Micro-credentials – a new opportunity for lifelong learning?

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

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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.
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 traditional 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
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
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?
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**?
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?
Presentation of methodological tools, preliminary findings, and next steps of the project
Methodological tools used in the implementation of the project

- Case studies
- Interviews
- Surveys
- Desk research
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

National authorities
The majority of respondents confirmed that the term micro-credential is not used in their national context

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

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

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

- **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

- **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

- **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

- **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

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<th>National authorities</th>
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<td>A big percentage does not know or could not answer this question.</td>
<td>MC generally trusted by education and training providers (63%) and trusted among employers (66%). Learners seem to trust micro-credentials the most (70%).</td>
<td>Employers trust MC that lead to nationally recognised qualifications (87.5%).</td>
<td>Greater trust among employees in micro-credentials leading to nationally recognised qualifications (56%) than those that do not (45%).</td>
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- 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

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<td>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%)</td>
<td>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%)</td>
<td>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%)</td>
<td>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%)</td>
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- **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
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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