

# **New trends in widening participation to learning**

## **Latvia**

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## **0. Generally: Adult education in Latvia**

*Adult education* –a multi- dimensional education process of persons, which, ensures the development of individual and his or her ability to complete in the labour market during the course of the lifetime of the person.

For the first time the term “ adult education” was used in the amendments of the Education Law in 1995. Amendments defined the responsibility of district municipality to organize adult education. There was no definition of adult education in Education Law. Since then almost every municipality has Adult Education Center.

Adults were mentioned as education target group in the new Education Law adopted in 1998. The definition of adult education was stated as well.

It was stated in the Education Law that Adult Education programmes are classified as specific types of educational programmes, the content of adult programmes, the procedure of their elaboration and implementation, the standards of adult education, financing and other items are regulated by Adult Education Law.

Later it was decided that taking in mind the idea of life long learning it is not necessary to pass the law on Adult Education.

Actually Law on Education, Professional Education Law, General Education Law and Law on Institutions of Higher Education regulate some aspects of adult education.

Ministry of Education and Science is responsible for development of adult education. During the second half of year 2002 a certain progress has achieved as related to legislative aspects of adult education and the Law on Education was supplemented with article on non-formal adult education, describing definition, implementation, licensing and legal sources of financing of non-formal adult education programmes.

At present there is no special department or sector in the Ministry of Education and Science directly responsible for adult education and lifelong learning. These issues are under responsibility of several departments: Department of Vocational Training, Department of General Education and Department of Educational Policy.

The Latvian Adult Education Association (LAEA) is a non-governmental founded on December 1993 with support from the Latvian Ministry of Education and Science and Institute for International Co-operation of the German Adult Education Association.

The goal of the LAEA is to facilitate the development of the adult education system in Latvia and to participate life-long learning development, promoting development of civic democratic and open society in Latvia. Members of LAEA are Adult Education Centers, Folk High Schools, Folk Schools, Non-governmental organizations, Training centers, Universities, Vocational schools and Evening (Night) schools.

## **1. Lifelong Learning Policy and practice**

The most important policy document regards to life long learning is The Concept of Education Development 2002-2005 accepted by Saeima (Parliament) in October 2002.

This document meet the objectives and directions of actions outlined in the Latvian Long –term Economic Strategy, the National Development Plan, the National Employment Plan, the Memorandum on Lifelong Learning of the European Commission and the guidelines of social and educational development under the UNESCO Education for All programme, and the education policy planning documents developed before 2002.

Common goal of the Concept of Education Development is:

Ensure changes in the education system to promote the formation of a democratic and socially integrated society based on knowledge and the raising of competitiveness of Latvian population and national economy, and simultaneously to preserve and develop cultural values typical of Latvia.

The goals of the Concept of Education Development are:

- Improvement of education quality of every stage and type of education to meet the needs of social and economic development;
- Granting of access to education for the Latvian population in the context of lifelong education;
- Increase of cost-effectiveness of each stage and type of education.

There is no comprehensive document as regards directly to life-long learning in Latvia.

### **What are the major policy discourses around lifelong learning?**

Discussions on the EU document " A Memorandum on Lifelong Learning " took place among adult educators since year 2001.

Discussions about this document emphasized the most important problems as regards to deficit of educational basic skills and necessity to create an adequate education offer. Discussions were important also because they underlined an equivalence of formal and non-formal education of adults and everyday learning in the process of the life-long learning education, inter alia in such aspect as recognition of the results of education.

Adult education has made a rapid progress in the recent years, as different public and private educational establishments have participated in its provision, although adult education has been developing without purposeful national policies and financing.

### **Who are involved in these discourses?**

Ministry of Education and Science in collaboration with Latvian Adult Education Association (LAEA) organized discussions. Other ministries and state institutions, educators, NGOs, municipalities, research institutions and other interested bodies were involved in consultations and discussions. LAEA also gave its contribution in the discussion on Memorandum by involving in its seminars representatives of European adult Education association and Nordic countries.

**What are the major research discourses around lifelong learning?**

Some conferences and workshops were held to discuss the most important issues of lifelong learning in Latvia. Ministry of Education and Science in co-operation with University of Latvia and Distance education Center of Latvia arranged an international conference “ Lifelong Learning- a Challenge for All” in November 2002. Main issues discussed in this conference were: learning skills, open and distance learning, the development of continuing education and training in the context of higher education reform, teachers further training, logistic information systems for knowledge dissemination, learning at school as the basis for lifelong learning, personal training in organizations, E-learning in SMEs, knowledge management and E-university.

**What major policy initiatives have been introduced to promote lifelong learning?**

Within the framework of the EU programme Socarates, adult education and human resource development plans were developed in 12 districts of Latvia. Latvian Adult Education Association (LAEA) headed a Project “Development of Transferable Ault Education Modules and Creation of a Regional Startegic Adult Education Programmes”. Participants in the development of the plans included local government employees, representatives of the institutions of regional councils and regional branches of state agencies, school staff, non-governmental organizations and business people. Project was realized in close co-operation with State Employment Agency and the Latvian Employers Confederation.

**To what extent have these initiatives been successful? What has there impact been?**

This work allowed:

- Each local government to become aware of priorities in human resource development;
- Provided all local governments with adult education strategies.

One impact of the development strategy is the statement of intent signed by the Jelgava Regional Council, the Jelgava Town Council and the State Revenue Service Regional Office of Zemgale on the establishment of the Zemgale Regional Training and Development Center. It is intended that this center will co-ordinate, plan and organize adult education and continuing training in the region.

**To what extent have these measures involved the supply of education and training or have they focused on demand for adult learning?**

These measures are more focused to exploration of demands for adult education and promotion of supply.

**Is there evidence of widening participation in learning?**

There are evidences of widening participation in adult learning in districts involved in the project “Development of Transferable Ault Education Modules and Creation of a Regional Startegic Adult Education Programmes”.

**Have there been changes in funding to encourage participation in lifelong learning?**

## **2. Widening participation in learning in work**

**Have there been policy measures to promote work-based learning? If so, what are these measures?**

There is an indirect public support for private expenditures on continuing education and training. Employers' expenditure on training of employee's is except from the enterprise income tax, however, no normative law setting out employers' responsibilities in respect of the training of their workforce.

Individuals can also offset part of their expenditure on continuing education against their personal income tax liabilities.

Thus national taxation system does not stimulate employers to invest in the education of employees. It is necessary to increase the contribution of employers in human resources by the means of taxation system.

The share of expenditure financed by employers has been dropping in recent years, while the share financed by individuals has risen.

**How much work based learning takes place?**

Employers supported continuous vocational training is available mainly in large-scale economically stable enterprises and those that have been founded through foreign investment.

Work based and employers' supported learning usually is not possible in small and medium scale enterprises because of limited funds.

**Who organizes work-based learning?**

Large-scale economically stable enterprises usually have enough funds to work out a staff development strategy and establish own training centers. Work based learning usually is organized by training centers established by large-scale enterprises. It is possible to order training programs in different training institutions as well. Large-scale economically stable enterprises have a strong motivation to develop long-term business and upgrade the qualification level of their employees.

**Who participates in work-based learning?**

High and medium level managers are more involved in work-based learning. White-collar employees get more access to learning than blue-collar workers.

**How much attention are large organizations paying to participation in learning at work?**

Large organizations are more interested to support learning at work, but funds available for different kinds of organizations differs. Sometimes just availability of funding is the most important factor to support learning at work.

### **What opportunities are there for work based learning in Small and Medium enterprises?**

It is difficult for Small and Medium size enterprises to allocate funds for staff development programmes because of financial difficulties. Small and Medium size enterprises just try to survive.

### **Do workers have an entitlement to learning at work?**

Latvian Labour Law determines the workers rights to raise qualification, get a study leave and some another rights connected with education and learning included in collective agreement (if there is an collective agreement in work place).

Section 96 " Raising of Qualification" includes the following: The work place of an employee, who has been sent to raise his or her qualification thus interrupting work, shall be retained. Employer shall cover expenditures associated with the raising of qualification.

If there is a collective agreement in the work place some additional settlements as regard to learning at work place can be included in this document.

Section 157 "Study Leave" includes the following:

- (1) An employee, who without discontinuing work, studies at an educational institution of any type, in accordance with a collective agreement or an employment contract shall be granted study leave with or without retention of work remuneration.
- (2) An employee shall be granted study leave for the taking of a State examination or the preparation and defence of a diploma work, which study leave shall not be less than 20 days a year, paying for such period the average earnings.

### **What role do trade unions and social partners play in work-based learning?**

Subcommittee of the Tripartite Council for Co-operation in Vocational Education and Employment realizes an indirect promotion of work-based learning. Subcommittee of the Tripartite Council for Co-operation in Vocational Education and Employment is a part of the institutional system of the National Tripartite Council for Co-operation which has been established with the purpose of promoting the co-operation of the government, employer and employee organizations concerning the planning and implementation of national policy and strategy in vocational education and employment.

Cooperation between trade unions and employers organizations as regards to learning at work place is established in some branches.

The most important is cooperation between trade union organization and employer at work place. Employers support work-based learning in accordance with development strategy and collective agreement mostly in large-scale enterprises. Trade unions representation in small and medium-size enterprises is low and employers resources limited.

Trade union membership covers less than 25 % of labour force in Latvia.

### **3. Providing access to formal education and training**

#### **What measures have been introduced to encourage participation in formal education and training?**

Some changes in legislation encouraged adults participation in formal education and learning in a certain extent.

According the revisions of the Law on Vocational Education further vocational education is a specific type of vocational education, which allows adults with certain educational background and professional experience to acquire a certain level of vocational qualification, while continuing vocational education is a specific type of vocational education which allows persons, regardless of their age, prior education or vocational qualification to acquire systematized vocational knowledge and skills.

Organization and content (highly demanded programmes, programmes based on single subject) of educational offers encouraged the adults' participation in formal education and training.

#### **Have these measures involved changes in the institutional structures?**

Local governments at district level have established new Adult Training Centers.

For example, Vidzeme Vocational Education Center was established in Valmiera and provides up-to-date vocational training for adults.

#### **Have these changes involved encouraging demand for adult learning?**

Demand for adult education is permanently high on countryside. Widening of supply (by new Adult Training Centers) is just smallest segment of the problem. Insufficient funding of adult education is the biggest, but not solved yet.

#### **Have new routes to education been developed?**

#### **Are there new opportunities for 'second chance' learning?**

Latvian evening-school system, providing formal general education possibilities is connected with many establishments of formal general and professional education; they can create connection also with non-formal education and provide opportunity to continue at any stage.

Evening schools are the most flexible part of Latvia formal education. Teachers of evening schools have adapted to work with students who have different level of knowledge and skills, different motivation, age and social state. Teachers understand students and are tolerant, and this is an advantage of the evening- school and shows readiness of evening schools to change.

#### **Are there new apprenticeship programmes for adults?**

It is important to involve young-aged unemployed in active employment measures especially during the first 6 months of unemployment and implement the prevention of long-term unemployment. For this purpose, the pilot project " Practice of young aged

unemployed with the employer” was implemented under supervision of State Employment Service.

#### **4. Promoting basic skills**

##### **How much attention is paid at policy level to the issue of literacy and numeric?**

Until recently the problem of a lack of basic skills in literacy and numeracy has been neglected. In many cases basic skills problems have been confused with illiteracy, which is not a large-scale problem in Latvia. Additionally, there are no data available on the scale of the problem. However, a number of factors have increased awareness towards this issue:

- The number of school dropouts and people without finished secondary school has increased rapidly during the last years, which is an objective indicator for the raising need of providing basic skills education for adults.
- The Latvian Adult Education Association conducted a survey in 1999. The objective was to investigate, whether there is a need for basic skills education in Latvia. For this reason possible target groups were tested in regard to their level of reading, writing and numeracy skills. Though it was not a representative research, the results clearly indicated that there is a large amount of people, whose level of basic skills is inadequate for succeeding in work and society.
- The UNESCO Latvian Commission has placed great effort on fostering the “Education for All” agenda. In a number of round table discussions with policy makers it was decided, that basic skills education, quality of education, and accessibility to education are the main priorities, which should be addressed within the implementation of the “Education for All” objectives in Latvia.

##### **What opportunities are there for participation in learning by adults lacking basic skills?**

Until now minimal or no provisions are made towards people with a lack of basic skills. People have the possibility to attend night schools, where they can accomplish basic education. A problem in this regard is that students have to go through the whole school curriculum; efforts are been undertaken to introduce a module-based second chance education system.

A number of projects have focused on basic skills education, but until now these have not been embedded in the educational system.

Adult education is to a large extent a competence of municipalities. Therefore the provided offers differ a lot between different municipalities. In some places activities are undertaken for the social inclusion of marginalized groups, which often goes along with raising their basic skills level.

But overall, there are no systematic learning opportunities for adults lacking basic skills in Latvia.

##### **Have measures been taken to encourage to learn?**

In a number of Latvian regions a network of adult education coordinators has been established, who investigate learning needs on a local level. Also activities to encourage

learning are undertaken by different organisations, such as the State Employment Service, which organises job seekers' clubs, Career guidance centres, NGOs.

**What measures have been taken to encourage digital literacy?**

Training courses for unemployed persons were organized free of charge, but not all unemployed have possibilities to attend them.

Commercial training courses are widely available in cities, but less available on countryside.

**What has been done to encourage participation by non-traditional learners in computer literacy programmes?**

Some computer literacy programmes were aimed to disabled people. These programmes were mainly supported by EU funding.

**5. New curricula and pedagogies**

**What measures have been undertaken to provide more flexible education and training provision for adults?**

The most important initiatives to provide more flexible education and training for adults are connected with virtual learning provisions by means of ICT.

It is possible also to get education and training on up-to date programmes, single modules and special themes: local and regional development- human resources-life-long education, social integration and civil participation.

**What measures have been taken to encourage adults to access this provision?**

**What pedagogical changes have been undertaken?**

Adult educators use new training methods. There are possibilities to learn these methods in training courses and use manuals.

**Are there new courses to encourage adults to participate? Where are these courses based? Who are the providers?**

There are a lot of new courses for adults. These courses are mainly based in:

- Adult Education Centres;
- Education and training institutions (training centres established by big enterprises, private training centres);
- Folk High schools;
- Training Centres established by different associations.

**Have there been changes in institutional structures?**

**Are there new delivery systems for education and training of adults?**

**Are there new accreditation systems? Are there moves to recognise non-formal learning?**

According to the amendments of the Law on Education, which specifically concerns the development of the adult education, it is planned to make accreditation of non-formal adult education programmes in local governments.

An idea what is under discussion now is the possible evaluation of non-formal and informal education and making it possible to get formal qualification after such education.

## **6. Widening participation to the socially excluded**

### **How important is the issue of social exclusion at policy level?**

Education and welfare sectors are of great importance in eliminating the risk of social exclusion. Latvian social security system is not precisely targeted at social exclusion, but it plays an important role by keeping people away from poverty and exclusion through financial benefits, labour market measures, and services activating integration and inclusion.

The Concept of the Cabinet of Ministers “ On Promotion of Employment “ adopted in 1999 foresees the development of the National Employment Plan of Latvia, which has to be compatible with the EU employment policy. The first National Employment Plan of Latvia was adopted in 2000, the second –in 2001. National Employment Plan 2002 respects goals of the employment policy for the year 2005 and 2010 put forward in the Lisbon and Stockholm EU summits and also the EU Council Employment Guidelines for 2002.

The government pays particular attention to implementation of the following aspects of the employment policy:

- Adaptation of professional training of people to market requirements;
- Enlargement of the scope of active employment measures and raising their efficiency;
- Implementation of activities of economic policy with the aim to create new jobs;
- Promotion of growth of revenues from work.

Since the risk of social exclusion is closely linked to poverty, the government’s attention has been focused on the integration of society and poverty reduction. At the same time there is no uniform approach to what poverty is. Is it the shortage of money alone, or should the absence of opportunities for people to improve their living conditions be treated as poverty as well? At policy level measures are aimed mainly to eradicate poverty, increase productive employment and enhance social integration.

National Poverty Eradication Strategy is adopted in Latvia.

### **How important is the issue of social exclusion at societal level?**

There are evidences of significant regional differences in Latvia. Some regions in the eastern part of Latvia have an underdeveloped infrastructure and it is difficult for them to attract investments, and this results in high unemployment rate- about 25 % percent.

It is verified by studies that poverty is more widespread in rural areas than in urban areas.

The Riga region (unemployment rate about 4%) has significantly lower poverty rate than other regions and the capital Riga has the lowest rate. These findings correspond to chances of residents of various regions to acquire high-quality education. We can acknowledge that social exclusion is extremely important issue for local society in some regions of Latvia.

Groups with particular difficulties to find job are: young adults with no previous work experience, women with children and old people.

Households' survey showed following groups with high risk of poverty: households where are three or more children, single parents households (especially single mother), households of the unemployed (especially unemployed of preretirement age), households where the breadwinner is employed in agriculture, households where the provider lacks professional education or work experience, households where the provider has low general education, households with one or more seriously ill or disabled family members and households where one or more family members are alcoholics.

**What measures are being taken to combat discrimination in access to education and training?**

Measures have been developed to ensure equal access to services of vocational orientation and consulting in all regions of Latvia, referring to both young people and adults. Professional Guidance Centre provides consultations to unemployed, school students, students of other education institutions, etc.

**What measures are being taken to overcome social exclusion through the provision of education and training?**

State Employment Service in cooperation with other institutions (educational establishments, local governments, etc.) and also employers within the scope of allocated budget resources train and retrain unemployed persons, unemployed persons are involved in the activities of job seekers' clubs.

**To which social groups is this provision directed?**

These provisions are aimed to different kinds of unemployed persons: long-term unemployed, pre-pension age unemployed, and disabled unemployed. Unfortunately not all people can in these target groups can get these provisions because of limited funds.

## **7. Training the trainers**

**Have there been measures to increase the professionalism of teachers and trainers?**

Ministry of Education and Science has tried to implement the idea of lifelong learning for upgrading qualification of vocational education teachers.

The Vocational Education Teachers Certification Committee evaluates and takes decisions concerning the compliance of knowledge and skills acquired by teachers through professional development courses or through self-learning to the Model Basic

Vocational Education Teacher Training Programme (authorised by Ministry of Education and Science).

**Have new initial training the trainers programmes been introduced?**

Latvian Adult Education Association together with Nordic Folk Academy (Sweden), Lithuanian Association of Education for Adults and the Estonian Association of Non-formal Education for Adults participated in the project “ Learning 4 Sharing” (2000-2002) supported by Nordic Council of Ministers.

Goals of the project were:

- To develop criteria for the competence of trainers of adults and their assessment,
- To promote the training of adult trainers and multipliers in the participating countries, by developing and implementing a new training programme.

As the results of this project a draft concept for education of adult educators was accepted. International working group created an adult educators’ training programme and adult educators handbook.

Internationally created adult educators’ training programme is translated in Latvian and adopted for local needs. Latvian Adult Education Association plans to start the realization of adult educators’ training programme in spring 2003.

**Are there programmes to train work-based trainers?**

Latvian Adult Education Association offers the training programmes and methodological materials for adult educators, also for work-based trainers. At the same time some training centres of enterprises (for example Lattelekom), trade unions (Training Centre of Free Trade Union Confederation of Latvia), universities and other organizations offer their own programmes for the training of work-based trainers.

**Are there professional development opportunities for teachers and trainers?**

**What measures are being undertaken to train teachers and trainers in supporting those who do not traditionally participate in education and training?**

**What research is taking place into changing roles of teachers and trainers?**

**8. Information and Communication Technologies and eLearning**

**What measures are being taken to widen access to adults to education and training through the use of ICT?**

Legal background for widening access to education and training through the use of ICT:

- The Latvian National Programme " Informatics" which has been originated according to the order of the Cabinet of Ministers in April 1997. The goal of the Programme is to form information society in Latvia and to integrate Latvia into Europe.
- The " Latvian Education Informatization System"- an essential part of the Latvian National Programme " Informatics". Process was originated in 1996, when Ministry of Education and Science established specialized industry IT Council and Strategy of Latvian education system informatization was developed. Latvian Education

Informatization System (LIIS) is a national-wide state supported school informatization project, which was started in June 1997.

**Who is involved in these measures?**

Ministries, education institutions, teachers and trainers as well as local governments, NGO and social partners are involved.

**Are they supply or demand side initiatives?**

Demand for ICT based education and training and supply differs significantly in different territories and is close connected with economic situation. Demand and supply in rural areas is limited mainly because of lack of computers, limited access to Internet and high costs of service. Some side initiatives can be supplied.

**Who are the major providers of ICT based training for adults?**

Major providers of ICT based training for adults in Latvia are universities. There are different approaches, for example, University of Latvia has established E-university, and Distance Education Study Centre of Riga Technical University provides different kind of training courses, Latvian Distance Learning Centre is mainly orientated to use ICT for the training in small and medium enterprises, Business High school "Turība" organize distance learning studies and continuing education courses.

**What is being done to train teachers and trainers in the use of ICT?**

Teachers Training Support Centre offers in-service training for teachers funded by national budget. There are programmes available for teachers and trainers in the use of ICT. Unfortunately budget funds are limited and all teachers can't use this opportunity.

Teachers who attend programmes for a fee may receive reimbursement of their training expenses from In-service Teacher Training Support Fund.

There are still considerable difficulties for teachers to get the training for ICT. Teachers and trainers especially in rural areas not always have access to new technologies (computers, internet access e.t.c.). Department of Physics and Mathematics (University of Latvia) offers special training courses in the use of ICT for teachers employed in rural areas.

**What is being done to ensure access to ICT based education and training for adults?**

**9. Education Guidance**

**Do adults have access to educational guidance?**

The Latvian system for vocational guidance and counselling provides this service for unemployed persons (by request of the State Employment Service), job-seekers who were not registered in the State Employment Service, employed persons, students of higher education establishments and parents of school children.

**Who provides this service and how is it funded?**

The public non-profit organization "Career Counselling Centre" has been in operation for 13 years now. It is an organization under the supervision of the Ministry of Welfare

that provides psychological help in the choice of education and career. The Centre is located in Riga - capital of Latvia and it has branches in 6 cities. " Career Counselling Centre " is a state budget funded institution.

Clients of the Centre (pupils of senior forms, unemployed persons, students of vocational schools, students of higher education establishments, unemployed job- seekers who were not registered in the State Employment Service, employed persons and parents of school children) can receive the following services:

- individual and group consultations on issues of career and training decisions and professional aptitude;
- individual consultations on job search issues;
- training seminars for young people and adults on career development and job search issues;
- informational consultations on training opportunities in Latvia and abroad.

The Agency for Vocational education Development Programmes (an enterprise established by the Ministry of Education and Science opened the Latvian National Resource Centre for Vocational Guidance in the year 2000. Latvian National Resource Centre for Vocational Guidance co-operates with similar organizations in Europe, together forming the Euroguidance Network. Latvian National Resource Centre for Vocational Guidance is mainly funded by EU programmes.

The objectives of Latvian National Resource Centre for Vocational Guidance are:

- creation of information materials for vocational guidance specialists and end-beneficiaries;
- participation in the international project ESTIA (it is a uniformed data base that includes information about the education system, training providers, labour market and professions of each participating country that contains links to relevant sites on each theme);
- organisation, participation and dissemination of information at national and European education fairs, information events, seminars and conferences, in order to promote the development of the European dimension in education and training;
- support for the upgrading of training for vocational guidance practitioners and the promotion of contacts among guidance practitioners in Europe.

#### **What new initiatives are there to provide educational guidance to adults?**

Unemployed persons have the possibility to participate in Job-seekers Club activities organized by State Employment Service

#### **What provision is there for the training of adult guidance professionals and to continuing professional development?**

There are possibilities for the training of adult guidance professionals and their continuing professional development.

#### **What opportunities are there to support adults in the development of professional learning plans?**

Support for adults in the development of individual action plan is limited. This support is mainly available for unemployed persons participated in Job-seekers Club activities.

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