



CEDEFOP

European Centre for the Development
of Vocational Training

Microcredentials in the European Union

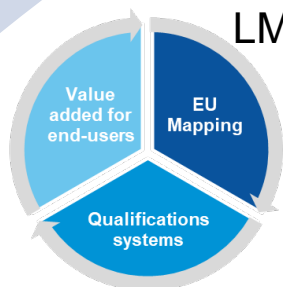
*Quality assurance of microcredentials -
webinar of ETF Forum for quality assurance
in vocational education and training*



ARE MICROCREDENTIALS BECOMING A **BIG DEAL**?



2020-2023
Cedefop study on VET and LM



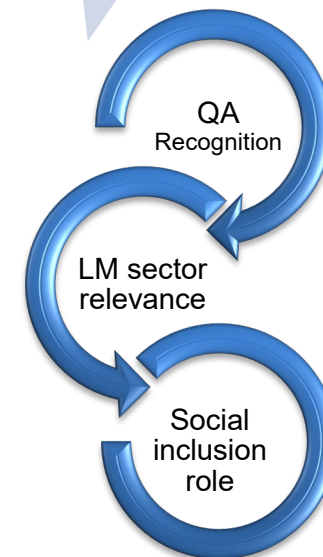
2021
Cedefop supports EC and the SWD with data from VET

2022
EC Council Recommendation MCs for LLL and employability

2023 - 2025
EU MS are increasingly embedding MCs in their ET systems

2025 - 2027
Cedefop New research: Deepening on MCs

Monitoring implementation



Four scenarios for microcredentials

Scenario 1: Supply-driven microcredentials (as part of formal education) for further learning

Scenario 2: Supply-driven microcredentials for LM entry and job setting (professional credentials)

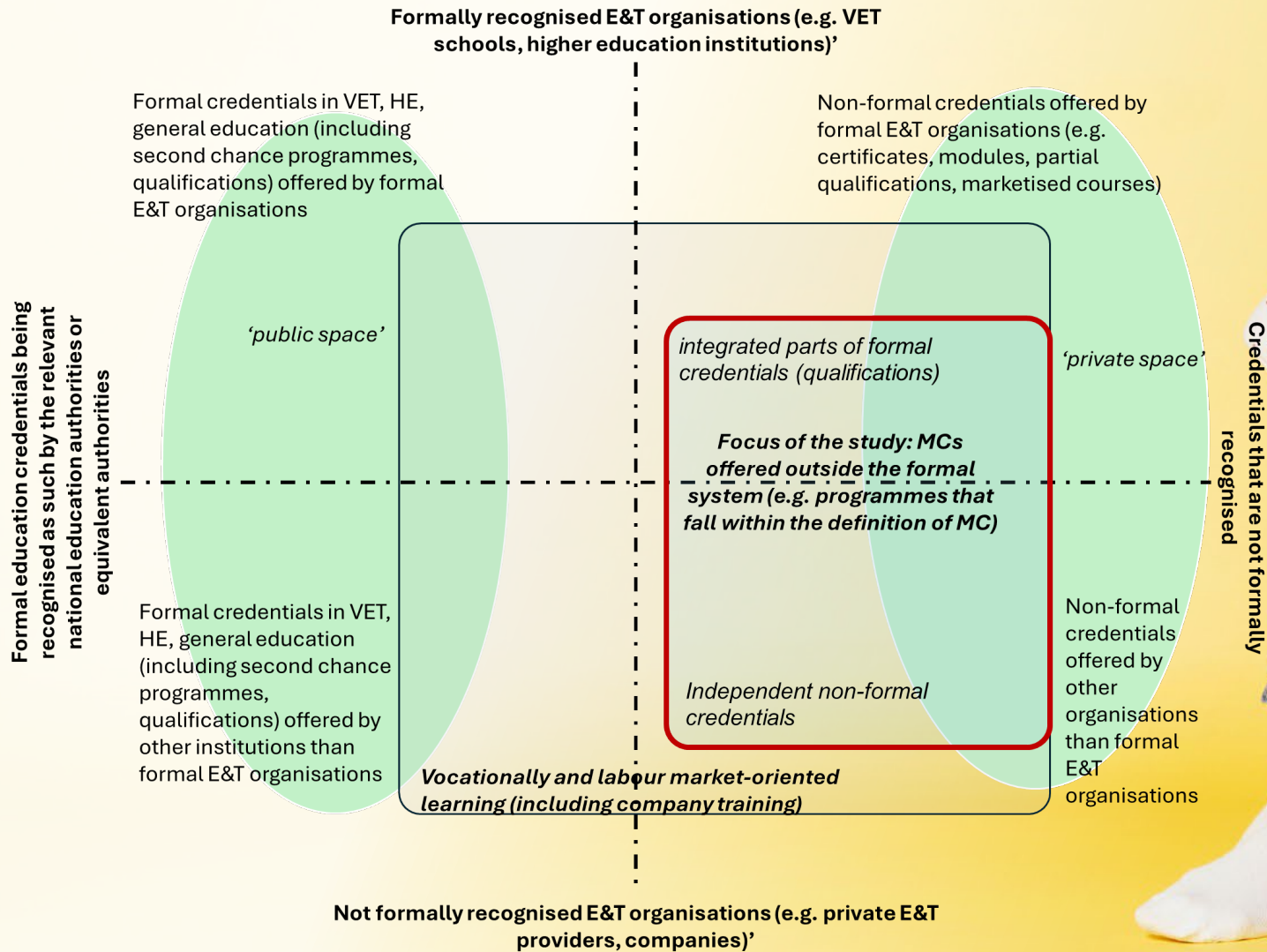
Scenario 3: Demand-driven microcredentials (examples of enterprises/sectors)

Scenario 4: Microcredentials for vulnerable groups /groups at risk (upskilling/reskilling)

Source: [Pouliou, A. \(2024\)](#)



What is the position of MCs (in focus) in the wider landscape of non-formal ET?



Methodology

Literature study / scoping interviews in Spring 2025

EU-wide survey on MC:

- ✓ Collecting descriptions of non-formal microcredential(-like) offers
- ✓ Complemented by national experts
- ✓ Targeted follow-up calls



WA1: Exploring the diversity of MCs

8 Case studies

- Desk research
- Expert interviews
- Pilot-phase concluded in **BE, AT**

WA2: Focus on LM sectors



Sectoral case studies on Construction & Cultural / Creative Industries

- Desk research
- Expert interviews

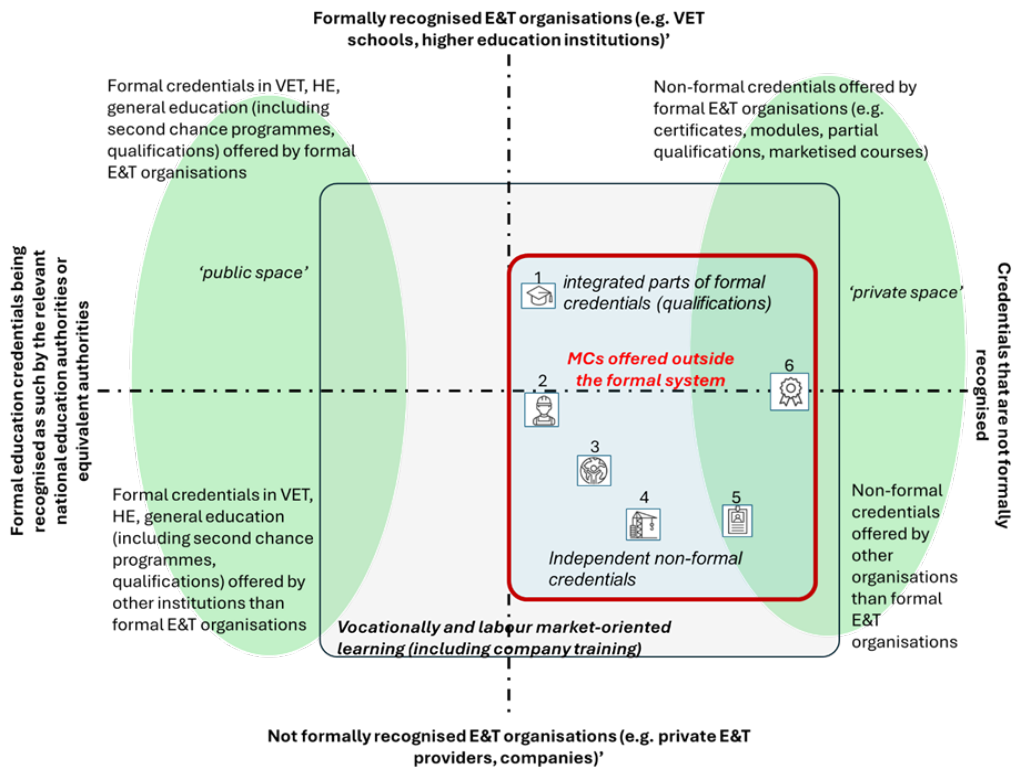
WA3: MC role for social inclusion



Overview all EU countries

- Desk research
- Cedefop ReferNet questionnaire (27 EU Member States)

Typology of MCs



(1) **Non-formal MC by providers of formal programmes:** Benefit from the institutional quality assurance systems already in place within their issuing organisations



(2) **Professional competence certificates:** Certificates showcase the practical skills and knowledge required for specific occupations. Professional competence certificates are subject to some level of public oversight



(3) **International standard based credentials:** Not linked to broader qualification systems, developed or endorsed by professional associations, industry bodies or specialist training providers. QA is varied, depending on international standard



(4) **Sector-recognised credentials:** Certify workers for the requirements set out by professional groups. Learning content, certification and quality assurance are developed by the sector itself



(5) **Employer-issued credentials:** Awarded for programmes offered by (providers contracted by) companies directly, with demands on QA typically governed by the employer itself



(6) **Badges:** Most flexible form which allows to validate acquired skill or knowledge, with non-standard and decentralised approach to QA

What are the operational characteristics of MCs (in focus)?

1. Credential Identification and Issuance:

- Title of the microcredential.
- Issuing body (type of provider)
- Country/region of the issuer.
- Issuance of a digital credential (creation of a digital portfolio)

2. Learning Outcomes and qualifications level:

- Defined learning outcomes (knowledge, skills, autonomy, and responsibility).
- Level of the qualification (e.g. level in national system/framework, equivalent NQF/EQF level (NB: indicate whether the MC formally has this NQF/EQF level, or whether the MC could informally be positioned at a certain NQF/EQF level)).
- Relationship to occupational fields, labour market sector, or tasks.

3. Workload and Credits:

- Notional workload required to achieve learning outcomes (e.g., ECTS, hours of learning).

4. Assessment and Certification:

- Type of assessment used (e.g., written, practice-oriented, mixed).
- Basis for awarding the credential (e.g., participation in programme, validation of prior learning, assessment only).
- Use of external assessment

5. Pedagogical and Delivery Features:

- Delivery format (e.g., online, face-to-face, blended).
- Learning site (e.g., workplace, classroom, dual learning environments).
- Role of the teacher (e.g., facilitator, lecturer).
- Control over learning (e.g., self-directed or teacher-centred).

6. Access:

- Entry requirements for the credential.

7. Use of the MC in formal education and outside

- Accumulation or stackability of MCs (possibility of combining MCs towards a qualification)
- Potential for automatic recognition across borders or institutions (NB: ability to integrate the MC (acquired elsewhere) in a formal VET/HE qualification).

8. Stakeholder Relevance:

- Engagement with industry or employers in designing the credential.
- Relevance of the credential to labour market needs.
- Transparency and clarity for learners, employers, and education providers.

The role of Quality Assurance

RQ3. Which are the elements to consider a microcredential as 'quality assured'?

- Which are the **quality assurance mechanisms** used to ensure the quality of microcredentials issued by different types of providers?
- Is quality assurance for microcredentials informed by relevant **regional and international standards and guidelines**? And if yes, which ones?
- What is the **role of labour market stakeholders** in designing, developing and implementing microcredentials and the quality assurance process?



What are the QA procedures underpinning MCs?

❖ **Key features of underpinning QA systems**

- ❖ Type of quality assurance mechanism (certification, quality awards, inspection, self-assessment)
- ❖ Responsible body for QA (government agency, department, NGO, other)
- ❖ Scope of assessment (organisation level, or programme level)
- ❖ Costs (what costs are involved)

❖ **Assessment process**

- ❖ Quality-assessed training elements (External quality certificate, leadership and management, ongoing monitoring, organisational structure, public information, quality management system, regulatory compliance, staff recruitment and training, training design and delivery)
- ❖ Assessment tools and methods (Analysis of performance indicators, expert reviews, interviews, self-assessment questionnaires, site visits, surveys)

❖ **Assessment outcomes**

- ❖ Grading system (fail/pass, or multi-category grading systems)
- ❖ Validity period of the outcome (in years)
- ❖ Benefits to providers (Display of quality label, eligibility for public funding, licence to operate, listing in a registry of providers, award)

❖ **Additional features:**

- ❖ QA informed by relevant regional and international standards and guidelines
- ❖ Regulations related to ensuring the involvement of labour market stakeholders in:
 - ❖ Designing, developing and implementing microcredentials;
 - ❖ The QA process (and the role these stakeholders have).

Which are the main elements to consider a microcredential 'quality assured'?



Accredited
QA systems



Credentials
offered by setoral
organisations



degree of
public
involvement

Source: Cedefop (forthcoming), 'Image of main elements to consider a microcredential 'quality assured'' prompt. ChatGPT, 21 October 2025

- ❖ **In Flanders**, government-coordinated QA, which explicitly focuses on incorporating labour-market input has the potential to strengthen the quality approach.
- ❖ **In Austria**, a looser structure of decentralised QA yields autonomy to individual providers, but reduces comparability between credentials within and beyond sectors

Current research:

- **Construction sector (green focus)**
- **Cultural and creative industries (CCI)**

Selection criteria for the labour market sectors

Sectors which:

1. are relatively broad
2. use microcredentials
3. are relatively widespread – i.e. exist in all/most EU Member States
4. are not too unique in their composition - to enable scalability of the findings
5. are currently undergoing some evolution in terms of skills needs etc.
6. have large employers

Additional optional selection criteria considered:

7. sectors with an institutionalised social dialogue
8. sectors that are diverse in terms of actors (both SMEs and large employers; both public and private)
9. sectors with high share of migrant workers who may benefit from microcredentials

Work done to date

- ❖ **Desk research and mapping** of CCI microcredentials: not a comprehensive mapping of the whole microcredential offer in the sector, but a targeted search for non-formal microcredentials used. 60+ identified and main information mapped
- ❖ **Interviews** with *strategic sectoral stakeholders* at EU level to identify trends, role and function of microcredentials in the sector, building on desk research
- ❖ **In progress:** interviews with providers of microcredentials to gather in-depth insights on why, how, and by whom the microcredentials selected in the labour market sector are developed and reviewed, and how they interact with traditional qualifications.



MCs are promising but getting things right is a balancing act



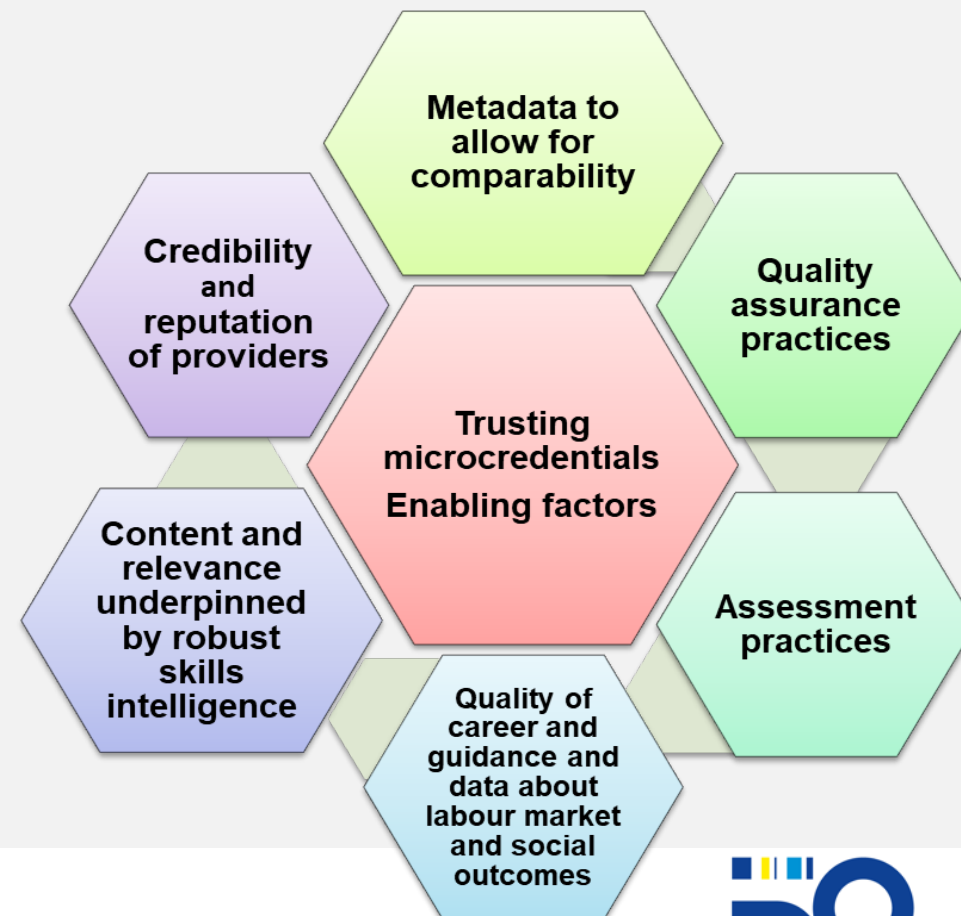
STRENGTHS

- Labour market responsiveness
- Up/reskilling & lifelong learning
- Skills validation potential
- Providers/employers cooperation
- Broadening access to learning
- Flexible learning pathways

WEAKNESSES

- Uncertainty about benefits
- Proliferation of unregulated MCs
- Confusion among users
- Quality assurance - transparency
- Recognition challenges
- Reaching disadvantaged learners

BUILDING TRUST IN MCS



More information on [Cedefop webportal](#)

Overall reflections

- ❖ Need for **agility** in VET systems
 - MC **ecosystems** can only be understood in relation to their **governance** configurations:
 - ❖ the degree of state involvement,
 - ❖ the strength of sectoral coordination,
 - ❖ and the way validation systems are structured.
-
- The examples collected through the survey and case studies shows the **diversity of credentials with a labour-market orientation**
 - The mix of providers of microcredentials with a labour market orientation is **broad but uneven**
 - Recognition** remains **fragmented**



Thank you

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Project page

www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/projects/microcredentials-labour-market-education-and-training

Publications

www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications/6221

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Podcasts

Cedefop/ILO podcast on [Microcredentials: powerful new learning tool or just “pouring old wine into new bottles”?](#)

Credentials unscripted podcast for the US context.

Available in [Spotify](#) and

[Apple Podcasts](#)



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