

# European Network of Public Employment Services

## Setup, achievements, lessons

### KEY FINDINGS

In September 2019, the Commission issued its proposal amending the Decision by the European Parliament and the Council of 2014 on enhanced cooperation between the Public Employment Services (PES) until 2027, without any substantial changes. Structured cooperation in a rather small and homogenous Network together with a high level of ownership has created the necessary trust to carry out an ambitious set of tasks.

At the heart of the PES Network activities is the so-called “benchlearning” method, based on European concepts for quality management in the public sector. Benchlearning aims to increase the effectiveness of PES performance and delivery of active labour market policies (ALMP). It includes the measurement of quantitative indicators (e.g. duration of unemployment, customer satisfaction) and a unified framework for qualitative performance assessment agreed by the Network, all with a focus on mutual learning. Furthermore, the Network shall contribute to a number of overarching objectives and a range of EU policy initiatives (e.g. Social Pillar, Youth Guarantee).

According to an external evaluation, there is good qualitative evidence for positive outcomes of the Network activities. Benchlearning is considered a success story and has been met with interest beyond the EU given its potential for application in other public organisations. So far, the PES Network has in particular contributed to the more specific objectives and initiatives set out in the PES Decision where the Network has been given a formal role (e.g. youth guarantee).

Points for consideration include:

- To integrate strategies for gender equality as objective;
- To explore further possibilities to cover the dimension of decent work, e.g. with a view to temporary contracts and recurring unemployment;
- To make the Network and the benchlearning method better visible through elaborating a strategy for dissemination and cooperation with external stakeholders;
- To explore how the reform capacity of those countries at a basic level can be increased, e.g. by selecting a set of basic indicators;
- To ensure that EU funding through the European Social Fund+ and other relevant programmes allows for sufficient capacity building of PES in the programme period 2021-2027;
- To explore the possibility of making greater analysis of the rich data material collected available to a wider public, e.g. country fiches.



In September 2019, the European Commission issued its proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and the of the Council amending Decision No 573/2014/EU on enhanced cooperation between Public Employment Services (PES) in Europe. Overall, the Commission proposes to prolong the mandate of the PES Network. Only a few amendments are proposed and they do not affect the substance. They include a few additions (Art. 3 Objectives: help to implement the European Pillar of Social Rights and the Sustainable Development Goals; Art. 5 Cooperation: develop cooperation with relevant EU Agencies).

In addition, a final evaluation replaces the mid-term review provided for in the 2014 Decision. Pointing to positive results from the evaluation, the Commission argues that the mandate of the Network should be extended until 31 December 2027 *"in order to continue this valuable cooperation" [...] "building upon the positive achievement of the Network demonstrated in the findings of (the) evaluation"*.

This briefing analyses the establishment, the setup and activities of the PES Network with a view to drawing lessons from the evaluation and other expert analysis. A second note for the EMPL Committee on *"Future of work: Implications for Public Employment Services* (forthcoming) will complement the picture, including some PES practices.

## Relevance of Public Employment Services for EU labour markets

Public Employment Services are **relevant actors on EU labour markets**: They manage considerable budgets in the field of labour market policies, serve large numbers of jobseekers and receive an enormous number of vacancies to fill every month:

- 16.9 million job-seeking clients were registered with PES on the day of measurement at the end of April 2018;
- The average monthly inflow of vacancies was roughly 1 million vacancies per month (28 PES) in 2017, most PES were experiencing increasing numbers of vacancy notifications in 2018;
- Total expenditure for labour market policies stood at EUR 65.2 billion in France, EUR 46 billion in Germany and EUR 25.6 billion in Spain in 2017 including services, measures and financial assistance. In comparison, the ESF has an overall budget of EUR 120.4 billion for 2014-2020. In many countries, overall labour market policy (LMP) expenditure amounts to two per cent or more of GDP (e.g. BE, DK, ES, FR, NL, AT, FI in 2017)<sup>1</sup>.

The importance of Public Employment Services has been **recognised in European policy initiatives** in the field of employment and skills development such as the European Pillar of Social Rights. The Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013 on establishing a Youth Guarantee assigns a key role to employment services and partnerships, as does the Council Recommendation of 15 February 2016 on integration of the long-term unemployed.

The Europe 2020 strategy refers to employment services as indispensable to achieving the employment targets set and, within the European Semester, regular country-specific recommendations (CSR) for the improvement of PES are issued. Moreover, employment services have been allocated a prominent role in the European Social Fund 2014-2020 and, more recently, in the European Pillar of Social Rights:

Employment services in the European Pillar of Social Rights:

Principle 4: Active support to employment

Everyone has the right to timely and tailor-made assistance to improve employment or self-employment prospects. This includes the right to receive support for job search, training and re-qualification. [...]

Young people have the right to continued education, apprenticeship, traineeship or a job offer of good standing within 4 months of becoming unemployed or leaving education.

People unemployed have the right to personalised, continuous and consistent support. The long-term unemployed have the right to an in-depth individual assessment at the latest at 18 months of unemployment.

Principle 13: Unemployment benefits

The unemployed have the right to adequate activation support from public employment services to (re)integrate in the labour market and adequate unemployment benefits of reasonable duration, in line with their contributions and national eligibility rules. Such benefits shall not constitute a disincentive for a quick return to employment.

Source: [European Pillar of Social Rights in 20 Principles](#)

## Rationale for setting up a formal PES Network at EU level in 2014

Given their importance as implementers of labour market policies, the variety of PES in terms of organisational capacity and effectiveness became a concern. Although an informal Commission advisory group of Heads of PES (HoPES) had been founded back in 1997 and several initiatives had been taken to support PES development, there was no systematic evidence with regard to the real capacity of national PES. Furthermore, due to the informality of the advisory group, there was no clear reporting mechanism and the Network as a structure lacked the legitimacy required to present a European PES position in the context of EU policymaking.

In June 2013, the **proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council for enhanced cooperation of Public Employment Services** was issued by the Commission. It had been supported by both the advisory group HoPES which had issued a discussion note, *“Towards an integrated Public Employment Services bench-learning initiative”*, as well as by an informal EPSCO meeting which had acknowledged the need for more focused cooperation between PES. In addition, it was able to build upon the preparatory work of the PES benchmarking group and the knowledge base developed by the first European mutual learning programme for PES (PES to PES Dialogue)<sup>2</sup>.

## Key elements of the PES Decision

The **European Network of Public Employment Services (PES)**<sup>3</sup> was formally **launched on 23 September 2014** following the Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 May 2014 on enhanced cooperation between Public Employment Services (PES)<sup>4</sup>. It was established for the period from 17 June 2014 to 31 December 2020 as an **‘incentive measure’ in accordance with Art. 149 TFEU** *“to encourage cooperation between Member States and to support their action in the field of employment”*.

## 1. Organisation

In organisational terms, the PES Network **is quite a small and homogenous structure**: It is composed exclusively of PES representatives and the Commission with the Employment Committee (EMCO)<sup>5</sup> having observer status (Art. 1). It is governed by a **Board** consisting of one member and one alternate member from the senior management of each Member State PES, including the EEA, as well as one member and one alternate member from the European Commission. The PES Network Board meets twice a year. It is assisted by a Secretariat based within the Commission preparing the board meetings together with the Chair and the Vice-Chairs and with support from the biannual meetings of the Advisors for European PES Affairs (AFEPAs) as established by the Rules of Procedure. Most of the AFEPAs are leading their PES department of international affairs.

In addition, the PES Decision also provides for the possibility to hold **restricted sessions** where only one member (ideally a PES Director) per Member State participates and one Member of the Commission (Art. 6). In 2017, informal leadership seminars, applying Chatham rules, were introduced to discuss strategic questions and issues prior to the official board meeting (e.g. how to create enthusiasm in our business?)<sup>6</sup>. Relevant external stakeholders, such as ETUC, BusinessEurope or international organisations take part in the annual stakeholder conferences<sup>7</sup>.

A number of provisions in the PES Decision together with working practice ensure a **considerable level of ownership**: It is up to the Board to appoint a Network Chair and two Vice-Chairs from the PES members whereas previously, with the informal Network of Heads of European PES (HoPES), the Commission had chaired. The Board decides on the activities to be developed to implement the PES Decision, *it “adopts and implements its annual work programme setting out its working methods, deliverables and the details related to the implementation of benchlearning”* such as the technical framework for the performance assessment. Furthermore, the Board adopts (unanimously) its Rules of Procedure including decision-making arrangements. The Commission assists the Board with a **Secretariat** (Art. 6). The **current Chair is Johannes Kopf**, head of the Arbeitsmarktservice (Labour market service), Austria. He took over from Fons Leroy, head of the Flemish Belgian PES VDAB (2016 - 2018) who had succeeded Frank-Juergen Weise, Chairman of the Federal Employment Service (Bundesagentur fuer Arbeit) Germany (2014 - 2016).

The Network is financed by budget allocations from the Commission as well as by staff and travel costs of each participating PES. The **aggregated annual cost** of the PES Network is estimated to be approximately EUR 5.5 million including EUR 3.1 million **financed** by PROGRESS, a strand of the EaSI programme, plus an estimation of Commission and PES staff costs, travel and meeting costs<sup>8</sup>.

Overall, this **specific setup has had a positive impact on the working atmosphere** as stated by the evaluation and the annual reports. The former Chair Fons Leroy underlined in his foreword to the Annual Report 2018 that collaboration in the PES Network is *“characterised by trustful relationships”*<sup>9</sup>. Sufficient trust can be considered an essential prerequisite for an open comparison of PES performance across Member States. The PES Benchmarking group (2002 - 2014) of the informal PES expert group identified a number of success factors for this, including confidential handling of data, good personal relations and mutual confidence between participants, a working programme based on the needs and interests of participants, the commitment of the participants and overall, a focus on learning, not on ranking of PES<sup>10</sup>.

## 2. Objectives and Tasks

The PES Decision sets out an **ambitious range of objectives and initiatives** (or tasks) for the Network, while at the same time managing expectations by underlining that the Network should act *'within the areas of PES responsibility'*. Whereas in 2014, its main aim was to support the implementation of the **'Europe 2020'** strategy, the proposal of 2019 takes a broader approach: the Network shall contribute to the implementation of the Union's employment policies, including more recent initiatives such as the European Pillar of Social Rights and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (Art. 3).

At the heart of the PES Decision is the initiative listed in Art. 4 and defined in Art. 2, **"evidence-based benchlearning"**. This innovative working methodology has been developed with strong involvement of the informal advisory group of Heads of PES. Benchlearning means a comparative quantitative and qualitative performance assessment of all PES in the Network in order to identify national priorities for organisational reform. As the Decision puts it, it *"consists of identifying good performances through indicator-based benchmarking systems [...] and of using findings for [...] evidence-informed mutual learning activities"* (Art. 2). Moreover, the Network members shall provide mutual assistance at the request of Member States, including support for the implementation of the PES-related country-specific recommendations (Art. 4, d). The PES Decision contains in its Annex a list of quantitative and qualitative indicators to be used for benchmarking (see below).

The concept applied originates in the Common Assessment Framework (CAF), the **European quality management instrument** to improve the performance of the public sector. It is derived from the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) Excellence Model<sup>11</sup> and has been further specified for the PES context: it combines categories of management with those of PES core services, above all services for jobseekers and employers. As a result, benchlearning not only makes PES performance across Europe comparable but, more importantly, the systematic analysis of strengths and weaknesses helps to build up and develop a culture of quality management and continuous improvement.

Through this and other activities, the PES Network will contribute to a number of **overarching European objectives**. Firstly, capacity building supported by benchlearning: analytical reports and identified good practices is assumed to ensure better implementation of relevant EU policies such as the Youth Guarantee. Secondly, the Network as a structure will prepare PES Network position papers to feed into European policy initiatives or to contribute to monitoring (e.g. Youth Guarantee, Council Recommendation on Integration of Long-term unemployed).

It is worth noting that the objectives listed under Art. 3 of the PES Decision 2014 (and 2019) vary with regard to the potential impact of PES. Some objectives are more specific, being connected with PES core business and responsibilities so that a higher impact of targeted PES activities and service improvements can be expected: objective a) to support the most vulnerable social groups with high unemployment rates, especially NEETs (Not in Employment, Education or Training) and the older workers, objective d) to identify skills shortages and to improve the matching of skills of jobseekers with needs of employers, objective h) to evaluate active labour market initiatives and their implementation. For the other objectives listed in the PES Decision of 2014, the evaluation points to the fact that they are of a rather global nature<sup>12</sup>. PES and the PES Network as whole can play an important role but it must be borne in mind that they are acting in a multi-factorial context with many other actors and determined by a variety of legal rules. For example, the role of PES in ensuring decent work depends on national labour law and occupation protection rules for the unemployed (objective b) and the issue which groups excluded from labour market can be targeted by PES depends on whether the PES has the political mandate to do so (objective g, e.g. inactive persons).

Another activity belonging to the catalogue of the Network tasks is **cooperation** with relevant labour market stakeholders (Art. 5). The range of stakeholders listed has been complemented in the proposal of 2019. In addition to social partners, NGOs and regional and local authorities, the list contains *EU agencies in the area of employment, social policy and education and training*. In practice these include, for example, the European Labour Authority which has incorporated EURES, the cooperation Network facilitating the free movement of workers within the EU, the European Training Foundation (ETF) supporting human development in neighbouring countries and Cedefop with its focus on vocational education and training, skills analysis and lifelong guidance.

Finally, the Network continues to be obliged to report on benchlearning and on all tasks carried out in an **annual report** to be sent to the Parliament and to the Council. The Commission shall submit an evaluation by September 2026 to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. This evaluation replaces the mid-term review provided for in the PES Decision of 2014.

#### Role of the European Parliament

During the negotiations on the initial PES Decision of 2014, the European Parliament had pushed for some additions to the objectives and initiatives (e.g. support for the most vulnerable groups, for decent and sustainable work, voluntary mobility on a fair basis). Further, it had pushed for the inclusion of the list of indicators annexed to the Decision as a precondition for accepting the delegated acts proposed by the Commission to adjust the benchmarking indicators if needed.

The European Parliament can request reports from the PES Network.

In a number of resolutions the European Parliament recognised the role of public and private employment services.

Source: [European Network of Public Employment Services: Setup and Activities](#) (2016: p. 5f)

## PES Network in practice - what has been achieved so far?

As demonstrated in the annual reports of the PES Network and as confirmed by the final evaluation, the PES Network has effectively delivered on its key tasks and achieved good results:<sup>13</sup>

External evaluation - main findings - achievements:

*“Though still at a relatively early stage of development, (the Network) has delivered a range of outputs and results that have increased knowledge and led to changes in performance and organisation of PES at all levels of maturity, and will be likely to lead to further improvements in the longer term, to the ultimate benefit of PES end-users (jobseekers and employers).”*

Source: [Study supporting the evaluation of Decision 573/2014/EU - Executive summary](#)

The evaluation points in particular to a structured framework via the benchlearning process, increased, structured cooperation and peer learning between PES, ensuring a collective voice and formal platform for PES in policymaking at EU and national levels. There is evidence from document analysis as well as from targeted consultations that all PES have benefited from participation in the Network. Moreover, there was a strong consensus among all stakeholders consulted (80 %) that EU action for strengthening the cooperation between PES is necessary and the **common view was the Network’s mandate should be renewed**.

## 1. Benchlearning in practice - framework and results

In order to implement the core initiative, benchlearning, the PES Network proceeded in three cycles with support from a dedicated PES Benchlearning Working Group:

- 2014 - 2015 Developing and testing the framework and performance indicators;
- 2015 - 2016 1st cycle of benchlearning -> PES change report following assessment visit;
- 2017 - 2018 2nd cycle of benchlearning -> focus on priorities for change;
- 2019 Targeted learning dialogues on chosen topics for improvement<sup>14</sup>.

The work of the PES Network is supported by comprehensive data collection, analysis and mutual learning activities with support from the PES Secretariat and a contractor. On an annual basis, **assessment reports on PES capacity** are published containing information on the profile of job-seeking clients, job vacancies, ALMP measures used by PES, internal resources in terms of finances and staffing. In addition, specific topics such as institutional characteristics with regards to PES responsibilities or strategic targets are presented<sup>15</sup>. All PES have committed themselves to provide data on quantitative and qualitative indicators set out in the PES Decision (Art. 4 and Annex). Data for the quantitative indicators are collected on an annual basis. They are stored in a **dashboard** hosted by the Commission together with more detailed information on qualitative indicators for PES maturity<sup>16</sup>. So far, the dashboard **is accessible for PES Network members only**. One reason is that comparability of data for the quantitative indicators is limited as underlying national rules vary considerably. For example, PES have different rules regarding the period for registration of unemployed or the deletion of filled vacancies. PES data for long-term unemployment vary as the calculation of the duration may start from zero following participation in an ALMP measure in one PES while it is considered as continuous in another PES.

The second strand of the benchlearning process allows for full comparability as **qualitative performance data** are collected on the basis of a unified framework for all PES. This framework is structured along the seven performance areas annexed to the PES Decision. Each area contains a number of sub-categories of 29 performance enablers to be assessed and scored using a six-level scale. In order to assess the capacity for reform and improvement of a given PES, the Board decided to add another area for the 2nd Benchlearning cycle from 2017: identification and implementation of the reform agenda (see box below).

Indicators for quantitative, result-oriented benchmarking (PES Decision, Art. 4.1 + Annex):

1. *Contribution to reducing unemployment* - transition rates (age, gender, qualification level); people leaving unemployment records;
2. *Contribution to reducing the duration of unemployment records and inactivity* - transition into employment within 6, 12 months (age, gender, qualification level); registration of previously inactive persons (age, gender);
3. *Filling of vacancies* (including through voluntary labour mobility - job vacancies filled, contribution of PES to finding a job (LFS data);
4. *Customer satisfaction with PES services* (jobseekers, employers).

Source: [PES Decision 2014](#), Art. 4.1 + Annex

The **general structure of the qualitative performance assessment** consists of a self-assessment by a given PES and a subsequent external assessment by a team of two to four trained peer assessors from other PES, a representative from the Commission and a contracted expert. The assessment ends with a feedback and a summary report on strengths and weaknesses together with recommendations what to learn from which PES. After the first cycle of assessment, the assessed PES were expected to present its change agenda. During the second cycle, the focus was on the change agenda with regards to progress made and on the PES' approach to change management<sup>17</sup>.

Based upon two cycles of assessment of all EU PES, comprehensive comparative information is available on organisational models, strengths and weaknesses of each PES. Furthermore, during each round of assessment, the assessing team detects good practices that may inspire other PES for future development. The data collected on the sub-areas of performance management are equally stored in the dashboard with restricted access for PES Network members. As they are based on a unified framework for data collection, they are comparable and offer **interesting material for further research**. For example, mapping strengths and weaknesses could be of interest for a wider public<sup>18</sup>.

Areas of qualitative performance assessment - PES Decision and expansion in practice:

1. *Strategic performance management* (target-setting, indicators/measurement, follow-up, use of results);
2. *Design of operational processes* (process definition/standardisation, support structure, quality management, blended services);
3. *Sustainable activation and management of transitions* (holistic profiling, segmentation, individual action planning and ALMP measures, early intervention = prevention, early engagement, service and activation strategy);
4. *Relations to employers* (employer strategy, specialised unit, matching vacancies and jobseekers);
5. *Evidence-based design and implementation of PES services* (evaluation, pilot projects, communication of evaluation results, change management/innovation);
6. *Effective management of partnerships with stakeholders* (identification/structuring, partnership building, management of different partnerships - supervising authorities, social partners, service providers, institutions youth guarantee);
7. *Allocation of PES resources* (human resource management including staff training, budget allocation/use);
8. *In addition to the areas as set by the Annex to the PES Decision*: Identification and implementation of the reform agenda (initialisation/design, implementation, reinforcement).

Source: [PES Benchmarking Manual](#), 2017: 12-18

Results from the qualitative performance assessment show a **mixed picture of PES maturity** in the EU. To conclude, from the two cycles of performance assessment carried out, there are two PES worlds: half of the PES are progressing towards or are already an effective transition management agency with the corresponding political mandate. The other PES are at a rather basic (developable) level, facing a dilemma: apart from three PES (CZ, LT, ES) they have less capacity to make the changes required. So far, overall improvements in PES performance are limited: none of the PES of the "developable" category (2016) achieved a higher level in the 2nd assessment cycle in 2018.

## Results from qualitative performance assessment, 2018

Maturity Organisation / Selected Areas (enabler)	Mature or well-developed PES	Developing PES	Developable PES
<b>Relations with employers</b>	<b>12</b> AT, <b>BE-VDAB*</b> , DK, EE, FI, FR, DE, LT, LU, PL, SI, SE (9 in 2016)	<b>11</b> BG, HR, CZ, HU, IS, IE, LV, MT, NL, NO, PT (13 in 2016)	<b>6</b> CY, EL, IT, RO, SK, ES (6 in 2016)
<b>Sustainable activation / managing transitions</b>	<b>5</b> BE-VDAB, DK, EE, DE, MT (6 in 2016)	<b>16</b> AT, HR, CZ, FI, FR, IS, IE, LV, LT, LU, NL, NO, PL, PT, SI, SE (13 in 2016)	<b>8</b> BG, CY, EL, HU, IT, RO, SK, ES (9 in 2016)
<b>Identification / implementation reforms</b> (measurement in 2nd cycle only)	<b>8</b> <b>AT*</b> , <b>BE-VDAB*</b> , DK, <b>EE*</b> , FR, IE, SI, SE (n.a. in 2016)	<b>6</b> HR, DE, IS, LT, NL, ES (n.a. 2016)	<b>14</b> BG, CY, CZ, EL, HU, IT, LV, LU, MT, NO, PL, PT, RO, SK (n.a. 2016)
<b>Overall score</b>	<b>9</b> <b>AT*</b> , <b>BE-VDAB*</b> , DK, <b>EE*</b> , FR, DE, NL, SI, SE (8 in 2016)	<b>6</b> HR, CZ, FI, IE, MT, NO (8 in 2016)	<b>14</b> BG, CY, EL, HU, IS, IT, LV, LT, LU, PL, PT, RO, SK, ES (12 in 2016)

Source: Own compilation, Annual Report European Network of Public Employment Services, 2018, p. 25; Annual Report 2016: p. 21; \*) mature 2018: UK not included, FI n.a. identification reforms; 2016: IT, UK not included

These findings should not hide **progress made** by several PES in certain areas and sub-areas. In particular, the number of PES with a **well-developed service for employers** has increased, offering PES more possibilities to match jobseekers with vacancies and also to analyse trends in demand for labour. In addition, two PES scored better with regard to activation of jobseekers (LU and LT). Furthermore, the annual report 2018 demonstrates that **all PES are planning relevant reforms** independent of their level of organisational maturity. Reforms focus on cooperation with employers, digitalisation of services, systematic performance management, competence-based profiling and matching and staff development. Finally, the PES knowledge base and the mutual exchange system help PES to implement service reforms decided on by governments, e.g. to implement the Work Ability Reform and new services to prevent unemployment in the Estonian PES<sup>19</sup>.

It should also be noted that the **PES Network is continuously refining the benchlearning** methodology: several PES working groups or reference groups are developing further a number of indicators taking up lessons from the assessments<sup>20</sup>.

Overall, the **benchlearning exercise as a framework for organisational quality management and continuous improvement has become a success story beyond the EU**. The concept has inspired the work of the OECD country reviews on active labour market policies, neighbouring countries and PES worldwide. The Regional Cooperation Council for the Western Balkan PES applies a “slim” format using fewer indicators (19 compared to 32 in the EU PES Network). In the same vein, the World Association of Public Employment Services (WAPES) is preparing a benchlearning “light” pilot, using fewer and adjusted enablers. According to the minutes of the PES Network meeting at AFEPA level in March 2019, EMCO showed interest in the collaboration of the Network with the Western Balkan countries and WAPES<sup>21</sup>.

In 2018, the Network gave priority to the implications of the **future of work** for the role and service design in PES: a working group, stakeholder conference and webinars supported the debate of the Network and stakeholders on how to design PES and ALMP measures to correspond to changing labour markets. Correspondingly, digital strategies and the use of “big data” analytics also ranked high on the agenda of activities (Annual Report 2018).

## 2. Contribution to the European Semester

The Network has a formal role in the European Semester’s **multi-lateral surveillance process** supporting the Commission. The PES Network representatives participate in EMCO reviews to give specialist input on the implementation of the Council Recommendation on establishing a Youth Guarantee and the Council Recommendation on integration of the long-term unemployed, and also with regard to PES capacities and delivery of ALMPs.

## 3. Mutual assistance

In 2017 and 2018, the PES Network and component members provided **Mutual Assistance** (technical assistance through peer PES support) for PES modernisation in four PES that had received a CSR (Romania, Italy, Cyprus and Spain). In addition, in 2019, PES Network members provide assistance to the Czech Republic. Moreover, **targeted learning dialogues** have been introduced as a new element into the Work Programme 2019 in order to allow for more targeted learning on chosen topics, taking account of the assessment and recommendations. This will help to strengthen in-depth advice and further develop individual peer learning<sup>22</sup>.

## 4. Contribution to European policy initiatives

The PES Network has contributed a number of position papers to give expert input for the design of relevant European policy initiatives such as the European Pillar of Social Rights and initiatives for labour market integration of refugees and asylum-seekers<sup>23</sup>. As requested by the PES Decision, the PES Network has prepared implementation reports and carried out mutual learning events to support the implementation of relevant EU policy initiatives. The evaluation study concludes that the contributions of the PES Network are much **more targeted where the Network has been given a formal role**. This relates to the Council Recommendation on establishing a European Youth Guarantee (2013) and the Council Recommendation on the integration of the long-term unemployed (2016)<sup>24</sup>.

It is noteworthy that PES are important actors in implementing the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways (2016), working with the unemployed and increasingly with people in employment, as the related Commission implementation report demonstrates<sup>25</sup>. However the PES Network has not been formally involved in this case.

## 5. Contribution to overarching PES Network objectives

As the evaluation concludes, for the period until the end of 2018, PES Network activities have contributed to the achievement of the objectives set out in the Decision (Art. 3), albeit to varying degrees, partially due to the global nature of the objectives and other actors having the main responsibility (e.g. EURES in the area of labour mobility). The Network **contributed most to specific objectives**, such as the integration of NEETs and other disadvantaged groups (e.g. refugees, long-term unemployed, people with disabilities), the better matching of demand and supply, and the better functioning of labour markets in the EU<sup>26</sup>.

In 2019, the PES Network is continuing activities that contribute to further objectives listed in the PES Decision. For example, it has updated the PES Network vision beyond 2020, provided studies on PES strategies to support an ageing workforce and another on measuring the quality of implementation of active labour market initiatives through a dedicated index. Work on an indicator to measure “sustainable work” is ongoing<sup>27</sup>.

## Challenges and lessons learnt

Given the intensive and structured work acknowledged by the external evaluation, the section on challenges or gaps at European and national level is rather small. Nevertheless, a few lessons could be considered for the future.

- **Gender equality:** In contrast to the long tradition of gender mainstreaming at EU level and the high priority given to it by the European Parliament and the new Commission<sup>28</sup>, gender equality is not included among the objectives of the PES Decision. Taking into account that several PES have put in place a gender mainstreaming strategy (e.g. Austria and Germany), consideration could be given to including the PES contribution to gender equality as an **additional objective**;
- **Decent work:** The evaluation concludes that PES Network activities have been limited as regards their **contribution to decent work** as governments, legal rules and employers are deemed to have a stronger role. Nevertheless, PES analysis could be of added value. The PES Network could, for example, explore the role of recurrent unemployment following temporary contracts in order to clarify the cost to the welfare system of achieving gains in terms of flexibility for employers and job opportunities for the unemployed;
- **Benchlearning:** The evaluation found out that those PES which participate least in the Network are often PES from the basic category (developable). For half of the PES Network members belonging to this category, the ambitious and detailed framework for qualitative performance assessment may be too demanding. Therefore, the PES Network could explore whether a **differentiation into a smaller set of basic and a full set including basic and advanced enablers** could have a positive effect. Such an approach would follow the model of other regions and organisations (WAPES - World Association of Public Employment Services) that have adopted or are in the process of adopting benchlearning;
- **Cooperation with external stakeholders** outside the circles of PES at European level was limited in the period 2014 - 2018. For the future, the evaluation recommends to make the PES Network and its achievements better visible through elaborating a **strategy for dissemination and cooperation with external stakeholders** at European level, at national levels including ESF authorities, with PES from neighbouring or other interested countries and international stakeholders (e.g. WAPES)<sup>29</sup>;
- **EU funding:** In the current programme period (2014 - 2020), a number of countries use the ESF for modernising their PES, in particular those belonging to the category of “developable” PES. Given changes in the set-up of the ESF+ (under negotiation), it would be important to ensure that EU funding through the European Social Fund+ and other relevant programmes is accessible for PES to support **targeted institutional capacity building** in the period 2021-2027<sup>30</sup>;
- **Research:** The PES Network has built up a comprehensive data base. While respecting data caveats and the focus on learning rather than on ranking, consideration could be given to **presenting more country-specific information** such as country fiches on PES business models and capacities to a wider public. The evaluation recommends that providing more detailed mapping of strong and weak areas of PES across the EU could allow even more effective targeting of support and learning<sup>31</sup>.

- <sup>1</sup> [Assessment Report on PES Capacity, 2018](#); Vacancies: [Assessment Report on PES capacity, 2017](#); [Labour market policy: expenditure and participants, 2017](#).
- <sup>2</sup> [Proposal PES Decision 2013](#), see also: F. Leroy, L. Kint, M. Winkler (2019): Public Employment Services - Policies and Practices, part 1: History of the PES Network.
- <sup>3</sup> European Network of Public Employment Services: [Commission website](#); [Board website](#)
- <sup>4</sup> [PES Decision 2014](#).
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