

## COMMON DEFINITION DOCUMENT

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## Introduction

The *Common Definition Document* is a collaborative effort produced by Veneto Lavoro and SOC, acting respectively as the coordinator and co-coordinator of **Work Package 2 (WP2)**. This work has been accomplished in close cooperation with all partners, reflecting a collective commitment to advancing the benchlearning activities that distinguish the project.

At its core, this document aims to establish a cohesive understanding of the four identified working areas listed below, which emerged as primary priorities during the inception phase of the NET PES project. These areas serve as the cornerstone for the partnership's benchlearning endeavours, guiding the collective efforts towards enhancing performance and fostering innovation within Public Employment Services (PES).

By providing a shared definition of these working areas, the objective is to facilitate subsequent benchlearning activities and provide a framework for assessing performance across diverse contexts. This document will serve as a guiding resource, not only for the consortium partners but also for internal staff and key actors within local ecosystems. In fact, moving forward, this document will be disseminated alongside a quick survey aimed at collecting input and feedback from stakeholders. Through this collaborative process, the NET PES partners aim to empower stakeholders to assess PES performance and align priorities with the ideal performances identified by the consortium.

In addition to outlining the working areas, this document also identifies and describes the key enablers delineating crucial performance assets considered essential to achieve desired outcomes. This comprehensive approach ensures that the benchlearning activities implemented by the partnership are rooted in a robust understanding of the factors driving success within PES.

## Methodological aspects

The definitions provided in this document are the result of a participatory process involving the Public Employment Services engaged in the project. Building on the structure of the **working areas** and **performance enablers** as outlined in the PES Network's official methodology manual<sup>1</sup>, the project partners conducted a series of co-design sessions—both in-person and online.

These collaborative activities aimed first to select the relevant working areas and performance enablers, and subsequently to develop and contextualize the content of each section. The definitions were thus shaped in accordance with shared needs, practical experiences, and common challenges across the participating PES, ensuring that the final framework is both methodologically grounded and operationally meaningful.

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<sup>1</sup> European Network of Public Employment Services (2024), PES Network Benchlearning Manual (<https://employment-social-affairs.ec.europa.eu/>); European Network of Public Employment Services (2021), PES Network Benchlearning Manual (<https://employment-social-affairs.ec.europa.eu/>)

## Working area: Sustainable activation and management of transitions

### Performance enablers

#### 1. Holistic profiling

Ideally, a PES bases the assessment of an individual's employment potential (profiling) on a holistic approach. The profiling is not only based on information about an individual jobseeker's employment record, work experience and formal qualifications ('hard facts') but includes an assessment of the full spectrum of competences/skills of a jobseeker (skills-based profiling).

This holistic approach applied to profiling must promote smooth pathways for job seekers and PES, and it implies broad conception of the ability to work, including for example health conditions and the perception of one's overall self-effectiveness. This might possibly be affected by target-related factors, i.e. migration-related stress.

In order to succeed in the implementation of this approach and to achieve ideal standards of performance, PES should consider the following key elements:

Multi-level cooperation in the Public sector (social services, health services, education and training organisations, etc.) in order to take into consideration the different aspects that contribute to understanding the user profile:

- Multidisciplinary teams working together within PES;
- IT cooperation system: an informative system of shared data/information implemented by different public administrations and other (private) service providers that allows a real-time exchange of information regarding PES users between the various stakeholders of the ecosystem
- Psychological personalised, individualised and reinforced support provided by specialised advisor(s) to end-users (promoting specific training for operators to acquire these skills)

A profiling system based on a holistic approach is functional to the design of tailor-made action plans for the users, with an offer of multi-disciplinary services which are consistent with the multi-faceted needs identified (work-life balance, health and well-being, career development, job security and stability, social protection, etc.)

#### 2. Segmented and tailor-made action plan and ALMP<sup>2</sup>-measures to enhance workforce inclusivity and diversity management

Ideally, PES group jobseekers according to their likely level of need based on the results of a holistic profiling. In order to design effective employment policies, it is essential to have thorough knowledge about the different specificities of the various groups to which the policies want to impact, with a particular focus to the most vulnerable ones: LTU<sup>3</sup>, people with disabilities, unskilled or low-skilled unemployed people, young

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<sup>2</sup> Active Labour Market Policies

<sup>3</sup> long term unemployed

people and NEETs, seniors (aged 50+), migrants, foreign born job seekers, people with socio-economic difficulties, people with health difficulties, highly qualified long-term unemployed, women in difficulty, gender gap, etc. It is also very important to take into consideration the intersectional aspects of vulnerable job seekers.

A PES builds the formulation of individual action plans on the results of holistic profiling and takes into account the segmentation of the jobseeker, in order to develop a sustainable transition strategy into the labour market. Active labour market policy measures play a key role in an individual's action plan. Thus, it is crucial to specifically tailor these measures to the needs of jobseekers, especially for vulnerable groups.

In a context of increasingly growing skill mismatch and labour shortages as problems in regional labour markets, among the ALMP measures, training/qualification measures to upskill and reskill jobseekers play a strategic role in supporting PES users' transition to the labour market. Collaboration of PES with education/**VET**<sup>4</sup> providers, on the one hand, and companies, on the other hand, it is crucial to identify specific sectors facing shortages and to understand the evolving skills needs (especially green and digital skills).

Consistently adhering to a personalised strategy, fast and agile training solutions can be proposed to those jobseekers who need to acquire only specific/sectoral skills (also including on-the-job learning solutions, making the training process more practical and directly applicable to the real labour market scenarios). This would ensure that users swiftly acquire the necessary expertise, aligning with the immediate needs of a company, thus contributing to addressing the mismatch in the short-term.

The evaluation of the efficiency of the ALMP's is made regularly, also after the end of the measure. Establishing channels for feedback allows users to express their opinions and concerns, providing insights for continuous improvement. Addressing user feedback demonstrates a commitment to enhancing the quality of services.

Internally, empowering PES staff is fundamental in order to provide effective guidance. Internal training plans should extend beyond general skills, encompassing "twin transition" skills that address the challenges posed by both green and digital transitions, ensuring PES staff are well-equipped to navigate these shifts.

### **3. Users' accessibility and engagement**

Modern PES combines different channels of service provision (i.e. online services, off-line face-to-face interviews or administrative support, blended services) and uses an integrated multi-channel management to supply appropriate services via the proper channels to customers according to their needs and background. This strategy always takes into account the accessibility of online channels based on the digital literacy of customers and staff, foresees procedures for monitoring and evaluating user friendliness, effectiveness as well as efficiency of different channels and offers support/help for users (for example in getting their "digital identity" to have access to online services). All members of staff have to be trained to be able to put blended services into practice. If on the one hand it is important to focus on PES digital

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<sup>4</sup> Vocational education and training

accessibility, on the other hand it is equally fundamental to preserve physical local agencies and the possibility for PES employees to meet jobseekers face-to-face.

Activation strategies are designed to foster jobseekers' engagement, motivation and pro-activity in their efforts to find work and/or improve their employability. Activation strategies typically feature:

- early intervention by PES in the unemployment spell and a high contact intensity between jobseekers and employment counsellors;
- regular reporting and monitoring of work availability and job-search actions;
- direct referrals of (unemployed) jobseekers to vacant jobs and/or ALMP-measures to prevent loss of motivation, skills and employability as a result of increasing unemployment duration.
- the setting-up of individual action plans according to a tailor-made approach.

\*We also talked about the mobility of job seekers (to go to training, to a job interview, etc.) and about the role of PES as mobility facilitators for job seekers: with its partners, each PES should make mobility “a springboard to employment”, by offering practical solutions to job seekers who encounter difficulties in transitions and mobility.

### **Working area: Relations with employers - *Establishing and maintaining fair relations with employers to overcome labour shortages and skill mismatch.***

Performance enablers

#### **1. *Specialised units for employer services***

Ideally, within the organisational framework of a PES, the establishment of specialised units (department or team) responsible for managing relations with employer customers is fundamental. These units' staff is made up of a multi-level team of counsellors, advisors and other professionals with a solid set of competences and skills:

- Profound knowledge of the regional/local labour market's composition and dynamics, within the broader framework of the transformations and challenges that national and international labour markets are constantly facing, especially within the Twin transition;
- Skill forecasting and knowledge of emerging professional profiles which can be relevant at local/regional level, to boost innovation drivers within companies;
- Proactivity and customer-oriented approach, in order to identifying and implementing tailor-made solutions to support employers effectively;
- Mediation and facilitation skills;
- Ability of working in team, with a collaborative attitude;
- Communication and marketing skills, especially to support companies in enhancing the attractiveness job offers;
- Constant update on regulations/laws that can be relevant for employer customers, especially in terms of hiring incentives, subsidies and ALMPs.

PES employees working within specialised units dealing with companies are provided by constant training in order to acquire and improve their strategic competences and knowledge. Training is carried out with the support of a various range of (ITC) tools and methodologies – including mentoring and coaching programs, as well as informal training procedures – and it is consistent with other workloads.

It is essential that the specialised units dealing with companies/employers and those dealing with unemployed people and job seekers are closely interconnected, by structuring (formal and informal) collaboration tools and internal procedures. This approach is embedded in the general workflows.

## **2. Matching labour supply and demand to overcome labour shortages**

The mismatch between employer needs and characteristics or availability of jobseekers emerges as one of the most significant challenges that regional labour markets are facing today. This misalignment generates and strengthens critical labour shortages, especially in specific professional sectors and profiles. Within this framework, PES plays a key role in ensuring efficient matches between employers and jobseekers (especially those belonging to the most vulnerable groups). Since the labour market mismatch is a multi-faceted phenomenon which is affected by various factors (skill mismatch, qualification mismatch, geographical mismatch, sourcing mismatch, contractual mismatch, etc.), the ideal PES offers adequate solutions and measures which are consistent with the specific dimensions and features of the issue at local level, always considering the impact of the twin transition.

With specific reference to the services offered to companies in order to address labour market mismatch, the ideal PES:

- Supports companies in identifying their needs (in terms of professional profiles, tasks, skills required) and improving the attractiveness of their job offers, also by rising employers' awareness regarding innovative organisational assets, welfare solutions, flexibility, work-life balance, sustainability, etc.
- Takes an active role in communicating the needs of the companies to educational institutions, so that they can provide the proper customised training in order to improve the skills of job seekers and to offer skilled workforce to the companies.
- Offers transparency and visibility to the job vacancies acquired from companies, taking care of the communication aspect;
- Provides support and advice in all phases of the selection and recruitment process. Matching processes can be supported by AI or ICT-driven automated skill-based matching, with a further selection by the employment counsellors.
- Provides training programs or other on-the-job learning measures aimed at improving candidates' skills based on the specific needs of companies, on the one hand, and labour market emerging needs (e.g. twin transition) on the other hand, thus facilitating transitions to the labour market;
- Organises initiatives, job fairs and public events.
- Participates in specific training and stays informed regularly (via specific tools: employment observatories, regional newsletters, etc.) in order to know the regional/local labour market and the diagnosis of the territory and in order to respond better and quickly to job seekers and companies.



PES employees working within specialised units dealing with companies take on an important mediating role between the initial requests of the companies and the availability/characteristics of the jobseekers. They actively promote an open-minded and flexible approach among employers, encouraging them to consider candidates' profiles that may appear different from their initial expectations. Addressing and overcoming stigma and prejudices associated with certain characteristics of jobseekers is a pivotal aspect of PES role: employers need to recognize their social responsibility, particularly towards the most vulnerable segments of the workforce (LTU, NEETs, mature workers, people with disabilities, etc.).

The quality of the matching process and design of the service offered is monitored and reviewed on a regular basis, taking employers' feedback into account (e.g., via employer satisfaction surveys).

### 3. Employer engagement strategy

To build a trustful win-win relationship between PES and companies and strengthen employers' engagement and active participation, the employers' service unit adopts a target-oriented approach and serves as a one-stop-shop for employers, with individual contact persons for each employer. Based on the characteristics of the companies in the area covered (with respect to size, economic sector, geographical location, level of development of the HR department, etc.), segmented and/or tailor-made employer services and target-oriented tools (for example: newsletters, seminars, conferences concerning PES' opportunities for employers) should be provided and implemented.

PES should engage employers in long-term partnerships to develop and find customised solutions. In order to reduce recruitment tensions, PES must target employers by sector of activity and invite them to participate in different events (for example: recruitment and information fairs - online or in person) or find other recruitment methods to attract all types of public (including vulnerable people).

A possible leverage to strengthen the level of commitment of companies is the reputation/perception of the PES by external actors.

### Working area: Evidence-based design and implementation of PES services

#### Performance enablers

##### 1. Promotion of Local Labour Market Understanding and Knowledge

PES should foster a better understanding of the local labour market both internally (PES employees at all levels) and externally (stakeholders), in order to shape their services according to the real needs of the local ecosystem.

To achieve this goal, PES produce and disseminate both *quantitative data* (with administrative and statistical nature) and *qualitative data* collected through field research, which integrates numbers and helps in their interpretation and contextualization. In order to produce data and information to better understand labour markets, building strategic partnerships (with universities and research institutions, employers' associations, trade unions, schools and VET providers, etc.) and fostering close relationships and constant dialogue with stakeholders emerges as an essential aspect. Therefore, each PES ideally has a local labour market observatory/research department, which makes available PES data, periodical reports and analysis. Local PES ensure the accessibility of this kind of information to other public administrations, partners, stakeholders

and civil society, also implementing and constantly updating their own data navigation system or open datasets.

Both internal staff and external (public and private) organisations should be provided with the right methodological tools and knowledge on how to make the best use of the information and data available in order to design and implement evidence-based services and measures.

PES should determine concrete actions in the labour market to raise awareness among companies in order to accelerate the digital and the green transitions and at the same time to train job seekers and employees in digital and environmental skills. To pursue this objective, PES should have an expert in digital/green transition who collaborates with companies and labour market actors to support them in the ecological and digital transitions.

## 2. Monitoring and evaluation systems

Promoting evidence-based design and implementation of services and ALMP-measures is a crucial step in enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of PES. To achieve this goal, PES have sound monitoring and evaluation systems, which contribute to the constant improvement of the policy-cycle. Monitoring and evaluation systems should cover the entire policy process.

For this reason, it is necessary that the PES foresee:

- An *ex ante* evaluation system (to be carried out before service implementation) to assess specific objectives and expected effects/impacts;
- A data collecting system that allows PES to monitor progress and results achieved from a quantitative point of view;
- An *ex post* evaluation system that integrates qualitative aspects to quantitative data. Given the difficulty in establishing a clear cause-effect nexus, when it comes to employment policies, the integration of data from the monitoring system with qualitative information from external evaluation is fundamental.

In the external evaluation, particular importance is given to customer feedback to identify practical success factors and obstacles to the implementation of specific services. In general, PES periodically measure the satisfaction of users (unemployed people/jobseekers and companies), collecting feedback through surveys, interviews and direct interactions. The information gained helps to verify the fulfilment of key performance indicators set by each organisation, to identify possible critical aspect and weaknesses, areas for improvement, bottlenecks in the workflows, trends in customer satisfaction, mismatching between users' expectations and actual outcomes, etc

At the same time, since the implementation of small-scale pilot projects<sup>5</sup> is growing within PES, their results need to be monitored and evaluated as well because they can provide important information/insights on the

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<sup>5</sup> A pilot project is a small-scale, preliminary initiative or test conducted to assess the feasibility, viability, and potential success of a larger project or idea. It allows organisations to gather data, identify potential challenges, and evaluate the opportunity of implementing a full-scale project. Pilot projects are typically used to minimise risks, refine strategies, and make informed decisions before committing resources to a broader initiative.



quality of the services provided. If necessary, the outcomes of these experiences can be incorporated into the new policy cycle.

Evaluation results are made available and communicated on a regular basis to all organisational levels of the PES, to relevant stakeholders and to the general public. Finally, PES integrate evaluation results into programs and services design, ensuring a transparent system of management of change and innovation.

### **3. Policy design through change and innovation**

Designing evidence-based policies involves questioning perceptions or intuitions to give way to a grounded and scientific approach to decision-making, considering its viability, effectiveness, and efficiency. The previous enablers - promoting the local labour market understanding and the existence of monitoring and evaluation systems- facilitate this type of approach. At the same time, they also generate new challenges for change and innovation.

PES strategically embraces change and innovation. It anticipates and proactively manages these processes, perceiving them as avenues for enhancing performance and to enable evidence-based design and redesign of public employment services. Engaging employees, customers, and relevant partners from the outset and throughout the process is integral to the PES approach with the aim to trigger change and innovation, and leverage expertise across all levels of the organisation.

For a PES is a key element the creation of collaborative workspace where employees, partners, job seekers, and companies come together to exchange ideas and co-create innovative solutions to design and redesign public services based on evidence. The goal is to eliminate the barriers associated with traditional project management by fostering an approach that promotes cross-functionality, collaboration, and the engagement of all stakeholders.

## **Working area: Management of partnerships and stakeholders**

### **Performance Enablers**

#### **1. PES Perception/Reputation to enhance users' engagement**

PES' reputation is shaped by their adaptability, collaboration and commitment to address labour market challenges, but some endogenous factors can influence it. Sometimes PES perception may be affected by stereotypes or disinformation. Ideally, PES develop their own brand and recognizable identity to enhance their reputation positioning. Accessible and creative communication strategies and tools should be used, including social media, TV and the radio.

PES should promote a positive image of services, emphasising on the willingness to be agile while respecting equity and inclusion, to bring added social value and to generate positive impact on beneficiaries. PES should convey reliability, security, transparency and ethics. PES should also set speed of service as a priority to foster their reputation and effectiveness towards end-users, being able to react and produce a response in a matter of hours or days. PES should also try to activate customers by involving them in the planning of services, regularly collecting feedback on services, or organising customer councils.

Launching targeted promotional campaigns to raise awareness about the services offered by PES can attract a wider audience and. Storytelling of best practices and success stories showing the tangible benefits of engaging with PES should be promoted and disseminated to foster empathy, trust and a positive perception of services.

PES should also strengthen internal communication on evidence-based results and storytelling as inspirational tools to build and spread the sense of belonging to the organisation and foster a good perception/reputation of services among the staff.

A strong reputation strategy should also include transparent information on the impact of funding and resource allocation. Importantly, the perception of PES is linked to user satisfaction and experience, then services should be designed to provide users with a positive experience and customer care services should be implemented to monitor their satisfaction and plan any corrective actions needed.

## **2. Building Strategic Partnerships**

Ideally, PES set up formal and informal partnerships, which consist of multi-level and multi-stakeholder cooperative relationships. This collaboration plays a pivotal role in customising activation efforts to meet the needs of jobseekers, particularly those – more vulnerable (LTU, people with disabilities, unskilled or low-skilled unemployed people, young people and NEETs, seniors aged 50+, ...) – who are more challenging to engage and place in employment opportunities. Partnerships include a wide range of actors, whose involvement vary according to specific purposes: public authorities, other (private) service providers, municipalities, healthcare and social services, third sector organisations, school and VET providers, employers' associations, business incubators, trade unions, civil society, etc.

Partnerships have strategic, institutional and operational purposes: they are aimed at contributing to the general objectives of national, regional and local policies and at designing, developing and implementing – with a bottom-up approach – innovative policy measures and targeted initiatives/projects. Targeted partnerships should be created – even by sector – to remove social obstacles to employment/employability of jobseekers, facilitate cooperation among different services and mobilise specific support. The impacts of strategic partnership should be measured and evaluated with regards to the added value brought in the creation/promotion of quality long-term employment opportunities.

To strengthen the ability of PES to build and maintain strategic partnerships, specific training about partnership building and management should be provided to the staff, also to improve the awareness about the role of PES as a crucial actor in the twin transitions.

## **3. Resource Allocation and Funding**

Ideally, to support and strengthen strategic partnership, PES combine EU, national and local public funds but also resources from private stakeholders. Fundings should be devoted to long-term development and innovation programmes and aim at supporting evidence-based design of services, especially in the field of vocational and training programmes and in the design of countercyclical policies. Resource allocation should be based on a holistic view that promotes multi-level government cooperation and financing and bottom-up decision processes. When partners are involved in joint initiative, they should pool resources effectively to

achieve common goals. Resource allocation should also cover training needs, especially to deal with the emerging challenges posed by the twin transition.

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