European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training

EUROPEAN SKILLS & VET WEEK 2026

Microcredentials in Europe: from policy ambition to implementation

MICRO-CREDENTIALS IN LITHUANIA: FROM A MODEL TO A FUNCTIONING SYSTEM



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Are microcredentials becoming a BIG DEAL?

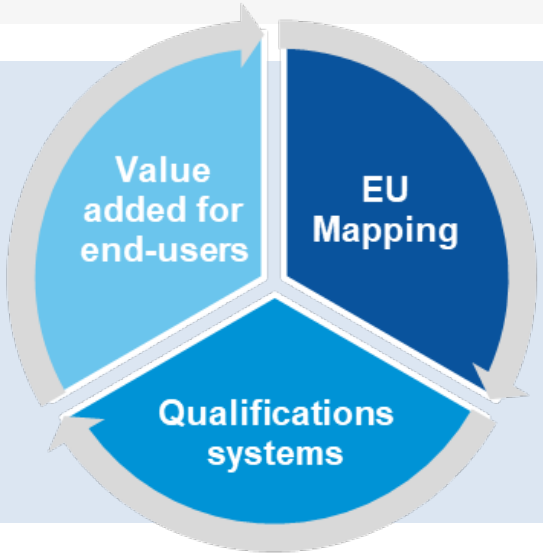
2020-2023
Cedefop study on VET and LM

2021
Cedefop supports EC and the SWD with data from VET

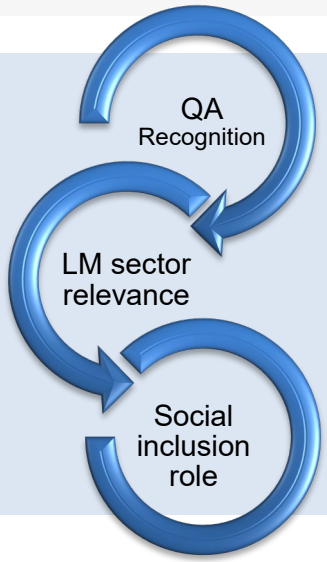
2022
EC Council Recommendation MCs for LLL and employability

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

2025-2027
Cedefop New research: Deepening on MCs



Monitoring implementation

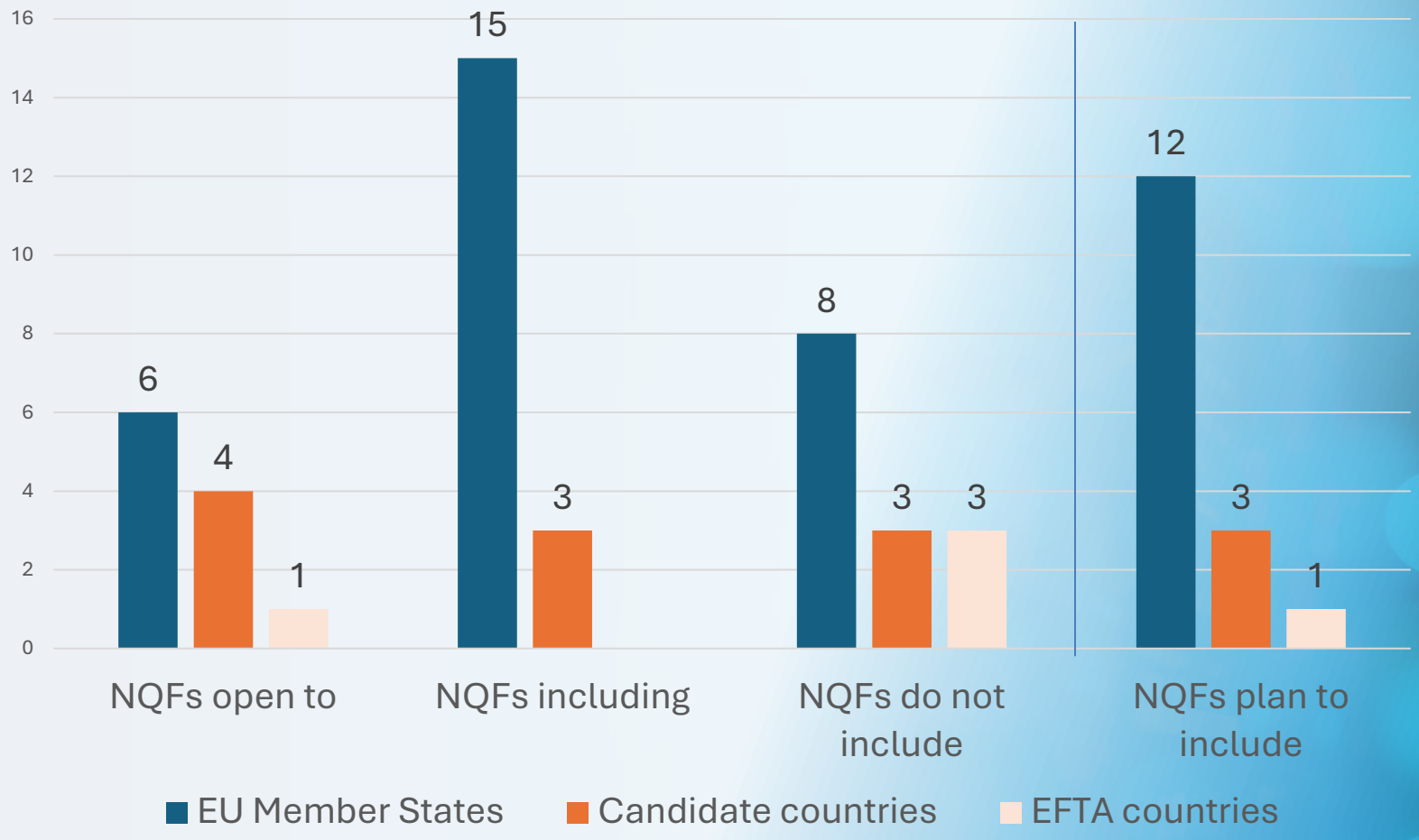


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Microcredentials as part of qualifications systems



Microcredentials in NQFs (2024)





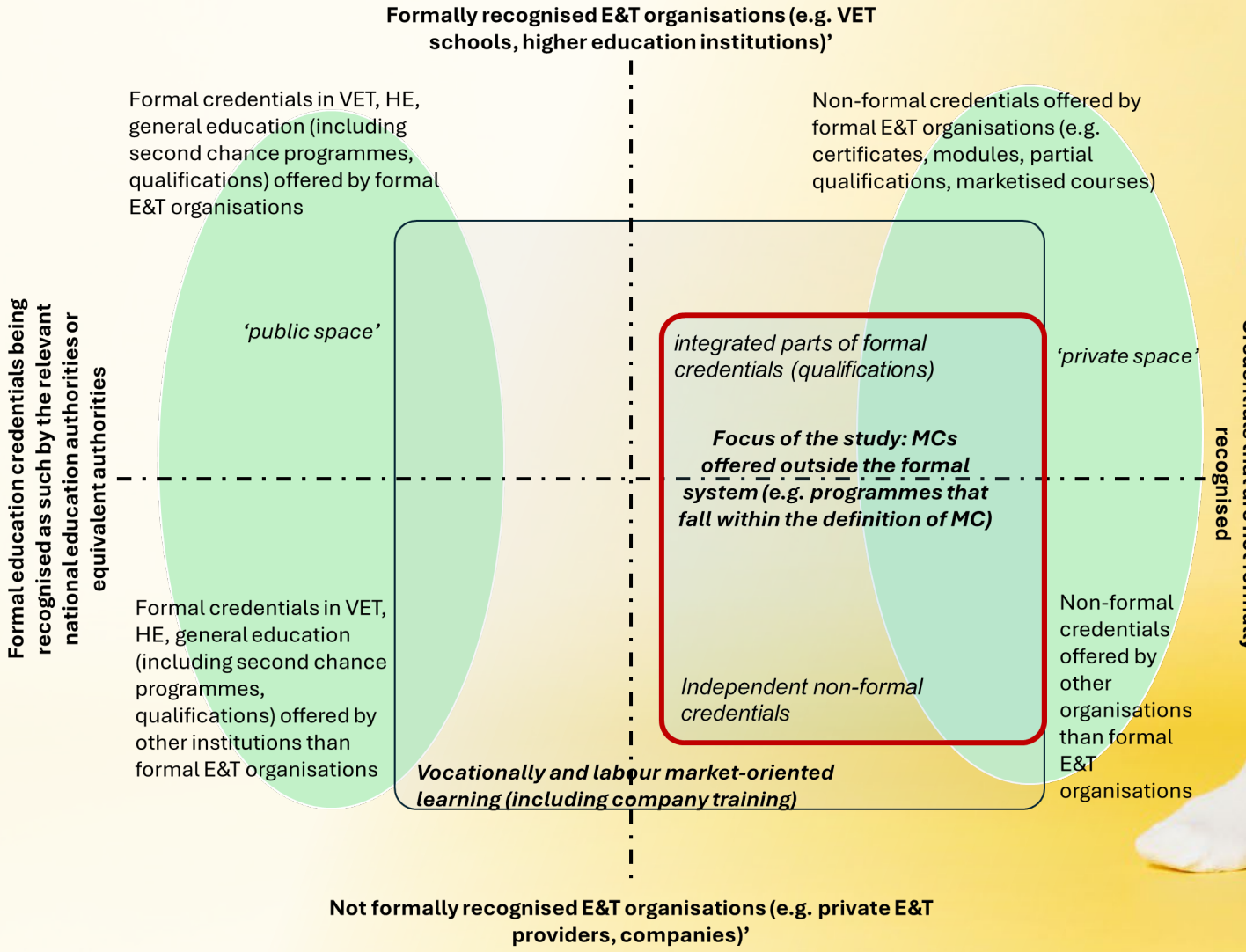
Source: Policy brief [Making qualifications and skills more visible]

Types of microcredentials in NQFs (examples)

Croatia	Micro-qualifications, part of adult education Lifelong learning programmes offered by higher education institutions
Cyprus	Partial vocational qualifications included in the System of Vocational Qualifications (SVQ)
Czechia	Vocational qualifications
Denmark	Qualifications awarded outside formal education and training Supplementary qualifications; acquired in adult education and training
Finland	Competence modules
Ireland	Minor awards Supplemental awards Special purpose awards
Italy	Micro qualifications
Malta	Awards
Moldova	Partial qualifications (micro-qualifications)



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





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Deepening on microcredentials

Study methodology

1 Work assignment 1
Mapping and understanding microcredentials across Europe

1. **Extensive literature review**
   Mapping existing evidence and developing a conceptual framework
2. **EU-wide survey on MC and quality assurance mechanisms**
   Collecting descriptions of non-formal microcredential(-like) offers
   Complemented by national experts
3. **Targeted follow-up calls**
   Contextualising and clarifying survey responses
4. **Country case studies**
   Eight national studies → exploring national practices in depth

2 Work assignment 2
Microcredentials in selected sectors

1. **Desk research to set the scene and identify key information on each of the sectors**
   - analysis of general literature and quantitative data
   - screening and mapping of sector-specific microcredentials
2. **Interviews with providers**
   to gain further insights on microcredentials in the selected sectors
3. **Two focus groups**
   Zoom in on the role of microcredentials and fill in data gaps on challenges/obstacles to their use in the labour market – prioritising representatives of employers.
4. **Two case study reports**

3 Work assignment 3
Microcredentials for disadvantaged groups

1. **Desk research**
   Building on findings from the previous work assignments.
2. **Structured collection of information**
   through questionnairies completed by Cedefop's ReferNet members.
3. **Mapping of initiatives and practices**
   related to microcredentials targeting disadvantaged groups.
   a. Development of a database
4. **In-depth analysis of 16 cases**
5. **Data analysis and synthesis**
   of key findings
6. **Stakeholder consultation**
   through a validation workshop.

1. Understanding the overall landscape and key features of microcredentials
2. Sector-specific insights on use and function
3. Focus on inclusion: how microcredentials support disadvantaged groups



Typology of microcredentials
outside formal education and training

- Education-system credentials
- Regulatory credentials
- Sectoral and occupational credentials
- Employer and corporate credentials
- Provider-led market credentials

Source of legitimacy

- Educational authority, governance and QA of a formal education or training institution
- Legislation, public authorities or bodies exercising regulatory powers
- Collective recognition by sectors, social partners or occupational bodies
- Employer, company, technology-vendor or corporate-ecosystem authority
- Provider expertise, reputation, transparency and market acceptance

Key findings

Mapping the diversity of MCs outside formal ET

01 Key characteristics



- Most MCs: **clear LM** oriented **focus**
- **Broad** competences or **specialised** occupational competences.
- Main users include **working adults, jobseekers and career changers**.
- Education-system credentials mostly linked to **credit transfer** and **accumulation**; still limited stackability.
- **Regulatory** and **sectoral** credentials often certify demonstrated competence
- **Employer-** and **provider-led** credentials address changing skills needs.

02 Functions & recognition

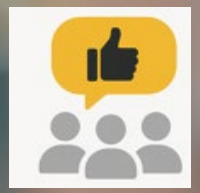


- MCs create value through **certification, signalling and recognition**.
- **Value** of MCs linked to intended purpose, **not universal recognition.**
- Public authority, institutional standing, sectoral acceptance and market reputation generate value.
- **Creating LM value** is a key function but fostering **progression in learning** is also visible
- Links between validation arrangements and MCs are **uneven** across EU countries

- There is no single QA model: assurance depends on type, purpose and governance context.
- Effective QA can combine learning outcomes, assessment, documentation, provider quality and external validation.
- Keep QA proportionate and preserve flexibility to respond to changing skills needs.







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Current research:

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

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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 institutionalised social dialogue
8. sectors 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

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Key findings
Construction sector

Sector context

- Construction: a **mature and highly institutionalised** landscape of education, training and professional certification.
- Significant **labour shortages and persistent skills gaps**, alongside substantial replacement demand due to retirement.
- Key sectoral transformations: **green transition, digitalisation and the industrialisation** of construction processes.

- **Complement traditional qualifications** — not a substitute**:** Microcredentials still require strong foundational skills.
- **Rapid response to emerging skills:** Their short format enables **quick upskilling aligned with changing labour-market needs**
- **Practical, targeted skills:** due to climate change
- Strongest microcredential offer when **labour market change** most **rapid**
- Targeted upskilling needs evident, although the term remains **mainly used in higher education**.
- **Labour-market recognition:** Microcredentials gain recognition by **responding directly to construction-sector skills needs**

Key findings

Cultural and creative industries (CCI)

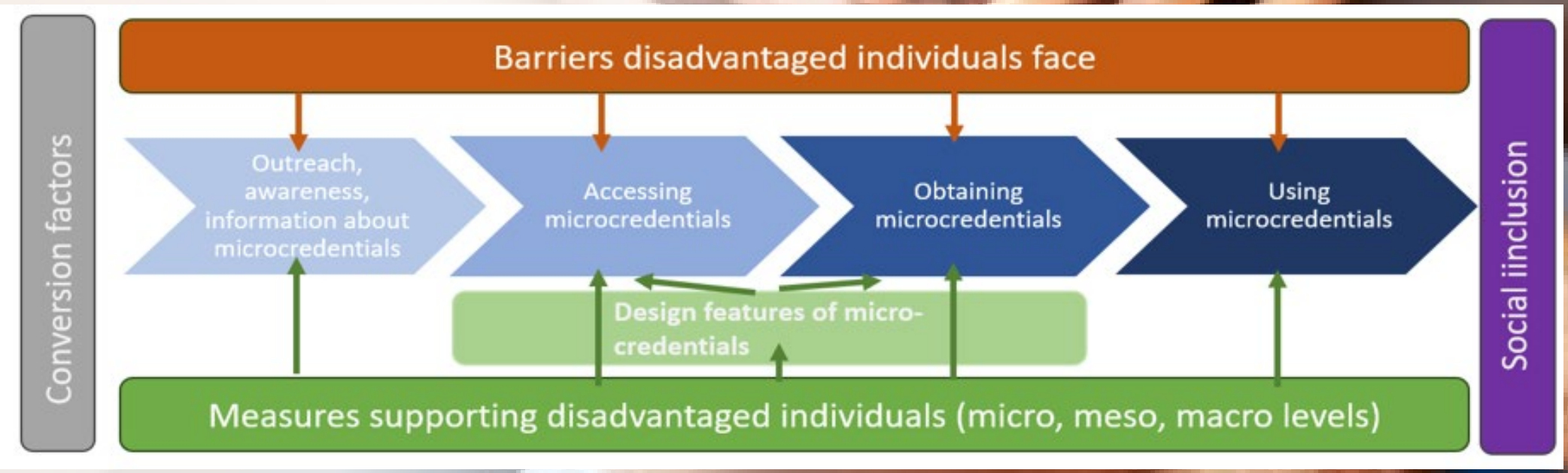
Sector context

- CCI is a **highly diverse, fragmented and heterogeneous** sector.
- Dominated by **SMEs, Micro-enterprises, Freelancers** and **self-employed** workers
- Employment ⟹ **project-based work, portfolio careers and informal and practice-based** learning
- Key trends: **digitalisation and AI, the green transition and sustainability** and growing need for **entrepreneurial and adaptive skills**

- **High potential but still developing unevenly**
- **Make skills visible** through informal and non-formal learning
- **Industry involvement key** to labour-market relevance and recognition
- **Employer trust depends more on occupational relevance** than formal accreditation alone
- **Practice-based assessment** reflects the nature of creative work
- **Two models are emerging:** HE-led (transversal skills) and industry-led (occupation-specific skills)
- **Key challenge:** balance flexibility and industry responsiveness with **quality assurance and wider recognition**.

The evolving role of MCs for social inclusion

Navigating the learners' journey



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Interim findings

Can microcredentials promote inclusion?

Three broad patterns

- Few countries offer microcredentials that already fulfil a social inclusion function;
- Microcredentials exist without specifically targeting disadvantaged learners/workers;
- Microcredential-like offers aim to support disadvantaged learners/workers.

Target groups

- General terms often used (disadvantaged, vulnerable, or underrepresented groups)
- Strong emphasis on jobseekers, low-skilled adults; migration-related disadvantages are also addressed.

Access to employment and learning pathways

- Microcredentials are more often framed as tools for employment, upskilling and lifelong learning than as dedicated social-inclusion instruments.

Dedicated approaches and evidence are limited

- Target-group-specific initiatives are uneven.
- Evidence on uptake, use and impact remains sparse, indicating that microcredentials for disadvantaged learners are still an emerging field.

Source: Preliminary findings based on ReferNet questionnaires.

Key interim findings II: barriers and support across the learner journey

Stage	Main barriers identified	Support measures identified
1. Outreach/ information	Low awareness; confusing terminology; limited visibility	Awareness campaigns and events; partnerships and cooperation; online platforms; guidance
2 Accessing	Time and cost constraints; low confidence; negative prior learning experiences	Tailoring provision to target group's needs and skills; counselling; vouchers or fee support
3 Obtaining	Digital, literacy and language gaps; difficulty with self-directed learning	Accessible materials; coaching, mentoring and learning support
4 Using	Uncertainty about labour market value; unclear stackability and progression	Guidance; awareness raising among companies; communicating benefits

Support imbalance:
mismatch between barriers and the existing support measures

Tailored packages are needed:
combined financial, guidance, language/digital and learning support

Source: Preliminary findings based on literature, ReferNet contributions and initiatives reviewed.

Germany: Partial qualifications (*Teilqualifikationen*, TQ)

01 Key characteristics

- Part of **non-formal continuing vocational education and training**
- **Stackable parts** of a recognised training occupation
- **Final examination** can lead to a recognised vocational qualification.
- Offered by **certified training providers** for occupations in various economic sectors.
- TQs jointly implemented by a **broad spectrum of stakeholders**
- **Structured pathway** back to learning and employment

02 Focus on inclusion

- **Target group:** adults above 25, including unemployed adults, low-skilled workers, migrants and refugees
- TQ approach can be **tailored to different groups**, for example through **learning coaching**, **individual guidance** or **language support**
- Support is also offered to host companies
- **On-site consultation** with each participant
- Theoretical component and in-company training **can be extended**

MICROCREDENTIALS IN LITHUANIA

Cedefop country evidence | 2025 questionnaire

17,668

certificates issued through Individual Learning Accounts (ILAs), 2024–25

9.8%

adult learning participation in 2024

POLICY & PROVISION

No official national definition yet; a cross-sector model is being developed, with approval expected in 2026.

Short learning offers already exist across formal VET modules, non-formal VET and adult education.

The KURSUOK platform / ILAs system has increased participation; 17,668 certificates were issued in 2024–25.

HOW THEY WORK

Formal VET modules and non-formal VET programmes typically lead to recognised digital certificates (NQF levels 2–5).

Offers span sectors including construction, manufacturing, IT, engineering, services, logistics and arts.

Main purposes: upskilling, reskilling and career mobility; delivery is often blended and includes assessment.

INCLUSION & CHALLENGES

Used by unemployed people, people with disabilities, migrants, low-income groups, older workers and learners with SEN.

KURSUOK provides quality-checked offers, guidance and up to €500 funding for eligible learners.

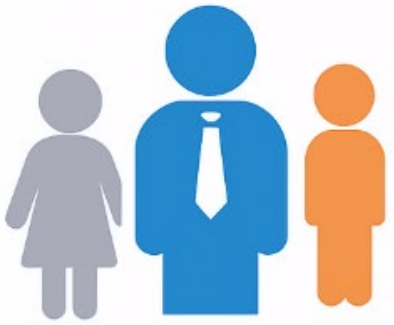
Key gaps: fragmented quality and recognition, limited data, funding and digital-access barriers, and insufficiently tailored provision.

Source: Lithuania – Cedefop Questionnaire on Microcredentials (2025), especially sections A, B, C and D. Figures and policy status as reported in the questionnaire.

Overall reflections



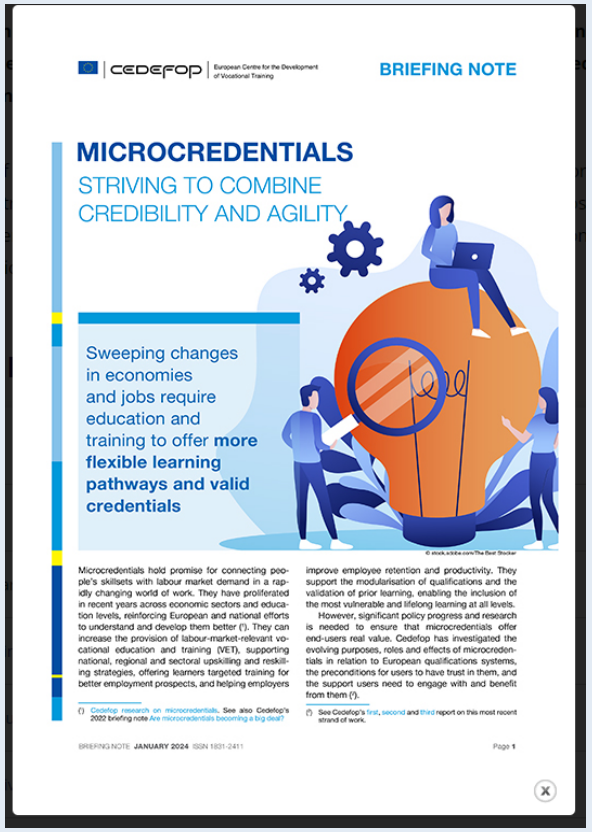
- Need for **agility** in VET system- Establish a **common transparency baseline** tailored to the needs of credentials.
- MC **ecosystems** can only be understood in relation to their **governance** configurations:
  - the degree of state involvement,
  - the strength of sectoral coordination,
  - and the way validation systems are structured.
- The mix of providers of microcredentials with a LM orientation is **broad** but **uneven**
- **Validation** provides a possible but **currently limited route** to the award of microcredentials
- **Recognition** remains **fragmented**
- Make **information** and **credential infrastructures usable**

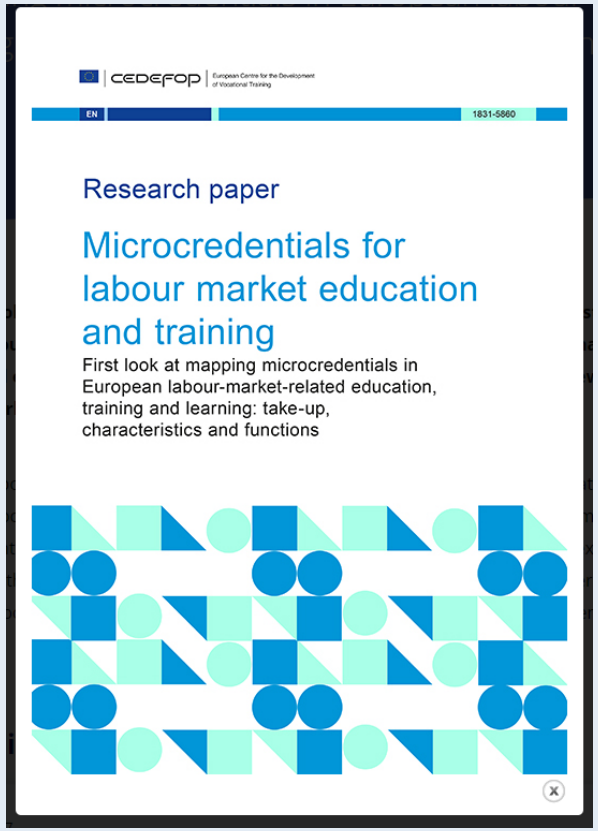


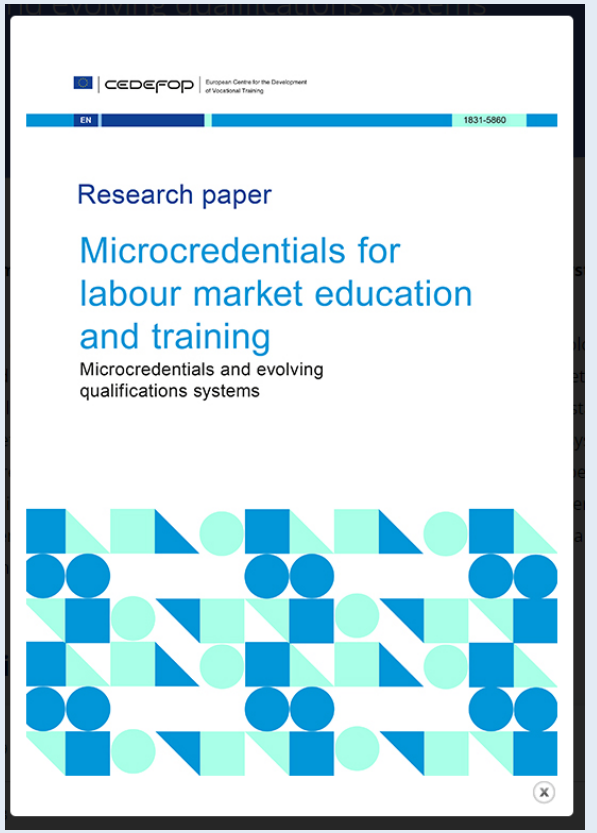


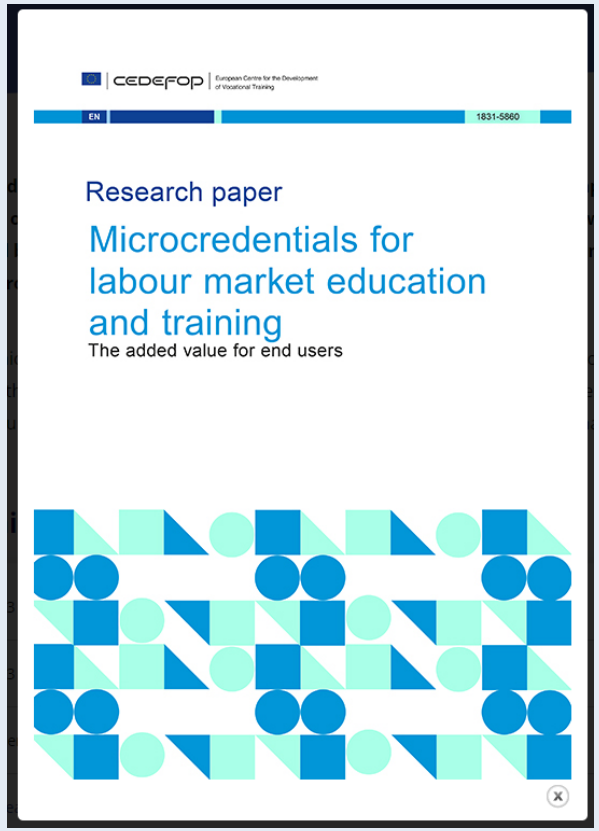
Microcredentials in Europe

Publications









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