

# LATVIA

## Early Childhood Education and Care ECEC Workforce Profile

*Country report author*

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## Glossary

### **EQF – European Qualifications Framework**

Outcomes based (knowledge, skills, competences), eight-level reference tool to enable qualification comparisons between countries.

<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/european-qualifications-framework-eqf>

### **ECTS – European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System**

A system for enhancing student mobility through the Europe-wide recognition of credit transfers and credit accumulation in higher education

[https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources-and-tools/european-credit-transfer-and-accumulation-system-ects\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources-and-tools/european-credit-transfer-and-accumulation-system-ects_en)

### **ISCED – International Standard Classification of Education**

An instrument for comparing levels and fields of education across countries, developed by UNESCO in the 1970s and revised in 1997 and 2011.

<http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/international-standard-classification-of-education-isced-2011-en.pdf>

## About the author

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**Note from the editors:** In official translations of government documents, ECEC settings in Latvia are invariably described as *Pre-school education institutions* and core practitioners as *Pre-school education teachers*. The preferred terms in the SEEPRO-3 reports for countries with an integrated ECEC system are *ECEC centre* and *ECEC Teacher*. The distinction is made because the term ‘pre-school’ is often used internationally to mean ‘pre-primary’ education, referring to the two or three years prior to school entry only. Since there is an official trend in Latvia to move away from the term ‘pedagogue’ to the term ‘teacher’ (associated in Latvia with a higher level of IPE and higher societal status), the terms *Early Childhood Education and Care Teacher* or *ECEC Teacher* are used interchangeably throughout this report.

### Introductory note on methodology

The methods used for preparing the report on the early childhood education and care (ECEC) workforce in Latvia are analyses of relevant statistical data, laws and regulations as well as expert interviews. Three interviews were carried out with the following experts: Ļubova Jakovele, a senior expert at the National Centre for Education (date of the interview 10.01.2022); Rasma Purmale, a principal of an ECEC institution in Riga and a lecturer in the University of Latvia, education programme “Early Childhood Education and Care Teacher” (date of the interview 13.01.2022); and Inese Seipule, Ministry of Education and Science, Department of Education, Deputy Director in the field of general education (date of the interview 17.01.2022). All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. References to expert statements are included in the text.

## 1. ECEC governance in Latvia

Latvia has a unitary system of early childhood education and care for children up to statutory school age at 7 years, organised in two stages. Both ECEC provision for children up to age 5 and pre-primary education for 5 to 6 year-olds come under the auspices of the Ministry of Education and Science (*Izglītības un zinātnes ministrija*). The Ministry of Education and Science has overall auspices of the ECEC institutions for children aged 1½–6<sup>1</sup> years, including the development of regulatory and curricular guidance. At the local level the municipal authorities are responsible for providing public ECEC facilities. The Ministry of Education and Science is responsible for the remuneration of ECEC Teachers working with children aged 5–6 years, while municipalities are responsible for the remuneration of ECEC Teachers working with the younger age groups. In general, all ECEC provision has two sources of funding: the state (for the salaries of teachers working with 5 to 6 year-olds) and municipalities (except for private ECEC settings). The small number of private ECEC centres is obliged to adhere to the same regulatory framework as the public institutions.

<sup>1</sup> **Editors’ note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. We have chosen the following age-inclusive format for the SEEPRO-3 reports for countries with a school starting age at 6: **0–2** years for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for 3, 4 and 5 year-olds. In Latvia, with a school starting at age 7, the corresponding formats are **1½–5** and **5–6** years.

## 2. Who belongs to the early years workforce?

### 2.1 Regular contact staff in ECEC provision

The main staff categories working directly with children in Latvian ECEC institutions are:

- Early Childhood Education and Care Teachers
- Teacher Assistants
- Early Childhood Music and Sports Teachers
- Speech Therapy Teachers
- Special Needs Pedagogues.

Minority ECEC institutions, where the language of instruction is not Latvian, may also employ a Latvian Language Teacher. Administrative staff categories are: Centre Heads (responsible for management tasks), Deputy Centre Heads (responsible for the educational programme), and Early Childhood Education Methodologists<sup>2</sup>. Technical staff categories include: teacher assistant, cooks, cleaners. In some institutions a Psychologist and/or a Nurse may also be employed. Music, Sports and Special Needs Pedagogues may be employed as permanent staff members of an ECEC centre and work on a daily basis with the children, but in the case of small ECEC institutions they may work part time and move from centre to centre.

Table 1 gives a brief overview of the main staff categories and also categorises the core practitioners (i.e. staff with group or centre responsibility) according to one of five ECEC professional profiles adapted from the original SEEPRO study (see Box 1 at the end of this chapter).

Table 1

Latvia: ECEC staff in centre-based settings

Job title	Main ECEC work-place settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement <sup>3</sup> ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
<b>Early Childhood Education and Care Teacher</b> <i>Pirmsskolas izglītības skolotājs</i>  <i>Profile:</i> Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional	<i>Pirmsskolas izglītības iestāde</i> <b>ECEC centre / kindergarten</b> 1½–6 years	Core practitioner with group responsibility	1½–7 years	Tertiary-level qualification in pedagogy and professional award as Early Childhood Education and Care Teacher <b>or</b> Tertiary-level qualification in pedagogy and professional award as Primary School Teacher <b>plus</b> a 72-hour B-programme <sup>4</sup> on early childhood pedagogy

<sup>2</sup> ‘Methodologists’ in Latvia are senior Early Childhood Education and Care Teachers responsible for professional support in organising the educational work in ECEC institutions; one of his/her responsibilities is monitoring the staff needs for continuing professional development.

<sup>3</sup> Cabinet of Ministers 2018a.

<sup>4</sup> See Chapter 3 on IPE for a clarification of ‘B-Programme’.

Job title	Main ECEC work- place settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age- range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement <sup>3</sup> ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
				<b>Or</b> Second level profes- sional higher education (Bachelor) in pedagogy <b>plus</b> a 72-hour B-pro- gramme on early child- hood pedagogy <b>or</b> Higher education de- gree (Bachelor's or Master's or Doctoral degree) in early child- hood pedagogy  ECTS credits: 108–240 EQF Level: 5 and higher ISCED 2011: 5 and higher
<b>Teacher Assistant</b> <i>Skolotāja palīgs</i>	<i>Pirmsskolas izglītības iestāde</i> <b>ECEC centre / kindergarten</b> 1½–6 years	Responsible for children's care needs and support- ing the teacher in ed- ucational and play activities	1½–7 years	There are no official minimum requirements for education and qual- ification. It is recom- mended that candi- dates have first aid training and attend courses on children's rights protection. Some municipalities may or- ganise a preparatory course on child psy- chology and develop- ment.
<b>Early Childhood Music/Sports* Teacher</b> <i>Pirmsskolas izglītības mūzikas/ sporta skolotājs</i>  <i>Profile depends on qualification route:</i> <b>either</b> Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional with additional specialist qualification  <b>or</b> Early Childhood	<i>Pirmsskolas izglītības iestāde</i> <b>ECEC centre / kindergarten</b> 1½–6 years	Main respon- sible person for children's music/ sports activities	1½–7 years	Second level profes- sional higher education degree in pedagogy with <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• additional qualifica- tion as Music Teacher</li> </ul> <b>or</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• additional qualifica- tion as Sports Teacher</li> </ul> <b>or</b> ECEC Teacher qualifica- tion requirements (see <i>above</i> )

Job title	Main ECEC work-place settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement <sup>3</sup> ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
Pedagogy Professional				ECTS credits: 108–240 EQF Level: 5 and higher ISCED 2011: 5 and higher
<b>Speech Therapy Teacher</b> <i>Logopēds</i>  <i>Profile:</i> Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional with specialist qualification	<i>Pirmsskolas izglītības iestāde</i> <b>ECE centre/ kindergarten</b> 1½–6 years	Main responsible person who works with children with speech problems	1½–7 years	Second level professional higher education degree in pedagogy <i>PLUS</i> a postgraduate qualification as Speech Therapy Teacher  ECTS credits: 108–240 EQF Level: 7 ISCED 2011: 5 and higher
<b>Special Needs Pedagogue**</b> <i>Speciālais pedagogs</i>	<i>Pirmsskolas izglītības iestāde</i> <b>ECEC centre / kindergarten</b> 1½–6 years	Main responsible person who works with children with special needs	1½–7 years	Second level professional degree in special needs education (Bachelor's or Master's)  <b>or</b> ECEC Teacher or Primary School Teacher professional qualification <i>plus</i> a 72-hour B-programme on special education approaches in ECEC.  ECTS credits: 240 and higher EQF Level: 6 and higher ISCED 2011: 6 and higher

\* In some ECEC institutions there is not a designated post for a sports teacher. ECEC Teachers also prepare and lead sports activities for children.

\*\* Special Needs Pedagogues (sometimes called Special Needs Teachers) work with children with complex needs both in regular ECEC settings and in special kindergartens. This staff position is not common in all ECEC institutions.

#### Box 1

**SEEPRO profile categories for ECEC core professionals** (adapted from Oberhuemer, Schreyer, and Neuman 2010)

- **Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (specialist focus, 0–6/7 years)
- **Pre-primary Education Professional** (exclusive pre-primary focus 3/4–6 years)
- **Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional** (focus on pre-primary *and* primary education 3/4–10/11 years)

- **Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (mainly broad focus, including ECEC, usually 0–12 years, but sometimes including adults)
- **Social Care/Health Care Professional** (sometimes early childhood focus, sometimes broad focus, including adults)

## 2.2 Centre leader

In Latvia, the right to work as a head of an educational institution, including ECEC centres, is determined by Regulation 569 of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Latvia (2018a). These rules apply to all schools and ECEC centres and the requirements are the same. Article 13 of these regulations stipulates that a person whose education meets one of the following requirements is eligible to work as a Centre Head, Deputy Head and Educational Methodologist of an educational setting:

- Higher education (except for the 2-year first-level professional higher education) in pedagogy or educational sciences (see *Table 3 – Route 1*)
- Higher education and a part of the study programme related to pedagogy has been learned within the framework of the higher education study programme for at least two ECTS credits or at least 72 hours.

Article 50 of the Education Law states that the heads of educational institutions must not have a criminal record.

Regulation 618 of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Latvia (2020b) on assessment of the professional performance of educational setting managers stipulates that the performance of the head is evaluated after a certain period of time, not less than once every six years. It is evaluated by the State Quality Service of Education. A first-time head of an educational setting is evaluated within two years, but not earlier than six months after taking up the position. This gives new heads time to familiarise themselves with the specific setting context.

ECEC Centre Heads are hired by the municipalities, where their contracts are concluded. Job duties are determined more specifically by each municipality.

An interview with the Director of an ECEC centre in Riga revealed that to become a Centre Leader, three years of experience in pedagogical work with children or in methodological work are required. The candidate must have knowledge of at least one foreign language and know how to work effectively with information technologies. According to this interviewee, a professional development centre for young ECEC leaders/ managers has been operating in Riga for five years or more, where young directors have the opportunity to improve their pedagogical, administrative, and financial management skills, as well as work with staff (Purmale, expert interview, January 13, 2022). This professional development centre was established and financed by Riga municipality.

The main leadership tasks are primarily administrative, however the teachers' salary regulations (Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Latvia 2018a), which also apply to ECEC Teachers, state that the Head and Deputy Head of the educational institution can work up to seven hours in addition to their basic workload. Therefore, in addition to the basic workload of 40 hours a week, directors can work an additional seven hours a week which may include working with children. Most often, the ECEC Principals work only at times when a teaching post is vacant and there is no one to fill these positions or a temporary replacement is needed. Secondly, there are Principals who wish to maintain their teaching experience and demonstrate their teaching skills in a real-life situation. Principals also need to be present in the everyday pedagogical work process, to understand what is happening in the classroom (Seipule, expert interview, January 17, 2022).



## 2.3 Centre-based posts of responsibility

The specialisation of employees depends on the specific ECEC centre and municipality, as the municipality provides personnel funding. In addition, there is a salary bonus for teachers for working with the children of asylum seekers. For this, a separate contract is concluded with educational institutions and a state budget is allocated (according to the number of children in the institution).

## 2.4 Co-ordinating and supervisory staff

Most ECEC centres in Latvia have a co-ordinating staff member called a “Methodologist”. Methodologists are senior Early Childhood Education and Care Teachers responsible for professional support in organising the educational work in ECEC centres. One of his or her responsibilities is monitoring the staff needs for continuing professional development, but they also have a counselling, coaching and support role in the ECEC setting. They may also organise on-site or regional continuing professional development activities. A person who has a higher pedagogical education (excluding a first-level pedagogical higher professional education), is entitled to work as an Educational Methodologist.

Supervisory functions are performed by the employees of the municipal education administration, which coordinates the professional development of teachers at the municipal level, as well as by the State Quality Service of Education, which in their inspections examines and verifies cases where there have been complaints about the quality of education.

Relatively recently, the National Centre for Education of the Republic of Latvia has launched the Learning Consultants Expert programme. The purpose of the programme is to promote the introduction of a new teaching and learning approach in the educational process. The main task of the consultant is to provide the ECEC Teacher with practical support in the work environment. Prospective Learning Consultant Experts are required to complete a certain number of CPD courses and then demonstrate the acquired skills. They study three levels of courses over a period of three years and are awarded 160 ECTS credits (this takes place alongside regular teaching work). In the second year, they are awarded the status of a learning expert; in this capacity they have the right to consult ECEC Teachers (Jakovele, expert interview, January 10, 2022). On 01.02.2021, there were 72 ECEC Learning Consultant Experts across the country, fully trained by the National Centre for Education (National Centre for Education 2021). Since 2017, six consulting centres have been operating in Riga, where attention has also been paid to ECEC settings. The consulting centres are staffed by specialists whose work is focused on support in organising the learning process and raising the quality of education (Purmale, expert interview, January 13, 2022).

## 2.5 Specialist support staff

Regulation 716 of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Latvia on “national preschool education guidelines” (2018b) stipulates that, taking into account the working hours and the number of groups of the educational setting, the local government which is provider of the ECEC centre ensures the necessary number of teachers and teacher support staff (including Speech Therapists) for the implementation of the ECEC educational programme. Therefore, in general, it is the municipality’s responsibility and decision which specialists to involve in ECEC work.

Regulation 447 of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Latvia on national preschool education guidelines (2016a) about the state budget targeted grant for teachers’ wages (article 8.5) envisages state funding for the salary of Speech Therapists employed to work with children from the age of 5 until the start of primary education. The ratio is set at one position for 200 children. For children up to the age of 5, the Speech Therapist's salary is paid by the municipality whereas

the state pays the salaries of those working with 5 and 6 year-olds. In Riga, there are Speech Therapists in all ECEC centres. In other municipalities, it depends on the size of the setting, the attitude of the municipality and the availability of specialists (Purmale, expert interview, January 13, 2022). In a study by the Latvian Speech Therapist Association (2021), it was found that one quarter of municipalities in 2021 did not receive the necessary state grants in full. Using the ratio set by the state in the calculations, the authors of the study show that the funding allocated by local governments for younger children to ensure the work of a Speech Therapist is even more insufficient. This confirms the widely known fact that Speech Therapist services are only available in a segment of the ECEC settings in Latvia. It should be noted, however, that children can also receive state-paid Speech Therapist consultations in medical institutions through a family doctor or a medical specialist.

Special needs staff work only in ECEC institutions that implement a special education programme (in total, there are 28 municipal special ECEC centres in Latvia). In Latvia, special education is for children with visual, hearing, language and learning impairments, severe somatic illnesses, movement and support apparatus impairments, mental health illnesses and learning disabilities (among young children, mixed developmental disabilities). Special education centres or groups are fully financed by the state, and the funding is determined by Regulation 477 of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Latvia on the financing procedure for special education classes (groups) in both special and regular education settings (2016b). Specialists in these ECEC institutions are engaged according to the children's needs and disorders. The ECEC principal interviewee states that teachers receive bonuses of 10-20% for work with special groups (Purmale, expert interview, January 13, 2022). If the help of an assistant is needed, the municipality or the state covers the wages, depending on the child's age.

### 3. Structural composition of ECEC workforce: qualifications, gender, ethnicity

In 2020/2021, 11,499 teachers were employed in ECEC centres in Latvia. 90.7% of these worked in municipal settings and 9.3% in ECEC centres established by legal entities or individuals. There are no data available on the technical staff (assistants, cleaners, cooks) who work in ECEC institutions.

8,282 or 72% of the pedagogical staff in ECEC institutions worked directly with the children as Early Childhood Education and Care Teachers, 10.2% were engaged in management duties (5.4% were employed as Centre Heads, and 4.8% worked as an Education Methodologist or Deputy Centre Heads).

7.2% of teachers were employed as early childhood Music Teachers, 4.4% as Sports Teachers and 6.5% of staff were Speech Therapists.

32.9% of the pedagogical staff in ECEC centres are teachers working for the mandatory preparation of children for school from the age of 5.

88.4% of teachers working in ECEC institutions have a tertiary-level professional qualification and the greater majority (84.7%) a specialisation in pedagogy (there are no available data on whether these teachers have a specialisation in early childhood pedagogy). 3.7% had a tertiary level education in another field. 13.3% of the staff with a specialised higher education degree have a Master's degree in pedagogy. 11.6% of teachers working in ECEC institutions have a qualification below tertiary level. Of these, 3.5% had a secondary vocational education and 8.1% a

general secondary education. 68.7% of this group of teachers with a secondary-level education (either vocational or general) are studying for a tertiary-level degree in pedagogy.

The available data show that 15.3% of staff working in ECEC institutions do not have a relevant qualification. In this group there are staff with a general secondary education, a secondary vocational education and with other (non-pedagogical) higher education.

In Latvia, the personnel working in ECEC institutions are mainly women (99%). Of all teachers working in ECEC institutions, only 0.84% or 97 persons are male. The majority of male teachers worked as sports teachers (58 persons or 59.8%) or music teachers (16 persons or 16.5%), 6 persons or 6.2% of all male staff were heads of institutions.

4.3% of teachers are younger than 24 years, 18.5% are in the age group 25-34 years and 21.9% are in the age group 35-44 years. More than half (55.3%) of the teachers working in ECEC centres are over 45 years of age. 29.9% are aged 45-54 years, and 25.4% are 55 years of age or older. In general, 6.2% of teachers working in ECEC institutions have reached retirement age.

Data on ethnic background or nationality within the ECEC workforce are not collected in Latvia. In 2020/2021, of all ECEC institutions registered in Latvia (in total, 643), 74.7% were with Latvian as the language of instruction, 7.6% with Russian, 17.4% were bilingual with both Latvian and Russian as the language of instruction. Teachers can work in any ECEC institution regardless of their ethnic background or nationality.

Table 2

**Latvia: Structural composition of ECEC\* workforce in Latvia, 2020/2021\*\***

Staff categories	Number of staff and proportion of workforce	
Total staff with higher education degree (or tertiary-level professional qualification) (ISCED 5 and above)	10,166	<b>88.4%</b>
Staff with a higher education qualification in pedagogy	9,739	<b>84.7%</b>
<i>of whom the following have a Master's degree in pedagogy</i>	1,534	13.3%
Staff with higher education qualification in another field	427	<b>3.7%</b>
Staff with upper secondary or post-secondary IPE:	1,333	<b>11.6%</b>
– secondary vocational (ISCED 3)	398	3.5%
– general secondary (ISCED 3)	935	8.1%
<i>the majority of whom are currently studying for a higher education degree in early childhood pedagogy</i>	915	68.7%
Staff with non-specialist qualification (both higher and secondary)	1,760	<b>15.3%</b>
Unqualified staff	No data available	
Specialist support staff	977	<b>8.5%</b>
– Speech Therapists	744	6.5%
– Special Education Teachers	34	0.3%
– Special Needs Pedagogues	100	0.9%
– Educational Psychologists	99	0.9%
Male staff:	97	<b>0.8%</b>
– Sports Teachers	58	0.5%
– Music Teachers	16	0.1%
– Principals	6	0.05%
– Other	17	0.15%
ECEC Teachers in the mandatory preparation of children for school from the age of 5	3,783	<b>32.9%</b>
Staff with a background of migration	No data available	

\* The data include only the pedagogical staff in ECEC institutions.

\*\* Ministry of Education and Science 2021 (personal communication). Data were provided directly by a ministry official. Not available on ministry webpage.

## 4. Initial professional education (IPE)

### 4.1 Initial qualifying routes (higher education and vocational)

During the last five years, the process of ECEC Teacher education in Latvia has been improved and some programmes have been modified, but the system has not fundamentally changed. Therefore, the information compiled in this chapter largely endorses the information in the previous report (Šūpule, Bebrisā, and Jansone 2018).

The higher education programme 'Early Childhood Education and Care Teacher' is offered by four higher education institutions in Latvia: University of Latvia (*Latvijas Universitāte*); University of Liepāja (*Liepājas Universitāte*), Rezekne Academy of Technologies (*Rēzeknes Tehnoloģiju akadēmija*) and Daugavpils University (*Daugavpils Universitāte*). Previously there was also the Riga Teacher Training and Educational Management Academy (*Rīgas Pedagoģijas un izglītības vadības akadēmija*; a non-university institution) offering this education programme. However, in 2017 the latter was reorganised and attached to the University of Latvia.

First-level higher professional education in early childhood education is provided at the four universities mentioned. Graduates of the first-level professional higher education study programme can obtain a Bachelor's degree in education by continuing to learn the content of the professional Bachelor study programme 'Primary Education Teacher'.

Primary School Teachers (grades 1-4) wishing to work in an early childhood institution, or Early Childhood Education and Care Teachers wishing to work in a special ECEC institution are obliged to follow a requalification course known as a 'B-programme'. These programmes are of 72 hours' duration and cover issues of early childhood pedagogy, particularly didactics. They are developed and conducted by the higher education institutions which offer study programmes in pedagogy.

Table 3

Latvia: Early Childhood Education and Care Teacher

<p><b>Job title in Latvian:</b> <i>Pirmsskolas izglītības skolotājs</i></p> <p><b>Profile:</b> Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional</p>
<p><b>Route 1: First level professional higher education programme</b></p> <p><b>Entry requirements:</b> Certificate of general secondary education or vocational secondary education (ISCED 34 and 35)</p> <p><b>Professional studies:</b> 2 years (2 years and 6 months for external studies) of professional higher education</p> <p><b>Award:</b> Professional status (diploma) as Early Childhood Education and Care Teacher</p> <p><b>ECTS credits:</b> 120</p> <p><b>EQF level:</b> 5</p> <p><b>ISCED 2011:</b> 55</p> <p><b>Main ECEC workplace:</b> ECEC centres/kindergartens (1½–6 years)</p> <p>Graduates with a Bachelor's degree can study further to gain a Master's or a higher education degree.</p>

<p><b>Job title in Latvian:</b> <i>Pirmsskolas izglītības skolotājs</i></p> <p><b>Profile:</b> Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional</p>
<p><b>Route 2: Professional Bachelor's degree programme</b></p> <p><b>Entry requirements:</b> Certificate of general secondary education or vocational secondary education</p> <p><b>Professional studies:</b> 4-year (4 years and 6 months for external studies) university/higher education study programme – sub-programme 'Early Childhood Education and Primary School Teacher'</p> <p><b>Award:</b> Professional Bachelor's degree in educational sciences/professional qualification as Teacher</p> <p><b>ECTS credits:</b> 240</p> <p><b>EQF level:</b> 6</p> <p><b>ISCED 2011:</b> 65</p> <p><b>Main ECEC workplace:</b> ECEC centres/kindergartens (1½–6 years)</p> <p><b>N.B.</b> Graduates with a Bachelor's degree can continue their studies in Master's programmes and professional education programmes.</p> <p><b>Route 3: Second level short professional higher education programme</b></p> <p><b>Entry requirements:</b> Higher education degree in pedagogy/Bachelor of educational sciences</p> <p><b>Professional studies:</b> 2 years of part-time studies affiliated to a university/higher education institution</p> <p><b>Award:</b> Professional qualification as Early Childhood Education and Care Teacher</p> <p><b>ECTS credits:</b> (240) +108, total 348</p> <p><b>EQF level:</b> 7</p> <p><b>ISCED 2011:</b> 65</p> <p><b>Main ECEC workplace:</b> ECEC centres/kindergartens (1½–6 years)</p> <p><b>N.B.</b> Holders of the professional post-graduate qualification can follow further studies to gain a Master's degree.</p>

**Note:** Since the required qualification routes of Early Childhood Music Education Teachers and Sports Teachers are similar to those of Early Childhood Education and Care Teachers (2<sup>nd</sup> level professional higher pedagogic education plus additional qualification as Music/Sports Teacher) and since Early Childhood Education and Care Teachers are eligible to fulfil the duties of Music/Sports Teachers, these IPE programmes are not described in more detail.

Table 4

**Latvia: Speech Therapy Teacher**

<p><b>Job title in Latvian:</b> <i>Logopēds</i></p>
<p><b>Route 1: Professional Bachelor programme 'Special Education and Speech Therapy Teacher' or 'Speech Therapy Teacher'</b></p> <p><b>Entry requirements:</b> Certificate of general secondary education or vocational secondary education (ISCED 3 and 4)</p> <p><b>Professional studies:</b> 4 or 4½ years of professional higher education</p> <p><b>Award:</b> Bachelor's professional degree in Education/professional status as Special Education Teacher and Speech Therapy Teacher.</p> <p><b>ECTS credits:</b> 240</p> <p><b>EQF level:</b> 6</p> <p><b>ISCED 2011:</b> 65</p> <p><b>Main ECEC workplaces:</b> ECEC centres /kindergartens (1½–6 years)</p> <p><b>Additional workplaces include:</b> primary schools, special education institutions, art schools, school management institutions, study centres</p> <p><b>N.B.</b> Graduates with a Bachelor's degree can continue studies in Master's programmes and 2nd level professional higher education programmes.</p> <p><b>Route 2: Second level (post-graduate) short professional higher education programme 'Teacher' – sub-programme 'Speech Therapy Teacher'</b></p>

Job title in Latvian: <i>Logopēds</i>
<p><b>Entry requirements:</b> Higher pedagogic education or Bachelor of educational sciences</p> <p><b>Professional studies:</b> 2 years of part-time studies affiliated to a higher education institution</p> <p><b>Award:</b> Professional status as Speech Therapy Teacher</p> <p><b>ECTS credits:</b> 108</p> <p><b>EQF level:</b> 7</p> <p><b>ISCED 2011:</b> 65</p> <p><b>Main ECEC workplace:</b> ECEC centres /kindergartens (1½–6 years)</p> <p><b>Additional workplace:</b> Primary schools</p> <p>Graduates with a Bachelor's degree can continue studies in Master's programmes.</p>

Table 5

#### Latvia: Special Needs Pedagogue

Job title in Latvian: <i>Speciālais pedagogs</i>
<p><b>Route 1: Professional Bachelor programme ‘Special Education Teacher and Speech Therapy Teacher’ or ‘Special Education Teacher’</b></p> <p><b>Entry requirements:</b> completed secondary education</p> <p><b>Professional studies:</b> 4 or 4½ years of professional higher education</p> <p><b>Award:</b> Bachelor's professional degree in Education/professional status as Special Education Teacher and Speech Therapy Teacher</p> <p><b>ECTS credits:</b> 240</p> <p><b>EQF level:</b> 6</p> <p><b>ISCED 2011:</b> 65</p> <p><b>Main ECEC workplace:</b> ECEC centres /kindergartens (1½–6 years)</p> <p>Additional workplaces: schools, special education institutions, art schools, school management institutions, study centres,</p> <p>N.B. Graduates with a Bachelor's degree may continue studies in Master's programmes and 2nd level professional higher education programmes</p>
<p><b>Route 2:</b></p> <p>Second level professional higher education programme ‘Teacher’ – sub-programme ‘Special Education Teacher’</p> <p><b>Entry requirements:</b> Higher education depending on the length of programme</p> <p><b>Professional studies:</b> 1½, 2 or 2½ years studies of professional higher education</p> <p><b>Award:</b> Professional status as Special Education Teacher</p> <p><b>ECTS credits:</b> 72, 90 or 120 (depending on previous initial professional education)</p> <p><b>EQF level:</b> 7</p> <p><b>ISCED 2011:</b> 65</p> <p><b>Main ECEC workplace:</b> ECEC centres/kindergartens (1½–6 years)</p> <p>Additional workplaces: primary schools and special education institutions</p>

## 4.2 Competences, curricula and pedagogic-didactic approaches in IPE programmes

As there are different study programmes for different staff categories, the main focus here is on the IPE programmes for Early Childhood Education and Care Teachers<sup>5</sup>. The main pedagogic di-

<sup>5</sup> The information is gathered from descriptions of study programmes of different higher education institutions.

dactic approach in the IPE programmes is a holistic and child-oriented approach. In the curriculum, Latvia is in the process of implementing a competency-based approach which allows pupils, based on their ability, to master a skill or competency at their own pace regardless of the specific learning environment.

### **Early Childhood Education and Care Teacher (*Pirmsskolas izglītības skolotājs*)**

#### ***Route 1: First level professional higher education programme***

##### **Competency specifications:**

- Understands the most essential concepts of early childhood education and the guidelines for the professional activity of an ECEC Teacher
- Justifies the choice of learning techniques, methods and technologies, according to the individual development of children and the achievable learning results
- Understands the principles of planning and implementation of a child-centred learning process in early childhood settings
- Knows the techniques of self-analysis, self-evaluation and self-reflection in the teacher's pedagogical activities.

##### **Curricular areas:**

- General education courses (for example, early childhood pedagogy)
- Specialisation courses (in pedagogy, psychology, physiology, study methods)
- Practical experience in an ECEC setting
- Preparing and presenting qualification thesis.

#### ***Route 2: Professional Bachelor's degree programme***

##### **Competency specifications:**

- Understands the basic concepts of the field of educational sciences and the guidelines of professional activity, which are necessary to perform the basic tasks and duties of a teacher's professional activity
- Understands the principles of planning, implementation and evaluation of the pedagogical process, the possibilities of their application in practical pedagogical activities
- Is familiar with the content of subject areas, core competences, intermediate competences and methodology
- Knows the techniques which are necessary for the improvement of professional competence, e.g. self-analysis, self-evaluation and self-reflection.

##### **Curricular areas:**

- Theoretical courses in pedagogy and psychology
- Courses of specific psychological development features of young children, methods of promotion of children's creativity, specific tasks of home tutors
- Pedagogical practical experience in ECEC institutions
- Preparation of thesis.

#### ***Route 3: Second level short professional higher education programme***

##### **Competency specifications:**

- Being able to practically use knowledge of early childhood pedagogy and study methods, taking into account their previous pedagogic education and work experience
- Being able to plan and organise pedagogic processes with certain goals.

##### **Curricular areas:**



- Theoretical courses related to the field (for example, early childhood pedagogy, playing in theory and practice)
- Courses of professional specialisation (for example, bilingual education in ECEC settings, sports in ECEC settings, music in early childhood pedagogy and others)
- Freely chosen courses
- Practical use of theory
- State examination.

### 4.3 Alternative entry and qualification routes, system permeability

During the last five years, the requirements on entry for working as an Early Childhood Education and Care Teacher have not changed significantly, only in one aspect. The information in this chapter therefore largely endorses the information already collected in the previous report (Šūpule, Bebriša, and Jansone 2018). The minimum requirement for working as an ECEC Teacher in an ECEC institution is a higher pedagogy-related education and a specific qualification. According to the relevant legislation, the only possibility for working without having these specific requirements is for students who are undertaking initial professional studies in pedagogy (Cabinet of Ministers 2018a). Experts still admit that it is common practice for students to start working during their studies and it has become one of the options to solve staff shortage problems in ECEC settings (Purmale, expert interview, January 13, 2022). Regulation 569 of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Latvia (2018a) also stipulates that after qualifying as an ECEC Teacher the pedagogue should work under the guidance of a teacher mentor for two years.

Almost anyone can work as an Early Childhood Teacher Assistant regardless of their education and qualification, the only requirement is a completed secondary education. However, according to legislation, when hiring a person, the ECEC setting provider is obliged to request information from the Punishment Register to make sure that a person has not been convicted of criminal offences that are related to violence or threats of violence, of criminal offences against moral and sexual inviolability (Latvijas Republikas Saeima 1998a) or of other crimes not permitted for those working with children.

An Early Childhood Education and Care Teacher has both vertical and horizontal career opportunities in ECEC institutions. A teacher can participate in the application process for vacant positions and become the Centre Head of an ECEC institution, a Deputy Centre Head for education work or a Methodologist. An ECEC Teacher can also make horizontal career moves. He/she can gain a specialist qualification and work as a Speech Therapist or a Special Needs Pedagogue. Teacher Assistants can only become an ECEC Teacher by following the required education and qualification routes.

## 5. Guided workplace experience (practicum) in the initial professional education of core professionals

Guided workplace experience in the form of a practicum is given great importance during the IPE programmes for the preparation of future Early Childhood Education and Care Teachers. It is an opportunity for students to test their theoretical knowledge and to improve their pedagogical skills. Workplace-based learning is implemented according to an agreement signed by both



the higher education institution and the service provider/employer offering the work placement. The agreement includes the goals and tasks of the practicum, as well as its planning, evaluation procedures and the duties and responsibilities of both co-operating institutions. However, in most cases students currently have to find a suitable placement themselves – frequently it is an ECEC centre close to the student's home or the one where the student already works alongside his/her studies.

During their practicum students need to develop and improve their skills of observation, to note and evaluate the individual development of each child, to develop skills for the independent planning of learning processes (including goal-setting and tasks), and to learn to choose appropriate pedagogic-didactic and organisational approaches in order to promote the individual development of each child. Students make regular notes of observations of daily practices and these are included in the overall evaluation of the practicum: "A student has to write an internship report, an internship diary based on theoretical knowledge. The diary is evaluated by the university supervisor and also by the Head or Methodologist of the ECEC institution. In the diary, students describe how they have prepared the lessons and how they have conducted them. At the end, there is the practicum exam; a model lesson is filmed and then watched by the assessment commission and evaluated. Contact with children is assessed, as well as how they have used theoretical knowledge and selected materials in relation to specific children" (Purmale, expert interview, January 13, 2022). The representative of the co-operating ECEC institution (Centre Head, Deputy Centre Head for education work or Methodologist) and the HEI supervisor of the field practice assess the student's performance together. Evaluation also includes a presentation by the student in their higher education institution.

In terms of a centre-based mentor or support person for the students, this role can be fulfilled by an ECEC Teacher as well as by a Centre Head, a Deputy Centre Head for education work or a Methodologist. Each ECEC setting makes this decision according to the tasks a student has to fulfil during the field practice.

According to field experts, a mentor or support person in the ECEC institution should be specially prepared in order to support students during the field practice. Several higher education institutions in Latvia offer relevant courses in their professional development programmes for teachers. As a preparatory course for this role has not been set as a requirement, some experts report that a Centre Head or Deputy Centre Head for education work who has 20 or more years of work experience can perform the duties of mentors without special preparation. Usually, the ECEC staff do not receive additional payment for fulfilling the tasks of a mentor or support person.

The number of ECTS allocated to workplace experience in the professional study routes for core practitioners is 20. The ECEC principal and lecturer at the University of Latvia, Rasma Purmale, characterised the workplace-based learning of students in this way: "One practicum is in the first year, when a student goes to an ECEC setting and watches how an experienced teacher works. A second practicum takes place in the second year, in groups-with children aged 1½–3 years, when the students are given practice assignments – ...] In the second year, they may also lead different aspects: organising play sessions, games and walks. In the case of teachers who study for only two and a half years, then before the end there is a qualification practicum period lasting for more than a month. By this time the student will be organising the daily schedule as a teacher. The qualification practice ends with the qualification exam, where the assessment committee evaluates the student's teaching practice" (Purmale, expert interview, January 13, 2022).

## 6. Continuing professional development (CPD) of ECEC staff

**Regulatory frameworks, rights and duties:** According to the relevant legislation, continuing professional development is mandatory for all teachers, including those working in ECEC institutions. Each teacher is responsible for undertaking professional development of not less than 36 hours within a period of three years (Cabinet of Ministers 2018a). The Education Law (Latvijas Republikas Saeima 1998b) states that a teacher has the right to 30 days over three years for his/her professional development and that this can take place during working hours, maintaining the salary. Whereas ECEC Teachers are responsible for their professional development, its planning takes place in cooperation with the ECEC leadership.

The professional development of technical staff (for example, Teacher Assistants) working in ECEC settings is not regulated at the state level. It is up to the municipality or the specific ECEC institution to decide whether these employees need professional development. There are possibilities for professional development training designed especially for this target group provided in the big cities.

**Providers:** CPD courses are developed and offered by higher education institutions, state and municipal institutions, non-governmental organisations and private institutions. Some examples: the 'Latvian Language Agency', and the 'Education and Information Services of Riga City (RIIMC)' which are education support institutions established by Riga municipality; the organisation 'Early Childhood Education Association', the 'Education Development Centre', the 'Latvian Early Childhood Music Education Association' and many more, as well as higher education institutions such as Daugavpils University, the Latvian Academy of Sports Education, the University of Latvia, Liepaja University, and Rezekne Higher Education Institution.

**Main forms:** CPD for Early Childhood Education and Care Teachers is mainly conducted in the form of training programmes and study courses. The course provider is responsible for coordinating the programme with the municipal education board. Less often, professional development may take place through participation in workshops and conferences and may also include a study period in another country.

In recent years, a new form of professional development has been launched in Latvia – professional development based on the work environment. This means that the professional development of the ECEC Teacher takes place on-site, in the ECEC institution, focusing on a specific topic of current importance for ECEC Teachers. The topicality is determined either by the Centre Head or by the Methodologist. A Methodologist observes play-based activities and the learning environment in individual groups and provides feedback to teachers. Observations are discussed with the teacher, strong points are emphasised and suggestions for improvement are made. Then they agree on activities that the teacher can undertake. After some time, another meeting is arranged and the learning consultant again observes activities and the learning environment to understand what professional development the teacher needs.

**Recent topics:** The topics of CPD offers are diverse and broad. This was one of the findings in a study by Šķestere (2020), who analysed the options offered by the Latvian Local Government Training Centre. The programme included the following courses: internet use for preschool children; practical methods and techniques for preschool language development in the context of the competence approach; methods and techniques for forming mathematical concepts; implementing the competence approach; competence-based curriculum planning and organisation in younger age groups in ECEC centres; implementation of a competence-based curriculum; features of communication in working with children with autistic spectrum disorders; mathematical

fairy tales and stories - a means of learning mathematical ideas within the competence approach in preschool.

**Access, costs:** The availability of different courses is satisfactory and many are provided free of charge. In the case of fee-paying courses, sometimes the ECEC institution or the municipality reimburse costs from their budgets. One of the interviewed experts pointed out that currently the most relevant courses are about improving the digital literacy of ECEC pedagogues, and these courses are offered at the expense of the state (Jakovele, expert interview, January 10, 2022). In her opinion, the three most relevant topics of professional development courses in ECEC are digital skills, children's rights and competence-based education.

**Research, debates:** Large-scale research projects on the continuing professional development of ECEC personnel have not received funding over the past five years. CPD has not been an issue in current debates in the field, in comparison with topicality of such issues as salaries and requirements for vaccination of ECEC Teachers against COVID-19.

## 7. Working conditions and current workforce issues

### 7.1 Remuneration

In general, the Ministry of Education and Science is responsible for the remuneration of ECEC Teachers working with children aged 5–6 years from the state budget, while municipalities are responsible for the remuneration of ECEC Teachers working with the younger age groups. As of September 1, 2021, the lowest monthly salary for ECEC Teachers was set at €872 (in 2020/2021, it was €790). This is the pre-tax amount. The final salary of ECEC Teachers is calculated according to their workload and work with special groups.

The site that collects information about the amount of pay in various professions reports that the average net monthly salary of ECEC Teachers in Latvia is between €580 and €952 (<https://www.algas.lv/algu-informacija/izglitiba-zinatne-petnieciba/pirmsskolas-skolotajs>). To live on this salary without additional support (e.g. living as a single parent with one child in a major city) is rather difficult and it provides a very low standard of living.

In general, ECEC Teachers are paid less than Primary School Teachers. For posts of responsibility, ECEC employees receive a slightly higher salary. Remuneration does not increase proportionally with the job requirements and responsibilities. The remuneration of ECEC staff differs from municipality to municipality. For example, the municipal authorities in large cities frequently pay additional money to employees in ECEC institutions. Remuneration also differs between public and private ECEC institutions, with a tendency to higher salaries in private settings.

### 7.2 Full-time and part-time employment in ECEC provision

The workload of a ECEC Teacher is 40 hours in total, of which 36 are contact hours and four hours are for other duties (preparation and so on), while the workload of a Primary Teacher is 30 hours a week. There are no data available about the relative proportion of the full-time and part-time working patterns of staff in ECEC settings in Latvia.

### 7.3 Support measures in the workplace for newly qualified and newly appointed staff

Support measures in the workplace for newly qualified staff are the responsibility of each ECEC institution. Usually, newly qualified ECEC Teachers almost always work together with a more experienced colleague, who fulfils the duties of a mentor. The work of a new teacher is also supervised by the Deputy Centre Head or a Methodologist, who observes the teacher at work and judges whether he/she can organise the learning environment and educational processes independently. According to a new Regulation, provision of the mentor is now an obligation (Cabinet of Ministers 2020a).

### 7.4 Non-contact time

In Latvia, there are no available data on the amount of time ECEC Teachers actually spend on planning, staff meetings, cooperation with parents, networking in the community and other activities. However, the weekly workload of an ECEC Teacher is 40 hours in total, of which 36 are contact hours and four hours are for such other duties.

### 7.5 Current staffing issues

The workforce shortage in the education sector, especially in preschools and schools, has been an ongoing problem for years in Latvia. The Latvian Education and Science Employees' Union (LIZDA) updates the information on this issue regularly. Their survey of the heads of educational institutions conducted in November 2021 on the current vacancies and the crisis caused by the shortage of pedagogues in the sector, reveals that there were 819 vacancies in 575 educational institutions at the end of November (LIZDA 2022). Data gathered by the Latvian Association of Local Governments (*ibid.*) shows that Latvian municipalities currently lack around 2,030 teachers – 700 in ECEC institutions and 1,330 in general education schools. The main reason for staff shortages in ECEC centres continues to be the low remuneration for the work, which has consequences for the societal prestige of the ECEC Teacher profession. Although higher education institutions prepare the specialists for this work, only a small proportion of them choose to work in ECEC institutions at the end of their studies. Young people prefer, for example, to choose an administrative job or a job in the field of human resources.

Solutions to the staff shortage in ECEC institutions are sought in various ways. Firstly, teachers are permitted to work more than one work load (40 hours per week in one institution). Secondly, teachers may acquire additional qualifications in order to occupy posts reserved for various specialists, such as a Speech Therapy Teacher. Thirdly, it can happen that ECEC Teachers take on the duties of the specialists who are lacking. For example, if there is no Sports teacher, ECEC Teachers may organise sports classes for their group of children. The fourth option is that ECEC institutions may recruit students of pedagogy programmes to take on a post as an ECEC Teacher.

Finally, it should be stressed that the amendments to the Regulations No 569 on the Required Education and Professional Qualification for Pedagogues and System of Improving Professional Competencies of Pedagogues (Cabinet of Ministers 2020a) make it easier for teachers to work in different positions and open up different solutions in professional development, including learning in the work environment (see also *Chapter 8*).



## 8. Recent policy reforms and initiatives relating to staffing and professionalisation issues

Amendments to the Regulations No 569 on the Required Education and Professional Qualification for Pedagogues and System of Improving Professional Competencies of Pedagogues adopted in 2020 (Cabinet of Ministers 2020a) provide that, from December 1, 2020, the academic staff of colleges and universities will be able to work in schools and ECEC centres without additional pedagogical education, as well as those students who obtain a teacher's qualification in the new work environment-based study programme<sup>6</sup>. The ECEC institutions are now obliged to provide a Mentor for ECEC Teachers who obtain or have obtained first-level higher pedagogical education. This will promote support for young educators, develop cooperation skills and a more successful application of acquired knowledge in daily work. In general, these changes make it easier for those who have already worked at one level of education to move to work at another level of education or area of specialisation, including working in ECEC institutions.

## 9. Recent country-specific research focusing on ECEC staff

During the last five years no state or municipality commissioned research projects directly focusing on ECEC staffing issues have been conducted in Latvia. However, the professional education/training of personnel and their work has been analysed in student research projects. For example, a Master's degree student, Laura Šķestere, prepared and defended her Master's thesis on the continuing education of ECEC Teachers (Šķestere 2020). The findings are compared with the results of the TALIS study in Latvia (OECD 2020).

### Opportunities for continuing professional development for ECEC Teachers in Latvia

**Source:** Šķestere 2020 (see *References* for full details)

**Aims:** The research aims to investigate the following questions: What opportunities for continuing professional development are available for ECEC Teachers in Latvia? What tendencies can be observed, what obstacles and necessities?

**Methods:** Survey of 166 ECEC Teachers in 50 ECEC institutions in Latvia

**Selected findings:** The findings are compared with the results of the OECD TALIS study 2018 (OECD 2020) conducted in Latvia among ECEC Teachers. The main conclusions are that there are various opportunities for teachers, including ECEC Teachers, to engage in continuing professional education in Latvia. The majority of ECEC Teachers evaluated the professional development courses as useful for their work (89%). Information about different courses is easily available on various websites, it is possible to apply or register for professional development events,

<sup>6</sup> This is implemented within a project (co-financed by the European Social Fund Nr. 8.2.1.0/18/I/004) called "The innovative, research-based education and pedagogy study programme" of the University of Latvia and the second-level professional higher education programme "Teacher". This education is intended for those who have a university education, but in a field other than the education sector. Every year, in the "Mācībspēks" project (<https://macitspeks.lv/>), 100 selected candidates have an opportunity to obtain a teacher's qualification during one study year and continue professional development during the second year to become a teacher in one of Latvian schools or ECEC settings.

and many of them are online. The most requested ECEC CPD course topics in 2017-2018 were: child development; promoting creativity and problem solving; promoting children's play. The interviewed ECEC Teachers felt the need for knowledge in working with children with special needs and with families. The main obstacle in professional development is the lack of replacement staff during their absence.

**Implications:** Each ECEC Teacher has their own needs in continuing professional development. Therefore, it is necessary to improve the opportunities for teachers to choose suitable professional development courses. According to the research results, there are teachers who have low motivation to improve professionally, and there are also difficulties balancing their working time with courses. At the level of municipalities and ECEC institutions, more attention needs to be paid to ensuring professional development opportunities are made accessible for teachers.

Another study is focused on the salaries of Speech Therapists working in ECEC centres.

### Remuneration and workload of Speech Therapists in ECEC

**Source:** Latvian Speech Therapist Association 2021 (see *References* for further details)

**Aims:** To investigate the salaries of Speech Therapists working in ECEC.

**Methods:** Survey of 136 Speech Therapists of ECEC institutions in 84 municipalities; Survey of 102 Speech Therapists at schools in 76 municipalities in Latvia.

**Selected findings:** The target grant from the state budget allocated to municipal ECEC institutions for the salary of teachers' Speech Therapists is not being allocated in accordance with the regulatory framework, and it is not sufficient to provide speech therapy classes for all children who need them. The regulatory framework does not include the ratio of children with speech disorders per one teacher's Speech Therapist. In ECEC institutions, Speech Therapist teachers work with different numbers of children for the specified salary. When working with a large number of children with inadequate remuneration, the Speech Therapist has limited possibilities to provide quality services and to achieve the necessary results.

**Implications:** Speech Therapists work with too many children with speech disorders for inadequate pay. This makes it significantly more difficult to provide qualitative services.

## 10. Workforce challenges – country expert assessment

In 2021-2022, new challenges in ECEC institutions were related to the **COVID-19 pandemic** and the requirement to vaccinate ECEC staff. Among the employees in ECEC centres, there was a higher number of opponents to vaccination than in schools and universities. For example, data of Ministry of Education and Science on 16.08.2021 (Mammām un Tētiem 2021) showed that only 56% of ECEC staff had been vaccinated against COVID-19 compared with 69% in schools and 82% in universities. This meant that many municipalities were faced with considerable resistance among ECEC staff. In all municipalities of Latvia, there were some ECEC Teachers who left their jobs due to the vaccination requirement, causing temporary difficulties in providing the necessary ECEC staff. (It should be noted that as of July 1, 2022, the requirements set for the education sector regarding the need for a vaccination or infection certificate were cancelled.)



Challenges that have been ongoing for a long time are related to **ECEC staff remuneration**. Although the ECEC staff salary has been increased in recent years, it still cannot be called competitive, and it should also be taken into account that in Latvia, as elsewhere in Europe, inflation and the cost of energy prices have significantly increased. Due to the low salaries, the work of teachers in ECEC institutions does not enjoy high societal prestige and for a long time has faced a gender misbalance with its almost all-female workforce.

Another challenge related to staffing in ECEC institutions concerns the readiness of teachers to deal with **ethnic heterogeneity** in ECEC institutions. In 2022, this issue was especially relevant in connection with **Ukrainian refugees in Latvia**. On October 1, 2022, there were 36,600 Ukrainian nationals who left their country due to hostilities and had registered their place of residence in Latvia (Central Statistical Office 2022). Among them, 3,500 were of preschool age (9.5% of all citizens of Ukraine in Latvia). According to information provided by Riga municipality in May of 2022, there were 730 Ukrainian children admitted in ECEC institutions of Riga municipality. During the year, this number changes all the time, because there is a continuous migration of Ukrainian refugees - some refugees return to Ukraine, some migrate to another country, new refugees arrive, and some remain. In some ECEC institutions, where there were such opportunities, Ukrainian persons have been hired as teachers and teacher assistants. In May 2022, there were seven groups with Ukrainian ECEC Teachers in Riga, and only Ukrainian children were admitted to these groups.

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