

## **Project 3.2.3 „Encourage internships and staff secondments among EUROSAI member SAIs”**

### **Report on questionnaire results**

#### **Introduction**

Encouraging internships and staff secondments among EUROSAI members is an ambitious task put forward in the EUROSAI Strategic Plan 2011-2017.

Internships and secondments serve to transfer knowledge and experience among SAIs, and could have important role in our institutions’ capacity building and our staff’s professional development.

It seems however that internships and secondments are not a very frequent experience in EUROSAI community, and it also seems that many of our members do not have a systemic approach to this capacity building tool.

Making the respective review in this field was delegated to one of the subgroups of Goal Team 3, Knowledge Sharing. The subgroup composed of SAIs of Poland, the Czech Republic and Macedonia.

The subgroup carried out a small survey aimed to share the views on SAIs’ practices of internships and staff secondments and to help us to find out what could be done to increase the number of internships and staff secondments in EUROSAI.

The survey was distributed among members of GT3 and GT4 as a representative sample of EUROSAI community appropriate for the assumed goals. Survey among all EUROSAI members (if needed ) was postponed to the further phase.

Below the main results of the surevy are presented.

#### **The results of the questionnaire**

Only 5 out of 19 (26%) respondents declare having a fixed formal internship policy in their SAI. The internship policy of one of these SAIs, relates to exchange experiences only within audit institutions of concrete indicated countries.

Two respondents declare their openness to the idea of drawing up such an additional policy. One SAI is currently preparing some rules in this area.

Only one of the SAIs declares having formal legal barriers in hosting interns/secondees from other countries (requirements for citizenship and language skills). Some SAIs raise strong limitations as regards:

- contacts with external stakeholders, especially Parliaments and auditees.
- access to information related to the economic-financial management of the public sector problem with the secrecy of audit findings
- the work possible to do (for example no possibility to participate in tax audits).

Generally the respondents highly appreciate the role of internships/secondments in capacity building of SAIs.

11 out of 19 ( 58 %) respondents have been host for interns/secondments for other SAIs within past 10 years. 4 of them are planning to be such a host in the coming 2-3 years and 7 don't exclude such a possibility (but do not have any specific plans yet).

Almost all of SAIs filling in the questionnaire (18 out of 19) have applied for internship/secondment in other SAI within the past 10 years. 8 of them are going to do it in the coming 2-3 years.

As the main benefits of internships/secondments the respondents indicate:

- exposure to new/different methodologies for approaching (broadly) common audit issues,
- building/deepening mutual understanding between SAIs of common problems and insights into (possibly) different approaches to the development of solutions,
- personal development for secondee and institutional learning/benchmarking for SAI.

The term "secondments/internships" is often applied generally to any form of exchange or study/working experience. They are possible both in operational i.e. audit services as well as supporting services (for example HR). The respondents emphasise that to guarantee a successful internship/secondment, it should be, planned well in advance and integrated into the operational planning of the service concerned. Clear arrangements should be made regarding the content, objectives and duration of the exchange and the number and capacity of participants. It is important to develop a clear and realistic expectation of what any period in another SAI might offer the intern and what the receiving SAI wants from him/her.

Majority of respondents declare flexibility in treating approaches/opportunities on case by case basis. They emphasize a need to be convinced that there is some longer-term benefit to the SAI's work from the arrangement of internships/secondments as well as personal benefit to the intern. Cost is also an important factor to be taken into account.

Planning each internship/secondment project should always start with getting the information about existing internships/secondments opportunities of the other SAIs. For the majority of the respondents (58%) such information is not available except for occasional and informal information from SAIs to which the respondent has strong bilateral links or when official communication on an offer has been already sent. There is no centralised systematic advertising forum with the offers of internships available. The existing information, as the SAIs stressed, is not enough and not addressed to all decision makers.

The respondents are fully aware that arrangement of internships/secondments requires a considerable effort in time and resources. As one SAI emphasises "*whatever the nature of the internship, the receiving SAIs need to allow an overhead in terms of the time their own staff will spend inducting and integrating an intern into SAI/audit teams and/or briefing and answering questions if the focus is on information gathering*".

Answering to the questions whether their SAIs have enough human resources to allow some employees to leave from their original duties for internship/secondments, the majority respondents don't give a direct answer. They indicate that:

- all depends on duration of planned secondments/internship projects,
- there a need of ground analyse case by case,
- in all cases there is a need to be convinced that the experience will enhance the individual's capacity to contribute to SAI goals and strategies on their return.

As we can see a decision on engagement of SAI in secondments/internship project will always depend on valuation of effecting circumstances, nevertheless, as one SAI stresses *"There is always a way. Especially with good proposals and depending on financial agreements"*.

Only 3 out of 19 (15,8%) respondents directly declares no possibility to fund staff internship/secondments from their SAI's budget.

One of the barriers could be language capacity. Several questions were asked in the survey to review the opinion of SAIs about the importance of this factor as the potential barrier in hosting an internship or in sending an employee to other SAIs.

It is important to develop a clear and realistic expectation of what any period in another SAI might offer the intern and what the receiving SAI wants from him/her. Language proficiency is understandably given a high priority in intern selection processes but, as one of the respondent raises *"unless this is matched with technical/professional capacity or experience, the placement is likely to have to be based on information gathering/work shadowing rather than developing hands-on audit experience through contributing to live audits"*

11 respondents (58%) declare a potential possibility to arrange an internship in their SAI for persons speaking another language.

In the opinion of respondents for a short internship on more general questions on the SAI's work, good knowledge of foreign language (not language of the host) might be sufficient.

For an internship in an audit unit, however, good knowledge of national language of the host is indispensable.

13 out of 19 respondents (68%) declare a possible to find persons in other SAIs interested in an internship organised by their SAI and speaking their language.

Some SAIs emphasised that they would only accept interns with a good level of spoken and written their language – and they might require prior test or other evidence of that capacity. In the opinion of these respondents having individuals who speak a range of other languages could be not sufficient to support a proper, added-value internship.

#### Methods and tools leading to an increased number of EUROSAI internships and staff secondments - in the lights of the questionnaire results

The respondents of the questionnaire indicate several EUROSAI activities which, in their opinion, could help to overcome existing barriers and increase number of internships and staff secondments within the region. The following activities are enumerated as useful and welcome:

- launching a “global fund” that would be able to finance at least part of the travel and accommodation expenses,
- using EUROSAI grants for paying to translators, which would help to communicate during internships,
- arranging a platform where candidates for internships and secondments could put their CVs and announce their availability (duration, languages spoken etc.),
- arrange central system or an internet page with information about possibilities for internship,
- working out some general framework of internships/secondments and define its key elements,
- developing of guidelines, models or knowledge/information sharing for international SAI internships,
- presenting / telling “success stories”,
- developing and distributing materials that help to establish an internship/secondment policy.