



Microcredentials for VET and labour market learning

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26 May 2023, ETF on Microcredentials: How to use ETF guidelines for designing, issuing and recognising microcredentials?



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**



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

A wide-angle, fisheye photograph taken from an elevated position, looking down at a coastal city. The city features several large, multi-story buildings with classical architectural elements like arches and red-tiled roofs. A large, open square with palm trees and a few people is visible in the middle ground. The sea is a deep blue, meeting the horizon under a clear sky. The foreground shows a curved concrete railing and a paved walkway.

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

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	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.	
Manufacturing		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

Emerging questions!

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- A photograph of five young men, likely apprentices, standing in a workshop. They are wearing blue work uniforms and caps. The man on the far left is wearing a white cap with a black logo. The man in the center is wearing a blue cap with the 'tgm' logo. The man on the far right is wearing a red and white cap. They are all looking towards the camera. The background shows industrial equipment and a workshop environment.
- ❖ 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

Surveys

Students and adult learners

25 countries
550 complete responses
382 partial responses
50.9% Male / 48.2% Female / 0.9% Other

932 responses

Individuals who are not employed

16 countries
261 complete responses
294 partial responses
42.2% Male / 55.7% Female / 2.1% Other

555 responses

Employees

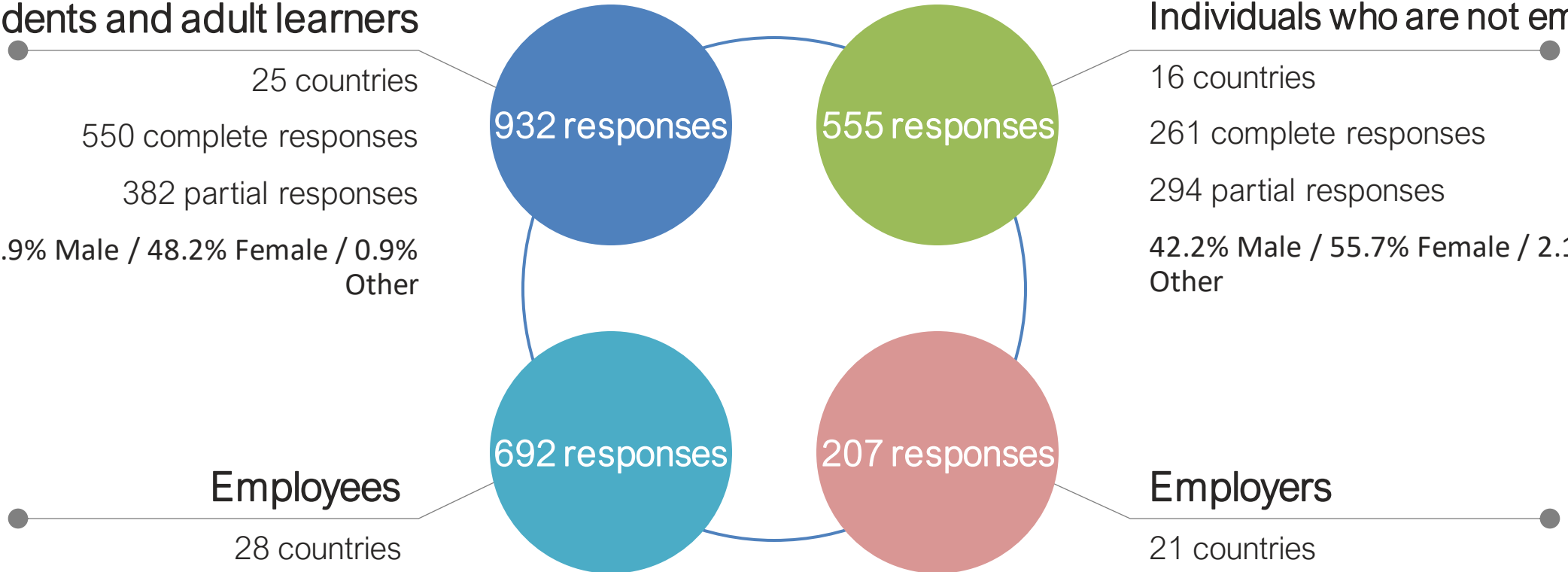
28 countries
370 complete responses
322 partial responses
36.4% Male / 62.8% Female / 0.8% Other

692 responses

Employers

21 countries
83 complete responses
124 partial responses

207 responses



Microcredentials shaped by both **supply** and **demand** side factors:

- The governance and configuration of national VET systems;
- The role of training in labour markets policies;
- The skills intensity and innovation dynamics in sectors of the economy;
- Enterprise organisation practices and skills utilisation.

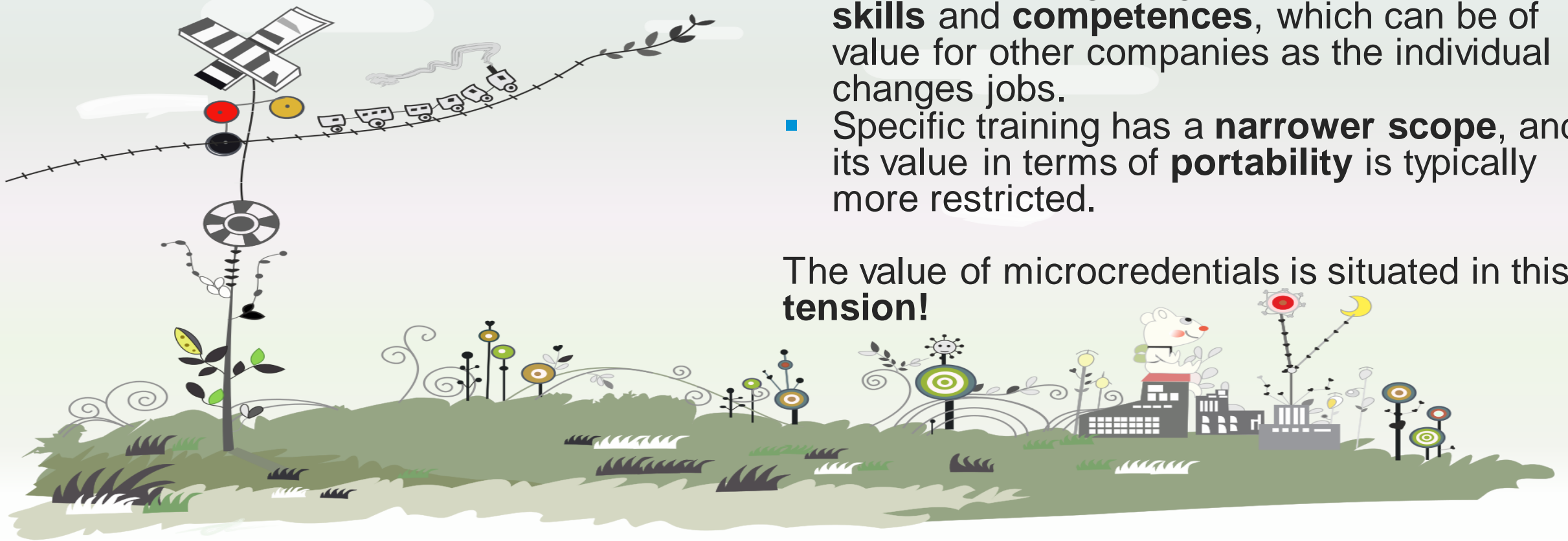


The nature of training

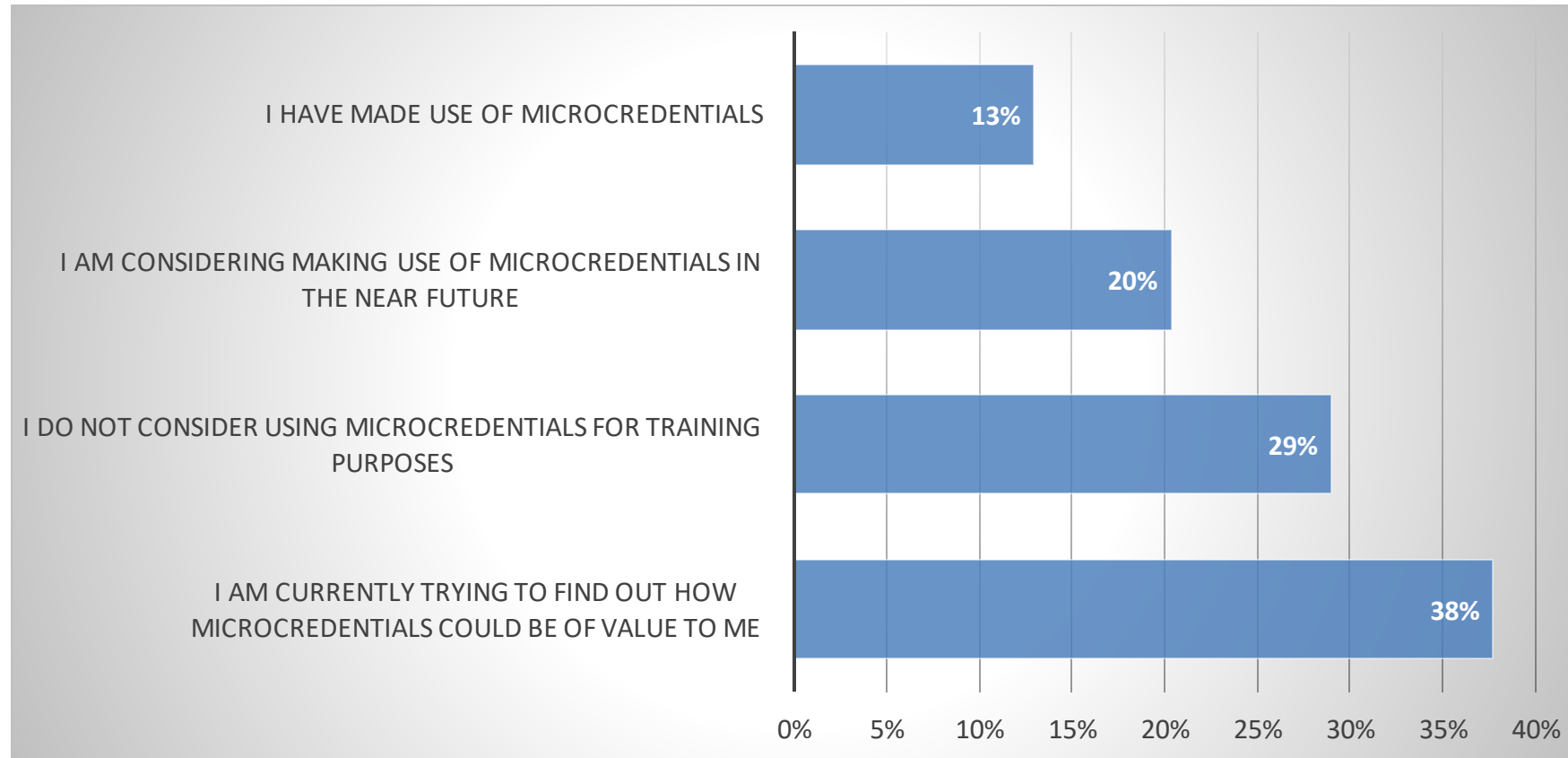
Training can both be **general** and **specific** in nature

- General training integrates **transversal skills** and **competences**, which can be of value for other companies as the individual changes jobs.
- Specific training has a **narrower scope**, and its value in terms of **portability** is typically more restricted.

The value of microcredentials is situated in this **tension!**

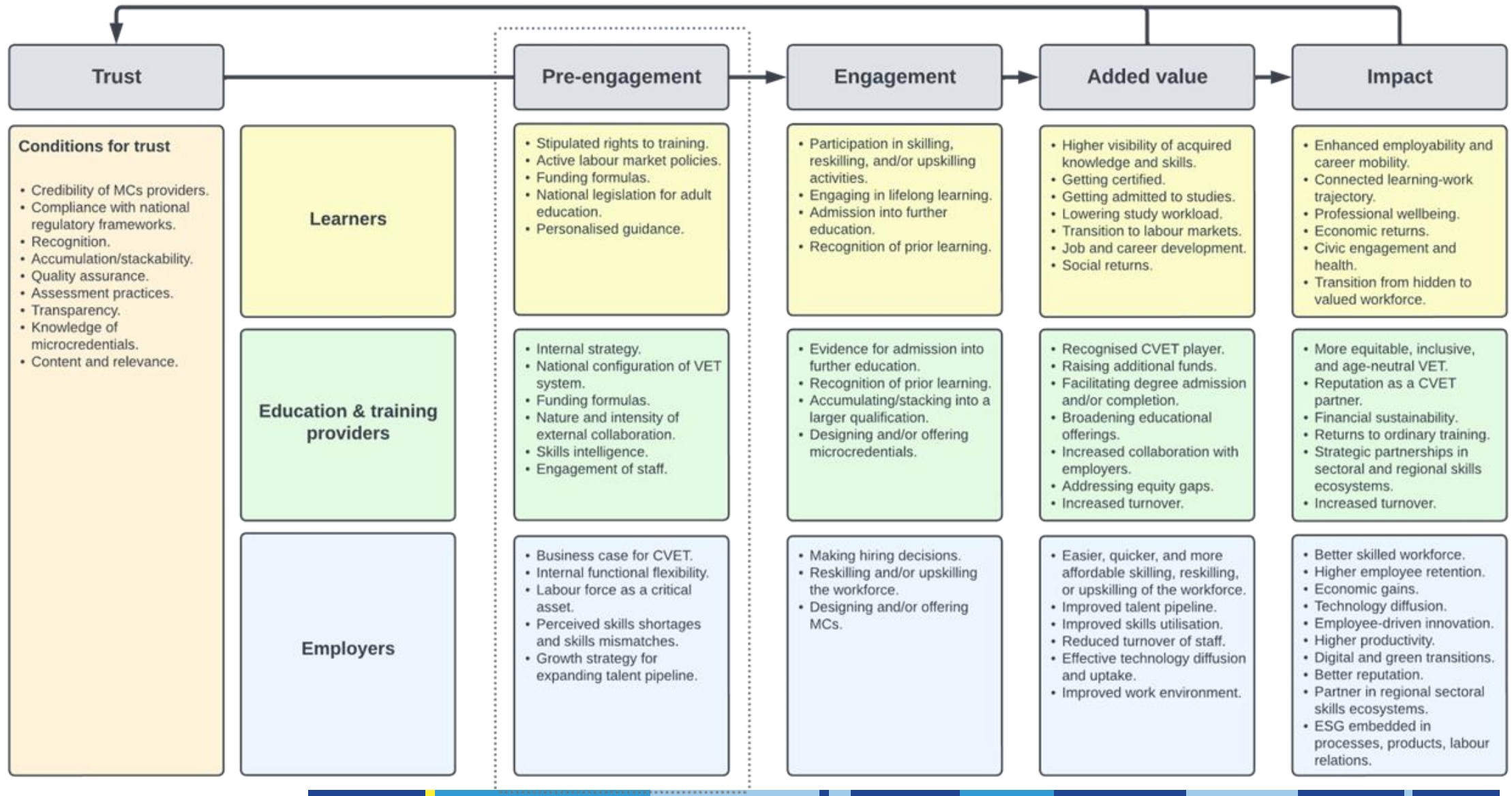


Would you **consider** or **have you already made use** of microcredentials for training purposes?

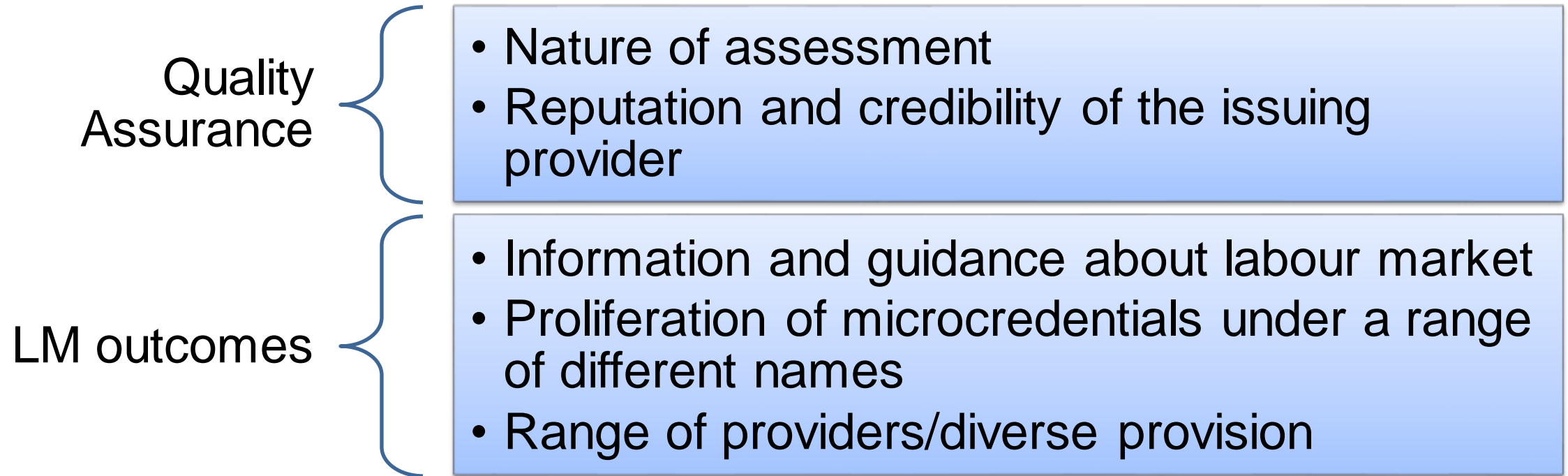


Source: Survey of stakeholders representing employees, students and adult learners and individuals who are currently unemployed (N=1180).

A complex MC landscape: establishing trust - generating added value



Trust in microcredentials is **contextual**

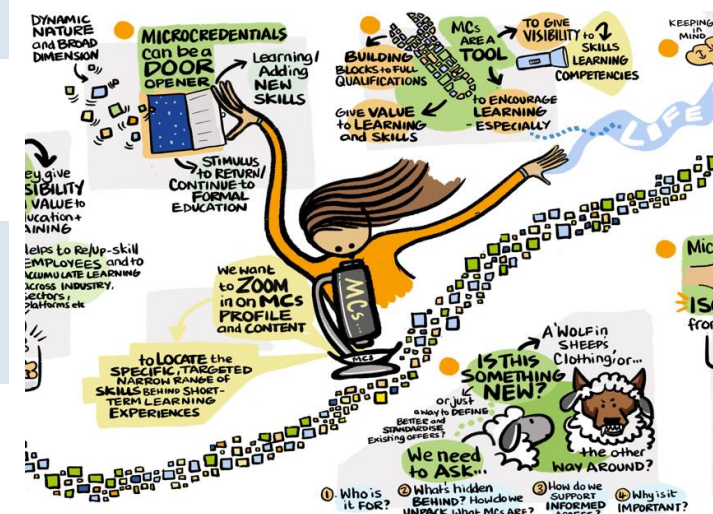


Indicative examples of why/how MCs are trusted in different local contexts

Country	Example
Estonia	High trust amongst learners 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	Up-skilling courses and VET modules 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 employers and learners . Still, not trusted by the state education and training providers: due to lack of understanding, governing regulations, and clear quality assurance standards.
Slovenia	Microcredentials accredited and included in the NQF are the ones most-trusted. For the rest, the trust depends on the perceived quality of content and training provider .

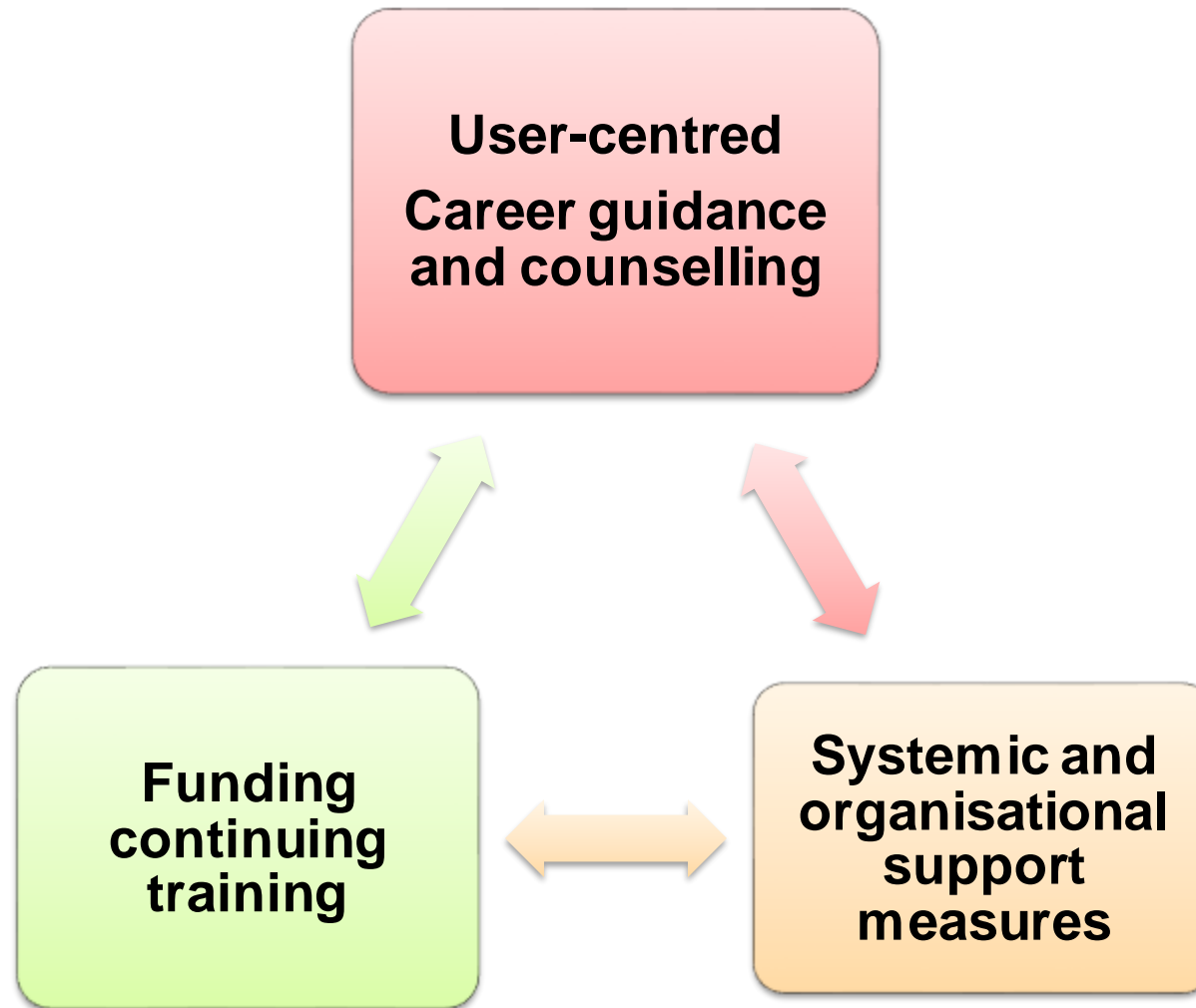
Microcredentials and added value for end users

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





CEDEFOP

European Centre for the Development
of Vocational Training



Microcredentials a labour market megatrend

22 and 23 June 2023

Virtual event

#microcredentials



Thank you

For further information:

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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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