



ESTONIA

Blended employment counselling: combining face-to-face and distance counselling of the jobseekers

USING FACE-TO-FACE, PHONE OR VIDEO CALLS, AND E-CHANNELS TO BETTER RESPOND TO CLIENT NEEDS AND PREFERENCES AND TO ENSURE AN EFFICIENT, HIGH-QUALITY SERVICE.

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Distance counselling options (phone and e-counselling) have already been in place in the Estonian PES since 2011. However, by 2019 only 8% of jobseekers used counselling by phone and 15% via e-channel. Face-to-face counselling dominated, amounting to 3/4 of all counselling sessions, due to legal restrictions (distance counselling was allowed only in specific cases), an outdated set-up for e-counselling (enabling just one-way communication, where the jobseeker could deliver information to the PES via the e-platform but only receive information back from the PES outside the e-platform, e.g., via e-mail) as well as a strong tradition of face-to-face interaction with clients.

This situation did not meet the clients' needs and expectations. The potential of developed e-services was also underemployed and counselling resources were not used most efficiently. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic made it impossible to rely only on face-to-face counselling, thus accelerating the implementation of already envisaged changes.

Name of the PES

Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund (EUIF)

Scope of measure
(a pilot project or a national reform)

National

When was the practice implemented?

The key changes in the counselling practice were implemented from March 2020 to December 2021. Training and coaching sessions are ongoing, as is the work on quality assurance of distance counselling.

What was the driver for introducing the practice? Was it internal or external?

The drivers for the blended employment counselling were first and foremost the changed needs and expectations of the clients. The organisation strived for modernisation, better use of e-solutions and a more efficient service model. The COVID-19 situation made the need for change more urgent.

Which organisation was involved in its implementation?

Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund (EUIF).

Which groups were targeted by the practice?

Registered jobseekers.

What were the practice's main objectives?

- ▶ To better respond to the clients' needs and preferences by offering employment counselling via the most suitable channel.
- ▶ To modernise and improve the quality and efficiency of counselling.
- ▶ To ensure continuous support for clients throughout the COVID-19 situation.

What activities were carried out?

- ▶ The law was amended to allow the PES to decide the mode of counselling in all cases without any time or other limits.
- ▶ The counsellors were given the discretion to choose and vary the mode of counselling according to the jobseeker's preference and individual needs.
- ▶ Choosing the most appropriate counselling channel and frequency is supported by an AI-based client-profiling model that predicts the probability of finding and sustaining employment.
- ▶ A new interactive e-channel was launched with options of counsellor-supported or independent job-search (without counsellor intervention).
- ▶ Guidelines for distance counselling were compiled and online workshops as well as coaching was provided for counsellors.
- ▶ The counselling feedback model previously used for face-to-face counselling was adjusted in order to monitor the quality of distance counselling.

<p>What resources and other relevant organisational aspects were involved?</p>	<p>Providing technical tools and software for distance counselling (web phones and headsets, MS Teams, Skype).</p>
<p>What were the source(s) of funding?</p>	<p>Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund budget for operational costs, no extra funding was required.</p>
<p>What were the outputs of the practice: people reached and products?</p>	<p>In 2021, working with clients is still influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic. This means that the PES has not yet been able to fully extend, choose and combine channels freely according to the individual needs. Distance counselling is highly prevailing now due to safety measures – face-to-face counselling is offered to the clients who need it the most (who could not benefit from distance counselling), amounting to only 10% of all counselling sessions.</p> <p>EUIF is planning to monitor and analyse the changes in the use of counselling modes, changes in client habits and expectations and readiness of using distance counselling as well as the impact of blended counselling on employment rates and client satisfaction.</p> <p>So far, the following products have been delivered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Guidelines for distance counselling. ▶ Workshops to help counsellors transfer their counselling skills to the context of distance counselling. ▶ An adjusted counselling feedback model.
<p>What outcomes have been identified?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ The PES counsellors can now vary the counselling channels according to their clients' individual needs although making full use of the blended model is hindered by the COVID-19 pandemic. ▶ More flexible arrangements have helped to improve the responsiveness and quality of EUIF services. ▶ Counselling resources are used more efficiently, which is especially crucial in times of increasing unemployment and workloads. ▶ More clients are now ready to use e-services and communicate with the PES via phone or video channels.
<p>What are the lessons learnt and success factors?</p>	<p>Rather than using one single mode of counselling, it is more effective to combine different modes of counselling, depending on each individual situation.</p> <p>When encouraged and guided, clients can do more digitally than initially expected.</p> <p>The following success factors have been identified:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Preparing clients for distance counselling (focusing on orienting the clients and supporting in technical matters if necessary). ▶ Preparing and coaching counsellors (focusing on distance counselling skills). ▶ Providing necessary tools for distance counselling and making it easier for both counsellors and clients. ▶ Ensuring the quality of distance counselling (adjusted methods and tools are required).



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