

Skills Lab Network of Experts

A modality for knowledge co-creation on emerging skills needs

ETF Proposal of working modalities and actions

to be presented to the network members during the launching event

Version 12 October 2021

1. Introduction

This is an ETF proposal to be presented and discussed on the launch event of the **Experts' Network on skills demand** ETF is organising on 21 October 2021. The proposal has two aspects: (i) the working modalities of the network (objective, membership, communication, etc.), and (ii) Action Plan of the network (from its launch at end-October until December 2022). The proposal presented below are based on the findings of online survey conducted to understand the potential interest for developing a network in skills demand area, as well as the results of focus group discussions organised in July to discuss and shape the key aspects of ETF's network of experts.

ETF hopes to get endorsement from the participants on the proposal during the launch event, after which it plans to gradually expand the Network of Experts. Consequently, its activities will be reviewed after a mid-term assessment (tentatively end 2022). The Network will be focusing on skills anticipation and changes in demand for skills, qualifications and occupations – with interested researchers, research institutes and expertise networks from ETF Partner Countries and the EU member states.

2. Objective and Target of the Network

The aim of the Skills Lab Network is to bring experts and researchers together from different institutions and countries to co-create, exchange, and disseminate labour market research to foster the culture of skills anticipation and matching.

The primary target population are the experts and researchers working on skills demand. They can be from a variety of public, private or non-profit research institutions and universities and/or international organisations and networks. Thus, the network will bring a high-level knowledge and

expertise together, and as such it does not target to involve policymakers and practitioners - though they may be associated at a later stage, according to the maturity and progress in the related thematic area. This would support system reforms and contribute to policy development in partner countries.

3. Main outcomes of the online survey and focus groups on the networks

- **So far, 52 organisations expressed their interest** in joining the ETF Network of Experts. The Network is and will be open to accept any additional members who are the experts and researchers working on skills demand.
- **More informal (bottom-up/loose) structure** in bringing researchers together, with longer term engagement and gradual investment to building trust and capacity around main research topics.
- **Independent nature of the network** as per the research objectives and scope. ETF would provide support and facilitation, but members would need to be proactive. The coordination could be eventually done by a reputable academic institution, on the basis of “investing into the network without dominating it”. We may consider setting up a Steering (or Advisory) Committee for the network to guide the future work and collaboration with network members.
- **Bring people with different specialisations** (skill needs identification, occupational changes, future of work, skills mismatch, the need for digital and green skills, skills’ mobility, gender, youth, quantitative vs. qualitative research, etc), and interdisciplinary approach to connect labour market and education issues by breaking silos. Working together is going to be valuable.
- **Increase the capacity and interaction of research community** to work together, by preparing comparative reports with other countries, organizing training sessions, having access to ETF publications and methodologies, developing and implementing joint projects, organizing joint seminars/ workshops on selected themes, etc.
- **Link the results of research with policymaking** in countries as and bridge the gap between theory and practice of the research. Respondents and participants of the focus group considered that the ETF has the ability and capacity to link the research with policy makers both at the EU level and in partner countries which adds value and impact for the network.

Various inputs from external participants in both Focus Groups revealed that the most important reasons of joining a network and examples of concrete benefits for the members can be grouped under ***the following five points:***

- 1. Access to new ideas and research fields**, access to data sources for research purposes (facilitated by ETF), to latest state-of-art knowledge/ methodology in the field, and to funding;
- 2. Sharing, exchanging and disseminating knowledge** and results of research, getting feedback from other colleagues, going beyond national borders, particularly for small countries;
- 3. Meeting new contacts**, interaction and networking with other experts/ researchers, learning from new country examples, with spinoff activities of joint/multi-country research and joint publications;

4. **Policy advocacy** of their research results towards national governments and international organisations (e.g. The EU), connecting research findings (theory) into policy making (practice);
5. **Learning** about opportunities (funding, new research areas, joint research possibilities), learning about new research topics, learning about other countries and international trends, and getting training (with or without certificate) on new research methodologies and approaches.

Therefore, the Skills Lab Network of Experts will primarily cover three functions: regular mutual/peer exchange, a capacity-building component, direct links to the ETF work as well as EU level and global practices.

4. Proposal of the main network actions from October 2021 to December 2022 (to be regularly reviewed and adapted to the community needs)

- **Thematic online seminars** on selected topics (use of big data for labour market analyses, skills mismatch, platform work, future skill needs in selected sectors, use of different methodologies to analyse current and future skill needs, etc.), where the network members will learn from others and present their relevant research on the topic. This may include ETF-organised seminars covering ETF initiatives on skills demand, where the network members are invited and assign a particular role when relevant. Network members are also encouraged to organise similar seminars on a voluntary basis.
- **Yearly live event** where the members of the network can meet, exchange, and review the network plans. The event could be hosted by the ETF in the first year (2022), but later alternatively the ETF would be happy to delegate the hosting also to network members and countries interested in organising the annual event on a voluntary basis. Co-sharing the costs would be an important aspect and incentive to make the live events cost-efficient and sustainable in the years to come.
- **A yearly call for research proposals** restricted to the network members in the area of skills demand. The ETF could contract the winner(s) to carry out their assignments with a limited funding. Although a broad thematic scope would be skills anticipation, the applicants can focus on a particular thematic issue in their research proposal. The ETF will come up with specific criteria for the selection which, besides the thematic focus, can also include, for example, a requirement for partnerships between researchers from the EU Member states and the ETF partner countries. Members of the Network are encouraged to launch similar research calls as well.
- **Network e-newsletter**, to be developed and disseminated e.g. bi-annually to the wider public; The ETF can disseminate it to all Open Space users for instance and using platforms developed jointly by the Network members. This will be in addition to the regular email exchanges facilitated from the ETF email account 'Skillslabnetwork' skillslabnetwork@etf.europa.eu.
- **Online platform to regularly** exchange, collaborate, store and disseminate the knowledge (co-) created within the Network. This is another way to facilitate regular exchange of information among the network members, as well as a tool for informing and coordinating the network activities (e.g. LinkedIn group). In addition, existing studies on emerging skills needs in partner countries in English and other languages can be made available. The network members may use

the platform to share their research results as well as translate their research documents or produce English summaries to reach a wider international expert community. For the purpose of sharing and exchanging, a dedicated online community platform will be set up.

5. Objectives of the Network launching event on 21 October 2021

The event aims at launching officially the Skills Lab Network of Experts and discussing the working modalities and main actions in a midterm perspective. The event will also be an opportunity to identify, together with members, thematic priorities to be addressed in the first year (2022). The ETF will present its ongoing flagship initiatives on skills demand to initiate discussions. Other initiatives from members may be also presented or shared in the meeting. A list of the ETF initiatives on skills demand is shared in advance with network members (updated version as of October 2021), together with this ETF proposal.