**Minutes of the expert groups**

Brussels, 19/11/2020

Minutes

13th ESCO Member States Working Group

19/11/2020, Brussels, via WebEx

1. **Nature of the meeting**

The meeting was non-public and held via the WebEx video conferencing platform.

The Commission (COM) chaired and opened the meeting.

All the presentations and documents from the meeting are available in the ESCO Portal.

1. **Approval of the agenda and of the minutes of the previous meeting**

The Commission informed that the minutes of the 12th meeting (joint MSWG and MAI info session) had been circulated and no comments had been received. All action points included in the minutes from the last meeting were implemented.

The Commission introduced the agenda and the structure of the meeting. The agenda of the meeting was approved with no further comments.

1. **List of points discussed**

**3.1 Thematic block 1: ESCO version 1.1**

The Commission presented an update on the new content of ESCO version 1.1 and proposals by the MAI.

The following questions on the information points report were raised by MS:

* Members asked about what the inclusion of new occupations in ESCO means. Are we talking about existing occupations sustained by qualifications and related learning paths? If the new occupation is not supported by a qualification, why include it in ESCO? the link with the qualifications pillar would also be missing, and so the linking with the European database of qualifications hosted by Europass. Or is the goal of these new additions to "prepare" the classification for new occupations when the time is ripe to talk about new occupations?

The Commission clarified that approach followed for ESCO v1.1 is very similar to the approach followed earlier. Together with expert organisations from all domains, occupations are being identified that are for one reason or another are not in ESCO. One reason could be that when ESCO v1.0 was published, there were not many occupations in a certain domain. A typical example is blockchain occupations. In 2017 (when ESCO v1.0 was published), blockchain was still unknown but recently it has become a very important new technology / tool for many IT applications. Another reason might be that there was insufficient coverage of a certain domain in ESCO.

Regarding qualifications, there was never a direct linking between qualifications and occupations in ESCO. We are currently analysing how this can be done and the pilot to link learning outcomes with ESCO skills is organised for this purpose.

* Members asked whether the survey had already been sent.

The Commission confirmed that a survey has been sent together with the documents of the 13th Member States Working Group meeting on 12 November 2020. Since the survey was not well received by all Members, it will be recirculated by email. The deadline will be adjusted with the recirculation of the survey.

Members stated that not every change needs to be made at the level of the taxonomy as such. Sometimes nuances are requested that can be solved at the level of the implementers instead of implementing these as changes in the classification. Some changes belong rather at the level of services that will be developed by implementers. How is the team checking this in a systematic manner?

The Commission replied that not every request for change needs to be taken onboard. This is why the Commission validates new content with domain experts, blueprint projects, etc. and of course also with the Maintenance Committee and the Member States Working Group. Also the Commission will consult with the ILO on where to place occupations in the hierarchy as suggested by the MAI.

It is true that ESCO allows flexibility for implementers. They can adjust ESCO as needed for their particular use case.

* 1. **Data for artificial intelligence in ESCO**

The Commission presented perspectives of using artificial intelligence in ESCO (use cases, practical examples and data sources) and related proposals by the MAI.

The following questions on the information points report were raised by MS:

* Members asked how many learning outcomes do we have as a total figure in the EU?

The Commission clarified that there’s currently not an exact number at this point. However, we see that a qualification in the LO linking platform contains on average 20 learning outcomes. But there are big differences between qualifications; a qualification can contain from only 5 up to more than 50 learning outcomes, depending on what is provided by the respective Member States.

* Members asked whether all AI models are used in English only? Will there in the future also be AI models in all European languages?

The Commission clarified that new technology in language processing emerges first in English as the data in English is much more available. The goal is to develop models that are generic / language agnostic enough so they can later be applied to all EU languages depending on the availability of data for each language to further finetune the models.

* Members point out to keep the dynamic in the labour market in mind. For example, problem solving in an automated production line used to be a task/job for a civil engineer and is now for a technical operator. AI should take this shift in tasks or skills into consideration.

The Commission confirms that this dynamic is taken into consideration through the data that is used to train the AI models. If this change is reflected in for example vacancies, then the AI model will pick this up and adjust after training.

* 1. **ESCO’s terminology on transversal skills**

Cedefop presented an update on the ESCO transversal skills work performed by the expert group.

The Commission presented the proposals and conclusions from the MAI.

The Commission further pointed out the two main lines of discussion:

* Terminology, clustering, etc of the transversal skills framework
* How the transversal skills framework can best add value to ESCO

The following questions on the information points report were raised by MS:

* Members asked how to deal with values in descriptions of the transversal skills? For example with self-management skills: reacting constructively. What does that mean, how to interpret ‘constructively’ correctly? The skill ‘working together’ is different from ‘reacting constructively’. There are so many ways to interpret the term ‘constructive’.

Cedefop acknowledged that this ‘value laden’ terminology should be avoided and this feedback is exactly what we need from Member States and stakeholders. When looking at the landscape today there are hundreds of different approaches to describe transversal skills which doesn’t facilitate dialogue. Making headway with ESCO to establish a transversal skills and competences framework would facilitate this dialogue. Cedefop further pointed out that values have at this point not been fully integrated in the transversal skills and competences structure. This needs to be treated very carefully.

The Commission acknowledged that this is precisely the work that will be performed next year. Concepts need to be developed (through their descriptions), their quality reviewed, and then contextualized. The Member States will be consulted in this process as well as implementers.

* Members inquired whether the presentations will be published in AGM so that they can be used in the following days when discussing feedback on the survey?

The Commission confirmed that the presentations will be added.

* Members expressed the wish for soft skills, as the queens of the labour market, to be in the spotlight of ESCO version 1.1. Soft skills are becoming fundamental also for assessing new working scenarios and contexts (e. smart working). Soft skills like resilience, motivation, stress management, change, autonomy, etc. are all important references for enterprises and employers for assessing performances and achievements of new working contexts like for example smart working.

The Commission repeated that working on an approach for contextualisation is scheduled in 2021 but at the same time managed expectations because this is a very complex and big job.

Cedefop further commented that the term ‘soft skills’ currently does not cover the full range of transversal skills and competences as defined by the expert group. Soft skills in the current structure fall mainly under the category of ‘social communication’ but there are many other transversal skills that need to be addressed.

* Members suggested that in addition to the structure, the Commission should also be looking in the future on how we can help professionals and end-users to deal with transversal skills and competences. More is needed than definitions and a tutorial.

The Commission confirmed that this is precisely what will be done in the course of next year: contextualisation, integration, and making it part of ESCO version 1.1. All this to make transversal skills useful for implementers and other stakeholders.

* 1. **ESCO communication**

Representatives of Iceland and Ireland presented their respective experiences of implementing and communicating ESCO in a discussion moderated by the Commission.

* What triggered the decision to use ESCO, what were the resources, and the challenges?

Ireland:

Main purpose of the new platform was to allow automated matching between vacancies and cv’s. The previous platform didn’t allow that and was based on manual matching performed by staff. The use of ESCO ensured that there was no need for a new list of codes to be developed.

Iceland:

Iceland (more specifically the directorate of labour) is in the process of implementing ESCO. The reason for choosing ESCO was to be able take a big step in modernization and to jump to the future instead of taking small steps and doing patchwork. Unfortunately Covid-19 impacted the delivery schedule.

* What challenges or technical difficulties did you experience?

Ireland:

In the beginning, users experienced difficulties finding the relevant skills. The reason for this was that it was unclear which ‘codes’ were available to them and how to find them in the ESCO hierarchy. As a result, the helpdesk was inundated by requests to find the relevant codes. This was resolved by adding a ‘smart’ field, similar to the search field on the ESCO portal, that helped the user finding the relevant codes and concepts based on the text.

The next step was to take synonyms into consideration to overcome the limitations of one-to-one, exact text matching.

Iceland:

The challenges so far have not been that big so far. Language / translation was a challenge. Also, the labour market in Iceland is smaller so a lot less concepts apply than are available in ESCO.

* What resources are used to implement ESCO? Is this perceived as a big investment?

Ireland:

Being an early adopter, we used external IT providers who collaborated closely with the Commission. Being an early adopter also posed challenges to acquire the necessary funding.

Iceland:

Many private employment services and a separate government recruitment agency (other than the directorate of labour) are keen on collaborating with the directorate of labour. This helps to get a better overview of the labour market in Iceland because before not all vacancies were known with the department of labour.

To our surprise the adoption of the stakeholders is now quite high, unlike before the implementation of ESCO in our systems.

Ireland:

The situation in Ireland is somewhat different because the system is mainly used by internal users in the department.

The main users outside the department are jobseekers and employers who come directly in contact with ESCO when using the jobsite. People get examples and explanations of for example jobs which come from ESCO descriptions.

Currently there’s no specific feedback on the use of ESCO in the systems but users of the jobsite so far provided positive feedback in general as they seem happy with the matching results (both job seekers and employers).

* Have you exchanged experiences with other stakeholders about implementing ESCO?

Ireland:

There have been several exchanges with different Member States and there was great interest in how ESCO is at the heart of the matching.

Iceland:

There will be an exchange with Greece in a couple of weeks. As the implementation isn’t completed yet we hope there will be more exchanges when the work has been completed.

* Any final advice?

Ireland:

Working closely with the ESCO support team to leverage the knowledge and their tools on how to implement ESCO.

Iceland:

Developing a new system takes time of course but we were already able to have a sneak peek into the system as it is being developed and we are happy with the results.

The following questions on the discussion were raised by MS:

* Members pointed out that when developing a system, it’s important to develop services and an application interface but at the same time it’s crucial to train internal colleagues to work with this new system. How was this tackled in the case of Ireland and Iceland?

Ireland:

In our case the users and the internal employees have been introduced to the new system in parallel. The difference is in the level of access each user group has; internal employees can for example see much more than the external users.

Iceland:

We have two different platforms, one for external users and one for internal employees. At this point the focus is on the internal system.

The Commission presented the possibility to create country fiches as a voluntary way to help disseminate ESCO-related information at national level and to enhance networking opportunities. The Commission solicited feedback from the Member States through a series of questions.

* Which source do you use to gather information about ESCO?

Members indicated that main sources of information are the ESCO portal, the ESCO support team, and other countries working with ESCO.

* How familiar are you with organisations using ESCO in your country? Are you in touch with them? How often would you need information about ESCO use in other countries.

Members indicated as an example the OAED in Greece. Also ESCO is being used in Romania to describe education programmes and to describe skills in occupation fiches.

Members mentioned they don’t have a view on who is downloading or using ESCO and asked whether the Commission has any information on this. And if so, if the Commission could share such a list to follow up in the respective Member States.

The Commission highlighted that several different platforms have been presented to the Member States in the past but now the Commission is reaching out to the Member States for further support in identifying implementers and share information that may be available with the Commission. The Commission also shared the link to the use cases on the ESCO portal (https://ec.europa.eu/esco/portal/howtouse/bfe2a816-f9dd-49df-a7d2-ec8fafcfce95), where an overview of implementers can be found.

Members pointed out that some country fiches will be empty if there aren’t any known uses by member states.

The Commission clarified that the idea is to have country fiches only for Member States that wish so, not for all. Therefore, there will not be any empty country fiches.

Also, the content of country fiches will be up to the given Member State, with what the Member State would like to present.

Members pointed out that there’s currently no information about the country fiches on ESCOpedia.

The Commission clarified that a country fiche is an infographic that gives an overview of the use of ESCO at a country level. So whoever visits the ESCO portal will be able to find this information and this way we open up opportunities for knowledge exchange and networking.

Members indicated that getting information about the use of ESCO every six months would be useful.

* How do you perceive the benefits of the suggested country fiches and what type of information would be useful to include?

Members indicated that all six types of information (as shown in the presentation) would be very useful. No other types of information to be included in the country fiches came to mind.

* 1. **The upcoming new ESCO portal**

The Commission presented an update regarding the development of the new ESCO portal.

The following questions on the information points report were raised by MS:

* Members requested that the Commission provides some information points to communicate the updated version to own organisation.

The Commission confirmed that the communication will be a very important part of the launch of ESCO version 1.1. Additionally, a news item will be published on the portal regarding the new portal.

* Members inquired about what data the user will get?

The Commission clarified that what can be downloaded in the new portal, will also be possible to download in the revamped portal. The datasets that can be downloaded will be the same, the way it can be downloaded will be adjusted to improve usability.

* Members illustrated that the dataset that can be downloaded currently seems wrongly formatted and is not easy to work with.

The Commission replied that this dataset is something that can be downloaded, it cannot be seen directly in the portal.

* Members asked if the functionality would be available in EU languages different than English.

The Commission clarified that the new ESCO portal will present the ESCO content in a renewed way. The ESCO content itself (the concepts) has been translated into all EU languages and this will also be available in the new portal. Other functionality can also be presented in other EU languages when selected.

1. **Any other business**

* Members asked whether for the next meeting, there could be some more news on the work related to the qualification pillar? Have you presented the transversal skills to the EQF?

The Commission will provide an update on the Linking pilot which aims to link learning outcomes in qualifications to ESCO skills. The Commission also pointed out that next week there’s an EQF Advisory Group.

1. **Next meeting**

The next meeting of the ESCO Member States Working Group is tentatively scheduled for quarter two of next year (tentative 10 June 2021).

1. **List of participants**

The 13th meeting of the Member States Working Group on ESCO was attended by:

* representatives of 27 Member States: BE, BG, CZ, DK, DE, EE, IE, EL, ES, FR, HR, IT, CY, LV, LT, LU, HU, MT, NL, AT, PL, PT, RO, SI. SK, FI, SE
* Representatives of 3 EEA countries: IS, CH, NO
* Representatives from social partners (SME United).