

Micro-credentials in the international and Italian contexts

European good practices in micro-credentialing

Università Europea di Roma, June 4th 2024

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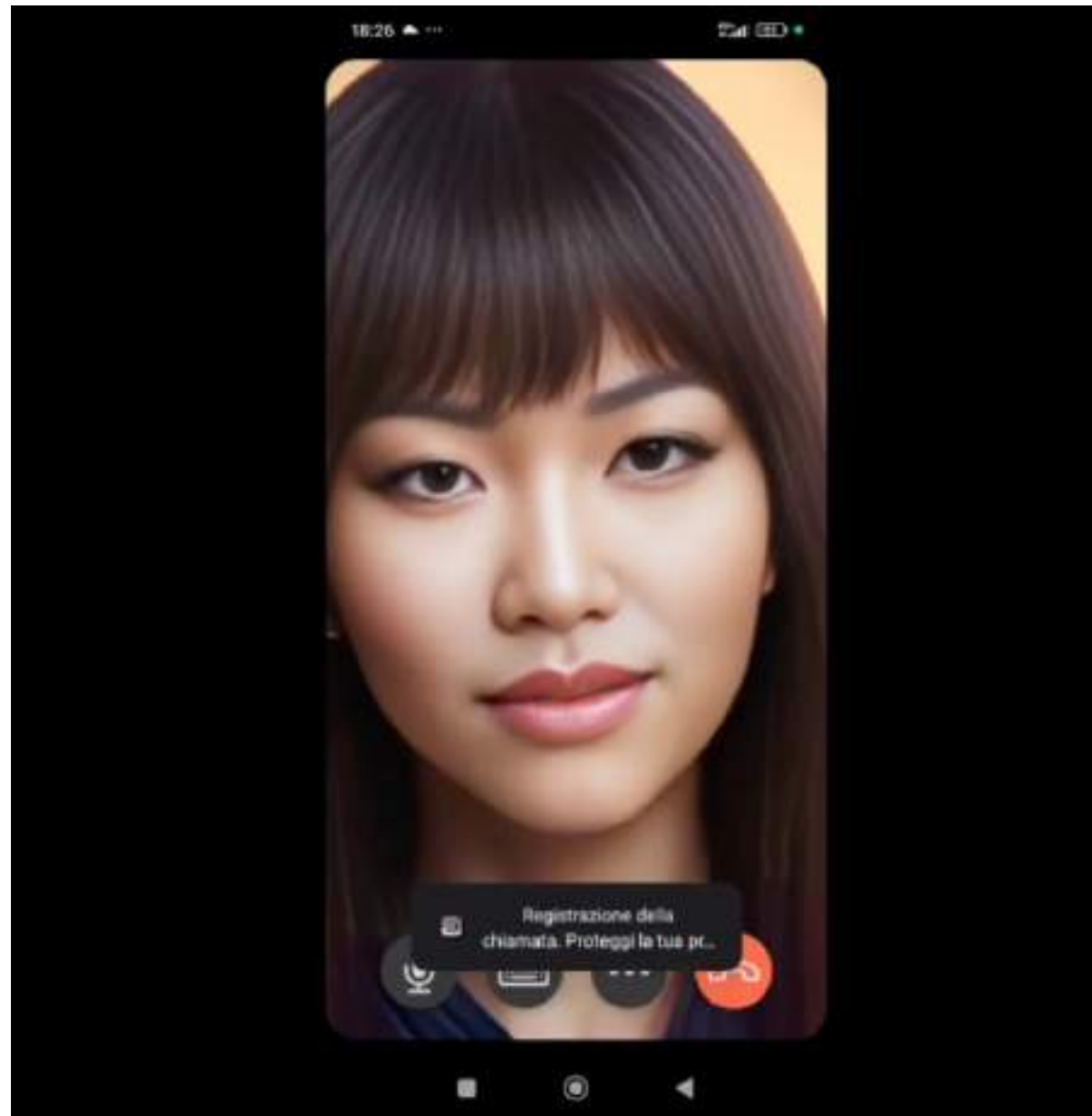
Why international and national policies on micro-credentials?

- Enhancing Workforce Skills
- Increasing Employability
- Promoting Lifelong Learning
- Supporting Innovation and Entrepreneurship
- Strengthening the Education System
- Demographic changes
- Post-covid recovery
- Green and digital transition



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Let's ask to Luna



EU and international perspectives on Micro-credentials



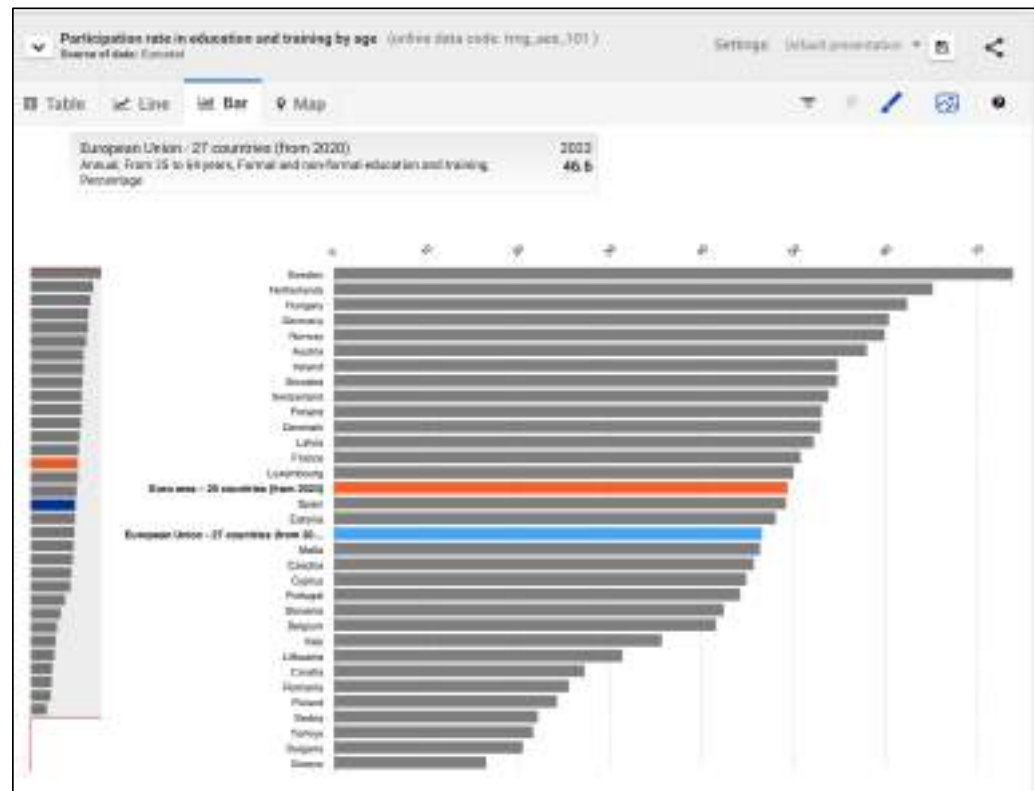
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Why attention on micro-credentials in public policies?

In 2022, the share of people aged 25 to 64 in the EU who had participated in education or training in the previous 12 months was 46.6% (higher than in 2016: 43.7%). The importance of adult learning is reflected in the **EU-level target** that at least 60 % of all adults should be participating in training every year by 2030 ([European Pillar of Social Rights](#)).



Source: <https://initiatives.weforum.org/reskilling-revolution/home>



Source: [Eurostat](#)





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Not a new concept as such...



From short learning experiences...

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- Present in legislation of some European countries: not specific regulation but allows for the provision of micro-credentials (as defined in the [European approach to MCs](#))
- Some examples:
 - Short courses targeted at labour market needs
 - Short courses to gain skills and competences for the teaching profession
 - Single course / module within a full study programme / degree
 - Courses in the framework of Life Long Learning (LLL) and adult education

For an evidence-based approach: [Micro-credentials and Bologna Key Commitments. State of play in the European Higher Education Area](#) (35 countries, February 2021), MICROBOL project

...but a new boost and a shift in the vision



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...to micro-credentials

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A new boost and a shift in the vision:

The learner at the centre, focusing on skills and competences.

- Importance of upskilling and reskilling, according to rapidly evolving skills demand
- Flexibilization and modularisation of HE – not alternative but complementary to full degrees
- Collaboration between HEIs or between HEIs and other education providers
- term 'micro-credentials' to encompass many different terms for the short learning provision in use in the EHEA countries
- standardise micro-credential features to enhance their quality, recognition, portability, relevance and use.
- An opportunity to rethink higher education role in lifelong learning.

The international perspectives on micro-credentials





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European Union



Policy context: European Union / 1

- [European Skills Agenda](#) (June 2020): identifies micro-credentials as a **way to up-skill and re-skill professionals**, to value learning outcomes and to increase permeability and flexibility between different education sectors and pathways.
- [Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027](#) (Sept. 2020): considers micro-credentials a **tool to support the relevance, quality and inclusiveness of European education** and training at all levels.
- [European Education Area](#) (Feb. 2021): micro-credentials are seen as a way to **diversify the student population and to make higher education more inclusive** by 2025 by supporting lifelong learning and providing more flexible and modular learning opportunities.
- The [European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan](#) (2021): micro-credentials as an innovative instrument that 'can facilitate flexible learning pathways and support workers on their job or during professional transitions'.
- [European Approach to micro-credentials](#) (Feb. 2021): a common definition of micro-credentials, presentation of building blocks, and a roadmap of actions for their development and adoption in Europe. Final report delivered in February 2021 by a group of experts established by the European Commission.



Policy context: European Union / 2

- [European strategy for universities](#) (Jan. 2022): micro-credentials as a mean of contribute to professional **reskilling and upskilling** to meet new and emerging needs in society and labour market, and to **develop skills and competences and technological innovation** for the digital and green transition.
- [Council Recommendation of 16 June 2022 on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability](#) (June 2022): a common definition of micro-credentials, sets out actions to develop 'ecosystems for micro-credentials', make recommendations on their use for the benefit of learners, support the development and use of micro-credentials.
- [2023 as the European Year of skills](#).



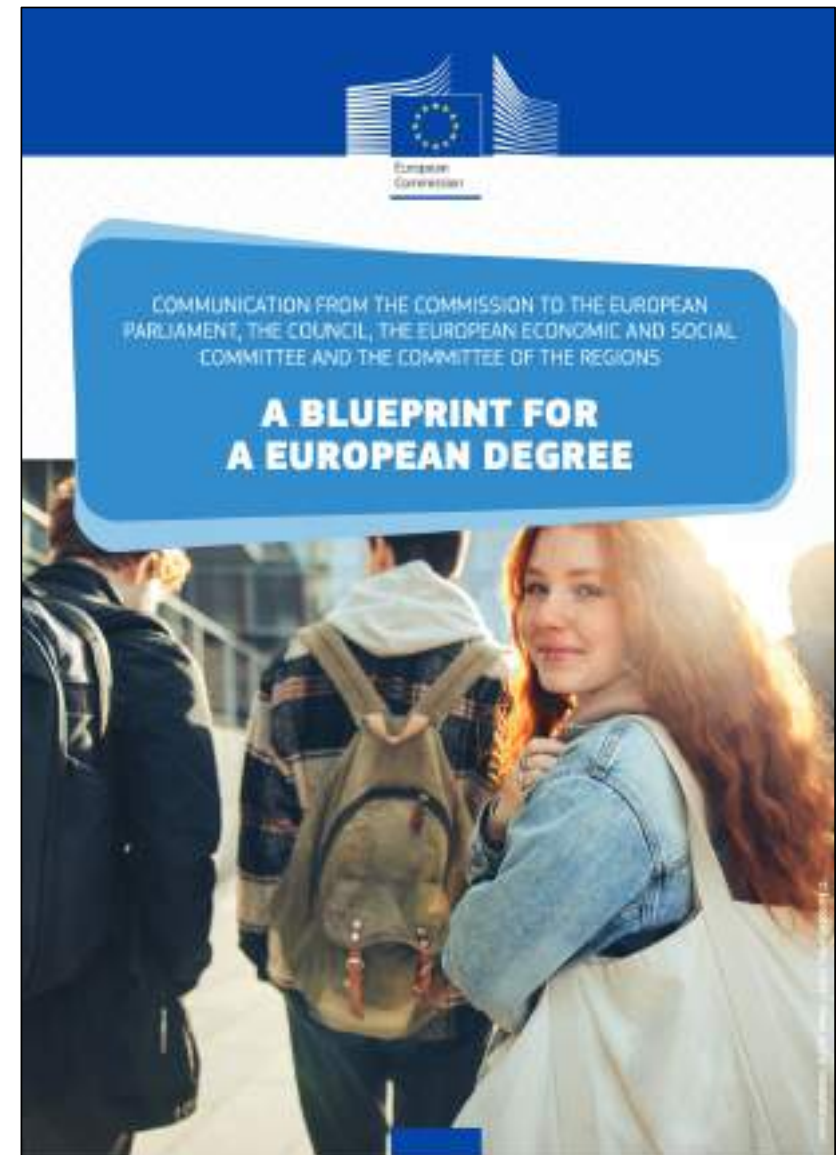
Source: European Union

Policy context: European Union / 3

- Role of [European University Alliances](#) in offering flexible learning opportunities and pathways for any age group, with some leading to micro-credentials
- Proposal for a Council Recommendation '[Europe on the Move](#)' – learning mobility opportunities for everyone: promotion of micro-credentials as an element of the overall strategy for mobility within the European Education Area
- Higher Education Package
 - [Blueprint for European Degree](#)
 - [Proposal for a Council Recommendation on a European Quality Assurance and Recognition System in Higher Education](#)
 - [Proposal for a Council Recommendation on attractive and sustainable careers in higher education](#)



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Source: [European Commission](#)



Source: European Union

Council Recommendation on micro-credentials



- ➔ **WHO:** Council of the European Union
- ➔ **WHAT:** common definition of micro-credentials, actions to create an 'ecosystem for micro-credentials', recommendations on their use for learners, support uptake and developments
- ➔ **WHERE:** European Union
- ➔ **WHEN:** adopted in June 2022
- ➔ **WHY:** upskill and reskill (green and digital transition, post-pandemic recovery), putting all the diversity under a common framework



Objectives



- enabling individuals to **acquire, update and improve the knowledge, skills and competences** they need to thrive in an evolving labour market and society (...)
- supporting the preparedness of providers of micro-credentials to **enhance the quality, transparency, accessibility and flexibility of the learning offering** in order to empower individuals to forge personalised learning and career pathways;
- fostering **inclusiveness, access and equal opportunities** and contributing to the achievement of resilience, social fairness and prosperity for all (...).
- Member States are recommended to use micro-credentials, where appropriate, as a **tool to strengthen and complement existing learning opportunities**, increase participation in **lifelong learning**

Source: [Council Recommendation of 16 June 2022 on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability](#) (2022)



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Definition of micro-credentials



'Micro-credential' means the **record of the learning outcomes** that a learner has acquired following a **small volume of learning**. These learning outcomes 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.



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Source: [Council Recommendation of 16 June 2022 on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability \(2022\)](#)

European Higher Education Area (EHEA)



Source: www.ehea.info



Albania	Kazakhstan
Andorra	Latvia
Armenia	Liechtenstein
Austria	Lithuania
Azerbaijan	Luxembourg
Belgium	Malta
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Moldova
Bulgaria	Montenegro
Croatia	Netherlands
Cyprus	North Macedonia
Czech Republic	Norway
Denmark	Poland
Estonia	Portugal
Finland	Romania
France	San Marino
Georgia	Serbia
Germany	Slovakia
Greece	Slovenia
Holy See	Spain
Hungary	Sweden
Iceland	Switzerland
Ireland	Türkiye
Italy	Ukraine
	United Kingdom

Rome Ministerial Communiqué, 2020

«Flexible and open learning paths, part of the original inspiration for the Bologna Process, are important aspects of **student-centred learning** and are in increasing demand in our societies. In addition to full degree programmes, many higher education institutions offer or plan to offer **smaller units of learning**, which enable learners to develop or update their cultural, professional, and transversal skills and competences at various stages in their lives. We ask the BFUG to explore how and to what extent these **smaller, flexible units, including those leading to micro-credentials**, can be defined, developed, implemented and recognised by our institutions using EHEA tool» (Rome Communiqué, Nov. 2020)



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Tirana Ministerial Communiqué, 2024

«The need for **Lifelong learning** in society is increasing, especially for all those requiring or desiring new competences to enhance their professional, personal or civic potential. Learning paths need to be flexible, properly delivered, quality assured, and recognised. They should promote inclusion, upskilling and reskilling, and be aligned with the requirements of learners, changing societies and labour markets. This also includes the recognition of prior learning, and new forms of education provision, such as **micro-credentials**. We commit to fostering such **flexible learning** paths in all higher education programmes» (Tirana Communiqué, May. 2024).



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A global perspective

Towards a common definition of micro-credentials

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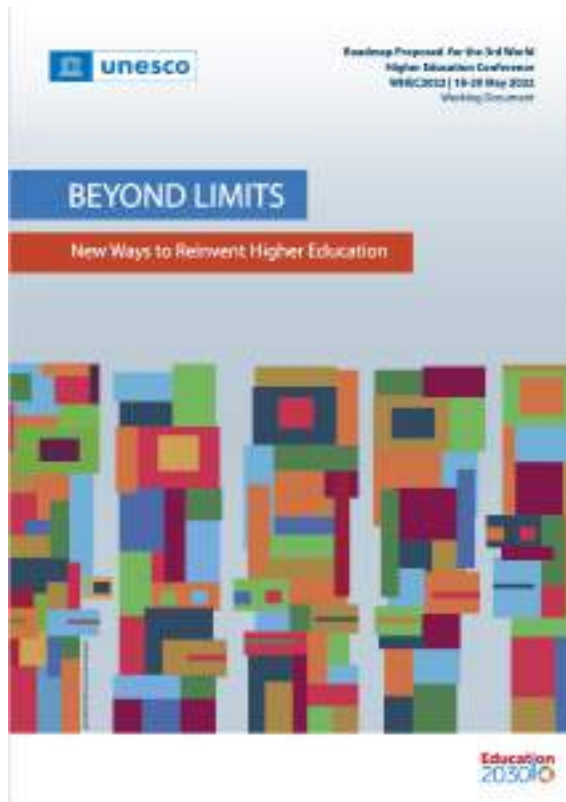
- Policy analysis: where are we at with micro-credentials?
- Towards a shared definition of micro-credentials
- The proposed definition of micro-credentials
- Conclusion and next steps

Definition:

- Is a record of **focused learning achievement** verifying what the learner knows, understands or can do.
- Includes **assessment** based on clearly defined standards and is awarded by a trusted provider.
- Has **standalone value** and may also contribute to or complement other micro-credentials or macro-credentials, including through recognition of prior learning.
- Meets the standards required by relevant **quality assurance**.

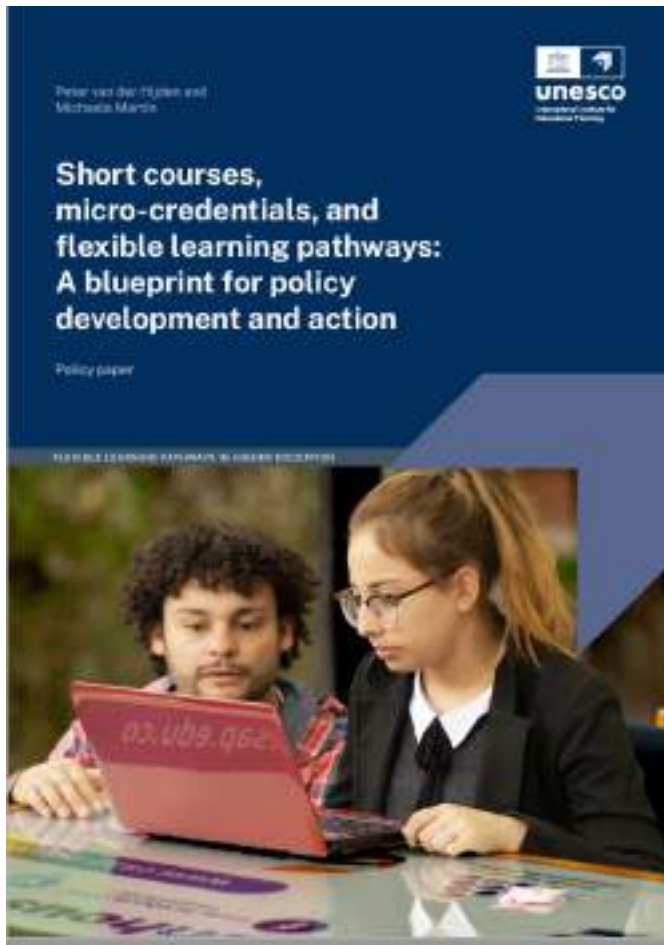
Beyond limits

New ways to reinvent Higher Education



- Lifelong learning approach, aimed at serving the diverse education needs of youth and adults, is one of the six major challenges that need to be overcome in reinventing Higher Education, according to the Roadmap proposed for the UNESCO 3rd World Higher Education Conference on 18-20 May 2022 "[Beyond limits. New ways to reinvent Higher Education](#)"
- Flexible learning pathways, recognition, mobility, and internationalization are one of the 9 ways to navigate towards 2030.

A blueprint for policy and action



- Why
- Definition
- Challenges
- Who does what?
- Global developments – experiences from European and OECD countries, and from developing and emerging countries

Global Convention on recognition



➤ Qualification:

- (a) **Higher-education qualification:** any degree, diploma, certificate, or award issued by a competent authority and attesting the successful completion of a higher-education programme or the validation of prior learning, where applicable
- (b) Qualification giving access to higher education [...]

➤ Recognition: a formal acknowledgment by a competent recognition authority of the validity and academic level of a foreign education qualification, of partial studies, or of prior learning for the purpose of providing an applicant with outcomes including, but not limited to:

- (a) the right to apply for admission to higher education; and/or
- (b) the possibility to seek employment opportunities

Article VI. Recognition of Partial Studies and Prior Learning

Italy and micro-credentials: policies and projects



Useful elements for a national dialogue

Novelty: not as a training programme offered but, in the identification and categorization of the what is offered.

Recognition: micro-credentials are included in in the definition of "qualification" as provided by the LRC, therefore the same principles should be applied.

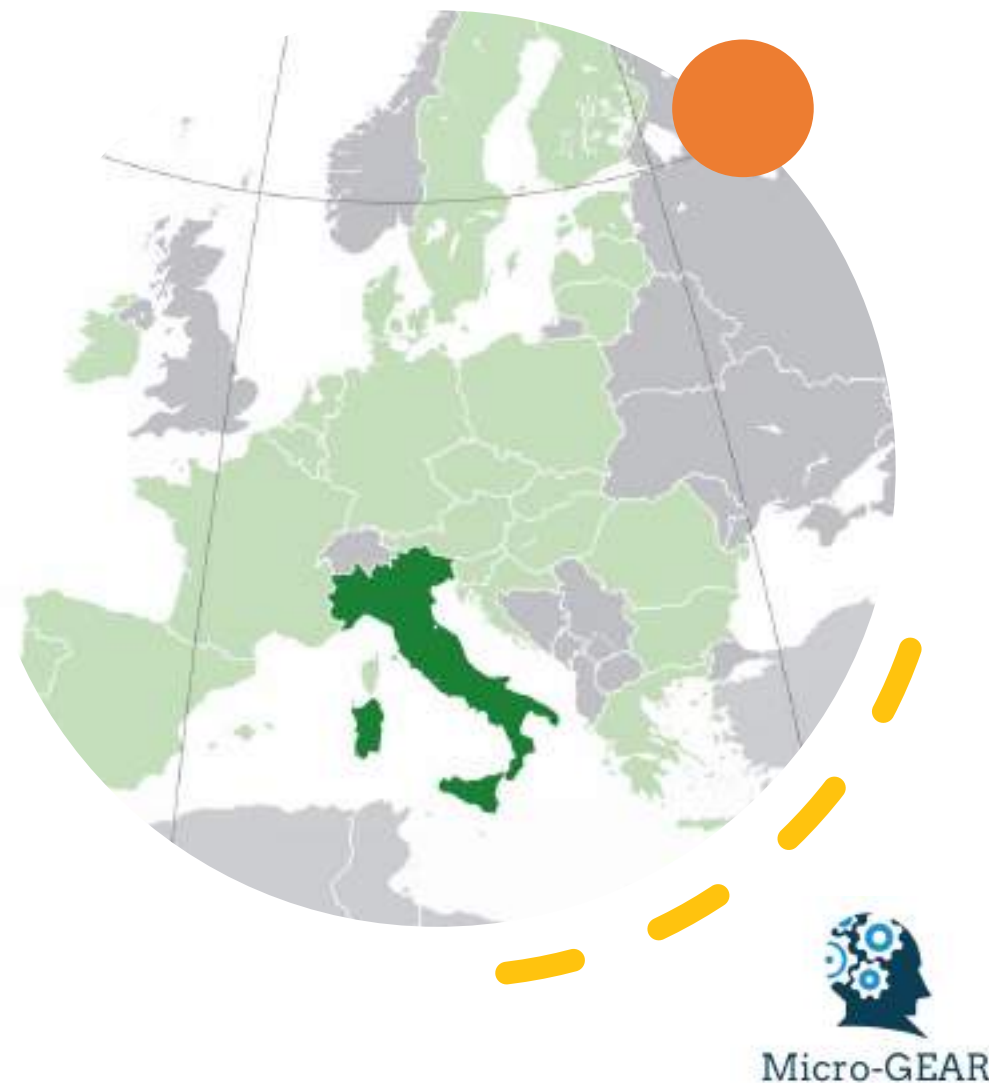
Central aspect of a micro-credential: learning outcomes.

Quality Assurance: adoption of different criteria than the one used for other courses.

Level: being based on learning outcomes, we could refer to different EQF level.

Difference with other qualifications: lack of academic and professional rights.

Opportunities for HEIs: not only for issuing and organization, but for supporting of the enterprises for the correct identification and "decoding" of the learning outcomes, the "weight" of the micro-credential and of their certification.



MicroBOL - Micro-credentials linked to the Bologna Key Commitments



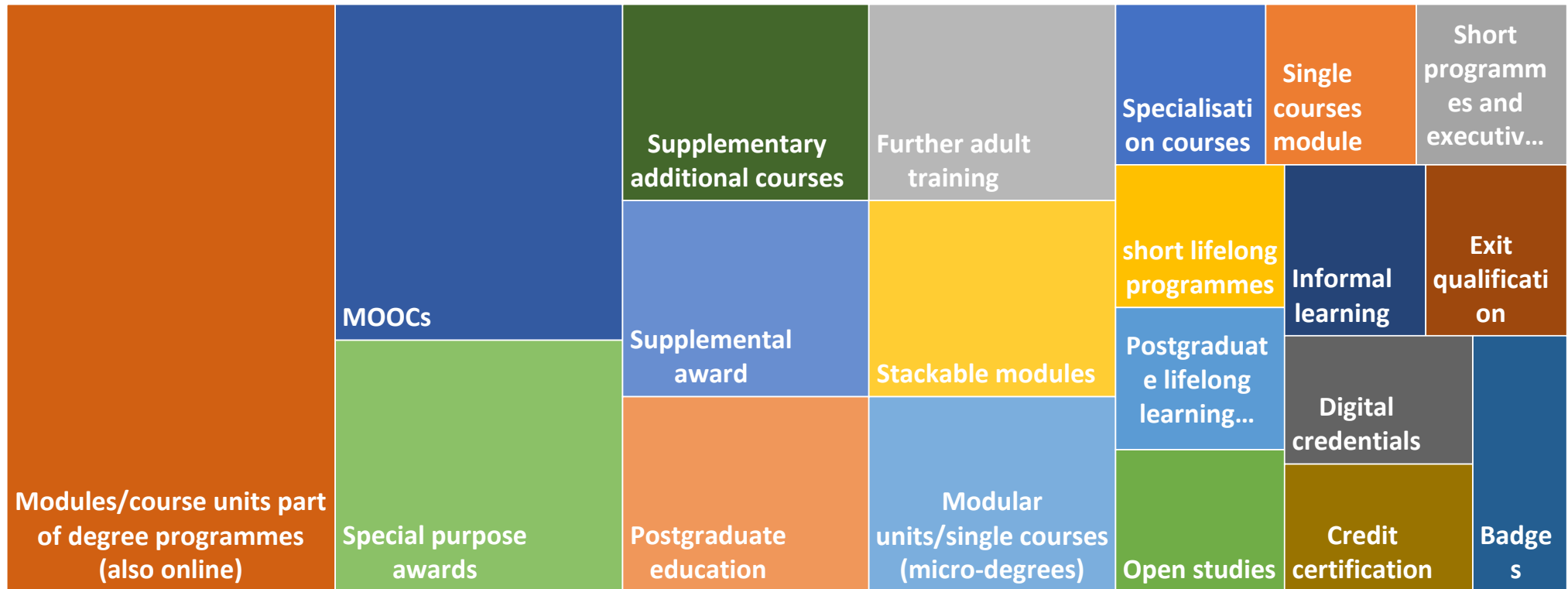
Source: microcredentials.eu

- **Goal:** explore whether and how the existing Bologna tools can be used and/or need to be adapted to be applicable to micro-credentials in QA, recognition, ECTS and QF
- **Outcomes:**
 - [Desk research report on micro-credentials](#) (August 2020)
 - [Report on the state of play of micro-credentials](#) in the European Higher Education Area (February 2021)
 - [Recommendations](#) from the MICROBOL project for the European Commission's proposal for a Council recommendation on micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability (July 2021)
 - Common [Framework for Micro-credentials](#) in the EHEA (March 2022)

Diversity as a strength – need for common understanding and approach



Examples of micro-credentials offered/recognised by HEIs



What is the current situation?

Focus on:

- Qualification Frameworks and ECTS
- Lisbon Recognition Convention and recognition
- Quality Assurance



5 key words to wrap up / 1

- **Life-long learning.** The effort to put all life-long learning diversity together and re-conceptualising it into a coherent and more understandable and verifiable whole, that is meant to complement, and not to substitute, full degrees. Micro-credentials are not a goal in themselves but are at the service of the educational and professional development of individuals.
- **Cooperation within HEIs** at international level to co-construct micro-credentials, but also within higher education, other public authorities, the other sector of society, and the labour market at international level but also within the same system
- **Digitalization of credentials supports recognition**, as it enables portability, transparency and reliability of information and verification of authenticity.



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5 key words to wrap up / 2

- **Transparency and information provision:** transparent information provision is key to support recognition of all higher education qualifications, and micro-credentials as well.
- **Recognition (strictly interrelated with Qualifications Frameworks and ECTS):** If all the constitutive elements are properly displayed, it is possible to assess such micro-credentials in line with the Lisbon Recognition Convention principles. If not, recognition is still possible, by using a RPL-procedure (recognition of prior learning and validation of non-formal and informal learning).



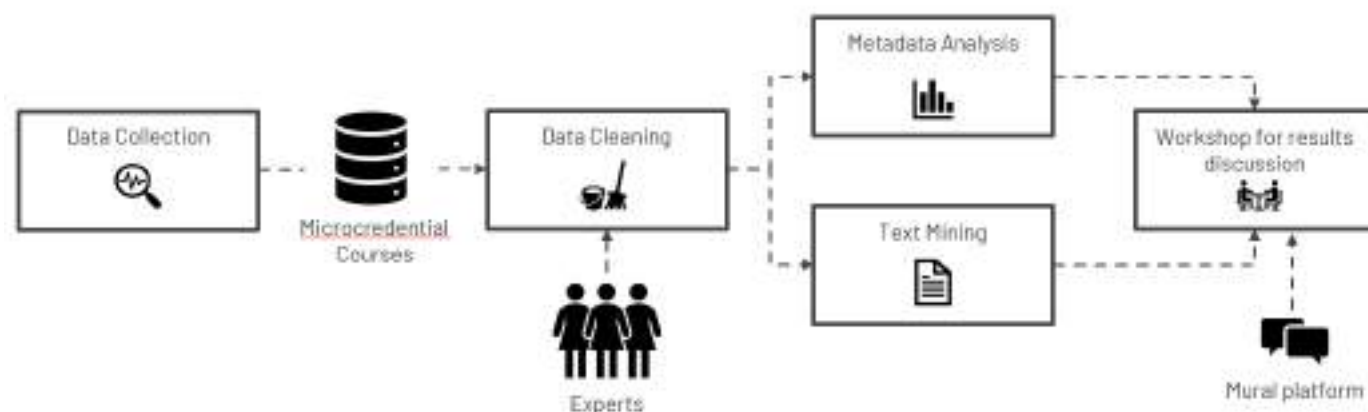


MARTe objectives

- **Goal:** support the implementation of the Council Recommendation on promoting automatic recognition and this will be achieved by seeking the **specific objective** of verifying the practical application of automatic recognition to micro-credentials
- **Focus on:**
 - Learning outcomes
 - Involvement of a non-academic actor
- **Working on:**
 - Text mining
 - Pilot

Text-mining technology applied to the repositories of micro-credentials

Identification of common patterns in learning outcomes acquired through micro-credentials



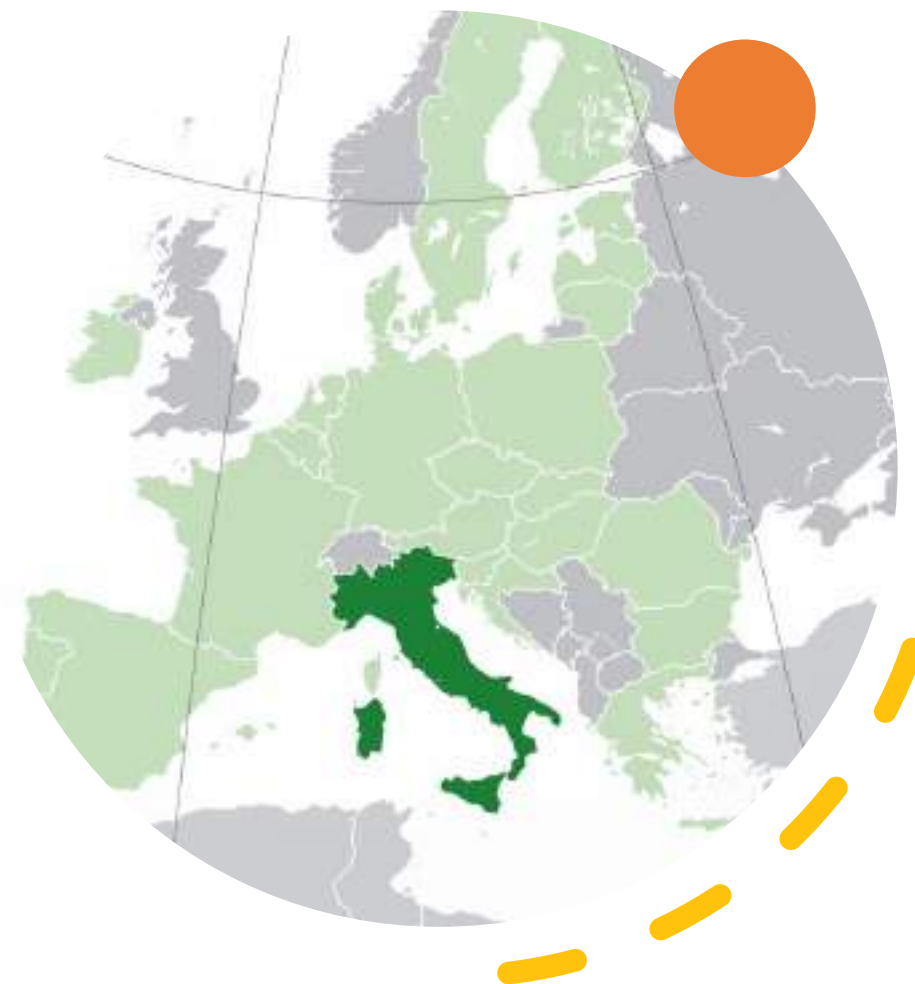
Professional academic courses

Certificates/ final diploma (Professional Certificates) are established by Art. 6, Law 341/1990 and Art.1,, paragraph 15, Law 4/1999, currently into practice.

Issuance of certificates related to the **accomplishment of individual examinations** or based on the **performance of a certain number of credits** (part of an ordinary path)

Lifelong learning pathways

Professional update



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Conclusions



- It should not be too prescriptive, so as to allow for innovation and flexibility
- Fostering trust and transparency, and preserving flexibility



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Thank you!

