Micro-credentials Survey Report

▶ ## Main objectives of the Micro-credentials survey (MC)

The survey collected data on the place and trends of micro-credentials in the qualifications and lifelong learning systems in different African countries. More specifically, it gathered information on the common types of micro-credentials, explored organisational differences and investigated various characteristics such as stackability, quality assurance methods, inclusion in NQFs and information requirements. Moreover, the survey gathered stakeholder perceptions, information on the current offering of micro-credentials and future plans.
Given the various definitions of micro-credentials used across the globe, respondents were asked to consider various concepts sharing common features of micro-credentials.

▶ ## Key findings of the survey

▷ ### Usage of terms and formal definitions
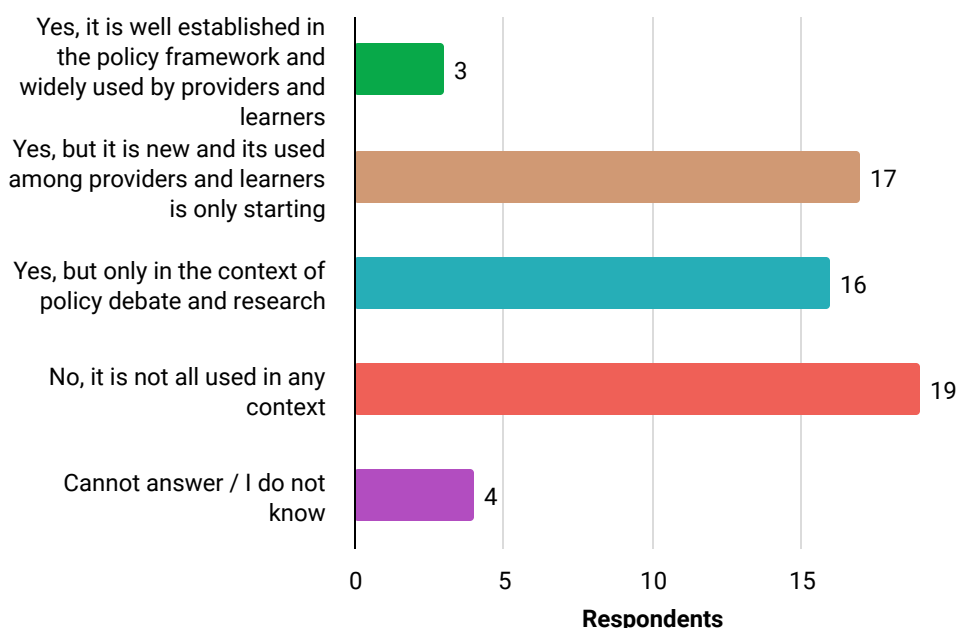
The usage of micro-credentials were estimated via a 4-scale question, specifying various degrees of adoption. Results show that **micro-credentials (or related concepts) are novel across the continent.** Overall, 36 respondents (61%) answered that the **term is used at least to some degree in the context of their education systems**. In turn, another 19 (32%) responded that the term, or other approximate concepts, are not used.

In the following, we will provide a brief assessment of the current extent of the usage of micro-credentials.

- While discussions on micro-credentials have started on most cases, **formal definitions are not yet widely adopted**. Half of the respondents (18 responses or 50.0%) claim that formal definition of micro-credentials in their country is in the process of development, this forms a majority compared to other options. Another considerable part (13, 36.1%) indicates that there is no formal definition of the term in their educational system.
- Three respondents indicated to have a formal definition from Sudan and Zambia.
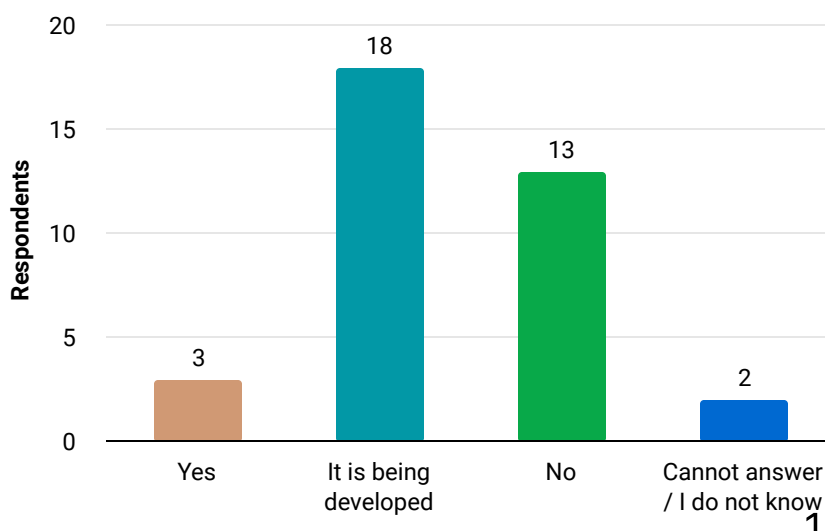
▷ Extent of discussion in national and regional contexts

Even against the current wave of developing definitions, this did not yet result in a commensurate presence in official policy documents. **Micro-credentials are not yet referred to in official policy documents** according to the plurality of the responses (21, 46.7%). Furthermore, around a third of the responses reported that the concept is mentioned or referred to (16, 35.6%), while quite a lot of respondents could not answer the question (8, 17.8%).

On the other hand, **discussion in national and regional fora are more extended, which can be expected to result in a future increase in the presence of micro-credentials in national or regional policy strategies**. Results show that almost the majority of the respondents think that micro-credentials are discussed at least to a large extent or very large extent (20, 44.4%). An identical share thinks that there are discussions to a smaller extent (20), while only 4 responses (8.9%) claimed that there are no discussions.

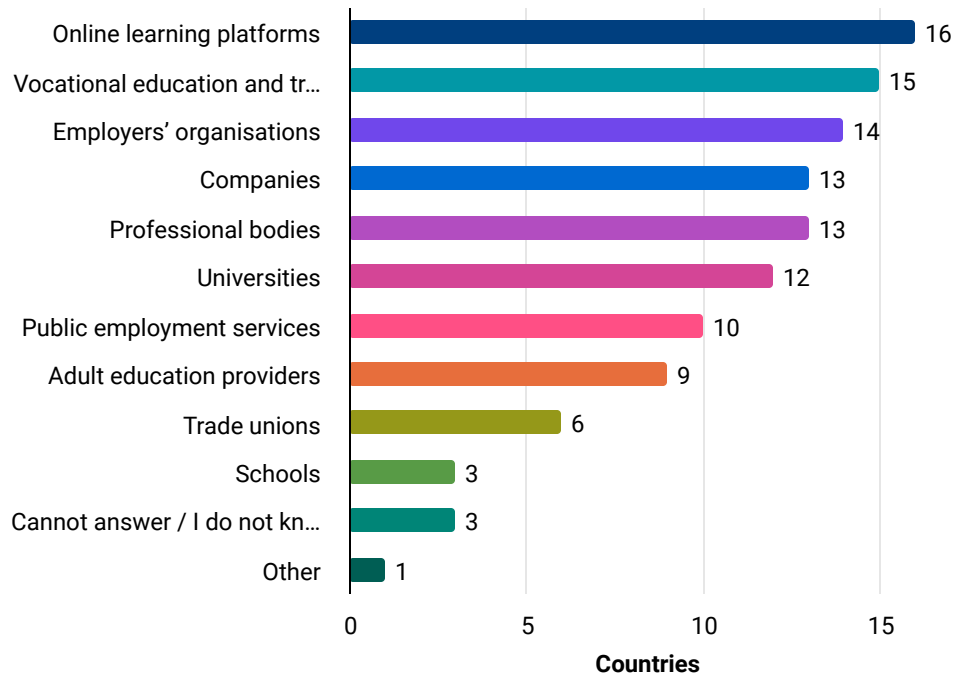## ▷ Education and training sectors offering micro-credentials
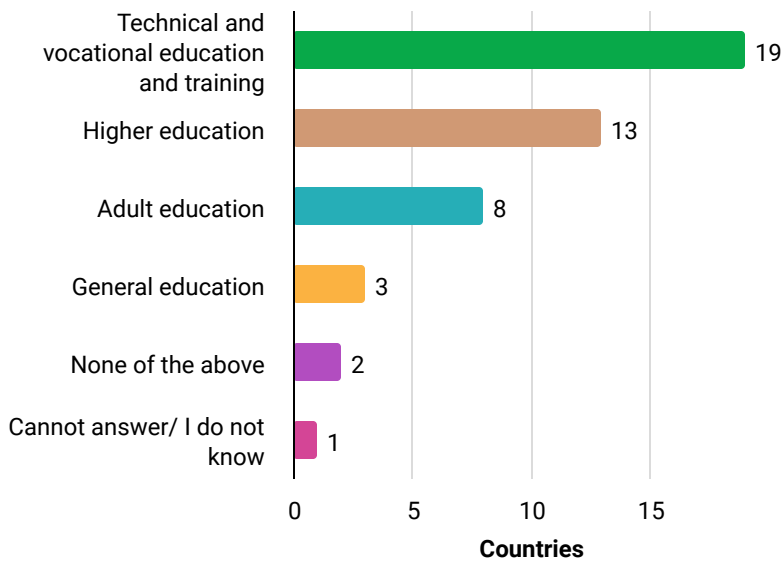
Micro-credentials are being **outstandingly more frequently offered in technical and vocational education and training sector** (TVET).

- It was indicated that 19 countries are providing micro-credentials in TVET.
- Higher education (13 countries) is placed second, while other sectors are much less likely to provide micro-credentials.
- Burkina Faso, Guinea-Bissau and Zambia stand out as countries offering the widest coverage in terms of the plurality of education and training sectors.

▷ Main providers of micro-credentials

The survey shows that there is a **wide range of micro-credential providers**, without one significant type of organisation.

- Online learning platforms (16 countries), vocational education and training providers (15) and employer organisations (14) were the most frequently selected providers.
- The frequencies across the various providers are fairly evenly decreasing. Trade unions and schools are the least likely providers
- Burkina Faso, Eswatini, Guinea-Bissau, Seychelles, South Africa and Zambia stand out as countries having the most variety in micro-credential providers.

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▷ Most common types of micro-credentials

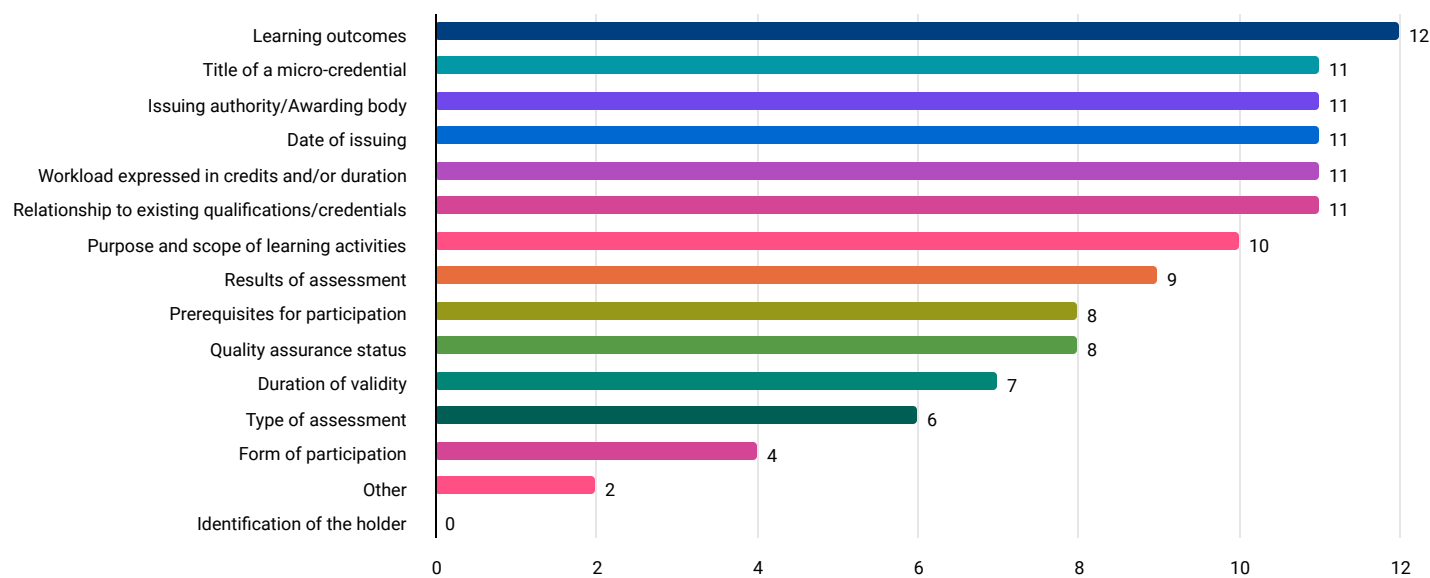| Types of micro-credentials (multiple-choice)	Countries
Professional certificates	20
Skills programmes	16
Vocational certificates	15
Partial qualifications	13
Unit / module certificate	10
Massive open online course certificates	10
Micro-qualifications	9
Vendor-specific certificates	6
Digital credentials	5
Digital badges	3
Open badges	2
Micro masters	1
Nano degrees	1
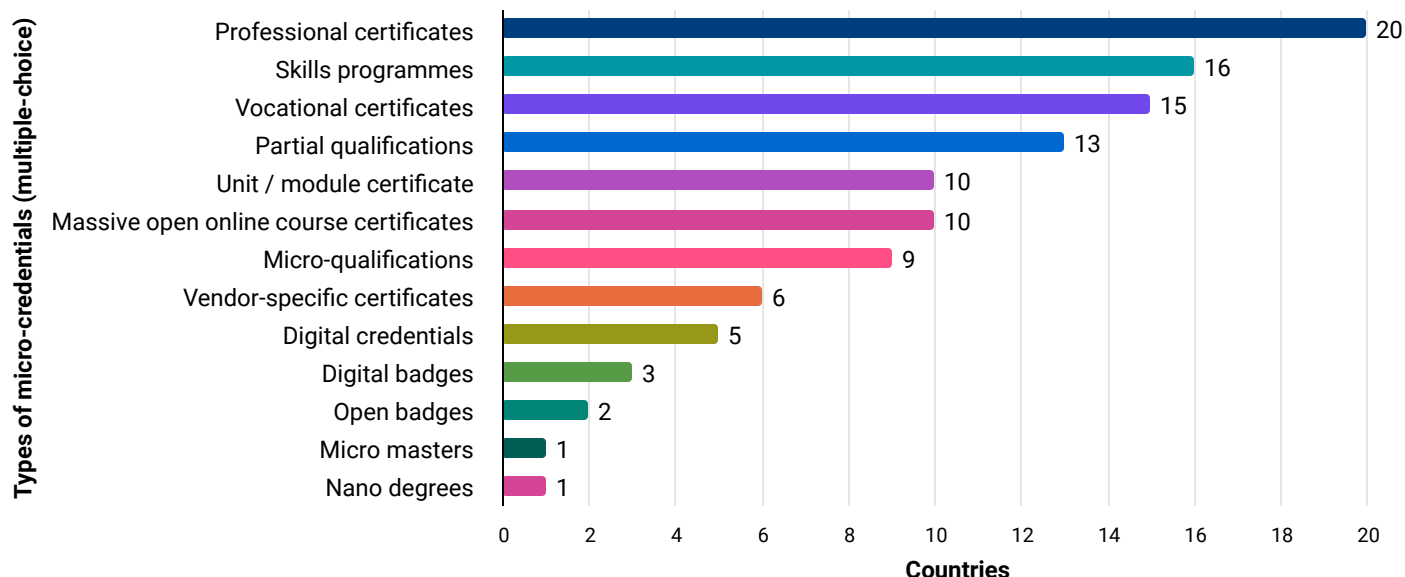
Overall, digital types of micro-credentials are less common in the surveyed countries. Instead, **micro-credentials more directly linked to professional development and skills acquisition are more popular.**

- Professional certificates were indicated to be provided in a higher number of countries (20), as well as skills programmes (16), vocational certificates (15) and partial qualifications (13).
- Among the reasons for not offering micro-credentials, the organisations cited various considerations, all of which were represented in largely equal weight. Providers explained that they do not offer micro-credentials because employers do not recognise these (2), micro-credentials are not accredited by responsible agencies/bodies, they are not compatible with NQFs (2) or because the organisation only offers full qualifications.

▷ Further characteristics of micro-credentials

Around **7 information elements are consensual in the case of micro-credentials included in NQFs.**

- These are the learning outcomes (12 countries indicated to include this), title (11), issuing authority or awarding body (11), date of issuing (11), workload (11) and relationship to existing qualifications or credentials (11).
- Overall, 9 countries (out of the surveyed 28) indicated that micro-credentials can be included in their NQFs. Furthermore, 7 countries have indicated that these micro-credentials can be stacked up with other qualifications and credentials.
- The absolute majority indicated that the growth of micro-credentials is expected to a large or a very large extent – such expectations were claimed by 19 (42.2%) and 18 (40%) respondents out of 45 respectively.

Information elements (multiple-choice)	
Learning outcomes	12
Title of a micro-credential	11
Issuing authority/Awarding body	11
Date of issuing	11
Workload expressed in credits and/or duration	11
Relationship to existing qualifications/credentials	11
Purpose and scope of learning activities	10
Results of assessment	9
Prerequisites for participation	8
Quality assurance status	8
Duration of validity	7
Type of assessment	6
Form of participation	4
Other	2
Identification of the holder	0

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▷ Main purposes of micro-credentials

Results indicate a need for a **strong alignment of micro-credentials with the evolving needs of the labour market and thus is seen as a flexible tool to equip learners with needed skills**.

- This is evident from the most popular purpose being that micro-credentials should better respond to changing labour market needs (37 respondents), as well as other purposes selected by more than 30 respondents (see below).
- Out of the 19 possible options, the purposes below have been selected most frequently. Other answer options have been chosen between 23-8 times. The least selected priorities were: to develop green skills (8), to support new models of pedagogy (9) and the facilitation of digital pedagogy (13).

Purposes of micro-credentials (top 8, multiple-choices)
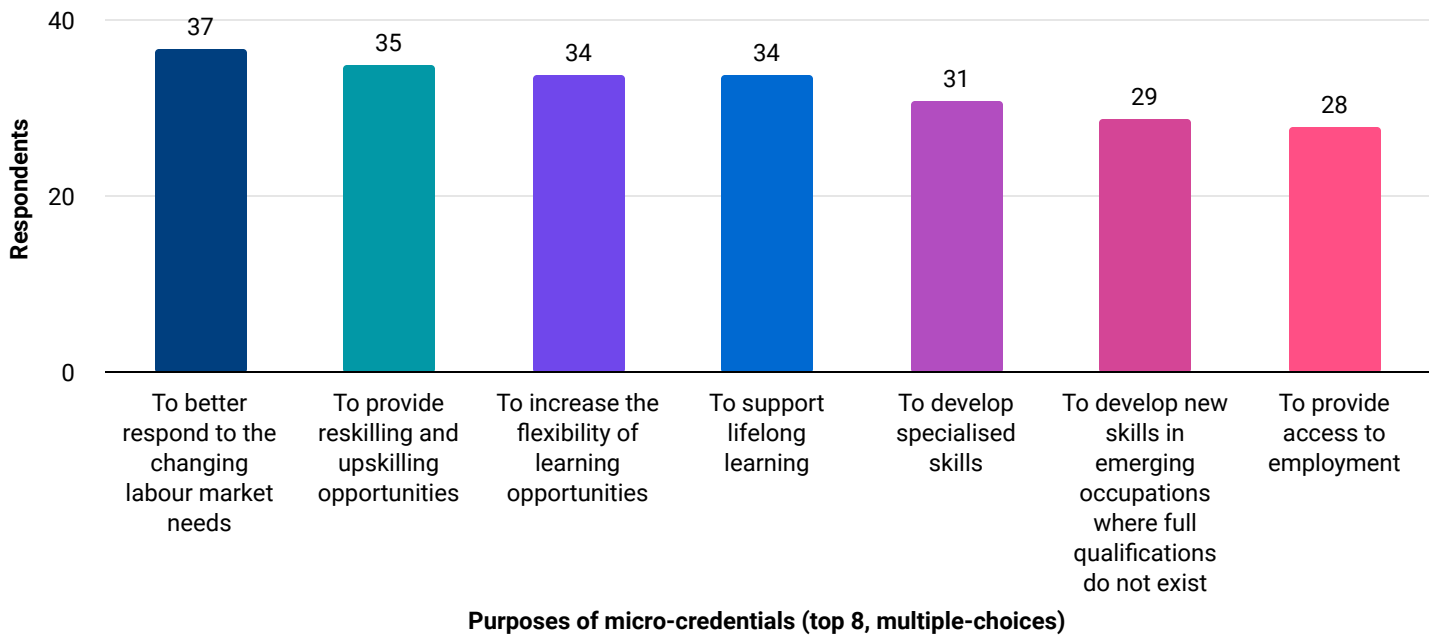
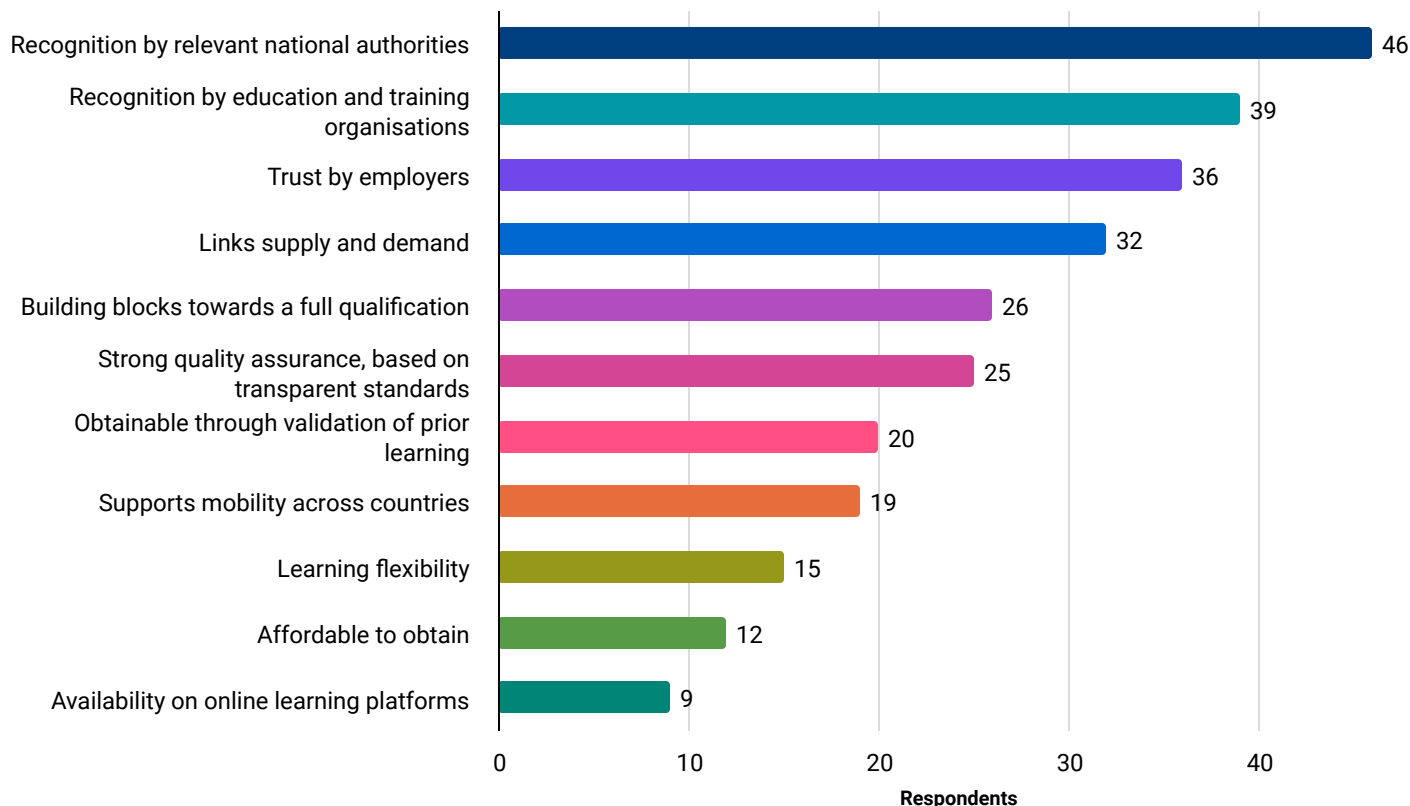## ▷ Other stakeholder views

Challenges to the uptake of MC

The data suggests that the **main challenges in implementing micro-credentials revolve around their recognition and standardisation**. Furthermore, the fact that micro-credentials are a new form of credentials also carries certain innate challenges, such as the lack of coverage by current policies, trust of and recognition by stakeholders, as well as a lack of a common definition. On the other hand, the **issues of accessibility and cost were mentioned by fewer respondents**. This could suggest that micro-credentials are generally seen as affordable and accessible.

The most frequently mentioned challenge was the lack of agreed standards for quality assurance of micro-credentials (35 respondents), followed by 'It is a new form of credential that is not well known' (32) and that micro-credentials are not supported by national policies or authorities (31).

Common approach

The survey results clearly indicate **a strong consensus on the importance of developing a common continental approach to micro-credentials**. A significant majority (42 respondents or 72.4%), consider this approach to be very important. An additional 24.1% deem it important. This suggests that there is widespread recognition of the potential benefits of a unified strategy, which could include greater consistency and comparability of credentials, improved quality assurance, and enhanced mobility and recognition for learners. The most frequently mentioned elements of this common approach are the **recognition of micro-credentials and quality assurance standards**, each selected by 47 respondents. The inclusion in NQFs or a register/database (46), and a common and transparent definition (41), defined levels, standards and learning outcomes (36) were also highlighted.

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▷ Features of high-quality micro-credentials

Recognition by relevant national authorities — 46
Recognition by education and training organisations — 39
Trust by employers — 36
Links supply and demand — 32
Building blocks towards a full qualification — 26
Strong quality assurance, based on transparent standards — 25
Obtainable through validation of prior learning — 20
Supports mobility across countries — 19
Learning flexibility — 15
Affordable to obtain — 12
Availability on online learning platforms — 9

Respondents

The survey results highlight several key aspects that respondents believe should be part of a common continental approach to micro-credentials.

- The most frequently mentioned aspects are the **recognition of micro-credentials and quality assurance standards**, each selected by 47 respondents. This suggests a strong desire for micro-credentials to be formally recognised and for there to be robust standards in place to ensure their quality.
- **Recognition by education and training organisations** (39), **trust by employers** (36 times), and the **ability to link supply and demand** (32). These features underscore the importance of recognition and value of MCs in both the education sector and the labour market, as well as the need for micro-credentials to be responsive to the needs of learners and employers.
- A need for strong quality assurance as well as the possibility of using micro-credentials as blocks towards attaining a full qualification were also underlined.
- Features such as **learning flexibility, affordability to obtain, and availability on online learning platforms** were mentioned less frequently. This could suggest that while these aspects are valued, they may be seen as less critical to the quality of micro-credentials compared to recognition and trust.

▷ List of countries that submitted responses

Country	Response number
Angola	3
Botswana	1
Burkina Faso	4
Cabo Verde	1
Chad	1
Democratic Republic of the Congo	1
Djibouti	1
Egypt	1
Eswatini	4
Ethiopia	1
Ghana	1
Guinea-Bissau	4
Kenya	3
Malawi	1
Mauritius	1
Morocco	3
Mozambique	4
Namibia	1
Nigeria	1
Rwanda	1
Senegal	1
Seychelles	4
Somalia	1
South Africa	2
Sudan	1
Tunisia	3
Uganda	2
Zambia	7

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