

Education and Training 2020

In-depth country workshops (peer learning activities)

In the ET2020 process, peer learning undertaken during in-depth country workshops or similar events is an integral part of the learning - and knowledge creation - process. Peer learning aims to allow participating countries to identify key elements of successful policies in a particular field, and to draw specific policy conclusions that are relevant to their own national situation. The WG organises in-depth country workshops on the basis the learning needs it has identified for itself.

Workshops are organised in cooperation between a host country, the WG and the Commission. They last typically 2-3 working days and focus on a specific aspect of policy.

Key elements in such a workshop are:

- short oral presentations from several different countries of specific policies on the chosen theme and their results (preferably supported by evidence from policy evaluations);
- written information, to be read before the event, about the national context in which each of these policies is set;
- a summary of the main data about the issue being considered (e.g. statistics on adults' skills);
- an analysis of the main research literature on the issue being considered.

During the workshop, participants use an analytical framework – devised by the group - to compare and contrast the different policies in the light of the other information available. They identify the key elements that seem to make for (more) successful policies. This enables each country to identify the specific action that it needs to take.

The theme should be a 'policy challenge' shared by the host country and the participating countries. It should be concrete. Representatives from the host country, some of the participating countries and the Commission plan the workshop together. This may include a planning meeting in Brussels.

Therefore, both the learning content and the learning context are crucial. New knowledge is created through lively and engaged exchange between participants, stimulated by carefully selected inputs. The learning context is influenced by the preparation of the programme, the composition of the group and the skills of the facilitators (who include members of the group).

Participation

Experience shows that the method works best with around 20 – 25 participants from (say) 10 countries.

Each country is required to send two participants – representing different sides of the theme (e.g. a policymaker and someone charged with implementing the policy).

Inputs

- Information brought by all participants about their national policies.
- Presentations made by participating countries, invited experts.
- Reviews, studies and background papers prepared by the Commission.
- Field studies (e.g. visits to institutions) may occasionally be useful if they allow the group to test out its working hypotheses, to gather evidence from key stakeholders about the policy of the host country, etc. However, the time available for visits is very limited and it is often more efficient to bring the relevant people to the meeting venue.

Outputs

The WG will need to specify the outputs it expects to achieve from each workshop, in the light of the final outputs it has to deliver.

These might include:

- a brief report that should describe :
 - the peer learning process that was undertaken and the evidence on which conclusions are based
 - the general conclusions reached about policy in the specific area under review (key elements for success, key pitfalls to avoid)
 - specific policy guidance for countries (or for groups of countries sharing similar challenges)

Hosting an in-depth workshop/peer learning activity

- Host country covers meeting room hire costs (if any - e.g. if meeting in a hotel). There has to be a room big enough for +/-30 people in plenary, plus enough space (e.g. in separate smaller rooms, or in corners of a big room) for small group work in 4 or 5 groups. Often, university or Ministry meeting rooms are used.
- It is preferable for all participants to lodge in the same hotel. Sometimes, the host country has organised a reduced rate for overnight accommodation in a conference hotel.
- There does need to be someone in the host country who can coordinate the booking of hotel rooms, keep a record of who will arrive when, and give advice to participants about travel, transfers etc.
This person can be in a Ministry, but can also be in a local tourism organisation, city hall, etc, depending on local circumstances.
- There also needs to be a contact person in the Ministry with whom we can finalise the programme, which will have been prepared and thought out by a small preparatory group of WG members.
- Some hosts provide lunches, but, again, this is not necessary, because in principle everyone has their food costs already covered.
- Providing a dinner is not obligatory; but most hosts provide something like a welcome drink on arrival, and maybe a dinner on one evening. But this is at host's discretion.
- Some hosts like to organise a cultural trip in the evening, *after* the working day.

Participating in an in-depth workshop/peer learning activity

- Every participant buys their own ticket and books their own room at the chosen hotel. They fill in the necessary reimbursement forms as for any meeting at the Commission. After the event, the Commission reimburses travel expenses in accordance with its usual rules.
- Accommodation and subsistence are covered by the sending country (for national representatives) or by the Commission (for NGOs, stakeholder groups etc).
- Active participation is a must; every participant will have several roles to play (rapporteur, Chair for a day, presenter); this means that good spoken skills in the language of the workshop (usually English) are required.