



## EAEA Contribution to the Commission's Micro-credentials Open Public Consultation

The European Association for the Education of Adults welcomes the consultation and hopes that the voice of non-formal adult education is taken into account sufficiently so that (potential) adult learners can benefit from the developments in this area.

### Flexibility to learning pathways

**Micro-credentials are a potential tool that could** boost access and participation to lifelong learning by **bringing more flexibility to the learning pathways and personalised learning** thanks to the modular approach and portability of credits. This is likely to attract a larger and more diverse number of learners, such as adults, and in the employment context it can open up lifelong learning opportunities for continuous professional development. For this initiative, as well as others related to education and training, **the first principle of the European Pillar of Social Rights should be respected**, protected and fulfilled for learners and educators alike to access quality education and training, in line with SDG 4. Against this background, MC are not only to be targeted towards participants of higher and/or formal education but rather to become a tool for lifelong and life-wide learning.

### A tool for disadvantaged learners

**Micro-credentials could also pave the way for more inclusive education and training offers and could be a relevant form of qualification in particular for learners who cannot access other types of qualifications**, such as migrants and refugees. For many people with low Basic skills, it can be very hard to achieve success, especially at the beginning of their learning pathway. Micro-credentials could be an encouraging way to boost confidence and further steps.

We regret seeing no mention of these disadvantaged groups in the report *Final Report: A European Approach to Micro-credentials: Output of the Micro-credentials Higher Education Consultation Group* and believe that this target group's needs to access education and training in Europe through short courses like micro-credentials deserve to be fully explored and taken into account. Having said so, we are wary of the idea that micro-credential can be the solution to reducing socioeconomic inequalities in education and training across the EU: micro-credentials should not replace full study programmes (thus full qualifications) and measures to ensure equal access to these still deserve attention and funding but be a complementary tool.

### Extending to non-formal education

Besides, micro-credentials could serve as a tool for the recognition and valorisation of all the knowledge, skills and competences acquired by learners outside the formal education system. **We deem that micro-credentials should be extended to non-formal education providers as well, i.e adult education centres, civil society organisations, non-governmental organisations** (including youth organisations and volunteer-based organisations) as they also often provide learning opportunities and can also help develop and make progress on validation arrangements at national levels. We stress that we wish to see these sectors be part of the future development of micro-credentials. **Furthermore, in the context of validation in non-formal education, we think that care**



**should be taken when approaching quality assurance (QA) standards as often these are far too rigid for non-formal education providers.** Especially in non-formal adult education, there are a number of small providers and NGOs, who would not be able to go through complicated quality management systems. **We would like to see QA standards moving towards learner-centred processes.** A European consensus is needed on quality assurance in ALE, taking into account the challenges of small providers but also the need for “formal quality assurance”. EAEA is offering to be of support in this process and encourages the Commission to also dedicate the necessary resources to gather the appropriate input from the civil society regarding QA standards. Furthermore, synergies between a European approach to micro-credentials and the Council Recommendation on Validation of non-formal and informal education are clear to us, we hope they are made possible when defining European micro-credentials.

### Civil Society's involvement

We welcome that the European Commission plans to set up European standards on micro-credentials and a list of trusted providers with the involvement of education and training providers, social partners among others, but we think one stakeholder is missing: civil society or the so-called third sector. **We believe that civil society organisations active in education and training should meaningfully be involved and consulted in the design and implementation of the European micro-credential approach.** Civil society are often the most adequate organisations to voice up and take the learners' and citizens' views into consideration.

### Dangers to avoid

**It is imperative, from our perspective, that the European framework embraces micro-credentials not only to fulfil employment and labour market needs but also to take into account learners' personal development and fulfilment.** We reiterate that education is a public good and should be focused on the learners and their needs. Furthermore, all future initiatives should be aware of the risks of commercialisation of micro-credentials and thus **stringent conditions should apply to private providers.** Micro-credentials could potentially disrupt the governance system in which education systems operate (particularly public institutions), thus comprehensive guidance should be provided to the Member States to develop a system prioritising public offers and having learners' needs at the centre.

**Micro-credentials must neither lead to a two-class system of provision** (one for credentials, the other non-formal) **which only recognises and values formal and formalised learning. Additionally, the decision to use micro-credentials as validation processes should always remain a choice for the learner.** If they want to follow their learning pathways in a completely non-formal way, they should be able to do so, and such an informal path should not be less valued than a formal one

### More information

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*The European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) is the voice of non-formal adult education in Europe. EAEA is a European NGO with 120 member organisations in 43 countries and represents more than 60 million learners Europe-wide.*