

**Employment and Social Affairs Platform (ESAP)****Regional Peer Review Workshop on Internship Programmes****26-27 November 2018, Skopje**

Under the ESAP project, the Western Balkan economies are implementing peer reviews on selected priority employment policies or measures. Peer reviews aim to facilitate learning, discussion and capacity building on employment policy development and implementation.

A two-day regional peer review workshop focusing on internship programmes took place on 26-27 November 2018 in Skopje. The Workshop was organised by the Regional Cooperation Council's (RCC), Employment and Social Affairs Platform (ESAP) project.

The Workshop gathering officials of Ministries of Labour from the Western Balkan economies in charge of the development and monitoring of active labour market policies/internship programmes as well as representatives of Public Employment Services (PES) in charge of such programmes. Representatives of ETF, DG EMPL and Belgian PES also participated. The meeting was opened by the host Minister of Labour and Social Policy, Mila Carovska and Biljana Jovanovska, Director of Employment Service Agency.

Minister Carovska underlined commitment of her Government to improve employment mechanisms in the economy, adding that workshops like this one helped them in achieving this goal as they hoped to learn from others what works and what does not in promoting jobs and protecting people, while at the same time gives an opportunity to share their own experiences. Ms. Biljana Jovanovska emphasized the important results achieved through the implementation of the internship programme by the Agency since 2008. The number of interns has increased steadily, reaching recently about 1000 beneficiaries per year. The Internship programme has also been integrated within the newly introduced youth guarantee scheme.

The representatives of WB six PES offices and Ministries of Labour presented internship programmes in their respective economies. The internship programmes are quite similar in all economies and all of them highlighted the following:

- Internship programmes are conducted in accordance with the current legislation.
- Internship programmes are intended for unemployed persons up to age of 34 without work experience in their profession with at least secondary education completed.
- Duration of internship programme ranges from 6-12 months depending on the economy



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- In general, 6 months for persons who have completed secondary education and 12 months for persons with higher education provided that these persons are employed for the first time in their professional education and profession.
- After the completion of the internship, the intern receives a certificate on completed professional training.
- Interns are entitled to an allowance which is considered as a salary.
- Work conducted during the internship is calculated in the work experience as a condition for working on certain jobs.
- As regards the employers, both the private and public sector have the right to participate in the realisation of the programme. However, when it comes to public sector for example in Serbia, the programme is exclusively for vacancies in health, education, social protection and justice sectors.
- Employer must have technical, spatial and other capacities for the provision of professional training.

Mr. Stefan Thomas, from ETF, made a presentation on financing work-based learning – lessons learned from apprenticeship. The participants had the opportunity to hear about different types of work-based learning in the EU, critical success factors, challenges and how well designed financing looks like.

Mr. Sven Shayes, from the Brussels Employment Office provided an overview on the Youth Guarantee in Belgium. He pointed out that the employment policy is a regional competence. Each region in Belgium implements a specific YG Action Plan which takes into consideration its context and challenges. The Youth Guarantee Action Plan in the Brussels Capital Region includes cross-sectoral policies on education, youth care, vocational training and employment. Mr. Shayes also gave an overview of the implementation of the youth guarantee service, what the service provides, who is eligible to apply for the traineeship, how long it lasts, how much money the trainee is entitle to receive, what are the outcomes of the traineeship, etc.

Ms. Pirkko Pyörälä, from DG Employment participated in the workshop via video link and made a presentation on Quality Framework for Traineeship. She explained the form, scope, content of the traineeship as well as the objectives to ensure a good learning content, under safe working conditions, and with enhanced transparency on financial conditions. Also, Ms. Pyörälä explained how the Quality Framework for Traineeships is being applied, as well as the legal framework in the member states, which differ greatly.

The EU quality framework for traineeship includes:

- Conclusion of a written traineeship agreement
- Learning and training objectives



- Mentor/supervisor assigned
- Working conditions applicable to trainees
- Rights and obligations
- Agreement clarifies whether there is health and accident insurance and sick leave; allowances
- Reasonable duration of 6 months max
- Termination with advance notice
- Proper recognition of traineeships with certificate
- Transparency requirements (hiring practices, allowances, insurance, financial conditions)

Recent and upcoming relevant work of the Commission includes a commission seminar on traineeships in spring 2019 with a focus on legal aspects and misuse. The report "Traineeships under the Youth Guarantee – Experience from the ground" and the creation of a database of promising practices.

During the second day of the workshop the participants were divided in two groups and worked on SWOT Analysis of Internship Programmes in the Western Balkans, which refers to strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. More exactly, they were looking into internal factors that affect the programme as well as the external factors. Internal factors refer to strengths and weaknesses of the programme and institutions that implement the programme. External factors refer to opportunities and threats that are beyond strict small environment within which the institutions operate but can very much affects their work. During the group work the participants were working on identifying the above-mentioned factors. The objective of this exercise was to see what the economies are doing well and what can be done better. At the end of the workshop the findings of each group were presented.

Strengths identified:

- Efficient, cost effective programmes that yield good results
- Committed staff
- New infrastructure of the institutions
- Organizational structure in place
- High interest of companies for internship programmes
- Focus on youth
- Connection with the Tax Authority
- Huge interest about the programme among young population

Weaknesses identified:

- Lack of staff working on Internship Programmes



- Lack of prioritising internship
- Limited funding
- Lack of legal and regulatory framework
- IT systems are not linked (mainly refers to BiH where IT systems are not linked between the entities)
- No links among labour markets
- Insufficient subsidy
- Lack of interest of public sector (refers to the Republic of Srpska) to employ the interns without the experience
- Lack of staff in institutions - workload is high and the number of employees too low

Opportunities identified:

- To measure the implementation of measure and learning outcomes
- To have a clear framework on traineeship
- To link internship with the overall career
- Possibility to use other funds (donors, partners, etc.)
- New Law on Internship (in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia)
- High unemployment rate
- Dual education system (in Montenegro)
- Cooperation with local government (in Serbia)

Threats identified:

- Incentive for the employers
- Political influence
- Education system is a bottleneck
- Emigration
- Lack of links with the labour markets
- Change of the law
- Small number of jobs created

Overall key success factors for internships include:

- Robust Institutional and Regulatory Framework
- Active Social Partner Involvement
- Strong Employer Involvement
- Close Partnerships between Employers and Educational Institutions
- Funding including Employer Subsidies and Other Incentives



- Close Alignment with the Labour Market Needs
- Robust Quality Assurance
- High-quality Guidance, Support and Mentoring of Apprentices/Trainees
- Appropriate Matching of Apprentice/Trainee to Host Organisation (Company)
- Combination of Theoretical, School-Based Training with Practical Work-Related Experience
- Existence of an Apprenticeship/Traineeship Agreement
- Certification of Acquired Knowledge, Skills and Competences
- Tailored and Flexible Approaches to the Needs of Vulnerable Young People

The host representatives from the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs reflected on the youth guarantee, which represents a systematic approach in tackling the issue of youth unemployment, and provided the explanation of the youth guarantee initiative and the process itself. Young people under 29 who belong to the NEET Group (they are neither in education, nor in training, nor recorded as unemployed and not included in the labour market) need to be identified and career counselling be provided. The representative of the National Youth Council of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia said that they are one of the implementing partners in the youth guarantee. Their task is to encourage young people to take part in the youth guarantee scheme in order to be registered in the Employment Agency, so the agency can prepare the individual plan and involve them in the labour market. It was pointed out that the most important factor is to establish a good cooperation and trust among the peers, then to get them familiar with the system and with the scope of measures that exist. The Council has created a plan on how to approach and how to address the young people. The Council also enabled online application and created bilingual promotional materials to reach young Roma, too.

As regards the proposed Law on Internship, it will help addressing the challenges of the labour market (High unemployment, especially among young and long-term unemployed, the gap between knowledge and supply and demand skills). It draws on past experiences of the interns (based on survey results), the actual results of the active employment measure – internship and financial viability in relation to other policies.

The results related to the youth guarantee in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia were presented:

- Pilot project in 2018 in 3 municipalities - Skopje, Gostivar, Strumica.
- The results of the youth guarantee exceeded the expected result of 30% of the inflow of young people registered in the Employment Service
- above 50% of the people who entered the youth guarantee are included in some active measure.



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It has been concluded that the goal of the workshop has been achieved and that is to exchange the knowledge and experience on the internship programmes as well as to learn more about the youth guarantee in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. In terms of next steps it has been mentioned that the descriptive reports of internship programmes are being finalised in all economies. These reports will be made public on RCC website. Also, the report from the meeting on what has been discussed shall be drafted and this report shall be shared with the participants along with the presentations. It will be looked into the possibility to translate the presentations. It has been announced that there is one more peer review in Albania on “On-the-job training”, which will take place on 17-18 January in Tirana.

N.B. This report also serves for the purpose of a duty trip report for Nand Shani and Sanda Topić