

PESs are swinging into Action in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

WAPES and its partners would like to thank you for your participation in our joint survey "PES mobilizes in response to the COVID-19 pandemic" which was carried out from 2 April to 28 May 2020.

With more than 50% participation, just over 79 public employment services responded to our survey, representing 72 countries on our five continents.

As previously mentioned, these data, which are currently being analysed, will be published jointly and shared at a **WEB conference** that WAPES is organising with its partners the ILO, IDB and SOCIEUX +, and to which you are cordially invited on **29 June 2020**.

Each of the partners is currently mobilizing its expertise to exploit this data.

As part of our partnership with *YouMatch*, we have also decided to carry out a first complementary, joint analysis, more focused on Africa, in order to provide food for thought and action for the communities of practice bringing together, on this continent, some of you. The proceeds of these actions will be communicated through our network.

We also provide you and the researchers working on these issues with the raw data for possible further studies.

The wide range of your answers and questions will enable us to quickly propose areas of sharing experience and practice, and to call upon the international community to help us respond to emerging issues.

You will find in this newsletter an analysis of the emerging trends that will be confirmed and developed in our future publications.



What can be said at this point...

Preamble

The data, graphic and comments below are resulting from a first overview of the raw data allowing us to identify some trends and to prefigure the topics we need to tackle today and in the future.

The distribution of respondents by country:



Note: As far as Oceania is concerned, only the Department of Education, Skills and Employment of the Australian Government replied, so to make comparisons between continents more relevant we chose to group Oceania and Asia in some analysis.

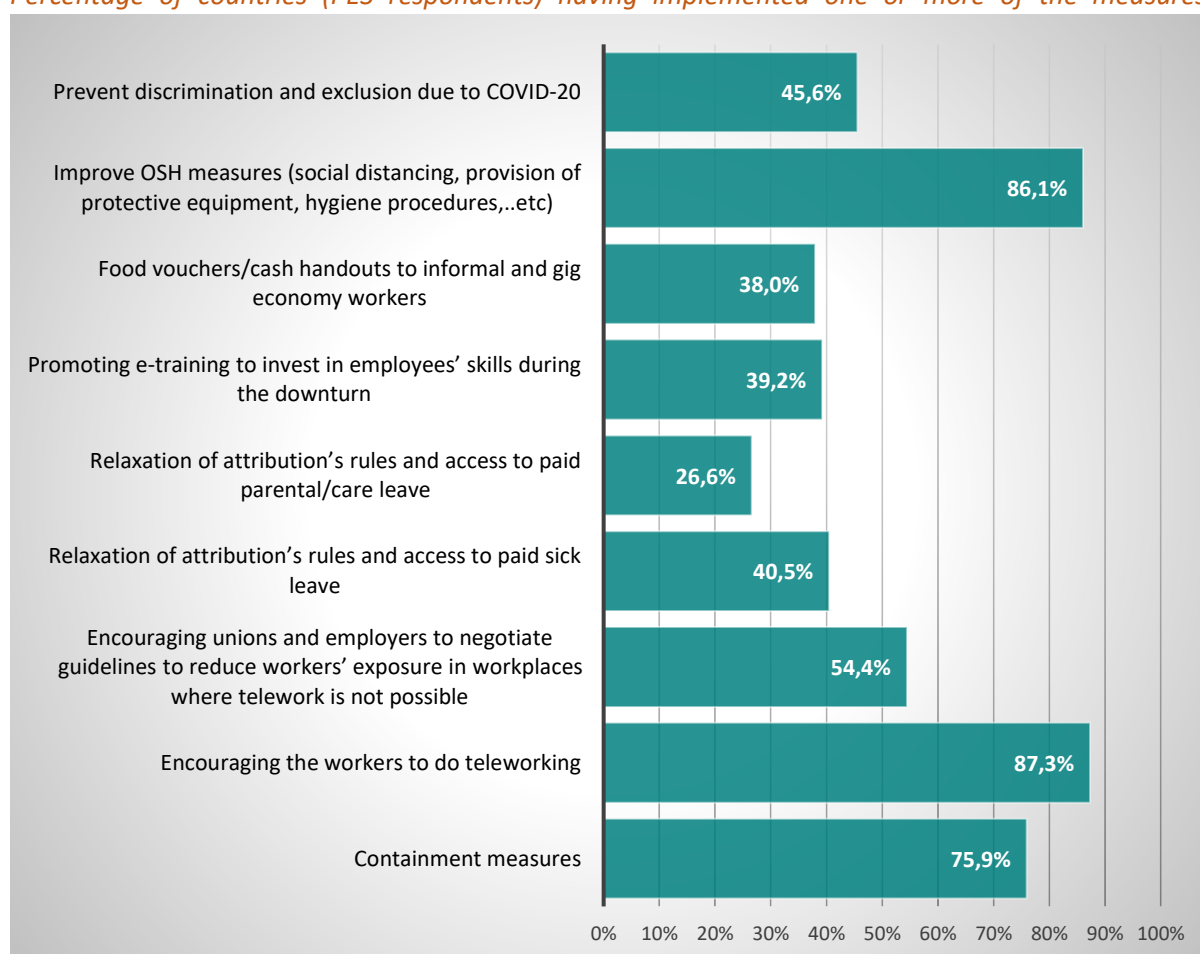
Part one: preventive and economic support measures

Protecting workers: A shared priority

Countries on all continents have adopted extensive measures to protect their populations, especially workers. Containment measures have spread rapidly (74.07%) but with the impact we are experiencing on the global economy, the extent and duration of the consequences are still difficult to estimate today.

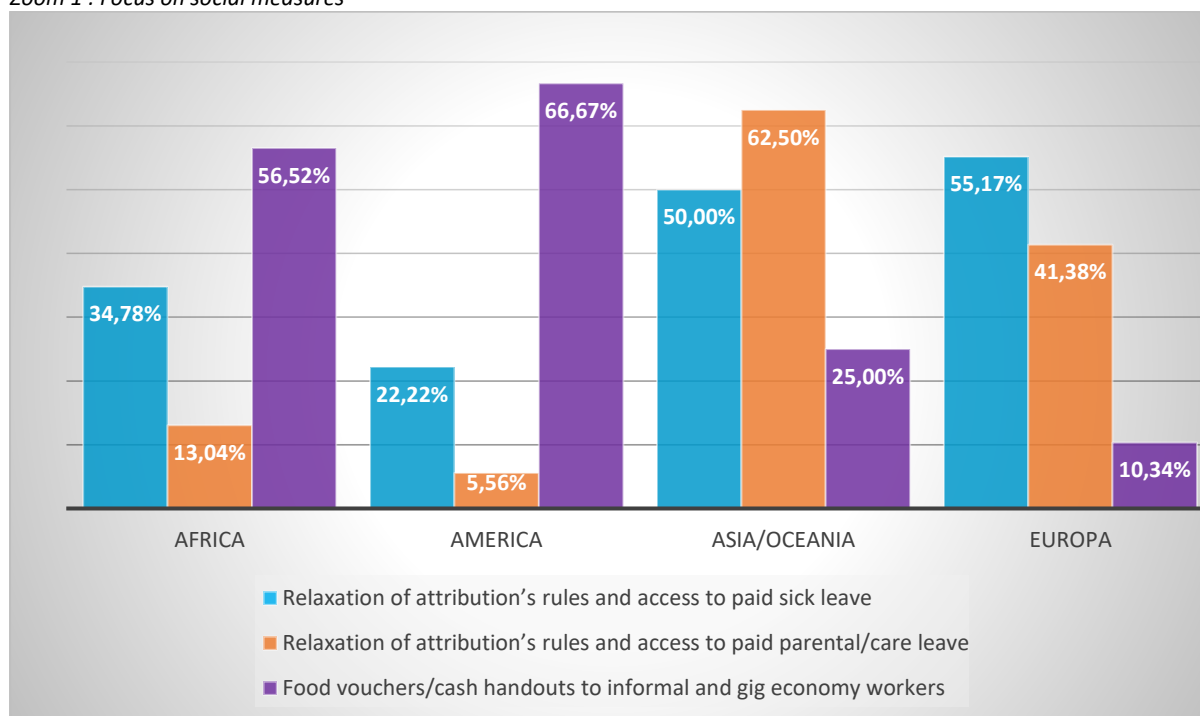
On all continents, and we will come back to this point later, telework has been fostered (87.3%) and when it was not possible, social dialogue has been encouraged to implement preventive actions in terms of health, safety and working conditions (86.1%).

Percentage of countries (PES respondents) having implemented one or more of the measures.



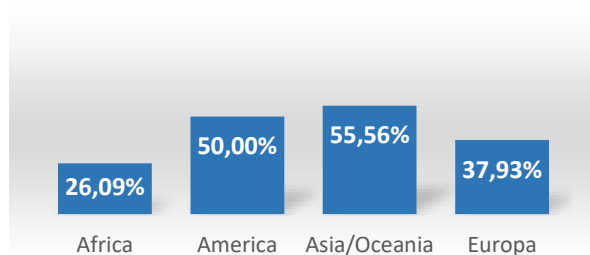
The main regional gaps can be noticed on social measures towards the working population, with the easing of access to existing social benefits, as it is happening in Europe and Asia. In America (mainly Latin America) and Africa, one-off targeted support measures are being implemented (food vouchers, cash aid) for the most vulnerable populations (workers in the informal economy and the gig economy).

Zoom 1 : Focus on social measures

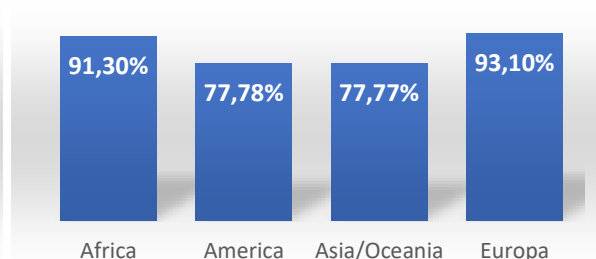


With an average of only 32.9%, promoting the use of online training to enable employees to invest in skills development during the period. However, it will be interesting to observe the impact of formal or informal "job switching" (change of professional activity, volunteering, coping with social distancing, etc.) on the skills of the working population. As the "zoom2" graph shows, America and Asia-Oceania, undoubtedly more accustomed to digital use, have made greater use of this measure.

Zoom 2: Promotion of online training to invest in employees' skills in times of downturn



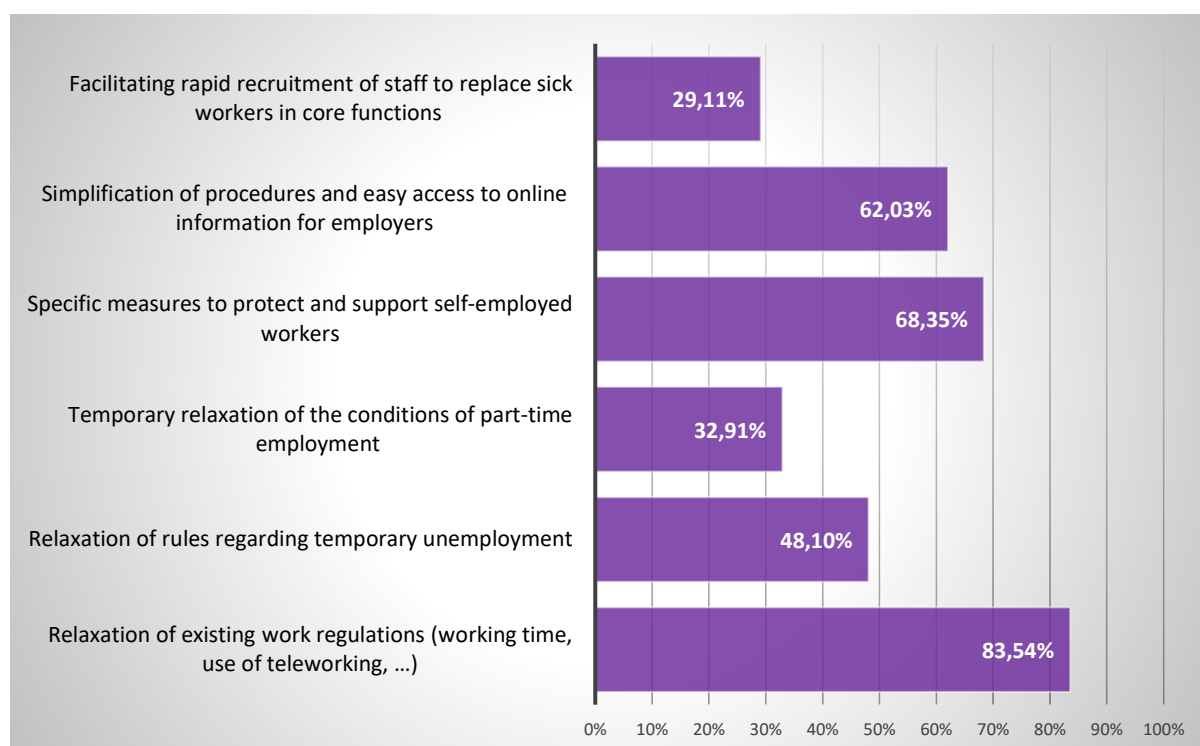
Zoom 3: Encouraging teleworking among workers



As for the encouragement of teleworking, the observation by continent (see Zoom 3 graph) shows the widespread use of this practice, with, as your statements indicated, the confrontation with heterogeneous realities of development in terms of infrastructures, facilities and cultural habits.

Facilitating Business Adjustment: Preserving the Diversity and Vitality of the Economy

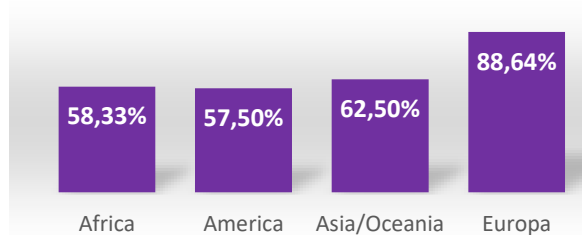
Percentage of countries (PES respondents) having implemented one or more of the measures.



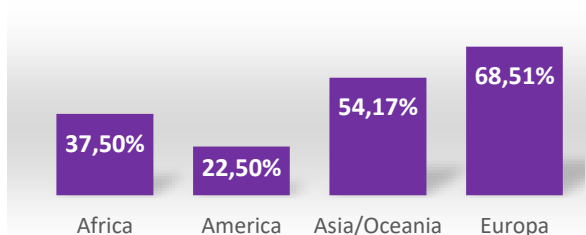
As shown in the graph above, most of our governments have taken steps to loosen up existing regulations so that companies can, for example, use telework whenever possible and adapt working hours. In most of the countries regardless of the region concerned (see Zoom 2 graph), measures dedicated to the protection of the self-employed were implemented to mitigate the effects of the sharp activity decrease experienced during this period.

It is mainly in Europe (41.38%) that measures have been implemented to accelerate the replacement of sick workers on essential functions. We have thus observed the implementation by some PESs and Ministries of simplified Offer-Demand matching platforms to meet this requirement (France, Belgium,).

Zoom 2: Specific measures to protect and support self-employed workers (% of countries having implemented the measure)



Zoom 3: Flexibility regarding the use of temporary unemployment (% of countries that have implemented the measure)



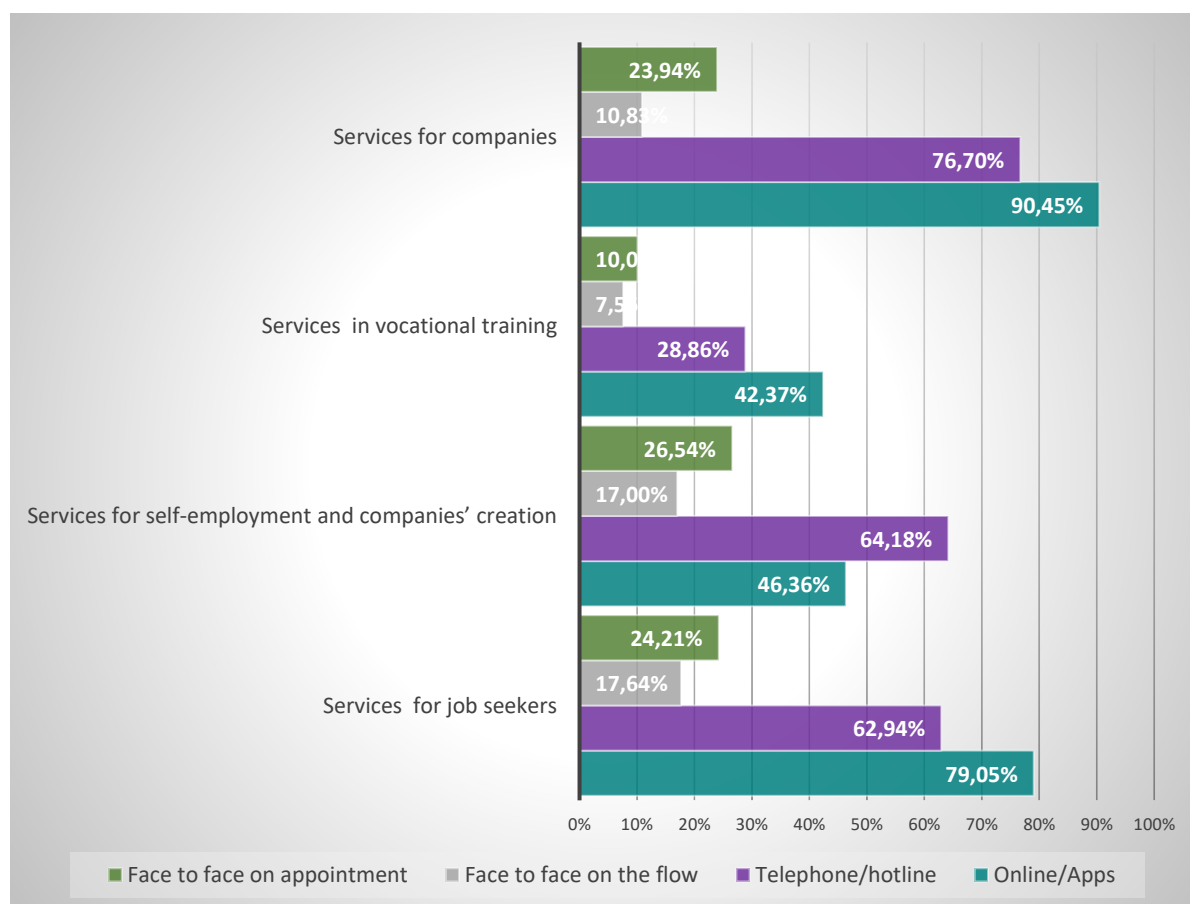
The use of temporary (partial) unemployment, an economic and social safety net, has been more favoured in Europe and in a large part of Asia-Oceania, than in America and particularly North America where fewer specific measures have been taken (45% if we consider only the Latin American countries).



Part two: Measures to maintain PES services

The responses to our survey show that most public employment services (PES), whether on a constant or on a deteriorated basis, themselves committed to measures to protect the health of their users and employees, have managed and continue to cope with the situation ensuring the maintenance of the majority of essential services.

To achieve this, the PESs have benefited from their experience, particularly in providing services via digital tools and the development of a multi-channel approach.



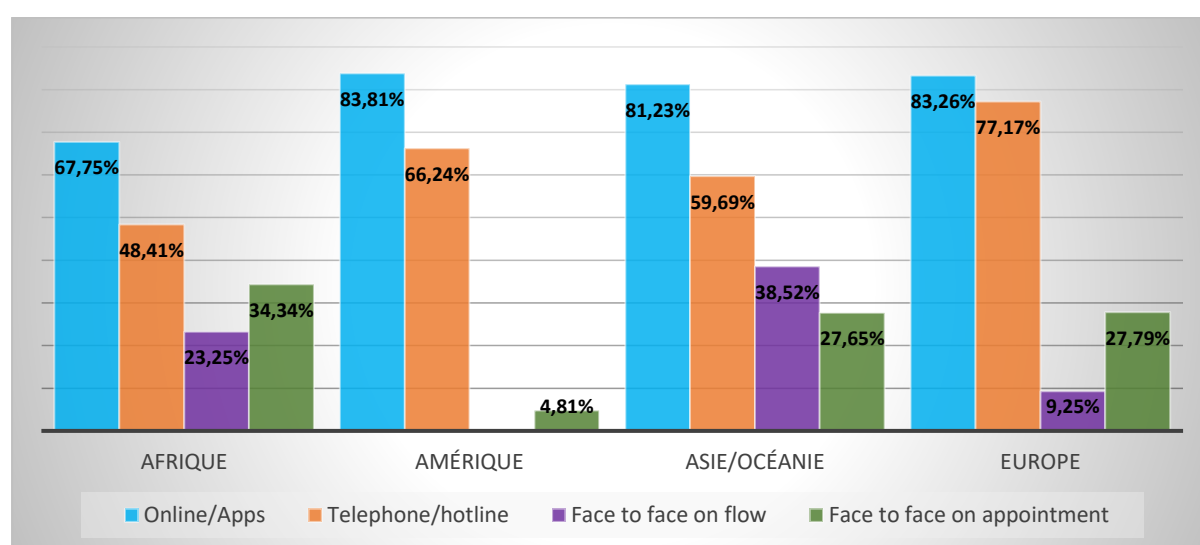
Zoom: Maintaining services for job seekers

Nearly 80% (79.05%) of respondents reported using a Digital workflow to deliver all services to jobseekers and more than 62% using the telephone; only 17.6% declared having maintained face-to-face contact on workflow, and 24% by appointment.

We can see from the table below that the main services to job seekers are available mainly thanks to the widespread adoption of a multimodal approach in our PES in recent years.

	Online/Apps	phone/hotline	Face to face on flow	Face to face by appointment
Registration	85,66%	60,36%	23,30%	23,77%
Information and consulting	83,17%	81,10%	24,12%	27,06%
Compensation for jobseekers	83,44%	52,18%	7,86%	17,45%
Payment of job-search aid	54,86%	41,04%	7,78%	23,40%
personalised support	82,13%	72,85%	20,93%	28,43%

On each continent remote access arrangements are available to all PES users on most of the services they normally provide. Face-to-face services, obviously linked to the different constraints of social distancing taken by each country, have been more widely maintained in Asia-Oceania and Africa. It should be noted that services provided by appointment have continued to remain in force in some European countries.



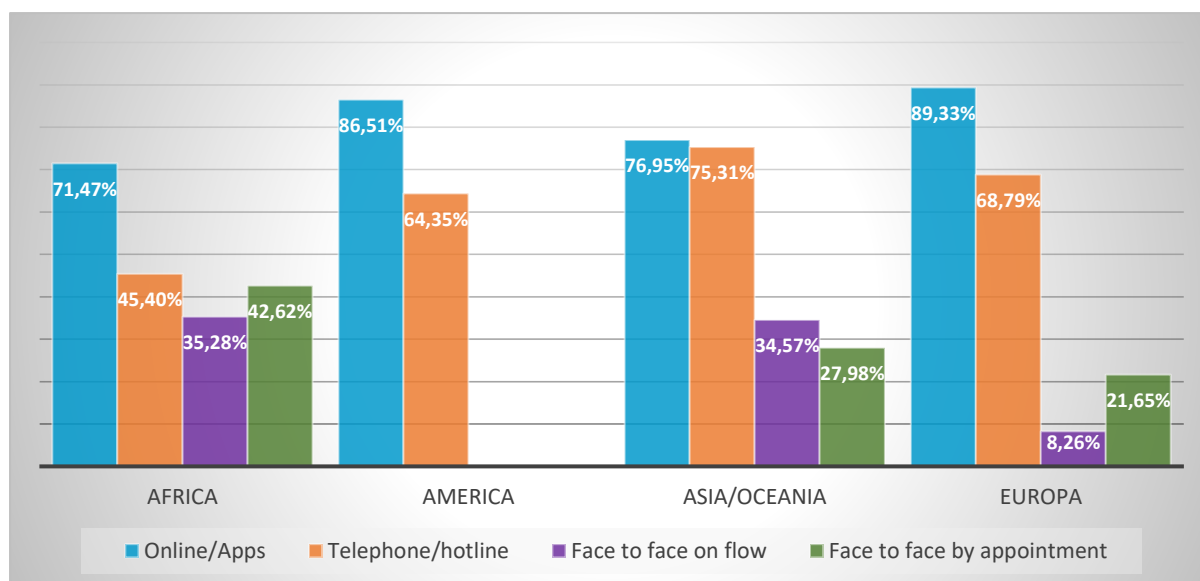
Zoom: Maintaining business services

As with services to assets, as can be seen in the table and graph below, the digitalization of services has enabled us to meet the expectations and needs of businesses during the period. In some regions the PESs have been mobilised to provide additional benefits and services, particularly in the management and payment of aid to companies or short-time working measures (e.g. Germany).

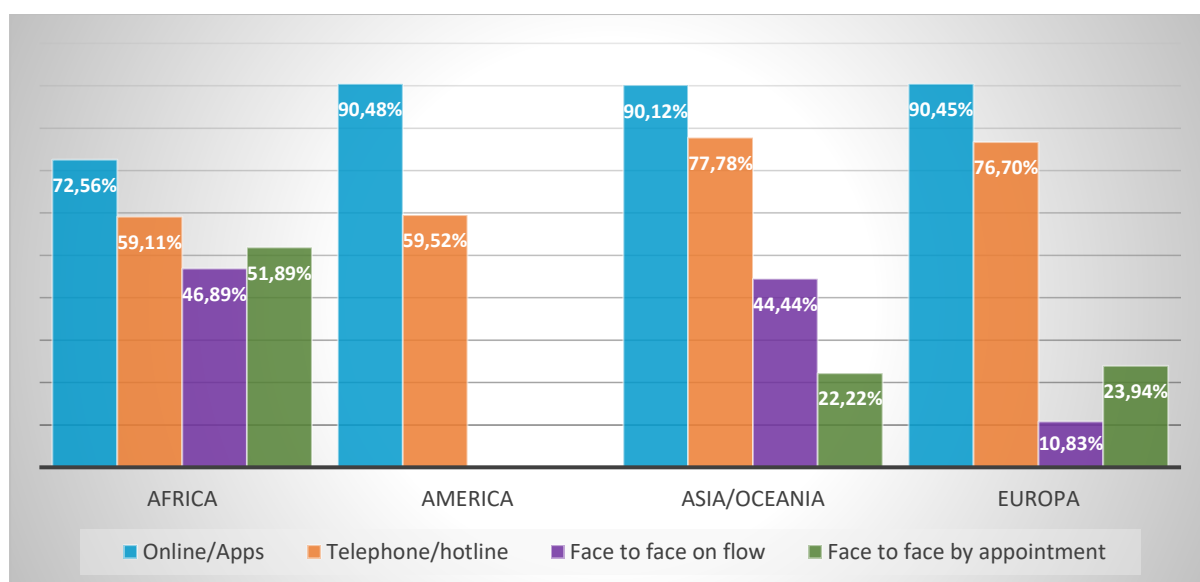
Weighted average by service and by delivery method (all respondents)

	Online/Apps	phone/hotline	Face to face on flow	Face to face by appointment
Registration and processing of vacancies	85,17%	69,64%	25,69%	26,37%
Information and advice	77,35%	74,74%	20,75%	27,48%
Payment of employment or vocational training aid	81,44%	43,24%	12,80%	17,91%

Modalities used to deliver business services (view by continent).



Offers' Registration and Processing

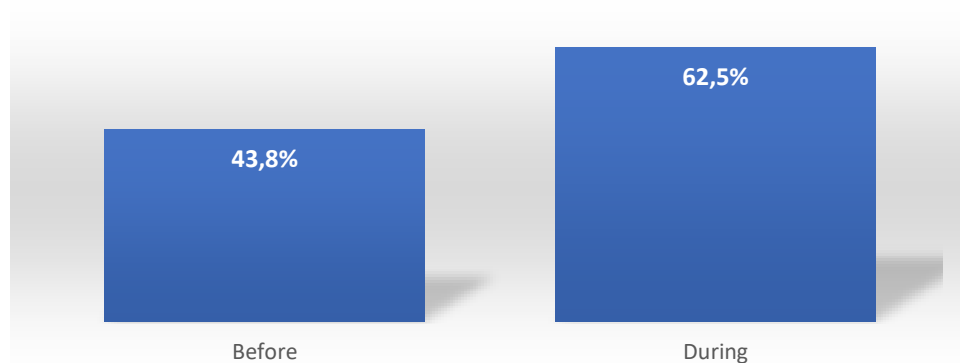


The registration and processing of job offers is handled mainly remotely and rather digitally. The particular needs of the job market and companies in sectors such as health and safety, logistics and agri-food, which have been under sudden pressure, have often required the setting up of specific digital matching platforms and accelerated training programmes in order to respond more easily and quickly (e.g. platform in France and the "jobs Switch" operation in Sweden).

Part three: Services organization measures

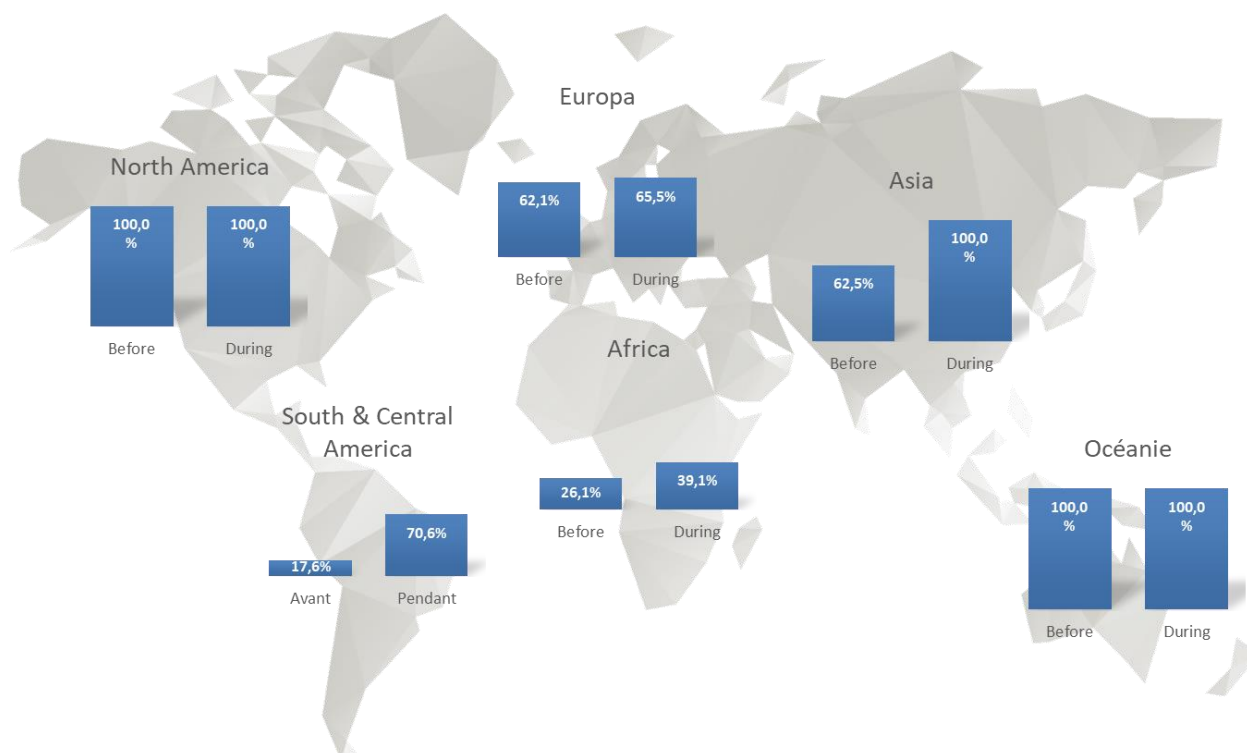
Public employment services have mobilized in an unprecedented way towards increased use of **teleworking**, as we have seen, in a majority of countries (87.3%), but also in countries and public structures where this practice was not usual (+19 points for our PES)

Percentage of PES using telework (before and during the pandemic) by continent



Indeed, we see in the diagram below, a clear increase in regions where this use was still relatively undeveloped before the pandemic, this is particularly the case for PES in Latin America, and to a lesser extent for those in Africa. This massive recourse, even in deficient infrastructure or equipment, has largely enabled us to achieve our priority missions.

Percentage of PES using telework (before and during the pandemic) by continent



Many of you are now declaring the intention to set up and optimise this way of organising work.

This progress has been facilitated largely by the maturity of our organizations (implementation of continuous improvement processes that have secured the processes, new management practices that have developed mutual trust management/employees, progress on mobile equipment supply, investment in digital services, etc.).

We have lessons to draw from this experience, from the way our leaders, managers and employees have been dealing with it. It is worth analysing how this has changed the traditional patterns of work organisation, disrupted working relationships, boosted or, on the contrary, depending on the activity, degraded our performance.

The careful reading of our survey allows us to say that we have undoubtedly progressed collectively in the mastering of these new communication and collaborative work tools. In the future, these new practices should become a natural part of our organizations, as a new performance instrument to better reconcile operational efficiency, the environmental constraint and quality of life at work.

But we must note that this unprecedented use of telework, in both the public and private sectors, has also revealed a form of digital precariousness and may eventually increase inequalities at several levels:

- At the sectoral level, between the tertiary sector (white collar), which can more easily resort to telework (type of activities, technological expertise, high equipment levels) and other sectors where it is more difficult or even impossible to implement teleworking because the activities are not compatible (agriculture, construction, catering, local commerce, manufacturing industries...). Indeed, these sectors see their organisations heavily impacted by the implementation of "barrier" measures and are therefore more affected by the slowdown in activity and the risk of unemployment.
- At the territorial level, as these sectors, in some regions, represent a significant part of the informal economy and employ a large percentage of less skilled workers, less digitally literate and therefore more vulnerable.
- At the social and educational level, where the lack of telecommunications infrastructure, insufficient or unsuitable equipment, as well as digital illiteracy, reinforce the vulnerability of certain sections of the population, particularly young people, who could find themselves temporarily excluded from the labour market and, above all, from education and vocational training...

For the Future

We can perceive in your answers a shared concern about the future in the short and medium term, with a common questioning on the evolution of the services to be provided.

The significant increase in unemployment in the majority of our countries, requires special consideration because for most of the PES, the challenge is and will be to absorb this significant growth in the number of people looking for work in a context of increasing debts and deficits of our countries, and therefore in the best case with the constraint of constant means. This will encourage us to continue and amplify our efforts to digitize services and develop the application of AI (Artificial Intelligence) in our activities

The matching supply/demand criteria, crucial to the fluidity of the labour market, will also be challenged.

We are already witnessing the impact of the decline in activity in sectors often vital to the economy of many countries, such as tourism-related sectors like transport, hotels, restaurants, and all related services. These declining sectors will free up skills that cannot always, in the short term, be reintegrated into sectors with increased needs, such as health workers or those in the pharmaceutical industry. We will probably have to manage significant movements in the labour and skills markets triggered by the gradual readjustments in the various sectors of our economies.

Moreover, the contraction of consumption in the "rich" countries and a foreseeable movement to relocate certain types of production will inevitably have an economic and social impact on the "emerging" countries, whose formal and informal economies are often essentially linked to the industrial production system (e.g. the garment sector in Asia is already badly affected), the export of consumer goods and mass tourism.

This will increase the vulnerability of people who were already excluded from the labour market or in very precarious work situations and will mark a significant setback in our progress towards decent work and increase the impoverishment of many of them.

From the point of view of public services, this obliges us to strengthen our systems for preventing and combating exclusion, for guidance and support, and encourages us to adapt and mobilise education and vocational training policies to a greater extent, or even to "lobby" them.

The "Job switch" issue, which may seem very short-term to us, is perhaps an indicator of a more structural change in the relationship between the working population and the labour market, in the same way as the movement we have seen in recent years with the development of the gig economy.

For us, the PES, this means increasing the flexibility and responsiveness of our retraining and redeployment systems. And this calls for the further transformation of our intermediation methods to move from an "employment as a job" logic to a "skills-oriented" logic, with particular focus on the strengthening of soft skills, especially those related to the personal capacity to handle change. Lifelong learning and guidance policies are therefore more than ever one of the responses to the crisis we are experiencing collectively.



It also means incorporating crisis management into our processes and organizations. The steps taken to secure processes, quality and performance have, in fact, enabled our organizations to react to this crisis. We will have to deal probably with another similar crisis or of another kind (climate, ecological,). There will therefore come a time to capitalize on all that has been done and learned, to prevent the future. It also means a change in the way continuing vocational training is conceived, both in its relation to the immediate needs of the economy and in its capacity to support and guide workers in their transitions throughout their professional life.

Another revealing point of the survey is that, during this period, the majority of PES have gone digital, which has highlighted a certain 'digital precariousness' which does not only concern countries with low levels of equipment and infrastructure.

The fragility of the networks and the technology as well as the more or less acquired knowledge of the populations of how to handle them encourage us to pursue actions of consolidation, support and embedding of the use of these devices when relating to our users.



In conclusion:

In this complex period, the PESs have been able to effectively maintain the implementation of their priority missions. But we collectively note that the pandemic crisis has and will have profound and lasting effects on our society and particularly on regions and populations that were already vulnerable.

As many countries are gradually exiting confinement, we will be facing an upturn in activity, in a context where the health risk remains very present, most certainly with drastic budget control measures, but also major transformations or fluctuations in the labour market associated with strong social tensions. In this context of uncertainty, we will have to act.

And for that, several actions can be taken:

- Pursue and accelerate the digitalization not only of our service offers but also of our internal processes by simplifying them (HR, logistics, ...) and increase our capacities of anticipation and intervention by developing relevant uses of artificial intelligence. Therefore, we equally need to install new sensors, to diversify and make the data of our environment more reliable (the best algorithm is only valid if the data introduced is significant and accurate).
- Pursue and accelerate our actions on our performance levers by integrating long-term risk management, in health and other areas, into our organizational plans and service delivery processes and by capitalizing on initiatives emerging from this crisis.

We have understood that telework is not only a question of technology but also of culture and particularly of corporate culture:

- Our teams have had to and have been able to create new ways of working, new rituals (social meeting, collaborative work and maintaining the link via social networks) and have demonstrated their unwavering commitment to fulfilling their missions,
- Our managers have been able to redefine priorities, rebuild regular links with their teams, anticipate and reorganize in uncertain times and thus reassure. They have been able to adopt and make effective use of new technologies, new communication 's and collaboration tools (zoom, skype, etc.).

The crisis of COVID-19 has highlighted the need for more horizontal and decentralized organizations with more autonomy for greater flexibility and responsiveness to events. Agility, empathy, and resilience are the markers of this difficult episode; we can make them lasting markers of our decision-making.

These are the topics that we propose to share with you during this webinar and to further develop within our Association.

