



Credential Quandaries: Developing Policy to Evaluate Credentials from Limited Recognition Countries

SHELBY L. CEARLEY

**SENIOR REPRESENTATIVE, GLOBAL TRANSCRIPT EVALUATION TEAM
ADTALEM GLOBAL EDUCATION**

Thank you for joining me today! My name is Shelby Cearley, and I am the Senior Representative on the Global Transcript Evaluation team (or GTE) at Adtalem Global Education. Adtalem is a system of five private universities: Walden University and Chamberlain University in the US and American University of the Caribbean School of Medicine, Ross University School of Medicine, and Ross University School of Veterinary Medicine. GTE is responsible for evaluating the non-US educational credentials for applicants seeking admission or for students seeking transfer credit at one of the five universities.

Today we are going to talk about developing policy to evaluate credentials from limited recognition countries.

Learning Objectives

- 1 Define “limited recognition country” and how this can affect credential evaluation
- 2 Identify and evaluate resources related to education and quality assurance in limited recognition countries
- 3 Implement policy and procedures to evaluate credentials and determine recognition status from limited recognition countries

Limited Recognition Countries

What are they?

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Before we begin, I want to clarify that the information in this presentation is provided for educational purposes only. Location references, publications, and other resources may be listed under commonly used names of countries, regions, and territories. The manner of their listing does not represent statements of cultural, historical, political, or social opinions or facts by me. I am only discussing these countries in the context of their *educational* situation, not a political one.

So now we will discuss what a limited recognition country is.

Two Political Theories

Declarative Theory

A state is a person in international law if it has:

- A defined territory,
- A permanent population,
- A government, and
- A capacity to enter into relations with other states.

Constitutive Theory

A state is a person in international law only if it is recognized as such by other states that are already a member of the international community.



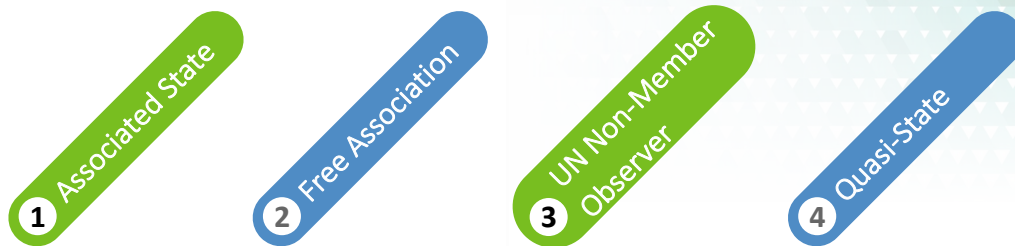
Is it a bit of both?

A limited recognition country must claim sovereignty, lack recognition from at least one UN member state, and either:

1. Satisfy the declarative theory of statehood, or
2. Be recognized as a state by at least one UN member state.

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Some Other Terms



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There are some other terms that we need to discuss in relation to Limited Recognition States.

1. **Associated State:** An associated state is the minor partner or dependent territory in a formal, free relationship between a political territory (such as a fully sovereign dependent state) and a major party, usually a larger nation. An associated state is generally a state or territory partly controlled by (but not a possession of) a stronger state but autonomous in internal affairs. Cook Islands and Niue are associated states in free association with New Zealand.
2. **Free Association:** Free associated states can be described as independent or not, but free association is not a qualification of an entity's statehood or status as a subject of international law. This is sometimes used interchangeably with the term "associated state". The United States also has something called "Compacts of Free Association", which are international agreements establishing and governing the relationships of free association between the US and the sovereign Pacific Island states of the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of Marshall Islands, and the Republic of Palau, and as of September 2023, with the Cook Islands and Niue.
3. **UN Non-Member Observer:** The United Nations General Assembly has granted observer status to international organizations, entities, and non-member states to enable them to participate in the work of the United Nations General Assembly, though with limitations.

The General Assembly determines the privileges it will grant to each observer, beyond those laid down in a 1986 Conference on treaties between states and international organizations. In 2012, Palestine's observer status was changed from "non-member observer entity" to "non-member observer state", which many called "symbolic". The other state with UN non-member observer status is the Holy See.

4. A quasi-state, which is sometimes also known as a state-like entity or a proto-state, is a political entity that does not represent a fully autonomous sovereign state with its own institutions. Quasi-state has most often been evoked in reference to militant secessionist groups who claim, and exercise some form of territorial control over, a specific region, but which lack institutional cohesion. An example is the Federal Republic of New Russia, which constitutes the Ukrainian breakaway republics of Donetsk and Luhansk.

Limited Recognition Countries

Abkhazia ²	Niue ¹	Somaliland ³	Taiwan ²
Cook Islands ¹	Palestine ⁵	South Ossetia ²	Transnistria ³
Kosovo ¹	Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic ²	Sovereign Military Order of Malta ⁴	Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus ²

1. UN specialized agency members not recognized by at least 1 UN member state and has diplomatic relations with the United States
2. Not state parties within the UN
3. Non-UN states recognized by other non-UN states
4. Political entity recognized by at least 1 UN member state
5. UN Non-Member Observer State

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There is no single recognized list of limited recognition countries, but the table on this slide contains a list of 12 generally recognized limited recognition countries as defined on an earlier slide.

Three of these countries are United Nation non-member states: Cook Islands, Kosovo, and Niue. They also have diplomatic relations with the United States. The US Department of State maintains a list called "Independent States of the World" which lists the 197 countries it considers to be independent, sovereign nations. The US established diplomatic relations with Kosovo in 2008 and with both the Cook Islands and Niue in September 2023.

Five of these states are not state parties within the UN: Abkhazia, Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, South Ossetia, Taiwan, and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. Two countries are non-UN states recognized by other non-UN states: Somaliland and Transnistria. One country is a political entity recognized by 111 UN member states: the Sovereign Military Order of Malta. One country has UN non-member observer status: Palestine.



Why does this matter?

Are you able to determine who has oversight for education in the country?

What if multiple entities claim jurisdiction?

Resources for Recognition

Selected limited recognition countries

Transnistria

- Part of Moldavian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic from 1924 to 1991
- Claimed independence from Republic of Moldova in 1991
- Self-proclaimed name: Pridnestrovian Moldovan Republic
- Name per Republic of Moldova: Administrative-Territorial Units of the Left Bank of the Dniester
- Only recognized by Abkhazia and South Ossetia
- Ministry of Education of the PMR and Ministry of Education of the Republic of Moldova

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Image source: <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/static/maps/MD-map.jpg>

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Along with a small portion of land on the other side of the river's bank, Transnistria controls most of the thin strip of land between the Dniester River and the Moldova–Ukraine boundary. Tiraspol is its largest and capital city.

Transnistria was part of the Soviet Union until its dissolution in 1990. A military conflict broke out in March 1992 between groups which wanted to seek independence or union with Romania and a group which wanted to remain within the Soviet Union. A ceasefire was negotiated in July 1992 between Moldova, Transnistria, and Russia, and Russian peacekeeping troops have remained in the region since then.

Transnistria has an established government, with a constitution, laws, and military. Its education curriculum follows the Russian educational standards and is taught in Russian. By law, schools must use the Cyrillic alphabet, even those which use the Romanian language. There is ongoing conflict with the Romanian schools.

The MOE within Moldova "has approved and is implementing the Regulation on the legal effects of study documents, issued by educational institutions in the Eastern districts of Republic of Moldova and Bender (published in the Official Gazette no. 19-21 (1373-1375) of January 30, 2004)" (<https://mecc.gov.md/ro/content/comunicat-de-presa-9>). Moldova's MOE also provides oversight to the Romanian language schools located in Transnistria.

Cook Islands

- Aligned to the United Kingdom in 1890
- Declared a British territory in 1900
- Aligned to the Colony of New Zealand in 1901
- British Nationality and New Zealand Citizenship Act 1948
- Self-governing state in free association with New Zealand since 1965
- Diplomatic relations with 52 countries; established with the US in September 2023
- Cook Islands Ministry of Education

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Image source: <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/static/maps/CW-map.jpg>

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The Cook Islands, located in the South Pacific, consists of 15 islands. It became aligned with the United Kingdom in 1890, as many islanders were concerned about being occupied by the French, who occupied nearby Tahiti. Ten years later, in October 1900, the islands were declared a British territory, and the following year, the islands were included within the boundaries of the Colony of New Zealand; this was the start of a formal relationship between Cook Islands and New Zealand. The next important change in their relationship came in 1948 with the New Zealand Parliament's passage of the British Nationality and New Zealand Citizenship Act 1948. This act established New Zealand citizenship for New Zealanders (including Cook Island, since it was a dependent territory of New Zealand) separate from their former status as British subjects. Cook Islands remained a dependent territory until it was granted self-governing status in 1965. Its constitution was written that year.

The Cook Islands is self-governing in free association with New Zealand. Most Cook Islanders are also citizens of New Zealand, but they also have the status of Cook Islands nationals, which is not given to other New Zealand citizens. Under the Cook Islands constitution, New Zealand cannot pass laws for the Cook Islands. The Cook Islands has tried to gain UN member state status, but this has been an issue for New Zealand, which has said that it would not support the application without a change in their constitutional relationship, in particular Cook Islanders' right to New Zealand citizenship. However, New Zealand has recently said it is willing to "work constructively" with Cook Islands should Cook Islands want to join the UN.

Palestine

- Claimed independence in 1988
- UN non-member observer state status in 2012
- Name changed from “Palestinian Authority” to “State of Palestine” (دولة فلسطين / Dawlat Filasṭīn) in 2013
- Recognized by 139 of the 193 UN member states
- Ministry of Education and Higher Education / UNRWA



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Image source: https://ichef.bbci.co.uk/news/976/cpsprodpb/3FDC/production/_128484361_bbcm_israel_gaza_131119.png

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Because Palestine has been in the news a great deal over the last year, I am not going to provide a discussion about its history. Palestine consists of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The West Bank is a landlocked territory sitting on the west bank of the Jordan River and also along the Dead Sea, and it borders Jordan. It is the larger of the two territories. The Gaza Strip is a narrow strip land bordering the Mediterranean Sea and Egypt.

Palestine claimed its independence in November 1988. It had non-member observer status at the United Nations, which was amended to non-member observer state status in 2012; the only other country to have this status is the Holy See. The following year, in 2013, the state changed its name from “Palestinian Authority” or “Palestinian National Authority” to “State of Palestine”. The country has been recognized by 139 of the 193 UN member states.

Education in Palestine is overseen primarily by the Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education, but it also overseen by UNRWA, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. The MOEHE website is <https://www.mohe.pna.ps/>. UNRWA operates one of the largest school systems in the Middle East, spanning 711 elementary and preparatory schools, eight vocational and technical schools, and two teacher training institutes in Palestine, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon.

Northern Cyprus

- Official name: : *Kuzey Kıbrıs Türk Cumhuriyeti* (Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus)
- Turkish Federated State of Cyprus established in 1975
- Claimed independence from Cyprus in 1983
- Ministry of National Education and Culture (primary, secondary, vocational/technical)
- Yükseköğretim Kurumları Denetleme ve Akreditasyon Kurulu (YÖDAK)
- Turkish Council of Higher Education (YOK)



Image source: <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/static/maps/CY-map.jpg>

On 15 July 1974, the Greek military junta and the Cypriot National Guard backed a Greek Cypriot military coup d'état in Cyprus. The invasion led to the formation of the first sovereign administrative body of Northern Cyprus in August 1974, the Autonomous Turkish Cypriot Administration. In 1975, the Turkish Federated State of Cyprus was declared as a first step towards a future federated Cypriot state but was rejected by the Republic of Cyprus and the United Nations. The north unilaterally declared its independence in November 1983 under the name of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus.

Education in Northern Cyprus is the responsibility of the Ministry of National Education and Culture. It oversees primary, secondary, and vocational/technical education in Northern Cyprus. Its website is <http://www.mebnet.net/>. Quality assurance for academic higher education since 2005 is legally the responsibility of the Higher Education Institutions Supervision and Accreditation Board (known as YÖDAK); their website is <https://yodak.gov.ct.tr/>. However, many Northern Cyprus universities are also accredited by Türkiye's Council of Higher Education (YOK).

Developing Policies/Procedures

Regarding recognition of institutions and credentials in limited recognition countries

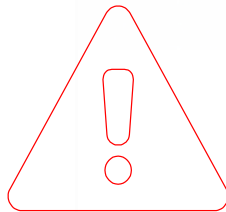
What Do You Normally Do?

Important questions to consider on any credential you evaluate include:

- What is the status of the institution's recognition?
- Does the institution exist?
- Was the program offered at the institution?

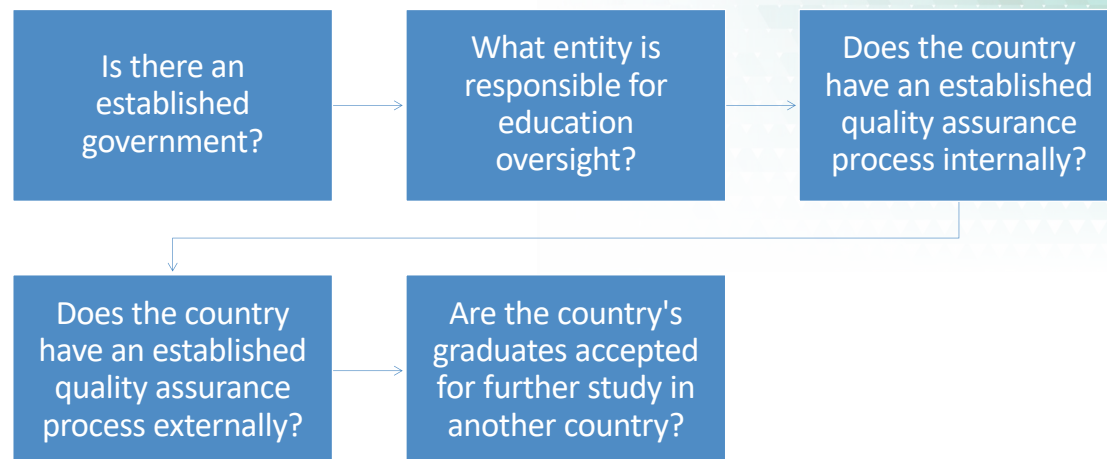
How Is It Different for a Limited Recognition Country?

- Are you able to locate a Ministry of Education?
- Does the country have a system in place to license/accredit/recognize institutions?
- Does it work with an entity in another country instead?
- Are its credential able to be used for admission into further education in other countries?



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Can It Be Considered Recognized?



Adapted from Ullrich and Johansson (2016), McKenna and Malgina (2018), and Cwiklinksi and Igarkava (2022)

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At GTE, we do not often see credentials from most of the limited recognition countries on the table I shared earlier in the presentation. The ones we do see tend to be from Taiwan. So how would we determine if we could evaluate a credential from one of the other countries on that table? We have adapted these questions from research by Amy Ullrich and Eric Johansson in 2016, Tatiana McKenna and Marina Malgina in 2018, and Matt Cwiklinksi and Alexander Igarkava in 2022. Let's discuss these questions in greater detail.

Is there an established government? A country must have an established government, and it must have some organ of that government be responsible for education, such as a Ministry of Education. We consider this to be mandatory. Why? While we understand the territory may not be accepted as an independent state by other countries, our priority is to establish whether it is able to manage its education sector.

What entity is responsible for education oversight? The country should have something like a Ministry of Education which is responsible for education oversight. For special purpose institutions, this may be the responsibility of a different arm of government, such as a Ministry of Health for nursing and medical programs or a Ministry of Tourism for tourism-related programs.

Does the country have an established quality assurance process internally? Is ministry recognition sufficient for recognition? Has the country established a quality assurance body,

such as an accreditation board, to accredit institutions and/or programs? If you do not know, you can often see this information in the country's education law.

Does the country have an established quality assurance process externally? Some countries may outsource their quality assurance process, such as when another country's ministry of education assumes quality assurance responsibility. Does an NGO have educational oversight instead of the ministry? Does an institution have something like US regional accreditation instead?

Are the country's graduates accepted for further study in another country?



Can it be considered recognized?

Let's answer these questions for the four countries we looked at earlier.

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Transnistria

1. Yes
2. Ministry of Education of the PMR
3. Yes
4. Yes for Romanian-language schools
5. Yes



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Image source: <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/static/maps/MD-map.jpg>

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1. Is there an established government? Yes, Transnistria has an established government.
2. What entity is responsible for education oversight? Its Ministry of Education, which is responsible for education and quality assurance.
3. Does the country have an established quality assurance process internally? Yes, the MOE is responsible for quality assurance, including accreditation. It has a somewhat detailed accreditation process.
4. Does the country have an established quality assurance process externally? Yes, since the Moldovan MOE provides quality assurance for the 8 Romanian language schools located in Transnistria.
5. Are the country's graduates accepted for further study in another country? Yes, although this is not universal. Transnistria and Moldova have mutual recognition, which allows Transnistrian-educated students access to further study in Moldova. Also, Transnistrian-educated students are allowed to pursue further study in Russia.

Would you consider a credential from Transnistria to be recognized or not recognized? At GTE, we would consider this to be recognized.

Cook Islands

1. Yes
2. The Cook Islands Ministry of Education
3. Yes
4. No for primary, secondary, and vocational post-secondary education; yes for academic post-secondary education
5. Yes



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Image source: <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/static/maps/CW-map.jpg>

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1. Is there an established government? Yes, the Cook Islands has its own established government.
2. What entity is responsible for education oversight? The Cook Islands Ministry of Education
3. Does the country have an established quality assurance process internally? Yes
4. Does the country have an established quality assurance process externally? No for primary and secondary education and for vocational post-secondary education. However, for tertiary academic education, the University of the South Pacific has US regional accreditation through the Western Association of Schools and Colleges' Senior College and University Commission.
5. Are the country's graduates accepted for further study in another country? Yes. The Cook Islands uses the New Zealand curriculum, so it has the New Zealand National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) as the senior secondary national qualification, and the NCEA is accepted for further education universally. Also, the University of the South Pacific operates a campus in the country, and its alumni are able to pursue further education universally.

Would you consider a credential from the Cook Islands to be recognized or not recognized? At GTE, we would consider this to be recognized.

Palestine

1. Yes
2. Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education and UNRWA
3. Yes: MOEHE for primary and secondary and AQAC for higher education
4. Yes for UNRWA schools
5. Yes



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Image source: https://ichef.bbci.co.uk/news/976/cpsprodpb/3FDC/production/_128484361_bbcm_israel_gaza_131119.png

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1. Is there an established government? Yes, there is an established government in Palestine.
2. What entity is responsible for education oversight? The Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). UNRWA operates nearly 300 schools in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.
3. Does the country have an established quality assurance process internally? Yes. MOEHE for primary/secondary schools and since 2002 MOEHE's Accreditation and Quality Assurance Commission (AQAC) is responsible for the accreditation and quality assurance of higher education.
4. Does the country have an established quality assurance process externally? Yes, for UNRWA schools.
5. Are the country's graduates accepted for further study in another country? Yes

Would you consider a credential from Palestine to be recognized or not recognized? At GTE, we would consider this to be recognized.

Northern Cyprus

1. Yes
2. Ministry of National Education and Culture and YODAK
3. Yes
4. Yes, YOK in Türkiye for universities
5. Yes



Image source: <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/static/maps/CY-map.jpg>

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1. Is there an established government? Yes, there has been an established government in Northern Cyprus
2. What entity is responsible for education oversight? The Ministry of National Education and Culture is responsible for education oversight for primary/secondary education, and YODAK oversees academic higher education institutions.
3. Does the country have an established quality assurance process internally? Yes.
4. Does the country have an established quality assurance process externally? It is not required, but Northern Cyprus universities can also be recognized by YOK in Türkiye.
5. Are the country's graduates accepted for further study in another country? Yes

Would you consider a credential from Northern Cyprus to be recognized or not recognized? At GTE, we would consider this to be recognized.

SIDE NOTE: these four examples were for countries whose credentials my organization would consider for admission and/or transfer credit. These opinions are Adtalem's and may not match the decision that your organization may make. Also, please keep in mind that although we would accept credentials from these four countries, we may not accept them from the other countries listed on the table earlier in the presentation.



Selected Resources

- Baumbach, K. (2015). *Conflict zones and disputed territories: Navigating the minefields* [Conference session]. TAICEP 2015 Annual Conference, Toronto, ON, Canada.
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- McKenna, T., & Malgina, M. (2018). *Whose reality counts? Evaluation of qualifications from unrecognized and disputed territories* [Conference session]. TAICEP 2018 Annual Conference, Philadelphia, PA, United States.



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- United States Department of State. (2023). *Independent states in the world*. <https://www.state.gov/independent-states-in-the-world/>

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shelby.cearley@mail.waldenu.edu



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