

SILTA BRON

SILTA-Työllisyyden yhdyssilta Pohjanmaa -
BRON-Sysselsättningens kontaktbro i Österbotten

Summary of the job seeker survey

SILTA BRON

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VAASAN EV.LUT. KIRKKO⁺
EV.LUTH. KYRKAN I VASA



The aim of the ‘SILTA - a Bridge to Employment in Ostrobothnia’ group project is to promote and strengthen employment while building bridges between employees and employers in Ostrobothnia. The focus of this survey is on the personal experiences and expertise of individual clients; we hope to better understand their needs and wishes related to the development of services. The perspectives of individual clients are invaluable as we work to build more functional and effective services.

Inclusion is at the heart of our project: we believe that everyone has the right to be seen and heard. Through this survey, we also aim to address the evolving environment of employment services, as the TE reform and the reform of the Integration Act introduce new opportunities and operating models. Together with the individuals who participated in the survey, our sub-project partners, and collaborators, we can identify barriers to employment, find effective solutions, and develop services that genuinely support everyone’s path to employment.

This survey also provides an opportunity to highlight valuable experiences and development ideas directly from the service users. We warmly thank you for your time and contribution - together, we are building bridges that lead to a fair and inclusive working life!!

Tiina Palonen-Stenvall
Project Manager

1. BACKGROUND

The field of employment services is undergoing significant change starting from the beginning of 2025, when the transfer of TE services to municipalities will come into effect. In Vaasa, employment services are provided by the Ostrobothnia Employment Area. The aim of the reform is to strengthen locally tailored, customer-oriented services, with responsibility increasingly shifting to municipalities and local actors. At the same time, the reform of the Integration Act (KOTO24) introduces new obligations and opportunities for municipalities to promote social integration and facilitate the integration of immigrants into the workforce. At the core of the reforms is closer collaboration between municipalities, employers, and service providers, alongside the development of innovative models to support the employment of long-term unemployed individuals and immigrants.

The aim of the survey was to assess individual clients' experiences with current employment services, as well as their skills and needs regarding services that promote employment. The survey also explored the barriers and challenges to employment that job seekers face. The collected data provides a valuable foundation for evaluating the effectiveness of current services and for designing and piloting new services, ensuring that solutions supporting employment are better targeted to meet the needs of clients.

The ESR+ funded SILTA – a Bridge to Employment group project is at the heart of these changes, addressing the specific needs of the Ostrobothnia Employment Area. The project focuses on two key target groups within the individual client segment: long-term unemployed individuals and immigrants. The main objective of the project is to develop customer-centric, effective solutions that reduce barriers to employment and support a sustainable transition into the workforce.



2. INTRODUCTION TO THE SURVEY

The assessment of the current situation was carried out through a survey from the perspective of the target group, which explored their experiences, views, and challenges related to employment. The goal was to gather information that would serve as a basis for planning future actions in the project to better support the target groups. The survey is one of the actions in the SILTA project aimed at identifying the needs of the target groups, as well as developing and piloting customer-oriented services and service pathways. The survey provides a knowledge base for service development and supports regional decision-making.

Objectives of the survey:

1. To evaluate the availability and effectiveness of current services.
2. To identify clients' needs and barriers to employment.
3. To utilise the results in designing and piloting new service models.
4. To enhance the target groups' participation in and commitment to the project.

The survey was targeted at job seekers whose needs are central to the project's objectives and who will benefit from the services being developed. The target groups included the long-term unemployed and individuals with partial ability to work, meaning those whose ability to work has been reduced due to illness or disability. Their employment can be supported through tailored services and measures promoting accessibility in the workplace. In addition to the long-term unemployed, the target group also included immigrants who require support with integration and transitioning into the workforce. In addition, the project targeted young people aged 18–29. The target groups were selected to support the main goal of the SILTA project: removing barriers to employment and developing services that promote employment. The selection of target groups took into account their specific needs, such as strengthening job-seeking skills for the long-term unemployed and reducing employment barriers for individuals with partial ability to work. The information collected through the survey enables the piloting of tailored services, such as practical coaching, language support for immigrants, and solutions to support the employment of individuals with partial work ability.

3. DESIGNING THE SURVEY

The designing of the survey began with defining both partial and main objectives, such as understanding the underlying factors of unemployment and participation in services that promote employment. The questions were formulated to be both concrete and measurable. These questions provide answers to topics related to the need for skill development, issues concerning work ability, and actions taken during periods of unemployment, among others. The questions were clearly formulated and easily understandable for all target groups, with terminology used by different authorities taken into account in all language versions. The survey started with more general questions and moved on to more specific, theme-focused questions related to employment and skills development. The survey used multiple-choice questions, Likert scales (e.g. 1–5), and open-ended questions in cases where qualitative data was deemed necessary.

The survey was conducted in compliance with data protection legislation, and the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in particular. Personal data was processed only to the extent necessary and solely for the purposes of the survey. Respondent anonymity was maintained throughout all stages, with all personal information anonymised prior to analysis. The survey was primarily conducted electronically using the Webropol platform, which complies with GDPR requirements and ensures the secure handling of data. All stored data was handled confidentially. The respondents' rights to data protection were upheld, and all data processing methods used in the survey were clearly outlined in the city's privacy policy statement.

We tested the survey with a small group of participants from the summer 2024 Cultural Camp activities to ensure the clarity of the questions and the technical functionality. The Cultural Camp was intended for young immigrants, aiming to help them familiarise themselves with Finnish society, gain insights into employment in Finland, and support their integration. The attendees were young people participating in basic education at Alma and vocational education at Vamia. At the end of the camp, participants were asked to complete a Webropol survey to capture their experiences and insights from the camp. Based on the results, the camp seemed to be very useful for many participants, particularly in terms of getting to know Finnish work life and society. The survey conducted among Cultural Camp participants explored the respondents' areas of expertise, strengths, and special skills, as well as the topics where they require more information or guidance. Additionally, the survey assessed the need for so-called card trainings, such as the Hygiene Passport and Occupational Safety Card, and provided guidance on how to obtain them. Group guidance also provided information on card trainings, apprenticeship training, wage subsidy, as well as training and work trial opportunities. In addition, individual guidance was provided as needed for job searching, mapping personal skills, and creating CVs and cover letters.



4. CARRYING OUT THE SURVEY

The survey aimed at individual clients was carried out from the perspective of exploring the views of unemployed job seekers on the effectiveness and usefulness of current services. With the TE25 reform, employment services will be the responsibility of municipalities in the future, making the development of these services increasingly important. The target groups of the SILTA project are immigrants, young people, individuals with partial ability to work, and individuals outside the labour market. Consequently, the survey was also directed at these groups.

The survey was conducted using an online form on the Webropol platform, which enabled online distribution and easy access for clients through a QR code. A paper version of the form was offered to clients who found completing the online form challenging. For respondents with an immigrant background, the need to go through the survey in more detail was identified, as it contained specific employment-related terms. The majority of respondents completed the survey online, with many using their own smartphones. Respondents with an immigrant background who completed the online form were able to translate it into their own language using various translation apps, such as Google Translate.

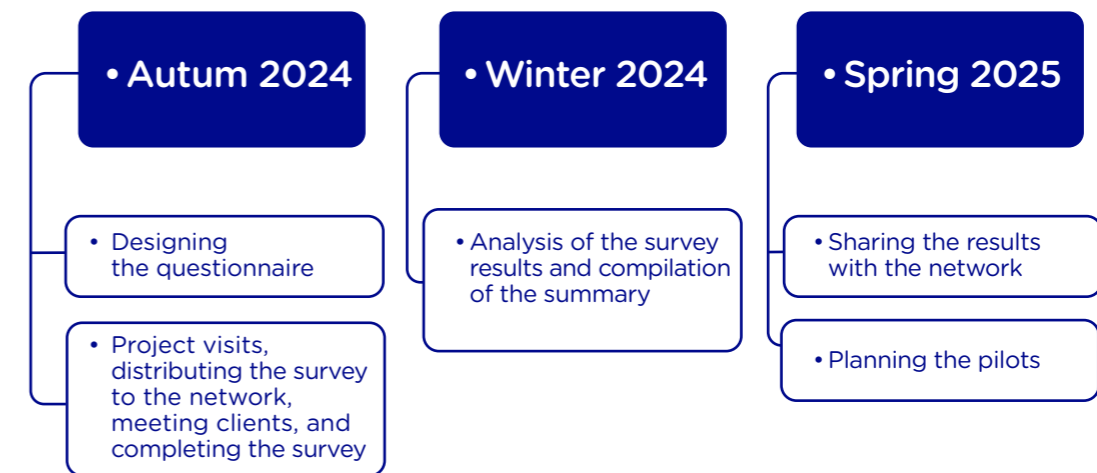
In practice, the survey was carried out through visits to various units where clients from the target group were involved in work activities. Project staff visited units organising rehabilitative work activities, such as Bestis and

the Vaasa Red Cross charity shop. In addition, the survey was completed with immigrant-background students from two Silta courses at Alma Adult Education Centre. Young respondents were reached through the Kartturi workshop and other units providing rehabilitative work activities. Project staff also visited organisations, such as Finland Kalyna ry, where people of Ukrainian background took part in the survey. The survey and project were also presented at Koulutuspalvelut Saarenpää Oy, which offers training services, where immigrant-background clients participated in completing the survey. In addition to the visits, the survey was distributed to the project network for further dissemination and to gather additional responses.

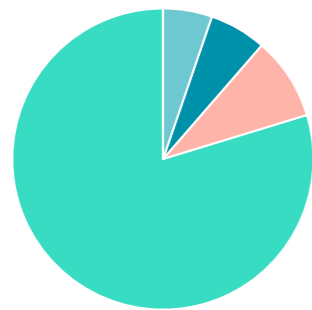
The survey was used to gather information on the respondents' nationality, language skills, age, and domicile, as well as the duration of unemployment, professional qualifications, and educational and work experience. Respondents could also volunteer information regarding any challenges related to their health and work ability, as well as the services they have been referred to. We also wanted to explore their awareness of existing services and how they had been referred to these services. At the end of the survey, respondents were able to share any thoughts in an open-ended question, should they have had any. The questionnaire was available in Finnish, Swedish, and English. The survey could be completed anonymously, meaning individual respondents could not be identified based on their answers. At the end of the form, there was an option to provide contact details for those who wished to participate in courses and pilots carried out as part of the project in the future.

The questionnaire used for the survey contained a total of 26 questions, including a few open-ended questions and multiple-choice options. The questions were designed to be as simple as possible to ensure they were easy to understand. When designing the questionnaire, we realised that completing it would likely take some time, and despite efforts to simplify it, support would probably be needed to fill it out. This led to the decision to

present the survey during the project visits and complete it together with the respondents. Respondents were first introduced to the project and its activities, after which they filled in the questionnaire with support from the project staff.



5. KEY FINDINGS AND OBSERVATIONS AS WELL AS DEVELOPMENT SUGGESTIONS

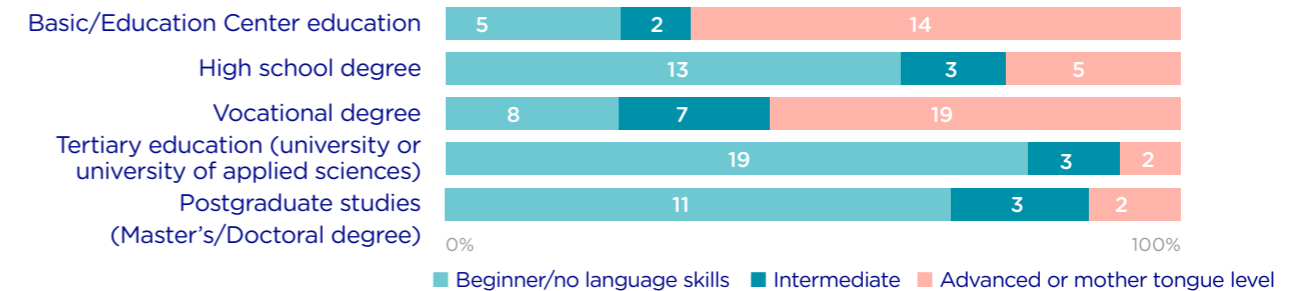


Respondents place of residence

- Vaasa: 96,81%
- Kristiinankaupunki: 6,5%
- Other (e.g. Mustasaari, Närpiö, Laihia): 7,6%
- Vöyri: 10,8%

The survey aimed at job seekers received 121 responses, of which 47% were women and 52% were men. The majority of respondents (80%) were from Vaasa, but a few responses were also received from Kristiinankaupunki, Närpiö, Mustasaari, and Vöyri. Of the respondents, 44% were Finnish citizens, while 40% held a temporary residence permit. 12% of the respondents had a permanent residence permit, while 10% were study-based immigrants. 3% of the respondents had refugee status. In the question regarding nationality, it is important to note that some respondents were uncertain about their own status, meaning their actual status may differ from what they indicated in their response.

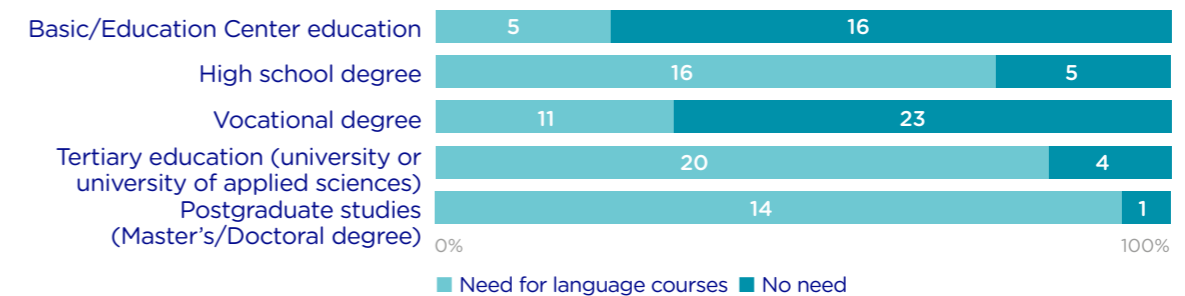
Finnish language proficiency by educational background



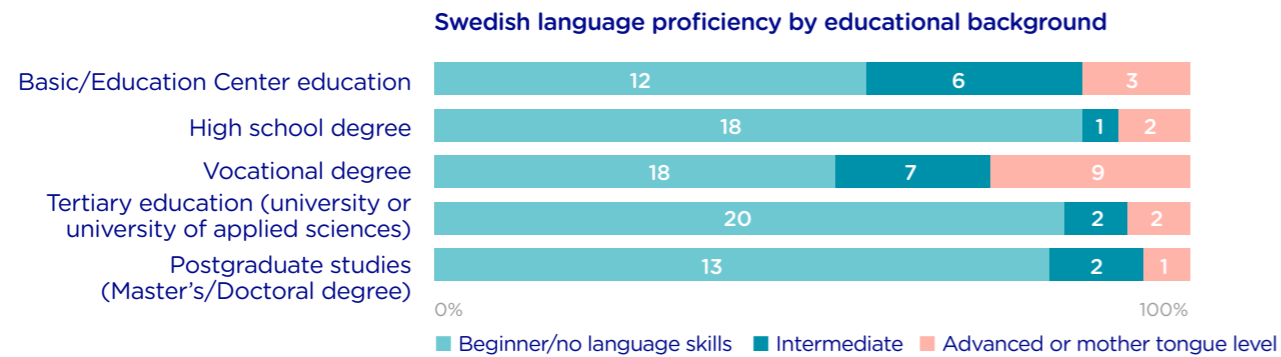
The questions related to language skills reveal that higher levels of education are associated with weaker proficiency in Finland's national languages. The majority of highly educated respondents to the survey were of immigrant background. Challenges posed by a high level of education and insufficient proficiency in Finland's national languages were clearly reflected in the open-ended responses. In the open-ended responses, respondents emphasised that finding employment without sufficient proficiency in Finnish is challenging. Some respondents highlighted that they are willing to do virtually any job in order to improve their language skills to meet the demands of the Finnish labour market. In addition, the waiting times for language courses are long, which makes the improvement of language skills feel slow. Respondents also identified language skills and the scarcity of job vacancies as the most significant challenges related to work ability. Many respondents felt that it is difficult to find a job in Vaasa without the necessary language skills, and that English alone is sufficient for very few positions. In addition to language skills, the open-ended responses highlighted that respondents generally wanted more information about available job opportunities.

20% of the respondents held a tertiary education degree, and 13% had completed postgraduate studies (master's or doctoral studies). Poor proficiency in Finnish is a significant barrier to the employment of highly educated immigrants in jobs that match their qualifications. The studies of many international students in English-language programmes at universities and higher education institutions do not sufficiently support learning Finnish, which makes it difficult for them to transition into the Finnish labour market after graduation. English-language programmes and international work environments can reduce students' motivation to learn Finnish, as they can manage with just their proficiency in English in these settings. However, this limits their opportunities to apply broadly within the Finnish labour market. Furthermore, many employers require strong Finnish language skills even for positions where Finnish is not essential. This puts foreign job seekers at a disadvantage compared to local applicants. The development of language skills is also influenced by the lack of networks and local knowledge, as international students often do not integrate into local professional networks, making it more difficult to find internships and job opportunities. The factors mentioned above increase the barrier to securing a first job, as, without prior Finnish work experience and strong language skills, employers may struggle to assess the competence and suitability of foreign applicants for the workplace.

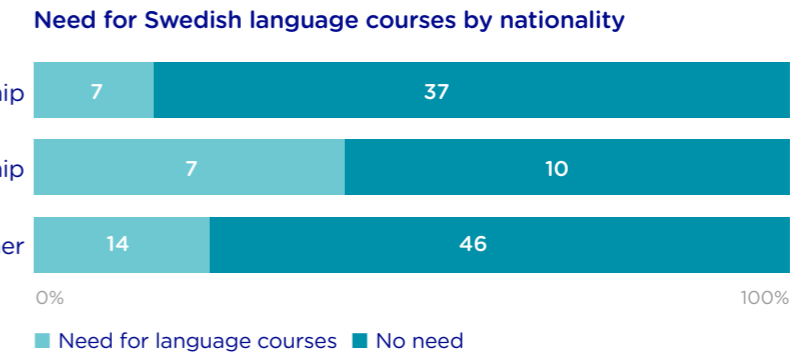
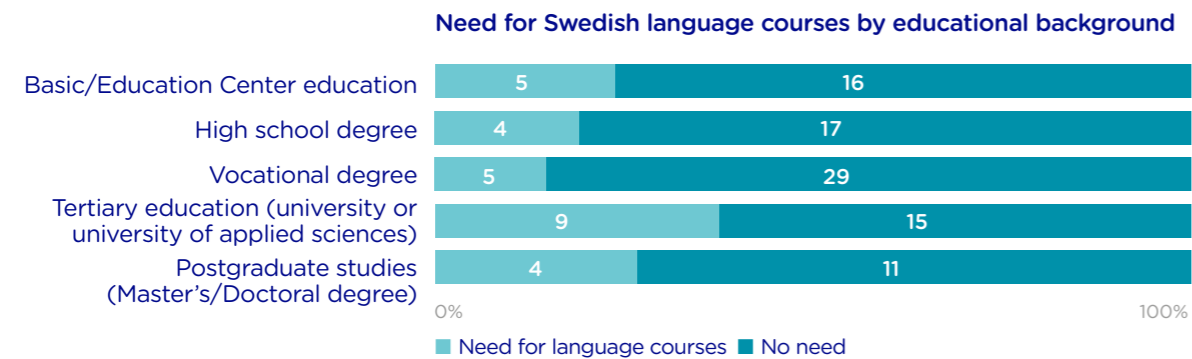
Need for Finnish language courses by educational background



A key solution to improve the situation could be language teaching tailored to the needs of the working life. English-language programmes should integrate Finnish language teaching that focuses on the needs and practices of the workplace. Companies should provide internship opportunities and summer jobs that allow language skills to develop through practical work. Additionally, collaboration with companies on thesis projects can strengthen students' professional networks and expertise. Universities should emphasise the importance of learning Finnish at the very beginning of studies so that students understand the importance of language skills for employment and getting to know the Finnish labour market. It can be said that the first work experience in Finland is often decisive. Employers should consider lowering the barrier to hiring employees who are still learning Finnish, as language skills improve through practical experience. These measures can significantly facilitate the transition of immigrants into jobs that match their education and strengthen their position in the Finnish labour market.



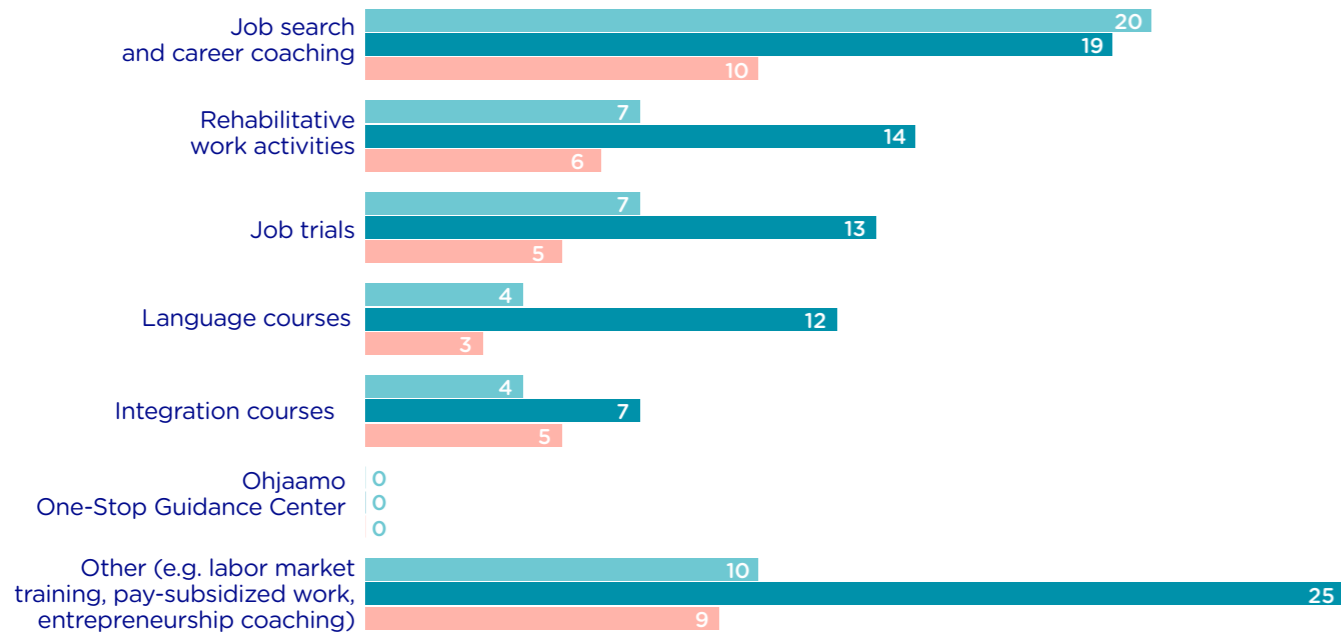
The survey also revealed respondents' willingness to study Swedish, and some immigrants who have settled in the Swedish-speaking areas of Western Finland feel a particular need to strengthen their Swedish language skills to participate in the local labour market.



Poor Swedish language skills particularly hinder the employment of Ukrainian immigrants if they have chosen to settle in the strongly Swedish-speaking coastal region of Ostrobothnia. The survey highlighted the need for effective language education, as the main challenges are insufficient training, high language requirements in the job market, and the slow development of language skills without continuous practice. Immigrants' motivation to study Swedish provides a basis for developing solutions such as work-oriented education, low-threshold jobs for learning the language alongside work, and supporting networking within Swedish-speaking communities. These measures can improve their chances of employment and integration into the local society.

Direction towards services that promote employment

The effect on employment from direction by TE-services towards employment-promoting measures.a

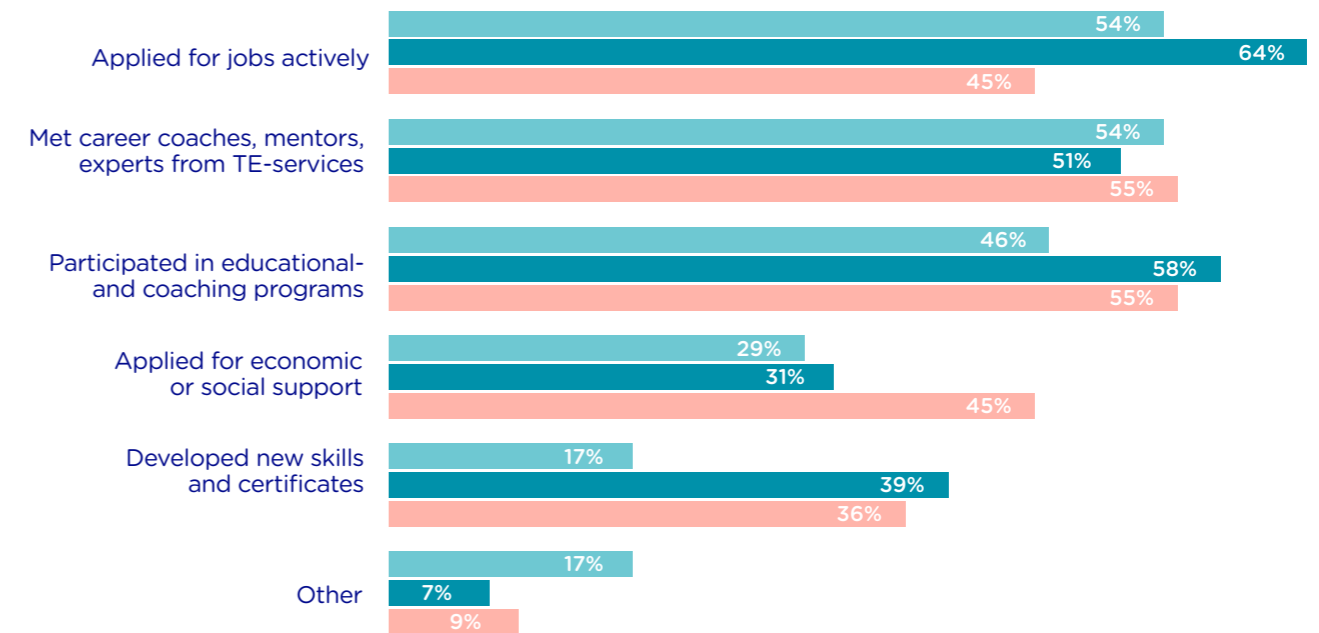


■ Yes, the services led to my employment ■ No, the services did not aid in my employment ■ No data

The most common employment-promoting measures the respondents were guided towards were job search and career coaching. Rehabilitative work activities were unsurprisingly highlighted in the responses, as the survey was completed with clients participating in rehabilitative work activities. Rehabilitative work activities are a social service that the Wellbeing

Services County of Ostrobothnia purchases as an outsourced service from various providers or organizes itself. Participation in language and integration courses was lower, possibly due to some respondents currently waiting for a place in upcoming language courses. A large proportion (38%) of respondents had been unemployed for over 2 years, which is why employment-promoting services focused on rehabilitative work activities as well as job search and career coaching. Those who had been unemployed for a shorter period had also participated in various coaching programmes.

Activities during unemployment by age groups



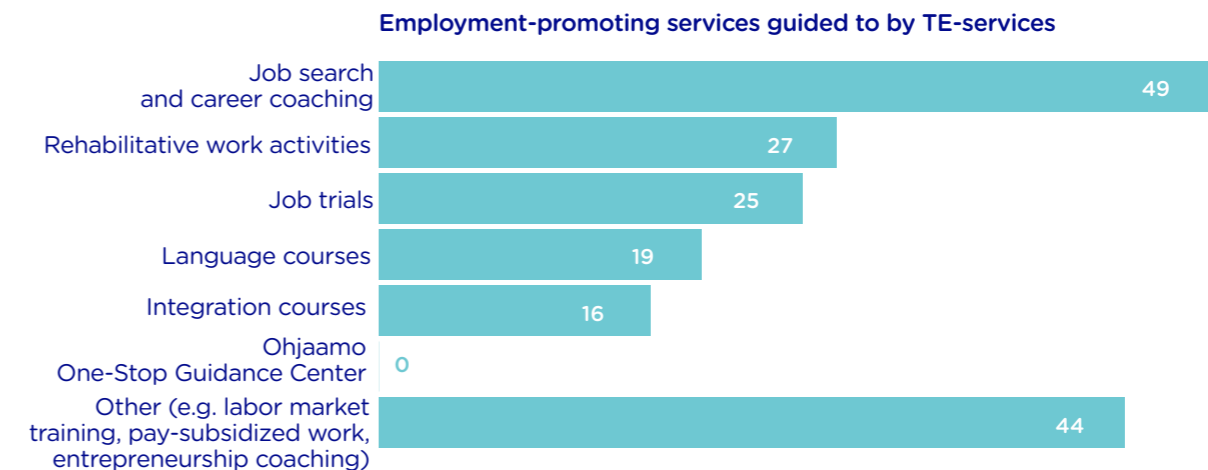
■ Yes, the services led to my employment ■ No, the services did not aid in my employment ■ No data

The questions regarding measures taken during unemployment aimed to identify what actions unemployed individuals in different age groups (18–29, 30–54, and over 55) have taken during their period of unemployment. When examining the results, the main observation is that, in accordance with the Nordic labour service model (Nordic Labour Market Service Model - Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment), job searching has been actively pursued and is the most common measure in all age groups, although it is slightly lower in the older age group (55+). This may be explained by the younger age groups' more active use of digital tools for job searching. Job seekers in all age groups have met with vocational or career counsellors and experts from TE services, thereby utilizing these services.

When comparing the participation of different age groups in various trainings, coaching sessions, and skill development, the 30–54 age group stands out as the most active. This suggests that middle-aged individuals feel the need to develop their skills to meet the demands of the labour market. The middle age group (30–54) emphasises skill development, whereas those under 29 are the least active in participating in activation measures aimed at skill enhancement.

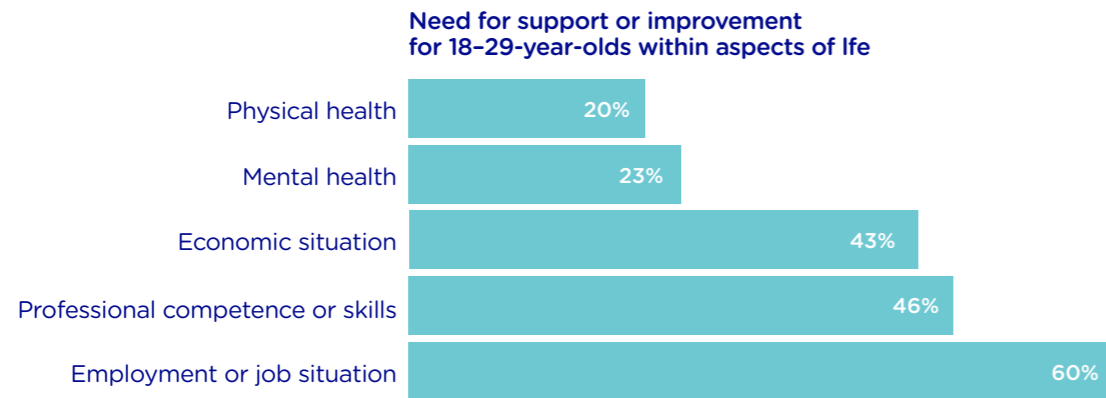
The survey results indicate that none of the respondents under the age of 29 had been guided towards Ohjaamo services. This finding is significant, as Ohjaamo is a low-threshold, multidisciplinary service specifically aimed at young people, offering support in areas such as employment and education. Ohjaamo activities are part of the TE services' own service production, which is why utilising it in counselling young people would be justified and important. Of the survey respondents, 27% were under the age of 29, indicating that a significant portion of young people are excluded from these services. The results clearly highlight the need to develop more systematic guidance models to ensure that young people, particularly those

under 29, are directed to low-threshold services at an early stage. Through these services, young people can, if necessary, be referred to appropriate support services that address their individual needs and enhance their opportunities to integrate into education and working life.

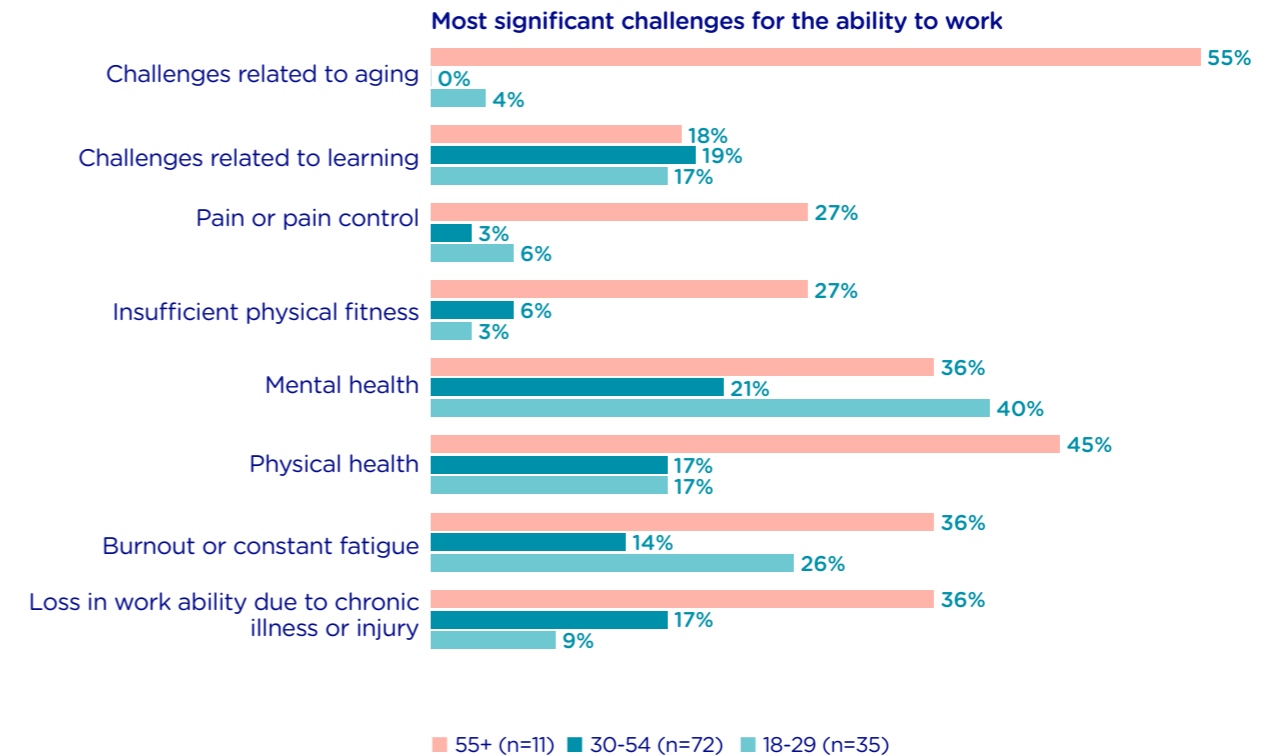


The survey also explored the areas of life in which respondents wished for improvement or support. Among the responses from young people aged 18–29, particular emphasis was placed on needs related to everyday well-being, financial situation, skills development, and employment. These areas are central to the core guidance provided by Ohjaamo services, which aim to offer low-threshold support for young people in managing daily

life, achieving financial stability, and integrating into the labour market. The results indicate that young people require comprehensive support encompassing the development of work readiness, strengthening financial well-being, and promoting everyday well-being. The multidisciplinary solutions offered by Ohjaamo services can help address these challenges, promoting young people's well-being and enhancing their opportunities to engage in education, employment, and society.



Challenges related to work ability

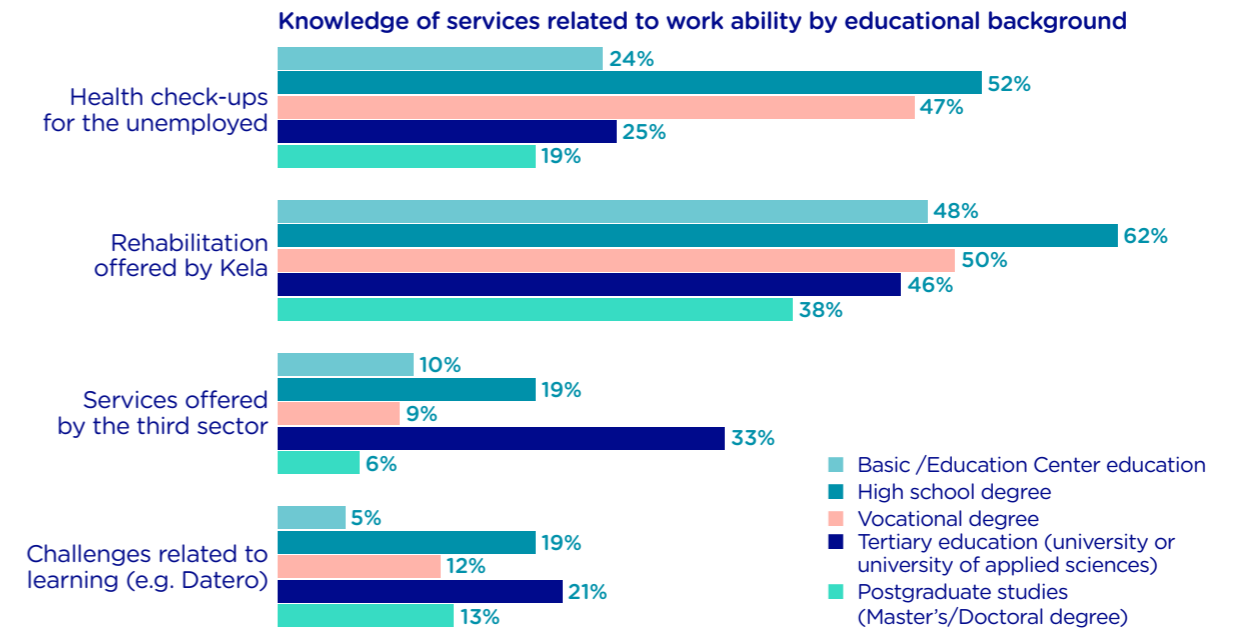


According to previous research, the most significant challenges to the work ability of the unemployed are related to mental health (cf. [Työpoliittinen aikakauskirja 2024:4, Työelämä ja mielenterveys | Finnish Institute of Occupational Health](#)). This survey also highlighted, particularly among older respondents, mental health issues – such as burnout and fatigue – as the most significant challenges affecting work ability, which often intensify as unemployment persists. In addition, long-term unemployment undermines self-esteem and leads to passivity, which makes it more difficult to return to work. Many unemployed individuals may also have untreated health issues, such as chronic illnesses or physical injuries, which limit their ability to take on full-time or physically demanding work. The rapid changes in labour market demands pose challenges, particularly for those whose skills are outdated or no longer align with current needs. For immigrants, language and cultural challenges also impact work ability. Limited language skills and unfamiliarity with Finnish workplace practices can make job searching and succeeding in the workplace more difficult.

Supporting and improving work ability requires low-threshold work trials, working life oriented training, and individualised job search coaching. In addition, access to mental health and healthcare services should be improved to strengthen physical and mental well-being. Guidance for long-term unemployed individuals regarding the statutory health check for the unemployed. ([A health check for the unemployed may promote employment; in Finnish](#)) should be strengthened within the service system. The health check includes an assessment of health status, necessary examinations, and a referral for follow-up care. The service is organised by the well-being services counties.

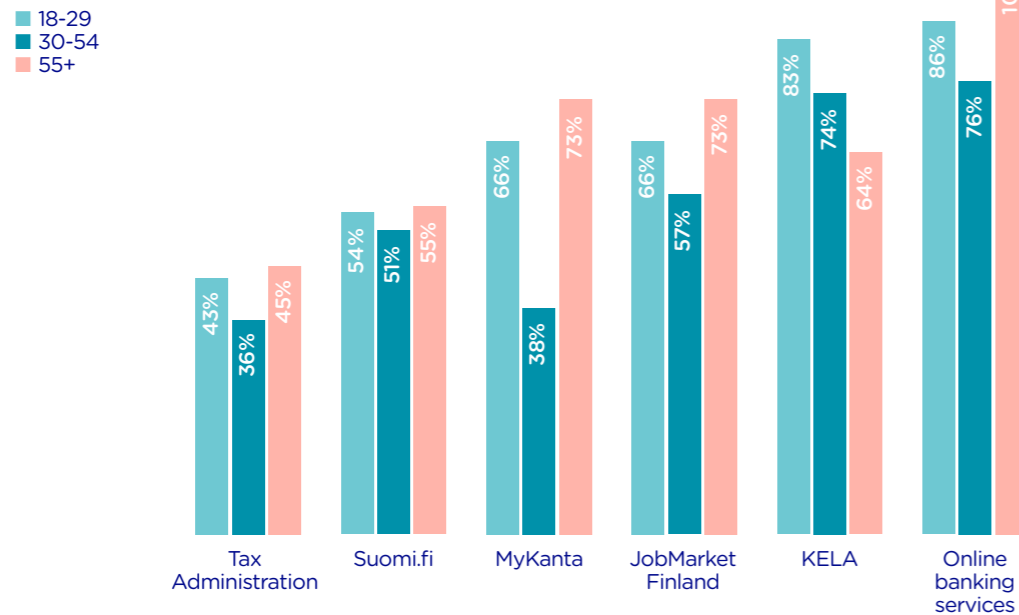
The third sector also supports unemployed job seekers by offering job search coaching, training, and workshops where they can develop work readiness and acquire new skills. Internship and work try-out placements in the third sector provide job seekers with the opportunity to gain work experience and

build self-confidence. Organisations offer community meeting spaces and peer support groups that can help alleviate the loneliness and stress caused by unemployment. Services aimed at immigrants, such as language training and mentoring, assist with integration and understanding Finnish working life. For immigrants, overcoming language and cultural barriers can be supported by offering Finnish or Swedish language training combined with practical work experience. Increasing networking opportunities and peer support is an effective way to help unemployed individuals build connections to the labour market and improve their chances of employment.



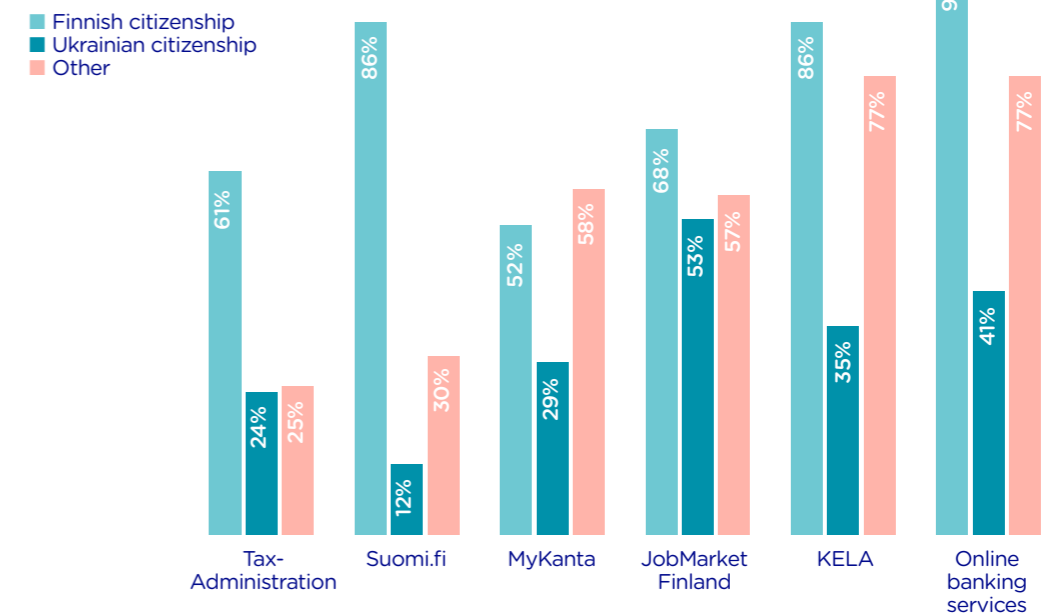
Digital skills

Digital skills by age group



Somewhat surprisingly, the majority of respondents had fairly strong digital skills. They were familiar with public services and had a good grasp of using online banking services. The open-ended responses included a few comments about the lack of online banking credentials, but overall, the respondents had strong digital skills. When comparing nationalities, it was noticeable that individuals of Ukrainian background had slightly lower digital skills. This may be explained by the fact that the type of online public services commonly used in Finland are not available in Ukraine. For

Digital skills by nationality



this reason, using online public services and learning about their content may be more challenging. The limited familiarity with banking services among Ukrainians may also be due to the fact that not everyone has access to online banking credentials. The same consideration regarding digital skills must be made for individuals of other nationalities, in addition to Ukrainians. Finnish public services are predominantly digital and electronic, and are likely very different from those available in their home countries. Consequently, adopting them may be challenging.



Open-ended responses

The survey included several open-ended questions, with the most responses received in the open feedback section at the end. 39% of respondents provided open feedback, while 18% shared their views on skills development and work ability challenges. This indicates that many respondents found the survey meaningful. The number and scope of open responses was a pleasant surprise, as leaving open feedback was entirely voluntary for the respondents. The comments were in several languages, including Finnish, English, and Russian. Many of the open responses highlighted language skills, their lack, and the difficulties in entering Finnish working life to improve them. The responses also highlighted the fact that many respondents are willing to take any job in order to learn more Finnish and get a foot in the door of the labour market. Some of those who responded to the open-ended questions felt that English should be more widely accepted as a working language in Finnish work culture. The language barrier was generally perceived as a significant challenge to employment.

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I am willing to do any kind of job in here Finland and hope to improve my skills and knowledge by doing a vocational training and improving my language skills.

For now, I am eager to learn the Finnish language and I am patiently waiting for my slot in the TE service. But, at the same time I am also applying for part time jobs while waiting for my language.

I really need to study the language so that I can communicate well not only in workplace but with the Finnish people.

In addition to language skills, the open responses highlighted the need for more information about available job openings and the long waiting lists for language courses. A large portion of respondents were currently job hunting on the open labour market and waiting for a place in language training. The open-ended questions also highlighted a desire for low-threshold language skills support services, as the waiting times for language courses can be quite long. Applying for jobs and the need for more information about available job openings were also highlighted in the responses. Some respondents felt that there is not enough information available about job openings and job application processes. This may also indicate that the respondents lack strong employment networks, which help in finding hidden job opportunities and positions that are not publicly advertised. Building networks is crucial in today's job search and employment process, as many job opportunities may not be publicly advertised. On the other hand, those who had applied for jobs reported not receiving responses for the positions they had applied for.

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I would really like help with learning Finnish, such as additional Finnish language courses, because the courses we receive from the Migri center are not professional and are only 4 hours a week.

It's just the language barrier. I would appreciate, if I could be trained in the Finnish language course.

Limited opportunities to provide courses for learning Finnish, as this reduces the chances of finding a job. Lack of information about integration courses. No information on where to look for a job (websites, materials) or leave a resume for vacancies.

I have applied for different jobs but couldn't get the jobs up to now due to language barriers. Please give me language class anyhow for my survival.

In addition to language skills and available job openings, the open responses also highlighted the general challenges of employment. The open responses highlighted challenges related to work ability, including personal coping skills, difficulties in the workplace caused by ADHD, and the demands of working in today's world. Some respondents feel that today's working life is exhausting and overly demanding, which negatively affects their ability to cope in the workplace. In addition, the open responses expressed a desire for job opportunities, even for those who have not yet accumulated much previous work experience.

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As a highly sensitive person, it would be nice if there were support tailored to help with employment for someone like me. I believe the most important thing for a highly sensitive person is to find the right kind of work environment and tasks that do not overwhelm with excessive stimulation from noise, job demands, or constant human contact, but still provide a sense of purpose, so the work doesn't feel too superficial.

It would just be nice to enter working life. It feels as though companies don't hire if you don't have previous work experience, except from school.

They are scrutinising job seekers for flaws but don't understand that the biggest flaw is with the workplaces. Management is a demanding task, and it is done very poorly in many workplaces. I want the Finnish society to have that are suitable for humans, where the tasks are designed to be suitable for human beings. By this, I mean breaks, working hours, social facilities, and sufficient job variety, for example.



6. UTILISATION OF THE RESULTS AND FOLLOW-UP ACTIONS

The data collected through the survey will be used as a tool in the pilots planned within the project. Services are planned particularly in collaboration with the Ostrobothnia Employment Area and the municipal integration services. The needs highlighted in the survey are particularly related to language training for immigrants, as well as low-threshold guidance and coaching services. The waiting lists for language courses are long, which creates a need for individual or group guidance on topics related to job search and employment. Based on the survey and collaboration with integration services, the project will pilot coaching targeted at immigrants, as there is clearly a need to develop language skills and workplace competencies. With the upcoming legal changes, it will be increasingly important to invest in services that guide individuals into the labour market, which such coaching can provide. The project will also pilot the organisation of various certificate (or card) training courses, as well as the development of new operational models and service pathways. Partners within the collaboration network and stakeholders will also be able to use the survey as a tool for their own development actions.

The project plans to organise pilots in a way that ensures, after its completion, they will be integrated into the existing service structures. Continuing best practices after the project is important, which is why

new services will be developed with the perspective that they remain sustainable even after the project ends. The project partners will also develop service guidance models that can make use of the results obtained from the survey.

The survey results will be shared electronically with the collaboration network and stakeholders, including the SILTA-Café network, the Ostrobothnia Employment Area, and other project partners, such as various educational organisations and representatives of the business sector. The results provide information on the effectiveness of services and customer-oriented needs, and can be used within the collaboration network for service development and piloting new operational models. The survey results will be presented in a compiled and anonymised format to ensure the privacy and anonymity of individual respondents. The sharing of information enables close collaboration between stakeholders, supports the more precise targeting of services to meet customer needs, and increases the effectiveness of the region's employment services. The active participation of the collaborative network and stakeholders ensures that the development work is comprehensive and addresses the region's employment challenges. The survey results are freely accessible at vaasa.fi/en/bridge

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BRON**

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vaasa.fi/en/bridge

ATTACHMENTS:

- Sample survey forms

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SILTA-Työllisyyden yhdyssilta Pohjanmaa -
BRON-Sysselsättningens kontaktbro i Österbotten