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1. Executive summary

CIVICA, the European University of Social Sciences, has built strong institutional foundations for joint innovation in teaching and training through Work Package 8 (WP8). This institutional foundation rests on a shared architecture composed of the CIVICA Innovation Hub and the Lifelong Learning and Training Department, bodies which bring together representatives from 9 of the 10 CIVICA universities. These bodies have collaborated throughout the lifetime of WP8 to gather and share information crucial for the development of common training programmes, to host workshops on new training formats like micro-credentials as well as consultative workshops with representatives of national and European accreditation agencies.

This white paper draws together the collective experience of the working groups and two specific strands of evidence – a survey of the current micro-credential and executive-education provision across the alliance and a benchmarking of nine representative non-degree programmes – and sets them against the European Union’s policy framework for micro-credentials and the wider state of practice across European University alliances. The purpose of the white paper is to discuss the realistic options for developing common, CIVICA-branded non-degree training, the design elements those options share and the open questions partners must still resolve before fully committing to the development of common programmes.

Based on the available body of information gathered from partners throughout the implementation of WP8, the central finding regarding the state of the art with respect to lifelong learning and training opportunities can be reduced to heterogeneity and asymmetry. Across CIVICA, **executive education is a mature, widely shared capability** – eight of nine responding partners offer such programmes and consider a common CIVICA executive-education offer feasible – whereas **micro-credentials in the strict European sense are nascent**. EUI has been piloting them, but SGH seems to offer them at scale. CIVICA as an alliance does not yet issue EU-standard micro-credentials, but has been working towards them. This places CIVICA in a position where it is able to learn from issuance front-runners among other alliances but it does not remove the vital need for experimentation and piloting.

Three scenarios for moving forward are examined: **(A)** adopting and scaling an existing partner programme already tested in a comparable network; **(B)** federating existing partner courses into a modular, stackable CIVICA programme pathway; and **(C)** co-creating an entirely new CIVICA flagship non-degree programme. The currently available evidence points to a **phased path that begins with Scenario A as a low-risk pilot**, uses the modular logic of Scenario B to assemble a credit-bearing CIVICA non-degree training pathway and ultimately holds Scenario C as a medium-term ambition once shared **standards**, a **business model** and **recognition arrangements** are proven. Two existing programmes – CEU’s Professional Development Programme for higher-education leaders (already tested in OSUN) and EUI’s ETGN Summer School on Agile Governance (already run as a multi-partner network programme) – stand out as the most natural starting points.

2. Introduction and purpose

WP8, *Foresight and Innovation in Social Sciences*, pursues two objectives: to consolidate a long-term vision for the future of CIVICA, ensuring access to teaching, learning and training in the social sciences for all; and to engage in active innovation by co-designing new teaching formats and tools with academia, policymakers, business and society. To advance the second objective, CIVICA established the **Innovation Hub (IH)** and the **Lifelong Learning and Training Department (LLT)**, supported by a Consultative Expert Group on Higher Education, to explore new joint, flexible and innovative formats of teaching and learning in connection with EU policy priorities.

This white paper synthesises three essential inputs. First, the **WP8 survey on micro-credentials and executive education**, which mapped the current situation, feasibility views and collaboration interests of the CIVICA partners. Second, the **WP8 benchmarking of case studies** in which each partner described one representative non-degree programme against a common template, as a candidate model for joint provision of non-degree training. Third, the **European policy and sector context** for micro-credentials and non-degree learning, summarised from CIVICA-facing research. This paper does not duplicate those documents; but rather interprets them jointly in order to present options, elements and open questions, as well as recommend a pragmatic path forward.

The scope has been deliberately restricted to **non-degree training**: short-term, professional or labour-market-oriented, flexible training that falls outside the traditional BA–MA–PhD programmes. Within this space the paper treats two overlapping families – executive education and micro-credentials – distinct but convergent forms of training that have been mapped and discuss within WP8.

3. The broad policy background: micro-credentials and non-degree learning at EU level

For micro-credentials the reference instrument is the **Council Recommendation of 16 June 2022 on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability (2022/C 243/02)**. It defines a micro-credential as *the record of the learning outcomes that a learner has acquired following a small volume of learning*, assessed against transparent and clearly defined criteria. The Recommendation is a soft instrument – not a formally binding one – but it establishes a common reference that CIVICA provision can and should align with, at least in the more advanced stages of developing common programmes.

The Recommendation provides three building blocks: (1) a common definition; (2) a set of **standard elements** to describe a micro-credential (mandatory elements include the learner's identity, micro-credential title, issuer, awarding body, date, learning outcomes, notional workload in ECTS “wherever possible” and level referenced to the EQF or QF-EHEA); and (3) ten **principles** for design and issuance – quality assurance, transparency, relevance, valid assessment, support for flexible learning pathways, recognition, portability, learner-centredness, authenticity and integration into lifelong-learning guidance. Micro-credentials

are intended to be owned by the learner, portable and complementary to – not a replacement for – traditional qualifications.

Adjacent instruments matter for any CIVICA design of common programmes. **ECTS** expresses notional workload; the **EQF/QF-EHEA** expresses level; and the **European Approach to quality assurance (ESG)** plus the **European Learning Model and Europass** support quality and portability. The 2024 European degree package – a blueprint for a European degree and recommendations on a European quality-assurance and recognition system – signals the EU policy direction: reducing the legal and administrative barriers to joint, transnational provision. For the time being, however, that direction is still more *policy intent*, not *operational reality*.

Across the European University alliances – as best as could be documented via desk research and participation in some relevant events hosted by non-CIVICA actors – practice is uneven. A small group of front-runners seems to have moved furthest on **issuance**: **ECIU** pioneered centralised, e-sealed micro-credentials issued through a single platform and storable on Europass; **Una Europa** is pursuing verifiable credentials via the European Blockchain Services Infrastructure and the European Learning Model; **UNITA** has built a micro-credential label, catalogue and business model. Civic and social-science-oriented alliances such as **CIVIS** run joint micro-programmes. The documented **barriers** are consistent: regulatory and national fragmentation in accreditation, student status and quality assurance; uneven recognition; terminological inconsistency; and short-term funding. These are precisely the constraints the CIVICA evidence below confirms at institutional level.

CIVICA's position within this landscape would seem to be best described as a social sciences and humanities **fast-follower**, rather than a first-mover: at present CIVICA does not yet issue EU-standard micro-credentials but has been working on non-degree short training programmes that could well be structured as micro-credentials. This means CIVICA can adopt proven models and standards rather than build its own completely new infrastructure. However, it seems paramount that the alliance avoids locking in an incompatible patchwork of certificates before a coherent framework or architecture is agreed.

4. The state of the art across CIVICA: evidence from the survey on micro-credentials and executive education programmes and benchmarking exercise

4.1 Current provision: strong executive education, nascent micro-credentials

The survey conducted among CIVICA partners shows that **executive education is well established** across the alliance: eight of the nine responding institutions – EUI, IE, Hertie, LSE, SGH, Sciences Po, SNSPA and SSE – offer executive-education programmes, several at considerable scale (SGH reported more than 170 programmes, SSE about 100, SNSPA about 20, Hertie 20 in 2024/25). Some partners have offered such programmes for decades; Sciences Po and SSE for more than fifty years.

For micro-credentials the situation is markedly different. The survey found that:

“For micro-credentials ... the situation is more nuanced and this form of training is not widespread across CIVICA.” – WP8 survey report

Hertie, LSE, SSE and Sciences Po had no micro-credentials at the time the survey was conducted (though LSE reported introducing a project to develop them); CEU was considering a dedicated CEU Academy; EUI was piloting a limited number of 3/5-credit micro-credentials; SGH reported fifty; SNSPA reported only micro-credential-like short programmes embedded in time-bound grant projects. A useful regulatory observation was made by SGH:

“micro-credentials are not strictly legally regulated on the national level and do not require a bachelor, nor a master degree as a prerequisite.” – SGH, WP8 survey report

This contrasts sharply with accredited executive provision: SNSPA notes that its executive programmes undergo external assessment by the Romanian Authority of Qualifications (ANC) for EQF and labour-market compliance, while micro-credential-like grant programmes carry only grant-specific prerequisites. Accreditation practice therefore ranges from none (CEU) through internal quality control (EUI, LSE, SNSPA micro-credentials) to fully independent national accreditation (SNSPA, SGH executive programmes).

4.2 Feasibility and interest

The asymmetry and heterogeneity highlighted above has implications for judgements on feasibility. For **executive education**, all responding partners except Sciences Po consider a common CIVICA-branded offer feasible. For **micro-credentials**, only four – EUI, IE, SGH and SNSPA – and these are also the partners that indicated concrete topics of collaboration. The reticence is most likely a direct consequence of limited experience, as acknowledged in the survey’s concluding remarks: the lack of internal experience with micro-credentials explains why only four partners consider CIVICA-branded micro-credential certificates feasible.

Two structuring ideas emerge from partner responses. The first could be described as **piloting with the willing**. CEU explicitly advised that:

“it would be more feasible to pilot a certificate among several of the partners that are readier / more interested.” – CEU, WP8 survey report

The survey’s own conclusions generalise this into a **variable-geometry** model, by inviting reflection on

“whether only some of the partners can commit, variably, to developing common programs based on their interests and experience (e.g.: 4 partners collaborate on one program, while 4 others on another).” – WP8 survey report

The second important idea is the **CIVICA-label threshold**. SNSPA proposed that the **CIVICA-label** for a common training programme be earned through genuine multi-partner delivery – manifested in the involvement of staff from a minimum number of partners – a principle the subsequent benchmarking report sharpened into a concrete rule (see 4.4).

On the requirements for a credible common offer, EUI provided the most complete checklist:

“clear governance structures; marketing and brand; agreement on curriculum aims / level, ECTS and QA; technical interoperability; participant’s handbook.” – EUI, WP8 survey report

IE stressed alignment with the alliance’s thematic priorities, consistent quality standards and transferable learning outcomes; SGH emphasised a fully specified framework (hours, ECTS, outcomes, certification rules); SNSPA, anticipating voluntary participation by professionals, stressed that student interest should drive topic selection and that delivery must be highly flexible.

4.3 Takeaways from the nine case studies

Following the preliminary mapping of executive education and micro-credentials, a benchmarking exercise asked each partner to present one representative non-degree programme meeting **four mandatory criteria**: non-degree, short-term (under one academic year), professional / labour-market-oriented and flexible in enrolment and course selection. Partners were also encouraged to choose a success story, ideally one already run jointly with other universities. The nine resulting programmes are summarised below.

Partner programme	/	Years	Delivery	Language	Duration	ECTS	Fee (learner)
CEU Professional Development for HE leaders	–	4	Online	English	12×2h per course	Yes (2)	No fee
EUI – ETGN Summer School on Agile Governance		4	In-person	English	4 days (24h)	No	€2,000 (*€1,600)
Hertie Transformational Certificate	–	3	In-person	German	3×2-day workshops/yr	No	No fee (+travel)

Partner programme /	Years	Delivery	Language	Duration	ECTS	Fee (learner)
IE – Global Advanced Management	7	Hybrid	English	6 months (113h)	No	€36,000
LSE – MBA Essentials Online Certificate	n/a	Online	English	10 weeks, self-paced	No	~€4,200 (£3,520)
Sciences Po – Corporate Governance	6	In-person	French	10 days (70h)	No	Client-paid (UM6P)
SGH – Sales Management	15	In-person	Polish	198h	Yes	€2,800
SNSPA – Procurement Management	9	In-person	Romanian	4 months (188h)	Yes (25)	€580
SSE – AI for Business Leaders	<1	Hybrid	Swedish/English	3.5 days (30h)	No	~€3,600

Source: WP8 benchmarking report

The programmes are **highly diverse** and the report noted candidly that “no single format ... stands out as a preferred option.” The diversity is nonetheless somewhat patterned when looking to specific programme features:

- **Audience specificity.** Each programme targets a sharply defined group – higher-education professionals, board members, senior executives, mid-career civil servants – rather than a general audience.
- **Delivery is skewed towards in-person participation.** Five of nine programmes are fully in-person, two online, two hybrid; in-person interaction is valued for networking.

- **Language fragments addressability.** Four programmes are delivered solely in a national language (German, French, Polish, Romanian), which the report had to flag as “not immediately favourable” to a common offer that would target an international audience.
- **Credits are the exception.** Six of nine programmes carry no ECTS, reflecting professional rather than student audiences; only CEU, SGH and SNSPA assign credits.
- **Practical work is common.** Six of nine include hands-on activity (15–50%), often via a practitioner alongside an academic.
- **Certificates vary widely,** from certificates of attendance and completion to certificates of competency (SGH) and nationally recognised postgraduate certificates (SNSPA).
- **Cohorts are small and staffing is fractional.** Typically, 25–30 learners, a coordinator plus rotating speakers and part-time administrative support.
- **Business models differ.** From fully fee-based (IE; LSE; SGH; SSE) to free, donor- or grant-funded (CEU, Hertie, EUI’s strategic network programme, SNSPA’s grant-based trainings).

4.4 Two transferable models and a labelling rule

Two programmes offered by CIVICA partners can be considered as highly pertinent models for CIVICA because they were already designed and tested in structurally similar networks. CEU presented its Professional Development Programme for higher-education leaders, noting that it has already been tested across the Open Society University Network (OSUN) and that:

“there is a real and important training niche for training university professionals, which CIVICA can explore ... CIVICA institutions can adapt it to suit the needs of their staff by bringing together expertise from several institutions.” – CEU, WP8 benchmarking report

EUI presented its ETGN Summer School on Agile Governance, coordinated on behalf of the European and Transnational Governance Network – a genuinely multi-partner programme in operation for 4 years, mixing in-person activities, without compulsory individual study time.

On the labelling (of CIVICA programmes) itself, the benchmarking report converted SNSPA’s survey suggestion into a working rule:

“a suggested requirement for the training to be labelled as CIVICA would be to have a minimum of 3 CIVICA partners involved in the delivery of the training.” – WP8 benchmarking report

This is still a point worthy of critical reflection: more partners would strengthen and substantiate a CIVICA label but would also increase administrative and coordination costs.

5. Scenarios for developing common CIVICA non-degree training

Based on the work conducted in WP8 and on the current external environment of the alliance three scenarios describe distinct routes to a common CIVICA offer of non-degree training. They are not mutually exclusive; the concluding section will in fact recommend sequencing them. Across all three, two **design dimensions** recur:

1. the choice between an executive-education vehicle (market-ready, fee-bearing, where CIVICA partners have a strong experience) and a narrower non-degree micro-credential vehicle (EU-aligned, credit-bearing, where CIVICA is developing, similar to other European Alliances); and
2. the choice of participation breadth – all partners versus a willing subset under a variable geometry model.

5.1 Scenario A – Adopt and scale an existing partner programme

Under Scenario A, CIVICA takes a programme that already works at one partner – ideally one already tested in a comparable network – and re-launches it under the CIVICA label with multi-partner teaching input. The **main elements** for this path are a proven curriculum and operating model; a host institution that bears coordination; rotating contributions from at least three partners to meet the label rule; minimal new infrastructure. The **best-fit candidates** would be CEU's Professional Development Programme (OSUN-tested, addressing a real staff-development niche) and EUI's ETGN Summer School (already network-run).

This scenario has the following **strengths**: fastest route to an operational CIVICA offer; lowest design and financial risk; immediate evidence of feasibility. Some corresponding limitations **include**: ownership and brand questions (whose programme is it?); the adopted programme may be in a national language or lack ECTS; demand is not guaranteed – EUI cautioned that for its summer-school topic “there is little demand for it currently in the European executive education field.”

5.2 Scenario B – Federate existing courses into a modular CIVICA pathway

Under Scenario B, partners keep their own courses but agree a common wrapper: a learner takes a defined number of courses from different partners and receives a single CIVICA certificate. **Main elements**: a shared catalogue of eligible courses; agreed credit/workload equivalences; a centralised application portal; common quality and transparency standards; a stackability rule so individual courses combine into a comprehensive certificate (as in CEU's programme). This is the scenario most naturally aligned with the EU micro-credential logic of **modularity and stackability**.

This scenario has the following **strengths**: it leverages existing strengths with little new content cost; it embodies genuine multi-partner collaboration; it builds directly towards stackable, ECTS-bearing, EU-aligned micro-credentials. As **limitations** one should note that it requires the hardest agreements up front – mutual recognition, credit equivalence, quality

parity and a working portal; language heterogeneity complicates a shared catalogue; the governance of a distributed offer is a potentially thorny, non-trivial problem.

5.3 Scenario C – Co-create a new CIVICA flagship programme

Under Scenario C, CIVICA designs a new programme from the ground up, virtually *ex nihilo*, around a shared social-science priority, drawing interested faculty from across the alliance. **Main elements:** a jointly agreed thematic focus aligned to CIVICA priorities and the partners' stated collaboration interests (e.g.: governance and European affairs, public policy, regulation and finance, AI and analytics, sustainability, leadership); a purpose-built modular structure; an agreed business and recognition model; a distinctive CIVICA identity. This scenario has the following **strengths:** it has the strongest brand and differentiation among the 3 scenarios; it can be designed EU-compliant and stackable from the very beginning; it avoids potential ownership disputes. Its significant **limitations** include: highest cost, longest lead time and greatest risk. During the survey and benchmarking exercises SGH warned that developing a full programme can take up to 2–5 years and partners repeatedly stressed that collaboration must be voluntary. SSE explicitly noted that “free cooperation among partners, rather than coerced joint program delivery would contribute to success.”

6. Cross-cutting design elements

Whichever option is chosen, the survey and benchmarking converge on a recurring set of elements that any common CIVICA programme must specify. The benchmarking report's tentative recommendations provide the core elements and prior partner survey responses add several relevant details.

1. **A clearly defined audience**, specific enough to avoid overlap with partners' existing programmes – the single most consistent feature of the case studies.
2. **Modularity and stackability**, combining stand-alone courses or workshops towards a more comprehensive certificate, mirroring micro-credential logic (the CEU model).
3. **Minimum disciplinary diversity with demonstrable complementarity**, except in highly focused short programmes; six of nine case studies span at least two disciplines.
4. **A clear practical component**, hands-on work using practitioners alongside academics, which sustains engagement even in short formats.
5. **A flexible / mixed mode of delivery**, blending in-person and online, with a rotating host location to build the CIVICA identity – balanced against the observed preference for in-person interaction and its networking value.
6. **A fair division of labour** with explicit roles, responsibilities and benefits among partners and at least three partners delivering to warrant the CIVICA label.
7. **A sustainable business model**. EUI advised agreeing a unified fee approach to avoid CIVICA courses competing with one another, with one host bearing hosting costs and

others funding their speakers in the first two editions; Hertie favoured corporate sponsorship while cautioning against tiered pricing for micro-credentials; SSE noted open-enrolment fee programmes as the only realistic model and highlighted the idea to customize programmes based on clients' needs.

8. **Recognition, credit and quality assurance.** Whether ECTS are attached (and whether courses contribute to degrees) should be a per-course decision, but LSE's caution is significant: "Any certification would have to come from CIVICA in the first instance – but a CIVICA accreditation on its own may not hold sufficient appeal," so external or European accreditation routes may need exploring.
9. **Branding and visibility,** with programmes recognised and publicised by CIVICA as a consortium and by each member through internal channels.

7. Open questions CIVICA partners must answer

The evidence collected within WP8 narrows the realistic choices but leaves a defined set of decisions that only the CIVICA partners, collectively, can make. These decisions are presented below, grouped under 4 themes.

Strategy and scope

- Executive education first, micro-credentials / non-degree training first, or a deliberate sequence from one to the other?
- All partners involved or a variable geometry with willing subsets – and, if the latter, how are subsets to be formed and how is coherence maintained across parallel programmes?
- Which shared thematic priorities anchor the first offer, given the collaboration interests named (governance and European affairs, public policy, finance and regulation, AI and analytics, sustainability, leadership, research methods and faculty development)?

Design and standards

- What is the minimum common framework (workload, ECTS where applicable, learning outcomes, assessment, certification rules) every CIVICA unit must meet – and does it align with the EU standard elements?
- What language policy applies – English-only for international reach, or multilingual with translation, accepting a trade-off in addressability?
- Are learning units stackable from the outset? And toward what comprehensive certificate?

Recognition and quality

- Who issues and ensures quality-assurance for the certification and does CIVICA alone confer sufficient value or are external / European accreditation routes needed?
- How is mutual recognition handled across partners' differing national accreditation regimes?

Operations and sustainability

- What is the business model – fee-based, sponsored, grant-funded or hybrid – and how are costs, revenues and any profits shared?
- Who hosts and coordinates; is hosting rotated?
- Is a centralised application and enrolment portal built? If so on what platform / infrastructure (keeping in mind interoperability and EU tools such as the European Learning Model and Europass)?
- How is demand evidenced before scaling, given that even strong partners reported uncertain demand for some topics?

8. Conclusions: a path forward

The two reports that inform this white paper together seem to support a single, sequenced recommendation rather than a binary choice between building on an existing programme and creating a new one. The best available option is to do both, but in order.

Phase 1 – build on an existing programme (Scenario A), now / short-term. CIVICA should re-launch a proven, network-tested partner programme under the CIVICA label as its first common offer, using a variable geometry and the three-partner labelling rule. CEU's Professional Development Programme for higher-education leaders is the strongest candidate: it addresses a genuine, under-served niche (the professionalisation of university staff), is already adapted to a multi-institution network (OSUN), is free to participants and is explicitly offered by CEU for CIVICA-wide adaptation. EUI's ETGN Summer School is a credible second pilot, with the caveat about topic demand. This phase delivers an operational CIVICA programme quickly, at low risk and will generate the further evidence the alliance currently lacks.

Phase 2 – federate into a modular, credit-bearing pathway (Scenario B). In parallel, partners should **agree the common framework** – workload and ECTS equivalences, learning-outcome and assessment standards, a shared catalogue and a centralised application portal – that lets existing partner courses combine into a stackable CIVICA certificate, on a three courses from three partners model. This is where executive education and the EU micro-credential agenda converge: a federated, stackable pathway is the most direct route from CIVICA's current strength to EU-standard, portable micro-credentials. It is also the phase that resolves the recognition and quality-assurance questions for later reuse.

Phase 3 – co-create a CIVICA flagship (Scenario C), as a medium-term ambition. Once standards, a business model and recognition arrangements are proven, CIVICA should

design a new flagship programme around a distinctive social-science priority, EU-compliant and stackable by design. Given the 2–5-year lead times partners reported and the strong preference for voluntary collaboration, this should be initiated only on the foundations laid in Phases 1 and 2.

This path is faithful to the full body of evidence currently available. It starts where CIVICA is already strong (executive education and adaptable existing programmes), respects the constraints partners named (voluntary participation, fair benefit-sharing, limited micro-credential experience, language and recognition fragmentation) and builds deliberately towards the EU micro-credential standard that CIVICA is well placed to adopt rather than reinvent. The immediate next steps would be to convene the willing partners around Phase 1, confirm the host and the three(plus) delivering partners and put the open questions in Section 7 to a structured decision. The **CIVICA Conference on Innovation in Higher Education** offers a good occasion for these discussions.