Microcredentials for VET and labour market learning

Anastasia Pouliou

Expert in qualifications and credentials – Future of VET

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The role of micro certs and what is happening in UE

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

Cedefop's Advisory Group on Microcredentials

CEDEFOP

Which are the distinguishing features of micro-credentials?

- MCs an **umbrella term** – uncertainty linked to the naming and function
- MCs most often indicate the **title, the date of issue, the identity of the holder, the provider and achieved LOs.**
- More **diverse** learners than full qualifications, e.g. employees, new hires, individual learners, customers of a company
- Non-formal MCs address the **limitation** of formal QSs to timely respond to labour market needs

Microcredentials and evolving qualifications systems

MCs and qualification systems/frameworks

➢ MCs do not necessarily present a new form of recognition but a way to **define better and standardise** the already existing offers.

➢ Incorporation of MCs into national qualification systems **varies substantially** between European countries

➢ Two main developments paving the way for the inclusion of MCs in NQFs are:

      ➢ *modularisation of qualifications*

      ➢ *opening up of NQFs to qualifications awarded **outside formal education and training**.*

➢ Microcredentials can be **outcomes** and **tools** of an RPL process

➢ Lack of adequate **quality assurance** practices comes as one of the main hindering factors to the utilisation of microcredentials in RPL.

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 of countries

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Linking modularisation to microcredentials

Modularisation 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. 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.

In ES, the new system of formal vocational training spans from **micro-training to degrees and specialisation courses**, based on learning progression. Micro-training modules are **partial** and **cumulative**, and lead to a partial accreditation of competence.

Opening up qualifications frameworks to microcredentials

✓ **CZ**: The NSK functions as a framework for qualifications obtained outside formal education and training, responding directly to the needs of the labour market. ==Vocational qualifications== could be considered a type of MCs, as they fit the European Commission's definition of MCs.

✓ **MT**: Some ==MQF awards== could be considered as a type of MCs. One of the aims of the 2023 update of the referencing report, is to adequately deal with MCs in order to be well integrated and regulated in the education system.

✓ **NL**: The Dutch Government sees classification of MCs into the NQF and their referencing to the EQF as crucial for ==transparency==.

✓ **PL**: Some ==market qualifications== are considered as microcredentials; increasing number is included in the integrated qualifications system (IQS);

✓ **SI**: ==supplementary qualifications== are comparable to microcredentials

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 (e.g., as in CY, DE, IE, NL and ES);
  - ✓ obtain a full formal qualification (this also relates to accumulation/stackability of MCs) (e.g., as in EE, IE, LUX and NO);
  - ✓ gain access to an education programme, including making the transition from VET to higher education (e.g., as in IE);
  - ✓ gain exemption from part(s) of an education programme and/or shorten its duration (e.g., as in Belgium-FL, DK and ES);
  - ✓ gain exemption from part(s) of a professional qualification (e.g. as in BE-FL and FR);
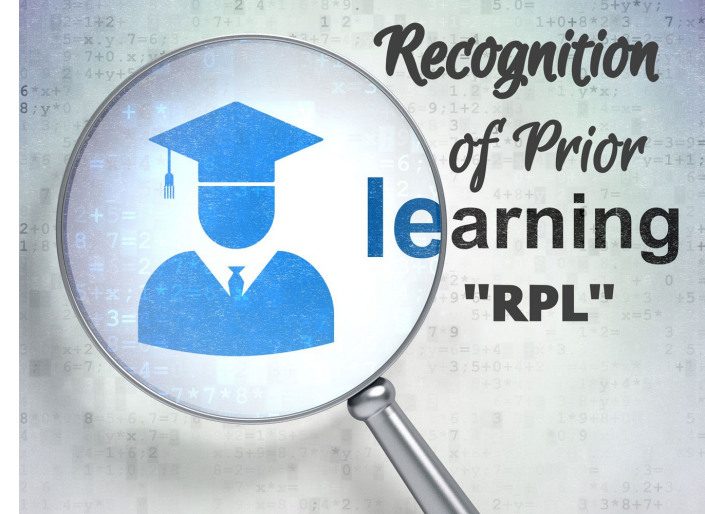
Main characteristics of microcredentials in the manufacturing and retail sectors

Sector	Title of microcredential	Location	Workload	Link to ECTS or ECVET specified	Mode of delivery		
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	In person/blended/online		
Manufacturing	International Welding Practitioner (IWP)	International (41 countries)	150 hours	ECVET	In person/blended	YES	YES
Manufacturing		Germany, France, Italy, Spain, UK, Portugal and Turkey.	60-70 hours	NO	Online/blended		
		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

23 out of the 39 mapped microcredentials explicitly describe their 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.

Emerging questions!

- ❖ Can certificates **awarded following solely the completion of a performance-based assessment** be considered microcredentials?
- ❖ Should microcredentials be **regulated**, **standardised**, or **formalised** to mimic the nature of existing sectoral and professional skills certificates?
- ❖ Is there a need to '**re-brand' a well-functioning procedure that leads to a certificate** that is well-accepted by the labour market?

Added value of microcredentials for end users

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

I HAVE MADE USE OF MICROCREDENTIALS — 13%

I AM CONSIDERING MAKING USE OF MICROCREDENTIALS IN THE NEAR FUTURE — 20%

I DO NOT CONSIDER USING MICROCREDENTIALS FOR TRAINING PURPOSES — 29%

I AM CURRENTLY TRYING TO FIND OUT HOW MICROCREDENTIALS COULD BE OF VALUE TO ME — 38%
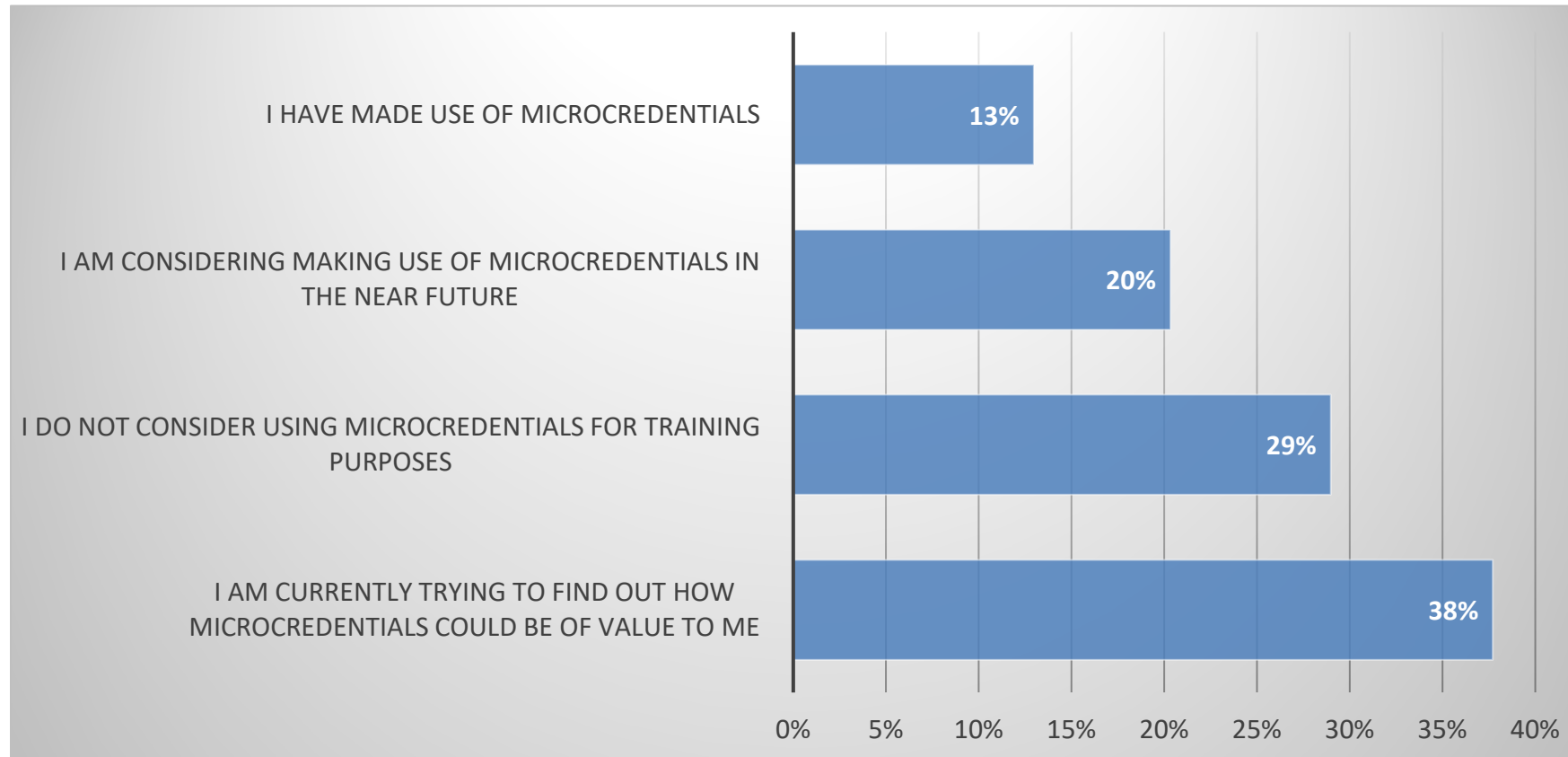
Source: Survey of stakeholders representing employees, students and adult learners and individuals who are currently unemployed (N=1180).

A complex MC landscape: establishing trust - generating added value

| Trust		Pre-engagement	Engagement	Added value	Impact
Conditions for trust • Credibility of MCs providers. • Compliance with national regulatory frameworks. • Recognition. • Accumulation/stackability. • Quality assurance. • Assessment practices. • Transparency. • Knowledge of microcredentials. • Content and relevance.	**Learners**	• Stipulated rights to training. • Active labour market policies. • Funding formulas. • National legislation for adult education. • Personalised guidance.	• Participation in skilling, reskilling, and/or upskilling activities. • Engaging in lifelong learning. • Admission into further education. • Recognition of prior learning.	• Higher visibility of acquired knowledge and skills. • Getting certified. • Getting admitted to studies. • Lowering study workload. • Transition to labour markets. • Job and career development. • Social returns.	• Enhanced employability and career mobility. • Connected learning-work trajectory. • Professional wellbeing. • Economic returns. • Civic engagement and health. • Transition from hidden to valued workforce.
	Education & training providers	• Internal strategy. • National configuration of VET system. • Funding formulas. • Nature and intensity of external collaboration. • Skills intelligence. • Engagement of staff.	• Evidence for admission into further education. • Recognition of prior learning. • Accumulating/stacking into a larger qualification. • Designing and/or offering microcredentials.	• Recognised CVET player. • Raising additional funds. • Facilitating degree admission and/or completion. • Broadening educational offerings. • Increased collaboration with employers. • Addressing equity gaps. • Increased turnover.	• More equitable, inclusive, and age-neutral VET. • Reputation as a CVET partner. • Financial sustainability. • Returns to ordinary training. • Strategic partnerships in sectoral and regional skills ecosystems. • Increased turnover.
	Employers	• Business case for CVET. • Internal functional flexibility. • Labour force as a critical asset. • Perceived skills shortages and skills mismatches. • Growth strategy for expanding talent pipeline.	• Making hiring decisions. • Reskilling and/or upskilling the workforce. • Designing and/or offering MCs.	• Easier, quicker, and more affordable skilling, reskilling, or upskilling of the workforce. • Improved talent pipeline. • Improved skills utilisation. • Reduced turnover of staff. • Effective technology diffusion and uptake. • Improved work environment.	• Better skilled workforce. • Higher employee retention. • Economic gains. • Technology diffusion. • Employee-driven innovation. • Higher productivity. • Digital and green transitions. • Better reputation. • Partner in regional sectoral skills ecosystems. • ESG embedded in processes, products, labour relations.

Microcredentials and **added value** for end users

Learners and employees	Employers	VET providers
Gainful employment.	Provide access to education and training that meets the changing and emerging needs of companies.	Incentivise VET institutions to take a proactive role as talent brokers and skills advocates.
Encourage further education and qualification completion.	Address talent shortages and skills gaps.	Encourage VET providers to consider the needs of employers.
Raise the income and opportunities of employees.	Provide access to cheaper and faster upskilling and reskilling of the workforce.	Help make skills more visible to students and employers.
Improve employability and employment prospects.	Improve employee retention through improved job and career pathways in the company.	Involvement in local, regional and sectoral skills ecosystems.
Provide flexible learning modules for lifelong learning.	Train employees with specialised in-depth knowledge to successfully adapt to changing technological and business needs.	Reach underprivileged people, those who could not be reached with traditional programmes (e.g., homeless, refugees).
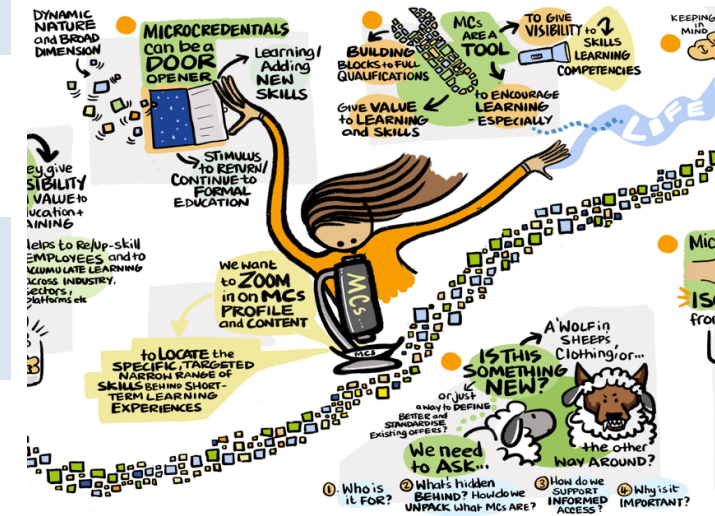
Source: Cedefop (2023, forthcoming)

Ways to support **engagement** with microcredentials
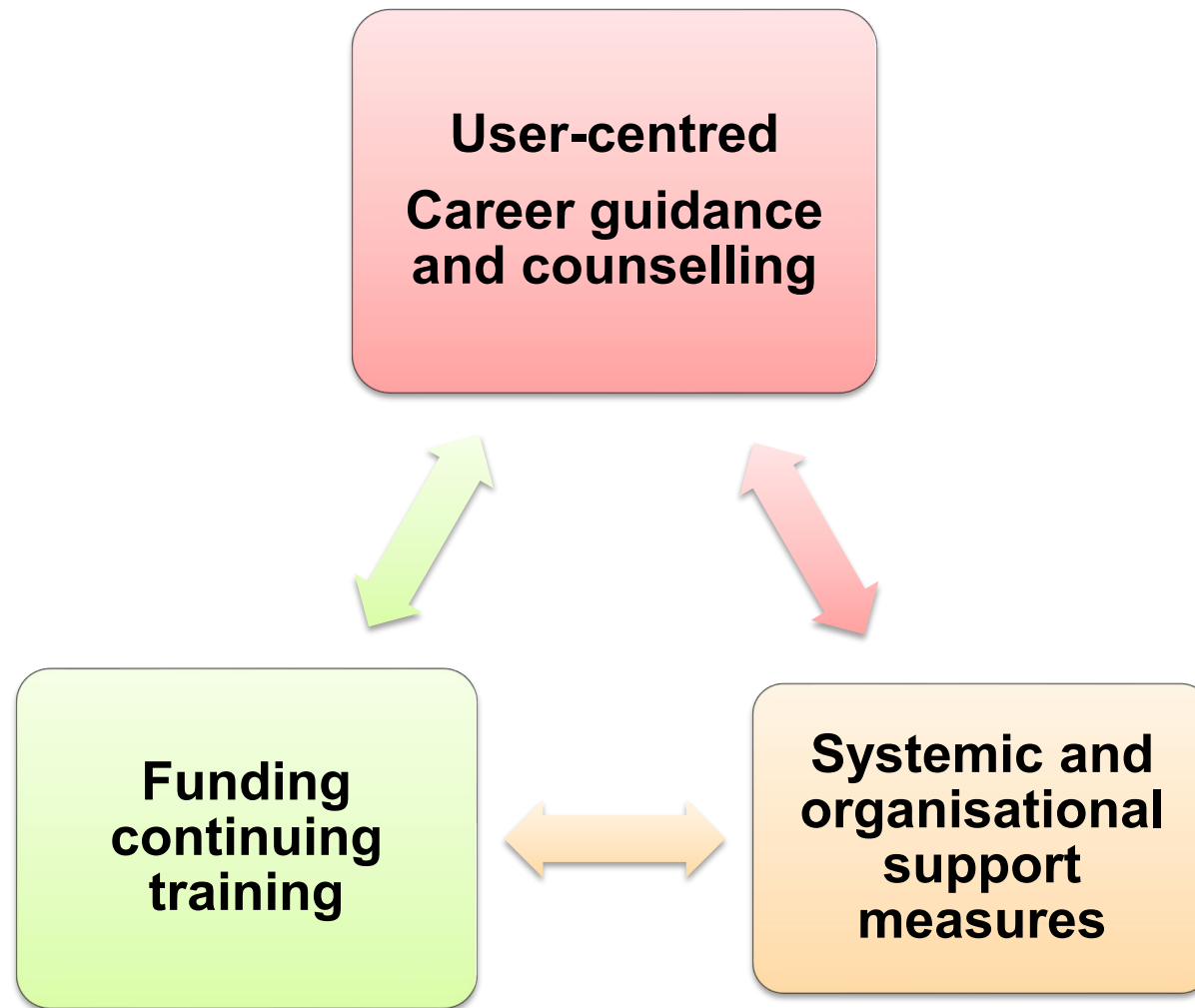
Vision for the future

Different scenarios: from a European MCs registry and opening up of NQFs to more incremental approaches based on metadata and easing comparability.

Both from a **user** and a **system** perspective each of these scenarios has advantages but also challenges given the diversity of provision

Thank you

For further information:

anastasia.pouliou@cedefop.europa.eu

Project page https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/projects/microcredentials-labour-market-education-and-training
Podcast: https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/podcasts/episode-6-microcredentials-are-they-here-stay

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