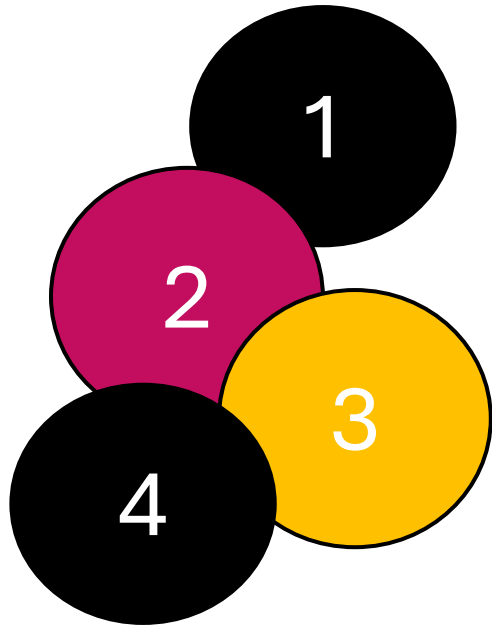


# Microcredentials

## European perspective

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# Outline



*What are microcredentials?*

Definition

*Through which policies have microcredentials been introduced?*

The European system-level perspective

*How can institutions introduce these flexible learning opportunities?*

The European institutional-level perspective

Discussion

# Definition

# DEFINITION (EEA)

**European Education Area**  
Quality education and training for all

‘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**. .... 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.



**COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION**

**of 16 June 2022**

**on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability**

(2022/C 243/02)

# UNESCO global definition

A micro-credential:

- 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 macro-credentials, including through recognition of prior learning.
- Meets the standards required by relevant quality assurance.



**Towards a common definition of micro-credentials**

# EQAR (DEQAR)



## Micro-credential ^

A certified small volume of learning (i.e. workload <60 ECTS), not leading to a full (recognised) degree. Micro-credentials may be provided through a cooperation of different providers.

## Definition of a micro-credential in DEQAR

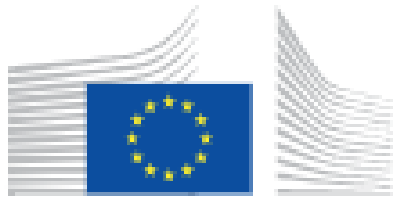
A study provision:

- a) Consisted by a workload expressed in ECTS in the range of 1 and 59 ECTS credits
- b) Related to EQF/ISCED level (5), 6, 7 or 8 OR QF EHEA level short, first, second, third cycle
- c) Does not lead to a full (recognised) degree

# European Policies

# EUROPEAN POLICY FRAMEWORK

EUROPEAN EDUCATION AREA  
EU SKILLS AGENDA



BOLOGNA PROCESS – EUROPEAN HIGHER  
EDUCATION AREA



# EUROPEAN POLICY FRAMEWORK (EEA)

**European Education Area**  
Quality education and training for all

## **Council Recommendation on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability (2022)**

‘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. .... 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.

## **Council Recommendation on a European Quality Assurance and Recognition System in Higher Education (2025)**

It is recommended that Member States, for educational provision leading to micro-credentials, use the European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability and the European principles for the design and issuance of micro-credentials as a reference.



# EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA

## Employability and Social Cohesion

- Improving employability and promoting social cohesion by ensuring equal access to learning opportunities (Prague Communiqué, 2001).
- Recognition of prior learning and qualifications frameworks are as essential tools for making lifelong learning a reality (Berlin Communiqué, 2003)
- Qualifications frameworks facilitate permeability between formal and non-formal learning pathways. The Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué, 2009)



## Social Dimension and Lifelong Learning

- Widening Participation for Equity and Growth: A Strategy for the Development of the Social Dimension and Lifelong Learning in the European Higher Education Area (Yerevan Communiqué, 2015)
- Principles and Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the EHEA (Rome Communiqué, 2020)
- „We commit to fostering flexible learning paths, properly delivered, quality assured, and recognised, including RPL and micro-credentials.” (Tirana Communiqué, 2024)



## Microcredentials in the EHEA in 2020



Reinforcing the role of higher education in lifelong learning, including through the provision of **micro-credentials**, will be key to recovery and contributing to a resilient society. 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 tools.

### Rome Ministerial Communiqué

Public authorities in charge of higher education should commit to...

creating a supportive environment, both in terms of funding and regulation, that enables higher education institutions to tailor education provision to the needs of **different types of learners** (lifelong learners, part-time learners, learners from underrepresented and disadvantaged groups), and to build a culture for equity and inclusion. This includes creating **flexible learning pathways (including micro-credentials)** on institutional and national levels and across the EHEA...

### **ANNEX III Recommendations to National Authorities for the Enhancement of Higher Education Learning and Teaching in the EHEA**

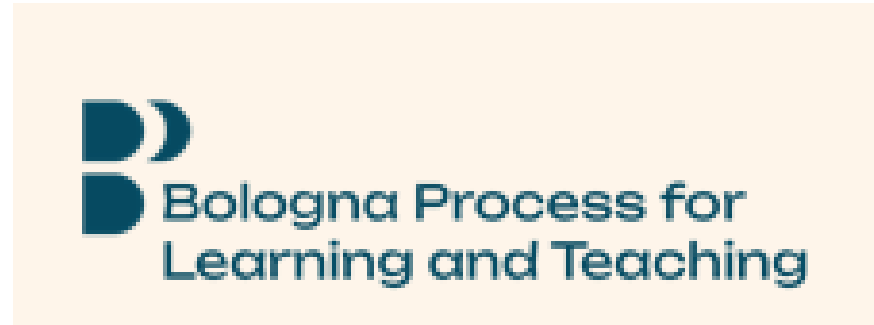


## Most recent ministerial commitments

- We invite the BFUG to review the **ECTS Users' Guide** 2015 by 2027, to strengthen its key features and adapt it to current developments, including micro-credentials.
- We commit to fostering **flexible learning paths**, which need to be flexible, properly delivered, quality assured, and recognised, in all higher education programmes. This also includes the recognition of prior learning, and new forms of education provision, such as micro-credentials. We need to ensure student-centred learning is a reality for all students.

## Tirana Ministerial Communiqué

# Bologna Tools



<https://www.eurashe.eu/project/bp4lnt/>



[https://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ESG\\_2015.pdf](https://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ESG_2015.pdf)

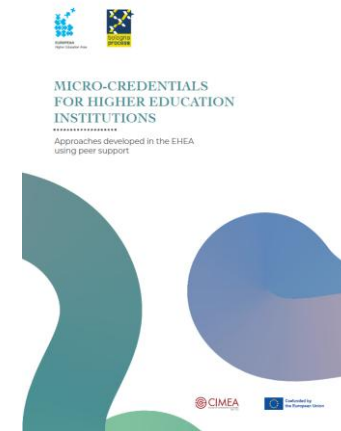


<https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/da7467e6-8450-11e5-b8b7-01aa75ed71a1>



## Recommendations and Guidelines on Micro-Credentials

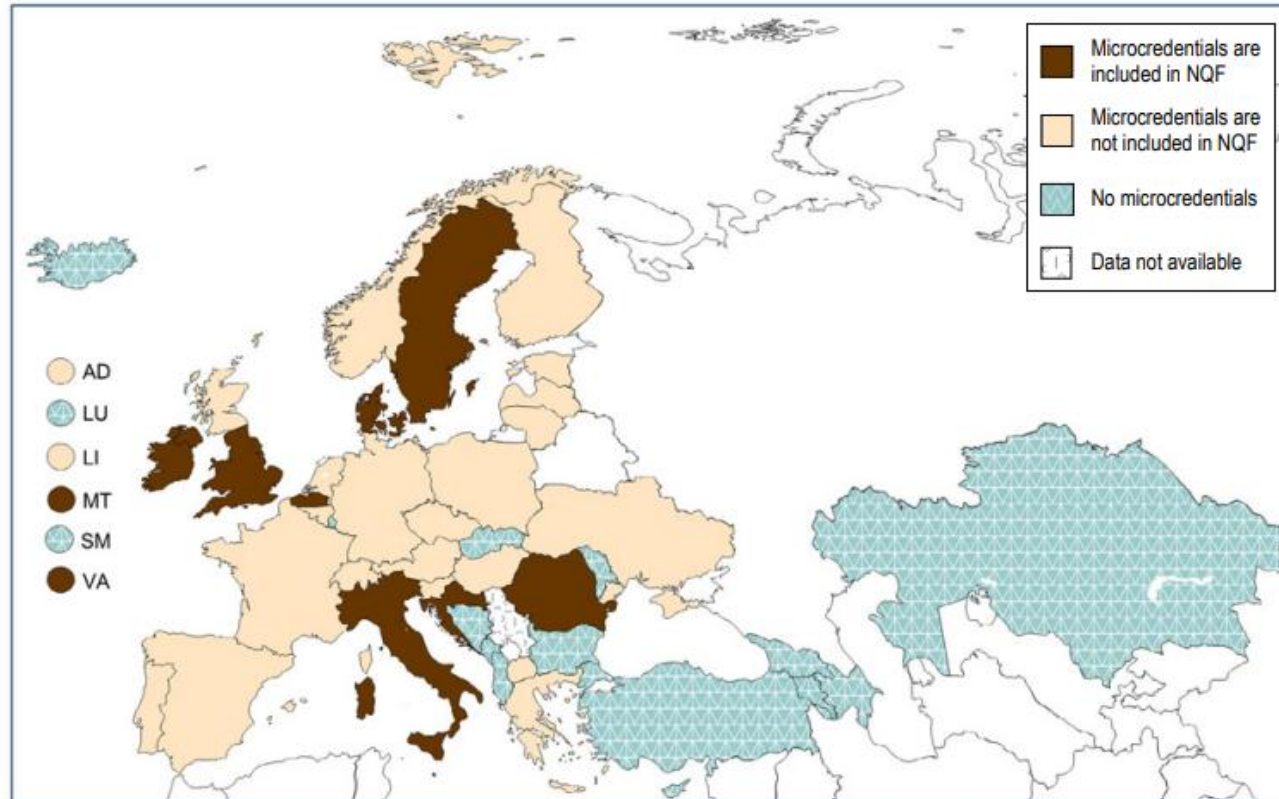
[https://ehea.info/Immagini/QUATRA\\_-\\_TPG\\_A\\_recommendations\\_on\\_micro-credentials\\_09.11\\_.2023\\_.pdf](https://ehea.info/Immagini/QUATRA_-_TPG_A_recommendations_on_micro-credentials_09.11_.2023_.pdf)



[https://www.cimea.it/Upload/Documenti/Micro-credentials%20in%20HE\\_1.pdf](https://www.cimea.it/Upload/Documenti/Micro-credentials%20in%20HE_1.pdf)

## State of play in 2022/2023 (BPIR 2024)

Figure 2.8: Inclusion of microcredentials in national qualifications frameworks, 2022/2023

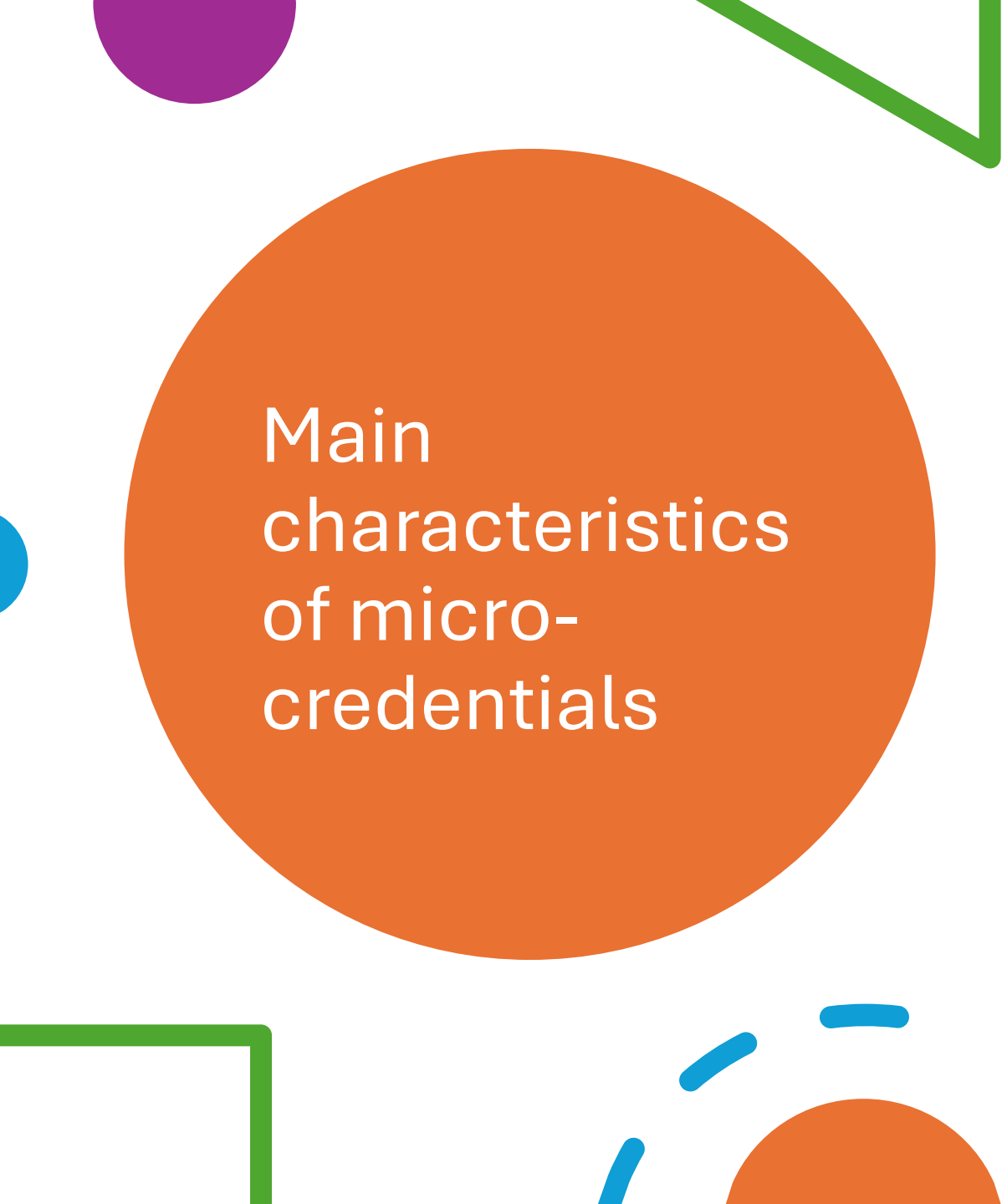


Source: BFUG data collection.

<https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/publications/european-higher-education-area-2024-bologna-process-implementation-report>

## Ensuring transparency of micro-credentials:

- 10 systems include **MC** in their **NQF**. In almost all of them learning modules leading to microcredentials are expressed in ECTS.
- 4 systems use **ECTS** to measure workload and thus facilitate the portability of MC.
- In 16 systems the legal frameworks provide for the **possibility for HEIs** to develop modules leading to MC although such programmes are not included in NQFs.
- Other systems have neither incorporated MC in NQF, nor in the legislation. HEIs can develop learning modules leading to MC under their own autonomy.
- In 15 systems, short courses leading to microcredentials are not yet a common feature.



## Main characteristics of micro-credentials

- **Short, skill-focused** and labour market-oriented, targeting individuals looking to upskill/reskill in a specific domain;
- **Learning outcomes-based** approach, appropriate **level** (descriptors), **workload** described with **credits** (ECTS), reliable **assessment** and assured quality (ESG);
- The **size** of MC is not limited but should be less than a full qualification. Currently, no specific credit range has been set for micro-credentials at the European level. A possible credit range between 1 and 59 ECTS;
- **Stackability** of micro-credentials - units of existing study programmes or as stand-alone units used as building blocks for different qualifications;
- **Portability** of micro-credentials - institutional frameworks established to recognise prior learning including credentials offered by alternative providers;
- **Internal QA system** that contain rules and procedures, criteria, and standards that apply to small units of learning leading to micro-credentials.

## „BEFORE”

- Different types of short learning modules provided by HEIs.
- Learning may or may be not certified, level may or may be not assigned, ECTS may or may be not awarded and/or recognised by other HEIs
- Although ESG apply to learning „which is not part of a programme leading to a formal degree” (ESG) institutional standards and practices differ and there are no specific requirements at the system level.

## „AFTER” (the term was coined)

- Explicit focus on the labour market requirements and skills development of increasingly diverse profiles of learners - support for re-skilling/up-skilling and lifelong learning;
- Learning outcomes-based approach, appropriate level (descriptors), workload described with credits (ECTS), reliable assessment and assured quality (ESG);
- Quality assurance and recognition practices supporting stackability and portability of micro-credentials
- There is a growing interest of governments and agencies to consider QA for safeguarding of student experience, assuring quality, comparability and consistency

# Institutional Policies

# CONTEXT

- Although ESG in principle apply to micro-credentials, institutions ask for more **GUIDELINES** from QA agencies.
- **BALANCE** between introducing and applying regulations and legislation related to micro-credentials while maintaining the flexibility necessary to preserve diversity.
- Agencies report insufficient **RESOURCES** to include micro-credentials in external quality assurance operations.
- External assessments/evaluations put **BURDEN** to institutions.
- Recognition and portability of micro-credentials are pending on the lack of system level **TRANSPARENCY TOOLS** (e.g. public registers and data bases such as DEQAR).
- How can **DIGITAL SOLUTIONS** support the portability and interoperability of micro-credentials?

## BFUG Thematic Peer Groups (TPG A, TPG B, TPG C)



### Recommendations and Guidelines on Micro-Credentials

[https://ehea.info/Immagini/QUATRA\\_-\\_TPG\\_A\\_recommendations\\_on\\_micro-credentials\\_09.11\\_.2023\\_.pdf](https://ehea.info/Immagini/QUATRA_-_TPG_A_recommendations_on_micro-credentials_09.11_.2023_.pdf)



[https://www.cimea.it/Upload/Documenti/Micro-credentials%20in%20HE\\_1.pdf](https://www.cimea.it/Upload/Documenti/Micro-credentials%20in%20HE_1.pdf)

# INVOLVEMENT OF STAKEHOLDERS

Involving various stakeholders in the design, delivery, monitoring, quality assurance, and use of micro-credentials is important because their engagement may increase the relevance of micro-credentials to the broader labour market and societal needs.

- **Employers** - the needs and requirements of the labour market and determining the profile of learners intended for specific micro-credentials that would meet those needs.
- HEIs should take steps to ensure an involvement of **current learners** as key internal stakeholders whose feedback could form a basis for improvements and future developments of micro-credentials.
- **Teaching staff** – to bring a broader perspective to specific learning design, increase trust and facilitate recognition.
- **Alumni** - graduates from study programmes and learners with micro-credentials via regular monitoring to provide inputs to further developments of micro-credentials.

# LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Micro-credentials are small units of learning that should be described in terms of learning outcomes irrespectively whether they are offered as units of existing study programmes or as stand-alone courses.
- HEIs should determine the appropriate approaches to learning, teaching and assessment to ensure that the intended learning outcomes are achieved.
- Micro-credentials should be awarded based on an assessment of learning outcomes and standards defined at the system level.
- There should be flexibility in designing small units of learning possibly leading to micro-credentials and open diverse possibilities of linking them with modules or individual learning outcomes. These small units of learning should be adapted to diverse individual learners' needs supporting upskilling and reskilling.

# Recognition of prior learning

Existing skills and knowledge should be valued so that nobody should learn again what they already know. Micro-credentials could be used to support the recognition of skills and knowledge gained outside of a formal education system. HEIs could use their existing arrangements and procedures for recognition of prior learning to incorporate micro-credentials.

# Level

- The micro-credentials could be positioned on the levels of the NQF or EQF or QF-EHEA respectively, depending on the system-level regulations. The basic principle for levelling micro-credentials could be identifying the appropriate level by applying the level descriptors of the NQF levels.
- Assigning level to micro-credentials is important to enhance employability and make academic recognition easier.
- It should be transparent that although a level has been assigned to a micro-credential, the awarded certificate should not be confused with a full degree, i.e., Short-Cycle, Bachelor, Master, or Doctor.

# Workload

Micro-credentials should be expressed in credits that can be accumulated and transferred (ECTS credits) so that micro-credentials could be compared, shared and, finally, portable. The ECTS Users' Guide could be used when allocating ECTS credits to small units of learning.

# Quality

- Micro-credentials need to meet the standards required by relevant system of quality assurance, institutional or programme accreditation arrangements, existing in the country.
- Internal quality assurance processes related to micro-credentials need to consider the specific characteristics of micro-credentials.
- Micro-credentials need to adhere to the same principles and standards that apply to full qualifications and degree programmes.
- HEIs should ensure monitoring of the implementation of micro-credentials and take appropriate measures to improve the delivery.

# Transparency

- HEIs should include programmes leading to micro-credentials in course catalogues, clearly explaining all the opportunities, conditions, rules and procedures in relation to micro-credentials. Description of micro-credentials should be easily available online for all users.
- Communication should be clear and transparent about the differences between micro-credentials awarded by HEIs, which belong to a HE system, and those awarded by alternative providers outside the higher education system.
- HEIs as well as alternative providers should keep all the records as regards micro-credentials in the same manner as they keep data on students and graduates of degree programmes.

# Certification

## Council Recommendation on a European approach to micro-credentials (Annex I)

Mandatory elements:	Identification of the learner
	Title of the micro-credential
	Country(ies)/Region(s) of the issuer
	Awarding body(ies)
	Date of issuing
	Learning outcomes
	Notional workload needed to achieve the learning outcomes (in ECTS credits, where possible)
	Level (and cycle, if applicable) of the learning experience leading to the micro-credential (EQF, QF-EHEA), if applicable
	Type of assessment
	Form of participation in the learning activity
	Type of quality assurance used to underpin the micro-credential
	Optional elements, where relevant (non-exhaustive list)
Supervision and identity verification during assessment (unsupervised with no identity verification, supervised with no identity verification, supervised online, or onsite with identity verification)	
Grade achieved	
Integration/stackability options (stand-alone, independent micro-credential/integrated, stackable towards another credential)	
Further information	

# Flexible learning pathways

- HEIs may develop and use micro-credentials to attract a wide variety of learners such as adult learners, working professionals and all those who for various reasons seek for upskilling and reskilling opportunities without necessarily following a full programme and achieving a degree.
- HEIs should make available guidance for learners regarding micro-credentials because these learners may come with different backgrounds and not be necessarily familiar with approaches common for higher education.

# Discussion