



PRESS RELEASE

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PUBLIC ENTITIES AND POLICIES

PÔLE EMPLOI: THE TEST OF MASS UNEMPLOYMENT

The *Cour des comptes* hereby issues a thematic report on the French national employment agency, Pôle emploi.

Born of the merger of ANPE (National employment agency) and Assédic (Associations for employment in industry and trade) in 2008, Pôle emploi is the largest public operator with 53,000 staff members, more than one thousand agencies and service points, €32bn paid out allowances and benefits and a budget of €5bn.

Pôle emploi is entrusted with demanding missions and is producing mixed results, with rising costs. Between January 2009 and January 2015, the number of job seekers increased from 3.9 million to 6.2 million, i.e. +58%.

Confronted with mass unemployment, it profoundly redefined its strategy in 2012, but continues to experience operational difficulties despite the commitment of its staff.

Mixed results and rising costs

As for job seekers, the law assigns Pôle emploi two main roles: payment and placement.

Overall, the payment of unemployment benefits is satisfactory, despite the persistence of "paper" files, which should be destined to phase out, and the continuing regulatory complexity.

Concerning the placement of job seekers, Pôle emploi's results are more difficult to measure, as there is no indicator to identify its own performance, particularly compared to the action of other stakeholders on the labour market. Yet the data available on long-term unemployment and the satisfaction of job opportunities show adverse developments.

The 2008 merger was accompanied by rising costs, particularly in terms of wages. Since then, Pôle emploi's costs have increased and become more rigid due to the recruitment of advisers on permanent contracts (+4,000 between 2012 and 2014) to cope with rising unemployment.

An intermediary mission between labour supply and demand that is no longer a priority

Pôle emploi profoundly redefined its strategy in 2012, with the agreement of the French Government and Unedic (National inter-professional union for employment in industry and trade): its main orientation is to further differentiate the services provided by the operator according to the profiles of job seekers and companies. The Court fully endorses this principle.

However, the conclusions Pôle emploi has drawn from this strategic realignment profoundly alter its role of general intermediary between labour supply and demand, even though the law has not modified the definition of its missions. Pôle emploi has thus abandoned any overall objective of collecting job offers: consequently, the number of job offers collected by the operator has been declining for several years.

Moreover, the division of the working time of Pôle emploi advisers does not foster intermediation between labour supply and demand. The proportion of working time devoted to companies is low (12% in total, with only 2% for prospecting and company visits) and is in practice an adjustment variable.



These developments have contributed to weakening the link with companies and diminishing Pôle emploi's expertise with regard to the labour market.

In addition, Pôle emploi primarily defined three support modalities for job seekers in 2012: the "monitoring" modality applies to more than 900,000 job seekers considered as independent, for whom Pôle emploi's action is now limited to the supply of digital job search tools; "guided" support, which applies to nearly 1.5 million job seekers; and "reinforced" support, which applies to slightly fewer than 290,000 job seekers who require a high level of assistance. This latter support modality only covers approximately 10% of the total number of job seekers who are monitored internally, but involves 20% of referring advisers.

Inadequate services and persistent operational difficulties

Despite being at the heart of the operator's strategy, the differentiation of services provided to job seekers is insufficient. Paradoxically, "reinforced" support represents the lowest proportion of long-term job seekers (unemployed for over a year). Moreover, the frequency of contact between advisers and job seekers decreases the longer a person is unemployed.

The intensity of individual support for job seekers is also too low: 75% of job seekers receiving "reinforced" support are only in contact with their adviser four times or fewer in six months, the notion of contact including not only interviews, but also telephone conversations and emails. 59% of job seekers receiving "monitoring" support, 49% receiving "guided" support and 33% receiving "reinforced" support are in contact with their adviser a maximum of once every three months.

In addition, the Court notes that the human resources are scattered. The excessive proportion of advisers' working time devoted to administration and management activities (22%) means that the time devoted to supporting job seekers - which is nevertheless a priority - represents in reality less than 30% of working time. The one thousand agencies form a network with a density that is not conducive to personnel pooling. Furthermore, absenteeism is high (almost 25 calendar days per year per staff member).

Conclusion and recommendations

The Court agrees with the strategic objective of better differentiating the services provided to job seekers and companies according to their needs, but notes that the practical implementation of this orientation could lower requirements on two points:

- the intermediary role of Pôle emploi on the labour market, a key element of the definition of the public employment service and its effectiveness;
- the efficiency level of the service provided through an inappropriate response to rising unemployment, and in particular long-term unemployment.

The Court issues three guidelines for the Government, the social partners, Pôle emploi and Unedic, as well as 13 recommendations intended to improve the services provided to employers and job seekers, to optimise the management and to ensure more effective oversight of Pôle emploi.

[To read the full report click here](#)

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