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General Feedback Report TLD 4 – Pôle Emploi
"E-services and Channel Management"



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1. Introduction

The fourth Thematic Learning Dialogue (TLD) on "E-Services and Channel Management" was held on 21-22 May in Noisy le Grand, near Paris. It was hosted by Pôle Emploi, the French PES, with Participating PES coming from Wallonia/Belgium, Denmark, Estonia and Luxembourg, each represented by two experts. In addition to that, peer PES in Flanders/Belgium and Norway both sent an expert to act as supporting peers for the Participating PES. The lead expert from the ICON consortium was in charge of moderating the TLD. Finally, one additional member from the ICON consortium attended the TLD, as well as a representative from DG EMPL in the European Commission. Before the TLD, dossiers on Participating PES and on the Host PES were drawn up, checked and sent to all participants. A preparatory "virtual kick-off" meeting was held on 6 May. This helped to clarify the roles of all the participants, and it discussed the final agenda and participants' expectations from the TLD.

2. Presentations by Host PES

After the welcome in the Noisy le Grand Regional Office and a brief round table, the first presentation was an introduction from Pôle Emploi's Strategy Department on the organisation's digital strategy where the developments and trends in e-services and channel management since 2012 were highlighted. The guiding principles of the digital strategy are the opportunities the digital world offers of a differentiated, personalised, result-oriented and decentralised service for Pôle Emploi's customers. One of the major challenges, when planning and implementing digital services, is anticipating the difficulties customers will experience in accessing digital services which originally were offered as face-to-face services.

The strategic decision to reorganise service provision for jobseekers and employers on a digital base arose from the fact that there is no real alternative to it: firstly, citizens themselves use more and more digital services; secondly, the competition with private providers calls for a faster and a more effective service delivery from the PES; thirdly, more and more public administrations in France adopt a consistent digital strategy; and finally, there is a general political will, a strong political will even, to accelerate digitalisation in public services.

The objectives of Pôle Emploi's digitalisation strategy are

- to emphasise jobseekers' autonomy and to make services more accessible,
- to help staff offer improved quality services,
- to motivate staff to create new solutions and
- to free staff resources for offering intensified services for jobseekers who are in need of more individualised and targeted support.

The digitalisation strategy was implemented step by step, and included the following elements:

- As a first step, the "Emploi store", a platform integrating a variety of digital services, was introduced. Today, it has around 400 services for supporting jobseekers. The first version of the digital service platform was created in Pôle Emploi's study centre, the LAB,² as a co-productive process and it was set up in just ten weeks.

² The LAB is a particular place, where customers, staff and partners of Pôle Emploi come together with external stakeholders such as startups for exchanging and elaborating new concepts, services and processes in order to improve Public Employment Services. New solutions are developed in collaborative sessions led by a

- In order to increase transparency for PES customers, "La bonne boite" (job offers) and "La bonne formation" (training opportunities) were developed as additional digital platforms.
- In parallel, Pôle Emploi introduced its "strategy of digital openness", allowing external IT companies to use PES data for supporting the digitalisation of services. Today, around 130 private partners contribute to Pôle Emploi's website.

After the successful launch of its digital services, all jobseekers are obliged to register with Pôle Emploi by using its digital channel. In case of obstacles (e.g. jobseekers having no computer or insufficient language skills, digital illiteracy etc.), the registration process is supported by the officer at the local office or via the telephone.

One important condition for being successful was the increase of digital competences among staff. In order to achieve this, digital self-evaluation tools where staff can check their own competences were introduced. Furthermore, "digital ambassadors" have been appointed in each local office, supporting staff in using digital tools effectively for their work. To the same end, digital working conditions were improved by the implementation of more tele-working facilities, and the introduction of "MAP – Mon assistant personnel" (my personal assistant) as a digital tool for staff supporting their delivery of services to customers. Despite all these efforts, 12% of the jobseekers still do not use the internet for their job-search, and 3% say they do not to know how to use the internet at all. For Pôle Emploi, this means detecting those who need assistance using their digital service as soon as possible. This means staff at Pôle Emploi can offer appropriate measures for increasing their digital proficiency, and direct these customers to the most appropriate service, either offered by the PES or by other providers and PES partners.

Important challenges which Pôle Emploi is facing are the optimisation of channel management (especially the question of whether customers should continue to decide which channel to use), the effective use of artificial intelligence (e.g. in the field of targeted but automated email answers) and the development of new services (e.g. in the fields of virtual reality and skills assessment and matching).

After the general input, the following aspects were discussed in a feedback session:

- Participants asked whether the French PES had experience of counselling customers via webcam. The representatives from Pôle Emploi pointed out that communication with customers via webcam is still at an initial stage. The satisfaction of customers and the feelings of counsellors is currently monitored. The roll-out of this method of communication will depend on the results of monitoring. So far, no information is collected on the impact of alternative communication methods between counsellors and customers on their search activities.
- Another question related to staff acceptance of training on the digital tools. It was reported that staff were (and continue to be) quite open to training, but a long preparation before the training, which also takes into consideration staff expectations and needs, is needed. For this, internal networks for exchanging ideas between counsellors and "digital ambassadors" have been created. In addition, tests and assessments of individual competences were carried out. As a result, it was possible to develop targeted training.

dedicated team using creative methods. The main objective is to develop new innovative services for customers by co-constructing new solutions with them. Working sessions in the LAB are also an important driver for the internal transformation of Pôle Emploi, by actively involving staff from the very beginning of a change process (concept phase), by introducing new, creative and collaborative working methods and by promoting a culture of innovation.

- With view to the increasing cooperation with private companies, participants were interested in knowing more about the costs of the partnership with Facebook. Representatives clarified that Pôle Emploi was not charged with any cost.
- Additional questions referred to details of the teleworking opportunities that staff can benefit from. Since 2017, PES staff have been able to work from home for one or two days per week. This has led to an increasing number of teleworkers within the organisation.
- Other important issues discussed referred to the segmentation model applied by Pôle Emploi, which starts from individual needs and not from available ALMP (Active Labour Market Policies) instruments, and the use of artificial intelligence, which especially helps to prepare jobseekers for an effective integration into the labour market.

For the first in-depth presentation, the participants' group was split into two sub-groups. The first one was made up of PES representatives covering strategic positions and it focused on the implementation of Pôle Emploi's digital strategy. Four speakers highlighted different aspects such as the use of artificial intelligence and the project "Smart emploi" which aims at making better use of existing labour market information and statistics for facilitating the successful integration of jobseekers into employment. Other presentations referred to digital services for employers, the potential consequences for the French PES when "Google for Jobs" across Europe starts up, and support mechanisms for jobseekers with difficulties in making full use of digital services through developing and mobilising digital skills in their job search.

The second group with high-level experts at the operational and technical level was informed about the operational implementation and business-oriented topics and tools which are used by Pôle Emploi in its digital strategy. In-depth information was given on the "MAP" (*Mon assistant personnel*) tool for the interaction between counsellors and jobseekers, the redesign of the online personal space for jobseekers, the collaborative platform "Sphère emploi" facilitating the exchange of information among jobseekers and the Application Programming Interfaces (APIs), as process models for the development of new digital services. An API seeks to fully use existing data from the PES and from labour market statistics. In the development phase, knowledge and competences of customers, counsellors and external companies, especially innovative start-ups are involved.

After the in-depth presentations, the following issues were discussed in a plenary feedback session:

- One question referred to the assessment of jobseekers' digital skills. When registering at the PES, jobseekers have to go through a self-assessment test. The results are used for defining the most appropriate communication pattern between customer and officer. The (digital) activities of jobseekers are monitored continuously by the officers, so that progress in using digital services can be assessed.
- Again, several questions from participants referred to artificial intelligence, and especially to the questions about which data should be taken into consideration. The following four sources were mentioned:
 - *Business data*, which refer to
 - i. Jobseekers, including their socio-demographic characteristics, their career paths, the unemployment benefits and other personal information.

- ii. Employers, including information on offered vacancies, expected competences to be covered by the applicant and the recruitment process.
- iii. Other areas such as partners, services, measures, grants etc.
- *Application and technical data, which includes*
 - i. Application data from mobile apps, Pôle Emploi's web presence (www.pole-emploi.fr) and logs from the matching system.
 - ii. Technical data, such as Weblogic, firewalls etc.
- *Data from reference repositories*, including competences, training catalogues and job descriptions according to the "Operational Directory of professions and occupations" (*ROME – Répertoire Opérationnel des Métiers et des Emplois*).
- *External data*, such as data from partners, business intelligence, the annual declaration of social data, pre-recruitment declaration etc.
- Another important question discussed in the TLD referred to the extent of staff resistance to the digitalisation strategy. The experts from the French PES pointed out that a variety of measures led to a generally strong support for the digitalisation strategy by staff. The co-production of digital services, intense training, the presence of digital ambassadors in local offices, a coherent and comprehensive internal information campaign, and a well-balanced mix of artificial intelligence and individual competence from counsellors, all helped to limit the rejection of new digital tools within the PES.

In a second in-depth presentation on Day Two of the TLD, the concept of the "Speeding up integration through support and control" (*Dynamisation par l'accompagnement et le contrôle*) pilot project was explained to participants. The start of this project is planned for the end of 2019. It will last 18 months, cover two pilot regions and affect around 500,000 jobseekers. The basic idea of the project is to systematically collect, check and use information from jobseekers and counsellors in a Job Search Activity Log-Board (*Journal de recherche d'emploi*). This information refers to the past, current and future activities of jobseekers, the support measures offered by the counsellors, the customised advice received and the follow-up of the jobseekers' commitment to Pôle Emploi. All information is analysed by artificial intelligence to optimise search activities and to identify needs and gaps within the integration process. In addition to the information gathered from the above-mentioned sources, a monthly update of jobseekers' activities is carried out on the basis of a questionnaire with standardised answers. Artificial intelligence analyses the answers and gives personalised advice for improving search strategies and integration activities.

The pilot project is set up in collaborative form. Representatives from the "pilot regions" (including project group members, managers and counsellors, different departments from Head Office, jobseekers (who participate in focus groups, user tests and LAB activities) as well as other relevant stakeholders are involved in the planning, the implementation and the monitoring process of the project.

In the discussion round following the presentations, some participants anticipated that jobseekers may not trust various aspects of the process, such as whether all their own activities and history are documented in the system, and whether they will all be seen by the counsellor and checked by computer programmes. This high transparency may bear the risk of jobseekers feeling controlled by the PES and therefore cause distrust from jobseekers, as experienced by the Danish PES.

Other aspects discussed by participants related to (a) the quality of information stored in the system, which may be lower when jobseekers know that artificial intelligence interferes in their direct relationship with the counsellor, (b) the criteria for assessing whether jobseekers' activities are sufficient or not and (c) the evaluation of the pilot project. For the latter, the representatives from the French PES pointed out that the planned external evaluation, starting at the end of 2019, will focus on return on employment as the core performance indicator.

3. Working groups and their results

There were two two-hour group work sessions, the first one on Day One of the TLD and the second one on Day Two. At the end of each working session, working group results were presented and discussed in the plenary session. For the working sessions, the following pairings were made between Participating PES on the one side and Host PES or supporting peer PES on the other side: representatives from the French Host PES were the supporting peers for Belgium-Le Forem and Luxembourg, a coach from Belgium-VDAB supported the Estonian PES, while the Danish PES representatives were assisted by a coach from Norway.

3.1 First working session: stocktaking

The *first working session* aimed at identifying those elements of the French PES which offer interesting ideas for the Participating PES in their specific situation. Since the context, the mandate and the current challenges faced by the Participating PES are themselves different, different aspects of the French PES were highlighted.

Le Forem – Belgium

In order to make the best use of digitalisation in the delivery of services and for better preparing customers for the digital world, some years ago Le Forem introduced a digital strategy which was assessed as an outstanding feature of the general PES reform strategy. The digital strategy included the (1) professionalisation of data management, (2) the construction of Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) and the IT architecture, (3) the roll-out of online services, (4) the development of staff skills and the support of staff, and (5) the creation of users' autonomy.

The new digital strategy at Le Forem uses a so-called "phygital" approach by combining physical (face-to-face) contact with a digital service delivery channel. The clients are free to use either the physical or the digital channel, or even both together. In this strategy, new online services have been made available for jobseekers and for employers. The reform is accompanied by various training offers for staff offered by both Le Forem's own Academy and also by external providers.

On basis of the input given by the French PES, the following examples were considered as being of the utmost importance for further developing digitalisation at Le Forem:

- Despite the strong will to enlarge the usage of digital services, the internal maturity regarding digital transformation is still low. In order to change this, internal skills need to be reinforced. The continuous and targeted training of staff in the French PES is therefore regarded as an important success factor which could set a very useful example to Le Forem.
- Another example that is of high interest to Le Forem is the strategy of Pôle Emploi for ensuring customers get easy access to digital services. If the services offered are programmed in a way that makes them easily usable and efficient from a customer perspective, more and customers will make practical use of them.

- To achieve a high acceptance of digital services not only functional technical solutions are necessary. It is also important to avoid that digitalisation is seen by staff and customers simply as a control instrument. Pôle Emploi's user-centric approach, which includes the integration of customers and staff in development processes (e.g. LAB projects and focus groups), the creation of digital ambassadors at local office level and the implementation of "Sphère emploi" as a digital platform for directly exchanging information among jobseekers, was regarded as helpful by the representatives of Le Forem.
- In this context, the consequent protection of individual data by fully implementing the GDPR, as implemented by the French PES, can contribute to help diminish many of the fears and reservations towards digital services.
- Finally, the Application Programming Interface (API), as a standard process model for the development of new digital services, was also mentioned as a helpful work-practice of the French PES. The opportunities for automated data sharing within Le Forem, and between Le Forem and its partners, helps to broaden the information basis and therefore helps to better inform decisions both on the strategic level, and on the individual level.

Agence pour le développement de l'emploi (ADEM) - Luxembourg

Beginning with the reform process initiated in 2012, ADEM has undergone considerable changes, both in its e-services and its channel management since it was until then a very much paper-based organisation. ADEM currently offers services via its contact centre, its website, its brochures, and its mailing as well as through social networks like Facebook and LinkedIn.

Despite all its progress, a paper-based documentation of the individual integration process still persists, leading to inefficiencies and a considerable amount of staff working time dedicated to administrative issues. Therefore, a systematic digitalisation of customer-related documents and the storage of these documents in a centralised electronic system could lead to a substantial reduction in the organisation's administrative burden, a considerable reduction in ADEM's paper consumption, speeding up its interaction with customers, and speeding up the integration processes as all the relevant documents for the whole administration would be instantly available. The implementation of "Emploi store" at Pôle Emploi as a platform that offers a huge number of digital services to customers and the MAP tool ("*Mon assistant personnel*") for the direct interaction between counsellors and jobseekers are examples which could also be implemented in Luxembourg, leading to better, more effective and less bureaucratic services and processes in ADEM.

Another element that was considered of high relevance for ADEM's representatives was the concise, coherent and comprehensive Pôle Emploi's digital services strategy. In contrast to this, the representatives from ADEM pointed out that for their PES the binding element of all initiatives taken in this field is still missing. A first step to a real digital strategy would be the elaboration of a strategic document and its communication within and outside the PES. In the elaboration process, ADEM's partner and all users of (digital) services should be included.

The Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund (EUIF)

At the moment, the EUIF offers its services via a broad spectrum of channels comprising face-to-face counselling, a self-service portal, Skype, phone calls and phone messaging, Facebook, mail, email, chat, mobile counselling and a call centre, as well as job fairs and information days. An increasing number of jobseekers (over one third) uses the online platform for registration, and around 9% of EUIF's customers make use of online job-search engines. One important objective within EUIF's digital strategy is to increase the share of jobseekers making use of digital services.

Although the services offered include practically all relevant channels, one current limitation for an extended use of digital services is national legislation which stipulates a focus on face-to-face contacts in counselling. At the moment, the registered unemployed can limit their contact with EUIF to the self-service portal for the first three months but this arrangement must be agreed with their job counsellor. Other constraints on a higher digitalisation of PES services are limited human resources vis-à-vis the need for simultaneously coordinating different change projects, the acceptance of new digital tools among staff, the limited openness of jobseekers for communicating with other jobseekers on e-platforms and difficulties in assessing the cost-effectiveness of digitalisation.

In addition, the representatives of EUIF see the need for taking into consideration the different level of digital competences that jobseekers have when they register with the PES. In this context, jobseekers can be roughly categorised into three groups: (a) jobseekers with sufficient digital skills that can use digital services without external support, (b) jobseekers with basic digital skills who need support making the best use of services offered digitally, and (c) the jobseekers who are not able to use e-services and need intensive support. Counsellors must react in different ways to each of these jobseeker groups. Hence, competences of counsellors and (digital) tools supporting counsellors in their job must be developed taking into consideration the different needs jobseekers have. In addition, counsellors are expecting a more flexible tool that would be easy to link to the in-house IT system. This would not only increase corporate motivation, but it could also lead to better-informed decisions being made by the counsellors and more targeted support for jobseekers.

To achieve the desired progress, the EUIF assessed some of the experiences of the French PES as highly interesting, especially:

- The development of user-centred e-services for jobseekers (especially the “Emploi store”),
- The simplification of the communication between PES-counsellors and jobseekers via the MAP (“Mon assistant personnel”) tool,
- The first steps towards using artificial intelligence in the analysis of data from different sources and in improving e-services,
- E-training to increase digital competences of PES customers and counsellors.

The Danish Agency for Labour Market and Recruitment (STAR)

In the context of e-services, STAR provides a number of different IT tools for the local offices which operate under the responsibility of the municipalities. Most of these IT tools are available to jobseekers, employers and caseworkers via the national PES website (www.jobnet.dk). Jobseekers can also access jobnet.dk and use its self-service options via their computer or mobile phones/tablets, and through campaigns via e-mail and text messages. Overall, there is a broad array of services and channels offered to customers and employers, which includes all relevant media.

Despite this generally positive situation, in the recent past STAR experienced some bottlenecks while trying to set up a broader use of e-services. The first one relates to different understandings between STAR and the municipalities on the service levels that need to be provided (both digitally and face-to-face) to customers. The second one refers to different views on what exactly to offer digitally and via other channels to customers. In this context, a clear and commonly shared digital strategy, which is supported by STAR and the municipalities, is needed.

Another weakness is the uncertainty about the robustness and effectiveness of the IT platform provided by STAR and used by the local offices. So far, a comprehensive assessment

of the technical capacity and performance of the IT infrastructure offered by STAR is missing.

In addition, a potential risk is that especially vulnerable groups among jobseekers face particular difficulties in making use of (expanded) digital services. It goes without saying that more enhanced e-services can only support the integration process if the digital competences of jobseekers (and case workers) are equally developed.

Finally, some uncertainties were expressed by the PES representatives. They referred to the potential for artificial intelligence to improve and speed up the integration process and the potential benefits of opening STAR's own data sources to other stakeholders, and, in turn, a broader access to data outside STAR.

With these challenges, the following experiences from the French PES were highlighted as source of inspiration for STAR's future digitalisation strategy.

- Pôle Emploi has conducted interesting pilot projects, which form the basis of a channel strategy based on the end-user's digital skills, and this allows a different approach towards users with different levels of skills. The digital strategy includes platforms such as "Sphere" for the "digitally savvy".
- Pôle Emploi has a progressive strategy for expanding its open Data Service through Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) and has established different bodies to support the strategy, including "Pitch@Pole" (for generating ideas) and "La Fabrique" (for developing ideas with private partners). This was a source of great inspiration.
- Pôle Emploi works consistently with end-user input to improve existing apps and to develop new apps and guarantee their relevance and quality.

On the basis of the differences identified between the French and the Danish PES and their specific context, the representatives from STAR drew the following conclusions for improving their digital agenda:

- STAR will conduct an end-user analysis of the different user-journeys taken by the unemployed, the caseworkers and employers looking for new employees. This will include looking into the possibilities of differentiating services according to individual needs.
- STAR is currently seeking to expand its knowledge of how the use of artificial intelligence for the services offered in a way that is valuable throughout the Danish Employment System. In order to increase competences and knowledge in this field, STAR is planning a new visit to Pôle Emploi, and also additional visits of small delegations to Sweden and to the UK. STAR is also seeking inspiration and knowledge from other parts of the public sector as well as the private sector.
- STAR is currently expanding its knowledge of how to work efficiently with greater use of open data and Application Programming Interfaces (APIs), and how to build its IT platform accordingly.

3.2 Second working session: adaptation

The objective of the second working session was to build on the first session, this time with concrete ideas for activities supporting the effective implementation of new e-services and/or the improvement of the already existing services. Assisted by supporting peers and experts from the Host PES, all Participating PES managed to elaborate an outline of change with milestones, in line with their identified needs, and they pointed out potential activities and sub-tasks, potential deadlines, responsibilities and relevant stakeholders to be included in further steps. The results of this second working session are presented separately in Chapter 5 of the Individual Feedback Reports.

4. General conclusions from the TLD

Despite the relatively heterogeneous context in which Participating PES operate, and the diverging priorities of their digital strategies and learning needs, some important elements of the strategy on how to organise and implement e-services and channel management in the French PES were thought to be crucial for all the Participating PES. These elements include:

- a) a strong commitment of top management to push forward digitalisation within the PES,
- b) an active involvement of the staff and of the customers in the process of elaborating digital services,
- c) a preventative approach by the PES for reducing reluctance towards, and fears about, digitalisation. This includes the fears of staff and customers towards transparent communication and information about the opportunities and risks of digital services, and
- d) a coherent strategy for increasing the digital competences of staff and customers, especially jobseekers from vulnerable groups.

In general, participants were very satisfied with the work presented by the French PES. They said the presentations were high quality: nine of eleven participants (82%) rated the general as either "very good" or "good". The in-depth presentations were rated as "very good" or "good" by eight participants (72%). Working in teams was also highly appreciated by the participants: in the post-event survey this form of exchange was rated "very good" or "good" by nine of the eleven participants (82%). General potential for improvement was however seen in a better balance between presentations and inputs from the Host PES, the question and answer sessions and the working in teams. In addition, preparation could be improved, especially by forwarding relevant documents (such as presentations) to participants at an earlier stage, by reducing technical problems before and during the virtual kick-off meetings and by integrating participants' expectations in the Host PES presentations in a more effective way.