HEI'25
Higher Education Intervention 2025

ORCA
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MONITORING REPORT OF NATIONAL ACADEMIC RECOGNITION INFORMATION CENTRE - NARIC

2023



Publisher:
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Prishtina, July 2024

"Our Father, who art in heaven, give us the power to keep our mouths shut when we have nothing to say. And give us the patience to think before we write! Inspire us with a sharp sense of justice to speak not only without bias, but to also act thus! Save us from the traps of grammar, distortions of language and errors of typing. Amen!"

Faik Konica

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Introduction

The National Academic Recognition and Information Center, known as the NARIC center from English, the National Academic Recognition and Information Center (hereafter the NARIC center), together with the Kosovo Agency for Accreditation, constitute the two key filters that protect the quality of higher education in Kosovo. This center is responsible for the recognition of the obtained diplomas OUTSIDE Kosovo, THAT WILL THE say, IS the first protection against fake diplomas, especially those of doctorates, whose holders try to enter the higher education system in Kosovo as professors.

The Organization for Quality Improvement in Education does the monitoring e DECISIONS AND meetings of the NARIC center, to ensure transparency of the process. Furthermore, through projects such as Intervention in Higher Education 2025 (HEI25 for short) and Quality, Accountability, Integrity and Transparency (QAINT for short),

supported by the Austrian Development Agency, technical assistance was provided to identify and resolve the center's difficulties.

This report is built on monitoring the work of the NARIC center in 2023. The chapters describe data on the recognition and verification of diplomas, the origin of diplomas, challenges and the future of the NARIC center.

How does NARIC center work and what is its legal basis?

Key definitions

NARIC CENTER - is responsible for the verification and recognition of diplomas obtained within and outside Kosovo, respectively. It also provides information on the procedures for the recognition of foreign diplomas and qualifications, as well as the higher education system and qualifications in Kosovo at the request of other countries. It consists of the Center Office and the State Council for Recognition.

STATE COUNCIL FOR RECOGNITION (SCR) is an authority that takes decisions for recognizing/ equivalence or not recognizing/equivalence, based on the file of the person making the request and the report prepared by the official of the Centre and in special cases, based on the recommendations of the experts' commission. It is composed of university professors from different study fields.

RECOGNITION – means an official acceptance by the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (MESTI), of a diploma obtained outside the country, which confirms the accuracy and validity of the diploma

VERIFICATION – means an official acceptance by the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation in Kosovo (MESTI), of a diploma obtained within the country. This service of certifying the diploma aims to ease the recognition of the diplomas and credits obtained in accredited institutions within the country for use abroad.

ACADEMIC INFORMATION - is the third service that the NARIC center performs for institutions and citizens in Kosovo and its purpose is to clarify the study fields of diplomas, interpret grade point averages and credits.

EQUIVALENCE – means an official acceptance by MESTI of a diploma obtained outside the country, which confirms the accuracy and validity of the diploma and compares it to the level of the diplomas and the respective study field in the country. In 2023, NARIC center did not do any equivalences.

Legal basis and procedures

The National Academic Recognition and Information Centre (NARIC) currently operates based on the legislation in force as follows:

- Law on Higher Education in the Republic of Kosovo [1]
- Administrative Instruction On Verification Of School Documentation (Public And Private) For Candidates Needs Being Educated Abroad.[2]
- Administrative Instruction on the Principles and Procedures for the Recognition of Diplomas, Degrees and Qualifications of Higher Professional and University Schools Obtained Outside the Republic of Kosovo[3]
- Regulation on the Work of the State Council for Recognition and the Commissions for the Relevant Fields [4]

[1] Law on Higher Education, link: https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=2761
[2] Administrative Instruction (Mest) No. 26/2014 On Verification Of School Documentation (Public And Private) For Candidates Needs Being Educated Abroad, link: https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=10210
[3] Administrative Instruction 12/2018 on the Principles and Procedures for the Recognition of Diplomas, Degrees and Qualifications of Higher Professional and University Schools Obtained Outside the Republic of Kosovo, link: https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=15228
[4] Official website of NARIC, https://naric-ks.online/

Degrees obtained in public universities of the region and in universities found in global ranking lists, such as Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU), Times Higher Education World University Ranking (THE) and QS World University Ranking, after obtaining confirmation by the country that they are authentic and valid, are approved by the staff of the NARIC Centre, without having to go through the State Council for Recognitions.

The State Council for Recognition, specifically the member of the field of study from which the diploma was obtained, first examines the application for recognition of the diploma, but in case of any ambiguity, the application is discussed with the other members of the council, otherwise, after examination, it is signed by the member of the relevant field and the applicant accepts the decision from NARIC that the diploma has been recognized.

The NARIC center requests information from the centers of the European network of information and recognition of diplomas (ENIC), on the status of higher education institutions, the validity of diplomas or certificates, their level according to the National/European Framework of Qualifications, as well as other additional information in the function of recognition/equivalence of the diploma.

The application for recognition of the qualifications of higher professional and university schools acquired outside the Republic of Kosovo is possible through the website of this center. Diplomas earned abroad must go through the Ministry of Education's recognition process to confirm their accuracy and authenticity, while diplomas earned domestically must go through verification process to prove degree validity and credit equivalency so that to facilitate the acceptance of these diplomas outside Kosovo.

Data on recognition and verification in 2023

Key findings

- 881 decisions on the recognition of diplomas have been issued by the NARIC Center. A diploma from Albania has not been recognized. Five other degrees that originated in Serbia have not been recognized. Three cases have been carried over to 2024.

- North Macedonia is the country with the most diplomas issued which are recognized in Kosovo.
- 354 degrees or 40% of all recognized degrees in 2023 belong to this country. Albania is the second country with the most recognized diplomas in Kosovo in 2023, with 152 OR 17%.

- 72% of diplomas recognized in 2023 were obtained in North Macedonia, Albania and Turkey.

- Level of recognized degrees: 163 doctorates (19%), 478 masters (54%), bachelors 234 (27%), and level 6 of education (<1%).

- The most doctorates recognized in 2023 came from North Macedonia – a total of 60 or 37% of all doctorates.

- 29% of recognized degrees in 2023 are from the field of medical and sports sciences, 18% are from social sciences, education and humanities, and 9% from economics.

- 3212 diplomas obtained in educational institutions within Kosovo have been verified by the NARIC center in 2023.

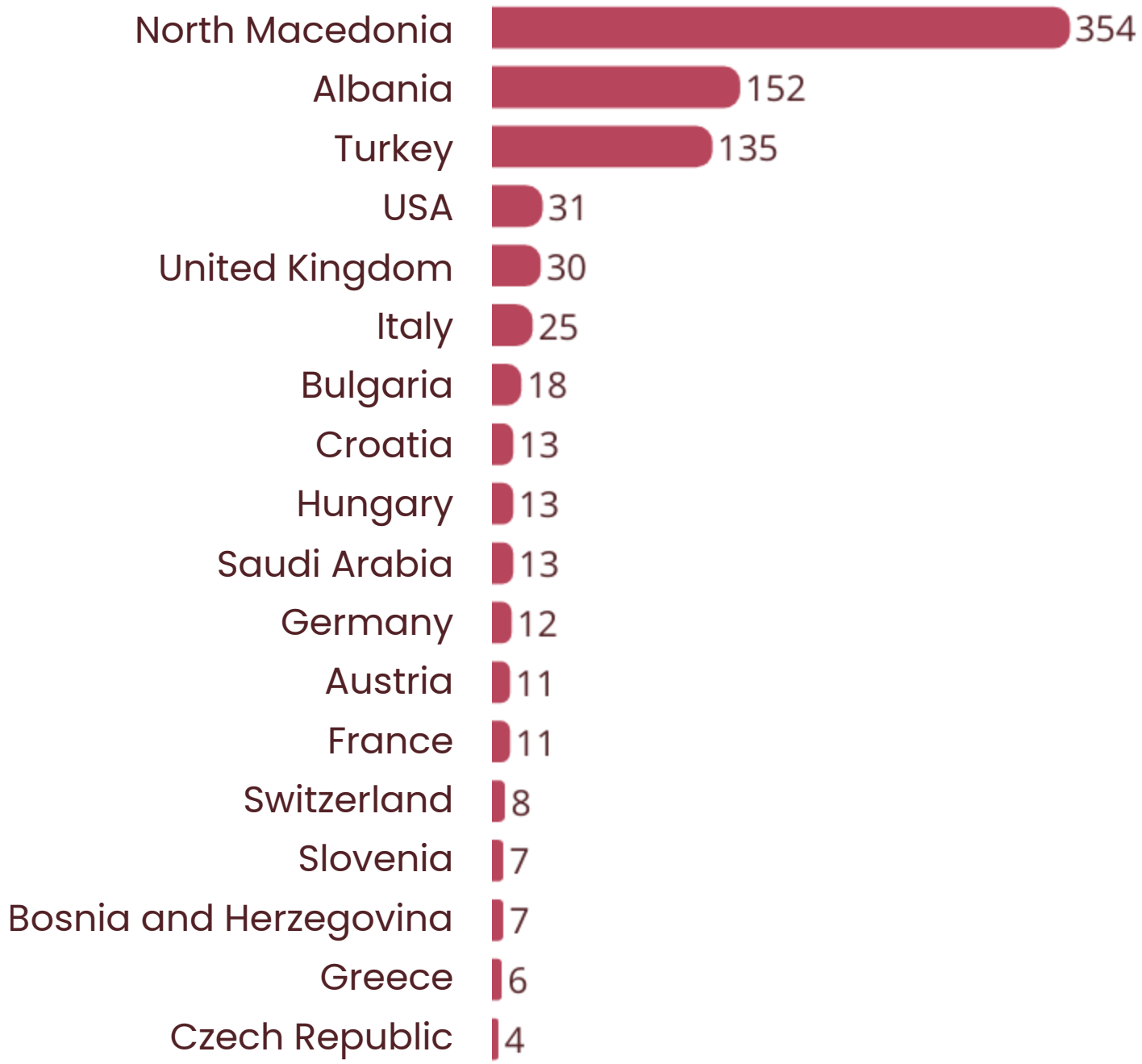
Recognition

Diploma recognition is the act of accepting the validity of the diploma obtained outside of Kosovo. Below are tabulated data for states, study fields and levels of schooling.

Data on the recognition of diplomas by country of origin

881 diplomas obtained outside Kosovo have been recognized from the NARIC center. These degrees were obtained in 36 foreign countries. 72% of those were obtained in North Macedonia, Albania and Turkey.

Diplomas recognized in 2023 by country of origin



Diplomas recognized in 2023 by country of origin

Jordan	4
Sweden	3
Montenegro	3
India	3
Belgium	3
Pakistan	2
Israel	2
Egypt	1
Estonia	1
Finland	1
Netherlands	1
Ireland	1
Canada	1
China	1
Poland	1
Portugal	1
Cyprus	1
Ukraine	1

North Macedonia remains the favorite country of Kosovars who want to study outside of Kosovo. We add here the number of many Albanian-Macedonians operating in Kosovo, then it can be expected that the country with most diplomas recognized in 2023 in Kosovo is North Macedonia.

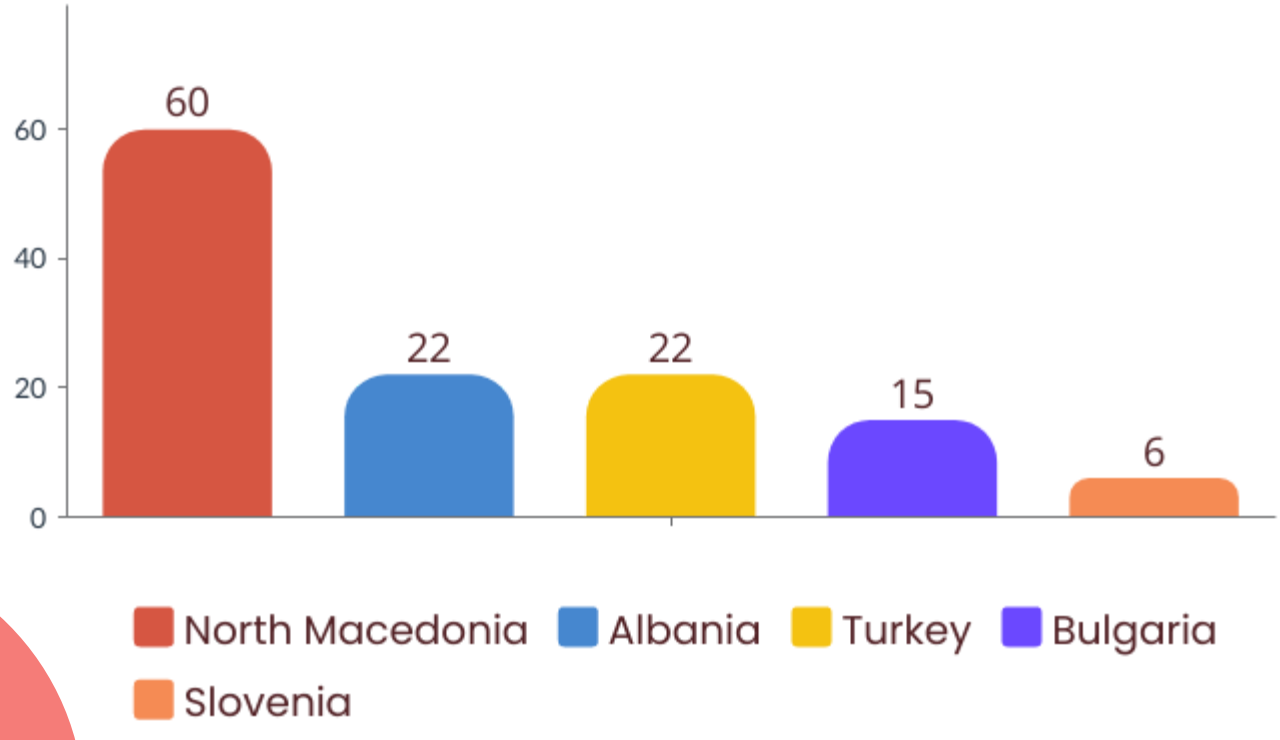
Albania is the second country in terms of diplomas issues, and that are recognized in Kosovo. Higher education institutions in Albania have many Kosovar students, as well as produce Albanian professionals who come to work in Kosovo.

Turkey is the third country and very close to Albania in terms of the origin of degrees recognized in Kosovo in 2023. A significant number of Kosovars study in Turkey, and many Turkish citizens have started to work in Kosovo - proportionally more than in the case of Albanian citizens.

Recognized diplomas at the doctorate level

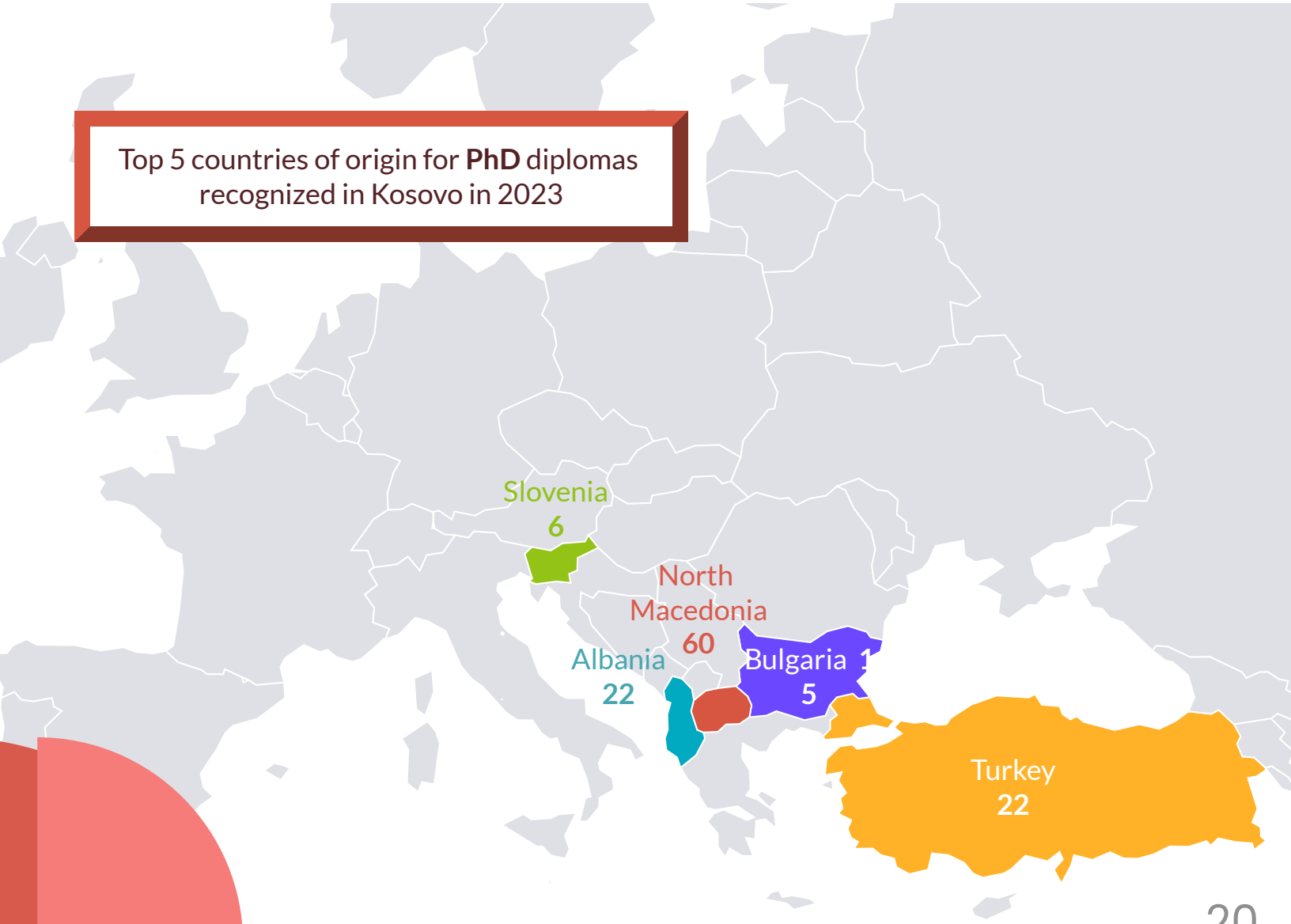
The most important scientific degree is a doctor of science or philosophy, which means a level 8 qualification according to the European Qualifications Framework. Individuals who possess this title can be employed as professors in higher education in Kosovo, if they also have a scientific paper published in international journals. ORCA closely monitors the processes and decisions in the selection of professors, and has observed in the past that certain individuals with diplomas in fictitious HEIs in the region attempted to be elected as professors.

Top 5 countries of origin for PhD diplomas recognized in Kosovo in 2023



In 2023, 163 PhD-level diplomas were recognized, which constitutes 19% of all recognized diplomas. Country origin with the most doctorates produced that are recognized in Kosovo is North Macedonia. Albania and Turkey are second. These three countries together have produced 65% of recognized doctorates in Kosovo in 2023. There are 17 other states that make up the remaining 35%.

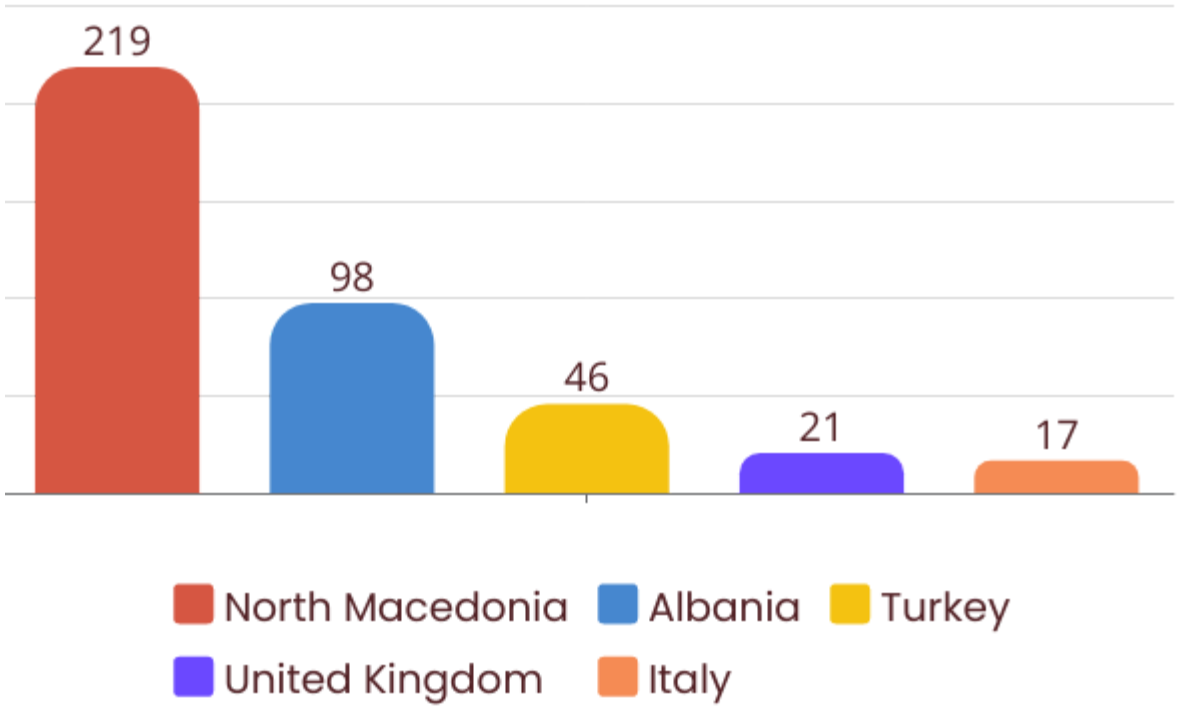
Top 5 countries of origin for **PhD** diplomas recognized in Kosovo in 2023



Recognized diplomas at the Master's level

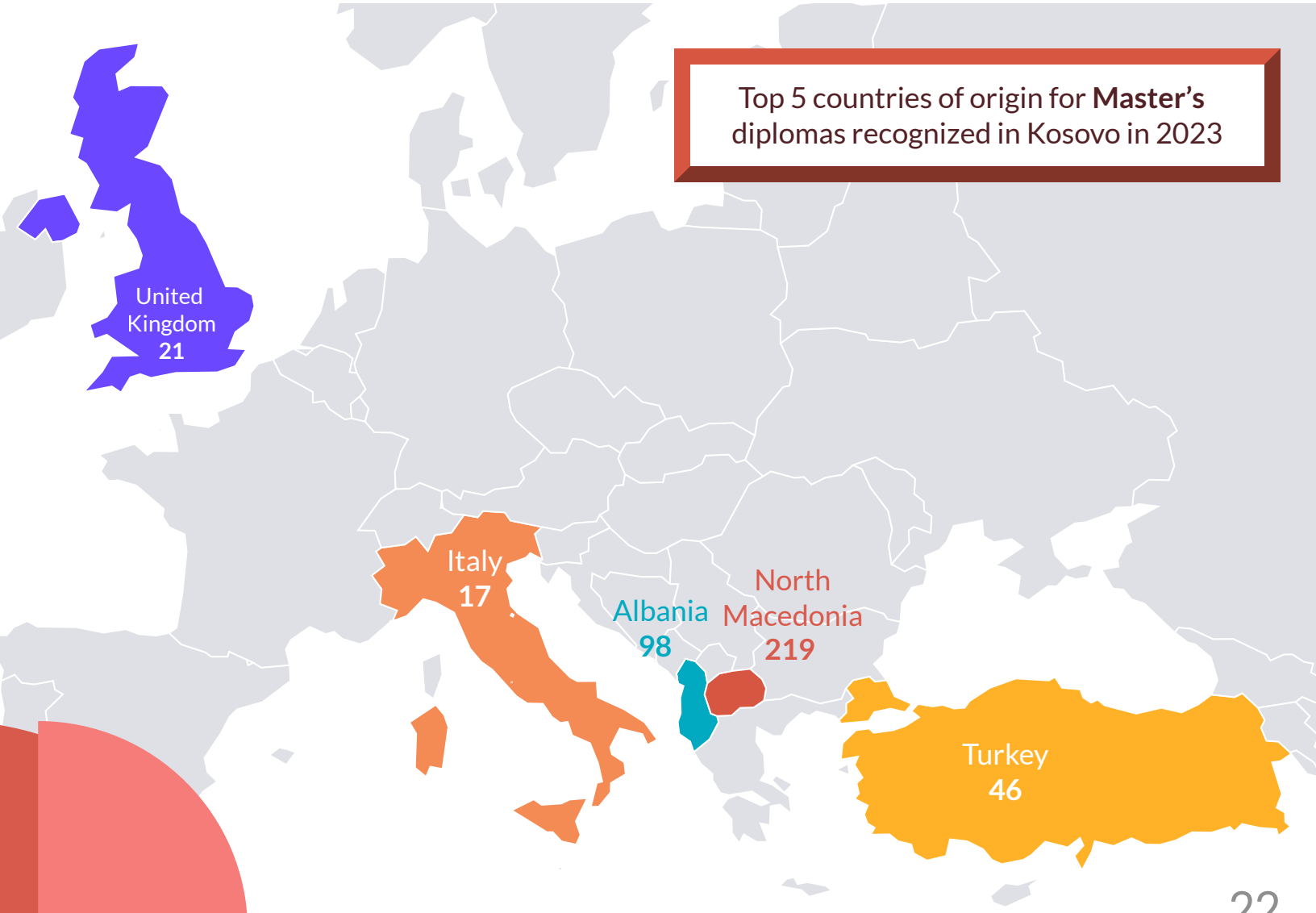
In terms of the number of recognized diplomas, master's degrees dominate. In 2023, 478 master's degrees were recognized, which constitutes 54% of all recognized degrees.

Top 5 countries of origin for Master's diplomas recognized in Kosovo in 2023



The three countries from which Kosovo has imported the most master's degrees are North Macedonia, Albania and Turkey. It should be emphasized that this scientific degree has had the most recognition compared to other degrees. Over half of the diplomas recognized in Kosovo in 2023 were of this degree.

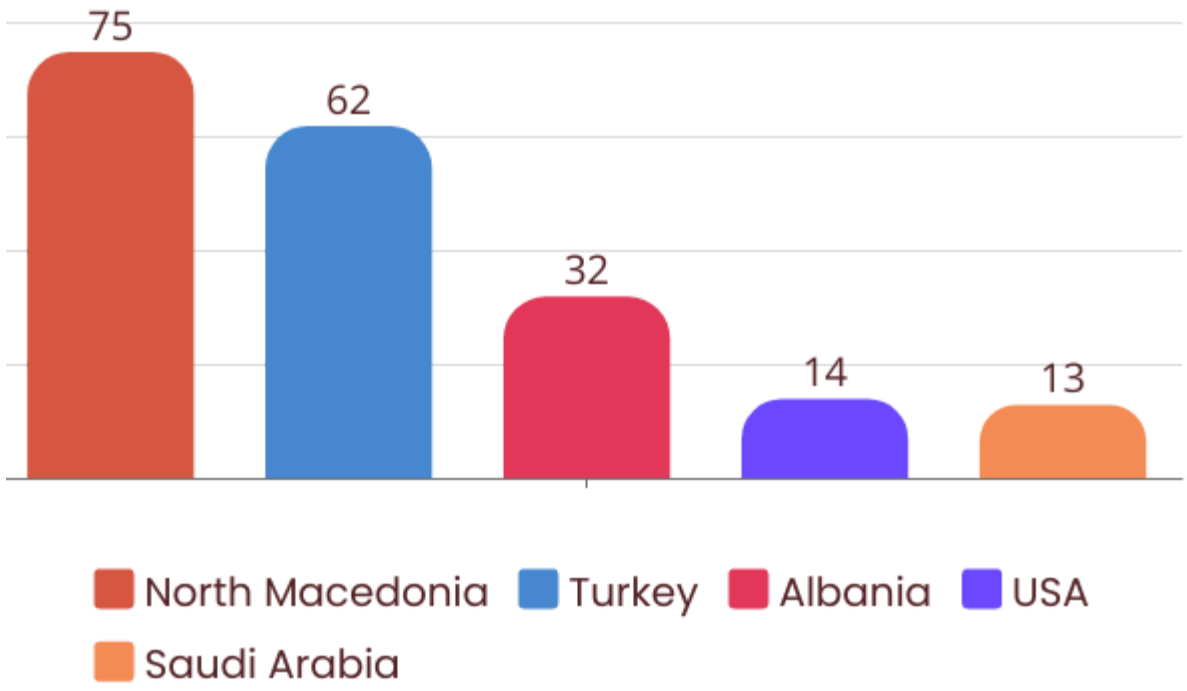
76% of all master's degrees recognized in Kosovo in 2023 come from the first three countries in the table.



Recognized degrees at the basic studies level – bachelor

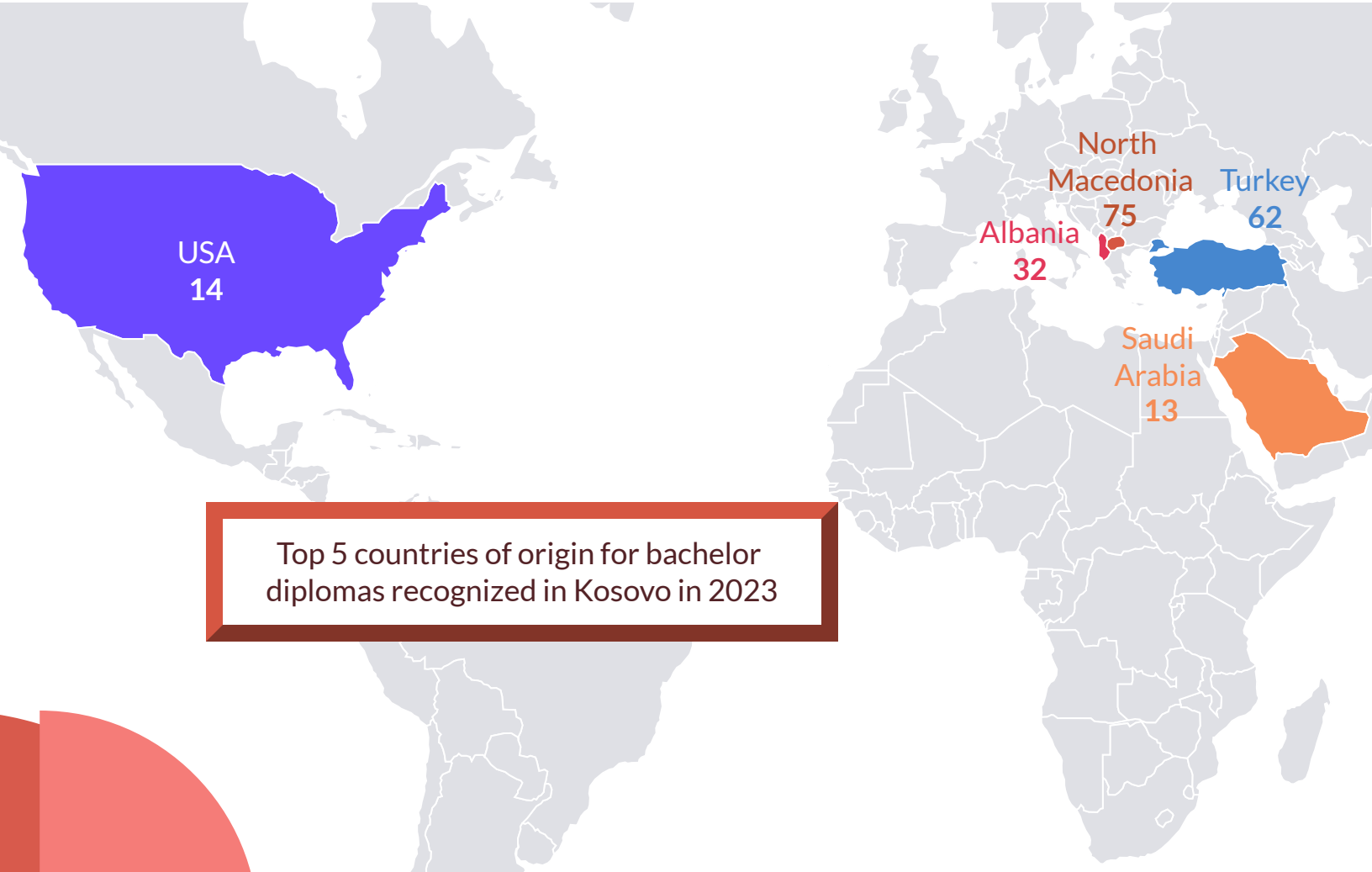
In 2023, 236 diplomas at the level of Bachelor's were recognized, which constitutes 27% of all diplomas recognized in Kosovo.

Top 5 countries of origin for bachelor diplomas recognized in Kosovo in 2023



As for bachelor's degree, North Macedonia leads as the country of origin with over 30% of all degrees recognized in Kosovo in 2023.

Turkey is the second before Albania in the ranking of the countries of origin of bachelor's degrees recognized in Kosovo in 2023, while Saudi Arabia has managed to enter the top 5. In 2023, 24 degrees by in religious studies were recognized in Kosovo, 10 of them are from Saudi Arabia.



Top 5 countries of origin for bachelor diplomas recognized in Kosovo in 2023

Table of diploma recognitions according to level of studies and country of studies

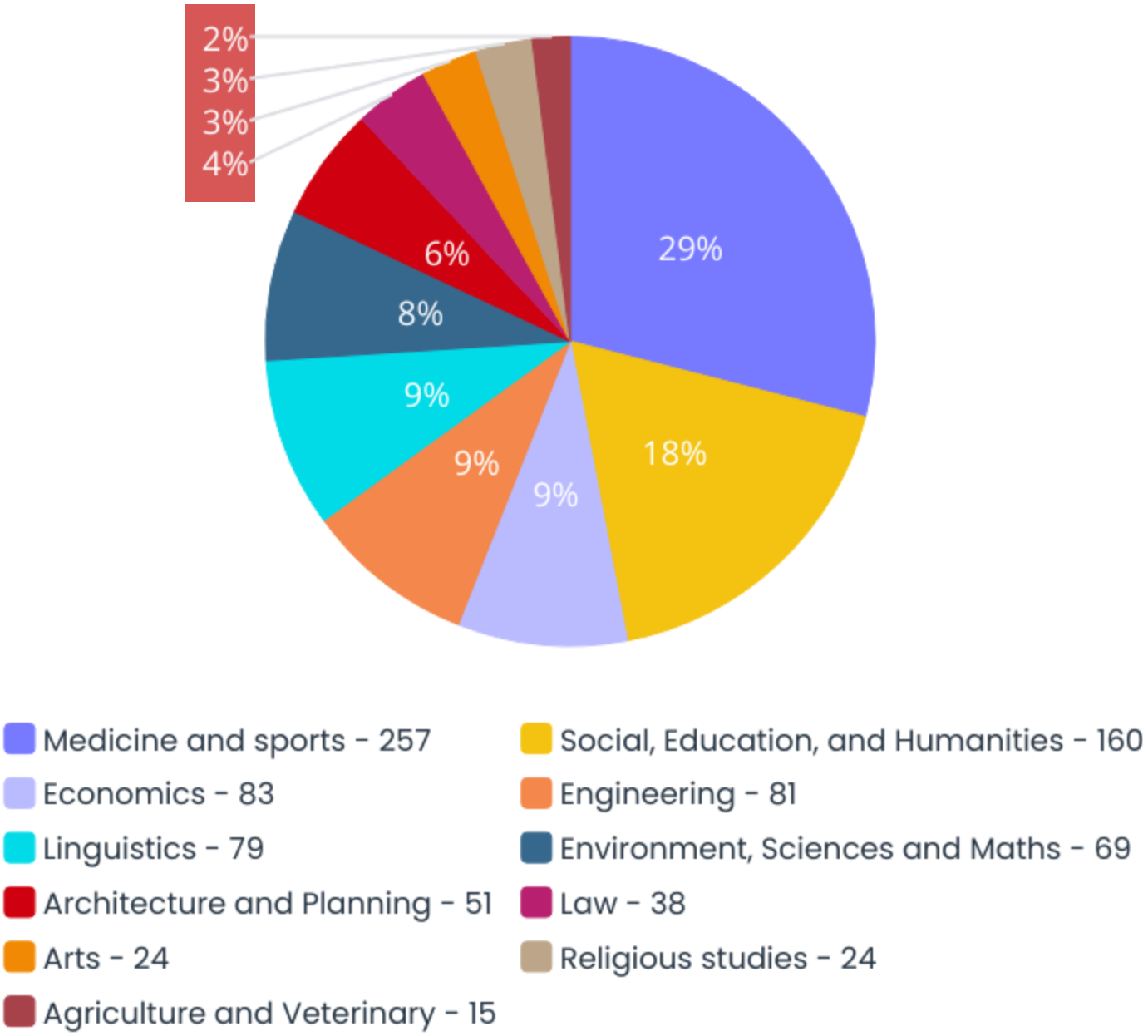
Shteti	Ph.D.	Masters	Bachelor	other
North Macedonia	60	219	75	
Albania	22	98	32	
Turkey	22	46	62	5
USA	3	14	14	
United Kingdom	1	21	8	
Italy	5	17	3	
Bulgaria	15	2	1	
Saudi Arabia			13	
Hungary	2	10	1	
Croatia	2	8	3	
Germany	3	7	2	
Austria	4	3	4	
France	2	5	4	
Switzerland	3	3	2	
Bosnia and Herzegovina	2	1	4	
Slovenia	6	1		
Greece		5	1	
Jordan	1	1	2	
Czech Republic	2	2		

Table of diploma recognitions according to level of studies and country of studies

Country	Ph.D.	Masters	Bachelor	other
Belgium		3		
India	1	2		
Montenegro	1	1	1	
Sweden		2		1
Israel	2			
Pakistan			2	
Egypt			1	
Estonia		1		
Finland			1	
Netherlands		1		
Ireland		1		
Canada	1			
China		1		
Poland		1		
Portugal	1			
Cyprus		1		
Ukraine		1		
Total	**161**	**478**	**236**	**6**

Data on diploma recognition per study field

There are 11 fields of study categorized by the NARIC center. The graph below shows the number of diplomas by field of study expressed in percentage.



The NARIC Center uses its own categorizations of fields of study for the recognition of diplomas. According to this categorization, 29% of recognized degrees in 2023 are in medicine and sports. This means that health qualifications and, to a lesser extent, sports qualifications, have been mostly imported to Kosovo. Medicine and sports, along with social, educational and humanities are the fields of study of almost half of the diplomas imported and recognized in Kosovo.

Religion makes up 3% of the fields of study of diplomas recognized in Kosovo, which is the penultimate percentage after that of the fields of agriculture and veterinary medicine. All degrees in the religious field were obtained during studies done in the Middle East, with the exception of one in the USA, and all belong to the field of the Islamic religion.

Verification

Verification is an act of acceptance of diplomas or qualifications obtained in Kosovo institutions. There are often more requests for verification than for recognition.

3,229 diplomas were reviewed for verification in 2023. 3,212 were verified, 17 were not. Of those verified, 1,472 belong to diplomas obtained in private higher education institutions, and 1,740 belong to public ones.

Challenges

Most of the challenges facing the NARIC center in 2023 are the same as in previous years. During 2023, with the support of the HEI25 project, an assessment of the center's needs was made, and a report was produced with recommendations for overcoming them. Below, the key challenges that were encountered during the monitoring of the center are listed, as well as the other challenges identified during the needs assessment are summarized.

- Insufficient staff
- Lack of database
- Non-accredited programs
- Misused profiles in HEMIS
- Impossibility of ENIC membership
- Other challenges identified in the needs assessment report
- Lawsuits

Insufficient staff

One of the main challenges of the NARIC Kosovo center is the limited staff. The main work of the center consists in handling applications for recognition and verification of diplomas. This has led to periods of time where the entire staff is fully engaged in working with applicants. The Center has handled an average of 3 diploma recognition cases and 12 diploma verification cases per day, in 2023. In certain periods, the latter went up to 20-25 cases per day.

In 2023, six people worked at the NARIC center.

Lack of database

At the moment, the NARIC Center is served with a digital application platform for recognition and verification of diplomas. Unfortunately, this platform cannot produce data on the type of diplomas, field of study, level, countries of origin and all other combinations, on which the policies of the center can be oriented.

This report has compiled data that has been extracted manually by the Center's staff - a process which could very easily have been automated through a digital database. Such a database would enable us to understand, for example:

- Which are the countries with the largest number of PhD-level diplomas that come to be recognized at the center? Are there any of them that have an abnormally large number of such degrees?

- If for example, 50% of PhD diplomas are coming from country X, then we need to see what quality they are, and if there's a need to create special policies for these cases that could potentially harm the labor market in Kosovo.

Similar data can be extracted for the verification of local diplomas. For example, we can understand what types of profiles are seeking verification to work outside Kosovo. This would help to alleviate the immigration of high-demand skills such as doctors, nurses, engineers, etc.

Programs without accreditation

One of the main reasons for non-recognition and non-verification of diplomas is that they were obtained in programs or institutions that did not have accreditation. Most of these cases are diplomas that were obtained many years ago, when there were no strong quality assurance mechanisms in Kosovo and in the region.

It should be noted that until a short time ago, study programs in Albania were accredited by Minister of Education's decision, without a thorough review of quality conducted by an independent agency, like accreditation agencies or quality assurance agencies. Many of the diplomas obtained at the time were obtained in fictive universities which later would be chased by the law authorities in Albania, such as Kristal University, which issued diplomas without students attending classes, had buildings without permits and false study programs. [5]

[5] Scandal with "Kristal" University, diploma with 10 days of attendance, buildings without permits, registrations without programs and fake diplomas. (2014). Sot.com.al

The main victims of these cases were the students who were not aware that the programs or institutions where they were enrolled did not have accreditation.

Misused profiles in HEMIS

The Higher Education Information Management System (HEMIS) is the register of all students of local higher education institutions. Every student who enrolls in an accredited study program in Kosovo is also listed in HEMIS. Among others, this system is also used to implement the allowed quotas for the number of students, which is set by the Kosovo Accreditation Agency, which means that if a program was accredited for 40 students, then this number can be monitored through HEMIS.

For various reasons, this registry has been manipulated to delete, add or change student profiles in violation of legal procedures. As a result, there's a considerable number of students who have graduated and do not appear in HEMIS. For this reason, when they applied for diploma verification in NARIC, they were rejected.

This problem has not been fully addressed by MESTI and by judiciary authorities in Kosovo, leaving many students with diplomas that are not recognized by the state of Kosovo. As a result, these students have been excluded from employment or education opportunities in those institutions where official recognition from the NARIC center is required, including especially institutions abroad.

Impossibility of ENIC membership

Kosovo is not a member of the European Network of Information Centers (hereinafter ENIC). This is because Kosovo is not a member of UNESCO and the Council of Europe, who are the founders of ENIC.

Kosovo's membership in ENIC would mean easier recognition of academic and professional qualifications, facilitating mobility for education and employment. Although the NARIC center is not part of ENIC, it largely implements its principles and standards.

Unfortunately, the political issue of Kosovo's membership in the Council of Europe and in UNESCO will penalize students, academic staff and professionals, who through ENIC they could have greater access to the labor market and education.

Other challenges identified in the needs assessment report

In November 2023, Kosovo Education Center through HEI25 project published the report "Naric Kosova - Use of Digital Tools'[6]. In this report, the needs of the NARIC center have been identified, as well as recommendations have been given for overcoming them and for the further development of the center. Beyond those mentioned above, in this report the following challenges were also identified:

- Limited platform for applying for recognition in higher education
- Lack of digital platform for verification
- Lack of digital platform for pre-university recognitions
- Equivalence of grade point averages and ECTS
- Lack of clarity in academic information

[6] NARIC Kosova – Use of Digital Tools, 2023. Colin Tuck and Arben Sahiti. Kosovo Education Center. HEI25 Project.

Some of the main recommendations concern the clarification of the roles and rules for the recognition of higher education diplomas as well as further developing digital solutions for center processes.

Lawsuits

During 2023, there were four pending lawsuits against the NARIC center. All of them had to do with the center not recognizing the diploma, either because of a mismatch of the level, or for other reasons.

The future of NARIC

Digitalization

The NARIC Center is oriented towards the digitilization of all processes within it, including the collection and reporting of data. For this purpose, the center is utilizing the support of the central government, MESTI, and foreign projects such as HEI25. With the latter, after supporting the assessment of the center's needs, cases from 2014 will be digitalized.

Further, with the request of the Prime Minister's Office, a database will be created, which will serve to produce real information on which it can to orient the policies for recognition and verification, with the aim on the one hand of protecting and ensuring the quality of education in Kosovo, and on the other hand of facilitating mobility for employment and education of citizens.

The new procedures

In the recent past, the NARIC center has been criticized for the lack of legal basis on which it has based its administrative instructions and other secondary regulations. For this, the center is revising its regulatory documents to harmonize them with laws in power.

The new regulation of the State Council for Recognition has facilitated its work and increased its functionality. The regulation also includes clear procedures for election of the chairman of the council, and a more frequent holding of meetings for final decisions for recognition and validation.

In order to harmonize the regulations with ENIC, and to speed up the integration processes in the European Union, the NARIC center is revising its procedures for recognizing diplomas obtained outside Kosovo.

This also includes the possibilities for the adaptation of three separate processes for the recognition of diplomas by the member states of ENIC, the countries of the Western Balkans and others.

Disclaimer:

This document has been produced with the financial assistance of the Austrian Development Agency. The views and opinions expressed herein, can in no way reflect the official opinion of the Austrian Development Agency.

With funding from

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