



**The European Commission Mutual Learning Programme
for Public Employment Services**

DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion

**INTEGRATED MULTI-CHANNELLING IN PES
SERVICES:
FINDING THE RIGHT MIX**

Thematic Paper

August 2011

This publication is supported under the European Community Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity (2007-2013). This programme is managed by the Directorate-General for Employment, social affairs and equal opportunities of the European Commission. It was established to financially support the implementation of the objectives of the European Union in the employment and social affairs area, as set out in the Social Agenda, and thereby contribute to the achievement of the Lisbon Strategy goals in these fields.

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1. PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT SERVICES, E-GOVERNMENT AND E-INCLUSION: EFFECTIVE ACCESS AND SERVICE STRATEGIES FOR A DIGITAL AGE

In the context of increased demands coupled with greater budgetary stringency, finding the **most effective and efficient ways to deliver services to job seekers** is among the core priorities of many Public Employment Services (PES). One way in which PES have sought to deliver this is to **target service delivery more clearly to individuals in greatest need** of assistance and providing those capable of helping themselves with effective tools to do so. Multi-channel management (MCM) is one strategy available to provide for better targeting. It also responds to citizen's desire for **more flexible and accessible services**, for example by delivering access to information around the clock through online services. Teerling (2007, see comparative paper p.2) defines MCM as "*the effective and efficient deployment of channels for the communication, interaction, transaction and/or distribution of products/services to the client*".

In the 'private' sphere, individuals' interactions with businesses and services have, over the last decade, become more and more dominated by digital forms of delivery, replacing more traditional face to face and printed channels. EU-citizens are increasingly conducting their banking and other commercial transactions online as this often provides them with the added convenience of access over a wider range of services at times that suit their lifestyle.

With a greater or lesser delay in different countries, governmental organisations have also been seeking to utilise the advantages of these new channels, partly learning from similar applications in the 'private' sphere, but at the same time mindful of the different **requirements underpinning public service delivery**, particularly with regard to **equality of access, equity and social inclusion**.

This paper seeks to draw together the evidence and lessons from a Peer Review held in Antwerp, Belgium on 30 June – 1 July 2011 under the auspices of the PES to PES Dialogue Programme including:

1. Papers prepared by national PES experts for the Peer Review, and discussions at the event;
2. The Comparative expert paper prepared for the Peer Review and subsequently reviewed;
3. An analytical paper on the issue of multi-channel management¹.

Evidence, good practice and recommendations regarding the challenges and opportunities of MCM for PES organisations trying to deliver better service quality with often diminishing resources are presented under four main headings: 1; ensuring equality of access in a digital age as a prerequisite for MCM; 2. the strengths and weaknesses of different channels for the delivery of different kinds of services and the challenges of delivering a coherent multi-channel management strategy; 3. the

¹ All documents are available on the [PES to PES website](#)

importance of addressing the organisational and staffing implications of multi-channel management; and 4. conclusions and recommendations arising from the evidence presented at the Peer review and in its supporting documents.

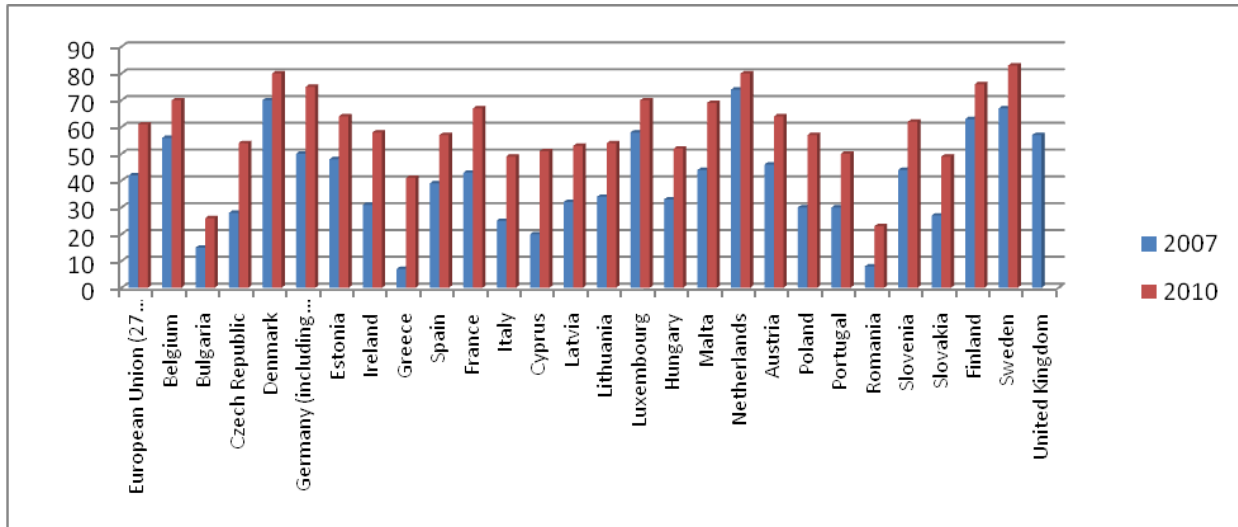
1.1 The development of MCM among PES organisations depends on the level of internet connectivity, digital access and digital skills among the user population

The ability to implement a successful PES MCM strategy (and the precise nature of the channels and tools used) is predicated on three factors:

- The level and quality of internet service coverage;
- The degree of internet usage among different individuals (and the key client groups for PES services in particular); and
- The extent to which core client groups possess the required digital skills to interact with new media.

According to Eurostat data (Eurostat, 2010), the **level of access to broadband internet service** (also referred to as broadband penetration) **has increased significantly over the past few years**. While standard internet service coverage can provide access to a basic range of facilities and services, it is high speed broadband which has the capacity to provide access to sophisticated internet tools, for example those including media such as video streaming. Despite the significant expansion in access to such services, significant differences remain between Member States. While broadband penetration in Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Finland and Sweden is over 75%, it remains below 30% in Bulgaria and Romania (see also Figure 1 below). Access to high speed internet provision among potential service users clearly has implications for the short and medium term application of more media-hungry e-government services. Having said that, despite the current variations in coverage, the speed at which broadband penetration is growing indicates significant future potential for such applications and therefore the need to plan ahead for services which require significant development time.

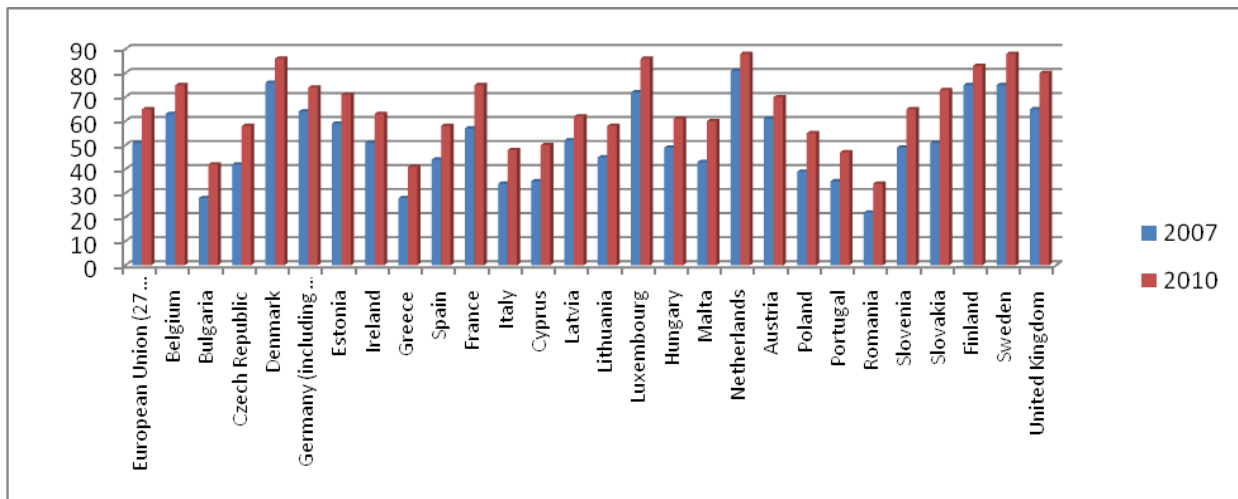
Figure 1: Households with broadband access (2007 and 2010)



Source: Eurostat 2010

Actual internet usage (irrespective of access to broadband services) is more widespread, ranging from **34% to 88% of Europeans using the internet almost every day**. In line with the quality and speed of internet service provision, usage is lowest in Romania and highest in Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands, Luxembourg and Finland (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Individuals regularly using the internet (2007 and 2010 data)

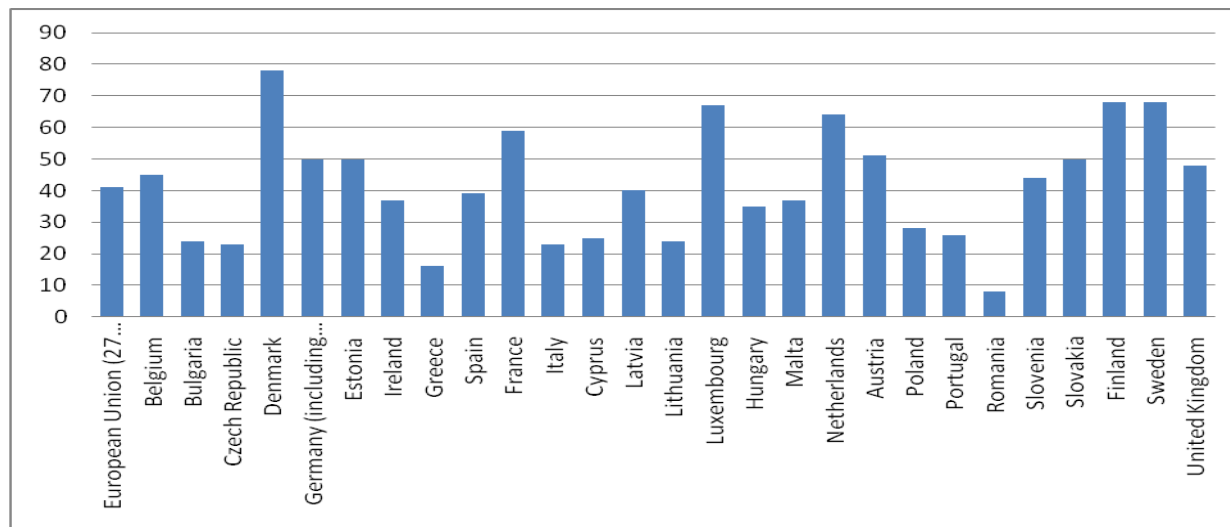


Source: Eurostat 2010

Young people and highly educated individuals are most likely to use the internet regularly (90% compared to 44% of individuals with low levels of education). Although this could be considered to indicate that the PES client group is less likely to be regular internet users, Eurostat data also show that **over four in ten unemployed individuals used the internet to access learning**, which was approximately on a par with the average of all internet users.

The Figure below shows the extent to which **the internet is currently used for interaction with public authorities**. In many ways this reflects the above patterns regarding broadband penetration and internet usage, with the highest figures being registered in the Nordic countries, Luxembourg and the Netherlands and the lowest figures in Romania, Bulgaria and the Czech Republic. Considering the relatively high level of broadband penetration and internet usage, the figures regarding interaction with public authorities are rather lower in Germany. The EU average is still relatively low at 40%, thus providing significant room for development and enhancement.

Figure 3: Individuals using the internet for interaction with public authorities



Source: Eurostat 2010

Although the rapid spread of internet penetration and use paints a promising picture regarding the potential for e-service applications by PES, it must also be borne in mind that e-inclusion is about more than internet access. While access (in the home) is improving and computers can be made available in job centres, Van Deuren, Ebbers and Van Dijk (2007, see comparative paper p.2) suggest that e-exclusion can also result from a lack of **digital literacy**. The European Competitiveness Report (2010) concludes that **around 65% of all European citizens have some level of digital literacy**. This means that over a third of individuals potentially lack the skill to use internet based applications and an additional group may not be able to access more complex services. Motivation and habit are also important factors conditioning whether and which channels are used to access services (Pieterse, 2009, see analytical paper p.5).

For PES this means that when considering their MCM strategy, they need to **take into account accessibility of internet based services** (do computers need to be made available to the core client group, is high speed internet access available to enable the development of more complex applications), **the level of digital skills among their target group** (is specific training required and at what level) and **how clients can be motivated to use new channels** (for further information on channel steering strategies see section 2.6 below).

The Peer Review meeting indicated that a number of PES (including in Belgium, Estonia and the UK) offer training to job seekers who require assistance in using computers and internet based tools. Many PES make computers available in their offices to allow access to vacancy search and other relevant services.

2. DESIGNING AN EFFECTIVE MULTI-CHANNEL MANAGEMENT STRATEGY: ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL

2.1 Service improvement is the main goal of MCM strategies

A number of years ago, all interactions between PES and jobseekers would have been conducted either face to face, by letter and to a more limited extent over the telephone. As a result of the increasing proliferation of the internet and mobile communications services, online, email/SMS based channels of interaction have been opened up and are increasingly being utilised not only in private sector applications (such as e-commerce) but also by PES and other government services. **The spread of new channel applications is largely driven by the desire to meet customer demand and improve customer service, but also by the need to make efficiency savings.**

In his comparative paper, Pieterse (2011, see analytical paper, p.5) demonstrates that for the vast majority of PES, the improvement of service quality is the key motivating factor in developing MCM. Although some countries (e.g. the Netherlands) consider cost reduction as a key factor, this is not to the exclusion of the desire to improve customer service. Similarly, those countries emphasising quality nonetheless hope for efficiency savings. In practice, both goals can be difficult to reach at the same time and it is therefore important that **when designing MCM strategies, development costs, timescales for achieving efficiency savings and qualitative goals are taken into account.**

2.2 Approaches to MCM have evolved and in some cases diverged

As mentioned above, MCM is about the 'effective and efficient' deployment of channels to communicate with and deliver services to clients. The key questions to be answered therefore relate to which services should be offered to whom via which channel. In the literature (Pieterse and Van Dijk, 2006, see comparative paper, p.2) a distinction has been drawn between four different MCM strategies:

- Parallel positioning: Services are offered via all channels with citizens free to decide which channel to choose. Such a strategy may be necessary at the outset but in the long term does not appear to be efficient as such an approach can make it more difficult to target scarce resources to those most in need of assistance.
- Replacement positioning: Channels replace one another based on the assumption that one channel is more effective and efficient than another for a particular task/client group. It is assumed that customers want to (and are able to) use the best channel and one channel can therefore replace another (immediately or over time).

- Supplemental positioning: Each channel has its own characteristics that make it suitable for certain services/client groups. It is therefore assumed that governments should offer services via the best suited channels.
- Integrated positioning: In this model all channels are integrated in the entire service delivery process. This means that all services are offered via all channels but that the strengths and weaknesses of channels are considered in their design. Users are steered to the best channel and channels integrate seamlessly.

In the reality of the PES, the actual application of MCM is more complex and nuanced and has evolved over time. In the beginning, most PES used parallel positioning, making newly developed channels available in tandem with existing means of communication. However, as MCM strategies have evolved, the development of specialised tools available primarily on certain channels (particularly the online channel) has become more widespread and the development of more individualised approaches to job seekers has made it possible to steer clients more readily into the direction of the channels most suitable for them.

In some countries, financial pressures are serving to dictate an increasing move towards replacement positioning (e.g. the Netherlands), with a goal of 90% of interactions taking place online by 2014. However, even in these countries, the wholesale replacement of certain channels – while it may ultimately be aimed at for certain types of service - is difficult to realise in a context where e-exclusion can remain an issue and public service obligations require equity of access. On the whole, there are efforts in many countries to move towards supplemental positioning, exploiting the relative strengths of different channels and a number of countries are beginning to move towards integrated positioning which also takes into account the integration of front and back office functions.

Estonia's approach to the gradual development of MCM

The Estonian PES have taken a gradual approach to the development of MCM, primarily aiming to use ICT solutions as a way to improve the accessibility, quality and efficiency of services delivered to job seekers.

The first step is the development of a modern information system (called EMPIS) which is capable of integrating data from various sources to allow for a smoother online registration for benefits; storing and tracking information on Individual Action Plans; assisting in service mediation and building up an automatic vacancy matching tool.

The next phase involved the launch of the PES 'virtual office' in January 2011, where emphasis was initially placed on job mediation, with new services being introduced step-by-step (e.g. a job search diary was added from 1 May 2011).

This process has led to a significant increase in communications with job seekers via email and a greater share of contracts are now being signed digitally.

Training was required both for job seekers and PES staff to use the new facilities.

The development of new e-services is time consuming and requires significant development and testing time to ensure products developed are user friendly and enhance existing service provision.

2.3 One size does not fit all: channel characteristics show different strengths and weaknesses

In order to maximise the effectiveness and efficiency of different channels, a key consideration is to match the right channel to the right task. Research by Daft and Lengel (1986, analytical paper, p.11) and Ebbers et al (2008, see analytical paper p.6) indicates that **some channels are clearly better suited to certain tasks than others**, depending on the complexity and ambiguity of the information to be communicated and tasks to be carried out.

From a PES perspective, it is illustrative to use the example of a job seeker registration and the link to automatic vacancy matching. The information to underpin such services has to be drawn from the normal process of client registration, which is then followed by profiling and needs assessment and matching with existing vacancies. All these processes require thorough preparation and accuracy, but even in this environment there is still the potential for ambiguity. With regard to existing experience, it is conceivable that a job seeker during the registration for employment services might be asked which sector he has previously worked in or in which field he/she would be keen to work. This may require judgements with regard to unfamiliar terminology (e.g. what is a SOC (Standard Occupational Classification) code, which one is relevant to my job?) or the interpretation of information (if I worked as a carpenter directly selling furniture to clients, as my previous job in manufacturing or retail) which could lead to

mis-classifications and therefore erroneous vacancy information being supplied through automatic matching. Some systems therefore continuously develop the tools for jobseekers' applications and vacancy description. Others build in a system of review if an individual has not applied for any vacancies automatically sent via email or text message after a given period of time, to assess whether this is due to mis-matching (or other reasons).

Discussions at the Peer Review suggest that the various channels of interaction available (face to face, telephone, online) can be argued to have the following advantages and disadvantages:

- **Face-to-face services for more complex situations**

As a rule of thumb, clearly the more complex and sensitive the advice to be given, or information to be communicated, the greater the value of using face to face communication. This most 'personal' channel also has a particular value in providing motivation and a feeling of 'social connection' to the most disadvantaged and / or demotivated job seekers.

- **Telephone channels increasingly as back-up channel**

This form of communication is often used for information giving and to supplement online and face to face channels. The range of their functions reaches from the basic (through automated messages) to personalised follow up of PES clients. However with the increasing use of online-services this channel might lose weight, other than as a back-up or support structure for the online channel.

- **Online services for routine and selected complex functions**

However, as online channels become more sophisticated (including the use of automatic matching tools, e-monitoring and the exploitation of the networking and information multiplier potential of social networking tools), their use has become more widespread to perform routine as well as more complex functions (including online profiling or testing), particularly with the assistance of back-up channels including call centre services.

- **Social media to reach (new) client groups and create multiplier effects**

Social media applications can prove particularly valuable to reach certain client groups (e.g. young people) and provide self-help services, particularly to more highly skilled individuals simply requiring self-help tools for job search. They can also provide a significant multiplier effect to share information.

Pieterse (2009) also provides suggestions for the purposes different channels are best suited for. He additionally indicates how channels might be linked to others, for example to provide a back-up function. This demonstrates that online channels are particularly well suited to the communication of large volumes of simple or moderately complex information, whereas face to face channels are central where information can be ambiguous and certainty is key.

Table 1: Suitability of different channels for different tasks

Channel	Chosen why?	Suited for what tasks?	Suited for what situations?	Refers to other channels
Website	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Easy to use - High contact speed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Simple & standard tasks - Much information (background) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To reduce low levels of uncertainty - When emotions play a minor role 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Telephone when ambiguity is high - Front desk when complexity and ambiguity are high - Telephone when closure is needed
Telephone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - High contact speed - High immediacy of feedback - Gives closure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ambiguous tasks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To reduce high levels of uncertainty - When emotions play a major role - When people are in a rush 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The website when ambiguity is reduced - Front desk when complexity and ambiguity are still high
Front desk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Out of habit - Gives closure - Is personal - Offers high levels of service 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ambiguous tasks and (highly) complex tasks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To reduce high levels of uncertainty - When matters are of high importance - When emotions play a major role 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The website when ambiguity is reduced
E-mail	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Easy to use - Gives closure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Simple & standard tasks - Much information (backgrounds) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To reduce medium levels of uncertainty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Telephone when ambiguity is high - Website when (simple) info is needed. - Front desk when complexity and ambiguity are high

Source: Pieterse (2009)

It is important to note that the **choice of channel available** to different job seekers is not only conditioned by the determination of the ‘best channel available for different purposes’. What can and cannot be done via online channels in different countries is **determined by various factors** like political, economic, or managerial decisions, the level of internet penetration in different countries, concerns and strategies relating to the ‘digital divide’ and different legal constraints (e.g. in relation to initial registration and / or application for benefits).

3. SERVICES FOR JOB SEEKERS AND EMPLOYERS

3.1 Use of online services and other new media

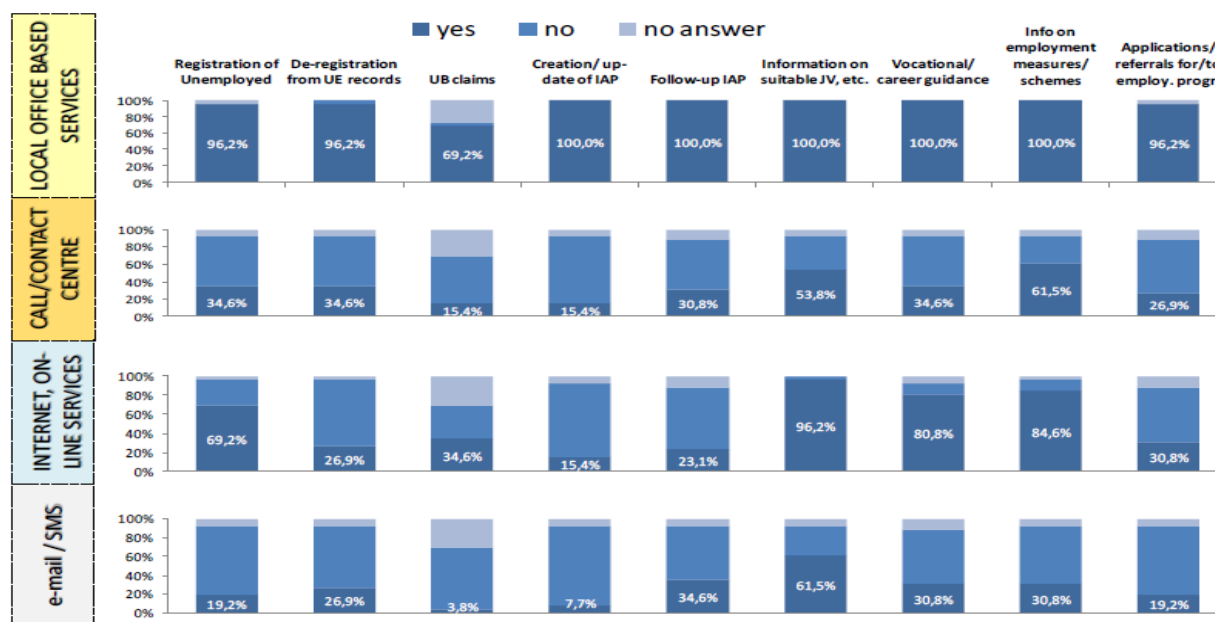
Given the strengths and weaknesses of different channels discussed above, it is not entirely surprising that a survey carried out by PES and the documents provided for the Peer Review demonstrate that **it is currently largely information services which are made available online.**

3.1.1 Services for job seekers

Online services for jobseekers primarily include information on suitable job vacancies, basic careers information (e.g. occupational profiles, local and regional employment trends) and details of employment policy measures. Nearly 70% of PES additionally offer **online registration for benefits**, although de-registration and claims primarily still have to be done face to face. Great emphasis is still placed on face to face interaction in the preparation of individual action plans because even if profiling tools are used, the individual counsellor’s judgement (and assistance in completing profiling) is considered to be key.

The use of online services to follow an individual’s progress in relation to their action plan **remains rather rare** (only around 23% of those answering offer this online). The latter can be considered to be linked to the administrative or ‘policing’ function many PES have over benefit claims, and therefore the need to prove compliance with certain criteria.

Figure 4: Services to job seekers by PES are provided via different channels

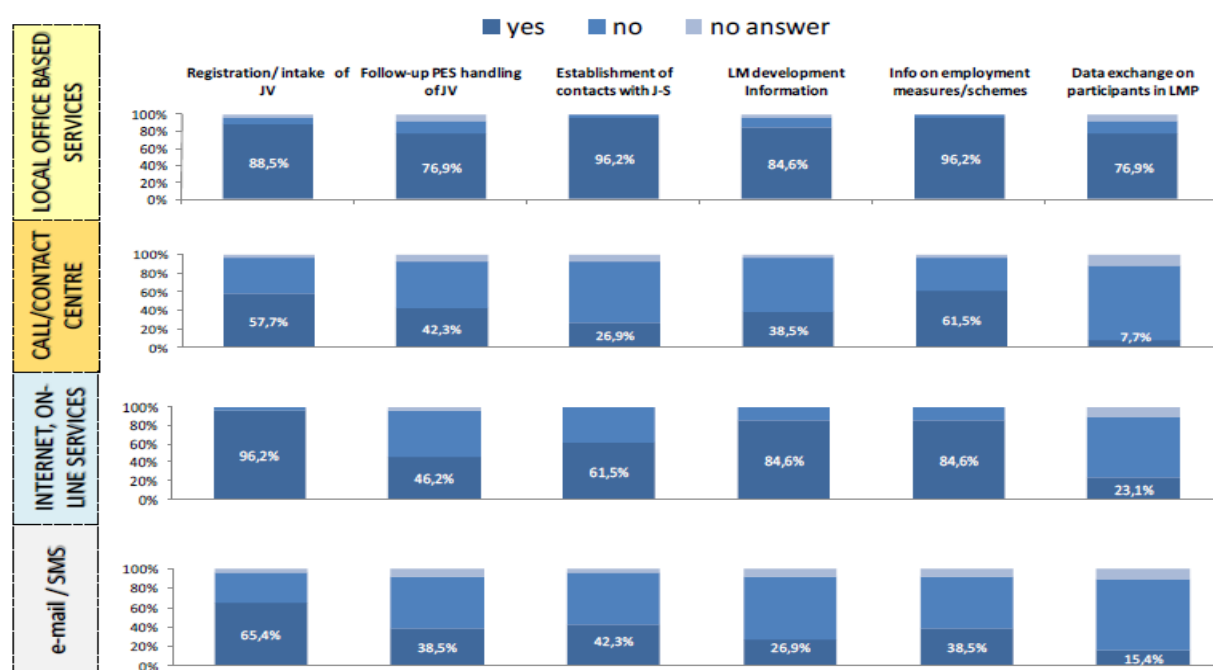


Source: Sonja Pirher, Employment Service of Slovenia, survey carried out in April 2010 on behalf of the PES-Benchmarking Group

3.1.2. Services for employers

The absence of such an ‘administrative’ function in relation to employer services can be one of the factors explaining the widespread use of online media for this client group. Here, the use of the online channel is widespread for the registration of vacancies (96.2% of PES answering the survey offer this service), the provision of local labour market information and the dissemination of the availability of labour market schemes accessible to employers (approximately 86% respectively). The use of the internet is much less widespread when it comes to exchanging data on participants of labour market schemes, not least because of data protection restrictions in many countries. Just under half of PES offer a follow-up to vacancy handling through online channels. This could serve to highlight the importance, according to personal contacts with employers, of ensuring the co-operation in achieving placements is effective.

Figure 5: Services to employers by PES are provided via different channels



Source: Sonja Pirher, Employment Service of Slovenia, survey carried out in April 2010 on behalf of the PES-Benchmarking Group

3.2 New online service tools offer opportunities for improved customer service and potential efficiency savings

There are a number of **services which have particular potential to reduce workload for case workers and allow them to concentrate their efforts on those most in need of targeted assistance.** In addition to online registration, these relate to automatic vacancy matching and the development of an e-book, allowing job seeker and counsellor to interact online or via emails/text messages to develop and update individual action plans.

3.2.1 Automatic vacancy matching tools

A number of PES (Belgium – Actiris, Le Forem and VDAB, Estonia, Germany and the Netherlands) have developed automatic vacancy matching tools which, with the use of data matching, bring together details of vacancies with individual job seekers' profiles. However, the precise nature of their functionality varies, with the system in Germany primarily focussing on matching 'within the system' which is then used to provide vacancies to job seekers in face to face meeting. Other systems go one step further and automatically link vacancy matching with the sending out of this information via email or text message to relevant job seekers or employers.

As already outlined above, the most fundamental requirements of such systems are the **accuracy and compatibility of data**. This can be difficult to achieve in an unmediated environment, where job seekers and employers enter their own information. It is therefore useful to thoroughly prepare and refine IT tools for job seeker registration and vacancy description to reduce ambiguity and increase the quality of matching. Accuracy and a strong follow-up can also be ensured by retaining the potential for review of such systems by PES staff to assess the matches created and the follow-up and job placements being achieved.

VDAB's automatic vacancy matching tool

VDAB's automatic vacancy matching system uses Elise software and defines key criteria upon which matches are based (location, job code, qualifications, experience etc). Automatic matches are sent out on a regular basis via email or sms to the job seeker. The Jobindicator tool allows PES staff to monitor which vacancies have been sent out to a particular job seeker, and which vacancies have been viewed. This supports the individual follow up with each job seeker and can assist with any actions which need to be taken to adjust the vacancy matching tool in case of mis-matches (e.g. if no vacancies have been sent out or no vacancies have been viewed) or to ascertain other reasons for not viewing – or following up matches.

The vacancy indicator tool equally allows PES staff to monitor how frequently a vacancy has been viewed, the number of job seekers the vacancy has been sent to and how many applications have been received (application letters and relevant CVs submitted can be viewed). In this way, the PES can work with individual employers to better understand their requirements and expectations and thus in turn to improve the automatic vacancy matching tool.

The tool has been refined over the years, and as a result, the number of mis-matches has been reduced.

3.2.2 Assistance and monitoring of job seekers through an e-workbook

An increasing number of PES are using e-workbooks to develop action plans and monitor the activities and progress of individual job seekers. Austria, Belgium – Actiris, Le Forem and VDAB, Estonia, Germany, the Netherlands and Slovenia have developed such tools but the nature and breadth of their use varies. In some countries

and for certain client groups, such digital tools are used on their own and from the beginning to the end of the integration process. This means that the tool is used for initial registration (and potentially even benefit application), profiling (individual assessment), action planning and monitoring, matching, information about active labour market policy measures, allocation to certain measures and eventually de-registration. In other countries, e-workbooks are largely used to provide PES staff with a single entry point for documentation and access to information (for example to ensure that different counsellors do not have to cover the same ground twice with a job seeker). There are therefore significant differences in the degree of sophistication of such tools. **Legal restrictions at Member State level can determine what can and cannot be done with the use of e-workbooks.** For example benefit registration may not be possible online, regular face to face meetings may be required to verify an individual is actively seeking work and there may also be restrictions on which data can be shared with third party providers. Data integration and compatibility is critical for the success of such tools, particularly if efficiency savings are being aimed for.

The Werkm@p e-workbook platform in the Netherlands

While the development of Werkm@p pre-dates the new PES strategy (Redesign 2014), its enhancement and utilisation has been significantly accelerated by the declared goal of the Dutch PES to manage 90% of interactions online by 2014 (therefore an example of replacement positioning for many services). The system allows individuals to register for employment services online. They are subsequently allocated to a personal counsellor. As a result of the recognition that 40-60% of job seekers find work within the first 3-6 months of unemployment, a decision was taken to make only digital channels available to job seekers for the first three months of unemployment. After that, face to face services are offered for individuals requiring more complex and detailed interventions.

Follow-up of individual action plans via e-workbook: many job seekers therefore interact with their PES counsellor (their so-called e-coach) entirely via the digital route, with the e-workbook informing them about the services available to them (such as 'speed dating' and other events with potential employers), automatic vacancy matching and other communications.

Preconditions: it is recognised that in order for digital channels to be successful, they have to be technically perfect, functional, easy to use, offer sufficient additional content/functionality and have the necessary back-up functions in case technical difficulties or other questions arise.

Continuous improvement: the Dutch e-workbook has undergone several iterations and new functions are being developed all the time. All new services to be offered via this medium undergo a period of piloting, testing and review to ensure that they are user friendly and function correctly.

On the whole, feedback on the use of the e-workbook is very positive, as many job seekers find it easier to interact with their counsellors in this way.

3.2.3 Social media

A new development which has not yet significantly spread among PES in the EU is the utilisation of social media such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. Five out of the 12 PES participating in the Peer Review (Belgium - Le Forem and VDAB, Estonia, the Netherlands, Sweden and the UK) are currently utilising either one or several of these media, with a number of other countries presently assessing their potential application.

The widespread use of such media (more than 940 million people worldwide use social media on a regular basis, with an explosive growth registered in their use since 2010) points to their potential to reach a significant number of individuals. However, when considering a social media strategy, it is **important for PES to be clear about why and how these new tools are to be used**. It should, for example, be considered whether the goal is reach new client groups or to reach existing client groups better. Social media could also be used to share new kinds of information or make new services available.

In term of 'new service provision' **LinkedIn** has the particular potential to share information on professional activities, e.g. for individuals to upload their CVs and for companies to market their profiles. Without requiring the PES to build their own platforms, the use of such tools could allow PES to assist more highly skilled job seekers to exploit existing social networks to help themselves in their search for a new job.

Facebook and Twitter can be useful to share and cascade information because of their significant multiplier effects. It can therefore potentially be used by PES to market their services and to disseminate information on particular events.

The main risk of introducing social media to the PES market mix is that constant public communication allows clients to provide both positive and negative feedback which needs to be managed and can therefore become time consuming.

Facebook pilot in the Swedish PES

This is a new initiative launched by the Swedish PES on 21 January 2011 with an aim to create a forum for people to meet and discuss issues related to employment and job search. A Facebook account for the Swedish PES was set up to represent the organisation at the national level. It is maintained by two PES experts who initiate discussions, answer questions, and mediate debates, but who are not supposed to engage in individual counselling (if requested they refer clients to their local PES).

PES posting come roughly one a day. They are typically passing on a link to news and information but can also be just a question to provoke discussion. Early experience shows that the early weeks proved to be challenging and it took some time to get meaningful discussion. During the first three months 2300 Facebook users 'liked' the Facebook account of Arbetsformedlingen and there have been on average around 6-12 comments to a posting. Some concerns have been raised within the organisation about the possible legal implications and the prevention of misleading or incorrect information appearing in the comments. Such concerns can be handled if the forum is only used for disseminating general information and referring clients to sources of more individualised help.

For more information visit <http://www.facebook.com/Arbetsformedlingen?v=wall>

Other current examples of the use of new media include **digital TV services** to provide careers and vacancy information. This is, for example, being developed by VDAB in Belgium to allow job seekers to view videos and information introducing particular job profiles while at the same time providing access to vacancy information.

3.3 MCM for jobseekers and employers

As discussed above, **job seekers' use of different channels** (their channel behaviour) **can be influenced by a variety of factors** including habit, early experience with the use of different channels and therefore the quality and nature of the information provided on different channels (e.g. if their first use is unsuccessful, they may not come back). As well as investing resources in the development of different channels and tools, as part of an integrated strategy, it is therefore important to develop mechanisms which steer job seekers towards the use of the channel which best suits their needs.

Two things are required as part of this mechanism, which must provide a significant degree of reliability: **early profiling** and **steering**.

Early profiling helps to determine the likelihood for a job seeker to be long-term unemployed and their respective needs; steering mechanisms and communication must be suitable to encourage job seekers to use certain channels without entirely foreclosing alternatives for those who require them (either because they lack access to certain channels or digital literacy or because they require further assistance for other personal reasons). While the most important element in channel steering is the quality

and suitability of the tools being provided; different methods have subsequently been used in different countries to promote the use of particular channels.

Steering by individual counsellors and promotional campaigns are the most frequently utilised mechanisms, but some countries have chosen 'hard' rather than such 'soft' instruments to influence channel behaviour (a hard instrument would be only making unemployment benefit registration available online). While it may not be possible for PES to foreclose access to certain avenues of communication altogether (although some countries effectively impose 'waiting times' with regard to access to certain channels), restrictions can be placed on access by – for example – increasing time spans between appointments.

3.3.1 Measurement and evaluation can go beyond counting access data

It is useful for the development of MCM for any strategy to include an **evaluation strategy, as well as piloting phases** (piloting has, for example been widespread in Austria as the country has introduced in new MCM strategy). In many PES, monitoring and evaluation of MCM is currently limited to monitoring access information. Other data which could assist in the further development of the strategy includes usage data beyond initial access (what do clients look at, where does interaction tend to break off and which services do they access more frequently), **customer satisfaction data**, and **information on customer needs** and requirements. Of particular relevance is information on **how channel strategies affect client outcomes**. In the UK, for example, an evaluation referred to in the Peer Review meeting showed the high impact of short face-to-face interventions. If job seekers were allowed to use electronic channels alone to communicate their job search activities rather than having to attend short fortnight meetings at the Job Centre to monitor their job search efforts, offloads into employment reduced.

4 FOCUS ON IMPLEMENTATION: DEALING WITH THE ORGANISATIONAL AND STAFFING IMPLICATIONS OF MCM

With so many important issues to consider in the design of an effective and efficient channel strategy, it is often possible for the organisational and staffing impact of such changes to be overlooked or accorded insufficient attention. It is therefore crucial to note that experience of the implementation of e-government strategies worldwide shows that such **organisational factors form the most important obstacles to the successful implementation of MCM**. Therefore, when introducing new channels, Peer Review discussions and the comparative and analytical papers made it clear that it must be considered how the hoped for shift in the way clients access the service will impact on organisational requirements, including:

- The balance of front and back office staff;
- The integration and front and back office functions/data sets;
- The need for staff information and consultation to 'bring them along' in the change process;
- The need to pilot new tools with staff to ensure their views and experience is taken into account;
- New staff training requirements;
- New managerial functions and requirements;
- Way of sharing information on implementation issues with offices in different locations;
- Developing methods to share best practice.

According to discussions among PES experts at the Peer Review, depending on the goals and targets set in line with the introduction of MCM, it is possible that either the number of **front office staff** will be reduced or that they will be given more time to deal with job seekers requiring a higher level of assistance or allocated additional tasks. Therefore, the goals an organisation aims to achieve in this regard should be clearly set out and a change management process implemented to ensure staff are either re-deployed (where possible) and provided with additional training to manage their new responsibilities. Even if the goal is to allow counsellors to deal with fewer job seekers, additional skills may be required to provide an enhanced service to a target group which is likely to have requirements for more intensive intervention.

As has already been outlined above, while the introduction of online channels for client registration and monitoring, as well as the delivery of automatic tools may require **fewer frontline staff**, it may be that **greater support** will be required **in the technical**

support and other telephone contact functions, also to ensure that channel integration can be achieved.

The process of **dealing with staff fears and expectations** therefore needs to be properly managed through a process of consultation and information to explain the rationale behind the new strategy and its impact on job descriptions. Experience shows that in some PES, a switch from face to face to e-coaching led some PES counselors to feel that their role was being downgraded when effectively they were doing the same job, simply using different media.

Staff buy-in and the quality of new tools being developed can be further enhanced through in-house piloting. Piloting can also be helpful in highlighting potential data compatibility issues. Many PES now have experience of developing or commissioning new IT based functions and understand the difficulties which can arise from piecemeal development which can be based on different IT platforms. Such difficulties can entirely undermine any potential medium to long term efficiency savings and must therefore be considered carefully in the development and commissioning phase.

It should not be forgotten that such **new developments require new skills and capabilities** from managerial as well as operational staff.

Piloting and the establishment of regional or national working groups allowing for information sharing on the roll-out of new channels or functionalities can be helpful in sharing information on potential pitfalls as well as good practices.

Implementing the Integrated Multichannel Service (IMS) strategy in Austria

In 2009, the Austrian PES introduced the project IMS with the following mission:

“Our goal is to develop a concerted use of different service delivery channels of the AMS. The handling of customer-related processes by means of e-services, supported by telephones, should be enabled as far as possible through optimal utilization of the self-help potential of our customers. The personal contact in the office should be limited as far as possible for agreed appointments due to defined care and counselling needs and administrative requirements. Thus the added-value of AMS should be increased and resources for demanding personal services can be obtained.”

As well as developing a specific channel matrix and the subsequent technical development of a new website, eJobroom and eAMS Konto (for automatic vacancy matching and to follow up job seekers' individual action plans), the PES developed a clear implementation strategy involving piloting, staff communication and training (including for managerial staff) and the setting up of a national steering group, tasked with overseeing the piloting of the new approach and learning from the experience of different regional pilots in order to enhance the system prior to national roll-out.

Particular attention was paid to the need for cultural and organisational change.

One of the key parameters for the piloting of the eAMS account was its initial application only to volunteers (among job seekers and employers). Focus groups were subsequently organised for different client groups as well as for counselors to share experiences and discuss how the system could be improved.

Pilots of the new system will run until 2012. This will be followed by an evaluation and the implementation of any necessary changes. Initial findings show that counselors need more time at the beginning of the process to provide accurate assessments of individual needs and to correctly use the new system. The first assessment is therefore that it remains difficult to say how many resources can be saved, but it anticipated that any gains in time can be allocated to other kinds of services.

The Peer Review meeting demonstrated the significance attached by PES to learning from the MCM strategies of other countries. The importance accorded to MCM was also demonstrated by a WAPES workshop on the same subject in 2011. In addition, the German PES have carried out a targeted exercise aimed at helping to understand the practices of other Member States with a view to transferring learning.

Emphasis on Mutual Learning in the German PES

The German PES have conducted consultations with other EU PES to learn from countries further advanced in their implementation of MCM, to help to understand success factors and potential obstacles in the introduction and rebalancing of different channels. Germany is currently in an average position in relation to the usage of e-government channels (despite high levels of broadband penetration and usage). The work covered the following key questions:

- How were the main parameters of MCM strategies defined and to what extent was this evidence based
- What are the goals different PES are seeking to achieve with MCM
- What are the central elements of MCM
- What were the main success factors in the implementation of the strategy
- How are PES seeking to motivate staff and clients to utilise the new channels
- What data is available on the use of different channels

The whole strategy is in line with the mission of the BA to be a modern service agency. The multi channel strategy of the BA has the objective to achieve efficiency gains which will be used for a shift of resources to increase the quality of face-to-face services by increasing the use of online services. At the same time this will help fasten service delivery. Currently pilots are being tested in several regions to make more use of existing online services (marketing, informing and training staff and concepts to better steer and coach customers).

5. CONCLUSIONS

Multi-channel management forms an important part of the modernisation of the PES and their efforts to enhance customer services and deliver greater efficiencies.

This paper has shown that to some extent, various levels of advancement in these approaches can be linked to the extent and quality of internet penetration and therefore access among the client group. However, it also demonstrates that because of the long planning and lead in times for such modernisation efforts and the exponential growth of broadband penetration, strategic planning needs to take place in the near future if it has not already happened. E-inclusion is a key concern in the development of MCM, but this does not solely revolve around accessibility but also the delivery of a digital skills for PES users.

Existing experiences clearly demonstrate that the twin goals of increasing customer satisfaction and greater service efficiency can be difficult to achieve simultaneously. E-government applications can be expensive to develop and implement (at least in the early years) and relevant goals therefore need to be planned with a realistic time perspective in mind.

The paper highlighted certain services which are showing particular potential to generate efficiency savings while potentially enhancing customer service. These include automatic vacancy matching and the development of e-workbooks. The successful development of both types of services require strong piloting (both with users and staff) to ensure accuracy and user friendliness. It is likely that the utilisation of an e-book from the beginning or the early stages of interaction with a job seeker will require additional up-front time by PES counselors to ensure the accuracy of profiling information if action planning and further intervention (and channel access) is to be guided by such assessments.

While there is clearly potential in social media applications, they need to be introduced with a clear goal in mind and in full awareness of their potential drawback and requirements in respect of reputation management.

The organisational and staffing impact of MCM is as – if not more – important than its technical development, with organisations required to pay attention to questions on how cultural change is best managed with the support and confidence of managerial, frontline and backroom staff. Positive examples of strategic planning, piloting, information and consultation and training exist among EU PES which can assist those countries at earlier stages of MCM implementation.

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