

Inventory of lifelong guidance systems and practices - Estonia

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Introduction

The national long-term development strategy 'Estonia 2035' (Estonian government, 2021) focuses mainly on the health of its people, the country's preparedness for change and the relationship with the living environment. The strategy sets out five long-term strategic goals:

1. Estonia's people are smart, active and care about their health;
2. Estonia's society is caring, cooperative and open;
3. Estonia's economy is strong, innovative and responsible;
4. Estonia offers a safe and high-quality living environment that takes into consideration the needs of all its inhabitants;
5. Estonia is innovative, reliable and people-centred.

The authorities responsible for the development of lifelong guidance are the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Education and Research, which have strategies for governance in place in the education and labour market areas. The [Education Strategy 2021-2035](#) (with a summary in English) focuses on the key strengths and challenges that need to be addressed to be able to keep pace with changes both in Estonia and worldwide and to prepare the education system and its participants for the future in the best way possible. The general objective of the strategy is to equip the population of Estonia with the knowledge, skills and attitudes that prepare people to fulfil their potential in their personal, occupational, and social life and contribute to promoting quality of life in Estonia as well as global sustainable development.

To ensure supported learning, the strategy underlines the need to continue the development of the career services system and career education at school, including the development of a comprehensive system to discover and develop individuals' capabilities. There is also a need to improve continuing training and retraining opportunities to respond swiftly to labour market changes and ensure that people are equipped with the right knowledge and skills for employment.

The [Welfare Development Plan 2023-2030](#) guides labour and social policy objectives and covers the performance area 'Well-being', which is one of the 17 performance areas of the State budget strategy. This has been defined through following policy areas: child and family well-being, gender equality and equal treatment, employment, a long and high-quality working life, social care corresponding to the need for assistance, reduction of social inequality and poverty, and supporting the elderly. The Plan contributes to the implementation of the goals and objectives set out in the country's long-term development strategy "Estonian 2035", supports the achievement of the UN Global Sustainable Development Goals and considers the European Union's directions and international commitments.

(Note that responsibility for employment policy was moved to the Ministry of Economy and Communications in July 2023.)

Sources

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Coordination and collaboration among stakeholders

There are many types of established cooperation, coordination, and collaboration among lifelong guidance stakeholders at different levels across the Estonian lifelong guidance system, involving both the labour market sector as well as the different levels and institutions comprising the education sector, and the interrelation between these broad sectors supporting career development and learning.

One task of general education, vocational education and higher education institutions is to ensure access to lifelong guidance for their students and support them in reaching the learning outcomes set in curricula (Republic of Estonia Education Act). The Education and Youth Board of Estonia (Haridus- ja Noorteamet) supports educational institutions in the implementation of national curricula as part of its mandate (Statutes of the Education and Youth Board, 2020).

As a result of the curriculum development process concerning entrepreneurship and career management skills, Estonia is heading towards the improved integration of career management and entrepreneurial skills within the curriculum application process across the different institutions over the forthcoming years.

As the national [Euroguidance centre](#) (part of the Erasmus+ supported network) working in the area of 'learning mobility' and competence development of career professionals, the Education and Youth Board also provides support in the areas of international learning mobility and lifelong guidance development within education, training, and employment for guidance professionals in Estonia and for those abroad. Euroguidance serves as the National resource centre for guidance and provides a range of services to Estonian and European guidance professionals, and it engages in different types of cooperation activities in the field nationally, locally and as part of the [Euroguidance network](#) throughout Europe. The website also provides resources for career professionals and their professional competence development.

In respect to lifelong guidance in relation to the labour market sector (provisions and practices, also serving diverse user groups), until the end of 2023, the provision of labour market services through the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund (Eesti Töötukassa, Estonia's public employment services - PES) was regulated by the Labor Market Services and Benefits Act (Tööturuteenuste ja -toetuste seadus) and the Employment Program 2021-2023 (Tööhõiveprogramm 2021-2023) approved on its basis. In addition to this, services provided by programmes and projects of open application rounds were added with the support of the European Union. As of January 1, 2024, the [Labor Market Measures Act](#) replaced the Labor Market Services and Support Act, and the new Employment Programme 2024-2029 established by the Government of the Republic Regulation comes into force. The Labor Market Measures Act defines the general principles of providing labour market measures and to whom and which labour market measures are provided (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications) (see section on [Access](#), as well as [Career guidance for employed, unemployed](#), for more information).

The role of the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund (Eesti Töötukassa, - PES), is to ensure the provision of career information and career counselling to all people regardless of their employment status or life stage.

In practice and delivery of guidance and career services, Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund (Eesti Töötukassa, - PES) offers access to different user groups through its [cooperation activities with partners](#). This includes opportunities for employers, trainers, counselling providers, rehabilitation cooperation partners, peer support providers, coaching partners and the EURES network.

There is also cooperation in the lifelong guidance field with various counterparts, in order to have overarching, common ground for different interests, in the National Career Guidance Forum, which was established in 2007 by Foundation Innove (Sihtasutus Innove) and re-established by the Unemployment Insurance Fund in 2019. Members of the Forum include the [Ministry of Education and Research](#) (Haridus- ja Teadusministeerium), [Ministry of Social Affairs](#) (Sotsiaalministeerium), [Association of Estonian Career Counsellors](#) (Eesti Karjäärinõustajate Ühing), [Education and Youth Board](#) (Haridus- ja Noorteamet), [Euroguidance Estonia](#) (Euroguidance Eesti) (within the [national agency for Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes in Estonia](#)), Estonian Schools Heads Association (Eesti Koolijuhtide Ühendus), Estonian Students Union (Eesti Õpilasesinduste Liit), Estonian Qualifications Authority (Sihtasutus Kutsekoda) and Estonian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (Kaubandus ja Tööstuskoda). A wider circle of experts and representatives are involved when it comes to decision-making in more specific areas (Larini & Rammo, 2023).

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Access to guidance

Career guidance in Estonia is based on three pillars – career education, career counselling and career information provision – and is provided by both education and employment systems in the respective sectors. Access to lifelong guidance is provided and enabled through different ministries governing policies in the labour market and regarding employment and in the education sector, and social sector, and implemented and delivered through different agencies, institutions, and other channels.

The [Ministry of Education and Research](#) is responsible for the planning of education, research, youth and language related national policies and, in conjunction thereof, managing the fields of pre-primary, basic, general upper secondary, vocational secondary, higher, hobby and adult education (formal, informal work-related training and retraining, and popular adult learning), organising research and development activities, youth work and special youth work, and compiling drafts of corresponding legal acts. The Ministry is also responsible for formulating and upholding national positions on the development and implementation of EU legislation that concern issues of education, research, youth, and language policy.

The [Education Act](#) of the Republic of Estonia stipulates that career guidance of children and youth is the responsibility of local governments. Development and implementation of the national curricula and career education is supported by [The Education and Youth Board](#) (Haridus- ja Noorteamet), a government agency of the Ministry of Education and Research, which supports educational institutions in the implementation of national curricula as part of its mandate (Statutes of the Education and Youth Board, 2020). (See also dedicated sections on [career guidance for school pupils](#), for [VET participants](#), [higher education students](#)).

Education sector provision in Estonia includes career education integrated in curricula at various education levels and is a long-standing tradition. One task of general education, vocational education and higher education institutions is to ensure access to lifelong guidance for their students and support them in reaching the learning outcomes set in curricula.

The [Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications](#) is responsible for formulating and overseeing the implementation of the working life policy, with a stated strong commitment to promoting equal treatment. Labour market related provisions including active and passive labour market measures, such as career information services and career counselling and the payment of labour market benefits, are available through the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund (Eesti Töötukassa - PES) free of charge to all eligible, regardless of employment status, all over Estonia. Diverse delivery methods and channels are available, and services are offered in Estonian, Russian and English. The largest target user groups of career services of the PES are the unemployed, the employed and the young aged seven to 26: special attention is given to the third school stage (classes from years seven to nine), upper secondary education level, students in vocational education and those who are NEET (aged 15 - 29). (Also see Quality assurance in career guidance).

Many services and information are available and accessible online. An all-age career portal - <https://minukarjaar.ee/et> - is available from the PES website with a variety of information on careers, also on the regional Career centres, and reasons for seeking career guidance. (See also [Career information and ICT in career guidance](#)). The portal also serves teachers, parents, and career professionals.

Within PES, [career services](#) are career information provision and career counselling. The stated main purpose of career services is to support individuals in making informed decisions in education and employment, and services can be accessed individually or in a group, online or offline. There is a career counselling [standard](#) that describes the approach and expectations for those accessing these services. Users gain access to different professionals (career information specialist and career counsellor).

- A 'career information specialist' supports users in finding relevant information to develop their career, including education opportunities, employment market status or various available positions in Estonia and elsewhere.
- A 'career counsellor' supports users in getting to know themselves through discussing personality traits and skills and planning the development of their career and linking this personal information to the decisions related to learning and careers. (see also section on [Training and qualifications](#))

The legal basis of the activities of PES has been defined by two laws: The Unemployment Insurance Act, which describes the unemployment insurance system and the organisation of PES, and the [Labour Market Measures Act](#) (2023), the most recent legislation in effect (See also [Career guidance for employed, unemployed, older adults](#)).

Until the end of 2023, the delivery of [labour market services](#) by the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund (Eesti Töötukassa - PES) was governed by the Labour Market Services and Benefits Act, in conjunction with the [Employment Programme 2021–2023](#), which has been endorsed as its guiding framework. In 2023 responsibility for formulating and overseeing the implementation of working life policy, with a strong commitment to promoting equal treatment, was moved to the [Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications](#).

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This includes [labour market services](#), also comprising career services and career counselling as provided in the sector..

The new [Labour Market Measures Act](#) superseded the Labour Market Services and Benefits Act, and the new Employment Programme for 2024–2029, as established by the Regulation of the Government of the Republic of Estonia, came into force in 2024. The Act delineates the overarching principles governing the provision of labour market measures and specifies the eligible recipients and the types of labour market measures that will be provided. The stated purpose of this Law accordingly, is ‘to reduce and shorten unemployment rates, prevent unemployment and support employment and quality employment, increase labour supply and support an inclusive and adaptable labour market and structural changes in the economy through labour market measures’.

Labour market measures (translated version) are listed in Chapter 4 of the Act:

1. provision of information on the situation on the labour market, and on the labour market services and benefits;
2. job mediation;
3. career services;
4. work-oriented counselling;
5. development of skills;
6. support for business;
7. support for work readiness;
8. support for work ability;
9. support for entering and maintaining employment;
10. support for participation in a labour market service.

While the purpose of ‘career services’ according to the Act is to ‘provide a person with information on studying and working opportunities, support informed choices of the learning pathway and employment, increase self-awareness and support career development’ (para 14), other measures of relevance listed are interrelated:

1. Provision of information on the situation on the labour market and on labour market services and benefits is to provide information on the situation on the labour market, on working and studying opportunities and on labour market services and benefits.
2. Job mediation is to support a person in finding suitable work and an employer in finding a suitable employee, including intermediate information necessary for finding work and an employee.
3. Work-oriented counselling is to support a person’s searches for and choices of employment, entering or adapting to employment and maintaining employment.
4. Development of skills is to support the acquisition and development of the knowledge and skills necessary for the employment of a person.
5. Support for business is to support a person in starting business and ensure sustainability of such an activity.
6. Support for work readiness is to prepare a person for searches for employment and for working life, support work habits and provide counselling for how to eliminate impediments to obtaining employment and to working.
7. Support for work ability is to support a person with a health impediment in entering and maintaining employment.

PES also enhances access to career development support activities to different user groups through its [cooperation activities with partners](#). This includes opportunities for employers, trainers, counselling providers, rehabilitation cooperation partners, peer support providers, coaching partners and the EURES network.

For example, career information specialists provide [workshops for schools](#) providing general education for pupils in grades 7 to 12. The aim of the workshops is to raise young people’s awareness of work and education and to increase their opportunities to shape their own careers. Settings include general education schools, youth centres, youth fairs, camps, Unemployment Insurance Fund’s career centres and other places where young people are present. (Also see [career guidance for school pupils](#))

Career information is provided on labour market trends and developments, employers’ expectations and recommendations for young jobseekers, study opportunities in Estonia and abroad, and more. An overview of the topics that inform young people are in the [career services menu](#). In addition to workshops, career counselling and information is offered.

In terms of access to privately provided lifelong guidance services, the private sector has created opportunities for career coaches, career counsellors and other professionals to design and provide services for a variety of user groups (from CEOs to teachers, youth workers and entrepreneurs). Based on the main services offered, companies providing career guidance for a fee can be divided into two categories. The first is consulting companies who mainly provide career counselling (for both outplacement and career development purposes), coaching and competency assessment. Additionally, recruitment companies provide services for job seekers (tools for inserting CVs on job matching platforms, CV revisions, consultations with advisers) and recruitment services for companies in search of new employees. (Larini & Rammo, 2023).

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Quality assurance

Quality assurance in the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund (Eesti Töötukassa, - PES)

In the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund (Eesti Töötukassa, - PES), focus is put on providing services according to the needs of the target user groups. The largest target user groups of career services of the PES are the unemployed, the employed and the young aged seven to 26: special attention is given to the third school stage (classes from years seven to nine), upper secondary education level, students in vocational education and those who are NEET (aged 15 - 29). Quality assurance is supported by a quality framework developed internally in 2022-2023. The quality framework includes a detailed action plan with different activities that help to assure the quality of career services. Some examples of quality assurance activities meaningful from a career guidance perspective include:

- client feedback collected on the process of a career counselling, information sessions and on job search workshops.
- structured shadowing sessions (individual career counselling and career information clients) to provide feedback to the practitioners;
- practitioner further training and support in acquiring professional qualifications.

An electronic client feedback system used internally allows for the collection of quick responses and customer satisfaction evaluation. Within two weeks after the counselling session, the clients are sent the following three simple questions:

1. Would you recommend career services to peers? Scale of 0-10;
2. What did you like and what should we change? Free answers;
3. How useful was the guidance for you? Scale of 1-5.

There is a brief [service standard for career information mediation](#), as well as for career counselling listing the opportunities and explaining the arrangements for users available on the webpage of the PES, downloadable, under information on services and benefits. It includes prior information on career tests used, for example.

Award of occupational qualifications

The occupational qualification system plays a significant role in ensuring the professional development of practitioners in career guidance and therefore an aspect of quality assurance (see Rammo, 2021) in contributing to the inputs and process of career guidance interventions. The system is a link between the labour market and the lifelong learning system, enhancing the development, assessment, and recognition of a practitioner's occupational competence. The occupational qualification standard describes occupational activities and provides the competence requirements for occupational qualifications and their levels ([Sihtasutus Kutsekoda](#)) (see section [Training and Qualifications](#)).

Quality assurance in the education sector

Based on recent studies (Kallaste et al, 2021; Pata et al, 2022), it could be concluded that while career education is defined as an overarching goal in education, there are three main areas where challenges appear:

- employees of educational institutions (teachers, support specialists, managers) do not have enough resources available for their continuing competence development in career guidance; these remain at a basic level;
- there is no overview of the availability of career guidance support, how career development skills are developed (including in cooperation with partners), what are the roles of the different stakeholders, or the impact and the results of the activities undertaken;
- overall lack of resources, including availability of learning content, support networks, coordination of cooperation between specialists, and time.

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Career management skills

A cross-thematic approach is used for the development of career management skills (CMS) in schools. In 2014, the national general education curricula were adjusted, with more specific study goals in connection with career planning included. The national curriculum does not prescribe to the school precisely what actions are to be taken to achieve the goals set; each school is able to select the best ways, methods and means based on the characteristics and abilities of the school. The school is obliged to ensure the availability of career-related services (Larini & Rammo, 2023). Further information may be retrieved from:

1. Pre-school, basic and secondary education
2. Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act
3. Consolidated texts of English translations of Estonian legislation.

The national basic school and national upper secondary school curricula include eight compulsory central topics, one of which is 'Lifelong learning and career planning'. The curricula are also accompanied by the syllabi of the elective subject and elective course in career education, which increase the topic's importance in the school curriculum.

The development of career management skills (CMS) is promoted as a priority for lifelong guidance systems in Estonia, as it is throughout many countries in Europe. National and international policy and research point to the need to teach people (and to learn) the skills that help them navigate the complex educational landscape and the changing labour market. In Estonia, a model has been developed in cooperation with various stakeholders to define the skills necessary for career management.

The development of the [Estonian CMS model](#) applicable to all ages, has been a long process spanning over ten years, also with the participation of schools promoting career education. The original version of the model from 2016 concentrated on national curricula, including career management skills in school settings, general education goals, and the learning outcomes and content of the cross-curricula theme. The model was then refined in 2017 in light of research findings, expert opinions, and career management theories and serves as a framework for reflection. Today, the model is based on the guiding principle of constructivism (Innove, 2017).

Several agreements, including national curricula, occupational qualification standards for career professionals, and service standards for career services, are the cornerstones of the service quality, access and availability, of services along with the the CMS development framework. The main structure of the model consists of four competence areas: development of self-awareness, analysis of opportunities, planning, and taking action (further information can be found [here](#)).

Since there are no specific curricula designed for the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund (Eesti Töötukassa, - PES) services, the constructivist principles used in the current CMS model have been adopted. One of the key focus points in PES offering career services is also to support the CMS of the clients in a way that they can be more successful in the process of finding a suitable learning opportunity and/or job. There is a clear link between the CMS model and the occupational qualification standards for PES staff providing career advice and guidance which are followed by PES.

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Evidence, monitoring and assessment

It is one of the main tasks of the National Career Guidance Forum re-established in 2019 by the Unemployment Insurance Fund as coordinator, to agree on and monitor career services provision and development goals, to propose further actions necessary to widen the access to and increase the quality of career guidance. The Forum meets 3-4 times a year to discuss development areas in the field of career guidance. Members of the Forum include the Ministry of Education and Research (Haridus- ja teadusministeerium), Ministry of Economic Affairs and

Communications (Majandus ja Kommunikatsiooniministeerium), Association of Estonian Career Counsellors (Eesti Karjäärinõustajate Ühing), Education and Youth Board (Haridus- ja Noorteamet)/ Euroguidance Estonia (Euroguidance Eesti), Estonian Schools Heads Association (Koolijuhtide Ühendus), Estonian Students Union (Õpilasesinduste Liit), Estonian Qualifications Authority (Kutsekoda) and Estonian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (Kaubandus- ja Tööstuskoda) (see also section [Coordination and collaboration among stakeholders](#)).

There is no joint approach to gathering data on career guidance services at national level covering both education and employment sectors. While the Ministry of Education and Research follows mainly the indicators identified in the Education Strategy 2021 – 2035, the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund (Eesti Töötukassa, - PES) proceeds from their own Development Plan and relevant national programmes and in accordance with governing policy on monitoring and evaluation (see section [Quality assurance](#)).

According to the 2023 [Labour market measures Act](#), the ‘Employment programme’ shall set out output and result indicators of the employment programme, the conditions and arrangements for their monitoring and the conditions and arrangements for assessing the impact of labour market services. Career services are considered in the Act as labour market measures designed to provide labour market information, support informed learning paths, increase self-awareness, and support career development, while job-oriented counselling supports job search, access to employment, as well as adaptation and retention.

Three recent studies focused on Estonia are dedicated to developments in career guidance specifically, including the occupational qualification system in the field of career guidance (Ernesaks et al, 2020; Rammo, 2021) and career guidance service provision (Kallaste et al, 2021). Another study gives an overview on professionalism and training models for career specialists (Pata et al, 2022).

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Career information, ICT in guidance

Estonia appears to be progressing towards the development of a digital economy and society, as evidenced by the results in the 2018 [Digital economy and society index](#). Based on Eurostat household data (Cedefop, 2023) on Estonia, 54% of individuals aged 25-34 years have above basic ICT skills, compared to the EU27 average of 39%.

E-governance is a strategic choice for Estonia to improve the competitiveness of the state and increase the well-being of its population, while implementing hassle-free governance (see [Estonian Innovation Agency, 2023](#)). According to various sources, the modern infrastructure has made it possible to build a safe e-services ecosystem. An important part of this ecosystem is flexibility and the ability to integrate its different parts, while improving e-services and allowing government systems to grow. Citizens (individuals residing in Estonia or abroad) can select e-solutions from among a range of public services at a time and place convenient to them, as 99% of public services are now available to citizens as e-services (ibid.). All residents of Estonia have an electronic ID, and, in most cases, there is no need to physically visit an agency providing a service (see [e-Estonia](#)).

The advancing digitalisation provides a basis for developments across Estonian society, in education and training, and in the labour market. Digital solutions in lifelong learning are in strategic focus (Larini & Rammo, 2023). The objective is to apply modern digital technology in learning and teaching in a more efficient way and with better results, to improve the digital skills of the population and to guarantee access to the new generation of digital infrastructure (<https://www.mkm.ee/en/e-state-and-connectivity/digital-agenda-2030>).

The Ministry of Education and Research has launched an [education portal](#) which is the main location for education and labour market information and career development issues. Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund (Eesti Töötukassa, - PES) hosts a web page for career development called [Minukarjäär.ee](#) (my career). Among its features are career information, self-analysis tools and career design, and toolboxes for practitioners

and relevant teachers.

There have been also some other new tools for career development used in different settings where career education and guidance are provided. For example, the Education and Youth Board:

1. has made virtual reality videos of occupations (e.g., medical workers, youth workers). These aim to make this a new way of introducing different occupations and work environments alongside more common texts, photos and videos, and
2. opened [virtual tours of all vocational education institutions](#).

In its service provision, Estonia exploits the use of the [X-Road®](#), an open sources software and system providing direct, unified and secure exchange of data between various public and private sector e-service information systems. This means that the clients of PES, adult or the young, only need to provide a minimum of paper-based information because the gathering of client information is done automatically through the established ICT systems.

The daily work of the guidance practitioners is intertwined with the use of various ICT solutions. The use of ICT is multi-faceted: practitioners are both ICT users and the creators of career information through their use of ICT solutions.

The ICT solutions can be broadly divided into the following two categories:

1. for service provision: including web pages, databases, educational software, games, social media channels, and e-tests;
2. for internal processes: including documentation management, customer management, feedback solutions, information exchange in cloud-based solutions, and e-learning environments (Larini & Rammo, 2023).

Practitioners of career services use a variety of electronically administered tests and evaluation tools, including personality tests and career choice tests, and adapted for use in Estonia. The online tests have been standardised based on representative groups of school children and adults in Estonia. Versatile technical environments for information exchange and group counselling are in use.

OSKA ('Future Trends of Work') analyses the needs for labour and skills necessary for economic development over the next 10 years, and OSKA supplies the education portal hosted by the Ministry of Education and Research and the EUIF hosted career development online resource [Minukarjäär.ee](#) (my career) (also see above). Guidance practitioners consider OSKA as an important resource to support both adults and young on their career development (Cedefop, 2020). The recently launched [Oskuste Kompas](#) is a guide to the diverse world of skills and professions. Users will find comprehensive overview of job fields, professions, and the skills required in them.

The Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund (Eesti Töötukassa, - PES) mediates career information for individuals and groups in workshops of county departments, as e-guidance. In the Career Centre/career information workshop, users can independently review information materials from the career library (e.g., sample application documents, career literature), use a computer to search for career information, apply for jobs, and prepare application documents. Career information specialists (see also in [Training and qualifications](#) for more information) can assist users and individual interviews they provide support in learning and job opportunities using portals, enabling users to develop the skills to search for information independently. There is [a service standard for career information mediation](#) (Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund. <https://www.tootukassa.ee/en/services/career-and-training/career-services>).

A wide range of information for job seekers, career planners, employers, and partners, also those with diverse needs and circumstances, is also available on the PES website in Estonian, English and Russian, including a [self-service portal](#) accessed directly using different methods. For example, [Specific European Union countries' service providers](#) can be accessed using eID.

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Training and qualifications

The majority of career guidance practitioners in Estonia work in the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund (Eesti Töötukassa, - PES) as career counsellors or career information specialists (see PES [career services](#)) or in educational institutions as teachers or career counsellors. No full academic qualification is obtainable for the practitioners from any education or training institution in Estonia – most practitioners have a higher education degree in social or educational sciences (e.g. psychology, teacher training, youth work and personnel management) (Larini & Rammo, 2023). In-service learning opportunities and the Estonian qualifications system offer routes to training and professional development for those entering or within the field, and the occupational standards sets out the required skills and activities of practitioners.

Qualification frameworks for lifelong learning are widely accepted as ‘powerful tools that make it easier for people to carry their skills and credentials with them to different contexts’ (Cedefop, 2020b). Considering the rapidly changing need for competences, the occupational qualifications system holds great potential in encouraging capacity building and professional development (Rammo, 2021). The system was launched in 2006 when the [Estonian Qualifications Authority](#) certified the [Association of Estonian Career Counsellors](#) for awarding and recertifying occupational qualifications.

The occupational qualification standard for the career specialist (karjäärispetsialist) included in the [registry of qualifications](#), describes occupational activities, and provides the competence requirements for occupational qualifications and their levels. Part A of the standard provides a general overview of the nature of work, its main areas, necessary tools, and work environment, including its specificities, the personal characteristics and skills enhancing occupational activities. The description of work includes activities such as individual and group career counselling; information provision concerning education, the labour market and professions for groups and individuals. In addition, the main tasks and elective areas of work are identified. The competence requirements presented in part B of the standard serve as a basis for the assessment of the applicant for the occupational qualification. When applying for a career specialist qualification, there is a need to demonstrate acquisition of the four mandatory competencies and the recurring competence.

All competence descriptions include performance indicators. The recurring competence has been identified with performance indicators, such as engagement in self-reflection and continuous capacity building, customer focus, adherence to professional ethics, goal setting, outcome analysis, language proficiency, team building and use of technology. In addition, at least one of the elective competencies must be demonstrated in the process, either career information provision or career counselling.

The current standard for career specialists is established at two levels: six and seven, equivalent to a bachelor’s degree and professional higher education certificate (level six), and a master’s degree (level seven) (Register of occupational qualifications, 2023). The main difference between the levels is that in addition to service provision, the level seven practitioner has more extensive experience and competences at national or international level, e.g. developing new tools, curricula or is active as a researcher or trainer.

In practice, the professional standard in guidance is used as a basis for compiling curricula and training programmes that meet the requirements of the labour market; as a basis for competence assessment of practitioners; to assist employers in describing and introducing occupations, recruiting employees, compiling job descriptions, defining professional requirements; and to help professionals assess own skills gaps, or for their own career development. It is also a basis for international comparisons of professional certificates. In principle, to hold an occupational qualification is optional for practitioners and is not a precondition for recruitment, but the certificate is highly valued by the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund (Eesti Töötukassa, - PES) (Ernesaks et al, 2020). As a result, the contents of the professional standard have been incorporated into the relevant job descriptions, and salaries tend to be higher for those who are qualified specialists. Guidance professionals working in the private sector can benefit from having the qualification when applying for field-related projects (Rammo, 2021).

In the Estonian occupational qualifications system, the labour market is divided into 14 sectors, each managed by a professional council. Institutions represented in the councils are nominated by the Government and persons representing these institutions are nominated by the Minister for Education and Research. Typically, institutions represented in professional councils are: employer organisations and trade unions of the sector; professional associations of the sector; education and training institutions; and the responsible ministry (Kutsekoda, 2020). Professional councils are responsible also for giving the right to awarding bodies to award occupational qualifications and approve the procedure for awarding occupational qualifications. An overview of the Estonian occupational qualifications system is available [here](#).

As the national [Euroguidance centre](#) working in the area of ‘learning mobility’ and competence development of career professionals, the Education and Youth Board also provides support for guidance professionals in the areas of international learning mobility and competence development within education, training, and employment fields. Euroguidance Estonia serves as the National resource centre for guidance. [The website](#) also provides resources for career practitioners and their professional competence development.

A blended e-course was developed on Multiculturalism, learning and labour migration in the context of career

development with the aim to enhance guidance practitioners' skills and competences. The course was jointly developed and taught by professionals at the Euroguidance/Education and Youth Board, Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Agency, [Eures](#), [Europass](#) and [YFU Estonia](#) held at [Tallinn University](#) and [University of Tartu](#). The course was awarded the Quality label in 2021 by the [Estonian Quality Agency for Education](#).

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Funding career guidance

The funding for labour market services in the sector (which serve various user groups), including career services, is derived from various sources, with the primary ones being the unemployment insurance funds, which are accrued from contributions made by employees and employers into the foundation of labour market services and benefits. Additionally, financial support is supplemented by benefits from both the state budget and the European Union and other subsidies intended for financing labour market measures (Labour Market Measures Act, 2023).

The Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund (Eesti Töötukassa, - PES) provides unemployment prevention measures that include career guidance with financing options for employees who need support in changing jobs or remaining employed due to lack of skills, outdated skills or not being able to continue in their current position due to health problems as well as towards employers to support their staff in finding and training a suitably skilled workforce and restructuring their companies. These free of charge services supporting individual training and career guidance include:

- required career counselling combined with a degree study allowance for an employed person or a person registered as unemployed for participating in vocational education, professional higher education or bachelor's studies;
- required career counselling to access labour market training with a training card for employed persons at risk of unemployment; and
- support for obtaining qualifications for employed persons who have undergone labour market or other training with the support of the training benefit and a training grant for employers for improving the skills and knowledge of their employees upon their recruitment and helping them adapt to changes in the employer's economic activities.

Financing of educational institutions, and thereby guidance (and career education) provision, depends on the ownership of the institution. There are state, municipal, and private educational institutions. All expenses of state-owned schools are covered from the state budget (central government as school owner). Municipal educational institutions are financed from the local government budgets, but the central government allocates financial support, accordingly. In addition, financial support from legal entities in the private sector, and income from paid services, etc. may be considered as resources both in the case of state and municipal educational institutions. The contribution from the European Union Structural Funds to education is substantial (Ministry of Education and Research / Eurydice Estonia, 2022).

The financing of career guidance provisions is embedded within each setting or institution, such as in the school context, making it difficult to discern how much is invested in guidance, and studies are rare on estimating how funding is allocated. Professional development of staff and salaries, investments in occupational standards and assessments, and resources such as ICT portals and self-help services, and financing support for adult learners, could be considered in the overall picture of funding career guidance in Estonia.

According to the [Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act](#), school running costs are covered by the school manager. In most cases, this means local governments, so activities related to making possible career studies at schools are financed by central and local authorities. Local governments are authorised to establish, rearrange, and close general education schools. Local governments keep account of the number of children obliged to attend, ensure school attendance control, make arrangements for school transport and the provision of school meals and perform a number of related functions (for further information please see [here](#)).

The number of students in municipal schools is used to calculate the subsidies allocated from the State budget to municipalities. The State subsidy is used for covering expenses on teachers' salaries, social taxes, training, and textbooks. Similar subsidies are also made available to private general education schools as prescribed by the Private Schools Act, but the State refrains from prescribing guidelines on the use of the funds allocated. The local government reserves the obligation and right to finance schools based on their actual needs (Estonian Ministry of Education and Research, 2020).

Development of career education in schools is also supported by public funding managed by the [Education and Youth Board](#), the government agency of the Ministry of Education and Research, that deals with the implementation of Estonian education and youth policy. The joint institution was established in 2020 on the basis of the services of former institutions: Foundation Innove, Foundation Archimedes, Information Technology Foundation for Education and Estonian Youth Work Center.

In respect to funding and costs related to guidance personnel and support staff, there is evidence that career guidance practitioners earn differently depending on their training and acquired qualifications. In principle, to hold an occupational qualification (see also section [Training and qualifications](#)) is optional for practitioners and is not a precondition for recruitment, but the certificate is highly valued by the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund (Eesti Töötukassa, - PES) (Ernesaks et al, 2020). This relates to differences in salary levels and incentives for professionals as well as for guidance providers.

The contents of the professional standard have been incorporated into the relevant job descriptions, and salaries tend to be higher for those who are qualified specialists. Guidance professionals working in the private sector can benefit from having the qualification when applying for field-related projects (Rammo, 2021).

Most VET schools are public and initiatives are funded by the State budget. Vocational educational institutions have the possibility to include career development as an elective subject in the curriculum. Some vocational educational institutions have their own career counsellor or educational counsellor who supports learners throughout the learning process from admission, some invite external career professionals from Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund (Eesti Töötukassa, - PES), or the private sector. Amendments to the Vocational Educational Institutions Act, adopted in December 2018, opened up the possibility for vocational educational institutions to carry out 'Choice of profession' training. The curriculum (30-60 ECTS) mainly focuses on career management skills and their development, with the aim of supporting young people in making decisions about their future education pathway or transition to the labour market. The main target user group consists of those who have dropped out of primary school, upper secondary school, or vocational school, those who are NEET, students with special needs, etc. who require additional support in their choice of profession and when entering studies or employment.

Provision of education in universities and professional higher education institutions is funded from the State budget, and career services are part of this system.

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Career guidance for school pupils

In the education sector, guidance is provided as both a part of non-formal youth work and a part of formal education. The development of general skills, including career management skills, begins in pre-school education. Children start to discover education, their parents' workplaces and the concept of work and the labour market in general. Children are supported to develop general skills, such as cognitive and learning skills, social skills, and self-management skills, which are all essential for coping in education, the labour market and society at large. The development of such skills and competencies is supported throughout the period of study – at all

levels of education (also see ‘[career training](#)’ at the Education and Youth Board’s website).

The [Education Act](#) of the Republic of Estonia stipulates that career guidance of children and youth is the responsibility of local governments. Development and implementation of the national curricula and career education is supported by [The Education and Youth Board](#).

General education

The national curricula establish the standard for basic and general secondary education. The curricula are implemented in all basic (grades 1-9) and upper secondary schools (grades 10-12) of Estonia. The national curricula do not dictate to schools the precise actions to be taken to achieve the set goals for career education, but allow each school to select the best ways, methods and means based on the specifics and capacity of the school. The school is obliged to ensure the availability of career-related services. This includes career counselling and career information services provided by the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund (Eesti Töötukassa, - PES) or other means for making career services accessible to students (e.g. employing a career counsellor as a staff member). The national basic school and national upper secondary school curricula include eight compulsory central topics, one of which supports pupils’ career development – ‘Lifelong learning and career development’. In addition, the curricula are accompanied by the syllabi of the elective subjects and elective course in careers education, which supports the implementation of the curricula where relevant.

[Rajaleidja centres of the Education and Youth Board](#) organise the provision and development of educational counselling services for parents, teachers, and other educators of young people with learning difficulties and specific educational needs and SEN (ages 1.5-18). The centres employ specialists such as speech therapists, psychologists, social pedagogues, and special education teachers. (See also [Career guidance for persons with disabilities](#)), who offer general guidance for supporting young people who can benefit from these services.

As part of the Youth Guarantee, the Ministry of Education and Research also launched an initiative to support young people aged 7-29 in relation to education, training, and employment, and as relevant, when entering and coping in the labour market, and to bring young people that are not in education or work (NEETs) back to education. The Youth Prop Up and ‘Hoog Sisse’ (in the City of Tallinn) are support programmes for young persons aged 15-26 who are not involved in studies or employment. The main aim of these programmes is to support young people in need who may have been made redundant (are without work) or have not completed their education and are not currently studying. From 2023 to 2029, the Education and Youth Board will implement the European Social Fund co-financed programme ‘Youth Work Measures to Support Youth Labour Market Entry and Provide Support Measures for NEET-status Youth.’ The aim of the youth programme is to improve the accessibility of youth services for all young people and increase awareness of mental health issues among students in the third stage of schooling (upper secondary). (See also [Career guidance for NEET](#))

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Guidance for VET participants

The goal of the [Vocational Educational Institutions Act](#) is to set out the basics of the organisation of studies in vocational education institutions. The task of a vocational education institution is to create opportunities for students to obtain the knowledge, skills, and ethical guidance necessary for life and work, including professional training and retraining, considering the needs of society, students, and the labour market.

Until the end of the academic period 2019/2020, supporting the development of career management skills took place in vocational education both through vocational training and generic skills modules. In every vocational education curriculum, there is a generic skill module which deals with career-related topics and the principles of entrepreneurship. In autumn 2020 the ‘Learning path and working in a changing environment’ module was introduced. According to national curricula, the module is compulsory at level 4 (vocational secondary education) and recommended at levels 2-5. A new elective (2022) module ‘Entrepreneurship training at the workplace’ offers opportunity to develop career management and entrepreneurship competencies in enterprises. The aim of the studies is for students to be capable of developing their careers in a modern economic, entrepreneurial, and working environment based on the principles of lifelong guidance. Passing the module will help learners acknowledge professional studies as one step in their career path and take responsibility for their learning and development. The curriculum describes the learning outcomes and assessment criteria of the module. The implementation of the module is decided by the educational institutions themselves.

Career development competencies are also developed throughout the course. Great emphasis is placed on

[Inventory of lifelong guidance systems and practices - Estonia](#)

practice, the preparation for which and direct feedback from the supervisor helps learners understand their studies, set goals, and determine the need for development. From 2021, the new occupational qualification standard for VET teachers is bringing attention to the relevant activities to support students' personal and professional development.

In addition to the aforementioned, vocational educational institutions also have the possibility to include career development as an elective subject in the curriculum. Some vocational educational institutions have their own career guidance practitioner (career counsellor or educational counsellor) who supports learners throughout the learning process from admission, some invite external professionals from the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund (Eesti Töötukassa, - PES) or private sector.

Amendments to the Vocational Educational Institutions Act, adopted in December 2018, opened up the possibility for vocational educational institutions to carry out 'Choice of profession' training. The curriculum (30-60 ECTS) mainly focuses on career management skills and their development, with the aim of supporting young people in making decisions about their future education pathway or transition to the labour market. The main target group consists of those who have dropped out of primary school, upper secondary school, or vocational school, those who are NEET, students with specific needs, etc. who need additional support in their choice of profession and when entering studies or employment. (See also section [Career guidance for persons with disabilities](#)).

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Guidance for higher education students

The goal of the [Universities Act](#) is to set the procedure for the organisation of studies and the graduation in universities as well as for the conditions for obtaining a higher education qualification. The Universities Act applies to six public-law universities (University of Tartu, Tallinn University of Technology, Tallinn University, Estonian University of Life Sciences, Estonian Academy of Arts and Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre). The Act applies to private universities unless the Private Schools Act states otherwise. The [Private Schools Act](#) applies to private legal entities (private-law legal persons) who may consequently offer pre-school, primary, secondary, or higher education in a private school.

Guidance support is available for student candidates and students in six public universities. The overall aim is to support students in their studies, to offer a number of services that help students develop personal life skills and achieve success in the labour market.

Career counselling in this context provides higher education students with support in career planning, making decisions related to their job and study choices, and develop job-seeking skills. Career counsellors (see section [Training and Qualifications](#)) support students in making career choices and career plans, do self-analysis, search, and apply for a job, to write a CV and cover letter and, to prepare for a job interview. Both individual counselling and services in groups involve university staff and external experts. Tutoring by student volunteers is also available, e.g. for first-year students and international students who are starting their studies.

Students are supported if problems arise during studies or in personal life (psychological counselling). Universities help students with special needs upon entering the university, participating in studies, taking exams and tests, obtaining study materials, as well as in creating a suitable social and physical environment. These students are offered help if they need to change or adapt the content of studies arising from the curriculum, organisation of work or study environment in order to guarantee an opportunity for maximum participation in the study process and individual development. Estonian students are advised on numerous student exchange options and incoming exchange students are supported throughout their application process and during studies.

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Guidance for the employed

The provision of active and passive labour market measures within the sector, including the career information service and career counselling and the payment of labour market benefits, is available through the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund (Eesti Töötukassa - PES) free of charge for anyone, all over Estonia since 2019.

The strategy entails the provision of career information and counselling to all individuals regardless of their employment status. This includes working adults having the opportunity to participate in career guidance, either

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at the PES or another employment service also in the private sector for a fee, or in the workplace.

Within PES, [career services](#) are the career information provision and career counselling. The main purpose of career services is to support individuals in making informed decisions in education and employment, and services can be accessed individually or in a group, online or offline.

1. A 'career information specialist' supports users in finding relevant information to develop their career, including education opportunities, employment market status or various available positions in Estonia and elsewhere.
2. A 'career counsellor' supports users in getting to know themselves through discussing personality traits and skills and planning the development of their career and linking this personal information to the decisions related to learning and careers. (see also section on [Training and qualifications](#))

The legal basis of the activities of the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund (Eesti Töötukassa - PES) has been defined by two laws: The Unemployment Insurance Act, which describes the unemployment insurance system and the organisation of PES, and the [Labour Market Measures Act](#) (2023), the most recent legislation in effect since 2024.

Until the end of 2023, the delivery of [labour market services](#) by the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund (Eesti Töötukassa - PES) was governed by the [Labour Market Services and Benefits Act](#), in conjunction with the [Employment Programme 2021–2023](#), which has been endorsed as its guiding framework.

The new [Labour Market Measures Act](#) superseded the Labour Market Services and Benefits Act, and the new Employment Programme for 2024–2029, as established by the Regulation of the Government of the Republic of Estonia, came into force in 2024. The Act delineates the overarching principles governing the provision of labour market measures and specifies the eligible recipients and the types of labour market measures that will be provided. The stated purpose of this Law accordingly, is 'to reduce and shorten unemployment rates, prevent unemployment and support employment and quality employment, increase labour supply and support an inclusive and adaptable labour market and structural changes in the economy through labour market measures'.

Labour market measures (translated version) are listed in Chapter 4 of the Act:

1. provision of information on the situation on the labour market, and on the labour market services and benefits;
2. job mediation;
3. career services;
4. work-oriented counselling;
5. development of skills;
6. support for business;
7. support for work readiness;
8. support for work ability;
9. support for entering and maintaining employment;
10. support for participation in a labour market service.

While the purpose of 'career services' according to the Act is to 'provide a person with information on studying and working opportunities, support informed choices of the learning pathway and employment, increase self-awareness and support career development' (para 14), other measures of relevance listed are interrelated:

1. Provision of information on the situation on the labour market and on labour market services and benefits is to provide information on the situation on the labour market, on working and studying opportunities and on labour market services and benefits.
2. Job mediation is to support a person in finding suitable work and an employer in finding a suitable employee, including intermediate information necessary for finding work and an employee.
3. Work-oriented counselling is to support a person's searches for and choices of employment, entering or adapting to employment and maintaining employment.
4. Development of skills is to support the acquisition and development of the knowledge and skills necessary for the employment of a person.
5. Support for business is to support a person in starting business and ensure sustainability of such an activity.
6. Support for work readiness is to prepare a person for searches for employment and for working life, support work habits and provide counselling for how to eliminate impediments to obtaining employment and to working.
7. Support for work ability is to support a person with a health impediment in entering and maintaining employment.

[Labour market services](#) according to the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications (accessed 7 August 2024) are offered for different purposes:

1. Assisting the unemployed in finding employment opportunities and promoting their professional growth.
2. Facilitating the professional development of currently employed individuals.
3. Assisting employers in sourcing a suitable workforce.
4. Providing support to individuals who are not currently employed and not officially registered as unemployed but require assistance to enhance their competitiveness in the labour market.

The Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund (Eesti Töötukassa - PES) provides unemployment prevention measures. These services are targeted towards employees who need support in changing jobs or remaining employed due to lack of skills, outdated skills or not being able to continue in their current position due to health problems as well as towards employers to support their staff in finding and training a suitably skilled workforce and restructuring their companies. These services include:

1. a degree study allowance for an employed person or a person registered as unemployed for participating in vocational education, professional higher education or bachelor's studies;
2. labour market training with a training card for employed persons at risk of unemployment; and
3. support for obtaining qualifications for employed persons who have undergone labour market or other training with the support of the training benefit and a training grant for employers for improving the skills and knowledge of their employees upon their recruitment and helping them adapt to changes in the employer's economic activities.

If those who are employed want to receive support from PES for obtaining a degree or attending training, as a first step, they need to meet with a PES career counsellor to discuss the skills or knowledge that need to be obtained to continue working. The counsellor advises them on if the training supports the acquisition of these skills and whether the person is eligible for the training PES can provide.

The private sector has become more active and conducive for establishing private services (companies). This has created opportunities for career coaches, career counsellors and other professionals to design and provide services for a variety of user groups (from CEOs to teachers, youth workers and entrepreneurs). Based on the main services, companies providing career guidance for a fee can be divided into two categories:

1. Consulting companies: who mainly provide career counselling (for both outplacement and career development purposes), coaching and competency assessment.
2. Recruitment companies: who offer services for job seekers (tools for inserting CVs, CV revisions, consultations with an adviser) and recruitment services for companies.

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Guidance for unemployed adults

The provision of active and passive labour market measures, including career information services and career counselling, and the payment of labour market financial benefits, is available through the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund (Eesti Töötukassa, PES) free of charge all over Estonia (see section [Career guidance for the employed](#); PES can be accessed by all users, including youth and older adults). The legal basis of the activities of PES is defined by two laws: The Unemployment Insurance Act, which describes the unemployment insurance system and the organisation of PES, and the [Labour Market Measures Act \(2023](#) – English translation), in effect in 2024, which contains the provisions concerning career services, job mediation and the related services supporting career development, skills acquisition, and labour market integration. The purpose of this Law accordingly, is ‘to reduce and shorten unemployment rates, prevent unemployment and support employment and quality employment, increase labour supply and support an inclusive and adaptable labour market and structural changes in the economy through labour market measures’.

Until the end of 2023, the delivery of [labour market services](#) by the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund (Eesti Töötukassa - PES) was governed by the [Labour Market Services and Benefits Act](#), in conjunction with the [Employment Programme 2021–2023](#), endorsed as its guiding framework. The new [Labour Market Measures Act](#) superseded the Labour Market Services and Benefits Act, and the new Employment Programme for 2024–2029, as established by the Regulation of the Government of the Republic of Estonia, came into force. The Act delineates the overarching principles governing the provision of labour market measures and specifies the eligible recipients and the types of labour market measures that will be provided.

- Labour market measures (translated version) are listed in Chapter 4 of the 2023 Act:
- provision of information on the situation on the labour market, and on the labour market services and benefits;
- job mediation;
- career services;
- work-oriented counselling;
- development of skills;
- support for business;
- support for work readiness;
- support for work ability;
- support for entering and maintaining employment;
- support for participation in a labour market service.

While the purpose of ‘career services’ according to the Act is to ‘provide a person with information on studying and working opportunities, support informed choices of the learning pathway and employment, increase self-awareness and support career development’ (para 14), other measures of relevance are interrelated:

- Provision of information on the situation on the labour market and on labour market services and benefits is to provide information on the situation on the labour market, on working and studying opportunities and on [Inventory of lifelong guidance systems and practices - Estonia](#)

labour market services and benefits.

- Job mediation is to support a person in finding suitable work and an employer in finding a suitable employee, including intermediate information necessary for finding work and an employee.
- Work-oriented counselling is to support a person's searches for and choices of employment, entering or adapting to employment and maintaining employment.
- Development of skills is to support the acquisition and development of the knowledge and skills necessary for the employment of a person.
- Support for business is to support a person in starting business and ensure sustainability of such an activity.
- Support for work readiness is to prepare a person for searches for employment and for working life, support work habits and provide counselling for how to eliminate impediments to obtaining employment and to working.
- Support for work ability is to support a person with a health impediment in entering and maintaining employment.

The strategy in the employment sector is based in the provision of career information and counselling to all people regardless of their employment status, for students, young people, jobseekers, employees, parents, or pensioners, and others.

According to the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund (Eesti Töötukassa - PES) ([available in English](#) as well as Russian), the services apply to different life stages and circumstances including choosing an education and starting in working life, when unemployed or in transition between jobs and education, and also include (see also section [Career guidance for the employed](#)):

- switching jobs
- after parental leave
- during retraining and continuing education
- when in danger of job loss
- looking for new challenges
- getting to know yourself better

For example, career counsellors focus on self-awareness, discussing skills and planning in relation to careers. These practitioners assist those in transitions and unemployed in discussing employment opportunities and the users fit for a desired position, keeping up with labour market changes, why change is necessary and how to remain adaptable; work-life balance when studying, reflecting on major changes in working life and setting goals and making action plans.

The Estonian lifelong learning strategy's [Adult education programme](#) (Täiskasvanuhariduse programm) aims to bring back adults who have interrupted their educational path and improve their access to high quality non-formal education based on their interests and abilities, supporting their development and taking into account the needs of the labour market.

The Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund (Eesti Töötukassa - PES) provides employment services to jobseekers, employers and, in some cases, also to people in employment, in order to prevent them from falling out of the labour market due to health issues or outdated skills (by covering the expenses of skills training or also supporting studies in vocational or higher education). Services and benefits include coaching for registered unemployed who were running a company or institution before becoming unemployed, including with financial benefits also for those reaching retirement age.

The Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund (Eesti Töötukassa - PES) is responsible for implementation of active labour market policies, management, and payment of unemployment and 'work ability' benefits and conducting work ability assessments, but also other related services. Since 2016, the services offered under [the Work ability reforms](#) aim to change attitudes in society towards people with reduced working ability and to help them find and secure a job, through assistance at job interviews, peer support, working with a support person, work rehabilitation, accessing commuting benefits and assistive work equipment. (See also [Career guidance for persons with disabilities](#)).

Since May 2017, the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund (Eesti Töötukassa - PES) has been providing unemployment prevention measures. These services are targeted at employees who need support to change jobs or to remain employed (low or outdated skills) under the Work and study programme. They also support employers in finding and training a skilled workforce and restructuring their companies. Available services include:

1. a study allowance for employed and registered unemployed people to obtain vocational, professional higher education or bachelor studies;
2. labour market training with a training card for employed people at risk of unemployment;
3. support for obtaining qualifications for employed persons who have undergone labour market or other training with the support of the training benefit;
4. training grant for employers for improving the skills and knowledge of their employees on recruitment and helping them to adapt to changes in the employer's economic activities.

Participation in a career counselling session prior to accessing services for the first two options of the programme (study allowance; and training cards for those at risk of unemployment) is mandatory. More specifically, this intervention is required in order to analyse together with a career counsellor whether the service user is eligible for the measures, what kind of measure is available, and to advise on suitable fields for a career. The career counsellor and service user discuss whether the training supports the acquisition of all the necessary skills according to their needs. However, participation in career counselling is not required for those who wish to access the third service but where support is offered for obtaining qualifications for employed persons who have undergone labour market or other training with the support of the training benefit.

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Guidance for older adults

The provision of active and passive labour market measures, including career information services and career counselling, and the payment of labour market financial benefits, is available through the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund (Eesti Töötukassa - PES) free of charge all over Estonia (see section [Career guidance for employed](#)).

The legal basis of the activities of PES is defined by two laws: The Unemployment Insurance Act, which describes the unemployment insurance system and the organisation of PES, and the [Labour Market Measures Act](#) (2023) in force in 2024, which contains the provisions concerning career services, job mediation and the related services supporting career development, skills acquisition, and labour market integration.

The Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund (Eesti Töötukassa - PES) provides career services including career information and career counselling to all people, regardless of their employment status, including youth and pensioners according to their needs and including in the context of retirement. (see [Career guidance for unemployed](#) and [employed](#))

The PES provides employment services to jobseekers, employers and, in some cases, also to people in employment, in order to prevent them from falling out of the labour market due to health issues or outdated skills (by covering the expenses of skills training or also supporting studies in vocational or higher education). Services and benefits include coaching for registered unemployed who were running a company or institution before becoming unemployed, including with financial benefits also for those reaching retirement age.

The PES is responsible for implementation of active labour market policies, management, and payment of unemployment and 'work ability' benefits and conducting work ability assessments, but also other related services. Since 2016, the services offered under [the Work ability reforms](#) aim to change attitudes in society towards people with reduced working ability and to help them find and secure a job, through assistance at job interviews, peer support, working with a support person, work rehabilitation, accessing commuting benefits and assistive work equipment. (See also [Career guidance for persons with disabilities](#))

Since May 2017, the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund (Eesti Töötukassa - PES) has been providing unemployment prevention measures. These services are targeted at employees who need support to change jobs or to remain employed (low or outdated skills) under the Work and study programme. They also support employers in finding and training a skilled workforce and restructuring their companies. Available services include:

1. a study allowance for employed and registered unemployed people to obtain vocational, professional higher education or bachelor studies;
2. labour market training with a training card for employed people at risk of unemployment;
3. support for obtaining qualifications for employed persons who have undergone labour market or other training with the support of the training benefit;
4. training grant for employers for improving the skills and knowledge of their employees on recruitment and helping them to adapt to changes in the employer's economic activities.

Participation in a career counselling session prior to accessing services for the first two options of the programme (study allowance; and training cards for those at risk of unemployment) is mandatory. More specifically, this intervention is required in order to analyse together with a career counsellor whether the service user is eligible for the measures, what kind of measure is available, and to advise on suitable fields for a career. The career counsellor and service user discuss whether the training supports the acquisition of all the necessary skills according to their needs. However, participation in career counselling is not required for those who wish to access the third service, but where support is offered for obtaining qualifications for employed persons who have undergone labour market or other training with the support of the training benefit.

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Guidance for NEET

Within the education, research and youth affairs strategy, the [Youth Sector Development Plan 2021–2035](#) outlines the strategic objectives in the youth field and which have implications for their career development. The overall goal of the development plan has been identified - a wide variety of development opportunities, a sense of security, and strong support for young people to create an Estonian state that they wish to contribute to and develop further. Major changes in the policy introduced include development of a youth talent policy; systematic implementation of a youth sector monitoring and analysis system; introducing the transfer to compulsory professional qualification; and strengthening youth-oriented solutions (support and safety networks).

Consequently, several indicators for youth to support their careers have been developed as part of the [national strategic planning for 2021 to 2035](#), in the fields of education, research, youth and language policy to benefit society. One indicator is '18- to 24-year-olds with low educational attainment not in education or training'. The [Youth Sector Development Plan indicators](#) focus on youth experiences in the areas of momentum (driving society forward), participation, independence and security in society. Indicators measure progress in youth work services, self-evaluation of available support for youth, their level of trust in the state, and percentage of youth entrepreneurs, and more.

To lower the risk of young people's exclusion by improving their employability, the Ministry of Education and Research has launched different programmes specifically targeting young people not in employment, education, or training (NEET). As part of the [Youth Guarantee](#) (ages 15-29), the Ministry of Education and Research launched an initiative to support young people aged 15-26 entering the labour market, as well as young people not in education or work (NEETs). The Estonian unemployment insurance fund (Eesti Töötukassa - PES), is one of the institutions implementing the national [Youth Guarantee Action Plan](#). Career services are also included, and young service users can visit the all-age <http://www.minukarjaar.ee/> website.

The Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund (Eesti Töötukassa - PES) offers the My first [job](#) measure, which can provide a way of gaining work experience, that helps find work for young people with no professional (VET) education or little work experience who have been unemployed for at least four months. Minors can apply with the consent of a guardian or parent/legal representative to register as unemployed and to receive job-search support services. [Wage subsidy](#) also aims to support the hiring of young people in the 17-29 age group without vocational education or long-term work experience by subsidising employees whose recruitment is targeted at young people.

Since 2023, the Education and Youth Board implements the European Social Fund co-financed programme 'Youth Work Measures to Support Youth Labor Market Entry and Provide Support Measures for NEET-status Youth' with several lines of action. The aim of the youth programme is to improve the accessibility of youth services for all young people and increase awareness of mental health issues among students in the third level/stage of schooling (upper secondary).

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Guidance for persons with disabilities

In Estonia persons with disabilities and specific needs are offered different forms of career guidance and support based on their needs and accordingly in different learning and working settings.

Within the school sector in Estonia, teaching students with special educational needs (SEN) is based on the principle of inclusive education. Every child has the right to study at a school near home. To ensure learning meets each student's capacity and provides an experience of success, students are supported according to their individual needs and development. The Education and Youth Board (Harno) offers counselling and methodological support for families, teachers, and schools for helping them support students with SEN.

Harno's regional youth guidance centres, called [Rajaleidja](#) (Pathfinder in English) centres, provide psychological, socio-pedagogical, special educational counselling and speech therapy. It is a [nationwide network](#) (at least one centre per country) belonging to the structure of the Education and Youth Board, which offers free study counselling to children and adults who support children in education. The services are focused on children and

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the young (age 18 months to 18 years) with specific needs and special educational needs (SEN) (hariduslikud erivajadused); the practitioners' main direct target group is school personnel and parents. The person who applies to the Centre can be a parent, a teacher, a support specialist, a director, an employee of a local government or, if necessary, a child/learner himself/herself. The Centre also provides useful [online materials](#) and guidance for supporting young learners in different contexts, for success in their school careers and gaining knowledge on accommodations. These activities, in line with career services, provided by the PES, may also play an important role in supporting the young in making the right decisions about choices of further study, career formation, and entering the labour market.

Within the VET sector, amendments to the Vocational Educational Institutions Act, adopted in December 2018, opened up the possibility for vocational educational institutions to carry out 'Choice of profession' training. The curriculum (30-60 ECTS) mainly focuses on career management skills and their development, with the aim of supporting young people in making decisions about their future education pathway or transition to the labour market. The main target group consists of those who have dropped out of primary school, upper secondary school, or vocational school, those who are NEET, students with specific needs (SEN, etc.), etc. who need additional support in their choice of profession and when entering studies or employment.

Students in higher education are supported if problems arise during studies or in personal life (psychological counselling). Students with specific needs get help if they need to change or adapt the content of studies arising from the curriculum, organisation of work or study environment in order to guarantee an opportunity for maximum participation in the study process and individual development. Universities support students with these needs, upon entering the university, participating in studies, exams, and tests, obtaining study materials, as well as in creating a suitable social and physical environment. Estonian students are advised on numerous student exchange options and incoming exchange students are supported throughout their application process and during studies.

In the labour market sector, through the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund (Eesti Töötukassa - PES), services are provided free of charge all over Estonia (see section [Career guidance for employed and unemployed](#)) including those with limited work capacity, or a disability, or other needs which are a barrier to employment. The legal basis of the activities of PES is defined by two laws: The Unemployment Insurance Act, which describes the unemployment insurance system and the organisation of PES, and the [Labour Market Measures Act](#) (2023), which contains the provisions concerning career services, job mediation and the related services supporting career development, skills acquisition, and labour market integration.

The services [related to work and health](#) offered under the [Work ability reforms](#) aim to change attitudes in society towards people with reduced working ability and to help service users find and secure a job, through assistance at job interviews, peer support, working with a support person, work rehabilitation, commuting financial benefits (up to the end of 2023) and assistive work equipment. Guidance and support are a part of some measures. Employment services provided to people with reduced work ability are co-financed by the European Social Fund of the European Union on the basis of Directive No. 57 of the Minister of Social Protection and the Minister of Health and Labour of 27 March 2015 'Provision of Labour Market Services to the Target Group of Work Reforms'.

The PES [supported employment service](#) supports people with health-related obstacles entering the open job market, to find and maintain employment, while [support persons](#) are also available for those with a disability, a permanent incapacity for work or otherwise, starting, or in employment.

Under the umbrella of PES services for persons with decreased work capability (pages in English accessed 2023. 27.06), guidance has been provided in sheltered employment services (limited up to two years) to prepare those with reduced work ability to work in the open labour market, to start a job and in transitioning into the open labour market. This includes learning work skills, work organisation and social protection related supports. For those who are unemployed, case managers support individuals in need of work-related rehabilitation specialists, who work with motivation, self-confidence and coping with disability or illness including while performing work duties, such as in organising work and applying accommodations.

In terms of web accessibility of the PES website (<https://www.tootukassa.ee/>) it is developed according to WCAG 2.1 AA [accessibility standards](#). This means that special technologies and processes have been used to make the content more accessible for people with disabilities. In addition, the page information explains that better accessibility can be achieved by configuring some browser and operation system tools.

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