



Position Paper

April 2017

The new Europass Framework - COM(2016) 625

In summary, EUROCHAMBRES:

- Acknowledges the overall aim of the revised Europass framework to improve transparency and understanding of skills and qualifications, thus facilitating mobility and ultimately employability.
- Welcomes the inclusion of a pan-European skills forecasting tool in the revised Europass framework given its potential for shaping the right policy messages and for career counselling while at the same time emphasizing the need for a strong role of organisations of the world of work, such as Chambers of Commerce in the VET system and the provision of training in order to ensure that both are geared towards companies' needs.
- Highlights the specific attention that disadvantaged groups including migrants require to fully benefit from the existing tools and services for skills and qualifications and to facilitate their integration in the European labour markets.
- Believes the initiative is premature as the different existing instruments are not fully implemented yet and would require a wide impact assessment on the added-value of the existing tools and services for the end-users, as well as an analysis of the impact of the integration of these tools and services in a single platform for the end-users.
- Believes that the European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO) is not mature enough to be granted a legal status and included in the revised Europass framework.
- Recommends that the organisation of services for skills and qualifications at national level should be left to Member States, while improved cooperation and communication should be encouraged

Introduction

EUROCHAMBRES – The Association of European Chambers of Commerce and Industry represents over 20 million enterprises in Europe – 98% of which are SMEs – through members in 43 countries and a European network of 1700 regional and local Chambers.

Chambers are active players in boosting skills and competences. Chambers are both business representatives and Vocational and Education Training (VET) providers. 80% of all Chambers of Commerce and Industry are involved in education and training and 48% of all Chambers deliver initial or continuous vocational education and training. Every year, nearly 1.8 million people receive training qualifications via the Chamber network and 600.000 apprenticeships are managed directly by

Chambers, mainly in Austria, France, Germany, Hungary, Luxembourg and Spain. Chambers are therefore, in some countries, deeply involved in the validation of skills, qualifications and competences. As business representatives, Chambers are strongly interested in improving understanding and transparency of skills and competences acquired by potential employees to facilitate the identification and recruitment of appropriately skilled people.

In this context, EUROCHAMBRES acknowledges the overall aim of the proposed revised Europass framework to improve transparency and understanding of skills and therefore facilitate mobility, and ultimately employability. Specific comments on the European Commission proposal can be found on the following pages.

Importance for greater transparency and understanding of skills and qualifications recognized

EUROCHAMBRES recognizes the importance for individuals to have an opportunity to present their skills and qualifications in less traditional formats. EUROCHAMBRES also strongly encourages the indication, documentation, assessment and validation of non-formal education so that this learning can be used for advancing in the career path and for further education and training. The required skill-sets needed are now increasingly broad, employers need people with soft skills who are problem-solvers, analytical thinkers, multilingual, entrepreneurial, and team players. EUROCHAMBRES recognized the importance to provide tools to self-assess skills, not only language skills but digital skills and entrepreneurial skills. This would enable easier and shared understanding of concept and outcomes by both individuals and those trying to assess and understand skills.

Importance of increasing the accessibility of tools and services for skills and qualification to disadvantaged groups

EUROCHAMBRES welcomes the particular attention given to the specific needs of disadvantaged groups (low-skilled people, long-term unemployed and migrants) in the revised Europass framework. They often lack computer skills, internet connection and/or experience in documenting and presenting their skills and competencies. The role of on-the-ground services (contact points at national level) to accompany the tools for skills and qualification is even more important in their case to provide tailor-made guidance to make sure the information is used efficiently and effectively. EUROCHAMBRES recommends to develop specific awareness campaign towards each of these groups. In the specific case of the migrants, EUROCHAMBRES underlines the importance to include in the revised Europass framework the future skill profile tool for third-country nationals, announced in the New Skill Agenda and currently prepared by the European Commission. This inclusion and its interoperability with the other EU tools for skills and qualifications will facilitate the integration of migrants in the European labour markets.

Inclusion of a pan-European skill forecasting tool welcomed

EUROCHAMBRES welcomes the inclusion of a skill forecasting tool in the new Europass framework, given its potential for shaping the right policy messages as well as in career counselling as an orientation. EUROCHAMBRES advocates for the development of a pan-European skills forecasting tool built on different group of data (anticipated business vacancies, data on business activity and economic situation, vacancy monitoring by public employment services and data on graduates from all types of education and training institutes). By blending information provided by these four types of data and looking at past and future trends, this tool would allow to more accurately anticipate the skills and competences needed in the future.

In this context EUROCHAMBRES at the same time stresses the need for countries to strive for making VET institutions and providers themselves more responsive to companies' needs and the changes induced through technological and organisational change. In order to achieve this, institutionalised

dialogue and a strong role of employers and other organisations of the world of work, such as Chambers of Commerce at system level as well as in the provision of the actual training, is needed. Only this will ensure that VET qualifications and their underlying curricula are geared towards the needs of the labour market.

European-wide platform of EU tools for skills and qualification premature: testing period and impact assessment required

EUROCHAMBRES welcomes the efforts of the European Commission to widen the scope of the Europass from a document-based facility to a European-wide platform gathering EU electronic tools and services for skills and qualification. EUROCHAMBRES stressed in several occasions, and in particular in its 2014 position on the “European Areas of Skills and Qualifications”, the challenge represented by the fragmentation of EU information, tools and services for skills and qualifications, and therefore welcomes the integrated approach proposed by the European Commission in the revised Europass framework. The synergy and interoperability of EU online tools and services should reinforce their effectiveness, impact and visibility, and thus awareness and should provide the user with a clear and complete picture of the services offered in the area. Ultimately, the transparency and understanding of skills and qualifications would be enhanced.

However, the inclusion of all existing EU services and tools for skills and qualifications in a single-platform is complex as they have different objectives, end-users and are at different stages of development. The existing services and tools should be easily accessible, visible and adapted to the needs of the end-users. Their added-value should be proven as well as their relationship to one another. EUROCHAMBRES recommends therefore to carry out a wide impact assessment on the uptake and usefulness of these tools and services for the end-users before integrating them to the Europass framework. The European Commission proposal should further define the responsibilities for the management of the platform to avoid uncertainties when it comes to data provision, updating, ownership and protection. The involvement of the relevant stakeholders (learners, job seekers, workers, employers, Chambers, guidance practitioners, public employment services, social partners, education and training providers, youth work organizations and policy makers) in the development and implementation of the platform is crucial so that it succeed. It should also be taken into account that although some of these tools are already used on an operational level in many countries, the implementation of other instruments, such as ESCO.

ESCO not ready to be included in the revised Europass framework

EUROCHAMBRES believes that the classification of European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO) is not ready to be a common reference language to support the functioning of Europass. ESCO is still under development and it would be premature to give ESCO a legal status and to link it with other existing tools. However, EUROCHAMBRES recognizes that ESCO could be a useful tool once it is completed to facilitate matching on the European labour market and bring added value as an efficient translation tool between the labour market and the world of education. However, the relevance of ESCO for the labour market still has to be proven.

Organization of services for skills and qualifications at national level should be left to each Member State

EUROCHAMBRES supports greater cooperation and communication between the existing centres at national level (Europass, EQF and Euroguidance centres) which will simplify administration, avoid overlap, improve visibility and facilitate promotion of the services and tools for skills and qualifications. However the revised Europass framework should respect the diversity of the education and training systems of the Member States and the specificity of each labour market as well as the principle of subsidiarity. Single

National Skills Coordination Point can't be imposed in each Member State. EUROCHAMBRES recognizes the great importance of the national centre(s) to provide tailor-made guidance to the different users and to maximize the effectiveness, efficiency, impact and visibility of the various EU tools for skills and qualifications. EUROCHAMBRES would like to stress finally the importance to increase the cooperation between these centres and the business community to strengthen the impact on the skills mismatches and employability in Europe.

Existing Expert Groups at European level shouldn't merge in a "co-ordination Group"

EUROCHAMBRES recommends to not replace existing expert groups at EU level that are relevant for the new Europass framework by a "co-ordination group". There are great concerns that the establishment of a new co-ordination group at EU level with two representatives per Member State would lead to a loss of expertise and quality.

EUROCHAMBRES is following closely the on-going discussions on the revised Europass Framework in the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament.

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