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Microcredentials in EU learning

The EU approach to microcredentials will provide flexible and modular learning opportunities in lifelong learning.

The EU needs a skills revolution so that people and the economy can grow through green and **digital transitions** and to help recover from the pandemic.

What are microcredentials?

A microcredential is evidence of the educational outcomes a student has achieved, following a short learning experience (training modules taken in a classroom, eLearning or blended setting) and transparently assessed.

Due to their flexible and short-term nature, microcredentials make education more inclusive, opening up lifelong learning to more people, in line with the goal of reaching the 60% target of adults in training annually set by the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan. In fact, they are suitable for all types of learners, but can be particularly useful for those who:

- wish to expand their knowledge, rather than obtain a full diploma;
- wish to bridge the gap between different degrees or between their initial formal education and the emerging skills required in the labor market;
- want to improve their skills or retrain (in this regard read also **Reskilling in Italian companies**).

Increased uptake of microcredentials could promote educational and economic innovation and contribute to a sustainable recovery from the pandemic.

As an immediate response to the economic crisis caused by the pandemic and to the need to develop specific skills in the labor market, short courses have the advantage of being able to be delivered quickly by higher education, vocational education and training institutions and private entities.

The European approach

Microcredentials were announced in the European Skills Agenda, published on July 1, 2020, as one of 12 major actions to support skills for employment across the EU.

"Training courses are becoming shorter and more focused and are often conducted online. European standards will be developed that can help recognize the outcomes of such courses."

They were included in the September 2020 Communication on Making a European Area of Education a Reality by 2025 to emphasize the key role of higher education in supporting lifelong learning and reaching a more diverse group of students. They were also included in the September 2020 Digital Education Action Plan.

The European Skills Agenda aims to put citizens in the advantageous position of being able to:

- identify the jobs in demand in the market and the key skills they need to acquire to obtain them;
- improve digital skills;
- Take training courses whenever possible;
- Get recognition for the training they have done and make the best use of their newly acquired skills;
- Obtain funding to develop skills useful in embarking on a new career path;
- learn best practices from peers in professional development networks.

The European approach is indispensable because:

- the European labor market is changing in all countries, under the influence of the pandemic and the digital and environmental transition. "More flexible learning opportunities are needed at all stages of life, in all disciplines and in all sectors."
- greater uptake of microcredentials will contribute to social, economic, and educational innovation;
- it will expand flexible and modular learning in a consistent way across Europe, while ensuring agreed quality standards.

The European Commission has launched a public consultation on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employment. During the coming weeks, the consultation will aim to gather broader input across all education and training sectors for a common definition of the recognition of short, targeted educational courses and European standards ensuring their quality and transparency with a view to the development of a Council Recommendation on micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employment perspectives by the end of 2021.

The European roadmap includes the following actions for microcredentials:

- definition of common European quality and transparency standards, together with all stakeholders (the world of education and training, labor market operators, social partners, youth organizations, civil society, chambers of commerce and employers, involving all Member States and countries of the European Higher Education Area);
- assessment of their inclusion in national qualifications frameworks, with possible reference to the European Qualifications Framework;
  drawing up a list of trusted providers and promoting quality assurance processes;
- examination of how the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) can be used in educational sectors other than higher education;
- definition of guidelines for a faster recognition process by adapting existing validation and recognition tools or developing new ones;
  facilitating the archiving and submission of microcredentials to employers through Europass (a completely revamped platform) and its infrastructure for digital credentials and the European student card initiative;
- use them to improve access to lifelong learning opportunities by ensuring better permeability between education and training sectors and enabling students to make an informed choice with the expansion of guidance services and the use of real-time labor market data;
  Provide through the Erasmus+ program and structural funds EU support to higher education, vocational education and training (VET) and other education and training institutions and providers to promote the uptake of microcredentials.

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