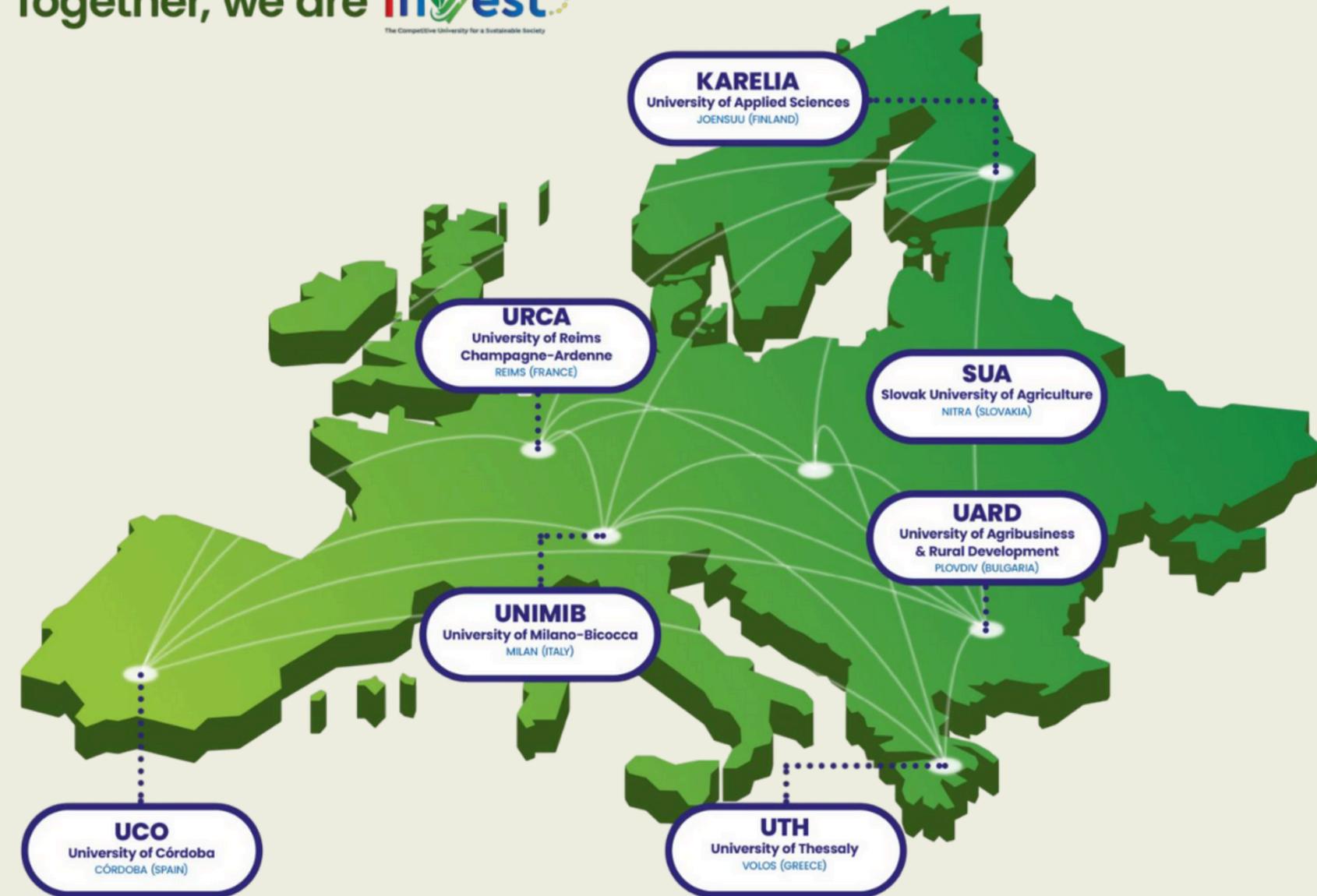**INVEST INnoVations of rEgional SustainibiliTy**

Together, we are invest

Funding: Implemented primarily through the Erasmus+ funding **€11.2 M in total**

Duration: 4 years (Nov 2023 to Oct 2027)

Composition:
- **7** partner universities with strong regional roots
- **137 400** students
- **11 671** administrative staff, lecturers/researchers
- **56** faculties

KARELIA
University of Applied Sciences
JOENSUU (FINLAND)

URCA
University of Reims
Champagne-Ardenne
REIMS (FRANCE)

SUA
Slovak University of Agriculture
NITRA (SLOVAKIA)

UARD
University of Agribusiness
& Rural Development
PLOVDIV (BULGARIA)

UNIMIB
University of Milano-Bicocca
MILAN (ITALY)

UCO
University of Córdoba
CÓRDOBA (SPAIN)

UTH
University of Thessaly
VOLOS (GREECE)

inVest
A European University Alliance
The Competitive University for a Sustainable Society

Our Strategic Focus Areas

**Water, Food, Energy & Environment Nexus /
Quality of Life / Entrepreneurship**

Sustainability & Resilience

Developing skills and mindsets to respond to climate, digital, and social challenges

Educational Transformation

Piloting micro-credentials, stackable learning, and personalized guidance

Digital Innovation

Harnessing AI and data to support students, teachers, and institutiona decision-making

Community Engagement

Connecting with regional ecosystems, businesses, and citizens to co-create knowledge

Our Vision and Mission

At INVEST, we aim to develop a new model of European higher education—one that is:

➜ **Sustainable**
Aligned with the Green Deal and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

➜ **Innovative**
Embracing digital tools and AI in education

➜ **Inclusive**
Offering fl exible, personalised learning opportunities

➜ **Resilient**
Preparing learners to address real-world challenges

We are building a European inter-university campus where students and staff move freely, collaborate openly, and thrive together.

What We Offer

Joint Learning Pathways

Flexible Micro-credentials and Life-long learning, Joint Bachelor's, Master's, and cotutelle and double degree PhD studies

Virtual Campus & AI-Powered Tools

Platforms like Virtual Campus and EDUC8EU for smart academic advising and micro-credential recognition

Living Labs

Student-driven, challenge-based learning connected to local and regional ecosystems

The INVEST Centre of Excellence

Collaborative research initiative, innovation philosophy & communities and infrastructure connection

Mobility Opportunities

Short-term, hybrid, and virtual mobility schemes for all the whole university community

INVEST Work Packages

WP1: Project Management

WP2: Quality Assurance and Evaluation

WP3: Student and staff journey - Mobility, involvement, entrepreneurship and society

WP4: Education - Joint programmes, Living Labs, Innovative pedagogy

WP5: Excellence and forward-looking education - micro-credentials, Double Degree PhD programs, Lifelong learning

WP6: Centre of Excellence in RD&I

WP7: Dissemination, digitalisation, sustainability

WP5: Excellence & Forward Looking Education – Micro-credentials, PhD Programmes, Lifelong Learning

Work Package leader: Università di Milano-Bicocca
Prof. Gabriella Pasi, Local Coordinator

WP5 Objectives

- To promote Micro-Credentials as a means to offer student centered, flexible learning opportunities: enrich and complement the educational offer and meet the demands of the labor market (Task 5.1)

- To create a framework for inter-university INVEST Cotutelles and Double Degree Doctoral Programs to engage with RD&I and society (Task 5.2)

- To design and develop lifelong learning programs at all levels (Task 5.3)

Task 5.1 To create a common Open Badge certification system within the INVEST Alliance

Task leader: Prof. Maurizio Casiraghi,
Università di Milano-Bicocca

Definition of Micro-Credentials

A micro-credential is a record of specific learning outcomes (knowledge, skills, and competencies) acquired through a short, focused learning experience and validated by an assessment.

These learning outcomes are always **assessed, quality assured, and designed to be portable** across institutions, sectors, and countries.

Definition of Open-Badge

Open Badges (OBs) are digital certifications of acquired knowledge, skills, and competencies. They are issued by the certifying organization and recognized internationally.

OBs can be used in electronic resumes and on social networks to quickly, succinctly, and credibly communicate what has been learned, how it was learned, and with what results to employers worldwide.

OB consists of an image and metadata. The latter allows verification of the badge's assignment to a user and guarantees access to all the descriptive content of the certification, hosted on a dedicated platform.

Common Elements of Micro-Credentials

Micro-credential will include a minimum set of common information elements, fully aligned with the European framework:

- the title of the credential,
- the identity of the learner,
- the issuing institution,
- the date of award,
- the workload expressed in ECTS,
- the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) level,
- the learning outcomes achieved,
- the form of assessment,
- the mode of delivery,
- the quality assurance framework applied,
- the recognition.

Open Badges vs Micro-Credentials

Common Characteristics with OBs

- Learner Identification
- MC Title
- Issuing Organization(s)
- Country or Countries/Region or Regions of the Issuing Body
- Date of Issue
- Learning Outcomes

Characteristics Not Necessarily Required in an OB

- Theoretical workload required to achieve the learning outcomes (expressed in ECTS)
- Level (and cycle, if applicable) of the learning experience aimed at obtaining the MC (European Qualifications Framework, Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area), if applicable
- Form of participation in the learning activity
- Type of assessment
- Type of quality assurance used to support the micro-credential
- They are signed with a unique electronic seal (digital equivalent of an institution's stamp)

INVEST - Complementary Approach to MC

Stand-alone Micro-Credentials

- For reskilling/upskilling in specific areas
- Valuable for students → job market readiness
- Relevant for professionals, adult learners & stakeholders
- Focus on short, targeted learning (esp. soft skills)

Stackable Micro-Credentials

- Building blocks towards degrees
- Flexible & personalized pathways
- Integrated into existing and new bachelor's/master's programmes
- Enhance mobility, recognition & innovative learning design

Design Guidelines & Standards

INVEST Partners commit to shared micro-credentials guidelines and standards, ensuring both compliance with European frameworks and coherence across our alliance.
Below principles are collective commitment of all INVEST partners to create **learner-centred, transparent, and trusted educational offer.**

Learning Outcomes

- Clearly defined & measurable
- Based on European Qualifications Framework (EQF) descriptors
- Ensure comparability & transparency for learners, employers, and other stakeholders
- Competence = verifiable acquisition, not just attendance

Workload & ECTS

- ECTS defined based on the course hours
- Transferable & recognized across HE systems

EQF Level

- Positioned within EQF & national frameworks
- Indicate undergraduate or postgraduate level
- Enables integration into degree structures
- Supports stackability into larger qualifications

Assessment

- Transparent & competence-based
- Verifiable evidence of learning: Project work, Portfolios, Applied tasks
- Guarantees academic integrity & labor market relevance

Delivery

- Flexible formats: online | hybrid | in-person
- Adapted to learner needs & institutional resources
- Accessibility & inclusivity prioritized

Stakability & Pathways

- Designed to connect with formal programmes
- Combine progressively into degrees – Bachelor/Master
- Recognition of prior learning
- Support personalized learning journeys
- Short experiences aligned with long-term goals

MCs as building blocks within broader pathways

INVEST MC Quality Assurance Model

Central for credibility, transparency & recognition
INVEST commits to Shared QA framework that integrates national mechanisms at the institutional level with joint oversight at the alliance level.

Core Principles of Quality Assurance (QA)

Alignment with ESG: all MCs must reflect transparency, learner-centred, continuous enhancement
Shared responsibility:
- At University level → national compliance
- At Alliance level (Joint QA Committee) → comparability, mutual trust & recognition

Key QA Mechanisms

- Clear & accessible info: outcomes, ECTS, EQF/NQF, delivery, assessment, recognition (standard template)
- Transparent admission: harmonized admission criteria to ensure inclusiveness & facilitate learner mobility
- Reliable & fair assessment: competence-based, transparent-verifiable evidence of learning outcomes
- Teacher competence – staff with expertise
- Monitoring & review - Completion rates, learner satisfaction, labor-market relevance, feedback loops, Structured feedback from learners, educators, and external stakeholders, Identifying corrective actions and improvements

INVEST MC Quality Assurance Model

QA Governance

Stand-alone Micro-Credentials

- if the MC is already existing the QA is granted at the partner's level
- there is no need for a INVEST QA procedure
- the stand-alone MC is managed by the INVEST scientific committee

Stackable Micro-Credentials

- if the MC is created within INVEST the QA has to be granted by INVEST QA
- the QA INVEST procedure is independent from the scientific committee

Alliance level: Joint Quality Assurance Committee (JQAC)
- Reviews & validates new micro-credentials
- Ensures consistency & alignment with ESG
- Coordinate periodic reviews and ensure feedback
- Publishes annual QA reports with recommendations

A Dual-Level Assurance Model - combining institutional QA processes with alliance-level JQAC Ensuring INVEST micro-credentials are credible & portable

Co-funded by the European Union

INVEST MC Toolkit

Templates:

- Micro-credential description template (with the 11 EU key information elements)
- Learning outcomes design template
- QA checklist

Guides & Workflows:

- Step-by-step guide to developing a micro-credential
- Workflow for approval within INVEST institutions
- Recognition procedure across partners
- Stakeholder engagement
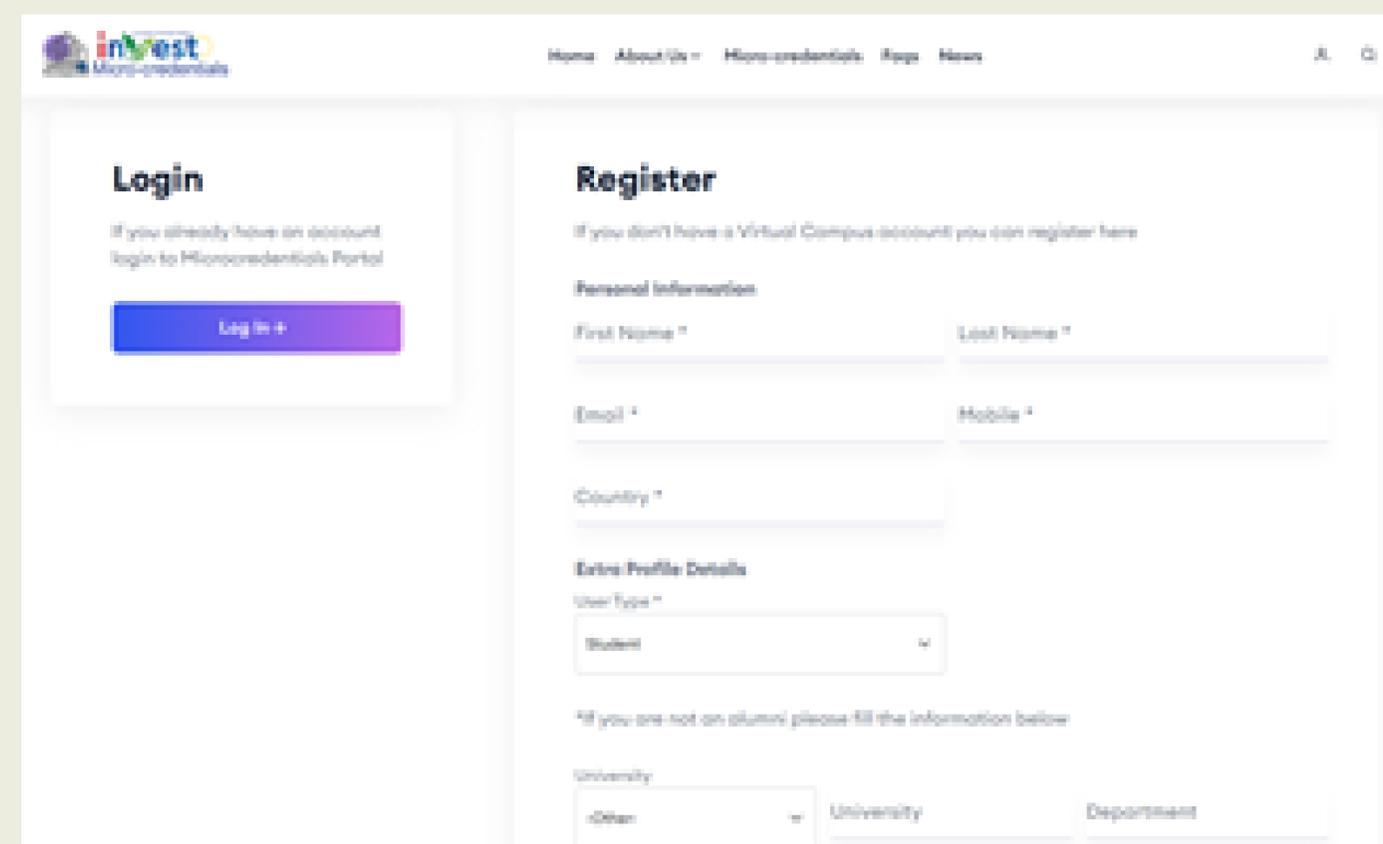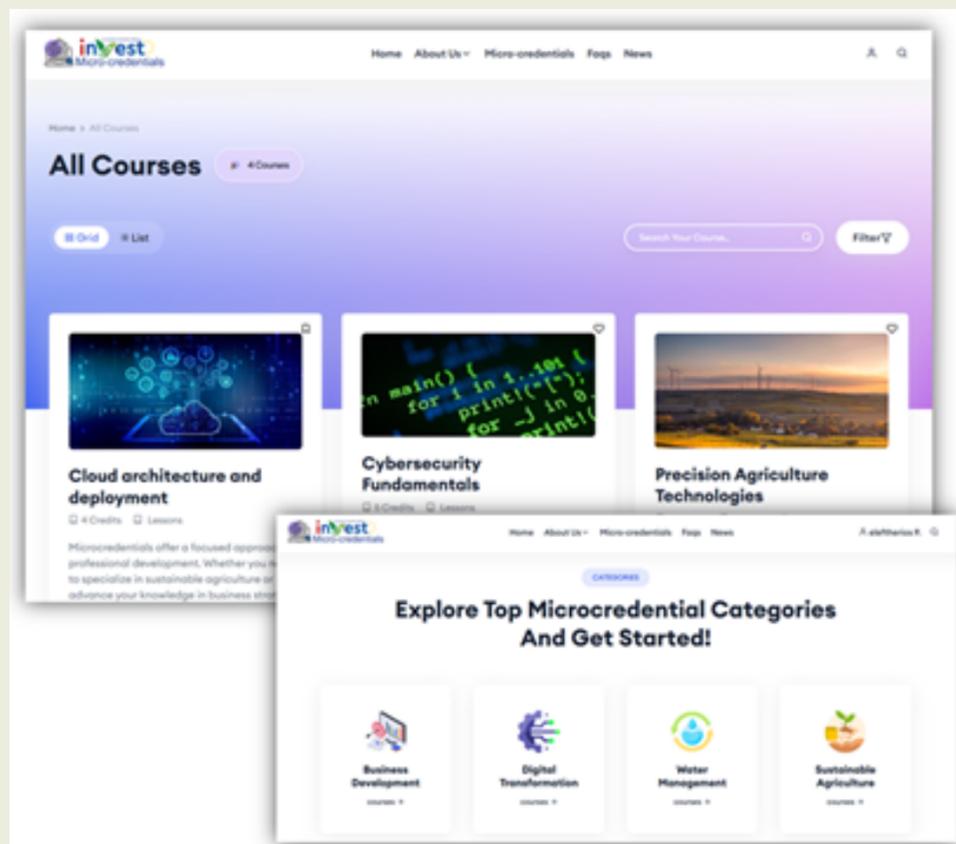
Quality Assurance Committee

- Composition & Role

Practical Resources:

- Communication, promotion and student recruitment strategies
- Financial Model for INVEST Micro-Credentials (tuition fees - e.g. single courses cost in each partner institution, European funding opportunities, national, regional and institutional opportunities; financial model/sustainability of INVEST micro-credentials)

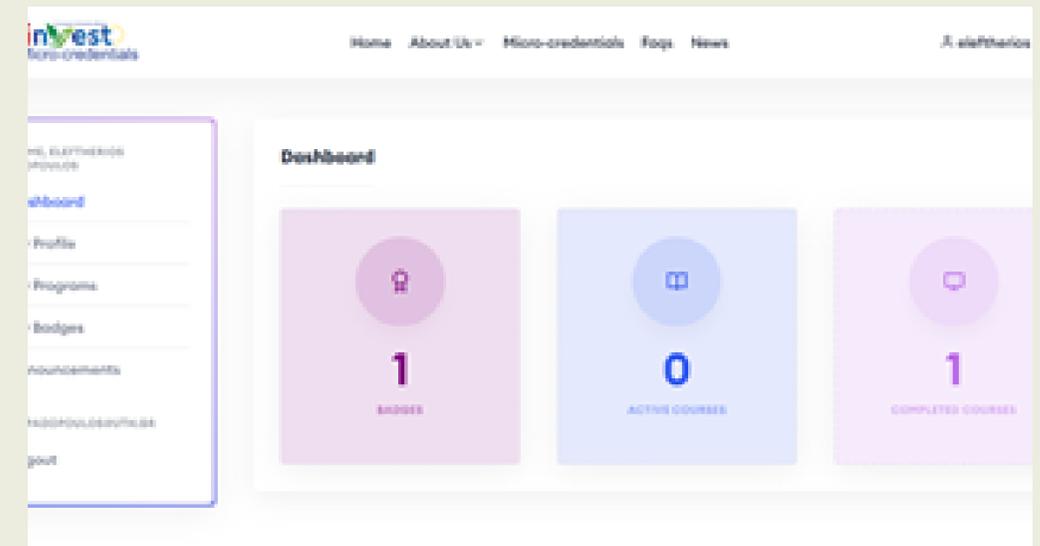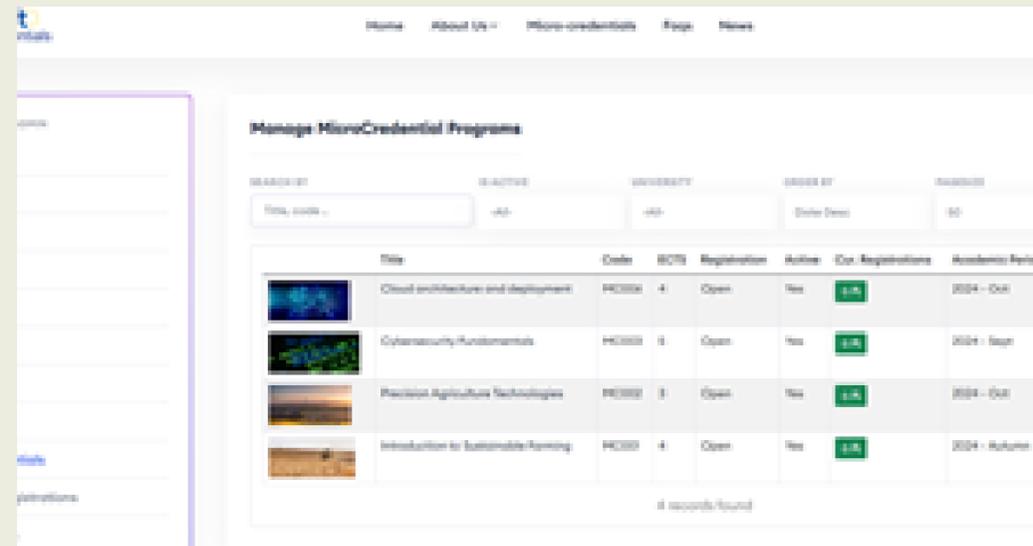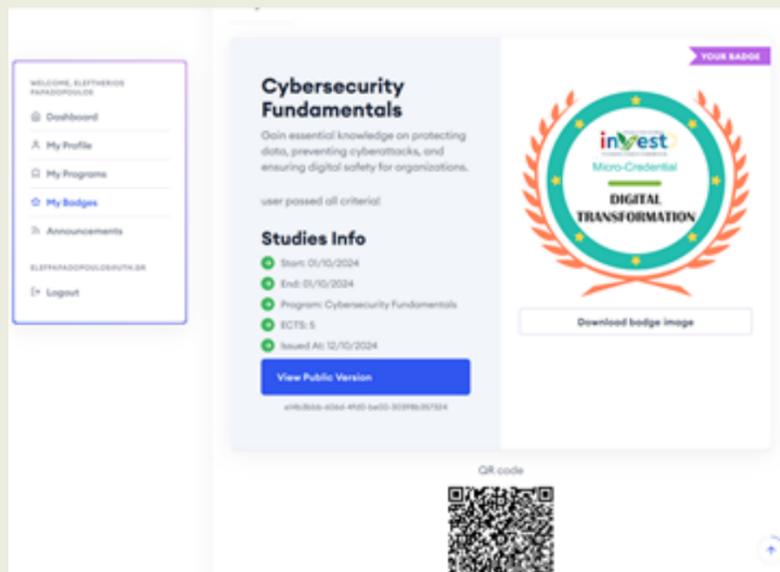# INVEST Learning Management System

Within WP7, UTH developed the initial version of the **INVEST Learning Management System** (Task 7.3):

- Central digital environment for creation, registration, and management of OBs
- Integrated with the INVEST Virtual Campus for interoperability & transparency
- Browse courses, access detailed info, register, and track progress
- Supports recognition through shareable digital badges
- Includes admin portal for managing programs, users, and badge issuance

Student Enrolment, Management & Open Badges

- Learners create/activate a Virtual Campus account
- Single sign-on (OpenID Connect) for seamless access
- Registration validated by hosting university
- Completion verified by instructors via MC Platform
- OpenBadge-compatible digital credentials issued
- Metadata aligned with Europass Digital Credentials (which is under evaluation) & ESCO standards

Recognition & Portability

- Automatic recognition of OBs across all INVEST partners
- ECTS-based workload ensures transparency & integration
- EQF/NQF alignment for competence clarity
- Europass Digital Credentials for cross-border validation, under process
- Stackability: MCs as building blocks toward Joint Bachelor Degrees in development.

https://microcredentials.invest-alliance.eu/

Contact us

INVEST at UNIMIB:

webpage: https://www.unimib.it/ateneo/iniziative-internazionali/european-university-alliance-invest

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