EDUCATION POLICY OUTLOOK | COUNTRY SNAPSHOT

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Initial education policy responses to the COVID-19 pandemic:
Latvia

Strengthening adaptability and resilience in the context of COVID-19

Initial evidence suggests that pre-existing resources in the education system facilitated areas of Latvia's first response to the pandemic. Latvia adapted structures and resources already in place for recent policy work to address new challenges: students identified as part of the Tackling early school leaving project (2017) were provided with extra targeted support for distance learning and wellbeing, and aspects of the ongoing curriculum reform were accelerated as new material produced for distance education included more innovative digital content. As Latvia works to balance short-term responsiveness with longer-term strategic aims and resilience, the crisis has brought specific challenges that must be addressed. With the increased pressure on educators to adapt to new circumstances and compensate for students' lost learning, as schools reopen, ensuring adequate support and professional development for teachers and school leaders will be critical for a cohort already reporting lower job satisfaction than their peers across the OECD. The measures introduced during the school closures to provide spaces for professional discussion, opportunities to contribute resources and feedback channels are good starting points that should be continued and strengthened.

This snapshot presents information originally published as part of the **Education Policy Outlook: Latvia (2020),** available at:
www.oecd.org/education/policy-outlook/country-profile-Latvia-2020.pdf

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The Latvian education system's initial response to the COVID-19 pandemic

On 12 March 2020, Latvia announced the closure of all educational institutions from 14 March 2020. At school level, general and vocational education institutions remained closed for the academic year. Initial responses in light of the work of the *Education Policy Outlook* in 2020 in the context of this pandemic are:

1. **Ensuring continued access to learning and smooth educational pathways**: To support online education, the pre-existing platforms e-klase, uzdevumi.lv and skola 2030 provided key information, teaching resources and professional development. Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) established a series of webinars to support teachers and issued guidelines for distance learning. To complement digital provision, Latvia launched Your Class, daily educational programmes broadcast on national television and online. Initially for younger students, provision was extended to all students across compulsory and upper secondary education. The material was developed by over 70 teachers with support from a voluntary parents' group. In both higher and vocational education, distance learning was provided in a more decentralised way, each institution taking responsibility for provision. State examinations at the end of lower secondary education were cancelled, with an optional Latvian language examination for those in minority education. State examinations at upper secondary level were postponed and the number of mandatory exams reduced. In vocational and higher education, wherever possible, examinations would be conducted remotely.

2. **Strengthening the internal world of the student:** During closures, the State Inspectorate for Children's Rights hosted a telephone hotline and online chatbot providing psychological support to children. The Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) collated various websites, tools and services promoting children's wellbeing.

3. **Providing targeted support and interventions for vulnerable children and families:** As schools closed, MoES conducted a rapid survey to establish the number of children without access to a device or the internet. In partnership with two private companies, the MoES then donated over 5 000 smart devices in the first week of closures. The MoES, in collaboration with municipalities, also provided free school meals for disadvantaged children. Through the Tackling early school-leaving project (2017) students considered to be at risk of dropping out received remote counselling. Staff at special education institutions provided distance learning, established telephone consultations with parents and, where necessary, supported a child at home.

4. **Harnessing wider support and engagement at local and central level:** Preschools provided childcare to some on-duty workers (around 6-7% of children in Latvia). Latvia pursued several public-private initiatives with the educational technology and telecommunications sectors to find innovative solutions to remote learning.

5. **Collecting, disseminating and improving the use of information about students:** Guidelines for student assessment during distance learning were published, promoting formative assessment approaches and recommending measures to support summative assessment. The MoES, in partnership with Edurio, regularly surveyed a range of stakeholders for feedback on the implementation of distance learning and key decisions. These had high response rates and provided valuable information that was then integrated into guidelines and memoranda. As closures were announced, the Union of Local Governments of Latvia convened school and local government representatives for an online discussion about the best possible solutions.

Table 1

Selected indicators of system readiness (OECD)		Latvia	Average	Min	Max
Students' readiness (according to students' self-reports in PISA 2018)					
1	Index of self-efficacy	-0.19	0.01	-0.61	0.36
2	Percentage of students in disadvantaged schools with access to a computer at home that they can use for school work	91.2%	81.5%	23.5%	96.5%
Teachers' readiness (according to lower secondary teachers' self-reports in TALIS 2018)					
3	Percentage of teachers with a high level of need for professional development related to ICT skills for teaching	22.6%	17.7%	5.3%	39.0%
4	Percentage of teachers agreeing that most teachers in the school provide practical support to each other when applying new ideas	85.3%	77.9%	64.7%	86.5%

Note: The information presented in this spotlight covers key measures announced or introduced **before 11 May 2020**.

For more information visit: http://www.oecd.org/education/policy-outlook/

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