EUROPEAN
COMMISSION

Brussels, 22.10.2026
COM(2026) 564 final

REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

Evaluation on the application of Decision No 573/2014/EU on enhanced cooperation between Public Employment Services

{SWD(2026) 318 final}

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. The PES Network during the period of evaluation

Public Employment Services (PES) are the main authorities implementing employment policies to facilitate the labour market integration of jobseekers, helping to match supply and demand in the labour market. The quality of their services has direct consequences on the impact of employment policies on the ground and on the employability of individuals seeking or making use of their services. PES are key actors in ensuring the successful implementation of relevant EU policy initiatives in the field of employment and, consequently, in strengthening the EU's competitiveness.

Decision 573/2014/EU[1] on enhanced cooperation between Public Employment Services (PES) ('the PES Decision') formally established the European Network of Public Employment Services ('PES Network'). The PES Network aims to foster effective and efficient collaboration between PES and provide a platform to compare their performance at EU level, identify good practices and facilitate the development of innovative, evidence-based employment policies in line with EU-level priorities.

In 2020, the PES Decision was amended by Decision (EU) 2020/1782, which renewed the PES Network's mandate until the end of 2027 and introduced the following key objectives: an increased focus on inclusion and support for vulnerable groups; fostering sustainable and inclusive growth; and enhancing cooperation between the PES Network and the broader community of labour-market stakeholders. The amended Decision No 573/2014/EU requires the Commission to submit by 30 September 2026 an evaluation report on how the Decision has been implemented In 2023, the Network transitioned to a multiannual work programme (updated annually) to streamline activities and rationalise planning, contributing to simplification. As part of ongoing efforts to simplify and streamline data collection processes, the Network has also enhanced the synergies between data collection for PES benchmarking and the European Commission's Labour Market Policies database.

The Network brings together the PES of the EU Member States, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, and the European Commission. The structures of PES vary by country, with differences in legal status, organisational setup, degree of independence from government and distribution of tasks across administrative levels.

[1] EUR-Lex - 02014D0573-20210101 - EN - EUR-Lex.

The Employment Committee (EMCO) has an observer role in the PES Network. The activities of the Network are financed under the EU programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI) strand of the European Social Fund+ (ESF+); its secretariat is based in the European Commission.

While core responsibilities showed little change between 2021 and 2025[2], PES adapted their services in response to a tighter labour market. Among other things, PES increasingly focused on long-term challenges and structural inequalities, with services targeting vulnerable groups (e.g. long-term unemployed, persons with disabilities, young people, workers over 55, displaced persons from Ukraine and migrants), or covering these groups under specific objectives[3]. In addition, while registered jobseekers remain their core target groups, PES increased their efforts to provide services for employed individuals at risk of losing their job[4] and to support people outside the labour force, including through outreach activities[5].

[2] PES Capacity Report 2021 p.13 and PES Capacity Report 2025 (including Annex 10).
[3] Trends in PES – Assessment report on PES Capacity - 2025.
[4] Early intervention and job-to-job transitions - The evolving role of PES.
[5] Hidden potential - Publications Office of the EU, Trends in PES – Assessment report on PES Capacity - 2025.

1.2. Overview of the evaluation methodology

The evaluation assessed the application of the PES Decision over the period 2021-2025 across the 27 EU Member States (EU-27) and Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway.

This involved a series of research tasks to gather robust evidence, including:

- desk research (comprising over 650 EU-level documents);
- EU-level interviews with 38 stakeholders, including social partners, NGOs, relevant networks and international organisations, EU agencies and Commission representatives;
- two surveys targeting Advisers for European PES affairs (AFEPAs) (31 responses), representatives from EMCO and national employment ministries (22 responses);
- two workshops, and six country case studies (BG, DE, ES, FI, LT, SI)[6].

A call for evidence launched in November 2025 ran until the end of December 2025.

2. MAIN FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Between 2021 and 2025, the PES Network carried out a wide range of activities and produced an extensive range of outputs, to support PES in a changing labour market.

These included: (i) governance activities (with the active participation of PES senior management, supported by AFEPAs); (ii) mutual learning (events, analytical and communication activities); (iii) 'Benchlearning', a process designed to help PES across Europe improve their performance by comparing themselves with peer PES via qualitative and quantitative assessments; (iv) and contributions to key EU policies.

This section summarises the evaluation's findings and conclusions on the implementation of the PES Decision, in line with the five criteria set out in the Commission's Better Regulation guidelines: effectiveness, efficiency, coherence, EU added value and relevance.

2.1. Effectiveness

Building on the success of the 2014-2020 period, the application of the amended PES Decision continued to strengthen cooperation and mutual learning, and support the modernisation of PES and greater transparency in how they work, while contributing to EU-level policymaking by providing the collective expertise of European PES**.**

Benchlearning was successful overall in increasing the transparency of PES performance and encouraging organisational change, due to its cross-cutting and peer-review approach, fostering a culture of self-reflection across PES. Benchlearning assessments have increasingly acted as a **trigger for follow-up actions through mutual learning activities**, strengthening the link between diagnosis and implementation. The currently limited dissemination of the outcomes of Benchlearning assessments, while strengthening trust among the participating

[6] The Staff Working Document Evaluation accompanying the proposal for a revised Decision on the PES Network presents the methodology in further detail.

PES, has partially affected the visibility of PES performance among stakeholders outside the Network.

The PES Network acts as a community of practice, fostering the exchange of knowledge and operational cooperation on common challenges, which leads to the uptake of good practices. The availability of different formats for taking part and the involvement of thematic experts are key success factors, with thematic learning dialogues, working groups, and thematic review workshops standing out as being particularly conducive to peer learning. Mutual assistance projects have also delivered tangible benefits, helping PES to directly address areas for improvement that have been identified through Benchlearning and the European Semester process.

Engagement in the activities of the Network has led to improvements in PES across several core areas, including **better management of performance, quality and change, and more strategic approaches to human resources**. Service delivery has also improved, in particular in relation to **digitalisation, support to vulnerable groups (including persons with disabilities), and tailored services for employers**. Multiple examples of learning from the PES Network's activities have resulted in concrete actions in individual PES, regardless of their size or their level of maturity. However, capacity and financial constraints (e.g. in smaller PES), differing structures (e.g. centralised versus decentralised PES), and conflicting national political priorities continue to influence the speed and scale of the implementation of good practices disseminated via the Network.

The PES Network strengthened its contribution to EU policy development, monitoring, and implementation. Compared to the pre-2020 period, the PES Network has expanded the frequency and scope of its contributions to EU policy design and monitoring, through formal roles set out in Council Recommendations (e.g. the Youth Guarantee, long-term unemployment, minimum income) and ad hoc inputs (e.g. targeted consultations, opinion papers). Contributions to policy implementation have also broadened through the exchange of knowledge and closer engagement with EU institutions. While the PES Network's contributions remain largely focused on employment policies, several examples of input on the employment aspects of broader policy areas (e.g. labour migration, the green and digital transition, education and skills) were identified. Nonetheless, **the Network's visibility in the EU policy landscape remains an area for potential improvement**, to ensure its expertise can be leveraged further.

In line with the stronger focus on cooperation with labour market stakeholders in the amended PES Decision, **collaboration between the Network and key actors increased** (e.g. EU-level and international institutions, social partners, networks and committees). Stakeholders external to the Network see cooperation as an area to be further developed in the years to come.

2.2. Efficiency

The implementation of PES Decision activities has been cost-effective. The total annual cost of supporting the PES Network and its programme of activities is estimated at EUR 2.2 million - lower than the annual cost for the previous period (EUR 3.12 million or EUR 3.99 million based on 2024 prices), primarily due to a greater reliance on digital tools, including an increased number of online events, allowing for activities to take place more efficiently while keeping costs down.

Most PES do not systematically monitor the amount of time or financial resources they devote to their participation in the Network. Where available, estimates indicate considerable variation between countries, from 10-30 FTE days to 500-1 000 days annually. Additional costs (e.g. travel, translation) were generally low, with only a small number reporting a higher level of expenditure. These investments of time and money are widely regarded as reasonable and proportionate to the benefits achieved, as the Network acts as a catalyst for PES modernisation, resource savings and institutional resilience.

In particular, **Benchlearning and mutual learning activities**, while requiring upfront costs in terms of staff time, **deliver particularly high value for money** by accelerating reform processes, reducing duplication of effort, and supporting more efficient use of national resources. These activities generate significant efficiencies for individual PES, allowing them to benefit from intelligence on international developments, advice on modernisation, and performance assessment.

2.3. Coherence

The amended PES Decision is consistent with and complementary to EU employment policies and related funding instruments (e.g. the European Pillar of Social Rights, ESF+, the European Semester). Several initiatives (e.g. the Youth Guarantee, the European Skills Guarantee) explicitly reference the Network or the key role of PES in their monitoring and implementation.

The PES Decision is also coherent with and complements the employment aspects of legislative and policy instruments tackling broader policy areas (e.g. migration, the green and digital transitions, and competitiveness). Between 2021 and 2025, efforts increased to improve synergies with policy processes linked to EU enlargement and labour mobility, as well as with EU agencies under the Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (Cedefop, Eurofound, the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, the European Training Foundation and the European Labour Authority), with further scope for improvement.

The PES Decision is **coherent with and complements national employment policies**, with Network activities often supporting national responses to common labour market challenges.

The PES Decision shows **good internal coherence**, with appropriate activities and inputs to achieve its objectives. The central coordinating role of the PES Network's secretariat is essential for ensuring consistency, synergies and the effective implementation of its activities.

2.4. EU added value

The amended PES Decision has generated EU added value, underlining the importance of extending the Decision beyond 2027. Key examples of the added value generated include: (i) accelerating PES reform through comparative evidence; (ii) peer learning and actionable Benchlearning recommendations; (iii) the availability of comparable data on PES performance on different labour market issues; (iv) faster and more cost-effective dissemination of good practices; (v) increased resilience and crisis-response capacity; (vi) a stronger collective voice for PES in EU policy processes; and (vii) enhanced collaboration within the employment ecosystem.

Discontinuing the PES Decision would have significant negative consequences, including the loss of structured EU-level cooperation, slower innovation and reform, widening disparities between PES, reduced policy coherence, and weaker collective capacity to respond to future labour market shocks. This would particularly impact areas where the PES Network's activities have been a major accelerator of reform - such as digitalisation, the integration of AI, employer services and performance management.

2.5. Relevance

The objectives of the amended PES Decision remained relevant and flexible to adapt to new needs and challenges throughout the 2021–2025 period. In this context, the PES Network demonstrated a strong capacity to adapt to changing contexts, adjusting its activities to respond to new challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.

Moreover, **the amended PES Decision continued to respond to persistent and emerging labour market challenges**, including labour and skills shortages, as well as digitalisation and the green transition. The ongoing relevance of the Decision's general and specific objectives relating to cooperation and mutual learning was ensured by: (i) implementing activities directly focusing on these challenges; (ii) mainstreaming key issues across broader activities; and (iii) fostering participatory approaches to developing work programmes and strategic documents that allow for the introduction of new thematic priorities as relevant.

3. LESSONS LEARNED

Overall, the findings confirm a high degree of continuity with the results of the 2019 evaluation, while pointing to clear improvements in cooperation, coherence and the maturity of the Network. The PES Network has consolidated its role, increased its relevance and impact over time, and is highly valued by both members and external stakeholders.

The evaluation of the PES Network's activities provides several important lessons that can guide its future strategic direction.

- **Increasing participation through cost-effective solutions**. The PES Network provides a dynamic range of strategically interlinked activities supporting PES modernisation and adaptation to new trends and challenges. New technologies may increasingly provide cost-effective solutions for the delivery of activities (online meetings) and the dissemination of deliverables (e.g. through dynamic search functions on knowledge-sharing platforms, or automatic translation).
- **Enhancing the visibility of Benchlearning outcomes**. There is scope to increase the visibility of Benchlearning outcomes by disseminating them beyond the Network. Greater access to Benchlearning outcomes could increase synergies between the work of the Network, that of other labour market stakeholders, and EU policies. Dissemination efforts should, however, take into account the need to ensure Benchlearning remains a secure space for PES to share sensitive information.

- **Stepping up operational cooperation on strategic priorities.** The PES Network has done extensive work to foster the take-up of common strategic approaches and tools. There is scope to continue to support further operational cooperation between PES on strategic priorities, such as digitalisation and performance measurement frameworks. This could entail drawing on proven methods and pulling together resources for pilots and innovation, building on examples of creating common definitions and approaches, for instance on green skills and jobs, and on measuring labour shortages[7]. While not explicitly mentioned in the PES Decision, this type of cooperation is fully aligned with the Network's objectives, and would represent a step forward in the Network's decade-long efforts to enhance cooperation and mutual learning among PES.

- **Strengthening and prioritising contributions to EU policymaking.** The PES Network has increased its efforts to contribute to EU policymaking, with the possibility to further broaden its sphere of contributions. The Network is consulted on several EU employment policies or the employment aspects of broader policy areas, including by collaborating with existing structures (e.g. EMCO). Further opportunities to contribute to policy processes and to strengthen the Network's visibility as a policy actor with significant implementation expertise could be sought, including as regards its contribution to the European Semester and activation of those facing significant barriers to enter the labour force. However, this

[7] For further information, please refer to Box 4 of the Staff Working Document.

should be assessed in light of available resources as well as policy priorities, and determined in consultation with PES.

- **Fostering further synergies with EU initiatives in the field of labour mobility.** The PES Network has stepped up its efforts to contribute to a wide range of policy areas, with the possibility to further build on its role as a key contact point and a space for information exchange on EU employment policies. As the Network has matured further and new challenges have emerged, there is scope for further synergies in the field of labour mobility – for example with labour mobility actors in fields of direct relevance to PES. This concerns, for instance, support to mobile workers via EURES, exchange of data and information in case of export of unemployment benefits, in the context of the European Exchange of Social Security Information (EESSI), and career guidance and skills assessment provided through Europass.

- **Developing a systematic monitoring framework and key performance indicators.** To date, monitoring efforts have focused primarily on gathering feedback on individual activities and collecting data on engagement and reach in relation to communication outputs. Monitoring of the impact of work programme implementation has varied over time. A more systematic internal process or framework, based on key performance indicators, to systematically monitor the performance of the Network itself is currently lacking. Such framework could be developed by the Network and its members to measure more systematically results of PES Network activities over time, supporting necessary adjustments for continued impact and cost-effectiveness. Building on monitoring activities developed so far, it would provide a more consistent and consolidated approach, keeping the administrative and reporting burden to the minimum necessary.

- **More systematic knowledge sharing and joint initiatives with partners**. The PES Network has increased its cooperation with and outreach to other labour market stakeholders over time, with scope to further strengthen collaboration. This could entail identifying common priorities, more systematic knowledge sharing, developing joint initiatives and increasing participation in relevant committees and events, based on the availability of human and financial resources.

- **Potential for further efficiency gains.** The PES Network is cost-effective, delivering a wide range of support activities at a relatively modest cost. There is, however, some limited scope for further efficiencies, for example by increasing the use of digital tools and developing a unified knowledge hub (streamlining the different platforms used for document sharing, co-creation and repositories), increasing operational cooperation or streamlining decision-making processes. Further efficiencies could be gained by fostering stronger synergies with relevant EU agencies (e.g. Eurofound, Cedefop, the European Labour Authority, the European Training Foundation) and contributing to their work, thus reducing the number of PES Network studies and publications and mitigating the risk of duplication. In addition, adjusting the frequency of reporting by the Network would simplify reporting processes and reduce the administrative burden related to reporting.

- **Building PES capacity and making best use of EU funding.** The PES Network promotes synergies with EU funding mechanisms (e.g. the European Social Fund +, the Technical Support Instrument, the Recovery and Resilience Facility, the Just Transition Fund). There is scope to further support PES in building their capacity and implementing PES reforms, notably by making the best possible use of available EU funding, including in the context of the post-2027 multiannual financial framework.

- **Ensuring continuity.** All those consulted confirmed the ongoing need for the PES Network. Following two consecutive positive evaluations, discontinuation of the PES Decision would represent a significant loss to EU-level cooperation, leading to slower innovation and reforms, widening disparities between PES, and reduced policy coherence. The PES Decision provides a robust and flexible framework to support PES in addressing current and future challenges and labour market transformations, aligning with wider and emerging EU policy priorities. Given the Network's limited budget and the well-established role of PES as key labour market players, ensuring the greater long-term stability of the Network would contribute to administrative simplification, by removing the need for periodic renewal of an established and well-functioning structure. At the same time, as summarised above, there is scope for further improvement of the Decision through targeted amendments.