

Unlocking the Future of Higher Education: Conference on Micro-credentials and Digital Learning at the University of Macerata



Micro-credentials in the European Context: Policy Developments and the Role of European University Alliances

1st April 2025, Macerata

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Agenda

1. The EU Political Context
2. European Approach to Micro-credentials
3. How Alliances Can Support Micro-credentials

Introduction to ERUA

ERUA in a Nutshell

Our Reform Philosophy & Commitment to Societal Impact:

❖ Reform at our Core

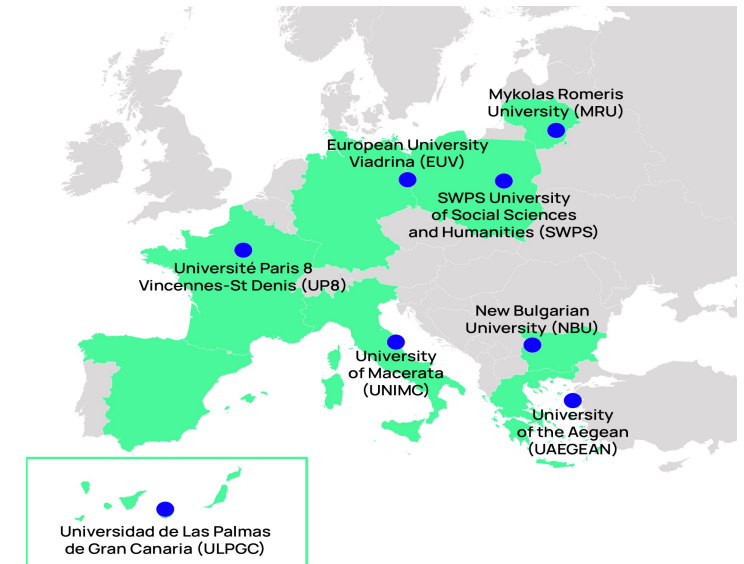
Universities as catalysts for social progress, fostering inclusivity, innovative learning, critical thinking and student-centred education.

❖ Focus on SSH and Arts with an Interdisciplinary Approach

Integrating Social Sciences and Humanities, and the arts, with STEM disciplines to drive transformative change across all university missions.

❖ Contributing to a more Prosperous Europe

Advancing social innovation, skills development, lifelong learning and civic engagement to contribute to a more inclusive, resilient and competitive Europe.



ERUA in Numbers

- 8 universities + 2 strategic associated partners (RUC, UNIKON)
- 85.000 students
- 10.000 staff (incl. academics)

3 Specific Objectives & 6 Flagships

OBJECTIVE 1
**Building an ERUA
community with an
interconnected green
campus**

FLAGSHIPS

- Increase mobility opportunities
- Full deployment of the virtual campus

OBJECTIVE 2
**Consolidating a
student-centred and
reformist educational
framework**

FLAGSHIPS

- Joint Degrees (e.g. migration)
- Deployment of Academic Innovation Lab

OBJECTIVE 3
**Serving global societal
challenges to shape a
more just, open and
inclusive society**

FLAGSHIPS

- Interdisciplinary & reformist research clusters
- Social entrepreneurship Programme

Thematic Areas towards Societal Impact

migration, exile and refugees



environmental transition



democracy, human rights,
inclusion and gender equality



interculturality and
multilingualism



arts and edges



Thematic Areas towards Societal Impact



Joint MA in Forced Migrations: Europe in a Global Context – in progress



Save the date: ERUA-VIADRINA Research Week

Place: European University Viadrina, Frankfurt (Oder) Date: 16 – 20 June 2025 We are pleased to announce the second ERUA-VIADRINA Research Week, taking place from June 16th to June 20th, 2025, hosted



ERUA Launches Its First Joint Social Entrepreneurship Course!

We are thrilled to announce the successful launch of the first ERUA Joint Online Social Entrepreneurship Course – Creating Solutions for European Challenges! The course officially kicked off on March 17th, 2025, after

1. The EU Political Context

EC's Geopolitical Agenda



Draghi's Report on the Future of European Competitiveness, September 2024

Competitiveness: The Political Agenda



Focus on economic growth, global leadership and strategic autonomy

- ✓ **Competitiveness Compass (1/25):** A long-term roadmap for sustainable economic growth, preparedness and global competitiveness.
- ✓ **Clean Industrial Deal (2/25):** A strategy to strengthen Europe's industrial base, ensuring competitiveness in the **green and digital transition**.
- ✓ **Union of Skills (3/25):** A plan to combine education, training and employment policies to bridge **skills gap** and match skills with industry needs.

Key Driver's in Skill Shortage

Demographic Change

Combined effect of a shrinking working age population with increase in demand for specific services, such as healthcare

Job Growth in Green & Digital Transition

Skill shortages concern all qualification levels, academic and technical profiles are especially relevant in STEM

Poor Working Conditions

Inadequate working conditions are key behind labour shortages in some sectors (e.g. construction, logistics, hospitality)

Key Policy Areas

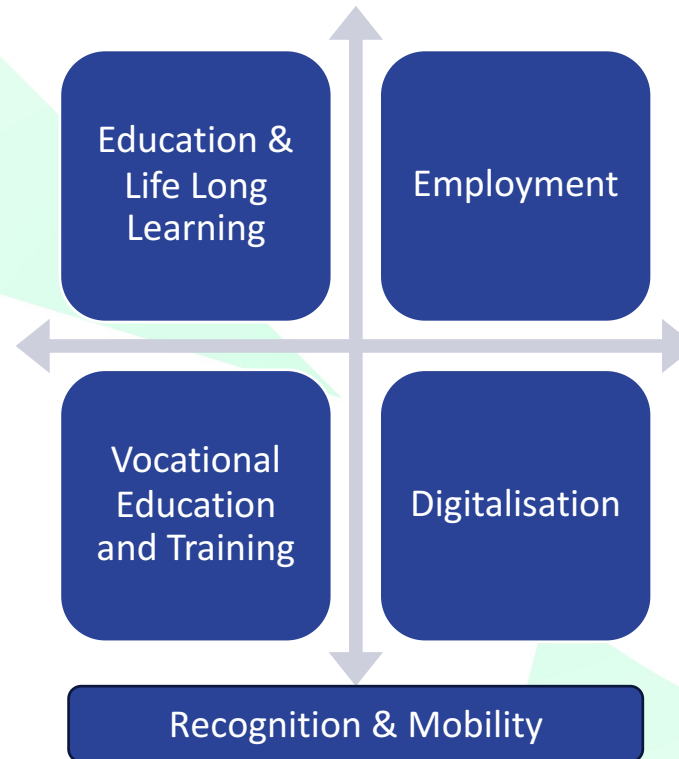
- ✓ Support the activation of **underrepresented people** in the labour market
- ✓ Provide support for **skills, training and education**
- ✓ Improve **working conditions**
- ✓ Improve fair **intra-EU mobility for workers and learners**
- ✓ Attract talent from the **outside of the EU**

Source: Communication from the EC, march 2024. Labour and skills shortage in the EU: An Action Plan

EU Policies related to Micro-credentials

- [European Education Area \(EEA\)](#)
- [Council Recommendation on Micro-credentials for Lifelong Learning & Employability \(2022\)](#)

- [Council Recommendation on Vocational Education & Training \(VET\) \(2020\)](#)
- [European Year of Skills \(2023-2024\)](#)



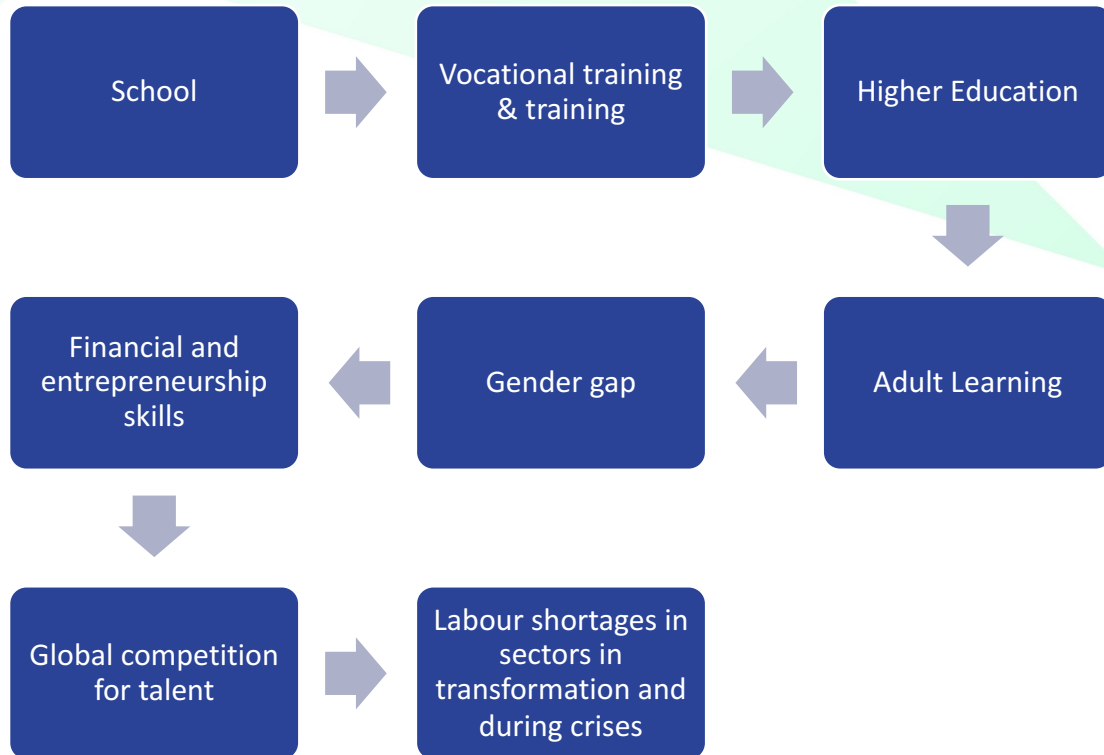
- [European Skills Agenda \(2020-2030\)](#)
- [Pact for Skills](#)

- [Digital Education Action Plan \(2021-2027\)](#)
- [Digital Europe Programme](#)

- [European Qualifications Framework \(EQF\)](#)
- [The European Digital Credentials \(Europass\)](#)

Union of Skills

Skills shortages and gaps



HIGHER EDUCATION

- More than half of new job openings by 2035 will be in highly skilled occupations.
- Europe needs to invest and support the **pooling of resources in higher education to increase access to innovation, cutting- edge knowledge and high-level skills**, incl. through **joint study programmes** within alliances of higher education institution, such as European Universities alliances.

Union of Skills

Strategy to equip people for a competitive Europe and contributing to economic, social and territorial cohesion

Objectives

1. Ensure that everyone is empowered to build solid skills foundations and engage **in life long upskilling and reskilling**.
2. Support companies to be more **resilient and competitive**.
3. Make skills and qualifications **transparent, trusted and recognised**.



5

Union of Skills



The Role of Alliances

European University Alliances play a key role in advancing the Union of Skills, but they are just one actor of a broader ecosystem:

- **Future-oriented education:** Alliances go beyond immediate labour gaps, equipping lifelong learners with critical thinking, adaptability, & transversal competences but also with skills needed to address pressing societal challenges.
- **Strengthening Public-Private Collaboration** – Deepening collaboration with industry, policymakers, and training providers is essential to align educational offerings with emerging labour market demands and technological advancements.
- **Stronger European Skills Ecosystem:** Alliances serve as innovation hubs, fostering pooling of resources, attract more students to Europe, cross-border cooperation to develop joint programmes, interdisciplinary and research-driven initiatives for life long learners.

Union of Skills

Micro-credentials to enhance teacher & academic staff, adult learning, leveraging public-private partnerships

Micro-credentials

1. **TEACHERS & ACADEMIC STAFF:** Enhance the attractiveness of teachers' and academic careers by developing a European competence framework.
2. **ADULT LEARNING:** Expand micro-credentials for upskilling and reskilling of adults.
 - **Academic & Private Providers:** Engage both private training providers, on top of education and training institutions.
 - **Strategic Sectors:** Increase joint micro-credentials issued by Centres of Vocational Excellence, European University Alliances & EU Skills academies to boost their role in recruitment and career growth in strategic sectors.
3. **PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS:** Leveraging public-private partnerships and promoting cooperation in strategic sectors
 - **Pilot actions:** Use Erasmus+, the Digital Europe and the EIT, to support joint programmes or to develop jointly micro-credentials, and to support entrepreneurship and mentorship for start-ups and scale-ups.

2. European Approach to Micro-credentials

European Approach to Micro-Credentials



“A micro-credential is the record of the learning outcomes that a learner has acquired following a small volume of learning. These learning outcomes have been assessed against transparent and clearly defined standards.

Courses 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.

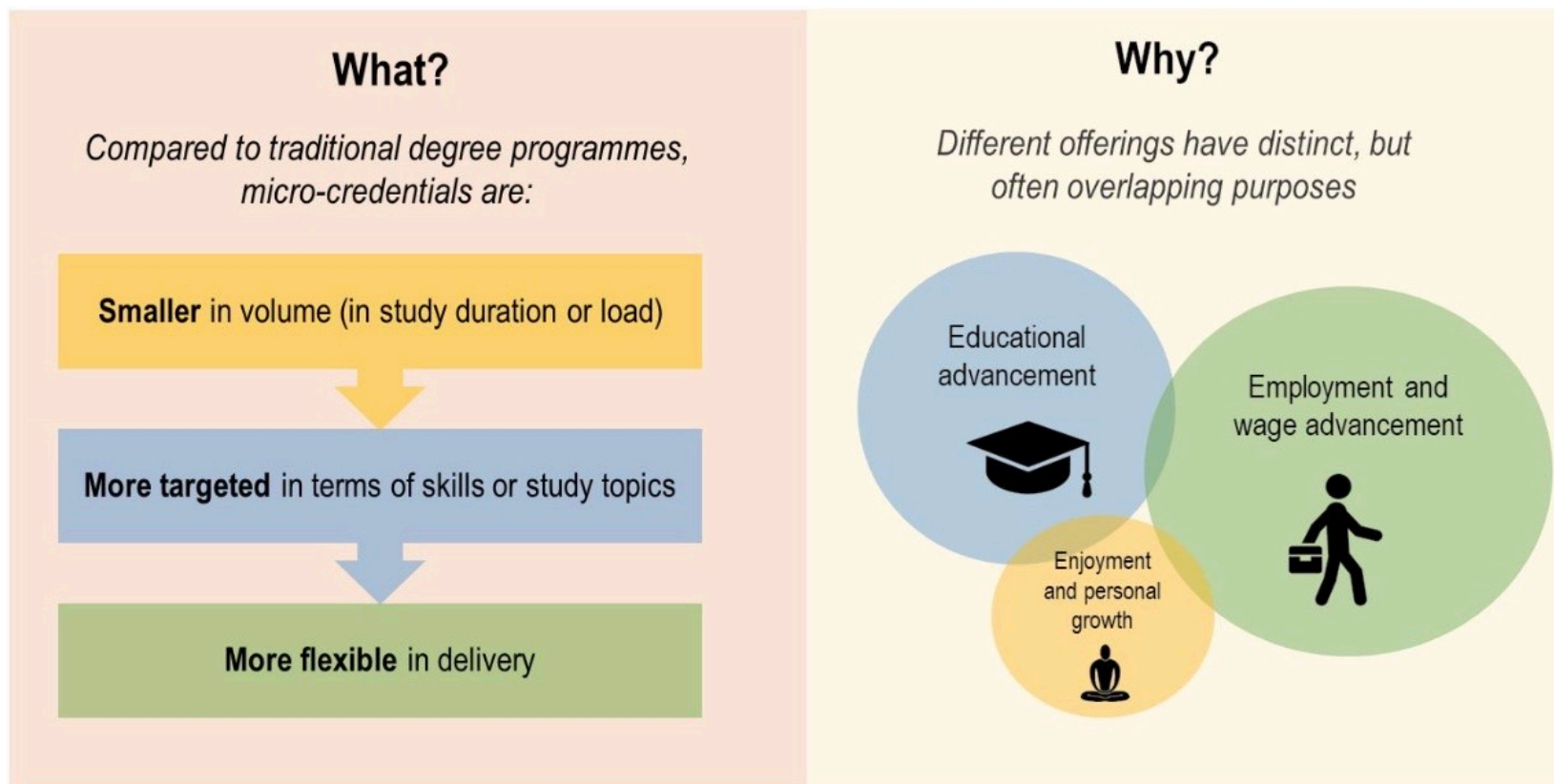
Micro-credentials are owned by the learner, can be shared and are portable. They may be standalone or combined into larger credentials. They are underpinned by quality assurance following agreed standards in the relevant sector or area of activity. “

Source: COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION of 16 June 2022 on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability

Box 3: Building blocks of a European approach to micro-credentials

- A common and transparent definition
- A defined list of critical information elements to describe micro-credentials
- Alignment to National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF): defined levels, standards for describing learning outcomes
- Quality assurance standards
- Defined credits: European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), defined learning outcomes and notional workload
- Recognition: for further studies and/or employment purposes
- Portability: issuing, storage and sharing of micro-credentials
- Platform solutions for the provision and promotion of courses leading to micro-credentials
- Incentives to stimulate the uptake of micro-credentials

Micro-Credentials: Why do they Matter?

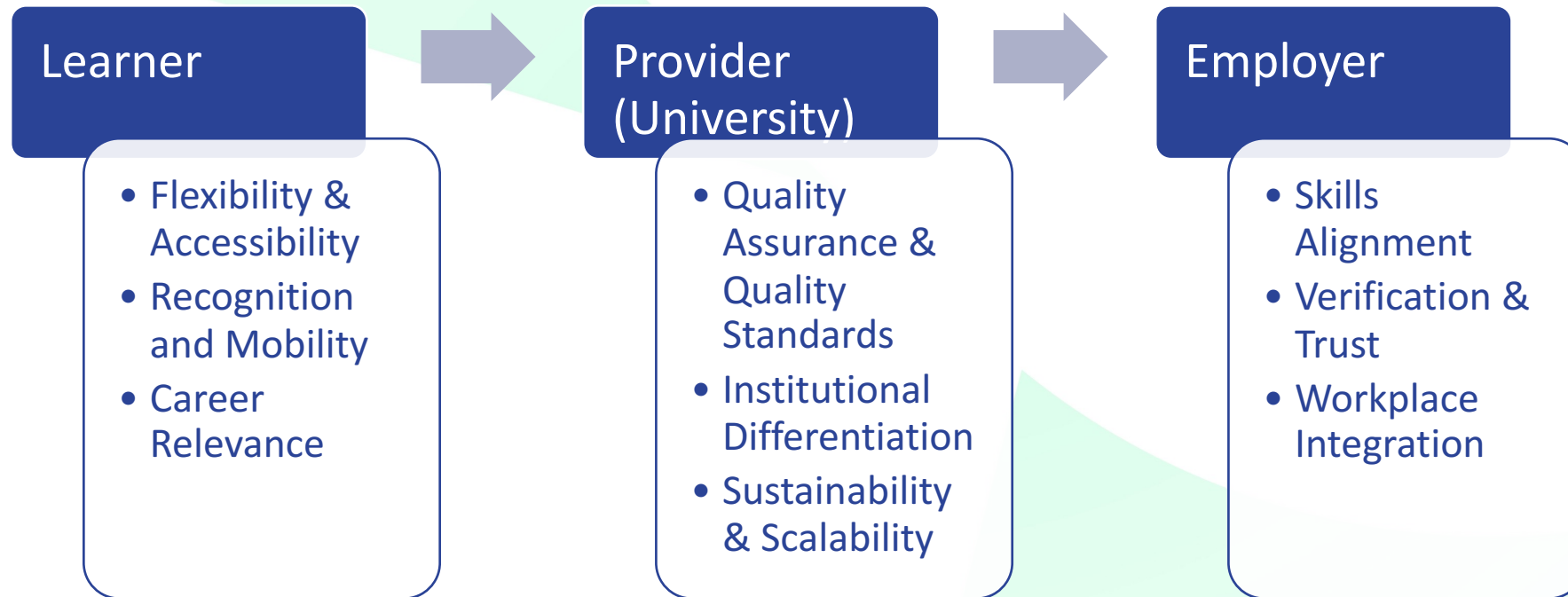


Higher Adaptability:
in providing fast evolving
and changing skills

Inclusivity:
Easier and wider access to
(Life-long) Learners

Source: Accompanying the document Proposal for a Council Recommendation on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability, 2021

The Different Perspectives



3. How Alliances Can Support Micro-credentials

Micro-credentials Landscape in Alliances



33

European University Alliances

Currently implementing or planning to implement micro-credentials

Source: Making Interoperability Work. Hochschulforum Digitalisierung 2023.



The alliances had collectively set up more than **600 joint study programmes and courses** at all levels, including around 160 joint degree programmes. They also launched more than **430 short courses leading to micro-credentials**.

- Monitoring framework data (data collected second half 2023)

Source: Report on the Outcomes and transformational potential of the European Universities Initiative. European Commission 2025.

Micro-credentials are primarily available to students within alliances, with recognition largely restricted to the respective alliance. Gaps include:

- Limited opportunities for upskilling of adult learners
- Limited use of Micro-credentials to increase access to education

Case Studies

BOX 45. EXAMPLE: ECIU MICRO-CREDENTIALS JOURNEY

ECIU MICRO-CREDENTIALS JOURNEY

📌 LIFELONG LEARNING



ECIU University has been a pioneer of micro-credentials in Europe. **The Alliance has published 3 white papers on the subject**, including reflections, alliance best practices, lessons learned and recommendations.

The ECIU University is the first alliance to issue e-sealed micro-credentials issued using the EDC (European Digital Credentials). ECIU University provides centralised credentials with an ECIU e-seal, ensuring that they are **forgery and tamper proof and meet European standards** for digital credentials.

These micro-credentials detail the competencies acquired during the learning process, including levels of expertise and ESCO (European Skills, Competences and Occupations) classifications. They can be easily stored and managed on the Europass platform. Through the ECIU Engage platform, students can navigate through personalised learning pathways, supported by tools such as a motivation scan and a competence passport, which helps to track the progress of their skills development. This personalised approach enhances students' employability and supports their lifelong learning journey.

Relevant links and sources:

News on e-sealed micro-credentials: www.eciu.eu/news/a-milestone-reached-eciu-university-is-the-first-european-alliance-to-issue-e-sealed-micro-credentials

European Digital Credentials: europass.europa.eu/en/stakeholders/european-digital-credentials

ECIU 1st micro-credential white paper: www.eciu.org/news/micro-learning-varies-from-online-courses-to-study-packages

ECIU 2nd micro-credential white paper: www.eciu.org/news/paving-the-road-for-the-micro-credentials-movement

ECIU 3rd micro-credential white paper: www.eciu.org/news/presentation-of-the-third-eciu-university-micro-credentials-paper-a-vision-for-european-learners-values-and-priorities

Related policy goals:

📌 DISSEMINATION BEYOND PARTNER HEIS



Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.

BOX 46. EXAMPLE: UNA EUROPA MOOCS AND MICRO-CREDENTIALS

UNA EUROPA MOOCS AND MICRO-CREDENTIALS

📌 LIFELONG LEARNING



UNA Europa has developed a vast offer of short courses, including Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), micro-credentials and lifelong learning certificates:

MOOC on Artificial Intelligence and Society launched in the summer of 2022. The MOOC supports learners to engage critically with the basics of AI and its related ethical issues, as well as its impacts on different sectors of society - including justice and jurisprudence, health care, and democratic participation. The MOOC examines how society could address these issues, and how the societal impact and relevant values can be taken into account in design, implementation, and deployment of AI. The study is self-paced, and fully online.

Micro-credential in Sustainability consists of five MOOCs which, once completed, award the learner with 10 ECTS issued by the University of Helsinki on behalf of UNA Europa. After an introductory course, students take four additional courses covering the environmental, economic, and social aspects of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

Lifelong learning certificates in 'Data Science' and 'Sustainability' offer the opportunity for learners outside of alliance partner universities to experience courses with instructors from multiple European universities. The lifelong learning courses have admission requirements related to previous studies. They can involve blended, face-to-face, and distance learning. Studies are usually restricted to certain months and days of the year, and thus not self-paced.

Relevant links and sources:

MOOC AI in Society: <https://www.una-europa.eu/study/mooc-ai-society>

Micro-credential in Sustainability: <https://www.una-europa.eu/study/microcredential-sustainability>

Lifelong Learning Certificate in Data Science: <https://www.una-europa.eu/study/data-driven-decision-making>

Lifelong Learning Certificate in Sustainability: <https://www.una-europa.eu/study/lifelong-learning-certificate-in-sustainability>

Related policy goals:

📌 KEY SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

📌 JOINT, FLEXIBLE, AND INNOVATIVE LEARNING OFFER



Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.

Source: Report on the Outcomes and transformational potential of the European Universities Initiative. European Commission 2025.

Largest Challenges for Alliances

Need for Stronger
Regulatory Framework

Lack of Standardisation

Scalability

Limited Employer
Awareness

Complex integration into
existing qualifications

No Unified National
Framework

Recognition in the job
market

Accessibility for Learners: Where to find high-quality micro-credentials from European University Alliances?

Integrate Technology: Use digital platforms, blockchain-based credentials, and AI-driven learning to enhance accessibility and recognition

**Regulatory Barriers to Micro-credentials'
Accreditation & Recognition**

erua-eui.eu

Key Takeaways: Integrate all Perspectives

LEARNER

Ensure Flexibility & Accessibility

Offer **flexible** learning options (modular, stackable, and online) to support diverse **learners**, in particular **upskilling and reskilling of adults** and **life long learners** to facilitate career transitions, and ensure easy **accessibility**.

ALLIANCES

Leverage on the Alliances' Strengths & Differentiation

Develop specialized MC based on alliances' expertise to provide **high quality, added value and differentiation** for learners, embedding **European values and competences for life** and fostering **inclusivity**.

EMPLOYER

Enhance Collaboration with Stakeholders & Industry

Co-create with employers, policymakers, & professional bodies to ensure **relevance, employability, and real-world application** along the priorities in the **Union of Skills**.

Thank you! Grazie!



Merci
Gracias
Grazie
Ευχαριστώ
Ačiū
Dziękuję
Благодаря
Danke