

Project: Mutual Learning – Learning Through Sharing

The European Training Foundation – project organizer

The European Training Foundation is an agency of the European Union based in Turin, Italy. It was established to contribute to the development of the education and training systems of the EU partner countries. The ETF mission is to help transition and developing countries to harness the potential of their human capital through the reform of education, training and labor market systems in the context of the EU's external relations policy.

ETF base their work on the conviction that human capital development in a lifelong learning perspective can make a fundamental contribution to increasing prosperity, creating sustainable growth and encouraging social inclusion in transition and developing countries.

Project purpose and objectives

ETF organized (2006) a peer learning project in South Eastern Europe which was very successful, particularly in terms of policy learning, capacity building and networking in the region. It was important to create a systematic follow up which was only possible if it is linked to national or donor initiatives.

The Mutual Learning project is a new three-year initiative (2009-2011) organized by the European Training Foundation. The purpose of the project is to prepare the candidates and potential candidates to adopt EU processes by creating a network and providing a space for countries to exchange experience and learn from each others practice. The countries involved are Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Kosovo, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey. The objectives of the ETF are to provide opportunities for learning among policy makers and experts on policy issues of common

concern with view to inform decision makers in context of ongoing reform processes in the areas of:

- adult learning
- quality assurance
- post - secondary professional education and VET

Through ETF country analysis and plans, which reflect the present state of discussion in the countries of South Eastern Europe, these three key topics emerged for future national and regional policy debates and actions. All of these areas are at the different stage of development in aforementioned countries and therefore it is crucial for them to support each other through exchanging experiences, issues and possible solutions. Capacity building and policy learning will help to improve the awareness of all stakeholders about the latest developments in the region and in the EU, which can then be fed into education and training reforms. Stakeholders from different ministries, schools, unions, agencies and research institutes will be better equipped to carry out education reform activities, join international partnership and actively participate in knowledge networks.

Expected results of the Mutual Learning project

The three year project is expected to bring the following results:

1. Communities of practice have identified key challenges in three areas: quality development and quality assurance, post-secondary education and adult learning and promote actions for policy changes in SEE countries;
2. Increase capacities of key stakeholders for evidence based policy making through regional networking and for reflecting on other countries' and EU experience and practice for national policy making;
3. Policy documents, briefs and statements in the three areas of the countries of SEE;
4. Three regional analysis of the policy discussions on quality development, quality assurance, post-secondary education and adult learning in SEE countries and recommendations for national or donor investments;
5. Key stakeholders kept up to date on EU developments and documents on education and training through regular information updates and other means.

Communities of practice

The role of ETF in this project is to make available instruments and resources and give assistance and guidance to participants during their learning. The ETF set up communities of practice on each of the three themes. Communities of practice are self-managed communities of professionals who define their own topics and agenda. Members develop a sense of belonging to the community by sharing knowledge and experience in the form of methods, stories, cases, tools and documents with view to solve problems of common concern.

Each community of practice prepared and follow its own three-year (2009-2011) action plan and the ETF facilitates policy learning by organizing network meetings and mutual learning activities, such as peer learning visits, peer reviews, comparative analysis, study visits and benchmarking.

Kick off conference Turin, 5 - 6 May 2009

During the start conference of project the objectives, policy priorities and methodology for the communities of practice were discussed. The main objective of the conference was for each community of practice to develop its mutual learning action plan for the full period of the project. The actions focused on mutual learning activities with a clear link to potential national action. During the conference participants defined the priorities in the aforementioned key areas. In further review of the project the focus will be on the area of adult learning. Within the developed action plan for the three target groups (companies, their managers and employees; unemployed and inactive people; individuals who want to increase their skill levels) in the area of adult learning further priorities emerged:

- organizing training and advisory services for micro and small companies;
- motivating employers to train people;
- training needs analysis with advisers;
- supply to respond to demand;
- how to motivate active unemployed and inactive adults;
- effective labor market training schemes;
- functional literacy/ basic and vocational skills;
- develop models for functional literacy and education;
- develop modules and materials for functional literacy and education;
- train the trainers;
- accreditation and certification.

Adult Basic skills workshop

One of the activities of mutual learning action plan in the area of adult learning was Adult Basic skills workshop that took place from 3rd to 5th May 2010 in Turin. The participants were experts and policy makers from South Eastern Europe who shared their valuable experience in the field. Experts from France and Norway gave their examples of good practice in developing basic skills in their countries. They supported participants to define further actions in functional education and basic skills development.

The experts from Norwegian Agency for Lifelong Learning VOX presented their initiative to create European Basic Skills Network and invited participants to the Launching Conference in Oslo. The aim of the network is to foster policy developments in the field of basic skills for adults, providing a platform for cooperation and collaboration between European policy makers and policy providers in the field. Many European eminent experts in adult education attended the conference as well as the representatives from Serbia.

This way the Adult basic skills workshop has two benefits. First, participants agreed that they have learned a lot about how the basic skills issue is addressed in their neighboring countries. On the other hand, the European Basic Skills Network is an excellent opportunity to share experience and collaborate with the policy makers and policy providers from the whole Europe.

Future actions – research

During the conference all participants agreed that the next step in action plan in area of adult education will be a research study, in participating countries, into the reasons why adults do not participate in learning and what exactly their skills or training needs are. It will be a starting point for further support of adult basic skills development in the region.

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