

EU Council Recommendation on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability: *the way in which it supported policies and activities in the EU countries*

Workshop: EU Council Recommendation – Practice of implementation

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Micro-GEAR



Council Recommendation on micro-credentials

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

C 243/10	EN	Official Journal of the European Union	27.6.2022
COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION of 16 June 2022 on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability (2022/C 243/02)			
THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,			
Having regard to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, and in particular Articles 149 and 292, 165 and 166 thereof,			
Having regard to the proposal from the European Commission,			
Whereas:			
1. Within Europe, a growing number of people need to update and improve their knowledge, skills and competences to fill the gap between their formal education and training and the needs of a fast-changing society and labour market. The recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and the digital and green transitions have accelerated the pace of change in how we live, learn and work. They have also highlighted the need for people to be better equipped to deal with current and future challenges. The pandemic has affected the career prospects of both young people and adults. It has also increased unemployment and damaged the physical, mental and emotional well-being of hundreds of millions of people in Europe.			
2. One of the major challenges facing European businesses and employers is an insufficient supply of relevant skills in the EU labour market. Simultaneously, workers are facing unprecedented changes in how work is organized. In addition, task profiles and skills requirements are changing fundamentally due to the digital and green transitions. As outlined in Council Decision (EU) 2021/1868 of 15 October 2021 on guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States ⁽¹⁾ , Member States and the Union are to work towards developing a coordinated strategy for employment and particularly for promoting a skilled, trained and adaptable workforce, as well as labour markets that are future-oriented and responsive to economic change. Continuous upskilling and reskilling are essential for workers to respond to the needs of their current job or to transition to new jobs and expanding sectors, such as the green and digital sectors, in particular in the context of demographic ageing.			
3. People need access to quality teaching and learning provided in different ways and settings, to develop their personal, social, cultural and professional knowledge, skills and competences. There have been calls for education and training systems to become more flexible and to find solutions to deliver more learner-centred, accessible and inclusive learning to a wider range of profiles. Non-formal providers of education and training are also addressing this need by providing new and innovative opportunities for upskilling and reskilling.			
4. An effective culture of lifelong learning is key to ensuring that everyone has the knowledge, skills and competences they need to thrive in society, the labour market and their personal lives. It is essential that people can access quality and relevant education and training, upskilling and reskilling throughout their lives. Lifelong learning opportunities should be part of the long-term strategy of education and training institutions to improve their responsiveness to the fast-changing needs of employers and learners. This would enable a more diverse body of learners (including graduates of these institutions and other adult learners) to upskill and reskill. It is recommended that higher education institutions, vocational education and training (VET) institutions, adult learning providers and other providers of micro-credentials, including employers, cooperate and integrate the latest research findings in the design and update of learning opportunities.			
⁽¹⁾ OJ L 379, 26.10.2021, p. 1.			

Source: European Union



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)

Why micro-credentials?

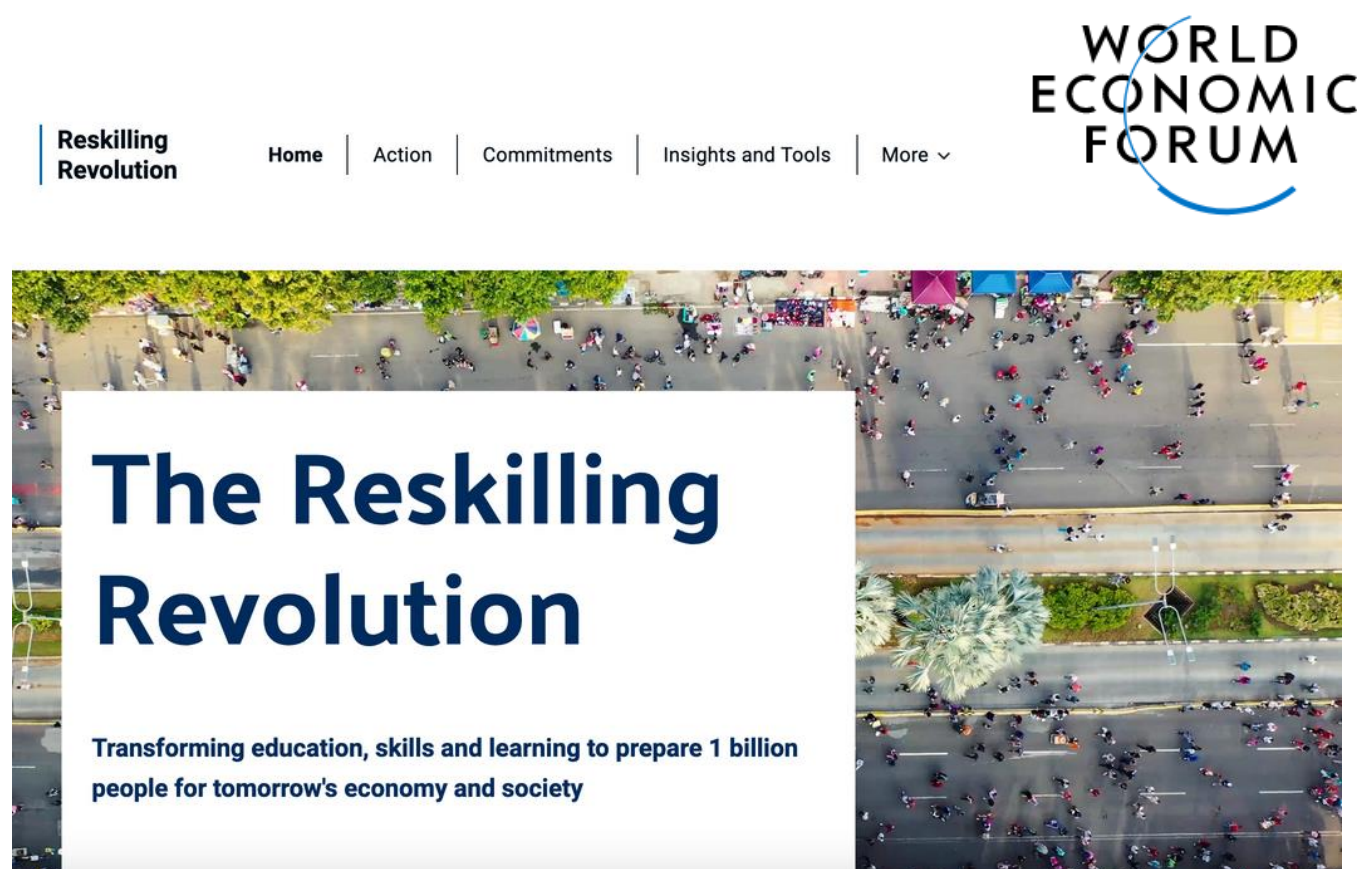


Micro-GEAR

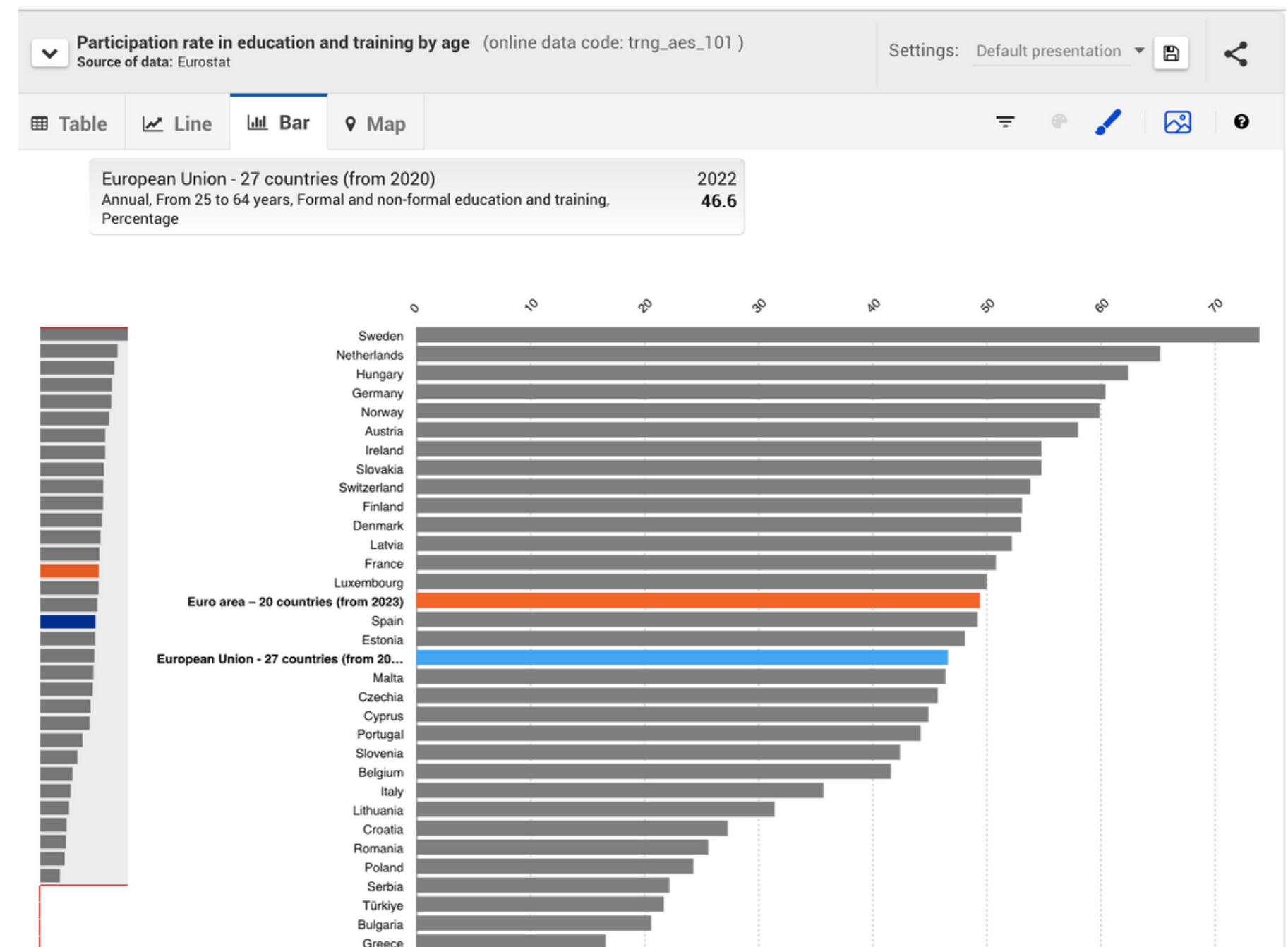
Micro-credentials to support the general right to participate in society

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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](#)

Why international and national policies on micro-credentials?

- Enhancing Workforce Skills
- Increasing Employability
- Promoting Lifelong Learning
- Strengthen the Education System
- Demographic changes
- Supporting Innovation and Entrepreneurship

Not a new concept as such...



From short learning experiences...

- 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
- Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs)

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



...to micro-credentials

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- Upskilling and reskilling, according to 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
- Standardise micro-credential definition and features to enhance their quality, recognition, portability, relevance and use.
- An opportunity to rethink higher education role in lifelong learning.



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Some national good practices

Germany



Platform
for cooperation

Ireland



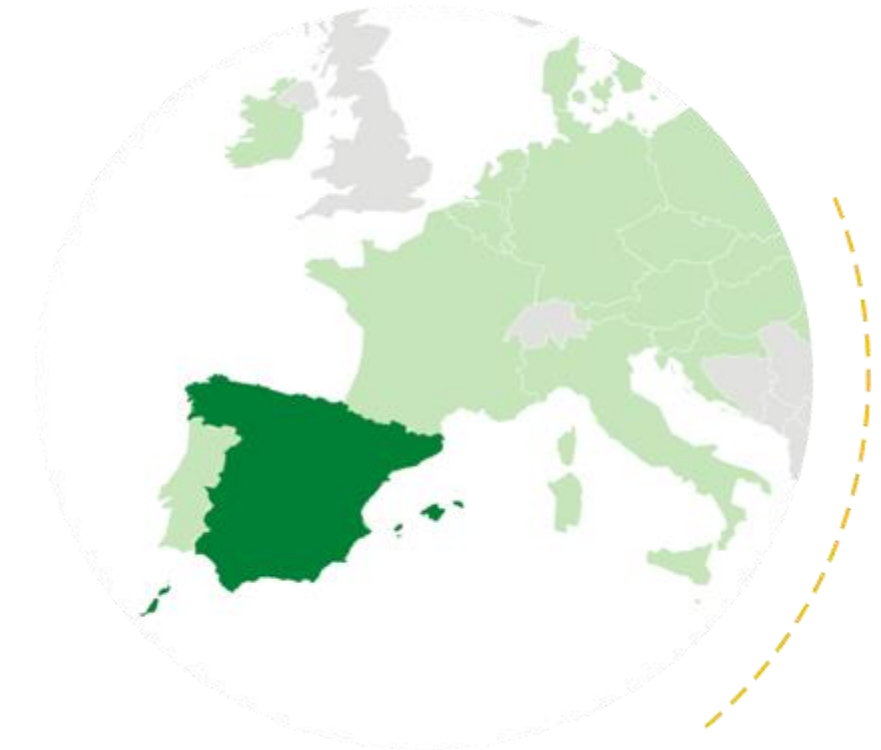
Funding
scheme

Italy



National
Qualifications
Framework

Spain



National Action
Plan



Micro-credentials in Germany: background

- The well functioning binary system generated reluctance to create a national policy on micro-credentials
- The recognition as a VET supplement is as responsibility of the companies and/or other regular issuers of VET certifications
- In HE the classification of micro-credentials remains uncertain
- Germany have established portals that provide comprehensive information about courses leading to micro-credential. These platforms serve as models for how micro-credentials can be made more accessible and comparable across national borders

Haseloff, Gesine (2023). Case study Germany: Microcredentials for labour market education and training. First look at mapping microcredentials in European labour-market-related education, training and learning: take-up, characteristics and functions. Thessaloniki: Cedefop.



Micro-credentials : German digital platform

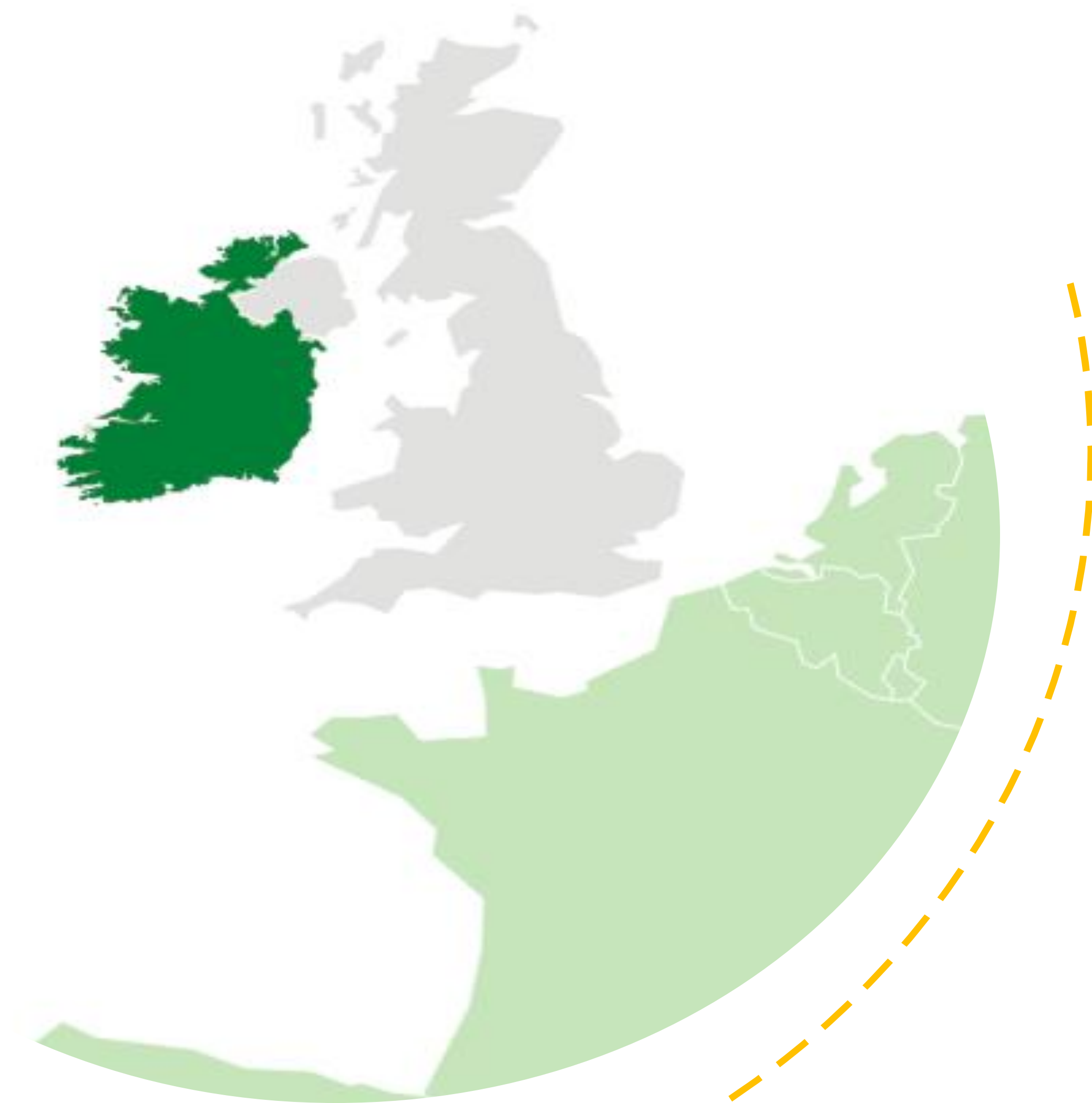
Atingi provides access to learning content and LLL opportunities throughout the African continent, where this remains a challenge.

- by the Federal Industry for Economic cooperation and development in cooperation with Smart Africa
- based on the IMS Global Open Badge Standard
- quality-assured by packaging earner, issuer, criteria required, and evidence of competence demonstration into digital badges that can be verified and validated.

Benefits for:

- geographic remoteness, lack of financial resources and marginalised groups

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Micro-Credentials in Ireland: background

- Ireland has a high rate of employment, with only 4.1% unemployment (for all persons aged 15-74 years) in August 2023.
- This means that many employers face skills shortages.
- At the same time, a substantial proportion of Irish workers (41% of all adults over the age of 20 in 2022) does not have a qualification above Level 5 on the NFQ.
- Together with the rapidly-changing nature of work, this means that many Irish workers need to upskill, reskill and make their skills more visible, in order to meet the demands of industry.

Source: [Hawley Woodall, J. \(2024\). European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2023 update: Case study: micro-credentials \(Ireland\). European Commission and Cedefop.](#)

Micro-Credentials: main current policies in Ireland

The national strategy for Higher Education (HE) states that it must be characterised by flexibility and innovation [Department of Education \(2019\). National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030.](#)

[The national strategy for Further Education and Training \(FET\)](#) highlights the importance of, “modular, micro and ‘bite sized’ offerings to meet specific up-skilling needs”. It identifies a role for ‘microcredentialing and digital badging’ in providing flexible, accessible upskilling opportunities to employees and enterprises, and in promoting lifelong learning.

Source: [Hawley Woodall, J. \(2024\). European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2023 update: Case study: micro-credentials \(Ireland\).](#)

[European Commission and Cedefop.](#)

MicroCreds project funding scheme



The MicroCreds Project was awarded funding following a competitive process under the **Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science's** (DFHERIS) Human Capital Initiative, Pillar 3, Innovation and Agility, with funding drawn from the National Training Fund.

The objective of the **Human Capital Initiative** (HCI) is to underpin the provision of additional capacity across the Higher Education Sector to meet priority skill needs for enterprise.

<https://microcreds.ie>

MicroCreds project



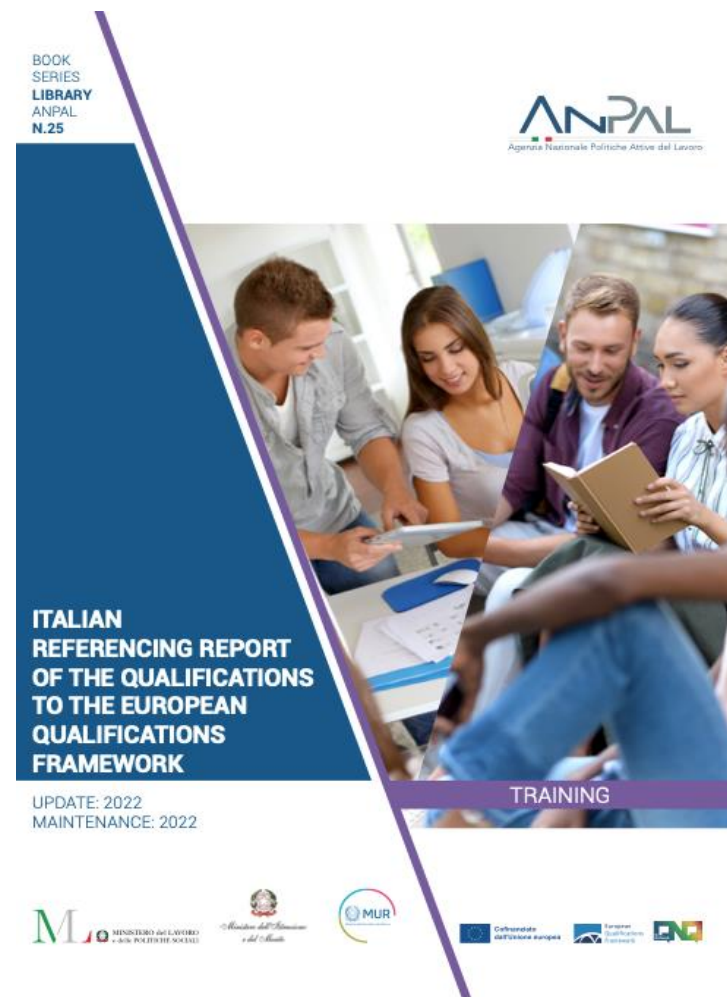
MicroCreds is a five-year, EUR 12.3 million project (2020-2025) led by the Irish Universities Association (IUA) in partnership with seven universities. These main partners also collaborate with learners and an Enterprise Advisory Group. Through the project, the partners aim to:

- establish a **National Framework** for quality assured and accredited microcredentials in HE,
- develop a sustainable model for data-informed collaboration between universities and enterprise: **MicroCreds Innovate**,
- create a **Discovery Platform** linked to a digital credentialing solution,
- develop and deliver **a suite of micro-credentials** across partner universities.

Source: <https://microcreds.ie>



Micro-qualifications in Italy



In the ['Italian Referencing Report on the qualifications to the European Qualifications Framework'](#) 'Micro-qualifications' are *'qualifications composed of one or more competences, as part of a broader qualification, issued at the end of short-term and modular (also flexible and personalized) learning pathways'*.

It is signed by by the Ministers of Labour, Education, and Higher Education.

Observatory on Micro-Credentials in Italy

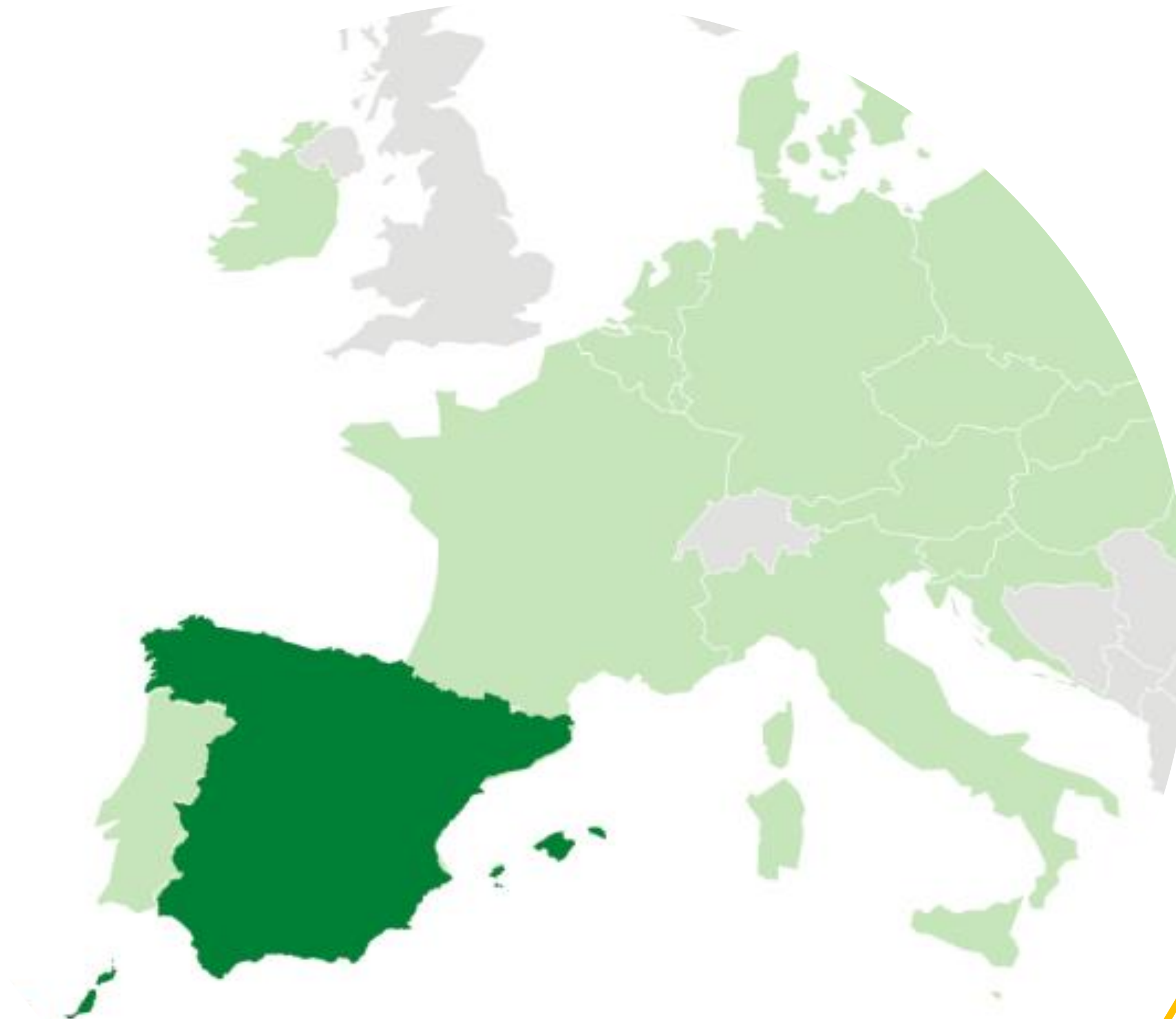
In December 2023, the Ministry of University and Research (MUR) in Italy issued a call for proposals to establish three Digital Education Hubs as part of the Next Generation EU initiative.

It is part of the Recovery, Transformation, and Resilience Plan.

Each Hub aims to serve 20% of the Higher Education student population, which amounts to 400,000 students per Hub.

One requirement of the call is the establishment of an Observatory on Micro-Credentials that will be coordinated among the three Digital Education Hubs.

<https://deh-pnrr.mur.gov.it>



Plan Microcreds in Spain

[Plan Microcreds](#) is a comprehensive initiative that includes significant financial support and a clear framework for the implementation of micro-credentials.

This initiative, developed by the Ministry of Universities, is a key component of the country's broader Recovery, Transformation, and Resilience Plan.

The Spanish government has allocated a substantial fund of 50 million euros to support this programme.

The “Plan Microcreds” has several primary objectives:

1. Finance the development of micro-credentials
2. Provide scholarships and assistance to vulnerable groups, including:
 - o Unemployed individuals
 - o Low-income earners
 - o Socially vulnerable populations
3. Foster stronger connections between universities and productive sectors



Plan Microcreds in Spain: definition

Spain established the requirement of micro-credentials including:

- references to learning outcomes
- assessment requirements
- required elements as part of the certificate
- ECTS
- N/EQF level
- target audience
- quality assurance
- modularity
- accreditation

Conclusions

- A range of **opportunities and challenges** that policymakers must carefully consider.
- Diversity of **national approaches** and lack of national policies has a negative impact on attempts to recognise certifications.
- It is essential that they are both **affordable and accessible**.
- **QA** mechanisms, **accreditation** processes and their dissemination through national or international **portals** would enhance transparency and comparability.
- **Two-tier systems** (HE and VET) is likely to create challenges in establishing consistent policies at both national and regional levels.
- There are numerous unresolved questions regarding the role of **alternative providers**, such as industry, tech companies, and the services sector, in the development and accreditation of micro-credentials.

5 key recommendations

to enhance the effectiveness of micro-credentials and assist national governments in developing robust policies

OECD 2023

- Clarifying purpose and target population
- Sustainable funding
- Quality Assurance and Recognition
- Articulation between education levels
- Information and dissemination

Source: [OECD \(2023b\). Public policies for effective micro-credential learning. Paris. doi.](#)



Thank you!

