

# Benchlearning Manual for Local Labour Market Ecosystems



# BENCHLEARNING MANUAL

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<b>Short description</b>	This document provides the main information collected by all the NET PES partners, with the goal to inspire local and regional PES across Europe. It offers practical tools and instructions from the NET PES project, aiming to foster continuous improvement and mutual support among employment services.
<b>Textual disclaimer</b>	<i>Funded by the European Union. The views and opinions expressed are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for this.</i>

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# Introduction

Public Employment Services (PES) across Europe are constantly evolving, driven by the need to enhance efficiency, effectiveness and the overall quality of services provided to jobseekers and employers. One of the most promising approaches for fostering continuous improvement in this sector is *benchlearning*, a methodology that combines benchmarking and mutual learning, developed and promoted by the *PES Network*<sup>1</sup>.

This manual has been drafted in the frame of the Erasmus+ NET PES project to serve as a comprehensive guide for local and regional employment services interested in applying small-scale benchlearning techniques to exchange experiences and best practices, assess their services and ultimately improve their performance through collaborative learning.

## Scope and structure of the manual

The primary goal of this manual is to inspire other local and regional PES across Europe and provide them with practical instructions and tools developed throughout the field experience of the NET PES project partners. This, to harness the potential of benchlearning for continuous improvement.

Specifically, the manual aims to:

- *Introduce and explain the benchlearning methodology*, thus providing a clear understanding of the principles, processes and benefits of benchlearning.
- *Align with PES Network and EVADES<sup>2</sup> practices*, thus ensuring that local and regional efforts are compatible with broader well-established European initiatives and methodologies.
- *Adapt the methodology to the local/regional context*, thus offering practical guidance on implementing benchlearning in small scale settings.

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<sup>1</sup> [European Network of Public Employment Services](https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&furtherEvents=yes&newsId=10211) - Further information on PES benchlearning methodology:

<https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&furtherEvents=yes&newsId=10211>

<sup>2</sup> The EVADES methodology, which stands for "EVALuación DESempeño" is a comprehensive performance evaluation approach developed within the PES Network, tailored for Spanish PES. The methodology focuses on systematically measuring and analysing various performance indicators related to employment services, such as job placement rates, customer satisfaction and service delivery efficiency.

- *Facilitate the exchange of experiences and best practices*, thus encouraging collaboration and mutual support among local and regional employment services.
- *Support performance evaluation and improvement*, thus helping services to systematically assess their performance, identify areas for improvement and implement effective changes.

Each section of the manual covers a critical step in the methodology, based on the concrete experience gained by NET PES partners while implementing the project and ensuring a thorough and effective approach to performance improvement:

- **Step 1 | Development of the small-scale methodology**

This section addresses the identification of priority working areas through needs analysis. It provides criteria for theme selection, emphasising the importance of prioritising working needs to ensure relevance and impact. It also details how to conduct virtual workshops and online brainstorming sessions, and covers the methodologies for conducting research within organisations.

- **Step 2 | Evaluation of the PES' own performance: self-assessment**

This section focuses on self-assessment, providing details on the tools and strategies to be used.

- **Step 3 | Learning by observing**

This section focuses on the study visits (LDDs - Learning Deep Dives) as a key stage for observing performances and services and support both the exchange of remarks and recommendations and the mutual learning process.

- **Step 4 | Learning by assessing**

This section focuses on systematically collecting and analysing feedback to improve services, performances and processes. It includes remarks on the production of feedback, the conduction of the light evaluation and the drafting of the feedback report, providing a description of the tools and strategies used.

- **Step 5 | Benchlearning follow-up and perspectives**

This section delves into the crucial phase of integrating insights gained from benchlearning activities into the operational framework of each PES examined. The focus is on how to effectively use the recommendations and feedback collected during the benchlearning process to enhance programme development and monitoring.

- **Appendix**

The appendix includes several valuable resources, such as the Common Definition Document, best practices and a collection and analysis of experiences from NET PES partners. It also provides examples of successful local and regional benchlearning implementations, results of surveys, guidelines and a glossary for reference. Last but not least, the appendix includes the observation sheet, the follow-up questionnaire and the feedback report elaborated by the partnership to support the different phases of the benchlearning process<sup>3</sup>.

The content of each section is organised on two different levels: on the one hand, it is aimed at providing general instructions, information, recommendations and tools for the implementation of the benchlearning process, as it has been adapted on a small-scale starting from the PES Network approach. On the other hand, it reports on the specific experience developed in the frame of the NET PES project, providing evidence of the actions and strategies undertaken by the project partners.

By following the guidelines in this handbook, local and regional PES can hopefully create robust, collaborative networks that foster continuous learning and performance improvement, ultimately contributing to the overall effectiveness and resilience of the European employment ecosystem.

## Benchlearning: a general overview

As a core methodology promoted by the PES Network to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of PES across Europe, *benchlearning* is a systematic approach that allows organisations to compare their processes and outcomes with the ideal performances outlined by the PES Network and with those actually performed by their peers, thus identifying gaps and strengths while learning from the best practices observed. This methodology encourages a culture of continuous improvement by promoting transparency, knowledge sharing and mutual support among participating PES. Through *benchlearning*, employment services can benchmark their performance

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<sup>3</sup> Please, note that the documents produced to support the benchlearning process should be completed at the correct timing, depending on the task. For example, the self-assessment should be drafted and read by visiting PES before the study visit, whereas the observation sheet should be used during the visit and the follow-up questionnaire should be completed shortly afterwards.

against comparable organisations, gain insights into effective strategies and implement improvements tailored to their specific contexts.

The methodology consists of three key components:

- *Benchmarking*, which involves the systematic comparison of performance metrics and processes between similar organisations and, by identifying performance leaders and weaknesses, allows organisations to pinpoint specific areas for improvement.
- *Mutual learning*, which allows PES to engage in active knowledge exchange, thus sharing not only best practices but also the contextual factors and strategies that led to successful outcomes.
- *Continuous improvement cycle*, which is a cornerstone of the benchlearning methodology, highlighting its iterative nature. Organisations implement changes based on insights gained, monitor the results and refine their strategies over time. This ongoing cycle of assessment, action and re-assessment ensures sustained improvement and adaptability, fostering a culture of perpetual growth and excellence.

According to the PES Network's approach, qualitative assessment of PES performance includes two core elements:

- *Self-assessment* completed by the analysed PES as a result of a self-reflective process. The self-assessment represents a valuable tool for PES to evaluate their own performance, foster organisational learning, and enhance service quality. It supports the delivery of effective and efficient employment services and contributes to the overall success of PES in facilitating labour market outcomes.
- *External assessment arranged through PES visits* by external Assessors from other peer organisations. This complements the self-assessment by offering feedback from experienced, informed and interested PES colleagues. It helps PES identify areas for improvement, learn from the best practices and continuously enhance the quality and effectiveness of their services.

## From theory to practice: the Spanish EVADES case study

As part of the knowledge-building and engagement activities related to the *benchlearning* methodology, the NET PES partners had the opportunity to meet with

four Assessors from the PES Network and the representatives of NTT DATA, a private contractor who is responsible for conducting evaluations for the Spanish PES by using the methodology developed by the PES Network, which is referred to as EVADES in Spain.

These meetings allowed for a better understanding of the methodology and the concrete applications of the theoretical principles through the experience of proficient evaluators, who highlighted the crucial aspects of the assessment and shared suggestions with NET PES partners on those elements that can be transferred on a small scale. The representatives from NTT Data, in particular, presented the latest edition of the assessment conducted in Spain, providing a practical and applicative explanation of the experience and illustrating the tools used, which were simplified and did not include the PDCA (Plan-Do-Check-Act) cycle. The opportunity to simplify the approach inspired the NET PES partners to elaborate their own methodology and tools to be used on a small scale.

The EVADES methodology, which stands for "EVALuación DESempeño" and served as a practical case study for the NET PES partners, is a comprehensive performance evaluation approach developed within the PES Network, tailored for Spanish PES. The methodology focuses on systematically measuring and analysing various performance indicators related to employment services, such as job placement rates, customer satisfaction and service delivery efficiency.

EVADES aims to provide a comprehensive and data-driven evaluation that helps identify strengths, weaknesses and areas for improvement within employment services. It allows benchmarking against other regions or countries, facilitating a continuous improvement process. By applying EVADES, PES can better align their operations with strategic objectives, enhance service quality and ultimately improve employment outcomes for job seekers.

The EVADES methodology focuses on three different evaluation levels:

1. *Quantitative evaluation*: this aspect of EVADES involves the analysis of statistical data and performance metrics. It assesses the effectiveness of employment services through measurable indicators, such as job placement rates, the efficiency of service delivery, and customer satisfaction levels. The goal is to provide a clear, data-driven understanding of the services' performance.
2. *Context variables*: this evaluation considers external factors that influence the performance of employment services, such as economic conditions, labour market trends and regional variations. By taking these variables into account, EVADES ensures that the evaluation is context-specific and that the impact of external influences on service outcomes is understood.



3. *Factors that affect performance:* this qualitative evaluation involves self-assessments by the employment services themselves, as well as external evaluations. It examines internal factors that may affect performance, such as organisational processes, resource allocation, and staff competencies. This aspect of EVADES is critical for identifying areas where internal improvements can be made and for understanding the broader context of the quantitative data.

Based on the comparison and integration of self-assessment and external evaluation, the EVADES methodology aligns with the PDCA cycle to provide a continuous improvement framework. This approach ensures that internal insights are combined with objective external perspectives, facilitating a comprehensive evaluation of employment services. By integrating these assessments into the PDCA cycle, the methodology enables systematic planning, implementation, monitoring and adjustment of strategies. This results in a more nuanced understanding of strengths and areas for improvement, driving ongoing enhancements in service effectiveness.

## Step 1 | Development of the small-scale methodology

This section focuses on the initial steps necessary for effectively implementing benchlearning and developing a tailored small-scale methodology. It outlines the process of selecting and defining specific working areas crucial for the methodology's success and explains the strategies and activities suggested for an effective implementation of the small-scale benchlearning process defined and proposed by the NET PES project.

### Adaptation of the official methodology to the local/regional scope: the NET PES small-scale approach

The benchlearning methodology outlined in this manual is closely aligned with the framework established by the *PES Network* and the Spanish *EVADES*.

Key elements from these established methodologies include:

- *Standardised metrics and indicators*: using common performance indicators to ensure comparability and facilitate meaningful benchmarking.
- *External validation*: incorporating external perspectives to validate findings and ensure objectivity.
- *Structured peer learning activities*: organising workshops, study visits and peer reviews to facilitate direct knowledge exchange.

The adaptation of these methodologies to the small-scale context provided by NET PES is based on these preliminary steps:

- *Getting familiar with the official methodology* and its concrete applications.
- *Sharing meanings on key concepts, definitions and topics* for the exchange of good practices, in order to be able to compare performances across different organisations.
- *Delving into the local contexts of the various PES involved*, to understand each other's needs, priorities and potential for improvement.
- *Selecting common working areas and priorities* to focus on during the benchlearning processes.

To do this, it is crucial, on the one hand, to actively engage various local stakeholders and any other external actors that may be relevant to outline the framework of the PES activities; on the other hand, to set up a multi-professional and multi-level working group within the organisation, combining different expertise and professional skills of internal staff.

The process of adaptation of the official methodology to the local/regional scope results in the production of shared and agile tools, which represent the backbone of the benchlearning process. These tools should be tested during pilot and experimental activities, thus enabling the identification of possible bottlenecks and allowing for real-time adjustments.

As a result of these remarks, the NET PES approach emphasises several tailored elements, including:

- *Localised peer comparisons*: engaging with comparable local or regional PES to ensure relevant and useful insights.
- *Focused learning networks*: creating smaller, more focused groups for knowledge exchange, which can be more manageable and directly applicable for local services.
- *Practical tools and templates*: providing user-friendly tools and templates to facilitate the benchlearning process without requiring extensive resources.
- *Context-specific best practices*: highlighting best practices that are directly relevant to the local or regional context, ensuring that lessons learned are applicable and practical.

## Selection and definition of the working areas for benchlearning

Benchlearning is a strategic process aimed at improving organisational practices and performance by comparing and learning from successful experiences and practices of others. To maximise the benefits of this process, it is crucial to correctly identify and select the topics for study. This section provides general guidelines on how to proceed with topic selection to ensure an effective and targeted approach.

Before starting the benchlearning process, it is essential to conduct a needs analysis to understand the areas where improvements are desired. This phase should include:

- **Assessment of current challenges**: identify the main issues the organisation is facing.
- **Definition of objectives**: establish clear and measurable goals that are intended to be achieved through benchlearning.

Once needs and objectives are defined, the next step is to identify the areas of interest for benchlearning. This process may include:

- **Selection of key topics:** choose specific areas that have a significant impact on the defined objectives. For example, this could include areas such as human resource management, service innovation, or operational efficiency.
- **Analysis of sector trends and challenges:** consider emerging trends and common challenges in the sector to ensure that the selected topics are relevant and current.

Involving stakeholders is crucial to ensure that the selected topics reflect the needs and expectations of all interested parties. This can be achieved through:

- **Consultations and interviews:** gathering input and feedback from key stakeholders to identify areas of greatest interest and priority.
- **Surveys and questionnaires:** using data collection tools to obtain a broader view of the areas to explore.

Once topics are selected, it is useful to define benchmarking categories that will guide comparison and analysis. Categories may include:

- **Best practices:** identifying leading practices that can serve as reference models.
- **Performance indicators:** establishing key indicators that will be used to assess performance and progress.

A Common Definition Document must be produced to unify the understanding of key working areas for the project's benchlearning activities. This document will guide consortium partners, internal staff and local stakeholders, and will outline crucial performance enablers necessary for achieving desired outcomes

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## Focus on the NET PES experience

The identification of working areas made in the frame of the NET PES project was first drafted through a **need analysis** implemented during the project development phase and then updated and further detailed during the kick off meeting held in January 2024 in Brussels, where partners also detected the key transversal issues for benchlearning: structural unemployment (NEETs, women, migrants, long-term unemployed), labour shortages and skills mismatch (particularly in sectors: healthcare, tourism), digital divide (with a great number of jobseekers in need of digital skills) and the reputation of PES.

As part of the kick-off meeting, and consistent with the NET PES project's small-scale approach as a common and shared methodology for analysing, evaluating and implementing processes, the ultimate goal was to **define best practices and common standards of quality and performance**. The achievement of this goal was made possible by the collaboration and active participation of all partners.

The kick-off meeting was key to underline and detail differences and similarities among the partners. Despite their different social and political backgrounds and needs, partners acknowledged having common viewpoints and perspectives on employment services and common strategic priorities that enhance their performances.

The partners first identified **a set of common keywords** to define the scope and characteristics of the working areas. These areas were established through mutual understanding of the project and can be summarised as follows:

- Managing sustainable activation and transition processes.
- Establishing and maintaining fair relationships with employers to address labour shortages and skills mismatches.
- Designing and delivering tailored PES (e)services for timely, customised support.
- Managing partnerships and stakeholders within local ecosystems to develop and implement a holistic service approach.

This stage of the workflow was carried out through an online meeting, using virtual tools to exchange insights and suggestions. Participants were divided into two groups to analyse the following working areas:

### **Group 1**

*Working areas:*

1. Sustainable activation and transition management
2. Evidence-based design and implementation of PES services

*Benchmarking Areas:*

- Key terms for defining the scope and characteristics of the working areas
- Concrete examples of policy measures, (e)services and organisational frameworks implemented by each PES
- Best practices for establishing "excellence benchmarks" (one per partner)

### **Group 2**

*Working areas:*

3. Employer relations

#### 4. Partnership and stakeholder management

##### *Benchmarking Areas:*

- Key terms for defining the scope and characteristics of the working areas
- Concrete examples of policy measures, (e)services and organisational frameworks implemented by each PES
- Best practices for establishing "excellence benchmarks" (one per partner)

To sum up, the outcomes of these initial activities were:

- An introduction to the core features of the benchlearning methodology developed by the PES Network and the cooperative approach.
- Collaborative group activities aimed at developing common definitions for the four key working areas identified by the project.
- A systematic summary of the results.

These outcomes laid the groundwork for launching the collaborative efforts on WP2 in February 2024. Building on the keywords established during the kick-off meeting in January, participants shared inputs, experiences and information on each of the subtopics listed below, focusing both on the **current state** and the **ideal performance**. For each subtopic, the group identified three **potential leverage points or dimensions** to guide the discussion:

- **Internal organisation:** structure, staff, workflows, etc.;
- **Services and policy measures:** addressing specific target groups, unmet needs and more;
- **Governance and approach:** interactions and impacts within the local ecosystem.

Four **tables** (see groups below) have been drafted to support the collection of ideas that contribute to the improved definition of each working area, exploring three main dimensions:

- **Current performance**
- **Ideal performance**
- **Priorities for future work**

**Group 1: Managing sustainable activation and management of transitions**

SUBTOPICS	MY CURRENT PERFORMANCE (What are we doing? How are we doing it)	MY IDEAL PERFORMANCE (What do I want to improve? What do I want to learn? How do we achieve it?)	OUR PRIORITIES (How can I get my ideal performance through changes in my current reality?)
<b>1 – Workforce inclusivity and Diversity management</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Internal organisation</li> <li>- Services/policies</li> <li>- Governance/approach (ecosystem)</li> <li>-</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Internal organisation</li> <li>- Services/policies</li> <li>- Governance/approach (ecosystem)</li> </ul>	
<b>2 - Holistic Approach to Employment</b>			
<b>3 - Users' Accessibility and Engagement</b>			
<b>4 - Skill Development and Management of Transitions</b>			
<b>5 - Knowledge Integration and Continuous Improvement</b>			

**Group 2: Managing partnerships and stakeholders in the local ecosystems to design and implement a holistic approach to services**

SUBTOPICS	MY CURRENT PERFORMANCE (What are we doing? How are we doing it)	MY IDEAL PERFORMANCE (What do I want to improve? What do I want to learn? How do we achieve it?)	OUR PRIORITIES
<b>1 – Labor Market Understanding</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Internal organisation</li> <li>- Services/policies</li> <li>- Governance/approach (ecosystem)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Internal organisation</li> <li>- Services/policies</li> <li>- Governance/approach (ecosystem)</li> </ul>	
<b>2 - PES Perception/Reputation</b>			
<b>3 - Building Strategic Partnerships</b>			
<b>4 - Resource Allocation and Funding</b>			
<b>5 - Skill Development and Management of Transitions</b>			

**Group 3: Evidence-based design and implementation of PES services to provide timely and customised support**

SUBTOPICS	MY CURRENT PERFORMANCE (What are we doing? How are we doing it)	MY IDEAL PERFORMANCE (What do I want to improve? What do I want to learn? How do we achieve it?)	OUR PRIORITIES
<b>1 – Knowledge of the labour market</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Internal organisation</li> <li>- Services/policies</li> <li>- Governance/approach (ecosystem)</li> <li>-</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Internal organisation</li> <li>- Services/policies</li> <li>- Governance/approach (ecosystem)</li> </ul>	
<b>2 – Customer satisfaction</b>			
<b>3 – External evaluation of programmes</b>			
<b>4 – Benchmarking: EU projects and mutual learning</b>			

**Group 4: Establishing and maintaining fair relations with employers to overcome labour shortages and skills mismatch**

SUBTOPICS	MY CURRENT PERFORMANCE (What are we doing? How are we doing it)	MY IDEAL PERFORMANCE (What do I want to improve? What do I want to learn? How do we achieve it?)	OUR PRIORITIES
<b>1 – Management of Relations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Internal organisation</li> <li>- Services/policies</li> <li>- Governance/approach (ecosystem)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Internal organisation</li> <li>- Services/policies</li> <li>- Governance/approach (ecosystem)</li> </ul>	
<b>2 – PES Perception/Reputation</b>			
<b>3 – Labour market mismatch</b>			
<b>4 – Strategic Branding and Marketing (of PES and/or companies and vacancies)</b>			



Based on these tables, in order to make the process more interactive and participatory, questions were developed and presented using **Mentimeter**<sup>4</sup> to gather participants' ideas, to help identify priorities and to contribute to the definition of common meanings.

Then, during the 1st online meeting, partners were divided into two groups and rotated through the four working areas, thus developing a **common definition of the ideal performance of a PES** and identifying **key enablers** for each working area. They shared **experiences, best practices and challenges regarding current performance**, and identified **strategic assets to invest in** to improve performance and services for employment (for further details on the online activities that followed the 1st meeting, see the focus on the NET PES experience under the next section titled "Online Activities").

As a follow-up to the activities carried out during the inception phase of the NET PES project, the "**Common Definition Document**" was developed. This document aims to provide a shared definition of the four key working areas that emerged as priorities during the initial phase, which form the foundation of the partnership's benchlearning activities.

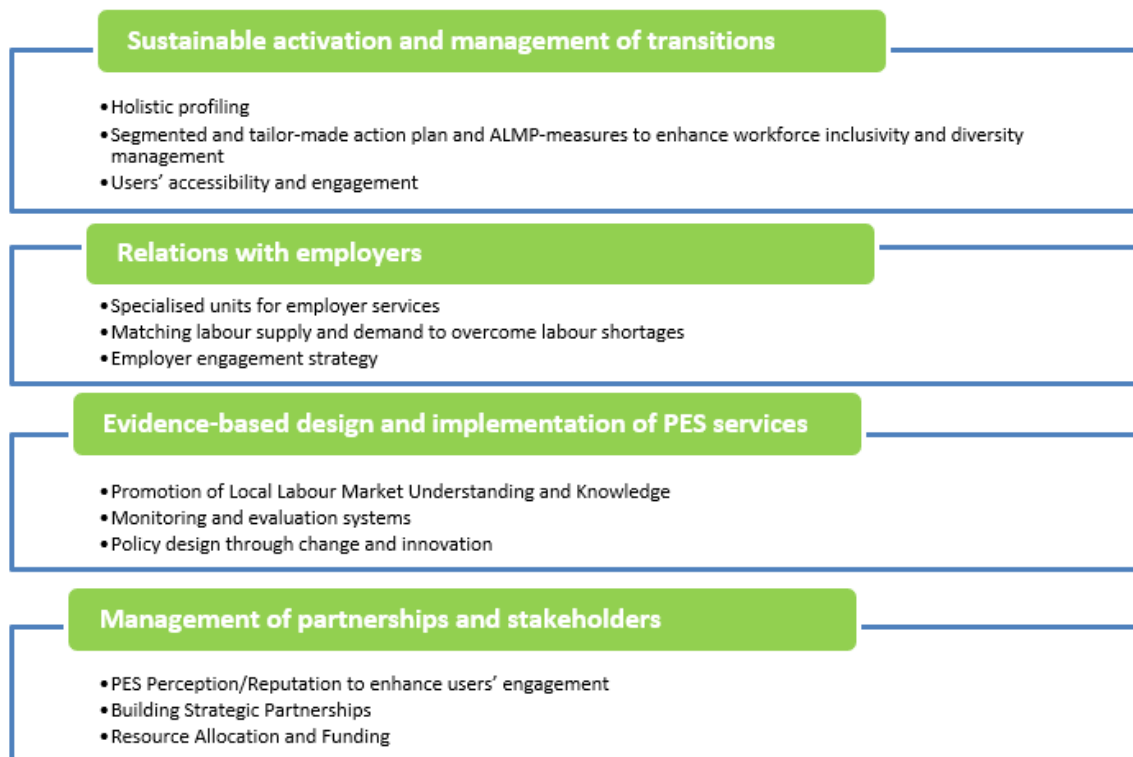
The "Common Definition Document" serves as a guiding resource for all consortium partners, internal staff and key actors within local ecosystems. Its main purpose is to facilitate future benchlearning activities by creating **a framework for assessing performance across different contexts**. Additionally, it is meant to be accompanied by a **quick survey aimed at gathering input and feedback from stakeholders**, in order to align priorities with the identified ideal performance benchmarks.

In addition to clearly defining the working areas, the document also describes the key enablers, resources and performance assets that are essential for achieving the desired outcomes. Through this comprehensive approach, the partnership's benchlearning activities were grounded in a solid understanding of the success factors that drive performance within PES.

Defined as a result of the above described process and in line with the official PES Benchlearning Manual, the following working areas and performance enablers defined by the NET PES consortium provide a small-scale, structured approach to performance improvement:

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<sup>4</sup> Mentimeter is an interactive presentation software that allows users to create live polls, quizzes, word clouds, and Q&A sessions. It helps engage audiences by letting them participate in real-time using their smartphones or other devices.



These working areas and performance enablers serve as qualitative indicators to assess best practices among NET PES partners, functioning as "excellence benchmarks". They also guide both self-assessment and external evaluation processes.

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## Online Activities

Based on the experience of the NET PES partners, this section is meant to provide practical instruction on the planning and management of online activities aimed at facilitating mutual exchange and understanding of different PES structural and service provision models, supporting the knowledge and understanding of the benchlearning methodology, enhancing the identification of best practices and ultimately enhancing the follow-up benchlearning activities planned during and after the LDDs.

The primary objective of the proposed online benchlearning activities is to familiarise participants with the benchlearning methodology, facilitate mutual understanding of the organisational systems of employment services (PES) in different countries and identify best practices. Additionally, the sessions aim to highlight critical areas and elements of interest where participants can learn from each other's experiences and practices.

The proposed online benchlearning activities are structured to provide comprehensive engagement through interactive tools, group tasks and mutual exchange sessions, through the following key stages:

- **1st Online Meeting (3 hours)**, aimed at providing a general overview of benchlearning and a general overview of the NET PES local/regional scale approach. Involved PES should contact the PES Network and ask for the involvement of one Assessor in this first online meeting to present the official methodology.
- **2nd Online Meeting (3 hours)**, aimed at promoting cooperative approach among participating PES, sharing information on the identified working areas of Benchlearning and their performance enablers. Each participant should draft a presentation of its services, organisational structure and policy priorities to be delivered during the meeting. Participatory group activities should be planned to finalise areas and common definitions.
- **3rd Online Meeting (3 hours)**, aimed at finalising the common definition document and providing instructions for the creation of internal working groups to help identify each organisation's best practices and for the delivery of a survey to internal and external stakeholders.
- **4th Online Meeting (3 hours)**, aimed at sharing of the survey results and identifying best practices. Each participant should collect, analyse and report the survey results and collect and present good practices under the identified working areas.
- **5th Online Meeting (3 hours)**, aimed at identifying the working and mutual exchange priorities to be set as a focus during the LDDs, creating the tools and defining techniques to be used for the observation during the LDDs and defining any further document or report to be drafted as a result of the benchlearning process at local/regional level.

The structure of five online meetings, each lasting three hours, is designed to ensure a thorough and collaborative benchlearning process:

- Five sessions provide a step-by-step progression, allowing participants to gradually build knowledge, engage in meaningful exchanges and refine outputs at each stage.
- Three-hour blocks strike an effective balance, offering sufficient time for presentations, discussions and participatory activities, thus supporting each PES's active involvement, building mutual understanding and enabling tangible outcomes from the benchlearning process.

The meetings aim to deepen understanding and awareness of the PES Network and its methodology, and to rationalise the working areas and enablers based on the characteristics of the participating PES.

Within each meeting, some time will be dedicated to internal briefings, both in group or bilateral meetings, depending on the coordination needs detected during the cooperative process.

The suggested online activities are expected to be handled on digital platforms such as Google Meet, Teams or Zoom, with the support of cooperative tools like Mentimeter and Miro<sup>5</sup>.

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## Focus on the NET PES experience

Between January and June 2024 the PES involved in the NET PES project jointly worked on:

- The **common definition of the four key areas detected** during the drafting of the project (i.e., managing sustainable activation and management of transitions, establishing and maintaining fair relations with employers to overcome labour shortages and skills mismatch, designing and implementing PES (e)services to provide timely and customised support and managing partnerships and stakeholders in the local ecosystems to design and implement a holistic approach to services).
- The **mutual understanding and sharing of organisational frameworks and best practices**.
- The definition of the **NET PES benchlearning methodology** to be implemented throughout the project life cycle and mutual learning activities.

These key stages were developed through off- and online meetings structured as follows:

- **Launch of WP2 during the project kick-off meeting (Brussels - January, 19<sup>th</sup> 2024)**: introduction to the key features of the benchlearning methodology developed by the PES Network, sharing of the cooperative approach needed for the success of the mutual learning process and drafting of common definitions of

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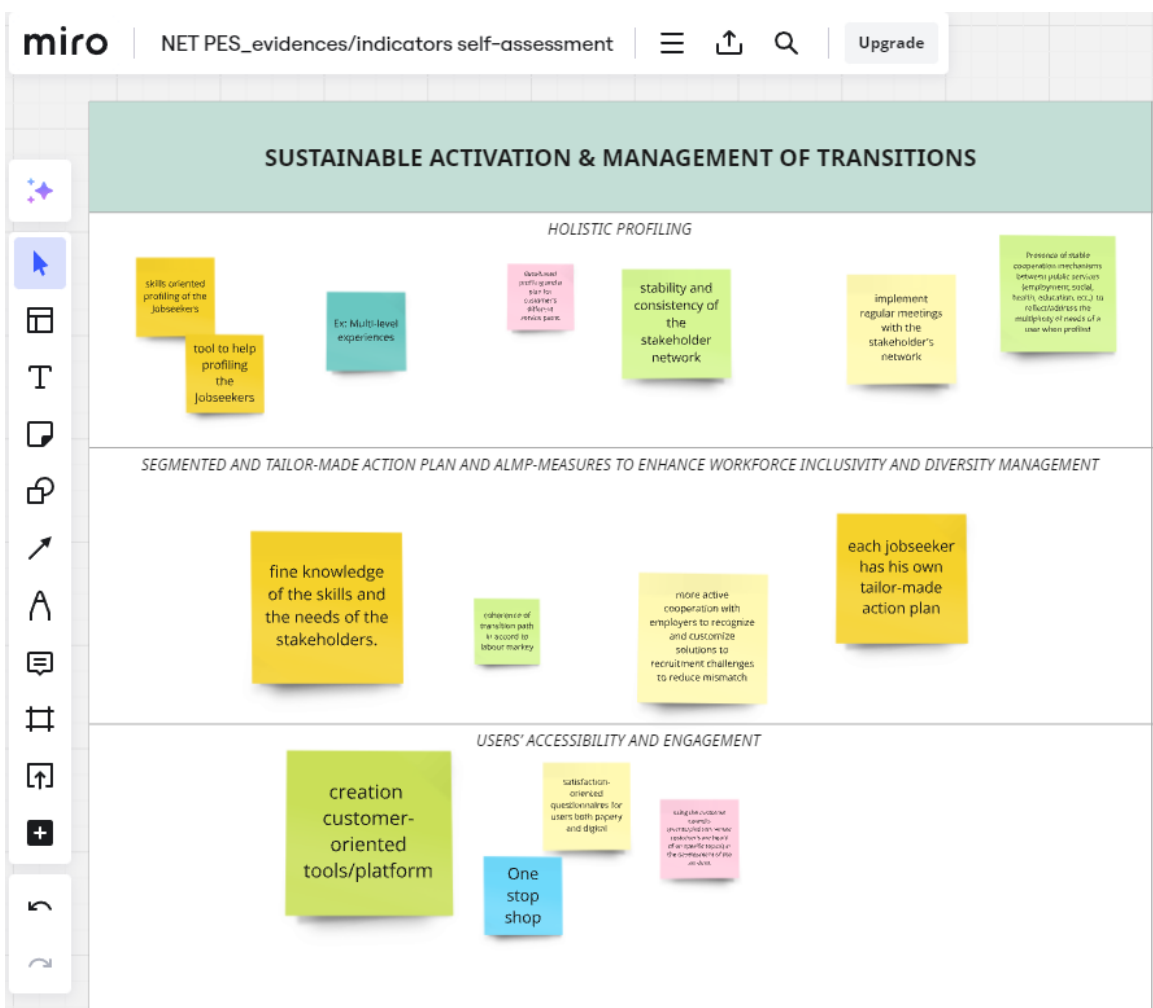
<sup>5</sup> Miro is an online collaborative whiteboard platform designed for teams to brainstorm, plan and work together visually. It provides an infinite canvas where users can add sticky notes, diagrams, images, mind maps and more.

the four key working areas detected by the project through participatory group activities.

- **1<sup>st</sup> online meeting:** online group activities aimed at sharing information on the organisational structure of each PES, with a focus on how digital PES have evolved in the past three years, and review of the needs identified during the preparation phase. Key issues discussed during this meeting included:
  - General introduction to the activities and group work and brief overview of the topics and key issues emerged from the kick-off meeting.
  - Participatory activities supported by Mentimeter to complete the definition of the working areas, enablers and key priorities (for further details on these activities, please refer to the focus on the NET PES experience under the section “Selection and definition of the working areas for benchlearning”).
  - Presentation of the objectives and the activities proposed during the first online meeting and presentation of the moderation scheme.
  - Presentation of the context analysis to be completed by each partner.
- **2<sup>nd</sup> online meeting:** general presentation of the benchlearning methodology developed by the PES Network led by Mrs Mafalda D’Onofrio, PES Network Assessor based in Italy (1h30’), followed by an internal session among partners aimed at reviewing the activities done during the 1<sup>st</sup> meeting and catching-up on the next steps (plenary session: 30’).

In this session, time was also dedicated to a collaborative dynamic using Miro Board helping to design the indicators that could be used in the self assessment tool.

An example of a Miro board window where partners worked on the first Benchlearning area




- **3<sup>rd</sup> online meeting:** presentation of the thematic dialogue scheme developed by the PES Network by Mr Niels Lieman, PES Network Assessor based in the Netherlands (45'), followed by an internal teamwork session among partners aimed at reviewing the priorities identified during the 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting and connecting them to best practices performed by each PES (45').
- **4<sup>th</sup> online meeting:** presentation of the self-assessment methodology and tools developed by the PES Network by Yannis Papadimitriou, PES Network Assessor based in Greece (1h30'), followed by an internal session among partners dedicated to the presentation of the draft of the common definition document (30').
- **5<sup>th</sup> online meeting:** presentation of the External assessment methodology and tools developed by PES Network by Sandrine Portier and Jean-Pierre Callais, PES Network Assessors based in France (1h) and presentation of a practical case study by Marina Polo González, Assessor at NTT DATA, private external

assessment company hired by SEPE (Spanish National PES), followed by teamwork among partners (1h30').

- **6<sup>th</sup> online meeting:** finalisation of the common definition of the four key working areas, identification of best practices and concrete examples of the operation flows and organisational processes implemented by the partners and identification of the most relevant features of the PES Network's benchlearning methodology, tools and strategies to be transferred to the "NET PES benchlearning". Before this meeting, the partners had identified 4 good practices (1 good practice per area of benchlearning : 1. Sustainable activation and management of transitions; 2. Evidence-based design and implementation of PES services ; 3. Relations with employers; 4. Management of partnerships and stakeholders). During the 6<sup>th</sup> online meeting, each partner presented the 4 good practices (20' each).
- **7<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> online meeting:** fine tuning meetings focused on the benchlearning tools and method formats at local/regional level, with the objective to create the detailed structure for the implementation of the LDDs. Before these meetings the [survey for internal staff](#) and [external stakeholders](#) was disseminated and results were collected and then presented during this meeting. All surveys were created with Google Forms and all partners used the auto generated graphs and tables to carry out their analysis.

Screenshot of the questionnaire for internal staff



**NET PES**

## Erasmus+ NET PES Project - Survey for Internal Staff

**NET PES PROJECT:**

Funded by the Erasmus+ programme, NET PES is a strategic partnership made up of 8 local/regional Public Employment Services based in 6 EU countries: France Travail Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes (France), Le Forem (Belgium), Veneto Lavoro (Italy), ARTI Toscana (Italy), Agencia para el Empleo de Madrid (Spain), Servei Públic d'Ocupació de Catalunya (Spain), Helsingin Kaupunki (Finland), and Arbetsmarknadsförvaltningen Stockholms Stad (Sweden).



- These meetings were also dedicated to share and further implement the drafts of the following documents:
  - Baseline check-up (for more information, please refer to the Appendix).
  - Benchlearning manual for local labour market ecosystems (for more information, please refer to the Appendix).
  - Guidelines and glossary for the implementation of LDD visits (for more information, please refer to the Appendix).
  - Roadmap for implementation of the follow-up LDDs (for more information, please refer to the Appendix).

All activities were based on a **participatory approach**, providing the participants with interactive tools (i.e., Mentimeter, Miro, shared documents...), group tasks and mutual exchange sessions.

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## Investigative Research in the Local Ecosystem

This section delves into the methodologies for conducting research within organisations. It provides guidance on forming internal work teams and engaging stakeholders from the local ecosystem. Additionally, it provides information on the design and



implementation of rapid surveys targeting both internal staff and external stakeholders, on the basis of the experience of the NET PES partners. The section also covers strategies for the systematic collection and analysis of data.

Carrying out research within PES is strategic for several reasons:

- **Informed Decision-Making:** Research provides data and insights that inform policy and operational decisions. This helps in making evidence-based decisions that can improve service delivery and outcomes for job seekers and employers.
- **Identifying trends and needs:** Research helps in identifying labour market trends, skills shortages and emerging employment sectors. This allows the organisation to proactively adjust its services and programs to meet the evolving needs of the labour market.
- **Enhancing accountability and transparency,** thus demonstrating commitment to continuous improvement and accountability to stakeholders.
- **Benchmarking and performance measurement:** Regular research allows PES to benchmark their performance against other organisations and standards. It helps in setting targets, measuring progress, and identifying areas for improvement.
- **Enhancing engagement:** Research involving surveys and focus groups engages various stakeholders, including job seekers, employers, and internal staff, fostering mutual trust and perception.

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## Focus on the NET PES experience

### *Online survey for internal staff and ecosystem stakeholders*

#### *→ Identification of survey's purpose*

Within the WP2 “Finetuning a common methodology”, a survey was administered by each PES involved in the project to **internal staff and external stakeholders, in order to better define the benchlearning areas identified by the partnership and get a multi-level perspective on their scope and priorities.**

#### *→ Identification of the target*

As already mentioned, the target of the survey was identified both in internal staff and external stakeholders, in order to ensure a balance between the self-perception of the PES' needs and the perception of the same from the outside.

On the one hand, within an **internal working group** that each partner had to set up in a preliminary phase<sup>6</sup>, the **mid-management of the organisation** (e.g. area managers, service supervisors, and coordinators within PES offices and local/regional headquarters) is chosen as the target of the survey. This, to have a broad-spectrum and overall vision of local PES, but also specific sectoral expertise.

On the other hand, external stakeholders were identified among **organisations, partners and other entities that closely cooperate with each PES** and were expected to have a good knowledge of the services provided by PES in the local ecosystem, including VET providers, trade unions, trade associations, social cooperatives, employers, public social service and any other relevant public and private stakeholders.

### **→ Development and piloting of the survey structure and questions**

The surveys' structure and contents were developed according to the working areas and the performance enablers identified and described in the Common Definition Document, while the content and form of the questions were adapted according to the reference target audience.

To ensure a meaningful comparison between the survey results of internal staff and external stakeholders, the following recommendations should be followed:

- **Standardise questions:** Ensure that both questionnaires have a set of core questions that are identical in wording and format. This allows for direct comparison of responses between the two groups.
- **Adapt question framing:** While the core questions should be similar to enable comparison, the framing can be adjusted to fit the context of each target group.
- **Consistent scaling:** Use the same response scales for both surveys (e.g., likert scales ranging from 1 to 5) to facilitate quantitative comparison.
- **Parallel structure:** the two surveys (internal staff and external stakeholders) should have a mirrored structure in order to facilitate partners in the analysis, interpretation and comparison of the results.

It would be preferable to choose **closed-ended questions (multiple choice and likert scale)**. Open-ended questions can be used to allow respondents to add comments and provide clarification.

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<sup>6</sup> **Definition of internal working group:** a team within each organisation that includes not only representatives actively participating in the benchlearning process with other PES but also colleagues from various departments. This group collaborates to share information about the benchlearning process, define self-assessment content, evaluate and select best practices to present to other PES and coordinate the diverse activities involved in the benchlearning process. By bringing together members with different expertise, the internal working group ensures that the insights and benefits of benchlearning are integrated across the organisation.

The focus of each section was to identify the **priorities of action, leverage points, and issues to be addressed in order to enhance performance**. A final section was dedicated to the cross-cutting issues, with the aim of assessing the level of intensity/maturity with which each PES operates in terms of: 1) support to vulnerable groups, 2) digital transformation, 3) green transition/sustainability, 4) gender equality/transversality.

Once the contents have been finalised, the survey was constructed using a Google form. It was then **tested by the internal working group** to ensure that each section was consistent with the previous and the following ones and that the questions were logically related.

### **→ Survey's dissemination**

The first step for dissemination was to translate the two questionnaires into the partnership's national languages.

It was the responsibility of each partner to ensure the completion of a minimum of 20 questionnaires. Recipients were expected to include a balanced mix of both internal staff and external stakeholders (at least 10 respondents representing internal staff and 10 representing external stakeholders). If disseminating to a broader audience, the partners were required to maintain a 50% ratio between recipients from internal organisations and external stakeholders.

The surveys had to be sent out along with the Common Definition Document (duly translated into the national language), so that everyone could have complete definitions and more precise information regarding the topics covered by the questions.

### **→ Data collection, analysis and reporting**

The final step was to report the results in a clear and accessible manner. This involved creating visualisations like **charts and graphs** to highlight key insights, and presenting a **narrative that contextualises the data**, explaining the methodology, and discussing the implications of the findings.

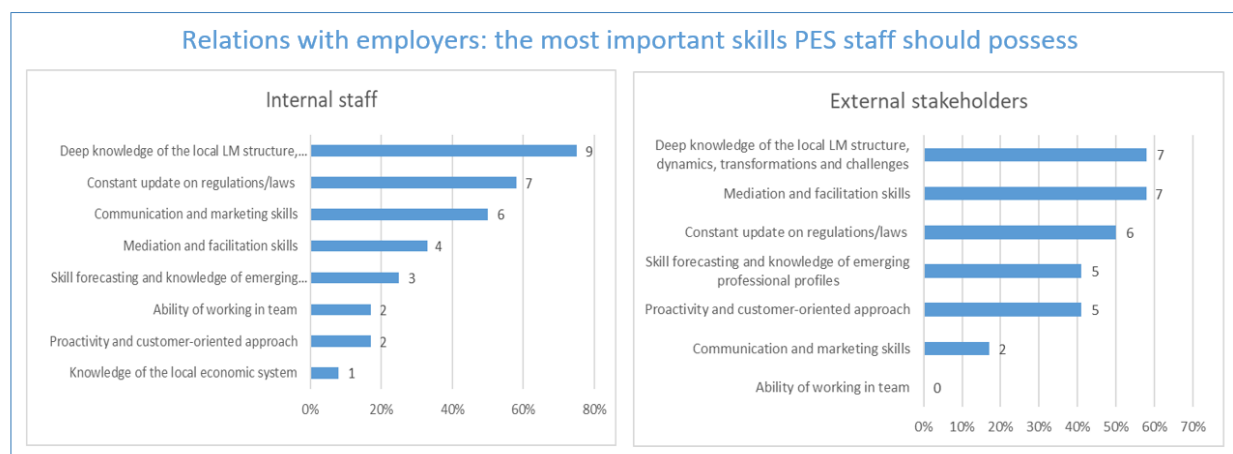
To facilitate comparison of the evidence emerging in each PES, a **standardised template for the analysis of results** was provided. The template is the basis for a **narrative report**, which presents the key findings of the two surveys. The report was organised by the target of respondents (internal staff and external stakeholders), working areas, and cross-cutting issues.

The findings were elaborated by partners in a concise manner, with an attempt to contextualise the findings within the specific framework of their own PES organisation.

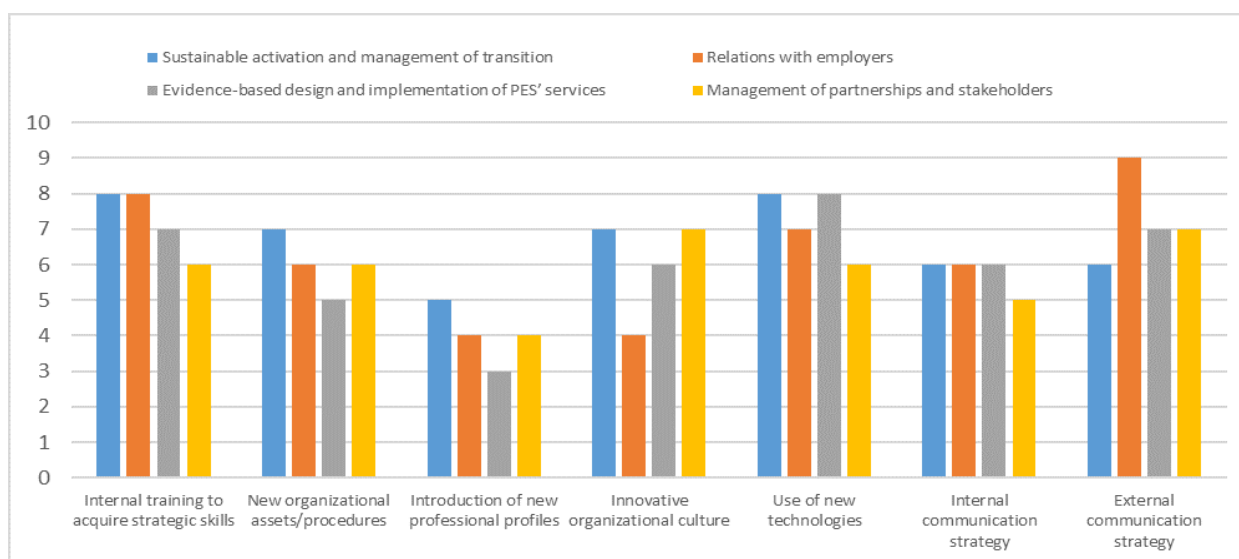
It was important to highlight any significant differences and/or common perspectives between the groups of respondents.

It is recommended to use various **visual tools to illustrate key data points**, such as **graphs and charts** (bar charts, pie charts, and line graphs) or **infographics**. Below, in the tab. 1, 2 & 3 you can find an example of data collected.

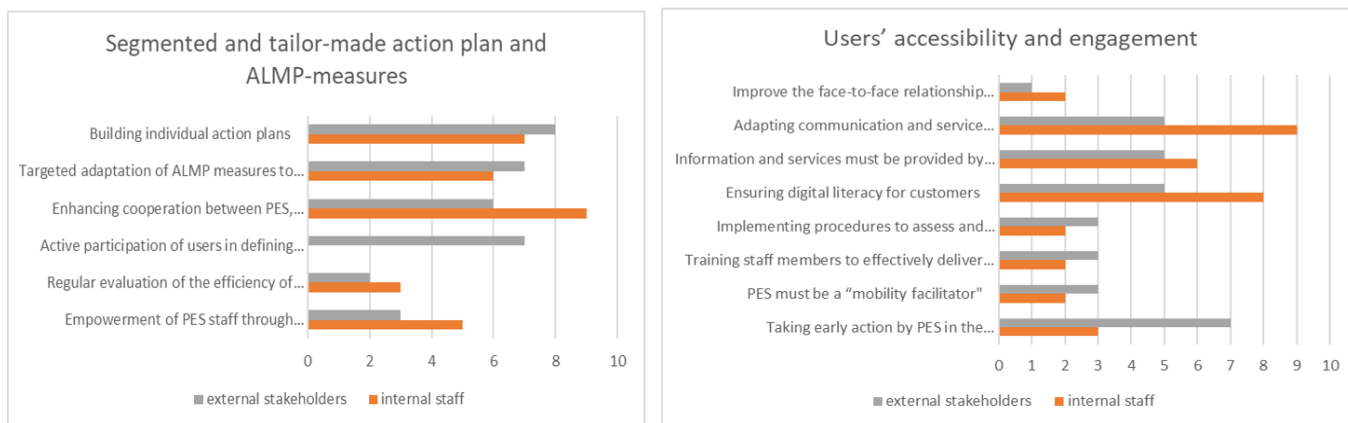
*Tab.1 - Assets to leverage on in order to improve your PES' performance in the four working areas considered (internal staff). Items scored 5 or 6 according to their importance*



*Tab. 2 - Comparison internal staff vs external stakeholders (n° of respondents for each asset/priority)*



*Tab. 3 - Comparison internal staff vs external stakeholders (n° of respondents for each asset/priority)*



## Step 2 | Evaluation of the PES' own performance: self-assessment

This section of the manual outlines the self-assessment process for PES, highlighting its benefits and implementation methods. It explains how self-assessment allows PES to evaluate their performance, foster continuous improvement, set realistic goals and engage stakeholders. Particular focus is given to the experience gained during the NET PES project, which involved the collaborative development of a self-assessment tool. The process included online sessions, pilot tests and subsequent revisions to ensure effective implementation, while addressing the four key working areas and the transversal topics such as the digital and green transitions.

Self-assessment is a process used by PES to evaluate their own performance and effectiveness and, according to the PES Network [Benchlearning Manual 2024](#), it is the first step in the benchlearning process. It involves reflecting on and analysing various aspects of their operations, including strengths, weaknesses and areas for improvement. This process facilitates the identification of the best solutions and interventions at the local level, as well as highlight areas for adaptation and improvement that are essential to ensuring the optimal performance of PES.

According to the official **benchlearning manual released by the PES Network in 2024**, the main goals of the PES self-assessment are:

- to identify strengths and weaknesses across various aspects of PES operations.
- to identify potential areas for enhancement.
- to recognize and document potential strategies and methods for enhancing promising aspects of PES operations and frameworks.

PES self-assessment offers several benefits for PES, including:

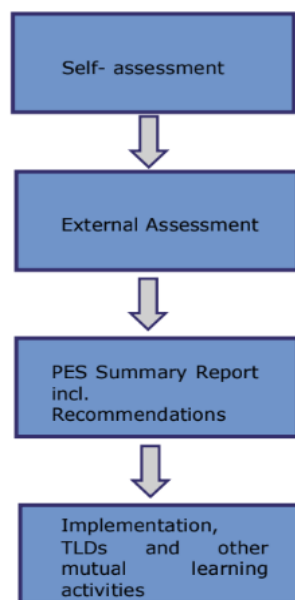
- *Performance evaluation*: it allows PES to evaluate their own performance and identify strengths, weaknesses and areas for improvement. It provides an opportunity to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of their operations, services and strategies.
- *Internal reflection and learning*: self-assessment encourages PES staff to reflect on their practices, processes and outcomes. It promotes a culture of continuous learning and improvement within the organisation. By critically examining their own performance, PES can identify innovative approaches and best practices that can enhance their services.
- *Goal setting and planning*: the chance of analysing processes and workflows helps PES set realistic goals and objectives based on their current performance

and desired outcomes. It enables them to align their activities and resources towards achieving these goals. Self-assessment also assists in developing action plans and strategies to address identified areas for improvement.

- *Accountability and transparency:* the process enhances accountability within PES by promoting a systematic and evidence-based evaluation of their performance. It allows PES to demonstrate their achievements, challenges, and progress to stakeholders, including government authorities, policymakers, and the public. This transparency builds trust and confidence in the services provided by PES.
- *Stakeholder engagement:* self-assessment provides an opportunity for PES to engage with stakeholders, including job seekers, employers and other relevant organisations. By involving stakeholders in the assessment process, PES can gather feedback, insights, and suggestions for improvement. This engagement fosters collaboration and ensures that the services provided by PES are responsive to the needs of their stakeholders.
- *Continuous improvement:* self-assessment is a key driver of continuous improvement within PES. It enables them to identify and implement changes, innovations, and best practices that can enhance the quality and effectiveness of their services. By regularly assessing their performance, PES can adapt to evolving labour market dynamics, emerging challenges, and changing needs of job seekers and employers.

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## Focus on the NET PES experience



One of the specific objectives of WP3 in the NET PES project was for partners to conduct a self-assessment in each of the areas of observation using a set of performance enablers/indicators. This process facilitated the identification of the best solutions and interventions at the local level, as well as highlighted areas for adaptation and improvement that were essential to ensure the optimal performance of Public Employment Services. To this end, a crucial task was the drafting of the self-assessment template, which was developed during WP2.

Within the previously presented theoretical framework, one of the objectives of WP2 was to align and provide a co-created tool to assess the performance of PES in the four areas of benchlearning selected for this project, as well as on transversal issues.



The process of self-assessment and mutual benchmarking among the project partners was inspired by the benchlearning strategies and techniques developed by the PES Network. Specifically, the theoretical references have been the third edition of the PES Benchlearning Manual, published by PES Network and the questionnaire developed by EVADES, an assessment programme designed by Spanish Public Employment Services based on the PES Network methodology.

The activities carried out during WP2 were essential in developing the self-assessment tool. Firstly, as outlined in Step 1, the PES organisations involved in the NET PES project collaboratively defined four key working areas and, for each of them, they identified three performance enablers and addressed issues related to transversal themes. Based on this work, the core objective in drafting the self-assessment tool was to create a framework that facilitates the evaluation of each performance enabler while considering these transversal themes.

Secondly, during WP2, there were several online sessions focused on theoretical topics related to benchlearning. The 4th and 5th sessions of these online meetings were specifically dedicated to self-assessment. During the 4th online meeting, the speaker - a PES assessor based in Greece - explained the objectives of self-assessment and the operation of the PDCA cycle. The PDCA, or Plan-Do-Check-Act method, is a four-step, cyclical problem-solving approach that organisations use for continuous process improvement. Each stage of the PDCA cycle contributes to identifying which business processes are effective and which need improvement. In its original format, as outlined in the Benchlearning Manual, the evaluators score and document each task. However, during the 5th session, a private external assessor based in Spain presented the latest edition of the assessment program EVADES, in which the PDCA cycle was not included. As a result, it was decided to design a self-assessment tool that minimises the use of the PDCA model, as the model requires an advanced level of theoretical knowledge in the field of evaluation. While retaining this approach for self-assessment, the goal was to create a more simplified and user-friendly structure that can be easily utilised by all PES.

Taking into account the issues that emerged from the 4th and 5th online sessions of WP2, the phase of drafting the self-assessment template has begun. The plan was to use this template for a pilot test to be implemented during the first site visit (LDD1) in Venice and Florence by Veneto Lavoro and ARTI.

The basic aspects of the self-assessment tool for the pilot test have been as follows:

- **Scoring Performance Enablers**  
Each performance enabler included a description of performances, and for each enabler, the PES was required to score from 1 to 6 based on the level of compliance.



- Four Information Boxes for Each Enabler  
For each performance enabler, there were four sections:
  - Description
  - Resources
  - Critical Issues
  - Areas of Improvement

These sections allowed respondents to provide detailed information on current PES performance, the sources that justified the score, and offered a critical perspective on areas for improvement and critical points.

- PDCA Box  
In the PDCA box, respondents had to select which stage of the process they were currently in.
- Transversal Points for Each working area  
For each of the four working areas, the PES had to address four transversal points:
  - Impact of this working area on the digital and green transition
  - Impact of this working area on the labour inclusion of vulnerable groups
  - Impact of this topic on your PES reputation
  - Impact of this topic regarding gender transversality

In the days following the visit, partners have evaluated the functionality of the self-assessment tool and have made some changes. Ultimately, the definitive version of the self-assessment tool incorporated the following modifications:

- Transversal Issues  
During the pilot test, difficulties emerged in addressing transversal issues for each of the four working areas. As a result, partners decided to create a specific section on transversal topics at the end of the entire self-assessment tool, accompanied by targeted questions.
- Detailed Responses for Transversal Issues  
Initially, the pilot version only asked respondents to assess the impact on transversal issues. Respondents were now able to provide a more comprehensive analysis by indicating:
  - a) Description of the performance
  - b) Critical issues
  - c) Areas of improvement and mutual learning

- **Dedicated Sections for Digital and Green Transitions**  
Separate sections dedicated to digital and green transitions have been integrated to ensure consistency with the follow-up questionnaire.
- **Clarification of Terminology**  
PES partners observed confusion between the enabler “PES Perception/Reputation to enhance users’ engagement” and the transversal issue “Impact of this topic on your PES reputation.”  
To address this, the enabler has been renamed “Perception of PES and impacts on users’ and stakeholders’ engagement” focusing on how services are perceived by stakeholders and how this impacts users.  
Instead, the transversal issue has been renamed “Communication and PES reputation”, focusing on communication strategies and reputation.
- **Enhanced PDCA Box**  
The PDCA box now included a new section for providing details about the PES’s responses, making it more understandable for external readers. Initially, partners had decided not to delve into information regarding the PDCA cycle, but they realised it was necessary to explain why a certain stage has been reached.

At the end, the structure of the self-assessment tool was organised as follows:

<b>working area of benchlearning (4)</b>
<i>Performance enabler (3 for each working area of benchlearning)</i>
Description of the ideal performance
Score
Description
Resources
Critical Issues
Areas for improvement
PDCA (Plan, Do, Check, Act)
Description
<b>Transversal section (5)</b>
Guiding questions

Description of your performance
Critical Issues
Areas for improvement and mutual learning

Once all the partners had edited and approved the self-assessment tool, they were able to use it during WP3.

## Step 3 | Learning by observing

### Learning Deep Dives (LDDs): study visits as a key stage for benchlearning

The study visit (or *LDD - Learning Deep Dives*, as referred as to within the NET PES project) is a key stage for benchlearning and is designed to be a multifaceted learning experience, offering participants the chance to engage in the **exchange of insights for collective learning on policies, methodologies and strategies** for the effective organisation and management of PES. Then, it is expected to highlight processes, initiatives and experiences that help in **facilitating transitions and managing relationships within local ecosystems**, complementarily supporting the **improvement of communication and reputation strategies**.

By participating in study visits, PES have the opportunity to **explore and create new connections** and **investigate cooperative possibilities with both public and private bodies** across different nations. Importantly, study visits seek to establish a unified language among partners, concentrating on **common challenges** and **fostering a network of international and European collaboration**.

Ideally, study visits should be structured in **three main steps**:

1. ***Preparation to the study visit***: participants are expected to carry out a **self-assessment and collect best practices on each of the Benchlearning areas identified**. To facilitate the learning process, self-assessments should be carried out **before the first study visit**. All participants are expected to approach the study visit with a spirit of mutual learning by making suggestions and providing recommendations for the visited PES and by *taking something home* from the experience in order to improve their performance. The objective of the self-assessment is **to identify** organisational **strengths and weaknesses**, to **determine** areas with the **highest potential for improvement** and **to provide staff** with new competencies that contribute to broader mission-driven activities, including research and evaluation of Active Labour Market Policies.
2. ***Implementation of the study visit***: participants actively engage in **evaluating the host PES' best practices and services for jobseekers and employers** and their **cooperation with local stakeholders** through direct observation and analysis, using tools like the self-assessment template and the observation sheet. Each presentation and field discussion should be followed by a **light evaluation for benchlearning session**, which allows visiting PES to share **quick feedback on the services observed**. This collaborative approach fosters a constructive exchange of feedback, comparative analysis and peer learning, all conducted with a spirit of mutual support.

3. **Follow-up to the study visit:** after the study visit, partners complete a **follow-up questionnaire** to provide comprehensive feedback to the host. Then, the visited PES examines and re-elaborate these insights into a **final report**, thus summarising the observations and recommendations collected from all guests. This report serves as a valuable **document for continuous improvement and knowledge sharing**, both among partners and within the examined PES.

Study visits should last **3 days** and serve as a **practical evaluation of the hosting PES' self-assessment**, based on the following structure:

- **Day 1:** activities should take place at the PES' **institutional headquarters**, serving as an opening session for presenting the examined PES' structure, mission and core activities and encouraging the sharing of experiences and knowledge among participants.
- **Day 2:** the focus of the second day should be set on one selected **local PES** and serve as a chance to **observe the implementation of activities**, potentially including a simulated “customer journey” for assessors and the presentation of best practices.
- **Day 3:** the closing day should be reserved for the hosts to showcase their **communication strategies and discuss transversal issues**, including the twin transition, gender equality and the job inclusion of vulnerable targets.

**The active engagement of stakeholders**, including companies and training providers, as part of the programme are highly recommended to complement the experience.

The entire process is designed to be **participatory**, ensuring all partners contribute to and benefit from the benchlearning experience.

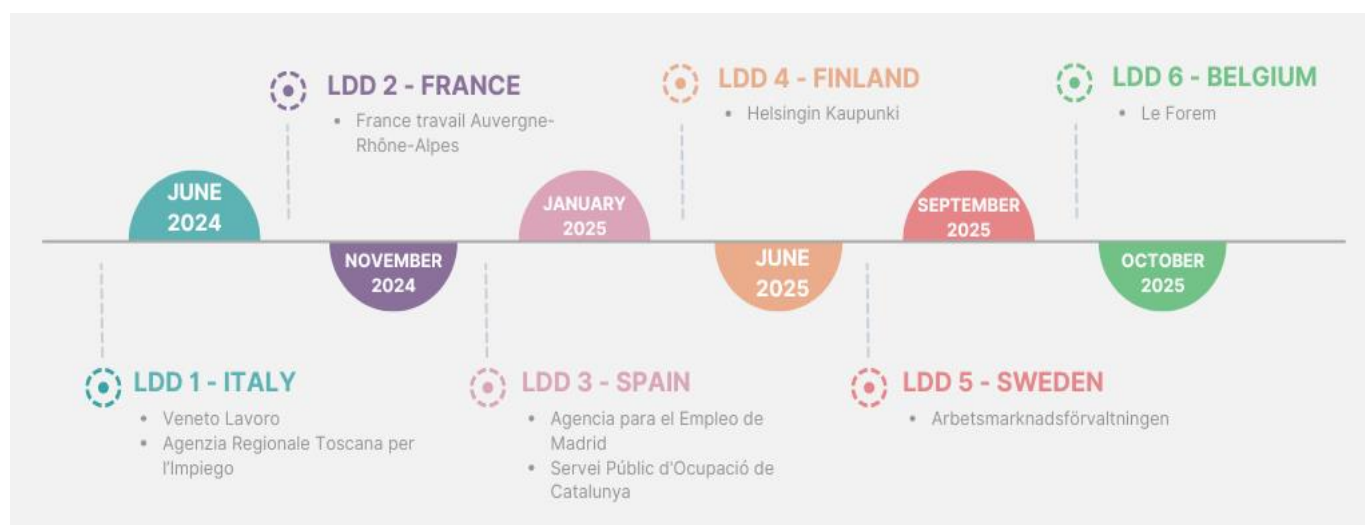
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## Focus on the NET PES experience

### The NET PES first pilot LDDs in Italy (Venice and Florence)

To provide a concrete example of the model developed within the NET PES project, this section focuses on the study visits held in Italy (Venice and Florence) in June 2024.

## Overview of the 6 LDDs, key dates and PES to visit



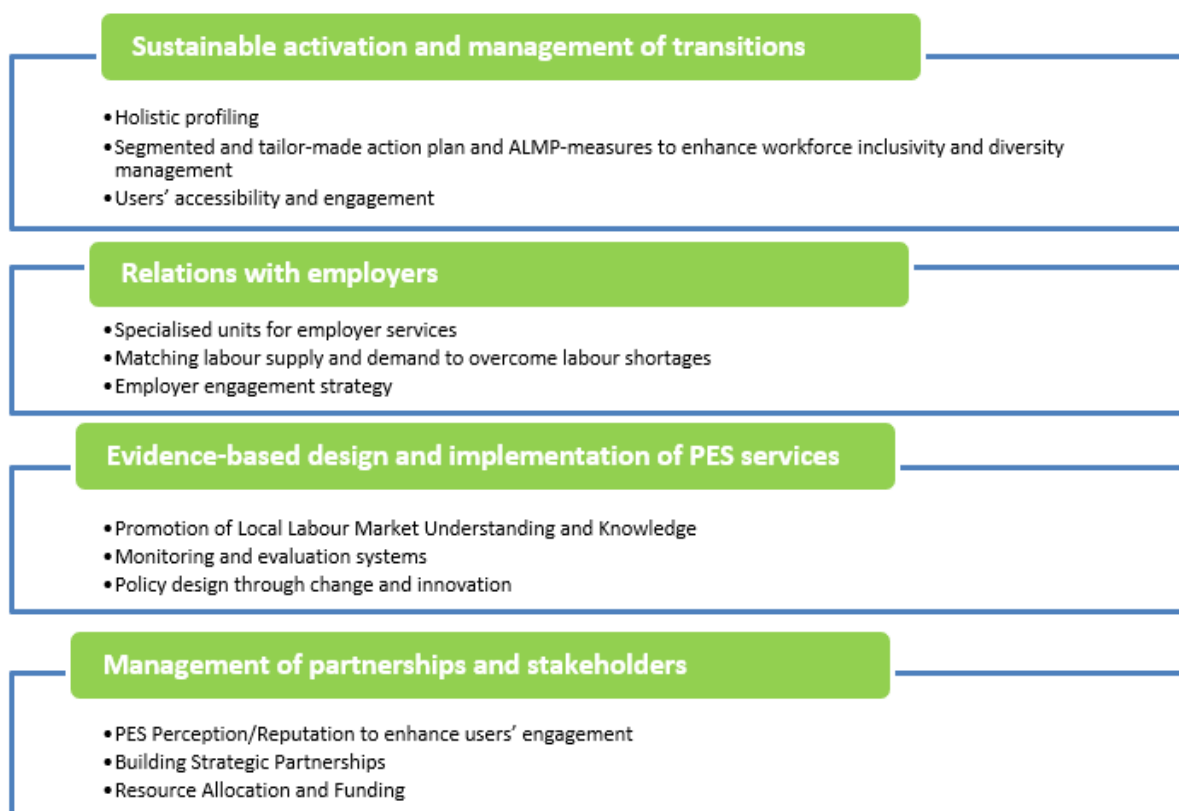
These visits served as pilots for the upcoming ones scheduled for the next two years in each of the participating countries:

Before the study visit in Italy, the NET PES project partners had already chosen the **4 working areas of Benchlearning** to be analysed:

1. Sustainable activation and management of transitions
2. Relations with employers
3. Evidence-based design and implementation of PES services
4. Management of partnerships and stakeholders

During online working meetings, the NET PES partners agreed to establish **3 performance enablers for each working area**:

## The 4 Benchlearning areas and their each 3 performance enablers



The pilot study visit was planned through three main steps:

1. **Preparation:** before the study visit, the project partners identified **32 good practices** (4 best practices per partner and per Benchlearning area), which were presented during the 6th online meeting. The two Italian partners sent **the self-assessments** to the other partners a few weeks before the study visit, so that they could read through them and get ready for the visit. Based on the experience gained by the NET PES partners, **allocating sufficient time (at least one month) to this stage is highly recommended.**
2. **Implementation:** during the study visit (*see the agenda below*), partners visited the PES headquarters and local offices and met some employers and stakeholders, who emphasised on their cooperation with PES. With the support of **the self-assessment and observation tools**, partners **observed the best practices** proposed before and, depending on time/agenda, the other performance enablers. **Short benchlearning sessions** were organised at the end of the study visit in order to share **quick feedback on the services presented.** Based on the experience gained by the NET PES partners, these benchlearning sessions should be preferably carried out **after the presentation of each best practice**, because this approach allows for a more in-depth discussion of the key strengths, innovative ideas and recommendations.

3. **Follow-up:** after the study visit, partners filled out a tailored **follow-up questionnaire** to offer detailed feedback to the host. Since not all performance enablers were visible or analysed during the study visit, partners reviewed all available documents when drafting the follow-up questionnaire. This included the self-assessment, resource links and other provided materials. Subsequently, the examined PES gathered and integrated these responses into a **feedback report**, which summarises the collective insights and suggestions from all partners.

The agenda of the pilot study visits is provided as follows and can be considered a model for the implementation of similar activities:

Partner	Day / Location	Programme
Veneto Lavoro (VL)	Monday, June 3rd (Regione del Veneto)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Welcome</li> <li>• Presentation of the LDD</li> <li>• Overview of the strategic programming of the ALMPs planned and implemented by the Veneto Region, with a view on innovation and the role of the twin transition</li> <li>• Overview of the role, the mission and the services provided by the regional agency for ALMPs and employment services</li> <li>• Best Practice in the working area “Management of partnership and stakeholders” : Territorial Animation</li> </ul>
	Tuesday, June 4th (Local PES - Padua)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presentation of the programme of the day</li> <li>• The Employment Center and the social relations in the local environment</li> <li>• The digital evolution of the services provided by the Employment Center</li> <li>• PES Padua and Relation with Employers</li> <li>• Presentation of the PES Padua + Visit</li> <li>• Visit of the Cooperativa Il Brolo</li> <li>• The role of cooperation in the job placement path of disadvantaged people</li> <li>• The active labour policy GOL4</li> <li>• Relations with the Municipality of Padua, PES and PUC</li> <li>• Conclusion and evaluation of the day</li> </ul>
	Wednesday, June 5th (VL headquarters)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Welcome and presentation of the day</li> <li>• Best practice in the working area « Evidence-based design and implementation of PES services » : The Regional Observatory on Labour Market of VL</li> <li>• Best practice in the working area « Relations with employers » - Towards a new vision of services: Incontra Lavoro LVMH &amp; Incontra Lavoro Economia del Mare” - Blue Economy</li> <li>• Best practice in the working area “Sustainable activation and management of transitions” : Veneto Lavoro’s Business Services and Crisis Management Unit</li> <li>• Focus on transversal issues: Veneto Lavoro’s communication strategies and PES perception at local level &amp; “Equamente al lavoro” information and communication campaign on gender equality in job inclusion and placement</li> <li>• Benchmarking session, focusing on the strengths of the host PES and providing indications for improvements</li> </ul>



<b>ARTI</b>	Thursday, June 6th (Tuscany Region offices + local PES)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Presentation of the day</li> <li>● Welcome from the Head of the Employment Sector of Tuscany Region</li> <li>● Presentation of the network of employment services of the Tuscany Region</li> <li>● Best practice in the working area “Sustainable activation and management of transitions” : Women victims of violence</li> <li>● The role of the Job Center Tutor in the ATI Project to help women on their pathway out of violence</li> <li>● Best practice working area “Management of partnerships and stakeholders”: ARTI’s Communication Plan</li> <li>● Presentation of local PES services and opportunities call for placement incentive</li> <li>● Best practice in the working area “Evidence based design and implementation of PES”: Tuscany Job Portal/accessibility/web learning platform Trio/Skill scanner/SIL of Regione Toscana a tool to monitorate and evaluate performances</li> <li>● Digital facilitators</li> </ul>
	Friday, June 7th (Tuscany Region offices)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Best practice in the working area “Relation with employers”: Tuscany Job Fair &amp; Textile Fashion Event "Buzzi" the dialogue between training and employment opportunities</li> <li>● Focus on transversal issue - communication strategies and PES perception at local level</li> <li>● Tuscany Job Fair: an example of multichannel communication campaign</li> <li>● Meeting with the company “Alma Spa”</li> <li>● Tuscany job Fair &amp; Textile Fashion Event held at Buzzi School in Prato : Job and training opportunities</li> <li>● Benchlearning session, focusing on the strengths of the host PES and providing indications for improvements</li> </ul>

## Step 4 | Learning by assessing

External assessment plays a crucial role in contributing to the improvement of Public Employment Services. The ultimate purpose of the external assessment is to support and mirror the self-assessment process by providing feedback to each PES from the perspective of knowledgeable peers in the field. It helps PES identify areas for improvement, benchmark their practices against others, and set improvement goals. Additionally, the process enhances accountability and transparency by providing independent evaluations, ensuring PES maintains high standards.

A key benefit of external assessment lies in learning through the act of assessing itself. When PES professionals evaluate other organisations, they gain valuable insights into effective strategies, innovative approaches, and potential solutions that can be applied in their own work. This "learning by assessing" process transforms assessment into a two-way educational experience. Assessors deepen their expertise and understanding, benefiting from direct exposure to various practices and outcomes, while those being assessed receive constructive feedback. This reciprocal learning approach encourages continuous improvement, as both parties gain knowledge that contributes to the overall advancement of PES services.

### Producing feedback

#### Light evaluation

During the study visits (LDDs) organised in each examined PES, visiting PES take on the role of "external assessors" in the hosting country. This external assessment is inspired by the process ruled by the PES Network within the official assessment but aims at serving as a lighter and smoother process for PES acting in small-scale assessments.

The light evaluation experienced and proposed by the NET PES partner complements the self-assessment efforts of the hosting PES by providing constructive feedback from the perspective of informed, interested and well-intended peer-assessors. This collaborative evaluation process is designed to enhance mutual learning and improve practices through the exchange of insights and experiences.

During the study visit, the visiting PES should actively engage in observing and analysing the practices of the visited one. The self-assessment should be used as a primary reference point throughout the visit, guiding the assessors in their evaluation. To facilitate systematic observation, the visiting PES may utilise observation sheets (see annex in the Appendix). These sheets are designed to help peer assessors record their

observations, ensuring that key performance enablers and areas of concern are captured accurately.

Observation and analysis should focus on understanding the effectiveness of the practices in real-world conditions, identifying both successes and challenges. Peer external assessors should pay attention to the contextual factors that may influence the outcomes, such as organisational culture, resource availability and external pressures.

Light evaluation benchlearning sessions are pivotal components of the LDDs, providing a structured forum for immediate feedback. These sessions should be conducted after each good practice is presented or following a group of related practices, ensuring that the feedback is timely and relevant. The hosting PES is responsible for organising these sessions, which should be designed to facilitate open and constructive dialogue.

The hosting PES is responsible for structuring these rapid participatory sessions. They may choose various methods and interactive tools (e.g., open discussions, quick surveys, group reflections) but must focus on gathering feedback in the following key areas:

- **Strengths:** identifying and discussing the positive aspects, innovations and elements that could serve as inspiration for other PES. This includes what the visiting partners find particularly effective or noteworthy in the host's practices.
- **Areas of improvement:** suggesting potential improvements or modifications that could enhance the practices observed. This could include recommendations for overcoming identified weaknesses or building on existing strengths.

After the light evaluation sessions, it is crucial to collect and document the insights gathered. The hosting PES should complete a comprehensive **feedback report** (see annex in the Appendix), which will integrate the feedback collected during the light evaluation sessions and the ones gathered from the **follow-up questionnaire** (see annex in the Appendix) completed afterwards. This report should be structured to offer a balanced view, acknowledging the strengths identified while also addressing the areas for improvement.

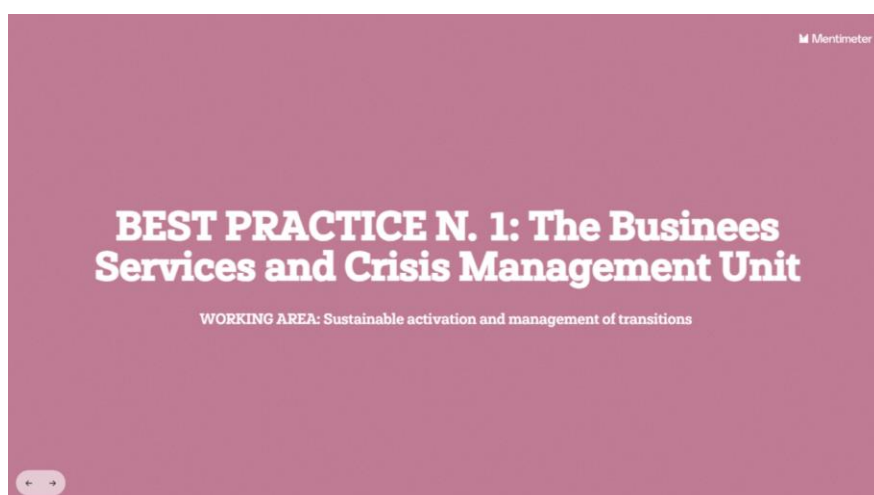
The feedback report will serve as a key resource for the hosting PES, guiding future efforts to enhance their practices. Additionally, it will contribute to the broader learning objectives of the PES network, providing insights that can inform collective strategies and initiatives aimed at improving employment services across the network.

## Focus on the NET PES experience

### Refining the light evaluation process in the NET PES project

As part of the NET PES project, the partners initially implemented a more complex version of the light evaluation during the pilot phase of the study visits in Italy. This approach was based on the *Start-Stop-Continue* methodology and included a comprehensive set of specific questions covering all the enablers listed in the self-assessment, transversal issues and best practices. The aim was to support a multifaceted observation culminating in a final light evaluation session at the end of the LDD. Questions and interactive feedback were managed through Mentimeter during the pilot LDDs in Italy, as reflected in the following samples:

Example of the first best practice from Veneto Lavoro



Start: What should be initiated or implemented to improve the best practice?



Stop: What should be stopped because it is ineffective ?



Continue: What is working well and should be maintained or further developed?



### Pilot phase: challenges and insights

During the pilot, partners organised a final light evaluation session at the conclusion of the visit, which aimed to bring together all the observations made throughout the LDD. However, this approach revealed several challenges:

- **Breadth of evaluation:** the broad scope of the evaluation, which encompassed all enablers, transversal issues and best practices, proved to be demanding. The sheer volume of information made it difficult for participants to maintain focus and provide feedback on every aspect.
- **Timing and effectiveness:** conducting the final light evaluation session at the very end of the visit was less effective than anticipated. By this point, participants

were often fatigued and the extensive discussions during the session did not always yield the desired depth of analysis.

- **Start-Stop-Continue limitations:** determining which measures or activities should be stopped or started was not as straightforward as initially expected. Participants struggled to clearly identify actions that warranted to be stopped or started, often leading to broader feedback on strengths and weaknesses detected.

### **Shift in focus: strengths, weakness and improvements**

Based on these insights, the NET PES partners decided to refine the light evaluation process to make it more targeted and effective. The revised approach emphasises a focus on **strengths, weaknesses and areas for improvement** rather than the broader *Start-Stop-Continue* framework, leading to the following benefits:

- **Clarity and precision:** by narrowing the focus to strengths, weaknesses and areas for improvement, participants are better able to provide clear and actionable feedback. This approach simplifies the evaluation process, making it easier to identify specific aspects of the host's practices that are working well, those that require attention and potential enhancements.
- **Ongoing evaluation sessions:** rather than saving all feedback for a final session, light evaluation sessions are expected to be integrated throughout the visit. After each good practice is presented or a group of related practices is demonstrated, immediate feedback is gathered. This ensures that observations are fresh and participants can provide more insightful and relevant input.
- **Enhanced effectiveness:** focusing on these three key areas has proven to be more effective in guiding the hosting PES towards practical improvements. Participants can readily identify and discuss positive aspects that could inspire other PES, highlight critical points that need attention and suggest improvements that are both feasible and impactful.

The experience of the NET PES project highlights the importance of adapting evaluation methodologies to suit the context and goals of the assessment. While the initial pilot phase provided valuable lessons, the refined approach focusing on strengths, weaknesses and areas for improvement has led to a more effective and manageable light evaluation process. This proposed refinement ensures that the study visits not only foster mutual learning but also lead to tangible improvements in PES practices across the network.

## Observation sheet

The **Observation Sheet** is a key tool used during study visits as part of the benchlearning process. It serves as a guide for peer-assessors to systematically gather and organise information about the performance of the host PES. Its purpose is to ensure that observations during the visit are structured, allowing assessors to evaluate the PES' operations and compare them to the self-assessment report and the ideal performance benchmarks identified in earlier phases of the assessment.

Before the study visit, assessors are expected to review the self-assessment report provided by the visited PES. During this initial analysis, they identify areas that require further clarification or verification. These points form the basis of the observation during the visit.

The observation sheet helps assessors focus on:

- Verifying the findings from the self-assessment.
- Clarifying unclear aspects of the report.
- Checking how the PES implements its approaches and the stage of deployment according to the PDCA model.
- Assessing whether the PES can serve as a model for others.

The observation sheet should be divided into different sections, each targeting key elements of PES performance, including:

1. **Visit topics and points to be checked:** this section outlines the specific aspects of the PES's work that need to be observed during the visit, based on the self-assessment report. Topics are linked to the PES's core functions, such as sustainable activation, digital and green transitions or strategies for vulnerable groups. Key questions are used to guide assessors' observations, such as:
  - How does the PES take a holistic approach?
  - Does the PES have tailored action plans to improve workforce inclusivity and diversity?
  - How accessible and engaging are the services provided?
2. **Performance:** assessors evaluate how well the PES is performing in the selected areas. This includes looking at how processes are implemented and whether they align with the ideal stages of the PDCA cycle. Assessors consider whether the PES's practices are consistent, well-integrated and systematically deployed.

3. **Evidence:** assessors record concrete examples and data that illustrate the PES' performance. These might include examples of specific practices, reports, or testimonials from staff and users, which help to justify the performance ratings.
4. **Strengths:** if the PES demonstrates an integrated approach, systematic deployment and evidence of excellence in any area, this is recorded as a strength. This section highlights the PES's successful practices that may serve as models for other organisations.
5. **Areas for improvement:** when the PES shows a lack of clarity in processes, limited or inconsistent deployment or insufficient evidence of effective management, it is noted in this section. The assessors focus on identifying gaps that need to be addressed for performance enhancement.
6. **Recommendations:** based on their observations and expertise, assessors provide practical recommendations to the PES. These suggestions aim to improve the PES's operational performance, address weaknesses, and enhance service delivery.
7. **Best practices:** this section is dedicated to identifying and documenting successful practices observed during the visit. The description includes the purpose of the practice, its target audience, and the potential for replication in other PES.
8. **Aspects to check:** assessors focus on the key elements of any best practice or performance area. This may include assessing the **impact**, **stage of development**, **actors involved** and the **replicability** of the approach in other PES environments.

The observation sheet is adapted to various operational areas within the PES, such as:

- **Sustainable activation and management of transitions:** evaluating how the PES supports employment transitions, the inclusivity of its action plans, and the engagement of users.
- **Digital and green transition:** observing how the PES manages the shift to digital tools and more sustainable labour market practices.
- **Vulnerable groups approach:** assessing how the PES addresses the needs of vulnerable job seekers and promotes their inclusion.

Each of these sections is linked to specific performance indicators, ensuring a thorough and comprehensive review during the visit.



## Follow-up questionnaire

The follow-up questionnaire is a key tool in the evaluation process that follows the field observation phase. After independently reviewing the comments collected during the LDDs, each visiting PES is required to provide more detailed and reflective feedback. This feedback goes beyond the initial insights gathered during the light evaluation session and is informed by the data recorded on the observation sheet throughout the study visit.

The follow-up questionnaire is structured to systematically capture both quantitative and qualitative evaluations, focusing on two key components: self-assessment criteria and direct observations made during the study visits. The objective is to assess the actual performance of the observed PES in relation to the ideal performance previously identified in the preliminary stages of the evaluation process.

The questionnaire should be divided into eight sections reflecting the four main working areas evaluated, along with four sections dedicated to key transversal aspects such as the digital and green transitions, vulnerable jobseeker groups and the gender perspective. Each working area is supported by a series of performance enablers.

The quantitative evaluation involves assigning a numerical score to the observed performance, offering a measurable indication of how closely the PES's current performance aligns with ideal standards. In parallel, the qualitative section allows for more detailed observations, providing space for comments on the strengths, weaknesses and areas for improvement identified during the visit.

In each area, visitors are asked to rate performance using a scale from 1 to 6 (taking into account the same criteria used in the self-assessment): 1 - No evidence or some ideas; 2 - Some weak evidence, related to some areas; 3 - Some good evidence related to relevant areas; 4 - Strong evidence related to most areas; 5 - Very strong evidence related to all areas; 6 - Excellent evidence, highlighting gaps between the observed reality and the ideal benchmark. Furthermore, the structure of the questionnaire encourages the identification of specific strengths and concrete suggestions for improving performance and services offered.

The follow-up questionnaire aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the PES' activities and performance while offering practical recommendations for continuous improvement, based on informed observations and collected data. This approach ensures structured feedback that reflects the operational specifics of each PES, strengthening their ability to respond effectively to the evolving challenges of the labour market.

# Elaborating feedback

## Feedback report

The feedback report is a comprehensive document designed to summarise and reflect on the evaluations conducted during the benchlearning process. This report includes a detailed analysis of areas for improvement, along with suggestions and recommendations.

Each hosting partner is responsible for creating a final report of the visit, incorporating the feedback and insights from the follow-up questionnaires submitted by participants in the LDD.

The feedback report includes the following key sections:

- **Description of the evaluation process**, which outlines the methodology and steps involved in the evaluation process.
- **Strengths and areas for improvement** for the four areas of benchlearning, including the four best practices.
- **Strengths and areas for improvement for transversal issues.**
- **Strengths and areas for Improvement for the communication strategy.**
- **Lessons learned and recommendations**, which provides key recommendations and lessons learned from the evaluation process, highlighting areas for improvement and best practices identified by visiting partners.

## Step 5 | Benchlearning follow-up and perspectives

This section delves into the impact of benchlearning at the local level, providing recommendations for integrating peer-assessment feedback and observed best practices into service programming and offering guidance on strengthening cooperation to drive continuous improvement and innovation in the field of public services for employment across Europe.

### Impact of benchlearning at the local level

Benchlearning exercises have substantial impacts on local PES operations, particularly in terms of service delivery and performance standards. Through the peer-assessment process, PES can identify strengths and weaknesses in their current practices. The local impacts of benchlearning include:

- **Enhanced service delivery:** by adopting best practices observed in other countries, PES can improve the efficiency and effectiveness of their services. This may include better profiling of job seekers, more tailored action plans, and improved user engagement strategies.
- **Increased awareness of best practices:** local PES can benefit from the exposure to innovative approaches and successful models implemented elsewhere. This awareness can stimulate local adaptation and implementation of proven strategies that address specific regional needs.
- **Benchmarking and performance measurement:** benchlearning provides PES with benchmarks against which they can measure their own performance. This comparison helps in setting realistic goals and performance standards aligned with best practices.
- **Capacity building:** the knowledge gained from peer assessments helps in building local capacity by highlighting areas for professional development and training needs.

### Strategies for integrating recommendations and best practices

To effectively integrate the recommendations from peer-assessors and observed best practices into local programming, PES should consider the following strategies:

- **Action plan development:** developing comprehensive action plans based on the feedback received during benchlearning. These plans should outline specific actions, timelines and responsible parties for implementing recommended changes. The action plans should address both immediate improvements and long-term strategic goals.

- **Adaptation of best practices:** tailoring the observed best practices to fit the local context. While it is crucial to integrate successful strategies, they must be adapted to meet the specific needs and circumstances of the local ecosystem.
- **Stakeholder involvement:** engaging key stakeholders, including local employers, training providers and community organisations in the implementation process. Their involvement ensures that the adapted practices are relevant and effectively address local challenges.
- **Monitoring and evaluation:** establishing mechanisms for ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the implemented changes. This will help in assessing the impact of the new practices and in making necessary adjustments.
- **Knowledge sharing:** fostering a culture of knowledge sharing within and between PES. Regularly communicating the outcomes of benchlearning exercises and the improvements made is key to encouraging continuous learning and the adoption of best practices.

## Recommendations for strengthening cooperation and innovation

To bolster cooperation and drive innovation in PES services across Europe, the following recommendations are proposed:

- **Foster collaborative networks:** creating and sustaining networks of PES professionals and stakeholders to facilitate the exchange of ideas and experiences. These networks can support collaborative projects and shared learning initiatives.
- **Promote joint initiatives:** encouraging joint initiatives and pilot projects between PES from different countries. Collaborative projects can lead to innovative solutions and enhance the collective impact of PES services.
- **Support innovation hubs:** establishing innovation hubs or centres of excellence that focus on researching and developing new approaches to employment services. These hubs can serve as platforms for testing and scaling innovative practices.
- **Leverage EU funding:** benefitting from European Union funding programs to support cross-border collaborations and innovation in employment services. Funding can help in implementing new technologies, developing training programs, and scaling successful models.
- **Continuous professional development:** investing in continuous professional development for PES staff to keep them updated on the latest trends, technologies, and best practices in the field of employment services.

Benchlearning offers a valuable framework for PES to enhance their services and performance through collaborative learning and improvement. By integrating recommendations and best practices, and strengthening cooperation across Europe, PES can drive significant advancements in the quality and effectiveness of employment

services. Embracing these strategies will not only improve local service delivery but also contribute to a more innovative and responsive employment support system across the continent.

In order to use the methodology effectively, it might also be useful to have general indications regarding:

## **1/ The time spent on each step of the project is as follows:**

### **Step 1: Development of the Small-Scale Methodology**

- **Online Activities:** 8 online sessions \* 3 hours = 24 hours (~3.5 days)
- **Documents:**
- Need analysis (3 days) + translation (11 days): **~14 days**
- Common definition document + translation: **~4 days**
- Benchlearning manual (15 days) + translation (11 days): **~26 days**
- Roadmap: creation + translation: **~4 days**
- Guidelines and glossary: **~4 days**
- Surveys for internal staff and stakeholders: creation, translation, interpretation: **~12 days**
- Best practices: **~2 days**
- **Total: ~69.5 days**

### **Step 2: Evaluation of the PES' Own Performance: Self-Assessment**

- Self-assessment creation (7 days) + completion (14 days) + translation (3 days): **~24 days**
- **Total: ~24 days**

### **Step 3: Learning by Observing**

- LDD – 3 days per study visit in BE, FI, FR, SE and 4 days for IT and ES: **~20 days**
- Agenda + preparation + contact with internal staff + stakeholders + translation: **~14 days**
- **Total: ~34 days**

### **Step 4: Learning by Assessing**

- Follow-up questionnaire – creation document (1 day) + completion: (7 partners x 7 follow-up=49 days) **~50 days**
- Feedback report – creation + completion + summary + translation: **~18 days**
- **Total: ~68 days.**

## **2/ Human Resources Involved**

**Project Partners:** 16 participants per meeting/LDD, including roles such as European project manager, communication specialist, labor market analyst, expert in international and institutional relations, expert in partnership relations, external relations expert, evaluation technician, planning officer, leading specialist, employment technician, communication manager, business services and marketing coordinator, expert officer

in active labor policies, labor policy officer, expert in labor market, integration, and education.

**During the Study Visits (LDD):**

- more than 100 managers
- more than 50 partners involved
- more than 100 advisors/technicians (operational functions of PES: advisors supporting job seekers and companies + experts in digital and ecological transitions).

**Persons Engaged Through Questionnaires:**

- 94 experts and managers: mid-management of PES & experts in digital and ecological transitions
- 68 local and regional partners: involved in visits and consultations to define the areas of Benchlearning.

**During the Online Sessions:** 6 external assessors of the PES Benchlearning:

- Mafalda D'Onofrio, PES Network Assessor based in Italy
- Niels Lieman, PES Network Assessor based in the Netherlands
- Yannis Papadimitriou, PES Network Assessor based in Greece
- Sandrine Portier and Jean-Pierre Callais, PES Network Assessors based in France
- Marina Polo González, Assessor at NTT DATA, private external assessment company hired by SEPE (Spanish National PES).

**Internal and External Experts for Evaluation of NET PES Documents:**

- International project coordinator – Irecoop Veneto, Italy
- General Manager Inova Consultancy, United Kingdom
- Associate professor at IEP Grenoble, France
- PES Coordinator (Arti – Pistoia)
- Project manager, Finland
- Chief Intermediation Service, Spain
- Head of unit at the labor market department, Sweden
- Technician of the Strategic Planning, SOC, Spain.

**European Commission:**

- Team Leader of Public Employment Services at the European Commission, has been informed about the project and will receive further information on the results.

# Appendix

[Baseline situation and needs](#)

[Best practices identified by the project partners](#)

[Common Definition Document](#)

[Guidelines and Glossary](#)

[Feedback report](#)

[Follow-up Questionnaire](#)

[Observation sheet](#)

[Roadmap for implementation of LDD](#)

[Self-assessment model & PDCA example](#)

[Surveys results \(for internal staff and stakeholders\)](#)

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