


WAPES World Congress - Abidjan 7-8 May 2025


General Report - Summaries and recommendations




13^{ème} CONGRÈS DE L'ASSOCIATION MONDIALE
DES SERVICES PUBLICS D'EMPLOI
Active employment policies and demographic issues: What challenges for labor market players?



36 speakers
and moderators



39 countries
from 5 continents



120 participants

And a strong mobilization
of the Ivorian government



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Acronyms

AI	Artificial Intelligence
BBCA	Bureaux de Bilan de Compétences et d'Accompagnement des Jeunes" ("Skills Assessment and Guidance Offices for Young People") project
ECCAS	Economic Community of East African States
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EU	European Union
GIZ	German service provider in the field of international cooperation for sustainable development and international education work
ILO	International Labour Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
NEET	Young people neither in employment nor in training
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PES	Public Employment Service
SOCIEUX+	EU Expertise on social protection, labour and employment
SSE	Social and Solidarity Economy
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WAPES	World Association of Public Employment Services

Introduction - Abidjan, the crossroads of change in the world of work



From 7 to 8 May 2025, the Abidjan Exhibition Centre was transformed into a veritable laboratory of ideas for thinking about the future of public employment in the face of global demographic change. The 13th World Congress of the World Association of Public Employment Services (WAPES), coupled with the General Assembly of the African Association of PES (AASEP), brought together participants from public employment services, ministries, international institutions and partner organisations.

The theme chosen - Active employment policies and demographic issues: what challenges for labour market players? - resonated strongly in a world that is changing. With accelerated ageing in the countries of the North and a demographic explosion in several regions of the South, the issue of adapting public employment services has become more strategic than ever.

The official opening ceremony, presided over by the Ivorian Minister of Employment and Social Protection, was held at the Palais de la Culture, in the presence of several ministers, members of the WAPES Managing Board, the President of AASEP, and numerous international personalities. This solemn moment marked the start of two intense days, punctuated by plenary conferences, round tables, thematic workshops and bilateral meetings.

In addition to the formal presentations, the conference was also a place to get together, exchange ideas informally and cross-fertilise practices - a space for mutual inspiration. The themes addressed provided an opportunity to cross the perspectives of Africa, Europe, Asia and the Americas, in a constant dialogue between local realities and global trends.

A structured programme for collective reflection

The conference was structured around four main themes, each addressed using formats adapted to stimulate exchanges between peers:

1. **Global demographic challenges** and their implications for employment policies - addressed in an opening plenary session with two leading experts.
2. **The adaptation of active employment policies** in contexts of ageing or massive youth populations - discussed in a round table with representatives of various experiences (Latvia, Japan, Burkina Faso...).
3. **Mobilising new PES ecosystems** - an issue explored in depth at a round table on governance and partnerships.
4. **Supporting economic transformations** (ecological, digital, social) - a theme explored in three parallel workshops, allowing participants to choose their area of focus.

Finally, a final round table entitled *"Putting people back at the heart of employment policies and our organisations"* provided an opportunity to link all the issues addressed to a broader reflection on the mission of the PES in an era of multiple transitions.

Global demographic challenges: crossroads and strategic avenues

An opening under the banner of demographic transition

Right from the first plenary session, the tone was set: the demographic changes underway will profoundly redefine economic, social and territorial balances. Two renowned speakers painted a picture of these global dynamics that was both contrasting and convergent.

Dr Moustapha Hinin, Director General of the Côte d'Ivoire National Population Office, painted a vivid picture of a young, fast-growing Africa, where the population is set to double by 2050 to reach 2.5 billion. With an explosion in the 15-24 age group and rapid urbanisation, the challenges of education, integration and employment are immense.

On the other hand, Ms Konstancja Piatkowska, an expert working for the European Union's SOCIEUX+ facility, spoke of the slow demographic erosion in the countries of the North, with a sustained fall in fertility, accelerated ageing, pressure on pension systems and labour shortages.

Yet these two trajectories do not imply opposing responses. Quite the contrary: they call for a reinvention of the Public Employment Services (PES), capable of playing a pivotal role in building inclusive, adaptable and sustainable societies.

PES strategies in the face of demographic challenges - multiple contexts, converging responses

International round table: adapting active policies to contrasting demographic realities

At this round table, speakers from a wide range of backgrounds - Europe, Africa, Asia - shared their observations, their innovations, but also their uncertainties in the face of profound demographic transformations.

Among the points of convergence: the ageing of the workforce in industrialised countries, the massive youth bulge in Africa, the skills shortage, and the risks of marginalisation of vulnerable groups (senior citizens, young NEETs, migrants, etc.).

In Latvia, the National Employment Agency is working on a number of fronts to support older workers: adapting workstations, assisting with retraining, awareness-raising campaigns. In Burkina Faso, the ANPE has set up the BBKA project, which aims to help two million young people find employment by combining skills assessments and personalised coaching.

Japan has extended the retirement age to 70, Italy has set up digital support platforms, and Bosnia-Herzegovina is strengthening its international partnerships to tackle the exodus of young graduates.

Despite the differences, a shared conviction has emerged: the PES must become orchestrators of career paths, capable of anticipating, innovating and federating all the players in the labour market.

The WAPES G7 Working Group: strategic responses to global challenges

A structuring contribution to international thinking

During the round table dedicated to active employment policies, a collective intervention on behalf of the WAPES G7 working group. Created in January 2023 at the request of the Labour Ministers of the G7 countries, this group brings together the PES of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States, with a mandate to strengthen strategic cooperation through the WAPES network.

The group's work focuses on two major issues:

- the greening of the labour market
- demographic change.

The shared findings point to an accelerated ageing of the population, a decline in the working population, and a growing shortage of digital and cross-disciplinary skills, requiring systemic responses.

Among the responses identified

- Italy: the GOL programme supports the retraining and inclusion of vulnerable groups, particularly young people and women.
- Japan: laws extend working life to the age of 70, with regional centres dedicated to senior citizens.
- Germany: recruitment subsidies for people aged 50 and over via the Eingliederungszuschuss scheme.
- Canada and the United States: focus on the green transition and support for workers undergoing retraining.

In addition to national initiatives, the G7 group is calling for an in-depth transformation of the PES: strengthened territorial governance, inter-institutional partnerships and increased use of digital and personalised services.

New PES ecosystems: towards collaborative governance of the labour market

Cooperating for better action: the PES at a time of strategic partnerships

The second day of the conference highlighted a key transformation in public employment services: the move from a centralised model to a more flexible, connected and partnership-based network.

In her introductory speech, Florence Dumontier (France Travail) retraced the historical development of the PES, from labour exchanges to the digital age, to emphasise their growing role as the linchpin of social cohesion. She stressed the need for the PES to coordinate their actions with those of companies, local authorities, associations and training bodies.

The round table discussions confirmed this trend: in Spain, the SEPE network is focusing on shared governance with the regions. In Belgium, Actiris has set up a structured network of partners. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, the PES rely on the diaspora and international organisations to build sustainable solutions.

The ILO has emphasised that well-coordinated employment ecosystems make it possible to improve access to services, increase the transparency of the labour market, and secure professional transitions.

The conclusion is clear: the PES can no longer act alone. Their legitimacy now rests on their ability to federate, to innovate together, and to adapt their offers to the specific needs of the territories.

Innovative economies: catalysts for employment and levers for transition

Three workshops to design the economy of tomorrow

The second day of the conference featured three simultaneous themed workshops, each devoted to a different facet of the emerging economies: the ecological transition, the digital revolution and the social economy. These sessions illustrated how the PES can become facilitators of economic transformation, anchoring themselves in local realities while anticipating major changes.

- **Workshop A - Green, circular and blue economy:**
The ecological transition is not just an environmental imperative: it is also a source of jobs. Speakers from Benin, Mauritania, Côte d'Ivoire and Slovenia shared concrete projects ranging from sustainable agriculture to waste recovery and the training of young people in the professions of tomorrow.
- **Workshop B - Digital economy and platforms:**
The opportunities offered by digital technology are immense, but so are the risks: job insecurity, unequal access, rapid obsolescence of skills. Presentations from China, the Netherlands and Côte d'Ivoire showed how PES can provide a framework for technological transitions while supporting skills development.
- **Workshop C - Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE):**
In contexts of structural unemployment, the SSE offers concrete and inclusive alternatives. From Cameroon to Spain, via Tunisia and Côte d'Ivoire, examples highlighted the power of community, cooperative and associative initiatives in creating sustainable and socially useful jobs.

These three workshops converged on a strong conviction: the PES must integrate new economic models into their support strategies, by supporting innovation, entrepreneurship and the local economy.



Putting people at the heart of change: towards more inclusive, agile and sustainable PES

Putting people back at the centre: rethinking employment policies around life-course issues

To close the congress, a poignant round table brought together experts from Estonia, Türkiye, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and Côte d'Ivoire to examine a fundamental issue: how can Public Employment Services better support individuals in a fragmented, changing and sometimes uncertain world of work?

The discussions highlighted the need to move beyond traditional activation approaches and adopt a global, personalised and interdisciplinary approach. It's no longer just a question of matching supply and demand, but of supporting transition paths that include health, mobility, retraining, and sometimes even personal reconstruction.

Among the avenues mentioned:

- making career paths more secure
- integrating people who are a long way from employment into the design of policies,
- developing community-based schemes anchored in local areas,
- linking the PES to wider networks: health, housing, education, social justice.

Conclusion: PES as strategists and humanists in the face of global challenges

At the end of two intense days, the 13th WAPES World Congress drew a shared conclusion: faced with demographic, ecological and digital transitions, Public Employment Services must rethink their mission. More than an administrative player, the PES is becoming a strategic pivot, at the crossroads of individual pathways, public policies and economic dynamics.

The recommendations made throughout the congress converge on several lines of action:

- think of PES as open, interconnected ecosystems.
- adopting a culture of data and forward-looking evaluation.
- supporting employment not as a one-off objective, but as a lifelong process.
- investing in the human, technological and partnership capacities of the PES.

