EUROPEAN
COMMISSION

Brussels, 4.10.2016
COM(2016) 625 final

2016/0304 (COD)

Proposal for a

DECISION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL

on a common framework for the provision of better services for skills and qualifications (Europass) and repealing Decision No 2241/2004/EC

(Text with EEA relevance)

{SWD(2016) 320 final}

EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM

1. CONTEXT OF THE PROPOSAL

• Reasons for and objectives of the proposal

Whether looking for employment opportunities, making decisions on what and where to learn or considering mobility options, individuals need access to information and means of assessing their skills and presenting what they know and are able to do. Equally, employers need to find more efficient and effective ways of identifying and recruiting appropriately skilled people. If the needs of individuals and employers in terms of skills and qualifications across sectors, regions and countries are to be addressed effectively, these needs must be clearly identified, communicated and understood.

EU tools and services can support the exchange of information and better understanding of skills and qualifications including those needed for mobility and employability. The EU has sought to offer and support a range of such tools and services to facilitate mobility and encourage transparency of skills and qualifications. To date, however, these tools and services have not exploited their full potential for several reasons. They have largely been developed on a case-by-case basis, with a minimum of integration and collaboration. This approach has had impact on the reach, potential and perception of the added value of each tool. Evidence shows that, despite some success stories such as the Europass CV, potential beneficiaries are generally scarcely aware of available services while barriers to the full use of qualifications and skills acquired abroad persist, with implications for mobility and the integration of European labour markets. In addition, the way EU tools and services have evolved over time has not necessarily followed the changes in the way people learn, work or communicate today and they are not responding to current or future demands and emerging technologies. Digitalisation and enhanced online presence are the minimum expected of tools for skills and qualifications today and even more so in the future.

This proposal seeks to modernise EU tools and services and to ensure that they reflect the changing needs of all potential users from the labour market and education and training sectors; are always updated to technological developments, new forms of sharing information and of the collaborative economy; and capable of supporting individuals in their multiple life-transitions of learning-work.

The new Europass framework will provide a two-layer approach:

Firstly, the new Europass framework will provide a European-wide platform through which all individuals can access, within an intuitive and seamless online service, a range of services such as the creation of an e-portfolio or the possibility of assessing their own skills. These services will be enriched by a wide range of information harvested across the Member States (including through web crawling) on learning opportunities, qualifications, recognition practices and data on labour market and skills intelligence, such as trends in occupations or professions. This variety of information will support individuals to make informed choices for their careers, mobility and learning and could contribute, among other things, to tackling skills mismatches by directing choices towards learning paths and careers with better prospects. Similarly, employers, education and training providers, guidance counsellors, employment services and policy makers will benefit from the information made available, for example better intelligence on what skills are needed and where, can stimulate the delivery of training courses where gaps exist. Particular attention will be given to the specific needs of third-country nationals. Open standards for qualifications, job vacancies and CVs will also be

made available for professionals who wish to publish this type of information electronically. By doing so, the Europass framework will promote inter-operability of electronic tools used to present and exchange information on skills and qualifications. Importantly, such European integrated platform will bring an important value added to the Member States in their objective of supporting individuals since they will not have to replicate the IT effort at national level.

This proposal therefore moves Europass from a document-based facility into a service-based platform, widening its scope of activity and ensuring that the user needs are at the heart of the framework services. The new Europass framework will bring together information currently provided by tools such as the Learning Opportunities and Qualifications in Europe Portal, (which provides information on learning opportunities and qualifications); the EU Skills Panorama (which offers information on skills intelligence including at national and EU level as well as for occupations and specific industries) and the ESCO portal (ESCO - the Classification of European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations, which provides a common language for describing specific skills and related concepts for employment and education purposes). To date, the development and implementation of these tools has been supported by the expertise of the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop), a Union agency. *Secondly*, the new Europass framework will include on-the-ground services, whose objective is to secure outreach of the services to the widest target audiences, including those who may have difficulty accessing or using digital services.

Currently the EU tools and services for skills and qualifications are promoted and supported at national level through centres or contact points (National Europass Centres, EQF – National Contact Points, Euroguidance Centres) that are financially supported by the EU through the Erasmus+ programme. Each is subject to separate administration and reporting processes. Each centre manages a separate communication programme and has separate branding. While Member States have taken necessary steps to ensure coordination, this is not the case in all Member States. The effect is that often there is no sense of a joined up skills and qualification service at national level and no much stimulus for centres to cooperate strategically and communicate systematically to present more coherent services. Centres are not fully reaching their target audiences and thus EU tools and services are not reaching all intended beneficiaries.

This proposal intends to offer greater potential and opportunity for Member States to strategically coordinate services offered at national level. More coordination and exchange of information, will enable services to respond in a systematic way to the needs of beneficiaries, whether intermediaries such as guidance practitioners, or individuals who could directly benefit from face-to-face services providing information and advice for learning and career opportunities, directing them to other services, if relevant, and helping those who may not have access to, or the skills necessary, to use digital and online tools .

- **Consistency with existing policy provisions in the policy area**

This is the first revision of the Europass Decision. Established twelve years ago, the Decision now needs to reflect advances in technology and changes in the labour market, education and training systems and society at large. This proposal will update and enhance the Europass framework to bring it more in line with today's need for more comprehensive, updated, easy-to-use and interoperable information and allow it to accommodate future developments and needs. The proposal intends to cater for the needs of learners, job seekers, education and training providers, recruiters and employers.

This proposal is linked to the first of the ten priorities of the European Commission, "A New Boost for Jobs, Growth and Investment"[1]. Skills development as a route to recovery is also highlighted in the Annual Growth survey for 2016[2]. This initiative is rooted in previous Commission initiatives on new skills for new jobs, for example:

– 'An Agenda for New Skills and Jobs' (2010)[3];

– 'Rethinking Education: Investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes'[4];

– the Employment package (2012[5]).

This Decision is one of the initiatives of the New Skills Agenda for Europe[6] and complements other actions proposed in that context. It is consistent with the European Parliament and Council Recommendation of 23 April 2008 on a European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF)[7]. The Recommendation created a common reference framework of eight European generic levels of learning, which serves as "translation grid" between national qualifications systems. Such levels are intended to support the transparency and comparability of qualifications. Information on the EQF will be included in the Europass framework so that individuals can use EQF levels to present their qualifications.

The proposed Decision is also consistent with the Recommendation on a Skills Guarantee[8] which is another action under the New Skills Agenda for Europe. The Skills Guarantee should help low-qualified people access to flexible upskilling pathways to acquire a minimum level of literacy, numeracy and digital skills, and continuing learning at their own pace to achieve an upper secondary level qualification leading to the acquisition of a broader set of skills. The self-assessment tools offered by the Europass framework will be beneficial to the target group of the Skills Guarantee.

The services offered through the Europass framework help individuals communicate information on their skills and qualifications acquired through different pathways, including outside formal education and training (for example through youth work, volunteering, work-based learning, traineeships). This proposal is thus also in line with the Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012[9] on the validation of non-formal and informal learning, which invites Member States to have arrangements in place for the validation of learning acquired outside formal education and training.

Individuals often use the Europass framework to provide information on their skills and qualifications to find employment. The EURES (European Employment Services) network as established by Regulation (EU) 2016/589 of the European Parliament and of the Council[10] is a

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1 A New Start for Europe: My Agenda for Jobs, Growth, Fairness and Democratic Change. Political Guidelines for the next European Commission. https://ec.europa.eu/priorities/publications/president-junckers-political-guidelines_en

2 Annual Growth Survey: http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1473755846317&uri=CELEX:52015DC0690

3 http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=958

4 http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1389776578033&uri=CELEX:52012DC0669

5 http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1039

6 A New Skills Agenda for Europe - Working together to strengthen human capital, employability and competitiveness, COM(2016) 381.

7 OJ C 111, 6.5.2008, p. 1.

8 Proposal for a Council Recommendation on establishing a Skills Guarantee, COM(2016) 382.

9 OJ C 398, 22.12.2012.

10 Regulation (EU) 2016/589 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 April 2016 on a European network of employment services (EURES), workers' access to mobility services and the

network of employment services and a mechanism for automated matching of people to jobs through the EURES common IT platform. Synergies and co-operation between Europass and EURES will be ensured to reinforce the impact of both services. The proposal is in line with the provisions of the Regulation, in particular as regards the use of the classification of European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO).

The proposal is consistent with other recent employment policies and initiatives, such as the Council Recommendations on the Youth Guarantee[11] and on Long Term Unemployment[12].

- **Consistency with other Union policies**

Services for skills and qualifications are intended to support employability and mobility across occupations, sectors, regions and borders through better transparency, comparability and understanding of an individual's skills and qualifications. They can support EU individuals that move outside the EU (including in cases where they subsequently acquire skills and qualifications in third countries) and third-country nationals moving to the EU or already residing there. In the current context of increased inflows and outflows of people to and from the EU, the Europass framework is consistent with the EU initiatives linked to the European Agenda on Migration as well as the EU Action Plan on the Integration of third country nationals[13]. Web-based information in several languages and support provided at national level can help integrate third-country nationals.

By providing more user-friendly tools and encouraging better synergy and cooperation for on-the-ground services on skills and qualifications to better serve individuals, the proposed Decision aims to reach out to a wide range of users, including the low skilled, the unemployed and migrants, and therefore contributes to inclusion.

The internet and digital technologies are transforming our world. By providing better access to services, the Europass framework is also in line with the Digital Single Market strategy[14] of the Union, which intends to allow better access for consumers and business to online goods and services across Europe.

2. LEGAL BASIS, SUBSIDIARITY AND PROPORTIONALITY

- **Legal basis**

The proposed legal basis is Articles 165 and 166 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

Documentation and the exchange of information on skills and qualifications is aimed at pursuing education and training opportunities, supporting career decisions, finding employment opportunities and supporting mobility.

Article 165 provides that the Union shall contribute to the development of quality education by encouraging cooperation between Member States and, if necessary, by supporting and

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further integration of labour markets, and amending Regulations (EU) No 492/2011 and (EU) No 1296/2013 (OJ L 107, 22.4.2016, p. 1).

11 Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013 on establishing a Youth Guarantee: http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX%3A32013H0426%2801%29

12 OJ C 67, 20.2.2016.

13 COM(2016) 377 final.

14 A Digital Single Market Strategy for Europe, COM(2015) 192 final.

supplementing their action. Union action shall be aimed, inter alia, at developing exchanges of information and experience on issues common to the education systems of the Member States.

Article 166 provides that the Union shall implement a vocational training policy which shall support and supplement the action of the Member States. Union action shall aim, inter alia, to improve initial and continuing vocational training in order to facilitate vocational integration and reintegration into the labour market and to develop exchanges of information and experience on issues common to the training systems of the Member States.

As education and vocational training policies are within Member States' competence, these articles exclude harmonisation of the laws and regulations of the Member States.

Both articles state that the Union and the Member States shall foster cooperation with third countries and the competent international organisations respectively in the field of education [Article 165(3)] and in the sphere of vocational training [Article 166(3)].

- **Subsidiarity**

This proposal complies with the principle of subsidiarity as it supports and complements Member State activities.

If addressed only at national level, the scope of the tools and services for skills and qualifications would remain limited, and the potential for synergies with existing services, both at EU and national level, would not be fully exploited. Action at EU level offers the necessary platform to create consistency and better understanding of diverse systems and qualifications among different countries and stakeholders. Improved choices, easier access to better quality information and new opportunities will ultimately be achieved and contribute to a better allocation of resources at EU level.

For services offered on the ground at national level through centres, the provisions for simplification and stronger cooperation proposed in the Decision are compliant with the subsidiarity principle. The proposal to set up one main interface and main beneficiary of EU funding per country with a coordinating role for issues linked to skills and qualifications that builds upon the experience of Member States does not impose any provision on implementation and coordination arrangements to Member States (and participating countries).

- **Proportionality**

The measures proposed in the revision of the Europass Decision do not increase the scope of EU action beyond what is necessary. The measures are proportionate to the objectives to be achieved.

The actions proposed address the existing instruments described here and therefore are proportional to reaching the objectives.

The revision of the Europass Decision is guided, as a general principle, by the need to update it, and the framework it establishes, to meet current evolving needs and keep it flexible enough to allow for possible future developments in technology, education and training, society and the labour market and avoid further revisions in the short term. In particular, the proposal intends to adapt the Decision to changing practices in the labour market such as publication of job vacancies, applications, skills assessments and recruitment which are

increasingly managed online. The involvement of a variety of education and training providers and the use of digital technologies and platforms also need to be considered when providing useful tools and services.

- **Choice of the instrument**

The instrument will be a Decision of the European Parliament and the Council repealing the existing Decision No. 2241/2004/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council.

3. RESULTS OF EX-POST EVALUATIONS, STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATIONS AND IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

- **Ex-post evaluations/fitness checks of existing legislation**

Two evaluations of the Europass framework were carried out in 2008 and 2013. The second evaluation, covering the period 2008-2012, confirmed that Europass documents have the potential to facilitate mobility and that they are useful tools for individuals who are interested in working or studying abroad. Europass documents can provide services to employers and have become increasingly relevant to the unemployed. Europass has also played an important role in mobility within the same country (40% of surveyed users were domestically mobile) and indeed the documents have become widely used within some countries such as Italy and Spain.

However, the evaluation also suggested that Europass should be simplified, become more target-oriented and up-to-date. Synergies should be improved between Europass and other European initiatives, in particular guidance and information services. Information services and interactive tools for skills and qualifications should become more streamlined as should the different European networks of national centres providing related support services. Relevant data from other existing EU tools should be easily integrated. The interoperability of Europass tools with EU tools such as those used for job matching should be enhanced.

The evaluation also highlighted that Europass documents have not evolved to allow for description of different types of learning and skills, such as those acquired through any non-formal or informal learning experience. The evaluation also considered it worth exploring the merits of merging the Diploma Supplement (a document explaining the nature, level, context, content and status of higher education qualifications) and the Certificate Supplement (a similar document issued for vocational training) into a single document.

The proposed Decision intends to respond to these concerns.

- **Stakeholder consultations**

In 2014 a public consultation was carried out in preparation for an initiative known at the time as the 'European Area for Skills and Qualifications'[15]. The consultation addressed the effectiveness of existing tools and services. In 2014 a special Eurobarometer[16] was issued on the same initiative, which also addressed the public perception of the effectiveness of the tools and services.

[15] Public Consultation on a 'European Area of Skills and Qualifications': http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/more_info/consultations/skills_en.htm

[16] Special Eurobarometer 417: European Area of Skills and Qualifications – Report, June 2014: http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_417_en.pdf

The public consultation found there was significant room for improvement in the current landscape of web tools for skills and qualifications. It also identified strong support for merging Europass documents. Results indicated that there was potential interest in the creation of a 'one-stop shop' providing integrated services covering the full range of European services on learning opportunities, guidance and the transparency of qualifications. Furthermore, current tools for transparency were found not to be fully suitable for recognising the outcomes of digital learning.

In 2016, the Commission carried several targeted consultations[17] on this proposal to revise the Europass Decision. Social partners and the networks of national centres (EQF National Coordination Points - NCPs, National Europass Centres and Euroguidance Centres) responded in particular to aspects of the proposal related to streamlining and to establishing National Skills Coordination Points.

Social partners agreed on the challenge represented by the current fragmentation of services for skills and qualifications and broadly welcomed the idea of more integration and synergy among both online tools and among national services. The social partners also identified a need for closer links to national skills agencies and observatories run by national governments and social partners themselves. The Europass framework is generally appreciated as a tool that can be used directly by individuals; in particular the Europass CV is a well-known and much used common format which can increase transparency and understanding. The higher education Diploma Supplement, developed by the European Commission, the Council of Europe and UNESCO, is widely used in the 48 countries of the Bologna Process. Within this Process, work to revise the Diploma Supplement is ongoing, to ensure it reflects the latest developments in higher education and is relevant for students and for employers. Improvements are also needed regarding the Certificate Supplement. Efforts to treat certain elements consistently between the two Supplements could be helpful in raising visibility and reinforcing use.

One of the main outcomes of the consultation with the Europass centres, EQF national contact points and the Euroguidance network was the need to focus more on guidance issues, which cannot be properly addressed using web-based tools and services but need a presence and face-to-face engagement with individuals. Centres also called for simplified administrative procedures and longer-term planning compared to the current annual exercise. This would be in line with the Commission's proposal to simplify the operations and financing of these policy networks. Some centres also raised specific concerns that the designation of National Skills Coordination Points should not require, at national level, the taking over of activities or a merger of the existing Europass centres, EQF national contact points and the Euroguidance centres, recalling that the organisation of the services at national level is a matter of subsidiarity. In this context, some Member States would prefer to maintain the current situation where these networks are mostly separate entities and which may fall under the responsibility of different parts of their administrations. The Commission explained that the aim of this aspect of the proposal is to simplify the administrative and co-ordination arrangements between the national and European level, and in turn to facilitate Member States' action for joined-up services to individuals. A main beneficiary of EU funding would be identified by the respective Member States and would be the main interface with the Commission in relation to the activities currently carried out by EQF National Coordination

[17] Social partners, policy networks (Europass centres, EQF national contact points, Euroguidance network), civil society.

Points, National Europass Centres and Euroguidance Centres. This is already the case in several countries[18]. The proposal seeks to create greater opportunity for more strategic use of funding by national services over a longer funding period but leaves any decision about implementation and coordination arrangements at national level to the Member State.

- **Collection and use of expertise**

A study was launched in 2015 to collect information on and analyse seven portals related to skills and qualifications (EURES, Europass, ESCO, Learning Opportunities and Qualifications in Europe, ENIC-NARIC, EU Skills Panorama and Youth Portal). The aim of the study was to better understand the challenges faced by target users and/or stakeholders. The analysis provided an initial overview of possible ways to improve complementarity and synergies between different online tools and services.

- **Impact assessment**

No impact assessment has been carried out. When designing the proposal, four options were considered which build on existing EU tools and services for skills and qualifications and aim to adapt, streamline and update them and ensure better coordination and synergy. The options do not entail significant operational implications for Member States and other stakeholders. The options outlined below are not mutually exclusive and can therefore be considered separately as well as in combination.

Option 1 - Enhancement of documentation and online presence

This option would entail enhancing and simplifying existing document tools for communicating skills and qualifications and improving the quality of their online presence. Documentation tools would continue to operate independently without any synergies with other related tools and services.

Option 2 - Better integration of services

This option would imply streamlining relevant EU tools and services for skills and qualifications (Europass, EU Skills Panorama, Learning Opportunities and Qualifications in Europe portal) to offer a more integrated service that addresses users' skills and qualifications needs in a comprehensive and clear way. Simplification and enhancement of documents tools for communicating skills and qualifications would be pursued as in option 1 but information provided by the EU Skills Panorama and Learning Opportunities and Qualifications in Europe Portal would be integrated within Europass in addition to the documentation tools. Integrating a wider set of tools and services would help simplify the information offered to users. ESCO would serve as a common terminology to describe skills, competences, qualifications and occupations. This would enhance access to and clarity of information for users. Integration of tools and services within Europass would aid their promotion, increase awareness and encourage use.

[18] Currently in 12 countries one single body hosts all the national centres of the country, in 17 two bodies host all the centres and in 7 countries there are three different bodies managing the centres, EACEA, 2016.

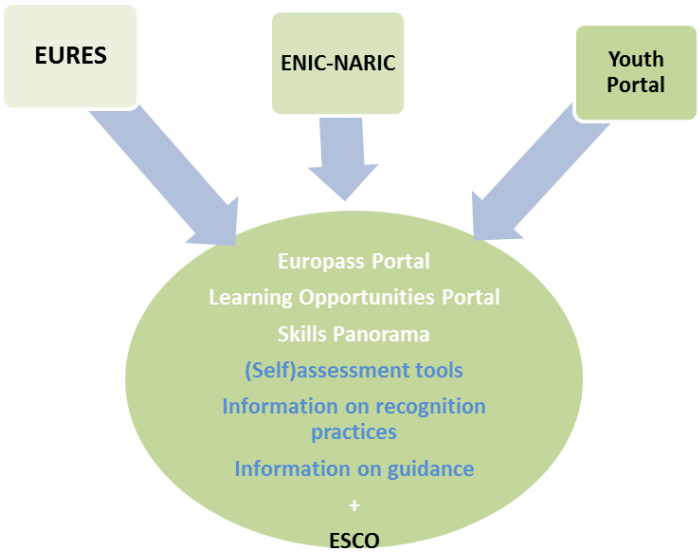
Option 3 – Better coordination of support networks

This option would entail establishing one coordination point at national level to coordinate activities currently associated with the National Europass Centres, EQF National Coordination Points, and Euroguidance Centres. Within each Member State a main beneficiary of EU funding and main interface with the Commission would be identified in relation to the activities currently carried out by the national centres, without prejudice to any national arrangement in terms of implementation and coordination. The coordination point in each country would streamline and simplify the operation of national centres and may support greater cooperation among services to enhance the transparency and understanding of skills and qualifications and support lifelong learning and career guidance at national level. The coordination point could also act as a central point for other linked services such as development of skills intelligence.

Option 4 - Better interoperability between tools

According to this option, Europass would support presenting and integrating relevant data from other existing EU tools as linked open data or open formats or standards in order to support better interoperability between different tools, services and data sources including those of third parties such as the labour market. ESCO would be used as the common terminology supporting this work. This option would allow these parties to better exploit data for different purposes, including job matching, and would align Europass tools and services with evolving digital trends.

A possible configuration for the integration of services and links and synergy with other tools would be the following:



Arrows indicate synergies or links to be established with the integrated service. In white are existing portals; blue indicates new features of the tool. ESCO would be the common terminology.

- **Regulatory fitness and simplification**

Not applicable. The proposal is not linked to REFIT.

Although the proposal is mainly focused on modernising and enhancing the Europass framework, the synergies it will achieve will simplify the range of EU tools and services that have been created over the years through ad hoc measures not necessarily supported by a legal basis. Such simplification should improve efficiency and usability.

The proposal is internet ready and presents solutions both for the digital and the physical environment.

- **Fundamental rights**

In the European Union the right to the protection of personal data is guaranteed under Article 8 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. Whenever the measures provided for in this Decision entail the processing of personal data, they shall be carried out in accordance with EU law on protection of personal data, in particular Directive 95/46/EC on the protection of individuals with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data[19] and the national implementing measures thereto, as well as Regulation (EC) No 45/2001 on the protection of individuals with regard to the processing of personal data by the Community institutions and bodies and on the free movement of such data[20].

Directive 95/46/EC will be replaced by Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 April 2016 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data (General Data Protection Regulation)[21] which is applicable as of 25 May 2018.

4. BUDGETARY IMPLICATIONS

Most of the tools covered by the proposed Decision already exist and are financed by the Union. The financial implications of the initiative are mainly linked to IT development, hosting and maintenance costs of web-based services at EU level.

Developing a more comprehensive online service as proposed by the initiative will be financed by the Union. Some initial investment will be needed in the short-term for new IT development of the new European-wide web-based platform, but there should be no unexpected costs at EU level. The level of investment required will depend on the technical IT choices made. The Erasmus+ Work programme for 2016 includes activities to develop web services for skills and qualifications for an estimated amount of €2.500.000 to cover this investment. There will be no financial implications for Member States, or participating countries, from this development work. They will be asked to continue to contribute information; this activity will be supported by Union budget as is currently the case.

Any initial investment will be balanced by savings achieved through the synergies established between existing tools and efficiency achieved in the long term. As services will be integrated into the new Europass platform, a number of platforms should cease to exist. This should help achieve substantial savings in financial resources primarily through the integration of the hosting, maintenance and support of the different IT tools and communication activities. This should amount to around €450.000 per year.

[19] OJ L 281, 23.11.1995, p. 31
[20] OJ L 8, 12.01.2001, p. 1
[21] OJ L 119, 4.5.2016, p. 1–88

The activities of the EQF National Contact Points, the National Europass Centres and the Euroguidance Centres are co-financed by the Commission through the Erasmus+ budget. There is no medium-term change envisaged in the budget allocated by Erasmus+ for the operation of the proposed National Skills Coordination Points. In 2016 the overall amount allocated by the EU budget to the centres amounted to €7,300,000. Existing budget allocations to the national centres would be grouped into a single allocation by country to be awarded to a single beneficiary in each Member State on a multiannual basis. This will simplify administrative procedures for reporting and multiannual financing would allow more strategic planning and use of resources compared to the current annual exercise. Member States may in fact be able to secure savings through reducing administrative costs associated with managing the reporting and financing of two or three separate centres. As such, no budgetary implications are associated with the establishment of the National Skills Coordination Points compared to the current situation.

5. OTHER ELEMENTS

- **Implementation plans and monitoring, evaluation and reporting arrangements**

An evaluation is planned every five years. The Commission, in cooperation with Member States, will report on progress in implementation as relevant.

- **Explanatory documents (for directives)**

Not applicable.

- **Detailed explanation of the specific provisions of the proposal**

The **preamble** introduces the current Europass framework and describes how it links and is complementary with other tools and services for skills and qualifications, in particular those related to information on learning opportunities and qualifications and skills intelligence and information.

Despite some important achievements, several challenges remain regarding the tools and services for skills and qualifications. These challenges are mainly linked to the transformations that have taken place over the years, in particular changing processes in the labour market and new forms and settings for delivering education. These changes require new formats for presenting skills, qualifications and experiences and new ways of communicating and exchanging information.

Information technology has changed the way the labour market works but the Europass framework and other EU tools have not necessarily kept pace with these changes. Firstly, they are not always adaptable to new trends such as use of social media, mobile devices, big data analysis and web crawling. The current Europass framework established by Decision No. 2241/2004/EC is limited in scope and flexibility because it focuses on documents and templates which are no longer compatible with current trends or the trajectory of online tools and services. Despite some evolution, this lack of deeper innovation hampers the use of these tools and makes them less attractive.

Secondly, EU tools are not sufficiently interlinked to allow matching, reuse and integration of data from different sources or interoperability with tools developed by the labour market. For job seekers, for example, the variety of tools to document skills and the variety of systems, formats and languages used to record vacancies prevent the automated matching of open job vacancies and potential candidates' CVs.

This is why a new framework is needed which encompasses more responsive tools and information both for learning and employment purposes, including skills intelligence, and which ensures better synergies with other relevant services such as EURES to mutually reinforce the role of each service.

This proposed Decision also addresses the operation of national level support services linked to the tools and services associated with Europass as well as the EQF and Euroguidance.

Article 1 defines the scope of the new Europass framework, which should provide a service for documenting skills and qualifications; offer opportunities for (self-) assessing skills; provide relevant information; and support the development of open standards to allow easier exchange of information between different tools and systems.

Article 2 sets out definitions of terms used in this Decision.

The improved service offered by the new Europass framework is detailed in **Article 3**.

Currently, the Europass framework is focussed on documentation of skills and provides a set of fixed templates, including the well-known Europass CV, to be filled in online and offline and printable. Through this proposal, the Europass CV would still be a key feature of the framework but it would evolve from a more traditional 'document' following a fixed template to a more flexible tool. The CV tool would allow for presentation of different kinds of personal data and information on skills and qualifications that can be easily rearranged and combined, if necessary, in a variety of fields and formats. As such the CV will become more adaptable to different needs and situations that arise for learners and jobseekers in different stages of their professional and personal lives. The CV would retain traditional features so that it can be edited and printed easily, but users will also be able to present their skills and qualifications in other less traditional formats, including visuals. They will also be able to make better use of the advantages of social media, mobile applications and job matching tools. This same approach will be taken with each of the Europass documents to ensure they are relevant, adaptable and able to integrate relevant data and that users have tools that meet their different needs, both now and in the future.

The Europass framework will also offer users the opportunity to self-assess their skills such as digital skills through tools provided at EU level and to integrate data from other EU self-assessment tools such as the Youthpass. All these tools will enable easier and shared understanding of concepts and outcomes by both individuals and those trying to assess and understand skills. Such tools are not provided by the current framework apart from the reference framework for assessment of language skills linked to the Europass documents.

Along with tools for documentation and (self-) assessment, the proposed framework will also provide relevant information on qualifications, learning opportunities, career guidance facilities, qualifications recognition practices and skills intelligence. This information will be accessed by users in a simple and seamless way, so as to better support their learning and career choices. This information is not provided by the current framework. Pooling such data in one location and using common terminology (in several languages) will help users find what they need more easily.

The revised Europass framework will offer the possibility to develop and use open standards for better exchange and sharing of electronic data on skills and qualifications.

The Decision defines a general framework but does not establish any set format or template for documentation of skills, as is currently the case. This will ensure the necessary flexibility for the services to adapt to future evolution of needs and technology.

Article 4 establishes the main principles inspiring the new framework. In particular, it will ensure transparency of learning and skills acquired in different settings (formal, non-formal and informal). The revised Europass framework will take into account the levels of qualifications as set out in the European Qualifications Framework so that information on qualifications from different countries (both EU and non-EU) will be more transparent and comparable.

The use of open standards will allow interoperability between services. Any development made in the context of this Decision will be without prejudice to decisions taken in the context of implementation of the EURES Regulation and will complement any subsequent technical developments.

To maximise European added value as well as outreach of the tools and services, Europass will be offered in all EU official languages. The use and importance of technology and the need to ensure adaptability to evolving needs is established in the legal text.

Article 5 establishes the Europass Qualifications Supplement(s). The Article supports the provision of information by authorised parties on the nature of qualifications acquired by a person through standardised documents. The Qualification Supplement(s) will embed existing supplements (the Diploma Supplement and the Certificate Supplement) provided for in Decision No 2241/2004/EC. In this context, the Article specifically acknowledges the need for cooperation between the Commission and the Council of Europe and UNESCO, in particular, who are the co-owners of the Diploma supplement.

Article 6 establishes the classification of European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO) as a common reference language to support exchange of information and documents on occupations, skills and qualifications and search or compare electronic documents. Using a common terminology will make search operations easier and support better exploitation of current technology such as web crawling. This is particularly useful for job searching, job matching, search for education and training opportunities as well as career guidance. These features will directly support the services offered by Europass. The notion of a European classification for occupations and skills is already embedded in the EURES Regulation. This Decision offers the opportunity to formally establish ESCO, in particular because the EURES regulation only takes into account two of the ESCO pillars (i) occupations, ii) knowledge, skills and competences), omitting the third (qualifications). As ESCO is de facto being used as a common classification in EURES, establishing it formally in the context of Europass would help take up and ensure the qualifications aspect is also taken into account. As the Europass Decision is based on Articles 165 and 166 on education and training and the framework clearly pursues learning purposes, it is the most appropriate context to introduce ESCO.

Article 7 focuses on the implementation and monitoring of the Decision. The Commission will in particular monitor the effectiveness of the tools and the consistency of information provided by National Skills Coordination Points.

Article 8 details the main roles of Member States, in particular in relation to the designation and management of the National Skills Coordination Point responsible for co-ordination of

activities associated with implementing the Europass Decision and linked tasks related to the EQF, validation, skills intelligence and guidance. The mandate and tasks of the National Skills Coordination Points are set out. The Article also establishes that relevant data and evidence available at national level are provided to feed into and update Europass tools. Coordination points are intended to be the main beneficiary of funding and the main interface with the EU, while internal implementation and organisational arrangements are left to Member States and participating countries.

Article 9 indicates that measures provided for in this Decision shall be carried out in accordance with EU law on protection of personal data. This includes EU data protection law applicable to Member States (the national implementing measures thereto) and to the Union institutions as the Commission is also involved in the processing of personal data. As personal data is provided, treated and, possibly, exchanged through Europass, users have in particular to be made aware of such processing, give their consent for processing and be able to ask for deletion of their personal data.

Details of evaluation are set out in **Article 10**.

Article 11 lists the countries that can participate in the Framework. It remains unchanged compared to the current Decision as there is no evidence of the need to extend or reduce participation. The information on skills and qualifications provided through the framework will, however, refer to a wider number of countries and education systems to cater for inflows and outflows of individuals from and to other parts of the world.

Article 12 sets out financial provisions.

Article 13 repeals the Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 December 2004 on a single Community framework for the transparency of qualifications and competences (Europass). In view of the changes in substance and purpose envisaged by the new proposal, the former Decision has to be repealed and replaced by the new text.

Article 14 establishes the day of entry into force for the Decision.

2016/0304 (COD)

Proposal for a

DECISION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL

on a common framework for the provision of better services for skills and qualifications (Europass) and repealing Decision No 2241/2004/EC

(Text with EEA relevance)

THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

Having regard to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, and in particular Articles 165 and 166 thereof,

Having regard to the proposal from the European Commission,

After transmission of the draft legislative act to the national parliaments,

Having regard to the opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee[22],

Having regard to the opinion of the Committee of the Regions[23],

Acting in accordance with the ordinary legislative procedure,

Whereas:

(1) Individuals, when looking for a job, or making decisions on what and where to learn, study or work need access to information on opportunities available, means of assessing their skills, and means of presenting information about their skills and qualifications.

(2) Differences in language, definitions, document formats, as well as assessment and qualification validation methods, all pose considerable challenges for individuals, employers and competent authorities. These challenges arise especially where individuals move between countries, including third countries, but also when looking for a new job or engaging in learning. Clear information and shared understanding is necessary to address these challenges.

(3) Decision No 2241/2004/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council[24] established a framework to address these challenges. It aimed to achieve better transparency of qualifications and competences through a portfolio of documents known as 'Europass', which individuals can use on a voluntary basis. Decision No 2241/2004/EC also established national bodies, known as National Europass Centres, to implement the Europass framework.

(4) To achieve its main objective, the Europass framework focused on tools for the documentation of skills and qualifications. These tools have achieved wide use.

22 OJ C , , p. .
23 OJ C , , p. .
24 OJ L 390, 31.12.2004, p. 6.

Activities by National Europass Centres offer support and promote the documentation of skills and qualifications[25].

(5) The Europass portfolio comprised five document templates. The Europass Curriculum Vitae (CV) template allows individuals to complete their CV in a standardised format. Over ten years there have been more than 60 million Europass CVs created online. Two qualification supplement templates, namely the Europass Diploma Supplement[26] and the Europass Certificate Supplement, offer information on the content and learning outcomes associated with a qualification and on the education system of the country issuing the qualification. The Europass Language Passport is used to describe language skills. The Europass Mobility describes the skills acquired abroad on mobility experiences for learning or work.

(6) The Europass portfolio is however only one of a number of tools and instruments put in place at Union level to improve transparency and understanding of skills and qualifications.

(7) The Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning[27] - hereafter "the EQF" - created a common reference framework to help individuals and organisations in comparing different qualifications systems and the levels of qualifications from these systems.

(8) The Learning Opportunities and Qualifications in Europe portal[28] gives access to information on learning opportunities and qualifications offered in different education systems in Europe and on the comparison of national qualifications frameworks using the EQF.

(9) The EU Skills Panorama[29] provides information on skills for different occupations and specific industries, including demand and supply at national level.

(10) A European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations framework (ESCO) has been piloted by the Commission as a common language and operational tool for education/training and work[30]. ESCO structures concepts that are relevant for the EU labour market and education and training in three interlinked pillars: i) occupations, ii) knowledge, skills and competences and iii) qualifications. The ESCO pillars can be complemented by auxiliary vocabularies covering related domains, such as work context, fields of education and training or economic sectors.

(11) Regulation (EU) 2016/589 of the European Parliament and of the Council[31] establishes European Employment Services (EURES), a network of employment services and a mechanism for an automated matching of people to jobs through the EURES common IT platform. To enable the exchange and the matching of job vacancies with

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25 Second evaluation of the Decision of the European Parliament and the Council on a single Community framework for the transparency of qualifications and competences (Europass), COM(2013) 899 final.

26 The Diploma supplement is issued by higher education institutions according to standards agreed by the European Commission, the Council of Europe and UNESCO.

27 OJ C 111, 6.5.2008, p. 1.

28 https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/

29 http://skillspanorama.cedefop.europa.eu/en

30 The Europe 2020 Strategy announced that the Commission would work on such framework, Communication from the Commission on "Europe 2020 - A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth", COM(2010) 2020 final.

31 OJ L 107, 22.4.2016, p. 1.

candidates, this mechanism needs a common and multilingual list of skills, competences and occupations. By developing ESCO the Commission is providing a multilingual classification system of occupations, skills and competences and qualifications that is suited to this purpose.

(12) Labour market processes such as publication of jobs, job applications, skills assessments and recruitment are increasingly managed online through tools that use social media, big data and other technologies. Candidate selection is managed through tools and processes that seek information on skills and qualifications acquired in formal, informal and non-formal settings.

(13) Education and training is increasingly offered in new forms and settings by a variety of providers, particularly through use of digital technologies and platforms. Equally, skills, experiences and learning achievements are acknowledged in different forms for example digital open badges. They are also known and used for skills gained through non-formal learning such as youth work.

(14) There is an acknowledged growing importance of transversal or 'soft' skills that can be applied in different fields. Individuals require tools and guidance on self-assessing and describing these and other skills, for example digital or language.

(15) Traditionally information on acquired skills and qualifications is presented in a CV and supporting documents such as certificates or diplomas. Individuals currently present information on their skills and qualifications also through new tools. Such tools facilitate presentation of skills and qualifications in varied online and digital formats and also support self-assessment by individuals of skills acquired in different settings.

(16) Analysis of vacancies, and other labour market trends, is an established way of developing skills intelligence to understand issues of skills gaps and shortages as well as qualifications mismatch. The use of information technology, such as web crawling and big data, helps to improve skills intelligence and therefore tackle skills mismatches.

(17) The current focus of the Europass framework on documentation is too limited to respond to current and future needs. To communicate skills and qualifications and make decisions on employment and learning opportunities users need access to relevant information and tools for understanding skills and qualifications as well as tools for documenting their own skills and qualifications.

(18) Union tools and services for skills and qualifications should adapt to changing practices and advances in technology to ensure they remain relevant and of value to users. This should be achieved by, among other things, creating more synergy between related tools and services, including those developed by third parties, to offer a more comprehensive and effective service.

(19) The revised Europass framework approach should consider the needs of all potential users, including learners, job seekers, workers, employers, guidance practitioners, public employment services, social partners, education and training providers, youth work organisations and policy makers.

(20) Services should be provided online at Union level. Services should also include the development and use of open standards, metadata schemata and semantic assets to facilitate the effective exchange of information, appropriate authentication measures to ensure trust of digital documents, and skills intelligence and information. In addition,

support services at national level should promote and ensure access to a wide range of users, including third country nationals.

(21) The Europass framework established by Decision No 2241/2004/EC should therefore be replaced by a new framework to address evolving needs.

(22) EURES is a cooperative network responsible for exchanging information and facilitating interaction among job seekers and employers. It provides free assistance to jobseekers wishing to move to another country and assists employers wishing to recruit workers from other countries. Synergies and co-operation between Europass and EURES should be ensured to reinforce the impact of both services.

(23) CV template(s), including the established Europass CV, and Qualification Supplement template(s) should form part of the Framework. Templates should be made available online.

(24) The designation of National Skills Coordination Points as the main interface and beneficiary of Union funding will support simplified administration and reporting and can support a greater cooperation and coordination between national services, including the existing National Europass Centres, EQF National Coordination Points and the Euroguidance network without prejudice to national arrangements in terms of implementation and organisation.

(25) Directive 95/46/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 October 1995 on the protection of individuals with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data and Regulation (EC) No 45/2001 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2000 on the protection of individuals with regard to the processing of personal data by the Community institutions and bodies and on the free movement of such data, as well as the national implementing measures thereto, apply to the processing of personal data pursuant to this Decision.

(26) Participation in the new framework should be open to acceding States, countries of the European Economic Area, potential candidate countries and candidate countries for accession to the Union, given their long-standing interest and cooperation with the Union in this field. Participation should be in accordance with the relevant provisions in the instruments governing relations between the Union and those countries. Information on skills and qualifications provided through the Europass framework will come from a wider range of countries and education systems than those of participating countries and reflect migration movements from and to other parts of the world.

(27) The Commission will guarantee a platform of cooperation with Member States and relevant stakeholders to ensure the overall coherence of implementation and monitoring of this Decision.

(28) Since the objective of this Decision, namely the establishment of a comprehensive and interoperable framework of tools, services and information for employment and learning purposes, cannot be sufficiently achieved by the Member States alone but can rather, by reason of the effects of the action, be better achieved at Union level, the Union may adopt implementing measures, while respecting the principle of subsidiarity as set out in Article 5 of the Treaty. In accordance with the principle of proportionality, as set out in that Article, this Decision does not go beyond what is necessary in order to achieve that objective.

(29) The activities carried out in the context of this Decision will be supported by the expertise of the Union agencies, in particular by the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop), in their domain of competence,

HAVE ADOPTED THIS DECISION:

Article 1

Subject matter and scope

1. This Decision establishes a European framework, comprising web-based tools, information and the development of open standards to support the transparency and understanding of skills and qualifications. The framework shall be known as 'Europass'.

2. Europass shall be managed by the Commission and supported by the National Skills Coordination Points.

3. The use of Europass shall not impose any obligations or confer any rights other than those defined in this Decision.

Article 2

Definitions

For the purposes of this Decision, the following definitions apply:

(a) 'certificate supplement' means a document attached to a vocational certificate, in order to make it easier for third parties to understand the learning outcomes acquired by the holder of the qualification as well as the nature, level, context, content and status of the studies completed;

(b) 'diploma supplement' means a document attached to a higher education diploma, in order to make it easier for third parties to understand the learning outcomes acquired by the holder of the qualification as well as the nature, level, context, content and status of the studies completed;

(c) 'Europass qualification supplement documents' means a set of documents, including the diploma supplement and certificate supplement, issued by the competent authorities referred to in Article 5;

(d) 'metadata' means data providing information about other data that is used in Europass documents;

(e) 'metadata schemata' means a description of metadata elements, their possible values, the obligation level of the values and the relationships between these metadata elements;

(f) 'occupation' means a grouping of jobs involving similar tasks and which require a similar skill set;

(g) 'organisations' means employers, recruiters, education and training institutions, and other stakeholders with an interest in education, training and employment issues;

(h) 'qualification' means a formal outcome of an assessment and validation process which is obtained when a competent authority determines that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards;

(i) 'semantic asset' means a collection of highly reusable metadata or reference data such as code lists, taxonomies, dictionaries or vocabularies which are used for system development;

(j) 'skills assessment' means the process or method used to evaluate, measure and eventually describe the skills of individuals. This may include self-assessment or assessment certified by a third party;

(k) 'standards' means recognized agreements on criteria or specifications of a product, service, process or method, including metadata schemata and semantic assets.

Article 3

Tools and information

1. Europass shall provide the following web-based tools:

   (a) tools for documenting personal information in a variety of formats, including curriculum vitae (CV) templates;

   (b) tools to (self-)assess individual skills, including through questionnaires, by reference to established descriptions of skills or through the integration of data from other existing EU self-assessment tools such as the Youthpass;

   (c) Europass Qualification Supplement template(s), as referred to in Article 5;

   (d) tools as necessary to support the presentation and exchange of information by organisations.

2. Europass shall provide information on the following:

   (a) learning opportunities available;

   (b) opportunities to validate non-formal and informal learning;

   (c) recognition practices and decisions in different countries, including third countries, to help individuals and other stakeholders understand qualifications;

   (d) services offering guidance for learning and career development;

   (e) analysis of trends in skills supply and demand and other types of skills intelligence including at geographical and sectoral level, using technological means such as big data analysis and web crawling;

   (f) any additional information on skills and qualifications that could be relevant to the particular needs of migrants arriving or residing in the Union to support their integration.

3. Europass shall support cooperation on the development, use and dissemination of open standards, comprising metadata schemata and semantic assets, to facilitate more effective exchange of information on skills and qualifications at EU level and by Member States and third parties. The multilingual classification system ESCO (European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations) referred to in article 6 shall be used to support this work.

Article 4

Main principles and features

1. The information and open standards offered through Europass shall be published, free of charge, for reuse by Member States and other stakeholders on a voluntary basis.

2. Europass shall seek to enhance transparency and understanding of learning acquired in formal, non-formal and informal settings and through practical experiences, including mobility.

3. Europass shall include tools to facilitate the understanding of skills through assessment by third parties and self-declaration by individuals.

4. The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) shall be used as a supporting framework to provide information in Europass. The EQF will be referred to in information on qualifications, descriptions of national education and training systems and other relevant topics.

5. Europass shall use the European Classification of Skills/Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO) established in Article 6 to ensure semantic interoperability between the tools for documentation and information. ESCO shall also provide a platform for interoperability with other relevant services such as those developed by the labour market.

6. The Europass framework may include an option to store personal information by users, such as a personal profile.

7. Europass shall support authentication services for any digital documents or representations of information on skills and qualifications.

8. Europass web-based tools shall be delivered in the official languages of the European Union.

9. Europass shall be updated in line with technological advancements as well as changes in labour markets and in the provision of education and training.

10. Europass shall be operated to support and ensure synergies with other instruments and services offered at Union level and national level. The development of open metadata schemata shall be compatible with the technical standards applied under Regulation (EU) 2016/589.

Article 5

Europass Qualification Supplement(s)

1. Europass Qualification Supplement(s) shall be issued by the competent national authorities in accordance with templates developed by the European Commission and other stakeholders[32] such as the Council of Europe and UNESCO.

2. Europass Qualification Supplement templates shall be:

[32] Current supplements are the Certificate Supplement and the Diploma Supplement.

(a) adhered to by the relevant national authorities when completing and issuing the supplements. In particular, the order of each item should be adhered to and each field must be completed to ensure ease of understanding and provision of complete information;

(b) made available through the Europass web tools;

(c) provided in the official languages of the European Union;

(d) subject to regular revisions to ensure relevance and usability of the supplements.

3. All Europass Qualification Supplement documents issued by authorised bodies shall be issued automatically and free of charge in electronic form, in the national language and/or in a major European language, in accordance with the procedures agreed between the issuing bodies and the National Skills Coordination Points referred to in Article 8 and in conformity with any procedures agreed between the European Commission and stakeholders.

Article 6

Classification of European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO)

1. The Commission shall manage a multilingual classification of concepts that are relevant for the EU labour market and education and training system known as the classification of European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO).

2. The ESCO classification shall directly support the functioning of Europass by providing a common reference language for exchanging information and documents on skills and qualifications and for the purpose of job searching, job matching, searching for education and training opportunities and providing learning and career guidance.

Article 7

Implementation and monitoring

1. The Commission shall, in cooperation with the Member States:

(a) develop web-based tools for the operation of Europass;

(b) ensure that adequate promotion and information activities are carried out at Union and national level in order to reach relevant users and stakeholders;

(c) regularly update Europass;

(d) regularly update the ESCO classification, in close cooperation with Member States and with stakeholders, such as social partners, professional associations, education and training institutes, research institutes, statistics institutes and employment services.

2. The Commission and the Member States shall work to ensure that all relevant stakeholders, at Union and national level, are involved in the implementation of this Decision.

3. The Commission, in cooperation with Member States shall, in particular:

(a) promote and monitor the effectiveness of Europass web-based tools and update and develop Europass services in line with user needs;

(b) monitor the effectiveness of support for development of open standards, metadata schemata and semantic assets for interoperability;

(c) support the implementation of article 14 of the Regulation (EU) 2016/589 in relation to the ESCO classification, and support the continuous update of ESCO;

(d) support the development of skills intelligence, including anticipation and forecasting;

(e) support the exchange of information on recognition practices and decisions;

(f) support the development of guidance policy and guidance services;

(g) monitor the activities of the National Skills Coordination Points, the consistency of information they provide for the analysis of trends in skills supply and demand, and the information provided on learning opportunities to the relevant portal at Union level;

(h) set up peer reviews and best practice exchanges between Member States.

4. The Commission shall report on progress following the adoption of this Decision, as appropriate, in the context of relevant education/training and employment policy frameworks.

Article 8

Member States' role

1. Each Member State shall be responsible for the implementation of this Decision at national level. To this end, Member States shall:

(a) designate and manage, in accordance with national circumstances, a National Skills Coordination Point, to support coordination and cooperation among the national services referred to in this Decision;

(b) ensure, through the National Skills Coordination Point, the timely and effective provision of data and information available at national level for the updating of the Europass framework;

(c) provide Europass users with access to the relevant information or data available within the Member State, in particular access to information on learning opportunities, qualifications and qualification systems and to semantic assets on national level;

(d) provide an evidence base to support evaluation as described in article 10 of this Decision, in particular data on actual use of tools and user satisfaction.

2. Each National Skills Coordination Point shall:

(a) coordinate, in cooperation with the relevant national bodies, the activities related to the implementation of Europass tools and services at national level;

(b) promote and provide information on guidance for learning and career purposes and make information on learning opportunities publicly available at national level and in the Union web-based tool;

(c) monitor the collection and dissemination of evidence based and real-time information on skills at national and regional level;

(d) support the transparent referencing of levels of qualifications within national qualifications frameworks to the EQF, provide information on the EQF to national stakeholders and communicate the results of the referencing process and on qualifications to the Union web-based tool;

(e) support cooperation at national level among public and private stakeholders on skills related issues in economic sectors;

(f) involve all relevant stakeholders in the activities under their responsibility;

(g) implement or support any other activities as agreed by the Commission and Member States at EU level.

3. The National Skills Coordination Points shall be the beneficiary of Union financing awarded for the implementation of this Decision.

Article 9

Data processing and protection

The measures provided for in this Decision shall be carried out in accordance with EU law on protection of personal data, in particular Directive 95/46/EC and Regulation (EC) No 45/2001[33].

Article 10

Evaluation

1. Within five years of the entry into force of this Decision, and then every five years thereafter, the Commission shall submit to the European Parliament and the Council an evaluation report on the implementation of this Decision.

2. The evaluation shall be carried out by an independent body based on qualitative and quantitative indicators to be agreed by the Commission and the Member States.

Article 11

Participating countries

1. Participation in the activities referred to in this Decision shall be open to Acceding States and to non-EU countries of the European Economic Area in accordance with the conditions laid down in the EEA Agreement.

2. Participation shall also be open to the candidate countries for accession to the Union and potential candidate countries in accordance with their European Agreements.

[33] Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 April 2016 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data, and repealing Directive 95/46/EC (General Data Protection Regulation) (OJ L 119, 4.5.2016, p. 1).

Article 12

Financial provisions

The implementation of this Decision shall be co-financed through Union programmes. Annual appropriations shall be authorised by the European Parliament and the Council within the limits of the financial framework.

Article 13

Repeal

Decision No. 2241/2004/EC is repealed.

Article 14

Entry into force

This Decision shall enter into force on the twentieth day following that of its publication in the *Official Journal of the European Union*.

Done at Brussels,

For the European Parliament	*For the Council*
The President	*The President*