

For Official Use**English - Or. English****25 November 2022****COUNCIL****Council****EVALUATION OF THE SKILLS STRATEGY HORIZONTAL PROJECT****Executive Summary****JT03508730**

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EVALUATION OF THE SKILLS STRATEGY HORIZONTAL PROJECT

The OECD Skills Strategy Horizontal Project (SSHP) was initiated in 2010, implemented during the 2011-2012 biennium and pursued as a horizontal theme through mainstreamed activities from biennium 2013-2014 up to the present day.

The need for and relevance of an OECD Skills Strategy Horizontal Project was established within the Education Policy Committee (EDPC) in April 2010. The Horizontal Project that followed was conducted during the 2011-2012 biennium jointly by the Directorate for Education and Skills (EDU), the Directorate for Employment, Labour and Social Affairs (ELS) and the Centre for Entrepreneurship, SMEs, Regions and Cities (CFE). Together they delivered the OECD Skills Strategy, endorsed in May 2012 at the Meeting of the Council at Ministerial Level, and published the same year under the title “*Better Skills. Better Jobs. Better Lives. A Strategic Approach to Skills Policies.*” The aim of the Strategy was to respond to the effects of the 2008 financial crisis on human capital and on the ability of people to retrain and reskill, through the building of bridges between education and labour.

After the 2011-12 biennium and the formal completion of the Horizontal Project, the skills theme was mainstreamed across the Organisation’s work programme, leading notably to a series of Skills Outlooks; a series of National (as well as regional and multi-country) Skills Strategies in co-operation with Members and non-Members; and an update, in 2019, of the 2012 OECD Skills Strategy. In the present case, “mainstreaming” meant that the main activities under the skills theme were placed in a specific OR, and direct or indirect reporting lines to the committees responsible for related skills work were created in order to ensure coordination.

The activities to deliver the outputs under, first, the Horizontal Project and, subsequently, the horizontal theme were conducted under the guidance of the Skills Strategy Advisory Group (SSAG) and supported by EDU and ELS. Furthermore, in 2017-18, the OECD Centre for Skills (SKC) was created to further reinforce the Organisation’s capacity to foster the required multi-sector approach on skills.

SSHP relevance is confirmed

The rationale for the 2012 OECD Skills Strategy, at the junction of employment and education, today is still valid, as confirmed in interviews and through survey results. There is a consensus among interviewees that skills are key to employment, economic growth and social inclusion, and that they are critical for a variety of sectors.

Considerable impact during the mainstreaming phase, especially of National Skills Strategies

The Horizontal Project and theme produced the OECD Skills Strategies, and to implement them, three other main types of products and events: i) National Skills Strategies (NSS), ii) Skills Summits, and iii) Skills Outlooks.

There has been considerable impact during SSHP’s mainstreaming phase, especially of NSS, derived from the OECD Skills Strategy. During the 2014-2021 period, 15 countries (two of which non-OECD Members), three subnational regions (all in Members) and one sub-region (Southeast Asia) received various forms of support leading to various products, sometimes more than one per country/region. A total of 30 products and events were delivered, including 10 Diagnostic Reports and one preliminary diagnostic for Southeast Asia, eight Assessment and Recommendations Reports, one Action Report and two Policy Notes, five Implementation Guidance documents, and three biennial

Skills Summits, a key dissemination tool for OECD skills work. Two more countries started their NSS projects at the end of 2021 and a Skills Summit was held in Colombia in 2022.

The National Skills Strategy projects have had an overall positive impact, with the beneficiaries of the projects asking for follow-up work in several cases. From the six NSS projects examined within the framework of this evaluation, two contributed to the materialisation of National Skills Strategies and two other to the preparation or update of skills plans or programmes. The In-depth Evaluation (IDE) was able to establish several factors that influenced the impact of the NSS. Those within OECD's control were its experience in areas related to skills, an adequate identification of stakeholders and the conduct of an interdisciplinary analysis. Yet, those factors characterising the national context of NSS projects (e.g. political system, political stability, policy cycle) may have not been favourable to the implementation of the project in several cases.

The OECD also introduced Skills Strategy Peer Learning Workshops as from 2013/14 to learn from the implementation of skills projects in different national contexts. These workshops brought together and had a good reception among representatives from countries having participated in NSS projects, as well as other interested OECD Members.

Under the SSHP, the “Skills Outlook” was published biennially from 2013 onward. The IDE shows that the Skills Outlook is mainly a document for reference, not directly leading to policy change. Publication analysis shows that Skills Outlooks have received significant interest from potential users and media in Members, but its outreach has decreased over time.

The quantitative analysis confirms a relatively positive picture: based on Programme Implementation Report (PIR) data, the impact of SSHP products is considered “medium to high,” whilst the quality of SSHP products is “high to very high.”

The SSHP and its “mainstreaming” phase were efficiently rolled-out

The IDE confirms that the Horizontal Project was efficiently rolled out over the 2011-2012 biennium and then mainstreamed within the Organisation throughout subsequent biennia with National Skills Strategies being proposed and delivered to interested Members and non-Members.

To oversee the new stream of work, in 2010 the Skills Strategy Advisory Group (SSAG) was created. The SSAG had no mandate over the Horizontal Project's budget, nor was it part of its formal governance structure. It also had no formal role in the preparation of the PWB or a reporting line to the Council. Nevertheless, the SSAG has provided strategic direction for the development of the Horizontal Project and subsequent horizontal theme. Its role and function remained relatively informal and poorly documented until the OECD Centre for Skills was created. Since then the Centre has served as a secretariat to the SSAG, which in 2021 was renamed Skills Advisory Group (SAG).

The OECD Centre for Skills (SKC) was another institutional outcome of the SSHP, created by the Secretary-General in 2017-18. Within the OECD Secretariat, it is responsible for the work programmed under the skills related Output Area, carrying out NSS projects; mobilising expertise from across the OECD to develop useful analytical tools and share those with policymakers and practitioners on a regular basis; and periodically updating the OECD Skills Strategy to ensure it continues to respond to countries' changing and evolving needs.

The SKC's institutional arrangement is uncommon: in terms of its substantive work the Centre reports to the EDPC, which has formal oversight over the skills work, whilst administratively the Head of the SKC reports to the ELS Director.

Lessons Learned

On the basis of the findings and analyses of the evaluation, seven “lessons learned” were formulated. These are based on the exemplariness, or the room for improvement of certain practices, as well as their novelty, effectiveness and transferability. These lessons relate to three different items, namely

to the SSHP overall; to practices which may be relevant to most horizontal projects; and to National Skills Strategy (NSS) projects. Lessons are summarised below.

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| SSHP | Lesson Learned 1. The SSHP has demonstrated the relevance and feasibility of horizontal work within the OECD |
| Horizontal projects | Lesson Learned 2. Mainstreaming can take different forms depending on the type of HP, and this should be acknowledged and anticipated Lesson Learned 3. Promote learning from experience <i>in itinere</i> – draw lessons while on-going Lesson Learned 4. Document Horizontal Projects well Lesson Learned 5. Define clear governance arrangements and rules |
| NSS projects | Lesson Learned 6. In the design of the approach for national projects, assess beforehand the institutional factors favouring or hampering the process and the uptake of results Lesson Learned 7. Develop tools to support the participants in the process |