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Introduction

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NATIONAL POLICIES OF ADULT AND LIFELONG LEARNING AND EDUCATION: LATVIA

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General Historical Background of ALE and LLL

Adult Education (AE) in Latvia has a long history. However, its content and interpretation have changed historically. Since the foundation of the Republic of Latvia in 1918, the following periods of AE development can be identified: 1920-1940, 1946-1988, 1995-2013, and 2014-2020 (Pata et al., 2017).

Nowadays, Article 1 (17) of the Education Law of Latvia defines AE as a diverse process of educating individuals, which ensures personal development and competitiveness in the labour market throughout a person's life (Saeima, 1998).

In turn, the lifelong learning (LLL) concept was introduced in Latvia after the country had regained its independence in 1990 and was further developed after it joined the EU in 2004. In 2005, comprehensive discussions were held at national and regional levels in the country, which resulted in the development of several significant documents concerning AE and LLL (Luka & Sungsi, 2015), among them the first National Strategy for Lifelong Learning (2007-2013) and its implementation programme in 2007 (Ministru kabinets, 2007).

The Strategy defined LLL as an educational process throughout a person's life, based on people's changing needs to acquire knowledge, skills and experience to improve or change their qualifications according to the requirements of the labour market, and their personal interests and needs. LLL combines non-formal learning with formal education and develops innate abilities alongside new competencies (Ministru kabinets, 2007).

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The LLL Strategy defined the following barriers to learning:

- 1) underdeveloped infrastructure
- 2) low availability of second-chance education
- 3) lack of targeted education offers for senior citizens and minors.

The LLL Strategy was revised in 2009, and the updated version emphasised that adult learning (AL) is one of the least advanced educational sectors in Latvia (Luka & Kulss, 2010).

The LLL Strategy was created in line with the Strategy for Education and Development 2015-2020, the main aim of which was to provide quality and inclusive education for personal development, people's well-being, and sustainable national growth (Saeima, 2014).

Later, in response to the fragmentation of the adult education sector, the government of Latvia established the Adult Learning Governance Model 2016-2020. Alongside prioritizing vocational education and training (VET), the Model also aims to manage resources, coordinate stakeholders, and enhance transparency and communication. Since it is aligned with Latvia's National Qualification Framework (NQF), the Model aims to improve basic skills, support adult transition to the labour market, validate previous learning experiences and provide non-formal education (European Association for the Education of Adults, 2020).

The current interpretation of the LLL concept of Latvia was developed during the third and fourth periods of AE development in the country (Luka et al., 2020).

The following legislation acts of the Republic of Latvia enforce AE policy as part of LLL:

1. Education Law (Saeima, 1998)
2. General Education Law (Saeima, 1999b)
3. Vocational Education Law (Saeima, 1999a)
4. Law on Institutions of Higher Education (Saeima, 1995)
5. On the Regulated Professions and the Recognition of Professional Qualifications (Saeima, 2001)
6. The Law on Support for Unemployed Persons and Persons Seeking Employment (Saeima, 2002)
7. The Law on Craftsmanship (Augstākā Padome, 1993)

Current relevant national legislation pertaining to adult and lifelong learning (ALE) and lifelong learning (LLL)

Currently, there is no unified document on AE and LLL in Latvia. The ALE policy in Latvia is reflected in the *Sustainable Development Strategy of Latvia until 2030* (Saeima, 2010), the *National Development Plan of Latvia for 2021-2027* (Saeima, 2020), and *Education Development Guidelines for 2021-2027 - Future skills for future society* (Ministru kabinets, 2021).

Elaboration of these documents began with meticulous research to assess the current situation, global trends, and challenges, including those identified in the National Development Plan 2020. A large-scale public participation was employed by organising discussions with sectoral experts, researchers, and academicians, NGOs, national and local government officials, the business community, and politicians across the country.

The *Sustainable Development Strategy of Latvia until 2030* (Saeima, 2010) is hierarchically the highest, long-term development planning document at the national level, which also sets directions in education. It recognizes the need for a paradigm shift in education. Its vision is that education should be of high quality, accessible throughout life, and oriented towards creativity. This would allow responding to global competition and changes in demographics, and would be one of the prerequisites for changing the economic model. It states that the objective of ALE is to create one of the best systems in the EU and become one of the leaders in terms of availability and use of adult education.

The challenges for ALE can be summarised as follows:

- An ageing society
- The inequality of income and a territorially unequal demographic situation
- Insufficiently inclusive education policies in relation to orphans and people with functional disorders
- An insufficiently flexible education system in response to the needs of adult further education
- Inefficient use of financial and human resources in the education system.

The priority long-term directions of action in ALE are:

- Training of adults and more active involvement of formal education institutions and employers in the provision of informal education offers

- Higher education (HE) and VET institutions should develop ALE as a stable action field
- Creating a link between the system of formal education and informal education, and further education of adults, to provide adults with equal opportunities in the labour market.

Possible solutions offered are:

- Developing an Open University
- Integration of further education in the system of formal education; and
- Measures for the training of entrepreneurs - state support for the education of existing and potential entrepreneurs and promotion of good practice.

The *National Development Plan of Latvia for 2021-2027* (Saeima, 2020) is the hierarchically highest medium-term development planning document at the national level, which determines medium-term priorities in different sectors, including the field of education and science. ***Its vision*** concerns developing knowledge and skills for personal and national growth and creating quality, accessible, and inclusive education.

This means that LLL should be the bedrock of a sustainable democratic society, scientific excellence, innovative companies, and a competent workforce. All tiers of the Latvian education system should meet today's needs and future challenges by training that is based on developing emotional intelligence and creating a critically minded and digitally skilled workforce. Latvia also stands out for its focus on the creativity of its population. In summary, the objective of this plan is the development of quality education for the acquisition of knowledge and skills applicable in business and daily life for every inhabitant of the country.

The challenges identified in this plan are:

- Today's changing socio-economic environment and labour market require new and improved knowledge and skills regularly
- New products, created through technological development, require investment not only in research but also in a skilled workforce that is open to new knowledge
- The need for continuous personal development for all

Priorities are:

- Development of society's digital and new technology skills

- Promoting demand for LLL through high-quality and flexible AE opportunities and accessibility
- AE for the acquisition of skills necessary for the economic growth of the economy
- Prevention and intervention to reduce the risk of early school leaving
- Informal education opportunities for youth at risk.

Proposed solutions are:

- Creating specific programmes for the improvement of digital skills and encouraging company participation in their financing
- Creating flexible AE offers
- Effectively using educational institutions and AE centres
- Promoting employer and sectoral investment and employee motivation
- Ensuring second-chance education in accordance with labour market trends
- Flexible studies, including modular education, e-learning, and work-based learning, development of LLL competencies; and
- Recognition of competences acquired outside formal education.

The *Education Development Guidelines for 2021-2027 - Future skills for future society* (Ministru kabinets, 2021) is a medium-term policy planning document developed by the Ministry of Education and Science of Latvia that defines the policy objectives, policy actions, timelines, responsible actors, related finances, and policy targets for the next seven years for education and skills policies. The Guidelines were developed in collaboration with relevant ministries and a wide range of stakeholders, such as the Free Trade Union Confederation of Latvia, the Employers' Confederation of Latvia, the Latvian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and various other institutions and associations (Jākobsone, 2022). They include all levels of education and all types of learning, including ALE.

The main goal of the Education Development Guidelines 2021-2027 (Ministru kabinets, 2021) is to set Latvia's priorities in providing a high-quality and inclusive education and training system for all citizens and to support sustainable national growth. The vision of these guidelines is in the development of future skills for the society of the future, **and their objective** is to offer quality education opportunities for all inhabitants of Latvia that promote the development and realization of their potential throughout life and build their ability to change and responsibly manage permanent changes in society and the national economy.

The challenges for these guidelines are:

- Insufficient adequate education offers for the contemporary needs of society
- Low motivation to be involved in the learning of all parties in AE
- Lack of demand for skills in the labour market
- Insufficient level of digital skills within society
- A decentralized quality assurance system for adult non-formal education
- An ageing society

Priorities are:

- Development of a High-quality and accessible AE offer; and
- Development of a sustainable AE system.

There are sub-priorities:

- Technological development and digital transformation
- Balanced development of relevant skills that correspond to the future needs
- Functional transformation of educational institutions and an improved education management system

Proposed solutions are:

- Expansion of the formal education (including second chance education) offer for adults by strengthening the work of VET and HE institutions with adult learners and ensuring the possibility to receive an individualized educational programme
- To ensure equal quality adult non-formal education for all inhabitants, defining common quality criteria for adult non-formal education and procedures for licensing adult non-formal education programmes and cancellation of licences
- Providing an individualised and flexible adult learning offers and support to reduce barriers to participation
- Strengthening the governance of AE
- Developing a socially responsible and sustainable system for financing AE
- Raising public and employers' awareness of adult learning and promoting participation in increasing the motivation for adult learning

The three above-mentioned documents include sections on ALE, although none of them is devoted exclusively to ALE. However, the main directions mentioned in ALE are similar.

Extent of devolution of powers in ALE and LLL to regions and cities, and to social partners

The Ministry of Education and Science of Latvia is responsible for AE policy. It provides supervision of AE, determines the principles of funding distribution, and promotes research related to AE. Local governments implement the AE policy and ensure the allocation of funding and supervision over the use of financial resources (Kārkliņa, 2024). Local governments may also implement their own AE initiatives under certain regulations.

The Department of Vocational and Adult Education of the Ministry of Education and Science develops policy, organizes and monitors the implementation of policy in the field of VET and AE, and oversees institutions subordinate to the Ministry: the State Educational Content Centre, the State Service of Education Quality, and the State Education Development Agency (Izglītības un zinātnes ministrija, 2020).

AE management is also implemented by other ministries - the Ministry of Welfare, the Ministry of Economics, the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Defence, and the Ministry of Justice. The State Employment Agency, which has experience in implementing LLL activities for various target groups, depending on the labour market situation, is also of great importance and has developed cooperation with employers (Kārkliņa, 2024). The Ministry of Welfare actively participates in providing formal and non-formal education measures to the unemployed and other target groups requiring career guidance. In 2023, 84,121 persons participated in 134,602 activities organised by the State Employment Agency of the Ministry of Welfare. Some of the measures involved the development of basic skills necessary for the labour market (communication skills, digital skills, social and civic skills, etc.), the development of additional skills required in the labour market (computer courses, language courses), various online courses, continuing professional education and professional development (Labklājības ministrija, 2025). The vocational cultural education system in Latvia consists of state, local government, and private educational institutions that implement vocationally oriented, vocational secondary and higher education programmes. These institutions provide training for professional artists, musicians, dancers, specialists in cultural sectors, and pedagogical staff. The Ministry of Culture, in cooperation with municipalities, provides adults with opportunities to participate in choirs, dance groups, and learn some crafts in non-formal education courses (Kultūras ministrija, 2025). The Ministry of Health organises various professional development seminars for doctors. The Centre for Disease Prevention and Control of the Ministry of Health ensures the operation of the Latvian National Network of Healthy Local

Governments and the Latvian National Network of Health-Promoting Schools. The aim of the National Network of Healthy Local Governments is to promote the exchange of good practices, experience and ideas between local governments, to support local governments and provide them with methodological support in solving various issues of public health and health promotion at the local level, and to increase the education of local government employees on issues of public health and health promotion, thus supporting the development of health, welfare and equal opportunities at the regional level (Veselības ministrija, 2025). The Ministry of Justice organises the State Unified Lawyer Professional Qualification Examination, which sets high requirements and ensures a uniform standard for obtaining the professional qualification of a lawyer. The exam guarantees the quality of young legal specialists in Latvia, promotes their international competitiveness, and improves the standards of legal education in the country in the long term (Tieslietu ministrija, 2025).

Influence and/or policy linkages to supranational organisations

Latvia's future vision is based on people's skills. This future perspective complies with the first principle of the European pillar of social rights - every person has the right to quality and inclusive education and LLL to acquire and improve the skills necessary to fully integrate into society and the labour market. Development directions and priorities of the EU, the recommendations of the EU and the CEDEFOP are considered when developing national standards in education, including ALE (Izglītības un zinātnes ministrija, 2020)

Education Development Guidelines for 2021-2027 "Future skills for future society" (Ministru kabinets, 2021) define the most important strategies, guidelines and documents of supranational organisations which were taken into account when developing national strategies, guidelines and regulations in education: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by UN, SDG 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote LLL opportunities for all (United Nations, 2015), Communication - European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience (European Commission, 2020a), European Pillar of Social Rights - Building a fairer and more inclusive European Union (European Commission, 2017), Shaping Europe's Digital Future (European Commission, 2020b).

Financing of LLL

The National Development Plan for 2021-2027 is implemented by ministries through policies and related investments. These are enacted by municipalities through plans and investments in accordance with a spatial planning perspective and national regional development policy and may be supplemented by individuals' personal contributions (Saeima, 2020). The funding source for the measures is the State Budget and the EU funds; the percentage/sum of money for ALE is not indicated in official documentation.

The state budget financing envisaged for AE development in *Education Development Guidelines for 2021-2027 'Future skills for future society'* constitutes 2.8% of the total financing planned for implementation of the initiatives stated in the Guidelines (Ministru kabinets, 2021). 76.1% of this financing is allocated to the priority *High-quality and accessible AE offer*, whereas the remaining 23.9% is allocated to the priority "Developing a sustainable AE system". The 23.9% is broken down into: 1) Strengthening governance in adult learning - 10.5% out of the 23.9% (2.5% of the total AE budget), 2) Raising public and employers' awareness of AE and participation in increasing adult motivation - 73.2% out of the 23.9% (17.5% of the total AE budget), 3) Establishing a socially responsible and sustainable system for funding AE - 16.3% out of the 23.9% (3.9% of the total AE budget).

The role of sectors and involvement of community stakeholders

The latest adult education survey in the country in 2022 provided data on adult participation in formal and non-formal education (see Table 1). Within the framework of the education system, different types of adult formal education (general, vocational, and tertiary) at integrated primary and lower secondary, upper secondary, and higher education levels are offered and usually linked to the existing infrastructure of educational institutions (European Commission, 2023).

Table 1. Participation in adult education by sex, age, educational attainment and labour status

	Total	Males	Females
2022			
Number of people, thousand			
Participating in formal and/or non-formal education	522.2	230.1	292.1
Participating in formal education	42.0	15.2	26.8
Participation in non-formal education	506.1	223.6	282.5
Not participating in education	477.9	258.7	219.2
Per cent of total population in the corresponding group			
Participating in formal and/or non-formal education	52.2	47.1	57.1
Participating in formal education	4.2	3.1	5.2
Participation in non-formal education	50.6	45.7	55.2
Not participating in education	47.8	52.9	42.9

Source: Official Statistics Portal of Latvia, 2025

Basic (single structure primary and lower secondary) education and upper secondary education: Adults in Latvia have a legal entitlement to complete previously commenced formal education at the basic education level (The International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) 1 and 2) and secondary education level (ISCED 3). General education for unqualified young people/adults is provided in evening schools and classes offering integrated general education programmes for persons who have not finished schooling and want to continue their education after having dropped out of the formal education system (European Commission, 2023). Premises of general schools are often used for adult non-formal education by an agreement between the school administration and local authorities.

VET: Initial VET (IVET) is centralised and highly regulated by the State. There are currently 54 VET schools. Most are founded and run by the State; around half are technical schools, receiving substantial resources for investment in infrastructure and equipment, with the support of EU funds. Other VET school types are vocational secondary schools, an arts education competence centre, a vocational further education centre, and a college (CEDEFOP, 2024).

The Ministry of Education and Science is the main body responsible for the VET legal framework, governance, funding and curricula. Social dialogue and strategic cooperation are arranged through the National Tripartite Sub-Council for Cooperation in VET and Employment (PINTSA). Fourteen sector expert councils ensure that VET provision is in line

with labour market needs; they participate in developing sector qualification frameworks, occupational standards, qualification requirements, VET curricula and quality assessment procedures (CEDEFOP, 2024).

The content of VET in accordance with Levels 2-4 of the Latvian Qualifications Framework has now been updated and restructured into professional competence modules. By attaining the learning outcomes specified in modular vocational education programmes, the learner is allowed to perform specific duties that are closely related to real working conditions; ideally, they can be implemented directly in the workplace. Modular vocational education programmes offer the learner an optional part that provides specific requirements of a region or specific companies (Izglītības un zinātnes ministrija, 2025). This is related to work-based learning - a form of vocational education providing learners an opportunity to develop practical skills for at least half of the study time in a real working environment in an enterprise, and theoretical knowledge - in a vocational education institution (Izglītības un zinātnes ministrija, 2020). VET institutions provide adults with an opportunity to acquire part of the programme (some modules) or study the whole programme, applying the EU financing.

Higher Education: There are two main ways that adults may participate in education opportunities provided by HEIs in Latvia: 1) through formal studies in short-cycle (normally two-year programmes), Bachelor, Master, and Doctoral programmes, and 2) for personal development, in-service training, and continuing education programmes at their premises (European Commission, 2023).

The role of HEIs has become more and more important in offering non-formal education opportunities to adults. The majority of HEIs ensure flexible arrangements of studies, such as part-time studies or studies in the evenings and alternative modes of delivering HE programmes by distance learning, each being particularly suitable for adult students combining education with work. HEIs offer online application procedures for study programmes (European Commission, 2023).

There are LLL centres and career guidance centres in many HEIs in all regions of Latvia. Usually, HEIs offer teacher CPD programmes, foreign language courses, Latvian language courses for ethnic minorities, computer classes for adults, and courses for the unemployed and jobseekers (European Commission, 2023).

Non-formal entities: The Latvian Adult Education Association has created a co-operation network of AE providers from towns and districts of Latvia, uniting 62 institutions. Folk

schools (tautskolas) are operating mostly in rural regions to provide rural residents with a well-rounded education. Folk schools continue the traditions established in the period of the first independent Republic, i.e., around civic education (European Commission, 2023).

According to the Education Law (Article 46, (4)), a permit for the implementation of a non-formal education programme shall be issued or cancelled by the local government of the relevant administrative territory in accordance with the procedures stipulated by the Cabinet of Ministers. Non-formal education programmes shall be registered in the local government of the relevant administrative territory. Persons who are not registered in the Register of Educational Institutions are entitled to implement non-formal education programmes after receipt of the permit. Accredited educational institutions, as well as units of the National Armed Forces, are entitled to implement non-formal education programmes without obtaining a permit (Saeima, 1998).

Local governments have an important role in adult non-formal education provision. Municipalities have established public AE institutions (AE centres, cultural clubs and associations) in their towns and rural municipalities to provide education opportunities for adults.

Various AE programmes are offered by professional associations, e.g., the Latvian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Employers' Confederation of Latvia, the Latvian Union of Physicians, and folk schools and other institutions providing liberal education.

Functions of AE at a much broader scale are implemented by large state-owned and private companies. In-service training for business or sectoral needs is organized at company training centres, e.g., the Bank of Latvia, Latvian Railway (European Commission, 2023).

Mechanisms of consultation with stakeholders: Public participation, namely the involvement of citizens, society, and non-governmental organisations in the policy-making process, is legally regulated in Latvia. The procedure for public participation is regulated by the Law on Development Planning System (Saeima, 2008).

To be able to read and comment upon draft legal acts in one place, the Single Portal for the Development and Coordination of Draft Legal Acts (Public portal for draft legislation - the TAP Portal) has been created. On the TAP portal, every member of the public can follow the progress of documents, starting with the idea stage (discussion document) and ending with a specific draft legal act (Valsts kanceleja, 2021).

The tracking of the effective implementation of policies

The main instrument for the implementation of the state's strategy is the National Development Plan, which is implemented via development policies of sectors and territories (regions, local governments), including by planning investment programmes of the state and local governments, instruments of EU policies, and other financial sources (Saeima, 2010). Indicators for ALE in the *Sustainable Development Strategy of Latvia until 2030* (Saeima, 2010) are as follows:

- Participation of inhabitants (aged 25-64) in ALE shall increase from 6.8% as of 2008 to > 14%
- Proportion of persons (aged 30-34) with HE shall increase from 27% as of 2008 to > 40%

Indicators for ALE in the *National Development Plan of Latvia for 2021-2027* (Saeima, 2020) are as follows:

- Participation rate of adults aged 25-64 in non-formal education and training (last 12 months) shall increase from 47.5% as of 2016 to 54% in 2027
- Percentage of adults aged 16-74 having basic and advanced digital skills shall increase from 48% as of 2016 to 60% in 2027
- Percentage of young people aged 15-24 neither in employment nor in education and training (NEET) (of the total population of 15-24) shall decrease from 7.8% as of 2018 to 6.0% in 2027

Indicators for ALE in *Education Development Guidelines for 2021-2027 'Future skills for future society'* (Ministru kabinets, 2021) are as follows:

- Percentage of adults aged 15-74 having only a general secondary education shall decrease from 26,2% as of 2019 to 24,5% in 2027
- Participation rate of adults aged 25-64 in AE (last 4 weeks) shall increase from 7.4% as of 2019 to 12% in 2027
- Percentage of adults aged 16-74 having at least basic digital skills shall increase from 43% to 70% in 2027
- Percentage of young people aged 18-24 not continuing their education shall decrease from 8.7% as of 2019 to 5.0% in 2027
- Percentage of inhabitants who have developed new skills in workplace learning shall increase from 16.6% as of 2019 to 25% in 2027

- Percentage of young people aged 15-29 neither in employment nor in education and training (NEET) shall decrease from 10.3% as of 2019 to 5.0% in 2027

Conclusion

The National Strategy for Lifelong Learning in Latvia and its implementation plan were created for the period of 2007-2013. The Strategy was amended in 2009. Despite the EU recommendations on developing a separate document with a strategy on LLL after 2013, this has not happened. Rather, the LLL Policy was reflected in the Education Development Guidelines for 2014-2020.

Since then, there have been three documents related to LLL: the Sustainable Development Strategy of Latvia until 2030 (Saeima, 2010), the National Development Plan for a 7-year period,- the last one adopted in 2020 for the period of 2021-2027 (Saeima, 2020) and Education Development Guidelines-, firstly for 2014-2020 (Saeima, 2014) and then for 2021-2027 (Ministru kabinets, 2021).

There has been a wish to integrate LLL into the overall education system of the country. However, this analysis argues that although the documents emphasize this and that the vision of the documents is directed towards quality education offered for the sake of individual development and the nation, the three main documents offer indicators for measuring AE and LLL outcomes that cannot be directly compared. This leaves a fragmented view of the situation and may cause problems in conducting international comparative analysis, since it is difficult to understand which of them is the main document.

Furthermore, the analysis of these policy documents shows that they focus more on adult education rather than adult learning as a component of LLL. However, some positive change is observed in the Education Development Guidelines 2021-2027, wherein, despite the low budget for AE, striving to create an education offer for every adult is visible.

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