The Global Convention on Higher Education

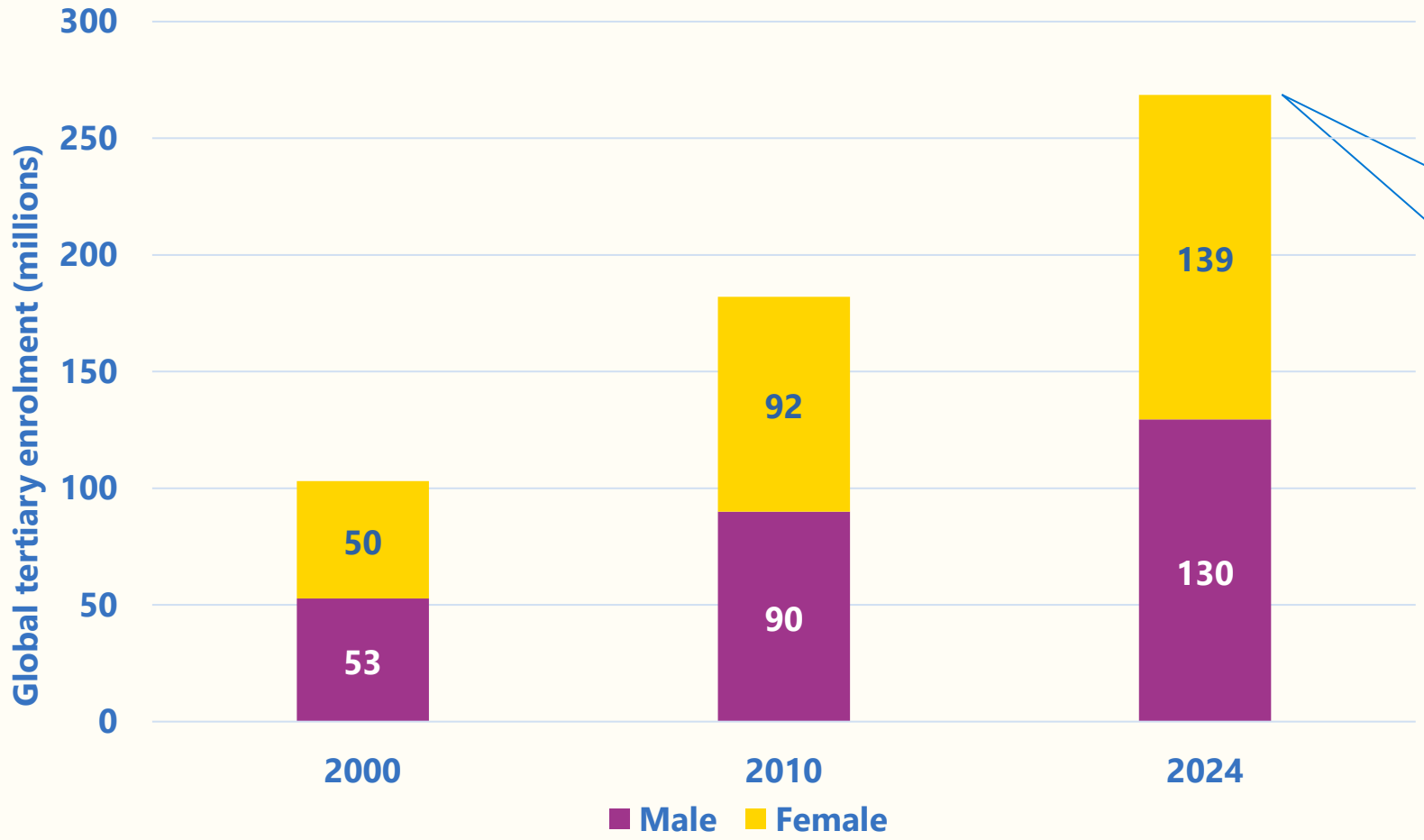
Unlocking global mobility through recognition

Leila Loupis, UNESCO

November 2026



Global tertiary education enrolment by gender, 2000-2024 (number of students)

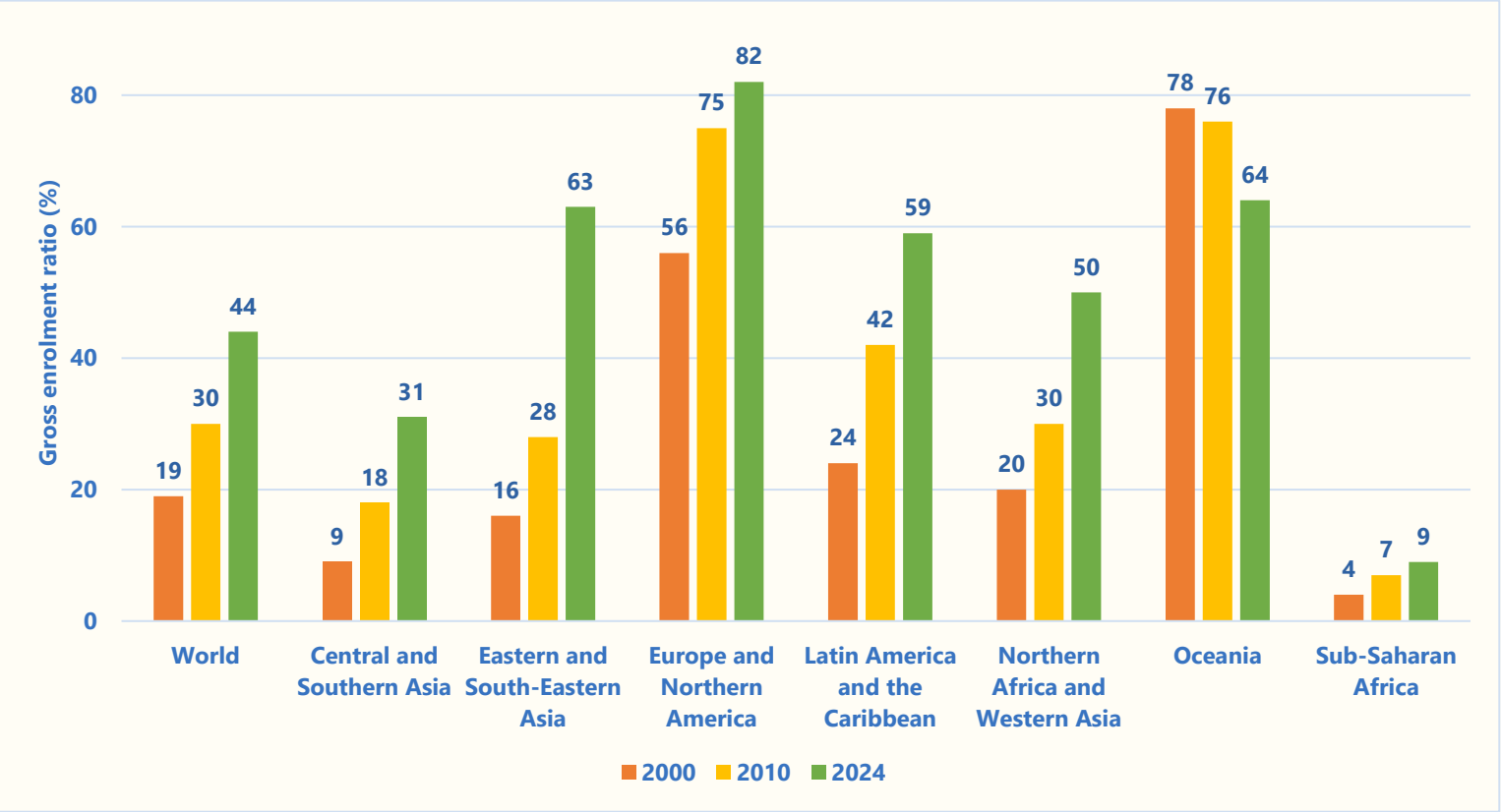


The number of students in higher education globally **more than doubled** over the past two decades, rising to **269 million.**

Global tertiary education enrolment: Enrolment in tertiary education, all programmes, both sexes. Individuals officially registered in ISCED 5 - 8 programmes, or stage or module thereof, regardless of age.

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics

Gross enrolment ratio (%) by region, 2000-2024



19% to 44%

The average world's gross **enrolment ratio** for higher education more than **doubled**, increasing from 19% in 2000 to 44% in 2024.

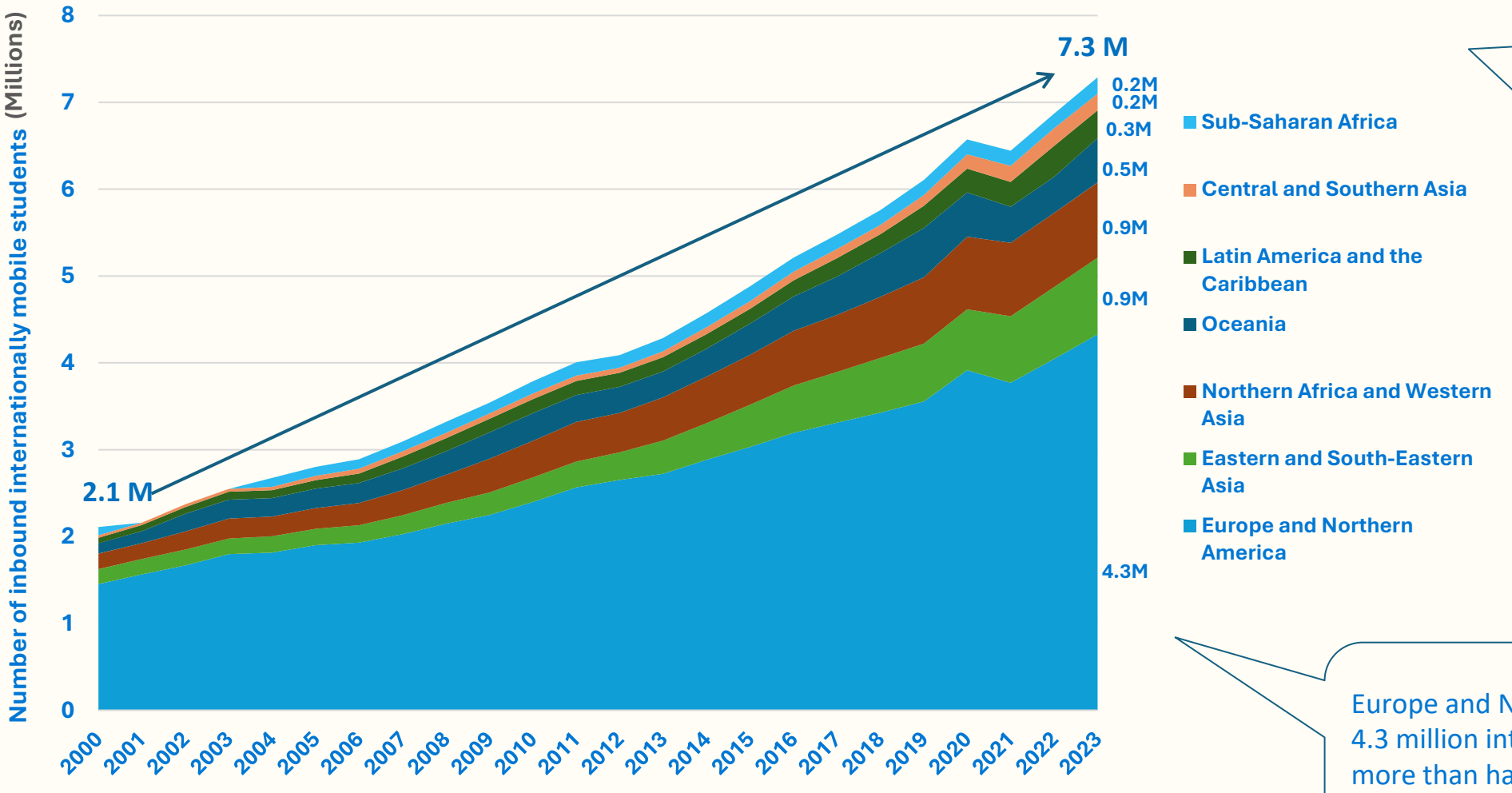
82% vs 9%

The global enrolment average masks **large disparities** in access to higher education, with the highest world region at 82% and the lowest at just 9%.

Gross enrolment ratio (GER) for tertiary education, ISCED levels 5 to 8: Total enrolment in tertiary education regardless of age expressed as a percentage of the population in the 5-year age group immediately following upper secondary education.

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics

International mobile students by host region, 2000-2023



The global number of internationally mobile students more than **tripled** during the last two decades, rising from **2.1 million in 2000** to over **7.3 million in 2023**.

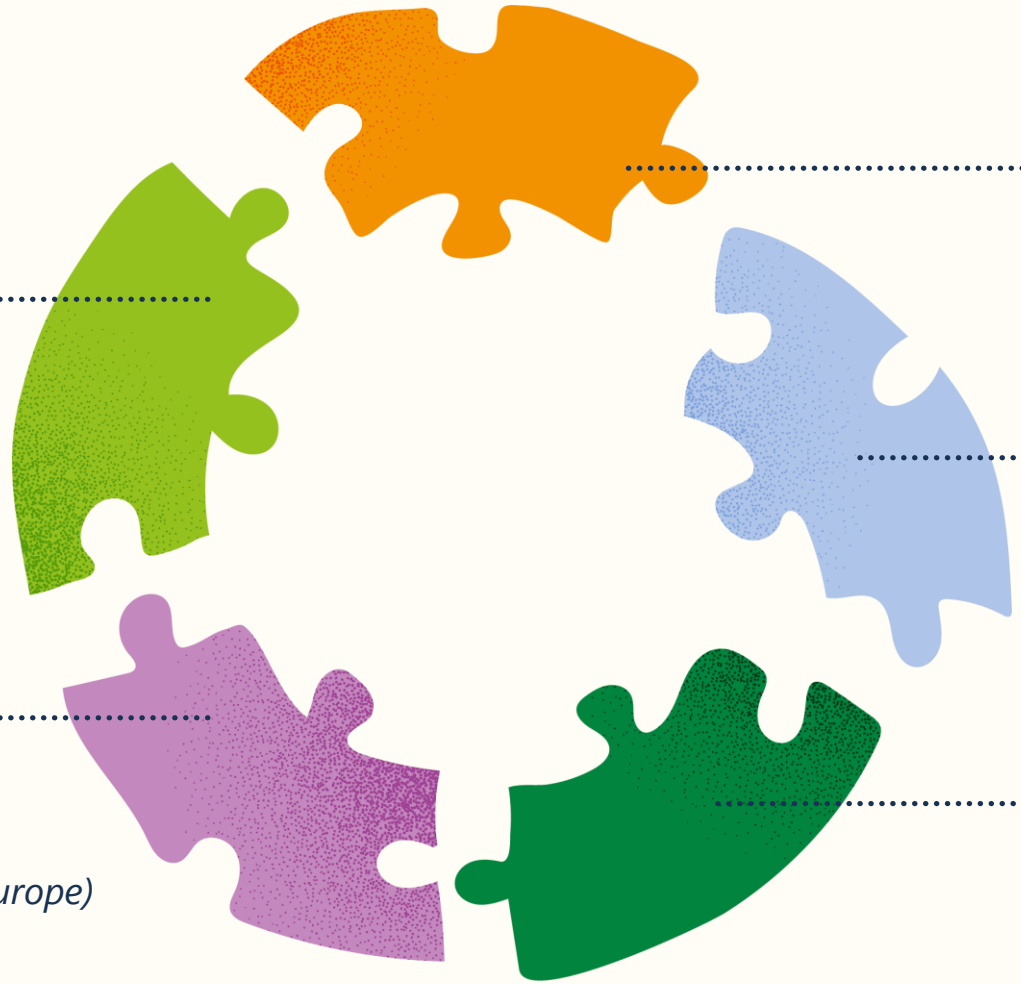
The COVID-19 pandemic interrupted the steady growth of international student mobility, causing a slowdown in 2020 and 2021.

Europe and North America hosted 4.3 million international students in 2023, more than half of the world's internationally mobile students

Internationally mobile students are individuals who have physically crossed an international border between two countries with the objective to participate in educational activities in the country of destination, where the country of destination of a given student is different from their country of origin.

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics

UNESCO's global and regional conventions



Addis Convention (2019)

Arab States Convention (2026)

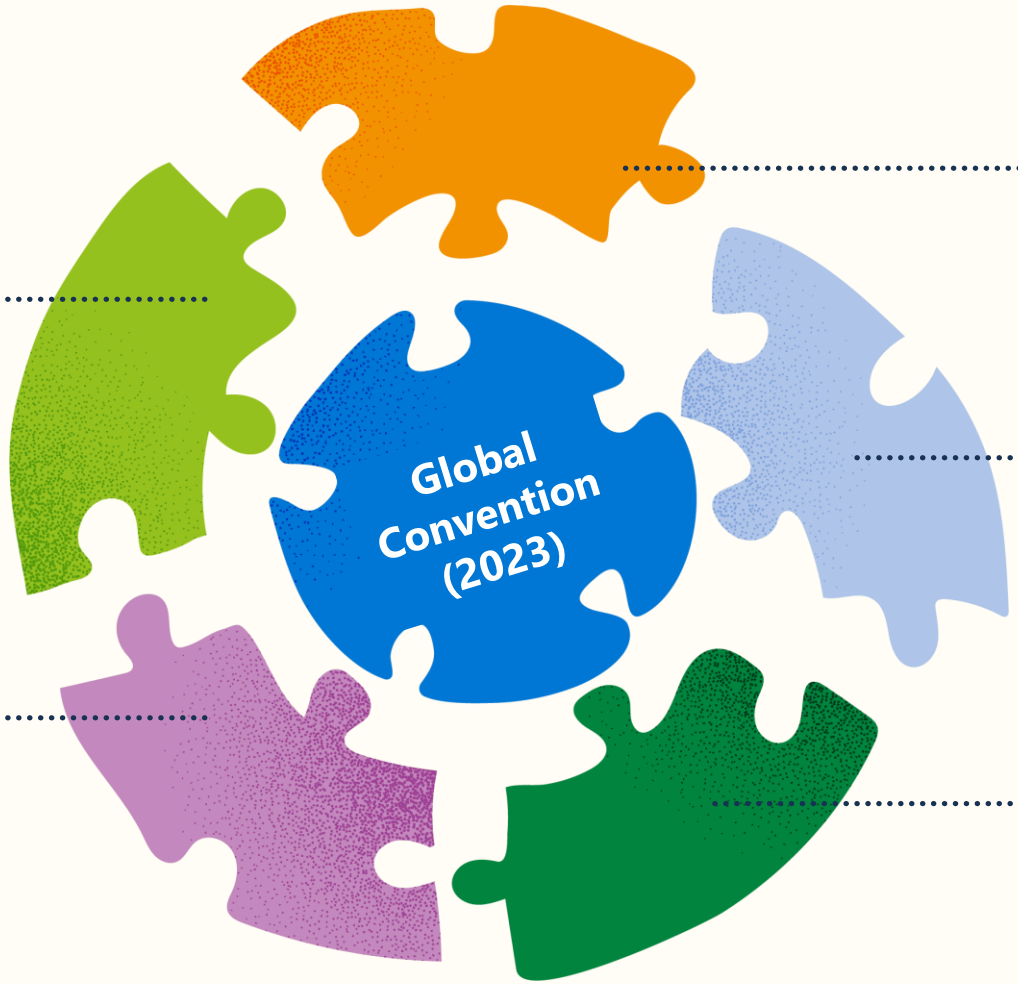
Buenos Aires Convention (2022)

Tokyo Convention (2018)

Lisbon Recognition Convention (1997)

(with the Council of Europe)

Linkages between global and regional conventions



Addis Convention

Tokyo Convention

Arab States Convention

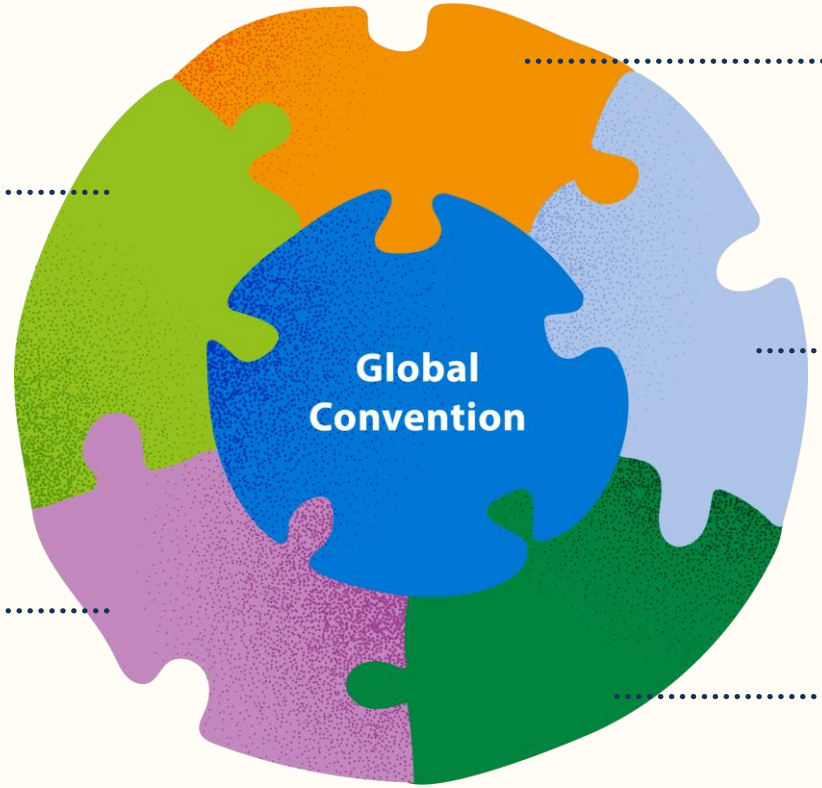
Lisbon Convention

Buenos Aires Convention

A global ecosystem of recognition

Addis Convention

Tokyo Convention



Arab States Convention

Lisbon Recognition Convention

Buenos Aires Convention

Global Convention: 43 States Parties and growing

2.2 million (30%)

of the world's 7.3 million mobile students are hosted by the States Parties

20+ Member States

Are reported to be well-advanced with ratification procedures, including countries in all UNESCO regions

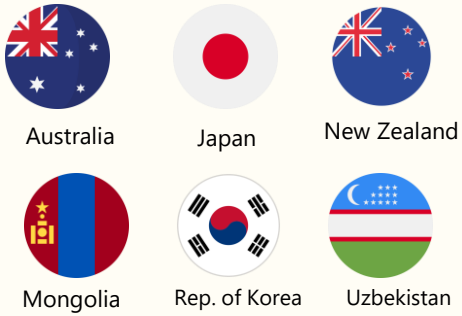
Regional conventions

39 out of 43 countries that ratified the Global Convention are States Parties to one or more regional conventions

Africa



Asia and the Pacific



Europe



Arab States



Latin America and the Caribbean



Qualifications recognition under the conventions



Facilitates mobility through international cooperation



Provides an inclusive framework for fair recognition



Does not require automatic recognition



Respects domestic laws and Institutional autonomy

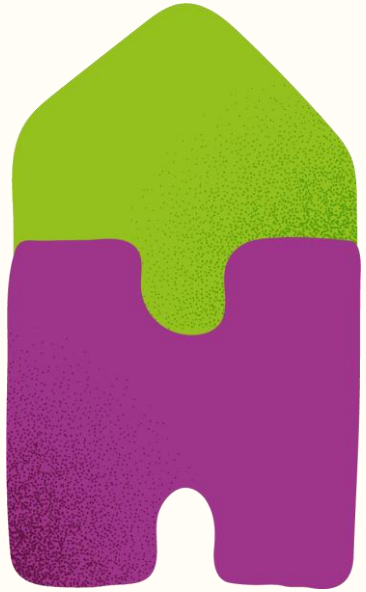
Benefits of the Global Convention on Higher Education



Students

- Facilitates mobility access to higher education internationally
- Supports entry into the labour markets
- Helps refugees and displaced persons access opportunities

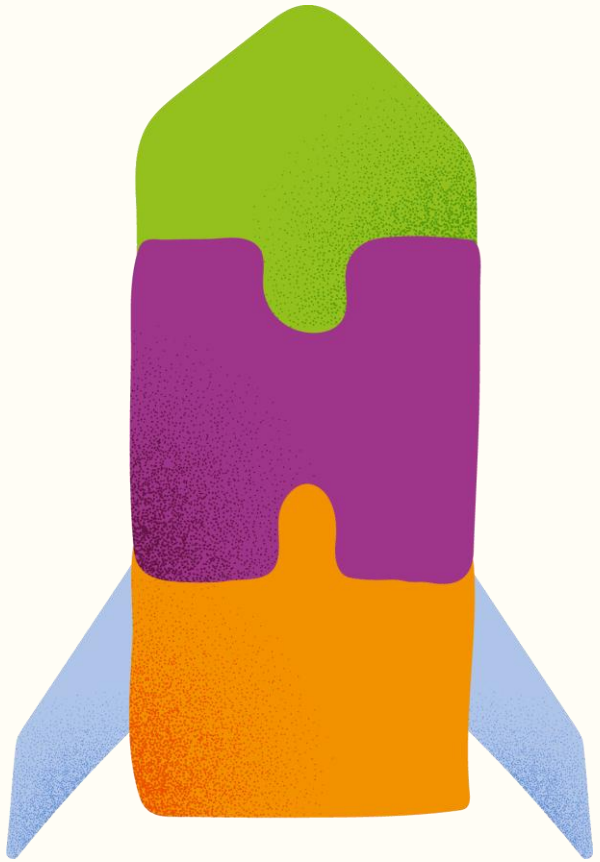
Benefits of the Global Convention on Higher Education



Institutions

- Enhances education quality and builds trust in institutions
- Foster international cooperation in education, research and innovation
- Diversifies mobile student, faculty, and researcher populations

Benefits of the Global Convention on Higher Education



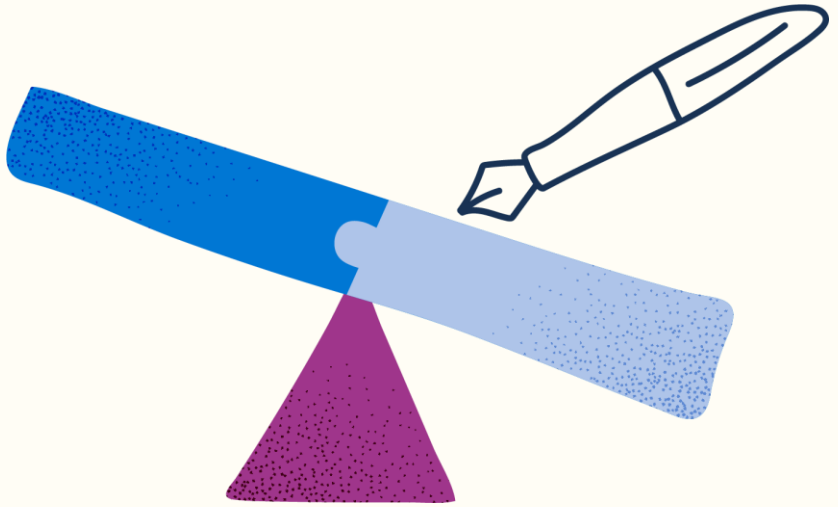
States Parties

- Facilitates access to inbound, outbound and circular/return mobility
- Strengthens international cooperation on recognition practices in higher education
- Supports academic exchange, research and innovation
- Fosters trust and confidence in the quality and reliability of qualifications.
- Promotes inclusion and lifelong learning by recognizing diverse learning pathways
- Provides guidance on recognizing refugees' and displaced persons qualifications
- Promotes the sharing of accessible, up-to-date, reliable, information on HE qualifications and systems.
- Enables participation in global policy dialogue on emerging issues

Main Principles of the Global Convention

Fairness and transparency

The Global Convention requires that procedures and criteria for the recognition of qualifications be fair, transparent, and non-discriminatory. It states that recognition decisions should be based on reliable information, clear criteria, and reasonable timeframes.

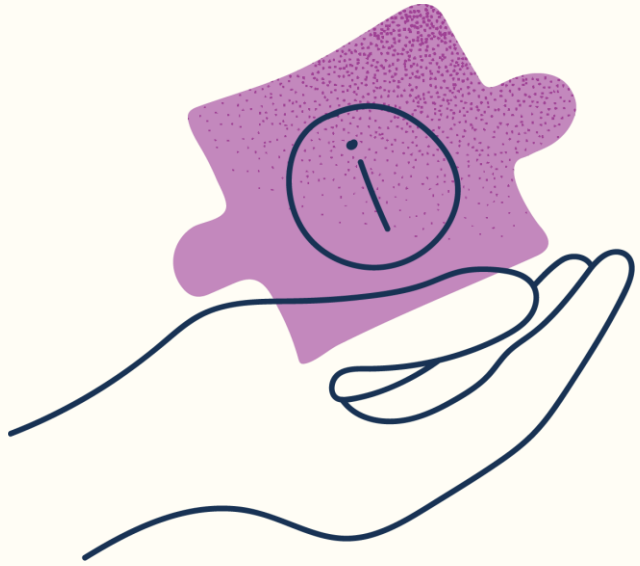


Main Principles of the Global Convention

Information provision

To ensure individuals' right to assessment of their qualifications, States Parties should:

- Create and/or ensure they have **national information centres/national implementation structures** to ensure the transparency of the recognition systems
- Provide access to relevant, accurate and up to date information about its higher education system, qualifications, etc.
- Where possible, use technology to ensure easy access to information



Main Principles of the Global Convention

Quality assurance

- Quality assurance plays a fundamental role in promoting access to higher education learning opportunities, upholding academic standards, and ensuring the credibility of qualifications.
- To strengthen quality assurance, the Global Convention on Higher Education aims to:
    - Promote a **culture** of quality assurance in higher education systems
    - Develop **capacities** for reliability, consistency and complementarity in quality assurance practices
    - Encourage State Parties to provide **accurate information** about their quality assurance mechanisms

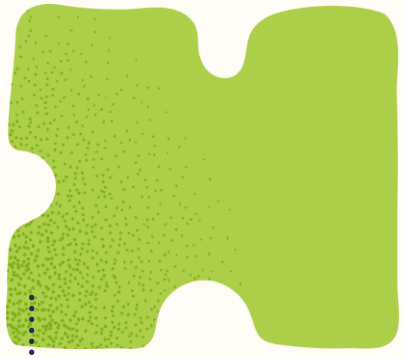


Addis Convention – 15 States parties



- Adopted by UNESCO Member States in December 2014 and entered into force in **December 2019**.
- It establishes a legal framework for the fair and transparent recognition of higher education diplomas in Africa.
- 15 States Parties.
- The **African Network of National Implementation Structures (ANNIS)** was launched in September 2022 and the Charter and Guidelines adopted in Marrakech,
- The 2026-2027 work plan, which is part of Campus Africa, focuses on cooperation through the regional network, capacity building and quality assurance.

Implementation structures and cooperation



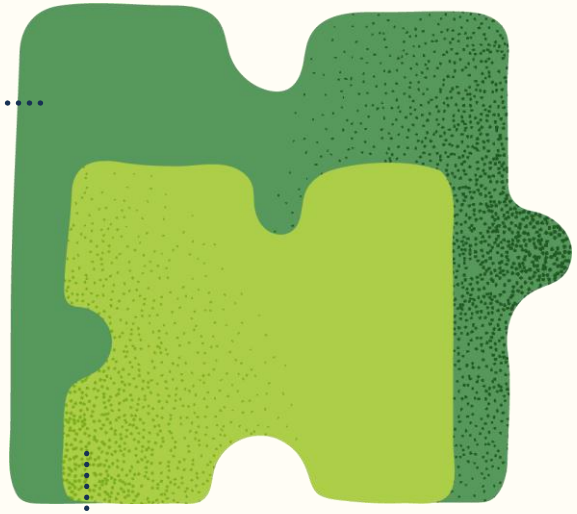
National

- National implementation structures/information centres
- Competent recognition authorities

Implementation structures and cooperation

Regional

- Regional Recognition Convention Committees (Representatives of States Parties)
- Regional networks of national implementation structures (e.g. ENIC/NARIC, APNNIC, CINALC, ANNIS)

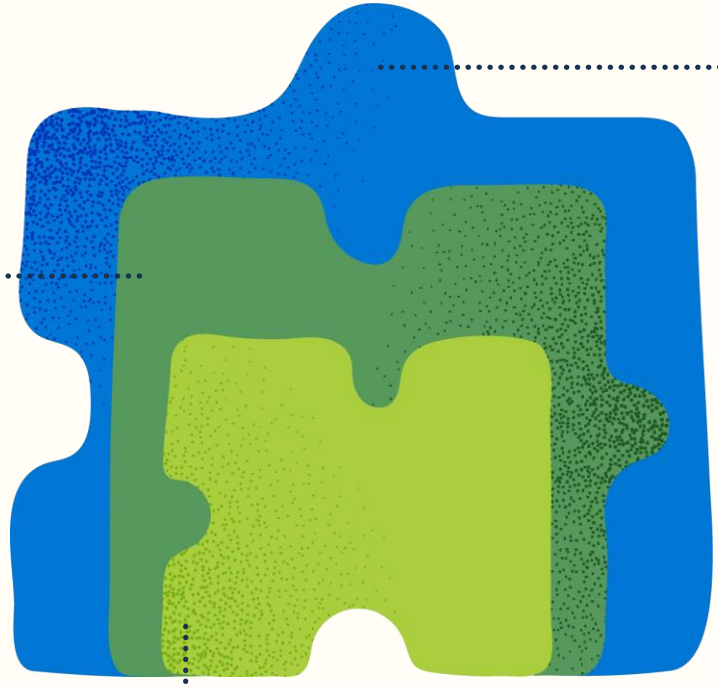


National

- National implementation structures/information centres
- Competent recognition authorities

Implementation structures and cooperation

Global, regional, and national organizations for accreditation, quality assurance, qualification frameworks, and recognition of qualifications.



Global

- Intergovernmental Conference of the States Parties (Representatives of States Parties, Heads of Regional Conventions)
- Networks of National Information Centres
- Working Groups

Regional

- Regional Recognition Convention Committees (Representatives of States Parties)
- Regional networks of national implementation structures (e.g. ENIC/NARIC, APNNIC, CINALC, ANNIS)

National

- National implementation structures/information centres
- Competent recognition authorities

Global Convention ratification process

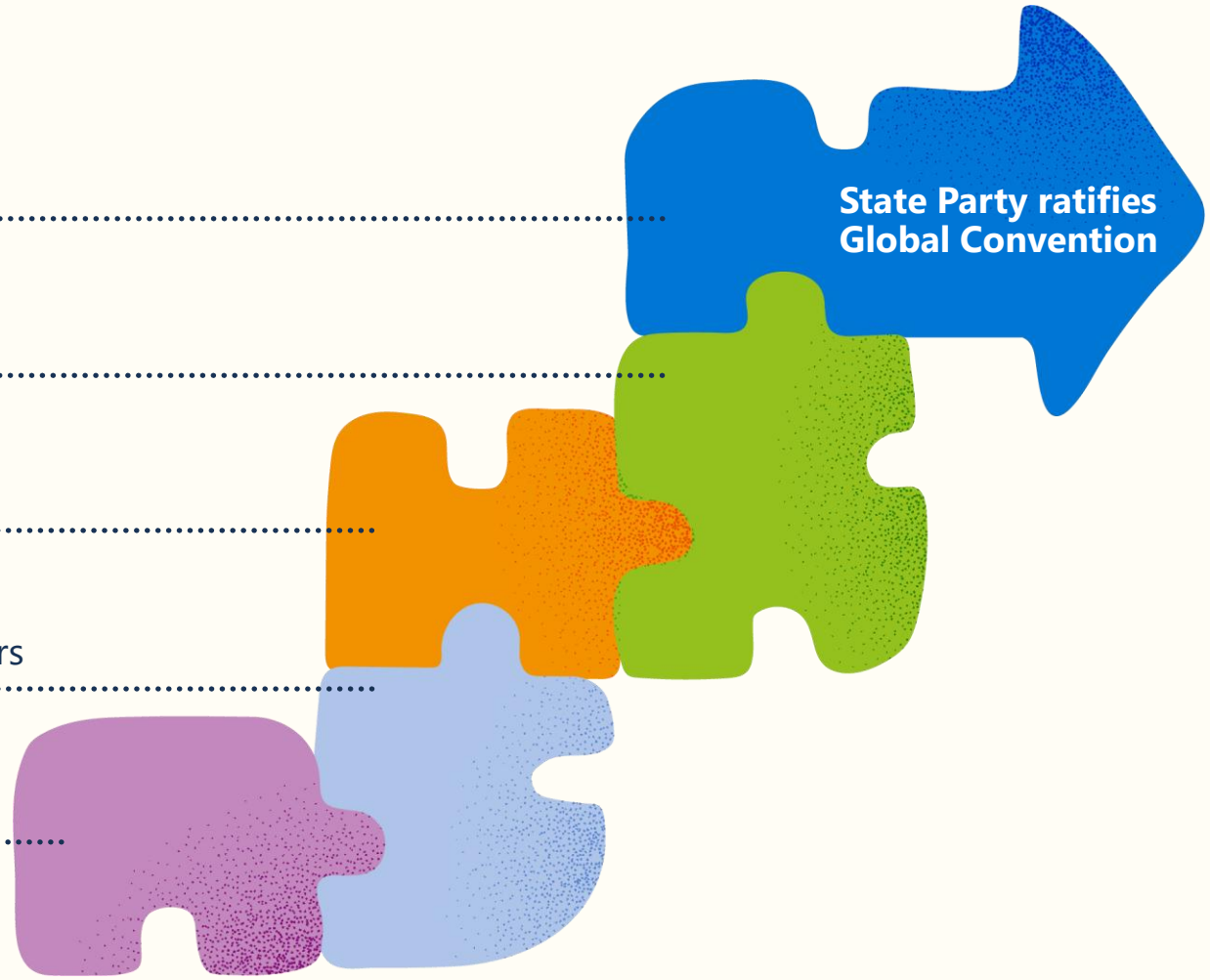
5. Instrument deposited in HQ

4. Signature of instrument

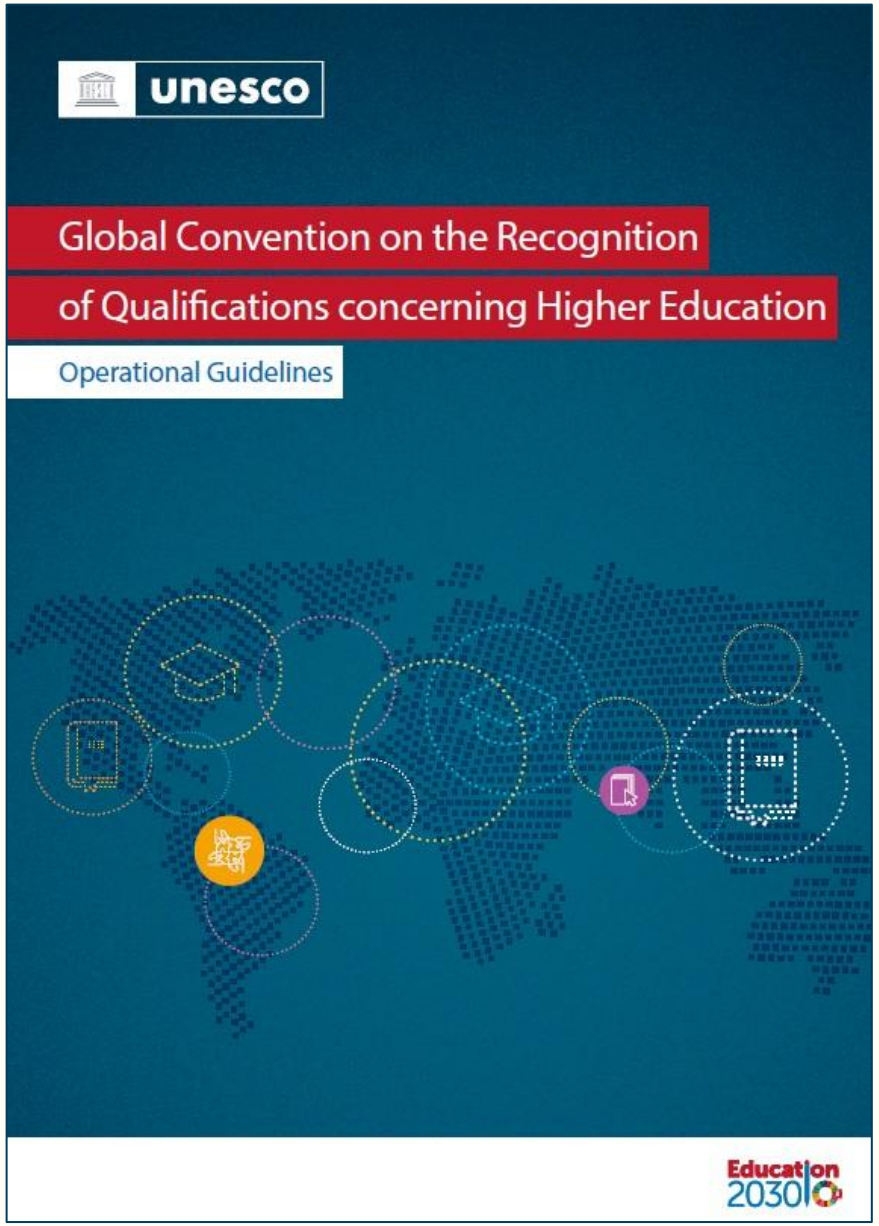
3. Passage in parliament

2. Consultation with different stakeholders

1. Benefits analysis for the country

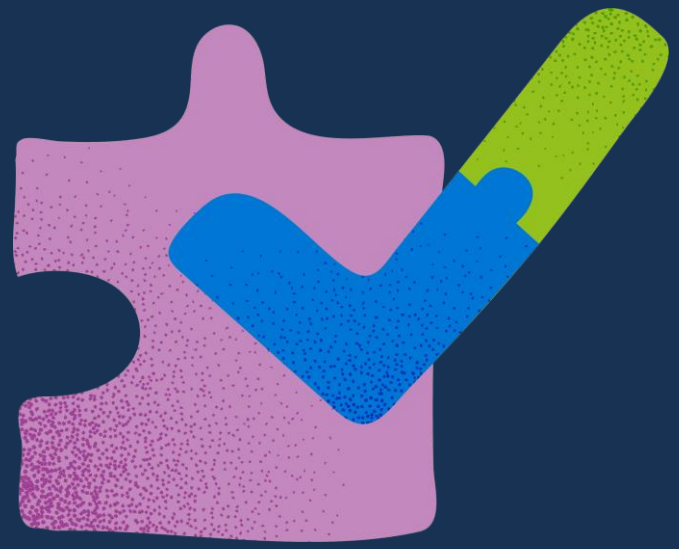


Additional resources



- **Operational Guidelines**
  https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000395680.locale=en
- **What is the Global Convention on Higher Education?**
  (benefits, how to ratify it, how to implement it)
  www.unesco.org/en/education/higher-education/global-convention/about
- **A Practical Guide to Recognition**
  https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000374905
- **Resolutions** Intergovernmental Conference of the States Parties to the Global Convention
  https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000386727and
  https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000389637
- **Regional recognition conventions**
  www.unesco.org/en/higher-education/conventions
- **Model instrument of ratification** for all UNESCO conventions
  www.unesco.org/en/node/66846

THANK YOU



For more information: https://www.unesco.org/en/higher-education/global-convention