

MATES Protocol for the collaborative review of occupation profiles and skills in the ESCO database

April 2022



About this Report

This document was developed through the EC-funded Erasmus+ project **MATES: Maritime Alliance for fostering the European Blue Economy through a Marine Technology Skilling Strategy**.

The objective of the MATES project is to develop a skills strategy that addresses the main drivers of change in the maritime industries, in particular shipbuilding and offshore renewable energy. Both sectors are strongly linked and require new capacities to succeed in an increasingly digital, green and knowledge- driven economy.

Duration: January 2018 – April 2022 (52 months)

More information on the project is available at www.projectmates.eu

Document information	
Short description	This document is a result of the “Definition of Occupation Profiles” Pilot Experience. It aims to share the results with interested stakeholders on how a blueprint project or a sectoral alliance can be an appropriate framework for updating the ESCO database, sharing a methodology which facilitates a collaborative review of occupational profiles.
Next steps	To be part of the transferrable package of WP4-Pilot Experiences, as well as the dissemination and outreach activities of WP6. Recommendations from this Protocol together with other project results were transferred to the WP5- long-term Action Plan and sustainability to feed the Maritime Technologies Skills Strategy.
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Contents

Executive summary5

Introduction6

Context.....6

Methodology6

Conclusions.....10



Executive summary

The MATES Protocol for the collaborative review of occupation profiles and skills in the ESCO database has **resulted from the Pilot Experience “Definition of new Occupational Profiles (DOP)”**, which was developed in the framework of the MATES project from 2020 until 2022. This Pilot Experience was **fully focused on providing relevant and acceptable updates to ESCO**, a multilingual database run by the Directorate General Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (DG EMPL). ESCO “works as a dictionary, describing, identifying and classifying professional occupations, skills, and qualifications relevant for the EU labour market and education and training”¹.

Contributors to the ESCO database require a broad knowledge base of the ESCO taxonomy and terminology employed, as well as an advanced level of English and the technical expertise related to the occupations that are being defined. The DOP Pilot Experience tested mechanisms to bridge these barriers, proposing the intervention of “ESCO facilitators” to promote the involvement of relevant “satellite experts” in the continuous improvement and updating of the database.

Therefore, this report aims to **facilitate the collaborative review of occupation profiles and skills in the ESCO database, summarising the best practices and lessons learned from the ESCO review process**, to make the methodological approach easier to apply, replicable, and useful for other Blueprint and sectoral alliance projects.

Facilitating the involvement of sectoral experts in the ESCO update benefits their industry through an increased awareness of the relevant sectorial occupations, which would also support the growth and progression of the sector in Europe.

¹ ESCO is available in all EU languages, as well as Icelandic, Norwegian and Arabic. More information available at <https://esco.ec.europa.eu/en/about-esco/what-esco>

Introduction

This Protocol was developed within a MATES Pilot Experience entitled the Definition of new Occupational Profiles for the maritime sector.

The purpose of this document is to summarize the best practices for a collaborative review of occupational profiles and to share the lessons learned from the ESCO review process, to make the methodological approach easier to apply, replicable, and useful for other sectoral projects.

The use of the Protocol to facilitate expert involvement in future projects will facilitate the transfer of results from the projects to the ESCO database.

Context

The ESCO classification² is a multilingual³ database managed by the DG EMPL of the European Commission that works as a dictionary, **describing, identifying and classifying** professional occupations, skills, and qualifications relevant for the EU labour market and education and training. ESCO was originally built upon three pillars, still shown in the ESCO portal: Skills and Competences, Occupations and Qualifications., with three main policy goals: 1) To encourage EU mobility, 2) To align people's skills with industry needs and 3) To provide skills-based labour market services. It now has two pillars as the Qualifications pillar has been subsumed in EUROPASS⁴.. These are: A) Occupations (3008) and B) Skills (13890) classified in terms of occupation, sector, cross-sectoral, transversal, languages and knowledge.

Methodology

The methodology followed in this Pilot Experience is summarized below (Figure 1).

Step One: Analysis of the present occupational profiles for the sector and area of interest.

First, revise the information available in the latest version of ESCO. ESCO V1.1 is the basis for the identification of occupations, and the skills, competences and knowledge that are already associated with them.

Consider reviewing primary and supporting occupations.

Step Two: Identification of skills needs and trends for future scenarios.

Identify sources of information in order to analyse skills gaps and expected future demand: i.e., Blueprint projects, analyses of technological trends, technology platforms reports, CEDEFOP Skills Panorama, are some relevant sources of information⁵.

² <https://ec.europa.eu/esco/portal>

³ ESCO is available in all EU languages, as well as Icelandic, Norwegian and Arabic

⁴ The Qualifications pillar is now integrated in EUROPASS <https://europa.eu/europass/en>

⁵ The DOP Pilot Experience based on previous outputs of the project for the identification of skill needs and trends for future scenarios: Sdoukopoulos, E., Tsafonias, G., Perra, V.M., Boile, M., 2020. Baseline Report on present skills needs in shipbuilding and offshore renewables value chains, MATES project results and Ergas, Ioannis, Smyrnakis, George (2020). Foresight scenarios identifying future skills needs and trends. Results of the MATES project (www.projectmates.eu)

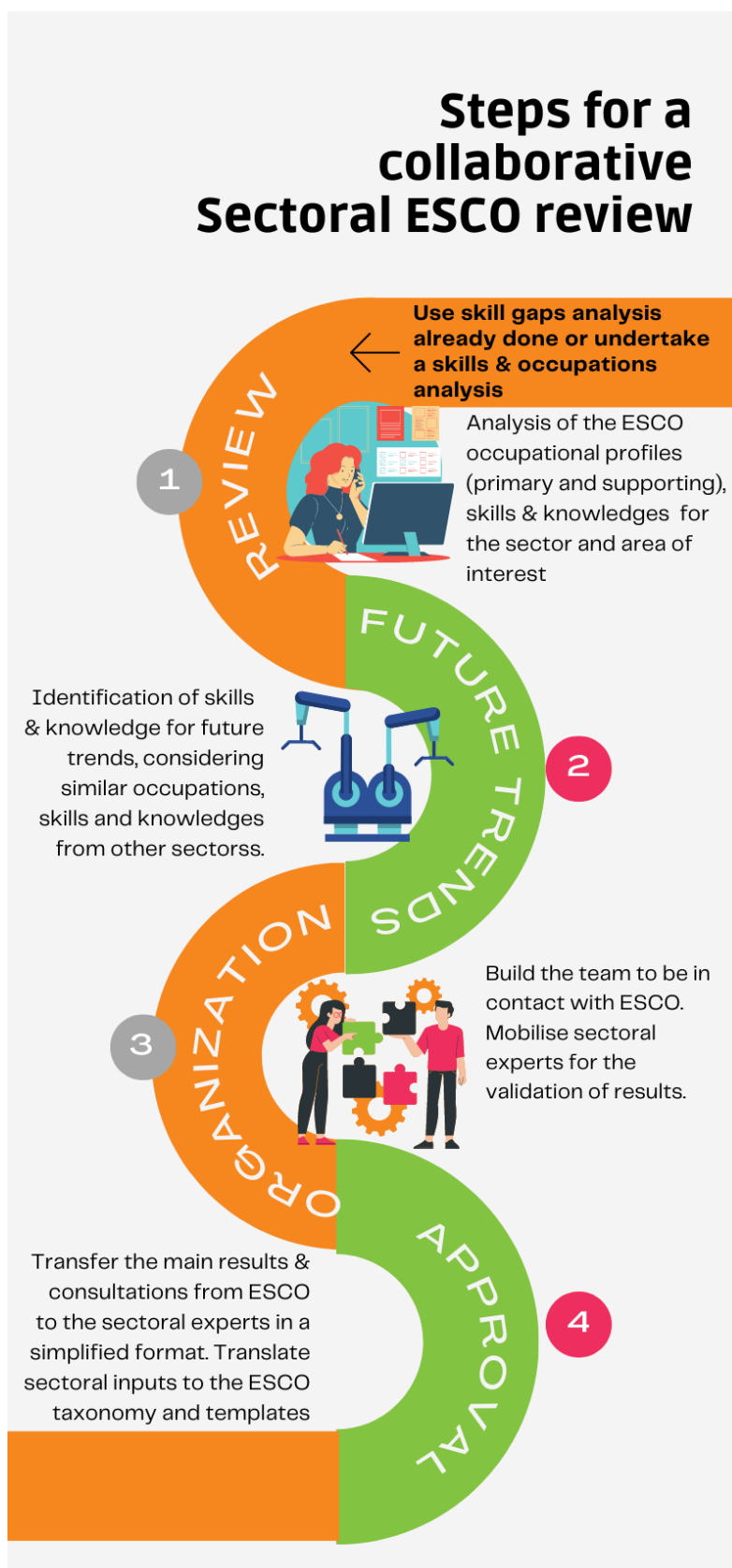


Figure 1: Infographic with the main steps needed to undertake a collaborative review of occupation profiles and skills in the ESCO database

Step Three: Organisation

Developing a working network is essential for undertaking a contribution to an ESCO review successfully. This Experience has demonstrated that having “satellite experts” and ESCO facilitators within the framework of a sectoral alliance project presents a good opportunity to establish collaboration with the ESCO secretariat for updating skills and occupations in the ESCO database (Figure 2).



Figure 2: Scheme of the proposed organization for undertaking a sectoral ESCO review

ESCO Facilitator/s must have the following characteristics:

- Broad knowledge of the ESCO taxonomy and terminology
- Advanced level of English: ability to write English at a high level and to understand written English being the most relevant.
- Sufficient technical expertise related to the occupations that are being defined
- Ability to coordinate communication within a team
- Good project management
- Reasonable standard of computer literacy

Satellite experts: they must have extensive knowledge of the sector addressed, and only need to be involved for short periods of time.

In the DOP Pilot Experience both Ms. Margaret Eleftheriou and Ms. Lucía Fraga were the ESCO facilitators. The review they carried out was validated by eight “satellite experts”, belonging to the project consortium. Both Ms. Eleftheriou and Ms. Fraga Lucia had been experts for the European Commission on the [ESCO](#) board from its inception in 2010 and therefore have extensive expertise in the ESCO taxonomy. For Ms Eleftheriou English is her native language and she has very wide expertise in VET standards and descriptors, and Ms Fraga, as the MATES Project Coordinator, brought sufficient expertise in both the shipbuilding and offshore renewable energy sectors.

Once the occupations, knowledge and skills have been identified as requiring to be updated or added to the ESCO database a peer review has to take place with the satellite experts. The ESCO facilitators therefore constitute the link between the sector stakeholders and the ESCO secretariat.

Feedback from those core stakeholders approached through the knowledge transfer activities for capacity building in ORE indicated that being involved in the ESCO update would benefit their industry through bringing an increased awareness of the relevant occupations to the ORE sector and that it would support the growth and progression of the sector in Europe.

Step four: Establish the collaboration with the ESCO secretariat

ESCO keeps track of the changes in the labour market to update the database, with the contribution of sectoral stakeholders and Blueprint projects, such as the MATES project. The process consists of eight steps and can extend over 20 months. It must comprise validation by all EU Member States (Ministries of Education and Labour) and translation to all languages before it can be published (Figure 4). Therefore, **it is very important to coordinate the transfer of inputs to the ESCO team with the revisions of the database**, and employ the templates and forms provided for doing so.

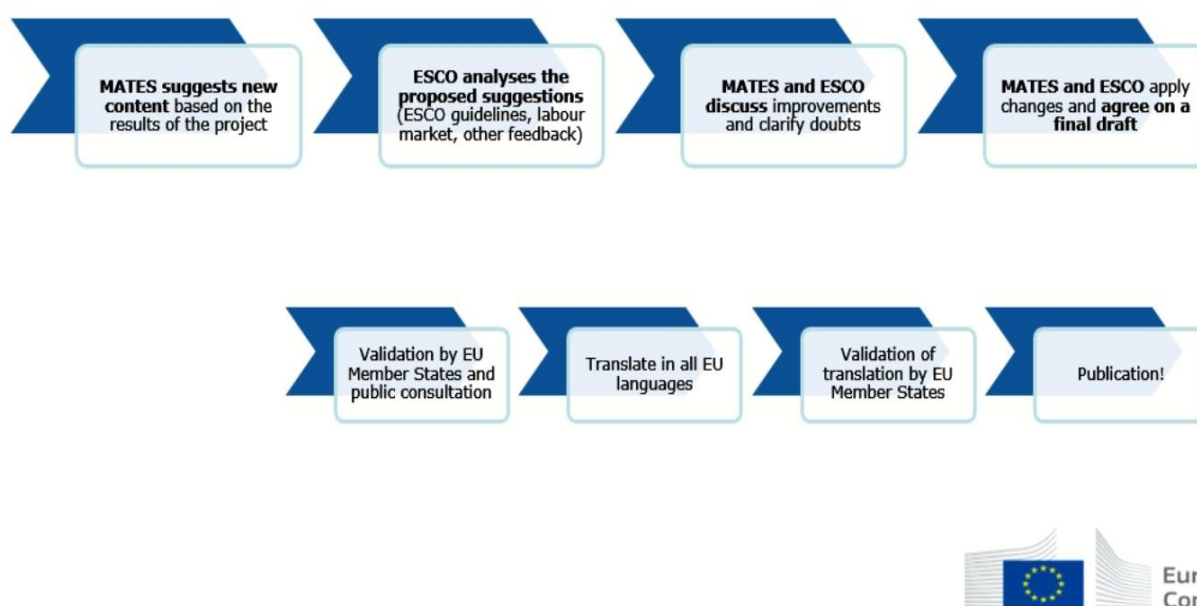


Figure 4: MATES project and ESCO collaboration showing the steps followed from August 2020 until February 2022

Step five: Evaluation and lessons learnt

Once the review process has started, ESCO experts will undertake the evaluation of the suggested modifications to the database and come back with questions and suggestions, until a final proposal is agreed. This is a win-win process since not only does the ESCO database keep on top of the current labour terminology but the organizations involved in the process will benefit from their feedback, keeping up to date as well as upskilling themselves about the ESCO structure and strengths.

Modifications to the initial proposal may be introduced during subsequent steps. A final review may help to draw up future reviewing processes.

Conclusions

One of the main challenges of the ESCO platform is to keep being updated, given the rapid changes that can occur in the work environment: new occupations appear, some requiring new or different skills and competences.

The inputs from Blueprint projects are very valuable to this process, as these projects have dedicated a huge amount of time and effort to analyse the changes in a specific sector in terms of occupations and skills required, and reviewing the already available contents. The inclusion of these results in a dictionary such as ESCO allows them to be used with a transversal approach and to apply them to more sectors.

The present report provides a five-step methodology which facilitates the development of a collaborative review of occupation profiles and skills in the ESCO database, and summarises the best practices and lessons learned from the ESCO review process, to make the methodological approach easier to apply, replicable, and useful for other Blueprint and sectoral alliance projects.

Facilitating the involvement of sectoral experts in the ESCO update benefits their industry through an increased awareness of the relevant sectorial occupations, which would also support the growth and progression of the sector in Europe. This is especially important for emerging sectors such as the offshore renewable energies, which had few occupations present in the ESCO v1.0, while facing the prospect of high growth in the very near future.

