



# Latvia Fact Sheet on Social Care & Support Services Sector for Persons with Disabilities

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There is a wide range of social care and support service providers for persons with disabilities in Latvia, from state and local authorities, to NGOs and private service providers. The Law on Social Services and Social Assistance (2002) lays down the obligations of the state and local government concerning provision of social services, as well as fundamental principles governing this provision. These include assessment of individual needs and resources; inter-professional and interinstitutional cooperation; and provision of services at the client's place of residence or as close to it as possible (social care and social rehabilitation in long-term care and social rehabilitation institution are therefore provided only when services at/close to the place of residence are insufficient). Laws and other legal acts ensure that persons with disabilities are eligible to receive services from the state and local governments, but otherwise they are rarely disaggregated among the overall service recipients. It is therefore difficult to obtain a representative overview of the number of service recipients, service providers and potential challenges in providing the services to this target group.

## SUBSECTORS OF SOCIAL CARE & SUPPORT SERVICES AND THEIR CHARACTERISTICS

### Early Childhood Intervention

The Law on the Protection of the Children's Rights (1998) states that a child with special needs (including a child with disabilities) has the same rights as any other child. In accordance with Section 55 of the Law, a child with special needs has the right to special parental care, while state and local governments help to integrate the child into society and provide education, healthcare and social services. Healthcare services<sup>1</sup> are provided in state, local government and private institutions. For children under the age of 18 years healthcare services are free of charge. There are no systematic early intervention programs, meaning parents based on the specific diagnosis of their child themselves search for specialists. Given the long waiting times (from several days to several months) for publicly-funded services, many parents choose paid services (including those in private institutions). In the event parents are not able to find support of specialists or pay for services, it is possible for children to be left without the necessary support.

After the State Medical Commission for the Assessment of Health Condition and Working Ability has determined a disability for a child for the first time, the family is entitled to ten 45-minute consultations with a qualified psychologist paid from the state budget (Cabinet of Ministers, Regulation No 1208, 2010). In 2015, this service was provided to two families, in 2017 – to five families.

Children with all types of disabilities can acquire pre-school education between the ages of 1.5 and 7 in both local government and private mainstream or special pre-school education institutions – kindergartens. Those who attend pre-school mainstream educational institutions, have the right to receive assistant services for mobility and self-care support. If necessary, the duration of the pre-school education programme may be extended by one year, depending on the child's health status and psychological readiness, taking into account the motivation of the parents and the opinion of a general practitioner or psychologist.

The procedures by which children are admitted to special pre-school education<sup>2</sup> groups are determined by the Government (Regulation No 591, 2015). In 2018, 1,723 children aged five and under completed special pre-school education programmes in local government pre-school educational institutions (data from the State Education Information System on 1 September 2018). The procedure for enrolling children in pre-school educational institutions is determined at local government level, therefore aggregated information about the waiting times for these services is not available.

<sup>1</sup>According to the Medical Treatment Law (1997) medical treatment includes professional and individual prophylaxis, diagnosis and medical treatment of diseases, medical rehabilitation and care of patients.

<sup>2</sup>The regulation states that 'Students with visual, hearing, speech, mental health, physical development, learning disorders (in pre-school education group also with mixed development disorders), mental development, including serious mental development or several serious mental development disorders and somatic symptom disorders shall be enrolled in a special educational programme, based on the opinion of a pedagogical medical commission, stating the educational programme or support measures recommended for the student.'

## Education Support

Section 3<sup>1</sup> of the Education Law states that everyone has the right to acquire an education regardless of the (...) state of health (Education Law, 1998). Compliance with these rights is ensured by inclusive education, which means “ensuring the corresponding diverse needs of all students by increasing the participation of all students in the learning process, culture and various communities and reducing options for exclusion from education and the education process” (Guidelines for the Development of Education 2014-2020, 2014).

In Latvia, education for children with special needs<sup>3</sup> (from five years of age) takes on different forms, ranging from fully inclusive education in general education classes to special schools<sup>4</sup> (Study on the Cost Model of Support Services for Children with Special Needs in the Context of Inclusive Education, 2017). Children with severe mental disorders, severe visual or hearing impairment receive education in public special education institutions. A special educational program takes place in classes with a smaller number of pupils and can be implemented over a longer period of time, with the maximum number of years varying based on the specific type of disability but not exceeding 12 years, for students with serious mental development disorders or multiple developmental disorders (General Education Law, 1999). According to data of the State Education Information System (SEIS), in 2018 there were 54 special educational institutions with 5,809 students or 2.70% of all students in general and secondary education programmes (SEIS, September 2018). In total, the overall basic and secondary education is provided by 745 educational institutions, including 682 local government and 59 private education institutions (SEIS, 2018 (2)).

The need for special education (general and vocational education adapted for persons with special needs) is determined by the Pedagogical Medical Commission or State Pedagogical Medical Commission of a local government. Their decision is of a recommendational nature for parents, but mandatory for educational institutions. Special education may be acquired in licensed special and general educational institutions<sup>5</sup> that provide needed support measures such as a speech therapist, educational psychologist and special education teacher among others.

Advisory and methodical support regarding education for parents of students with special needs, students and teachers is provided by Special Education Development Centres<sup>6</sup>. In 2018, 12 Special Educational Development Centres were in operation in Latvia (Ministry of Education and Science, 2018).

There is also such phenomena in Latvia as education at home for children with severe disabilities. It means that formally the children are in school, and in practice they receive home visits from a teacher twice a week for one or two hours.

From 2012, students with disabilities can receive the services of a state-paid assistant (up to 40 hours per week) in mainstream education institutions for mobility and self-care (Cabinet Regulation No 695, 2012). Some 243 children with disabilities received this service in 2018. The assistant service is provided on as-needed basis, there are no queues.

## Employment Support

In the field of employment, support measures for persons with disabilities<sup>7</sup> are provided by the State Employment Service (PES) and its 26 regional branches, and are available for persons with all kinds of disabilities like for any other registered unemployed person or job seeker. Support measures are implemented by the PES, private companies or NGOs selected as

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<sup>3</sup>According to the General Education Law (1999) special needs are defined as ‘a necessity to receive such support and rehabilitation, which creates an opportunity for a student to complete an educational programme, taking into account his or her state of health, abilities and level of development’. Section 49 states that ‘special educational programmes shall ensure the possibility of completing general education for students with acquired or hereditary functional disorders according to their special needs’.

<sup>4</sup>Not all children attending special schools are children with disabilities. The schools cater also to children from social risk families without learning disabilities per se, but potentially from environments that provide insufficient pedagogic and/or social stimulus for their development.

<sup>5</sup>Licensing arrangements and procedures by which students are admitted to educational institutions are determined by the Cabinet (Cabinet Regulations No 468, 2014 and No 591, 2015).

<sup>6</sup>The criteria and procedures for granting this status to a special education institution are determined by the Cabinet of Ministers (Cabinet Regulation No 187, 2016).

<sup>7</sup>A disability must be determined by the Disability Law (2010).

service providers through public procurement. PES services are financed from the national budget and in recent years mainly from European Structural Funds. With PES support, several thousands of persons with disabilities find employment in the course of one year. During six months of 2018, some 2,025 persons with disabilities found employment, of whom 969 (47.9%) did so after completing an active PES measure (Overview on the Unemployment Situation in the Country (June,2018)).

A person with a disability registered with the PES has the right and opportunity to receive support within the framework of a large array of measures ranging from those targeting competitiveness, starting up of commercial activities or self-employment to vocational training and non-formal education among others.

Within the framework of measures provided by the PES:

- in the year 2018, some 5,447 (7,500 in 2015) persons with disabilities participated in the measures to increase their competitiveness, including individual consultations and group classes for learning job search skills, psychological support and acquisition of basic skills and skills necessary for the labor market;
- the number of persons with disabilities receiving vocational training, grew from 319 in 2015 to 516 in 2018, in non-formal education programs for learning and promotion of the state language, foreign languages and digital skills – from 1,563 in 2015 to 2,009 in 2018;
- regional mobility support was provided to 28 persons in 2015 and to 376 persons in 2018;
- support for business start-ups or self-employment was provided respectively to 9 persons in 2015, and 12 persons in 2018;
- practical training of people with disabilities provided by an employer was received by 6 persons in 2015, and by 17 in 2018<sup>8</sup>;
- from February 2015 to October 2018, some 2,723 subsidized jobs were created, 693 or 25.5% of which were created for persons with disabilities<sup>9</sup>. More subsidized jobs were created in the Latgale region (with higher unemployment rates), amounting to 279, with 109 in Kurzeme region, 151 in Riga, 83 in Vidzeme and 71 in Zemgale region (PES, October 2018). Subsidized jobs for persons with disability are limited in time and quite often persons with disability do not have the opportunity to continue in the jobs created for them.

Specifically for people with disabilities PES provides sign language interpreter services for communication purposes and ergotherapist services for trainingplace or workplace adaptation. Persons with disabilities who are unemployed for at least 12 months may receive additional support, including: individual and group studies with professional specialists, psychological support (individually and in groups), interpersonal meetings, support and counseling in solving individual social problems, sign language interpreter and assistant to specialist. These services are available under the measure 'Motivation program for job search and social mentor services for long-term unemployed with disabilities' (PES, 2018).

'Open Door Day for Persons with Disabilities in Companies' has been organized yearly since 2017; it allows people with disabilities to visit different companies and find work, while employers can use this opportunity to find employees. In 2017, some 62 employers and 207 persons with disabilities participated in the campaign, in 2018 the initiative mobilized 64 employers and 296 job seekers. In 2018, some 128 job vacancies were offered, with 7 persons with disabilities being recruited ([lvportals.lv](http://lvportals.lv), 08.10.2018.).

PES has also created an electronic catalogue 'Appropriate working environment for persons with disabilities' (2017) for employers, and it organizes consultations on the employment of unemployed persons with disabilities.

<sup>8</sup>Data were provided by PES and relate to the first ten months of 2018.

<sup>9</sup>Subsidized jobs for people with disabilities were created in private companies and NGOs. Those employers who create subsidized workplace, receive subsidies for persons with disability's salary and compulsory state social insurance contributions, as well as a one-time subsidy for compulsory health checks, subsidy for job managers' remuneration and one-time subsidy for technical aids and workplace adaptation. Subsidies are paid from the ESF and the Employment Special Budget (PES (2), October 2018).

## Day Care

According to Section 27 of the Law on Social Services and Social Assistance (2002), persons with physical or mental impairments have the right to receive care services and a possibility to engage in physical and mental activities in day-care and social rehabilitation centres funded by local government.

Day care centres for people with mental impairments is a service provided by local government or organisations contracted by it. The state co-finances the establishment and maintenance expenses of day care centres for people with severe mental impairment (who do not study and are not employed). State subsidies comprise 80% in the year of establishment of the centres, 60% in the first year of activity, 40% in the second year and 20% in the third year. According to plans, beyond 2018, the full 100% of spending will be covered by local government budgets (Law on Social Services and Social Assistance, Section 13, Paragraphs 3 and 4)<sup>10</sup>. However, these day care centres are not established in all local governments.

In 2018 there were in total 54 day care centres for persons with mental impairments, including 13 NGO-run centres registered in the Register of Social Services Providers (Social Services Provider Register, October 2018). A decision on granting day-care services is taken by each local government, with aggregate information on waiting times for these services not available. In terms of data on recipients of day-care services, in 2017:

- 1,400 persons received services in day care centres for persons with physical and mental disabilities; local government expenditures were 2,4 mn euros in 2017 and 2.6 mn euros in 2016;
- 200 persons received services in day care centres for children with disabilities; local government expenditures were 372,000 euros in 2017 and 318,500 euros in 2016;
- 1,500 persons (including with disability) received services in day care centres for people of retirement age; local government expenditures were 437,600 euros in 2017 (up from 368,400 euros in 2016) (Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia).

On 1 October 2018, day care services were provided by 114 centres (including those for elderly, people with physical impairments and children with disabilities) for 22,295 users (including those with disabilities) (Ministry of Welfare in Latvia).

## Living Support

The procedure of receiving living support services and the amount of corresponding services is determined by the Law on Social Services and Social Assistance (2002) and underlying legal acts. The state provides and finances measures for determining the vocational suitability<sup>11</sup> of a person with disability and person with a foreseeable disability<sup>12</sup>, as well as for vocational rehabilitation, social rehabilitation of disabled persons with impaired vision and hearing, technical aids and assistant services. Acquisition of a new profession or development of professional knowledge and skills are provided by the Social Integration State Agency of the Ministry of Welfare College and Jurmala Vocational Secondary School. In 2017, some 407 persons received services aimed at determining their vocational suitability, 321 students received a vocational rehabilitation service in Jurmala Vocational Secondary School, and on average 160 students – in the College (Social Integration State Agency, 2018).

Social rehabilitation of and provision of technical aids to persons with impaired vision and hearing is delegated to NGOs – the Latvian Society of the Blind and the Latvian Association of the Deaf (Section 13, Law on Social Services and Social Assistance (2002)). People with disabilities regardless of their age may receive other necessary technical

<sup>10</sup> The criteria for determining the establishment and maintenance of day centres, the granting of state co-financing and procedure of state co-financing is determined by the Cabinet (Regulation No 829, 2007).

<sup>11</sup> According to the Law on Social Services and Social Assistance these are state provided social services. Determination of vocational suitability means evaluation of the ability of persons with disabilities to do some kind of work. During vocational rehabilitation services people with disabilities also receive social rehabilitation services during which they are taught about coping living with a disability.

<sup>12</sup> In accordance with the Disability Law (2010) 'a predictable disability is a limited functioning caused by a disease or trauma which, in case if the required medical treatment and rehabilitation services are not provided, may be a reason for determining disability'.

aids for life and work (wheelchairs, sticks, crutches, quadripods, rolators, walking frames, etc.) at the state-run 'National Rehabilitation Centre 'Vaivari". In turn, prostheses, orthoses, orthopaedic footwear may be received by (mainly private) organisations contracted by the 'National Rehabilitation Centre 'Vaivari". In 2017, the Vaivari Technical Aids Centre issued 16,384 technical aids to 11,387 customers (Vaivari Technical Aids Centre, October 2018). Demand for technical aids is growing every year in Latvia – at the end of 2017, some 7,099 persons were on waiting lists. In 2016 this list contained 6,889 persons; up from 6,335 in 2015 (Public Annual Report for 2017). The government sets the waiting time before a person is entered on a waiting list for new technical aids. For example, for a wheel-chair this leeway period is 4 years, for a functional bed it is 10 years, for armpit support crutches for children it takes 2 years. Technical aids require a co-payment of EUR 1.42 when the recipient is a child, and EUR 7.11 for an adult.

Persons with severe disabilities may receive an assistant service up to 40 hours a week to promote physical mobility and involvement of persons with disabilities in social life (Regulation No 942, 2012). The service is assigned by the local government, paid for by the state and provided mainly by family members – this being primarily because assistant fees are very low. The assistant's hourly rate corresponds to the minimum wage per hour for regular working hours which in the end of 2018 was just over 2 euros (Regulation No 942, (2012)). In 2017, 920 children with disabilities, 4,467 persons with severe disabilities and 4,179 severe disabled persons with mental disorders respectively received assistant services. Assistant services are provided on an as-needed basis, there are no queues.

According to legislation, the local government 'has a duty to provide people with the possibility to receive social services and social assistance corresponding to his or her needs' (Section 9, Law on Social Services and Social Assistance (2002)). The most requested service is care at home. At the beginning of 2018, home care services were received by 74 children with disabilities (including 12 children with mental impairment) and 1,977 adults with disabilities (including 168 persons with mental impairments). In total, care services at home were provided by 34 local government institutions, 15 NGOs and 38 private institutions (Summary of National Statistical Reports, 2017). Social care and social rehabilitation services are paid by the client or their guardian, meaning the person who is their direct caretaker/guardian. In the event the client or provider cannot cover the cost of the services, they are to be covered from the local government budget (Section 8, Law on Social Services and Social Assistance (2002)).

The same Law defines that specialised workshops are 'a social rehabilitation service that ensures activities promoting skills and support of specialists to persons with functional disorders' (Section 1, Law on Social Services and Social Assistance (2002)). Some 11 sheltered workshops for persons with disabilities are registered in the Register of Social Services Providers (Social Services Provider Register, December 2018). Most of them are structural units of day care centres and provide services for persons with mental disabilities.

## Long-Term Institutional Care and Respite Care

In cases where the necessary care exceeds the amount prescribed for care at home or in day care and social rehabilitation institutions, disabled persons with mobility restrictions are entitled to municipally-funded services in long-term social care and social rehabilitation institutions. These services are available from local government institutions, NGOs contracted by local government to provide certain services, or private institutions. The service is paid for by the client. If the client's income is not sufficient, namely their disposable income is less than the statutory minimum wage multiplied by a determined coefficient after payment for services, the cost is to be covered by their caretaker/guardian.

Persons in need<sup>13</sup> are exempted from the payment (Ministry of Welfare, 2018).

Disabled children aged 4-18 with severe mental development disorders, persons having Group I and II disability with severe mental disorders, that do not require services of a specialised medical institution and whose health status is not a threat for the surroundings, are entitled to receive state-funded services in long-term social care and social rehabilitation institutions. State-funded long-term social care and rehabilitation services are provided by five state social care centres

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<sup>13</sup> A person whose income is less than €128.06 per month during last three months (if material conditions, specified in the Cabinet Regulations No 299 (2010), are met) is recognized as a person in need.

(and their affiliates) and organisations selected through procurement procedures to provide publicly-financed social services. In the beginning of 2018, some 7,772 persons with disabilities, 312 children among them, received services in long-term social care and social rehabilitation institutions in Latvia. Some 4,990 persons with disabilities were located in state-run and contracted social care centres, 204 in local municipality social care centres for children, and 2,578 in their equivalents for adults. The state also co-finances establishment and equipping of group houses (apartments) and half-way houses for persons with mental impairments. The half-way house service is a transitional phase from long-term social care to independent living. The state covers 50% of the cost of these institutions in the year of its establishment. In 2017, some 200 persons with mental disability (the same number in 2016) received services in group homes (apartments). Local government expenditures were 942,700 euros in 2017, up from 767,300 euros in 2016 (Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia). Eighteen group homes (apartments) for persons with mental impairment are registered in the Register of Social Services Providers (Social Services Provider Register, December 2018). The state covers some of the costs for those individuals who opt for independent living in group houses (apartments) after social rehabilitation in a half-way house.

### **Leisure and Social-Life Support**

To participate in the cultural life, leisure, free time and sports activities, persons with disabilities may use assistant services not exceeding a legally prescribed number of hours (up to 40 hours per week).

The Latvian Paralympic Committee, which consists of 23 sports federations, which, in turn, have their own sports clubs operating in different cities, make 27 different types of sports available to persons with disabilities. The Latvian Paralympic Committee also covers the Deaf Sports and Special Olympics. The committee's activities are provided courtesy of state budget grants (Latvian Paralympic Committee, October 2018).

## **FUTURE TRENDS**

Several major reforms have been launched in Latvia. In the field of education, a change in the General Education Law, which provides for the introduction of new educational content and the transition to knowledge-based learning content (Amendments to the General Education Law, 2018), took place in July 2018. The improved pre-school education content will enter into force on 1 September 2019, but introduction of the new training content in schools will take place between 1 September 2020 and 1 September 2022. There is no information on how the new reform will influence education of children with disabilities if at all.

In the field of social services, if the deinstitutionalisation project launched in 2015 is implemented successfully, it will lead to the creation of a wide range of services, so that children living in social care centres can grow up in a family environment and children with functional impairment can receive social care and rehabilitation from their local government. Meanwhile adults with mental impairments will be able to choose to live independently perform jobs appropriate for them depending on their capabilities and with needed specialist support (Ministry of Welfare, October 2018). It is planned that by the end of 2023, some 700 persons with mental disability will start to live in the community - outside long-term social care and social rehabilitation institutions. There is a foreseen closure of three long-term social care and social rehabilitation institutions (or affiliates). The number of children in institutional care should reduce by 720 children. The number of places in state-financed long-term social care and social rehabilitation institutions will be decreased by 1,000 places and the proportion of people with mental disabilities living outside institutions and for whom community-based services are available, will be increased by 45%.

## CONDUCTED INTERVIEWS

- Mrs. Dzintra Mergupe-Kutraite, Senior Speaker at the Department of Education, Ministry of Education and Science. October 2018
- Mr. Aldis Dudins, Deputy-Director of Social Service Department, Ministry of Welfare. October 2018
- Mrs. Inga Skestere, Chairperson, Latvian Movement for independent living. December 2018

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