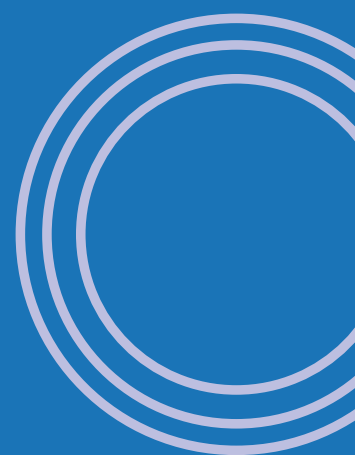


Declaration on Improving the Flexibility and Responsiveness of Educational Systems through Micro-Credentials in Europe.

March 2023

Barcelona, Spain



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Context

The *International Micro-Credential Summit* held in Barcelona in March 2023 brought together key stakeholders of the international micro-credential community to discuss the current state and visions for education and employment in Europe. **With the support of by 110 practitioners, policymakers as well as thought-leaders from 70 public to private entities** who attended the Micro-Credentials Masterclass, **this declaration calls upon European governments, educational institutions, accreditation authorities, learner representatives and employers** to respond to the challenges of societal transformation and technological disruption with more flexible opportunities for micro-learning.

Strategic Leadership

We already know a great deal about effective educational leadership and that **top-down change initiatives are doomed to fail**. Similarly, there is a crucial difference between transactional and transformational leadership. This difference highlights the importance of being intentional about who leads institutional micro-credential strategies.

While the private sector has responded at scale in addressing societal challenges, conventional public education systems in Higher Education and Vocational Education and Training are lagging. As this creates a risk of segmentation of education systems, the following recommendations seek to **reinforce the role of formal education institutions in enabling the public right to education**.

Given this, institutional leaders are called to:

- Massively increase their roll-out of micro-credentialing - every institution should analyse how micro-credentials can contribute to their overall strategic goals and **implement an appropriate strategy**.
- Contribute to closing the knowledge and skills gaps in Europe through **cross-sectoral collaboration** in the design and improvement of micro-credentials.
- **Widen access** to Europe's education systems and standards (such as, but not only through, entrance-level micro-credential courses) to sustain the relevance of formal education during the transformation of our economies.

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Policymakers are called to:

- Accelerate the **alignment of micro-credentials with qualification frameworks** as indicated by the *European Union Council Recommendation on a European Approach to Micro-Credentials*.
- Organise sector-wide and cross-sectoral **knowledge building initiatives** to facilitate cooperation and coordination in micro-credentialing.

Digital Transformation and Interoperability

There is significant room for advancing digital credentialing in Europe - none of the largest micro-credential platforms are based inside the European Education Area (EEA). Learners inside the EEA still do not typically receive a digital credential in a secure, verifiable, open standard format, which undermines mobility and the recognition of skills and qualifications.

Acknowledging that digital transformation is a journey that should *#leavenonebehind*, institutions might move along this journey at a different pace but with **explicit, transparent roadmaps**. The policy scaffolding is in place for technology to be widely available but the inertia of current practice is slow to **embrace adoption of digital credentials and recognition technologies**.

The following recommendations prescribe how micro-credential platforms should **avoid succumbing to silos** at the cost of interoperability, portability and the ability to stack credentials from various providers.

Micro-credential platforms and learning providers are called to:

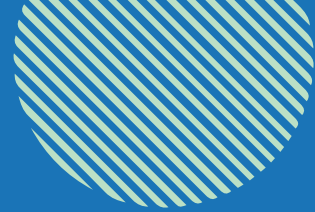
- **Provide transparent information on micro-credentials** along the lines of *Annex I of the European Union Council Recommendation on a European Approach to Micro-Credentials*.
- Award digital credentials to learners using **open-source standards** based on *W3C Verifiable Credentials* and *European Digital Credentials for Learning*.
- **Enable interoperability** by allowing learners to share micro-credentials digitally across different educational, job and/or other platforms.

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Policymakers are called to:

- Incentivise **the growth of European micro-credential portals** which promote European quality standards¹.
- Incentivise the **accelerated adoption of trusted, open-source digital credential technologies** based on *W3C Verifiable Credentials* and *European Digital Credentials for Learning* which enable (i) learners to be sovereign owners of the digitalised credential and (ii) interoperability as the credential may be shared across different educational, job or other platforms as well as be verified automatically.

Recognition

There is a wide variety of understanding around quality assurance in the context of micro-credentials offered on the market, making it difficult to understand the quality standards and especially the level of knowledge and skills attained by micro-credential holders. Specific courses are usually tied to individual platforms, and information about their quality is often limited or entirely unavailable.

Given this, learning providers are called to:

- Design micro-credentials with **learning outcomes** described with **skill and competency taxonomies**², aligned with qualification frameworks¹, as well as appropriate learning design and **valid assessment methods**.
- **Share data on quality assurance, learner-evaluation procedures and criteria publicly.**
- Make micro-credential quality standards as well as recognition and validation procedures **accessible for non-experts**.
- Implement semi-automated³, transparent, fit for purpose, fair and fast recognition procedures in line with **international standards and regional conventions**⁴.
- Embrace recognition practices that enable learners to share credentials from their **digital wallets**.

¹ Such as the *EQF-LLL* or *QF-EHEA*, *ESG* for HE and *EQAVET* for VET.

² Such as, but not limited to, *ESCO* and *DigComp*.

³ Such as issuer authenticity and accreditation status check.

⁴ Specifically, the *Lisbon Recognition Convention* and the *Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education*.

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Micro-Credentials for Lifelong Learning and Development

A key success factor for micro-credential policies is ensuring enhanced opportunities for global lifelong learners and addressing many of the social inclusion issues with our current education, training and learning systems.

In this regard, learning providers are called to:

- Provide **open-source micro-credentials**, e.g. by developing openly licenced or OER-based micro-credentials.
- Support **trials to unbundle** existing programmes to widen access to learning opportunities to lifelong learners.
- Ensure that micro-credentials are **inclusive** and do not further reinforce the digital divide.
- Put enabling **learner choice at the centre of micro-credential strategies** - allowing learners to decide which micro-credentials are most appropriate for their strategies.

We call on policymakers to:

- **Fund open-source and inclusive micro-credentials.**
- Mainstream micro-credentials in policy as a tool to increase efficiencies of public educational systems and **increase access to quality education for all.**

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