

## **Employment and Social Affairs Platform**

### **Annex 1: Guidelines for Peer Reviews**

#### **Introduction**

The Employment and Social Affairs Platform regional project aims to strengthen regional cooperation and institutional capacities of national administrations from the Western Balkans, enabling them to develop and effectively implement labour market and social policy reforms in their EU enlargement process.

Under the project, the implementation of peer reviews is intended as a flexible mechanism for exchanging experience and mutual learning. An external group of experts (peers) are invited to assess and review a selected employment policy measure, during which process they visit the host institution. Peers are normally officials who work in a similar environment and have specific professional knowledge and expertise in the subject matter of the peer review. In-depth thematic discussions and hands-on exposure to day to day activities should enable both the host and visiting teams to draw lessons that can be documented and further on applied in their own activities. Both teams are working for the same overall goal of enhancing the role and impact of employment and social policies and the peer review can help improve programmes with a focus on mutual learning regarding processes and approaches rather than trying to assess results.

These guidelines for the peer review process build on the experience of the EU-wide Mutual Learning Programme related to the implementation of the European Employment Strategy. Throughout the process, lessons will be drawn from and synergies will be sought with the EU peer learning process.

#### **Objectives:**

The main objectives of the peer review process are:

- Create an opportunity for Western Balkan institutions in charge of employment and social affairs policy making and implementation to exchange experiences and good practices with regard to concrete policy issues.
- Enhance cooperation between institutions, contributing to better understanding common challenges and priorities and improve policy making on employment and social affairs.
- Enhance capacities of official from the involved institutions through sharing information, knowledge and skills.
- Provide external expert contribution and support and strengthen cooperation with other stakeholders.

## Overview:

### 4 phases of a peer review

The peer review process encompasses 4 phases.

1. The preparatory phase serves to build consensus around the process, identify the policy areas to be covered, prepare background documents and agree on a timetable for the peer visit. This phase is estimated to last 3 to 4 months.
2. During the peer visit phase, peers come to visit the host institution and an in-depth presentation and the discussion takes place, including possible field visits and interviews with different stakeholders. At the end of the visit, the peers meet to discuss the feedback and agree on the main points that will be included in the peer report. The peer review can start as early as June 2017, however all 6 peer review visits would be completed before December 2017.
3. Peers draft a report on the peer visit, and after receiving comments by the host institution, the final Peer Review Report is produced.
4. The fourth phase is crucial for the improvement of organizational development: Conclusions and recommendations from the Peer Review are translated into concrete actions for improvement, which are planned and implemented.

A dissemination conference will be further organized to share the findings of the peer reviews and upon the identification of good practices or other relevant topics, mutual learning workshops on best practices will complement the peer review process.

### Timetable and Key Steps

#### Preparation:

The preparation for the peer review will typically consist of the following steps:

- ESAP/expert team prepares a template for the identification of the peer review topic.
- The host institution completes and submits the template that states its intention to undergo a peer review, proposes the area for the peer review and provides the contacts from the institution.
- ESAP/expert team distribute the topics for the peer review with the peer institutions, which identify official that will participate in the peer reviews.
- ESAP/expert team develop and provide guidelines for the peer review to nominated participants.



- The following background documents are prepared and shared with all participants 1 month before the peer visit:
  - A host country paper by a national expert and the officials from the host institution.
  - A peer country perspective by the peer officials with support from a national expert.
  
- The date is set for the peer review visit and an agenda is agreed among participants.

It is expected that the preparation phase will last 3-5 months.

#### Peer visit:

During the peer visit, the host institution will make arrangements for the availability of meeting rooms and the provision of access to premises or official responsible for the topic being reviewed. The meeting should ideally be comprised of presentations of officials and experts and joint discussions, followed by a final meeting session of the peer review team in order to agree on the main conclusions and responsibilities for drafting the peer report.

The actual duration of the peer review visit is expected to be between 1.5 and 2 days.

#### Peer visit report:

The peer review expert team will produce the draft peer report, according to a standard template prepared by the expert team, with contribution from all the involved peer officials at the latest 2 weeks after the peer visit. Comments by the host institutions will be provided within the next week, and another week will be used to incorporate comments and finalize the report.

It is expected that the finalization of the peer visit report will take up to 1 month.

#### Follow-up:

The host institutions will need to take a decision on the follow up to the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the peer review visit. This could involve the development of an action plan and the implementation of the improvement measures. Such effort will require a clarification of the objectives, resources and implementation mechanisms. To the extent possible, ESAP will aim to support the institutions in such efforts.

The timeline for the follow-up will vary depending on the type and depth of the envisaged actions, however it is expected that most measures should fall into the 6-12 month implementation cycle.

The dedicated online platform of ESAP will contain all the necessary and relevant documentation on the process, visits and reports and a dissemination event will serve to promote the process, its findings and build political support around the implementation of follow-up actions.



Several key stakeholders are involved in the implementation of the peer review process.

**ESAP project team** coordinates the overall peer review process, provides the financial support, supervises and supports the expert team engaged in the process.

**Host institution team** will be composed of officials in charge of the identified policy measure and other related stakeholders. A core receiving team of 3-4 people would be advisable, while ensuring that access and communication is available with a broader range of officials as needed. Their role is to contribute to the preparation of the national peer review topic paper, help organize the peer review visit, provide feedback to the peer review report, and develop follow up actions to the peer review.

**Peer review team** will be composed of official and experts from the peer economies.

Peer officials will be practitioners involved in the design, implementation and monitoring of different measures or actions in the area of employment and social affairs. Their task is to contribute to the preparation of their national commentary to the selected peer review topic, participate actively in the peer visit, and contribute to the preparation of the peer review report.

Peer experts: A team of international and national experts will be contracted by ESAP to support the process of developing, implementing and following up on the peer reviews.

A typical peer review team will be composed of 1-2 officials from each peer institution, 1 national expert from each economy, 1 international expert and the ESAP/expert team managing the process.

**European Commission:** In all activities, to the extent possible, the European Commission will be asked to act as an external advisor, providing guidance and sharing its own experience in the process.