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# FOREWORD

In 2024, we celebrated the 10th anniversary of the PES Network—a decade defined by commitment, growth, and forward-thinking initiatives. This milestone year has not only underscored our achievements but also strengthened our collective resolve to shape a future-ready labour market that embraces green, digital, and demographic shifts.

April marked a significant moment with the release of our first PES Network Memorandum to the next EU leadership, presenting 10 concrete proposals to support PES in navigating labour market transitions ahead. Our call for a “Decade of Skills” resonates with new priorities, and we are encouraged to see the new European Commission’s ongoing focus on up- and reskilling.

Our anniversary year has also been a time of connection and innovation. As Europe continues its enlargement journey, the Network can contribute with its collective experience in helping more countries on their path towards the EU. Thinking and acting beyond our usual scope is another topic we explored when we looked at how to amplify our impact, making job markets more resilient and inclusive for all Europeans during the Annual Conference on ‘Rethinking support to those further from the labour market.’ Cooperation with private employment services will also be key in this context.

This year, PES experts came together to develop resources supporting green jobs and to establish common standards for measuring labour shortages. Our focus on job-to-job transitions and labour market foresight reinforces our commitment to ensuring that PES stay ahead of evolving needs. We have also closely followed the EU’s Talent Pool initiative for third-country nationals and its possible impact on PES operations. Our input into the EMCO review on Individual Learning Accounts—now being implemented across several EU countries—underscores PES dedication to flexible, lifelong learning models that prepare workers for changing demands.

At the same time, our commitment to PES modernisation continues. This year saw the start of the fourth cycle of Benchlearning, and two mutual assistance programmes for the PES of Luxembourg and Romania. The Digitalisation Working Group also maintained its role, supporting PES IT experts in driving digital progress within their organisations. We launched the PES Network LinkedIn group, creating an online space to engage our community and stakeholders.

Reflecting on 2024, I extend my heartfelt gratitude to all PES Secretariat colleagues, our Vice-chair, board members, AFEPAs, Benchlearning assessors, and all PES staff across the Network. Whether preparing mutual learning activities, sharing knowledge through our publications, coordinating working groups, or representing PES at key events, it is your dedication and expertise that give life to our network and drive its success.

With the strong foundation we have built together, the PES Network is primed for the future. Let us continue to share our expertise with one another and European policymakers, working toward a vibrant, skilled, and inclusive European labour market.

Thank you for your commitment and passion!

**Caroline Mancel,**

*Chair of the PES Network*

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1. PES Network in 2024

The 2024 Work Programme was implemented in a landscape which saw the unemployment rate remain relatively stable (at 5.9% in the EU27 in September 2024)<sup>1</sup>, whilst the labour and skills shortages have continued to grow across many sectors and several Member States. Against a context of continued geopolitical tensions, employment growth is expected to be more subdued in the future<sup>2</sup>: the September 2024 European Labour Market Barometer signals some pessimism from PES<sup>3</sup>.

### PES Network Memorandum – call to tackle the future labour market challenges

A new European Commission is now in place and set out new [Political Guidelines for 2024-2029](#). Skills has been a central theme with the closing of the [European Year of Skills](#) in April, keeping skills, quality jobs and skills shortages at the top of the European agenda. These issues are also a key component of the [PES Network Memorandum for the Next European Leadership](#) adopted by the Board in Spring, which proposes action under three key pillars.

**Skills and labour shortages:** The Network calls for a European Decade of Skills to foster collaboration between education and labour market actors, enhance the collection and analysis of labour market intelligence and for exploring a 'right to training for all'. The Memorandum also underlines PES' involvement in the recruitment of third-country nationals to address labour market shortages.

**Leveraging EU instruments:** The Memorandum calls for a strong commitment to employment and skills in the future multi-annual financial framework, for a clear framework for skills, employment and active labour market policies at EU level and for new ways to support activation and employment of groups currently underrepresented in the labour market.

**Harnessing data and technology:** The Network calls for setting common European standards for the ethical use of AI in labour market contexts. It proposes an open-source digital space to facilitate collaboration among PES and stakeholders.

Since 2014, the European Network of Public Employment Services (PES Network) works to enhance the co-operation between the PES. Its members are the Public Employment Services of all 27 EU Member States as well as Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein and the European Commission.

The Network is governed by a Board where each country and the Commission are represented. The Board meets twice a year to conduct strategic discussions and take decisions on the activities of the Network. It also works in close co-operation with the Employment Committee (EMCO). Advisors for European PES affairs (AFEPAs) appointed in all participating PES are supporting and preparing the Board in the decision-making process.

A Secretariat, provided by and based within the European Commission, assists the Board. In co-operation with the Chair and Vice-Chairs, it prepares the Board meetings and supports the implementation of the Annual Work Programme.

1 [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Unemployment\\_statistics#Unemployment\\_in\\_the\\_EU\\_and\\_the\\_Euro\\_area](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Unemployment_statistics#Unemployment_in_the_EU_and_the_Euro_area)

2 [https://economy-finance.ec.europa.eu/economic-forecast-and-surveys/economic-forecasts/spring-2024-economic-forecast-gradual-expansion-amid-high-geopolitical-risks\\_en](https://economy-finance.ec.europa.eu/economic-forecast-and-surveys/economic-forecasts/spring-2024-economic-forecast-gradual-expansion-amid-high-geopolitical-risks_en)

3 <https://iab.de/en/daten/european-labour-market-barometer/>

With regards to governance, Caroline Mancel (Deputy Director General of the Brussels PES, Actiris) continued her role as PES Network Chair, together with the First Vice-Chair Inga Balnanosienė (Head of the Lithuanian PES), who started her official position from 1 January.

Two Board meetings were held in 2024 in Liège (Belgium) on 6–7 June 2024 and in Budapest

(Hungary) on 5–6 December 2024. In addition, two AFEPA meetings took place in March (when a joint meeting was organised with Youth Guarantee coordinators) and in October. The Network's Chair was also involved in the Employment Committee's Multilateral Surveillance Reviews on Active Labour Market Policies and Individual Learning Accounts in March and October, as well as in the closing event of the European Year of Skills in April 2024.

### 2024: A milestone year for the PES Network



2024 marked the 10-year anniversary of the PES Network. The anniversary was celebrated across the year, showcasing how the Network has helped members to become better PES together.

## 1.2. Snapshot of the 2024 Work Programme implementation

The 2024 Work Programme, was structured around four thematic strands:

- **Structural and labour market challenges:** adjusting strategies to deal with rapidly changing labour markets, green skills and jobs evolution and using skills and labour market intelligence.
- **PES service delivery:** encouraging continuous improvement and modernisation of PES' service delivery, particularly around supporting those furthest from the labour market and providing proactive support to job-to-job transitions.

- **PES performance management:** enhancing capacity building as well as data-driven PES and digitalisation strategies (including harnessing the potential of AI) and using Benchlearning as a vehicle to support PES' performance.
- **PES governance and ecosystem:** deepening understanding of key trends in PES, enhancing the outreach of the Network and co-operation with partners, with a focus on partnerships with private employment services.

The Work Programme was delivered through a combination of Benchlearning, Mutual Learning and communication activities. Benchlearning activities focused on the start of the 4<sup>th</sup> cycle of the Benchlearning site visits, with 15 assessments taking place in 2024 (LT, BG, LV, HR, AT, PT, HU, DE, EL, CZ, EE, NL, MT, IE and CY).

Figure 1 PES Network activities in 2024



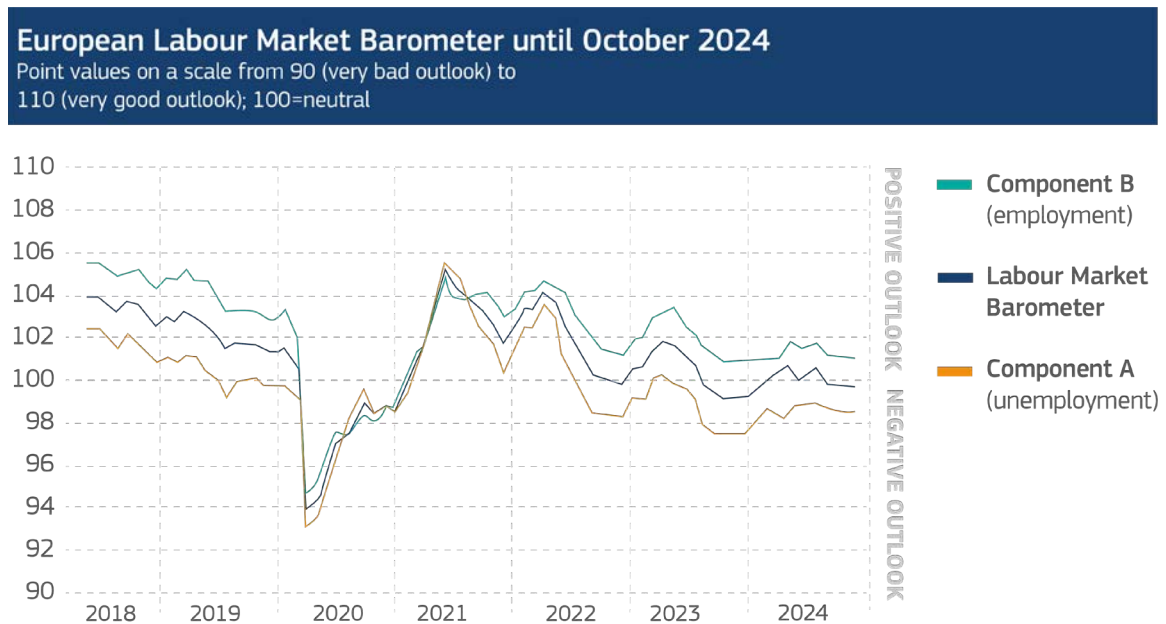
## 2. ADDRESSING THE COMPLEX CHALLENGES FACED BY PES

Across 2024, the Network worked to support PES in anticipating labour market needs and supporting skill developments, and took a detailed look at how PES can support the greening of the labour market. It looked at rethinking service delivery, particularly for those furthest from the labour market, to support work-to-work transitions. The Network also continued to look at how to make services further digitalised, data-driven and personalised, building on developments in AI and reinforcing the importance of partnerships.

### 2.1. PES responses to structural and labour market challenges

While unemployment continues to be overall low, the situation in 2024 has been more volatile. By October 2024, the European Labour Market Barometer shows worsening prospects for the labour market as the year comes to a close.<sup>4</sup>

Figure 2 October 2024 European Labour Market Barometer outlook<sup>5</sup>



Source: European Network of Public Employment Services, Institute for Employment Research (IAB).

Employers (and SMEs in particular) are having increasing difficulties in finding a workforce with the right skills and labour shortages have become a major concern. Supporting employers to identify current and future skills needs is therefore key.

More widely, the triple (demographic, green and digital) transition is speeding up and placing new demands on the workforce. The need to invest in skills intelligence, guidance, training and upskilling is thus more visible than ever.

<sup>4</sup> <https://iab.de/en/daten/european-labour-market-barometer/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://iab.de/en/daten/european-labour-market-barometer/>



### Anticipating labour market needs and supporting skills development

Anticipating labour market needs and supporting skills development is a growing concern.





Several PES have skills anticipation systems in place and are using forecasting methodologies (including advanced technologies), to anticipate future trends.

Exchanges within the Network have highlighted that, while forecasting remains a valuable tool, its reliability diminishes the further we project into the future. It is of critical importance to consider the entire 'labour market intelligence toolkit' (with midterm skills forecasting being just one component alongside survey-based forecasting) and to avoid delegating this responsibility entirely to AI.

The application of advanced technologies can be insightful, but PES counsellors need to be trained effectively to utilise these tools and know their limitations (such as ethical concerns). Skills intelligence is crucial to help counsellors to deliver more relevant career guidance services: it needs to be as user-friendly, clear and as visual as possible. By anticipating the needs of the labour market, the counsellors can better identify the trainings and guide jobseekers accordingly. Comprehensive taxonomies of occupations and skills as well as partnerships to build relevant and reliable skills and labour market intelligence are also essential in this regard.

Against the background of the evolving labour market, PES have witnessed changes in the career guidance offered, in line with wider societal changes (as shown in Figure 3 below).

Figure 3 Trends observed in changes in career guidance<sup>6</sup>

Trends observed in changes in career guidance		
	Digital skills	48% AT, BEA, BEF, CZ, DE, FI, FR, HR, IS, LT, LU, LV, NO, PT, SI
	Green skills	32% AT, BEF, DE, FI, FR, LT, LV, LU, PT, SI
	Digital and green skills	51% AT, BEF, CY, DE, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, LT, LV, LU, MT, PT, SE, SI
	Other	32% BEA, FI, IS, LV, LU, MT, NO, PL, PT, SE

Source: PES Capacity Questionnaire 2024, Part I Q2: Have you experienced any of the following changes in the last five years in the focus of your career guidance? N=31.

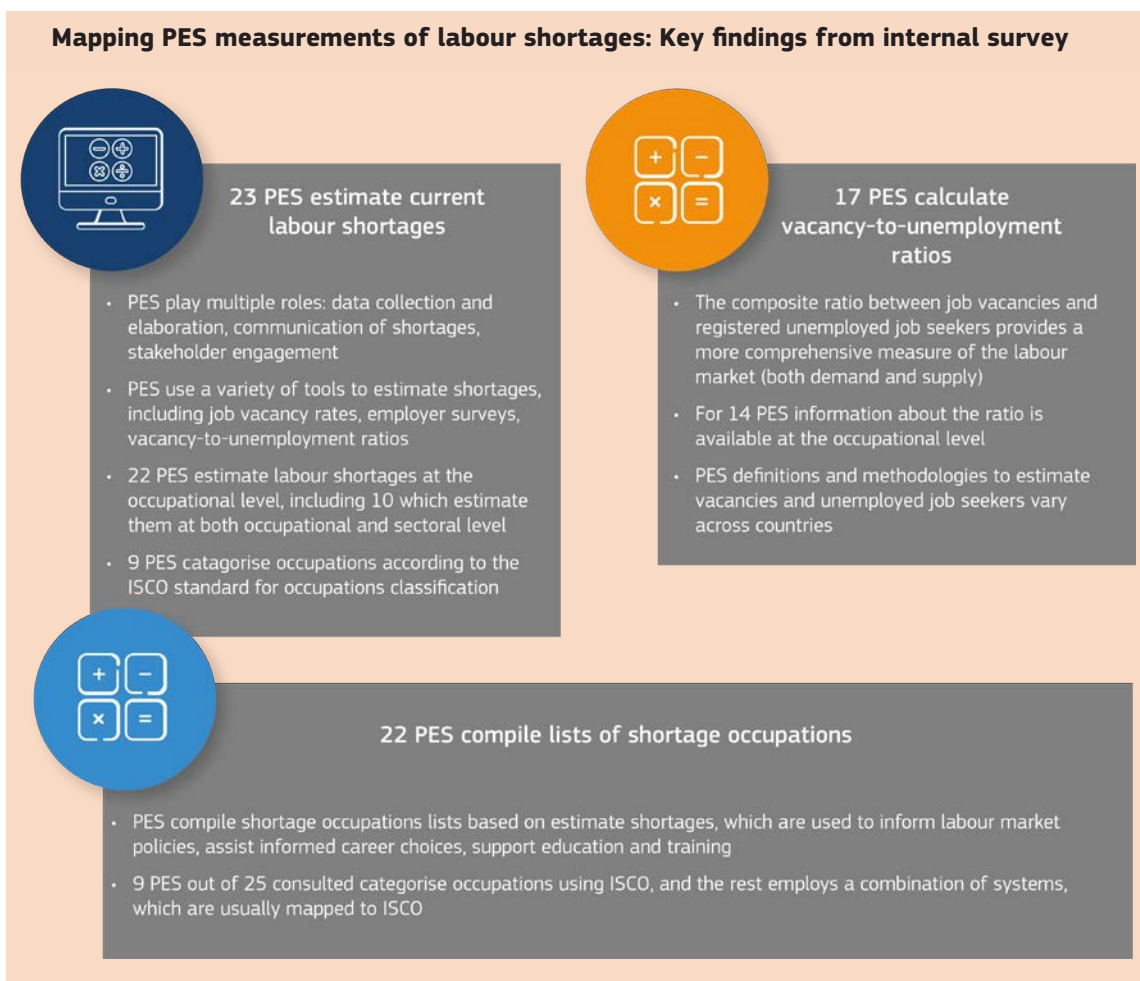
### Piloting a common approach to measuring labour shortages

Some PES have improved their vacancy monitoring systems, for example by introducing a list of shortage occupations or making changes to how they identify shortages and bottleneck occupations<sup>7</sup>. These can inform future decision-making regarding interventions such as training programmes, support to employers and jobseekers.

In this context, a Focus Group met to discuss the findings of an internal mapping on 'Measuring Labour Shortages across PES Network Members'. The group agreed upon exploring the use of the ratio between job vacancies and registered job seekers as a possible common approach to measure shortages 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. Preliminary testing took place with a task force. The next steps will be discussed early 2025. The challenges, particularly those linked to coverage of PES vacancy data, will need to be fully assessed.

<sup>6</sup> European Commission (2023) PES Thematic Report 2024 – PES support of career guidance and skills, qualifications recognition and individual learning accounts (ILA) (forthcoming)

<sup>7</sup> European Commission (2024) Trends in PES Assessment Report on PES Capacity 2023



### Related Network activities

- The topic of Skills and Labour Market Intelligence was explored in a Thematic Review Workshop (hosted by the Greek PES) in October 2024. A thematic paper will be published in early 2025.
- An internal pilot on measuring labour market shortages within the PES Network was conducted, with a dedicated Focus Group and Taskforce following up this activity.
- A [Podcast](#) was published on 'Skills, innovation and initiatives from the Greek PES.'
- A [Podcast](#) was published on 'A Lithuanian perspective on the Future of Work.'

### Implementing career guidance and Individual Learning Accounts

In recent years PES have taken a more active role in providing career guidance and skills assessment as well as taking forward a role in providing or brokering training<sup>8</sup>.

Skills assessments are a key task for most PES, with 90% (28 out of 31) of PES having full or



partial responsibility for them, working closely in partnerships to do this<sup>9</sup>. Most PES (87%, 27 out of 31) are involved in career guidance and they (apart from two) offer guidance to both unemployed and employed persons registered with PES. 71% of PES deliver skills assessment services and all the PES are responsible (48% partially; 39% fully) for provision of training to the unemployed<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> European Commission (2022) [Future skills, career guidance and lifelong learning in PES](#)

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

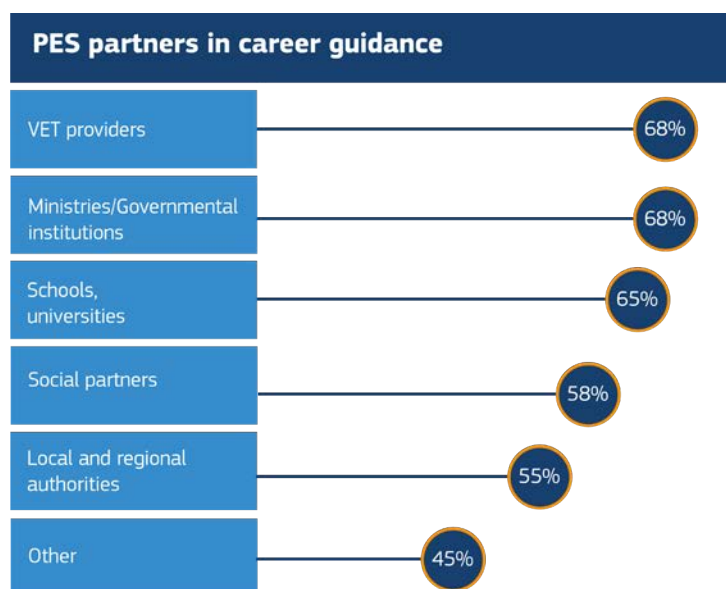
<sup>10</sup> European Commission (2023) *PES Thematic Report 2024 – PES support of career guidance and skills, qualifications recognition and individual learning accounts (ILA)* (forthcoming)

Figure 4 Overview of PES' career guidance customers

Overview of PES' career guidance customers		
	Registered unemployed	87%
	Registered employed	81%
	Non-registered clients	65%

Source: PES Capacity Questionnaire 2024, Part I Q1.1: Does your PES' role in career guidance cover: Registered unemployed/Registered employed; Part I Q1.3: Does your PES play a role in supporting non-registered customers through career guidance? N=31.

Figure 5 PES partners in career guidance



Source: PES Capacity Questionnaire 2024, Part I. Q. 1.2 Who are the partners in your work on career guidance? N=31.

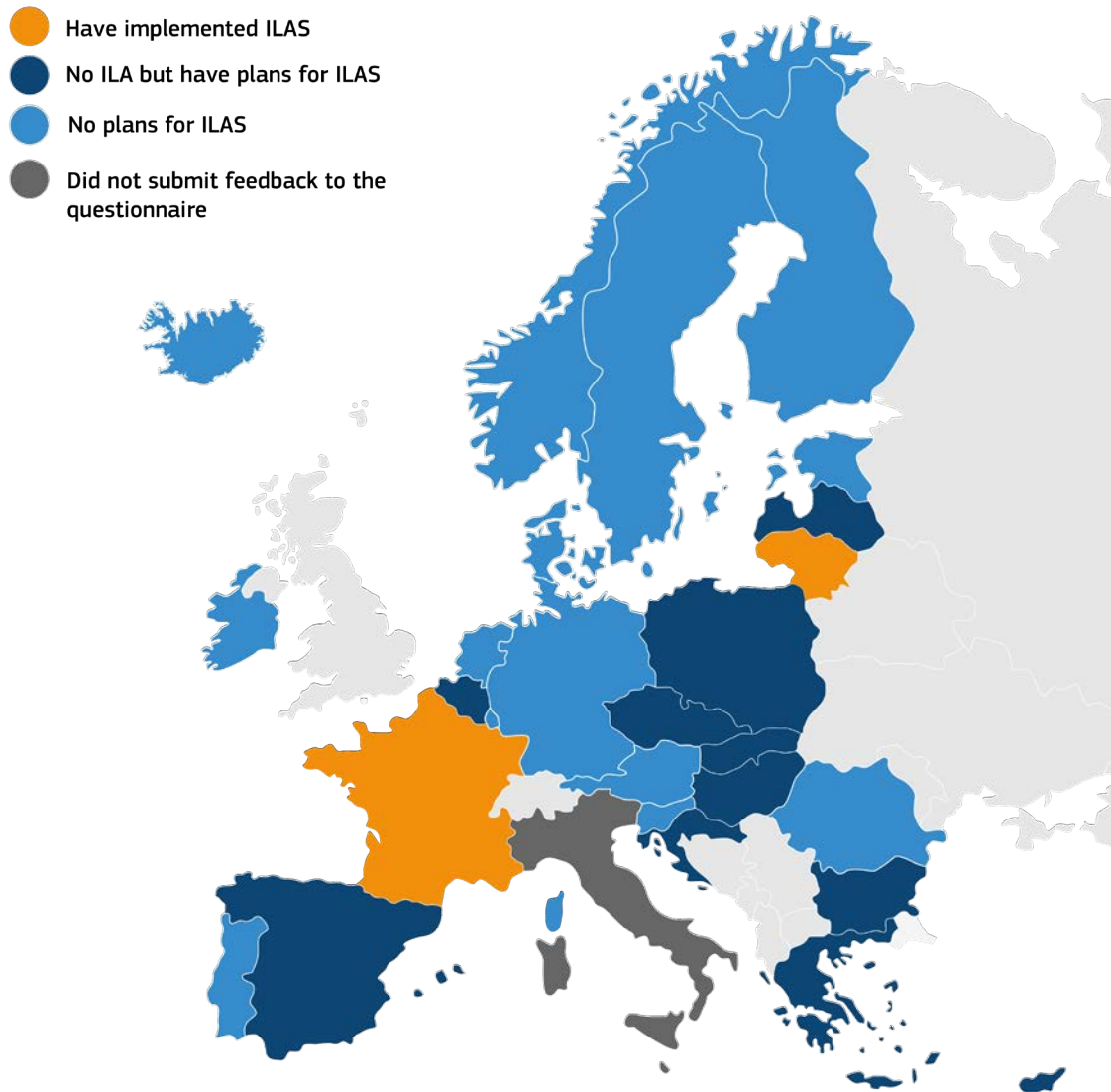
Vocational education and training providers are one of the most common partners in career guidance, and this reflects that career guidance is often useful for jobseekers who are exploring vocational education (for example, as a way to re-enter the labour market, or to further develop their skills to the needs of the current and labour market). In addition, schools and universities and social partners are also common partners who can help facilitate the delivery of career guidance at an operational level.

In contrast, partnerships with ministries and governmental institutions are often at a strategic level, for example around information sharing.

Since 2022, the European Commission has encouraged Member States to adopt [Individual Learning Accounts \(ILAs\)](#), with the aim to develop massive access to training for the European active population. ILAs are designed to develop the national training offer and provide individuals with a personal budget dedicated to covering the costs of training activities relevant to the labour market. PES can work with other partners to be involved in the implementation of ILAs. This is the case for 2 out of 31 PES, where they are taking a supporting role, primarily signposting jobseekers and employed people to access Individual Learning Accounts. Thirteen out of 31 PES work on designing pilots or have plans to introduce ILAs<sup>11</sup>. Figure 6 below shows the current development of ILAs across Member States.

<sup>11</sup> European Commission (2024) PES Thematic Report 2024 – PES support of career guidance and skills, qualifications recognition and individual learning accounts (ILA)' (forthcoming)

Figure 6 Current development of ILAs across Member States



Source: PES Capacity Questionnaire 2024, Part I, Q9. Does your country have an ILA scheme? N=31.

Figure 6 shows the views of the PES during the time of the questionnaire (summer 2024), when only a few PES had begun introducing ILA schemes.

#### Related Network activities

- The 2023 PES Network Annual PES capacity report was published, with a dissemination webinar in June 2024. It provides an overview of the trends in PES governance and ecosystem and how PES are reacting to changes in the labour market.
- A survey was carried out on 'PES support of career guidance and skills, qualification recognition and Individual Learning Accounts'. A thematic report will be published in 2025 and preliminary results were presented to the October 2024 EMCO Multilateral Surveillance Review on Individual Learning Accounts.

### Equipping PES with the appropriate tools to support the green skills and jobs evolution

The green transition is expected to impact on the skills required in the labour market, the types of jobs available as well as the number of job-to-job transitions.

PES have a role in smoothing the transition, supporting jobseekers and employers to make the step towards green industries with the relevant skills and to mitigate any transition effects<sup>12</sup>. Several have introduced steps to address labour market challenges linked to the green transition, from developing strategies to designing and im-

plementing services such as training measures, job creation programmes and active labour market policies for specific sectors, including the energy sector.

Within European PES, there has been much discussion on using appropriate taxonomies (classification systems) regarding the definition of what is considered a 'green job'. Some PES are piloting approaches to define green jobs (sometimes until the skill level), building on existing approaches at various levels of aggregation (occupation, sector, region, technology), for most of these PES, implementing a task-based approach.

### Defining green jobs and occupations and piloting a common approach

The Taxonomy Working Group undertook a mapping of existing approaches towards defining green jobs, which showed that:

- Defining green jobs is challenging for PES as there is no common agreement on what constitutes 'green', given rapidly changing labour markets and insufficient internal capacity.
- Some PES define 'green' occupations using various approaches within their classification systems. These definitions are influenced by legislation, national policies, and local economic contexts.
- Over a third of PES have a definition of green jobs. A minority of PES have identified and differentiate between green skills, tasks and competencies.
- To better understand the skills needs for the green transition, PES rely on partnerships with researchers, training providers, other experts and social partners.

### Related Network activities

- A Toolkit on 'PES support to green skills and jobs: From commitment to practical steps and strategies', which provides PES with practical guidance and promotes skills development for the green transition, to be published in early 2025.
- A Working Group (led by Sweden) on Taxonomies focused on looking at existing approaches to green jobs among PES and piloting a common PES Network approach.

### PES role in attracting skilled labour from third countries

Attracting talent from outside of EU is becoming increasingly important to address labour shortages within the EU.

Most migration schemes are demand-driven or employer-driven, whereby a job offer is a pre-condition for Third Country Nationals to obtain the right to enter and reside in a Member State. In this context, PES tend to mainly perform administrative tasks such as being involved in the decision on the admission of a jobseeker and the issuing of

work permits, performing labour market tests and in some cases also assessing working conditions. Recently, however, an increasing number of PES have been actively involved in the recruitment of skilled workers from outside the EU – often within bilateral mobility agreements. The PES role depends heavily on their mandate and the conditions in each Member State.

Supporting third country labour migration is a challenging task. This requires identification of shortage occupations through use of labour market intelligence and comes with the need to pro-

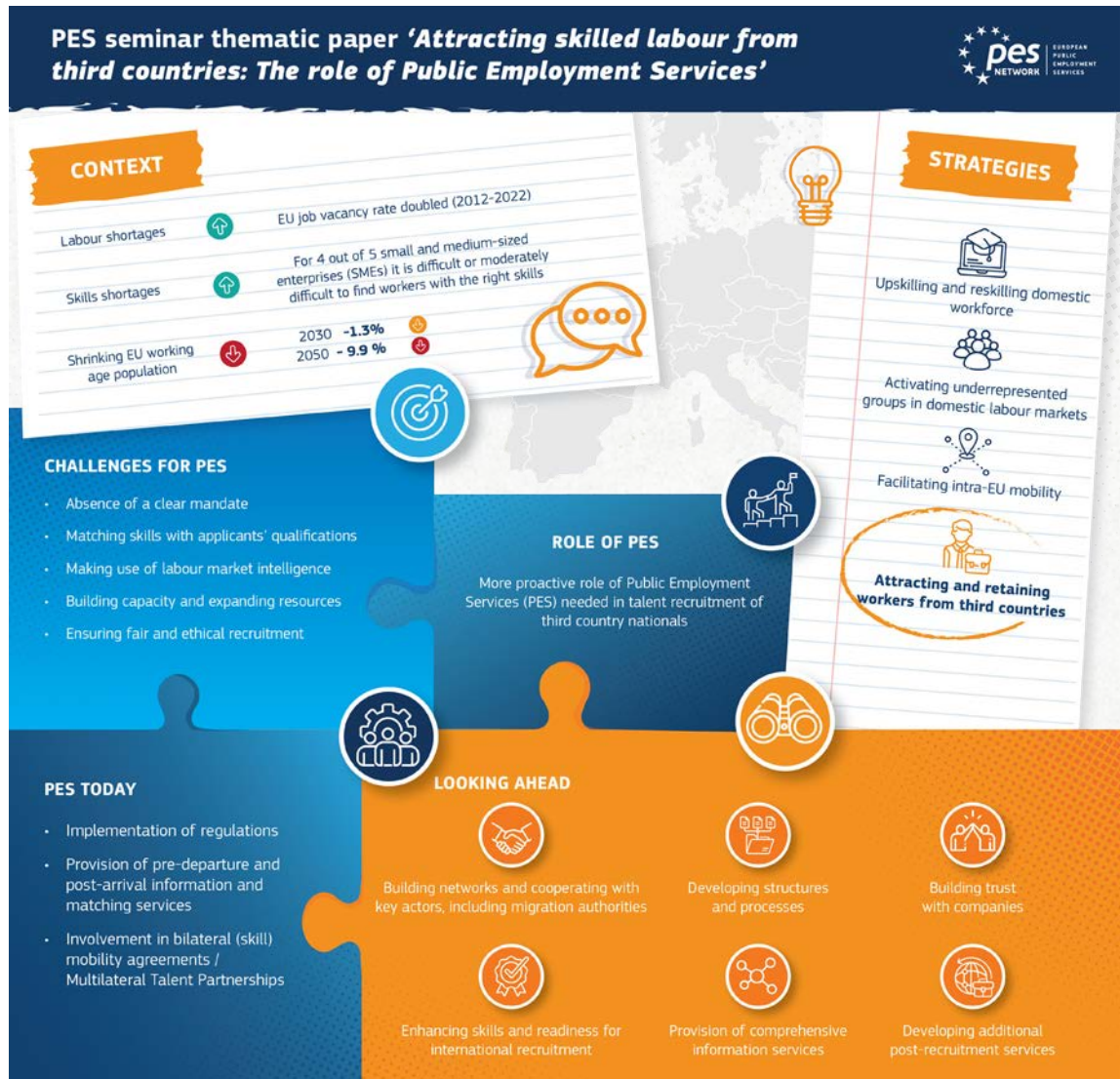
<sup>12</sup> European Commission (2023) '[PES support to greening of the labour market](#)'



vide reliable and up-to-date information on the work permit process, qualification recognition procedures and job opportunities. Making comprehensive information available through a single

information source in several languages and in cooperation with ministries and migration authorities may be a way to reinforce PES capacity to support international recruitment.

Figure 7 Key messages from the Thematic Paper 'Attracting skilled labour from third countries: The role of public employment services'



Source: 'Attracting skilled labour from third countries: The role of Public Employment Services' Thematic Paper

### Related Network activities

- A Thematic Paper on the [PES role in attracting talent](#) was published, capturing responses to PES survey and the key discussions during the November 2023 seminar.

## 2.2. Improving service delivery while supporting those most in need

In 2024, the PES Network focused on how PES can improve service delivery while ensuring that those furthest from the labour market are fully supported and not left behind.

### **New approaches to support those furthest from the labour market**

Recent data shows high employment overall, but lower participation for certain groups. In 2022, over 10% of young people aged 15–29 were not in employment, education, or training<sup>13</sup>. Meanwhile, the employment rate for those aged 55–64 increased from 45% in 2011 to 60.5% in 2021, though rates vary between Member States, highlighting the need to support older workers' retention in the labour market<sup>14</sup>.

'Rethinking Support for Those Furthest from the Labour Market' was the topic of the Annual Stakeholder Conference. Held in November, it brought together 165 participants from public and private employment services, social partners, NGOs, EU agencies, and the European Commission. Heads of PES from some enlargement countries also attended for the first time. The topics addressed how to better integrate underrepresented groups

like persons with disabilities, young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs), women with caregiving duties, and older jobseekers into the workforce.

In-depth workshops examined strategies for outreach, highlighted the importance of person-centred, holistic services that combine housing, health, and digital tools tailored to specific needs. Other workshops explored lifelong career guidance, co-operation with private employment services for rapid skills matching, and evidence-based services to improve support for vulnerable groups. Sessions dedicated to women as caregivers, older jobseekers, and individuals with disabilities discussed targeted supports, such as job carving and co-created services with employers, which can contribute to overcoming barriers like ageism, caregiving burdens, and accessibility issues. Support for NEETs emphasised psychological support and personalised guidance through partnerships with youth organisations.

The conference concluded with calls for stronger collaboration and trust-building between Public and Private Employment Services, as well as the need for skills development, cross-border recognition, and capacity-building within PES to address future labour market demands.

<sup>13</sup> European Commission (2023) *'Demographic change in Europe: a toolbox for action'*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

Figure 8 Main messages from the Stakeholder Conference 'Rethinking support for those furthest from the labour market'



### Celebrating 10 years of making a difference with the PES Network

One of the main challenges for the Netherlands PES is re-integrating people on disability benefits. The Danish PES shared their experience in the field of occupation and health and showed the Dutch PES how they organised the medical assessments and re-integration of people with an occupational disability. With their insights, the Dutch PES are now looking into changing the system in the Netherlands.

#### Ensuring access to digital services

When supporting those furthest from the labour market, a key concern for PES is ensuring full inclusive access to digital services in view of the increasing move towards digital-first approaches.

This raises the question of whether and how to provide services online to jobseekers who either have no or very low levels of digital skills, or who do not have the resources to access digital services. Outreach is an important first step, with clear coordinated online campaigns. In some cases, low-threshold online services which have separate

branding to PES can be attractive to some groups, such as young people. Understanding jobseekers' barriers to using digital services is an area of focus for PES, with tailored diagnostic tools that help to identify clients with no or minimal digital skills (noting that first interviews with a jobseeker remain important to fully understand their needs).

The Network has explored how to provide basic digital skills training and online counselling in an accessible way, tailoring to the needs of specific jobseekers and ensuring that PES staff are trained appropriately.



Figure 9 Main messages from the Thematic Paper on 'PES digital services to successfully integrate vulnerable jobseekers'



Source 'PES digital services to successfully integrate vulnerable jobseekers' Thematic Paper

### Related Network activities

- A Stakeholder Conference took place on 'Rethinking support to those furthest from the labour market', on 5 November 2024, in Brussels, Belgium. A synthesis paper is forthcoming.
- A Thematic Paper on '[PES digital services to successfully integrate vulnerable jobseekers](#)' was published, following a Thematic Review Workshop (hosted by Croatia) in November 2023.



### Celebrating 10 years of making a difference with the PES Network

*Belgium-FOREM organised a study visit to Denmark to explore practices that could enhance support to jobseekers, such as rapid, intensive intake, advisor-validated CVs, and prioritised job seeking actions. The existence of the European PES Network facilitated collaboration with the Danish PES, highlighting the value of both formal structures and informal relationships fostered through the Network.*

### Proactive support job-to-job transitions

In recent years, PES' role has changed in some countries with mandates shifting to cover those at risk of job losses.

This includes enhancing the effectiveness of career centres and other similar service points and working with partners to get closer to employees and jobseekers to engage them in PES services.

In this context, PES are increasingly collaborating with employers and private partners to build resilient, stable workforces, using strategic approaches to develop deep insights and understand em-

ployers' short, medium and long-term needs.

For individuals (jobseekers and employees), an increasingly important aspect is to make guidance and counselling as accessible as possible, with some PES using 'pop up' service points outside of the PES premises (such as in shopping centres and dedicated coffee carts, to raise awareness and visibility). By taking this approach PES are physically closer to potential service users, proactively reaching out to jobseekers and employed people, instead of waiting for them to go to the PES offices or accessing the PES' online presence.

#### Related Network activities

- A Thematic Review Workshop, hosted by Lithuania, took place on 'Early interventions and job-to-job transitions' in September 2024. A Thematic Paper will be published.

### Improving PES services - using data and latest information

Evidence-based service design refers to an approach where data and outcomes are used to improve operations and inform which services (and modes of delivery) will lead to best possible effects. In PES, the term 'evidence' encompasses quantitative and qualitative information on the delivery of employment support programmes

(mostly Active Labour Market Policies, ALMPs, but also other interventions, measures, and PES services). An evidence-based approach has been implemented in European PES for many years, although the degree of implementation as well as the complexity of approaches varies. New methods are also emerging (such as the use of behavioural science in shaping services), also prompted by artificial intelligence and big data.



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*Denmark hosted a Working Group on evidence-based service design within PES in 2023 and 2024, bringing together PES experts to share knowledge and recent work on "what works for whom." The group explored how digital tools and AI can support jobseekers' online job search behaviour, amongst other topics.*

#### Success factors and lessons learned on evidence-based service design

Evidence-based service design is supported by:

- Understanding clients' requirements, ensuring that services are tailored to meet clients' needs effectively
- Investing in the capabilities of PES staff (including a focus on the use of AI and behavioural insights), and ensuring adequate resources for user-friendly analytical tools
- Accessibility and on-time feedback, using short surveys and using feedback to adjust services
- Establishing a culture of using evidence, building a sense of trust and supportive environments with a culture of change
- Cooperation with external suppliers

However, there are challenges in adopting evidence-based approaches in PES:

- Resource challenges, including staff capacities, access to software
- Process challenges, ensuring that capturing evidence is integrated in development cycles
- Cultural challenges, including incentivising staff to use new methods
- Data quality and analysis, including data preparation, ethics and quality data
- Data protection
- User-centred approaches – balancing users' concerns and expectations and the involvement of stakeholders

#### Related Network activities

- A Working Group (led by Denmark) focused on 'Evidence-based service design: Towards more data and experience-based models, use of behavioural science' took place in March 2024 (hosted by the Danish PES). An Output Paper was published, presenting recent trends and good practices.

### 2.3. Improving performance, driving quality

This year, digital approaches and using Artificial Intelligence (AI) has been at the top of the

Network's agenda. PES Network members have shared approaches on using digitalisation across the customer journey, for both jobseekers and employers, and how AI is being used to improve delivery of core services

#### New European Artificial Intelligence Act (AI Act) entered into force

The AI Act came into force on 1 August 2024. It aims to foster responsible artificial intelligence development and deployment in the EU, outlining requirements and obligations regarding uses of AI. It provides a clear definition of AI, a framework and a risk-based approach for approaches to AI. Within the framework of the PES Digitalisation Working Group its implications for PES and their activities were discussed<sup>15</sup>.

#### Digitalisation and AI – potential for service personalisation and optimisation but ethical implications need to be considered

Digitalisation developments for PES have continued to be important, against the backdrop of the digital transition and accelerations in areas such as AI.

The Network has continued to share experiences and look at issues ranging from IT procurement, service delivery and support to those furthest from the labour market as well as how to leverage the use of data and new technologies going forward. In some cases, PES are using public-private procurement for delivery of IT services, including development of AI applications. This may be to utilise external expertise and resources and bring forward knowledge and approaches from the private sector into PES approaches. Having

clear mutual expectations and a common vision is imperative when using public-private procurement. Discussions underlined that aligning developments with PES strategies and optimising the integration of new (AI)solutions into existing systems and business processes is key.

Many PES are advancing their digital transformation using AI to enhance service delivery and personalised support. AI is being applied across different business processes such as profiling, matching and career guidance, supporting jobseekers, employers and employees. The Working Group on Digitalisation has also shared approaches to developing AI strategies that underpin their work on AI. The Working Group discussions showed that AI strategies need to carefully balance privacy, efficiency, accuracy and fairness as well as lawfulness and innovation.

<sup>15</sup> [https://commission.europa.eu/news/ai-act-enters-force-2024-08-01\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/news/ai-act-enters-force-2024-08-01_en)



### Celebrating 10 years of making a difference with the PES Network

*Participation in PES Network has provided the Latvian PES with insights on topics, such as the role of digitalisation and AI in modernising employment services.*

#### AI developments and influencing factors – 10 observations.

The recent report on 'Opportunities of AI within PES processes and services: A qualitative study exploring PES experiences, best practices and emerging business value<sup>16</sup>, highlighted 10 observations:

- While AI adoption in PES is relatively new, it is expanding rapidly, and PES are developing organisational practices to support its' implementation.
- PES are learning and gaining experience from AI initiatives and focus on aspects such as innovation.
- PES are reporting positive outcomes from AI initiatives, based on soft indicators.
- Profiling applications are most frequently used, with career guidance applications next, driven by the increasing role of PES in supporting career development.
- PES tend to develop standalone applications, but they are increasingly considering end-to-end workflows.
- AI tools are positioned as a supplement to human judgement and aid decision-making, they are not a replacement for staff.
- Stakeholder involvement is crucial for the success of AI initiatives, from leadership to incorporating end-user feedback.
- There is a continued need to balance (business) priorities, legal/ethical requirements, experimenting with different approaches and prioritising explainability.
- Transitioning from experimental AI to production ready systems poses challenges for PES.
- PES are optimistic about AI's potential to transform business processes, and they recognise AI's possibilities that can be harnessed.

#### Related Network activities

- The Network published a report on 'Opportunities of AI within PES processes and services.'
- A Working Group on PES Digitalisation (led by the Netherlands) met twice, sharing updates on IT projects and reforms, discussing the implications of the AI Act<sup>17</sup>, exploring digitalisation and use of AI across customer journeys, as well as the sharing of IT solutions and public-private partnerships.
- A Mutual Assistance project was concluded, supporting Luxembourg in the use of AI in development of a matching tool, with support from PES from Belgium-VDAB and Sweden (more on this below).

#### Optimising performance – Mutual Assistance

Supporting PES to modernise is a core pillar of the PES Network's mandate. An important individual learning tool is Mutual Assistance Projects, which offer tailored support to individual PES.

Two Mutual Assistance projects have been carried out in 2024. The Mutual Assistance Project in Luxembourg was completed in April 2024. Starting from the viewpoint of PES organisational and digital transformation strategy, it discussed key

<sup>16</sup> Forthcoming

<sup>17</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32024R1689>

questions for AI based matching at all project- implementation stages - from functionalities (where AI can be best used in customer journeys for employers and employees) to technical development and to the support required for users to adapt to a new matching solution. The Mutual Assistance Project showcased relevant approaches used in Belgium-VDAB and in Sweden.

A second Mutual Assistance Project began in October to support the Romanian PES on HR strategies. It will aim to provide the Romanian PES with practical experiences on onboarding, guidance and training for new staff and it will also explore the role and guidance to be shared by the national level to local level PES offices.

## 2.4. PES governance and its ecosystems

Since May 2022, several PES introduced reforms to their service delivery models and tools, with 12 out of 31 PES (39%) having implemented reforms<sup>18</sup>. Around a quarter of PES reported changes or updates in relation to their key tasks and activities compared to previous years, and these changes mainly relate to upgrades of services or benefits provided by the PES<sup>19</sup>.

The PES Network has continued to develop partnerships within the wider ecosystem as a way to continue to amplify the voice of the PES Network and to deliver services that matter.

### Working across the ecosystem - PES and private employment services

European PES are increasingly using, or considering, a mixed service delivery model combining the traditional in-house provision of services and a network of external partners supporting intermediation and employability services.

A recent survey on cooperation between public employment services (PES) and private employment services (PrES)<sup>20</sup> has shown that the majority of PES (19 out of 27 PES respondents) cooperate with PrES, most of them with Private employment placement agencies, skills training providers, temporary work agencies, as well as coaches and career advisors.

Working with PrES enhances capacity, uses additional expertise and specialisation and many PES note that working with PrES helps them to reach groups furthest from the labour market. While the partnerships are in place, it is not without its challenges. The survey highlighted that challenges exist in particular around data exchange, privacy issues and accuracy of matching processes.



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*Thanks to participation in the PES Network, the Portuguese PES launched the Employer Days initiative in 2016, and subsequently it has become an annual event. It promotes PES services, strengthens relationships with employers and local businesses, and creates job opportunities. The initiative was developed following a joint PES Network Employers' Day.*

<sup>18</sup> European Commission (2024) [Trends in PES Assessment Report on PES Capacity 2023](#)

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> European Commission (2024) *PES partnerships with private employment services – State of play and trends (forthcoming)*

### PES partnerships with private employment services – observations

The forthcoming report on 'PES partnerships with private employment services – State of play and trends' highlights key change factors:

- Seeing partnerships as indispensable to tackle the challenges of labour markets in transition.
- Regarding employment services as a tool to building human capital.
- The potential access to more vacancies and employment through partnerships needs to focus on quality and diversification.
- Partnerships improve the service to vulnerable groups and open the perspective of working in ecosystems.
- Client centricity is key to the service, but supporting clients in making informed choices about their provider options is essential to empowering their decision-making.
- Partnerships can include a relevant number of non-commercial aspects.
- Making use of technology is a backbone to successful delivery.
- The professionalisation of partnerships needs to become a strategic step for PES
- Evidence on the effects of working with external providers on employment service delivery must be evaluated more regularly.
- Share knowledge of successful collaborations via mutual learning process will enhance trust and knowledge of the added value of these partnerships.

### Raising the visibility and online presence of the PES Network, and planning for the future

In 2024, the PES Network has taken a hands-on approach to shaping the communications activities and enrich visibility of the Network's inputs, internally and externally. A new Communications Working Group was established to develop a group of like-minded peers who have provided feedback on key communications activities. Major communication developments, to which the Work-

ing Group has contributed, included the website migration of the standalone [pesnetwork.eu](https://pesnetwork.eu) website to one central PES Network [website](#), which has created a one-stop-shop for all PES Network outputs including the [podcast](#). The Working Group collaborated on the development of the anniversary strategy and activities. They also provided valuable input into the collaborative platforms used by the Network.



### Celebrating 10 years of making a difference with the PES Network

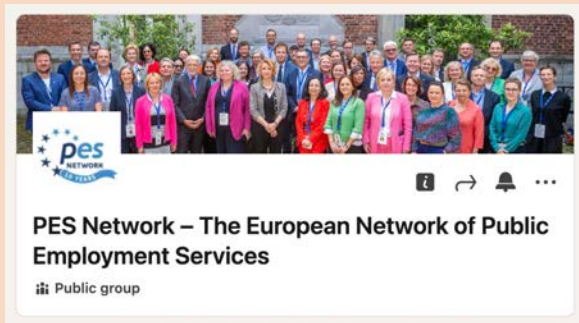
*Thanks to the participation in the PES Network, the Lithuanian PES has been able to broaden their horizons and grown stronger because of working with the community of PES across Europe. Together, they have been able to exchange ideas, sparking innovation, and shaping brighter futures for job seekers and employers. Becoming better PES isn't just their goal – it's a journey they share with colleagues from across Europe.*



### New PES Network – The European Network of Public Employment Services LinkedIn Group

In July 2024, a new dedicated [LinkedIn group](#) was established to:

- Increase the visibility of the PES Network by providing news and updates
- Promote the Network to partners and stakeholders
- Connect PES and encourage exchanges
- Provide inspiration and best practices



By the end of October 2024, the group had nearly 500 members with active contributions from the Network. The Communications Working Group informed the strategy and have supported the development.

### Related Network activities

- A new Communications Working Group (chaired by the Lithuanian PES) met three times across the year.
- A Working Group (chaired by the PES Network Secretariat) came together across the year to prepare the draft Work Programme 2025-2026.

## 3. BENCHMARKING TO SUPPORT PES MODERNISATION

Benchlearning is integral to the PES Network's activities: embedded in the PES Network Decision. It involves creating a systematic connection between benchmarking (both quantitative and qualitative) and mutual learning activities.

Benchlearning aims to assist PES in improving their performance by systematically comparing their organisational setups and outcomes against an 'ideal PES', facilitated by institutional learning among peers. Outlined in a common Benchlearning Manual, the features of such 'ideal PES' are based on the concept of organisational excellence as outlined in the Excellence Model of the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM). They include requirements towards all aspects of PES management, starting with strategic performance management and design of operational processes, aiming to cover all aspects of PES functioning<sup>21</sup>.

The ultimate aim is to support each PES in improving performance through comparisons and learning from peers. In order to achieve this, a structured analysis of PES performance and its drivers is conducted through the analysis of performance data (quantitative benchmarking) and an on-going process of PES self-review, peer review and expert review (qualitative benchmarking).

### Quantitative benchmarking

Qualitative analysis of PES set-up and operations is supported by quantitative performance indicators, captured in PES Network decision. They cover key areas of PES performance, such as transition

to employment, activation, filling of vacancies, customer satisfaction.

Following the revision of the PES Excellence model, an in-depth review of the mandatory quantitative indicators was carried out in 2024. It allowed to further sharpen the focus of performance indicators, while facilitating the data collection process. Further analytical work was done to identify synergies with the Labour Market Policy Data base, aiming at improving the quality of data, aligning when possible methodological specifications and reducing the PES effort associated with data collections.

### Qualitative benchmarking

The 4<sup>th</sup> Benchlearning cycle of site visits was launched in January 2024. Fifteen assessments have been conducted, covering the PES of Lithuania, Bulgaria, Latvia, Croatia, Austria, Portugal, Hungary, Germany, Greece, Czechia, Estonia, The Netherlands, Malta, Ireland, and Cyprus. So far, all Benchlearning took place onsite, except the one in Portugal which took place fully online.

The assessment visits have been conducted following the updated Benchlearning methodology. This updated version ensured continuity with the 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle, while reflecting new labour market trends and the challenges faced PES and emphasising greater flexibility, user-friendliness, and effectiveness. To date, most PES have made extensive use of the new features introduced in the revised Excellence Model.



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*Thanks to the PES Network and Benchlearning, the Estonian PES received practical tips and advice from other PES on a range of topics including Austria (quality assessment and performance management systems), Lithuania (cooperation with employers), Germany (evaluation of the performance of labour market measures and decision support tools), Finland (labour demand barometer and measures to prevent unemployment), Belgium VDAB (decision support tools), among others.*

21 ['PES Network Benchlearning manual' \(2024\)](#)



**In-depth session.** The majority of PES (8 out of 15 PES) requested an in-depth analysis of one section of the excellence model to be assessed more in depth<sup>22</sup>. It enabled the assessment team to delve much deeper in specific aspects of the performance enablers, and in turn to provide more detailed and granular diagnostics and recommendations. **Specialised unit.** The opportunity used by several host PES (3 out of 15 PES) to replace one local office visit with a visit to a specialised unit has enhanced the analytical depth of the site visit, while enabling the PES to receive external feedback, targeted recommendations and ideas for further improvement. **External stakeholders.** The involvement of external stakeholders in most assessment visits (11 out of 15 PES) on 'Section F- Management of ecosystem' has allowed to directly evaluate the effectiveness and trustworthiness of partnerships in the ecosystem between host PES and selected partners.

#### Preliminary findings from the 4<sup>th</sup> cycle

Based on assessment visits conducted so far,

the management of ecosystem (Section F) has emerged as the area with the greatest overall progress in PES performance and maturity. High-performing PES are moving from bilateral partnerships to ecosystem management, where they act as gatekeepers and orchestrators to ensure strategic alignment, encourage collaborative policies, and establish structured feedback systems. The area of quality management and channel strategy (combining face-to-face and online channels) emerged as the most challenging area for many PES.

Success criteria that contributed to performance improvements so far include the adoption of comprehensive and up-to-date strategies across key PES operational areas, systematic approaches to 'learn from crisis' and proactive uptake of key technology trends (including diversification of e-services, 'online first' approaches, and gradual implementation of automated skills-based matching systems).



#### Celebrating 10 years of making a difference with the PES Network's Benchlearning

*By participating in Benchlearning, Iceland has been able to improve their services. After receiving recommendations from the assessors, they engaged in mutual learning dialogues focused on the areas they aimed to refine.*

*For example, Iceland joined in in a Thematic Learning Dialogue in Estonia, focused on Systematic Quality Management. They learned more about best practices in the field from the Estonian PES and in a one-on-one coaching from the Austrian PES, Iceland learned on how to strengthen their Systematic Quality Management. Since then, they have made two Study Visits to the Estonian PES for more knowledge and inspiration on Systematic Quality Management, which gave them tools to offer better services to their clients.*

<sup>22</sup> The following sections were selected for the in-depth analysis: 'Section B – Design of operational processes', 'Section C – Sustainable activation and management of transitions', 'Section D – Relations with employers', 'Section F – Management of ecosystem.'

## 4. LOOKING AHEAD



### Celebrating 10 years of making a difference with the PES Network

*As the Greek PES says: “We need to remember that through the collaboration, the coordination, the best practices exchange and the knowledge transfer that we all achieve together, through the Network, we become stronger together and better together!”*

Building on 2024’s thematic priorities of skills intelligence, green transitions and digitalisation, the 2025 Work Programme will focus on labour market transitions, skills and shortages continuing the discussions on the PES role in supporting the green transition and fair recruitment of third-country nationals. It will deepen the understanding of PES support to lifelong career guidance in the new world of work.

Activation and personalised PES services to job-seekers and employers will feature in 2025, with an Opinion Paper expected as a contribution to the European Pillar of Social Rights’ Action Plan review. The Work Programme will also focus on cooperation around supporting long-term unemployed and minimum income recipients and a focus on services to employers in the context of labour market shortages. Data and technology continue as priorities, with the continuation of the Digitalisation Working Group and a specific focus on developing a common framework for ethical

standards in the use of AI in PES. Underpinning these activities, the Network will look into what works and for whom, strengthen multi-level co-operation, develop wider partnerships and turn to the topic of EU Enlargement and the PES Network.

Finally, 2025 will also see the closure of the 4<sup>th</sup> Benchlearning cycle with an additional 16 assessment visits scheduled and reporting on lessons learned.

Looking ahead, the move from dual to triple transitions and a focus on urgent demographic challenges will raise questions for PES on how they can best support those outside of the labour force. How can PES use AI to support those that are in vulnerable situations? How will the triple transition affect the core business for the PES? And how can PES work better across and within their ecosystem to be ready for tomorrow’s labour market challenges?

### Key achievements of the PES Network - and looking ahead to the future

2024 marked the ten-year anniversary of the PES Network. Activities took place throughout the year to celebrate the achievements, with a special week of action in September where members shared their experiences and how the PES Network has helped them. A new [LinkedIn group](#) for PES, and relevant stakeholders, was launched in July 2024 and a dedicated week of action on social media took place where PES shared their favourite memories and stories of how the Network has helped them. Ten key achievements of the Network are summarised in an [animated carousel](#). An anniversary edition of the PESPod podcast was produced featuring the past and current PES Network Chairs in conversation, sharing their memories and favourite achievements.



Across the last 10 years, the PES Network has provided support to PES to:

- Strengthen their services
- Improve PES performance through Benchlearning
- Pioneer innovative digital processes
- Promote an inclusive labour market for all
- Tackle the COVID-19 crisis together
- Support refugees and persons displaced from Ukraine
- Advocate for a European Decade of Skills
- Prepare for a greener, digital future

The PES Network Work Programme for 2025 will continue to provide opportunities and valuable resources for the PES, partners and the wider ecosystem to drive forward improvements and modernisation.

# ANNEX 1 – WORK PROGRAMME



## PES Network Work Programme 2024



<b>Structural and labour market changes</b>	<b>Addressing EU labour market challenges in the 5 years ahead</b> PES Board Memo Opinion paper	<b>Labour market taxonomy in the green transition</b> Exchange and recommendations Working Group	<b>PES support to Green skills and jobs evolution</b> From commitment to practical steps and new strategies Toolkit	<b>Skills and labour market intelligence</b> Improving data use for better informed services and policies Thematic Review	<b>Measuring labour shortages</b> Discussing a common PES approach Focus group	<b>Labour Market Information</b> Anticipating short term developments Monthly EU Labour Market Barometer
<b>PES service delivery</b>	<b>Rethinking support to those further from the labour market</b> (incl. support to persons with disabilities) Stakeholder conference		<b>Early intervention and job-to-job transitions</b> - Supporting those in work and preventing unemployment Thematic Review Workshop		<b>Evidence-based service design: latest trends</b> - Towards more data and experience-based models, use of behavioural science Working Group (last meeting in Q1)	
<b>PES performance management</b>	<b>PES Benchlearning</b> - Qualitative and quantitative assessments of PES performance Start 4th cycle assessments New data collection methodology			<b>Data-driven PES and digitalization strategies</b> PES 4.0 Task Force (Working Group) AI and algorithm use in PES (Webinar)		
<b>PES governance and ecosystem</b>	<b>PES Network partnerships</b> Cooperation with relevant labour market stakeholders (including PES from candidate countries)		<b>PES capacity survey</b> Mapping trends in PES, PES governance and partnerships (New concept: webinar and survey report)		<b>PES partnership with private employment services</b> State of play and trends (Survey and webinar)	
<b>Others – supporting activities</b>	<b>Mutual Assistance Projects</b> Peer PES support to 2 or 3 PES	<b>PES current challenges</b> Self-driven exchanges on addressing PES Network priorities Jours Fixes (upon demand)	<b>Communication</b> Standing Working Group, new strategy Annual Report, Newsletters, webpages, videos, PESpod, PES practices		<b>Planning Work Programme 2025-2026</b> Working group	<b>Research</b> Linked to/supporting the learning activities Ad hoc studies and surveys
<b>Governance and other meetings</b>	<b>PES Board</b> 6-7 June, Liège Belgium (in person) December, Hungary (format tbc)		<b>AFEPAs</b> 7-8 March 2024 3-4 October 2024 (tbc)	<b>Benchlearning Working/Steering Group/Statisticians' meeting</b> Online/Physical		<b>Benchlearning Assessments</b> Online/Physical

# ANNEX 2 – OUTPUTS FROM 2024 MUTUAL LEARNING ACTIVITIES

The PES Knowledge Centre presented the knowledge outputs of the PES Network in an easy to access repository. Innovative and inspiring practices from the work of PES across Europe are regularly shared through the dedicated PES Practice Database.

## **Working Groups, Mutual Assistance Projects, Thematic Review Workshops, Seminar and Webinars**

- Digitalisation (Working Group, chaired by NL)
- Communication (Working Group, chaired by LT)
- Taxonomy (Working Group, chaired by SE)
- Evidence-based Service Design (Working Group, chaired by DK, final meeting)
- Preparation of the Work Programme 2025-2026 (Working Group, chaired by the PES Network Secretariat/DG EMPL)
- Measuring Labour Market Shortages (Focus Group)
- Rethinking support to those furthest from the labour market (Conference)
- Early intervention and job-to-job transition (Thematic Review Workshop, hosted by LT)
- Skills and labour market intelligence (Thematic Review Workshop, hosted by EL)
- Public Employment Services: Trends in 2023 (Webinar)
- HR strategy and SMEs (Internal Webinar, hosted by FR)
- HR strategy (Mutual Assistance to PES RO)
- Digital matching tools (Mutual Assistance to PES LU)

## **Reports, Toolkits and position papers**

- PES Network Memorandum for the next European leadership (Opinion Paper)
- PES digital services to successfully integrate vulnerable jobseekers (Thematic Paper)
- Attracting skills labour from third countries: The role of Public Employment Services (Thematic Paper)
- Evidence based services: latest trends Working Group – Output Paper
- PES Network Annual Report
- PES Network Benchlearning manual
- PES Network Work Programme 2025-2026

## **PES Practices published in the PES Practice Repository by December 2024:**

- EVADES (Evaluation of PES performance), Spain
- AI Job Matching, Spain
- Cost-effective indicators, Poland

- Diversity Plans, Belgium-ACTIRIS
- Minus12 project: keeping unemployment shorter than 12 months, Iceland
- Social media project: 'kontakt next', Germany
- Talent Boost programme, Finland
- Transnational apprenticeships, Luxembourg
- Using online methods to encourage young NEETs to use PES services, Portugal
- 'SmartCorners' and 'SmartJobs' – digital skills and digitalisation of jobs, Belgium-FOREM
- Bridging skills gaps in the labour market: principles and methodology for identifying training offer, Estonia
- Screening to identify jobseekers' skills, Belgium-Forem
- Vocational preparation training, Germany
- Voucher-based adult training scheme, Croatia

#### **Information on the PES Network communication activities**

##### **News and Events**

The PES Network regularly publishes news items to highlight key messages from its work. At regular intervals, a summary of the latest news and events is disseminated through the PES Network newsletter, along with other updates on important labour market topics for PES EU-wide. In 2024, the Network presented:

- 13 News items
- 4 newsletters: January, May, July and November

##### **PESPod**

The PES Network continued to produce its podcast ('PESPod'), which started in 2021. In 2024, 3 new PES-Pod episodes were produced and released on the PES Knowledge Centre:

- Skills, Innovation and Initiatives from the Greek PES with Spiros Protopsaltis
- A Lithuanian Perspective on the Future of Work
- PES Network at 10 years: reflections and looking to the future with Network Chairs past and present

