

## **Rights of children working and/or living on the street - implementation of the UN HRC resolution 16/12**

### **Contribution of Latvia**<sup>1</sup>

**1.** Law on Protection of the Rights of the Child of the Republic of Latvia provides the following definition: “*Street children are children who have insufficient contact with family and who spend the greater part of their time on the streets or in other circumstances inappropriate for the development of a child*” (Section 1, paragraph 14). In practice, the definition incorporates a wide understanding that street children are children from dysfunctional families with insufficient supervision. The situation of children living or working on the street is considered in the context of their family situation and should be dealt in a comprehensive manner in order to achieve satisfactory results in long term.

Statistical data on children working and/or living on the street as such are not available, however data of different institutions might indicate the number of street children, as well as the number of so called problematic/dysfunctional families. In cases when the State Police establishes that a child lives in conditions that are dangerous or in conditions which do not provide his or her physical or intellectual development (for example, a child works and/or lives on the street, begs, is vagrant), the State Police informs the Orphan’s Court. The State Police informs the Orphan’s Court and local government social service if it is not possible to provide the assistance at the moment - then a child can be placed in a prophylactic institution or in a child care institution or foster family. The State Police has records on the children, who are begging on the street, are vagrant or perform other acts which may lead to illegal actions; the Police can perform preventive work with those children or in cooperation with local governments develop social correction and social assistance programmes. Data on vagrant children in Latvia: first half of 2011 - 166 children; in 2010 – 249 children; 2009 – 342; 2008 – 397; 2007 – 401.

At the local level offices that provide social services collect information on the families with children that receive social assistance and social benefits (e.g., in 2009 - 33 859 families with children have received social benefits from local governments). Orphan’s courts collect information on the families, in which the development and upbringing of a child is not ensured sufficiently and which need assistance (e.g., in 2010, there were 2237 such families with 3851 children; in 2009 – 2300 families with 3916 children).

**2.** Main focus of the relevant institutions in this field is to improve and strengthen inter-institutional cooperation and early prevention measures. Offices that provide social services, orphan’s courts, social pedagogues at schools, State Inspectorate on the Rights of the Child, police, medical workers have the responsibility to inform other institutions on any indications of risk situations for children. For example, an Orphan’s court has an obligation to inform a social service office of the local government or other responsible institutions on the families, in which the development and upbringing of a child is not ensured sufficiently and which need assistance.

For prevention and timely intervention reasons, social service offices once in 6 months provide assessment of risk families with children. Orphan’s courts perform risk assessment prior to the taking of a decision regarding the removal of child care rights of parents.

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<sup>1</sup> Information provided by the Ministry of Welfare and Ministry of Interior of Latvia

Currently the Ministry of Interior is developing the *Minor Persons Support Information System*. The main goal of the project is to develop a unified information system for processing data related to minors at risk – e.g. minors who commit criminal/administrative offences, who are engaged in vagrancy, live in socially adverse and dangerous conditions, etc. The system would provide prompt information circulation and cooperation among police/social/educational/other institutions, as well as prevent juvenile delinquency and victimization among minor persons at early stage. Primary aim of the system is not to provide surveillance or punishment, but rather to assist minors allowing them to break as early as possible the connection with criminal and anti-social activities and promote their development. It is planned that about 4500 users will be granted on-line access rights to the system and 200 public/local government institutions will be provided with the possibilities to exchange information in the framework of the system. Implementation of the project will promote future cooperation also at the regional/international level.

**3.** One of the challenges is the fact that the major assistance is provided to the families with children which have low or no income. It is more difficult to recognize those families that do not fall into that category but in which children do not receive sufficient attention and therefore are at risk of spending most time on the street.

**4.** At the state level there is a toll free hot-line for children operated by the State Inspectorate for Protection of Children's rights. Consultations are provided by professional psychologists – children can inform on cases of violation of their rights, they may ask for an advice or just talk to professionals. If a child agrees, further assistance may be provided to him/her – the Inspectorate contacts other institutions at local level that can deal with the case further.

At the local level there is a network of day care centers where children may spend their free time. In the capital city of Latvia there is so called “mobile team” which in cooperation with other institutions aims to assist street children. Major tasks of the mobile team are: to explore problems of street children; to provide children with social and informative support; to promote their integration into society; to perform preventive rounds in the Riga city in any time of the day with the aim to reveal violations of children's rights; to assist children and youth in emergency situations. There are also some NGOs involved in field work with street children.