

PES Network  
Stakeholder conference  
**The power of PES  
partnerships**

20-21-22 April 2021



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# **EUROPEAN NETWORK OF PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT SERVICES**

Stakeholder conference  
“The power of PES partnerships”  
20-21-22 April 2021

Synthesis paper

## LEGAL NOTICE

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# Conference key messages

The Conference has built upon a very interesting series of webinars and working groups organised by the PES Network during the crisis. A key message is that “**the future has arrived already**”. Developments that have been predicted for many years have rapidly arrived in the day-to-day working lives of employment services. **Partnerships are now cutting across organisational silos**, as the Swedish PES have described, moving on a journey from “ego to eco” as an open service platform delivers the backbone of an employment service partnership ecosystem. Organisations traditionally operating in their own silos, perhaps previously not looking at partnerships particularly widely, and with limited use of IT and data, are now taking advantage of possibilities to extend and expand their reach. Partnerships can drive ecosystem development.

A future unique selling proposition for PES, as described by Actiris – the Brussels Region PES in Belgium – can be in **guiding the choices of citizens**, particularly for more vulnerable people who are less able to initially take advantage of digital services. There is a paradox that even though more and more actors are potentially available through the employment service “door”, the ultimate result might be a far more streamlined, and less complicat-

ed service. Where partnerships are well connected it can be possible to make maximum use of the data and apply it in a personal way, to meet individual matching needs.

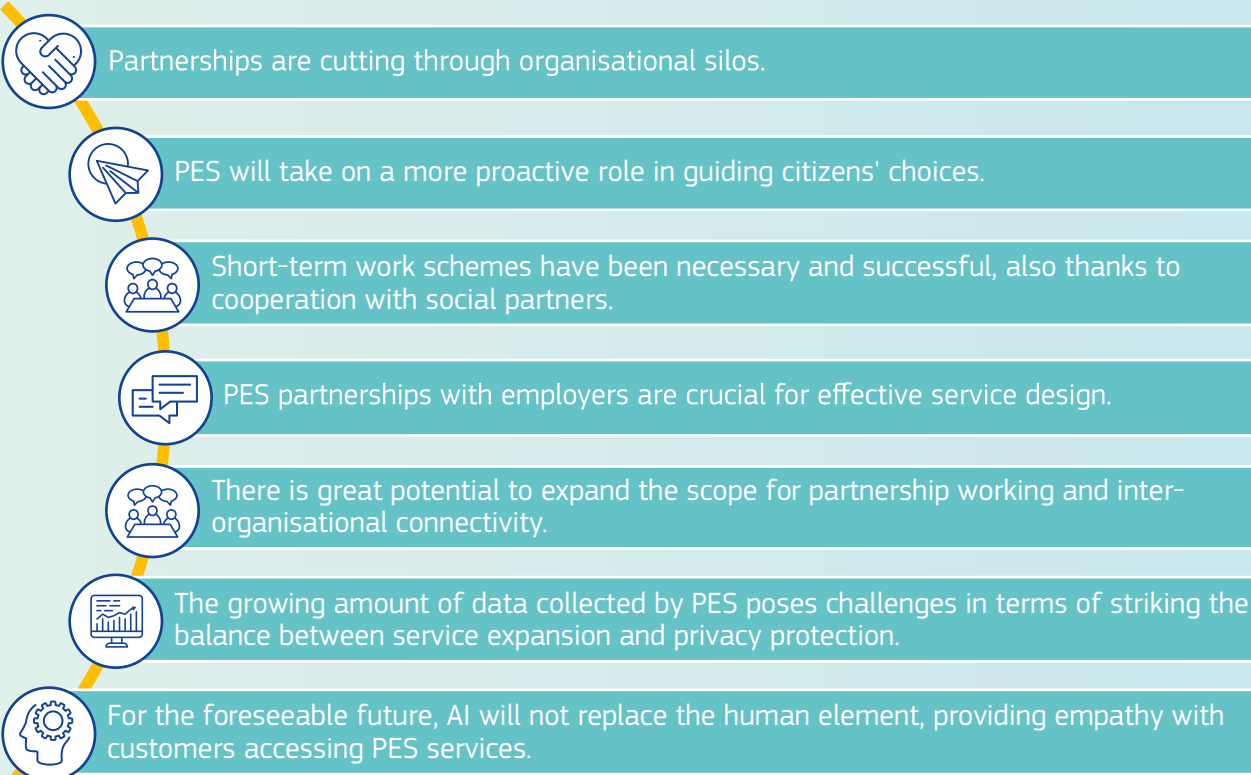
There was a clear message that **short-time work schemes have been successful and necessary**. There should however be ongoing assessments to determine when they are no longer required so as to avoid potential labour market distortions once labour market balance is restored. Short-time work schemes should be easy to access, with eligibility rules which are not defined too strictly to avoid excluding those who can benefit from them. It is essential that all social partners, especially unions and employers, are involved in the construction design, and possibly the monitoring and evaluation of short-time work schemes.

Great benefits can be realised where **employers work closely as key partners** for public employment services. The Greek employment service is, as an example, working in close cooperation with IT companies that have a stake in working with people who encounter barriers to integration. This shared agenda can promote investment in training potential customer beneficiaries, with positive outcomes for both enterprises and public employment services.

**FIGURE 1: WORD CLOUD FROM THE CONFERENCE, ON THE QUESTION: “In one or two words, what is your main takeaway from this conference?”**



**FIGURE 2: Visualisation of the key messages from the conference**



The Conference explored possible future developments in partnership working. Sweden is looking very seriously into how the education and employment support systems can be more closely aligned to ensure a more coordinated approach to skills development, which is intrinsic to successful labour market operation. When an ecosystem is established, **there is almost limitless potential to expand the scope for partnership working and inter-organisational connectivity** through enhanced data utilisation. This enables an individual's situation to be analysed in terms of their ability to find work, their financial situation, and perhaps their health, and housing conditions.

As soon as one organisation enters into an ecosystem, its perceived network has already been subsumed into various other ecosystems, so there is a multiplier effect. Ultimately there is almost limitless scope to investigate and combine information about citizens globally. The policy challenge and question for employment services is how to use this to best effect in the interests of their primary employer and jobseeker customers, striking the **optimum balance between service expansion and ensuring that necessary safeguards exist to protect personal and sensitive information**. At the European level, an evolving regulatory framework will be needed to achieve this desired and essential outcome.

Notwithstanding significant advancements in the development of AI, there remains a consensus that **the human element in employment service provision, requiring empathy with customers, will feature for**

**the foreseeable future**. The immense capability of AI, machine learning, and data analysis is yet to offer a technological replacement for some key personal inputs to employment support systems. In this regard, the greatly increased capacity for partnership working from the application of IT will particularly add value in increasing service efficiency, including for those interventions continuing to need a counselling intervention as well as increasing numbers of automated transactions.

### CONFERENCE MATERIALS

A variety of materials have been produced for this conference:

- a [background paper](#) presenting the conference theme and the conceptual framework behind it;
- an [informative video](#) presenting the conference theme in an agile way;
- preview papers for each conference day, providing details on each day's theme as well as speaker bios and practices presented.  
[20 April - 21 April - 22 April](#)

All of the materials above and more can be found on the conference event page on the Commission's website, via [this link](#).

Recordings of plenary sessions are also available on YouTube via [this link](#).



# Background and rationale

The labour market is changing very rapidly. Prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the labour market across Europe was performing strongly, with positive trends in most Member States. Nevertheless, high levels of employment co-existed with skills mismatches and continuing gender inequality and worse outcomes for certain groups, notably ethnic minorities, the disabled, migrants and ex-offenders (European Commission, 2020a). Young people in particular have been negatively affected by changes in job security and wages in the so-called ‘gig economy’.

The current COVID-19 crisis is increasing problems already faced by vulnerable citizens, increasing unemployment generally with a particular impact upon the insecurely employed, temporary workers, young people and the low to medium-skilled. It has also increased youth unemployment and the rate of those Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEETs), while households have lost considerable income, especially at lower levels of the income distribution (European Commission, 2020b).

Furthermore, the range of anticipated future changes may exacerbate inequalities and insecurities faced by sections of the population. The OECD predict that **around 14% of jobs are at risk due to automation**, with workers in manufacturing, agriculture, food preparation or communications occupations (postal, courier etc) most at risk (Nedelkoska, & Quintini, 2018). While new waves of automation over the last decade have not yet led to significant employment losses in any country, automation is already influencing employment growth between occupations and the skills demands within them. The lowest skilled are becoming more concentrated in the most vulnerable sectors and occupations (OECD, 2021). More positively, technology has enabled large numbers of jobs to be protected during the COVID-19 crisis, enabling workers to continue in employment even during lockdowns. The **uptake of telework** is expected to lead to the accelerated use of new technology after the crisis.

All of this will have an ongoing impact on PES and accelerate pressures that they were already experiencing and responding to. PES will need to continue to demonstrate increasing effectiveness and efficiency and deliver results in helping the workforce and employers to adjust and ‘build back better’. One means of PES responding to the multiple labour market challenges that they face is through further development of partnerships. This will involve a review of existing partnership arrangements

and further learning from the many strong examples of PES facilitating closer working across organisational boundaries. By sharing good examples and best practice, PES can highlight and encourage further positive engagement between stakeholders in enhancing social and labour market inclusion through the delivery of increasingly citizen-centric services.

## The impact of COVID-19 on the labour market

The COVID-19 outbreak, and more particularly the policies that have been implemented to mitigate the risks it poses to public health and healthcare systems, put Europe and the world under unprecedented public health, economic and social stress. Though an improved employment situation was recorded in the EU before the pandemic (in 2019, the EU unemployment rate fell to the lowest level ever recorded, namely 6.7%; European Commission, 2020a), the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the EU labour market has been immediate, with **nearly five million jobs lost** by the end of the second quarter of 2020 (ETUI, 2020). Many people living in Europe today are in short-time work, have lost their job or are at risk of losing it and hence are in/at risk of poverty and social exclusion. Long-term and youth unemployment is high within the EU with demographic trends (ageing population, migration) affecting society and the world of work (European Commission, 2020a, c).

## The need for partnerships

Close collaboration between PES and other stakeholders is crucial to address policy challenges that cannot be resolved by institutions working in isolation. As well as for jointly responding to negative impacts of COVID-19 on vulnerable groups, further **policy gaps** are also observed especially regarding the digitalisation process (European Digital Strategy<sup>1</sup>). Policy responses are needed in regard to global challenges such as the ‘transformation of the world’ of the UN Agenda 2030 (UN; 2015). European PES are the main agencies executing employment policies facilitating labour market integration of jobseekers. They are the main actors implementing activation policies in the EU Member States and they play a vital role in facilitating successful labour market transitions and integration (European Commission, 2019). European PES are also increasingly required to assist new customers from those vulnerable groups farthest from integration

1 <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/content/european-digital-strategy>



by providing support services (Davern, 2020). Accordingly, **PES have been called to enhance cooperation between stakeholders** in the labour market (European Commission, 2019; European Union, 2014b, European Union 2020). They have already anticipated the need for and are committed to partnership working, especially working in concert with other employment service providers to support the European Pillar of Social Rights<sup>2</sup> and achieving the UN-Sustainable Development Goals (Davern, 2020; Nunn, 2015).

In addition to PES, other key stakeholders are called to work together, utilising the support available from the European Social Fund (ESF+). All EU Structural Fund programmes apply the partnership principle because it adds value to the implementation of European public policies (European Commission, 2016). Article 5 of the Common Provision Regulation makes it compulsory for each European Structural and Investment Fund to work in partnership at all programming stages and all levels<sup>3</sup>. The European Code of Conduct on Partnership was issued in 2014 (European Union, 2014a) and reviewed in 2018 (European Commission, 2018). The Review demands that regional and local stakeholders mobilise to achieve the Europe 2020 Growth Strategy. Successful partnerships should realise benefits beyond the functional goals of cooperation. They can help to develop shared interests and align values, a key element of cooperation within the European Union. (European Commission, 2018).

## The potential from ESF+

With a budget of 88.67 billion for 2021-2027, **ESF+** is the main instrument to invest in people. It merges the previous ESF, the Youth Employment Initiative<sup>4</sup>, the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived<sup>5</sup> and the EU Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI)<sup>6</sup> (European Commission, 2021). ESF+ priorities will be more closely aligned with the recommendations and

country analysis provided under the European Semester of policy coordination, and they will be geared towards making the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights a reality on the ground<sup>7</sup>. The ESF+ will operate jointly with other funds such as the European Regional Development Fund<sup>8</sup>, the Cohesion Fund<sup>9</sup> and Erasmus+<sup>10</sup> under the Cohesion and Values headings of the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027 (European Commission, 2021).

**ESF+ offers new opportunities for partnership working** since it will promote the involvement of all stakeholders throughout the different stages of its implementation. Partnerships between all actors at the relevant territorial levels and the socio-economic actors are essential for implementing social innovation<sup>11</sup> and social experimentation<sup>12</sup> within ESF+. Supporting social innovation to re-design delivery mechanisms implies a new emphasis on bottom-up approaches based on partnerships and values of co-creation (European Commission, 2021). Member States may also support upscaling approaches tested through social experimentation.

**European PES are well placed to take an active role** in deepening partnership work to improve policy embedded in a fruitful 'ecosystem'. This requires an organisational culture of openness and cooperation between partners, commitment from participating organisations, transparency, clarity of objectives from the outset, proportionate governance, and suitably regular monitoring (Davern, 2020). PES, however, need to adapt their partnership working: a consultation with stakeholders conducted for the evaluation of the PES Network found that 'there is some cooperation between the Network and other relevant labour market stakeholders (...), but there is scope for improvement in the future by developing stronger relationships with partners at EU and national levels' (European Commission, 2019, p.6).

2 [https://ec.europa.eu/info/european-pillar-social-rights\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/european-pillar-social-rights_en)

3 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32013R1303>

4 <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1176>

5 <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1089>

6 <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1081&langId=en>

7 [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/MEMO\\_18\\_3922](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/MEMO_18_3922)

8 [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/funding/erdf/](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/funding/erdf/)

9 [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/index.cfm/en/funding/cohesion-fund/](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/index.cfm/en/funding/cohesion-fund/)

10 [https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/node\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/node_en)

11 'Social innovations' mean activities that (i) are social both as to their ends and their means and (ii) relate to the development and implementation of new ideas that simultaneously meet social needs and create new social relationships or collaborations between public, civil society and/or private organisations, thereby benefiting society and boosting its capacity to act.

12 'Social experimentations' mean policy interventions that aim to provide an innovative response to social needs, implemented on a small scale and in conditions that enable their impact to be measured, prior to being implemented in other contexts including geographical and sectorial ones, or on a larger scale, if the results prove convincing.

# Advantages from cooperation

The spirit that has changed European PES from more bureaucratic ‘top-down’ institutions towards service-oriented agencies<sup>13</sup> during the late 1990s until (partly still) today, could now be harnessed for building fruitful learning ecosystems where PES take an active role in partnership development. The ‘conducting’ approach implies a strategic orientation for PES in which they sit at the centre of a Public Employment System incorporating a range of actors that provide specialist, sometimes complementary, overlapping or competitive services (Nunn, 2015).

Well-functioning cooperation between employment service providers and their service users is essential for PES since **employment services can better be aligned to the needs of beneficiaries.**

Enhanced cooperation can give the PES **more opportunities to develop innovative, evidence-based policies** (European Commission, 2019). ESF+ fostering social innovation and social experimentation can serve as a seedbed for testing new approaches. Partnerships can enable PES to increase placements through enabling actions which they may not be able to undertake alone: adopting *integrated policy approaches*, targeting **out-reach to the most deprived**, employing **preventive policy approaches**, and offering **person-centred approaches**.

Responsibility for labour market integration is shared between PES and cooperating stakeholders, including municipalities, NGOs, and social partners. Collective ownership is often accompanied by **partners sharing resources**. ESF+ can be used to test innovative labour market measures and also to develop partnerships.

ESF+ offers options to **improve multi-level arrangements** as policies are aligned alongside different governance levels. The ESF partnership approach is often implemented through devolution of funding and service delivery to local partnership and community structures (Stott & Scoppetta, 2011). The PES Network and individual PES can enhance engagement, for instance, in activities of the **‘transnational ESF landscape’**.

By engaging in these activities, PES can **learn from others** what does and does not work, an approach adopted by the “Long-term unemployment project” of the former Transnational ESF Employment Network<sup>14</sup> and within the EU Mutual Learning Programme<sup>15</sup>, to name just two examples.

Partnership development within the ESF+ with an active role for PES can also help to develop **adequate answers to the policy challenges faced regarding the changing world of work**. The strategic alignment of funds within ESF+ and coordination with other programmes can help to promote synergies between different policy domains, including labour market, education, health and social policy. Enhanced dynamic transitions in the labour market require responses that reduce existing policy silos and that require out-of-the-box thinking. Holistic approaches taken in the labour market and social policy include the change from age differentiation towards age integration and the shift from the ‘classical school’ of labour market transitions towards the incorporation of various forms of transitions that also comprise currently unpaid forms of work such as family care (Scoppetta, 2019).

**European PES are asked to take a more active role** in building a fruitful and collaborative ‘ecosystem’ since the various actors in labour market policy must come together and work in partnership for the benefit of the most deprived groups of society. This is especially important considering the challenges posed by COVID-19, technological change and the changing nature of work. These challenges require enhanced and aligned policy responses from key labour market actors to help those left behind. The ESF+ offers new options for PES regarding ideas, partners, funding, structures, other resources and the sustainability of measures. European PES are consequently called to utilise the ESF+ and prioritise a more active role in partnership development during the 2021-2027 funding period for the benefit of the vulnerable groups in society and for the EU as a whole.

13 Or customer-centric organisations (Hägele, 2019).

14 <https://ec.europa.eu/esf/transnationality/ltu-project>

15 e.g.,” Peer Review on “Employer’s service delivery” (26-28 October 2020, online)

# Responding to the changing context: strategic challenges and ways forward for PES and other stakeholders

## A conceptual model for the Employment Support Services ‘Ecosystem’

The first day of the 2021 PES Network conference ‘The Power of PES partnerships’ was dedicated to presenting the support services for integrating people into the labour market as an ecosystem. This focused on the new ways in which PES and stakeholders cooperate towards this shared goal. Responding to new and accelerating challenges requires PES to adopt new ways of thinking, to embrace new principles and to incorporate ‘big ideas’ that can help guide policy, practice and organisational change. Several pre-existing and new ideas that might guide policy are relevant to PES partnerships. The concept of ‘**Decent Work**’ is well established in the European Commission (e.g., the legal framework for the PES Network (European Commission, 2019)) and other international organisations, notably the ILO (International Labour Organisation) and the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals. This concept can help guide the response to desirable job growth in the context of increased ‘precarity’. The concept of ‘**transitional labour markets**’ (Schmid, 2008a, 2008b, 2015) can help focus attention on the need to support new, more complex and more numerous transitions throughout working life. This is especially the case in relation to frequent shifts between training and skills development, caring and other family responsibilities and work, and more frequent work-to-work transitions.

It is widely accepted that the labour market is an ‘**ensemble of institutions and relationships**’ between actors (Schmid, 2016). Institutions and actors co-regulate one another’s behaviour and the flow of information between them also helps to shape decision making within and between these institutions. That means that accurate and adequate information flow between households, employers and a range of labour market stakeholders (e.g., PES, skills providers etc) is crucial to ensuring ‘**positive complementarities**’ (e.g., policies that encourage households and firms to invest in skills) and ‘**beneficial constraints**’ (e.g., policies which prevent involuntary non-standard work contracts constraining innovation) (Streck, 1997).

Understanding of labour market institutions can be improved by the contribution of feminist economists who have drawn particular attention to the way that the for-

mal labour market is dependent on household or community processes (Elson, 1998) that generate ‘**social reproduction**’ or the regeneration of society on a day-to-day and intergenerational basis (Steans and Tepe, 2010). This includes the often gendered and unpaid (or gendered and low paid) care, provisioning and the transfer of stabilising values and ideas. Designing services to support transitional labour markets and generate positive constraints and complementarities requires that social reproduction be integrated into the analysis of the way that the labour market operates as an institutional ensemble (Nunn, 2018).

**Social Innovation** and the concept of ‘**co-creation**’ can help to understand how services can be designed to meet the needs of different labour market actors and institutions, including the role of social reproduction. Co-creation means the inclusion of service users and potential users as ‘problem-solving... experts on their own experiences ... creation of (long-term) outcomes by changing the relationships, positions and rules between stakeholders and customers’ (Hägele, 2019). It means recognising the interests of service users and empowering them to direct the composition and desired outcomes of services. Evidence on the aggregate effects of ‘non-standard work’ suggests that services which empower workers to make decisions over their employment status at different phases of their life can be rewarding while leading to productivity growth in the context of changing work (Schmid, 2016).

PES can enhance their role in the “ecosystem” through facilitating and channelling the behaviour and decision-making of a range of different actors, especially through information flows. This is close to the ‘**conducting**’ role of PES requiring PES to operate in a range of effective partnerships. Conducting implies that partnerships should extend from contracting out to a **form of ‘inclusive governance**’. This involves all social interests associated with labour market policy (including service users and their advocates) joining a conversation about the future delivery of PES services. Inclusive governance recognises the diversity of the agents and relationships involved in the wider ecosystem of the labour market and focuses on the co-creation of solutions to shared understandings of labour market problems.

## Building successful partnerships

Mutual learning between European PES has already focused on ‘what works’ in developing effective partnerships (Nunn, 2015; Scoppetta, 2013). Recently the PES Network has revisited this work, strongly endorsing the need for PES to work in a range of partnerships and defining a typology with four models (Davern, 2020):

- **Agile** – producing quick solutions to time-limited and specific problems as they emerge.
- **Sub-contracted** – assigning or outsourcing specific tasks to external organisations which may have competence, resources and skills relevant to the delivery of that task. There are different forms of sub-contracting arrangements from traditional contracts to black-box payment by results arrangements. Each of these has strengths and weaknesses and is suited to the sourcing of different forms of expertise in different market conditions.
- **Co-constructed** – enabling partners to share power, responsibility and expertise. They are particularly useful to integrate service users – such as jobseekers and employers – into the process of designing and delivering services.
- **Supportive** – “catalysts for the growth and success of participants and provide space for members to grow, succeed, and generate innovative ideas”. They may be looser in structure and have less of an initial focus on the delivery of specified outcomes and outputs but aim to deliver broadly defined policy objectives through the development of organisational and network capacity.

During the 2021 PES Network conference on ‘The power of PES partnerships’, a dedicated workshop considered each type of partnership and aimed at presenting a specific example:

- **Agile** – The example presented was the “Karjeras” regional career centre in Alytus, Lithuania. This innovative practice was introduced as a pilot in 2019, as part of the wider national Vocational Guidance Model developed in 2018 by participants in the “Create Lithuania” programme. This model pinpoints improved career guidance as a tool to fight Lithuania’s rising unemployment rate and increasing number of recipients of social benefits. In particular, the model focuses on addressing a series of structural challenges: firstly, that career guidance services are often duplicated in different institutions; secondly, that such services are only available to a small percentage of the population. In the case of Alytus, this translates to two main issues: on the one hand insufficient vocational guidance in schools due to insufficient resources, competence and clear programmes to provide quality services; on the other hand, fragmented vocational guidance in the Employment Service.

- **Sub-contracted** – The example presented was a partnership implemented in Estonia: The Workability Reform. The initiative stems from a proposal from disabled clients to fight negative attitudes which prevent the integration of people who face barriers to work or with limited work capability. The main objective is to help people with decreased work capacity to find secure employment. To achieve this, the Estonian PES – Töötukassa – decided to partner with NGOs which work with disabled people for both service design and delivery. The services were designed together in collaboration and negotiation with partners, harnessing their experience and understanding of the needs and expectations of disabled people to design more inclusive services. The partners were also charged with service delivery, through legally binding agreements to meet objectives determined by PES. This allows greater flexibility than in-house provision of inclusion services and builds on the higher trust which disabled clients sometimes have in NGOs.
- **Co-constructed** – The example presented is the use of social impact bonds by Actiris, the Brussels PES, to improve vocational integration through digital training for Brussels jobseekers. After successful initiatives led in 2014-2016, with “DUO for a JOB: mentoring of young migrants” and 2017-2022 with “Intervention on supply and demand: job crafting for long-term unemployed”, the third SIB, from 2020 to 2025 is called “BeCode: digital training for jobseekers”. This digital training project addresses the following double challenge: high demand for and shortage of people with digital skills despite high levels of long-term unemployment. The BeCode Digital Training project was co-constructed between three parties. Social investors provide upfront funding to BeCode, the service provider. The private investors are represented by Kois Invest. A monitoring committee representing BeCode and the investors oversees the operation of the Social Impact Bond to ensure compliance with correct processes. PES representatives participate as observers. The co-constructed nature of the partnership helps to promote client focus and innovation, since proposals can be launched to attract potential partners even before a detailed specification has been agreed upon. It does however require the most intensive activity to be undertaken before the project’s launch, through agreement programme design and resource input from investors.
- **Supportive** – The example presented is the Regional labour market transition teams established in the Netherlands in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis. The teams developed from a support package introduced by the Ministry of Social Affairs & Employment to mitigate the negative labour market effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. In particular, the transition teams aim to address an imbalance in labour demand induced by the crisis, as some sectors are in decline, while in others there is a high demand for

skilled workers. The Ministry invited actors, including social partners, NGOs, vocational training institutes, private contractors, municipalities and PES to join forces in supporting jobseekers – and employees who are threatened by unemployment – to find new jobs. This process was enacted in a formal partnership in which the Ministry of Social Affairs & Employment serves as the awarding authority and resulted in the development of “Regional labour market transition teams”, made up of employees from Municipalities, Unions, Employer organisations, and PES (UWV). The precise formation of the team may differ in each individual labour market region. The services provided supplement those already available from the PES and Municipalities. These include career counselling, labour market orientation, vocational education and training, job matching and coaching, as well as tailored, custom-made services designed for specific jobseekers, for example mental health support or financial consulting. A special focus is also placed on supporting disabled workers through services to keep disabled workers “fit for work” and through sheltered work.

Successful partnerships involve adequate resources, high-quality leadership, structures and partners that are well suited to their objectives, as well as shared understanding, values and motivations. There is more detailed guidance in the various reviews and summaries produced by the PES Network (Davern, 2020; Nunn, 2015; Scoppetta, 2013).

### From changing service user needs to changing PES services

The second day of the 2021 PES Network conference ‘The power of PES partnerships’ was focused on the changing role of PES and particularly on the swift changes in service provision brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. Even before COVID-19, socio-economic changes meant that there was a need to **adapt PES services to support new and more complex transitions** throughout the life course (Scoppetta, 2019). The combination of longer-term social trends and the catalytic effect of COVID-19 means that PES will increasingly deal with new types of service user and jobseekers/changers with new needs. As these trends develop, PES may find that they are dealing with higher-skilled service users with more ability to co-create their own labour market journeys or that co-creation is more necessary to overcome entrenched and complex labour market barriers. There will be a need to ensure that PES service users have access to skills updating services across their working life course and that lifelong learning opportunities respond dynamically to overall changes in the economy. These will need to be shaped locally and across different sectors and occupations. This is central to ensuring that trends such as automation, digitalisation and AI lead to job-rich and high productivity growth. **PES services will need to be further targeted at existing inequalities** (e.g. skills, gender, ethnicity and disability employment and pay

gaps), ensuring that employers adjust their Human Resources practices to these new realities and that services support people to access second and third chances for education, training and social inclusion through decent work. **Life-course transitions** need to be seen by PES as opportunities to deliver supportive services and reduce inequalities (Scoppetta, 2019).

Rising to these challenges requires that PES continue to develop their existing positive reforms in relation to **dynamic service provision**. Training will need an even greater focus on new needs and will need to be mapped to local employment opportunities and skills gaps. There will be an increasing need to **integrate not just unemployment benefits but social protection with PES services** to ensure seamless support across transitions and to facilitate labour market adjustments (Scoppetta, 2019). Targeted Work Placements might support particularly vulnerable groups but will need to be aligned to growth sectors and occupations. Like other workers, PES staff will need to have their expertise, knowledge and skills constantly updated. Inclusive governance is the key to successful partnership working especially through co-creation between employers, service users and those who support them.

One of the workshops on the second day of the 2021 PES Network conference explored the role of PES in the provision of short-time work schemes both before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. Short-time work (STW) schemes are defined in a 2020 European Commission regulation proposal as ‘*public programmes that allow firms experiencing economic difficulties to temporarily reduce the hours worked while providing their employees with income support from the State for the hours not worked*’. In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdown measures adopted by governments forced many businesses to reduce or cease trading. In many countries, existing short-time work schemes were simplified or enhanced to address the challenges of increased numbers of applicants and to provide adequate support to workers forced to reduce their working hours.

In 2020, the government of **Luxemburg** decided to set up a special short-time work scheme (the **“force majeure / coronavirus” scheme**), with an accelerated application and advance payment process, to help alleviate the tangible repercussions of the crisis on Luxembourgish workers. The design of the scheme was complemented by the development and implementation of an integrated online application and payment processing procedure, to allow for easier access and application for workers. This also served to reduce the application processing time (the time elapsing between the finalisation of the application and the reception of the payment). Before the COVID-19 crisis, the PES processed on average 20-25 applications for short-time working per month. In April 2020, the PES suddenly received almost 14.300 applications covering almost 150.000 employees, underlining the importance and relevance of this kind of support to workers.

The **COVID-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP)** is a statutory income support payment implemented in **Ireland** for employees and self-employed people who have lost their employment due to the COVID-19 public health emergency. All applicants are required to have at least one social insurance contribution in the 4 weeks before their PUP claim or be in insurable self-employment. The rates are determined by an individual's prior average weekly earnings. The rate of the PUP for a self-employed person is calculated by reference to their income in either 2018 or 2019, whichever is greater. PUP is also payable to self-employed people where there has been a significant reduction in their trading income as a direct consequence of the pandemic. As of 12 April 2021, there are some 420,000 people in receipt of the PUP. At its height in April 2020, over 600,000 were using the scheme. To date, over €6.5 billion has been spent on PUP.

**Temporary lay-off schemes** have been used in **Norway** for decades as an alternative to dismissals when companies are affected by a temporary shutdown or missing work orders. Their main objective is to keep employers and their employees connected through their work contracts. While this longstanding practice has traditionally been used in only specific sectors, it has been widely applied across all during the corona crisis. The extended scheme has been prolonged several times during the corona pandemic to prevent mass and long-term unemployment, and recently a new measure (wage support to employers) has been introduced so that employers will be able to redeploy and retain employees in the summer while they remain covered by the temporary lay-off scheme.

## More targeted services to respond to specific needs

Workshops on the second day of the 2021 PES Network conference 'The power of PES partnerships' also focused on how PES can better respond to the needs of different groups, both before, during and after the COVID-19 crisis. Workshops focused on measures targeted at SMEs, vulnerable groups, and young people. One of the workshops particularly focused on services aimed at supporting the development of digital skills for young people to support recovery.

Two examples of support for SMEs were presented: The Starting Strong programme in Ireland, and the Employment for All programme in Malta.

The **Starting Strong programme** in Ireland is part of the Going for Growth suite of initiatives introduced in 2008 to encourage female entrepreneurs to be more ambitious and to support them to realise their aspirations. Going for Growth was originally focused on entrepreneurs who were already well established. It became evident, however, that a clear need existed for women at an earlier stage of their entrepreneurial journey to benefit from the type of peer support that Going for Growth provided. Hence Starting Strong was developed and implemented in 2015. The target beneficiaries are innovative female entrepreneurs. The business will typically be in the early revenue stage and will have moved well beyond proof of concept. The programme follows a 6-month cycle during which participants meet in groups, each supported by an individual lead entrepreneur. After successful completion of the cycle, the participants are invited to join the Going for Growth Community to avail of continued support for their entrepreneurial journey. Starting Strong, as part of Going for Growth, is funded primarily through the support of Enterprise Ireland, the main development agency in the country, by KPMG, a major accountancy firm, and the voluntary contribution of time by Lead Entrepreneurs. The arrangement with Enterprise Ireland and KPMG is formal, while that with the Lead Entrepreneurs is informal.

The **Employment for all programme** in Malta aims to integrate substance abusers undergoing rehabilitation in the labour market by enhancing their employability skills and increasing their employment prospects, which will facilitate their entry and retention in employment. SMEs are the main employer beneficiaries of the programme. The partnership stems from Jobsplus – the Maltese PES – identifying the need to offer specialised services to unemployed substance abusers to increase their employability. To address this issue, Jobsplus decided to reach out to other stakeholders, specifically NGOs in Malta that have the structure and capacity to provide specialised employment-related services, including the Inspire Foundation for its expertise on intellectual disability, the Richmond Foundation, for mental health issues, as well as Caritas Malta and OASI Gozo, for substance abuse rehabilitation.



### LEARNING POINTS:

- The legal framework must be clear.
- Access to schemes should not be too strict.
- Partnerships with employers and unions are essential.



The support offered includes:

- practical training on independent, social and employability skills, gardening, food preparation and hygiene, maintenance and others;
- guidance and advice regarding personal skills, preferences and talents;
- work exposure and job placement within the private sector, including on and off the job monitoring;
- other services according to individual needs, such as social work service, counselling and psychotherapy.

This practice has been implemented by Jobsplus for more than 20 years with various enhancements improving results. Through the partnerships between the Inclusive Employment Services Unit within Jobsplus and the NGOs, participants – mainly persons with disability, substance abusers, persons under detoxification treatment, persons with legal barriers and social cases – are offered customised service according to their needs.



#### LEARNING POINTS:

- There can be an important role for PES in developing partnerships to promote entrepreneurship.
- Partnerships can benefit from design input provided by beneficiaries/customers.
- Partnerships can be particularly useful in providing specialist support for the integration of the most vulnerable job seekers.
- Integration partnerships can be especially effective if they cooperate in a delivery chain that reflects the client re-integration journey.
- In multi-agency partnerships, roles and responsibilities must be clear.
- Support partnerships for SMEs must consider the specific issues faced by smaller employers.
- SMEs can offer good opportunities to employ vulnerable clients, but in many cases may need support from partners to deal with some post-recruitment HR issues, lacking an internal infrastructure.

Two examples of support for vulnerable groups were presented during workshops: Lanzaderas de Empleo (Employment Launchers) in Spain and Training programmes providing digital skills to unemployed people in Greece.

The **Lanzaderas de Empleo** project was first launched in 2013. The project was designed as an innovative way to help unemployed people to overcome isolation and demotivation. The concept is to accompany the unemployed through a process of personal and professional transformation that will allow them to optimise their job search and secure new possibilities for job placement. Lanzaderas are 5-month programmes with groups of 20 unemployed people of different ages, educational profiles and career paths, with one technician who helps and guides the participants. The aim is for participants to find a job, to start a new activity (entrepreneurship), or to improve their qualifications. The programme can also be delivered 100% online. Participants are invited to identify their skills and areas for improvement, design their job search plan and update their CVs. Job interview simulations are also conducted, and the participants are invited to elaborate employability maps, contact companies and seek business opportunities. The project is implemented by the regional public employment services in partnership with different public administrations (e.g. provincial councils, city councils) and private entities. The regional employment services can finance these programmes with state funds, their own resources or European budgets.

In the second example, the Greek PES – OEAD – has harnessed the digital expertise from two major institutions – Google and Coursera – to bridge the gap between digital skills and employability for unemployed people. Google is one of the biggest technology companies in the U.S. information technology industry.

Coursera is the largest online higher education platform in the world. More than 200 of the world's best universities and educators in the industry have partnered with Coursera to offer more than 4,000 courses that train more than 53 million students worldwide. As students complete their courses, they receive certificates from the leading university and industry providers. The partnership with both companies is formalised through Memoranda of Understanding (MoU). So far, two programmes have been implemented between July 2020 and February 2021.

The first aimed at reducing the digital skills gap between the young unemployed and the labour market, while the second focused on allowing unemployed people to access distance learning programmes in the COVID-19 period.



#### LEARNING POINTS:

- Vulnerable groups: all unemployed people experience some vulnerability but some who experience higher levels need extra support.
- It is important to engage companies and other actors that have a stake and can reach out to target groups – PES have a key role to play in reaching out to such organisations.
- It takes time to build these types of partnerships and cost-effectiveness is important.
- COVID-19 is accelerating the requirement to improve digital skills, increasing the need for people to acquire in-demand skills.
- Not only the content but also the complexity of programme design determines which target groups can access it.
- Programme success depends on clarity concerning goals, good management and visibility so that beneficiaries can easily access support.
- The transferability of an initiative depends upon the availability of funding and the quality of cooperation.

Three examples of practices investing in digital skills for young people were presented: the Spanish “Free training in digital skills”, the Italian “Growing Digital” and the French regional practice “Skills Investment Plan”.

Both in Europe and globally, the COVID-19 pandemic caused a massive increase in the use of digital tools, to enable teleworking and for people to keep in touch. In many cases, this exacerbated a pre-existing need for improvement in digital skills and knowledge.

This was the reason behind the introduction of the “Free training in digital skills” in Spain, established in 2019 before COVID-19. The training is a result of a collaboration between the Spanish PES (SEPE) and the National Foundation for Training in Employment (FUNDAE). The organisations have so far engaged 28 partner companies, including large digital players such as Amazon Web Services, CISCO, Accenture, Telefónica Foundation, Google, Huawei, IBM, Linux, Oracle, amongst others. The partners are engaged by FUNDAE to provide free online training courses, offering different levels of complexity and specialisation. Currently, more than 600 training modules have been made available and are accessible via FUN-

DAE’s website. The training is open to the entire population of working age, but the initiative is mostly targeted at responding to the needs of SMEs and unemployed people. From the launch of the programme to October 2020, the total number of visits to the training space exceeded one million, underlining the significance of the initiative for Spanish workers.

A similar context led to the development and implementation of the “Growing Digital” practice in Italy with two aims. It provides training to support the development of digital skills for young unemployed people and NEETs, while also supporting SMEs to find young recruits. The project was first implemented in 2015 and then renewed in 2018 until 2023. It provides 50+ hour courses to young unemployed and NEETs, who then participate in workshops and interviews with SMEs willing to hire them or offer them internships. The project is run by the Italian Union of Chambers of Commerce in partnership with Google and the Italian PES (ANPAL) and is funded through the Youth Guarantee.

The French Skills Investment Plan aims at upskilling job-seekers with a focus on the young and the least qualified. It provides vocational training, improved training schemes and training conditions, and prioritises the strengthening of digital skills suited to the jobs of the future. With investment of over 15 billion euro, the challenges addressed by the plan are threefold: training for one million low-skilled/unskilled jobseekers, and one million young people furthest away from the labour market (in particular people with disabilities and those living in urban policy priority neighbourhoods – quartiers prioritaires de la politique de la ville) and rural regeneration areas (zones de revitalisation rurale); meeting the needs of companies facing recruiting difficulties; and contributing to the skill-related process of transformation, particularly in light of the digital and green transitions.



#### LEARNING POINTS:

- Partnerships allow PES to improve their outreach. This is particularly crucial for services aimed at groups of people further away from the labour market.
- Partnerships are important to identify skill needs. Training can often only be delivered effectively through partnerships.
- Partnerships can work well in targeting measures at different groups (youth, NEETs, older workers, women...)





Finally, one workshop focused on young people and particularly on the effects of the Youth Guarantee and the PES partnerships underpinning its implementation. Two examples were presented: firstly, the one-stop-shops introduced in Finland as part of the Youth Guarantee, secondly the Upskill programme in Portugal.

One-stop shops were introduced in Finland in 2015 following studies that showed that in some cases young people value face-to-face interactions over other forms of contact e.g., online. They were also implemented to ease the challenge of a fragmented service sector, including employment, social and health services, as well as to accommodate changes in working life. One-Stop-Shop Guidance Centres for young people provide a holistic approach where different service providers across private, public and third sectors operate in one place, providing a better and simpler way to serve NEETs. The Centres have been rolled out nationwide under the Youth Guarantee scheme and have proven to satisfy young people's needs. The broad network of partners includes youth and employment counsellors from the Finnish PES, social workers, nurses, outreach workers (especially for youth), and a range of other service providers. By creating this cooperative network of partner organisations, the measure eliminates service duplication and gaps in provision and simplifies access. Private counselling and guidance, as well as group sessions, are available for customers to find employment or education, support life management and career planning, and the development of social and everyday life skills. Recruitment events are also organised. Social workers and nurses can provide counselling for health and social security issues.

The Upskill programme in Portugal is aimed at developing digital skills to promote employment. Though it was not initially directed at young people, most participants are young, with an average of 28 years. This programme stems from the lack of qualified professionals in the ICT sector in Portugal. The demand for qualified people with digital skills has increased considerably in recent years, not only for companies that operate directly in the ICT sector but also for others dealing with digital transformation. IEFP – the Portuguese PES – therefore developed Upskill: a training programme which aims to retrain, by 2023, around 3.000 unemployed or underemployed people as professionals in Information Technology, Communication and Electronics. The project is funded partly through IEFP's budget, part of wider government funding, and will therefore benefit from the EU Recovery Plan. The companies involved also contribute by paying a grant to the trainees during the on-the-job training.

One of the innovative features of this Programme is the guarantee that at least 80% of trainees who complete the training course will be hired by the companies where they undertook work experience. Though an attraction for potential beneficiaries, in the current context this is a constraint for some companies who, if participating, must offer jobs.

#### LEARNING POINTS:

- Involving youth organisations in partnerships brings many benefits. They can act as a bridge between individual young people and authorities, help create targeted measures, enhance young people's motivation and help spread information.
- It is important to define the responsibilities and leadership and management roles of cooperation partners.
- Digitalisation is reshaping the world of work. Young people's survival in the labour market will depend on digital skills. Partnerships will help to define and elaborate future digital skills needs.

### The future of the employment ecosystem

The third and final day of the 2021 PES Network conference 'The power of PES partnerships' focused on addressing the changing reality in which PES operate and how PES are adapting to deliver services that are increasingly relevant for customers and their journey towards employment. One of the main issues which emerged from the day was the impact of technology on the labour market, specifically new ways of working, the role played by PES and impact on their service delivery, and the ways in which they engage with current and future partners. New technology is central to partnership working and inclusive governance for several reasons:

- **Technology can facilitate more effective partnership working**, facilitating the transfer of information, the development of shared meeting spaces and the development of outputs. IT can also support performance management and rapid responses to changing labour market information.
- **Partnerships are required to provide a PES focus on growth sectors, many of which will be heavily dependent upon the enhanced application of IT/Digital technology**, and to enable a better understanding of employment and skills needs. This will be crucial for PES to more effectively support employers with their recruitment needs and jobseekers with acquiring the skills required to access new opportunities.
- **PES can also use partnerships to support the uptake of technology** more widely across sectors as part of the overall development of their competitiveness and productivity. This includes facilitating links between employers, sharing information and also mapping training provision to the needs of these employers.

- **Big data offers the opportunity for real-time mapping of changing balances** between skills demand, supply and training provision. It will also require drawing data from a wide range of labour market actors. This will identify needs to co-create analysis to ensure that the implications and limitations of data from multiple and complex sources are fully understood.
- **PES will need to use technology to help jobseekers improve their skills by offering opportunities for digital training.** While there are many downsides to the COVID-19 pandemic, one of the upsides is cultural and behavioural change in relation to the uptake of digital and online training (OECD, 2021; World Economic Forum, 2020, 2021). The approach already adopted by many PES seeking to ensure that key groups of vulnerable workers and unemployed have basic IT digital skills will need to become standardised. PES may then act as a broker and commissioner to ensure that there are sufficient learning opportunities available to meet and match employer and jobseeker needs. Some of this may necessitate the development of further partnerships to support training provision, an increased focus on quality assurance and facilitating certification to overcome common challenges. In some cases, it may also mean providing infrastructure to facilitate access for those without IT resources. While this will require investment and new ways of working with new partners, the potential benefits in terms of efficient and tailored access to training provision are substantial. PES partnerships to facilitate provision, demand and access to training via digital media can help to overcome some of the most significant barriers to adult learning (e.g., time, financial resources, location) (OECD, 2020). Many countries already have established platforms for training providers such as the ‘Smart Training Education Platform’ in South Korea. In France, the Ministry of Labour has established a platform for sectoral skills development (e.g., via Massive Online Open Courses in skills related to food processing). In Germany, the Federal State of Baden-Württemberg provides a platform for online learning. In several countries, the government provided free online training available during lockdown periods (e.g., Ireland, Spain, Croatia, Romania, Sweden) or expanded free training usually only available to the unemployed to those on short-time working or pay subsidy schemes.
- PES are well placed to use their traditional role, exchanging information between employers and jobseekers to help shape the quality and content of available online learning and training to meet the needs of growth sectors. Partnership working will be central to this. **Partnerships can help to facilitate the exchange of information between new and existing firms (within and between sectors) and training providers** to ensure that skills development supports business and wider economic growth, especially at local and/or regional levels.
- **Technology can help PES to develop new co-constructed partnerships with service users.** Technology offers a mechanism for jobseekers to access flexible support from PES staff, as and when it is needed, and to provide timely information about the barriers they face. Therefore, innovative services can be developed providing the support required to enable clients to overcome these.
- **Technology also offers the opportunity to engage a wider range of stakeholders in inclusive governance,** helping to co-create labour market goals and services to achieve these. Applying technology can also make monitoring and evaluation more transparent and inclusive.
- **PES can use triage to identify the capacity and capability of PES service users to access their own online or digital services** and to identify those jobseekers who lack basic skills including in the use of IT. Such service users are likely to face barriers to labour market entry and progression and it is therefore essential that they are targeted for specialist support to ensure that they are not left behind.

### Future-looking practices developing the role of PES in the future ecosystem

Workshops on the final day of the 2021 PES Network conference focused on presenting and discussing practices around four themes: the changing labour market and the changing role of PES, the (re-)integration of clients in a digital world, and the impact of technology on PES activities.

Two examples were presented illustrating the theme of partnerships adjusting to meet the needs of a changing labour market: the Croatian approach to career advising in higher education, and the skills centres in Wallonia (Belgium). The “Career advice for people in higher education” practice stems from the need of the Bjelovar University of Applied Sciences in Croatia to offer adequate career advice to its students before they enter the labour market. The aim is to improve the employability of students and to reduce their time between graduation and finding a job. The practice targets students of bachelor study programmes at the University which initiated the partnership in 2018 building on support from Bjelovar CISOK (Career Guidance centre).

The activities offered include lectures, workshops, individual and group counselling, support in the preparation of a CV and job application, and the preparation of application documentation for international mobility programmes. This practice has resulted in more students receiving career advice, benefiting from advice on how to prepare successful job/placement/mobility applications and reduced time between graduation and finding a job after college.

The Skills Centres in Wallonia were established to provide high-end information and training in leading sectors of the economy. The concept is based on the integration of the needs of socio-economic actors and is delivered through partnerships between the public and private sectors. The Skills Centres support the economic growth of areas with high development potential. The aim is to equip Wallonia with “new generation” training centres. These centres therefore aim for quality, creativity, the development of human capital, and accessibility for all. The objective is to foster economic development and to raise public awareness related to certain growth professions as well as promoting lifelong learning. The skills centres are based on formal partnerships including between the public employment and vocational training service (Le Forem), academics (universities, research centres), training providers, enterprises, sectors federations, providers in the field of business creation, and Walloon government decision-makers. The centres are funded through regional funding from the Walloon government and by European funds. The first centre was created in 2000, now there are 24 Centres across the Region on 49 sites. Every year 111.000 people receive training.



#### LEARNING POINTS

In the workshop examining partnerships in the changing labour markets, participants concluded that they are crucial to understanding rapidly evolving labour market needs.

- PES must talk to other labour market actors to ensure that they understand developments and trends.
- Extended partnerships can add particular value, especially through expanding their scope beyond traditional arrangements involving public employment services and NGOs.
- It is increasingly important to develop partnerships with schools and the wider education sector to facilitate better school-to-work transitions.
- Partnerships are important to overcome the skills gap, which has perhaps been exacerbated by the labour market disruption of COVID-19.
- Crucially partnerships are needed to address gender-based barriers and end gender discrimination in the labour market, which unfortunately remains a very real and prevalent issue.

Two examples were featured in a dedicated workshop exploring the changing role of PES: the JobTech digital infrastructure introduced in Sweden, and the Online Job Search functionality developed by the PES in Slovenia.

The JobTech development is a digital infrastructure providing the basis for the development of a Swedish employment and educational support ecosystem. JobTech particularly addresses the issue of the lack of a unified, open and functional digital infrastructure covering both the Swedish labour market and the education systems. This is accentuated by the need to improve skills development and lifelong learning opportunities and reduce skill mismatches. Arbetsförmedlingen, the Swedish Public Employment Service, therefore had the idea to introduce an open and dynamic digital infrastructure for these sectors in order to build stronger bridges between the worlds of work and education and training, with an aim to ultimately to better support the labour market. JobTech was implemented in April 2018 utilising a lean approach to project start-up and implementation. The objective is to develop an infrastructure that grows and develops in collaboration with the actors as they build their services into the project. Over 500 organisations are involved: from large IT companies to small start-ups, municipalities, other governmental organisations, major banks and insurance companies, universities, and schools. JobTech Development is managed and developed by an expert unit within the Swedish PES.

The Online Job Search functionality was developed by ESS, the Slovenian PES, to introduce a modern, simple and efficient tool for searching job vacancies. The tool aims to help both job seekers, through improved searching of job vacancies, and employers, through the implementation of positive reference badges. External suppliers were contracted to develop the search and matching tool and to ensure webpage integration. Three groups from within the PES also participated: the search and match project implementation group with members from the IT, business and analytics departments; a test group involving counsellors from PES local offices; and a working group for the positive reference symbol for employers, including PES members from the IT, business and analytics departments. The tool includes a series of new functionalities. Through new semantic search technology, the user can find an expanded list of vacancies including also content-related jobs based on the search entered. The idea is to provide job seekers with the widest possible insight into the labour market and also offer them jobs they had not considered previously. Successful companies where good employers are recognised as prioritising the career development of their employees are marked with a special symbol.



### LEARNING POINTS

The workshop added clarity to the meaning of the term “employment service ecosystem”.

- To exploit the benefits from this wider ecosystem, employment service provider organisations must involve staff and carefully consider cultural change issues.
- Open-source data offers immense potential to offer more personalised support.
- Ethical implications must be considered and correct safeguards for data usage must be introduced as the ecosystem evolves.
- The ecosystem offers particular scope for offering better services to employer customers, though it needs to be well-designed so that employers and other partners will trust the service and fully engage.

The workshop concluded that that the ecosystem is an essential component of the far more dynamic world of work in which PES now operate. This will continue to change and develop sometimes very frequently, enabling integration support services to keep pace with the extremely frequently changing labour market.

The theme of the impact of technology on future relationships was explored through presentations of two practices: the #COVID-19 VDAB and partners digital ecosystem in Flanders (Belgium) and the Job Market Finland system.

The system introduced by VDAB (the Belgian-Flanders PES) allows partners to send vacancies automatically using VDAB Application Programming Interfaces (APIs). Their vacancies are then highlighted on the VDAB website. The system was introduced in October 2016 and adapted in March 2020 for temporary jobs related to COVID-19, filtering and highlighting them on the website. The system was developed by VDAB as part of its wider business model for open services. Some of the APIs are free while a charge on employers/users is made for others (the CV service for example costs 6000 euro per partner for one year). Some partners are also not granted access to a particular API, for example, employment agencies do not get access to the job vacancy service. As of early 2021, 455 partners are involved in the system. This does not include multiple offices, for example, the Randstad Temporary Work Agency (TWA) only counts as one partner but has 76 offices.

The Job Market Finland system has been developed to meet a similar need. The Finnish PES – TEM – realised that overlapping services and processes made it difficult for the customer to navigate through TEM’s digital sys-

tems to receive support. TEM therefore decided to design a completely new digital service system with a multidisciplinary and partnership-based service. The main objective of Job Market Finland is to promote the matching of supply and demand. This is done by creating a shared platform for job seekers, employers and service providers. For job applicants, the platform will offer improved possibilities to find work as well as information and services for career support. Employers will get better tools for finding new employees and also information and support services.

There are currently more than 220 services provided by public, private and third sector organisations available on the digital platform. Interestingly, the platform is being developed through a collaborative process including a development group of approximately 400 people. They are joined through an informal partnership. The vision of the platform was built together with stakeholders from the public, private and third sectors.

Partners have been able to influence the layout, contents, processes and terminology used in the platform. Joint development takes place at interactive meetings, online workspaces, and customer feedback.

Anyone interested in participating in the joint development process (including private citizens) is free to join the development group.



### LEARNING POINTS:

- Posts onto open-source platforms can facilitate enhanced data collection and access.
- Government institutions can play an important role in ensuring an inclusive approach to data acquisition, eliminating discriminatory practices and inappropriate data harvesting.
- Data is *perhaps the highest valued commodity* available to Public Employment Services, but it must be usable and of good quality.
- The main benefit of data-driven support systems is to enable more personalised services to be provided.
- It is especially important to make sure that partner selection is well considered and that the right partners are brought together to make the most of any collaboration.
- The way PES are working with partners is changing in a paradigm shift.
- Private and public employment services have equal stakes and can have equal benefits from collaborating more fruitfully.
- There is scope to build ever more intuitive systems. This requires regular, well-constructed feedback from end-users of systems and data from other partners to ensure mutual benefits for all.

Finally, two examples were presented showcasing the topic of the (re-)integration of jobseekers in an increasingly digital world: the “New Plan” Self-assessment Tool for Orientation and Counselling developed by the Bundesagentur für Arbeit – the German PES – and the Job-VEU model of cooperation between the employment system and the educational system developed in Denmark.

The “New Plan” was initiated in 2019 in the context of lifelong career guidance to complete the development of BA’s counselling services. Against the background of the far-reaching changes in the labour market, employees are facing new challenges: on the one hand, they must think about their career path in a new and more thoughtful way; on the other adults are often unclear about their strengths and professional development opportunities. People therefore need to reflect on professional development needs. For those in need of vocational (re)orientation and further education, the BA has developed the New Plan online tool. This has been operational since December 2020, and several partners are providing ongoing feedback.

Further components such as a test for further training and a strengths-to-weaknesses test will be made available by October 2022. Based on analysis of statistical data, the BA’s clients will receive suggestions inspired by others and career ideas beyond the scope of their current job.

The Job-VEU model in Denmark was developed to coordinate up-skilling education and training for adults in cooperation with the educational system, private companies, job centres, trade unions and employers’ associations. In 2017/2018 a tripartite agreement between the Danish government and the social partners gave the Ministry of Employment and the Danish PES the task of improving coordination between the educational system and the employment system (jobcentres) for unemployed and employed adults in need of up-skilling.

One of the main focal points of the Job-VEU-model was to only initiate education programmes when there is a specific labour market need. The main target groups were unemployed and employed adults in need of up-skilling to stay or become employed. The activities involved projects enabling private companies to recruit people with the specific skill sets needed. During COVID-19, projects that aimed to retain employees through up-skilling were also carried out.

The Danish PES initiated the partnership in cooperation with the educational system, the job centres, trade unions as well as employers’ associations. Depending on the project, the nature of the partnership can be formal or informal.



#### LEARNING POINTS:

- Partnerships are crucial to shift mindsets and to make people think positively about what clients can offer.
- Partnership working can ensure that everybody involved in the counselling and support of clients focuses on the strengths and potential of clients rather than their weaknesses.
- Partnerships can encourage positive attitudes and more autonomous approaches to job searching.
- The vocational education training sector and all education providers must share responsibility for enhancing clients’ digital skills to make sure that people can have successful reintegration journeys.
- During COVID-19, partnership working has changed companies’ attitudes to providing education to employees rather than laying them off or making them redundant during a drop in demand.



# Conclusions and recommendations

Digitalisation and automation were driving considerable changes in the labour market even before the COVID-19 crisis. Evidence since the advent of the pandemic is that **pre-existing trends have been exacerbated** by the impact of the economic downturn on labour demand and the changes in job design driven by employers' responses to health and safety concerns. **PES are facing an increasing challenge in assisting job seekers and employers** to deal with these changes, especially the impact on citizens farthest from the labour market. Enhancing partnership working is a valuable tool for generating capacity and identifying specialist expertise to meet the needs of harder-to-integrate customers. Further to this, advances in technology offer considerable opportunities for an increasingly dynamic and fluid relationship between a range of providers, including PES, PrEAs, and NGOs. The potential to expand choice and personalisation of labour market integration services is therefore reinforcing the PES partnership agenda irrespective of the trend towards joint working in response to the current crisis.

The impact of both advances in technology and responses to the crisis in enhancing the PES partnership development is reflected in the direction of European Employment policy. There is an increasing emphasis on **partnership working as an intrinsically beneficial device to promote mutual learning** and more strategic utilisation of European funds. In this regard, changes during the new programme period, with the inception of ESF+, can provide a catalyst for social innovation and experimentation to promote inclusion. The evolution of an employment services ecosystem provides the delivery framework within which PES and other providers can combine to provide bespoke solutions to meet the requirements of individual cases. This support can increasingly be provided within an overall institutional framework where organisational boundaries are less rigid and of decreasing importance.

Building upon good foundations from a long tradition of developing and leading partnerships, **European PES are in a good position to take an active role** in promoting

the development of an employment services ecosystem. This can identify positive multiplier effects with the potential for a greater return on investment from increased collaboration. This can foster **more effective integration services** through cutting across silos, identifying and bridging gaps, and eliminating service duplication. Achieving this will require PES to prioritise partnership working as a specific objective to identify synergies. Deeper collaboration with potential partners will need to be based upon the identification of shared goals and objectives. Whilst a culture of transparency and openness, shared strategic ambitions, and joint commitment to effective governance are prerequisites for effective partnerships, there are considerable variations in the type of joint working models which can be applied. The nature of the partnership adopted is therefore a key consideration with a range of possible informal and formal arrangements, and degrees of inter-organisational cohesion. Different approaches will be appropriate for meeting the needs of delivering different policies to specific groups in particular situations.

**The structure of partnerships will therefore vary on a case-by-case basis**, notwithstanding the need to emphasise and endorse basic partnership principles. Provided that due regard is taken to considering the implications of individual organisations' ethos, objectives, legal frame, and internal structures and geography, **partnerships can offer one of the most promising vehicles for improving integration**. This opens the prospect for more personalised support packages, with increased choices for employment service clients, and the possibility of developing data-driven systems to improve case management and further social and labour market integration. Such an approach can actively assist the development of greater autonomy for more self-sufficient clients, provide more intensive support for those in need of greater assistance, and offer flexible support to all with provision available from a variety of service users as appropriate. This can establish customer-centric provision to shape and drive re-integration journeys that make optimum use of the wider range of support possible from more developed cooperation.

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# Annexes – Promising partnership practices

## Annexe 1 – Belgium/Brussels-Capital Region

Actiris

**“Social Impact Bond (SIB) for vocational integration through digital training for Brussels jobseekers”**

### What is this about?

The practice concerns the use of social impact bonds (SIB) by Actiris, the Brussels-Capital Region PES, to improve vocational integration through digital training for Brussels jobseekers. The current SIB programme, operating from 2020 to 2025, is called “BeCode: digital training for jobseekers”.

This digital training project addresses the following double challenge: high demand for and shortage of people with digital skills despite high levels of long-term unemployment. Around 450 jobseekers are expected to receive training in web development. The target group must live in Brussels and be registered with the PES, with at least 25% non-EU nationals and 30% women. The goal is for 63% of the participants who complete training to secure employment. Budget: 2 083 450 euros for the entire project period.

The course lasts 7 months and focuses both on developing soft skills and technical skills to create a website or mobile application. BeCode also provides intensive job coaching and will put the participants in contact with a network of potential employers. This increases the chances of finding an internship (after the training follows an obligatory 3-month internship) and subsequently a job.

### When?

The use of social impact bonds by Actiris started in 2013. The following SIB programmes were implemented over time:

- **2014-2016:** “DUO for a JOB: mentoring of young migrants”;
- **2017-2022:** “Intervention on supply and demand: job crafting for long-term unemployed”;
- **2020-2025:** “BeCode: digital training for jobseekers”.

### What kind of partnership?

The BeCode Digital Training project was co-constructed between three parties. Social investors provide upfront funding to BeCode, the service provider. The private investors are represented by Kois Invest. A monitoring committee representing BeCode and the investors oversees the operation of the Social Impact Bond to ensure compliance with correct processes. PES representatives participate as observers.

The co-constructed nature of the partnership helps to promote client focus and innovation, since proposals can be launched to attract potential partners even before a detailed specification has been agreed upon.

### Bundesagentur für Arbeit (BA)

### “New Plan, the Self-assessment Tool for Orientation and Counselling”

#### What is this about?

With the introduction of Lifelong Career Guidance in 2018 in Germany, the BA has significantly enhanced its offline and online services to support young people and adults in coping with these changes by establishing high quality online and face-to-face services for guidance throughout their working lives. The “New Plan” was initiated in 2019 in the context of lifelong career guidance to complete BA’s counselling services. Against the background of the far-reaching changes in the labour market, employees are facing new challenges: on the one hand, they have to think about their career path in a new and more thoughtful way; on the other adults are often unclear about their strengths and professional development opportunities. In other words, people need to reflect on professional development needs. For people in need of vocational (re)orientation and further education, the BA has developed the online tool “New Plan”.

The tool consists of three pillars:

- Testing: Based on psychological tests, self-assessment procedures and information offers, users receive assistance with their professional orientation and statements assessing suitability for specific professions.
- Inspiring: Suggestions inspired by others’ employment experiences in similar fields.
- Searching: New Plan supports searches for further training opportunities.

#### When?

The project was initiated in late-2019, in the context of the BA’s lifelong career guidance services, and the tool has been online since December 2020. By October 2022, further components such as a test for further training and a strengths-to-weaknesses test will be made available. Furthermore, based on statistical data, the BA’s clients will receive suggestions inspired by others and career ideas beyond their current job.

#### What kind of partnership?

The project is based on an informal partnership between the BA and many different partners. Partners were involved in the design and implementation of the tool over time, and are currently providing ongoing feedback for future enhancements of the tool.

### Uitvoeringsinstituut Werknemersverzekeringen (UWV)

### “Regional labour market transition teams”

#### What is this about?

The Regional labour market transition teams set up in the Netherlands in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis. The teams developed from a support package introduced by the Ministry of Social Affairs & Employment to mitigate the negative labour market effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. In particular, the transition teams aim to address an imbalance in labour demand induced by the crisis, as some sectors are in decline, while in others there is a high demand for skilled workers. This creates a risk of a steep rise in unemployment and a substantially increased risk of long-term unemployment.

The Ministry invited actors, including social partners, NGOs, vocational training institutes, private contractors, municipalities and PES to join forces in supporting jobseekers and employees who are threatened by unemployment to find new jobs. These teams aim to reach two sets of targets. They target those who are either at risk of unemployment or have become unemployed during the crisis, especially those who risk becoming long-term unemployed. Special attention is dedicated to youth, disabled workers and entrepreneurs. The teams also work with employers in sectors in decline and others requiring new (skilled) employees.

Services are additional to those already available from the PES and Municipalities. These include career counselling, labour market orientation, vocational education and training, job matching and coaching, as well as tailored, custom-made services designed for specific jobseekers, for example mental health support or financial consulting. A special focus is also placed on supporting disabled workers through services to keep disabled workers “fit for work” and through sheltered work.

#### When?

The Regional labour market transition teams were set up in the Netherlands in the wake of the COVID-19 Crisis. In total, 35 regional transition teams will be formed, of which about 6 are operational as of April 2021. The rest will follow later in 2021.

#### What kind of partnership?

The Ministry invited actors, including social partners, NGOs, vocational training institutes, private contractors, municipalities and PES to join forces in supporting jobseekers and employees who are threatened by unemployment to find new jobs. This process was enacted in a formal partnership in which the Ministry of Social Affairs & Employment serves as the awarding authority, resulting in the development of “Regional labour market transition teams” made up of employees from Municipalities, Unions, Employer organisations, and PES (UWV). The precise formation of the team may differ per labour market region.

## Arbetsförmedlingen

## “Job Tech digital infrastructure”

### What is this about?

The JobTech development is a digital infrastructure for the Swedish Employment and educational ecosystems. JobTech stems from one main issue: the lack of a unified, open and functional digital infrastructure for both the Swedish labour market and the education system. This is accentuated by the need to improve skills development and lifelong learning opportunities and to reduce skill mismatches.

Arbetsförmedlingen, the Swedish Public Employment Service, therefore had the idea to introduce an open and dynamic digital infrastructure for the Swedish employment and educational ecosystems to build stronger bridges between the world of work and the world of education and training and ultimately to better support the labour market.

The objective of JobTech is to develop a dynamic and highly functional digital infrastructure that grows and develops in collaboration with the actors that build their services on the project.

### When?

JobTech was implemented in April 2018 through a lean start-up method.

### What kind of partnership?

Over 500 organisations are involved in JobTech: from large IT companies to small start-ups, municipalities, other governmental organisations, major banks and insurance companies, universities, schools etc. JobTech Development is managed and developed by an X-Unit within Arbetsförmedlingen, the Swedish PES. The division consists of around 40 employees. Financial funding comes primarily from Arbetsförmedlingen, the Swedish Public Employment Service, though in future some funding might be available through the Swedish Government Innovation partnership programme.

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