

[ eInclusion in ]

# Latvia

Latvija



ICT & Ageing

Geographic Digital Divide

eAccessibility

# eInclusion

Cultural Diversity

Inclusive eGovernment

Digital Literacy & Competences

Country Profile

History

Strategy

Legal Framework

Actors

Who's Who

Areas

The Future of eInclusion

**What's Inside**

## **Contents:**

<b>Country Profile .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>eInclusion History .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>eInclusion Strategy .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>eInclusion Legal Framework.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>eInclusion Actors .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>eInclusion Who's Who .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>eInclusion Areas.....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>The Future of eInclusion .....</b>	<b>20</b>

### **Disclaimer:**

This document is not intended to be exhaustive. Its purpose is to give an overview of the general eInclusion status in Latvia. Even though every care has been taken to ensure accuracy, the information herein should be treated as indicative and no responsibility for errors can be assumed. Neither the European Commission, nor any person acting on its behalf can be held responsible for the use that could be made of the information provided.

## Country Profile

### Basic data and indicators

#### Basic Data

**Population (1 000):** 2 248.4 inhabitants (2010)

**GDP at market prices:** 18 538.7 million Euro (2009)

**GDP per inhabitant in PPS (Purchasing Power Standards, EU-27 = 100):** 49.0 (2009)

**GDP growth rate:** -18.0 % (2009)

**Inflation rate:** 3.3 % (2009)

**Unemployment rate:** 17.1 % (2009)

**Government debt/GDP:** 36.7 % (2009)

**Public balance (government deficit or surplus/GDP):** -10.2 % (2009)

Source: [Eurostat](#)

**Area:** 65 000 km<sup>2</sup>

**Capital city:** Riga

**Official EU language:** Latvian

**Currency:** Lats

Source: [Europa website](#)

#### Information Society Indicators

**Percentage of households with Internet access:** 58 % (2009)

**Percentage of households with broadband connection:** 50 % (2009)

**Percentage of individuals regularly using the Internet:** 61 % (2009)

**Percentage of individuals using the Internet for uploading self-created content:** 19 % (2008)

**Percentage of individuals using the Internet for reading online newspapers/magazines:** 46 % (2009)

**Percentage of individuals using the Internet for finding information about goods and services:** 50 % (2009)

**Percentage of individuals using the Internet for seeking health-related information:** 29 % (2009)

**Percentage of individuals using the Internet for looking for a job or sending a job application:** 25 % (2009)

**Percentage of individuals using the Internet for doing an online course:** 7 % (2009)

**Percentage of individuals using the Internet for seeking information with the purpose of learning:** 34 % (2009)

**Percentage of individuals using the Internet for interaction with public authorities:** obtaining information 22.2 %, downloading forms 8.4 %, returning filled forms 6 % (2009)

Source: [Eurostat](#)

*Editorial notice: Statistical indicators referenced in this section reflect those of Eurostat at the time the Edition is being prepared.*

## eInclusion History

### Main developments and key milestones (in reverse chronological order)

For the latest developments, see: [ePractice news for eInclusion](#)

### Recent News

#### November 2010

The [Ministry of Transport](#) (*Satiksmes ministrija*) prepared a draft action plan (*Valdības rīcības plāna projektu*) in line with the government's targets for the communications sector during the period 2010-2014. A key objective is to **develop and expand broadband infrastructure** so that it covers the entire Latvian territory, and to ensure faster and more efficient access to public administration and commercial services and information. This will be achieved through the implementation of the 'Infrastructure and Services' operational programme, which calls for broadband network development and electronic communications services of equal access throughout Latvia at a minimum rate of 2 Mb/s. A consultation process will follow.

#### June 2010

On 10 June 2010, the Parliament approved the '[Sustainable Development Strategy of Latvia until 2030](#)' (*Latvijas ilgtspējīgas attīstības stratēģija līdz 2030. gadam*). The Strategy, which was developed with broad stakeholder involvement and public deliberations by expert groups, aims to ensure that Latvia flourishes under active and responsible citizens. **ICT is seen as a key driver** in transforming intellectual and creative potential and resources into sustainable economic and social benefits.

Based on this, ICT will:

- ▶ provide access to networks of social services and support. Activities of NGOs, charity and social institutions will be actively promoted and new forms of activities (i.e. informative and consultative services in the digital environment with emphasis on local and digital networking), will be stimulated;
- ▶ offer efficient and safe solutions for balanced development of the regions and locations, remote and economically disadvantaged areas;
- ▶ ensure widespread availability of public eServices and information provided by inclusive government, thus facilitating public participation.

#### April 2010

While drafting the '[Electronic Skills Development Plan 2010-2013](#)' (*Elektronisko prasmju attīstības plāns 2010. - 2013. gadam*), the [Ministry of Regional Development and Local Government](#) (*Reģionālās attīstības un pašvaldību lietu ministrija*) encouraged the public to actively contribute to the planning process via an [open consultation](#). The plan laid down measures intended to improve the digital skills of all, including special needs groups, and to foster the use of ICT via a series of training courses. It provided an analysis of the overall level of ICT skills in Latvia, and stressed the need to motivate, inform and increase the interest of the public in acquiring and using digital skills. The consultation process ended in May 2010. Updated information will be posted on the Ministry website.

#### 2010

Latvia ratified the [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) on 1 March 2010 and the [Optional Protocol](#) on 30 August 2010, which has been in force since 30 September 2010.

## News 2009 and before

### 2009

- ▶ In conformity with the decision of the [Cabinet of Ministers](#) (*Ministru kabinets*) of 1 June 2009, the [Ministry of Regional Development and Local Government](#) (*Reģionālās attīstības un pašvaldību lietu ministrija*) became responsible for the overall development of the information society and related policy.
- ▶ On 7 May 2009, the [Ministry of Regional Development and Local Government](#) (*Reģionālās attīstības un pašvaldību lietu ministrija*) signed a [memorandum of cooperation](#) with the [Latvian Open Technology Association](#) (*Latvijas atvērto tehnoloģiju asociācija*, LATA). The key actions set were:
  - reduce the digital divide;
  - promote ICT activities in the private sector;
  - boost the competitiveness of the ICT industry in the global market.
- ▶ On 23 April 2009, the [Ministry of Regional Development and Local Government](#) (*Reģionālās attīstības un pašvaldību lietu ministrija*) signed a [memorandum of cooperation](#) with the [Latvian Information and Communications Technology Association](#) (*Latvijas Informācijas un komunikācijas tehnoloģijas asociācija*, LIKTA). They agreed upon common goals and mutual support for the **transformation of Latvia into an information society**:
  - introduce amendments to legislation in order to create the legal framework for an information society;
  - enhance ICT development;
  - promote enhanced ICT in all areas of education.

### 2008

- ▶ In 2008, Latvia signed the [Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities](#). The United Nations instrument is intended to promote, protect and ensure the full enjoyment of human rights by people with disabilities and ensure that they enjoy full equality under the law. It stresses that the disabled should be able to live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life.
- ▶ During the same year, Latvia received USD 2 million from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to expand computer user access in libraries, train librarians, as well as to fund impact assessment and advocacy activities.

### 2007

- ▶ In 2007, the [Latvian Organisation of People with Disabilities and their Friends](#) (*Invalīdu un viņu draugu apvienība*, Apeirons) set up a [mobile computer classroom](#) which travelled throughout the country and taught ICT skills free of charge to excluded groups, particularly the disabled.
- ▶ The 30-month, EU-funded [EQUAL project](#), intended to boost the digital literacy skills of the unemployed, came to an end in 2007. More than 8 000 jobseekers and unemployed people were trained in ICT competencies.

### 2004

- ▶ The Declaration of Intended Activities of the [Cabinet of Ministers](#) (*Ministru kabinets*) approved on 1 December 2004, included a section on information society. This document laid the foundation for the

introduction of a series of strategically significant activities in the **development of the information society**.

- ▶ In 2004, the government began to consider activities which involved the concept of digital literacy. Recognising that ICT is a powerful driver of growth and employment, it aimed to **develop the country's digital literacy skills**.

In the same year, the [Latvian Information and Communications Technology Association](#) (*Latvijas Informācijas un komunikācijas tehnoloģijas asociācija*, LIKTA) launched the '[Latvia@World](#)' (*Latvija@Pasaule*) initiative. It envisaged **training the entire population in the use of ICT**, with special attention paid to special needs groups.

## 2002

In 2002, the [Cabinet of Ministers](#) (*Ministru kabinets*) adopted the strategic policy planning document '[eLatvia](#)' (*eLatvija*), which stressed the need to **adopt an information society**, and sought to disseminate information on its conceptual framework and principles as envisioned by the EU.

## 1999

In 1999, the [Cabinet of Ministers](#) (*Ministru kabinets*) approved the national programme '[Informatics \(1999-2005\)](#)' (*Nacionāla Programma Informatika 1999. - 2005. gg.*), which introduced the Latvian population to the notion of an **information society**. It outlined the following objectives:

- ▶ develop information systems and services for the government that are accessible online;
- ▶ develop electronic communication networks;
- ▶ transfer the processing of electronic data to relevant legislative frameworks;
- ▶ digitise the cultural values of Latvia, and translate software into Latvian;
- ▶ create an ICT infrastructure for the education sector in order to modernise and enhance the learning process.

# eInclusion Strategy

## Main strategic objectives and principles

There is no single strategic policy document entitled 'National eInclusion Strategy'. The Latvian eInclusion policy is being implemented and will be developed in accordance with several policy planning documents, including the '[National Development Plan 2007-2013](#)' (*Nacionālais attīstības plāns 2007. - 2013.gadam*), '[Information Society Development Guidelines for 2006-2013](#)' (*Informācijas sabiedrības attīstības pamatnostādnes 2006. - 2013. gadam*), '[Electronic Skills Development Plan 2010-2013](#)' (*Elektronisko prasmju attīstības plāns 2010. - 2013. gadam*) and '[Broadband Development Strategy for 2006-2012](#)' (*Platjoslu tīklu attīstības stratēģija 2006– 2012.gadam*).

### National Development Plan 2007-2013

The '[National Development Plan 2007-2013](#)' (*Nacionālais attīstības plāns 2007. - 2013.gadam*) outlines objectives for national growth and delineates Latvia's main development areas up to 2013.

Key tasks related to ICT:

- ▶ modernise educational infrastructure at all levels and ensure accessibility for the disabled;
- ▶ update and expand eLearning programmes and platforms;
- ▶ develop ICT infrastructure and services, and provide its accessibility to public administration institutions and households;
- ▶ facilitate digitalisation and development of services supplied at national and local government levels;
- ▶ ensure digitalisation of the education system and improve the digital competencies of the relevant actors;
- ▶ provide national and local government bodies, including health care, labour, social and cultural institutions, with the necessary ICT infrastructure, as well as enhance the digital competencies of the relevant actors;
- ▶ provide access to broadband data transfer networks in the public domain so as to facilitate balanced regional development;
- ▶ facilitate the use of ICT in households in order to ensure wider accessibility of services and information.

### Information Society Development Guidelines for 2006-2013

The goals and key focus areas for the development of an information society are set out in '[Information Society Development Guidelines for 2006-2013](#)' (*Informācijas sabiedrības attīstības pamatnostādnes 2006. - 2013. gadam*), which are fully in line with EU schemes, including the Lisbon Strategy, the i2010 policy document which promotes an inclusive information society, and the eInclusion and eAccessibility initiatives. It envisages a Latvian society where all citizens regardless of disability or age could fully access and use ICT-based information resources, as well as public services that are tailored to their needs.

In order to create a knowledge-based economy and to improve the quality of life so that all citizens reap the **benefits of ICT**, the following short-term tasks have been set:

- ▶ develop widespread territorial coverage for ICT infrastructure;
- ▶ make ICT financially reasonable for private users;
- ▶ ensure that all citizens are provided with the opportunity to acquire the relevant ICT skills;
- ▶ support the eAccessibility of online services.

Long-term measures to build an information society:

- ▶ Expand broadband rollout (8 Mb/s by 2013) and triple play services beyond Riga wherever broadband is not provided, by using various funding instruments.
- ▶ Engage special needs groups in accessing and using ICT by mainstreaming universal design in the development of ICT products and services.
- ▶ Modernise and enhance existing ICT infrastructure in the sphere of education, adopt ICT skills curricula, create digital learning tools, integrate ICT through a cross-curricular approach, build on lifelong education and retraining in the use of ICT.
- ▶ Develop or upgrade the ICT competencies of groups at risk of exclusion, notably the elderly, the disabled, minorities and the unemployed, and define and create content for such groups that conforms to EU eAccessibility standards.
- ▶ Support the creation of digital resources and products (museums, archives, library repositories and new media).
- ▶ Facilitate the introduction, development, accessibility and quality of public online services.
- ▶ Facilitate the development of social sciences related to the information society (communications, informatics and linguistics). Support research work and feasibility studies to allow for the use of the Latvian language in the area of ICT.
- ▶ Work out special support programmes to allow for stakeholder cooperation in the development of innovative research projects and the launch of various ICT-related products.
- ▶ Boost ICT R&D within Latvia and foster international ICT community networks.
- ▶ Attract national and EU funding to contribute to the development of ICT infrastructure and services.

In addition to the short- and long-term activities laid down, the action plan will serve as a starting point for preparing documents on medium-term policy planning, and for determining the priorities for public and private financial backing.

### Electronic Skills Development Plan 2010-2013

The '[Electronic Skills Development Plan 2010-2013](#)' (*Elektronisko prasmju attīstības plāns 2010. - 2013. gadam*) constitutes a concrete set of actions and targets aimed at **improving the digital skills of special needs groups such as the elderly, the disabled and marginalised youth**. Moreover, it seeks to foster the use of ICT through information dissemination and training. In analysing the state of play in the overall level of ICT skills, the strategy document emphasises the need to encourage, inform and interest all citizens in the use of ICT, and the potential to be derived from it.

### Broadband Development Strategy for 2006-2012

The '[Broadband Development Strategy for 2006-2012](#)' (*Platjoslu tīklu attīstības stratēģija 2006–2012.gadam*) aims to **ensure availability of and access to broadband services for all**, including rural areas and remote locations. Densely-populated regions provide sufficient broadband access, in contrast to low population density areas with minimal or non-existent growth penetration due to the fact that it is not economically viable to proceed with network deployment. In order to provide the necessary broadband penetration growth rates and to bridge the digital divide, the development of broadband in distant or inaccessible territories requires public funding.

## eInclusion Legal Framework

### Main legal texts impacting on the development of eInclusion

#### eAccessibility Legislation

Legislative obligations for eAccessibility in Latvia are limited, though in principle the constitutional prohibition against discrimination forms a basis for eAccessibility. To date, there have been only limited policy initiatives.

Policy approaches based on equality/anti-discrimination legislation have considerable potential in the eAccessibility field. Such approaches can provide the disabled with the right to seek redress if they are confronted with inaccessible ICT products or services, either in relation to ICT-based goods and services in a general sense, or to specific usage contexts.

The [Constitution of the Republic of Latvia](#) (*Latvijas Republikas Satversme*) states that all people shall be equal before the law and that human rights shall be observed without discrimination of any kind. The amendment to the constitution in 1998 set out the concept '[Equal Opportunities for All](#)' (*Vienādas iespējas visiem*), which is related to eAccessibility.

Source: '[Measuring Progress of eAccessibility in Europe - MeAC](#)'

#### [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#)

In 2010, Latvia ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and its Optional Protocol. The UNCRPD is currently impacting on the development of disability policy in Latvia. In order to carry out the gradual implementation of the UNCRPD, the Ministry of Welfare (*Labklājības ministrija*) has established several working groups. Since January 2010, one of the groups has been looking into matters related to eAccessibility and tasked with generating solutions in order to tackle problem areas.

The main challenges and obstacles for the full and rapid implementation of the UNCRPD at national level have to do with insufficient funding sources due to the current economic climate. This imposes constraints on efficient realisation of the UNCRPD principles in almost all areas, in particular with ensuring accessibility in the very broadest of terms.

Source: '[Ministry of Welfare](#)'

#### [Equal Opportunities for All](#)

The national policy document that forms the basis for disability policy in Latvia is the concept paper 'Equal Opportunities for All' (*Vienādas iespējas visiem*), which was first adopted in 1998 in the form of a report and subsequently updated on a regular basis. One of the main tasks of the document, current through to 2010 and conforming to the [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#), is to minimise the risk of social exclusion for special needs groups. It determines the necessary steps to be taken and the measures to be carried out in order to provide equal opportunities for active participation for every member of society, regardless of disability, impairment or age.

#### [Action Plan for Implementing the Basic Principles on Policy for Elimination of Disability and its Consequences 2005-2015](#)

The main aim of the policy planning document 'Action Plan for Implementing the Basic Principles on Policy for Elimination of Disability and its Consequences 2005-2015' is to eliminate, or reduce the risk of disability for people threatened by some form of disability and to minimise the risk of social exclusion. An innovative feature of the action plan is its focus on preventing disability. It attempts to define the

concept of a 'person threatened by disability', as well as to identify services to avert or alleviate disability, such as assistive technologies.

## eCommunications Legislation

### [Electronic Communications Act](#)

The regulation transposes the Directive [2002/22/EC](#) on universal service, which addresses the obligations of such a service and users' rights, including people with special needs. The universal service provision defines the minimum level of electronic communications services for all existing and potential end users, as determined by the '[Regulations on universal service in the electronic communications sector](#)' (*Noteikumi par universālo pakalpojumu elektronisko sakaru nozarē*). These regulations state that the disabled have to be provided with fixed telephony and text phone services, including the provision of special measures, so as to make such services available to them. The universal service provider has to supply its services to the disabled at discounted rates.

## Broadcasting

According to the '[Radio and Television Law](#)', programmes transmitted in foreign languages should have subtitles in Latvian, but there is no specific subtitling provision for people with disabilities. With respect to sign language, Article 54, Paragraph 4 foresees that within a national remit, the public need for broadcasts in sign language translation will be met. The law does not specifically impose an obligation on the public service broadcaster, it however is included in the annual remit. The legal requirements for digital television do not make any specific eAccessibility provisions.

*Source: '[Measuring Progress of eAccessibility in Europe - MeAC](#)'*

### [Regulations on the provision of information services rendered](#)

The regulations have imposed obligations on providers of chargeable information services. People with disabilities who request information, are entitled to free services. Fees are also lifted when seeking information from an online government source.

## eInclusion Actors

### Main roles and responsibilities

#### National eInclusion

##### Policy/Strategy

##### **Ministry of Regional Development and Local Government (*Reģionālās attīstības un pašvaldību lietu ministrija*)**

The Ministry is the national regulatory authority for the information society and ICT, and is tasked with facilitating the overall development of the information society in Latvia. To this end, it has prepared the '[Electronic Skills Development Plan 2010-2013](#)' (*Elektronisko prasmju attīstības plāns 2010. - 2013. gadam*), which is intended to improve the digital competencies of all citizens, including special needs groups.

##### **Ministry of Transport (*Satiksmes ministrija*)**

The Ministry has the overall responsibility for policies in the electronic communications sector. With this aim, it has recently published the '[Electronic communications sector policy guidelines for 2011-2016](#)' (*Latvijas Republikas elektronisko sakaru nozares politikas pamatnostādnes 2011. - 2016. gadam*), which describes the situation in Latvia in terms of the electronic communications sector, both present and future.

##### **Ministry of Education and Science (*Izglītības un zinātnes ministrija*)**

The Ministry drafted the policy document '[Information and Communications Technologies for Quality Education 2007-2013](#)' (*Informācijas un komunikācijas tehnoloģijas izglītības kvalitātei 2007.-2013.gadam*), which foresees the large-scale implementation of ICT and digital skills projects throughout the educational spectrum. In addition, it prepared the '[Lifelong Policy Guidelines for 2007 - 2013](#)' (*Mūžizglītības politikas pamatnostādnes 2007.-2013*) with the aim to provide lifelong learning access to people regardless of age, gender, previous education, residence, income level and functional abilities.

##### **State Chancellery (*Valsts kanceleja*)**

The State Chancellery, a central public administration institution directly under the Prime Minister, drafted the policy document '[State Administration Policy Development Guidelines for 2008-2013](#)' (*Valsts pārvaldes politikas attīstības pamatnostādnes 2008.-2013.gadam*) which is intended to ensure and provide state government services in accordance to the needs of society.

##### Coordination

##### **Ministry of Regional Development and Local Government (*Reģionālās attīstības un pašvaldību lietu ministrija*)**

The Ministry coordinates sectoral policies in information society and ICT, as well as the development of state and local government electronic services.

##### **Ministry of Transport (*Satiksmes ministrija*)**

The Ministry is in charge of coordinating the state policy in electronic communications (policy planning documents).

## Implementation

### **Ministry of Regional Development and Local Government (*Reģionālās attīstības un pašvaldību lietu ministrija*)**

The Ministry is responsible for implementing government policy in information society and ICT, in addition to accessibility activities related to eGovernment.

### **Ministry of Transport (*Satiksmes ministrija*)**

The Ministry implements the state policies and legal acts regulating the communications sector. It is tasked with implementing the '[Broadband Development Strategy for 2006-2012](#)' (*Platjoslu tīklu attīstības stratēģija 2006. – 2012.gadam*).

### **Ministry of Education and Science (*Izglītības un zinātnes ministrija*)**

The Ministry implements programmes related to ICT in the areas of mainstream, vocational, continuing and lifelong education.

### **Latvian Information and Communications Technology Association (*Latvijas Informācijas un komunikācijas tehnoloģijas asociācija, LIKTA*)**

LIKTA works to enhance the ICT levels of citizens and enable them to benefit from the information society through the implementation of the European Computer Driving License (ECDL) certification programme.

## Support

**Sectoral NGOs** that cooperate with various ministries on an ad hoc basis include:

### **Latvian Information and Communications Technology Association (*Latvijas Informācijas un komunikācijas tehnoloģijas asociācija, LIKTA*)**

LIKTA's overall mission is that of a digitally literate population and a well-developed ICT industry so that all citizens are provided with the opportunity to benefit from ICT and contribute to a knowledge-based society. It carries out awareness-raising activities such as conferences, and takes part in preparing professional study programmes for IT specialists.

LIKTA provides expert advice to governmental institutions on legislative matters and other issues related to ICT, and maintains close ties with industry players, both nationally and internationally. It is actively involved in consultations concerning legislation and in monitoring public procurement procedures for ICT products and services.

### **Latvian Organisation of People with Disabilities and their Friends (*Invalīdu un viņu draugu apvienība, Apeironi*)**

'Apeironi' works towards an inclusive society and raises awareness of disability issues that also include activities in the area of ICT. It regularly holds seminars and conferences for all stakeholders on disability-related issues. Its experts provide consultations and assist policy-makers to incorporate the disability perspective into government programmes and action plans. Furthermore, it administers computer courses and works on Web accessibility standards.

### **Latvian Open Technology Association (*Latvijas atvērto tehnoloģiju asociācija, LATA*)**

LATA endeavours to strengthen the competitiveness of the Latvian ICT industry. It fosters collaboration between technology suppliers and consumers, including public and municipal authorities, educational and scientific institutions.

## eInclusion Who's Who

Main eInclusion decision-makers and executives

### Ministers responsible for eInclusion



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Source: <http://www.apeirons.lv/>

## eInclusion Areas

### Riga Declaration Priorities

#### ICT & Ageing

##### Status in ICT & Ageing

The report [Eurostat Data in Focus](#) compared Internet use in 29 European countries. It showed that elderly women (55-74) in Latvia ranked below the EU-27 average (19 %) in Internet usage at 14 %. Men (15 %) in the same age group were well below the corresponding EU-27 figure (31 %).

In 2008, 13 % of the population was aged 67 or over. By 2015, when the baby boom generation is set to retire, this figure will increase further, and it is projected to reach 17 % by 2030.

##### Actions to support ICT & Ageing

###### Lifelong Policy Guidelines

The objective of the '[Lifelong Policy Guidelines for 2007 - 2013](#)' (*Mūžizglītības politikas pamatnostādnes 2007.-2013.*) is to provide access to formal and informal learning opportunities for the elderly, irrespective of age. The acquisition of **ICT competencies** via lifelong learning for the elderly is seen as paramount in fostering continuous development and improvement of the knowledge and skills needed for employment and/or personal fulfilment.

###### Electronic Skills Development Plan

The '[Electronic Skills Development Plan 2010-2013](#)' (*Elektronisko prasmju attīstības plāns 2010. - 2013. gadam*) targets the ICT skills of the elderly (pre-retirement, pensioners). The basic premise of the action plan with respect to the elderly is that the challenges posed by the ageing process can be reduced through active **participation in the information society**. Senior citizens have at their disposal free ICT resources in 877 libraries and 517 Public Internet Access Points; however, they are not deriving any benefit from such services. The strategy document aims to integrate the elderly into today's digital environment, and to facilitate their access to ICT tools and training.

#### Geographic Digital Divide

##### Status of Common Access to Electronic Content and Services

The information society in Latvia is at an early stage of development; nevertheless, it is making significant improvements to narrow the gap with the EU-27 average. Broadband services are widely available and account for almost all internet subscriptions. Competing infrastructure based on cable, FTTH (fibre-to-the-home) and wireless broadband is also widely accessible.

Overall DSL coverage in Latvia stands only slightly lower than the EU-27 mean, even though broadband coverage in rural areas is problematic. Coverage remained stable in 2009, where broadband penetration reached 19.3 % compared to the EU-27 average (24.8 %). Broadband connectivity showed marked improvement (10 percentage points), reducing the difference with the EU-27 aggregate figures.

Source: [Europe's Digital Competitiveness Report 2010](#)

## Actions to support Common Access to Electronic Content and Services

### Broadband Development Strategy

The objective of the '[Broadband Development Strategy for 2006-2012](#)' (*Platjoslu tīklu attīstības stratēģija 2006. – 2012.gadam*) is to ensure **broadband access for all** at affordable prices by 2012. The network deployment policy aims to cover 80 % - 95 % of Latvia's territory, with the focus on rural areas, at speeds of 256/128 Kbps. Access to broadband services involves modernising the existing electronic communications services infrastructure, development of new infrastructure, and its upkeep.

### Public library development project

From 2006-2008, the first phase of the [public library development project](#) (*Trešais tēva dēls*, 3TD) was carried out and all 874 public libraries in Latvia were equipped with modern computers and software, broadband internet connections and free Wi-Fi access. Additional funding in 2009 allowed for the continuation of the activities started during the initial phase. All libraries continue to provide **free access to computers and the Internet**. Local area networks and internet connections are being improved in order to take full advantage of the operational capabilities.

### PIAPs

An encouraging sign for the expansion of user-created content is that approximately 1 423 Public Internet Access Points (PIAPs) at state libraries were accessible to the public in 2009. There are **PIAPs in nearly all municipalities and libraries** throughout the country, with further expansion ahead. It is estimated that by 2013, another 400 PIAPs will be established.

## eAccessibility

### Status of eAccessibility

It is difficult to obtain information on assistive technology products and potential technology solutions for people with disabilities. Due to the lack of informational resources and the prohibitive cost of such products, a segment of the disabled population **cannot fully benefit from the use of IT**, or is excluded from the information society. As a result of architectural barriers such as stairs and the lack of ramps, or lifts, Public Internet Access Points are by and large inaccessible to wheelchair users.

### Actions towards eAccessibility

#### Apeirons

The purpose of the [Latvian Organisation of People with Disabilities and their Friends](#) (*Invalīdu un viņu draugu apvienība*, Apeirons) is to further the **independence and integration of people with disabilities into society**. It is dedicated to developing a more accepting attitude towards persons with disabilities and facilitating equal opportunities for them in society. Apeirons is committed to the principle that all people are equally important and no one should be relegated to a position of powerlessness on the basis of disability. As such, all its activities focus on achieving equality of opportunity, full participation and independent living.

Areas of activity include:

- ▶ provision of disability-related information (e.g. universal design and accessible environment standards, social services, assistive technology products);
- ▶ consultation on required accommodations and means to adapt or adjust ICT for disabled users;
- ▶ support to wheelchair-accessible, disability-friendly technology learning centres.

#### 'Open Door' Project

The 'Open Door' (*Atvērtās durvis*) project, which is run by the [Latvian Organisation of People with Disabilities and their Friends](#) (*Invalīdu un viņu draugu apvienība*, Apeirons), intends to expand the

research on assistive technology products, adaptive software and accessibility features in order to serve people with disabilities. This will result in training opportunities for specialists in eAccessibility.

### e-Accessibility Centre

In 2008, the first [e-Accessibility Centre](#) (*e-Pieejamības centru*) was established within the framework of the 'Open Door' (*Atvērtās durvis*) project implemented by the [Latvian Organisation of People with Disabilities and their Friends](#) (*Invalīdu un viņu draugu apvienība, Apeirons*). Its objective is to provide assistance on how to **adapt ICT to the needs of the disabled**. The general public and government employees can obtain expert advice on assistive technology products and services, and innovative solutions.

### Guide for the disabled

In 2008, as part of the 'Open Door' (*Atvērtās durvis*) project, the [Latvian Organisation of People with Disabilities and their Friends](#) (*Invalīdu un viņu draugu apvienība, Apeirons*) published "[Customise your computer to suit your needs!](#)" (*Pielāgo datoru atbilstoši savām vajadzībām!*). The guide provided information on **how computers can be adapted to suit the needs of the disabled**. It dealt with enabling technologies that are intended to improve computer access for people with standard desktops and laptops, and how existing software and hardware applications can be exploited to enhance the performance for people with various disabilities or impairments.

### Centre for Independent Living

The purpose of the [Centre for Independent Living](#) (*Centru neatkarīgai dzīvei, CIL*) is to disseminate information on adapting to ICT. An assistive technology product exhibition has been set up on the premises. People with disabilities and stakeholders can seek consultation on assistive device solutions.

### Latvian Library for the Blind

The government agency [Latvian Library for the Blind](#) (*Latvijas Neredzīgo bibliotēka*) offers a full range of library services for the visually impaired. It houses books in Braille and digital talking books at the central library situated in Riga and at seven branch locations throughout Latvia.

## Digital Literacy and Competences

### Status on Digital Literacy and Competences

In 2009, [Eurostat Data in Focus](#) compared Internet access and broadband connections by households in 33 European countries. Latvia ranked below the EU-27 average in both Internet access and broadband connections.

The rates of Internet use and non-use in Latvia are close to the EU-27 average. Take-up of Internet services is also relatively high. In contrast, Latvia lags behind in digital skills, where negative growth rates are noted.

Source: [Europe's Digital Competitiveness Report 2010](#)

### Actions towards stimulating Digital Literacy and Competences

#### Electronic Skills Development Plan

The overall strategy of the '[Electronic Skills Development Plan 2010-2013](#)' (*Elektronisko prasmi attīstības plāns 2010. - 2013. gadam*) is to **improve the digital skills and competencies of all citizens**. It specifically targets the following groups:

- ▶ **Municipal employees:** It is seen as essential to improve digital literacy among public sector workers. The eAccessibility of online services is reflected in the enhanced ICT skills of the actors tasked with administering such services. Even though there are a number of centres that train staff locally, there is a need to expand the training facilities to other municipalities. Furthermore, the

existing programme of digital skills instruction has to be re-evaluated in order to identify areas in need of improvement.

- ▶ **Unemployed/job seekers:** Employability in today's labour market presupposes digital literacy skills. There exists a divide in the workforce where idle citizens are unable to find suitable employment. Informal education and vocational training programmes have been set up to increase job prospects for the digitally excluded.
- ▶ **People of pre-retirement age and elderly residents in long-term social care institutions:** Internet access opportunities for the elderly and people of pre-retirement age are provided free of charge in 877 libraries and 517 Public Internet Access Points. By exploiting the full potential of ICT, these target groups can actively participate in the information society and facilitate daily life by reading online media sources, paying bills and communicating via email, among other things.

### Information and Communications Technologies for Quality Education

'[Information and Communications Technologies for Quality Education 2007-2013](#)' (*Informācijas un komunikācijas tehnoloģijas izglītības kvalitātei 2007.-2013.gadam*) sets out the strategic objectives to develop the **digital skills and competencies of learners in formal and informal school settings**, and to enhance such skills in teachers so as to widely use ICT in teaching.

#### Latvia@World

The '[Latvia@World](#)' (*Latvija@Pasaule*) initiative carried out by the [Latvian Information and Communications Technology Association](#) (*Latvijas Informācijas un komunikācijas tehnoloģijas asociācija*, LIKTA), seeks to enable all citizens to **benefit from ICT, overcome the digital divide** and social exclusion. It conducts a number of modular courses in basic ICT skills for government employees and the general public, in addition to special modules such as 'Virtual guide for families' and 'Digital skills for NGOs'. Up to and including 2009, more than 39 000 people had acquired digital literacy skills.

#### Library development project

During the period 2006-2008, the '[public library development project](#)' (*Trešais tēva dēls*, 3TD) trained librarians in digital skills. Additional funding was provided in 2009, allowing for continued **ICT skills training**. All librarians have been trained to provide advice on the use of new technologies.

#### Apeirons

The [Latvian Organisation of People with Disabilities and their Friends](#) (*Invalīdu un viņu draugu apvienība*, Apeirons) offers a wide range of **on- and off-site ICT training** for people with disabilities. The 'Open Door' (*Atvērtās durvis*) project aims to create educational, employment and social opportunities for marginalised youth and adults through free computer access, increased computer literacy and technology skills development.

#### Latvian Information and Communications Technology Association

The [Latvian Information and Communications Technology Association](#) (*Latvijas Informācijas un komunikācijas tehnoloģijas asociācija*, LIKTA) administers the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) certification programme. Latvians, from primary school students to working professionals, have the opportunity to acquire **computer literacy skills at various levels**. As a result, new primary and secondary school IT curricula were introduced that are compliant with ECDL qualification requirements.

#### ICT Competence Centres

Since 2006, ICT Competence Centres (*IKT nozares kompetences centriem*) have been serving the needs of municipalities. The Centres support local government employees and residents in matters related to computers and the Internet, create links between employers and job seekers, and provide information on the digital competencies required in the labour market.

#### Window to the Future Association

The mission of the [Window to the Future](#) (*Langas j ateitī*) association is to **promote the use of the Internet** in Latvia through various activities designed to provide basic computer skills. It has carried out

a number of information technology training projects since 2003, all aimed at building up the digital skills and competencies of the entire population, as well as to encourage the use of ICT in daily life.

### Structural Funds

During the period 2007-2013, the [Ministry of Education and Science](#) (*Izglītības un zinātnes ministrija*) will benefit from EU structural funding. Specifically, 767 schools in the [general education](#) sector will receive 11 255 desktops, 1 023 laptops and 589 multimedia projectors; 5 000 school teachers will undergo professional development training in IT in [vocation education](#).

### State Employment Agency

The [State Employment Agency](#) (*Nodarbinātības valsts aģentūra*) administers computer literacy training courses in Latvia.

### e-Skills Week

In March 2010, Latvia took part in its first European e-Skills Week campaign, which highlights the growing demand for skilled ICT users and professionals to drive a competitive and innovative Europe. The [event](#) informed the Latvian people about the vast range of **opportunities related to ICT**. Basic and advanced digital skills training, ICT competence testing and the presentation of new ICT were among the week-long activities that attracted more than 20 000 registered participants.

## eInclusion and Cultural Diversity

### Status on eInclusion and Cultural Diversity

In assessing the existing cultural landscape, the '[National Culture Policy Guidelines 2006-2015](#)' (*Valsts kultūrpolitikas vadlīnijas 2006-2015*) portray Latvia as a nation with a rich cultural heritage, both material and intangible. By preserving the local diversity and cultural identity, the position of Latvian national identity has been strengthened.

According to the Riga Dashboard, the 'Index of Regular Internet Use in At-Risk Groups by Country', compiled by the European Commission's '[Europe's Digital Competitiveness Report](#)' (2010), Latvia ranked slightly below the EU-27 average (0.65) for the 'Riga Total-at-Risk Groups'.

### Actions towards eInclusion and Cultural Diversity

#### National Culture Policy Guidelines

The '[National Culture Policy Guidelines 2006-2015](#)' (*Valsts kultūrpolitikas vadlīnijas 2006-2015*) stress the need to use **ICT for safeguarding culture and improving its accessibility**, particularly when it comes to preserving cultural heritage and national identity in support of EU diversity. Moreover, the development of new technologies and their successful utilisation, and the smooth transformation into an information society, allow for cultural diversity to flourish.

The objectives of the long-term policy guidelines are to:

- ▶ make use of the potential of ICT to promote the accessibility of culture, to ensure the diverse presence of culture in the global arena, to safeguard and disseminate the values of cultural heritage (digitalisation of culture resources), as well as to create new cultural products and services;
- ▶ facilitate the development of the information society into a knowledge-based society;
- ▶ make the use of the Internet and other digital media more extensive and purposeful with respect to culture;
- ▶ make more widespread use of ICT to develop new forms of communication and cooperation in culture and policy planning.

### Lifelong Policy Guidelines

The '[Lifelong Policy Guidelines for 2007 - 2013](#)' (*Mūžizglītības politikas pamatnostādnes 2007.-2013*) set objectives for the provision of lifelong learning for minority groups. Immigrants can benefit from **ICT skills training** in both formal and informal learning environments.

### Cultural heritage portal

The [Latvian Cultural Heritage portal](#) (*Latvijas Kultūras mantojuma portāls*) contains an integrated website for Latvian libraries, archives and museums, and serves as a repository for information in the culture domain. The virtual one-stop shop aims to provide an online meeting place for people working at various institutions, as well as academic staff, students and all other key actors. The portal intends to expand its services by offering tour and event registration, as well as bookings.

### Culture map

[Culture Information Systems](#) (*Kultūras Informācijas Sistēmas*) is in the process of **digitising archives, libraries and museums** in order to preserve Latvian cultural diversity. The agency under the [Ministry of Culture](#) (*Kultūras ministrija*) implements the [Culture map](#) (*Kultūras karte*) project, a database containing detailed information on the various Latvian regions and their respective diversity, coverage and accessibility to culture, infrastructure and trends. It helps to assess the state of affairs in each region and to identify growth areas and future courses of action. This repository of culture is the first of its kind in the Baltic region, in that it allows users to obtain information on a wide array of topics and to view the cultural processes from a multifaceted perspective.

## Inclusive eGovernment

### Status on Inclusive eGovernment

Latvia has demonstrated the most significant benchmark progress since 2007. It improves its positioning in the full online availability ranking by nine and currently achieves a full online availability of 65 %. In terms of sophistication, Latvia leapfrogs its peers and ranks 10 positions higher than in 2007. The overall online sophistication of eGovernment supply reaches 78 %. Citizen services have an online sophistication of 72 %.

eGovernment use has risen among citizens, and online availability has doubled since 2008. Even though still below the EU-27 average, Latvia is narrowing the gap. It has reorganised its eGovernment efforts to increase focus and concentrate resources within a clear and inclusive organisational framework.

Source: '[Smarter, Faster, Better eGovernment - 8th Benchmark Measurement](#)'

### Actions towards Inclusive eGovernment

#### Latvian eGovernment Development Programme

The overall objectives of the '[Latvian eGovernment Development Programme 2005-2009](#)' (*Elektroniskās pārvaldes attīstības programma 2005. -2009. gadam*) are to implement IT and optimise public administration processes by improving the quality and **accessibility of state government services**, thus decreasing the administrative burden for citizens. The development of eGovernment has to be based on fundamental policy principles, including equal opportunities for all, and taking into account special needs groups. The Programme will provide a basis for the forthcoming Latvian eGovernment Development Plan for 2011-2013.

#### National portal

[www.latvija.lv](http://www.latvija.lv) is a disability-friendly eService portal which provides a single access point for state and municipal services. Citizens are able to obtain pertinent information on state and local government services through categorised links, and also access electronic services. The portal satisfies the 'Points of single contact' criteria of the Directive [2006/123/EC](#).

# The Future of eInclusion

## Research in Practice & Future Challenges

### Future Challenges

The following constitute the most pressing eInclusion issues:

- ▶ establish a monitoring system at national level in order to harmonise the execution of the goals set by the Riga Ministerial Declaration;
- ▶ engage all public bodies at national, regional and local levels, NGOs and the private sector in drawing up and implementing eInclusion policy and associated actions;
- ▶ develop a national inclusion strategy and action plan;
- ▶ initiate and implement various projects in different eInclusion areas;
- ▶ carry out research and studies in key eInclusion areas;
- ▶ promote the adoption of a regulation for public online services to comply with universal design and Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) standards, so as to ensure such services and information are accessible to all, including people with disabilities;
- ▶ promote ICT skills development;
- ▶ raise public awareness on eInclusion and eAccessibility issues;
- ▶ reduce regional disparities in internet access and increase the availability of broadband coverage in underserved locations;
- ▶ develop assistive technology devices for people with disabilities.

### **European Commission - eInclusion Practice**

eInclusion practice (epractice.eu) is an information and exchange service for European professionals.

The eInclusion factsheets are one of the epractice.eu services. The factsheets present an overview of the eInclusion status and progress in the European countries.

The eInclusion factsheets are produced and updated once a year.

eInclusion practice is an initiative of the Directorate General for the Information Society and Media.

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