

Enhanced cooperation between Public Employment Services (PES)

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This Commission staff working document consists of the evaluation accompanying the report on the proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Decision No 573/2014 /EU on enhanced cooperation between Public Employment Services (PES).

Although not required by the Decision, this evaluation has been undertaken in the interest of good administration and in line with the 'evaluate first' principle to take into account the lessons of past EU action and to better design future interventions.

This evaluation assesses the state of play and degree of implementation of the Decision, and whether the Network has fulfilled its legal obligations and achieved its objectives. It covers the five criteria set out by the Better Regulation requirements, namely relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coherence and EU added value.

Relevance

The Decision remains highly relevant for PES. The objectives of the Decision and the initiatives encompass the key areas of PES responsibility and provide a robust framework for the policy and concrete activities of the Network. How PES can contribute to the better functioning of the labour market in the changing world of work has been addressed more prominently in the Network's work programme over the past years. By providing a broad framework for Network activities, the objectives enable a flexible approach to addressing priorities for action depending on labour market developments.

Effectiveness

The Network has been effective in delivering its initiatives and objectives. PES have taken up the results of PES cooperation, and the PES have increased their level of maturity as organisations. The Network's effectiveness is illustrated out by the strong endorsement and implementation of the successful bench learning concept, as well as by the success of knowledge sharing through mutual learning events, reports and PES practices.

Efficiency

The Network has been efficient in delivering initiatives and reaching objectives. Some Network activities are difficult to quantify, and four years is also a short period to realise certain gains and make them visible, such as changes in organisational culture. However, the willingness of PES to participate in bench learning and mutual learning events, as well as positive feedback from PES demonstrate that the Network outputs are highly effective and appreciated by all Network members. Overall, less advanced PES have benefited more from participating in the Network in terms of the progress they have made on performance, but advanced PES have also progressed.

Coherence

There is a good degree of consistency between the Decision and the EU policy framework. No duplication of action is observed. The Network has contributed extensively to the implementation of EU relevant policies and initiatives in various areas and by different means, and has established a collective voice and

a formal platform in policymaking at EU level, while making contributions to the EU 2020 strategy for jobs, and smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. The Network's contributions have been most extensive in the long-standing issues of implementation of the Youth Guarantee and the integration of the long-term unemployed into the labour market. The Network has also demonstrated flexibility to target new topics such as the integration of migrants and refugees, the prevention of unemployment and addressing skills shortages.

EU value added

An added value of the PES Network has been a structured framework for assessing PES performance and capacity and for facilitating comparisons, peer learning and improvements. The evaluation demonstrates several other results of the Decision that would not have been achieved by voluntary cooperation of national PES. Some important achievements are greater ownership, the provision of individual PES learning and collective mutual learning, ensuring a collective voice and a formal platform in policymaking at EU level, and contributions to the EU2020 objectives. There is potential, however, to develop stronger relationships with social partners, NGOs and ESF managing authorities, and at the international level in order to increase synergies and mutual benefits.

Lessons learnt

Overall, the evaluation shows that the Decision has been successfully implemented and some lessons learnt could be identified. The persisting difficulties that vulnerable groups face when trying to (re-)enter the labour market demonstrate the continued relevance of the objective of supporting vulnerable groups with high unemployment rates.

The evaluation clearly underlines the importance of continued focusing on learning and sharing experiences.

Potentials to further improve efficiency of the Network include focusing on smaller and more targeted learning events and the potential for further use of digital solutions.

The PES are also key actors implementing the European Social Fund, and play an active role in the development of a comprehensive strategy for a policy framework on ALMPs, thereby contributing to the effective and efficient spending of EU funds.

Financial, organisational and expert support from the EU level is essential to ensure the ongoing participation of all PES. Without such support, some countries could face difficulties participating, while commitments to long-term activities could become difficult, and cooperation could be more fragmented in terms of themes.