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ANNUAL REPORT

**EUROPEAN NETWORK
OF PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT
SERVICES (PES)**

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Acronyms

AFEPAs – Advisors for European PES Affairs

ALMP – Active Labour Market Policies

BL – Benchlearning

EMCO – European Employment Committee

ESCO – European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations

GDPR – General Data Protection Regulation

LTU – Long-term Unemployed

MAP – Mutual Assistance Project

ML – Mutual Learning

NEETs – “Not in Education, Employment, or Training”

PES – Public Employment Services

SMEs – Small and medium-sized enterprises

STW – Short Term Work Schemes

TRW – Thematic Review Workshop

WG – Working Group

YG – Youth Guarantee

Foreword

2021 has been another demanding year for Public Employment Services across the EU, but also a year of hope and innovation. The PES Network has once again confirmed its flexibility and strength. First when the COVID-19 crisis hit us, and now again to supply the labour market with skilled workers as quickly as possible as the economy recovers. 2021 has shown two coexisting challenges: from preventing the growing unemployment (as support measures are being phased out) to managing the demand in the labour market. Together with all members, the PES Network has seized the momentum for change despite persisting challenges, guided by an 'opportunities first' approach.

Public Employment Services have a key role to cushion the employment impacts of the pandemic. Even if the situation around Europe following the pandemic remains challenging, we can sense a recovery. The "new normal" we experience opens new challenges and opportunities. More dynamic market mean more frequent job transitions for citizens throughout their lives. We need to tackle the mismatch between skills and jobs, finding new ways to provide education and training. Virtual-meetings and digital formats has become an ordinary part of our working day. The challenge ahead is to find a balance between flexible contact formats and physical meetings for those who need it most. In a digitalized world, we need new ways to work with NEETS, those that do not participate in education, employment or training. As a result of last year's decision to extend the legal basis for the Network, a new PES Network Strategy was adopted in June, which sets out a renewed vision equipping PES to face complex challenges. The strategy will help the Network aligning with the ever-changing labour market so that it can achieve its core purpose – to promote modernisation of individual PES.

During 2021, we have successfully continued to carry out the Work Programme activities with on-line formats. Priority was immediate actions and short-term recovery, helping PES in the 'new normal', including via digitalisation. But also supporting youth and the most vulnerable as well as preparing for the green transition, in line with the objectives of the European Pillar of Social Rights, the European Green Deal and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Benchmarking visits have continued in 2021 and have been a valuable source of exchange and learning for the Network, particularly to draw on how PES have handled the crisis. In March, the Network launched a new format, PES Podcast to spread the latest news on the work of PES in the EU.

This year, PES have worked tirelessly and contributed to dampening the employment impacts of the crisis. I am pleased to see that employment rates are increasing in many parts of Europe. Still, focusing on skills, career guidance and lifelong learning will be more important than ever to help jobseekers and those anticipating change. Support to vulnerable groups will remain important. Tackling youth employment will be underlined in the *European Year of Youth 2022*. Moreover, the greening of economy has to permeate every activity we embark leading us towards the 2050 goal of a climate neutral economy.

As Chair of our Network, I would like to thank all my colleagues for their commitments during the year.

JOHANNES KOPF

*Chair of the European Network of Public
Employment Service
Managing Director of AMS, the Austrian Public
Employment Service.*

1. Introduction

The European Network of Public Employment Services (PES Network) was established in May 2014 to enhance the co-operation between PES in Europe and extended in 2020 following a Decision of the European Parliament and Council. Its members are the Public Employment Services of all 27 EU Member States as well as Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein and the European Commission.

The PES Network aims in particular to:

- compare PES performance through **benchmarking**;
- identify evidence-based **good practices** and foster **mutual learning**;
- promote the **modernisation** and strengthening of PES service delivery;
- prepare inputs to the European Employment Strategy and the corresponding national labour market policies.

The seventh Annual Report covers activities from January to December 2021, in line with Article 6 of the Decision establishing the PES Network.

Activities were organised along the four thematic priorities identified in the **2021 Annual Work programme**: 1. Recovery and future of work 2. Recovery and PES service delivery 3. PES performance management and 4. EU PES initiatives and PES visibility.

The 2021 Annual Work Programme has provided a platform for PES to learn from each other in adapting to and recovering from the COVID 19 crisis, as well as grasping opportunities to innovate (in particular via digitalisation). It also put a particular emphasis on supporting vulnerable groups and preparing for future labour market challenges such as the green transition. Many activities directly contributed to the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, and in particular its Principle 4 ‘active support to employment’.

Figure 1. Overview of the PES Network’s activities - 2021



Due to the effects of COVID-19 crisis, all PES Network activities during 2021 were held online. While this has limited opportunities for informal exchanges, online formats also allowed reaching a broader and more diverse audience. Outcomes of PES Network activities can be found at the **PES Knowledge Centre** and **PES practices** websites¹.

1.1 PES Network Update

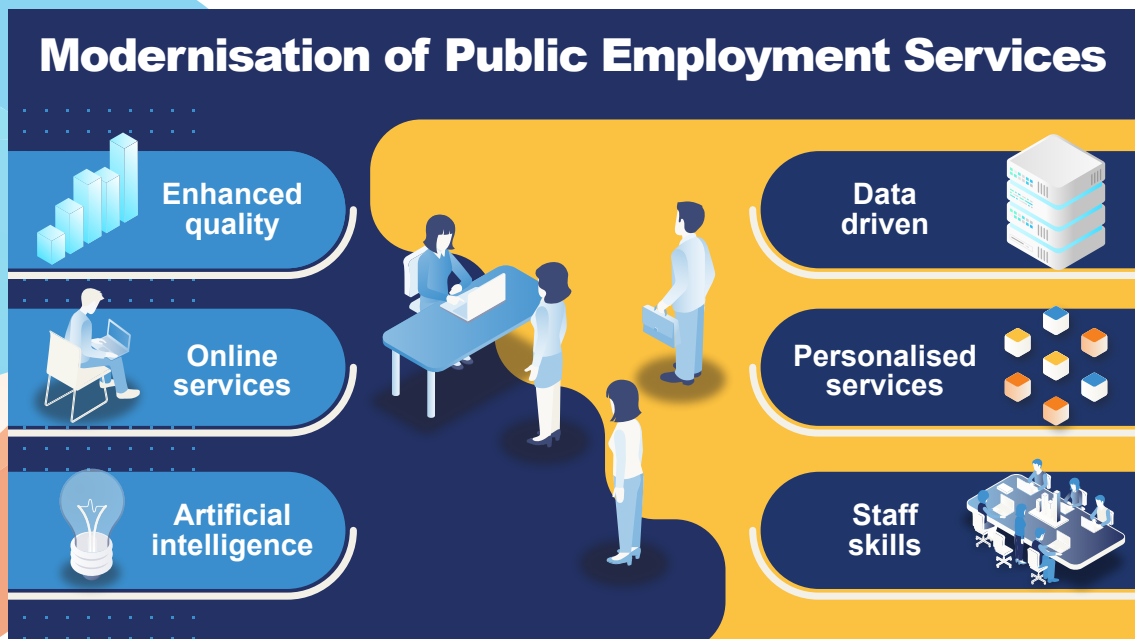
Changes in the PES Network

Johannes Kopf, Managing Director of AMS, the Austrian Public Employment Service, was re-elected Chair of the PES Network at the 24 June Board Meeting, with a term of office of 2 years from 1 July 2021 to 30 June 2023. Spiros Protopsaltis, Governor of OAED, the Greek Public Employment Service, was elected First Vice-Chair at the PES Network Board Meeting on 9 December 2021, for a 2 year period. The PES Network welcomed Liechtenstein as a new member on 4 May 2021.

New PES Network Strategy

A new PES Network Strategy² was adopted at the Board Meeting on 25 June 2021. The Strategy aligns with the decision from the European Parliament and the Council to extend the period of establishment of the Network until 31 December 2027. The updated Strategy focuses on the evolving challenges of a labour market characterised by accelerated change and increased flexibility. It recognises that labour markets are experiencing a shift away from traditional unemployment-employment divisions towards a reality characterised by frequent labour market transitions. It aims to strengthen and encourage cooperation between PES in order to promote modernisation of individual PES, **encourage optimum use of technology and data, and facilitate enhanced competencies for staff**. It will contribute in guiding the way to achieve Europe's employment goals, the European Green Deal and UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Figure 2. Modernisation of Public Employment Services



Source: PES Network Strategy³

1 <http://ec.europa.eu/social/PESknowledgecentre> and <http://ec.europa.eu/social/PESpractices>

2 [PES Network Strategy \(europa.eu\)](http://ec.europa.eu/social/PESstrategy)

3 [PES Network Strategy \(europa.eu\)](http://ec.europa.eu/social/PESstrategy)

1.2 Overview of PES Network Work Programme 2021

The PES Network Decision requires the Network to adopt and implement its Annual Work Programme. PES network governance, Benchlearning and Mutual Learning and are key to the implementation of the Work Programme.

PES Network Governance

The Network is governed by a Board, where each Member State and the Commission are represented. The Board meets twice a year to conduct strategic discussions and take decisions on the activities of the Network. Advisors for European PES affairs (AFEPAs) are supporting and preparing the Board in the decision making process.

A Secretariat, provided by and based within the European Commission⁴, assists the Board. In co-operation with the Chair and Vice-Chairs, it prepares the Board meetings, the Annual Work Programme and this Annual Report. The Secretariat also organises the meetings of the AFEPAs.

PES Network Board Meetings Summary

At the 24-25 June online meeting hosted by the Portuguese Presidency, topics for discussion included an exchange with EU Social Partners, the Green Deal and its impact on PES as well as digital services. The Board adopted the updated Network strategy and re-elected the PES Network Chair for a second term.

The 9-10 December online meeting hosted by the Slovenian Presidency addressed PES support throughout recovery, labour shortages and staff security challenges. A specific marketplace discussion was organised on the topic 'Leaving no one behind'. The Board adopted the Annual Report and Work Programme 2022 and elected its First Vice-Chair.

Meetings of the Advisors for European PES Affairs

AFEPAs have met regularly to review Network activities, follow the progress on delivery of the Work Programme and formulate draft positions on current

issues in advance of subsequent Board discussion. In 2021 the Advisors met online on 11 February, 22 March, 6 May, 30 September and 28 October.

Benchlearning

Benchlearning, anchored in the PES Network Decision, has been at the core of the PES Network. The implementation of the third Benchlearning cycle, initiated in 2020 had to be temporarily interrupted due to the Covid-19 pandemic, but was adapted to an online format. 11 online assessments took place in 2021, covering Croatia, Austria, Hungary, Germany, Belgium VDAB, Greece, the Netherlands, Portugal, Czechia, France and Malta. Additional information on benchlearning is provided in section 3.1.

Mutual Learning

In total, 19 Mutual Learning events were carried out in 2021, bringing together close to 1500 participants.

- One PES Network Stakeholder conference on 'The power of PES partnerships',
- One PES Network seminar 'Supporting structural change',
- Three working groups on 'Supporting PES visibility and branding', 'Updating the PES Network Strategy' and 'Quality management',
- One self-driven working group on 'Taxonomies',
- Three thematic review workshops on 'Youth employment support', 'Support to vulnerable groups' and 'PES support to recovery',
- Three webinars on 'Supporting young job-seekers', 'Promotion of gender equality' and 'PES support to the greening of labour markets',
- Four PES Jour Fixe on 'Algorithms for profiling tools', 'GDRPs impact on PES', 'The role of video counselling in the new normal' and 'PES leaders' role in setting the stage for ambidexterity.
- Three mutual assistance projects to the Greek, Lithuanian and Belgian (Actiris) PES.

Additional information on Mutual Learning Activities and their main outcomes is provided in section 2.

⁴ DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion. The PES Secretariat can be reached at EMPL-PES-SECRETARIAT@ec.europa.eu.

PES Knowledge Centre and PES Practices

The PES Knowledge Centre website⁵ was launched in 2016 to collect and share information on the organisation and services of public employment services in Europe. Analytical papers, practitioners' toolkits, good practice examples, conference outcomes and other reports from the activities of the PES Network are published continuously. The knowledge centre offers tools to learn from the experiences of other countries for PES, researchers, stakeholders and citizens. Throughout 2021, 12 new learning resources were published in the knowledge centre and 25 practices added to PES practices database⁶.



5 <http://ec.europa.eu/social/PESknowledgecentre>

6 <http://ec.europa.eu/social/PESpractices>

2. Thematic Priorities

This section highlights some key topics addressed throughout the 2021 Work Programme and the main learning outcomes.

2.1 COVID-19 crisis and recovery

Responses to the COVID 19 crisis continued to be a central work strand throughout various activities. The PES Network displayed its strength helping PES to share valuable practices handling the crisis.

Response to COVID-19 Update

To ensure PES could learn from each other and improve their service delivery in challenging times, a regular survey “Response to COVID-19 Update” was launched in 2020. It is a regular update by PES for PES on measures implemented to cushion the effects of the crisis, capturing internal organisational changes and labour market measures put in place to tackle the pandemic. In 2021, the update was developed to recovery measures, thus adding an outlook on the future post COVID-19.

PES service delivery in the wake of the crisis

The study ‘PES service delivery in the wake of the crisis’ shows that job retention measures have helped to dampen the labour market effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. The main labour market adaptation has been through reducing working hours rather than the number of employed, and here job retention schemes played a key role. Many of the schemes are now being phased out after having been extended several times. Unemployment rates have become highly volatile in 2021, pointing to high dynamics in the labour market. Labour market transitions have been increasingly difficult for young people, people with disabilities, long-term unemployed, older workers and migrants.

To mitigate the effect of the pandemic, several PES raised the level of unemployment benefits. Some PES extended the coverage, some extended the maximum period of receipt before reapplying and in other cases the process of claiming benefits was eased.

As not all persons are covered by unemployment benefit schemes, a range of countries temporarily implemented social assistance and minimum income schemes. In other countries, eligibility criteria for receiving unemployment benefits were changed to cover self-employed that were hit by the pandemic.

PES have also reacted to the pandemic by opening up their services not only to unemployed but also to persons at risk of losing their jobs. Most PES concentrated on supporting companies of specific sectors that were hit hardest by the pandemic, many of them experiencing problems in finding skilled workers.

The use of ALMPs during the crisis has been varied. During the first phase of the pandemic, ALMPs could mostly not be implemented. In the following phase, a number of PES have upscale specific ALMPs or have introduced new measures and programmes in order to bring people back to work. PES have also increasingly upscale and introduced new measures in the area of training. The training provision itself underwent structural changes with online courses being implemented.

One of the major impacts of Covid-19 pandemic was the speeding up of the digitalisation. This has involved amendments of internal rules, implementation of technical solutions and getting staff used to work with new tools. Future challenges are linked to accelerated digitalisation, as well as PES’ role in promoting mobility at the labour market and securing income and promoting access to jobs for vulnerable jobseekers.

2.2 Greening of labour markets

The greening of the economy and labour markets is likely to be sped up as the EU and Member States, with the European Green Deal, have committed to move towards a green and climate neutral economy by 2050. The PES Network has demonstrated its strong commitment on the issue throughout 2021. Forecasts of the net employment effects of the green transition, show a low positive net effect in the future. The challenge for PES will consist in supporting smooth transitions between sectors and occupations, as the volumes of job destruction and job creation could be significant for some sectors.

In July, the Network published a study to better understand the green transition's impact for PES, which was disseminated during a webinar on 16 September. The study shows that some PES have started to identify occupational profiles for green jobs, been involved in skills anticipation, vocational guidance and information on occupations. Others rely on a high level of experience in upskilling, reskilling and facilitating mobility. A number of PES have elaborated strategies and built partnerships and some have implemented sector-specific measures. Other activities include low scale measures to promote the greening of specific sectors and training programmes to support the ecological transition at the labour market.

PES will need a shift in the focus of their activities towards skills profiling, identifying transferable skills and vocational guidance. Upskilling and re-training measures at all skill levels is essential. PES will also need to have other active labour market programmes in place, targeted at those who cannot be upskilled or reskilled. It is recommended that PES improve matching for green and greening jobs by using technology and improving the skills taxonomy. Close cooperation between PES and employers, sector associations, training institutions, universities and research centres is key to grasp the type of skills needs.

The study shows that PES across Europe have already substantial experience in managing the labour market transitions linked with the ecological transition. In 2021, the PES Network Board approved a **position paper** at its meeting in December as a contribution to greening Europe's economies.

The paper presents reflections of the PES Network on effects on the labour market and potential contributions from and future challenges ahead for the PES.

2.3 Digitalisation

Exchange among PES on digitalisation

Digitalisation and "big data" offer many new opportunities for development of PES service delivery. Further digitalisation and use of artificial intelligence have increased the importance of data protection and security of personal information. PES collect and use individual (often sensitive) data and are faced with similar challenges in implementing the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Experiences were exchanged in the PES Network during two 'Jour Fixe' meetings hosted by Norway on the GDPR's impact on PES and on 'Algorithms for profiling tools', hosted by Austria.

Another Jour Fixe discussion on 'The role of video counselling in the new normal', hosted by Germany, allowed PES to exchange on opportunities raised by video counselling (such as outreach, agile and flexible support) and challenges (in particular in terms of supporting the most vulnerable).

Taxonomies and occupational classifications

Taxonomies and occupational classifications are key for good profiling and matching. PES Network co-operation on the topic continued in 2021 through a Working Group on Taxonomies, led by Sweden. This was an opportunity to exchange on Member States' national, regional and sectoral classifications of skills and occupation, PES' specific role and the use of ESCO (the multilingual classification of European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations).

In the future, the working group will put an increasing focus on greening of the labour markets, which has impacts on classifications of skills and occupations. This means not only building the skills needed by jobs in new green sectors, but also enabling significant adaptation within existing industries and building transversal skills that can underpin a greener economy overall, such as in information and communications technologies.

2.4 Support to youth

Youth employment support

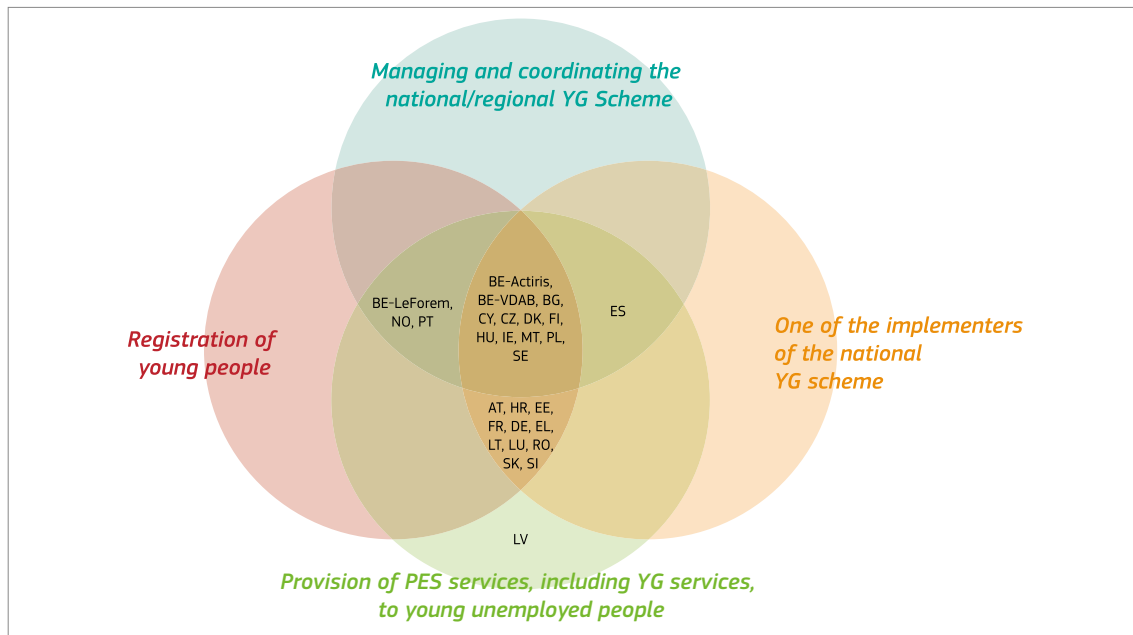
With nearly 3 millions of young jobseekers, and ahead of the European Year of Youth 2022, youth employment has remained a major topic for PES Network members. A Thematic Review Workshop on Youth employment support took place in March 2021, hosted by the French PES. It examined youth employment support across Europe and how PES need to adapt their offer to ensure successful implementation of the Youth Guarantee (YG). Participants stressed the importance of cooperation with grass root organisations and local partners for both mapping and outreach activities. The workshop also discussed how services could be tailored to match the needs of vulnerable young people. Participants agreed that acquiring soft skills before entering formal training or employment was crucial for this group. The discussion on placement and traineeships for vulnerable youth emphasized the need for continued post-placement support. Mentors, for instance, can help navigate the informal rules and traditions in the workplace. Most importantly, young people themselves should be involved when considering how to provide tailored support. Further experiences was shared via the **webinar** 'PES support to young jobseekers in the recovery period'. Presentations focused on reinforced pre-existing initiatives for young jobseekers or initiatives that have helped in overcoming short-term effects of lockdown measures on youth employment. The webinar covered initiatives to help youth making informed career choices and national and local initiatives to support vulnerable youth. The presenters included national PES as well as other key stakeholders such as municipalities and representatives for the youth and employers.

Monitoring PES support of the reinforced Youth Guarantee

The report on PES support of the reinforced Youth Guarantee (YG) is part of the monitoring activity of the PES Network. Based on responses from 26 EU members, Iceland and Norway, it focuses on PES' role and administrative capacity to implement the reinforced YG.

The report shows that PES continue to have a wide range of responsibilities in management, coordination and direct service provision of the reinforced YG or similar youth-oriented schemes. Many PES work in partnerships with stakeholders to prevent young people becoming NEET and for outreaching. Almost half of PES have staff solely responsible for the implementation of the YG. A majority of PES use profiling tools to assess the job-finding prospects of NEETs and their needs to progress into employment, education or training. Services such as career guidance, counselling, motivational sessions, referrals to social services and advocacy are widely used in preparing young people to overcome barriers to employment. Almost two thirds of PES have targets in place for youth-oriented services. A majority of PES reported monitoring trajectories of young people who receive an offer within four months, and following up young clients entered in employment or training. The majority of PES also collect qualitative feedback about their youth-oriented services using different tools, of which satisfaction surveys are the most used.

As part of the co-operation between the Network and Employment Committee the PES Network Chair presented the main findings at the EMCO review of implementation of the YG.

Figure 3. PES role in the implementation of the Youth Guarantee (Based on PES capacity report)

2.5 Enhancing equality and inclusion

Support to vulnerable groups

The COVID-19 crisis hit vulnerable groups disproportionately hard. In September the PES Network held a thematic review workshop on ‘Support to vulnerable groups’ hosted by Belgium (Actiris and Le Forem). The workshop reviewed PES approaches to develop more effective and sustainable support. Particularly promising seemed to be a local focus with the involvement of stakeholders, including businesses and social partners, to respond to local needs, especially where the market has failed.

The review highlighted that the potential of PES to act as partners or suppliers of employment programme or social enterprise ‘start-ups’ could be further explored and may offer increased opportunities for vulnerable groups. It was also pointed out that the cost of non-employment can provide a good metric to assess the added value of employability programmes across Europe. This measure could be used in conjunction with ‘soft’, ‘distance travelled’ measures assessing the increased employability of programme participants. An increased focus on social activation and innovation is especially important, allowing for learning by trial and error and out-of-the box design of programmes. Examples presented at the workshop included voluntary participation of long-term

unemployed in programmes and creating working conditions that provide safety and security. The added value of outsourcing has not been clearly established, yet incentives in the form of payment-by-results need to be carefully managed and only used in well-defined situations. Payment by results can work, enabling the sourcing of expertise and extra capacity, however good specific drafting of contracts with clear commitments, obligations, and quality/volume targets and expectations is essential. Investment in employment programmes and support needs to shift from most expenditure on short term unemployed towards supporting long-term unemployed and inactive people.

Gender equality

PES approaches to combatting gender discrimination in the labour market were discussed in a webinar in February, based on the findings of the PES Network ad hoc study on gender equality (part of Work Programme 2020). It also featured presentations of the Gender Equality Index as well as PES practices on opposing gender stereotyping through supporting women in meeting the recruitment demands in IT and services. A key message was that holistic and intersectional approaches are needed. Whilst many barriers within the labour market still need to be tackled, major issues outside the labour market such as inequalities in unpaid work are seen as equally as important.

Mapping PES responses against discrimination

Based on a survey of PES across Europe, the report 'Mapping PES responses against discrimination'⁷ reviews PES' role and practices in restraining labour market discrimination.

In most countries, the mandate of the PES is limited to its general role in supporting job search and protecting jobseekers' rights against labour market discrimination. However, some PES have a detailed and proactive anti-discrimination strategy. All PES reported cooperating with several stakeholders in tackling discrimination, especially with employers, their associations and trade unions. The current toolbox is dominated by demand-side policies, notably wage subsidies. This might be effective in compensating employers for losing the (perceived) gains of statistical discrimination but may fail to tackle other sources of discrimination. There may also be a need for spreading the use of and broadening the range of supply side measures and internal procedures.

Though most PES include equal treatment in their strategy, and many have concrete targets attached, they often lack evidence on the effectiveness of anti-discrimination measures. The report thus highlights the need for assessing the impact of ALMPs as well as PES services and internal procedures to tackle discrimination.

Figure 4. The labour market ecosystem



Source: PES Network Strategy

2.6 Partnerships

PES Network Stakeholder Conference

Under the theme 'The Power of PES Partnerships', the April annual stakeholder conference explored how working more closely with partners can help PES to build stronger labour markets and provide better services to clients. It featured a mix of panel discussions, interactive workshops and webinar-style sessions taking place online over three consecutive half-days.

While former Mutual learning activities had already highlighted 'what works' in developing effective partnerships, the conference was an opportunity to discuss a wide range of partnerships including: agile, subcontracted, co-constructed and supportive partnerships. The use of new technology to facilitate more effective partnerships was also a topic of interest. Furthermore, partnership in the context of COVID-19 and how PES partnerships need to evolve in the future were addressed. The conference also put emphasis on how partnership with stakeholders can support SMEs, youths and vulnerable groups, increase the employment opportunities and decrease the skills gaps.

Building upon good foundations from a long tradition of developing and leading partnerships, European PES are in a good position to take an active role in promoting the development of an employment services ecosystem. Partnerships can offer one of the most promising vehicles for improving effective integration services through cutting across silos, identifying and bridging gaps, and eliminating service duplication.

⁷ To be published on PES Knowledge Centre in 2022

2.7 Enhancing PES visibility

PES visibility and branding

The PES Visibility and Branding Working Group aims to explore activities that can enhance or contribute to the visibility of PES and its public image. The Working Group exchanged learnings on internal and external communications. This included finding the right channels for internal communication, involvement of employees, employer branding, and strategies to boost the PES image.

In some countries, employees are encouraged to act as ‘ambassadors’ and use their social media networks to promote PES activities. Communication channels and content should be targeted to specific audiences wherever possible. A mix of proactive and reactive channels was seen as best, including written materials and newsletters, emails, videos, radio, podcasts, and social media platforms.

A practice casebook ‘Tools and techniques for developing the PES brand through effective communication: learning from each other’ highlights the importance of having a clearly defined purpose, matching messages to channels, testing approaches with relevant target groups and ensuring the use of simple language and visuals. The casebook stresses the value of being creative, positive and surprising. It examines how to measure and evaluate communication activities effectively.

Podcasts and video

In March the PES Network launched the new podcast ‘PESPod’⁸ which aims to reach its audiences with relevant and engaging information in a new way covering the latest news on the work of the PES. All episodes of the ‘PESPod’ are available on the PES Network webpage and other streaming platforms. The first episode featured an interview with PES Network Chair, Johannes Kopf, whilst episode 8 involved the European Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights Nicolas Schmit.

In between, six different episodes have been focusing on interesting areas of work and experience.

1. 2020 — the most challenging year in the PES Network’s history
2. Lessons from the Pandemic
3. How will the future work?
4. Benchlearning is fun
5. Digitalisation of the Greek PES
6. How participative management is transforming a Belgian Public Employment Service
7. The secret of successful change management
8. Commissioner Schmit shares his optimism for the future of European labour markets.

An animated video was created to support the 2021 stakeholder conference⁹. It highlights the importance of partnerships, giving insight into how they can help to improve services and labour market functioning.

News and newsletter

Four editions of the PES Network newsletter were published in 2021¹⁰. Moreover, extra news, social media, recommended reading and regular in-depth analysis of key EU labour market issues are available on the <https://www.pesnetwork.eu> website. 31 news items were drafted and published in 2021. In addition, 28 event pages were created and updated with core factual information about mutual learning events.

European Labour Market Barometer

Within the PES Network, the Institute for Employment Research (IAB) is producing a monthly leading indicator for the labour market by drawing on the expertise of the public employment services¹¹. 17 Network member PES is contributing to the Barometer which is based on a monthly survey among local branches of the employment services in the respective countries. The branches are asked about the expected development of unemployment and employment in their district. Time series is available back to June 2018.

8 <https://www.pesnetwork.eu/podcast/>

9 <https://audiovisual.ec.europa.eu/en/video/l-204253>

10 The newsletter can be received by subscribing to the PES Network Secretariat EMPL-PES-SECRETARIAT@ec.europa.eu and is also uploaded on the European Commission PES website. The European Commission PES website is actively used to disseminate news and information from the PES Network

11 www.iab.de/Presse/elmb-components

3. Supporting PES Modernisation

Benchlearning is central to the PES Network's activities. Together with Mutual Assistance projects and PES Jour Fixe meetings¹², it is key to supporting PES modernisation.

3.1 Benchlearning

Benchlearning, anchored in the PES Network Decision, is the process of creating a systematic and integrated link between Benchmarking (both quantitative and qualitative) and Mutual Learning activities. The ultimate aim is to support each PES in improving their performance through comparisons and institutional learning from peers. The core idea is that this will lead to better results and contribute towards improved functioning and a convergence of labour markets, thereby demonstrating the added value of PES.

Benchmarking: quantitative and quality approach

A structured and systematic analysis of PES performance and its drivers is conducted through the analysis of performance data (quantitative Benchmarking) and on-going processes of PES self-review, peer review and expert review (qualitative Benchmarking).

Each year PES are asked to provide data on twenty indicators that are calculated from the PES data and other sources. The time series of these indicators and their correlation with other data are published on a dashboard and made accessible to registered users. The dashboard is the major tool used to promote transparency between all members of the PES Network.

Qualitative benchmarking is based on qualitative assessment of performance enablers identified in the PES Network Decision.

Due to the pandemic, almost all visits planned for the 3rd benchlearning cycle were postponed until 2021/2022 and adapted to an online format.

Re-launch of the 3rd Cycle

The 3rd cycle was relaunched in spring 2021 and 11 virtual assessments have been conducted, covering the Croatian, Austrian, Hungarian, German, Belgian VDAB, Greek, Dutch, Portuguese, Czech, French and Maltese PES. The site visits will continue in 2022 with the aim to complete the cycle by September.

Virtual visits are organised along a four-day agenda and encompass all attributes of on-site visits: sessions with the various management levels from the head office and "visits" to two local offices where top and middle management and frontline staff are met. In the course of the development of the virtual format, a number of practices were tested to optimise this approach, for example, the inclusion of a larger number of assessors and an intensified preparation. To systematically address the impact of the pandemic on the services delivered by PES, an additional new section on 'crisis management' was added to the excellence model.

During the assessments conducted so far, the efforts made by all PES for tackling the crisis and softening its impact on the labour market became apparent. PES turned out to be highly flexible and creative in adjusting to the new situation and meeting the challenges posed by the pandemic. Although the first months of the crisis proved to be demanding on the PES and their staff, the labour market in many cases was found to be more robust than expected. At the same time, the shift of priorities of PES also affected their planned and ongoing organisational change processes that had to be put on hold or at least slowed down.

¹² In 2021 one Jour Fixe addressed PES leaders' role in setting the stage for ambidexterity.

Update of the Benchlearning Manual

The original version of the Benchlearning Manual dates from 2017. An updated version was approved at the PES Board meeting 9-10 December, which reflects methodological changes introduced following the pandemic. These concern in particular sections on change and crisis management as well as updates on the excellence model.

Additional information on the process of scoring, the roles of assessors and the current standard agenda of the site visits, as well as the specifics of the virtual assessment format, included in the updated version.

3.2 Mutual assistance

The PES Network continued to provide Mutual Assistance (MAP) for PES modernisation.

Greece

The Greek PES (OAED) took up the opportunity to request a Mutual Assistance Project (MAP) on their pathway of change. The objective was to strengthen the client-employer matching system through improvements in client profiling, client referrals, employer engagement, use of technology and overall monitoring.

The Estonian PES provided peer experts and sharing insights from their counselling and performance management systems including specific focus on approaches to forecasting, data infrastructure, and performance monitoring and impact analysis.

The MAP started with two online workshops held in 2020 and was concluded with a final workshop in 2021.

Belgium-Actiris

Following the 2019 Benchlearning feedback report to Belgium-Actiris, the Brussels-Capital regional PES set up a unit dedicated to digital transformation.

A specific MAP was requested on this issue in 2020 and completed in July 2021, focused on 1) The type of data to be collected and their purposes? 2) Strategies and tools to efficiently collect data from clients (job seekers, active workers and companies) 3) Profiling, segmentation, monitoring and personalised counselling tools and approaches. Experts from Germany, the Netherlands, France, Slovenia and Sweden have supported the project.

Lithuania

The 2020 Benchlearning Assessment saw the highly motivated staff as an important asset of the Lithuanian PES. External assessors recommended complementing the achievements with a more systematic development of human resources.

Following the development of an HR strategy, the Lithuanian PES requested a MAP to support the design of an implementation plan and learn from experiences of other PES. Two workshops took place in 2021, with a final one planned in 2022.

Actiris, the Brussels regional PES, was selected as the main peer PES for this MAP, given their recent experience with human resources management reforms. Other PES from Austria and Estonia are also involved.

4. New environment and strategic changes: PES Performance Capacity Overview

Within its Annual Work Programme, the Network annually undertakes a survey on PES capacity. The main findings are summarised below.

The measures taken to combat the pandemic thoroughly changed the environment in which PES operate and initiated or accelerated the introduction of strategies and reforms in 80% of the PES in 2020¹³.

4.1 Information on adult career advice and guidance added to institutional characteristics

The responsibilities assigned to PES remained broadly similar, with four PES (BE-Actiris, BG, DE and ES) introducing changes. For the first time, this year information became available on the involvement of PES in career advice and guidance for other groups than young people still in education. A majority of 17 PES is fully responsible for these services, 10 PES are one of more providers or offer them jointly with partners.

4.2 PES environment - reversal of trends in registered unemployment and vacancies

While in previous periods the majority of PES reported decreasing numbers of registered unemployed, in 2020 all PES were confronted with substantially higher numbers. Young people were hit relatively hard.

At the same time, all PES saw the number of vacancies registered with them decrease in 2020, the exceptions being the PES in Bulgaria, Greece and Iceland. Overall, the number of PES registered vacancies decreased by 20.7% in 2020¹⁴.

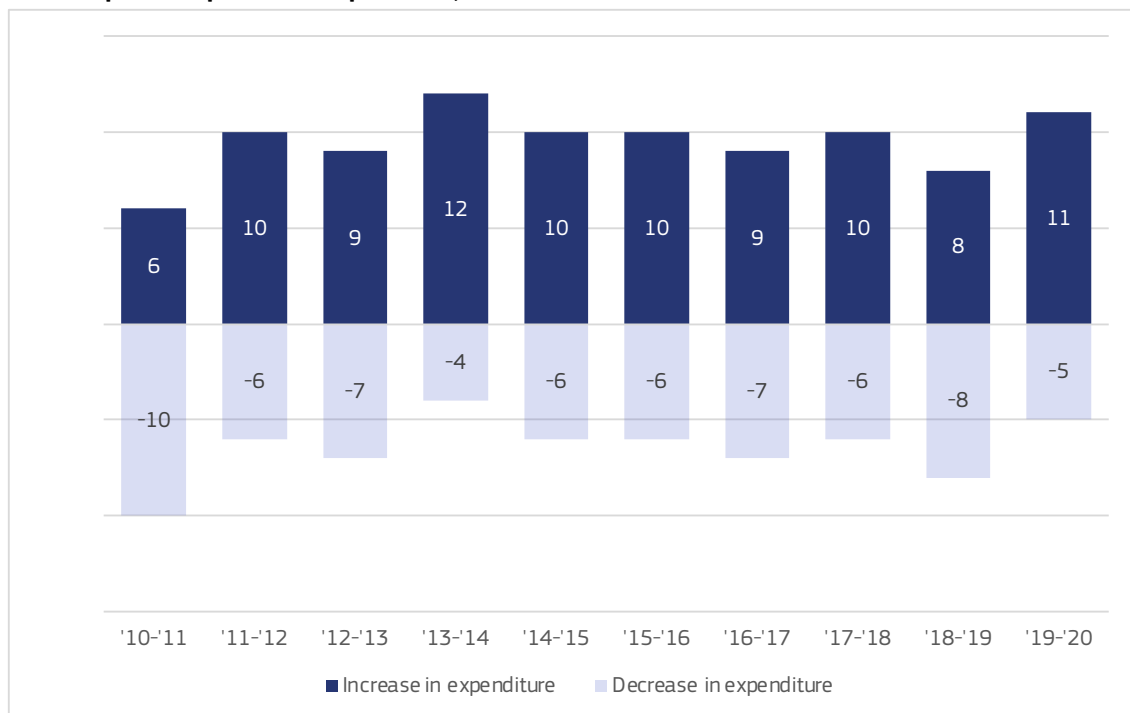
4.3 PES resources - financial and human resources increasing

Between 2019 and 2020, the number of PES that increased their expenditure was notably higher again than the number of PES that spent less than the year before. Furthermore, the share of expenditure on ALMPs increased in 2020, although to a different degree in individual PES (see figure 5 below).

¹³ This review of PES Capacity is based on 30 questionnaire responses received from European PES during July and August 2021 (Italy did not submit its response).

¹⁴ For 29 PES. No or insufficient information was available for Italy and Sweden.

Figure 5. Number of PES reporting changes in total expenditure, excluding benefits paid and pro forma expenditure, 2010-2020



Source: Annual PES Benchmarking Data Collection.

Note: Information for 16 PES. No information – or insufficient information – is available for BE-Actiris, BE-FOREM, BE-VDAB, CY, DE, EL, ES, HU, IE, IT, MT, NL, NO, PL and RO.

To ensure comparability between PES, expenditure on unemployment benefits, other benefits or pro forma expenditure are not included in these analyses. Nevertheless, benefit expenditure increased in all PES that administer such schemes. Total PES staff mainly increased as a result of COVID-19 in 2020. Collectively, the total PES staff, measured in Full-Time Equivalents, after decreasing for 4 years, increased again by 8.7% between April 2020 and April 2021. 17 of these PES saw their staff number increasing or remaining the same¹⁵. PES expect this trend to continue: 16 PES are planning to hire more staff in 2021. Nine of these increases are related to the pandemic and its effects.

The pandemic also impacted the way PES deploy their staff, but this impact is expected to become less significant over the course of 2021.

4.4 LMP services and measures changed more often than in 2019 to respond to the crisis

The impact of the pandemic on the labour market is reflected in the number of PES that amended their Labour Market Policy (LMP) interventions and the number of new and amended interventions, all of which were substantially higher in 2020 than the year before.

The main type of newly introduced interventions were employment incentives, followed by training and client services. Amendments in existing LMP interventions concerned in particular training and employment services, followed by direct job creation. The focus of new interventions was already moving away from the traditional target groups in 2019 and the trend was intensified in 2020. Older people and long-term unemployed (LTU) were far less often targeted. 18 interventions addressed a variety of other types of target groups. Almost a quarter of the new interventions was explicitly introduced in response to the pandemic.

¹⁵ Information on total staff numbers is available for 25 European PES, excluding Italy and five PES where data could not be included in this report (IE, IS, PL, RO, and NO).

4.5 PES formulated external and internal ambitions for 2021

The main PES ambitions for 2021 relate to the employment of jobseekers on the one hand and the improvement of their internal processes on the other. The most often mentioned strategic objective for 2021 relates to the core business of PES: labour market (re-)integration (17 PES). This is followed closely by objectives in the field of internal processes and efficiency (13 PES), and objectives relating to specific clients' groups (12 PES).

26 PES set strategic targets for 2021. The most common types of targets are those relating to the outputs and results to be achieved during the year. 12 PES set targets relating to their internal functioning. These concern work processes, quality, and the management and efficiency of their organisations.

4.6 COVID-19 accelerated digitalisation, but also curbed other reforms

The initiation or acceleration of strategies and reforms was mentioned by 22 and 24 PES respectively. Nevertheless, 10 and 14 PES reported delays or postponement to a later date respectively. In particular, PES invested in the development and introduction of digital services. However, some important digital projects were suspended if they did not directly help to deal with the COVID-19 crisis. The same applied to other initiatives aimed at improving the internal functioning of PES.

Various reforms in active labour market measures and client services were moved forward to respond to needs arising from the pandemic. However, a number of larger revisions of such schemes were postponed or delayed, because of the costs or the efforts involved.

4.7 Preparations for post-COVID times started

17 PES had a strategy in place to deal with the post-pandemic period. Digitalisation of services and strengthening partnerships with other actors, such as social partners and social services are important elements in these plans.

PES consider it particularly important to address digitalisation of services, integration of young people into the labour market, and a personal and individualised approach to clients. Other issues to be addressed are furthering digital skills amongst jobseekers, face-to-face counselling for individuals who needs it, and supporting unemployed that have severe and/or multiple employment barriers. Supporting the transition to a greening economy, has by comparison less priority.

5. Concluding Remarks

The situation of many individuals has changed considerably over the past two years, with a stronger effect on those who were already unemployed or in vulnerable situations before the COVID-19 outbreak. In 2021, The PES Network continued to demonstrate its ability to bring members together and collaborate on a wide range of topics aimed at building effective and efficient PES. The joint-effort is fundamental, helping individual PES with methods to offer job seekers a career perspective and avoid long lasting scars of unemployment.

The 2021 Work Programme has followed up on key topics from the 2020 programme, with a strong focus on immediate action and support to recovery. Activities facilitated exchange of recent experience and knowledge on how individual PES can respond to internal changes and labour market changes provoked by the crisis, as well as supporting the underlying structural changes recent recovery. Modernisation of PES has been a priority. The 3rd cycle of benchmarking activities and Mutual Assistance Projects continued successfully during 2021, with many lessons learned.

PES are increasingly using digital channels as part of their blended service-delivery approach.

The Work Programme 2021 allowed PES to regularly exchange on both the opportunities and challenges of digitalisation. Collaborating in the PES Network is fundamental for PES to effectively strengthen their service delivery via digitalisation, capacity building and modernisation efforts. The Greening of labour market remained a central part of the agenda. This year, PES Network collaborations promoted individual PES transition to greener labour markets, particularly regarding the role of PES in supporting skills adaptation and upskilling. This means not only building the skills needed by jobs in new 'green' sectors, but also enabling significant adaptation within existing industries.

In many parts of Europe, the labour market is still heavily affected by the COVID-19 crisis. However, in some countries the rates of unemployment are back at pre-COVID-19 levels or below and labour market is faced with shortages. The Work Programme 2022 will support the PES Network in addressing those fast evolving challenges, at a time when the PES Network needs more than ever to be comprehensive, multifaceted and flexible.

Annex 1 - Work Programme 2021

Recovery and Future of Work	Update of PES Strategy 2020 & beyond Visions of the Network and inclusion of new EU priorities <u>Working Group</u> 26 February		Support to recovery The role of PES in the recovery phase <u>Webinar</u> 04 March and <u>Thematic Review Workshop</u> 10 November		Green Deal Support PES in better understanding the impact on Labour Market <u>Analytical study</u>		Future skills, career guidance, lifelong learning Identification of skills needs etc. <u>Seminar</u> January 2022 (TBC)	
Recovery and PES Service Delivery	PES service delivery in the wake of the crisis Follow-up on the 2020 Study on STW schemes <u>Study and Webinar/podcast</u>	Youth Employment Support Implementation of the reinforced Youth Guarantee <u>Thematic Review Workshop</u> 18-19 March	Support to vulnerable groups /ALMPs Support to inclusion, policies against exclusion <u>Thematic Review Workshop</u> September	Technical innovations AI, algorithms, technical innovation to support recovery <u>Jour Fixe</u> AT-24 February	Anti-discrimination Mapping PES responses <u>Survey</u> In progress. End 2021	Support to persons with disabilities <u>Toolkit</u> To be published in 2022	Gender equality Follow-up the 2020 Study <u>Dissemination webinar</u> 2 February	
PES Performance Management	PES Benchlearning Performance Assessments Assess 15 PES under 3 rd cycle, focus on Check and Act and new section I (online) Site Visits		Update of the Benchlearning Manual <u>Reference Group</u>		PES Staff Management New organisation of work, team management, etc. <u>Format TBC</u>		Quality Management <u>Working Group</u>	
EU PES Initiatives and PES Visibility	PES added value/benefits Improve PES Network reputation and visibility <u>Working Group</u>		PES Stakeholders conference Involve stakeholders and share good practices on high stakes for the PES Network and actors on the Labour Market <u>Online conference</u> 20-22 April			Strengthening cooperation with partners and stakeholders Reinforce the links with partners <u>Podcasts</u>		
Others	Mutual Assistance Projects Peer PES support to 2/3 PES EL, BE-Actiris, LT	PES current challenges PES self-driven exchanges <u>Jours Fixes upon demand</u> NO – April DE – May DE – July	PES practices & videos Linked to/supporting the learning Activities	Research Linked to/supporting the learning activities <u>Ad hoc studies and surveys</u>	Labour Market Information <u>EU Labour Market Barometer</u>	Taxonomies PES self-driven <u>Working Group</u> 25 February		
Meetings	PES Board Online/Physical PT: 24-25 June SI: 9-10 December		AFEPA s Online/Physical 11 February (online) 22 March (online) 6 May (online)		Benchlearning Working/Steering Group Online/Physical		Benchlearning Assessors Online/Physical	

Annex 2 – Mutual Learning Events, Learning Resources and Evaluation

Mutual Learning Events

- Three *Thematic Review Workshops on 'Youth employment support'* (hosted by the French PES, 18-19 March) '*Support to vulnerable groups*' (hosted by the Belgian PES Actiris and Le Forem, 28-29 September) and '*PES support to recovery*' (hosted by the Dutch PES, 9-10 November).
- Three Working Groups on '*Supporting PES visibility and branding*' (hosted by the Estonian PES) '*Updating the PES Network Strategy*' (hosted by the Austrian PES) and '*Quality management*' (hosted by the Austrian and German PES).
- Three webinars, one on '*supporting young jobseekers*', one on '*promotion of gender equality*' and one on '*PES support to the greening of labour markets*'.
- Three *Mutual Assistance Projects to the Greek*, Belgium (Actiris) and Lithuanian PES.
- One PES Network Stakeholder Conference on '*The power of PES partnerships*' (20-21-22 April).
- Four Jour Fixe on '*Algorithms for profiling tools*' (hosted by the Austrian PES, 24 February), '*Challenges in meeting the Directive on General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)*' (hosted by the Norwegian PES, 29 April), '*Role of video counselling in the new normal*' (hosted by the German PES, 12 July) and '*PES leaders' role in setting the stage for ambidexterity*' (hosted by the German PES, 20 May).

New learning resources

- Report on '*Integrated service for the long-term unemployed*'
- Study-based Report on '*Monitoring of PES support of the reinforced Youth Guarantee*'
- Practice casebook on '*Tools and techniques for developing the PES brand through effective communication*'.
- Thematic paper on '*Upskilling, reskilling and prevention in times of crisis*'
- Thematic paper on '*Youth employment support*'
- Thematic paper on '*The power of PES partnerships*'
- PES Network annual report 2020
- 2021 PES Network work programme
- PES Network Strategy¹⁶
- Study on '*PES approaches to the promotion of gender equality*'
- Study on '*Remuneration of Open-Market Traineeships in EU-27*'
- Study on '*Greening of the labour market – Impacts for the Public Employment Services*'.

¹⁶ Available in English, French, and German.

PES practices published in the PES Practice Repository

1. An update to the 2019 promising PES practice 'Luxembourg Skills Bridge' – Luxembourg
2. 'Youth towards work' – Finland
3. 'The EQW&L toolkit' – Italy
4. 'Speed interviews' – Sweden
5. 'Promoting gender equality through support mechanisms improving work-life balance' – Austria
6. 'New plan' – Germany
7. 'National training fund' – Poland
8. 'MyOAEDlive' – Greece
9. 'Mental health prevention in times of crisis' – Croatia
10. 'Measure to support self-employment for those changing their economic activity' – Lithuania
11. 'Jobevidens.dk' – Denmark
12. 'Job Rotation Scheme' – Denmark
13. 'Improving data exchange in conformity with GDPR' – Germany
14. 'IBB on-demand' – Austria
15. 'GigLab Sweden' – Sweden
16. 'French Skills Investment Plan' – France
17. 'Free training in digital skills' – Spain
18. 'Flexible and creative partnerships for effective outreach strategies and targeted support to young NEETs' – Belgium.
19. 'Data projects at the PES' – France
20. 'Blended employment counselling' – Estonia
21. 'Supported employment' – Norway
22. 'Horizon scan' – Norway
23. 'JobTech Development' – Sweden
24. 'AMS-Boxenstopp' – Austria
25. Promising practice: Social Impact Bond (SIB) – Belgium.

Monitoring of activities

The implementation of the project and in particular of the ML events are monitored and evaluated systematically in a way that enables rapid adjustments as well as structural and strategic re-focusing.

In April 2021, an annual survey among all participants in one or more ML events conducted in 2020 was carried out.

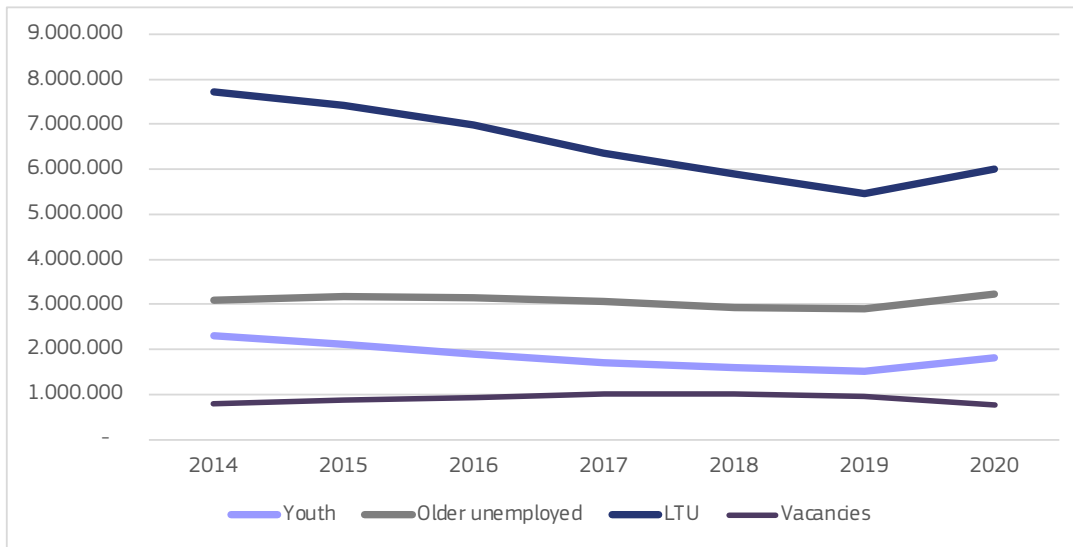
An overall analysis of the results of post-event surveys shows that participants were highly satisfied with the selection of the themes (93%) and the balance of the event programmes (92%). The open answers suggest that PES representatives especially appreciated working in groups, networking, and sharing ideas with their peers from other countries.

Overall satisfaction levels with the five types of ML event held (i.e. Network Seminar, Thematic Review Workshop, Mutual Assistance Project, Webinars, and Working Groups) were high. The results also revealed that satisfaction levels remained relatively unaffected despite the extraordinary circumstances of the COVID-19 crisis that led to the transformation of face-to-face events into virtual formats.

In relation to the dissemination elements of the ML programme, use of the PES Knowledge Centre was not extensive with few respondents using it on a regular weekly basis, though almost half claim to using it occasionally/sometimes. The CIRCABC sections of the PES Network platform had similar levels of use as the PES Knowledge Centre with just under 41% of respondents using it occasionally. In the case of the PES Network Newsletter, two-thirds of respondents claimed to subscribe to it (up from 44% in 2019-2020).

Annex 3 – Figures from PES Capacity report

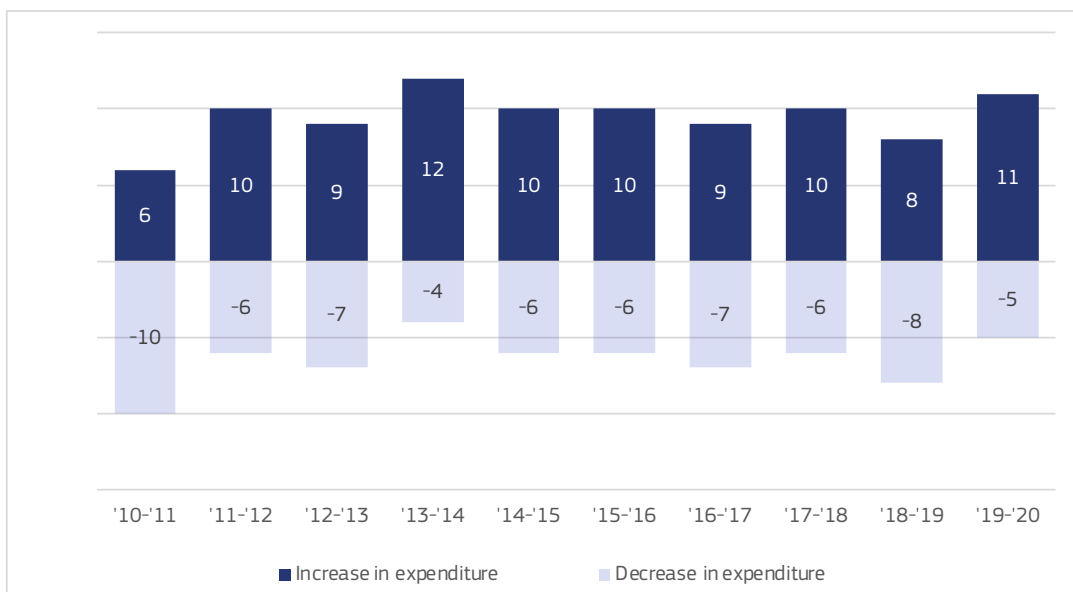
Figure 6. Number of registered unemployed by target groups and vacancies reported to PES, 2014-2020



Source: Annual PES Benchlearning Data Collection.

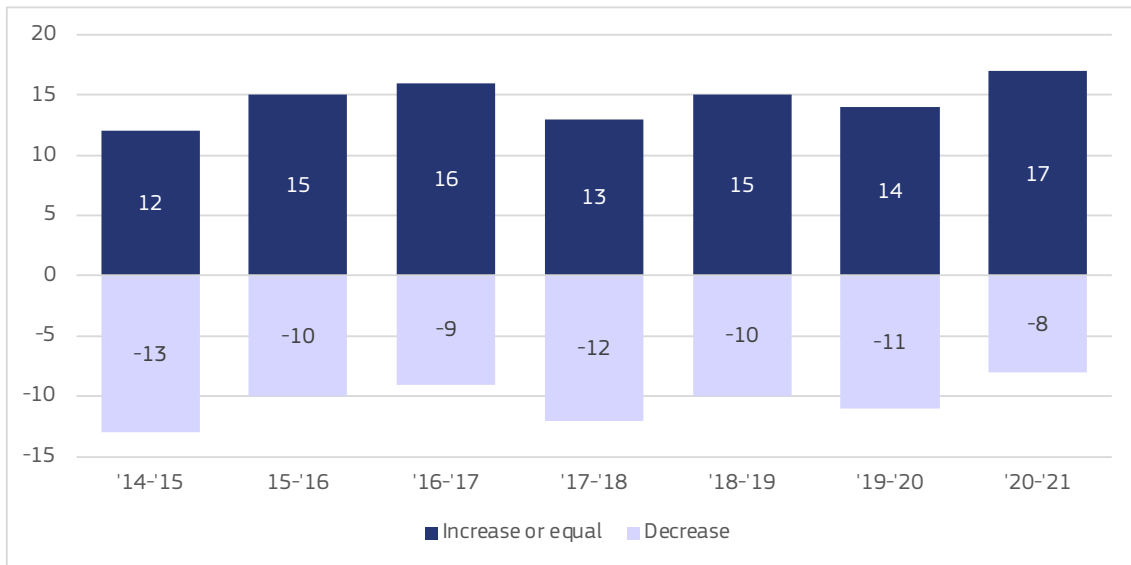
Note: Based on the data for 22 PES – no or insufficient information is available for CY, CZ, EL, IE, IS, IT, NL, NO and RO.

Figure 7. Number of PES reporting changes in total expenditure, excluding benefits paid and pro forma expenditure, 2010-2020



Source: Annual PES Benchlearning Data Collection. Note: Information for 16 PES. No information – or insufficient information – is available for BE-Actiris, BE-FOREM, BE-VDAB, CY, DE, EL, ES, HU, IE, IT, MT, NL, NO, PL and RO.

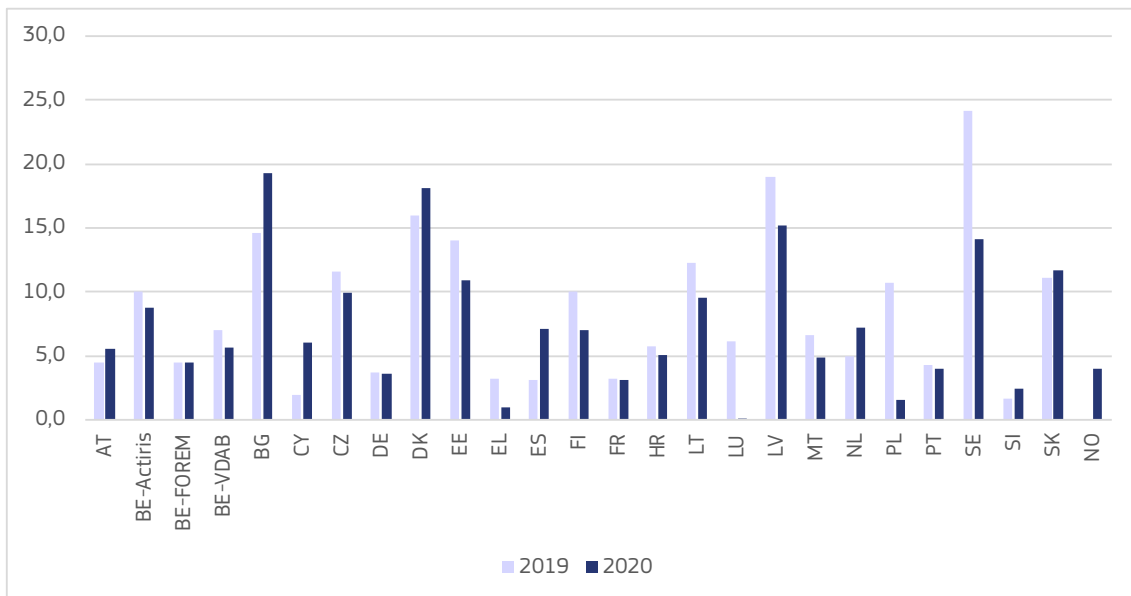
Figure 8. The number of PES experiencing an increase or a decrease in staff (in FTE) between 2014 and 2021 (30 April)



Source: responses to PES Capacity Questionnaires, 2015-2021.

Note: Based on 25 PES, no information – or insufficient information is available for IE, IS, IT, PL, RO, and NO. All data refer to 30 April or the closest date to this date where data were available.

Figure 9. Overall staff turnover in 2019 and 2020



Source: responses to PES Capacity Questionnaires, 2020 and 2021.

Note: 25 PES No information for IE, HU, IS, IT, RO, and NO. Staff turnover is defined as ‘the proportion of total staff leaving the organisation over a set period of one year for whatever reason’ (including retirement, leaving voluntarily, redundancy, etc.).

Table 1. Number of PES* whose introduction or whose implementation of strategies or reforms was affected by COVID-19 and area concerned

Category	Speeded up	Initiated	Introduction Postponed	Implementation Delayed
Digitalisation services	20	11	1	1
Channels used	2	2	0	0
ALMPs and client services	3	9	6	7
Income provision	1	2	2	0
Redundancy measures, STW	1	1	0	0
Rapid service and support	1	2	0	0
Internal procedures/processes	2	1	5	4
Other	2	2	1	0

** Note that for one PES multiple areas may be affected.
Information for 29 PES, no information for FI and IT.*

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