

## SUMMARY REPORT

# **PES NETWORK CONFERENCE: WORKING TOGETHER FOR A STRONGER EUROPEAN LABOUR MARKET**



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The European Network of Public Employment Services was created following a Decision of the European Parliament and Council in June 2014 (DECISION No 573/2014/EU). Its objective is to reinforce PES capacity, effectiveness and efficiency. This activity has been developed within the work programme of the European PES Network. For further information: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/PESNetwork>.

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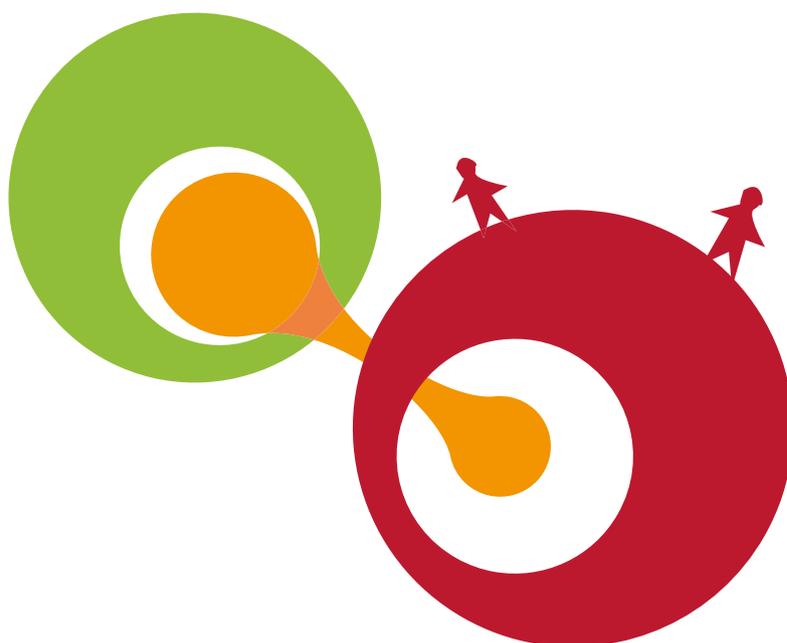


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## 1. Introduction

The first stakeholders' conference of the PES Network took place in Brussels on 26 and 27 of May 2015. It brought together PES and diverse labour market stakeholders, including social partners, private employment services, international organisations and NGOs with the aim of **strengthening existing partnerships and developing new ones** to work together for a stronger European labour market. The participants developed **concrete ideas and proposal** for working together in different areas, including PES modernisation, the implementation of the Youth Guarantee and bridging career transitions.

The ideas and key messages that came out of the conference are summarised in this report, together with the potential next steps that could be taken forward after the conference.

## 2. The role of social partners in the PES reform

The role of social partners in PES governance varies considerably across EU Member States and different forms of cooperation between PES and social partners can develop according to the national settings.

Key messages include:

- PES with a tradition of engaging social partners at all levels of governance speak of the **benefits** of strengthening the cooperation with social partners at different levels in terms of a shared understanding, embedded social agreements, the timeliness of social partner responses in times of emergency and easier and faster implementation of policies and measures on the ground.
- **Informal collaboration** with social partners can be very effective. There is value in engaging social partners in informal or ad-hoc dialogue when specific situations arise, as well as allowing new social partners to join the dialogue in a flexible way.
- Collaboration can take place at the lower levels of governance. **Local-level collaboration** can be just as important as dealings at the highest political or board level. There can be demonstrable value in joint delivery where social partners share an interest with PES in local labour market.



### Collaboration ideas

**a) Capacity-building of PES and social partners at the local level** – Local-level collaboration could help PES with less experience to build their capacity in engaging with social partners. This capacity-building would focus on concrete, operational issues and initiatives and thereby enable PES and social partners to devise practical, implementable solutions, which in turn would create success stories that support political buy-in. The PES Network could provide through the benchlearning valuable information on good practices and performance, as well as offer mutual learning opportunities in this area. Cross-border twinning could also support capacity building.

**b) Joint design and delivery of initiatives** – Based on the idea that jointly designed, resourced and financed initiatives lead to better implementation, social partners and PES should be encouraged to come together to develop new initiatives, focusing on operational issues to develop practical solutions. Creating a shared sense of responsibility at all levels – EU, national, regional and local – underpins the success of the idea, although it is dependent on i) the capacity of social partners to adopt a joint approach and ii) making the resources available to operate at the local level to begin with.

## 3. Working with private employment services (PrES)

In some countries, PES and PrES cooperation is well-established, while in others, it is not as advanced.

Key messages include:

- **PES-PrES cooperation is critical** to address national labour market challenges and to shift towards more efficient and transparent labour markets and enhancing quality service provision to a wider group of beneficiaries. National PES should take steps to work with national PrES – or improve existing cooperation – whilst taking account of the political and institutional context.

- **It is important to have an agreement in place between PES and PrES** to outline the aims and objectives of the collaboration and be clear on the respective roles and responsibilities. This agreement could be formal or informal and may be results-based.
- **It takes time to build mutual trust and understanding.** To ‘start small’ and on a local level at first could be a good approach, e.g. by sharing best practice via practically-focused regional or local events on specific aspects of service delivery.
- The **PrES contribution to the implementation of the Youth Guarantee at European level** need to be further defined.



#### Collaboration ideas

##### a) **Sharing labour market intelligence**

– PES and PrES could work together at the national level to share data, which would improve labour market information (LMI) for policymakers. While helping to identify current and future skills gaps, it would enable better data comparison across the EU. The PES could provide access to data on the labour market e.g. by establishing an online platform to share LMI, which both PES and PrES would then contribute to.

##### b) **Sharing best practice via practically-focused events**

– PES and PrES could organise national or regional events to share best practice on specific aspects of delivery. The events could include practical examples on the partnership between PES and PrES in, for example, the delivery of the Youth Guarantee. The outcome of such events could be toolkits and other instruments which could be used as guides for future delivery and PES-PrES collaboration.

## 4. Contribution of the PES Network to the European Semester

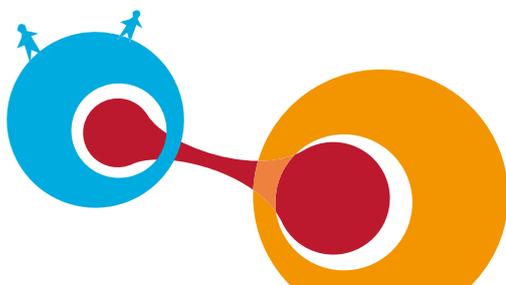
According to the *Decision on Enhanced Cooperation between PES*<sup>1</sup>, the PES Network is expected to contribute to the European Semester by cooperating with the Employment Committee (EMCO) and assisting PES to address country-specific recommendations (CSRs).

Key messages include:

- **The cooperation between Council – EMCO, the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council (EPSCO) – and the PES Network** is important to reach the EU 2020 objectives and should be enhanced.
- **The European Commission is adopting a new approach to streamlining CSRs in 2015.** Although there are likely to be fewer CSRs explicitly targeted at PES, PES performance remains a key issue in the Semester. The PES Network will ensure evidence-based monitoring of PES performance through the implementation of its innovative ‘benchlearning’ concept<sup>2</sup>.
- **The idea behind ‘benchlearning’ is to trigger a self-improvement** process that is inherent within each PES. Moreover, it works on the principle of distinguishing between PES performance due to internal (e.g. PES processes, strategic management) and external factors (e.g. labour market context, institutional conditions). While the PES Network can address the internal factors, the European Semester provides a tool to address the external ones.
- **The PES Network is seen as instrumental in monitoring the impact of the Youth Guarantee** by collecting data on the PES relevant components of the implementation of the YG.

1 Decision No 573/2014/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 May 2014 on enhanced cooperation between Public Employment Services (PES)

2 Defined in Article 2 of the Decision as “the process of creating a systematic and integrated link between benchmarking and mutual learning activities, that consists of identifying good performances through indicator-based benchmarking systems, including data collection, data validation, data consolidation and assessments, with appropriate methodology, and of using findings for tangible and evidence-informed mutual learning activities, including good or best practice models”.





### Collaboration ideas

**a) Creation of a formal process for the Network to report on benchlearning to EMCO and EPSCO.** The PES Network can formally report to EMCO on the results of benchlearning and engage in EMCO discussions on PES-related areas on a regular basis. A reporting to EPSCO on benchlearning results should also be established. A formalized process would ensure that the policymaking of EMCO – and ultimately EPSCO – is directly informed by the evidence base underpinning PES performance. Moreover, it would help to raise the awareness and commitment of national labour ministries vis-à-vis the benchlearning concept.

**b) Close cooperation between the PES Benchlearning Steering Group and the EMCO Indicators Group.** The groups could formally exchange information and concepts in order to ensure that the indicator frameworks and data collection of both regimes are aligned and mutually reinforcing. This cooperation could help to refine the indicators used, particularly in relation to qualitative performance and outcomes, as well as the monitoring of the Youth Guarantee.

**c) Regional and local-level awareness-raising of benchlearning concept.** The PES Network and EMCO could work together to develop ideas on how to raise the awareness of regional and local authorities. This would facilitate the engagement of PES at *all* levels, enhance the impact of benchlearning and enhance the take up of mutual learning opportunities.

## 5. PES work with private employment services and guidance, education and training providers to deliver the Youth Guarantee

PES play an important role in the implementation of the Youth Guarantee. Although their role can vary in different countries, from strategic planning through to on-the-ground delivery, it relies on the creation of strong synergies with other labour market stakeholders.

Key messages include:

- **PES, education and guidance providers need to work together** to support young people as early as possible. Identifying, reaching out and providing guidance and counselling to those at risk of becoming not in education, employment and training (NEET) is a crucial first step in developing a young person's employability.
- **National and local-level cooperation** between PES and PrES, guidance, education and training providers as well as other stakeholders is valuable in both ways. National partnerships can support collaborative strategic-level decisions, while local partnerships focus on delivery.
- **PES need to work with youth organisations to communicate with young people.** These organisations have 'inside' knowledge of what works with young people in terms of the language, key messages that may appeal, and effective communication tools.



### Collaboration ideas

**a) Promotional campaigns to raise awareness and dispel myths** – Young people and employers can have low-level awareness or even negative perceptions of PES and their services. PES could work with their partners to develop professional promotional campaigns to raise awareness of the Youth Guarantee, using 'hooks' to engage young people.

**b) Strategies to tailor employer-engagement activities** – PES could develop employer-engagement strategies based on location, sector and size as these factors significantly influence a company's needs. Where possible, PES could link to employers' corporate social responsibility strategies in a variety of ways.

**c) Work with employers to create an 'employer career and guidance counsellor' role within schools** – Led by employers, this role would provide one-to-one career and guidance counselling to young people. This support could help young people to better understand the labour market, appreciate the world of work and plan in more detail their future careers.



## 6. PES as a conductor of partnerships between labour market actors

PES have a key ‘conductor’ role to improve the functioning of the labour market and facilitate the transitions that people make throughout their working lives. This role involves initiating and managing partnerships between a wide range of labour market organisations.

Key messages include:

- It is essential for **PES to have sufficient flexibility to respond to regional and local issues**, drawing on their established networks and know-how. This does not imply changing the PES governance structure, but rather putting in place protocols and procedures that help to recognise and support the role of local/regional PES.
- **Effective partnership-working relies on transparency and active network management** between the different actors involved. For example, there needs to be a shared vision and strategy, agreement on roles and responsibilities, clear and regular communication and evidence-based decision-making linked to key performance indicators.



### Collaboration ideas

**a) Defining the ‘eco-system’ of labour market actors** – A partnership could undertake a detailed mapping of labour market actors, which would profile actors in terms of, inter alia, their territorial remit, expertise with different target groups and their role in the design and/or execution of labour market interventions. The output would improve ‘stakeholder intelligence’, mobilise organisational competences and networks and make the best use of shrinking resources to address specific labour market problems – especially at the local level.

**b) Learning and development to improve PES capacity to take up the conductor role** – PES could organise activities to develop the knowledge and skills of their staff in areas critical to the conductor role. For example, PES staff in-

creasingly require capabilities in project management, communication, networking and employer relations, as well as a sound understanding and commitment to the value of partnership-working in modernised PES.

**c) Active data exchange between labour market actors** – PES and other labour market actors could take action to share labour market data and other related intelligence, wherever possible and working around the legal constraints (to data sharing) in some Member States. This collaboration could include sharing access to strong analytical capabilities and disseminating the results of such analyses amongst partners.

## 7. Bridging career transitions: PES work with employers and skills development of jobseekers/job-changers

PES can play a crucial role in bridging career transitions. They can support career changes and offer quality profiling and individualised counselling. They can also work with employers and training providers to identify skills demands, adapt training offers, and match newly acquired skills to vacancies.

Key messages include:

- **PES and their partners need to offer high-quality and individualised career guidance.** All jobseekers and job-changers, regardless of their qualification level, should have access to career guidance at all stages of their career and/or transition.
- **A seamless flow of information between PES and different stakeholders is crucial** to ensure all labour market actors perform at their best. Robust data and evidence facilitate a clear understanding of employers’ present and future skills demands in key industries. This allows targeted investment in the training and skills development of jobseekers and job changers.
- **PES can focus on collaborating closely with employers in priority / high recruitment sectors.** Cooperating with a small number of key employers can create more opportunities than occasional collaboration with a large number of employers.



### Collaboration ideas

**a) Organisation of awareness-raising activities** – PES could collaborate closely with the education and training sector and implement a range of awareness raising activities. These activities would help students and parents to gain a more realistic view of employment opportunities in some sectors and change negative perceptions of vocational qualifications. They would also encourage learners to acquire transversal and career management skills, thereby raising their employability.

**b) Close collaboration with employers to collect up-to-date data on skills demands** – To improve the information flow between the supply and demand side, PES could act as ‘data hub’. In this role, PES could communicate the information they receive to targeted partners (e.g. organisations in the education and training sector) using a variety of channels.

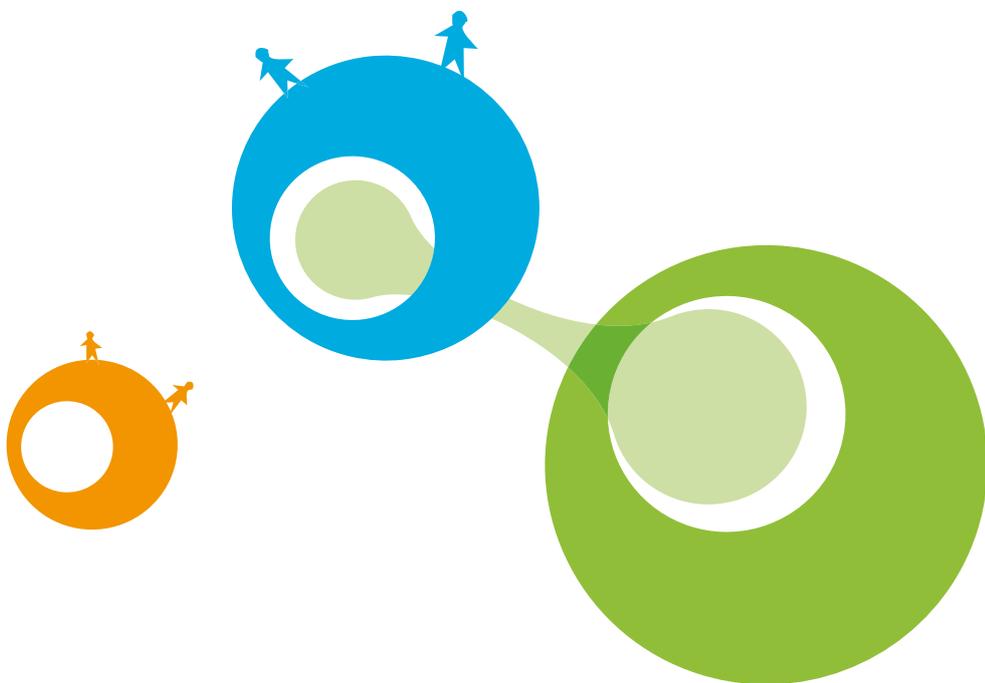
**c) Written collaboration agreements with key employers and a ‘one-stop shop’ single coordination point in the PES** – For employers that have multiple regional branches, PES could act as a single coordination point and help employers to manage their activities across different branches. This could be set up nationally, led by ‘key account managers’.

## 8. Looking towards future collaboration

The conference highlighted further opportunities **for PES in contributing to initiatives at European level:**

- On the Youth Guarantee, PES are key contributor to the indicator framework and should take a lead role in collecting meaningful and comparable data.
- The PES Network has already provided advice on the formulation of a new initiative at EU level targeting the long-term unemployment. The practical experience held by PES in the delivery of active labour market policies to this target group will play a major role in the successful delivery of this initiative.
- The European Parliament would benefit from engaging more closely with the PES Network this year in relation to the Annual Growth Survey exercise, the mid-term review of the Europe 2020 Strategy and the parliamentary group on undeclared work.

As follow-up of the conference, the PES Network will evaluate all ideas, which came out of the conference and develop proposals on how these could be taken forward. As part of the follow up, the Network will organise bilateral meetings with key labour market stakeholders to discuss collaboration in greater detail.



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