

# CHARM-EU Micro-credentials Strategic Plan

Public version extracted from CHARM8 Deliverable 3.3

## Contents

Executive Summary.....	3
Glossary.....	5
1. Introduction .....	6
1.1. Opportunities and strategic alignment of CHARM-EU micro-credentials.....	6
1.2. Purpose of strategic plan.....	7
2. Methodology .....	8
3. Market analysis .....	9
4. Vision Statement .....	11
5. Strategic goals .....	12

## Executive Summary

The CHARM-EU micro-credentials strategic plan outlines the CHARM-EU approach to enhancing lifelong learning and employability within Europe through the implementation of micro-credentials. Recognizing the growing importance of micro-credentials as a means for skill development and professional growth, CHARM-EU aims to leverage its collective strengths across alliance institutions to lead and innovate in this evolving educational landscape. This strategic plan provides a clear framework for the development and implementation of micro-credentials, and micro-credential offerings, trainings and programmes, within the CHARM-EU alliance, aligning with European and national educational and research priorities. Our vision is to position micro-credentials as integral components of CHARM-EU's mission to offer distinctive, transformative learning experiences that respond to both current and future market and industry needs and in line with CHARM-EU educational principles and values. The strategy is built on the following core components.

### Identification and analysis of target markets

We have identified key target markets, both internal to CHARM-EU (e.g. staff and students) and targeted individuals in external markets (e.g. lifelong learners and professionals). By using our existing partnerships, collaborations, and resources CHARM-EU will support and pilot micro-credential offerings to create impact in European skills acquisition.

### SWOT and institutional analysis

Our Alliance institutions are at different levels of micro-credential development, which is both a challenge to development and an opportunity for joint provision and best practice sharing. CHARM-EU can leverage its strong reputation and collaboration partnerships to harness opportunities for educational programme expansion, increasing micro-credential provision, and reinforcement of the CHARM-EU community.

### Vision and strategic objectives

Our overall vision for micro-credentials is to harness the combined strengths of CHARM-EU institutions to progress micro-credential adoption, delivery, innovation, and quality across and within our institutions. Strategic objectives include promoting transdisciplinary education, enhancing learner recognition and certification, awareness of training aligning with learning objectives, and addressing European market demands in key areas such as sustainability, digital skills, and entrepreneurship.

### Micro-credential development

We propose a balanced approach, combining the promotion of existing micro-credentials with the creation of new joint programs. This strategy maximizes the use of available resources while fostering innovation across the alliance.

### Operational and risk management

The operationalization of CHARM-EU micro-credentials will be supported by digital infrastructure, including the use of digital badges for credentialing, clear governance structures, quality assurance, and policies. Additionally, a comprehensive risk management framework is in place to anticipate and address potential challenges.

### Action plan and timeline

The strategic plan sets clear milestones for the development and delivery of 120-160 ECTS worth of micro-credentials during 2025-2026, with an ambitious goal of engaging 2,000-3,000 lifelong learners by 2030.

Through this strategic plan, CHARM-EU aims to become a leader in the European micro-credential ecosystem, offering learners accessible, high-quality educational opportunities that align with the evolving demands of the global workforce.

Note that this public version of the Strategic Plan omits analysis and operational details that are contained within the restricted deliverable.

## Glossary<sup>1</sup>

**Micro-credential:** *“A proof of the learning outcomes that a learner has acquired following a short learning experience. These learning outcomes have been assessed against transparent standards. 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. Micro-credentials are owned by the learner, can be shared, are portable and may be combined into larger credentials or qualifications. They are underpinned by quality assurance following agreed standards”* (Council of the European Union, 2022).

**Lifelong Learning:** *“Any learning activity undertaken throughout life in a formal, non-formal or informal setting, which results in improving knowledge, know-how, skills, competences and qualifications for personal, social or professional reasons”* (CEDEFOP, 2023).

**Digital badge:** A digital badge is one which contains metadata about the learner, the skills and competencies learned, the issuing organization, the date of issue, and usually, a visual image representing the badge<sup>2</sup>.

A **CHARM-EU micro-credential** is defined as a micro-credential following the Council of the European Union definition above. Both pre-existing micro-credentials developed by a CHARM-EU institution as a model of best practice, or newly developed educational programmes that lead to the issuance of a micro-credential can be considered as part of the CHARM-EU micro-credential programme.

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<sup>1</sup> Definitions are a contentious point in the micro-credentials landscape with many discussions on how and in what way micro-credentials, and aligned activities (e.g. digital badges), can be defined (Varadarajan et al. 2023). CHARM-EU recognizes that micro-credentials are evolving at a rapid rate and can be understood in varied ways by universities, employers, learners, and teachers. To standardize our strategy, we will use the Council of the European Union micro-credential definition as our anchor point. For the purposes of this strategy and for CHARM-EU the following definitions will be used.

<sup>2</sup> Although the term ‘badge’ is used in the CHARM8 proposal, the general understanding is that ‘badge’ in this form relates to the attribution of a credential to a micro-credential. For example, a PDF certificate, a digital badge, a digitally signed certificate, a Blockchain certificate etc...

## 1. Introduction

Lifelong learning is a key segment of the European educational landscape, prioritized by CHARM-EU, to consolidate and extend our innovative educational model. By enhancing social inclusion, active citizenship, personal development, competitiveness, and employability (Council of the European Union, 2018), lifelong learning aligns strongly with CHARM-EU's values and mission. Micro-credentials are becoming central to this varied, flexible, and innovative lifelong learning ecosystem; a tool for all learners to gain or upskill relevant labour market skills through transformative learning opportunities. Their role within this ecosystem is to facilitate market-relevant skill acquisition, personalized learning pathways, accessibility for all learners, adaptability to market changes and needs, recognition of effort, transparency of learning standards, and portability across modern educational and professional settings.

However, the current development of micro-credentials is fragmented, often lacks transparency and consistent quality assurance<sup>3</sup>, and is challenging to integrate into current higher education systems<sup>4</sup>. Many European governments and universities are still exploring how to legislate for micro-credentials, how they can be funded, how they can gain credibility for stakeholders and learners, how they can integrate with existing educational systems, and how policies and processes can be developed.

### 1.1. Opportunities and strategic alignment of CHARM-EU micro-credentials

Despite these challenges, micro-credentials offer opportunities for CHARM-EU and align with European, National, Alliance, and Institutional strategic needs. At a **European level**, the Council of the European Union has identified micro-credentials as an important enabler of skills development in Europe. As such, they are growing as a means to enhance lifelong learning in Europe; a tool for all learners to gain labour market skills through transformative learning opportunities. Within their Recommendation on a European approach to Micro-credentials for Lifelong Learning and Employability (2022)<sup>5</sup>, European University Alliances (EUAs) are noted as crucial for the development of a European micro-credential ecosystem. An array of European resources, tools, technologies and supports have been documented which offer opportunities for CHARM-EU to leverage this knowledge for their own micro-credential development. Many funding opportunities are available for micro-credentials at a European level, and CHARM-EU should be ready to respond to these. By supporting micro-credential development, CHARM-EU can also align and feed into the European Commission's new Union of Skills, a comprehensive framework for workforce development across the EU, focusing on equipping people with the necessary skills for emerging industries and sectors.

At a **European University Alliance (EUA)** level, micro-credentials are a key activity to achieve impact across and within institutions. To date, the majority of existing EUAs are either offering, or planning to offer, micro-credentials in some form. For EUAs, micro-credentials offer a means for collaboration, education and research innovation, knowledge dissemination, and engagement with different target groups. For CHARM-EU to remain competitive and relevant within the EUA space, micro-credential development is warranted. Other EUAs, through the FOREU initiative, offer opportunities for CHARM-EU to learn best practices from their experiences.

At a **national level** some CHARM-EU countries have implemented micro-credential programmes, policies, and government support. This offers CHARM-EU opportunities to leverage national initiatives for micro-credential development. Conversely, some CHARM-EU countries do not have

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.engq.eu/wp-content/uploads/IMINQA-MC-report\\_Approaches-to-Quality-Assurance-of-Micro-credentials.pdf](https://www.engq.eu/wp-content/uploads/IMINQA-MC-report_Approaches-to-Quality-Assurance-of-Micro-credentials.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/5603\\_en.pdf](https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/5603_en.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9237-2022-INIT/en/pdf>

much experience or development in micro-credentials. This also offers an opportunity for CHARM-EU partners to share knowledge and encourage micro-credential policy-making and delivery.

At an **institutional level** micro-credentials are at differing levels of development; some CHARM-EU universities already deliver micro-credentials, others are in the planning phase for offering micro-credentials, and others still are considering offering micro-credentials and discussing internally their opportunities and challenges. Our combined strengths in education and research offer opportunities for joint delivery of programmes where partners can mutually support micro-credential development.

For **CHARM-EU**, micro-credentials are a means for actioning one of the four value propositions of the CHARM-EU 2024-2030 strategic plan “*offering a unique learning experience for lifelong development*”<sup>6</sup>. They can showcase the unique strengths of CHARM-EU education and research networks, educational principles, transdisciplinary focus, and mobility opportunities.

CHARM-EU recognizes the need to focus on this evolving landscape of lifelong learning, develop a strategy for micro-credentials, and align with the European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability. It envisages that micro-credentials will be a valuable tool to foster internal and external transformation, transnational collaboration, increase our networks and stakeholder interactions, increase visibility and access, and share CHARM-EU values, transdisciplinary education, and inter-institutional knowledge.

## 1.2. Purpose of strategic plan

CHARM8 WP3 KPIs state that CHARM-EU should “*prepare 120-160 worth of microcredentials to preliminary test the Continuous Education model as part of the second half of the project in WP4.*” This document describes the CHARM-EU strategy for micro-credentials within the broader context of lifelong learning to achieve this objective.

This is part of Deliverable 3.3 for the CHARM8 project and forms the strategy for CHARM8 WP4 (2025-2026). It aims to align this strategy with the larger framework of the CHARM-EU 2024-2030 strategy, and other strategic documents developed by CHARM8 work packages. Supplementary documentation available on request describe the research and work of WP3.4 which evidences this strategy.

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<sup>6</sup> [CHARM-EU Strategic Planning D1.2](#)

## 2. Methodology

The development of the strategic plan has followed these steps:

### Step 1: Market and institutional analysis

An analysis of the current position of our institutions related to micro-credentials, a research-based market analysis, and a target market analysis.

### Step 2: SWOT analysis

A strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats analysis was developed to inform the strategic plan.

### Step 3: Vision Statement

Based on our market, institutional and SWOT analysis, a vision statement was developed based on research in other vision statements from EUAs, alignment with CHARM-EU strategic goals and its mission.

### Step 4: Strategic goals

Emerging from this stepwise approach, the overarching strategic goals of CHARM-EU micro-credentials were established.

### Step 5: Micro-credential programme development

To operationalize the micro-credential programme structure, content, and development were documented. This includes consideration of technology, partnerships and collaborations, marketing, quality assurance, governance, and monitoring.

### Step 6: Risk analysis

A detailed risk analysis was conducted to ensure that all risks were considered and mitigation actions documented.

### Step 7: Action Plan

An action plan for CHARM-EU micro-credentials during 2025-2026 was developed. This provides the operational basis of how the micro-credentials programme will be carried out.

**Note that this public version of the Strategic Plan omits analysis and operational details that are contained within the restricted deliverable.**



### 3. Market analysis<sup>7</sup>

As part of the strategic development of CHARM-EU micro-credentials, an exploration of the perceptions of micro-credentials from various perspectives was considered essential. By exploring aspects of micro-credentials with parties who may develop or engage with micro-credentials, CHARM-EU can inform and evidence their strategic direction. A range of research activities was held between January and March 2024 with CHARM-EU students, alumni, Work Package members, and stakeholders. In addition, key discussion points from a meeting with Quality Agencies, Ministries and European experts in micro-credentials were also reviewed and considered. These data sources were then analysed and considered to provide strategic recommendations for CHARM-EU's micro-credentials.

**Strategic approach:** Ensure communication clarity, alignment with stakeholders and industry, flexibility and accessibility, standardization and quality assurance, and maintaining CHARM-EU differentiation and value.

#### Strategic recommendations from students

- Define micro-credentials for students in a clear and concise manner with visual aids and examples.
- Clearly highlight the value of micro-credentials to students (e.g. address the gap between university education and job readiness)
- Focus on practical, skills generation, and hands-on approach of micro-credentials.
- Provide guidance for students to help them select a micro-credential, perhaps in the form of a tool, or ESCO skills/employer alignment.
- Highlight how micro-credentials can facilitate personal specialization.
- Consider operational challenges for students doing a micro-credential and studying a programme at the same time. Ensure equality of access where possible.
- Ensure the skills attained by micro-credentials are clearly described in the credentials given to ensure that employers can easily align with their needs.

#### Strategic recommendations from alumni

- Ensure that micro-credentials offered are up to date and relate to contemporaneous specific content.
- Micro-credentials should directly address skills and competencies needed by learners in the workplace. CHARM-EU should keep abreast of industry and alumni needs to ensure this alignment through engagement with stakeholders and alumni.
- CHARM-EU could consider partnering with high-profile stakeholders (e.g. UN, EC) who could support training in specific areas where there is a demand.
- Micro-credentials targeted at recent graduates should be low-cost and flexible.
- Curriculum content areas should be more targeted, less vague and on specific niche topics.
- Micro-credentials should be structured with lifelong learner commitments in mind.
- Micro-credentials should aim to support CHARM-EU students from different backgrounds to gain knowledge in areas they are not familiar with (e.g. research).

#### Strategic recommendations from PMT and WP members

- The CHARM-EU micro-credential value proposition needs to be differentiated, clear, and strong for whichever market it is seeking to target.
- Micro-credentials which will focus on CHARM-EU internal or external transformation should be clarified and detailed.

<sup>7</sup> See Supporting Documentation for this full analysis.

- CHARM-EU micro-credentials need to have a minimum standard in terms of content, credits etc.
- CHARM-EU micro-credentials should be approved by a relevant body.
- The overall aim of micro-credentials for CHARM-EU needs to be clarified. Be it disseminating CHARM-EU values, gaining more students, skill recognition, and/or financial sustainability.
- Content areas should strongly align to the overall strategic aim of CHARM-EU micro-credentials and its target markets.
- The added value of a CHARM-EU micro-credential should be aligned with CHARM-EU expertise and values.
- Each micro-credential should have a clear target audience with strong consideration of whether its value is on skill acquisition or recognition.
- Each micro-credential should be visible and well communicated.
- Micro-credentials should be structured with lifelong learner commitments in mind.
- Micro-credentials should be embedded throughout the CHARM-EU WP ecosystem at all levels (e.g. staff, students, stakeholders) if all markets are targeted.
- CHARM-EU should use micro-credentials as a means to widen networks and gain stakeholders.

#### Strategic recommendations from stakeholders

- Stakeholders should be involved in the development and teaching of micro-credentials to ensure up-to-date industry knowledge is disseminated to learners.
- Micro-credentials should focus on practical skill acquisition that is recognized by industry.
- Micro-credentials should align with industry needs.
- Micro-credentials should offer opportunities for networking with stakeholders.
- Stakeholders should communicate CHARM-EU micro-credentials to their staff.

#### Strategic recommendations from Ministries and Agencies meeting

- Align CHARM-EU policies and standards with European standards related to definition, standard elements, technical, and design and issuance.
- Ensure internal quality assurance mechanisms and align with European Quality Assurance frameworks.
- Focus on lifelong learning and employability where skills and competencies needed by the labour market are prioritized and a need has been identified.
- Offer opportunities for learning pathways and modularization.
- Provide guidance for learners to find the relevant micro-credential for them.
- Aim to co-design micro-credentials with stakeholders to ensure industry needs are addressed.

Based on these recommendations, the following overlapping recommendations relevant to the strategic plan were identified.

Clarity in communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Micro-credentials value and definition are clear</li> <li>• Support for micro-credential selection and personal specialization</li> <li>• Promote recognition and credentialization</li> </ul>
Alignment with stakeholders and industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborate with industry to develop micro-credentials</li> <li>• Prioritize content related to industry needs</li> </ul>
Flexibility and accessibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flexibility in micro-credential delivery</li> <li>• Accessibility in micro-credential provision</li> </ul>
Standardization and quality assurance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure European standards for quality assurance</li> <li>• Employ European standards for micro-credentials</li> </ul>
Differentiation and CHARM-EU value	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CHARM-EU micro-credentials have a differentiated value</li> <li>• Micro-credentials are embedded within the CHARM-EU eco-system</li> </ul>

#### 4. Vision Statement

CHARM-EU has created this micro-credentials vision statement to inspire our CHARM-EU partners, to provide direction to our overall micro-credential strategy, and to set out a unique approach to differentiate CHARM-EU as a micro-credential enabler. It will be used initially for CHARM-8 activities from 2024-2026 and revised at the end of this period based on our experiences. It aligns with the overall [CHARM-EU Vision and Mission Statement](#).

**Our overall vision for micro-credentials is to harness the combined strengths of CHARM-EU institutions to progress micro-credential adoption, delivery, innovation, and quality across and within our institutions.**

By practising our vision for CHARM-EU micro-credentials, we aim to foster innovative education, facilitate lifelong learning, and contribute to the transformation of higher education. Through collaboration, shared resources, and a learner-centred approach, we aim to empower individuals, enhance their employability, and reconcile humanity with the planet.

We aim to leverage micro-credentials to enhance these vision pillars:

- Increase **collaboration and partnership** across, within, and external to our Alliance institutions.
- **Innovate educational delivery** and content through unique and targeted learning experiences.

- Strengthen **learner recognition, certification, and portability**.
- Enable access to **skill development and personal growth**.
- Address **market and employer needs**.
- Foster **intercultural** and **mobility** opportunities.
- Support continuous improvement in **quality assurance, policy development, and governance**.

These vision pillars are connected and actioned by our strategic goals presented in the next section.

## 5. Strategic goals

The CHARM-EU micro-credentials strategy needs to be embedded within the wider CHARM-EU strategic plan, in particular, focusing on the value proposition “offer a unique learning experience for lifelong development”. This approach “fosters a lifelong love of learning and equips students with the flexibility and adaptability needed to thrive in an ever-evolving job market. CHARM-EU provides in this regard, it will strengthen the focus on students and intercultural learning through transnational cooperation through the means of mobility combined with internationalisation at home actions as part of the professional development for students, staff, and external stakeholders.”

- To achieve this value proposition, a long-term goal of 2,000-3,000 lifelong learners should have registered in micro-credentials by 2030.
- In the short term, within the CHARM8 project, the goal of preparing 120-160 ECTS worth for piloting during 2025-2026 was also established.

To achieve these activity levels, the following key strategic goals are described:

### Enhance collaboration and partnership

- Enhance and support micro-credentials offered at an institutional and CHARM-EU level by providing a collaborative, open, and innovative strategic approach where broad applications and delivery types of micro-credentials are considered.
- Foster extra-academic partnerships using the CHARM-EU partnership and collaborations eco-system.
- Support new joint micro-credential development between CHARM-EU partners through collaboration, innovation, and transdisciplinary development, and promote micro-credential development in partners where it is less developed. Using a “accreditation partner” and “co-lead” strategy will support this as documented in the Micro-credentials Policy.
- Promote best practice sharing from partners with existing micro-credentials that align with the values, content and mission of CHARM-EU through targeted calls.
- Encourage educational networks of micro-credential sharing and exchange among and outside CHARM-EU.
- Identify national and European-level funding opportunities for micro-credentials.
- Boost the impact of CHARM-EU through collaborative micro-credential activities.
- Collect and share best practices related to micro-credentials that reflect CHARM-EU values.

### Innovate in educational delivery and content

- Support the delivery of micro-credentials through different delivery formats, including online, blended or in-person programmes, Blended Intensive Programmes, Summer/Winter Schools, Hackathons, and other novel means of educational delivery that may emerge in the future. This will ensure broad participation and inclusion of different learner types.
- Offer unique learning experiences for lifelong development focusing on the CHARM-EU educational principles, including sustainability, transdisciplinarity, and challenge-based learning. This will ensure that CHARM-EU will have a unique selling point to set it apart from existing micro-credential offerings.
- Foster transdisciplinary learning opportunities by facilitating entry to micro-credentials from any disciplinary background where possible.
- Experiment and innovate micro-credentials within different modalities, pedagogies, target groups, and content areas.
- Explore how pathways to the acquisition of transdisciplinary knowledge could be facilitated via stackable micro-credentials (i.e. via inter-institutional structures and thematic alignment).
- Explore the stackability of micro-credentials in the long term for learner recognition and certification, but consider possibilities in the short term when micro-credentials are being developed.
- Redevelop CHARM-EU MSc teaching content for lifelong learners.
- Leverage CHARM-EU digital technologies in the delivery of micro-credentials (e.g. hybrid classroom).
- Focus on content areas of strategic importance for the mission of CHARM-EU and its educational principles, for our Alliance institutions, and for skills identified and required at a European level, including sustainability and climate change, transversal skills, technology and STEM, Entrepreneurship, innovation and business, and European values, culture and language.

### Strengthen learner recognition, certification and portability

- Provide quality assured, transparent, and verified certification for learners taking part in micro-credentials through digital badge and walleting technologies. We acknowledge the future needs of portability and strive to support this at a European level where possible.

### Enable access to skill development and personal growth

- Develop a holistic ecosystem of lifelong learners, including all individuals seeking career changes and development, upskilling, and personal growth.
- Encourage lifelong learners from all levels, backgrounds, and abilities to upskill and enhance their careers by providing opportunities for them in multiple environments, levels, and languages providing opportunities for reskilling and upskilling the workforce. This may include current employees, individuals seeking career advancement, and any individual seeking to upskill, including university staff and students where relevant.
- Consolidate and extend our innovative educational model by offering micro-credentials to new markets outside of existing university students.

- Enable broader access to education to lifelong learners through varied micro-credential offerings.
- Facilitate greater inclusion and access to micro-credentials through targeted offerings.
- Enhance intercultural competencies and experiences.

### **Improve quality assurance processes and policies**

- Improve the quality and standardisation of micro-credentials via supporting dedicated quality assurance policies and processes at Alliance and university levels.
- Create and support policy pathways for flexible, transparent, and quality-assured learning experiences following a small volume of learning.

### **Address market and employer needs**

- Collaborate with CHARM-EU stakeholders to investigate the skill needs of industry and develop micro-credentials to respond to this with a focus on Green and Digital skills.
- Enhance and support language acquisition through micro-credentials delivered in Alliance languages.
- Increase the recognition of CHARM-EU educational programmes in partner universities, regional organizations, and companies via quality-assured mechanisms.
- Provide learners with skills and competencies that respond to specific national and European market needs and are aligned with broad European skill frameworks (i.e. ESCO).

### **Integrate mobility into micro-credentials**

- Increase mobility opportunities for lifelong learners through a bespoke micro-credential and mobility framework, including virtual mobilities.
- Identify funding opportunities for mobility that can be integrated into micro-credentials (e.g. Blended Intensive Programmes).

### **Clarify and support policy and governance**

- Facilitate and streamline the process and uptake of micro-credential development in the CHARM-EU alliance through policy and process development.
- Develop governance structures around CHARM-EU micro-credentials.