

LATVIA

Key Contextual Data

Compiled by
Inge Schreyer and Pamela Oberhuemer

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Sources are outlined at the end of each section. Full details of all sources are to be found in the references section at the end of the key contextual data profile. Individual statistical data used in tables are indicated by an asterisk*, both in the table and in the sources.

Early childhood education and care (ECEC)

ECEC system type and auspices

At the national level in Latvia, the Ministry of Education and Science (*Izglītības un zinātnes ministrija*) has overall responsibility for the development of regulatory and curricular frameworks for early childhood education and care. At the local level, and under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, the municipalities are responsible for organising and running public ECEC centres for 1½- to 7-year olds. There are few private ECEC services, but these are also subject to the same regulatory frameworks as publicly run provision. The Ministry of Welfare/Social Affairs (*Labklājības ministrija*) is the regulatory body in terms of ensuring that the municipalities comply with national regulations.

Sources: EFA 2015.
Ministry of Education and Science 2016.
Šūpule, I., I. Bebrīša, and L. Jansone 2017.

General objectives and legislative framework

General objectives of ECEC highlight each child's right to education and equality of opportunity. Key pedagogical goals include: promoting children's individuality, enhancing their physical, cognitive and social development, promoting initiative, curiosity, independence, communicative competence and creativity, strengthening their health and psychological preparedness for school, as well as mastering the basics of the Latvian language.

The settings which provide compulsory pre-primary education for 5- and 6-year olds are expected to make sure that their educational programmes help to prepare children for school.

Both the general Education Act (*Vispārējās Izglītības likums 1999*, with amendments in 2013) and the Council of Ministers' Guidelines and Model Programmes for Preschool Education (*Noteikumi par valsts pirmsskolas izglītības vadlīnijām 2012*) provide the regulatory framework for ECEC. Compliance with service provider regulations is also required.

Sources: EFA 2015.
Eurydice 2016.
Ministry of Education and Science 2016.

ECEC entitlement and compulsory enrolment age

Children aged 1½ and older are legally entitled to a fee-free place in a publicly run ECEC institution. However, the municipalities sometimes find it difficult to provide the required places.

Kindergarten attendance is compulsory for 5- and 6-year olds. For younger children attendance is voluntary.

Statutory primary school begins at age 7.

Sources: European Commission, EACEA, and Eurydice 2016.
Eurydice 2016.
Šūpule, I., I. Bebriša, and L. Jansone 2017.

Main types of provision

In 2015/16 there were 647 early childhood institutions in Latvia, with 92,045 children on roll*.

Kindergartens or 'early childhood education institutions' (*pirmsskolas izglītības iestādes - bērnodārzs*) are the main form of ECEC setting for 1½- to 7-year olds. For children aged 4 and younger, attendance is voluntary whereas 5- and 6-year olds attend a compulsory **pre-school programme** (*pirmsskolas izglītības vadlīnijas*) either in a kindergarten or a school. The ECEC settings are either free-standing or integrated into the school building.

Municipalities are required to ensure a sufficient number of places in ECEC settings for those parents who wish their child to attend. However, particularly in the capital city of Riga, where there is a shortage of places, it is sometimes difficult for the municipalities to fulfil this requirement. In rural areas the municipalities provide transport so that children can attend the nearest setting in their area.

ECEC settings are generally closed for one or two months during the summer. However, a more flexible approach may be taken if the parents are in need of support. Most ECEC settings open between 7:00 and 7:30 and stay open until 18:00 or 18:30. In some cases, overnight care is provided for children on a 24-hour basis.

Beyond these main forms of provision, there are also a number of nurseries, playgroups and free-time leisure centres for children of preschool age which provide short-term, sessional activities. These settings are expected to align their programme of activities to the requirements of the curricular framework provided by the Ministry of Education. No official statistics are available for these settings.

Sources: *Central Statistical Bureau 2017.
EFA 2015.
Europäische Kommission, EACEA, Eurydice, and Eurostat 2014.
Ministry of Education and Science 2016.

Provider structures

In 2011/12, 95.7% of ECEC settings were public and only 4.3% were run by private providers. In general, privately run services do not receive state subsidies. However, if the municipalities are unable to fulfil their duty of providing sufficient places, since 2013 it is possible for private providers (centre-based and home-based) to receive a state subsidy. Also, in cases where private settings provide the compulsory pre-primary programme for 5- and 6-year olds, they are co-financed by the municipality.

Moreover, regulations issued by the Ministry of Welfare/Social Affairs in 2013 state that persons who have completed a 40-hour training course and a first aid course, and who have not been previously convicted, can work as a family day carer/childminder, for which they are paid 142€ per month. It is hoped that this measure will help to reduce the lack of available places in ECEC provision.

Sources: Eurydice 2016.
Šūpule, I., I. Bebriša, and L. Jansone 2017.

Participation rates in regulated provision

According to Eurostat data, the proportion of under 3-year olds in centre-based settings has increased significantly over the past decade – from 7% in 2005 to nearly 23% in 2015. In terms of the 3- to 6-year olds, the overall increase is not so pronounced (2005: 79%; 2015: 82.3%), but the proportion attending for over 30 hours per week rose from 49% in 2005 to over 79% in 2015.

Table 1

Latvia: Participation rates according to duration of attendance in centre-based settings 2005-2015*

Year	Weekly attendance	0 to under 3 years in %	3 years up to school entry in % ⁺
2005	1 to 29 hours	2	30
	Over 30 hours	5	49
	No attendance	93	22
2010	1 to 29 hours	1	14
	Over 30 hours	8	66
	No attendance	91	21
2015	1 to 29 hours	0.9	3.1
	Over 30 hours	22.0	79.2
	No attendance	77.2	17.7

According to national statistical data, there are very few under 1-year olds in centre-based settings (0.1%). Over one quarter of 3-year olds (28.2%) were enrolled in a centre-based setting in 2015; the overall participation rate of 3- to 7-year olds was 89.8%.

Table 2

Latvia: Number of children in centre-based ECEC settings according to age and participation rates, 2015**

2015	Number	Share of the age group, in % ⁺
Under 1 year	19	0.1
1-year olds	3,221	15.5
2-year olds	14,427	71.9
under 3 years	17,667	28.2
3-year olds	17,808	94.6
4-year olds	17,371	91.3
5-year olds	18,317	88.6
6-year olds	19,149	85.5
7-year olds	1,765	8.1
Compulsory years, 5- and 6-year olds	37,466	87.0
3- to under 7-years	74,410	89.8
0- to under 7-years	90,312	62.9

⁺ own calculations based on the Eurostat child population data for 2015

Sources: **Central Statistical Bureau 2017.
*Eurostat 2017f.

Financing and costs for parents

The Education Act stipulates that public ECEC provision is to be funded through the state and municipal budgets respectively. The municipalities are responsible for staff salaries, for equipment and for building maintenance. The staff salaries of those working with 5- and 6-year olds are cov-

ered by the state. Private service providers receive state subsidies towards staff salaries and set their own parental fees. However, since 2013, attendance at a private ECEC setting may also be free of charge if the municipalities co-fund the provision in order to cover a local demand for places.

Parents only have to pay for meals in public ECEC provision (roughly 1.36€ daily)¹ and for additional services such as language or dancing tuition. The costs may be reduced for low-income parents. In private settings that are not state subsidised, parental fees amount on average to 300€ monthly. If parents are obliged to enrol their child in a private setting because of insufficient places in public provision, they may receive a state or municipal grant. In May 2016, the state grant amounted to 95.67€ per month; however, municipal grants vary. In Riga, for example, they may amount to 132.33€.

Sources: EFA 2015.
EPIC 2016.
European Commission, EACEA, Eurydice, and Eurostat 2014.
Eurydice 2016.
Šūpule, I., I. Bebrīša, and L. Jansone 2017.

Staff-child ratios

No mandatory regulations exist regarding staff-child ratios. Criteria for grouping children can be based on a number of options: same-age or mixed-age, or other criteria such as the languages of minority ethnic groups. It is sometimes the case that in one particular setting a variety of groupings can be found.

As a measure to reduce bureaucracy, regulations concerning group size were abolished in 2009. These are now determined by the municipality or by the individual ECEC setting.

Source: Eurydice 2016.

Curricular Frameworks

Early childhood education is considered to be the first stage in the education system. The regulatory enactment Model Programmes for Preschool Education (*Noteikumi par valsts pirmsskolas izglītības vadlīnijām* 2012) includes the curricular framework for ECEC settings and other relevant guidelines. The areas of learning to be included in a play-based activity approach are determined by the Ministry of Education and Science. The number of activities per week is organised according to the children's age. The learning areas include: language development, mathematics, sensory development, experiencing nature, sport and music. Reading and writing skills are also practised during the educational activities. Periods of free play and outdoor play are also included. One of the main goals is to prepare children for school.

Settings are able to develop their own programme as long as it is aligned with the Model Programmes for Preschool Education. The staff have freedom of choice in terms of didactic approaches and learning resources. However, these are not provided free of charge.

¹ The amounts in Euro refer to the artificial common reference currency unit PPS (Purchase Power Standard) used in the European Union to express the volume of economic aggregates for the purpose of cross national comparisons. (European Commission, EACEA, Eurydice, and Eurostat 2014, 156)

Sources: Eurydice 2016.
Ministry of Education and Science 2016.
Šūpule, I., I. Bebrīša, and L. Jansone 2017.

Inclusion agenda

Children with special educational needs and disabilities

Inclusion is highlighted in the Latvian Development Plan 2014-2020. Overall, an inclusive educational policy is followed which emphasises taking into account the individual needs of all children. According to the Development Guidelines for Education 2014-2020 approved by the Council of Ministers, target groups are predominantly children at developmental or health risk, with a socially disadvantaged background or those from minority ethnic families such as Roma children.

The most recent amendments to the Education Act include educational guidelines for children with special needs. These children may be enrolled in regular ECEC provision if the setting works according to these guidelines and the spatial environment is suitable. However, both public and private segregated provision is also available for children who, despite additional supports, are not able to attend a mainstream setting and who have an official diagnosis from a national or municipal paediatric commission.

Children with a minority background

In Latvia, there are two classification systems for identifying persons with a minority background: (1) ethnic background according to ethnicity; (2) nationality according to citizenship.

Table 3 presents data on persons with a non-Latvian ethnic background. In 2016, these persons accounted for 38.2% of the total population. The largest group (25.6%) were Russian minority. Just under one third of the 0- to 4-year olds and the 5- to 9-year olds came from a family with a minority background.

Table 3

Latvia: Number and proportion of persons with a Latvian and non-Latvian ethnic background, 2016*

Ethnic background	Total		0 to 4 years		5 to 9 years	
	Number	%	Number	% ⁺	Number	% ⁺
Latvian	1.216.443	61.8	71.984	69.5	68.221	65.7
Russian	504.370	25.6	15.246	14.7	13.160	12.7
Belorussian	65.999	3.4	514	0.5	510	0.5
Ukrainian	44.639	2.3	496	0.5	475	0.5
Polish	41.528	2.1	723	0.7	553	0.5
Lithuanian	23.944	1.2	329	0.3	370	0.4
Other	72.034	3.7	14.332	13.8	20.554	19.8

*own calculations

In terms of nationality according to citizenship, in early 2016, 84% of the population had Latvian citizenship, 12% were non-citizens (having immigrated to Latvia during USSR times and not yet being naturalised), 3% had Russian citizenship, and 1% had another citizenship.

Some publicly-run kindergartens offer a language other than Latvian. In general, however, settings ensure that the curriculum is implemented bilingually so that the children from ethnic minority families can develop a feeling of belonging to Latvia. In the public school system, the curriculum is offered in seven languages: Russian, Polish, Hebrew, Ukrainian, Estonian, Lithuanian and Belorussian. In 2015/16, 26% of all pupils were enrolled in one of these programmes.

Sources: *Central Statistical Bureau 2017.
EFA 2015.
Eurydice 2016.
Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2016.

Monitoring – Evaluation – Research

ECEC staff make observations of individual children in their group and inform the parents orally about the child's progress. Since 2011, parents receive a written report about their child's achievements (knowledge, skills and attitudes) at the end of the compulsory preschool programme.

The state Educational Quality Agency is responsible for safeguarding quality in education. According to the Education Act, all educational institutions must be officially approved/ licensed. This certification (external evaluation) must take place during the first five years following the establishment of the setting. The setting's curriculum is reviewed during the two years following publication, after that at least once every six years. The professional activities of the staff are also evaluated externally.

The external evaluations are conducted by a specially trained team of experts. Besides examining the setting's documents, they also include observations of teaching and learning processes as well as interviews with children, parents and staff. The final report is structured according to 22 review criteria.

Settings also carry out self-evaluation procedures. Reports from these are included in the external evaluations.

Source: Eurydice 2016.

Parental leave arrangements

Maternity leave is granted for 112 calendar days (6 weeks), 56 of which are taken before birth. Mothers receive 80% of average earnings.

Fathers are granted 10 days **paternity leave** under the same conditions during the two months following birth.

Both parents are entitled to **parental leave**. It is granted for 18 months and can be taken in one piece or separately up to the child's eighth birthday. 70% of average earnings are paid up to the child's first birthday (at least 171€ per month). Up to the age of 18 months a monthly flat rate of 171€ is paid, and up to the child's second birthday a monthly flat rate of 42.69€.

In order to mitigate the effects of austerity for young families, in 2014 the allowance for care arrangements for children up to 1½ years old was raised. Moreover, besides receiving a parental allowance, it is now possible to receive additional benefits and/or to work. Since 2015, there are no limits to the payments for maternity leave and parental leave, and state family benefits have been reintroduced (11.38€ per month for the first child, 22.76€ for the second and 34.20€ for the third child).

Sources: EPIC 2016.
International Labour Organization 2017.
OECD 2015.

Historical highlights and shifts

1910	First childcare facilities established by unions, churches and the State
1950-1980	Expansion of ECEC provision
1991	Many settings are closed as a result of high costs, low birth-rate and low participation rates
Since the end of the 1990s	The number of available places in ECEC settings no longer matches local demands
Since 2004	Most pre-primary buildings have been included in renovation programmes financed by municipalities and EU structural funds
2013	Possibilities for becoming a family day carer are extended as a measure of dealing with the lack of available places

Source: Oberhuemer, P., I. Schreyer, and M.J. Neuman 2010.

Current challenges for the system of Early Childhood Education and Care in Country

Country expert assessment by Inese Šūpule

The main challenges confronting the system of Early Childhood Education and Care in Latvia are connected with the remuneration system for pedagogical staff. Due to the low salaries, the work of teachers in ECEC institutions does not enjoy high societal prestige and also faces a gender imbalance with its almost all-female workforce (see the ECEC Workforce Report for Latvia).

As previous studies show*, there is also a problem of qualification and readiness of teachers to deal with ethnic heterogeneity in ECEC institutions. Since 1995, there has been general support regarding bilingual education in all pre-primary, primary and secondary education institutions. However, a significant obstacle in the implementation of a bilingual approach in the ECEC institutions with Russian as the language of instruction is the lack of knowledge of the Latvian language among pre-school teachers.

Experts in pre-school education suggest that in order to promote the acquisition of the Latvian language in pre-schools with Russian as the language of instruction, serious attention should be paid to the qualification of pre-school teachers. They need the knowledge and skills to be able to work flexibly with different language acquisition methods according to the child's age, abilities and learning content. It is necessary to improve the skills of pre-school teachers to integrate the acquisition of the Latvian language into a range of daily activities in the ECEC setting, and it is necessary to promote closer cooperation with the parents of children. At the level of pre-school educational institutions, efforts should be made to create mixed teams of teachers with both Latvian and Russian as their first language. This would ensure acquisition of the Latvian language, and would also provide the informal framework of a play-based pedagogy for paying attention to certain language issues and for providing the necessary social and psychological support for children in their home language.

Sources: *Kļave, E., I. Šūpule, and I. Bebrīša 2013.
Šūpule, I., I. Bebrīša, and L. Jansone 2017.

Demographic data

Total population

In 2016, the population in Latvia totalled 1,968,957. This is a further indication of a steady decline in numbers over the past 20 years (1995 total: 2,500,580 and 2005 total: 2,249,724).

Children under 7 years of age

Since compulsory schooling in Latvia starts at age 7, data in this section include children up to age 7 from available sources, whereas otherwise the demographic data refer to children up to age 6.

In 2016, children under age 3 accounted for 3.3% and children under 7 years of age for 7.3% of the total population. The proportion of under 3-year olds was slightly above the EU average. The share of the 3- to 7-year olds, although significantly higher in 1995 than the EU-average (Latvia was not a member state at that time), dropped considerably below the average up to 2005; in 2016 the proportion corresponded approximately to the EU average.

Table 4

Latvia: Children under 6 years of age, 2016.

Age of children	Number of children
Under age 1	218,84
1-year olds	219,97
2-year olds	208,88
Under age 3 total	647,69
3-year olds	200,90
4-year olds	187,65
5-year olds	189,25
6-year olds	206,07
Total 3- to under 7-year olds	783,87
Total 0- to under 7-year olds	1,431,56

Table 5

Latvia: Children under 7 years of age – share in total population compared with EU average, 1995 to 2016, in %[†]

Age	1995	Ø EU15 ²	2005	Ø EU25	2016	Ø EU28
Under 3-year olds	3.2	3.3	2.7	3.1	3.3	3.0
3- to under 7-year olds	5.7	4.7	3.4	4.2	4.0	4.2
0- to under 7-year olds	8.9	8.0	6.1	7.3	7.3	7.2

[†] own calculations, deviations due to roundings

Source: Eurostat 2017a.

² The 1995 data are for the EU15 countries at the time (AT, BE, DK, DE, IE, EL, ES, F, FI, IT, LU, NL, PT, SE, UK); the 2005 data (EU25) also include CY, CZ, EE, HU, LV, LT, MT, PL, SI, SK. Data for 2014 include the additional EU28 countries BG, RO und HR.

Single households with children under age 6

In 2015, 57.1% of households with children under age 6 were couple households. Single parent households accounted for 5.6%, whereby these were almost exclusively single mother households (4.9%).

Table 6

Latvia: Households with children under age 6, 2015

Household type	Total households	Total households in per cent ⁺
Households – total	240,600	
Couple households	137,500	57.1
Other types of households	89,800	37.3
Single households, total	13,400	5.6
Single households, women	11,700	4.9
Single households, men	1,700	0.7

⁺Own calculations

Source: Eurostat 2017e.

Employment rates of parents with children under age 6

In 2015, the employment rate of men (aged 15 to 64) in Latvia was 69.9% and that of women 66.1%.

Of the women with children under 6 years of age, 68% were employed in 2015, whereas 88.6% of men with children of the same age were in the labour market. Both employment rates were slightly above the EU28 average in 2015.

Table 7

Latvia: Employment rates of parents with children under age 6 compared with other EU states, 2005-2015

	Year	Mothers in per cent	Fathers in per cent
Latvia	2005	49.8	85.2
	2010	60.5	74.8
	2015	68.0	88.6
European Union	EU15 – 2005	77.3	93.5
	EU27 – 2010	75.2	92.7
	EU28 - 2015	61.0	87.3
Highest rate of employment	2005	Slovenia – 76.8	Cyprus – 95.3
	2010	Slovenia – 76.7	Netherlands – 93.5
	2015	Sweden – 78.9	Malta/Czech Republic – 93.0
Lowest rate of employment	2005	Malta – 29.3	Bulgaria – 72.4
	2010	Hungary – 32.7	Latvia – 74.8
	2015	Hungary – 38.8	Bulgaria – 77.3

Sources: Eurostat 2017b, 2017c..
Oberhuemer, P., I. Schreyer, and M.J. Neuman 2010.

Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion³

In 2015, 27.7% of children under age 6 in Latvia were at risk of poverty or social exclusion. This is above the average rate in the EU28 (average = 24.7%) for this age group. The proportion of persons at risk of poverty or social exclusion within the overall population totalled 30.9%.

Source: Eurostat 2017d.

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³ 'At risk of poverty or social exclusion' refers to the situation of people either at risk of poverty (threshold set at 60 % of the national median equivalised disposable income after social transfers), or severely materially deprived or living in a household with a very low work intensity.
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