



Benchlearning Initiative External Assessment

Summary report 2nd cycle –Spain



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PES of Spain – Servicio Público de Empleo Estatal (SEPE)

Summary Report 2nd cycle

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1. Introduction

This report outlines the results of the second Benchlearning (BL) external assessment of the Spanish Public Employment Service (Servicio Público de Empleo Estatal - SEPE), conducted between September 10th and 13th, 2018. It is addressed to the SEPE in its function as coordinator of the Spanish National Employment System (NES). The findings and recommendations made in this report may nevertheless offer food for thoughts for the autonomous regions and their PES in addition to the results of the EVADES Programme.¹

Different to the first external PES Benchlearning assessment (carried out in 2016), the second assessment only focused on significant changes that had taken place between 2016 and 2018, taking especially into consideration the SEPE's own Change Agenda. This also meant for the assessment of the SEPE to concentrate on those Enablers and Sections, where substantial progress had been achieved. Hence, Sections A, B, C and H were chosen as subject for the assessment, whereas no assessment of the remaining sections took place, thus leaving unchanged the scoring of the first cycle. However, this does not exclude that progress has been made also in these sections.

The team of seven external assessors had three peer PES staff (from the Brussels Capital Region, Dutch and Latvian PES), two representatives from the European Commission and two experts from ICON-Institute (the supporting contractor). The programme of the four-day visit included meetings with senior management from the SEPE, senior management from the PES in the autonomous communities (regions) of Castilla y León (Servicio Público de Empleo de Castilla y León - ECYL) and Aragón (Dirección Gerencia del Instituto Aragonés de Empleo - INAEM) as well as a visit to two local offices, one in Zaragoza (in the autonomous community of Aragón) and the other in Medina del Campo/Valladolid (in the autonomous community of Castilla y León).

The time and resources that the SEPE invested in the preparation for the Benchlearning visit, particularly the self-assessment reports for the SEPE and the regions produced within the EVADES Programme, the change report, other background information (such as material from conferences) and the presentations forwarded to the team of external assessors were a key part of its success.

The SEPE is an independent body within Spain's Central Government attached to the Ministry of Employment and Social Security, under the Secretary of State for Employment. It is a separate legal entity and it is independent from the Central Government.

Its key responsibilities include –

- producing and submitting national level regulatory proposals on employment for the Ministry of Employment and Social Security;
- providing vocational training and unemployment protection;
- producing preliminary draft budgets;

¹ Evaluación del Desempeño de los Servicios Públicos de Empleo Españoles - the Evaluation of the Performance of the Spanish Public Employment Services, which was organised by the SEPE in co-operation with the autonomous communities and their PES in preparation to the first and the second PES Benchlearning assessment.

- stimulating the development of the National Employment System, which is made up of the SEPE jointly with the Public Employment Services of the autonomous communities (the regions) in cooperation with the regional PES;
- cooperating with the autonomous communities (i.e. the regions) and social partners to produce the Annual Work Plan of the National Employment System, and the implementation of the European Employment Strategy plans;
- managing and overseeing unemployment benefits.
- using EU funds to co-finance activities and programmes;
- managing employment and vocational training plans;
- maintaining databases on employment and unemployment statistics;
- undertaking research on the labour market.

Within the National Employment System, the SEPE is responsible for granting unemployment benefits and developing labour market policies. In addition, the regional PES in each autonomous community are responsible for the (decentralised) implementation of the active labour market policies in their specific regional context. The SEPE remains responsible, however, for the overall coordination of the network of regional PES. The basic structure of the National Employment System consists of:

- the central headquarters;
- 17 regional PES with a regional coordinator reporting to the SEPE headquarters;²
- 52 provincial directorates;
- 711 local offices.

SEPE, the regional PES, the provincial directorates and the local offices have the two major objectives in common:

1. Getting the unemployed into work, retaining them in the labour market, and improving human capital through cooperation with each other, and with other employment-related agencies;
2. Reinforcing coordination between all agents involved in, or with an interest in, labour market issues.

2. SHORT SUMMARY OF THE CHANGE AGENDA

In comparison to most other PES, shared responsibilities between the national government and the autonomous communities are an important characteristic of the Spanish PES system. The successful implementation of change therefore needs the support and an active contribution from all the partners involved. Furthermore, common objectives and commitments have to be agreed, and specific roles need to be defined.

² The Regional Coordinator is a Provincial Director of each Autonomous Community that assumes this function.

An important step towards achieving a common understanding of change between the central and the regional levels of the Spanish National Employment System is agreement on the contents and on the direction of the desired change, its objectives and the actions that need to be implemented to achieve the agreed goals. The basis for this was laid down in Royal Decree 1032/2017 (15th December 2017), approving the 2017-2020 Spanish Strategy for Employment Activation. This Decree is crucial, as it stipulates that the national and all the regional PES are linked together in the multi-annual Spanish Strategy for Employment Activation. The central government developed this strategy in partnership with the autonomous communities and the economic and social partners. It is important to note that this strategy also takes into consideration the results of the first PES Benchlearning cycle. The results of the self-assessment and the Summary Report submitted after the external assessment were taken on board, and they had an influence on the contents of the Employment Strategy.

The change agenda, which was elaborated in 2017, marks an important step on the road to a systematic and commonly shared approach to the changes affecting the entire Spanish National Employment System. A coordinating role is played by the SEPE, but it is important to point out that the change agenda is also backed and supported by the regional PES. An important factor in this context has been the very positive experience of self-assessment. As part of the first external assessment, a self-assessment exercise was carried out at the national (SEPE) level as well as in all regional PES (by an external institution contracted by the SEPE). Results and recommendations for improvement were formulated at the central and the regional levels, which gave important and valuable food for thought to all the partners for how to improve their organisation. In preparation for the second PES Benchlearning cycle, the setting-up process for the first cycle was repeated, which produced additional information concerning those areas that needed further improvement.

The change agenda elaborated in 2017 focused on two major fields of action:

- a) the improvement of *the structure and organisation* of the National Employment System;
- b) the improvement of *specific operational measures* which are important for guaranteeing a minimum quality of service from a customer perspective.

Within these fields of actions for change, the following change projects (measures) have been defined and launched:

Improvement of structure and organisation of the National Employment System

1. *The implementation of PES Benchlearning methodology in the National Employment System*

This measure directly refers to the recommendation in the first PES Benchlearning cycle for implementing a national process of ongoing and systematic benchlearning, managed by the SEPE. As with the first PES Benchlearning cycle, the EVADES programme was also repeated in the second cycle. The methodological design elaborated at European level, following the PDCA cycle (P = Plan; D = Do; C = Check; A = Act), and focusing on the EFQM (European Foundation for Quality Management) excellency model with 29 enablers (and three additional enablers related to change management), was again used for the (self-)assessment of all 17 regional PES and also the SEPE.

In addition, PES performance was monitored on the basis of the same indicators that are used within the PES Benchlearning project at the European level, which covers information on unemployment, customer satisfaction and ALMP expenditure.

The value of this combined approach is that the exchanges and the communication between the SEPE and the Spanish regional PES are based on a commonly accepted methodology. It happens systematically at regular intervals and it is grounded on sound evidence. In comparison to previous communication systems, this is a huge step forward as it allows a fair comparison between the regional PES and the identification of areas for improvement across the entire system of Spanish Public Employment Services.

2. The promotion and systematisation of the sharing of good practices

Experiences of the SEPE in the European PES Benchlearning exercise show that a systematic and evidence-based exchange about what works and what are the most effective strategies for achieving SEPE's specific objectives offer better results than a continuous process of isolated trial and error. Using the internal quantitative and qualitative benchlearning approach described above, the SEPE has started to run thematic conferences where PES from the autonomous communities have the opportunity to present specific practices and approaches that have worked well in their own regional contexts, which could be helpful to other regional PES that want to achieve improvements in the same area. The stakeholders in the National Employment System of Spain have made positive experiences with the exchange process, so that learning from other regions will become a driving factor in organisational and process changes.

So far, different thematic working group sessions, where experts from other European PES and from the European Commission share experiences and expertise with representatives from the SEPE and the regional PES, have been planned in a 'mutual assistance' format. In 2018, the focus was on vocational training (Valladolid, March 2018), profiling jobseekers (Santiago de Compostela, October 2018) and customer satisfaction (Canary Islands, November 2018).

3. Improvements in annual strategic planning

Another major issue taken up by the SEPE is the improvement of the annual strategic planning process, on the basis of recommendations made in the first Benchlearning assessment, and in line with suggestions for the implementation of the Youth Guarantee in Spain.

The problem identified in the first Benchlearning cycle was that in the past the autonomous regions had developed different 'service concepts' which led to diverse contents, elements, quality and intensity of services. This created problems when comparing their results and performance, and also in giving customers a comparable service across the whole country.

The set of shared performance indicators and the coherent coordination and communication processes agreed between the SEPE and the regional PES should therefore help to overcome this situation.

An early improvement, already achieved, was moving the start of the planning process forward. In practice, the target-setting process now starts in the autumn with the SEPE's first proposals on the basis of indicators already agreed with the autonomous communities. This gives the time till the end of the year for bottom-up feedback-processes and negotiations, so that the

new year starts with agreed targets for service provision and the implementation of ALMPs.

4. Improved information for ALMP spending

One consequence of the decentralisation is the lack of transparency and clarity about expenditure on ALMPs in Spain. In order to improve the allocation of European, central government and the regional level funds, the multi-annual Spanish Strategy for Employment Activation proposes monitoring expenditure, with clear categories and definitions that are accepted by all stakeholders. The proposed categories and definitions make use of the standards which were developed for the PES Capacity Survey within the PES Benchlearning project.

The improvement of important specific operational measures to guarantee a minimum quality of services from a customer perspective

Activities at the operational level relate to the profiling of jobseekers, their matching to vacancies, the implementation of the Youth Guarantee and the systematic collection of information on customer satisfaction.

1. The implementation of a statistical profiling system for the unemployed

The SEPE and the regional PES work together to elaborate a common profiling methodology which also includes statistical profiling, in order to offer targeted and comparable services across the entire country that help customers on the basis of individual needs. The new profiling system uses relevant experiences from other European PES. It will take around 40 factors into consideration, related to work experience, socio-demographic factors, formal qualifications, informal skills and competences, and labour market 'contexts'. As a starting point, the profiling questionnaire implemented by the Catalan PES has been proposed as standard tool. This work is part of the multi-annual Spanish Strategy for Employment Activation and it was also recommended to the PES in the first PES Benchlearning cycle. It started with the first joint conference of the SEPE and the regional PES in October 2018.

2. Improvement in the identification of vacancies and job-matching, providing employers with a 'candidate search' tool

In addition to improved profiling, specific activities aim to better match jobseekers' profiles with vacancies. A first step in this direction is the implementation of the 'candidate search' tool, which allows employers to screen jobseekers' profiles according to their own specific needs. However, the candidate search tool still seems to be under development.

3. Improvement in the Youth Guarantee's management and support system

The implementation of the Youth Guarantee met with some difficulties in the past. Substantial progress has been achieved as result of the transfer of the overall coordination of the Youth Guarantee from the Ministry of Employment and Social Security to the SEPE in 2017. In its coordinating role, the SEPE set up a working group of representatives from the National Youth Guarantee System (Sistema Nacional de Garantía Juvenil – SNGJ) for elaborating and implementing effective improvements at technological and operational levels. For example, one improvement has been adding a paper-based registration opportunity, as the young people from vulnerable groups either did not have the opportunity, or were unable, to register online.

Progress could also be achieved by modifying the rules for registration. Instead of registering twice (both with the SEPE and with the Youth Guarantee scheme) a person below 30 years of age registering as a jobseeker is now automatically directed to the Youth Guarantee initiative.

4. *The development of a shared 'user satisfaction methodology' for jobseekers and employers using the Public Employment Services*

Together with the regional PES, the SEPE has started a process for defining criteria which measure jobseekers' and employers' satisfaction. In order to achieve this, a specific working group across all regional PES and the SEPE has been set up. Its aim is writing up a customer satisfaction questionnaire, which will then be used by all PES. Results should correspond to the standards defined at the European level in relation to the satisfaction indicators where the different European PES submit comparable information on an annual basis.

3. RELEVANCE, COHERENCE AND CONSISTENCY OF THE REFORM AGENDA

The SEPE's reform agenda was strongly influenced by the recommendations of the first PES Benchlearning assessment. The suggestions made by the external assessors were carefully studied by the SEPE and translated into appropriate actions suited to the specific structures of the decentralised National Employment System. The reform agenda was guided by the need to harmonise services in order to guarantee comparable service quality across the country. One priority was therefore activities which help to improve cooperation between the SEPE and the regional PES but which do not interfere with the autonomy of the regions.

An important element in the SEPE's reform programme is to make the current good practices more visible as some have already been implemented successfully in the autonomous communities. This increase in transparency is accompanied by different activities which lead to a systematic dissemination of these practices and to a strengthened cooperation between the PES. In other words, it is not the SEPE suggesting how the necessary harmonisation of services has to be offered and organised, in fact it is the regional PES themselves doing it while the SEPE acts as facilitator and moderator in the exchange process.

In this context, external assessors consider the format of moderated thematic dialogues between the centre and regions as being decisive in creating a coherent modernisation of the National Employment System. A great advantage of the SEPE is that its coordinating role is widely accepted by the autonomous regions. Supportive factors on which to build in future are the common language – literally, but also related are their shared understanding of 'customers' services', clear legislation and a clear mandate from the Government, a reliable multi-annual strategy at national and regional levels, common objectives, and the SISPE (the IT-based labour-market information platform which is shared by all the PES organisations across Spain).

The EVADES programme also contributed in a positive way to these developments, as it started a systematic process of reflection on the basis of a clear methodological approach. However, the active involvement of the autonomous region governments and the regional PES remained limited, as external consultants, contracted by the SEPE, carried out the analytical work in the autonomous regions. If the European Benchlearning concept had been followed, this process would have been organised as a combined process of internal self-reflection and external Peer-PES assessment. Therefore, while the suggestions developed by the EVADES programme offer important food for thought for the regional PES, their commitment to translating these

suggestions into concrete actions would have been greater if they had been the result of a real benchlearning process.

Another supportive factor for the changes initiated was the coordinating role that was given to the SEPE for implementing the Youth Guarantee. The SEPE proved not only that it was able to improve processes and make them more transparent and effective, it also managed to fully respect the responsibilities of the autonomous regions and all other relevant stakeholders. In return, the SEPE's moderating, coordinating and facilitating role has been widely accepted among the regional PES not only in the field of the Youth Guarantee but also in the 'thematic areas' of change which were defined in the reform agenda.

As a consequence, the PES Network and the European Commission started to support this process with the Mutual Assistance Project started in course of 2018. External assessors are convinced that this assistance is suited for stabilising and strengthening the role of the SEPE, especially the fruitful cooperation and communication between all the relevant stakeholders in the National Employment System.

External assessors also believe that the successful introduction of a common profiling tool, combining a statistical and a qualitative assessment of jobseekers, would have a significant positive impact on customer service quality. Introducing evidence-based profiling, which is already successful in other European PES, should produce better results when 'segmenting' jobseekers. Using this system, the Spanish PES should be able to more effectively direct their limited resources to the jobseekers that really need intensive support, while those who are relatively near to the labour market, will have access to improved 'digital matching (*job search and candidate search*)' tools.

The enhancement of job search tools for jobseekers (and even more so the new 'candidate search' tool for the employers) plays a major role in digitalising PES services. If employers and jobseekers can meet and find each other successfully on the virtual platform, then placements will be realised more frequently without the active involvement of the PES. This should free up resources which could then be dedicated to the 'harder to place' jobseekers.

As a result, there is huge evidence that the reform agenda set up by the SEPE covers all the thematic aspects mentioned in the assessment of the first PES Benchlearning cycle. It focuses on areas where the effective coordination and moderation of initiatives that have beneficial outcomes are not only feasible but they are also appreciated by the PES in the autonomous communities. The participative approach adopted by the SEPE for pushing forward reforms is considered highly suitable for the specific structure of the decentralised National Employment System.

4. ASSESSMENT OF CHANGE MANAGEMENT

The responsibility for managing the change process lies with the SEPE, and all planning and coordination activities are carried out by the SEPE's Sub-Directorate General in cooperation with the Sub-Directorate General of Statistics and Information. An internal working group has been created to analyse the recommendations of the first assessment cycle and to formulate a change agenda outlining appropriate change initiatives. 13 potential areas for change were initially identified, of which eight strategically important areas were then selected for the implementation of concrete actions. Representatives from various organisations were integrated into this process, including the regional PES, the social partners, organisations active in the field of integration of people with disabilities, and other stakeholders; their engagement was, however, somewhat limited.

Different actions in the field of communications were identified, especially in the thematic conferences with the PES representatives from all autonomous communities. In fact, no specific communication strategy was elaborated, so the reform process is not backed by a systematic communications approach and/or a 'Communications Plan'. One consequence of this is that the knowledge in the local offices about the ongoing change seems to be rather limited. Whether and how information on the change initiatives is shared within the organisation and within the local offices depends on the regional PES. Our conclusion is that despite a variety of conferences and cooperation formats between the SEPE and the regional PES, the change agenda is still perceived as being an agenda of the centrally organised SEPE and not the entire National Employment System.

This effect may also be a result of missing milestones in the planning process: thus far, the Change Report has only had an indicative timeline on when to achieve certain rather strategic objectives, which are often not translated into concrete and measurable targets. In addition, the somewhat generic milestone planning could be regarded as an internal working document for the SEPE rather than as a common work plan for the SEPE and the regional PES together. In other words, there is currently little need for the autonomous regions to commit themselves to concrete actions. However, with the concept of thematic working groups and the SEPE's objective of increasing ownership of the autonomous communities with view to specific thematic changes the degree of concreteness may increase in future.

The EVADES programme was one important initiative for bringing all the autonomous communities on board with the change process. The real benefit of this exercise was the agreement between the SEPE and the regional PES on an 'excellence model' for PES organisation, structure and service delivery. This means that the contents and the objectives of the service provision are not under discussion any more, but they are shared with the partners at the central and regional levels. The two assessment cycles that were carried out between 2016 and 2018 were also very important for deepening communication, both between the SEPE and the autonomous communities and within the regional PES.

Nevertheless, further intensification could be achieved by organising the assessment not by simply following the EFQM model, but also by combining a self-reflection process within the SEPE and within the regional PES with an external assessment by (regional) peer PES.

A visible and important result of the change management process was a series of thematic dialogue formats between the SEPE and the regional PES on profiling, customer satisfaction and partnerships with employers, and an additional 'Mutual Assistance Project that will continue to help with the effective transfer of successful practices from other European PES to the Spanish National Employment System. External assessors are convinced that the organisation of continuous, systematic and thematic exchanges among the regional PES would help to speed up the dissemination of the practices that currently exist. Nevertheless, a sustainable success can only be achieved if the regional PES feel responsible and take ownership of the reform process for those thematic areas where they have gained specific know-how and expertise.

In order to achieve this, the SEPE's change management process can build upon its rich experiences of social dialogue, and strong partnerships with all the relevant stakeholders. This offers huge potential for setting up effective cooperation mechanisms with the objective of harmonising services and offering a comparably high quality of customer service throughout the country. Another important resource to be mentioned is the high motivation of staff at the SEPE, and its participative approach which resulted in the full support for the changes initiated within its own organisation. The next step is achieving the same commitment and engagement within all regional PES and their local offices.

5. SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

On basis of its findings, the external assessment team would like to make the following suggestions that may help the SEPE as it endeavours to achieve the desired systematic changes in the National Employment System:

- The changes which have already been implemented and the quality of co-operation with the PES in the autonomous regions that has been achieved since the first EVADES programme is impressive. If they were planned and implemented in a more systematic way, the speed and the effectiveness of the changes could be increased. If successful, the Spanish example could be an important reference for other big PES in Europe that want to organise and spread out changes across a decentralised PES in a systematic way.

For supporting this systematic change at all organisational levels, the external assessors suggest the *introduction of coherent milestone planning*. This should include a more precise definition of objectives, activities, targets, timelines and responsibilities, and include clear commitments for the regional PES to carry out. It goes without saying that the SEPE's milestone planning should be backed by appropriate milestone planning in the regional PES. The Slovenian and the Brussels Capital Region PES (Actiris) could serve as good references for developing this kind of coherent milestone planning.

As another measure in this area, the external assessors suggest the setting up of a *dedicated change team* at the SEPE, whose first task would be to refine the existing reform agenda and elaborate the milestone planning mentioned above. In this context, the French and Norwegian PES are good examples.

- As already described, the success of the change process will depend on the engagement of the regional PES. In order to achieve this, the team of external experts recommends systematic *internal Benchlearning* on basis of the experiences of the EVADES programme. It should be organised as a combined self-assessment and external peer-PES assessment. As supportive measures, the external assessors also suggest creating a repository of (good) practices which could be used by local offices, which would be available on a shared platform. In addition, the SEPE should organise a systematic exchange of experiences between local offices, for example at the level of regional and/or thematic clusters as in Germany or in Sweden. Other relevant examples can be studied in the Dutch or the Austrian PES.

For effectively organising an internal Benchlearning process, the SEPE could refer to the Swedish, the French and the Dutch PES. In addition, the Maltese and the Austrian PES offer good examples for repositories of practical experiences.

- In order to achieve the necessary support for the reform process from the regional PES, the external assessors would encourage the SEPE to invest more in *labour market analysis and research*, thereby giving the regions sound evidence on what works, for whom and under which conditions. Another service for the regions would be reliable information on their specific regional labour market developments. By offering this kind of information, the SEPE would provide relevant and sound evidence that can then be used by the regional PES and the local offices in their planning, in the fine-tuning of their strategies, or in the allocation of ALMPs.

The German and the French PES have built up appropriate service systems for the regional PES units and they may therefore serve as relevant examples of practice.

- As an additional service the SEPE could offer to the regional PES, the external assessors suggest strengthening '*leadership*', e. g. through training, seminars and other appropriate formats. This would help to disseminate the objectives, contents, activities and potential benefits of the reform agenda from the SEPE via the regional PES to the local PES offices. Relevant examples in this field can be studied in the Swedish, Norwegian and the Dutch PES.
- Another important recommendation of the external assessment team is the introduction of a more suitable *performance management system*. The reduction of Key Performance Indicators and the greater emphasis on results and performance (instead of a series of indicators monitoring outputs and activities) was already been suggested to the SEPE in the first external assessment, and some initiatives have indeed been taken in this regard since then. Nevertheless, there are currently around 60 indicators that are still under discussion. The system has not changed significantly, so it still does not allow for the achievements made by the National Employment System on the labour market to be more widely understood.

In addition to the recommendations stemming from the first cycle, the external assessors would also suggest integrating appropriate indicators in the performance management system which could then be used to monitor progress in the implementation of the SEPE's reform agenda. A pre-condition for this, however, would be defining appropriate quantified targets for measuring the progress of the reform process.

For advice on revising their performance management system, the SEPE could refer to relevant experience of other PES in Europe, such as the German, the Austrian and the Dutch PES.

- In order to strengthen the SEPE's ambition for acting as *facilitator of processes*, the external assessors recommend carefully examining the successful Danish model, which has managed to give guidance at its regional and local levels without actively interfering in the strategic decisions and operational processes of its regional and local offices.
- As described above, the SEPE and the regional PES have ambitions to ensure high quality services for all PES customers. The elaboration and implementation of a common profiling system could be an important step forward in this context. In order for this to be effective, the external assessors also suggest the introduction of a *systematic quality management system* based on clear quality criteria, shared by the SEPE and the regional PES. This process would cover all the service delivery across the entire PES organisation. Relevant experience in this field is offered by the Austrian and the German PES, as well as by the PES of the Brussels Capital Region (Actiris).
- Finally, the external assessment team also recommends that the SEPE elaborates a clear and easy to understand *mission statement* on the basis of the multi-annual Strategy for Employment Activation. This mission statement would help the SEPE itself to have a clear focus at a strategic level. At the same time, this clear focus could easily be communicated to the autonomous regions, the local PES offices, the SEPE's partners and customers, and the general public.

