



Brussels May 2016

**DRAFT MINUTES OF THE SECOND MEETING OF THE MEMBER STATES WORKING GROUP ON ESCO, 26 APRIL 2016, BRUSSELS (BE),<sup>1</sup>**

**INTRODUCTION**

The second meeting of the Member States Working Group on ESCO (MSWG) was attended by representatives of 24 Member States (MS) authorities from the labour market and education and training (all EU MS except EL, BG, IE and NL). Some MS were represented by their permanent representations instead of the official nominated representatives. The meeting was also attended by 3 observers from candidate and EFTA countries (NO, SW, IS), and by representatives of European social partners (Business Europe, ETUC and UAPME). Representatives from the ESCO Secretariat (SEC) also attended the meeting.

The Commission (COM) chaired and opened the meeting. The three main goals of the second MSWG meeting were: a) to inform MS about the New Skills Agenda for Europe and the role of ESCO in it; b) to provide an overview of the latest developments of the ESCO project in terms of process and calendar, country visits, translations, the pilot projects and the communication strategy and c) to invite the MSWG to give general feedback on ESCO version 1 (v1) and its translation into the 24 EU official languages.

MS requested the COM to include in the agenda a reporting on the latest work done by other ESCO governing bodies-the Maintenance Committee (MAI) and the Board (BOA). MS endorsed the agenda without further comments.

**1. LATEST DEVELOPMENTS ON SKILLS AND QUALIFICATIONS**

COM presented an overview on the key elements and actions of the New Skills Agenda for Europe (see power point attached). The New Skills Agenda for Europe has three main priority areas: improving skills levels and relevance, making skills visible and comparable and improving skills intelligence and information for better career choices. COM provided an overview of the preparatory work on three actions of the New Skills Agenda for Europe relevant for the ESCO developments:

- a revision of the EQF Recommendation for Lifelong Learning,
- a revision of the Europass Council decision<sup>2</sup> and

---

<sup>1</sup> Please note: all meeting documents and Power Point presentations are attached to this document.

<sup>2</sup> *Update*: The New Skills Agenda for Europe was adopted by the COM on 10 June 2016. The proposals for the revision of the Europass Council decision and for the establishment of a European Coordination Group on Skills and Qualifications will be adopted at a later stage.

- the establishment of a European Coordination Group on Skills and Qualifications

#### Comments, questions and answers

- On the revision of the EQF Recommendation, MS pointed out some concerns about the updating of qualifications. This updating could lead to the obsolescence of past qualifications. MS consider important to check beforehand the impact of this updating, in order not to harm workers who have been for long in the labour market. MS missed the inclusion of some instruments such as ECVET, ECTS or EQAVET in the governance proposal. MS would also like to see the role of EURES more clearly reflected in the same proposal.
- MS would like to receive additional information on the new governance structure (European Coordination Group on Skills and Qualifications) proposed by the COM. In concrete, MS would like to be informed about the timeline, the mandate, the legal basis for the proposal and the role of the MSWG and the social partners in the structure.
- MS had questions on a mandate for this governance structure that would be too broad, as it would have to cope with different topics and strongly advised to include Public Employment Services (PES) in the structure.

COM foresees to adopt this initiative on the 7<sup>th</sup> June 2016. After this adoption, the proposals will be discussed with the European Council and the European Parliament. The entering into force of the proposals is not foreseen before mid-2017. In the discussions with the Council, the education side (the Education Committee) will take the lead.

COM informed MS that the potential new governance structure would be established in the form of a COM informal expert group. The group would bring together representatives from both the education and the employment sides and would constitute a platform to discuss with MS, social partners and other stakeholders topics related to skills and qualifications at European level. The COM stated that the link with the PES would also be included in the proposal.

In relation to instruments such as ECVET, the COM stated that these are sectoral issues and the coordination group would look more for horizontal instruments that need a coordinated approach. Therefore these instruments would not be specifically considered in this new governance.

#### Operational follow up:

- ➔ COM will keep the MSWG informed on the latest development both on the New Skills Agenda initiative.

## **2. ESCO OVERVIEW**

- 2.1. How was ESCO developed?
- 2.2. Review of ESCO by the MSWG. Process and calendar.

COM provided an overview on the process for the development of ESCO and the proposed review by the MSWG of ESCO's contents and translations (see power point

attached). In addition, COM summarised the results of the last BOA and MAI meetings, as requested by the MSWG.

#### Comments, questions and answers

- MS expressed that they share the concern of the MAI on the feasibility of the timeline foreseen for the translation of the ESCO content into 23 languages and the quality of these translations. MS perceived an overlap in time between the content development and the translation phase.
- MS also expressed their concerns about possible administrative burdens that may be caused by the two rounds of feedback on the content and translation of ESCO. MS would also like to receive further clarification on the type of feedback the COM expects from them on the ESCO content.
- MS welcomed the COM proposal on involving national experts to support DG Translation in ESCO's translation process.
- MS requested more information on how ESCO and ISCO are connected to each other.

COM informed MS that the content in EN resulting from the recent ESCO on-line consultations will be reviewed by the MAI and BOA in their next joint meeting in June. COM is fully aware of the challenging timeline until the launching of ESCO v1 and is taking all steps to comply with it while guaranteeing ESCO's overall quality. For this COM has been implementing several quality assessment procedures, most of them advised by the MAI, in the current development of ESCO. These measures include a full process of gap analysis with several national classification systems.

Concerning the MS concern on the overlap between content and translation, COM considers that both processes are interrelated and cannot be separated. However, the translations will only start once ESCO content is stabilized in English. Input from the two rounds of feedback by the MS would be incorporate in this process.

The consultation to MS foreseen in June before the translations aims to assess if the content generated can be considered stable for v1. COM expects general feedback from the MSWG on ESCO's terminological richness and notably on its adequacy to map to national classifications. Feedback from MS to the translated content should focus on linguistic accuracy. The results of the consultation will allow the Commission to anticipate any potential ESCO implementation issues and facilitate future mappings of national classifications to it.

COM informed MS that ESCO is already mapped to ISCO, it is already reviewed by an ILO expert and it is usable in both directions.

#### Operational follow up:

- ➔ COM will keep MSWG informed about the methodology for their feedback on ESCO, as well as on how to integrate this feedback in the development of ESCO. The MSWG will also be informed on precise time estimations for the two rounds of consultations.
- ➔ COM will assess the possibility to have a discussion with the MSWG on the outcome of the consultation.
- ➔ MS will provide the ESCO Secretariat with a list of national contact points to support DG Translation during the translation process.

### 2.3. The qualifications pillar: country visits

COM provided an overview on the qualification pillar and the EU supporting tools to implement ESCO in the area of qualifications (see power point attached).

COM already carried out 3 country visits (LV, IT, EL) with three main objectives: to exchange information on the qualifications systems, to understand the current situation of national qualifications databases/options for links to EU portals and to assess the workload for Member States for the implementation.

LV and IT showed their gratitude for these visits and pointed out its importance to understand the process and establish improved cooperation between MS and COM in the inclusion of qualifications in ESCO.

#### Comments, questions and answers

- MS expressed some concerns about the inclusion of the private qualifications pillar and how to assure that these qualifications are trustable enough.

COM clarified that within the EQF discussions, there is a strong intention to have more and more comprehensive NQF. The criteria to include private qualifications in the different NQF differ very much among countries but ESCO should capture qualifications even if they are not in the NQFs because many are valued by the labour market. This is the reason why from early stages of the ESCO development it was agreed that the qualifications pillar would be fed by direct inclusion of qualifications and indirect inclusion (via the EQF process). To address the potential risk of fraudulent qualifications, the COM can assess the opportunity to build in the system some alert mechanisms to prevent fraud but not limiting information. Private qualifications are included in ESCO only if they fulfill all the mandatory fields requested.

COM invites the MSWG to request a COM country visit in order to assess the situation of the databases in their countries, how to link them to European portals and to establish a close cooperation in the qualifications field.

### **3. TRANSLATING ESCO**

DG Translation provided an overview of the services and mechanisms they can offer to translate the ESCO content into 23 languages.

- MS reiterated that the timeframe proposed by the COM for the translation process seems too ambitious. MS expressed the need of including in ESCO accurate terminology from the labor market.

DG Translation clarified that they already have some experience in translating this type of content, for instance with the ISCO classification. In addition, DG Translation carried out a pilot project on translating a part of ESCO into the Dutch language to assess timings and issues that may occur. DG Translation stated that the two main important aspects for the correct performance of the translations are to have a high quality source in EN and a good and continuous cooperation with the network of labour market experts in the MS.

Operational follow up:

- ➔ MS will identify the national experts that will cooperate with DG Translation in the process and will provide the COM with the list of contact points.

#### **4. ESCO PILOT PROJECTS**

COM provided an overview on two of the pilot projects developed in ESCO: the mapping pilot and the pilot project on qualifications.

##### Comments, questions and answers

- MS would like to receive information on how the pilot project on qualifications includes the learning outcomes.

COM informed MS that the EQF Advisory group is currently discussing how to make the information on qualifications comparable among countries. Currently countries describe qualifications in very different ways, and not always using the same format to describe the learning outcomes. For better comparability and transparency the COM has proposed a common format for describing learning outcomes, with a syntax construction that can be used in a constant manner.

Countries that already have descriptions in learning outcomes may need a second layer of description that corresponds to this format if they want to link it to the European level. At present there are no examples that can be used in this pilot.

#### **5. ESCO'S COMMUNICATION STRATEGY**

COM presented an overview of the communication strategy in ESCO and clarified that the communication strategy is for now only shown as high level. The communication strategy is not only about marketing but also a mechanism of quality assurance and listening to the stakeholders.

##### Comments, questions and answers

- MS welcomed and approved the ESCO's Communication strategy. However MS consider that the strategy is for the moment too much high level and they would like to see more concrete actions.

##### Operational follow up:

- ➔ COM will provide complement information with concrete steps for the next 6 months. COM will also propose concrete actions to communicate with people at the lowest level of education.

#### **6. AOB**

COM informed MSWG that they have been selected to take part in a pilot for a new electronic system for reimbursements of travel expenses.