



ESCO Communication Strategy 2016 - 2018

8 March 2016

*Employment,
Social Affairs
and Inclusion*

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List of abbreviations

Abbreviation	Complete form
BOA	Board
CEDEFOP	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
CSREF	Cross-sector Reference Group
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
ESCO	European Classification of Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations
EUSP	EU Skills Panorama
ISCO	International Standard Classification of Occupations
MAI	Maintenance Committee
MSWG	Member State Working Group
NACE	Statistical classification of economic activities in the European Community
PES	Public Employment Services
PRES	Private Employment Services
SEC	Secretariat
SPP	Spokesperson's Service

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Purpose of this document

In order to accomplish a successful communication of ESCO towards its stakeholders, the ESCO Secretariat (SEC) has developed a communication strategy. The communication strategy provides a sound analysis of the internal and external environment, overall aim, objectives, approach and target groups of the communication, while the communication plan sets out a framework for communication activities and allocates roles and tasks to stakeholders. The latter one provides more specific information on implementation planning, including a work plan.

Both will serve as guiding documents throughout the lifecycle of ESCO. This communication strategy¹ forms the basis for the planning of the ESCO communication activities by the European Commission, which will be outlined in the ESCO communication plan (separate document).

1. Scope

The ESCO communication strategy provides the approach that will support the implementation of the ESCO vision and objectives, as displayed in the ESCO strategic framework. To this end, the communication strategy outlines the communication aim, objectives and guiding principles, as well as actors driving forward this process. Actions related to the implementation of the communication objectives are included in the communication plan.

2. Aim and objectives of the ESCO communication strategy

2.1 Overall aim

The aim of the ESCO communication strategy 2016 – 2018 is threefold:

- i. Inform, raise awareness and enhance the use of ESCO;

¹ This is the final version of the communication strategy. It builds on the third version (ESCO (2015) SEC 004 DRAFT), discussed on the 13th ESCO Board meeting on 29 January 2015. The European Commission incorporated in this version the results of the discussions of that meeting and the comments collected via written procedure before the 15th Board meeting on 28 October 2015.

- ii. Listen what the stakeholders need and expect from ESCO and collect feedback from the implementers to learn what ESCO does well and what can be improved.

Once these first two communication aims are achieved, following the launch of ESCO v1, the stakeholders will have built trust around ESCO. At the same time, being aware of their needs, the European Commission will continue with its third communication aim;

- iii. Adapt ESCO v1 and its future versions to the needs of the stakeholders.

2.2 Specific objectives

In order to accomplish the aims of the ESCO communication strategy, the European Commission has set up the following specific communication objectives:

- Improve understanding of what ESCO and its objectives are and
- Showcase the ESCO use cases, i.e. demonstrate how stakeholder groups can benefit from ESCO in the labour market and education sector.

The success of the communication objectives can be measured by:

- the number of stakeholders, who pilot and/or implement² ESCO and
- the composition of the ESCO community forums³, i.e. adequate geographic and stakeholder balance, e.g. social partners, education, labour market, etc.

Up to March 2016 the following stakeholders have implemented ESCO: EURES, [Textkernel](#), [Academy Cube](#) and [Iceberg](#). By end of 2016 the European Commission envisages to have carried out 10 pilots and implementations. The European Commission plans to multiply this number following the release of ESCO v1.

3. Internal and external communication

This European Commission distinguishes between “internal” and “external” communication. “Internal” communication refers to the communication of the European Commission with the ESCO governing bodies, i.e. Board (BOA), Maintenance Committee (MAI) and the Member State Working Group (MSWG). “External” communication refers to the communication involving all other actors, who are not

² Implementation is the usage of ESCO, while a pilot is an experiment in the usage of ESCO, which may lead to implementation.

³ ESCO (2015) SEC 104 DRAFT. For more information, see p.14

part of the governance structure of ESCO, i.e. contributors, implementers as well as influencers (see section 4).

Throughout the “internal” communication, the European Commission seeks advice from the members of the aforementioned groups to design the policy towards the implementation of the ESCO communication objectives. Throughout the “external communication”, the European Commission listens to the requirements and needs of the stakeholders and informs them on the progress, scope and delivery dates of the improved versions of ESCO (push – pull mechanism).

For the smooth diffusion of information “internally” and to ensure transparency, the European Commission shares meeting minutes, documents on project planning and methodology, reports on quality assurance of the content and on the results of pilots, etc. with the ESCO governing bodies. In order to ensure an effective communication “externally”, the European Commission updates the ESCO portal regularly, shares newsletters and publishes news items and documents related to the progress of ESCO.

Furthermore, the distinction between “internal” and “external” communication becomes evident from the:

- i. type of information the European Commission discloses to its stakeholders, i.e. technical and strategic information “internally”, official and open to the public “externally”.
- ii. frequency of the communication messages, i.e. continuous communication “internally”, less frequent “externally”.

4. Target groups involved in communication

Effective communication is a critical factor for the accomplishment of the ESCO objectives. The European Commission relies on the expertise of stakeholders, i.e. domain experts, implementers, as well as influencers, in order to get a clear understanding of the needs and requirements of the industry niches they represent. Their collaboration and support in building and maintaining ESCO ensures that the final product provides value and benefits to the implementers and beneficiaries (end users). Stakeholders take up the following roles:

Contributors: These are actors that contribute to the development of the content and maintenance of ESCO. In their capacity as experts in various domains, they advise the European Commission on content development and quality assurance, provide strategic advice and help shape ESCO according to the needs of the industry niche

they represent. Contributors are well placed to high-light emerging trends in the labour market, as well as in the education and training sector.

The European Commission considers as contributors: ESCO Secretariat & service providers (taxonomists, terminologists, IT developers), members of the ESCO governing bodies, i.e. BOA, MAI, MSWG, members of the cross-sector reference group (CSREF), participants of the ESCO online consultation (14 October – 31 December 2015), experts representing public and private employment services, social partners, representatives of professional associations, national ministries, educational institutions, training organisations, statistical organisations, European and national sector skills councils and networks.

Implementers: (Potential) implementers of ESCO share and discuss implementation options including feature requests, best practices and practical issues related to the integration and use of ESCO such as how to use, replace or map the ESCO classification in their systems.

Implementers come from: public and private employment services, ministries responsible for national qualification databases, job portals and relevant online services, standardisation bodies (incl. those developing qualification standards), career and HR guides and recruiters, as well as other European initiatives, e.g. EURES, EUROPASS, EU Skills Panorama (EUSP).

Influencers: Influencers have a solid understanding of the requirements and needs of their constituencies. Therefore, their impact is twofold: they can influence the development and maintenance of ESCO and at the same time explain the added value of ESCO to their constituencies. If they decide to use ESCO in their businesses, their constituencies would, subsequently, make use of ESCO.

These are actors that have gained the support and trust of citizens. In several cases, citizens have provided them with access to their personal data in return for benefits, such as networking opportunities and access to job vacancies that match their skills. Public Employment Services (PES), LinkedIn, training institutions, social partners, as well as businesses pioneered by leaders in diverse sectors, e.g. [Academy cube](#) (pioneered by SAP and Cisco) fall under this category.

Decision makers: EU institutions, in particular, the European Commission, the European Parliament and the European Council, have a leading role in setting the legal framework and the guidelines of operation of ESCO. In addition, the European Centre

for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) has an active role in the governance of ESCO.

The Member States, via the European Council and the European Parliament, are empowered to shape these decisions. For instance, once the draft proposal of the new EURES Regulation is adopted by the latter EU institutions, *Article 19 "Automated matching through the common IT platform"* will make reference to the European classification of skills, competences, qualifications and occupations. In addition, Member States will decide, how to implement ESCO at national level, i.e. whether they will replace their national classifications with ESCO (and possibly extend ESCO), map all their national, regional and sectoral classifications to and from ESCO or use ESCO as a benchmark to improve their classification.

In several cases stakeholders may have more than one role. For instance, Member States, although positioned under the category of decision makers, have the power to act also as influencers, since they influence and shape the legal framework of operation of ESCO. For an exhaustive list of stakeholders and their role, see *Annex, List of stakeholders and their roles*.

5. ESCO communication guiding principles

Deriving from the ESCO strategic framework, a set of principles guide the development of the ESCO communication strategy and subsequently of the communication activities. These are listed below:

Strategy

Focus on ESCO The ESCO communication strategy supports the ESCO vision.

objectives Its aim is to help achieve the objectives outlined in the strategic framework.

Flexibility Communication with the stakeholders is likely to change over time. Information requests come from different sectors, organisations and stakeholders. At the same time ESCO evolves and the economic and technological context changes. We therefore need to be flexible with our communication and adapt messages, channels and activities to the changing communication needs.

Transparency We will be transparent and explain how ESCO is being developed. To this end we will publish minutes of ESCO management bodies, clear timelines and documents explaining the methodology of ESCO.

Compliance to EC Communication Guidelines Whenever the European Commission communicates about ESCO, it respects the overall communication guidelines. These include inter alia rules for interaction with stakeholders and press (involvement of the Spokesperson's Service (SPP)), the European Commission visual identity and rules for online communication⁴.

Complementarity with other EU Instruments ESCO needs to work complementary with other instruments that enhance interoperability in the labour market and in education and training. These include other classification systems, controlled vocabularies and frameworks, databases with complementary information, technical or syntactical standards, legislation and tools that make use of ESCO to provide services. When communicating about ESCO, we need to be clear about interaction and synergies with other projects and products.

One of the main use cases of ESCO is the data exchange among the Member States and the support of the EURES Job Mobility Portal. This does not only require close cooperation between the EURES and the ESCO team. It also includes consistent communication between the two project teams.

In a similar manner, the EUSP and EUROPASS will make use of ESCO. Communication about ESCO and the role of ESCO within each of these European instruments need to be clarified so that any further development will be consistent.

⁴ Information Providers Guide (<http://ec.europa.eu/ipg>).

The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) makes levels of qualifications comparable throughout Europe. The ESCO terminology can be used in this context to make learning outcomes more transparent across languages. ESCO and the EQF are being developed side by side. When communicating about the use of ESCO in education and training, this complementary nature of ESCO and the EQF needs to be well explained and highlighted.

Stakeholder management

Building partnerships Stakeholder engagement is key to the success of ESCO. Building strong long lasting relationships with them is critical. We need to listen to their needs and requirements and involve them at an early stage (*see "Listen" phase of the communication cycle, chapter 6.2*).

Strive for acceptance and voluntary adoption ESCO aims to become a de facto standard by providing an added value and a useful tool for service providers. In our communication we should therefore focus on the potential of ESCO, its usefulness and its voluntary adoption by implementers.

Communication channels

Showcasing The benefits of ESCO and its added value for the implementers become tangible in connection with job matching portals, career guidance tools, statistical information, etc. We, therefore, need adopt an approach of showcasing examples through pilots that demonstrate how ESCO can be used to meet the user's requirements and add value.

Using existing channels and structures We will avoid creating new communication channels, fora, networks or stakeholder groups, if communication with the target group can be organised through the existing channels. By using existing national and European structures, information can be disseminated to stakeholders in the right time and format for policy debates and decision-making processes.

The ESCO classification is a building block for online services and the semantic web. Communication about ESCO should, therefore, heavily rely on online communication channels.

Communication messages The messages need to be simple and clear so that they are easily understood by the receiver. Thus, they should be targeted to the characteristics of the target groups, to the purpose of the communication and to the communication channel.

In addition, messages should be consistent. Conflicting messages will do more harm than being beneficial as stakeholders will lose credibility in ESCO.

Online communication The ESCO classification is a building block for online services and the semantic web. Communication about ESCO should, therefore, heavily rely on online communication channels.

6. ESCO communication cycle

In order to ensure a smooth flow of communication among relevant actors, the European Commission developed the **ESCO communication cycle** (see figure 1). The ESCO communication cycle consists of four phases:

1. **“Listen”**: the European Commission collects feedback on implementers’ needs;
2. **“Learn”**: the European Commission evaluates the feedback and discusses improvements;
3. **“Build”**: the European Commission implements improvements and
4. **“Market”**: the European Commission presents the improved ESCO versions and collects further feedback.



Figure 1: ESCO communication cycle

Each phase represents a different stage in the development and continuous maintenance of ESCO. Therefore, the communication objectives and the role of the ESCO actors change in each phase of the ESCO communication cycle. In order to build momentum in communication the European Commission relies on **multipliers**, i.e. structures at European level that have a network of stakeholders at national, regional and local level, and can communicate about ESCO to different target audiences. These organisations manage the information flow to and from their member organisations. The CSREF, ESCO Board, ESCO Maintenance Committee and the MSWG serve the role of multipliers.

6.1 Feedback loop throughout the communication cycle

The communication cycle resembles a feedback loop mechanism. Feedback loops are fundamental to improve how ESCO operates. Simply gathering feedback does not suffice. It is essential to *close the loop* by designing an adequate feedback mechanism, analysing the collected data and ensuring that decision makers use the data to improve ESCO. Securing the support of stakeholders is essential to *close the loop*. ESCO aims at establishing a sustainable feedback loop mechanism. This requires support stemming from the following actors:

- Stakeholders: willing to provide feedback;

- European Commission: i) listens, analyses and reports the feedback and ii) acts upon feedback.

A feedback mechanism is a process of building commitment and accountability and requires equal efforts from all the aforementioned target groups under chapter 4 throughout the feedback loop. While it is of prime importance to create this environment (of commitment and accountability) from the beginning, it is of equal importance to cultivate it throughout all phases of development and maintenance of ESCO. To this end, the European Commission will implement a feedback loop mechanism through four stages:

1. Collect (feedback)
2. Analyse and Evaluate
3. Implement (revise and improve) and
4. Validate.

Each stage relates to each one of the communication phases (Listen, Learn, Build, Market). The communication plan will outline the activities that accompany each one of the four communication phases and stages of the feedback loop mechanism.

6.2 Phases of the communication cycle



The "**listen**" phase is the initial step for each development phase in ESCO. Our starting point should always be the requirements, needs (incl. emerging changes in the labour market) and expectations of the industry niches the stakeholders represent. It is of vital importance to understand how the stakeholders relate to the overall aims of ESCO, i.e. what is their view on these aims, why are they interested in ESCO and how can they support the European Commission achieve the aims of ESCO. Together with the stakeholders we need to discover the full potential of ESCO and understand how to best develop it further. During this phase the European Commission starts building support for ESCO, long-lasting relationships with stakeholders and a win-win situation for both parties.

Involved actors in this phase are all those that will be affected by the results of ESCO, but in particular (potential) implementers, who want to use ESCO to deliver better services.

In a nutshell, communication objectives of the Listen phase:

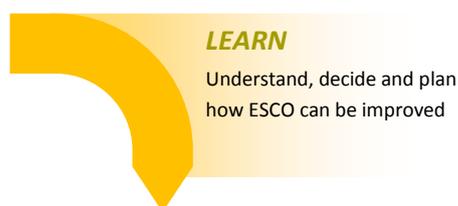
- Receive information on requirements towards ESCO to make it a useful tool that will deliver better services (for potential implementers);
- Receive feedback following the use of ESCO and suggestions for further improvement (for implementers).

The "Listen" phase corresponds to the first stage of the feedback loop mechanism "**Collect**". In order to listen to the needs and *collect* feedback from stakeholders, the European Commission will use the ESCO community forums⁵. The objective of the community forums will be to support the everyday maintenance and use of the ESCO vocabulary.

The first forum will empower experts and users to share and discuss topics on the content of the classification, such as emerging trends relating to skills or occupations. Participants will be taxonomists, domain experts and translators, who will provide their expertise on the update of the specific concepts within ESCO. The second forum will focus on the technical development of ESCO and in particular on how to solve technical issues, such as missing features, key performance indicators and requirements for improving the classification. It will be made up of IT developers.

The ESCO community forums will be an information source and virtual place for discussions on the ESCO classification. They will contribute to the continuous improvement process of ESCO.

Discussions with (potential) ESCO implementers will focus on how ESCO can be used to support better services. We need to understand the technical and information requirements to facilitate implementers map to ESCO or use it in applications. This includes, e.g. information on technical formats, documentation and training. If they are already using ESCO, we want to listen to their experiences and ideas on how ESCO can be improved.



view of the ESCO commitments.

Involved actors in this phase are:

- i) professionals, who possess technical expertise on how to build and manage classification systems. These professionals will draft technical

In the "**learn**" phase the European Commission evaluates the collected feedback and translates it into action. During the evaluation we will examine how these actions will influence and shape the classification in

⁵ ESCO (2015) SEC 104 DRAFT

- documentation for the development and maintenance of ESCO, addition of new features and integration of ESCO into the technical infrastructure of the users;
- ii) taxonomists with experience in drafting methodologies and content for the development and maintenance of skills classifications. Taxonomists will develop new ESCO use cases and scenarios for fit-for-purpose exercises. They will also keep the ESCO portal up-to-date;
 - iii) translators, who will manage and carry out new language revisions;
 - iv) experts with experience in carrying out mappings to other classifications;
 - v) policy makers, who will provide guidelines on the marketing of ESCO.

In a nutshell, communication objectives of the Learn phase:

- Improve understanding on how ESCO can be improved (via discussion on future features);
- Build consensus with regards to the priorities of the areas to be improved within ESCO;
- Build consensus around the timelines for implementation;
- Learn, which are the technical and content features that implementers require so that ESCO meets the needs of their clients and facilitates the matching of CVs to job vacancies.

The “Learn” phase corresponds to the second stage of the feedback loop mechanism **“Analyse and Evaluate”**. In order to understand the collected feedback, it is crucial to analyse it. A feedback analysis will show the evolution of ESCO over time, the impact on its community of stakeholders and its relation to relevant classifications and instruments. The ESCO community forums will facilitate this process. Open dialogues will i) allow deeper and detailed discussions on the feedback, ii) foster a shared understanding of ways to improve ESCO and its functionalities, iii) raise expectations among the community of stakeholders and iv) boost their sense for accountability. Furthermore, the European Commission will share this analysis with the MSGW and seek their feedback.

This is a continuous learning process in which the European Commission identifies improvements in ESCO and potential synergies with relevant projects, classifications and frameworks and plans how they can be implemented, e.g. reuse of results or

import of content. This requires alignment with the objectives of ESCO, conciliation and balance of conflicting needs and prioritisation.



The "**build**" phase refers to the development process of ESCO v1 and the future versions; this encompasses: i) build the technical systems for managing the classification, ii) improve the content of the classification, iii)

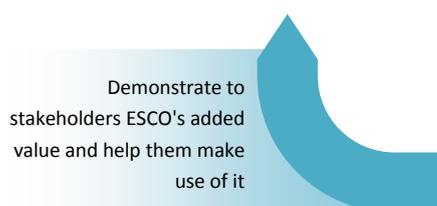
create mappings that are within the scope of ESCO and as such they are managed by the ESCO team, e.g. mappings to the International Standard of Occupations (ISCO)-08 and the Statistical classification of economic activities in the European Community (NACE Rev.2)⁶, iv) translate the classifications into 23 European languages and v) deliver the final product by publishing it on the ESCO portal and including it in the ESCO APIs.

Involved actors are those that will contribute to the technical and content development of ESCO, that is to say: i) professionals, who possess technical expertise on how to build and manage classification systems and ii) taxonomists with experience in drafting methodologies and content for the development and maintenance of skill classifications.

In a nutshell, communication objectives of the Build phase:

- Communicate required features to the actors that will implement them;
- Inform (potential) implementers about future features and the timeline for their development.

The "Build" phase corresponds to the third stage of the feedback loop mechanism "**Implement**". At this stage the European Commission acts upon the evaluation of the feedback and the technical team implements the decisions. The *feedback loop will not close*, unless the findings lead to action.



In the "**market**" phase, the European Commission showcases, through the different channels in section 7, the features of the existing and future versions (following

⁶ NACE rev.2, EUROSTAT Methodologies and Working papers, <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/3859598/5902521/KS-RA-07-015-EN.PDF>

improvements) of ESCO to (potential) implementers and demonstrates how it can support them deliver better services and reach their objectives. Once they decide to use ESCO or map to ESCO (for mappings that are not managed by the ESCO team itself), the European Commission and technical team will support them by providing technical support, e.g. technical documentation and coaching how to use ESCO effectively in their use cases.

Involved actors in this phase are: i) those that provide products or services that could be improved with ESCO, e.g. organisations and/or companies that provide job matching or placement services (this includes stakeholders, who manage national, regional or sectoral classifications and map to ESCO), career guidance, statistical offices, education and training institutes, ii) beneficiaries of ESCO, i.e. jobseekers, employers and learners.

In a nutshell, communication objectives of the Market phase:

- Demonstrate improved version of ESCO and how it can be used in the context of concrete business cases;
- Showcase the ESCO use cases, i.e. demonstrate how stakeholder groups can benefit from ESCO in the labour market and education sector;
- Enhance the use of ESCO by a growing number of implementers;
- Promote the positive image of ESCO among its stakeholders;
- Trigger feedback and suggestions for improvement of ESCO that will be used for the "listen phase"

The "Market" phase corresponds to the fourth phase of the feedback loop mechanism "**Validation**". The European Commission demonstrates the new, improved version of ESCO to the stakeholders for validation, a posteriori the collection of their feedback, evaluation and implementation of it. The European Commission will keep collecting feedback on a continuous basis.

7. Strategic communication channels

Communication channels are the spine upon which the communication strategy is based. The ESCO Secretariat will use the following "listening channels" to carry out communication activities:

Broadcasting channels

Communication campaigns on ESCO, e.g. the campaign prior the online consultation

ESCO community forums
ESCO conferences, e.g. launch conference of ESCO v1
ESCO large meetings, e.g. introductory sessions on the promotion of the online consultation
On invitation at other conferences, workshops to showcase/present ESCO
Social media (following the rules of the European Commission)
ESCO portal, Directorate General Employment portal, European Commission portal
Links to other portals managed either by the European Commission or by European decentralised agencies, e.g. EUSP, etc.
ESCO newsletter
Narrowcasting channels
Bilateral meetings, e.g. with representatives from PES, PRES, job matching portals, industry federations, etc.
Country visits in Members States for the integration of national qualifications in ESCO
Mapping pilots with PES
Pilots with the private sector, e.g. Academy Cube
Targeted campaigns by sector

ANNEX – List of stakeholders and their roles

		Roles					
		Moderate and capture feedback	Draft technical documentation on how to develop, maintain and integrate ESCO into the users technical infrastructure	Integrate ESCO into their systems	Provide feedback content wise	Provide feedback tech-wise	Market ESCO to their constituencies
Contributors	EC services developing ESCO, i.e. ESCO Secretariat & service providers (taxonomists, terminologists, IT developers)	X	X				
	ESCO governing bodies, i.e. BOA, MAI, MSWG, plus CSREF	X			X	X	X
	PES and PRES			X	X	X	X
	Social partners	X			X		X
	Industry associations				X		X
	National ministries			X	X	X	X
	Education & Training institutes			X	X	X	X

	Statistical offices			X	X	X	X
	Sector skills councils and networks				X		X
	Organisations that manage related classifications and frameworks, e.g. EQF, eCF, NACE, ISCO, etc.				X	X	
	Organisations that manage national, regional and sectoral classifications			X	X	X	X
Implementers	PES and PRES			X	X	X	X
	National ministries			X	X	X	X
	Online service providers, e.g. job portals			X	X	X	X
	Standardisation bodies (incl. those developing qualification standards)				X	X	X
	Career & HR guides, recruiters			X	X	X	X
	EU instruments (EURES, EUSP, Europass)			X	X	X	
	Organisations that			X	X	X	X

	perform job matching						
Influencers	PES and PRES			X	X	X	X
	Education & Training institutes			X	X	X	X
	Organisations that perform job matching			X	X	X	X
Decision makers	European Commission	X	X				
	CEDEFOP	X		X		X	
	Member States			X	X	X	X