



Microcredentials – a new opportunity for lifelong learning?

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

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CEDEFOP

European Centre for the Development
of Vocational Training

Why a Cedefop-study on microcredentials?

- ❖ Recent research carried out on micro-credentials focus on **higher, academic education**.
- ❖ This overlooks the potential role of microcredentials in and for **vocational and professional education and training**.
- ❖ It overlooks the potential role of microcredentials outside formal education and training, **notably by companies and labour market sectors**.



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The challenge of defining Micro-credentials

- ❖ No agreed definition exists
- ❖ Existing definitions (from OECD, EU Commission etc..) point to **key characteristics** of microcredentials:
 - 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



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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

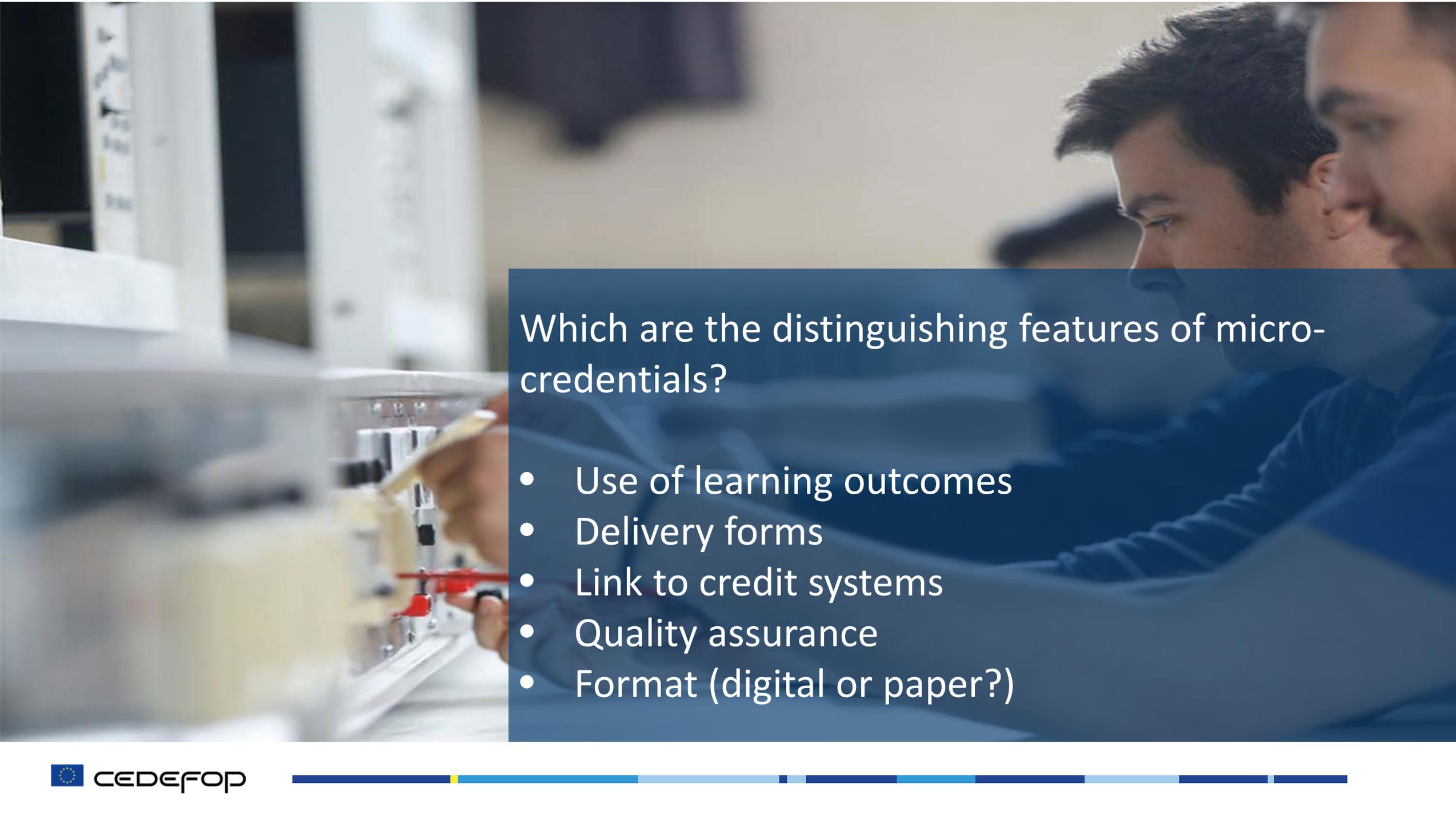
Microcredentials and the added value for end users

Work assignment 1:

What is the current use of microcredentials?

- ✓ To what extent are microcredentials used **in and for labour market related education, training and learning?**
- ✓ To what extent are microcredentials operating as **integrated parts of formal qualifications and credentials systems?**
- ✓ To what extent are microcredentials evolving outside of formal education and training systems, for example offered by **companies, professional organisations and others?**





Which are the distinguishing features of micro-credentials?

- Use of learning outcomes
- Delivery forms
- Link to credit systems
- Quality assurance
- Format (digital or paper?)

Work assignment 2:

Microcredentials and evolving qualifications systems

- ✓ How are microcredentials, **linked to and integrated** in the overall qualifications and credentials systems?
- ✓ Which are the objectives and roles, if any, of microcredentials in **national qualifications and credentials systems**?
- ✓ What impact are microcredentials having on the overall **balance of qualifications and credentials systems**?



Work assignment 3: Microcredentials 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 microcredentials**, what support can be envisaged?
- ✓ How could microcredentials play a more targeted role in supporting **'age-neutral' systems for VET**, strengthening the focus of up-skilling and re-skilling?



Image by Fenele from Shutterstock

A man wearing a grey hoodie and a blue cap is standing in a meeting room, presenting to a group of people. He is positioned in front of a large projection screen that displays a software interface with a prominent orange polygon. The room is dimly lit, with the primary light source being the projection. In the foreground, the blurred backs of several audience members' heads are visible, indicating a workshop or training session. A whiteboard with some handwritten notes and a red level are also visible in the background.

Presentation of methodological tools, interim findings, and next steps of the project

Methodological tools used in the implementation of the project



Desk research

Implemented for drafting reports for WA1, WA2 and case studies

Literature review is based on the **variety of sources**:

- ✓ national documents related to national qualifications and credentials systems and VET sector,
- ✓ studies, monitoring reports and evaluations in the field of national qualifications and credentials systems and VET sector,
- ✓ documents prepared by international and stakeholder organisations etc.

Surveys

between 7 June and 12 July 2021

- ✓ Surveys addressed **four stakeholder groups** and were carried out using in-house survey tool Alchemer;
- ✓ Surveys were distributed via a **variety of channels**



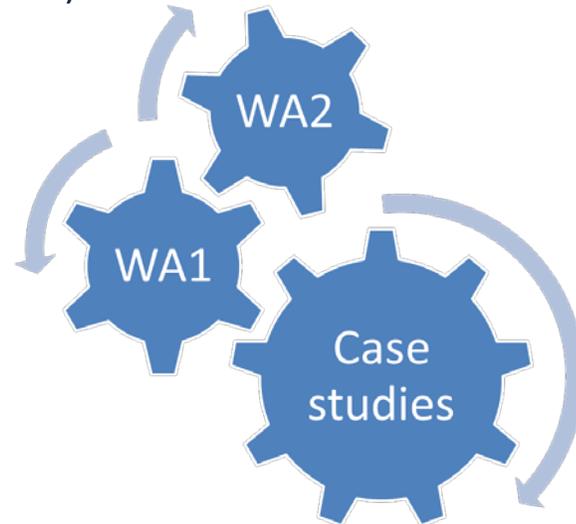
Interview programme

Work assignment 1 and case studies

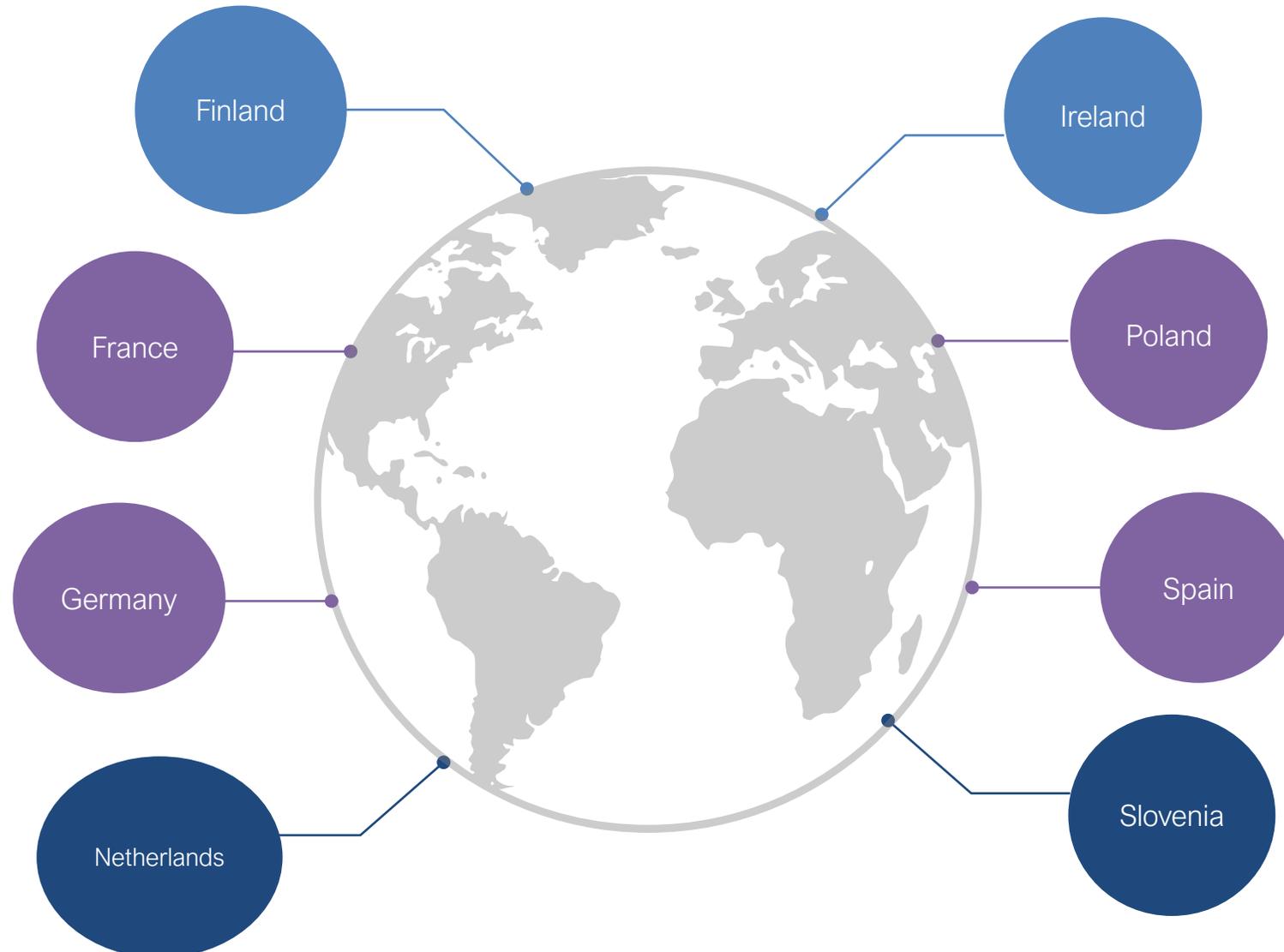
- **40-48 interviews** for case studies;
- **20 supplementary interviews** for WA1
- **66 interviews implemented** in case study countries (the interview programme is ongoing in several countries);
- **26 supplementary interviews implemented** (the interview programme has recently been launched).

Work assignment 2

- Interviews to be conducted in **30 countries**, 1-3 interviews per country
- Interviews implemented in **15 countries**, including Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Sweden.



Case studies



Case studies

- Case studies prepared using the **standard template** and answering the main research questions of the study;
- Case studies primarily based on **desk research, interviews** and some information from the **surveys**;
- National researchers implemented **66 interview for case studies**, 6-12 interviews per country;
- The interview programme is **still ongoing** in some countries.

Country	Finland	France	Germany	Ireland	Netherlands	Poland	Slovenia	Spain
Number of interviews implemented	12	10	8	6	7	9	7	7

Timeline: what is next?



Survey findings

Mapping microcredentials in European labour market related education, training and learning
4 types of surveys targeting different stakeholder groups

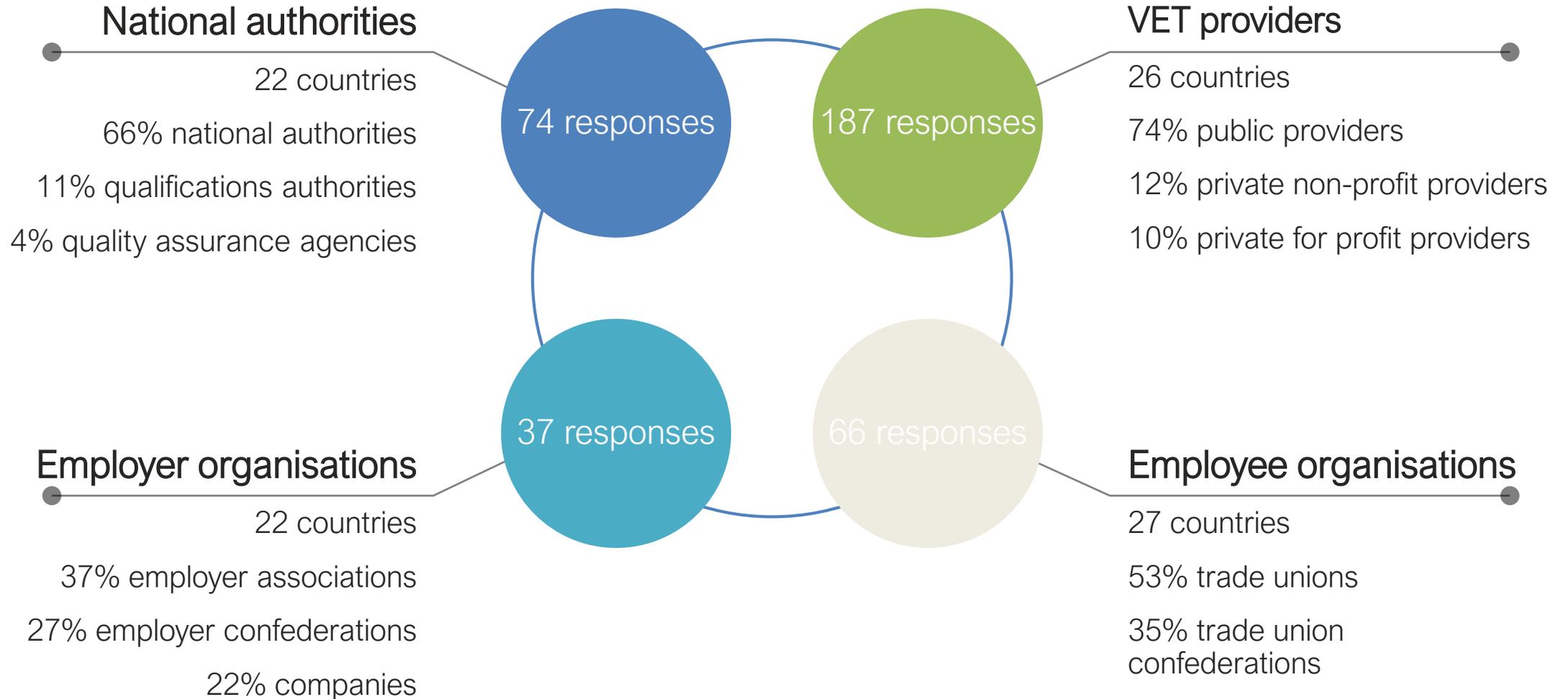
National
authorities

Vocational
education and
training
providers

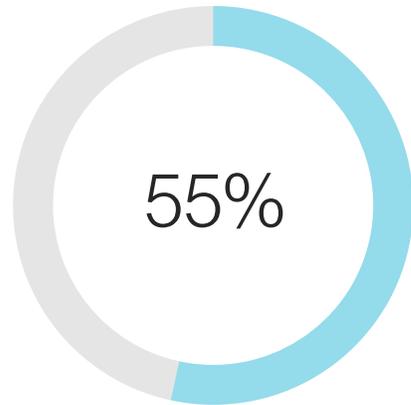
Employer
organisations
including sectoral
and occupational
organisations

Employee
organisations
including trade
unions and
employee
associations

Surveys

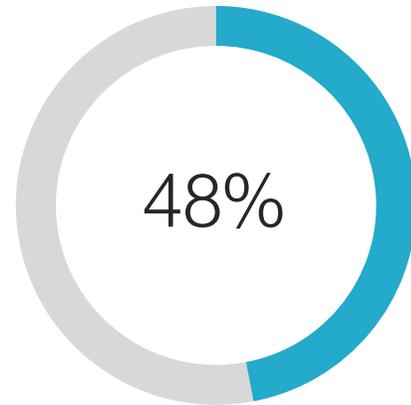


Awareness of micro-credentials



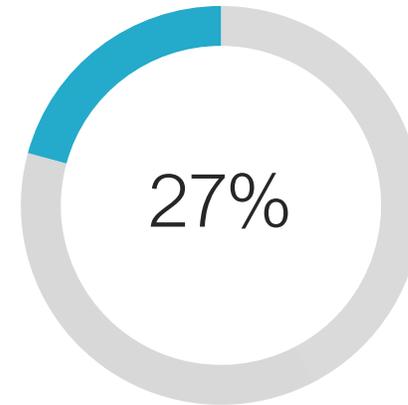
National authorities

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



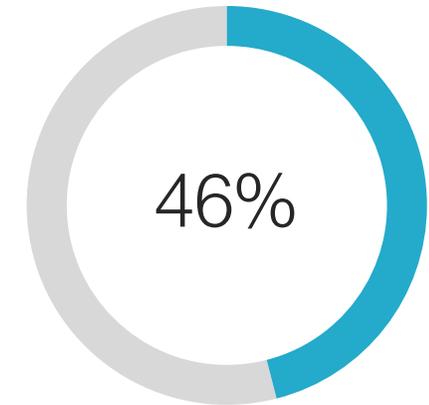
VET providers

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



Employer organisations

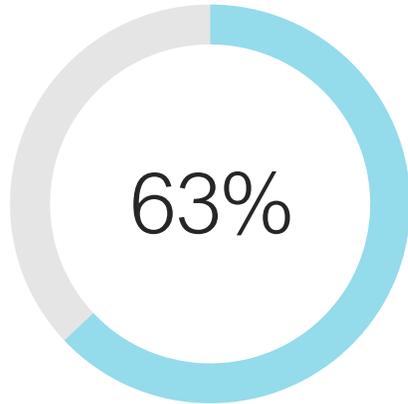
Only 27% of employers and organisations representing employer were not familiar with the term micro-credentials



Employee organisations

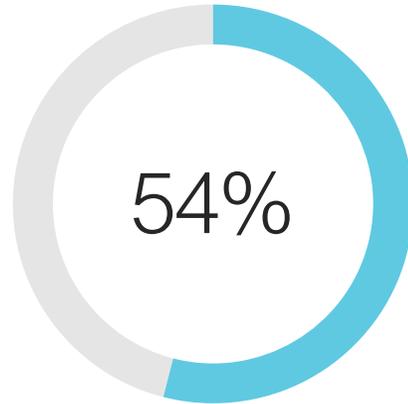
Almost half of employee organisations were not familiar with the term micro-credentials

Benefits and added value of microcredentials compared to traditional forms of qualifications



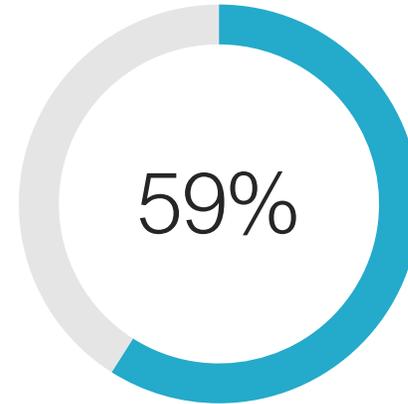
National authorities

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



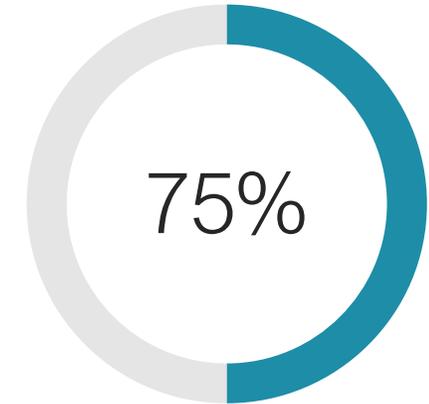
VET providers

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

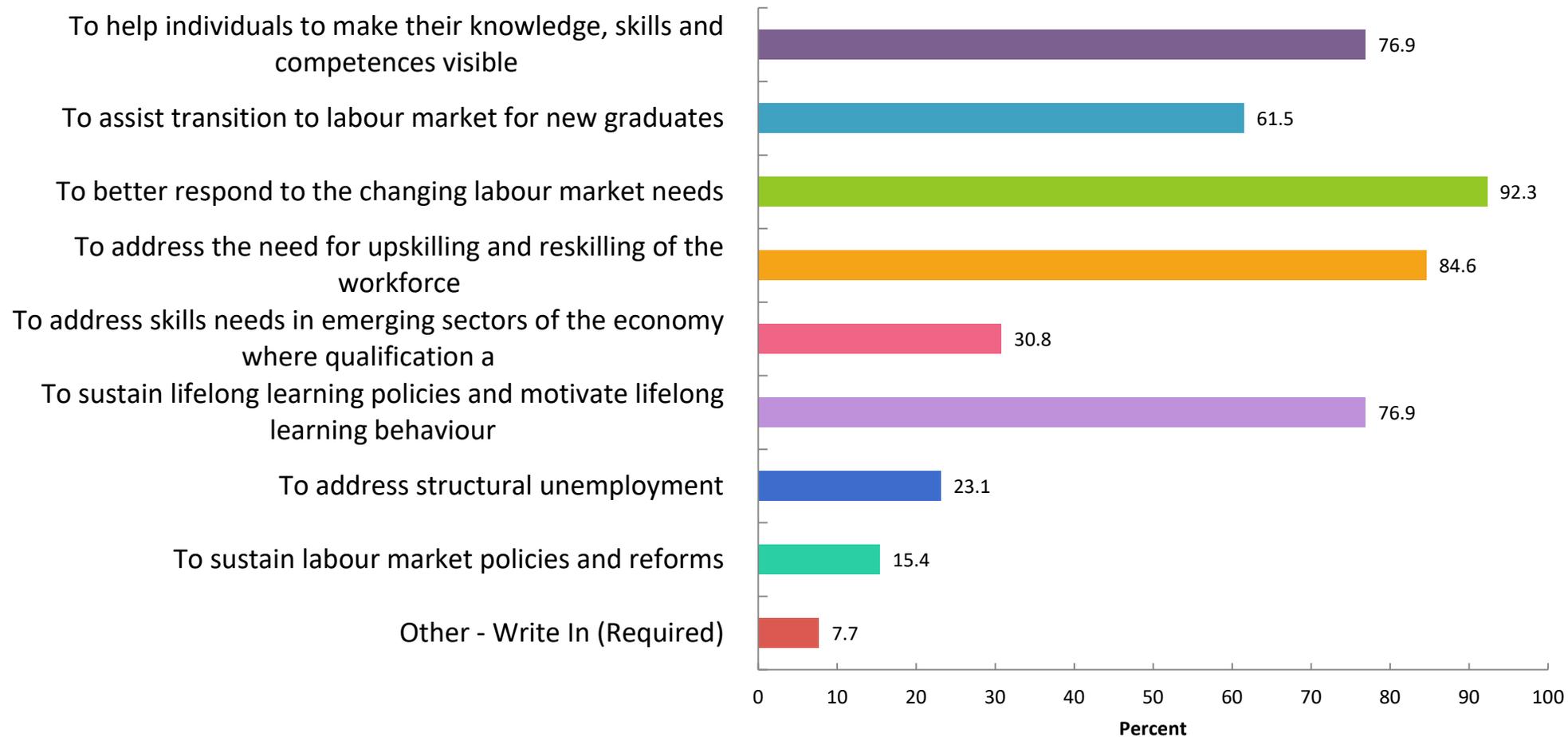
100% improve employee **motivation**
75% improve **retention** of employees
75% build a **culture of CPD**
82% **format** allows for speedier response to the needs of employers
73% **flexibility** for upskilling and reskilling
64% content is more **relevant** to labour market needs



Employee organisations

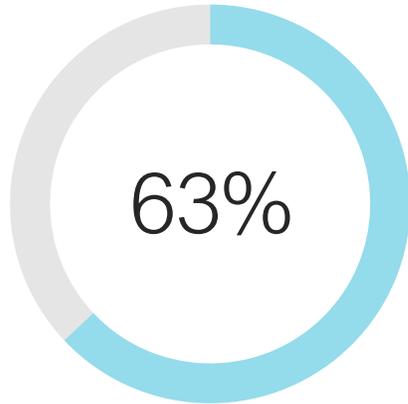
75.8% **flexibility** for upskilling and reskilling
66.7% **format** allows for speedier response to the needs of employers
51.5% ability to **validate** and recognise employees' knowledge
51.5% **short** duration
48.5 **relevance** of the content to labour market
42.4 **fast response** to the needs of employers
24.2 **lower** cost

Purposes of microcredentials in national qualifications systems



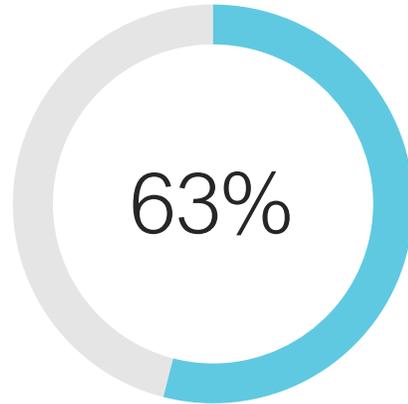
Source: Survey of stakeholders representing national authorities

Perception of credibility and trust



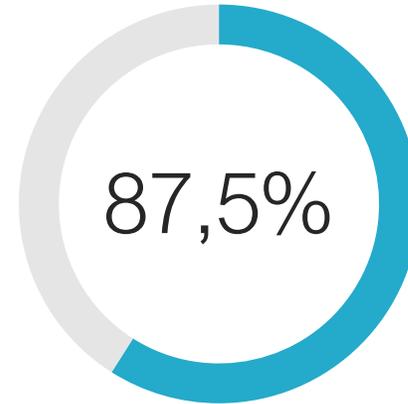
National authorities

A big percentage does not know or could not answer this question.



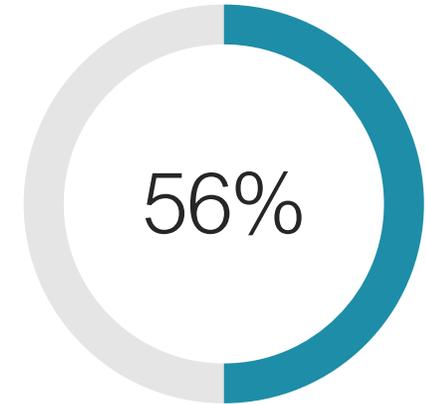
VET providers

MC generally trusted by education and training providers



Employer organisations

Employers trust MC that lead to nationally recognised qualifications



Employee organisations

Greater trust among employees in micro-credentials leading to nationally recognised qualifications (56%) than those that do not (45%).

Preliminary findings from the interview programme

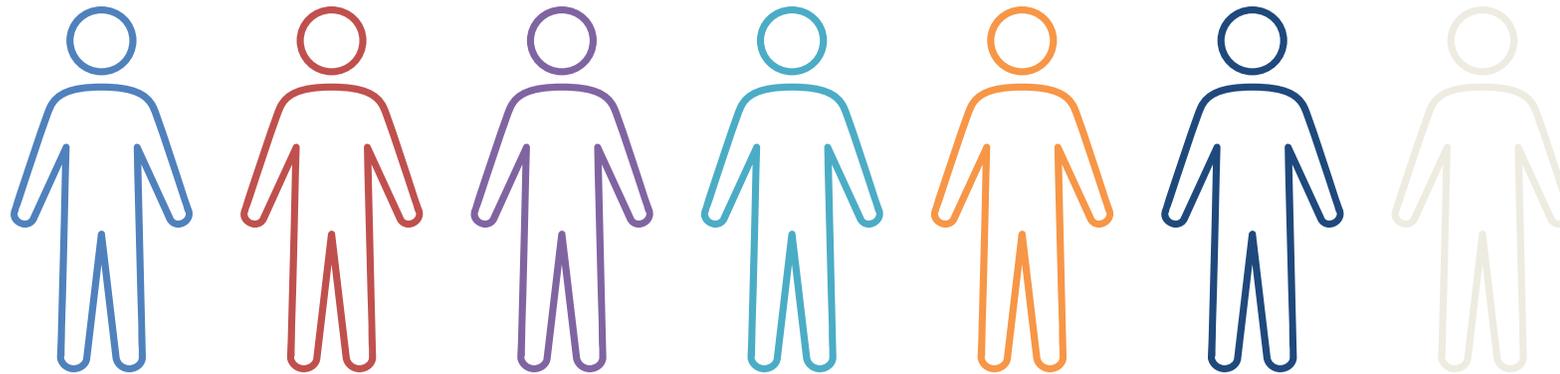
The term “micro-credential” is not commonly used

Most countries already have certified short courses or module certificates that fit the European Commission’s definition of “micro-credential”

Even though most microcredentials operating in the labour market are not part of the formal qualifications system, there is a lot of sectoral and company-level activity

The main purposes of microcredentials are employability, upskilling and reskilling, lifelong learning, adult education and inclusiveness

There needs to be a balance between flexibility and standardisation of education and training



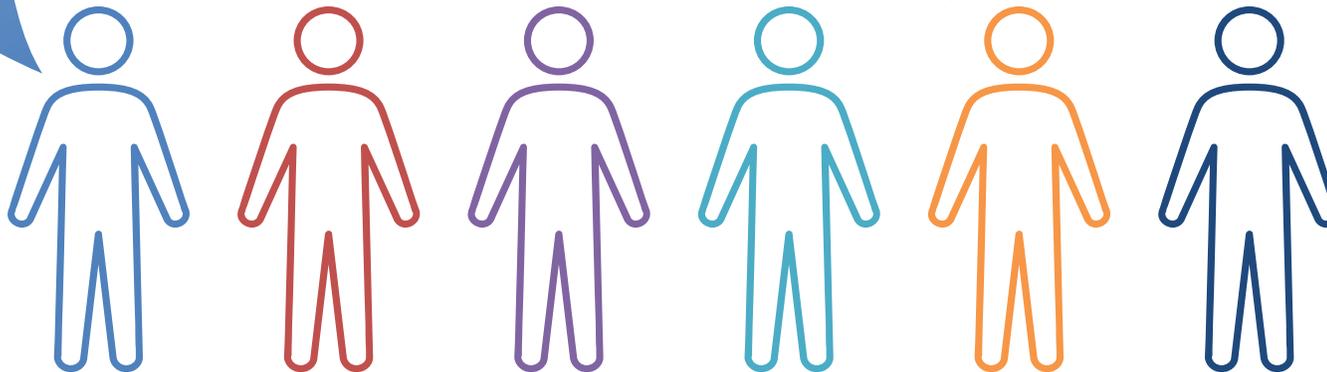
Preliminary case study findings

A term 'microcredential' is not commonly used in national contexts; terms like 'open badges' or 'small volume certificates' indicate that the actual phenomenon is real, the term MC is still not accepted or recognised

The provision of short learning experiences, both certified and uncertified, is long-standing practice in many countries

Majority of countries have qualifications systems which partly prevent easy integration of MCs; this may indicate that MCs are expanding outside formal QFs

Initial VET (perhaps with the exception of Ireland and reflecting its highly modularised qualifications system structure) has yet to embrace MCs



Examples from case studies



Finland: The need driven by **skills gap**, mainly limited upskilling opportunities for adults and limited availability of short courses relevant to the labour market



France: The **concept is scarce**, whereas other related concepts are present (open-badges, block chains, block of competences, e-portfolio)- none of the few existing microcredentials – mainly in higher education – are in the National Qualifications Catalogue (RNCP)



Germany: Micro-credentials play a **minor role** compared to vocational education qualifications and are seen as supplementary to the existing system



Ireland: The **term** micro-credentials is **new**, but the qualifications authority (QQI) has been validating small volume courses and certifying the resulting learning with formal qualifications in the NFQ for many years

Examples from case studies



Netherlands: The Dutch VET policy was revised during the last government period (2017-2021) to prioritise **flexibilisation of educational programmes** for job seekers and employed adults as well as create more opportunities for lifelong learning



Poland: Microcredentials are still perceived as a **relatively new phenomenon** in Poland. They are popular in sectors specializing in the development of IT technologies (software development, computer systems administration and IT management)



Slovenia: Microcredentials **can potentially play a role** in labour market-oriented education and training that relate to national strategic development priorities, which are defined in the Smart Specialisation strategy



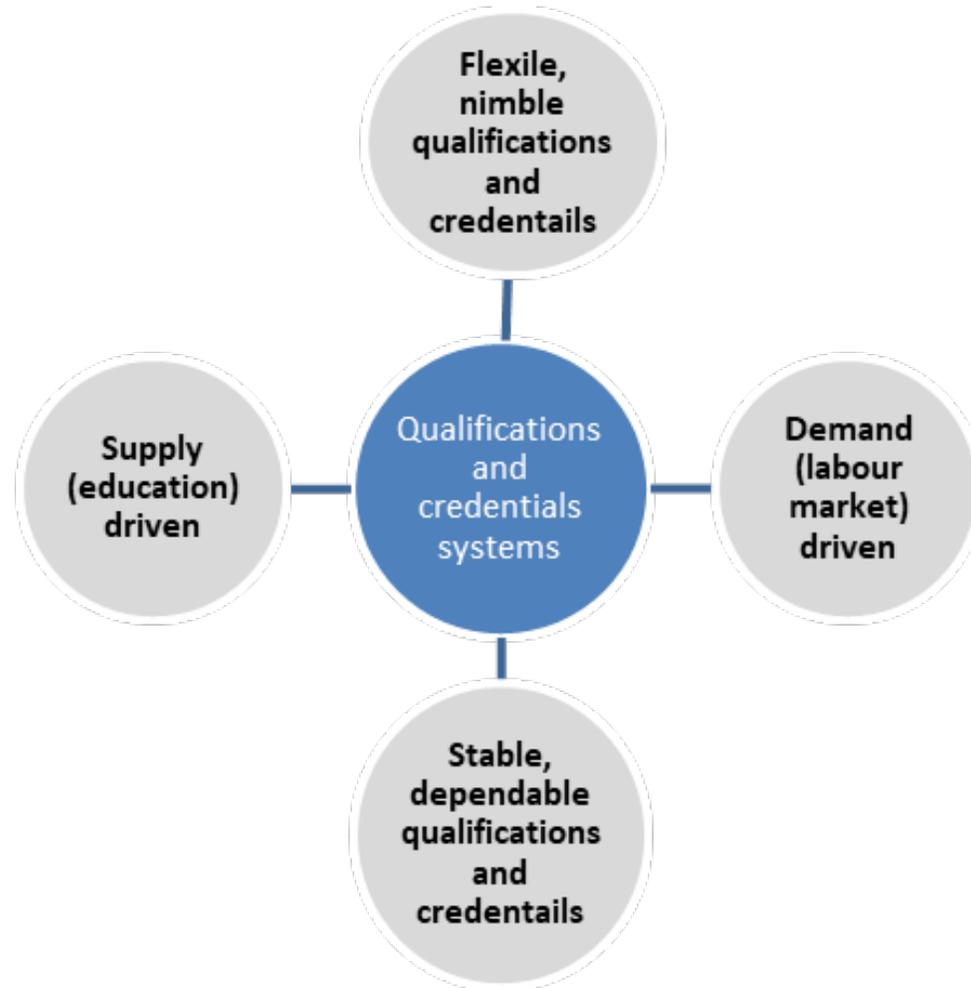
Spain: Employment authorities are preparing a **reform** of non-formal non-accreditable training for employment addressed to employed and unemployed workers that **will consider micro-credentials**, linked to the Catalogue of Training Specialities managed by the national PES

How do micro-credentials fit in the labour market related education, training and learning?

- Microcredentials refer to **shorter learning activities**.
- Employers are struggling to recruit a new workforce and thus they want **shorter and faster** ways to train and hire employees.
- The main **providers** of micro-credentials in the **labour market** include large companies, industry associations, start-ups, online learning platforms, non-governmental organisations and international organisations.

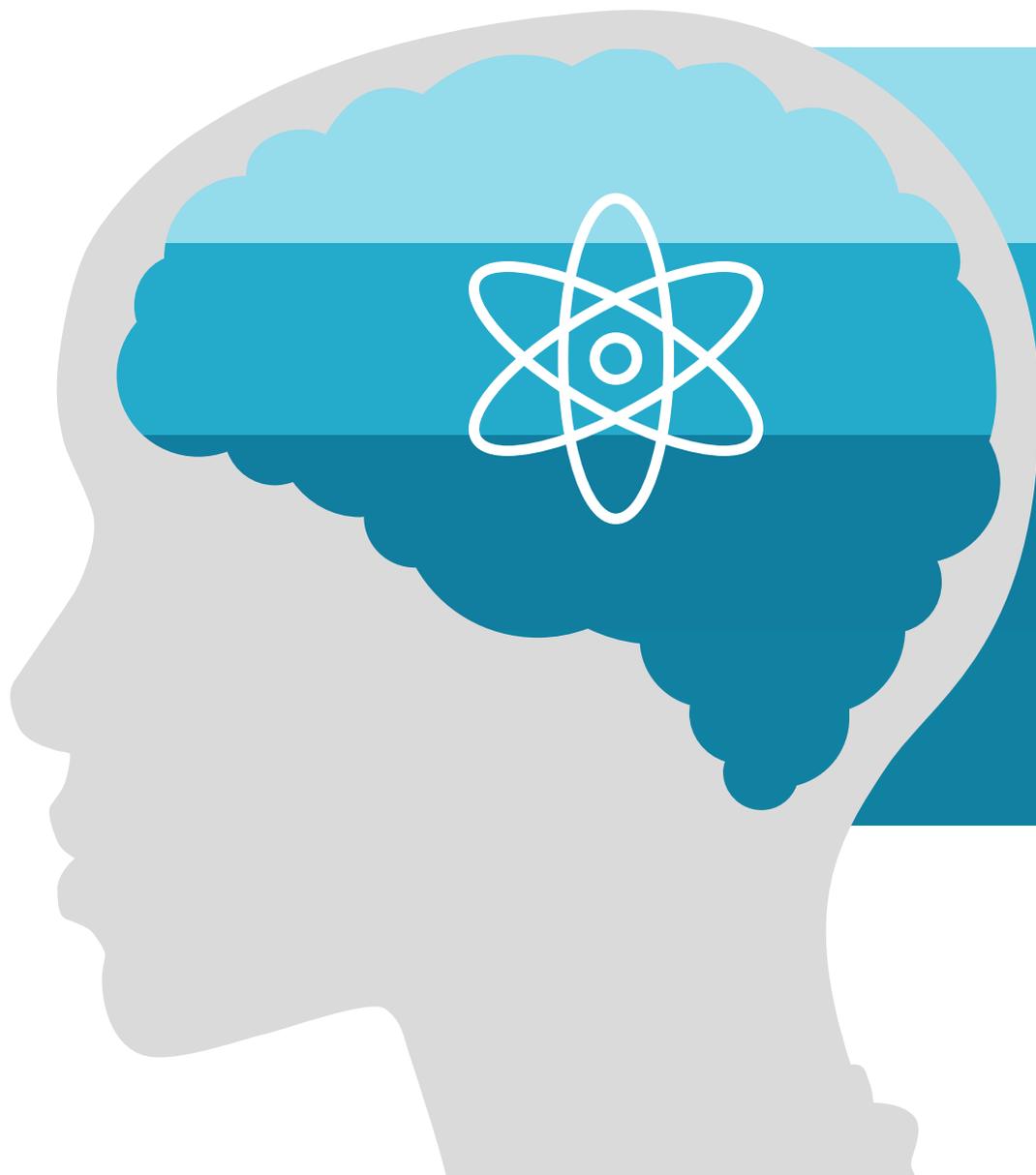


Dimensions of qualifications systems



Source: Cedefop 2010

Important points raised in 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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