

A Comparative Analysis of Family Support Policies in the Context of Norway, Estonia, Ireland, Poland, and the Netherlands

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Demographic and migration factors have had a profound impact on the Latvian economy since the country regained its independence, creating both challenges and opportunities that require in-depth analysis. This research examines these factors, emphasizing their importance for the development of the Latvian economy. To better understand the experiences of other European countries in shaping family support policies, five very different countries were selected: Norway, Estonia, Ireland, Poland, and the Netherlands. These case studies aim to provide information and recommendations for improving the Latvian policy framework, including factors related to prosperous family support systems observed in these comparable countries.

In a situation of prolonged depopulation, Latvia faces the greatest challenges, increasing population ageing and low birth rates, which contribute to population decline, negatively affecting the labour market and economic productivity (Klotmiņš and Krišjāne, 2016). The study aims to analyze how these demographic changes, combined with migration patterns, affect the Latvian economy in terms of labour participation and economic growth. In addition, the study aims to examine how family support policies in other European countries can serve as a model for Latvia to promote higher birth rates and improve job retention.

The methodology chosen for this research — a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative demographic and migration data analysis with qualitative assessments of family support policies — provides a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of Latvia's demographic challenges and policy options. This approach enables both the statistical evaluation of trends and the in-depth exploration of policy effectiveness, providing valuable insights that neither method alone can fully capture. By integrating quantitative data from sources such as the Central Statistical Office of Latvia and Eurostat with qualitative policy analysis from case studies in Norway, Estonia, Ireland, Poland, and the Netherlands, the study benefits from a robust empirical foundation to accurately track demographic and migration patterns that impact Latvia's economy. Arbidāne and Markevica's (2016) research on the dynamics of the active population provides a solid basis for understanding the current demographic picture in Latvia.

It also offers a contextualised understanding of how different family support policies shape demographic and labor market outcomes in diverse European settings, allowing the identification of best practices tailored specifically to Latvia's unique socio-economic conditions. The mixed-methods approach enhances the reliability and validity of findings through triangulation of data sources and methods, providing a well-rounded perspective that links statistical trends with real-world policy implications. Overall, this design strengthens the study's capacity to provide actionable, evidence-based insights for improving Latvia's family support framework in response to demographic and economic challenges.

Data regularly collected by the Central Statistical Bureau Republic of Latvia, as well as Eurostat's comparative statistics of European countries, show that Latvia is at a critical family policy crossroads, where proactive changes are essential to address demographic change. The challenge of an outflow of young, skilled workers has led to a decline in the available workforce, threatening economic sustainability (Indāns, 2013). On the other hand, countries such as Norway have been able to use strong family support policies to promote higher birth

rates and workforce stability. Norway's complete parental leave policy and access to affordable childcare have been shown to promote both family development and economic resilience (Krūmiņš and Krišjāne, 2019). In Estonia, improved family benefits have also contributed to an increase in birth rates and better female participation in the labour market, creating a more balanced and productive economy (Freidenfelde, 2012).

Given these observations, it is clear that the strategic implementation of family support policies in Latvia could significantly strengthen the economy. Decision-makers should consider the impact of financial incentives on families, parental leave and improved childcare facilities, as well as instruments to combat the decline in birth rates and promote the return of emigrants (Zobena, 2005). Comparative analysis reveals that investments in family support can generate significant long-term economic benefits, including labour market stabilisation and productivity gains.

In conclusion, the interaction of demographic and migration factors creates both risks and opportunities for Latvia. By adopting welfare family support policies from other European countries and adapting them to the local context, Latvia could potentially mitigate the negative impact of population ageing and labour shortages. This study highlights the need for political decision-makers to prioritise family strategies that not only respond to demographic challenges but also promote sustainable economic growth and social cohesion in Latvia (Krūmiņš and Krišjāne, 2016; Arbidāne and Markevica, 2016), which would strengthen the unity of society, the interconnectedness of its structures and the mutual connection. Prioritised family strategies would also increase the degree of solidarity within society and the country as a whole. A renewed emphasis on family support could help transform Latvia's economic future and ensure its resilience in the face of ongoing demographic change.

Keywords

demography, migration, family support policy, labour, population ageing