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**TRANSFORM4EUROPE:
THE EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY FOR
KNOWLEDGE ENTREPRENEURS**

**T4EU JOINT STRATEGY AND FRAMEWORK ON
MICROCREDENTIALS**

**PART II: T4EU JOINT FRAMEWORK ON MICROCREDENTIALS
2025-2030**

Prepared by:
Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski
Work Package 3
Nikolina Tsvetkova
Contact: transform4europe.su.bg@gmail.com

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1. Approval

Approved by:

- USAAR
- UA
- EKA
- UCP
- UP
- JMU
- USil
- SU
- UNITS
- VMU

2. Executive summary

The current Joint T4EU Framework on Microcredentials is an indispensable part of the Joint Strategy on Microcredentials and provides in-depth understanding of the context in which the T4EU Alliance has set to develop microcredentials as well as its vision regarding their implementation.

Microcredentials are increasingly promoted as a new and more flexible way of recognizing knowledge, skills and competences. New types and business models of microcredentials are proliferating, and HEIs, learners and employers should be encouraged further to use such opportunities to up-skill or re-skill. Acceptance is largely based on trust and value which will continue to be hampered despite the definition proposed at the EU level¹. In recent years, policymakers, scholars and educators have produced their own definitions, advancing scholarship in the area, yet sometimes causing more confusion by adding yet another definition.

The current Joint Framework for Microcredentials is the first part of MS68. It was preceded by extensive work during the pilot phase of the Transform4Europe Alliance, the most pertinent results of which are D.3.9 Concept for Lifelong Learning Certificates for the Three Target Groups and D.3.3 Customised Course Content and Programme for the Transform4Europe Bachelor Tracks. The implementation of the latter was thoroughly evaluated, which also gives important insights into how joint T4EU microcredential (MC) courses/programmes should be designed and administered.

The document sheds light on the joint definition of microcredentials adopted by the T4EU partners. It also defines the audiences of MC offered by the T4EU Alliance and what format, duration, etc., they take.

3. Main Principles and goals

One of the specific T4EU objectives is to establish automatic recognition, joint flexible curricula, seamless mobility, and approaches to microcredentials.

Regarding microcredentials, the following goals have been set:

- Agree on a definition of microcredentials that reflects both the European approach to microcredentials (<https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/higher-education/microcredentials>), the specificities of the T4EU Alliance partners as well as the national, regional, and institutional contexts in which they function.
- Develop and implement an integrated long-term joint strategy and a framework for microcredentials to ensure sustainable mobility and collaborative efforts.

¹ Council of the European Union (2022). COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION of 16 June 2022 on a European approach to microcredentials for lifelong learning and employability (2022/C 243/02).

- Create a joint microcredential approach based on the good practices of the pilot [T4EU Bachelor tracks], respective joint criteria and a shared definition of Microcredentials.
- Create a portfolio of existing microcredentials at each of the partner universities that can be offered to the whole Alliance, and/or can be combined with new ones, specifically designed to cater for the wide range of target groups identified by T4EU from Bachelor students to individuals from the labour market in a LLL perspective (in close cooperation with tasks 5.3 and 8.5).
- Develop jointly a T4EU Knowledge Entrepreneurs' course for students to serve as a model for the implementation of the microcredentials approach at large.
- Utilise the matchmaking activities set in place as part of performing Task 4.4 Matchmaking for Excellence and the Connect4Research Partnering tool (<https://web.ogpi.es/t4eri/>), and by allowing access to the T4EU seed funding initiative.

3.1 European principles for the design and issuance of microcredentials²

The following principles highlight the European approach to microcredentials and are applicable to the creation of MC courses/programmes and the adoption of MCs in any national, institutional, sectoral context and so can be considered universal.

- Quality
- Transparency
- Relevance
- Valid assessment
- Learning pathways
- Recognition
- Portable
- Learner-centered
- Authentic
- Information and guidance

² Council of the European Union (2022). COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION of 16 June 2022 on a European approach to microcredentials for lifelong learning and employability (2022/C 243/02), p. 23–25.

3.2 Specific principles set in place

- Adherence to the existing national legal requirements actively seeking opportunities to initiate dialogue with the respective authorities such as Ministries of Education and Labour as well as certification bodies in order to utilise the good practices from the Alliance and bring about innovation and change to the existing national frameworks.
- Respect for the variety and specific institutional, regional and national contexts of the T4EU partner universities.
- Respect for and consideration of the various learners' needs – from school leavers through university students to lifelong learning.
- Consideration of the most pressing societal needs at the level of individual partners and at Alliance level.
- Opportunity for learners from the whole Alliance and beyond to follow the T4EU Microcredential courses/programmes.
- Variety and flexibility of the Microcredential courses/programmes offered by the T4EU Alliance in terms of format, duration and mode of delivery.
- Real needs-driven T4EU Alliance Microcredential courses/programmes meaning MC courses correspond to identified learner and labour market needs and provide opportunities for active, independent, hands-on learning.

4. Concrete Goals

This document aims to establish a joint definition of microcredentials and to present a structured framework for the future deployment of a T4EU microcertification offering at the **Transform4Europe Alliance**. In this regard, the compilation of data at each partner's institutional, national, European, and international levels, particularly concerning regulations, serves as a primary guideline for examining all aspects and unavoidable challenges related to realizing this ambition.

Such an offer shall be integrated into an ecosystem of excellence-oriented education driven by research, in rapidly evolving fields with significant societal stakes, to address the new and emerging needs of society and the labour market as well as personal needs for higher qualification. It is part of the higher education context and of the broader context of lifelong learning.

5. Joint definition of microcredentials

The T4EU Alliance adopts the following definition which is based on the one provided in the COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION of 16 June 2022 on a European approach to microcredentials for lifelong learning and employability (2022/C 243/02)³. The definition was reached after carrying out a baseline survey of the current national legislative frameworks and existing practices at the T4EU partner universities. Annex I presents a summary of its most important findings.

Microcredential (MC) means the record of the learning outcomes that a learner has acquired following a small volume of learning within a degree or a lifelong learning programme that takes into account the needs of the European labor market and responds to new and emerging societal needs. They lead to acquiring an additional specialisation or professional competence and/or provide added value to a degree but do not represent a degree as such.

MCs are owned by the learner; they can be shared; they are stackable and are portable⁴. They may be stand-alone or combined into larger sets of credentials. They may lead to certification and/or to awarding a certain number of ECTS credit points, i.e 1, 1.5, 2, etc. up to 30 (depending on university). These high-potential training offers are distinguished by their ability to be combined (stacked).

Learning experiences leading to microcredentials are designed to provide the learner with specific knowledge, skills and competences that respond to societal, personal, cultural or labour market needs. Microcredential learning outcomes are assessed

³ Council of the European Union (2022). COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION of 16 June 2022 on a European approach to microcredentials for lifelong learning and employability (2022/C 243/02).

⁴ For the meaning of shareability, portability and stackability, please refer to the Glossary at the end of the document.

against transparent and clearly defined criteria. They are underpinned by quality assurance following agreed standards in the relevant sector or area of activity ensuring their quality, transparency, cross-border comparability, recognition and portability.

6. Measures

Based on the principles and goals laid out in this document, the T4EU Alliance has set to create a list of concrete measures to further define, monitor, and reach these goals.

This list of measures will be subject to regular revisions.

The T4EU Alliance comprises 10 regular members and one associate member from different parts of Europe. The diversity of educational, organisational, legal, financial and cultural backgrounds, constraints and needs within the Alliance means that the proposed measures will not necessarily be implemented in all partner institutions.

The partners have committed themselves to jointly putting the proposed steps of the Strategy into practice where a clear time frame shall be established. Other measures may be adopted by only some partners, depending on local constraints, needs, and contexts.

All partners shall appoint/ nominate responsible persons to follow up internally on strategy implementation. They will ensure all agreed steps will be completed with quality and in compliance with the Alliance goals. These specialists will collaborate with the relevant (if and where applicable) university departments such as lifelong learning and postgraduate education offices, structures offering in-service training for the general public. They will collaborate with PR offices to promote MCs across the T4EU Alliance and beyond and with the IROs to facilitate the process of providing MCs to learners outside their national context. Once compiled, the Portfolio of the joint T4EU offering of MCs is going to be revised on a yearly basis prior to the beginning of each academic year (in September).

7. Target groups

Microcredentials can be offered to all students at different stages of their studies:

- **Recent high school graduates**, holders of a high school diploma. They may wish to attend only specific courses, without pursuing a degree in order to acquire specific skills or specialisation (i.e. a MC in Artificial Intelligence: Challenges, opportunities, practical cases).
- **Bachelor degree students**, recently admitted to the University, holders of a high school diploma. If they follow a Bachelor programme, additional MC programmes could be offered to them, related to their particular interest providing a more narrow specialisation in a given field of studies (i.e. for students of European Studies a MC in Cultural and Lingusitic Diversity of the EU⁵).

⁵ The examples in parentheses in this section are based on the good-practice examples shared by the T4EU partners during the baseline survey activities.

- **Master and Doctoral degree students.** If they wish to specialise further in their field of studies or if they would like to attend MC courses in another field and obtain certain certification of these additional competences.
- **Executive staff.** Learners in managerial and executive positions can take MC courses as part of their on-the-job training related to dealing with current challenges and changes in their respective fields.
- **All learners, including labour market entrants and long-time employees.** If they wish to acquire new skills, to upskill or reskill in a university-offered course/programme or if their job requires certain in-service training (i.e. a MC in expertise in care).

8. Additional considerations regarding the potential target groups

- Potential participants would expect that a MC course can further their learning or working career.
- For some of the MC courses, working experience in a certain field might be required.
- Some MC programmes may be implemented in partnership with national, regional or local governments, with other representatives of the T4EU Alliance stakeholder ecosystem (i.e. R&D organisations, NGOs, etc.) or with international companies or national companies seeking to operate in more than one country.
- All MC courses/programmes have their specific admission requirements listed under the MC course/programme description.

9. Format, duration and mode of delivery

The format of the T4EU MC courses/programmes should be flexible in order to match the variety of learners' and labour market needs and the agreed modalities of horizontal or vertical mobility across the T4EU Alliance. A modular format with clear (sub)sets of learning outcomes, opportunities for accumulation of ECTS credit points (if applicable) is recommended. Opportunities or possible paths to 'stack' certain MCs should also be highlighted (if applicable). However, the T4EU MC format should also reflect the respective national legal frameworks.

The duration of T4EU MC courses/programmes shall not be strictly fixed but it shall reflect the specific learning/training needs and the context in which the partners operate.

T4EU MC courses/programmes are highly flexible in time and place. They can be face-to-face, blended or entirely online (offered in a synchronous or asynchronous mode).

10. Common platform

Existing MC courses/programmes shall be proposed by each partner university and listed in a Portfolio of T4EU MCs, as part of the joint T4EU Portfolio of flexible study offers. It is to be regularly updated to reflect new developments both at the level of

individual universities and at the Alliance level. Each university will select the courses to offer to the whole Alliance and various stakeholders.

The above MC courses will be available for browsing, selection and registration through a common platform.. It is recommended to explore how this platform can be integrated with developments under T1.4 and T1.5 to maximize efficiency and user-friendliness and at the same time stays affordable.

In cases of blended or entirely online MC courses/programmes, it is recommended that they should be offered through the established learning management systems of the T4EU Alliance members or another centralized platform.

11. Accessibility for learners from all Alliance universities

In line with the country requirements and depending on the availability of MC offers or the readiness to provide such at the particular University, MC courses/programmes can be made available for learners from all Alliance universities.

One commonly agreed, conceptualised and developed course could be piloted across the interested universities to serve as a model for the implementation of the microcredentials approach at large. Such could be, for example, a T4EU Knowledge Entrepreneurs' course (based on the experience from the Pilot phase of the T4EU project⁶) or similar.

12. Time of delivery

This feature of the MC courses/programmes is also flexible. In the cases where MC courses/programmes target Bachelor, Master or Doctoral students, the time of delivery might be tied in with the respective academic calenders. In cases of primarily in-service and lifelong learning, the time can vary, i.e. courses starting on a rolling basis every month, bimonthly, etc., on-demand courses, etc.

13. Quality assurance

Quality assurance is pivotal to increasing transparency and the level of trust in Microcredentials.

An available mechanism in one of the project countries (universities) could be studied and if acceptable for all – applied in the common MC course/programme.

Alternatively, the Joint Quality Assurance Office could be asked to help the specialists, appointed to carry out the task or performing duties related to MCs at the partner universities, with developing and implementing specific T4EU quality assurance measures. Such measures may (but are not limited to) include a joint T4EU MC template to describe the pre-existing conditions, target learners, learning outcomes,

⁶ See, for example, D3.3 Customised Course Content and Programme for the Three Transform4Europe Bachelor Tracks.

course/programme structure, etc.; a joint T4EU MC certificate⁷; a joint mechanism/procedure for establishing learners' needs and satisfaction; an agreed path through the MC courses provided by the different partners to support MC stackability, etc⁸.

14. Assessment and certification

Assessment modalities should be planned at the outset and included in the descriptions of individual T4EU MC courses.

A joint assessment approach implemented with the help of the Joint Quality Assurance Office is recommended.

Cooperation on skills assessment and certification among the project partners is a good way to implement the MC approach. This requires a multi-partner agreement on standard elements describing them, such as – defining the target group, the title, duration, mode of delivery, learning outcomes, type of assessment, issuing mode, type of certification opportunities to combine a particular MC with others. Annex 2 contains a list of T4EU standard elements to describe microcredentials as suggested in the COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION of 16 June 2022 on a European approach to microcredentials for lifelong learning and employability (2022/C 243/02, p. 12). Using such a list of descriptors will be beneficial to increase the interoperability and exchange of information on the T4EU MCs. The list comprises mandatory and optional entries. The latter shall be revisited by the Alliance partners as needed on a regular basis.

The certifying documents can be a digital badge, a course certificate with ECTS, a programme certificate or diploma with or without ECTS, etc., as agreed by the Alliance partners and in line with the respective national frameworks.

15. Promotion of the T4EU MC courses/programmes

The list of T4EU MC courses/programmes shall be regularly updated to reflect the changing societal and labour market needs and personal needs for higher qualification.

When a new MC course/programme is launched, the partners involved will publicise this on their dedicated websites and following the agreed rules for dissemination, on the T4EU webpage. The partners involved will also use their regular channels such as mailing lists and social media to popularise MCs among various potential target learners.

16. Fees

The fee guidelines of the respective partner university offering the MC courses/programmes shall apply. In cases of jointly developed new MC

⁷ See Deliverable 3.9 (D79) Concept for Lifelong Learning certificates for the three target groups from the pilot phase.

⁸ For some recommendations which may be adapted to the needs of implementing Joint T4EU Microcredentials, see D3.5 Evaluation Report of the Pilot (BA Tracks) and Recommendations for the Roll-out, from the pilot phase.

courses/programmes, the partners shall agree on the amount, collection and distribution of the fees.

The T4EU universities can sign further agreements to exempt from fees certain types of learners based on the International Cooperation Outline Agreement dated 7 March 2022 (and amended with the new partners joining).

The above mean establishing close cooperation with the legal and financial departments (or other relevant administrative structures at the partner universities) as well as with the T4EU Management Board.

17. Proposal for further steps within the timeline of the Transform4Europe Alliance project

At the level of the T4EU Alliance partners:

- Within the project, a pilot aimed at students could be realised based on the T4EU Bachelor Tracks from the pilot phase of the T4EU project. In synergy with Task 5.3, the planned microcredential course on knowledge entrepreneurship targeted to staff could be used to pilot the agreed joint quality assurance measures, etc. In synergy with Task 8.5, where a T4EU Lifelong Learning Centre should be developed, the current T4EU MC Strategy could also be implemented and in-service learning opportunities from the T4EU MC portfolio promoted to a wide circle of target learners.
- Selected existing MC courses/programmes at one partner university should be open to learners from other partner universities and/or lifelong learners from their region/country.
- Further T4EU courses and curricula can be jointly developed (including with partners from industry, for example – multinational companies and regulatory/certification bodies). This could be done by encouraging the relevant staff members (administrative and academic) to seek matchmaking and seed funding opportunities, including such provided by external actors, e.g. external organizations

At national level:

- Further experimentation with practical initiatives could be proposed to underpin defining the role of microcredentials in education and training, for example – introducing MCs as part of the qualification systems and National qualification frameworks.
- Initiating dialogue with the relevant national authorities (i.e. Ministries of Education, of Labour, of Innovations, etc., certification bodies, vocational education and training providers, etc.) should be actively sought to achieve uptake at the policy level and to lead to legislative change where applicable.
- Related to the above, in countries where the MC approach has not been implemented, a concept for such implementation and/or mainstreaming microcredentials in skills development systems, including legislative

arrangeents, can be developed, based on the existing experience in partner countries and piloted programmes.

Glossary on microcredentials (in alphabetical order)

Degree – a comprehensive course of study at a college or university, or the qualification given to a student after he or she has completed his or her studies, i.e. Bachelor's, Master's, PhD degree.

Informal learning – means learning resulting from daily activities and experiences which is not organised or structured in terms of objectives, time or learning support; it may be unintentional from the learner's perspective⁹.

Non-formal learning – learning which takes place outside formal education and training through planned activities in terms of learning objectives and learning time and where some form of learning support is present¹⁰.

Learner needs – gaps between what a learner knows/can do/has competence in and the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required to perform a specific task or achieve a specific learning outcome. Learning needs can vary depending on the student's prior knowledge, learning style, motivation, interests, strengths, weaknesses, and background.

Learning outcomes (in view of MC) – description of measurable skills, abilities, knowledge or values that students should be able to demonstrate as a result of completing an MC course/programme; defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence

Lifelong learning – learning in all its forms – formal, non-formal or informal – taking place at all stages in life and resulting in an improvement or update in knowledge, skills, competences and attitudes or participation in society

Microcredential – the record of the learning outcomes that a learner has acquired following a small volume of learning within a degree or a lifelong learning programme that takes into account the needs of the European labor market and responds to new and emerging societal needs. They lead to acquiring an additional specialisation or professional competence and/or provide added value to a degree but do not represent a degree as such. MCs are owned by the learner; they can be shared; they are stackable and are portable. They may be stand-alone or combined into larger sets of credentials. They may lead to certification and/or to awarding a certain

⁹ Regulation (EU) 2021/817 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 May 2021 establishing Erasmus+: the Union Programme for education and training, youth and sport, p. 14.

¹⁰ Regulation (EU) 2021/817 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 May 2021 establishing Erasmus+: the Union Programme for education and training, youth and sport, p. 14.

number of ECTS credit points, i.e 1, 1.5, 2, etc. up to 30. These high-potential training offers are distinguished by their ability to be combined (stacked).

Learning experiences leading to microcredentials are designed to provide the learner with specific knowledge, skills and competences that respond to societal, personal, cultural or labour market needs. Microcredential learning outcomes are assessed against transparent and clearly defined criteria. They are underpinned by quality assurance following agreed standards in the relevant sector or area of activity ensuring their quality, transparency, cross-border comparability, recognition and portability – a recognised proof of the learning outcomes that a learner has achieved following a short learning experience, according to transparent standards and requirements and upon assessment. The proof is contained in a certified document that lists the name of the holder, the achieved learning outcomes, the assessment method, the awarding body and, where applicable, the qualifications framework level and the credits gained. Microcredentials are owned by the learner, are shareable, portable and may be combined into larger credentials or qualifications (stacked).

Microcredential course – a course leading to awarding microcredentials to a learner

Microcredential programme – a set of courses leading to a larger credential

Portability – the quality of microcredentials to be transferred and recognised in other contexts, i.e. between and within education and training sectors, in the labour market and across countries; refers to both the document and the qualification; connected with *shareability* and *stackability*.

Shareability – the quality of microcredentials to be shared with a party of the learner's choice (whether national or transnational); related to portability.

Stackability – the quality of microcredentials to add them to one another and accumulate them towards building a “larger” qualification.

Annex I: Results of the survey on microcredentials administered among the partner institutions

The existing legal framework regarding microcredentials on national level varies greatly:

- in 6 partners' national legislation there is no existing official definition or framework regarding MCs
- in 1 a relevant legal act is under governmental review

The institutional framework is also highly varied, i.e. in 5 partner universities there are corresponding internal regulations concerning the MCs, while in the other 5 it is still lacking.

It was established that the target groups represent the whole array of potential learners to address via MC courses – from students to working adults and from members of academia or outside learners.

The format, duration and mode of delivery of MC courses/programmes provided by the partner universities are of a flexible format allowing a blended mode of delivery. Face-to-face delivery is not mandatory and the modality can be synchronous or asynchronous. The respective duration and teaching schedule can also be different – spanning from 5 hours to a whole academic year. At some partner universities they are delivered according to a fixed schedule, at others they are offered upon demand.

With respect to certification, 5 of the partners are allowed to issue Certificates. As far as ECTS are concerned, the range varies from 1 to 30.

ITEM	YES	NO
Definition, Internal Act, Strategy	4	6
National Legal framework	5	4
Existing MCs	6	4
Who is in charge of the Microcredentials in your organization- centralized, by Department	3 – Department	6 Centralized
Target groups	Various – no restrictions, possibly to be for students or working adults	
ECTS	1-30 ECTS – wide range	
Format of MCs' courses – online, blended, face to face, etc.	Flexible – no restrictions on f2f only, blended is possible	
Teaching schedule – fixed or upon demand	Fixed – 2	Upon demand – 2
Existing recruitment practices	2-Similar to other Open Academy courses	8- NO

MCs paid for/ free	Paid -5	Free - 4
What is the way for recognition of the credit issued – formal recognition/ non-formal	5 Formal	N/A

Annex II: List of T4EU standard elements to describe microcredentials

The following list is suggested in the COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION of 16 June 2022 on an European approach to microcredentials for lifelong learning and employability (2022/C 243/02, p. 21). The T4EU Alliance shall revisit, adapt and change the list of optional elements prior to releasing/updating the Portfolio of T4EU Microcredentials.

Mandatory elements:

Identification of the learner

Title of the microcredential

Country(ies)/Region(s) of the issuer

Awarding body(ies)

Date of issuing

Learning outcomes

Language

National workload needed to achieve the learning outcomes (in ECTS credits, where possible)

Level (and cycle, if applicable) of the learning experience leading to the microcredential (EQF, QF-EHEA), if applicable

Type of assessment

Form of participation in the learning activity

Type of quality assurance used to underpin the microcredential

Optional elements, where relevant (non-exhaustive list)

Prerequisites needed to enroll in the learning activity

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 microcredential/integrated, stackable towards another credential)

Further information, including contact details of responsible offices/person