

NEWS

PROJECT

NextGen Microcities -
Next Generation Micro
Cities of Europe

📍 Ventspils & Valmiera,
Latvia

TOPIC

Jobs and skills in the
local economy

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NextGen Microcities tests innovative approaches to match the demand for ICT talents in the job market

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website



In this article, we focus on project's activities that have the ambition to demonstrate what can be done to facilitate the match with the growing demand of ICT specialists and professionals spurred by the digital transformation era.

More than 750.000 job positions in ICT related sectors will be vacant in 2020. The Council of European Professional Informatics Society has stated that Europe does not input into the job market enough ICT talents to meet the potential demand. But it is not just about the production of ICT graduates that is insufficient, a large competence mismatch exists across all sectors, as the job market is not able to facilitate the match between supply and demand of jobs.

There is much that countries can do to address this challenge: from attracting talents from abroad to promoting informed career-making and lifelong development decisions, to working on the upskilling and reskilling of the existing workforce. The UIA NextGen Microcities project attempts to cover all of the above, with specific

strategies that are directed at Specialists' and Talents' attraction, Career guidance, Generational Marketing, and Professional Retraining. In this article, we focus on updates that concern the project's activities that fall under these headings, and that have the ambition to demonstrate what can be done to facilitate the match with the growing demand of ICT specialists and professionals spurred by the digital transformation era.

A call for ICT talents

Among the two municipalities involved in the project, it is Ventspils that is trying a very innovative approach to talent attraction and integration. If the pilot will be successful, the model and the tools will be made available not just to the other partner city Valmiera, but to all micro cities in Europe that will want to try out the tested approach. The approach is based on a larger ICT strategy to promote Ventspils as an attractive place to work and live, and a set of support services to facilitate relocation and integration into both the business and social community. The ambition is to attract 100 newcomers to Ventspils in the span of the project.

The centerpiece of this ICT strategy is a unique internet platform named www.livinventspils.lv. The website has been created with the aim to have almost all information about moving to Ventspils in one place. The platform has been active since May this year. Currently, the website is only in Latvian, but the project team is currently working to make it available in English and Russian by the end of January 2021.

The platform has four main major sections:

1. **Life** – displaying information about education opportunities, cultural life, municipal services, sport and health, transport, and living information.
2. **Job** – offering new vacancies and information about employers in Ventspils. Currently, 27 companies have joined the website and 128 vacancies have been added so far. The main goal is to have all Ventspils' employers to post their vacancies on the web site.
3. **Specialist database** – letting employers access online a database to find the employees they need from this database of specialists.
4. **Business** – displaying a list of institutions and business support organizations for those who want to start a business.

The team is pushing the visibility of the platform through online and offline marketing activities. The website has reached more than 14.000 page views. The average time spent by a person on the website is 4 minutes, that is quite a long time in our digital world. As per site visitors' origin, a growing percentage is from Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Ireland, Austria, Lithuania, and Switzerland.

The platform is also being presented through seminars, either organized by the project team or by third parties. For instance, a stand was created to attend an event named "Business days", an opportunity festival in Kurzeme for entrepreneurs new in entrepreneurship.

But the platform is only a part of the story. There is also an opportunity to call or write an e-mail to a physical contact point, a "Future Career Office" named LIVIN, to solve relocation associated issues like housing, employment, schools, etc.

Once a newcomer, the project team organizes for you various social gatherings and networking events to assist with integration. Some are seminars to inform about professional or business opportunities, others are social gatherings for families that involve cool locations, movies, and events with cakes for kids. The community is important, it produces a sense of belonging and stability, and contributes to social inclusion. The project team aims at keeping newcomers engaged as they want to help them stay at least two years, after which it becomes more difficult to leave again.

So far, the project has welcomed 46 newcomers. Some of them already found a job. A lot are returning Latvians, some of them had their grandparents in Latvia before the family migrated to Ukraine or Uzbekistan. But the sense of belonging is strong, and the country seems ready to accommodate in the job market professional profiles that are in line with the long-term trends. So, people decide to come back, and they get a soft landing thanks to the UIA project.

Up you go the skill chain

One of the goals of the project is to provide training and retraining to the current workforce for moving into jobs in ICT related fields. The project partners involved in the activity are able to match demand coming from companies with qualified specialists, who then are offered training to deepen their existing knowledge or acquire a new one, which would allow them a change of profession.

In particular, the activities that fall under this stream are the following:

- Identification of companies interested in creating new ICT jobs in Ventspils
- Matching candidates and job vacancies

- Recruitment of participants for retraining programs
- Development of retraining programs suitable for new ICT job profiles
- Delivering retraining and/or job practices

Specialists are trained and retrained in the following ICT professions: telecommunications engineer, IT program manager, IT project manager, IT service manager, website developer and administrator, IT support technician, IT analyst, application developer, etc. In addition to the classic ICT professions, specialists can also be trained and retrained in other professions requiring digital skills: big data analyst, social media specialist, graphic and animation designer, communication specialist, multimedia marketing specialist, mechatronics engineer, etc.

The project staff regularly interviews Latvian employers who already have or will have relevant vacancies in the future which could create new jobs. Employer surveys are conducted on relevant ICT vacancies and the readiness to employ specialists for on-site or remote jobs. After establishing the needs of the companies, job advertisements are posted on the DarbaGuru website (<https://www.darbaguru.lv/en>), one of the main portals of such type in Latvia, and social networks to identify potential candidates for retraining and employment. And as well, all those who will be retrained and will be looking for a job will post their CVs in the LIVIN database of specialists, so that Ventspils entrepreneurs can more easily find potential candidates, as these two activities are both developed in Ventspils.

The project helps put together groups of trainees and provide online training for the preparation and retraining of specialists in the ICT field in Ventspils, in accordance with the demands of Latvian employers.

The project delivered and will continue to deliver the following online (in real-time) training:

- Basic programming and practical introduction to Python and XML
- Digital marketing
- WEB programming (Back-end, front-end).
- Google IT Support Professional Certificate.

More topics are currently under development. All are training programs that are perfectly in line with some of the professions being created by the digital transformation. The objective is to engage at least 5 companies in this pilot, and as a result of the project, it is expected that these companies will create at least 40 new jobs during the project implementation.

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