

Where Is Education In a Transition Economy Heading? The Case Of Latvia

Education is an important precondition for dynamic state and regional development. It is a general perception in Latvia that human resources represent its key (and perhaps only) resource endowment, and higher education level and skills acquisition should be promoted by all means.

The demographic situation in Latvia is characterized by population ageing and negative natural movement. Despite the shrinking population the total number of students in higher education establishments has been constantly rising since 1993, the ratio of students per 1000 habitants has increased from 138 to 556, and Latvia is ranked 2nd in the world according to this indicator. But how is this going to develop?

By calculating the number of potential university entrants the paper aims to assess the future developments of size and structure of student population in Latvia. The number of secondary school graduates is increasing and will reach the maximum in 2008, but after 2009 the number of secondary school graduates will drop. By that time also the pool of elderly people who are acquiring their 'modern' education (vs. Soviet type diploma) will be scarce.

By considering these demographic developments, the paper evaluates how the changes would affect the higher education system in general. The scarcity of students would increase competition between universities, affect the quality and force them into further education activities that are underdeveloped in Latvia at the moment.