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EVALUATION

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REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

Evaluation on the application of Decision No 573/2014/EU on enhanced cooperation between Public Employment Services

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Glossary

<i>Term or acronym</i>	<i>Meaning or definition</i>
AFEPA	Advisers for European PES Affairs
AI	Artificial Intelligence
ALMP	Active Labour Market Policy
CEA	Cost-Effectiveness Analysis
Cedefop	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
CIRCAB	Communication and Information Resource Centre for Administrations, Businesses and Citizens
DG EMPL	Directorate-General Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion
EIGE	European Institute for Gender Equality
ELA	European Labour Authority
EMCOEU	Employment Committee European Union
ESCO	European Skills, Competences, and Occupations
ESF+	European Social Fund Plus
ETF	European Training Foundation
ETUC	European Trade Union Confederation
EU	European Union
EURES ¹	European Employment Services
ILO	International Labour Organisation
MAP	Mutual Assistance Project
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PES	Public Employment Services
RRF	Recovery and Resilience Facility
SPC	Social Protection Committee

¹ EURES is the Network of Public Employment Services for facilitating the free movement of workers. More information in [EURES](#).

TLD	Thematic Learning Dialogue
TRW	Thematic Review Workshop
TSI	Technical Support Instrument
WAPES	World Association of Public Employment Services
WEC	World Employment Confederation
WG	Working Group
LTU	Long-term unemployment

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose

The European Network of Public Employment Services (PES Network) was established in 2014 by Decision No 573/2014/EU (hereafter ‘the 2014 PES Decision’)² to ‘encourage cooperation (...) between Member States in the field of employment, within the areas of PES responsibility, in order to contribute to the implementation of the Union’s employment policies. The Network’s mandate was extended until 31 December 2027 with the amended Decision No 573/2014/EU (‘the 2020 PES Decision’).³

Article 10 of the 2020 PES Decision requires the Commission to submit an evaluation report by 30 September 2026. This evaluation assessed the state of play and degree of implementation of the PES Decision, as well as the extent to which the Network has fulfilled its legal obligations and achieved its objectives. It provides an analysis of the five mandatory evaluation criteria, in line with the Commission's Better Regulation guidelines⁴: effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, coherence, and EU added value. Based on the assessment of each criterion, the evaluation draws overall conclusions and lessons learned.

The evaluation covers the 27 EU Member States and Iceland, Liechtenstein, and Norway, aligning with the Network’s geographical scope. It assesses the implementation of PES Network Decision 573/2014/EU—as amended by Decision (EU) 2020/1782—over the period from 1 January 2021 to 31 December 2025⁵.

1.2 Methodology, limitations and robustness

This Staff Working Document draws on evidence from an evaluation study commissioned to an external contractor (Ecorys), initiated in June 2025 and conducted over twelve months⁶. Evidence has been collected from several sources combining appropriate measures for enhancing the robustness of results. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used, including desk based research and literature review; mapping of inputs, outputs, results and impacts of the PES Network; country case studies (BG, DE, ES, FI, LT, SI), broad stakeholder consultations (EU-level interviews, two targeted surveys to Advisers for European PES affairs (AFEPA) and two workshops with AFEPA and Heads of PES)⁷. Additional desk research was conducted, drawing particularly on key data

² [Decision No 573/2014/EU](#)

³ [Decision \(EU\) 2020/1782](#)

⁴ [Better regulation: guidelines and toolbox](#)

⁵ The cut-off date was set to maximise the data availability for the evaluation. Secondary sources used in the evaluation can have different cut-off dates.

⁶ For further details of the evaluation study please see *Study supporting the evaluation of Decision 573/2014EU as amended by Decision (EU) 2020/1782 on enhanced cooperation between Public Employment Services (PES)*, for consulting the procedural information please see ANNEX I.

⁷ Unless specified otherwise, the source of Boxes, Tables and Figures used in this SWD is: *Study supporting the evaluation of Decision 573/2014EU as amended by Decision (EU) 2020/1782 on enhanced cooperation between Public Employment Services (PES)*, Ecorys for the European Commission, 2026.

from the *PES Capacity Reports* and the outcomes of Benchlearning activities. When interpreting the results, the following main limitations should be considered⁸.

(1) Capturing PES clients' views: Consulting representatives from organisations representing PES clients posed challenges, due to their sometimes-limited knowledge of the Network. Mitigation measures included: targeted interviews focused on specific activities involving these organizations; collaboration with PES to identify clients' representatives with a long-standing partnership and knowledge of the PES Network.

(2) Avoiding bias in consultation activities by those with a stake in the future of the PES Network: Guided by the PES Network's strategic focus and scope, the evaluation drew on insights from key stakeholders, namely, decision-makers and implementers within the PES and their partners, who possess firsthand knowledge of its operations and impact. This targeted approach ensured an evidence-based assessment grounded in the perspectives of those best placed to observe the Network's impact. The fact that the Network's primary target groups are PES themselves, and its relatively limited external visibility imply that a significant proportion of the evidence emanates from sources with first-hand knowledge within PES. This was mitigated by triangulating the data gathered from PES sources with data gathered from external stakeholders and cross-referenced with the data from the desk research. Consultees were made aware of the anonymity of the information provided. A balanced perspective was achieved by engaging a wide range of stakeholders. The interview programme engaged 38 consultees, primarily external to the Network. Of the 47 stakeholders consulted for the country case studies, 33 were external to the Network.

(3) Collecting quantitative data on cost: While all PES provided qualitative insights on the costs and benefits of their engagement in the PES Network, time and resources invested in Network activities are not always systematically tracked in quantitative terms. To mitigate this, the evaluation utilised all available financial data and complemented the analysis with qualitative data.

(4) Limited availability of secondary evidence on the results and impact of the implementation of the PES Decision, likely due to the PES Network's specific remit and membership. Extensive desk research was performed, and a diverse range of stakeholders were consulted to triangulate the evidence gathered.

(5) Lack of systematic monitoring framework: While event satisfaction surveys and biannual impact surveys on mutual learning activities are conducted, no systematic monitoring framework assesses the implementation of activities and objectives expressed in the PES Decision. In the absence of comparable performance data, information was collected via desk research, as well as stakeholder consultations. To isolate impacts specific to the evaluation period, research tools included targeted questions on outcomes directly attributable to the application of the 2020 Decision.

⁸ Annex II presents in more details the methodology applied, its robustness and limitations.

2. WHAT WAS THE EXPECTED OUTCOME OF THE INTERVENTION?

2.1 Description of the intervention and its objectives

PES Decision: objectives and activities

The PES Network was formally established in 2014⁹. Until then, the Heads of Public Employment Services Network had provided an informal avenue for EU PES to exchange and cooperate. The objective of the PES Network was to address the need for more effective collaboration between PES and provide a more formal platform to compare performance at EU level, identify good practices and establish a mutual learning system to promote and facilitate the development of more innovative, evidence-based employment policies in line with EU-level priorities.

Originally covering a six-year period (2014-2020), Decision 573/2014/EU was amended in 2020 following an evaluation¹⁰, by Decision (EU) 2020/1782¹¹. The following amendments were introduced during the revision:

Extending the mandate of the PES Network until 31 December 2027 (Article 1).

Increased focus on inclusion and support for vulnerable groups: amending the objectives (Article 3) to include a specific mention of supporting people with disabilities and those facing multiple discrimination, gender equality and ‘inclusiveness’ of labour markets. References were included to the Network’s role in contributing to ‘reducing unemployment for all age, gender and vulnerable groups’ and in promoting the sharing of best practices to support vulnerable groups to enter and remain in the labour market (Article 4).

Promoting sustainable and inclusive growth: stipulating support to the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR), the EU Green Deal and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) among the aims of the Network, as well as the inclusion measures to support jobseekers (e.g. career counselling and training) (Article 3).

Enhancing cooperation with the broader community of labour market stakeholders: adding explicit reference to collaboration with EU agencies, equality bodies, vocational training organisations, as well as PES from third countries (Article 5). A call to step up its cooperation with the Employment Committee was included (Article 6).

Based on the PES Decision, the following intervention logic was developed, providing a framework for a standardised approach to the evaluation.

⁹ [Decision No 573/2014/EU](#)

¹⁰ [Study supporting the evaluation of Decision 573/2014/EU on enhanced cooperation between Public Employment Services \(PES\).](#)

¹¹ [Decision \(EU\) 2020/1782 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 November 2020 amending Decision No 573/2014/EU](#)

Figure 1. Intervention logic of the 2020 PES Decision



2.2 Points of comparison

To capture the changes generated over time by the PES Decision, the evaluation compares performance against a set of points of comparison that differ across evaluation criteria, due to data availability with the situation prior to the 2020 Decision. For assessing **effectiveness and efficiency**, the situation prior to 2020 is the main point of comparison. For **coherence**, the evaluation examines the coherence with other initiatives over the evaluation period. For **relevance**, the evaluation assesses the extent to which the Decision was relevant throughout the evaluation period and will continue to be relevant in the future. For **EU added value**, the evaluation assesses how the situation could have been expected to evolve in the absence of the 2020 PES Decision. Table 1 provides an overview of the key points of comparison used for each criterion. The specific points of comparison are stated in the findings for each criterion (section 4, Evaluation findings).

Table 1: Key points of comparison per evaluation criterion

Criterion	Key point(s) of comparison
Effectiveness	Situation prior to the implementation of the 2020 PES Decision (degree of effectiveness identified in the 2019 evaluation of the PES Decision); No./type of exchange/knowledge-building activities/outputs and any results/impacts between PES prior to 2020; PES performance indicators prior to 2020
Efficiency	Situation prior to the implementation of the 2020 PES Decision: degree of efficiency identified in the 2019 evaluation of the PES Decision (including any quantitative benchmarks where possible); Stakeholder views on degree of efficiency prior to 2020
Coherence	Degree of coherence and complementarity with other national and EU-level initiatives throughout the evaluation period; Objectives and scope of other relevant policies and initiatives at EU, international and national level; Degree of coherence and complementarity identified in the 2019 evaluation of the PES Decision
EU added value	Projection of how the situation could have been expected to evolve in the absence of the PES Decision; Situation prior to the implementation of the 2020 PES Decision (degree of EU added value identified in the 2019 evaluation of the PES Decision)
Relevance	Ongoing and future relevance to needs/problems over the evaluation period and in the future; Situation prior to the implementation of the 2020 PES Decision (degree of relevance identified in the 2019 evaluation of the PES Decision)

For all comparisons, the evaluation takes into account changes in **contextual factors** (e.g. labour market situation). Particular attention is paid to **changes in the 2020 PES Decision** (compared to the 2014 Decision) to assess any impacts of these changes. For each point of comparison, the evaluation examines the degree to which any change can be **attributed to the PES Decision(s)** and state limitations/caveats.

3. HOW HAS THE SITUATION EVOLVED OVER THE EVALUATION PERIOD?

This section starts by presenting labour market trends and related developments in PES over 2021-2025, before introducing the activities of the PES Network, set within its broader EU policy context.

3.1. Labour market trends: record-high employment, low long-term unemployment and persistent labour market challenges

During the evaluation period, key labour market indicators showed steady improvement, signalling a relatively rapid recovery from the impact of COVID-19. The employment rate (on average in the EU and for those aged 20-64¹², as for the rest of indicators presented in this paragraph) grew steadily from 73.1% in 2021 to 76.1% in 2025¹³, while the labour market participation rate peaked at 80.4%¹⁴ in 2024. The unemployment rate continued to decline, falling from 6.9% in 2021 to 6% in 2025¹⁵. Similarly, the long-term unemployment (LTU) rate, decreased by over 1 percentage point, reaching 1.9% in 2025¹⁶. Data from the PES Benchlearning data collection¹⁷ reflect these overall positive trends. After a rise due to the impact of the pandemic in 2020, the number of unemployed jobseekers registered with PES decreased from 2021 to 2024, going from 23.2 to 21.2 million¹⁸, in line with an overall downward trend since 2010¹⁹. Transitions into employment have generally become faster between 2021-2025. For example, the average rate of unemployed jobseekers reintegrated into employment within 6 months increased by over 10 percentage points, from 56% in 2021 to over 67% in 2024²⁰, surpassing pre-pandemic levels. Progress has, however, been uneven across EU Member States. In some countries, the unemployment rate remained steadily above the EU average (e.g. EL, ES, FI, FR, IT)²¹. A minority of countries (CZ, DK, DE, EE, FI, SE) have also seen a growth in unemployment at the end of the evaluation period.

The overall positive trends mask some persistent challenges for specific cohorts of the working-age population. Employment outcomes continued to be affected by personal characteristics such as age, gender, and education level²². The rate of young people neither in employment nor in education and training (NEETs), while decreasing, remained high (from 10.8% in 2021 to 9% in 2025 for those aged 15-24)²³. The gender employment gap remained large, standing at 9,6 percentage points²⁴. Educational attainment continued to affect employment, with people with a high level of education (ISCED 5-8) achieving much higher employment rates²⁵. Other vulnerable groups also continued to face challenges: the EU disability employment gap was 24,2% in 2025²⁶, while people with a migrant background remained over-represented among those with overqualification, in

¹²Indicators use the standard Eurostat age group for each series.

¹³Eurostat Employment annual statistics; Eurostat employment news

¹⁴Latest available in that extraction; Eurostat lfse_argan dataset

¹⁵Eurostat unemployment rate in 2025

¹⁶Eurostat unemployment news; Eurostat long-term unemployment article

¹⁷Administrative data collected annually in the PES Network.

¹⁸The decline has stalled since 2022, and 2024 has a break in series.

¹⁹Trends in PES – Assessment report on PES Capacity - 2025

²⁰Ibid

²¹Unemployment by sex and age - annual data

²²Employment - annual statistics

²³edat lfse_20 - Eurostat NEET news; Eurostat NEET statistics article

²⁴Eurostat Employment annual statistics

²⁵In 2025, Eurostat reports employment rates of 86.8% for people with high education, 75.1% for medium education and 58.2% for low education among ages 20-64.

²⁶disability employment gap by level of activity limitation and sex

temporary work, in-work poverty, low-wage sectors or facing employment gaps²⁷. Transitions into employment remained longer for older, less educated, and to a lesser extent female unemployed jobseekers²⁸. LTU persons continued to face additional barriers in entering the labour market. While the overarching LTU rate in the EU improved in 2021-2025, the share of LTU jobseekers reintegrated into employment as a percentage of the number of LTU persons registered with PES peaked in 2021 (at 4.3%), but has since been decreasing, to only 3.5% in 2023²⁹.

The ongoing digital and green transition also continued to rapidly reshape the world of work, with new professions emerging, existing roles being reshaped, and the demand for new skills on the rise. The level of ‘digitalness’ remained high, with at least 20% of skills needed across occupations requiring digital competences³⁰. In 2021, 54% of individuals in the EU had basic digital skills, with this share rising to 60% in 2025. Yet only 29% of them had above-basic digital skills in 2025.³¹ Europe’s efforts to achieve climate neutrality also contributed to profound changes in employment³². Online job advertisements point to rising demand for green skills, with green pervasiveness³³ steadily increasing across sectors between 2021 and 2024 (e.g. from 1.1% to 4.5% in the construction sector), requiring more workers to up- and reskill. The share of job vacancies in clean tech and manufacturing in the EU doubled in between 2019-2023³⁴; yet, in 2023, 25% of companies reported skills shortages in these areas, as reported in the 2024 Draghi report³⁵. Moreover, Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine had important implications for European labour markets and for PES. The influx of displaced persons from Ukraine under the EU Temporary Protection Directive³⁶ created an urgent need for labour market integration. On 30 April 2026, 4.37 million non-EU citizens fleeing Ukraine under temporary protection were identified in the EU. Germany, Poland and Czechia hosted the largest numbers.³⁷

3.2. Public Employment Services: Recent developments

Public Employment Services are the main public agencies implementing employment policies that facilitate labour market integration of jobseekers, helping to match supply and demand in the labour market. They play a key role in ensuring the successful implementation of relevant EU policy initiatives in the field of employment, thereby contributing to the Union’s competitiveness. Their structures vary by country, with differences in legal status, organisational setup, degree of independence from government

²⁷ [Joint Employment Report 2026](#); [Commission migration and EU labour market paper](#)

²⁸ [Trends in PES – Assessment report on PES Capacity - 2025](#)

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ This value is based on online-job-ad evidence only. [Cedefop digitalness dashboard](#); [Cedefop Skills-OVATE](#)

³¹ [Eurostat Skills for the digital age](#); [Digital Decade targets article](#); [Eurostat isoc sk_dskl_i21](#).

³² [Tracking the green transition in labour markets](#).

³³ [Cedefop, Greenness and green pervasiveness dashboard](#)

³⁴ [The future of European competitiveness: A competitiveness strategy for Europe](#).

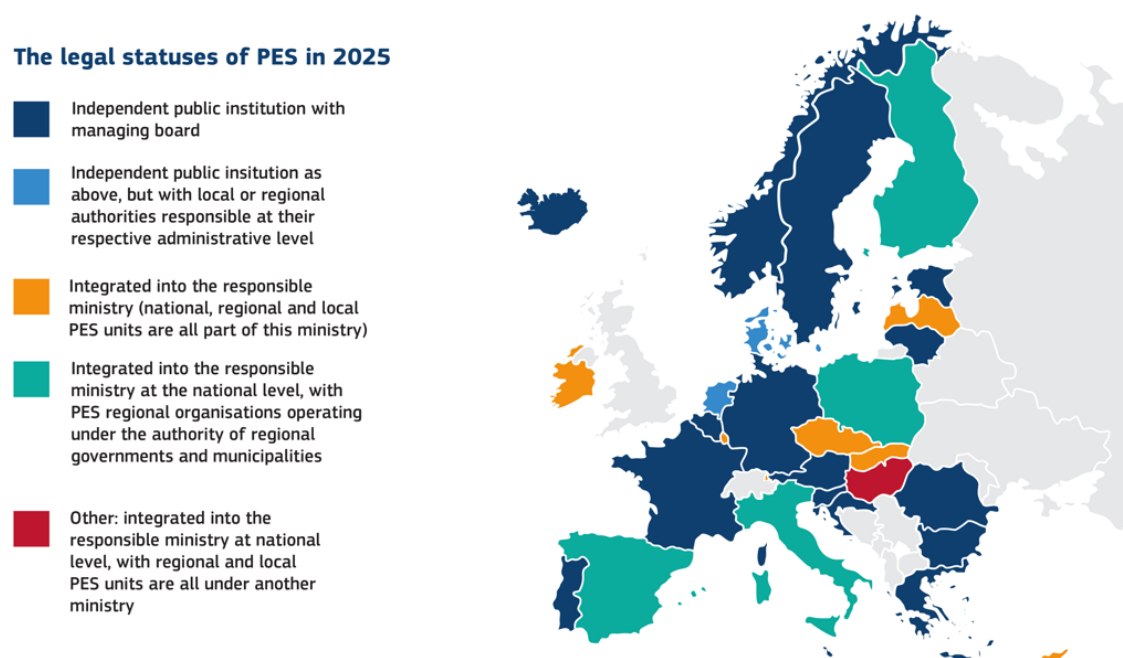
³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ [Council Directive 2001/55/EC](#).

³⁷ [Eurostat temporary protection monthly statistics](#); [Eurostat news release](#)

and distribution of tasks across administrative levels (Figure 2). PES' legal status remained broadly stable over the evaluation period, with a few exceptions (including FI, IT)³⁸.

Figure 2. The legal statuses of PES

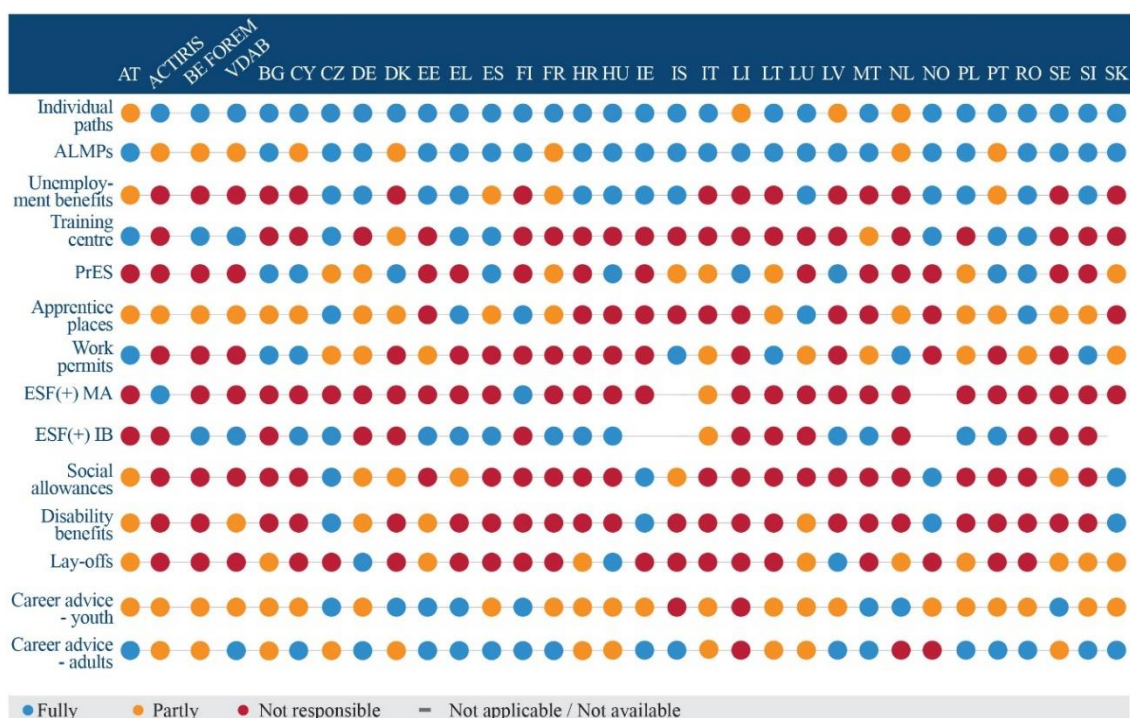


Source: *Trends in PES: Assessment report on PES capacity 2025*, [Trends in PES: Insights from the 2025 Capacity Report - Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion](#)

The services provided by PES to both jobseekers and employers include matching and support for job search, counselling, vocational guidance, support to placement, upskilling and reskilling, support to geographic and occupational mobility, labour market information, with variations across countries (Figure 3). In addition, PES are also frequently in charge of unemployment benefits and related activation measures (e.g. job-search obligations, training, reintegration support for mobile workers). As the designated competent institutions for unemployment benefits, they also contribute to the export of unemployment benefits across borders in the context of EU social security coordination rules.

Figure 3: PES responsibility by tasks and activities

³⁸ [PES Capacity Report 2021](#), p.14.



Source: Trends in PES: Assessment report on PES capacity 2025, [Trends in PES: Insights from the 2025 Capacity Report - Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion](#)

Note: Figure 3 provides an overview of the current services offered by the PESs and whether these services are the solely the responsibility of PES or shared with other partners. Individual paths refer to individualised assistance and follow-up of unemployed towards a planned path to sustainable employment. ALMPs refer to Active Labour Market Policies. ESF refers to the European Social Fund. Layoff refers to having measures for addressing a discharge of workers because of economic conditions or labour shortages.

While their core responsibilities showed little change between 2021 and 2025³⁹, PES adapted their services in response to a tighter labour market:

- **Tackling long-term challenges and structural inequalities** - PES increasingly focused on long-term challenges and structural inequalities, with services targeting vulnerable groups (e.g. LTUs, people with disabilities, youth, 55+ workers, displaced persons from Ukraine and migrants), or covering these groups under specific objectives. In 2023, all PES set strategies and targets to ease labour market access for the most vulnerable groups, and in 2024 around 80% of PES worked with employers with the specific aim of supporting disadvantaged groups⁴⁰.
- **Supporting new types of customers** - While registered jobseekers remain their core target groups, PES increased efforts to provide services towards employed clients at risk of losing their job⁴¹ and supporting those outside the labour force⁴². There has been increasing outreach and preventive measures to support employees at risk of being

³⁹PES Capacity Report 2021p.13, [Trends in PES – Assessment report on PES Capacity - 2025](#)

⁴⁰[Trends in PES – Assessment report on PES Capacity - 2025](#)

⁴¹[Early intervention and job-to-job transitions - The evolving role of PES](#)

⁴²[Hidden potential - Publications Office of the EU](#)

made redundant and reaching out to workers in sectors affected by the twin transition (e.g. counselling and career advice)⁴³. By 2023, over 70% of PES had launched services to help those outside the labour force find work⁴⁴. Following Russia's war of aggression on Ukraine, PES swiftly ramped up their efforts to support the labour market integration of persons displaced, with over 350.000 Ukrainians registering with PES between 2022 and 2023⁴⁵.

- **Growing focus on skills** - PES have played an increasing role in skills assessment, supporting up and reskilling, informing both jobseekers and employers about existing and emerging skills gaps, and anticipating future skills needs. By 2025, over 80% of PES were conducting skills assessments, and 91% provided upskilling and reskilling opportunities for the unemployed. They have also made an increasing use of skills intelligence tools to improve labour market diagnosis.
- **Addressing labour shortages** - Over two-thirds of PES (66%, 21/32) now offer an expanded range of updated services to employers to tackle shortages, up from 2023. All but one PES (31/32) have implemented at least one of nine key measures⁴⁶ (primarily enhancing employer outreach and collaboration), while 19% (6/32) have adopted the full set of nine, underlining a comprehensive response to workforce challenges. PES are also increasingly focusing on recruiting talent from abroad⁴⁷.
- **Supporting the twin digital and green transition** - The share of PES tackling labour shortages related to digital and green skills increased (to almost 70% in 2024), with several providing services to individuals with low digital skills (e.g. foundational and advanced/sector-specific digital skills training, certification schemes). Between 2021 and 2024, at least 12 PES formulated green transition strategies, implementing measures to tackle the impacts of greener labour markets (upskilling/reskilling, defining and mapping green skills, and cooperating with employers), or mainstreaming the green transition into their activities⁴⁸.
- **Accelerated digital transformation** – Post-pandemic years have seen a clear shift towards the digitalisation of core PES services. By 2023, all PES had either initiated or further developed digital strategies and over two-thirds had introduced digital or hybrid services to jobseekers and employers⁴⁹. By 2025, digital tools were commonly used for jobseeker registration, vacancy matching, and satisfaction monitoring, while more personalised services – such as career guidance and individual action plans –

⁴³[Trends in PES – Assessment report on PES Capacity - 2025](#)

⁴⁴[Trends in PES – Assessment report on PES capacity – 2023.](#)

⁴⁵See [Public Employment Services support to persons displaced from Ukraine: latest developments - Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion](#) & [Public Employment Services step up support to persons displaced from Ukraine: Latest developments - Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion](#)https://employment-social-affairs.ec.europa.eu/news/public-employment-services-step-support-persons-displaced-ukraine-latest-developments-2023-03-15_en

⁴⁶ [Trends in PES – Assessment report on PES Capacity - 2025](#) pg. 80.

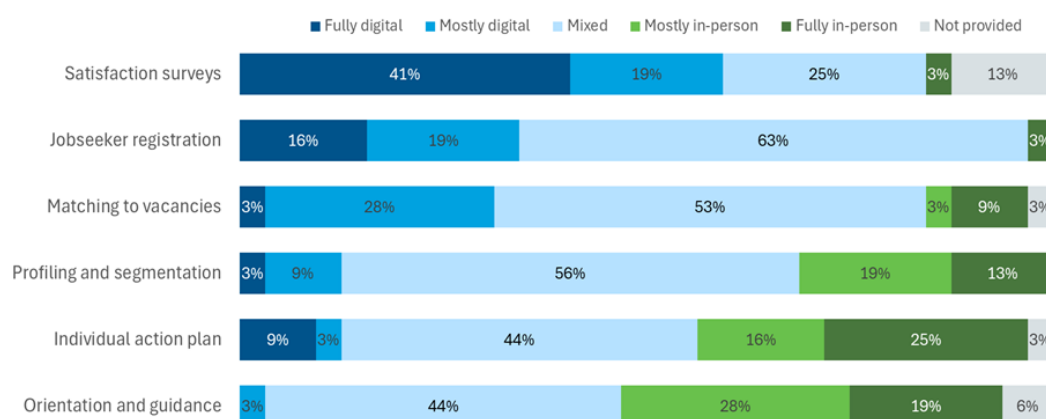
⁴⁷ [How Public Employment Services Can Help Attract Skilled Talent from Third Countries](#)

⁴⁸ <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=28034&langId=en>

⁴⁹[Trends in PES – Assessment report on PES capacity – 2023.](#)

often still relied on in-person interaction (See Figure 4). 60% of PES (19 out of 32) used Artificial Intelligence (AI), for example to assist profiling and skills-based matching.

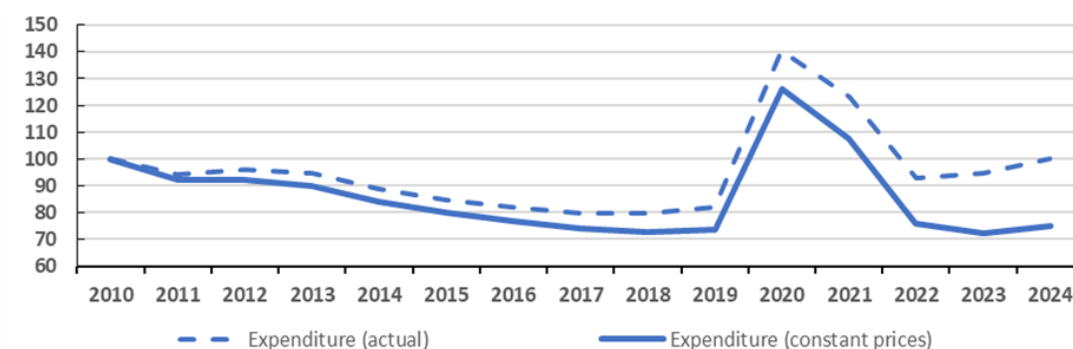
Figure 4. Extent to which services to jobseekers are digitalised across the 32 PES



Source: Trends in PES: Assessment report on PES capacity 2025

Despite a substantial blip during the COVID-19 crisis, PES expenditure measured in constant prices has largely been in decline since 2010 and throughout the evaluation period, reaching a new low in 2023, before rising slightly. In 2024, PES expenditure was 6.2% higher than in 2023, primarily as a result of increased spending on social benefits (mostly unemployment benefits).

Figure 5. PES expenditure, PES Network, 2010-2024 (index 2010=100)



Source: Trends in PES: Assessment report on PES capacity 2025

3.3 The PES Network over 2021-2025

This section presents the PES Network's organisation and key activities in the field of governance, Benchlearning and mutual learning, highlighting key developments over 2021-2025. Contributions to EU policies are presented in the following section.

3.3.1 Main activities and evolution

Governance and organisation

The Network's main governing body is a Board, composed of Heads of PES from each member country and representatives from the Commission. The Employment Committee representative holds observer status. The Board meets twice a year in the Member State holding the EU Presidency, setting the strategic direction of the Network, discussing labour market developments and monitoring the work programme's implementation. Advisors for European PES Affairs (AFEPAs), appointed in all participating PES, support and prepare the decision-making process. During the evaluation period, the Network was led by Chairs from Austria (2019-2023), Belgium-Brussels Region (2023-2025), and Greece (2025), with first Vice-Chairs from Greece (2020–2023) and Lithuania (2024–2025). Liechtenstein joined as a new member in 2021.

The Network's Secretariat is hosted by the Commission's Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion. Over the evaluation period, two annual and two biannual work programmes were delivered, with the last one set to be completed in 2026. In 2023, the Network transitioned to a multiannual work programme (updated annually) to streamline activities and rationalise planning. Outcomes are detailed in the Network's annual reports, which are submitted to the European Parliament and the Council. The Network itself is supported by funding from the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+, EaSI strand), covering both operational and administrative costs.

Benchlearning⁵⁰

Since its inception, the PES Network has supported its members across Europe to improve their performance by comparing themselves with peer PES via qualitative and quantitative assessments. The aim is to support each PES in improving its capacity and performance through evidence-based comparisons and peer-driven learning.

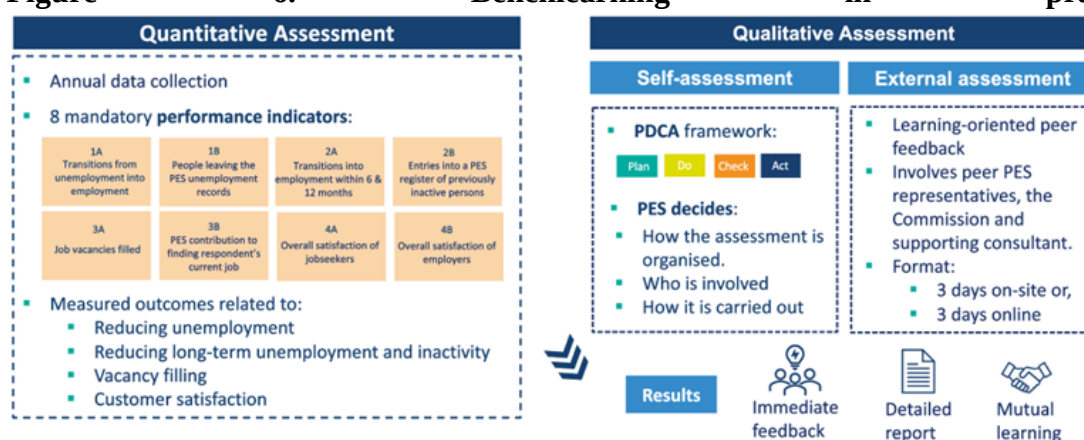
Quantitative benchmarking is the data-driven component of the Benchlearning process. PES administrative data is collected each year to provide the eight mandatory benchmarking indicators listed in the Annex to the Decision. Over the evaluation period, efforts focused on identifying overlaps and aligning more closely with the EU Labour Market Policy (LMP) database. Updated guidelines were produced to improved data quality and country fiches were introduced to better support the qualitative assessments. These changes aimed to simplify reporting requirements, while strengthening the reliability and relevance of PES data.

⁵⁰The concept of Benchlearning is defined in Article 2 of the PES Decision as 'the process of creating a systematic and integrated link between benchmarking and mutual learning activities (...)'. In practice, it has been used to refer to qualitative and quantitative benchmarking defined in the PES Decision annex.

Through qualitative benchmarking, members undergo an individual assessment by a team of assessors during an on-site visit. Qualitative assessments are based on a self-assessment, building on a common ‘Excellence model’⁵¹. Areas of qualitative benchmarking listed in the Annex to the PES Decision include: 1. Strategic performance management; 2. Design of operational processes such as effective channelling and profiling of jobseekers and tailored use of active labour market instruments; 3. Sustainable activation and management of transitions; 4. Relations to employers; 5. Evidence-based design and implementation of PES services; 6. Effective management of partnerships with stakeholders; 7. Allocation of PES resources.

Thematic Learning Dialogues (TLDs), a format introduced in 2019, conclude each cycle with a series of dedicated peer sessions that build on the outcomes of Benchlearning to offer an in-depth, practical focus on key challenges identified during the cycle.

Figure 6. Benchlearning in practice



Source: ICF for the PES Secretariat/Commission

Between 2021 and 2025, the Network conducted two Benchlearning cycles, fully or partially: the third cycle (2020–2023), which concluded in 2023 with nine TLDs, and the fourth cycle (2024–2026), with TLDs still ongoing at the time of drafting the evaluation, though all site visits were concluded. The methodology was adapted for each new cycle to address emerging challenges. (See Annex VI for a comparative analysis of the Excellence Model across cycles, highlighting both continuity and adaptations).

Mutual learning: events, reporting and analytical activities, communication

The Network organises a variety of mutual learning events to facilitate collaboration and innovation, each with distinct objectives. Thematic Reviews, hosted by a PES, use a 1.5-day format to examine specific topics, with a practical focus. Two formats offer a deeper collaboration through multiple meetings: Working Groups (WGs), hosted by a PES, enable ongoing collaboration, in-depth learning and practical cooperation on critical topics, while Mutual Assistance Projects (MAPs) provide tailored peer-driven counselling to one PES to address specific needs, often as a follow-up to Benchlearning recommendations. While most events are internal, the annual stakeholder conference

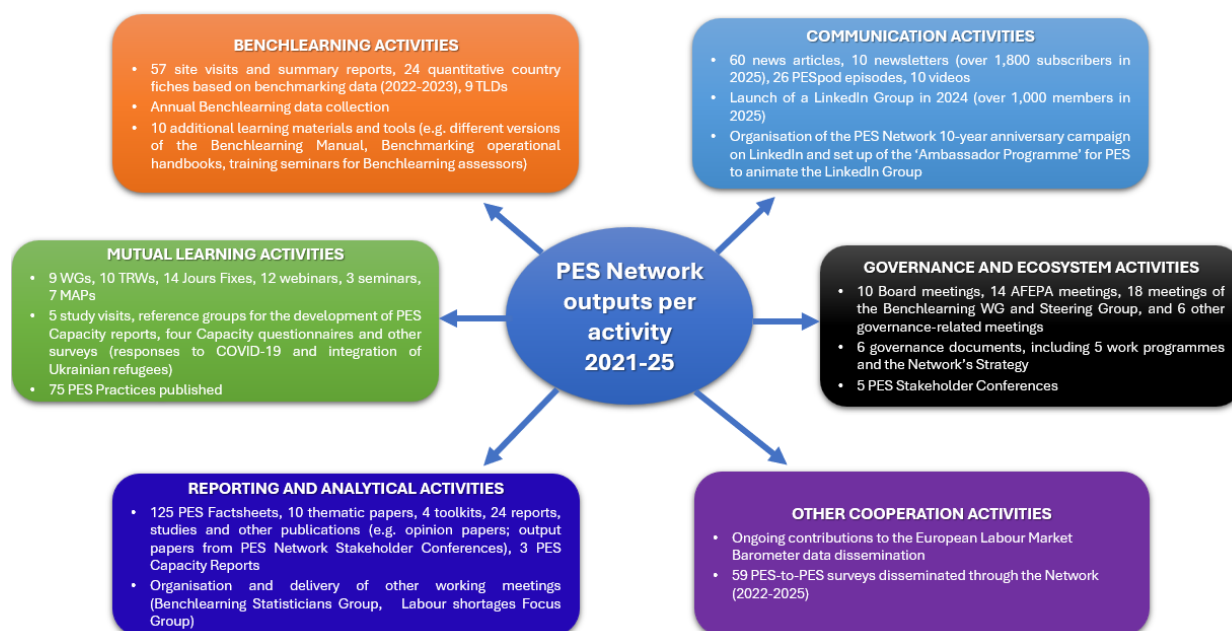
⁵¹[Benchlearning Manual](#)

fosters strategic dialogue with external partners. Additionally, seminars provide focused networking opportunities to explore thematic issues, linking them to policy developments. A new online mutual learning format ('Jour Fixe') was introduced in 2021 to allow more flexible and reactive exchanges in a more confidential context. Over the evaluation period, the Network made an increasing use of webinars and online meetings. The practice, developed for most of the activities in 2020 and 2021, was maintained to some extent in the post- COVID period (see section on Efficiency).

Events are complemented by a wide range of **reports and analytical activities**. Thematic papers summarise learning elements from events, while toolkits provide practical tips for PES to integrate in their day-to-day work. PES Capacity Reports examine trends in PES, with a focus on PES' internal organisation and management, legal status, services, target groups: a new, biannual format was launched in 2025. Other reports (often based on surveys), studies and publications cover a wide range of topics relevant to the PES. Four opinion papers were also published as inputs to EU policies.

During the evaluation period, the PES Network revamped its **communications activities** and strategy, supported by WGs led successively by Estonia, Austria and Lithuania. Streamlined news items highlight outputs, while the updated newsletter offers curated content. A podcast series (launched in 2021) invites guests to explore PES practices and trends while video content tailored for social media features interviews with PES changemakers and stakeholders. A new Network's LinkedIn Group was launched in 2024 and has reached over 1200 members, as a collaborative space for sharing news and experiences. A fresh visual identity was adopted in 2025, and a modernised website serves as the central hub for information.

Figure 7. Overview of PES Network outputs (per activities, 2021-2025)



Box 1. Address new challenges through multi-format responses

Between 2021 and 2025, the PES Network adapted its mutual learning activities, deploying a range of formats to respond swiftly to post-pandemic recovery and new priorities.

Post-COVID recovery - The PES Network consolidated lessons from the pandemic through regular online exchanges and targeted surveys. PES' crisis responses were addressed via a focus group on short- time work schemes, a [study](#) on recovery and a [report](#) on staff management in the 'new normal'. This enabled rapid documentation and dissemination of adaptable crisis-response policies.

Supporting persons displaced from Ukraine⁵² - In March and May 2022, in the weeks following the start of Russia's war of aggression on Ukraine, the Network held online meetings with AFEPA and Heads of PES. In March, it launched a regular [survey](#) to monitor registrations of persons displaced with PES and support provided to them⁵³. In October, an exchange of practices was co-hosted by Germany and Sweden. Additionally, Heads of PES engaged in discussions in June with the EU Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights, and in December with the Ukrainian Deputy Minister of Economy and the Commissioner's Special Adviser on the integration of people fleeing Ukraine. The following year, a WG on the Integration of Displaced People and Refugees updated the PES Network's '[Key Considerations](#)', which were presented at the Ukraine Solidarity Platform in October 2023.

Digital transformation - Since 2022, a dedicated WG (successively led by the Netherlands, Estonia and co-led by France and Germany) has facilitated collaboration among PES IT staff to advance digital transformation. The Network published a [study on AI in PES](#), while a WG led by Norway developed a [Framework for ethical standards of AI in PES](#). The Network also focused on the impact of digitalisation on (vulnerable) customers, through a [toolkit](#) and a [thematic review](#) hosted by Croatia.

Green transition - Specific activities included discussions at Board meetings, the publication of an [opinion paper](#) and a [study](#), as well as a [thematic review](#) hosted by Germany, which informed a [toolkit](#) to support

⁵²More information on the joint response is provided in this [news item](#) and a specific [podcast](#) episode.

⁵³Which inputted in the Commission Communication "[Welcoming those fleeing war in Ukraine](#)" and [Guidelines on labour market integration of persons displaced](#) adopted in 2022

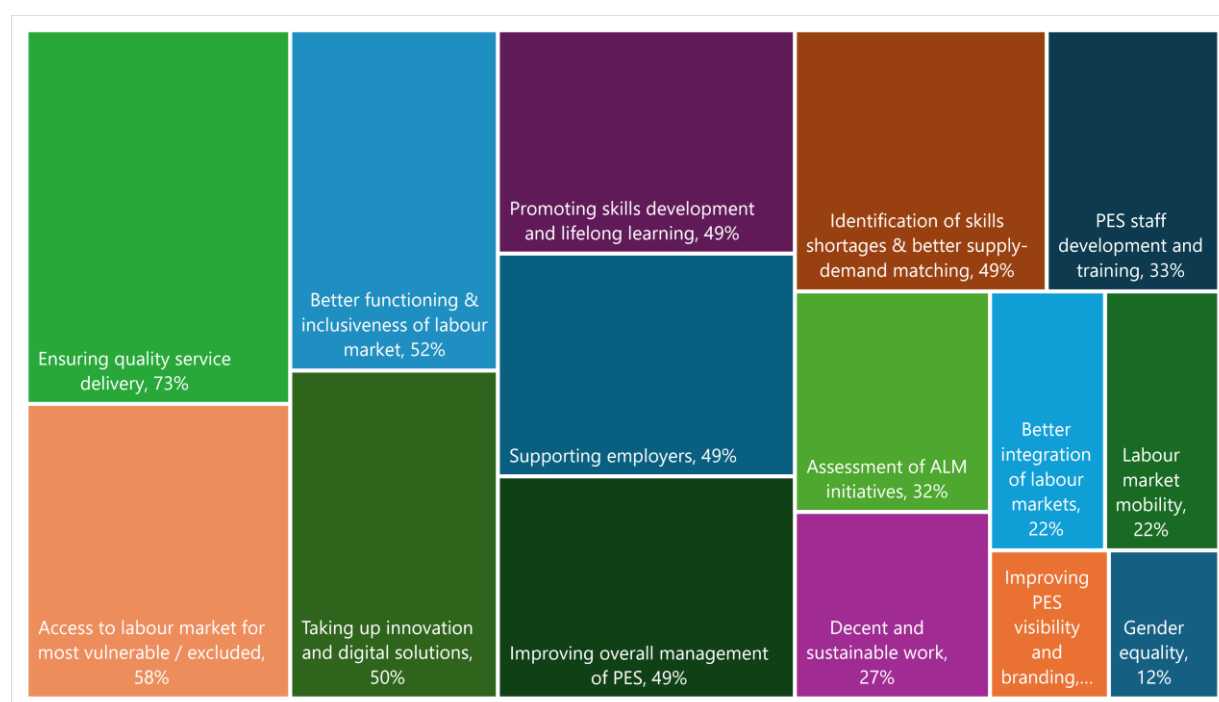
capacity building. The issue was also central to the WG on taxonomy, led by Sweden, which piloted a common approach to defining green jobs. Additionally, the [2024 Benchlearning Manual](#) incorporated a new emphasis on sustainability, while the Network contributed to the [Catalogue of Actions](#) developed by the dedicated WAPES G7 WG.

3.3.2 Thematic focus

The PES Network produced **653 outputs across activity strands** in 2021-2025 (see figure 7), reflecting the challenges on the EU labour market and in Member States during the evaluation period which, in turn, impacted the work of PES.

Based on their thematic coverage (See Figure 8), these outputs can be broadly categorised into two groups. The first group includes all PES Network outputs focusing on how PES can tackle ongoing challenges in the labour market (4 categories: access to the labour market for the most vulnerable (58% of outputs), better functioning and inclusiveness of the labour market (52%), promoting skills development and lifelong learning and identifying skills shortages for better supply-demand matching (49%) and other labour market challenges). The second group of outputs focuses on improving PES organisation and management (6 categories: ensuring quality service delivery (73% of outputs), taking up innovation and digital solutions (10%), improving the overall management of PES (49%), supporting employment (49%), PES staff development and training (33%), and improving PES visibility and branding (13%)).

Figure 8. PES Network outputs contribution to thematic areas (2021-2025)



Notes: Analysis based on the areas covered in Art. 3 and 4 of the PES Decision and challenges affecting the labour market over 2021-2025. Some outputs covered more than one of the thematic areas. Thematic areas with fewer than 10% of contributions are not shown to maintain readability. These include “other” thematic areas corresponding to respondents’ suggestions in the primary research undertaken as part of the case studies and stakeholder consultation activities.

3.3.3 PES performance and modernisation: outcomes from Benchlearning

This section presents key trends and divides in PES performance emerging from the third and fourth Benchlearning cycles.

3.3.3.1 Benchlearning Methodology: Evolution and Key Success Factors

The Benchlearning methodology has evolved through a history of continuous improvement, underpinned by the collaborative contributions of all PES Network members. The successful implementation of the first four cycles has been driven by several key factors: trust and collaboration among participants, including both generalists and data specialists; confidentiality in the handling of shared data and information; participant-led programme, tailored to the needs and priorities of PES; high engagement levels, with 60 assessors from 24 PES trained and deployed for the fourth cycle in 2024.

3.3.3.2 Performance Trends: Third and Fourth Cycle Findings

PES exhibit varying performance levels, influenced by differences in governance, leadership, operational processes, and external factors (e.g. labour market conditions, legislative frameworks, and institutional constraints). While many of these elements lie beyond PES control, they significantly shape outcomes.

The Benchlearning methodology has undergone progressive refinement, particularly between the third and fourth cycles, to reflect shifts in the PES operational environment. Although core elements remain consistent, updates to the Excellence Model—including

heightened maturity-level requirements—have affected scoring. Consequently, direct comparisons between the third and fourth cycles should be made with caution, as methodological adjustments may influence longitudinal trends.

An overview of outcomes of the third and fourth cycles is presented in Annex VI: it provides a basis for assessing progress, though interpretations must account for contextual disruptions (e.g., COVID-19).

Third Cycle: Progress and persistent challenges⁵⁴

The third cycle revealed notable improvements across all assessed areas, largely driven by PES responses to the COVID-19 crisis. Key advancements included: performance management and digitalisation; support for vulnerable groups and labour market stabilisation measures; enhanced collaboration with partners and greater team autonomy.

However, structural challenges persisted, particularly in service digitalisation (uneven adoption); quality management (often perceived as a compliance exercise rather than a tool for improvement); strategic employer engagement (lack of proactive approaches); weak evaluation culture within the Network. The pandemic's impact on assessments results remains difficult to quantify, given its potential influence on self-reporting content, assessors' judgments, and the shift to online assessments (a first for the programme). A potential positive bias in scoring cannot be ruled out, as all PES demonstrated resilience in maintaining service continuity during the crisis.

Fourth Cycle: emerging divides

Preliminary fourth-cycle findings suggest a polarisation in performance (see Annex VI). While a small cohort of high-performing PES is nearing alignment with the global Excellence Model, a second group remains at levels consistent with second- and third-cycle outcomes, with limited progress in critical areas: performance management and overall strategy; digitalisation (jobseeker/employer services); quality management, monitoring, and evaluation; partnership governance and HR modernisation. While quality management remains a Network-wide challenge, persistent issues from the third cycle—such as digitalisation gaps, reactive employer engagement, and weak partnership ecosystems—are concentrated in lower-performing PES.

To address these findings, 10 TLDs are being organised in 2026: seven section-specific TLDs (e.g., section D “relations to employer”, with a focus on skills-based vacancy matching) and three cross-cutting TLDs on impact and efficiency KPIs; customer-centric service design; decentralised PES models. Lower-performing PES will be prioritised for participation in TLDs aligned with their recommendation themes, ensuring targeted capacity-building.

⁵⁴ More information on the outcomes of the 3rd cycle, including distribution of organisational maturity by PES, can be found [here](#).

3.4 Link with EU instruments broader policy framework

3.4.1 PES use of EU Funds

EU funds play a pivotal role in supporting the modernisation of PES at both strategic and operational levels and their delivery of ALMPs. Ensuring that these funds are used effectively to drive meaningful reforms and advancements remains essential.

The **European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)** finances a range of initiatives to support PES services for employers and jobseekers (including via ALMPs, training for unemployed persons, workers at risk of job loss, and outplacement schemes), as well as to foster PES capacity (for instance through staff training, digitalisation of services, and the development of skills intelligence and labour market forecasting). These interventions are primarily programmed under the specific objectives on access to employment and modernising labour market institutions. The majority of funding under the ESF+ is allocated under shared management⁵⁵ with the Member States. In 2025, two PES act as a managing authority (in Belgium - Brussels Region in Finland) and 14 PES as an intermediate body⁵⁶. An estimated 14.5 billion euros of ESF+ funding is available for PES-related activities during the 2021–2027 programming period, with national co-financing from Member States bringing the total potential support to 21.4 billion euros⁵⁷.

Box 2. Supporting the design of ESF + funded HR measures in Romania

A MAP in Romania was completed in August 2025. It provided the Romanian PES with support in developing a modern HR strategy in the context of large-scale project supported by the ESF+. It showcased approaches, tools, and techniques from Belgium (Wallonia), France and the Netherlands on topics including resource allocation and recruitment processes; onboarding of new staff; skills development as well as retention and engagement of staff. *Source: Annual report 2025*

Beyond ESF+, PES also use other EU funding instruments⁵⁸. The **Technical Support Instrument (TSI)** has been mobilised to foster innovative practices addressing long-term unemployment, implement national skills frameworks, upgrade counselling services, and develop new client management or integrated quality management systems. For instance, it has supported the design of public employment services for economically inactive people in Poland⁵⁹, the reform and modernisation of the PES in Greece⁶⁰, the implementation of the Common Employment Services Portfolio and various ALMP reforms in Spain⁶¹ and the modernisation and optimisation of public employment services in Bulgaria⁶².

⁵⁵[Shared management European Social Fund Plus](#)

⁵⁶[Trends in PES: Insights from the 2025 Capacity Report - Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion](#), Annex1, pg.126.

⁵⁷Source: European Commission, based on analysis of operational programmes capturing broad intentions of managing authorities to invest in areas with PES relevance.

⁵⁸An overview of PES use of EU funds can be found in the [PES capacity report 2023](#) (section 8.3)

⁵⁹[Developing Public Employment Services for Economically Inactive People in Poland - Reforms and Investments](#)

⁶⁰See [Improving the delivery of public employment services - Reforms and Investments](#), [Supporting Greece to implement a National Skills Framework for Learning Pathways - Reforms and Investments](#) & [Reform of the unemployment benefit system in Greece - Reforms and Investments](#)

⁶¹See [Strengthening the implementation of the Common Portfolio of Employment Services in Spain](#), [Strengthening policies and governance arrangements within the Spanish national employment system](#).

⁶²[Optimising processes and services at Bulgaria's National Employment Agency](#)

Benchlearning recommendations developed in the context of the PES Network were used in this context. A multi-country project is supporting PES from France and Greece on improving PES effectiveness through AI and data solutions⁶³.

The **Recovery Assistance for Cohesion and the Territories of Europe (REACT-EU)** has been used by PES in several Member States, to support various forms of active labour market policies and COVID-19 mitigation measures. The **Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF)** has supported structural improvements, including upgrades to infrastructure, performance management systems, and the modernisation and digitalisation of PES services⁶⁴. It also funds specific ALMPs, such as measures targeting vulnerable groups, wage subsidies, green transition support, and business creation schemes. The **Just Transition Fund (JTF)** complements these efforts by funding reskilling and other measures in regions affected by the transition to a green economy.

3.4.2 Contribution to EU policy initiatives

The Network operates within the EU employment policy framework, supporting the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, particularly Principle 1 (education, training, and lifelong learning) and Principle 4 (active support to employment).

Throughout 2021-2025, the Network was involved in the development, monitoring and implementation of EU employment policies through both multilateral surveillance⁶⁵ and complementary policy initiatives. In the context of the European Semester, Employment Guideline 7 invites Member States to ‘make the best use of EU funding and technical support to enhance the capacity of public employment services to provide timely and tailor-made assistance to jobseekers, respond to current and future labour-market needs, and implement performance-based management, supporting their capacity to use data and digital technology’. In 2025, fifteen Country Specific Recommendation were issued in relation to Active Labour Market Policies and activation. The PES Network has taken part in yearly EMCO multilateral surveillance reviews on the issue. The Network also indirectly supported the European Semester via Directorate-General Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (DG EMPL) geographical desks’ participation in Benchlearning assessments and contributions by the PES Network Secretariat to relevant Semester analysis. Country Reports frequently reference PES challenges, occasionally highlighting the need to strengthen PES⁶⁶. **The Network also contributed to the implementation and monitoring of specific EU policy initiatives.** These include in particular the Council Recommendation of 30 October 2020 on the reinforced Youth Guarantee, Council Recommendation of 15 February 2016 on the integration of the LTU into the labour market, as well as the employment-related aspects of the Council

⁶³ See more information at [Improving public employment services through Artificial Intelligence and data solutions in France and Greece - Reforms and Investments](#)

⁶⁴ [2025_RRF-Research-Study-on-Labour-Market.pdf](#)

⁶⁵ With PES Chairs attending six EMCO meetings in the evaluation period, often due to the Network’s formal monitoring role.

⁶⁶ PES were mentioned in 11, 13, 13, 19 and 25 Country Report issues as part of the European Semester in 2022, 2023, 2024, 2025, and 2026 respectively. In the 2026 Spring Package, PES were mentioned in 25 Country Reports, 6 Recitals, and 3 Country Specific Recommendations (CY, RO, BG).

Recommendation on adequate minimum income ensuring active inclusion of 31 January 2023 and the European Skills Guarantee. It is also set to play a role in supporting disadvantaged groups' access to the labour market in the context of the EU's first Anti-Poverty Strategy, adopted by the Commission on 6 May 2026 notably of persons with disabilities, who will be supported by a strengthened Disability Employment Package, in line with the Communication on Enhancing the Strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities up to 2030

Over the course of the evaluation period, the Network broadened its focus to a wider range of policy areas, responding to emerging or growing labour market challenges (Table 2). This involved active engagement with the European Skills Agenda (particularly the monitoring and implementation of Council Recommendations of 16 June 2022 on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability (2022/C 243/02) and on individual learning accounts (2022/C 243/03)) and the Union of Skills. It also supported the implementation of the Commission Action Plan on tackling labour and skills shortages, adopted in March 2024. More broadly, the Network contributed to the implementation of other Union policies. These include in particular labour mobility and labour migration, employment-related aspects of the European Green Deal, support to persons displaced from Ukraine, as well as enlargement policy.

Table 2: Selected examples of the Network's contributions to EU policies

Policy areas	Examples of contributions by the Network
Policy initiatives in the field of employment	- PES Network Memorandum to the Next European Leadership (2024) - Opinion Paper on the European Pillar of Social Rights' Action Plan Review (2025)
Active support to employment (including for vulnerable groups)	- Report 'Remuneration of Open-Market Traineeships' (2021) - Thematic paper on 'Youth employment support' (2021) - Capacity Report 2021 and Capacity Report 2023 on the reinforced Youth Guarantee, input to EMCO review - Practitioner toolkit (2022, part of the Commission's Disability Employment Package) - Capacity Report: Labour market training for the long-term unemployed (2022), input to EMCO review - Thematic paper on 'New forms of PES service delivery' (2023). - Joint Minimum Income Network and AFEPA meeting (2024), input to Minimum Income Report (2025) - Targeted consultation on the Anti-Poverty Strategy (2025)
Education, training and lifelong learning, and skills	- Conference on 'Empowering the Workforce, Bridging the Skills Gap', input to an Opinion Paper on European Year of Skills (2023) - Thematic paper 'New forms of skills assessment and validation' (2023) - Capacity Report on Individual Learning Accounts (2025), input to EMCO review - Thematic paper on 'Skills and labour market intelligence' (2025).

	- Targeted consultation on the Skill Portability Initiative and the VET Strategy (2026) - Taxonomy WG focusing on Skills Portability (2026)
Labour mobility and migration	- Input in the Communication on “Welcoming those fleeing war in Ukraine” and Guidelines on labour market integration of persons displaced (2022) - Talent Pool: Targeted consultation via survey and discussion at AFEPA meeting (2023) - Key considerations on the ‘Labour market integration of displaced people and refugees’ (2023) - Thematic papers Attracting skilled labour from third countries (2024), Fair Recruitment of Third Country Nationals (2026) - Participation in the Implementation Dialogue on Fair Labour Mobility with EVP Minzatu (2025)
Green transition	- Position Paper ‘A contribution to greening the labour market’ (2021). - Toolkit on ‘Green Skills and Jobs: From commitment to practical steps and strategies’ (2025, presented during EMCO review on Fair Transition Council Recommendation) - Taxonomy WG piloting a common approach to green jobs (2023-2025)
Enlargement policy	- Commission’s New Growth Plan for Western Balkans (2023) calls to explore participation in PES Network activities - PES Board decision to enhance cooperation with enlargement countries (2024)
EU funding programmes	- Capacity report with specific section assessing the use of EU funds by PES (2023). - PES Network Statement on the ESF+ (2025)

4. EVALUATION FINDINGS (ANALYTICAL PART)

The evaluation questions covering all evaluation criteria are presented in Annex III.

4.1 To what extent was the intervention successful and why?

4.1.1 Effectiveness

The amended PES Decision has been effective in strengthening cooperation, mutual learning, and performance improvement across PES, particularly in enhancing transparency through Benchlearning, facilitating the exchange and uptake of good practices, piloting and fostering operational cooperation, and supporting improvements in PES service delivery, digitalisation, and employer engagement. It has also fostered a strong community among PES, enabling both formal and informal cooperation across Member States and contributing increasingly to EU employment policy priorities. However, the current limited dissemination of the outcomes of Benchlearning assessments, while strengthening trust among participating PES, has partially affected the transparency of PES performance towards stakeholders external to the Network.

4.1.1.1 Benchlearning activities' success in assessing and achieving increased transparency of PES performance (EQ1a)

Benchlearning activities have been successful in assessing PES performance and encouraging organisational change. Benchlearning has facilitated a structured, systematic, and comprehensive analysis of PES performance, contributing to creating a cultural shift in PES towards self-reflection and internal cooperation. Benchlearning self-assessments require different national PES departments and roles to cooperate, developing a shared understanding of PES performance. All 31 respondents to the AFEPA survey reported that Benchlearning activities have contributed to better identification of PES development areas to a large (21 respondents) or some (10 respondents) extent. The peer review aspect of Benchlearning is particularly valued, creating a judgment-free space, as confirmed by multiple EU level interviewees and the AFEPA workshop.

Some evidence shows an increased transparency of PES performance, both at national and EU-Level, compared to the previous evaluation period. External stakeholders were included in the site visit assessments for the first time in the 4th cycle methodology for dedicated sessions on PES ecosystem, which increased external transparency at country level (as highlighted by desk research and case studies⁶⁷). At the EU-level, data from Benchlearning has been increasingly used to inform annual PES Capacity reports and various Commission publications⁶⁸ (based on a data collection report revamped in 2024), and a summary of outcomes from the 3rd cycle was published⁶⁹. Interviewees from EU institutions reported that participating in Benchlearning as observers provided them with a better understanding of the challenges faced by PES.

⁶⁷External Study, page 24.

⁶⁸E.g. [Employment and Social Developments in Europe 2025](#), pg.120.

⁶⁹See summary outcomes of the 3rd cycle at:
<https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=26801&langId=en>

However, transparency of PES performance at the broader EU level remains reduced by the limited access to Benchlearning data from external stakeholders (NGOs, social partners, and Commission staff not directly involved in the PES Network). This also leads to reduced coherence between the PES Network and labour market stakeholders/EU policies, as highlighted in section 4.1.3 (Coherence). Wider dissemination of some Benchlearning assessments results would, however, need to be balanced against the need to maintain a safe space for PES to share sensitive data and information, a factor identified as critical to Benchlearning's success.

4.1.1.2. Facilitating mutual learning, mutual assistance and uptake of good practices (EQ1b)

The PES Decision has facilitated mutual learning and mutual assistance to a large extent, with strong evidence of good practice uptake across participating PES (Study Annex 9). Mutual learning events, mutual assistance and Benchlearning activities, in particular, provided PES with opportunities to assess their practices, identify ways to improve performance, and implement innovations (as highlighted by desk research and the AFEPA survey)⁷⁰.

Consultations show that mutual learning events and outputs were consistently very positively viewed⁷¹, with consultees, particularly AFEPA, frequently highlighting that they provided a space to learn about PES practices on service delivery and management processes. A majority of surveyed AFEPA reported that mutual learning events facilitated knowledge exchange *to a large/some extent* (see Figure 9). Mutual learning events (the second-largest work strand with 22% of 650+ outputs, 2021–2025⁷²) were also the most well-known aspect of the PES Network to stakeholders not directly involved in it, implying that these activities are widely recognised and help disseminate the Network's work beyond those directly involved.

Benchlearning is the foundational activity in facilitating mutual learning. Assessments require PES to identify areas for improvement, in turn triggering engagement in mutual learning, as found in the consultations and also noted in the 2025 PES Network Monitoring report. 21 of 31 AFEPA surveys stated that Benchlearning has facilitated mutual learning *to a large extent* (Figure 9). TLDs - a new format only introduced in 2019 - were effective in promoting mutual learning among PES, as highlighted in findings from the AFEPA survey and the workshops. There were also strong links between Benchlearning and mutual assistance, with MAPs used to address Benchlearning recommendations⁷³.

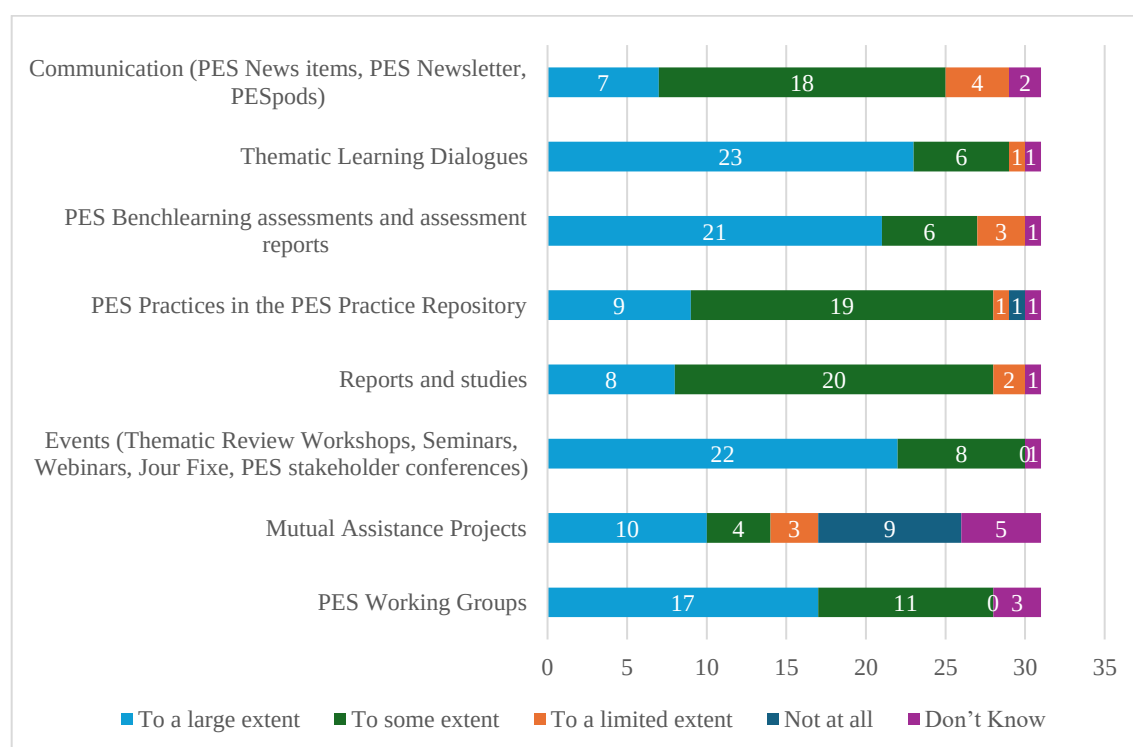
⁷⁰External Study, page 25

⁷¹EU institutions, agencies and structures, international agencies, social partners and civil society organisations interviews; AFEPA, and national stakeholders consulted in surveys and case studies.

⁷²Study Annex 6.

⁷³Examples of impact are provided in ANNEX VIII

Figure 9. To what extent have each of the following PES Network outputs facilitated mutual learning in your PES?



Source: AFEPA survey (n=31)

Overall, mutual learning facilitated by PES Network activities has led to the uptake of good practices to a large extent (Study Annex 9). Multiple examples were provided by consultees and evidenced in desk research. Some types of activities found to be most often leading to the uptake of good practices in PES, in particular Thematic Review Workshops (TRW), WGs, MAPs and TLDs. **Evidence is more mixed on the extent to which other PES Network activities led to the uptake of good practices.** Resource-sharing platforms (e.g., PES Knowledge Centre, Dashboard) were found to be helpful repositories, yet no direct uptake examples were provided. No examples were provided of webinars leading directly to uptake, likely due to their focus on external promotion and dissemination of reports. Reports and studies were perceived to have impacted mutual learning to a large extent by only 8 out of 31 respondents to the AFEPA survey. This is likely due to the large range of reports produced, their focus on promoting the work of PES towards external stakeholders (e.g. annual reports) and, in the case of output papers, the fact that their impact should be considered jointly to that of related events.

Other outcomes from mutual learning and mutual assistance

Evidence indicates that the primary additional spillover effect is facilitating faster, more effective crisis responses (e.g. in relation to COVID-19, Russia's war of aggression on Ukraine). Consultees (both internal and external) highlighted how the Network's crisis-focused mutual learning and assistance activities (e.g., surveys, webinars) allowed PES to tap into knowledge and resources that supported them to adapt services effectively. Crisis response was a large focus of the PES Network throughout the

evaluation period, with 42% of all outputs tackling topics linked to either the pandemic, Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine, or inflation (Study Annex 6). In particular, in the wake of COVID-19, mutual learning propelled a shift towards digitalisation in service delivery (e.g. setting up remote counselling platforms and managing short-term employment schemes). It also helped PES to rapidly adapt their own internal procedures to integrate remote/hybrid ways of working. Following the start of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, mutual learning provided a space to plan design and coordinate approaches to better integrate persons displaced from Ukraine on the European countries labour markets.⁷⁴

Factors influencing mutual learning and the take-up of good practices in Member States

The PES Network has achieved positive results in terms of mutual learning and take-up of good practices across PES, irrespective of national contexts. PES with differing sizes, levels of maturity⁷⁵ and organisational set-ups have implemented changes following participation in PES Network activities⁷⁶. Both centralised and decentralised PES have benefited. EU-level standards, indicators, and mutual learning exercises have proven to be helpful also in decentralised contexts, providing a common reference framework that supports greater consistency across regional/local PES, helping reduce fragmentation (as highlighted in the case study on Spain). Participating decentralised PES (e.g. Italy, Finland and Spain) were also able to learn from each other on specific challenges, including via a specific TLDs. However, they may face additional obstacles to implementing good practices, due to the need to adapt to regional/local realities and ensure buy-in from regional/local management (AFEPA survey and case studies).

Key factors supporting widespread positive impact in this area (identified in surveys and interviews) include: the **peer-to-peer and practical nature of activities** (which create an open dialogue on in-depth operational issues), **strong involvement of Heads of PES** (ensuring institutional commitment) and, to some extent, the **variety of engagement formats**, allowing PES to tailor their participation (145 mutual learning outputs delivered, with an increase in the range of formats in 2021–2025). **The main hindering factors to the uptake of good practices** include **limited financial resources** especially for small or medium-sized PES⁷⁷; the differing priorities at the national level (cited by 10/31 respondents), affecting political buy-in and resource allocation, regulatory constraints (such as national and regional procedural rules making it difficult to integrate new practices quickly (7 respondents)). The **relatively low visibility of PES Network outputs** and language barriers (with English-only resources) were also identified by a small number of PES (3 AFEPA). These hindering factors are similar to those identified in the 2019

⁷⁴Examples are provided in Annex VIII.

⁷⁵In Benchlearning assessments, quantitative indicators are generated for each performance enabler to show how closely each PES approaches the defined Excellence level. Based on the total of the score of all enablers, a PES is assessed as Mature, Well-developed, Developing or Developable.

⁷⁶As highlighted in case studies, External Study Annex 4 and the Study Annex 9.

⁷⁷Some smaller PES also reported that they benefit more from the PES Network activities by having access to the knowledge and expertise of larger organisations.

evaluation⁷⁸ likely because they are largely external factors outside the control of the implementation of the PES Decision.

4.1.1.3 Cooperation between PES Network and relevant labour market stakeholders (EQ1C)

The PES Decision has led to cooperation between the PES Network and the relevant labour market actors listed in Article 5⁷⁹ to a high degree overall. This followed 2020 amendments that introduced a focus on cooperation with additional stakeholders compared to the 2014 Decision, in particular Union agencies, equality bodies, and public employment services in third countries. During the evaluation period, the PES Network continued to cooperate regularly with EU and international institutions, social partners, networks and committees, involving them in a range of PES Network activities, as evidenced by consultation activities and desk research.

The degree and nature of the cooperation varied, depending on the profile and role of the stakeholder:

- **EU-Level Social Partners** (Business Europe, European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), SGI, World Employment Confederation (WEC)) were regularly involved as **contributors to targeted thematic discussions** (e.g., on employer engagement, labour market challenges). Sectoral social partners representing Private Employment Services (WEC Europe) were regularly involved in the annual stakeholder conference, in particular in 2025 where public-private cooperation was the main focus.
- **EU Agencies** (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop), European Training Foundation (ETF), European Labour Authority (ELA), and European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE)) **provided technical expertise, skills intelligence, policy analysis and thematic insights**. Their involvement was concentrated on mutual learning events focused on areas in the agencies' remits, including skills development (Cedefop), labour mobility (ELA⁸⁰), gender equality (EIGE)⁸¹ and the Western Balkan PES (ETF).
- **EU Networks** (such as EURES, the Social Protection Committee's Minimum Income Network (SPC)) and support structures (European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO) Secretariat) were involved through technical coordination

⁷⁸[Study supporting the evaluation of Decision 573/2014/EU on enhanced cooperation between Public Employment Services \(PES\) - Publications Office of the EU](#), pg.43-44.

⁷⁹Other providers of employment and social services and the social partners, and, where appropriate, Union agencies in the areas of employment, social policy, gender equality, and education and training, organisations representing unemployed persons or other vulnerable groups, equality bodies, vocational training organisations, NGOs working in the fields of employment and just transition, and regional and local authorities; PES from third countries.

⁸⁰Including participation in the Annual conference 2025, presentations of the Talent Pool Pilot, of communication activities, participation of PES Network Chair in various ELA events.

⁸¹e.g. Cedefop contributed to the [2022 PES Network seminar Future Skills](#); EIGE contributed to the [2021 webinar on PES approaches to the promotion of gender equality](#); Benchlearning materials were made use of by ETF in their activities.

(e.g. ESCO Secretariat being involved in the Working Group on Taxonomies), **policy alignment and participation in governance processes.**

- **International Organisations and global networks** (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), International Labour Organization (ILO), World Association of Public Employment Services (WAPES)) primarily contributed as knowledge partners providing **thematic expertise** to support PES Network Activities (all of them - their members in the case of WAPES - having participated to the at least one conferences and Board meetings). Instances of PES Network providing expertise to partners were also identified (e.g. feeding into an OECD study on AI in PES and to WAPES activities on greening⁸²).
- **NGO engagement was less frequent, focused on a number of relevant selective issues**⁸³ (e.g. annual conference 2024 on groups further from the labour market which saw the participation of several NGOs as speakers, launch and dissemination of toolkit on support to persons with disabilities).
- **The PES Network also cooperated with PES from Third Countries.** The Board agreed in June 2024 to step up cooperation with enlargement countries. PES from enlargement countries were invited to 2024/2025 Stakeholder Conferences and attended at Head of PES level, Network members and the Secretariat took part in activities from relevant EU funded projects. In this context, the Lithuanian PES increased exchanges with Eastern Partnership countries (e.g., Moldova). PES from Ukraine, Switzerland, United Kingdom were also invited to attend dedicated PES Board discussions (in person and online), respectively in 2021, 2023 and 2024.
- **Cooperation with the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions** took place primarily via PES Network leadership taking part in high level events⁸⁴. Regional and local authorities' involvement was more limited, centred around participation in the stakeholder conference.

With the exception of cooperation with EU agencies, the views of PES Network and external stakeholders tend to diverge regarding how successful cooperation was. Consultation evidence found that alignment in practice is dependent on national priorities and that consultees see a need for more systematic collaboration between the Network and NGOs, social partners, and employers to strengthen this alignment. According to the AFEPA survey, PES Network activities were most successful in supporting cooperation with EU agencies (22/31 respondents) and private employment services (22/31 respondents). EU agencies also expressed positive view on their cooperation with the PES Network during interviews. **Views of other cooperation partners were more mixed.** Whilst welcoming ad-hoc cooperation, interviewed EU social partners called for more

⁸²[Catalogue of Actions: New WAPES G7 Group supports greening economies](#)

⁸³e.g. the European Youth Forum contributed to the [2021 PES webinar on supporting young jobseekers in the recovery period](#), the European Disability Forum was involved in the [launch webinar](#) of the 2022 toolkit on strengthening PES to improve the labour market outcomes of persons with disabilities.

⁸⁴2023 [Conference](#) on "The social dimension in the National Recovery and Resilience Plans, 2025 [hearing](#) on the EU anti-poverty strategy.

systematic engagement, particularly on data sharing (including from Benchlearning outcomes, as highlighted in section 4.1.1.1) and policy priorities. NGOs interviewed shared a similar view, reporting a more limited degree of cooperation and less familiarity with the work of the Network than some other stakeholders.

The views of stakeholders on cooperation also diverged in the 2019 evaluation, with those directly involved in the PES Network holding more positive views compared than external stakeholders. However, the current evaluation shows that this is less the case now. **A higher degree of cooperation between the PES Network and external partners in this implementation period is visible, suggesting that the 2020 amended Decision (which increased the focus on cooperation) was effectively implemented in this area.** This was also recognised by several NGO interviewees who felt that, although cooperation remains limited, the interest of the Network to cooperate had increased.

4.1.1.4 Contribution to strengthened, modernised and better performing PES (EQ2)

Benchlearning and mutual learning activities contributing to strengthened, modernised and better performing PES (EQ2a and EQ2b)

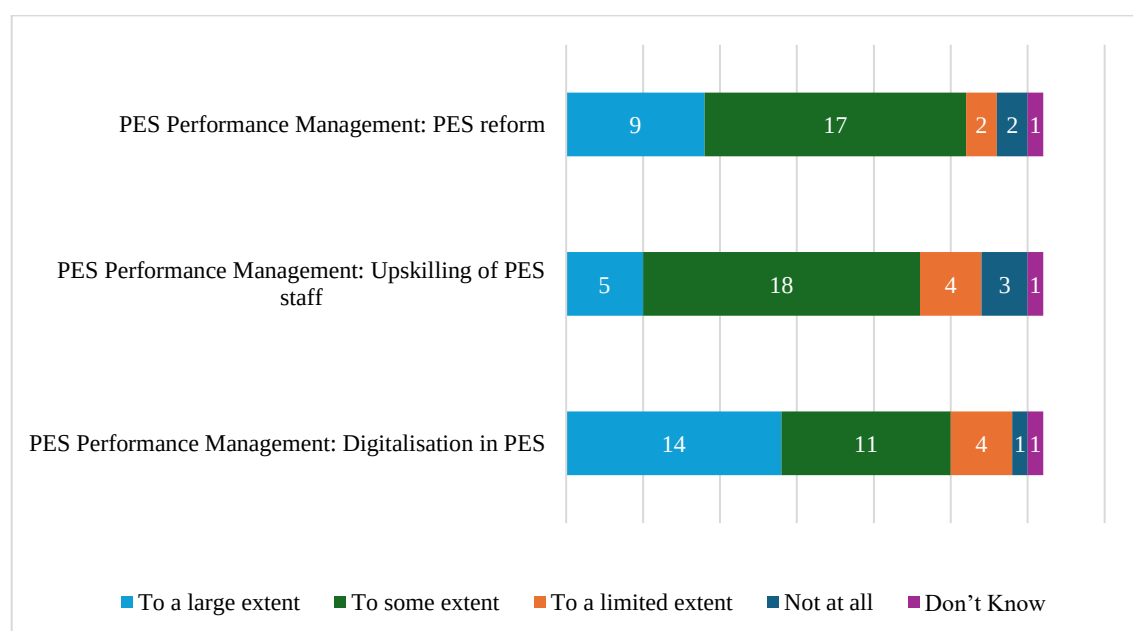
The PES Decision's implementation has contributed to a large extent to strengthened, modernised and better performing PES. In the AFEPA survey, all 31 AFEPAAs agreed that the objective has been achieved (Study Annex 8, Figure 1). Similarly positive views were expressed in the EMCO/ministries survey (20 of 22 respondents – Study Annex 8, Figure 25). Benchlearning and mutual learning activities have greatly supported operational cooperation and shared approaches among PES on strategic priorities.

The Network has contributed to triggering PES development especially in performance management, service delivery, governance and addressing structural labour market challenges, by enabling PES to share experiences and tools and pilot common approaches on a range of relevant areas (see examples in Table 5, Annex V).

PES performance management - Consultations⁸⁵ show that PES Network activities in the area of PES performance management have strengthened PES across all levels of maturity and regardless of size, as seen also in section 4.1.1.2 (EQ1b). Strategic performance management benefitted from Benchlearning to a large or some extent for 23 of 31 AFEPAAs (Study Annex 8, Figure 3). Feedback is also very positive across all three areas of PES Performance management (Study Annex 8 figure 5 and Figure 10 below), with the highest number of respondents indicating that the digitalisation in PES benefit to a large extent from the mutual learning activities (14 of 31). This confirms that the Network has continued to play -since the previous evaluation- an important role in supporting operational cooperation for PES transition to digital services.

⁸⁵AFEPA survey and the AFEPA and Heads of PES workshops.

Figure 10 - To what extent have each of the following areas of PES responsibility benefited from mutual learning activities in your PES?



PES service delivery - The PES Network has supported individual PES to strengthen and modernise their service delivery to jobseekers and employers to a large extent. Desk research shows that most (73 %) of the PES network outputs were related to ensuring quality service delivery (Figure 7 and Study Annex 6). These activities are very well-perceived by consulted AFEPA's in terms of their contribution to enhancing PES service delivery, with particularly high results for labour market integration of vulnerable groups and personalised services to jobseekers (See Study Annex 8, Figure 5, ⁸⁶ Examples are provided in Study Annex 7 - 2a-B).

PES governance and ecosystem - PES Network activities contributed to strengthening cooperation between individual PES and other actors at the national level, equipping them with new tools to engage within the broader labour market ecosystem. However, the extent of this varies by type of actor: the largest effects were reported in cooperation with employers, owing to their particular status as both PES clients and stakeholders. This aligns with the Network's thematic priorities, with 49% of all activities and outputs PES related to cooperation with employers (Study Annex 6). Cooperation with other actors (NGOs, social partners) was somewhat strengthened through the PES Network's activities, though evidence for this was more limited than that for employers. This aligns with the findings in EQ1c. Examples are provided in Study Annex 7, 2a-E.

Structural labour market challenges - The PES Network has supported individual PES to strengthen and modernise their work in addressing skills and labour shortages and labour market skills anticipation. Mutual learning activities in these areas benefitted to a majority of PES, especially those related to addressing skills and labour shortages (See Study Annex

⁸⁶27 and 26 of 31 AFEPA's respectively indicated that mutual learning has benefitted these areas of PES responsibility to a large or some extent.

8, Figure 5). 68% of PES Network activities and outputs related to the theme identification of skills and labour shortages, low training participation and activation of the inactive whilst 37% of mutual learning activities contributed to identifying skills shortages and enhancing supply-demand matching.

Cooperation and experience exchange between PES (EQ2c)

Enhancing cooperation and experience exchange between PES is the main success story of the PES Network. Consulted stakeholders across all categories stressed the invaluable contribution in fostering cooperation, by providing a formal space for exchange and peer learning. Most AFEPA survey respondents and all 17 respondents to EMCO/ministries survey reported PES increased cooperation under the amended PES Decision (See Study Annex 8, Figures 6 and 29). Desk research supports this with the PES Network 2025 Monitoring report noting that 83% of AFEPA found that 2023-2024 mutual learning activities strengthened Member States cooperation. Further examples of cooperation through Benchlearning and mutual learning activities can be found in Study Annex 7.

Participating PES also developed or intensified new cooperation activities during the evaluation period, pointing to a high degree of cooperation fostered by the Network. These include PES-to-PES surveys prepared by the PES themselves and shared with peers, informing the PES Network Secretariat. Between 2024 and 2025, 59 surveys were shared, with an average of 50% replies per survey, though a minority⁸⁷ found them resource intensive. Study visits to other PES: allow visiting PES to learn about specific practices or areas of work on which the host PES has extensive expertise. In 2025 for example, several experts from the Icelandic PES took part in two study visits to the Estonian PES on Systematic Quality Management.

Several other forms of informal cooperation between PES exist, also because the Network is a well-established structure, with many national PES representatives having developed strong personal relationships over time. In some instances, these relationships have led to bilateral cooperation between PES outside the Network, taking the form of ad hoc collaboration on specific topics, with positive impacts on PES work (as outlined in Table 6, Annex V).

4.1.1.5 Contribution to the development and implementation of relevant EU policies (EQ3)

Contributions to policy development and implementation,

The PES Network contributed more to EU-level policy development in the evaluation period than it did before 2020. Desk research and consultation evidence identified six instances of Network formal input to upcoming EU-level policy initiatives compared to one in the 2019 evaluation⁸⁸. Contributions also expanded beyond formal responses to

⁸⁷ 10 respondents to the AFEPA survey.

⁸⁸ [Study supporting the evaluation of Decision 573/2014/EU on enhanced cooperation between Public Employment Services \(PES\) - Publications Office of the EU](#), p.19 (Network Board contribution to the Commission's consultation on the European Pillar of Social Rights).

Commission consultations to include opinion/position papers⁸⁹. Some of the PES Network's contributions were explicitly referenced in policy initiatives, such as in the Impact Assessment for the EU Talent Pool Regulation. **Policy contributions significantly expanded to cover new topics and emerging issues** such as the green and digital transitions, labour migration, skills anticipation and forecasting (see EQ4 below), although the employment domain remains the PES Network's primary focus, consistently with its mandate and the previous evaluation period. AFEPA and EMCO/ministries survey respondents highlighted contributions in field of education, training and lifelong learning, labour mobility, and EU funding programmes (see also Study Annex 7, 3-B).

There has been a marked increase in the contribution of the PES Network to monitoring of EU policy initiatives since the 2014–2020 period, both in number (participation in 6 multilateral surveillance reviews over the evaluation period) and scope (the Network being involved in new areas including Individual Learning Accounts and Adequate Minimum Income) (Section 3 and Study Annex 7, 3-C). The engagement with EMCO is seen by many AFEPA as a key avenue for influence as it is a systematic, formal, well-established monitoring process. The Network also contributed indirectly to the European Semester through the involvement of DG EMPL's geographic desks in Benchlearning assessments and the participation of the PES Network Secretariat in country teams. Country Reports frequently reference PES challenges, occasionally highlighting the need to strengthen PES⁹⁰.

Compared to the 2014-2020 period, the Network supported the implementation of a broader range of policies and through more varied means⁹¹. This included developing tools to support the implementation of EU policy instruments⁹², carrying out data collection exercises to gather information on issues or policy priorities, sharing PES perspective in high-level events, and hosting/taking part in bilateral meetings with policymakers (Study Annex 7, 3-D for examples).

The PES Network also supported PES better understand EU policy developments in the field of employment, and of legislative and funding initiatives within PES. 2021-2025 Board and AFEPA meetings minutes suggest DG representatives were routinely invited to contribute to discussions and/or present relevant policies, while the PES Network Secretariat provided regular updates. Five consulted PES highlighted the dedicated policy discussions were valuable for national-level implementation.

⁸⁹ [Study supporting the evaluation of Decision 573/2014/EU on enhanced cooperation between Public Employment Services \(PES\)](#), pg.19.

⁹⁰ PES were mentioned in 11, 13, 13, 19 and 25 Country Reports issues as part of the European Semester in 2022, 2023, 2024, 2025, and 2026 respectively. See Study Annex 9, Table 2.

⁹¹ It its earlier focus was in particular on the Youth Guarantee and the LTU recommendations, See [Study supporting the evaluation of Decision 573/2014/EU on enhanced cooperation between Public Employment Services \(PES\) - Publications Office of the EU](#), pg. 19.

⁹² Such as Toolkit on PES Support to persons with disabilities - part of the Commission's Disability Employment Package, building PES Capacity related to the green transition via a toolkit, thematic review and Taxonomy WG, in line with the Council Recommendation on Fair Transitions.

Contribution to relevant EU policies: specific challenges

Barriers to the PES Network's contribution to EU policymaking were identified. EU-level stakeholders reported a relatively limited knowledge and understanding of its resources, likely reducing its policy impact. Engagement with the Network by EU institutions heavily depends on the outreach efforts of the Secretariat which resource constraints may further limit. Consultations revealed **contrasting stakeholder views on strengthening the Network's EU policy role.** EU-level stakeholders urged greater engagement in EU policymaking where PES expertise provide added value (e.g. stronger cooperation with the European Parliament, the SPC and the ESF+ Committee, Pact for Skills and the European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAfA) and the upcoming Skills Portability Initiative (SPI)). Meanwhile, AFEPA's and Heads of PES raised concerns that a stronger EU policy focus may divert resources from mutual learning activities. EU-level consultees noted that the inability to cite Benchlearning findings (in particular in European Semester Country Reports), as well as the limited visibility of the Network's **strategic position papers**, limit the Network's role as a key policy actor.

4.1.1.6 Support to thematic policy priorities (EQ4)

The PES Network has addressed the 9 thematic priorities outlined in Article 3 and supported its members in tackling them to a varying degree, as highlighted in particular by desk research (Study Annex 6) and consultations (Study Annex 8 Figures 9 and 31). Out of the 3 new priorities added or reinforced in 2020⁹³ the Network expanded its focus on support to vulnerable groups (Art. 3(a) amended to include persons with disabilities and those facing discrimination), the identification of skills shortages and skills matching (Article 3(d) amended to including preventative measures including counselling and career guidance)⁹⁴. The focus on Gender equality (Art. 3ca) remained more limited. As regards other thematic priorities, the Network enhanced its focus in particular on the Increased voluntary geographical/ occupational mobility (Art.3(f)), better integration of labour markets (Art.3(e)). The PES Decision has contributed to supporting decent and sustainable work (Art. 3(b)) to a lesser extent compared to other policy priorities.

New thematic priorities introduced in the revised PES Decision

The focus on supporting vulnerable groups and persons excluded from the labour market (Art 3 (a)) was reinforced - 58% of all PES outputs addressed these groups. Compared to the 2014 Decision, the PES Network expanded support activities to people with disabilities and those facing discrimination⁹⁵, migrant workers and displaced people from Ukraine (see EQs1c, 2a and Study Annex 6, 4-A), whilst keeping a strong focus on youth and LTU⁹⁶. Similar to the findings of the 2019 evaluation, there is less evidence of support for the integration of older workers, beyond one-off activities. While 25 of 31

⁹³Namely: gender equality as a new area, inclusion of persons with disability and those facing multiple discriminations under article 3a as well as preventative measures, VET career guidance under article 3d.

⁹⁴ See section 2 and Intervention Logic.

⁹⁵ Including via a Toolkit, dedicated workshops during annual conferences 2024 and 2025, a WG in 2026, a specific survey.

⁹⁶e.g. 2021 [Thematic Paper on youth employment support](#), a 2022 [video on Youth Employment](#), EMCO reviews of the Council recommendations on the reinforced Youth Guarantee and long-term unemployment.

respondents to AFEPA's survey considered that Network contributed to a large and to some extent to this priority, this was seen differently by EMCO/ministries (11 of 17 respondents). Social partners and civil society organisations called for increased involvement of organisations representing the vulnerable groups' interests in the PES networks' activities to strengthen focus on them. (see EQc1 findings on cooperation with NGOs).

The identification of skills shortages and skills matching (Art.3(d)) has become a stronger focus in 2021-2025, reflecting their emergence as a key challenge over the last five years. 49% of outputs addressed skills supply/demand matching. The AFEPA and EMCO/ministries surveys identified this as the main policy priority to which the Network has contributed. Specific activities were organised regarding the thematic priorities introduced in the amended Article 3(d)⁹⁷.

Supporting gender equality (Art. 3(ca)) is a new PES Network priority compared to Decision 573/2014/EU. 12% of mapped outputs specifically address gender equality. Many respondents noted limited or no focus, though it is mainstreamed across other themes.

Other thematic priorities

The PES Decision continued to focus heavily on improving the functioning and inclusiveness of labour markets (Art.3(c)). Over 52% of mapped outputs (Study Annex 6) focused on this priority: 25 of 31 AFEPA's and 12 of 17 EMCO/ministries respondents saw significant contributions in this area. The workshops and interviews also highlight this topic as a key priority, with stakeholders indicating that, by helping strengthen and modernising PES, the PES contributes to a better functioning labour market. Benchmarking and mutual learning play a key role in this process (see EQ2a).

The PES Decision has contributed more prominently to fostering the better integration of labour markets (Art.3(e)) and increasing voluntary geographical/occupational mobility (Art.3(f)) compared to the 2014-2020 mandate. The mapping displays that each of both priorities featured in 22% of all outputs between 2021-2025, and only 3 of 31 surveyed AFEPA's considered that increased voluntary geographical and occupational mobility was covered to a large extent. Nevertheless, several PES Network contributions showed a growing emphasis due to skills shortages.

Evaluating and assessing active labour market initiatives and their implementation (Art.3(h)) is a core responsibility in many PES. 32% of the Network's output addressed ALMP assessment. Interviewed EU-level stakeholders consider this as a key area of work for the PES Network. Several trade union consultees called on for more rigorous ALMP assessments, notably to better support vulnerable groups. In an effort to improve and streamline ALMP monitoring, the Network has also enhanced synergies between data

⁹⁷These include, for instance: a study on career guidance (forthcoming), TRWs on prevention of unemployment, skills intelligence, skill-based approaches.

collection for PES benchmarking and the European Commission's Labour Market Policies (LMP) database⁹⁸.

The PES Decision has contributed to supporting decent and sustainable work (Art. 3(b)) to a lesser extent compared to other policy priorities, which is in line with the 2019 evaluation findings. 27% of mapped outputs cover this thematic area and around half of the respondents to both surveys (Study Annex 8, Figures 9 and 31) stated that the PES Network has supported this priority to some extent, with only three AFEPA respondents (no EMCO/ministries) respondents reporting a contribution to decent and sustainable work to a large extent. Social partners interviewed called for greater focus on quality jobs, amid labour market changes.

4.1.2 Efficiency⁹⁹

The implementation of the amended PES Decision is broadly efficient, with most stakeholders considering that the benefits of participation, particularly from Benchlearning and mutual learning, clearly outweigh the financial costs. While there is variation in staff time investments across countries, additional direct costs are generally low, and overall EU-level costs have decreased compared to the previous period, partly due to increased use of digital formats. The Network delivers strong benefits through knowledge sharing, economies of scale, and avoiding duplication, although data limitations constrain precise cost-effectiveness analysis. Some opportunities for further efficiency gains exist, notably through improved knowledge management, streamlining of Benchlearning processes, reinforcing the collaboration with EU agencies and better integration of activities. Network members are little inclined to reduce the overall scope of activities given their perceived value.

4.1.2.1 Costs¹⁰⁰ and benefits and relationship between them (EQ5)

European Commission costs

European Commission average annual operational and administrative costs over the evaluation period amounted to EUR 1 994 000. This included both administrative functions (board and other management meetings, monitoring, evaluation and office support) and operational activities (delivery of events and knowledge sharing activities). The average annual cost for administrative activities accounted for 7,4% of this total, while operational activities (mostly supporting to contractual costs for Benchlearning activities and to mutual learning and assistance activities) accounted for 92,6%¹⁰¹.

Regarding costs related to staff, 1.9 FTE EC staff annually support the PES Network and total annual staff costs are estimated to be EUR 234 000¹⁰². For the sake of comparability, this calculation does not include the costs of the four national PES staff seconded to the

⁹⁸ [Labour market policies \(LMP\) database - Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion](#)

⁹⁹ As it is difficult to monetise the benefits, the efficiency of the PES network is assessed qualitatively, by comparing the PES network deliverables and broader benefits against the costs at national and at the EU level.

¹⁰⁰ The information was collected only for the year 2024. (see Annex II section 5 (task 4)).

¹⁰¹ Costs were not broken down in this way in the previous evaluation.

¹⁰² See Annex IV, pg.98 for more details on calculations.

Secretariat, as such costs were not addressed explicitly in the previous evaluation. Such costs are however incurred in country PES time investment below. The annual cost of all secondees' time (based on the addition of average gross civil service salaries in each country) was estimated at EUR 424 000.

The total annual cost of supporting the PES Network and its programme of activities at EU level is estimated to be EUR 2 228 400, which is lower than the average annual cost for the previous period (EUR 3.12mn or EUR 3.99mn based on 2024 prices, taking inflation into account)¹⁰³. Digitalisation is likely to have helped the Commission to deliver activities more efficiently while enabling the overall costs to be lower, as explained below.

Country PES time investment and costs

There is significant variation in the absolute amount of time national PES dedicate to PES Network activities (estimated as number of days in full-time equivalent - FTE), similarly to the 2019 evaluation¹⁰⁴. A small minority of AFEPA survey respondents (3) reported less than 60 FTE days, while many others (15) indicated higher levels of engagement (between FTE 500-1000 days at maximum). Nine respondents could not provide estimates. While the evidence indicates a positive correlation between the size of the country and the amount of time invested, feedback gathered from AFEPA indicates that other elements come into play, such as seconding national experts to the PES Network Secretariat (DE and FR), chairing WGs (e.g. LT, DK) or hosting mutual learning activities.

Consistent patterns emerge across countries on how this time is used, highlighted through the AFEPA survey, workshops and cost estimations provided by AFEPA. Benchlearning stands out as the most resource-intensive activity, particularly during assessment years. On average, Benchlearning (including work on data) accounted for around 0.8 FTE per PES. Benchlearning also generated the highest additional expenditure, particularly for self-assessment materials and site visits. Other major time commitments include participation in mutual learning activities (which were the next most onerous for staff resources but required relatively low additional expenditure), responses to PES-to-PES surveys and ad hoc requests. AFEPA and Heads of PES also mentioned time spent before and after AFEPA and Board meetings, though Governance activities consumed the least staff time overall.

Most PES incur low to moderate additional annual costs – For travel, accommodation, translation, and external expertise (additional costs not reimbursed by the Commission), most estimates fell within the EUR 5 000–10 000 range (10 of 31 responses); followed by EUR 10 000–20 000 (8 of 31); and EUR 0–5 000¹⁰⁵ (6 of 31). Very few AFEPA reported higher additional costs. The few responses to a related open question imply that AFEPA identified these additional costs as insignificant and that they did not limit their participation in activities.

¹⁰³Prices in 2024 are about 28% higher than in 2019 due to inflation (source: Eurostat).

¹⁰⁴[Study supporting the evaluation of Decision 573/2014/EU on enhanced cooperation between Public Employment Services \(PES\) - Publications Office of the EU](#)

¹⁰⁵This was the case for the German PES (see German case study, Study Annex 4, pg.54)

Overall total country PES costs, consisting of PES time investments and PES additional costs, ranged from approximately EUR 11 600 to EUR 364 200, with an average of approximately EUR 98 800 per country in 2024¹⁰⁶.

Comparison with the previous evaluation and a similar Network

An overall higher number of meetings and events were organised, compared to the previous evaluation period¹⁰⁷. A comparative analysis of key deliverables (from mutual learning and the governance and ecosystems activities) suggests that an overall higher number of meetings and events took place over the 2021-2025 period compared with the 2014-2018 period. Benchlearning activities were excluded due to issues of comparability (difference of level of granularity) with the previous period. The previous evaluation suggests an average of 14.5 meetings or events¹⁰⁸ each year. Over the 2021-2025 period, an average of 23 meetings or events took place each year. There was also a lower ratio of administrative to operational meetings in the current period. This should be seen in a context where digitalisation allowed to have more frequent, but also shorter meetings.

The greater use of online formats for meetings has led to efficiency savings for the operation of the Network. Over 2014-2018, three of the 58 events or meetings (5%) were held online only. Over 2022-2025, excluding 2021 due to all events being held online due to the pandemic, 49 of the 92 events were held online, representing 53% of all meetings and events. When broken down by activity category, the majority of governance and ecosystem activities were in-person (18 of the 24), while the majority of mutual learning activities were online (43 of the 68)¹⁰⁹.

A comparison with the European Migration Network (EMN), a cooperation and knowledge sharing network of similar scope, provides further evidence of the PES Network's cost-effectiveness. Both PES and EMN produce substantial knowledge distribution outputs, including factsheets, reports, and newsletters, and engage in capacity building activities such as workshops and webinars. The PES Network has a larger budget than EMN which aligns with its mandate to deliver additional activities such as Benchlearning cycles, study visits, and MAPs. EMN produces fewer deliverables but contributes extensively through meeting participation, events, and project involvement.

¹⁰⁶PES expenditure, by type (% GDP), average across groups of PES can be found in [Trends in PES – Assessment report on PES Capacity - 2025](#), pg. 116.

¹⁰⁷ Unit cost analysis can offer insights into how resources translate into specific outputs and results; however, as boundaries between PES Network activities are often fluid, it is challenging to isolate the proportion of staff time, financial resources, or other inputs contributing to each output or result. There are also limitations in the precision and completeness of available. The evaluation concluded that producing unit cost estimates for specific activities across the Network was not feasible.

¹⁰⁸Includes: WGs, TRWs, study visits, follow-up visits, webinars, seminars, AFEPA and Board meetings.

¹⁰⁹ See Study Annex 3b, section D, for detail on the delivery format of events in the 2021-25 period.

Table 3. Comparison of PES Network and EMN deliverables (2024)

Costs/deliverables	PES Network	EMN
Budget (annual)	EUR 2.2 mn	EUR 2.0 mn
Working groups	5	
Capacity building activities	8	21
Good practice publishing	14	
Published report/studies/position papers	6	
Factsheets	32	31
Conferences	1 (EU level)	14 (national)
Newsletters published	4	4
News articles	13	
Podcast episodes	3	

Source: Ecorys' own analysis, 2026.

Relationship between costs and benefits

Benefits

The application of the PES Decision has been overall cost-effective, with stakeholders considering the Network as a catalyst for PES modernisation, resource savings and institutional resilience.

Enhanced economies of scale, reduced duplication and accelerated reforms - through 'copy-adapt' approaches - were the primary benefits. Activities improved service quality, policy alignment, and innovation. **The PES Network is viewed as a good use of resources based on what it has achieved.** The learning role of the Network as well as its role as a platform for collaboration are critical to foster relationships and productive discussions among PES. As a second core benefit are the **significant cost savings from accessing knowledge from other PES via the Network** rather than relying on external consultants to access this expertise (as highlighted by several AFEPA's and Heads of PES). For example, the Spanish PES used Digitalisation WG insights to improve its data exchange system (SISPE-CEUS), reducing the administrative costs for the PES. The case studies also showed that smaller PES (e.g. BG, LT, SI) would have more limited access to advanced solutions without the Network. As a third core benefit, the **Network represents a strategic asset that enhances PES' policy alignment and foresight.** Participation enables PES to anticipate and adapt to emerging EU priorities (green and digital transitions, inclusion, crisis responses during COVID-19 and the influx of persons displaced from Ukraine).

Cost-effectiveness

Benefits of participating in PES Network activities outweigh the costs, with collaborative opportunities, knowledge base, and peer support providing a strong return on investment. Most of AFEPA's, 23 of 31 respondents stated that benefits significantly or slightly exceeded costs (study Annex 8, Figure 13). Only one felt costs slightly exceeded benefits, while four saw them as equal. Among the highest-time-investing countries, six of

seven said benefits outweighed the costs though one indicated there was scope for efficiency gains.

The overall work of the PES Network during 2021–2025 was cost-effective, a conclusion supported by a large majority of AFEPAAs (26 of 31, with 15 strongly agreeing and 11 agreeing)¹¹⁰. The country case studies also consistently showed that Network participation is considered cost-effective. Cost-effectiveness perceived by AFEPAAs¹¹¹ varies across activities: WG and TLDs were the most highly rated (both 21 of 31 responses), followed by Mutual learning events (19 of 31), Benchlearning assessments (17 of 31), and PES Practices (15 of 31). PESpods and MAPs had the smallest positive shares and also attracted the few ‘not cost-effective’ ratings. (Study Annex 8, Figure 14). Overall, most AFEPAAs agreed that the PES Network’s structured governance, multi-annual planning, and continuity of activities ensured cost-effectiveness with operational and strategic gains (e.g. improved performance management, digital transformation, enhanced cooperation) far outweighing the associated costs.

While the global perception was strongly positive, a few AFEPAAs mentioned challenges in assessing cost-effectiveness (in the absence of systematic monitoring), citing limited visibility of EU-level costs or the need for detailed financial data¹¹². Some also acknowledged that benefits were occasionally constrained by timing or resource limitations, and one noted that Benchlearning could feel bureaucratic and time-consuming. A few consultees identified further challenges, including language barriers, and timing misalignments with national reforms.

4.1.2.2 Potential for simplification and reduction of inefficiencies (EQ6)

38% of AFEPAAs identified opportunities for efficiency gains, emphasizing the potential to develop a more integrated, digitally supported, and outcome-focused approach, while maintaining flexibility and the collaborative spirit of the network.

The primary potential for efficiency gains lies in knowledge management, as highlighted by most PES when making suggestions in this area. Streamlining of existing platforms (such as the PES Knowledge Centre and PES Practices repository) could improve usability and user-friendliness. This would give PES easier access to the existing knowledge developed through the Network, and help them gather relevant information more efficiently, while reducing the number of requests for additional input (e.g. PES-to-PES surveys). Better use of online platforms was already flagged in the 2019 evaluation. While progress has been made (such as the co-creation of some documents, the development of a collaborative space for the Digitalisation WG and Benchlearning site

¹¹⁰In the survey questionnaire cost-effectiveness was defined as the relation between the resources invested (costs) and the results achieved by the PES Network through its work and activities with reference to categories of results listed in a previous question. In the absence of more systematic evidence on the quantitative relationship between costs and benefits, AFEPA’s reflections based on their experience were included as a useful source of evidence. See Study Annex 8, Figure 14 and 17.

¹¹¹Study Annex 8. Figure 14 shows AFEPAAs replies to the following questions “Using the previous definition, to what extent was your PES’ involvement in the following activities and outputs of the PES Network cost-effective? (N=31)”.

¹¹²External study, pg. 53.

visits), further use of a common repository for documents sharing and co-creation, alongside streamlining of existing platforms ('knowledge hub'), could provide additional resources savings.

A few AFEPA (less than five) noted that Benchlearning preparation and site visits are resource-intensive and could be streamlined. Interviews with Benchlearning Steering Group members suggest that efficiency in Benchlearning preparation and site visits could be achieved by strengthening the link between Benchlearning cycles, focusing more on monitoring progress from previous assessments rather than starting each cycle from scratch. In addition, the preparation phase could be simplified via digital tools.

Additional suggestions focused in particular on administrative tools and improving synergies between activities. Leveraging digital tools (e.g., micro-learning modules, multilingual guides, communities of practice) could help reduce onboarding costs and broaden dissemination. Other practical suggestions included improving predictability through clearer calendars, reducing interpretation costs by maintaining English as the working language, prioritising high-value outputs like benchmarking and innovation projects. Most AFEPA survey respondents (Study Annex 8, Figure 15) stated there were sufficient synergies between different types of Network activities (16 of 31 responses)¹¹³. Respondents suggested that enhancing cost-effectiveness could centre on stronger coordination, better integration of activities, and aligning activities strategically around common themes. Suggestions also included creating thematic networks of experts; improving communication and scheduling; using updated data to minimise repetitive tasks; and ensuring systematic follow-up on recommendations.

Synergies with partners also offer potential for efficiency gains, as highlighted in surveys and workshops. Stronger ties with EU initiatives (e.g., Pact for Skills, EURES) and policy areas, such as mobility and labour migration, could maximise impact and reduce overlap. Efficiencies could be gained by fostering stronger synergies with relevant EU agencies (e.g. Eurofound, Cedefop) and contributing to their work, thus reducing the number of Network studies and publications and mitigating the risk of duplication. A few stakeholders (less than five) suggested inviting PES partners and field practitioners to selected events to broaden perspectives and improve implementation.

The evaluation does not identify grounds for scaling back or discontinuing any specific PES Network activities. All types of activities were considered valuable and key to contribute to the Network's objectives (by 21 of 27 AFEPA). Besides, the format of meetings (in person/online) did not emerge as a priority area for further efficiency gains. While the 2019 evaluation's call for further use of online meetings and live-streaming has been partially implemented, with a growing share of online meetings, in-person engagement remains highly valued for trust-building and informal exchange. Only a few

¹¹³ Another 12 respondents stated that there were sufficient synergies to some extent, while only two felt it was to a limited extent, and one respondent selected 'Don't know'.

stakeholders advocated replacing large events with hybrid formats, citing resource constraints.

Overall, the PES Network’s management and governance were rated very positively.

Support and management activities (Secretariat and contractors) received the strongest endorsement in the AFEPA survey (25 of 31 respondents rating them very efficient, see Study Annex 8, Figure 16), followed by the composition of the Board (24 of 31). Decision-making and governance processes and Board size were also viewed favourably. The survey responses did not include any negative ratings. The AFEPA workshop generally reflected the positive view of the efficiency of decision-making and governance processes within the PES Network, underlining its clear, well-structured, and professional processes. Participants agreed the framework ensures continuity, strategic focus, and effective coordination, backed by high-quality documentation, exemplified by the successful launch of the 2024 Memorandum. The structure was also credited with driving PES modernisation and EU alignment, delivering clear added value. Overall, while governance is widely regarded as efficient, there is some interest in streamlining processes and enhancing the strategic depth of discussions. Some concerns (10 of 31 respondents) included the need to simplify decision-making (e.g. to reduce multi-level validations from both AFEPA and Board members). Recommendations included spending less time on administrative issues in meetings, delegating Network tasks to AFEPA, focusing in-person meetings on strategy, networking, and external expertise.

4.1.3 Coherence

The amended PES Decision is coherent and complementary to EU policies in employment and labour mobility, education and training, enlargement, labour migration, green, digital and competitiveness policy, as well as the UN Sustainable Development Goals. It is coherent with EU funding instruments and the work of EU agencies under the remit of DG EMPL. The strongest coherence is with EU policies in the field of employment. There is potential to strengthen synergies with labour market policies impacting PES. The PES Decision is also coherent with and complementary to national policies. Activities and inputs at EU and national level are appropriate for achieving the objectives (internal coherence).

4.1.3.1 Coherence and Complementarity with EU and other International Policies and initiatives¹¹⁴ (EQ7)

The coherence and complementarity of the revised PES Decision and its implementation were examined against 32 EU and international policies and initiatives. The findings demonstrate that the 2020 PES Decision is coherent and/or complementary to EU and international policies to a large extent. The 2019 evaluation¹¹⁵ of the original PES Decision indicated a high level of coherence with relevant EU policies. This high level of coherence and complementarity has continued under the 2020 PES Decision, but the scope of EU

¹¹⁴This section is based on Analysis of the coherence of the policy objectives, scope and activities in the legal texts underpinning policies (desk research) is complemented by analysis of the views of stakeholders (via consultations and surveys) and insights from case studies.

¹¹⁵ [EUR-Lex - 52019SC1350 - EN - EUR-Lex](#)

policies which are coherent with the PES Network has broadened (encompassing e.g. green, digital and competitiveness policies and the UN SDGs), and the PES Network activities have increasingly focused on actively seeking synergies and fostering cooperation. However, coherence in the implementation of EU employment policies could be improved through enhanced access to Benchmarking outcomes from key stakeholders at EU level (as highlighted in section 4.1.1.1). There is also potential to strengthen synergies with labour market policies impacting PES.

Coherence in policy frameworks and implementation

EU policies in employment, and education and training

Analysis of the legal text indicates a high degree of coherence between the objectives of the PES Decision and **EU policies in employment, labour mobility, and education and training**. The analysis suggests that there is complementarity, rather than overlap, with these policies. The evaluation also demonstrates that the PES Network has actively sought to ensure coherence and complementarity with relevant EU employment policies. For example, the PES Network contributed to the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights via AFEPA and Board workshops in 2024, leading to an opinion paper in 2025. The Network also contributed to

Labour mobility

The PES Decision is coherent with and complementary to EU labour mobility policies and tools, as confirmed by desk research¹¹⁶. A strong majority of survey respondents also considered that the PES Decision was coherent to a large extent with policy initiatives related to labour mobility¹¹⁷. For instance, while the PES Network focuses on strengthening cooperation between PES to improve PES performance, the EURES Network focuses in particular on the pooling of job vacancies and applications, in the context of Article 45 and 46 TFEU. The PES Decision objectives of supporting PES activities to facilitate labour mobility for individuals and helping employers to address skills shortages is also complementary with those of the Europass¹¹⁸ platform and tools.

However, there is potential to strengthen both the coherence of legal frameworks and synergies in implementation of key labour market policies impacting PES, as highlighted in Box 3. The Network's maturation in recent years, alongside evolving labour market challenges and the development of related EU policies over the evaluation period suggests scope for further progress. This concerns in particular EURES, Europass, and the Electronic Exchange of Social Security Information.

¹¹⁶ See further analysis in the Study Annex 9.1 (Table 4) and Study Annex 9.2.

¹¹⁷ 20 of 31 responses in the AFEPA survey and 14 of 17 responses in the EMCO/ministries survey considered that the PES Decision was coherent to a large extent with EU labour mobility policies. A further 7 responses for AFEPA and 3 for EMCO ministries considered that they were coherent to some extent. See Study Annex 8, Figures 18 and 34.

¹¹⁸ [Decision - 2018/646 - EN - EUR-Lex](#)

Box 3. Enhancing synergies with labour mobility policies and instruments

While the PES Decision itself is broadly coherent with EU labour mobility policies, there is potential for further alignment with key policy areas and instruments. For instance, although the EURES Regulation calls for cooperation between both networks, the PES Network Decision does not entail any specific reference to EURES. Public Employment Services are explicitly mentioned as a target group in the Europass Regulation (Article 1)¹¹⁹. The recent revision of EC regulations 883/2004¹²⁰ and 987/2009¹²¹ on social security coordination (both of which entail numerous references to employment services) indirectly reinforces the role of PES, putting an additional focus on data and information exchange about the situation of unemployed persons who export their unemployment benefits, such as on their compliance with activation and job placement measures and on work resumption.

Developments over 2021-2025 also point to potential for further synergies in implementation, highlighted by desk research and consultations:

EURES: Both the PES Network and EURES contribute to initiatives related to the EU Talent Pool¹²², monitor labour shortages and address cooperation with private employment services. Cooperation on these topics between both networks took mostly the form of exchange of information. Of the five stakeholders who commented on coherence with EURES, two (from the European Commission and an EU-level network) called for closer cooperation with the EURES Network, while one stakeholder linked to EURES called for further clarification of the remits of each Network. In the autumn 2025, Heads of PES from Slovenia and Croatia launched a joint letter calling for enhanced synergies between the PES Network and EURES, presented during the December 2025 Board. A joint meeting between AFEPAs and EURES National Coordination Officers took place in March 2026, where participants called for enhanced cooperation on priority topics, including labour market transitions, shortages, personalised services and digitalisation.

Europass: Over the evaluation period, synergies between Europass and EURES were stepped up to enhance jobseeker services and streamlining European digital tools for employment and mobility¹²³. PES can benefit in a strategic way from the standardised Europass CV format, which makes the skills, qualifications and experiences of job seekers more comparable, both at the national level and in a cross-border mobility context. Europass is based on the multilingual ESCO taxonomy, which also contributes to the transparency of skills and occupations of job seekers and can therefore improve job matching. Half of all PES who responded to a 2024 survey¹²⁴ offer the use of Europass as part of their career guidance (51%, 16 out of 31) to both registered unemployed and employed people. Europass is also offered to non-registered customers by 32% of PES respondents¹²⁵ while all PES make jobseekers aware of it when creating a CV. The Europass user base has been continuously increasing since the launch of the revamped platform in July 2020. By May 2026, users have created 10 million Europass profiles (around 1,5 million profiles each year) and the platform has received nearly 145 million visits in total.

EESSI: From 32 EEA countries which use the Electronic Exchange of Social Security Information (EESSI) for unemployment benefits exchanges, in August 2026 PES from five countries (BG, IE, IT, MT, PL) do not directly participate in the exchanges which may affect the efficiency of those exchanges¹²⁶. In support of the adoption of the revision of the Regulations (EC) No 883/2004 and its implementing Regulation (EC) No. 987/2009, the Commission issued a statement committing to explore already under the existing framework enhancements of the digital data exchanges between the institutions (within EESSI), and to explore further

¹¹⁹ [Decision - 2018/646 - EN - EUR-Lex](#)

¹²⁰ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32004R0883>.

¹²¹ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2009/987/oj/eng>.

¹²² European Commission, EU Talent Pool. [EU Talent Pool - Migration and Home Affairs - European Commission](#)

¹²³ [Europass and EURES become stronger together with one goal – better supporting job seekers!](#)

¹²⁴ <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=27936&langId=en>, pg.25.

¹²⁵ <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=27936&langId=en>, pg.25.

¹²⁶ <https://ec.europa.eu/social/social-security-directory/pai/select-country/language/en>

solutions in the context of the upcoming Fair Labour Mobility Package to reinforce cooperation and data exchanges between institutions on control, activation and job placement measures in the context of export of unemployment benefits.

EU funding instruments

There is also a high level of coherence and complementarity¹²⁷ with EU funds supporting PES capacity, especially the ESF+, but also the RRF and the TSI. There are various examples of the use of ESF+ to support PES modernisation and of PES Network outputs which actively encouraged the use of ESF+ (Section 3.3, Study Annex 7(7-D)). The objectives, scope and types of intervention set out in the RRF¹²⁸ and TSI¹²⁹ regulations are also coherent and complementary with the PES Decision, although these cover much broader policy fields.

EU enlargement policy

The evidence also indicates that the 2020 PES Decision is coherent with EU enlargement policy. The Annual Commission Communications on EU enlargement policy¹³⁰ over the evaluation period highlight progress and challenges in the functioning of labour markets, including labour mobility, which are coherent with the PES Decision. There have been efforts since 2024 to involve PES from enlargement countries in the PES Network's events. The Employment and Social Affairs Platform (ESAP) in the Western Balkans has supported labour cooperation and PES development, including replication of the Benchlearning model¹³¹.

EU migration policy

Analysis of the Pact on Migration and Asylum¹³², the Talent Partnerships¹³³ and the EU Talent Pool¹³⁴ confirms that they are coherent with the 2020 PES Decision objectives, and complementary due to their specific focus on third country nationals¹³⁵. A seminar was organised in 2023 to take stock of the evolving role of PES in the labour market integration of third country nationals (presentation of the final thematic paper¹³⁶ during the Labour Migration Platform in October 2024¹³⁷). The participants at the Heads of PES workshop also emphasised the strong focus of the PES Network on the labour market integration of displaced people from Ukraine, and the role of the PES Network in the Talent Pool Pilot for beneficiaries of temporary protection.

¹²⁷See analysis in Study Annex 9.1 (Tables 6-7), and Study Annex 9.2.

¹²⁸[Regulation \(EU\) 2021/241 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 February 2021 establishing the Recovery and Resilience Facility.](#)

¹²⁹[Regulation \(EU\) 2021/240 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 10 February 2021 establishing a Technical Support Instrument.](#)

¹³⁰[2025 EU Enlargement Package.](#)

¹³¹See Study Annex 7 (example 7-L) for further examples.

¹³²[Pact on Migration and Asylum.](#)

¹³³https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/legal-migration-and-resettlement/talent-partnerships_en

¹³⁴<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2026/1047/oj/eng>

¹³⁵See analysis in Study Annex 9.1 (Table 10).

¹³⁶[Attracting skilled labour from third countries](#)

¹³⁷See Study Annex 7 (example 7-M) for further examples.

EU green, digital and competitiveness policies

The communication on the Clean Industrial Deal¹³⁸ and the European Green Deal¹³⁹ (which includes a focus on activating education and training) are coherent with the PES Decision objective on addressing skills shortages. The Council recommendation on a Fair Transition towards Climate Neutrality¹⁴⁰ shows a high degree of coherence with the PES Decision objectives, particularly through the mention of effective support to quality employment through employment services¹⁴¹. The Digital Compass¹⁴² and Digital Decade¹⁴³ both include a focus on digital skills, also in coherence with the 2020 PES Decision's objective on addressing skills shortages¹⁴⁴. The communication on the EU Competitiveness Compass¹⁴⁵ is coherent as it includes promoting skills and quality jobs as one of the horizontal enablers that are necessary to promote competitiveness¹⁴⁶. 42% of PES Network outputs addressed the digital and green transition.

UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The 2020 PES Decision has a high degree of coherence with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)¹⁴⁷, in particular SDGs 8 and 4, but also SDGs 1, 3, 5 and 10¹⁴⁸.

Outcomes of consultations

The consultations (interviews, surveys, workshops, case studies) support that coherence and complementarity between the PES Network objectives/activities and EU and international policies are overall high. A large majority of the surveyed AFEPA and EMCO/ministries consider that is a large extent of coherence across all policy areas (See Evaluation Annex 9, Figures 18 and 34). The survey respondents highlighted the important role played by the PES Network itself in ensuring the coherence of activities under PES responsibility with EU and international policies, in two different ways: firstly (top-down), by facilitating an understanding of key policies across the PES Network; and secondly (bottom-up), by giving PES a voice in shaping those policies.

There was, however, a variation in the perceived extent of coherence among different policy areas. Across all consultations (surveys, interviews, workshops), the policy areas considered to have the largest extent of coherence were those related to employment, as well as education, training and lifelong learning (See Study Annex 8, Figures 18 and 34). 22 of 31 respondents in the AFEPA survey and 15 of 17 responses in the EMCO/ministries survey considered that the European Semester and EU policy initiatives linked to active support to employment were coherent to a large extent (See Study Annex 8, Figures 18

¹³⁸ [The Clean Industrial Deal: A joint roadmap for competitiveness and decarbonisation](#).

¹³⁹ [The European Green Deal](#).

¹⁴⁰ [ensuring a fair transition towards climate neutrality 2022/C 243/04](#).

¹⁴¹ See analysis in Study Annex 9.1 (Table 11) and further examples in Study Annex 7 (7-H).

¹⁴² [2030 Digital Compass: the European way for the Digital Decade](#).

¹⁴³ [Decision \(EU\) 2022/2481 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 December 2022 establishing the Digital Decade Policy Programme 2030](#).

¹⁴⁴ See analysis in Study Annex 9.1 (Table 11).

¹⁴⁵ [A Competitiveness Compass for the EU](#).

¹⁴⁶ See analysis in Study Annex 9.1 (Table 12).

¹⁴⁷ <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>.

¹⁴⁸ See analysis in Study Annex 9.1 (Table 13).

and 34.). Further examples of EU policies underlined as being coherent included the EPSR, EURES¹⁴⁹, the Youth Guarantee, the EU Talent Pool¹⁵⁰, the Quality Jobs Roadmap¹⁵¹, and the Network's involvement in committees such as EMCO¹⁵². All consultees considered that enlargement, migration, green, digital and competitiveness policies were coherent and/or complementary with the PES Network objectives to some degree (See Study Annex 8 Figures 18 and 34.)¹⁵³. The lowest proportion of survey respondents stated that there was a large extent of coherence with the UN SDGs.

There was also a strong consensus that the PES Decision's objectives were coherent with the EU funding instruments supporting PES capacity (e.g. ESF+, RRF, TSI). Several (more than five) interviewees¹⁵⁴ confirmed that they were aware of EU-funded projects run by PES (most commonly ESF+) to implement Benchlearning recommendations. The case studies also confirmed the strong coherence with EU funding available at national level, in implementation (Study Annex 4, see also Section 3.3). Although the PES conducted activities to boost the uptake of EU funding to support PES reform (see Study Annex 7 (7-J)), some interviewees considered that more could be done to increase synergies (e.g. cooperation with ESF+ Managing Authorities).

Interviewees¹⁵⁵ also considered that there is a high level of coherence with the mandates of the EU agencies under the remit of DG EMPL. All interviewees from the respective agencies said that they would welcome enhanced cooperation.

4.1.3.2 Coherence and complementarity with national policies and initiatives (EQ8)

The PES Decision objectives and its implementation have remained largely coherent and complementary to national policies, with this alignment strengthening further compared to the 2019 evaluation. Qualitative evidence strongly suggests a more active dissemination of learning among national policymakers, and greater acknowledgement of the value of this learning at national level.

Consultations and case studies confirmed that the PES Decision and its implementation was considered coherent and complementary with national policies to a large extent. This concerns primarily the fields of employment and skills, but also wider policy areas such as migrant integration, wider support for vulnerable groups and addressing the green, digital and demographic transitions. The majority of AFEPA and EMCO/ministries survey respondents considered that PES Network activities are coherent

¹⁴⁹However, two interviewees called for closer cooperation with the EURES Network, and one EURES stakeholder recommended further clarification of the remits of each Network.

¹⁵⁰https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/legal-migration-and-resettlement/work/eu-talent-pool_en

¹⁵¹ [Communication \(COM\(2025\) 944 final\) on the Quality Jobs Roadmap](#).

¹⁵² Further examples can also be found in Study Annex 7 (example 7-I).

¹⁵³No AFEPA considered that any of these policies were not coherent with the objectives of the PES Network. Only one respondent to the EMCO/ministry survey considered that the objectives were not coherent with EU competitiveness policy, while one other respondent considered that they were not coherent with EU enlargement policy.

¹⁵⁴EU institutions (Geographical desks), agencies and structures; international agencies; EU social partners.

¹⁵⁵3 EU institutions, agencies and structures; international agencies; 2 AFEPA's.

to a large extent with national employment policies¹⁵⁶. This alignment has been further ensured by the bottom-up approach guiding Work Programme development, co-created with members, as underlined in the Head of PES workshop. **Many underpinning examples were identified through desk research consultations and case studies** (Study Annex 4). In Germany, for instance, the PES Decision objectives align with national goals on labour force participation, migrant integration, and skills intelligence. In Spain, coherence is evident in digitalisation, employer engagement, and performance indicators. In Finland, the municipality-based employment service model aligns with PES Decision goals on vulnerable groups and youth employment. The PES Decision objective to develop more effective services for both jobseekers and employers aligns closely with the evolving municipality-based employment service system in Finland.

The value of learning from the PES Network is increasingly seen as supporting national policy development and there were many examples of mechanisms at national level to foster complementarity with it. One AFEPA stated that ‘when the government is working on strategies and measures in these areas, it frequently seeks advice from us within the PES’, while another highlighted that ‘the ministry and stakeholders/social partners see how effective it is to pose questions to all of Europe. Being able to gain insight into what is happening helps them determine whether they are on the right track¹⁵⁷. Another AFEPA highlighted the value of the Network in identifying new policy areas: ‘Encountering these topics repeatedly within the Network (e.g. skills portability) prompts us to pay attention and take action.’

Nonetheless, some consultees¹⁵⁸ noted that challenges to ensuring coherence with national policies still exist. These include that EU policy priorities are not necessarily always aligned with national policy priorities (e.g. on topics such as migration or green policy) and that policy cycles sometimes do not align¹⁵⁹. These challenges do not however affect the PES Decision’s ability to meet its general or specific objectives or achieve EU added value.

4.1.3.3 Appropriateness of activities and inputs in achieving objectives (EQ9)

The evaluation findings suggest that there is good internal coherence within the amended PES Decision, and that Network activities and inputs are appropriate for achieving its objectives. The implementation of the PES Decision closely follows the logic set out in the intervention logic (see Study Annex 5). The inputs and activities as

¹⁵⁶In the AFEPA survey (n=31), 17 respondents considered that it was coherent to a large extent, with a further 10 stating that it was coherent to some extent. In the EMCO/ministries survey (n=22), 13 respondents considered that it was coherent to a large extent, and a further 5 to some extent. See Study Annex 8 (Figures 19 and 35).

¹⁵⁷Two AFEPA at the AFEPA workshop.

¹⁵⁸3-4 respondents to the AFEPA and EMCO/ministries surveys; 5-6 participants in the AFEPA and Heads of PES workshops.

¹⁵⁹While this does not necessarily prevent PES Network activities/priorities from influencing the PES Network (and vice versa), it means that it can be more challenging, or be delayed, where policy timings do not align.

described in the intervention logic are appropriate for achieving the specific and general objectives of the PES Decision.

Effective coordination at both EU and national levels is essential for ensuring the successful implementation of the PES Decision. At EU level, the day-to-day coordination of the PES Network activities, led by the PES Secretariat and supported by external contractors - is essential for ensuring that the activities are implemented effectively and efficiently, while maximising synergies. Substantial efficiency gains are generated through this dedicated function and centralised coordination. There was strong consensus at the AFEPA workshop on the essential role and strong added value of the PES Network Secretariat, ensuring the coordination of the governance, processes and governance. At national level, AFEPA play a pivotal role: as the primary liaison point within their PES, they facilitate participation in activities, coordinate with both the Secretariat and other AFEPA (e.g. responding to answer PES-to-PES surveys, arranging bilateral exchanges), and disseminate relevant information in their respective countries. In some countries (e.g. ES), this also includes organising mutual learning with regional PES.

The key activities of the PES Network, in line with Art. 4 of the 2020 PES Decision, form a wide-ranging and complementary set of activities, involving both top-down information and guidance, as well as strong bottom-up engagement and peer-to-peer mutual learning. Evidence from all consultation activities (surveys, interviews, case studies) strongly indicates that stakeholders highly value the range and type of PES Network activities and believe that they are highly complementary.

The findings from the consultations point to strong internal coherence. Network members consider that the current PES Network governance structures and processes are appropriate for achieving cooperation and supporting EU employment policy objectives¹⁶⁰. They also consider that the governance arrangements lead to mutual trust and interpersonal relationships, which allow PES to reach out to other PES, even outside the formal Network activities. The ‘layered structure’ (incorporating WG, AFEPA and Board meetings) reportedly works well for achieving consensus, even if there can be some repetition across levels.

Many consultees nonetheless highlighted some challenges to internal coherence. These included the high workload placed on AFEPA, stemming from the large number of activities and growing national interest in the learning from the Network. Another issue was that Network outputs are not currently translated into national languages, although some consultees noted that this may become more feasible due to advances in AI/machine translation. In addition, varying levels of commitment among PES in the Network were noted.

¹⁶⁰In the AFEPA survey (n=31), 24 respondents stated that governance structures and processes are appropriate for achieving cooperation and supporting EU employment policy objectives to a large extent, and a further 5 to some extent. One respondent felt that this was to a limited extent, and one further respondent did not know. See Study Annex 8 (Figure 20).

4.2 How did the EU intervention make a difference and to whom? (EU added value)

The application of the amended PES Decision generated added value, as EU-level cooperation through the Network accelerated PES modernisation, strengthened resilience to labour market shocks, supported the systematic uptake of effective practices, while enabling benchmarking, mutual learning and crisis response capacities that would not have emerged to the same extent through national action alone. In the absence of EU intervention, structured cooperation and peer learning spaces would be lost, likely leading to slower innovation and increased fragmentation over time, particularly for smaller and less-resourced PES.

4.2.1 Continued need for EU level action (EQ10)

The objectives of the PES Decision are still best met by EU-level action. The structured, EU-backed forum for European PES to learn and cooperate with each other was crucial given that the challenges faced by PES are largely the same across Europe, including the complex and rapidly changing geopolitical, economic, and environmental context, as highlighted consistently by consultees across consultation activities and stakeholder types. The evaluation found strong added value brought about through EU-level action designed to enhance cooperation and mutual learning among PES, as evidenced in the range of impacts and results triggered by engagement in the PES Network in PES participating countries (see in particular sections on effectiveness (4.1.1) and efficiency (4.1.2)).

The evaluation identified that the application of the 2020 PES Decision continued to provide added value in all areas that had already been identified in the 2019 Staff Working Document and supporting study. In particular, the main effects of the 2020 PES Decision, which could not have been met by action at national level alone, as identified across all sources of evidence for this evaluation, are as follows:

Accelerated PES reform through the provision of comparative evidence and opportunities for mutual learning. The PES Network has supported PES reform by supplying a steady flow of comparative evidence on PES performance, peer experience, and actionable recommendations (see EQ1b). This has enabled PES to adopt proven service delivery models, upgrade management systems, and embed quality improvement processes that likely would not have emerged at the same speed through national efforts alone (see EQs 1b and 2a and examples in Study Annex 7, 10-A).

Faster and more efficient implementation of good practices and innovative approaches through operational cooperation: EU-level cooperation ensured that promising innovations - such as AI-supported matching, employer-segmentation models, digital service tools, and quality-management systems - were shared more efficiently and effectively across PES participating countries. Mutual learning enabled PES to “copy-adapt” effective solutions rather than develop them from scratch, reducing duplication, lowering costs and reducing risks of experimentation (see EQs 1b, 2a, 6, 7 and examples in Study Annex 7, 10-B).

Box 4. Sharing tools and piloting common approaches (digitalisation, green transition and labour shortages)

The evaluation has highlighted the Network's potential to pilot and foster operational collaboration and shared approaches among PES, by drawing on proven methods and consolidating resources for pilots and innovation. Examples include:

- **A common definition green skills and jobs:** Between 2023 and 2025, the PES Network Taxonomies WG worked to identify the most suitable approach to build a common definition of green jobs and piloted it with both national and EU level taxonomies, using ESCO data. The work inspired the Swedish PES to further advance its work by developing a comprehensive dataset for green taxonomies and the Bulgarian PES to accelerate the development of national methodologies for defining green jobs and skills.
- **Piloting a common approach to measuring labour shortages:** Throughout 2023-2025, a Focus Group was set up to pilot and test a common approach to measuring labour shortages, exploring the use of the ratio between job vacancies and registered job seekers as a possible common approach among PES Network members. This approach is already used by most of the PES consulted, though with large variations in the nature of data and the methodology.
- **Sharing digital tools:** The 2025 PES Work Programme provided for the piloting of an open-source digital platform where PES could exchange expertise, pool resources and tools, and share reusable components of IT solutions in a secure manner. In December 2025, a dedicated space for sharing and engaging around IT assets was launched.

Stronger resilience and better crisis-response capacity across PES: PES were better able to rapidly adapt service models, digitalise operations, and design targeted support measures to persons displaced from Ukraine, as crisis-response knowledge circulated quickly across the Network. This led to more coherent, timely, and effective PES responses than would have been possible through PES working alone in fragmented, bilateral exchanges (see EQs 1b, 2a and 14 and examples in Study Annex 7, 14-A and 14-B). While structured cooperation to tackle increasingly common challenges was also highlighted as an added value of the PES Decision before its renewal in 2020¹⁶¹, this aspect further came to the fore in the 2021-2025 period due to consecutive crises.

Increased transparency, accountability, and understanding of PES performance: Benchlearning is a unique EU-level mechanism for PES to understand their strengths and weaknesses, compare themselves with peers, and access structured recommendations for improvement. This self-reflection and peer review exercise has allowed PES to both strengthen their own assessment culture and continued to contribute to fostering greater EU-wide awareness of how PES are progressing over time (see EQ1a, 1b, and 2a and example 10-C, Study Annex 7).

PES voices were more involved in EU employment policy: By speaking collectively through the PES Network, national PES gained a stronger and more coherent voice in EU policy debates than if they were to act individually. PES Network contributions to EU initiatives on the Youth Guarantee, the LTU, minimum income schemes, individual learning accounts, micro-credentials, labour mobility initiatives, and the broader European

¹⁶¹[EUR-Lex - 52019SC1350 - EN - EUR-Lex](#)

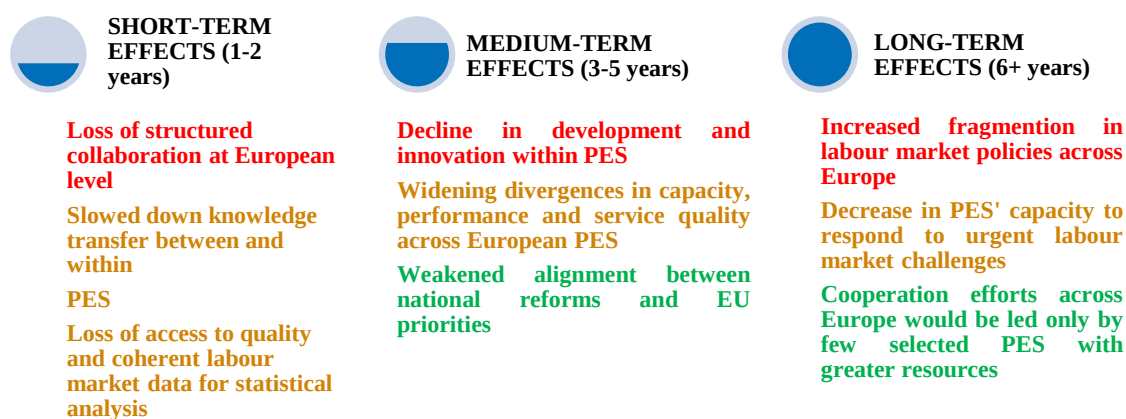
Semester process, both through a formalised consultative role (e.g. EMCO reviews) and ad hoc consultations, contributed to ensuring that EU employment policies took into account PES implementation realities (see EQs 3 and 7).

Broadened cooperation with labour market actors and strengthened ecosystem collaboration: In line with Art.5 of the amended PES Decision, over the evaluation period, the Network expanded cooperation beyond PES-to-PES exchange, reinforcing collaboration with EU agencies, social partners, NGOs, regional actors, and EU enlargement countries. This wider engagement helped PES align strategies, strengthen partnerships, and access broader expertise, ultimately contributing to more

4.2.2 Impact of discontinuing the PES Decision (EQ11 and EQ12)

The short-, medium-, and long-term consequences of discontinuing the PES Decision based on input from AFEPAs, PES heads, EMCO members, and EU stakeholders are presented in Figure 11.

Figure 11. Effects of discontinuing the PES Network in the short, medium and long term



Notes: The colours highlight the frequency of concerns, with red indicating high mention and green lower emphasis.

In the short term, the largest concern would be the loss of structured EU-level collaboration, dismantling the only formal platform for systematic mutual learning, knowledge exchange, and Benchlearning among European PES. Stakeholders¹⁶² stressed that replacing this with bilateral cooperation would demand significant extra resources - financial and human- which many PES, particularly smaller ones, do not have. Without EU-level coordination and financial and human resources, only few individual PES could realistically replicate the scale, depth or methodological rigour of the evidence-based assessment process provided by Benchlearning, affecting performance transparency and the identification of improvement areas. Suspension of mutual learning activities would likely also reduce opportunities for PES to exchange solutions, test innovations and implement proven practices, slowing down knowledge transfer between and within PES,

¹⁶²EU institutions and agencies, social partners, international organisations and networks, AFEPAs, Heads of PES, EMCO/ministry representatives.

that would face greater risks, higher experimentation costs. Furthermore, the discontinuation of the PES Decision would also affect the availability, coherence and quality of data on key labour market-relevant issues, which is currently collected through the PES Network.

In the medium term, the discontinuation of mutual learning and Benchlearning could reduce the efficiency and quality of PES reforms and lead to a decline in development and innovation, particularly in areas where the Network has driven progress, such as digitalisation, AI integration, and employer services (see EQs 1 and 2). Research shows that half of the PES Network’s outputs focus on digital transformation, with tools like profiling systems and online services directly shaped by Benchlearning recommendations. Without access to tried-and-tested approaches in these areas, PES would face greater risks, higher experimentation costs and longer delays in implementing reforms. Over time, this would widen divergences in capacity, performance and service quality, with less-resourced PES particularly experiencing reduced access to innovation. The erosion of personal networks would also reduce collaboration, potentially shifting cooperation toward regional clusters and deepening uneven development across Europe. The absence of an EU-level platform would further limit opportunities for PES to engage in EU policy dialogue and contribute to key EU processes and policies, weakening alignment between national reforms and EU priorities—a critical gap when coordinated responses to labour market challenges are most needed.

In the long term, the discontinuation of the PES Decision and lack of a structured PES Network could lead to PES adopting increasingly divergent approaches in key areas like activation, skills matching, and digital transformation, where the Network has established common frameworks and tools. This fragmentation would hinder PES’ ability to address pressing challenges, including demographic shifts, skills shortages, and green/digital transitions. There would be a decrease in PES capacity to respond to urgent labour market challenges such as demographic shifts, persistent skills shortages, and the green and digital transitions. In addition, during both COVID-19 and the influx of displaced persons from Ukraine, the Network played a critical role in enabling rapid peer exchange and coordinated adaptation (see EQs 1b, 2c, 15). Without this infrastructure, collective crisis preparedness and responsiveness would be significantly weakened, with PES struggling to maintain the responsiveness and anticipatory capacity that have been strengthened during the current mandate (see EQs 1b, 2c). Cooperation between PES would become sporadic, ad hoc and likely limited to a handful of well-resourced PES, undermining Europe’s resilience to future crises.

4.3 Is the intervention still relevant?

4.3.1 Relevance

The amended PES Decision remained highly relevant throughout the evaluation period, with its objectives closely aligned to persistent and emerging labour market challenges and evolving EU policy priorities.

The PES Decision objectives remained relevant, allowing the Network to adapt to new needs and challenges throughout the evaluation period. It demonstrated strong adaptability to major shocks and structural changes - such as COVID-19, the green and digital transitions, and the Ukraine crisis - while continuing to address long-standing needs like skills shortages and inclusion of vulnerable groups.

The scope of the PES Decision provides a robust and flexible framework to support PES in addressing current and future labour market transformations, aligning with wider and emerging EU policy priorities. Stakeholders broadly agree that its aims remain fit-for-purpose and are likely to stay so in the future, given ongoing megatrends, and that its strong alignment with key EU frameworks (e.g. the EPSR, Green Deal, and social inclusion agenda) reinforces its continued relevance.

4.3.1.1 Relevance and flexibility over the implementation period (EQ13 and EQ 14)

Relevance of objectives

A range of labour market challenges persisted during the implementation period, affecting the work of all PES. Some were ongoing structural challenges, others were the results of shocks, which required all to react fast in often unprecedented contexts, such as COVID-19 pandemic and Russian war of aggression in Ukraine.

The objectives of the amended PES Decision remained highly relevant in this context (See Study Annex 8, Figure 22). The PES Decision functions as a driver for integrated and effective solutions, with its objectives forming a shared foundation that is relevant in supporting national PES to improve their services and address labour market needs. Stakeholders consider the objectives to be logically structured and suitably pitched to address challenges. In contrast to the findings of the 2019 evaluation¹⁶³, stakeholders raised no concerns about the hierarchy or level of generality of the objectives.

The **general objective of cooperation and mutual learning**, and the specific objective of facilitating mutual assistance and uptake of good practices remained relevant to a large extent in addressing both types of challenges (See Study Annex 8, Figure 22). The objectives of facilitating mutual learning and the uptake of good practices were also particularly relevant in the context of budgetary constraints and rising expectations on PES performance throughout the evaluation period. Multiple AFEPAs highlighted that practical learning tools such as toolkits MAPs and good practices helped accelerate ‘copy-adapt’ processes, reducing duplication of work and shortening the time from design to implementation. The approach to PES service delivery continued to change during 2021-2025, with an ongoing move towards increased digitalisation, accelerated initially by the COVID-19 pandemic and propelled further by the rapid expansion of AI and the challenges and opportunities around integrating AI into PES services¹⁶⁴.

The objective of the PES Network to **contribute to the modernisation and strengthening of PES** remained highly relevant in this context, as it allowed the Network to provide tangible support on key modernisation fronts. In this context, the broad scope of the PES Decision provides a robust and flexible framework to support PES in addressing current

¹⁶³ [EUR-Lex - 52019SC1350 - EN - EUR-Lex](#)

¹⁶⁴ [A new dawn for public employment services: Service delivery in the age of artificial intelligence.](#)

and future labour market transformations and aligning with wider and emerging EU policy priorities. The study identified similarly positive findings on the objective of **assessing and increasing transparency of PES performance through Benchlearning**. Facilitating comparability and accountability of the PES through Benchlearning remained relevant particularly considering that key structural challenges impacting the work of the PES persist over multiple years, with Benchlearning providing a consistent framework over longer periods of time to assess progress on these issues.

The specific objective to **support policy development and implementation at EU level by offering the experience of PES** was viewed as **less relevant compared to the other specific objectives** across the consultations with the lowest number of respondents indicating it was relevant to a large extent (Study Annex 8, Figure 22). AFEPA survey respondents and interviewees recognised the relevance of a **bottom-up feedback channel** through which PES can share day-to-day operational experience to inform EU policies but also noted that, in practice, this type of feedback cannot be a main driver of EU-level policy design.

Flexibility and adaption to change

The Decision allowed **flexibility** and remains adequate for upcoming challenges (EQ14). The **PES Network was able to adapt to changes over the implementation period to a high degree**, providing PES with relevant support to respond to newer labour market challenges. Stakeholders considered the Network flexible and responsive to evolving needs and challenges. Of the 31 respondents, 24 considered the PES Network to be flexible to a large extent in both performing supporting efforts to **integrate displaced Ukrainians** into the workforce and adapting to the labour market impacts of the **COVID-19 pandemic**. Additionally, 15 respondents valued the Network's degree of flexibility in supporting the development of **green skills** and 14 in addressing **skills and labour shortages** to a large extent (See more in Study Annex 8, Figure 23).

This was notably enabled by **the joint planning process** for the strategy and work programmes of the PES Network, which allow members to propose new priorities, and by the **objectives** of the PES Decision, which are broad enough to encompass activities across a range of thematic areas. Evidence regarding the PES Network's ability to adapt to changes throughout the implementation period is presented in the table below.

The broad scope of the PES Decision's objectives, together with its general and specific objectives (as set out in Arts. 3 and 4), continue to provide a relevant framework for tackling ongoing and upcoming challenges in the EU labour market.

4.3.1.2 Relevance to potential future challenges and new policy priorities (EQ 15 and EQ16)

The PES Decision's objectives continue to correspond closely to wider and emerging EU policy goals and priorities, including:

European Employment Strategy (EES): Although the PES Decision does not explicitly reference the EES, its objectives align with the aim of the EES to coordinate EU countries'

reform efforts in labour market-and social policies through Benchlearning, monitoring and best practice exchange, rather than legislation.

European Semester: the PES Network Chair is regularly invited to speak at EMCO meetings while the EMCO Chairs participate in the Network's Board meetings as observers (see EQ3 and EQ7).

European Pillar of Social Rights and its Action Plan: The European Pillar of Social Rights and its Action Plan are supported by the PES Decision, which provides a framework for activities contributing to the Pillar's principles and 2030 headline targets (see Study Annex 7, 16-A). PES Benchlearning data collected annually under Article 4 of the amended PES Decision — including data on unemployment, inactivity, vacancies filled, and customer satisfaction with PES services — is also highly relevant for wider EU employment and social inclusion objectives. Between 2024-2025, the PES Network enhanced synergies with the Labour Market Policy (LPM) database to improve the relevance and operational of this data and provide closer alignment with the LMP database. This could further support cross-validation to improve data quality, enable more detailed analysis of PES-coordinated ALMP measures and, crucially, consolidation of data delivery to reduce the burden on data providers.

The transition towards a climate-neutral and digital economy: PES will be increasingly required to provide tailored support to help workers and employers navigate the creation of new professionals, transformation of existing roles and the increasing demand of green and digital skills¹⁶⁵ the objectives of the Decision are very likely to remain relevant to these developments, as the need for PES to learn from peers at operational level will remain acute (See section 4.3.1.1.).

The technological developments: Impacted by the objective of fostering cooperation and mutual learning and how the Network operates¹⁶⁶ Consultees particularly highlighted process automation in profiling and job matching and the use of AI-based applications for HR and recruitment as new developments which will require PES to rapidly adapt the way they offer their services. The PES Network has already adapted its work to address these challenges (See section 4.3.1.1.). The relevance of the PES Decision is only likely to increase, as PES will require opportunities to learn from each other at operational level on how to transform their services.

The demographic and labour market challenges: **Demographic shifts** will continue to progressively exacerbate **skills and labour shortages** across sectors¹⁶⁷. There was broad consensus across interviewees (29 respondents of the AFEPA Survey between to a large and to some extent, (See Study Annex 8, Figure 24) and workshop participants that ensuring PES can adapt their services to support both the working population to develop

¹⁶⁵ [Trends in PES – Assessment report on PES Capacity - 2025](#)

¹⁶⁶ [Trends in PES – Assessment report on PES Capacity - 2025](#)

¹⁶⁷ [ELA Report on Labour Shortages and Surpluses in Europe 2023. EURES](#)

the right skills and employers to find workers matching their evolving needs warrants active and continued collaboration among PES in the years to come.

Competitiveness: **European competitiveness** is likely to remain a key EU priority, with skills shortages identified as one of the main obstacles to overcome¹⁶⁸. Of the 31 respondents of the AFEPA survey, 29 confirmed the continued relevance of the PES Network's objectives (to a large and to some extent) for addressing competitiveness challenges (See Study Annex 8, Figure 24), with all 22 respondents to the EMCO/ministries survey agreeing that these objectives will remain relevant in the future (See Study Annex 8, Figure 33). Strengthening skills intelligence, development, and matching capabilities, and enhancing cooperation with other labour market stakeholders and employers will therefore be essential.¹⁶⁹ Interviewees and AFEPA workshop participants confirmed the continued relevance of EU-level collaboration in dealing with these challenges.

¹⁶⁸ [The Draghi report on EU competitiveness](#)

¹⁶⁹ [Empowering the Workforce in the Context of a Skills-First Approach | OECD](#)

5. WHAT ARE THE CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED?

5.1 Conclusions

In 2021-2025, the PES Network implemented a wide range of activities and produced an extensive portfolio of outputs, to support PES in a changing labour market. This section summarises the evaluation's findings and conclusions on the implementation of the PES Decision, in line with the five criteria set out in the Better Regulation guidelines.

Effectiveness - Under the Decision, the PES Network continued to strengthen cooperation, mutual learning, and PES modernisation, enhancing transparency and contributing EU policymaking. Benchlearning improved performance transparency and organisational change, though limited dissemination reduced external stakeholder transparency. TLDs and MAPs advanced performance management, digitalisation, and vulnerable group support, but capacity constraints and national priorities slowed implementation. While the Network expanded contributions to EU policy development, visibility remains an area for improvement.

Efficiency - The PES Decision's application has been cost-effective, with annual costs reduced due to in particular to increased digital tools. PES resource investments varied but were considered proportionate. Benchlearning and mutual learning delivered high value for money, accelerating reforms and reducing duplication.

Coherence - The Decision is coherent with EU employment policies and funding instruments, as well as complementing broader areas such as labour migration and green and digital transitions. Synergies with EU agencies increased, though further improvements are possible. The Decision supports national employment policies and demonstrates strong internal coherence.

EU added value - The amended PES Decision generated significant EU added value, accelerating reforms through comparative evidence and peer learning, while enhancing crisis response capacity. Discontinuation would imply risks such as slower innovation, wider disparities, and weaker policy coherence.

Relevance - The Decision's objectives remained relevant and fit for new challenges, with the Network addressing challenges such as COVID-19, labour shortages, and the green transition through adaptive activities and participatory work programmes.

5.2 Lessons learned / Suggestions for improvement

Overall, the findings confirm a high degree of continuity with the 2019 evaluation, while pointing to clear improvements in cooperation, coherence and the maturity of the Network. The PES Network has consolidated its role, increased its relevance and impact over time, and is highly valued by both members and external stakeholders.

The evaluation of the PES Network's activities provides several important lessons that can guide its future strategic direction.

Enhancing transparency of Benchlearning outcomes - There is scope to increase transparency and coherence by further disseminating Benchlearning outcomes beyond the Network while ensuring it remains a safe space for sharing sensitive information.

Stepping up operational cooperation on strategic priorities - The Network has done extensive work to foster common strategic approaches and could support further operational cooperation on priorities such as digitalisation and performance measurement frameworks.

Strengthening and prioritising contributions to EU policymaking - The Network has increased efforts to contribute to EU policymaking, with opportunities to further deepen and prioritise its sphere of contributions, in consultation with PES.

Further synergies with EU labour mobility initiatives - The Network has stepped up contributions to policy areas, with scope for further synergies with in particular EURES, EESSI, and Europass.

Potential further efficiency gains - Limited scope remains for further efficiencies, such as a unified knowledge hub or streamlined decision-making processes, stronger synergies with EU agencies in analytical work. New technologies may also increasingly provide cost-effective solutions for greater accessibility of activities and deliverables.

Building PES capacity and optimising EU funding - The Network promotes synergies with EU could further support PES in accessing and making the best use of the ESF+, TSI, RRF, and post-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework opportunities.

Developing systematic monitoring and KPIs - A more systematic monitoring framework with KPIs would allow the Network to systematically measure results over time and make the necessary adjustments to ensure continued impact and cost-effectiveness.

Ensuring continuity - The current PES Decision is broad and flexible enough to address new challenges, and discontinuation would represent a significant loss in support for the ongoing development of European PES and their contribution to a well-functioning labour market. Providing greater long-term stability of the Network would contribute to administrative simplification, by removing the need for periodic renewal of an established and well-functioning structure.

ANNEX I: PROCEDURAL INFORMATION

DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (DG EMPL) is the lead for the evaluation of Decision No 573/2014/EU on enhanced cooperation between Public Employment Services (PES).

The Commission's Better Regulation Guidelines were followed to carry out the evaluation without deviations.

The evaluation draws on a study commissioned from an external contractor (Ecorys), initiated in June 2025 and conducted over twelve months. The evaluation timeframe covers the period from the entry into force of Decision (EU) 2020/1782 on 1 January 2021 until 31 December 2025.

Data have been collected from several sources, and both quantitative and qualitative methods have been used, including: Desk based research and literature review; Mapping of inputs, outputs, results and impacts of the PES Network; Country case studies (BG, DE, ES, FI, LT, SI), Stakeholder consultations (EU-level interviews, two targeted surveys to AFEPAs and two workshops with Advisors for European PES Affairs and Heads of PES and a cost effectiveness analysis. A call for evidence was launched in November 2025 until 26 December 2026.

ANNEX II. METHODOLOGY AND ANALYTICAL MODELS USED

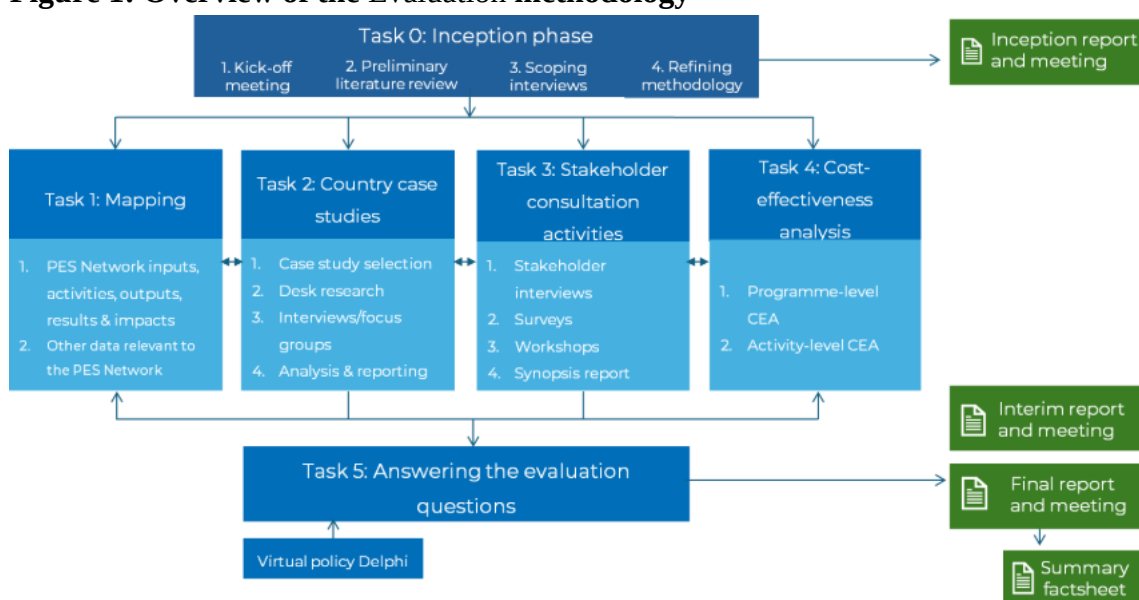
This section sets out in detail the methodological approach used in the evaluation.

This evaluation aimed to gather robust evidence on the effectiveness, efficiency, coherence, EU added value and relevance of the implementation of the amended PES Decision. In order to understand these elements, the findings needed to address the following overarching evaluation questions, corresponding to the different evaluation criteria:

- To what extent was the intervention successful and why?
- How did the EU intervention make a difference and to whom
- Is the intervention still relevant?
- What are the conclusions and lessons learned?

The methodological approach was thus designed to combine the appropriate methods to enhance the robustness of results. The figure below presents an overview of the evaluation methodology and the different Tasks, showing the way in which the evaluation team conceived the interconnections between the Tasks to ensure gathering all the complementary evidence needed to provide comprehensive answers to the evaluation questions.

Figure 1: Overview of the Evaluation methodology



1.Task 0: Inception

1.1 Preliminary Literature Review

During the inception phase, the list of literature sources presented was reviewed. The evaluation team mapped additional sources by targeting gaps in the initial selection and consulting additional data sources shared by DG EMPL and the external contractors supporting the work of the PES Network. This included the use of keywords to narrow down the sources (e.g. 'PES Network', 'PES', 'Public Employment Services', 'employment services'). In particular, the preliminary literature review focused on:

- Mapping contextual information relevant to the work of the PES Network, including EU-level legislation, strategic documents on EU initiatives and relevant evaluation studies and

reports produced by EU institutions and key stakeholders, as well as statistical data on labour market evolutions;

- Gathering sources for the mapping of PES Network inputs, activities, outputs, results and impacts, including documents related to PES Network governance (e.g., PES Work Programmes, meeting minutes of the PES Network Board), as well as outputs resulting from its activities (e.g., Benchlearning, mutual learning, etc.). This included gathering further qualitative and quantitative data sources from DG EMPL that are not in the public domain, as follows:
 - Materials from PES Network Board and AFEPA meetings (e.g. presentations, briefing notes, meeting agendas);
 - Materials from the Benchlearning WG meetings (e.g. presentations, meeting agendas, meeting minutes, operational conclusions; briefing notes);
 - Materials from the PES Benchlearning statisticians' meetings e.g. presentations, meeting agendas, meeting minutes);
 - Benchlearning quantitative data reports 2019-2024.
 - Benchlearning qualitative assessments (e.g. PES Summary Reports from the 3rd, and 4th Benchlearning cycles);
 - Materials from TLDs (e.g. individual and general feedback reports);
 - Benchlearning quantitative data 2010-2024.

The preliminary review helped to refine the evaluation matrix and research questions. This review also laid the foundations for the subsequent Tasks of the evaluation, with the following aims:

- To support with the identification of sources for Task 1 (Mapping);
- To assist the research on the national level to be undertaken for Task 2 (Country case studies);
- To finetune the data collection tools for Task 3 (Stakeholder consultation activities), ensuring in particular that the interview guides and survey questionnaires ask specific questions on aspects which are not sufficiently covered by existing datasets;
- To assess the availability and quality of quantitative financial data on the PES Network for Task 4 (Cost-effectiveness analysis).

The preliminary literature review gathered a total of 60 documents, including EU-level legislative and strategic documents and a longlist of 65 sources of statistical indicators relevant to understand the socio-economic context in which the PES Network and individual PES operate, to be analysed as part of sub-task 2.2 (Mapping of other data relevant to the PES Network). Documents and statistical sources were collected and reviewed with the use of a purpose-designed Excel screening tool. The screening tool helped to categorise documentary sources according to author, type of source, geographical scope, and year of publication. Sources were also screened for information on the following aspects:

1. PES/PES Network-specific information or information on the broader socio-economic context in which the PES Network operates;
2. Evidence of the PES Network's impact;
3. Focus on specific themes or target groups relevant to the PES Network;

4. Relevance to the objectives and activities of the PES Network, as outlined in Articles 3 and 4 of the amended PES Network Decision.

The overall relevance of each source to the objectives of the evaluation was rated across a scale of low-medium-high, based on the above criteria.

In addition, during the preliminary literature review, a list of sources of information on PES Network outputs, activities, inputs, results and impacts, to be further analysed as part of Sub-task 2.1 (Mapping of PES Network inputs, activities, outputs, results and impacts) was developed. A mapping matrix was set up to record information on PES Network outputs, related activities, as well as evidence of any results or impacts achieved on the ground, and data on (human and financial) resources invested (where available). This preliminary research identified 345 outputs, and the mapping matrix was partially completed with basic information on each output.

1.2 Scoping Interviews and training session

During the Inception phase, three scoping interviews were carried out. The following stakeholders were interviewed:

- Four DG EMPL staff members part of the PES Network Secretariat to gather insights on the overall functioning and management of the PES Network and its activities;
- Two senior representatives of the external contractor in charge of supporting the PES Network Benchmarking activity (EY), to gather insights on the management and implementation of Benchmarking process, including challenges and success factors;
- Two senior representatives of the external contractor in charge of supporting PES Network Mutual Learning Activities (ICF); to gather insights on the range Mutual Learning activities implemented by the Network, including challenges and success factors.

These interviews were carried out in parallel to the preliminary desk research and complemented the inception research with further insights from European Commission representatives involved in coordinating, managing and interacting with the PES Network and its work in various ways and provided valuable insights and access to data on the implementation of the PES Network Decision to date. Specifically, the interviews:

- Gathered insights from EU policymakers on the PES Network Decision's aims and objectives, to sense-check and refine the draft intervention logic of the evaluation.
- Clarified the way the PES Network is managed and coordinated by the PES Network Secretariat in DG EMPL
- Identified additional sources that would be useful for the evaluation, in particular sources not publicly available on the inputs to PES Network (financial data if available) as well as data from the work of the PES Network (Benchmarking indicators categorised and assessed under Task 1).
- Gathered insights on the role and visibility of the PES Network within DG EMPL and its coherence with other DG EMPL-led EU policy initiatives.
- Obtained initial insights on the outputs, results and impacts of the PES Network from experts involved in the day-to-day coordination and management of the Network.

Furthermore, the evaluation team attended a training session on the Benchlearning methodology on 4 September 2025, organised and delivered by the European Commission’s external contractors in charge of supporting the PES Network’s Benchlearning activities (EY and Alphametrics).

The findings of the scoping interviews and the training session helped to lay the foundations of the evaluation and contributed to the refinement of the methodology and research tools. This included finetuning and sense-checking the intervention logic, identify key lines of enquiry to probe in the surveys, and helped to finalise the selection of countries for the case studies, and key stakeholder groups to consult as part of the interview programme.

1.3 Refinement of methodology and task preparation

Based on the discussions at the kick-off meeting, the inception meeting, and the preliminary desk research, the evaluation methodology and tools were refined and included the updated versions in the revised Inception report. The main changes made are indicated in the Table below.

Table 1. Main Revision undertaken during the inception phase

Section-task	Main methodological changes
Evaluation matrix	Evaluation matrix revised, to tailor further the scope of the evaluation and address comments made by the ISG/DG EMPL, reviewing sub-questions and indicators.
Intervention logic	Intervention logic revised.
Mapping (Task 1)	Matrix for Mapping of PES Network inputs, activities, outputs, results and impacts qualitative data developed and partially pre-filled
Country case studies (Task 2)	- Revised criteria for the selection of case evaluation countries (e.g. - Selection of case evaluation countries and rationale updated (BG; DE; ES; FI; LT; SI) - Revised list of topics to be tackled by the country case studies
Consultation strategy and tools (Task 3)	- Revised research tools and two interview guides developed (AFEPAs/Heads of PES/EMCO chairs and EU and international organisations) - List of interviewees updated, and details of contact persons added - Revised survey questionnaires (AFEPAs and EMCO/ministries)
Cost-effectiveness analysis methodology (Task 4)	Method updated to include further details on the Contingent Valuation Method
Answering the evaluation questions (Task 5)	Method updated to indicate that the possibility of a virtual Policy Delphi to be assessed at the interim stage
Work plan	Work plan updated to reflect agreed dates for the workshops with AFEPAs and Heads of PES

2.Task 1: Mapping

Task 1 aimed to identify, map and systematically collect all relevant data concerning the inputs, activities, outputs, results and impacts of the PES Network, as well as other relevant data related to the work and objectives of the PES Network.

2.1 Mapping of PES Network inputs, activities, outputs results and impacts

The objective is to identify, map and systematically collect all relevant data concerning the inputs, activities, outputs, results and impacts of the PES Network. PES Network activities were grouped under six categories, broadly corresponding to the strands of work outlined in Article 4 of PES Decision 573/2014/EU as amended by Decision (EU) 2020/1782:

- **Benchlearning activities** allowing PES to regularly assess their performance against qualitative and quantitative indicators under a shared Excellence model;
- **Mutual learning activities** to disseminate the knowledge and lessons learned accumulated by the various strands of work of the PES Network and support learning and development among PES;
- **Reporting and analytical activities** covering a wide range of learning resources and publications and research activities;
- **Communication activities**, promoting PES Network activities and outputs towards both Network members and external stakeholders;
- **Governance and ecosystem activities** supporting the overall functioning and management of the PES Network, and fostering information exchange among stakeholders in the employment ecosystem;
- **Other cooperation activities**, covering the Network's cooperation with a wide range of stakeholders, as well as additional internal cooperation activities promoting knowledge sharing on specific issues among the Network's members.

Individual PES Network outputs were then classified under these six categories of activities, as agreed with DG EMPL at Inception stage. The categorisation of PES Network activities and outputs is set out in Figure 2 below.

Table 2. Categorisation of PES Network activities and outputs

Benchlearning activities	• TLDs • Quantitative Benchlearning materials • Benchlearning study visits/reports • Learning materials	Communication activities	• News articles and newsletters • PES Podcasts • PES videos • LinkedIn webpage • Communication campaign
Mutual learning activities	• Seminars • Study visits • Surveys • WGs • TRWs • Webinars • Jour Fixe • PES Practices • MAPs • Assessment activities	Governance activities	• Internal meetings • Stakeholder conferences • Work programmes
Reporting and analytical activities	• PES Factsheets • Reports, studies and other publications • Thematic papers	Cooperation activities	• PES-to-PES surveys • Partnership and / or cooperation activities • Other

	• Toolkits • Internal meetings • PES Capacity reports		
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To map PES Network outputs produced during the evaluation period (2021-2025) against these six categories, a **mapping matrix** was designed to allow the evaluation team to gather a vast amount of data in a systematic and organised way, and to support the analysis needed to answer the evaluation questions (Task 5). The mapping tool was structured as an Excel matrix, designed to compile data for all outputs (as rows) against a specific set of information aligned to the evaluation questions indicated in the evaluation matrix (as columns). The tool was designed to adequately capture the range of outputs of the PES Network, including thematic areas that are not explicitly mentioned in the PES Decision such as responding to external crises/trends (COVID-19 pandemic, Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, skills shortages etc.) More specifically, the mapping matrix served as a tool to gather information under the following headings and sub-headings for each output mapped:

- **Basic information:** Basic information was mapped, including the **output name**, the **activity type** it relates to (e.g. Benchlearning, mutual learning, report and analytical activities, communication activities, PES Network governance activities), the **output type** (e.g. events, reports, news items, annual reports, work programmes), the **year** of delivery, the **geographical coverage**, the **link** to the resource and a **short description of the output**;
- **Links to the objectives of the 2020 PES Decision:** The mapping identified which of the PES Network general objectives and specific the output was relevant. The list of general objectives and specific objectives were revised to ensure alignment with the revised intervention logic.
- **Thematic area:** Theme covered by the output to allow to understand at a glance the main topic addressed. This included sixteen thematic areas, identified on the basis of themes addressed in Arts. 3 and 4 of the PES Decision as amended in 2020, and challenges affecting the labour market and PES over the evaluation period as outlined the intervention logic for this evaluation), as follows: access to labour market for the most vulnerable / excluded, decent and sustainable work, better functioning and inclusiveness of the labour market, gender equality, identification of skills shortages and better supply-demand matching, better integration of labour markets, labour market mobility, assessment of ALM initiatives, promoting skills development and lifelong learning, supporting employers, improving the overall management of PES, ensuring quality service delivery, taking-up innovation and digital solutions, PES Staff development and training, and improving PES visibility and branding. Researchers could also include other thematic areas as a free text option;
- **Relevance to trends/crises:** this indicated whether the output is relevant to trends/crises encountered (i.e., demographic change and ageing, rapid tech developments, COVID-19 pandemic, Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, labour / skills shortages, low training participation, activation of inactive, and digital/green jobs and new forms of work). These stem from the external factors listed in the intervention logic;
- **Geographical coverage:** The countries involved in a given output were listed as appropriate (i.e. only for PES Network outputs where country participation was relevant);

- **Inputs:** Where available, the actual or estimated human and financial resources required for the delivery of the output were indicated. Evidence on inputs was primarily gathered through financial data provided by DG EMPL. Most of this information came in the form of aggregate numbers – i.e. estimations by type of activity.;
- **Evidence of results and impacts:** Where available, information on the number of downloads/accesses/views (for outputs published or delivered online), the number of participants (for outputs involving participation), and the number of best practices shared (if any), was recorded. Additionally, evidence on identified results and impacts of the specific output was included, primarily based on insights gathered through the consultation activities (Task 3) and the country case studies (Task 2);

Throughout the evaluation, all documents and resources that contributed to or resulted from the PES Network activities were **systematically collected, compiled, and analysed** to provide information to populate the mapping matrix. **A total of 653 outputs produced from 1 January 2021 were mapped** in the matrix. This was achieved through a comprehensive literature review and desk research to ensure that all available secondary data on the PES Network inputs, activities, outputs, results and impacts, was mapped in the matrix, and its relevance assessed. In particular, the evaluation team:

- Conducted a comprehensive review of the PES Network website and other relevant platforms and repositories (e.g. PES Network Knowledge Centre, PES Practices repository, PES Network Dashboard, Communication and Information Resource Centre for Administrations, Businesses and Citizens (CIRCABC)) as well as of the relevant official European Commission webpages, extracting all data publicly and non-publicly available.
- Gained access from the European Commission (PES Network Secretariat) and their external contractors to documents and resources not publicly available (e.g. data on financial inputs to the PES Network, participation in PES Network activities, monitoring reports).

The mapping matrix was filled out through a thorough review and analysis of the content of each output mapped to identify key themes, labour market trends and topics addressed in the output as well as to identify the (general and specific) objectives of the amended PES Decision which the output contributed to achieving. In instances where certain topics or objectives were covered to differing degrees, this was reflected in the mapping through the use of colour coding. This classification exercise was further complemented with the findings from the primary research undertaken as part of the case studies (Task 2), and stakeholder consultation activities (workshops, interviews, and targeted surveys) (Task 3), with results identified in these activities then mapped to the corresponding output in the mapping matrix.

A list of the information that was mapped and analysed and examples of sources to identify this information is presented in the table below.

Table 3. Examples of information mapped and sources used

Category	Examples of information mapped	Examples of sources
Inputs	• Number of full-time equivalents (FTEs) at the European Commission • Financial resources allocated to the governance and operation of the PES Network by 1) the European Commission	• PES Network Secretariat financial input data

	(including via contractors) and 2) national authorities (as available)	
Activities and outputs	Mutual learning activities	
	• Reports, publications, thematic papers, studies, thematic reviews, policy documents (outputs of activities such as WGs, MAPs, TRWs, Seminars, Webinars, Jour Fixe and study visits) • PES Practices published in the PES Practice Repository	• PES Website and PES Knowledge Centre • PES Network Annual reports • PES Network Work Programmes • Repository of PES Practices • CIRCABC
	Benchlearning activities	
	• Benchlearning models and methodologies • TLDs • Benchlearning assessment reports and recommendations	• PES Network Benchlearning Manuals • Main outcomes of the 3rd cycle of PES Benchlearning (overall reports, PES summary reports) • Main outcomes of the 4th cycle of PES Benchlearning (overall reports, PES summary reports) • Annual quantitative data collection and analysis gathered via the Benchlearning exercise (3rd and 4th cycle) • Qualitative assessments collected within the Benchlearning exercise (PES self-assessment reports, overall assessment reports) • Quantitative assessment reports • TLDs (General Feedback reports, Individual Feedback reports)
	Reporting and analytical activities	
	• Reports and studies produced • Evaluations of active labour market initiatives carried out • Reports, Toolkits and position papers published in the PES Knowledge Centre	• PES Network Knowledge Centre and PES Network outputs therein
	Communication activities	
	• News articles, newsletters, events, PES pods and videos	• PES Network Newsletters • News items • Videos • PES Network post-event reports • PESPod episodes • PES Network LinkedIn Group
	Governance and ecosystem activities	
	• Internal meetings (e.g. board and AFEPA meetings) • Work programmes, annual reports and activity reports	• Input documents to the PES Network Board and to the Meeting of the AFEPA. AFEPA, produced with the support of the Network Secretariat • Meeting minutes of the PES Network Board (and related news articles) and meeting minutes of AFEPA meetings • Reports from PES Network Stakeholder Conferences
	Cooperation activities	

	- Partnerships and cooperation activities with relevant labour market stakeholders - Contribution to the European Labour Market Barometer - Partnerships and cooperation activities between PES Network members (i.e. PES to PES surveys)	- PES Network Annual reports - PES Network Work Programmes - European Labour Market Barometer
Results and impacts	- Evidence on the level of cooperation between PES, including bilateral cooperation - Evidence of the extent to which Benchlearning activities helped identify best practices and development areas - Evidence of the implementation of Benchlearning assessment recommendations leading to measurable improvements - Evidence of the extent to which mutual learning activities helped identify best practices and development areas for PES - Evidence of the extent to which mutual learning activities led to the uptake of good practices by PES - Evidence of the effectiveness of PES Network communication activities in raising awareness of its outputs and results	- Reports on PES capacity and reports on PES implementation of the Youth Guarantee and PES services for LTU - Results of the targeted stakeholder (AFEPA/ Heads of PES) consultations - Meeting minutes of the PES Network Board (and related news articles) and meeting minutes of AFEPA meetings - Monitoring and evaluation activities in regard to the activities compiled by contractors who support the implementation of the Network's work programme - Other testimonials of the Network members (e.g. shared as part of the PES Network 10 years anniversary campaign; posts in PES Network LinkedIn Group) 2019 evaluation of Decision 573/2014/EU on enhanced cooperation between Public Employment Services

The evaluation team also gained access to benchmarking data gathered through relevant Benchlearning cycles and available on the PES Network Dashboard. This data was structured within one comparable file, allowing for benchmarking data to be disaggregated by country and (sub)indicators. The benchmarking data was provided to the National Experts to support the development of the country case studies (Task 2), and used as part of the main report to support the analysis of how labour market trends and the work of PES evolved during the evaluation period. Benchmarking data was not used as evidence of the impact of the PES Decision since it is not possible to establish a direct causal link between the work of the PES Network and broader labour market dynamics.

2.2 Mapping of other data relevant to the work and objectives of the PES Network

Based on the preliminary literature review conducted at Inception stage the evaluation team continued to map and assess relevant literature and policy documents, as well as statistical data on the labour market evolution for the period considered for this evaluation. This data contributed to the evidence base and the analysis for the evaluation, in particular by supporting the evaluation team to:

- Identify additional contextual qualitative and quantitative data to understand the context in which the 2020 PES Decision was implemented.
- Provide evidence to further define the points of comparison.
- Support the assessment of the coherence of the PES Decision by identifying and analysing related EU employment and social policy initiatives.

A total of 106 EU-level resources were gathered, including policy and legislative documents, strategies, evaluations, studies, and other publications. The most relevant resources gathered were analysed and triangulated with evidence coming from the rest of the research tasks (Sub-task 1.1., Task 2, Task 3, and Task 4) to answer the evaluation questions as part of Task 5.

Moreover, the evaluation team gathered statistical data relevant to the evaluation, notably labour market indicators and indicators on specific needs to be addressed by PES. This data sought to inform the socio-economic context in which the 2020 PES Decision was implemented; support the contextualisation of the PES Network results and impacts, as relevant; feed into the data to be further analysed by the National Experts and presented in the six country case studies. A total of 65 datasets from across different sources (e.g. Eurostat, Labour Force Survey, Cedefop) related to labour market indicators relevant to the work of PES and the PES Network were identified and mapped. The table below includes selected examples of these.

Table 4. Examples of Indicators Mapped

Indicator	Source
Income and living conditions	
Persons at risk of poverty or social exclusion by age and sex	Eurostat (EU-SILC)
In-work at-risk-of-poverty rate by age and sex	Eurostat (EU-SILC)
In-work at-risk-of-poverty rate by type of contract	Eurostat (EU-SILC)
Employment and activity (incl. unemployment and labour market transitions)	
Employment and activity by sex and age - annual data	Eurostat (Labour Force Survey)
Unemployment by sex and age - annual data	Eurostat (Labour Force Survey)
Part-time employment as percentage of the total employment, by sex and age (%)	Eurostat (Labour Force Survey)
Part-time employment and temporary contracts - annual data	Eurostat (Labour Force Survey)
Transition from unemployment to employment by sex, age and duration of unemployment	Eurostat (Labour Force Survey)
Long-term unemployment by sex and age - annual data	Eurostat (Labour Force Survey)
Young people neither in employment nor in education and training (NEET), by sex and age	Eurostat (Labour Force Survey)
Inactive population as a percentage of the total population, by sex and age (%)	Eurostat (Labour Force Survey)
Job vacancy rate	Eurostat (Labour Force Survey)
Labour force growth (% annual rate) by country	Eurostat (Labour Force Survey)
Employment growth (% annual rate) by country	Eurostat (Labour Force Survey)
Job openings (absolute numbers) by country	Cedefop Skills Forecast
Job vacancies by sector	Eurostat
Job vacancies by country	Eurostat
Education and training (incl. skills)	
Population by educational attainment level, sex and age (%)	Eurostat
Participation rate in education and training (last 12 months) by sex, age and labour status	Eurostat
Participation rate in education and training by educational attainment level	Eurostat
Employment rates of young persons NEET since completion of highest level of education	Eurostat

Basic digital skills (% of individuals)	Eurostat (Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI))
Above basic digital skills (% of individuals)	Eurostat (Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI))

3.Task 2: Country Case Studies

Task 2 consisted of the development of six country case studies contributing to assessing the effectiveness, efficiency, coherence, added value, and relevance of the PES Decision at the national level. The case studies were developed through consultation with individual PES as well as other national stakeholders, exploring how they engage with and perceive the PES Network.

The case studies aimed to provide evidence on:

- Actions taken at national / regional / local level(s) in response to the PES Decision and PES Network activities, including Benchlearning activities.
- The impact PES Network activities have had on the activities and performance of individual PES.
- The influence PES Network activities have had on the development and implementation of national employment policies and initiatives.
- The contribution of the PES Network to increased cooperation between PES.
- The influence that PES Network activities have had on the implementation of EU employment policies and initiatives at the national level.
- The costs associated with involvement in the PES Network at the national level and for individual PES, and the degree to which these costs are proportionate to the benefits.

The countries for the case studies were selected using 12 selection criteria. These included:

- General indicators related to contextual factor, to ensure that the case study sample would include a balanced set of countries, taking into account key contextual characteristics.
- Indicators specifically related to PES characteristics and performance, to ensure a variety of organisations.

The following table provides a detailed list of the criteria used to select the six case study countries.

Table 6. Selection criteria for case study countries

Selection criteria	Detailed sub-criteria
General indicators	
Geography	• Northern Europe • Central and Eastern Europe • Southern Europe • Western Europe
Population size	• Up to 2 million • 2-6 million • 6-15 million • >15 million
Economic development	• less than 0% real GDP growth • % - 1.5% real GDP growth • 1.5% - 3% real GDP growth • > 3% real GDP growth

Unemployment rate	• less than 4% • between 4% and 5.5% • between 5.5% and 7% • >7%
Job vacancy rate	• less than 1% • between 1% and 2% • between 2% and 3% • > 3%
PES-specific indicators	
PES legal structure	• Independent public institution with a Management Board • Independent public institutions with local or regional authorities responsible at their administrative level • PES integrated into the responsible Ministry • PES integrated into the responsible Ministry with regional organisations operating at their administrative level • PES integrated into the responsible Ministry with regional organisations operating under a different Ministry
Trends in PES expenditure	• Increased spending based on latest PES capacity report • Decreased spending based on latest PES capacity report
PES maturity	• Developable • Developing • Well-developed • Mature
Opportunity for comparison	• Extent to which countries had participated both in the 3rd and 4th Benchlearning cycle, covered by the evaluation period.

Some ‘second-tier’ indicators were considered to ensure a wide representation of country contexts in the case studies. These ‘second-tier’ indicators included taking into account the existing responsibilities of individual PES, to ensure that the case study selection would include examples from PES with different remits. Additionally, the gender employment gap in 2024 was reviewed for each country, reflecting the introduction of a focus on gender in the 2020 PES Decision.

The application of the selection criteria led to the selection of six Member States, as outlined in the table below, reflecting a balanced variety of countries with different PES set-ups.

Table 5. Case study selection and rationale

Country	Reasons for inclusion
Bulgaria	• Central and Eastern countries with a mid-sized population, a medium-high GDP growth rate, medium-low unemployment rate, and a low job vacancy rate. • Increase in PES expenditure between 2021-2022, with the PES being assessed as ‘developing’ in terms of overall maturity. After completing its 3rd Benchlearning cycle in 2021, Bulgaria participated in the 4th cycle in 2024. • The National Employment Agency (NEA) is structured as an independent public institution with a Management Board, the most common PES structure across the EU. • NEA is fully responsible for providing individualised and follow-up assistance to the unemployed, and for managing ALMPs. • NEA is also partially responsible for supporting employers managing mass redundancies and registering private employment agencies. • NEA provides guidance to young people in their final two years of secondary education, and issues work permits to third-country nationals. • Bulgaria shows a significant percentage of outflows (above 70%) as well as one of the highest shares of inflows of nationals (43%) across the EU. • Bulgaria shows an increase in PES expenditure between 2021-2022, with the PES being assessed as ‘developing’ in terms of overall maturity. After completing its 3rd Benchlearning cycle in 2021, Bulgaria participated in the 4th cycle in 2024.
Finland	• Northern European country with a medium-low population size. Finland recorded a low GDP growth in 2024, high unemployment, and a medium-low job vacancy rate. • Decreased PES expenditure between 2021-2023, and overall ‘developing’ maturity status of ‘developing’. • In 2025, the Finnish PES undertook a major reform, with the responsibility for organising employment and integration services being transferred from a central independent institution to municipalities.
Germany	• Western European country with a large population. In 2024, the country had a low GDP growth rate, low unemployment rate, and a high job vacancy rate compared with other countries. • German PES is assessed as ‘well-developed’ in terms of overall maturity and has participated in the 4th Benchlearning cycle in 2024 and the 3rd Benchlearning cycle in 2021. • Bundesagentur für Arbeit (BA) is structured as an independent public institution with a Management Board, with the BA acting as a self-governing public law corporation with its own legal status. • BA conducts labour market monitoring, analysis and research and produces reports and labour market statistics and provides assistance to jobseekers (e.g. counselling, guidance, job-search assistance), manages ALMPs, distributes unemployment benefits including additional allowances (e.g. child allowances or short time work allowances). • BA is partially responsible for administering benefits for people with disabilities, as this responsibility is shared with other agencies; it is fully responsible for providing career guidance and advice to young people in education. • Germany remains among the top destinations for annual inflows of intra-EU mobile workers, the latter represent another potential key group of end-users for the German PES, influencing their service delivery.

Lithuania	• Central and Eastern European country with a medium-low population size. The country showed a medium GDP growth, high unemployment, and a medium job vacancy rate in 2024. • The PES was categorised as ‘developing’ as part of the 3rd Benchlearning cycle, and its spending saw a decrease between 2021 and 2022. Lithuania participated in both the 4th and 3rd Benchlearning cycles, allowing to assess the progress across cycles • The Lithuanian Employment Services (the PES) is an executive agency working under the auspices of the Ministry of Social Security and Labour, to which it reports directly. • The PES is fully responsible for providing individualised and follow-up assistance to the unemployed, and for managing ALMPs, but does not administer unemployment benefits or any other types of allowances. • The PES is only partially responsible for supporting young people but does not have specific responsibilities for providing specific benefits or support towards people with disabilities.
Slovenia	• Central and Eastern European country with a medium-low population size. In 2024, the country recorded a medium-high GDP growth rate, low unemployment, and a medium-high job vacancy rate. • The ESS (the Slovenian PES) delivers its services autonomously as an independent institution. • The ESS is fully responsible for providing individualised and follow-up assistance to the unemployed, managing ALMPs for jobseekers, and administering unemployment benefits. • The PES decreased expenditure between 2021 and 2023 and was assessed as ‘developing’ as part of the 3rd Benchlearning cycle. Its participation in the 4th Benchlearning cycle was scheduled to be completed in the second half of 2025.
Spain	• Southern European country with a large population. In 2024, it recorded high unemployment, and a low job vacancy rate. • Overall PES maturity level was assessed as ‘developable’. • The National Employment System (NES) is made up of the State Public Employment Service (SEPE) and the public employment services of the 17 autonomous communities, showing a high level of decentralisation • The PES are fully responsible for providing individualised and follow-up assistance to the unemployed, with the autonomous communities overseeing the implementation of the services and programmes for employment activation policies.

Following approval of the case study selection by the European Commission, the evaluation’s National Experts commenced the research. To support this process, the team produced a guidance document setting out the background to the evaluation and providing detailed instructions on the national-level desk research and consultations to facilitate a coherent approach across all six case studies. In addition, two coordination meetings were organised to fully brief the evaluation National Experts.

Desk-based research was undertaken by the National Experts to collect both qualitative and quantitative information on the following aspects:

- Additional contextual information, including relevant national- or regional-level labour market initiatives and policies.
- Detailed information about PES, including their main aims and objectives, target groups, stakeholders involved, budget, and activities.
- Actions or reforms taken as a result of the PES Benchlearning or other mutual learning activities, and any potential outcomes or impacts of these, to support the contribution analysis.
- Information to help identify potential interviewees.

The National Experts were given access to key sources of qualitative information, including PES summary reports from the third and fourth Benchmarking cycles, PES country factsheets, PES quantitative country fiches, EU-level statistical data sources and policy documents to be used as contextual evidence for the case study. Benchmarking data was also shared, as well as the list of EU labour market indicators gathered under Task 1.

In addition, National Experts collected and examined additional qualitative and quantitative sources such as administrative, monitoring, and evaluation data from PES registers, national or regional authorities (including feedback surveys), and data from the National Statistics Offices. They also included national policy documents, studies, evaluations, and analytical sources produced by authorities at national or regional level that provide useful information on the national employment policies and activities or initiatives related to the PES Decision 2020/1782. Other national qualitative sources included publications of intergovernmental organisations, academic articles and reports produced by non-governmental organisations.

To build on the desk research conducted, the National Experts organised targeted consultations with national-level stakeholders. A total of 47 interviews were conducted between October 2025 and March 2026. A list of the stakeholders consulted can be found in the table below.

Table 6. Stakeholders consulted for the case studies

Country	Stakeholder category	Organisation/Role	Number of interviews
Bulgaria	Stakeholders in the PES Network	Directorate General of the Bulgarian Employment Agency (AFEPA)	1
		Employment Agency (Head of PES)	1
	National and regional level policy makers	Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs	1
		Employment Agency Directorate	1
		Employment Agency, Statistics Department	1
			5
Germany	Stakeholders in the PES Network	Federal Employment Agency AFEPA; Head of PES; and alternate member of the PES Network; Head of IT	4
		Regional Office of BA for Northern Germany	1
	National and regional level policy makers	Jobcenter City of Nürnberg	1
		BDA - Association of German Employers	2
	Organisations working on labour market topics	German Trade Union Confederation (DGB)	1
		ver.di Trade Union	1
			10
Finland	Stakeholders in the PES Network	Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland (AFEPA; Head of PES)	2
	National and regional level policy makers	Association of Finnish Municipalities	1
		(Keha) Development and Administrative Services' Centre	1
		Helsinki Region Employment Area	1
	Organisations working on labour market topics	University of Tampere	1
		Confederation of Finnish Industries (EK)	1

		Central Organisation of Finnish Trade Unions (Employment policy specialist; Senior employment policy specialist)	2
		The VATES Foundation – Promoting Employment of People with Disabilities	1
		Employment Industry Finland	1
			11
Lithuania	Stakeholders in the PES Network	Employment Service of Lithuania (AFEPA; Head of PES)	2
	National and regional level policy makers	Ministry of Social Security and Labour	1
		Ministry of Foreign Affairs	1
		Youth Affairs Agency	1
	Organisations working on labour market topics	Kaunas Industry and Employers Association, Lithuanian Confederation of Industrialists	1
		Lithuanian Engineering and Technology Industry Association	1
		Vilnius Caritas	1
			8
Slovenia	Stakeholders in the PES Network	Employment Service of Slovenia (AFEPA; Head of PES)	2
	National and regional level policy makers	Institute of Macroeconomic Analysis and Development	1
		Trade Union Youth Plus	1
	Organisations working on labour market topics	National Youth Council of Slovenia	1
		Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education and Training	1
			6
Spain	Stakeholders in the PES Network	Spanish Employment Service (SEPE) (AFEPA; Head of PES)	2
	National and regional level policy makers	Employment service of Galicia	1
		Employment service of Navarro	1
	Organisations working on labour market topics	Spanish confederation of Business Organisations (CEOE)	1
		General Union of Workers (UGT)	1
		Zabaltzen Sartu	1
			7
Total			47

The topic guide was structured along the five evaluation criteria of the Better Regulation Guidelines, following the evaluation matrix. Additionally, it contained questions to support the evaluation's cost-effectiveness analysis (Task 4), namely on the costs and benefits associated with involvement in the PES Network. The interviews were carried out on a semi-structured basis to allow for prompting and probing on key topics, following the agreed topic guide in the language of the country. The topic guide was adapted for each case study and case study interviewee, based on their background and experience.

Following the collection of the primary and secondary data, National Experts carried out data consolidation, analysis and triangulation, and subsequently drew findings based on the evidence gathered. This exercise also involved the triangulation of relevant information gathered in Tasks 1 and 3. The following table illustrates the structure of the case study reports.

Table 7. Case study structure outline

Section	Content
Introduction and national context	- Labour market situation - Policy context

	• PES functioning and performance
Evaluation findings	• Effectiveness • Efficiency • Coherence • EU added value • Relevance
Conclusion	• Synthesis of the evidence and analysis presented in the case study, including key changes and impacts at national level, by evaluation criteria
Annexes	• Bibliography • List of organisations consulted

4.Task 3: Stakeholder consultations

Task 3 consisted of a comprehensive range of targeted consultation activities to gather the views of a wide range of European and national level stakeholders relevant to the PES Network, and collect evidence to assess the effectiveness, efficiency, coherence, EU added value and relevance of the PES Decision. The Task also:

- Provided key evidence to be integrated into the mapping of PES network inputs, activities, outputs, results, and impacts under Task 1.
- Fed into the country case studies under Task 2 by providing additional contextual information.
- Gathered additional evidence on costs and benefits of specific activities of the PES Network to support the cost-effectiveness analysis carried out under Task 4.

4.1 Consultation Strategy

The evaluation team developed a consultation strategy at inception phase which defined the consultation activities to be carried out, the stakeholders to consult, and the activities through which their views would be obtained. As outlined in the evaluation framework, the consultation activities intended to provide evidence and insights to answer evaluation questions under all evaluation criteria, and across all steps of the evaluation.

Given the specific focus of the PES Network and its activities, many of the stakeholders consulted had direct experience of involvement in the Network in order to gather the necessary information about the detailed functioning of the PES Network. This included for example Heads of PES, AFEPAs, and Benchlearning Steering Group members.

In order to ensure balance, the consultation strategy also included a range of stakeholders external to the PES Network across the different consultation tasks (specifically case studies, interviews, surveys) to ensure that a diverse set of opinions was gathered. These included organisations representing PES clients (e.g. EU-level NGOs, social partners) to assess the impact of the activities of the PES Network on them. This ensured that perspectives from outside of the PES Network contributed to the evaluation findings.

As agreed in the methodological approach to the evaluation, some of the evaluation consultation activities targeted the same stakeholder groups; AFEPAs and Heads of PES were consulted as part of the surveys, case study interviews, and workshops. As such, the consultation activities were planned to ensure complementarity, rather than overlap. While the interviews gathered in-depth individual

perspectives in a confidential setting, the workshops acted as a space for AFEPAs and Heads of PES to share general feedback on the functioning and work of the PES Network, as well as exchange ideas and experiences in a collective dynamic. The survey of AFEPAs provided more systematic evidence on the PES Network's impact on the national level. AFEPAs and Heads of PES in case study countries were not selected to be part of the stakeholder interviews (see below) to avoid duplication and evaluative burden.

It was decided to focus the final phase interviews on gathering additional views from indirect stakeholders of the PES Network rather than consulting PES, to avoid risks of duplication in information and consultation fatigue.

4.2 Stakeholder interviews

Through in-depth interviews with the relevant stakeholders, the evaluation team gathered information which could not be easily acquired through other research methods. Interviews were carried out with three key groups of stakeholders:

- **Stakeholders directly involved in the PES Network:** namely those involved in the management and implementation of the PES Network such as the Heads of PES and the AFEPAs, as well as previous and current EMCO chairs, and Benchlearning Steering Group members;
- **Stakeholders indirectly involved in the PES Network:** this will primarily include selected representatives from relevant DG EMPL units and Geodesks, who have knowledge of labour market and employment policies, both at EU and national level;
- **Organisations working on labour market topics and/or representing the voice of PES end-users:** European and international organisations involved in employment policies as well as training and diversity in the labour market. These included social partners, civil society organisations and networks, representing the interests of end-users (e.g. employers and jobseekers as well as specific sub-groups, e.g. SMEs, young people, older workers).

The interviews gathered evidence for all evaluation criteria – effectiveness, efficiency, coherence, EU added value, and relevance - and fed into the cost-effectiveness analysis (Task 4) and answering the evaluation questions (Task 5). They furthermore provided important qualitative data, feeding into Task 1 (mapping of activities, outputs, results, impacts of the PES Network), as well as additional national data and context for the case studies carried out under Task 2.

Interviewing is well-suited to gathering detailed information on policy and practice. However, some potential limitations of this method were duly considered:

- **Social Desirability Bias:** to ensure that respondents felt free to express their perspectives, specific viewpoints were not attributed to individual stakeholders when reporting;
- Information gathered from different interviewed stakeholders was compared and triangulated with evidence obtained through all other research methods. This ensured that the evidence collected allowed us to formulate robust and balanced conclusions.

Interviews were conducted using a semi-structured approach, which, as opposed to other formats, allows the interviewer the necessary flexibility to deviate, probe, and ask unscripted follow-up questions based on the interviewee's responses, thus allowing to further investigate key topics. In

line with the revised evaluation matrix, the evaluation team developed two topic guides, tailored to the two groups of stakeholders to be consulted and their estimated familiarity/experience with the work of the PES Network:

- **Group 1:** EMCO chairs and Benchlearning Steering Group representatives;
- **Group 2:** European and international organisations working on labour market topics and/or representing the voice of end-users, DG EMPL representatives (i.e. Geodesks and other units working on topics related to the remit of the PES Network).

The topic guides are structured in line with the evaluation criteria and closely follow the evaluation questions and sub-questions defined in the technical specifications and elaborated upon in our evaluation matrix. This ensured that the interviews could directly feed into the responses to the key evaluation questions of the evaluation and facilitated triangulation of sources during the analysis. The questions were further tailored as needed by the research team depending on the experience, background and area of expertise of the individual stakeholders consulted.

The interview programme was launched in October 2025 and completed in March 2026. In total, 38 stakeholders were interviewed. The table below provides the list of organisations consulted.

Table 8. Stakeholders interviewed

Category	Organisation/Institution
Stakeholders directly involved in the PES Network	EMCO
	Steering Group on Benchlearning
Stakeholders indirectly involved in the PES Network	DG EMPL Geodesks for Slovenia, Germany and Austria, Romania, Bulgaria, Spain and Portugal
	DG EMPL, Unit B1
	DG EMPL, Unit B2
	DG EMPL, Unit B3
	DG EMPL, Unit D1
	DG EMPL, Unit E1
	DG EMPL, Unit E3
	DG EMPL, Unit G1
Organisations working on labour market topics and/or representing the voice of PES end-users (employers and jobseekers, including specific sub-groups)	EU and international organisations
	Eurofound
	Cedefop
	European Training Foundation (ETF)
	European Labour Authority (ELA)
	OECD
	Euroguidance
	EURES Network
	World Association of Public Employment Services (WAPES)

	EU-level civil society organisations
	European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities (EASPD)
	Confederation of Family Organisations in the European Union (COFACE)
	European Disability Forum (EDF)
	European Network of Social Integration Enterprises (ENSIE)
	EU social partners
	Business Europe
	SME United
	European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC)

The interviewers wrote the summary notes from the interviews within a template structured around the main headings from the topic guide, which was used as the basis for subsequent analysis. The write-ups were prepared in individual Word documents, with one write-up per interview conducted. These write-ups were subsequently uploaded to the qualitative analysis tool: [ATLAS.ti](#). The evaluation team used this tool to undertake a systematic thematic analysis, drawing out key issues and findings under each of the main topic headings corresponding to the five evaluation criteria (effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, coherence, and EU added value) and the questions outlined in the interview topic guides. Coding the themes emerging from the interviews allowed for filtering and searching, to compare and contrast the views of stakeholders and to distinguish areas of consensus from areas where there were marked differences in opinion. These comparisons allowed the evaluation team to explore the degree of concurrence in viewpoints between different types of stakeholders (direct and indirect stakeholders of the PES Network, as well as between public and non-governmental actors), and whether any country differences emerged from the qualitative data. The evaluation team also had access to the full set of interview summary notes to verify details and/or further delve into the insights shared by interviewees as relevant.

The evidence from the interview programme was used in drafting the preliminary answers to all evaluation questions presented in evaluation, complementing the research conducted in Task 1 (Mapping), Tasks 3.2 (Surveys), 3.3 (Workshops), and Task 4 (Cost-effectiveness analysis).

4.3 Surveys

The surveys gathered evidence from key stakeholders involved in the PES Network and in related policy areas on all evaluation questions for the evaluation. The survey evidence complemented the information collected through the interviews about the implementation of the PES Decision. Data from the surveys also informed the content of the workshop with Heads of PES and was used to populate the mapping matrix with any evidence of results and impacts of the PES Network (Task 1). Two surveys were conducted in total, covering three stakeholder groups:

- **Survey 1** targeted AFEPA's;
- **Survey 2** targeted EMCO members and national labour and social affairs ministry representatives.

The questionnaire for AFEPA's covered the specific objectives of the PES Network, exploring in-depth the activities and outputs, and their results and impacts at the national level. The questionnaire for

labour and social affairs ministers and EMCO members included more strategic and policy-level questions, on the relevance and coherence of the PES Network objectives to and with national employment policies. Some specific questions to EMCO members were also included, using routing, to investigate synergies between the PES Network and EMCO. The questionnaire addressed the key evaluation criteria and included the following types of questions:

- Closed-ended questions: factual, for example ratings on the extent to which the PES Network achieved its objectives or contributed to policy priorities set out in Decision 573/2014/EU as amended in 2020;
- Dedicated areas for comments/suggestions (open questions): in which respondents were invited to express or explain their positions and reasoning behind their replies, as well as to provide examples of how and the extent to which PES Network activities and outputs achieved results and impacts at the national and EU level.

The questionnaires were developed to ensure language accessibility (i.e. limiting the use of EU jargon, using simple, accessible language to the extent possible) and using appropriate routing. The surveys included both closed and open questions. Closed questions used scales to allow data to be collated and analysed in a consistent way, including questions concerning perceptions on PES Network activities being more or less successful than others. Open questions were used to maximise the depth of information collected, allowing respondents to further elaborate on their responses and provide examples as relevant. The questions were split by evaluation criterion, to gather evidence across all evaluation questions.

The two surveys targeting AFEPA and EMCO/ministries were launched on 15 and 16 October 2025 respectively, and ran for about five weeks, with the AFEPA survey closing on 17 November 2025 and the survey of EMCO/ministries closing on 19 November 2025. The AFEPA survey was shared with 33 potential respondents. The EMCO/ministries survey was disseminated by the EMCO Secretariat directly. To ensure an appropriate response rate, several reminders were sent to consultees, including with the valuable support of the PES Network Secretariat. Reminders to the AFEPA were sent on 29 October, 11 and 13 November 2025. A reminder to the EMCO members was sent on 6 November and reminders to the national ministries was sent on 10 and 17 November 2025. There were 31 valid responses to the survey of AFEPA, and 22 valid responses to the survey of EMCO/ministries.

The results were analysed to identify the frequencies of the answers to the closed questions and qualitatively assess the replies to the open questions to identify recurring trends, examples and relevant insights to support the data from the closed questions. The survey results were triangulated with secondary data collected under the mapping in Task 1 and primary data collected through the other stakeholder consultation activities (interviews, workshops in Task 3 and country case studies interviews and focus groups under Task 2). The results of the survey were used to draft the preliminary answers to all evaluation questions presented in the Interim report and the final answers to all evaluation questions and all analysis presented in the Final report.

4.4 Workshops

Two in-person evaluation workshops were carried out to consult key PES Network representatives. The first workshop was organised as part of the in-person AFEPA meeting that took place on 9 October 2025 in Brussels, bringing together 32 AFEPA. A second in-person workshop for

Heads of PES was delivered on 12 December 2025 as part of the PES Network Board meeting held in Copenhagen, which brought together 50 participants.

The workshop with AFEPAs covered the extent to which PES activities and outputs have had an impact on PES practices and the success factors and hindering factors behind this, the operational delivery of PES Network activities and areas for improvement in terms of effectiveness, costs of participation/involvement in the PES Network and factors influencing cost-effectiveness of the PES Network.

The workshop with Heads of PES focused on more high-level topics, examining for example the overall added value of the PES Network to the work of PES in each country, the relevance of the Network to the issues facing PES overall, the coherence of the work of the PES Network with national employment policy priorities and initiatives and whether/how this can be increased, and areas on which the PES Network could focus in the future to ensure continued relevance.

For each workshop, the Research Team developed a range of materials for its delivery, including:

- The **agenda** and key questions for discussion, accompanied by a short briefing note with background information on the context of the consultation. The finalised agenda and briefing note were shared with workshop participants by DG EMPL a week prior to the event, to allow sufficient time for AFEPAs to prepare for the discussion.
- **PowerPoint presentation** to present the evaluation (i.e. scope, timeline and key objectives, overview of the methodology), introduce the workshop key aims and agenda, and explain the format of the discussion.

The workshops were structured by evaluation criteria and lasted two hours each. A brief overview of the evaluation aims and methodology was followed by breakout discussions based on guiding questions to gather insights from AFEPAs and Heads of PES across all evaluation criteria and collect additional examples of impacts or challenges encountered. The workshops closed with a final plenary session asking participants to reflect on future aims and improvements to the PES Network.

4.5 Virtual Policy Delphi

The evaluation team conducted a virtual Policy Delphi - a structured, online method for gathering expert opinions, using an anonymous questionnaire. The methodology of the Policy Delphi was adapted to focus on consulting a selected group of stakeholders on forward-looking conclusions and lessons learned that can help shape the future of the PES Decision post-2027. To implement the Policy Delphi, a panel of 12 stakeholders with relevant expertise was selected, including the following experts: High-level Advisors for the evaluation (Marton Csillag from the Budapest Institute and Stefan Humpl from 3s), EMCO chairs, EU social partners, civil society representatives and other networks. The Policy Delphi was launched on 9 April 2026 and ran for three weeks, until 30 April 2026, gathering 8 responses.

5.Task 4: Cost-effectiveness analysis.

The study assessed the cost-effectiveness analysis (CEA) of the activities of the PES Network, taking into account the costs of activities' outputs and results and the factors that had an influence on delivery and effectiveness. To facilitate comparisons with the findings of the 2019 evaluation, the approach to the efficiency assessment followed closely the approach adopted in the previous evaluation.

A traditional CEA addresses how far activities have been implemented at a cost which is proportionate to the level of outputs and results achieved. Traditional CEA assumes a direct, quantifiable link between costs and measurable outputs/results, which is often not feasible for complex, multi-level initiatives like the PES Network. The evaluation methodology acknowledged that many PES Network results and impacts, such as institutional learning or long-term employment impacts, are intangible or indirect, limiting the scope of strict unit cost calculations.

The evaluation's approach maximised the use of quantitative data, where available, complemented by qualitative insights that examined scope for cost savings and gains in efficiency. Cost-effectiveness analysis of specific activities was undertaken with reference to the refined intervention logic, ensuring that all potential cost inputs and potential outputs and results were mapped and incorporated. Data to inform calculations was gathered from a range of sources across all research tasks:

- PES Network expenditure data, including data on the costs of managing and delivering the PES Network at EU level, gathered from the PES Network Secretariat in DG EMPL;
- Analysis of the activities and outputs of the PES Network compiled in the Mapping of PES Network inputs, activities, outputs, results and impacts (Sub-task 1.1);
- Data from the consultation activities in Task 3 (EU-level interviews, surveys of AFEPAs, workshops with AFEPAs and Heads of PES), which allowed us to ask detailed questions regarding time spent at country-level in the work of the PES Network and factors determining the cost-effectiveness of PES Network activities;
- Data from national-level consultations conducted as part of the country case studies (Task 2).

Drawing on data provided by DG EMPL on the expenditure at EU level to manage and 'run' the PES Network, the evaluation team examined how far the administration and management costs of coordinating and implementing the PES Decision was cost-effective. Trends in budgetary allocations between 2021-2025 were compared to the 2014-2018 period covered by the previous evaluation. In addition, to the extent feasible, the analysis benchmarked cost-effectiveness findings against other comparable EU-level networks and structures focusing on promoting mutual learning. In particular, the analysis focused on drawing comparisons between the PES Network and the European Migration Network (EMN), due to a common focus on implementing activities encouraging cross border cooperation, knowledge sharing and cross border cooperation and receiving European funding.

The consultations undertaken in the evaluation provided opportunities to develop a deeper analysis of factors affecting the balance of expenditure between administration and operational costs, steps taken to reduce the administrative obligations and whether there is scope to achieve a more cost-effective balance. All research tools were reviewed in the inception phase and again following each research task with the CEA needs in mind.

In terms of country-level costs incurred by individual PES, data was gathered through consultation activities (Task 3). In particular, through the AFEPAs survey, the evaluation team gathered quantitative data on the number of days that full-time equivalent (FTE) staff within individual PES spent on PES Network activities in 2024, and estimations of additional costs (e.g. travel and accommodation) incurred by PES to participate in Network activities in 2024. Subsequently, the data was analysed through the following steps:

- Data collected through the AFEPAs on the number of days spent in Network activities was then converted into FTEs, assuming an average of 220 working days a year.

- The calculated FTEs were then multiplied by the average civil service gross salary from each country, based on Appendix 2 of the Eurostat Report on the 2024 annual update of remuneration and pensions of EU officials, to estimate the staff expenditure on the PES Network from the national PES.
- The results of the above calculations were added to data on estimated additional costs, to calculate the overall total PES country costs.

In addition to budget data shared by the PES Network Secretariat (DG EMPL) and data on direct costs and contributions-in-kind from participating PES collected via the consultation activities (Task 3), a follow-up questionnaire was shared with nine AFEPAAs who volunteered to provide additional information on costs incurred by their organisation to engage in PES Network activities. The follow-up questionnaire was sent in February 2026 and ran until 15 March 2026, with seven responses received. It should however be noted that there may have been selection bias, in that the PES who volunteered to provide this extra data are among those most engaged in the PES Network and may be more likely to then assess it positively. Questions included the following:

- Estimate of the number of days staff spent on PES Network activities within the PES, across key activity strands (e.g. Benchlearning, mutual learning, governance activities);
- Estimate of total costs associated with PES Network involvement (e.g. travel, accommodation, translations, expert inputs, etc.);
- Extent to which costs associated with involvement in the PES Network are proportionate to the benefits.

Expenditure data both at ‘programme’ and ‘activity’ level, with a focus on per annum costs for DG EMPL and individual PES, including internal staff costs (Full Time Equivalent (FTE)), subcontracted costs and other expenditure items, as well as a qualitative assessment of benefits (compared to cost), supported an assessment of how investment in each activity category has translated into selected outputs and results, and how this has changed over time.

The analysis of expenditure was complemented by a qualitative assessment of the cost-effectiveness of the PES Network’s activities. The in-depth consultation activities (in particular the survey of AFEPAAs as well as the input received through the workshops of AFEPAAs and Heads of PES), undertaken as part of Task 3 built on the expenditure tracking to provide an in-depth qualitative understanding of the activity: the way in which the activity was delivered (e.g., approach to mutual learning), costs involved, and how it contributed to specific outputs and results. These consultations generated insights on any efficiencies or inefficiencies arising in the process of delivery.

The results of the cost-effectiveness analysis are included in Annex IV.

6.Task 5: Answering the evaluation questions

To produce the evaluation report, all the evidence and findings from the different research Tasks (1-4) were compiled and analysed by our evaluation team in line with the structure of our evaluation framework. The evaluation framework provided the structure for all the evaluation research tools, which ensured that the findings from all the different Tasks for each evaluation criterion could be easily collated in the interim and final stages of the evaluation for analysis.

The evidence gathered through all the research tasks (mapping, country case studies, stakeholder consultation activities, cost-effectiveness analysis) was analysed and triangulated to provide answers to all evaluation questions and sub-questions, with systematic reference to the evidence and/or analysis underpinning the findings presented. The analysis was presented in the reports in sections corresponding to each of the evaluation criteria, and by individual evaluation question.

ANNEX III. EVALUATION MATRIX

The evaluation matrix addresses the research questions, presents the sub-questions that fall under the headline questions, the judgment criteria and indicators that were used to address these questions and the elements of our methodology which would provide the required evidence.

Evaluation criteria	Main evaluation questions	Sub-questions	Judgment criteria ¹	Indicators	Points of comparison ²	Data sources
Effectiveness	1. To what extent has the PES Network been successful in achieving its specific objectives?	a. How successful were the Benchlearning activities carried out by the PES Network in assessing and achieving increased transparency of PES performance? Have the Benchlearning activities been more successful in some national contexts than others? If so, why (e.g. national procedures, rules, economic context, etc.)?	- Benchlearning has contributed to improved transparency of PES performance since 2021 at EU level and in the majority of participating countries - There are clear improvements in the methodology and indicators used to assess PES performance since 2021 - Significant improvements (e.g. new methods, wider dissemination, new communication tools/channels, etc.) can be observed in dissemination and communication of assessments of PES performance to relevant stakeholders since 2021 - Benchlearning activities have been more successful in improving the transparency of PES performance in certain national contexts (e.g. socio-economic context, PES organisation, structured dissemination of learning from the PES Network, etc.) than others	- Greater transparency of PES performance to which the Benchlearning process (benchmarking, mutual learning, etc.) has contributed - Use of results of qualitative and quantitative Benchmarking leading to e.g. mutual learning activities or specific changes in national PES - Improvements in the methodology and indicators for defining and assessing PES performance - Improvements in dissemination and communication of assessments of PES performance - Benchmarking results (quantitative and qualitative assessment indicators), TLD results and mutual learning activity outcomes	- Degree of success in terms of transparency on PES performance achieved through Benchlearning activities in 2014-2020 - Degree of success in terms of transparency on PES performance which could reasonably be expected in the absence of the 2020 PES Network Decision (non-continuation of the PES Network activities from 2021)	2019 evaluation of the PES Network Decision - PES Network Work Programmes, PES Network Annual Reports, etc. - PES benchmarking indicators 2014-2020 and 2021-2025 (for context) - Qualitative and quantitative desk research (Task 1) - Mapping of PES Network activities (Task 1) - Country case studies (Task 2) - Stakeholder consultations (Task 3)
		b. To what degree has the PES Network facilitated mutual learning and mutual assistance, leading to the uptake of good practices, as well as other outcomes (e.g. other improvements in PES practices/performance, self-reflection), relevant for PES in areas within the scope of the PES Network Decision? - Which PES Network activities were particularly effective in facilitating mutual learning and uptake of good practices? - Are there any additional effects of PES Network activities (such as stronger tendency for innovation, sharing of digital solutions)? - Which areas of PES responsibilities have particularly benefited from mutual learning and its outcomes, including the uptake of good practices? - Have there been more positive outcomes from mutual learning in certain national contexts than others? If so, why? Have the Member States most in need of improvements taken up good practices?	- The PES Network has facilitated mutual learning and mutual assistance, leading to the uptake of good practices, as well as other outcomes (e.g. other improvements in PES practices/performance, self-reflection) in areas within the scope of the PES Network Decision - Specific PES Network activities have been more/less effective than others in fostering relevant mutual learning, leading to relevant outcomes, including the uptake of good practices - Additional types of impacts in PES in several participating PES (e.g. increase in innovation, sharing of other solutions e.g. digital, sustainability-related, etc.) deriving from involvement in PES Network activities - The uptake of good practices has been greater in certain national contexts (e.g. socio-economic context, PES maturity level, PES organisation, etc.)	- Number, type, scope, engagement (participation), outputs, results and impacts of mutual learning activities - PES Network activities which have been more/less successful than others in fostering mutual learning and relevant outcomes, including the uptake of good practices - No./type of additional impacts (e.g. increase in innovation, sharing of other solutions e.g. digital, sustainability-related, etc.) which can be attributed to participation in PES Network activities - Specific areas of PES responsibility, including organisational processes and responsibilities, have improved thanks to mutual learning or mutual assistance, leading to relevant outcomes including the uptake of good practices - Quantitative and qualitative evidence on examples and impacts of uptake of good practices in different MS/context	- Number/type/scope of mutual learning activities implemented in 2014-2020 - Degree to which mutual learning and mutual assistance led to the implementation of improvements by PES, including the uptake of good practices in 2014-2020	2019 evaluation of the PES Network Decision - PES Network Work Programmes, PES Network Annual Reports, etc. - Qualitative and quantitative desk research (Task 1) - Mapping of PES Network activities (Task 1) - Country case studies (Task 2) - Stakeholder consultations (Task 3)

		a. b. c. To what degree has the PES Network Decision led to cooperation between PES Network and relevant labour market stakeholders³?	Notable increase in cooperation with relevant labour market stakeholders at EU/international level	- Participation (numbers, types, frequency) of relevant EU/international labour market stakeholders in relevant Network activities and meetings - Exchange of information and data with relevant labour market stakeholders	- Degree of cooperation with relevant EU and international labour market stakeholders in 2014-2020 - Likely degree of cooperation with relevant labour market stakeholders in the absence of the PES Decision	2019 evaluation of the PES Network Decision - PES Network Work Programmes, PES Network Annual Reports, etc. - Qualitative and quantitative desk research (Task 1) - Mapping of PES Network activities (Task 1) - Country case studies (Task 2) - Stakeholder consultations (Task 3)
	2. To what extent has the PES Network Decision's implementation contributed to a strengthened, modernised and better performing PES?	a. To what extent has the PES Network Decision's implementation (Benchmarking and mutual learning activities) contributed to a strengthened, modernised and better performing PES in individual Member States?	- Improvements in PES performance (as shown by PES benchmarking indicators A+B of the Annex of Decision), can be attributed at least partially (via contribution analysis) to PES Network activities - Modernisation (e.g. digitalisation) and strengthening of PES can be attributed at least partially (via contribution analysis) to PES Network activities	- Benchmarking indicators on PES performance 2021-2025 - Scope, scale and volume of impacts on PES Network members in terms of modernising and strengthening PES and improving performance (e.g. digitalisation of services, new working processes, improved communication and outreach, improved services for jobseekers/employers etc.) - Qualitative or quantitative (e.g. labour market data) evidence of reasons which can provide context to any impacts in terms of modernisation, strengthening and better performance of individual PES	- The degree to which the Decision's implementation contributed to strengthened, modernised and better performing PES in 2014-2020 - Differences in the impact on PES Network members in the period pre-2021 - PES benchmarking indicators A+B in the period 2014-2020 - Views of relevant stakeholders on the situation pre-2021	2019 evaluation of the PES Network Decision - PES Network Work Programmes, PES Network Annual Reports, etc. - Quantitative and qualitative benchmarking indicators on PES performance 2014-2020 and 2021-2025 - Qualitative and quantitative desk research (Task 1) - Mapping of PES Network activities (Task 1) - Country case studies (Task 2) - Stakeholder consultations (Task 3)
		b. If there are significant differences in impact between PES Network members, what is causing them?	- The results of the implementation of the PES Network Decision's implementation show that the impact on modernising and strengthening PES (Art.4.1(c)) show substantial differences - in terms of e.g. scope, scale and volume - between Network members - Reasons can be identified to explain such differences (e.g. engagement levels of members, national-level dissemination of learning, national socio-economic context, PES maturity level, PES organisation, etc.)	- Benchmarking indicators on PES performance 2021-2025, including key differences between PES Network members - Qualitative or quantitative (e.g. labour market data) evidence of reasons which can explain any differences	Differences in impact between PES Network members identified in the 2014-2020 period	
		c. To what extent has the PES Network supported and encouraged cooperation and experience exchange between Member States? Has this resulted in (bilateral) collaboration beyond the activities organised by the Network (spillover effect)?	- Several examples of cooperation and exchange of experience between Member States in the different areas of PES responsibility (as set out in Art.3 of the PES Network Decision and areas that contribute to the modernisation and strengthening of PES) which can be attributed to PES Network activities since 2021 - Clear and corroborated examples of bilateral cooperation between Member States beyond PES Network activities since 2021 that can be linked to PES Network activities	- Number, type and scope of exchanges and cooperation between Member States linked to PES Network activities - Volume, type and scope of bilateral cooperation between Member States outside PES Network activities	Levels and type of cooperation and exchange of experience between Member States pre-2021	

	3. To what extent has the PES Network Decision's implementation contributed to the development and implementation of relevant EU policies (as set out in Art.4.1(e) of the PES Network Decision), including in particular the Union's employment policies (as stipulated in Art.3 of the PES Network Decision)?	To what degree has the PES Network effectively supported the development and implementation of relevant policies, particularly in the field of employment (e.g. European Youth Guarantee, the Council Recommendation on the integration of the LTU etc.) and the employment dimensions of specific policies (i.e. European Green Deal, UN Sustainable Development Goals) at EU level?	- Clear examples of the PES Network activities having effectively supported the development and/or implementation of relevant EU-level policies since 2021 - No/limited evident gaps in the PES Network's support to relevant EU-level policy development and/or implementation - Examples of contributions from the implementation of the PES Network Decision to the implementation of a range of (at least 3-4) specific EU employment policies since 2021 at EU and/or implementation of EU policies at national level	- Evidence of contributions of the PES Network activities to relevant EU-level policies to development and/or implementation (e.g. in legal texts, reports, events, impact assessments, etc.) - Numbers and policy focus of EU-level policies for which the PES Network has contributed to their development and/or implementation - Evidence from analysis of legal texts (regulations, decisions, communications) underpinning relevant EU policies of the incorporation of the experience of PES, which can be linked to PES Network activities	- Contributions by PES Network activities to EU policies pre-2021 - Views of relevant stakeholders on the situation pre-2021	2019 evaluation of the PES Network Decision - PES Network Work Programmes, PES Network Annual Reports, etc. - Qualitative desk research (Task 1) - Legal analysis of texts underpinning relevant EU policies - Mapping of PES Network activities (Task 1) - Country case studies (Task 2) - Stakeholder consultations (Task 3)
	4. To what extent has the PES Network Decision's implementation (activities and outputs) contributed to PES activities supporting the policy priorities set out in Article 3 of the PES Network Decision?	To what extent has the implementation of the Decision supported PES activities and outputs contributing to support for⁴: - All vulnerable social groups with high unemployment rates (Art.3(a)) - Decent and sustainable work (Art.3(b)) - Better functioning and inclusiveness of the EU labour markets (Art.3(c)) - Gender equality (Art.3(ca)) - The identification of skills shortages and skills matching (Art.3(d)) - Better integration of labour markets (Art.3(e)) - Increased voluntary geographical/ occupational mobility (Art.3(f)) - The integration of persons excluded from the labour market (Art.3(g)) - The evaluation and assessment of active labour market initiatives (Art.3(h))	The implementation of the PES Network Decision made a clear contribution (with a broad range of examples e.g. as the focus of mutual learning events, good practices, MAPs, etc.) to PES activities supporting these policy priorities since 2021	- Number, type, results and impacts of PES Network activities and outputs addressing the different policy priorities - Contributions (e.g. as the focus of mutual learning events, good practices, MAPs, etc.) by PES Network activities to supporting these policy priorities	Contributions by PES Network activities to supporting these objectives pre-2021	2019 evaluation of the PES Network Decision - PES Network Work Programmes, PES Network Annual Reports, etc. - Qualitative desk research (Task 1) - Mapping of PES Network activities (Task 1) - Country case studies (Task 2) - Stakeholder consultations (Task 3)
Efficiency	5. To what extent are the administrative and adjustment costs of the intervention justified, given the changes/effects it has achieved?		There are convincing evidence and examples that benefits (changes/effects) generated by the PES Network activities justify the administrative and adjustment costs since 2021	- Administrative and adjustment costs related to the implementation of the PES Network at national and EU level - Qualitative/quantitative evidence on changes/effects (benefits) - Degree to which administrative and adjustment costs can be justified by the changes/effects (benefits) observed - Evidence on whether benefits could have been achieved more efficiently	Degree to which costs to achieve the changes/ effects were justified pre-2021	2019 evaluation of the PES Network Decision - Qualitative desk research (Task 1) - Mapping of PES Network activities (Task 1) - Country case studies (Task 2) - Stakeholder consultations (Task 3) - Cost-effectiveness analysis (Task 4)

	6. Is there evidence of costs (including administrative obligations) that could be avoided or reduced, for example via increased digitalisation?	Were lessons learnt from the previous implementation period implemented to reduce costs?	- The intervention was implemented efficiently and there is no evidence that costs (including administrative obligations) could have been avoided or reduced via efficiency measures (e.g. via increased digitalisation, reorganisation of services, etc.) since 2021 - If there is scope for cost reduction, the evaluation can identify types of efficiency gains (e.g. via increased digitalisation, reorganisation of services, etc.) which have been able/had the potential to reduce/avoid costs since 2021 - Lessons from the previous implementation period were implemented to reduce costs	- Qualitative and (where available) quantitative evidence on costs which could be reduced or avoided, and whether lessons learnt on cost reductions were implemented - Qualitative and where available) quantitative evidence on types of potential efficiency gains	Evidence on areas where costs could have been avoided/reduced pre-2021	
Coherence	7. To what extent is coherence and complementarity ensured with other EU or international policies and initiatives with related objectives? ⁵	What is the complementarity and coherence of the PES Network Decision with: - Broader policy initiatives in the field of employment (e.g. European Pillar of Social Rights, European Skills agenda, European Employment Strategy) - The EURES Network, given the objective of the PES Network to support voluntary geographical and occupational mobility - EU policies to integrate Third Country Nationals in the EU labour market - Support to PES capacity via European funds (e.g. ESF+, RRF, TSI) - The work and objectives of EU agencies under remit of DG Employment (Eurofound, Cedefop, EU-OSHA, ETF, ELA) - Employment and social dimensions of EU Enlargement policy - Employment and social dimensions of EU Migration policies - Employment and social dimensions of the European Green Deal - Employment and social dimensions of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals?	Legal analysis conducted, corroborated by consultations, indicates a high level of complementarity and coherence of the PES Network Decision with relevant EU or international policies in legal texts and implementation/results since 2021, including: - Broader policy initiatives in the field of employment (e.g. European Pillar of Social Rights, European Skills agenda, European Employment Strategy) - The EURES Network, given the objective of the PES Network to support voluntary geographical and occupational mobility - EU policies to integrate Third Country Nationals in the EU labour market - Support to PES capacity via European funds (e.g. ESF+, RRF, TSI) - The work and objectives of EU agencies under remit of DG Employment (Eurofound, Cedefop, EU-OSHA, ETF, ELA) - Employment and social dimensions of the EU Enlargement policy - Employment and social dimensions of the European Green Deal - Employment and social dimensions of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals	- Evidence of complementarity and coherence based on a coherence analysis of the legal texts underpinning the EU/international policies - Extent of complementarity with relevant EU/international policies from other sources (e.g. desk research, consultations)	- Objectives, scope and activities of other EU and international policies and initiatives set out in the legal texts underpinning them - Degree pf coherence with relevant EU/international policies over the evaluation period (2021-2025)	2019 evaluation of the PES Network Decision - PES Network Work Programmes, PES Network Annual Reports, etc. - Legal texts underpinning other EU and international policies and initiatives - Qualitative desk research (Task 1) - Mapping of PES Network activities (Task 1) - Country case studies (Task 2) - Stakeholder consultations (Task 3)

	8. To what extent was coherence and complementarity ensured with national policies and initiatives?		• Indications that there is a high level of complementarity with relevant national policies and measures • Examples of mechanisms/tools at national level to foster complementarity with national policies and measures (e.g. feedback/contributions/learning from PES Network activities/priorities in national policymaking forums, events etc.)	• Qualitative evidence from a coherence analysis of the PES Network Decision with relevant national policies and measures in the PES Network member countries • Qualitative evidence on the extent of complementarity with relevant national policies and initiatives from other sources (e.g. desk research, consultations)	• Objectives, scope and activities of relevant national policies and initiatives • Evaluative findings from 2019 on coherence with national policies and measures pre-2021 • Views of relevant stakeholders on the situation pre-2021	• 2019 evaluation of the PES Network Decision • PES Network Work Programmes, PES Network Annual Reports, etc. • Information sources on national policies and initiatives • Qualitative desk research (Task 1) • Mapping of PES Network activities (Task 1) • Country case studies (Task 2) • Stakeholder consultations (Task 3)
	9. Are activities and inputs (both at EU - including PES Secretariat staffing model- and national level) appropriate to achieve the objectives? (internal coherence)		• Activities and inputs to the PES Network, both at EU and national level, are aligned and coherent with its objectives and overall appropriate, based on expert evaluative judgment, for achieving them. • No evidence suggesting that changes to the inputs or activities would be required to enhance its internal coherence.	• Internal coherence analysis of the inputs and activities of the PES Network as set out in the PES Network Decision • Extent of internal coherence obtained from other sources (e.g. desk research, consultations)	• Internal coherence and appropriateness of inputs and activities to meet the objectives according to expert evaluative judgment	• 2019 evaluation of the PES Network Decision • Qualitative desk research (Task 1) • Mapping of PES Network activities (Task 1) • Country case studies (Task 2) • Stakeholder consultations (Task 3) • Cost-effectiveness analysis (Task 4)
	~~To what extent were the results of the PES Network Decision consistent with the aims of the Decision as captured in Art.3 – i.e. contribution to the Union’s employment policies (including the European Pillar of Social Rights), the European Green Deal and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals?~~	<i>As noted above (see Q.7), we have proposed consolidating this question into Q.7 for better streamlining of the research and presentation of the results</i>				
EU added value	10. Is it still valid to assume that the objectives of the intervention can best be met by action at EU level?	• To what extent do the needs/problems addressed by the intervention continue to require action at EU level?⁶	• The majority of relevant stakeholders agree that the objectives of the PES Network Decision can best be met by action at EU level • The no action at EU level scenario shows that the objectives of the PES Network Decision can reasonably be expected to best be met by action at EU level	• Evidence on the need for EU action from relevant labour market stakeholders • Likely projection of the counterfactual policy-off scenario of no EU-level action (based on stakeholder views, expert analysis, consideration of PES Network activity outputs and results from mapping, etc.)	• Evaluative findings from 2019 on the need for action at EU level to meet the objectives • Projection of how the situation could have been expected to evolve in the absence of EU-level action	• 2019 evaluation of the PES Network Decision • Projection of results and impacts of a counterfactual ‘policy-off’ scenario with no EU-level action • Qualitative desk research (Task 1) • Mapping of PES Network activities (Task 1) • Country case studies (Task 2) • Stakeholder consultations (Task 3)
	11. What would be the most likely consequences of stopping EU intervention?		• Evidence suggests that stopping the EU intervention in the counterfactual ‘policy-off’ scenario projection (discontinuing the PES Network) would have negative consequences across a range of domains (e.g. impact on cooperation at EU level, impact on PES performance, etc.)	• Likely consequences Likely the counterfactual policy-off’ scenario of no EU-level action (based on stakeholder views, expert analysis, consideration of PES Network activity outputs and results from mapping, etc.)	• Evaluative findings from 2019 on the consequences of stopping EU intervention • Projection of likely consequences of stopping the EU intervention	
	12. To what extent would the positive effects last if the intervention ends?		• Evidence and analysis show the likely duration - short (1-2 years), medium (3-5 years), long (6+ years) term - of different positive effects of the PES Network Decision in the counterfactual ‘policy off’ scenario (discontinuing the EU intervention)	• Views of stakeholders on the likely duration of positive effects if the intervention ends • Likely consequences from a projection of the counterfactual ‘policy-off’ scenario (stopping EU intervention)	• Evaluative findings from 2019 on the duration of any positive effects if the intervention had ended • Projection of likely consequences of stopping the EU intervention in terms of duration of positive effects	

Relevance	13. To what extent did the objectives of the intervention remain relevant over the implementation period?		Evidence that the needs and problems addressed by the objectives of the PES Network Decision remained relevant over the 2021-2025 implementation period	- Evidence from and expert judgment based on desk research on ongoing needs and problems on the EU labour market - Evidence from the analysis of the evolution of PES benchmarking indicators on ongoing needs for PES - Evidence from stakeholder consultations and other desk research on the ongoing relevance of the objectives	- Original objectives/needs as set out in the PES 2020 Network Decision - Evaluative findings from 2019 on ongoing relevance of objectives over the previous period - Evolution of the labour market situation across the evaluation period (2021-2025) - Evolution of PES performance over the evaluation period (2021-2025)	2019 evaluation of the PES Network Decision - PES Network Decisions - Quantitative and qualitative benchmarking indicators on PES performance - Qualitative desk research (Task 1) - Mapping of PES Network activities (Task 1) - Country case studies (Task 2) - Stakeholder consultations (Task 3)
	14. To what extent was the PES Network flexible and able to adapt to changes in the implementation context?	- What outcomes were achieved by flexibility/adaptations that were introduced? - What were the consequences of any insufficient flexibility to adapt to change?⁷	- Clear examples that - over time - the PES Network has been flexible in adapting to changes in the implementation context (e.g. introduction of new topics for PES Network activities, introduction of new working/cooperation processes, etc.) - No evidence of gaps in adaptation to key changes - Existence of mechanisms/tools to foster reactivity/flexibility of the PES Network to changes in the implementation context	- Key changes in the implementation context (e.g. Covid-19, Russian aggression in Ukraine, rapid digital/green transition, reducing unemployment, etc.) - Evidence on the ability of the PES Network to adapt to changes (from consultations, desk research, mapping of PES activities/outputs, etc.)	- Evaluative findings from 2019 on the flexibility of the PES Network to respond to changes in the implementation context - Expectations of relevant stakeholders on the flexibility of the PES Network and the alternative scenario (if changes have/have not been made)	2019 evaluation of the PES Network Decision - PES Network Decisions - PES Network Work Programmes, Annual Reports, etc. - Qualitative desk research (Task 1) - Mapping of PES Network activities (Task 1) - Country case studies (Task 2) - Stakeholder consultations (Task 3)
	15. To what extent are the aims, general, and specific objectives of the PES Network still relevant and likely to remain relevant in the context of the situation and new challenges on EU labour market (e.g. skills and labour shortages, demographic change, challenges of digital and green transitions, competitiveness challenges)?		- Credible evidence that the aims, general, and specific objectives of the PES Network are still relevant to the current context of the EU labour market - Clear evidence that the aims, general and specific objectives of the PES Network will remain relevant to key emerging challenges on the EU labour market (e.g. skills and labour shortages, demographic change, challenges of digital and green transitions, competitiveness challenges)	- Evidence from research tasks (desk research, consultations, case studies, etc.) on the current situation and emerging challenges in the EU labour market - Evidence from research tasks (desk research, consultations, case studies, etc.) on the current and likely future relevance of the aims, general and specific objectives of the PES Network	- Original objectives/needs as set out in the PES 2020 Network Decision - Evaluative findings from 2019 on the existing and future relevance of objectives	2019 evaluation of the PES Network Decision - PES Network Decisions - Qualitative desk research (Task 1) - Mapping of PES Network activities (Task 1) - Country case studies (Task 2) - Stakeholder consultations (Task 3)
	16. How do the objectives of the intervention correspond to wider and new EU policy goals and priorities?		There is a high level of correspondence of the objectives set out in the PES Network Decision with wider and new EU policy goals and priorities (e.g. the Union of Skills, the Competitiveness Compass, the Clean Industrial Deal, etc.)	- Evidence from a coherence analysis of the legal texts underpinning the wider and new EU policy priorities compared with objectives of the PES Network Decision - Evidence from research tasks (desk research, consultations, case studies, etc.) on the correspondence of the objectives of the PES Network with wider and new EU policy goals and priorities	- Objectives, scope and activities of wider and new EU policy goals and priorities - Evaluative findings from 2019 on the correspondence of objectives to wider and (then) new EU policy goals and priorities	2019 evaluation of the PES Network Decision - PES Network Decisions - Legal texts underpinning wider and new EU goals and priorities - Qualitative desk research (Task 1) - Mapping of PES Network activities (Task 1) - Country case studies (Task 2) - Stakeholder consultations (Task 3)

ANNEX IV. OVERVIEW OF BENEFITS AND COSTS

This Annex includes a Table (i.e. ‘cost-benefits table’) providing an overview of the main costs and benefits associated with the application of the amended PES Decision, drawing on the evidence collected for this evaluation.

Annex II (Methodology and Analytical model used) provides further details on data sources and robustness.

In line with the Better Regulations Guidelines¹⁷⁰ and Toolbox¹⁷¹, the Table below distinguishes between direct costs, direct benefits, and indirect benefits, and identifies whether these are recurrent or one-off costs. It also identifies the stakeholder groups affected, categorised as citizens, businesses, and public administrations.

¹⁷⁰ [Better Regulation Guidelines](#).

¹⁷¹ [Better Regulation Toolbox](#).

Type of costs/benefits	Description	Type (one-off or recurrent)	Citizens		Businesses		Administrations	
			Quantitative	Comment	Quantitative	Comment	Quantitative	Comment
Direct costs								
PES staff costs	Costs incurred to administer the PES network activities	Recurrent	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable	EUR 2,966,826	Total annual cost across all national PES
PES non labour costs	Costs, such as travel, accommodation, translation, and external expertise that do not include PES staff costs and are not reimbursed by the European Commission	Recurrent	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable	EUR 306,240	Total annual cost across all national PES
Second, Staff costs	Costs of national PES staff seconded to the Secretariat incurred by Member States	Recurrent	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable	EUR 423,724	Estimated annual gross salary cost based on average civil service salaries for the relevant countries. ¹⁷²
European Commission expenditure on administrative items	Costs of administrative functions such as board and AFEPA meetings, staff missions, monitoring, evaluation and office support	Recurrent	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable	EUR 147,535	Annual cost
European Commission	Costs of operational activities such as	Recurrent	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable	EUR 1,846,503	Annual cost

¹⁷²It should be noted that seconded costs were not included in the calculation of PES Network Secretariat costs in the 2019 evaluation.

expenditure on operational items	Benchmarking activities, mutual learning and assistance activities, reporting and analytical activities, communication activities and tools							
European Commission staff costs	In addition to the contracted costs for the PES Network Work Programme, the Commission incurred costs for staff allocated to the Network Secretariat (without the costs of national PES staff seconded to the Secretariat which were incurred by Member States)	Recurrent	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable	EUR 234,359	Estimated annual cost based on FTE inputs To calculate the salary costs, an average value at the mid-point of the range of staff grades 5 to 12 that is allocated to the job position was taken, based on official salary information ¹⁷³
Direct benefits								
Accelerated reform of PES	Engagement in PES Network activities	Recurrent	<i>Not applicable</i>		<i>Not applicable</i>		<i>Not applicable</i>	PES Network activities have strengthened PES

¹⁷³See: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:C_202407388

policy and practice through the provision of comparative evidence through Benchlearning and opportunities for mutual learning	leading to faster PES reforms and uptake of good practices and innovative solutions across key areas of PES responsibility, driven by comparative evidence and mutual learning.							across all levels of maturity and regardless of size. This has enabled PES to adopt proven service-delivery models, upgrade management systems, and embed quality-improvement processes that likely would not have emerged at the same speed through national efforts alone. This has led to more strategic approaches to performance management (e.g. KPIs, evidence-based monitoring), better quality services – particularly towards vulnerable groups and employers – and increased digitalisation (e.g. digital transformation strategies, AI-powered tools and platforms, digital service delivery). Benchlearning recommendations offered evidence for needed changes and reforms.
Faster and more efficient implementation of good practices and innovative approaches through	Piloting and fostering the take-up of shared approaches among PES, by providing opportunities to enhance operational cooperation and	Recurrent	<i>Not applicable</i>		<i>Not applicable</i>		<i>Not applicable</i>	PES Network activities ensured that promising innovations (e.g. on digitalisation) were shared more efficiently and effectively across PES, with mutual

operational cooperation	collectively drawing on proven innovative methods.							learning enabling PES to “copy-adapt” effective solutions rather than develop them from scratch, reducing duplication, lowering costs and reducing risks of experimentation.
Increased transparency, accountability and understanding of PES performance	Benchlearning cycles allowing PES to understand their strengths and weaknesses, compare themselves with peers, and access structured recommendations for improvement.	Recurrent	<i>Not applicable</i>		<i>Not applicable</i>		<i>Not applicable</i>	The peer review aspect of Benchlearning fostered a regular, judgment-free space to exchange, promoting increased self-reflection on existing practices and identified areas for improvement, including through links with mutual learning opportunities to accelerate change. This self-reflection and peer review exercise has also allowed PES to both strengthen their own assessment culture (e.g. by requiring different departments, functions and roles in the PES to cooperate internally to develop a shared understanding of PES performance) and continued to contribute to fostering greater EU-wide awareness of how PES are progressing over time.

Positive impacts on PES staff development		Recurrent	<i>Not applicable</i>		<i>Not applicable</i>		<i>Not applicable</i>	Engagement in PES Network activities exposed PES staff to new ideas, tools, and perspectives, and supported PES to further develop their HR strategies to enhance staff capacity and training.
Enhanced cooperation and experience exchange between PES through participation in Network activities	PES Network activities providing a space for formal and informal cooperation and trust building between PES.	Recurrent	<i>Not applicable</i>		<i>Not applicable</i>		<i>Not applicable</i>	Engagement in PES Network activities has allowed PES to build personal relationships and a network of contacts, representing an invaluable resource that facilitated rapid exchange of information on specific topics between PES.
Stimulating increased bilateral cooperation beyond the PES Network	Increased opportunities for PES to cooperate and exchange information beyond the formal activities organised by the PES Network	Recurrent	<i>Not applicable</i>		<i>Not applicable</i>		<i>Not applicable</i>	The Network is now a well-established structure, with many members having developed strong personal relationships over time. This means that cooperation continues beyond the Network itself, with personal relationships built through Network activities leading to bilateral cooperation and exchanges (e.g. study visits) and partnerships.
Stronger PES contributions to	Greater influence of PES on EU policy	Recurrent	<i>Not applicable</i>		<i>Not applicable</i>		<i>Not applicable</i>	PES gained a stronger and more coherent voice

EU policy development, implementation and monitoring through speaking collectively through the Network	instruments related to employment and other relevant policy areas.							in EU policy debates in the area of employment, and on employment aspects of other policy areas, by feeding into PES Network contributions to formal consultations and opinion papers.
Broadened cooperation with labour market actors and strengthened ecosystem collaboration	Expanded cooperation beyond PES-to-PES exchange, reinforcing collaboration with EU agencies, social partners, NGOs, regional actors, and EU enlargement countries.	Recurrent	<i>Not applicable</i>		<i>Not applicable</i>		<i>Not applicable</i>	Wider engagement helped PES align strategies, strengthen partnerships, and access broader expertise, ultimately contributing to more coherent and effective labour-market governance across Europe.

Indirect benefits								
Enhanced quality of services for PES clients	Better quality services provided by PES to jobseekers and employers resulting from PES' engagement in the PES Network	Recurrent	<i>Not applicable</i>	As a result of Network participation, several PES reported enhancing their services towards vulnerable groups (e.g. outreach strategies, enhanced activation measures, profiling tools) and implementing personalised and tailored support services for jobseekers (e.g. enhanced career guidance, job placement and training services).	<i>Not applicable</i>	As a result of Network participation, several PES reported increased cooperation with employers, including through the development of employers strategies, dedicated services, and partnership building.	<i>Not applicable</i>	
Stronger resilience and better crisis-response capacity	Experience exchange facilitating more rapid reactions in the face of unexpected socio-economic crises in the 2021-2025 period, and the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's war of	Recurrent	<i>Not applicable</i>	Exchanges through the PES Network supported PES to provide more tailored support to individuals affected by the COVID-19 crisis and displaced	<i>Not applicable</i>	Exchanges through the PES Network supported PES to provide support to employers through the implementation of ad hoc measures, e.g.	<i>Not applicable</i>	The PES Network acted as a crucial space for cooperation and information exchange in the immediate aftermath, and to tackle the medium to long-term consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and the influx of Ukrainian

	aggression against Ukraine in particular.			Ukrainian persons (e.g. simplified registration procedures and tailored job-matching support).		short employment schemes.		refugees following Russia's war of aggression to Ukraine. Ad hoc activities (e.g. events and surveys) allowed PES to learn from each other and implement measures taking into account the experience of, and lessons learned by, other PES, ultimately helping them coordinate approaches to skills validation, fast-track profiling, and cooperation with partners.
Increased awareness of EU employment policies among PES staff	Increased knowledge and awareness among PES of EU policy developments in the area of employment	Recurrent	<i>Not applicable</i>		<i>Not applicable</i>		<i>Not applicable</i>	PES regularly received policy updates as part of PES Network Board meetings and AFEPA meetings, with several PES sharing this knowledge internally, with other PES staff. This has helped PES increase their knowledge and awareness of relevant EU policy developments and to anticipate and adapt to emerging priorities.

ANNEX V. STAKEHOLDERS CONSULTATION - SYNOPSIS REPORT

The consultation strategy and respective consultation activities aimed to collect data and/or opinions from key stakeholders, to gather evidence to answer the evaluation questions under all evaluation criteria.

1. Overview of consultation activities

Table 1. Overview of stakeholders consulted in all consultation activities

Stakeholder category	Specific stakeholder group	Case study interviews	Interviews	Targeted surveys	Workshops	Virtual policy Delphi
Stakeholders directly involved in the PES Network	Heads of PES (Heads of PES)	✓	✓		✓	
	Advisors for European PES Affairs (AFEPAs)	✓	✓	✓	✓	
	EMCO		✓	✓		✓
	Steering Group on Benchlearning		✓			
	European Commission		✓			
	Contractors involved in the delivery of PES Network activities		✓			
Stakeholders indirectly involved in the PES Network	DG EMPL Geodesk officers	✓	✓			
	PES staff members	✓				
National and regional level policymakers	Labour and social affairs ministries	✓		✓		
	National and regional authorities in charge of employment	✓				
Organisations working on labour market topics and/or representing the voice of PES users	EU and national level social partners	✓	✓			✓
	EU and national level civil society organisations	✓	✓			✓
	EU and International organisations		✓			✓
Other relevant stakeholders	Researchers and academics	✓				✓

1.1 Call for evidence

The **call for evidence**¹⁷⁴ was launched on the Have Your Say website of the European Commission, and open for contributions from any interested stakeholder between 28 November 2025 and 26 December 2025. Five responses were received. The feedback from the call for evidence highlights generally positive perceptions of the PES Network's role, while also suggesting areas where its visibility and analytical capabilities could be strengthened. One business stakeholder emphasised the need for greater promotion of the Network at national level and improved accessibility for jobseekers

¹⁷⁴European Commission, [European Network of Public Employment Services – evaluation on the application of Decision No 573/2014/EU](#)

and employers through a public-facing platform. An NGO welcomed the evaluation initiative and praised the Network's societal relevance, particularly its attention to gender parity and engagement of specialised NGOs, urging policymakers to preserve these features. Two EU citizens expressed strong support for cross-border cooperation in employment policy, noting its role in strengthening labour mobility, social security, and fairness in the EU labour market. Another citizen proposed the creation of an EU-wide monitoring tool to assess labour mobility and retention. Overall, the feedback highlights both the value of the PES Network and the desire for enhanced transparency, analytical tools, and sustained commitment to inclusive labour market governance.

1.2 Interviews

The semi-structured interviews aimed to gather detailed input from those directly involved in the PES Network (the PES Network Secretariat, contractors involved in the delivery of activities, Benchlearning Steering Group members, and the previous EMCO chair), indirect stakeholders of the PES Network (e.g. DG EMPL representatives from policy and geographical units) and organisations working on labour market topics and/or representing the voice of PES end-users (EU agencies and structures, international agencies, social partners and civil society organisations). In total, **32 interviews** were carried out with **45 stakeholders**. Where relevant, group interviews took place with European Commission representatives to maximise outreach and to consult as many relevant units as possible. The interviews included questions on all five evaluation criteria.

Table 2 - Online semi-structured interviews completed

Stakeholder category	Stakeholder	No. of interviews
Stakeholders directly involved in the PES Network	Former EMCO chair	1
	PES Network Secretariat	1
	Benchlearning Steering Group members (CY; LT; SE)	2
	Contractors delivering PES Network activities	2
Stakeholders indirectly involved in the PES Network	Selected DG EMPL geodesk officers (SI, DE/AT, RO, BG, ES, PT)	4
	Selected DG EMPL representatives (DG EMPL B1, B2, B3, D1, E1, E3, G1)	7
Organisations working on labour market topics and/or representing the voice of PES users	Eurofound	1
	Cedefop	1
	European Training Foundation (ETF)	1
	European Labour Authority (ELA)	1
	OECD	1

	Euroguidance	1
	EURES Network	1
	World Association of Public Employment Services (WAPES)	1
	European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities (EASPD)	1
	Confederation of Family Organisations in the European Union (COFACE)	1
	European Disability Forum (EDF)	1
	European Network of Social Integration Enterprises (ENSIE)	1
	Business Europe	1
	SME United	1
	European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC)	1

1.3 Targeted surveys

The two targeted surveys aimed to gather evidence from stakeholders directly and indirectly involved in the PES Network: the first survey directly targeted the 33 AFEPAs of the PES Network, and the second survey targeted EMCO members and national labour and social affairs ministry representatives. The surveys were prepared using EU Survey, with closed and open-ended questions addressing the key evaluation criteria and were open from 15 October until 17 November (AFEPAS) /19 November (EMCO/Ministries) 2025. There were 31 valid responses to the survey of AFEPAs² and 22 valid responses to the survey of EMCO members/national labour and social affairs ministry representatives.

1.4 Workshops

Two in-person evaluation workshops were organised alongside planned PES Network meetings. The first workshop was organised as part of the in-person AFEPAs meeting that took place on 9 October 2025 in Brussels and aimed to gather feedback from AFEPAs on all evaluation questions. The second workshop took place on 12 December 2025 as part of the PES Network Board meeting held in Copenhagen and aimed to gather feedback from Heads of PES to deepen the evidence gathered from the prior consultation activities, identify and fill gaps in the data collected to date, and collect specific examples of results and impacts of the PES Network.

1.5 Case study interviews

The case study interviews aimed to gather evidence from national level stakeholders in the selected countries across all evaluation criteria. The case study interviews took place in two phases, October – December 2025 for the first three countries (DE, ES, SI) and January – March 2026 for the second three countries (BG, FI, LT). A total of 47 interviews were conducted across different countries and stakeholder categories. There was some variance in the total number of interviews carried out for each

case study depending on stakeholder availability; risks of overrepresentation of the views of any specific stakeholders in countries where there were less interviews were limited by ensuring that they were represented all views in a balanced manner.

Table 3 - Organisations consulted during the case study interviews

Country	Stakeholder category	Organisation/Role	No. of interviews
Bulgaria	Stakeholders directly involved in the PES Network	Directorate General of the Bulgarian Employment Agency (AFEPA)	1
		Employment Agency (Head of PES)	1
	National and regional level policy makers	Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs	1
		Employment Agency Directorate	1
		Employment Agency, Statistics Department	1
Germany	Stakeholders directly involved in the PES Network	Federal Employment Agency (AFEPA; Head of PES; and alternate member of the PES Network; Head of IT)	4
	National and regional level policy makers	Regional Office of BA for Northern Germany	1
		Jobcenter City of Nürnberg	1
	Organisations working on labour market topics and/or representing the voice of PES users	BDA - Association of German Employers	2
		German Trade Union Confederation (DGB)	1
		ver.di Trade Union	1
Finland	Stakeholders directly involved in the PES Network	Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland (AFEPA; Head of PES)	2
	National and regional level policy makers	Association of Finnish Municipalities	1
		(Keha) Development and Administrative Services' Centre	1
		Helsinki Region Employment Area	1
	Organisations working on labour market topics and/or representing the voice of PES users	University of Tampere	1
		Confederation of Finnish Industries (EK)	1
		Central Organisation of Finnish Trade Unions (Employment policy specialist; Senior employment policy specialist)	2
		The VATES Foundation – Promoting Employment of People with Disabilities	1

		Employment Industry Finland	1
Lithuania	Stakeholders directly involved in the PES Network	Employment Service of Lithuania (AFEPA; Head of PES)	2
	National and regional level policy makers	Ministry of Social Security and Labour	1
		Ministry of Foreign Affairs	1
		Youth Affairs Agency	1
	Organisations working on labour market topics and/or representing the voice of PES users	Kaunas Industry and Employers Association, Lithuanian Confederation of Industrialists	1
		Lithuanian Engineering and Technology Industry Association	1
		Vilnius Caritas	1
Slovenia	Stakeholders directly involved in the PES Network	Employment Service of Slovenia (AFEPA; Head of PES)	2
	National and regional level policy makers	Institute of Macroeconomic Analysis and Development	1
	Organisations working on labour market topics and/or representing the voice of PES users	Trade Union Youth Plus	1
		National Youth Council of Slovenia	1
		Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education and Training	1
Spain	Stakeholders directly involved in the PES Network	Spanish Employment Service (SEPE) (AFEPA; Head of PES)	2
	National and regional level policy makers	Employment service of Galicia	1
		Employment service of Navarra	1
	Organisations working on labour market topics and/or representing the voice of PES users	Spanish confederation of Business Organisations (CEOE)	1
		General Union of Workers (UGT)	1
		Zabaltzen Sartu	1
Total			47

1.6 Virtual Policy Delphi

The virtual policy Delphi took place in the final phase of the evaluation in April 2026, as a structured, online method for gathering expert opinions, using an anonymous questionnaire to validate a set of conclusions to the evaluation. The focus of the Delphi was on forward-looking elements of the draft conclusions and lessons learned. To implement the policy Delphi, a panel of 12 stakeholders with

relevant expertise was contacted. These stakeholders include High-level Advisors for the study, the current EMCO chair, EU social partners, civil society representatives and other networks. Of these, eight responded to the Delphi.

Table 4. Delphi respondents

Stakeholder category	Stakeholder
Stakeholders directly involved in the PES Network	Current EMCO chair
Stakeholders indirectly involved in the PES Network	DG EMPL Mutual learning programme network
Organisations/individuals working on labour market topics and/or representing the voice of PES users	High level advisors (x2)
	European Disability Forum (EDF)
	Business Europe
	SME United
	European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC)

2. Methodology and tools used for data processing

Online semi-structured interviews: the write-ups from the interviews were prepared in individual word documents, broken down by question and respective evaluation criterion. These write-ups were subsequently uploaded to the qualitative analysis tool: [ATLAS.ti](#). The Research Team used this tool to undertake a systematic thematic analysis, drawing out key issues and findings under each of the main topic headings.

Targeted surveys: the analysis of results was carried out using both quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative data analysis included the frequency distribution for each variable related to the closed-ended questions, and cross-tabulations between specific variables and characteristics of respondents and between specific variables, though the low number of responses limited the possibilities for this. To avoid misleading the reader, the total number of respondents have been provided as part of the analysis (i.e. 24 out of 31 respondents), rather than percentages. For the qualitative data analysis, data was classified by related variable and analysed to identify additional information.

Workshops, detailed notes were taken throughout each workshop which were used to triangulate and fine-tune the findings.

Virtual policy Delphi: focuses on forward-looking elements, which falls outside the specific scope of the evaluation.

3. Overview of results of consultation activities

3.1 Effectiveness

28 of the 31 respondents to the survey of AFEPAs agreed that the **PES Network Decision objective to assess and increase the transparency of PES performance through Benchlearning had been achieved**. This view was echoed by the majority of EU-level interviewees, national and regional case study interviewees, and workshop evidence. AFEPAs respondents to the survey (e.g. from BE, EL, ES, SI) specified that the self-assessment process of Benchlearning is key in supporting this self-reflection and cultural change - in turn promoting transparency of PES performance. Multiple respondents to the EU-level interviews and participants in the workshop with AFEPAs also reported that the assessment of PES by PES creates a judgment-free space, which increases transparency and an openness to constructive self-reflection. In line with this, all 31 respondents to the survey of AFEPAs reported that the PES Network Benchlearning activities have contributed to better identification of PES development areas to a large (21) or some (10) extent.

All consulted stakeholders across all consultation activities consider that the **PES Network has facilitated mutual learning and the uptake of good practices**. Mutual learning activities in particular are viewed very positively, with the vast majority of AFEPAs stating in the survey that PES Network outputs facilitated mutual learning in their PES to either a large or some extent (i.e. an average of 27 respondents out of 31 across all mutual learning activities). Stakeholders also generally agreed as to which of the mutual learning activities have been the most useful, namely TRWs, TLDs and WGs, suggesting that these activities are leading to greater uptake of good practices³. In terms of additional outcomes of mutual learning activities, there was consensus among AFEPAs and Heads of PES that **mutual learning played a key role in helping PES respond quickly to major shocks**, including COVID-19 and the influx of displaced Ukrainians, enabling rapid adaptation of services and sharing of crisis-response measures. Consulted AFEPAs from decentralised PES reported that mutual learning accelerated understanding of how to manage decentralisation, by providing concrete and comparable solutions that could be adapted to national contexts. There was also consensus across AFEPAs that the strong involvement of Heads of PES ensures that lessons learned are valued and actively supported at leadership level, and that the variety of formats of mutual learning activities increases the uptake of good practices. On the other hand, limited financial resources and competing organisational priorities – reported specifically by smaller PES- make it more difficult to implement good practices gained through mutual learning.

AFEPAs responding to the survey considered **PES Network activities largely successful in supporting cooperation**. The EU social partners, including both worker and employer representatives, however called for more systematic collaboration between the Network and their organisations, especially on data sharing and policy priority-setting. In addition, stakeholders directly and indirectly involved in the Network both felt that the degree of cooperation between the PES Network and EU-level NGOs could be improved, with calls from EU-level NGOs interviewed for strengthened cooperation. EMCO and ministry survey respondents viewed cooperation with the PES Network as successful overall whilst also providing ideas for further streamlining cooperation.

Across the consultation activities, AFEFAs and EMCO/ministries reported strong agreement that the **PES Network has contributed to the modernisation and strengthening of PES**. All 31 AFEFAs surveyed agreed that this objective had been achieved, and 20 of 22 EMCO/ministries respondents expressed similarly positive views, with 2 respondents stating that they did not know. Benchlearning and mutual learning were seen as important drivers of progress, with evidence from workshops with Heads of PES and AFEFAs echoing that PES at all levels of maturity gained from these processes. AFEFAs consulted during the workshop highlighted that integration services and personalised jobseeker support benefited most from Network activities, with Heads of PES also agreeing. Digitalisation emerged as a major area of progress, with 25 of 31 AFEFAs in the survey reporting improvements in this area triggered by Benchlearning and mutual learning activities, with direct and some indirect national and regional stakeholders of the PES Network interviewed as part of the case studies highlighting this point in particular. The consultations indicate that recent PES strategic outputs, including opinion papers and policy positions, have **enhanced the PES Network's capacity to articulate shared priorities and provide contributions to policy development at EU level**. Conversely, stakeholders across consultations (EU- and national-level labour market stakeholders, AFEFAs, Heads of PES, and EMCO and national ministry representatives) frequently highlighted the Network's contribution to policy monitoring and implementation, particularly its provision of concrete, practitioner-driven evidence on implementation challenges. Engagement with EMCO was identified as the Network's most effective avenue for influence, given its structured processes and formal follow-up. AFEFAs emphasised in the survey and workshop that participation in policy discussions provides valuable opportunities both to shape EU-level dialogue and to understand how national implementation can be strengthened. ■

The results of the survey of AFEFAs suggest that the vast majority of respondents (25 out of 31) were **positive about the Network's contribution to supporting vulnerable groups and labour-market integration**, with a large majority reporting that these areas were addressed to a large or some extent. By contrast, external stakeholders to the Network, such as EMCO/ministries survey respondents (5 out of 17), and interviewed social partners and civil society organisations, were less convinced of the extent of this contribution and called for stronger engagement with organisations representing vulnerable groups. The priority **improving the functioning and inclusiveness of labour market**, was considered to be tackled to a large or at least some extent by the majority of surveyed AFEFAs (i.e. 25 out of 31) and EMCO/ministries representatives (i.e. 12 out of 17). Stakeholders from across surveys and interviews (i.e. AFEFAs, EMCO representatives, national authorities, as well as interviewees representing EU and international institutions and agencies, social partners, and civil society), further identified **skills shortages** as extensively covered by the Network's activities and outputs. **Labour mobility** was seen as a less prominent area, with only 3 out of 31 AFEPA survey respondents reporting contribution of the Network to a large extent on this topic. EU-level stakeholders interviewed highlighted the Network's important role in contributing **expertise on Active Labour Market Policies (ALMPs)**, noting that its concrete operational insights help inform EU-level discussions. However, some stakeholders, particularly trade union representatives interviewed, suggested that the Network could go further in supporting PES to enhance evaluation and assessment of ALMPs. Lastly, stakeholders highlighted that **gender equality** had been addressed only to a limited extent (i.e. 11 out 17 respondents to EMCO/ministries survey, and 12 out of 31 AFEPA survey respondents), reflecting a gap in the Network's thematic coverage. ■

3.2 Efficiency

Across all stakeholder groups consulted, the **Network was widely regarded as delivering important benefits, particularly through Benchlearning and mutual learning activities**. Stakeholders highlighted the value of access to best practices, Benchlearning, and peer learning, which enhance service delivery, organisational performance, and professional development. Consulted AFEPA and Heads of PES during the workshops noted that shared tools and peer learning foster economies of scale, reduce duplication, and enable “copy–adapt” solutions. Representatives from smaller PES tended to view the benefits of the PES Network even more positively, emphasising the significant cost savings gained by accessing expertise through the Network instead of external consultants. However, AFEPA consulted through the survey and the workshops consistently indicated that Benchlearning is the most resource-intensive activity, particularly during assessment years. During the workshops, AFEPA and Heads of PES also highlighted additional tasks such as hosting delegations, contributing to capacity surveys, and engaging in knowledge-sharing activities like podcasts and reports that can be resource-intensive across all sizes of PES. █

Although **the perception of value of the PES Network Decision was overall very positive**, some consulted AFEPA acknowledged remaining challenges to efficiency. These included limited internal resources, language barriers, and timing misalignments with national reform cycles, which can constrain participation or slow implementation of lessons learned. Representatives (Benchlearning Steering Group Members, AFEPA) from more mature PES occasionally reported that tangible benefits were less visible due to their already mature systems and suggested improving integration of Network outputs into internal processes. Nevertheless, the majority across all stakeholder groups stressed that the Network’s collaborative culture provides a high return on investment and remains strategically important for policy alignment and foresight. █

A majority of AFEPA believed the **Network’s work during 2021–2025 was cost-effective and that benefits outweighed costs** (14 of the 31 respondents stated that benefits significantly exceeded costs, and nine said benefits slightly exceeded costs), with WGs and TLDs most frequently rated “very cost-effective,” followed by mutual learning events and Benchlearning assessments. Most direct stakeholders of the Network (AFEPA, Heads of PES, Benchlearning Steering Group Members), opposed scaling back activities and strongly supported maintaining the breadth of the Network’s work, noting the high value of in-person collaboration, with consistently positive views of the Network’s management and governance structures. █

3.3 Coherence

Consultations across all stakeholder groups indicate **broad agreement that coherence between the PES Network and wider EU and international policy frameworks is high**. A majority of respondents from the AFEPA and EMCO/national ministries surveys saw strong coherence across most policy areas, particularly employment, education and training, and active support to employment. Workshop participants (AFEPA and Heads of PES) further highlighted that the PES Network plays a dual role: it both familiarises PES with key EU policy initiatives (“top-down” coherence) and enables PES to feed operational insights into EU policymaking (“bottom-up” coherence), strengthening complementarity across governance levels. EU-level interviewees (representatives of the European Commission, EMCO, EU agencies, and international organisations), as well as national-level

interviews consulted from case study countries, largely supported this positive view, noting particularly strong alignment with the employment dimensions of the European Semester, EURES, the Youth Guarantee, the EU Talent Pool and the Quality Jobs Roadmap. EU agencies such as Eurofound, Cedefop, ELA, and ETF emphasised coherence between their mandates and the PES Network's work. |

AFEPA and EMCO members/national ministries also found the **PES Network to be coherent with EU funding instruments**, especially ESF+ (26 out of 31 AFEPA respondents and 15 out of 17 EMCO members/national ministries respondents reported coherence to a large or some extent). However, some EU-level stakeholders interviewed found that further synergies could be developed with ESF+ governance structures and that PES capacity to manage EU-funded projects varied across Member States. By contrast, coherence with EU Enlargement policy was perceived as somewhat weaker, though still largely positive, by EU-level stakeholders interviewed, with ongoing initiatives involving Western Balkan PES increasingly strengthening alignment over time. |

Across all stakeholder categories, **coherence with labour mobility and migration policies was viewed positively**. Some EU-level agencies and international network representatives interviewed recommended even closer cooperation with neighbouring-region organisations and extra-EU networks such as WAPES, especially in light of growing policy focus on labour mobility and skills shortages. Conversely, coherence with broader policy agendas, such as the UN SDGs, EU Competitiveness Strategy, and the European Green Deal, was seen as more mixed. For example, AFEPA viewed coherence as stronger on these policy areas, whereas EMCO member/national ministry respondents viewed coherence as weaker which partly reflects the varying levels of awareness and engagement across groups. |

Both AFEPA and EMCO member/national ministry survey respondents overwhelmingly reported **high coherence between PES Network priorities and domestic policies** (27 out of 31 AFEPA respondents and 18 out of 22 EMCO member/national ministry respondents reported coherence to a large or some extent). This is supported by the fact that many countries integrate EU employment priorities directly into their national strategies and the bottom-up design of the PES Network Work Programme, which enables members to shape priorities based on national needs. |

Finally, stakeholders across AFEPA, Heads of PES, and European Commission representatives agreed that **internal coherence within the PES Network is strong**, with governance structures (Board, Secretariat) and processes (work programmes, annual reports) considered appropriate and effective in achieving objectives. Workshop discussions emphasised the value of mutual trust, interpersonal relationships, and the layered governance structure in enabling consensus building. |

3.4 EU added value

Consultations of AFEPA, Heads of PES, and EU-level and national-level stakeholders indicate consensus that **the PES Network delivers clear added value at EU level**, particularly in fostering cooperation between PES and a broader range of labour market stakeholders. For example, survey results show that most AFEPA (21 out of 31) consider cooperation with external stakeholders to require EU-level action, a view also supported in AFEPA and Heads of PES workshops and interviews

with EU agencies and EU social partners, where stakeholders highlighted the Network's role in expanding collaboration beyond national boundaries.

AFEPA and EMCO members/national ministry representatives furthermore both believe that **the majority of the objectives of the PES Network Decision can best be met by EU-level action**, with broad recognition that bilateral exchanges cannot generate comparable benefits and that the Network's continuation is essential to maintaining structured collaboration among PES. Social partners representing both workers and employers interviewed from Spain (case studies) also noted that eliminating the Network would weaken their capacity to advocate for improvements, as comparative evidence from EU peers is a central argument in national debates.

Information from all stakeholders reveal agreement that **discontinuing the PES Decision would have negative consequences**. Stakeholders reported that ending the Decision beyond 2027 would result in a decline in structured collaboration (i.e., through Benchlearning and mutual learning) and a shift towards fragmented, selective cooperation. AFEPA and Heads of PES consulted via the workshops further expressed concerns regarding the financial and operational costs of replacing Network-provided expertise with external contractors, which would reduce efficiency and undermine existing cooperation structures, as well as representing a loss of resources already invested in the Network.

3.5 Relevance

Across all stakeholder groups, including AFEPA, EMCO representatives, EU institutions, international organisations, and social partners, there was agreement that the **objectives of the PES Decision remain relevant to addressing current and emerging challenges**. AFEPA survey respondents highlighted the relevance of practical learning tools, such as MAPs, toolkits, and good practices, especially under resource constraints and rising expectations of PES performance. The general objective of encouraging cooperation and mutual learning was viewed by both stakeholder groups as highly relevant throughout the implementation period. Survey data also highlights this objective as particularly important in light of evolving social and labour-market contexts, with AFEPA in particular (also during the workshop and case study interviews) emphasising that cooperation has become even more essential in responding to major shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic and broader structural changes in the labour market. The specific objectives of the amended PES Decision were also viewed as very relevant by AFEPA and EMCO members/national ministries, corroborating that these objectives continue to align closely with national needs and EU-level priorities. Stakeholders across surveys, case study interviews, and workshops highlighted that the PES Network had shown strong adaptability in addressing themes such as digitalisation, labour and skills shortages, green skills development, and the impact of demographic change. However, several EU-level interviewees noted that some areas, such as gender equality and support for older workers, had been addressed to a more limited extent, signalling opportunities for more focused attention in future work programmes.

Finally, most stakeholders (AFEPA, EU and national level civil society organisations, EU agencies, EMCO representatives, social partners) emphasised that the **PES Network's relevance is reinforced by the growing complexity of labour market transformations**, including the green and digital transitions, AI-driven changes in recruitment and service delivery, and persistent skills and labour

shortages. Representatives of EU institutions and international organisations interviewed highlighted the increasing need for structured cooperation across Member States to address these cross-cutting challenges, with many interviewees identifying enhanced partnerships with academics, labour-market experts, and other EU initiatives as key to future relevance. The overall conclusion from all stakeholders is that the PES Network's objectives remain not only relevant but increasingly necessary for coordinating responses to interconnected employment and social challenges across the EU.

ANNEX VI. CHANGES IN THE PES DECISION

This Annex provides an overview and comparison of the Objectives and activities of the PES Network included in Decision 573/2014/EU and the amendments introduced by Decision 2020/1782. The amendments introduced in 2020 are highlighted in bold.

Objectives and activities under amended Decision 573/2014/EU

Article 3 Objectives

The aim of this Decision is to encourage cooperation between Member States through the Network in the field of employment, within the areas of PES responsibility, in order to contribute to the implementation of the Union's employment policies. **This will also help implement the principles in the European Pillar of Social Rights, contribute to the European Green Deal objectives and pursue the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, thereby supporting:**

- (a) all vulnerable social groups with high unemployment rates, especially older workers and young persons not in employment, education or training (NEETs) **as well as people with disabilities and people facing discrimination on multiple grounds;**
- (b) decent and sustainable work;
- (c) the better functioning and inclusiveness of the labour markets;
- (ca) gender equality;**
- (d) the identification of skills shortages and the provision of information on their extent and location, as well as the better matching of the skills of job-seekers with the needs of employers, **including through the identification of needs for vocational training, as well as the employability of job-seekers and the prevention of unemployment, for example through career counselling and training;**
- (e) the better integration of labour markets;
- (f) increased voluntary geographical and occupational mobility on a fair basis to meet specific labour market needs;
- (g) the integration of persons excluded from the labour market as part of the combat against social exclusion;
- (h) the evaluation and assessment of active labour market initiatives and their effective and efficient implementation.

Article 4 -Initiatives of the Network

1. Within the areas of PES responsibility, the Network shall, in particular, carry out the following initiatives:
 - (a) the development and implementation of Union-wide, evidence-based Benchlearning among PES to compare, with appropriate methodology, the performance of their activities in the following areas:
 - (i) contribution to reducing unemployment for all age, gender and vulnerable groups;
 - (ii) contribution to reducing the duration of unemployment and reducing inactivity, so as to address long-term and structural unemployment, as well as social exclusion;
 - (iii) filling of vacancies (including through voluntary labour mobility);
 - (iv) customer satisfaction with PES services;

- (b) the provision of mutual assistance, either in the form of peer-to-peer or group activities, through cooperation, exchanges of information, experiences and staff between the members of the Network, including support for the implementation of PES-related country-specific recommendations issued by the Council upon request by the Member State or the PES concerned;
- (c) contribute to the modernisation and strengthening of PES in key areas, **in view of the Union's employment and social policies, and having in mind the European Pillar of Social Rights, the European Green Deal and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, as well as challenges related to digitalisation, the changing world of work and work patterns as well as demographic changes;**
- (d) prepare reports at the request of the European Parliament, the Council or the Commission, or on its own initiative;
- (e) contribute to the implementation of relevant policy initiatives;
- (f) **the adoption and implementation** of its annual work programme setting out its working methods, deliverables and the details related to the implementation of Benchlearning **as well as dissemination and cooperation strategies;**
- (g) the promotion and sharing of best practices on the identification of NEETs, on the development of initiatives to ensure those young people gain the skills necessary to enter and remain in the labour market, **and on the integration of the LTU and other vulnerable groups into the labour market.**

Article 5 - Cooperation

The Network shall develop cooperation with relevant labour market stakeholders, including other providers of employment **and social** services and the social partners, **and, where appropriate, Union agencies in the areas of employment, social policy, gender equality, and education and training**, organisations representing unemployed persons or other vulnerable groups, **equality bodies, vocational training organisations**, NGOs working in the fields of employment **and just transition, and regional and local authorities**, by involving them in relevant activities and meetings of the Network and by exchanging information and data with them. **Where appropriate, the Network may exchange best practices with relevant public employment services from third countries.**

ANNEX VII. BENCHLEARNING ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGIES AND RESULTS

Table 1: Benchlearning Excellence Model for 2nd, 3rd and 4th cycle: evolution of enablers (New enabler / merge of enablers / enabler number change)

Excellence Model	2nd Cycle	3rd Cycle	4th Cycle
Section A: Strategic performance management			
A1	Performance management by target-setting	Performance management by target-setting	Performance management by target-setting
A2	Targets into key performance indicators (KPI)	Targets into key performance indicators (KPI)	Targets into key performance indicators (KPI)
A3	Following up performance management	Following up performance measurement	Following up performance measurement
A4	Use of the results of performance management	Use of the results of performance management	Use of the results of performance management
Section B: Design of operational processes			
B1	Process definition and standardisation	Process definition and standardisation	Process definition and standardisation
B2	Implementation of support structure	Implementation of support structure	Information and communications technology (ICT) and data management
B3	Quality management	Quality management	Quality management
B4	Channel management and blended services	Channel management and blended services	Channel management and blended services
Section C: Sustainable activation and management of transitions			
C1	Holistic profiling	Holistic profiling	Outreach, profiling and segmentation
C2	Segmentation	Segmentation	Individual action plan and ALMP measures
C3	Individual action plan and ALMP measures	Individual action plan and ALMP measures	Early intervention to avoid unemployment
C4	Early intervention to avoid unemployment, and implementation of Youth Guarantee	Early intervention to avoid unemployment	Implementation of services
C5	Early intervention to reduce the duration of unemployment	Early intervention to reduce the duration of unemployment	-
C6	Implementation of service and activation strategy	Implementation of service and activation strategy	-

Section D: Relations with Employers			
D1	Employer strategy and management	Employer strategy and management	Employer strategy
D2	Specialized unit for employer services	Specialised unit for employer services	Specialised unit for employer services
D3	Matching vacancies and jobseekers	Matching vacancies and jobseekers	Matching vacancies and jobseekers
Section E: Evidence-based design and implementation of PES services			
E1	Ex-ante and ex-post evaluation	Ex-ante and ex-post evaluation	Evidence-based service design and implementation
E2	Pilot projects	Pilot projects	Pilot projects
E3	Communication of evaluation results	Communication of evaluation results	Management of change and innovation
E4	Management of change and innovation	Management of change and innovation	-
Section F: Management of partnerships and stakeholders			
F1	Identification and structuring of relevant stakeholders	Identification and structuring of relevant stakeholders	Identification and structuring of relevant stakeholders
F2	Partnerships building	Partnership building	Partnership building and managing
F3	Management of partnerships with supervising authorities	Management of partnerships with supervising authorities	Management of partnerships with service providers
F4	Managing of partnerships with social partners	Management of partnerships with social partners	-
F5	Management of partnerships with service providers	Management of partners with service providers	-
F6	Management of partnerships with institutions involved in the Youth Guarantee	-	-
Section G: Allocation of PES Resources			
G1	Human resources	Human resources	HR strategy, management and corporate culture
G2	Budget	Budget	Empowerment of staff
G3	-	-	Organisational resilience and business continuity
G4	-	-	Budget allocation and use
Section H: Identification and implementation of a reform agenda			

H1	Initialisation	-	-
H2	Design	-	-
H3	Mobilisation	-	-
H4	Implementation	-	-
H5	Reinforcement	-	-
Section I: Crisis Management			
I1	-	Organisational Resilience	-
I2	-	Reaction to an emergency situation	-
I3	-	Communication, information and empowerment for a culture of error tolerance	-

Source: Benchlearning Manual 2nd cycle, 3rd cycle, 4th cycle

Between the second and third cycles, changes to the Excellence Model were limited. Regarding the Model itself, all sections (A to G) and enablers remained identical. However, the second cycle's specific section H on the identification and deployment of reforms was removed in the third cycle, replaced by a new Section I—"Crisis Management"—with a focus on managing the COVID-19 crisis (see table x).

The differences between the third and fourth cycles were far more substantial. The 4th cycle has introduced several innovations aimed at increasing the coherence, relevance, and effectiveness of the methodology. At the end of the 3rd cycle, the Excellence Model was subject to a comprehensive review, leading to a streamlined structure with fewer Sections and Enablers to improve user-friendliness, the integration of new concepts to strengthen alignment with the 2020 EFQM model (notably digitalisation, sustainability, and ecosystem approaches), and the introduction of more robust benchmarks to better equip PES to respond to customer needs and emerging trends. From an organisational standpoint, a series of innovations fundamentally impacted on-site visits. The host PES was given several new options: from conducting its evaluation fully online if preferred, to assessing an enabler in depth (13 PES), organising a visit to a specialised unit instead of a local agency (6 PES) or inviting partners to participate in the Section F evaluation discussion. A mandate disclaimer could be used if certain Model activities fell outside the PES's remit. The on-site visit was shortened by one day, condensing interviews, analysis, and feedback into three days.

Table 2: Main findings from the 3rd and the 4th cycles of Benchlearning

Excellence model	3rd cycle: main findings (see here)	4th cycle : main findings
Section A Strategic performance management	Areas of progress: - Improved alignment of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) with strategic objectives. - Shift from output-oriented to outcome-focused metrics (e.g., employment retention, long-term employability). - Regional/local offices given a more active role in target planning. Challenges: Further development of outcome-focused KPIs	Top performing PES - Align national strategic objectives with regional/local operational goals. - Use evidence-based targets (based on labour market forecasts, analytics). - SMART KPIs with stakeholder engagement (employers, jobseekers, staff). Lower-performing PES: - Targets often legally rather than strategically driven. - Top-down, input-focused metrics (e.g., job applications processed) instead of outcomes.
Section B Design of operational processes	Areas of progress: - Flexible channel management: PES rapidly adapted to digital/remote services during COVID-19, with many retaining hybrid models post-pandemic. Challenges: - Quality management remained underdeveloped - Implementation of IT support structure supporting operational processes	Top performing PES - Customer-centric process design - Strong ICT infrastructure supports service delivery and data analytics. - Coherent channel management strategy (guiding use of digital/face-to-face services based on needs) Lower-performing PES: - Quality management weakest area for all but one PES - Need to modernise IT systems, limited data sharing. - Limited proactive use of digital or blended services

Section C Sustainable activation and management of transitions	Areas of progress: - Increased focus on vulnerable groups (LTU, migrants, NEETs, persons with disabilities). Challenges: - Digitalisation gaps: difficulties with automation, data sharing, and digital service access for jobseekers with low digital skills. - Fragmented or reactive approaches for quality management; quality seen as a compliance requirement rather than a tool for improvement.	Top performing PES - Data-driven profiling of jobseekers (skills, barriers, labour market demand). - Dynamic Individual Action Plans (IAPs) linked to Active Labour Market Policies (ALMPs) (e.g., wage subsidies, training). - Proactive outreach to vulnerable groups (e.g., NEETs, older jobseekers, persons with disabilities). Lower-performing PES: - Basic segmentation (e.g. based only on demographics) - IAPs often seen as administrative tasks rather than strategic tools. - Limited preventive measures for at-risk workers.
Section D Relations with employers	Areas of progress: - Stronger employer engagement to address skills shortages. - Matching systems improved Challenges: - Matching activities still relying on manual processes in many PES. - Lack of systematic employer strategy or segmentation of employer needs.	Top performing PES: - Clear employer engagement strategies - Co-creation of services with employers - Single points of contact for key employer groups/dedicated teams Lower-performing PES: - No systematic employer strategy. - Low quality of vacancies data.
Section E Evidence-based design and implementation of PES services (3rd) Evidence-based service design and change management (4th)	Areas of progress: - Widespread use of pilot projects to test new services before scaling. Challenges: - Evaluation culture globally limited - Lack of systematic monitoring of pilot outcomes to inform strategy	Top performing PES: - Structured evaluation units - Pilot projects aligned with strategic goals Lower-performing PES: - Change management lacking structured strategies - Culture of continuous improvement lacking - Weak monitoring and scaling of successful pilots.

Section F: Management of partnerships and stakeholders (3rd) Management of ecosystem (4th)	Areas of progress: - Functioning partnerships at all levels Challenges: - Lack of genuine partnership strategy in most PES. - Limited mapping of stakeholders to align with PES objectives.	Top performing PES: - Stakeholders mapping and ecosystem management. - Partnerships integral part of day-to-day operations in most PES. Lower-performing PES: - Partnerships often bilateral rather than ecosystem wide. - Limited performance monitoring of external service providers. - Lack of systematic ecosystem steering. - Limited use of partner feedback.
Section G Allocation of PES resources (3rd) PES resources and organisational resilience (4th)	Areas of progress: - High staff motivation during COVID-19 Challenges: - Ageing workforce, need for knowledge retention strategies.	Top performing PES: - Cohesive HR strategies. - Proactive Business continuity. - Staff empowerment (e.g. training, knowledge-sharing, error-tolerant culture). Lower-performing PES: - Top-down HR policies, leading to high turnover. - Ageing workforce and retention issues. - Budget allocation lacking efficiency metrics - Over-reliance on EU funding in some PES.
Section I Crisis management (3rd)	Highest level of maturity across all areas Leadership and empowerment helped PES adapt quickly to COVID-19.	

Annex VIII: Examples of PES Network's impact¹⁷⁵

This Annex provides the examples of particular impact the PES Network has had on operational cooperation related to PES' services; the impact on enhanced cooperation between PES services as a result of PES Decision, the impact of Benchlearning on digitalisation, performance and employer management; examples of the uptake of good practices by type of PES Network activity; Impacts of mutual learning in periods of crisis and evidence of PES Network adaptation to changes/trends. Additional supporting examples are included in Annex 7 of the study.

Table 1. Supporting operational cooperation among PES

Area	Examples of sharing tools and piloting common approaches
Green transition	A common definition green skills and jobs: Between 2023 and 2025, the PES Network Taxonomies WG worked to identify the most suitable approach to build a common definition of green jobs and piloted it with both national and EU level taxonomies, using ESCO data. The work inspired the Swedish PES to further advance its work by developing a comprehensive dataset for green taxonomies and the Bulgarian PES to accelerate the development of national methodologies for defining green jobs and skills.
Labour shortages	Piloting a common approach to measuring labour shortages: Throughout 2023-2025, a Focus Group was set up to pilot and test a common approach to measuring labour shortages, exploring the use of the ratio between job vacancies and registered job seekers as a possible common approach among PES Network members. This approach is already used by most of the PES consulted, though with large variations in the nature of data and the methodology.
Digitalisation	Sharing digital tools: The 2025 PES Work Programme provided for the piloting of an open-source digital platform where PES could exchange expertise, pool resources and tools, and share reusable components of IT solutions in a secure manner. In December 2025, a dedicated space for sharing and engaging around IT assets was launched.

Table 2. Enhanced cooperation between PES as a result of PES Decision

Impact	Example
Identifying joint solutions to common labour market challenges	The Slovenian and Austrian PES established cooperation on posted workers sent from Slovenia to Austria. Their engagement in the PES Network was mentioned as crucial for the two organisations to cooperate on this topic.
Improving service delivery	The Croatian PES worked closely with the Slovenian and Lithuanian PES to develop its employer strategy, which also led to assigning several counsellors to work exclusively with employers. In exchange, the Slovenian PES learnt from the Croatian regarding the development of statistical profiling.

¹⁷⁵ The examples in this section were identified in the context of the external evaluation. They are intended to show selected examples of potential effects associated with participation in PES Network activities. They should not be regarded as exhaustive, nor as representing the most significant type of impact in any given country. Further examples are provided in the evaluation study.

	Through their collaboration, the Austrian PES supported the German PES to introduce the EFQM model as one of their organisational management principles. After attending PES Network events showcasing France's experience with AI - the Bulgarian PES decided not only to adopt the best practices presented, but also to further enhance them by developing advanced functionalities for both job seekers and employers (see Study Annex 4).
Making use of funding support through EU funding programmes	Interviewed representatives from EU institutions noted that participation in the PES Network has enabled PES to work on joint proposals to access EU funding, particularly within social and innovation programmes such as ESF+, to implement projects based on knowledge gained through mutual learning activities organised by the PES Network.

Table 3. Impact of Benchlearning on digitalisation, performance and employer management

Area	Benchlearning recommendation/ Trigger	Follow-up action and result
Digitalisation	Benchlearning recommended the Belgian PES (Actiris) to advance digital transformation, especially in data and digital services	A follow-up MAP helped Actiris develop PIX, a digital skills assessment tool; MAP remains a reference point for new digital service actions
Performance management	Several Benchlearning assessments underscored the need for the Cypriot PES for a performance management system	Developed a PES-wide performance management system, including scorecards and KPIs for all District and Local Offices
	Benchlearning outputs and peer-review feedback helped the Spanish PES identify areas to strengthen evaluation culture	Benchlearning outputs and peer-review feedback served as a reference for the design of Spain's national PES evaluation framework and for the organisation of regional peer reviews within the National Employment System
Cooperation with employers	Recommendation to the Estonian PES to strengthen cooperation with employers	Revised the national employer strategy to improve employer outreach and engagement
	Benchlearning highlighted the need for the Greek PES to improve matching, profiling, employer engagement, and use of data.	Engaged in a MAP to strengthen the client-employer matching system and improve client profiling, client referrals, use of technology and overall monitoring.

Table 4. Examples of the uptake of good practices by type of PES Network activity

Type of activity	Overview of activity	Key strengths identified	Examples of uptake of good practices
Thematic Review Workshops (TRW)	1.5 days, hosted by PES Network members with around 30 participants. Content is practical and focused on in depth-learning on specific topics	Small group discussions provide opportunities for deeper engagement and peer learning. Lead to the development of Thematic Papers, which crystallise shared knowledge and make it accessible over time	TRW on labour market skills intelligence: supported the Slovenian PES introduce medium- and long-term forecasts of labour market needs, and better plan more targeted interventions to address skills gaps and labour shortages Additional examples in Study Annex 7, 1b-A.

Working groups (WG)	Typically, 3 meetings per WG hosted and chaired by one PES, with up to 15 participants. 9 WGs established during 2021-2025	Allow participating PES to access a diverse array of case studies and lessons learned Regular meetings increase PES expertise in a specific topic over time and deepen relationships between PES Insights from external experts provide PES with new expertise on tried and tested approaches	WG on Evidence-based design: provided the Danish PES, which chaired the WG, with inputs on how to improve the governance and organisational set-up of evidence-based work, and increased awareness of ways to communicate results to decision makers and front-line staff. WG on Taxonomies: inspired the Swedish PES to further advance its work on green skills, by developing a comprehensive dataset for green taxonomies (green jobs and skills). The Bulgarian PES accelerated the development of national methodologies for defining green jobs and skills, which is now a priority in their action plan Additional examples in Study Annex 7, 1b-B
Mutual Assistance Projects (MAP)	Last up to 18 months, for up to 3 countries simultaneously, with around 3 meetings a year Over the evaluation period, PES from BE, EL, LT, LV, LU, PT and RO received assistance through MAPs	Provide more tailored support on specific performance gaps/management issues Strengthen synergies across different activity strands, as PES use MAPs to follow up on Benchlearning recommendations As implementation depends on explicit request, participants are highly committed to learning	MAP on the use of AI-based tools in matching services: the Luxembourg PES, used insights gained from the Belgian (VDAB) and Swedish PES to identify technical measures and support needed to update matching tools to integrate AI solutions. MAP to strengthen jobseeker-employer matching system: the Greek PES was able to learn from experts, including from the Estonian PES, on counselling and performance management systems, including approaches to forecasting, data infrastructure, performance monitoring and impact analysis. Additional examples in Study Annex 7, 1b-C
Thematic Learning Dialogues (TLD)	Part of the Benchlearning process Bring together a small group of PES to discuss their identified areas of improvement and plan concrete steps to address them with peer support	Allow PES to concretely address Benchlearning recommendations Pragmatic and action oriented	The TLD on 'Exchange among PES operating in a decentralised model' led the French PES to organise bilateral meetings between the central office and teams working on the ground, to improve coordination across governance levels The TLD on Change Management provided useful insights to the Finnish PES to foster better cooperation between all stakeholders involved in reshaping the PES system in Finland. An action plan was drafted following Finland's participation in the TLD, setting out measures to promote trust between municipalities and PES staff, including through providing spaces for open discussions, careful planning staff transitions, while striving to keep customer satisfaction high throughout the reform process. Additional examples in Study Annex 7, 1b-D

Table 5. Impacts of mutual learning in periods of crisis

Crisis	Impacts of mutual learning	Examples
COVID-19 pandemic	Propelled a shift towards digitalisation in service delivery (e.g. setting up remote counselling platforms and managing short-term employment schemes). Helped PES to rapidly adapt their own internal procedures to integrate remote/hybrid ways of working.	Examples include: • Surveys on PES’ responses to the COVID-19 pandemic carried out on a monthly basis between 2020-2021 • Ad hoc survey to feed into the 2021 study on ‘Service delivery by Public Employment Services in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis’. The exchanges within the PES Network on COVID service delivery and hybrid counselling as well as the Network discussions on interoperability and data-driven policy helped shape responses to the pandemic. Examples include the Italian PES’ digital modernisation efforts, including the SIISL (Unified Information System for Labour and Social Inclusion). This is a unified national platform replacing regional systems which now connects employment, social and training services, supporting coordination and accessibility, especially for vulnerable groups such as NEETs, people with disabilities, and families with care responsibilities. The Romanian PES also took inspiration from good practices shared by other European PES through the PES Networks through online events and PES-to-PES questionnaire to adopt a range of measures to address and limit the negative impacts of the pandemic on workers, the self-employed, and employers.
Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine	Provided a space to plan, design and coordinate approaches to skills validation, fast-track profiling, and cooperation with social partners in the integration of displaced Ukrainians. Helped PES rapidly adapt services, for example through simplified registration procedures and tailored job-matching support for Ukrainian jobseekers	Examples include: • The 2022 ‘Exchange of Experiences: Support to Displaced People from Ukraine’ event to exchange experiences on how to effectively and efficiently address challenges related to supporting the labour market integration of displaced persons from Ukraine, with a focus on “learning by sharing” to further develop efficient PES support. • A 2022 survey to identify the types of support provided to displaced Ukrainians and monitor the number of displaced persons registered with PES. • A 2022 PESpod episode discussing and raising awareness on actions implemented by PES to respond to the Russian war of aggression in Ukraine. Joint webinars and policy briefs on fast-track labour market access for displaced persons from Ukraine provided a timely reference for PES to discuss common challenges and learn from each other. For example, the Lithuanian PES adapted its national response, leading to simplified registration and tailored job-matching support for Ukrainian jobseekers. See also Study Annex 7, 14-C.

Table 6. Evidence of PES Network adaptation to changes/trends

Major change	Evidence of PES Network adaptation	Examples of relevant activities/outputs
COVID-19 pandemic	• Rapid shift of PES Network activities online and expansion of PES Network engagement channels • 42% of activities related to unexpected shocks including COVID-19 pandemic, war in Ukraine and inflation (See study, Figure 5) • 24 of 31 AFEPA's rated the Network highly flexible in responding to the pandemic (See Study Annex 8, Figure 23) • Frequently mentioned by AFEPA's and Heads of PES as an example of PES Network responding flexibly	• 2021 Thematic review workshop and 2022 Thematic paper on PES support to recovery¹⁷⁶ • 2021 Jour Fixe on the role of video counselling in the new normal. • PES practices on telecounseling (EL); blended employment practices (EE); supporting self-employed impacted by the crisis¹⁷⁷ <i>See Study Annex 7, 14-A for additional examples.</i>
Influx of persons displaced from Ukraine	• 24 of 31 AFEPA's rated the Network highly flexible in responding to the needs of PES brought on by the war (See study Annex 8, Figure 23) • 42% of PES Network activities related to unexpected shocks including Ukraine war, COVID-19 pandemic, and inflation (See study, Figure 5) • Case studies specifically refer to the relevance of Network support e.g. supporting PES to develop simplified registration and tailored job-matching for Ukrainian jobseekers in Lithuania (See study Annex 4).	• Online meetings with AFEPA's and heads of PES (March and May 2022), dialogue with the Commissioner (June 2022 Board) • 2022-2023 WG on the Integration of Displaced Peoples and Refugees. • 2022 PESpod episode on actions implemented by PES to respond to the war • 2016 paper on Labour Market integration of refugees updated in 2023 to take into account new challenges brought by war in Ukraine <i>See study Annex 7, 14-B for additional examples.</i>
Rapid technological development	• 23% of PES Network activities addressed technological developments (See study Figure 5) • Interviewed stakeholder from EU institutions, AFEPA's and Heads of PES saw this as an area where the PES Network showed particular adaptability by integrating the topic into its Work Programmes and establishing dedicated WGs	• 2025 Webinar and Report on Opportunities of AI within PES processes and services¹⁷⁸ • 2025 WG on Developing a Common framework for Ethical Standards of AI • PES practice: AI Job Matching (SE)¹⁷⁹ <i>See study Annex 7, 14-C for additional examples.</i>
Labour & skills shortages	• 49% of mapped activities related to labour and skills shortages (See study Figure 5) • 14 of 31 AFEPA's rated the Network highly flexible in addressing skills and labour shortages (See study Annex 8, Figure 23) • Workshop and survey consultees highlighted this area as one where the PES Network's outputs remained relevant, with clear impacts (e.g. in Spain in supporting the development of skills-oriented ALMPs; in Slovenia in developing and updating skills and labour shortage strategies (See study Annex 4)	• 2022 PES Network seminar – Future Skills, Career Guidance and Lifelong Learning in PES • 2022 PES Stakeholder conference - Jointly addressing labour and skills shortages, preparing for Europe's Future Labour Market • 2024 Thematic Review Workshop on Skills and labour market intelligence • 2025 Thematic Review Workshop on skills-based approaches in PES processes and activities

¹⁷⁶ [European Network of Public Employment Services - Publications Office of the EU](#)

¹⁷⁷ [PES practice: MyDYPALive - Greece; Blended employment counselling- Estonia; Measure to support self-employment for those changing their economic activity - Lithuania.](#)

¹⁷⁸ [European Network of Public Employment Services - Opportunities of AI within PES processes and services - Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion](#)

¹⁷⁹ [PES practice: AI jobmatching – Sweden.](#)

Digital & green transitions	• 42% of outputs related to green/digital jobs (See study Figure 5) • 15 of 31 AFEPA's rated the Network highly flexible in supporting the development of green skills (See study Annex 8, Figure 23) • Stakeholders consulted in surveys, workshops and interviews highlighted the focus on green taxonomy as an indicator of the flexibility of the PES Network in responding to emerging needs of the green economy	• 2021 Thematic Paper on PES support to greening the labour market ²³⁸ • WG on Labour Market Taxonomy adoption of Key Considerations on Green Concepts in Labour Market Taxonomy in 2023 • 2025 PES Toolkit on Green Skills and Jobs²³⁹
Demographic change	• 23% of outputs related to this topic explicitly (See study Figure 5) • Less directly mentioned by consultees, but tackled through other topics, especially skills shortages	• 2023 Jour Fixe Support for those furthest from the Labour Market