



Microcredentials for VET and labour market learning

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#microcredentials



**Microcredentials
a labour market
megatrend**



CEDEFOP

European Centre for the Development
of Vocational Training

Microcredentials for VET and labour market learning

Three
key
objectives

Mapping microcredentials in European LM-related education, training and learning

Microcredentials and evolving qualifications systems

Microcredentials and the added value for end-users

New research
(2024-2026)



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Cedefop has embarked on the global discussion on microcredentials

Conceptual background

Defining microcredentials



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Where were we standing in 2021?

- **Uncertainty** linked to the **naming** and **function**
- **Diverse** landscape across EU countries - wide range of short learning activities
- Microcredentials' is an **umbrella term**
- **Tight 'Vs' loose** definition: balance between fostering trust and flexibility



Novelty or old wine with new label?

- MCs are a **phenomenon that is growing**
- MCs do not necessarily present a new form of recognition but a way to **define better** and **standardise** the already existing offers.
- Emerging mostly in areas such as **ICT, engineering, manufacturing, and construction**, but also in sectors such as **hospitality, human health, and social work**



Main characteristics of microcredentials

- MCs indicate the **title, the date of issue, the identity of the holder, the provider and achieved LOs.**
- **Online learning vs face-to-face** mode of delivery (classroom-based learning)
- More **diverse learners** than full qualifications, e.g. employees, new hires, individual learners, customers of a company
- MCs are mainly used by **adults in employment**, as continuing VET and supplements to full qualifications
- MCs address the limitation of formal Qs to **timely respond to labour market needs**

Focusing on sectoral and professional skills certificates

Can we consider them as microcredentials?

Adding an extra level of complexity...

Resemblance to microcredentials is most prominent when they are awarded upon the completion of an education and/or training programme (they check all the boxes to be labelled a microcredential, according to the European definition).

Given that not all microcredentials enjoy the same level of trust and quality assurance practices as sectoral and professional skills certificates, it is also possible to conceptualise them as a type of microcredentials that enjoys higher visibility, recognition and trust.

Depending on the national context, the answer differs

Sectoral and professional skills certificates can be either awarded upon completion of an organised learning activity followed by a form of assessment, or solely upon the completion of a performance-based assessment

Main characteristics of microcredentials in the manufacturing and retail sectors

Sector	Title of microcredential	Location	Workload	Link to ECTS or ECVET specified	Mod deliv		
Manufacturing	Safety procedures in medical processes	France	12 modules 17 days	NO	In person		
Manufacturing	Quality management system and welding coordination	Denmark	22.5 hours, 3 days	NO	In person		
Manufacturing	International Welding Engineer (IWE)	International (41 countries)	448 hours	ECVET	person/blended	YES	YES
Manufacturing	International Welding Practitioner (IWP)	International (41 countries)	150 hours	ECVET	person/blended	YES	YES
Manufacturing		Germany, France, Italy, Spain, UK, Portugal and Turkey.	60-70 hours	NO	Online/blended		
Manufacturing		Austria	1 month (fulltime)	NO	In person		
Manufacturing		Malta	125 hours	ECVET	In person	YES	YES
Industrial		Czechia	NS	NO	In person	NO	NS

Highly targeted/specialised types of training that are designed around specific occupational/professional

Focus on new and emerging topics and technologies

Microcredentials often describe learning outcomes. The remaining either do not mention their LOs or present them in the form of content description

Mode of delivery differs; it can be in-person training, online or blended.

Policy discussions at national level

Microcredentials discussion at national policy level

Policy discussions
at an initial stage

BE-FL – BE-FR –
BU – CY- CZ –
DK – FR – DE -
EL

Advanced policy
discussions

NL – PL - SK

Legislation or draft
regulations
already introduced

EE – IE – LV - ES

Indicative
examples
(2022)

Indications that system or broader policy developments ease the expansion of microcredentials

Microcredentials as part of qualifications systems

QUALIFICATION

Linking modularisation to microcredentials

Modularisation is very common in **adult learning**; modules are often considered similar to microcredentials. Indicative examples: BE-FL, BE-FR, CZ, DK, HU,

In HR, the term '**micro-qualification**' (*'mikrokvalifikacija'*) was introduced in the 2021 Adult Education Act. Compiled units of learning outcomes (micro-qualifications) lead to short training programmes and/or qualifications at EQF/NQF levels 2-4.

In IE, the **modular nature** of the QS accommodates **free-standing qualifications** and qualifications as small as five credits; credentials smaller than this can be used as stepping stones into qualifications on the NFQ by being aggregated and used in recognition of prior learning.

Microcredentials and recognition of prior learning

Microcredentials as outcomes of the RPL process

Microcredentials, as a tool of RPL, can be used to

- obtain a partial qualification;
- obtain a full formal qualification (this also relates to accumulation/stackability of MCs);
- gain access to an education programme, including making the transition from VET to higher education;
- gain exemption from part(s) of an education programme and/or shorten its duration;
- gain exemption from part(s) of a professional qualification;



The added value of **microcredentials**



Research questions (added value)

1.

For end-users to trust microcredentials, which conditions must be met to ensure portability and transferability

- information to be contained;
- trust to be generated?

2.

For individual learners to make use of microcredentials, what support can be envisaged?

3.

How could microcredentials play a more targeted role in supporting 'age-neutral' systems for VET, strengthening the focus of up-skilling and re-skilling?

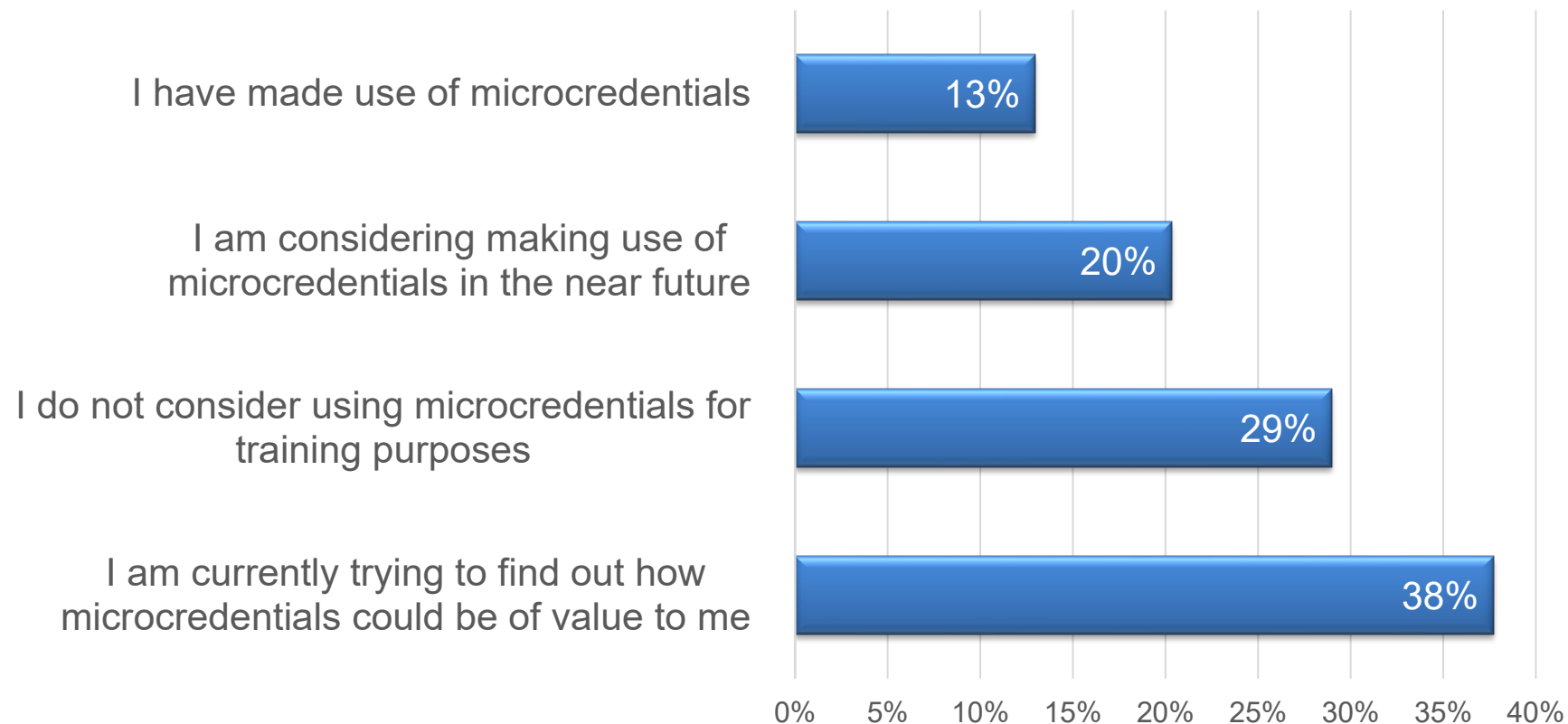


Tension I: Is it a new skills currency?

End users perceptions
(policy intentions)
VS
Reality



Would you consider or have you already made use of microcredentials for training purposes?



Source: Survey of stakeholders representing employees, students and adult learners and individuals who are currently unemployed (N=1180).

**Have you experienced in practice
that microcredentials helped you
get promoted?**

46% No

30% Yes

24% Do not know/
cannot answer

Microcredentials and added value for



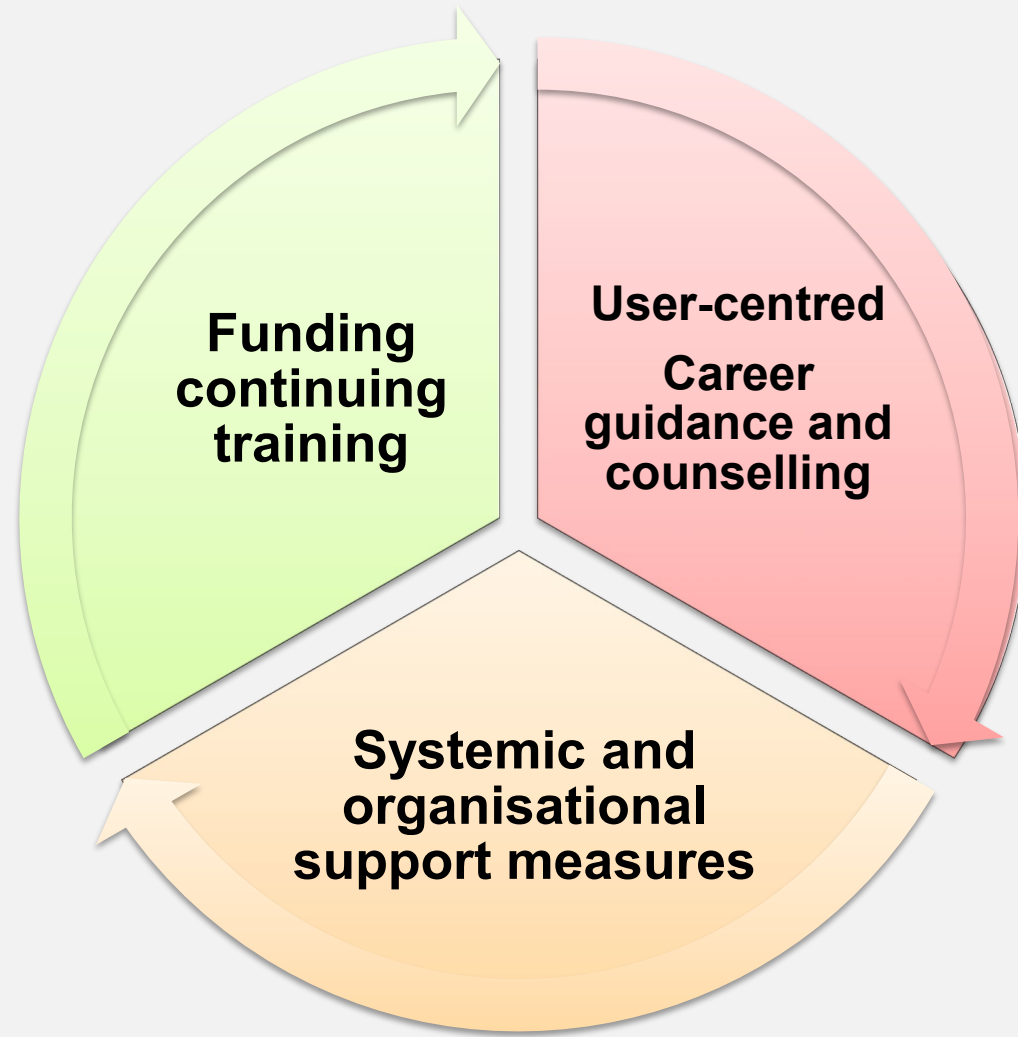
Learners and employees	Employers	VET providers
Standing out in a recruitment situation.	More responsive training offer	Expanding the outreach of VET providers.
Labour market mobility through vertical and horizontal skills pathways.	Faster and more efficient upskilling and reskilling of the workforce.	Consolidate strategies for VET excellence.
Improved labour market outcomes in the form of income and career development.	Improve employee retention through improved job and career pathways in the company.	Allowing for new services and engagements with new targets groups.
Career shifts.	Expanding the recruitment base (hidden workforce).	Involvement in local, regional and sectoral skills ecosystems building skills intelligence.
Access to continuing and further learning on a flexible basis.	Reducing induction costs of new employees by providing more individualised and affordable training opportunities.	Building institutional capacity to innovate by e.g., co-designing new forms of provision to reach underprivileged target groups.
Recognition of prior learning.	Renewed competitiveness and innovation performance through concurrent strategies for upskilling and reskilling.	Improving quality of provision by engaging actively with stakeholders in local labour markets.

Source: Cedefop (2023, forthcoming)

Barriers to a wider uptake of microcredentials

- Lack of **adequate and transparent QA standards**
- **Uncertainties** about nature of microcredentials
- The way **learning outcomes are assessed and documented**
- Lack of **formal recognition** by national authorities
- **Incompatibility** of some microcredentials with NQ systems
- **Limited opportunities** for the accumulation and **combination** of microcredentials

Ways to support engagement with microcredentials



Source: Cedefop, (2023, forthcoming)

Microcredentials (MCs) for VET & labour market learning are promising, but getting things right is a balancing act

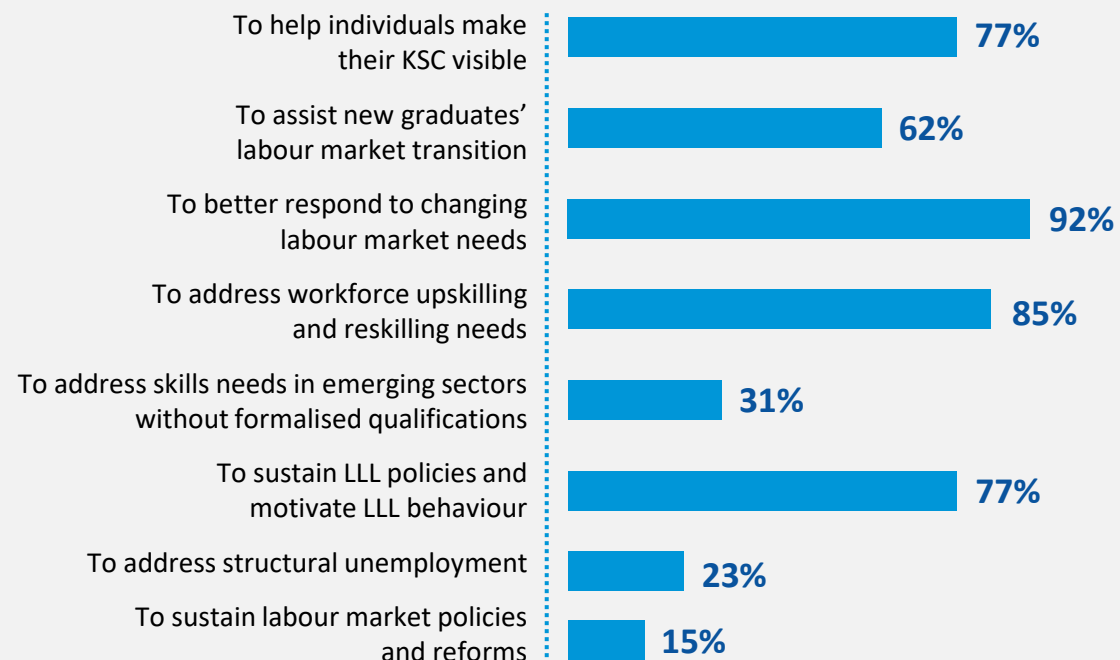
STRENGTHS

- Labour market responsiveness
- Up/reskilling & lifelong learning
- Skills validation potential
- Providers/employers cooperation
- Broadening access to learning
- Flexible learning pathways

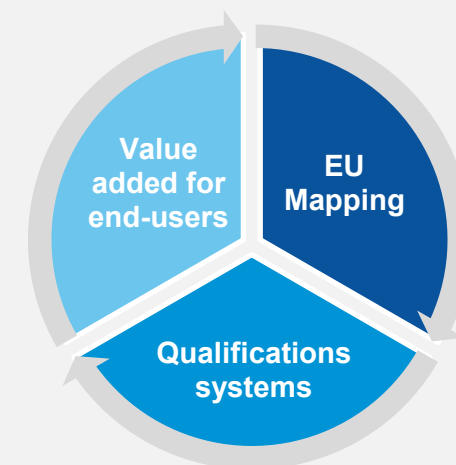
WEAKNESSES

- Uncertainty about benefits
- Proliferation of unregulated MCs
- Confusion among users
- Quality assurance transparency
- Recognition challenges
- Reaching disadvantaged learners

PURPOSES OF MCs IN NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS SYSTEMS



Source: Survey of stakeholders representing national authorities.



More information on [Cedefop webportal](#)



Thank you

For further information:

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Project page

www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/projects/microcredentials-labour-market-education-and-training

Podcast

www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/podcasts/episode-6-microcredentials-are-they-here-stay

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