

Lifelong Learning for Europe's Skills Agenda: What Universities Can Do and How CIVIS Can Lead"

CIVIS Days 2026 Workshop

Workshop Summary

1. Context and Objectives

The workshop, prepared and/or presented by Flavia Baccani (Sapienza), Vassiliki Kollia (NKUA), Laetitia Linden (ULB), [Pascal Paschoud](#) (Unil) and Mariana Vieira (Unil) addressed the strategic importance of University Lifelong Learning (ULLL) in responding to Europe's evolving skills agenda. It combined policy framing, CIVIS activities, and a participatory World Café to explore future directions.

The starting point is a significant European skills gap: by 2030, 75% of jobs will require advanced skills, while many adults still lack basic digital and literacy competencies. Demographic change further intensifies the need for continuous learning, with one-third of Europeans expected to be over 60 by 2050. Against this backdrop, lifelong learning emerges as both an economic and societal priority, supporting employability, inclusion, sustainability, and democratic resilience.

Despite EU ambitions, such as achieving 60% adult participation in learning by 2030, participation remains uneven and insufficient. This reinforces the need for universities to reposition lifelong learning as a core mission, rather than a peripheral activity.

2. The Role of Universities in Lifelong Learning

The workshop highlighted a shift in how universities must operate. While they are still perceived as trusted providers of high-quality education, they face several criticisms: lack of flexibility, high costs, and insufficient alignment with labour market needs.

From both learner and employer perspectives, the following expectations emerge:

- More flexible and modular learning pathways
- Recognition of prior learning and experience
- Affordable and short-format programmes
- Stronger links with professional practice
- Clearer progression routes (lifelong learning pathways)

Micro-credentials were positioned as a central instrument to respond to these challenges. They allow for short, stackable, and targeted learning experiences, supporting both upskilling and reskilling in a rapidly evolving labour market.

To succeed, universities must:

civis.eu

Member universities :

 amU
Aix
Marseille
Université

 NATIONAL AND KAPODISTRIAN
UNIVERSITY OF ATHENS

 ULB
UNIVERSITÉ
LIBRE
DE BRUXELLES

 UNIVERSITY OF
BUCHAREST

 UNIVERSITY
OF GLASGOW

 Unil.
University of Lausanne

 UAM
Universidad Autónoma
de Madrid

 SAPIENZA
UNIVERSITÀ DI ROMA

 PARIS
LODRON
UNIVERSITÄT
SALZBURG

 Stockholm
University

 EBERHARD KARLS
UNIVERSITÄT
TÜBINGEN

Associate member universities :

 HIS

 UNIVERSITÉ
CHEIKH ANTA DIOP
DE DAKAR

 UNIVERSITY OF THE
WITWATERSRAND
JOHANNESBURG

 Maastricht University

 UNIVERSITÉ DE LA
MÉDITERRANÉE

 University of Stavanger

- Embed lifelong learning in institutional strategies
- Develop partnerships with employers and civil society
- Invest in digital transformation and AI-enabled learning
- Enhance guidance and accessibility for diverse learners

3. CIVIS Alliance: Strategy and Achievements

CIVIS Alliance plays a key role in coordinating institutional transformation at the European level and the CIVIS Expert Group on Lifelong Learning (2024–2026) focuses on:

- Developing frameworks and tools for micro-credentials
- Supporting new educational initiatives
- Strengthening CIVIS' positioning in the European LLL ecosystem

Key achievements include:

- Creation of guidelines and templates for joint micro-credentials
- Organisation of training activities and collaborative projects
- Launch of pilot programmes (e.g., "Design Your Micro-Credential")
- Engagement with European initiatives such as ALLIES and FOREU4ALL

The CIVIS Expert Group on Lifelong Learning formulated six major recommendations for CIVIS and its member universities:

1. Make lifelong learning a strategic priority across the alliance
2. Implement a hybrid governance approach (top-down priorities + bottom-up initiatives)
3. Simplify collaboration models for joint micro-credentials
4. Ensure stackability and transferability of credentials across institutions
5. Develop a sustainable financial model
6. Create a common digital credentialing system

4. Insights from the World Café Discussions

The World Café sessions provided concrete insights into challenges and opportunities, structured around **mission, governance, and educational models**.

Theme 1 (table 1) : What challenges does the Union of Skills create for universities in terms of ULLL missions, governance and educational models?

Participants highlighted that the Union of Skills implies a profound transformation of universities' roles across lifelong learning (LLL) missions, governance, and educational models. Universities are

increasingly expected to act as key societal actors by expanding access to continuous learning, addressing demographic change, and supporting upskilling at all stages of life. This shift requires stronger engagement with society, a renewed institutional mindset, and the ability to respond to diverse learner profiles, while also competing with non-university and online providers.

At governance level, more flexible and responsive structures are needed to support LLL. However, participants identified significant barriers, including insufficient funding and staffing, regulatory constraints related to accreditation, and internal resistance to change. Strengthening institutional capacities—across academic, administrative, and digital domains—was seen as critical.

Regarding educational models, participants stressed the need to move towards flexible, short, and inclusive learning formats (including hybrid and intensive programmes), with a stronger focus on practical skills, challenge-based learning, and collaboration with societal partners. This transformation requires rethinking curricula design, assessment methods, and accreditation frameworks, while enabling pedagogical innovation such as experiential learning and non-traditional teaching roles.

Theme 2 (table 2): Labour market and external stakeholders

The discussions highlighted several practical issues:

1. Stakeholder engagement

- Collaboration with **HR managers, companies, and public services** is essential
- Universities must identify the right stakeholders and the right persons
- Volunteering and civic engagement can also serve as learning channels

2. Co-creation and skills identification

- Training programmes should be **co-designed with labour market actors**
- There is a need to better **map existing and emerging skills**
- Regular exchanges (e.g., every 6 years or more frequently) can support foresight

3. Governance complexity

- Participants stressed that **too many procedural steps hinder innovation**
- Simplification and flexibility are required in joint programme development

4. Early engagement

- Collaboration should begin at an **“early stage”** of programme design
- Continuous interaction—not one-off consultation—is key

Theme 3 (table 3): Lifelong Learning, Micro-credentials and CIVIS

Table 3 explored how CIVIS can support the development of meaningful, recognised and stackable micro-credentials within a broader lifelong learning strategy. The activity was organised around a visual board with four dimensions: target groups, competences and needs, barriers, and practical support. Participants contributed by placing post-it notes on the board, while a set of thematic cards provided examples and prompts to facilitate discussion. The participatory methodology

encouraged the production of short, concrete and comparable contributions, which were subsequently clustered according to thematic recurrence.

The discussion generated the following insights:

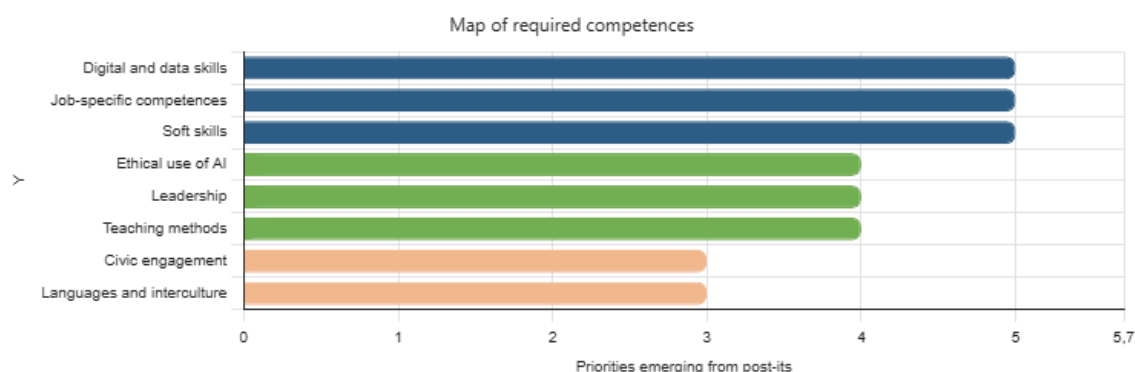
Target groups – Who should CIVIS prioritise?

Participants identified both internal university communities and external audiences as relevant target groups for CIVIS micro-credentials. Priority groups included students, alumni, academic and administrative staff, doctoral researchers, and early-career academics, as well as professionals seeking upskilling or reskilling, public sector workers, people in career transition, and local stakeholders. Attention was also drawn to vulnerable or underrepresented groups, learners with family responsibilities, and multilingual or transnational learner profiles.

University community	Professionals	Social inclusion	Territorial dimension
Students, alumni, academic staff, administrative staff, doctoral candidates and early-career academics.	Workers involved in upskilling/reskilling, public-sector professionals and people in career transition.	Vulnerable or underrepresented groups, people with family responsibilities and multilingual learners.	Citizens and local stakeholders with needs linked to social, environmental and economic challenges.

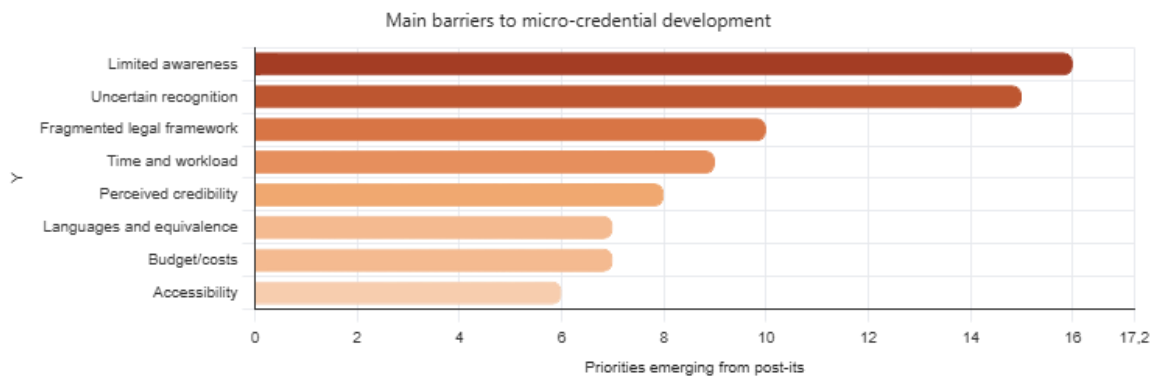
Competences and needs – Which competences and needs seem most important?

In terms of competences, participants highlighted the importance of digital and data-related skills, professional and job-specific competences, transversal skills, and lifelong learning or learning-to-learn competences. Micro-credentials were seen as particularly valuable when they respond to concrete, practical and recognisable needs across academic, professional and social contexts.



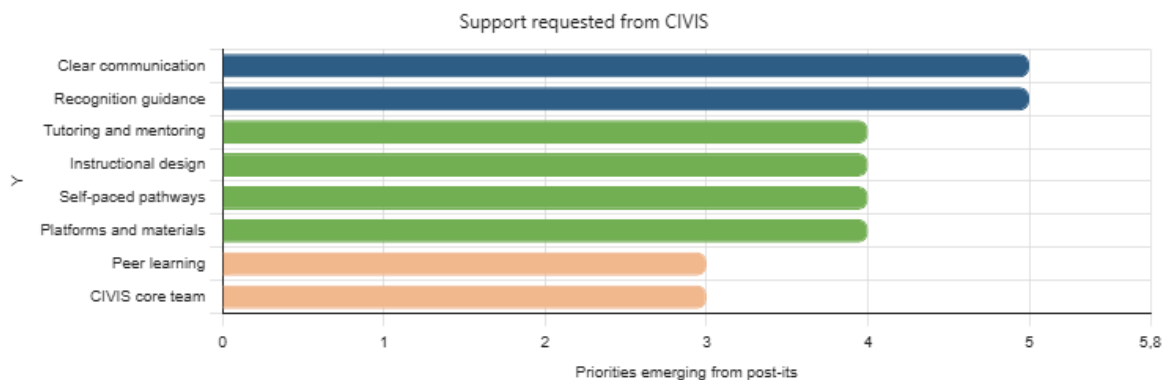
Barriers – Which barriers are the most important?

The main barriers identified concerned limited awareness of micro-credentials, uncertainty about recognition, fragmented regulatory and institutional frameworks, time and workload constraints, and the complexity of administrative processes. These findings point to the need for clearer communication, better guidance, and shared standards to make the value, purpose, recognition mechanisms and possible uses of micro-credentials more understandable.



Practical support – What support would be most useful in CIVIS?

Participants emphasised the need for concrete support from CIVIS, including clear guidelines, templates, examples of good practice, instructional design support, mentoring, recognition guidance, digital tools, flexible formats, and visible progression and stackability pathways. Overall, the discussion showed that the development of effective micro-credentials requires not only new learning offers, but also an enabling ecosystem based on quality, recognition, inclusion, support and cooperation across the Alliance



5. Conclusion

The workshop clearly confirms that lifelong learning is central to Europe's future, requiring a deep transformation of universities. Institutions must evolve toward more flexible, inclusive, and demand-driven models, while maintaining academic quality.

CIVIS is well positioned to lead this transition by:

- Structuring cooperation across universities
- Scaling micro-credentials
- Strengthening links with society and the labour market

The World Café discussions reinforce that success depends not only on strategy, but on implementation capacity: simplifying governance, engaging stakeholders meaningfully, and embedding co-creation practices.

Ultimately, lifelong learning must become a shared ecosystem, where universities, employers, and learners collaboratively shape skills for an uncertain future.