



WHITE PAPER: ADVANCING MICRO- CREDENTIALS IN ARMENIAN HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

**“MICRO-GEAR MICRO-CREDENTIALS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEMS
OF GEORGIA AND ARMENIA: SOUTH CAUCASUS LIGHTHOUSE PROJECT”**

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“MICRO-GEAR: MICRO-CREDENTIALS FOR HIGHER
EDUCATION SYSTEMS OF GEORGIA AND ARMENIA:
SOUTH CAUCASUS LIGHTHOUSE PROJECT”
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1. Executive Summary

Armenia is embracing micro-credentials as part of a broader strategy to modernize its education system, enhance lifelong learning, and respond to labor market needs. This white paper outlines the policy position, legal foundations, and implementation approach for micro-credentials in Armenia, informed by recent legislative developments and aligned with European Higher Education Area (EHEA) standards. This document explores the integration of micro-credentials into Armenian higher education system as a transformative approach to lifelong learning, skills development, and workforce qualification and requalification.

2. Introduction and Context

The 21st-century workforce requires constant upskilling, reskilling, and competency-based training. Traditional degree programs often lack the flexibility to meet these demands. Micro-credentials, as short, focused certifications of specific competencies, provide a means for learners to acquire and demonstrate skills in a timely and efficient manner. Armenia recognizes the strategic value of integrating micro-credentials into higher education to:

- Promote lifelong learning;
- Strengthen employment outcomes;
- Increase educational flexibility and access;
- Align national practices with international trends.

The introduction of micro-credentials at the higher education level will contribute significantly to the alignment of students' knowledge, skills, and competencies with modern labor market demands, including in fields like digital technologies and innovations. It will enable the integration of the most up-to-date knowledge through short, affordable, and flexible educational programs, thus promoting educational inclusivity and improving access to education, especially for low-income and vulnerable groups.

3. International Practices for the Implementation of Micro-Credentials

Although the notion of micro-credentials has only recently entered the European discourse on flexible teaching and learning, lifelong learning, and employability, higher education institutions (HEI) and alternative providers have been developing and delivering small units of learning for a long time. The introduction of micro-credentials in the educational space began in the early 2010s with online platforms like Coursera and edX, which offered short courses and digital badges. The large-scale development of micro-credentials accelerated in the 2020s, especially following the European Council's 2022 recommendation, which encouraged their integration into national qualifications frameworks across European countries.

Countries such as Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand have also made significant strides in the implementation of micro-credentials. In 2020, the *MICROBOL* project, funded by Erasmus+, supported the reform of micro-credentials within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). This project identified the definition of micro-credentials and applied tools like the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) to them.

In 2023, EHEA TPG A working group on Micro-credentials conducted a survey of TPG A members (in total 28 countries) exploring the existence of smaller units of learning possibly leading to micro-credentials available in the respondent countries in higher education sector (EQF level 5-8) including adult continuing learning. The following main outcomes were highlighted:

- More targeted and comprehensive regulation of micro-credentials and other forms of smaller learning units in many countries may be necessary;
- Need for a reference to the EQF/NQF or QF-EHEA level in the certificates of micro credentials could be useful for transparency, comparability and recognition;
- Lack of uniformity in how qualifications are classified and recognized by different countries and HEIs leads to implications for the portability and comparability of micro-credentials;
- Need for a greater flexibility and responsiveness in higher education, as well as the potential of micro-credentials to meet specific skills and learning needs in the labour market are important aspects;
- Need for greater clarity and consistency in quality assurance as regards micro- credentials may be observed;
- Need for improved stakeholder understanding and support for micro-credentials approach was highlighted;
- Need for continued support and investment in the area concerning micro-credentials was emphasised;
- Need for increased international cooperation and coordination in the development and recognition of micro-credentials to support the development of approach to micro credentials;
- Need to develop a more unified and widely accepted definition of micro-credentials to raise stakeholders' awareness of micro-credentials.

Based on the results of the survey **recommendations and guidelines** were prepared and submitted to the Bologna Secretariat for the design and implementation of small units of learning leading to micro-credentials. The recommendations and guidelines were addressed to three different groups of stakeholders:

- **National authorities** in the countries of the EHEA responsible for developing system level policies and legislation;
- **Higher education institutions** in the EHEA designing and delivering small units of learning leading to micro-credentials (recommendations for practical use),
- **Quality assurance agencies** in the EHEA developing standards, principles, procedures or approaches to quality assurance of micro-credentials in line with Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) and the system-level policies and frameworks.

The recommendations and guidelines cover the following **topics**:

1. Involvement of stakeholders
2. Inclusion in the NQF
3. Learning outcomes
4. Assessment
5. Design
6. Recognition of prior learning
7. Level
8. Workload
9. Quality
10. Supplement to micro-credential
11. Transparency
12. Support to implementation
13. Learning pathway

4. Legal and Institutional Framework

Armenia, in response to the challenges and recommendations outlined internationally, has taken steps to develop and implement regulatory approaches to integrate micro-credentials into its educational framework.

The key challenges Armenia face included a lack of regulatory framework, clarity in quality and recognition for micro-credentials, the need for standardized terminology, and the absence of clear legal provisions specifically addressing smaller units of learning. Armenia has worked towards addressing these issues and developing a regulatory framework that aligns with European approaches.

Development of micro-credential regulatory framework in Armenia is accompanied by a **roadmap** that takes into account the approach and recommendations mentioned above. This roadmap reflects the strategic steps Armenia intends to follow in order to effectively integrate micro-credentials into its education system, ensure quality assurance, and make them widely recognized both domestically and internationally.

The draft Law of the Republic of Armenia on Higher Education and Science provides the foundation for implementing micro-credentials:

4.1 Definition

In the draft of the Law, micro-credentials are defined as a certificate registered as a result of an assessment confirming the acquisition of certain professional knowledge and skills by a learner as a result of training in a non-degree educational program or in a non-formal education format, which can be used both separately, as a basis for employment, and as a component of an educational program granting a qualification, if the given program leading to micro-credential is accredited and as a result of it, ECTS credits are awarded, as well as if such an opportunity is provided for by the educational program.

4.2 Institutional Roles

- Universities are authorized to develop and deliver micro-credential programs.
- These programs can function independently or contribute credits toward bachelor's and master's degrees.

4.3 Certification and Recognition

- Certificates are issued in a standard format defined by the institution, approved by the MOESCS.
- Data on micro-credentials, including digital versions, are registered in the national qualifications and license registry.
- Accredited micro-credential programs that assign ECTS credits are subject to national quality assurance and accreditation procedures.

4.4 Quality Assurance

- Micro-credential programs are evaluated and accredited through the same mechanisms as formal academic programs.
- Institutional and programme accreditation is mandatory for credit-bearing credentials.

5. Strategic Objectives

Armenia aims to achieve the following objectives:

- **Lifelong Learning Promotion:** Facilitate ongoing, modular learning pathways.
- **Labor Market Alignment:** Ensure credential content reflects current workforce needs.

- **Educational Innovation:** Encourage universities to adopt flexible and technology-enabled learning models.
 - **European Integration:** Align with EHEA guidelines on micro-credentials and digital credentialing.
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6. Implementation Framework

To successfully deploy micro-credentials nationwide, Armenia proposes the following phased approach:

Phase I: Policy Development and Stakeholder Engagement

- Develop national standards and descriptors for micro-credentials.
- Consult with universities, employers, and learners to refine the framework.

Phase II: Capacity Building and Program Development

- Train academic staff on micro-credential design and assessment.
- Develop pilot programs aligned with national and sectoral skills strategies.

Phase III: Digital Infrastructure and Recognition Systems

- Establish a digital credential platform integrated with the national qualifications registry.
- Promote recognition and portability of Armenian micro-credentials within and beyond national borders.

Phase IV: Monitoring and Continuous Improvement

- Conduct periodic reviews of program quality, impact, and uptake.
 - Adjust policy and implementation based on feedback and data.
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7. Challenges and Considerations

- **Quality Assurance:** Ensuring rigor and credibility across diverse providers.
 - **Recognition:** Gaining employer and international acceptance of micro-credentials.
 - **Infrastructure:** Developing robust digital systems for credential issuance and tracking.
 - **Funding:** Sustaining institutional innovation and participation.
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8. Policy Recommendations

1. **Enact National Standards** for micro-credential development, including metadata, workload, and assessment criteria.
 2. **Support Universities** in designing micro-credential curricula and integrating them with formal programs.
 3. **Establish a Central Digital Registry** to issue, verify, and manage micro-credentials.
 4. **Foster Industry Partnerships** to co-develop demand-driven micro-credential offerings.
 5. **Align with European Guidelines** to ensure interoperability and global recognition.
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9. Conclusion

Micro-credentials offer Armenia an opportunity to future-proof its education system, enabling learners to thrive in a dynamic global economy. By implementing a comprehensive framework for quality, recognition, and digital infrastructure, Armenia can become a regional leader in agile, skills-based learning.

10. References

- Recommendations and Guidelines on Micro-Credentials; The report was prepared in the terms of the activities of the QUATRA – TPG A Working Group on Micro-Credentials.
- Developments of the MICROBOL Erasmus + project
- Draft Law on Higher Education and Science, Armenia
- Armenian Qualifications Framework
- EHEA Principles and Guidelines on Micro-Credentials
- The 2030 Education Development State Program

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