European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training

Deepening on Microcredentials: A focus on construction skills

Sustainable and resilient construction sector:
WHAT, HOW and WHO will drive the skills revolution?

Conference, Sofia, Bulgaria



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21 October 2026

Are microcredentials becoming a BIG DEAL?

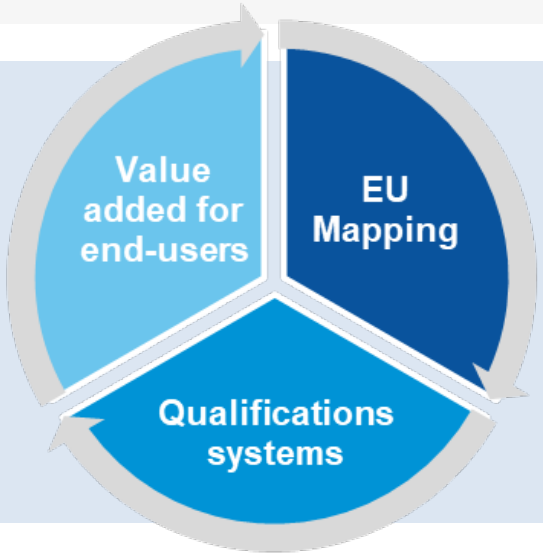
2020-2023
Cedefop study on VET and LM

2021
Cedefop supports EC and the SWD with data from VET

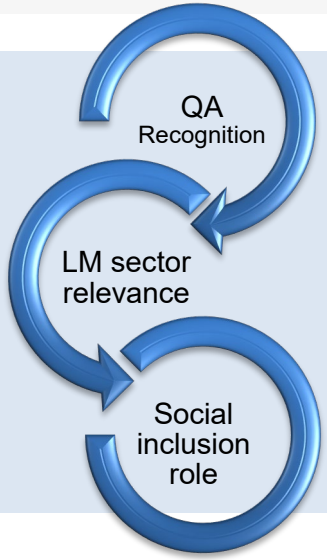
2022
EC Council Recommendation MCs for LLL and employability

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

2025-2027
Cedefop New research: Deepening on MCs



Monitoring implementation



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**

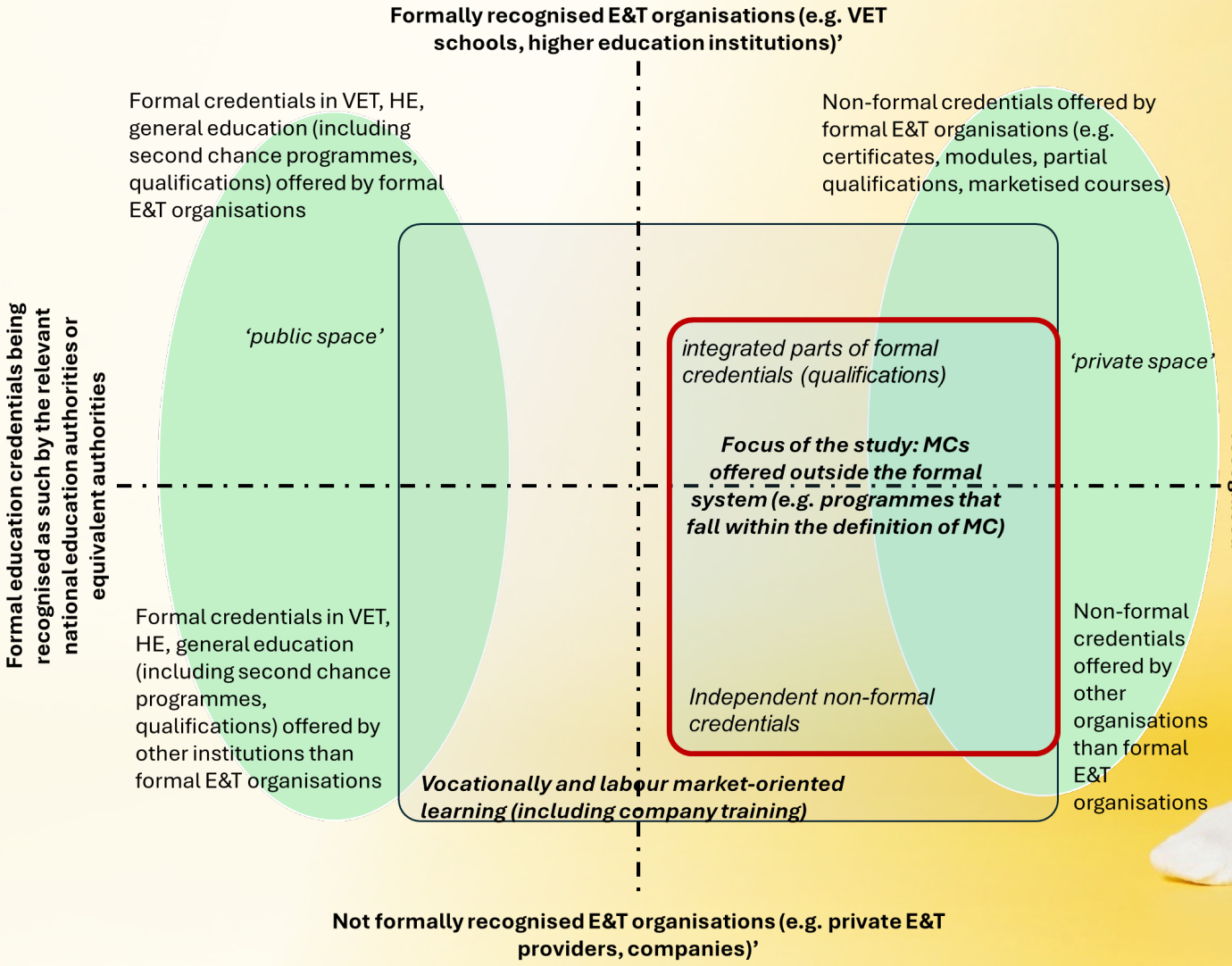
3 Work assignment 3
Microcredentials for disadvantaged groups

1. **Desk research**
   Building on findings from the previous work assignments.
2. **Structured collection of information**
   through questionnaires 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



Positioning microcredentials in non-formal education and training





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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



Sectoral focus:

- 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

Zooming in on construction sector (focus on greening)

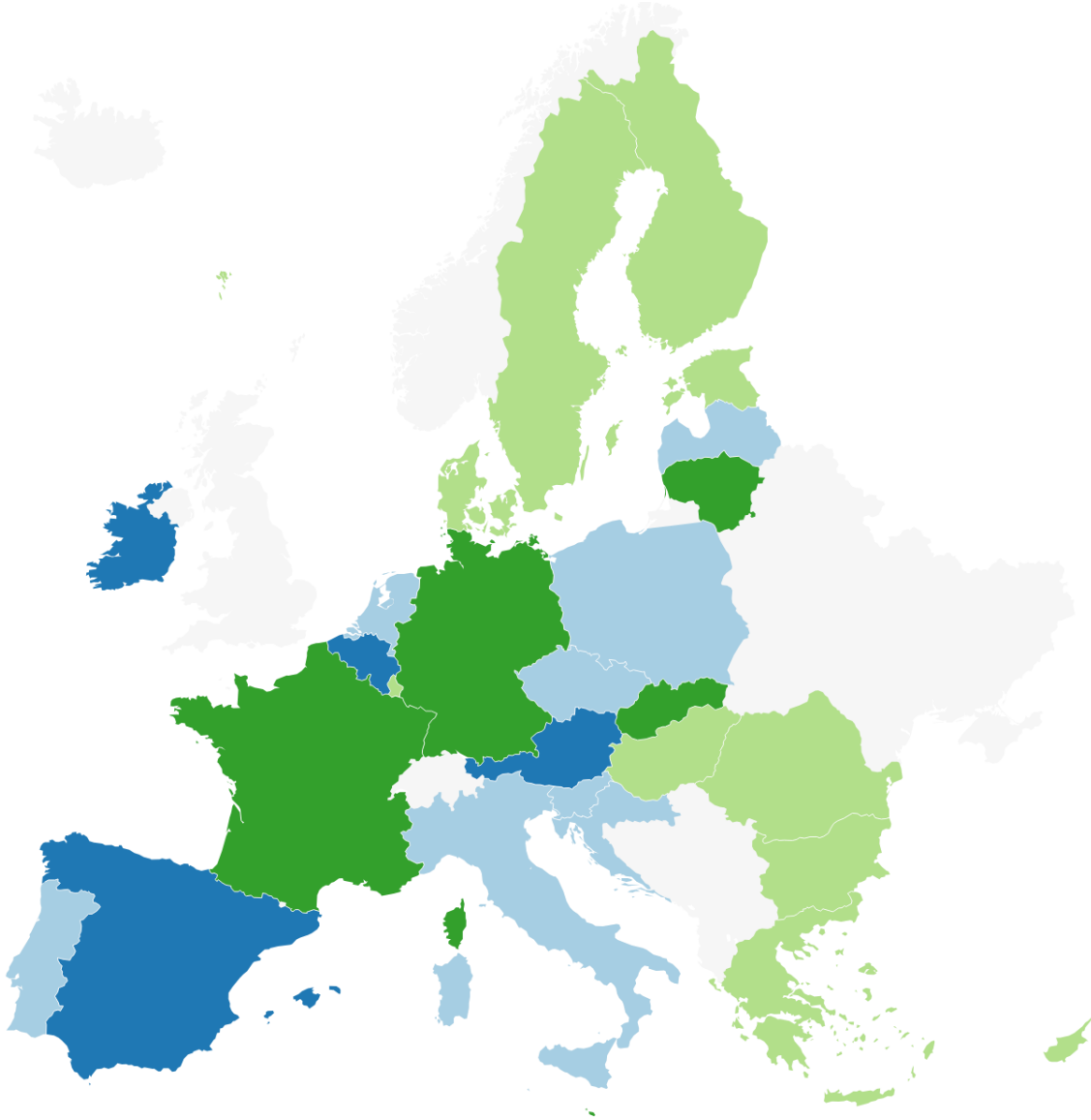
- ***Widespread*** *with large and small employers, a large share of migrant workers and institutionalised social dialogue*
- ***A total of 5.6 million persons****, or 3% of the total workforce, are employed in either construction of buildings or civil engineering in the EU*
- ***Green transition****: huge impact on the sector- EU Renovation Wave Strategy and Energy Performance of Buildings Directive pushing fwd change with in-demand skills*
- *Sector undergoing* ***digital transformation****, new digital tools for management and planning requiring advanced skills*
- *Microcredentials are* ***directly included in sectoral strategies****: Engineers for Europe Skills Strategy*
- *Sector provides opportunity to* ***focus on TSCs*** *(interpersonal skills)*



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Microcredentials overview

1. Initial findings indicate that **certification practices in the construction sector remain to a large extent informal and highly practice-oriented**
2. The distribution of microcredentials across Member States is **highly uneven**.
3. Existing examples are generally isolated, only rarely interconnected, and appear to be at an **early stage of development.**
4. Most identified examples of microcredentials originate from the **higher education sector/ linked to EU funded projects.**
5. Term not common in the construction sector. However, a variety of **short programmes in the construction sector** is evident.



Features of MCs in construction sector

- ✓ Issued by providers of formal education programmes and professional
- ✓ Sector-recognised credentials
- ✓ Employer-issued microcredentials remain difficult to identify
- ✓ Addressed to individuals already employed within the industry
- ✓ Rarely use explicitly formulated learning outcomes
- ✓ The largest share of microcredentials identified appears to focus on occupation-specific learning outcomes
- ✓ The duration and workload of microcredentials in the construction sector vary significantly

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Key findings
Construction sector

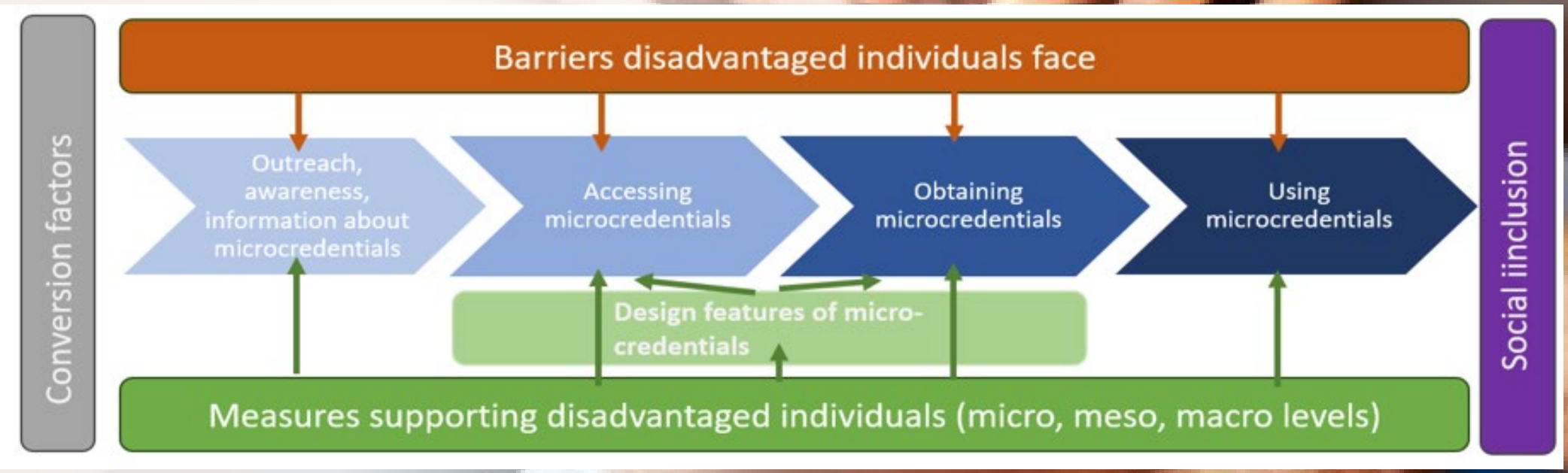
Sector context

- 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**

The evolving role of MCs for social inclusion

Navigating the learners' journey



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Key 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

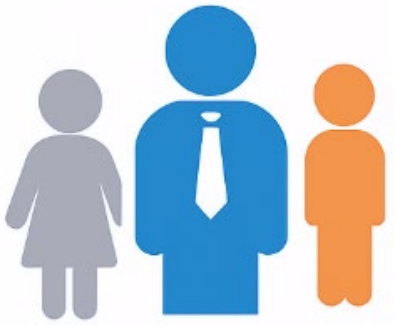
- Target-group-specific initiatives are uneven.
- Evidence on uptake, use and impact remains sparse, indicating that microcredentials for disadvantaged learners are still an emerging field.

Source: Preliminary findings based on ReferNet questionnaires.

Overall reflections



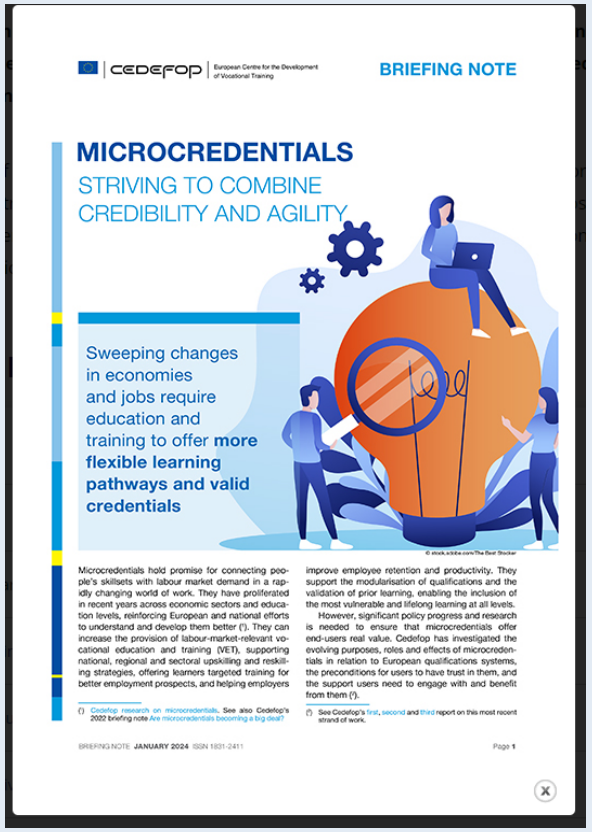
- Need for **agility** in VET system- Establish a **common transparency baseline** tailored to the needs of credentials.
- MC **ecosystems** can only be understood in relation to their **governance** configurations:
  - the degree of state involvement,
  - the strength of sectoral coordination,
  - and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

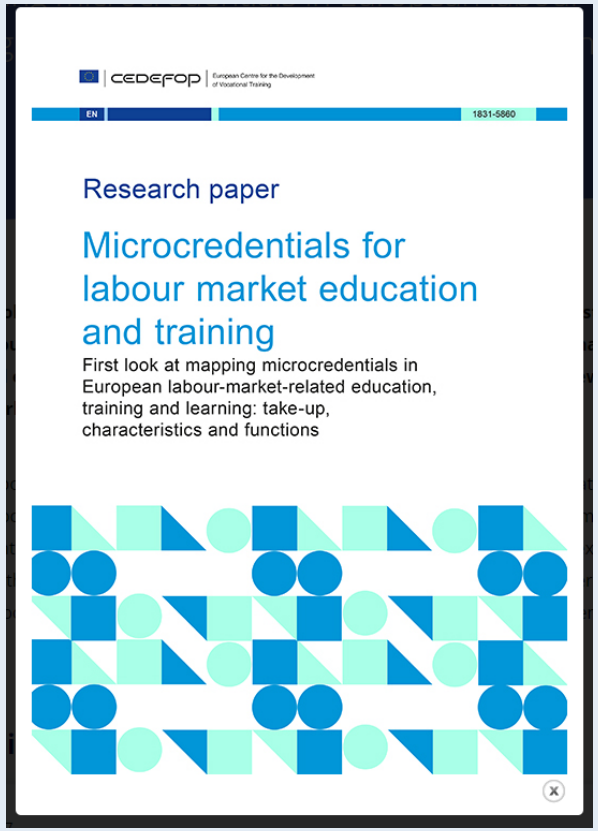


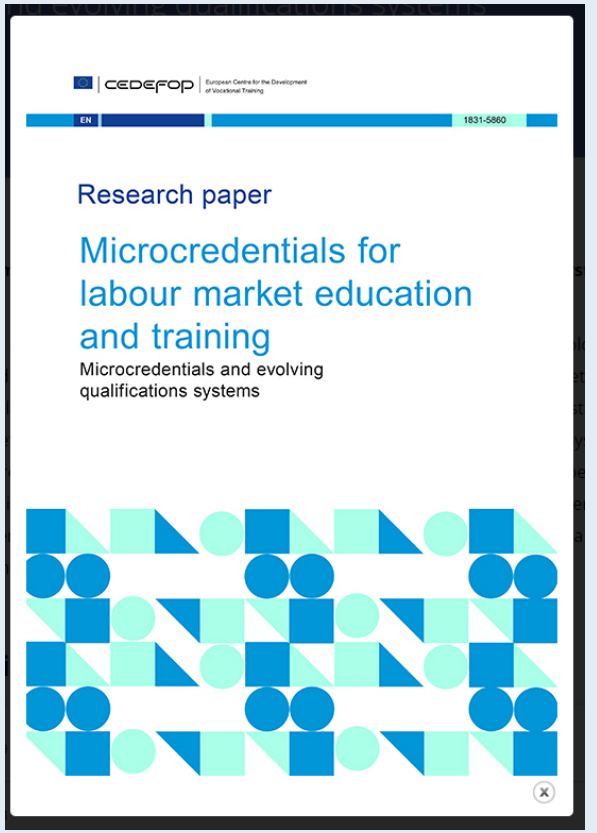


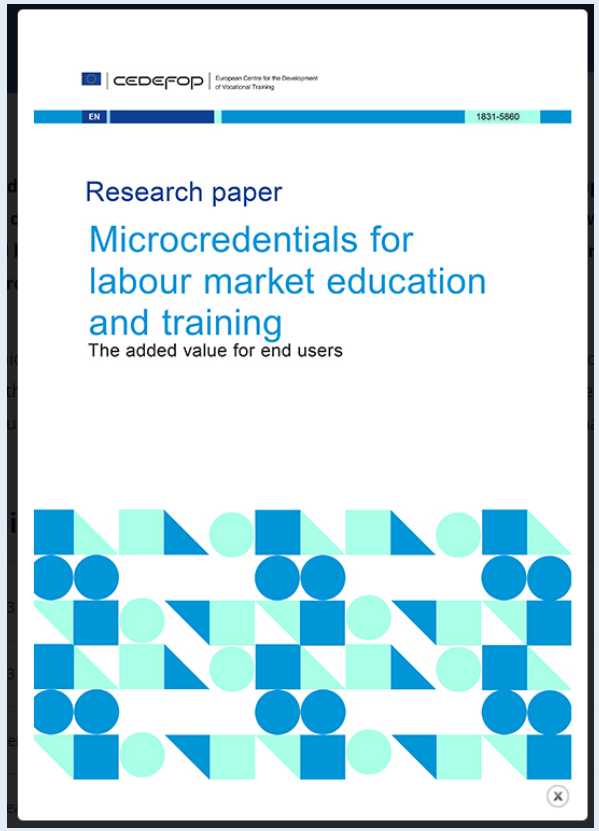
Microcredentials in Europe

Publications









Thank you

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For further information:
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Project page
www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/projects/microcredentials-labour-market-education-and-training

Publications
www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications/6221
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Podcasts
Cedefop/ILO podcast on Microcredentials: powerful new learning tool or just “pouring old wine into new bottles”?
Credentials unscripted podcast for the US context.
Available in Spotify and Apple Podcasts

YouTube video recordings (VGT, 29 September 2026)

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