



European Network of Public Employment Services

WORKING GROUP ON
EVIDENCE BASED SERVICE DELIVERY

How Public Employment Services could create and use
evidence about their services for organisational
improvement

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POLICY PAPER



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Introduction

This paper provides an outline of the main issues discussed at two meetings of the Public Employment Services (PES) Network Working Group on evidence-based service delivery. Building on the discussions of the 2018 working strands 'Digitalisation' and especially the January 2018 PES Network Seminar on piloting and evaluation, the Working Group explored how to facilitate a culture and an acceptance of the systematic use of evidence in the further development and delivery of services. While considering other more general questions as well, the meetings focused especially on evidence-based service-delivery methods used for active labour market policies (ALMP). In these ways, participants were able to concentrate on specific, practical issues and identify feasible solutions that could be implemented in their own organisations.

The PES Network seminar on piloting and evaluation discussed five issues relating in general to service delivery: the prerequisites for a successful evaluation strategy; data warehouses; randomised controlled trials; piloting and dissemination. This policy paper draws on existing materials produced for the PES network in recent years, the results of a questionnaire completed by the PES participating in the Working Group² and discussions during two workshops held in Amsterdam on 5 April and 10 May 2019. The final paper also benefitted from valuable inputs and comments to earlier drafts received from workshop participants.

The term 'evidence' is used in a broad sense to cover quantitative and qualitative information on ALMP delivery and outcomes and covers descriptive data as well as standard counterfactual impact evaluations.³ This acknowledges that while striving to ensure the reliability of the data used PES need to combine various sources of information. By the same token, the term 'evidence-based' is used in a broad sense to cover situations where data and evidence are used to inform decisions together with other considerations.⁴

The importance and potential benefits of using evidence

The general argument for using reliable evidence for the development of PES measures and services is that it helps increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the PES by improving the design of PES services and measures; as well as informing client referrals and the allocation of PES budgets. If presented in user-friendly formats (e.g. colour-coded interactive dashboards), evidence can inform and improve the decisions not only of PES managers and policy makers, but also PES frontline staff, employers and jobseekers.

In many cases, although the positive effects of a measure may be predicted on the basis of theoretical models or professional experience, the exact size of the impact can only be measured by rigorous evaluation. If the measure is expensive, reliable information about the size of the impact is especially important to determine whether the measure is cost-effective. Evaluations may also be used to decide the detailed design of a programme, especially when there is no consensus among practitioners and/or when the design options have similar expected impacts but costs vary widely. This may be the case for example in designing the exact duration or amount of a wage subsidy scheme or in the choice between face-to-face versus online counselling for those at risk of long-term unemployment. The

² Participating PES included Bulgaria, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Lithuania, the Netherlands, LE FOREM and VDAB (Belgium). Latvia participated in the questionnaire but did not attend the workshops.

³ See definition on page 9. For more information, please see European Commission 2012.

⁴ Although 'evidence-informed' may be a more accurate term to use, we chose to use 'evidence-based' as it is a more commonly understood expression and is used in the title of the working group.

gradual shift from resource to results-based management has increased the demand for reliable evidence in several of the PES across Europe.

Reliable evidence on the impact of PES measures can strengthen the position of the PES in budgetary negotiations with the government and also help them win the support of social partners. If actively disseminated, such evidence can also improve the public image of the PES as an accountable and efficient organisation.

The Netherlands: Using evidence to prove the PES business case

In the Netherlands, the PES is governed by the line ministry with no formal involvement of the social partners. The governance structure is essentially top-down, whereby the ministry decides on the annual performance targets of the PES. However, since its budget was significantly reduced in 2010, the PES has been increasingly proactive in developing its own vision and making proposals for improvements and investments in PES activities.

This strategy required reliable evidence of the effectiveness of PES services. Furthermore, the PES set up an advisory board including influential experts from academia and the social partners.

This proactive approach has strengthened cooperation with the ministry. Currently, the PES Department of Strategy, Policy and Knowledge has weekly meetings with the ministry to discuss policy proposals coming from both the PES and the ministry and to carry out an ex-ante impact analysis on most proposals.

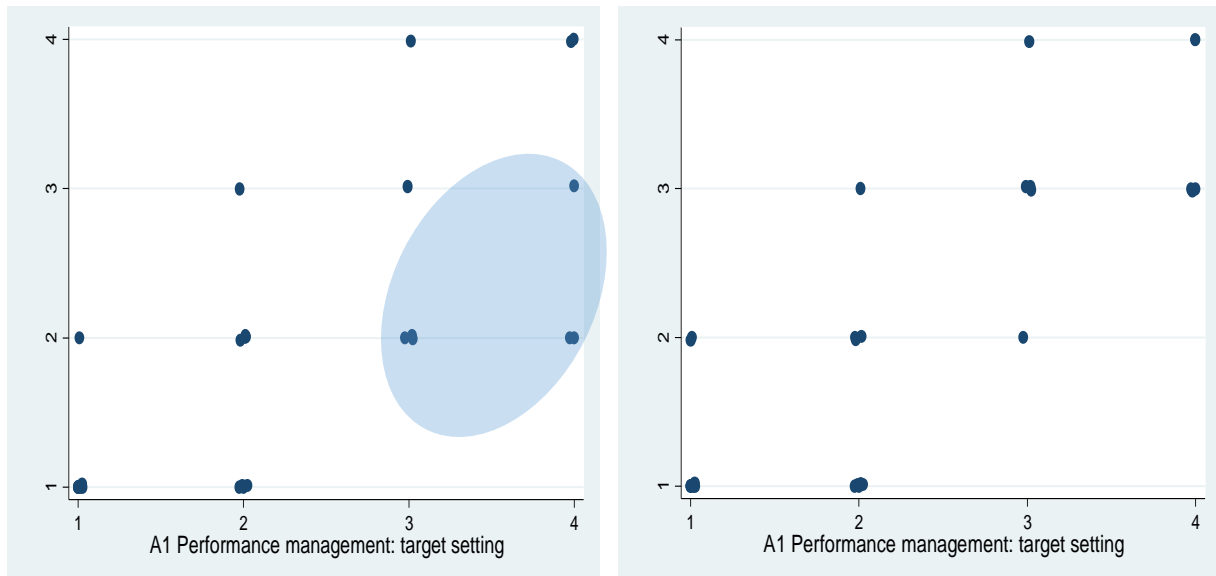
State of play and current issues in evidence-based ALMP delivery

State of play in evidence-based ALMP delivery

The benchmarking results from the first cycle show considerable variation in PES practices regarding impact evaluations. Twelve of the member PES do not regularly conduct evaluations, while six PES have well-developed or mature systems for conducting evaluations. Evaluation practices are closely linked to the overall PES performance management (PM) approach, presumably as strong PM creates a need for reliable evidence.⁵ As Figure 1 below illustrates, advanced PM systems tend to be found together with systematic evaluations and a transparent system for managing change and innovation. PES with a strong target-setting system⁶ also have a more advanced approach to conducting ex-ante and ex-post evaluations (scores 3 and 4 in the left panel) and integrate evidence-based service design and implementation into a transparent system of change-management (scores 3 and 4 in the right panel). This indicates that PES with a fairly advanced PM system are best placed for developing their evaluation systems (marked in blue in the left panel of Figure 1), while PES with a less advanced PM system need to develop both areas simultaneously.

⁵ It should be stressed that the figures are illustrative: the available data are not sufficient to prove causation.

⁶ This is typically the case in mature PES. A strong target-setting system is based on a small number of clear, ambitious targets that are determined in a process that is (i) not too complicated or time consuming, (ii) informed by systematic analysis of the labour market and (iii) successfully involves regional/local units. Also, targets are well communicated to all relevant levels of the organisation.

Figure 1. Correlation between target setting and evaluation practices

Source: Benchlearning scores (4-degree scale) for 2015-2016. Scores are jittered to show multiple observations of the same value. Note that in the benchlearning methodology, although enabler Section E is titled 'Evidence-based design and implementation of PES services,' enablers E1 to E4 have a narrow focus on evaluations, while monitoring is covered mainly by sections A and B.

The pre-workshop survey showed that all PES participating in the Working Group rely on some form of evidence in developing their ALMP measures and services, but there is a wide variation in the quality and use of this evidence. In PES where evaluations are in a development stage, the evidence base is typically limited to customer satisfaction surveys, monitoring indicators, and general labour market statistics. They do not conduct or commission counter-factual impact evaluations, although they may use the results of evaluations of relevant measures from other countries. In mature PES, development initiatives are embedded in the PM systems and are based on rigorous evaluations mainly prepared in-house. These PES use quasi-experimental and sometimes experimental methods⁷ in ex-post evaluations to ensure that impact estimates are reliable (European Commission 2018b). However, the pre-workshop survey suggests that this latter group of PES are not equally advanced in the use of evidence. Their current practices vary markedly in terms of (1) how research needs are derived from PM outcomes and discussed within the organisation; (2) how research outcomes feed back into the design of ALMP and guidelines for frontline staff; and (3) how evidence is used for making the business case for PES.

Barriers to promoting the use of evidence in PES

Even the best performers meet some barriers they need to tackle in order to progress further. While the two Amsterdam workshops did not explore these issues in detail, they did point to a few inspiring examples of how to surmount barriers.

The pre-meeting questionnaire indicated that time pressure imposed by the tight schedule of decision-making is a common constraint that affects all PES to some extent. Limitations in data quality and data access are also widespread. These may especially concern legal barriers about linking data, using personal data, or sharing data with parties outside the

⁷ Experimental methods ensure that the outcomes (typically, the reemployment rate) of ALMP participants can be compared to the outcomes of a control group that has the same characteristics on average, except they do not participate in the ALMP. In most cases, this is carried out through the random selection of participants. Quasi-experimental methods also aim to ensure the similarity of the participating and the control group, but this is achieved by exploiting some feature of the programme (such as comparing clients just below or above age 25 to measure the impact of a youth guarantee measure) rather than by setting up an experiment.

PES. A further aspect is how to change the culture and attitudes towards the use of evidence among PES management and staff. The EU-level requirement to evaluate projects financed by the European Social Fund provides a direct incentive for evaluations. Benchlearning across European PES and concrete recommendations from peer PES may also help in creating a momentum and strengthening the motivation of PES managers to embark on reforms. In the case of Cyprus, the benchlearning exercise was instrumental in initiating investment in IT and monitoring.

In PES where the use of evidence is less developed, technical constraints such as expert capacities in data management and evaluations or the technical limitations of existing IT systems may also create barriers to generating and using evidence. PES IT systems are often built with the limited aim of supporting the main client processes, and do not facilitate other uses for analytical purposes. PES lacking such capacities may receive support via a Mutual Assistance Project in the PES Network⁸, or from the [Centre for Research on Impact Evaluation](#) of the EU Joint Research Centre.

PES at a more advanced stage may also meet problems in the design and implementation of evaluations, for example legal or ethical concerns raised by social partners or PES staff about randomised control trials; or the difficulty of isolating the impact of a single intervention when several changes are introduced in parallel. Evaluation results may also generate problems as they may not be as clear-cut as expected by policy makers and the evaluators may be under pressure to simplify their interpretation or extrapolate from results. Cooperation with academic research, though potentially beneficial, may be constrained by institutional issues, time pressures, or legal barriers to sharing data.

Current issues in developing evaluation systems

The pre-workshop questionnaire of participating PES identified the following main issues regarding the further development of their approach to evaluations.

Cost effectiveness estimates are immensely useful for the efficient allocation of PES resources, but are often difficult to calculate if the data on costs is fragmented or unavailable.

Big data approaches represent a new opportunity in exploiting administrative data and possibly other sources such as information generated in social media.

Detecting causal mechanisms goes beyond measuring impacts and can greatly contribute to improving the design of ALMP.

Exploring heterogeneity of the effects (i.e. where the size of the effect varies across subgroups among the unemployed) can support the targeting of ALMP and the development of sub-schemes tailored to the needs of particular subgroups.

Integrating the requirements of evaluation into the early stages of planning and piloting new measures can greatly improve the reliability of estimates and also help in measuring heterogeneous effects and exploring causal impacts.

Strengthening mechanisms to **ensure that evaluation results are fed back** into the decision-making process and the daily implementation of ALMP apparently continues to be an issue for most PES.

⁸ The PES Network includes two or three Mutual Assistance Projects in its annual work programme. Through these projects PES with special needs can get assistance from peer PES to develop procedures or tools.

Elements of a well-functioning evaluation system⁹

Ideally, evaluations are embedded in the overall PM system (European Commission 2016, 2017a). As outlined in the benchlearning methodology, the PES should integrate evidence-based service design and implementation into a transparent system of change management and innovation (European Commission 2017b). This implies that change is not perceived as a threat but as an opportunity for improving performance and that change is driven by evidence-based strategic decisions. All organisational levels of the PES as well as employees are involved in the decision-making process ensuring that all available expertise is channelled into the process. For example, this may include thematic dialogues, good-practice exchange and other formats to which representatives of all levels are invited to contribute.

A successful PES evaluation system may include the following elements (European Commission 2018a):

- A clear purpose of piloting and evaluation within PES;
- Regular planning and execution of the evaluation of core PES activities and systematic piloting of major new reforms before their launch;
- Internal piloting and evaluation capacity in the PES and links with external research institutions;
- Adequate data infrastructure within the PES;
- Use of robust evaluation methods;
- Mechanisms that ensure support for evaluations by PES management and staff;
- Embedding the use of evaluation results across the PES, from the senior management to regional and local staff levels.

A comparison of existing analytical facilities of PES participating at the Amsterdam workshops suggests that institutional conditions make a significant difference. Ensuring that the organisational units responsible for research and analysis have a certain degree of independence from PES management is likely to improve the reliability of research and creates good conditions for widespread dissemination. For example, in Germany, the independence of the Institut für Arbeitsmarkt- und Berufsforschung (IAB, Institute for Employment Research) ensures that their studies are considered reliable and are widely cited in policy debates. At the same time, it is important to establish regular, institutional channels and fora for interaction between the analysts and decision-makers.

France: Governance of evaluation programmes

Since its creation in late 2008, Pôle emploi has by law an evaluation committee with eight permanent members that monitors evaluations of its programmes and projects with regard to benefits, services and measures. The evaluation committee is appointed by the members of the PES Board (social partners, State inspectorates, independent experts) and meets on a bi-monthly basis. It defines the annual evaluation programme (linked to PES strategic priorities), monitors evaluations, reports and makes recommendations to the Board to inform further decision-making, and provides advice on the external communication of evaluation results.

⁹ This section is based on European Commission (2018a).

Sources and tools for generating evidence

The basic infrastructure available in most PES for collecting information on the use and effectiveness of ALMP includes administrative records on jobseekers maintained by the PES and client satisfaction surveys. PES **administrative data** typically records client characteristics, dates of changes in benefit status, PES services, ALMP participation, and outcomes. In some PES, these records can be linked to other administrative databases that provide further information on outcomes such as job entry, wages, maternity leave, or retirement. This linked information may be available to PES as personal information, or only in an anonymous format suitable for research. Also, the linking may be automated and regular or only available on-request. Apart from standardised data that can be easily encoded into numerical formats, PES may also collect and use **textual information** that can be exploited by new tools of content analysis. Such information may be collected from internal sources, e.g. the free-text notes written by frontline staff in the internal IT system, or may come from outside the PES, e.g. job search information derived from social media or demand for certain sub-skills derived from commercial job advertisements.¹⁰

All PES that took part in the survey use tools to monitor participation and outcomes of ALMP, although there is a wide variation as to how informative these tools are, as well as whether they are accessible to managers only or frontline staff (or even outsiders); and the extent to which monitoring outcomes are used to inform decisions.

Monitoring data on ALMP participation and outcomes, broken down by relevant characteristics (such as age, education, duration of unemployment, or level of disability) and PES units may allow the PES management to monitor the allocation of ALMP resources, the implementation of segmentation strategies, and may also signal potential problems with the effectiveness of particular measures.

Customer surveys may supplement monitoring data with information on customer satisfaction with PES services and may also provide useful feedback on particular features of service delivery.

Evaluations go one step further and aim to assess whether ALMP and services are effective. While ex-ante evaluations use theoretical models, predictions and existing empirical evidence, ex-post evaluations are based on information collected before, during and after the implementation of an ALMP. Evaluations may apply qualitative or quantitative methods, or both. Impacts and causal mechanisms can best be explored by counterfactual evaluation (whether quantitative or qualitative), in which those affected by a measure are compared to a similar control group that was unaffected by it.¹¹

Experimental evaluation is a quantitative counterfactual evaluation method considered the most reliable way to evaluate the impact of a new (or modified) measure, though it may not always be feasible. In an experimental setup, the new measure is offered to a group of randomly selected participants, while those not selected form the control group. The impact of the measure is calculated as the difference in outcomes in the participating group compared to the control group. If participants are randomly selected, this ensures that the two groups on average have the same characteristics, so any difference in their outcomes can be attributed to the measure.¹² Thus, randomised controlled trials (RCT) are considered to provide highly reliable evidence. **Quasi-experimental evaluations** also rely on the comparison of participants with a control group, but the selection of the two groups is not random and there may be differences in the two groups' characteristics. Such

¹⁰ Big data methods are being introduced in several of the PES, perhaps most systematically at VDAB (Belgium).

¹¹ The term counterfactual refers to the logic of the method which is to approximate the ideal (but impossible) comparison of what happened (the observable fact) with what would have happened without the intervention (the unobservable counter fact). More information is provided e.g. in European Commission 2012.

¹² For more detail, see European Commission 2018a or Gertler et al 2016.

differences in observed characteristics can be eliminated using statistical methods. However, if the two groups differ in unobserved characteristics, this will introduce a bias in the estimated impacts. Recent advances in quantitative methods can also help in exploring how programme effects vary across target groups (e.g. the 'Modified Causal Forest' used in VDAB). **Qualitative evaluations** can explore the causal mechanisms that generate the effects or assess effects that cannot be captured by quantitative methods.

Several of the PES have valuable experiences regarding the barriers to applying RCTs (addressing ethical concerns, attitudes, precision of implementation, or availability of internal research capacities). In Denmark and the Netherlands, RCTs are part of the standard evaluation toolkit and are used regularly. The Dutch PES has invested considerable time and effort in informing and supporting PES staff in the implementation of a recent RCT on the added value of face-to-face contact (European Commission 2018c, see box below). Other PES have used the RCT approach occasionally for particular measures, e.g. for piloting intensive services for youth (in France, see Blasco et al 2015); public provision of services for hard-to-place jobseekers (in Germany, see Krug and Stephan 2016); deciding when to invite newly unemployed to a meeting with a PES counsellor (in Belgium, see Van Landegem et al 2016); or the frequency of meetings with a PES counsellor (Estonia).

Dutch RCT: Informing and motivating PES staff in implementing experiments

The Dutch PES invested considerable time and effort in the implementation of a recent RCT in order to motivate PES staff and foster a culture of 'future-proof, evidence-based PES'. All levels of staff across the organisation were involved. Regional road shows were organised to explain why and how the RCT was going to be conducted, supported by a video message from the board of directors and a personal e-mail from the general director. Starting from the design stage, management was regularly informed throughout the whole process. A toolbox was developed for all staff, with detailed FAQ's and other relevant information (European Commission 2018c). The PES also created opportunities to discuss ethical issues, notably the moral dilemmas flowing from the RCT setup. (UWV 2018).

Germany: 'TrEffeR' analytical tool

TrEffeR is a self-service reporting tool that combines performance assessment and evaluation developed jointly by the Bundesagentur and the Institute for Employment Research (IAB). TrEffeR focuses on quasi-experimental analysis with constructed control groups. It can indicate where a programme is effective and can assess the potential impact of particular ALMP measures for particular subgroups of jobseekers and/or particular regions. It is available to managers and controllers in all local PES units. TrEffeR estimates are also used as the basis for the star-rating in Kursnet, a recently developed online tool that supports clients holding training vouchers in making their choice of training courses and providers.

The underlying tool regressions are updated twice a year. The data come from the control unit of the PES. The tool is maintained by PES staff and requires one expert and two IT specialists at the PES headquarters.

Piloting is used by most PES to detect and correct any mistakes in the design of measures, to inform the development of the implementation process, and to assess the impact of new or modified measures. Pilots may also be used to inform the choice between design options. The obvious advantage of pilots is that problems can be tackled before nationwide rollout.

However, pilots take time and thus may not always fit into the tight schedule of decision-making.

Cost effectiveness calculations combine information on costs with impact evaluations to verify if the monetary gains of an ALMP measure exceed the expenses of the measure. Cost effectiveness calculations are systematically used for example in the Netherlands. VDAB is currently investigating how to combine its activity-based costing information (see box) with the impact results of its training programmes.

VDAB, Belgium: Activity-based costing

With activity-based costing (ABC), PES can accurately estimate the cost elements of particular measures or services, taking into account that these contribute to indirect costs to a varying degree.¹³ VDAB started the ABC project in 2008, and the first results used by management emerged in 2011-2012. Initiated by VDAB management and the finance department, the project seeks to obtain an accurate estimate of the total cost of particular measures and services. At the start, an external consultant was hired to adapt the method. Currently the project employs two experts in the finance department.

The calculations are based on financial accounts and an annual time budget survey in which team leaders within the organisation are asked how much time (per unit of time) is devoted to different (sub-) activities in their team (e.g. how much time does a first interview for a Dutch-speaking client take or a client who only speaks a foreign language?) The results can be used to calculate and compare the cost-effectiveness of various types of ALMP and also to support decisions on new investments and proposals.

Combining tools to explore what drives the effects

Quantitative counterfactual evaluations provide evidence about which ALMP are effective, and well-designed experiments may also identify particular features that can contribute to effective ALMP implementation. Evidence from such evaluations is very useful in guiding the design of particular ALMP measures and referring clients to particular measures. However, neither approach provides detailed information on how PES may improve their internal *processes* to enable the effective design and delivery of high quality ALMP.

To understand how the effects are generated and to identify what features of design and implementation are most important, a combination of the above quantitative and qualitative tools is necessary. Qualitative methods may also help in gaining a deeper understanding of local conditions and details of the implementation process. This can greatly facilitate the correct interpretation of quantitative evaluation outcomes and improve the overall credibility of evaluation studies, especially among PES staff, who may have their own personal impressions of the effectiveness of particular ALMP.

Benchmarking within and across countries may supplement the main tools outlined above as it can support the identification of good practices in the implementation process. One example is the recently developed ALMP indicator (European Commission 2019). The indicator measures five aspects of ALMP implementation in 28 PES across Europe using

¹³ For example, if staff training mainly focuses on updating counsellors on legal changes in the administration of unemployment benefit, these training costs are assigned to the benefit administration service rather than evenly distributed across all services as a general cost.

information from the benchlearning process, a dedicated survey, and Eurostat statistics. The outcomes can be used to identify the PES that appear to excel in particular aspects of the ALMP implementation process. However, it should be noted that the construction of the indicator itself relies on theory and extrapolation from existing evidence rather than direct evidence about what works.

A further argument for combining tools flows from the need to make decisions in time. Obtaining reliable evidence on the effectiveness of ALMP measures and PES services takes time and requires analytical capacity, while PES need to make decisions on how to use their resources and serve clients in a fast-changing environment. This implies that PES need to combine less accurate indicators of effectiveness (such as raw outcome indicators in monitoring systems) that are available promptly, with more accurate measures (such as results of counterfactual impact evaluations) that may be out of date in some respects. For example, PES may evaluate employers' proposals for internship subsidies using the results of past evaluations of such schemes combined with monitoring data on the raw outcomes of such internships in a particular sector or among particular employers. In some PES, the combination of data sources is systematically built into the applications that support management decisions, such as TrEffeR, as explained above.

Cooperating with external experts

Cooperating with external experts offers several advantages even for PES that have their own internal analytical capacity and advanced evaluation systems.

First, involving distinguished independent experts in impact evaluations of ALMP may increase the credibility of the evidence for those outside the organisation. Second, external experts may complement the analytical capacity of PES and allow them to meet the need for analytical staff in a flexible manner. Third, cooperation with external experts may help the PES to exploit the potential of new, innovative tools for generating evidence.

Mechanisms for using evidence in the decision-making process

According to the pre-meeting questionnaire, establishing and strengthening feedback loops continues to be a challenge in most PES. In order to overcome this, it would be necessary to build a coherent PDCA¹⁴ system where evidence is systematically generated and used to inform PM and ALMP delivery. Table 1 highlights some of the key areas where evidence should feed into PES processes. In the processes related to PM and ALMP delivery, evidence is collected in the 'check' phase, and is used to inform decisions in the 'plan' phase (P), and support actions in the 'do' (D) and 'act' (A) phases. The PDCA of evaluation (as a specific function of PES) is different, as in this case the function itself refers to collecting and analysing data and accordingly, data collection happens in the 'do' phase.

The table also illustrates that the PDCA cycles of PM and ALMP delivery are closely linked in the 'check' phase, and overlap with the 'do' phase of evaluation (marked in blue).

¹⁴ PDCA refers to the 'Plan-Do-Check-Act' or 'Plan-Do-Check-Adjust' management method.

Table 1. Using evidence in PM and ALMP delivery*

	Performance management	ALMP delivery	Evaluation
P	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> use labour market analysis and past performance to inform target setting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> use evidence to inform <ul style="list-style-type: none"> allocation of resources across ALMP defining guidelines for the referral of clients to ALMP identifying good practice in implementation details modifying existing ALMP or introducing new ones 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> choose what to evaluate and when how to identify causal impact
D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> adjust indicators for local labour market context 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> use evidence <ul style="list-style-type: none"> on ALMP effectiveness to inform referral of clients to ALMP in selecting training (and other) providers to inform jobseekers' choices e.g. of training providers on risk of deadweight or fraud in awarding employer subsidies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> collect data do ex ante analysis of ALMP do ex-post analysis of ALMP communicate results
C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> benchmark performance, controlling for local context share PM results with managers and staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> monitor the effectiveness of ALMP and of providers monitor and evaluate variation in ALMP across local units /regions evaluate the effectiveness of ALMP and of providers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> check validity and interpretation of results, explore causes of bias check understanding of results
A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> identify local units /regions that perform below expectations and provide tailored support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> use evidence to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> inform adjustments of existing ALMP phase out ineffective programmes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> lessons for future evaluations: correct data collection, etc adjust /develop dissemination tools, etc.

* Please note that the table does not contain all elements of the PDCA in these three areas, only those that are closely related to generating or using evidence.

Following discussions at the workshop, it was concluded that developing an evidence-based approach is best implemented as a gradual process rather than as a major overhaul of the organisation. There are some actions that may catalyse the move towards a more evidence-based approach. First, external pressure, such as from governments or stakeholders, may increase awareness of the need for reliable evidence. In the absence of such pressures, analytical or strategy units may proactively raise awareness of the importance of having reliable evidence. Second, training PES staff to understand and be aware of the quality (degree of reliability) of the various "layers" of evidence can support management buy-in for data collection and use of reliable evaluation methods. Third, if evidence is available, proactive dissemination within and outside the organisation can demonstrate its usefulness and increase demand for more and better information. Highlighting that better quality evidence may enable counsellors to provide more effective support to clients may also further motivate staff buy-in. Lastly, providing tailored evidence relevant to users, presenting it in easy-to-understand, appealing formats, and facilitating the use of analytical tools, mobile applications, and others, can all contribute to strengthening the use of evidence and generating demand for evaluations. The PES participating at the Amsterdam workshops have several good examples of such activities.

Disseminating evidence to PES staff

Dissemination may focus on summarising research results in non-technical language for counsellors and managers, as in Pôle emploi (see box below). In some PES, such as in Estonia, the initial training for new recruits includes a module on labour market statistics, analysis and evaluation. New managers also visit the analytical department as part of the personal induction programme and get acquainted with the activities and outputs of the department. Adding a module on the importance and methods of using evidence in internal

training programmes can also be an important step towards building an evidence-based culture.

Disseminating research evidence among PES staff

In France, Pôle emploi has introduced a new way to communicate evidence to counsellors. The two-page briefs known as 'données pour agir' (DPA) provide simple explanations of research results. The DPAs are prepared by the staff from Statistics, Evaluations and Studies Department whenever a new research report may directly feed into the professional practices of counsellors. DPAs are available to counsellors via the intranet. While DPAs are not public, Pôle emploi regularly publishes evaluation reports at <http://www.Pôle-emploi.org/statistiques-analyses/>.

In Wallonia, Belgium, LE FOREM uses several tools to disseminate evidence on effective practices and ALMP. They have a library of internal reports (RRI) of professional meetings and events, which also reference relevant documents in the EU PES Knowledge Centre. The reports provide support in evaluating the applicability of particular practices in the Belgian context. They are currently developing a wiki portal (with the working title 'Wiki connaissances') to collect and share information on employment policies and labour market trends in a user-friendly interface. Web-based dissemination can be supplemented by physical discussion fora. LE FOREM has also introduced lunchtime seminars to initiate a dialogue between experts and staff on various topics. These seminars also serve as a forum to disseminate new results of research and analysis conducted within LE FOREM and to collect feedback from users.

Using evidence to inform counsellors' daily work

There are detailed mechanisms for integrating evaluation results into service delivery in Denmark, Estonia, the Netherlands, and Germany. Some were already mentioned in the section on tools for generating evidence, and some further examples are presented below.

Estonia: Visualising data in a counsellor dashboard

The Estonian PES is currently working on a dashboard for counsellors and regional managers to support them in providing services, planning resources and in organising their work. The beta version was launched in May 2019. Currently the dashboard provides information on the relevant socio-economic characteristics of the clients such as education, language and computer skills, risk group, area of residence, duration of unemployment etc. The data on participation in services, type of job required and vacancies will be added soon. Data on dashboards are updated daily.

The interactive dashboard enables counsellors to see at one click the list of clients within each category (for example the list of clients with insufficient skills) and thereby offer them suitable services. It also gives an overview of changes in the volume of clients in the portfolio over time. As such the dashboard supports the caseworkers in analysing their client portfolio, e.g. in annual performance dialogues. Managers of PES regional offices can see the customer portfolio of their region as a whole and they are able to compare portfolios of different counsellors.

The dashboards are created using *Tableau* business intelligence software which is connected to the data warehouse of PES. The dashboards are developed by the analysis department in close cooperation with counsellors and regional managers.

Lithuania: Developing a dashboard to inform and motivate frontline staff

In 2010, the Lithuanian PES introduced a new interface for frontline staff that provides information on key performance indicators' (KPI) targets and progress, at the level of the counsellor, the local PES unit, and the country. The new dashboard uses colour codes to signal performance below and above the target and allows counsellors to navigate to the list of individual clients ('the persons behind the numbers') at a click from the main indicators. The dashboard was developed in-house by the IT division. The development process involved staff at all levels: at the beginning a working group was established in order to identify user needs at all management levels and to describe the interface of the platform. All the steps were tested/piloted in local offices and in the central office. Following the second reorganisation of the Lithuanian PES system, the PES is currently developing a new, more comprehensive and unified PM system that will require an update of the dashboard as well.

Denmark: Benchmark tool for ALMP traineeships to inform counsellors

The Danish PES has established an online tool (VITAS) for collecting and sharing information on traineeship programmes. When opening a trainee position as part of an ALMP intervention, employers must register on VITAS and supply information on the outcomes, such as the duration of the traineeship and if it ended in a job offer. VITAS provides searchable information on the number of trainee positions and the employment outcomes for particular employers and in comparison to other registered companies within a specific type of business (e.g. transportation) within a given time period. The tool is accessible to PES counsellors and social workers as well as the companies themselves. The Danish Agency for Labour Market and Recruitment developed user tutorials (in Danish) for [social workers](#) and [employers](#) (European Commission 2018b).

UWV, The Netherlands: Analytical support for managers

As a new PM element, UWV set up regional support bureaux in 2017 to offer analytical support to UWV managers in planning and work preparation, data management, management information and analysis, signalling and quality control. The bureaux also help local job centres that lag behind in their performance. The bureaux have a staff of between three and 14 persons (depending on the size of the region) and have expertise in data analysis, planning, control and labour market analysis.

Key lessons and recommendations

The current challenges in developing PES evaluation systems appear to concern these four areas in particular:

- use of robust methods, especially what types of questions require the use of RCTs, and what are the preconditions; and, in some PES, ensuring a suitable infrastructure for data analysis;
- regular planning and execution of evaluations;
- embedding the use of evaluation results across the PES (both in PM and the delivery process); and
- establishing mechanisms to ensure management and staff buy-in.

The experiences of the more advanced PES appear sufficiently rich and varied to provide a good basis for mutual learning within the Working Group in these areas. Further inspiration may be drawn from the existing literature and experience of other PES in Europe (e.g. Austria, Ireland, Sweden, or the UK) and outside Europe (notably Australia, Canada and the USA).

The following key lessons and recommendations emerged during the discussions in the Working Group.

Key lessons

- (1) Evidence needs to be reliable and comprehensive. Institutional independence may support the reliability and credibility of evidence. Combining qualitative and quantitative methods may improve reliability as well as credibility among PES staff.
- (2) PES staff should be trained to think about evidence in their work and about how the services can be improved.
- (3) It is important to proactively disseminate evidence internally as well as to external stakeholders. This can be a first step in developing an evidence-based culture.
- (4) Visualising evidence and tailoring it to users' needs can greatly enhance usage.
- (5) Finding common goals and involving stakeholders in defining a multi-annual evaluation strategy can also support the emergence of an evidence-based culture.
- (6) Evidence should be used systematically in the performance management cycle and in the delivery process as well.

Recommendations for the PES Network

- (1) Develop a model/roadmap for using evidence as the basis for PES performance.
- (2) Develop and share a database or toolkit on the practical application of evaluation methods in PES, to provide inspiration and hands-on advice.
- (3) In a future workshop or study, explore the institutional pre-conditions of good practices and identify feasible next steps for the less advanced PES given constraints in terms of budgets, HR capacities and institutional contexts.

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