MyCred4Home

Benchmark REPORT

Result 1

DOCUMENT TITLE

Benchmarking report (MyCred4Home Result 1)

AUTHOR

Marta Tybura, STEPS

CONTRIBUTORS

MyCred4Home Partners:

IPERIA, GDOCE, University of Cyprus, Centre Familial de Bruxelles

REVIEWERS

Roberto Righi (STEPS), Marion Marty (IPERIA), Ariana Camacho (IPERIA)

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

- **formal learning** means learning which takes place in an organised and structured environment, specifically dedicated to learning, and typically leads to the award of a qualification, usually in the form of a certificate or a diploma; it includes systems of general education, initial vocational training and higher education;

- **non-formal learning** means learning which takes place through planned activities (in terms of learning objectives, learning time) where some form of learning support is present (e.g. student-teacher relationships); it may cover programmes to impart work skills, adult literacy and basic education for early school leavers; very common cases of non-formal learning include in-company training, through which companies update and improve the skills of their workers such as ICT skills, structured on-line learning (e.g. by making use of open educational resources), and courses organised by civil society organisations for their members, their target group or the general public;

- **informal learning** means learning resulting from daily activities related to work, family or leisure and is not organized or structured in terms of objectives, time or learning support; it may be unintentional from the learner's perspective; examples of learning outcomes acquired through informal learning are skills acquired through life and work experiences, project management skills or ICT skills acquired at work, languages learned and intercultural skills acquired during a stay in another country, ICT skills acquired outside work, skills acquired through volunteering, cultural activities, sports, youth work and through activities at home (e.g. taking care of a child);

- **open educational resources (OER)** means digitised materials offered freely and openly for educators, students and selflearners to use and reuse for teaching, learning and research; it includes learning content, software tools to develop, use and distribute content, and implementation resources such as open licences; OER also refers to accumulated digital assets that can be adjusted and which provide benefits without restricting the possibilities for others to enjoy them;

- **a skills audit** means a process aimed at identifying and analysing the knowledge, skills and competences of an individual, including his or her aptitudes and motivations in order to define a career project and/or plan a professional reorientation or training project; the aim of a skills audit is to help the individual analyse his/her career background, to self-assess his/her position in the labour environment and to plan a career pathway, or in some cases to prepare for the validation of non-formal or informal learning outcomes;

- **a qualification** means a formal outcome of an assessment and validation process which is obtained when a competent body determines that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards;

- **learning outcomes** means statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process, which are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competences;

- **a national qualifications framework** means an instrument for the classification of qualifications according to a set of criteria for specified levels of learning achieved, which aims to integrate and coordinate national qualifications subsystems and improve the transparency, access, progression and quality of qualifications in relation to the labour market and civil society;

- **validation**[1] means a process of confirmation by an authorised body that an individual has acquired learning outcomes measured against a relevant standard and consists of the following four distinct phases:
1) IDENTIFICATION through dialogue of particular experiences of an individual;
2) DOCUMENTATION to make visible the individual's experiences;
3) a formal ASSESSMENT of these experiences; and
4) CERTIFICATION of the results of the assessment which may lead to a partial or full qualification or credits leading to a qualification.

- **recognition of prior learning** means the validation of learning outcomes, whether from formal education or non-formal or informal learning, acquired before requesting validation.

- **micro-credential**[2] is a recognised proof of the learning outcomes that a learner has achieved following a short learning experience, according to transparent standards and requirements and upon assessment. 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. Micro-credentials are owned by the learner, are shareable, portable and may be combined into larger credentials or qualifications.

- **Personal and Household services (PHS)** means as stated by the European Commission, PHS are services that cover a broad range of activities that contribute to well-being at the homes of families and individuals: childcare (CC), long-term care (LTC) for the elderly and for persons with disabilities, cleaning, remedial classes, home repairs, gardening, ICT support, and so on.

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[1] The Council recommendation on validation of non-formal and informal learning, 2012:
https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/Council_Recommendation_on_the_validation_20_December_2012.pdf
[2] Erasmus+ Guide, Glossary of terms: https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/programme-guide/part-d/glossary-common-terms

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FOREWORD

The above document is the result of work of the MyCred4Home partnership. The MyCred4Home project is funded by the Erasmus+ Programme, Cooperation Partnerships in Adult Education. The Benchmarking Report presents first Result of the MyCred4Home project, about the existing initiatives on micro-credentials specially for low qualified profiles. It delivers an overview of the validation and certification of small volumes of learning outcome in partner's countriesThe research was conducted by five institutions (IPERIA, STEPS, GDOCE, University of Cyprus, Centre Familial de Bruxelles) respectively in: France, Italy, Cyprus, Spain and Belgium. The timeframe of the project covers 30 months: from November 1st 2021 to April 30th 2024 , the baseline study was carried out from November to June 2022.

The document also presents an analysis of the initiatives regarding the validation of small volumes of learning outcomes as well as micro-credentials' role in supporting labour-market employment, education, training, and learning with a special focus on personal and household services (PHS) sector.

The report is composed of 2 main parts:

1) introductory part describing the European context of micro-credentials;
2) analysis of the research activity carried out by the partnership, starting with the MyCred4Home methodology description, followed by the presentation of desk and field research results.

This report includes analysis of 10 practices and 6 interviews with experts from public and private sector, offering therefore a significant overview about the addressed topic. The extent of the collection of data was limited to the purpose of MyCred4Home project and is not representing a full analysis on the presence and role of micro-credentials in partnership countries.

The opinions expressed and arguments employed herein are those of the authors. The report does not represent the official views of the European Commission.

The information in this report is up-to-date as of 1 August 2022.

RATIONALE. WHAT IS THE PROJECT ABOUT & WHAT ARE THE NEEDS THE MYCRED4HOME PROJECT PLANS TO ADDRESS?

The growing use of micro-credentials is an outcome of the changing nature of the labour market and of growing uncertainty as to what work will look like in the future. Fewer "jobs for life" now exist, and employers demand flexibility and quick reactions to changing circumstances. The lockdown measures introduced across the EU in the light of COVID-19 had a substantial impact on the EU labour market, with millions of workers losing their jobs or being placed under short-term work schemes. Micro-credentials are particularly useful in this situation, as they allow for personalised, tailored, quick and accessible skills (re)development. "With growing consensus on the need for more responsive education, training and learning systems that allow individuals to upskill and retrain in quicker and more flexible ways, **alternative credentials have come under the spotlight**. Although qualifications and degrees from initial education and training still play a key role, alternative credentials (including digital badges, microcredentials, nanocredentials, minor awards, etc.) are seen as necessary to make existing qualifications and credentials systems better fit for purpose. This priority was acknowledged in the **2020 EU skills agenda** which is calling for a European approach to microcredentials."[3]

The **MyCred4Home** project intends to promote social and professional inclusion for low qualified profiles by **combining two EU tools: micro-credentials and the validation of non-formal and informal learning**. Their common aim is to help individuals to get their skills recognised and valued more easily and quickly, and transform them into better employment opportunities, and therefore into inclusion.
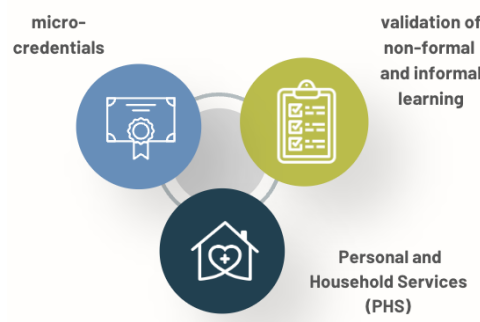
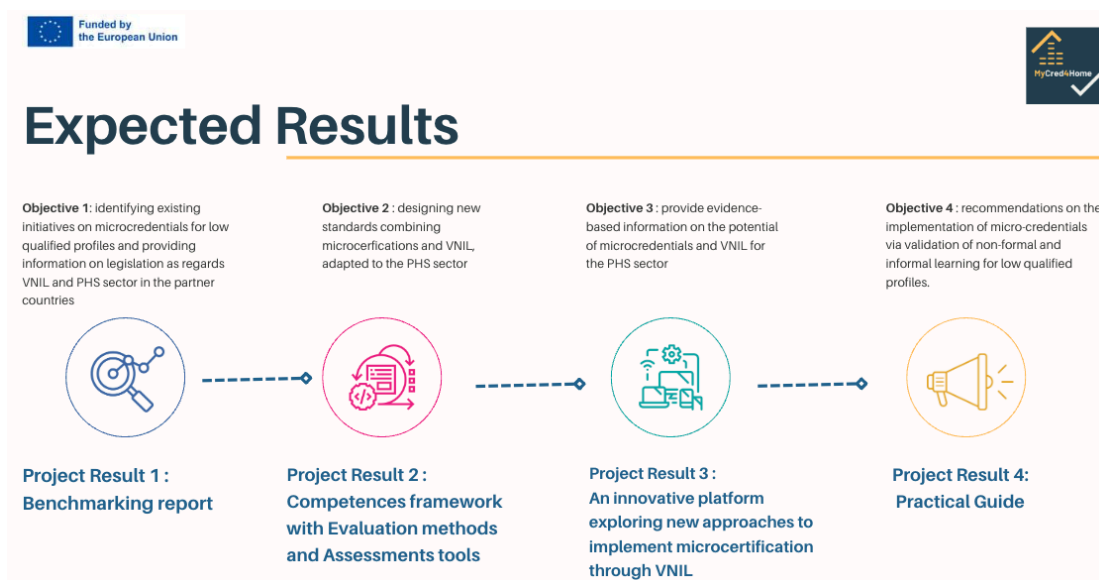(image source: project communication tools, developed by STEPS)

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[3] Micro-credentials are they here to stay, CEDEFOP, https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news/microcredentials-are-they-here-stay

The personal and household services (PHS) sector has been chosen as particularly propitious for this purpose, since it combines several facilitating features: it requires a wide range of basic, hard, soft and transversal skills, which can be largely applicable to other sectors; secondly, despite all this set or rich skills, PHS professionals often lack of sufficient recognition and a targeted tool like micro-credentials, combined with validation, could offer promising perspectives; lastly, the current demographic trends are driving an increasing demand of these services resulting into a growing demand of qualified workers, which can turn into a powerful leverage for raising awareness and spreading micro-credentials.

The MyCred4Home project partners will jointly work to reach **4 MAIN OBJECTIVES thanks to the development of following 4 RESUSULTS**:

(image source: project communication tools, developed by STEPS)

The **Benchmarking Report** contributes to the preliminary researches carried out by the partnership and presents description of current situation of the use, role and potential of micro-credentials in partner countries. On the basis of the report findings, the partners will develop standards for key competences in the PHS sector, as well as evaluation and validation tools. These standards and tools will make it possible to explore the potential of validation of non-formal and informal learning for micro-credentials. The final project result will provide useful insights on the implementation of micro-credentials and could serve as inspiration for other target groups and sectors as a promising tool to boost employability and social inclusion, especially for disadvantaged groups.

MICRO-CREDENTIALS AND THE POLITICAL CONTEXT

Recently micro-credentials gained EU-wide attention in policy debates. Most countries, as yet, have no official definition. Even the term "micro-credentials" is not well-known, with certificates for short learning formats being referred to in various ways, including micro certifications, badges, micro/partial/supplementary qualifications and module certificates.

Why are micro-credentials raising interest?

Achieving inclusion, both social and professional, is a complex goal requiring complementary and concrete actions to bring down barriers, especially those related to knowledge and skills development and recognition. The current pandemic context and its impact on a changing labour market urges to develop new initiatives and tools, building as much as possible on the existing ones, to ensure no one is left behind.

Professor Brown form Dublin City University in his presentation titled "Global market of micro-credentials - Untangling a Twisted Story" is listing employability and life-long learning as two main drivers for the increasing role of micro-credentials significantly boosted by digitalization.

Drivers and Attractors for Micro-credentials

	All Publications		Highly Relevant	
	n	%	n	%
Increase employability	94	63.5	38	84.4
Support CPD and workplace training	88	59.5	28	62.2
Increase flexibility for learning	80	54.1	34	75.6
Close skills gaps in response to changing nature of work	74	50.0	32	71.1
Promote lifelong learning	71	48.0	30	66.7
Develop 21st Century transversal skills	50	33.8	23	51.1
Develop a new 21st Century credential ecology	35	23.6	22	48.9
Increase access and pathways to formal education	30	20.3	17	37.8
Support new models of pedagogy	27	18.2	12	26.7
Respond to COVID crisis	23	15.5	14	31.1
Reflects Neo-liberal market forces	22	14.9	5	11.1
Test innovations and trigger changes	13	8.8	6	13.3
Reduce costs of education and training	12	8.1	5	11.1
Increase equity for under-represented groups	12	8.1	6	13.3

65%
Employability

48%
Lifelong Learning

(source: Global market of microcredentials - Untangling a Twisted Story - M. Brown)[4]

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[4] Global market of microcredentials - Untangling a Twisted Story - M. Brown , https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/10._day_2_-_session_2_-_global_market_of_microcredentials_-_untangling_a_twisted_story_-_m._brown.pdf

Major European policy initiatives related to micro-credentials

In the foreword to the **"European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning"**[5] Detlef Eckert Director for Skills, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion highlighted that "we are presented with opportunities to learn every day. Beyond the formal classroom setting, we can acquire the most valuable of knowledge, skills and competences in our daily lives, be it at work, at home or during leisure time. Learning throughout life is a key route to personal development and acknowledging such learning can give greater value to citizen's achievements and their potential contributions to society. Despite this, the influence of traditional forms of education remains strong, with non-formal and informal learning often ignored and undervalued. **The 2012 Council recommendation on validation of non-formal and informal learning** recognises this conflict and seeks to promote a more systematic approach to 'validation', to increase the visibility and value of learning taking place outside formal education and training systems. Validation arrangements can be of benefit to all citizens and **help combat unemployment by improving skills matching and social cohesion**. Validation can offer crucial support to the unemployed or those at risk of losing their jobs by enabling citizens communicate the value of their skills and experiences either to potential employers or when returning to formal education to earn a new qualification. Validation can also form part of the **response to the current refugee crisis** through identification, documentation, assessment and certification of migrants' previous experiences, to support quicker and smoother integration into host countries. For individuals that need to **redirect their careers**, validation can open a door to new occupations. It can also play a major role in **combating youth unemployment** by making skills acquired through voluntary work, or during leisure, visible to employers."

- **Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning**[6] highlighted an important role of validation for the employability
  The validation of learning outcomes, namely knowledge, skills and competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning can play an important role in enhancing employability and mobility, as well as increasing motivation for lifelong learning, particularly in the case of the socio-economically disadvantaged or the low-qualified.
  The links between validation and recognition of small sets of skills is an issue that deserves further development, also in relation to innovative practices of skills

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[6] https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/Council_Recommendation_on_the_validation_20_December_2012.pdf

recognition such as micro-credentials, which are often linked to short courses, but may also have an impact on validation activities.

- **"European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning"** - "a link to formal credit and qualifications is not enough. Validation should take advantage of innovative practices in skills recognition, such as micro-credentials. As micro-credentials recognise a small or very small set of skills, they can be a useful instrument to validate skills developed outside formal education and training. If they are developed and awarded respecting agreed standards of quality assurance and transparency, micro-credentials could make learning pathways more flexible. Appropriate developments, closely coordinated with qualifications frameworks, could build upon the experience gained through the implementation of ECVET and national experience with partial qualifications".

- **The "Europe 2020" strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth** calls for the development of knowledge, skills and competences for achieving economic growth and employment. **The accompanying flagship initiatives "Youth on the Move" and the "Agenda for new skills and jobs"** emphasise the need for more flexible learning pathways that can improve entry into and progression in the labour market, facilitate transitions between the phases of work and learning and promote the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

November 2017, the EU institutions formally proclaimed the European Pillar of Social Rights. Its first principle is that 'Everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and life-long learning in order to maintain and acquire skills that enable them to participate fully in society and manage successfully transitions in the labour market'.

- **"Communication - European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience (2020)"[7]**

Under point 3.2 of the Communication we can read: "Empowering workers to up- and reskill throughout their entire lives also means **making sure that all learning**

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experiences are properly valued. Increasingly, workers are attending short and tailored training and need to get recognition for that. Such courses can be **offered by a variety of education and training providers** (e.g. higher education institutions, VET providers, research organisations, industry, social partners, Chambers of Commerce, Industry or Crafts, civil society organisations).

Micro-credentials recognise the results of such short courses, often in the digital field, and capture their results. They can increase permeability between different education pathways/systems and improve flexibility. They can **make learning more adapted to individual needs**, thus **fostering more innovative and inclusive approaches and facilitating access to the labour market and job transitions**. They can also **facilitate further learning**, as they may be cumulated to obtain a larger credential, allowing individuals to accumulate learning outcomes over time and across institutions, sectors and borders and also online through e-learning schemes. However, to date (2020) no European standards exist to support the quality, transparency and take-up of micro-credentials across the EU."

> Example: "Ivana is an experienced supermarket stock manager. A new software is opening up possibilities for less waste – if she and her staff can master its use. By following a short, targeted training module provided by her industry federation, she will be awarded a micro credential as proof of her new skills – ready to put to use with her current or future employer.

-   **Proposal for a COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION on vocational education and training (VET) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience, 2020[8]**
    The Commission Proposal aims at renewing the EU's VET policy by:

- "Modularising VET programmes and expanding them to higher levels of qualifications and micro-credentials. Modularisation – breaking vocational qualifications into smaller parts of learning outcomes –is the way to flexibly update the content and to customise it to the needs of individuals. Validation of learning outcomes acquired in non-formal and informal learning will facilitate up-and reskilling, leading not only to full qualifications, but to micro-credentials or partial qualifications. It also helps to bridge between different fields, which is necessary for the developing area of green and sustainable economy.

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[8] https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:8e89305c-bc37-11ea-811c-01aa75ed71a1.0001.02/DOC_1&format=PDF

- Vocational education and training programmes are based on modules or units of learning outcome sand validation mechanisms are in place allowing the transfer, recognition and accumulation of individuals' learning outcomes with a view to gaining a qualification, a partial qualification, or a micro-credential, as relevant".

- **Proposal for a Council Recommendation on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability[9], 10 December 2021**

  To strengthen lifelong learning, the Council is recommending member states **to adopt a European approach to micro-credentials and in particular to apply a common EU definition, EU standards and key principles for the design and issuance of micro-credentials.** The goal is that member states, stakeholders and providers (from education and training institutions to private companies) develop and use micro-credentials in a coherent way.

  Among other things the recommendation contains the following points:

  - A number of standard elements to describe a micro-credential. These include: the learning outcomes, workload needed to achieve the learning outcomes and the type of assessment
  - Guidance to develop an ecosystem for micro-credentials for instance by promoting the development of micro-credentials designed and agreed by employers' and workers' representatives and by applying and developing quality assurance mechanisms.

  Member states are invited to inform the Commission by December 2023 about measures to support the objectives of the recommendation.

- **EU standard on micro-credentials** proposed by the Network of Experts working on the Social dimension of Education and Training (NESET)[10], issued on 28.01.2021

  This could ensure the transparency of micro-credentials at all levels of education and training in the context of lifelong learning. Such an EU standard would contain varied information about learning outcomes, quality assurance and assessment. Group discussions and contributions from European projects and studies resulted in the

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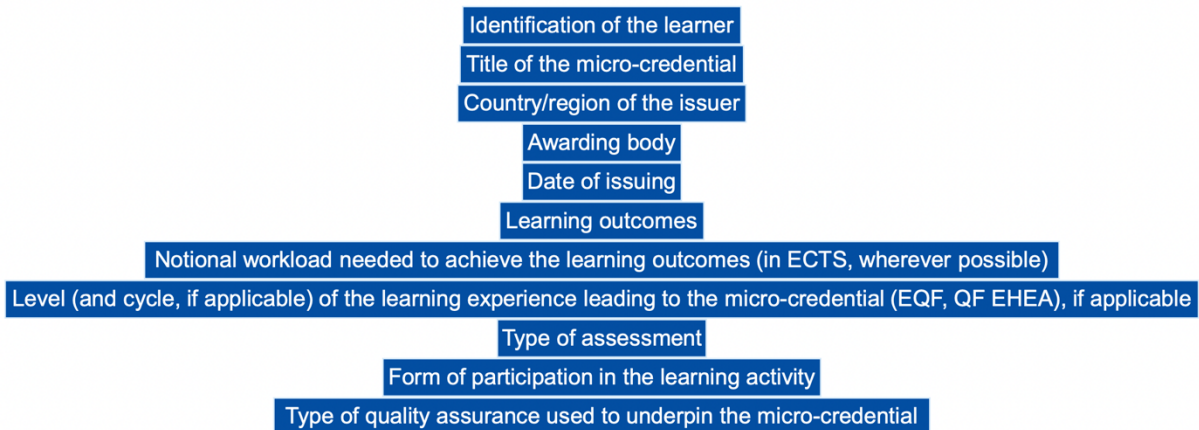[9] https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9237-2022-INIT/en/pdf
[10] https://education.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/document-library-docs/european-approach-micro-credentials-higher-education-consultation-group-output-final-report.pdf

following proposal for a **European standard of constitutive information elements that European micro-credentials should contain**.

Union Standard Elements to describe a micro-credential

Identification of the learner
Title of the micro-credential
Country/region of the issuer
Awarding body
Date of issuing
Learning outcomes
Notional workload needed to achieve the learning outcomes (in ECTS, wherever possible)
Level (and cycle, if applicable) of the learning experience leading to the micro-credential (EQF, QF EHEA), if applicable
Type of assessment
Form of participation in the learning activity
Type of quality assurance used to underpin the micro-credential

(source: Presentation "Proposal for a Council Recommendation on a European approach to Micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability", 11.05.2022)[11]

EUROPEAN RESEARCH - WORK IN PROGRESS

Which are the challenges in the implementation process of micro-credentials?

The UNESCO study "Towards a common definition of micro-credentials" identifies micro-credentials' weakness mainly in two aspects: first of all, "it appears that micro-credentials **are not well understood**, particularly by employers (MicroHE 2019; Kato, Galán-Muros et al., 2020). This is partly because employers were **unfamiliar with the term** (Cirlan and Loukkola 2020), and because micro-credentials can take a **multitude of forms** (Gallagher, 2018). Definitions and taxonomies to structure these new credentials have not been widely agreed upon (Resei, Friedl et al., 2019; Beirne, Nic Giolla Mhichíl et al., 2020; Kato, Galán-Muros et al., 2020; Presant, 2020). Furthermore, not everyone agrees on what the term micro-credentials includes: micro-credentials could be certificates (academic certificates awarded by educational institutions; professional/industrial certificates which are awarded by professional bodies, industries or product vendors); micro-certifications; short courses, boot camps or digital

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[11] https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2022-05/Micro-credentials_ETF_19%20May%202022.pdf

badges (Cirlan and Loukkola, 2020) or other forms of certification. Some have noted the **need to develop a glossary of terms** (Maxwell and Gallagher 2020) in a common language that defines and describes the concept of micro-credentials in an easily accessible and understandable manner (Brown, Nic Giolla Mhichíl et al., 2021).[12]

Micro-credentials – work in progress – observing the change

According to the consultation group of experts working on micro-credentials, the European approach to micro-credentials should consist of a number of **key building blocks**. These contribute to improving the transparency and portability of micro-credentials, easing recognition processes and enhancing uptake. The key building blocks of a European approach to micro-credentials include, please see the table below:

	Key building blocks (steps which need to be achieved)	State of art: available, not available, in progress
1.	A common and transparent definition	Available
2.	A defined list of critical information elements to describe micro-credentials	Available
3.	Alignment to National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF): defined levels, standards for describing learning outcomes	Work in progress
4.	Quality assurance standards	Work in progress
5.	Defined credits: European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), defined learning outcomes and notional workload	Work in progress
6.	Recognition: for further studies and/or employment purposes	Work in progress
7.	Portability: issuing, storage and sharing of microcredentials	Work in progress
8.	Platform solutions for the provision and promotion of courses leading to micro-credentials	Work in progress
9.	Incentives to stimulate the uptake of micro-credentials	Work in progress

(source: European approach to micro-credentials, p.11: https://education.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/document-library-docs/european-approach-micro-credentials-higher-education-consultation-group-output-final-report.pdf)

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[12] Towards a common definition of micro-credentials, UNESCO, 2022, https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000381668

Towards a shared definition of micro-credentials

1. CEDEFOP study "Microcredentials for labour market education and training", 2021-2023

The Cedefop study identifies several drivers contributing to the growing demand for, and use of, different types of micro-credentials. Micro-credentials can certify learning in areas where formal qualifications are limited or do not yet exist. This is why they play an important role in adult education.

First finding of the study were presented during the Cedefop's virtual conference on microcredentials[13], on 25 and 26 November 2021, demonstrating that the topic is of global appeal. During the event the **definition for micro-credentials and its core elements** have been presented (please see the slide below).

Common definition for micro-credentials

'Micro-credential' means the **record** of the **learning outcomes** that a learner has acquired following a **small volume of learning**. These learning outcomes have been **assessed** against transparent and clearly defined criteria. Learning experiences leading to micro-credentials are designed to provide the learner with specific knowledge, skills and competences that respond to societal, personal, cultural or labour market needs. Micro-credentials are **owned by the learner**, can be **shared and are portable**. They may be **stand-alone or combined into larger credentials**. They are **underpinned by quality assurance** following agreed standards in the relevant sector or area of activity.

Record

Learning Outcomes

Small volume of learning

Assessed

Owned by the learner

Shared and portable

Combined into larger credentials

Underpinned by quality assurance

European Commission

(source: Presentation "Proposal for a Council Recommendation on a European approach to Micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability", 11.05.2022)[14]

Why a CEDEFOP study on micro-credentials?

According to the first findings presentation form January 2022, CEDEFOP started the analysis because of the **lack of research about the role of micro-credentials in and for vocational and**

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[13] CEDEFOP Conference on microcredentials, https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events/conference-microcredentials#group-contacts
[14] https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2022-05/Micro-credentials_ETF_19%20May%202022.pdf

professional education and training, and its main focus on the higher, academic education. In the same time, the recent **research overlooks the role of micro-credentials outside formal education and training**, notably by companies and labour market sectors.

First findings: identification of the understanding, use and possible role of micro-credentials in EU countries.

Examples from case studies

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

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

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

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

○ CEDEFOP

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

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

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

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

(source: https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/micro-credentials_acvt_dgvt_meeting_apouliou_240122_0.pdf

2. The ETF survey on micro-credentials

In May-June 2021, the ETF conducted a survey that explored the views of different actors and stakeholders in education and training and the labour market on the subject of micro-credentials. It focused mainly on EU neighbouring countries. 499 responses from 60 countries all over the world have been collected, which gave a global snapshot of views on micro-credentials.

Through a questionnaire, respondents were asked to share their views on what micro-credentials are, why they are important, and how they can make a difference and be linked to existing quality assurance and recognition mechanisms. The respondents were formal and non-formal education and training providers, national authorities and agencies, as well as labour market stakeholders.

The aim of the survey was to identify what support is needed to boost a micro-credential approach and to collect examples of existing micro-credentials and opinions on the implications of their uptake and use. Based on the responses, the survey findings support the definition of micro-credentials as a shared tool, alongside other lifelong learning instruments.[15]

The survey participants did not see micro-credentials as a new phenomenon. They are mostly associated with existing credentials that certify: a) a short learning experience (upskilling and reskilling short courses, both in formal and non-formal settings, parts of formal education programmes); b) demonstrated competence: professional certificates, certificates of competence awarded by professional or other authorised bodies, awards certifying validation of non-formal and informal learning.

ETF survey results highlight the key characteristics of micro-credentials defined by European Commission and UNESCO.

3. The Common Microcredential Framework – an example of Higher Education initiative developed by the European MOOC Consortium, from 2019

The European MOOC Consortium launched the Common Microcredential Framework (CMF) in 2019, aiming to set criteria for alternative credentials. The Common Microcredential Framework (CMF) uses the European Qualification Framework (and other national qualification
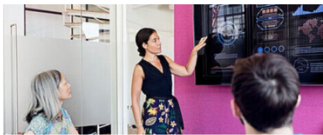
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[15] Micro-credentials policy brief, ETF, https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2022-05/Micro-credentials%20policy%20brief%20EN.pdf

frameworks of recognised universities) to provide high-quality courses that award academic credit.

The Common Microcredential Framework (CMF) is developed by the **European MOOC Consortium** consisting of FutureLearn (UK), FUN (France), MiríadaX (Spain and IberoAmerica), EduOpen (Italy), and OpenupEd/ the European Association of Distance Teaching Universities (EADTU). The framework helps gain knowledge and skills at a higher education level in smaller units. More: https://www.futurelearn.com/info/the-common-microcredential-framework

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The European MOOC Consortium suggests that courses meeting the following specifications should be qualified as a micro-credential:

- have a total study time of no less than 100 hours and no more than 150 hours, including revision for and completion of the summative assessment;
- be at level 6 or 7 in the European Qualification Framework, or the equivalent levels in the university's national qualification framework;
- provide a summative assessment that enables the **award of academic credit**, either directly following successful completion of a micro-credential or **via recognition of prior learning** upon enrolment as a student in the university's course of study;
- operate a reliable method of ID-verification at the point of assessment that complies with the university's policies and/or is widely adopted across the platforms authorised to use the CMF; and
- provide a transcript that sets out the learning outcomes of a micro-credential, total study hours required, EQF level and number of credit points (European MOOC Consortium, 2019).

MYCRED4HOME METHODOLOGY

A preliminary research was conducted during the application form preparation, in order to identify the existing initiatives on micro-credentials (with a special focus on low qualified profiles). Several initiatives and projects have been identified but they are all linked to high education level and profiles and linked to training e.g.:

- The New Zealand Qualifications Authority,
- The MICROBOL project (Micro-credentials linked to the Bologna key commitments)

According to the project application the first result of the project (PR1) the benchmarking report will deliver an overview on the situation in the partner countries regarding the validation and certification of small volumes of learning outcomes and existence of micro-credentials in partner countries covered by the project: France, Italy, Spain, Cyprus, Belgium.

The lead partner **STEPS (IT)** was responsible for monitoring of the implementation of the activity; development of research tools and guidelines and analysis of the national reports and creation of the final outcome.

WORKPLAN: Result 1 Benchmarking Report

1. Activity: Design of the research architecture/ responsible STEPS/ 11-12.2021

The aim of the first activity was to create a common methodology and terminology to define the key criteria of the research, makingmake the data comparable.

The following tasks were coordinated by STEPS in collaboration with the partnership:

- Design of the Guidelines including explanation of the task, working plan and methodology.
- Draft of the proposal for the desk research questions and comparative criteria for the practices.
- Presentation of the Guidelines and questionnaires with partners during an online meeting on 17 December 2021.
- Feedback and co-creation process of the desk research template until 23.12.2021.
- Translation of the final version of the template for collection of practices from EN in FR, ES, IT, FR.

	11.2021	12.2021	1.2022	2.2022	3.2022	4.2022	5.2022	6.2022	7.2022	8.2022
PR1/A1 Design of the research activity	███	███								
PR1/A2 Desk research			███	███	███					
PR1/A3 Field research				███	███	███	███	███		
PR1/A4 Compared analysis of the data							███	███		
PR1 /A5 Final Benchmarking Report									███	███
PR1/A6 Translations										███

2. Activity: Desk research in partner countries/ All partners involved/ 01-03.2022

This activity was composed of 2 main tasks:

- In the first phase ,each partner organization carried out desk research to **present country context** considering the following aspects:
  - *Do you have national or regional rules/laws for micro-credential, badges, minor awards certifications? If any, please shortly describe them.*
  - *Do you have any national or regional rules specifically targeting the PHS sector, and recognising their skills?*
  - *What is the role the PHS sector plays in your country: number of employed; main problems of these sector; are there any solutions that your country/region is implementing to support PHS services and workers?*
  - *Do you have any national or regional rules targeting low qualified profiles, and possibly validating non-formal and informal learning?*
- In a second phase, partners conducted field research to **collect a set of good practices** (1-2 per country) linked to the validation of non-formal and informal learning or to the certification of targeted skills.
- The parameters used to identify and collect good practices were defined by the partnership under an **assessment grid template**. The assessment grid summarizes a list of key elements that any micro-credential should provide according to the recommendation of experts on the EU standard on micro-credentials[16]

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[16] https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/cb7e025d-61e5-11eb-aeb5-01aa75ed71a1

The MyCred4Home assement gridod is presented here below.

Assessment grid for the collection of good practices based on the EU standards on micro-credentials.

1.	**Title of the credential (Name of the recognised competence)**
2.	Provider of the credential
3.	Name of alternative credentials (e.g. digital badges, micro-credentials, nano-credentials, minor awards, etc.)
4.	Target group (identification of the learner)
5.	Description of the learning activity content and its purpose.
6.	Learning outcomes what the successful learner knows, understands and can do based on this assessed learning.
7.	Level (and cycle, if applicable) of the learning experience leading to the micro-credential (EQF and/or national qualifications framework)
8.	Form of participation in the learning activity: online, onsite or blended, volunteering, work experience
9.	Workload needed to achive the learning outcomes - Credits number, if credit-bearing.
10.	Time period when the learning took place.
11.	Any prerequisites that were required to begin the learning activity.
12.	Learning resources relevant for the credential
13.	Type of assessment : testing, application of a skill, recognition of prior learning, portfolio, etc
14.	Outcome for a successful learner : admission to a degree programme, credit towards a degree programme, certification or digital badge earned, number of credits.
15.	Integration/stackability options (standalone, independent micro-credential/integrated towards anothe credential)
16.	Added value of micro-credentials to individual learners, employees and employers
17.	*Supervision and identity verification during assessment* (unsupervised with no identity verification, supervised with no identity verification, supervised online or onsite with identity verification)

(*The grid collects a list of critical information elements that any micro-credential should provide: https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/cb7e025d-61e5-11eb-aeb5-01aa75ed71a1)

3. Activity: Field research in partner countries/ All partners involved/ 02 - 06.2022

This activity covered the following tasks:

- Design of the interview questions (STEPS), consultations with partners (see the semi-
  structured interview grid);

INTERVIEW – semi structured
Name & Surname
Contact (E-MAIL)
Name of the represented organization and Sector
Public or Private sector
What is your role within the organization?
What is your experience regarding validation of non-formal and informal learning and certification of small volumes of learning outcomes?
What do you think is the role of official validation of non-formal and informal learning for: - PHS sector and - low skilled profiles
Can you please share with us any examples on existing initiatives on micro-credentials, especially for low qualified profiles?
What would be the most relevant skills (basic, hard, soft and transversal) to be recognised by micro-credentials in order to reinforce the employability of low qualified profiles?
What are the most common ways/tools for recognition of skills?
Official validation of non-formal and informal learning via micro-credentials, what impact it can have on the PHS sector?
Which obstacles do you see for the validation of non-formal and informal learning in your country/region?

- Communication and invitation of possible stakeholders e.g. national and regional
  certification authorities, social partners, decision makers, public administration, public
  or private employment services etc.
- Carry on of interviews in 5 countries covered by the project with relevant stakeholders
  (at least 1-2) per partner.
- Transcription of the interview in English.

4. Activity: Analysis of data/ALL/ 05 – 06. 2022
- Collection of input and creation of national reports. The template of National Report
  was developed by STEPS and consulted with all partners.

- Structure of the National Report:
  - Introduction, Country context
  - Description of an Identified practice
  - Interviews findings - in depth investigation
  - Overall conclusions, and recommendations for the design of MyCred4Home framework.
5. Activity: Design of the Benchmarking Report/08.2022 - once all national reports were finalized, STEPS was responsible for the elaboration of the national reports and preparation of the final report.
6. Activity: translations of the final report into national languages.

FINDINGS

INDICATOR:	1-2 per country, from 5 – 10 in total 1 interview per country, 5 in total
ACHIEVED NUMBER OF PRACTICES:	10
NUMBER OF INTERVIEWS:	6
The INDICATOR for the R1, A2 IS REACHED	

A2: Desk research – results

Country where the research was carried out	Title of the practice	Number of the practices per country
Italy/STEPS	1) Communicating and acting with "care" in educational contexts, IT : Il corso di formazione Comunicare e agire con "cura" nei contesti educative 2) Multipurpose Domestic Assistant, IT : CORSO - Colf Generico Polifunzionale 3) Validation of non-formal and informal learning (prior learning experiences) by the regional certification authority in Emilia- Romagna Region: https://formazionelavoro.regione.emiliaromagna.it/qualifiche/approfondimenti/documentazione	3
France/IPERIA	1) VAE by blocks or "block of skills"	1
Spain/ GDOCE	1) Emotional education 2) Accompaniment in death 3) Validation of work experience and non-formal education by the regional government of Galicia (Xunta de Galicia)	3
Cyprus/ University of Cyprus	1) Certification procedure of human resource development authority of Cyprus (HRDA)	1
Belgium/ Centre Familial de Bruxelles	1) Validation of skills home cleaner for low qualified profiles or vulnerable/disadvantaged publics. "Certificate of professionalism" FR: "Validation des compétences Aide-ménager" In the PHS sector (Personal and household services) https://www.validationdescompetences.be/metiers/aide-menagerere-5 2) Validation of worked experience of childcare worker (from home) "Certificate of professionalism"; in French Accueillant(e) d'enfants	2

| | https://www.validationdescompetences.be/metiers/accueillante-denfants-97 | |

KEY ELEMENTS USED BY MyCred4Home FOR THE IDENTIFICATION OF PRACTICES:

The desk research conducted by the partners focused on four key elements:

1) presence of the term "micro-credential"
2) small volumes of learning
3) low qualified profiles
4) validation of non-formal and informal learning

Name of the practice	presence of the term "micro-credential"	covering small volumes of learning	addressed to low qualified profiles	validation of non-formal and informal learning
Communicating and acting with "care" in educational contexts	yes, use of open badges in digital format	yes	Yes, no prerequisites needed	No, based on the training
Multipurpose Domestic Assistant	no	yes	Yes, no prerequisites needed	based on the training BUT prior working experience is appreciated: participants with at least 12 months of certified work experience in the sector, have access to the nationally recognized certification exam
Validation of non-formal and informal learning by the regional certification authority in Emilia- Romagna Region in case of care professions	no	No, certification of a large qualification	yes	yes
VAE by blocks or "block of skills"	no	Yes, the blocks of compétences are parts of formal professional certifications, registered at national level in	yes	yes

		the French Repository of professional certifications. Level III.		
Emotional education	no			
Accompaniment in death				
Validation of work experience and non-formal education by the regional government of Galicia (Xunta de Galicia)				
Certification procedure of human resource development authority of Cyprus (HRDA)	NA	NA	NA	NA
Validation of skills home cleaner for low qualified profiles or vulnerable/disadvantaged publics. "Certificate of professionalism"			anyone who wants the recognition of his cleaners' skills. Nevertheless, it's mainly addressed to jobseekers, migrants without a recognized diploma so more vulnerable/disadvantaged public	
Validation of worked experience of childcare worker (from home) "Certificate of professionalism"				

Analysis: As visually represented throughout the green fields, the practices collected by the partners do not enable to cover all 4 key elements selected in the study. There is always at least one element missing. Regarding the term "microcredentials"we can observe that the term termdoes not almost exist on the national level. Nevertheless, is use is confirmed linked to short online training courses. An interesting practice is noticed in Italy, which includes the use of micro-credentials (in digital format),is the EduOpen platform financially supported by the Italian Ministry of Education. Micro-credential in the EduOpen environment is called Open Badge, and gives value to skills learned in a lifelong & lifewide learning context.

On the other hand, validation mechanisms of learning outcomes, namely knowledge, skills and competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning are present in all 5 partnership countries. Validation plays an important role in enhancing employability and mobility, particularly in the case of the socio-economically disadvantaged or the low-qualified. There are remarkable examples of validation practices mentioned by partners, e.g. in Belgium (Brussels), Spain and Italy. A special attention is should be given to the French (IPERIA) initiative

"VAE by blocks" (or block of skills) because of its innovative character consisting in the recognition (formal) of the block of compétences and possibility to continue the pathway towards certification ("parcours de certification"), thanks to VPL or training programme.

A3: Field research/ Interview findings

All interviewees present an outstanding expertise in the topic of validation, Vocational training, evaluation of competences as well as understanding of National Qualification Frameworks. Among the interviewed, 3 of them represents a public sector organization and 2 of them work for the private sector, therefore is a good balance of public-private sector representatives.

Country	Interviewee professional profile/role
France	In charge of the VAE unit at the Université du Domicile (UDD). Adult trainer, also provides guidance and training related to the Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience (VAE, French equivalent of VNIL).
Italy	Regional Coordinator of Vocational Education and Training (IEFP) and Evaluation Processes Expert (EPV) for the Regional Qualifications System in Emilia Romagna.
Spain	Head of Service at the Subdirección General de Cualificaciones/Instituto Gallego de las Cualificaciones. Public body responsible for the establishment and management of the National System of Professional Qualifications in Galicia.
Cyprus	Coordinator of the Office of the Rectorate, Coordinator of the OUC Quality Assurance Office.
Belgium	General manager in Social Advancement education sector of the Centre de Validation de compétences Bruxelles Ouest enseignement de Promotion Sociale.

The interviews conducted in the framework of the benchmarking report are synthesized and analyzed in the following section.

Country	Interviewee experience regarding validation of non-formal and informal learning and certification of small volumes of learning outcomes?
France	*Development of the Validation of Acquired Experience (VAE) as a way of accessing professional certifications in the private employer and home employment sector. The objective is to validate French official professional titles in the private employer and home employment*

	sector (Life assistant, Childminder, Domestic housekeeper, Childminder of the private employer), throughout the valorization of employees' professional experience and knowledge they have acquired directly "on the spot". IPERIA is experimenting with the implementation of "block of skills", by adapting existing tools of VAE mentorship.
Italy	The Regional System of Formalization and Certification of Emilia Romagna provides for the possibility of recognising the individual skills and knowledge required by a system qualification. With respect to the validation of skills acquired in non-formal contexts, FORMart formalizes the skills and knowledge acquired in carrying out training internships in the company. However, the reference must in any case be one of the qualifications provided by the regional system. Over the period 01/01/2019 - 30/03/2022 FORMart formalized the skills and knowledge acquired of 12,330 trainees, of which 116 related to the profile of care and cleaning operator of spaces and environments.
Spain	From the perspective and experience of the department, the accreditation of units of competence by citizens opens up a wide range of possibilities for them to enter and progress in the labour market.
Cyprus	The University of Cyprus participates in the E-SL Pwhich is a project about European Short Learning Programmes (SLPs) for continuous professional development and lifelong learning, that targets higher education lifelong learners and delivers credit-based (ECTS) certification/credentials. The Open University of Cyprus is offering stand-alone modules of 5-10 ECTS in the context of lifelong learning.
Belgium	Long experience in fieldwork of validation of skills center of Bruxelles-Ouest. "Titles of validation of skills": 1. Childcare worker; 2. Household help UC1 Carry out the routine maintenance tasks of the house UC2 Ensure the ironing and washing 3. Inter-sectoral supervisor referent

Comment:

The experts interviewed showed big experience and high knowledge regarding validation of non-formal and informal learning and certification of small volumes of learning outcomes. The situation differs from one country to other, depending on the general national regulations and profile of the organization represented by the interviewee. 4 from 5 cases present ways of

validation of non-formal and informal learning addressing PHS professionals, one (Cyprus) presents credit-based certification targeting higher education learners.

Country	Role of official validation of non-formal and informal learning for: - PHS sector and - low skilled profiles
France	*With only 30,000 certified workers (with a formal certification of the sector) for 1.4 million employees, the sector has a very high potential for VAE. VAE can help promote the professionalization of the sector. VAE can bring a lot of flexibility compared to formal training. The VAE has the advantage of making professionals reflect on their own practices. VAE is also an encouragement to get further training, whether by continuing self-training or by engaging in formal training. VAE is also a form of response adapted to low-qualified people and can be less scary than training. The law establishes the principle of access to VAE for all and in this sense abolishes pre-requisites.*
Italy	*Given that the SRFC System provides for the validation of skills/knowledge exclusively present in regional qualifications, some of them can be operated in multiple production contexts / work processes; therefore, the validaiton favors employability in multiple work situations, especially for 3rd level EQF Operator profiles (profiles with low complexity and usually access to the world of work).*
Spain	*It is an activity that has not yet been implemented in Spain but which is consider to be of great importance (according to the interviewee).*
Cyprus	*Non-formal and informal learning can be an important advanced for low skilled people, and mechanisms to validate such learning could provide additional incentives to tackle unemployment, motivation to learn, and improved access to education without restrictions. Official validation of non-formal and informal learning will allow individuals to document and certify new skills gained. It could lead to qualifications as well, and exemptions from certain modules of tertiary/higher education degree programmes. Skills validation is also likely to increase social inclusion and can empower people, such as unemployed, low-skilled adults, migrants, refugees, early school leavers, etc., to engage more actively in formal, informal and non-formal learning. Validation of non-formal and informal learning can also bridge the gap between skills sought by employers and skills possessed by the labour force.*

Belgium	*First, the main role is to help job seekers find a job cause without any doubt the validation reinforces the employability of low qualified profiles. Likewise, the validation of skills allows to access to employment incentives in Belgium (recognized by Public Employment Service). The validation for low qualified profiles improves self-confidence and self-esteem of the disadvantaged background' groups (such as migrants, jobseekers, single mothers or battered women, etc.)* *Secondly, in some cases validation allows to access to some specific profession for example hairdresser so these people can to start their own business thanks to this certificate. And last, validation can be an key element to the employer to choose the candidate because there is an official certificate than proves his skills.*

Comments:

According to the input received from experts of the sector, the role of official validation of non-formal and informal learning for 1) PHS sector and 2) low skilled profiles is potentially extremely significant. Data collected by IPERIA shows that there are only 30,000 certified PHS workers (with a formal certification of the sector) compared with for 1.4 million employees! In this specific case, VAE (Validation of Acquired Experience) can help promote the professionalization of the sector and bring a lot of flexibility compared to formal training. Moreover, validation:

- favors employability of low qualified profiles;
- makes professionals reflect on their own practices;
- allow individuals to document and certify new skills gained;
- encourages to get further training, whether by continuing self-training or by engaging in formal training;
- help tackle unemployment;
- increase social inclusion and empower people, such as unemployed, low-skilled adults, migrants, refugees, early school leavers, etc., to engage more actively in formal, informal and non-formal learning;
- can also bridge the gap between skills sought by employers and skills possessed by the labour force;
- improves self-confidence and self-esteem of the disadvantaged background' groups (such as migrants, jobseekers, single mothers or battered women, etc.);
- can be an key element to the employer to choose the candidate because there is an official certificate than proves his skills.

Country	Examples on existing initiatives on micro-credentials, specially regarding low qualified profiles
France	An experiment that took place between May and December 2021 "VAE by blocks of competences" (by IPERIA). Unlike the classic VAE process in which candidates have to present a file that includes all the competences of the targeted professional title, candidates can choose to validate one or more of the 8 blocks that compose one professional title.
Italy	Experience of validating the skills /knowledge acquired during training internships.
Spain	The only accredited experiences in Spain are related to the competences of qualification SSC413_1 - Domestic Employment which are basic level.
Cyprus	Micro-credentials connected with Higher Education sector: - http://slp4you.eadtu.eu/ - https://www.futurelearn.com/microcredentials - Coursera, etc. any sort of MOOCs
Belgium	In Belgium some low qualified sectors require the certificate to have access to the profession, e.g. beauty therapist at home (freelance), company tutor (painter tutor, cleaner tutor) for managing small teams. There are more of 60 the validation of skills of non-formal learning as diverse as home cleaners, administrative employees, building painter and IT technician. In many cases Validation of skills could exempt of a part of the training courses, like the "baker" certificate, this validation exempts of 1 ½ year of studies (as the credit process ECTS), so that is the half of the training course of 3 years.

Comments:

Existence of micro-credentials in countries covered by the MyCred4Home project raised a concern due to unfamiliarity with the term. It seems that the name of "micro-credential" may be new, but the idea is not so much. It hasbeen in use in various education and training sectors; playing a role, among others, in the certification of IT courses or health workers' professional development.

Several initiatives and projects have been identified but they are MOSTLY linked to high education level profiles (MOOCS) and linked to training. European countries are looking for the best ways to operationalise micro-credentials as documented learning outcomes of a short,

quality-controlled learning experience. Modularisation of VET programmes is one of the factors setting the scene for their wider use.

Country	What would be the most relevant skills (basic, hard, soft and transversal) to be recognised by micro-credentials in order to reinforce the employability of low qualified profiles?
France	*When set up the VAE by blocks experimentation, the focuse was more on the most operational blocks as a priority, which contain technical skills (housekeeping) or essential knowledge to master as a carer (nutrition for example). The transversal competences (e.g. management and development of a multi-employer activity) can be more problematic, and are often more difficult to obtain. The competences linked to a speciality (e.g. providing support for people with disabilities) will inevitably affect fewer professionals. However, this is the advantage of VAE by blocks: everyone can take what best corresponds to their situation and professional objectives.*
Italy	*The competences in the regional repertoire are only professionalizing. Basic (transversal) skills - as codified at national level (D.I. 56 of 7/07/2020 which incorporates the State-Regions Agreement of 1/08/2019 N ° 155 / CSR) - are formalized and certified exclusively to the internal courses of Vocational Education and Training.*
Spain	*Micro-credentials have a structure that should be respected in line with the concept of learning outcomes so that they can be recognised and identified by employers and with professional achievement criteria, aligned with the qualification.*
Cyprus	*If offered online, they can also allow individuals to develop 21st-century skills, such as ICT, media literacies, etc.*
Belgium	*The validation for low qualified profiles is a quick system, is no really a training so we can evaluate the "know how" and the experience of the applicants in order to grant them the "Title".*

Comments:

Keeping in mind PHS sector, the focus should go on the **most operational blocks as a priority**, **which contain technical skills** (housekeeping) or **essential knowledge to master** as a carer (nutrition for example). **The transversal competences** (e.g. management and development of a multi-employer activity) can be more problematic, and are often more difficult to obtain. The **competences linked to a specialty** (e.g. providing support for people with disabilities) will inevitably affect fewer professionals.

Country	The most common ways/tools for recognition of skills?
France	*The <u>oral exchanges and sharing of experience</u> are at the heart of the VAE pedagogy. The mentor is there to ask questions, not to answer them. We never use role-playing, because that would mean relying on fictive situations, whereas the objective is to bring out the skills behind the reality of their practices, and personal, concrete experiences, not typical examples. Candidates are encouraged to share their experiences orally on each theme, and can then exchange. This allows them to make an inventory of their practices. This is what allows them to become aware of and verbalize their skills, and it is the basis of the VAE dossier.* *The evaluation and the official recognition are done in two steps: the jury first reads the file and then the candidate has <u>an interview with the jury</u>, the duration of which is determined according to the number of blocks to be validated.*
Italy	*The skills / knowledge validation process envisaged by the SRFC system is <u>based on the collection, correctness and relevance of evidence</u> (documentary, procedural, etc.). Instead, in the certification phase, the reference work process is reproduced or, alternatively, an <u>evaluation interview</u> is held, depending on the type of certification required.*
Spain	*The Competence Portfolio and the Europass CV*
Cyprus	No data available
Belgium	*The whole process takes place in the official centers where Information and guidance are provided by professionals working in guidance, recognition, and validation of competencies. For the household help, the centers have all a similar "little appartement" for carrying out the <u>practical assessment</u> and <u>use the same evaluation grid</u>.*

Comments:

The principles underpinning the process of recognition and validation of informal and non-formal learning include validity, reliability, confidentiality, transparency, and fitness for purpose (CEDEFOP, 2009). Among the most common ways/tools for recognition of skills the interviewed listed:

- IDENTIFICATION: career counselling on personal goals & self-assessment form in order to profile and identify skills, interviews;
- DOCUMENTATION: portfolio – collection of evidence;
- ASSESSMENT: work observation (practical assessment); skills testing.

Country	Official validation of non-formal and informal learning via micro-credentials, what impact it can have on the PHS sector?
France	*Fewer obstacles to entry into certification programs because the VAE program is more accessible, more flexible and is carried out at the employee's pace. This flexibility is crucial. A certain amount of availability, time and spirit is required when undertaking this approach. If the process is more comfortable, there is less risk of drop-out and this can <u>encourage people to continue a recognition or skills acquisition process</u>. All of this contributes to the value of the sector, to its professional character and to the value of its employees.* *Moreover, the employees who took part in the experimentation had <u>positive feedback from their employers</u> who appreciated the effort made and the result thanks to the validation of the blocks, and indicate that this contributed to strengthening the relationship of trust.*
Italy	*The validation of non-formal skills through the processes envisaged by the SRFC system allows to:* *• certify the skills, validated on a document issued by a body accredited by the Emilia Romagna Region, which can be used as evidence during the job interview / job search phase;* *• access a training course with training credits, so to encourage the acquisition of a professional qualification, with consequent inclusion in a training chain that can lead to higher levels* from a Life-Long Learning perspective.
Spain	*Transparency and public recognition, empowerment of the people involved, trust in the formal system for low-skilled people, integration of lifelong learning.*
Cyprus	*If employees in the PHS sector are early-school leavers or have dropped out of universities, the official validation of non-formal and informal learning can provide a first stepping stone towards their return to formal learning.* *By securing the validation of non-formal and informal learning, they will also have access to higher education institutions (and maybe exemptions thus shortened study periods) that should enhance their offerings and improve accessibility to a more diverse learners population to become more inclusive and support global, financial and societal challenges.*
Belgium	*Professionalization of the sector, is like an award to highlight the company or organization.*

Comments:

Concerning the impact of the official validation of non-formal and informal learning via micro-credentials on the PHS sector, the process can:

- encourage lifelong learning;
- be used as evidence during the job interview / job search phase;
- encourage people to continue a recognition or skills acquisition;
- contribute to the value of the sector, to its professional character and to the value of its employees;
- contribute to strengthening the relationship of trust with the employers who appreciated the effort;
- provide a first stepping stone towards return to formal learning of early-school leavers/ low-skilled people;
- improve transparency and public recognition.

Country	Possible obstacles for the validation of non-formal and informal learning in your country/region
France	*This kind of system needs to be communicated and promoted in order to raise public awareness on a massive scale, to make people understand that this recognition has a real value. Indeed, we are faced with a paradox: even if people are afraid of the idea of preparing a diploma, they are also often very attached to this notion, and do not recognize other types of qualifications.* *The fact that the written form is still compulsory remains a significant obstacle to wider dissemination. On another level, the administrative process required by the organisations delivering professional titles throughout VAE takes actually more time that the person employed to create his/her dossier VAE, which can be discouraging, including in the VAE by blocks process.* *The mastery of the computer tool/digital competences, in the context of long-distance mentorship can also be a hindrance.*
Italy	Only the competences relating to the repertoire provided by the Regional Qualifications System are subject to validation and certification. Therefore, the Service is not applicable for skills/ knowledge that go beyond this Regional System. However, it is always possible to activate the source procedure to generate a new qualification to be reentered within the System, relevant to the economic and territorial working context.

Spain	*There is not enough culture and professional practice to support this initiative and it will take time for institutions to integrate the recognition of informal learning.*
Cyprus	*There is yet no single European level framework for the process of recognizing micro-credentials.* *Guidance for those who manage and carry out the validation process for micro-credentials are important, as well as the establishment of clear rules to ensure the transparency of the validation processes* *Need to engage more actively with all stakeholders, e.g. employers, ministries, universities, training providers, national authorities for human resource professional development.*
Belgium	*The system is expensive for the government. We have a closed budget nevertheless the asked sectors are more and more the drift of employment by obligation because the participants be scare to lose the unemployment benefices*

Comments:

Among the main obstacles mentioned by the interviewees we can find:

- insufficient communication and promotion of the validation practices in order to raise public awareness and to make people understand that this recognition has a real value;
- long administrative procedures/ bureaucracy;
- long procedures results in high costs for the validation centers;
- only the competences relating to the repertoire provided by the Regional Qualifications System are subject to validation and certification. Therefore, the Service is not applicable for skills/ knowledge that go beyond this Regional System.

Note:

Input collected in the chapter "Findings" is based on the research carried out by all partners of the MyCred4Home project. The extent of the collection of data (10 practices, 6 interviews) is not representing a full analysis on the presence and role of validation mechanisms and micro-credentials in partnership countries.

SHOWCASING SKILLS: ISSUING, STORAGE AND SHARING OF MICRO-CREDENTIALS

Once the individual has a certificate proving her or his skills, she/he needs to be able to communicate them when applying for a job or further learning. **New technology opens up possibilities for communicating skills beyond the traditional CV** and linking people up with learning and job opportunities.

According to the 3.3/Action 11: Showcasing skills: the new Europass platform (ref. Communication - European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience from 2020[17]) "the **new Europass has been developed to become the EU's online tool to help people effectively communicate their skills and qualifications** and to proactively guide them to a job or learning opportunity. It offers free tools and information in all EU official languages for learners, workers and job seekers to manage each stage of their careers and learning."

Action 11 of the document foresees that the new Europass platform would **support people to manage their careers in a fast-changing labour market.** The upgraded tool will among others:

- guide users to assess and describe their skills and communicate their qualifications and experience to training providers and employers, so they can take the next step in training or work;
- make use of skills intelligence to provide tailored information on skills trends and needs to users when planning a change of career or moving to another country;
- **enable education and training institutions to issue digital diplomas and certificates to learners in a European-wide digital format of 'Europass Digital Credentials', encouraging easier recognition;**
- support a **"fast track" to recognition**, reducing administrative burden and decreasing fraud by supporting automatic authentication of qualifications by employers and training providers; and
- **support legally residing migrants to showcase their skills and qualifications and facilitate their recognition** through better information. The EU 'Skills Profile Tool for Third Country Nationals' currently used in reception centres and by organisations

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guiding and supporting the integration of asylum seekers and refugees will be linked to the new Europass.

**EUROPASS – MICRO-CREDENTIALS – AND …INDIVIDUAL LEARNING ACCOUNTS**

Council recommendation on **individual learning accounts to boost training of working-age adults:** https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/06/16/council-recommendation-on-individual-learning-accounts-to-boost-training-of-working-age-adults/

The Commission published the proposal for a Council recommendation on individual learning accounts on 10 December 2021 – alongside the proposal on micro-credentials. Both proposals are part of the twelve flagship actions announced in the European Skills Agenda (July 2020) and the European Social Rights Action Plan (March 2021).

DIGITAL FORMATS OF MICRO-CREDENTIALS (examples of portability)

Edubadges

Edubadges are digital certificates which show that the owner has acquired certain skills or knowledge. Edubadges can be issued for both accredited education and extra-curriculair activities. Organisations, create and edit micro-credentials, and learners can store and share them with employers or education providers. External parties can verify and authenticate badges. The platform currently contains nearly 800 different badge classes: https://edubadges.nl/login
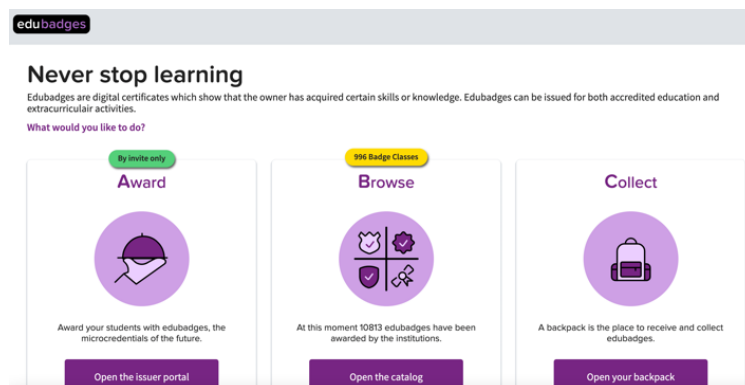
Open Badges Platform based on IMS Global Open Badge Standard

Open Badges is the world's leading format for digital badges. Open Badges is not a specific product or platform, but a type of digital badge that is verifiable, portable, and packed with information about skills and achievements, https://openbadges.org/.

Example of micro-credential assignment

An interesting example of "atingi"[18] eAcademy Tourism & Hospitality presents the case of recognition of prior learning in cooperation with the private sector[19] and with the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development.

Millions of people with years of practical experience in tourism and hospitality lost their employment during the COVID-19 Crisis. Many of them do not have formal (vocational) education certification and originally entered the job market informally. Many cannot provide credible evidence from employers or otherwise for their competencies and skills. They need to prove their competencies ("recognition of prior learning") they claim with their CV ("work and life experience") to be competitive on the labour market and find new employment. Others find that the uncertain downtime during the crisis is an opportunity for personal upskilling in flexible self-study learning paths, instead of a commitment to a more demanding long-term education degree program. The atingi eAcademy Tourism and Hospitality offers a solution considering such real-life situations. The academy offers 45 web-based learning courses in tourism and hospitality in English and French organized in mobile micro-learning form. After completing the learning pathway, the participants receive a digital credential ("open badge"), which can be shared on social media. More information: https://online.atingi.org/enrol/index.php?id=2476

Digital micro-credentials assigned by atingi are based on IMS Global Open Badge Standard.

IV. OVERALL CONCLUSIONS

Referring to the key messages from Cedefop micro-credentials research, the Agency's Executive Director Jürgen Siebel said that: "microcredentials should not replace traditional qualifications or substitute existing national processes to organise education and training, employment or labour markets. Instead, they can complement traditional qualifications and serve as a lifelong learning opportunity to all. Given their flexibility, **micro-credentials can be designed and delivered by a variety of providers in many different formal, non-formal and**

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[18] https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/11._day_2_-_session_2_global_market_of_microcredentails_-_d.orr_and_o.rusnak.pdf

[19] Course overview "Tourism and Hospitality" by Atingi, https://www.atingi.org/eacademy/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/course-description-eacademy-tourism-and-hospitality.pdf

informal learning settings. Micro-credentials can be used to complement and enhance education, training, lifelong learning and employability ecosystems."[20]

The scope of MyCred4Home research was to identify practices of the use of micro-credentials on national level as well as to collect practices of validation of non-formal and informal learning.

Micro-credentials are a new concept, but not a new phenomenon. They are mostly associated with existing credentials that certify: a short learning experience (upskilling and reskilling short courses, both in formal and non-formal settings; a demonstrated competence (professional certificates, certificates of competence awarded by professional or other authorised bodies, awards certifying validation of non-formal and informal learning).

According to the findings of the MyCred4Home research findings we can observe that the term "micro-credentials" almost does not exist on the national level in countries covered by the project: France, Spain, Italy, Belgium, Cyprus. The use of the term is mostly linked to short online training courses. An interesting practice is noticed in Italy, which includes the use of micro-credentials (in digital format), is the EduOpen platform financially supported by the Italian Ministry of Education. Micro-credential in the EduOpen environment is called Open Badge, and gives value to skills learned in a lifelong & lifewide learning context.

General approach to micro-credentials in EU countries represents "institutional wait-and-see attitude" according to what will come from the European Commission – mainly in terms of definition and scope – decisions will be made to buy into it, or not. There is the need of more transparency coming first from the EU level and take-up of micro-credentials at national levels. In particular, according to country level findings coming out mostly from interviews shows that for the effective implementation of micro-credentials the following aspects needs to be taken into consideration:

-    Creation of European standards which address minimum requirements for quality and transparency. This will build trust in micro-credentials and facilitate their portability and recognition across the EU.

- Possible inclusion of micro-credentials in qualifications frameworks, in dialogue with national qualification authorities.

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[20] European approach to microcredentials a step nearer, Microcredentials are they here to stay? 12th CEDEFOP Brussels seminar, https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news/european-approach-microcredentials-step-nearer?fbclid=IwAR1uuaZy_U7wG8E4qSGsT51ADTeI2zwwlN0t-xH9PLh8jLKoIO_DD5YnycQ

- Development of a tool to store and showcase to employers acquired micro-credentials (an idea could ne Europass and its Digital Credentials).

Validation mechanisms of learning outcomes, namely knowledge, skills and competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning are present in all 5 partnership countries. Validation plays an important role in enhancing employability and mobility, particularly in the case of the socio-economically disadvantaged or the low-qualified. There are remarkable examples of validation practices mentioned by partners, e.g. in Belgium (Brussels), Spain and Italy. A special attention also for the development of the next steps of the MyCred4Home project should be given to the French (IPERIA) initiative "VAE by blocks" (Validation of Acquired Experience by blocks of skills) because of its innovative character consisting in the recognition (formal) of the block of compétences and possibility to continue the pathway towards certification ("parcours de certification"), thanks to VPL or training programme. It focuses on the needs of the candidate, employability, proposes a shorter training pathways, leverage to certification. VPL could be an interesting modality to validate a micro-credit.

Main findings - potential of micro-credentials for lifelong learning:

➢ Micro-credentials can create additional opportunities for individual learning achievements obtained in different contexts to be recognised and can facilitate recognition of prior learning.

➢ Micro-credentials contribute to the promotion of employability and social inclusion of disadvantaged groups thanks to micro-credentials.

➢ Micro-credentials can be a tool to bring short courses and credentials into the qualification system. The link with validation and demonstrating competences is a key element. Building on existing validation and quality assurance arrangements will help to integrate micro-credentials and courses leading to micro-credentials into qualification systems.

➢ Micro-credentials make it possible to certify the outcomes of small, tailored learning experiences – for example a short course or training – and thus support the targeted, flexible acquisition of knowledge, skills and competences. However, the lack of a common definition and standards has so far limited their uptake and risked undermining their potential.

➢ Micro-credentials are cost and time saving (short duration of learning; affordable for those paying for themselves).

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ANEXES:

- National Report IPERIA
- National Report GDOCE
- National Report University of Cyprus
- National Report STEPS
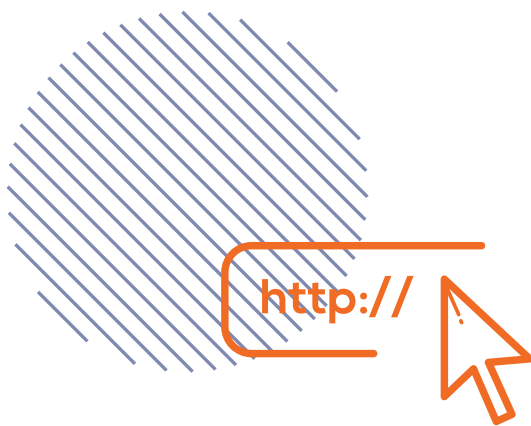- National Report Centre Familial de Bruxelles

MyCred4Home

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Developing Micro Credentials for the Home Care Sector

http://

MyCred4Home Partnership

- IPERIA, Coordinator https://www.iperia.eu/
- Strategies and Tools to Enhance People's Skills (STePS), https://www.stepseurope.it
- The Software Engineering and Internet Technologies (SEIT) Laboratory of the University of Cyprus: www.ucy.ac.cy
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