

COURT DEVELOPMENT PLAN

2024–2030

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Mission

The court works to defend people and ensure stability and the rule of law.

Values

Expertise: professionalism, keeping up with the times, constantly developing professional knowledge and skills, valuing commitment and working efficiently and smartly.

Reliability: valuing people and teams, treating people with respect, communicating with the public in a fair and clear manner.

Independence: impartiality and respect for law and conscience.

Vision and main development targets for 2030

A human-centred and technologically advanced court that delivers fair, efficient and transparent justice.

Delivering on this vision is based on:

- 1) **A human-centred approach.** Behind every case is a person and their concern; the court responds to the expectations and needs of all members of society.
- 2) **Quick and quality administration of justice.** Justice is administered in a reasonable time; there is a balance between the quality and speed of the administration of justice.
- 3) **Foreseeable and consistent judicial proceedings.** Judicial proceedings that consistently apply best practices ensure consistency of case law and reduce legal uncertainty.
- 4) **Digital solutions.** Fast and efficient proceedings are supported by user-friendly digital solutions.
- 5) **Capacity as an employer.** The court is an attractive and supportive employer, offering its employees the conditions they need for professional development and satisfaction.
- 6) **Openness of the organisation.** The court is open to change and innovation and acts in a socially responsible manner.
- 7) **Unity and coherence of the judiciary.** The judiciary is a whole; the relationships between its parts are cooperative and follow a shared vision.

Main activities

Organisation of the administration of justice, management and administration of the court. The goal is to create a judicial organisation that is responsibly managed and ensures the effective and quality administration of justice. This includes bringing the administration of courts into the area of responsibility of the judiciary itself, ensuring court administration services of a uniformly high quality as well as specialisation and an equal workload. Systematic monitoring of the quality of the administration of justice and support for the development opportunities of judges and staff are also provided.

Effective judicial proceedings. The goal is to provide society with a fast, accessible and professional judicial service that focuses on the administration of justice and offers society legal stability and security. In order to achieve this, it is planned to simplify and streamline court procedures, encourage the use of conciliation and arbitration and make procedural law more understandable. In addition, the focus will be on speeding up the proceedings and reducing litigation by removing from the jurisdiction of the courts cases that can be resolved elsewhere and reducing the unnecessary extra tasks of courts.

Human resources policy. The goal is to create a cohesive, competent and well-functioning team that can adapt to change and ensure quality and effective administration of justice. Achieving a strong organisational culture and sense of belonging is based on ethical leadership, which is in turn based on values. This will be achieved by ensuring a coherent HR policy that supports the professional development of staff and promotes a feedback culture and lifelong learning. The court will be transformed into an attractive employer, where the recruitment of young people and the development of judges are systematically supported and employees are offered a modern and safe working environment.

Digitisation. The goal is to achieve fully digital and more efficient judicial proceedings using artificial intelligence and automation. Artificial intelligence helps optimise work processes, improve the quality of documents and simplify court proceedings for the parties. Actions include the introduction of new information systems, automation of processes and training of staff in digital skills.

Communication. The goal is to be open and trustworthy, improving the reputation of the court and contributing to the growth of legal awareness. Actions include an active media presence, including social media, raising the awareness of journalists and young people, and clear and open internal communication. The protection of personal data and access to court proceedings will also be ensured to increase public understanding and trust in the court.

ORGANISATION OF THE ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE, MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION OF THE COURT

Goal

The court and its three instances and three branches are a responsibly managed comprehensive modern organisation that performs its tasks efficiently and to a high standard.

Sub-goals:

- 1) The judiciary itself is responsible for the management and administration of the courts.
- 2) A court administration service of consistently high quality is guaranteed for all courts.
- 3) The court network is optimal for ensuring an equal workload and, in particular, procedural efficiency and high quality through specialisation in the administration of justice.
- 4) The court is reasonably accessible to everyone. In each of the main centres, which is usually the county centre, there is a courthouse or a room where a hearing can be held and where anyone can lodge documents and obtain the information and support they need to address the court.
- 5) In the process of drawing up the state budget, the courts of first and second instance as a whole are seen as a constitutional institution.
- 6) The salary fund of the courts is budgeted using an indexation mechanism based on a fixed formula; the salary fund for vacant posts of judges can also be used for other salary costs of the courts in the same or the following financial year.
- 7) Judges are paid the salary stipulated by law, which is sufficient to guarantee the independence of judges and related to the salary of a member of the Riigikogu and the Government of the Republic; judges are paid additional remuneration for the performance of additional duties.
- 8) In the interests of a uniform high standard of administration of justice and ensuring the best professional development opportunities for judges, attention is systematically given to the quality of the work of judges.

Measures

- We will develop the courts into an organisation that ensures a consistently equal workload of high quality and promotes specialisation. We will consider various options to ensure the consistent and uniform quality of the administration of justice across Estonia, including the nationwide distribution of cases, the strengthening of specialised networks of experts, the merging of judicial bodies, the creation of a reserve of judges (temporary judges), etc.
- We will create a Judicial Administration Council and a subordinate Judicial Administration Service to manage the judicial bodies; once the new model of judicial administration is up and running effectively, we will transfer the tasks related to servicing the self-governing bodies of judges and their work to the Judicial Administration Service.
- We will design a court management model where the establishment of a work division plan, the formation of court departments and the division of judges into departments will be decided by the presidency leading the court institution, whose members include, among others, the judge(s) elected by the general assembly of the court.

- We will strengthen the role of the general assembly of the court in setting the court's development directions and taking positions and giving opinions on general issues.
- We foresee the division of the courts of first instance into departments of an appropriate size for efficient functioning, taking into account the need for specialisation, the work of which will be organised by a judge, who is subordinate to the president of the court in the performance of the management duties.
- We envisage the establishment of a work division plan for judges in such a manner that ensures targeted and efficient specialisation and an equal workload, in particular for certain types of cases, which will be distributed to all judges to equalise the workload. We will develop a policy of regular but smooth redeployment of specialisations to ensure full development opportunities for judges and judicial staff.
- We base our budgeting for courts on the actual workload and capacity of the previous period and the foreseeable changes for the financial year, with the judicial system being responsible for its own budgeting and management within the limits of the national budget.
- We will set up a system to assess the quality of the work of judges.

Goal

The administration of justice is professional, accessible and swift to ensure legal stability and certainty for society. The court focuses on its main task: the administration of justice. Each type of case has its own procedural rules according to its nature and its importance for society, including the appeal procedure.

Sub-goals:

- 1) High-quality judicial proceedings.
- 2) A smaller number of court disputes, including avoidance of ill-considered (unnecessary) recourse to the courts, the repetition of disputes of the same nature and unjustified additional tasks of the courts.
- 3) Swift, predictable, cost-effective court proceedings that respect the interests of the parties.
- 4) Conciliation proceedings before court proceedings and arbitration proceedings are encouraged.
- 5) Procedural law is more understandable.
- 6) People guaranteed better support in litigation.

Measures

- We will remove from the jurisdiction of the courts cases that are better dealt with out of court, e.g. in administrative proceedings.
- In order to speed up court proceedings: we will provide simplified proceedings in cases where going through the full proceedings is not practical; we will make proceedings more predictable by providing for the preparation of a case plan where necessary, including the coordination of the expected course of proceedings with the parties to the proceedings as far as possible.
- We will communicate proactively with parties, explain the procedure in a human way and shape their expectations.
- We will write procedural orders, letters and court decisions in an understandable way.
- We will harmonise the types of court proceedings, eliminating unjustified differences, e.g. in appeal procedures and time limits.
- We will improve the quality of compliance with the duty to explain.
- In administrative cases, we will shorten the proceedings in public procurement cases by one dispute resolution step; create a set of rules for correcting errors in administrative acts and a fast-track procedure for the annulment of clearly erroneous administrative acts; speed up the resolution of renewable energy disputes; and facilitate the resolution of pilot cases, including on the basis of the Chancellor of Justice's right of protest.
- In criminal proceedings, we will reduce bureaucratic obstacles that prolong the time taken to hear cases; speed up decisions on pre-trial authorisations; change the rules on the allocation of cases so as to streamline the workload of judges; and limit the need for judges to withdraw from the substantive hearing of cases.

- In civil proceedings, we will support the efficient organisation of the work of the courts through the continuous development of the Code, with particular emphasis on specialisation, standardised resolution of simpler cases and the facilitation of teamwork; and remove unjustified obstacles to the reasonable organisation of work.

Goal

Developing a cohesive, capable, well-functioning and adaptable team to ensure quality and efficient administration of justice. An effective HR policy creates a strong organisational culture and a sense of belonging. This requires ethical leadership that is based on values, and the development and cooperation of the people working in the courts.

Sub-goals:

- 1) Our people carry the court's values – they are competent and committed, value lifelong learning and development, and work together beyond the call of duty.
- 2) Our people are well managed – the judicial system is managed in a progressive, smart and inspiring way at every level.
- 3) Our people are part of a modern organisation that is a good and safe workplace – we have smart work processes and efficient and flexible working arrangements that support people doing high-quality work.

Measures

- We will agree on a common human resources policy and take it into account in our budgeting.
- We will create a supportive environment around the people working in the courts to unlock their potential as professionals and increase job satisfaction.
- We will adopt a culture of constructive feedback, in which regular collaborative discussions will play an important role.
- We will adopt a progressive mindset, valuing lifelong learning, sharing know-how and learning new skills.
- We will consciously develop the image of the judicial system as a competitive employer.
- We will systematically recruit young people as successors to the judicial system, including through paid traineeships or scholarships.
- We will clearly and meaningfully explain the path to becoming a judge, from the curriculum of law and the judge selection process to the mentoring and evaluation of beginner judges in their first three years.
- In the selection and development of judges, we will follow a model of the prerequisites and competences needed to be a judge.
- We will support recruiters and development supporters to achieve excellence.
- We will support the development of high-potential advocates to become judges with a well-functioning succession scheme, including the possibility of training in other judicial institutions.
- We will design a consistently excellent, cohesive and flexible induction programme for new judges, taking into account their individual needs and preferred learning path.
- We will ensure high-quality training opportunities. We will organise more interactive training, including round tables and colleague-to-colleague training.

- In order to motivate judges and promote their professional development, we encourage internships in higher courts, other public authorities, public universities or international institutions.
- Judges receive appropriate feedback to their work, their development is supported and, where necessary, an individual programme of training and other development activities is drawn up for the judge.
- We will make a legislative proposal to increase the social guarantees of judges and clarify the restrictions on their activities.
- Managing people is the responsibility of every manager. Changes that concern human resources and the organisation of work are professionally managed, targeted and clearly communicated.
- We value the management of structural units, chairing working groups, round tables, etc.
- We clearly define the functions and expectations of managers. In the selection and development of managers, we will follow a model of the prerequisites and competences needed to be a manager and support their development according to their personal needs.
- The judicial system is aware of its responsibility to ensure the quality of the administration of justice. The principles of supervision and disciplinary proceedings are clear and targeted.
- The working environment is environmentally friendly and the tools are modern and appropriate to the nature of the work.
- When developing the organisation of work, we will make maximum use of the benefits of specialisation and teamwork.
- We will describe the tasks, service standards and competences of the main positions in order to raise and harmonise the quality of services, design the efficient organisation of work, an equal workload and remuneration that value the position as well as a motivating career development system. We will distinguish between the position and remuneration of a consultant, advocate general and senior advocate general.
- We will proceed from practicality and staff motivation when organising the work of the procedural groups.
- We will ensure flexible working conditions, including remote work to the extent that it does not hamper teamwork or the cohesion of the judicial system.
- We will support the readiness of the people working in courts to embrace new IT and work organisation solutions.

Goal

Court proceedings will become paperless.

The technology used by the court supports the achievement of the court's substantive objectives and prevents the transmission and creation of unnecessary data. Procedural information is concise and clear.

The court has a role for smartly ordering its information systems.

Sub-goals:

- 1) Information systems and digital solutions make it possible to conduct more efficient, including faster and smoother proceedings, and reduce the number of typical errors.
- 2) The introduction of artificial intelligence and the automation of proceedings will replace existing technical workflows (e.g. translation, identification of parties to proceedings), which in turn will make it possible to redesign the work of the staff.
- 3) The introduction of artificial intelligence and the automation of proceedings will make it possible to reorganise the work of the judge and the advocate general in such a manner that the work of the advocate general will become more creative and the proportion of work involving independent decision-making competence will increase.
- 4) The introduction of artificial intelligence provides the judge and the advocate general with an important tool to navigate and draw conclusions from the law, background information (legal literature, case law), procedural documents and evidence.
- 5) Proceedings are viewed as a whole. The parties to proceedings will receive an application that can assess, based on previous case law, the prospects for the success of litigation and the amount of time and money needed, so they can make an informed decision on whether to go to the court.
- 6) Information systems make it easier for people to go to court in typical proceedings while ensuring the substantive quality of this.

Measures

Stage I (can be done with existing technology)

- Launch an essentially new stage of digitisation of courts to automate and deploy artificial intelligence. Identify sections of work where artificial intelligence and automation could be applied. We will set a schedule and provide the necessary resources to follow it.
- Introduce either artificial intelligence or automation, depending on the possibilities, in the technical workflows of the Payment Orders Department, Land Registry and Registration Department.
- Gradually make the communication between the court and the parties to proceedings fully digital.
- Introduce a new court information system, replacing the current document-based proceedings with data-based proceedings. Ensure that data are not entered repeatedly.

- In simpler proceedings, switch to forms filled in the information system (e.g. maintenance claim). The information system will facilitate their submission via questions. Artificial intelligence and automation will help prepare actions and complaints.
- Based on the data entered, the information system generates the main templates of rulings and other procedural documents as well as the more typical procedural documents as a whole.
- Make approval and signing procedures faster.
- Hearings can be recorded on video, if necessary. AI prepares the transcripts of hearings and, on the basis of the transcripts, records/summaries of the facts relevant to the dispute.
- Translation is based on AI or translation software and only edited by a human, if necessary.
- Create a system that makes it possible to identify repetitions in texts and avoid duplication of evidence in files.
- Identification of persons in remote interviews and video hearings is carried out using digital solutions, similar to notaries.
- AI takes over communication with people in solving their everyday, simpler requests, but people must be able to communicate with a human if they wish.
- AI divides cases more precisely than before, taking into account workload, specialisation, proximity to home, etc.
- AI/automation makes it possible to determine the price and state fees of an action and assess the monetary amount of claims, the need for procedural assistance and support for the allocation and determination of the costs of the proceedings.
- AI/automation cleanses rulings of personal and other data whose disclosure would harm the interests of the parties to the proceedings (e.g. disclosure of the file to the press).
- Provide staff with ongoing training in the digital skills they need to do their job.

Stage II

- In the pre-trial proceedings of simpler cases, AI will organise the exchange of documents and the initial review of applications.
- Interpretation is based on AI.
- AI supports the management of proceedings and keeps an eye on all the ongoing proceedings of a judge, reminding them at the right time what needs to be done and, where necessary, carrying out simpler standardised operations itself.
- AI helps analyse evidence.
- AI analyses and summarises large procedural documents, thereby helping to identify the facts the parties are disputing.
- AI identifies deepfakes and highlights inconsistencies.
- AI analyses case law on the basis of data from legislation, case law and legal literature databases (Estonian, EU law). Based on the knowledge gained, AI will prepare a draft settlement (especially formula-based settlements, such as maintenance, default interest, price reduction), leaving the judge the option to correct the settlement and develop the practice further and the obligation to check the compliance of the draft with the legislation and case law.

- AI offers the parties the option to settle the dispute out of court on an online platform.
- The data of court proceedings can be used to develop AI in a way that ensures the protection of personal data.

Pending the completion of major projects, the existing court information system will be actively upgraded, eliminating its shortcomings and improving user-friendliness.

Goal

The purpose of the court's communication is to be open, clear and visible. Effective communication builds understanding and trust in the court, helps maintain the authority of the administration of justice and improves the court's reputation.

Sub-goals:

- 1) The trust in the court is still high and growing.
- 2) The court is visible, with a clear message and for the people.
- 3) The court values public administration of justice while ensuring the protection of personal data.
- 4) The court contributes to increasing the legal awareness of journalists and the public, including young people.
- 5) As a highly valued employer, the court understands the role of strong internal communication.

Measures

- We will explain the course of proceedings in cases of public interest.
- We will make proposals to journalists to cover important civil and administrative cases.
- We will continue busting major myths about the administration of justice.
- We will rethink the choice of channels based on the target group we want to address with our messages.
- Judges are ready to explain judgments to the public. We have an agreed organisation of work regarding who explains the judgments if the judges who processed the case do not do so.
- We train people who speak on behalf of the court.
- We are active in the media and visible through our own programmes, podcast or blog.
- We are active and visible on social media.
- We will allow public access to hearings, including video hearings, and, where possible, organise webcasts of hearings and the deliveries of judgments.
- In compliance with data protection rules, we will provide journalists with access to court rulings and case materials, including a clear and transjudicial understanding of the presentation of a file, including a digital file.
- We will share the principles of court proceedings and the rule of law with the press and the public: we will organise round tables and meetings and publish introductory and explanatory materials.
- We will raise the awareness of young people: we will invite schools to observe hearings, organise events for young people, participate in fairs, visit schools and universities, organise internship and case competitions, cooperate with student organisations, and encourage judges to teach classes in schools.
- We will ensure consistent, open, fair and effective internal communication in all courts, where the keywords are 'people-centred' and 'our people'.
- We will support the public image of the court as an employer with the necessary messages.