**Response of the Republic of Latvia to the Questionnaire in relation to the UN Human Rights Council Resolution A/HRC/RES/41/21 on climate change and human rights**

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (hereafter - CRPD) defines the general framework for the planning and implementation of disability policy. Latvia ratified the CRPD in 2010, committing to implement the principles set out in CRPD, to promote the fundamental rights and freedoms of persons with disabilities. The CRPD provides for the introduction of policies and measures aimed at recognizing the capabilities of the person and ensuring equal rights. The overall goal of the disability policy pursued in Latvia is consistent with the goal of the CRPD, which is to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by persons with disabilities, to promote dignity and take measures to mitigate the effects of disability.

The rights and fundamental principles set out in the CRPD must be implemented horizontally, i.e. the responsible sectoral ministries and the other institutions are responsible for the gradual implementation of the commitments set out in the CRPD. It means that each line ministry (incl. health, education, environment, transport etc.) and institutions are responsible for ensuring equal principles and rights for persons with disabilities. During preparation of the policy planning documents and legal acts, the sectoral ministries are responsible for the mainstreaming of a principle of equal opportunities for persons with disabilities, thereby ensuring the implementation of the rights of persons with disabilities.

Persons with disabilities are among the most vulnerable groups of society at risk of poverty and social exclusion. This can lead to a situation when persons with disabilities do not have the necessary information on changes in different public and global processes that can have a direct or indirect impact on their quality of life, including climate change and its effects on person's lives. As a result of climate change, lack of resources and information, persons with disabilities may be more frequently exposed to a variety of social risks, such as deterioration of health, threats in the event of natural disasters, lack of access to accessible and adequate housing, which both directly and indirectly affects the ability of a person to participate freely and without barriers in society and to realize their right to freedom of movement.

The Ministry of Welfare cooperates with sectoral ministries and other institutions in order to ensure that the interests, different needs and rights of persons with disabilities are also taken into account in the development of legal acts, policy planning documents, information materials and support services. The Ministry of Welfare regularly organises meetings with non-governmental organisations representing a person with disabilities, during which current/actual issues are discussed and the most important information is provided. That contributes not only the understanding of persons with disabilities of their rights, but also to the general public's understanding of disability issues and the needs of persons with disabilities.

On 17 July 2019 the Cabinet of Ministers adopted the policy planning document developed by the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development “Latvian National Plan for Adaptation to Climate Change until 2030” (hereinafter – the Plan), which aims to “reduce the vulnerability of Latvia's people, economy, infrastructure, construction and nature to the impacts of climate change and promote climate change.”

One of the five strategic goals of the Plan is the protection of human life, health and welfare from the adverse effects of climate change, irrespective of a person’s gender, age and social affiliation. In addition to this goal, two directions of action have been set – the improvement of the early warning system, and general preventive measures in order to protect the human life and health from adverse effects of climate change.

As set out within the research on risks and vulnerabilities “The evaluation of risks and vulnerabilities and the identification of adaptability measures in the health and welfare sector”, which was the basis of the Plan, in Latvia climate change is most likely to affect socially vulnerable groups. These include families with small children, older people, persons with chronic illnesses (including with physical and mental health disorders), persons with disabilities, poor and low-income persons, persons who live further away from economically active regional centres, etc. Without receiving the necessary aid and support, including accessibility of medical and other services (affected by the poor material conditions, and inadequate or unavailable infrastructure and information), the socioeconomic status of these groups can significantly worsen, and this would increase the social inequality in the country.

The expressions of climate change (including extreme climate change) relevant to the health and welfare system of Latvia are:

* Rise in the average temperature, as a result of which the spring/summer/autumn seasons could lengthen while the winter season could shorten;
* Rise in the average annual precipitation, rise in the prevalence of strong rainfalls, rise in the water temperature of rivers, lakes and other bodies of water;
* Rise in the prevalence and length of heatwaves.

In the area of health and welfare various risks have been identified, however as the main risks with the highest probability level we can identify “rise in the prevalence and incidence of heatstroke” and “rise in exacerbation of chronic illnesses (cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, etc.) and of death cases from these illnesses”. In relation to damages to human health, as the most significant negative effect from climate change can be expected in the context of cardiovascular illnesses.

In accordance with Attachment No.1 to the Plan “Measures for implementing the directions of action identified in the Plan”, various adaptation measures have been set in order to reduce the adverse effects of climate change and the threat to human life, health and welfare, irrespective of their gender, age and social affiliation. These include developing recommendations for social care facilities and social workers on health measures during heatwaves, society information campaigns for health measures before and during heatwaves, and review of legal measures relating to the necessity of installation and maintenance of air cooling systems in public spaces, with special priority to healthcare institutions, and social care and rehabilitation institutions.

The Plan will be implemented from 2020 to 2030, and will involve a broad range of institutions. In 2026, a mid-term report will be prepared in order to evaluate how the Plan is implemented.

In addition, the Ministry of Economy is currently developing a policy planning document “Latvian National Energy and Climate Plan 2021-2030”. This plan explains energy poverty as linked to a number of adverse effects on human health and well-being, such as respiratory and heart disease and mental health, exacerbated by low temperatures and stress associated with gas, heat and electricity bills that citizens cannot afford to pay for. However, a definition of energy poverty is still being sought, including through the development of energy poverty criteria for Latvia.