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**CHILDREN'S REPORT TO THE
UNITED NATIONS ON
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE UN
CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF
THE CHILD IN LATVIA
for Hearing in Geneva in 2006**



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Introduction

This is the first Children's Report to the United Nations Organisation from Latvia. The idea to compile children's thoughts regarding their rights and situation, in order for adults in Latvia and the rest of the world to learn about them, had been considered by us for many years, during which time "Save the Children" drove around Latvia filming material for a TV programme we produced about children's rights. The children we encountered were so wonderful and patient when faced with life's difficulties, and they were always ready to understand and justify those who maltreated them. These children had ideas and proposals about what the State and other adults should do in order to improve things, yet the majority of the children were convinced that nobody was interested in what they had to say. At the same time, they were aware that this was actually very unfortunate, because if they were given a chance to express their thoughts, many adults might take decisions much differently. Then LSC decided to improve this situation and, thanks to the support of the Royal Netherlands Embassy and the Information Office of the Council of Europe, we can now convey children's thoughts to those who take decisions which may influence them in Latvia and the European Union and the United Nations. The children knew that their views would be submitted to the UN and therefore they provided answers to the questions prepared by experts and expressed proposals with a sense of great responsibility.

This Report compiles children's views and proposals regarding problems that cause discomfort to children. The Report was prepared by the organisation "Save the Children", which is also preparing the Latvian NGO Children's Rights Network Alternative Report to the UN as a commentary to the Report of the Government of Latvia. Though both Reports are about children, they differ according to their essence. The participation of adults in the Children's Report was only made manifest in listening to them, distributing the questioning forms, processing and compiling data, as well as in briefly providing an evaluation of this data. The Children's Report clearly indicates the ignoring of certain paragraphs of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Children's Report reflects the actual situation in the life of children in our State, as understood by the children themselves; this is of great significance, because the vision of real life is very different for the children that it is for those persons whose duty it is to care for children. In comparing the State's Report and the Children's Report, we see a very different picture. Many people whose job is related to children are not aware of children's thoughts, their needs and attitude, and therefore it is often the case that these people cannot perform their job in the best interests of the children. It is not right that ¼ of Latvia's citizens are not listened to and that their views are not taken into consideration in the taking of decisions that affect their lives. Children do not have voting rights and therefore they do not have representation in either the local or the

central parliament, nor in the government. This is a sign of children's discrimination, which is intrinsic to any era, yet in the conditions of the development of advanced technology in the 21st century, it is becoming more and more dangerous to continue to not take into consideration the views of children. Children must be ensured with actual rights to participate in the taking of decision regarding their education, the protection of their health, and the protection of the environment. Contemporary life takes place at such a fast pace that adults may seriously impair the life of children today and in the future with a few decisions; adults usually give primary consideration to the needs of adults and of the present, instead of children and the future. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child prescribes that a state, in taking any decision that may in any way affect the interests of children, shall give primary consideration to children's interests. In Latvia as well, we see the ignoring of the views of children at all levels. Though children's councils have been established in a few schools, the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs has established the Children's Council; nevertheless, these formations do not ensure the hearing of children's views, because they mostly include children from the more successful and ensured families, or very active children. Everyone else, along with their problems and their views of these problems, "remain on the other side". Latvia is the poorest state in the European Union, with almost the worst main statistical indicators of health and welfare. State policy in regards to children in the past decade has been ill-considered and chaotic, and the State budget in regards to children has been very stingy. The situation has improved since the Ministry for Children and Family Affairs was established in 2003. After reading the Children's Report, you will understand the consequences of unsuccessful State policy. In order for the children's situation in our State to improve, a truly close co-operation between the State authorities and children is absolutely necessary. This may be achieved only by regularly hearing the views of the average child, not those of honour students or children from elite families. The first such attempt has been made by "Save the Children" by compiling the views of more than 9 000 children.

The goal of this project was to ascertain the main problems of children in various target groups, problems which hinder children from feeling good, as well as children's proposals regarding ways in which we might improve their situation. Latvia acceded to the European Union in the spring of 2004, and this has opened up many opportunities. In order to take advantage of these opportunities, children's views and proposals must make their way to our State, but also to EU decision-taking and executive authorities, in order for policy to be planned more successfully in the interests of children. It is very important for this data to be analysed in the UN, European Commission, and Parliament, because precisely these structures may actually influence the directing of the operations of state and international institutions in the interests of children.

The political and economic processes which are currently taking place in the world attest to the fact that children's interests and rights are not put forth as a priority – the destruction of the environment, armed conflicts, correct perception, the shortcomings of politics. Scientists frighten us about the negative impact on the environment and our health caused by insufficiently controlled farming, gene engineering, etc.

20% of children are faced with the threat of contracting diabetes II sometime in the future as a result of sugary beverages and fast food, but the interests of merchants continue to be ensured in selling these products in schools and near schools. Latvia is hurrying to

actualise the reforms in local governments that are in accordance EU recommendations, which have already failed in a few EU states, instead of listening to our scientists, opposing the EU, and attempting to preserve our qualitative agricultural products and land, which, in comparison with the EU, is still relatively unpolluted. All of this will influence our children in the future, but is anybody today on the level of Latvian or international decision-taking authorities inviting them to express their views? The consequences of that which we do today will influence children's lives and therefore they must be given the rights to promote or block each and every decision that affects their interests.

Information regarding the compiler of data provided by children

Several NGOs that work with various children's problems having been in operation in our State for many years now. These NGOs, which also work with children's rights, have merged in the NGO Children's Rights Network. The Latvian Children's Rights Network is a Member Organisation in the Regional Network for Children in CEE/CIS & the Baltic States. Latvia's Presiding Organisation in the NGO Network is the Latvian Organisation "Save the Children". One of the Presiding Organisation's most important fields of activity is the conducting of studies and data analysis regarding violations of children's rights in the State, the informing of the public about such violations, and the formulation of proposals to the government for the diminishing of these violations. All of the Children's Rights Network's NGOs participate in this activity, and "Latvian Save the Children" (LSC) has the role of co-ordination.

The majority of NGO Children's Rights Network organisations, including LSC, have been in existence since the early 1990s, and new organisations are constantly joining. Since the renewal of Latvian independence, the LSC has formulated several dozen laws and norms which have supported the Network's other NGOs, and achieved the inclusion thereof in legislation. The Network's organisations have succeeded throughout the years in achieving many projects and government decisions in order to improve the situation of children in certain specific target groups. In 2000, LSC presented to the UN the NGO Network's Initial Report regarding Children in Latvia. In 2001, the UN submitted recommendations to the Latvian Government, in which the information expressed in our Report was also taken into account. These recommendations had a great effect on the further course of events in our State in the field of children's rights. We hope that the first Children's Report will also generate repercussions and that after the reading of this Report, the UN and other international organisations will be able to act much more effectively.

How were the children's views expressed in this Report listened to?

The Latvian organisation "Save the Children" has 44 local departments and support groups, to which families and children regularly turn with their needs. The Non-governmental Children's Ombudsman operates in the central offices of "Save the Children" in Riga. It is here that the hearing of children takes place over the telephone; on reception days, children's problems are listened to and consultations are provided by lawyers, physicians, psychologists, and, where appropriate, other specialists. LSC regularly contacts the other Children's Rights Network NGOs regarding children's problems in their target groups. Research and questioning is periodically conducted in the districts of the State. On average, approximately 10 000 individuals have turned to "Save the Children" annually since the 1990s in cases of violations of children's rights. In the last two years, this stream has drastically diminished, because the official services of local governments and the State have been operating more and more successfully. The initial "Save the Children" Alternative Report was submitted to the UN in 1998 and reviewed in 2000.

Since this time, "Save the Children" has conducted:

- in 1999/2000, a children's questioning regarding violence – 4 300 children;

- from 2000 to 2002, a study regarding violence against children in 29 institutions for care, orphanages, and boarding schools – 110 children were directly interviewed, 170 children were interviewed by way of a written questionnaire;
- from 2004 to 2005 a children’s questioning in Latvia’s schools, orphanages, regular and special boarding schools, centres for care within the framework of the NGO/ UNICEF Regional Children’s Rights Network in CEE/CIS & the Baltic States Campaign “Leave No Children Out” – 2 112 children and 300 adults, who are closely connected to the questioned children. In this questioning, children from the following Campaign target groups were provided with questionnaires: children who live in poverty; children with special needs; children who have lost parental care; children from ethnic minorities.
- Several hundred direct interviews
- 2 children’s discussion days with the participation of representatives from the ministries and the mass media

Members of “Save the Children” – specialists for work with the relevant problem group in co-operation with experts from the corresponding branch – prepared the questionnaires for the children’s interviews. The information obtained from children by way of direct conversations, using the trust telephones, and in consultations was also recorded throughout all of these years.

Special characteristics of the children’s environment in the conditions of a post-communist state

In becoming acquainted with the situation of children in Latvia, it will be interesting for the UN and other international organisations to take into account the environment where the children live whose thoughts have been compiled and analysed in this Report. Latvia is the first or one of the first post-communist states whose children have provided a Report regarding the observance of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The children’s situation in Latvia in recent years is very different in comparison with the time period when Latvia was violently included in the Soviet Union. During that time, the greatest deficiency in the lives of children was the prohibition to freely express one’s political and economic views, to recognise national holidays, to belong to a religion, to speak in the national language in official events, and to avoid membership in the children’s and youth movements controlled by the Communist Party. Individualism was condemned in every way possible, and if individualism was referred to in a character description, it was considered a mark of shame and hindered a child’s or young person’s career. Nevertheless, there were also positive features: relative social security; free education, medical and social care; actual support for families with many children; the ensuring of the development of interests; a small, but stable income; medicines that were often only mildly effective, but nevertheless inexpensive; food that was hard to come by but inexpensive; low-quality, but inexpensive food service for children at school; free summer and sports camps. There existed disadvantaged families, alcoholics, and poor children during the Soviet period as well, yet the number of poor individuals was adequate, not exceeding 15% of the total number of families and children. Within the context of the republics of the Soviet Union, Latvia had one of the highest

standards of living, education, medicine, and culture. Unemployment did not exist at all, and individuals who were unemployed or didn't work were faced with criminal liability. A workplace was also ensured for completely anti-social types and it was almost impossible to fire someone from his or her job. Latvia was full of factories, plants, and undertakings that produced very bad, ugly, and mostly unusable goods that lay around for years in warehouses because they were only rarely procured. Agricultural products were often obtained in poor-quality or had already spoiled in inadequate warehouses. In essence, the Latvian citizens' comparative economic situation could be explained by the securing of centralised resources from the USSR. When Latvia regained the status of an independent State, this system collapsed, and the useless factories and country farms were closed down, leaving an enormous percentage of family providers unemployed. Gradually, as a result of the Soviet "pause", Latvia arrived in a situation that was catastrophic to its development – without personnel, without resources, without experiences (before the occupation, in the years of the first independent Latvian State, Latvia achieved first place in Europe according to the number of students and third place according to the export of agricultural products). The State began to develop in the direction of fierce capitalism, and many governments lacked the ability to both influence this direction and compensate for its impact on families with children in a situation where suddenly 85% of families with children had gone from being individuals of modest but prosperous means, to being socially unprotected and needy or extremely poor. Already in 1993/1994, the Organisation "Save the Children", after surveying 30 000 families with children, announced catastrophic data, which was submitted to the UN in 1997 and which was later validated by the UNDP, but which several Latvian Governments repeatedly denied as false. This data stated that approximately 85% of families with children since that time and up to the present day live under the real subsistence minimum and that approximately half of families with children do not have access to adequate medical care and medicines, a fact which was denied by the Ministers for Welfare of several Latvian Governments until this information was validated by a study conducted by the Health Department in 2000. Already beginning from that time, LSC has notified regarding the approximately 15 000 children who do not attend school, a figure from which one may estimate that 4% of children do not acquire an education. In the last few years, the Ministry of Education no longer denies this fact, yet nothing has actually been done in order to find these children and ensure their right to acquire an education. Even more so, the Monee Centre of UNICEF Report "Transition Decade" certifies that the main indicators of children's welfare and health are one of the worse among the States that at the time were European Union Candidate States: the maternal mortality rate, children's mortality rate in all age groups, the disablement of teenagers, and the contraction of infections and diseases dependent on vaccines are the highest among those States. Only the spread of HIV/AIDS is higher in Estonia, and the number of suicides and depression is higher in Lithuania.

Children's views regarding the observance of the norms of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and violations of children's rights in Latvia

Analytic material prepared by experts, which is based on the children's hearing conducted by "Save the Children"

As has already been mentioned, the views of children regarding problems in various target groups were acquired by conducting a written and verbal questioning of several thousand children, as well as by listening to information provided by children by way of trust telephones and during separate days dedicated to children's views. Several experts, in co-operation with the children, analysed the acquired information in order to provide proposals to the takers of decisions in Latvia and in international institutions regarding how to diminish children's problems. In this part of the Report, the experts have attempted to reflect and briefly comment on the views expressed by children regarding those norms of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child that are violated in Latvia.

Article 1 (definition of a child)

Many children with special needs are of the opinion that their rights to be looked upon as children until 18 years of age are violated, because at 15 years of age they are required to repeatedly go through health examinations in order to continue to receive financial support from the State. This is a great burden to their families and the children themselves because it demands expenses that are significant to their budget, and many children from social risk families are not even able to fulfil this requirement.

Many children complain about the fact that on trains, children's tickets are only sold to children who are under 10 years of age. Children's tickets to various events, as well as aeroplane tickets, are also sold only up to a limited age. "It's not as if I suddenly have more money beginning with my 11th birthday".

Article 2 (on discrimination)

A relatively large number of children are of the opinion that the norms of this Article are not observed, because there exists demonstrable discrimination of children. The children place the most emphasis on discrimination on the basis of "ethnic or social origin, property, [and] disability". Paragraph two of this Article is also violated, because Latvia as a Member State does not take all appropriate measures to ensure that a child is protected from discrimination, the basis of which might be the status of the child's parents, legal guardians, or family members. For instance, LSC has received complaints regarding the differing medical care for children who are citizens and children who are stateless, also in cases where a child is stateless as a result of documents that have not been arranged due to bureaucratic reasons. A large percentage of the children of national minorities are of the opinion that they are discriminated against through the non-observance of their views regarding educational reform and through their not being sufficiently informing regarding the nature of such reform. The children questioned indicate the following features of discrimination:

- there is a lack of sufficient and quality food – 52%

- there is a lack of heating, electricity, household and hygienic supplies – 44%
- the aid of a children’s doctor cannot be sufficiently received – 39%
- there is a lack of good medicine when the child is ill – 52%
- the opportunity to participate in various events does not exist – 63%
- there is a lack of educational materials – 53%
- there exists a worse attitude toward children from poor families – 44%
- I have to study in a bad school, since I wasn’t accepted to the good school, because it is in a different district

Among 1100 pupils questioned in schools, comparatively big percent of children mentioned they know children with homosexual orientation, but they are not aware of their problems and whether they have them. This fact shows that issue of homosexuality of children should be raised at level of school psychologists, pedagogues and parents. Such children definitely have psychological discomfort and society has no rights to avoid solving this problem. Taking into the account high level of homosexuality in society in general as well as high depression rates in children and adults in Latvia, we can expect that significant amount of pupils should need a special psychological support not to feel discriminated because of belonging to sexual minority.

Article 3 (in the taking of decisions, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration)

Many children complain about the fact that in “courts of law, administrative or legislative bodies, the best interest of the child” are not a “primary consideration” as is prescribed by the Convention.

Article 3, Paragraph 2 (which will help parents and legal guardians ensure everything necessary for a child)

Children in orphanages and institutions for care who have lost their parents express a desire to live with families and are of the opinion that their rights in this matter are not ensured. Several children from these institutions have complained that “the State does not provide sufficient support to parents and only for this reason are we forced to live in an institution for care”. *Vēģi, Talsi district. Why does the State or the local government have lots of money for my five brothers and sisters to live in a orphanage, where we live without my parents? Why can’t they give us just one-tenth of this money, so that our mother could pay for the rent and heat? Why can’t we stay together with our mother??* The eviction of children from apartments because of their family’s debts is also scandalous. *“We have to go to a house without a roof or a furnace; I don’t know how we will live there during the winter, because I have asthma. Why do I have to leave my home and why isn’t anybody helping me?”* The State should be more forthcoming in helping these children, so that they would not have to leave their homes and live in hunger and in the cold.

Article 3, Paragraph 3 (regarding a safe and healthy life in institutions for the care of children)

We continue to receive information provided by children regarding physical, sexual and emotion violence against children on the part of employees in institutions for care. Children also complain that the employees of the institutions responsible for their protection often ignore the children’s views and interests. Examples of violations of this Article may be read both in the NGO Children’s Rights Network Report and in this Report’s Division on violence

against children in institutions for care. *Yet one particularly flagrant example may be mentioned here as well. Dozens of children and young people complained to the organisation “Save the Children” about traditionally long-term and wide-ranging violence in a certain social institution for care. Children also complained that this violence is based on family matters and corrupt ties, as well as employees’ fear of losing their jobs if they try and help the children. Even though we had a 60-hour-long video at our disposal with children’s testimonies, as well as the conclusion of a court psychologist and psychiatrist regarding the fact that these testimonies are legitimate, and though we had also widely informed the press, the government, and the parliament, the only result we succeeded in achieving was that “Save the Children” was sued in court using the funds of the Ministry of Welfare for defamation and the injuring of dignity. After this, the investigation and court proceedings, which lasted for years, did not even arrive at the dismissal and punishment of all guilty parties. A portion were not punished as a result of a limitation period, and a portion succeeded through the court in resuming their jobs after having been dismissed. One girl, who now lives at the Piltene Care Facility, talked about the Vegi instructor D.: “He called me into the coatroom, locked the door, took off his pants and did it. I said: ‘It hurts, it hurts’, but he wouldn’t listen. After that they took me to get an abortion”. The referred to D. continued to work at Vegi for many years after this and similar offences, in spite of the fact that the directors and the staff knew about the repeated raping of the mentally disabled girl. D. also continued to work for a long time after LSC had submitted the video with the testimonies of the girl and other children to the Minister for Welfare and the Prosecutor General.*

We also have examples from other places in Latvia, where individuals charged with violence and sexual exploitation of children, also including those whose guilt was proven by a court, once again work with children in institutions, even though the judgment of the court states that such individuals are not permitted to work with children for a few years. In the Aleksandrova Boarding School in the Krāslava district, 2 girls complained about the director: “I wanted to phone home, and he called me into his office, locked the door, and started to touch me. I said no. He said that I wouldn’t be allowed to phone home then.”

Many individuals who work in children’s protection institutions do not comply with the standards specified by the competent bodies.

From the children’s statements: “They brutally hit and degraded us. Will they be punished? Nobody listens to us, we’re not taken into account, we are nothing.”

Article 4 (that the State undertake all appropriate measures for the implementation of this Convention, and will also attract international co-operation)

The children had difficulty in providing a statement about this Article and their only commentary was the following: “The State could definitely do more for the interests of children” – children have said this about almost any field of children’s rights – both social, medical and educational.

In turn, the Children’s Rights Network is of the opinion that Latvia has actually begun to consistently fulfil the requirements specified by Article 4 only in the last two years, that is, since the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs of the Republic of Latvia was established. In relation to social rights, the responsible Latvian institutions utilised fairly poorly the involvement in international co-operation specified in this Article. *For many years, the*

Ministry of Welfare turned down both the help of physicians offered through “Save the Children”, and also refused to help with space, transportation, payment of customs expenses for many cargoes with medication, vitamins, children’s food, and computers, which were so very necessary for Latvia’s children. We think that a conflict of interests was partly at the basis of these refusals, because individual Ministry employees were directly interested in developing a commercial network in Latvia of the referred to goods in order to make a profit, and, as a result, the goods that arrived as donations threatened to decrease this profit. For instance, “Save the Children” supplied the majority of Latvian hospitals with medical catheters alone, which were donated by Denmark’s “Maersk Medical”

Article 6 (the duty of the State to provide for the normal development of the child to the maximum extent possible)

Our State has not ensured to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child. In a situation where 85% of families with children live below the real subsistence minimum, the State subsidy for one child to families with children mostly comprised an average of 1/20th of the real subsistence minimum, and the subsidy for childbirth and child-care, with the exception of the last year, could not ensure a child’s mother or father with the possibility of providing wholesome nourishment for themselves and their child. *“The child cannot develop normally, because he hasn’t been fed”; “All winter, we ate potatoes and porridge at home, I like fried potatoes better, but you can only fry them if you have oil.”*

Normal development is not ensured for those 15 000 children who are not registered in educational institutions and do not attend school. *In several country districts, and even in Riga, our children have complained that only one out of three can go to school, because there is only one pair of winter boots and one warm jacket at home. The LSC offices are regularly visited by desperate parents with children who face eviction from their apartments or who have already been evicted because of debts. Among them are both socially immature, marginal individuals, yet many are parents who have been particularly lonely all these years and who fight and do everything in their own and their children’s interests, but are unable to ensure the means of subsistence. The very low payment that many intelligent unemployed women receive “in an envelope” from their employer in the market is paltry at best, and, in addition, taxes are not paid for such payment. Payment for a day of work in the period from 2001 to 2004 was on average 2 LVL per day. Social services often do not provide actual aid or such aid is very paltry. Both parents and children certify that the employees of social services and also the employees of Orphan’s Courts persistently recommend that they give their children to an institution for care, “so that they could at least eat and keep warm; stop thinking just about yourselves, think about your child; before you can provide for children you have to get your own life in order”. Families that require aid are of the opinion that the norms for the provision of aid are completely unacceptable – “the minimum subsistence guaranteed by the State – 21 LVL – can only guarantee minimum subsistence for a pet”.*

52% of the children questioned by us attest that many children lack food, but more than half of the children indicate that the food available to them could be of better quality – they rarely get meat, fruit, fish, or vegetables, and mostly subsist on potatoes, bread, milk, and porridges.

As it turns out, our State is financially ready to provide only for children in institutions for care, in this way violating every child’s right to grow up in a family.

Article 7 (on registration and citizenship)

As the data from the children's questioning attests, 24% of children do not have sufficient information about how to acquire citizenship; for more information, please consult the Division on the problems of ethnic minorities.

This information is reflected in great detail in the NGO Children's Rights Network Report.

Article 8 (rights to identity)

LSC conducted a study in orphanages in 2004/2005, which discovered that in many Latvian orphanages, neither children nor educators are sure about which nationality a child belongs to, even though each child has a right to know his or her ethnic identity. *When the representatives of a Jewish Society came to LSC, they talked about how official institutions had rejected their requests and desire to help Jewish children in orphanages and institutions for care. The State Human Rights Office explained to us that they do not have the right to provide information to anybody regarding the ethnic background of these children because they protect the confidentiality of private persons' data, while the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs, though only at the level of the Minister himself, promised to give this data to the Jewish Society. The Society's representative said that the Minister really did give them the co-ordinates of two institutions, though unfortunately the Jewish activists encountered an uninterested and negative attitude at these institutions. After this, LSC gave them information about individual Jewish children in these institutions.*

In their questionnaires, the children also indicate the violation of this Article of the Convention, because approximately half of the questioned children have not received any information about their ethnic identity either from their parents or from their educational institution. Only 45% answered "yes" to the question "Are your rights to the preservation of ethnic identity/your identity explained to you at school?"

Article 9 (on the separation of a child from his or her parents)

LSC regularly receives complains from children regarding the fact that their views regarding which of their parents they would like to remain with in the case of divorce are not listened to or are ignored, as well as in cases where a decision is being made about whether a child will remain in his or her own family or with a legal guardian. *This autumn, a LSC board member and expert in juridical matters is still defending in court the interests of two children who want to remain with their foster parents and do not wish to return to their blind mother and blind stepfather, because they are of the opinion that they do not live well enough there. The corresponding Orphan's Court ignored the children's views. (Kurzeme)*

In the last few years, LSC was also forced to defend in the mass media and in the Office of the Prosecutor General the rights of a family's children in an orphanage (on the basis of the request of the children), who were violently removed from their foster family by official institutions, thus causing a great mental trauma to the children. The official institution that was supposed to protect the interests of the children caused harm to the children in place of protection by ignoring their views and rights and doing everything to defend their own correctness at every cost. Prosecutors in both the corresponding J. city and in the Office of the Prosecutor General were disappointed about this fact.

Paragraph 2 of this Article was also violated, when the hearing of children's representatives and witness in judicial proceedings was refused.

Article 12 (the right of a child to freely express his or her views)

The children's statements and the results of the questionnaires attest to the fact that the State does not ensure children's rights to freely express their views on any matter affecting the interests of a child, as well as does not ensure that due weight is given to a child's views in accordance with his or her age and maturity.

53% of questioned children report that they would gladly participate in the forming of State policy in relation to children, yet they are not invited to do so. The hearing of children at the State level and in local governments does not reflect the views of children of either the majority or individual problem groups. Councils of schoolchildren and elementary school advisory groups at the ministries are for the most part made up of children from the most stable and affluent families.

An example of a violation of Paragraph 2 of this Article is a court case which took place in the last few years in a Riga district court, in which the judge refuse to listened to the views of a child with the intermediation of a representative or the relevant body. The judge actually avoided fully defending the interests of the sexually abused child and his mother, and looked upon as a priority the interests of the father of the foreigner accused of sexually abusing the child, thus ignoring the child's views.

Article 13 (the right to freedom of expression, to receive and impart any information)

The right to "seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, ...through any... media of the child's choice" specified in this Article may be threatened by ill-considered State decisions to restrict the opportunities for children to communicate on the Internet taken with the good intention of protecting them from getting involved in pornography and other harmful activities. The State must find a way how to protect children without restricting their rights to the exchange of information.

Many children have expressed that they suffer from the lack of the Internet's opportunities: "If I want to achieve something in life, my family needs more money, because the Internet is expensive."

Article 14 (the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion)

Within the framework of this Article, LSC has received complains in relation to Division 3 regarding the freedom to express one's religion or beliefs. The complaints have come from both sides, both from sectarian parents who forbid the transfusion of blood to their children if such transfusion is related to the saving of their health or life, as well as from physicians who are of the opinion that the State does not protect them from violations of these requirements.

Article 16 (on a child's privacy)

Children are of the opinion that the norms of this Article are violated, because it has occurred that physicians, the school psychologist, a social pedagogue, or an employee of the Orphan's Court have expressed the personal information about a child that has been at their disposal. This is particularly important in small parishes, villages, and small towns,

where the making public of information regarding, for example, a child's disease, pregnancy, home conditions, etc., causes great injury to a child when such information is made public. The children expressed the fact that as a result of these precedents, they are not able to trust a portion of officials and psychologists who are supposedly paid to help children solve their problems, not to complicate them even further. There is no information at our disposal about a single case of the implementation of the children's rights to protection against interference or attacks registered in Paragraph 2 of this Article. *In the last few years, society was alarmed by a case where information was spread at school that a student had AIDS. The attitude was not unequivocal and nobody received any truly substantial punishment. One doctor from the Latvian Physicians Organisation recommended exposing all of these children and isolating them from society. What else but a suicide attempt could possibly present itself to these children as a possible solution to this problem?*

Information regarding underage pregnant women is similarly expressed. These women are then regarded as prostitutes for the rest of their lives in their small towns, and must suffer from all of the harmful consequences on their opportunities for development that arise from this view of them.

Many children have complained that educators have taken advantage of the negative information about a child's family that has come to their disposal so that they may express reprimands in relation to some offence committed by the child. Children have mentioned shocking examples: "What else can you expect from a child whose parents are drunks or thieves, or bums, or who dress in thrift store clothing, or who live on welfare, etc." This information is then in turn used by classmates to tease or belittle the child, yet the educators usually do not receive any punishment for this unethical attitude toward children.

Article 17 (on the mass media)

"States Parties recognize the important function performed by the mass media and shall ensure that the child has access to information and material from a diversity of national and international sources, especially those aimed at the promotion of his or her social, spiritual and moral well-being and physical and mental health. To this end, States Parties shall: a) encourage the mass media to disseminate information and material of social and cultural benefit to the child and in accordance with the spirit of Article 29; b) encourage international co-operation in the production, exchange and dissemination of such information and material from a diversity of cultural, national and international sources; c) encourage the production and dissemination of children's books; d) encourage the mass media to have particular regard to the linguistic needs of the child who belongs to a minority group or who is indigenous; e) encourage the development of appropriate guidelines for the protection of the child from information and material injurious to his or her well-being, bearing in mind the provisions of Articles 13 and 18."

Children and parents have been complaining for years over the trust telephone regarding the lack of good informative and educational programmes on State radio and TV. Children's books are for most part very expensive, and obviously are not subsidized by the State. In turn, libraries in the countryside are so disadvantaged that they do not have the opportunity to acquire very many good books. There are no programmes in the mass media regarding the needs of minority children.

The important function of the mass media in relation to the norms of Article 29 regarding the direction of the education of a child is indicated in Article 17. Children, families, and experts acknowledge that the requirements of Articles 17 and 29 are for the most part not fulfilled, because it is clear that the State does not allocate funds to the mass media so that they might “develop to the maximum possible extent a child’s character, talents, and mental abilities, increase respect toward a person’s rights and basic freedoms, increase respect toward his or her cultural identity, language, and values, and toward their national values, as well as toward civilisations that are different than their own”. For the time being, children do not have any hope that the State might fulfil the requirements of this Article of the Convention, which our government and parliament should indicate to the UN and other international organisations.

The majority of children who have the opportunity to watch satellite programmes indicate that they do not watch Latvian TV broadcasts at all; these broadcasts are also not watched by children who have access to the Internet.

Article 18 (on State support for the upbringing of a child)

The duties of States to assist parents and legal guardians in the performance of child-rearing responsibilities referred to in Article 18, Paragraphs 2 and 3 have, since the renewal of Latvian independence, been fulfilled very incompletely, and the development of a network of children’s institutions has been insufficient. There is a particular lack of child-care services for young children of working parents. One of the parents must remain at home or hire a nanny if they want to work. In the last year, the situation has improved for children under one year of age, because the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs has succeeded in securing a child-care allowance for children up to one year of age for one of the parents at the rate of an average monthly salary.

During the last year many children suffer severely, because their parents, driven by poverty and desperation, have gone to work abroad, leaving their children in Latvia under rather doubtful supervision of adults or without any adult supervision at all. According to different sources there is various data on the number of people left, but it is fluctuating between 60 000 and 100 000 people, which makes about one tenth of the labor capable people. The members of “Save the Children”, who work at custody court, emphasize that there is a great number of such cases and they are simply not able to manage all the problems of the left children. According to data, among the children, which regularly disappear or are missing completely, many have their parents working in Ireland or England. There is no governmental conception in place, how to help the great number of children, whose parents have left to work abroad – to ensure the children’s rights, including a satisfactory social status and security. At the end of year 2005 on the request of the State President a commission was established, in order to search for solutions, how to stop the manpower drain in Latvia, though, as far as known, nothing has been done on the governmental level to get the situation under control and provide for the children, whose parents have left to work abroad.

Article 19 (on protection against violence, abuse, maltreatment or exploitation)

Children are of the opinion that the children’s rights included in this Article are still not qualitatively ensured. Children mostly do not dare to notify regarding violence in the

family. With rare exceptions, children also do not notify regarding violence performed against them by educators and the employees of other institutions, because they are afraid of the negative experience they have acquired in seeing the sanctions against other children that have resulted following this type of informing. If a child notifies the relevant institutions or LSC, then we have examples where the child is shamed by the other educators or employees for the repercussions he or she has caused. *In the winter of 2005, a 9-year-old girl phoned LSC to say that she is very sad and worried because her mother does not love her. The child complained that her mother always refused her wishes to talk and spends most of her time with acquaintances. When we phoned the school's director, she had a very ironic attitude and was very negative, saying that the child's mother was a rather positive person, participates in amateur collectives and was very socially active. It seemed very strange to us that the school's director had not received any education about emotional violence and the neglect of a child as a type of violence. It did not seem self-evident to the director that if the little girl was forced to phone a public organisation in order to ask for help, then she really does feel very bad about things. There is an extremely low level of knowledge about psychology among many educators, because this subject is not in the list of mandatory subjects for educators.*

Already in our commentary about the referred to Articles, we mentioned cases where neither the State nor local government institutions had performed sufficient preventative measures. In the 2000/2001 questioning, where 4 300 children filled out questionnaires in Latvia's schools, 18% of the children indicated that they suffer from physical violence in the family and at school, and 2% of children suffer from sexual violence. Approximately half of the children showed signs that they suffer from emotional violence at home and at school. The answers provided by children in studies by LSC, UNICEF and Dārdedze vary by percentage, yet it is absolutely clear that the State's statistics do not comply with any of the referred to figures. The corresponding Parish Courts and other services have also not performed monitoring operations of the situation regarding how the children from their territories feel in institutions. Also, in several cases where the LSC had informed the local government and State institutions regarding various types of violence against children, effective assistance for children as a whole was not ensured – only separate stages from the chain of necessary aid were performed (see the Division on studies regarding violence in children's institutions). *For instance, the police and local government services justified the inability to bring children to psychological and psychiatric expert examinations by a lack of gasoline.*

Articles 20 and 21 (on children who have been deprived of parental care)

The questioned orphaned children in institutions for care express their despair and indignation regarding the fact that they have to live outside of families in orphanages. Half of the children notify that they have lived in orphanages for 4 to 10 years and that for all of these years the responsible services have not made any effort to find a foster family or legal guardian for them or to improve the conditions in their own families so that they could return to their families (if such exist). 90% of children in these institutions feel lonely and only 40% feel loved. 100% of children would leave their orphanage to go anywhere, if only this were possible, and only 10% of children would be sad to leave the orphanage.

LSC has received complains from children who complain of being adopted into families that live abroad, thereby separating them from their brothers and sisters. We have already written that adequate attention is not paid to a child's ethnic origins. There continue to be very few foster families, thus there is a lack of families in which children can be placed for a shorter period of time, and therefore they arrive in families. Though the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs makes a great deal of effort to support the development of foster families, this nevertheless has not happened, because operations in this field on the part of the State did not take place 10–12 years ago; in fact, just the opposite took place – the need for foster families was rejected and doubted for many years even by the Ministry of Welfare. There also exists a prejudice toward foster families in many local governments, because a portion of the population is jealous of foster parents for receiving money from the State and is of the opinion that children must remain either in their own families or in institutions. The creation of conditions for the placing of children for adoption continues to take place very slowly.

Violations continue to take place of the rights of a child who has been temporarily or permanently deprived of his or her family environment, or in whose own best interests cannot be allowed to remain in that environment. Paragraph 3 of the Article provides for the placing of a child in institutions for care or adoption. Placement in the relevant institutions for care is provided for with the stipulation “if necessary”. In the last two years, the situations has comparatively improved, but up until the establishment of the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs, the children's rights regulated in Articles 20 and 21 were regularly violated, which caused Latvia to receive a UN reprimand in 2001. At that time, LSC informed the UN regarding the inobservance of this Article and the non-existence in this State of foster families as an alternative form of care.

Article 23 (on children with special needs)

Children's complaints regarding violations of the norms of this Article are set out in detail in the Report's Division on the questioning of children with special needs. The children's main complaints are regarding a completely inadequate environment for children with movement disorders, as well as expensive transportation costs and the inability to use public transportation in order to attend various events. The children suffer from the fact that they are torn away from their families and forced to learn in special boarding schools, therefore they only see their parents on weekends. Teenagers complain about the State's requirements to undergo repeated medical examinations, without which they cannot receive allowances. Many lack the financial and technical opportunity to undergo these examinations and they do not understand why the State does not continue to provide this assistance without additional encumbrances for individuals up to 18 years of age. The children complain about the lack of orthopaedic shoes appropriate to the season, because they are very expensive, yet the State only pays for one pair per year, therefore they do not have season-appropriate shoes at all. Children who are hard of hearing complain that they do not have suitable programmes on State television. Visually impaired children complain that the UN Convention is not available in Braille. Several children from boarding schools for visually impaired children complain about emotional violence on the part of individual educators. *In 2004, a girl from J. city attempted suicide. The child explained the reason for this desperate step as the degrading attitude of educators, who condemn and curb expressions*

of individuality like style of dress, method of expression, and the desire to go for a walk outside of the hours specified by the schedule. A very large percentage of children complain that they do not receive the necessary procedures in their place of residence and that they do not feel support and understanding at school, at institutions, and even in their families. And regarding the fact that they are not listened to, the children's main proposals are for information to be collected from local governments regarding those children who do not receive assistance; the children also recommend promoting the creation of a friendly environment in schools and to educate healthy children so that they make more contact with children with special needs (for a more detailed description, see the Division on the questioning of children with special needs).

Latvia also has an enormous group of children – thought to be at 5–7% of the total number of children – with so-called attention deficit disorder. There is currently nothing serious being done at the State level for the benefit of these children. The children themselves and their families have complained about this, because the development and socialisation of these talented children is threatened if the State does not actively do something about the situation. Many of the children with an attention deficit have thoughts of suicide. *I don't want to live, because everybody hates me. Everybody is disgusted with me, but I can't be any different.*

Particularly tragic is the situation of children with mental sicknesses. The Irish organisation “Shoes for Children” asked LSC to engage in assistance for children in a psycho-neurological boarding-home. *The Children in A. town's boarding-home live in very cramped quarters, and the majority of employees do not look upon them as people whom they should take into consideration. The things which we have donated for the entertainment and development of children, for example, televisions, do not arrive in the hands of the children themselves, but rather sit in a room intended for employees, where children never get to use this equipment. This organisation also asked LSC to help in relation to the unpacking of humanitarian aid in the V. boarding-home, the employees of which had taken the donated goods to their own homes. The attitude of the police was completely negative, obviously because the employees of the centre for care were related to several of the police employees.*

In institutions for care, children with mental development disorders are not ensured an education in accordance with their opportunities. Children with physical and mental development disorders are lumped together, and children whose mental abilities are sufficiently well developed are not worked with in an adequate manner. Many children complain that they are violently given injections of medication at the slightest sign of aggression.

Paragraph 4 of Article 23 is also violated, which prescribes the attraction of international aid opportunities for the solving of the problems of disabled children. These opportunities are not taken sufficient advantage of. This particularly applies to children with attention deficit syndrome and to children to whom Latvian physician are not able to provide the necessary assistance; the State, in turn, does not ensure the receipt of this aid in foreign states, as well as does not provide information about these opportunities.

Article 24 (health)

Paragraph 1 of Article 24 determines that a child has the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health and that Member States shall strive to ensure that

no child is deprived of his or her right of access to such health care services. Children have provided us with the information that 39% of children do not have access to the help of a children's doctor in cases of necessity. 52% of children cannot receive quality medication due to a lack of resources. As a result of the reform, there are fewer and fewer children's physicians in the State, and they are replaced with family doctors who often do not have sufficient knowledge of the more specific branches of paediatrics, and children and families have complained that many family doctors do not give orders to see specialists, though they themselves are not capable of providing adequate aid. LSC received this information via the trust telephones, and when conducting consultations, this information was corroborated. *For example, a child of D. city received prolonged treatment with antibiotics for diarrhoea, though the child did not have an infection, but rather an enzyme deficiency. The suspension of natural nursing with breast milk was recommended for countless children, explaining without grounds to the mothers that their children had an intolerance to breast milk.*

It is specified in Paragraph 2 of this Article that the State will take special care in order to:

a) "diminish infant and child mortality". Infant and child mortality in all age groups in Latvia was for many years the highest of all EU Candidate States, and now is the highest among EU Member States.

c) "combat disease and malnutrition..., through, in other words, the application of readily available technology and through the provision of adequate nutritious foods and clean drinking-water...". The morbidity rate with tuberculosis and other infectious and vaccine-dependent diseases in Latvia is one of the highest in the EU. The majority of lavatories in Latvian hospitals and schools have neither toilet paper nor soap and towels. The Convention's norm that the "State will combat...malnutrition"..., ...through the provision of adequate nutritious foods..." sounds particularly cynical in Latvia. Of the 1 100 children questioned regarding poverty, 52% indicated that many children do not have access to a sufficient amount of food. Children suffer a quantitative lack of food, and, in terms of quality, only a small percentage of children receive a sufficient amount of wholesome proteins, micronutrients, and fresh fruits and vegetables.

Children and their parents indicate that several other norms included in this Article are also violated. They call particular attention to the fact that neither parents nor children "are informed, have access to education and are supported in the use of basic knowledge of child health and nutrition, the advantages of breast-feeding, hygiene and environmental sanitation and the prevention of accidents". Likewise, the norm of Clause (f) of Paragraph 2 of Article 24 is also not sufficiently ensured – "to develop preventive health care, guidance for parents and family planning education and services". *Many schoolchildren from a secondary school in the Cēsis district harshly criticize the instructional level and method of the educators.* This lack of knowledge among children is attested to by the very high number of underage pregnant girls (more than 800 in 2004, or approximately 5% of the total number of adults) and the fact that due to financial reasons, the children also do not have access to means of protection. Paragraph 3 of the Article addresses the fact that the Member State will do everything possible in order to promote the abolishing of traditional practices prejudicial to the health of children, yet the State violates this obligation by, for instance, allowing the sale of sugary carbonated beverages in schools, the use of which causes digestive system discomfort and illness to approximately half of Latvia's children, as well as a pre-

condition for the development of diabetes II. *Some children and their parents periodically turn to LSC with the proposition that we include in our TV programmes criticism of the relevant State and local government officials who allow such violations.* At a time when many states, including our neighbours Estonia and Lithuania, ensure free lunches for schoolchildren, 52% of schoolchildren acknowledge that they do not feel like they have eaten a good meal. Children have expressed in previous years that they miss the school's earlier nurse. Likewise, many children indicate their dental problems, which many feel very keenly due to aesthetic reasons. In interviewing parents and children, it was disclosed that though medicine here is free, dentists who have to provide care to children for free are for the most part not actually available, because there is a lack of such dentists. Violations of children's rights in the field of health are analysed in detailed in the Children's Rights Report to the UN prepared by LSC, which has also been submitted to UN for review in January and May of 2006, and which is available on our Internet home page.

In Paragraph 4 of Article 24 as well, similar as in several other Articles of the Convention, there is reference to Latvia's duty to attract international assistance in order to completely actualise the rights recognised in this Article. The Ministry of Health was for many years included in the composition of the Ministry of Welfare, which occupies itself with matters of children's health only minimally, demonstrating incompetence and evasion (from the views of NGO members and physicians). Now the Ministry of Health has been separated, yet the public does not have information regarding the fact that the Ministry has actually achieved something truly significant for the benefit of children's health. The percentage of mothers in Latvia who nurse their children up to 6 months of age continues to be only one-fifth; the main children's health indicators continue to be the worst among EU Member States; and the iodine deficit has still not been eliminated, along with the effects on pregnant women and children caused by such deficit.

Article 25

The requirements of this Article are in many cases not actualised at all. While inspecting more than 20 institutions for the care of orphans and other children, LSC determined that quality control of the work of physicians in these institutions does not actually take place. In turn, the Parish Courts and Orphan's courts from the districts from which children have been sent, as well as Commissions sent by State institutions, either do not perform their duties at all or perform them formally in relation to the hearing and evaluation of a child's views and the attitude toward them. *One example:*

in an institution for care in Kurzeme, middle- and high-level physicians did not notify regarding violence against children and the harm done to children as a result of such violence, and similarly did not notify regarding pregnancies to the children's legal representative; also, medicines and chemicals with which children poisoned themselves were stored in unlocked rooms in violation of provisions. Representatives from the Commissions that had visited the children had not listened to the children themselves. Responsible employees from the Ministry of Welfare had ignored information provided by individual brave employees regarding violence against children, and the non-provision of medical assistance. Causes were not eliminated, the guilty parties were not punished, but repressive measures were enforced against the informers. In several cases where violence and other violations of children's rights were permitted in institutions for care, the accused employees and employees

of the institutions supervising them were relatives or linked by corruptive connections. Since the establishment of the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs, control in these institutions has been monitored to a greater extent. Likewise, work is also being done in the educating of specialists from Orphan's Courts, Parish Courts, and other specialists involved with children's rights.

Articles 26 and 27 (on social security and a standard of living adequate for development)

These Articles address the norms of children's rights in relation to social security and the standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development. Latvia is still not a welfare state and therefore the State could argue that it does not have the possibility to ensure each of the State's citizens with the referred to norms and standard of living. Nevertheless, Latvia has ratified this UN Convention and both children and we here at LSC and also other NGO experts are completely convinced that the State has done and continues to do far too little to ensure the rights of the child specified in Articles 26 and 27 of the Convention. The information provided by children regarding the situation of their peers in Latvia verifies that which is stated above. (For more detailed information, please see the Division on the questioning in schools and children's institutions throughout Latvia)

Indications provided by children regarding mass poverty:

- not enough food – 52% of children
- lack of heating, electricity, household and hygienic items – 44% of children
- lack of necessary medication – 52%
- lack of resources necessary for studies – 53%
- do not have the opportunity to visit a children's doctor – 39%
- lack the opportunity to participate in events – 63%
- often feel lonely or depressed – 75%
- are not sufficiently listened to and do not have anyone from whom to ask for advice – 76%

Both children and adults are of the opinion that the State has not recognised the true situation of children and citizens, and that the number of needy and poor individuals is much larger than that which has been declared to the population and the world by several Latvian Governments since the regaining of independence. Both the figures named by children and other studies by LSC and other NGOs and the data of the UNDP attest that over 80% of families with children live below the real subsistence minimum, and 93% of families with three or more children live below this minimum. This difference between the figures declared all these years by the State and the figures of NGOs and trade unions has come about because the Latvian Governments had chosen the wrong evaluation criteria. During all of the years of independence, except for the last couple of years, the State did not recognise the subsistence minimum specified by NGOs and trade unions, but referred to its own, with which it was not at all possible for an individual to cover his or her necessary expenses. Even up until 2004, the State had recognised the State-guaranteed subsistence minimum for one person as approximately 30 euro, though at that time the real subsistence minimum was 150 euro. If a family had an income higher than 30 euro per person (before taxes! – so even less), then in accordance with local legislation, the family did not have a legal basis to request social assistance. *During the time when LSC was conducting the*

questioning of children, a small boy from Kurzeme in the Southwest of Latvia, wrote us the following: "So that we would not have to live in poverty, so that our faces could smile and so that our health could be as strong as concrete." Both children and adults in our State are very thankful and understand our State's difficulties, yet governments should not be allowed to take advantage of this thankfulness and understanding and exhaust them to no avail, avoiding calling things by their true names. The truth of family and children's matters is as follows: an average of 85% of families with children lack the income (because it is under 150 euro per person after taxes) to purchase quality and balanced food, pay for heating, purchase adequate clothing, purchase books and attend cultural and sports events and events necessary for their health. Labourers, educators, physicians, and civil servants have to choose which of the referred to necessities to ignore. It is completely logical that the majority purchase low-quality food in order to avoid falling into debt, so that the family is not evicted from its apartment. The mass acquiring of second-hand clothing continues to be popular.

The time has finally come when the State should acknowledge to itself and the other Member States of the Convention regarding the number of pregnant women and children whose health is threatened in Latvia because the individuals do not have the means to provide for themselves, and the State lacks the means to support them. In order to do this, the State must calculate the number of people in Latvia who, after paying all necessary taxes, earn an adequate subsistence minimum – which at the given time is approximately 150 euro. The State cannot follow the poverty level accepted for African states, where means are not necessary for heating, and much less are needed for clothing and electricity. If a family cannot ensure elementary needs for its children, then this family is poor and no manipulation or terminology will help the matter. The wrong selection of criteria in acknowledging as sufficiently prosperous those families that live in real need is the main thing that Latvia can be reprimanded for within the framework of Articles 26 and 27 of the Convention. The second greatest reproach is the permitting of the social discrimination of children within the framework of the Baltic States. The State must finance textbooks and free lunches at schools and pre-school institutions, because otherwise it is not possible to ensure food for those who acknowledge in our questioning that they live in hunger (52% of children indicate that many children live in hunger). If this can be done in Lithuania and Estonia, why cannot this be done in Latvia as well, where practically everything in the field of children and families is similar to Lithuania and Estonia.

For many years, children and their parents have been offended regarding allowances for families with children – the so-called children's allowances. These allowances have not been indexed and increased in accordance with the increase in Gross Domestic Product since the time period of Latvia's first Government, for which it was comparatively more difficult to ensure these allowances. The children themselves explain this phenomenon by the fact that they do not have any real influence on the government, because unfortunately they are not voters and therefore are the last to be reckoned with. Already in 2001, Latvia received a reprimand from the UN in this matter, when Latvia's first State Report and the NGO Network Report presented by LSC regarding the situation of the child in Latvia were analysed and compared. In all of the target groups of questioned children in all of the years the NGO

Children's Rights Network has been in operation, many children have traditionally expressed that the State should take more care of children, including by paying larger allowances and by providing more support to their families. Thousands of Latvia's families with children are evicted from their apartments because of their debts and, as a result of this, many children suffer in inhumane conditions or have been separated from their parents and are forced to live in institutions for care. This is a very serious incrimination, which both children and the NGO Network have put forth to the ruling establishment in Latvia, and which it looks upon as a very harsh violation of children's rights. Another very serious reproach from the side of NGOs defending children and their interests is the fact that several governments have "washed their hands clean" of the matter, delegating the majority of child-care functions to local governments. The central government has a duty to ensure the observance of children's rights in the State and a budget for such observance. If a part of such budget is not directed to local governments, then the purpose of the flow of money, which is intended precisely for children and which local governments do not have the right to use for other purposes, must be firmly defined. The government should firmly control the observation of this principle and must provide for sanctions in the case of the violation of such principle. Nothing like this happens. *For instance, in the 2004/2005 school year, the funds allocated to a special boarding school in Kurzeme were not diverted from the district's council to these children, but transferred to dead souls in others institutions in the same district. Though the school's director had complained to the Ministry of Science and Education, and the Educational State Inspection had verified that the funds were not diverted for the needs of the children at the referred to school, nothing changed, and the director was forced to discontinue instruction and close the school. Only after the intervention of LSC, which informed the mass media, the Office of the Prosecutor General, and the Corruption Prevention and Combating Bureau, was it possible to renew instruction at the school, which was achieved by reclaiming at least a portion of the stolen funds for the school.*

Detailed proposals for the improvement of the situation may be read in the NGO Children's Rights Network Report prepared by LSC.

Article 28 (on education)

Article 28 regulates the State's duties in relation to education. For many years, the rights of a child to education have been violated in Latvia, because approximately 15 000–17 000 children do not receive a basic education at all. This figure displays the difference between the registered number of children born in Latvia and the number of children registered in educational institutions. One must take into account that there also children who are not registered in the Birth Register, as well as a large number of children who regularly do not attend school for weeks and months on end and therefore do not receive a quality basic education. From the early 1990s until today, State and local government structures have neither ensured the identification of children not attending school nor developed a mechanism of how to force parents to send their children to school.

In turn, secondary education is not available for a majority of children who fail exams upon finishing elementary school. The children who have failed exams do not receive a

diploma, but rather only a report card, and therefore they cannot continue their education in a good high school. The State has not yet created criteria or a mechanism for the evaluation of the quality of education. Therefore there is no objective proof of whose fault it is that an enormous percentage of elementary school graduates are not able to pass their exams – the children’s or the educator’s.

Various unspecific surveys, including surveys of the results of competitions, attest to the fact that the level of education in schools is qualitatively different. As it turns out, a sufficient level of education exists for the most part only in schools in the capitol, which are rich with traditions, and, calculating in terms of the total number of schools, in only a few schools in other cities and in the countryside. As a result of everything referred to above, the persons who suffer most from violations of civil rights are without a doubt the **10% of children who have failed elementary school exams, and for whom an important phase of their lives has been destroyed; in turn, no sanctions are applied against those educators who are not capable of or do not wish to provide with a quality education those children who frequently miss class, etc.** The State also violates the children’s rights referred to in Article 28, which prescribes that a State shall “encourage the development of different forms of secondary education, including general and vocational education, make them available and accessible to every child, and take appropriate measures such as the introduction of free education and offering financial assistance in case of need”. *This year, the State lost in a judicial proceeding in the Constitutional Court against a private school for minorities, to which the State avoided transferring the financing intended for each child’s education. Neither the State nor the local government transferred finances for the education of Latvian children in the International School of Latvia, which Latvian citizens also attend. The motivation for this was the fact that the school had supposedly not been accredited in Latvia during its years of existence, which is very strange because teaching takes place in the school in accordance with the international baccalaureate programme, and the school is accredited on an international level. These children’s parents were forced to once again pay a large sum of money from their own pockets, which they have already paid in taxes, and to which every child in Latvia has a right in order to receive a free education. Children are not ensured with free educational materials, but if education is free, then it goes without saying that textbooks, paper, and notebooks must be free as well. The official formats of books and notebooks are constantly being changed, rendering impossible the use of previously issued educational materials. Countless parents and children complain about financial difficulties in the procurement of textbooks, therefore with the beginning of each school year, there is always lack of food and other necessities at home.*

It is truly sad that children’s rights may only be ensured by parents or private schools by appealing to the Constitutional Court against Latvia.

The State also does not take sufficient care in order for higher education to be available to everyone in accordance with their abilities. These children’s rights are harshly violated. First of all, as we have already mentioned earlier, children in many schools are not provided with sufficient knowledge in order for them to even successfully finish elementary school, and, as it was also already mentioned, a quality level of education is only rarely found in high schools. That which determines a child’s opportunity to gain admittance to an institution of higher education is not a child’s abilities, but the fact that he or she has not

provided with a quality education. In a situation where the majority of the State's citizens are needy, the State should have a duty to ensure free higher education, yet the State only covers educational expenses for a paltry number of students. *For example, 480 students study in the Department of Economics and Management at the University of Latvia, but only approximately 5% of these students study with funds provided by the State. During the years of the first Republic of Latvia, our State was in first place in Europe according to the number of students. Latvia does not have any natural resources, therefore the development of the people is only possible by earning money thanks to the high level of education.*

Of particular note are the violations of children's rights by the State against children who have lost parental care. Children whose working parents have died receive a survivor's pension while they are attending an institution of higher education. Yet those children who are "orphans of living parents" do not receive any funds at all from the State. These are the many children stuck in orphanages whose parents continue to have parental rights, in spite of the fact that the children have been in the orphanage for the greater part of their lives. After they reach 18 years of age, these children are not provided with any kind of financial support for their studies in institutions of higher education, because they are formally not allowed to receive the survivor's pension, though the referred to "caregivers", of course, do not support them either. Violations of Article 28 attest to the discrimination of the child in the field of education on the basis of the social principle, origin, or place of residence.

The State's duties regulated in Article 28, Paragraph 2, which ensure that school discipline is administered in a manner consistent with the child's human dignity, are also violated. *Many children and parents have turned to LSC for help in relation to emotional, physical, and sexual violations by educators against schoolchildren and injury to their dignity and honour. In conversations with school directors, it is often the case that they defend the injurious educational methods and we very often hear educators comment that: "It is not possible to make contact with today's children, and we must defend the rights of educators, not the children who terrorize educators. This uproar about children's rights must cease – it's about time we started teaching them their duties". Unfortunately, a similar stance also governs amongst a portion of Parliament deputies and high State officials, who are liable for the observance of civil rights in Latvia. Latvian citizens remember the commentaries of a prominent Latvian civil rights specialist on Latvian State television regarding a case where a teacher had hit her student for calling her an uncensored name. The State official had praised the teacher's conduct, explaining it from the viewpoint of civil rights in the following manner: "Any woman has the right to slap a man that allows himself to call her a name." In a boarding school in Zemgale, a teacher had for several years terrorised an entire class of children with special needs. Unlike the majority of the heads of these institutions, the director had enough courage to suspend her from performing her duties during the time period of an investigation and to prohibit her from approaching the children from this class, so that she could not influence the children's testimonies. Unfortunately, it is still very difficult in Latvia to prove violence against children on the part of employees from schools and institutions, yet it is even more difficult to succeed in punishing them, and it is extremely difficult to achieve the imposing of a prohibition from working with children again at any time in the future. The law that regulates work on the railroad clearly specifies that individuals who have committed various violations are not allowed to continue their job working on the railroad at any time in the future.*

Approximately half of those questioned complain about emotional violence on the part of children or educators in schools and institutions for the care of children. More detailed information regarding violations of children's rights on the part of employees at educational institutions is available in the Division with the LSC study on violence, which may be found in the NGO Children's Rights Network Report to the UN or on the home page of the LSC – NGO Rights Network Presiding Organisation or on the home page of the referred to Network: www.rnc-rtb.lv.

Paragraph 3 of Article 28 determines that a State “shall promote and encourage international co-operation in matters relating to education, in particular with a view to...facilitating access to...modern teaching methods”. A portion of children have said that several teachers explain teaching materials in a way that is uninteresting or incomprehensible and that the teachers make offensive statements if a child asks them to repeat something.

Article 29 (on education)

1. a) Determines that “the education of the child shall be directed to the development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential”. Children and NGO representatives are of the opinion that a portion of educators in Latvia do not have any sense of modern teaching methods. Classes are uninteresting, and they often do not take place at all. As was already mentioned, educational criteria still do not exist in this State. In the smallest schools, there exist very restricted opportunities for developing children's interests. *For instance, children have said that there is either the choir or dancing – no other opportunities exist; but those who are not musical cannot participate in these activities.*

1. b) The majority of questioned children said that not in a single subject at school are they taught “respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations”. Only rarely did a child acknowledge that these concepts are explained in a way that is interesting and understandable.

c) the questioning of ethnic minorities and Latvian children attests to the fact that a very large percentage of children are not taught “respect for...his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living; ...and for civilizations different from his or her own”.

d) the children's questioning attests to the fact that approximately one-third of children are not prepared for a “responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin”.

Paragraph 2, Article 29 in relation to Article 28 is also violated, because there are incidents of State financing not being directed to children who study in private schools (See Article 28).

Article 30 (on the rights of ethnic minorities)

In order for the State to be able to fulfil the requirements of this Article, the State mass media would have to ensure programmes for the children of Latvia's traditional ethnic minorities in accordance with and in relation to Articles 17 and 29 of this Convention.

Article 31 (recreation, leisure time, and cultural life)

The majority of the violations of this Article's rights are related to a child's restricted opportunities to participate in cultural life and art. State television and radio does not ensure children with programmes from which children could gain an all-encompassing insight into cultural and artistic values (see Article 17). The majority of children from the State's districts do not have the opportunity to attend cultural and artistic events due to their families' poverty, because transportation and tickets to these events are very expensive. Too few of these opportunities also exist for children from State institutions for care. A large percentage of children living in Riga also have restricted opportunities to attend events. Everything referred to above is corroborated by the data from the children's questioning found in the relevant Division of this Report on the children's questioning in schools. Unfortunately, a majority of quality activities outside of school in the field of art and culture are also not free of charge. *LSC regularly receives requests for help and information regarding the necessity to suspend studies in a music school because a child's family has a lack of funds. The Latvian Children's Fund has been helping these particular children for years with donated funds. But it definitely cannot be said that the State ensures a child's opportunity to "participate freely in cultural life and the arts".*

Approximately 63% of children inform us that they lack the opportunity to participate in cultural life, recreational and sports events. Tickets to these events are expensive when compared with families' incomes. Children complain in particular about extremely expensive tickets for public transportation; Article 1 of the Convention is not observed in this area either, and children up to 18 years of age are not considered children in all public transportation vehicles as it is specified by the Convention. For example, children's train tickets are sold for children up to 10 years of age. In trams, persons up to the fourth grade are considered children. Similar children's discrimination on the basis of age takes place in other transport vehicles, which attests to the fact that it is difficult for children to attend events outside of school.

Many children, particularly from social risk families, yet often from average families as well, complain about the non-fulfilment of the rights specified in the Convention's Article; these children talk about the "lack of leisure and rest, as well as a lack of opportunities to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to their age". A fairly large number of children acknowledge that parallel to their studies they are swamped with garden, outdoor, and household chores, and have to look after their youngest family members and household pets. In the countryside, there are many children who are practically unable to rest during the summer time for the reasons referred to above, and often must additionally work poorly paid jobs for other landowners, or must pick berries and mushrooms for sale to the point of exhaustion, which for many families in the countryside is the only source of income. Obviously, particularly heavy conditions exist for those 15 000 children who are not registered in an educational institution and are therefore outside of society's control.

Article 32 (on economic exploitation and work)

Economic exploitation of children is not a mass phenomenon in Latvia. The main feature of exploitation in our State is discriminately low payment for work in cases where such work is performed in the same amount and of the same quality as it would be performed by an adult. In 12 years of filming material for TV programmes about the rights of the child,

the LSC team has travelled to all of Latvia's districts and often met children who are overworked at home and thus are rarely able to attend school.

Paragraph 2 of Article 32 determines that a State shall "provide for appropriate penalties or other sanctions to ensure the effective enforcement of the present article", therefore in all the years since the State ratified the UN Convention, it had a duty to protect children from not being allowed to attend school (15 000 children) and from being overworked at home so that their development and education would not be harmed.

It is strange that the official institutions that had the task of tending to the observance of civil rights were of the opinion that our State does not have a lawful mechanism in order to force parents to let their children attend school. If a Member State lacks a mechanism for the ensuring of the rights of a child, then an international convention may act as a substitute for this missing law. Unfortunately, officials in Latvia in these cases are almost never guided by this principle when defending the interests of children. Any of our proposals to the Inter-ministry Children's Rights Commission (which operated for many years under the wing of the Ministry of Education and Science) regarding the fact that these children must be taken out of their families, for the benefit of their primary interests, and put in boarding schools so that they could acquire an education, were rejected as directed against parents' rights. It is elementary that in taking any decision in a Member State, the rights of the child are looked upon as having priority. In this case, these are the rights to a child's education, without which a child's normal development is not possible. In turn, parents' rights to decide regarding their children are secondary, because in exercising these rights, they cause harm to the child. Today as well, this situation is very actual, because thousands of children do not attend school. The intervention of the UN, EU, and other international organisations is necessary so that the norms of children's rights specified in this Article and other Articles that address education are ensured in Latvia.

Particular concern was caused by information that repeatedly came into the LSC regarding the exploitation of children in institutions for care. *Verified information attests to the fact that children with special needs are used for work in the farms of the institutions themselves, as well as in the farms of employees. Children have been overworked in performing heavy labour and made to work unsuitable hours at all hours of the day and evening, and have also been physically coerced when they have tried to refuse to work. Young people in a youth recreational centre in Zemgale talk about how they were made to work on the private farms of the employees of the social centre for care: "It was around two o'clock in the morning when he brought us home; when I couldn't work anymore he hit me so hard that I flew over the bushes; when I got up he hit me again, and when I got up again he hit me once more. The nurses knew this but they were afraid to say anything."* Another individual tells about how "an employee owned a potato field, and even though it was very hot and dry, all of us boys went with buckets full of water down the hill and across the highway to water those potatoes of his".

Article 33 (narcotic drugs)

21% of more than 1 000 questioned children indicate that they know children who use narcotic drugs, 7% of the children indicate that know a few narcotic drug users, and 14% say that they know many narcotic drug users. In turn, 346 adults who work closely with the questioned children indicate that they know 7% of children who use narcotic drugs.

Children orient themselves much better in the narcotic drugs situation in regards to where to turn for help. For many years, children and adults have complained that the police do not respond at all to children who have used narcotic drugs.

From 1998 to 2000, the children's rate of infection had increased 10 times, but since 2000, infection with HIV/AIDS once again grew 2 times during one year. The number of intravenous narcotic drug users, including children, increased by 300% in 2000 when compared with the period up to 1998, and this attests to the fact that our State has not had an adequate strategy or tactic for protecting children from the use of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances. Set against the backdrop of dumping prices, with the police not seriously controlling narcotic drug distribution sites, schools, clubs, and points, the State police was instructed not to detain and not to send for analyses those children who had used narcotic drugs, the reason being that they did not have the funds allocated by the State to pay the 30 LVL for an analysis of every suspicious child. Sufficient education of children and educators regarding the problems of children's health, HIV/AIDS, prevention of drug abuse, and treatment of drug abuse, or regarding the provision of emergency assistance for children, was in the majority of cases not ensured in schools, or on State radio and TV and in Internet portals, where it could have been and should have been financed by the State. Infection with parenteral virus hepatitis is also increasing in a certain correlation with the growth in intravenous narcotic drug users. The spread of HIV/AIDS has grown dramatically (one may become convinced of this fact by reviewing the UNICEF "Transition Decade" and other Reports) and these figures were even larger in Estonia than in Latvia in the last years. This situation has come about as a result of the State's irresponsibility, for it did not develop a State strategy and plan of action in a timely manner, unlike Lithuania and Kyrgyzstan, which succeeded in arresting the spread of HIV/AIDS and narcotic drugs among children.

Article 34 (on sexual exploitation)

This Article prescribes that the State shall undertake to protect the child from all forms of sexual coercion and sexual abuse. In 1998 and 2000, LSC questioned 4 300 children, and of these children, 2% acknowledged that they had suffered from heavy sexual abuse. A very large percentage of children have suffered from lighter forms of sexual abuse, yet in this first large questioning performed by LSC, children did not yet have a clear understanding of the concept of sexual coercion and sexual abuse. In later years, we became convinced that children were not taught that coercive touching, engagement in conversations about sexual themes, various flashers and so on all count as sexual abuse. In subsequent questionings conducted by LSC, during which children were provided with an explanation of sexual abuse, it was disclosed that more than half of the questioned children had encountered sexual violence. The children themselves are of the opinion that often these problems cannot be solved, because they do not have any faith in Parish Courts, social educators, psychologists, and the police; children are afraid of both publicity and ridicule, and also of revenge on the part of the offender. Several children have been afraid of losing income, which their poverty-stricken parents might blame them for. Training of police and other officials about how to disclose and prove cases of the sexual exploitation of children is still necessary in at least some parts of Latvia. The experience of LSC shows that this knowledge is often incomplete and for this reason, or as a result of a lack of funds or a lack

of time, the attitude of police is negative. *In 2002, when conducting conversations with children, LSC gave lectures on violence and also filmed for TV programmes in Vidzeme, where approximately 6 children provided video testimonies regarding a citizen of a foreign state who owns property in the region and who employs children for payment and has also sexually abused some of them (their classmates). The indicated children who had allegedly been abused did not really admit such abuse. The parish's officials had called the district's police, yet the children did not admit to having endured such abuse, and thus criminal proceedings were not initiated. LSC continued the public investigation, interviewing the accused foreigner, and submitted a request to the Office of the Prosecutor General to initiate criminal proceedings, as well as to Interpol. LSC is of the opinion that the team of psychologists should have seriously inspected the possible victims, because the entire parish was convinced that sexual abuse was taking place. Yet nothing happened, and the accused man continued to pay the children and bring them abroad and abuse them. In the spring of 2005, two of the abused children and their parents turned to LSC with a request to punish the guilty party. LSC appealed to initiate criminal proceedings on the basis of the request already submitted in 2002, which had now been proven, and to detain the guilty party. However, we received an answer that there is not enough of a basis to take such action, because our request of 2002 was no longer valid. Then LSC turned to the Office of the Prosecutor General with a request to detain the guilty party and to initiate criminal proceedings, and the Deputy Prosecutor-General solved this matter immediately; very simply, the guilty party was detained on the basis of the LSC submission of 2002 and confessed, yet the question remains – how many children's lives did he ruin in all of the years since society knew what he was doing, yet its officials lacked the potential to ensure these children's rights?*

LSC received a call of SOS from a child's legal guardian whose little girl and her friend had been harassed by a man for an extended period of time. He gave the girls treats and followed them, touching them and not leaving them alone. The police had reproached the man, yet everything continued as it had before, and the police said that they could not do anything more until something else took place. The girls became anxious and could not sleep, because the man had threatened that he would take revenge on their family and friends if the girls refused to meet him. There are many cases like this and the situations are not solved until a NGO, often with the help of the media, turns to the highest authorities. Periodically there appear on the Internet invitations to provide girls for pornographic materials, and we have repeatedly informed Interpol regarding such invitations.

More information regarding violations of this Article may be found in Articles 19, 23, and 25

Article 35

Children did not comment on the norms included in this Article

Article 37 (on torture, punishment, and the deprivation of liberty)

Questioned children from separate institutions for the care of children acknowledged that they and their peers had been subject to torture in these institutions. For many years, LSC received information sent by children and parents regarding the incarceration of children without a sufficient basis – pre-trial investigations were drawn out so long as to violate any human boundaries. Many children have complained about a heartless,

disrespectful attitude on the part of the police. “The right to prompt access to legal and other appropriate assistance” was not received by practically any children from disadvantaged or needy families. Children indicate that during pre-trial investigations in the time period up to 2004, they did not have access to education, appropriate clothing, and sufficient access to fresh air, physical activities, or good literature.

During visits to prisons during the 1990s, we heard complaints from children about a lack of food and laundry detergent and inhumane conditions in cells. Everything that has been taking place throughout these years to children during pre-trial investigations has been a harsh violation of children’s rights on the part of the State.

In 2005, a study took place of underage individuals in a residential institution in Cēsis in which the questioned individuals provided answers to questions about their rights and duties in the institution, and regarding practical household matters, the organisation of their free time, access to medical services, food services, and their opportunity to study. The main problems emphasised by the incarcerated individuals were as follows:

- uniformity of food and an insufficient amount of food
- lack of a psychologist
- events should be organised more often
- meeting time with parents and girlfriends should be longer
- lack of opportunity to wash (there is an opportunity to use a sauna once a week)
- rooms need repair

Articles 38–43

Violations of children’s rights in relation to Articles 38 to 43 are analysed in the Children’s Rights Network Report to the UN prepared by LSC

Articles 44 and 45

Latvia has regularly violated this Article. The Government of Latvia had to submit the UN Initial Report regarding the Implementation of the UN Convention in Latvia within a time period of 2 years after the entering into effect of the Convention. Latvia submitted this Initial Report at the end of 1998, four years late. The next Report had to be submitted 5 years after the Initial Report, that is, in 2002. The LSC, in turn, had prepared Alternative UN Reports, which were submitted in 1998 and 2002, and with which the UN could not work because Latvia’s Reports had still not been submitted. As a result, the first recommendations in relation to the improvement of the children’s situation could be submitted by the UN only in 2001. Latvia finally submitted the second Report in the fall of 2004, and since this Report was submitted very late, the UN could include the reviewing of the Report in its agenda only beginning in May of 2006. In turn, the LSC received an invitation to submit the NGO Children’s Rights Network Report with information that was as recent as possible, including in such Report information about the first 9 months of 2005. The review of this NGO Report at the UN is set for January of 2006.

RESULTS OF QUESTIONING OF CHILDREN IN SCHOOLS (children living in poverty) LATVIAN SAVE THE CHILDREN – Presiding Organization of Latvian NGO Children’s Rights Network

Description of Questioning

The Questioning was arranged within the action organized by the NGO Regional network for the children of the Central and East European countries, CIS and the Baltic states. It was an informative campaign „Leave no child out”. The campaign comprised a number of risk groups of children: children living in poverty, children, which have lost their parent’s care, children of the ethnic minorities, and children with HIV/AIDS.

The main task of the questioning was to find out the children’s and partly also adults’ opinion on the situation of children in Latvia guiding from their own life experience or the point of view on the children living in their neighbourhood.

The Latvian children together with their country find themselves in the European Union and new possibilities have opened to help children. However, it is important to hear the point of view of children about the assistance exactly needed and who should assign it.

The main target of the questioning was to realize, summarize and analyse the opinion of children and suggestions in various groups of risk, in order to forward the results for the attention of our government, UN and those taking decisions and shaping the policy of the European Union countries in relation to children.

The working method – the questioning of children was executed with the help of questionnaires. The questionnaires were produced by the volunteers of the Save the Children (SC) – representatives of various professions, teachers, doctors, etc. When the questionnaires were discussed within SC and other NGO, they were repeatedly considered by specialists of each target group individually. The members of SC distributed the questionnaires. The material was summarized and analysed by experts. (The results of the questioning in their final version including charts are accessible at the web site of the Save the Children www.glabietbernus.lv and that of the Latvian NGO Children’s rights network www.rnc-rtb.lv)

Questioning of Children at Schools on their general problems 2004/2005

The main emphasis in this questioning was put on establishing problems concerning needy and poor children. Whereas approximately 4/5 of families with children live under any adequate subsistence minimum, the questioning, executed at schools, could give answers on all the required questions concerning this target group – children living in poverty.

On the whole 1394 filled out questionnaires were received, of which those from children – 1061 and from adults’ – 333. The major response came from children. The questionnaires

were received from all the 4 districts of Latvia, towns and rural areas. The largest number of respondents rest with the Latgale district – the poorest region in the European Union.

The questioning was executed both in cities and rural areas.

The answers given to the questions of the questionnaire by children specify that

- 52% of children are short of sufficient or quality nourishment
- 44% of children either have no electricity or no heating at home, or lack the necessary domestic articles or there is no water at home at all
- 39% of children have not sufficiently available medical aid
- 52% of children are not able to obtain quality medication for treatment
- 63% of children have no possibility to attend any events
- 55% of children have no possibility to go in for the groups of interests they would like to
- 80% of adults often use alcohol. **Whereas in Latvia there is one of the highest levels of depression throughout the European Union, the state should introduce appropriate social programmes for such children, as it is in Sweden.** Every normal child is proud of his/her parents, whatever they are like. One's own mother and father are the dearest and the closest. However, at the age, when children can reasonably judge about their parents, and when others laugh at them, it causes dual feelings – either anger or enmity against the laugher, or shame about the parents. As mentioned above, parents losing jobs, sinking in depression and beginning to drink are the reasons of shame and a heavy inner condition about such parents. Most often, both in city and in countryside, such people are like the mockery objects for many adults and consequently also for children. Two sides are as if fighting within the sole of child – love and anger, enmity and shame. At the moment the state and local governments absolutely ignore such sufferings, but it should not go on like that. Main thing is that child is fully incapable to change anything about this issue, because the degraded parents would be the last to hear. The powerless request: “Please, take yourself into your hands” sounds as a scream in the questionnaires of children.
- 44% of schoolchildren know at least a few, while 7% of schoolchildren know many children, which are not able to acquire the school programme
- 53% of children lack training aids
- 50% of children know a few, but 29% know many schoolchildren, which are not willing to study
- 63% of children acknowledged that they have not any appropriate clothes. Many children asked in their questionnaires to reintroduce the school uniforms as before. The school uniforms would eliminate the sharp differences between the children arriving at school well dressed and well cared of and those children wearing their brothers' or sisters' worn down clothes and incongruous and out-of-season footwear or generally improper to school clothes – thin, unsuitable to the weather conditions. The obtainment of both – training aids as well as footwear and clothes in the beginning of the school year is a major material blow to the poor families. The child feels humiliated, if he/she is made to go to school in dirty, torn and old clothes.

- 51% of children feel humiliated due to the social reasons. The shame for being not ready for school and society humiliates the children most. That is one of the most frequent replies in questionnaires. Even if they are not ridiculed, internally they feel tense and unconfident, often transforming such feelings into aggressiveness against others. On the outside the child wants to show that he/she does not suffer. Aggressive and angry children are a frequent phenomenon among the poor, while the opposite extreme is shutting away – keeping silent, humbling oneself, which often is abused by normally situated individuals, which take advantage and easily oppress and subdue the internally and externally humiliated peer. Other activities painfully taken by children under question are the summer camps and tours. In that respect, children are short of the clothes and food, which in such outings are necessary, therefore the needy and poor children, as much as they would like to take part in summer camps and tours, try to avoid from participation in such activities. The self-government seldom covers the payment for the summer camps for the poor children, in particular, if they come from disadvantageous families. Such children are castaways and both the school time and the summer holiday time becomes utter torment for them.
- 35% of schoolchildren know at least a few children, while 4% of schoolchildren know many children, who are abused because of their nationality. As children explain themselves, because of this reason much attention is paid to the pronunciation of children, and if a child is of some other nationality and the manner of speaking is different from that of the others, then not too often, but still it serves as a reason for mockery. In particular, it is very typical to Latgale district, because there are many different nationalities in the region – Lithuanian, Byelorussian, Russian and the local Latgalian dialect, which notably differ from the literary speech. However, it seems being one of the less painful issues. Actually, the problem is represented in the questionnaires of the children from the frontier areas bordering with Lithuania in Kurzeme district.
- 70% of children indicate that children from poor families are treated worse.
- 43% of children indicate that in public the children with health problems or disability are treated worse. The questioning results do not cover the children living and studying at home, while it does cover the sick children, which attend school together with others and study. The more complicated illnesses are evident – those with motion disturbances or those manifested otherwise. First of all, the sick children admit that they shrink into themselves, because they externally differ from others. They envy the healthy external shapes of others and with their inlaying pain hold aside, while the rest, seeing the reticence of the sick children, do not approach them. They do not speak badly about those children, but because they do not know how, they do not approach them openly and with help. Generally, such children were not run down or ridiculed in any of the questionnaires, it was only repeatedly explained, that they do not know how to treat such children, so here the lack of teaching of ethics at school expressly shows, which would try to explain and teach children in relation to those questions.

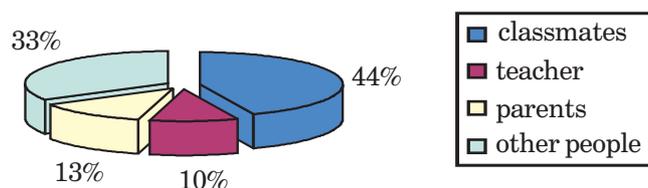
Also the question about introduction of lessons of ethics at school continues to be deferred and the officials excuse themselves that there are not enough teachers and manuals, although the ethics thought B.C. by Aristotle would be sufficient.

In one of the adults' questionnaires a woman, whose child is sick and has motion disturbances, advises, that it would be necessary to appoint two healthy children as guardians for every sick child, and so in every school, which is attended by sick children.

A child has written very sharply – I know I am a cripple, but I am living and want to live as all others, I want to live as other children.

– 37% of children specify that children, whose parents people despise, are treated badly

Schoolchildren give percentage of people badly treating children. Children specify that they experience bad treatment: from classmates – 44%, parents – 13%, teachers – 10%, other people – 33%. Under 'other people' the neighbours (both children and adults), relatives and schoolmates are meant, who study in other forms or have finished school.



Graphic chart. People, badly treating children

As stated in one of the questionnaires the former pupils come to their native school to spread drugs. In case of disobedience the schoolchildren are humiliated.

Most often children point out that they suffer from abuse and ridicule on the part of their classmates. The reasons have already been mentioned above, how children are humiliated and ridiculed for their outer appearances, their opinion and their parents. Not very often, but still, schoolchildren mention that they also suffer from teachers. If children are not able to do something, the teachers ridicule and humiliate them in front of the others. Children are afraid from such ridicule and naturally run away from the lessons of such teachers. Unfortunately, this worsens the situation even more.

One of the schoolchildren confesses that a teacher has expressed a threat, that he will make the student unsatisfactory in three subjects, that the teacher is able to arrange for that. Consequently the mentioned pupil will not get a certificate on basic education and will obtain only the school-report. But with the school-report one would not be able to continue education, thus the way to any further education would be cut.

- 61% of children periodically feel lonely or oppressed, while 14% of children constantly feel oppressed. Children write that they have no one to talk to, share opinion or ask for advice. In many questionnaires it was underlined that there is no one to talk to. On daily bases a child gets in touch with many people: his peers, teachers, parents, relatives, etc. But unfortunately none of these people is able to talk to the child about his pain or mood.

A boy regrets that he feels hurt about his grandfather who ignores him, but he would like to be a good grandson.

Children acknowledge that there are few people that children can trust.

- Only 38% of children are ready to trust the social worker, psychologist or any other official, because they are afraid of making their problems open to public.
- 48% of schoolchildren know at least a few, but 8% know many children, which have no friends.

A child, willing to make friends with such an outcast child, states that his parents do not allow him to. They say: „ He is from a bad family, do not even make your way home from school together with him”.

- **Only 68% of schoolchildren do not know any child, which would be thinking about suicide. But 28% of schoolchildren know at least a few children, which are thinking of suicide, and 4% of schoolchildren acknowledge that they know many children, which are thinking of suicide.**

In Latvia there is one of the highest depression and suicide figures throughout the European Union.

- 25% of children know schoolchildren, which use drugs, of which 16% know many children, which use drugs.
- For their part only 7% of adults know many children, who use drugs.
- 90% of children write that they know where to search for help in event of use of alcohol or toxic stuff.

There was also the following question in the questionnaire: „Please, indicate anything that causes you and other children feel discomfort”. Answers to this question are given in detail throughout the previous text, but in an aggregate the main issues mentioned by children are the following:

1. The problems caused by poverty – lack of money, unsuitable clothing, insufficient nourishment, shame for poverty.
2. Absence of love in family – bewilderment, unhearing, quite often cruelty.
3. Alcoholism and arguments in family both mutually between parents and children.
4. Very negative attitude of peers, other people and teachers.
5. Negligence on the part of the State towards children – inadequate educational system, which otherwise would explain much to children, expensive books and other training aids, no free lunch at school, pathetically small state benefits to families with children, etc.

Desires and suggestions by children in relation to the future society, family and school

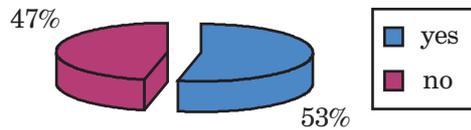
In the conclusion of the questionnaire there were several questions whereby children were asked to draw conclusions and express their wishes concerning their current situation and the nearest future, and first of all: “What do you expect from European Union? “. Children are very well informed and also interested in this question. They understand that the membership in European Union will require a lot of the state resources, and they are afraid that the so far stingy funds will be assessed with new taxes. There is a very categorical attitude against European Union on the part of both – adults and children in the Latgale district. There are so many suggestions to secede from European Union just for one reason: everything will become more expensive. However, there are also other ideas of children: that joining European Union will bring new investors and factories will be built; there will be work and money for parents. Hence, also benefits and other assistance will be increased for the disadvantaged. One of the greatest hopes is free education abroad, work possibilities in foreign countries, mastering of languages. Certainly no one expects all this to come straight away. Most often the time period of the next 10 years is mentioned, when the solution for better life should come. Family is ranged in the first place in the other group of suggestions and here the advice is unanimous: to stop drinking, to begin to work somewhere, to summon up courage, not to despise and not to punish children, but to talk them like with equal persons. The wish of children to be alongside with parents as equals, which are not subdued, is very big, at least 90% of answers are the following: to listen attentively, to be able to talk and not to shout at them, not to humiliate children and not to treat hard-heartedly. Understanding, sensitiveness and love are required most.

In relation to the government and state institutions, the suggestions and requests of children are rather unanimous – to decrease the payment for studies, to increase the number jobs, to increase parents’ wages so that all family could be supported, to create new jobs, to take care of the people, because for the majority it seems that the most substantial improvement could be reached, if efforts are taken by the government itself and the state institutions with the participation of the representatives of people. Here it is closely related with the educational improvements through changing the educational programmes, balancing them with the world requirements, there are requests for the possibility to obtain the higher education free of charge, because the children presenting the questionnaires would not be able to cover such payments, and consequently they lose their dreams for better future. There are plenty of suggestions to the government, but the main one is to take the care of the people.

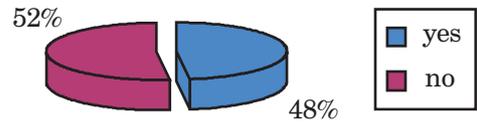
It seems that some boy from the countryside of Kurzeme district has hit the point:

I wish no one would live in need so that everyone would smile happily and the health would be as strong as the reinforced concrete.

There is a survey in the end of the questionnaire: „Would you like to participate in the discussion of problems of children and the drafting of proposals for those, who take decisions in Latvia and European Union?“



Graphic chart. Children willing to participate in discussion of problems



Graphic chart. Adults willing to participate in the discussion of problems of children

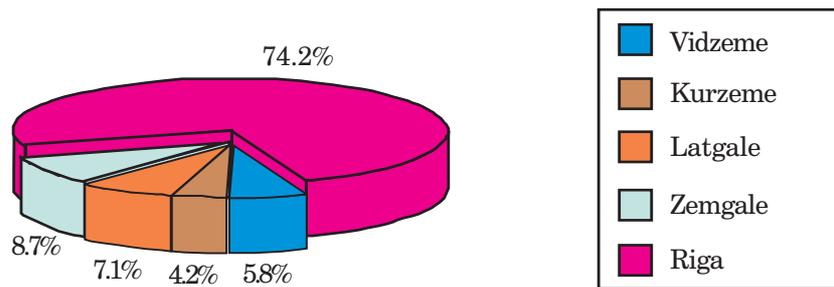
Both children and adults wish to participate and to gather forces both for the public and state organizations, in order to implement the campaign slogan „Leave no child out” of the NGO Children’s rights network and decrease the number of unhappy children. Such collaboration should definitely be promoted and the conditions should be created, that people, willing to do something, would not be ignored, but in reality be able apply their efforts and knowledge. This appeal should actually be implemented in our daily life. The decision makers must take into account the opinion of children expressed in this questioning.

RESULTS OF THE QUESTIONING of children from ethnic minorities LATVIAN SAVE THE CHILDREN – Presiding Organization of Latvian NGO Children’s Rights Network

A questioning of the ethnic minority children living in Latvia was carried out.

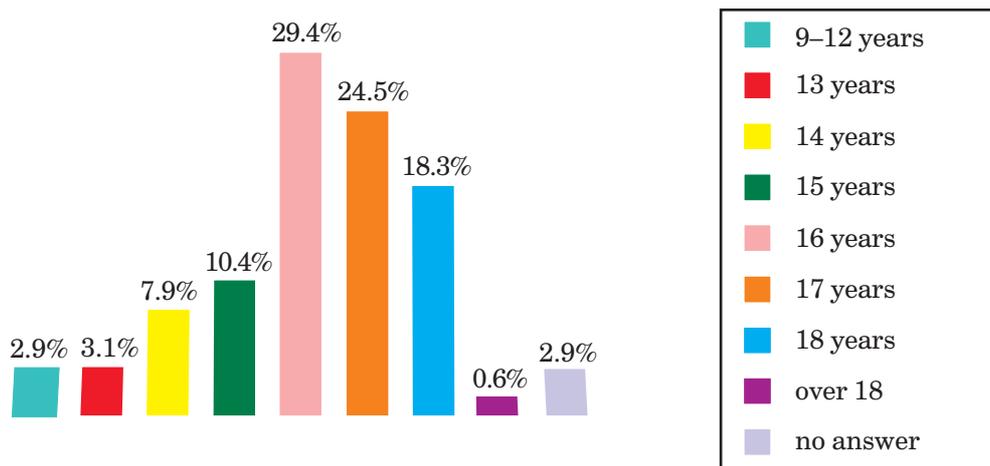
The target of the questioning: to reduce problems disturbing children to feel good and to find out how to help them.

1. 873 children from Vidzeme, Kurzeme, Zemgale and Riga took part in the questioning. The largest number of respondents was from Riga, since the majority of ethnic minorities live there.



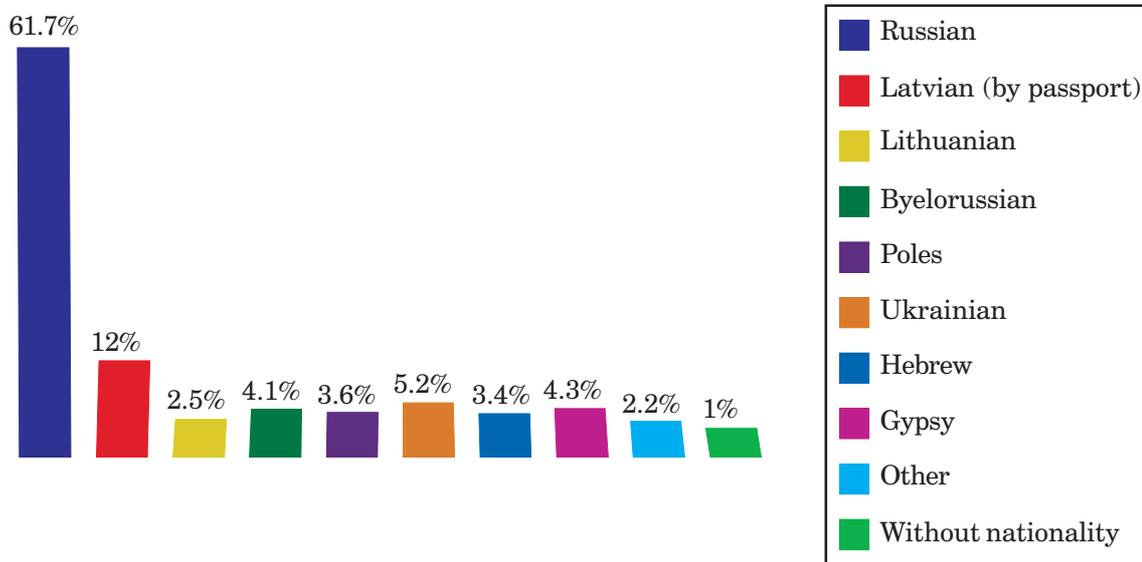
Graph 1. Distribution of children in the regions of Latvia

2. The age of the participants was from 9 to 18 years. 72.2% respondents were in the age from 16 to 18 years old.



Graph 2. Distribution of respondents by age groups

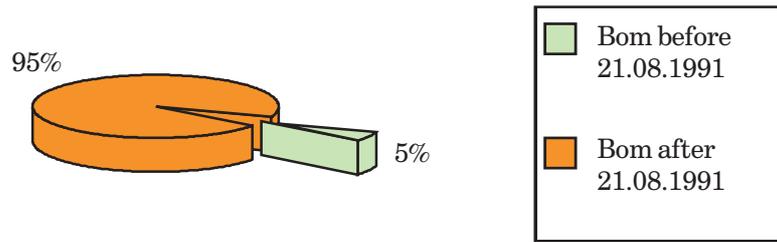
3. The children of 15 ethnic minorities living in Latvia answered to the questions: Russians, Latvians (according to passport data; Latvian Russians or Latvian Gypsies; mixed families – Estonians, Lithuanians, Russians, where one of the parents is Latvian), Gypsies, Byelorussians, Poles, Ukrainians, Armenians, Lithuanians, Estonians, Tatars, Georgians, Germans. 1% of the respondents did not provide an answer to the question about their ethnicity. New notions of nationalities have developed: Latvian Russian, Latvian Gypsy, Latvian Hebrew, Latvian Pole.



Graph 3. Distribution of respondents by nationality

The graph displays the peculiarity of the Latvian situation where Russian-speaking inhabitants form a community differing from the accepted notion ‘minority nationality’. Such situation has developed during the Soviet period, when the society was forced to use Russian. The Russian language gradually developed into the predominating language and the languages of other ethnic minorities were used less and less. Poles, Byelorussians, Ukrainians began to identify themselves by Russians, so the Russian-speaking community was artificially increased. The new, independent Latvia has to provide a greater support for the minority communities in order to Ukrainians, Byelorussians, Poles would aware about the origin of their families and would wish to acquire their own language. It would widen the richness of Latvian nationalities and influence also the Russian speaking inhabitants, promote the regard towards their own and other nationalities’ languages.

4. 95% of the questioned have born before the August 21, 1991 in Latvia (after the independence for Latvia was gained).



Graph 4. Division of respondents by birth before or after August 21, 1991

It is important that various teenagers living here would be aware of Latvia as of their motherland independently of their nationality. All the nationalities living in Latvia has a common goal – to develop and strengthen their country and, it is important to carry out patriotically educational activities that help to understand their belonging and the main values of the country to make this process successful.

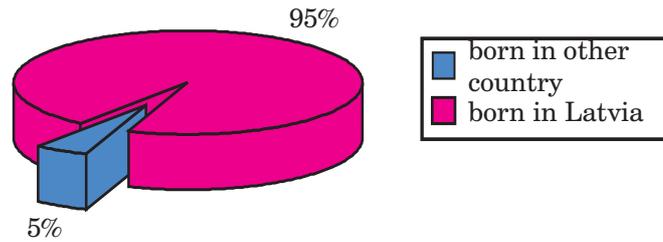
5. The questioning shows that the nationality a respondent has pointed out has little relation to the language he or she uses. 79% of the enquired point out to their native tongue as Russian. The only nationality naming their native language consequently is Gypsies. 7% of the respondents say that their native tongue is Latvian. The representatives of Gypsies confirm the role of parents and the personal example in the keeping of the national traditions.

Nationality	Native tongue
Lithuanian	Russian
Armenian	Russian
Hebrew	Russian
Latvian	Russian
Gypsy	Gypsy
Pole	Russian
Ukrainian	Russian
Georgian	Russian

6. The nationality as provided by the questionnaire is not related to the parents' native tongues or the language used at home. The respondents' answers confirm the influence of the Soviet social policy to the families of the respondents. As a result, the Russian language is used by the majority of the families regardless the nationality, and the national language is already forgotten.

Nationality	Native tongue	Language spoken by parents	Language used at home
Russian 57%	Russian 79%	Russian 85%	Russian 83%
Other nationalities 43%	The national 21%	The national 14%	The national 9%
		Other language 1%	Latvian 7%
			Other 1%

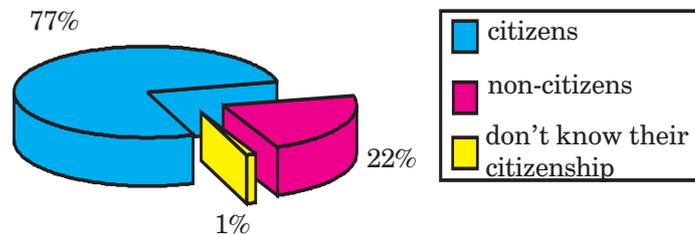
7. 95% of the enquired children have born in Latvia. 5% of the children have born in: Russia, Lithuania, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Estonia, Hungry, Germany.



Graph 5. Distribution of respondents by their place of birh

Thus, the young people of national minorities are born basically in Latvia and Latvia is their motherland, the values and culture of which is important to be aware of in order to develop their career successfully when working in Latvia or abroad.

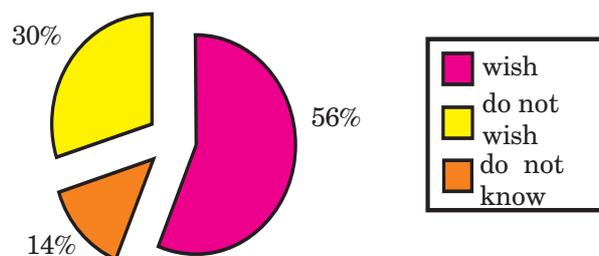
8. 77% of the enquired are the citizens of Latvia, 22% of them are without citizenship, and 1% does not know its citizenship.



Graph t. Characterization in nubers showing the part of the respondents being the citizens of Latvia

It is important to carry out educational work at schools as much as possible to help to understand the mutual influence of the society and the state authorities, the feedback between the individual and the state so that young people might become aware of the importance of their citizenship and the number of citizens would increase in Latvia. It would change also the young people's attitude towards their country. The understanding and strengthening of the citizenship would help the present non-citizens to feel safe in their country.

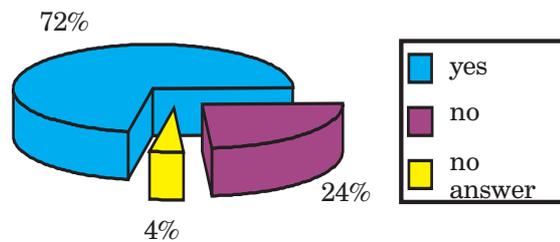
9. 56% of the enquired children wish to be EU citizens, 14% of them do not want to be EU citizens, 30% do not know yet.



Graph 7. Percentage of the enquired children wishing to be EU citizens

The standard of living has changed very sharply independently of the nationality and citizenship during the decade before Latvia accessed to EU. The society has stratified into the rich and the poor. A part of the respondents does not understand this economical situation and relates it to the issue of citizenship. A part of young people are influenced by their parents who do not wish and do not see their future in European Union. The situation is influenced by the social insecurity and joblessness in Latvia. This situation promotes nostalgia for the previous Soviet system and they express a willingness to collaborate more with Russia than with European countries. Also this area needs explanatory work among young people so that everybody might take part in educational programmes and to see the new possibilities provided by the situation when Latvia is a member state of European Union.

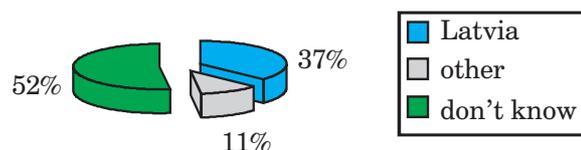
10. The question “Do you know how to obtain the citizenship of Latvia?” provided the following answers: 72% of the children answered that they know it, 24% do not know how to obtain the citizenship, 4% of the respondents have not responded. It should be mentioned that a part of children already having the citizenship have responded that they do not know how to obtain it.



Graph 8. Percentage of children who know how to obtain the citizenship of Latvia

The graph shows that a part of young people do not have access to the information. In general, the work at the information and education of the young people on the essence of the citizenship and the possibilities to obtain it must be continued as at the level of the formal, as well as the informal education. Organizations promoting the process of integration in Latvia must be fostered and supported.

11. Only 37% of the enquired plan to live and work in Latvia, 11% of the respondents think to study and to work in other country, but 52% of the children have not decided yet.

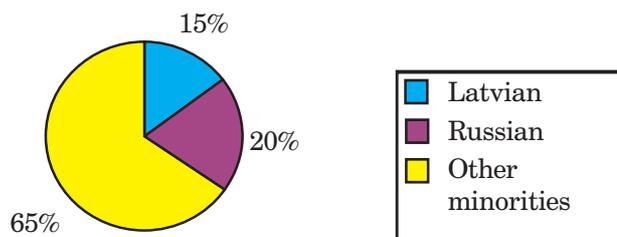


Graph 9. Percentage of children planning to live and to work in Latvia

The economical situation does not allow the possibilities of practice in Latvia, since all the vacant jobs and newspaper advertisements demand for people with an experience in the field. Non-citizens feel especially unstable in this situation, because they consider that they may be left out of job because they are not citizens owing to the lack of knowledge in these issues. Young people suffer most of the uncertainty about their future. Market economy put the most severe demands for the competitiveness as for the citizens, as well as non-citizens. Entrepreneurship develops more or less in Riga and Riga district, but the country has no the regional development policy. These conditions make many families to decide on sending their offspring abroad. As a result, many young people work hard, physical work abroad and it alienates them from the possibilities to get the higher education during their young years. Foreign entrepreneurs receive well-educated young people, Latvia loses the means invested in their education, if it does not look for the possibilities to establish more jobs for people here.

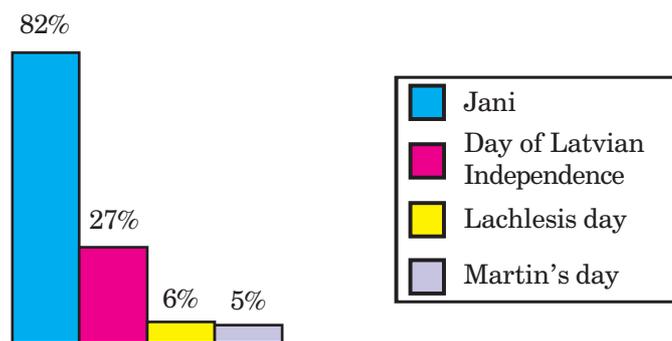
Young people without a period of service cannot receive the benefits meant for the unemployed, also other social guarantees based on the social payments are restricted (maternity benefits, etc.). With this, a large number of young people practically has no the means for existence, since also **more than 20% of children are not able to pass examinations and to finish the basic education???**

12. 66% of the respondents learn in Russian schools, 9% of them go to Latvian schools, 25% attend the schools of national minorities. There is a positive tendency to increase the number of national minority schools in Latvia that helps young people to find a school corresponding to their interests and to learn the native tongue of their forefathers. Poles are especially active in this area, also Lithuanians. The national minority schools promote also the collaboration of the pupils and parents with neighbouring countries, so the targets of education are reached and the tolerance in the society is established. On the other hand, the number of Latvian schools decreases and concerns on the decrease of the basic nationality arise. One of the reasons of this problem is the decrease of the birth-rate in Latvian families and that young people from mixed families do not chose Latvian schools. Latvian families feel a certain concern in this situation about threat to the Latvian language and culture. It would be good to explain and to educate the society on this aspect by the programmes for integration. That is because each nation has to be responsible on the development of its culture and other nationalities are not to take such responsibility. The popularization of own culture and the awareness of the cultural heritage of other nationalities make a person mentally richer, more intelligent and helps to make his or her carrier more successfully. The process promoted the development of a personality, so it is important.



Graph 10. Division of the respondents by schools with different work languages

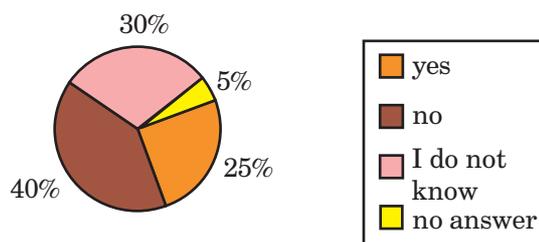
13. The most popular festivals in the national minority families are Jani – Ligo. 82% of the respondents celebrate them. 27% of the enquired celebrate the Day of Latvian Independence, Lachplesis day – 6%, Martin’s day – 5%.



Graph 11. The most popular Latvian festivals celebrated by national minority children

Patriotic education is insufficient in the schools, the national minority schools pay more attention to it than Latvian schools often; youth acquire the traditions of their country and of the nationality they belong to. But, the national minorities are rather standoff in the celebration of Latvian national festivals since also Latvians are not active enough themselves.

14. The following answers were provided to the question “Do you know Latvian history well enough and do you admit that Latvia was occupied and incorporated into the Soviet Union without asking the opinion of the inhabitants?”



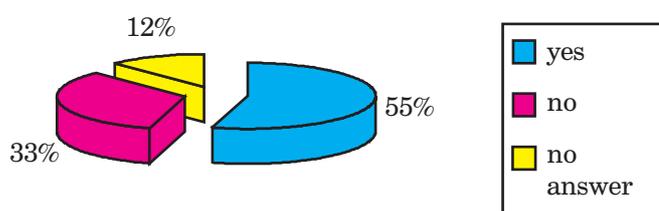
Graph 12. Percentage representing if the national minority children know the history of Latvia.

Even the grown-ups from the part of Latvian families interpret history in different ways, but this difference is especially great in national minority families, mainly of Slavic origin. With this, children and teenagers growing and living in these families are influenced by them very much. The genuineness of historical data is disputed by the society in various ways. But, the lacking knowledge of facts, avoiding from them and the framing up of reality separates the society. Exactly this separation is the purpose of a part of Russian politicians and mass media, since Russia has never acknowledged the occupation of the Baltic states at its highest level and, of course, the fact of occupation is not included in the textbooks of Russian history. The efforts of Latvians to gain independence and the ambiguous activities during the World War II that are incriminated to Latvians and other Baltic states are treated as the sign of fascism and it is still used as a means of propaganda by those Russian mass media that are watched also by national minority families and children living in the Baltic states. Therefore, a greater attention should be paid to the teaching of history in Latvian schools.

15. 82% of the questioned children's families celebrate Christmas, 80% - the Easter. The respondents' families celebrate, relevantly, the Catholic, Orthodox, Old Belief, Hebrew, Muslim church celebrations.

Celebrations create the feeling of commonness and belonging to a certain group of people. It is very important that young people learn how to celebrate such festivals and to know the traditions of their nationality. Those who know their own festivals and understand them also respect the festivals of other nationalities. It is important to promote the traditions of festivals in the society and to organize various activities on the state holidays in order to provide the possibilities for choice to the inhabitants. It is important to promote the festivals of various nationalities that give an opportunity for each of the nationalities to keep to the cultural peculiarities of this nationality.

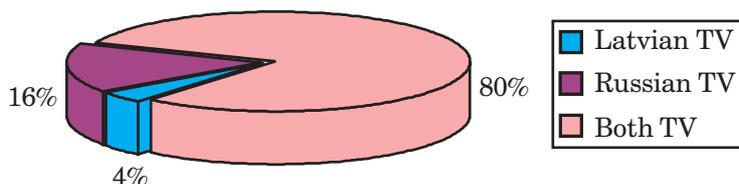
16. The following answers were provided to the question "Does your family celebrate the festivals related to your nationality and keep to the national traditions?"



Graph 13. Percentage showing how many minority respondents celebrate their national festivals

Children attribute also some more occasions to the national festivals erroneously: the New Year Day, the Old New Year, the Victory Day (May 9), the 8th of March (the International Women's Day), the 23rd of February (the Day of Army). Hebrew festivals are being celebrated: Hanuka, Sukot, Silihat, Tora, Purim, also Pole, Byelorussian and Ukrainian celebrations.

17. The children of ethnic minorities watch also different TV programmes – 4% of the families watch only the programmes of Latvian TV, 16% – only Russian TV, 80% – both.

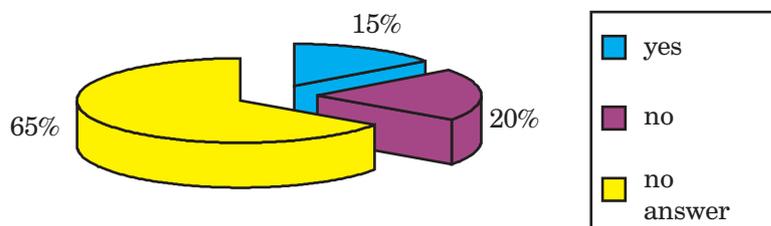


Graph 14. Percentage reflecting the division of TV programmes watched by the questioned minority children

Young people and children excluded from the informative environment of Latvia do not receive information important for Latvia, they feel alienated and are not able to react adequately to the events of their country. Besides this, the real facts are replaced very often by various guesses and, sometimes, fully untrue information containing ideology that is not acceptable or even hostile to the country. It means, it is very important to organize

informative meetings, analysis of the latest events of the country! It is important that children and young people might have an access to the information about their country and develop the skills of analysing, comparing and obtaining of information, and to have an opinion on each of the issues discussed in the country.

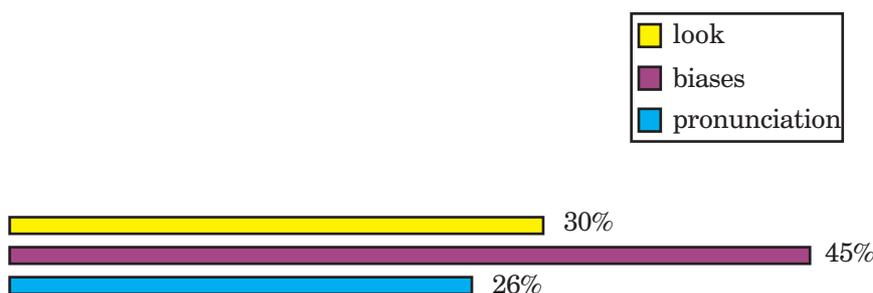
18. Answers to the question “Do children of different nationalities learn at your school?” are the following:



Graph 15. Do children of different nationalities learn at your school?

The majority of children and young people do not pay attention to the nationality of their class and school-mates. In general, the attitude towards the children of various nationalities is friendly. Children are influenced by prejudices of their families. These prejudices are mainly related to the grownups’ opinions within the society not to the specific experience of the children. Children transfer these prejudices to an abstract image of other nationality youth. These prejudices may be decreased only by education of the society and by the explanations of the basic values such as mutual regard, the culture of mutual relations and by the awareness of values each nationality acquire basing on the collaboration with other nations.

19. When putting the question “How do you think, are there such conflicts among the children of different nationalities that are based on the differences among these nationalities?” we received answers that might be represented graphically, as well as such that we might only to quote.



Graph 16. The main differences why conflicts and disagreements among various nationality children arise

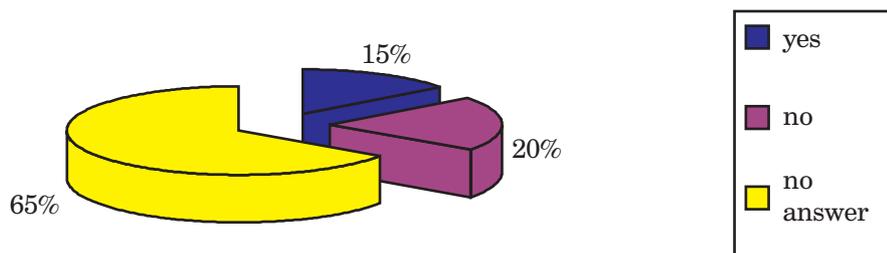
Other differences:

- the way of behaviour, upbringing, mentality, character;
- intellect, mind, life opinions, political opinions, religion, traditions.

Quotations from the questionnaires:

- “Conflicts may arise only because of different world outlooks, ideas and opinions. It means, it is necessary to work at common values and to a mutual respect between the basic nationality and the other party.” (a Russian girl, 17 y. o., a non-citizen)
- “Misunderstandings may be caused by character, behaviour, the way of speaking characteristic for some nationality.” (17 y. o., a Russian boy)
- “Idea that one nationality might be better than the other.” (a Russian girl, 17 y. o., a non-citizen)
- “Dislike and misunderstanding between the parties, principles that are biases in reality.” (a Russian boy, 16 y. o., a non-citizen)
- “Russians dislike Latvians, it is hard to explain why.” (a Gypsy boy, 21 y. o., a pupil)
- “There are no such misunderstandings and conflicts among normal children.” (a Ukrainian girl, 18 y. o.)
- “The opinions of the grown-ups influence the children’s ideas in these issues.” (a Russian girl, 17 y. o.)

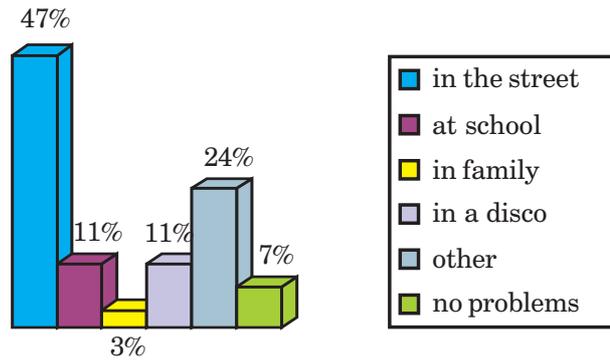
20. There was raised an artificial and natural fuss on the reform of education and the gradual transfer to teach the main subjects in the state language in the minority schools beginning from the school year 2003/2004. The following answers were provided to the question “Did somebody discussed with you and your schoolmates the essence of the reform of education and explained what you will gain of it?”



Graph 17. Distribution of the percentage reflecting if the essence of the education reform and the gain of it is explained to children during the previous school years

The obtained data evidence that explanatory work for schools and the society is not carried out sufficiently on the gradual transition to the teaching in Latvian. A special piety and tolerance must be observed in such a fine point as transition to learning in other language that may cause anxiety about the keeping of the ethnic identity, especially if to take into consideration the historical disagreements between a part of Russians and the basic nationality. Latvian government had to be aware of the bad history knowledge of non-Latvians and the effect of Russian misleading propaganda when it worked at the reform. It had not to avoid that the opinion of the “object” – the pupils of minority nationalities – is ignored and not asked. The information had to reach each child in Latvia. The present situation evidences that the initiated work has to be continued so that each young person would understand the meaning of the reform and to be aware of the benefits it brings to a personality and the society in general.

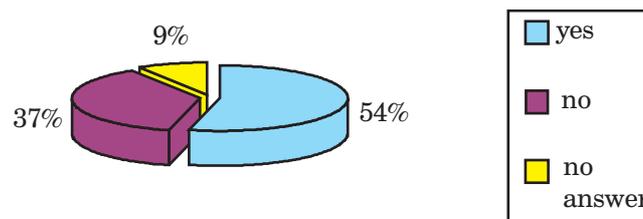
21. The following answers show if children from Russian or other ethnic minority schools where Latvians do not learn have had nationality based conflicts:



Graph 18. The most distributed places where children have met nationality based conflicts

Children from those Russian or national minority schools where Latvians do not learn have had nationality based conflicts. Most conflicts they have in the street (almost a half), in a disco (1/8). ¼ of the children point out to the answer “other”, including institutions such as the state authorities and the public transport. But, 1/8 of the children suffer from national conflicts at school and 1/20 part even in the family. Even if the official opinion of the state authorities is that international conflicts are minimal in Latvia, then only 7% of the children during research have said that they have had no conflicts or problems related to their nationality. These numbers serve as evidence on more constrained situation exactly at the informal places of meeting. It means, the schools take care about the safety of young people more or less and suppress all the kinds of aggressiveness. (Although the work is insufficient also in this area and schools cannot be regarded to be a completely safe environment.) On the other hand, we have made sure during the conversations with the children that youth receive too little attention as personalities in the school and many of them acquire too low self-awareness that basically is the cause of conflict situations in the streets or other public places. Exactly young people with low self-awareness are initiators of international conflicts. They feel important, since they are able to influence somebody or to humiliate only because the other person speaks other language or looks in a different way. ¼ of the young people get into national conflicts in the public transport with grownups or with the state officials.

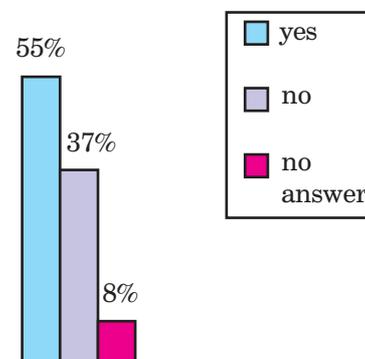
22. Children were asked: “Do your parents or teachers have consulted with you about learning in such language that you wish?”



Graph 19. Distribution of the per cents reflecting if parents and/or teachers have asked children in what language they want to learn themselves

Nobody has asked to almost a half of children about in the school of which nationality and what languages he or she wishes to learn. About 10% of the children have not answered to this question at all. It means, the tie between parents and school children is very weak in families. It is promoted by the unstable economical situation, unemployment, insufficient social protection or very high load the parents have in their work. With this, a special role should be given to social pedagogues at schools which might find time for discussions with the pupils and for individual discussions on the issues urgent for particular children. It is necessary to enliven the work with the pupils' families at schools. It is important to find acceptable forms of collaboration and the possibilities for the exchange of opinions. If parents have no had a chance to discuss the language issue with their children, it means, also other important issues have been left without attention. Often, parents also do not understand the importance of language and are not aware of the numerous possibilities provided to their child by the system of education.

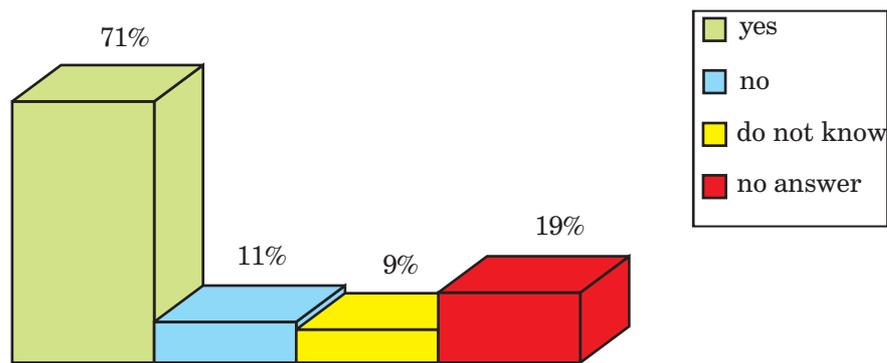
23. The children's opinion on "Will education in the state language provide you with any advantages for further education and life" are the following:



Graph 20. The distribution of children thinking that education in the state language will provide advantages for them

About 40% of children think the learning in the state language will provide advantages to them. The number of children with which parents have not discussed the language of learning (graph 19) is similar. The numbers evidence, that almost half of the pupils and parents of ethnic minority schools do not understand the language situation of Latvia. Only if all the inhabitants will know one and the same language, it is possible to establish a stable informative area in the country that is accessible to all regardless their nationality. This, without doubt, would strengthen the peoples' feeling of belonging to the country. Latvian national values become accessible to all its inhabitants and the basic nationality, on its turn, have an access to national minority opinions and views about the development of contacts and the state. Good knowledge of the basic nationality – state – language does not restrict the representatives of the society in any way to use any language that brings an emotional satisfaction to them. The knowledge of the state language does not restrict people in the development of their own national (not the state language) language skills. It is logical, that adequate development of the minority language may occur only in the original country of this ethnic minority. It is utopia to hope for that when living in a country, where one does not belong to the basic nationality. Besides this, the knowledge of the state language means that a child or a grownup is competitive in the country he lives in.

24. Answers are the following to the question: “If you acquire knowledge in several languages at school, will it help to you in your further life?”

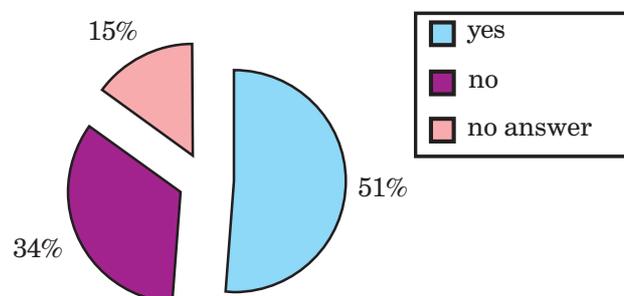


Graph 21. Distribution of per cent reflecting how many children think that learning in several languages will help in their further life

Almost the third of the children do not acknowledge that learning in several languages will help in their further lives.

The possibility to learn in several languages at school mobilizes the pupils and promotes their intellectual development. Children and young people who are not motivated by their parents or pedagogues to learn languages, lose possibilities of their full-bodied development and career. The numbers evidence the necessity to improve the work of the Ministry of Education and Science with the parents and children already during the pre-school period. At present, the result of this undone work is that a part of parents and pupils blame the Latvian language in a bad progress in the acquired knowledge. Although the scientists have proved long before that learning in several languages promote the development of children, the education reform has turned into a new basis for biases as a result of the job badly performed by the state and the insufficient explanations. The solution may be found in the understanding of these biases and the motivation, after which the biases are diminished and cease to exist or even to disturb the educational process of.

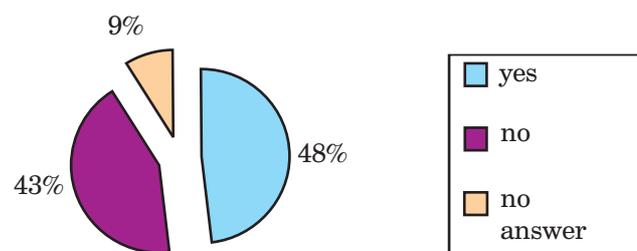
25. “Do your parents explain your rights to ethnic identity to you – the keeping to your native tongue and traditions?”



Graph 23. Percentage representing how parents have explained the rights of children to keep their ethnic identity

As the numbers show, a large part of children and families do not understand the meaning of ethnic identity and are not aware on the child's rights to keep the ethnic identity. It seems, almost a half of parents does not attribute a meaning or ignores this aspect of children's rights. The ethnic identity is the basis of each family. Those nationalities where families keep to their ethnic identity have more respect to other nationalities. The individuality of each nationality is a value within the range of world culture. The nationalities enrich themselves when they acquire their own and other nationalities' cultural heritage. A new term "intercultural dimension" has been introduced in EU. It includes an idea on the keeping of culture traditions and ethnic peculiarities, and the mutual respect. It is necessary to carry out a large-scale educational work in Latvia, since the present indicators do not evidence on the understanding in this issue. Children and young people have to acquire knowledge that each ethnic adherence is respected in the country and each has not only the rights to be understood and accepted by the society regardless his or her origin, but also the awareness on his or her knowledge about the ethnic peculiarities of other nationalities and respect and regard towards them is equally important.

25. "Have the rights to your ethnic identity – keeping to your native tongue and traditions – been explained at your school?"



Graph 24. Proportions of children to which their rights for ethnic identity have been explained at school

The children's answers mean that more than half of the educational institutions do not explain their rights for ethnic identity (see the comment at the graph 23).

The explanatory work is not sufficient in the ethnic minority schools. If to take into regard that families do not fulfil their functions in the area well enough, the explanatory work at school. What is even more important, an attention should be paid to the way it is done so that children and young people might understand the issue. Schools should have an educational programme of the area for breeding, language, craft lessons. For extracurricular activities it is important that children learn how to collaborate with children from other countries. Latvia has many positive examples. As one of such examples Rezekne Pole Secondary School may be mentioned. Children and young people from it collaborate with Poland schools. The school promotes friendly activities, exchange programmes and other educational and instructional activities that help to the children to get aware of their Pole origin and the Pole identity. As a result, these children integrate in the society very well, they wonderfully communicate with Russian, Latvian and other nationality children.

26. The answers to the question “What is your and other ethnic minority children’s main problems caused by the different nationality?” were grouped in the following way:

51% has problems

34% have no problems

15% have not responded

Psychological 34%

Discrimination:

- the restriction of the ethnic rights
- distrust, humiliation
- denied ethnic rights
- attitude
- dislike from other people Envy, hatred, preconceptions

Communication 56%

Bad language skills

Appearance

Irreverence

Quarrels

Culture, traditions

The attitude of the Police

Education 5%

Insufficient knowledge of language

Education reform

The lack of possibilities to get the higher education in Russian

Social 5%

It is hard to find job

28.5% of children who have pointed out to psychological problems existing among people of different nationalities understand psychological problems as related to the discrimination. They understand it as denying and restriction of the ethnic rights; distrust and humiliation; different attitude explained by children as envy, hatred or preconceptions shown by people.

48.5% of children have pointed out to problems in communication. The children explain the communication problems as bad language skills, appearance, irreverence, quarrels, culture and traditions. One of the problems specially stressed was the attitude of the Police.

Problems related to education are mentioned only by 5.7% of children. They explain it by insufficient knowledge of language and the lack of possibilities to get the higher education in Russian. Also the education reform is mentioned as a cause.

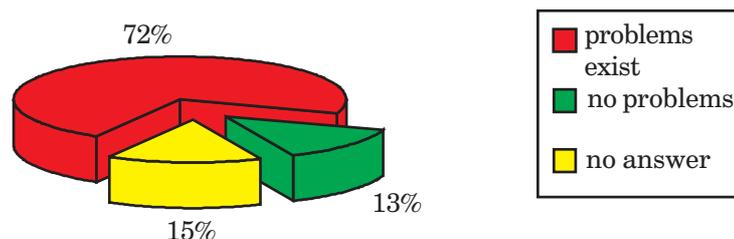
The group of social problems was mentioned by 4.1% of the children, who said mainly that it is hard to find job for minorities.

Quotations explaining children’s opinions from the questionnaires:

- “Children “lose” their ethnic culture” (17 y. o., a Russian girl)
- “Such problems are only in Latvia. Other countries have no problems, it means forcing of the Latvian language upon us, a prohibition of full education in the native tongue.” (17 y. o., a Russian boy)
- “There are no possibilities to acquire the higher education in the native tongue (Russian) here. There are no possibilities to work without knowing the state language at the age of 18.” (18 y. o., a Russian boy, a non-citizen)
- “Irreverence from the national majority.” (18 y. o., a German boy)

- “There must be children – chauvinists in order to create such conflicts already in the childhood.” (16 y. o., a Russian girl)
- “We are poor.” (12 y. o., a Gypsy girl)
- “South nationalities are more shameless, Gypsies walk around with knives and sell narcotics, Russians beat Latvians.” (17 y. o., a Russian boy)
- “Material difficulties, social protection (a Russian orphan, but they don’t pay benefits to him that are granted by the law.)” (17 y. o., a Russian girl)

27. The answers to the questions “What problems do you have that are related to the nationality or the citizenship?” are grouped in the following way:



Graph 25. Percentage representing how many children have problems not related to their nationality or citizenship

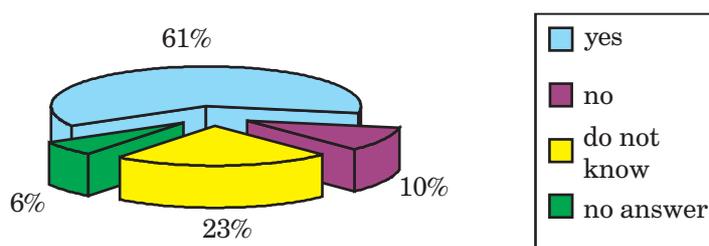
Social problems 23%	Social protection Work Funds Money for living Place of living, flat Dress Bad knowledge of Latvian Expensive textbooks Inaccessibility to the places of entertainment Health Uncertainties about the future Dissatisfaction with oneself
Educational problems 38%	The higher education establishment (fees, choice) The choice of profession Bad marks School Teachers Delayed issue of diploma
Personal problems	Overwork Bad relations to the parents, family problems Problems with friends Psychological problems Different nationalities of the parents

Table 3. Problems causing discomfort for ethnic minority children not related to the nationality or the citizenship

Quotations:

- “I am concerned about my future, the choice of the profession – where to study, how will I live in EU, what rights will I have.” (18 y. o., Russian, a non-citizen)
- “The issuing of the diplomas at the end of July disturbs entering in the educational institutions abroad.” (18 y. o., a Russian girl)
- “It is difficult to go to other state to continue education.” (18 y. o., a Byelorussian, a non-citizen)
- “Social protection of the new specialists and families” (17 y. o., a Russian girl)

28. The following answers were given to the question “Do you think that there exist different (better, worse) attitude towards children depending on their nationality in Latvia (discrimination of ethnic minority children)?”



Graph 26. Distribution of the opinion that there exist different attitude towards children depending on their nationality in Latvia

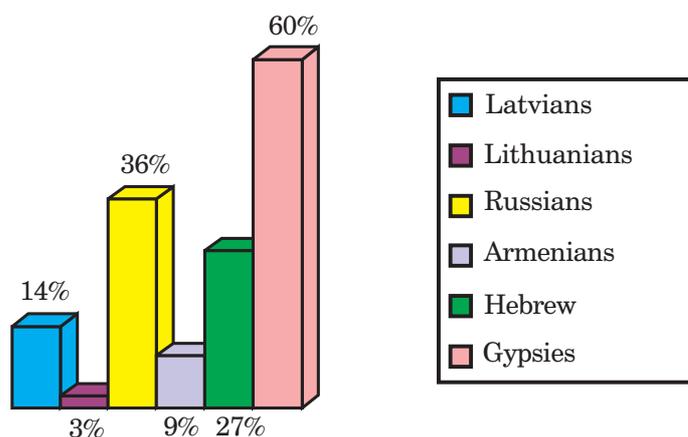
The situation of Latvia is serious and demand for a solution, so it is necessary to reconsider the educational work in minority schools and new specialists should be attracted, especially people from other countries where the principles of work are based on tolerance, respect towards the diversity of the world nationalities, the ability to find the most important things, to stress the positive in the collaboration of the nationalities of the world. If approach to the solution of the issues will not change in the country and the ethnic minority teachers will not see the importance of the issue themselves, children and youth will continue to live under the conditions of psychological and physical stress in the schools. Many pedagogues should revise their opinions on the mutual integration of the nationalities living in the territory themselves. Separate programmes for education of teachers for work at ethnic minority schools should be prepared in the country.

Quotations from the questionnaires:

- “Latvians of our school think that all bad things are always done by Russians.” (15 y. o., a Russian girl)
- “I don’t love Latvians and I behave towards them neutrally. I do not react to them at all.” (16 y. o., a Russian boy)
- “Bad attitude from Latvians – officials in various authorities.” (17 y. o., a Russian boy)
- “It does not depend on nationality. Only the policy of our state may provoke conflicts among different nationality children. They do not arise by themselves.” (17 y. o., a Latvian Russian girl)

- “I cannot feel in Latvia as at home. Latvia does not accept me although I have been born and grown here.” (17 y.o., a Russian girl, a citizen)
- “I don’t like Latvian, I think, it is an idiotic language, but the majority of Latvians are stupid.” (16 y. o., a Russian boy)

29. Children have found difficulties in answering on the question “The children of what nationality are being discriminated most (receive worse attitude)?” A part of answers are given basing on the situation in the world. The children who have answered ‘no’ to the previous question, point out to nationalities at this question.



Graph 27. Percentage reflecting the nationalities of children that are most discriminated

Other: Byelorussians, Estonians, Ukrainians, Georgians, Caucasians, Chinese, South Vietnamese, Afro-Americans, Tatars, Asiatics, Chechens, Arabs, Islam believers.

The children guide themselves by the wording “worse attitude”.

A quotation from the questionnaires

An example: “Estonians – jokes. People use to judge on Estonians by negative jokes (16. y. o., a Russian boy). There is told about situations common in Estonia – when asked about the right way an Estonian does not point to the right direction if you don’t ask it in Estonian, especially, if the question is put in Russian. There have been precedents in Estonia that international conference is held in Estonian without interpretation. Such cases are very rare in Latvia, but conferences without interpretations for foreigners have not taken place. Latvia, on its turn, have other negative traits better seen by Estonians or Lithuanians, who reflect them in their own jokes. It is popular to call Latvians “horses’ heads”, because people used horse flesh for their food in Latvia.”

The answers show that children of those nationalities are more discriminated, about which the society has less knowledge. In fact, the more other nationalities are respected by the representatives of each nationality, the more they are respected themselves. A part of answers are only myths created by the society, since the society has a general opinion that some of the nationalities are discriminated more. Thus, Russian children consider the learning of Latvian as the source of oppression, what, in fact, is not an oppression of this

nationality, but a possibility to become competitive in the country they are living in. Rather many Russians are of opinion that Latvian is not necessary and it is sufficient, if they know Russian and English.

30. The following answers were received to the question “Do you know ethnic minority children (non-Latvians) who feel discomfort

- a) because they feel lonely and depressed
- b) because they don’t have anybody to speak, exchange ideas, ask an advice
- c) because nobody trust in them
- d) because they have no friends
- e) because they are always angry and aggressive
- f) because they think on suicide
- g) other variant?”

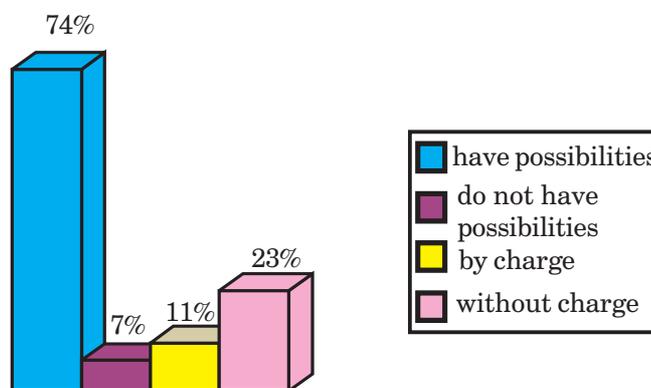
No.	Many	Some	Nobody
a)	5%	26%	33%
b)	6%	18%	34%
c)	7%	17%	34%
d)	5%	19%	39%
e)	5%	23%	33%
f)	3%	15%	36%
g)	7%	14%	

Table 4 The percentage of ethnic minority children having psycho-emotional problems

Quotations from questionnaires answering on the point g - “Other variant”

- “Not because the nationality but because love” (16 y. o., a Russian girl)
- “Cannot go out in the society” (17 y. o., a Russian girl)
- “Those who are not satisfied with parent’s prohibitions (prohibitions for separate nationalities)” (17 y. o., a Russian girl)
- “Those who are afraid of everything” (16 y. o., a Russian boy)

31. “Do you have a possibility to meet a psychologist when you wish it?”



Graph 28. Access to a psychologist

19% of the respondents have not answered this question on the possibilities. Children have not wished to answer the second part of this question about the charge. The most probable variant – they do not know it.

32. “What do you wish to improve in relations among the children, children and grown-ups of different nationalities in Latvia?”

Also the following proposals are made:

- **to teach more history**
- **to pay more attention to children**
- **to keep to the principles of equality**
- **to give citizenship to all the residents**
- **to promote political tolerance**

Quotations form the questionnaires:

- **“Latvia has to end the suppression of Russian language, traditions.” (18 y. o., a Russian boy)**
- **“Only Latvian nation should be in Latvia.” (17 y. o., a Byelorussian boy)**
- **“It is necessary to teach more history to people.” (17 y. o., a Hebrew boy)**
- **“Relations among children will be established when the grownups will end to think on nationality.” (18 y. o., a Russian girl)**
- **“To end the school reform. Latvian citizenship should be given to all the residents of Latvia and those who are born there.” (17 y. o., a Pole boy, a citizen)**

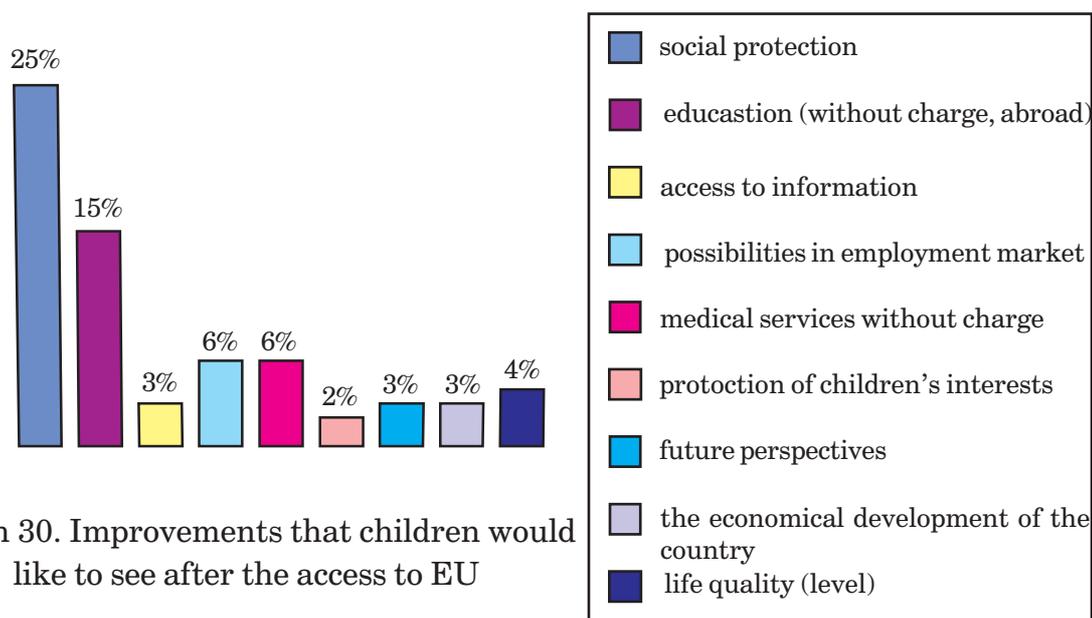
- “In order to improve relations, people need to be more tolerant and the opinions about the citizenship should be revised.” (17 y. o., a Russian boy, a citizen)
- “They must not blame everybody for the occupation.” (17 y. o., a Pole girl)
- “The cause of misunderstandings is that children of various nationalities do not contact among themselves.” (17 y. o., a Byelorussian boy)
- “They don’t need to manipulate by children to defend their interests, the children have not deserve it.” (16 y. o., a Russian girl)
- “Regard one to another, since we live in one country, for many of us it is our Motherland.” (17 y. o., a Russian girl, a non-citizen)
- “Politicians should stop to “make bubbles” of the national problem.” (18 y. o., a Russian girl, non-citizen)
- “The Satversme (the Constitution) says, that children have rights to receive education in their native tongue.” (17 y. o., a Russian girl)
- “Oh, gosh, it’s irrelevant to me!” (18 y. o., a human – Lithuanian)
- “To acknowledge the local traditions and to shut up Zhdanoka and Pliners!” (17 y. o., a Russian boy)

Tatjan Zhdanok is an active struggler for the rights of Russians, the deputy of European Parliament.

Jakovs Pliners – the deputy of the RL Saeima, one of the leading activists of the Russian Protection Headquarters

- “Not to call non-citizens by brutish names” (16 y. o., a Lithuanian girl)
- “They may speak Chinese if they are not able to speak Russian.” (17 y. o., a Russian girl)
- “All the problems are based on the policy. The politicians should clarify their relations at first.” (17 y. o., a Ukrainian girl)
- “More Russians in Latvian forms” (14 y. o., a Russian boy)

33. “What would you like to be improved in your and other children – non-citizens’ lives after the accession to European Union (in the social and other areas of life unrelated to the nationality)?”



Graph 30. Improvements that children would like to see after the access to EU

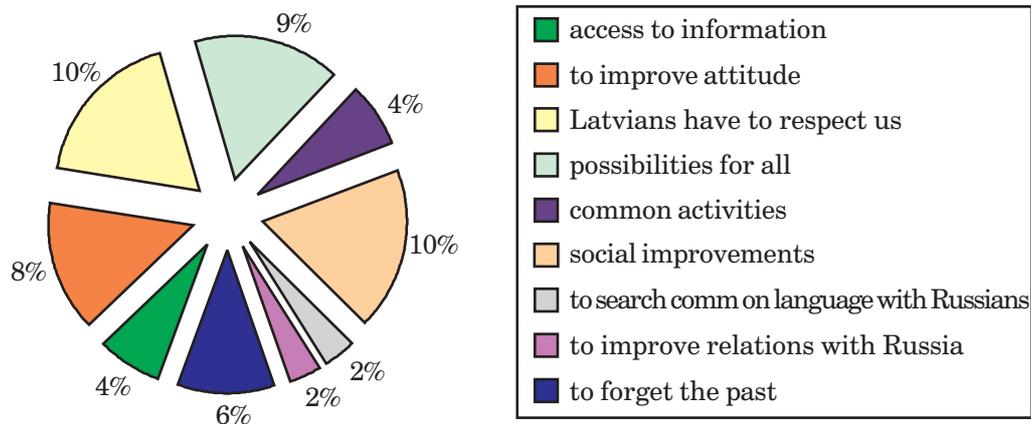
The following proposals are made:

- To provide work and living area for the new specialists
- Safety
- Common activities in order to bring different nationalities together
- Programmes for young people in the employment market
- The possibilities to have education abroad (without charge)
- The social area – increase in allowances; services free of charge – benefits, decrease in prices, the increase of pensions
- Employment market – jobs for pupils during their holidays, the possibilities to work abroad, employment programmes, work in the state institutions

Quotations from the questionnaires:

- “I want that children might express their opinion and be listened in.” (17 y. o., a Russian girl)
- “Not to have wandering and ill-used children in the streets” (19 y. o., a Russian girl)
- “Possibilities to work. The possibilities to receive allowance that is sufficient for a family for living (700–800 LVL per month)” (18 y. o., a Russian boy)
- “Children not having parents should be provided with food and clothes.” (15 y. o., a Lithuanian girl)
- “It would be nice, if school accessories and books would become cheaper, also transport would be cheaper for children. I am lucky with my school, but the situation is very bad in other schools sometimes. They should think on improvements.” (17 y. o., a Latvian Lithuanian girl) *It is about municipal and state subsidies, and EU support.*
- “The first, free of charge education in European Union, increased salaries for teachers, doctors, policemen.” (18 y. o., a Ukrainian girl)
- “Not to begin conflicts with Russians, otherwise they’ll receive back!” (13 y. o., a Russian boy)
- “Not to join European Union.” (15 y. o., a Russian girl, a non-citizen)
- “That something new appeared at our village; otherwise it is possible to die of the boredom.” (13 y. o., a Latvian Russian boy)
- “Education and work in other countries” (17 y. o., a Russian girl)
- “More teachers from abroad” (17 y. o., a Russian boy)
- “That there would not be orphanages and children would live in families.” (18 y. o., a Russian boy)
- “I want that children would have no problems with teachers and they would not yell at us because we don’t like to them.” (14 y. o., a Russian girl)

34. “What should be done to improve your life and the lives of other ethnic minority children in order to prevent problems related to your belonging to other nationality (not the basic nationality)?” Your proposals:



Graph 31. What should be done to improve ethnic minority children's life

The following proposals are made:

- 2 state languages
- to stop the reform of education
- to regulate the problem at the level of EU
- citizenship for all
- to listen in the society
- to teach the Russian language to Latvians

Latvian children should

- “Think less about nationalities. People are divided into bad and good.” (16 y. o., a Russian girl)
- “Not to be as representatives of a higher race” (19 y. o., a Russian girl)
- “To leave away their arrogance (and the Russian society should do the same).” (18 y. o., a Russian girl)
- “To understand that “Latvians in Latvia” – it is a nightmare” (17 y. o., a Russian boy)
- “Not to listen in the tales of grandmothers and grandfathers on the “bad” Russians – occupants and not to create biases that Russians should not live in Latvia.” (17 y. o., a Russian girl)
- “It is enough to repeat at school that the USSR occupied the poor Latvia and took away its sacred independence in a gusty and villainous way.” (18 y. o., a Ukrainian girl, a non-citizen)
- “To keep fingers and not to boast.” (17 y. o., a Russian boy)
- “To become wiser and to dress more acceptably” (17 y. o., a Russian girl)
- “They should not detest Russians. Children are not guilty on that their ancestries were in war and occupied Latvia.” (14 y. o., a Lithuanian girl)
- “Regardless the nationality, it is necessary to know the state language and to communicate in it.” (16 y. o., a Russian girl)

- “Not to suppress other nationalities or be better than they.” (16 y. o., a Ukrainian girl)
- “Their parents should teach their children to good, they should try to resemble Russian parents.” (17 y. o., a Russian girl)
- “To entomb them all.” (17 y. o., a Russian boy)
- “To dress more simply, not to show off, to keep away from us.” (17 y. o., a Russian boy, a citizen)
- “To send them all to Siberia and EU” (17 y. o., a Russian boy, a citizen)
- “Not to be so stupid” (16 y. o., a Russian boy, a citizen)
- “To finish thinking that they are the “salt of the Earth”” (18 y. o., a Russian girl)
- “Not to vijebivatsja”¹ (16 y. o., a Latvian Russian boy)

The Latvian society in general

- “To change the attitude towards Russia” (18 y. o., a Russian girl)
- “To forget the developments that occurred more than 50 years ago.” (17 y. o., a Russian girl)
- “To respect the Russian nation because, if we were not here, they would be under Germans till now.” (18 y. o., a Russian boy)
- “To change the attitude towards Gypsies” (12 y. o., a Gypsy boy)
- “To confess their mistakes” (18 y. o., a Hebrew girl)
- “To understand Russians correctly and to admit the right history” (18 y. o., a Russian girl, a citizen)
- “To understand that Russians are a great nation and they will not give away because of their mentality and character” (18 y. o., a Russian girl, a citizen)
- “Not to be offended by things that do not exist for long already” (17 y. o., a Pole girl)
- “Not to forget what happened in past. To respect the Russian flag” (18 y. o., a Russian boy)
- “Not to tell lies on Gypsies” (12 y. o., a Gypsy girl)
- “Not to be so greedy” (18 y. o., a Latvian Gypsy boy)
- “You think, we will forgive it to you and forget. You sweep your feet on us now, but remember – we can answer.” (17 y. o., a Byelorussian boy)
- “Turn more attention to children.” (13 y. o., a Latvian Russian boy)
- “To be less.” (13 y. o., a Russian boy)
- “To die.” (17 y. o., a Russian boy)
- “To stop feeling like former slaves (what is hard, of course).” (17 y. o., a Russian girl)
- “The society needs to understand that Latvia has no future, if it will not improve its relations with Russia.” (16 y. o., a Russian girl)
- “It is in the state to cast out Pliners, Kabanovs and “the headquarterists”, to eliminate Garda” (17 y. o., a Latvian Russian boy, a citizen) *Latvians and Russians having nationalistic or radical views are meant here.*
- “To put steel doors and bars for windows as soon as possible” (16 y. o., a Russian boy)
- “To buy some brain” (17 y. o., a Russian boy, a citizen)

¹ Āūžīuāņņ – (*Russ., a vulgārišm*) to show off

- “They are stupid, they keep to long inexistent insults, they are revengeful, pitiable creations.” (17 y. o., a Russian girl, a citizen)
- “They don’t need to play heroes” (18 y. o., a Russian boy, a citizen)
- “To respect other nationalities and to understand that they can become a minority themselves” (16 y. o., a Russian girl, a citizen)
- “Not to behave as at home” (16 y. o., a Latvian Russian girl, a citizen)

Municipal and other authorities who can really help to improve the international environment

- “To take care, to look what children are lacking” (18 y. o., a Ukrainian girl)
- “To inform the society” (17 y. o., a Lithuanian girl)
- “To close the Museum of Occupation” (17 y. o., a Russian boy)
- “To offer job for my mother” (17 y. o., a Gypsy girl)
- “I don’t know if it is possible to educate the police officials.” (18 y. o., a Lithuanian boy)
- “To introduce the society to the concrete work they perform on the behalf of people” (18 y. o., a Russian boy)
- “To have a good attitude towards everybody who turns to them” (18 y. o., a Ukrainian girl, a citizen)
- “Separate schools (for Latvians, Russians)” (13 y. o., a Russian boy)
- “To work not to have a rest in their offices and receive salary” (17 y. o., a Latvian Russian boy)
- “They all are “bribe takers”. There are no places to work in summer.” (16 y. o., a Russian boy)
- “Not to put the money into the pocket, but to invest it where is its proper place.” (18 y. o., a Latvian Gypsy)
- “Get off, leave Russians in peace!” (16 y. o., a Russian boy, non-citizen)

Decision makers in Latvia

- “To be more severe towards nationalistic orators” (18 y. o., a Russian girl)
- “To listen in the society” (16 y. o., a Byelorussian girl)
- “To turn Russian into the second state language” (18 y. o., a Russian boy)
- “To provide citizenship for all, to allow Russians to take part in elections and to become full-bodied members of the society, to improve the quality of life and to raise the level of life” (17 y. o., a Russian boy)
- “To carry out reforms so that less provoking materials would be in mass media” (16 y. o., a Hebrew boy)
- “Equality for our country!” (17 y. o., a Hebrew boy)
- “To pay attention to more important things, but not to creating conflicts between the Latvian society and ethnic minorities.” (18 y. o., a Russian boy)
- “They need to think a little bit more by their heads about people living in the street without food for several days in a row.” (17 y. o., a Russian girl)
- “To accept the situation in the schools (Russian)” (17 y. o., a Tartar girl),
- “Let a Russian be the president of Latvia!” (16 y. o., a Hebrew boy)
- “To pay less to deputies and more to pensioners and children” (13 y. o., a Russian boy)

- “To pay higher salaries to other inhabitants of Latvia” (13 y. o., a Latvian Russian boy)
- “To influence the government of Latvia to keep to EU norms, not only to “give advices”” (16 y. o., a Russian boy)
- “Let them look more to Latvians and see that they are „nahals”² (14 y. o., a Russian girl)
- “Forget about your purses, although it is not real!” (17 y. o., a Latvian Russian boy)
- “To stop propaganda of Latvians that promote an undeserving attitude towards the representatives of the minor nationalities” (18 y. o., a Russian girl, a citizen)
- “I will not forget the reform and nobody of the Russian speakers will not forgive it to you” (18 y. o., a Russian boy, a non-citizen)
- “To resign and to turn back the stolen. To eliminate the frank-masons from the country.” (17 y. o., a Latvian Russian boy, citizen)
- “To hang up yourself” (16 y. o., a Russian boy, a non-citizen)
- “To take less money in hands. To meat Zhirinovsky. Not to lick up the fifth point of the USA and not to blow the guff about Russia.” (17 y. o., a Russian boy, a citizen)
- “To resign and to give job for Russians” (17 y. o., a Russian boy, a citizen)
- “I wish them not to live for long” (17 y. o., a Russian boy, a citizen)
- “The debile, they don’t understand people’s tongue!” (17 y. o., a Russian boy, a citizen)
- “Hey are stupid. They only steal and think how to filth more money” (15 y. o., a Russian boy, a non-citizen)
- “We need Russian deputies and the President!” (15 y. o., a Russian boy, a citizen)

European Union decision makers

- To understand that the state in multinational” (16 y. o., a Russian boy)
- “The decisions must be loyal” (18 y. o., a Russian girl)
- “To evaluate the facts, not the emotions” (18 y. o., a Hebrew boy)
- “They should think on that Russian and other nationality children would have a possibility to learn in their native tongue.” (15 y. o., a Russian girl)
- “Let all the inhabitants be of one nationality” (15 y. o., a Russian girl, a citizen)
Evidently, it is meant that the nationality would not be marked in the passport, but only the citizenship as it is in many other countries.
- “No to try to revenge by such methods for the weakness of Latvia in the past and to weaken it again by it” (16 y. o., a Russian boy)
- “To put a photograph of a watery European girl on the 100 euro bill” (17 y. o., a Latvian girl by the passport)
- “To abrogate the reform, since chemistry, physics, mathematics is impossible in Latvian. If I have to sit at home by hours to translate the terms, how can I learn the subject?” (17 y. o., a Russian girl)
- “To fund the organization “Save the Children” (16 y. o., a Russian boy)

In general, only a part of the ideas expressed by the ethnic minority children evidence on the understanding of the history of Latvia, rather it is a deny of the history already by the family taken over by the children from their parents. The majority of the young people and children feel themselves as the representatives of their nationality, but do not

¹ қадағ – (Russ., colloquial language) an impudent person

understand their belonging to the society of Latvia, they have not noticed their perspectives, their future among the nationalities of European Union. The answers evidence on the lack of mutual tolerance among different nationality children in Latvia that means the lack of educational activities. The situation tends to deteriorate, so the grownups need to think about new educational programmes as in the formal education, as well as in the informal one, taking a special care on the children and young people's possibilities to travel and to have new experiences in the integration process of other nationalities.

CONCLUSIONS BASING ON THE RESULTS OF THE QUESTIONING OF ETHNIC MINORITY (MINORITY NATIONALITY) CHILDREN

1. The children lack information on the perspectives of their education and employment (these are issues most urgent in youth).

2. There is no clarity about the possibilities of the citizens in EU. (An opinion predominates that other nationality people are restricted in their rights for education and employment only because of their nationality. It is not clear about the differences between a citizen and a non-citizen.)

3. An opinion predominates that citizens – Latvians have access to a better social services and social protection.

If something demanded is provided in some area, there is an opinion that it is because a person is of other nationality.

The demands for the social area are very high:

- An education (the higher) without charge in the native tongue in Latvia;
- The Government has to provide a possibility to continue education in EU countries without charge;
- To establish exchange programmes for pupils;
- To provide the new specialists and families with apartments;
- To provide young people and schoolchildren with work during summer holidays

4. The record on the nationality in the passport bears a formal meaning. The major part of the respondents representing various nationalities considers the native tongue to be Russian (see points 5 and 6).

When answering the question about the keeping to the national traditions, one of the respondents writes that “speaking the national language means keeping to traditions.”

5. The children think that international strain is caused by politicians and mass media.

6. The children wish to have common activities, since they consider the lack of communication to be the main cause of the mutual misunderstanding.

THE PROPOSALS FOR DECREASING THE PROBLEMS REVEALED BY THE QUESTIONING OF ETHNIC MINORITY (MINORITY NATIONALITY) CHILDREN

1. To involve ethnic minority and basic nationality children in the decision making process, if this decision is related to them:

a) to establish a Children's Board with some NGO, for example, the Association of National Culture Societies or "Save the Children", or any other NGO.

2. Informative activities (using the mass media of the ministries or by the state funded broadcasts)

To explain the following issues to the children:

- What are the rights of citizens, the possibilities for education, for work in other EU Member states. (The reason: teenagers from secondary schools and gymnasiums have the idea that regardless that if he or she is a citizen or not, going abroad (to EU) is difficult and demands many formalities.)
- If there are any differences in the receiving of social services (amount, quality, etc.) depending on if it is a citizen Latvian or a citizen Russian, or other nationality citizen?
- A comparative material is necessary on the possibilities of non-citizens and citizens in our country and some other EU country (the children think that everything one wishes is accessible in other countries).
- Informative materials on the continuation of education abroad are necessary. Information on the costs of studies, curricula, demands would be suitable. (The children think that the state must provide free education as in Latvia, as well as in EU countries.)

2. To secure rights to keep the ethnic identity by broadcasts on the radio and TV for the officially registered ethnic minority children.

3. To organize larger (country level) and smaller (municipality level) activities, camps, forums, discussions for children of difference nationalities.

4. To organize the days of information once per month related to ethnic minority problems:

- where children might receive individual answers to their questions;
- where they might get to know the place to find an answer or to solve a problem.

5. To organize a day of information once per month in municipalities (for any inhabitants) related to the problems of ethnic minorities:

- to provide answers;
- to help by contacts (suggestions where to go for an answer or a solution).

6. Social aid is necessary for schools attended by Gypsy children (at Ventspils, for example). The questionnaires show that school accessories or other necessary things are lacking.

7. It is necessary to research additionally:

- The situation with Gypsy children (separate questionnaires);
- A questioning for Latvian children in order to compare the opinions in some arguable or differently treated issues.

RESULTS OF THE QUESTIONING Of Children with special needs*

LATVIAN SAVE THE CHILDREN – Presiding organization of Latvian NGO Children’s Rights Network

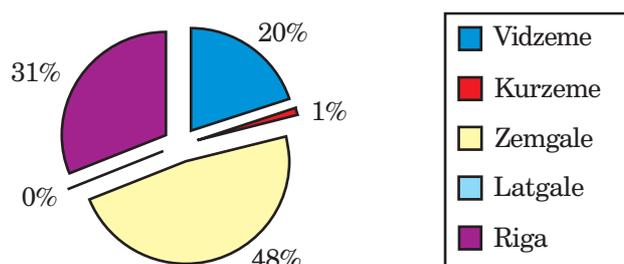
Characterization of the enquiry

178 children from Vidzeme, Kurzeme, Zemgale and Riga took part in the enquiry.

The age of children is from 4 to 18 years. The age of 11% of the respondents is from 19 to 22 years. These young people took part in the poll, since they learn in the specialized schools and their mental development correspond to the mental development of a child. The results of the enquiry reflect only a part of the problems, since only children learning in schools or rehabilitation institutions were asked, so, they have an access to education and rehabilitation. The problems of those children that are left outside an adequate care system are shown by the Report on Latvian Network of Children Rights NGO’s made by „Save the Children”.

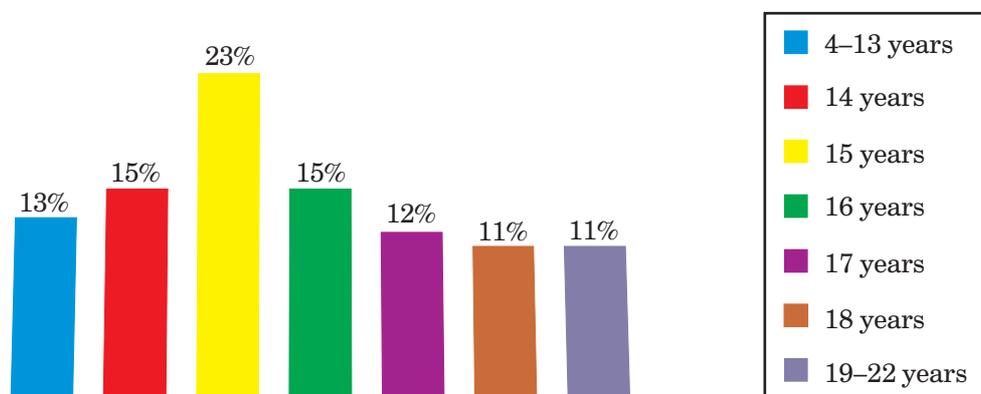
Questions and answers

1. Your place of living



Graph 1. Distribution of children in the regions of Latvia

2. Your age



Graph 2. Distribution of respondents by age groups

* The results of the enquiry do not reflect the situation of the disabled in general, since only children having access to professional care in special establishments.

A comment:

Also 19 to 22 years old young people took part in the enquiry, if their mental development corresponded to the level of a child, so they could express their opinion.

3. Diagnosis

F-70 (slight mental slowness) 36.5%

Polyomielithis (without mental slowness) 14%

Schizophrenia 1%

Bone and posture diseases 12.5%

(osteoporosis, bone aplasia, backbone deformation, kyphosis, juvenile rheumatoid arthritis, plexitis of hands and shoulders)

Scoliosis 15.8%

Partial deafness 6.7%

Other 13.5%

(Shereshevskis-Terner's syndrome, mental diseases, split of the palate, osteopathy, lever cirrhosis, electric burns, deformations of muscles – dystrophy, arthrogryposis, angiosarcoma, tetraparesis, pseudoarthrosis, diabetes, myopathy)

A comment:

The children's answers confirm psychological and emotional discomfort felt by a large part of disabled children. Especially isolation of such children from other children and people who might give an advice is stressed. 8.4% of children have answered they know at least some children thinking on suicide.

4. Do you know disabled children

a) who feel lonely or depressed

b) who have nobody to speak with, to exchange opinions, to ask an advice

c) to whom nobody trusts in

d) having no friends

e) who are always angry, aggressive

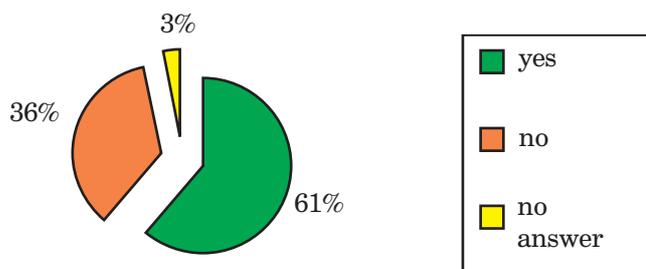
f) thinking on suicide

g) other: nobody loves them, do not know anybody to trust in, teasing everybody

How many such children do you know? How many

	many	some	nobody
	4%	31%	38%
	0.5%	19.5%	28.6%
	1%	15.5%	22.4%
	4.5%	21%	22.4%
	1.5%	17.5%	30.3%
	–	8.4%	36%
	7%	5.6%	17.5%

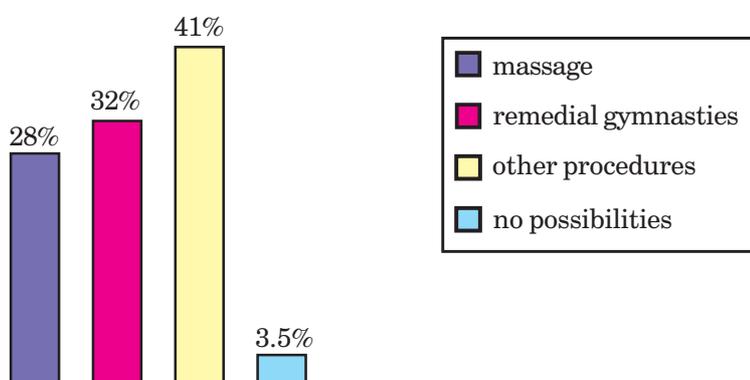
5. Have you an access to the centres of social rehabilitation as often as necessary?



Graph 3. Accessibility of rehabilitation centres for children

About 40% of the enquired children confirm that their access to rehabilitation centres is insufficient, but the real number is much larger since those children having no access to any care did not take part in the inquiry.

6. Are you provided with the necessary treatment and procedures at your place of living?



Graph 4. Distribuiton of percent representing treatment for children

A comment:

Only a part of the enquired children has an access to the necessary treatment and procedures at their place of living.

7. Have you a possibility to meet a psychologist when you want it?

Have a possibility – 52.2%

No possibilities – 17.5%

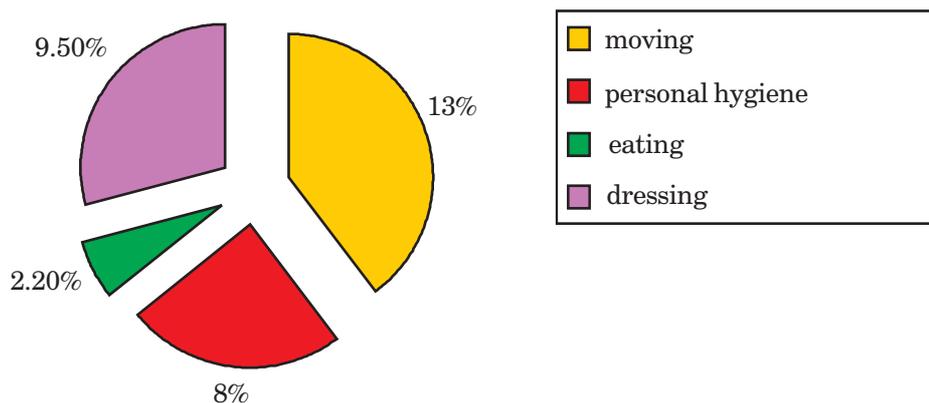
By charge – 13.5%

Without charge – 40%

A comment:

Only a half of children confirm a possibility to meet a psychologist in the case of necessity. These numbers explain the answers provided with the point 4, including the thinking about suicide.

8. Do you need other persons' assistance?

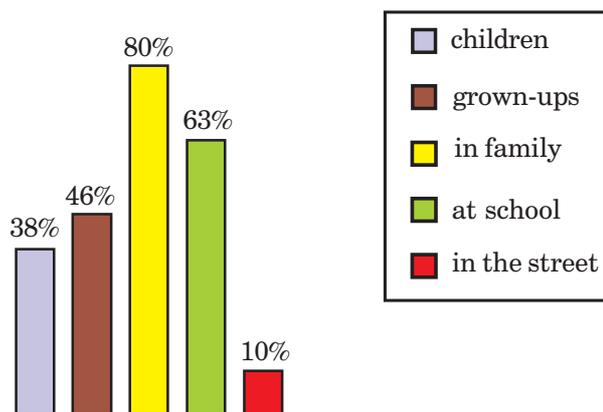


Graph 5. Number of children in need for other persons' assistance

A comment:

About 1/3 of children is in need for other persons' assistance in providing their essential needs. It means, the country must take care on the means of support and social guarantees for the relatives upbringing their children on their own instead of giving them away to special care establishments in order to go to work.

9. Do you feel support and understanding from other people?

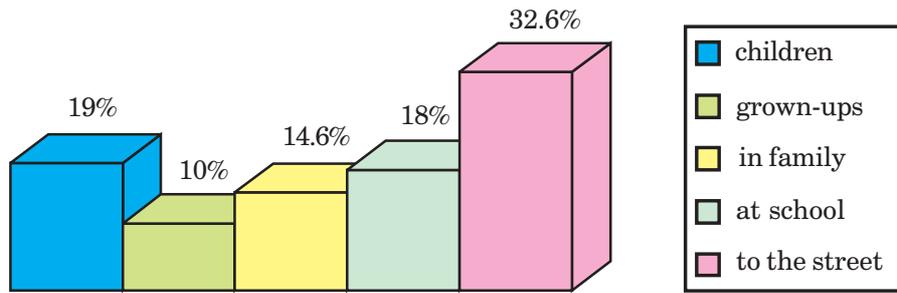


Graph 6. The number of children feeling support and understanding from other people

A comment:

Much work is still to be done so as the disabled children might feel understood and supported. 1/5 of the children do not feel support by the family, 2/5 of the children feel misunderstood at school. Only 2/5 of the children feel understanding from other children and the grown-ups, only 1/10 of the disabled children feel support from the people in the street.

10. Do you feel irresponsiveness from other people?

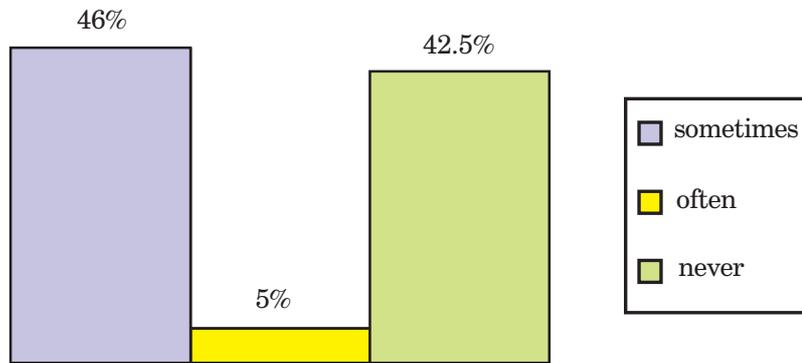


Graph 7. The number of children feeling irresponsiveness from other people

A comment:

Disabled children feel unsupported, 1/6 of these children feels it even in their own family, 1/5 of the children at school and from other children, but, for the most part, in the street of course.

11. Do you feel helpless and castaway?



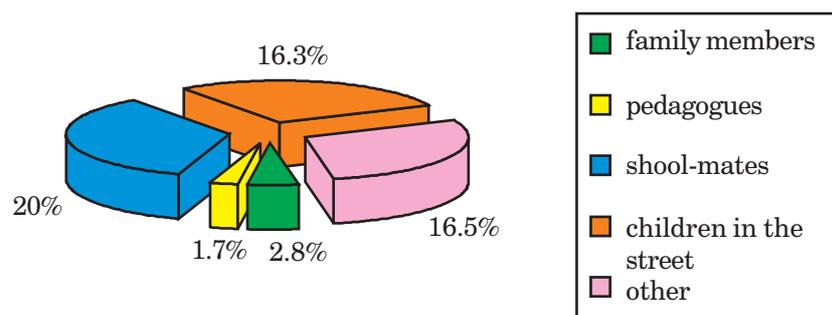
Graph 8. The number of children feeling helpless and castaway

A comment:

The attitude towards disabled people differs in the old and new EU countries very much and it is necessary to diminish this difference as soon as possible.

The authors of the research have put similar questions on purpose. People feeling emotional suffering, humiliation or discrimination for a longer time do not wish to express it openly. But, varied questions promote openness.

12. Do any persons cheat and abuse you?



Graph 9. Cheating and abuse

A comment:

These answers evidence a very high proportion of disabled children suffering from abuse such as humiliation, cheating, etc.

The largest% of these children suffers from abuse in educational establishments and in the street. “Save the Children” has prepared a movie against violation and for creation of children-friendly environment in educational establishments, but the Ministry of Welfare of the Republic of Latvia taking charge about these children, has rejected to fund the copying of this movie, although this ministry has a large budget for the solution of such issues.

13. Have you any difficulties in moving?

- a. I have difficulties to move – 18%
- b. I have to wear prosthetics – 2%
- c. I need other special equipment – 18,7% (from 2.2% of children do not have them)

A comment:

This inquiry regards only the enquired children we met in various establishments and it does not characterize the situation of the country in general. Actually, many children have not qualitative special equipment and prosthetics at all (in social risk families and in ordinary families as well during various stages of growing) (see the Report on the Network of Children Rights).

Quotations from the questionnaires:

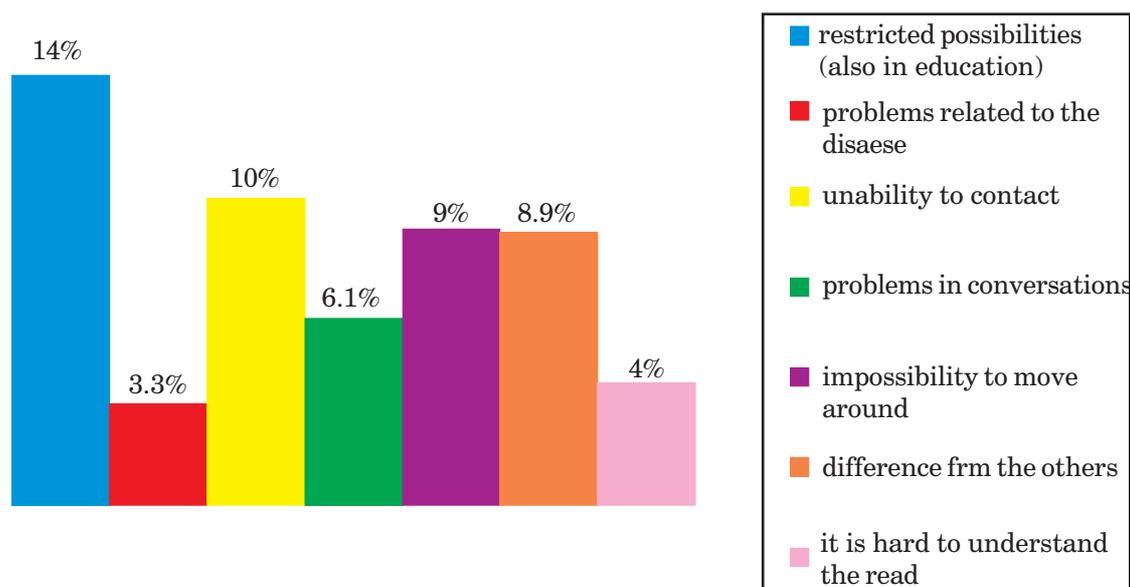
- “I do not walk, nor creep” (4 years old, osteopathy)
- “It is difficult, my stomach is large” (5 y. o., liver cirrhosis)
- “I can receive surgical boots only one pair for free and only once per year” (16 y. o., polymielithis, mental and physical slowness)
- “I would need a closet at the bed and something to get into the bath. There’s nothing.” (17 y. o., backbone deformation, mielodisplasion)
- “Shorter (6 cm) legs after an operation” (11 y. o., inborn pseudoarthrosis)
- “The prosthetics tears often, so I cannot go in sports often” (15 y. o., polymielithis)
- “It is difficult to walk when my left leg is cramped” (15 y. o., scoliosis)

14. Name everything that does not let you feel good!
- The disease – 21.3%
 - Children mistreat me (cheat, touch physically) – 18%
 - The family (quarrels, parents' work, alcohol) – 7.5%
 - The environment – 7.8%
 - The lack of possibilities – 4.5%

Quotations from the questionnaires:

- “I do not hear. I don't like others to yell at me” (15 y. o., a damaged auditory nerve)
- “Little money in the family, quarrels with my brother. The hearing people do not understand me.” (15 y. o., impaired hearing)
- **“They cheat me at school, they think I am fool. But I am not.”** (16 y. o., slight mental slowness)
- “The deformation of my chest; when I lay on the stomach it is pressed and hurts.” (15 y. o., thorax deformation)
- **“The beds are too old and short in the boarding-school”** (15 y. o., scoliosis)
- “My crippled hip when I look in the mirror” (15 y. o., scoliosis)
- **“The distance from my home does not let me feel good”** (15 y. o., scoliosis)
- “The device is heavy sometimes and it is hard to walk” (15 y. o., poliomyelitis)
- **“Almost nothing is fitted to people with such problems in our country”** (17 y. o., poliomyelitis)
- “The toilet rooms are not well equipped at school” (20 y. o., mental slowness)
- “Lack of friends, lack of entertainment, I cannot get out of my home” (17 y. o., backbone deformation)
- “There is a lack of support and understanding from the representatives of the authorities” (15 y. o., on psychiatric register)
- “The conditions at home, the oldest son” (15 y. o., on psychiatric register)

15. Which are the main problems caused by your disability?



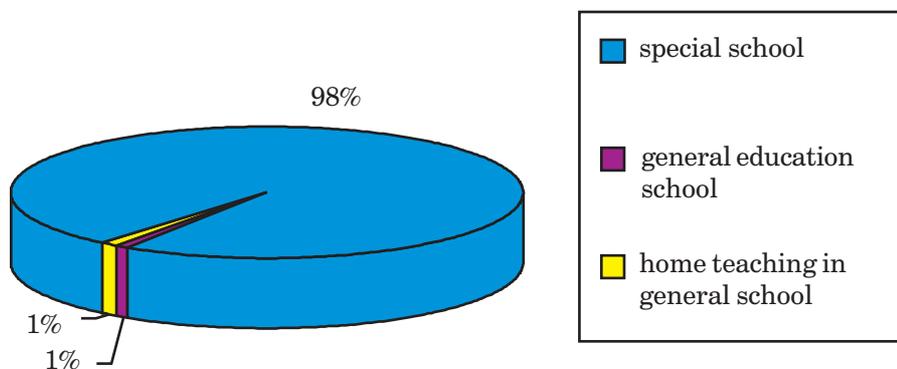
Graph 10. Main problems related to disability

16. Do you know other children with similar problems as your?

How many such children do you know?

many	several	nobody
28%	28.4%	27.5%

17. Where do you learn?



Graph 11. Distribution of children within schools

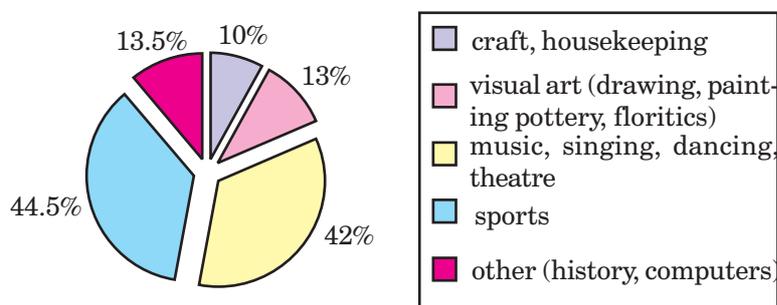
A comment:

About 15,000 children do not receive any education in Latvia (are not registered with any educational establishment). A part of these children are children having special needs and the major part of them is not identified by any municipal or governmental authorities.

18. If you learn in a general education school, is it

- a. It is easier for you to learn comparing to the others – 18%
- b. You feel, it is harder for you to learn than for the others – 2.2%
- c. You think, other way to acquire the subjects would be necessary – 2.2%

19. Are you involved in extracurricular activities at school?

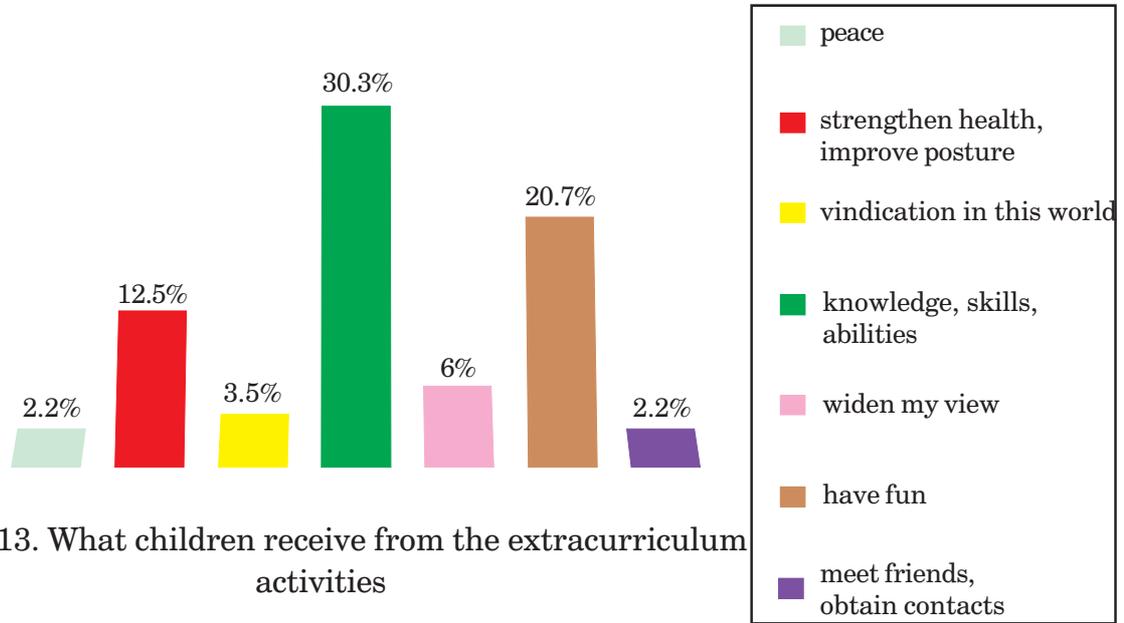


Graph 12. Extracurriculum activities involving disabled children

A comment:

The situation with interest education for children has improved since 2002 in Latvia, when the Ministry of Education and Science managed to find more funding. It happened because the Minister of Education and Science had to report on children in the UNO General Assembly's session In New York.

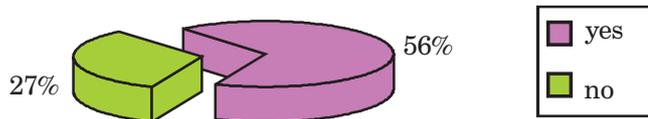
20. Are you interested in them and what do you find in these activities?



Graph 13. What children receive from the extracurriculum activities

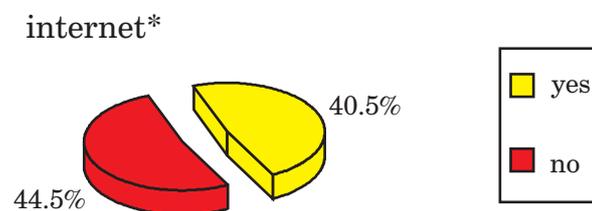
21. Have you and other disabled children a regular access to a computer*

i.



Graph 14. Number of children having access to a computer

ii.

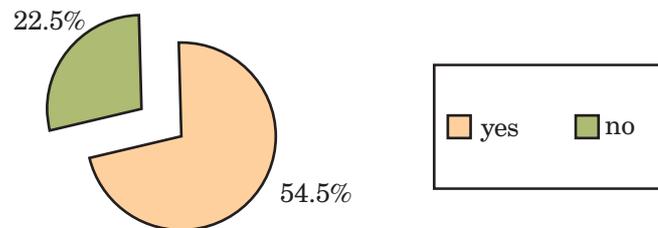


Graph 15. Numbr of children having a regular access to internet

* The mentioned answers are not credible, because the situation with a regular access to computers and, especially, internet is very poor, so an additional enquiry was carried out. It became clear after it, that children principally have an access to computers in the

establishments where they go through a course of rehabilitation. But, they have no possibilities to have a sufficient access to a computer and internet in their places of living or basic educational establishments. Communication by internet is not accessible at all within a large part of the territory of Latvia, there are even municipal authorities having no access to internet at present.

22. Do you and other disabled children attend culture and sport events regularly and are they without charge?



Graph 16. Number of children attending culture and sport events regularly

A comment:

1/5 of the asked children has no had possibilities to attend culture and sport events. Culture and sport events for disabled children are less accessible in Latvia in general than this table presents.

23. What would you like to improve in your life?

IN FAMILY, AT HOME

Quotations from the questionnaires:

- “I would like to have a dog and the father living with us” (10 y. o., arthrogriposis)
- “I would like parents to work less and to receive more money” (12 y. o., polyomyelithis)
- “To put various handles in order to move around the home freely” (12 y. o., polyomyelithis)
- “I would like to have a little brother” (15 y. o., DMT)
- “To get treated” (15 y. o., a mental disease)
- “I don’t want my brother beat me” (15 y. o., on psychiatric register)
- “I want some place to study and work” (20 y. o., F-70)
- “Trust by the family” (17 y. o., F-70)
- “I would like to live in a house from which I could get out on my own” (17 y. o., backbone deformation)
- “I would like my parents to be better and more loving to me” (15 y. o., F-70)
- “I would like a better and more caring mother” (13 y. o., backbone deformation)
- “Special ramps to get to the flat” (14 y. o., miopathy)
- “Relations with some family members” (14 y. o., backbone deformation)
- “No, I have a good family” (14 y. o., a prolapsed scapula)
- “More trust in me and less restrictions” (13 y. o., scoliosis)
- “My family needs more money, there is a very little furniture in our home” (13 y. o., diabetes)

- “It is all right in my family. I want me to be treated.” (16 y. o., scoliosis, the 2nd stage)
- “More money to live on” (14 y. o., S-type scoliosis)
- “I want my family be all together again and to be with them all the time.” (16 y. o., scoliosis)
- “I feel well, because I do what I want, I watch TV, listen in radio or play games” (16 y. o., F-70)
- “A husband and a car for my mother” (17 y. o., F-70)
- “We need a new home without an owner who asks very high rent for it” (15 y. o., an impaired hearing)
- “More friends in the yard” (14 y. o., an impaired hearing)
- “I want my own room” (15 y. o., an impaired hearing)

AT SCHOOL

- “I want to go to other school” (10 y. o., arthrogyrosis)
- “There is necessary a school for disabled children in Kengarags” (11 y. o., inborn pseudoarthrosis of the left leg)
- “More swimming in the pool” (14 y. o., polyomielithis)
- “I would like to receive more understanding from the teachers” (16 y. o., arthritis)
- “To introduce more severe regulations against smoking, more discipline” (16 y. o., bone deformation)
- “To change some teachers” (15 y. o., electric burns of both palms)
- “I would like a cabinet of relaxation at school and to visit it” (16 y. o., polyomielithis)
- “Time in the sports hall” (16 y. o., F-70)
- “Playgrounds” (22 y. o., F-70)
- “Education, access to internet, better dinner” (18 y. o., slight mental slowness)
- “I don’t want the better ones to cheat me” (20 y. o., slight mental slowness)
- “I don’t want to be called in bad names” (15 y. o., slight mental slowness)
- “Common activities” (13 y. o., backbone deformation)
- “I don’t want that teachers sort children at school” (16 y. o., polyomielithis, displesia)
- “More computers and internet at school” (15 y.o., polyomielithis)
- “I would like a circle of fishing” (14 y. o., leg deformation)
- “More circles in the leisure time” (14 y. o., spinal kyphosis)
- “To make the school more homely in order to make the stay in it more agreeable and not to feel in it as in a prison.” (16 y. o., angiosarcoma)
- “I want them to understand me.” (14 y. o., scoliosis)
- “I want that teachers would not go together with a child to a shop of anywhere. Children in such schools need more freedom, otherwise he feels suppressed.” (15 y. o., scoliosis)
- “Not to make to do so much by force” (14 y. o.)
- “An access to internet, new windows in the boarding-school, hot and more food, more fruit and vegetables” (15 y. o., scoliosis)
- “More interesting activities” (15 y. o., F-70)
- “More time to internet” (15 y. o., F-70)
- “Better food in the school canteen”

ENVIRONMENT

- “High steps in the transport” (11 y. o., arthritis)
- “An access to any place I want” (10 y. o., dystrophy)
- “More special ramps and fitted transport” (17 y. o., spastic tetraparesis)
- “I want the older pupils to respect the little ones in the school bus” (15 y. o., disabled)
- “To clean rivers” (16 y. o., F-70)
- “To improve the air” (18 y. o., F-70)
- “Free ticket to all the kinds of transport” (19 y. o., slight mental slowness)
- “I don’t want teacher Koslovskis to smoke” (13 y. o., backbone deformation)
- “Cheaper transport” (14 y. o., scoliosis)
- “More responsive people” (15 y. o., kyphosis)
- “Tidier environment” (16 y. o., schizophrenia)

24. What do you expect to improve in your and other disabled people’s life after the access to European Union?

Quotations from the questionnaires:

- “Treatment abroad” (12 y. o., polyomyelitis)
- “More understanding and financial support” (15 y. o., damaged auditory nerve)
- “More possibilities for education” (14 y. o., damaged auditory nerve)
- “I don’t expect anything, everything will be the same. My health will not improve because of European Union”. (16 y. o., scoliosis)
- “I would like more specially fitted pavements. Larger benefits and cheaper medicaments, medical treatment without charge” (15 y. o., scoliosis)
- “Improved attitude towards disabled” (17 y. o., inborn scoliosis)
- “I hope, other people will not look at the disabled as to different and will not be afraid of them. They are looked upon as a normal part of the society there (EU).” (15 y. o., scoliosis)
- “The state laws and rights will improve because of EU.” (16 y. o.)
- “More entertainment for the disabled and other activities may be then.” (15 y. o., scoliosis)
- “I hope everything will go to the best, I don’t want the same as with the Soviet Union.” (14 y. o., scoliosis)
- “*Hopefully, the school will change its visual image to a better one, it will obtain equipment the disabled will use to move and the school will not complain for the lack of funding for heating, dry-cleaning, catering, etc.*” (14 y. o., scoliosis)
- “I want to travel much” (17 y. o., F-70)
- “I will work and study” (18 y. o., F-70)

24. What is necessary to do to make your and your fellows – disabled children’s – life better: your proposals?

FAMILY MEMBERS

- “I want my parents to be happy” (16 y. o., polyomyelitis)
- “More trust in me” (12 y. o., polyomyelitis)
- “To go more often to various medicinal institutions” (15 y. o., electric burns of palms)
- “Easier to get job, higher wages” (19 y. o., slight mental slowness)

- “They need to be understanding and, the most important, they need to love him (a disabled child)” (14 y. o., myopathy)
- “They may trust some work. A disabled child will understand that he is able to do something and is necessary.” (13 y. o., scoliosis)
- “To buy the necessary medicaments” (13 y. o., diabetes)
- “Less quarrelling” (15 y. o., F-70)
- “To involve a child in common (family) activities.” (14 y. o., dystrophy of the auditory nerve)

OTHER CHILDREN

- “*Better attitude towards the disabled*” (14 y. o., polyomyelitis)
- “Young people might have more information on the disabled.” (16 y. o., arthritis)
- “That each person is equal, able and needed.” (14 y. o., osteoporosis)
- “They might help more, to involve in activities.” (15 y. o., backbone deformation)
- “They don’t need to cheat” (16 y. o., scoliosis)
- “To allow thinking he is the same as the other children.”
- “To cheer others more” (14 y. o., spinal kyphosis)
- “You need not to feel like an invalid, your spirit is not ill. Be as you want to be.” (16 y. o., angiosarcoma)

MUNICIPALITY

- “To organize activities I may take part in.” (10 y. o., Disha’s muscle dystrophy)
- “To turn more attention to the disabled living within their territory and their rooms.” (17 y. o., spastic tetraparesis)
- “To provide medicinal procedures at the place of living.” (15 y. o.)
- “To help in the solution of issues that I cannot solve myself.” (12 y. o., polyomyelitis)
- “They need to help more to a child.” (15 y. o., a mental disease)
- “To find job for children” (19 y. o., a slight mental slowness)
- “More funding for the school” (19 y. o., a slight mental slowness)
- “Translations of the TV broadcasts, movies, etc. into the sign language.” (16 y. o., bad hearing)
- “Places of rest for teenagers” (15 y. o., bad hearing)

THE GOVERNMENT

- “To remember the disabled children not only during the pre-electionary period, but also during the rest of the time.” (10 y. o., backbone deformation)
- “Not to liquidate the children’s hospital “Gailezers”, I will not go to Vienibas street; their attitude towards me is bad.” (10 y. o., Disha’s muscle dystrophy)
- “To develop the environment more accessible, to know about the problems with flats. I live on the 5th storey in a house without a lift and nobody is interested in that how I can get up or down.” (17 y. o., backbone deformation)
- “Ministers might not to change so often.” (19 y. o., a slight mental slowness)
- “A better material condition.” (16 y. o., schizophrenia)
- “To help more with funding for schools in order to buy new additional equipment.” (14 y. o., spinal kyphosis)

- “Some fund should be established where people might donate exactly for the purchasing and establishing of these equipment.” (14 y.o., scoliosis)

SAEIMA (THE PARLIAMENT)

- “Please, don’t argue and quarrel among yourselves so much!” (10 y. o., kyphosis)
- “To issue laws on employment” (19 y. o., a slight mental slowness)
- “Not to cast out of homes the families of debtors” (18 y. o., a slight mental slowness)
- “Laws to increase the pensions for the disabled must be issued.” (13 y. o., spinal deformation)
- “They need to think on us not themselves. They should invest money in the disabled and to help to us a little bit.” (15 y. o., kyphosis)
- “To speak to the disabled as to equal, not to speak as with fools, but to integrate in the society.”

DECISION MAKERS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

- “Money for the infrastructure for Latvian disabled should be allocated.” (20 y. o., SMA I)
- “The disabled need a pension, because much money goes away for medicaments.”
- “I want that Russian children might learn in their own language.” (19 y. o., slight mental slowness)
- “I think, EU might give money for the development of the school.” (20 y. o., slight mental slowness)
- “We need to think what will be Europe when we will grow up in order the life would be good.” (14 y. o., scoliosis)
- “Softer laws for disabled children and many things without charge.” (15 y. o., scoliosis)

SUMMARY

Children with diagnoses such as mental slowness, bone diseases, impaired hearing, liver cirrhosis, diabetes, split of the palate, muscle deformations, electric burns, etc. For a large part of the enquired children, the presence of the disease or disability is clearly visible, many of them need other people's assistance. 13% of children need assistance in moving, 8% in personal hygiene, 9.5% in dressing and 2.2% in eating.

7% of the respondents know many disabled children who are not loved or have nobody to trust in.

36% of the ill children do not have an access to social rehabilitation centres as often as needed.

The necessary treatment and procedures are not provided at the place of residence: only 28.6% have an access to massage, 32% to remedial gymnastics, other kinds of procedures – 41% of ill children.

52.2% of children affirm the possibility to meet a psychologist. There are notes 'with the social pedagogue' in the questionnaires, that means, the children have no possibilities to meet a qualified psychologist and they do not receive full assistance.

The most assistance and understanding the children receive from their families. Unfortunately, 20% do not receive it, 63% of the respondents receive it at school, 46% from the grown-ups, 38% from children and only 10% in the street. These data evidence on that when the children are in an unknown environment, they have minimal possibilities to receive assistance and the probability people will understand them is very little.

32.6% of the enquired have felt irresponsiveness in the street, 19% – from children, 18% – at school, 14.6% in the family. It may be concluded from the answers, children with mental slowness are treated worse by families, but children with impaired hearing are most avoided in the street. 5% of the children have met such situations.

The problems are deteriorated by cheating and abusing. Schoolmates are the cruellest, 20% point out to this fact. 16.3% point out to unpleasant situations in the street, 2.8% mark the abuse in their families, 1.7% suffers from their teachers. The respondents point out that the elder brothers beat them in the family. If teachers yell, it causes suffering.

18% of the children moving by wheelchairs talk about their poor quality and inadaptability. The questionnaire evidences about the problem to obtain wheelchairs for a part of the children.

Huge problems are aroused by plastic prosthetics – they brake very fast.

The limit for the free surgical boots is unreasoned in the country level. The children may have one pair of the surgical boots per year without charge. Children from poor families are in constraint to buy boots themselves, since they cost about LVL 60.-. Such children have no boots corresponding to the season.

The enquired point out to the lack of additional equipment: closets, washing devices and other special equipment. We need to conclude, the equipment is insufficient even in the schools for children having special needs.

The most disturbing is the disease for the ill children (21.3%). It means pain and the sense of inferiority. These feelings are stressed by cheating, physical abuse (18%). Micro-climate of the family is very important. 7.5% speak about quarrels in the family, the parents' work, alcohol. The environment is disturbing to their wellbeing in the case of 7.8% and the lack of possibilities for 4.5%.

The main problems caused by disability: restricted possibilities (also in education) – 14%, lack of contacts – 10%, impossibility to move around (the lack of wheelchair, impossibility to get out of the flat) – 9%, emotional suffering caused by the difference from the others – 8.9%, difficulties to speak and communicate – 6.1%, difficulties to read and to understand what is read – 4%.

98% of the respondents learn at the specialised schools.

Only 18% of the enquired say that it is easy to learn together with other children. It means that 82% experience problems.

Those, who wish may take part in extracurricular activities. A part of the respondents take part in 2 to 4 circles. Sport is the most popular (44.5%), music, singing, dancing, theatre is very popular (42%). Children hope to use the acquired skills in visual art in future (13%). Children are interested in crafts and housekeeping. Such activities as computer, history, environmental protection circles and Red Cross are more individual.

The involvement in the circles provide: acquisition of knowledge, skills and abilities – 30.3%; strengthen health – 12.5%; children have fun – 20.7%, meet friends – 2.2% and exonerate themselves in front of this world– 3.5%.

Regular access to computers is provided for 56% of the enquired, internet for 44.5%, but only while a child is in a special establishment. Children living at home rarely have access to computer, but internet network is not accessible for disabled children living in rural areas.

The children's answers on the question "What would you like to improve in your life?" the following:

- At home – own room, repairs, to avoid quarrels, to avoid abuse, a better (better paid) job for parents. Such devices as to move outside the house independently, understanding, love.
- At school – better relations to the classmates, more understanding teachers, access to internet, a good sports hall, better dinner, and understanding from teachers.
- From the environment – ramps, lifts, fitted transport. Clean rivers, fresh air, tidy environment, restricted smoking are important to children.
- Children expect from the access to EU: cheaper (or gratis) medicine, higher pensions and benefits, treatment free of charge, possibilities to be treated abroad, possibilities to work, to educate oneself; schools provided by all the necessary, possibilities to travel, more entertainment and sport events.

When asked "What should be done to make the life of disabled and ill children better" the children answer:

- Family – more trust in the child, to be together with children, love them, less quarrels, mother and father should live together.
- Other children – exchange of information with ill children, the change of attitude, cheering, involvement of disabled children in various activities.
- Municipality – to organize activities, to turn greater attention to the social issues, to find jobs for children, the sign language in the TV broadcasts.
- The government – more accessible environment, aid to the schools, not to change ministers so often.
- Saeima – not to quarrel among itself, not to put out the families in the street, to increase pensions and benefits, to issue laws on employment.

- EU decision makers – to allocate (invest) funding in the development of schools, to create laws more suitable for children, increase in pensions.

The information obtained during the enquiry draws attention and makes to understand better the needs of ill and disabled children.

The children's answers promote activity and collaboration, the children want to be equal, to rehabilitate themselves in this life and wait for support and help.

It is necessary to present the materials of the enquiry a larger society, may be, also on internet.

Healthy children's opinion and proposals, and suggestions on collaboration are necessary.

CHILDREN'S PROPOSALS

1. To continue the research on the needs of ill and disabled children.
2. To establish a children's workgroup with the organization "Save the Children":
 - To include the most active and interested children in it, including children having special needs, minority children, orphans, etc.
 - To involve a grownup person able to manage and support the children's activities.
3. To draw funds for the support of children in their activities, for issue and distribution of an informative means (newspaper, informative leaflets).
4. To prepare and issue booklets on acquired diseases – injuries, scoliosis, etc. Information on how such diseases are acquired and what to do in order to avoid them should be put in this booklet.
5. To promote the "network of friendship" among schools. To promote common activities. The target: healthy children having contacts with ill children or children having special needs. To promote supporting such activities (common venues, competitions) by institutions, companies, etc.
6. To collect and summarize information on children having particular unsolved problems from municipalities, various institutions, civil parishes and Orphan Courts.
7. To offer to the government a proposal for the amendments to the regulations about the limit of the free of charge surgical boots – each child needs at least two pairs of such boots per year. A proposal might be the other pair of boots might be for a 50% discount.
8. To make proposals on which children's broadcasts on the TV might be translated also in the sign language (in order to let the poor hearing children to understand them also).
9. To collect and summarise the information on the opinions and proposals of the healthy children on how to collaborate with disabled children (also ill children). What are the agreeable forms of collaboration, what methods should be used?

RESULTS OF QUESTIONING OF CHILDREN LOST PARENTAL CARE AND LIVING IN INSTITUTIONS

LATVIAN SAVE THE CHILDREN

The questioners were divided among 170 children who have lost parental care and were living in 29 institutions such as orphanages, social care centres, and boarding schools. The age of children was from 10 to 17 years. In that part of report we are only reflecting the results of the questioning of 170 children. Besides that we have also done a large investigation on situation regarding violence in child care institutions. Results of that investigation you can find in the Annex of Latvian NGO Children's rights network Report to UN.

1. Age: between 10 and 17

2. How long have you been in the children's home/boarding school?

4-10 years	50%
less than 4 years	40%
do not remember	10%

3. Have you ever wanted to run away from the children's home/boarding school?

yes	10%
never	80%
not sure	10%

4. Do you feel lonely?

yes	80%
no	10%
not sure	10%

5. Do you feel loved?

yes	40%
sometimes	10%
never	20%
not sure, maybe	30%

6. Are you maltreated?

yes	20%
sometimes	15%
no	65%

7. Do you know what is violence?

yes	70%
no	25%
no answer	5%

8. What would hurt you most deeply?

if I never see my mum or dad	85%
if I have to part with my friends	5%
when I am called bad names because I live here	8%
when I am accused and I am not guilty	2%

9. If you were given a chance to leave this place (to go to your parents, a foster family or some other people), would you go at once or would you be sorry to leave?

I would go to my parents or some relatives at once	75%
I would, but I have nowhere to go (maybe to a foster family)	15%
I would be sorry to leave this place	10%

This questioning confirms the importance of the UN Recommendation 2001 to Latvian Government – to complete legislation and practical rules for adoption, fostering and social supports to families. Save the Children reported many years to the state the facts about hundreds of children kept “imprisoned” in institutions against their will and rights instead either to support their families or to find new for them.

Unfortunately a year ago only the state confirmed earlier announcements of Save the Children (new established Ministry for Children and family affairs). Lots of work still has to be done supporting families on necessary level to enable them to continue caring for their children in critical situations instead to give up and place them into the institutions. Also still lots of work is necessary to be done by state developing foster families network.

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Acronyms

EU – European Union

LSC – Latvian Save the children

NGO - non governmental organizations

MCFA – Ministry of Children and family affairs

UN – United Nations

UN CRC – UN Convention on the rights of the child

WTO – World Health Organisation

