SKILLS LAB NETWORK OF EXPERTS LAUNCH
"Towards a joint creation of knowledge on emerging skills needs"

THE EVENT SUMMARY WITH CONCLUSIONS (21 OCTOBER 2021)

On the 21st of October 2021, the ETF officially launched the Skills Lab Network. As announced before, the newly established network aims to bring experts and researchers from different institutions and countries to co-create, exchange, and disseminate labour market and skills research to foster a skills anticipation and matching culture. By bringing together high-level knowledge and expertise, both ETF and network members could support consolidation of skills needs identification and anticipation in the developing countries.

The hight interest in the ETF's network was confirmed by almost 60 external researchers/ research institutes who joined the official launch event. They were from a variety of public, private or non-profit research institutions and universities and/or international organisations and networks. The event was preceded by an online survey with researchers/experts potentially interested in joining the network and focus group discussions with those who agreed to explore further their ideas to shape the network.

The launch started with the welcome and a brief introduction to the objectives of the Skills Lab Network. Then the participants were divided into four groups to discuss and share their work/expertise and express their expectations around some thematic areas. These four thematic areas were: methodologies for skills demand analysis; big data analytics; sector-specific skills analyses; and target-specific skills analyses. In each break-out group, the participants discussed firstly their experiences/work achieved so far, and secondly their plans/expectations for the future on each thematic area.

Summary from Group 1 on methodologies for skills demand analysis: The first group discussed various methodologies such as the use of job vacancies, statistics from national statistical offices, big data, surveys with employers, tracer studies and complementary methods such as focus groups meetings. One of the main points emerged was that there is no one-fit-all methodology, and one must pick the best approach based on the reality and the country context to be analysed. As for the future, the participants recognised the growing importance of green skills and big data analysis for labour market demand, and the need to integrate traditional methods with those new ones.

Summary from Group 2 on big data analytics: The second group focused on innovative aspects of big data analytics to understand skill demand, and how big data was used to measure new trends, e.g., impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and digitalisation on the labour market. New technologies bring new opportunities for data analysis, for example, by helping them to collect new data and filling in possible gaps. Notwithstanding the importance of the data itself, the interpretation in a specific context was highlighted as crucial to mitigate biases. The participants agreed on the importance of clarity and knowledge on how to use these new methodologies and combining them with the experts' knowledge, expertise, and insights. As for the future, they confirmed the possible use of data in new

labour market research, different and emerging types of skills analyses and how these data can be used to boost research capacity.

Summary from Group 3 on sector-specific skills analyses: The third group discussed sector-specific analysis of skill demand. Many participants were already involved in different sector analyses in several countries, including platform work, agri-food, tourism, automotive sectors, online job vacancy analysis, digital skills analyses, Covid's impact on sectors, migration's impact on sectors, etc. As for the future, emphasis was made on online learning (looking at choices of learning at MOOCs), entrepreneurship and green skills, mapping skills needs from online vacancies (and other big data analytics on sectors) and researching the possible impact of automation on skills and foreign workers' skills needs. The participants also agreed that adjusting the education and training system to the new needs of selected sectors will be vital in the near future.

Summary from Group 4 on target-specific skills analyses: The fourth group discussed target-specific skill needs focusing on youth and skills mismatch. While conducting research, any skill analysis must start with contextualisation, institutionalisation and adaptability. The first step is always to assess the most appropriate methodologies in the local context, with reference to related sector and the target groups. Without this, we risk overlooking and ignoring determinant factors. The analysis might also opt for focusing on certain target groups such as youth, women, migrants, etc. Finally, any analysis should be linked to the actual policy usage of governments. As for future directions, the participants agreed on the need to increase the youngsters' adaptability and willingness to become life-long learners, which means to start including soft skills and skills for the 21st century in current skills analysis and consolidate the research focused on school-to-work transition.

In the last session of the launch, the conclusions from the group discussions were shared, and the participants further gave their opinions and valuable suggestions on shaping the network and the network's functions such as: continuous exchange of ongoing research projects and papers among the network members; the organisation of joint seminars and training; a yearly live event to meet, exchange, and review the network plans; staff exchange and peer learning visits; innovative group works on specific topics. Many participants expressed a specific interest for further skill demand analysis on platform work, big data analytics, and green skills.

The ETF informed the participants about the launch of a 'yearly call for research proposals in the area of skills demand', restricted to the network members only, in early 2022. The ETF also has intention to organise in 2022 at least 2-3 thematic seminars and the first yearly face-to-face event in Torino. From the preferences expressed by the network members in the launch, ETF suggests organising the first thematic seminar towards the end of **Q1 2022 on green skills**, the second seminar towards the end of **Q2 2022 on platform work**, and the first yearly **face-to-face event towards the end of Q4 2022** (possibly in December). Any additional thematic seminars volunteered by the network members are welcome. Moreover, all ETF events related to skill demands will also be disseminated to the network members and the same communication is expected from the members.

In the longer term, there is also a plan to produce a bi-annual network e-newsletter and co-created online platform for regular exchange, collaboration, storing and dissemination of knowledge. The members were particularly encouraged to spread the word about ETF Skills Lab Network of Experts, which is OPEN to all researchers, research institutes and expertise networks from ETF Partner Countries and the EU Member States working on skills demand. For any new researcher/ research institute who are interested to join the network, it will be enough to send us your expression of interest, main skill demand activities and your contact details.

The ETF asked the network members to particularly inform the ETF on relevant thematic seminars (online) they want to attend/ contribute; on relevant thematic seminars (online) they want to organise; and on any volunteer organisation to host the yearly live event of the Network in the future.

For now, communication among the network will be through the ETF Skillslabnetwork email account: skillslabnetwork@etf.europa.eu. Once the members contact the ETF on their ongoing research projects, papers and events, the ETF will disseminate this information among the network members through the Skillslabnetwork email account.

The event ended with a commitment and sense of community, and all the participants celebrated the kick-off of our common endeavour!