The EU’s micro-credentials agenda: addressing the skills gap

UnILiON Open Talk

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Reminder of background

Achieving the **EUROPEAN EDUCATION AREA** by 2025

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**THE EUROPEAN PILLAR OF SOCIAL RIGHTS ACTION PLAN**

- at least **78%** of the population aged 20 to 64 should be in employment by 2030

- at least **60%** of all adults should be participating in training every year by 2030
Problems to be tackled

• Policy challenge:
  growing number of people need to update their knowledge, skills and competences (green and digital transitions, COVID-19 recovery)

• Rising number of micro-credentials globally and in Europe, but:
  ➢ value and understanding of micro-credentials not always clear
  ➢ wide range of providers (education and training, private sector)
  ➢ questions on quality, transparency and uptake of micro-credentials between and within countries, between sectors, from one job to another
Why Micro-credentials?

- Targeted, relevant learning
- Small volume, short in duration
- Flexibility to fit with how people live, learn and work
What is needed to deliver on the potential of micro-credentials?

- Support understanding
- Support trust
- Support transparency
- Support uptake

EU action
Objectives

- Enable people to acquire the knowledge, skills and competences they need to **thrive in a changing labour market and society**, so they can benefit fully from both a socially fair recovery from COVID-19 and just transitions to the green and digital economy.

- **Support the preparedness of providers** of micro-credentials to enhance the transparency and flexibility of the learning offer in order to empower people to forge personalised learning and career pathways.

- **Foster inclusiveness and equal opportunities**, contributing to the achievement of resilience, social fairness and prosperity for all, in a context of demographic change and throughout all phases of economic cycles.
Scope

• Micro-credentials are not new. The proposal establishes a common European approach to the ongoing and emerging provision of micro-credentials.

• Proposal covers micro-credentials, as well as their policies that can support their effective design and use.

• The proposal does not seek to replace or disrupt existing systems or qualifications.

• The proposals sets out a definition and guidance for the design, issuance and description of MCs to facilitate their quality, transparency and uptake.
Outline of Proposal

‘Building Blocks’
- Common Definition of Micro-credentials
- Standard Elements
- Principles for Design and Issuance of Micro-credentials

Recommendations
- Development of Ecosystems for MCs
- Deliver on the potential of MCs
- Commission Support

Focus
- Active Labour Market Policies
- Education, training and skills policies
Common definition for micro-credentials

Micro-credential means the record of the learning outcomes that a learner has acquired following a small volume of learning. These learning outcomes have been assessed against transparent and clearly defined standards.

Courses leading to micro-credentials are designed to provide the learner with specific knowledge, skills and competences that respond to societal, personal, cultural or labour market needs. Micro-credentials are owned by the learner, can be shared and are portable. They may be standalone or combined into larger credentials. They are underpinned by quality assurance following agreed standards in the relevant sector or area of activity.
EU Standard elements to describe a micro-credential

- Identification of the learner
- **Title** of the micro-credential
- **Country/Region of the issuer**
- Awarding body
- Date of issuing
- **Learning outcomes**
- **Notional workload** needed to achieve the learning outcomes (in **ECTS**, wherever possible)
- **Level** (and cycle, if applicable) of the learning experience leading to the micro-credential (EQF, QF-EHEA), if applicable
- **Type of assessment**
  - Form of participation in the learning activity
  - Type of **quality assurance** used to underpin the micro-credential

Optional Information

- Prerequisites needed to enrol in the learning activity
- Supervision and identity verification during assessment
- Grade achieved
- Integration / stackability options
- Further information
Union principles for design and issuance of micro-credentials

1. Quality
2. Transparency
3. Relevance
4. Valid assessment
5. Learning Pathways
6. Recognition
7. Portable
8. Learner Centred
9. Authentic
10. Information and Guidance
Recommendations to Member States

- Adopt MCs definition
- Adopt standard elements
- Adopt principles for design and issuance
- Development of ecosystem for MCs
- Delivering on potential of MCs
- Implementation
Development of ecosystems

- Providers
- NQFs
- Social Dialogue
- RPL/Validation
- Quality Assurance
- Catalogues
- Skills Intelligence

European Commission
Development of ecosystem for MCs
Systems

Formal learning
- Support exploration of MCs by HEIs (European universities Alliances)
- Support exploration of MCs by VET Providers (COVEs)

Non-formal + informal learning
- Non-formal providers incl. employers, social partners, civil society organisations, local authorities & private providers
- Promoting the development of MCs designed & approved by employers’ and workers’ representatives through social dialogue
- Adaptation of validation/RPL processes

Quality and Transparency
- apply, adapt and develop quality assurance mechanisms for MCs
- supporting the use of ‘skills-intelligence’ systems to identify needs to develop or update MCs
- ensuring that providers publish catalogues of MCs
- integrate MCs in NQFs, where relevant.
Education, training and skills policies
Delivering on the potential of micro-credentials

- include MCs in national catalogues of education and training courses
- use MCs to improve access to education and training for all learners, including disadvantaged and vulnerable groups
- use MCs to support the transition from upper secondary or VET to tertiary education and the completion of degree programmes
- use MCs to improve basic and advanced digital skills
- using MCs to support the development of learning provision in environmental sustainability
- promote use of MCs by education and training institutions and other providers to boost the relevance and increase the positive impact of micro-credentials on the economy of their cities and regions
- promoting the understanding and use of MCs through continuing professional development for teachers and trainers as well as academics and researchers
- promoting use of MCs for the prompt transfer of the latest research findings into learning opportunities
- exploring the use of MCs in the European Education Area to challenge gender and other discriminatory stereotypes concerning study choices and within educational practices and materials
Active Labour Market Policies
Deliver on the potential of micro-credentials

address **skills mismatches + bottlenecks** in economic sectors and regions

to upskill and reskill workers for **in-demand skills and jobs** (e.g. digital and green)

include MCs in **national registries of training opportunities linked to ILAs**

support **self-employed and non-standard workers**, incl. platform workers

support and motivate **vulnerable groups** to re-enter the labour market

as part of **Youth Guarantee**

as part of the national implementation of **EASE Recommendation**

to meet **regulatory requirements** for jobs/work (e.g. licences, mandatory training and permits)
Member State Implementation

• define measures by **building on relevant national arrangements and financial frameworks** to implement this Recommendation
  
  • national resource allocations as appropriate
  
  • links with individual learning accounts

• **make best use of Union funds and instruments**
  
  • support the necessary reforms, enabling framework, development and use of micro-credentials.
Commission Support

Adapt existing EU tools

Support cooperation between Member States and stakeholders

Technical implementation through Europass

Research and Data Collection
Monitoring and Reporting

Member States should:

• implement the Recommendation as soon as possible
• submit a plan (12 months after adoption) setting out measures to be taken at national level to support the achievement of the objectives of the Recommendation by 2025.

The Commission should:

• assess and evaluate the progress made in implementation via relevant Union monitoring and reporting frameworks
• co-operate and consult with Member States and stakeholders concerned
• report to the Council within 5 years from the date of adoption
Key findings from the survey programme

• **Uncertainty** linked to the **naming** and **function** of microcredentials,

• Emerging mostly in areas such as **ICT, engineering, manufacturing, and construction**, but also in sectors such as hospitality, human health, and social work;

• Clear benefits of microcredentials with regards to the **flexibility** and **responsiveness** to labour market needs;

• There also **needs to be a wider awareness** of microcredentials;

• **Quality assurance** of microcredentials is one of the most important aspects. However, **quality assurance processes differ** and not all MCs are quality assured based on the nationally established quality standards.
Purposes of microcredentials in national qualifications systems

- To help individuals to make their knowledge, skills and competences visible: 76.9%
- To assist transition to labour market for new graduates: 61.5%
- To better respond to the changing labour market needs: 92.3%
- To address the need for upskilling and reskilling of the workforce: 84.6%
- To address skills needs in emerging sectors of the economy where qualification a: 30.8%
- To sustain lifelong learning policies and motivate lifelong learning behaviour: 76.9%
- To address structural unemployment: 23.1%
- To sustain labour market policies and reforms: 15.4%
- Other - Write In (Required): 7.7%

Source: Survey of stakeholders representing national authorities
How do micro-credentials fit in the labour market related education, training and learning?

• Microcredentials refer to shorter learning activities.
• Employers are concerned with the speed that the formal qualifications systems can identify skills needs and adapt training offers accordingly. They want a training where:
  • content is developed with input from the labour market;
  • content is responsive to the emerging needs in a more agile way;
  • is shorter, includes hands-on learning and is integrated in workplace
• The main providers of micro-credentials in the labour market include large companies, industry associations, start-ups, online learning platforms, non-governmental organisations and international organisations.
Microcredentials in a nutshell

“Microcredentials are evidence of practical, flexible, on-demand, and short learning experiences. This is what makes them so attractive. Common European standards must preserve this attractiveness and not limit it through over-regulation and formalization. It is thus central to find an appropriate balance between fostering trust and transparency as part of a common approach without compromising the flexibility of microcredentials”

Employers organisations survey, Germany