



Transparency and transferability of learning outcomes: a 20-year journey

Making learning progression a reality

Learners in the spotlight

21 February 2024

Virtual event

#learningoutcomes

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Project on transparency and transferability of learning outcomes

Duration: 3 years
(2022-2025)

Overall aim

The project looks at European and national policy **initiatives** promoting transparency and transferability of learning outcomes **over the last 20 years** (2000-2020) to examine their relationships and the extent to which they have supported individual citizens' **lifelong learning** and mobility.

Future policy scenarios towards 2040 will be developed.

First effort to look at policies in a systematic way across different education and training systems

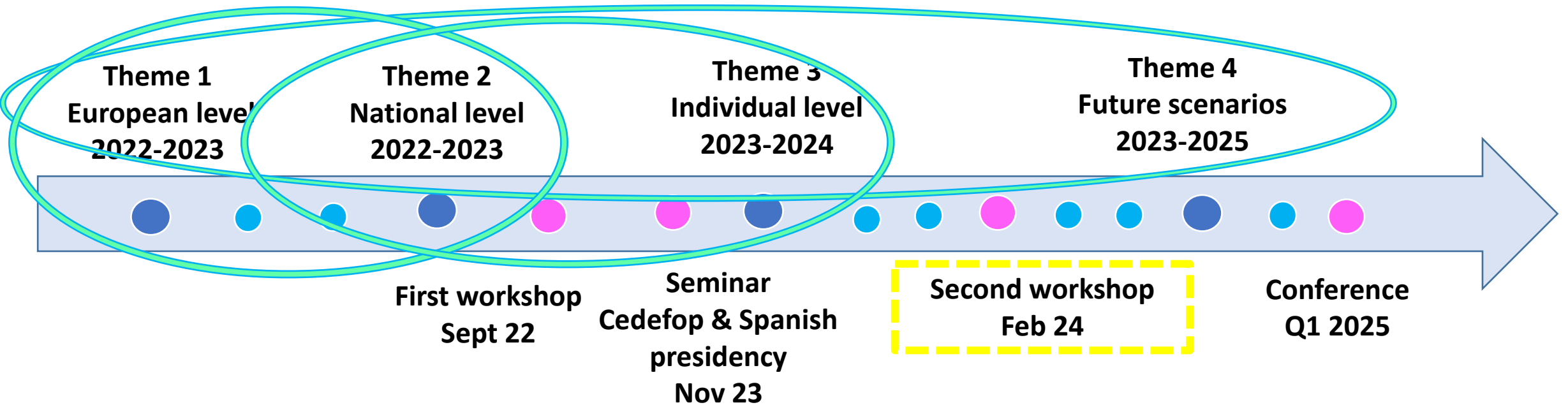
Themes, timeline and methodology

Theme 1: European-level policies supporting transparency and transferability of learning outcomes

Theme 2: National policies supporting transparency and transferability of learning outcomes

Theme 3: Lifelong learning in 2000 and in 2020: what has changed for the individual citizen?

Theme 4: Scenarios for lifelong and life-wide learning: policy options and implications



Methodology

- Desk research
- Eight country cases
- Statistical analysis
- Focus groups
- Panel discussions
- Interviews
- Surveys

● Cedefop events

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The origins of the “transparency journey”

Between 1996 and 2000 → Growing awareness that **learning takes place throughout life** and in all venues of life -in education, at work and at home –and **that individuals must be able to combine and build on this learning.**

1996: European Year of Lifelong Learning

2000: Lisbon strategy

2001: Memorandum on lifelong learning

- The **concept of lifelong learning** was firmly put high on the political agenda
- Increasing awareness of the need for more **flexible** and open education and training systems
- Increasing attention to **transparency and transferability** of learning



Overreaching policy strategies and processes

- 2000 Lisbon agenda/strategy
- 1999 Bologna process and following communiqués
- 2002: The Copenhagen process and following communiqués, declarations and conclusions
- 2010: Europe 2020 Strategy (the successor to the Lisbon Agenda/Strategy)
- 2009: Strategic frameworks for European co-operation in education and training (ET 2010 and ET 2020)
- Recent developments: Skills agenda 2016 and 2020; 2017 European Pillar of Social Right; 2020 Osnabrueck Declaration

Programmes

1995-1999/2000-2006: Leonardo Da Vinci I and II
1995-1999/2000-2006: Socrates I and II
2001-2010: Grundtvig
2007 -2013: Lifelong Learning programmes (LLP)
2014-2020: Erasmus+ (and Erasmus)

Funds

European Social Fund (ESF)
Employment & Social Innovation programme (EaSI)

Working methods

Open method of cooperation
Testing and piloting
Working groups
Networks

Barriers to lifelong learning and mobility

Education, training and learning systems **as complex and diverse across and within countries**. This makes difficult:

- for **employers** and education and training **providers** understand learning acquired by applicants;
- for **individuals** to understand opportunities and to **move** from one country to another maintaining their “educational and professional status”.

Education and training systems **organised as ‘silos’** operating partly in isolation from each other

- not designed to foster mobility

Learning taking place outside formal education and training institutions, was **less visible, not fully trusted and valued**.

Policy initiatives and developments at European level

Thematic policy areas

MOBILITY

LIFELONG
LEARNING

Transparency and
Transferability of LOs

Quality
assurance

Comparability
of skills and
qualifications

Validation of
non-formal
and informal
learning

Credit
accumulation
and transfer

Recognition of
qualifications

The study identified five thematic policy areas supporting transparency and transferability of learning outcomes

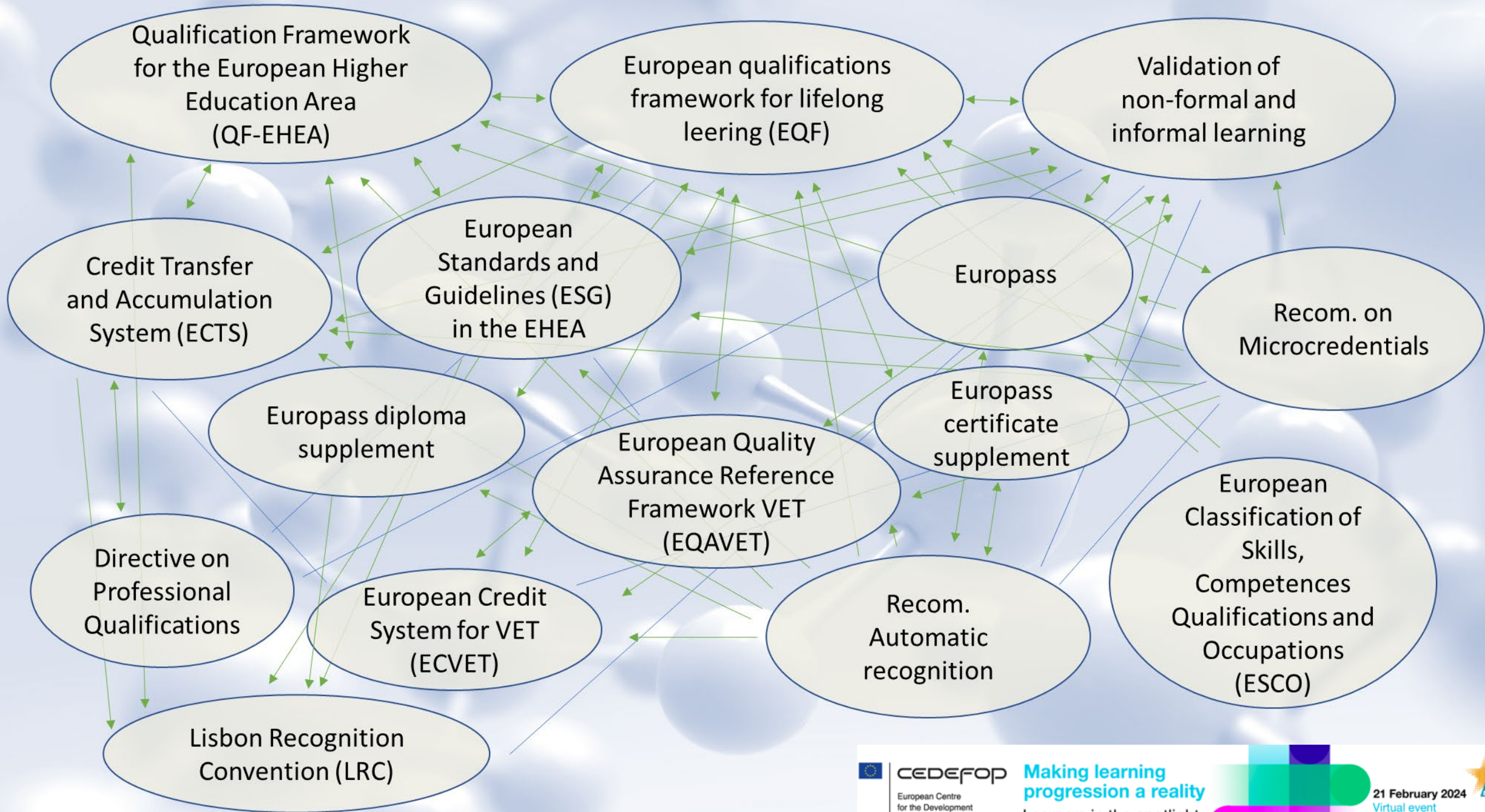
EU FUNDING POLICY EXPERIMENTATION OMC RECOMMENDATIONS DIRECTIVES

The set of policy initiatives analysed

Quality assurance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)- 2000• Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) – 2005 and 2015• European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) 2009 and 2020
Credits	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) - 1985• European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) - 2009-2020
Comparability	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF) -2008 and 2017• Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA) - 2005• Europass (Diploma supplement, Certificate supplement, and Europass portal) -2004 and 2018• European key competences Reference Framework - 2006 and 2018• The multilingual classification of European Skills, Competences, and Occupations (ESCO) -2017• Recommendation on Microcredentials (MC) - 2020
Validation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Recommendation on Validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) - 2012
Recognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC) on recognition of academic qualifications 1997• Directive on Professional Qualifications 2005/36/EC and 2013/55/EC (PQD)• Recommendation on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad - 2018

Considerations on relationships

- Most initiatives **underpinned by the principle of learning outcomes**
- Overall, **fairly good connection** among policy initiatives at European level. Many share aims and objectives, with concepts that integrate and align.
 - It is **not always easy to create a coherent policy framework** and **even more difficult** promote synergies during **development and implementation**.
 - Sustained **cooperation among stakeholder groups** responsible for initiatives is essential for effective synergies. Some initiatives → strong collaboration, in others cooperation can be enhanced.
- There are “**cross-systems**” initiatives that can serve as platforms for cooperation.
- The **EQF** stands out as one of the tool with the most extensive connections across policy areas and sectors



- No **linear path towards change**. Initiatives interact and are not the only factor influencing change.
- **Mobilisation** of policymakers, stakeholders, institutions, practitioners and local actors **needed** to make the necessary changes. → Impact on individuals depends on national-level changes.
- Some **processes run in parallel** (sub-systems or thematic focus); while they impact their respective sub-system, it remains unclear to what extent they promote permeability *across* sub-systems, lifelong learning and mobility for all.

Considerations on impact

Combined impact/contribution of policy initiatives at European level

- Voluntary tools/processes → **success story in EU cooperation.**
- Programmes, projects, working groups and networks → **promote synergies**
- EU initiatives as **catalyst for policy changes and reforms** (national developments also influenced EU initiatives).
- **Favourable environment** for the implementation
- Sustained discussions and attention on the need to **enhance system's flexibility**
- **Convergence process and commitment** to the transparency, comparability and recognition of qualifications
- Emphasised and encouraged the use of a **learning outcomes approach** in different sectors of education and training



Policy initiatives and developments at national level

Overall considerations

- National initiatives and reforms show a **great diversity** in timing, objectives, approaches and orientation strongly related to the diversity of national conditions, institutional settings, and the degree of policy commitment and implementation capacity.
- First decade **setting the basis** – second decade **concrete developments in more countries**
- National “**readiness**” played a key role. Specific EU countries started promoting learning outcomes approaches, permeability and learner-centred, individualised systems even before 2000. Central, Eastern and Southern Europe countries followed, after joining the EU or in the context of EU-oriented reforms.
- Often, progress has been more apparent in promoting **comparability of skills and qualifications**.
- Progress at national level **has been slower**, or limited to some sectors, in credit accumulation and transfer (more developed in the HE sector than in VET), and in setting-up validation arrangements for non-formal and informal learning.
- Complex and varying **interactions** and levels of coherence **between national and EU initiatives**.

Objectives of national initiatives

National policy initiatives in the 5 thematic areas:

- have some common objectives
- these objectives are related to those of EU initiatives
- aim to promote transparency and transferability of learning outcomes

Examples of objectives

- QA policies aim to develop **quality assurance standards and principles** to improve trust in the quality of learning outcomes.
- NQFs aim to increase the **transparency and comparability** of qualifications and to support the **mobility** and **progression** of learners.
- Validation policies aim to support **lifelong and life-wide learning**, improve the **employment, career and learning** opportunities of all learners, and **enhance the connections** within and between ET subsystems and the labour market.
- Credit policies aim to make learning pathways more **flexible** and to **promote learners' and workers' mobility**.
- Recognition policy initiatives aim to promote transferability of qualifications and **mobility** of students and workers across borders.



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Coherence in policy implementation

Coherence in policy implementation seems to be higher when:

- There is a **clear governance structure in place**, overseeing and **coordinating** the development and implementation of the different initiatives.
- The implementation and **continued running of initiatives** is guided by an **overarching strategy** or reform, firmly enshrined in law.
- Initiatives cover **several or all education sub-systems**, or effective links are made between instruments operating in different sub-systems to aid transferability of learning outcomes.
- There is strong **stakeholder involvement**.

Links between initiatives and broader changes

The NQF example

The implementation of NQFs is often **linked** to initiatives in other policy areas:

- NQF level descriptors are often used **in quality assurance**.
- Explicit links (e.g. in legislation) between **NQFs and validation procedures**.
- NQFs are used in the **recognition of foreign qualifications**.

There are indications that they have contributed to broader changes:

- NQFs have contributed **to increasing the transparency on qualifications**.
- NQFs have promoted the **adoption of a learning outcomes approach**.
- NQFs also have helped to promote the social value **and attractiveness of vocational qualifications**.
- Opening-up frameworks have contributed to **improving quality and raising trust to qualifications awarded outside formal education and training**.

Changes

Quality Assurance

Increased focus on quality assurance in education and training . **Specific institutions** have been created and developed standards/guidelines/tools to make this process transparent and robust.

Enhanced quality has contributed to increasing trust to and improving reputation of ET providers

Quality assurance seems to represent a **stepping stone for promoting** the transferability and transparency of learning outcomes.

Credits

Credits are used (mostly in HE) and **support transferability** between institutions, usually in the same ET subsystem.

In Finland, there is a **coherent approach to credit accumulation and transfer in both VET and HE sectors**, making possible the recognition and transfer of credits inside and between these sectors.

Validation

Despite uneven developments, countries are establishing validation arrangements, and more **people have access to validation**, making “hidden learning” visible.

Recognition

In a complex landscape with uneven implementation, recognition initiatives, including legally binding, have supported **mobility of individuals and transferability of qualifications**.



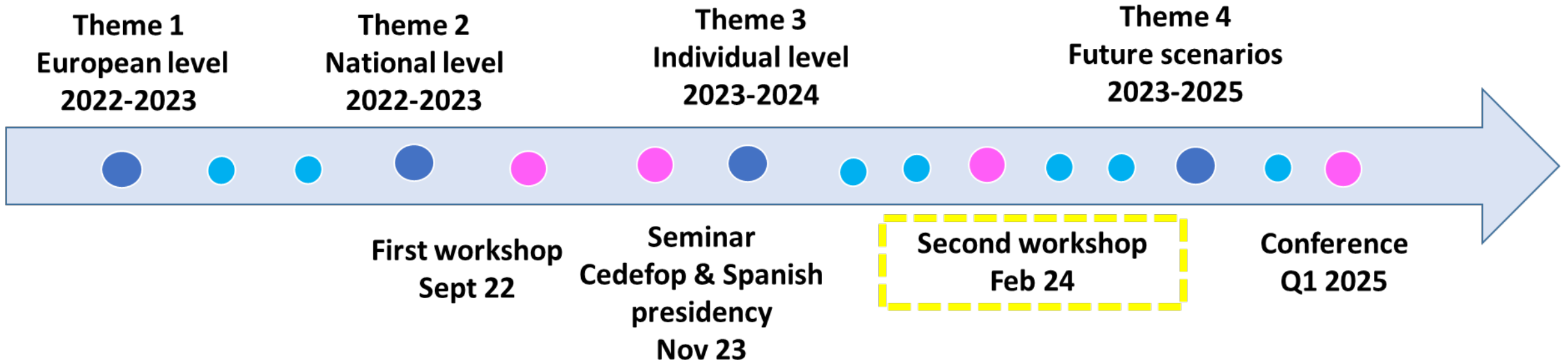
Combined changes

- Enhanced **flexibility** of education and training **pathways**
- Greater **permeability of the education and training system**
- Shift towards a **learning-outcomes based approach**
- Increased **transparency** of the education and training system.
- Greater **comparability and/or transferability** of qualifications across countries
- **Strengthened trust and collaboration within education and training sectors** and between them and the labour market
- **Increased quality assurance** in education and training

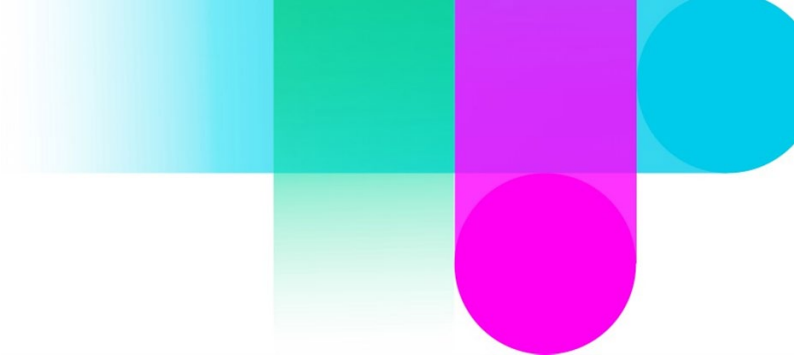
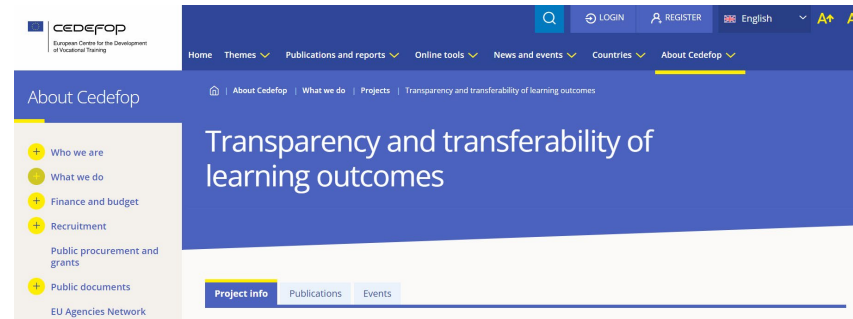
Where we are

Theme 3 → Exploring what has changed for individuals 2000- 2020

Theme 4 → Policy scenarios towards 2040



The project page



<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/projects/transparency-and-transferability-learning-outcomes>

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Thank you



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