



Microcredentials for VET and labour market learning

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#microcredentials



Microcredentials
a labour market
megatrend



CEDEFOP

European Centre for the Development
of Vocational Training

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

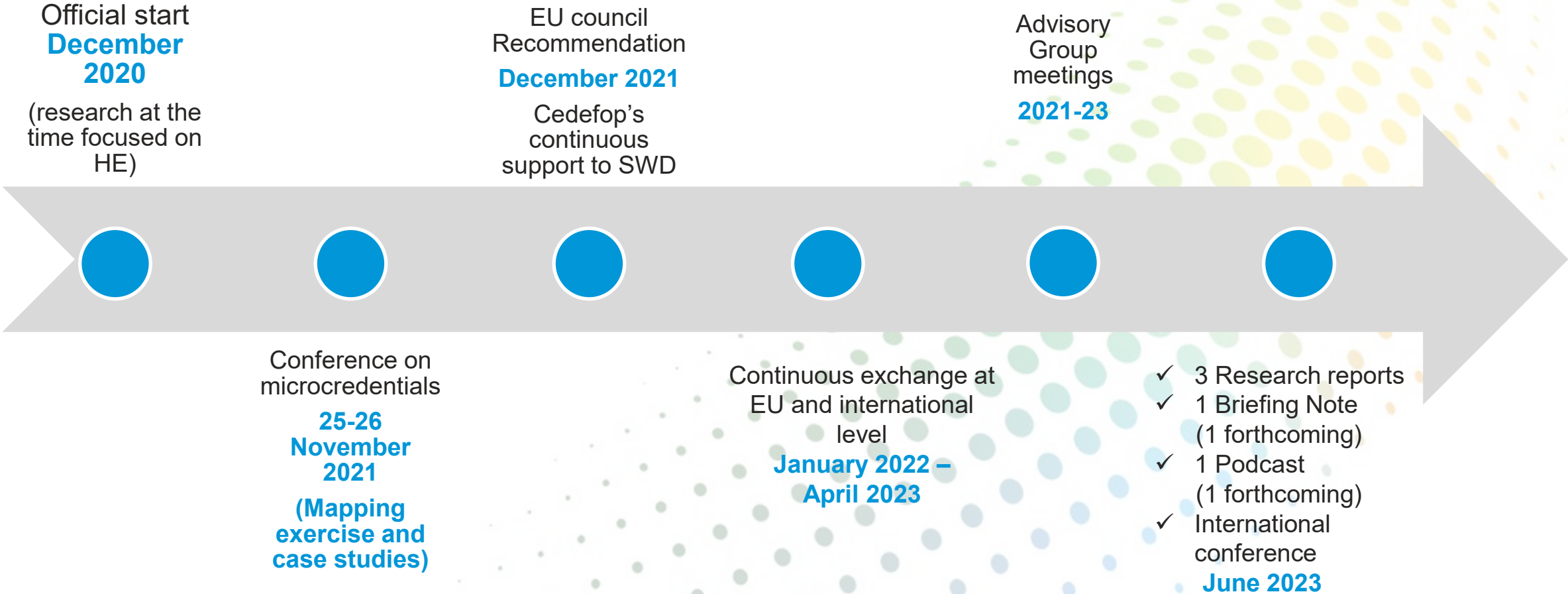
Cedefop's
Advisory Group
on the study



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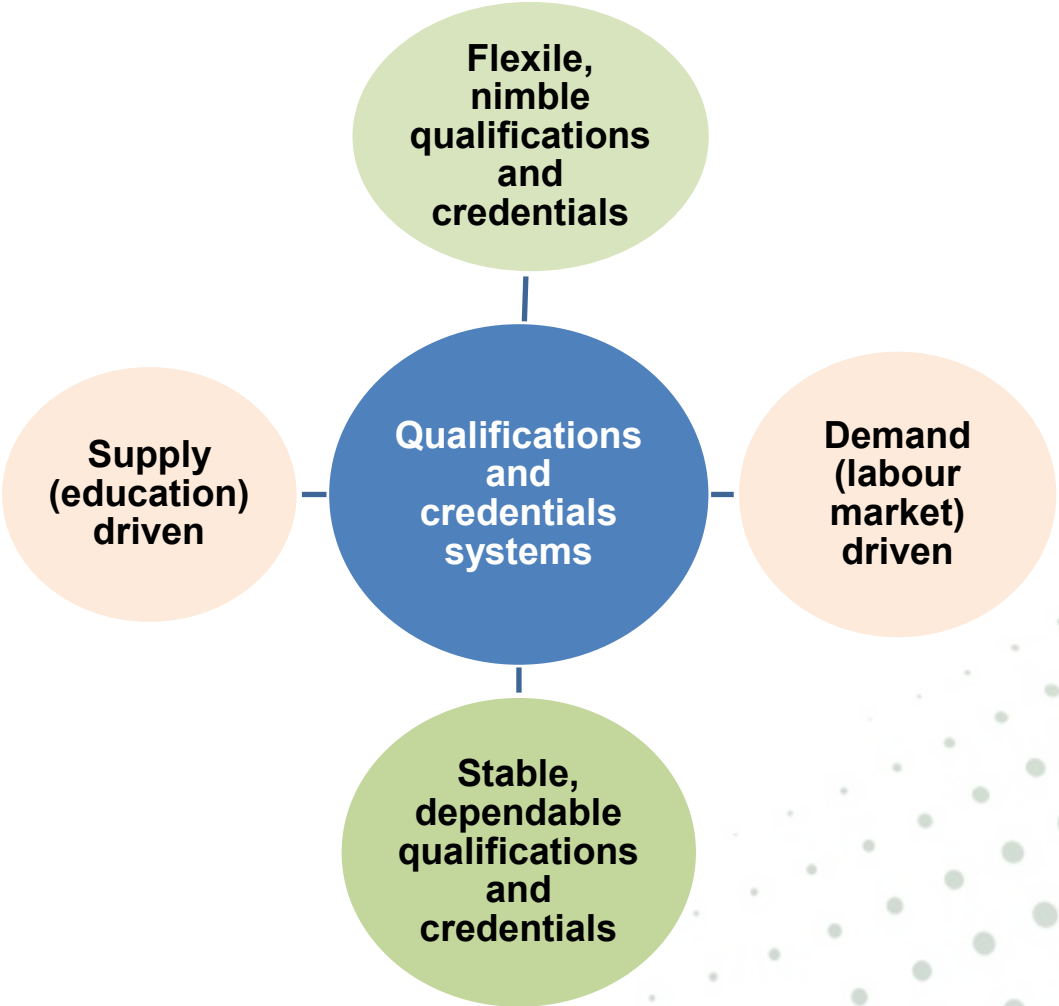
Cedefop has embarked on the global discussion on microcredentials

Timeline of the project



Conceptual background

Dimensions of qualifications systems



Source: Cedefop 2010

Main conceptual elements of the study

We adopted a wider **‘dual’ perspective** regarding qualifications

- ‘qualified’ in the sense of having obtained a formal qualification
- ‘qualified’ by virtue of having showed the ability to carry out a job effectively

Traditional vs modern qualifications: microcredentials have a number of overlapping functions with modern ones:

- promote lifelong learning
- enable alternative learning pathways
- are co-defined by stakeholders

The **currency** or **value** of microcredentials in the labour market and for further learning

- as a means of accessing and progressing within employment
- as a gateway to further learning
- in the form of social value.



Defining microcredentials



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Where were we standing in 2021?

- **Uncertainty** linked to the **naming** and **function**
- **Diverse** landscape across EU countries - wide range of short learning activities
- Microcredentials' is an **umbrella term**
- **Tight 'Vs' loose** definition: balance between fostering trust and flexibility
- Digital transition – Post-pandemic period



Novelty or old wine with new label?

- MCs are a **phenomenon that is growing**
- MCs do not necessarily present a new form of recognition but a way to **define better** and **standardise** the already existing offers.
- Emerging mostly in areas such as **ICT, engineering, manufacturing, and construction**, but also in sectors such as **hospitality, human health, and social work**



Focusing on sectoral and professional skills certificates

Can we consider them as microcredentials?

Adding an extra level of complexity...

Resemblance to microcredentials is most prominent when they are awarded upon the completion of an education and/or training programme (they check all the boxes to be labelled a microcredential, according to the European definition).

Given that not all microcredentials enjoy the same level of trust and quality assurance practices as sectoral and professional skills certificates, it is also possible to conceptualise them as a type of microcredentials that enjoys higher visibility, recognition and trust.

Depending on the national context, the answer differs

Sectoral and professional skills certificates can be either awarded upon completion of an organised learning activity followed by a form of assessment, or following solely on the completion of a performance-based assessment

Emerging questions!

- 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?

Main characteristics of microcredentials

- MCs indicate the **title, the date of issue, the identity of the holder, the provider and achieved LOs.**
- **Online learning vs face-to-face** mode of delivery (classroom-based learning)
- More **diverse learners** than full qualifications, e.g. employees, new hires, individual learners, customers of a company
- MCs are mainly used by **adults in employment**, as continuing VET and supplements to full qualifications
- MCs address the limitation of formal Qs to **timely respond to labour market needs**

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		
Manufacturing	Safety procedures in medical processes	France	12 modules 17 days	NO	In person		
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	YES	YES
Manufacturing	International Welding Practitioner (IWP)	International (41 countries)	150 hours	ECVET	person/blended	YES	YES
Manufacturing		Germany, France, Italy, Spain, UK, Portugal and Turkey.	60-70 hours	NO	Online/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

Highly targeted/specialised types of training that are designed around specific occupational/professional

Focus on new and emerging topics and technologies

Mode of delivery differs; it can be in-person training, online or blended.

Microcredentials often describe learning outcomes. The remaining either do not mention their LOs or present them in the form of content description

Policy discussions at national level

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
(2022)

Indications that system or broader policy developments ease the expansion of microcredentials

Key factors driving discussions relating MCs to qualification systems

- Upskilling and reskilling
- Labour market relevance
- Recognition of prior learning
- Trust and credibility
- Equal opportunities and wider access to a greater variety of learners
- Integration and progression within employment



Microcredentials as part of qualifications systems

QUALIFICATION

MCs and qualifications systems

- A wide variety of microcredentials can **fall outside of the formal qualifications system** and operate solely in the labour market.
- Strong indications that microcredentials **will not diminish the labour market value** of recognised qualifications in the near future
- Microcredentials can push qualifications systems to become more **flexible, adaptable** and **responsive** to labour market needs
- Can microcredentials lead to **fragmentation** of knowledge?
- Too much modularity encourages **early exits from training**



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Linking modularisation to microcredentials

Modularisation is very 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 Adult Education Act. 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.

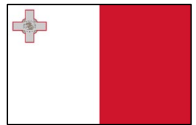
Opening up qualifications frameworks to microcredentials



The NSK vocational qualifications could be considered a type of MCs, as they fit the European Commission's definition of MCs.



The DKQF includes qualifications awarded outside formal education and training, including microcredentials.



Some MQF awards could be considered as a type of MCs.

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;
- obtain a full formal qualification (this also relates to accumulation/stackability of MCs);
- gain access to an education programme, including making the transition from VET to higher education;
- gain exemption from part(s) of an education programme and/or shorten its duration;
- gain exemption from part(s) of a professional qualification;



Barriers to a wider uptake of microcredentials

- Lack of **adequate and transparent QA standards**
- **Uncertainties** about nature of microcredentials
- The way **learning outcomes are assessed and documented**
- Lack of **formal recognition** of by national authorities
- **Incompatibility** of some microcredentials with NQ systems
- **Limited opportunities** for the accumulation and **combination** of microcredentials

The added value of **microcredentials**



Research questions (added value)

1.

For end-users to trust microcredentials, which conditions must be met to ensure portability and transferability

- information to be contained;
- trust to be generated?

2.

For individual learners to make use of microcredentials, what support can be envisaged?

3.

How could microcredentials play a more targeted role in supporting 'age-neutral' systems for VET, strengthening the focus of up-skilling and re-skilling?



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!**



Tension I: Is it a new skills currency?

End users perceptions
(policy intentions)
VS
Reality

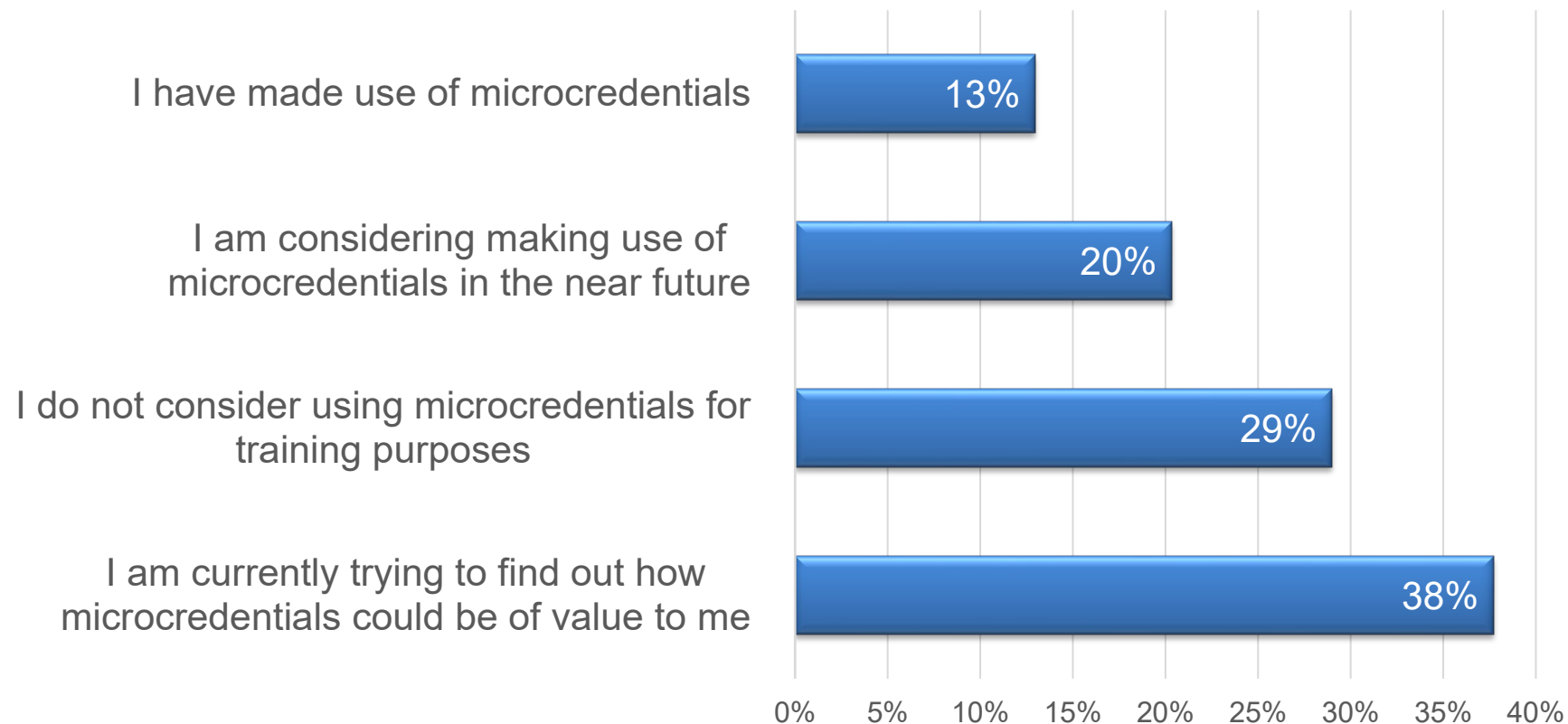


Tension II

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**.

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).

**Have you experienced in practice
that microcredentials helped you
get promoted?**

46% No

30% Yes

24% Do not know/
cannot answer

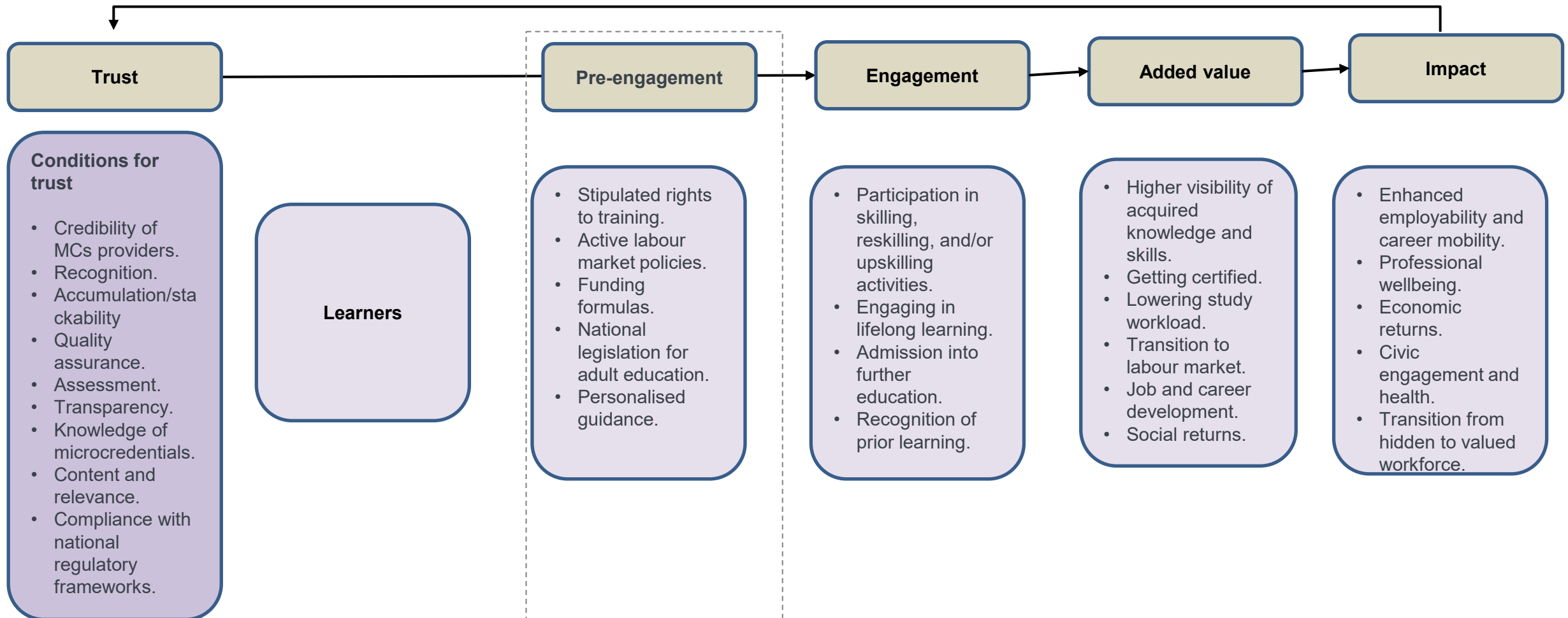
Microcredentials and added value for



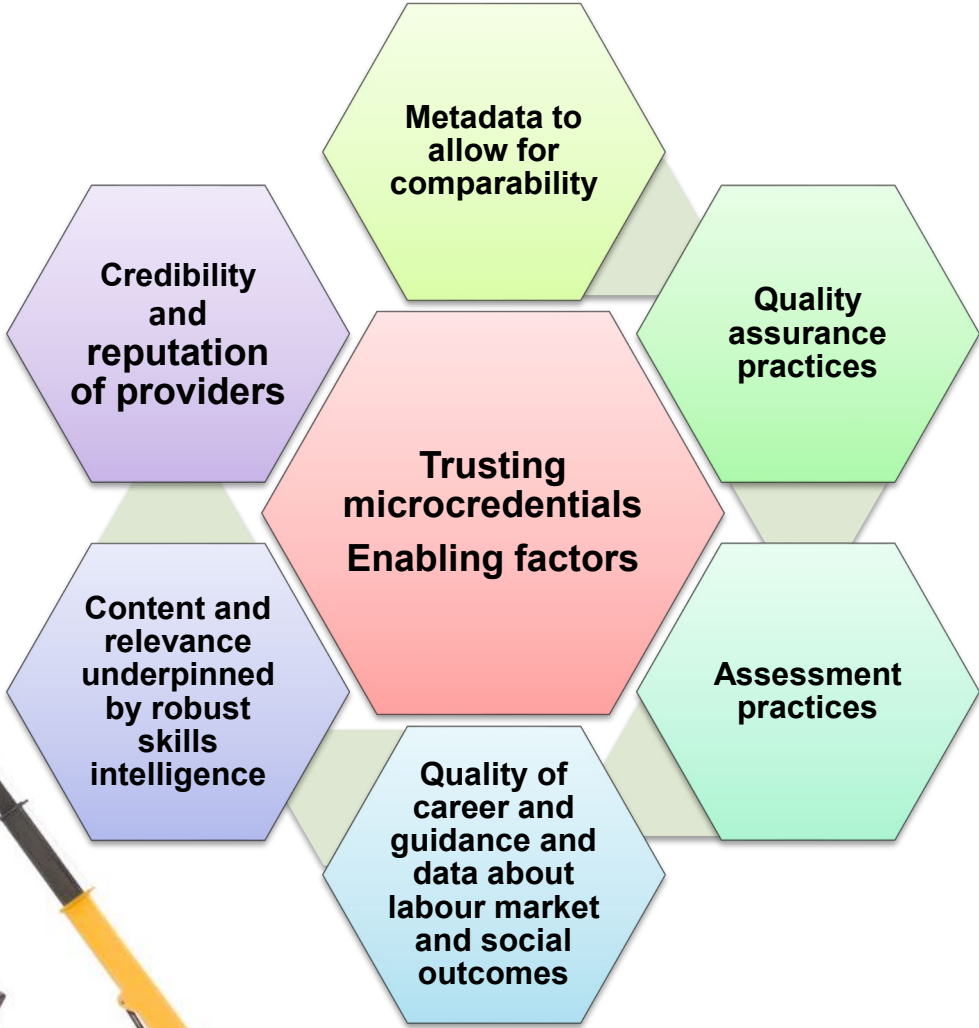
Learners and employees	Employers	VET providers
Standing out in a recruitment situation.	More responsive training offer	Expanding the outreach of VET providers.
Labour market mobility through vertical and horizontal skills pathways.	Faster and more efficient upskilling and reskilling of the workforce.	Consolidate strategies for VET excellence.
Improved labour market outcomes in the form of income and career development.	Improve employee retention through improved job and career pathways in the company.	Allowing for new services and engagements with new targets groups.
Career shifts.	Expanding the recruitment base (hidden workforce).	Involvement in local, regional and sectoral skills ecosystems building skills intelligence.
Access to continuing and further learning on a flexible basis.	Reducing induction costs of new employees by providing more individualised and affordable training opportunities.	Building institutional capacity to innovate by e.g., co-designing new forms of provision to reach underprivileged target groups.
Recognition of prior learning.	Renewed competitiveness and innovation performance through concurrent strategies for upskilling and reskilling.	Improving quality of provision by engaging actively with stakeholders in local labour markets.

Source: Cedefop (2023, forthcoming)

A complex MC landscape: establishing trust - generating added value



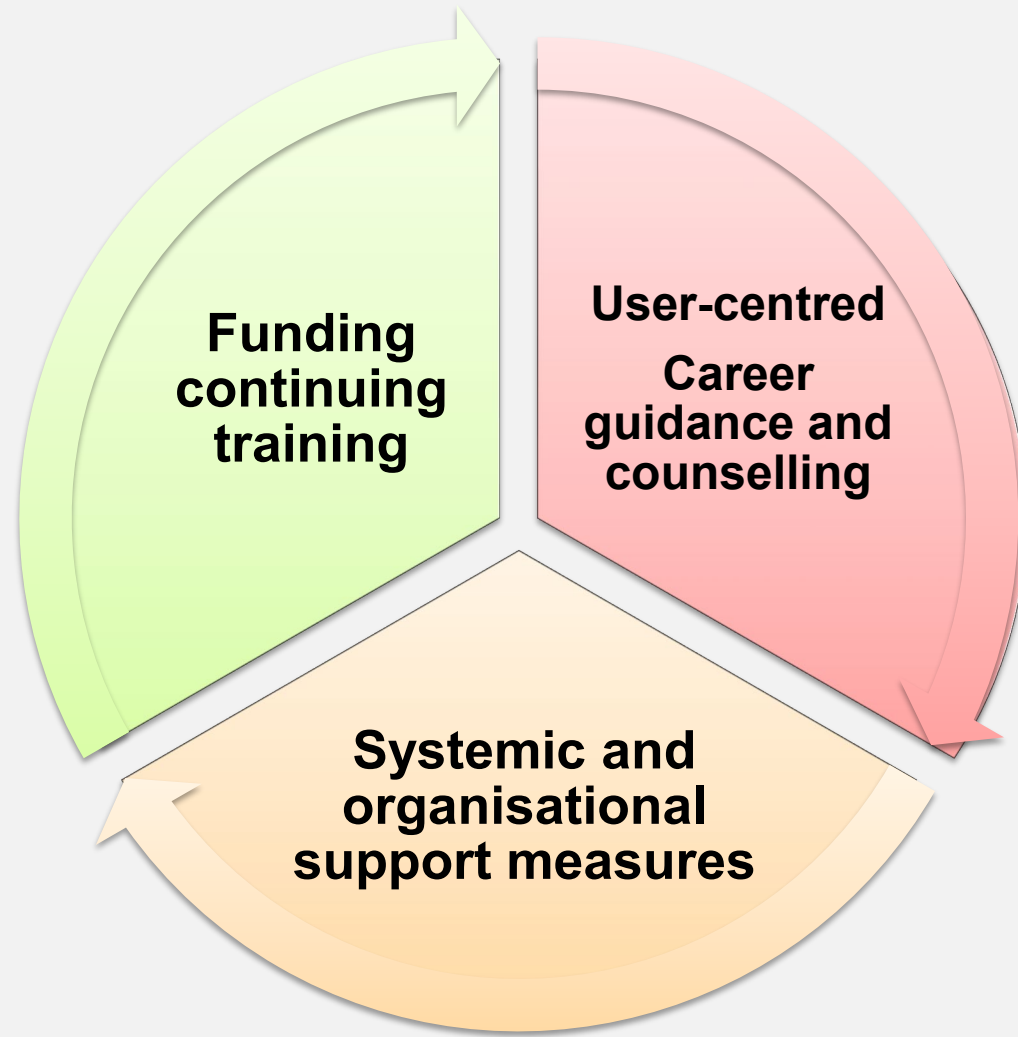
Conditions for building trust



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Source: Cedefop, (2023, forthcoming)

Ways to support engagement with microcredentials



Source: Cedefop, (2023, forthcoming)

Examples of systemic support measures

Denmark:

- Danish Trade Union in finance -> options to introduce skills and performance-based standards

Finland:

- For two decades aim: skills development and utilisation
- WORK2030 development programme
- Finnish Innovation Fund : a visionary strategy process

Emerging questions!

- Could microcredentials become a selection mechanism that increases *inequities*? Is there a risk of qualifications unbundling?
- Does the provision still remain *fragmented* and *disconnected*?
- Are there sufficient *user-centred* services that could help learners and employers make informed decisions about learning options?



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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



Thank you

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Project page

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

Podcast

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