

Policy into Action Forum

The Power of *Mutual Learning*

Policy into Action | Event Highlights

'The Power of Mutual Learning' – 16 November 2017

ICF launched their new *Policy into Action Forum* series on 16 November 2017, with their first event on ['The Power of Mutual Learning'](#), organised in association with EUROCITIES. Each Forum aims to provide a platform to explore, discuss and learn more about how today's policy challenges and issues can successfully be addressed through programmes, networks and other types of implementation initiative across Europe. Understandably, there is a lot of debate about EU policy-making, but less so about effective models for implementing policy - finding the best ways to deliver policy on the ground. And so, this is an area of discourse that ICF would like to stimulate and add value to.

Mutual learning is an approach that has gained a lot of currency over the last 15-20 years and become a key policy instrument in soft law areas, such as employment and social policy. There are many mutual learning programmes and activities out there, and through effective design and delivery, they are known to help different government institutions and related stakeholders in their policy endeavours. This naturally raises the question: What is the *power* behind mutual learning? In practice, what does it mean? How does it work? And how can it be designed in way to leverage knowledge transfer and improvements in policy performance?

To answer these and other questions, three guest speakers presented their success stories. They explained how they have been involved in mutual learning over the last few years, what they have learnt from their European peers and the benefits of this experience for their organisations and wider policy context.





Jūratė Baublienė, Head of Communication Division at the Lithuanian Labour Exchange, spoke about the mutual learning activities of the [European public employment services \(PES\) Network](#). By participating in a range of activities, involving collaboration with Germany and Estonia (amongst other European countries), the Lithuanian PES has been able to improve its organisational capacity and performance, thereby strengthening the quality and efficiency of public service delivery for both jobseekers and employers. The example is particularly striking insofar as the Lithuanian PES has been so engaged in the learning process that it has taken its *own* initiative to organise follow-up visits and learning opportunities outside of those offered by the European PES Network.



Yngve Rosenblad, Chief Analyst at the Estonian Qualifications Authority, provided an example of one of the longest standing initiatives: the [Mutual Learning Programme](#) of DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion. As such, it illustrated very well mutual learning at the policy, rather than practitioner level. One of the key success factors in mutual learning is ensuring that there is organisational buy-in to the learning process, beyond the people who actually participate in learning events. The Estonian Qualifications Authority illustrates that perfectly because they organised ‘dissemination seminars’ to cascade the knowledge from their European peers and use it directly in the design process for OSKA, a new skills anticipation and monitoring system in Estonia.



The final story came from **Andrea Canevazzi, Architect in IT Technologies at AMAT (Milan, Italy)** and **Gabriel Jacqmin, Policy Support Officer, EURO CITIES**. They demonstrated that mutual learning does not only apply to social policy, nor country-to-country exchange. Through the [Sharing Cities](#) project (funded through Horizon 2020), six European cities – including Milan - have found mutual learning to be a key vehicle for looking at energy efficiency, mobility and citizen engagement as part of their smart city strategies. The learning has also extended to mutual support whereby ‘lighthouse’ and ‘fellow’ cities coach and validate each other’s plans.

What came through from all three stories is that there is ‘no one-size-fits-all.’ Mutual learning can yield positive benefits for policy-makers and practitioners alike, address many different policy areas, be applied to different territorial levels, and take place within or outside of formal European networks or programmes. However, it can only be effective if there is a strong evidence base, the mutual learning tools and formats are tailored according to the context and needs, and there is a solid understanding of how individuals and organisations learn and change within complex, institutional and political settings. Indeed, there is a real science behind mutual learning in order to maximise the benefits and ensure knowledge transfer across Europe.

Overall, the Forum provided an insight into what is possible through mutual learning and an inspiration for those who participated. **The next Forum - scheduled for February 2018 - will build on this by delving deeper into the specific mutual learning formats and methodologies that can be applied. Watch out for further details on www.icf.com/mutual-learning.**

