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# Micro-credentials

## A Tool Supporting Professional Development

Project No. 2023-2-PL01-KA210-VET-000171223 co-funded by the European Union.



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## Small Steps. Major Impact.

Micro-credentials are a response to the dynamic changes in the labour market and the growing need for flexible lifelong learning. Increasingly, it is specific competences—rather than formal titles—that determine professional opportunities. This publication demonstrates how micro-credentials can support professional development across various educational and career guidance contexts. The handbook has a practical and inspirational character and is addressed to individuals and institutions involved in skills development.



**THE EDUCATION OF  
THE FUTURE IS NOT  
ABOUT EARNING A  
SINGLE DIPLOMA,  
BUT ABOUT  
CONTINUOUSLY  
VALIDATING UP-TO-  
DATE COMPETENCES.**

Micro-credentials are a modern response to a world in which:

- professions change faster than curricula,
- competences matter more than titles,
- what counts is what you can do— here and now.

**This handbook demonstrates how micro-credentials can be used as a tangible support for professional development across education, career guidance, and lifelong learning.**

# WHY IS CHANGE NEEDED?

The labour market is changing faster than traditional education systems. New professions are emerging, while existing ones require continuous skills updating. In this context, there is a growing need for short, flexible, and reliable ways of validating competences. Micro-credentials make it possible to respond to these changes quickly and in line with real labour market needs.



Not long ago, one profession was enough for a lifetime.

Today:

- skills become outdated within just a few years,
- employers look for specific skills, not general declarations,
- everyone is learning—young people, adults, and those changing careers.

**WE NO LONGER ASK: WHAT DID YOU STUDY?  
WE ASK: WHAT CAN YOU DO?**

**Micro-credentials respond to this change by offering a flexible and transparent way of validating competences.**

# WHAT ARE MICRO-CREDENTIALS?

Micro-credentials are a confirmation of clearly defined competences acquired through short learning experiences. They focus on what an individual is able to do, rather than merely on participation in a training programme. They are transparent, verifiable, and easy to present to employers or educational institutions. Their strength lies in simplicity and a strong focus on learning outcomes.

## Micro-credentials at a glance

A micro-credential is:

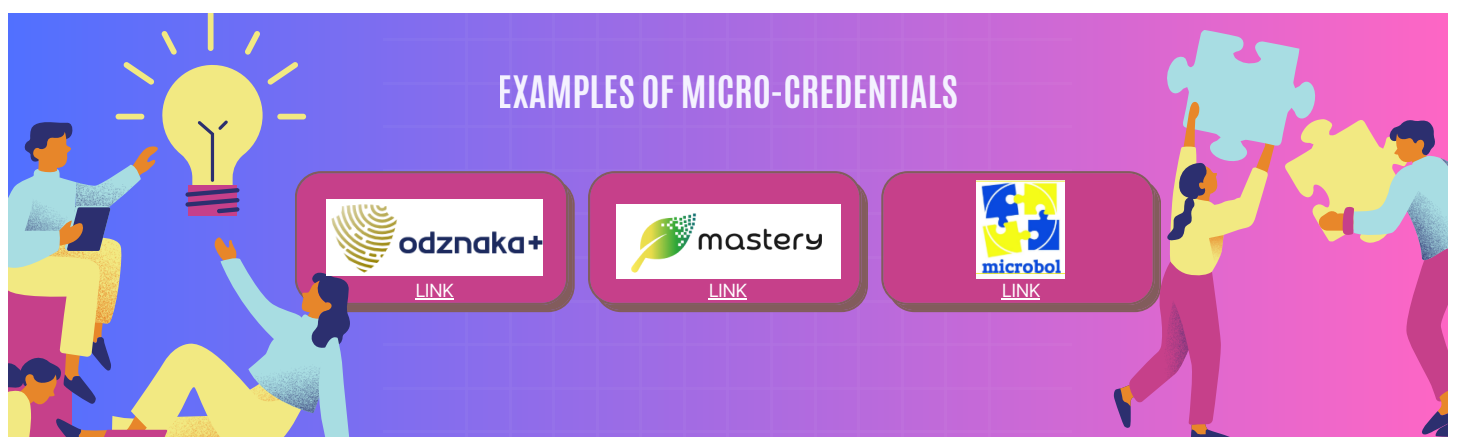
- ✓ confirmation of a specific competence,
- ✓ obtained through a short learning experience,
- ✓ possible to present and verify.

Micro-credentials are NOT:

- ✗ a diploma,
- ✗ a full qualification,
- ✗ merely a “paper certificate.”

**It is proof of skills – not just participation.**

***Format: certificate, digital badge, portfolio entry.***



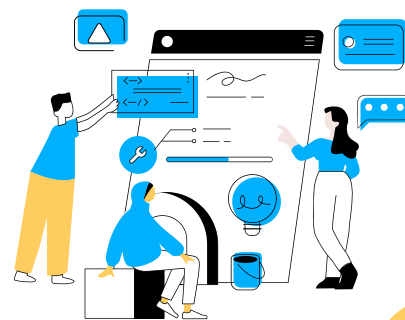
# MICRO-CREDENTIALS AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Professional development increasingly takes place in stages rather than along a single, linear career path. Micro-credentials enable careers to be built step by step by validating successive skills. They support both upskilling and career transitions. They provide a sense of progress and strengthen motivation for further learning.

## Micro-credentials:

- They break professional development into achievable stages,
- help to visualise progress,
- and strengthen motivation.

**Big goals start with small victories.**



**Three pathways for professional skills development**



**Upskilling – developing existing competences**

Upskilling involves deepening and updating existing competences so that they keep pace with technological and market changes. It enables individuals to increase their effectiveness and competitiveness without the need to change professions. This approach supports continuous development and adaptation within one's current career path.

**Reskilling – changing career direction**

Reskilling means acquiring new competences that enable individuals to perform a different occupation or work in a new field. It is a response to the decline of certain professions and the emergence of new professional roles. Through reskilling, a flexible and secure change of career path becomes possible.

**Return to the labour market**

Returning to the labour market refers to individuals who have been temporarily outside employment, for example due to health, caregiving, or educational reasons. Updating competences and rebuilding self-confidence are of key importance in this process. Short learning formats and micro-credentials facilitate a smoother re-entry into professional activity.

Each step can be validated with a micro-credential.

# ROLE IN CAREER GUIDANCE

In career guidance, micro-credentials help translate competence diagnosis into concrete development actions. They facilitate the planning of realistic goals and development pathways. They can be used as an element of individual action plans or as a tool for monitoring progress. As a result, the guidance process becomes more practical and outcome-oriented.

In career guidance, micro-credentials:

- translate diagnosis into action,
- help plan realistic goals,
- strengthen a sense of agency.



A micro-credential can be:

- a short-term goal,
- an element of an Individual Action Plan (IAP),
- evidence of progress in the support process.



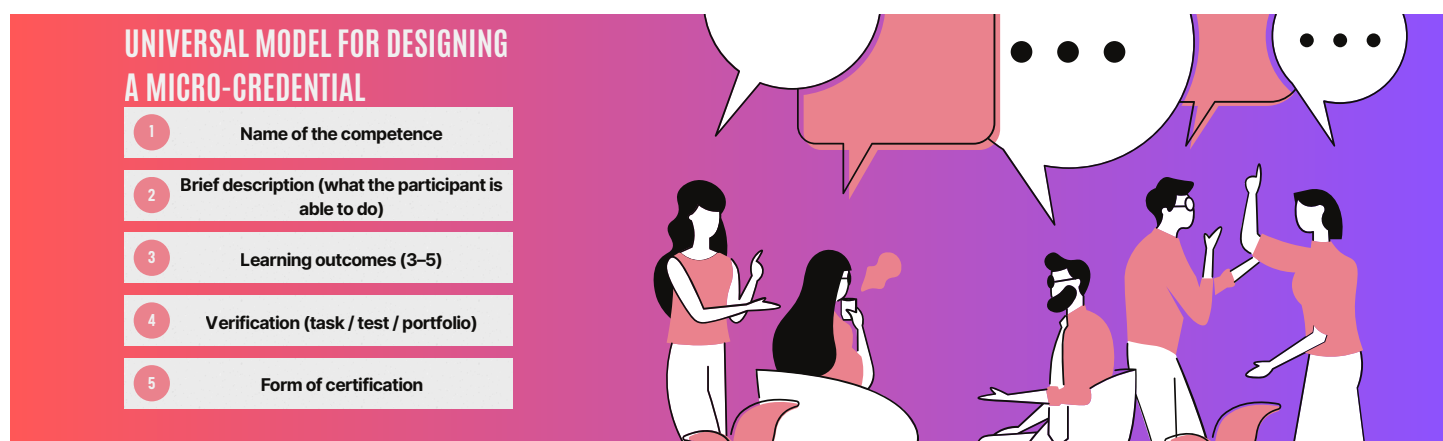
**An Individual Action Plan only works when it leads to action.**

# HOW TO DESIGN MICRO-CREDENTIALS

Designing micro-credentials should be based on a simple and transparent model. It is essential to clearly define the competences, learning outcomes, and methods of their assessment. A well-designed micro-credential is understandable both to the learner and to the employer. A universal structure allows for easy adaptation across different sectors and target groups.

The simpler the structure,  
the greater its usefulness.

## Universal five-step model



*A model applicable in any institution.*

## **Transparency as the foundation of trust**

*Transparency is the foundation of trust in micro-credentials. Each micro-credential should be clearly identified and include a set of key information elements that enable it to be understood, assessed, and compared. A transparent structure allows learners, education and training institutions, employers, and quality assurance bodies to clearly determine its value and scope. The more readable and transparent a micro-credential is, the greater its significance on the labour market.*

## **Mandatory elements of a micro-credential**

*A well-designed micro-credential should include information identifying the learner, the title of the micro-credential, the country or region of issuance, and the awarding body. It should also specify the date of issue, clearly defined learning outcomes, the estimated workload required to achieve them (where possible expressed in ECTS credits), the qualification level (e.g. EQF), and a description of the mode of participation and the type of assessment. A key element is also information on the quality assurance mechanism applied.*

## **Optional elements enhancing value**

*Depending on the nature of the micro-credential, it is worth including additional information such as entry requirements, the type of supervision and identity verification during assessment, the final grade achieved, or options for combining the micro-credential with other forms of learning. These elements enhance the transparency and functionality of micro-credentials, particularly in the context of their further educational or professional use.*

# QUALITY AND CREDIBILITY

Trust in micro-credentials depends on their quality and transparency. Clear assessment criteria and reliable verification of learning outcomes increase their value on the labour market. It is important that micro-credentials are not merely a formality, but a genuine confirmation of competences. Appropriate quality standards prevent certificate inflation and strengthen their significance.

## Why does quality matter?

Trust in micro-credentials is built through:

- ✓ clear criteria,
- ✓ transparent assessment,
- ✓ clarity for employers.



A certificate has value only  
when it is trusted.

## Beware of certificate inflation – less is more.

COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION of 22  
June 2022 on a European approach to  
micro-credentials for lifelong learning  
and employability (2022/C 243/02)



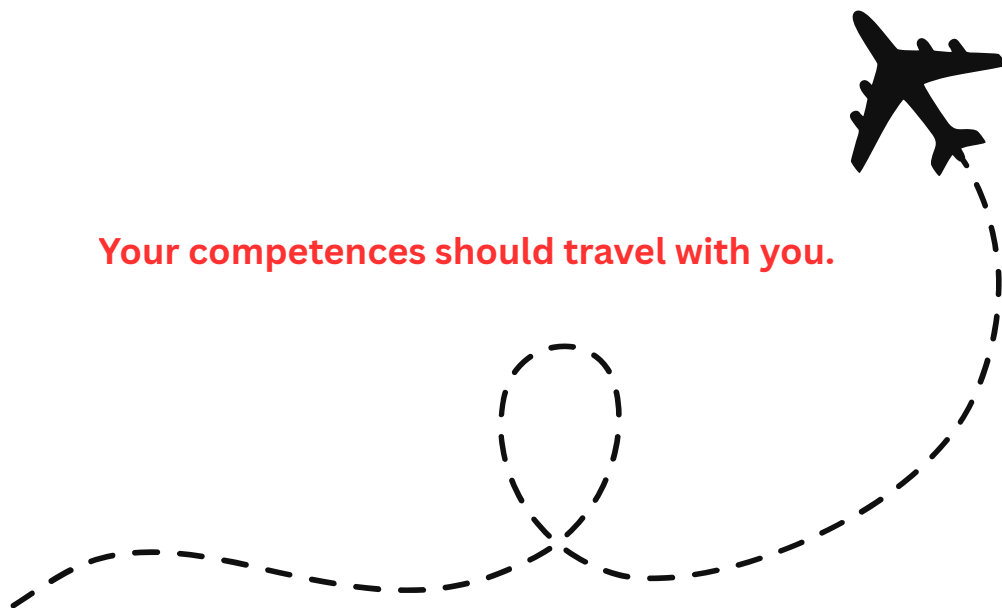
[LINK](#)

# MICRO-CREDENTIALS IN THE DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT

Digital micro-credentials enable easy storage, sharing, and verification of competences in an online environment. They can be integrated with digital portfolios, educational platforms, and professional profiles, increasing the visibility of skills in the labour market. Thanks to standardisation and transparency, they facilitate the comparison of competences and build employers' trust. Competences in digital form support educational and professional mobility in the modern economy.

## Digital micro-credentials:

- are easy to share,
- support mobility,
- build a digital professional identity.



**Your competences should travel with you.**

## EXAMPLES

LinkedIn | portfolio | educational platforms

# EXAMPLES OF MICRO-CREDENTIAL APPLICATIONS

Micro-credentials are used across many areas of education and the labour market, responding to the need for flexible and practical validation of competences. Thanks to their modular format, they can support professional development as well as career guidance, educational and training processes. The examples below illustrate how micro-credentials can be applied in different contexts and for diverse target groups.

Where do micro-credentials prove effective?



## **Digital competences**

Micro-credentials in the area of digital competences enable the rapid validation of skills such as using digital tools, working with data, or ensuring safe use of technology. They are applicable in both formal and non-formal education, supporting continuous upskilling. Thanks to short learning formats, they allow competences to be regularly updated in line with technological development. They provide employers with a clear signal of readiness to work in a digital environment.

## **Green competences**

In the field of sustainable development, micro-credentials can certify knowledge and skills related to ecology, energy efficiency, or the circular economy. They facilitate the acquisition of competences required in green sectors and emerging professions of the future. Thanks to their flexibility, they enable rapid responses to changing regulations and labour market needs. Micro-credentials support the development of responsible professional and environmental attitudes.

## **Soft skills**

Micro-credentials increasingly cover soft skills such as communication, teamwork, stress management, and problem-solving. Certifying these skills through micro-credentials increases the visibility of competences that are essential yet often difficult to formally document. Short assessment formats based on practical tasks or portfolios enhance their credibility. They support effective functioning in the workplace.

## **Preparation for employment and return to the labour market**

Micro-credentials can play an important role in preparing for employment and supporting a return to the labour market after a career break. They enable skills updating and help build a sense of agency through achieving concrete, measurable goals. They facilitate documenting progress and increase the confidence of jobseekers. As a result, activation processes become more motivating and results-oriented.

# MICRO-CREDENTIALS – A DIRECTION FOR THE FUTURE

Micro-credentials are becoming an increasingly important element of modern lifelong learning systems. They connect labour market needs with the flexibility of education and career guidance. They support learners' autonomy and enable individuals to manage their skills development independently. Their role will continue to grow alongside further digitalisation and labour market transformation.

## Micro-credentials as a New Standard

Micro-credentials:

- support lifelong learning,
- connect education with the labour market,
- strengthen learners' autonomy.

**The future of  
career guidance is  
flexible, digital,  
and competence-  
oriented.**



## Recommendation:

*Start with small steps. Design wisely. Ensure quality.*