



NGO CRC NETWORK NATIONAL COORDINATOR IN LATVIA

LATVIAN ORGANIZATION «GLĀBIET BĒRNUS» INDEPENDENT CHILD OMBUD



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To Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
Advisor on Child Rights
Ms. Imma Guerras-Delgado
Copy to Ms. Jana Hainsworth
Eurochild
Secretary general

5th of February 2014

In response to request for information on: Preventable mortality and morbidity of children under 5 years of age as a human rights concern – Human Rights Council resolution 24/11

Dear Ms. Imma Guerras-Delgado,

I represent Latvian NGO CRC Network and Latvian Save the Children* („Glābiet bērņus”), where I have been working for over 20 years. I also represent the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Latvia as assistant professor, am a board member of the Latvian Association of Paediatricians and Latvian Doctors’ Association. Our organization has participated in the writing of three Alternative Reports to the UN, presenting them in Geneva in 2001 and 2006 during the pre-sessional meeting of UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. Coincidentally my main job and social work is connected to research, including research on the child mortality problem. Your questions on child mortality under-5 pertain most to developing countries, where mortality has different causes and cause-specific relationships. However, please pay attention also to Latvia, because our country has the worst child (including under-5) mortality, especially from external causes and infant mortality rates among EU 25 countries (members before 2007). What is especially important - these mortality indicators are the worst among the three countries of the Baltic region – in Estonia infant mortality is 2.5 but in Lithuania 1.5 times lower on average than in Latvia.

Around 2007, when we started studying mortality, in Latvia ten times more children drowned and nine times more children died due to fire or smoke than in the

European Union. Child mortality under-5 was three times higher than in Sweden, we had the highest SIDS (sudden infant death syndrome) prevalence, first place in the Baltics and EU in vehicle-related trauma, 3rd place in child suicide etc.

In the three Baltic countries everything started in a similar economical and political situation with the onset of independence in 1990, however, a sudden gap appeared between the Baltic countries regarding child health and mortality, and has persisted for 24 years. However, child mortality indicators in Latvia historically mostly had been the lowest.

The Medical faculty at the University of Latvia has undertaken a series of studies on the relationship between child mortality and macro and socioeconomic factors – GDP, healthcare expenditure, unemployment, GINI coefficient, differences between rural and urban areas, mothers' education etc. We have analysed these cause-specific relationships in the three Baltic countries and determined most of the causes of high infant and child mortality in Latvia:

1. Differences in healthcare expenditure (health budget) structure in Baltic countries (in Latvia higher out-of-pocket payments);
2. Lower increase of healthcare expenditure (health budget) in the first decade of independence, but later lower purchasing power than in neighbouring Baltic countries;
3. Which results in limited accessibility to healthcare services;
4. Inability of country to provide favourable and well-rounded healthcare reforms in Latvia.

Our studies resulted in the creation of a textbook chapter, local and international publications, suggestions and recommendations, several changes in law and regulatory rules at government, municipality and institutional levels. Latvian Save the Children („Glābiet bērņus”), Latvian Doctors' Association and Latvian Association of Paediatricians lobbied LU Medical faculty's research results and recommendations, which resulted in the decrease of the mortality of small children from external causes, and decreased SIDS incidence.

Regarding Latvia's politics in the area of child rights, close cooperation of Latvian Save the Children („Glābiet bērņus”) with UN experts, who have compared our (NGO) and government written reports and sent recommendations to the Latvian government has been of great help, as the government was forced to more or less implement the recommendations received.

However, still in 2013 infant mortality is still the highest in Latvia among the Baltic countries and EU-25 countries, including both perinatal and postneonatal mortality. The annual decrease of infant mortality in rural areas is by 50% lower than in urban areas, because in rural areas medical personnel isn't able to diagnose and/or treat foetal and newborn circulatory and respiratory conditions, respiratory distress syndrome, intracerebral hemorrhage etc. Not enough ultrasonographies are performed for pregnant women, between which and mortality due to congenital anomalies and other causes of infant mortality we have found a strong correlation. Child mortality under-5 is still an important problem in Latvia, which differs in several aspects from the nearest neighbouring countries. For us the involvement of the UN Commission for Human Rights in obtaining international assistance in solving the problems of child mortality in Latvia according to the UN Convention 4th paragraph would be crucial.

Sincerely,

Inguna Ebela

M.D., Ph.D. assoc. prof.

Medical faculty, University of Latvia

board member of Latvian Save the Children ("Glābiet bērņus")

**Latvian Save the Children- "Glābiet bērņus" is not member of ISCA at present, was established in 1990 and works as independent NGO for advocacy in all areas of children's rights.*

Links to some of our related publications (in English):

1. Mortality of Children Under Five and Prevalence of Newborn Congenital Anomalies in Relation to Macroeconomic and Socioeconomic Factors in Latvia. Inguna Ebela, Iriša Zile, Aleksandrs Zakis, Valdis Folkmanis, Ingrida Rumba-Rozenfelde. *Medicina (Kaunas)* 2011;47(12):667-74.
<http://medicina.kmu.lt/1112/1112-06e.pdf>

2. CRIN website. Latvian Save the Children's („Glābiet bērņus”) compiled 3 Reports to the UN can be found here:
<http://web61388.aiso.net/organisations/vieworg.asp?id=1236>
3. Under-Five Child Mortality in Latvia: Causal Relationships and Reduction Possibilities in an International Context. Inguna Ebela, Enoks Biķis, Ingrīda Rumba-Rozenfelde. Summary in English on p.26.
<http://www.lu.lv/materiali/apgads/raksti/750.pdf>