

Alternative Report to the UN 2015 Part III

Latvian NGO Children's Rights Network Recommendations to the government on implementation of the UN Convention on the rights of the child in Latvia

1. Poverty

Break “vicious cycle of poverty” which has been prolonged in Latvia in context of Baltic region for a quarter of a century.

- 1.1. Allocate 2,5% of the GDP of Latvia to families with children (like in Estonia and most EU countries, not 1,5%, as has been the case in Latvia thus far);
- 1.2. Enforce an existence minimum and consumption basket that reflects the real needs of a person residing in the European Union, so that the government takes it into account when planning its budget.

2. Health

To reorganize child healthcare in order to eliminate disparity between Latvian Laws, the UN CRC and reality - to stop social and regional discrimination, provide healthcare free of charge, to close the mortality gap between Latvia and rest of the Baltic region and renew direct access to paediatricians in primary care:

- 2.1. reimburse child parents/guardians for their out of pocket payments, recognizing them as temporarily made for diagnostics and/or treatment of child in contradiction to current Law;
- 2.2. by increasing state quotas for diagnostics and treatment in children to the necessary level, or abolish regulations and declare, that there is no child healthcare free of charge in Latvia;
- 2.3. decrease child mortality, especially perinatal, infant mortality and mortality due to external causes and suicide by inviting international consultants from more successful countries, improving knowledge of medical personnel in the delivery departments, especially rural ones, providing Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) and drowning prevention campaigns and education;
- 2.4. unburden the only full scope tertiary care child hospital in Latvia from primary and secondary healthcare level patients, providing trauma sorting and admission in four places in capital – Riga (currently only one);
- 2.5. to promote friendly study environment for students and lecturers of medical faculties of universities introducing European University hospital model in Latvia (MoE - state covers education, state/local government covers treatment in and administration of the hospital);
- 2.6. provide tertiary care accessibility 24/7 to all children in Latvia;

- 2.7. **avert iodine deficiency and its consequences in Latvia (mental retardation in new-borns, increased risk for malignancy etc.) by urgently implementing Law on mandatory universal salt iodation in (in accordance with the intergovernmental agreement signed in 2002 during the UN General Assembly in New York, to be implemented before 2005). Decrease in IQ by one point is connected to persistent 0.11% annual decrease of GDP per-capita;**
- 2.8. injury sorting in secondary health care, admission department in at least four places in capital – Riga (until now for years was in only one place);
- 2.9. urgently set up and implement screening for attention deficit disorder (ADD), early signs of depression, dyslexia and other reasons for learning difficulties in educational institutions especially in early stages.

3. Education

- 3.1. Install a universal internationally praised and renowned education model in Latvia – from Finland. Let the Latvian Ministry of Education stop the quarter century lasting trials on Latvia's children, trying to “reinvent the bicycle”, which has successfully already been done abroad;
- 3.2. Provide a safe, child-friendly environment in preschool and school , providing obligatory education of all teachers and institution staff on the State Inspectorate of Child Rights Protection's project „Child-friendly schools” etc.;
- 3.3. Introduce obligatory studies on general Health topics, such as healthy eating, reproductive health as well as human rights , especially UN Convention on the Rights of the Child;
- 3.4. Provide as state obligation according to the UN CRC sufficient physical education lessons and swimming skills in schools! (Do not allow anyone to skip these. Health and physical fitness level is low, but drowning rate high in EU context);
- 3.5. Support schools in the countryside – special state subsidies according to a predefined coefficient – in order to avoid endangering a child's health (possibly caused by spending too much time on the way to school) and prevent the depopulation of rural areas;
- 3.6. Keep state support to local boarding schools, teaching professions in rural areas in order to avoid the progress of the on-going depopulation of the country and to promote the development of social business in rural areas - especially for children with learning difficulties;
- 3.7. Create civilized support and loan system for students, in order to prevent intellectual potential from leaving Latvia (studies for free or reasonable loans like in UK – pay back when earning sufficiently, cover inflation + 3% if earning well);
- 3.8. Provide access to inclusive education in all educational institutions.

4. Municipalities and the state

- 4.1. Determine a coefficient for state and municipal budget balancing according to European Charter of Self-Government - depending on changes in the GDP, in order to reduce the ability of political parties to manipulate municipal budgets for mercantile purposes;
- 4.2. Reduce state bureaucracy to meet the EU average; including reducing the number of steps required in the allocation of European fund resources;
- 4.3. Establish a mandatory training course on the implementation of the European Charter of Self-Government for officials (including MPs) and the heads of other professions who work with the structuring of the state and municipal budgets;
- 4.4. Allocate state resources to local governments for the prevention of juvenile crime – for direct prevention, determining a coefficient for the subsidization of schools, extracurricular and leisure activities for children, especially in rural areas;
- 4.5. Secure free lunch to all children in schools, as is the case in Estonia;
- 4.6. Tickets free of charge or discounted for all children and adolescents who are studying (up to the age of 24) in public transport and free entry to state museums;
- 4.7. Abolish the Cabinet of Ministers regulations that prevent food from the nearest farmers being purchased for feeding children in educational and other institutions.
- 4.8. Urgently conduct research on the practicality of deinstitutionalization in the countryside and allocate the deinstitutionalization ESF fund part (ESF 2015-2020) to the respective municipality employees that work with the local inhabitants and transportation;
- 4.9. Reconstruct the real estate tax calculation to prevent depopulation in the cultural heritage sense – that has caused thousands of families to abandon their several generation old property in Jurmala (seaside) and Riga (capital) - according to the system in Estonia (no payments for land smaller than 1500 m² and flats smaller than 150 m² (unverified) in cities);
- 4.10. Unemployment benefits and support to pregnant women and young mothers needs to be secured for children and adolescents, who have not made any social payments, as they come from “the school seat” since the state has not succeeded in securing them with jobs in time;
- 4.11. Strengthen capacity of child rights protection system on country and community level – supporting custody courts with increased level of other specialists such as social workers, social pedagogues, school and family psychologists and persons working on prevention of juvenile offenders;
- 4.12. The child’s opinion should be determined and taken into account in all matters that could potentially influence their interests – public discussions on strategies, environment planning, and signatures of children in public petitions. Introduce a section titled “impact on children” in all documents planning any decisions at the state and municipal levels, in accordance with the UN CRC paragraph on children’s best interests (like the existing section in all documents on the “impact on the environment”);

- 4.13. Create Family court institution in Latvia, which works for specific interests of children and is a positive successful example in other countries; until Family court institution is developed, ensure prioritised litigation of child matters in court and institutions urgently, ensure the accessibility of lawyers to children with mental disabilities to protect their interests in case against their guardians/parents, and make it mandatory for courts to invite children to express their opinion directly;
- 4.14. Increase state funding of supporting children in foster and guardian families, and maximally foster the moving of children under the age of 9 and older children to these families or adoption from institutions (older children less likely to be adopted);
- 4.15. Ask for Latvia's debt obligations to be relieved through the EU Commission. Furthermore, they must attempt to have the IMF and WB only be allowed to issue loans to countries after the best interests of the child have been reviewed – in accordance with the CRC on the procedure for how decisions are to be made at all levels (task for country that holds presidency of the Council of EU).**

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Please note that sources are in two parts – Part I and Part II of the Alternative Report to UN respectively.

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