Employment and Social Affairs Platform

Guidelines for Benchlearning among Western Balkan Public Employment Services

Introduction

The EU funded, RCC implemented 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.

A specific objective is the promotion of mutual learning and sharing of good practices among Public Employment Service (PES) offices with the aim of enhancing organizational development and improving performance. In October 2016, RCC commissioned the preparation of a study of performance management and the development of a conceptual framework and methodology for the implementation of the benchlearning initiative in the Western Balkan PES offices. The study has been finalized in December 2016 and shared with representatives of PES offices. PES offices have been familiarized with the concept of benchmarking - a systematic comparison of business models, processes, performances and tools among different employment services on the basis of quantitative and qualitative indicators to assess performance and identify good practices. The process draws heavily on the experience of the EU PES network.

Objectives:

The overall objective of the benchlearning initiative is to strengthen the capacities of PES offices for performance measurement and management. To that end, the initiative will contribute to enhanced organizational development and improved performance through the identification, sharing and replication of good practices.

Overview:

1. Conduct a quantitative benchmarking

The first key step of the initiative will be to support the preparation of PES performance assessment and produce comparative analysis of PES data that will lead to the identification of good practices. This will entail:

1.1. An agreement on the set of quantitative data to be collected for the analysis. The purpose of the quantitative assessment is to measure a small and meaningful set of performance indicators, which focus on the results and outcomes of PES activities. The proposed indicators are:

- The transition rate from *factual* unemployment into employment in the primary labour market (with and without a subsidy either to the employer or the jobseeker), for all persons in contact with PES as well as for long term unemployed, youth and low-skilled.

- The share of all transitions from *factual* unemployment into employment in the primary labour market which happen within 6 or 12 months (or both) of factual unemployment ("speed of transitions"), for all persons in contact with PES as well as for long term unemployed, youth and low-skilled.

- The number of vacancies notified to the PES relative to the number of all hirings in the economy ("PES market share in hirings).

Additional indicators can be proposed by the Western Balkans PES working group.

1.2. Coordination of the collection of data with a time series starting in 2010, while benefiting from external technical and methodological advice and clarification.

1.3. The development of a methodology and the preparation of a thorough analysis and validation of data in order to generate context-adjusted valid performance indicators, that are comparative over time and among PES offices.

1.4. Preparation of a comparative analytical report on WB PES performance.

2. Conduct a comprehensive qualitative assessment

The purpose of the qualitative assessment will be to identify non-quantifiable strengths and good practices as well as areas of improvement of the PES offices involved. Qualitative performance assessment will involve structured and scored interviews based on the relevant areas of PES performance enablers used in the EU PES benchlearning. This will entail a comprehensive stock taking of all potentially relevant organizational aspects. It will consist of a combination of self-assessment and external assessment to collect the necessary information on performance enablers for qualitative benchmarking.

2.1. Develop an assessment framework for collecting PES data on performance enablers (both for self-assessment and external assessment) based on the areas of PES performance enablers used in the EU PES Benchlearning.

2.2. Conduct self and external reviews on the methodology of the assessment and the use of the assessment framework. Use the ESAP virtual platform to the extent possible.

2.3. Organize 6 multilateral peer reviews that will take place over in each participating PES.

2.4. After each PES visit, a report will be prepared on the findings for all performance enabler indicators, including strengths and areas for improvement and identifying evidence based good practices for the mutual learning events. At least one good practice should be identified in each participating PES, for which a separate 2-3 page good practice fiche needs to be prepared.

3. Organization of mutual learning events and update of benchmarking exercise

3.1. *Mutual learning events.* The good practices identified and agreed under the second activity above will constitute the potential topics of mutual learning events. Tentatively, 4 events will be organized by ESAP, including three thematic review workshops and one PES conference.

3.2. Practitioners' guides/toolkits. Based on accumulated evidence from previous events, reports and best practice results, two practitioner's guides or toolkits will be produced. They will be approximately 30 pages long, including checklists and detailed step-by-step guides, and fundamentals of design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

3.3. Update the context-adjusted valid performance outcomes and good practices database. In order to complete the cycle of benchmarking, a second round of data collection for quantitative benchmarking will take place, followed by an update of the context-adjusted valid performance outcomes and proposal for good practices.

3.3. Prepare an *updated comparative analytical report on WB PES performance*.

Timetable and Key Steps

Preparation:

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

➢ ESAP/expert team prepare a detailed guidelines and a toolkit for the self-assessment.

➢ Collection of quantitative data

➢ Validation and context adjustment

➢ The date is set for the peer review visit and an agenda is agreed among participants.

➢ Qualitative self-assessment

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

External Assessment:

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.

The actual duration of the peer review visit is expected to be between 2 and 3 days and might involve a field visit.

External Assessment 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 4 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 1 – 1.5 months.

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 self assessment, help organize the external assessment visit, provide feedback to the external assessment report, and develop follow up actions to the peer review.

Peer review team will be composed of officials from 2 peer institutions, as well as external benchlearning experts and ESAP representatives.

The main task of the peer officials is to review the self-assessment, prepare and participate actively in the external assessment visit and follow-up, and contribute to the preparation of the external assessment report.

Benchlearning experts: External expertise will be contracted by ESAP to support the process of developing, implementing and following up on the peer reviews.

A typical external assessment 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 and the EU PES network will be asked to act as an external advisor, providing guidance and sharing its own experience in the process.