

**Project`s “Labour Plus” Regional Consultation Meeting
and
Regional conference “Towards Labour Market Challenges for Inclusion, Equal
Employment and Mobility”**

**University of Latvia, Small Hall
Riga, June 11, 2014**

REPORT

REGIONAL CONSULTATION MEETING (RCM)

On June 11, 2014, project`s LabourPlus partner from Latvia – University of Latvia – organized the Regional Consultation Meeting (RCM) together with the projects` international conference “Towards Labour Market Challenges for Inclusion, Equal Employment and Mobility”. During RCM the international conference project`s best integration practices were presented to more than 40 participants of which 16 were representatives from public and local authorities – Ministry of Welfare, Ministry of Education and Science, State Employment Agency and 8 municipalities from different urban and rural regions of Latvia, including capital city Riga, port cities Liepaja and Ventspils and municipalities of Dobeles, Burtnieki, Olaine and Dagda representing smaller and further rural regions in Latvia. Participants of RCM discussed main challenges of integration of socially vulnerable groups in society, identifying common aspects among Latvian municipalities as well as common and different aspects with project`s partners. Representatives of municipalities shared their main challenges and best, innovative solutions for integration of socially vulnerable groups into labour market. An important target groups in all municipalities are unemployed young people, which is also one of the main project focuses of Latvian partner, and pre-retirement-age people. In many cases main challenges for young people are lack of experience, education and qualification while main challenges for pre-retirement-age people are necessity of re-qualification and adjustment to new, including technologically advanced, working conditions. As a result tailor-made activities are designed to tackle challenges for integration of these social groups on both national and municipal levels. Since Latvia is comparatively small country both in terms of population (less than 2 million people) and territory and taken into account the large concentration of business and thus also population in capital city of Riga and its suburbs, most of the employment stimulating measures are developed and implemented in a centralized manner. Thus local municipalities are working with different projects, initiatives, programmes and measures developed by Ministry of Welfare, Ministry of Education and Science, State Employment Agency and other centralized government and public authorities.

During the RCM the Labour Plus project, its main objectives and tasks, provisional recommendation and best practices identified by project partners were presented by the UL project team. During presentations by RCM participants representing national and regional authorities of Latvia best

practices and main challenges for ensuring equal employment and social inclusion possibilities were discussed. During presentations the following best practices and challenges were presented:

1. State Employment Agency (SEA) is implementing a project (2008 - 2014) of **twinning employers with employees to help unemployed people to find jobs easier**. In result of this programme around 4128 job placements were created involving unemployed people in labour market. The SEA also provides a subsidy for salaries of those unemployed people from whom the employer has created a job placement. The success rate - 85% of those willing to work have new job placements found of which 70% have remained in these new jobs. The SEA has the main office in Riga, as well as branch offices in all cities and regions of Latvia. (http://www.nva.gov.lv/index.php?&new_lang=en) They have also some programmes for working with ethnic minorities, handicapped people, long term unemployed, people with low level of education, etc. Another **good examples is project “Workplace for youth”** - this good case practice by Latvian State Employment Agency is addresses towards increase of youth employment and youth integration into labour market through supporting and enhancing internships, workplaces for youth and youth voluntary work. The project focused on integration of young unemployed people (aged 18 to 24 years) in the labour market, while contributing to the creation of sustainable jobs and permanent employment for young people.

2. The Riga City Council (<http://www.ld.riga.lv/start-page.html>) has a lot of social programmes to work with youth employment, social employment, etc. Biggest problems are related to long term unemployed people, homeless people, considerably large number of social assistance recipients. Also, one of target groups among socially disadvantaged people is elder Russian speaking people who can no find jobs without Latvian language skills. One of the best practice examples of fighting social exclusion implemented by the Municipality of Riga is the project financed by the ESF for homeless unemployed people "**Developing and implementing motivation programmes for homeless unemployed persons/V.E.L.G.**" http://www.ld.riga.lv/sadarbibas_partenri_esf_atbalstitajos_projketos.html

3. Burtnieki Region - a small region on the Northern part of Latvia, around 150 km from Riga. The biggest problem for the region is unemployment, especially **unemployment amongst young people** without an adequate level of education (sometimes they have completed only 5 or 6 grades). Other problematic social groups are single parents (usually women with children), handicapped people and their families, people with mental problems and different dependencies. The Social service of Burtnieki have developed quite **impressive social assistance programmes**, including programme to support families, camps for handicapped people, assistance to prepare for job interviews, assistance by doctors, individual consultations at psychologist, trainings for increase of self-esteem and other.

4. City of Liepaja - Liepaja always has had quite considerable unemployment rates (currently ~13,7%) which is its biggest challenge. The State Employment Agency Office in Liepaja has developed a special programme for participation in the social programmes developed by the State Employment Agency, including, “semi-vocational education”. In result, around 300 new job placements were created, as well as seasonal job placements for unemployed and also schoolchildren which want to work in summer (from 13 years age). An **interesting example is the Liepaja Society of Blind** (<http://www.redzigaismu.lv/eng/>) which **supports handicapped people and provides jobs for them**. For example, they have had cooperation with such employers as

Greetings International Ltd which has placed regular orders to the Society, as well as other good examples of integrating disadvantaged groups of society into labour market. They also implement a lot of projects related to more successful integration of handicapped people into society and labour market.

The other example - House of Youth provides a lot of programmes for young people where they can spend their free time by learning and doing useful things, such as participating voluntary work, learning languages, music, etc. There are more NGOs in Liepaja working with youth issues and helping people with disabilities. (<http://www.liepaja.lv/page/968>)

5. City of Dobele (<http://www.dobele.lv/page/municipality>). The priority of the Municipality is to promote **employment of young** people and to prevent long term unemployment. A special programme designed by the Municipality is the **Youth Initiative Health Centre** which offers informal programmes for young people. (<http://djivc.lv/en/par-mums-118067>) There is also the **Life Long Learning Adult Education and Entrepreneurship Support Centre** established to promote entrepreneurship and employment. (<http://www.pic.dobele.lv/page/us>) The Municipality has well established relationships with NGOs involved in social assistance and employment issues.

6. City of Ventspils. Ventspils has quite a big Roma population (~8%) and has **good examples of integrating Roma children in schools**. (There are 6 452 people which have registered as Roma in Latvia, total population is ~2 million). Ventspils Municipality has developed a good cooperation with the **Ventspils High Technology Park (VATP)** for promoting social entrepreneurship. There is a **project called "Beginning" which supports new projects of social entrepreneurship** for solving different social problems. The main purpose of the project is to promote entrepreneurship and employment in Ventspils. In addition, VATP has signed a contract with the Ventspils Municipality that it will provide business consultations free of charge to any person living in Ventspils who has an interest about starting entrepreneurship and/or has a business idea. In result, there were around 200 serious business consultations conducted and 6 new companies registered.

At the end of meeting it was agreed that best practice examples identified at the RCM can be presented to Labour Plus project partners during the study visit which is planned for September, 2014. During the study visit the exchange of experience between project partners and regional authorities could take a place.

Participants of the meeting agreed to have a closer look at the Labour plus best practices and inform the UL team about possible interest for implementing them in their regions. The UL team should get back to participants in July when the local implementation plan will be drafted.

This was also agreed that UL will continue to inform national and regional authorities about the project implementation, conclusions and recommendations drawn by the end of project.

REGIONAL CONFERENCE. Towards Labour Market Challenges for Inclusion, Equal Employment and Mobility

RCM was the first meeting of the project's Conference "Towards Labour Market Challenges for Inclusion, Equal Employment and Mobility" where representatives of different regions and

countries, mainly from academic environment – scholars and Ph.D. students presented their researches on integration practices in Europe. Conference participants discussed various topics including issues related to international experiences in labour market integration, society development and demographic challenges, competitiveness of labour market, migrants' identity structure, social entrepreneurship issues, EU regional development, migrations' economic effects, challenges for public administration, pension trends and other topics with a particular focus on Baltic States and the EU Eastern partnership countries.