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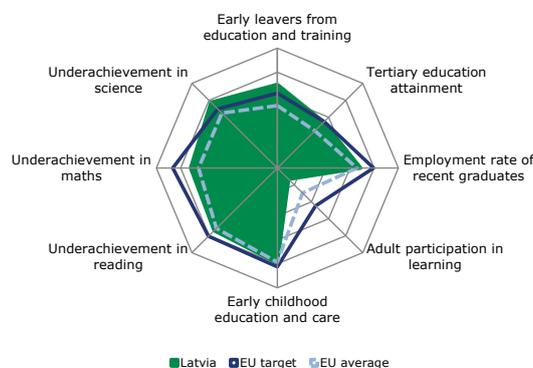
# LATVIA

## 1. Key Indicators and Benchmarks

		Latvia		EU average		
		2011	2014	2011	2014	
<b>Educational poverty and spending cuts: challenges for the education sector</b>						
Share of 15 year-olds with underachievement in:	Reading	•	: 17.0% <sup>12</sup>	:	17.8% <sup>12</sup>	
	Maths	•	: 19.9% <sup>12</sup>	:	22.1% <sup>12</sup>	
	Science	•	: 12.4% <sup>12</sup>	:	16.6% <sup>12</sup>	
Education investment	Public expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP		5.9%	5.7% <sup>13</sup>	5.1%	5.0% <sup>13</sup>
	Public expenditure on education as a share of total public expenditure		15.2%	15.7% <sup>13</sup>	10.5%	10.3% <sup>13</sup>
<b>Education attainment levels of young people across Europe</b>						
Early leavers from education and training (age 18-24)	Men		15.8%	11.7%	15.2%	12.7%
	Women		7.5%	5.1%	11.5%	9.5%
	Total	•	11.6%	8.5%	13.4%	11.1%
Tertiary education attainment (age 30-34)	Men		25.0%	27.8%	31.0%	33.6%
	Women		46.7%	52.3%	38.7%	42.3%
	Total	•	35.9%	39.9%	34.8%	37.9%
<b>Policy levers for inclusiveness, quality and relevance</b>						
Early childhood education and care (participation from age 4 to starting age of compulsory education)		•	92.7%	94.1% <sup>13</sup>	93.2%	93.9% <sup>13</sup>
Teachers' participation in training	Any topic (total)		:	96.1% <sup>13</sup>	:	84.6% <sup>13</sup>
	Special needs education		:	31.1% <sup>13</sup>	:	32.4% <sup>13</sup>
	Multicultural settings		:	21.4% <sup>13</sup>	:	13.2% <sup>13</sup>
	ICT skills for teaching		:	72.1% <sup>13</sup>	:	51.0% <sup>13</sup>
Foreign language learning	Share of ISCED 2 students learning two or more foreign languages		72.3%	71.6% <sup>12</sup>	63.0%	: <sup>12</sup>
Share of ISCED 3 students in vocational education and training (VET)			37.8%	39.1% <sup>13</sup>	50.4%	48.9% <sup>13</sup>
Employment rate of recent graduates by education attainment (age 20-34 having left education 1-3 years before reference year)	ISCED 3-4		55.4%	65.2%	71.3%	70.8%
	ISCED 5-8		84.0%	86.0%	82.5%	80.5%
	ISCED 3-8 (total)	•	71.6%	77.0%	77.1%	76.1%
Learning mobility	Inbound graduates mobility (bachelor)		:	1.7% <sup>13</sup>	:	: <sup>13</sup>
	Inbound graduates mobility (master)		:	3.0% <sup>13</sup>	:	: <sup>13</sup>
Adult participation in lifelong learning (age 25-64)	ISCED 0-8 (total)	•	5.1%	5.5%	8.9%	10.7%

Sources: Eurostat (LFS, UOE, GFS); OECD (PISA, TALIS). Notes: • ET 2020 benchmark; data refer to weighted EU average, covering a different number of Member States depending on the source; b= break in time series, d= definition differs, p= provisional, u= low reliability, <sup>12</sup>= 2012, <sup>13</sup>= 2013. Further information is found in the respective section of Volume 1 (ec.europa.eu/education/monitor).

**Figure 1. Position in relation to highest (outer ring) and lowest performers (centre)**



Source: DG Education and Culture calculations, based on data from Eurostat (LFS 2014 and UOE 2013) and OECD (PISA 2012, TALIS 2013). Note: all scores are set between a maximum (the highest performers visualised by the outer ring) and a minimum (the lowest performers visualised by the centre of the figure).

## 2. Main strengths and challenges

In recent years Latvia has made remarkable progress in reducing its early school leaving rate, raising its tertiary education attainment rate, and improving basic skills attainment. It is now outperforming the EU average in all these indicators. Nevertheless, issues remain to be addressed to further improve the quality of vocational education and training (VET) and higher education. The main challenge for the VET system is to provide labour-market relevant skills for the workforce. In higher education, there is significant scope to help raise the innovation potential of the Latvian economy. Although public funding for higher education has so far lacked a performance-oriented component, promising reforms in this area are ongoing. Finally, the gender gap in education is a challenge across the board, with women significantly and persistently outperforming men both in terms of qualifications and basic skill proficiency.

### Box 1. The 2015 European Semester country-specific recommendation on education and training

The 2015 European Semester country-specific recommendations (CSRs) to Latvia (Council of the European Union 2015) included a recommendation on education and training:

CSR 2: Improve vocational education and training, speed up the curricula reform and increase the offer for work-based learning. Ensure that the new financing model of the higher education system rewards quality. [..].

## 3. Investing in education and training

Latvia's general government expenditure on education is well above the EU average, both as a share of GDP (5.7%, compared to 5.0% in 2013) and as a share of total public expenditure (15.7%, compared to 10.3% in 2013).<sup>1</sup>

So far, Latvia's financing model for higher education has lacked performance-oriented components. A new quality-targeting financing model of higher education has been developed in 2015, based on the recommendations from a recent World Bank study (World Bank 2014). The new funding model includes three pillars:

- 1) base funding allocated per study place and per full-time equivalent of academic staff;
- 2) performance-oriented funding (with a number of indicators for performance in research and internationalisation);
- 3) targeted funding for innovation and development, currently supported mainly by the EU funds.

For the second pillar, the Latvian Government made EUR 5.5 million in performance-oriented funding available on a pilot basis in 2015; for 2016 and 2017, the government has allocated EUR 6.5 million per year. This is a welcome step, although the amounts are lower than those required for the optimal model of development suggested by the World Bank study.

## 4. Tackling inequalities

Latvia's early school leaving rate has been steadily decreasing since 2008 and reached 8.5% in 2014. Women perform more than twice as well as men: in 2014 the figures were 5.1% and 11.7% respectively. Having exceeded the Europe 2020 national target of 13.4%, Latvia has set a new 2020 target of 10%. Participation in early childhood education has somewhat increased in recent years and is now slightly higher than the EU average (94.1% compared to 93.1% in 2012).

<sup>1</sup> Source: Eurostat, General government expenditure by function (COFOG) database.

In terms of basic skills, 15-year-olds' performance in the 2012 OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in reading, mathematics and science improved compared to 2009 and continues to outperform the EU average. While the influence of socioeconomic status on pupils' performance is weaker than the EU average, Latvia shows a very high gender gap in reading, where 25.7% of boys are low achievers compared to just 8.2% of girls (OECD 2013). The 2012 PISA results also show a significant difference in performance between schools in urban areas and schools in rural areas (Kangro et al. 2014).

To identify causes of early school leaving and thus improve the evidence base for policy actions, a number of studies were carried out in 2014 and 2015. In the area of special needs education, the planned measures include working with schools and teachers to provide a teaching approach that is more tailored to the needs of individual students, both in special and mainstream schools.

Piloting of the new competence-based curriculum will start in September 2015 and will be followed by gradual introduction of the competence-based curriculum in all school grades. Diagnostic tests in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects will be introduced for ninth- to eleventh-grade students starting from the 2015/16 school year, while tests for eighth-grade students already started from 2014/15. An optional pilot exam in physics, chemistry or natural sciences for twelfth-grade pupils is to be introduced from 2015/16.

## 5. Modernising school education

According to the 2013 OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS), a very high proportion of teachers took part in some professional development activities in the previous 12 months (96%) and, more specifically, in ICT training (72%). As for teaching practices, the proportion of teachers assigning different work to students based on their individual needs was above the EU average (53%, compared to 46%). The same applies to the proportion of teachers using ICT for students' projects or class work: 41%, compared to the EU average of 34% (OECD 2014b).

Latvia is introducing a new teacher remuneration model (see Box 2). During the 2014-20 programming cycle of the European Structural and Investment Funds, the EU will provide Latvia with support for education research to help implement an education quality monitoring system. Latvia will receive assistance to participate in international education quality research and to develop monitoring tools. The Ministry of Education and Science, jointly with the National Centre for Education, has begun to develop a new ICT study programme for schools, which includes an integrated teaching and learning approach.<sup>2</sup> In the frame of a pilot project, five different education programmes will start from September 2015. They aim at contributing to the development of digital competences as part of a comprehensive curriculum standard, based on learning outcomes, by 2018.

### Box 2. The new teacher remuneration model

After being piloted in the 2014/15 school year, a new teacher remuneration model is to enter into force provisionally from 1 September 2016.

Under the previous system, according to the 'money follows student' principle, municipalities were allocated government funding on the basis of the number of students enrolled at the beginning of the school year. Municipalities then distributed the funds for teachers' salaries to schools. Municipalities and school principals had substantial room for manoeuvre in how they handled the funds: e.g. municipalities could add money from their budget to top up teachers' salaries and school heads could distribute the salary unevenly between teachers based on how many contact hours each teacher was given. Moreover, teachers' tasks outside contact hours

<sup>2</sup> The approach consists in ICT teachers cooperating with other teachers and integrating ICT approaches into the teaching of their subjects.

(e.g. marking homework, working as a class supervisor) were paid separately, with a complex system of tariffs going into the salary formula.

As a result, the remuneration system was not transparent, and teachers' salaries varied considerably from municipality to municipality and depending on the size of school, with other factors also playing a role. For instance, the salary paid to two teachers with the same workload in terms of teaching hours and other tasks could vary by as much as 60% (Ministry of Education and Science and LIZDA 2015).

The OECD noted a number of weaknesses of the teacher remuneration system. These included:

- (i) low salaries and a flat pay scale, sending a message that teaching is a low-status profession unlikely to attract the best graduates or to retain a quality, motivated workforce;
- (ii) a formula based on the minimum salary (rather than actual or average salary) which did not recognise seniority;
- (iii) insufficient sensitivity to different student needs (i.e. the pay system did not recognise effort put into working with students individually);
- (iv) a narrow understanding of teachers' duties, which failed to recognise preparation time, marking and feedback to students as integral parts of quality teaching (OECD 2014).

The new model addresses many of these issues. It does away with the non-transparent formula for calculating individual teachers' salaries by introducing:

- a unitary salary base, calculated based on the average number of students in class in a given school and based on a 36-hour week;
- a clear scale of teacher's base salaries depending on the size of school/class, irrespective of which municipality the school is located in, recognising the actual differences in class sizes in Latvian schools (e.g. taking into account the rural-urban divide).

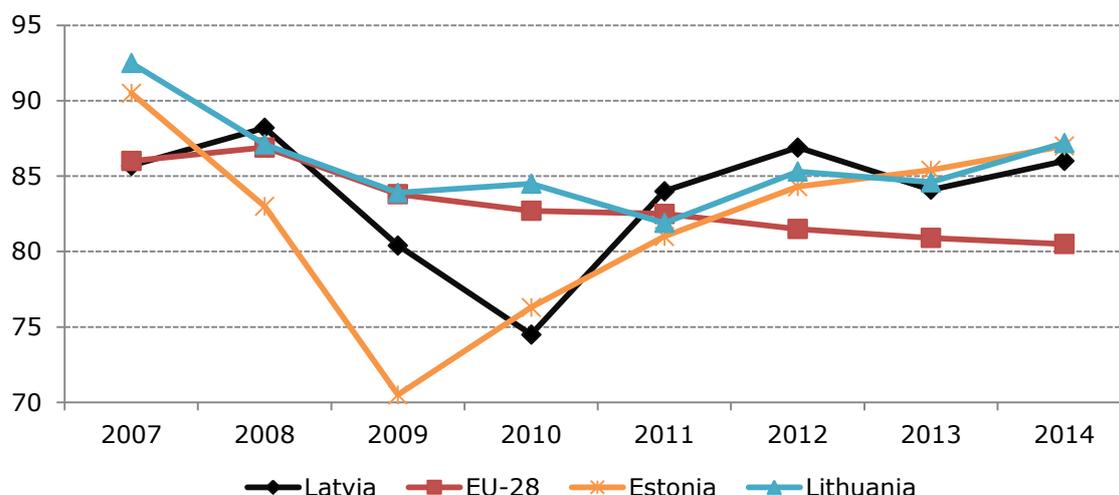
Municipalities no longer play a role in redistributing the money earmarked for teacher salaries, thus eliminating, at least in theory, the difference in salaries between municipalities. Quality-related additional remuneration based on teachers' assessment has also been put in place. It remains to be seen to what extent it will improve motivation, as so far most teachers have been assessed at an average level (OECD 2014, p.61), which entailed a rather small monetary incentive.

Overall, the reform is an important step towards making teachers' remuneration more transparent and fairer, and reducing salary differences currently penalising teachers in smaller schools. However, the level of most teachers' salaries, even after the reform, remains relatively modest and may make it difficult to attract the best-qualified graduates into the teaching profession.

## 6. Modernising higher education

Latvia's tertiary education attainment rate slightly decreased between 2013 and 2014 (from 40.7% to 39.9%) after significant increases in previous years, but remains well above the national Europe 2020 target of 34-36%. Women strongly outperform men, with the figures for tertiary education attainment in 2014 being 52.3% and 27.8% respectively. Inbound graduate mobility is rather low, both at bachelor's and master's level. The overall number of tertiary students decreased by 34.5% between 2005/06, when it reached its maximum level, and 2014/15. This was mainly the result of adverse demographic trends and the outward migration flows triggered by the economic crisis in 2008-10. The employment rate of recent tertiary graduates<sup>3</sup> quickly recovered after the 2008-10 crisis. It has fluctuated somewhat over the last three years, although remaining above the EU average (Figure 2).

<sup>3</sup> People aged 20-34 who left education between one and three years before the reference year.

**Figure 2. Employment rate of recent tertiary graduates**


Source: Eurostat

To improve the accreditation system, the government has designated the Academic Information Centre<sup>4</sup> as the independent national accreditation agency starting from July 2015. The Centre aims to be included in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education in 2018 at the latest, i.e. before the next big accreditation round, which is scheduled for 2019. EUR 1.5 million will be invested in capacity building of the accreditation agency, of which EUR 1.27 million will come from the European Structural and Investment Funds (Government of Latvia 2015).

To improve the quality of academic staff, the rules for assessing professors' qualifications are being amended. Under the new compulsory criteria, professors will have to have a minimum number of international publications and sufficient knowledge of foreign languages. In order to achieve a better balance in the supply of places in higher education, Latvia is gradually increasing the number of publicly financed study places in STEM fields and cutting it in social sciences. This should help steer the demand towards study fields linked to high-value added economic sectors.<sup>5</sup>

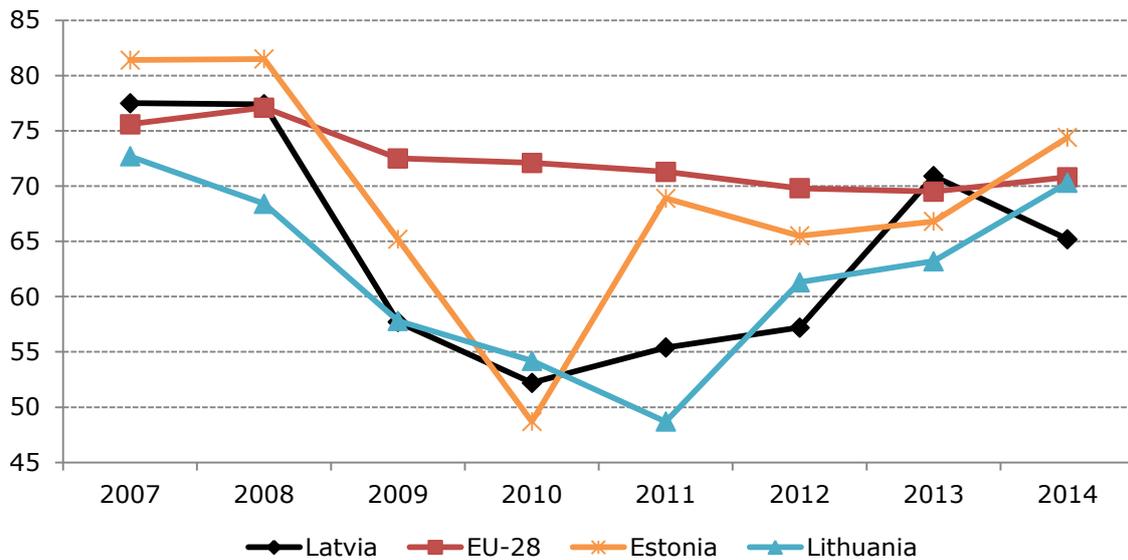
## 7. Modernising vocational education and training and promoting adult learning

Participation of upper secondary students in VET is slightly increasing, but remains below the EU average (39.1% compared to 48.9% in 2012). Since 2010, in the aftermath of the economic crisis, the proportion of young people not in education, employment or training has decreased. The 2014 figure of 12% of 15-24 year-olds was just below the EU average of 12.4%. After a strong increase between 2012 and 2013, the employment rate of recent upper secondary graduates<sup>6</sup> decreased by almost 6 percentage points in 2014 to well below pre-crisis levels (Figure 3). Adult participation (25-64 year-olds) in lifelong learning is low (5.5% in 2014, compared to 10.7% for the EU as a whole). For adults with high educational attainment, the gap is particularly large (9.4% compared to 18.8%).

<sup>4</sup> The Academic Information Centre is in charge of recognising diplomas and professional qualifications and referencing the national framework to the European qualifications framework.

<sup>5</sup> According to Eurostat data, the proportion of university graduates in STEM fields remains below the EU average (18.8% compared to 22.8% in 2012), although it has increased significantly in the last five years.

<sup>6</sup> People aged 20-34 who left education between one and three years before the reference year.

**Figure 3. Employment rate of recent upper secondary graduates**


Source: Eurostat

Making vocational education and training and its work-based learning component attractive remains a challenge. Eurobarometer surveys have shown that VET in Latvia has a negative image overall (European Commission 2011, 2014). In addition, the apprenticeship component is not completely developed. For example, there is no proper legislative framework regulating relationships between apprentices and companies (e.g. on pay and training requirements) and incentives for companies to provide work-based learning or practical training placements are still being developed.

While the consolidation of the vocational education and training network is in its final stages, reforms of curricula are still a work in progress. So far almost half of the profession standards, planned modular programmes and content for qualification exams have been updated and the reform is due to continue until 2023. The Latvian Parliament approved amendments to the Vocational Education Law, which came into force in May 2015. The amendments clearly set out the role of sectoral expert councils in developing curricula, examination content and organising work-based learning. They also bring in new frameworks to strengthen the role of employers and other stakeholders in VET governance. The amendments also link VET qualification levels to the national and European qualification levels.<sup>7</sup>

The project "National Authorities for Apprenticeships: Implementing Work Based Learning in Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia (WBL-Balt)", where the Ministry of Education and Science of Latvia is a project coordinator, has been ongoing since 1 December 2014. It aims at supporting development of work-based learning in the Baltic States and enhancing their cooperation in implementing VET reforms.

The take-up of work-based learning, piloted in 2013, is expected to increase further. For example, the number of schools that applied to take part in the work-based learning pilot project in 2014/15 was four times higher than the previous year, and the number of enterprises taking part increased six-fold compared to 2013/14 (CEDEFOP 2015, p.25).

To address the challenge of low adult participation in learning, the Ministry of Education and Science is implementing in 2014-15 the Erasmus+ project 'National coordinators for the

<sup>7</sup> The 2015 legislative amendments propose to award VET students separate diplomas: one for general education skills and one for professional skills. This could have an ambiguous impact on student performance in basic skills and calls for careful monitoring.

implementation of the European agenda for adult learning'. The project aims to increase adult participation in lifelong learning by achieving better coordination of adult education policies that target different sectors of the economy. One major challenge of the project is to reach adults with no motivation for learning and adults from risk groups.

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