

Skills portability for green and circular transitions

Joint consultation response to the European Commission

This document presents the joint position of the MASTERY project consortium and other contributing organisations on the European Commission's Skills Portability Initiative. It draws on a survey of practitioners from across the EU working in green and circular economy skills, including Vocational Education and Training (VET) providers, higher education institutions, public authorities and industry associations.

The green and circular economy is creating new jobs and transforming existing ones across construction, waste management, renewable energy transition, manufacturing, and digital services. Workers are increasingly acquiring these skills through workplace experience, short training programmes, and non-formal upskilling pathways rather than through formal education alone. Yet when they move across borders or change sectors, they often cannot prove what they know.

This is not only a problem for education and training systems. It directly affects:



Companies struggling to recruit and retain workers with verified circular economy competences, slowing down the adoption of sustainable business models.



Public authorities implementing EU environmental legislation that requires new professional profiles, from circular procurement to waste prevention planning.



Regions and cities trying to attract investment in green industries without a workforce that can demonstrate the right skills across borders.

The EU already has the policy architecture to address this: the European Qualifications Framework, Europass, ESCO, the 2012 Recommendation on validation of non-formal and informal learning, and the 2022 Council Recommendation on micro-credentials. What is missing is not new frameworks, but sector-specific implementation that reaches the people and industries where green and circular economy skills are actually being developed.

Key messages from practitioners



Work-based skills are the main portability gap. Documenting work experience is the single most reported difficulty. Green and circular economy competences are increasingly acquired through hands-on work and informal upskilling, not only through formal education.



Existing EU frameworks need implementation, not new layers. The EQF, Europass, ESCO, the VNFIL Recommendation and the Micro-credentials Recommendation already provide a solid architecture. Practitioners need sector-specific implementation of these tools, particularly for green and circular skills in construction, waste management, renewable energy transition and manufacturing, not additional frameworks.



Digital tools are necessary but not sufficient. Digital credential infrastructure only works when there is underlying agreement on what credentials mean and how employers can trust them. Technology should enable recognition, not substitute for it.

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Recommendations for EU action

1	<p>Accelerate sector-specific implementation of the VNFIL - Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning framework for green and circular skills.</p> <p>Fund pilots in sub-sectors like construction, waste management and circular manufacturing that build on existing national validation systems rather than creating new ones.</p>
2	<p>Extend fast-track mutual recognition to green and circular skills in critical sectors.</p> <p>Prioritise high-demand skill sets as early candidates for streamlined cross-border recognition, covering both formal qualifications and verified work experience.</p>
3	<p>Accelerate ESCO updates for emerging green and circular job profiles.</p> <p>Establish a dedicated green economy review track within ESCO governance with a shorter update cycle (12–18 months) for emerging occupational profiles.</p>
4	<p>Build digital credential infrastructure on existing Europass/EDC architecture.</p> <p>Fund the integration of national and sectoral credential systems with the EDC infrastructure, lower e-seal barriers for smaller providers, and avoid creating competing wallet systems.</p>
5	<p>Target micro-credential acceptance through multi-stakeholder engagement.</p> <p>Establish a pathway through which green and circular skills micro-credentials endorsed by recognised structures (Pact for Skills, CoVE networks, Skills Alliances) can gain cross-border recognition status.</p>

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