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**STREET CHILDREN  
IN LATVIA: PROBLEMS  
AND SOLUTIONS**

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## SUMMARY

In Latvia the transition period has been a time of both economic and social tensions; it has created new problems and exacerbated existing ones. One of the new problems, which appeared in Latvia without warning, is the problem of street children. Although Latvia's laws protect the rights of all children, they have proved inadequate for dealing with the problem of street children. The question is whether this situation can be changed in a way that is financially and administratively feasible.

This study shows that it is possible and takes a look at the strategic questions that should receive attention if the existing system for protection of children's rights is to work well enough to cope with the problem of street children.

The study:

- analyses the causes and effects of the street children phenomenon;
- defines the term "street children" and explains the adopted approach;
- outlines the difficulties connected with registering the exact number of street children and assesses future prospects for obtaining regular data;
- examines current policy on protection of children's rights and evaluates measures taken at a state and local government level to cope with the street children problem;
- makes recommendations based on case studies carried out in various Latvian cities.

The study also includes a number of specific proposals, concerning:

- the term "street children";
- statistics on street children;
- municipal child and family support councils.



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## INTRODUCTION

Sometimes, street children are referred to as the "lost generation," a generation that can no longer be helped, an inevitable victim of the times of change. It is widely believed that, as the prosperity of the nation increases, the street children problem will automatically disappear.

However, developments in other countries indicate that such a one-sided perception of this phenomenon could prove to be extremely imprudent. We should keep in mind that there are street children even in such prospering countries as the USA and Great Britain. This suggests that a wait-and-see strategy, hoping that the problem will simply "go away," would not be wise. Everything possible must be done to learn more about this phenomenon, to determine what is typical for Latvia, to benefit from experience in other countries, to analyse the strengths and weaknesses of current policy on protection of children's rights, to use available resources more effectively, and to apply new, progressive tactics in seeking solutions to the problem.

The street children phenomenon appeared during the period of transition to a free market economy<sup>1</sup>, during a time when families and children were exposed to various types of risks (unemployment, low wages, high public utility payments etc.), but did not receive sufficient support to overcome them. As a result, in the mid-1990s, begging, working and vagrant children appeared in the streets of Latvia's cities. At the same time, children who did not attend school also became a problem.

On the one hand, these were the effects of the impoverishment of many of Latvia's families with children. On the other hand, the links between family, school, society and government institutions, which had functioned so smoothly during the Soviet era,

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<sup>1</sup> In the 1920s–1930s, during the first period of Latvian independence, there was also a large number of children who did not attend school and spent much of their time on the streets. However, in those days, there were other reasons for this problem, connected with the aftereffects of the war.

had been completely eliminated in the mid-nineties, but had not been replaced with anything new.

In ten years of independence, much has been done to protect children's rights. The foundations have been laid for a versatile social security system, legislation that is conform with international standards has been enacted (the Convention on the Rights of the Child has been ratified, the Law on Protection of Children's Rights has been adopted) to protect children, to guarantee that every child has shelter, food, proper care, opportunities for an education. A widespread network of institutions for the protection of children's rights has been developed. Nevertheless, all this has not been able to prevent the street children phenomenon nor guarantee protection of the rights of these children. Neither their basic needs nor their development needs are satisfied. Street children often have no links or weak links to family, school and other childcare or educational institutions that are supposed to guarantee favourable conditions for the development of a child. Living on the streets, children find their own solutions to situations in which their safety and sometimes even lives are at risk.

Professional assessments, statistical surveys and studies carried out in Latvia all lead to the conclusion that the number of street children is not declining and that their problems are becoming increasingly serious, deeply-rooted and chronic. Current government policy on protection of children's rights is unable to deal with the problem of street children or to guarantee equal development opportunities for all children.

Allowed to continue at its present rate of growth, the street children phenomenon could have a deleterious impact on the general welfare in two ways:

First, society will suffer from a rise in crime, drug addiction, prostitution, theft, beggary and hooliganism. The consequences will become apparent not only in the negative effects of the street environment on the development of children and their ability to function in society, in growing crime and threats to public safety, they will also become apparent in rising social welfare costs and proliferation of social risk groups.

Second, children who spend most of their time on the street become part of a specific subculture that is ruled by "street laws." This includes street culture, street ethics and street values which have little in common with the generally accepted rules by which society abides. These children will grow up, and they will represent a part of society in Latvia. Studies in other countries show that children who grow up on the street later have dysfunctional families and children very much like themselves, eventually making the process permanent and irreversible.

## The theoretical and practical basis for the study

Legislation on the protection of children's rights, regulations issued by institutions involved in the protection of children's rights, other relevant documents such as policy concepts, guidelines, recommendations, draft laws, etc. have been used for this study. In order to provide a comprehensive picture of the situation and to evaluate the dynamics of the problem, the author has also used data provided by the Central Bureau of Statistics, the annual Social Reports of the Ministry of Welfare, the reports of the National Centre for Protection of Children's Rights on the situation of children in Latvia, as well as data obtained from other institutions. Other studies on the issue and articles on street children that have appeared in major Latvian newspapers since 1997 have been analysed.

There are no statistics in Latvia on the dimensions of the problem of street children, and only a few studies have been carried out on the topic. This is why one of the most important sources of information for this report were interviews with experts and politicians who work for state and municipal institutions that are involved in protecting the rights of children. Thirty-two in-depth interviews were conducted in Latvia's four major cities: Riga, Daugavpils, Liepāja, Jelgava. The respondents were chosen from municipal institutions responsible for the protection of children's rights and usually included directors and experts from the following: city council departments for juvenile and social affairs, orphans' courts, school boards (including children's rights inspectors), social welfare services/centres, state and municipal police, various other local government institutions and NGOs that are involved in protecting the rights of children (see Appendix 1 for list of respondents). Other sources of information were: telephone interviews, seminars and debates, the Internet and other sources (books, publications, visits) of information on the situation in other countries, polls carried out by the Association for Street Children.

## 1. THE STREET CHILDREN PHENOMENON IN LATVIA

### 1.1. What are street children?

The street children phenomenon is not easy to describe or explain. Its causes and effects are linked to problems of poverty, unemployment, drug abuse, and crime. However, the problem that this report deals with is neither drug addiction, nor crime, nor alcoholism, nor beggary – it is "street children."

The first step in overcoming a problem is to admit that it exists. Although the term "street children" has been used on and off in Latvia since the mid-nineties by experts, journalists and politicians, its meaning remains unclear. The term is often employed by the media to draw attention and grab headlines.

Experts sometimes interpret the term differently, depending on the institution with which they are affiliated. For instance, educators may describe street children as children who do not attend school. Police may describe street children as those who violate the law. Social workers may describe them as those who come from dysfunctional families.

The term "street children" is defined differently in different countries, and sometimes parallel interpretations may be used. Usually, a description of street children includes an assessment of:

- links to the family;
- level of deviant behaviour<sup>2</sup>;
- working on the street.

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<sup>2</sup> Behaviour that does not conform to generally accepted norms or to socially accepted standards.

The evolution of children into street children is often seen as a process that begins with a relatively small amount of time spent on the street and progresses to become a life on the street.

Regardless of the different approaches to the issue, it is important to understand what is characteristic for each country, in this case, for Latvia.

An analysis of the opinions of different experts and of the use of the term in studies and by the media shows that in Latvia street children are considered to be children who spend most of the time on the street. They are children who have run away from home or who have been turned out of their homes, who spend the night on the street. They are children who do not receive the necessary supervision and care from adults, which is why they spend most of their time on the street.

For the purposes of this report, "street children" should be understood both as children who live permanently on the street and children who spend most of their time there.

This approach is based on an analysis of the concepts and terms that have so far been used in this context in Latvia (see Figure 1). The main argument for the use of this approach – it accurately reflects the situation in Latvia, where **most of the children who spend time on the street have links with their families and usually spend the night at home**.

It should be pointed out that the term "street children" and other related terms are usually used by the press and in state and local government documents without elaboration.

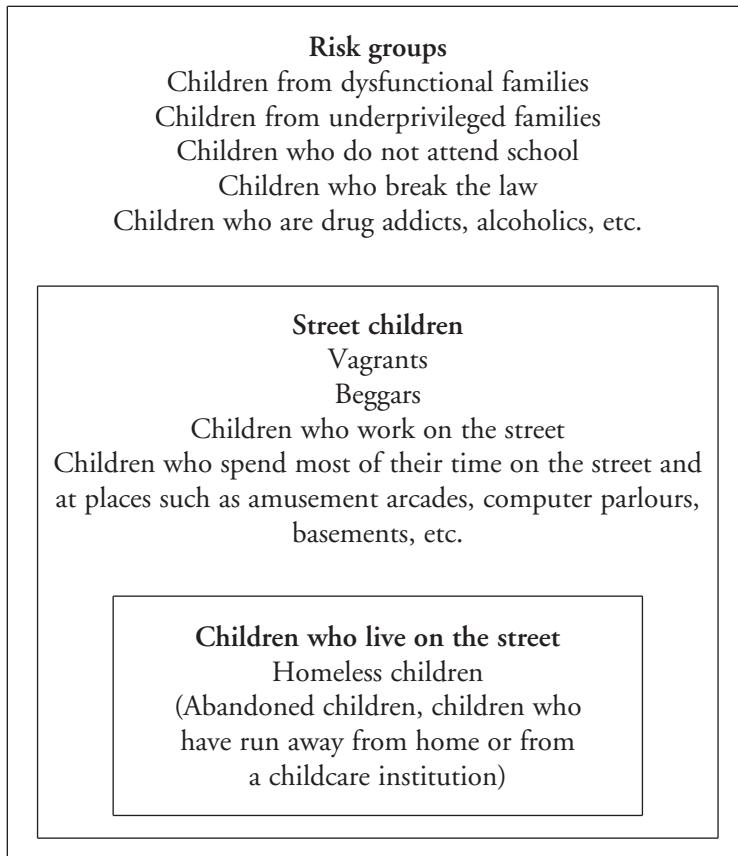
A look at the way in which this term has been used in various documents clearly shows that the term "street children" incorporates a much larger group of children, not just those who live on the street. Children who actually live on the street can be set apart as a subgroup of this much larger group. This makes it possible to assemble specific data on this group and to determine the proportion of children who actually live on the street in relation to the larger group commonly described as street children. Another argument for use of the broader definition is the great importance of the concept of "socialisation"<sup>3</sup> when characterising street children. Normally, family and school play the main role in the socialisation process of a child. In the case of street children, it is the street – the place where the child spends most of his time, the place where the child

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<sup>3</sup> The personality development process during which a child acquires information, learns social standards, skills and values which make it possible for the child to function successfully within a community.

learns to live within a community, where he acquires necessary life skills and, ultimately, his own system of values.

**Figure 1. The term "street children" in relation to other concepts**



## 1.2. Why do children choose life on the street?

Conceptually, this problem emerges as the contradiction between what the family can offer the child and what he or she can get among peers in a street environment. The phenomenon is found in the circumstance that the street is often a better and even safer place for these children than the home, or that the street helps them to obtain support for their families, which have landed in difficulties and are unable to solve their problems and satisfy their needs unaided.

Researchers who have studied the phenomenon of street children elsewhere in the world mention three important causes for this phenomenon: poverty, violence and modernisation.<sup>4</sup>

To what extent can the above conclusions be applied to Latvia?

### Poverty

All poverty researchers have concluded that a radical polarisation of society has taken place in Latvia. A comparison between consumer spending of the well-to-do 20% of the population and the 20% at the other end of the scale shows that the first group spends USD 203 per capita/month, while the latter spends only USD 35 per capita – 5.7 times less.

Researchers agree that households with children are among the groups that are most susceptible to the risk of poverty.<sup>5</sup> A great part of the children in Latvia live in underprivileged families, where more than 50% of total family income is spent on food. It is also true that poor families tend to have a greater number of children.

The situation is particularly difficult for single-parent families. Despite official reports of an economic upswing and a noticeable GDP increase, the income of these families has not increased in recent years, and in the year 2000 income was even lower than in the previous year.<sup>6</sup> This suggests that, in reality, economic growth is achieved at the expense of social welfare and fairness.

### Violence

The number of children who suffer from violence increases from year to year in Latvia. In 2000, there were 935 registered cases of children who had been victims of a crime – 234 more than in 1998. Statistics do not, however, always reflect the true situation. Violence against children actually occurs far more often. Children suffer abuse at home, at school and on the street.

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<sup>4</sup> Aptekar, Lewis. Cross-Cultural Research, Vol. 28, No. 3, August 1994, p. 30.

<sup>5</sup> Social Report 2000, Ministry of Welfare, p. 85.

<sup>6</sup> Children in Latvia. Statistics Bulletin. Republic of Latvia Central Bureau of Statistics, Riga, 2001.

## Modernisation

Modernisation is a factor that is difficult to assess in terms of the way in which it affects the problem of street children. The UNICEF study "Child on the Street" shows that the street environment with its wide array of attractions such as amusement arcades, night clubs and Internet cafes has become seemingly appealing for children. It is also true that many families with children, as well as children on their own, come to Riga in the hope of making money. Juveniles come to Riga to beg or work in the streets, or to engage in prostitution.

The "Child in the Street" study was the first in Latvia to analyse the causes of the street children phenomenon. The authors name 10 principal factors which have contributed to development of the problem: the large number of disadvantaged families and broken homes; the large number of children born to single mothers; lack of coordination between the work of the national government, local governments and public organisations; the absence of a statistical database on the situation of children in Latvia; a shortage of qualified social pedagogues and social workers; the fact that social welfare is often not received by those who need it most; the fact that negative situations in schools contribute to a growing number of children who do not attend school; eviction of impoverished families with children from their homes; the attraction of the street environment.

The authors of the study interviewed 62 children aged 5–15 in the streets of Riga. The children named the following as the main reasons for their life on the street:

- shortage of money in the family (39%);
- regular conflicts in the family (36%);
- loneliness (25%).<sup>7</sup>

Information provided by the Riga Municipal Crisis Centre for Street Children "Marsa Gatve" (Mars Avenue) on typical reasons for why children end up on the street concurs with data obtained by the 1997 UNICEF study. The main reasons why children have come to the centre are:

- the parents are drug addicts or alcoholics, conditions at home are unsanitary;
- the children are vagrants;
- the children have been abandoned, left without care;

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<sup>7</sup> "Child on the Street" project. Latvian National UNICEF Committee, Riga, 1997.

- the children have been abused;
- the children have conflicts with their parents;
- the children have run away from childcare institutions.

Failure to attend school or dropping out of school can be both cause and effect in the process of a child's becoming a street child.

A study on children who leave school, carried out in 1999 by the non-governmental organisation "Atbalsts" (Support) as part of the PHARE LIEN democracy programme, identified three main categories of reasons for children dropping out of school.

1. Sooner or later, school is abandoned by children with health problems, i.e., children with special needs whose condition has not been diagnosed and who do not receive the special attention that they require.

Experts admit that children with development problems are at risk of becoming part of a social group whose behaviour does not conform to generally accepted standards. Children with psychological problems can be easily influenced. This is why ending up on the street can be a danger both for the children themselves as well as for society in general.

2. School is abandoned by children with social adjustment problems, which are the result of a lack of parental supervision and a negative social environment in the family.

3. School is abandoned due to poverty and circumstances connected with this. The child is not properly clothed, has no money for transportation or schoolbooks, must work or look after younger brothers and sisters while the mother is at work.

The study has revealed a certain discrepancy in Latvia: although teachers are sufficiently competent to deal with the problem of low self-esteem among students, in reality they often contribute to aggravation of the problem, which then becomes one of the reasons why children drop out of school and become street children. Schools are also known for trying to get rid of so called "problem children," which means that it will be extremely difficult for these children to continue their education, go on to college or university and fit into our modern society. They will very likely be unemployed or have low-paid jobs.

Interviews conducted in 2001 with experts on the protection of children's rights showed that **in recent years the causes of the problem have not significantly changed**. The experts conclude that the problem of street children stems from a series of economic

and social risk factors – unemployment, poor national and local government support for families with children<sup>8</sup>, low salaries and high public utility costs, limited opportunities for children from poor families for spending their free time, eviction of families with children from their homes, etc. (see Appendix 2). These factors have a negative effect on the functioning of a family. Families that have been stricken by poverty often end up in the dysfunctional families category – they are unable to solve problems within the family and suffer permanently from psychological pressure, stress and a feeling of helplessness. Conflicts arise, alcoholism and unsanitary conditions prevail, and parents neglect their children because they are unable to cope with their own problems.

It should be pointed out that street children can also come from seemingly good homes. Such families often suffer from the working-parents syndrome. These parents are so busy at work that they are unable to give their children sufficient care and attention.

In both cases, street children suffer from similar emotions – they feel unloved, unneeded, lonely. They try to find the solution to their problems on the street.

### **1.3. How widespread is the problem?**

There are no statistics in Latvia about street children. There are several reasons for this. The first one is the inability of experts to agree on terminology – what exactly are street children in Latvia? The second reason is that street children are an extremely mobile group. Every now and then, they change both domicile and lifestyle. They spend some time on the streets, some with their families, some in childcare institutions, and then return again to the streets. This means that they cannot be registered using traditional methods. Another reason is that street children are not statistically treated as a separate group, although the Law on Protection of Children's Rights charges the government with keeping statistics on the protection of children's rights.

It should be pointed out that neither have any other studies been carried out in Latvia on problems that can not be explored with traditional approaches or quantitative research methods, for example, child prostitution or exploitation of children.

For Latvia, assessment of the dimensions of the street children problem is also a serious challenge posed by the international community. In January 2001, the United Nations

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<sup>8</sup> Small family allowances and municipal social welfare benefits, a poorly developed network of family-support services such as child day care, family crisis centres, professional consultations, etc., insufficient local government efforts to solve the housing problems of low-income families, ineffective mechanisms for collecting child-support payments from absentee parents.

Committee on the Rights of the Child pointed out in its Concluding Observations that Latvia does not have a fully functioning systematic and comprehensive system for collecting data on all groups of children. This system should encompass all children up to the age of 18, with focus on children who are particularly unprotected, including those who live on the street.<sup>9</sup>

**Currently, examination of the street children phenomenon is possible only with the help of statistics that suggest causes and effects or define the social risk groups that most often produce street children.**

In 2000, there were 154,934 children in Latvia living in disadvantaged<sup>10</sup> families. This is 29% of all children aged 0–17. The number of children living in dysfunctional families was 18,821 (see Appendix 4).

In the period from 1998–2000, orphans' courts had suspended or per court ruling terminated the parental authority of 5,297 persons. The number of children in these families was 7,747.

These figures indicate that the number of street children in the country is likely to increase because, as pointed out previously, street children come predominantly from dysfunctional families.<sup>11</sup>

The street children problem is to some extent connected with the failure of children to attend school. In 2000, of all 308,590 children between the ages of 7 and 15 who are officially registered in Latvia, 14,818 were not registered at an educational institution (4.80%). Of those registered at educational institutions, 2,607 or 0.84% did not attend school. The main reasons why children had not started going to school were:

- illness (566);
- parental negligence (444);
- social problems (339).

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<sup>9</sup> UN Committee on the Rights of the Child Concluding Observations: Latvia. Committee on the Rights of the Child, 26th session. Review of State Party reports, pursuant to Article 44 of the Convention, January 26, 2001.

<sup>10</sup> Families registered with municipal social welfare agencies.

<sup>11</sup> Families which for various reasons (poverty, single-parent, etc.) are unable to fulfil the normal functions of a family, such as caring for children, providing a regular income, etc.

In 2000, the greatest number of children who had not started to attend school was registered in Riga (813), followed by Liepāja (160) and Daugavpils (111). As in the case of the children who do not attend school, the street children problem is also a phenomenon typical for the big cities.

Statistical indicators such as the number of crimes committed by juveniles<sup>12</sup>, the number of juvenile drug addicts<sup>13</sup>, and the number of children taken into custody during police raids<sup>14</sup> also suggest that the street children problem is spreading.

Almost all of these indicators are on the rise, despite the fact that the number of children in the country is on the decline. Since 1989, the number of children under the age of 17 has dropped by 147,272 or 22%.<sup>15</sup>

### **Experts admit that the street children problem worsens from year to year.**

The results of a survey conducted among directors and specialists of non-governmental organisations indicate that the number of street children in Latvia could be between 3,000 and 5,000, but more than 1,000 of them spend almost all of their time (including nights) away from home.

#### **1.4. How do children live on the street?**

Over a period of several years, street children have adjusted to life on the street. They are no longer as conspicuous in the streets, and they have learned to avoid confrontations with the police. They do not wander about the streets at night, and in the summer, they often leave the city to spend the night in a safe place. Children who beg do not usually sit around in the streets, they comb cafes and shops, asking for money. You

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<sup>12</sup> In the last 10 years, the number of crimes committed by juveniles has increased by 63%. In 2000, the State Police registered 3,923 children who had broken the law. One factor that promotes criminal behaviour is the fact that many young people do not attend a school and are not raised in a family. Over half of the juveniles who were sentenced did not work or attend school, 4–7% were not raised in a family.

<sup>13</sup> Compared to 1995, when there were five registered juvenile drug addicts, in 2000 the number had grown to 289. Furthermore, experts claim that this figure does not reflect the true situation. The actual number of drug addicts could be much higher.

<sup>14</sup> In 2000, the Juvenile Affairs Inspectorate apprehended 2,503 juveniles during police raids, but a total of 4,030 children are registered with the Inspectorate.

<sup>15</sup> Children in Latvia. Statistics Bulletin. Republic of Latvia Central Bureau of Statistics, Riga, 2001.

could say that they have become streetwise and live by the laws of the street. Since there are so few studies on street children, it is not known to what extent criminal groups take advantage of these children, but there is definitely a big risk that street children may become involved in organised crime.

The average age of street children is declining. A couple of years ago, they were mainly young people in their teens, now they are children as young as nine, or even younger. The street has become their lifestyle.

Many of the children are accustomed to this kind of life and feel that living on the street gives them the opportunity to make money and buy things that they desire. It makes it possible for them to avoid school and gives them freedom and independence from their parents. They find friends and have fun. Nevertheless, the road to fortune that is chosen by street children usually diverges from that which is generally accepted by society.

At the same time, street children relatively often find themselves in dangerous situations and are subject to negative impacts, including sexual abuse, violence, smoking at an early age, alcohol and drugs, health problems, suicide attempts, stealing, etc.

The street is a completely uncontrollable environment. Children who spend a long time on the street become "addicted" and believe that they enjoy complete freedom. They live without restrictions, rules or discipline.

## Conclusions

- Street children are children who spend most of their time on the street (in the broadest sense of the word – this includes attics, basements, derelict houses, amusement arcades, etc.). They do not receive sufficient support from their families. They are children who loiter, beg and work on the street. Among these children, there are also children for whom the street has become a home and who no longer have any links with their families.
- The street children problem has a number of causes, among them negative socio-economic factors, which affect the situation in the family and promote the increase of dysfunctional families. Another cause is inadequate social support for such families.
- Street children suffer from poverty, shortage of food, hunger, unsanitary and unhealthy conditions, narcotics, diseases, injuries, accidents, and physical or sexual abuse from older children and adults. Street children lack parental support, discipline, social services and advice. It is difficult for them to get an education or a job, and to escape family problems.

- A prolonged life on the street leaves a deep impact on children and reduces their ability to function within a society. They become part of a subculture with a crippled system of values.
- In recent years, there has been a change in the quality of life on the street, as children have acquired specific skills and have become better adapted to this lifestyle.
- The effects of this problem affect the whole community and, in the future, they will have a growing impact on public welfare and safety. They will also raise the costs of social security.
- Statistics available in Latvia do not make it possible to determine the number of street children or the number of children who actually live on the street.
- Statistical reports do not deal separately with the group of children that lives on the street, which is why such information can not be correlated.
- All statistical indicators that define the number of risk-group children in Latvia have risen in recent years.

## 2. THE PROBLEM OF STREET CHILDREN AND THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN'S RIGHTS IN LATVIA

The ability of the government to deal with the problem of street children can not be judged simply in terms of the failure of individual institutions to assume responsibilities and fulfil duties. It is necessary to identify the weak spots in the whole system for protection of children's rights. The evolution of street children is a complex process, closely connected with the general situation of children and families in the community. Street children are only the tip of the iceberg, which has now become visible to all and which has focused the attention of the government and the public on the fact that current children's rights policies are not able to guarantee equal rights to development for all children.

### 2.1. The main stumbling blocks in the system for protection of children's rights

#### Institutional cooperation and distribution of responsibility for children's rights

The system for protection of children's rights in Latvia (see Figure 2) is characterised by the distribution of responsibility among countless ministries and other institutions. As a result, it is difficult to develop and implement an integrated national policy for child and family support. The distribution of responsibility, on the one hand, and the inability to cooperate, on the other, have created a situation in which the welfare of children is treated separately from the welfare of families. Each ministry develops its own policy. The ministries are not involved in shaping a common policy. In this kind of situation, it is not possible to deal effectively with interdisciplinary questions such as the protection of children's rights. It is also not possible to develop preventive programmes to combat the causes of the problem.

The distribution of responsibility among various government institutions as is prescribed by the Law on Protection of Children's Rights has not promoted the development of

a national policy on protection of children's rights. For example, the law says that the Ministry of Education and Science is responsible for drafting a national policy on protection of children's rights, but the Ministry of Welfare is charged with developing a national policy on the social security of children and families – including social insurance, social welfare, health care, medical rehabilitation and employment of teenagers. This distribution of competence and poor cooperation makes it difficult to develop and implement a consistent national policy. As a result, several policies are developed, with a very limited exchange of information, coordination of projects and use of resources.

National institutions are responsible for developing national policy on protection of children's rights, making recommendations for improvement of the system for protection of children's rights, coordinating and administering the work of national and local government institutions. However, these institutions have neither sufficient authority nor resources to coordinate and administer the country's system for protection of children's rights.

The Law on Protection of Children's Rights assigns the duty of supervising implementation of the law and related regulatory enactments, and coordination of the work of national and local government institutions, non-governmental organisations and private agencies to the National Centre for Protection of Children's Rights (NCPCR). However, the NCPCR does not have the mechanisms to carry out this function. As a result, supervision of the way in which children's rights are observed at a local government level is limited because the NCPCR does not have at its disposal the children's rights inspectorates (inspectors)<sup>16</sup> that have been anticipated by the law. Although the NCPCR has attempted to obtain financing for these inspectorates, the issue has been postponed, year after year. One of the reasons is that politicians do not believe that these inspectorates could actually guarantee implementation of the law at a local government level, and that concrete results would not justify the financial input. Local governments are not interested in increasing this type of control, which is why they do not support establishment of this supervisory institution. This means that **the government has at its disposal a limited number of mechanisms for control of the protection of children's rights in Latvia**. At present, control of children's rights as required by the Law on Protection of Children's Rights and by the NCPCR by-law is carried out by three NCPCR officials.

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<sup>16</sup> The Law on Protection of Children's Rights, Section 65, Clause 2 specifies that the National Centre for Protection of Children's Rights shall be in charge of regional inspectorates (inspectors) for protection of children's rights, responsible for supervising implementation of the law in their administrative territories.

The main control instruments applied by the NCPCR are: examination of complaints submitted by the population or by institutions (in complicated cases, special commissions are set up), regular interviews with the children themselves<sup>17</sup>, in-depth analysis of specific problems and preparation of recommendations for solutions (for example, in 2001, on the role of the courts in protection of children's rights, on children in residential childcare institutions).

It is clear that failure to meet the requirements of the law<sup>18</sup> has created a discrepancy between the duties and responsibilities of the NCPCR and the centre's possibilities of fulfilling them, in view of its limited financial and human resources. Furthermore, the NCPCR must simultaneously carry out two conflicting functions: it must coordinate and administer and, at the same time, control the system for protection of children's rights in Latvia.

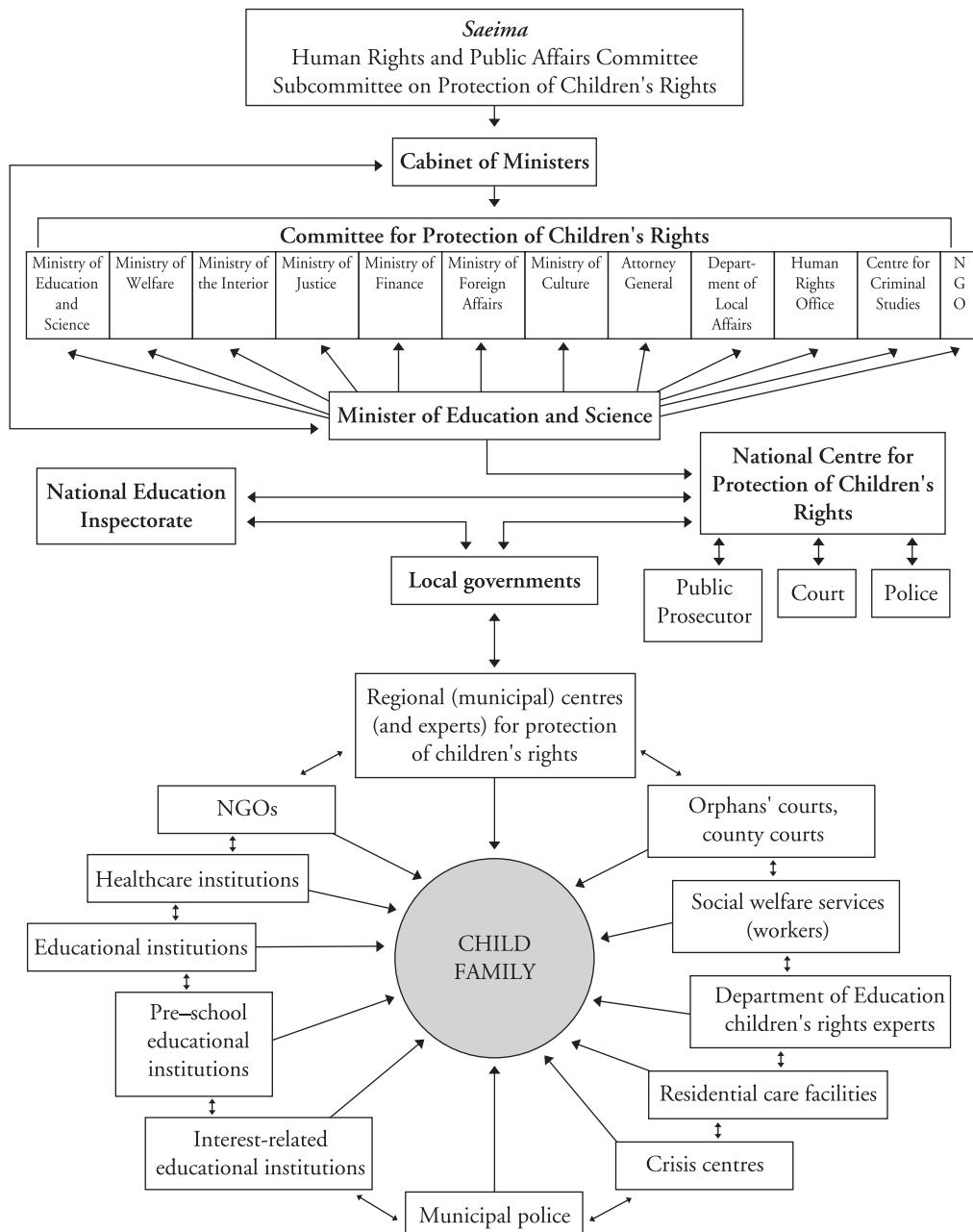
In accordance with the Law on Protection of Children's Rights and the Law on Local Governments, responsibility for the protection of children's rights in any specific administrative territory rests with the local government. Currently, municipal children's right experts work for the municipal Departments of Education. Unfortunately, centres for protection of children's rights operate only in some cities, for example, in Riga and in Valka. Local governments operate independently within the limits of their authority, and they can be controlled or given orders only by the institutions set forth in legislation, such as the National Education Inspectorate, the National Sanitation Inspectorate and others.

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<sup>17</sup> Once a month, the views of children are heard (this takes place either at the NCPCR or at different institutions). The NCPCR also has a group of children's consultants.

<sup>18</sup> Establishment of regional (municipal) inspectorates for protection of children's rights.

Figure 2. Coordination between national and local government institutions in the system for protection of children's rights<sup>19</sup>



<sup>19</sup> Source: National Centre for Protection of Children's Rights.

### A strategy for protection of children's rights

Since 1999, pursuant to Section 65, Clause 1 of the Law on Protection of Children's Rights, a National Programme for Improving the Situation of Children is prepared each year. For two years now, the programme has also included measures to improve the situation of street children. Although the contribution of the National Centre for Protection of Children's Rights to preparation and implementation of the programmes<sup>20</sup> should generally be judged as positive, it must be admitted that these programmes do not really achieve their objective. There are several reasons for this.

First, the programmes are not based on a long-term strategy, because there is no such strategy for the protection of children's rights.

Second, funding for these programmes is rather modest<sup>21</sup> and if the already limited funds are used without a long-term strategy, it is clear that the programmes cannot be particularly effective. So far, financial input has not been evaluated in terms of the resulting output.

Third, if questions concerning the protection of children's rights are to be dealt with effectively, they can not be separated from questions concerning protection of families in general. Unfortunately, the national programmes are not drafted as integrated programmes for the support of children and families. There is, however, no other way of achieving sustainable improvement of the situation of children.

Fourth, in recent years, the national programmes have never been adopted on time. This reduces their effect even more, because measures that have been planned for a period of one year must ultimately be carried out in three or four months! For example, the programme for the year 2000 was approved on September 5, 2000, but for the year 2001, on July 24, 2001.

A positive factor is the National Programme for Prevention of Violence against Children for the years 2000–2004. As a result of this programme, in 2000 a total of 577 children were able to undergo therapy financed by the state. Currently, work is underway on a national strategy for prevention of juvenile crime. A good many of the measures included in this strategy could help in dealing with the problem of street children.

<sup>20</sup> A broad spectrum of experts from national and local government institutions and NGOs is involved in preparation of the programmes, but a competition is held for the right of implementation.

<sup>21</sup> In 1999 – Ls 118,187; in 2000 – Ls 105,190; in 2001 – Ls 119,790.

At the same time, it must be pointed out that, as long as there is no general strategy for the protection of children's rights, all these measures will mainly be combating the effects and not the causes of the problem. However, preventive measures are the ones that are the most important if we wish to reduce the number of street children.

It is necessary to develop a strategy that is not focused on dealing with crisis situations and spin control, but rather on follow-up care that takes into account long-term needs.

#### An integrated child and family support policy

**A negative family situation is one of the main reasons why children end up on the street. This is why attention should be focused on improving the welfare of the family if we wish to overcome the problem of street children in the future.** There are several closely related issues that require attention:

- reduction of poverty;
- support for families with children;
- enforcement of children's rights.

All of these aspects should be part and parcel of a single national policy on support of the family. A policy that manifests itself as a concerted approach and a package of measures for seeking solutions to family problems.

One step in the right direction is the Framework Document on National and Local Government Policy on Support for Families with Children drafted by the Ministry of Welfare. On February 1, 2000, the document was approved by the Cabinet. The authors claimed that the principal reason for preparing this document was the lack of a coordinating mechanism in Latvia for aligning the various policies and measures prepared and undertaken by various sectors in order to protect the interests of families and ensure the necessary support. As a result, there was a considerable amount of overlapping in the work of these institutions. It was also underlined that questions involving children's rights, social security, education, employment, and related issues were treated separately from questions concerning the family, and this was done at various levels by different institutions, which had no connection with each other. The work of these institutions was generally focused on the child, on the child in a crisis situation, on the dysfunctional, impoverished family and not on the healthy family, i.e., it was focused on certain categories of the population, on incidental consequences and ways to eliminate them. The objective of the document was to justify the need for a common support policy for families with children, to provide various approaches to development and implementation of this policy, to set out the principles for distribution of responsibility

among family, society and government, and to outline possible institutional solutions for coordination of family-support policies. The document emphasizes that ministries must, in concurrence with their responsibilities, create internal mechanisms for implementation of the common family-support policy.

The long time that was necessary to draft and debate this document has confirmed, yet again, how complex the preparation of such strategic documents can be. During the debates, the Framework Document received sharp criticism from various institutions and a number of politicians who questioned the need for such a document. It was their opinion that all legislation that was necessary for protecting the rights of the child and the family has already been enacted, and all that remained to do was to make sure that it was implemented.

At the end of 2001, the Ministry of Welfare finally completed work on the Framework Document on Support of Families with Children, had it coordinated with all of the ministries, and submitted it to the State Chancellery. It is hard to predict what will happen to the document now, but it is very likely that its transformation into a detailed, practicable, financially supported programme could turn out to be a long and hard process. In its current form, the document provides only general guidelines, both for the directions in which work should be concentrated and for the implementation mechanisms.

#### Statistics on the situation of children in Latvia

Accurate information on the dimensions of a problem is one of the prerequisites for a successful solution – development of necessary programmes and allocation of resources.

The fact that the Republic of Latvia Central Bureau of Statistics has, for two years, now, published the statistics bulletin "Children in Latvia" is a positive development. With the financial support of UNICEF, the report "Children and Families in Latvia" has been published for several years. With UNICEF support, Latvia is taking part in a project for monitoring the transition of Central and East European countries to a market economy (MONEE), and, in cooperation with the Central Bureau of Statistics, has published several reports on the situation of children and families in Latvia. Nevertheless, the data that can be obtained from these reports can provide only indirect information on the dimensions of the street children problem. There are no accurate figures on this phenomenon.

In Latvia, statistics on children's rights issues are compiled in accordance with Section 67<sup>1</sup> of the Law on Protection of Children's Rights. This says that the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Welfare, the Ministry of Justice, the Minister for Special Assignments on Public Administration Reform, and

the local governments are responsible for keeping statistics on the protection of children's rights in Latvia. Statistics must be collected on: families in which parental authority has been suspended or terminated or which have been evicted from their homes together with their children; on the adoption of children and placement of children in foster homes or residential childcare institutions; on administration of mandatory correctional or medical treatment to children; on criminal prosecution of children; on children who have suffered abuse. Reports must be submitted to the Central Bureau of Statistics, which compiles this information once a year and submits it to the National Centre for Protection of Children's Rights. The law was updated to include this provision only in March 2000 – before then, there was no nation-wide system or criteria for collecting and collating information on violation of children's rights.

The NCPCR has prepared a special form for the registration of violations of children's rights that have been uncovered within the jurisdiction of the local governments. Unfortunately, these forms are often filled out inaccurately, which is why they are only partially used for preparing the NCPCR annual report on the situation of children in Latvia. This means that, for all practical purposes, there is no comprehensive information on violation of children's rights in Latvia.

A look at the NCPCR form for registration of violations of children's rights makes it clear that it is impossible to fill out without lengthy explanations. The form is based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and it seems that its main purpose is to facilitate preparation of the report on the situation of children in Latvia for the UN. One of the major shortcomings of the form is that it does not provide clear criteria for filling it out. This allows individual interpretation of many of the points, for example: failure to observe the right of a child to employment due to lack of information; unlawful exploitation of a child by the family; failure to observe the right of a child to rest and free time owing to the fault of the family, etc. Many of the points included in the form can not simply be quantitatively assessed, they require detailed analysis, which is why their interpretation must be left to those who are professionally involved in protection of children's rights.

Experts at the Ministry of Education and Science feel that Section 67<sup>1</sup> of the Law on Protection of Children's Rights covers all the rights of a child anticipated by legislation. The ministry feels that, in the case of street children, the rights that are violated most often are the rights of a child to life and to development, to normal living conditions, to education and creative occupation. To a certain extent, this is true, however, data on all of the above violations of children's rights still does not make it possible to determine how many street children there are in the country, because these violations do not necessarily involve only street children. In the case of street children, the main element is the street, which socialises a child in a way that society perceives as negative, and which is a threat to the life and development of a child.

In practice, protection of children's rights is focused on diagnosing and dealing with effects, but little is done to identify risk groups and negative factors that affect the well-being of children.

Although the information provided by the reports submitted to the NCPCR is considered inaccurate, it reflects the opinions and interpretations of experts from many different sectors regarding violation of children's rights. This information could, therefore, be of value in preparing an in-depth analysis of data and current trends, because it provides a better look at the actual situation than has ever been available before.

It is true, of course, that although this data is considered to be inaccurate due to the way in which it has been collected, this may actually have more to do with a lack of trust in the judgement of professionals.

At the recommendation of the inter-ministerial Committee for Protection of Children's Rights, a work group was set up to improve the NCPCR form<sup>22</sup>. It is important that experts critically analyse every item included in the form. First, each item must be examined for its applicability. Then it must be examined from the aspect of data collection methodology, keeping in mind that the dimensions of some problems can not be determined solely with the methods of quantitative surveys. This is true for the problem of street children. Although gathering statistics on this group will involve additional expenses, it will only be possible to do something about the problem and to follow its dynamics if the dimensions of the problem and its qualitative characteristics are defined to obtain a frame of reference.

As mentioned previously, since the beginning of the 1990s, the number of children who do not attend school has rapidly increased in Latvia. This problem is closely connected with the problem of street children. As studies show, a great number of street children do not attend school. So far, statistics on the number of children who are not going to school have been incomplete. Coordinated registration of school-age children was started only in 1999, and the first information on children who do not attend school and reasons for their not doing so was available only in the second half of 2000. However, this data is not particularly reliable. The main problems involving registration of school-age children have not yet been solved. The first problem is connected with the shortcomings of the Population Registry, although, as registration

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<sup>22</sup> On April 25, 2001, an inter-ministerial meeting took place to evaluate the previous year's form. Representatives from the national government, local governments and NGOs, as well as an official from the Central Bureau of Statistics took part at this meeting.

of the population improves, so does the accuracy of statistics. For example, in 1999 the discrepancy between the number of children registered by the Population Registry and by educational institutions was more than 30,000. But in 2000, as the work of the Population Registry improved, the difference was only 14,000. The second problem is that the local governments do not keep records of children who are not registered in schools. As a result, work is done only with children who are registered in schools, but do not attend them.

Where statistics are concerned, there is another phenomenon that can be observed in Latvia. Although the Law on Protection of Children's Rights says that a child is a person who has not yet reached the age of 18, statistical surveys sometimes work with different age groups, making it difficult to assess the situation of children in Latvia. So, for example, studies on household budgets single out households with children only up to the age of 16, which means that children between the ages of 16 and 18 are counted as adults.

At the same time, it must be said that the Central Bureau of Statistics works professionally, that it is prepared to make corrections to its data, to improve and supplement its statistics – if it receives concrete recommendations and funding from the client.

Until now, little use had been made of qualitative studies which, in combination with quantitative studies, provide a more comprehensive picture of the dimensions, causes and effects of social problems, including the problem of street children.

## 2.2. The main instruments used for dealing with the problem of street children

### The Law on Protection of Children's Rights

In Latvia, the rights of street children are guaranteed by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Law on Protection of Children's Rights<sup>23</sup>, the Law on Education, the Civil Law of Latvia and other regulatory enactments. In recent years, a lot has been done in Latvia to improve the legal basis for protection of children's rights. At the same time, it must also be said that there are no mechanisms for the implementation of a number of provisions.

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<sup>23</sup> Section 10 of the Law on Protection of Children's Rights guarantees every child the right to living conditions and a positive social environment, which ensure normal physical and intellectual development. The law guarantees every child the necessary nourishment, clothing and shelter.

In practice, several requirements of the Law on Protection of Children's Rights are not being fulfilled, although they do not require additional funds and although, in view of the fact that many causes of the street children phenomenon are related to the situation in the family, their implementation is of key importance for the support of these children and their families. For example, the law says that support families and trusted persons<sup>24</sup> must be used in working with children and families to help regulate relationships between parents and children. The law also says that local governments must document cases that call for prophylactic measures, that they must set up social adjustment and support programmes for children who beg, are vagrants or in some other way demonstrate conduct that can eventually lead to unlawful activities.<sup>25</sup>

Latvia's Law on Protection of Children's Rights is basically a progressive law and covers almost all of the questions included in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. However, where street children are concerned, a number of amendments to the law would be called for. First of all, the question of finding a definition for street children and a reliable way of obtaining statistics should be resolved. This would make it possible to work systematically and it would allow local governments to prepare special support programmes for street children.

A positive outcome of years of initiatives on the part of public organisations was the inclusion of a number of supplements recommended by the NCPCR in draft amendments to the law at the end of 2001. If the amendments are endorsed, the law will include the term "street children," statistics will be prepared on this group of children and local governments will be charged with developing and implementing a programme for working with street children.

#### **Yearly National Programmes for Improving the Situation of Children**

It is a positive fact that, for the past two years, the yearly National Programme for Improving the Situation of Children has received funds from the national budget for the support of various local government and NGO initiatives to support street children and children from social risk groups. For example, in the year 2001, the sum of Ls 24,046 was allocated for improvement of the living conditions of underprivileged groups and street children. These improvements involved such things as the establishment of day centres, crisis centres and organisation of camps. The negative fact is that **there is no**

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<sup>24</sup> Law on Protection of Children's Rights, Section 26.

<sup>25</sup> Law on Protection of Children's Rights, Section 58.

strategy for the use of such funds, which is why, as noted previously, it is extremely difficult to evaluate the efficiency of the way in which they are used, especially since these resources are very limited.

### Financing

It is difficult to assess how much money is spent on improving the welfare of children in Latvia. There is no accurate information on the share of national and local budget funds that are spent on the protection of children. The Concluding Observations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child also point out that the allocation of budget funds for the protection of children's rights does not have priority status. It is also difficult to calculate the amount of money that children receive indirectly in the form of social welfare for families.

Although total government spending on support for families with children has increased in the period from 1991 to 2000, its share of GDP has been gradually reduced. In 1993 it was 2.6%, but in 2000, only 1.2% of GDP.<sup>26</sup>

#### Government financial support for families with children

Since many street children come from poor, single-parent or unemployed families, financial support from the government is very important for these families if the children are to enjoy at least a minimum level of welfare. However, for many years now, family allowances have remained very small.<sup>27</sup> Although the Ministry of Welfare has repeatedly submitted proposals to the Cabinet for increasing family allowances, each year these proposals are rejected due to lack of finances. Currently the date for raising family allowances has been postponed to the year 2003.

#### Local government financial support for families with children

Subsistence level cost of living, which is taken as the basis for calculating municipal social welfare benefits for low-income families, has been set by the government at a monthly Ls 38.23 per capita. This sum has not changed since April 1994.

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<sup>26</sup> Socio-economic characterisation of the child and the family in the 1990s in Latvia. MONEE Regional Monitoring Report 2001. Republic of Latvia Central Bureau of Statistics. Riga, 2001.

<sup>27</sup> The size of family allowances depends on the number of children in the family and year of birth of the children. For example, for the first child, born before January 1, 1999, a family will receive Ls 4.25, but for a child born after January 1, 1999, Ls 6.

For several years now, there have been plans for the introduction of a guaranteed minimum income (GMI), but so far, nothing has been done. GMI could provide at least a minimum of welfare in poor families with children.

Low-income families also receive financial support for the education of their children and for school lunches. Some of the more affluent local governments (for example, Riga) are able to provide more support, but, generally, municipal support is rather scarce.

In practice, social welfare is received by those who apply for it, or who have been reported by others as needing support. This is why dysfunctional families (and their children) often receive no support, since they are frequently passive and do nothing to improve their situation.

### **Repressive methods**

Protection of children's rights, including those of street children, often involves the use of repressive methods: children are detained on the street, they are placed in correctional institutions, parents or guardians receive punishment, including suspension or termination of parental authority. These are usually methods that do not deal with a problem in the best interests of the child, in fact, they often serve to aggravate the problem.

The Latvian Administrative Sanctions Code prescribes fines for persons who cause intoxication of a minor or involve minors in begging, as well as fines for parents or guardians who neglect their duties with regard to education and care of children. The local governments impose various other sanctions.<sup>28</sup>

This system of sanctions is ineffective, mainly because the parents in question usually have low incomes and are not able to pay the fines.

Although the Social Report prepared by the Ministry of Welfare in 1998 pointed out that social policy was tending towards development of a network of alternative forms of social care and rehabilitation, in reality this is not the case. Local governments have for years been suspending parental authority in cases where the safety and development of a child is endangered by the family, and they continue to do so. As a result, the number of children in residential childcare institutions is increasing. Another problem

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<sup>28</sup> For example, the Daugavpils local government imposes fines of up to Ls 10 on minors for smoking in public places, and fines of up to Ls 30 if minors use foul language and act indecently on the street, in stairways or in other public places. Parents can be fined if a minor (up to the age of 15) is found on the street unattended by parent or guardian between 11 p.m. and 6 a.m., or if he or she is found in a café, nightclub or similar venue during this time.

is that the placement of children in institutions is no longer a temporary measure, since families receive practically no support in trying to overcome a crisis and making it possible for the child to return to the family.

From 1990 to 2000, the number of childcare institutions in Latvia has increased from 15 to 57. The number of children's shelters has increased most – sixfold since 1990. In 2000, there were 48 such facilities in Latvia. Altogether 3,605 children lived in state and municipal childcare institutions in the year 2000 – and only 5% of these children were orphans. The majority of the children (79%) have parents, but their parental authority has been either suspended or legally terminated. Among them are many former street children. Both children's rights experts and the public are gradually beginning to understand the consequences of this form of social care (the child becomes alienated from its family and lacks a proper basis for successful socialisation, since childcare institutions cannot provide all the skills that a child needs in order to lead an independent life), but are not doing much to change the existing system. For the moment, at least, the wisdom that the family is the best place for the development of a child remains purely declarative. In practice, the traditional methods that were introduced during the Soviet era, as the seemingly quickest and easiest way of dealing with the problem, are still applied.

No studies have been done in Latvia and no data is available on the adult lives of children who have been raised in institutions. Such data could prove to be a powerful stimulus for introduction of alternative forms of childcare.

It is interesting that the sums spent by local governments on the social care provided in institutions increase from year to year. Childcare is no exception. Since 1998, the sum spent annually on childcare has increased by Ls 250,000, and the total spent for this purpose in the year 2000 exceeded four million lats.

Average monthly expenses for each child living in a residential childcare institution are Ls 179.90<sup>29</sup>. This is the equivalent of three minimum wages.

### **Developments in the educational system**

Working with children who do not attend school is one way of reducing the number of street children. As already pointed out, currently, local governments can only keep track of children who are registered in schools, but they do not keep records on the

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<sup>29</sup> From 1999 to 2000, expenses for one child increased by 14% (to some extent, this was connected with the 1998 regulations on minimum requirements).

children who are not registered in schools. According to the local governments, one of the main reasons for this is lack of funds. The problem is particularly acute in the big cities, especially in Riga. Here, at the beginning of the 2000/2001 school year, 8,898 children were not registered in educational institutions. The fact that a child has never attended a school is usually uncovered only by chance.

In recent years, the number of families – and, therefore, of children – who are not officially registered at a certain address has increased. As children's rights inspectors point out, it is also difficult to obtain information about families who live unofficially in sublet accommodations (rooms). These are usually one-parent, low-income families, who are forced to rent cheap accommodation with a minimum of modern conveniences, after having been evicted from other lodgings. Such problems are especially typical for Riga.

Some parents simply do not sign up their children for school, so that the names of these children do not appear in school registers. Although each year, by December 15, the Ministry of Education and Science dispatches a letter to all heads of local governments with a list of children who are registered in the city but do not attend school, there is no real mechanism for keeping track of these children either at a national or local government level. It is possible that the NCPCR should assume responsibility for encouraging greater efforts on the part of local governments.

Work with children who are registered in schools, but do not attend them, has improved in recent years. In the major cities, special social and academic adjustment classes have been set up to reintegrate children who, for various reasons, have not attended school for some time (usually street children) into the school system. About 105 academic adjustment classes have been set up and are attended by 1,105 children. These classes are concentrated in Riga and other major cities, where the problem of children who do not attend school is particularly serious. The network of social adjustment classes must be expanded in the future.

Early diagnosis of social problems in the family is one way of making sure that these problems receive attention at an early stage and reducing the risk that a child might drop out of school and become a street child. The work carried out in schools by social pedagogues and psychologists has shown positive results, but financial considerations could put an end to the presence of social pedagogues in schools and this responsibility could be transferred to the local governments.<sup>30</sup> The role of homeroom and subject teachers in providing an early diagnosis of social problems has been underrated. The Ministry of Education and Science has not devoted sufficient attention to this problem.

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<sup>30</sup> Letter No. 1-14/207 from the Ministry of Education and Science informs that as of June 14, 2001 social pedagogues are no longer employed in schools.

Teaching has become the sole component of the educational process, guidance and counselling have been completely neglected. According to the Law on Education, however, the educational process must incorporate both – teaching and guidance.

### **Professional social work**

Because institutionalisation has been the predominantly applied method, professional work with street children and their families has progressed sluggishly. Interviews with local government politicians and senior officials in Daugavpils, Liepāja and Jelgava made it clear that politicians and officials have no real understanding of social work, of its purpose and its role in the protection of children's rights. Furthermore, the role of financial support is usually overestimated. Municipalities also suffer from a shortage of social workers. As a result, social work remains an instrument that is inadequately applied in dealing with street children and their families.

The situation in Riga is somewhat better. Here, for the past two years, the social services have had special support units for families with children. However, even here, there are not enough social workers to provide support for all children and families that need it.

Currently, there are often situations, especially in the case of street children, where there are several, unassociated experts working with a child, but there is no one to assume responsibility for coordinating and focusing their efforts. The ability to handle social problems is what sets social workers apart from other professionals (doctors, psychologists, teachers), which is why they should be given the opportunity to take the lead in dealing with social cases.

### **Special services for street children and the activities of non-governmental organisations**

**In the major cities, a network of special services that could provide help for street children has not been developed.**

Elsewhere in the world, professionals who work with children give priority to support that is focused on the family. However, they also admit that this approach is not suitable for all children.<sup>31</sup> In order to deal with the problem of street children, it is necessary to work simultaneously in two directions, combining preventive measures with rehabilitation.

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<sup>31</sup> For example, for older teenagers who do not wish to return to their families, or for children who have suffered abuse in the family.

Preventive measures should include development of the as yet underdeveloped network of social services for families with children, early diagnosis of social problems in the family and support for such families, help in finding lawful, permanent and sufficiently well-paid jobs, a greater role for schools in the early diagnosis of children's social problems, improvement of opportunities for spending free time, development of a child-friendly urban environment, etc.

Currently, there is very little support for young families. There are not enough kindergartens, and many families cannot afford the kindergarten fees. There are no alternative day care or babysitting services for minding children at home. The free childcare consultations that are available for parents are not very popular.

The local governments have no rehabilitation programmes for helping children who spend most of their time on the street. Instead, there are only the previously outlined repressive methods, which simply attempt to isolate a child from the street.

Cities must, first of all, provide services that are aimed at satisfying the basic needs of children – nourishment, clothing, shelter, sanitary conditions, medical care. Currently, street children only receive these when they are placed in an institution – a shelter, a juvenile centre (correctional institutions in Riga and Daugavpils), a crisis centre. Cities have very few day centres and no night shelters where children in difficulties can spend the night. Cities do not organise social street work, which is one of the most effective ways of keeping track of street children and giving them professional help. Local governments do not have special programmes for teenagers (e.g., flats for groups of young people, government subsidised housing) which could provide help for those beginning an independent life: help in finding a place to live, learning a trade, getting a job, acquiring social skills.

#### Non-governmental organisations (NGOs)

Non-governmental organisations usually play the role of gap-stoppers, when governments do not function effectively enough. This is particularly true in the case of street children. Many of the public organisations that provide various forms of support for street children were created around 1996, at a time when the problem was not even being discussed at a national and local government level and no particular help was being provided for street children. During this time, NGOs have gained a lot of experience in working with street children. Currently, their main areas of activity are:

- day centres (here children can get a warm meal, wash up, do their homework, participate in different activities, etc.);
- childcare centres (residential childcare institutions for neglected children);

- youth clubs (provide an alternative to the street for spending free time);
- crisis centres (help provided by social workers, social pedagogues, psychologists, doctors);
- camps, excursions;
- humanitarian aid for children from underprivileged families;
- consultations and health care services, etc.

It is clear that NGOs deal mainly with the effects of problems. They do not have sufficient funding for prophylactic measures, for example, work with the families of street children, help for impoverished parents, support in family crisis situations.

The work of non-governmental organisations is based primarily on projects that are financed by international foundations. NGOs often find it difficult to guarantee the sustainability of their services, which is particularly important in working with street children. If financing ends, a project must sometimes be discontinued.

A big job is also done by religious organisations, which finance various projects for street children, for example, day centres and humanitarian aid. In Daugavpils, for example, an Ethics Council was set up two years ago. The council examines different questions and problems from an ethical aspect, strives to increase the role of spiritual values in society and involve children in the church. Representatives of all religious denominations are involved in the work of the council, as well as a representative of the City Council and the police.

In many cases, especially in the province, local government officials have a negative view of non-governmental organisations and do not trust them. This does little to improve cooperation and reduces the possibilities of obtaining public funds for improving the situation of street children. Of course, the activities of the public sector can vary from city to city. The majority of the NGOs that work with street children operate in Riga. The work of non-governmental organisations with street children has been especially supported by the Soros Foundation – Latvia: a special street children programme has been carried out since 1997 and, each year, several projects that deal with the problems of street children receive support. The PHARE ACCESS programme has also sponsored individual street children projects. In general, public organisations that work with street children receive most of their funding from foreign foundations.

In order to maintain an active dialogue with national and local government institutions and take part in shaping a policy for protection of children's rights, at the end of 2000 NGOs founded the Association for Street Children, with participation of organisations

not only from Riga, but also from cities such as Daugavpils, Talsi and Tukums. The association was created as a logical step in the development of the NGO sector, in awareness of the fact that some problems can be better solved by combining efforts. By joining together, NGOs acquire greater potential for making proposals and recommendations, and it becomes easier to influence national and local government policy, to shape public opinion and activate society. The Association for Street Children has several important tasks. It supports non-governmental organisations to ensure that they provide the best possible services for street children, that they develop new, progressive working methods<sup>32</sup> and apply them throughout Latvia. It supports the development of an integrated national, municipal and NGO services network and participates in working out a national strategy, annual programmes and legislative amendments.

However, the street children problem, with its complex causes and far-reaching effects cannot be left only to the NGOs. In working out a long-term strategy for the protection of children's rights, the government should consider what can be offered by the NGO sector and align this with national social policy. It should make recommendations for programmes that are necessary and provide financial support for the NGOs that operate successfully.

## Conclusions

- The protection of children's rights does not have priority on the political agenda.
- The Law on Protection of Children's Rights:
  - was drafted in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child;
  - sets out goals that are not met in the case of street children;
  - includes a number of provisions which are important for dealing with the problem of street children (trusted persons, support families, adjustment programmes, etc.), but which are not observed.
- There is no long-term strategy for protection of children's rights. As a result, the measures taken to deal with the problem of street children have not been effective, since they apply tactics that focus on coping with effects, not on prevention and development.

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<sup>32</sup> For example, in the year 2002, with the support of Soros Foundation – Latvia, the Association for Street Children plans to begin street work in Riga.

- Responsibility for protection of children's rights is distributed among various institutions, but there is insufficient cooperation among these institutions.
- Children's rights issues are considered apart from family welfare issues.
- The government does not have the resources to coordinate and take charge of a national system for protection of children's rights, nor to monitor the way in which laws and regulatory enactments are observed.
- There are no comprehensive statistics in Latvia on violations of children's rights, including those of street children. Risk factors that affect the welfare of children are not comprehensively analysed.
- Repressive methods are common in dealing with street children – children are placed in institutions, parents punished. These methods are ineffective because they do not deal with the causes of the problem.
- Local governments do not have any specific strategy for dealing with the problem of street children, which is why there are no appropriate methods or tactics for working with street children.
- The non-governmental sector uses effective methods in working with street children, but their resources are limited and they are not able to provide support for all children who need it.

### 3. LOCAL GOVERNMENTS AS THE MAIN ENFORCERS OF STREET CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

The Law on Protection of Children's Rights says that local governments are responsible for protection of the rights of the children living in their territory. Local governments must provide help and support for families with children and guarantee that every child living within their jurisdiction has shelter, warmth, clothing and proper nourishment. They must provide care for children who have lost or temporarily lost their families or who, in their own interests, can not be allowed to remain in the family.

In other words, local governments must provide for the needs that are most often not satisfied in the case of street children. Their lifestyle and the conditions in which they live often involves lack of a permanent shelter or life in an unsuitable environment, lack of proper clothing or clothing that is inappropriate for the season, poor nutrition, etc.

At a local government level, protection of children's rights is usually the responsibility of:

- orphans' courts (county courts);
- social welfare centres;
- children's rights inspectors;
- municipal police;
- juvenile affairs committees;
- children's shelters, crisis centres;
- health care and educational institutions, incl. pre-school childcare institutions;
- institutions that organise free-time activities for children, incl. NGOs;
- state police juvenile affairs inspectorates.

Other governmental and non-governmental organisations can also be involved in the protection of children's rights.

So far, only two studies on street children have been carried out in Latvia, both of them in Riga. To find out more about the situation of street children in this country, 32 interviews with experts were carried out in Daugavpils, Liepāja, Jelgava and Riga.

The information obtained from these interviews reveals the problems – both at a national and local government level – which, according to the experts, are the main obstacles to successful resolution of the street children dilemma. The opinions of the experts more or less agree with conclusions drawn from analysis of the current national policy on protection of children's rights in Latvia:

- children in Latvia are not a priority issue either for the national or for the local governments;
- long-term strategies for protection of children's rights are not being drafted at either a national or local government level;
- current government policy, at both national and local level, is basically aimed at coping with crisis situations. No systematic prophylactic work is being done;
- free-time activities are mainly oriented to active children and teenagers:
  - not much is being done to make sure that supply meets demand (for example, activities that are very popular among children, such as karting, mountaineering, computer courses, or English, are usually available only for a fee. Free courses have waiting lists of up to a year);
  - organisation of free-time activities is not planned professionally, taking into account the specific interests of all groups and providing special training for pedagogues who have to work with "difficult" teenagers, street children, etc.;
  - local governments do very little to establish children's day centres/clubs – places where children can spend their free time, where children are encouraged to take part in organising activities and are at the same time under the supervision of social workers (in places where such centres have been established, a negative attitude has been observed on the part of the community).
- local governments do not have comprehensive, inter-institutional databases on the children living within their jurisdiction, on their problems and those of their families, and on the support that has been provided;
- there is a shortage of professional social workers who can work with social risk families and children, and assume a case-manager role;
- there is insufficient cooperation among institutions, and it is often not clear which institution should assume the leading role in a specific case. This prevents effective

- use of resources and strategic planning. Personal contacts play an exaggerated role in cooperation;
- professionals have no instruments for working with children who are vagrants;
  - municipal police juvenile affairs departments (except in Riga) are poorly equipped (for example, lack of computers and Internet access makes it difficult to create databases and exchange information with other organisations);
  - schools are not sufficiently involved in early diagnosing of children's social problems and are very slow in providing information about children who do not attend school (schools usually report only on children who have failed to attend school for a longer period of time).

In general, the experts name three important and mutually related factors, which are at the root of the street children problem and contribute to its escalation, year after year.

First, underprivileged families are unable to provide an environment that is beneficial for the development of a child and often become dysfunctional.

Second, no social work with dysfunctional families is done at a municipal level – neither in cases where the child is still living at home, nor when the child has already become a "street child," and not even when the child has been placed in a municipal childcare institution.

Third, limited resources are employed for helping children and families (the potential of various institutions and experts is not utilised for dealing with problems), the activities of different institutions are not sufficiently coordinated.

Just as at the national level, a long-term strategy for protection of children's rights has not been approved at a local government level either, which means that work is generally focused on coping with effects and dealing with crisis situations.<sup>33</sup> Despite the fact that there is a broad institutional basis for enforcement of children's rights, interviews with local government deputies and experts indicate that cooperation among institutions is inadequate and that there are often several different social services working independently with a child. Distribution of functions is also unclear, resulting in uncalled-for competition and overlapping of functions. Until now, the human factor has often played a major role in cooperation and the process of coordination – the ability of individual persons to unite all institutions and non-governmental organisations that are involved in the protection of children's rights.

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<sup>33</sup> Several local governments (e.g., in Riga and Liepāja) have started work on a social welfare strategy, which includes protection of children's rights.

In Daugavpils, Liepāja and Jelgava, the social services centres are considered to be the weakest links in the system for protection of children's rights. The centres, which should bear the main responsibility for working with dysfunctional families and children, do not fulfil this function. One reason is a lack of professional social workers. Another reason is a lack of understanding on the part of politicians and directors of institutions about the importance of professional social work in dealing with the social problems of children and families. As a result, there is little support for the development of these centres. The help for families with children that is provided by these social services centres is usually limited to financial support (allowances), monitoring of conditions at home, and issue of warnings. The quantitative indicators (e.g. the number of families monitored) are often considered to be more important than the qualitative indicators (for example, rehabilitation plans for children and families, support for and monitoring of implementation of such plans, consultations with experts, etc.). Work with children and families has no system, each case is treated individually.

Families with children, which have come to the attention of social assistance centres (SAC), usually already have complicated problems that are difficult to solve. This means that information about families in need of support from SAC comes too late. There is no information flow between SAC and, for example, doctors, patronage sisters, kindergartens, schools and other institutions that have an important role in the early diagnosis of child and family problems.

Links between the directors of institutions and local government politicians are different in each city, but, generally, the dialogue between politicians and professionals can be described as poor. For example, in Daugavpils, the directors of institutions feel that they are involved in the decision-making process, but in Liepāja and Jelgava, they feel no interest or support on the part of local deputies, and little understanding for the work of their institutions.

A typical trend in Daugavpils and Liepāja is the overwhelming desire to isolate children from the street environment. Since this is impossible, experts usually come to the conclusion that repressive methods (punishment, correctional institutions) are called for to force children to obey.

Lack of cooperation and coordination is clearly evident in the daily work of some of the institutions responsible for protection of children's rights – social services, the police and educational institutions are unable to find a common denominator for enforcement of children's rights and see only their own interests. As a result, the provision of the law, which says that the interests of the child always have priority, is in certain cases not observed.

## 4. RECOMMENDATIONS

There are three conditions that must be fulfilled in order to start dealing effectively with the problem of street children: agreement must be reached on definition of the term "street children," methods of diagnosing the problem of street children must be improved, municipal councils for support of children and families must be established in major cities.

The above conditions should be fulfilled as follows:

### **I. Clarification of terminology<sup>34</sup> (see Project No. 1).**

To eliminate this problem, it is necessary to supplement the Law on Protection of Children's Rights with the term "street children."

### **II. Improved diagnoses of the street children problem (see Project No. 2).**

In order to make sure that street children and children who live on the street are registered nation-wide, Section 67<sup>1</sup>, Clause 1 of the Law on Protection of Children's Rights must be supplemented to include street children. This will ensure statistical monitoring of this group of children.

Objective statistics on this group can be obtained from yearly studies, which are carried out using special methodology and combining various research methods. These studies must include: analysis of statistics connected with the problem<sup>35</sup>, polling of experts, assessment of the situation on the street, including monitoring and interviews.

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<sup>34</sup> If the government endorses the supplements to the Law on Protection of Children's Rights that were submitted at the end of 2001, this requirement will be fulfilled.

<sup>35</sup> For example, information provided by state and municipal police, or data obtained from orphans' courts, social welfare services, crisis centres for street children, NGO day centres, etc.

### III. Establishment of municipal councils for support of children and families in major cities (see Project No. 3).

Establishment of municipal councils for support of children and families is necessary in order to make it possible for local governments to carry out the functions imposed on them by the Law on Protection of Children's Rights, in particular Section 66, Clause 1, which says that local governments must prepare and implement a programme for protection of children's rights within the jurisdiction of the city or county.

The programmes prepared by the local governments of major cities must include a special subprogramme for dealing with the problem of street children.<sup>36</sup>

The main task of the council: to ensure that an integrated child and family support policy is launched, that programmes are developed and implemented at the municipal level.

The council would also monitor the work of institutions and assess the efficiency of their work and cooperation with other institutions. It would engage in planning, prepare reports on work with families and children, and special reports on street children.

### IV. In addition, several nation-wide measures should be undertaken in order to provide a stable basis for dealing with the problem of street children:

- 1) the priority of children's rights and family welfare issues on the political agenda must be established;
- 2) children's rights policy must focus on control of the situation of children's rights. The government must have accurate and objective information at its disposal;
- 3) the work of institutions involved in protecting children's rights must be coordinated<sup>37</sup>:
  - enforcement of laws must be improved, the government should have a sufficiently powerful mechanism to carry out this function<sup>38</sup>;

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<sup>36</sup> The three main guidelines of the subprogramme: "*Children have the right to be on the street. The assignment is to 1) make the street a friendlier and safer place for children, 2) support the family, help it to carry out its functions and satisfy the needs of the child, and 3) create more alternative ways of spending free time, to reduce the amount of time spent on the street.*"

<sup>37</sup> In order to do so, the government must take a political decision on the need to reform protection of children's rights, possibly on the need for a new ministry (which would coordinate child and family affairs).

<sup>38</sup> To fulfil Section 65, Clause 2 of the Law on Protection of Children's Rights, which says that the Inspectorates (Inspectors) for Protection of Children's Rights, which are responsible for monitoring implementation of the law in their administrative territory, are under the supervision of the National Centre for Protection of Children's Rights, funds must be allocated.

- a long-term plan/strategy (minimum 5 years) must be developed for the support of children and families, which should be focused on improving the welfare of families with children. The yearly National Programme for Improving the Situation of Children should be based on this strategy<sup>39</sup>;
- the programmes prepared by various institutions must be coordinated (if the programmes are to be successfully implemented and if they are to be effective, local governments, NGOs, institutions of higher education, the media and politicians must all cooperate)<sup>40</sup>;
- the effect on the welfare of families and children of various draft resolutions must be assessed;
- the level of responsibility of service providers who offer local governments and public organisations specific, necessary services must be clearly determined (in accordance with the programme).

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<sup>39</sup> Responsibility for working out the strategy should be assumed by the Committee for Protection of Children's Rights.

<sup>40</sup> One of the coordination mechanisms is the establishment of special work groups, which must agree on the basic principles of the programme, leaving the details to the responsible institutions.

## PROJECTS

### Project No. 1

#### SUPPLEMENTATION OF THE LAW ON PROTECTION OF CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

Objective: to provide a stable basis for sustainable and effective resolution of the street children problem at a national level.

Task: to make the following amendments to the Law on Protection of Children's Rights.

##### 1. Supplement Section 1 of the law with the following:

"Street children – children who spend most of their time on the street (in the broadest sense of the word, including attics, basements, derelict houses, amusement arcades, etc.) and who do not receive sufficient support from their families. These are children who are vagrants or beggars and children who work on the street. Among them are children for whom the street has become a permanent home and who no longer have ties with their families."

##### 2. Supplement Section 66 of the law with the following clauses:

"prepare and incorporate into the local government programme for protection of children's rights subprogrammes for dealing with specific problems such as working with street children, reducing juvenile crime, etc.";

"provide for territorial day centres/clubs for children and juveniles."

##### 3. Amend Section 67<sup>1</sup>, Clause 1 to read as follows:

"The Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Welfare, the Ministry of Justice, the Minister for Special Assignments on Public Administration Reform, and the local governments shall provide for statistical monitoring of the protection of children's rights in Latvia, of families whose parental authority has been suspended or terminated or who have been evicted from their homes together with their children, of the adoption of children and the placement of children in foster homes or residential childcare institutions, of the administration of mandatory corre-

tional or medical treatment to children, of criminal prosecution of children, of children who have suffered abuse, of street children. Reports shall be submitted to the Central Bureau of Statistics. The Central Bureau of Statistics shall compile this information once a year and submit it to the National Centre for Protection of Children's Rights."

Effects of the project:

- 1) agreement will be reached at a national level on use and meaning of the term "street children":
  - a) communication and exchange of experience among professionals will be facilitated;
  - b) special programmes for working with street children will be stimulated;
  - c) communication on street children will be facilitated at an international level (with the use of a concrete definition);
- 2) active participation of national and local governments and public organisations in dealing with the problem of street children will be ensured (work on programmes for street children will encourage local governments to develop integrated, long-term child and family support programmes);
- 3) statistics will be prepared on street children as a separate group, funds will be made available for studies.

**Project No. 2**  
**STATISTICAL SURVEY OF STREET CHILDREN**  
**IN LATVIA**  
**(research study)**

**Study on Street Children in Latvia's Major Cities<sup>41</sup>**

Project objective: to determine the exact number of street children in Latvia.

Project tasks:

- to elaborate a methodology suitable for registration of street children;
- to determine the most suitable executors of the study and the cooperation partners;
- to prepare the necessary financial calculations for the study;
- to determine possible sponsors for the project.

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<sup>41</sup> Prepared with the support of University of Latvia Institute for Philosophy and Sociology researchers.

Structure of the study: the study will have three parts, which will comprise both quantitative and qualitative analysis of the situation:

- 1) Analysis of existing information (statistics, studies and other documents).
- 2) Polling of experts – national and local government experts who are involved in protection of children's rights (orphans' courts, social welfare centres, children's shelters, police employees, school directors, teachers, etc.), NGO employees.  
The purpose – to determine the views of experts on the street children situation in Latvia's major cities. Approximately 20–30 interviews in each city.
- 3) Assessment of the situation – registering and polling of street children in different parts of the city.<sup>42</sup>

Project budget<sup>43</sup> (not incl. VAT):

1. Collation and analysis of existing material (statistics, studies and other documents)	500 Ls
2. Interviews with experts – representatives of government institutions and NGOs (orphans' courts, social welfare centres, police, crisis centres, shelters, schools, etc.). Approximately 20–30 interviews in each city.	
Interviews	200 Ls
Processing and analysis of interviews	300 Ls
3. Registering and questioning of street children in various neighbourhoods of the city <sup>44</sup> .	
3.1. Work on methodology for the 3rd stage of the study	110 Ls
3.2. Registering of street children in different parts of the city during one week	2,450 Ls

<sup>42</sup> The third part of the study will be carried out by a special working group, which will consult with experts and analyse material obtained in the earlier stages of the study and then work out a methodology for the third stage of the study. In this stage, both quantitative and qualitative methods will be applied: 1) all children who are found on the street during a specific period of time will be registered and questioned about their reasons for being on the street; 2) approximately 30 in-depth interviews with children will be carried out.

<sup>43</sup> The budget has been calculated for a study carried out in a single city. Expanding the study to several major cities (e.g., Riga, Liepāja, Daugavpils, Jelgava) will increase costs for some of the items, but not for all.

<sup>44</sup> Costs for the 3rd stage of the study are only approximate. Actual costs will depend on the methodology chosen by the working group.

This could include about 1,500–2,000 interviews and 20–30 in-depth interviews in each city.

It is hard to predict the number of interviews, since the number of children on the streets is not known.

This sum includes the following items:

- preparation of a questionnaire;
- testing of the questionnaire, translation into Russian;
- duplication of the questionnaire;
- registration of children and street interviews;
- organisational costs, including training of interviewers;
- transportation costs (public transportation) of interviewers.

3.3. Preparation of a data screen form	70 Ls
3.4. Data input	120 Ls
3.5. Computer processing of data, SPSS programme (correlation coefficients, tables, diagrams)	110 Ls
3.6. Analysis of interview data by age group, city district, time of interview, etc.; conclusions	500 Ls
4. Preparation of a report on parts 1+2+3 of the study and on results of the study	400 Ls
5. Other expenses:	
▪ office rent and administrative expenses	340 Ls
▪ office expenses, office supplies, telephone	240 Ls
▪ assignment travel expenses for interviews that are conducted in a city other than Riga	250 Ls
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>5,590 Ls</b>

Study implementation: the study will be carried out by the University of Latvia Institute for Philosophy and Sociology.<sup>45</sup>

During the preparatory stage of the project, UNICEF, UNDP, the Centre for Criminal Studies, and experts from other institutions, who have had previous experience with studies on street children, could be involved as consultants.

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<sup>45</sup> The institute was chosen for its experience in conducting qualitative studies.

Study financing: the study will be financed partly by the government and partly by international funds, such as the PHARE programmes. The share contributed by the government will increase over a period of three years, and subsequent studies will be financed entirely by the Latvian government.

The proportion between government and international financing will be 40:60 in the first year, 60:40 in the second year, and 80:20 in the third year.

Project results:

- 1) the government will have accurate information on the number of street children, the UN recommendation for registration of the number of street children in the country will be fulfilled;
- 2) repeated (yearly) studies will make it possible to follow the dynamics of the problem;
- 3) the study will also make it possible to make a qualitative assessment of the problem and to plan specific strategies aimed at reducing the number of street children and raising the necessary funds to do this, both at a national and local government level;
- 4) the effect of non-objective information on efforts to deal with the problem will be diminished;
- 5) sufficient funds will be allocated for dealing with the problem;
- 6) the public and professionals will obtain a regular source of objective information on the situation of street children, and this will reduce generalisation in media reports and in individual cases involving street children.

Risks connected with the project:

- 1) it could be difficult to obtain funds for the studies;
- 2) in the first 2–3 years of the study, assessment of the dynamics of the problem could prove to be difficult – while the methodology is being tested in the initial stage, it may, for objective reasons, be necessary to make changes (there is little experience with such projects in Latvia);
- 3) the information that is obtained, might not be used in planning national and local government programmes for protection of children's rights.

## Project No. 3

# MUNICIPAL CHILD AND FAMILY SUPPORT COUNCILS

### I. Structure, goal and objectives of the council

The council is set up following a decision by the City Council.

Structure of the council<sup>46</sup>: representatives from the Permanent Committees of the City Council (Social Affairs, Education and Culture, Finance, etc.), the Inspector for Protection of Children's Rights, heads of institutions involved in the protection of children's rights, one or two NGO representatives from organisations that deal with children's rights.

Goal of the council: to ensure development of an integrated child and family support policy, and development and implementation of relevant municipal programmes.

#### Principal objectives:

- to work out a long-term (min. 5 years) municipal Programme for Child and Family Support<sup>47</sup>, including special subprogrammes for specific issues (such as street children, drug addiction, juvenile crime, etc.);
- to prepare and submit to the City Council a plan for implementation of the following year's programme;

<sup>46</sup> The make-up of the council can differ in each municipality, but the presence of political representatives is mandatory.

<sup>47</sup> Structure of the Programme for Child and Family Support (example):

I. The basic principles of the programme (e.g., children's rights issues have priority, a child has the right to grow up in a family and the right to normal development, inter-institutional cooperation is important for effective enforcement of children's rights).

II. Assessment of the situation (incl. a description of the institutions involved in the protection of children's rights and their competencies).

III. Definition of the problem.

IV. Solutions: preventive and rehabilitative work (including necessary resolutions and directives).

V. Expected results.

VI. Required funding.

The programme should also include: principles of the registration system, the general direction of both preventive and rehabilitative work, coordination mechanisms for the system of protecting children's rights (incl. institutional liability, a mechanism for reporting and exchanging information, principles for management of social cases, etc.), a scheme for accounting and assessment.

- to carry out regular assessment of the children's rights situation, make necessary amendments to the programme, plan studies and other projects that will help in assessing the situation and the results that are achieved;
- to assess the local government's draft legislation for possible effects on the situation of children and families;
- to monitor the work of institutions involved in providing child and family support services and to assess the quality of their work (to work out assessment criteria, determine the responsible institution);
- to regularly inform the City Council about the work of the council and provide an assessment of the situation (annual report on the situation of children in the city);
- to cooperate with the NCPCR, provide reports on the situation of street children in the city and on work with street children.

The rights of the council:

- to request and receive information on children's rights issues from national and local government institutions and NGOs<sup>48</sup>;
- to prepare and submit proposals for improving the system for protecting children's rights to the local government;
- to review the City Council's draft legislation and make recommendations about its effect on the situation of children and families in the municipality;
- to request the help of professionals in carrying out its duties;
- to inform the media about the work of the council.

The council can also solicit funds from foundations and entrepreneurs, for example, by setting up a special "Child Development Fund."

Council management: the affairs of the council are managed by a person who is recommended by the Social Affairs Committee and approved by the City Council.

Legal basis for the work of the council: the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Law on Protection of Children's Rights and other Latvian legislation, local government resolutions and directives that are in any way connected with children's rights.

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<sup>48</sup> Guaranteeing confidentiality of data.

## **II. Recommendations for the Child and Family Support Programme**

(Current issues connected with preventive and rehabilitative work, which should be included in the programme)

A new approach should be used for policy on protection of children's rights, one that is not based on overcoming consequences and punishing culprits, but rather on improvement of preventive and supportive work, and on education.

The municipal programmes must include basic principles and measures, in order to:

- create a rational, integrated and systematic approach for working with street children;
- achieve better cooperation, communication and coordination among service providers;
- raise the competence/professional skills of workers;
- conclude a maximum number of contracts with public organisations for the provision of services.

### I. Resolution of family problems helps to keep children off the streets – therefore:

- early preventive measures must be taken in all areas that are connected with growth and development of the child:
  - support for young families from the very start of a pregnancy;<sup>49</sup>
  - all-round support for families with children through the healthcare, social welfare, education and employment systems, etc.;<sup>50</sup>
- the number of social workers who work with families must be increased, and the proportion between professional social services and financial support must be altered in favour of the former;
- rehabilitation opportunities must be provided for parents and for children who are addicted to alcohol or narcotics;
- involvement of support families and trusted persons must be introduced in social work with families and children.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> This includes improvement of information flow between maternity hospitals and social welfare services, introduction of educational and consultative services for helping parents to care for their children.

<sup>50</sup> A broad network of services for all families with children, with special focus on a variety of day care/babysitting services, help in finding living quarters and jobs, and support in family crisis situations.

<sup>51</sup> In accordance with Section 26 of the Law on Protection of Children's Rights and Ministry of Welfare Recommendations for Social Welfare Services on Establishment of Support Families and Choice of Trusted Persons.

II. Local government policy must be steered away from keeping the child off the street towards making the street a child-friendly environment – therefore:

- support must be given to establishment of day centres/clubs<sup>52</sup> for children and juveniles, and ways must be found to ensure their maintenance (with extensive involvement of the public sector);
- social street work must be organised;
- urban planning must respect the needs of children (planning of playgrounds and sports facilities, cooperation with entrepreneurs to promote development of child-and family-friendly services, etc.);
- negative factors that affect children in a street environment must be strictly controlled (alcohol and tobacco trade, prostitution, drug trade, night clubs, amusement parlours, etc.);
- night shelters must be provided for children who, for whatever reason, have ended up on the street or find themselves in a crisis situation (special children's night shelters or facilities at crisis centres);
- measures must be taken to ensure that each child is informed about opportunities for receiving help in crisis situations (toll-free, 24-hour crisis hotlines, crisis centres, etc.);
- support must be provided for older children (from the age of 15) trying to begin an independent life, find a job, get professional training<sup>53</sup> by:
  - making available group flats for minors;
  - providing accommodation in government-subsidised housing;
  - helping to find professional training and job opportunities, helping to acquire life skills.

III. The guiding and supportive role of the school must be increased, as well as active participation in early diagnosing of social problems in the family:

- the guidance functions of the homeroom teacher should be expanded (teachers should be trained, more time and financial resources should be provided for this function), cooperation between the school and parents should be improved;

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<sup>52</sup> A minimum of one centre in each neighbourhood of the city.

<sup>53</sup> So that teenagers who do not wish to return to their families due to violence in the family or other objective reasons can live on their own.

- the responsibility of schools for children dropping out of school should be increased<sup>54</sup>;
- cooperation between schools and social welfare services should be improved<sup>55</sup>;
- in cases where a child has not attended school for a longer period of time, opportunities should be provided for attending social and academic adjustment classes or, in the case of older teenagers, professional training (even for those who have not completed their basic education);
- in cases when a child transfers to a different school, a mechanism is needed for checking whether the child is actually attending the new school.

#### IV. Social problems are best dealt with by an inter-disciplinary team:

- a clear plan should be conceived for cooperation among institutions involved in the protection of children's rights, with the role and functions of each institution precisely defined;
- territorial inter-disciplinary teams should be set up (e.g., in different neighbourhoods)<sup>56</sup>;
- the functions of the person/institution/specialist who is the case manager should be precisely defined<sup>57</sup>;
- services provided by the non-governmental sector must be incorporated into the network of municipal services<sup>58</sup>.

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<sup>54</sup> Schools should be required to investigate the situation at an early stage and report on cases of truancy.

<sup>55</sup> Schools should be required to cooperate with social workers in correcting the social behaviour of children and in developing and implementing social support programmes, or school social pedagogues should be financed by the social services and controlled by the same.

<sup>56</sup> For example, social worker, school social pedagogue, psychologist, policeman.

<sup>57</sup> Management and coordination of social cases should be assumed by professionals from social welfare services/centres.

<sup>58</sup> In order to do this, the local government requires an expert who is responsible for cooperation with NGOs and for preparing a database on NGOs that are active in the municipality, who promotes coordination between services provided by NGOs and the local government, who follows the work of NGOs, monitors observance of children's rights, provides recommendations for NGO projects, etc.

V. A comprehensive database is a prerequisite for objective analysis of a situation, for research-based planning and effective use of resources, and for dealing with social problems:

- an inter-institutional computer database on children living within the jurisdiction of the local government must be established.

### **III. How municipal child and family support councils will help to deal with the problems of street children:**

- 1) a long-term child and family support programme will be developed, which will include special measures for dealing with questions that concern street children;
- 2) the use of municipal resources (institutional, human, financial, non-governmental) will be improved;
- 3) a municipal network of services based on the needs of families and children will evolve, which will make it possible to reduce the number of dysfunctional families in the municipality;
- 4) decisions that have a negative effect on the welfare of families with children will not be taken in other areas of local government;
- 5) it will be possible to carry out regular and long-term assessment of the work done by local government institutions to support children and families because work will be planned;
- 6) the proportion of professional services in the spectrum of social support will increase, the role of professionals in providing social services will grow;
- 7) creation of a child-friendly urban environment will reduce the negative effects of the street on the development of children;
- 8) improvement of social services that meet the needs and interests of children will help to reduce the amount of time spent on the street;
- 9) setting priorities will help to cut expenses (for example, improving support for families with children and developing alternative forms of childcare will reduce the number of children placed in institutions and the costs connected with this).

## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1

#### List of interview respondents

No.	City	Organisation	Official
1.	Daugavpils	Daugavpils City Council	City Council deputy chairwoman
2.		School Board	Daugavpils City Council inspector for protection of children's rights
3.		Orphans' Court	Orphans' Court chairwoman
4.		Municipal Police	Director of the Daugavpils Municipal Police Dept. for Prophylactic Work with Juveniles
5.		Department for Prophylactic Work with Juveniles	Daugavpils Municipal Police senior inspector
6.		Municipal Police	Daugavpils School Board employee (psychologist)
7.		Department for Prophylactic Work with Juveniles	Social Services Centre deputy director
8.		Social Services Centre	Social Services Centre Children's Department social worker
9.		Social Services Centre	Chief of the Juvenile Affairs Inspectorate
10.		State Police	Centre director
		NGO, Daugavpils Psychological Support Centre	
11.	Liepāja	Liepāja City Council	Expert on youth and social issues
12.		Orphans' Court	Court official
13.		Social Services Centre	Expert
14.		Municipal Police	Juvenile Affairs Department
15.		Youth Centre Children's Club "Good Friends"	Expert
16.	Jelgava	Jelgava City Council	City Council deputy chairwoman
17.		Orphans' Court	Orphans' Court chairwoman

18.		School Board	Inspector for protection of children's rights
19.		State Police	Juvenile Affairs inspector
20.		Municipal Police Department for Juvenile Affairs	Juvenile Affairs inspector
21.		Department for Health and Social Affairs	Department director
22.		Department for Health and Social Affairs	Senior expert on work with families and children
23.		Department for Health and Social Affairs	Psychologist
24.	Riga	Riga Orphans' Court	Orphans' Court chairwoman
25.		Riga Municipal Police	Social Affairs Department director
26.		Riga City Council Welfare Department	Child and Family Support Department director
27.		Riga City Council Welfare Department	Child and Family Support Department expert
28.		Prophylactics Centre for Neglected Juveniles	Inspector, teacher
29.		Riga Kurzeme District Municipal Social Welfare Service	Department for Families and Children expert
30.		Riga Municipal Crisis Centre for Street Children "Mars Avenue"	Crisis Centre director
31.		National Centre for Protection of Children's Rights	Centre director
32.		<i>Saeima</i> Subcommittee on Protection of Children's Rights	Chairman

### Interviews with NGO directors and experts

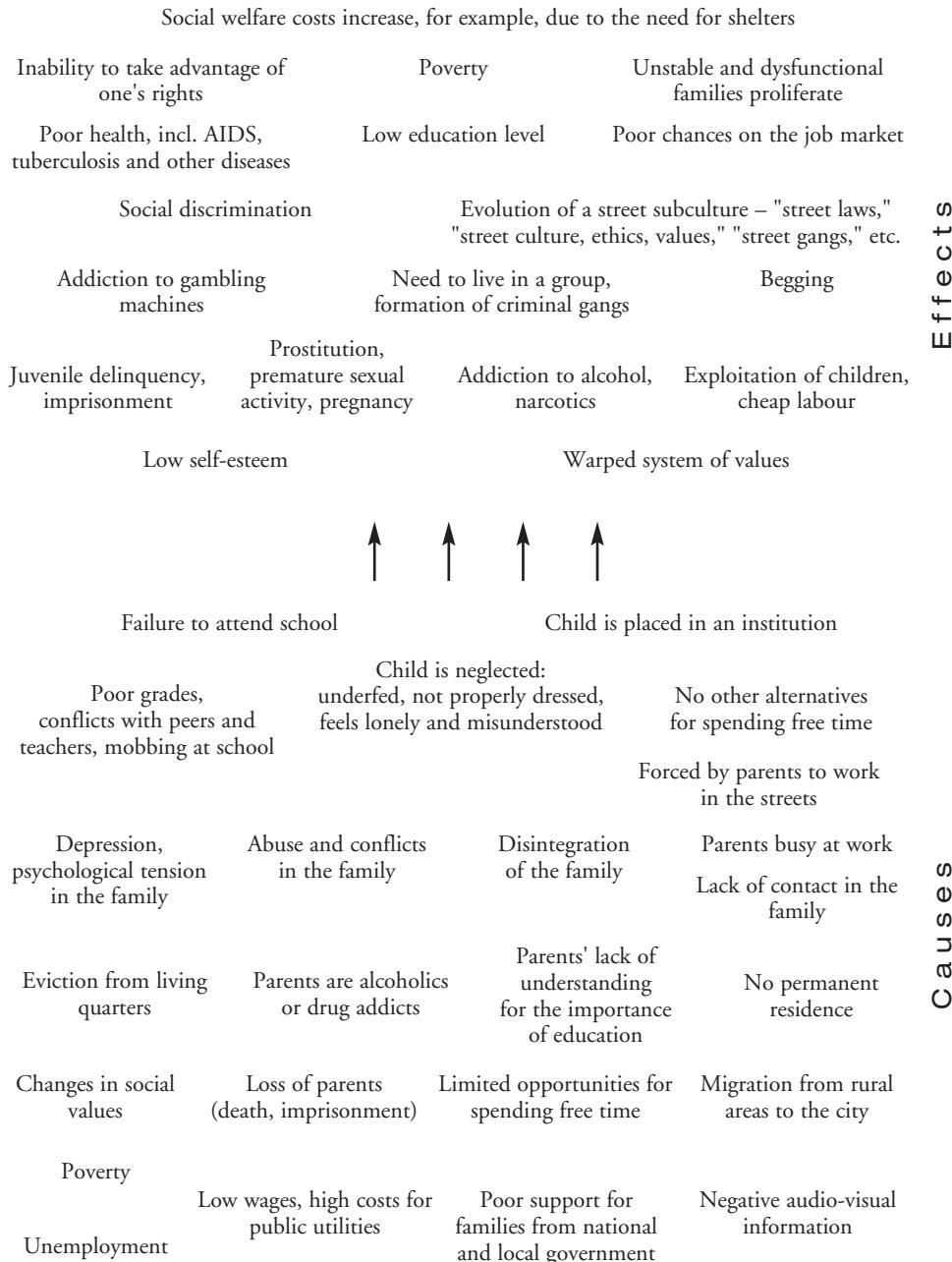
(March 6, 2001)

Participants:

- 1) Ev. Luth. Church of Latvia welfare centre for street children, Liksnas 13–1, Riga, LV-1003;
- 2) Club "Baltais zvirbulis" (White Sparrow), Maskavas 254/4–8, Riga, LV-1003;
- 3) Orthodox Church of Latvia St. Nikolai Riga Christian Children's Shelter, Lāčplēša 85–5, Riga, LV-1011;
- 4) Child and Family Rights Support Foundation, Pulkveža Brieža 18, Riga, LV-1010;
- 5) "Save the Children", Ģertrūdes 19/21, Riga, LV-1011;
- 6) Tukums NGO Association, Talsu 5, Tukums, LV-5400;
- 7) Anti-Abuse Centre for Support of Children and Families, Jūrmalas gatve 74/76, Riga, LV-1083;
- 8) Talsi Women's and Children's Crisis Centre, Saules 7, Talsi, LV-3201;
- 9) Social Education Foundation, Eiženijas 1, Riga, LV-1007;
- 10) Daugavpils Crisis Centre for Psychological Support, Saules 17–2, Daugavpils, LV-5400.

## Appendix 2

### Street children – causes and effects of the problem



## Appendix 3

### Strengths and weaknesses of the children's rights protection (CRP) system

Strengths of the CRP system	Weaknesses of the CRP system
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A relatively good legal basis has been established for protection of children's rights:           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ the Convention on the Rights of the Child has been ratified, the Law on Protection of Children's Rights has been enacted;</li> <li>▪ each year, a National Programme for Improvement of the Situation of Children is elaborated;</li> <li>▪ the basic principles of the Framework Document on National and Local Government Policy on Support for Families with Children have been adopted, work has been completed on the Framework Document on Support for Families with Children;</li> <li>▪ the National Programme for Prevention of Sexual Abuse of Children 2000–2004 has been approved;</li> <li>▪ work is continuing on a strategy for prevention of juvenile crime.</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ There is a broad network of institutions involved in securing children's rights.</li> <li>▪ Work has been started on a comprehensive statistical study of the situation of children in Latvia.</li> <li>▪ The public sector is active in this field.</li> <li>▪ A number of organisations have acquired new and effective methods for working with street children.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Protection of children's rights is not high on the political agenda.</li> <li>▪ There is no long-term strategy for protection of children's rights.</li> <li>▪ Individual provisions of the Law on Protection of Children's Right are not enforced.</li> <li>▪ Input of funds for protection of children's rights is not analysed for output.</li> <li>▪ Several different institutions are responsible for the protection of children's rights. As a result, children's welfare issues are separated from family welfare issues.</li> <li>▪ There is more focus on coping with problems and their effects than on development.</li> <li>▪ There is no effective mechanism for controlling enforcement of the law and coordinating the work of national, municipal and public organisations in protecting children's rights.</li> </ul> <p>Municipalities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The majority of local governments do not have long-term programmes for supporting children and families.</li> <li>▪ Policies are focused on limiting the effects of certain problems:       <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ financial support is the main form of support;</li> <li>▪ the role of social welfare services is not sufficiently appreciated;</li> <li>▪ there is lack of understanding about the importance of social work in dealing with the problems of children and families, a lack of professional social workers and case overload.</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Insufficient assessment and application of public resources.</li> <li>▪ Insufficient cooperation between institutions.</li> </ul>

## Appendix 4

### Children in Latvia – key indicators

#### Number and gender of children

	January 1, 1989	March 31, 2000 <sup>59</sup>	Decline (1989–2000)
Total population of Latvia	2,665,770	2,375,339	290,431
Children aged 0–17	681,408	534,136	147,272
females	334,127	261,259	72,868
males	347,281	272,877	74,404

Source: Children in Latvia. Statistics Bulletin, Republic of Latvia Central Bureau of Statistics, Riga, 2001.

#### Children aged 7–15 not attending school

	1998/99	1999/2000	2000/2001
Did not attend school at the start of the school year (of those registered at educational establishments)	3,932 <sup>60</sup>	3,024 <sup>61</sup>	2,607 <sup>62</sup>

<sup>59</sup> Preliminary results of the 2000 census.

<sup>60</sup> Results of the "There is a School Waiting for You" campaign (not including disabled children and children with special needs).

<sup>61</sup> Source: Children in Latvia. Statistics Bulletin, Republic of Latvia Central Bureau of Statistics, Riga, 2000.

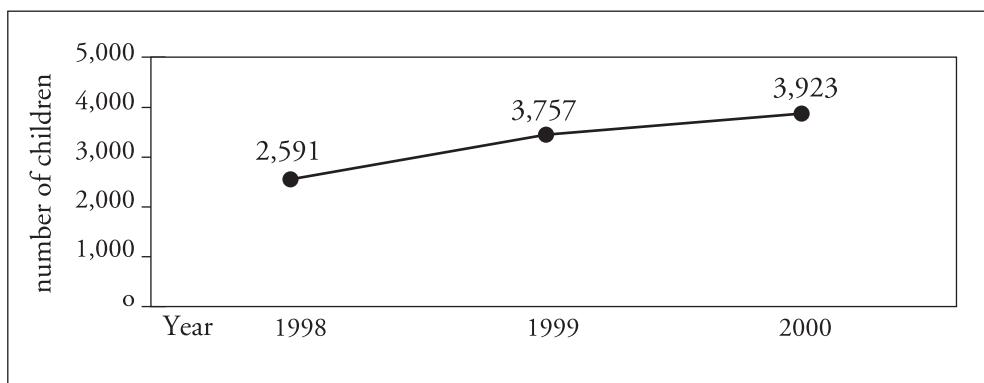
<sup>62</sup> Source: Children in Latvia. Statistics Bulletin, Republic of Latvia Central Bureau of Statistics, Riga, 2001.

**School-age children in the 2000/2001 school year  
(born 1985–1993)**

Cities, districts	All officially registered school-age children	Attending school or having completed a basic education		Not attending school and not having a basic education		Emigrated from Latvia or deceased		Not registered at educational establishments	
		Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Total in Latvia	308,590	290,330	94.08	2,607	0.84	835	0.27	14,818	4.80
Daugavpils	14,236	12,296	86.37	2	0.01	0	0.00	1,938	13.61
Jelgava	7,901	7,380	93.41	331	4.19	115	1.46	75	0.95
Jūrmala	6,702	6,210	92.66	487	7.27	2	0.03	3	0.04
Liepāja	11,140	10,341	92.83	14	0.13	10	0.09	775	6.96
Rēzekne	4,633	4,352	93.93	16	0.35	1	0.02	264	5.70
Riga	83,957	74,859	89.16	199	0.24	1	0.00	8,898	10.60
Ventspils	5,313	5,135	96.65	71	1.34	51	0.96	56	1.05
Total in cities	133,882	120,573	90.06	1,120	0.84	180	0.13	12,009	8.97

Source: Ministry of Education and Science Department for Informatics and Economic Management.

**Children in conflict with the law**



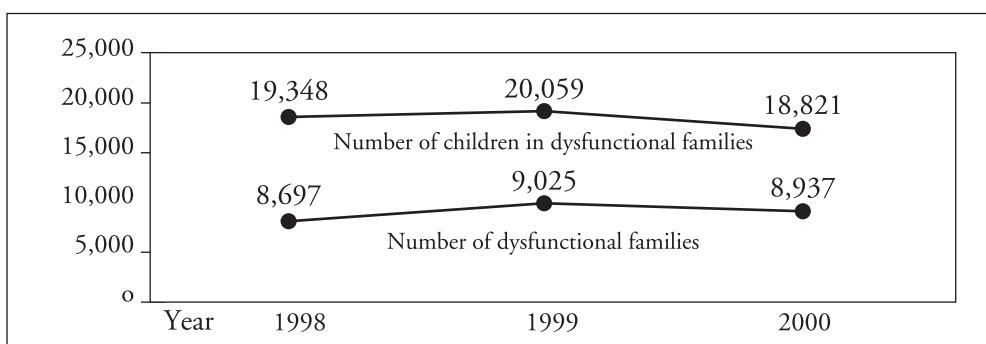
Source: Children in Latvia. Statistics Bulletin, Republic of Latvia Central Bureau of Statistics, Riga, 2001.

### Disadvantaged families with children<sup>63</sup>

	1998	1999	2000
Number of families	74,241	67,152	66,956
Number of children	178,681	157,551	154,934 <sup>64</sup>

Source: Children in Latvia. Statistics Bulletin, Republic of Latvia Central Bureau of Statistics, Riga, 2001.

### Dysfunctional families in Latvia



Source: Children in Latvia. Statistics Bulletin, Republic of Latvia Central Bureau of Statistics, Riga, 2001.

### Number of children in residential childcare institutions

	January 1, 1999	January 1, 2000	January 1, 2001
Municipal children's shelters	2,344	2,456	2,412
Residential childcare institutions	797	719	740
Residential childcare institutions for children with special needs	456	462	453
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,597</b>	<b>3,637</b>	<b>3,605</b>

Source: Social Welfare in Latvia. Statistics and Analysis. Ministry of Welfare Social Welfare Foundation, Riga, 2001.

<sup>63</sup> Families registered with municipal social welfare services.

<sup>64</sup> This is 29% of all children aged 0–17.

### Reasons why children are placed in childcare institutions

	Residential childcare institutions			Children's shelters			Childcare institutions for children with special needs		
	1998	1999	2000	1998	1999	2000	1998	1999	2000
Death of parents	2	12	8	115	165	195	–	–	–
Illness	259	241	247	7	1	19	456	462	453
Parental authority suspended by an orphans' court	240	255	223	1,329	1,327	1,434	–	–	–
Parental authority legally terminated	20	13	21	399	424	467	–	–	–
Social circumstances	...	94	...	...	436	...	–	–	–
Abandonment	94	68	84	32	41	22	–	–	–
Other reasons	182	36	157	504	62	275			

Source: Children in Latvia. Statistics Bulletin, Republic of Latvia Central Bureau of Statistics, Riga, 2001.

### Municipal (incl. rural districts) funds spent by child care institutions (Ls)

	1998	1999	2000
Funds spent on child care	3,926,365	4,132,287	4,176,453
Increase from previous year		205,922	44,166

Source: Social Welfare in Latvia. Statistics and Analysis. Ministry of Welfare Social Welfare Foundation, Riga, 2001.

**Use of funds for government social welfare programmes,  
municipal allowances for families with children, child care institutions,  
implementation of national programmes for improvement  
of the situation of children in the year 2000 (Ls)**

	Ls
Municipal allowances for families with children:	
settlement of public utility and/or rental debts	2,642,517*
support for children's education	3,514,521*
use of funds by social welfare institutions:	
national childcare institutions	3,192,909*
municipal childcare institutions	4,590,263*
Government material and financial support:	
childbirth allowances	2,734,774
childcare allowances	11,588,914
family allowances	30,351,449
allowances for disabled children	3,700,843
guardianship compensation	2,852,252
reimbursement of guardians' expenses	1,745,508
foster family compensation	705
Funding for the yearly National Programme for Improvement of the Situation of Children	105,090
<b>Total</b>	<b>67,019,745</b>

Source: Social Welfare in Latvia. Statistics and Analysis. Ministry of Welfare Social Welfare Foundation, Riga, 2001.

\* Report on the situation of children in Latvia in the year 2000. NCPCR. Riga, 2001.

**Suspension, termination and renewal of parental authority  
in the period from 1998–2000**

	1998–2000 (3-year period)
Suspension of parental authority	5,299
Renewal of parental authority	923 (17%)
Termination of parental authority	385
Renewal of parental authority	11 (3%)

Source: Social Welfare in Latvia. Statistics and Analysis. Ministry of Welfare Social Welfare Foundation, Riga, 2001.

**Alcoholism and drug addiction**

Registered children	1995	1999	2000
Acute alcoholic intoxication or use of alcohol with harmful effects	241	394	345
Addiction to psychoactive substances (not including alcohol)	5	241	289

Source: Children in Latvia. Statistics Bulletin, Republic of Latvia Central Bureau of Statistics, Riga, 2001.

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