



# Microcredentials: are they here to stay?

**Interim findings from Cedefop project on Microcredentials for VET and labour market learning**

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**CEDEFOP**

European Centre for the Development  
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# Cedefop project: Microcredentials (2021-23)

Three key objectives structured in three work assignments

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

Microcredentials and evolving qualifications systems

Microcredentials and the added value for end users



## Which are the distinguishing features of micro-credentials?

- MCs most often indicate the **title, the date of issue, the identity of the holder, the provider and achieved LOs.**
- Traditional face-to-face mode (**classroom-based learning**) of delivery a popular teaching mode
- The **learning outcome-based** approach is often standard practice for both full qualifications and microcredentials
- Assessment usually is an in-house process, but also undertaken by independent assessors.
- Data shows some MCs can be **accumulated** and **combined** with Qfs



# Research questions (links to qualification systems)

1. Which are the **objectives** and roles, if any, of microcredentials in national qualifications and credentials systems?
2. How are micro-credentials, as identified in WA 1, linked to and integrated in the overall qualifications and credentials systems?
3. What **impact** are microcredentials having on the overall balance of qualifications and credentials systems?





# Two main conceptual elements

- We adopted a **wider** 'dual' perspective regarding qualifications
  - 'qualified' in the sense of having obtained a formal qualification
  - 'qualified' by virtue of having showed the ability to carry out a job effectively
- **Traditional** vs **modern** qualifications: microcredentials have a number of overlapping functions with modern ones:
  - promote lifelong learning
  - enable alternative learning pathways
  - provide different options for progression
  - facilitate the partial recognition and validation of prior learning
  - are defined by stakeholders



# Main key findings

- Microcredentials operate both **within** and **outside** formal qualifications systems
- More **diverse learners** than those engaged with full qualifications, including employees, new hires, individual learners, customers of a company – a lot of sectoral activity
- Defining MCs: balance between fostering **trust and transparency** and preserving **flexibility**
- Strong indications that **microcredentials will not diminish the labour market value of recognised qualifications** in the near future
- Microcredentials can lead to **fragmentation of knowledge**



# MCs and qualification systems/frameworks

- Policy discussion and developments on MCs:
  - policy discussions are at an **initial stage**;
  - **advanced** policy discussions;
  - **legislation** or draft regulations already **introduced**.
- Two main developments paving the way for the inclusion of MCs in NQFs are:
  - ***modularisation** of qualifications (WA1)*
  - *opening up of NQFs to qualifications awarded **outside formal education and training**.*
- Majority of MCs that are attributed EQF or NQF levels are at **levels 2 to 5**.
- MCs conceived as a tool for facilitating **RPL** towards the award of a larger qualification.





# 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



# Key factors driving discussions relating MCs to qualification systems



# Focusing on sectoral and professional skills certificates

Can we consider them as **microcredentials**?

Adding an extra level of **complexity**...

**Resemblance** to microcredentials prominent when awarded to individuals and/or training programme

Not all microcredentials enjoy the same level of **trust** and **quality assurance** practices as sectoral and professional skills certificates, so possible to conceptualise them as a type of microcredentials that enjoys **higher visibility, recognition** and **trust**.





# 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?



# 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	Highly targeted/specialised types of training that are designed around specific occupational/professional		
Manufacturing	Safety procedures in medical processes	France	12 modules 17 days	NO	In person	Focus on new and emerging topics and technologies		
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			
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	Mode of delivery differs; it can be in-person training, online or 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	

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

# 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.

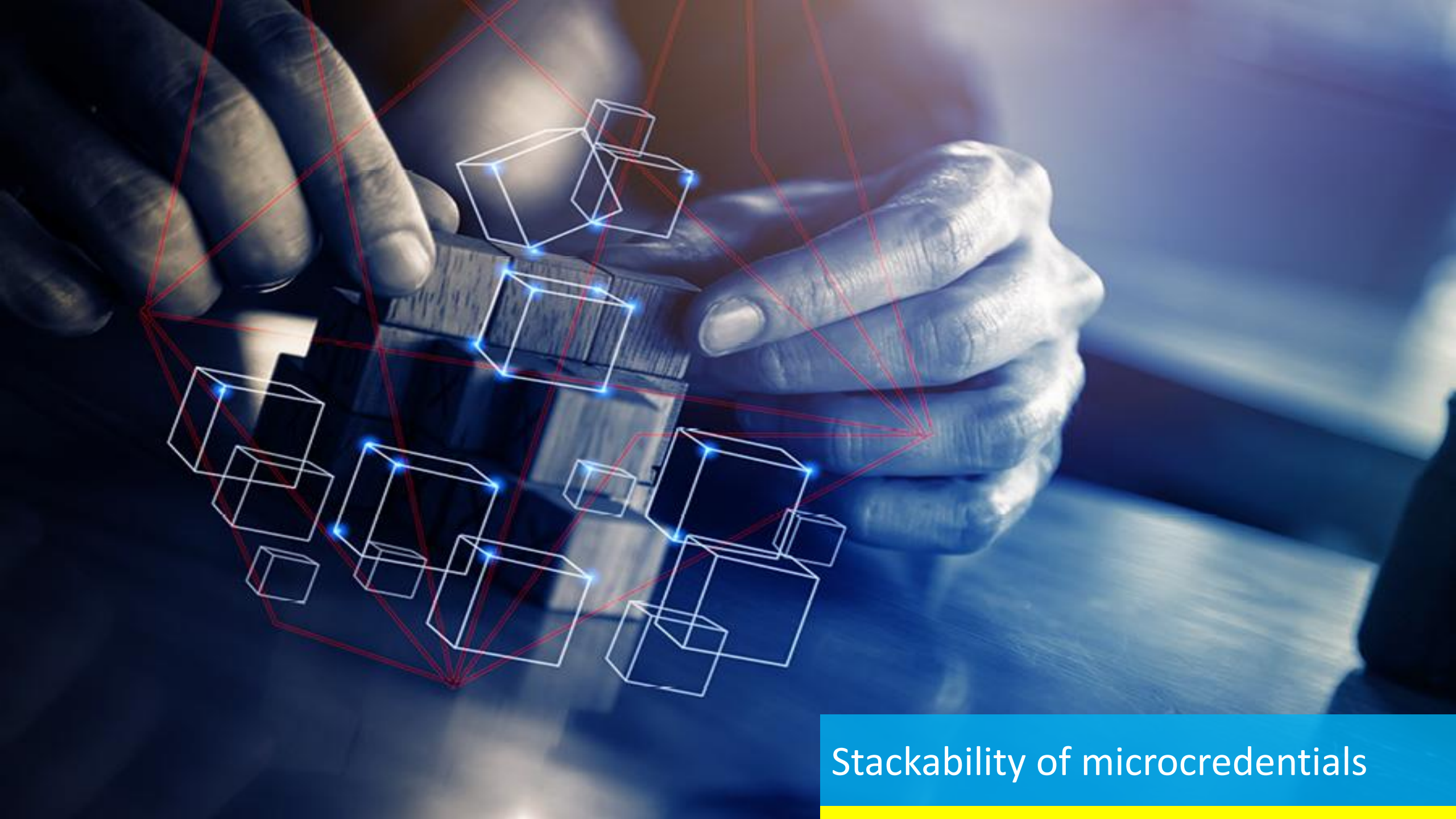
In ES, the new system of formal vocational training spans from **micro-training to degrees and specialisation courses**, based on learning progression. Micro-training modules are **partial and cumulative**, and lead to a partial accreditation of competence.

# 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 BE-FR and 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);







Stackability of microcredentials

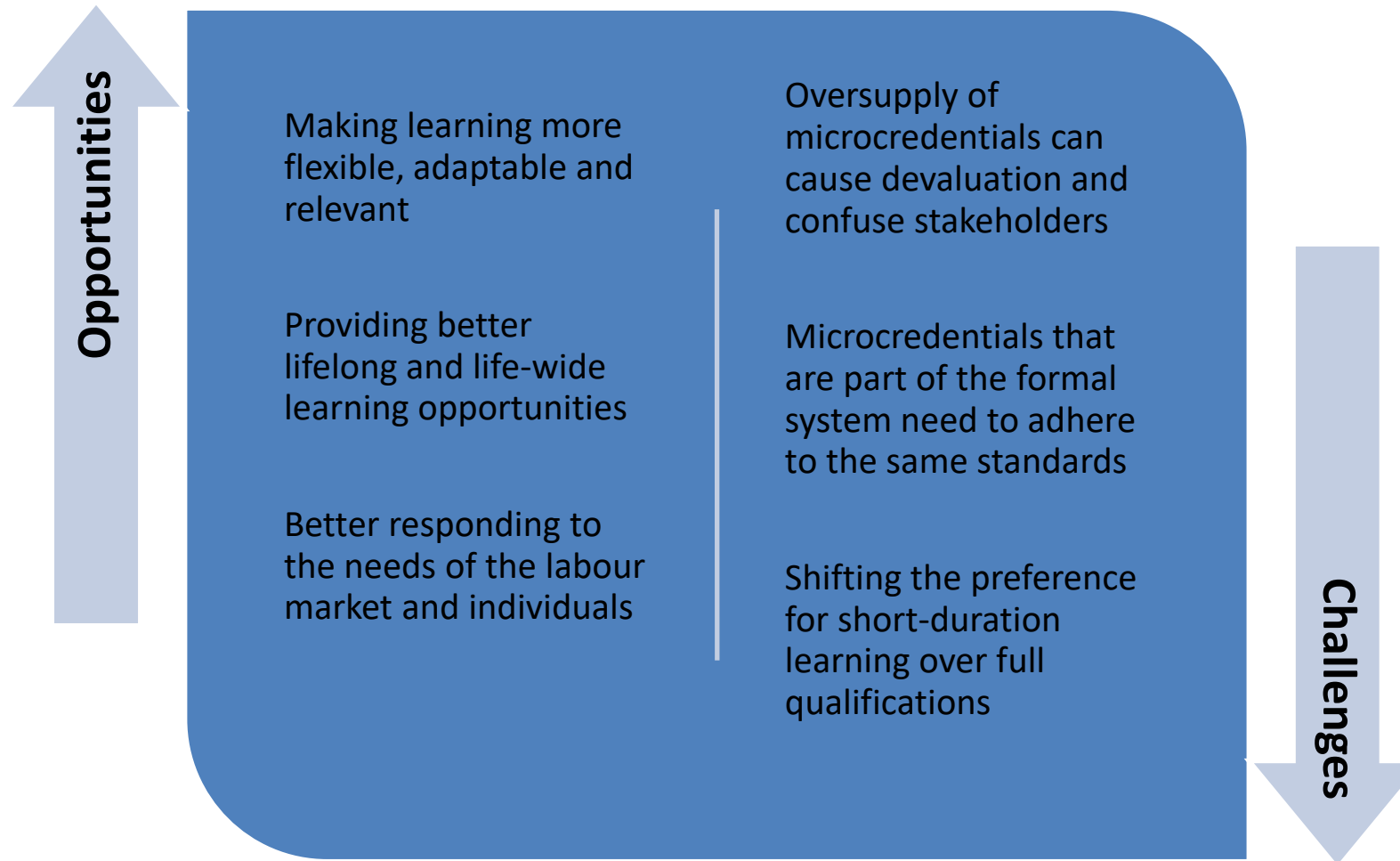
# Stacking microcredentials

- ✓ Microcredentials using ECVET do **not always** allow accumulation and stacking and are not always linked to EQF/NQF levels.
- ✓ In **Spain**, microcredentials can be stacked and lead to a formal VET certificate under its new Organic Law for the Ordination and Integration of VET
- ✓ **Latvia's** new law also allows microcredentials to be accumulated towards a full qualification or to be used as stand-alone qualifications.



Stacked Stones on Sand — Image by © Tim McGuire/CORBIS

# Challenges and opportunities that microcredentials bring to national qualification systems



Source: Cedefop 2022 (forthcoming)





**Added value of microcredentials for end users**



# Research questions (added value)

1. For end-users to trust micro-credentials, 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 micro-credentials, what support can be envisaged?

3. 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?



# Microcredentials and the added value for end users

Learners and employees	Employers	VET providers
Encourage further education and degree completion.	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.
Provide gainful employment and economic mobility and value.	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 employment prospects.	Improve employee retention.	Provide a solution to the worker shortage and skills gap.
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).
Provide access to quicker and more flexible upskilling and reskilling opportunities.	Rapid acquisition of specific knowledge and skills required by the specific workplace.	Widen education offer and address equity gaps in VET.
Provide access to occupational and transversal skills through lifelong learning opportunities.		Make learning flexible and personalised.



Source: Cedefop (forthcoming)



# What would influence a wider uptake of MCs by employees?

Factors for wider uptake	% Of total Responses	Count
Relevance of microcredentials to employees' career goals	56%	37
Recognition of microcredentials across sectors and borders	46%	30
Inclusion of microcredentials in the training and continuous professional development programme at the workplace	44%	29
Support from employers to seek microcredentials (e.g., free time, covering the costs)	36%	24

Source: Cedefop (forthcoming)

# Examples of why/how MCs are trusted in different local contexts

Country	Example
Estonia	High trust <b>amongst learners</b> reflected in the competition for admission to the microcredentials offered by Estonian universities. A quality assurance system is planned to raise trust in MCs.
Latvia	<b>Up-skilling courses</b> and <b>VET modules</b> addressing a particular competence (both leading to certificates) are widely used and well-trusted. This is due to a well-functioning national QA.
Poland	Microcredentials are widely trusted by <b>employers</b> and <b>learners</b> . Still, not trusted by the state education and training providers: due to lack of understanding, governing regulations, and clear quality assurance standards.
Slovenia	Microcredentials <b>accredited and included in the NQF</b> are the ones most-trusted. For the rest, the trust depends on the perceived <b>quality of content and training provider</b> .

# Thank you for your attention!

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Project page <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/projects/microcredentials-labour-market-education-and-training>

First research report <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications/5587>

Podcast <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/podcasts/episode-6-microcredentials-are-they-here-stay>