

skillset AND MATCH

CEDEFOP'S MAGAZINE
PROMOTING
LEARNING FOR WORK



 CEDEFOP

ISSUE 24 / JANUARY 2022

MAIN STORY:
MICROCREDENTIALS: A NEW
UPSKILLING TREND

INTERVIEWS:
PHILIPP GONON
JULIE REDDY
GAVIN MOODIE

ARTICLE:
ACCELERATING
THE GREEN TRANSITION

OCCUPATION IN FOCUS:
CONSTRUCTION WORKERS

MEMBER STATE: FRANCE



The **European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training** (Cedefop) is the European Union's reference centre for vocational education and training, skills and qualifications.

We provide information, research, analyses and evidence on vocational education and training, skills and qualifications for policy-making in the EU Member States.



Cover photo:
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Publications Office of the
European Union, Luxembourg

ISSN: 2363-0183
TI-AQ-22-001-EN-N
No of publication: 9162 EN
Free of charge

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Apprentices

as greeners!

JÜRGEN SIEBEL

CEDEFOP EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



*Apprenticeships
bring about green
innovation, green
mindsets and green
ambassadors*



In the wake of COP26 in Glasgow, the few successes can hardly hide the gloom and frustration shared by many about the world not managing to get its act together. Promises yes, actions at best so-so, goals almost out of reach. One thing that is certain is that without innovation there will be no catching-up and no realistic chance to meet the 1.5-degree target.

The good news is that many belonging to generation Greta are currently doing their apprenticeships. And apprenticeships, if designed well, bring about green innovation, green mindsets and green ambassadors: apprentices as greeners! That punchline was one of the many that Professor Gonon, of the University of Zurich, shared during his keynote speech at the joint Cedefop/OECD symposium on apprenticeships for greener economies and societies, held online last October. For more insights, check out the interview and the broader coverage of the symposium in this edition.

Two further Cedefop events made waves in November: the Brussels seminar on inclusive adult learning, co-hosted with the Slovenian EU Presidency, and our conference on microcredentials. The former reinforced the importance of adult learning reaching out to those who need it most but currently attend the least, while the latter – attracting a Cedefop record world-spanning audience – investigated the links between vocational education and workplace requirements and the role of microcredentials in supporting relevant upskilling and reskilling. Both events are covered extensively in this edition.

We also look at France (the current EU Presidency country), refugee labour market mobility in Europe, and at our new and improved web portal.

Finally, an official Commissioner visit is always a highlight in any EU agency. But what do you do if two of them come on the same day? Find out on pages 8 and 9. Enjoy! ■

VET and apprenticeships: tools for greenification



© Philipp Gonon, 2021

PHILIPP GONON

“ *It is important that green elements find their way into VET curricula. They must be taught and discussed* ”

PROFESSOR OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING, UNIVERSITY OF ZURICH

As the greening of the economy is a policy priority for Europe, Professor Philipp Gonon of the University of Zurich, in an interview with *Skillset and match*, argues that vocational education and training (VET), and particularly apprenticeships, can play a vital part in this process by transferring awareness as well as green practices to businesses and the economy as a whole. Professor Gonon was a keynote speaker at the Cedefop/OECD symposium on apprenticeships for greener economies and societies (see pp. 6-7).

How does one define ‘green skills’? What is it that makes skills green?

In a nutshell, to act in a sustainable way. By sustainable, we mean a practice that is not governed by the search for a short-term result but has a long-term perspective. It takes into consideration future consequences. Sustainability also has a technical side, in that science may be in a position to solve some of the issues, perhaps reducing some climate-negative effects.

Some say it is our last chance to greenify and that tomorrow it will be too late. Is it already too late?

It is difficult to say whether it is too late. Some people said in the 1980s that it was already too late to save the planet. As it turned out, it wasn't. But, now that the climate crisis is truly severe, every year we come up against more

and more difficulties. Even some farmers who used to adopt a rather conservative approach to climate change are now alarmed by the way the productivity of their crops is affected.

You say that coordinated economies are better equipped for further greenification than liberal economies...

Coordinated market economies work with the help of a strategic alliance. This kind of alliance can also serve liberal economies in solving some coordination problems. The aligning role played by the State in more coordinated economies can be substituted by stakeholder alliances in more liberal economies. These alliances can ensure that green issues come to the forefront and that aims relating to green issues are set.



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What is the interaction between VET and greenification? How do they influence each other?

Historically, the ecological movement has been linked to a certain level of education, as most first-comers to green activism had a university education background. On the other hand, traditionally, apprenticeships have been a rather conservative institution. Unlike in the past, nowadays people realise they can combine a university (or a university of applied sciences) or other short-term higher education with a vocational one, and this is something that has boosted the vocational path. These two developments have led VET schools and apprenticeships to take on board some green elements, to make sure they remain attractive to young people. Additionally, cooperation schemes between VET schools and businesses present several chances to develop green elements. This, in turn, makes apprenticeships attractive to some young people. In a way, greenification also acts as a sort

of a marketing element for VET and apprenticeships.

But how can VET and apprenticeships contribute to the EU's greening policies?

Pilot projects in Germany have shown that apprentices' views on green processes bring a new perspective to firms. Thus, apprentices become the pioneers of greenification in industries, while also, to some extent, bringing democracy to the workplace. There is real potential here: apprentices must have opportunities to share their ideas, ask questions about how things are done in the business. This will help greenify firms and the economy as a whole.

Besides being aware of green issues, though, apprentices need to master green practices and skills to transfer them to firms. Where can they acquire knowledge about these practices before joining businesses as apprentices?

In many cases, they acquire that knowledge at VET schools where they are taught about

greenification issues and processes. Admittedly, often apprentices do not master green processes but have adopted green practices in their personal lives, so they ask valuable relevant questions. Of course, they have to familiarise themselves with the firm's practices, so it is a learning process that goes in both directions.

So, VET schools are crucial in allowing learners to learn green skills and practices and then transfuse them to firms they join as apprentices...

Yes, I agree. But while working in firms, apprentices familiarise themselves with other questions and issues that businesses have to deal with, and that knowledge also gets channelled back into VET schools. So, it is a two-way process. Furthermore, Germany, Switzerland and Austria have revised their curricula and introduced green elements. It is important that green elements find their way into VET curricula. They must be taught and discussed. ■

Accelerating

the green transition



‘Green’ can become a selling factor to attract attention and learners

Apprenticeships can play an accelerating role as a supporter and facilitator of the greening of the economy, one of the main priorities in the European green deal. ‘Green’ can become a selling factor to attract attention and learners.

The smooth transition to a greener economy depends on simultaneously developing the required skills by resource-efficient processes and technologies and integrating these in businesses and communities.

Cedefop and the OECD, which have worked together successfully to promote apprenticeships, organised a second joint symposium last October to discuss apprenticeships for greener economies and societies. Speakers and participants exchanged views on how apprenticeships can be a positive influence in the green transition, while practical experience and empirical findings from various industries were presented.

Cedefop Executive Director Jürgen Siebel noted that apprenticeships are an established, structured governance platform, which reassures stakeholders advocating for a just and green transition of their potential. OECD Director for Employment, Labour and Social Affairs Stefano Scarpetta pointed out that the close interaction between the education system and the world of work makes apprenticeships well placed to respond effectively to changing skill needs, including those related to the green transition.

The event’s keynote speaker, University of Zurich Professor Philipp Gonon (see interview on pp. 4-5), spoke of the advantages apprenticeships have as

green transition promoters in comparison to other forms of vocational education and training (VET). One reason for this that he cited is that green skills are acted rather than learnt. This, he said, is why the role of small and medium-sized enterprises is considered significant.

MINIMISING DISRUPTION

Several key aspects were among papers presented at the conference.

- The design of learning venues in apprenticeship programmes with a view to developing sustainability-oriented professional competence.
- The need for lifelong learning and upskilling and reskilling of workers to minimise the disruption that transition to a green economy entails and to satisfy the rising demand for skills that are essential for green occupations.
- The transformative power of green apprenticeships in the VET system, adjacent social systems (involved in VET) and civil society; how the education sector is affected by the challenges in a special way, with new technical and interdisciplinary competences in companies needed that must be provided by the VET system; and VET becoming more attractive thanks to new, digital and sustainability-oriented learning offers.

Presentations showcasing sectoral experience in the link between greenification and apprenticeships outlined:

Cedefop and OECD symposium Apprenticeships for greener economies and societies

21 and 22 October 2021
Virtual event

#GreenApprenticeships
#ApprenEU



- how Siemens' *Professional education goes green skills* takes a strategic innovation approach by introducing a green skills curriculum to more than 6 800 learners worldwide;
- why an influx of green skills on the labour market will not be sufficient and how upskilling and reskilling are essential to equip workers with the skills they will need to perform their job in the future and/or to support employee mobility across jobs and sectors;
- how the aim of becoming zero-carbon implies a transformation of the construction industry and construction VET and apprenticeship systems across Europe; currently, the construction sector is responsible for 40% of energy consumption and 36% of energy-related CO₂ emissions in the European Union.

THE DIFFERENT ROLES

Discussing the role of apprenticeships in the transition to greener economies and societies, and the related challenges and opportunities, panel speakers presented the perspective of those who will eventually make this change happen: companies, workers, apprentices, training providers.

Summarising the gains from the conference, El Iza Mohamedou, Head of the OECD Centre for Skills, pointed to the actions each component of the apprenticeship cycle ought to take: 'Training providers and social partners need to work together to update curricula, invest in the skills of teachers

and trainers and keep each other informed of new developments. Apprentices need to be proactive and vocal about the importance for them of having greener curricula and more opportunities to develop skills for the green transition. They need to interact with employers and training providers about this and provide feedback on what they learn. Trade unions need to support workers who are upskilling and reskilling through apprenticeships, but also raise awareness among workers of the need for training in light of the green transition.'

Cedefop's Ramona David closed the event by reflecting on the scope of the next Cedefop/OECD joint event, in two years' time: 'Technology, innovation and digitalisation were often mentioned in connection to the green transition. Indeed, one big part of the green transition cannot be dissociated from technology and digitalisation. So, at the next symposium, we could very well look at the other facet of the "twin transitions", digitalisation, and how apprenticeships are affected by it and may support it as no education system, no sector of the economy and virtually no company remains unaffected by digitalisation.' ■

Cedefop/OECD symposium on
Apprenticeships for greener
economies and societies



Cedefop project: Apprenticeships
in work-based learning



High-profile visit highlights Cedefop's 'skills revolution' role

“ *European Commission Vice-President Margaritis Schinas and European Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights Nicolas Schmit spoke of the significance of Cedefop's research and policy support for the future of work and education in Europe*

A high-profile gathering at Cedefop emphasised the European Union's determination to pursue policies that bring vocational education and training (VET) centre-stage as a crucial tool for Europe's post-pandemic recovery.

European Commission Vice-President Margaritis Schinas and European Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights Nicolas Schmit visited Cedefop's headquarters in Thessaloniki in September, met with the Agency's management, addressed staff, and spoke of the significance of Cedefop's research and policy support for the future of work and education in Europe.

This was the first official visit after many months of remote communication, a rare joint presence of such high-ranking officials at a decentralised EU Agency.

Cedefop Executive Director Jürgen Siebel welcomed the delegation, noting that VET is not a repair shop for society but a tool for resilience

and innovation. 'The skills revolution that we are aspiring to requires more than just funds, it requires a concerted effort and a comprehensive strategy,' he said, hailing the Commission's policy focus on skills and VET.

Deputy Director Mara Brugia referred to the two ingredients that enabled Cedefop to deliver value for policy-making and planning: its proactive approach and its ability to connect and bring together people from the labour market, the VET community and business.

REVOLUTION UNDERWAY

Mr Schinas pointed out that the importance of Cedefop's contribution was evident in the joint presence of two members of the College of Commissioners at its premises.

He added: 'Cedefop is at the heart of European Union efforts to forge new skills and bridge the important skills gap that the pandemic has revealed,





but also one that is created by the growth that now is picking up, the twin transition towards a digital and green Europe that requires a skills revolution for the right mixture of people so that our job markets can cope with shortages and increased competition.’ This revolution is already underway, he argued.

Speaking about the ‘greening’ of the economy and digitalisation, the Vice-President indicated that, while investment was made available all-around Europe, there appeared to be a shortage of people participating in reskilling to meet the requirements of the twin transitions. ‘Here lies the significance of your contribution, as Cedefop needs to keep supporting policy-making,’ he said.

REVAMPING SKILLS CAPACITY

Mr Schmit noted that several EU Member States are lagging in lifelong learning, and therefore the Commission has made skills a key area. ‘Revamping and amplifying our skilling capacity, the skills revolution, is a crucial element to sustain the technological and economic transformations that lie ahead,’ he added.

The Commissioner stressed the importance of networking to disseminate the knowledge gathered by Cedefop, such as the big-data mining that underpins the Agency’s skills intelligence project. ‘This Commission has very much focused on education, skills, and vocational training, so the Agency is of great importance for our work,’ he said,

concluding that ‘you help us make better evidence-based policies.’

In an exclusive interview, which launched the new Cedefop podcast series *Skillset and match*, Commissioner Schmit struck a positive note on Europe’s post-pandemic education and labour market landscape, which will have an increased focus on digital and green skills: ‘There are a lot of problems around, but this is not the time to be gloomy. It is the time to give people trust, to offer them the right solutions. This is the way to overcome this difficult period, due to the pandemic, but also in the context of economic changes. We need to be encouraging people, by giving them the right tools. I am reasonably optimistic, and I am sure that we will be able in Europe to bring about these improvements for the benefit of all people.’

The two high-profile visitors, who were accompanied by the Head of the European Commission Representation in Greece Niovi Ringou, also addressed an extraordinary Cedefop staff assembly, the first hybrid event since the beginning of the pandemic. ■

Watch a video clip of the visit



Watch a video statement by Vice-President Schinas



Watch an exclusive interview with Commissioner Schmit



Listen to Episode 1 of the Cedefop podcast



Key elements in promoting CVET and adult learning

“ *Adult learning and continuing vocational education and training are not only about people’s willingness to participate, but also employers’ willingness to invest* ”

Europe is again at risk of missing its policy targets on participation in vocational education and training (VET) and lifelong learning. A fresh strategic response based on incentives is needed to ensure high-quality and inclusive continuing VET (CVET) and skill development.

That was the conclusion of Cedefop’s 11th Brussels seminar, organised virtually with the Slovenian EU Presidency of the second half of 2021, in November. The seminar discussed: the trends and characteristics of adult participation in education and training in the EU; integrated support measures and incentives for individuals aimed at increasing inclusive participation in CVET; and the role of employers in increasing inclusive participation in CVET.

Brussels-based stakeholders from the Permanent Representations of Member States to the EU and representatives of the European Commission, the European Parliament, European business and sector associations, trade union and employee organisations took part in the seminar. They discussed Cedefop research and analysis covering the general theme of inclusive participation in CVET.

ALL ABOUT INCENTIVES

Translating needs into actual demand and participation for individuals and companies remains challenging. On the individuals’ side, Cedefop’s latest opinion survey on adult learning and CVET shows that participation in both is low, not because they are unattractive learning options, but due to a lack of incentive, and difficulty for individuals to

identify specific training needs and associate training with a concrete exchange value on the labour market.

Pointing to a Cedefop-European Training Foundation discussion paper on *The importance of being vocational: challenges and opportunities for VET in the next decade*, Cedefop Executive Director Jürgen Siebel said that, in light of the current and future trends and the changing world of work, a policy focus on CVET was more important than ever. ‘In fact, the paper identifies CVET as the priority objective for this decade.’

The European Commission’s Alison Crabb referred to the final two proposals of the European skills agenda, which were announced a few weeks after the seminar. These, she noted, will be opening up pathways for adult learning, focusing on microcredentials and the individual learning account as tools to help trigger higher participation.

NEW LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

This priority was reflected in the Presidency priorities, Director General at the Slovenian Ministry of Education Nataša Kranjc said, as the increase and improvement of the provision of high-quality adult learning opportunities was becoming part of wider policies designed to enable economic recovery through the green and digital transformations.

Chair of the Education Committee of the Slovenian Presidency Luka Živić stated that the European agenda was part of a holistic approach



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that focused on the adult learner and covered all learning activities.

Incentives are the key to making CVET more attractive and increasing adult participation, as Cedefop's Lidia Salvatore concluded in her presentation, which was based on the Agency's research. Personal development benefits are in the control of individuals, she said, but work-related benefits are generally in the hands of employers. 'Hence, the attractiveness of adult learning and CVET is not only about people's willingness to participate, but also employers' willingness to invest.'

Cedefop's Cynthia Harrison, Patrycja Lipinska and Ernesto Villalba-Garcia pointed out that VET support policies encompass three transversal themes: lifelong guidance, validation of non-formal and informal learning, and financing VET/adult learning. Cedefop provides a wealth of research and data tools covering those three themes, while still expanding its work in the field.

A STRATEGIC APPROACH

During a panel discussion, European Trade Union Confederation's Agnes Roman, noting that training budgets suffered in periods of crisis such as the pandemic, called for CVET to be reinforced, since it contributes to job quality and good working conditions.

Business Europe's Robert Plummer underlined that, to provide continuing vocational training to the unemployed, cooperation between public employment services and social partners was key, but companies should also be involved in the development of the training offers.

Commission Policy Officer Felix Rohn said the fact that in only one year the Pact for skills initiative had attracted 450 signatories highlighted the European Commission's provision of incentives for reskilling and upskilling workers.

Cedefop Deputy Director Mara Brugia concluded the seminar by distilling the main findings of the discussions.

- People have no accurate picture of their own skill needs and cannot see the exchange value new skills would bring to them in the labour market. Hence, the below-target participation in CVET.
- The requirements for raising participation in CVET are: stronger synergies among various policies, systems and initiatives, well-coordinated financing, guidance and validation policies, and support for people and companies, particularly SMEs.
- Social dialogue and partnerships that engage all stakeholders as well as governance arrangements that encourage effective collaboration should be the foundations of a strategic approach that will help shape the new vocational education and training culture. ■

Inclusive participation in CVET – Cedefop Brussels seminar



The importance of being vocational: challenges and opportunities for VET in the next decade



Cedefop Brussels seminar – concept paper



Microcredentials: a new upskilling trend



Microcredentials ‘tend to fly under the radar’, so using a ‘microscope’ could help zoom in on their profile and content

‘Microcredentials are not objectives in themselves. They are tools.’ This was the key message highlighted at Cedefop’s conference on microcredentials last November. Over 200 participants joined the event, representing 40 countries in Europe and beyond, demonstrating that the topic of microcredentials and changing qualification landscapes is of global appeal and concern.

WHY ARE MICROCREDENTIALS IMPORTANT?

Microcredentials arose as a result of the digital age and the rise of massive open online courses (MOOCs). They are a means of giving visibility and value to shorter learning courses and experiences, and are evidence of practical, flexible, on-demand and short learning experiences. Many see them as a way to recognise learning outcomes acquired outside education institutions (for example at work), while others see them as an integrated way to recognise smaller modules or units of formal education and training.

The conference focus was the presentation of the interim findings of Cedefop’s project on ‘Microcredentials for labour market education and training’. Cedefop experts Anastasia Poulidou and Jens Bjørnåvold presented the project and its outcomes. Participants were given the opportunity to reflect on microcredentials’ broader uptake and function. Cedefop’s research is not taking place in isolation; it contributes to preparations for the forthcoming Council Recommendation on an EU approach to microcredentials.

Study interim findings show much uncertainty around the naming and function of microcredentials, with differing opinions on how they are being identified. In addition, microcredentials are emerging mostly in areas such as engineering, manufacturing and construction, as well as in sectors such as hospitality, human health and social work.

MICROCREDENTIALS ARE TOOLS

The main question that triggered discussions during the two-day event was: what kind of tools are microcredentials? According to participants, they can be tools:

- for making visible learning, skills and competences acquired through learning;
- to give value to such learning, knowledge, skills and competences;
- to encourage learning and motivate individuals to develop in a lifelong and life-wide perspective.

MICROCREDENTIALS: A DEFINITION

A microcredential is a proof of the learning outcomes that a learner has acquired following a short learning experience. These learning outcomes have been assessed against transparent standards. The proof is contained in a certified document that lists the name of the holder, the achieved learning outcomes, the assessment method, the awarding body and, where applicable, the qualifications framework level and the credits gained. Microcredentials are owned by the learner, can be shared, are portable and may be combined into larger credentials or qualifications. They are underpinned by quality assurance following agreed standards (European Commission, 2020).



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Visibility, value and learner encouragement are key objectives to consider when reflecting on microcredentials. They cannot be seen in isolation from the systems or other tools as they are not free-standing instruments. They need to be understood as elements in a broader system of qualifications and credentials.

Another key question that emerged was: how do microcredentials interact with existing qualification systems? What is the relationship between this emerging phenomenon and traditional qualifications and credentials? Do microcredentials, apart from digital delivery, represent a genuinely new form of recognition? Or are they a way to define better and standardise the already existing offer? Although this question remains the key focus of the current Cedefop study, microcredentials cannot take the place of formal qualifications; rather, they complement the current conventional learning opportunities.

MICROCREDENTIALS AT VARIOUS LEVELS

A broader perspective on microcredentials was discussed by a panel of international experts from the OECD, UNESCO and the European Training Foundation. They debated their global dimension as independent building blocks in national and international skills strategies.

Microcredentials are awarded by various stakeholders operating at different levels and institutional contexts. They are often initiated by local providers, but also by providers in the national and, to some extent, regional context. They are also increasingly viewed as independent building blocks in skills strategies responding to several drivers (such as

fast-changing labour market demands, digitalisation, ageing populations, the need for reskilling and upskilling). As they spread through different parts of education and training systems, and often in the non-formal or private sector, microcredentials might challenge the traditional national governance of qualifications and credentials systems.

Having common principles and common labelling for microcredentials is necessary as they are dynamic in nature and broad. They ‘tend to fly under the radar’, so using a ‘microscope’ could help zoom in on their profile and content; the specific, targeted and narrow range of skills that are behind short learning experiences. Considering that individual needs are very different, microcredentials can serve as ‘door openers’, addressing new and emerging skills or even serving as a stimulus to continue and/or go back to formal education, but can also be used as a tool ‘for excellence’ for particular target groups.

A key challenge in the coming years is to develop further Cedefop’s understanding of the links between vocational education and workplace requirements, and the role of microcredentials in supporting individual learners to accumulate learning across sectors, industries, borders and lifespans. ■

EU approach to
microcredentials



More on the Cedefop
conference on
microcredentials



Cedefop project:
Microcredentials
for labour market
education and training



Microcredentials: challenging views beyond Europe



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JULIE REDDY

CEO, SOUTH AFRICAN QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY



The recognition of learning does not necessarily have to be formally quality-assured and assessed to be recognised and have currency

Looking for a broader view on microcredentials, we interviewed two non-European keynote speakers at the Cedefop conference.

Dr Julie Reddy is the Chief Executive Officer of the South African Qualifications Authority and an expert with a distinguished career in skills and qualifications. She approves of the key principle behind microcredentials but voices some concerns about their use across the North-South divide.

What are your concerns about the definition of microcredentials?

My concerns stem from how the term 'credentials' is being used in the Global North, where

credentials equal qualifications in credential evaluation of qualifications, particularly in the higher-education space. To me, credentials are a much more expansive term that is commonly used to describe a person's abilities, experiences and agency to serve a purpose. A formally acquired qualification is but one item in a 'basket of credentials' attained by a lifelong learner in their lifetime and individualised learning journeys. The definitions being posited for microcredentials in the Global North are following a similar trajectory of trying to define it as an 'assessed and quality-assured' module or unit of learning. This suits the higher and formal education academy but continues to marginalise the recognition of non-formal and informal learning achievements.

Is there a place for microcredentials in your country's national qualifications framework (NQF)?

I am not opposed to the key principle underpinning microcredentials, which essentially is the recognition of credits and short learning programmes. The South African NQF has already been implementing this for many years. We have a national policy to register qualifications and part-qualifications/credits on our NQF. The question I am currently grappling with, given my concerns about the narrow definition and usage, is: do we need to follow the global trend and rename/rebrand what already exists in our system? My view is that both credentials and microcredentials, as currently



GAVIN MOODIE



People feel they need to promote microcredentials because they are deeply dissatisfied with the status quo

ADJUNCT PROFESSOR IN THE DEPARTMENT OF LEADERSHIP, HIGHER AND ADULT EDUCATION OISE, UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

defined, need to be qualified as terms relating to recognising a 'basket' of specified learning achievement and not be posited as a universal term to recognise formally certified qualifications and parts thereof.

In the current fast-moving digital era, how do you see people getting their skills and knowledge better recognised?

As a strong believer in lifelong learning, I am an activist for making all learning – formal, informal and non-formal/self-learning – visible so that it might be recognised and have currency for the learner in terms of their livelihood and other pursuits. To me the recognition of learning does not necessarily have to be formally quality-assured and assessed to be recognised and have currency. We must guard against commodifying all learning and its recognition, and prescribe what learning gets recognised and by whom.

'MINOR ADVANCE'

Professor Gavin Moodie, of the University of Toronto, looks at the role of microcredentials from a more sceptical point of view.

Comparing microcredentials

with the MOOC boom of the early 2000s, you argue that they have both been 'hyped extravagantly'. Why is that?

The claims that microcredentials will transform post-secondary education far exceed their likely impact, and indeed their impact so far. At best they may be a minor advance on longstanding practice, which may be valuable but is far more modest than the ambitious claims for them. People feel they need to promote microcredentials because they are deeply dissatisfied with the status quo and believe strongly in the change(s) they ascribe to microcredentials.

In your opinion, what is the role microcredentials can play in the current educational landscape?

Inasmuch as 'microcredentials' is a new label for what post-secondary education has been doing for decades, it is redundant and diverts from the steady progress that is being made. Inasmuch as the advocates for microcredentials seek to push post-secondary education in a new direction, that new direction would damage education and its students.

How can we make microcredentials work as more than a simple tool that serves the completion of a specific task? Can they, as part of a person's overall education and training, enrich what they know and do?

Microcredentials can't enrich what people know and do because they just give a new name to what people know and do, a new name which adds nothing to what people know and do. If they are to be educational credentials, it would be necessary to adopt a view on whether they report a volume of learning or the demonstration of a competence. If they state a volume of learning, it would be necessary to adopt a unit in which the volume would be measured, such as percentage of a year's study of a normal full-time student. If microcredentials are to state the demonstration of a competence, it would be necessary to adopt a view on how that competence was evaluated, the level of its performance, and how it may be expressed as a proportion of the competence demonstrated; for example, by someone who has completed an apprenticeship. ■

Construction workers

In the EU, over 7.5 million people are employed as construction workers. This makes it one of the largest occupations. It is a traditional vocational education and training (VET) occupation, which bundles a variety of jobs such as housebuilders, carpenters, stonemasons, plasterers, plumbers, painters and floor-layers.

Construction withstood relatively well the challenges the coronavirus pandemic brought about. While the first EU-wide lockdown in spring 2020 caused demand for construction workers to fall sharply, employment bounced back quickly. Since then, the pandemic appears to have had little impact on employment in construction. Skills, and later also material shortages, caused by the widespread disruption of logistics and supply chains, turned out to be much more challenging for European construction companies.

In many EU Member States there were ample new employment opportunities in construction, which

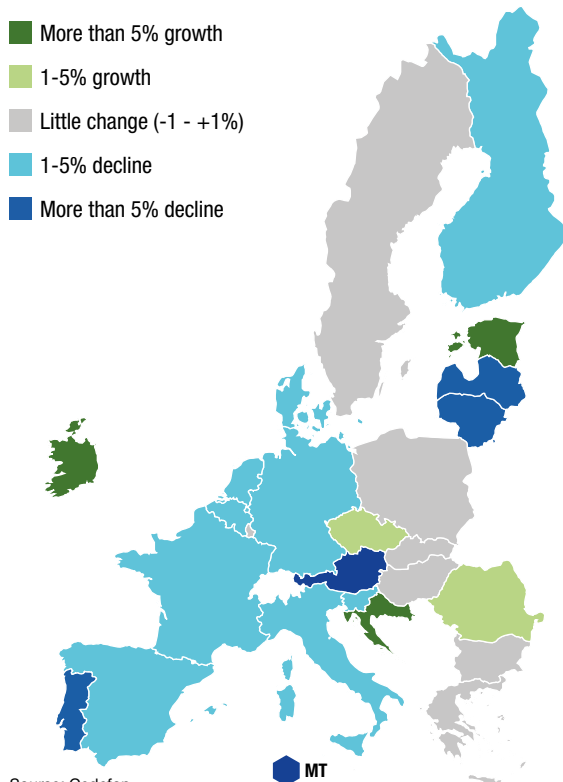
often could not be fully met because of limited supply of skilled workers. A 2021 survey among construction managers showed 1 in 7 construction companies had to limit production because of such skills shortages.

Cedefop forecasts good employment prospects for construction workers. Up to 500 000 new jobs are expected to be created in the 2020-30 decade, while 3 million construction workers will retire and need to be replaced. Implementing European green deal policies, including the renovation wave, is expected to lead to over 3% additional employment growth. Construction is central to achieving the green transition. To make it happen, millions of construction workers will need training on energy efficiency and renewable energy sources.

The construction sector is likely to remain a stable source of job opportunities. It has shown its resilience in the face of the largest employment crisis in more than a decade. Future demand for construction workers totals almost half of current employment. This already poses a challenge to education and training systems. Learning providers and policy-makers need to work together to address the double challenge of securing enough skilled construction workers and promoting and facilitating the up- and reskilling opportunities the sector and its workers need to make and shape the green transition. ■

Construction sector in the EU

Employment change 2019 to 2020 (in %)

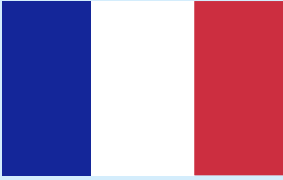


CONSTRUCTION WORKERS

- 7.5 million in the EU (2020)
- 3% female
- 32% aged 50 or older
- 3.6 million job openings up to 2030

Learn more about
construction
workers





Mobility in vocational education and training (VET) has been central in France since the Middle Ages when the *Compagnons du devoir* organised youth mobility among French and European craftsmen. Nowadays, several measures are being taken to continue to promote the mobility of learners enrolled in alternance training and, in particular, long-term mobility for apprentices.

France has also a long tradition of apprenticeship, dating back to the 19th century. The last reform, in 2018, reorganised the management of apprenticeship. In 2020, France had 2 500 apprenticeship training centres and 629 000 apprentices.

In 2018/19, 6 900 learners who were enrolled in alternance training in France benefited from Erasmus+ mobility, 30% more than two years earlier. 'This dynamic, combined with a post-COVID recovery and increased funding, could reach over 10 000 Erasmus+ mobility workers in 2022,' says Laure Coudret-Laut, Director of Erasmus+ France/Education Formation. The 4 080 apprentices in secondary education who left in 2018/19 accounted for 21% of the VET learners in Erasmus+ mobility that year. In 2018, the labour ministry announced its desire to double the number of apprentices on Erasmus by 2022.

The Erasmus programme has been open to apprentices and trainees in vocational training since 1995. However, this mobility is often limited to a few

Apprentice
mobility
increasingly
popular in



weeks, unlike student mobility. Former MEP Jean Arthuis, now President of EuroApp Mobility, is promoting the long-term mobility of apprentices and trainees. The action targets all kinds of obstacles: legal, academic, financial, educational, linguistic and psychological.

A French project to promote apprentice mobility within the EU could serve as a roadmap for ALMA, the new EU programme to help young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs). As 22-year-old Arthur Miche, a car mechanic, testified after six months of training in the UK, the experience of mobility is not going to stop in France. 'It was hard at first, but soon I felt good,' he says, encouraging all apprentices to go for it: 'This is a really crazy experience.'

The French EU Presidency of the first half of 2022 will work on similar topics that cover the European skills strategy, such as training strategies and retraining for adults, the impact of the green transition on training policies and apprenticeship, and European mobility of learners. ■



by REFERNET
FRANCE

Skills-based

mobility of refugees

within the



There is a need to overcome the traditional divide between refugee protection and labour market mobility

The prospect of creating labour mobility opportunities allowing refugees to move lawfully from first-asylum EU Member States to other EU countries, based on both their skills and qualifications and the recipient labour market needs, was the focus of a pioneering Cedefop research project, concluded in the second semester of 2021.

Cedefop researchers investigated how refugees could be selected and be able to move lawfully from the country where they applied for asylum (sending country) to another host country (receiving country), mainly thanks to their potential to fill labour demand gaps linked to real employment opportunities that are hard to fill with the local labour force.

The paper explores the idea both from a theoretical and an empirical point of view, focusing on how (and if at all) vocational education and training (VET), skills and qualifications were used in the context of the EU relocation programme of September 2015 to September 2017; identifying the potential and interest of countries to work further on this skills-based solution to refugee protection by engaging with a variety of stakeholders in selected Member States; and running a pilot intra-EU relocation scheme between Greece and Portugal to pinpoint difficulties, needs and opportunities on the ground.

A DUAL APPROACH

The analysis considers the possibility of skills-based mobility for refugees from a third country to an EU

Member State as a form of complementary pathway, or from one EU country to another, and makes use of a theoretical framework comprising a dual approach: the migratory and the labour-market one.

The migratory component examines the intricacies of the refugees' admission status as a prerequisite, their legal status in the receiving country, the challenge of striking a balance between the need for quick relocation from the first country of asylum (e.g. in the EU to relieve the country's pressure on the national asylum system) and the time and context needed to conduct some form of skill assessment that would allow selection and matching of potential beneficiaries of such solutions with available labour market opportunities in a receiving country.

The labour-market view argues that the design of a skills-based solution to refugee protection must start from the demand side, from the employers (skill-demand approach), rather than the supply side (availability of skills). This means that reaching out to employers in the receiving country is crucial; however, information on the supply side is also a priority. Therefore, a database that provides access to the skills of refugees is as important as a list of potential job offers or a list of employers participating in an initiative.

Additionally, attention is drawn to various obstacles, such as barriers to regulated professions, referencing of qualifications and language



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proficiency, suggesting that these obstacles can only be tackled in the long run. The paper stresses that this, as well the feasibility of the scheme as a whole, heavily depends on political support, particularly in the receiving country.

EMPIRICAL GAINS

The limited-scope pilot scheme aiming at Portuguese employers hiring refugees residing in Greece led to no actual hirings, but it produced several benefits for research.

At the receiving country end, it helped map the expectations of Portuguese employers, the type of skills and competences they are looking for, and the support they expect and could provide. On the sending country's side, it allowed researchers to summarise the challenges, opportunities and lessons learnt from the profiling of refugees in Greece and to spot policy implications.

Commenting on the outcomes, Cedefop's Ramona David said that, given the circumstances, the 'chances of achieving actual hirings were almost null since the outset, but the stakes were higher. The work with employers in Portugal clearly revealed the necessity to involve employers more in national strategies on integration. To this end, national migration and integration authorities need to create

a strategy regularly and proactively reaching out to employers and to build and maintain an employers' network.'

Talking about the lessons learnt from the project's practical component, Cedefop's Ioannis Katsikis noted that it was shown that refugees and employers are willing to participate in cross-country programmes allowing legal mobility of refugees based on employment, where refugees would retain the status when admitted to a destination country based on skills.

He added: 'To make it work, there is a need, among others, to overcome the traditional divide between refugee protection and labour market mobility; to identify refugees' skills as soon as possible upon arrival in the EU, and create a unique repository of refugees' talents; and to create a repository of employers and skill needs.' ■

Cedefop report: Creating lawful opportunities for adult refugee labour market mobility



The EU's New pact on migration and asylum



Cedefop policy brief: Relocation 2.0: tying adult refugee skills to labour market demand



New Cedefop web portal: an interactive journey



With the launch of a new-generation web portal, Cedefop goes beyond the simple provision of static information on European vocational education and training, skills and qualifications

Cedefop has been providing up-to-date, reliable and relevant information on its website since 1996, dedicating substantial resources to ensuring a positive web experience for users.

With the launch of a new-generation web portal, Cedefop goes beyond the simple provision of static information on European vocational education and training (VET), skills and qualifications.

The new portal empowers users with actionable insights, while continuing to offer easy access to Cedefop's publications and events; news and videos; country-specific findings; statistical overviews; indicators on VET and skills; data visualisations and tools.

WHAT'S NEW?

Thematic access points compile related data and content across Cedefop's multiple data sets. This innovative approach entails new ways of presenting and understanding the Agency's findings.

The thematic access points reflect Cedefop's strategic vision:

- skills and labour market;
- VET knowledge centre;
- delivering VET and qualifications.

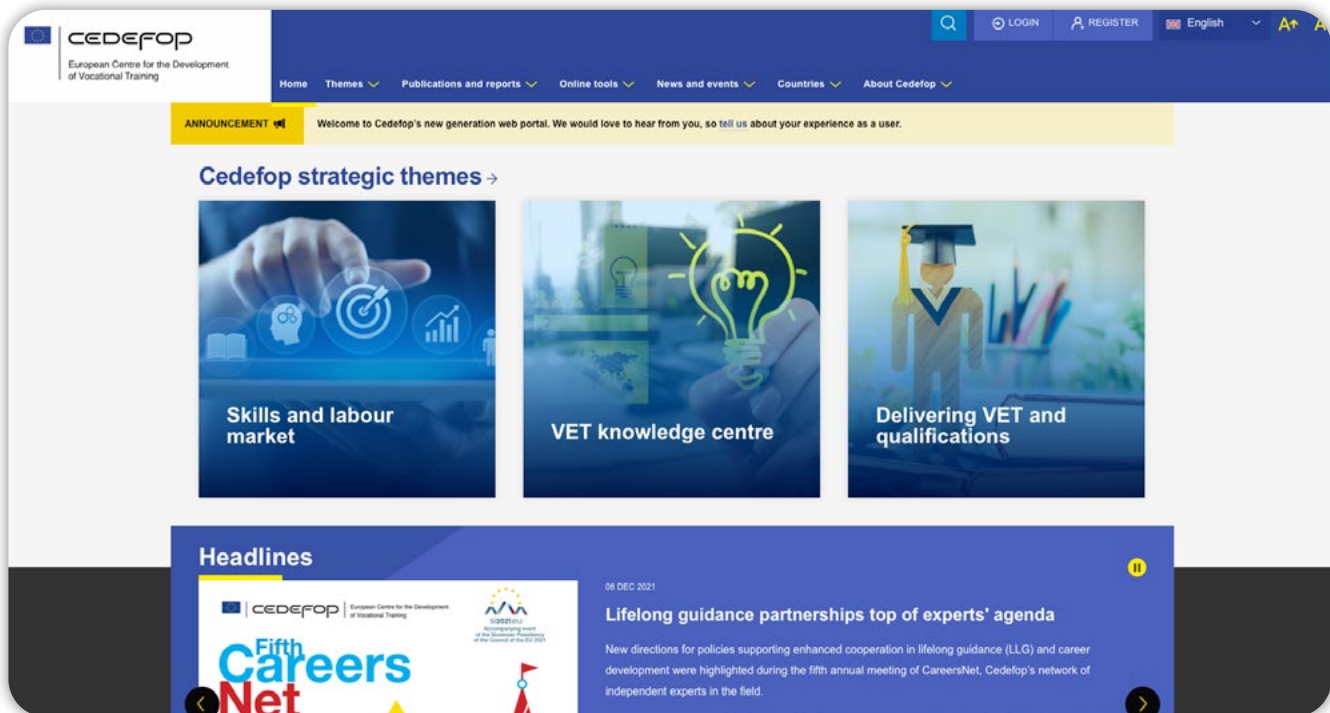
They are supported by transversal access points:

- national VET systems;
- statistics.

The 'Skills and labour market' theme focuses on what drives changing skill needs and how skills policies contribute to meeting them. Improving VET systems depends on high-quality and timely insights on job-market dynamics and new skill demands. Cedefop analyses how changing economic and social megatrends, such as workforce ageing and the digital and green transitions, generate new skill demands and skill mismatches, and reshape the future of work in EU workplaces.

To support policy-making in making lifelong learning a reality for everybody, the 'VET knowledge centre' brings together expertise from different areas of VET and VET-related policies. It includes information and evidence from Cedefop's work on teachers and trainers' professional development, apprenticeships, tackling early leaving from VET and empowering NEETs (people not in employment, education or training), continuing VET and upskilling pathways for adults, guidance, validation, and financing and other incentives.

How do systems respond to new needs and prepare for the future? 'Delivering VET and qualifications' seeks to provide answers to this question. Cedefop gathers and compares data from Europe and beyond to support the development of VET systems and institutions that are responsive to the skill demands of labour markets and society. The delivery of VET is influenced by the use of learning



outcomes which act as a common language for the content and profile of VET. Based on an analysis of the strengths and limitations of this approach, Cedefop develops guidance and support tools for curriculum development, learning methods, and the design and application of assessment and validation.

RAISING OUTREACH

Cedefop Head of Communication Gerd-Oskar Bausewein outlines the idea behind the change: 'Three strategic themes explain what Cedefop is about and guide visitors of our new web portal to their individual area of interest. I believe that our user-friendly dashboards, interactive online tools and target-group-specific data visualisations will notably contribute to expanding the outreach and impact of Cedefop's research.'

Cedefop's web content management coordinator Nancy Toussaint adds that 'with the redesign of the web portal, our goal was to go beyond the pure provision of information and to empower our users

with meaningful working tools that provide new ways of interacting with our content online.'

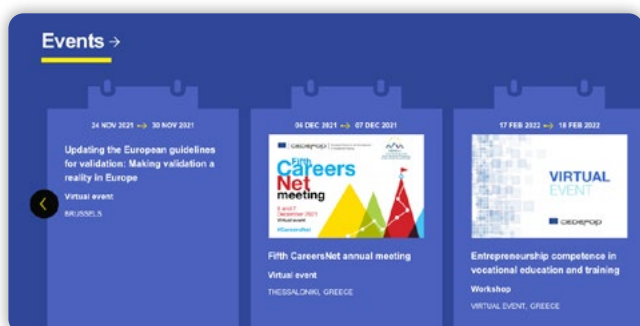
WHAT ELSE IS NEW?

The new portal is equipped with innovative data visualisations, interactive online tools, additional functionalities and a more powerful search function. These upgraded features not only allow easy access to content, they also enable users to interact with the content across multiple data sets, bringing together quantitative and qualitative content on VET, skills and qualifications.

In the Skills intelligence online tool, users can find the content from the Skills Panorama website. The tool provides all the information on occupations, sectors, countries and skills created during the life of Skills Panorama as a standalone website.

At the same time, skills intelligence becomes closely integrated with the rest of the Cedefop website. Its indicators, dashboards and data insights are connected to the large family of Cedefop's publications, reports, articles and other content.

We hope our new web portal meets your expectations. ■



Check out the new Cedefop web portal!



Tell us about your experience as a user!



new

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IN FOCUS

ENABLERS AND DISABLERS OF CROSS-BORDER LONG-TERM APPRENTICE MOBILITY

Cross-border long-term mobility of apprentices is understood as the period an apprentice spends abroad in in-company training, potentially combined with training at a vocational education (VET) and training provider, typically of up to 12 months, as part of their apprenticeship training. It is more difficult to organise than mobility in school-based VET and higher education, largely because the training companies must be willing to let the apprentice undergo a part of his/her training abroad. This publication presents reflections on the enablers and disablers of such mobility and shows what would need to be considered to make it work in the medium to long term.

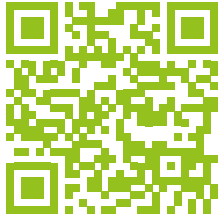


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OTHER PUBLICATIONS:

- Apprenticeship governance and in-company training: where labour market and education meet
- Artificial intelligence and job automation: an EU analysis using online job vacancy data
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- Adapting business practices to new realities in the middle of a crisis – First findings from the COVID-19 European company survey
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- Digital transitions in lifelong guidance: rethinking careers practitioner professionalism

coming up



For the latest information on what's coming up, go to www.cedefop.europa.eu/events or scan this QR code

IN FOCUS

ENTREPRENEURSHIP COMPETENCE IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

17-18 FEBRUARY

WORKSHOP (VIRTUAL)



Entrepreneurship competence generally supports a higher rate of start-ups, leads to better employability and prevents social exclusion. It is not only about starting a business but also about creating value for others, innovation, inclusion and sustainable development; hence a must-have key competence for all. This Cedefop workshop will give a platform to European vocational education and training (VET) stakeholders to: discuss the research methodology piloted by Cedefop's research team in Italy and Latvia; share first results on how the entrepreneurship competence is embedded in VET, including policy implementation challenges; and discuss tools and methods that can help policy-makers, social partners and training providers overcome barriers in promoting the financial, cultural or social value of entrepreneurship in VET.

OTHER EVENTS

MARCH	21-22	VIRTUAL EVENT	Monitoring and evaluation in lifelong guidance – towards future European standards? The event will present results of Cedefop's study on support and incentives for learning and careers, discuss a proposed monitoring and evaluation framework, and generate new knowledge for building the evidence base on monitoring and evaluation in career guidance.
MAY	19-20	ICELAND	Validation of prior learning (VPL) for integrated approaches in lifelong learning – 4th VPL Biennale. Hosted by Iceland's Education and Training Service Centre, the biennale will examine VPL in different contexts and pathways of work and life, explore various validation processes and support measures, and present lessons from results achieved around the world.



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Publications Office

ISSN 2363-0175



9 772363 017506