

**Higher School for Social Work and Social Pedagogics  
“Attīstība”**

**&**

**The Center for Criminological Research**

**PROJECT**

**“Child in the Street”**

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## INTRODUCTION

Since the restoration of the national independence of Latvia, the legal system has been improved, measures in the field of social security are implemented, social values change. The socialization process of individuals, including children, is transformed. However, many primary and secondary socialization institutions and structures are currently unable to function adequately in forming the necessary values in children, in developing positive interests and ideals in them. In the transitional period, new formations have started to take part in the socialization process which are quite significant for children, including the phenomenon of the street and other social occurrences.

Since children do not always feel support in their families and if they lack interest in studies, they tend to spend more and more of their time in the street. Under the conditions of the transitional period, a situation has emerged when the street becomes the environment which develops and forms children, provides them with the necessary means of sustenance, and children acquire such social skills in the street which help them to survive under these conditions.

Generally, the problem of the “street children” is related to four fundamental problem groups:

First -- the factors which have forced children out of their usual environment, which is necessary for them, and in the street. This problem group includes factors which form the street children and define the potential “candidates” for the status of outcasts;

Second -- the typical features of the street and the social environment. From the outside, the street and social phenomena become more attractive, as it were, while internally they are in fact more cruel and autonomous;

Third -- the types of activities of children, the socialization process and the behavior of deviants in the street and in other public places. In the process of the development of child, the street is not the most positive element of socialization;

Fourth -- the consequences of the socialization process of children. These consequences are related to negative changes in the psyche of children: their values are deformed, and specific sub-cultural elements emerge.

The problem of street children in Latvia, although it was first identified in the 1930s, currently is new and has not been investigated. Therefore it is very important now to carry out identification of “street children” and to carefully investigate their way of life and the causes which have led them out on the street, with the purpose to define and develop the strategies for dealing with this problem. The “street children” are not actually identified in Latvia now, neither on theoretical nor on practical level. Without becoming fully aware of the objective difficulties and shortcomings of the transitional period and without urgently dealing with this problem, we can say with full responsibility that Latvia can irreversibly lose part of its children and adolescents, including those whom we can denominate as “street children” in Latvia.

At the time being, we do not precisely know the number of children who do not study, do not attend school educational institutions, we do not know the percentage of children who are without closer links with their families and adults, who spend most of their time in the street and in other places.

We have not investigated the problem: in what exactly manner the street socializes or deforms children and adolescents; what is the attraction of this social structure.

At the heart of this problem, there lies the question of what should we do with those children whose priority is no longer their family and parents and not the school or other learning institutions but rather the street?

On the one hand, the public is becoming aware of the problem of the “street children”, various institutions are being established to deal with the problems of children, surveys carried out, etc., but on the other hand, all these activities are not linked with deeper analysis of the problem, the causes of the problem are not identified, and therefore institutions cannot offer adequate assistance. No such programs are being developed on the national or local government level which would be directed towards doing away with the causes of the problem.

In the course of carrying out the research of “street children”, the team of authors analyzed the experience of Latvia in 1930s. During the study, comparative analysis was carried out with the results of certain other research projects abroad (in Denmark, Brazil, Peru, etc.).

This research was carried out with support of UNICEF at the Higher School for Social Work and Social Pedagogics *Attīstība*, in cooperation with the Center for Criminological Research.

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## 1. The Aims and Tasks of the Research

The **principal aim** of the research “Child in the Street” was to analyze the phenomenon of street children and to identify the social factors which contribute to children becoming “street children”.

**Subordinate aim of the research:** on the basis of the identified social factors, which create the problem of the “street children”, to prepare conclusions and recommendations which would help to deal with the problem and to prevent the emergence of “street children”.

Taking into account that the problem of children not attending schools has become acute in Latvia now, the study also included analysis of information and search for causes

which bar children from education and investigation of the linkage between these two phenomena: children who do not attend school and “street children”.

Attention was focused on the juvenile delinquency as one of the more serious consequences to the problem of “street children”.

**To achieve the aim of the research, the working group set the following tasks:**

1. To carry out the analysis of definitions and similar studies abroad. To define the concept “street children” in Latvia. .
2. To analyze the social phenomenon “children in the street” in Latvia in 1920s and 1930s.
3. To analyze those social factors which contribute to the emergence of the problem of “street children” and to consider concrete individual cases, thus creating the social portrait of “street children”.
4. To render qualitative characterization of the linkage between the two social phenomena: “children in the street” and “children with deviant behavior”.
5. To characterize the connection between the social phenomena: “children not attending school” and “children in the street”.
6. On the basis of the studies carried out, to prepare recommendations for possible solutions to the problem of “street children”.

## **2. Methodology of the Research**

### **2.1. Methods Used in the Research**

When looking into theoretical literature and similar foreign studies, it can be found that methodology is different in various studies, depending on the aims of such studies. Still, in most of studies, the following major methods were applied:

- direct observation: in institutions (centers for diagnostics, day-care centers, asylums) as well as in the street and in other public places;
- interviews: free and structured interviews. One of the preconditions for researchers has been the knowledge of the local language, as in Longitude Studies in Mexico. (Lusk Mark W. 1989);

The free and structured interviews and direct observation have been acknowledged as the most adequate methods in many studies, because they allow to understand the behavior of children in their social and economic context.

The following methods have also often been used in studies:

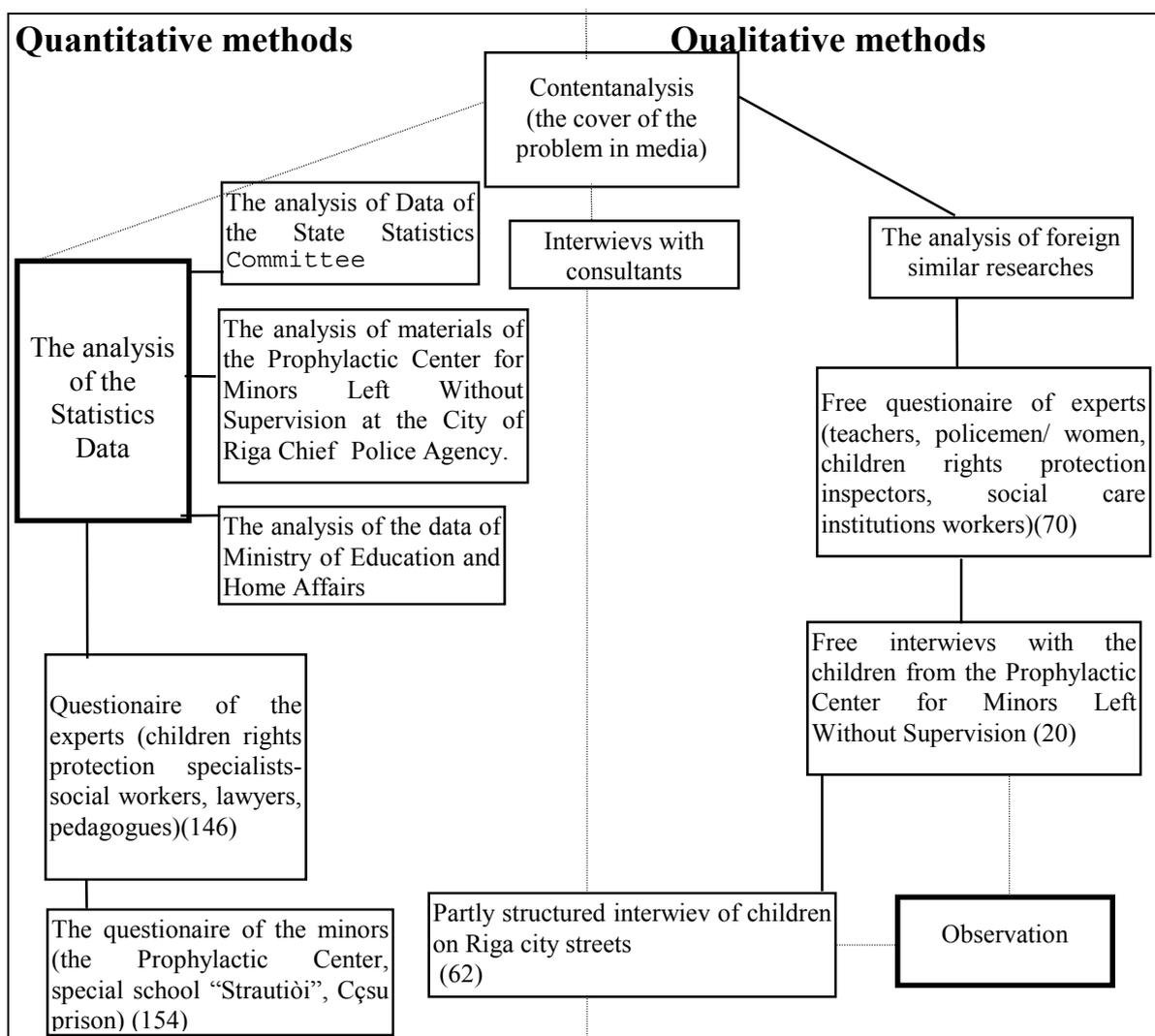
- document analysis (for example, the analysis of biography descriptions);
- standardized psychological tests:
  - 1) to define the mental development of children and to assess intelligence (Kohs S.C., 1923);
  - 2) to identify the emotional, neurological functioning of children (Lewis Aptekar, 1989).

According to the results of our analysis of similar studies, in our research project “Child in the Street” we decided to use a complex set of qualitative and quantitative methods and sources for obtaining primary social information. (Scheme No. 1).

**Methods Used in the Research:**

- Theoretically-logical analysis (similar foreign studies).
- Historical analysis.
- Analysis of documents.
- Analysis of statistical data.
- Direct observation.
- Content analysis.
- Interview method:
  - free and partially structured interviews;
  - questionnaires.

Scheme No. 1 *Methods used in the research*



**According to its structure, the research had 3 stages:**

**The 1st stage** (October 1996 - December 1996): mainly quantitative research methods were used. Similar foreign studies were analyzed; terms were defined, including

the term of “street children”; further research methods clarified; and the experience of Latvia (in the twenties and thirties) in dealing with the problem of “street children” was analyzed. Primary information was gathered through free interviews: by interviewing adolescents at the Prophylactic Center for Minors Left Without Supervision at the City of Riga Chief Police Agency. At the same time, free expert interviews (by 70 experts) and document analysis (materials of the State Statistics Committee and of the Prophylactic Center) were carried out.

**The 2nd stage** (January 1997 - July 1997): mainly quantitative research methods were applied in the process of gathering empirical information: the analysis of interviews with respondents of different categories and of statistical materials.

To find out the expert opinion about those social factors who cause the problem of “street children” and bar children from primary education, a questionnaire was prepared for expert opinion (Supplement No. 1). Three categories of experts were interviewed:

- Social workers whose field of activities includes work with children from social risk and unfavorable families;
- Workers of educational institutions;
- Legal professionals from law enforcement institutions who, along with other offenders, deal with prevention for juvenile offenders.

Data of those questionnaires were analyzed and Summarized, the respondents of which were working in their capacity for more than two years and so could give their competent opinion about the problem of “street children” in general.

In order to carry out comparative analysis between the opinions of experts and opinions of adolescents from different categories regarding the factors which determine the emergence of the problem of “street children”, a questionnaire was developed for interviewing adolescents (Supplement No. 2). Children were interviewed at the Prophylactic Center (at Alises iela 3a), juvenile offenders at the Special School “Strautiõi”, and in the Prison of Cçsis.

**The 3rd stage** (August 1997 - December 1997): a partially structured survey of “street children” was carried out in the City of Riga (62 minors were interviewed), and -- at the same time -- direct observation on the street was carried out.

The survey was focused on finding out the causes which have prompted children to their “street life-style” as well as on drafting a general social portrait of “street children”. The questions in the survey were about the family of the “street children”, about their activities, school attendance, characterization of the street environment, the attitudes of the public and children of the same age towards the “street children”, and about their values and expectations from the future.

Also, the conclusions from the course projects of students of the Higher School for Social Work and Social Pedagogics *Attistiba* on the causes of children’s vagrancy in the Vidzeme and Latgale Borough (I. Lobanova, 1997; V. Dimiõa, 1997) were summarized.

After the data of the survey were processed, a report was prepared and recommendations worked out on strategies for dealing with the problem.

## **2.2. The Information Base for the Research**

### **1. Statistical data:**

- Data of the Citizenship and Immigration Department of the Ministry of Interior about the minors registered in the Population Register;

- Data of the Ministry of Education and Science about school attendance by children;
- Data of the State Statistics Committee, including the data of the study carried out with support of the World Bank about the household budgets in 1996.

## **2. Interviews:**

- with “street children” in the City of Riga: 62 minors were interviewed (partially structured interview; Supplement No. 5).
- with children who were placed at the Prophylactic Center for Minors Left Without Supervision (20 free interviews).
- with teachers, police officers, children’s rights protection inspectors, workers of social assistance services, on the level of cities and districts (70 interviews);
- interviews with:
  - \* Professor William Meezan, Study Program Director at the Social Work School of the University of South California (USA);
  - \* Professor Tamar Cohen, from the Meitel Center for Treatment of Child Sexual Abuse in Israel.

## **3. Surveys according to special questionnaires**

### **Of experts:**

- 60 social workers;
  - 49 educators;
  - 37 legal professionals
- (Total number of experts: 146)

### **Of minors:**

- 14 adolescents placed at the Prophylactic Center for Minors Left Without Supervision at the City of Riga Chief Police Agency;
- 70 adolescents placed at the Special Regime Rectification Institution “Strautiõi”, in the District of Alûksne;
- 70 adolescents convicted for crimes and placed at the Prison of Cēsis.

## **3. Analysis of Terminology and Operational Concepts (Defining the “Street Children”)**

Until now, no studies of “street children” have been carried out in Latvia, and therefore no criteria are defined, according to which children could be included in this group. Studies have been carried out at the Higher School *Attīstība* about vagrancy, homelessness, begging, illiteracy, juvenile crime, etc., which are partially related to the problems of “street children”, but there is no unified definition of “street children” in these studies. Taking into account that it is not so simple -- to define the border where the “street child” starts, this term is often applied differently, depending on the interests and the focus of attention of the user of this term. So, for example, in the educational aspect, “street children” are equaled to “failing” or “outcast children” who should be at school according to their age but who actually are outside any social, educational or even a rehabilitation institution. They are outside the normal social control which includes all the rest of the children of the same age. As different studies in the world show, these are most often boys between the age of 5 and 18 years. Their links with the family differ: some of them have a certain contact with the family, others have no relations at all, and there are also those who are directly conflicting with the family. They live in all possible places in the city: in the street, in abandoned houses, in railroad stations, ports, parking lots, marketplaces, shopping malls, tunnels, etc.

For the purposes of both theoretical as well as practical analysis of the situation, it is very important to use precise terminology. “Street children” is the basic term which actually refers to a large number of problems.

Although we can find references in various cultures and literature about children who could be regarded as “street children”, the very term “street child” was created only in the 1980s to identify children who have optioned or have been forced to spend most of their time in the street in different activities. Most of these definitions come from North America, especially from literature about vagrants and homeless persons (J.G. Cosgrove, 1990).

According to the classification of UNICEF, the concept of a “child in especially difficult / hard circumstances” includes the following categories:

1. working children;
2. **street children**;
3. neglected and abandoned children;
4. children involved in armed conflicts or natural disasters.

All these categories are not exclusive in relation to each other: both street children as well as working children can, at the same time, be victims of abuse and neglect. On the other hand, many children may become street children or working children as a result of armed conflicts or natural disasters.

It is still problematic to precisely define the “street child”, and the term is in the process of further clarification. Initially, the term “street children” was applied equally to all city children who spend most of their time in the street, whether working or not. However, more and more often this term is also applied to those children who have very tenuous links with their families or no links at all and who have worked out specific survival strategies of their own.

When analyzing studies about “street children” carried out in different countries, it should be noted that various approaches are used to define what a “street child” is:

- in many studies, the **basic definition** used is the “street child” definition of the United Nations adapted to specific conditions of the given country. According to this definition, “street child” is any boy or girl for whom the street has become his/her usual residence and/or source of sustenance, while the adults, who are responsible for them, fail to provide adequate protection, supervision and direction for them (ICCB, 1985).

This definition is important for our research, since it includes both children who keep some linkage with their families while working in the street -- full- or half-time, as well as those who have no contacts with the family and who literally live in the street.

- There are definitions which are more of a descriptive character and consist of several parts; taking certain conditions as the basic criteria, such as: what links the child has with the family, what are the available shelters, as well as other aspects.

In the regional UNICEF Report for South Asia, “street child” is defined as follows:

1. children who have uninterrupted, lasting links with the family but who, together with their parents, spend most of their time in the street: working, begging, etc.
2. working children who spend all their days and some nights on the streets, in public places. Children who have rare contacts with their families.
3. children in the street: orphans, vagrant children, refugees who have no contacts with their families at all.

As the basis for this definition, the division into 3 groups, developed by UNICEF (UNICEF, 1986), has been used:

1. “candidates” -- children who may become “street children” (children who work in the street while living in the family) or live in families under extreme poverty;
2. “children in the street” -- children who have inadequate / sporadic support from their families (most often these are families of alcoholics, drug addicts, single mothers, large families);
3. “street children” -- children who live without any support from their families.

Similarly, in the regional UNICEF Report for Latin America, these children are divided into three large categories:

1. Children-at-high-risk. They are defined as children (boys and girls) who live in utter poverty, in shelters with extremely deficient environment, without provision for basic needs. Most of these children are under inadequate supervision by their parents, many of them live in slums, with no utilities, without adequate schools, etc.
  2. Children-in-street. This category of children consists of those boys and girls who are in the street mainly to work. These children spend much of their time in the street environment. They keep their contacts with the family but do not attend school regularly. Since the distance between their homes and the places where they “work” may be large, they sometimes also spend their nights in the street, in staircases, parks, under bridges or in abandoned buildings.
  3. Children of the street. Boys and girls for whom the street environment is their primary living space. These are children who are either neglected or orphans, or (what is most often) have fled their homes. The street -- is the place where they work from time to time and it is also their home. This is the place where their values are transformed according to the “ethics of the street”. The children of this category grow up completely outside the framework of the two major socialization institutions: the school and the family.
- There are definitions based on the following division:
    - \* runaways -- children who regularly leave their homes without parents’ permission;
    - \* throwaways -- children whom their parents have prompted to leave the home or who have been abandoned by their parents, as well as those who have suffered abuse and neglect by their parents (Nye & Edelbrock, 1980; Richter, 1989).
  - Many definitions of “street children” reflect the **specific features** of the particular country or the **interests and focus of attention of the users of this term / definition** (See Table No. 1).

*Table No. 1 Definitions of street children in foreign studies*

Country	Definition of “street children”
<u>India</u>	The term “street child” is applied to those children <u>who earn money</u> (including in illegal way) in the city streets. In other words: these are <u>street-based working children</u> or children in the street. Only few of them actually live in the street, and they have weak ties with their families -- they are <u>children of the street</u> . (L. Fonseca, D.D. Malhotra, 1994)

<u>Thailand</u>	Street children are defined as children without permanent home, who roam around public places, earn their living in the street and who are subject to being involved in crimes. (Santaputrat, Washanavongs, Thaiarry, 1990)
<u>Myanmar</u> (former Burma)	Children who are without family, or whose ties with the family are so weak that they can be met at home very rarely. (Yangon UNICEF, 1992)
<u>Malaysia</u>	Street children are included into a wider category of children who are in need of protection and care or who are at risk. (Keen, 1992)
<u>Cambodia</u>	Children without the family support who are often in the street, either to beg or to earn their living, or children <u>whose households are managed by women</u> and who lack care and attention, are classified as “street children”. (Cruz, 1992)
<u>China</u>	“Street children” are mainly referred to as those who do not attend school and who abandon their studies at school -- the nine-year mandatory education. (Xiang, 1990)
<u>Vietnam</u>	Thousands of children who live in the street are called children of the dust. Three categories have been defined: 1. abandoned children and children left without shelter; 2. children who go home to their families; 3. children of street families (i. e. families who themselves live in the street, in slums, etc.). (Childhope Asia, 1992)
<u>Jakarta</u>	Two categories have been defined: 1. children who work in the street; 2. children who live in the street. (CCIPS, ICWF-Childhope, 1992)
<u>Denmark</u>	The following definition is offered in the report on “street children”: “Street children are children and adolescents before the age of 18 who spend some shorter or longer time in a special street environment -- in special places: around the central railroad station, in squatter houses (arbitrarily occupied, abandoned houses, where communes of youngsters settle and live), in shopping malls and other places of the city. Street children are young people who have lost their ties with the family and whose basic ties are with the groups in the street environment. They may nominally have the address of their parents or affiliation with some institution, but the basic difference is that they practically spend very few time in these places, and there are no adults -- parents, school, institutions or social charity establishments -- with which they would have closer (binding) relations.” (Soren Juul, 1992)
<u>Nepal</u>	This is a special category of homeless persons: “street children” are children who live in the street, beg, work as ragmen and regular workers, for example, as porters. The definition “homeless street children” comprises: children who are not an active part of their households (families) and who earn their living with their own work. (Methods Used in Research with Street Children in Nepal, Rachel Baker, Catherine Panter-Brick, Alison Todd)
<u>Columbia</u>	The term “street children”, when used in the press and even among professionals, usually implies that these children have been suddenly abandoned by their families, and they are often abandoned children indeed. Furthermore, the term implies that these children have nowhere else to live, apart from the street, and that they have no families. (Lewis Aptekar, 1989)

When defining the phenomenon of “street children”, it should be kept in mind that there is a difference between street children in the welfare countries and in the developing ones (Forrest, Tyler, Tyler & Echeverry, 1986):

1. *In the developing countries, “street children” include mainly boys who have completely abandoned their homes and fully understand that life in the street is nothing romantic nor a means of social protest.*

2. *On the other hand, in the welfare states, a typical “street child” is rather a girl from a white family or youngsters from families with medium and higher incomes who*

*have abandoned their homes for a short period of time because of inter-personal or family conflicts.*

Richter (Richter, 1991) discovered that the average age of “street children” in Third-World countries is 11-16 years. This is different from the First-World countries where the average age of street children is over 16 years. In the Third-World countries (for example, South-Africa), children have the tendency to stay in the street for longer periods of time than children in the First-World countries -- mainly because they have no alternative shelter, home, or adequate family conditions. (Johan Le Roux, 1996; Richter, L.M., 1991; Ross, C., 1996.) Thus, the phenomenon and the term of “street children” is to be viewed in the concrete socio-economic, political and cultural context of the given country.

Although there are different approaches how to define and describe the phenomenon of “street children”, there are still some common features:

- these are children who try to avoid / escape unbearable conditions at home or in their direct environment;
- these are children who have undertaken to direct and control their own lives by themselves;
- they are easy targets for exploitation ;
- most of them have abandoned / left a disorderly family environment, in which violence, alcoholism, alienation and other factors reign;
- these are children who do not believe that the society will protect them.

In this research, the definition of the United Nations was adapted:

**“Street child” is any boy or girl for whom the street is the basic environment of socialization and has become his/her usual residence and/or source of sustenance, while the adults, who are responsible for him/her, fail to provide adequate protection, supervision and direction.**

**These children and adolescents have the following typical features:**

- 1) They have some permanent place of stay on the street and also some permanent occupation (a way of earning money for food, clothes, even for the gambling machines, etc.).**
- 2) They form their own social group which is for them a means of survival.**
- 3) Often they do not attend school or attend it irregularly, they have no close relations with adults (including school, local governments).**
- 4) They spend most of their time in the street environment and usually have very weak ties with their families. Their parents are not interested in the life style of these children.**

#### **4. The “Child in the Street” in Latvia in 1920s and 1930s**

In today’s Latvia, we do not have precise records about children not attending school, and we also have no compiled and summarized information about the “street children” and the extent of illiteracy. The existing information is imprecise and does not fully reflect the actual situation. It should be noted that Latvia already encountered similar problems in 1920s and 30s, during the first independence period, and acquired a certain experience in dealing with these problems.

Certainly, the causes of these problems were then different from what they are now, but we still believe that the analysis of the experience of 1920s and 30s could help us to better understand the problem of “street children” in today’s Latvia and could help to analyze our situation, thus allowing to plan activities to improve the situation.

Twenties and thirties was the period of independent nationhood. At that time, there were many children left in the street without provision, and usually they did not attend school, either. In 1920s and 30s, these children were categorized as orphans, but today we would call them “street children”. The “street children” in the inter-war Latvia were generally defined as children not attending school. Therefore this problem was mainly dealt with mainly through improvement of the system of education. During that time, the Latvian Government started to use the term “social policy”. The term included the efforts of the Government to improve the standard of living of socially disadvantaged persons by developing a welfare system and thus decreasing poverty levels. Just after establishing the independent nation in 1919, radical changes had to be carried out, forming a completely new economic, social and education system.

The Government focused on the problem of illiteracy. Illiteracy was defined as inability to write and read. As compared with 1913, the number of illiterate persons had slightly decreased in 1919. Data show that in 1913, there were 78% of children below the age of 10 who could neither read nor write. In 1919, there were 75% of such children. This slight improvement can be explained by the war, since the number of youngest classes at school was reduced during the war. As the war continued, the number of illiterate school-age children grew larger. In the age of 8 - 11 years, there were 2840 illiterates against 10,708 children who could read and write. Data about the educational level of the population were obtained during the censuses. Such census was made on 2 February 1919. In 1925, there were 1845 thousand people in Latvia, of which 25.11% were illiterate, and 14.72% of illiterates were older than 10. In the said year, there were 12.66% of illiterate persons in Riga. In the age group of 10 - 15 years, there were 11.83% illiterate children in Latvia, and 7.74% illiterates -- in the age group of 15 - 20 years (Data from *Izglītības ministrijas mēnešraksts* [Monthly Bulletin of the Ministry of Education], 1925).

In connection with proclamation of the independent Latvian nation, the school had also to be put on new, nationally-cultural foundations. The whole system of education had to be formed anew, since there were no statistical data about the situation in schools. Part of the data from the time of the Russian rule disappeared as the Russian authorities collapsed, and the remaining data had no value. The new local governments had at first rely more on intuition rather on certain statistical data. The situation in Latvia today is somehow similar. In 1919, the Ministry of Education issued an order: to gather statistical data about the schools. According to the data submitted by the inspectors of primary schools, there were 864 Latvian-language primary schools and secondary schools with primary classes in the autumn and winter of 1919, but these data are incomplete, since the schools did not send complete information. In 735 schools, there were 65078 students at that time.

There is a similar situation in Latvia today. On 4 June 1996, the Republic of Latvia Cabinet of Ministers passed Regulations No. 194, “Regulations for Recording School-Age Children. According to Decree No. 114, of 06.11.1996, passed by the Republic of Latvia Ministry of Education and Science, the “Instructions on Documentation in Learning and Educational Institutions to Provide for Recording of School-Age Children and Registration of Movement of Students Between Schools”. Pursuant to these documents, local governments collect information about children who do not attend school. However, they do not involve such children in the learning process at school.

The foundations of the Latvian educational system were laid during the Congress of Teachers in Tõrbata (Dorpat, now: Tartu), in 1917. The Congress of Teachers later in Riga adopted the educational system worked out during the Congress in Tõrbata. Furthermore, the school systems existing in other countries were studied, for example, in Norway, Sweden, to develop an educational system most appropriate for that time in pedagogic terms. In the Law on Educational System in Latvia, studies were divided into three stages:

1. House-teaching or pre-school, for children aged 7-8;
2. Primary school, for children aged 9-14;
3. Secondary school or the alternative supplementary school, for children aged 15-16;

For comparison, the division in today's Latvia:

1. Starting school, for children aged 7-10 (forms 1 - 4);
2. Primary school, for children aged 11-15 (forms 5 - 9);
3. Secondary school, for children aged 16-18 (forms 10 - 12);

The popular higher school was continuation and completion for the supplementary school. It was defined in Clause 33 of the Law on Educational System, that education is compulsory for every Latvian citizen from the age of six and up to sixteen.

The Law on People's Education, passed on 12 June 1934, and the Law on the Culture Fund laid down the new foundations for education and culture. The Law on People's Education, together with corresponding amendments to the Statute of the Ministry of Education, included new tasks for education and the issue of the national school, and it also introduced a united and centralized school management and leadership system. According to the new regulations on school management, all the institutions reporting to the Ministry of Education were united into one Schools' Department. In order to establish which children from the corresponding age must start their schooling, every local government had, not later than 4 weeks before the start of the school year, to register all the children who had reached the school age. These lists were sent to the headmasters of the respective schools, so that they could follow that the Law on People's Education is duly observed. In addition to these regular registrations, there were also wider registrations, targeted to children who, for one reason or another, did not attend school.

Such registrations took place during the population census. There was a point in the census card about school attendance. These data allowed to find out the number of children who did not attend school. In this way, information was obtained about children who did not attend school in 1925 and 1930. Since the census data only registered facts but did not explained the causes for them, the Schools' Department organized a special registration for children not attending school. Such registrations were carried out in the school years 1921/22, 1923/24, 1927/28, 1936/37 (see Table No. 2). The data given in the table show that in the course of fifteen years (1920 - 1935), the number of children, found out during the population censuses as not attending school, diminished, for example, the number of children not attending school, in the age 8 - 14 years, was 151883 in 1920. In 1925, there were only 66532 such children, in 1930 -- 34217, and in 1935 -- 36739. Thus, the number of children not attending school declined more than four times, as compared with 1920.

*Table No. 2      The number and percentage of children not attending school*

Age	1920		1925		1930		1935	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
8 years	30201	82.01	11581	57.09	10659	35.70	13057	38.92
9 "	23043	70.35	9640	40.15	5258	20.28	5315	15.61
10 "	23814	62.24	8876	27.83	2908	12.43	2615	7.89

11 “	14721	49.57	7108	22.07	2297	9.91	1995	5.85
12 “	21010	50.32	7613	20.60	2281	12.01	2529	7.68
13 “	17985	50.21	8865	25.09	3702	18.20	4223	13.58
14 “	21109	57.35	12849	35.77	7112	30.24	7005	26.42
Total:	151883	60.14	66532	30.72	34217	20.71	36739	16.30

Among the children not attending school in 1920s and 30s, were also children with physical and mental disabilities. Before the war, there were the following educational institutions for children with various disabilities in Latvia: schools for deaf and dumb children in Riga, Jelgava, Valmiera, the Institute for Deaf Children in Strazdmuiža; Correction Labor Colony for juvenile offenders in Ropāži, a department for children in the psychiatric institution near Jelgava.

When the World War One began, these schools were closed, except for the school for deaf children in Riga. In February 1920, the Latvian Government, through the official publication “Valdības Vēstnesis” ordered the district boards to carry out registration of deaf and dumb and blind children. Schools for deaf and dumb children were organized in the regions of Vidzeme and Kurzeme. The City of Riga Social Security Department in Riga later opened a school and asylum for children with physical and mental disabilities. The educational institution was again opened for juvenile offenders at the Seminar in Irlava, and later the Institute for Blind Children was opened in Strazdmuiža.

In December 1920, there were 435,000 children in Latvia. 90,000 of these children were those who were injured during the war and orphans; 4000 of them were in asylums, 5000 were provided for outside asylums. 43000 were fed once a day by the American Assistance Administration. Further 52,000 children received benefits of one kind or another. The question is, however, how did the other 40,000 children survived?

The Union for Helping Children was established in Geneva to fight children’s destitution and death. The Union had 15 memberstates, and Latvia was one of them. Under the Red Cross Society, a Latvian Union for Helping Children was established. It included leaders from various non-governmental organizations: Women’s Help Corps, the Internal Mission, Latvian Charity Society, the Red Cross , etc.

In 1928, the Children’s Protection Office of the Baltic States was organized, the Latvian Society of the Friends of Children started its activities, and by the end of 1930s, the Children’s Provision Committees were organized in the rural counties of Latvia. There are also new non-governmental organizations in the modern Latvia which have started activities in the field of protecting children, and international institutions (including the United Nations) have also shown interest in the children’s situation in Latvia.

## **5. Analysis of the Social Factors of Today which Contribute to Children Getting in the Street**

### **5.1. Socially Disadvantageous Factors which Determine the Formation of the Problem of “Street Children”**

Seven years have passed since the independence of Latvia was restored. This has been the time, during which the transition to the market economy proceeds and radical changes take place in the social, educational, health and other spheres of life. The changes in the economic, social and political processes generate the feeling of instability and

uncertainty in a large part of society. This feeling is even more exacerbated by the changing legislation.

In this situation, when the adults themselves are often unable to manage their problems and when there is vagueness and uncertainty about tomorrow in the whole society, children suffer most, since they are the most vulnerable part of society. Furthermore, the adult problems are often repeated in their children, and the children are in many cases those who have to deal not only with their own but also with the problems of their parents and other adults. It could be said that the life of children in today's Latvia is a precise projection of the processes going on in society as a whole, since children just learn and inherit the life style of their parents and society.

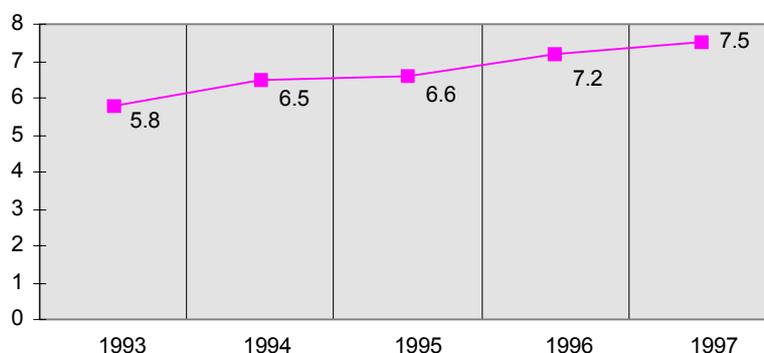
As we analyze those socially disadvantageous factors of today which contribute to children becoming "street children", we should take several factors into account. On the one hand, these are the objective factors created by the economic development and its consequences. On the other hand, there is the own perception of reality by the "street children" themselves, who also have their opinion about what has led them to such a way of life.

If we analyze the economic situation of Latvia today, we can see apparent correlation between the economic situation and those social factors which create the problem of "street children", as well as the socio-demographic processes in society as a whole.

It has been proven that, as the production declines and unemployment grows, various negative social phenomena occur. The standard of living of each particular member of society is defined, first of all, whether he or she works. As the unemployment level rises (see Picture No. 1), the living standard of the population declines.

Under the impact of the growing unemployment, which has now reached 7.5%, there have been negative changes in the structure of consumption by the population. The percentage of moneys spent to buy food and to pay for utilities and rent, has sharply increased in the household budgets. Furthermore, in low-income families, the percentage of these expenditures (up to 75%) is substantially higher than in families with high incomes (up to 47%). It means that the families with low and middle incomes are unable to satisfy their needs for recreation, health care, clothes and footwear, or can only satisfy such needs partially.

Most of these families are unable to provide normal physical and mental development for their children and cannot satisfy their material needs.



*Picture No. 1*                      **The level of unemployment (%)**

Studies, carried out in the world, for example the study of Townsend (1979) in Great Britain, have shown that unemployment or very low income harmfully affect individual

and his or her family. It has not only direct negative influence, as, for example, low-quality food to be used by the family and children raised by it, but also indirect negative impact, in the form of demoralization, depression and social isolation. (Towsend, P. 1979)

As a result of the unstable economic situation, society has stratified, and this process continues, and the number of poor families grows.

**The low living standards of the people is a factor which contributes to children becoming “street children”, since the social needs of the family cannot be fully satisfied under these conditions.**

The level of satisfying the social needs (physiological needs, safety, social contacts, self-esteem, self-realization) of every person, including children, is the basis for the very existence, self-confidence and the ability to act. These needs are the driving factor for the activities of every person, including children. Any of these needs, if left unsatisfied, may be a cause for children leaving their home and becoming “street children”. Children are the group of society which are not legally responsible for their actions, and they cannot protect themselves socially. The protection must be provided by parents, custodians, state authorities, but a large part of families are currently unable to provide normal physical and mental development for their children. Therefore it happens more and more often that children try themselves to obtain the money necessary to satisfy their needs, and often to that during the time when they should be at school.

As a result of the low living standards, a situation has formed in Latvia that a large number of children cannot satisfy even their basic needs (physiological needs, the need for safety, for social contacts) -- children beg in the street or try to earn something by washing cars, since the family cannot provide them with food, clothes, often even with shelter. It happens more and more often that families are evicted from apartments in the houses returned to the house-owners or privatized without giving them any other apartment in place. But there are also children living in these apartments who suffer not only from poverty but often also from dirtiness and demoralization, since their parents are alcoholics. It often happens that these children do not start their studies at school, but rather learn their peculiar survival skills -- by begging and by committing various crimes.

The feeling of safety is one of the most important conditions for harmonious development of the child. However, in the families of alcoholics, and often simply in poor families, where the parents are struggling with their own problems and are living under permanent stress, the children are not protected against negative experiences, against fear from physical or psychological threats. The child is in need of feeling and experiencing all the human emotions, beginning with the love from other people and up to his or her own care for others. Unfortunately, many families in Latvia cannot satisfy these needs of the children.

**The high number of unfavorable families in Latvia is one more factor contributing to the problem of the “street children”.** Many children live in families where the parents are alcoholics or demoralized: according to the data of the Latvian National Statistics Committee, there were 35 694 people registered in medical institutions with the diagnosis: alcoholism or alcoholic psychosis, i. e. 1439 alcoholics per every 100,000 inhabitants. Furthermore, in connection with changes in the registration order of patients and the growth of anonymous state and private medical institutions, many patients prefer to go for treatment in these anonymous institutions and are not recorded in the official registers. Therefore the actual number of alcoholics is even higher. The consumption of all kinds of alcoholic beverages in the country in 1996 was 12 585 thousand deciliters.

Violence against children is an often phenomenon in the families of alcoholics. There are often conflicts in such families, vice, irresponsibility, and other negations, all of

which contribute to driving the children into the street, looking for other forms of protection and survival.

In such families, children are subject to physical, sexual and psychological abuse. Although a new Clause was added to the Criminal Code on 24 March 1992 -- Cruelty Towards and Abuse of Minors (111.1), suffered from a person from whom the victim is materially or otherwise dependent, many children, who have been victims of abuse, continue to live together with the unpunished offenders. In 1995, 21 criminal cases were opened according to Clause 111.1 of the Criminal Code; 22 cases -- in the first six months of 1996. However, such cases are for long periods under investigation and either lose their urgency or, if, as said before, they continue to live with their offenders, the court case harms the child even more.

When analyzing the descriptions of these criminal cases, it can be concluded that, most often, the fathers are those who abuse the children.

**There is a high divorce rate typical for Latvia today** (see Table No. 3). In 1996, the divorce rate was 63% of the marriage registration number, but 5596 children live in these broken families. There are also many children born in Latvia to single women (who were previously called "lonely mothers"); in 1996, 6540 children were born to single women. Most of these children have gone through a serious psychological trauma, together with their families. Without the help of psychologist or any other services, such families and the children in them suffer depression, low self-evaluation. But the children, especially in the age of adolescents, need to have positive self-evaluation, they need acknowledgment and appraisal from their parents and other people. Unfortunately, divorce is factor with negative influence on the self-evaluation of a child, the child feels betrayed, needless, not necessary for anyone. Later these children often have problems with the step-parents, since, as they appear, the child often does not perceive this as his or her own family. The psychological link with parents is broken, and, as a result, the child, in certain cases, leaves the home and goes in the street.

In the broken families, the material provision is often sharply reduced, since the children usually stay to live with their mothers after the divorce, and the mother then becomes the only provider for the family. The support rendered by the father usually depends on his sense of responsibility. In cases of irresponsibility, the collection of the child-support money (alimonies) is very difficult, since the disorderly legislation has created a situation when evasion from the payment of alimony has become easy, and it is very difficult for women to fight for their rights in this respect.

*Table No. 3                      The number of registered marriages and divorces*

	1995	1996
Registered marriages	11072	9634
Divorces	7821	6051

**The large number of broken families, where the children are raised by only one parent, is also one of those major negative factors which contribute to children becoming "street children"**. Such families are, in most cases, poorly provided, and the parents in them are too busy to pay sufficient attention to the child or pay no attention at all. This was also proved by the studies carried out in Great Britain, based on the data of the National Child Development Research. The subject of the research was more than 11000 children born in one week of March, 1958.

The researcher Ferri published most of the results obtained in this research in his book, "Growing up in a One-Parent Family" (1976). On the other hand, Widge and

Prosser, on the basis of the data from the Child Development Research, identified 3 factors which create negative social environment for the child:

- 1) the composition of the family: children are raised by only one parent, or if the family is very large;
- 2) low income level;
- 3) poor life conditions.

In their book, "Born to Fail?", Widge and Prosser note that those children are living under unfavorable conditions who are affected by all three aforementioned factors.

The researcher Smart (1985) pointed out that these three factors are interconnected and are not functioning without each other.

A family provided for by only one of the parents or a very large family is in a socially disadvantageous situation, because it is needy (i. e. incomes do not match needs). If we separate these factors in independent units, we will discern that families cared for only by one of the parents are in itself "incorrect", and the low level of incomes and poor living conditions are additional negative factors. In fact, many children cared for by only one parent are living under socially unfavorable conditions because of the poverty. Researchers (Popey, Rimnensen, Rositer, 1983) have found out one more factor adversely affecting partially families. Failed marriages today can be compared with bankruptcy in deals, in which all people engage and in which most of them apparently succeed. Therefore a situation is created when the father or the mother (as it is most common in Latvia), who raise the children alone, regard his or her situation as abnormal, and the other people have similar attitude. Families with only one parent do not form a uniform group, and the attitudes from other people depend on the concrete conditions which have formed the situation of the given family. The public is more sympathetic towards widows and widowers but is more disapproving of single people raising children as well as divorced people. This differentiating attitude by the public is in itself unfavorable, because, in such situations, the major attention should be on the protection of and help to the children in such families. The attitude towards all children should be equal, independently of what conditions have affected the situation of the family.

There is a disadvantageous situation for large families in today's Latvia. For example, according to information from the Latgale Borough in Riga as of 1 January 1997, 1890 large families lived in this borough. This social group suffers most from lack of moneys, as a result of which 680 families, or 36% of all large families, have been declared poor and granted social assistance allowance. 120 families, or 6% of all large families, are regarded as social risk family, but there are 440 children living in them. 76 children (born before 1982) from the large families in this borough do not study anywhere.

The current state policies show little attention, in the practical aspect, to supporting children and the family. Support for children has rather declarative character, which finds its expression in, for example, ratifying the "International Convention on Children", in passing separate regulations, related to registration of children not attending school or, for example, the payment of children's allowances. The amount of these allowances is so meager that it could not be regarded as serious help to children. On the other hand, there are such developments as the closure of smaller schools in the countryside because of lack of funds, thus barring the children from poor families from the possibility of getting even the basic education, because the fare to the nearest town school is too high as compared with the minimal incomes of their parents. In connection with the growing unemployment levels and the resulting poverty, many parents, especially in the countryside, cannot buy the necessary teaching aids and books for their children. In the cities, because of the lack of funds, institutions for children's out-of-school activities are being closed and interest groups liquidated at schools. Gyms and swimming pools of schools are leased to

businessmen. Therefore children lose opportunities to usefully spend their free time. The void thus created is filled in by the street, which becomes the place where children spend their spare time, where they start to earn some money by selling newspapers, washing cars, begging, stealing, etc. The moneys so earned by the children and the child allowance is often the only income of the family. Children also spend the time on the street when they should be at school. Taking into account that the family is the major provider for children and that it plays the most important role in normal development of children, it may be said that, at the time being, the contribution of state and local governments in supporting families with children, in strengthening their moral and material potential is insufficient.

The phenomenon of "street children" is also, to a large extent, the result of the disorderly Latvian legislation as well as lack of coordination and cooperation between various children's rights protection institutions. The legislation is changing all the time, the norms of the law are often contradictory. The fact that there is no legal interpretation of certain issues of the legislation is often hampering investigation of cases in court and operative help to children and families. The work of state institutions and non-governmental organizations is usually not specialized enough and not sufficiently coordinated.

Since Latvia is a full member of the United Nations, it has acceded to the "Convention on Children's Rights", adopted by the UN General Assembly. In 1994, the Children's Rights Protection Commission was established in Latvia with the purpose to successfully implement the UN "Convention on Children's Rights". This Commission has advisory rights at the Republic of Latvia Cabinet of Ministers on all issues related to children's rights and their social protection.

Furthermore, almost all the ministries of the Government have certain functions which affect the state of the family and children in Latvia. Coordination between the Ministry of Welfare, the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Interior and the Prosecutor's Office is especially important. In 1996, the Children's Rights Protection Center was established, which coordinates and provides methodological assistance to inspectors of children's rights protection centers in the cities and the countryside, analyzes the provision for children's rights in the country and activates various state, local government and non-governmental organizations when the staff of the Center find out about violations against children's rights.

The Children's Rights Protection Center does not have a united data base about all the Latvian children and their education, since the Center does not possess the necessary technical facilities (computers, a united program and computer facilities in the districts of the country to allow it to function as a united system).

It should be noted that the technical provision is today one of the factors which impede to set up a united, precise data base. One of the causes for the fact that the social assistance system for children today is still inadequate in Latvia, is the situation that, while various children's rights protection institutions exist both on the official as well as non-governmental level (there are 30 organizations today registered in the list of non-governmental organizations, the aim of which is the protection of children and the family), they are all, unfortunately, carrying out their activities separately. This situation is, to a large extent, caused by the lack of a national concept of dealing with children's issues.

No legislative acts have been passed in Latvia until now providing for a mechanism how to influence a family which limits the rights of a child to survival, development, education, participation. It is defined, though, in Clause 177 of the Civil Law that "it shall be the direct duty of parents to care -- taking into account, as far as possible, the individuality, abilities, strivings of their children -- for the life and welfare of the children

under their control, to provide them with food, shelter, clothes, to educate and school them, and to prepare the children for useful activities.” Thus, on the one hand, the law defines the responsibility of parents for their children. At the same time, however, the staff of the City of Riga Prophylactic Center for Minors Left Without Supervision<sup>1</sup> (hereinafter referred to as Prophylactic Center) said in interviews that, every day, they encounter difficulties caused by inadequacies of the legislation. There are no laws allowing to exert practical influence on those parents who do not care for their children. Only under the provisions of Clause 173 of the Latvian Code of Administrative Offenses, reports can be made on parents for failing to perform their parental duties of educating and teaching their children. There are many materials at the Prophylactic Center about the anti-social way of life of certain parents whose apartments have become nests of drinking and meeting places for criminals. This information is then forwarded to the Schools Board, but -- in connection with the said inadequacies of the legislation -- there are no ways to practically influence the way of life of these families, apart from imposing fines. There are children of certain families who are repeatedly taken to the Prophylactic Center. Out of 89 children interviewed at the Prophylactic Center (within the framework of the survey of the staff of the Prophylactic Center) 28 strictly refused to return home, because their parents are alcoholics and these children live in half-starvation.

According to the opinions of specialists, 54% of children, who are taken to the Prophylactic Center, are able to pass independent decisions, and they have a sense of responsibility for their actions. Under favorable social conditions, these children are able to adapt fast and forget about the street life. However, due to the shortcomings of legislation and lack of institutions of social care for children, 75% of these children are returned to their families, and no social work is performed with these families. But the fact that these children run away from home is a kind of protest against this situation and the anti-social behavior of their parents.

Likewise, the staff of the Youth Affairs Inspection of the City of Riga Government Police Agency stressed in interviews that the situation is uncontrollable. Those adolescents, who come to the Prophylactic Center from the vicinity of the railroad station and from apartments in which their parents drink heavily, do not stay for long at the Center, since parents take them out from the Center soon. These are their rights. And the adolescent is then in the street again the same evening, This is a kind of vicious circle, said the staff. They believe that this problem could only be solved by introducing radical changes in the control system and by setting up a special police unit which would only be responsible for these things. Latvian specialists believe that an important task would be to set up a special school for those juvenile “street children” who have not yet committed any crime, to prevent them from doing it, taking into account the high prestige and activity of criminal elements in the street environment. They also suggest mandatory medical treatment for juvenile alcoholics, drug addicts, and to coordinate strictly all such measures. Contrary to these opinions of the Latvian specialists, according to foreign practice and the views of

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<sup>1</sup> The City of Riga Prophylactic Center for Minors Left Without Supervision is acting under the supervision of the Republic of Latvia Ministry of Interior and is a closed institution. Police officers and psychologists work in it. The Center provides isolation for children from unfavorable conditions of the family and the street. Sometimes those minors are placed in the Center whose criminal cases are under investigation. For a long time, the Center was the only institution in the country which performed the functions of an asylum. Children aged 3 - 16 are taken to the Center. Altogether 50 places are available. Minors left without supervision or who are vagrant are detained during the time from 23.00 to 6.00, if they are found in the street, in backyards, squares, etc. The minors can be kept at the Prophylactic Center for up to 60 days, and this term may be prolonged for 30 days more under the sanction of a prosecutor. There are no special educational measures carried out at the Center. The major task of it is: to provide temporary shelter for children until they possibly return to their families.

the consultant for this research, Prof. William Meezan, the services to families and children should rather be based on a family-directed approach, not as it is usual now in Latvia, when children are still very often taken out of families, unable to care for their offspring, and placed in large, impersonal institutions -- orphanages, asylums. It is important to carry out work with families and children at home, so as to avoid the necessity to isolate children from the family.

Despite the many legislative acts passed in the recent years, we can see little efforts by the state to care for children. Coordination among all institutions dealing with issues related to, for example, disadvantaged families, is inadequate. There are such institutions as the Municipal Police, the State Police, social services, children's rights protection inspectors, etc., but these institutions mainly only duplicate each other. It is clear that this system must be put in order, and it should be precisely defined what is the task of each of the different services to reach the common aim (protection of children).

**There is a similar situation in the social assistance system: it is staffed with insufficiently qualified personnel, often inappropriate for working with children, and there is lack of social pedagogues and social workers.** The profession of social worker, which could have the most significant role in dealing with the problem of "street children", can be studied in Latvia only since recently. There is lack of understanding, both on the level of the Government as well as among the public, about the functions and necessity of this profession. Social work and social pedagogy are terms which describe services intended for correcting social problems in industrial society, to render "social assistance" and to help people to integrate in society. Assistance to the youth, which is the most important and wider field of activities for the social work, is differentiated in the following branches: work at residences, special fields of work, work at youth assistance institutions.

The following account of separate fields of assistance to adolescents is rendered in the Catalogue of Rural Youth Institutions of the Federal Labor Department of Germany [*Ein Katalog der Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft der Landesjugendsämter*] (Ðiðeva, 1997):

1. Social work at residencies. Tasks: general assistance to adolescents, consultations on issues of education (consulting in functional education), institutional care and family raising, assistance to the youth on issues of justice and custody, patronage over endangered adolescents, social work with adolescents.
2. Special fields of organized work: adoption and issues of adopted children, assistance in raising children with presence, custody, assistance to youth and adolescents in cases of probation sentences, consulting and training for children and families (for example, consultations on educational issues and youth consultations, marriage and family consultations).

To deal with a concrete issue, one of the aspects in the work of a social pedagogue is additional education (socio-emotional education), i. e. assistance in cases when the family and the educational institution fail to provide the necessary positive environment. One of the tasks of the social pedagogue is to create conditions helping the child and the family to overcome difficult situations. Thus, the social pedagogue is acting as an intermediary between individual needs and society. The social worker and social pedagogue must be ready to render assistance to the child and the family when they encounter problems in their everyday life, in studies, behavior, communication. The aim of the work is to help to identify evaluate and try to find solution of how to overcome social and emotional difficulties in the family.

There are also no social workers of the street in Latvia at the time being, but they would be necessary to deal with the problems of “street children” (to find out the causes, to compile statistics, to work with children, their families, to coordinate activities between various children’s rights protection institutions, to develop strategies for dealing with problems, etc.). The major function of a social pedagogue is to work with the family for the benefit of the child. The services of social pedagogues are necessary to provide children with positive solutions in many situations, as, for example, when discrepancies emerge in the family or when a crisis has already occurred. The children must stay in their biological environment, receiving, at the same time, all necessary support. If children need to be isolated from the family for a time, they should be better placed with their relatives, to maintain continuity of relations and the feeling of safety which only relatives can give.

There are no strong links in today’s Latvia between governmental institutions and non-governmental organizations (NGO). The state and local governments very rarely provide any practical support to the initiatives and target programs of NGOs. This cannot be explained just by lack of funds, but rather by distrust towards these organizations, may be also by competition.

**The usual situation in Latvia today is that, in most cases, assistance both from the non-governmental organizations as well as from state social services goes to those who request that assistance themselves or about whom other persons have reported.** Therefore many disadvantageous families (and the children in them, of course) remain outside the receivers of such assistance, since the parents are often degraded to such an extent that they would not even go and ask for help, while the children in these families cannot do that themselves. And the assistance which is still actually rendered is not related to searching for and eliminating causes but only trying to deal with the consequences of problems.

There is no system, worked out in the country, for working with children who do not study, do not work, who wander around, beg. That should be a system which would provide children with assistance according to the conditions of their family and taking into account the level of their physical and mental development. The problem of “street children” is today extensively reported in the press and television. There are conferences and seminars organized discussing the problems of the protection of children, but all the documents drafted by them are rather on the level of ideas and projects, while no unifying concept for the protection of children’s rights has been developed. Each branch works in a relatively narrow field, including the protection of children’s rights in their projects only to the extent of the competence of the given institution, leaving many problems outside the range of resolved issues. The problem of “street children” is often one of these. Thus, for example, the Ministry of Welfare has prepared the “White Book”, which is a project for social assistance administration within the framework of the Latvian social welfare system reform. This project provides, in order to stop the tendency of growing number of children left without parental care, for more focus on increased responsibility of parents for sustaining their children, and the need is stressed in the project for local governments to more precisely target poor families and families-at-risk. However, this is only one aspect of the problem. Also, the draft is now being prepared for the Law on the Protection of Children’s Rights, but the Law is still in the preparation stage.

Taking into account that one of the tasks of this research was to investigate the link between the two phenomena: “children not attending school” and “street children”, a special focus was put on analyzing this problem (for more details, see Section 7). However, it should be mentioned at this point that **problems of adolescents at school is one of the causes why children get in the street.** The British author Robinson (1976) wrote that the

problems of education are related to unresolved issues both on micro as well as on macrolevel. On the macro level, these problems find their expression as bad school progress and low level of development of the child, caused by unfavorable conditions at home where the child does not feel safe, by insufficient material resources and by considerable configuration of unfavorable conditions. The unresolved problems on the macro level are related to the general state policies.

According to the data from the practical survey, carried out at the Higher School *Attīstība*, "Problems of the Youth in Their Own View", 82% of the 675 interviewed students of forms 7 - 12 said that they feel a certain discomfort at school. Only 5% of students answered with *No* the question of whether they are afraid of teachers at school. Only 4% of students feel happy, 18% said they are unhappy, and 47% - rather unhappy than happy. A similar research, in which 400 secondary school students were interviewed in the City of Riga, revealed the 3 following problem fields:

- 1) problems of communication: most often, the adolescents referred to the aforementioned discrepancies in the family. Only 35% of the adolescents interviewed said that there are no conflicts in the family. They mentioned the daily overload and stress as the major cause of conflicts. 53% of students have often conflicts with their mothers, which is evidence that, in most families, only the mother deals with the issues related to raising the children. Consideration should be given to the fact that only 7% of the students interviewed were ready to discuss their problems with their teachers;
- 2) socioeconomic problems. Students are uncertain about continuing their education, because education is very expensive (57.7% wish to continue their studies but have financial difficulties);
- 3) problems of self-evaluation. In most cases, adolescents do not feel confident, many said that they feel as if nobody needs them (notably, many of them are from broken families).

After analyzing the situation, we can conclude that, under the present conditions of social crisis, educational institutions, because of various objective and subjective reasons, are unable to effectively perform the functions entrusted upon them. Likewise, the survey of experts confirmed that there are many negative factors at school affecting children unfavorably. Experts named the following negative factors:

- low discipline in educational institutions (86%);
- insufficient qualification of pedagogues, especially in the field of social pedagogy (81%);
- insufficient educational work at school (73%);
- insufficient fields of activities for students after school (72%);
- unsatisfactory cultural and entertaining events for students in educational institutions (65%).

The first reasons for not attending school, apart from economic causes, often are conflicts with teachers and classmates. Part of students, with lower study progress, are alienated from school because they are unsuccessful. For the pedagogically failed children, school is not the referential place where they could meet their need for self-assertion and where they could enhance their status and prestige by integrating in their class and in the system of mutual relations. It rather happens the other way: failures in studies cause psychological discomfort and lead adolescents to search for other network of communication and for other referential group. When feeling the discomfort at school, adolescents option for another environment where they can assert and realize themselves. The result is absence from school, vagrancy, involvement in different groups, often even criminal ones.

A few years ago, when the financial difficulties started, many facilities for students' out-of-school activities were closed, interest groups abandoned. The view was propagated that children must be raised in the family and that the society has only secondary role. Unfortunately, not all families are ready to take up the educational functions. This drastic change in circumstances led to the situation that more and more children are vagrant and begging in the street.

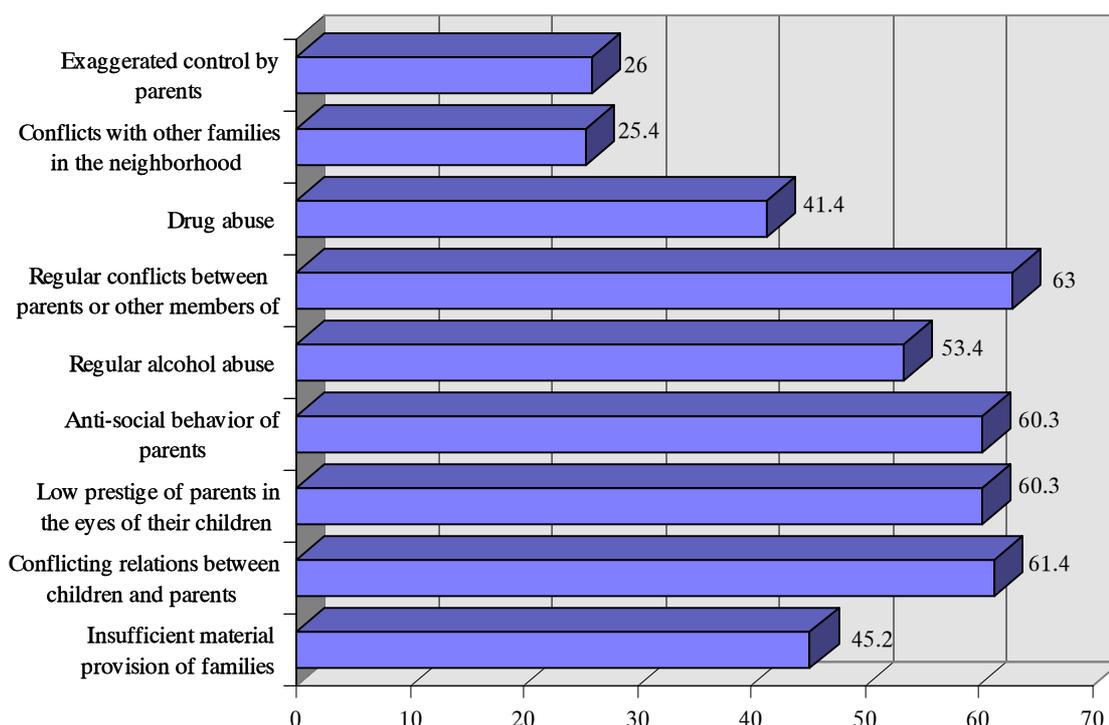
The survey of experts carried out within the framework of the research and interviews with specialists who deal with issues of children's rights protection and preventive activities against juvenile offenses, helped to reveal further causes behind the emergence of the problem of "street children". Thus, the staff of the **Youth Affairs Inspection and school inspectors said, during the interviews, that one of the causes for vagrancy among children is the fact that the former links between the family, the school, the society and various state institutions were fully severed and that nothing new has been formed instead.**

Parents do not feel responsible for their children, the state is not responsible for the family and the school does not feel any responsibility towards the children. There are also no organic connections between the institutions dealing with the problems of child-raising, there is no information exchange, no experience is pooled, no coordination of work done.

The school inspectors, teachers and the staff of the Youth Affairs Inspection also pointed out, as to an important cause for vagrancy among children, to the eviction of insolvent families from apartments, when the whole family, including children, is left out in the street, or when such families, on their own initiative, exchange their previous good apartments with all utilities against apartments without utilities. As a result of such change of residency, the living standard of the family is reduced dramatically, and this a serious psychological trauma, especially for adolescents.

Taken as a whole, the results of the surveys within the research "Child in the Street", in addition to the aforementioned objective social factors which contribute to children becoming "street children", allowed us to reach the conclusion that about 80% of families are not satisfactory provided for. Approximately half of the families with children live under poor conditions. According to the opinions of experts, each third family in Latvia could be regarded as a disadvantageous family, i. e. such which cannot provide harmonious development for the child.

More than half of the experts (53%) noted that excessive alcohol abuse is regular in many families, and experts also believe that regular conflicts between parents or other members of the family (63%) as well as conflicts between children and parents (61.4%) (see Picture No. 2) are among the more usual negative social factors which contribute to children becoming "street children". Experts also pointed out to the anti-social behavior of many parents in Latvia today and to the fact that, in many families, parents have very low prestige in the eyes of their children (60.3%). In the opinion of experts, such phenomena as exaggerated control by parents over children and conflicts with other families in the neighborhood are relatively rare.



Picture No. 2 *Socially unfavorable factors in families (joint assessment by experts %)*

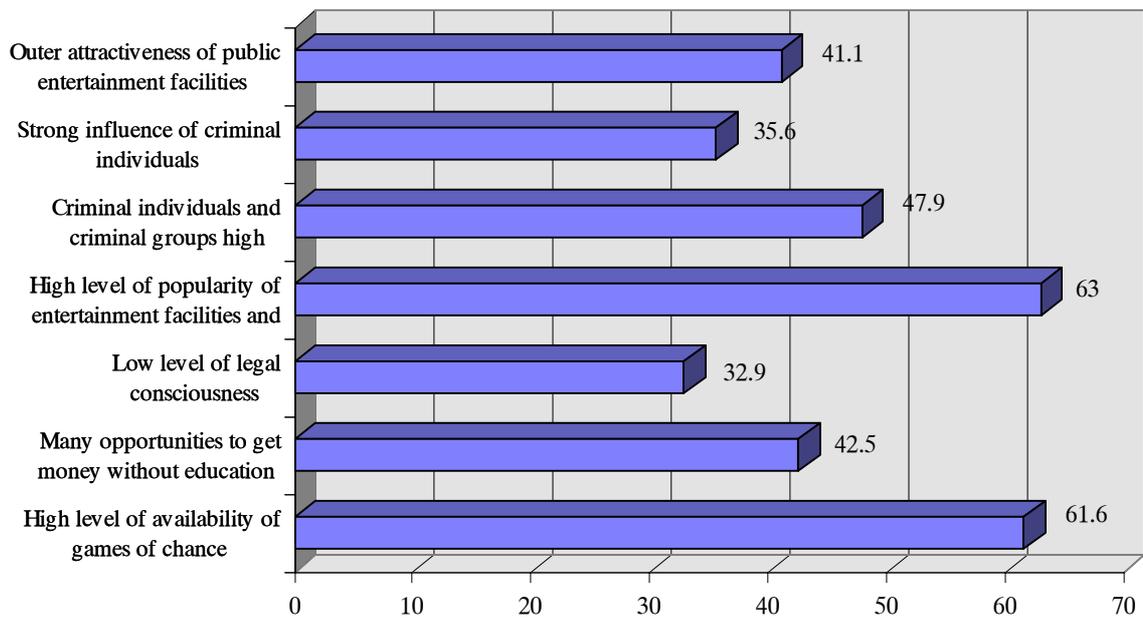
Of course, social communication and informal environment -- the street, public places, etc. -- play significant role in the process of the child's personality development. On the one hand, the street has a combined developing, communicative and educational function, but, on the other hand, as the street becomes externally more attractive, it starts to act as intensive and very strong source of influence, which is often very contradictory. Apart from positive factors in social micro-environment, there are more and more socially unfavorable factors. Experts noted the following developments in the structure of spare-time activities of adolescents in Latvia today:

- 1) the role of games of chance and gambling machines is increasing. Games of chance are related to intensified emotional activity, excitement, egotism, fixed orientation towards money acquisition, even in amounts which an adolescent does not have and cannot have. At the same time, real possibilities for employment and opportunities to have some real income from work are very scanty and limited;
- 2) enhanced prestige and popularity of public entertainment facilities (cafes, discos, bars, etc.) among children and adolescents. Adolescents are much more willing to spend more time gambling-machine halls, discos, or simply in the street than at home, in the family or at school (see Picture No. 3).

As experts pointed out, the influence of criminal individuals and criminal groups in such public entertainment facilities is high, and they are popular among adolescents. The street is today for many children in Latvia a place where they can get money without education.

We can conclude: although the street life is not something so exiting that many youngsters would like to choose it, it still has its own special attraction. Many adolescents feel happy when they can decide for themselves, where they will sleep, that they have get

rid of the parents and their instructions what they may and may not do. Furthermore, most of the “street children” have an incredible sense of solidarity, and, when living in their street group, they get the necessary protection from others, and they often get satisfaction to those needs what the family could not provide for them. On the one hand, the street group becomes a survival tool for the children, but, on the other hand, this group will often abuse the child and lead him or her to crime. We can conclude that children get in the street environment when they are in a certain stressful situation: on the one hand -- a disadvantageous family, discomfort at school and among friends; on the other hand -- attractiveness of positive features which children have discovered in the street -- independence, opportunities to earn money, to get rid of studies, etc.



*Picture No. 3 The influence of socio-communicative processes and the environment on the vagrancy of children (total assessment by experts in %)*

In the course of the research, the activities of various governmental and non-governmental institutions and organizations in dealing with the problems of “street children” were analyzed. The experts interviewed rendered different evaluations to activities of various organizations in preventing and eliminating the problem of “street children”. In a 5-points scale, the experts gave the highest assessment to the Minors Affairs Inspection (4.1), units of the State Police (4.0), Municipal Police (3.8), Custody Court (3.7). Experts said that pedagogical staff of schools have very low effectiveness (2.7), like the special children’s educational institutions, for example, the prison for juvenile offenders in Cçsis (2.2). Experts were also rather positive about the non-governmental organizations, like “Save the Children”, “Care Child”, “Children’s Fund”.

## **5.2. The Assessment of Social Conditions of Street Children by Themselves**

Apart from all the earlier analyzed negative social factors and data obtained from the survey of experts about the causes of the problem of street children, the primary aspect is, however, the objective needs of the children themselves, and not so much our opinions

about them. Children, if only we can listen to them, inform us about themselves and their problems. The needs of children are dynamic, they depend on changing outer conditions, therefore their development must be constantly analyzed.

During the period from August till October 1997, 62 children aged 5 - 15 were interviewed in the streets of Riga, within the framework of the research "Children in the Street". Taking into account that no special registration of vagrant children has been carried out in Latvia, including Riga, apart from children who have been taken to the Prophylactic Center for minors, it is not possible to select a precise sample. Partially structured interviews were made according to the so-called "snow-ball" principle and were carried out in places where the "street children" are most often met: in the Central Market of Riga and in other markets in various districts of the city (for example, in the markets of Purvciems, Imanta, Zolitûde), in Riga Central Railroad Station and in the Bus Terminal, as well as in the tunnels near the Central Railroad Station and the Bus Terminal. Interviews were also made in the square before the Philharmonic Hall and in the *Doma* Square in the Old Town, in the shopping center "Berga bazârs", at the shop "Sakta", at McDonald's, at the parking lot of the hotel "De Rome", at the hotel "Tûrists", at the supermarkets "Rimi", "Maksimarkets", and elsewhere in the city.

It can be said that the children surveyed in this way, taking into account the results of the former survey and the data acquired from Riga Prophylactic Center for Minors, represent the situation of street children in the City of Riga as a whole. The data so obtained allow us to form a rather precise social portrait of street children and allow to carry out a sufficiently qualitative and versatile analysis of the causes of the problem.

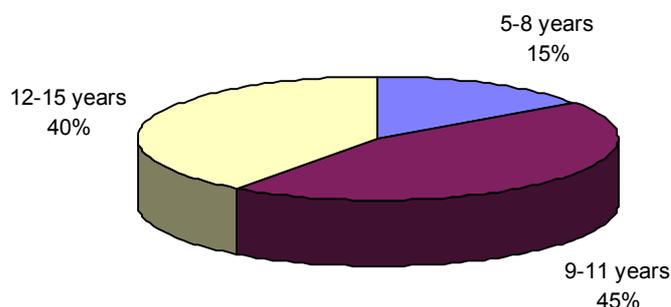
The scheme of the interview included several blocks of questions (see Supplement No. 5): socially-demographic questions about the age of children, their place of residence, family circumstances, questions related to school attendance, school environment, friends and spare time, questions about the attitude and support by the public, as well as the assessment of the current situation as viewed by the child, and the future plans and expectations of these children. The interviews were conducted by a specially formed group consisting of 20 interviewers. A sociologist specially trained and instructed these interviewers. The interviews proceeded in the form of a free conversation, trying to win possibly more trust and openness from respondents. Interviewers also noted down their observations.

#### *General characterization of street children (age, gender, residence).*

From the 62 children who were interviewed, 74% were boys and 26% girls; 46% Latvians and 54% Russians. The data from the Riga Prophylactic Center for Minors show a similar proportion: 77% boys and 23% girls. It can be concluded that boys are 3 times more often in the street than girls. It does not imply that girls are better provided for than boys, the cause is rather different education for boys and girls as well as the fact that, by their nature, girls are often more timid and more tended towards asking for adults' help to deal with their problems.

As aforementioned, the age of the children interviewed was between 5 and 15. The medium age was 11 years. Most widely represented was the age group of 9 - 11 years (45%). The medium age was 11.5 years for boys and 10 years for girls (see Picture No. 4).

89% of the children interviewed lived in Riga, while only 11% came from smaller towns in the District of Riga (for example, Salaspils, Mârupe, Kauguri) and neighborhoods near Riga.



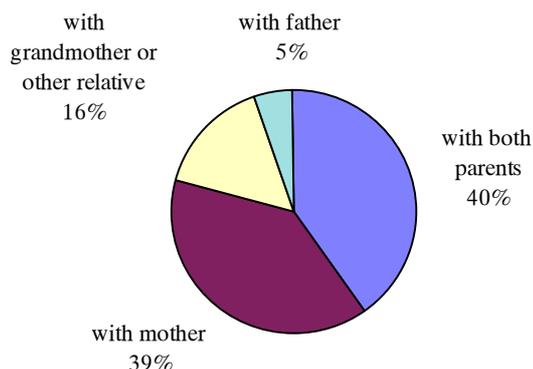
Picture No. 4. *The age of the children interviewed*

According to observations, many of these children were very poorly dressed, often in dirty clothes, inadequate for their size and season. This cannot be said, however, about all the children interviewed. There were, for example, begging children among the interviewed who were quite well-dressed, but this was a very small proportion of the children. Many of them were coughing, sneezing, husky. Several children told that they earlier had suffered various injuries (brain concussion, spine injuries, etc.), the consequences of which they still felt. It was observed during the conversations that most of these children avoided looking into the eyes of the interviewer, were often restless, uncertain, with wavering glance. They were very distrustful at the beginning of the interview. Still, there were some children among the interviewed who were, quite the opposite, somewhat boasting, even proud of their life-style, bragging that they earn more than adults and that they themselves are masters of their lives.

*Characterization of the families of street children.*

The data acquired during the interviews evidence that 60% of “street children” come from partial families where children are raised only by their mother or some other family member. The percentage of such children is very large. However, taking into account the aforementioned very high number of divorces in Latvia, as well as the number of children born to single mothers, such a proportion is not surprising.

From the children questioned, 40% live together with both parents, while 39% live only with their mother. 16% of children live together with their grandmother or some other relative, and 5% -- with their father. (see Picture No. 5).

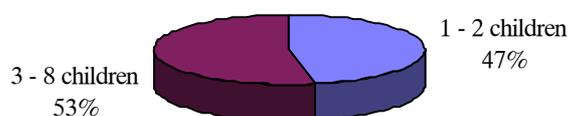


Picture No. 5

**The structure of children's families**

As the data from the Prophylactic Center show, 46% of children come from partial families, while 8% of children have no parents at all, and they lived in orphanages before they came to the Prophylactic Center. This is an evidence that the situation is not rare in Riga when children fly away from orphanages and boarding schools, this happens regularly, at least in the case of children who have been taken to the Prophylactic Center.

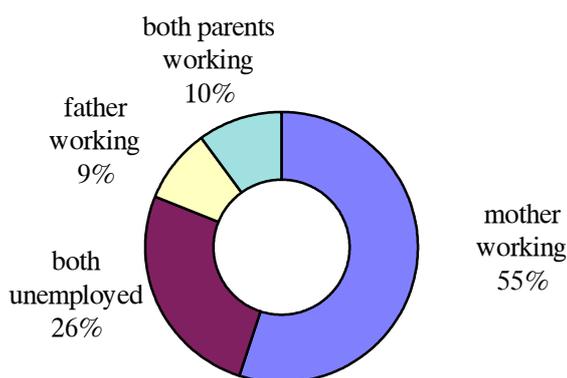
A large part of the children interviewed were from families in which there are 3 and more children (see Picture No. 6). As it was explained earlier, these families are very poorly provided for in Latvia. Many of these families survive only because of child benefits. Furthermore, taking into account that in many cases the children are raised only by their mother or grandmother, it is not difficult to picture the dismal state these children live in and how little time can be given for their care in such families.



Picture No. 6

**The size of the families of street children**

As data from the interviews show, the problems of street children and their causes are often to be sought in the unemployment reigning in these families and the related material destitution. It was found out in the survey that only in 10% of the cases of these children both of their parents worked, and knowing that 39% of the interviewed live only with their mothers, it was not surprising to find out that, for 55% of these children, the mother was the only earner. We should note that in only 9% of cases, the father was the single earner, while in 26% of cases both parents were unemployed (see Picture No. 7).



Picture No. 7

**Employment of the parents of street children**

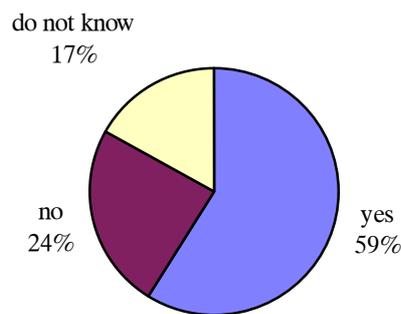
Seeing these proportions, a question arises: what is the role of woman in today's family? Is she really capable to bear the double load of the work and the family, what could be the consequences of such overload?

Many of the parents of these children were working in the market (for example, as watchmen, loaders, single-job workers, drivers, or they may just sell berries and

mushrooms they have gathered). Several children said that their parents drink. In such families, it is usually the mother who works, while the father is unemployed. Several of the children interviewed had their fathers in jail, in one case the father had died.

Most of the children interviewed (61%) said that their parents treat them well, while 44% mentioned various conflicts in the family, mostly related to the alcohol abuse by the father: father beats mother, beats children. In some cases, parents were driving the children out of the home or were completely unconcerned about what the children were doing. One of the girls interviewed told that her father has broken her leg while beating her and has threatened the mother with an ax. It should be noted here that younger children tend to idealize their parents, and only when control questions are asked, it can be found out that the parents, for example, drink and are often aggressive towards children when drunk. And this despite the fact that, in most cases, children love their parents and strive very much to get a positive evaluation from their parents. Only 2 of the children interviewed acknowledged that they do not want to return home and said that they can get along quite well without the parents.

Interestingly to note that in only 68% of cases children said that their parents know where they are at the moment and what they do. Several persons said that their parents themselves make them earn money by begging and stealing. 59% of the street children told that they are fully satisfied with such a life style (see Picture No. 8).



Picture No. 8 **Whether the children like to live in the street**

*The life of the children in the street (shelter, activities, health).*

Most of the children interviewed (74%) stay at home in the night, while the rest cited various places as their shelters for the night: basements, attic, railway stations and bus terminals, heating plants, in separate cases they were lodging with their friends. The children who lodge at home arrive there very late at night (around midnight), only to sleep and then go out again into the street in the morning. Some of the children revealed that they have not been at home for a very long time -- 1 to 2 years. One of the boys said that he went home when the seasons changed from warm to cold, just to take some warmer clothes.

It happens quite often that the children say to their parents that they spend the nights at, for example, the grandmother or some other relative, while to these people they say that they stay with the mother, thus deluding both parties and actually staying out of any supervision. Such a situation is also a pertinent example of the lack of interest and indifference on the part of such parents.

Most of the children interviewed earned their living by begging (in the market, in railroad stations or bus terminals, in trains, at hotels and shops), and several of them disclosed that they were stealing (in shops, at bus stops, in public transport).

Almost all of the interviewed, aged 10 and more, were also working different jobs, such as: selling newspapers, washing and guarding cars, selling alcohol and cigarettes, or helping to bring merchandise in the market. Some children were helping their parents in the market, gathering berries and mushrooms in the summer, or selling flowers, one of the children interviewed was collecting and selling empty bottles.

Several children who usually stay in the market, receive money from sales-women working in the market. One girl from a large family (10 children) told that the women working in the market always give the children something to eat. The data of the interviews also show that the grandmothers, older brothers and friends of these children also give them some money. Their parents, however, give them some pocket money only in rare cases. Some of the children earned additional income by leasing lodging space to similar children.

Answering the question whether they often get ill, 53% of the children said that they are never sick, while the other 47% acknowledged that they often have sneeze, cough and that head is often aching. The children also mentioned such diseases as epilepsy, tuberculosis, virus B hepatitis. Most of the children interviewed have never been to a physician. The answers of these children give evidence that their parents pay no attention to their health and that there are even cases when they were nursed by complete strangers when sick. The children said that the attitudes of the surrounding people differ greatly: some scold them and drive away, call them beggars, drug addicts, drunkards, while others sometimes give them some change. In the interviews, none of the children ever mentioned any workers of social services or teachers as having shown any interest in them. They only mentioned policemen making their raids during the night. It is noteworthy to mention that children told about usually knowing beforehand about the forthcoming raids several days earlier, and that they do not show up in the streets in such nights. One of the boys told: "If I wish to live for some time at the *Alises* Street (where the Prophylactic Center is), I allow them to catch me, otherwise I do not show up."

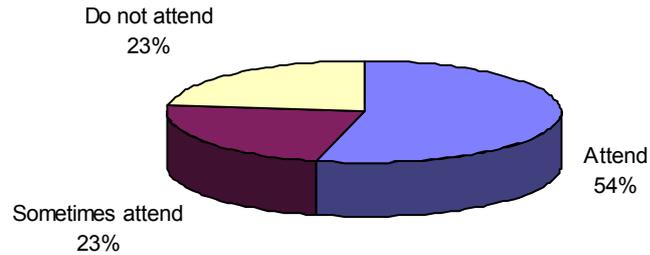
In difficult times, friends and relatives of the children (especially grandmothers) help them. Two of the children interviewed attend the non-governmental organization "Hope for the Children"<sup>2</sup>

*The negative experience of "street children" at schools.*

Most of the children interviewed (54%) said that they go to school, while 23% -- that they do not. The remaining 23% said that they sometimes attend school. According to the observations of the interviewers, the group of children who say that they "sometimes attend school" may also be included in the group who do not go to school, because, when asked a control question, it most often turned out that they have not been to school for a long time: the children interviewed had the tendency to say what seemed to be expected from them.

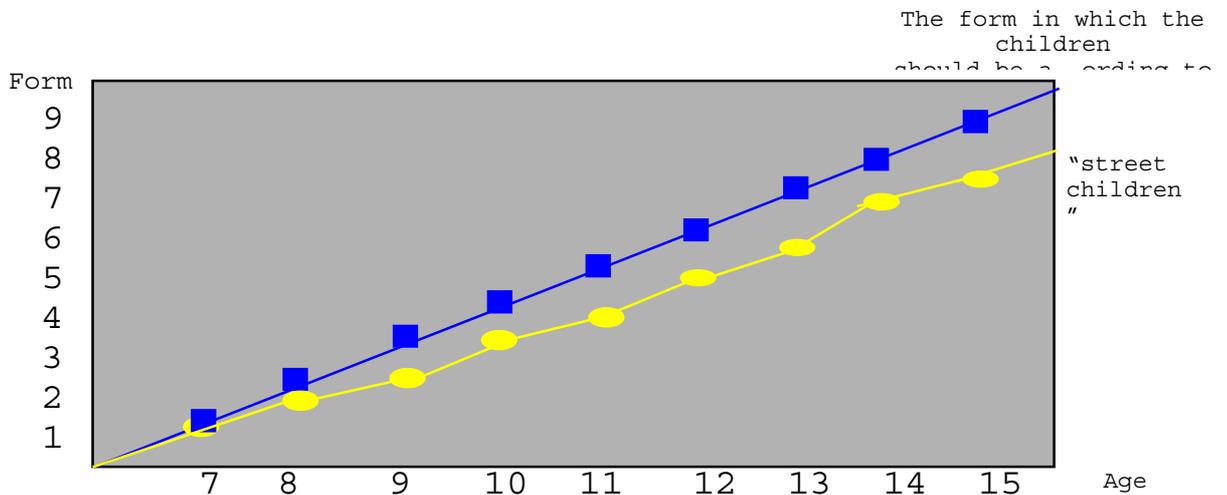
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<sup>2</sup> "Hope for the Children" is a non-governmental organization in Latvia, the aim of which is to create asylum for adolescents under the age of 18, to render them material, moral and spiritual support in safe and stable environment, disregarding the nationality and religious beliefs of these children; to render help to poor and disadvantaged families. The activities of this organization are as follows: founding asylums, family rehabilitation events, free meals, provision with clothes, medical aid, and other charity, Christian education, etc.



Picture No. 9 *School attendance by the street children*

It should be noted that many children, when asked in which form they are, mentioned a form which did not correspond to their age, for example, 13 and 12 year old boys said that they are in the 3rd form, a 9 year old boy was in the 1st form, etc. When comparing the age of children with the form they attend at school, a curve below shows that, in all age groups, there is a significant shift (see Picture No. 10).



Picture No. 10 *Correspondence between the age of street children and the form they attend at school*

45% of the children interviewed said that they like to study, the largest part, however, told that they do not or could not tell.

**The children cited various reasons for failing to attend school. Most often, the following were mentioned:**

- **Lack of money in the family;**  
(Parents cannot buy all that is necessary for the school, especially the text books which are very expensive. Some of the children are actually earners for the family themselves, so they do not have the time to attend school, apart from the lack of moneys.)
- **Some children were expelled from school because of poor grades and absences;**  
(Most often, the parents of such children do not try to find some other school, or -- in separate cases -- other schools do not wish to admit such children. If a child has been absent from school for a longer time, he or she rather prefers not to attend the school at all than to listen to the reprimands of teachers.)
- **Some children do not want to attend school, since they do not like to study.**  
(School subjects are difficult enough, many children need additional help to master them. If the child does not receive support from educators and parents in the learning process, cannot manage the tasks, has been absent for a while, he or she often loses interest, does

not believe in his or her abilities and does not wish to attend school anymore as a result of all that, since it is not interesting to study, and the child does not like it.)

When the children were asked what did they like at school, many of them mentioned concrete subjects, most often -- mathematics and physical education. Many of the children said that good food and free lunch is the best that is at school. These answers give us reason to think that most of the street children do not eat regular hot lunch, and sometimes are even half-starving for longer periods.

Interestingly to note that 13% of children said that the best things at school are holidays and breaks, as well as friends with whom to play cards. Only some of the children mentioned good teachers. Mostly those were younger children who were positive about their class tutors.

Most of the children said, however, that teachers are supercilious or do not even notice them. Some children said that teachers only respect those students whose parents are wealthy. One of respondents (a 15-years-old girl) said that teachers, like classmates, treat her with dislike and abomination. Generally, however, the attitudes from classmates have been very diverse. Most of the children (56%) said that relations were neutral, while other people mentioned beatings, derision, abuses. Several of the children interviewed said that they had some friends at school, while the parents of the other children had not allowed them to associate with the street children, and so they were left alone. Some girl said that classmates ridiculed her because she went to school with a mesh bag, and sometimes they also laughed about her poor clothes. These stories prove that social differentiation has occurred at school under the impact of the socio-economic situation. This differentiation has substantial effect both on the mutual relations between students as well as on relations between students and teachers.

*Causes that have contributed to children getting in the street.*

It is a common assumption that the major causes why children get in the street are of economic character. This was also proven within this research by data obtained from expert surveys, interviews with specialists, with the "street children" themselves, and after the analysis of statistical materials and documents.

**The causes of the current life style of these children, as mentioned in the interviews with the "street children", may be divided into three major groups** (see Picture No. 11):

- **Lack of money in the family (39%)**

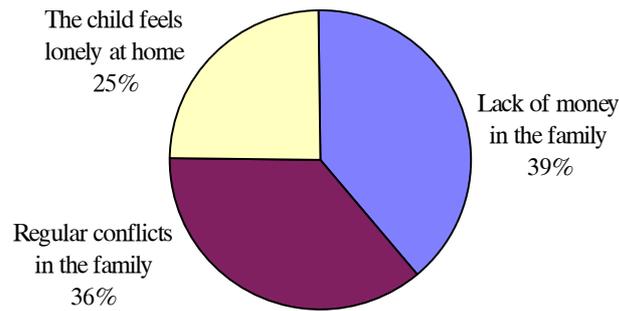
(The child supports his or her parents by working in the street, parents even often force the child to do it. In the case of disobedience the child is punished.)

- **Regular conflicts in the family (36%)**

(Parents of the "street children" often abuse alcohol, are cruel towards the child, beat the child, or otherwise -- because of insurmountable difficulties -- members of the family are under heavy stress, as a result of which continuous disputes and conflicts occur in the family.)

- **The child feels lonely at home (25%)**

(In the street, the child finds his equals, it is much more interesting out there. He or she does not want to go to school, since there seems to be no sense in studies, from which the child understands nothing, and teachers are also indifferent whether the child goes to school or not.) Parents are involved in their own problems, they do not spend their time for children.



*Picture No. 11. The main reasons why children have got in the street in the opinion of the "street children"*

As already mentioned earlier, most of the children (54%) have had encounters with the police -- basically, in connection with smaller thefts or vagrancy. Half of the children had earlier been detained during police raids and taken to the Prophylactic Center for Minors.

The children named the following major advantageous of their life style:

- Own money earned by oneself and to be spend according to one's own wishes (44%);
- Freedom to do what one wants, feeling of independence, no accounts to be given to anyone, nobody scolding you (33%);
- Possibilities to go to disco, computer games, to buy something tasty (12%);
- Many good friends in the street (7%);
- No studies at school (4%).

#### *Street environment*

The children interviewed were complaining most about the cold weather -- nowhere to get warm and nowhere to stay during the night, and nothing to eat sometimes. Many of them complained also about not having enough money and about people deriding them, scolding them and driving away. They do not have good things and toys that other children have. They feel scared in the night, are afraid of darkness.

When speaking about the future, most of the children told that they wish to earn much money and find a good job. Many dream about becoming salespersons and businessmen, wish to have their own private house and car. The answers of these children prove that material values are major and only ones in their system of values. While this tendency could not be generally described as harmful, and today it is a means of survival for most of the "street children", still -- thinking about the concrete environment and the future prospects of these children -- it could not be ruled out that such a deformed system of values, in which the only value is money and considering the often inadequate future plans of these children and the actual possibilities to achieve them, could eventually lead the children to criminal activities and disappointment in life. Only some of these children wanted to study, and those who did justified such wish by saying that then they will have much money.

Almost all the children dream about wealthy parents, and every second of them said that they wish their parents to be smiling, kind, that they would not beat and scold them. The children wish the teachers at school to be kind, responsive and understanding. It is obvious that these children lack positive social experience, they have not had enough love and understanding either from the parents or from society in general.

Several children wanted that their parents would not drink and that mothers would pay more attention to them, and they also wished the parents to find job and would have good health. Only two of the children said that they do not wish to see their parents and that they will not return to them.

Taking into account that it is difficult to name a precise number of street children in the streets of Riga, the children were asked whether they know many similar children. After summing up the results obtained, we can conclude that children in the street are often in groups. The size of such groups is most often 8 - 14 children. These groups have a hierarchy which is usually defined by age and physical strength. Children, in order to survive in this environment, very quickly accept the condition that they are to obey those who are stronger, more experienced, with greater influence. Thus, for example, a 15-years old boy told in the interview that he feels good among his friends, since he has got a certain respect for himself. There is apparent difference between younger children, who have spent only some shorter period in the street environment, and older children. The younger ones are ashamed of what they do (for example, begging), they are restless, afraid, while the older children are bragging, use much slang and obscene language, they are proud of what they are doing, they are more talkative and like to speak about themselves.

During this research, many interviews were conducted with children and later analyzed. Offering to look into some of them (see the *Descriptions of Separate Cases*), we wish to stress how important it is to see the causes of the problem of the "street children" in a system and as a complex aggregate. This problem consists of many factors which are mutually affecting each other, both the aforementioned negative factors of the environment as well as the internal factors of the family intertwine here.

## Descriptions of Separate Cases

### *Case No. 1: a girl aged 12*

The girl was interviewed at *Berga Bazârs* (shopping center), at 10.30 PM. The mother of the girl is dead, she does not remember her father. She lives together with her grandmother, a pensioner. The grandmother does not know that the girl is not attending school for 2 years already. In the morning, the girl prepares as if to go to school, then comes in the afternoon, "to leave her school-bag", eats something and then returns back to the street where she stays till late at night (her grandmother knows that the girl goes out to "earn something", she only requests her to return back home before midnight, otherwise she gets angry). At the beginning, the girl was begging in the street, which she did not like much, but later she met friends who taught her to earn money in other ways. Now the girl is doing various jobs, such as helping salespersons in the market, guarding and washing cars. Sometimes she takes her friends with her home for lodging and receives pay for it. She knows some 8 children who never go home at all. She does not go to school because her grandmother could not buy everything that was necessary for the school. Also, she had not much success in studies and consequently did not like them. She told "I had no luck". The best things which she remembers from school are: a light class with big windows and tasty food, while teachers were "meddling" and treated her with dislike. The other children in the class derided her -- because of her clothes and because she went to school with a mesh bag, since grandmother could not buy a school bag for her. The girl does not like the street life. She described differently the attitudes of adults and children of the same age around her. Summing up, what she said: different people have different attitudes, but it could be felt that the girl had experienced different behavior towards herself. The other children are sometimes friendly, but there are also such who take away your money or beat you up. The older children had forced her to earn money for them. The outer appearance of the girl evidenced

poverty, but her clothes were clean. The girl was very pale, with blue circles below her eyes, very thin. Asked whether she is often ill, she answered that her belly often aches and that her eyesight is poor. She has never been to a physician, because of lack of money. The girl dreams about working as a salesperson in a sweets' shop. During the interview, the girl was speaking very slowly, with her glance downcast, but was willing to tell much and was open. The best things which she sees in her life are good friends and possibility to earn money, but the bad things are that people treat her badly and drive her away. She also complained about the cold weather.

*Case No. 2: a girl aged 7*

The girl was interviewed in the market of Purvciems at the open cafe, where she -- together with her friends -- sorted out damaged fruit and put them in a bag. The girl was thin, with blue circles below her eyes. Her clothes were dirty, worn-out and with holes. Mouth, hands and hair dirty. She lives in a one-room apartment, with only cold water, without bath or shower. She lives together with her parents, who do not work anywhere, and 7 other sisters. (She does not remember her two elder sisters, they live elsewhere now.) The girl sleeps in the kitchen, since there is no place in the room, sisters sometimes disturb her in her sleep, stepping on her legs. Her mother is now in the hospital, since one more child has born. Parents treat her well, but she dislikes that her parents drink. To survive, the girl sells flowers sometimes, which she gathers in the fields, but her sister takes the money away from her, saying that she is older and knows what to do with money. In the market of Purvciems, she asks food from the salespersons who already know her. The people around her are kind and offer help. The girl likes to go to school, but she attends it rarely. She does not like that other children laugh at her in the school. In this life of her, she does not like that she has no such toys as other children have. In the future, she would like to become a doctor.

*Case No. 3: a boy aged 15*

The boy has his permanent residence in Īengarags, but he sometimes also lives at his mother's sister in the downtown. He lives together with his parents. The father is often not at home, but the mother uses to go to her friend, and in such cases the boy has to go to his aunt. The father is alcoholic (he has once beaten the mother, therefore the police were called), but now has found a job at a sawmill. In the summer, the mother sells berries, in the autumn -- mushrooms. Both parents treat the boy well. He attended school earlier, has completed 3 forms, but this year has not been to school. He did not like the teachers at school and often argued with them. Relations with classmates were good. During the daytime, he stays outside home, since he believes that there is nothing to do at home anyway, and it is more interesting on the street (the boy is excited by adventures in the street). He lives in the street, gets money by begging at shop doors, and sometimes steals when necessary. People around him give something to eat to him or cash. Some woman once brought some clothes for him (the boy was dressed inadequately for the cold weather). He has good relations with the children of his own age, since all are his friends. The worst thing in this way of life is the lack of money. The boy likes cookies, therefore he comes in the shop from time to time to take some from the shelf. In the future, he would like to become a driver or tractor operator.

*Case No. 4: a boy aged 15*

The boy was interviewed in a square in the Old Town. He lives at his grandmother's together with his sister. He does not go to school, because he dislikes it and does not wish to. He spends his time in the street from morning till night. He is uncertain about where his real home is, maybe the street is home because he feels at home there, and there are his friends. To survive in the street, he steals in the basements of houses (he

had encounters with police because of that) or sometimes he sells newspapers in the train, but he does not like it much. He spends his nights in basements, in the attic, in railroad terminals or at his friends. He knows 12 more children like himself. Children of the same age treat him well, the boy said: "We all go together, and then people often avoid us." People around them scold them, call them beggars, drug addicts, thieves, alcoholics. The best thing in this life is that there are places where you can go and sleep, rest yourself, have a drink, smoke, the bad thing is the lack of money.

*Case No. 5: a girl aged 6*

The girl lives with her parents. The father does not work, he drinks. The mother washes clothes for gypsies. When the father is drunk, he beats the child and her mother. In such cases the girl leaves the house and spends the night in the street. On the street she begs. She does so in places where her mother says her to, and sometimes they beg together with the mother. However, the girl does not like to sit on the street and beg. She wishes that everything would be well at home.

*Case No. 6: a girl aged 15*

The girl goes to school and likes to study, but it is difficult for her to understand the subjects. The teachers treat her like any other child, but the classmates are not very kind towards her. She lives together with her parents in a family of 8 children (2 of the children live elsewhere). The parents do not work anywhere and are not kind to the girl (the girl believes that she could do without the parents). The girl begs in the street, most often in markets, and steals, she said that it is most easy to steal from people at bus stops. The girl was well-dressed, and nothing could suggest that she could be begging. The girl has already been used to such a life style; most of all she likes stealing. Children of the same age are friendly. The girl does not know much about professions to be able to choose any of the them as hers in the future.

*Case No. 7: a boy aged 11*

The boy begged at a church. He begs for 2 years already, to make his living. He lives together with his mother, who is unemployed, and her new husband. He does not remember his father. There are 6 children in the family. The mother treats him well, but the step-father beats him when the boy does something wrong or when the step-father is drunk. He sometimes goes to school, is in the 4th form. In the school, he likes the studies and the free meals. The teachers treat him satisfactory, they know what he does for his living. Classmates do not know about his activities, and maybe this is why they are friendly.

*Case No. 8: a boy aged 11*

The boy does not attend school. He has completed 2 forms at school. He did not like to go to school, he only liked the hot lunch he received there. He does not live at home since spring and does not even know whether his parents still live there, because they were summoned to court because they had not paid the rentals. His parents are unemployed. The mother told him to steal and beg and then bought liquor for the money he brought home. The boy left the house so that he could keep all the money for himself. His clothes were dirty and much too large, he had new sports shoes on, and there was rash on his hands. The boy noted that there are certain rules in the market: you may not steal from the permanent sellers, only from temporary ones. The boy is satisfied with his current activities, he was even proud that he is the master of his own life and can manage everything, and that he earns more than some adults do. In the street he gets money by begging at the hotels in the Old Town, by stealing at shops, in the railway station, in the bus terminal, in the market, he is also sometimes helping to carry things in the market or helping to guard; sometimes

smaller children give him money as remuneration for lodging he finds for them. He himself spends his nights in basements, in the attic or in heating plants. In the market, they have their own “pack”, while the so-called “sissies” are avoiding him, since their mothers do not allow to make friends with him. The people around him are different in their attitudes: one of the traders even admitted him to his home when the boy was ill. He likes this way of life because he is the master of his own life. The bad thing is that some houses are not heated, therefore is cold there at night, and it is impossible to go around on trams, since there are conductors in them. Once the police wanted to detain him, because he was asleep at the bud terminal, but he lied that he was waiting for his mother. In the future, he would like to have his own house and car, therefore he will work in the market, where he knows everything. Generally, he does not want to see either his parents or teachers.

*Case No. 9: a girl aged 9*

The girl is in form 2 at school, she goes to school sometimes. At the school, she most likes the teacher who is treating her well. She dislikes that there are no friends of her neither at school nor in her class. She lives together with her parents, in a family with 4 children. Her father is in prison, her mother does not work but only receives child benefits, has little interest in her children. She lives outside her home for already a year now. She left the house because it is much more interesting in the street, and there are many more friends in the street. The girl is quite satisfied with the fact that she is a beggar in the street. She spends her nights either in basements, in the attic or at her friends. The attitudes of the people around her are different: there are such who drive her away, others give her something to eat or small change. Children of the same age are friendly and protect against “bad” children. She had encounters with the police because of vagrancy. The worst things in this way of life is that she cannot play, has no dolls, no other toys. In the future, she would like to work in a cafe or a shop.

*Case No. 10: a boy aged 12*

The boy washes cars in Purvciems, at the shop “Maksimarkets”, for two lats apiece. He lives together with his aunt, his parents are divorced. The friend of his mother did not like the boy, there were conflicts, because the step-father wanted to “teach” the boy with a lash, therefore the boy went to live at her aunt’s. The aunt does know that he is together with his friends but does not know what they are doing. He spends the whole day in the street, and sometimes also the night. Then he lies to the aunt that he was with his friends. The boy was poorly dressed but rather clean, very nervous, restless, he did not look into the eyes of the interviewer, maybe because the eyes were inflamed. This way of life attracts him by the feeling of freedom. Bad is that other people regard him as a wicked boy, do not allow him to wash their cars or do not pay for it. He goes to school, is in the 5th form for the second consecutive year. At school, he likes to meet friends and to eat meals (the boy has free lunch). In the future, he would like to learn to work with computer, then to buy one for himself and to earn money by programming. He would like that the teachers were more friendly and understanding, but he does not want to his parents.

*Case No. 11: a girl aged 7*

The girl lives together with her mother, sister and brother, her father lives in the countryside at the grandmother’s, together with her eldest sister. Her parents do not work. When the father is in Riga, he drinks and beats the mother, but does not hurt the children. The mother also drinks, therefore the children have not enough to eat. The children beg before the church to earn some money for the family to eat. The girl goes to boarding school, in the 1st form. She likes to go to the school, the teachers are good. She does not like that children fight.

When analyzing the research project of the Higher School *Attīstība*, “On the Causes of Vagrancy in the Latgale Borough of the City of Riga”, which was carried out in January 1997, the situation revealed was rather similar to that described above. Under the said project, altogether 14 children were interviewed, in the age of 10 - 14 (8 children from the leveling class of Riga Secondary School No. 44 and 6 children detained during a raid by the Youth Affairs Inspection for vagrancy). Interviews were carried out in the form of free discussions.

After summing up the results of these interviews, we can conclude that the major causes for the life style of these children, characterized by vagrancy, absence from school, working in the street, are the same as the previously obtained results. The major causes, cited by the children, were: poor provision in the family, drinking parents and conflicts between them, the necessity to earn money themselves, absence of the wish to study (see Table No. 4).

*Table No. 4 Causes contributing to children getting in the street, in their own view (In Latgale Borough of the City of Riga)*

Causes	Percentage
The necessity to earn money by themselves	24%
Parents drink, frequent conflicts in the family, physical abuse of children	24%
The family needs money	21%
Do not wish to study	14%
Ashamed from classmates	10%
Like to go to gambling halls	3%
Fear from teachers	2%
Parents do not control the child	2%

Results of surveys and observations attest that the behavior of children is not influenced by just one of the causes: it is rather a combination of several causes. For example, a poor family where parents are alcoholics, or a poor family where children are raised only by the mother who does not supervise them enough.

When analyzing data from the Prophylactic Center for Minors (see Table No. 5), we can see that the number of children taken to the Prophylactic Center during the ten months of 1997 was by 187 children, or 21%, larger than during the same time in 1996. According to the data of the Center, most of the children are in the age of 11 - 13. The children are mainly taken to the Center after the night raids by the police. Typically, more than half of these children are from partial families, as it was discussed earlier.

*Table No. 5 Characterization of Children at the Prophylactic Center for Minors*

Years	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996 till X	1997 till X
Total number of locked up in the centre	532	530	705	736	1080	689	876
The number of them - citizens of Latvia	403	446	676	726	1063	680	867

Parentless	71	60	34	52	93	75	138
Child has one of parents	291	245	378	420	570	386	484
Boys	395	389	539	584	848	558	706
Girls	137	141	166	152	232	127	170
Age: from 11 till 13 years	115	190	257	318	444	279	332
from 14 till 15 years	-	101	126	77	248	128	214
from 16 till 17 years	81	54	37	27	49	19	27
older than 17 years	-	46	25	11	17	2	6
studying	336	293	331	286	392	301	500
working	14	3	17	3	2	-	4
children neither studying or working	182	113	245	366	686	385	334
run away from home	321	297	249	297	496	268	333
run aways from schools, special schools, children's homes	76	41	35	52	94	71	154
lost	14	21	64	46	20	29	19
placed at nighttime	-	59	226	119	65	65	62
returned to family	441	449	606	555	826	466	556
returned to children's homes	105	38	52	107	127	159	128
sent to the health care institutions	28	25	31	56	72	62	42

## **6. CONNECTION BETWEEN “STREET CHILDREN” AND THE DEVIANT BEHAVIOR OF CHILDREN<sup>3</sup>**

When organizing the research “Child in the Street”, one of the basic theses for the research work was the probable linkage between the problem of “street children” with various forms of deviant behavior.

To find this out, a survey of experts -- competent specialists (social workers, pedagogues and lawyers, specialized in the field of protection of children’s rights) was carried out. The results obtained in this survey of experts were corresponded and compared with separate statistical data and the results of interviews and surveys of minors.

The empirical information so obtained allowed to find out certain connections between the problem of “street children” and separate forms of deviant behavior of children.

### **6.1. Staying away from school**

The fact that children are in the street is often related to their avoidance from school. As the results of the random survey suggest, the avoidance from school among the

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<sup>3</sup> When carrying out the research “Child in the Street”, the team of authors agreed that the term “deviance” shall mean such actions and forms of behavior which do not correspond to and deviate from social norms and values accepted by society. See: Socioloīijas skaidrojošā vārdnīca [Explanatory Dictionary of Sociology]: Rīga, 1997. pp. 31 - 32. Because the uncontrolled staying of children in the street, related to their weak ties with the family, and their lack of close and positively oriented relations with adults cannot be regarded as corresponding to the accepted social norms in society, the “street children” as such can be interpreted as a deviant group. However, when considering the socially deviant norms of behavior among the street children, this section will include rather the analysis of socially dangerous forms of actions, i. e. the deviant behavior.

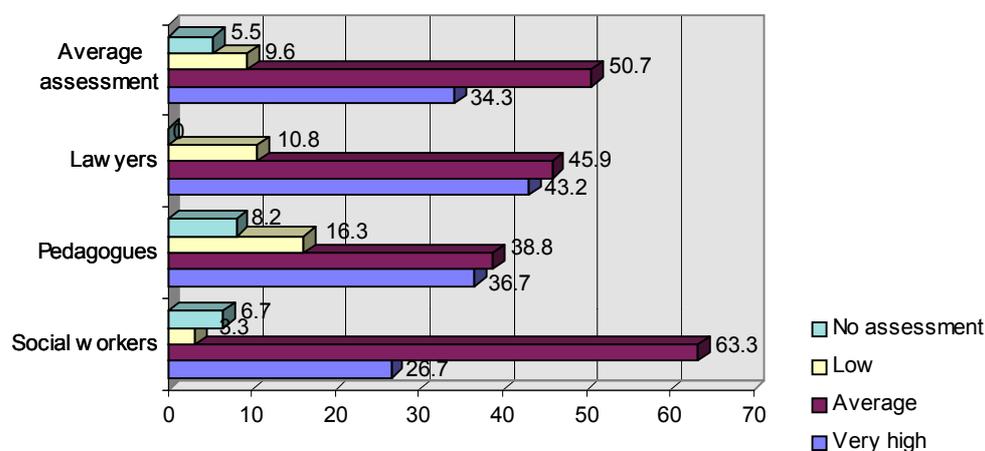
school children is very high and is an often occurring phenomenon -- according to the opinion of each third expert. Every second expert said that avoidance from school is medium high. Only each tenth expert said that avoidance from school is low (see Picture No. 12).

The experts also evaluated the prevailing current tendencies in this form of deviant behavior. Three of four respondents said that the avoidance from school is increasing. Children are more and more tended to stay away from school, vocational secondary school and other learning institutions. The following were cited as the probable causes of this tendency:

- increasing complexity of school syllabuses and intensification of the study process which lead to lower interest, among a part of pupils, in studies, contributes to failing progress and reduces the attraction and prestige of the school among children;
- absence of attractive and interesting events in schools, which could compensate the difficulties in studies;
- insufficient activities of schools to induce children to return to the school and to integrate them in the study process.

Furthermore, the costs of studies are increasing, and not all families are therefore able to sufficiently provide their children with the necessary learning tools and materials.

If we analyze the data obtained by interviewing adolescents in the street and at the Prophylactic Center at Alises Street, at the Special School “Strautiòì”, and in the Prison of Ççsis, we can see that, in all these groups, the avoidance from school is an often occurring phenomenon.



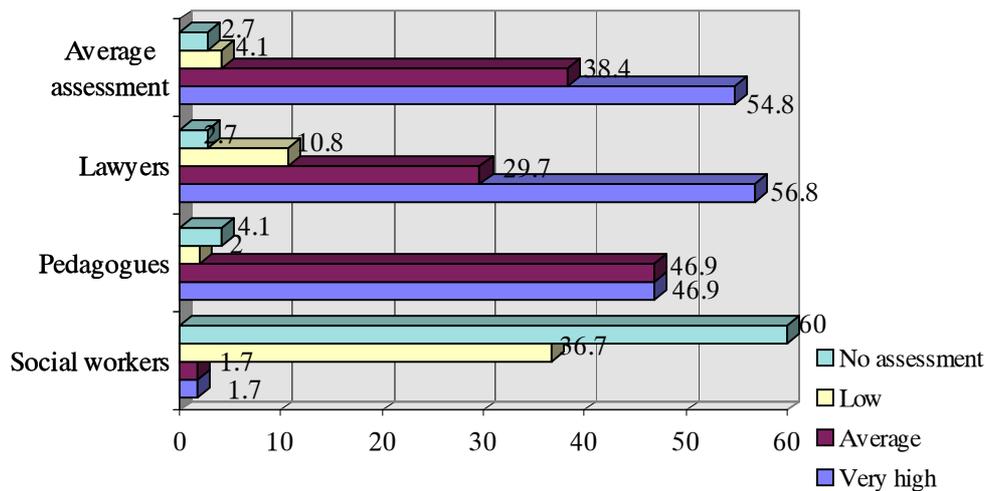
Picture No. 12 *The extent of the avoidance from school (%)*

## 6.2. Vagrancy

When children and adolescents stay away from school, this often takes the form of vagrancy, staying in the street and other public places. Vagrancy is one of those phenomena which is at the basis of the mechanism of formation of “street children”.

Every second expert -- social worker, pedagogue and lawyer -- acknowledged that vagrancy is, at the time being, very frequent or frequent. It means that quite a significant part of children spend their time in roaming around, staying in public places and in the street. Vagrancy is also related to begging, small thefts, sometimes to extortion, abuse of alcohol and toxic substances and other forms of deviant behavior.

A very small number of experts said that vagrancy is not often among adolescents (see Picture No. 13).



Picture No. 13 *The frequency of vagrancy among children in the evaluation by experts (%)*

Since the experts acknowledge that, at the time being, more children are vagrant in the street and staying around without purpose at public places, we may conclude that these are children who stay away from school. This means that, in many cases, children are absent from school and spend their time in the street and at public places. The vagrancy without purpose is related to lack of control over children on the part of parents or custodians.

The interviews of children allowed to conclude that vagrancy is more common among juvenile offenders and those who have been detained for vagrancy and stay at the Prophylactic Center for Minors.

### 6.3. Adolescents staying away from home and permanent residency

The unfavorable social environment, alcohol abuse by parents of persons replacing them and their anti-social way of life are all factors which contribute to children being unable to live and stay at their homes. On the other hand, there are quite many things outside home which attract children: friends, reference groups, opportunities to live without restrictions, lack of control, etc. These and other factors lead to the situation of children escaping from home and their permanent residency.

Every sixth expert (16.7%) believes that the frequency of children escaping from home is very high and high. However, the escapism from home is not the most frequent and negative phenomena among the forms of deviant behavior. This deviancy is a kind of medium stage between the unfavorable situation at home and possible further forms of negative socialization of children. The fact that adolescents leave their homes on their own is evidence not only that home has low meaning and value for them but also that they will have to earn money for themselves, including by committing thefts and other offenses against the law. Escapism from home is one of the major stages in the mechanism of formation of “street children”. As the data of the Prophylactic Center for Minors show that 333 (38%) of the 876 children who were detained in 1997 had left their homes on their own (see Picture No. 5).

### 6.4. The frequency of hooliganism among children and adolescents

The avoidance of children from school, vagrancy and fleeing from home which leads to the fact that children spend their time in the street and at public places is also related to negative forms of behavior in this new environment.

Meetings and communication between children, who have often already “inherited” a deformed system of values from their parents, not only increase the joint potential of

deviancy of these children but also cause a certain negative response from other individuals. This leads to conflicts between these children and their social environment, which can take the form of public order disturbances, i. e. hooliganism.

It can be said that hooliganism, as a form of deviant behavior, is one of the most often among adolescents. Fifty-two percent of experts acknowledged that the frequency of hooliganism among adolescents is very high or high. Only a very small number of experts (1.4%) believe that hooliganism is not common among minors.

After comparative analysis of the opinions of experts and the data of regular (official) statistics, we arrived at the conclusion that hooliganism is the most wide-spread form of criminal offenses among adolescents after crimes against property (see Picture No. 6).

*Table No. 6 Tendencies of hooliganism in Latvia among minors in 1991 - 1997 (in absolute figures)*

Years	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1st half of 1997
The number of registered criminal cases of hooliganism	154	118	69	101	137	171	95

Similar results were obtained by interviewing different categories of adolescents. According to these respondents, hooliganism is most wide-spread among those adolescents who have already committed crimes and also among vagrant children.

Analysis of the data of criminal statistics show that there is, indeed, an objective tendency of growing hooliganism among adolescents. Every year (since 1994), the criminal cases of hooliganism among minors increase by 15 - 20%. This form of crime was also increasing in 1997. There are sufficient reasons to link this negative tendency with the exacerbation of the problem of "street children". The children who come from this unfavorable social environment exercise their acquired negative standards of behavior among their peers and in the public. It is also typical for hooligans to ignore and negate normal public values. Similar attitude is also common among those children who develop and stay in the street for long time.

It should be noted here that latent forms of hooliganism are wide-spread. The absolutely largest part of threats against public safety are not registered at law enforcement agencies. This is one more factor contributing to the frequency of hooliganism and deforming the consciousness and values of adolescents.

### **6.5. Fights and violence among children and adolescents**

Satisfaction of needs (for certain material values), settlement of mutual relations, distribution of roles and status in the groups of adolescents and in hierarchies of these groups is often done by violent means and by the use of physical force, i. e. by fighting. The efforts to secure dominance over others by violence is more and more wide-spread among children and adolescents.

The results of the survey of experts show that every fourth expert of a relevant profile (social worker, pedagogue or lawyer) is convinced that the occurrence of fights and violence is very high or high (23.9%). Only about every tenth respondent of the said category (12.7%) said that fights are not wide-spread. Such assessment is probably relevant for certain regions where violence is, indeed, less common.

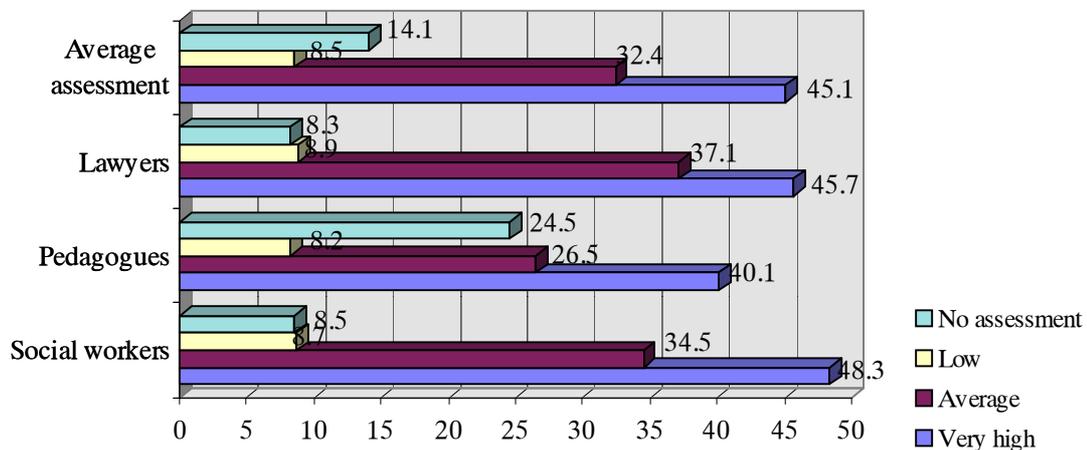
It should be noted that experts are convinced that fights and violence are on the rise at the time being. The same opinion was found among children and adolescents. The

minors who are placed at the Special School “Strautiõi” and in the Prison of C sis said that violence and force has to be used in almost every second occasion when conflicts arise. Using the expression of J. London, “sharp elbows” and muscles determine the relations in the street, including among children.

### 6.6. Spread of prostitution among minors

Prostitution is among the major forms of deviant behavior among adolescents. According to the data of the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Welfare, prostitution and other forms of sexual deviancy are more and more wide-spread among adolescents leading to various negative consequences.

According to the evaluation of experts, prostitution and sexual services are very high or high among minors. This was the opinion of 45.1% of all social workers, pedagogues and lawyers. Only every third expert said that that prostitution is medium wide-spread. Three out of every four experts said that prostitution is now rising among adolescents. None of the experts said that prostitution and sexual service are decreasing among adolescents.



Picture No. 14 *Spread of prostitution among minors in the evaluation by experts (%)*

According to the data of the Police of Morals, there are more than one hundred the so-called “intimate clubs” where sexual services are also rendered by adolescent girls. Even child-prostitutes have been detained in Latvia (8 - 10 years of age).

Sexual services and prostitution in the age of adolescence affect the morals of girls, form a deformed system of social values among them, cripple them both in the spiritual as well as psychological and physical sense. Deviations and abnormalities in the sphere of sexual relations, which are especially related to sexual services, cause irreversible damage in the presence and for the future of children. They loose their potential for normal, harmonious morals, virtuous relations in life. These girls later encounter objective difficulties to establishing families, to bear children, etc.

Sexual services also cause the spread of sexually transmissible diseases, including among adolescents.

### 6.7. Spread of drug abuse among children and adolescents

Drug abuse is one of the most dangerous forms of deviant behavior among adolescents. The increased risk of this form of deviant behavior is related to:

- a) degradation of the morals of adolescents, physical and psychological dependence on narcotic drugs;
- b) the necessity to get money to buy narcotic drugs;
- c) crimes committed under the intoxication of narcotic drugs and their negative consequences.

Every third expert said that the spread of drug abuse is very high or high among children and adolescents. More than half of the social workers, pedagogues and lawyers said that the number of users of narcotic drugs is increasing. It should be noted that this opinion of experts fully matches statistical data. According to the information of the Drug Enforcement Bureau (NAB), which functions at the Ministry of Interior State Police, the number of adolescent users of narcotic drugs and drug addicts has increased in the recent years (see Table No. 7).

*Table No. 7      The number of users of narcotic drugs  
and patients among minors (in absolute figures)*

Description of minors	Years		
	1994	1995	1996
The number of users of narcotic drugs	15	36	37
The number of patients - drug addicts	2	5	6

If we analyze the data registered by the Narcology Service at the Ministry of Welfare about drug addicts, we can conclude that the number of first-time registered patients is on the rise, especially among adolescents. One in every seven diagnosed drug addicts is an adolescent. Despite this fact, there are not sufficient places for minor drug addicts in medical institutions.

Six of the children diagnosed in 1996 as users of narcotic drugs used opiates. Adolescents usually buy and use narcotic drugs at public places and in the street.

### **6.8. Abuse of toxic substances among children and adolescents**

Toxic substances are substances with strong effect which are not included in the group of narcotic drugs and which produce psychical effects. When using toxic substances (medical drugs, consumer chemicals, etc.), social, psychical and physical dependency develops on these substances. Specialists acknowledge that the negative consequences from the use of toxic substances are even more unfavorable than when using narcotic drugs.

Children and adolescents obtain and use toxic substances mainly in the street. The problem of toxic substances-addiction is closely related to the “street children”.

In the course of the research, every third expert believed that the spread of toxic substances-addiction is very high or high. Only every tenth expert said that toxic substances-addiction is low among adolescents. Almost half of the respondents of the said category (46.6%) acknowledged that the number of users of narcotic drugs is growing among children.

These random survey results are fully confirmed by the data of the Ministry of Interior and the Statistics Committee (see Table No. 8)

*Table No. 8                      The number of users of toxic substances and patients among minors (in absolute figures)*

Description of minors	Years		
	1994	1995	1996
The number of users of toxic substances	53	153	156
The number of patients -- toxic substances addicts	4	13	58

**Within the last three years, the number of patients who suffer from toxic substances - addiction among minors has grown twelve times (!)**, while the number of users of toxic substances has grown three times. Adolescents can freely obtain and use different psycho-stimulants, they inhale glue fumes, etc. In 1996, after the use of narcotic drugs, 220 adolescents applied for medical help at the City of Riga Narcologic Center alone.

The survey carried out in schools in 1996 by the Drug Enforcement Bureau of the Ministry of Interior showed that 84% of children have used narcotic drugs or toxic substances at least once.

The negative effects of abuse of narcotic drugs and toxic substances are increasing.

During the recent years, the number of death cases has increased among drug abusing adolescents and children. The number of such death cases has increased especially among adolescents as compared with other age groups. In 1994, 7.3% of all death cases caused by the abuse of narcotic drugs and toxic substances occurred among adolescents; in 1995 this percentage was 14.3%, in 1996 it reached 16.5%. In the recent years, regularly 5-6 adolescents die from the abuse of narcotic drugs and toxic substances.

The use of narcotic drugs and toxic substances is spreading in discos, events at school, in the street. There is especially high interest among children about various euphoric substances. Caplets such as "Ecstasy", "Jaf", etc. are distributed among adolescents.

The motives which create the interest in the use of narcotic drugs and toxic substances include curiosity, imitation (conformity), romanticism, etc.

### **6.9. Spread of alcohol abuse among children and adolescents**

Alcohol abuse in general is one of the most widely spread social evils in Latvia. Abuse of alcohol is also spreading among children and adolescents. Alcohol is used by them mainly in public places and in the street. Alcohol is one of those factors which involves children in street gangs, and the use of alcohol is a model for spending one's free time.

The involvement of children in alcohol abuse is related to the fact that they take over the patterns of behavior from their surroundings and families. These patterns of behavior can also be observed in the street.

It was found during the research "Child in the Street", that three of every four respondents (72.6%) are convinced that alcoholism and the use of alcohol are very high or high. Only a small number of experts (2.0%) said that alcoholism is not wide-spread among children and adolescents.

Most of the experts noted that the alcohol abuse is on the rise now and that the negative effects of the alcohol abuse are increasing.

The research led to the conclusion that the spread of the use of alcohol among those children and adolescents who spend most of their time in the street is related to the following negative effects:

- under the influence of alcohol, adolescents become aggressive, they have less self-control, and the pattern of affective behavior forms among them. In this condition, children in the street either commit crimes themselves or become victims of crime. On average, every fourth crime is committed by minors under alcohol intoxication (in 1995 -- 26.9%; in 1996 -- 25.0%; in the first half of 1997 -- 26.8);

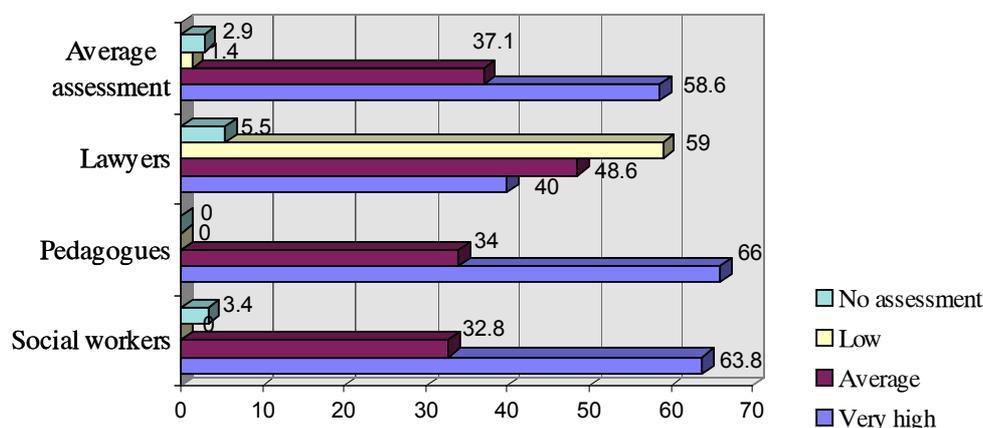
- the use of alcohol in the minor age cause various diseases: liver cirrhosis, heart and blood-vessel diseases, alcoholism, and it facilitates suicides;

- the use of alcohol deforms the consciousness of adolescents as a social group and their individual values. Alcohol and the use of alcohol become to be regarded as normal among the “street children”. Measures preventing the use of alcohol among adolescents could also help to deal with the problems of “street children”.

### 6.10. Spread of small thefts among children and adolescents

Street children and adolescents need money, so that they could live in the street and stay at places of public entertainment, buy food and other means of survival, and satisfy their quasi-needs for alcohol, narcotic drugs and toxic substances. One of the most usual ways of obtaining the necessary moneys is illegal activities, including thefts.

Small thefts, meaning thefts of objects without high material value, are very wide-spread or wide-spread, according to the opinion of experts. Almost two out of every three experts expressed this opinion (see Picture No. 15). Only 1.4% of the experts interviewed said that the spread of small thefts is low. Typically, most of the experts acknowledged that small thefts have a tendency to rise.



Picture No. 15 *Spread of small thefts among minors in the evaluation by experts (%)*

Also the adolescents who are placed at the Prophylactic Center at Alises Street and at the Special School “Strautiõi”, as well as children interviewed in Riga acknowledged that they had often got the necessary moneys through small thefts in public transportation, at different public places, in parks, by breaking into summer cottages and stealing from basements.

Most of the small thefts remain undiscovered, hidden. Even if they are reported to the law enforcement agencies, criminal cases are not opened because of their seemingly

lesser importance, and their perpetrators are not searched and found out. This lack of punishment for small thefts created the attitude of irresponsibility among children and adolescents and promote thefts of larger scale. The lack of punishment and irresponsibility lead these children to much more serious crimes.

#### **6.11. Extortion of money and other values from other adolescents**

To have the possibility to live independently, without support of their parents, families or other relatives, the necessary moneys are gained by extorting moneys and other values from peers and younger children and adolescents. Those phenomena which are quite frequent in the criminal environment, are transformed and spread among the children in the street.

In the opinion of experts, extortion of moneys and other values is wide-spread among adolescents. Almost half of the experts said that the frequency of these phenomena is very high or high and that racket is on the rise among adolescents. In the recent years, more than ten criminal cases are opened every year on crimes of racketeering and extortion with participation of adolescents.

#### **6.12. Popularity of games of chance**

Games of chance and gambling machines have been increasingly popular in the recent years among children and adolescents as a way of spending one's free time.

Almost two of every three experts acknowledged that popularity of games of chance is very high or high among children and adolescents. Children and adolescents play dimes, cards and other games of chance in public without embarrassment. They play games on cartoon with plastic tokens. The excitement of games of chance has become an inseparable part of the life of children.

These games are not only related to the excitement but also to the possibility to gain some income. Money and other values increase the excitement and involve the adolescents even more in the games of chance.

Of lately, because of the wide distribution of gambling machines, the games of chance with gambling machines have become more and more popular with children and adolescents. In the opinion of experts, the games of chance with gambling machines is one of the most wide-spread activities among children and adolescents. Four out of five experts said that the frequency of this activity is very high or high. Noteworthy, the infatuation with the games of chance with gambling machines is increasing in the recent years.

The children living in the street spend part of their time in gambling halls or playing games of chance elsewhere. This form of excitement in itself should not be regarded as a form of deviant behavior. However, the games of chance require moneys and some way to get them. The games with the gambling machines is related to large turnover of moneys. And the money is more lost than gained. And to get the necessary moneys, adolescents commit crimes and other offenses against the law.

#### **6.13. Involvement of children in criminal activities**

The staying of children in the street is not only related to the way how they spend their free time. The fact that children are in the street also means that they are in the sphere of control and influence of criminal groupings. The street and other public places are under strong control and monitoring of organized criminal groups.

Every fourth experts (25.9%) acknowledged that the involvement of children and adolescents in the activities of criminal groups at the time being is very high or high. "Street children" are kind of recruits of the criminal world. The involvement of minors in criminal groups is more and more wide-spread and obvious. This development is

facilitated also by the interest of adolescents in guns and explosives. One third of experts said that this interest among children and adolescents is very high or high.

Infatuation with explosives and fire arms is not only dangerous for the adolescents themselves and for the surrounding people, but it also leads to other criminal activities. In the opinion of experts, vandalism, intentional damage to property (44.3%) and participation in disclosed thefts and robberies (25.3) is very high or high.

These crimes are mainly performed by those adolescents who are not under parental control and who spend much of their time in public places and in the street. The growth of the number of “street children” determine unfavorable tendencies in the field of criminal activities by adolescents.

#### **6.14. Linkage between “street children” and deviant behavior among adolescents**

The deviant forms of behavior among adolescents reveal the negative aspects in the field of Latvian economy, social sphere, legal and political situation.

Children and adolescents are very sensitive towards the negative aspects of social life. These negative developments are those which are the causes of why children do not have adequate living conditions in their families, as a result of which children spend much of their time in the street and at other public places. There are certain standards of the life in the street which are often deformed, as compared with normal human values. Smaller deviation, if not properly addressed and resolved, lead to much more dangerous and more significant forms of deviant behavior related to crimes and offenses.

Already in 1994, at the Baltic States’ Regional Seminar on Crime Among Children and Adolescents, the major causes were named which contribute to deviant behavior among minors. These causes are just as pertinent today, and many of them are also related to the problem of “street children”. During the said seminar, specialists referred to the following major causes:

1. The situation in the family in Latvia, which has sharply deteriorated in Latvia in the last years:

- the increasing number of poor families;
- the growing consumption of alcohol which provokes conflicts in the family, immoral behavior, irresponsibility and other negative phenomena;
- the increasing number of divorced families and partial families;
- less and less children attend pre-school institutions;
- the growing number of children who do not attend school and who are therefore potential illiterates.

2. Part of parents are not even able to raise their children themselves (alcoholics, toxic substances - addicts, prostitutes, parents who are totally involved in work, etc.). Even wealthy families are often pedagogically inept.

3. There is no system -- corresponding to the conditions in the family and the level of mental and physical development of children -- in working with those children who stay away from school, who are vagrant and begging in the street.

4. The work of different state institutions and non-governmental organizations in the prevention of crimes among adolescents is not specialized and sufficiently coordinated.

5. Secondary schools have moved away, in the last years, from efforts to organize the free time of children and efforts to work with children and their families.

6. Non-governmental organizations are not sufficiently strong financially and organizationally.

7. Legislation is changing all the time, the laws are often contradicting each other. Absence of legal interpretation of separate issues impedes the investigation of cases, hearing of them before the court, as well as operative assistance to children and families.

8. There are not sufficient resources available to social assistance services (including funds, personnel) to enable them to solve the problems affecting the majority of the population.

## **7. Characterization of the Linkage Between “Children not Attending School” and “Children in the Street”**

Children are a social group who are not responsible for themselves, who cannot protect themselves socially and cannot provide for themselves. This must be done by parents, custodians or by the state and local government institutions. Normally, children must be materially provided, and they must have the possibility to receive at least primary education. Primary education is compulsory in Latvia.

Schools have a very significant role as a socialization institute in the development of children:

This is one of those socialization institutes which ensures social control from the side of society. If the child stays out of school, then normal integration of the child in society is impeded. From October till December 1996, available statistical information was gathered about children not attending school. The task was to determine:

- whether such information is regularly collected;
- whether such information is compiled on all levels (county, district, city, the country as a whole);
- whether there is a certain methodology on the national level, according to which these data are arranged, what is this methodology, what are the strong and weak sides of this methodology,
- which state and local government institutions are gathering this information and what is the coordination between these institutions,
- whether it is known what happens with the registered children later.

The situation, as existing in December 1996, was investigated in the following cities: Riga, Liepāja, Ventspils, Kandava, Tukums; and in the districts of Riga, Ogre, Valmiera, Bauska, Kuldīga, Tukums.

As it was found out that no collection of data had started as yet in some of the districts and cities included in this sample, and that no information was available for certain other regions, because the data were not yet arranged accordingly.

According to Paragraph 3 in the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No. 194, “Regulations for Registration of School-Age Children”, passed on the collected information must be submitted to the local government of the corresponding region by 10th October of each year. Concrete local governments are responsible for registration of school-age children. There were certain local government territories where such registration was carried out for the first time (for example, in the District of Kuldīga), in other districts and cities certain registration had already been carried out in the previous years, but not according to the provisions of the aforementioned Regulations. As it was pointed out in the research materials, registration was carried out in respect to those children who were officially registered as residing in the corresponding territory.

According to the Regulations issued by the Cabinet of Ministers and Letter No. 4/91 of 08.08.96, “On the Compulsory Registration of School-Age Children”, sent out by

the Administration of Institutions of Education and Science at the Ministry of Education and Science, data from school boards are requested in the following format:

- 1) the number of children registered as residing in the corresponding region;
- 2) the number of all children attending school;
- 3) the number of children admitted to the school but not appearing for classes;
- 4) the number of children appearing for classes but not previously registered in the lists of pupils;
- 5) the number of children registered as residing in the corresponding region but attending schools of other districts (cities);
- 6) the number of children attending schools in the corresponding region from other districts (cities).

As it was noted, mainly schools and school boards are engaged in compiling this information.

The Decree No. 115 of 06.11.96, passed by the Ministry of Education and Science, defines the order for information collation and comparing on the level of each corresponding region with the regional branch of the Citizenship and Immigration Department, and for coordination of information between the Ministry of Education and Science and the Ministry of Interior.

As the results of the research show, local governments had encountered certain difficulties in meeting the requirements of these Regulations, and therefore information was not collected for all Latvian regions not only by 10 October 1996 but even by the end of 1996.

During the research, partial information was received not only from the school boards but also from social assistance services. From the district police units, information was received from minors affairs inspectors who have registers of juvenile offenders who do not attend school as well as from the Youth Affairs Inspections of the City of Riga Municipal Police (Vidzeme and Latgale Boroughs). These Youth Affairs Inspections get their information from schools of the corresponding borough as well as during raids when vagrant and begging children are detained. Thus, for example, during the raids by the Latgale Borough Youth Affairs Inspection, the following numbers of children were detained:

from 04.09.96 till 06.09.96	5 children
from 09.09.96 till 13.09.96	6 children
from 15.09.96 till 20.09.96	8 children
from 23.09.96 till 27.09.96	11 children
from 01.10.96 till 31.10.96	13 children
Total:	53 children

In similar raids in the Vidzeme Borough, 42 children were detained who were staying away from school.

Since the Youth Affairs Inspection at the Latgale Borough Municipal Police has been active since May 1996, there are no data for the previous years. The youth affairs inspectors could not tell, whether this information will be further compiled and used, and it was said in the interview that “the higher-ups do not show any interest in it.”

As of 10 December 1996, 137 children were registered in the Latgale Borough for vagrancy and staying away from school. As the inspectors themselves acknowledged, this

is only part of the children who do not attend school. There are special problems related to finding out information about and registering Gypsy children.

It should be noted that information coming from different institutions is often diverse and is not integrated in a unified system.

Upon analyzing the situation with children who do not attend school, we can conclude that the “Regulations for Registration of School-Age Children”, passed by the Cabinet of Ministers, and the Instruction issued by the Ministry of Education and Science, “On the Compulsory Registration of School-Age Children”, are inadequate to reflect the actual situation. The following reasons should be mentioned here:

- In order to find out the children who do not attend school, the number of children registered as residing in the given local government territory is taken as a reference point. However, during the last years, the number of those families has increased who live without a certain passport registration of residence. As the children’s rights protection inspectors pointed out, it is also difficult to obtain information about those families who sub-lease apartments (or rooms) from other persons. Most often, these are broken families who live in bad financial conditions. These families often can only afford to hire a living space with minimum utilities and minimum payment after they have been evicted from their previous apartments. Especially often, these problems occur in Riga.
- A part of parents do not register their children at school, therefore these children do not appear in the lists prepared by the schools.
- Since information must be summarized, on the level of districts, by the 10th of October, it does not adequately reflect the number of children who stay away from school later in the same school year, because, as the children’s rights protection inspectors explained, the number of children not attending school in September is usually lower than later. Thus, for example, the children’s rights protection inspector of the City of Riga Ziemeļu [Northern] Borough had registered 58 children, in the age of 7 to 15 years old, not attending school in November 1996, while there were only 21 such children on 1 October 1996.

According to information collected by the Ministry of Education and Science, 785 children did not attend school in February 1997 (these data do not include, however, all the districts and cities of Latvia; for more details, see the official newspaper “Latvijas Vēstnesis”, No. 66/67 (781/782), p. 326).

Different methods have been used by the Citizenship and Immigration Department to calculate the number of children staying away from school: they compared the number of children of compulsory school age with the total number of children in schools in the given year. This approach is also used by the Education Information Center and the State Inspection of Education. Thus, for example, according to this method, about 15000 children were staying away from school in the school year 1995/96. In the data of the Education Information Center (26.03.96.#2-4), there are also references to migration and the approximate number of children staying in the same form for a second year, and these considerations are taken into account when calculating the number of children staying away from school. It should be noted, however, that these data are very approximate, since, as it has been already noted in regard to the data of the Citizenship and Immigration Department, there are incongruities and discrepancies between the information of the Citizenship and Immigration Department and information at the disposal of local

governments. The data of the Citizenship and Immigration Department are obsolete in regard to a certain part of families.

There are data published in the newspaper "Latvijas Vēstnesis" (No. 66/67 (781/782), p. 327) about the distribution of children in comprehensive secondary schools according to years of birth and the number of children of the corresponding age living in Latvia according to the data of the Citizenship and Immigration Department. The difference between these two groups is similar to that appearing in the data of the State Inspection of Education about children not attending school. It should be taken into account here, though, that home education is provided for a part of children not attending school, part of them attend specialized schools, boarding schools and night schools.

As seen from the situation described above, there are no optimal methods available at the time being to precisely define the number of children who do not attend school. There are significant differences between the aforementioned methods and results of data collection, they have certain shortcomings, therefore it is impossible, at the time being, to refer to precise data of children staying away from school.

So long as there is no precise registration of children and it is unknown how many children stay away from school, what these children are doing, what is their situation and what are their needs and the level of satisfaction of these needs, there are serious reasons for concern.

There was, however, one latest initiative taken which seems to have rendered the most precise data so far about children staying away from school. One of the aims of this initiative was to activate the mechanism of registration of school-age children and to facilitate cooperation and methodological coordination in local governments. This initiative was the campaign "Tevi gaida skola" [The School Is Waiting You] organized by the Children's Rights Protection Center at the Ministry of Education and Science. Data received from 557 local governments about children of compulsory school age not attending school were used as the information source in this campaign. Special attention was focused on trying to establish how many children of the total number of children not attending school were those who did not even come to the first form. Information was also collected about children who were declared "not teachable" and are not admitted to educational institutions and other information. According to the results of the campaign "Tevi gaida skola", there are 3414 children in Latvia, aged 7 - 18 years, who do not attend school and have not obtained primary education (see Supplement No. 6).

Within the same campaign, the staff of the Minors Affairs Inspection, in cooperation with police services, carried out raids, during the period from 15 September till 20 October 1997, to find out those children and adolescents who have a tendency to commit violations of the law and who had not started studies at school in the school year 1997/1998. According to the Report No. 3/2249/49 by the Deputy Chief of the State Police on the results of the activities of the Minors Affairs Inspection, 4123 minors were checked during these raids, and 1322 of them did not work and did not study. 959 minors in the age of 7 - 15 years were found as avoiding school, 468 of them had not even started attending school this year, 257 have not attended school for several years, and 161 were not even included in the records of school boards. It was established during these raids that 277 children and adolescents did not attend school because of lack of money, 13 are unable to get to the school because of lack of transport, and in 131 cases parents do not wish to send their children to school.

At the same time as statistical data were collected and situation studied in the said districts and cities, during the period from October till December 1996, 70 interviews were carried out with teachers, school principals and staff members of school boards, children's rights protection inspectors, police officers, employees of social assistance services, asking them for opinions about the following:

- why are children staying away from school;
- what happens to these children;
- is there any cooperation between various state and local government bodies in dealing with this problem, and if yes: what kind of cooperation.

After processing the results of these interviews, the major factors were profiled which cause the situation that children stay away from school. These factors are as follows:

- => the economic situation of the country. The fact that the number of families living under unsatisfactory conditions has increased is closely related to the economic situation in the country and the fast stratification of society, characterized by downward vertical mobility dominance;
- => the large number of poor families. This conclusion was also confirmed by the results of the Household Budget Research carried out by the State Statistics Committee in 1996. According to this research, children from poor families face the biggest problems in obtaining education, since most of incomes in these families are used to buy food, clothes and to cover apartment costs. As the Household Budget Research showed, 47% of children who do not attend school live in poor families. These poor families do not have enough moneys to prepare children for school, to buy them text-books, exercise books and other teaching aids, as well as clothes and footwear.
- => in many cases, the children who do not attend school come form families of unemployed people, where one or even both parents are unemployed. As the respondents told, it often happens that children in these families work to supplement the family incomes. These are either random works or earning of money in the street (for example, washing cars, selling postcards to foreigners, etc.) Children are also sent to beg, alone or together with parents, to supplement the family budget. In cases when these parents have no official status of unemployed (for example, if they had no labor contract with their last employer or if no social tax was paid for them), then the child support benefits are the only source of income for the family. It was often said in the interviews that these parents usually do not have corresponding education and qualification to get some other job. In this situation, many people are bewildered, they cannot adapt to their new conditions;
- => the respondents said that many of those children who do not attend school, come from broken families. These families have financial as well as psychological problems. A typical partial family in Latvia is a family consisting of mother with a child or children; these families are usually worse off in financial terms. The same problems pertain both to single mothers as well as to divorced women;
- => most of respondents, when describing the types of families, in which there are problems with school attendance, mentioned the unfavorable families. In the description of these families, such features dominate as: alcoholism, drug abuse, often conflicts and fights, child abuse. The parents are often unemployed in these families, they do not wish to work and live at the expense of their children. These parents are not concerned about their children, they are

not disturbed by the fact that their children do not attend school, therefore these parents are often described as uncaring, irresponsible, and having a negative influence on their children;

- => in the countryside, the transportation problems are among the factors leading to children staying “outside” school. The respondents pointed out not only to the fact that transport services are expensive and there are no free-of-charge tickets for the school pupils but also that buses are very rare or there is no transportation at all to get to the school. The public transportation schedules are not coordinated with the start and end of classes at school. There was special concern about the respondents about the prospect of possible closure of small country schools because of lack of funds;
- => disabled children are partially left out of school education, especially if their parents are not much concerned, since home teaching is not always provided them in the countryside;
- => according to respondents, a substantial factor leading to children staying away from school, is the absence of precise registration of school-age children, as it is now. The respondents pointed out that “there is no precise filing system for recording school-age children at state level.” The respondents also pointed out that there is insufficient control by state and local government institutions over those children who stay away from school, and too little interest in the actual situation of these children and families.

Besides the above described factors, which are more related to the situation in the country and in families, the respondents also pointed out to problems related to socio-psychological climate in educational institutions:

- => conflict situations among pupils and between pupils and teachers is one of the factors leading to children staying away from school;
- => as part of the respondents-teachers acknowledged, the poverty of the family of a child affect his or her relations with other children. These children are laughed-at, because they are badly dressed and lack the necessary learning materials, they are often regarded as retarded;
- => failures in studies, staying for the second year in the same form cause unwillingness in children to attend school;
- => for children who have not attended school for a longer time (2-3 years), it is difficult to establish normal relations with other children, or they choose the role of the negative leader;
- => when speaking about the city schools, especially in Riga, teachers pointed out to the usually large number of chi in each class, as a result of which it is difficult for teachers to exercise an individual approach to every child: “it is difficult to follow the actual situation of every child because of the large amount of work to do”;
- => part of the pupils feel vague about their prospects and future after graduation from school, therefore they lack the motivation for studies.

As regards the cooperation between institutions, most of respondents told that there is no sufficient and well-planned cooperation between them in dealing with these problems. There is also lack of knowledge and funds to help the families and children. Every institution tries to do something to better the situation, but there is no complex and professional approach. Social workers stressed the necessity to render comprehensive social assistance to those families who need it, because the currently existing system of

small child benefits is inadequate. On the other hand, the police officers and children's rights protection inspectors pointed out to shortcomings and discrepancies in legislation as a significant factor impeding work in this field.

The results obtained led to the conclusion that those causes which lead children to the status of a "street child" are similar to those typical for the children who do not attend school. Certainly, not every child not attending school can be regarded as a potential "street child", but definitely there is linkage between children staying away from school and "street children".

## Conclusions

After summarizing the results of the research, we can conclude that there are many socially unfavorable factors in Latvia, on the macro-, meso- and micro-levels, affecting the development process of children and contributing to them becoming “street children”.

### *National level*

1. No strategic program has been developed for social protection of children, based on actual facts of life and directed towards resolving the problems of children discussed here;
2. No system has been developed in the country for working with children who do not attend school, do not work, are vagrant and begging;
3. State policies do not promote the prestige and protection of the family;
4. Disorderly, often changing legislation, contradictory laws. Absence of legal interpretation of certain cases impede the processing of them in courts and hinder effective assistance to children and families;
5. There are no legislative acts which would allow to influence parents who do not care for their children;
6. Lowering of living standards of the population, including the rise of unemployment, as a result of which the number of poor families is growing. These families are unable to provide conditions for normal development of their children.
7. It is typical for the country that the number of divorced families is very high, as a result of which there is a considerable number of partial families where children are raised by one parent only (most often, by the mother);
8. While there are different children’s rights protection organizations, both those of the state as well as non-governmental organizations, the social provision system for children is still inadequate. The work of state institutions and non-governmental organizations in protecting the children’s rights is not sufficiently specialized and coordinated, the various organizations act on their own. The result is that there is no comprehensive statistical data base reflecting the situation of children in the country. The former linkages between the family, the school, society and state institutions has completely disappeared, and no equal system has been established in their place;
9. The social care, social rehabilitation and social assistance systems employ insufficiently qualified staff, and there is lack of social pedagogues and social workers. There are no street social workers in Latvia;
10. There are many unfavorable families, in which parents are alcoholics or have immoral habits. Children in these families are subject to sexual abuse and psychological violence. No professional social assistance is offered to dependent persons (on alcohol, drugs, etc.).

### *Local government level*

1. The work in protection of children is not sufficiently coordinated, the service network for children and families is inadequate.
2. The actual social needs of children and families in the corresponding region are not analyzed with the purpose to develop programs for activities.
3. There are no adequate professional social consulting services at social assistance institutions.
4. Availability of social services to children and families is limited in the countryside.

### *At school*

1. Under the current conditions of social crisis, educational institutions are not always able to carry out effective socially-pedagogical functions, entrusted upon them, which happens both because of objective reasons (lack of funds) and subjective causes (lack of skills, unwillingness, etc.);
2. The lack of funds leads to closure of institutions for pupil's out-of-school activities, and interest groups are abandoned at schools. The result is that children do not have opportunities for spending their free time usefully;
3. There are certain factors at school, often occurring today, which affect children unfavorably and contribute to turning them into "street children":

- \* low discipline, inadequate qualification of teachers, low quality of social pedagogy and social work, especially on issues of social assistance, social rehabilitation and social correction of behavior, weak teachers' skills in social training;
- \* insufficient tutoring, lack of social pedagogues who could work with individual social cases, who could professionally define the problems of children and the family and correspondingly define the forms of social assistance to deal with these problems;
- \* no activities are organized for children after classes;
- \* cultural and entertainment activities at schools are inadequate and not sufficiently well-planned;

4. Because of lack of progress in studies and absence from classes, pupils are expelled from schools, and, in most cases, their parents do not look for some other school instead. There are often cases when other schools do not wish to admit these children;
5. The school curriculum is rather difficult, many children need additional help to master the subjects. If children are absent from school for longer periods, have delayed studies, then they lose interest in studies, do not believe in their forces any more, and do not wish to go to school as a result, since they do not like to study;
6. Social differentiation at school has negative effect on the relations among children as well as the relations between pupils and teachers;
7. Teachers lack patience and do not spend much time for children who have problems in studies.

### *In the family*

1. The formation of the problem of "street children" is affected by many negative factors in the family:
  - lack of material provision for children (approximately half of all the Latvian families with children live under poor conditions);
  - partial families in which parents are unable to pay sufficient attention to children and their needs according to their age;
  - alcohol abuse by parents;
  - regular conflicts in families.

The result is that the family is unable to satisfy the vital needs of children:

- the need for food, clothing, shelter, etc.;
- the need for safety (in the unfavorable families, children are often subject both to physical as well as psychological violence);

- children do not have sufficient attention and love from their parents, they feel lonely, because the parents are overwhelmed by their problems and pay little attention to them;

2. The emergence of “street children” is also caused by the now existing painful problem in Riga: the eviction of insolvent families from apartments, when the whole family is left in the street, including children. Likewise, change of residency, when the living standard is sharply falling, is a serious psychological trauma for children, especially in the age of adolescents.

### *The street environment*

For “street children”, the street is source of income, it offers opportunities to earn money, to get friends, to find a refuge from the family, if the family threatens the child.

As the street environment becomes more attractive, it turns into a place of intensive, strong and contradictory influence. There are many negative social factors active in the street which adversely affect children, such as the raising popularity of the games of chance and gambling machines, the prestige of places of entertainment, such as discos, bars, etc., is growing, and the influence of criminal personalities on children is strong.

*The social portrait of “street children” was drawn up as a result of interviews with children in Riga. The following are the features on this portrait:*

These are most often boys aged 9-15 years who spend most of their time in the street and return home late at night (around midnight), only to sleep. 60% of these children come from partial families, and the number of unemployed parents of these children is very high. 53% of “street children” come from large families. Most of them (54%) do not attend school. Those who do not attend school or go to school irregularly, cite the following causes for staying away from school: lack of moneys in the family, unwillingness to learn, having been expelled from school because of lack of progress. Most of these children like the life in the street, and they do not complain much about the attitudes of other people towards them. They mainly get their means of sustenance by begging, car washing, stealing. They usually have several friends in the street or a group of friends.

Speaking about the main reasons why they are in the street, these children referred to the following:

- lack of moneys in the family (39%);
- regular conflicts in the family (36%);
- having felt lonely at home (25%).

These children see the street as a solution to their problems:

- the street is an opportunity for them to be free and independent from parents;
- opportunity to have many friends;
- opportunity to earn and buy the things they have long coveted;
- opportunity to stay away from school;
- opportunity to spend their time interestingly.

## Recommendations

The major directions to reduce the problem of “street children”:

- => to improve the socio-economic conditions of life;
- => improving the social welfare of children;
- => humanizing social relations;
- => perfection of legislation, the judicial system, the system of law enforcement agencies;
- => improving the professional qualification of social institutions and the quality of assistance rendered to children and families (acknowledging the professions of social pedagogue and social worker in the country, including these professions in the official classifier of professions in the Republic of Latvia).

To achieve the aims defined, the state should declare the child and the family as national values, confirming such declaration with special financial provision for a national program for protection of children’s rights. The development of such program will allow to expand the policies of support to children and families and to implement permanent planning strategies for raising the welfare of children.

The foreign specialists Kamerman and Kahn (1990) suggest that governmental bodies should initiate new organizational approaches to increase the range of social services. More attention should be paid to coordination, cooperation, planning, and methods to attract and distribute funds.

When planning the activities, it is important to base on the multi-factor or system model which simultaneously takes into account different mutually connected factors which affect each other. Such systemic approach is also recommended for social protection of children and adolescents in the Social Development Declaration of Copenhagen signed also by Guntis Ulmanis, the President of Latvia. There are five directions of activities defined in the Declaration for working in protection of children and adolescents (see Picture No. 16): provision of education, ensuring an adequate environment, health protection, providing of jobs for the youth, securing social integration.

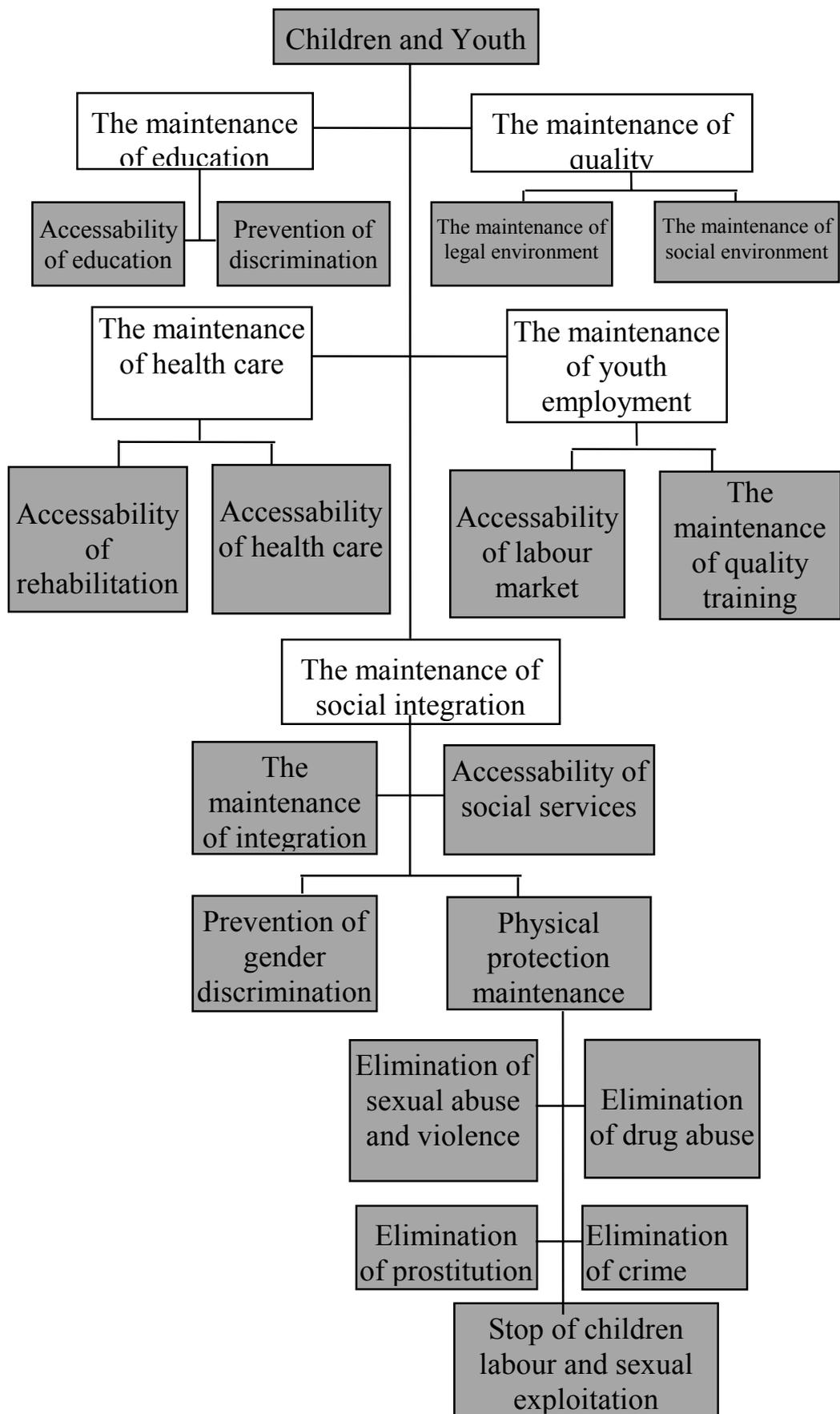
In order to significantly improve the welfare level of children and thus to deal with the problem of “street children”, it is necessary to implement a series of measures on state and local government level:

1. Awareness should be raised about how the children’s rights are observed and the public should be educated on the issues of the Convention of the Protection of Children’s Rights and its observance in Latvia:

- 1.1. Registration of school-age children in the country must be established;
- 1.2. Data bases should be formed of families-at-risk, of children not attending school and “street children”, the situation of children in these families must be kept under control;
- 1.3. The children themselves must be involved in finding out their problems and needs and looking for ways how to satisfy them.

2. The applicable legislation must be put in line with the Convention of the Protection of Children’s Rights, and the already existing laws must be enforced:

- 2.1. It must be ensured that the provisions of laws, related to responsibility and rights of children, could be actually applied;



Picture Nr.16

Children and youth social protection

2.2. Laws should include prohibitions and clauses providing rights for:

- vagrant, begging, i. e. the “street children”;
- children who are under the age of 15 years, if they do not study at school; responsibility should be defined for those who are guilty of this situation (family, educational institution, schools board, local government, or some other institution).

3. The potential of the state and the public should be raised for controlling the “street children”:

3.1. On the national level, the training of professional social workers and social pedagogues at tertiary schools should be supported;

3.2. To develop services targeted to strengthening the functions of the family, to ensure availability of such services;

3.3. To create a network of specialists directly engaged in dealing with the problem of “street children”, including the street social workers;

3.4. To provide for qualification improvement of minors’ affairs inspectors, deepening their knowledge in social work and social pedagogy, in psychology;

3.5. To involve social pedagogues in the work at schools.

4. Children must be provided with access to information about available social assistance services and should be helped to acquire the necessary skills enabling them to deal with their problems and overcome difficult situations.

5. Taking into account that the problem of “street children” is, to a certain extent, related to the problem of children not attending school, actually free-of-charge compulsory education must be provided for children, so that all families, independent of their financial state, could send their children to school.

It is important for schools to facilitate the improvement of the qualification of pedagogues and to raise the prestige of the profession of educator. The current situation at schools suggest that it is necessary to develop and implement a special Code of Ethics for educators which would ensure emotional and psychological protection of children.

Social pedagogues must be involved in the work at schools.

The work of the social pedagogue at school should include several directions: information provision, teaching social skills (how to overcome difficulties), finding resources necessary to resolve problems, individual consulting, etc.

The tasks of the social pedagogue should include:

- to analyze separate social cases, to professionally define the causes of the problems of the child and the family and to correspondingly offer social assistance to resolve such problems;
- to strengthen the mutual ties between the school and the family;
- to establish personal contacts with the pupils, define the forms of intervention, to work according to an individually accommodated plan.
- to collect and analyze the necessary information about the place of residence of the child, the surrounding social environment, material situation, situation in the family and the possibilities of social institutions to render assistance;
- to support parents and teachers with permanent presence and participation in the educational process of the child.

(In the work with parents: to render support by educating them: by inviting psychologist, organizing lectures; to promote meetings of parents, discussions, etc.)

6. It is important to preserve and develop the institutions engaged in organizing additional education for children and adolescents and their free time, as well as to keep the state funding for the payment of pedagogues working in these institutions. The events, study groups, etc., organized in the out-of-school institutions must be available to children from poor families.

7. The program for ambulatory medical observation and regular check-ups must be reviewed and amended, so that real medical care could be provided for all children which need it, including "street children".

Compulsory medical treatment must be ensured for children who are drug addicts and toxic substances - addicts.

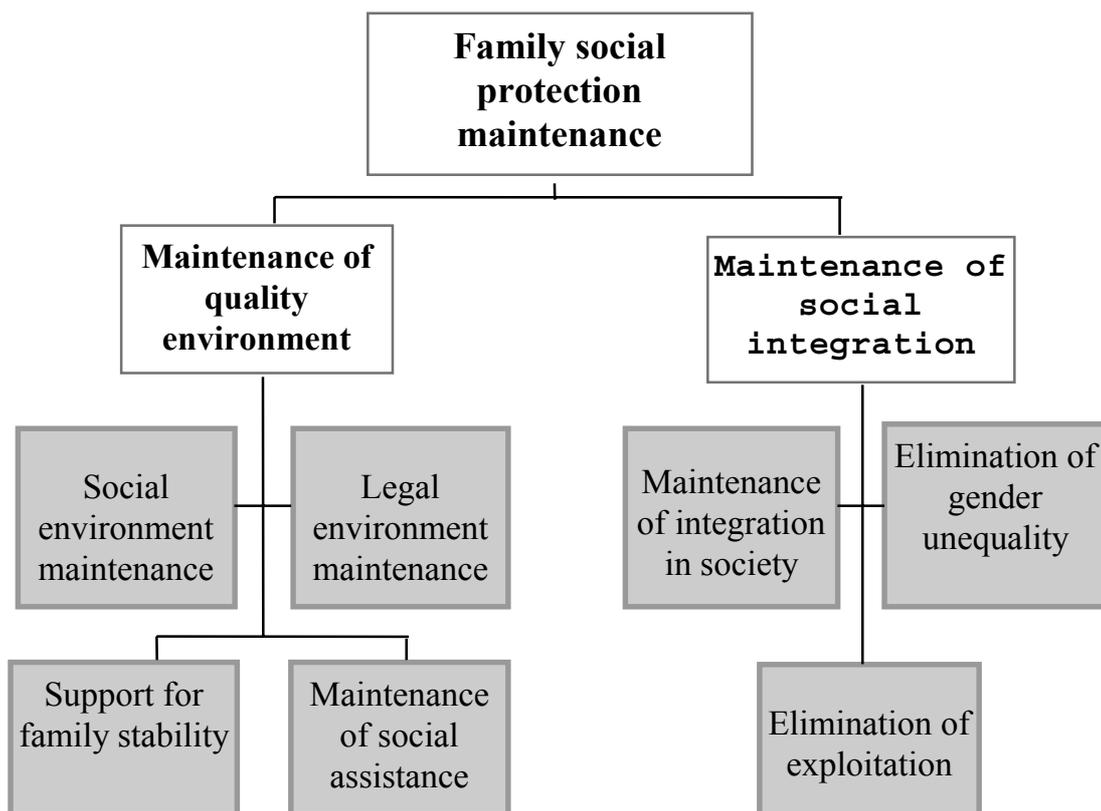
8. The role of non-governmental organizations should be increased in meeting the interests of children and adolescents, and funding must be provided for such projects. Non-governmental organizations should be included in a united coordinated system dealing with the problem of "street children".

9. Strengthening of the family is necessary by rendering the necessary material support and support in crisis situations.

Providing social protection for the family is one of the major tasks to reduce the possibilities for the creation of "street children". According to the Social Development Declaration of Copenhagen, work in two directions is necessary to provide for social protection of the family: provision of quality environment and social integration (see Picture No. 17).

The following is necessary to create an environment which could ensure stable functioning of the family:

1. to find out the actual situations and social needs of families and to analyze them;
2. to extend the availability of social services and information by improving the quality of services;
3. to create a wide range of versatile services and to develop social institutions according to regional specifics (the development of social infrastructure);
4. to create an information data bank (data containing the social portrait of the family and the creation of corresponding social support programs);
5. to train professional specialists (social workers, family therapists, social nurses, social caretakers, crisis therapists);
6. to become aware of and coordinate local resources (voluntarily organizations, private institutions, local government bodies);
7. to develop programs for prevention of further social polarization and differentiation of inhabitants and to stop marginalization of families;
8. to develop social programs, based on progressive family policy.



Picture No. 17 *Provision of social protection for the family*

The results of the research show that the emergence of the problem of “street children” is, to a large extent, determined by the environment, in which children live and develop, including the specific family situation of children. It is therefore important to develop services targeted on strengthening the functioning of the family and on controlling problems in the family. It is important to establish a service system which could offer a wide spectrum of services for different families (see Table No. 9), starting from every normal (preventive measures), for families which are in need of additional assistance (both material as well as emotional), and up to the families-at-risk, families in crisis situations, for families where children are endangered.

Table No. 9 *Services offered to the family and children (V. Meezan, 1996)*

Family type	Supplied services
Any family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- health care</li> <li>- educational centres for development</li> <li>- children care</li> <li>- family orientated labour policy</li> <li>- adults education</li> <li>- entertainment possibilities</li> <li>- family planning centres</li> <li>- information services</li> </ul>
Families with additional assistance needed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- family support centres</li> <li>- family leisure programmes</li> <li>- home visits projects</li> <li>- family consultations</li> <li>- parental assistance centres</li> <li>- support groups</li> <li>- services for single parents</li> </ul>

Risk families with special assistance needed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- alcoholism and drug abuse healing</li> <li>- short term children care</li> <li>- family orientated social services</li> <li>- special training and health centres</li> <li>- consultations for pregnant minors and youngster families</li> <li>- mental health centres</li> <li>- assistance for mentally handicapped and emotionally unstable children and their families</li> </ul>
Families with protection needed children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- diagnostic centres</li> <li>- step parents homes</li> <li>- therapeutic temporal care institutions</li> <li>- group homes</li> <li>- therapeutic group homes</li> <li>- care centres</li> <li>- services for family reunion</li> </ul>
Families in crisis or on the edge of divorce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- services for children protection</li> <li>- assistance for family preserve</li> <li>- assistance for chronic unfavourable families</li> <li>- assistance for vagrant children and their families</li> </ul>
Families without reconciliation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- adoption services</li> <li>- services for maintenance of independent life after divorce</li> </ul>

The first precondition for this service system to be effective is good coordination, to ensure easy access to these services. **The major aim of these services is to work with families and their children in their homes, to avoid the necessity to isolate children from families.**

Children should be temporarily isolated from their families in cases when parents are cruel with their children, when they abuse alcohol or drugs or when children are not provided with the necessary means of sustenance. To be able to do that, it is necessary to advance the number of foster-families, so that children from unfavorable families could have the possibility to live in normal families for a time, until their biological parents are again capable to carry out their functions.

Permanently planned activities should provide for protection of the family and children on the grounds of the following principles:

- 1) a number of social services should be available to all families, assisting them to develop and preserve their integrity;
- 2) the cases of disfunctioning of families, which could lead to the necessity to place children in foster-institutions, should be found out timely;
- 3) the work with families and children should be done in their homes, so as to avoid the necessity to isolate children from their families;
- 4) the isolation of children from their families should take place according to special rules and only after other measures, including the assistance of different institutions and other services, have failed to resolve the situation in the family;
- 5) before or just after the isolation of the child from the family, it is necessary to carefully assess different institutions, and the child should be placed in the institution most appropriate for him or her and imposing the minimum unavoidable restrictions on the child.

Furthermore, when working with the family, it is always important to implement holistic approach ensuring the analysis of the situation in the family and rendering assistance, taking into account both internal as well as external factors defining the functioning of the family in the social environment (see Table No. 10).

*Table No. 10 Internal and external factors defining the functioning of the family*

External factors determining the functioning of family in the social environment	Internal factors determining the functioning of family
Welfare model (the aims of the social policy, the structure, the essence of the family policy)	Economic resources and opportunities
The influence of the political system	Cultural and ethnic background
Flexibility of the employment system	Social and psychological features: * low level of education * shifted values * destructive relations * pedagogical incompetence of parents
Social institutions compliance with needs of the family	Social conditions
Norms of social control	Degree of social isolation
Accessibility of the social service network	Values and goals
Quality of the education system	Features of social behaviour: * cruelty (violence) * delinquency * alcohol or drug addiction
Quality of the health care system	Social abilities
The reliability of the service system (transportation, communications, quality of community services)	Physical / psychological crisis
	Models of interaction between parents and children
	Social and demographic features (large family, incomplete family, the elderly in the family, repeated marriage)

It is crucial that social services, educational institutions, the Prophylactic Center and other institutions should employ professional social workers or social pedagogues who could deal with social problems on professional level and would form a well-coordinated network of social services based on cooperation. Timely intervention is an important precondition for dealing with the problem of “street children”. In the event of a late intervention, the placement of the child in some institution is often the only possible solution left. Most attention should be focused on working with the parents of the child, since they are the people who will or will not be able to provide normal living environment for the child. In order to carry out these activities and to ensure that they are effective, the legislation on social assistance and related provisions should clearly define the duties and rights of social workers as well as the rights and duties of parents.

Timely intervention and prevention are crucial in eradicating the causes of the problem of “street children”. However, the work with the “street children” themselves in their usual environment, to be carried out by the street social workers, is not less important. When working with these children, it is important to take into account all the factors which have led the child into the street and to respect the existing situation of the child (which, as we saw from the survey, the children themselves regard as satisfactory in most cases) and avoid implementing immediate fast changes (to force the child to attend school, to place him or her in asylum, to return to the family, etc.), which could again lead to negative experiences for the child with adults and institutions. The work with “street children” has to be based on the step-by-step principle, always taking into account the concrete psychological, material, shelter and other problems of the child. The work with these children will probably have the form of lasting relations between the social pedagogue and the child which will start in the usual environment of the child and then will move on to the family and, if necessary, to some institution.

Taking into account that Latvia, up till now, has no experience in street social work, the starting of these activities may be related to several problems: for example, uncertainty about the eventual functions of the street social worker as well as problems in implementing these functions, since, because of the limited resources and services offered, the potential activities of the street social workers could be restricted initially. However, this should not be a reason for renouncing the functioning of such professionals. In the beginning of this work, it would be important to collect information about these children, to perform in-depth analysis of their problems and needs, to gain their trust and establish contact.

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