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MICRO-CREDENTIALS AS A BUILDING BLOCK FOR FLEXIBLE VALIDATION

Introduction

This session frames micro-credentials as a system component supporting flexible validation, rather than as isolated short courses.

The focus is on how micro-credentials relate to:

- labour-market needs and skills anticipation

- Public Employment Services (PES) and employer engagement

- validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL)

The aim is to connect policy intent, system design and practice, drawing on EU and Cedefop evidence.

What are micro-credentials? (EU definition)

A micro-credential is a record of the learning outcomes that a learner has acquired following a small volume of learning, assessed against transparent and clearly defined criteria.

Micro-credentials:

- certify specific learning outcomes
- may result from formal, non-formal or informal learning
- can be standalone or combined with other learning
- are owned by the learner

Source: Council Recommendation on a European approach to micro-credentials (2022)

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Why micro-credentials matter now
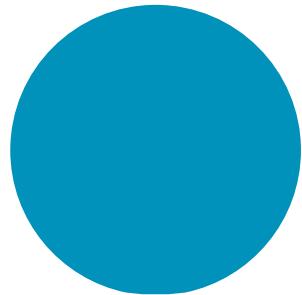
Labour markets are changing faster and becoming increasingly forward-looking, driven by digitalisation, green transitions and structural change.
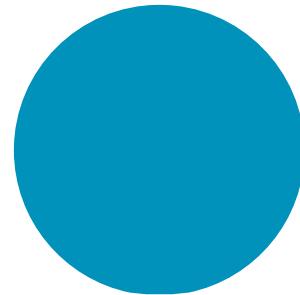
Skills anticipation and labour-market forecasting increasingly point to emerging and future skills needs, while traditional qualification development often requires long design and approval cycles.
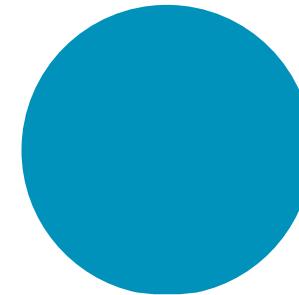
Micro-credentials help address this timing gap by supporting timely responses to evolving skillsneeds, while longer-term qualification reforms are developed.

Micro-credentials: a multi-dimensional instrument

Labour-market responsiveness

- Respond to skills shortages and emerging needs
- Support upskilling and reskilling
- Strengthen employability and mobility

Recognition of prior learning (RPL / VNFIL)

- Certify skills acquired through work, experience, informal learning
- Support validation pathways
- Increase visibility of existing competences

Flexible learning pathways

- Modular and stackable learning
- Bridges between formal, non-formal and informal learning
- Guidance connects micro-credentials to job and career pathways
- Support lifelong learning and career transitions

Digitalisation and portability

- Digital credentials with verifiable learning outcomes
- Increased transparency and portability
- Potential for interoperability across systems and borders

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Micro-credentials and VNFIL / RPL

Micro-credentials can support validation systems by making skills and learning outcomes

more visible and by enabling modular recognition of competences.

However, micro-credentials do not replace:

- validation procedures
- assessment standards
- quality assurance arrangements

Micro-Credentials strengthen VNFIL only when embedded in quality-assured validation systems and clear governance frameworks.

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Cooperation between actors: why it matters

Effective use of micro-credentials depends on cooperation between multiple actors:

- education and training providers

- employers and sector bodies

- Public Employment Services (PES)

- quality assurance and validation authorities

EU and Cedefop analysis shows that cooperation is often ad hoc or project-based, with unclear roles in design, recognition and guidance.

This directly affects relevance, trust and how individuals navigate learning, validation and Work.

Source: EU Progress Report on micro-credentials (2025)

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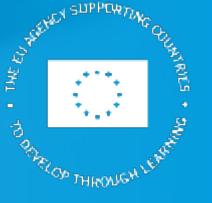
COUNTRY EXAMPLES

Croatia – example

Problem addressed:

Croatia has focused on improving responsiveness of adult upskilling and reskilling while strengthening links between labour-market needs and validation systems.

What was done:

Micro-credentials were linked to labour-market priorities, with learning outcomes considered in relation to qualifications frameworks andVNFIL/RPL.

Interpretation of micro-credentials:

Micro-credentials are interpreted as a policy tool to support labour-market-responsive skills development.

Key takeaway:

Micro-credentials are explored as a bridge between labour-market needs and validation systems.

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Source: Cedefop; EU Progress Report (2025)

Netherlands – example

Problem addressed:

The challenge was to provide flexible, targeted upskilling for workers where full qualifications were often too slow or insufficiently targeted.

What was done:

Employers and sector bodies were involved in defining learning outcomes,and micro-credentials were positioned to interface with existingqualifications and established RPL/VNFIL arrangements.

Interpretation of micro-credentials:

Micro-credentials are interpreted as labour-market-relevant learning units developed in sectoral contexts.

Key takeaway:

Micro-credentials function as building blocks within a mature skills and validation system.

Source: Cedefop; EU Progress Report (2025)

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Denmark – example

Problem addressed:

Denmark aims to support adult learning and workforce adaptability in a context of continuous skills development.

What was done:

Micro-credentials are developed alongside strong VNFIL/RPL arrangements, enabling recognition of skills acquired through work and experience.

Interpretation of micro-credentials:

Micro-credentials are interpreted within a modular continuing VET and adult-learning system.

Key takeaway:

Strong validation systems allow micro-credentials to complement recognition of existing skills.

Source: Cedefop analyses

Synthesis: what these examples show

Across countries, micro-credentials connect most effectively to VNFIL where:

- skills anticipation and labour-market intelligence are used

- employers are involved

- validation and quality assurance systems exist

Micro-credentials do not create validation or coordination mechanisms on their own.

They operate as system components within broader skills, employment and validation ecosystems.

Micro-credentials across system levels

System level:

- skills anticipation and labour-market intelligence
- governance and quality assurance
- links to qualifications frameworks and VNFIL

Institutional level:

- education and training providers
- employers and PES
- design, assessment and recognition arrangements

Individual level:

- visibility of skills
- career guidance and navigation
- transitions between learning, validation and work

The recurring gap

Evidence shows that micro-credentials often develop faster than the systems that should steer them.

Common gaps include:

- weak links to skills anticipation and forecasting
- limited integration with PES and guidance
- uneven quality assurance and validation arrangements

The core challenge is system coordination, not micro-credentials themselves.

Source: EU Progress Report on micro-credentials (2025)

ETF MICRO-CREDENTIALS WORK PLAN 2026-2027

ETF analytical work and survey (2026–2027)

What is coming up:

- We will analyse how micro-credentials are developing and being used in partner countries and how they connect to skills and employment systems.

Areas of focus:

- Skills anticipation and labour-market intelligence
- Employer involvement
- Public employment services and guidance
- Qualifications frameworks and validation (VNFIL)
- Governance and coordination

How we will work:

- Build on existing knowledge within ETF
- Clarify what we already know before identifying remaining evidence needs
- Conduct field research
- Analyse collected data
- Publish results (mostly 2027→)

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Closing

Micro-credentials are a building block for flexible validation, not astandalone solution.

Impact of micro-credentials depends on skills intelligence, cooperation between actors, quality assurance and guidance.

Our work going forward relies on collaboration, we hope for active participation in our knwoledge building and sharing exercise.

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THANK YOU.

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