



Questionnaire

Micro-credentials –
implementing council
recommendation and digital
credential frameworks

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Questionnaire for the International Peer Learning Activity

Micro-credentials – implementing council recommendation and digital credential frameworks

Monday, 12 December 2022
University of Innsbruck, Innsbruck

The PLA will consider **different approaches to tackle micro-credentials and challenges at different stages of national discussion** and implementation. Among the wide range of aspects of the regulation, provision and certification of micro-credentials, the PLA will focus on the following:

- Participating countries' national perspectives on and their policies derived from and in relation to the EU Council Recommendation
- Institutional implementation of micro-credentials in selected countries
- Implementation and use of digital credential structures and the European Digital Credentials for learning (EDCL)
- Interaction between micro-credentials and digital credential infrastructure
- Cooperation with non-higher education providers (e.g. enterprises)

To facilitate participants' preparation for the event, we would like to provide them with some information on the state of play in participating countries. Therefore, we have put together this questionnaire. The compilation of the **filled-in questionnaires will be disseminated to the participants before the event** and be **published as part of the documentation afterwards**.

We define micro-credentials according to the recently adopted [EU Council Recommendation](#):

“Micro-credential” means the record of the learning outcomes that a learner has acquired following a small volume of learning. These learning outcomes will have been assessed against transparent and clearly defined criteria. Learning experiences 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 stand-alone or combined into larger credentials. They are underpinned by quality assurance following agreed standards in the relevant sector or area of activity.” (p.13)

Please make sure to **answer the questions as concisely as possible and return the filled in document by mail to bologna@oead.at no later than 23 November 2022**, respecting the given **character limits**. We **will not edit** the questionnaires **before distributing and publishing** them, therefore please make sure to structure your answers well, providing continuous text and making use of lists where appropriate.

Croatia

Authority in charge of micro-credentials: Ministry of Science and Education

Contact person for this questionnaire: Josipa Češnovar

QUESTIONS

- What is the position of your country on provisions that fall within the definition of a micro-credential according to the EU council recommendation? Please cover, if applicable, issues like providers, ECTS credits extent, allocation to NQFs, recognition, stackability, ...
- Are there any official policy or legal documents regulating the provision of micro-credentials? Please insert a link or source.

Microcredentials in higher education are not yet defined in the legislation in Croatia, but Croatia has a long tradition of implementing lifelong learning programmes. Legislation regarding lifelong learning programmes has recently changed.

Firstly, a new *Act on Higher Education and Scientific Activity* has been adopted in 2022, which regulates the link between lifelong learning programmes and the Croatian Qualifications Framework. According to the new Act, higher education institutions can offer lifelong learning programmes, which contain competences aligned with the occupational standard or units of competences and the qualification standard or units of learning outcomes from the Register of the Croatian Qualifications Framework. The lifelong learning programme is not considered a study programme and can be financed through vouchers for the purpose of accessing the labour market.

Furthermore, *Instructions for developing, harmonizing and approving educational programmes of higher education institutions at the higher education level for the purposes of financing via vouchers with funds from the National Recovery and Resilience Plan 2021-2026* were developed in Croatia, requiring the linking of learning outcomes obtained at the end of short training programmes at the level of higher education with standards of the Croatian Qualifications Framework. The instructions were developed for the purposes of financing short education programmes through vouchers funded from the National Recovery and Resilience Plan 2021-2026, where one of the financing conditions is the compliance of the educational programme with the Register of the Croatian Qualifications Framework

In accordance with the abovementioned, link between microcredentials and the Croatian Qualifications Framework is strongly supported.

Please give an overview of the current provision of micro-credentials by HEIs in your country:

- What share of institutions and which types of institutions offer micro-credentials?
- What is their extent in terms of ECTS credits or workload in hours?
- Are MCs connected to specific curricula, specific fields and/ or dedicated to re- and upskilling?

- Who are the target groups of those offers, do they take into account any societal groups, which are otherwise underrepresented among learners, students and graduates of tertiary education?
- Are these offers developed and implemented in cooperation with external partners (companies, civil society organisations, ...)?
- How are they financed?
- What are the considerations and what support measures are planned for providers/HEIs?
- Is the MC offer of HEIs in your country (still) very small or does it have a considerable size?
- Are there any other providers (companies) that are not recognized HEIs, that offer micro-credentials on tertiary level in your country? If so: which?

Please provide links to examples, if possible.

The Ministry of Science and Education is organizing a series of workshops for higher education institutions on a topic of linking micro-credentials in higher education and the Croatian Qualifications Framework. Within the workshops the *Instructions for developing, harmonizing and approving educational programmes of higher education institutions at the higher education level for the purposes of financing via vouchers with funds from the National Recovery and Resilience Plan 2021-2026* are presented, together with experiences of evaluating learning outcomes in higher education as a basis for developing lifelong learning programmes and possibilities of their financing through vouchers. The global and European context of microcredentials in higher education is presented and the link between microcredentials in higher education and the Croatian Qualifications Framework is discussed.

Please give an overview of the current provision of micro-credentials by HEIs in your country:

- What share of institutions and which types of institutions offer micro-credentials?
- What is their extent in terms of ECTS credits or workload in hours?
- Are MCs connected to specific curricula, specific fields and/ or dedicated to re- and upskilling?
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- Are there any other providers (companies) that are not recognized HEIs, that offer micro-credentials on tertiary level in your country? If so: which?

Please provide links to examples, if possible.

The Ministry of Science and Education in Croatia conducted in 2022 an online survey among higher education institutions, in order to get insight on their lifelong learning programmes. In addition, through this survey the opinions of higher education institutions about the advantages of such programmes and the challenges in their implementation were investigated. The results of the survey provided a clearer picture of the current state of implementation of shorter educational programmes at higher education institutions and their compliance with the Croatian Qualifications Framework, and will serve as a basis for further steps.

Lifelong learning programmes are in Croatia implemented by all types of higher education institutions - universities, faculties, polytechnics. The range of credits ranges from 1 ECTS - 95 ECTS. There are also smaller programmes whose range is determined in hours.

Such programmes are currently implemented in various sectors according to the Croatian Qualifications Framework (e.g. *Education, Education and Sports, Health, Construction, Geodesy and Architecture, Economy and Trade*).

Their goals are employability, change of workplace or competencies in profession, continuing education, acquisition and improvement of competencies for personal, social and professional needs, requirements for monitoring the quality of activities or advancement in a professional career, social integration and inclusion, specialization, obtaining certificates for the submission to the professional chambers.

Some of these are developed and implemented in cooperation with other higher education institutions or with other external partners (companies, civil society organisations, public authorities, or alumni (the work and execution of the programme is adapted to the specific needs of the company).

They are financed with the funds of the participants, but also with the use of EU funds (e.g. the European Social Fund). There are also examples of programmes whose source of funding are sponsors (companies and foundations), national scholarships or funds allocated as part of bilateral cooperation. Some of them are implemented through volunteering.

Shorter programmes could be potentially delivered by other providers (companies), but currently there wasn't any survey to explore such programmes.

Digital Credentials Infrastructure and recognition:

- Does your country have a national policy or position for Digital Credentials? (If yes, please describe the policy as well as the current situation of its implementation. If no, please give us further elaboration on the current situation.)
- What IT infrastructure for Digital Credentials is already being used in your country?
- Which principles do HEIs apply to assess MCs in the sense of recognition?

The Act on Higher Education and Scientific Activity (Official Gazette 119/22) provided for the possibility for higher education institutions of issuing documents in digital form. The certificate, diploma and diploma supplement are issued by the higher education institution free of charge, in Croatian and English language, in a signed and certified printout and in digital form. The form and content of certificates, diplomas and diploma supplement shall be determined by the Minister by ordinance.

An example of good practice is the University of Split, which joined the Europass Digitally Signed Credentials (EDC) piloting project and as such successfully piloted the issuance of the first digital diploma supplements. The University has extended its activities in this area to the areas of issuing digital credentials for participation in conferences, workshops, etc. Therefore, it issued 437 digital credentials for all participants of the WIRE conference, which took place in November 2020 at the Faculty of Economics. Furthermore, the issuing of credentials has been continued through the Student Business Incubator, which confirmed participation in trainings to its participants through digital credentials.

What are the biggest challenges considering micro-credentials your country is currently facing? What are the next steps you are planning, concerning micro-credentials?

One of the challenges is that the term microcredential is not yet sufficiently understood among higher education institutions. Further challenge is a quality assurance of microcredentials since existing lifelong learning programmes not always included quality assurance and quality assurance of microcredentials developed by non higher education institutions could be insufficient. Finally, potential threat could be insufficient recognition of microcredentials on the labour market. The above-mentioned activities will contribute to solving these challenges.

Finland

Authority in charge of micro-credentials:

Contact person for this questionnaire: Jonna Korhonen jonna.korhonen@gov.fi

QUESTIONS

- What is the position of your country on provisions that fall within the definition of a micro-credential according to the EU council recommendation? Please cover, if applicable, issues like providers, ECTS credits extent, allocation to NQFs, recognition, stackability, ...
- Are there any official policy or legal documents regulating the provision of micro-credentials? Please insert a link or source.

Finland finds the Council Recommendation as a good starting point. From the higher education perspective the issue of providers is not a problem, as the Finnish higher education system is composed on of public funded universities and universities of applied sciences. The quality assurance in Finland is based on institutional level audits, and thus, the starting point is that QA system in HEIs covers also the provision of micro-credentials. Finland has not yet defined any range for micro-credentials, but has taken the Microbol definition of ECTS as a starting point (1-59 ECTS). The issue of NQF will be discussed in the soon to be established separate working group on micro-credentials, but in general it should be noted that the NQF in Finland is already open to also to the competences modules other than degrees covering usually 30 ECTS (20 ECTS). There is a separate process for this: [Qualifications frameworks | Finnish National Agency for Education \(oph.fi\)](#). Finland underlines however the importance of learning outcomes as an important component to ensure recognition of micro-credentials.

The legislation allows the provision of micro-credentials, but there is no specific legislation for micro-credentials. In fact, Finland sees that already many oft he existing open studies at the universities and universities of applied sciences, e-learning provision such as MOOCs, and similar developments e.g. in the context of the European Universities networks falls under the category of the micro-credentials if they will issue their credentials in the form of standard proposed in the Council Recommendation. In addition, it is good to note that microcredentials exist beyond higher education in Finland.

However, there is need for a more coherent definition and use of the concept of micro-credentials in planning, marketing and implementing them. Therefore, work towards this starts early 2023 (see next question).

- Is there already a plan in your country to support HEIs in the implementation of micro-credentials according to the EU Council Recommendation?

- What are the considerations and what kind of support measures are planned for HEIs?

Yes, implementation of the micro-credentials is planned to take place next year as part of the national strategy of higher education institutions on continuous learning published in December 2022.

Ministry of Education and Culture will establish a task force/working group that aims to establish a common definition and framework for the micro-credentials in the Finnish higher education system. The work will take the Council Recommendation as well as Microbol Framework (EHEA) as a starting point.

The work will also include the development of national level platform for the offering of the micro-credentials.

Both the ministry and the HEI's find a common definition and a framework are needed in order to establish common rules for the platform and possibilities of the funding.

Please give an overview of the current provision of micro-credentials by HEIs in your country:

- What share of institutions and which types of institutions offer micro-credentials?
- What is their extent in terms of ECTS credits or workload in hours?
- Are MCs connected to specific curricula, specific fields and/ or dedicated to re- and upskilling?
- Who are the target groups of those offers, do they take into account any societal groups, which are otherwise underrepresented among learners, students and graduates of tertiary education?
- Are these offers developed and implemented in cooperation with external partners (companies, civil society organisations, ...)?
- How are they financed?
- What are the considerations and what support measures are planned for providers/HEIs?
- Is the MC offer of HEIs in your country (still) very small or does it have a considerable size?
- Are there any other providers (companies) that are not recognized HEIs, that offer micro-credentials on tertiary level in your country? If so: which?

Please provide links to examples, if possible.

As explained in the answers before, all kinds of offer is already available, which can fall under a description of a micro-credential. This is why we are working on a definition and a framework, to identify the offer and make it visible.

Digital Credentials Infrastructure and recognition:

- Does your country have a national policy or position for Digital Credentials? (If yes, please describe the policy as well as the current situation of its implementation. If no, please give us further elaboration on the current situation.)
- What IT infrastructure for Digital Credentials is already being used in your country?
- Which principles do HEIs apply to assess MCs in the sense of recognition?

The higher education institutions have a common project Digivision 2030 which will aim to create a shared learning ecosystem

[Front page - Digivision2030](#)

In addition, as part of the RRF programme, Finland is developing a national level digital learning environment that will also aim to cater for diverse learning needs.

What are the biggest challenges considering micro-credentials your country is currently facing? What are the next steps you are planning, concerning micro-credentials?

To concertize the added value to the already existing learning offer. In other words, also how to engage also the employers more in the development and financing of the MCs.

Georgia

Authority in charge of micro-credentials: National Center For Educational Quality Enhancement (NCEQE)

Contact person for this questionnaire: Ketevan Panchulidze

QUESTIONS

- What is the position of your country on provisions that fall within the definition of a micro-credential according to the EU council recommendation? Please cover, if applicable, issues like providers, ECTS credits extent, allocation to NQFs, recognition, stack ability, ...
- Are there any official policy or legal documents regulating the provision of micro-credentials? Please insert a link or source.

- In Georgia, there are no legal bases that ensure the wide understanding of the term **microcredits** and the development of relevant programs. It is also hindered by the fact, that the legislation of Georgia has not established the need to develop appropriate programs for the academic level in the formal education area.

- In 2016, as part of the Tempus project, the Ministry of Education and Science conducted a study on strengthening the role of universities in lifelong learning. The manual was developed for higher educational institutions, which is still a relevant resource today. The Manual reviews the short-term programs/courses/trainings operating in the context of continuing education in higher education institutions, which are micro-balls in their essence. However, the certificates issued for the mentioned programmes/courses/trainings will not be recognized either for further study or for employment purposes (in the absence of relevant legislation). In Georgia, mechanisms for recognizing non-formal education for the academic level have not been introduced, therefore the mentioned programs cannot be placed in the formal academic education.

During the study the questionnaires were sent to 44 HEI's, out of which 26 are developing short-term programs/courses/trainings in the direction of ensuring lifelong learning. In terms of field of study, business administration leads in 20 HEI; an hourly programm workload is used; the internal quality assessment system is not different from the internal quality assessment system of academic educational programs of formal education.

For detailed information related to the study, you can contact Irina Darchia, Associate Professor in Classics Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University; Higher Education Reform Expert (HERE) email: irine.darchia@tsu.ge;

Guide link (Available only in Georgian language)

: http://erasmusplus.org.ge/files/files/Guide_ULLL-ge.pdf

- The term **microcredit** was firstly used in Georgia at the NCEQE 2021 International Annual Conference, where representatives from three higher education institutions presented the short-term programs they are implementing. Mentioned programs correspond to microcredits in terms of content and structure. The discussion revealed that the development of microcredits in Georgia will help higher education institutions to make the educational process diverse, flexible, more focused on the student and the employment market. Therefore, the universities are ready for a participating in the dialogue on this topic.
- In order to study the current situation, in September 2021, the National Center for Education Quality Enhancement (NCEQE) conducted a survey. The desk research document developed within the framework of Bologna Process / European project MICROBOL and the semi-structured questionnaire were sent to all authorized higher education institutions of Georgia. 27 HEI's participated in the study. Based on the findings, the Research Report on the Existing Practice of Micro-Credentials System in the Georgian Higher Education system was prepared.

The research report is available on the NCEQE's website:
<https://eqe.ge/en/page/static/1006/kvlevebi>

According to the results of the survey, the majority of respondents considered it necessary to create appropriate legal bases for the introduction of microcredits at the academic level, preferred the use of ECTS credits (instead of hours) and the use of external quality assurance mechanisms, and also noted the need to reflect the small-credit programs in the NQF. At this stage, only a small part of the interviewees implement such programs informally, although the majority believes that the demand for small credit programs will increase in the future.

- Is there already a plan in your country to support HEIs in the implementation of micro-credentials according to the EU Council Recommendation?
- What are the considerations and what kind of support measures are planned for HEIs?

In order to advance the issue of the microcredit system in Georgia, in 2023 it is planned to carry out an analysis of the legal base and to prepare a draft of legislative changes that will allow the system to introduce microcredits in formal education, as well as to create the basis for recognizing non-formal education in higher education. It is also planned to hold informational meetings in order to raise the awareness of interested parties.

Please give an overview of the current provision of micro-credentials by HEIs in your country:

- What share of institutions and which types of institutions offer micro-credentials?
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Please provide links to examples, if possible.

Besides the non-formal short-term programs, HEIs implement short-term formal vocational training-retraining programs. The learning outcomes of such program is relevant to 2-5 levels of NQF, the program is measured in hours and formal external QA system is on place.

Vocational training programme prepares a person to perform individual tasks and obligations related to the profession. Vocational retraining programme aims to acquire and/or develop competencies to carry out professional activities in the same field.

The mentioned programs are microcredits in terms of their purpose.

The short-term programme can be implemented by any legal entity that meets the relevant requirements of external quality assurance. As a result of this process, the legal entity obtains the right for program provision and is allowed to issue a certificate of vocational education recognized by the State - a certificate.

As already mentioned, the learning outcomes provided by short-term programs may correspond to levels 2/3/4/5 of the Georgian NQF. The compliance of the learning outcomes of the short-term program to the NQF with the levels of the national qualifications framework is determined by the methodology defined by the NCEQE.

Field experts determine the compliance of a short-term programme developed by the legal entity with the established standards and prepare a conclusion. The final decision shall be made by the Council granting the right to implement the Vocational Training/Vocational Retraining Programme, whose members are appointed and dismissed by the Prime Minister

of Georgia upon the recommendation of the Ministry and NCEQE. The administrative support of the Council is carried out by the NCEQE.

HEI's are legally entitled to carry out professional programs that can be NQF level 3-5 and issue a state-recognized professional diploma corresponding to the certain level. Upon completion of these programs a state-recognized certificate is issued. Vocational programs are calculated by ECVET system, thus the training and retraining by hours.

HEI's implementing VET training and retraining short programs:

LEPL - Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University;

LEPL - Shota Rustaveli Theatre and Film Georgia State University;

LEPL - Georgian Technical University;

LEPL - Sokhumi State University;

LEPL - Shota Meskhia State University of Zugdidi;

LEPL - Akaki Tsereteli State University;

LEPL - College of Physical Education and Sports of Georgia;

LEPL - Iakob Gogebashvili Telavi State University;

More information is available on the NCEQE's website :
<https://eqe.ge/en/page/parent/769/profesiuli-momzadeba-da-profesiuli-gadamzadeba>

Digital Credentials Infrastructure and recognition:

- Does your country have a national policy or position for Digital Credentials? (If yes, please describe the policy as well as the current situation of its implementation. If no, please give us further elaboration on the current situation.)
- What IT infrastructure for Digital Credentials is already being used in your country?
- Which principles do HEIs apply to assess MCs in the sense of recognition?

What are the biggest challenges considering micro-credentials your country is currently facing? What are the next steps you are planning, concerning micro-credentials?

The biggest challenge for Georgia today is to prepare a package of relevant legislative changes that will allow us to legally implement micro-certificates at the Higher Education level; This also includes the needs to set up the system for recognition of the non-formal education.

Germany

Authority in charge of micro-credentials:

Contact person for this questionnaire: Tim Maschuw, DAAD

QUESTIONS

- What is the position of your country on provisions that fall within the definition of a micro-credential according to the EU council recommendation? Please cover, if applicable, issues like providers, ECTS credits extent, allocation to NQFs, recognition, stackability, ...
- Are there any official policy or legal documents regulating the provision of micro-credentials? Please insert a link or source.

On policymaker, stakeholder and HEI level, many institutions in German follow very closely the ongoing debate and the evolving development of micro-credentials throughout the European Higher Education Area.

The definition of the EU Council recommendation is extremely valuable insofar, as it creates a common foundation for the ongoing development of micro-credentials in Europe. It is an important starting point for the emerging micro-credentials ecosystem. Efforts should be undertaken that support learners in navigating this growing market to find suitable offers of high quality.

The definition is intentionally broad to cover not only higher education, but also technical vocational education and training and – more broadly – lifelong learning in general. It remains to be seen if the different sectors (HE, TVET) will find the concept of micro-credentials similarly useful and adaptable to their educational offers.

While there are no legal obstacles for implementing micro-credentials and “experimenting” with this concept of small learning units in Germany, there is no imperative to politically enforce their uptake either, as many of the underlying elements of micro-credentials are not new but can be found in partial qualifications, in workforce training as in courses of continuing education (Wissenschaftliche Weiterbildung) at HEIs.

It has been a longstanding position of Germany that micro-credentials must not undermine the coherence of regular degree programmes. “Stackability” requires that different units build logically upon each other. The awarding of a “larger degree” will require, that – in combination - the number of acquired micro-credentials build something larger than the sum of its parts.

In turn, this also means that the “unbundling” and personalized “rebundling” of courses may have its limits and must not lead to a fragmentation of the canon of knowledge and the principle of the regulated occupation (“Berufsprinzip”). While they might become an entry point to regular degree programmes, micro-credentials are not a substitute for them.

It is encouraging that the European Commission has made this aspect very clear on several occasions.

On the question of workload expressed in ECTS credits, it was probably wise not to put a precise number in the council recommendation. Different countries will have different approaches to address this issue.

- Is there already a plan in your country to support HEIs in the implementation of micro-credentials according to the EU Council Recommendation?
- What are the considerations and what kind of support measures are planned for HEIs?

Currently there is no national implementation plan for micro-credentials in Germany. Given that there are no legal barriers for implementing micro-credentials, there is more of a market-oriented approach to see, if the supply by HEI (and other education institutions) is meeting the demand of learners.

If learners will indeed experience a boost to their career prospects by acquiring a particular set of skills through micro-credentials, then the market is likely to grow. If learners/employees and employers have to invest more than they get out of a micro-credential, then this product will probably quickly disappear from the market.

From the political level, this calls for smart regulation, but so far no decisions have been made to financially incentivise the development and uptake of micro-credentials on a larger scale. If micro-credentials are here to stay, they have to prove their effectiveness to learners and employers.

Please give an overview of the current provision of micro-credentials by HEIs in your country:

- What share of institutions and which types of institutions offer micro-credentials?
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- Is the MC offer of HEIs in your country (still) very small or does it have a considerable size?
- Are there any other providers (companies) that are not recognized HEIs, that offer micro-credentials on tertiary level in your country? If so: which?

Please provide links to examples, if possible.

There is no straightforward answer to the question as to whether the MC offer of HEIs in Germany is small or of considerable size. If we merely look at courses that use the label “micro-credential” and which were specifically designed in light of the most recent developments in Europe, then we would have to say that the offer is still small – with some of the European Universities and other MOOC-experienced HEI leading the way. However, if we look at the number of course offers that pre-date the emergence of the term micro-credentials but might well fall within the Council Recommendation’s definition, then the size is indeed significant. A recent DAAD-survey among German HEI revealed that about half of the 155 universities and universities of applied sciences (HAW) that participated in the survey either offer micro-credentials, have concrete plans for their introduction or at least say that MC are a major topic of discussion at their HEI. It can be assumed that many courses – especially in continuing education (“wissenschaftliche Weiterbildung”) can be considered as a micro-credential, but are not labelled as such (mostly using the term “Zertifikatskurse”).

One of the most important aspects that will determine if MC can make a breakthrough in the education market is how they address different target groups. Currently, many European Universities that offer MC do so within the context of their international alliances, but limit their offer to the already existing student body. Of course, it is a very positive development that HEI use MC in such contexts to enable otherwise non-mobile students to experience virtual forms of exchange and international learning experiences. While this is an additional instrument to support “internationalization at home”, it is not an offer of which “non-traditional students” and underrepresented groups can easily benefit without being admitted to regular degree programmes.

On the other end of the spectrum, most offers in the area of continuing education that would fit the term “micro-credentials” address learners that already hold a HE degree. This is surely an important offer to learners who need a particular set of skills for their professional career and are in the position to make a substantial investment for such courses either themselves or have it paid for by their employers. For HEI this can be an important source of revenue. However, these courses barely address underrepresented groups.

If MC are to have a major impact beyond what is already offered on the market, they will have to address lifelong learners for whom a particular MC has a stand-alone value for their jobs, but can also be used as an entrance to HE degree programmes by means of recognition.

An example for the added value of Micro-Credentials across different sectors of education could be offers that focus on certain topics in the field of digital transformation. In the field of Artificial Intelligence, the BMBF-funded project “KI-Campus / AI-Campus” has developed several Micro-Credentials on the topic of AI in Medicine for both recognition in further education and the integration in higher education curricula.

For MC offers to be relevant to professionals, market forces will likely have a harmonizing effect on the workload of a micro-credential.

Digital Credentials Infrastructure and recognition:

- Does your country have a national policy or position for Digital Credentials? (If yes, please describe the policy as well as the current situation of its implementation. If no, please give us further elaboration on the current situation.)
- What IT infrastructure for Digital Credentials is already being used in your country?
- Which principles do HEIs apply to assess MCs in the sense of recognition?

There is a recommendation of the German Rectors’ Conference (HRK, 24.11.2020) regarding Micro-Degrees and Badges as Formats of Digital Additional Qualification.

The German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) funds several projects in this context.

The DiBiHo project (Digital Credentials for Higher Education Institutions) explores a trusted, distributed, and internationally interoperable infrastructure standard for issuing, storing, presenting, and verifying digital academic credentials in a national and international context.

*The goal of PIM (Platform for Inter*national Student Mobility) is to provide HEIs with practical solutions for implementing the requirements of the Law for Digital Access (Onlinezugangsgesetz, OZG) and of the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education (ECHE). PIM is built on EU standards, main ones being EMREX/ELMO for course achievements and EDCI for the exchange of module information. The integration of EWP processes and especially of the Learning Agreement is in scope as well.*

In addition, BMBF initiative “INVITE” as the federal innovation competition for the networking of CVET platforms intends to create an innovative and interoperable digital ecosystem for education linked to the National Education Platform, with the national online CVET platform NOW! run by the PES being part of the ecosystem. The interconnectivity with and interoperability in the Meta-platform Europass is high on the agenda in this regard.

The HRK MODUS (Mobilität und Durchlässigkeit stärken: Anerkennung und Anrechnung an Hochschulen) project aims to strengthen recognition and credit transfer practices at higher education institutions in order to promote mobility and permeability. Within this scope, the project will provide recommendations on how to make best use of micro-credentials to allow for flexible acquisition of skills and competencies while ensuring quality and integrability within the German higher education system.

From 2020 to 2023, the BMBF is also funding the development of the information portal "hoch & weit" (hoch & weit - Das Weiterbildungsportal der Hochschulen (hoch-und-weit.de)) on continuing education at the German Rectors' Conference (HRK), which went online in April 2022. The portal aims to counteract the incomplete information situation on continuing education offerings at universities: it provides nationwide and up-to-date information on continuing education courses at universities, primarily those that are shorter than degree courses and that can be taken individually.

What are the biggest challenges considering micro-credentials your country is currently facing? What are the next steps you are planning, concerning micro-credentials?

Micro-credentials will have to prove that they are effective and offer learners real benefits in terms of career prospects and a return on investment. While much attention is currently focused on the supply-side of MC, the demand side remains understudied.

In addition, the European Commission underlines constantly the potential of MC to increase accessibility for "non-traditional students". That is a promise that MC have yet to deliver on. Currently it seems that most MC offers rather cater to those who already hold a HE degree. If this trend continues, MC might rather have a stratifying than an equalizing effect in the education landscape.

As for I-VET we don't want to implement micro-credentials in DE which put our holistic approach at risk. However micro-credentials can be valuable in CVET as a fast reply to technological innovation. It looks like that the market and companies know what is needed whereas the added value of any European standardised approach is questionable and will lead to an administrative and financial burden: The reason why is because we expect that training providers will claim for marketing purposes that they meet these European standards and then authorities have to check and validate this statement. As a result we have to build a net of accredited institutions to perform this judging and validating task.

Given the legal status and nature of the initiative, we therefore stick to the market as the owner and driver to organise and provide micro-credentials in the way that suits the companies and learners best.

Ireland

Authority in charge of micro-credentials: In Ireland Universities are Designated Awarding Bodies (DABs) who are authorised to accredit learning and issue higher education awards. Other education providers (further, vocational, private) are accredited through Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI). The information shared through this survey is presented from the POV of University of Limerick

Contact person for this questionnaire: Sarah Brady, University of Limerick, MicroCreds Project Lead & Caitriona Nic Giolla Mhichíl, Dublin City University, Micro-Credential Institutional Project Lead.

QUESTIONS

- What is the position of your country on provisions that fall within the definition of a micro-credential according to the EU council recommendation? Please cover, if applicable, issues like providers, ECTS credits extent, allocation to NQFs, recognition, stackability, ...
- Are there any official policy or legal documents regulating the provision of micro-credentials? Please insert a link or source.

The provision of short forms of accredited learning or “micro-credentials” as per the EU definition, are broadly divided into two categories of educational providers, those in the further education (which aligns with European sense of vocational education) and higher education sector. The provision of “micro-credentials” within further education is more mature than in higher education but is often referred to by other labels, including but not limited to MOOCs, and special purpose awards. Similar provision of “micro-credentials” within higher education is less mature but one that is experiencing mass growth, as well as scrutiny.

In 2021 the Government of Ireland (Department of Further and Higher Education, Research and Innovation and Science with funding drawn down from the National Training Fund) issued the “Human Capital Initiative – Pillar 3: Innovation and Agility” initiative seeking proposals for projects to increase capacity in higher education in skills-focused programmes designed to meet priority skills needs.

The key HCI objectives are to:

- Increase provision in areas of identified skills need;
- Future-proof graduates with industry relevant skills for emerging technologies;
- Ensure that there is a greater focus across the whole spectrum of higher education course provision on promoting and embedding transversal skills; and
- Incentivized continues reform and innovation in higher education provision building on best practice available nationally and internationally.

It is in this context that the project “[MicroCreds: Multi-campus Micro-credentials](#)” was formed. This is 5-year, €12.3 million project (2020-2025) led by the IUA in partnership with the seven founding IUA universities: Dublin City University (DCU), Trinity College Dublin (TCD), Maynooth University (MU), NUI Galway (NUIG), University College Cork

(UCC), University College Dublin (UCD) and University of Limerick (UL). Its vision is to empower lifelong learning in Ireland by re-imagining the learner's relationship with education through agile, accessible and bite-sized qualifications: micro-credentials.

MicroCreds is one of 17 HCI-P3 funded projects which focuses on the delivery of short forms of accredited "micro-credentials" to increase provision of identified skills needs. In addition to the delivery of micro-credential content, MicroCreds also seeks to establish and support the adoption of a national framework to support the description and recognition of micro-credentials.

This universal vision for micro-credentials described micro-credentials to be:

- Small, focused courses
- Range from undergraduate to masters level ([National Framework of Qualifications](#) - NFQ 6-9)
- Have a credit range of 1-30 ECTS where 1 ECT = 25 Learning hours
- Are university quality assured
- Are stand alone credentials, though some may stack towards a larger award
- Have been developed in response to identified need.

The purpose of the project is to pilot these recommendations, to identify barriers to mainstream implementation together with solutions and strategies to overcome these challenges. It is anticipated that by end of project, through a series of pilots, case-studies and testimonials a robust definition and framework for the issuing and recognition of micro-credentials across Ireland will emerge.

Regarding official documentation – it is the intention of the project that the MicroCreds framework will be adopted by all higher education providers as the official framework to standardise the provision of micro-credentials.

As autonomous Designated Awarding Bodies (DABs) Irish Universities regulate provision of higher education offerings, including micro-credentials. Other providers (including those from private education and further education) are regulated by the [Quality and Qualifications Ireland](#) (QQI). QQI published a retrospective analysis of Micro-Credentials covering the period 2014-2020 and key findings from this report illustrate that micro-credentials up until this stage have been in the domain of further education and other HEIs, Universities to a large extent (particularly those in the Micro-Creds project) only have limited numbers of micro-credentials at the time of this analysis. Furthermore, it should also be noted that micro-credentials from a QQI perspective were considered as being particular non-major awards on the Irish NFQ:

- Special purpose
- Supplemental
- Minor Awards

Please see more details at <http://www.qqi.ie> for information on these award types

- Is there already a plan in your country to support HEIs in the implementation of micro-credentials according to the EU Council Recommendation?

- What are the considerations and what kind of support measures are planned for HEIs?

Whilst no new policy has been developed to support implementation as per the recommendation, existing national policy and initiatives are driving implementation as they include areas included in the recommendation. The Micro-Creds project is one such initiative which has aligned itself to the European approach to ensure consistency and coherence, recognising that the EHEA tools are central to implementation particularly to support key areas such as recognition, stackability and flexibility.

The MicroCreds project currently supports IUA universities to implement micro-credentials. This project is resourced as a hub-and-spoke model, centrally coordinated by the Irish Universities Association with 7 appointed Project Leads and 7 Steering Committee members representing each of the partner institutions.

The impact of micro-credentials is recognised to be significant across many areas of HEIs including:

- Registry and Quality assurance,
- Teaching & learning,
- Research Centres,
- ICT systems

In addition, it is recognised that in order for micro-credentials to succeed there is a need to instigate and sustain collaboration (at national and European level)

- within universities
- between universities
- With other HEIs
- With other providers
- With national skills architecture
- With enterprise
- With quality and qualifications agencies

Therefore, central considerations include: capacity to lobby for strategic support and collaboration for adoption of micro-credentials; central administration to comply with reporting requirements; strategic marketing and recruitment efforts to raise awareness and incentivise engagement with micro-credentials

At the institution level considerations will vary dependent on individual contexts but generally centre around resourcing to facilitate technical requirements and integrations, teaching and learning resources to assist with the design, building and delivery of MCs as well as resources to support awareness raising activities both the learners as well as academic to encourage participation.

Please give an overview of the current provision of micro-credentials by HEIs in your country:

- What share of institutions and which types of institutions offer micro-credentials?
- What is their extent in terms of ECTS credits or workload in hours?
- Are MCs connected to specific curricula, specific fields and/ or dedicated to re- and upskilling?
- Who are the target groups of those offers, do they take into account any societal groups, which are otherwise underrepresented among learners, students and graduates of tertiary education?
- Are these offers developed and implemented in cooperation with external partners (companies, civil society organisations, ...)?
- How are they financed?
- What are the considerations and what support measures are planned for providers/HEIs?
- Is the MC offer of HEIs in your country (still) very small or does it have a considerable size?
- Are there any other providers (companies) that are not recognized HEIs, that offer micro-credentials on tertiary level in your country? If so: which?

Please provide links to examples, if possible.

Current Offerings

With regard to the MicroCreds project there are currently approximately 150 micro-credentials on offer or under development by the 7 partner universities.

The majority of these micro-credentials are 5-10 ECTS at NFQ 9 though some are as small as 2.5 ECTS.

As noted earlier, MicroCreds have been developed in response to an identified need, which may be national, regional or sectoral in nature. This allows for diversity of offerings across partner institutions. Currently the offerings are in the areas of:

- Business
- Sustainability/Environment
- Law
- Food and Agri Science
- Social Work/Policy
- AI/Technology
- Health Sciences
- Arts & Humanities
- Engineering
- Social Sciences

Working is on-going to identify transversal and priority skills that are developed in offerings.

Target Group

As part of the project, market research was completed to identify primary and secondary audiences for micro-credentials which were determined to be 1) career-developer individuals and 2) growth-minded organisations. While the majority of the micro-

credentials on offer will service the call to action to address labour market needs, this does not preclude other micro-credentials which focus on societal, personal, or cultural needs.

In recognition of reaching those underrepresented among learners, students and graduates of tertiary education, there are a number of micro-credentials (outside of the majority) that are being developed and offered at NFQ 6-8 to provide them with the confidence to engage with higher education. It is hoped that there will be additional provision for micro-credentials at NFQ 10 but that additional discussions at partners institutions will be required to progress this.

In addition, there is a national project underway, [“Recognition of Prior Learning \(RPL\)”](#), also funded through HCI-P3, which is looking at mechanisms to formalise the recognise prior learning. Coordination efforts have begun between this and the MicroCreds project to identify key learnings as well as identify priority opportunities for further collaboration to broaden access to higher education, including:

- Structured pathways of university-enterprise engagement;
- Visibility and clarification of RPL in Lifelong Learning entry criteria to MicroCreds;
- Clear progression pathways.

Further to this approximately a further 20 national projects are linked to the development of micro-credentials under the Human Capital Initiative in Ireland. Also, it should be noted that key policy documents in Ireland are referencing micro-credentials as a means of implementation these include digital action plans. It is also notable that submissions to government by external stakeholders such as employer bodies are also calling for micro-credentials to form part of policy in support of upskilling and reskilling.

Digital Credentials Infrastructure and recognition:

- Does your country have a national policy or position for Digital Credentials? (If yes, please describe the policy as well as the current situation of its implementation. If no, please give us further elaboration on the current situation.)
- What IT infrastructure for Digital Credentials is already being used in your country?
- Which principles do HEIs apply to assess MCs in the sense of recognition?

At present there is no co-ordinated national policy with respect to digital credentials with most institutions providing digital forms of credentials but there has been no centralised move to reflect the European Data/Learning Model, although some institutions as part of internal reviews are moving to include these models.

As part of the MicroCreds Universal Vision for micro-credential it is proposed that micro-credential should adopt the European standard elements to describe a micro-credential, namely:

- i. identification of the learner
- ii. title of the micro-credential
- iii. country(ies)/region(s) of the issuer

- iv. awarding body(ies)
- v. date of issuing
- vi. learning outcomes
- vii. notional workload needed to achieve the learning outcomes (in European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System – ECTS, wherever possible)
- viii. level (and cycle, if applicable) of the learning experience leading to the micro-credential (European Qualifications Framework, Qualifications Frameworks in the European Higher Education Area), if applicable
- ix. type of assessment
- x. form of participation in the learning activity
- xi. type of quality assurance used to underpin the micro-credential

A significant project output will be the MicroCreds Discovery Portal. In addition, MicroCreds is engaging with Europass as part of their Early Adopter programme and has secured a unique derogation to share MicroCreds courses with Europass giving exposure to 4.2 million active users in 30 countries.

Recognition

Recognition processes exist in all institution and are in the main based on current processes for major awards and the implementation of institutional RPL.

What are the biggest challenges considering micro-credentials your country is currently facing? What are the next steps you are planning, concerning micro-credentials?

A number of challenges exist:

Awareness raising amongst key stakeholders (wider population, employers, employees and other target groups) is a major factor, institutions will and are developing these provisions but demand must reflect the supply for institutions to continue to engage in these short form offerings as the overheads for delivery are substantial.

The MicroCreds project is ambitious, but markets are indicating that demand for short learning options and their recognition and validation are likely to further increase. To accommodate for these needs, learning pathways at higher education (as well as vocational, and training institutions) will need to become more flexible (increase access points, diversify modes of delivery, systemise modes for recognising alternative models of learning) and modular (diversify modes for consumption). Micro-credentials offer this potential flexibility and inherent modularity. The challenge to adopt this necessary change in mind-sets, culture and structures is not to be underestimated. HEIs systems are traditionally built upon the concept of delivering programmes, not entities smaller than this, but it is anticipated that the outputs, outcomes, and opportunities for learners will far outweigh the efforts and inputs required to develop and deploy micro-credentials at higher education.

In addition, the challenge to sustain support for micro-credential implementation cannot be taken for granted. Through the regular lobbying for their support micro-credentials is now a standing item on the IUA President's Meeting series ensuring the micro-credentials are positioned as a valuable higher education offering and activity.

Providing for a coherent digital infrastructure amongst institutions to support recognition and to allow this offering type to scale will be critical. Further to this the promise of micro-credentials of being relevant i.e. with industry, society and for other professional requirements, requires micro-credential development not to be a case of designing MCs in a similar vein as to what is currently on offer but ensuring a distinctive approach to be applied to them.

Malta

Authority in charge of micro-credentials:

Contact person for this questionnaire: Lawrence Azzopardi

QUESTIONS

- What is the position of your country on provisions that fall within the definition of a micro-credential according to the EU council recommendation? Please cover, if applicable, issues like providers, ECTS credits extent, allocation to NQFs, recognition, stackability, ...
- Are there any official policy or legal documents regulating the provision of micro-credentials? Please insert a link or source.

In Malta micro-credentials are known as awards and

- a) They can start from 1 ECTS;**
- b) Are portable, stackable and recognised;**
- c) Are accredited by the MFHEA;**
- d) Have several credits (ECTS/ECVET) allocated to them**
- e) Are written using the Learning Outcomes Framework approach;**
- f) Are pegged to any level of the MQF/EQF, thus can be used to access further education and even for upskilling and reskilling;**
- g) They are for both VET and academic programmes;**
- h) They are included in Malta's national register for qualifications;**
- i) Awards are well established in the last version of the Referencing report (refer to pages 53-56 in Malta's Referencing Report of 2016 available at [Referencing Report - Malta Further & Higher Education Authority \(mfhea.mt\)](#))**

- Is there already a plan in your country to support HEIs in the implementation of micro-credentials according to the EU Council Recommendation?
The Further and Higher Education Strategy 2022-2030 encourages HEI to offer micro-credentials to address skills gap. Furthermore since 2016 the Malta Qualifications Framework allowed the implementation of micro-credentials in higher education
- What are the considerations and what kind of support measures are planned for HEIs?
Funding schemes for the take up of MCs by individuals

Please give an overview of the current provision of micro-credentials by HEIs in your country:

- **What share of institutions and which types of institutions offer micro-credentials?**

Further Education Institutions and Higher Education Institutions.

- **What is their extent in terms of ECTS credits or workload in hours?**
Micro-credentials can be of 1 ECTS i.e. 25 hours of total learning time
- **Are MCs connected to specific curricula, specific fields and/ or dedicated to re- and upskilling?**
MCs can be part of a whole programme or specifically dedicated for re-upskilling.
- **Who are the target groups of those offers, do they take into account any societal groups, which are otherwise underrepresented among learners, students and graduates of tertiary education?**
The adoption of “awards” has enabled:
 - a) employers and NGOs to get formal accreditation for formal, informal and non-formal training provided to employees and members of the organisation;
 - b) employers and NGOs to request formal training for their employees or members of the organisation from education and VET providers that is tailor made for the organisation;
 - c) education and training providers to address the education and training needs of the labour market and of civil society by providing short, accredited and level-rated courses;
 - d) young people and adults to embark on lifelong learning trajectories
- **Are these offers developed and implemented in cooperation with external partners (companies, civil society organisations, ...)?**
Yes, they can be developed and implemented with employers, NGOs, trade unions, etc,
- **How are they financed?**
There is no specific funding for providers offering MCs but there is national funding to support the take-up of MCs in Higher Education by learners
- **What are the considerations and what support measures are planned for providers/HEIs?**
Regular meetings and information sessions are given to HEI offering MCs. During these meetings, HEIs are provided guidance on accreditation of MCs and external program audits.
- **Is the MC offer of HEIs in your country (still) very small or does it have a considerable size?**
All HEIs offer micro credentials so it is quite considerable.
- **Are there any other providers (companies) that are not recognized HEIs, that offer micro-credentials on tertiary level in your country? If so: which?**
Providers (companies) need to have a license to offer micro-credentials.

Please provide links to examples, if possible.

Training Pays Scheme

The Training Pays Scheme forms part of the ESF.01.001 – Training for Employment Project and it aims to

assist individuals to develop and/or improve their skills by participating in further off-the-job training.

The scheme offers assistance in the form of a refund to aid participants with costs relating to training. This

refund will be awarded to the individual (trainee) after successful completion of his/her training.

<https://jobsplus.gov.mt/schemes-jobseekers/training-pays-scheme>

GET QUALIFIED is an initiative that supports the personal development of individuals for the achievement of

qualifications and certifications required by industry. The incentive is applicable to individuals following a

course of studies leading to a certification, diploma, degree or post-graduate degree courses. Upon successful

completion the student will benefit from a tax credit enabling them to recover part of the costs incurred.

<https://www.maltaenterprise.com/support/get-qualified-2017-2023>

Digital Credentials Infrastructure and recognition:

- Does your country have a national policy or position for Digital Credentials? (If yes, please describe the policy as well as the current situation of its implementation. If no, please give us further elaboration on the current situation.)

NO

- What IT infrastructure for Digital Credentials is already being used in your country?

There is currently no IT infrastructure

- Which principles do HEIs apply to assess MCs in the sense of recognition?

The national quality assurance system covers micro-credentials offered by HEIs.

The external quality assurance systems are in place to assure quality of the courses offered by HEIs through a) programme accreditation b) external institutional audit and c) external program audit.

What are the biggest challenges considering micro-credentials your country is currently facing? What are the next steps you are planning, concerning micro-credentials?

We already have a system for micro credentials but it is national and therefore makes it a challenge for recognition in other countries. We are planning to create a continuous professional development programme in QA for all providers to help them develop further MCs. We will do research through focus groups, case studies and surveys on the challenges that HEIs are facing in offering MCs.

The Netherlands

Authority in charge of micro-credentials:

Contact person for this questionnaire: Bas Wegewijs (Team Leader International Recognition, Nuffic)

QUESTIONS

- What is the position of your country on provisions that fall within the definition of a micro-credential according to the EU council recommendation? Please cover, if applicable, issues like providers, ECTS credits extent, allocation to NQFs, recognition, stackability, ...
- Are there any official policy or legal documents regulating the provision of micro-credentials? Please insert a link or source.

- Micro-credentials and other forms of flexible learning and e-learning are already provided by Dutch higher education institutions, in some cases through the well-known international platforms for online learning. In October 2021, a more systematic approach was started by launching the Dutch National Micro-credentials Pilot project, in which 32 higher education institutions participate. In this questionnaire, we provide information on this initiative, since it is the most relevant form of implementing the EU Council Recommendation.
- Website on the Pilot Project: [Microcredentials Pilot \(versnellingsplan.nl\)](https://www.micropilot.nl). All quotes given below are taken from this website.
Currently, there are no legal documents: „The concept of microcredentials is gaining more and more interest, but it has not yet been included in the WHW (Higher Education and Research Act) and therefore does not yet have a legally recognised status.“

- Is there already a plan in your country to support HEIs in the implementation of micro-credentials according to the EU Council Recommendation?
- What are the considerations and what kind of support measures are planned for HEIs?

- See above (Pilot Project).
- “Institutions can count on support from the direction team, have a designated contact, have access to a change budget and are invited to exchange knowledge and experience at national meetings.” For more information, see the FAQ’s (11 – What is the guidance structure of the pilot).

Please give an overview of the current provision of micro-credentials by HEIs in your country:

- What share of institutions and which types of institutions offer micro-credentials?

- What is their extent in terms of ECTS credits or workload in hours?
- Are MCs connected to specific curricula, specific fields and/ or dedicated to re- and upskilling?
- Who are the target groups of those offers, do they take into account any societal groups, which are otherwise underrepresented among learners, students and graduates of tertiary education?
- Are these offers developed and implemented in cooperation with external partners (companies, civil society organisations, ...)?
- How are they financed?
- What are the considerations and what support measures are planned for providers/HEIs?
- Is the MC offer of HEIs in your country (still) very small or does it have a considerable size?
- Are there any other providers (companies) that are not recognized HEIs, that offer micro-credentials on tertiary level in your country? If so: which?

Please provide links to examples, if possible.

Here are some answers from the Pilot Project:

“32 higher education institutions – 10 universities and 22 universities of applied sciences – have been taking part in the Dutch national Microcredentials pilot under the direction of the [Making education more flexible zone](#), the [Universities of The Netherlands](#), and [The Association of Universities of Applied Sciences](#) of the Netherlands.“

„A micro-credential is a digital certificate for an independently completed educational unit in the range of 3 – 30 EC with an *accreditation* worthy level, quality mark and recognised value for the target group professionals.“

“What are the minimum requirements for (internal) quality assurance?”

1. The quality of the education certified by microcredentials is guaranteed on the basis of the [Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area \(ESG\)](#)
2. The Executive Board is familiar with and consciously chooses to offer microcredentials on the basis of the institution’s LLL (Lifelong Learning) vision.
3. The institution has set up an internal quality assurance process for the design, accreditation and quality assurance of microcredentials.
4. The institution has designated a body or bodies that can guarantee the final level of microcredential-certified education.
5. A form of educational evaluation, participation and possibility of submitting complaints has been organised for participants in mc-certified education“

Digital Credentials Infrastructure and recognition:

- Does your country have a national policy or position for Digital Credentials? (If yes, please describe the policy as well as the current situation of its implementation. If no, please give us further elaboration on the current situation.)
- What IT infrastructure for Digital Credentials is already being used in your country?
- Which principles do HEIs apply to assess MCs in the sense of recognition?

See above

- “The Acceleration Team envisages a national register for microcredentials that will firmly establish flexible education for professionals. The obvious solution is to set up this register alongside the existing diploma register at DUO. An exploratory survey previously carried out by DUO to this end has given rise to a number of follow-up steps. As it is unlikely that DUO will have such a register available at the start of the Acceleration Plan pilot, we will start to provide microcredentials with the edubadges infrastructure already available at SURF.”
- “The aim of the pilot is for institution-wide collaboration to create a system in which microcredentials have recognised value. By acting together and using a shared language and a common quality framework, the institutions can assign independent value to the microcredentials.

Learning outcomes describe what a learner may expect to know, to understand and to be able to apply. It is important to note that learning outcomes are about ‘the outcomes of the learning process, independent of educational content and curriculum, study load, duration of the study, organisation of the education, manner of instruction and where and how the education is given’. In other words, a learning outcome describes what someone knows and can do after successfully completing a learning path. This also means that learning outcomes achieved in a microcredential programme in one institution are recognised as such in the same institution or by another institution. With a microcredential a participant can, for instance, demonstrate to have the required prior knowledge when starting a programme or another microcredential. Furthermore, learning outcomes that overlap with an accredited programme may lead to exemption when enrolling in the programme. Exemptions are not granted automatically but must be requested from a designated institutional body, such as an examination board.”

What are the biggest challenges considering micro-credentials your country is currently facing? What are the next steps you are planning, concerning micro-credentials?

See above and the website of the pilot project.

Poland

Authority in charge of micro-credentials: Ministry of Education and Science

Contact person for this questionnaire: Ms Jolanta Urbanik, University of Warsaw

QUESTIONS

- What is the position of your country on provisions that fall within the definition of a micro-credential according to the EU council recommendation? Please cover, if applicable, issues like providers, ECTS credits extent, allocation to NQFs, recognition, stackability, ...
- Are there any official policy or legal documents regulating the provision of micro-credentials? Please insert a link or source.
- Is there already a plan in your country to support HEIs in the implementation of micro-credentials according to the EU Council Recommendation?
- What are the considerations and what kind of support measures are planned for HEIs?

The Ministry of Education and Science, a national body responsible for higher education and other education sectors in Poland, has been working on the issues related to the implementation of micro-credentials into the system for almost a year, mainly by way of discussions held in a Minister's Advisory Group composed of experts from all relevant sectors followed by formulation of official positions which may be later included in the ministerial regulation or used to amend the current Law on Science and Higher Education. In general the concept of micro-credentials has been perceived as a means of HE reaching out to new target groups with the innovative offer created by the academic and non-academic sector alike, in response and in partnership with the stakeholders, as an instrument of LLL, an important tool to up-skill and re-skill graduates to be able to respond to the challenges posed by the labour market, at the same time appreciating the possibility of benefitting from the HE sector potential based on the current research and up-to-date T&L methodology. Another dimension of the micro-credentials concept well worth mentioning is its impact on further internationalisation of HE: a facilitating step on the way to create joint European degrees within the European Alliances. Since its launch the Minister's Advisory Group has been very active in discussing subsequent versions of the Council Recommendation, proposing relevant content and stylistic amendments, aiming at a clear and unambiguous message resulting from the Recommendation. Poland is in favour of all the provisions stipulated in the Recommendation however no formal position has been presented in case of the acceptable ECTS credit range leaving the matter to be decided to the interested HEIs taking account of the volume of learning required to complete post-graduate non-degree programmes as well as international cooperation agreements (eg. within the European University Alliances). It has not been as yet decided whether micro-credentials will be allocated to NQF although it has been agreed that intended learning outcomes should be referred to the level descriptors. Other attributes of micro-credentials like stackability, recognition or providers have not risen any disputes. Bearing programme autonomy of HEI in mind it has not been decided

whether any ministerial regulation would indeed be needed as the current one leaves sufficient room for innovation. However in order to guarantee recognition, stackability and for that matter permeability of the system QA measures should be rigorously implemented, inclusive of the standard elements to describe a micro-credential. Non-academic providers would not use ECTS but work-load would be described in terms of course teaching hours.

Please give an overview of the current provision of micro-credentials by HEIs in your country:

- What share of institutions and which types of institutions offer micro-credentials?
The survey has not been yet completed.
- What is their extent in terms of ECTS credits or workload in hours?
The issue has not been examined.
- Are MCs connected to specific curricula, specific fields and/ or dedicated to re- and upskilling?
It seems that most of them would be dedicated to up-skilling.
- Who are the target groups of those offers, do they take into account any societal groups, which are otherwise underrepresented among students and graduates of tertiary education?
No targeted action has been as yet commenced. Offer has been addressed to the potentially interested at large.
- Are these offers developed and implemented in cooperation with external partners (companies, civil society organisations, ...)?
It seems that the offer is developed inter alia with the European University alliances
- How are they financed?
By contributing HEIs or as a fee-paying courses by enrolled participants.
- What are the considerations and what support measures are planned for providers/HEIs?
It has not been yet decided.
- Is the MC offer of HEIs in your country (still) very small or does it have a considerable size?
It is small.
- Are there any other providers (companies) that are not recognized HEIs, that offer micro-credentials on tertiary level in your country? If so: which?
The issues had not been examined.

Please provide links to examples, if possible.

Digital Credentials Infrastructure: Does your country have a national policy or position for Digital Credentials? (If yes, please describe the policy as well as the current situation of its implementation. If no, please give us further elaboration on the current situation.)

There is no official policy as such.

What IT infrastructure for Digital Credentials is already being used in your country?

Potentially the infrastructure of National Register of Qualifications may be used but no decision has been taken. Alternatively Europass Digital Credential infrastructure might be eventually used.

Which principles do HEIs apply to assess MCs in the sense of recognition?.

No concrete data is available for HEIs. The relevant national agenda is likely to take advantage of LRC principles.

What are the biggest challenges considering micro-credentials your country is currently facing? What are the next steps you are planning, concerning micro-credentials?

Recognition of micro-credentials in all possible dimensions might be the challenge along with QA and their stackability. The Ministry will continue with the discussion within the working group and eventually disseminate the results. It has not been yet decided whether the new law or amendment of the current law will be needed.

Romania

Authority in charge of micro-credentials:

Ministry of Education, through different structures and agencies, such as the Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation Funding (UEFISCDI)

Contact person for this questionnaire:

Cezar HAJ (cezar.haj@uefiscdi.ro; cezarhaj@gmail.com), UEFISCDI

Cristina FIȚ (cristina.fit@uefiscdi.ro), UEFISCDI

Alexandru CĂRȚIȘ (alexandru-mihai.cartis@unibuc.ro), University of Bucharest

QUESTIONS

- What is the position of your country on provisions that fall within the definition of a micro-credential according to the EU council recommendation? Please cover, if applicable, issues like providers, ECTS credits extent, allocation to NQFs, recognition, stackability, ...
- Are there any official policy or legal documents regulating the provision of micro-credentials? Please insert a link or source.

Micro-credentials are considered of great importance for the Romanian educational system and decision makers, understanding that aligning the national framework to the European and international one is essential for continuing the educational innovation process. The ministry of education and other national stakeholders are currently working on specific proposals for regulating micro-credentials and their use in the national educational system, whereas, up to this moment, no specific provisions have been made.

Since there is an ongoing process for changing the national educational law, several debates and discussion on this topic reflected the need to support micro-credentials' use in Romanian education, both in higher education programmes and degrees, but also for re-skilling and up-skilling, and lifelong learning. The national education law proposals sent for consultations are meant to include specific sections dedicated to micro-credentials and their connections with other educational sectors.

The general lines of discussions until this moment are that micro-credentials should be regarded in direct connection with ECTS credit points, as a comparable and transparent mean for assessing the student workload and the level of investment for achieving the certification. Also, in terms of comparability, ECTS provides necessary frameworks for the portability of learning across European countries.

In terms of providers, current discussions are considering higher education institutions as primary bodies for awarding micro-credentials, even if this still falls under debates related to possible existence of other provides (such as companies, training centres, NGOs, etc.). Nevertheless, the general consideration is that any provider must adhere to same regulations and principals, such as the quality standards of micro-credentials, transparent assessment, comparability, and use of ECTS.

The line of discussions leads to micro-credentials being allocated to the NQF, by the same principles and practices used for `traditional` certifications, the level and competences varying based on each micro-credential. For that, a specific registry of qualifications achieved through micro-credentials is envisaged, as part of the Romanian NQF.

Even if there are no official policies or legal documents regulating micro-credentials in Romania yet, several stakeholders have proposed recommendations and visions on this topic. The “Universitaria” Consortium (with 9 HE institutions in Romania that encompass almost half of Romania’s students), in its recent Resolution¹ (May 2022), requests that the Ministry of Education regulates `micro-credentials` and their use in HE, while in consultations with the European Commission, some rectors emphasised that `micro-credentials` “can offer enlarged access to learning experiences to all students”² and “have to be implemented as soon as possible”³. Micro-credentials are also one of the priorities of the Romanian universities that are member of European Alliances, the “RO European Universities” consortium, which has dedicated a working group on this topic and contributed also to a report proposal on the internationalisation of HE⁴. Ongoing work on the conceptual and practical approaches towards micro-credentials in the Romanian HE system is conducted at national level, through projects such as “New building blocks of the Bologna Process: fundamental values – NewFAV”⁵ and “POCU-INTL”⁶, and relevant studies have proposed means for supporting integration of micro-credentials in the educational system, such as the results of the national Conference “Ten years of evidence-based public policies - employability, internationalization and equity”⁷ and the experience of Romanian universities members of the European Universities Alliances (Iucu et al., 2021⁸).

- Is there already a plan in your country to support HEIs in the implementation of micro-credentials according to the EU Council Recommendation?

¹ <https://unibuc.ro/consortiu-universitaria-solicita-implicarea-sa-imediate-in-procesul-de-elaborare-a-legii-educatiei/>

² <https://unibuc.ro/punct-de-vedere-civis-micro-credite/>

³ <https://www.edupedu.ro/universitatile-sunt-cele-care-trebuie-sa-implementeze-cat-mai-curand-micro-certIFICATELE-sustine-remus-pricopie-rectorul-sns-pa-la-o-intalnire-initiata-de-comisarul-european-pentru-educatie/>

⁴ https://uefiscdi.gov.ro/resource-866875-s4_recomandari-politici_intl.pdf

⁵ <https://uefiscdi.gov.ro/new-building-blocks-of-the-bologna-process-fundamental-values>

⁶ <http://pocu-intl.uefiscdi.ro/results>

⁷ <https://uefiscdi.gov.ro/conferinta-zece-ani-de-politici-publice-bazate-pe-evidente-angajabilitate-internationalizare-si-echitate>; https://uefiscdi.gov.ro/resource-866879-s4_propunere-pol-publice-micro-certificari.pdf

⁸ <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.6088135>

- What are the considerations and what kind of support measures are planned for HEIs?

Whereas there are no universities that offer micro-credentials that fall under the full understanding of these tools and their connection with the European approach, the Ministry of Education, several HE institutions, and other decision-makers work towards identifying the most suitable options for supporting the implementation of micro-credentials in national education system. As mentioned, new provisions are considered for the national regulations in place to support micro-credentials and their implementation process, while universities work together with other national bodies (QA Agency, Qualifications Agency, and others, to design a process that responds to societal and professional needs, building on recommendations and practices in line with the EU Council Recommendation and other European and international recommendations.

In this line, the national regulations consider proposing specific elements that could support HEIs in designing and implementing micro-credentials, as well as including micro-credentials in the NQF, allowing ECTS recognition and portability, and considering possible routes for the design of new educational programmes based on micro-credentials and the recognition of previous learning.

Such approaches in implementing recommendations and guidelines according also to the EU Recommendation, may consider the experience of HEIs that have piloted micro-credentials (such as micro-programmes, modular learning activities, flexible courses, etc.) as part of the educational offer of the European Universities Alliances they are part of, as well as other relevant experiences in designing new flexible learning pathways based on micro-credentials.

Please give an overview of the current provision of micro-credentials by HEIs in your country:

- What share of institutions and which types of institutions offer micro-credentials?
- What is their extent in terms of ECTS credits or workload in hours?
- Are MCs connected to specific curricula, specific fields and/ or dedicated to re- and upskilling?
- Who are the target groups of those offers, do they take into account any societal groups, which are otherwise underrepresented among learners, students and graduates of tertiary education?
- Are these offers developed and implemented in cooperation with external partners (companies, civil society organisations, ...)?
- How are they financed?
- What are the considerations and what support measures are planned for providers/HEIs?
- Is the MC offer of HEIs in your country (still) very small or does it have a considerable size?

- Are there any other providers (companies) that are not recognized HEIs, that offer micro-credentials on tertiary level in your country? If so: which?

Please provide links to examples, if possible.

Some public universities and other higher education institutions are offering educational activities that can fall under the proposed definition, even if, currently, since no specific regulations are in place, they are not considered and reported as micro-credentials. In this case, no official micro-credentials are offered by HEIs in our country, while some universities are part of international programmes that embed `micro-credentials` philosophy and characteristics.

As part of the experiences of some universities in the European Universities Initiative, activities ranging from 3 to 15 ECTS credit points are more often identified, but the status quo of these actions is yet to be defined, based also on national regulations and frames. The purpose and aim of such micro-credentials still differ from HEIs and other relevant actors, since some consider them as more relevant for some fields, whereas some would enforce their use in re- and up-skilling processes (for lifelong learning purposes), offering them to varied types of learners (and opening learning to non-traditional students also). Due to short sequence of the programmes, micro-credentials can be addressed to other social categories that would normally not be engaged in learning. The vision around these types of educational activities is that they should be designed in cooperation with social partners, such as companies, NGOs, civil society, integrating service learning and transferable skills in their objectives.

Even if there is no clear image at national level on the number of programmes and learning activities that fall under the provisions of the `micro-credentials` definition and are offered by HEIs in our country, it is assumed that the offer is very small, but there is high potential and will from HEIs in this direction. After national regulations will be proposed and a definition will also be adopted at national level, it would be important to see how many educational activities previously implemented fall under these conceptual approaches. Considering the proposed definition, some professional training programmes offered by non-HEIs could be considered as `micro-credentials` offer, but further analysis in this direction is needed.

Digital Credentials Infrastructure and recognition:

- Does your country have a national policy or position for Digital Credentials? (If yes, please describe the policy as well as the current situation of its implementation. If no, please give us further elaboration on the current situation.)
- What IT infrastructure for Digital Credentials is already being used in your country?
- Which principles do HEIs apply to assess MCs in the sense of recognition?

Romania has no national policy document targeting digital credentials but is highly supporting further developments in sustainable and digital solutions for education, in line with the Educated Romania agenda and other national priorities in education. Several Romanian HEIs are using the Europass Digital Credential Infrastructure, and some HEIs have also implemented (or are in an implementation process) the European Student Card (linked with institutional digital identification systems and digital credentials platforms and tools) and other digital platforms and tools that give access to learners to own digital credentials systems, supporting recognition and portability of learning.

Since no `micro-credentials` regulations are in place at the moment, there are no specific principles or guidelines for the recognition of micro-credentials. Nevertheless, such approaches will consider existing national and European policies and regulations on recognition of learning, where ECTS, QA procedures, and accreditation processes will support and enlarged recognition of such credentials.

What are the biggest challenges considering micro-credentials your country is currently facing? What are the next steps you are planning, concerning micro-credentials?

One of the biggest challenges in our country is linked with transposing the understanding and conceptual approach of `micro-credentials` in the national education system, identifying a comparable approach for designing and implementing such credentials in line with current and future educational offer and frameworks. Even if the experience of some HEIs in European Universities Alliances is much relevant for this approach, many countries still have different views, and the EU Council Recommendation should support developing a coherent framework that would suit all countries.

Another challenge is represented by lack of clarity related to the relation between HEIs and lifelong learning (re- and up-skilling educational activities), much of the micro-credentials conceptual approaches being connected with this area. As well, the rigidity of `traditional` programmes and curriculum still do not allow embedding micro-credentials in the learning pathway, thus preventing HEIs from designing flexible learning pathways driven by the students' and society's needs and challenges.

Austria

Authority in charge of micro-credentials: Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research (BMBWF)

Contact person for this questionnaire: Stephan De Pasqualin

QUESTIONS

- What is the position of your country on provisions that fall within the definition of a micro-credential according to the EU council recommendation? Please cover, if applicable, issues like providers, ECTS credits extent, allocation to NQFs, recognition, stackability, ...
- Are there any official policy or legal documents regulating the provision of micro-credentials? Please insert a link or source.

The four sectors of the Austrian higher education system and the ministry (national position) consider the concept of micro-credentials as a chance for higher education institutions to enhance their offers, to approach new target groups and to foster cooperation with non-tertiary education partners. This could be a strong contribution to the emerging competition in higher education.

Austria did not support the Council Recommendation in terms of setting none ECTS range at all. The range of a micro-credential should be between 3 and 15 ECTS credits. More than 15 credits would undermine the term "Micro" and its concept behind. Furthermore, micro-credential could clash with short cycle programs and this would lead to even more confusion. It's also a matter of future comparability of micro-credentials.

In Austria Micro-credentials will not be allocated to the NQF, because of its minor workload. We talking in the context of our national NQF about longer lasting learning-, education- and further education periods ("meaningful units"). The allocation of such short qualifications would lead to confusion in terms of the NQFs public image.

Austria underlines, that the permeability and recognition are nationally and internationally crucial for the success of micro-credentials. The higher education institutions and the respective programme directors are in charge of the recognition of micro-credentials. There is no legal claim for recognition and individual case decisions by the higher education institutions will be necessary.

Austria is in favor of higher education institutions awarding micro-credentials, especially considering the use of ECTS credits, therefore the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System is serving as the relevant system to record the workload of students.

Non-higher education institutions should describe learning outcomes and the workload in hours in order to record the competences acquired by students and use those as a basis for the validation of non-formal and informal learning at higher education institutions.

- Is there already a plan in your country to support HEIs in the implementation of micro-credentials according to the EU Council Recommendation?
- What are the considerations and what kind of support measures are planned for HEIs?

Two Austrian Universities (Montanuniversität Leoben and the University of Innsbruck) have implemented pilot projects within their performance agreements with the Ministry. The ministry is also thinking about working on national recommendations together with HEI to break down the Council recommendation into the national circumstances.

Please give an overview of the current provision of micro-credentials by HEIs in your country:

- What share of institutions and which types of institutions offer micro-credentials?
- What is their extent in terms of ECTS credits or workload in hours?
- Are MCs connected to specific curricula, specific fields and/ or dedicated to re- and upskilling?
- Who are the target groups of those offers, do they take into account any societal groups, which are otherwise underrepresented among learners, students and graduates of tertiary education?
- Are these offers developed and implemented in cooperation with external partners (companies, civil society organisations, ...)?
- How are they financed?
- What are the considerations and what support measures are planned for providers/HEIs?
- Is the MC offer of HEIs in your country (still) very small or does it have a considerable size?
- Are there any other providers (companies) that are not recognized HEIs, that offer micro-credentials on tertiary level in your country? If so: which?

Please provide links to examples, if possible.

- *The ministry knows of public universities and universities of applied sciences offering micro-credentials in the app. range of 3 to 15 ECTS credits, but there is a national survey being conducted at the moment, so Austria will get a bigger picture of the status quo for the PLA.*
- *Target groups and the purpose of micro-credentials differ from HEI to HEI. One are using micro-credentials in the sense of internationalization (e.g. European University initiatives), others see a strong involvement of companies concerning re- and upskilling and reacting to rapidly changing societies.*
- *Austria sees the offering and the acquisition of micro-credentials before, during and after higher education studies, in the sense of lifelong learning. Offering flexible*

learning and competence acquisition micro-credentials have the potential to address students from underrepresented groups in terms of social dimension, because of their short sequence.

- *The ministry does not have a greater picture yet, but it assumes the offer is very small. After conducting the national survey, we should have a better picture.*
- *The ministry has no knowledge of non-HEI providers offering micro-credentials.*

Digital Credentials Infrastructure and recognition:

- Does your country have a national policy or position for Digital Credentials? (If yes, please describe the policy as well as the current situation of its implementation. If no, please give us further elaboration on the current situation.)
- What IT infrastructure for Digital Credentials is already being used in your country?
- Which principles do HEIs apply to assess MCs in the sense of recognition?

Austria has no national policy document explicitly targeting digital credentials, but is supporting sustainable and digital solutions.

The Ministry knows of Austrian HEI using the Europass Digital Credential Infrastructure and would like to see as many HEI as possible using this platform.

No evidence by the ministry, but see our national position on recognition.

What are the biggest challenges considering micro-credentials your country is currently facing? What are the next steps you are planning, concerning micro-credentials?

An international challenge will definitely be the permeability of micro-credentials. Many countries have different approaches, but all should take the constitutive elements of the Council Recommendation in consideration.

The ministry is planning a national recommendation and is currently conducting a national survey.