



*European Skills,  
Competences,  
Qualifications  
and Occupations*

# The integration of transversal skills into the ESCO skills pillar

**MSWG 13-04**

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## 1. Introduction

The skills pillar of ESCO version 1.0 was developed for 27 different economic sectors listing around 13500 terms according to their occupational, sectoral or cross-sectoral relevance and specificity. While a separate list of transversal skills was developed in parallel, these terms were only partly integrated into the overall skills pillar of ESCO version 1.0.

One of the conclusions of the October draft report from the expert group on transversal skills is that this lack of systematic integration undermines the overall quality of the ESCO terminology. Therefore a key challenge for version 1.1 of ESCO is to make sure that transversal skills are systematically and fully reflected in the overall terminology.

With reference to the discussions in the October 2020 ESCO Maintenance Committee (MAI), this note outlines ways in which transversal skills can be better integrated into the overall ESCO terminology.

## 2. The main principles of integrating transversal skills into ESCO version 1.1

The new transversal skills structure should be used as a reference point and resource for the Commission as well as ESCO implementers. This is essential for ESCO to capture the increasing importance of transversal skills in society. For a terminology of occupations and skills to stay relevant and useful, it is necessary to capture also these widely demanded skills, and not just focus on narrower skills that refer to specific occupations or sectors. The latter have the disadvantage of becoming obsolete more easily due to technological change, modifications of operational procedures or other developments reshaping the world of learning and work. The integration of transversal skills into the ESCO skills pillar can be taken forward in relation to the Commission and ESCO implementers, as follows:

### a. Supporting the review and continuous renewal of ESCO

The transversal skills structure should support the Commission in reviewing and continuously updating the ESCO skills terminology. This work departs from the fundamental observation that transversal skills need to be contextualised in order to be of relevance. In this context, the revised and refined transversal skills structure will be a clear reference point which will enable the Commission to:

- Contextualise transversal skills in order to describe occupations and economic sectors.
- Avoid duplications and confusion of terms, therefore simplifying the overall terminology.
- Identify areas where transversal skills are lacking, are underrepresented or presented in a biased way.

### b. Supporting ESCO implementers

While ESCO version 1.1 will provide an improved version of the terminology on knowledge, skills and competences, ESCO implementers must be able to tailor and

deepen the terminology according to their specific needs. The transversal skills structure is designed as a map of transversal skills and therefore can assist implementers in developing and orienting own applications which (for example) support the writing of occupational standards, the preparation of a vocational qualification or the identification of criteria for assessment and/or validation. In these cases, where the combination of transversal and occupationally specific skills is critical, ESCO should be seen as a toolbox which allows implementers to combine the general terminology with more targeted terminological tools<sup>1</sup>, notably the transversal skills structure.

### **3. Considerations of the ESCO MAI for integrating transversal skills in ESCO version 1.1**

The October ESCO MAI discussed how to approach the integration of the new transversal skills structure into the overall Skills pillar of ESCO. The discussion mainly covered the need to contextualize transversal skills, the importance of the new transversal skills terminology for ESCO version 1.1, the question whether to fully integrate the new transversal skills structure into the overall ESCO skills hierarchy or keep the two separate, and the actions for completing the new transversal skills terminology.

In particular, the following remarks were made:

#### **a. General remarks**

- Transversal skills rarely operate in isolation and will therefore need to be contextualised. Transversal skills are (to some extent) terminological abstractions needing 'translation' to be understood and used by end-users.
- Transversal skills need to be considered for all sectors, occupations and tasks but will vary in importance between different areas of use.
- Different from ESCO version 1.0, the transversal skills structure of ESCO version 1.1 will act as a common reference and resource to systematically inform the Commission as well as ESCO implementers. This will help to:
  - Avoid overlaps and duplications.
  - Avoid inconsistent naming of terms.
  - Identify missing elements in the existing terminology.
  - Make visible the role of transversal skills across sectors, occupations and tasks.

#### **b. Co-existence of the new transversal skills list with the overall skills hierarchy**

There is agreement that the overall quality and relevance of the ESCO skills pillar requires a systematic integration of transversal skills.

Two scenarios emerged:

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<sup>1</sup> To these tools could be added a terminology of manual and physical abilities, currently not included by the transversal skills expert group.

- Keep the transversal skills hierarchy separate from the overall skills hierarchy; or
- Fully integrate the clusters and/or skills of the new transversal skills list into the overall skills hierarchy.

The MAI underlined that the integration of the transversal skills structure depends on how the latter will be applied in different ESCO use cases. To this end, the Commission will seek for Member States' feedback on the content and terminology of transversal skills and on how to make best use of it. As a next step, an online workshop could be organised with a group of engaged implementers to discuss on the impact that the integration of the transversal skills structure would have on their use cases.

The option of operating with a separate transversal skills structure was seen as feasible and necessary under the following requirements:

- Guidelines for the integration of transversal skills into ESCO version 1.1 as well as for future updates.
- Clear guidance to ESCO implementers as regards the interaction between transversal skills and the overall skills structure.

### **c. Quality check of the new transversal skills list**

Possible duplicates between the current and the new transversal skills list require a thorough quality check before further integration (if this scenario is chosen).

### **d. Re-organization of the overall skills hierarchy groups**

Currently there are four parallel sub-hierarchies within the overall skills hierarchy:

- Skills
- Knowledge
- Languages
- Attitudes and values

The last two sub-hierarchies are also included in the new transversal skills hierarchy and therefore could be removed as sub-hierarchies of the overall skills hierarchy.

### **e. Thematic approach**

There is a need to facilitate ESCO implementers when looking for thematic skills. This could be achieved by appointing labels to transversal skills, e.g. green skills, skills related to certain sectors, etc.

## **4. Conditions for integration – the completion of the transversal skills structure**

A condition for an integration as outlined above, by the Commission and ESCO implementers, is the completion of the draft transversal skills structure. As indicated in the note by the transversal skills expert group, additional work is required in the following areas:

- Complete the identification of skills for all clusters (particularly for Life skills). As indicated by the discussions in the ESCO MAI, certain categories and clusters will need to be enriched and/or rebalanced.
- Compose descriptions and (where necessary scope notes) for skills concepts.
- Allocate alternative labels to skills concepts.

The completion of these tasks should be accompanied by a detailed reflection on integration and contextualisation of transversal skills into the overall skills structure.

## 5. Conclusions and recommendations

Based on the above, the following recommendations are made:

- Following its completion (as outlined in point 4 above), the draft transversal skills structure will be used as a terminological reference point and resource. As such, it will support a systematic articulation of transversal skills at the level of tasks, occupations and sectors.
- The transversal skills structure will be used as a reference point for ESCO's contextualisation, review and continuous update.
- The transversal skills structure will support ESCO implementers in tailoring own applications, by providing a map of transversal skills and showing the relationship between categories and clusters of terms.
- As regards the two different scenarios for the integration of the transversal skills structure in the overall ESCO skills hierarchy:
  - A fully integrated transversal skills structure into the overall ESCO skills hierarchy would enrich the latter and help to address possible inconsistencies in existing terms. This option would require cooperation between Member States and the Commission and would also be influenced by the contextualisation methodology to be followed.
  - A separate transversal skills hierarchy would require less processing by the Commission but would also not directly touch or influence the 13500 occupation- and sector-specific skill terms.

The Commission will invite the Member States' input on technical issues related to the new transversal skills terminology and structure, in particular on agreement or comments on the proposed draft structure and terminology, on national needs for transversal skills in ESCO, on potentially missing or superfluous transversal skills, and on whether to fully integrate or separate the new transversal skills structure and the overall ESCO skills hierarchy. The Member States' representatives at the MSWG will receive such questions with an EU Survey, for replying after further elaboration at the national level. The same questions will be presented at the MSWG meeting of 19 November 2020.