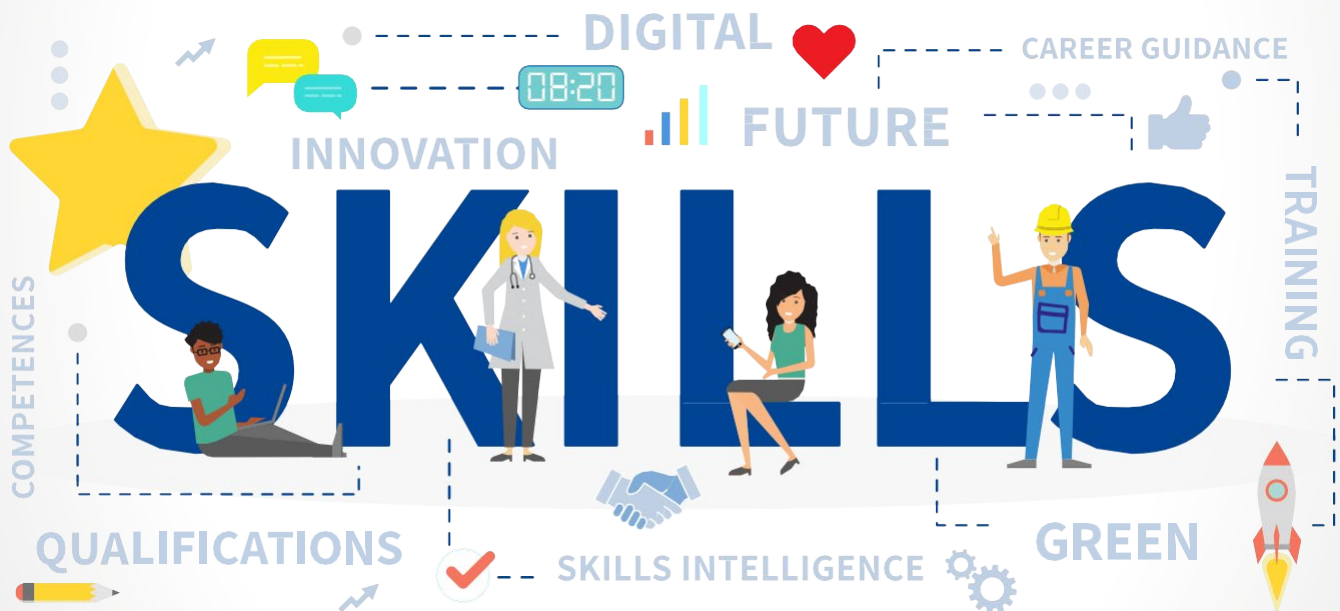




PES Network
Stakeholder Conference
**Empowering the Workforce, Bridging
the Skills Gap**
30 March 2023



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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Unit E.1 — Labour Mobility, Public Employment Services, ELA

Contact: Yasmin Salem

E-mail: EMPL-PES-SECRETARIAT@ec.europa.eu

European Commission
B-1049 Brussels

EUROPEAN NETWORK OF PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

Stakeholder Conference

“Empowering the Workforce, Bridging the Skills Gap”

30 March 2023

Synthesis paper

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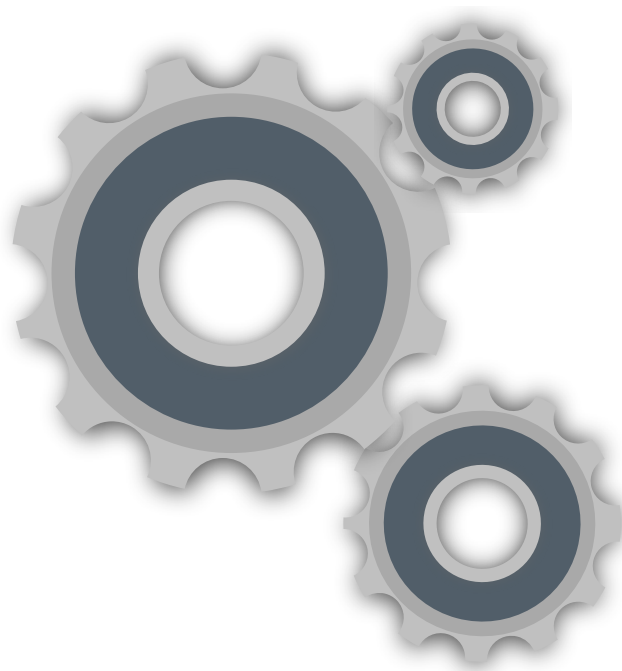
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Introduction

This paper provides an overview of the key themes discussed in the **2023 PES Network Stakeholder Conference** dedicated to “Empowering the Workforce, Bridging the Skills Gap.” It is intended to **showcase the contribution which Public Employment Services (PES) and their stakeholder partners** can provide to address skill challenges, in line with the objectives of the [2023 European Year of Skills](#).

The conference was attended by **Heads of PES** and other **PES staff**, particularly those working on skills and training, plus social partners, labour market and skills experts from EU institutions, private employment services, education and training providers, NGOs, and international organisations. Participants had the opportunity to learn about the **latest skills-related trends and developments**, to discover **how PES and their partners can** successfully address skills challenges, and to consider **the future role of PES and stakeholders** in this regard.



1. Policy context: skills and labour market challenges

The opening speech by Jordi Curell, Director for Labour Mobility and International Affairs at the European Commission, emphasised the importance of **communication and cooperation amongst PES and stakeholder partners** to deliver the [2020 European Skills Agenda](#), put the [Porto Declaration](#) into practice and deliver on the [European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan](#) targets: at least 60% of adults to participate in training every year, and an employment rate of at least 78% by 2030.

Delivering on these EU ambitions is important because a **workforce equipped with in-demand skills contributes to sustainable growth**, encourages innovation and improves companies' competitiveness. Skilled workers enjoy better job opportunities and can fully engage in society. This is key to ensuring that both economic recovery and the dual transitions are socially inclusive.

The European Year of Skills provides further impetus to these initiatives. One of its aims is to encourage **EU institutions and labour market stakeholders to cooperate towards promoting reskilling and upskilling for quality jobs**. The European Year of Skills especially prioritises skills to support the green and digital transitions and to foster economic recovery. Attracting skills and talent from third countries, including by strengthening learning opportunities and mobility and facilitating the recognition of qualifications, will play an important role in this regard.

Figure 1 – Graphic recording of the opening remarks



Source: Graphic recording by SCRIBING.IT - M.Lobietti & G.Peddes



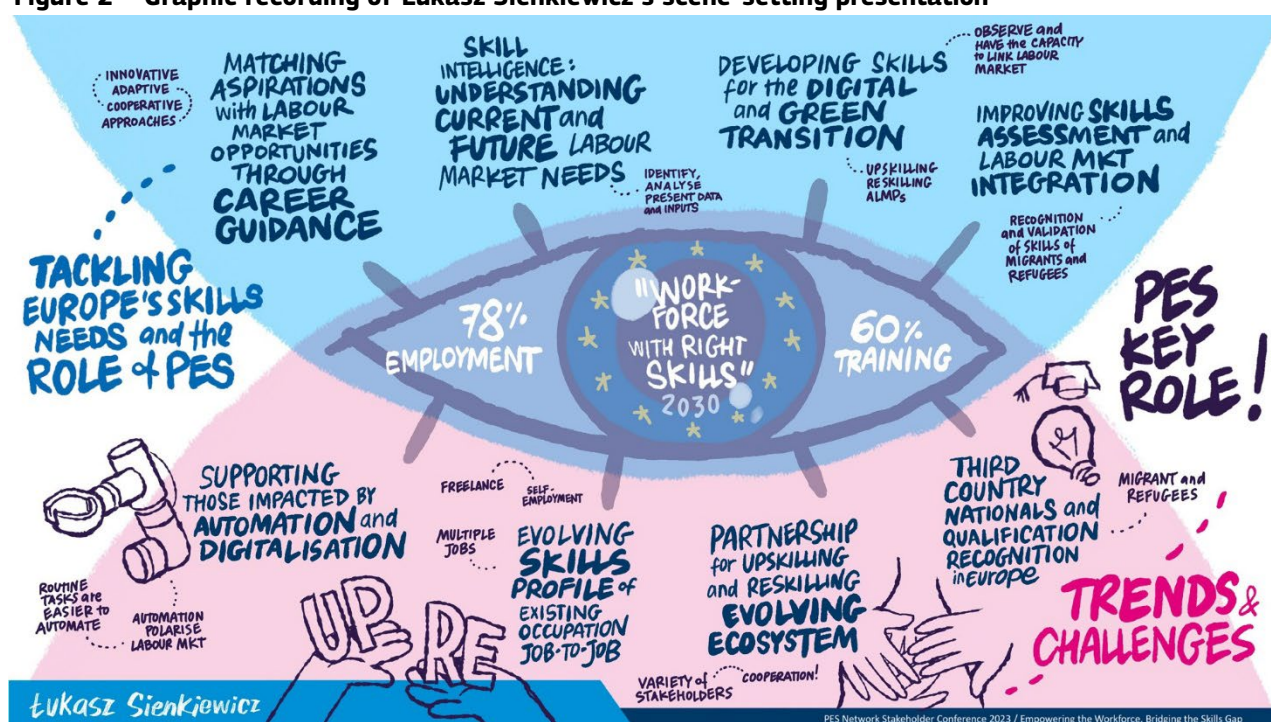
In his scene-setting presentation, Łukasz Sienkiewicz, Chairman of the Institute for Labour Market Analyses and Associate Professor at Gdansk University of Technology, identified the **technological, societal and economic changes driving digital and green skills transitions** as the most significant skills-related trend in the current climate. Coupled with the fast pace of change in job design and skills requirements, this is generating an **increased need for reskilling/upskilling**. The latest figures from Eurostat and the [Digital Economy and Society Index](#) state that only 37% of adults regularly participate in training, while 4 out of 10 adults and every third person who works in Europe lack basic digital skills. Gender gaps are further exacerbating this issue, with women representing only 1 in 6 of those working in the IT sector and 1 in 3 STEM graduates.

These changes are taking place in a complex **skills ecosystem that calls for increased cooperation between relevant stakeholders**. Finally, fast changes are coupled with longer careers, resulting in a growing need for support among individuals (both working and jobseekers) as part of **lifelong learning**.

The key challenges for PES and their stakeholders in addressing skills challenges, as mapped out in the scene-setting presentation, are:

1. The **accelerating impact of automation and digitalisation** which will require agile and flexible responses from employment support services and skills providers.
2. **Demographic and societal changes**, particularly due to Europe's rapidly ageing population, are increasing the importance of lifelong career guidance and support.
3. The **evolving design of existing and new jobs**, leading to increased demand for high technology/high-skilled profiles.
4. There is an **increasing need for cooperation in skills development**. This will require PES to use their position to build bridges, facilitating partnerships for skills development.
5. A **variety of skills development pathways** will be needed to provide more personalised assistance to meet individual learning needs.
6. **Innovative approaches to skills recognition and validation** are needed to fully utilise the untapped potential of Europe's workforce, including migrants and refugees. These must incorporate systems to recognise and validate the outcomes of non-formal and informal learning.

Figure 2 – Graphic recording of Łukasz Sienkiewicz's scene-setting presentation



Source: Graphic recording by SCRIBING.IT - M.Lobiatti & G.Peddes

What skills for Europe's future labour market?

The introductory panel, featuring PES and social partners, discussed current and future implications for the skills of the European workforce. The speakers offered different but complementary perspectives as to what the main challenges are in ensuring that skills are relevant to the labour market. All agreed that the demand for new skills is being felt across almost all areas of the economy. The panel also underlined the complexity of the challenge from a PES perspective. The PES Network Chair highlighted the importance to successfully “cross the river”, i.e. to ensure that bridges are in place and to develop new programmes proactively without waiting for skills shortages to emerge. PES and stakeholders must be forward-thinking in this regard, ensuring that their customers have relevant skills.

Employer representatives mentioned the importance of coordination and collaboration among labour market stakeholders, particularly to reach those farthest from the labour market. The key challenge in this regard is to provide appropriate support in meeting individual training needs, including for those who have been out

of work for a long time. Training offers also need to be flexible, especially in order to accommodate the needs of people working in smaller organisations. Finally, trade unions agreed that stakeholder collaboration is essential, particularly to maximise the quality of training and support the creation of quality jobs. It is equally crucial that labour market developments and changes in the world of work do not increase precarious employment, and it is therefore particularly important to reinforce protection for platform workers.

Other key labour market challenges were mentioned in the discussion, such as the importance of not treating unemployment and in-work reskilling as separate, unconnected issues and of supporting employers to assist restructuring and keeping people in work. Panellists also underlined the importance of creating the right opportunities for third-country nationals and young people, particularly through initiatives supporting both sectorial and geographical labour mobility. Together with investments to support growth, this will be crucial to ensure that the twin transitions are socially inclusive.

Figure 3 – Graphic recording of the introductory panel



Source: Graphic recording by SCRIBING.IT - M.Lobiatti & G.Peddes

2. Tackling Europe's Skill Needs: the role of public employment services and their partners

The four morning workshops provided an overview of the latest practices developed by PES, discussing ways in which PES can help to address skills challenges and considering their role in the wider skills ecosystem.

Matching aspirations with labour market opportunities through career guidance

Background

Career guidance (also referred to as career counselling) describes the services which **help people of any age to manage their careers** and make the educational, training and occupational choices that are right for them. This involves a **range of connected activities**, including providing career information, personalised guidance/counselling, skills assessment, engaging with the world of work and teaching decision-making and career management skills¹. As demonstrated by the [flash survey run by Cedefop in 2020](#), the role of career guidance has grown since the COVID-19 pandemic, mainly due to the social and economic uncertainty it generated for people of all ages. This has led to an **increased demand for career guidance services**, especially for careers and labour market information, individualised career counselling, and psychosocial support. Career guidance has also been recognised as an important factor in preparing the workforce for reskilling and upskilling in times of change.

Career guidance providers include the education sector (schools, universities and training centres), career guidance centres (national or municipality-operated), employers and trade unions, as well as employment services. **PES** have also been widely recognised as providers of professional career counselling².

Strategic challenges and learning

The European Labour Authority offered some **insight on the impacts of automation and digitalisation**, drawing upon experience from EURES. This included references to shortage and surplus occupations, with a presentation of the EURES data dashboard, and a discussion of the need to **improve counsellors' capacity** to deliver better career guidance. The Flemish PES VDAB and their stakeholder Acerta presented their **joint efforts in supporting job-to-job transitions**

in Flanders. To increase labour mobility and address skill shortages, VDAB has developed a **new strategic employer programme** that is more proactive in supporting both SMEs and larger companies. Part of their approach is to develop partnerships with strategic stakeholders in order to redirect people who have been made redundant towards sectors with labour shortages. Finally, the Dutch PES presented the **Service Centres on Education and Work**: partnerships between municipalities, VET providers and PES, providing people with the information and support they need to make informed career decisions. They offer people **step-by-step career orientation** and direct them towards any resources they might need, including re-skilling opportunities.



Key learning points

There is a need for better **coordinated services and service delivery**, and particularly a (joint) **framework for measuring the quality and effectiveness of career guidance**, both in the short term (especially for subjective indicators) and the longer term (ideally with more objective indicators, based on a clear intervention logic).

Another point regards the need for a **knowledge base** about future skills needs and the current skills of the workforce. It is also important to distinguish between the impacts of **automation** (e.g. routine tasks disappearing) and **digitalisation** (processes affected, leading to fragmentation of tasks requiring end-to-end cognitive skills and decision-making).

It is equally crucial to ensure **good, tailored communication with target groups** by:

- Addressing negative limiting beliefs and underlying fears of change.
- Ensuring job and income security alongside training.
- Contacting trade unions before reaching out to companies.
- Developing specific outreach and services for small enterprises.
- Developing real collaboration, moving away from the commonly applied top-down approach.

Finally, policymakers should **adjust the legal context** to enable effective collaboration and partnerships and establish an explicit basis for lifelong career guidance.

1 See the interagency [Investing in career guidance](#) report from 2019.

2 See the European Commission paper from 2020 on [Lifelong guidance policy and practice in the EU: trends, challenges and opportunities](#).



Skills intelligence: understanding current and future labour market needs

Background

Skills intelligence is the outcome of an **expert-driven process of identifying, analysing, synthesising, and presenting quantitative and/or qualitative skills and labour market information**. This may be drawn from multiple sources and adjusted to the needs of different users³. Diagnosing current and future skills needs is an increasingly important aspect of employment policies, including the activities of PES and their partners. One of the key actions under the European Skills Agenda is **strengthening skills intelligence in European countries**, in which PES play a vital role.

PES in the European Union have various approaches towards analysing future skills requirements. According to the 2022 report **Future skills, career guidance and lifelong learning in PES**, eighteen PES currently analyse future skills needs and eight PES report taking a lead in establishing new systems. Many PES are undertaking **activities aimed at analysing skills and occupational needs**, however these often lack the systematic approach needed to develop them into fully-fledged skills intelligence systems. Nevertheless, they **provide important information to PES staff** (e.g. employment counsellors, career guidance professionals), **and customers** (both jobseekers and employers). Recent developments include **more advanced approaches** involving text analysis and machine learning models, web scraping/web crawling of vacancies or more advanced AI-based applications. Many of these approaches are still in their infancy and need further refinement and development to be fully operational and useful for service provision.

Strategic challenges and learning

One of the initiatives presented was a **new approach to skills intelligence with a focus on green jobs**, developed by the World Association of Public Employment Services (WAPES). The Greek PES DYPA and the Greek Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs also presented their cooperation on the **Mechanism of Labour Market Diagnosis**. The Mechanism uses the **power of advanced analysis combined with data visualisation software** to produce labour market information. It analyses sources such as the Labour Force Survey (LFS), the unemployment and vacancies information gathered by DYPA, and ESCO data on skills by occupation.

Key learning points

The importance of **skills intelligence** in a fast-changing environment: diagnosing current and future skills needs is an increasingly important part of employment policies and their impact, including activities delivered by PES and their partners.

To operate properly, PES need **'real-time' information on skills demand**, including at local/regional and sectoral level, and qualitative information on transversal skills, using big data analysis of job vacancies.

Approaches towards analysing future skills requirements in the labour market vary significantly: the **lack of a systematic approach** hampers the development of skills intelligence systems with long-term forecast abilities.

Coordinated action with stakeholders puts PES at the centre of the skills ecosystem and is required to balance and coordinate demand and supply for skills, and to inform policy design in this regard.

Developing skills for the digital and green transitions

Background

In 2020, Cedefop⁴ estimated that some 128 million adults in the (then) EU-28, Iceland and Norway are low-educated, have low digital skills, have low cognitive skills, or are at risk of skill loss or their skills becoming obsolescent. As such, the upskilling and reskilling of adults – both those in and out of work – is an urgent priority⁵.

There is increasing awareness that upskilling does not always require a long training programme and that it may be more cost-effective to provide shorter courses. Developing e-learning courses and hybrid learning formats are also seen as means for PES to reduce individual training costs and provide access to a wider group of learners. Policies to incentivise the upskilling of staff through training and development can assist in dealing with recruitment shortages. Stakeholders, including employment services, VET providers, and employers should work together to design and implement the most effective training pathways. However, this collaborative approach can also present challenges.

3 See the Skills intelligence page on [Cedefop's website](#).

4 Cedefop (2020). [Empowering adults through upskilling and reskilling pathways. Volume 1](#).

5 Cedefop (2020). [Empowering adults through upskilling and reskilling pathways. Volume 2](#).

Strategic challenges and learning

The World Employment Confederation presented two **case studies**: the Adecco Group's **training for the hydrogen industry**, a growing sector in France; and activities by Lee Hecht Harrison (LHH), offering **innovative training for R&D people** in the automotive industry to develop **sustainable mobility solutions**. The Lithuanian PES, UZT, explained how they are making their activities more sustainable, offering **more digital services and implementing sustainability** in most of their processes. UZT also presented a project aimed at unleashing the **potential of young people** to support the green transition.



Key learning points

Demographic change is generating a need for more training in digital skills for older people. Young people also need training to understand how to use digitally available information.

Career guidance should start earlier, in secondary school, to allow young people to make informed decisions regarding their careers. Career guidance is also particularly important for women, to attract them into STEM careers and support both the digital and green transitions.

Efforts are needed to **develop a taxonomy of green jobs / sectors**, and to **map the differences and different needs between regions and sectors**. This is particularly helpful to support worker mobility.

The success of skills development depends on the **quality of training**. Therefore, close cooperation with employers is necessary to offer relevant content to trainees.

Skill-based approaches to job matching have the potential to make recruitment more inclusive and should be stepped up.

Improving skills assessment and labour market integration

Background

Skills assessment procedures are usually well-established in PES in Europe⁶. In recent years, increased efforts have been made to develop tools to analyse jobseekers' skills for the purpose of skills-based job matching and counselling. These include moving from a qualification and occupation perspective towards **skills-based profiling, comprehensive assessments** including job-related and 'soft' skills, and **multi-level skills assessments including self-assessment** (usually through online testing), counsellor support (interviewing, professional tests), and practical assignments.

PES in Europe are also becoming increasingly involved in **skills recognition and validation**, including covering the outcomes of **non-formal and informal learning**. PES – often working with their partners – are increasing their efforts to validate the skills of people for whom the labour market is difficult to access, especially **migrants and refugees**. New PES initiatives aim to build a comprehensive, skill-focused system, often based on individual learning (training) accounts. This is with a view to strengthening the promotion of **skill-based matching** in PES services, developing tools and testing procedures (including self-assessments, and online and counsellor-supported testing), and integrating skills information into a single database used by all providers. PES also report new developments in **providing skills training that leads to formally recognised qualifications**.

Strategic challenges and learning

The Swedish PES presented their matching method '**Job Matching from Day-1**', which was developed for jobseekers expected to have low employability and particularly **refugees and their relatives**. It starts by **mapping** a jobseeker's features, skills and preferred occupations. The same mapping process is applied to vacancies and employers, and then a match is made. A joint presentation from the Spanish PES and the Valencian regional PES addressed their use of **Professional Certificates**. These certificates are used to assess candidates' skills through **fully individualised assessment tests** that are designed to certify skills for which applicants do not possess any formal learning. After the assessment, **training opportunities are offered** to help applicants improve the skills that they haven't been able to prove in their assessment.

6 European Commission (2023). Discussion paper on New forms of skills assessment and validation – impact on PES services and counselling (forthcoming).



Key learning points

It is important to reflect on whether **schools and vocational education and training** can really and fully prepare people for work, or if they should mostly prepare people to be **adaptable** to changes in the labour market.

Recognising competences can help to make the **labour market more fluid** by providing better, more transparent information and equipping individuals with a visible **'passport'** for life.

Most of the discussion focused on exploring the details of the Swedish and Spanish practices and how they help **migrants** in entering labour markets. In this regard, **language remains a key issue but not a central one** when helping migrants to enter the labour market.

3. The changing demand for skills in Europe – trends and challenges

The **afternoon workshops** focused on **the future role of PES and their partners** and how this may need to evolve in the coming years. This was explored through a series of interactive discussions.

Supporting those impacted by automation and digitalisation

Background

Studies confirm that **routine tasks** that can be easily optimised and codified are easiest to automate⁷. Specific sections of the population, especially less educated workers, the long-term unemployed, youth, migrants, persons with disabilities, and some women, are likely to be the most affected by this, further exacerbating their **existing labour market vulnerability**. Persons in these groups are **disproportionately employed in low-skilled, highly automatable jobs**, such as office support, production, customer service and sales, which have the highest potential for displacement.

Another profound change driven by digitalisation is the **growth of the platform economy**. A continuing increase in the sharing economy will be driven by demographics, particularly the ageing population. Increasing numbers of **older workers** whose jobs have been eliminated or who have been forced to seek alternative employment may be required to engage in **non-standard forms of employment** to supplement their incomes, especially if they have had an intermittent employment pattern during their working life and have limited pension benefits⁸.

Strategic challenges and learning

Participants considered the question: **“What measures should employment service providers and their partners put into place to alleviate the effects of job automation on those most exposed?”**. To help frame the discussion and inspire participants, Eurofound presented the main trends and challenges regarding digitalisation and automation, and the Brussels PES Actiris briefly described its role in attracting jobseekers and finding employment in sectors with shortages.



Key learning points

Digitalisation, automation, and polarisation of jobs pose challenges for PES, especially for **career guidance and training provision** and particularly for young people, persons with disabilities and those without higher education.

PES could act as mediators to support people in non-standard forms of employment (i.e. platform workers).

PES and their partners should invest in **collaboration and cooperation**, using cross-sectoral connections and partnerships to share information and develop tools to support people who are facing digital exclusion.

PES and their partners need to **raise awareness and promote training and reskilling**, designed with a holistic approach, to act as “guidance angels” and help people stay in employment.

PES and their partners have to invest in the **professionalisation and training of their staff members** delivering services to those most impacted by automation and digitalisation in order to remain updated on the emerging issues and be proactive towards clients.

Evolving skills profiles of existing occupations – Towards more frequent re/upskilling and job-to-job transitions

Background

The effects of changes brought about by the digital and green transition on the world of work cannot be understood simply in terms of **job creation and destruction**. **New professions** will emerge in areas which are still difficult to predict. **Skills requirements** are also being altered by changes in the worker-employer relationship as well as fundamental shifts in the nature of work. **Technological advances** are transforming job design so that the classic employer/employee model often no longer applies. There has been a significant increase in teleworking and bogus self-employment.

7 Manyika, J., et al. (2017). [Jobs lost, jobs gained: What the future of work will mean for jobs, skills, and wages](#).

8 [Berde, É. and Tóké, L. \(2020\). The platform economy as a working opportunity for older people: The case of the Hungarian carpooling company Oszkár](#)

More people already hold **several jobs simultaneously** with multiple income sources. The work-leisure balance is also changing, with workers placing increasing importance on self-actualisation, and increasingly pursuing self-employment and entrepreneurship. Increases in **hybrid working structures** and **enquiry-based learning** are promoting creativity and critical thinking and driving a greater demand for skills utilising new technologies and AI tools.

It is estimated that **96% of workers in Europe** with jobs at risk due to technology could find similar or better work with sufficient training. However, those who most need this support are often the **least likely to seek upskilling opportunities**.

Strategic challenges and learning

Participants were invited to reflect on this question: **“What measures should employment service providers and their partners put in place to prepare those that are currently in employment for future occupations and more frequent job transitions?”**. To inspire them in their discussions, Cedefop described the main trends and challenges in regard to the changing nature of work and the support necessary to navigate transitions. The Wallonia PES Le Forem gave an overview of measures deployed by the PES to support people experiencing labour market transitions.



Key learning points

PES will increasingly need to **develop AI and digital tools** to support their clients, but it is important to ensure that these tools are always combined with **counsellors’ assessments** of client needs.

Transparency will be increasingly important, both in the assessment of the offer and demand for skills (from candidates or vacancies) and on the relevance of training programmes.

Quality of work should be given higher priority through measures such as **bonus systems** for companies with a good work-life balance, and implementation of solid greening initiatives. This will **support jobseekers in making decisions** that support sustainability. PES and partners need to develop **stronger coordination**, working towards speaking with “one voice” or “speaking the same language”.

Accurately **mapping skill needs and improving the governance of the skills system** are crucial steps in ensuring that workers and jobseekers receive the support they need to navigate transitions.

Education for young people should be redesigned, focusing on a more flexible and modular approach.

Partnerships for upskilling and reskilling: an evolving ecosystem

Background

Future jobs will require a **wide range of skills**. In an increasingly dynamic labour market, **more effective and accessible career transitions** and measures to untap the **potential of people outside of the labour market** will play an increasing role in reducing shortages. These will involve **adapting existing skills**, developing new skills, and identifying how the **transferability and portability of skills** between occupations can be developed. To deliver these objectives, PES will need to collaborate with employers, private agencies, NGOs, research institutions and VET providers to offer skills assessment and matching services, and to ensure **improved labour market transparency**.

The Pact for Skills has emphasised the **importance of partnerships**, while changing skills needs will require **new approaches to skills partnerships**. Skills partnerships are needed to reduce skills mismatches, make learning more attractive, expand employment prospects, and promote work-based learning. PES can support **employees and companies** to respond to digital transformation and support occupational restructuring. Partnerships can help people **access training and products** in order to develop their skills and businesses. PES can join forces with municipalities, universities, training institutes, businesses, and NGOs to provide **new learning environments** including training platforms and digital workshops. Skills delivery partners must have access to up-to-date skills intelligence and good mechanisms for engaging with employers.

Strategic challenges and learning

Participants were invited to reflect on the question: **“How do PES partnerships need to evolve to better meet current and upcoming skills challenges?”**. To frame the discussion, the Luxembourg PES presented its training offer and related partnerships showcasing the Skills4Job initiative. Then, the European Platform for Rehabilitation (EPR) made an intervention on the importance of partnerships for good training opportunities.



Key learning points

Key issues included the **application of inclusive approaches**, the importance of people-centred services and the advantages of sustainable partnerships. Participants underlined the need to develop **quality partnerships** to ensure quality service delivery.

A **broad partnership** of actors in the skills ecosystem was suggested, including employers, unions, public institutions, training institutions, social partners, and NGOs, amongst others. These partnerships should be based on **real collaboration, shared goals and a joint understanding between** partners.

Quality partnerships take time. PES are well-placed in **taking the lead**, including in the mapping of partners, the engagement process and bringing stakeholders together.

Participants suggested that **innovative approaches should be tested in small-scale pilots** and upscaled for wider implementation if successful. Further actions to increase learning on this subject could include sharing knowledge of how ESF+ is being used successfully, the use of specialist support services, and practices around skills recognition, micro-credentials, and job matching.

Third-country nationals and qualification recognition in Europe

Background

Foreign citizens are more likely than nationals to be **overqualified**⁹. The 2020 overqualification rate for nationals was 20.8% compared with 32.3% for citizens of other EU Member States and 41.4% for non-EU citizens¹⁰. Migrants, both from other EU member states and third countries, tend to take **longer to find employment** than native-born workers. They are overrepresented in low-skilled work, even when they have levels of education and skills similar to those of native-born residents. Skilled migrants often face **more limited opportunities** than native workers, suggesting failures to recognise and utilise their qualifications. This is detrimental both to individuals and the wider economy.

9 Defined as persons with a tertiary level of educational attainment (ISCED levels 5-8) working in low or medium skilled occupations (ISCO groups 4-9) for which a tertiary educational attainment is not required.

10 [Eurostat Migrant integration statistics](#).

EU countries are dealing with the **challenges of qualification recognition** for third-country nationals through a variety of measures. These include systems for skills assessment, language training schemes, supplying migrants with information concerning skills recognition processes, and making validation tools available, including exclusively visual and multi-lingual tools. **Mentoring** can also be an important skills recognition and enhancement strategy. **Support from civil society organisations** and **use of digital systems** can be particularly useful in developing matching systems. **Fast-track training schemes** involving combinations of work and upskilling activities, including language courses, and the ability to move around a country to take advantage of opportunities, are also important factors in promoting integration and the skills utilisation of migrants from third countries.

Strategic challenges and learning

Participants were invited to discuss the question: **“What measures should employment service providers and their partners put in place to improve the labour market integration of third-country nationals?”**. Following a scene-setting presentation by the European Training Foundation, attendees discussed crucial questions relating to the **recognition of third country nationals’ qualifications**.



Key learning points

It is important that **activities supporting migration** commence before migrants arrive in their country of destination. These actions are necessary to strengthen support systems: e.g. to initiate and where possible complete job profiling, and to prepare a digital platform with information about skill and labour shortage occupations.

Work permits could possibly be arranged before entry. Efforts should be made to further harmonise the European Qualifications Framework, the European credit system for vocational education and training and the European Credit Accumulation and Transfer System.

It is important to clarify the difference between the **recognition of qualifications** awarded in the country of origin and **recognition of learning outcomes** (i.e. of competences). In many instances, it might be **faster to (re)assess migrants’ competences** rather than to try to identify and understand the qualifications awarded in the country of origin.

Conclusions

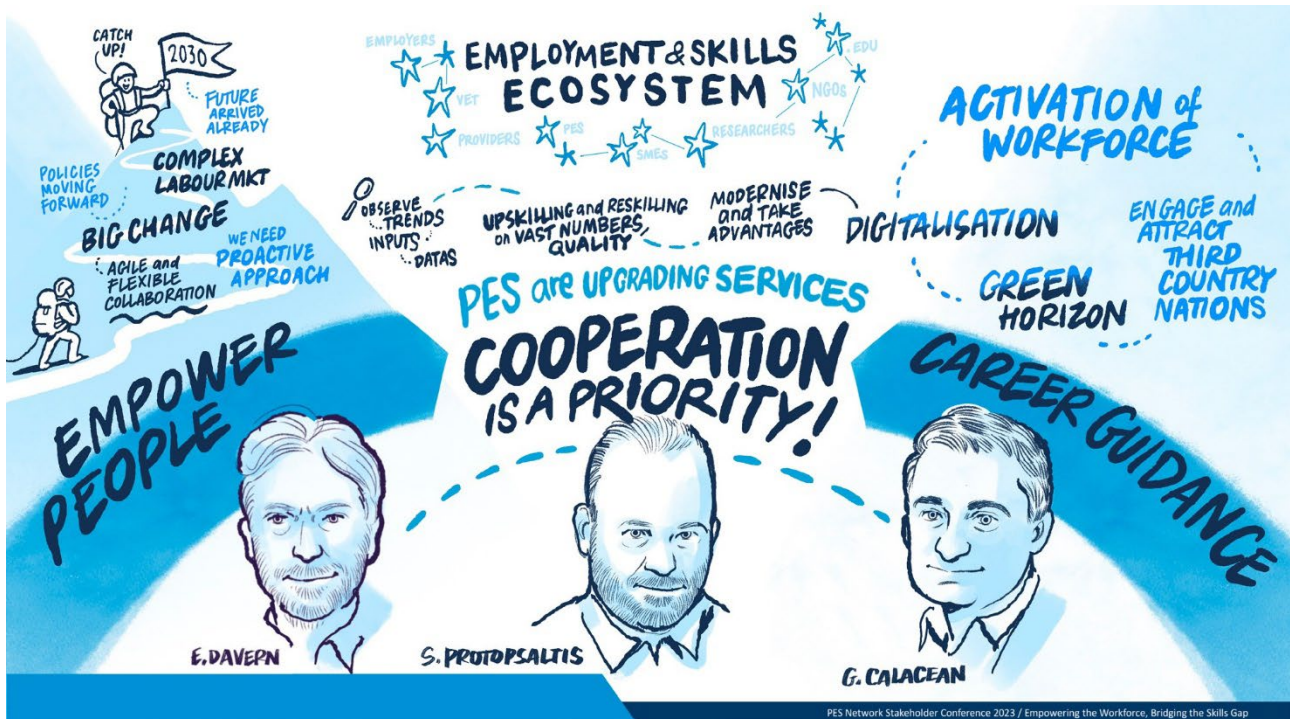
During the closing session, speakers remarked on how the European Year of Skills, already before its official start, has brought together the **energy and creativity of PES and stakeholder partners**, which can increase momentum behind the important initiatives presented during the conference. The labour market is a complex entity with a great number of individual moving parts, and the conference has shown how stakeholders are developing more robust models and **working together to illustrate and investigate labour market trends** and current and future skills needs.

This is particularly important as workers, employers, and support agencies are increasingly asked to adopt a **proactive, rather than reactive, approach**, to keep pace with the requirements of a dynamic evolving labour market. **Improved skills assessment** will be an essential feature of this model: not just improved mechanisms and methodologies for skills profiling, but also acknowledging the **value of soft skills** and those **acquired through informal learning**.

Speakers also noted that there is **enough unmet skills demand** across the EU to employ many of Europe's long-term unemployed and inactive people, if provided with **appropriate support and guidance**. This is a key priority, as raising Europe's employment rate and reducing its skills gap can be addressed through providing more citizens with the skills needed to access the many opportunities in shortage occupations.

The key takeaway point, noted by both participants and speakers, is that **PES and stakeholders must continually increase the priority of cooperation**. This means deepening and broadening partnerships, as only a **participative and collaborative model** can truly deliver the tools to empower the workforce and bridge the skills gap.

Figure 4 – Graphic recording of the closing remarks



Source: Graphic recording by SCRIBING.IT - M.Lobietti & G.Peddes

ANNEX: EU initiatives to support skills development

The European Year of Skills builds on the many current EU initiatives to support skills and increase their take-up, including:

- The [European Skills Agenda](#) is the framework for EU skills policy cooperation and will continue to help individuals and businesses to develop and apply more and better skills.
- Under the [Pact for Skills](#), more than 700 organisations have signed up, and 12 large-scale partnerships in strategic sectors have been set up with pledges to help upskill up to 6 million people.
- The Commission has also proposed new initiatives to address EU skills shortages and improve migration cooperation. The roll-out of an [EU Talent Pool](#) and of [Talent Partnerships](#) with selected third partners will help match the skills of candidates to work in Europe with labour market needs. This is a key deliverable under the New Pact on Migration and Asylum.
- The [New European Innovation Agenda](#), adopted in July 2022, proposes a flagship initiative and set of actions to create the right framework conditions to develop talents.
- The European strategy for universities, adopted in January 2022, proposes a series of 50 actions. These are key to developing and future-proofing high level skills for a wide range of learners, including lifelong learners, enabling them to become creative and critical thinkers, problem solvers and active and responsible citizens.
- The European [Digital Skills and Jobs Platform](#) is an initiative launched under the [Connecting Europe Facility Programme](#). It offers information and resources on digital skills such as a digital skills self-assessment tool, as well as training and funding opportunities.
- The EU [Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition](#) tackles the digital skills gap by bringing together Member States, social partners, companies, non-profit organisations and education providers to raise awareness and encourage organisations to take different actions to promote digital skills training such as a pledge to boost digital skills.

EU funding and assistance to invest into skills

Significant EU funding and technical support is available to support Member States' investment in up- and reskilling, including:

- The [European Social Fund Plus \(ESF+\)](#) with a budget of more than €99 billion for 2021-2027 is the EU's main instrument for investing in people.
- The [Recovery and Resilience Facility](#) can support Member States' reforms and investments, including in the area of skills and jobs. In the national recovery and resilience plans endorsed by the Commission and the Council so far, around 20% of the social expenditure is dedicated to "employment and skills".
- The [Digital Europe Programme's](#) €580 million for development of advanced digital skills. This provides strategic funding supporting activities including the development of a skilled talent pool of digital experts. It also enhances cooperation between EU Member States and stakeholders in digital skills and jobs.
- [Horizon Europe](#) underpins skills for researchers, entrepreneurs and innovators notably through its [Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions](#), the [European Innovation Council](#) and the [European Institute for Technology](#).
- [Erasmus+](#) with a budget €26.2 billion supports, actions including the personal and professional development of learners, staff and institutions in vocational education and training through funding mobility activities and partnerships for cooperation across Europe. It also funds European Universities which are pioneering the development of micro-credentials for training, up-skilling and re-skilling.

Additional programmes that can support skills development include the [InvestEU programme](#), the [European Globalisation Adjustment Fund](#) for displaced workers, the [European Regional Development Fund](#), the [Just Transition Fund](#), the [European Solidarity Corps](#), the [Programme for Environment and climate action](#) (LIFE), the [Modernisation Fund](#), the [Technical Support Instrument](#), and the [Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument](#).

