

PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT MEASURES FOR TEACHERS IN REGIONS OF LATVIA

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Abstract. The authors in the paper present the results of the on-line survey on teachers' professional support measures which was carried out in collaboration with the Latvian Trade Union of Education and Science Employees. The aim of the research was to explore, how teachers assessed availability and level of professional support measures within a context of current education reforms. The quantitative research design was used in the study and the quantitative survey of the teachers was conducted via web tool *visidati.lv* (n=1258) from November 2 till November 27, 2018. The questionnaire comprised the statements on following measures of professional support: financial, material and technological, methodological, and societal. Teachers' opinions regarding their provision with resources and support were analysed by region. The results witness about regional disparities mainly between Riga and Latgale regions. There are statistically significant differences between both regions in how teachers are provided with health insurance. The need for financial and societal support was assessed as most important for teachers in Riga region, while Latgale teachers considered the need for methodological and material support. Teachers in Zemgale more often than the respondents from other regions agreed with the statement that when integrating students with special needs into general education institutions, teachers are not paid for additional duties. The authors conclude that different professional support measures are available for teachers in Latvia, but there is No common support system in place to address which functions and support measures should be implemented at national level and which at municipal level.

Key words: educational institutions, professional support, regions, teachers.

JEL code: R23, K31.

Introduction

The support that teachers need includes financial, material and methodological support, as well as broader public awareness and involvement in the implementation of reforms. Policy pointers of the European Union „highlight the need for incentives to be set to ensure investment in teachers' and trainers' professional development, taking into account the differing needs of each role" (European Union, 2018, p.3). The development of professional competencies and the extent to which the specially designed teachers' professional competence development programs should be ensured in Latvia is determined by the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No. 569 (Noteikumi par pedagogiem ..., 2018). They concern the general competences of the teacher, the content of the education and didactics, and the management of education. Although the offer is diverse, teachers admit that socially and technologically changing conditions require more up-to-date content measures than they are available to date. To some extent this is acknowledged also in other studies (for example, Sprött, 2018). Each country looks for the appropriate way how to support educators at both national and local levels. As OECD report states, „in half of the OECD countries and economies with available data, school heads and teachers working in a disadvantage or remote area are rewarded with additional compensation" (OECD, 2018:26).

To understand the broader picture and opinions of the teachers in Latvia, the Latvian Trade Union of Education and Science Employees (LIZDA) conducted a web-survey in autumn, 2018. The aim of

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the research was to explore, how teachers assessed availability and level of professional support measures within a context of current education reforms. The following tasks of the study were defined: (1) to identify problems in various aspects related to teachers' professional support, (2) to compare results across regions and Latvia as a whole, and (3) to develop proposals for the improvement of teachers' professional support. The article presents the results of the LIZDA study, which focus on the assessment and improvement of the professional support of teachers.

Research methodology

Quantitative research strategy was used for the research. The questionnaire was developed and posted on the webpage *visidati.lv* and was available from November 2 till November 27, 2018. Information about the survey was disseminated via LIZDA homepage, trade union's member organizations in schools, social media, and website *eklase.lv*. The questionnaire comprised the statements on various measures of professional support: financial, material and technological, methodological, and societal. All these measures were assessed within a context of current education reforms: (1) support for the introduction of competence-based content; (2) support for novice teachers; (3) support for the provision of inclusive education; (4) support for principals of educational establishments. The respondents were offered to use symmetric 5-point Likert scale (strongly agree, slightly agree, neither agree nor disagree, slightly disagree, strongly disagree) in order to assess the statements. The teachers' survey was conducted on the basis of the methodological and ethical principles of the online survey (Roberts & Allen, 2015; Toepoel, 2015). The survey was anonymous and the results were used only in an aggregated way.

The research sample was made of 1258 respondents, more than half of whom (68 %) were LIZDA members. Of the teachers surveyed, 40 % lived in cities, while 60 % lived in rural municipalities. Among the respondents, 94 % were women and 6 % were men. The teachers surveyed represented all planning regions of Latvia: Vidzeme (25 %), Kurzeme (15 %), Zemgale (18 %), Latgale (24 %) and Riga region (18 %). Respondents represented all levels of education (preschool, elementary school, primary school, secondary school) and positions; they were with different seniority and represented different age groups.

For the descriptive analysis of quantitative data mean (M) was calculated by using statistical program SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science v21) and Independent samples t-test was calculated to analyse differences in opinions of the respondents representing different regions.

Research results and discussion

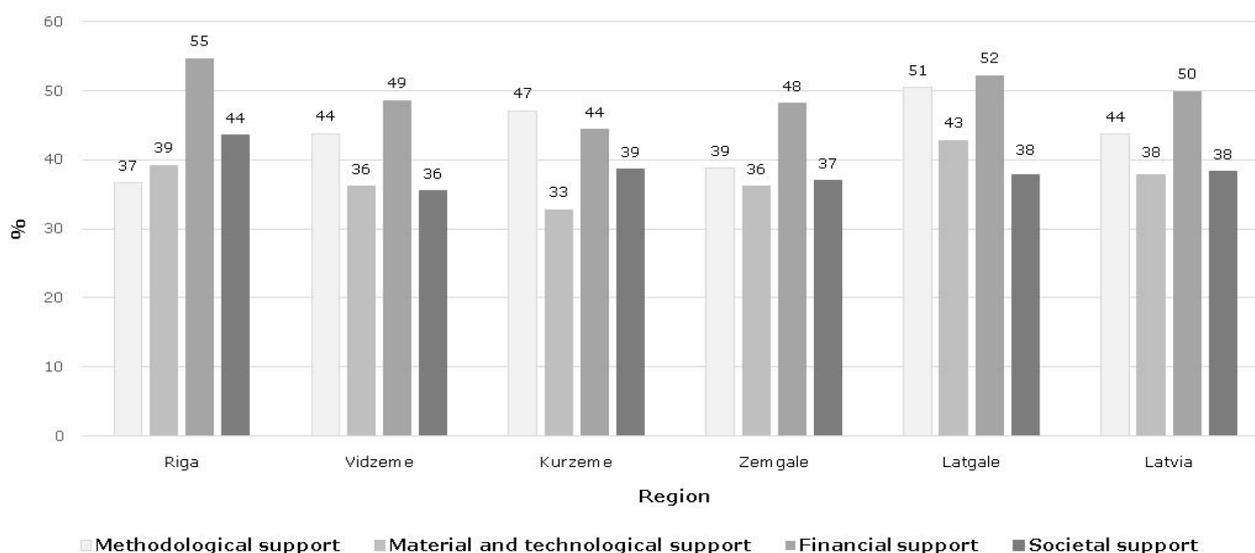
1. Teachers' views on their professional support in Latvia's planning regions

The main areas of support in the research were related to support for the implementation of competence-based content, support for novice teachers, support for inclusive education and support for principals of educational institutions. The comparison of teachers' professional support in Latvia's planning regions was performed by comparing the views of teachers on available provision with resources for teaching methods, materials for technical, financial and public support. Figure 1 shows which types of support teachers considered as the priority for their professional development.

Methodological support as very important was most often assessed in Latgale (51 %) and Kurzeme (47 %). Material and technological support was assessed as the most significant in Latgale region (43 %), while societal support in Riga region (44 %). In general, the survey results revealed that in the regions of Latgale and Riga teachers were more likely to assess all forms of professional support as important, so they felt the need for aid. In teachers' opinions of the regions of Riga and

Latgale, contrary to the comparison of all other regions, were statistically significant differences ($p < 0.05$) in assessment of importance of all support measures: financial support (Riga $M = 1.90$; Latgale $M = 1.92$); material and technological support (Riga $M = 2.11$; Latgale $M = 2.05$); methodological support (Riga $M = 2.24$; Latgale $M = 1.97$); societal support (Riga $M = 2.15$; Latgale $M = 2.22$).

In general, teachers of Latvia assessed financial support (50 %) and methodological support (44 %) as a priority. Technical support (38 %) and societal support (38 %) were equally important. As a priority, the financial support was more often assessed by teachers in the regions of Riga (55 %) and Latgale (52 %), although Riga teachers have higher average wages compared to other regions, but less frequently in the region of Kurzeme (44 %).

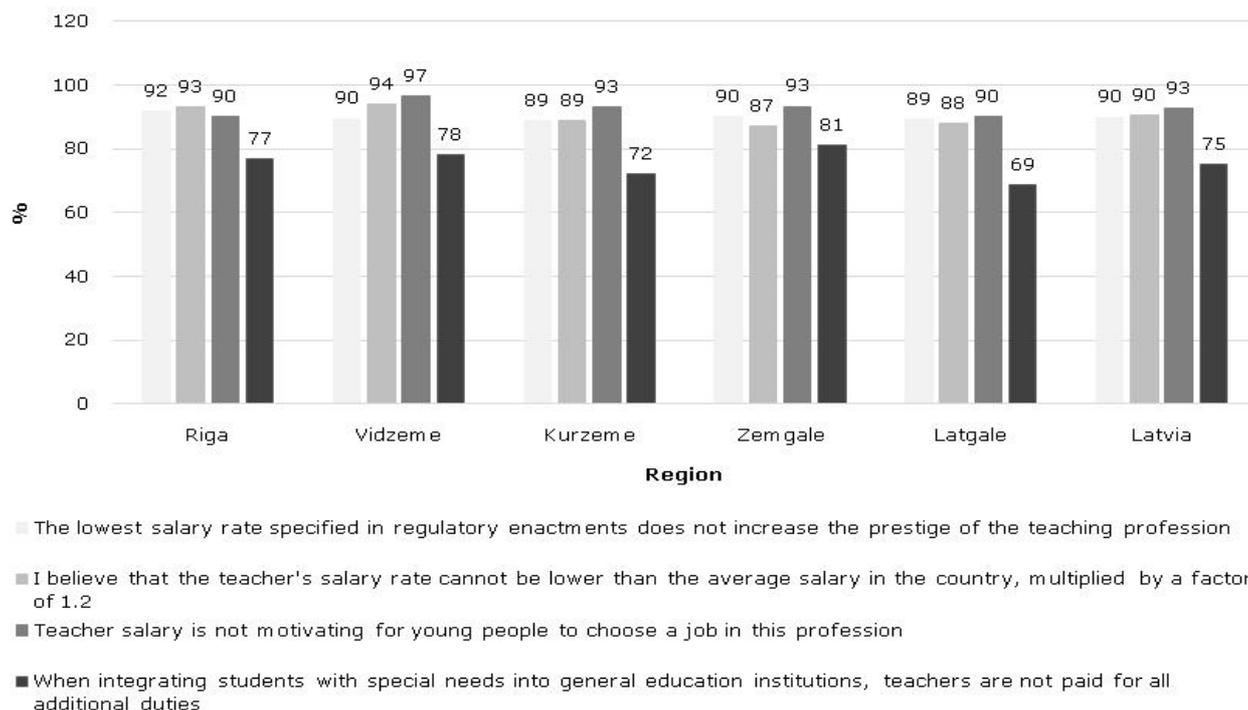


Source: Authors' calculations based on LIZDA survey data

Fig. 1. Teachers' views on the importance of types of their professional support (aggregate of the assessments 'strongly agree' and 'slightly agree', %), $n = 1258$

2. Financial support

As part of the study, teachers were asked to assess the statements related to the lower salary rate and the motivation of young people for the work of the teacher and for additional obligations regarding inclusive education (see Figure 2). Nearly all teachers agreed (90 %) that the lowest rate of wages for teachers set out in the regulatory enactments does not increase the prestige of the profession (92 % of Riga teachers supported this statement) and believed that the salary rate of the teacher cannot be lower than the average salary in the country, multiplied by a factor of 1.2 (93 % of Riga and 94 % of Vidzeme respondents). The regions of Riga and Latgale had statistically significant differences in teachers opinions ($p < 0.05$, Riga $M = 1.36$, Latgale $M = 1.55$), as well as the regions of Riga and Zemgale ($p < 0.05$, Riga $M = 1.36$, Zemgale $M = 1.46$). Vidzeme teachers more frequently (97 %) than the respondents on average (93 %) agreed that teacher remuneration is not motivating for young people to choose a job in this profession. Zemgale teachers more often (81 %) than teachers in the country on average (75 %) agreed with the statement that when students with special needs are integrated in general education institutions, teachers are not paid for any additional duties. Regarding this statement, the regions of Riga and Latgale have statistically significant differences ($p < 0.05$, Riga $M = 1.36$, Latgale $M = 1.64$).



Source: Authors' calculations based on LIZDA survey data

Fig. 2. Teachers' assessment on salary and motivation for work (aggregate of the assessments 'strongly agree' and 'slightly agree', %), n=1258

Teacher ratings on the statements of job motivation factors (aggregate of answers 'strongly agree' and 'slightly agree') are presented in Figure 3.



Source: Authors' calculations based on LIZDA survey data

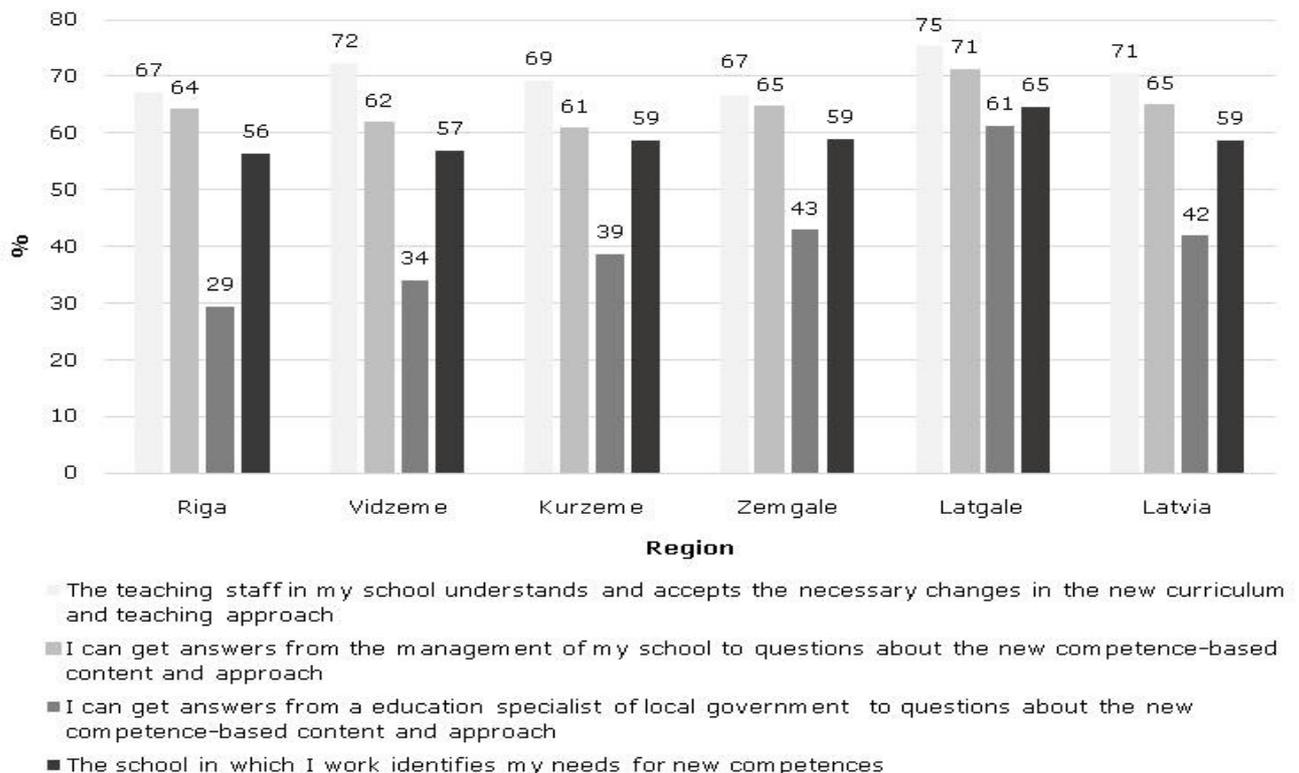
Fig. 3. Assessment of teachers on motivational factors for work in the education sector (aggregate of the assessments 'strongly agree' and 'slightly agree', %), n=1258

In Latgale, teachers more often (64 %) than average in Latvia (58 %) strongly agreed and slightly agreed that they have funded their teacher's professional development from their private resources over the last three years. The regions of Riga and Latgale, contrary to the comparison of all other regions, had statistically significant differences ($p < 0.05$, Riga $M = 2.87$, Latgale $M = 2.42$) regarding this statement. Around 80 % of the respondents in all regions strongly agreed or slightly agreed they

value positive experience of other countries in giving teachers creative leave. There were No statistically significant differences in teachers' opinions between regions regarding this statement. Regarding provision of health insurance there are statistically significant differences between the regions of Riga and Latgale ($p < 0.05$); in the region of Riga the 75 % of the respondents have received health insurance, while in Latgale there were only 21 %, which is the least result in comparison to all other regions. Approximately 40-50 % of teachers in all regions had cost catering; there were No statistically important regional differences in this.

3. Methodological support

When comparing the statements on cooperation for the development of professional skills in the educational establishment (see Figure 4), it should be concluded that there were No statistically significant differences between regions and all regions equally dominated by the notion that the educational establishment understands and accepts the necessary changes in the new teaching content and teaching approach, and that teachers receive answers to questions about the new competence-based content and approach from the school leaders. There was a significant difference between Riga and Latgale regions: in Riga 29 % of teachers received answers to questions about the new competence-based content and accessed support from an education specialist in local municipality, while in Latgale 61 % of the respondents reported on positive experience. In all regions, equally around 60 % of the teachers acknowledged that the educational institution was aware of the needs for new, necessary competencies.

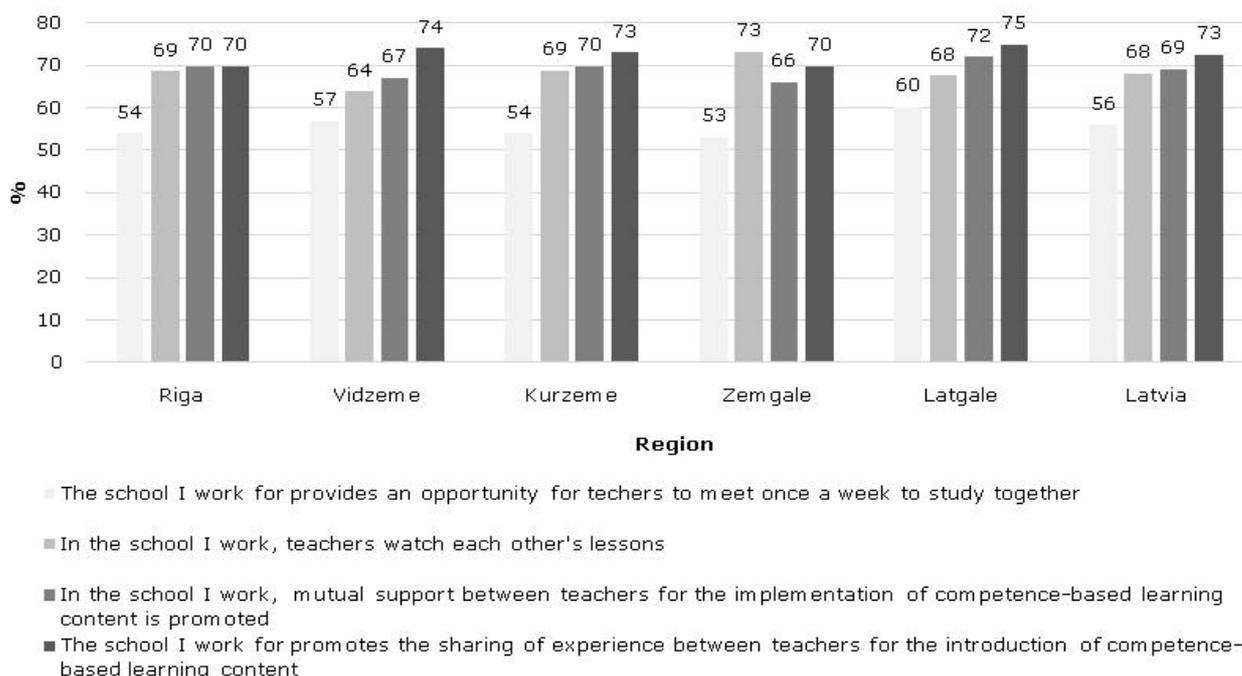


Source: Authors' calculations based LIZDA survey data

Fig. 4. Teachers' assessment on cooperation to improve professionalism in the educational establishment (aggregate of the assessments 'strongly agree' and 'slightly agree', %), n=1258

There are No statistically significant differences between regions in teacher opinions on cooperation to improve professionalism in educational establishments for the implementation of competence-based content (see Figure 5). The study shows that fewer (average 56 %) teachers are

given the opportunity to meet once a week to study together, but more often (average 73 %) teachers believe that they are promoted to share experience.



Source: Authors' calculations based on LIZDA survey data

Fig. 5. Teachers' assessment on support for implementation of competence-based education (aggregate of the assessments 'strongly agree' and 'slightly agree', %), n=1258

4. Societal support

In the Kurzeme region, it is more common (47 %), but in the Riga region it is uncommon (69 %) that teachers consider it necessary to educate members in municipalities in order to take various decisions on educational development issues (see Table 1).

Table 1

Teachers assessment on societal support for work in the educational sector (aggregate of the assessments 'strongly agree' and 'slightly agree', %), n=1258

No	Statements	Riga	Vidzeme	Kurzeme	Zemgale	Latgale
1.	In the municipality in which my school is situated, it is necessary to educate members of municipality on the development of the educational sector	69	75	77	75	72
2.	As one of the options, I welcome the partial organisation of methodological work at both national level and at municipal level.	65	62	68	63	64
3.	Employer provides supervision to teachers when needed	29	26	31	26	29
4.	National media needs to reflect more on good practices in the education sector	88	89	91	88	89

Source: Authors' calculations based on LIZDA survey data

In Kurzeme, teachers have been more critical of organising methodological work at all levels, as well as the need to reflect good practices in the education sector in the media. In this region, employers have provided more frequent supervision for teachers (31 %) than in Vidzeme (26 %) and Zemgale (26 %). When assessing the views of teachers on social support for work in the

education sector, it can be concluded that there are No statistically significant differences in opinions across regions.

5. Material and technological support

Views of teachers on technology provision are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2

Teachers' assessment on the provision of technical support in the educational establishment (aggregate of the assessments 'strongly agree' and 'slightly agree', %), n=1258

No	Statements	Riga	Vidzeme	Kurzeme	Zemgale	Latgale
1.	The necessary support for technology use is available	73	76	77	80	79
2.	There is a computer available with the Internet connection	83	80	76	83	76
3.	There is sufficient support with different programs on computers	72	68	62	72	75
4.	There is unlimited access to the printer	63	70	63	69	78
5.	There is unlimited access to the copier	69	77	75	77	81
6.	There is unlimited access to the scanner	51	58	58	55	66
7.	There is an opportunity to use an interactive blackboard in the learning process	50	54	54	59	58
8.	A smartphone is available and paid for using it	20	21	23	24	26
9.	Municipal Service apartments are available for attracting teachers	14	10	7	17	9

Source: Authors' calculations based on LIZDA survey data

It should be concluded that there are No statistically significant differences in the views of teachers between the regions, but the continued trend is that teachers in Latgale region are more positive in terms of technology provision compared to the teachers of the Riga region. It is positive that in Zemgale municipalities (17 %) and Riga municipalities (14 %) more teachers have access to service apartments what motivates teachers to work in municipalities.

Conclusions

- 1) In comparison with other regions, teachers in Latgale and Riga regions are more likely to assess all forms of professional support as important. The regions of Riga and Latgale have statistically significant differences in assessing all types of professional support. There are No such differences between the views of teachers in other regions.
- 2) The need for financial and societal support is most important for teachers in Riga region, while Latgale teachers consider the need for methodological and material support.
- 3) Compared to other regions, teachers in Riga and Vidzeme are more critical in their assessments of motivation for work in the teaching profession and its impact on the prestige of the teaching profession. Teachers in Vidzeme more often than in Latvia, on average, agree that the teacher's salary is not motivating so that young people choose a job in this profession.
- 4) Teachers in Zemgale more often than teachers in the state, on average, agree with the statement that when integrating students with special needs into general education institutions, teachers

are not paid for additional duties. Teachers in the regions of Riga and Latgale have statistically significant differences in this view.

- 5) There are statistically significant differences between the regions of Riga and Latgale, as well as the regions of Riga and Zemgale, in teachers' assessments of the lowest salary rate, which should be similar to the average salary in the country, multiplying it by a factor of 1.2.
- 6) In Latgale, the teachers more frequently strongly agree and slightly agree with the statement that over the last three years, they had to finance their own teacher's professional development from their private means. Regarding this statement, there are statistically significant differences between the regions of Riga and Latgale.
- 7) There are statistically significant differences between the regions of Riga and Latgale in how teachers are provided with health insurance: more teachers receive it in the Riga region than in Latgale.
- 8) Professional support measures are being implemented for teachers in Latvia, but there is No common support system in place to address which functions and support measures should be implemented at national level and which at municipal level.

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