



European Governments Turn to Peer Support



Under Pressure to Deliver Better Citizen Services

In today's changing and uncertain world, European governmental organisations and agencies are often expected to do 'more for less', while improving their performance and top-tier services to citizens. Their everyday pressures can entail:

- Adapting to the demand for new technology and digital service provision
- Deploying resources, capacity building and know-how where services are most needed
- Dealing with external economic and social conditions, such as demographic change and migration
- Bringing about major policy reform against the background of political shifts and changing power structures

On top of this, where organisations are lagging behind others, they face added scrutiny from European and international organisations. How can these entities address these new challenges, serve their citizens, and raise the bar for the European community? In some cases, 'peer support' can provide a guiding light.

Peer Support Offers a Solution

Peer support is a specific form of Mutual Learning targeted at a single country, supported by a small, specially selected group of other countries. Peer support offers the recipient country (represented by one or several governmental organisations / agencies) the opportunity to be counselled by peers in an area where they need critical support, sometimes framed by European Commission country-specific recommendations. The counselling takes the form of a series of virtual and face-to-face meetings and visits, supported by tools and expert inputs to help the recipient country move forward.

Peer support has a number of distinct features, including:

- **Practical, hands-on and tailored learning activities**—It is typically up to the recipient country to request peer support and define the nature and content of the support provided.

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- A **medium-term outlook** (typically 12-18 months), so that the support not only defines the actions and solutions, but sustains the commitment to delivering them over time. The peer countries are key to both reviewing and facilitating this process.
- A focus on **building trust and commitment** among peers through regular, in depth discussions, something that cannot be achieved through a one-off event or meeting.
- An **action plan** developed and 'owned' by the recipient country, supported by the peer countries. This provides an important frame of reference for the whole peer support process.
- Collaborative **direct assistance between equals**, rather than evaluating or monitoring from a higher authority.

Multiple Benefits

For the country receiving peer support, the outcomes can be very positive. For example, an education provider can pilot digital tools to improve access to learning for its customers. A tax authority can weigh up different approaches to implementing new legislation to maximise its tax revenues. Whatever the challenge, whatever the ambition, positive steps can be taken forward within a 'safe', peer-based environment.

Although the peer countries are not the primary focus, they can also benefit from the experience. By exchanging with others, they can establish new forms of cooperation with other institutions, and gain a deeper understanding of policies and practices across Europe.

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