



CEDEFOP

Recognising the learning outcomes acquired abroad by IVET learners

Some progress made, but still much to do

POLICY BRIEF



POLICY BACKGROUND



Recognition is the process by which an education institution bestows on a learner, who has acquired learning outcomes abroad, the rights normally attached to acquiring the same learning outcomes within the institution itself. These rights include moving to the next step of a study course or to graduation. Recognition is primarily a prerogative of the education institution. However, in the context of initial vocational education and training (IVET) in the European Union (EU), this prerogative is framed by a range of policy statuses. The [Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 10 July 2001](#) invited Member States and stakeholders in education and training to take steps to facilitate the recognition of learning carried out in other Member States, including setting up frameworks for recognition decisions to be justified, appealable if needed, and issued within reasonable timescales. The [Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006](#) called for providing learners participating in mobility with assistance to facilitate recognition; it also called for sending institutions to commit to recognising successful mobilities. The [Council Recommendation of 28 June 2011](#) also encouraged Member States to address the issue of recognition, with particular mention of taking advantage of existing

EU transparency, validation, and recognition tools, and improving recognition processes, as well as the visibility of the contact points for information on recognition.

In a [Staff working document issued in May 2018](#), the European Commission observed (p. 26) that ‘recognition of qualifications in higher education and upper secondary education is still problematic [...] despite a good framework and legal commitments of national authorities, problems persist [...] the necessary tools and framework to enable automatic recognition have been developed, but uneven implementation has hindered them being used to their full potential’. Based on these findings, the Council adopted on 26 November 2018 a [Recommendation promoting automatic mutual recognition](#). This provides for the automatic recognition in any Member State of the outcomes achieved by a learner in another Member State in terms of higher education qualifications or higher-education-oriented secondary qualifications. It also provides for the recognition of outcomes of learning periods carried out in secondary education for less than 1 year, as well as in higher education.

Promoting the free movement of workers is a foundational objective of the European Union. Preparing

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RECOGNITION OF LEARNING OUTCOMES IS CRUCIAL

future workers for mobility from the time of their education and training is, therefore, essential. Consequently, ensuring the recognition of the learning outcomes acquired through mobility is crucial as this may foster learner motivation to go on mobility.

In the EU, transnational learning mobilities for IVET learners often take place within the framework of [Erasmus+](#), last less than 3 months, and are integral to the learner's study programme. Such short-term mobilities, framed by interinstitutional agreements within Erasmus+, usually do not pose major recognition problems. But such is not the case for other transnational mobility experiences which IVET learners may participate in, whether within country-specific schemes or outside, on individual life course journeys. Individual life course experiences include cases of secondary education abroad having lasted more than 1 year but not having led to certifications. Mobilities within country-specific schemes or on person-specific experiences may

not require any prior agreement between a sending institution and a hosting one. They also may not have led to any entitlement to higher education. In such cases, the Commission Staff working document points out that recognition can become a lengthy, costly, and cumbersome process, where the learner may even be required to repeat the non-recognised years of learning. Table 1 lists a few examples of the existing country-specific mobility schemes.

This policy brief analyses country policies and practices on recognising the learning outcomes acquired abroad by IVET learners on transnational learning mobility, whether in or outside Erasmus+. The analysis covers the EU Members States, Iceland, and Norway. It is based on data collected in 2021 from [Cedefop's ReferNet network for the Mobility Scoreboard](#).



ERASMUS+ INTERGRAL TO THE LEARNER'S STUDY PROGRAMME

Table 1. Examples of mobility schemes other than Erasmus+ accessible to IVET learners in the EU Member States and Iceland

COUNTRY	MOBILITY SCHEME	TARGET GROUP	SOURCE OF FUNDS
Bulgaria	My first job with EURES	IVET learners aged 18-35	European funds
Denmark	DK-USA programme	IVET learners, IVET teachers, IVET managers	National budget
	PIU (Practical placement abroad) AUB (Employers' education contribution)	IVET learners involved in the main programme of work-based learning	Employers' reimbursement system
Estonia	Nordplus	All, including IVET learners	Nordic Council of Ministers
	Bilateral mobility projects between VET institutions	IVET learners	VET institutions
Finland	The Finnish National Agency for Education State funding for internationalisation	IVET students and staff, teachers, trainers (mainly with focus on non-European countries)	National budget, Ministry of Education and Culture
France	Échanges franco-allemands de jeunes et d'adultes en formation professionnelle [Franco-German exchanges of young people and adults in vocational training]	VET learners	Ministry of Education and Higher Education
	Schemes run by regional councils and professional networks	All, including IVET learners	Regional and sectoral
Germany	Ausbildung Weltweit [Training worldwide]	IVET learners	National funds
	Schemes run by chambers, enterprises, foundations	All, including IVET learners	Mostly private
Iceland	Nordplus	All, including IVET learners	Nordic Council of Ministers
Italy	Percorsi per le competenze trasversali e per l'orientamento [Pathways for transversal competences and guidance] (the part of PCTO carried out abroad)	IVET learners (vocational schools) and upper secondary general education students	National Ministry of Education
	Transnational mobility and internships schemes	Learners from technical and professional institutes; upper secondary general education students; post-secondary non-academic pathways students	ESF European Social Fund, Ministry of Education
Spain	Scholarships schemes run by the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training	IVET learners (upper secondary and tertiary); teachers	National funds
	Bilateral VET mobility programme with Germany	Learners (dual VET schemes)	European; national
Sweden	Athena utbyten [Athena exchanges]	IVET learners; teachers	National budget
	Atlas praktik [Atlas practice]	IVET learners	National budget

NB: More than 50 mobility schemes other than Erasmus+ exist across the EU Member States and Iceland. For the full list see [Cedefop's mobility scoreboard](#).

Source: Cedefop (2021). IVET mobility scoreboard database: country fiches.



EVIDENCE

In this section

Country profiles in terms of recognition policy content and recognition practices

Country approaches to governance of the recognition policy



Country profiles in terms of recognition policy content and recognition practices

EU recommendations on mobility require Member States to improve recognition through ensuring the processing of requests within reasonable timescales, promoting the visibility of access points for information on recognition, and making use of the range of EU tools for transparency, validation, and recognition. Analysis of recognition data collected in 2021 reveals contrasting situations. EU Member States, Iceland and Norway were examined in terms of the time limit for the processing of recognition requests (whether a maximum time limit is in place or not), visibility of information access points (whether arrangements conducive to visibility are in place or not), and the use of EU tools for recognition purposes (whether most tools are used or not). Five tools were considered: the Europass mobility document, the Europass certificate supplement, the European credit system for vocational education and training (ECVET), the European and national qualifications framework (EQF/NQF), and the learning outcomes approach.

Six country profiles in terms of policy content (PPCs) could be observed (Table 2). Policy-content Profile 1 is that of countries that meet all three criteria: Iceland, Norway, and four EU Member States (Germany, Netherlands, Romania, Finland). Half of

the countries monitored (14 of 29), belonging to PPCs 1 and 3, meet at least two of the three criteria. Four countries (Ireland, Cyprus, Malta, Slovakia) fail to meet, even in part, any of the three criteria. Belgium is split over PPCs 4 (one criterion met) and 6 (none of the criteria met).

It appears that making use of most (if not all) of the EU tools for recognition purposes is the most popular trend across countries, as this is practised by four-fifths of the countries monitored (24 out of 29). The two other types of action are far less frequent. Two-thirds of the countries monitored (21 out of 29) lack a time frame for processing recognition requests. Half of the countries (14) lack a policy to make their structures for information on recognition visible. Detailed descriptions of country policies and practices are available in [Cedefop's IVET mobility scoreboard](#).

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Table 2. Country profiles in terms of policy content (PPCs) on recognising the learning outcomes acquired abroad by IVET learners, within or outside Erasmus+. EU Member States, Iceland, and Norway, 2021

FRAMED TIMESCALE FOR RECOGNITION PROCEDURES	VISIBILITY POLICY FOR INFORMATION ACCESS POINTS	USE OF EU TOOLS FOR RECOGNITION PURPOSES	COUNTRY DISTRIBUTION BY POLICY-CONTENT PROFILE (PPC)
<p>Yes</p> <p>This includes automatic recognition as well as limits established by regulations or practice, whether longer or shorter than 12 weeks</p>	<p>Yes</p> <p>Visibility-inducive policies or practices are in place, or at least setting one is underway</p>	<p>At least three of the five considered EU tools are in use in the country for recognition purposes</p>	<p>PPC 1</p> <p>Finland, Germany, Iceland, Netherlands, Norway, Romania</p>
	<p>No</p> <p>No visibility-inducive policies or practices are in place, and there is no plan to set up any</p>	<p>At least three of the five considered EU tools are in use in the country for recognition purposes</p>	<p>PPC 2</p> <p>Bulgaria, Portugal</p>
<p>No</p> <p>No time frame is in place</p>	<p>Yes</p> <p>Visibility-inducive policies or practices are in place, or at least setting one is underway</p>	<p>At least three of the five considered EU tools are in use in the country for recognition purposes</p>	<p>PPC 3</p> <p>Estonia, France, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Poland, Sweden</p>
		<p>Not more than two of the five EU tools are used for recognition purposes</p>	<p>PPC 4</p> <p>Belgium-FR</p>
	<p>No</p> <p>No visibility-inducive policies or practices are in place, and there is no plan to set up any</p>	<p>At least three of the five considered EU tools are in use in the country for recognition purposes</p>	<p>PPC 5</p> <p>Czechia, Denmark, Greece, Spain, Croatia, Luxembourg, Austria, Slovenia</p>
		<p>Not more than two of the five EU tools are used for recognition purposes</p>	<p>PPC 6</p> <p>Belgium-DE, Belgium-FL, Ireland, Cyprus, Malta, Slovakia</p>

Source: Based on data collected from ReferNet for Cedefop's mobility scoreboard.

Country approaches to governance of the recognition policy

Country profiles in terms of policy governance (PPGs) can be identified as well, based on governance features (Table 3); three criteria were also used in this instance. First, the country may have set up targets for its recognition policy, or it may have planned to do so, or not. Second, policy coordination (whether complete or incomplete) may be in place or not. Third, the actions taken may be (at least to some extent) evaluated or not.

Eleven country policy-governance profiles could be distinguished. In none of them are all three criteria fully met. In only two profiles (1 and 5), covering four countries, are two criteria fully met. In profile 11, covering three countries, none of the three criteria is, even at least in part, met. Profiles 2 to 4, 6 and 7 cover 12 countries where only one criterion is fully met. The remaining profiles cover 10 countries meeting only in part one criterion or more.

In terms of policy governance, target-setting is the criterion that is the least often met (three countries). Policy coordination is the criterion that is the most often completely met (13 countries). Policy evaluation is the criterion that is the most often incompletely met (12 countries).

Policy governance thus clearly appears to be an issue in national approaches to recognition. Overall, national policy governance in this area is underdeveloped. Countries almost systematically omit to assign targets to their recognition policies. They also tend to be reluctant to perform full, systematic, and in-depth assessment of the actions that were carried out; they seem only to be willing to coordinate their policy actions country-wide.

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Table 3. Country profiles in terms of policy governance (PPGs) on recognising IVET learners' learning outcomes acquired abroad. EU Member States, Iceland, and Norway, 2021.

COUNTRIES	PPG	POLICY TARGET-SETTING			POLICY COORDINATION			POLICY EVALUATION		
		IN PLACE	PLANNED	NOT FORESEEN	COMPLETE	INCOMPLETE	NO COORDINATION	COMPLETE	INCOMPLETE	NO EVALUATION
Luxembourg	1	x			x					x
Lithuania	2	x					x		x	
Belgium-DE	3	x					x			x
Cyprus		x					x			x
Latvia	4		x		x					x
Netherlands	5			x	x			x		
Romania				x	x			x		
Sweden					x	x		x		
Estonia	6			x	x				x	
Finland				x	x				x	
Italy				x	x				x	
Norway				x	x				x	
Spain				x	x				x	
Bulgaria	7			x	x					x
Denmark				x	x					x
Germany				x	x					x
Czechia	8			x		x			x	
France				x		x			x	
Croatia	9			x		x				x
Hungary				x		x				x
Portugal				x		x				x
Slovenia				x		x				x
Greece	10			x			x		x	
Ireland				x			x		x	
Poland				x			x		x	
Slovakia				x			x		x	
Austria	11			x			x			x
Belgium-FL				x			x			x
Belgium-FR				x			x			x
Iceland				x			x			x
Malta				x			x			x

Source: Based on data collected from ReferNet for Cedefop's mobility scoreboard.



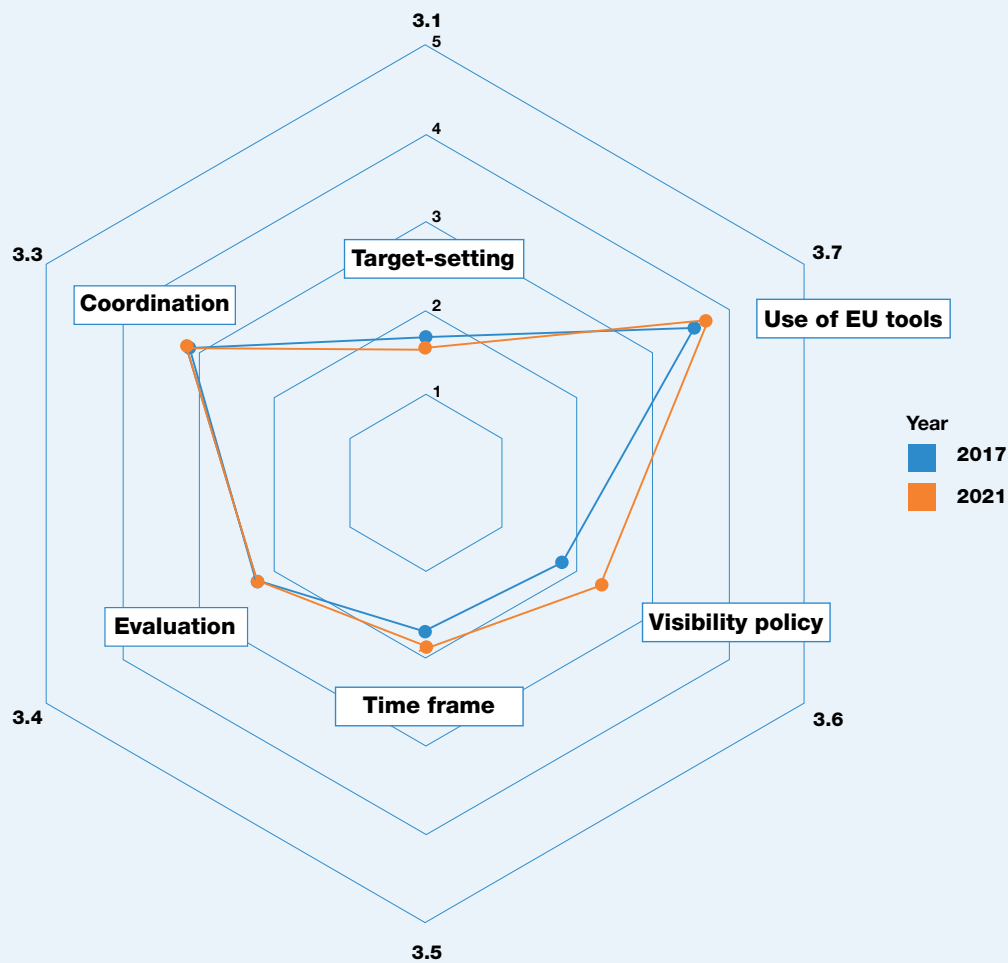
CONCLUSIONS





Figure 1. Progress in the average performance of the 29 countries monitored (EU Member States, Iceland, Norway) in the area of recognition between 2017 and 2021

As can be seen from the figure below, progress has been made in recognition policies since 2017.



Source: Cedefop. IVET mobility scoreboard database: progress graphs.

Progress was mainly made in the visibility policy strand. The policy governance side remained unchanged.

From closer consideration of countries' situations, and still taking on board both policy content and policy governance aspects, four groups of countries can be identified in terms of completeness of their recognition policy in 2021 (Table 4). Half of the countries (14) fail to reach at least 'Good performance' level, and none of the countries

has reached 'Excellent performance' level. This situation can be contrasted with that for other thematic areas such as 'Information and guidance', 'Partnership and funding', 'Long-term preparation', and 'Portability', where most countries achieve at least 'Good performance' and some rank in the top 'Excellent performance' class ([Cedefop: mobility scoreboard indicators](#)).

It appears that countries still have room for progress in their recognition policies. To meet the requirements of the Recommendations of 2001, 2006, 2011, and 2018 better, Member States should consider improving their recognition policies and practices, both inside and outside Erasmus+. Priority attention should be paid to reducing significantly the timescales for the processing of recognition requests, and improving policy governance in recognition, especially in terms of target-setting and policy evaluation. Increasing the use of EU tools and progressing towards making information access points even more visible should be continued. Good practices identified by [Cedefop's inventory](#) suggest that experiences in the Netherlands, Portugal, and Slovenia, could be inspirational.



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Table 4. **Distribution of countries by level of development of their recognition policy, based on both policy content and policy governance criteria: EU Member States, Iceland, and Norway, 2021**

DEGREE OF CLOSENESS TO FULL IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 2011 'YOUTH ON THE MOVE' RECOMMENDATION IN THE AREA OF RECOGNITION	COUNTRIES
Excellent performance	None
Very good performance	Estonia – Germany – Netherlands Norway – Romania – Sweden
Good performance	Bulgaria – Spain – France – Italy – Latvia Lithuania – Luxembourg – Portugal – Finland
Some progress has been made	Croatia – Cyprus – Czechia – Denmark – Greece Hungary – Iceland – Ireland – Poland – Slovenia
Little progress has been made	Belgium – Malta – Austria – Slovakia

NB: The criteria used for this ranking differ in two ways from those used above in the policy brief:
 (a) the processing timescale criterion is stricter in this ranking, as it refers to a regulatory timescale of 6 weeks maximum, instead of the brief criterion that refers to any timescale capped by regulations or practice; and
 (b) the range of types of learning components and outcomes (units, modules, courses, etc.) admitted for consideration of recognition requests is taken into account in this ranking.

Source: Cedefop. IVET mobility scoreboard database: indicators.



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