**Information of the Republic of Lithuania to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights thematic report on the rights of the child and inclusive social protection**

**Children benefits**

After the birth of a child, a family can claim various benefits. Some financial benefits are provided to compensate the lost income of a previously working mother or father, while others are given based on other reasons or belong to all families with children, regardless of any circumstances. Families raising children can receive various monetary benefits and also take advantage of services that are designed to strengthen families.

* Child benefit of 80.5 EUR/per month is provided to every child from birth to the age of 18 and up to 23 if they are in education, irrespective of family income. For low income families raising one or two children, families raising three or more children and for disabled children, an additional child benefit of 47,38 EUR/per month is paid.
* Childcare benefit of 276 EUR/per month is provided to person in training or education if he/she is not eligible for a childcare benefit under the Law on Sickness and Maternity Social Insurance;
* Extra benefits are given when two or more children are born. Granted to one of the parents and paid monthly as follows: 184 EUR/per month for twins; 368 EUR/per month for triplets. This benefit is paid from birth up to the age of two.
* One-time child benefit of EUR 506 is provided to each new-born or adopted child, irrespective of whether a benefit for a new-born child has already been paid;
* One-time financial benefit of EUR 3450 is granted to those who have been placed under guardianship (curatorship), upon termination of the guardianship of the child because of them reaching the age of majority or getting married. This benefit is not paid in cash.

**Social insurance orphan pension**

After the death of one or both parents (foster parents), the orphan children may receive a social insurance orphan pension.

* Children and foster children up to 18 years old.
* Children and foster children over the age of 18 years, who are pupils or students, but not longer than until they reach the age of 24 years;

The social insurance orphan pension is paid if the deceased person has gained the right to receive a pension for lost working capacity (disability) or a retirement pension or received one of these pensions.

**Social support**

Social support is provided for the children from low-income families studying at general education schools, vocational schools, pre-school education establishments and other establishments designed to educate children (libraries, cultural centres, etc.) according to general education (primary, basic, secondary or special) or pre-primary curricula, with the exception of curricula for adults. The types of social support for pupils:

* free meals;
* back to school supplies.

Schoolchildren who study according to pre-primary curricula and primary curricula 1 grade and 2 gradewithout regard to a family’s (persons living together) incomehave the right to free lunch.

**Social assistance orphan’s pension**

Whenever one or both parents (foster parents) die, the children who were left orphaned can be appointed with a social assistance orphan’s pension. From 2022, the social assistance orphan's pension is granted and paid regardless of the fact that the person receives a social insurance lost work capacity (invalidity) or old-age pension (regardless of their amount).

The right to receive the social assistance pension have the following children (adopted children) of a deceased person or a person declared dead in the manner prescribed by law:

* those aged under 18;
* those aged 18 and over who are students, but not longer than until they reach the age of 24 years;
* those aged 18 who were recognised as having lost 45 or more per cent of the capacity for work before the day they reached 24.

Please note, that the social assistance orphan’s pension is paid if the child is not entitled to receive the state social insurance orphan’s pension. If the state social insurance orphan’s pension is less then the social assistance orphan’s pension the differential amount is paid.

**Social services**

Children with disabilities can receive social services. Social services are also available to children who lost parental care, children at social risk. Social services may be provided both at social service institutions (social care centres, foster families, temporary shelters, day centres for social care, community institutions, etc.) and at home. Municipalities are the main providers of social services. They evaluate and analyse children needs, forecast and establish the scope and types of social services and establish the budget of social services in general.

It should be noted that social services are one of the elements that can reduce social exclusion. However, there are various challenges in the field of social services. After Lithuania started the deinstitutionalization process, attention was focused on the creation and development of a system of complex family services, ensuring the individualization of services, their availability in the community, family care and adoption of children who cannot return to their biological family. These measures made it possible to significantly reduce the number of children deprived of parental care and children in institutional care, but the development of community services is still insufficient; there are problems with the spectrum of social services, coordination and inter-institutional cooperation.

Due to the aforementioned reasons, the quality, efficiency and individualization problems of services that meet the individual needs of the child and family remain relevant. There is still a need (especially in the regions) to continue to develop the service infrastructure, to ensure the availability of services for the most vulnerable families raising children (primarily those experiencing social exclusion - single mothers with children; parents raising children with disabilities, etc.).

A study (2020) of services aimed at family and children found that there is a substantial lack of services for certain groups of children and their parents. These groups include 1) pregnant women and mothers raising children aged 0-2; 2) teenagers living at precarious situations, those experiencing violence, as well as those engaging in youth crime; 3) children experiencing violence who lack timely services; 4) teenagers with alcohol and drug addiction problems, especially the youngest ones (aged 8-14 years). For parents, accessing necessary and timely services is the hardest for 1) those in poverty; 2) single parents; 3) parents with mental disability; 4) parents raising children with disabilities; 5) parents of children with special educational needs.[[1]](#footnote-1) Once identified, those challenges are being further addressed by the Government.

The practice of the Ombudsman of Child‘s Rights of the Republic of Lithuania also shows that children and their families who belong to **vulnerable groups often face various challenges in ensuring their social protection**. The following aspects are to be mentioned:

* **Children who have experienced violence**.

The network of services intended for a child (family) who has experienced direct and / or indirect violence is very unevenly developed between municipalities. There is still a need to develop a network of services that meet individual needs of abused children and their families, to increase the availability of services provided by emotional support lines, and to solve the problems of the availability and quality of mental health care services for children.

In addition to the above, one of the remaining problems is to provide appropriate help and support to the children who are victims of sexual crimes and their relatives. Currently, taking into consideration the geographical location of the Support Center for Children - Victims of Sexual Abuse (established according to the Barnahus (“children's house”) model), not all children are available to get services of this center in a timely manner. In addition, the services provided are short-term. Issues of ensuring timely help, support (especially long-term) for the children and their relatives were and remain extremely relevant. Therefore, further efforts will need to be taken to ensure consistency of adequate services across municipalities.

* **Children with disabilities**

Issues that deserve further attention are as follows: problems in the family are not identified in time, because municipalities do not have detailed data on children with disabilities and the situation of their families. There is a lack of services that meet the individual needs of the family, i.e. the needs of children with disabilities and of parents with disabilities raising children. Families are not provided with services that they want or need (for example, municipalities lack social care, respite services for families raising children with disabilities). Social services are not sufficiently coordinated with education, health care services and other. There is a lack of information about the available services, qualified information about child's development, education and treatment possibilities. Parents who raise children with disabilities are at greater risk of poverty.

* **Children with behavioral problems / children in conflict with the law**

One of the biggest challenges is providing help to children in specialized institutions - children's socialization centers. It is necessary to solve the problem of availability of services and assistance for children housed in children's socialization centers, to ensure safe, developmentally necessary, and change-oriented conditions, as well as respect for children's rights, proper implementation of their rights and best interests.

* **Teenagers**

In practice, even when providing help to teenagers, various challenges can be encountered. Parents (or other legal representatives) do not pay enough attention to the child, do not get involved in the help process, do not take responsibility. Teenagers refuse to accept the help offered (e. g. addiction treatment, specialist counseling, etc.). Considering the above mentioned, it is necessary to carefully assess the real need of social risk prevention measures for children in municipalities, to develop and make more efficient the areas of services provided for children experiencing social risk (including those using psychoactive substances).

* **Children growing up with mothers serving a prison sentence**

To reduce the harmful deficiencies and other threats related to children raised by mothers serving a prison sentence, it will be necessary to critically review the norms of supply of social services from the child's perspective and strive for further improvement of conditions.

* **Migrants**

In 2021, Lithuania faced a massive influx of foreigners. The resulting critical situation was difficult to manage due to the lack of experience, lack of suitable accommodation, services, human and financial resources, insufficient training of specialists, etc. However, now, with the easing of restrictions on migrants as well as with the departure of families from Lithuania, the scale of the problems has diminished. The ratio of employees to residents has improved, which currently allows to ensure the availability of the services they need. On the other hand, migrants might face difficulties to find the necessary housing for the family due to high rent prices and various attitudes of society.

In order to address issues related to unaccompanied minors, amendments to the Law on the Legal Status of Aliens of the Republic of Lithuania have been adopted, making it possible to appoint a representative (a natural person) for an unaccompanied minor in a quicker and simplified way (a relative, a person emotionally linked to the child) who has arrived together with the child. In emergency situations, it makes possible to ensure that the child's guardianship is taken without any delay in the family's surroundings.

It is important to share our recent best practices; Lithuania, immediately after Russia started the war of aggression against Ukraine, has become a safe place for Ukrainian children fleeing the war. The Law on Social Services is supplemented by providing that social care for unaccompanied foreign minors shall be financed from the state budget funds in accordance with the procedure established by the Minister of Social Security and Labour, and from the state budget funds earmarked for the payment of guardianship allowance in accordance with the Children's Allowances Law. Children who have fled from hostilities, who are or have been deprived of parental care and who have received social services in their home country, would be able to receive long-term social care when they arrive in Lithuania, and the financing of these services would be ensured from the state budget. Amendments have been made to the Law on Child Benefits, which establish the right of foreigners caring for foreign children to receive a targeted supplement to the foster care benefit. This unifies the rights of guardians (carers) who are citizens of the Republic of Lithuania and persons coming from Ukraine in caring for a child without parental care.

1. Tamutiene, I. 2020. Vaiko Gerovės politikos pokyčių vertinimas vaiko teisių apsaugos Lietuvoje reformos kontekste ir NVO galimybių dalyvauti viešųjų paslaugų teikima. Tyrimo Ataskaita. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)