Micro-credentials – a new opportunity for lifelong learning?

Initial findings from Cedefop-project on Micro credentials for TVET and labour market learning

Jens Bjornavold,

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CEDEFOP | European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training

The general aim and research questions of the project

Why a Cedefop-study on micro-credentials?

❖ Recent research carried out on micro-credentials focus on **higher, academic education**.

❖ This overlooks the potential role of micro-credentials in and for **vocational and professional education and training.**

❖ It overlooks the potential role of micro-credentials outside formal education and training, **notably companies and labour market sectors.**

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The challenge of defining Micro-credentials

❖ Definitions (from OECD, EU, BFUG 2020..) point to **key characteristics** of micro credentials:

- – broadly referring to learning over a limited time period and/or in a specific area
- – may form part of or adding to formal qualifications,
- – potentially 'stackable' over time, adding to individual learning careers
- – given their limited size and focus, more flexible than raditional qualifications
- – frequently delivered in a digital form

❖ Do they represent a **genuinely new form of recognition** or not?

Micro-credentials in a nutshell

''Microcredentials are evidence of practical, flexible, on-demand, and short learning experiences. This is what makes them so attractive. Common European standards must preserve this attractiveness and not limit it through over - regulation and - formalization. It is thus central to find an appropriate balance between fostering trust and transparency as part of a common approach without compromising the flexibility of microcredentials''

Employers organisations survey, Germany

European Centre for the Development
of Vocational Training

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Cedefop's objectives?

Cedefop project: Micro-credentials (2021-23)

Three key objectives structured in three work assignments

Mapping Micro-credentials in European LM related education, training and learning

Micro-credentials and evolving qualifications systems

Micro-credentials and the added value for end users

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Work assignment 1:
What is the current use of micro credentials?

✓ To what extent are micro-credentials used **in and for labour market related education, training and learning**?

✓ To what extent are micro-credentials operating as **integrated parts of formal qualifications and credentials systems**?

✓ To what extent are micro-credentials evolving outside of formal education and training systems, for example offered by **companies, professional organisations** and others?

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Work assignment 2:
Micro credentials and evolving qualifications systems

✓ How are micro-credentials, **linked to and integrated** in the overall qualifications and credentials systems?

✓ Which are the objectives and roles, if any, of micro-credentials in **national qualifications and credentials systems**?

✓ What impact are micro-credentials having on the overall **balance of qualifications and credentials systems**?

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Work assignment 3:
Micro credentials and the added value for end users?

✓ For end-users to trust micro-credentials, which conditions must be met to ensure **portability and transferability?**

✓ For **individual learners to make use of micro-credentials**, what support can be envisaged?

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

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Presentation of methodological tools, preliminary findings, and next steps of the project

Methodological tools used in the implementation of the project
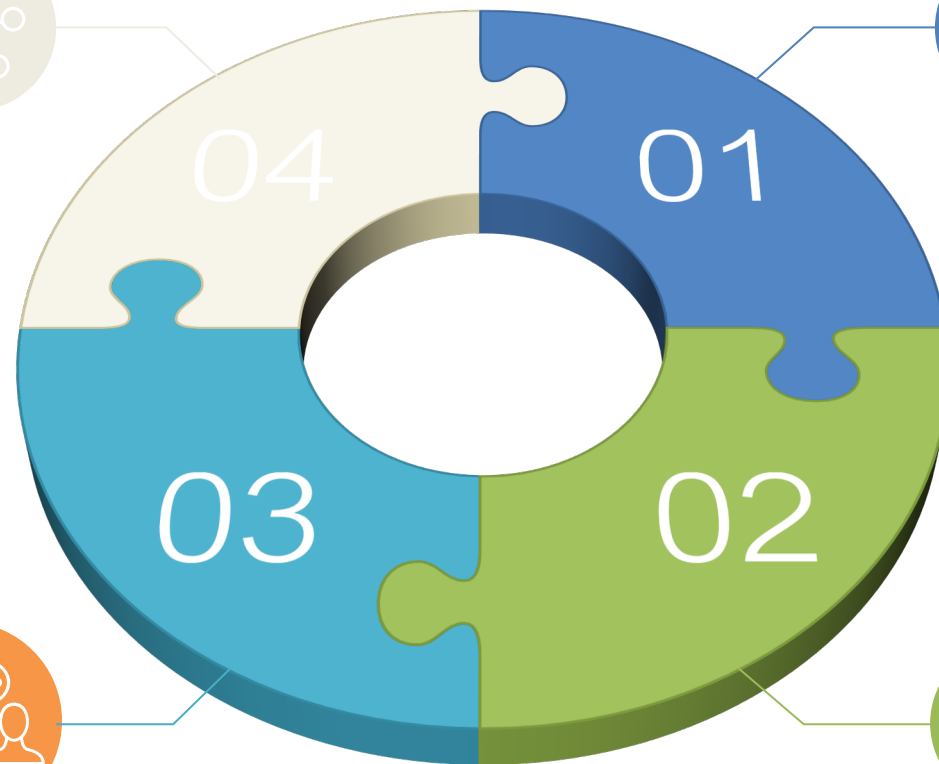

Case studies

Desk research

Interviews

Surveys

01

02

03

04

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Preliminary findings

Mapping micro-credentials in European labour market related education, training and learning
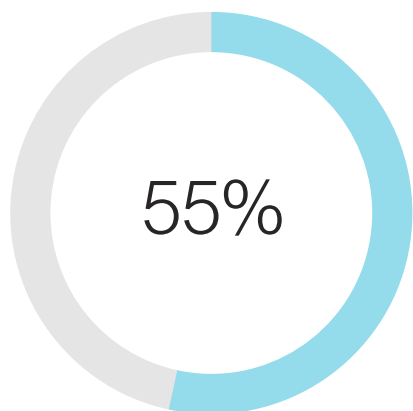**4 types of surveys** targeting different stakeholder groups

| National authorities	Vocational education and training providers	Employer organisations including sectoral and occupational organisations	Employee organisations including trade unions and employee associations

Awareness of micro-credentials

55%

National authorities

The majority of respondents confirmed that the term micro-credential is not used in their national context
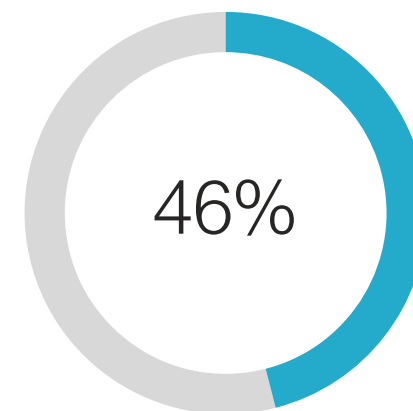
48%
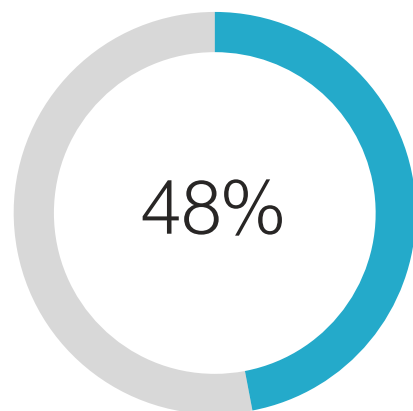
VET providers

Almost half of VET providers could not indicate whether their organisation provides any micro-credentials

27%
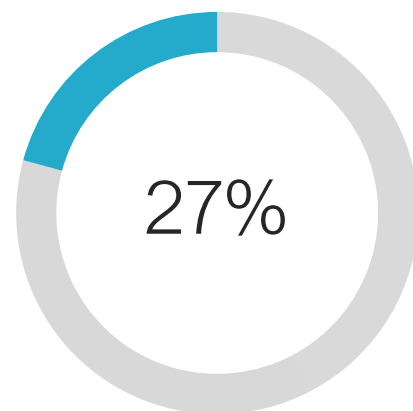
Employer organisations
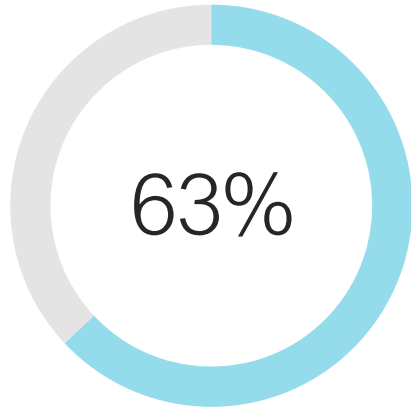
Only 27% of employers and organisations representing employer were not familiar with the term micro-credentials

46%

Employee organisations

Almost half of employee organisations were not familiar with the term micro-credentials

Benefits and added value of micro-credentials compared to traditional forms of qualifications

63%

National authorities

89% **flexibility** for upskilling and reskilling

80% suitable for **lifelong learning**

78% **responsiveness** to labour market needs

34% micro-credentials provide **basic employability skills** for individuals

31% micro-credentials used to **upskill and reskill** individuals in the labour market
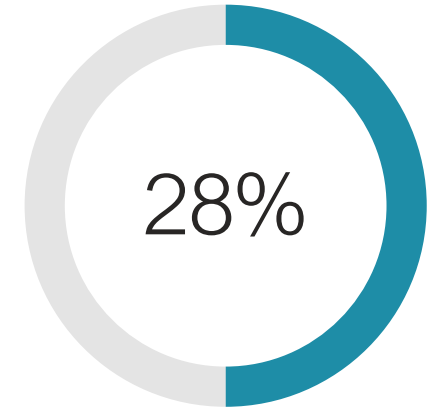
54%
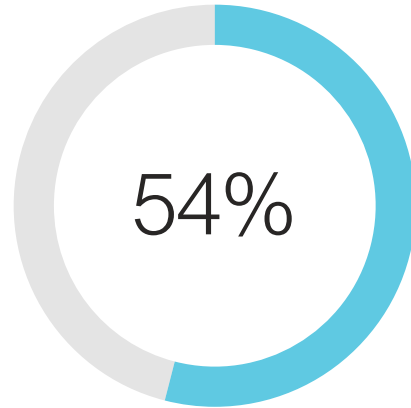
VET providers

73% **flexibility** for upskilling and reskilling

68.1% **response** to the needs of learners for specific education and training

66.7% **response** to the needs of employers for specific education and training

58.4% suitable for **lifelong learning**

53.9% content is more relevant to labour market needs

48.3% **responsiveness** to labour market needs

59%
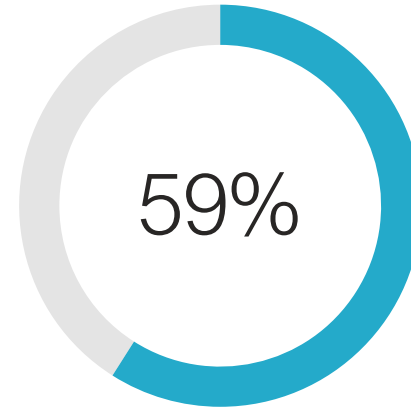
Employer organisations

100% improve employee **motivation**

75% improve **retention** of employees

75% build a **culture of CPD**

82% **format** allows for speedier response to the needs of employers

73% **flexibility** for upskilling and reskilling

64% content is more **relevant** to labour market needs

28%

Employee organisations

75.8% **flexibility** for upskilling and reskilling

66.7% **format** allows for speedier response to the needs of employers

51.5% ability to **validate** and recognise employees' knowledge

51.5% **short** duration

48.5% **relevance** of the content to labour market

42.4% **fast response** to the needs of employers

24.2 **lower** cost

Perception of credibility and trust

| National authorities	VET providers	Employer organisations	Employee Organisations
A big percentage does not know or could not answer this question.	MC generally trusted by education and training providers (63%) and trusted among employers (66%). Learners seem to trust micro-credentials the most (70%).	Employers trust MC that lead to nationally recognised qualifications (87,5%)	Greater trust among employees in micro-credentials leading to nationally recognised qualifications (56%) than those that do not (45%).

✓ Micro-credentials that lead to **nationally recognised qualifications** seem to be trusted more.

✓ Despite the perceived lack of trust in micro-credentials, organisations representing employees somewhat agree (50%) that **employees** in their sectors would benefit from a **wider uptake of micro-credentials** for training and **continuous professional development**.

Distrust/barriers of MC

National authorities	VET providers	Employer organisations	Employee Organisations
Lack of transparent and commonly agreed definition of micro-credentials and standardised recognition (75%), new form of credential not well known (63%), learners are not interested in or do not value MC (10%)	Lack of interest among learners (13%), limited understanding of the value of micro-credentials among employers (13%), no common definition, no agreed QA standards, lack of accreditation (11%)	A new form of credential (86%), lack of common definition for micro-credentials (71%), lack of transparency on assessment (60%) and variety of names for short learning experiences, which causes confusion (57%).	Lack of common definition (60.9%); micro-credentials are not part of national qualifications system (56.5%); a new form of credential that is not well known (47.8%); uncertainty whether employers recognise them (43.5%); uncertainty whether ET providers recognise them (34.8%%)

✓ **New**, **unknown** form of credential

✓ High percentage of distrust due to **uncertainty** of the added value, of its recognition and use

8 Case studies

Finland

Ireland

France

Poland

Germany

Spain

Netherlands

Slovenia

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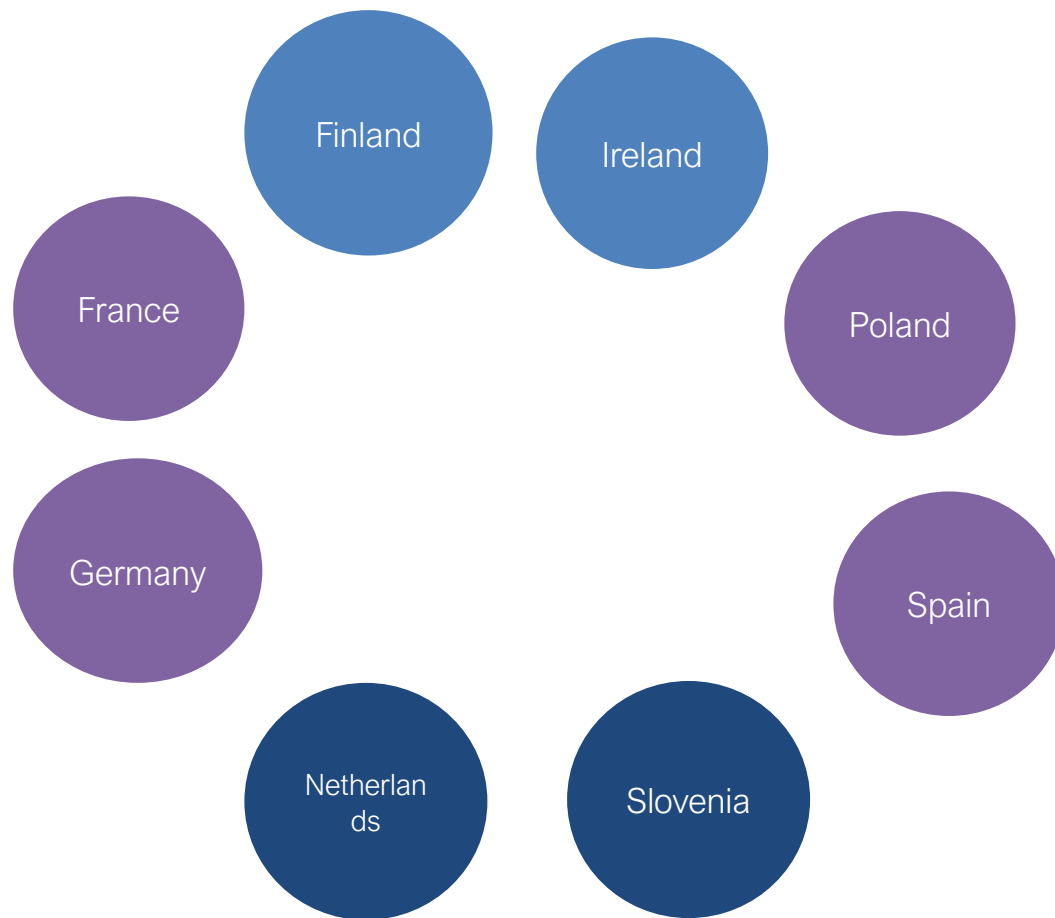
Overall findings from the case studies

A term "micro-credential" is not commonly used in national contexts

The provision of short learning experiences, both certified and uncertified, is long-standing practice in many countries

Micro-credentials are seen as a way to meet specific skills needs

There are discussions about making education and training more flexible, adaptable and accessible
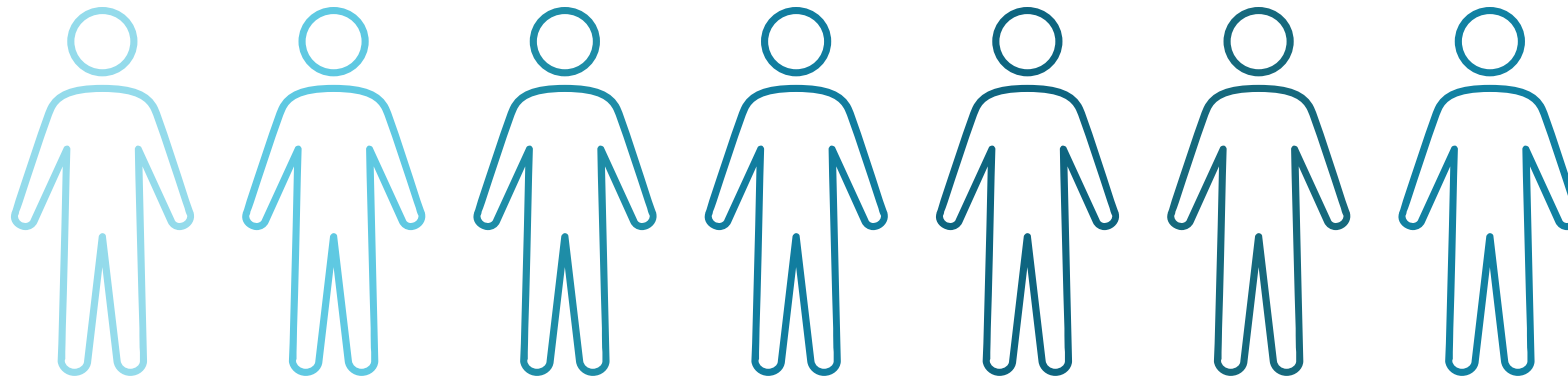
Important remarks

- ✓ Data provide **important insights** but are not strong enough on the **characteristics** of MC; need to go deeper into the research with the interviews and case studies;

- ✓ Goes **beyond academics**, reaches out to **labour market** stakeholders;

- ✓ Data depend on the **individual respondents' reference point**;

- ✓ **Technical details** better provided by **VET providers**;

- ✓ The '**do not know**' responses in the surveys capture the current state of play

Some questions that emerged from interviews
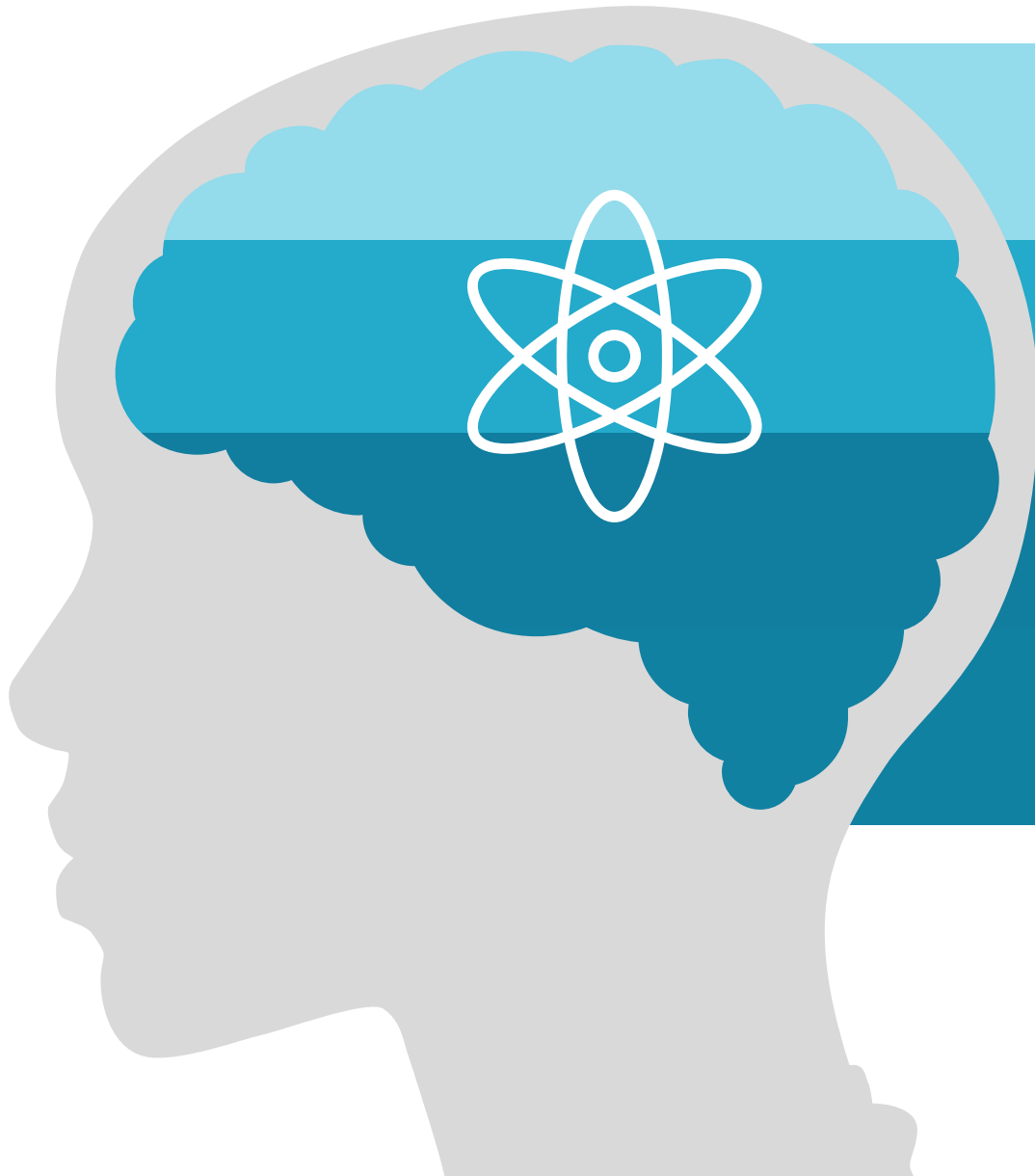
Is it something new or is it a way to better define / standardise the already existing offer?

Can partial qualifications and module certificates be considered micro-credentials?

How do micro-credentials fit in the formal qualifications system and whether they need to be included in the formal system?

How do micro-credentials operate in the labour market as well as informal and non-formal education, and whether they should operate independently of the formal system?

Thank you

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