## Reporting of the Recognition Working Group
## Online, 21.01.21

In the morning of the first meeting of the Working Group on Recognition, the MICROBOL project coordinator gave an update on the current state of play of the project; after this the European Commission Report on micro-credentials "A European approach to micro-credentials" and the survey "Micro-credentials and Bologna Key Commitments - State of play in the European Higher Education Area" were presented to introduce the work of the day. All the presentations are available on the project's website, at this link.

During the first meeting of the Recognition working group, two rounds of discussion in groups were organized to further discuss national policies and approaches towards micro-credentials and to highlight the existing challenges, on the recognition side, with micro-credentials. The work of the groups was first stimulated by the panel of the experts (Ann Katherine Isaacs, Frederik De Decker and Peter van der Hijden), who commented the results of the "Micro-credentials and Bologna Key Commitments - State of play in the European Higher Education Area" survey. The three experts pointed out the following aspects to feed the discussion of the Working Group:

- A relatively low number of respondents to the survey recognize micro-credentials for the purpose of access to HE; micro-credentials are, indeed, a key to inclusion for learners that, for many reasons, do not enroll in full-degree programs, or wish to enrich them;
- A larger proportion, but still not the majority of respondents pointed out that they do not recognize micro-credentials from providers other than HEIs; in this project, the emphasis is on higher education, but it is relevant to see the synergies that can be developed between HEIs and other providers in a framework of trust and security;
- From the first WG it was clear that Bologna tools are applicable to micro-credentials, but the survey indicates their implementation at the national level has until now not always been put into practice:
  - Fig. 9 in the survey shows that micro-credentials are not or not always expressed in ECTS even if the ECTS Users' Guide, that is an official EHEA document, explicitly indicates that students and learners can achieve learning outcomes through informal and non-formal learning, and that these can be recognized accordingly;
  - Fig. 11 in the survey shows that many countries have not yet developed explicit policies related to the recognition of micro-credentials, but in the Lisbon Recognition Convention arrangements are offered not only for the recognition of full degrees but for periods of study as well;
- There is a distinction between "recognizable" and "recognized" which is due to the distinction between "access" and "admission"; one key element to go from "recognizable" to "recognized" is transparency in information provision.

The conclusions made by the experts were that micro-credentials give us the possibility to build a more free, more diversified and inclusive learning experience. Furthermore there are challenges related to the full implementation of the existing Bologna tools.

The experts' input part was followed by the first session of discussion in groups which focused on national state of the art and gave the possibility for each country to further illustrate and explain their answer to the MICROBOL survey.

In the afternoon, the participants shared their experiences in the groups, discussing the challenges related to the recognition of micro-credentials that they see at national level and that are to be envisaged. Please find here the principal ones:

- Need for revision of the legal framework related to micro-credentials at national level;
- In principle, micro-credentials are recognizable, but Bologna tools have to be used and in place (at the national level);
- Transparent information provision is among the keys to recognition and must include the elements that are needed for recognition and this should be addressed both to higher education institutions and to non-formal providers;
- ENIC-NARICs, as a network, should be involved in the developments related to micro-credentials and review existing practices, in order to contribute to setting common criteria;
- A how-to-do guide could be developed on how to give information and which information is to be given (main target higher education institutions);
- Recognition of prior learning is a tool that can be applied to micro-credentials but it should be proportioned to workload of micro-credentials in order not to be a too heavy measure;
- The real challenge is related to stand-alone micro-credentials rather than to micro-credentials that are part of a full-degree program, especially for those awarded by non-formal providers;
- Linked to the last bullet point, the level of micro-credentials and their stackability has also been highlighted as a challenge; on this, also the need of coordination with Higher Education Institutions was raised.

After the reports from the three parallel sessions, conclusions were made by summing up the most relevant aspects of the day that will also provide the starting material for our next working group meeting, to be held on 11 May 2021.

Here are the topics touched upon during the conclusive part of the meeting:

- Consensus on the possibility of recognizing micro-credentials;
- The importance of recognition of micro-credentials for access purposes with the aim of enhancing the inclusive nature of higher education;
- The importance of transparency of the information provided on micro-credentials;
- The importance of effective and proportionate QA;
- The possibility of elaborating guidelines for information provision on micro-credentials;
- The need for a common definition to be used when addressing the topic of micro-credential and the need for it to be as inclusive as possible;
- Stackability is a responsibility of HEIs but it would be interesting to discuss this topic with HEIs and registrars.

*Last update 05/03/2021*