

**COST Action CA17114**

Transdisciplinary solutions to  
cross sectoral disadvantage  
in youth (YOUNG-IN)

**WG5**



**Working paper series**

# **Youth-oriented policies beyond ideal-typical welfare regimes in Europe:**

## **Situation and initiatives from the perspective of youth transition regimes**

### **Latvia**

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This WP series contributes to the main aims of YOUNG-IN and WG5 (Knowledge-based social investment policy for youth) by aiming to:

- 1) Describe today's situation of youth in our nine case countries based on characteristics perceived to be the most relevant by the literature of Youth Transition Regimes (YTR);
- 2) Give an overview of the main policy initiatives targeted at youth within key policy areas relevant for YTR.

This WP is structured as follows: Part I gives a harmonised comparative overview of the existing situation in the analysed nine countries in comparison with EU28 (the analyses cover period before Brexit, thus kept EU28 instead of EU27). Part II consists of nine chapters about youth-oriented policy initiatives in those countries in two recent decades across policy areas especially relevant for youth (education, labour market, social inclusion, participation and housing). Part III concludes with an executive summary that compares the countries' youth-oriented policy directions in the modified framework of YTR.

The structure and authorship of respective chapters are as follows (current chapter highlighted):

- ▶ Part I: A comparative introduction of situation of youth, Triin Lauri
- ▶ Part II: Country reports on youth oriented policies:
  - Youth-oriented policies in Bulgaria (BG), Veneta Krasteva
  - Youth-oriented policies in Switzerland (CH), Berihun Wagaw, Matthias Drilling, Semhar Negash
  - Youth-oriented policies in Estonia (EE), Anu Toots and Triin Lauri
  - Youth-oriented policies in Spain (ES), Francisco Javier Moreno-Fuentes, Pau Marí-Klose
  - Youth-oriented policies in Lithuania (LT), Daiva Skučienė, Natalija Mažeikienė
  - **Youth-oriented policies in Latvia (LV), Anna Broka**
  - Youth-oriented policies in Moldova (MD), Crismaru Mariana
  - Youth-oriented policies in Malta (MT), Sue Vella
  - Youth-oriented policies in Turkey (TR), Hande Barlin, Nilufer Korkmaz Yaylagul
- ▶ Conclusion, Anu Toots, Triin Lauri

WP series is edited by Triin Lauri, Anu Toots, Tom Chevalier and Matthias Drilling.

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## Brief information on country

**LATVIA** neighbours the other two Baltic countries – Estonia in the north and Lithuania in the south, as well as Russia to the east and Belarus to the southeast. The population is 1,9 million, out of which the Russian-speaking minority composes 25.2%. Latvia suffers from decreasing population due to emigration, low birth rates and ageing. The share of young people 15-29 years of age is 15,6% compared to the 20,2% of the age group 65+ (CSB, own calculations 2019).

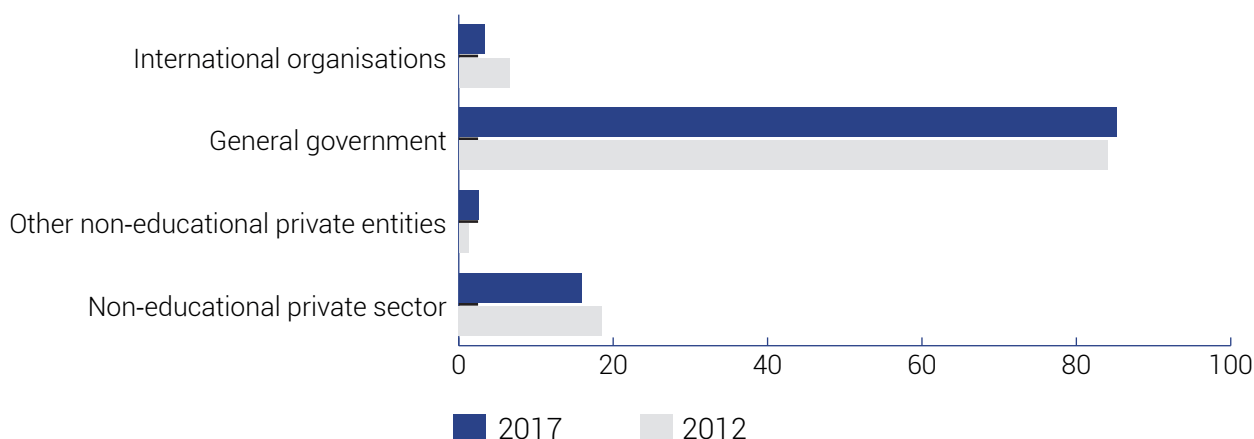
Latvia is a parliamentary democracy governed by coalition governments. The democratic rule was fully re-established in 1991; from 1940-1991 Latvia was occupied by the Soviet Union. Latvia is a member of the EU, OECD, Council of Europe and NATO. Latvia belongs to countries with high human development, ranking 39th in HDI 2019.

## Part II. Main youth related initiatives in key policy areas

### 2.1. Education policy beyond the lower secondary level

Latvian government expenditure on education (% share of GDP) has fluctuated in recent years with an increasing tendency since 2007, reaching the highest share of 5.33% in 2015, but again decreasing to 4.40% in 2017 (Eurostat, see also Part I for comparison with other countries). The level of public expenditure in education remains rather low and is similar before and after the economic recession. The governance of education is organised and administrated at three levels – national, municipal and institutional.

Most of the pre-school, basic and secondary educational institutions are free of charge, funded by a central or local government. A private education institution may set a tuition fee.



**Figure 1: Total education expenditure by education level and type of source (all ISCED 2011, incl. early childhood education)**

Source: Eurostat, data for 2012 and 2017 own calculations.

Primary and lower secondary education (levels 1-2) comprise the 9-year compulsory education, starting at age 6 or 7 and usually completed at the age of 16, with continuity options until the age of 18. Variety of schools: Basic compulsory educational programmes can be acquired at *primary, secondary, vocational schools, special education institutions, night (shift) schools, boarding schools or educational institutions of social or pedagogical correction or in any other educational schools providing basic education programmes*. (Eurydice) At the end of basic school, students take centralised national examinations and receive a certificate of basic education as well as their transcript of records. The certificate of basic education qualifies students for admission to further education and training in secondary level educational programmes and serves as a selection criterion, which can be complemented with an exam or other criteria defined by the school. The policy is generous and inclusive at the primary level, and the flexibility of different programmes results in a very high attainment rate at ISCED 2011 levels 0-2. If the person has a certain reason for not receiving the certificate, he/she receives a *school report* that is a substantial document for continuing in further education and training in basic vocational educational programmes (State Education Development Agency). To some extent, the dualisation starts at the general education level (entrance to grade 7 and 10) with a path for those with "high grades" who can be admitted to secondary school with "high ranks". General secondary education institutions are most often located in "urban centre-developed areas" and are accessible. VETs are located both in urban and rural areas, and special programmes with basic vocational education and training for persons with disabilities are often located in rural areas.

The education policy can be characterised as rather **generous and inclusive at the primary and secondary levels**, including vocational education and training (VET) as an important part of upper secondary education. VET programmes include a practical training component, but these are not nationally classified as work-based programmes. Admission and enrolment in VET depend on completed basic education. In special cases, there is an option to complete the general basic education alongside vocational training and to obtain a qualification. As previously mentioned, the graduates of vocational secondary education qualify to enter higher education programmes by passing five centralised examinations. Post-secondary vocational training or in-service training programmes can be obtained via up-skilling/professional development programmes or in training institutions, incl. VET as a part of secondary stage education.

Participation rates in VET programmes are higher in engineering, manufacturing and construction, services, business administration and law, and arts and humanities programmes. Graduation of these programmes is higher among men, especially in engineering, manufacturing and construction, than among women. (OECD 2017). However, more young people prefer general programmes to VET. In 2018 the share of students in VET was 38.9% of the total enrolment rate in upper secondary education (Eurostat 2018).

In 2015 the Latvian, Lithuanian and Estonian governments' ministers of education signed a Declaration of Intent (07 Sept 2015) about cooperation in the field of apprenticeship and other work-based learning (WBL) schemes (the Baltic Alliance for Apprenticeship (BAA)) in order to increase the competitiveness of the labour force trained in the VET systems. The main focus

was to increase the importance of WBL in VET, to exchange information and best practices, to increase the quality of education, peer-learning, study visits, to encourage cooperation between VET providers and companies, as well as the exchange of students and staff, and to facilitate the development of joint projects (LR Ministry of Education and Science, signed 22 June 2015, in force 07 Sept 2015, BAA).

All higher educational institutions at the tertiary level in Latvia are defined as *private government-dependant institutions* in regard to their autonomy and governance model. The state covers tuition fees for a certain number of students' places, and the respective students receive state grants. Each higher institution may set a tuition fee for the other students' places. At these nationally considered public institutions, the tuition fees are some of the highest among European countries. At the national level, these tuition fees vary widely across institutions and depend on the degree levels. At the bachelor level, the tuitions range from less than 2100 to over 11 200 USD, most commonly 4 300 USD, they are higher for foreign students at around 7300 USD, and at the doctoral level the tuition fee is around 5 800 USD. Small class sizes inflate the costs of education per student (OECD 2019).

Steps taken in education policy in relation to the development of secondary education, VET and tertiary levels are rather incremental. The dominant features of the **generous and inclusive education at the primary and secondary levels** are different small-scale supportive measures introduced for different social groups, i.e., persons with disabilities, families in need and large families. Transition from one level of education to another has almost no restrictions and is rather flexible. General education is provided until a certain age, but can be prolonged in case of special education or other individual situations. For those who are not able to obtain education in a full-time, in-class learning environment can obtain it via evening education, through home-based or distance learning. The recently developed competence centres that are often part of VET or higher level education (College) institutions are offering life-long learning and training for those in the labour market as well as for those who lack specific skills in later stages. Training institution can set their own tuition fees or offer training as part of certain EU funded project that is free of charge for specific target groups. The "Serving the best" strategy can be recognised in its earlier stage in the transition to secondary school, in grades 7 and 10. Students from the general secondary level as well as from VET with secondary level education after examination of general subjects can be admitted to the higher education. Each higher education level institution can set their own admission criteria in addition to the results of the examination. Latvian government scholarships for studies are available for a certain number of students, while others have to pay a tuition fee. Any student is entitled to a state guaranteed loan for his/her studies in higher education programmes.

**More paradigmatic** (i.e. change in policy objectives and instruments) policies can be identified since 2012-2013, with the introduction of the Work-Based Learning (WBL) approach in all educational levels. From 2015-2022 a total of 14 million euros are invested in the basic education and almost 12 million in the Work Based Learning (supported by the European Social Fund). The first pilot projects in VET were initiated already in 2013 and until 2023 nearly 22 million euros will be used for implementation (in Golca, Rajevska 2017). These resources are invested both in infrastructure (building) as well as in learning materials and hi-

tech equipment. Latvia, among other countries, is still rather late in implementing the work-based learning (WBL) model and with less student support, while being most decentralised and marketised in co-financed structures (flexible) (CEDEFOP 2018; 2020; Tosun et al., 2017; Rajevska, Rajevska 2020).

### **2.1.1. Policies against school drop-out, low achievement & NEET**

Support for NEET: Traditional educational/vocational programmes were supplemented with 'Youth Guarantee' (2013) and 'Upskilling Pathways' (2016) – the EU funded programmes directly aimed at youth, especially NEET youth inclusion in the labour market. Free training and career opportunities were assured until 2018 for more than 6500 young people. In December 2013, the *Latvian Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan* was presented, and in January 2014 the Youth Guarantee scheme started, targeted at NEETs (aged 15-29). At the central level, the Ministry of Welfare (MW) and the Ministry of Science and Education (MSE) were in charge of coordinating activities. The Ministry of Welfare was managing activities implemented by the State Employment Agency (PES-public employment services) and the State Education Development Agency (SEDA). Participants registered for special programmes via PES or VET (2nd chance programme). In order to reach for non-registered youth, the MSE, with the involvement of the Agency for International Programs for Youth, municipalities and youth organisations at the local level, were in charge of getting in contact with non-registered youth and referring them further to VET programmes or to the PES (Data collection for monitoring of Youth Guarantee schemes 2017, LABREF). In 2010, Latvia introduced an internship at the State Employment Agency, supported voluntary work in non-governmental organisations and agreed on the organisation of workshops at education institutes to give young people a chance to test or practice different professions (in Tosun et al. 2017). ALMPs involving activating and training-oriented labour market programmes during the period of 2012-2014 were one of the lowest in Latvia in terms of expenditure (% of GDP). Still, Baltic countries are among the most decisive and adopted the greatest number of ALMPs. The implementation of the ALMP plan was organised under the supervision of the employment service and was closely related to the education system (VET and Competence centre's development). Funding was invested in continuing education, practical training and quality improvements. From 2014 to 2020, the Youth Guarantee programme continued and introduced more measures for persons with disabilities and the long-term unemployed. The funding was allocated also for the costs that were needed to compensate transportation and meals (SEDA).

### **2.1.2. Access to different tracks and levels**

General secondary educational programmes are more attractive among young people than VET programmes. The pathway from *general educational programmes* at the secondary level to higher education is in line with requirements that cover a broader scope of themes. At the same time, after completing specific VET programmes or other forms of post-secondary education it is more difficult to enter higher education (e.g., pathway from humanity programme to natural science). Lifelong learning programmes and training as well as the Open University scheme allows obtaining the lacking knowledge and skills from different disciplines.



The most recent reforms in Latvia advance the dual training system or work-based learning, following the upgraded traditional vocational education and training (VET). The Work-Based Learning approach (WBL) introduced in 2012-2013 might influence different tracks on all educational levels in the near future.

A strict age gradient is defined in Latvia, stating that a compulsory basic education shall be acquired until the age of 18 (Education Law, Article 4, in force since 01.06.1999.). In the later stages, there are no age restrictions defined and several options to re-enter education are available.

### **2.1.3. Policies on educational quality**

The availability of funding for different educational levels and more specifically for curriculum modernisation depends on several factors. Local governments own the pre-school education institutions and are responsible for financing the salaries of teachers, administrative and teaching staff salaries, learning materials, maintenance of buildings and utilities. The central state budget covers the salaries of teachers in compulsory pre-school education (5-6 year olds). At the general education level, teachers' salaries are funded from the state budget and the maintenance and utility costs from the local government budgets. In 2009/2010 the funding model "money follows the child" was introduced in order to manage the school network after administrative reform. Schools for disabled children, boarding schools and schools/classes for social correction are fully funded. State secondary schools receive extra finances for additional costs of teachers' professional development. The state secondary schools are fulfilling the role of methodological supervision and providing support for other educational institutions on regional and local levels. At the moment, VET schools are still state funded and owned institutions, with some private exceptions. However, the aim is to pass over VET to local municipalities. VET may receive a special targeted budget form the competent ministry according to the defined and supported professional area. Maintenance and capital needs of municipality-owned schools are covered from local municipality budgets, bearing the responsibility and control over the use of these resources. A school principal is responsible for the operation and performance of the school as well as the effective use of resources. However, in practice most of the educational institutions do not have bookkeeping and resource management independent from the municipality (SAO 2020). In order to improve their equipment or learning environments, schools have support foundations with donations from parents, pupils or other physical persons. Private education institutions bear the full cost, except the costs of compulsory education for 5-6 year olds, which is funded from the central budget. Private accredited education institutions may receive funding for teaching staff salaries and may sign agreements with local authorities (Eurydice).

### **2.1.4. Social support to learners**

*Scholarships:* As state-funded scholarship is available for students admitted to VET in the state funded or local government funded places. The amount granted is not lower than 10 euros and on average is 14.23 euros per month. An increased scholarship may be granted

for orphans or out-of-home care students, as well as to those students without parental care continuing education after the legal age. One-time or increased scholarships can be provided in case of certain needs and for good and excellent achievements, and this amount shall not exceed 150 euros. The scholarship is prioritised in the same manner – for disabled, larger families and orphans or out of parental care students. In addition, special targeted scholarships are available from the European Social Fund programmes. At the higher educational level (tertiary), state funded scholarships are granted (on equal school and scientific performance basis) and prioritised for disabled persons, orphans or persons without parental care, for those with a granted status of a family in need and a large family (with three or more children), as well as students who have children (Cabinet 2004). State funded scholarships are not available for students in fully state-funded special VET programmes. At these special educational institutions, dormitories and school meals are completely free of charge (state budget). Privately funded scholarships are offered at educational institutions.

*Dormitories:* Diversified funding – depending on institution and source of funding. Local funding mainly.

*Lunches:* school lunches are funded from the state and local government budget at the primary level (1-4 class), and later depend on the municipality, affordability, and type of institution. Special educational institutions and boarding schools are fully state funded.

Cabinet regulation No 614 (Cabinet 2020). This regulation states that pupils in public funded institutions are entitled to free meals covered by the national budget (1.42 EUR per pupil per day) and in private education institutions (0,71 euro per day). The main goal is to ensure free and equal access to food. Local authorities are responsible for implementation at the local municipal and school level. There are no strong actors or opponents against the food nutrition policy. The main challenges are insufficient funding in order to provide quality meals, geographical inequalities among wealthier municipalities that can invest more, diverse catering services with unequal quality insurance, and a high level of food waste (Grivins et al. 2018). In later stages, it depends on the local municipality – to what extent it can provide the school meals.

Differentiated support measures are available at the municipality level for youth experiencing disadvantages, e.g., individual career counselling, free school lunch, support for school equipment, support for families in need, social pedagogy, psychology at school, etc. (Eurydice). A career counselling project was implemented with EU funding. Smaller rural schools could not implement the project due to restricted student numbers. Even though the social welfare services are not analysed in detail here, some positive effects are evident in regard to the expansion of social policies. Differentiated social entitlements and supplementary support measures at the state and municipal levels improve the life of families and youth. The additional measures introduced to promote and support youth transition to the labour market and to improve the economic situation. At the same time, regional disparities and local municipalities in their economic capacity affect the allocation of resources. The social support measures (social assistance) as well as education support measures depend on the local budget.



## 2.2. Labour market policy for youth

Young people are defined as one of the important target groups in the main policy documents (NAP 2020; Youth Law, in force 01.01.2009.), in the context of the previously mentioned education/vocational training, as well as in active labour market policy (ALMPs), poverty reduction and social exclusion. The main concern of these policies is to reduce youth unemployment and promote the social inclusion of young people in the labour market, as well as to increase young people's social protection and equality.

### 2.2.1. Unemployment protection (PLMP)

Young people who are not able to obtain education (drop-outs) and who do not have a job/are not in training (NEET) are eligible for a social assistance (SA) benefit. The Latvian social policy model provides evidence of being a mixture of conservative and liberal welfare models with not very generous, but still not strictly means-tested social assistance and social services provided at the local level. Those unemployed with some work experiences are covered by social insurance and there are additional eligibility criteria for employment benefit. Social insurance shall be not less than a year. The benefit may be received for a maximum of 8 months. The amount of the unemployment benefit depends on the period person has been insured and average amount of the contribution from the salary. For instance, if the person has been ensured from 1 to 9 years the unemployment benefit is 50% of the average contribution salary. The disabled person after regaining the working ability and person with disability since childhood can receive the unemployment benefit independently from the contributions. In this case the unemployment benefit is 60% from 218 euros (the double state social security benefit) (SSIA).

### 2.2.2. Active labour market policy (ALMP)

In respect to poverty reduction and the application of youth orientated ALMPs, the Baltic States are valued as being most decisive. The ALMPs play a most crucial role in the poverty reduction strategy among youth, especially NEETs. In 2013-2014, Latvia adopted the greatest number – seven youth-oriented reforms and spent the largest share of expenditure (% of GDP) on training and incentives, less on job creation and start-ups (EC 2016a, 24-5; in Tosun et al. 2017). Still, the spending on ALMPs in comparison to other EU countries is very low. Only 5 percent of youth in the age group 15-19 are employed while in education, basically due to full-time general education and the inability to combine work with education. VET institutions are still mainly school-based, with apprenticeship periods at schools or enterprises that are not paid by employers. There was funding from ALMPs for training and employment practice, and these initiatives were mainly targeted at supporting businesses – subsidised working places, equipment and consultancy. It is evident that in the later stages (starting from 20-24 years of age) around 13% combine education with work and 43% are working (OECD 2017). Employment in the age range from 20-29 is rather high – 71% (Eurostat, 2018). Positive results can be explained with available public funded education up to the secondary level, incl. VET, ALMPs as part of education and training, public work initiatives as well as the ability

to combine work with education in the later stage. As previously mentioned, Latvia is among those Eastern European countries that have a lower incidence of low-wage, non-standard employees and a rather high level of informal workers that are difficult to identify. Atypical work conditions still shall be taken into consideration and shall be seen contextually with rather flexible labour market regulations (self-employment, micro- and small enterprises) that are not sufficiently covered by social security schemes. Social assistance and unemployment support measures can be restricted for those with a rather high level of labour market entrances and exits during the transition period. Strictly defined terminations, e.g., previous one to three month employment or unemployment or other income conditions, can restrict access to support measures in a period of economic or financial hardship.

### **2.2.3. Industrial and other labour relations**

Working time regulation is a matter of individual agreement and involves regular daily working time (40 hours, 5 days a week), overtime and part-time work in Latvia (Labour Law). During the economic recession (2008-2012) part-time work increased from 7% to 11%, which could be explained by shorter hours of work that were adopted to minimise employment cuts (ILO 2016). Even though discrimination is prohibited by law, the gender pay gap can be identified by lower paid jobs where women are employed (health care, education, etc.). Pay transparency instruments proposed in the 2014 European Commission's Recommendations (c (2014)1405 final) are mainly observed, but not implemented yet. From 2012-2018, the share of part-time workers (from 8.8% to 7%) and involuntary part-time<sup>1</sup> work decreased especially among women (from 42.5% in 2012 to 29.6% in 2018). One possible explanation might be the scarce availability of paid jobs, as well as a disproportion between the high qualification of the workforce and a labour demand for low qualified workers (Eurofound 2018). Employment flexibility can be characterised by different types of agreements and contracts, but only some of those agreements are subject to the obligation to pay the social insurance tax (32,15%).

## **2.3. Social welfare policy**

In the first decades since Latvia regained its independence, the social welfare policy was designed as a basic social safety net and means of ensuring minimum subsistence. The social protection system developed in a liberal direction, relying on tax transfers and a rather small social security system (expenditures on social protection were much lower compared to the EU average and still are the lowest at around 15.2% of the GDP in 2019). The means-tested benefits for low-income families with an extended support system at the local level and partly decentralised social service provision, e.g., school meals, food stamps, housing benefits, etc., were introduced in different combinations and are very diversified from one municipality to another. The social protection system has become less universal with rather diversified models of private and public service provision, student fees and a mix of flat-rate benefits and earning related benefits. During the period of 2007-2019, the social welfare policy expanded in terms of general social services and increased support for poor families

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<sup>1</sup> Part-timeworkingbecausetheycouldnotfindfull-time.

and families in need of differentiated services (care for children with disabilities, foster care, etc.). Changes in family policy can be divided into three main periods: severe economic crisis (2008-2012), expansion and reconstruction of social policy areas after the crisis (2013-2017) (Rajevska, Rajevska 2020), and a very initial shift towards universality and progressivity (from 2018 on).

Social benefits, adequacy and coverage of social protection for different groups of young people may vary according to their household combinations or special individual circumstances. In general terms, youth (between 15 and 20, and if studying to 24 years) are eligible to all types of social benefits, unemployment, and family benefits if they are living with their parents or living separately and can verify the certain conditions. According to the Civil law (in force since 01.09.1992) parents (guardians) are duty-bound to provide care and maintain the needs of the child (young person) in accordance with their material ability until they can ensure their independent livelihood (section 179, paragraph 1). On local level there is available housing benefit, social social assistance (SA) and other social measures for single parents and persons with disabilities. The guaranteed minimum income level depends on rather strictly defined criteria, i.e., registered living place, income threshold, household composition and family income, material assets, special conditions (disability, illness), etc. No other specific youth-oriented initiatives, except ALMPs and local level initiatives supporting those studying, can be recognised.

### **2.3.1. Access and eligibility to social assistance**

Social benefits, adequacy and coverage of social protection for different groups of young people vary. It is rather complicated to identify youth among benefit recipients. Age is one of the eligibility criteria applied in most cases at age 18-20 and for students up to the age of 24. Different family-household eligibility criteria and a combination of support on local, regional and state levels make it even more difficult to grasp the reality.

Family protection and support is defined in the Constitution (1922, Section 110), whereas a marriage is strongly supported between a man and a woman as a family. This means that family in the form of marriage is an important eligibility criterion in case of divorce and property rights. A household measure is applied in case of social assistance, whereas eligibility criteria to receive certain benefits dependent on the specific household situation, dependents or other extended family members living in the same household (elderly, dependents) and is assessed by the municipality's social service provider (social worker).

At the central level, there are ten types of in-cash universal state social allowances paid on a regular basis and three types of lump-sum allowances (Law on State Social Allowance, Section 3), which encompass the rights of parents and the rights of the child, special support for disabled children, children left without parental care or suffering from violence. The universal family allowance (11,38 euros) is granted for all children aged 1-15 years and up to 20 years if the person is studying<sup>2</sup>. Considerable welfare redistribution changes were

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<sup>2</sup> Not receiving scholarship, except the EU funded, and not married.

made to support large families with increased allowance<sup>3</sup> (entered into force 01.01.2018.). Since 2013 the childcare benefit increased to 171 euros and is granted until the age of 1,5 years, after which it is 42,69 euros until 2 years for every next child. Special supportive measures were implemented for families that are taking care of children with disabilities and severe disabilities<sup>4</sup> (amendments made from 2009-2010, Cabinet of Ministers Nr.1607, paragraph 2; VSSA data). Following the deinstitutionalisation process (2009-2017,) several additional allowances were introduced for guardians, foster families and child adoption. The deinstitutionalisation process is still in its initial stage but shows promising continuity of supportive arrangements both for children in out-of-home care and children with disabilities (Broka et al. 2017; 2018). In total, more than 18 amendments with three Constitutional Court decisions (on Sections 4 and 20) and four Supreme Court decisions (on Section 3, 6, 9 and 10) have been made about different types of family allowances in 2007-2019. Even though child benefits in all three Baltic countries are universal, these are too low and not sufficient to eradicate poverty. In Latvia, the social entitlements for single, two-parent and single parent families with low earnings during the recession (2008, 2009) were regressive, thus supporting higher income groups. Only in 2011 did positive values indicate improvements and income replacement became higher for families with lower earnings (SPIN).

### 2.3.2. Access and eligibility to social services

The share of social housing in the housing stock (EU) is one of the lowest in Latvia (below 5 per cent of the total). Social housing in Latvia consists of housing that is owned by municipalities and offered for families in need, who are social assistance recipients or meet eligibility criteria to rent an apartment in social housing (according to social assistance regulations on the municipality level). Thus, the main mission of social housing is to offer housing to vulnerable and socially disadvantaged people by giving priority to orphans or persons out of parental care from the age of 18. In 2006, investments in new social housing were co-financed by the central government and the EU. Between 2008-2009, housing benefits decreased. In addition to previously mentioned social group, eligibility criteria include: low-income households, disabled persons, the elderly and families with children, especially large families (three and more children). Financial support is directly provided through the local municipal budget. It is a fixed rent ceiling with housing allowance for utility costs (European Parliament, Social housing in the EU, 2013). In the most recent OECD report "Policy Actions for Affordable Housing in Latvia" (2020), OECD secretary general Angel Gurría stressed the importance of providing low-cost rental housing in areas with job opportunities in Latvia. The Ministry of Economy has introduced grant schemes for families with more than three children for the first housing and set the availability of housing as a national priority.

Providing shelter for those in need is the responsibility of the local government and is offered to families and individuals in crisis (according to the municipality regulations).

<sup>3</sup> For second child (22,76 euros), for third (34,14) and for more than four children (50,07 euros) and extra payment (summing up for two children – 10 euros, three – 60, and next – 50 euros).

<sup>4</sup> Since 2009 allowance increased from 71.14 euros to 106.72 euros; additional child care benefit for children with severe disability increased from 106,72 euros to 313, 43 euros per month in 2019.

Psychological and legal counselling – local government. Social service departments provide necessary support in accordance with the Law on Social Services and Social Assistance (in force 01.01.2003). There are certain social services, incl. psychological help that can be provided by a municipality or by specialised institutions such as crisis centres. Psychological assistance is defined as part of social work with individuals' or families' interpersonal and social problems. The psychological assistance can be provided by a psychologist who is covered by the local municipality as part of social work or by the state in case of violence as part of social rehabilitation in a crisis centre.

Social/public transport – local government. Public transport is solely the responsibility of local municipalities. Public school transport is provided for those living in a particular area. As part of social work (social) specialised transportation is provided for persons to access hospitals or rehabilitation services. The cost is covered from the municipality budget but can also be shared by the person that needs the service.

## **2.4. Housing policy**

Housing policy has been implemented by the central and local governments in Latvia. There are two main processes that influenced the general housing policy. First, privatisation and denationalisation (returning back property to original owners), and, second, general socio-economic conditions (e.g., expansion of the real estate market (building boom), mobility of population and economic crisis). The Ministry of Economics Department of Construction and Housing Policy is responsible for the assurance of quality management and administration of residential houses (the Law on Administration of Residential Houses was adopted in 2009). The main policy concern is to promote housing quality, accessibility, and ensure a legal framework for the effective management of residential houses, with establishment of funds in the local governments and support to energy-saving activities. During the economic recession (until 2011), the central government supported housing allowances. The most recent is the Housing Guarantee program (ALTUM), available for families with children (up to 23 years of age included) with regular income but not enough savings to make the down payment (Cabinet regulations on State Aid for Purchase or Construction of Living Quarters, No. 95, 20.02.2018.). The energy saving measure is the main priority of the central government, while the local government is responsible for assuring both accessibility and quality, including social housing, which is entirely the local government's responsibility. Housing policy does not respond to the needs of the poor persons and very few initiatives on local level can be recognized as a response to the housing affordability issue.

### **2.4.1. Access to public housing**

Housing policy is also defined at the local level. The municipalities in their own regulations set priority groups. Recent changes that have been identified are related with the assessment criteria. Municipalities are now providing public housing not only for those persons in need, but also for qualified specialists. It is rather unclear how these two very different groups are divided in the decision-making process and whether there is equal treatment.



## 2.4.2. Access to and affordability of commercial housing

The most recent initiative evolves the state grant programme for families with 3 and more children (age group until 23) towards purchasing their first housing for a price that is not higher than 250 000 euros. A government guarantee on the loan consists of the terminated agreement for the 10 years ensuring 10% of the total loan (not exceeding 10 000 euros for the one child family), 10-15% of the loan for families with two children (not exceeding 15 000 euros) and from 10-20% of the loan for the families with three and more children (not exceeding 20 000 euros). The guarantee can be increased if the housing has an A class energy saving rate (Altum).

## 2.5. Health policy

In 2015, 85 per cent of young people perceived their health to be good or very good, which is rather equal between males and females. Almost 13 percent perceived their health as fair and only 2.1 percent perceived it as bad or very bad in the same age group (Table 24). Accordingly, there is a very low share of youth (1.7 percent) reporting unmet medical needs (too expensive, too far or waiting lists) (Table 26). The Latvian health care system is tax-financed, statutory health care provision, a purchaser-provider split and a mix of public and private providers, which finally was established in 2011 (NHS-type). The NHS provides coverage for the entire population and pays for a publicly funded benefit package. This package covers certain pharmaceuticals and preventive, diagnostic and therapeutic interventions, while excluding certain services such as dental care for those aged over 18, rehabilitation, as well as sight and hearing correction aids, etc., as well as some procedures that should be included yet are not. This package is rather limited and was reduced during the economic recession in 2008, and it negatively affected the good quality of health care. Patients are paying substantial user charges and direct payments, e.g. pharmaceuticals and inpatient procedures. The structure of out-of-pocket spending is the result of limited coverage of health services and pharmaceuticals. Low-income households are among those affected the most by this structure (around 25% of poorest quantile are paying out-of-pocket in comparison to 4% of the richest quantile). Primary care is provided mainly by NHS, while secondary care is both by public and private providers, with public provision on the municipal or regional level. Health expenditure is the second lowest and has declined in recent years from 6.2 percent in 2009 to 5.8 percent in 2015. However, Latvia made several efforts in order to improve cancer care since 2009 with centralisation of cancer care and early diagnostics (in 2017, Green Corridor pathways). Youth and especially men are among the high-risk groups for premature deaths (traffic accidents, lung cancer, heavy alcohol consumption, etc.). Engagement in physical activities is lower among younger persons (15 years old), while it is higher among older young people. Tobacco control policies might have contributed towards reduced smoking rates among adolescents over the past decades. Similarly to other EU countries, the government increased excise taxes on alcoholic beverages and tobacco products in 2015 and 2017. Still there is very low spending on preventive measures (around 2 percent of health spending). Only in 2014-2020 were resources allocated for health promotion and preventive activities



under the Public Health Strategy with EU funding. The current low level of expenditure on health is associated with the relatively poor health of general population (OECD 2017a).

### **2.5.1. Access to the public health care**

Access to the free public health care is universal until age 18.

### **2.5.2. Public health and awareness raising**

Alcohol restrictions are limited by law – the age limit for consumption and purchasing is 18. Alcohol use is also limited by restrictions in time – the trade of alcohol is banned for retailers from 10.00 PM to 8.00 AM. The smoking policy is related to a public health policy aiming to reduce cardiovascular diseases. Smoking is forbidden in public areas (Law on the Handling of Tobacco Products, Herbal Products for Smoking, Electronic Smoking Devices and Their Liquids, in force 20.05.2016.)

## **2.6. Active citizenship**

Youth policy until 2009 was not specifically defined but supported by local governments in terms of developing youth centres, and initiatives in sports, culture and education. These initiatives are often part of the education or in-school activities. Since joining the EU in 2004, more youth-oriented activities have been organised by different NGOs working with youth.

Since 2009 the Youth Law (entered into force 01.01.2009) determines young people's (aged 13 to 25) initiatives, participation in decision-making and social life as well as youth work. Youth policy is part of all public policies and is implemented by public government and local government institutions as well as by youth organisations, and other physical or legal persons. On a central level, the Ministry of Education and Science is the main actor in policy development and coordination and approves the annual youth policy state programme. Youth policy priorities for 2020 involve harmonisation of activities in all regions and especially on the local level, expansion of activities for more active engagement, usage of different methods, contacts, support of youth organisations, collaboration with state and local municipalities, as well as international youth political areas in accordance with 11 of the EU Youth Strategy targets for 2019-2027. These initiatives are promoted through different institutions and findings. The Agency for International Programs for Youth (subordinated to the Ministry of Education and Science) promotes youth activities, volunteering and mobility with other EU, Eastern Partnership and MEDA countries, as well as implementing non-formal learning and projects targeted at more active youth involvement and participation via different actors (NGOs, youth centres and municipalities). There are seven different programmes available – Erasmus+ Youth in Action, EuroDesk, a bilateral Latvian-Swiss cooperation programme, e-Twinning, Anna Lind Fund Latvian Network, and the state programme and Youth Guarantee project "Know and Do". Each of the programmes has certain funding and application procedures as well as eligibility criteria (SEDA).

### **2.6.1. Regulations of youth involvement in decision making**

Youth involvement starts at the school level with self-government youth councils, acting in accordance with the school's general regulations and elected annually. The main task of these organisations is to collaborate with the educational institution's administration and teaching staff, represent the interests of pupils, foster education processes, coordinate the civic engagement of youth and actively engage in public/social life, etc. Youth participation in social activities and civic engagement is supported by youth organisations outside schools (municipal Youth Centres, NGOs and youth workers). Active development and expansion of youth organisations beyond schools started in 2011. Today there are 219 youth representatives – youth workers (16) or youth specialist (73 persons), more than 30 Youth NGOs, 82 child/youth centres and 18 Youth Councils in Latvia (Youth Actions). There are 38 youth organisations (NGOs) registered between 2011–2019 with different priorities and fields of activities. Most youth organisations (20) mention legislation and political participation as their priority. In Riga and Pieriga region are located 18 organizations and the rest in other regions: Latgale (2), Zemgale (5), Vidzeme (4), and Kurzeme (3) region (MES). Youth specialists and youth workers are recognised professions according to professional standard and are employed by the local government. There are 356 youth workers employed by local municipalities. In many municipalities certain planned activities of youth organisations are directly financed from the local government budget. Almost all youth policy planning documents on the local municipality level (42) were issued in the period from 2013–2020. Thus it can be recognised as a youth policy planning and implementation period acknowledging the importance of youth engagement and participation harmonised on the local level. Beyond municipal support, youth organisations are funded via different youth-oriented projects and programmes as well as special financial grants for youth initiatives from the state budget.

### **2.6.2. Programs on advancing youth citizenship and political participation**

## **Conclusion**

After all the youth are addressed in different policy areas, e.g., education, labour market, social welfare, housing etc. Education. Universal accessibility is on pre-school, basic and secondary educational level, incl. VET, are free of charge (local government and state funded). It is 9-years compulsory education starting from the age of 7 and usually completed at the age of 18 with continuity options. In education the youth are recognised as part of certain structure while receiving general level of education. Further education on tertiary level is mixed between structural and individual level. Recent policies on the WBL have emphasised the need for specialisation in the earliest possible stage (already starting on the basic education level, class 7 and secondary level – class 10, since 1 September 2020). The tracking system dividing students into a group by their abilities cannot be formally recognized. Different support measures (transportation, allowances, scholarships, grants, meals, dormitories, etc., for socially disadvantaged pupils, students). However, it is evident that education system is highly institutionalized for children with disabilities. Recent reforms within deinstitutionalization are

still in development stage and it is hard to evaluate to what extent inclusive education will be a solution for families relying on accessible special boarding school education environment (institutionalized one). Transition from one level of education to another is flexible with no restrictions. The main concern is about increasing marketization of education system. On tertiary level it is government - dependent education institutional settings with public and student contributions (mainly tuition fees or other fees paid by students). There is available student financial support system with grants and loans. The student support scheme evolves the public funding for certain prioritised programmes (e.g., High-Tec, engineering, natural sciences and medicine etc.). Funding is available for good performing students. Integration of "Youth Guarantee" in VET, education modules (since 2013-2019) (active policy coordination by the MES and the SEDA) allowed to enter the education the NEETs and early leavers. There are developed carrier counselling centres at the municipality level.

Labour market can be characterized as rather flexible with rather low social security coverage. Unemployment benefit depends on insurance and contributions, while increasing evidence is about atypical and non-standard work conditions among youth. The ALAMPs has been an important policy measure since 2011, incl. education and training, practical training on the labour market, subsidised employment. Employment of young people is rather high, especially in the later stage (20-29 of age, 71%). Still the main challenge is an opportunity to combine the work and education. Disadvantaged groups in the labour market are drop-outs, NEETs, young parents, esp. young single parents, youth without family support (orphans, poor families) and persons with disabilities and other disorders. Labour market is rather flexible, while lacking a social safety net. Youth oriented social policies. Social benefits (social assistance) are rather individualised (from age of 15) independently of family income, but the assessment involves the household (family's income) as a unit. Social benefits provided by the state are universal, but the coverage is very low and eligibility criteria are strict, mainly depending on household income. Minimal guaranteed income level is not defined and thus makes it difficult in application of social policy measures. Social assistance and other family benefits are granted for children or individual as a young person (means tested), depends on the local municipality. Health. There is public health until the age of 18, while private and public health insurance from age of 18. Share of out-of-pocket payment for health care is evident for different groups, especially for those with lower income level. Compensatory health care system is for persons with disabilities in accordance with social rehabilitation (incl. DI plan with community - based services). Availability and affordability of health care is disputable. Housing has only recently been acknowledged as a political priority (reflection on OECD in 2019). Special programmes – the State guarantee is available for young families (since 2020). Meanwhile the youth are dependent on their family income and wealth (affordability). At the same time there is rather low housing burden rate, which shall be more carefully assessed. Municipalities are subsidising the low-income households (housing benefit) and vulnerable groups (e.g., disabled, persons after alternative care). Youth active citizenship can be recognized by activities that are mainly project-funded (in schools, NGOs, incl. coordinated by the Agency for International Programs for Youth under the MES). Local governments are funding the youth centre structure and part of the activities; but mainly the youth centre activities are still project-based and dependent on external financial resources.

Education institutions are important promoters and partners for NGOs that are targeted at youth; however, these initiatives are dependent on a school's capacity and ability to engage in different projects. The Youth Law defines the main areas of active citizenship, yet these activities are rather formal and do not have sufficient support at the local level. Civic education is still not prioritised and is rather formal in education curricula.

**Table 1. Youth oriented policies**

EDUCATION	Low stratification	High stratification
High commodification		
Low commodification	X →	X

LABOUR MARKET	Compensatory	Preventive
Structure-related	X →	X
Individualising	X	

SOCIAL WELFARE	
Individualised	X
Familialised	X

HOUSING	Universal access	Selective/targeted access
High commodification		X
Low commodification	X	

ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP	Individualized options	Structure –related options
High involvement		X
Low involvement	X	

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