

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



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## Preliminary Remarks

On 10 December 2021, the European Commission issued a proposal for a Council Recommendation on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability.

This initiative<sup>1</sup> is part of the Commission's strategy to help people to develop their set of skills in a rapidly changing world of work.

As with all sectors of the economy, the current skills shortages and skills gaps are hindering the competitiveness of European MET industries and thus the creation of quality jobs. Moreover, millions of European MET jobs are in a transformation process, in particular in the automotive industry. MET companies have, therefore, a pressing need to easily find and access the rightly skilled workforce that can support the industries in a smoother transition towards a green and digitalised economy. In this light, the need for up-skilling and re-skilling the workforce is today more relevant than ever.

As part of its objectives to support the workforce to up-skill and re-skill and remain employable all along their career, the Commission recommends Member States to adopt a *European approach to micro-credentials*.

Ceemet and its member associations put forward the following comments on this proposed approach:

### On the objectives:

Ceemet shares the Commission's objectives that recommend Member States to adopt a European approach to micro-credentials aimed at supporting individuals to update their set of skills, knowledge, and competences so that they can progress in a fast-changing world of work.

Indeed, it is crucial that workers are constantly up-skilled and re-skilled all along their career in order for them to acquire the right set of skills adapted to labour market needs and for companies to remain competitive and to continue providing quality jobs. Continuous training is also decisive to ensure that the workforce remains employable to be able to change jobs and/or event sectors.

Against this background, we are convinced that "*developing a European approach to micro-credentials*" can certainly be an **added value tool** to support the workforce to be trained on labour market needs and to foster a culture of lifelong learning.

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<sup>1</sup> The Commission announced its intention of releasing an initiative on micro-credentials on its European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience released on 1 July 2020

Ceemet also shares the Commission's views that micro-credentials can be used to complement and enhance education, training, lifelong learning and employability. They should, certainly, not be used to replace or disrupt initial, higher education, VET or traditional qualifications.

### **On the definitions**

Ceemet agrees on the definition of micro-credentials, "*as the record of the learning outcomes that a learner has acquired following a small volume of learning*". Further, we also welcome the specific reference to the labour market relevance of micro-credentials, as the Commission rightly points out that the courses leading to micro-credentials should provide the learner with specific knowledge, skills and competences that responds to labour market needs.

As EU sector social partner, we also share the definition of the "providers of micro-credentials" that includes social partners, employers, industry etc. Indeed, much of the learning occurs on the job on a daily basis. Therefore, the fact that that employers or social partners are considered as "providers of micro-credentials" makes perfect sense as they should also be able to recognise learning outcomes acquired previously that lead to micro-credentials.

A wide approach towards learning outcomes will also ensure the flexibility, adaptability, recognition and labour market relevance of micro-credentials. In this light, we support the Commission proposal that states that "learning outcomes" can take place in all kinds of settings: formal, non-formal and informal.

### **On the inclusion of VET and higher education institutions as providers of micro-credentials**

Ceemet and its member associations are convinced that universities and the VET system should actively contribute to the up-skilling and re-skilling of the workforce as they are key actors when it comes to equipping the future labour force with the right set of skills.

In this regard, we share the Commission's proposals which advises Member States to engage universities and the VET system in the provision of training that leads to micro-credentials. This is further the adequate path to actively involve the VET and higher education system into the "lifelong learning environment".

Along these same lines, we welcome the specific recommendation made to Member States to promote the development of micro-credentials designed and approved by social partners through social dialogue.

### **Cooperation amongst all**

We support the need to promote and strengthen cooperation between all stakeholders, including social partners, education and training providers, employers and industry etc. with a view to identifying needs for micro-credentials, co-developing and up-dating micro credentials.

As a matter of fact, Ceemet has long been calling for reinforcing the links between social partners, industry and education & training providers, in order for the latter to provide with qualifications, skills and training which are labour market relevant, flexible and responsive to changing skills needs.

Reinforced cooperation between all stakeholders constitutes a fundamental step to successfully address the skills gap.

### **On the importance of involving social partners**

While Ceemet shares the Commission's recommendation to Member States so that they integrate micro-credentials in their employment and active labour market policies, we would welcome a reference to social partners.

Similarly, we also miss the reference to social partners when the Commission recommends Members States to ensure that information and advice on identifying and selecting micro-credentials is incorporated within lifelong learning guidance. We believe that social partners, at all levels, should actively be involved in this process, as they are closer to the needs of companies and workers, and thus best placed to give advice on training that is labour market relevant and that leads to the obtention of micro-credentials.

### **On the funding aspect**

We share the Commission's views that all available EU funds and instruments including the Recovery and Resilience Facilitate are made available to support the necessary reforms in order to put in place the enabling framework for the development and use of micro-credentials.

However, as funding opportunities are scattered around (local, regional, national, EU level), we call on the Commission to put in place a clear mapping of the funds and budget lines that can finance skills policies, in particular the enabling framework to develop micro-credentials. This mapping could also provide simplified information on the policies that each fund can finance and on any other criteria that can ease the understanding of the funding opportunities. An easily accessible unique portal gathering this information could be very useful.

### **Structured exchange of best practices**

We call on the Commission to enhance a structured exchange of best practices on how micro-credentials work at different levels: local, regional, national.

This is a way to facilitate the flow of information and knowledge on this matter that can support Member States, in cooperation with stakeholders and social partners to better decide on a European approach to micro-credentials.

Social dialogue at all levels is a good forum to foster this exchange of best practices.

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