

Youth Partnership

Partnership between the European Commission
and the Council of Europe in the field of Youth



COUNTRY SHEET ON YOUTH WORK IN LATVIA



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Author: **Gints Klasons**

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1. Context of youth work

The development of Latvian youth policy needs to be assessed in the context of the socio-political challenges associated with Latvia's late transformation. From the mid-1990s onwards, Latvian youth policy, like many other policy areas, started to evolve as a contested policy field at the intersection of traditional interests. Latvian youth policy at the crossroads was reflected in institutional, as well as in substantive terms. For instance, on one hand, and most visibly, structured leisure time activities (that is "hobby and interest education"), similar to those of the former communist structures of youth management, continued to exist as an important element of the youth policy. On the other hand, international co-operation and counselling in the youth policy development and youth work introduced new concepts to the Latvian context. These included development of civil society by facilitating participation, establishing NGOs, promoting autonomy and non-formal methods of education and training.

Although youth work is being increasingly perceived and accepted as an independent area of policy and practice, still in society as a whole and among those who are involved in youth work (teachers, local representatives, parents) there is still a widespread belief that youth work is limited to hobby-related education.

As an interdisciplinary area, youth policy identifies several relevant topics to address – youth employment, health and health care, participation, emigration. Youth work recognition and the availability of appropriate funding is also a concern of youth policy.

Although the Latvian labour market has recovered during recent years, unemployment remains a key problem affecting young people. Regional differences persist and continue to reinforce social inequalities. Labour market participation is additionally affected for young women by an absence of relevant child care and pre-school facilities, as well as by high female unemployment after maternity leave.

Latvia follows a strategy of enhancing the youth-friendliness of health services by adopting access to, and provision of, services according to young people's needs within an environment of an overall system where health care provision has a comparatively low profile. So far, very few health centres for children and young people, offering specialised youth counselling for a broad range of issues, have been established. Health care for the youth population can be identified as one of the issues to address in youth work – statistical data shows several critical aspects (smoking, drinking alcohol, obesity, inactive lifestyle, etc.).

Currently available forms of youth participation, like the popular school councils at many schools, provide valuable opportunities for responsible youth involvement. However, their status in terms of, for example, citizenship versus leadership learning is unclear. The further extension of the internet – as well as institution-based access to youth information – might be critical for successful youth participation and citizenship in the future. In recent

years in Latvia many youth projects have been implemented that are directed to facilitate the participation of young people, but the most important challenge still is to reach and activate particularly inactive and less active young people.

Having regard to the fact that during the period from 2013 to 2017 on average 20 000 people have emigrated from Latvia annually, and the proportion of young people in the total number of emigrants is on average 35% (in figures between 7 000 and 8 000 young people a year), young people living in emigration (the diaspora) becomes an important issue in the political agenda. Over the last 15 years, the total number of emigrated young people from Latvia is more than 122 000. Thus the diaspora youth represents a very significant part of Latvian youth (up to one third). Work with the diaspora youth is a new challenge for youth policy in Latvia, particularly because not only is the number of young people in Latvia decreasing, but also the proportion of young people in society.

Although the Youth Law was adopted in 2008 and work with young people as a separate policy area has existed for more than 10 years, there is still the issue of recognition and professionalisation of youth work. In the last two years, special attention has been paid to activating youth work at local level – still only about half of Latvian municipalities have adopted planning documents directly in the youth policy field, and only a small number of local governments have developed institutional models for implementing youth work. Therefore, it is still important to maintain youth work matters in the policy agenda, including financial provision in particular.

2. Strategic and legislative framework of youth work

The Youth Law was adopted by the Parliament of the Republic of Latvia and came into force on 1 January 2009. The purpose of the Youth Law is to improve the life quality of young people (persons from 13 to 25 years of age) by promoting their initiatives, participation in decision making and social life, as well as by supporting youth work. The Youth Law determines the persons involved in the implementation of the youth policy and the competence thereof in the field of youth policy, youth participation in the development and implementation of the youth policy, as well as the basic principles for granting of financing to youth initiatives, for participation in decision making and social life and for youth work.

Based on the Youth Law, three bylaws were accepted:

- 1) regulations on the Youth Advisory Council that regulate the work of the Youth Advisory Council;
- 2) regulations on training of youth affairs specialists that set out the training system – necessary skills, competences and knowledge to work as a youth work specialist according to the profession's standard;
- 3) regulations on procedures for receiving financing from the state budget, which is provided for promotion of young people initiatives and participation in decision making and social life, as well as for youth work for:
 - youth organisations for receiving funding for projects the objective of which is the promotion of youth initiatives and participation in decision making and social life, as well as projects for youth work;
 - local governments and associations or foundations for projects which are oriented towards youth work;
 - youth organisations for operational support of their activity.

The Youth Policy Implementation Plan 2016-2020 was drafted as a mid-term policy planning document for four years aimed at achieving a coherent youth policy implementation and co-ordination, and identifying priority action lines and policies, creating a vision of development in relation to the life quality of young people and youth policy. The guidelines identify the key challenges for youth policy, as well as the main actions and operational results of four years in the youth policy field.

Every year the Ministry of Education and Science develops an annual programme, which includes particular measures and activities to implement youth policy within the Youth Policy Implementation Plan 2016-2020. A budget is allocated by the state based on the annual work programme.

According to the Law on Local Governments, municipalities can also take administrative decisions in the field of youth.

Out of 119 Latvian municipalities, 37 have defined their youth policy in a separate document, but 30 have integrated it into another planning document (for example, in the overall municipality development planning document). At the same time, in the study of 2015 it was concluded that the current practice on drafting planning documents of local municipalities is rather inefficient and has little impact on real youth work. This is due to the fact that these documents do not always meet the best practice requirements in of planning documents. Very often these documents are not based on the specific needs of young people in a particular local government, and often they express a certain objective without financial back-up.

3. Recognition

No particular recognition systems are implemented or used. For projects funded by Erasmus+: Youth in Action (2014-2020) Youthpass is available and used, but it is known that it is considered to be formal and with almost no real impact on the youth field.

There are occupational profile standards for youth affairs specialists and youth workers. Standards define needed competencies, education, and experience for those working in mentioned professions.

Since 2016 the Ministry of Education and Science has organised an annual contest, "Youth Capital City of Latvia". As a result of this contest a local government is selected and declared as the Youth Capital City for the next year. Throughout the year, different youth events and initiatives of youth work and youth participation take place there. In 2016 the winner was Jelgava, in 2017, Liepaja, and in 2018, Madona.

The Ministry of Education and Science also organises an annual contest, "The Best in Youth Work", whose aim is to express the appreciation of the Ministry of Education and Science to the local governments, to persons who are involved in youth work, as well as to youth organisations and associations that perform youth work investing in improving the quality of life of young people.

4. Funding youth work

National level

The budget allocated to the field of youth has been gradually increasing:

2012 – €152 225

2013 – €315 856

2014 – €330 520

2015 – €328 520

2016 – €328 520

2017 – €561 493

2018 – €682 484

The relative indicator of the allocated budgets has also increased – in 2012 it was only €0.5 per young person, in 2017 it had reached €2.2 per young person.

At the same time, it should be noted that Latvian youth policy is funded by several ministries and it is not possible to put precise figures on each individual contribution. The numbers given above show only financing under the Ministry of Education and Science.

The main responsible institution for the annual National Youth Programme funding is the Ministry of Education and Science. The National Youth Programme provides yearly support to local authorities, municipalities and youth organisations. The National Youth Agency is in charge of this process. Any additional funding available to the youth field from other ministries and institutions, is directly managed by each institution.

According to the annual National Youth Programme for 2018, specific youth policy measures funded are: work with young people in municipalities, support for youth organisations and various youth initiatives, international co-operation in the youth field, and information support.

Regional and local level

The municipal budget allocation for youth differs according to the availability of funding in each municipality. There is no estimated amount known, as no survey has been carried out to calculate the amount that is allocated in the field of youth at the municipal level. It is also very complicated to collect financing data as there is no particular methodology as to what budget lines should or should not be considered as relating to youth work (especially regarding the education, culture and sports fields).

International funding

Whereas the state funding for the youth field is rather small, opportunities for international funding are crucial for the development of youth work. International financing for the youth field in Latvia is co-ordinated by the State Agency for International Programmes for Youth. The most significant sources of international funding are: Erasmus+: Youth in Action; the Latvian-Switzerland co-operation programme (ended in 2017); and the European Union funds for the programming period 2014-2020.

5. Structures, actors and levels in youth work provision

5.1 State structures/public authorities deciding on or providing youth work

National level

Ministry in charge of youth – [the Ministry of Education and Science](#)

- Minister – Kārlis Šadurskis
- Duration of mandate – since February 2016

Other national public bodies who are directly involved in youth policies:

- Other ministries – [the Ministry of Culture](#), [the Ministry of Defence](#), [the Ministry of Welfare](#), [the Ministry of Health](#), [the Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#)
- Offices – [State Agency for International Programmes for Youth](#). The Agency for International Programmes for Youth is subordinated to the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Latvia. The objective of the Agency is to promote youth voluntary service, activities and mobility (e.g. with EU, Eastern Partnership, MEDA countries). The Agency implements non-formal learning and information programmes and projects targeted at youth and those working with youth, and supports the link between non-formal learning and lifelong education.

There are several commissions in Parliament responsible for issues dealing with the youth field:

- Name – Commission of European Affairs
 - o role and competence – develops the Latvian positions for international co-operation
- Name – Commission of Education, Culture and Science
 - o role and competence – responsible for the education field, evaluates legislative acts on education

Regional level

According to the Law on Regional Development there are five regional planning councils created from representatives of local governments. The role of planning councils is to ensure the planning process of regional development, including defining the regions' long-term development goals, objectives and priorities by adopting regional planning documents.

The role of planning regions in youth policy is indirect and is tackled via regional development plans not only directly addressing youth policy fields, but also different youth policy directions, such as youth unemployment or education.

One of the defined policy results of the Youth Policy Implementation Plan 2016-2020 envisages establishing a post of youth affairs co-ordinator in each planning region, but until now it has not been implemented in any of the regions.

Local (municipal) level

On the local level the main actors in youth policy are the municipalities and the institutions subjected to them. One of local government's functions is planning and implementing youth work, by taking into consideration the basic principles of youth policy and the documentation for the planning of state youth policy development. According to the Youth Law, local governments plan local work with the youth, creating the documentation of local government youth policy (for example, youth work strategy).

Each local government creates its own institutional system for youth work, by appointing the responsible institution or responsible employees for implementing youth work. A local government is authorised to recruit a youth affairs specialist and establish a youth centre, Advisory Committee on Youth Affairs or Youth Council.

In accordance with the information of the Ministry of Education and Science, in 105 of 119 municipalities there is at least one staff member working with young people (in Latvia in total there are 328 such employees (on average in Latvia there is one youth worker for 800 young people)), in 93 municipalities there is at least one NGO that performs youth work, in 87 municipalities there are youth centres, only 40 municipalities have youth councils, and in only 27 municipalities is there a youth advisory commission.

In order to promote the implementation of youth work in municipalities according to the long-term national planning documents the general criteria to assess youth work in municipalities were developed. There are 105 general criteria grouped in 10 thematic sections that can be used to assess the current situation in youth work.

5.2 National or local youth councils

The National Youth Council of Latvia was founded in 1992 as a public youth organisation whose members are youth organisations and youth organisation associations. It has more than 30 member organisations. Members of the National Youth Council of Latvia identify and try to solve a variety of youth-related questions, and enable the participating organisations to intervene on young people's needs and growth, ensuring the flow of information and their support.

The National Youth Council of Latvia provides information to the public and promotes civic participation of young people, encouraging them to engage in youth organisations. It

organises non-formal education activities and represents the youth organisations. Its tasks are to represent the interests of young people in Latvia and in international institutions, as well as to gather the views of young people, explore their options, preferences in different regions of Latvia and to help them implement the various youth initiatives. Thus the mission of the National Youth Council of Latvia is to promote youth organisations, development and comprehensive co-operation, to motivate young people to get involved.

The National Youth Council of Latvia in co-operation with the Ministry of Education and Science and other stakeholders ensure the implementation of the European Commission structured dialogue in Latvia, organising national consultations with young people about priorities in the field of youth put forward by presidency of three members of the European Council. The National Youth Council of Latvia chairs a national work group of the European Commission structural dialogue.

Furthermore, the National Youth Council of Latvia is a member organisation of the European Youth Forum and organisations in Latvia such as the Civil Alliance Latvia and the Latvian Platform for Development Co-operation.

Web page – <http://www.ljp.lv>

There are regional and municipal youth councils established, particularly in cities, which often function in close co-operation with local municipalities. The structure, members and tasks may differ case by case and are defined by local needs. As an example, one of the biggest municipal youth councils is Riga City School Council, which unites all pupils' councils from Riga's city as members and involves youth organisations active in Riga city. Its main tasks are to work with pupils' councils in Riga, to support young people and to participate in municipal youth work planning and implementation.

Pupils' councils can be established according to the Law on Education in every general education institution; they act as an independent pupils' institution which participates in the educational institutions' work. Their aim is to lobby and unify the interests of pupils and administration of educational institutions in order to obtain active pupil participation in educational work. The work of pupils' councils is supported by the municipal youth affairs specialist and the State Youth Initiative Centre.

Similar to pupils' councils, according to the Law on Higher Education Institutions student councils are established in every higher education institution. Student councils are elected, independent structures representing interests and rights of students in the particular higher education institution or in relation to other public structure.

5.3 Youth and youth work NGOs

According to the Youth Law, a youth organisation is a society that is registered in the register of associations and foundations and on the list of youth organisations, that meet

several criteria defined in the law: (1) one of the purposes of activity specified in the statutes of the association is youth work, the promotion of youth initiatives and participation in decision making and social life; (2) the association carries out youth work and the tasks of the association defined in the statutes correspond to at least three main tasks defined in the third part of article 2.1 of the law; (3) at least two thirds of the members of the association are children and young people, or associations where in total at least two thirds of the members are children and young people; and (4) the participation of young people is ensured in administrative institutions of the association, and the procedures for this participation are specified in the statutes of the respective association.

Up to now, 36 youth organisations that meet the criteria have been registered officially in the register of youth organisations of Latvia. A full list of organisations can be found here: www.izm.gov.lv/lv/jaunatne/jaunatnes-organizaciju-saraksts.

Not all youth organisations are registered in the register (as not all are motivated to do so) – data from a survey of municipalities in 2016 show that there are more than 200 NGOs in municipalities which do youth work. But representatives of municipalities also mention that only a small part from them are active in the youth field. One of the main obstacles to more active work is lack of financing.

5.4 Other relevant actors

None.

6. Forms and examples of youth work in your country

At the national level, the Ministry of Education and Science defines key statements for youth work and youth policy, but practical youth work is organised and co-ordinated by local governments. In turn, in local governments the youth work is carried out by hired youth affairs specialists and youth workers, in addition attracting also the non-governmental sector representatives, to whom sometimes certain municipal functions in youth field are delegated (such practice is actually rather rare). Various institutions – schools, social services, cultural and sports coordinators, youth centres, etc. – are involved in youth work.

At the national level there is funding available for training of youth affairs specialists, projects for improving youth work at municipalities, and there is funding available for youth organisations, while the basic infrastructure and its costs need to be financed by the local municipalities.

Taking into account that the 119 Latvian local governments are very different in size, youth work is significantly different due to available funding and the number and proportion of young people in each municipality.

At the national level the Ministry of Education and Science particularly encourages local municipalities themselves to take the responsibility and initiative for activating and implementing youth work. It also contributes to strengthening the capacity of representatives of non-governmental organisations by providing them with funding for various projects.

There are some activities specifically targeting young people with fewer opportunities, but not in the field of youth work. These activities are within the remit of the Ministry of Welfare (implementing programmes for NEET, etc.).

7. Quality standards

There are no quality standards for youth work and youth workers, but there are occupational profile standards for youth affairs specialists and youth workers. Standards define needed competencies, education, and experience for those working in these professions.

In addition, to obtain the knowledge and skills necessary for performing his professional duties, a youth affairs specialist shall, within two years from the day he has taken up employment or been recruited, take a training programme for a youth affairs specialist for a minimum of 80 academic hours. The content of this training programme is defined in regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers (issued under the Youth Law). However, as the financial capacity of the Ministry of Education and Science is restricted, not all youth affairs specialists have the opportunity to enter this training programme, and there are also discussions about its low quality.

According to the data of the Ministry of Education and Science, the following number of youth affairs specialists have completed mandatory training:

2010 – 25 youth affairs specialists

2011 – No data

2012 – No data

2013 – 43 youth affairs specialists

2014 – 20 youth affairs specialists

2015 – 18 youth affairs specialists

2016 – 23 youth affairs specialists

For youth workers there are also many opportunities for training activities under the State Agency for International Programs for Youth and under projects carried out by youth field NGOs. Nevertheless, these trainings cannot be considered as professional development courses or trainings, as the Agency does not issue certificates or any other conformity evidence.

8. Knowledge and data on youth work

Once a year the Ministry of Education and Science of Latvia studies the situation in municipalities (surveying municipalities), asking representatives of municipalities to send information about youth work at local level – institutions involved, planning documents developed, NGOs active in the field, main statistical data about youth, etc.

There are no other regular youth work research activities.

According to the survey done at the beginning of 2017, in total 300 persons involved in youth work (youth affairs specialists, youth workers and others) are employed in local municipalities.

Data on volunteering in youth work are not available.

Website of the Ministry of Education and Science

In Latvian – <http://www.izm.gov.lv/lv/jaunatne>

In English – <http://www.izm.gov.lv/en/youth>.

Information about youth policy and other related information, as well as statistical data and researches on different youth issues, is published on the website of the Ministry of Education and Science. Regularly published e-journals on youth issues are available on the website.

Portal of youth issues

In Latvian – <http://www.jaunatneslietas.lv/>

In English – <http://www.jaunatneslietas.lv/en/>

The portal serves as a guide where wide-ranging information on youth policy is available. Information and links to access necessary and interested information on different themes, such as youth employment possibilities, education, involvement, culture, sport, etc. are also available in the portal. Additionally, there are a youth organisations database and a youth affairs co-ordinators database that include contact information.

Database of researches and publications available on the website of the State Chancellery

In Latvian – <http://petijumi.mk.gov.lv>.

The database of researches and publications collects all studies, publications and methodologies of public institutions starting from 2000. Besides, a list of perspective studies, publications and methodologies planned for the two years ahead is also available in the database.

Databases of the Central Statistical Bureau

In Latvian – <http://www.csb.gov.lv/dati/statistikas-datubazes-28270.html>

In English – <http://www.csb.gov.lv/en/dati/statistics-database-30501.html>

Statistical databases about social, economic, environment and other issues are freely available on the website of the Central Statistical Bureau. Although youth statistics are not grouped as a separate category of the database, by selecting data by age parameters, it is possible to obtain varied information about youth target group.

The website of the Agency for International Programs for Youth is <http://www.jaunatne.gov.lv/en>.

9. European and international dimension of youth work in the country

Co-operation with European countries

The Ministry of Education and Science is represented on the Council of Europe's European Youth Action Committee (European Steering Committee for Youth (CDEJ)), which makes decisions on the Council of Europe's youth policy. The Parliament in the youth field provides a wide range of methodological support and a variety of informational materials, as well as a variety of training and information networks. Essential tools for the EP's co-operation in the youth field include EP international assessment reports on youth policy.

International co-operation

International Youth Development Exchange Programme between Latvia and Japan

Since 2006, Latvian young people can participate in the International Youth Exchange between Australia and Japan. Exchanges take place between Japanese and Latvian youths, who undertake mutual visits with the aim of developing a better understanding and friendly relations between the two countries (among young people). Young people taking part in the international conference and the discussions in the form of visiting state and local authorities get to know Japanese and Latvian culture and history.

Nordplus youth education programme

The Nordplus Junior programme supports a variety of activities in the field of school education in the Nordic and Baltic region: student class trips with their peers, student practice, development of new projects, the exchange of teachers between schools, and other types of projects, all of which improves the quality of education and develops intercultural dialogue.

Baltic states and Flanders

This form of co-operation falls within the framework of the Protocol between Latvia and Belgium (Flanders), and provides for the exchange of experience workshops that cover the challenges of working with youth and young people in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Belgium.

10. Current debates and open questions/policies on youth work

The National Youth Programme defines the youth work priorities for 2018 as follows:

- 1) to promote the long-term planning of youth work at local and regional level;
- 2) to support initiatives of youth organisations for promoting the participation of young people;
- 3) the development of the common model for the recognition of young people's non-formal education at national level;
- 4) the professional development of people involved in youth work.

The study of 2017 on youth work at national and local level as the main issues and challenges in the youth field identified:

- 1) The provision of the basic infrastructure for youth work in municipalities. In order to ensure equal opportunities for young people regardless of their place of residence, it is necessary to define and to ensure the minimal infrastructure for youth work, as well as the material and technical basis, and human resources (for example, in every municipality there must be available separate premises for youth activities; at least one youth affairs specialist ; regular annual funding for youth work ; and regular annual funding for youth initiatives).
- 2) To plan activities for raising capacity and qualification of non-governmental organisations, thus activating the non-governmental sector in the youth work field. A particularly relevant question is ensuring the basic financing for operational work of non-governmental organisations and sustainability of implemented projects.
- 3) To ensure gaining a broader exchange of experience to those who are involved in youth work (joint events, joint projects).
- 4) Taking into account the significant number of emigrated young people and its proportion in the total number of young people in Latvia, activating diaspora youth and identifying it as separate target group of young people both in data recording and in youth policy.

In Latvia, different line ministries offer different welfare and social services for young people within their field of competence via the agencies and institutions assigned to them. The main actors and their competencies are the following:

- 1) The Ministry of Welfare develops youth-friendly state policies in the sphere of social services and social assistance, oversees their implementation and ensures support to unemployed young people and job seekers by organising active employment activities.
- 2) The Ministry of Justice is the leading state administration institution covering legal issues. It co-ordinates the public registers, the state policy on the penal system and

criminal punishment, and the implementation of these policies. The State Probation Service is subordinated to the Ministry of Justice, and it organises forced labour and public work for minors, as well as assistance to the youth after they have served their sentence.

3) The Ministry of Health ensures health care for the youth and promotes the development of a youth-friendly health care service.

Although based on the interdisciplinary approach, several and various national, regional and local level institutions are involved in youth work, yet the co-ordinated action among these institutions is still a big challenge in Latvia. Each institution performs activities within their competence; only in rare cases are activities consulted on and co-ordinated with other institutions.