession, or to enter higher education. One-stop-shops can be particularly helpful for immigrants who are unfamiliar with the domestic bureaucracy, or who face difficulty accessing and using information about recognition pathways.

HOW? One-stop-shops are an important source of initial help and advice for immigrants seeking information about recognition. Depending on the country, different forms of one-stop shops may be suitable to ensure that services are accessible by all migrants. In small countries where migrant populations are concentrated in urban agglomerations, walk-in offices that group together all relevant services under one roof can be a suitable format. In larger countries, on the other hand, where migrant populations are distributed over the whole territory, spreading offices all over the country might be difficult. In this case, online tools combined with phone hotlines are an efficient solution ensuring that information is not only concentrated but also accessible for everyone across the country.

Many OECD countries maintain one-stop-shop information portals online that explain recognition requirements and procedures step by step, refer immigrants to the relevant recognition bodies, and provide application templates. Centres of this format exist for example in Austria, Canada, Iceland and in the Belgian region of Wallonia. More comprehensive one-stop-shops usually move beyond the mere provision of information and provide more extensive services. They accept initial

applications for the assessment of different types of qualifications and transfer these internally to the competent recognition bodies. They co-ordinate the relevant institutions, compile information and give advice to applicants, employers, recognition agencies and other stakeholders (including the government).

Denmark is among the OECD countries to provide such a comprehensive one-stop-shop. The Danish Agency for Higher Education co-ordinates different recognition authorities in the field of employment and higher education, maintains an online portal providing tailored step-by-step information for different types of potential applicants, and offers brief assessments resulting in a statement of equivalence that can be presented to employers. Similar centres exist for example in Finland, France, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands and New Zealand (see Table 3a).

Sweden is another example of a country that has made substantial efforts to restructure and simplify the recognition of foreign qualifications. In 2013, it created a new co-ordinating body, the Swedish Council for Higher Education, which serves as a one-stop-shop for all types of qualifications and is responsible for the assessment and recognition of foreign upper-secondary, post-secondary, and tertiary education for labour market purposes in non-regulated professions and for teachers. The result of the institutional reorganisation has been that in 2014 the newly-created agency saw the highest number of requests for assessments of foreign qualifications that had ever been recorded in the country.

In Germany, the central government set up a multi-channel support structure to support the implementation of the Federal Recognition Act and help potential applicants navigate through the recognition procedure. The online portal "Recognition in Germany" and its online tool "Recognition Finder" refer applicants to the competent authority and provide information about the procedure in Arab, English, German, Spanish, Polish, Italian, Romanian, Turkish and Greek. Recently, the portal has been complemented by a recognition app, to be used on smartphones (see Box 2). Moreover, a telephone "recognition" hotline offers individual support in German or English. Between 2012 and 2015 the hotline received over 43 000 enquiries on recognition of which approximately a third came from abroad. On the ground, the 93 drop-in centres of the "Integration through Qualification (IQ)" network offer initial advice and direct individuals seeking recognition of professional qualifications to the relevant authorities. Finally, the Central Office for Foreign Education (ZAB) informs about and accepts applications for a Statement of Comparability of academic qualifications in non-regulated professions.

In the United States, responsibility for recognition of foreign qualifications is spread among multiple actors including institutions of higher education, employers and state boards of professional licensing. Most recognition procedures are performed by independent credential evaluation services, of which many are members of the National Association of Credential Evaluation Services (NACES). Established in 1987 in response to a lack of regulation and government standards, NACES provides the name and website information for all its member institutions on its website and enables individuals to choose from a network of evaluation services that are continuously screened and adhere to strict standards of professional ethics and good practices. It does not, however, accept applications for recognition. In addition, "Upwardly Global", a US non-profit organisation that helps immigrant professionals to rebuild their career in the United States, developed Licensing Guides for a number of regulated professions. The guides help individuals with foreign qualifications understand all of the steps required to earn a state professional license or credential to return to the full practice of their profession. Guides are currently available for the states California, Illinois, New York, Michigan and New Hampshire and exist in ten different fields, including accountant, architect, dentist, engineer, IT professional, lawyer, nurse, pharmacist, physical therapist, physician, and teacher. The site also discusses options for pursuing alternative professional pathways.

To ensure that immigrants are informed about recognition pathways as soon as possible after they arrive some OECD countries have made assessing foreign qualifications an integral part of migrant introduction programmes (see Table 3b for an overview of the information channels on recognition used in OECD countries). In Canada, for example, referral services to have foreign credentials assessed are a systematic component in introduction activities for permanent residents, refugees, protected persons and live-in caregivers. In a similar fashion Denmark, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden inform new arrivals about recognition options in the framework of their introduction programmes.

The Swedish City of Malmö maintains a Centre of Validation where immigrants can prepare an individual "qualifications portfolio" as part of the general introduction programme for new arrivals. They take part in a step-by-step process that lasts several days and includes a detailed assessment of foreign credentials and occupational skills. At the end of this process immigrants either receive a validation certificate or are referred to a short-term upper secondary course leading to an upper secondary certificate. Immigrants can then present their qualifications portfolio to employers when looking for a job.

In Portugal, the High Commission for Migration (ACM) runs three National Support Centres for the Integration of Migrants that offer government and support services in the form of a one-stop-shop to facilitate immigrants' early integration. In the past few years, the three centres have developed special support services for the recognition of foreign qualifications.

Compared with recognition for the purpose of employment, recognition of education credentials for the purpose of entering or pursuing higher education in the host country can be somewhat less complex. In fact, in many countries, the recognition procedure is part of the regular institutional admission process. Students hence frequently apply directly with the higher education institution of their choice, which then evaluates their degree and communicates the outcome of this evaluation to the applicant as part of its admission decision.[7] Higher education institutions may also chose to consult a national recognition information centre, such as the NARIC offices established in many OECD countries. However, the education institution's admission office usually remains the contact and reference point for the applicant.

Box 2. Recognition in Germany – a smartphone app

In early 2016, the Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB) has developed the "Recognition in Germany App" on behalf of the German Ministry of Education and Research to provide easily-understandable information on:

- the recognition procedure itself
- requirements for recognition of foreign qualifications for work, higher education study, training or school attendance
- local information centres in proximity of the applicant

As a complement to the already existing multi-channel support structure on recognition of foreign qualifications in Germany, the app targets in particular young refugees, many of whom come with training or education from their home countries. The app is available for Android, iOS and Windows phones and provides information in Arab, Dari, Farsi, German, English, Pashto and Tigrinya. Most of the information is available offline; however, some features require internet access.

Source: www.anerkennung-in-deutschland.de/app.

Table 3a. One-stop shops for assessment of foreign qualifications in OECD countries, 2016

	Single unit(s) informing about recognition procedure for different types of qualifications	If yes …	
		Types of qualifications covered by unit	Unit also accepts applications for assessment and recognition
Australia	Yes (Department of Education and Training)	Academic degrees	Yes
Austria	Yes (via four regional contact points and counselling hours in the other provinces)	All	No (but support with applications)
Belgium	Yes [three national information centres (NARIC) informing about recognition in their respective community]	• All types of qualifications (in Flanders and German speaking Community) • Academic qualifications and professional qualifications in regulated professions covered by EU Directive (in Wallonia)	Yes (except in Wallonia)
Canada	Yes (web-based portals; CICIC website)	• 13 targeted regulated occupations under the Pan Canadian Framework (web-based portals) • Academic and occupational credentials	Yes
Chile	No	/	/
Czech Republic	Yes	Professional qualifications in regulated occupations	Yes
Denmark	Yes (the Danish Agency for Higher Education)	All	Yes (only for non-regulated professions)
Estonia	No	/	/
Finland	Yes (The Finnish National Board of Education)	All qualifications except for some regulated professions (e.g. social services and health care professions)	Yes
France	Yes (CIEP)	Qualifications in non-regulated professions	Yes
Germany	Yes (Central Office for Foreign Education; online portal "Recognition in Germany", telephone hotline "Working and Living in Germany" and the drop-in centres of the "IQ network"; competent authorities)	Vocational and academic qualifications in regulated and non-regulated professions (at the Central Office for Foreign Education only academic qualifications in non-regulated professions)	Yes (only the Central Office for Foreign Education and competent authorities)

Table 3a. One-stop shops for assessment of foreign qualifications in OECD countries, 2016 *(cont.)*

	Single unit(s) informing about recognition procedure for different types of qualifications	If yes …	
		Types of qualifications covered by unit	Unit also accepts applications for assessment and recognition
Greece	Yes (but several units depending on type of qualification: National Contact Point; Information Service Directorate; National Organisation for the Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance)	• Professional qualifications (National Contact Point) • Academic qualifications (Information Service Directorate) • Vocational degrees (National Organisation for the Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance)	Yes
Hungary	Yes (ENIC Centre)	Academic qualifications in non-regulated professions	Yes
Iceland	Yes (Directorate for Education; NARIC office)	• Qualifications in most regulated professions and trades (Directorate for Education) • Academic qualifications (NARIC office)	No
Ireland	Yes (NARIC Ireland)	All except professional qualifications in regulated professions	Yes
Israel	No	/	/
Italy	No (planned for professional qualifications covered by EU Professional Qualification Directive)	/	/
Japan	No	/	/
Korea	No	/	/
Latvia	Yes (Academic Information Centre)	All types of qualifications	Yes
Lithuania	Yes (Centre for quality assessment in higher education)	Qualifications giving access to higher education and higher education qualifications for the purposes of further study and/or employment	Yes
Luxembourg	No	/	/
Mexico	Yes (Dirección General de Profesiones)	Tertiary degrees in regulated professions	Yes
Netherlands	Yes (Credential evaluation information centre (IDW))	All types of qualifications	Yes (except for legally binding recognition certificates in regulated professions)

Table 3a. One-stop shops for assessment of foreign qualifications in OECD countries, 2016 *(cont.)*

	Single unit(s) informing about recognition procedure for different types of qualifications	If yes …	
		Types of qualifications covered by unit	Unit also accepts applications for assessment and recognition
New Zealand	Yes (New Zealand Qualifications Authority - Qualifications Recognition Services)	Academic, vocational and technical qualifications	Yes
Norway	Yes (the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance)	All types of qualifications	Yes (for general recognition of academic degrees and certain craft and journeyman's certificates from Poland and Germany)
Poland	Yes (ENIC NARIC)	Higher education qualifications (for non-legally binding recognition statements)	Yes
Portugal	Yes (ENIC NARIC; IEFP - National contact point for the EU Professional Qualification Directive; CQEP/National Agency for Qualification and Vocational Training and ANQEP - Centre for Training and Vocational Education)	• Higher education qualifications in non-regulated professions (ENIC NARIC point) • Higher education qualifications in regulated professions covered by the European Qualification Directive (IEFP) • Non-tertiary education qualifications and professional qualifications in non-regulated professions(CQEP/ANQEP)	Yes (all units mentioned accept applications for recognition and have the possibility to forward the applications to the appropriate service)
Slovenia	Yes (there are two centralised units: ENIC-NARIC centre and the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs)	• Formal education in non-regulated professions (ENIC NARIC Centre) • Professional qualifications for mutual recognition (Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs)	Yes (ENIC-NARIC accepts applications for the non-legally binding assessment procedure)
Spain	Yes (two different Directorates in the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport)	University degrees and Higher VET qualifications	Yes
Sweden	Yes (the Swedish Council for Higher Education, UHR)	All	Yes (qualifications in non-regulated professions and in teaching)
Switzerland	No	/	/

Table 3a. One-stop shops for assessment of foreign qualifications in OECD countries, 2016 *(cont.)*

	Single unit(s) informing about recognition procedure for different types of qualifications	If yes …	
		Types of qualifications covered by unit	Unit also accepts applications for assessment and recognition
Turkey	Yes (Council of Higher Education - CoHE)	Academic degrees	Yes
United Kingdom	Yes (UK NARIC)	All types of qualifications	Yes
United States	Yes (NACES)	Foreign education credentials	No

Note: n.a. = information not available; / = not applicable.

Source: OECD questionnaire on the assessment and recognition of foreign qualifications, 2016.

Table 3b. Information about the assessment of foreign qualifications in OECD countries, 2016

	Information about recognition procedure	If yes, channels of information
Australia	Yes	Multiple active and passive information services provided by different government and non-government agencies
Austria	Yes	Via website (berufsanerkennung.at), printed guide and several contact points providing multilingual information free of charge throughout the country
Belgium	Yes	• By employment offices and via website (in German-speaking community) • Not proactively, information is provided via a phone line and via meetings upon request (in Wallonia)
Canada	Yes	Pre- and post-arrival services including providing newcomers with information, path-finding, and referral services to have their credentials assessed are a systematic component in introduction activities for permanent residents, refugees, protected persons, live-in caregivers (http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/newcomers/credentials/index.asp; http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/newcomers/pt/index.asp; http://cic.gc.ca/english/newcomers/before-services.asp; http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/newcomers/map/services.asp; http://www.cicic.ca/1293/About-the-Canadian-Information-Centre-for-International-Credentials-CICIC/index.canada)
Chile	No	/
Czech Republic	Yes	Counselling is provided across the country by NGOs, regional authorities and involved ministries (not yet systematic)
Denmark	Yes	New arrivals are systematically informed about the possibility to have foreign qualifications or prior learning recognised in asylum camps and residences (for asylum seekers and refugees) or by municipal integration services and PES (for other migrants)
Estonia	Yes	Not pro-actively: information is available online (www.studyinestonia.ee) and provided by educational institutions upon request
Finland	Yes	All competent authorities provide information on their websites and in occasional information sessions
France	Yes	Immigrants who have signed the reception and integration contract are systematically informed in the framework of introduction activities

Table 3b. Information about the assessment of foreign qualifications in OECD countries, 2016
(cont.)

	Information about recognition procedure	If yes, channels of information
Germany	Yes	• Part of the regular counselling scheme for adult migrants and provided by employment offices • In addition there is a multi-channel support structure for applicants including an online portal "Recognition in Germany", a telephone hotline "Working and Living in Germany", 93 drop in centres (IQ network centres) at the regional level, the Central Office for Foreign Education (ZAB) and competent authorities
Greece	Yes	Not pro-actively: information is available upon request via a national contact p
Hungary	No	/
Iceland	Yes	Information material is available on websites and at venues that immigrants are likely to frequent such as employment offices, magistrates offices and educational centres that teach Icelandic to foreigners
Ireland	Yes	Via NARIC Ireland website; QQI and NARIC Ireland liaise with relevant national authorities, agencies and immigration bodies who interface with immigrants
Israel	Yes	Information about the procedure and application forms are available online
Italy	Yes	Not pro-actively: two centres provide information upon request
Japan	No	/
Korea	No	/
Latvia	Yes	Not pro-actively: information are available online
Lithuania	Yes	Information is provided online, by phone and via emails by the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education
Luxembourg	Yes	Systematic part of integration activities for humanitarian migrants
Mexico	Yes	Information is available online and provided by different government authorities to migrants from the US and Central America
Netherlands	Yes	Systematic part of the labour market orientation included in the Dutch integration programme for immigrants
New Zealand	Yes	Not pro-actively; information is provided via two websites: http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/qualifications-standards/international-qualifications/; https://www.newzealandnow.govt.nz/work-in-nz/finding-work/getting-job-ready)
Norway	Yes	• Humanitarian migrants are informed about recognition options in the framework of the regular integration programme • The Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance provides guidance to applicants via email, phone or appointment; other recognition agencies provide information via websites and on request
Poland	Yes	Not pro-actively: information is provided via website, email and telephone by ENIC NARIC to all interested migrants
Portugal	Yes	Not (yet) proactively: information is provided upon request by the information centre on recognition for higher education qualifications in non-regulated professions (ENIC NARIC) and by the national contact point for the EU Professional Qualification Directive (IEFP) for recognition of certain higher education in regulated professions via email and by the National Agency for Qualification and Vocational Training (CQEP) for non-tertiary education qualifications and professional qualifications in non-regulated professions

Table 3b. Information about the assessment of foreign qualifications in OECD countries, 2016
(cont.)

	Information about recognition procedure	If yes, channels of information
Slovenia	Yes	Part of introduction activities for new arrivals
Spain	Yes	• Part of the integration programme for new arrivals • Website for VET qualifications: todofp.es
Sweden	Yes	Part of regular introduction scheme for newly arrived migrants
Switzerland	Varies across cantons	The State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation provides information online and upon request
Turkey		
United Kingdom	Yes	No standardised method of informing immigrants about recognition services upon entry into the United Kingdom

Note: n.a. = information not available; / = not applicable.

Source: OECD questionnaire on the assessment and recognition of foreign qualifications, 2016.

Lesson 4

Strengthen systems for the Recognition of Prior Learning and ensure effective access for immigrants

WHAT and WHY? Measures for the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) give immigrants a chance to have their competencies systematically assessed and certified, regardless of how and where these skills have been acquired. The focus of RPL is on informal and non-formal learning that has been obtained through previous work experience or voluntary activities. As such RPL is an important complement to the recognition procedures for formal qualifications discussed in previous lessons.

Although most OECD countries offer an RPL provision, immigrants do not always benefit from it. In France, for example, the share of immigrants among participants in RPL is estimated at less than 10%. This is unfortunate, as RPL is frequently the only way to ascertain the professional competencies of refugees with little or no formal schooling.

WHO? RPL measures help to prevent that those persons who acquired most of their skills through work-experience or who do not have a formal (or formally recognised) diploma are penalised in the labour market. However, it is also valuable for degree-holding humanitarian migrants who have no copy of their qualifications and are unable to supply alternative forms of documentary proof or could not terminate their studies before fleeing from war and conflict. Finally, RPL is a relatively quick and cost-effective means to identify individual needs for further training and to prevent the duplication of training content for migrants whose foreign qualifications are not found to be equivalent to domestic ones. In such cases, RPL can be incorporated into bridging programmes to allow migrants to fill the skills gaps that prevent them from obtaining a domestic degree or licence needed to exercise a particular occupation in the host country (see Lesson 5).

HOW? The possibility to have prior learning recognised exists nowadays − at least in certain fields or for specific purposes − in most countries across the OECD. In the majority of countries this possibility is even embedded in a legal framework for RPL (see Table 4a).[8] Norway, for example, has established a strong legal framework for RPL granting a legal right to undergo an assessment procedure of prior learning in primary and lower secondary, upper-secondary, post-secondary, tertiary vocational and higher education.

Assessments are usually carried out by the public employment service in collaboration with competent professional organisations and employers (see Table 4d). Methods of assessing prior learning vary from country to country and across professions. Typically, though, they are combinations of portfolios,

structured interviews, aptitude tests, exams and practical demonstration of skills via workplace observations, simulation scenarios or review of work samples (see Table 4b).

To ensure that employers and educational institutions accept RPL outcomes it is important that assessment criteria and reports are clear, transparent and consistent. This normally requires that RPL builds upon an established qualifications framework that maps skills, knowledge and competencies against occupational standards and formal learning outcomes. In Australia and Norway, for instance, RPL is informed by the respective National Qualification Frameworks. Similar procedures exist in Chile and Luxembourg. In Sweden, sector specific assessment models have been developed for RPL in co-operation with relevant industries in the framework of the fast-track scheme (see Lesson 5). Canada funds the development of tools, resources and training that promote consistency, fairness and quality standards in RPL services across the country. It works with immigrant serving organisation, academic institutions, regulatory bodies, and the private sector to encourage the effective uptake of these tools and resources.

Ideally, recognition of competencies acquired through non-formal or informal learning can lead to the award of a national qualification or a professional title. This is currently the case in a total of 16 OECD countries, where this is an option, at least in certain fields (see Table 4c). Where a national qualification cannot be awarded, RPL can generate a comprehensive roadmap of existing skills that immigrants can showcase to potential employers to send positive signals and reduce uncertainties about the value of their qualification. A prime example of such an approach is the Danish initiative “My competence portfolio”, a digital tool helping immigrants to developing competence portfolios (see Box 3).

For persons who wish to pursue further studies, it is usually possible to enter higher levels of education and training based on recognition of prior learning (see Table 4c). Where this is not possible, there is frequently the possibility to have at least certain parts of study programmes accredited, which may mean that an applicant can be exempted from certain study modules and complete a particular programme in shorter period of time based on RPL (see Table 4c).

To make sure that immigrants use RPL systems, it helps if the latter are well advertised and explained. Momentarily about half of the countries that run RPL systems provide systematic information about this option (see Table 4a). RPL measures are most likely to reach those who could benefit the most if bureaucratic hurdles are minimal and do not discourage applicants with limited proficiency in the receiving country language, low levels of literacy, awareness or

confidence. RPL must also be flexible enough to respond to the needs of specific target groups. For example, RPL procedures should not be too exigent in demanding documented evidence of competencies when dealing with immigrants, and humanitarian migrants in particular. Examples of countries with special RPL procedures for humanitarian migrants with no documentary proof of their qualification include Australia, Austria, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom (see OECD, 2016a).

In Germany, for example, a standardised procedure for RPL is currently developed in the framework of the pilot project VALIKOM in co-operation with the Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Confederation of Skilled Crafts and Small Businesses. Canada has incorporated a focus on RPL in its labour market integration strategy in the recent Syrian refugee operation. In this context, many provinces and territories funded RPL projects in support of foreign qualification recognition for Syrian refugees.

Box 3. My competence portfolio – a digital tool for developing competence portfolios in Denmark

Following an agreement on an action plan for Recognition of Prior Learning the Danish Ministry of Education has developed "My Competence Portfolio" (*Min kompetencemappe*) as an online tool enabling persons to create a systematic overview of their prior learning free of charge. The tool is available in Danish and English and allows persons to describe and document prior learning and previous education for various purposes including:

- Education/continuing education and training
- Recognition of competencies
- Job search

For example, immigrants may describe any relevant job experience and attach pictures of products or other outputs of their work. Once they have created a profile and filled in all information they can download a presentation of their portfolio and enclose it with a job application. Portfolio presentations can be customised to particular jobs, which means that users can select which items they want to include in a given portfolio in accordance with the job for which you are applying.

My competence portfolio can also be used by education institutions and there is a specific interface for education counsellors. Moreover, there is a specific portal for employers, who can use the tool for annual performance reviews or for planning their employees' continuing education and training. The portal is currently being revised with a view to improve usability and customisation of workflow tools to strengthen immigrant's self-reliance in the process of describing their skills. The updated tool will be available by the end of 2016.

Source: https://minkompetencemappe.dk/Introduction.aspx?group=1&purpose=3.

Table 4a. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in OECD countries, 2016

	Possibility to have prior learning recognised	Legal right to have prior learning recognised	Systematic information about the Recognition of Prior Learning
Australia	Yes	Yes	Yes (multiple active and passive information services provided by different government and non-government agencies)
Austria	Yes (several channels)	No	No
Belgium	• Yes (in German speaking community and Flanders) • Yes for admission to higher education programmes (in Wallonia)	Yes	No (In German-speaking community and Wallonia)
Canada	Yes	No (but newcomers are encouraged to undertake RPL assessments)	Yes (Canada's settlement and employment service providers inform newcomers about and refer them to prior learning assessment services where available, and can also undertake RPL assessment as relevant for employment services)
Chile	Yes (National Labour Competency Certification System (ChileValora)	Yes	No
Czech Republic	Yes	Yes	Yes (counselling is provided across the country by NGOs, regional authorities and involved ministries; not yet systematic)
Denmark	Yes	Yes	Yes (municipal integration services and PES provide counselling which usually covers RPL procedures)
Estonia	Yes (Accreditation of Prior and Experiential Learning (APEL)/ Estonian Varasemate õpingute ja töökogemuste arvestamine (VÕTA))	Yes	No
Finland	Yes (for study purposes or completion of (specialist) vocational qualifications or parts of them)	Yes	Yes, but not proactively: information on study opportunities is available in three languages at https://studyinfo.fi/ (Studyinfo) and provided by education institutions.
France	Yes (Validation des acquis de l'expérience)	Yes	No
Germany	Yes via two channels: • The "external students' examination" gives applicants with work experience access to the regular final examinations for vocational degrees • A standardised procedure for RPL is currently developed in the framework of the pilot project VALIKOM)	Yes	Yes (via a telephone hotline and regional drop-in centres of the Network IQ)

Table 4a. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in OECD countries, 2016 *(cont.)*

	Possibility to have prior learning recognised	Legal right to have prior learning recognised	Systematic information about the Recognition of Prior Learning
Greece	Yes, but only in a few occupations (e.g. adult educators and trainers, staff of private security services and land loaders of the port)	Yes	No
Hungary	No	/	/
Iceland	Yes (raunfærnimat)	Yes	Yes (information material is available on websites and at venues that immigrants are likely to frequent such as employment offices, magistrates offices and educational centres that teach Icelandic to foreigners)
Ireland	Yes (for study purposes and for award of domestic qualifications)	No	Yes (but not pro-actively: provider institutions inform applicants upon request)
Israel	Yes (for the purpose of salary grading)	No	Yes (online in seven languages)
Italy	Yes (a national legal framework "Individuazione, calidazione e certificazione delle competenze" / "Sistema nazionale di certificazione delle competenze" is in place but its implementation at the national level is still at a pilot stage)	Yes	No
Japan	No	/	/
Korea	No	/	/
Latvia	Yes (for VET and higher education)	Yes	Yes (but not pro-actively: several public institutions provide information upon request)
Lithuania	Yes	Yes (in accredited vocational training and higher education institutions)	No
Luxembourg	Yes (a "validation procedure" exists at the level of secondary, VET and higher education); the procedure is integrated with the recognition procedure for formal qualifications)	Yes (for the level of VET and secondary qualifications)	No
Mexico	Yes	Yes	Yes
Netherlands	Yes (EVC "erkenning van verworven competenties")	Yes	No
New Zealand	Yes [provided by individual training providers and Industry Training Organisations (ITOs)]	No	Yes (but not systematically)

Table 4a. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in OECD countries, 2016 *(cont.)*

	Possibility to have prior learning recognised	Legal right to have prior learning recognised	Systematic information about the Recognition of Prior Learning
Norway	Yes (at all levels of education and training: "*realkompetansevurdering*")	Yes (in primary; lower, upper and post-secondary; and higher education)	Yes (but not systematically: for non-EU migrants information is provided pro-actively in the framework of a mandatory civic integration course, for other migrant groups information is available upon request)
Poland	Yes	Yes	No (but higher education institutions may provide information)
Portugal	Yes (Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competences (RVCC)-Procedure for recognition of competences at non-tertiary level and Assessment Procedure for Recognition of Prior Learning for access to higher education programmes)	Yes	Yes (but not proactively: information about RVCC is provided upon request by Employment and Vocational Training Centres or at the Centres for Qualification and Vocational Teaching; information about RPL to access higher education is provided on an individual basis by higher education institutions)
Slovenia	Yes (for prior learning corresponding to vocational and professional qualifications in accordance with labour market needs and the Nat. Professional Qualifications Act)	Yes	No
Spain	Yes (for professional and VET qualifications)	Yes	Yes (but not pro-actively: general information and in some cases individual counselling is available upon request)
Sweden	Yes (for labour market purposes, in adult education and for admission to further studies and credit transfer procedures in higher education)	Yes	Yes (part of regular introduction scheme for newly arrived migrants)
Switzerland	No	/	/
Turkey	Yes (for vocational education)	Yes	Yes (information is available online and upon request)
United Kingdom	Yes	Yes	No

Note: n.a. = information not available; / = not applicable.

Source: OECD questionnaire on the assessment and recognition of foreign qualifications 2016.

Table 4b. Assessment methods used for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in OECD countries, 2016

	Assessment methods used for Recognition of Prior Learning
Australia	• Comparison of a migrant's evidence, experience and skills (including formal education[1] and work experience) against the relevant Australian qualification • Practical demonstration of skills • Technical interview
Belgium	*In German-speaking community*: • Theoretical exam in front of a jury "Jury Central" (for certain regulated professions) • Examination in different subjects in front of the examination board for secondary education in order to gain the university entrance qualification • Mastership examination if relevant professional experience can be proven (practical exam) *In Wallonia:* Assessment methods are at the discretion of higher education institutions
Canada	• Varies by occupation and province/territory but often an informal process involving an in-person interview and/or assessment of skills and references check (non-regulated occupations, if RPL is done by employers) • Challenge exams, demonstrations of skills, structured interviews, simulations and portfolios (regulated occupations or entry into academic programmes)
Chile	Assessment of applicant's performance against occupational performance standards of knowledge and behaviour based on the National Labour Competency Certification System (ChileValora) through accredited evaluators
Czech Republic	Standardised examination (in Czech language) according to an assessment standard of professional qualifications listed in the National Register of Qualifications
Denmark	Self-assessment, documentation, interviews, skills assessment which can include workplace assessment
Estonia	Varies (often a combination of interviews and self-assessment; sometimes tests and demonstration of skills)
Finland	Depends on the institution performing RPL
France	A combination of interviews and workplace assessments
Germany	• Applicants can participate as external candidates in the regular exams for vocational training without prior formal training • Further components are currently developed in the project VALIKOM
Greece	Theoretical and practical exams
Iceland	• Interviews providing guidance and support • Gathering of documentation of previous learning • Self-assessment • Formal assessment of knowledge and skills • Assessment of hands-on skills • Formal documentation of real skills which are registered in an official database
Israel	Verification of official documents of prior learning
Ireland	Identification of learning outcomes, mentoring and documentation, assessment , certification (each institution uses their own methodology of assessment against national standards)
Italy	Still in development
Latvia	• Practical examination of skills required for vocational qualification (for VET) • Evaluation of documents justifying acquired competences by a commission of higher education institutions (for higher education)

Table 4b. Assessment methods used for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in OECD countries, 2016 *(cont.)*

	Assessment methods used for Recognition of Prior Learning
Lithuania	• Theoretical knowledge assessment test and a practical skills assessment task (in vocational training institutions) • Procedural briefing, group or individual consultations and assessment (interview and assessment of document portfolio provided for the recognition procedure) (in higher education)
Luxembourg	A tripartite jury evaluates applicants' evidence based description of their prior learning based on the learning outcomes of the comparable domestic qualification
Mexico	Written tests, oral and case study evaluations
Netherlands	• Identification • Documentation (resume, e-portfolio, profile of prior learning) • Assessment (depends on institution and may involve interviews, workplace assessments, self-assessments) • Certification
New Zealand	Depend on organisation conducting RPL assessment (may include a portfolio of learning, workplace assessment, skills testing)
Norway	Vary according to level and type of education or training (often a combination of practical tests and interviews, workplace assessments, self-assessments or online assessments)
Poland	A commission composed of teachers and the university dean evaluates knowledge and skills against the learning outcomes of a given programme based on a test of 15-30 questions on the subject matter and documents including e.g. proof of previous employment and CV
Portugal	• Portfolio construction, self-assessment and evaluation instruments incl. portfolio analysis sheet, technical interview guide, observation in the workplace and certification of skills through evidence (for Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competences (RVCC) of competencies at non-tertiary level) • Under the discretion of higher education institutions (if RPL is performed to access a higher education programme)
Slovenia	Depend on the profession (e.g. oral or written assessment, practical assessment including task implementation in a simulated workplace environment, validation of documents)
Spain	Creation of a portfolio, interviews, work-place based observations, simulations or standardised tests (depending on the applicant's profile)
Sweden	Varies by the recognising education institution (PES uses sector models including self-assessments, theoretical tests and workplace assessments)
Turkey	Written exam, interview and practical exam

Note: n.a. = information not available; / = not applicable.

1. In the Australian context, RPL is a defined term that involves not only recognition of informal and non-formal but also of formal learning (for further information see http://www.aqf.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/RPL-Explanation.pdf).

Source: OECD questionnaire on the assessment and recognition of foreign qualifications 2016.

Table 4c. Outcome of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in OECD countries, 2016

	Documents resulting from Recognition of Prior Learning	Possibility to enter higher levels of education and training based on Recognition of Prior Learning
Australia	• Full Australian Qualification (if an applicant meets the full Australian qualification requirements) • Statement of attainment listing the individual units of competency (If an applicant does not meet the full Australian qualification requirements)	Yes
Belgium	• Formal diploma granting the same rights as any other holder of a comparable domestic diploma (in German speaking Community) • Admission to a higher education programme (in Wallonia)	Yes (in German-speaking community and Wallonia)
Canada	Varies by occupation and by province/territory: • RPL conducted by employers is often informal and may not result in any documents but rather in an offer of employment • Formal RPL processes may result in a document or certificate stating that the applicant fulfils the requirements for a Canadian academic credential, education programme or professional license (for regulated occupations)	Varies (depends on educational institution, programme of study and degree being sought)
Chile	• Certificate attesting that the applicant's competence meets the performance standards of a domestic occupational skills profile and skills portfolio documenting the findings of the evaluation process (for applicants whose skills are recognised as equivalent to a domestic qualification) • Skills portfolio identifying gaps in applicant's performance that must be improved to obtain certification (for applicants whose skills are not recognised as equivalent to a domestic qualification)	Yes (but only in Higher Technical Training (CFT) institutions, not for academic studies)
Czech Republic	Certificate of recognition of professional qualification	Yes
Denmark	• Document granting access to most formal education and training programmes • Document exempting from parts of a formal education and training programme and/ or giving access to individual tailored education and training programme • "Certificate of competence" leading to access/ exemptions in adult education and training programmes • "Education certificates" for parts of/or a whole education programme on the basis of validation of prior learning	Yes (in connection with upper secondary qualifications VET and higher education)
Estonia	Certificate recognising certain competencies	Yes
Finland	Depends on the institution performing RPL (e.g. accreditation of knowledge and skills towards a degree)	Yes in some cases (if this is the purpose of the RPL procedure)
France	Domestic diploma	Yes
Germany	Domestic degree (external candidates in regular vocational examinations receive the same certificates as regular candidates)	Yes
Greece	Vet- Certificates at different levels	No

Table 4c. Outcome of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in OECD countries, 2016 *(cont.)*

	Documents resulting from Recognition of Prior Learning	Possibility to enter higher levels of education and training based on Recognition of Prior Learning
Iceland	A certificate stating the results of the assessment of prior learning	No (usually completion of formal education at an educational institution in Iceland is required)
Ireland	• Portfolio listing the skills of an applicant • Domestic qualification	Yes
Israel	Decision about salary grading	/
Italy	"Citizen's training booklet" recording a person's skills and competencies	No
Latvia	• Professional qualification certificate (for VET) • Shorter period of study (for higher education)	Yes (in higher education the outcome of RPL can allow participants to complete the equivalent domestic higher education programme in a shorter period)
Lithuania	• Diploma or a right to continue studies in a vocational training programme (for vocational training) • Document certifying that a person has the relevant competencies (in higher education) • If a person wishes to gain a higher education qualification, a particular number of credits is awarded and relevant subjects or modules of the study programme are scored up	Yes
Luxembourg	• Certificate stating that the applicant fulfils the requirements for obtaining a domestic qualification • Document stating the missing elements to obtain a domestic qualification	Yes
Mexico	• Professional titles • Certificates of a specific educational level or grade (in secondary and higher education)	Yes
Netherlands	• Certificate of Experience "Ervaringscertificaat" (for employment purposes) • Exemption from a study programme or full domestic degree (in higher education)	Yes
New Zealand	Depends on organisation conducting RPL assessment (some may issue a New Zealand qualification, others a statement of assessment)	Depends on organisation conducting RPL assessment
Norway	• Lower secondary education certificate • Proof of competence / full or partial completion of specific study/training units • Certificate of completed upper secondary education; Trade or Journeyman's certificate (if applicants have undertaken the relevant final examination) • Admission offer to a study/training programme • Diploma or specification in the final certificate of the units or modules obtained through RPL	Yes
Poland	Decision on admission to study	Yes

Table 4c. Outcome of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in OECD countries, 2016 *(cont.)*

	Documents resulting from Recognition of Prior Learning	Possibility to enter higher levels of education and training based on Recognition of Prior Learning
Portugal	• Certificate of qualifications listing the applicant's skills and, if applicable, the level of the corresponding domestic qualification (for basic, lower-secondary, secondary and vocational education) • Access to a higher education programme (if RPL is performed by higher education institutions)	Yes
Slovenia	Certificate of acquired national vocational (or professional) qualification	No
Spain	• Accreditation of units of competence / professional modules • Full qualification (if accredited units of competences / professional modules accumulate to a domestic qualification)	Yes
Sweden	• Recognised occupational certificate (for labour market purposes if sector models are used) • Educational marks (in adult education) • Formal educational credits or full diploma (for higher educational purposes)	Yes
Turkey	Qualification certificate based on occupational standards	No (but this will be addressed during the implementation of Turkish Qualifications Framework (TQF) over the next years)
United Kingdom	• Statement of comparability and progression options	Yes

Note: n.a. = information not available; / = not applicable.

Source: OECD questionnaire on the assessment and recognition of foreign qualifications 2016.

Table 4d. Actors involved in Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in OECD countries, 2016

	Employer involvement in RPL	Other actors involved in RPL
Australia	Yes (employer associations and unions representatives can be involved in the development of the assessment tools used by Registered Training Organisations)	Registered Training Organisations including higher education providers and vocational education training institutions (both government-owned and private providers)
Austria	Yes (but not yet systematic)	Public Employment Service, education and training institutions
Canada	Varies across occupations and provinces/territories	Depends on the occupation (academic bodies, Provinces and Territories' regulatory bodies, credential assessment bodies)
Chile	Yes (the National Labour Competency Certification System (ChileValora) includes three representatives of employers)	ChileValora includes three representatives of workers, three public sector representatives and an Executive Secretary (besides the employer representatives)

Table 4d. Actors involved in Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in OECD countries, 2016
(cont.)

	Employer involvement in RPL	Other actors involved in RPL
Czech Republic	No	n.a.
Denmark	Yes (the Ministry of Education has an agreement with the Federation of Danish Employers and the Confederation of Danish Professionals and The Danish Association of Managers and Executives)	Educational institutions, job centres, trade unions, unemployment funds and the third sector
France	Yes	Universities, trade unions and sometimes local governments
Germany	Yes	Employers are actively involved in the pilot project VALIKOM (see Lesson4)
Italy	Varies considerably (procedures for RPL at national level are still under construction)	Public and private organisations including chambers of commerce, educational institutions, universities and higher education institutions
Luxembourg	Yes	Tri-partite jury (employers, employees and teachers/trainers)
Mexico	No	E.g. the National Center for Assessment in Higher Education (Centro Nacional de Evaluación para la Educación Superior -CENEVAL-)
Norway	No	Ministry of Education and Research, Skills Norway, the Norwegian Agency for Lifelong Learning (formerly VOX), Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training (for primary, lower and upper secondary education, vocational colleges (post-secondary and tertiary) and higher education institutions
Poland	No	Higher Education Institutions
Portugal	No	Centres for Qualification and Vocational Teaching, Employment and Vocational Training Centres, Higher Education Institutions
Slovenia	Yes (for vocational qualifications)	Commissions for recognition (for professional qualifications); National Committee for Occupational and professional education, examination centres, assessors of RPL, social partners (Chambers of Commerce, associations of employers, unions, NGOs, ministries (for vocational qualifications)
Spain	Yes (employers can be involved in the definition of professional standards of reference for assessment)	Unions, Public Employment Service, sectoral experts

Table 4d. Actors involved in Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in OECD countries, 2016 (cont.)

	Employer involvement in RPL	Other actors involved in RPL
Sweden	Yes (depends on industry, in vocational training employers act as mentors/instructors at the workplace) The role of employers depends on the validation model of their industry. Validation within vocational training normally involves mentors/instructors at the workplace. For about 100 occupations sector representatives (employers and unions) have developed models for RPL related to skills needed for employability.	Public Employment Service, formal training institutions at all educational levels, non-formal sector training institutions, social partners, relevant competent authority and/or sector organisations (in regulated professions)
Switzerland	No	No
United Kingdom	Yes	Varies (education providers, training/awarding bodies)

Note: n.a. = information not available; / = not applicable.

Source: OECD questionnaire on the assessment and recognition of foreign qualifications, 2016.

Lesson 5
Link partial recognition to bridging courses

WHAT and WHY? Taking into account the discrepancy in the content and quality of education systems across countries, it is not surprising that a considerable number of individuals obtain a partial but not a full recognition of their previous training abroad. Without adequate policy solutions, immigrants in such a situation may then have to repeat part or all of their training in the receiving country's education system to be entitled to work in their field and skill level. This often involves substantial costs in terms of time and money and can have lock-in effects that delay labour market integration and activation of skills. Effective bridging courses offer a fast-track and a cost-efficient solution out of this dilemma, enabling immigrants to fill specific skills gaps and obtain full recognition or even a host-country degree.

If they are effective, bridging programmes provide excellent value for money. A bridging programme for nurses in Australia, for instance, costs only 10% of alternative training offers that would be delivered through higher education institutions (Konno, 2006). If immigrants are well aware of bridging programmes and their benefits, this might also encourage them to apply for recognition, given that refusal could then steer them to such retraining offers.

WHO? Bridging courses are useful for all migrants, whose qualifications are not fully equivalent to a domestic degree. For immigrants trained in regulated professions they are a necessity as eligibility to exercise these professions is dependent on obtaining formal recognition. Most bridging courses are currently offered to health professionals as medical training pathways are heavily regulated and vary strongly from one country to another (see Table A.1). Further, there is a clearly acknowledged shortage in this field virtually everywhere.

HOW? To allow immigrants with partial recognition statements to quickly fill their skills gaps and obtain full recognition, partial recognition decisions should include a clear statement about which skills are missing and which additional training is needed. This is the case in most OECD countries where partial recognition is possible (see Table 5a). Bridging courses must then be made available in co-operation with professional bodies and/or educational institutions to prepare immigrants for licensing examinations and help them find traineeships and work placements, in order to eventually obtain full recognition.

Given that the outcome of individualised recognition is liable to be quite unique the resultant bridging requirements are unlikely to be fulfilled by any one specific course without substantial repetition. As a result, effective bridging courses are

tailored to the applicant's specific needs and follow an individual learning plan. To achieve this, the regulated professions in Germany, for example, are now co-operating with recognition authorities and educational institutions in order to divide the course work into several modules. These modules can then serve as an orientation to recognition authorities who are able to require candidates to attend only those modules relevant to the competencies that they are found to be lacking. The flexibility inherent in this modularisation enables a more individualised bridging offer that is able to avoid unnecessary repetition.

Even where bridging is modularised ensuring that migrants across the country have access to bridging offers adapted to their individual needs is not an easy task – in particular if migrants come from various different education systems, professional fields and with different skill needs. To facilitate sufficient supply and accessibility of bridging offers at a reasonable price, countries will have to develop flexible solutions including mobility schemes and distance-learning programmes. An example is the Canadian province of Ontario, where internationally educated nurses can prepare for licensure and receive an Ontario College Certificate via distance education and online learning.[9] Along similar lines, Sweden offers bridging courses for teachers, which can be partially undertaken via distance learning.

Ideally, bridging offers combine tailored professional training with language instruction, work experience and a mentoring scheme to provide immigrants with all the resources that they need to transfer their skills into the receiving country's labour market (see Table 5b for an overview on the components of bridging programmes in OECD countries).

Professional mentoring schemes are still relatively rare but are gradually developing in countries such as Austria, Norway and Switzerland, where they are part of active labour market policies, but not specifically linked to bridging courses. In Canada many bridging programmes include a mentoring component. One such programme is the Environmental Immigrant Bridging Program which targets experienced environmental professionals who have completed an assessment of their foreign qualification. The programme comprises 180 hours of training during which migrants are taught technical writing; environmental issues in Canada; and professional communication skills. They are encouraged to obtain work experience through an internship and benefit from a mentorship scheme, volunteering and networking events.

Bridging courses that include a vocational language component are particularly helpful for professionals lacking language skills who need to communicate with patients or clients using a technical or vocation-specific vocabulary. Portugal, for example, runs a programme for foreign-trained medical doctors since 2002, which

provides for the translation of documents, bridging courses in the faculty of medicine, comprehensive preparation material, internships in teaching hospitals, and vocation-specific language training. An evaluation of the programme, which is jointly operated by non-governmental organisations, the health ministry and a university, suggests that 106 of 120 participants found work in their profession. The cost of the nine-month programme was only a fraction of the average annual cost of medical training in the country (OECD, 2008).

An evaluation of bridging courses in Sweden suggests that it takes a strong consortium of delivery partners to design and implement effective bridging courses and that such initiatives are most effective where they culminate in the award of a domestic qualification that employers can easily interpret (Niknami and Schroeder, 2012). Building on this, Sweden developed a tripartite fast-track initiative, which combines trade customised bridging education (including vocational Swedish) with recognition of formal qualifications and prior learning and leads to the award of an occupational certificate or credential (see also Lesson 2). Programmes begin by mapping, validating and bridging the skills of participants in their mother tongue, while at the same time offering language tuition alongside these activities. A key difference with previous initiatives is that Swedish language skills, a requirement that, in the past, has substantially slowed down bridging and limited the number of eligible participants, will not be required prior to the commencement of validation and bridging efforts. In the teaching profession, for example, where the skills of up to 1 500 newly accepted refugees with experience as teachers are needed to help accommodate newly-arrived minors into the school, specific bridging courses at universities initially concentrate on Swedish pedagogy while building language skills alongside this process. At the end of the course, teachers continue their language studies alongside work by working four days a week in the classroom in their mother tongue, and devoting one day to Swedish language classes (Arbetsförmedlingen, 2016).

Canada, too, funds bridging programmes across the country that enable immigrants to work in the occupation for which they were originally trained and educated. In addition, Canada has developed an innovative approach to help those foreign trained professionals use their knowledge and skills in the labour market who do not have the time and resources to obtain licensure or who have not found a job in their occupation despite successful licensure. The “alternative career” pathway provides career options in jobs that require little or no upgrading upon arrival but that relate to the profession in which immigrants were originally educated and trained. This approach immediately uses the person’s transferable technical and soft skills, education and experience. For immigrants who plan but have not yet had their credentials assessed the alternative career approach can

also offer an interim employment option, allowing them to gain professional experience, learn work-related language, connect with employers and network alongside the recognition procedure (see Box 4).

Box 4. Work alongside bridging in Canada and Germany

Combining work and participation in bridging courses ensures that early contact with the labour market does not impinge upon the ability of qualified migrants to eventually enter employment in which they are able to use their skills and qualifications. One option is to provide early work experience within a field that is closely related to the subject area of the bridging material.

Since only 20% of immigrants in **Canada** in licensed occupations obtain a professional license in their field, Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) has been working with partners to explore alternative careers. For some migrants alternative careers may become a satisfactory career choice in itself, while others may pursue them alongside efforts towards gaining the requisite license to practice in the occupation they were originally trained and educated for. Since 2013, CIC, together with Settlement service provider organisations and provincial and territorial counterparts, has worked with over 800 high skilled immigrants in various sectors including finance, biotechnology, health, accounting and engineering, to explore alternative career options and connect immigrants with employers. One example is the engineering profession:

Alternative careers: Non-regulated alternatives to engineering

Professional Engineers (Regulated)	**Technologists** (Non-regulated)	**Technicians** (Non-regulated)
Are required by law to assume professional responsibility for the design, research and development, commissioning and field review and construction of engineering projects.	Apply theoretical and practical methods to design, plan, develop, test, manufacture, construct, install & commission engineered products, systems and services.	Assist with the design, development, manufacturing, testing, construction, installation, commission, operation & maintenance of engineered products, processes, systems and services.

The model brings together stakeholders – government regulators, professional associations, educational institutions and employers – to provide information to internationally trained individuals on alternative career pathways, licensing practices and connects them with employers to discuss job options.

Source: Canadian Council of Technicians and Technologists and Canadian Technology Immigration Network (see: www.engineeringcareerpathways.ca).

In **Germany**, a model programme called Early Intervention, which has recently been anchored in legislation as a principle, assists certain asylum seekers with a high likelihood of being granted permission to stay to determine what their skills are, how these are relevant to different occupations and how to apply them in the labour market already during the asylum procedure. Migrants may then begin working in a job that requires a lower level of qualifications than the job for which they are formally qualified (for example as a nursing assistant rather than as a nurse) with the aim of moving into a more qualified position when they have attained fluency in German and have experience of the German nursing sector. Importantly, migrants are given the opportunity to study language alongside their initial position in order to ensure they progress towards their goal and do not remain stuck in a position for which they are over-qualified (Büschel et al. 2015).

Table 5a. Bridging programmes in OECD countries, 2016

	Availability of bridging offers for immigrants with partial recognition of foreign qualifications	Systematic information about bridging offers for immigrants who obtained partial recognition
Australia	Yes (for air conditioning or refrigeration mechanics, electricians, line workers, technical cable jointer and plumbers)	Yes (skilled migrants with an Offshore Technical Skills Record)
Austria	Yes (but not systematically and mostly for regulated professions)	Yes (provided by four regional contact points for recognition)
Belgium	No (in German-speaking community and Wallonia)	/
Canada	Yes	Yes (the Settlement Program provides pre- and post-arrival employment counselling to newcomers, which includes the provision of information related to recognition of prior learning and assessments services)
Chile	No	/
Czech Republic	No	/
Denmark	Yes	Varies (in regulated professions candidates with a partial recognition are informed by the competent authority about the courses needed in order to obtain an authorisation to exercise their profession, in other cases candidates need to inform themselves)
Estonia	No	/
Finland	Yes (but not systematic)	Yes
France	No	/
Germany	Yes	Yes (but not pro-actively; information is available via websites and information centres)
Greece	No	/
Hungary	No	/
Iceland	No formal bridging offers available (bridging is dealt with on a case-by-case basis)	No
Ireland	Not systematic (but education and training boards may provide bridging at local levels)	No (but migrants with declared skills obtain assistance to identify their needs)
Israel	Yes	n.a.
Italy	No	/

Table 5a. Bridging programmes in OECD countries, 2016 *(cont.)*

	Availability of bridging offers for immigrants with partial recognition of foreign qualifications	Systematic information about bridging offers for immigrants who obtained partial recognition
Japan	Yes (for nurses and caretakers from the Philippines, Indonesia and Vietnam based on EPA)	Yes
Korea	No	/
Latvia	No	/
Lithuania	Yes (for higher education qualifications in non-regulated professions)	Yes
Luxembourg	No	/
Mexico	Yes	Yes
Netherlands	Yes (at higher education institutions)	Yes (for immigrants who apply to higher education institutions)
New Zealand	No	/
Norway	Yes (but not systematically for all professions and programmes, well established in the health sector)	Yes (but not for all professions and programmes)
Poland	Yes	Yes
Portugal	Yes	Yes
Slovenia	No	/
Spain	Yes	Yes
Sweden	Yes (for teachers, medical doctors, nurses, dentists, veterinarians and lawyers; further measures are currently developed in 14 sectors covering 20 professions)	Yes (educational institutions and PES provide counselling on bridging measures)
Switzerland	No	/
Turkey	Yes (for bachelor degrees)	No
United Kingdom	Yes (not systematically but a rich suite of bridging and up-skilling programmes are available to immigrants)	Yes (for applicants wishing to pursue further studies or applicants seeking employment)

Note: n.a. = information not available

Source: OECD questionnaire on the assessment and recognition of foreign qualifications 2016.

Table 5b. Type and components of bridging programmes in OECD countries, 2016

	Type and components of bridging programmes
Australia	• Successful TRA assessment • Receipt of an Offshore Technical Skills Record (OTSR), provisional licence • Approved Minimum Australian Context Training (MACT) program • Period of supervised work • Full qualification • Unrestricted licence in their occupation
Canada	Differ for each province, bridging offers typically include: • Sector-specific labour market supports • Job-specific language training • Job-searching skills • Workplace orientation • Classes that help prepare for the licensing or certification process • Academic and technical training in some cases
Denmark	• EU nationals with a conditional decision concerning a regulated profession must choose between an aptitude test and an adaptation period before gaining full access to pursuing the profession • Non-EU nationals with a conditional decision concerning a regulated profession may be required to complete an aptitude test, an adaptation period or relevant, supplementary training or elements thereof. Profession specific language courses are available.
Germany	• In regulated professions: successful completion of a compensatory measure stipulated by the competent authority (i.e. an adaptation period or test) • In non-regulated occupations: Continuing training measures to compensate for the missing skills listed in the assessment notice
Israel	The Ministry of Aliyah and Immigrant Absorption (MOIA) funds preparatory courses for foreign professionals for national licensing examinations in medical professions, law and accounting. Medical licensing exams can be taken in Russian, English, Spanish or French. MOIA provides grants to immigrants in internships in professions requiring them.
Italy	Vocational training
Japan	Language courses for nurses and care takers in the framework of EPA schemes
Lithuania	• Recognition of periods of study • Demonstration of the required competencies through examinations, etc.
Norway	• For professional recognition: competent ministries contract courses in higher education institutions • In higher education immigrant students attend regular courses to complete their degree. Before they may be admitted or requested to take Norwegian language classes.
Poland	Regular further studies leading to the relevant degree (no specially designed bridging courses)
Portugal	Further education and training, traineeships or a mix of those
Slovenia	Continuation of the study programme in Slovenia and receipt of an academic degree
Sweden	• Profession specific language courses • Information sessions on Swedish regulatory and professional framework for occupation • Trial work period • Practical and theoretical test
Turkey	• Language education • Education procedure to obtain equivalency for a bachelor degree, internship, etc.
United Kingdom	A rich suite of bridging and up-skilling programmes

Note: n.a. = information not available

Source: OECD questionnaire on the assessment and recognition of foreign qualifications 2016.

Lesson 6
Ensure that regulatory bodies treat immigrants fairly

WHAT and WHY? In order to apply for recognition and to be admitted into a regulated profession, immigrants must usually approach the relevant professional regulatory body and follow its specific assessment criteria and procedures. This can be difficult for immigrants, particularly when assessment criteria and procedures lack transparency. Things are often particularly complex for immigrants who are still residing abroad or for those who lack official documentation of their foreign qualifications, for example because they fled from war in conflict-ridden zones. These and other obstacles may place immigrants at a disadvantage over native-born applicants. To ensure that recognition practices in regulated professions and trades do not discriminate against immigrants with foreign qualifications but comply with principles of fairness and transparency "fairness commissioners" can act as a liaison between the immigrant and the assessment body.

WHO? Fairness commissioners defend the interests of any immigrant with foreign qualifications who considers applying for the assessment and recognition of a diploma to work in a regulated profession.

HOW? The fairness commissioner model was pioneered by the Canadian province of Ontario in 2006 (see Box 5). In the 1980s, Ontario had established a task force that examined requirements for the entry into regulated professions and concluded that immigrants trained abroad encountered systematic obstacles and barriers to recognition. These insights resulted in the Fair Access Act of 2006 which established a fairness commissioner in charge of dismantling such barriers by streamlining processes, improving information, and providing support. Since 2005, several other Canadian provinces including Manitoba, Quebec and Nova Scotia have followed suit and passed similar legislation. Denmark, Australia, and New York State are currently liaising with Ontario's fairness commissioner to establish similar offices in the future.

In Belgium, the Federation Wallonia-Brussels and Wallonia have established the office of an ombudsman who addresses, although not exclusively, issues of foreign credential recognition. As such, the ombudsman treats complaints regarding accessibility of recognition services, processing times and unclear decisions. The office also assists applicants in identifying the competent recognition authority and forwards applications to the competent body. All services are free of charge.

Besides the establishment of specific fairness offices countries across the OECD have made efforts to render existing recognition procedures as accessible as

possible for applicants – regardless of where their diploma was obtained and whether or not they have proof of it. For instance, the vast majority of OECD countries have established alternative assessment procedures for refugees and other migrants lacking full documentation of their foreign degrees [see Table 6a below and OECD (2016) for an overview of good alternative assessment practices for applicants without documentation].[10] In addition, recognition authorities in several OECD countries now accept qualifications in various languages or provide subsidies for translation services where required (see Table 6b).

In the United States, the Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition (MIRA) promotes the rights and integration of immigrants and refugees via policy analysis and advocacy, institutional organising, training and leadership development, strategic communications, citizenship assistance and capacity-building for community-based organisations. Amongst others, MIRA's work addresses the career barriers facing professionals with foreign qualifications in Massachusetts and helps them have their qualifications recognised or find new career pathways building on their advanced training and experience. For this purpose MIRA developed the initiative "Back to the Office", which provides online resources offering information, training materials, and links to organisations that can help skilled immigrants as well as career advisors and educators better understand and navigate options for professional recertification and alternative career pathways. The initiative also offers career workshops for immigrant professionals and career advisors as well as programme development support to community-based organisations, career centres, job training agencies, and other groups to help them build their capacity to respond to the needs of this population. Moreover, MIRA works to shape policy and increase awareness at the regional and local level around the challenges and opportunities related to foreign-trained professionals, particular in medical fields.

Box 5. The Office of the Fairness Commissioner of Ontario in Canada

In 2006, the provincial Government of Ontario passed the Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act that requires regulated professions to have fair registration practices in place and established the Office of the Fairness Commissioner (OFC) to ensure that the professions comply with the law. The Fair Access Act grants applicants to regulated professions a number of rights, including the following:

- the right to obtain clear information about requirements, assessment criteria, processes and timelines;
- the right to timely decisions;

- the right to an explanation of the reasons driving the result of the assessment;
- the right to request a review or appeal;
- the right to a transparent, objective, impartial and fair assessment of their qualification by adequately trained assessors; and
- the right to access application records.

The OFC of Ontario has since been issuing recommendations to regulatory bodies to review and improve their registration practices in line with the Fair Access Act. The Office can request self-reviews from regulatory bodies, as well as reports and audits to gain insight into assessment criteria and processes. If regulatory bodies commit an offense against the Fairness Act, the OFC may issue compliance orders or impose a fine of up to CAD 100 000.

Other responsibilities of the OFC in Ontario include advising regulated professions on registration issues; specifying scopes and standards for audits and receiving audits; advising government ministries about issues relating to licensing and recognition practices, and reporting to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration on a regular basis.

The OFC in Ontario share their insights through a number of stakeholder engagement activities. A study with 3700 applicants (holding both domestic and foreign qualifications) resulted in 17 specific recommendations issued by the Fairness Commissioner in 2013.

Table 6a. Alternative assessment methods for applicants without (full) documentation of foreign qualifications in OECD countries, 2016

	Alternative assessment methods for applicants without (full) documentation of qualifications	Type of alternatives
Australia	Yes	Statutory declaration and/or recognition of prior learning (e.g. practical demonstration, technical interview)
Austria	Yes (for humanitarian migrants)	Practical or theoretical exams, work samples or professional interviews
Belgium	• Yes in certain regulated professions, for secondary qualifications granting access to universities and for professional qualifications (German-speaking community) • Yes but not systematically (in Wallonia)	Examinations (a more comprehensive concept for the validation of all types of formal and informal qualifications is being developed)
Canada	Yes	Sworn statements before a legal authority; Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL); substantial equivalence; competency based assessments; expert validation; practical (on the job), oral and written assessments; verification with source country institutions or embassies
Chile	No	/
Czech Republic	Yes (except for professional qualifications)	Submission of an affidavit, recognition exam

Table 6a. Alternative assessment methods for applicants without (full) documentation of foreign qualifications in OECD countries, 2016 *(cont.)*

	Alternative assessment methods for applicants without (full) documentation of qualifications	Type of alternatives
Denmark	Yes	Background report describing the educational background of the applicant and indicating how the Danish Agency for Higher Education would normally assess a similar qualification if sufficient documentation was available
Estonia	No (but possibility to access vocational education)	/
Finland	Yes	Type of RPL called competence-based qualification procedure via skills demonstrations
France	No (but alternative assessment methods are being developed)	/
Germany	Yes	"Qualification Analysis" (including work samples, professional interviews or presentations)
Greece	No	/
Hungary	Yes (for refugees and asylum seekers)	
Iceland	Yes	Recognition of Prior Learning
Ireland	Yes	
Israel	Yes (on a case by case basis)	Decision by an inter-ministerial committee based on alternative documents (e.g. copies instead of originals) or affidavits that are signed by a lawyer
Italy	Yes (for humanitarian migrants on a case by case basis)	Support from the Foreign Ministry to obtain a statement of validity (*Dichiarazione di valore in loco*)
Japan	No	/
Korea	Yes (for North Korean defectors or if the qualification is registered in the origin country)	
Latvia	No (but alternatives are being developed)	/
Lithuania	Yes	Reconstruction of the educational background validated through examination and/or interview
Luxembourg	No	/
Mexico	Yes (in special cases, e.g. for refugees)	
Netherlands	Yes	Indication of level of education (*Indicatie Onderwijsniveau*)
New Zealand	Yes	Verification of copies (special arrangements apply for refugees under the United Nations Refugee Quota)
Norway	Yes (for higher education)	Recognition Procedure for Persons without Verifiable Documentation ("UVD-procedure")
Poland	Yes (for refugees)	Confirmation of completion of higher education based on alternative forms of proof (e.g. transcripts, documents confirming acquired professional rights or previous employment)
Portugal	No (but alternatives are sought to facilitate access to the education and training system)	/

Table 6a. Alternative assessment methods for applicants without (full) documentation of foreign qualifications in OECD countries, 2016 *(cont.)*

	Alternative assessment methods for applicants without (full) documentation of qualifications	Type of alternatives
Slovenia	Yes	Notice providing information about their education (a comprehensive assessment procedure for applicants who lack documentation is being developed)
Spain	Yes	Granting more time obtain alternative forms of documentation
Sweden	Yes (for non-regulated professions)	Background sworn procedure resulting in an education description similar to, but not formally, a recognition statement; a pilot to assess qualifications of persons without document is underway
Switzerland	Yes	Validation of previous education
Turkey	Yes	Comparison of personal data and the information obtained from investigation
United Kingdom	Yes	Combination of related-information held, testing and interviews

Note: n.a. = information not available

Source: OECD questionnaire on the assessment and recognition of foreign qualifications 2016.

Table 6b. Language and translation issues with recognition of foreign qualifications in OECD countries, 2016

	Languages in which applications are accepted for recognition	Availability of subsidies to cover or reimburse the costs of translation
Australia	English	No
Austria	German, English (depending on competent authority)	Possibility to cover translation costs up to a certain limit (no legal right)
Belgium	• German, French, Dutch and English (In German-speaking community) • French (Wallonia)	Yes (but only for beneficiaries of social benefits in German-speaking community)
Canada	English, French (depends on province)	No (but Canada committed to a permanent Foreign Credential Recognition (FCR) Loans Programme to cover costs associated with FCR)
Chile	Spanish	No
Czech Republic	• Czech, Slovak, English (for vocational and academic qualifications) • Czech, Slovak (for basic, secondary and higher vocational education) • Czech (for professional qualifications)	No

Table 6b. Language and translation issues with recognition of foreign qualifications in OECD countries, 2016 *(cont.)*

	Languages in which applications are accepted for recognition	Availability of subsidies to cover or reimburse the costs of translation
Denmark	Danish, English, Norwegian, Swedish, English, French, German, Spanish	Yes
Estonia	Estonian, English, Russian	No
Finland	Varies across competent authorities (Finnish, Swedish, Norwegian, Danish, Icelandic, English, French, Spanish, German at the Finnish National Board of Education)	No
France	Depends on the languages spoken by the staff of the recognition centre (French, German, English, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese and Arabic did not require translation in 2015)	No
Germany	German	Yes
Greece	Greek	No
Hungary	Hungarian and English (French and German for regulated professions)	
Iceland	Icelandic, English and Scandinavian languages	No
Ireland	English	
Israel	Hebrew, Arabic and English, Russian, Ukrainian	No (but this is planned)
Italy	Italian (some universities accept academic degrees in English, Spanish or French)	No
Japan	Japanese	No
Korea	Korean, English	Depends on institution
Latvia	Latvian (also English, Russian and other European languages are accepted for ordinary types of documents such as regular general secondary diplomas and higher education degrees)	No
Lithuania	English, Lithuanian, Russian (exceptions can be made for standard diplomas / transcripts in further languages)	No
Luxembourg	Luxemburgish, French, German, English	No
Mexico	Spanish	No
Netherlands	All languages	Yes
New Zealand	English	
Norway	Norwegian, Swedish, Danish, Finnish, Icelandic, English	No
Poland	Polish (English in exceptional cases)	No
Portugal	• Portuguese for basic, lower-secondary and upper-secondary education • English, French, Italian, Spanish for applications for automatic recognition of higher education qualifications • Portuguese for higher education qualifications and professional qualifications in non-regulated professions • Varies for decisions about equivalence issued by Higher Education Institutions	Translation is free of charge for immigrants because authorities provide for the official translation of documents
Slovenia	Slovenian, English, German, Croatian, Serbian, Bosnian, Chinese	Yes (for refugees and asylum seekers)
Spain	Spanish	Yes
Sweden	Swedish, Danish, English, Finnish, French, German, Icelandic, Norwegian, Spanish	Yes (for persons that are registered with the PES)

Table 6b. Language and translation issues with recognition of foreign qualifications in OECD countries, 2016 *(cont.)*

	Languages in which applications are accepted for recognition	Availability of subsidies to cover or reimburse the costs of translation
Switzerland	German, French, Italian, English	No
Turkey	Turkish	No
United Kingdom	Arabic, Bulgarian, Catalan, Chinese, Danish, Farsi, French, German, Italian, language of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Norwegian, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Serbian, Spanish, Swedish	

Note: n.a. = information not available; / = not applicable

Source: OECD questionnaire on the assessment and recognition of foreign qualifications 2016.

Lesson 7
Engage employers and other relevant non-governmental stakeholders

WHAT and WHY? Employers have expert knowledge about skills in demand and about the level and type of information they look for when assessing educational and professional credentials. Engaging employers and generating buy-in from all relevant stakeholders is thus crucial to ensure that recognition procedures are known and outcomes are widely accepted and meet employers' needs.

WHO? Employers and regulatory bodies are key stakeholders in any recognition system. Nevertheless, in most OECD countries, employers (especially in the non-regulated professions) play only a small, if any role in formal assessment and recognition mechanisms. Recognition partnerships should aim to include them further in the design and implementation of recognition policies. This is particularly appropriate in countries where the social partners play a strong role in labour market policy and integration, such as in Austria or Belgium.

HOW? In most countries, responsibility for recognition of foreign qualifications for the purpose of employment is spread across various actors including public recognition offices, regulatory authorities, state boards and employers or membership-based organisations, such as employer associations and professional boards. Frequently competence on recognition depends on whether or not a profession is regulated in the host-country.

In *non-regulated* professions, where a formal recognition statement is usually not required for employment, many immigrants do not bother to have their qualifications formally recognised. In this case, the decision of whether or not to "recognise" a foreign diploma depends on the discretion of individual employers and coincides with their decision to hire or not hire a candidate with foreign qualifications. In Canada, for example, it is up to the employer to determine when and how to assess an individual's foreign qualifications in non-regulated professions. Employers are thus the competency evaluators for 80-85% of occupations that make up Canada's non regulated labour market. Employers may choose to assess qualifications with support from education credential assessment bodies, professional associations, apprenticeship offices, or by themselves, depending on the person's qualifications to be assessed.

Where a holder of foreign qualification in a non-regulated occupation wishes to obtain a formal recognition statement, the relevant body to contact is usually not the employer but a public credential evaluation agency, such as the NARIC offices that exist in many European OECD countries (see Lesson 8). Exceptions are

Australia, Germany, Lithuania and the United Kingdom, where employers are actively involved in the formal assessment and recognition of foreign qualifications in non-regulated professions (see Table 7).

Where access to jobs depends on the discretion of individual employers, the latter may benefit from accessing the rich pool of information generated by recognition bodies in their assessment and evaluation of qualifications from various contexts. Sharing this information with employers would improve the information flow and enhance transparency about the assessment of foreign qualifications. By making such information publicly available, recognition authorities offer resources that stakeholders can consult independently when in doubt about the value of a foreign qualification. OECD countries providing publicly accessible assessment databases include Australia (see Box 6a below), Germany and Denmark.

At the same time, employers themselves can provide valuable feedback about their workers with recognised qualifications. This may help to improve recognition procedures and can assure other employers. By doing so, it helps to grow trust in the reliability of recognition procedures.

Box 6a. Databases on foreign qualifications in Australia and Germany

Comprehensive databases about migrant-relevant country education systems (structure, framework, governance, quality-assurance procedures, public-private sector trends, and institutional status) can be easily updated and shared with employers. They are also of great value for employers and further recognition stakeholders in other countries.

Australia's Country Education Profiles

The Australian National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition[1] shares Country Education Profiles online that provide information on how to place foreign qualifications within the Australian Qualifications Framework. They are intended to assist employers and higher education institutions in deciding whether to admit a candidate for employment or studies. To this end, every country profile provides assessment guidelines; a list of recognised institutions; a description of the education system; as well as other relevant information (such as grading standards, language of instruction, admission requirements, etc.). The country profiles also give advice on how to read a foreign diploma. There are currently country profiles covering 127 countries, focusing on higher education and post-secondary vocational qualifications. The profiles are only accessible to registered users and in exchange against a flexible subscription fee. (https://internationaleducation.gov.au/Services-And-Resources/services-for-organisations/Pages/Services-for-organisations.aspx).

1. AEI-NOOSR is part of the Department of Education, Science and Training and is the Australian NARIC, National Information Centre on Recognition. It provides official information and advice on the comparability of overseas qualifications with Australian qualifications, using the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) as a benchmark.

Box 6a. Databases on foreign qualifications in Australia and Germany *(cont.)*

The BQ Portal in Germany

In Germany, the BQ online portal provides individual employers and competent assessment bodies including the Chambers of Skilled Crafts with detailed and authoritative information regarding foreign vocational training systems in 76 countries, the substance and duration of 1 650 individual vocational training programmes and the legal basis on which these are offered. The platform also allows registered members of the Chamber of Skilled Crafts to add information thereby pooling all relevant information on foreign professional qualifications. With its collaborative approach the BQ-Portal ensures that the competent organisations draw on the same database and hence fosters transparency and consistency between the decisions made by the various chambers across the Federal Republic (https://www.bq-portal.de/en/home).

In *regulated* professions a formal recognition statement, a professional license or membership in a professional association is typically required to practice in the profession. Responsibility for such recognition or licensing commonly rests with regulatory authorities or state boards, but may also involve professional boards and employer associations and individual employers (see Table 7). In Denmark, Greece, Iceland, Sweden and Luxembourg employers are for example actively engaged in the recognition procedure via skills assessments or trial periods at the work place.

Employers can also play an active role in the recognition of prior learning, meaning the assessment of in-formal and non-formal learning that a person may have acquired abroad (see Lesson 4). The Netherlands provide an example of successful engagement with employers and social partners in this field. In some industrial branches, trade unions and employer organisations run Training and Development Funds (O&O-fondsen) to promote industrial training of employees. These funds are also used to assess skills and competencies of employees. Several sectors have established RPL procedures in consultation with employers, the social partners, sector organisations and vocational training institutions. In Denmark, the Ministry of Employment and the social partners jointly established regional knowledge centres for the assessment of skills and qualifications acquired abroad (see Box 6b).

Box 6b. Employer involvement in skills assessment in Denmark

Employers are actively involved in the development of industry specific practical guidelines for RPL through vocational trade committees. Practical guidelines and manuals for RPL have been developed in various sectors including building and construction; trade, administration, communication and management; industry; kitchen, restaurant, bakery, pastry and meat industry; dairy and agriculture; metal industry; social and health; the services sector; the tree industry and transport. In addition, employers co-operate with VET schools and training centres offering RPL schemes when undertaking validation of RPL for example as part of their company's continuing training for workers.

Employers can also use the initiative "My competence portfolio", a digital tool helping immigrants to develop competence portfolios (see Box 3).

Table 7. Employer involvement in the recognition procedure of foreign formal qualifications in OECD countries, 2016

	Regulated occupations		Non-regulated occupations	
	Employer involvement	Type of involvement	Employer involvement	Type of involvement
Australia	Yes	Recognition authorities engage with employers and industry groups in determining the professional standards for recognition	Yes	Assessment authorities engage with employers to ensure that assessment standards are in line with AQF qualifications required for employment
Austria	Yes	In cases of partial recognition, where practical training at the workplace is required	Yes	In cases of partial recognition, where taking a final (practical) apprenticeship examination is required
Belgium	No	/	No	/
Canada	Yes (but very limited)	n.a.	Yes	Employers may choose to assess qualifications with support from education credential assessment bodies professional associations, apprenticeship offices, or by themselves)
Chile	No	/	No	/
Czech Republic	No	/	No	/

Table 7. Employer involvement in the recognition procedure of foreign formal qualifications in OECD countries, 2016 *(cont.)*

	Regulated occupations		Non-regulated occupations	
	Employer involvement	Type of involvement	Employer involvement	Type of involvement
Denmark	Yes	Active involvement via adjustment/trial periods at the workplace	No	/
Estonia	No	/	No	/
Finland	No	/	No	/
France	No	/	No	/
Germany	Yes	The Chamber of Crafts and Trades assesses the equivalence of a foreign qualification in "Meister" occupations in skilled trades	Yes	Employers (Chambers of Commerce and Industry, of Crafts and Trades etc.) are responsible for recognition procedures
Greece	Yes	Active involvement via trial periods / supervision of practice	No	/
Hungary	No	/	No	/
Iceland	Yes	Active involvement in designing recognition standards and skills assessments via trial periods	No	/
Israel	No (if recognition is for the purpose of salary grading)	/	No (if recognition is for the purpose of salary grading)	/
Ireland	Yes		No	/
Italy	No	/	No	/
Japan	No	/	No	/
Korea	No	/	No	/
Latvia	No (but employers may be involved via professional organisations)	/	No	/
Lithuania	No	/	Yes	Employers are involved in the commissions of evaluation of competencies
Luxembourg	Yes	Active involvement via mentorship and supervision of a compulsory trial period at the workplace	No	/
Mexico	No	/	No	/

Table 7. Employer involvement in the recognition procedure of foreign formal qualifications in OECD countries, 2016 *(cont.)*

	Regulated occupations		Non-regulated occupations	
	Employer involvement	Type of involvement	Employer involvement	Type of involvement
Netherlands	No (but professional experts may be involved in an assessment committee)	/	No	/
New Zealand	No	/	No	/
Norway	No	/	No	(but experts on Norwegian vocational education and training are involved in the recognition of foreign crafts and journeyman's certificates. Experts are appointed based on advice from professional councils within vocational education and training.)
Poland	No	/	No	/
Portugal	No	/	No	/
Slovenia	No	/	No	/
Spain	No	/	No	/
Sweden	Yes	Active involvement via adjustment/trial period at the workplace	No (but tripartite agreements for fast-track recognition procedures have been signed in non-regulated shortage occupations)	/ (But following tripartite agreements employers will be involved in the design and implementation of fast-track assessment, recognition and bridging procedures for designated shortage occupations)
Switzerland	Varies	May be involved in design of assessment methods and provision of technical knowledge	No (but professional associations are involved)	/
Turkey	No	/	No	/

Table 7. Employer involvement in the recognition procedure of foreign formal qualifications in OECD countries, 2016 *(cont.)*

	Regulated occupations		Non-regulated occupations	
	Employer involvement	Type of involvement	Employer involvement	Type of involvement
United Kingdom	Yes (in cases of professional qualifications and occupational skills)		Yes	
United States	Yes		Yes	

Note: n.a. = information not available; / = not applicable.

Source: OECD questionnaire on the assessment and recognition of foreign qualifications, 2016.

Lesson 8

Establish partnerships and networks for the transnational exchange of expertise and good practice in the area of recognition

WHAT and WHY? OECD countries dispose of a wealth of experience and expertise in the field of recognition and many face similar issues and challenges in terms of developing effective systems for the recognition of foreign qualifications and prior learning. There is thus a great potential to benefit from each other's experience by promoting transnational exchange of insights, evaluations of foreign degrees and educational institutions, research findings, lessons learned, and examples of good practice.

WHO? Policy makers in charge of designing or reforming recognition systems, recognition practitioners, professional bodies and employers find it useful to learn about other countries' practices and experiences to inform their own approach. The potential for mutual learning is greatest where countries face common issues and challenges or share similar policy approaches.

HOW? Settlement destination countries for skilled migration such as Australia or Canada have revised and refined their recognition policy frameworks over years, accumulating considerable expertise and examples of good practice. Other countries have developed innovative policy tools that they could share. Canada and Australia, for instance, are already working together to improve the recognition of foreign qualifications. Both countries maintain federal political systems, meaning that different agencies and jurisdictions govern recognition processes. They have recognised shared challenges and the potential for mutual learning. Since 2011 Australia and Canada have organised two transnational round table events (the Australia-Canada Roundtables on Foreign Qualification Recognition) that gave a wide range of stakeholders a chance to exchange expertise.

Another example of transnational exchange and collaboration on issues of recognition is provided by the European Union. In 1984, the European Commission created the NARIC (National Academic Recognition Information Centres) network that aims to improve academic recognition of tertiary degrees and periods of study within the European Union, the EEA and Turkey.[11] All member countries have NARIC centres that inform and advice higher education institutions, students and academics about foreign education systems, qualifications and recognition procedures. They also co-operate in related matters with other information centres, higher education institutions, their networks and other relevant actors in the national context. In some countries, the NARICs have an advisory role but do

not conduct assessments themselves as these fall under the auspice of higher education institutions.

The European Recognition Manual is a further tool that aims to create more clarity regarding recognition practices in the European region. Based on the Lisbon Recognition Convention (see Lesson 9) the manual provides commonly agreed standards and guidelines to enable credential evaluators and higher education institutions in all European countries to practice a similar methodology in the recognition of qualifications. Separate manuals have been developed for higher education and for professional recognition including specific guidelines on how to handle cases of undocumented qualifications. Recently the manual has been complemented by an online training and exchange forum for practitioners on recognition (see Box 7).

In countries with a federal structure, partnerships and networks can also serve as a mechanism for information sharing among federal and regional governments. An example is the Foreign Qualification Recognition Working Group[12] in Canada, which was established by the Forum of Labour Market Ministers to support the implementation of a Pan-Canadian Framework for the Assessment and Recognition of Foreign Qualifications. The FQRWG strengthens collaboration and horizontal linkages between federal and provincial governments, regulatory bodies and national professional associations to facilitate the exchange of information and share best practices and tools through various formats including roundtables, committee meetings, conferences and workshops.

Box 7. STREAM – An online platform for training and exchange of credential evaluators at higher education institutions

The European project "Streamlining Institutional Recognition: a Training Platform for Admissions Officers" (STREAM) envisages to streamline region-wide recognition processes and enhance knowledge of good practice in recognition.

STREAM targets admissions officers working in Higher Education Institutions in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). It provides concise training materials, based on the EAR-HEI manual, including various examples and exercises from daily recognition practice. Members can also use the "real cases forum" to post questions on specific cases and ask advice from peers throughout Europe. Participation is free of charge. In March 2016 the platform had over 750 users.

Source: http://www.enic-naric.net/stream-the-online-training-platform-for-admissions-officers.aspx.

Lesson 9

Expand bilateral and multilateral agreements on the assessment and recognition of foreign qualifications

WHAT and WHY? Apart from sharing expertise and good practice, OECD countries can improve skills mobility through bilateral and multilateral agreements on the assessment and recognition of foreign qualifications. Such agreements save time and resources, and allow highly skilled migrants to start working immediately after arrival without any delay caused by outstanding recognition requirements. For example, based on a mutual recognition agreement, Canadian registered doctors can take up supervised work placements in Australia immediately after arrival (prior to obtaining full registration) without having to pass any additional examination (Schuster et al., 2013). Doctors who were trained in Australia do have to pass an examination in order to practice in Canada, but their pass rates are generally high.

WHO? Transnational recognition agreements have benefits for immigrants who aim to work in a regulated profession but are less relevant to immigrants trained in non-regulated professions where the access to jobs depends on the discretion of individual employers. Mutual agreements covering higher education degrees benefit immigrants who intend to take up or continue higher education in the destination country and immigrants qualified for non-regulated professions.

HOW? Within the OECD there are many examples of bilateral agreements (see Table 8). These include for example the 1996 Trans-Tasman Mutual Recognition Arrangement between Australia and New Zealand and the 2008 France-Quebec agreement on the mutual recognition of professional qualifications. In 2010, Ireland and Australia explored the possibility of formally aligning the Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) with the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) and concluded that such an alignment was possible in the future to enhance mutual recognition between both countries.

A prominent example of multilateral collaboration in the field of recognition is provided by the European Union. In 2007, the Directive EC/2005/36 on the Recognition of Professional Qualifications in the European Union established the automatic recognition of the basic qualifications required for the practice of medicine, dentistry, general care nursing, midwifery, veterinary surgery, pharmacy and architecture in the EU's internal market (see Lesson 1). A further multilateral agreement is the 2011 Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education. Along similar lines, in 1997, the Council of Europe proposed the Lisbon Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications

concerning Higher Education in the European Region that has since been signed by almost 50 countries including European countries as well as Australia, Canada and the United States.[6] The Convention facilitates the transferability of academic qualifications and aims to improve recognition procedures and make them more transparent. Further region specific agreements exist in the APEC, ASEAN, CAMES and NAFTA region. At the global level, UNESCO is currently working on a Global Convention on the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications to facilitate academic mobility, improve quality and enhance international co-operation in higher education. A first draft of the Convention will be reviewed at the UNESCO General Conference in November 2017.

Transnational recognition can also be agreed between regulatory bodies. In 2013, for instance, the two regulatory bodies for accountants in Australia and Canada and the umbrella organisations for engineers in both countries renewed their existing mutual recognition agreements. While these arrangements are not legally binding, they still improve the mobility of professionals within specific occupations across countries. Another field-specific international agreement is the Washington Accord. Signed in 1989 among bodies responsible for accrediting engineering degree programmes it recognises the substantial equivalency of programmes accredited by those bodies and recommends that graduates of programmes accredited by any of the signatory bodies be recognised by the other bodies as having met the academic requirements for entry to the practice of engineering.

Divergent content and quality of education systems can be an obstacle to the use and effectiveness of international co-operation in this field. Indeed, the most far-reaching agreements generally concerned countries where quality differences are perceived as small. To fully exploit the benefits of international co-operation in this field, there is hence a need for more stringent systems for international quality assurance and international accreditation systems.

Table 8. Bilateral and/or multilateral agreements on the recognition of foreign qualifications in selected OECD countries, 2016

	Documents resulting from the recognition procedure
Australia	• Lisbon Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education • Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education • 34 Education and Training formal agreements, including Memorandum of Understanding some of which include qualifications recognition issues • Washington Accord, Dublin Accord and Sydney Accord i.e. with regards to Engineering and the Canberra Accord with regards to Architects
Austria	• EU Professional Qualifications Directive (2013/55/EC) • Bilateral agreements with Germany, Hungary, Italy (regional) on apprenticeship level
Canada	• Many Mutual Recognition Agreements −MRAs (i.e. NAFTA) • Individually developed bilateral and/or multilateral agreements in some occupations for the recognition of foreign qualifications
Chile	• Agreement for mutual recognition with Argentina • Bilateral Agreements: Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Uruguay • Multilateral Agreements: Bolivia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Peru
Czech Republic	• EU Professional Qualifications Directive (2013/55/EC) • Bilateral agreements with Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, Germany and Slovenia
Denmark	• EU Professional Qualifications Directive (2013/55/EC) • Lisbon Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education • Bilateral agreement (Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)) with China on research and innovation
France	• EU Professional Qualifications Directive (2013/55/EC) • Lisbon Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education • Agreements with universities or schools
Germany	• EU Professional Qualifications Directive (2005/36/EC) • Lisbon Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education • Bilateral agreements with Austria, France and Switzerland
Hungary	Several bilateral agreements (www.oktatas.hu/kepesitesek_elismertetese/jogszabalyok?itemNo=2)
Italy	• Bilateral agreements with Argentina, Australia, Austria, China, Cyprus,[1] Ecuador, France, Germany, Former Yugoslavia, Malta, Mexico, United Kingdom, Slovenia, San Marino, Spain, Holy See and Switzerland • EU Professional Qualifications Directive (2013/55/EC) • Lisbon Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education • Convention on the recognition of studies, diplomas and degrees of Higher Education in the Arab and European states in the Mediterranean

1. Note by Turkey:
The information in this document with reference to "Cyprus" relates to the southern part of the Island. There is no single authority representing both Turkish and Greek Cypriot people on the Island. Turkey recognises the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). Until a lasting and equitable solution is found within the context of the United Nations, Turkey shall preserve its position concerning the "Cyprus issue".

Note by all the European Union Member States of the OECD and the European Union:
The Republic of Cyprus is recognised by all members of the United Nations with the exception of Turkey. The information in this document relates to the area under the effective control of the Government of the Republic of Cyprus.

Table 8. Bilateral and/or multilateral agreements on the recognition of foreign qualifications in selected OECD countries, 2016 *(cont.)*

	Documents resulting from the recognition procedure
Japan	Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) between the Philippines/Indonesia/Vietnam and Japan for foreign nurses and caretakers
Korea	Mutual recognition agreements with other countries (e.g. for engineers)
Lithuania	• Lisbon Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education • Bilateral agreements with Poland, the Holy See, Germany and Ukraine • Multilateral agreement with Estonia and Latvia
Luxembourg	• EU Professional Qualifications Directive (2013/55/EC) • Lisbon Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education
New Zealand	• Several free trade agreements in which qualifications are mentioned • Attempts to promote each other's qualifications with China, Malaysia and Hong Kong • Lisbon Recognition Convention
Norway	• Lisbon Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education • Nordic Declaration on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education (The Reykjavik Declaration) • EU Professional Qualifications Directive (2005/36/EC and 2013/55/EU)
Poland	Agreements with Austria, Belarus, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Lithuania, Libya, Ukraine and Slovakia
Portugal	• EU Professional Qualifications Directive (2005/36/EC and 2013/55/EC) • Lisbon Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education • Bilateral agreement with Brazil that includes the recognition of qualifications
Slovenia	Agreements with Romania, Libya, Bulgaria, Iraq, Algeria, Russia, Poland, Austria, Italy, Slovak Republic, Czech Republic, Hungary and Croatia
Sweden	• EU Professional Qualifications Directive (2013/55/EC) • Lisbon Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education
Switzerland	Bi- and multilateral agreements with various countries
Turkey	• Lisbon Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education • Bilateral agreement with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
United Kingdom	• Agreement s with Argentina, China, Mexico and Spain

Note: n.a. = information not available.

Source: OECD questionnaire on the assessment and recognition of foreign qualifications 2016.

Lesson 10
Make sure that costs do not represent a barrier

WHAT and WHY? Assessment procedures and bridging courses should be available to all holders of foreign qualifications, independent of their financial means, in order to be equitable and non-discriminatory. However, applicants are usually required to pay a fee when applying for an assessment. Fees for recognition of formal qualifications vary substantially by country and field and may range anywhere between EUR 16-EUR 48 in Mexico to several thousand euros in Australia. Fees for the recognition of prior learning (RPL) differ similarly ranging between a mere stamp duty of EUR 25 in Luxembourg to more than one thousand euros in some cases in countries like Germany, France, the Netherlands and Sweden (see Table 9). The costs of bridging courses may also be difficult to afford, particularly if the measure lasts several months or years during which the applicant cannot work full time.

High costs discourage immigrants from applying especially if they are unsure about the chances of success. In such cases, financial support is needed to ensure that assessment procedures and bridging courses are accessible and equitable.

WHO? Migrants who are unemployed (and fulfil some additional requirements) often have access to financial support and subsidies from the public employment service, enabling them to participate in retraining or up-skilling schemes (see Table 9 below). However, those who are working, albeit in a job below their level of qualification, are usually not eligible for public support. For these migrants, dedicated government initiatives are the only chance to obtain financial assistance to fund assessment procedures or bridging courses.

HOW? To ensure that costs do not represent a barrier countries can either wave fees altogether and offer assessment services free of charge or they can provide financial assistance to reimburse those who cannot afford to pay for the service themselves. Where financial support is not available, anecdotal evidence suggests that some recognition bodies encourage applicants to withdraw their applications if chances for success appear low so that they can save the fees that would otherwise be due if the application was fully processed. However, this leads to a downward bias in rejection statistics, as unpromising applications are withdrawn without entering official statistics.

A range of OECD countries such as Denmark, Iceland, Israel, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal and Sweden offer most or certain types of assessment procedures free of charge. The same is true for RPL services, which are usually free of charge in the Nordic countries, Israel, Portugal and Turkey. Where assessments

are subject to a fee, subsidies are available in various countries including for example Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Hungary, and Slovenia. Frequently, eligibility to subsidies is limited to particular groups such as the unemployed in Germany and Sweden or persons with refugee status in New Zealand and Mexico (see Table 9).

In addition to the assessment itself some countries also subsidise other costs related to the assessment, such as translation fees (see Table 6b in Lesson 6). The Canadian Government, for example, committed to make its Foreign Credential Recognition (FCR) Loans Program permanent in order to reduce barriers to credential recognition for newcomers. The FCR Loans Program builds on the success of a FCR Loans Pilot that ran from 2012-2015 and demonstrated that FCR loans can accelerate the recognition process for newcomers as well as improve their employment outcomes and earnings. Through contributions funds, third-party organisations guarantee loans offered by financial institutions to highly skilled newcomers to cover costs associated with foreign credential recognition, such as qualification assessments, association and exam fees, books and course materials, short-term bridge training, travel expenses and living allowances.

A further example of a practice intended to enable migrants with limited financial means to benefit from recognition opportunities and bridging courses is provided by Germany. In Germany, job centres can cover the costs for recognition procedures and, if required, adaption periods and further training measures for unemployed persons. Moreover, in November 2016, the federal government started a programme that provides financial assistance for the costs of recognition procedures up to a maximum of EUR 600 (covering for example fees, translation costs, etc.). It is limited to applicants with low income and no other support from public means. In addition, funding initiatives have been developed at the regional level. An example is the city of Hamburg, which has launched a scholarship scheme that provides financial assistance to immigrants who must pass a bridging course in order to obtain recognition of their foreign qualification or a certificate of equivalence. The volume of available funding corresponds to the government-funded study loan "BAföG" which is half loan, half scholarship. Funding can be granted for a maximum of 36 months and is paid monthly. Applicants can also receive subsidies for fees and study material. The scholarship is available to persons with foreign qualifications who are unemployed or have a job below their skill level, who would like to work in Hamburg and require recognition of certificate or an equivalence to do so. To be eligible, migrants must be residents of Hamburg, have a valid residence permit, and earn not more than EUR 26 000 per year.

Last but not least, employers can take a stance in financing recognition procedures for their employees. Indeed, the potential gains from a person working at the right skill level will benefit them, as much as society in general.

Table 9. Costs for recognition of foreign qualifications and prior learning in OECD countries, 2016

	Official costs (or cost range) charged to applicants for …		
	Recognition of foreign qualifications		Recognition of prior learning (RPL)
	Fee	Subsidies	
Australia	• Up to EUR 6 160 (academic degrees) • Up to EUR 2 530 (non-tertiary degrees)	No	Varies (subsidies available)
Austria	• Up to EUR 350 in regulated professions • EUR 150 recognition fee for academic degrees in non-regulated professions • EUR 40 - EUR 60 for assessment + EUR 150 recognition fee for apprenticeships in non-regulated professions (certificates of equivalence)	Yes (refund of costs for assessment and recognition incl. translations of up to EUR 500 per person)	/
Belgium	*In German-speaking community*: Free of charge *In Wallonia:* EUR 200	Reduced fees (EUR 150) in Wallonia for applicants from an ODA receiving country	*In German-speaking community:* • EUR 35 (for jury in regulated professions) • EUR 13 - EUR 38 (for examination board for secondary education) • EUR 200 (mastership examination) *In Wallonia*: Free of charge
Canada	Vary	No (loan-pilots have been used)	Vary (subsidies available)
Chile	Free of charge		On average EUR 200 (subsidies available)
Czech Republic	• Free of charge (academic degrees) • EUR 37 (basic, secondary, higher vocational education in non-regulated occupations) • EUR 74 (non-tertiary qualifications in regulated occupations)	No	Vary by profession (depend on the costs of professional qualification exams)
Denmark	• Free of charge in non-regulated professions • Varying fees in regulated professions (e.g. EUR 168 for gas, plumbing and sanitation fitters and EUR 162 for medical doctors)	Yes	Free of charge
Estonia	Free of charge	/	n.a.
Finland	EUR 213 - EUR 340 (at the National Board of Education)	No (but some projects/services may cover costs)	Mostly free of charge in the education system
France	• EUR 70	No (free of charge for refugees)	EUR 300 - EUR 2 000 (typically EUR 1 000 for an ISCED-5 level diploma (“licence”))

Table 9. Costs for recognition of foreign qualifications and prior learning in OECD countries, 2016 *(cont.)*

	Official costs (or cost range) charged to applicants for …		
	Recognition of foreign qualifications		Recognition of prior learning (RPL)
	Fee	Subsidies	
Germany	• Usually EUR 100 - EUR 600 for regulated and non-regulated professions • EUR 200 for a certificate of equivalence for academic qualifications in non-regulated professions	Yes (for unemployed; in addition some regions offer voluntary financial support)	Approx. EUR 300 - EUR 1 200 (depending on the occupation and the examination regulations of the competent authorities)
Greece	• EUR 100 for recognition of professional or non-tertiary qualifications • EUR 184 - EUR 415 for academic qualifications (EUR 230 for undergraduate level; EUR 184 for postgraduate level or doctorate; EUR 369 for post-graduate and doctorate; EUR 415 for under- and postgraduate)	No	EUR 50 per certification examination (total costs for RPL may be higher depending on professional area and organisations involved)
Hungary	• EUR 357 (academic degrees) • EUR 268 (non-tertiary qualifications)	Yes	/
Iceland	• Free of charge (for crafts and trades professions and academic qualifications) • Up to EUR 350 (for regulated professions in health sector)	No	Free of charge
Ireland	Free of charge (downloadable statement of comparability)		Varies (by provider, institution and qualification)
Israel	Free of charge	/	Free of charge
Italy	Vary by educational institution and required bridging measures, etc.	No	n.a.
Korea	EUR 31		
Latvia	• EUR 41 (for study purposes and for work in non-regulated professions) • EUR 200 (for regulated professions)	No	Depend on the qualifications (subsidies available)
Lithuania	Free of charge	/	• Max. EUR 38 application fee and max. EUR 23 assessment fee for each recognised study credit (for higher education) • Vary (for vocational training)
Luxembourg	• EUR 75 - EUR 375 (for regulated professions) • EUR 75 (for academic degrees in non-regulated professions)	No	EUR 25 (stamp duty; all other costs are covered by the government)
Mexico	• EUR 48 (for academic degrees) • EUR 16 (non-tertiary qualifications)	Yes (in special cases)	EUR 69 (no subsidies)
Netherlands	Free of charge (for all migrants in the integration programme)	/	EUR 1 000 - EUR 1 500 (depending on organisation)
New Zealand	EUR 455	Yes (for UN Quota refugees)	Depend on organisation conducting the RPL assessment and the methods used

Table 9. Costs for recognition of foreign qualifications and prior learning in OECD countries, 2016 *(cont.)*

	Official costs (or cost range) charged to applicants for …		
	Recognition of foreign qualifications		Recognition of prior learning (RPL)
	Fee	Subsidies	
Norway	• Free of charge (for general and academic recognition of higher education and recognition in most regulated professions) • EUR 180 (for assessment of applications in health professions) • Further costs may have to be covered (fully or in part) for tests and courses required for recognition or authorisation in some regulated professions	No (but fees are generally subsidised)	Free of charge
Poland	• Up to 570 (for academic degrees) • Free of charge (for recognition statements issued by ENIC NARIC and for non-tertiary qualifications)	Applicants with financial difficulties can ask universities for a reduction or exemption of costs	Fees are determined individually for each applicant based on the costs of assessment (fees cannot exceed 120% of the costs incurred during the process)
Portugal	• Free (for basic, lower-secondary and upper-secondary education) • EUR 27 (for applications for automatic recognition of higher education qualifications under Decree Law 241/2007) • Free (for higher education qualifications and professional qualifications in non-regulated professions under Order 13584/2014) • Varies (for decisions about equivalence issued by Higher Education Institutions)	No	• Free of charge (for Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competences (RVCC)) • Varies (for RPL performed by Higher Education Institutions)
Slovenia	• EUR 50 (assessment procedure) • Free of charge (decision issued by education institution in a recognition procedure for the purpose of continuing of education)	Yes (for unemployed and socially deprived; free for refugees and asylum seekers)	Up to EUR 224
Spain	• EUR 160 (for university degrees) • EUR 48 (for VET qualifications) • Free of charge (for professional recognition in regulated professions)	No	Varies across regions
Sweden	• Free of charge (for non-regulated professions) • EUR 50 - EUR 201 (for academic degrees in regulated professions) • Around EUR 1 004 (for non-tertiary qualifications in regulated professions)	Yes (for unemployed persons)	• Free of charge within educational system and as part of labour market programmes • EUR 436- EUR 1 091 sector specific fees for industry licenses (depending on the industry employers might pay for industry license)

Table 9. Costs for recognition of foreign qualifications and prior learning in OECD countries, 2016 *(cont.)*

	Official costs (or cost range) charged to applicants for …		
	Recognition of foreign qualifications		Recognition of prior learning (RPL)
	Fee	Subsidies	
Switzerland	• EUR 501 (for legally-binding recognition in regulated professions) • EUR 137 (for attestation of level in non-regulated professions)	No	/
Turkey	Vary across certification bodies	Yes	Free of charge (academic degrees)
United Kingdom	EUR 71 – EUR 323		

Note: n.a. = information not available; / = not applicable

Source: OECD questionnaire on the assessment and recognition of foreign qualifications 2016

Notes

1. Note that the latter percentages are not overqualification rates, which are calculated as the share of highly-educated in employment who work in low-skilled jobs. Instead, they refer to the share of all high-educated who are working in low-skilled jobs.
2. Obviously, establishing a right to a procedure does not imply that the procedure is provided free of charge.
3. In some countries, the possibility to have foreign qualifications recognised exists only for certain types of qualifications or in particular fields. In Japan, for example, where there is no systematic recognition framework in place, academic qualifications may be recognised by Higher Education Institutions for the purpose of further study. However, this depends on the institution. Further recognition options exist for nurses and caretakers from Indonesia, the Philippines and Vietnam and for foreign doctors, dentists and nurses after passing an individual assessment and successfully sitting the Japanese national examinations. In Korea, recognition options exist only for qualifications covered by mutual recognition agreements; other qualifications can be verified but not recognised.
4. Directive 2013/55/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 November 2013 amending Directive 2005/36/EC on the recognition of professional qualifications facilitates recognition of foreign qualifications among EU and EEA member countries. It covers regulated EU/EEA professional qualifications held by EU/EEA nationals and their families. Under certain conditions, specific groups of non-EU/EEA migrants, such as scientific researchers, EU Blue Card holders, long-term residents and refugees enjoy the same rights as EU nationals with regard to the recognition of diplomas, certificates and other professional qualifications.
5. The Federal Ministry of Education and Research publishes the results of the monitoring of the implementation of the Federal Recognition Act in an annual

report, which can be downloaded here: https://www.anerkennung-in-deutschland.de/html/de/daten_und_berichte.php

6. The Lisbon Recognition Convention establishes a right to an assessment of higher education that was obtained in one of the signatory countries or is held by refugees. In reverse, it generally does not cover non-tertiary education qualifications and does not apply to migrants with qualifications from non-signatory countries who migrated for other than humanitarian reasons. The Convention applies to recognition of qualifications required for admission to higher education and to recognition of part of (units or courses constituting part of) higher education study programmes.

7. Depending on the type of education to be evaluated, recognition may take place at various levels within a higher education institution. For example, credits earned during periods of studies abroad may be recognised at the faculty level, while entire degrees may be evaluated by a central office (Nuffic, 2016).

8. In the European context, the development of RPL systems is encouraged by the 2012 Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning. The Recommendation asks EU countries to put in place, by 2018, arrangements to enable individuals to have their knowledge, skills and competences acquired via non-formal and informal learning validated, and to be able to obtain a full or partial qualification on the basis of informal or non-formal skills and competencies (Council of the European Union, 2013:C398/3). The European Commission supports EU countries and stakeholders in this process, including by regularly reviewing the European Inventory on the validation of non-formal and informal learning, in cooperation with member countries (European Commission; Cedefop; ICF International, 2014).

9. For further information see http://www.citizenship.gov.on.ca/english/keyinitiatives/bridgetraining/nursing.shtml.

10. From a legal point of view, the Lisbon Recognition Convention provides an important tool to encourage access to recognition procedures for persons with undocumented qualifications.

11. National information centres exist also for UNESCO Europe and Council of Europe countries. The ENIC centres implement the Lisbon Recognition Convention and develop policy and practice for the recognition and mobility of

academic qualifications. The ENIC Network cooperates closely with the NARIC Network of the European Union.

12. As of April 1, 2017, the “Foreign Qualification Recognition Working Group” is merged with another group and called “Mobility Qualification Recognition Working Group” (MQRWG).

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Annex A

Table A.1. Documents resulting from recognition procedures in OECD countries, 2016

	Documents resulting from the recognition procedure
Australia	• Certificate of equivalence with a domestic degree/qualification (for academic, vocational, regulated and non-regulated degrees) • Offshore Technical Skills Record (OTSR) (for vocational degrees in certain regulated trade occupations) • Statement of Attainment (for vocational degrees) • Host country degree (for academic, vocational, regulated and non-regulated degrees)
Austria	• Host country degree for academic degrees in regulated professions (*Nostrifizierung*) and for vocational (school-based) diplomas in regulated and non-regulated professions (*Nostrifikation*) • Certificate of equivalence with a domestic degree for apprenticeships in non-regulated professions (*Gleichhaltung*) • Legally-binding certificate of partial recognition or equivalence with a domestic degree (possible outcome for all kinds of degrees/diplomas)
Belgium	
Canada	Varies by occupation/assessing body and province/territory. Examples include: • Certificate of equivalence indicating the Canadian credential equivalency • Notification of partial recognition and list of requirements to complete certification/licensure • License or certificate to practice in a particular jurisdiction • Recognition of skills and experience for non-regulated occupations is done by employers and does not generally lead to any formal documentation of recognition
Chile	• Host country degree • Convalidation with regards to training level (certificate of equivalence between curricular activities completed at a foreign higher education institution and those of a domestic university)
Czech Republic	• Legally-binding certificate of partial or full recognition of the equivalence of a foreign school report (for basic, secondary and higher vocational education) • Legally binding decision on partial or full recognition of higher education qualifications (for tertiary level qualifications) • Decision on the recognition of professional qualifications (for professional qualifications)
Denmark	• Legally binding decision of (full or partial) recognition for access to further education and for determining salaries in public positions • Certificate of equivalence with a domestic degree for labour market purposes in the private sector • Both documents are issued for all types of formal qualifications from compulsory school over VET qualifications to phd-degrees

Table A.1. Documents resulting from recognition procedures in OECD countries, 2016
(cont.)

	Documents resulting from the recognition procedure
Estonia	• Certificate of full equivalence with a comparable domestic degree granting access to practice in a regulated profession (for academic qualifications) • Statement of full recognition granting access to practice in the comparable profession in Estonia (for holders of foreign professional qualifications if the profession is regulated by law in the origin country or if the holders has ten years of work experience in this qualification) • Statement of partial recognition (for holders of foreign professional qualifications that do not correspond to the required educational level in Estonia)
Finland	• Legally binding decision based on national legislation for qualifications in regulated professions (at the FNBE this grants eligibility to practice in a regulated profession, at other competent authorities decisions may grant permission to use a protected occupational title) • Recognition of the level of a foreign qualification (for labour market purposes for qualifications in non-regulated professions at the FNBE) • Admission to a study programme (for study purposes for higher education qualifications at Higher Education institutions)
France	• Non-binding comparability statement (for higher, secondary and professional secondary education qualifications in non-regulated professions) • Licence to practice in a regulated profession or registration in a professional order (for qualifications in regulated professions)
Germany	• Legally-binding certificate of partial or full recognition with a domestic degree for all qualifications except for academic qualifications in non-regulated professions • Certificate of equivalence with a domestic degree (for academic qualifications in non-regulated professions)
Greece	• Certificate of recognition of professional qualifications or non-tertiary qualifications from an EU country • Certificate of equivalence with a domestic degree (for academic qualifications) • Certificate of recognition of professional/ non tertiary qualifications from third countries
Hungary	• Legally-binding certificate of partial or full recognition with a domestic degree • Certificate of equivalence with a domestic degree
Iceland	• A licence granting a legal right to practice in a given regulated profession in Iceland (for regulated professions) • An assessment of equivalence for academic professions
Ireland	Downloadable statement of comparability based on the Irish National Framework of Qualifications (not legally binding, nor individualised)
Israel	Legally binding certificate
Italy	• Host-country degree (for academic degrees) • Legally-binding certificate of full or partial recognition (for professional qualifications) • Certificate of equivalence (for access to public examinations)
Japan	• Host country degree, licences and documents certifying sufficient ability of Japanese language, etc. (for nurses and caretakers from Indonesia, the Philippines and Vietnam, and foreign doctors, dentists and nurses) • n.a. (higher education degrees)
Korea	• Domestic qualification (for professional engineers) • Certificate of authentication from National Research Foundation (for verification of qualifications)

Table A.1. Documents resulting from recognition procedures in OECD countries, 2016
(cont.)

	Documents resulting from the recognition procedure
Latvia	• Statement of comparability with a domestic degree/educational document (for study purposes and for work in non-regulated professions for all levels of qualifications) • Legally binding decision on recognition or partial recognition including information what a person should do to get full recognition (for qualifications in regulated professions)
Lithuania	• Legally-binding certificate of partial recognition of a part of a person's qualifications or diploma certifying a certain qualification (for vocational training) • Recommendation to employers, higher education and other institutions regarding the comparability of a foreign qualification • Legally-binding recognition statements of partial or full recognition or recognition with additional requirements (for foreign higher education qualifications concerning higher education) for individuals seeking study and/or employment
Luxembourg	• Legally-binding certificate of partial or full recognition with a domestic degree (in regulated professions after completing additional competence requirements and for professions covered by the EU Professional Qualifications Directive) • Certificate of equivalence with a domestic degree (through the "homologation" procedure at the Ministry of Higher Education)
Mexico	Legally-binding certificate of partial or full recognition with a domestic degree ("*revalidacion*" document)
Netherlands	• Statement of credential evaluation indicating the most comparable domestic qualification (for formal qualifications in regulated and non-regulated professions) • Indication of level of education (for refugees without documentation of their qualification) • Legally binding recognition statement issued by a competent authority (for professional recognition of qualifications in regulated professions)
New Zealand	Statement of Comparability to the New Zealand Qualifications Framework
Norway	• Legally-binding general certificate of recognition of obtained domestic degree level without reference to subjects and grades (for academic degrees in regulated and non-regulated professions) • Legally-binding certificate of recognition of a domestic degree issued by a higher education institution and with reference to discipline(s) or of part of such degree (for academic degrees in regulated and non-regulated professions) • Legally-binding certificate of recognition of comparability with a domestic craft and journeyman's certificate within the qualifications carpenter, hairdresser, industrial concrete worker, meat cutter and plumber • Admission to study programmes or modules or documentation of partial recognition of study programmes • Authorisation or recognition for regulated profession
Poland	• Legally-binding certificate of partial or full recognition with a domestic degree (issued by universities after nostrification procedure for higher education qualifications) • Certificate of equivalence with a domestic degree (issued by ministries in case of international recognition agreements for higher education) • Non-legally binding recognition statements issued by NARIC (for higher education qualifications)

Table A.1. Documents resulting from recognition procedures in OECD countries, 2016
(cont.)

	Documents resulting from the recognition procedure
Portugal	• Certificate of full equivalence with a domestic degree (for higher education under Decree 283/83) • Notification of registration on the back of the original diploma (for higher education under Decree 341/2007) • Qualification certificate based on the National Qualifications System (NQS) (for non-tertiary education and professional qualifications in non-regulated professions) • A Portuguese degree (after recognition by the relevant education institution)
Slovenia	• Non-legally binding opinion regarding formal education issued by ENIC-NARIC centre in an assessment procedure for employment and other purposes (for regulated and non-regulated professions). • Legally binding decision regarding formal education in a recognition procedure for the purpose of continuing of education issued by education institutions. • Legally-binding decision issued by the ministry responsible for the regulation of individual professions in the procedure of mutual recognition of professional qualifications for the pursuit of regulated professions according to Directive 2013/55/EU
Spain	• Legally-binding certificate of full recognition with a domestic degree (for professional purposes in regulated professions requiring university education) • Certificate of equivalence with a domestic degree (for academic purposes only)
Sweden	• Legally-binding certificate of partial or full recognition with a domestic degree (for regulated professions after completing additional competence requirements) • Non-binding recognition statement (for all others)
Switzerland	• Legally-binding certificate of partial or full recognition with a domestic degree (in regulated professions) • Attestation of the level of a foreign education (in non-regulated professions)
Turkey	• Legally-binding certificate of partial or full recognition with a domestic degree (for academic qualifications) • Legally-binding certificate of equivalence with a domestic degree (for non-tertiary qualifications)
United Kingdom	• Host country degree • Certificate of equivalence with a domestic degree ("Statement of Comparability") for academic recognition procedures • Career path report (in-depth description of foreign qualification)

Note: n.a. = information not available.

Source: OECD questionnaire on the assessment and recognition of foreign qualifications 2016.

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