

**Action Plan  
for implementing the European Child Guarantee**

**Riga, 2023**

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### List of abbreviations

UN	United Nations
BKUS	Children's Clinic University Hospital
European Child Guarantee	Council Recommendation (EU) 2021/1004 of 14 June 2021 establishing a European Child Guarantee
CSP	Central Statistical Bureau
FEAD	Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
EM	Ministry of the Economy
EU	European Union
ESF	European Social Fund
EU-SILC	European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions
IZM	Ministry of Education and Science
KM	Ministry of Culture
LM	Ministry of Welfare
LPS	Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments
CM	Cabinet of Ministers
NAP	Latvian National Development Plan for 2021-2027
NVD	National Health Service
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PVD	Food and Veterinary Service
RSU	Riga Stradiņš University
SAM	Ministry of Transport and Communications
SIF	Society Integration Fund
SPKC	Centre for Disease Prevention and Control
UNESCO	UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
VARAM	Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development
VBTAI	State Inspectorate for the Protection of Children's Rights
VDEĀVK	State Medical Commission for the Assessment of Health Condition and Working Ability
VM	Ministry of Health
VK	State Chancellery

## Introduction

The Interinstitutional Proclamation on the European Pillar of Social Rights of 13 December 2017 by the European Parliament, the Council and the European Commission (2017/C 428/09)<sup>1</sup> incorporates the principle of ‘Childcare and support to children’ (principle 11 of the European Pillar of Social Rights), according to which children have the right to affordable early childhood education and care of good quality. Children have the right to protection from poverty. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds have the right to specific measures to enhance equal opportunities.

The Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan of 4 March 2021 (COM(2021) 102 final)<sup>2</sup> gives as target number three the reduction of the number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion by at least 15 million by 2030. The report goes on to state that ‘poverty and social exclusion have declined in the EU in the last decade. In 2019, around 91 million people (out of which 17.9 million were children aged 0-17) were at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the EU, close to 12 million less than in 2008, and around 17 million less than the peak in 2012. Still, the ambitious Europe 2020 social target of a 20 million reduction was not met. The COVID-19 pandemic is expected to worsen the situation, leading to higher levels of financial insecurity, poverty and income inequality in the short term. Out of 15 million people to lift out of poverty or social exclusion, at least 5 million should be children. The focus on children will allow not only to provide them with access to new opportunities but will also contribute to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty, preventing that they become adults at risk of poverty or social exclusion and thus producing long-term systemic effects.’

On 4 June 2021 the Council of the European Union adopted a Recommendation establishing a European Child Guarantee<sup>3</sup>. The aim of this Recommendation is to prevent and combat social exclusion by guaranteeing access of children in need to a set of key services, thereby also contributing to upholding the rights of the child by combating child poverty and fostering equal opportunities.

The causes and impacts of child poverty are multidimensional as access to health, education, childcare, leisure, food, health and housing are all interlinked.<sup>4</sup>

Poverty and social exclusion can have a profound impact on the lives of children, preventing them from accessing basic services such as healthcare, education, nutritious food, quality housing and childcare. For the poorest families the situation is dire. Children suffer poverty differently from adults and they are more likely to experience lifelong consequences from it. Malnutrition can last a lifetime, having long-term consequences on children’s physical, social and emotional development. And losses in learning at a young age can result in children falling behind in school, finding it difficult to ever catch up. Without access to health care, children could miss out on vaccines that could be life-saving in later years and the treatment necessary to grow up healthy and thrive.<sup>5</sup>

The European Child Guarantee recommends guarantees for children in need<sup>6</sup>:

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<sup>1</sup> European Pillar of Social Rights, [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/LV/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32017C1213\(01\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/LV/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32017C1213(01)&from=EN).

<sup>2</sup> European Pillar of the Social Rights Action Plan, [EUR-Lex - 52021DC0102 - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/LV/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32021DC0102-EN).

<sup>3</sup> European Child Guarantee, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/LV/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32021H1004&from=EN>.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/greece/en/child-guarantee>.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/greece/en/child-guarantee>.

<sup>6</sup> ‘Children in need’ means persons under the age of 18 years who are at risk of poverty or social exclusion (paragraph 3 point (a) of the European Child Guarantee).

- 1) Effective<sup>7</sup> and free access<sup>8</sup> to early childhood education and care, education and school-based activities<sup>9</sup> and at least one healthy meal<sup>10</sup> each school day for children in need;
- 2) Effective access to healthy nutrition and adequate housing.<sup>11, 12</sup>

The European Child Guarantee focuses particularly on those children and target groups which in all likelihood will be most difficult to lift out of the cycle of disadvantage.

The European Child Guarantee recommends that Member States identify children in need and within this group take into account, wherever appropriate in designing their national integrated measures, specific disadvantages experienced, in particular, by:

- 1) homeless children or children experiencing severe housing deprivation;
- 2) children with disabilities;
- 3) children with mental health issues;
- 4) children with a migrant background<sup>13</sup> or minority ethnic origin, particularly Roma;
- 5) children in alternative, especially institutional, care;
- 6) Children in precarious family situations<sup>14</sup>.

Member States are also recommended to build an integrated and enabling policy framework (paragraph 6 of the ECG), to take specific measures to safeguard early childhood education and care, inclusive education and school-based activities and a healthy meal each school day (paragraphs 7 and 8 of the ECG), healthy nutrition (paragraph 9 of the ECG) and adequate housing (paragraph 10 of the ECG).

The European Child Guarantee is the first policy instrument at EU level that aims to prevent the adverse conditions and childhood exclusion that so often lead to disadvantage later in adult life. This

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<sup>7</sup> 'Effective access' means a situation in which services are readily available, affordable, accessible, of good quality, provided in a timely manner and where the potential users are aware of their existence, as well as of entitlements to use them (paragraph 3 point (d) of the European Child Guarantee).

<sup>8</sup> 'Effective and free access' means a situation in which services are readily available, accessible, of good quality, provided in a timely manner and where the potential users are aware of their existence, as well as of entitlements to use them, and provided free of charge, either by organising and providing such services or by adequate benefits to cover the costs or the charges of the services, or in such a way that financial circumstances will not pose an obstacle to equal access (paragraph 3 point (e) of the European Child Guarantee).

<sup>9</sup> 'School-based activities' means learning by means of sport, leisure or cultural activities that take place within or outside of regular school hours or are organised by the school community (paragraph 3 point (f) of the European Child Guarantee).

<sup>10</sup> 'Healthy meal' or 'healthy nutrition' means a balanced meal consumption, which provides children with nutrients necessary for their physical and mental development and for physical activity that complies with their physiological needs (paragraph 3 point (g) of the European Child Guarantee).

<sup>11</sup> Council Recommendation of 14 June 2021 (paragraph 4 of the European Child Guarantee).

<sup>12</sup> 'Adequate housing' means a dwelling that meets the current national technical standards, is in a reasonable state of repair, provides a reasonable degree of thermal comfort and is available and accessible at an affordable cost (paragraph 3 point (h) of the European Child Guarantee).

<sup>13</sup> 'Children with a migrant background' means third country national children, irrespective of their migration status, and children with the nationality of a Member State who have a third country migrant background through at least one of their foreign-born parents (paragraph 3 point (b) of the European Child Guarantee).

<sup>14</sup> 'Children in precarious family situations' means children exposed to various risk factors that could lead to poverty or to social exclusion. This includes: living in a single-earner household; living with a parent with disabilities; living in a household where there are mental health problems or long-term illness; living in a household where there is substance abuse, or domestic violence; children of a Union citizen who has moved to another Member State while the children themselves remained in their Member State of origin; children having a teenage mother or being a teenage mother; and children having an imprisoned parent (paragraph 3 point (c) of the European Child Guarantee).

Recommendation effectively implements principle 11 of the European Pillar of Social Rights (Child-care and support to children).

### **Description of the national approach adopted by Latvia in the fight against child poverty as a whole**

According to the results of the 2022 EU-SILC survey, compared with the other EU Member States Latvia<sup>15</sup> had the fifth highest proportion of the population at risk of poverty or social exclusion<sup>16</sup> (26.1% in 2020 and 26.0% in 2021). The situation was worse in Romania, where the proportion of the population at risk of poverty or social exclusion was 34.4%, followed by Bulgaria (31.7%), Greece (28.3%) and Spain (27.8%).<sup>17</sup>

In Latvia, the poverty risk threshold<sup>18</sup> rose from EUR 472 per month in 2020 to EUR 513 per month in 2021.<sup>19</sup>

In 2021, the poverty risk for children (for the resident population in the 0-17-year-old age-group) in Latvia was 16.2%, which was lower than in 2020, when the poverty risk for children (for the resident population in the 0–17-year-old age-group) was 16.9%. The poverty risk for children (for the resident population in the 0–17-year-old age-group) was 15.8% in 2019, 14.5% in 2018, 17.5% in 2017, 18.4% in 2016, 18.6% in 2015 and 23.2% in 2014.<sup>20</sup>

The findings of the 2022 EU-SILC survey show that, compared with previous years, the risk of poverty in Latvia has increased for families with children. For families of two adults and one child, the poverty risk has grown by 2.5 percentage points (from 12.6% in 2020 to 15.1% in 2021). Similarly, the risk of poverty has risen slightly for households with two adults and three or more dependent children (from 16.5% in 2020 to 17.1% in 2021) and for households with two adults and two children

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<sup>15</sup> The data for Latvia refer to the provisional findings of the 2022 survey, data for the other EU Member States refer to the findings of the 2021 survey.

<sup>16</sup> As of 2021, the following indicators have been used to assess the risk of poverty or social exclusion:

- 1) persons at risk of monetary poverty after social transfers);
- 2) severe material and social deprivation
- 3) very low work intensity.

A resident is deemed to be at risk of poverty or social exclusion if they meet any of the above-mentioned criteria.

([https://admin.stat.gov.lv/system/files/publication/2023-01/Nr\\_09\\_Nabadzibas\\_risks\\_un\\_sociala\\_atstumtiba\\_Latvija\\_2022\\_%2823\\_00%29\\_LV.pdf](https://admin.stat.gov.lv/system/files/publication/2023-01/Nr_09_Nabadzibas_risks_un_sociala_atstumtiba_Latvija_2022_%2823_00%29_LV.pdf)).

<sup>17</sup> [https://admin.stat.gov.lv/system/files/publication/2023-01/Nr\\_09\\_Nabadzibas\\_risks\\_un\\_sociala\\_atstumtiba\\_Latvija\\_2022\\_%2823\\_00%29\\_LV.pdf](https://admin.stat.gov.lv/system/files/publication/2023-01/Nr_09_Nabadzibas_risks_un_sociala_atstumtiba_Latvija_2022_%2823_00%29_LV.pdf).

<sup>18</sup> Risk-of-poverty threshold - 60% of the median disposable income adjusted for the number of equivalent consumers in the household (Official statistics portal [in Latvian] <https://stat.gov.lv/lv/statistikas-temas/iedzivotaji/monetara-nabadziba-nevienlidziba-un-sociala-atstumtiba/tabulas/nnr010>).

<sup>19</sup> [https://admin.stat.gov.lv/system/files/publication/2023-01/Nr\\_09\\_Nabadzibas\\_risks\\_un\\_sociala\\_atstumtiba\\_Latvija\\_2022\\_%2823\\_00%29\\_LV.pdf](https://admin.stat.gov.lv/system/files/publication/2023-01/Nr_09_Nabadzibas_risks_un_sociala_atstumtiba_Latvija_2022_%2823_00%29_LV.pdf).

<sup>20</sup> [https://admin.stat.gov.lv/system/files/publication/2023-01/Nr\\_09\\_Nabadzibas\\_risks\\_un\\_sociala\\_atstumtiba\\_Latvija\\_2022\\_%2823\\_00%29\\_LV.pdf](https://admin.stat.gov.lv/system/files/publication/2023-01/Nr_09_Nabadzibas_risks_un_sociala_atstumtiba_Latvija_2022_%2823_00%29_LV.pdf).

(from 11.7% in 2020 to 12.1% in 2021). The fastest fall in the risk of poverty has been seen in single-parent households with children (by 8 percentage points, from 37.4% in 2020 to 29.4% in 2021).<sup>21</sup>

In 2021, the risk of poverty before social transfers was 40.7%. This means that without social transfers, the proportion of the resident population at risk of poverty would be 18.2 percentage points higher than it currently is (22.5%).<sup>22</sup>

Provisional data show that in 2021 7.2% of the resident population (up to the age of 64) were living in households with a very low work intensity.<sup>23, 24</sup> In 2020, 6.0% of children (in the 0-17 year-old age-group) were living in households with a very low work intensity, and in 2021 the proportion of such children was 6.4%.<sup>25</sup>

Since 2021, the number of persons at risk of severe material and social deprivation has begun to rise.<sup>26, 27</sup> Calculations based on provisional data show that in 2022, 7.8% of the resident population suffered from severe material and social deprivation, which was 2.5 percentage points up on 2021. In 2022, 5.9% of children (in the 0-17 age-group) suffered from severe material and social deprivation, compared with 4.7% one year earlier.<sup>28</sup>

Reducing poverty and social exclusion is one of Latvia's strategic objectives. The 'Latvia 2030' strategy sets the target of reducing the percentage of the resident population at risk of poverty to no more than 16.0% by 2030. The resident population at risk of poverty must therefore have more opportunities for improving its wellbeing. Doing this means 'identifying the social groups most at risk of poverty and developing the appropriate social security mechanisms for them. One of the key prerequisites for reducing the risk of poverty is to have in place an effective system of social services, social assistance and social security, one of the aims of which is to provide effective aid to the most deprived sections of the population'.<sup>29</sup>

The Latvian National Development Plan for 2021-2027 ('NAP 2027') aims to reduce the percentage of the resident population at risk of poverty to 22.5% in 2024 and 21.5% in 2027. In addition, it is particularly important to reduce poverty amongst society's most vulnerable groups. **The plan is to reduce the percentage of children (in the 0-17 years age-group) at risk of poverty from 17.5%**

<sup>21</sup> [https://admin.stat.gov.lv/system/files/publication/2023-01/Nr\\_09\\_Nabadzibas\\_risks\\_un\\_sociala\\_atstumtiba\\_Latvija\\_2022\\_%2823\\_00%29\\_LV.pdf](https://admin.stat.gov.lv/system/files/publication/2023-01/Nr_09_Nabadzibas_risks_un_sociala_atstumtiba_Latvija_2022_%2823_00%29_LV.pdf).

<sup>22</sup> [https://admin.stat.gov.lv/system/files/publication/2023-01/Nr\\_09\\_Nabadzibas\\_risks\\_un\\_sociala\\_atstumtiba\\_Latvija\\_2022\\_%2823\\_00%29\\_LV.pdf](https://admin.stat.gov.lv/system/files/publication/2023-01/Nr_09_Nabadzibas_risks_un_sociala_atstumtiba_Latvija_2022_%2823_00%29_LV.pdf).

<sup>23</sup> Low work intensity means that all persons in a household in the 18–64-year-old age-group (excluding students and schoolchildren aged 18.24) worked less than 20% full time in the previous 12 months.

<sup>24</sup> [https://admin.stat.gov.lv/system/files/publication/2023-01/Nr\\_09\\_Nabadzibas\\_risks\\_un\\_sociala\\_atstumtiba\\_Latvija\\_2022\\_%2823\\_00%29\\_LV.pdf](https://admin.stat.gov.lv/system/files/publication/2023-01/Nr_09_Nabadzibas_risks_un_sociala_atstumtiba_Latvija_2022_%2823_00%29_LV.pdf).

<sup>25</sup> [https://admin.stat.gov.lv/system/files/publication/2023-01/Nr\\_09\\_Nabadzibas\\_risks\\_un\\_sociala\\_atstumtiba\\_Latvija\\_2022\\_%2823\\_00%29\\_LV.pdf](https://admin.stat.gov.lv/system/files/publication/2023-01/Nr_09_Nabadzibas_risks_un_sociala_atstumtiba_Latvija_2022_%2823_00%29_LV.pdf).

<sup>26</sup> A broader account of the scale of severe material deprivation can be found in the report 'Material deprivation in Latvia in 2022' [in Latvian].

<sup>27</sup> A person is deemed to be suffering from severe social and material deprivation if they meet at least 7 of 13 deprivation criteria, for example they are unable to pay utility bills, spend a small amount of money on themselves or afford a hobby (<https://stat.gov.lv/lv/statistikas-temas/iedzivotaji/monetara-nabadziba-nevienlidziba-un-sociala-atstumtiba/preses-16>).

<sup>28</sup> [https://admin.stat.gov.lv/system/files/publication/2023-01/Nr\\_09\\_Nabadzibas\\_risks\\_un\\_sociala\\_atstumtiba\\_Latvija\\_2022\\_%2823\\_00%29\\_LV.pdf](https://admin.stat.gov.lv/system/files/publication/2023-01/Nr_09_Nabadzibas_risks_un_sociala_atstumtiba_Latvija_2022_%2823_00%29_LV.pdf).

<sup>29</sup> The 'Latvia 2030' strategy (<https://www.mk.gov.lv/lv/latvijas-ilgtspējigas-attistibas-strategija>).

**in 2018 to 11.5% in 2027.** Furthermore, in households where children are raised by one adult, the plan is to reduce the percentage of persons at risk of poverty from 26.2% in 2018 to 24.5% in 2027, and in households where three or more dependent children are being raised by two adults, to reduce the percentage from 16.7% in 2018 to 12.0% in 2027.<sup>30</sup>

In order to achieve the poverty reduction targets set out in Latvia's National Development Plan 2021-2027 (NAP 2027), on 1 September 2021 the Cabinet of Ministers approved the Social protection and labour market policy guidelines 2021-2027 (Order No 616, record No 58, paragraph 37), with the Ministry of Welfare and the Ministry of Justice being designated as the institutions responsible for implementing the guidelines and coordinating the completion of scheduled work. In terms of scope, the 2021-2027 Guidelines cover aspects of social protection such as State social security, State social benefits, social assistance provided by the municipalities, social services financed by central and municipal government, aid to promote employment, and working environment that is safe and of high quality.

Measures particularly worthy of mention are those aimed at increasing the volume of social transfers and their impact on reducing the risk of poverty, reviewing the targeted disbursement of social benefits, improving beneficiaries' coverage and reducing food and basic material deprivation.

In order to reduce inequalities and ensure that aid for the disadvantaged is in line with social reality, a minimum income reform has been implemented at national level.<sup>31</sup> Under this reform, as of 1 July 2023, there has been a change in the minimum guaranteed income for beneficiaries of State social security benefits, recipients of minimum old-age, invalidity and survivors' pensions and poor and low-income households receiving social assistance from the municipality (whereas minimum payments were hitherto laid down by law as specific amounts, they are now set as a percentage of the average median income).

Measures to ensure the implementation of the recommendations featured in the European Child Guarantee for children in need<sup>32</sup> are included in the following policy planning documents:

- 1) Measures in the field of education included in the Education development guidelines for 2021-2027 approved by the CM on 22 June 2021 (Order No 436, record no 49, paragraph 46). The Ministry of Education and Science has been designated as the body responsible for implementing the guidelines. The Education Development Guidelines set out a single national policy and development strategy in education for the next seven years and contain the basic principles, overarching objectives and sub-objectives of education policy, including quality objectives in education, key measures to achieve the objectives set, the results to be achieved and the performance indicators, in accordance with the principles laid down in legislation governing the development planning system (Article 13.<sup>1</sup>(1) of the Law on education). The Education Development Guidelines set out the relevant action plans to achieve the objectives set for the next seven years: for the first three years, the following two years and the remaining two years;
- 2) measures to implement the European Child Guarantee in respect of healthcare for children are included in the Public Health Guidelines for the years 2021–2027 approved by the CR of 26

<sup>30</sup> <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/315879-par-latvijas-nacionalo-attistibas-planu-20212027-gadam-nap2027>.

<sup>31</sup> <https://lvportals.lv/skaidrojumi/353094-minimalo-ienakumu-reforma-ka-tiks-parskatiti-minimalie-pabalsti-un-pensijas-2023>.

<sup>32</sup> 'Children in need' means persons under the age of 18 years who are at risk of poverty or social exclusion (paragraph 3 point (a) of the European Child Guarantee).



May 2022 (Order no 359, record no 28, paragraph 43). The Ministry of Health has been designated as the body responsible for implementing the guidelines and coordinating implementation work. The measures planned under the guidelines are designed to improve the health of Latvia's resident population, prolong healthy lives, prevent premature deaths and reduce inequalities in the field of health.

- 3) measures to implement the European Child Guarantee in respect of securing adequate housing for children are included in the Guidelines on accessible housing for the years 2023–2027 approved by the CM on 8 November 2023 (Order no 739, record no 56, paragraph 33). The plan is to designate the Ministry of the Economy as the body responsible for implementing the guidelines, which include measures to promote access to housing by offering solutions to ensure that housing is available to households with different income levels, including those with the lowest income, and to ensure that the existing housing stock is improved and new housing stock developed;
- 4) measures to implement the recommendations of the European Child Guarantee on protecting children from poverty and social exclusion, as well as on access to healthy nutrition and providing at least one healthy meal every school day, are included in the Social protection and labour market policy guidelines for the years 2021-2027 approved by CM on 1 September 2021 and the Public health guidelines for the years 2021-2027 (Order No 616, record No 58, paragraph 37);
- 5) measures to implement the recommendations of the European Child Guarantee on support for orphans and children deprived of parental care (children in alternative care) are included in the Child, Youth and Family Development Guidelines for the years 2022-2027, endorsed by the CR of 21 December 2022 (Order No 967, record No 66, paragraph 56);
- 6) measures to support access to early childhood education services for children are included in the Regional policy guidelines for the years 2021-2027 approved by CR of 26 November 2019 (Order 587, record No 54, paragraph 63).

### **Current overall coordination and monitoring arrangements at national level in the fight against child poverty**

The Ministry of Welfare is the State body responsible for social protection, the rights of children and the family, equal opportunities for persons with a disability and gender equality (paragraph 1 of CR No 49 of 27 January 2004 laying down the statutes of the Ministry of Welfare).

This is therefore the ministry that monitors overall social protection in the country. At the same time, the situation at local level is monitored by the municipalities, which are responsible for providing their residents with assistance. In accordance with Article 4(1)(9) of the Law on municipalities, the provision of support to the resident population to help solve social problems, and the provision of access to social assistance and social services, is an autonomous function of the municipality.

The Central Statistical Bureau (CSP) is the country's main producer and coordinator of official statistics at national level.

It publishes a regular (yearly) statistical compendium of information on births, deaths, age structure, health status, education, social protection, the risk of material deprivation and poverty in families

with children, the economic activity of minors, the use of information technology, violence against children and children in conflict with the law in 2021, and provides comparisons with previous years.

Pursuant to Article 14<sup>1</sup> of the Law on social security, a welfare information system (LabIS) has been set up to generate statistics to plan, develop and evaluate public policies in the field of social services that will ensure the timely provision of accessible and high-quality social services. The information system is managed by the Ministry of Welfare. In accordance with subparagraph 2.1 of Cabinet Regulation No 490 of 26 July 2016 on the welfare information system (LabIS), the Ministry of Welfare inputs into the welfare information system (LabIS) data on measures put in place by central or local government in the form of monetary or material assistance or services to ensure full implementation of the individual social rights laid down in the Law on social security, namely promotion of education and employment, social insurance, the right to healthcare, social guarantees under special circumstances in the event of a loss of health, family expenditure allowance, aid to secure adequate housing, assistance for children and young people, social assistance and the social inclusion of people with disabilities.

In accordance with Article 14(1)(5) of the Law on social services and social assistance, one of the tasks of the Ministry of Welfare in the field of social services and social assistance is also to set up and maintain a State social policy monitoring information system. The Ministry of Welfare sets up and maintains the State social policy monitoring system with a view to the following:

- 1) framing State policy in the field of social services and social assistance, and organising and coordinating its implementation;
- 2) organising the administration of budgetary resources allocated by the State to the provision of social services;
- 3) monitoring implementation of the Law on social services and social assistance, controlling compliance with legislation regulating the provision of social services, the quality of social services and compliance by providers of social services with regulatory requirements, and imposing administrative sanctions on providers of social services in the event of infringements.

In accordance with Article 67.<sup>1</sup> of the Law on the Protection of Children's Rights, the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Welfare, the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Health and the State Inspectorate for the protection of children's rights, along with the municipalities, as per their respective remits, provide statistical information on the protection of children's rights in the country, on parents whose custody has been terminated or withdrawn, on families with children that have been evicted from accommodation, on child adoption, the placement of children in out-of-family care and the application of special educational and medical coercive measures to children, on the criminal prosecution of children, on children of school age who fail to attend educational establishments and on children who are the victims of neglect/abuse and street children, and these bodies then submit a summary to the CSP. The CSP collects this information once a year and forwards it to the Ministry of Welfare and the office of the Ombudsman.

In accordance with Article 62(1)(7) of the Law on the Protection of Children's Rights, the Ministry of Welfare sees to the preparation of an annual report on the situation of children nationally and its submission to the Saeima (Latvian Parliament) and the Cabinet.

In the fight against child poverty a significant role in the coordination and planning of policy measures is played by the committees and consultative bodies set up by the Ministries of Welfare, Health, Education and Science and by the Cabinet, which are attended by the relevant line ministries, other central and municipal government bodies and NGOs:

- 1) Committee for the coordination of social inclusion policy<sup>33</sup>. The Committee examines questions relating to the situation regarding poverty, income inequality and social exclusion in the country, looks at proposals for the development and refinement of policy planning documents in the field of social inclusion and exchanges information on topical issues in the social inclusion sector such as up-to-date statistics, new legislative initiatives in different sectors and examples of best practice.<sup>34</sup> The committee is chaired by the Ministry of Welfare. The following institutions and organisations take part in the work of this committee: The Latvian Association of Free Trade Unions, the Federation of Latvian Pensioners, the CSP, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Latgale Planning Region, the Ministry of the Economy, the Ministry of Culture, Riga City Council, the Confederation of Employers of Latvia, the Ministry of Transport and Communications, the Kurzeme Planning Region, the Ministry of Agriculture, Sustento (the Latvian Society for People with Special Needs), the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development, the State Police, the Ministry of Health, the association EAPN-Latvia, the Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments (LPS), the Ministry of Justice, the Zemgale Planning Region, Latvian Children's Fund and the Vidzeme Planning Region;
- 2) the Council for demographic affairs promotes a unified national demographic policy and its implementation at all levels of public administration. The Council evaluates and coordinates implementation of the government's demographic policy, and briefs the media on issues relating to demographic policy<sup>35</sup>. The Council's decisions on initiatives supported in the field of the National Revival Strategy also have a positive impact on child welfare and material security.<sup>36</sup> The Council is chaired by the Prime Minister, and the following institutions and organisations take part in its work: Foreign Ministry's Ambassador -at-large for diaspora issues; the Minister for the Economy; the Minister for Welfare the Minister for Finance; the Minister for the Interior; the Minister for Education and Science; the Minister for Culture; the Minister for Justice; the Minister for Health the Minister for Environmental Protection and Regional Development the Parliamentary Committee for Social and Employment Affairs; the Parliamentary Committee for Human Rights and Public Affairs; the Centre for Demographic Affairs; the department of Statistics and Demography at the Faculty for Economics and Management at Latvijas Universitāte [University of Latvia]; the Faculty of Geography and Earth Sciences, Latvijas Universitāte; the Chancellery of the State President; the Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments (LPS); 'Asociācija Ģimene' [Family association]; the Latvian Association of large family societies; the non-profit NGO 'Nākotnes fonds' [Future fund]; the Latvian employers' confederation; Free Trade Union Confederation of Latvia; 'Latvijas Bērnu forums' [Latvian children's forum]; the alternative childcare alliance;
- 3) the Council for cooperation on children's affairs promotes a common understanding of the principle of the priority of the best interests of the child in central and municipal government policies, as well as promoting united and coordinated action by institutions, public organisations and other natural and legal persons, including children's rights protection cooperation groups, in the protection of children's rights<sup>37</sup>. The Council for cooperation on children's affairs consists of: the Minister for Welfare (Chair of the Council); the Minister for the Interior;

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<sup>33</sup> Set up pursuant to Order No 31 of 8 March 2023 of the Minister for Welfare, which also repealed Order No 38 of 27 April 2016 of the Minister for Welfare setting up a committee for the coordination of social inclusion policy, <https://www.lm.gov.lv/lv/socialas-ieklausanas-politikas-koordinacijas-komiteja>.

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.lm.gov.lv/lv/socialas-ieklausanas-politikas-koordinacijas-komiteja>.

<sup>35</sup> Paragraph 1 of the Statutes of the Council for Demographic Affairs(<https://likumi.lv/doc.php?id=229250>).

<sup>36</sup> <https://www.lm.gov.lv/lv/demografisko-lietu-padome>.

<sup>37</sup> The Council's statutes were approved by Order No 32 of 10 March 2023 of the Minister for Welfare, <https://www.lm.gov.lv/lv/bernu-lietu-sadabibas-padome>.

- the Minister for Education and Science; the Minister for Justice; the Minister for Health; the Minister for Environmental Protection and Regional Development; the Minister for Culture; the State Inspectorate for the Protection of Children's Rights (VBTAI); the State Chancellery; the LPS; the association 'Latvian children's welfare network';
- 4) the Mother and Child Health Advisory Board also provides professional sectoral support for implementing maternal and child health policy and improving the health of mothers and children<sup>38</sup>. The Board consists of: The Ministry of Health, the National Health Service, the Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (SPKC), the Children's Clinic University Hospital (BKUS), the Latvian Association of Gynaecologists and Maternity Professionals, the Latvian Association of Midwives, the Latvian Association of Paediatricians, the Latvian Association of General Practitioners, the Latvian Association of Rural General Practitioners; The Latvian Nursing Association, the Latvian Association of Neonatologists;
  - 5) the Nutrition Council promotes nutrition policy, studying diet-related public health issues and submitting recommendations to address these<sup>39</sup>. The Board consists of: The Minister for Health, the Ministry of Education and Science (IZM), the Ministry of Welfare (LM), the Latvian Association of Dieticians, the Latvian University of Bioscience and Technology, the LPS, the Latvian Federation of Food Companies, Latvian Association of Paediatricians, the University of Latvia, the Latvian Association of Nutrition Professionals, the Latvian Association of Hotels and Restaurants, the Food and Veterinary Service (PVD), Riga Stradiņš University (RSU), the SPKC, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Agriculture, the Latvian Association of Diet and Nutrition Professionals;
  - 6) and the advisory board 'Izglītība visiem'<sup>40</sup> [Education for all]. The Board acts as an interface between government and society and promotes cooperation with international partners to ensure that the objectives set by the World Education Forum (2000, Dakar) are met in Latvia. The Board encourages the implementation in Latvia of recommendations drawn up by the UN, UNEOP, the EU, the Council of Europe and other international organisations. The Board consists of the Minister for Education and Science, representatives of other ministries and other central and municipal government bodies, representatives from the private sector and from community and international organisations, who are invited following recommendations of the IZM and the Latvian National Commission for UNESCO.

The Children's Cooperation Council monitors implementation of the European Child Guarantee.

### **Description of the procedure for drawing up the action plan**

The Ministry of Welfare has undertaken to draw up the action plan to implement the European Child Guarantee, as it is the leading government body in the field of social protection, the rights of children and the family, equal opportunities for persons with disabilities and gender equality (paragraph 1 of CR No 49 of 27 January 2004 laying down the statutes of the Ministry of Welfare).

In accordance with paragraph 11 of the European Child Guarantee, with a view to sound governance, monitoring and reporting and taking due account of existing national structure and mechanism, Member States are recommended to:

<sup>38</sup> <https://www.vm.gov.lv/lv/mates-un-berna-veselibas-konsultativa-padome>.

<sup>39</sup> <https://www.vm.gov.lv/lv/uztura-padome>.

<sup>40</sup> [https://www.unesco.lv/lv/konsultativa-padome-izglitiba-visiem?utm\\_source=https%3A%2F%2Fduck-duckgo.com%2F](https://www.unesco.lv/lv/konsultativa-padome-izglitiba-visiem?utm_source=https%3A%2F%2Fduck-duckgo.com%2F).

- a) nominate a national Child Guarantee Coordinator, equipped with adequate resources and mandate enabling the effective coordination and monitoring of the implementation of this Recommendation;
- b) with a view to most effective targeting of measures to children in need and taking into account national, regional and local organisations and circumstances, involve relevant stakeholders in identifying children in need and barriers they face in accessing and taking up the services covered by this Recommendation;
- c) submit to the Commission an action plan, covering the period until 2030, to implement The European Child Guarantee, taking into account national, regional and local circumstances as well as existing policy actions and measures to support children in need. The action plan should include, in particular:
  - i. targeted categories of children in need to be reached by corresponding integrated measures;
  - ii. quantitative and qualitative targets to be achieved in terms of children in need to be reached by corresponding measures, taking into account regional and local disparities;
  - iii. measures planned or taken in implementing this Recommendation, including at regional and local level, and the necessary financial resources and timelines;
  - iv. other measures planned or taken to address child social exclusion and to break inter-generational cycles of disadvantage, based in particular on enabling the policy framework provided for in paragraph 6 of the European Child Guarantee;
  - v. a national framework for data collection, monitoring and evaluation of this Recommendation, also with a view to establishing a common monitoring framework, as referred to in paragraph 12, point (d) of the European Child Guarantee;
- d) develop effective outreach measures towards children in need and their families, in particular at regional and local level and through educational establishments, trained social workers, family-support services, civil society and social economy organisations, with a view to raising awareness and encouraging and facilitating the take-up of the services covered by this Recommendation;
- e) ensure the participation of regional, local and other relevant authorities, children and relevant stakeholders representing civil society, non-governmental organisations, educational establishments and bodies responsible for promoting social inclusion and integration, children's rights, inclusive education and non-discrimination, including national equality bodies throughout the preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the action plan;
- f) report every two years to the Commission on the progress in implementing the European Child Guarantee, in line with the national action plan for the implementation of the European Child Guarantee.

In accordance with paragraph 11 point (a) of the European Child Guarantee, the Ministry of Welfare has nominated Lauris Neikens, senior expert at the Department for children and family policy at the Ministry of Welfare as the European Child Guarantee coordinator (e-mail: [Lauris.Neikens@lm.gov.lv](mailto:Lauris.Neikens@lm.gov.lv); tel.: 67021673).

In accordance with paragraph 11 point (b) of the European Child Guarantee, the identification of children in need and the barriers they face in accessing and taking up the services covered by the Recommendation in question has involved both competent national and local authorities and NGOs, including the Latvian Children's Welfare Network.

The Ministry of Welfare, which played a leading role in the drafting of the action plan, collected information on the issues falling within the remit of the various institutions involved and on the measures included in the policy planning documents relating to the implementation of the European Child Guarantee.

The ‘Latvian Children’s Welfare Network’ association brings together associations, foundations and other legal and natural persons which are registered in Latvia and which are active in the fields of education, health, social issues and the protection of children’s interests.<sup>41</sup>

Representatives from the Latvian Children’s Welfare Network have attended various meetings of the Member State coordinators for the European Child Guarantee.

In the spring of 2023, the Ministry of Welfare and the Latvian Children’s Welfare Network joined forces to organise think-tanks in Riga and Rēzekne, at which discussions focused on topical issues relating to the implementation of the European Child Guarantee in Latvia, target groups, the applicability of the fields and recommendations referred to in paragraphs 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10 of the ECG to a specific target group, problems encountered and the solutions called for. The Riga think-tank was attended by representatives of central and municipal government bodies, municipal institutions and NGOs. The Rēzekne think-tank brought together representatives from municipal institutions, NGOs and youth associations, with special attention focusing on the situation of children and youngsters in the regions.

The think-tanks discussed possible target groups of the action plan: children being raised by a single parent; children suffering from domestic violence; street children; children and young people living in remote areas; children with a disability<sup>42</sup>; children being cared for outside the family and children at risk of poverty etc. People were also invited to come up with suggestions for definitions of other or additional target groups.

In order to ensure that the paragraph 11 point (e) of the European Child Guarantee is implemented, which recommends that Member States secure the participation of regional, local and other relevant authorities, children and relevant stakeholders representing civil society, non-governmental organisations, educational establishments and bodies responsible for promoting social inclusion and integration, children’s rights, inclusive education and non-discrimination, including national equality bodies throughout the preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the action plan, the review of the issue of the European Child Guarantee has been included in the range of issues to be examined by the Council for cooperation on children’s affairs.

On 22 September 2022 the Council for cooperation on children's affairs set up a subgroup ‘on the drafting of an action plan to implement the European Child Guarantee’ (record No 3, paragraph 1, point 10). The following institutions and organisations are involved in the subgroup ‘on the drafting of an action plan to implement the European Child Guarantee: the Latvian child welfare network, EM, IZM, KM, LPS, VK, SAM, SIF, TM, VBTAI, VM VARAM.

On 1 December 2022 the subgroup examined the draft action plan prepared by the LM and agreed on further measures needed to ensure the successful drafting of the action plan.

The draft action plan to implement the European Child Guarantee was examined at the meeting of the Council for cooperation on children’s affairs of 24 May 2023 (record no 2, paragraph 3)<sup>43,44</sup>. At the meeting of the Council in question it was decided that:

- 1) the information provided by the LM would be backed in principle;

<sup>41</sup> <https://www.bernulabklajiba.lv/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Statuti-2022.pdf>.

<sup>42</sup> For children up to and including the age of 17, invalidity is defined without being broken down into groups. For children, impairment and its manifestations at the level of organ systems have dominated and continue to dominate as a criterion for assessing the severity of disability and its impact on the ability to carry out everyday activities.

<sup>43</sup> <https://www.lm.gov.lv/lv/bernu-lietu-sadabibas-padome>.

<sup>44</sup> <https://www.lm.gov.lv/lv/media/22761/download?attachment>.

- 2) the stakeholder institutions involved would examine the joint action plan submitted for approval;
- 3) the LM would fine-tune the action plan and submit it to the European Commission by 1 June 2023;
- 4) the Council subgroup on the drafting of an action plan to implement the European Child Guarantee should monitor implementation of the action plan.

At the meeting of the Council subgroup on the drafting of an action plan to implement the European Child Guarantee of 31 May 2023, it was agreed to informally send a working version of the draft action plan to the European Commission for comments and suggestions, given that the subgroup considers that the action plan needs to be improved before it can be published and made generally available on the European Commission's website.

Following the decision by the Council subgroup on the drafting of an action plan to implement the European Guarantee for Children, on 1 July 2023 the LM sent the European Commission the working version of the draft action plan for its comments and suggestions.

On 23 June 2023 the LM received the European Commission's informal comments and suggestions on improving the draft action plan to implement the European Guarantee for Children.

On 29 September 2023 the LM received the results of the survey carried out by the Latvian Child Welfare Network entitled 'Latvian family barometer 2023'<sup>45</sup>. The aim of this survey was to identify families' degree of satisfaction, unfulfilled needs and expectations regarding the fields covered by the European Child Guarantee - childcare, education, healthcare, housing and healthy nutrition. In each of these fields broader problems were identified and risk groups singled out which encounter these problems on a regular basis.

The LM has improved and supplemented the draft working plan in line with the European Commission's comments and recommendations and the results of the 2023 Latvian family barometer survey.

### **Target categories of children in need and the assistance granted to them in the fields referred to in the European Child Guarantee.**

#### Target categories of children in need

In accordance with paragraph 11 point (c) subpoint (i) of the European Child Guarantee, with a view to sound governance, monitoring and reporting, and taking due account of existing national structure and mechanisms, Member States are recommended to submit to the European Commission an action

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<sup>45</sup> <https://www.bernulabklajiba.lv/latvijas-gimenu-barometrs-rezultati/>.

plan, covering the period until 2030, taking into account national, regional and local circumstances as well as any policy actions and measures to support children in need.

In accordance with the above-mentioned point of the Recommendation, EU Member States are recommended to ensure that **the action plan also includes target categories of children in need to be reached by corresponding relevant integrated measures.**

Article 3(2) of the Law on the Protection of Children's Rights provides that the State must safeguard the rights and freedoms of all children without any discrimination, irrespective of race, nationality, gender, language, political party alliance, political or religious convictions, national, ethnic or social origin, place of residence within the country, property or health status, birth or other circumstances of the child, or of his or her parents, guardians or family members. Article 6(2) of the same law provides that in all actions with regard to the child, irrespective of whether taken by central or local government authorities, public organisations or other natural and legal persons and courts and other law enforcement authorities, priority must be given to the rights and interests of the child. These persons must respect the best interests of the child in all actions that directly or indirectly affect or may affect the child: in assessing any case relating to the child; in acting in any case relating to the child; in taking any decision relating to the child.

To ensure that the best interests of the child are also safeguarded for every child in need, the State has defined, and specifically singled out, target groups of children for additional or special support or protection measures for the child and the family.

In accordance with Article 26(1) of the Law on the Protection of Children's Rights, central and municipal government supports families, particularly those with a large number of children, and families caring for children with disabilities, and provides them with the requisite assistance.

At the start of 2021 there were 503 100 nuclear families in Latvia (hereinafter 'families'). The single-parent family is the most common type of family in Latvia, with 24% of families having one parent (generally the mother) with one or more minor children<sup>46</sup>. Married couples with minor children accounted for 16.3% of the total number of families in Latvia. Unregistered cohabiting partners with minor children, by contrast, accounted for 3.5%.<sup>47</sup>

Latvia has around 12 000 families with three children, around 2 300 families with four children, around 700 families with five children and 400 families with six or more children. This makes a total of around 15 500 families with a large number of children under the age of 18<sup>48</sup>.

In 2022, 8 988 children with disabilities were registered in Latvia.<sup>49</sup> For the majority of children, disability is based on a general medical condition. Of the specific functional impairments (vision, hearing, movement, mental and behavioural disorders), children with disabilities are most likely to experience mental and behavioural disorders. General medical condition - 4 685 children; mental and behavioural disorders - 3 285 children; movement disorders - 326 children; hearing disorders - 481 children; impaired vision - 280 children.

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<sup>46</sup> The largest group is 'single parents', mainly women. However, this group is problematic, as it is unclear what 'single' means. The group is hard to identify as it is so heterogeneous (in terms of number of children, income, support from other family members, working time regime), <https://www.lm.gov.lv/lv/media/16686/download>.

<sup>47</sup> The CSP published population census data on families and households on 30 July 2021, <https://www.csp.gov.lv/lv/majsaimniecibas-un-gimenes>.

<sup>48</sup> [www.godagimene.lv](http://www.godagimene.lv).

<sup>49</sup> Welfare information system (LabIS), CSP.



In addition, the legislator has enhanced the State's obligation to assist less well-off families in particular with raising and educating children, vocational education and finding work and somewhere to live (Article 26(3) of the Law on the Protection of Children's Rights).

As of September 2023, 41 252 individuals had the status of deprived persons.<sup>50</sup>

Article 110 of the Constitution of the Republic of Latvia, second sentence, provides that the State shall also furnish special assistance to children who have been deprived of parental care or who are victims of violence.

In 2022, 5 798 children were in care outside the family (1.52% of all children living in Latvia). In 2022, the majority of children in care outside the family were placed with guardians, meaning that 3 795 children or 65.5% of all children in care outside the family were in guardianship. For 1 476 children (25.4 %), care was provided by a foster family, and for 527 children (9.1%) out-of-family care was provided by a long-term social care and social rehabilitation institution. In 2022, therefore, 90.9% of children were cared for in a family-like environment.

Statistics compiled by the LM show that on average 1 700 children per year receive a social rehabilitation service on the grounds of having been victims of unlawful acts. In 2022, 1 611 children received a social rehabilitation on the grounds of having been victims of unlawful acts (864 girls and 747 boys). It should be noted that a social rehabilitation service for children who have been victims of unlawful activities may be granted either separately according to the type of violence suffered (emotional violence, physical violence, sexual violence, abandonment of a child) or for various types of violence combined. It is also not uncommon for a social rehabilitation service for children that have been the victims of unlawful acts to be granted to the same child several times in the course of a year, to make sure that the child recovers successfully from the violence suffered.

The aforementioned include target groups of children to which the government has drawn special attention in a bid to increase the protection and support of children in those groups.

We would also point out that, in accordance with the Law on support for Ukrainian civilians, as of 5 March 2022 Ukrainian civilians have been designated as a target group eligible for special assistance where they have left Ukraine or are unable to return to Ukraine owing the ongoing armed conflict started by the Russian Federation. Assistance under the Law on support for Ukrainian civilians is granted during the course of the armed conflict. For the purposes of this law, 'Ukrainian civilians' means Ukrainian citizens and their family members, as well as persons who have been granted a permanent Ukrainian residence permit and who are unable to return to their country of citizenship, persons classified as stateless or having international protection status, and their family members.

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<sup>50</sup> Data collected by the LM. No separate statistics are collected on children having the valid status of 'deprived'.

In accordance with Article 36(3) of the Law on social services and social assistance, basic social assistance benefits and the status of poor or low-income households:

- (1) shall be granted for a period of three calendar months if the household has at least one person of working age;
- (2) shall be granted for a period of six calendar months if no person of working age is present in the household or the person is covered by the exceptions set out in paragraph two of this Article;
- (3) may be granted for one calendar month if the household income does not exceed the income thresholds established in Article 33 of the Law on social services and social assistance, but there is an established non-compliance with any of the conditions laid down in Article 9 (1), Article 36 (1) (2) and (2) of this Law or the documents required for receiving social assistance or for granting the status of a poor and disadvantaged household as established by the Cabinet of Ministers.' Members of the household shall be obliged to work with municipal social services or other bodies in order to rectify these non-compliances.

8 928 Ukrainian refugees aged between 5 and 18 are registered in Latvia. 4 299 students are registered in the Latvian education system, of which 1 524 are in early childhood education, 2 775 in general education and 74 in vocational education.<sup>51</sup>

On 1 April 2023, 467 Ukrainian children were resident in Latvia under emergency guardianship arrangements with an emergency guardian.

Nine were children aged from 0-3, 114 were aged 4-12 and 344 were aged 13-17. Between 16 March 2022 and 1 April 2023 Orphan's and Custody Courts took a total of 1 010 decisions establishing emergency guardianship for children and appointing emergency guardians for Ukrainian children. As of 1 April 2023, 703 children had reached the age of majority or been released from emergency guardianship, most commonly (in the case of 368 children) because they had returned to Ukraine or their parents had travelled to Latvia and moved to another country.<sup>52</sup>

It should also be pointed out that legislation and policy planning documents also feature special support measures for other, broader, target groups that include not just specific target groups of children but all children, residents in all age groups and persons who have reached the age of majority. However, measures such as these aimed at a wider target group also have a positive impact on the situation of children in need. For example, review of the targeting of social benefits and improved coverage of beneficiaries, including review of the conditions for granting the State family allowance and eliminating differences in the conditions for granting<sup>53</sup> the allowance and the supplement, food aid and basic material assistance for disadvantaged households and households in crisis<sup>54</sup>.

The action plan sets out the children's target groups that the State has singled out by approving legislation and policy planning documents, thus ensuring that they are guaranteed specialist and bespoke support measures.

By contrast, the children referred to in paragraphs 5 points (a), (c) and (d) of the European Child Guarantee are not singled out as separate target groups.

As regards the children referred to in paragraph 5 point (a) of the European Child Guarantee (homeless children or children experiencing severe housing deprivation), we would point out that Latvia's child protection system does not allow children to be in such a situation (homeless or experiencing severe housing deprivation). In this type of situation, the municipality helps families with children resolve housing issues. If it is not possible to provide a child with assistance within the family, the child will be put into care outside the family or into alternative care until the biological family has been able to resolve its crisis situation. In accordance with Article 27(1) of the Latvian Law on the Protection of Children's Rights, a child may be separated from its family if:

- 1) the life, health or development of the child is seriously threatened as a result of violence or justified suspicions of violence against the child, or as a result of lack of care or home circumstances (social environment);
- 2) the child is seriously jeopardising its health or development by using alcohol, narcotics or toxic substances.

In the cases referred to in Article 27(1)(1) and (2) of the Law on the Protection of Children's Rights, where the child's life, health or development of the child is seriously threatened as a result of violence or justified suspicions of violence against the child, or as a result of lack of care or because of circumstances at home (social environment); or where the child is seriously jeopardising its health or

<sup>51</sup> Civil Protection Department data.

<sup>52</sup> VBTAI data.

<sup>53</sup> Social protection and labour market policy guidelines 2021-2027, task 1.2.1, <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/325828-par-socialas-aizsardzibas-un-darba-tirgus-politikas-pamatnostadnem-2021-2027-gadam>.

<sup>54</sup> Social protection and labour market policy guidelines 2021-2027, task 1.7 <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/325828-par-socialas-aizsardzibas-un-darba-tirgus-politikas-pamatnostadnem-2021-2027-gadam>.

development by using alcohol, narcotics or toxic substances, a child shall be separated from its family if the circumstances detrimental to the child's development cannot be remedied with the child remaining in the family.

A child separated from its family must have out-of-family care arranged or be placed with a guardian or a foster family. Out-of-family care in a childcare institution is arranged only when care by a guardian or a foster family is not appropriate for the child in question. The child remains in a childcare institution until it can be assured appropriate care by a guardian or foster family.

As regards the children referred to in paragraph 5 point (c) of the European Child Guarantee (children with mental health issues), we would point out that the measures taken and scheduled to be taken by Latvia are couched more broadly to include not just mental health issues but also somatic health issues that compromise a child's ability to integrate into society (children with special needs, children with a disability).

As regards the children referred to in paragraph 5 point (d) of the European Child Guarantee (children with a migrant background or minority ethnic origin, particularly Roma), we would point out that the number of such children is relatively small, so they have not been singled out as a specific target group of children in need, and given the general principle that an equally high level of support should be given to all children, children who have migrated to Latvia and children with an ethnic minority background do not constitute an exception in this instance.

According to statistics on the work of the Orphan's and Custody Courts compiled by VBTAI, 22 unaccompanied minors were brought to the attention of the Orphan's and Custody Courts in 2022. Out-of-family care was provided to 10 asylum seekers (nine were placed under guardianship and one in an institution for long-term social care and social rehabilitation), and two minors that were granted refugee status were placed under guardianship). One minor who was refused international protection in Latvia was placed with a foster family.<sup>55</sup>

At the start of 2023, 96.3% of all children were Latvian citizens, 0.6% were non-citizens and 3.1% had citizenship of other countries. As of 1 January 2020, newborn children are no longer granted the status of non-citizen in Latvia so non-citizens as a proportion of the number of children is falling sharply. By ethnic origin, 69.4% of children were Latvian, 13.1% Russian, 2.0% Ukrainian, 0.6% Polish, 0.5% Belarusian and 14.4% were of other ethnic origin.<sup>56</sup>

By nationality, 12 398 of newborns were Latvian, 1 446 Russian, 88 Polish, 56 Belarusian, 250 Ukrainian, 35 Roma, 58 Lithuanian and 1 623 other (including children whose nationality was not declared).<sup>57</sup>

With regard to paragraph 11 point (c) sub-point (i) of the European Child Guarantee, we would point out that the social protection measures implemented by Latvia cover household members of all age groups, thus ensuring that families are guaranteed income security, particularly in the event of old age, unemployment, illness, disability, an accident at work, maternity and loss of breadwinner, and are able to access services of social importance, including healthcare, housing, education and care.

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<sup>55</sup> <https://www.bti.gov.lv/lv/jaunums/valsts-statistikas-parskatu-par-barintiesu-darbu-2022-gada-analize>.

<sup>56</sup> CSP, statistical data collection "Bērni Latvijā 2023" [Children in Latvia 2023, in LV], [https://admin.stat.gov.lv/system/files/publication/2023-08/Nr\\_05\\_Berni\\_Latvija\\_2023\\_%2823\\_00%29\\_LV\\_EN\\_0.pdf](https://admin.stat.gov.lv/system/files/publication/2023-08/Nr_05_Berni_Latvija_2023_%2823_00%29_LV_EN_0.pdf).

<sup>57</sup> CSP, statistical data collection "Bērni Latvijā 2023" [Children in Latvia 2023, in LV], [https://admin.stat.gov.lv/system/files/publication/2023-08/Nr\\_05\\_Berni\\_Latvija\\_2023\\_%2823\\_00%29\\_LV\\_EN\\_0.pdf](https://admin.stat.gov.lv/system/files/publication/2023-08/Nr_05_Berni_Latvija_2023_%2823_00%29_LV_EN_0.pdf).

State social protection for families with children primarily includes social insurance for the child's parents, a child maintenance guarantee (where one of the parents does not pay maintenance), universal and income-tested social benefits and personal income tax relief for dependants.

The wellbeing of a child in need <sup>58</sup> may also be indirectly influenced by support received in the household as a whole, or by an individual adult member of the family, e.g. employment-related support.

Article 3(1) of the Law on State social insurance provides for the State to organise measures to cover the risk of loss of work income for a person or his dependants in respect of sickness, invalidity, maternity, paternity, unemployment, old age, occupational accident or illness or childcare. The amount of State social insurance services (benefits and pensions) depends on the type of scheme from which contributions are made.

## Material support for families with children

### Social insurance

Socially insured parents (employees contributing 34.09% of their salary and the self-employed contributing 31.07% of their income) are entitled to the following social security benefits:

- 1) **maternity benefit** for the duration of maternity leave is paid to a woman who is employed or self-employed at the start of maternity leave. The benefit is paid in two instalments. Before childbirth, for 56 or 70 calendar days of maternity leave, and 56 or 70 calendar days after childbirth. The allowance is set at 80% of the applicant's average contribution basis.
- 2) Article 155 of the Labour Law establishes the right of the child's father to 10 working days' leave for the birth of a child. This leave must be taken within six months of the child's birth. The State Social Insurance Agency grants a paternity benefit of <sup>59</sup> 10 working days to the father of a newborn child. **Paternity benefit** may also be granted to a parent who has adopted a child that was in out-of-family care up to the age of 18 and who was granted 10 working day's leave by the employer in connection with the adoption. The benefit is set at 80% of the applicant's average contribution basis.
- 3) **parental benefit**, which is paid to one of the parents who is employed or self-employed. The amount of parental benefit depends on the requested length, and there are two options:
  - a. up to the age of one, the benefit is 60% of the beneficiary's average contribution basis;
  - b. up to the age of 18 months, the benefit is 43.75% of the beneficiary's average contribution basis;

Parental benefit is paid up to the amount granted if the parent is on parental leave. If the parent is working, 30% of the benefit is paid.

- 4) **sickness benefit** may be granted to a child's parent (including a guardian or other person taking care of the child by decision of a Orphan's and Custody Court) who is employed or self-employed where they are unable to go to work as they are caring for a sick child, lose income from paid work or economic activity as a result and have been issued with a B work incapacity certificate by a doctor to take care of a sick child at home or in hospital. Sickness benefit is payable for caring for a sick child who is under the age of 14 years (has not yet turned 14). If the child is diagnosed with a serious disease, sickness benefit may be granted

<sup>58</sup> A concept that describes an individual's satisfaction with everyday life as determined by social, economic and environmental aspects <https://tezaurs.lv>.

<sup>59</sup> Paternity allowance is granted to a person other than the child's mother if the child's paternity has not been recognised (established), the child's father has died or the father of the child no longer has custody.

until the child reaches the age of 18. Calculation of the amount of sickness benefit takes account of the applicant's average contribution basis.

- 5) a **survivor's pension** is paid to the family members of a deceased insured person. The deceased person's children are entitled to a survivor's pension, regardless of whether or not they were a dependent of the deceased. The survivor's pension is calculated on the basis of the breadwinner's potential old-age pension:
- a. for one dependent - 50% of the pension;
  - b. for two dependents - 75% of the pension;
  - c. for three or more dependents - 90% of the pension.

The amount of the pension for each child may not be lower than the minimum amount set by the Cabinet. The minimum survivor's pension for each child, as of 1 July 2023 is:

- up to and including the age of six EUR 157.00 (EUR 136.00 up to 30 June 2023);
- from the age of seven EUR 188.00 (EUR 163.00 up to 30 June 2023);

Maternity, paternity and parental benefits all carry qualifying periods (minimum contribution period) of at least three months during the last six months prior to the month in which the insurance event occurred, and no fewer than six months over the last 24 months.

In accordance with Article 151(1) of the Labour Law, the employer is obliged to grant additional paid annual leave to employees with children. Employees caring for fewer than three children up to the age of 14 are entitled to at least one working day. Employees caring for three or more children up to the age of 16 or a child with a disability up to the age of 18 are entitled to three working days. In accordance with Article 73 of the Labour Law, the employer is obliged to pay an employee the average earnings for the time the employee is on such leave.

#### State social benefits and remuneration

At the same time, the Law on State social benefits provides for cash support in situations where additional expenditure is likely. Regular State social benefits are paid to all parents:

- 1) a State family allowance is paid for each child being raised in the family from the day they reach the age of one year until the age of 16, as well as for a child aged 16 to 20 if they are in general or vocational education and are not married. Monthly amount of the State family allowance:
  - a. for one child - EUR 25;
  - b. for two children - EUR 100 (EUR 50 per child);
  - c. for three children - EUR 225 (EUR 75 per child);
  - d. for four or more children - EUR 100 per child.

In the case of a child with a disability, the family benefit is increased by an additional amount. As of 1 January 2024, this amount will be EUR 160 per month.

- 2) A childcare allowance is paid to one of the child's parents, to the child's guardian or other individual who, by decision of a Orphan's and Custody Court , is effectively caring for a raising a child up to the age of two years. Monthly amount:
  - a. for a child up to the age of 18 months - EUR 171;
  - b. for a child aged between 18 months and two years - EUR 42.69;
- 3) An allowance for raising a child under guardianship is paid to the guardian for raising a child from the day of establishment of the guardianship to the age of 18 years or the day the guardianship ceases. Monthly amount:
  - a. for a child up to the age of seven - EUR 215;
  - b. for a child aged between 7 and 18 - EUR 258;

- 4) remuneration for fulfilling the duties of a guardian is paid to the guardian from the date of establishment of guardianship until the child's 18 years of age or the day the guardianship ceases. Remuneration for fulfilling the duties of guardian is EUR 54.07 per month;
- 5) remuneration for fulfilling the duties of a foster family is paid to the foster family (other than a specialised foster family) to which care of the child has been assigned for a period longer than a month by decision of a Orphan's and Custody Court and an agreement reached by the municipality and the foster family. *Remuneration depends on the number of foster children in the foster family. Monthly remuneration is as follows:*
  - a. for one child placed with a foster family - EUR 171;
  - b. for two children placed with a foster family - EUR 222.30;
  - c. for three or more children- EUR 273.60;
- 6) remuneration for the care of an adopted child is granted to the adoptive parent under whose care and supervision the adopted child has been placed by decision of a Orphan's and Custody Court prior to the approval of the adoption by the court. Remuneration depends on the age of the adopted child and the employment situation of the adoptive party. Remuneration is equal to 70% of the national average contribution base for employees caring for a child under the age of eight, and EUR 171 per month for other persons;
- 7) a disabled childcare allowance is paid to a person caring for a child whom the State medical commission for the assessment of health and work capacity has recognised as being disabled and in respect of whom an opinion confirming the need for special care has been issued on the grounds of physical or functional impairments. the disabled childcare allowance is EUR 313.43 per month;
- 8) the State allowance for children with coeliac disease as of 1 January 2024 is EUR 160 per month;
- 9) a child adoption allowance is paid to one of the adoptive parents once the court judgments approving the adoption has entered into force. *Monthly amount:*
  - a. for a child up to the age of seven - EUR 107.50;
  - b. for a child aged between 7 and 18 - EUR 129;
- 10) A child adoption allowance (one-off payment) is paid to one of the adoptive parents once the court judgment approving the adoption has entered into force. The child adoption allowance is EUR 1 422.87;
- 11) a childbirth allowance (one-off payment) is paid to one of the parents permanently resident in Latvia for each child to whom a personal identification number has been assigned. An allowance is also paid to a guardian if a child is placed under guardianship up to the age of one. The allowance is EUR 421.17 per child.

#### Material assistance provided by the municipalities to families with children

In addition to the material assistance provided by central government, families with children are also eligible for assistance from the municipality.

#### Social assistance

The Law on social services and social assistance lays down uniform fundamental principles in accordance with which the municipality provides social assistance, meaning material assistance to low-

income households to ensure income at the guaranteed minimum income threshold, to cover expenditure relating to the use of housing and to cover payment of certain expenditure in crisis situations.<sup>60</sup>

In accordance with Article 33 of the Law on social services and social assistance, the minimum income thresholds for the provision of social assistance are set as percentages rounded to the nearest euro according to the median minimum income published on the CSP website<sup>61</sup> per equivalent consumer per month. The guaranteed minimum income threshold is 20% of the median income (EUR 125 for the first or only person in the household and EUR 87.5 for other persons in the household). The income threshold of a poor household is 50% of the median income (EUR 313 for the first or only person in the household and EUR 219 for other persons in the household). Each municipality is free to determine the income threshold of a disadvantaged household, the maximum being 80% of the median income (EUR 501 for the first or only person in a household and EUR 351 for other persons in the household, but no lower than the income threshold of a poor household as laid down in paragraph 3 above). Minimum household income thresholds are calculated by applying the following coefficients to the relevant income thresholds:

- 1) for the first or only person in the household the coefficient is 1;
- 2) for other persons in the household the coefficient is 0.7.

Minimum income thresholds are reviewed in accordance with the procedure laid down in the Law on social security.

In accordance with Article 9(2) of the Law on social services and social assistance, if a municipality has received information from natural persons or institutions regarding a person who might require social assistance, the municipality in question must, in accordance with the procedures specified in the Law on social security, verify the information received, evaluate the individual's needs in terms of social assistance, and inform this person or their legal representative of the rights and possibilities of receiving social assistance, as well as the procedures to be followed to do so.

In accordance with Article 35 of the Law on social services and social assistance,

- 1) the basic social assistance benefits are:
  - a. guaranteed minimum income benefit, which is material support in monetary terms for covering everyday expenses;  
in accordance with paragraph 9 of Cabinet Regulation No 809 of 17 December 2020 on the assessment of the material situation of households and the receipt of social assistance, the amount of guaranteed minimum income support is calculated as the difference between the sum of guaranteed minimum income thresholds for the household and the household's total disposable income;
  - b. housing allowance - material support to cover expenditure relating to use of the home;

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<sup>60</sup> In accordance with Article 32 of the Law on social services and social assistance, the purpose of social assistance is to provide material assistance to low-income households to ensure income at the guaranteed minimum income threshold, to cover expenditure relating to the use of housing and to cover payment of certain expenditure in crisis situations.

<sup>61</sup> The calculation of minimum benefits and pensions calls for an indicator that reflects socio-economic realities if these are to be fit for purpose. In situations where a dataset contains a range of very large and very small values, as in the case of income, which may be very high or very low, average indicators do not provide an objective overview of the situation, so in this case (income of the resident population) use is made of the median. The median is the mathematical indicator in the middle of a set of increasing or decreasing values. This means that the median is at the mid-point of a set of values, excluding the highest and lower figures. The median of minimum incomes is an indicator that is obtained from the household survey organised by the Central Statistical Bureau, in which around 6 000 households participate. Data on the median minimum income can be found on the CSP website at:

[https://data.stat.gov.lv/pxweb/lv/OSP\\_PUB/START\\_POP\\_NN\\_NNM/NNM080/](https://data.stat.gov.lv/pxweb/lv/OSP_PUB/START_POP_NN_NNM/NNM080/).

the amount of housing allowance is calculated based on the following expenditure:

- use of living quarters (rent, expenditure on compulsory management activities);
- services relating to the use of living quarters (energy for heating and hot water, electricity, water, natural gas, wastewater and sanitation, management of communal waste), where these are not included in the rental fee or the expenditure on compulsory management activities;
- expenditure relating to telecom and internet services, plus expenditure on the installation and reading of water meters.

The amount of housing allowance is calculated as the difference between the sum of guaranteed incomes for the household multiplied by the coefficient given in Article 35(5) of the Law on social services and social assistance<sup>62</sup> and expenditure on housing as laid down in legislation and the household's total income.

2) the additional social assistance benefits are:

- a. assistance with the payment of certain types of expenditure - material assistance to help individuals function socially and lead independent lives (the allowance is granted to an individual or household recognized as poor or disadvantaged, and the aims of these types of assistance, the amount of the allowance and the procedure for its allocation and disbursement, are laid down by municipal ordinance);
- b. assistance in a crisis situation - provision of material support to prevent or mitigate the consequences of exceptional events (the amount of the allowance and the procedure for its allocation and disbursement is laid down by municipal ordinance).

The State provides the municipalities with co-funding to cover expenditure to the tune of 30% of the guaranteed minimum income support and housing allowance paid to households.

#### *Assistance provided by the municipality as part of autonomous functions*

In performing their autonomous functions, municipalities may grant families with children additional support (support related to measurements of the family's income level and support to which any family with children is entitled). For example, financial support for families whose children of pre-school age are not on the waiting list for a pre-primary school. An overview of information on the support each municipality offers for families with children is available on the 'Vieta ģimenei' [Space for the family, in LV] website managed under the SIF's 'Family-friendly municipality' and 'Family-friendly workplace' programmes.<sup>63</sup>

#### Tax relief

Assistance can also be given to families with children by applying a favourable fiscal policy:

- 1) in accordance with Article 13(1)(a) of the Law on personal income tax, tax relief is available to taxpayers for children who are minors. Any individual (natural person) who is employed and pays income tax is entitled to tax relief on a dependent child. Tax relief is available to

<sup>62</sup> To calculate the amount of housing allowance for a household, the following coefficients are applied to the sum of guaranteed minimum income thresholds:

- 1) for a person of pensionable age living alone or a person with a disability living alone - a coefficient of 2.5;
- 2) for a household consisting solely of persons of pensionable age or persons with a disability - a coefficient of 2;
- 3) for a household consisting solely of persons of pensionable age or persons with a disability and children - a coefficient of 2;
- 4) for other households - a coefficient of 1.5 (Article 35(5) of the Law on social services and social assistance).

<sup>63</sup> <https://vietagimenei.lv>.



- one of the parents. For each dependent, the tax-free amount increases by €3 000 per year or €250 per month. This means that no tax is payable on that portion of a person's income;
- 2) in accordance with Article 10(1)(2) of the Law on personal income tax, prior to the imposition of income tax, the following expenditure incurred by the taxpayer is deducted from the amount of annual taxable income: expenditure on improving the qualifications of the taxpayer or the taxpayer's family members, on the acquisition of a specialist qualification, on schooling, including interest-based education programmes for children, on the use of medical services and payments of health insurance premiums to insurance companies established and operating in accordance with the regulatory enactments governing the insurance sector;
  - 3) in accordance with Article 5(1<sup>1</sup>) of the Law on immovable property tax, a municipality grants tax relief to taxpayers to whom it has granted the status of persons or families that are poor or disadvantaged - for persons in need, to the amount of 90 per cent of the calculated tax amount and for deprived persons, up to 90 per cent of the calculated tax amount for the period during which the taxpayer qualified as in need or deprived;
  - 4) in accordance with Article 5(1<sup>2</sup>) of the Law on immovable property, an individual's total tax due on immovable property is reduced by 50 per cent of the calculated tax sum, though not by more than 500 euros, for the following immovable property tax items: residential houses regardless of whether they have been divided into apartment properties, parts of residential houses, groups of premises within non-residential houses whose use type is residential, and the land belonging to these where the individual in question (themselves or together with their spouse) or their spouse has three or more children under 18 years of age (including children under guardianship or children placed in a foster family) or children under 24 years of age in secondary, professional or higher education as of 1 January of the taxation year and if their spouse has the declared place of residence at that address together with at least three of the abovementioned children. These types of relief also apply where the owner or legal possessor of the immovable property is one of the children referred to in this paragraph or a first-degree relative of the person or their spouse who has a declared place of residence at that address;
  - 5) under Article 7(5) of the Law on the motor vehicle tax and company car tax, a large family pays road user tax for one of the vehicles owned, held or possessed by one of its members equivalent to 50 per cent of the amount due for the relevant calendar year, where the vehicle is registered as:
    - a. a passenger car or general-use vehicle;
    - b. a box van or van, if the passenger seating capacity of the vehicle concerned exceeds four;
    - c. a bus with up to 16 passenger seats;
    - d. a light passenger or goods vehicle or a caravan.

### Resources from the Maintenance Guarantee Fund

In accordance with Article 179(1) of the Latvian Civil Law, parents are obliged to provide maintenance for a child commensurate with their ability and financial circumstances. The duty rests with the father and the mother until such time as the child is able to provide for itself. In accordance with paragraph 5 of that Article, the minimum maintenance which each of the parents must provide for the child, regardless of their ability to provide maintenance and their financial circumstances, is determined by the Cabinet in the light of the national minimum monthly wage and the age of the child. In accordance paragraph 2 of Cabinet Regulation No 37 of 15 January 2013 on the minimum amount of

child maintenance, each of the parents must provide their children with the following minimum amounts of maintenance:

- 1) for each child from birth to the age of seven, 25% of the minimum monthly wage set by the Cabinet<sup>64</sup>;
- 2) for each child from the age of seven to the age of 18, 30% of the minimum monthly wage set by the Cabinet;

In accordance with Article 3(1) of the Law on the Maintenance Guarantee Fund, the latter shall provide for children up to the age of majority, as well as for persons after the age of majority, if they continue to attend basic, secondary, vocational or special education in the Republic of Latvia, until they reach the age of 21, in any of the following cases:

- 1) the parent does not provide the child with maintenance which is at least equal to the amount of maintenance to be paid from the Maintenance Guarantee Fund, as determined by the Cabinet<sup>65</sup>, and none of the circumstances referred to in Article 11(5) of the Law on the Maintenance Guarantee Fund Law apply;
- 2) the debtor fails to comply with a court decision on the recovery of maintenance or a maintenance agreement and information has been received from the judicial officer that the debtor has not paid into the judicial officer's deposit account the amount specified in the notice to comply with the decision within the time limit specified in the notice.

### High-quality and inclusive education

In line with the recommendation made in paragraph 7 point (a) of the European Child Guarantee, in a bid to remove barriers to participation in early childhood education, according to Article 17(2<sup>1</sup>) of the Education Law, a municipality is obliged to provide a child who has reached the age of 18 months and whose place of residence has been declared as being in the administrative territory of the municipality with a place in an early education programme implemented by a municipal education institution (from the age of 18 months until the beginning of primary education) or cover the costs associated with the early education programme at an institute of private education.

On 11 January 2022, the Cabinet of Ministers adopted Regulation No 11 on the procedure for enrolment and withdrawal of pupils from general education programmes, and minimum requirements for the admission of pupils to the year above. Paragraph 9 of this CR provides that orphans and children deprived of parental care are to be admitted as a matter of priority:

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<sup>64</sup> In accordance with paragraph 2 of the Cabinet Regulation of 24 November 2015 on the amount of the minimum monthly wage under a standard working regime and the calculation of the minimum hourly rate, the minimum monthly wage under a standard working regime is EUR 620.  $0.25 \times 620 = \text{EUR } 155$  (minimum maintenance for a child from birth to the age of seven);  $0.3 \times 620 = \text{EUR } 186$  (minimum maintenance for a child from the age of seven to the age of 18).

<sup>65</sup> In accordance with paragraph 3 of CR No 616 of 10 December 2019 on the amount of maintenance disbursed from the Maintenance Guarantee Fund, the following amounts of maintenance are paid out from the Maintenance Guarantee Fund for a full calendar month:

- 1) EUR 107.50 for each child from birth to the age of seven;
- 2) EUR 129 for each child from the age of seven to the age of 18 and for a person who has reached the age of majority from the age of 18 until they reach 21.

- 1) to a special early education group at the municipal educational establishment closest to their declared place of residence, or to the special early education programme recommended in the opinion of the pedagogical-medical commission;
- 2) to a general education programme at the municipal educational establishment closest to their declared place of residence, unless an entrance exam is held and admission criteria set;
- 3) to a general secondary education programme, unless an entrance exam is held and admission criteria are set;
- 4) to a general basic or general secondary education programme, where the candidate scores the same as another student in the entrance exam and in respect of the established admission criteria.

In light of the recommendation made in paragraph 7 point (b) of the European Child Guarantee ('take measures to prevent and reduce early school leaving'), the State Service for Quality Education has from March 2017 to December 2023 been implementing ESF project No 8.3.4.0/16/I001 ('Support to reduce early school leaving'), to help reduce the number of students dropping out of school. The plan is to involve at least 80% of municipalities, including no fewer than 665 institutions of general and vocational education.

The project encourages the creation of a sustainable cooperation system between municipalities, educational establishments, educators, support staff and pupils' parents or representatives to allow pupils at risk of dropping out of education to be identified on time and provided with customised support.

Teaching staff are given the opportunity to develop professionally and enhance their skills in working with pupils. Methodological tools have been developed as part of this project. A joint database has been set up to allow information to be exchanged regularly between central and municipal government bodies and educational establishments on pupils who have been identified as at risk of dropping out, preventive measures taken and the results of these. This provides meaningful statistics and allows the effectiveness of measures to be evaluated in the long term.

The project also supports youth NGO initiatives in raising awareness of the problem of school drop-out amongst young people themselves, reaching out to learners through peers and involving them in activities. The measures focus on early diagnosis and solutions.

Individual support is provided through municipalities for learners who might drop out for want of financial resources, for example the cost of transport, meals, student accommodation and so on are reimbursed. However, the main focus of the project is not the temporary provision of financial assistance but the creation of a sustainable comprehensive mechanism that creates a supportive and inclusive environment for all learners.

The project's target group is:

- 1) pupils in general education, years 1 to 12;
- 2) students in vocational education levels 1 to 4 (including students in institutions of general education running vocational training programmes).

For each learner involved in the project, at the beginning of the semester, a member of the teaching staff draws up a bespoke support plan assessing the risks of drop-out and setting out the necessary support measures to mitigate these risks:

- 1) counselling/advisory support provided by educators and support staff (teaching staff, psychologists, youth workers, teaching assistants, special needs teachers, sign language interpreters, assistants, occupational therapists);
- 2) reimbursement of public transport costs;
- 3) reimbursement of lodging expenditure;
- 4) reimbursement of meal costs;
- 5) reimbursement of expenditure on the purchase of individual learning materials;
- 6) reimbursement of expenditure on the purchase of articles for individual use;
- 7) the option of joining youth NGO projects in the municipality.

This project was developed in accordance with Cabinet Regulation No 460 of 12 July 2016 on the rules for implementing specific objective 8.3.4 ‘Reducing early school leaving through prevention and intervention measures’ forming part of the ‘Growth and Employment’ Operational Programme.<sup>66</sup>

In light of the recommendation made in paragraph 7 point (c) of the European Child Guarantee (‘provide learning support to children with learning difficulties to compensate for their linguistic, cognitive and educational gaps’), the National Centre for Education (VISC) implemented a project from 17 October 2016 to 31 December 2023 entitled ‘A competency-based curriculum approach’ (Skola2030) with the objective of developing, validating and implementing in Latvia a general education curriculum and teaching approach from pre-school to secondary education that will equip pupils with the knowledge, skills and attitudes they need for life today. This project involves reviewing and developing the contents of current learning material, drawing up and approving new curricula and developing learning programmes and materials, including those aimed at children with special needs or with health issues. Under the project, training is scheduled for 16 843 educators (including 4 710 teachers) implementing teaching content in a linguistically heterogeneous environment, teachers in 100 institutions of early and general education (pilot schools) and all early education and school management teams in Latvia, and a teaching resources site is being developed to provide easy access to teaching and digital learning material in each and every school. A major component of the project is explaining the teaching approach to school teachers, the general public and parents. The project would thus create a support mechanism for head teachers, teachers, municipalities and parents, thus ensuring that the new teaching approach is successful in all pre-schools and schools in Latvia and that every child and young person in Latvia is provided with state-of-the art learning opportunities by 2021. The project is being implemented by the National Centre for Education in conjunction with the University of Daugavpils, the University of Latvia, the Latvian Academy of Sport Education, the University of Liepāja, the Rezekne Academy of Technologies, the Riga Academy of Teacher Training and Education Management (which merged with the University of Latvia in October 2017), the Latvian Language Agency, the Strazdumuiža boarding school (development centre for blind and partially-sighted children), and with the municipalities whose institutes of education are involved in approving teaching content.<sup>67</sup>

To improve support for children with special needs, and in line with paragraph 7 points (d) and (e) of the European Child Guarantee, on 1 October 2020 amendments were made to the Law on the Protection of Children's Rights, which as of 1 September 2021 provides for all children to be given a special needs assessment on commencement of compulsory education, with individual measures being laid

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<sup>66</sup> <https://www.ikvd.gov.lv/lv/par-projektu>.

<sup>67</sup> <https://skola2030.lv/lv/par-projektu>.

down for the provision of pedagogical and psychological support in State, municipal and private institutes of education. The Law delegates to the Cabinet the task of laying down the methodology for the assessment of special needs children in pre-primary schools.

The methodology drawn up by the IZM provides that each pre-primary school must designate a member of teaching staff responsible for assessing special needs children. In accordance with Cabinet Regulation No 453 of 29 June 2021 on the methodology for the assessment of special needs pupils in pre-primary schools, to assess the special needs of children that have reached the age of five, the member of staff makes use of a special needs assessment form that indicates whether the child needs the opinion of the school's support specialist.

This form is used to assess the child's basic skills and behaviour to establish whether he or she needs support with learning or a broader evaluation of special needs. The completion of this assessment form and subsequent action taken within the educational establishment comprise one of the initial steps in the development of an early special needs assessment system.

Once the assessment form has been completed, the head of the educational establishment ensures that the child's legal representative is informed of the outcome. If the member of teaching staff finds that the child needs the opinion of the school's support specialists as provided for in the CR, then, depending on the request made by the child's parents, the school support specialists carry out a learning or psychological assessment and submit their opinion. If the child's legal representative does not cooperate with the school, the learning or psychological assessment is carried out on the initiative of the school, which informs the child's parents of the outcome. Members of teaching staff at the school, in accordance with the recommendations made by an educational or clinical psychologist, speech therapist, speech therapist teacher or special educator, and the child's special needs, draw up an individual learning plan featuring adaptive and support measures.

As in the past, children up to the age of five, as well as older children in early education (both within educational establishments and outside of these), will be able to draw on the services of municipal pedagogical-medical commissions to assess special needs.

In accordance with paragraph 7 point (f) of the European Child Guarantee ('provide at least one healthy meal each school day'), Cabinet Regulation No 614 of 10 December 2019 on the procedure for calculating, allocating and using resources earmarked in the State budget to provide pupils with meals, lays down the procedure for calculating, allocating and using the State budget to provide meals for pupils attending schools in years 1, 2, 3 and 4 of basic education programmes (hereinafter 'pupils') and the amount of State budgetary resources per pupil per day. The amount of State budgetary resources per pupil in State-run schools is EUR 3.09 per day, and in municipal and private schools EUR 1.545 per day. The municipality distributes State budgetary resources to municipal and private educational establishments in the administrative territory of the municipality to provide meals for pupils according to the number of pupils. If State budgetary resources remain unused by the educational establishment education, the head may use these to provide meals for pupils in years 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9. We would also point out that many municipalities provide financial support to provide pupils with meals, particularly pupils from disadvantaged families and children from large families.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Further information on State aid can be found on the SIF website 'Vieta ģimenei' [family space, in LV] at <https://vietagimenei.lv/pasvaldibas/>.

The Rural Support Service uses EU co-funding to implement the programme ‘Milk and fruit for school’<sup>69</sup>. The aim of the programme is to promote lifelong healthy eating and nutrition habits for children, and to increase the effectiveness of the programme, provide more targeted support and increase the promotion of healthy diets among schoolchildren. The joint schools programme ‘Milk and fruit for school’ uses a uniform approach to distribute products to children and youngsters - from 1 October, fruit, vegetables and dairy products are available free of charge three times per school week to children of pre-school age and pupils in years 1 to 9.<sup>70</sup>

In line with the recommendation made in paragraph 7 point (g) of the European Child guarantee (‘ensure the provision of educational materials’), on 11 March 2021 the Cabinet approved Regulation No 155 on the procedure whereby central government and the local authorities finance the procurement of educational materials for institutes of education. This Regulation lays down the following:

- 1) the procedure whereby central government and the local authorities finance the procurement of educational materials for institutes of education;
- 2) the procedure and criteria used to calculate and finance from the State budget the procurement of the teaching materials needed to teach classes on the Latvian language, Latvian history and culture, and Latvian nature and geography (subject ‘Latvian classes’);
- 3) the procedure and criteria used to calculate and finance from the State budget the procurement of teaching materials for the educational programme on minority languages and cultural history;
- 4) the procedure for additional State budget funding for the purchase of teaching materials in the teaching year leading up to the first stage of basic education programmes in the State language for pupils who have completed minority education programmes in the previous school year.

The purchase of literature for teaching, electronic resources, interactive learning platforms, games in printed or digital form (including online), toys and accessories, methodological tools, supplementary literature, educational material, handouts, technical teaching aids, teaching materials, facilities and equipment, as well as the purchase of or subscription to learning management platforms and the purchase of subscription to learning and communication software for State educational establishments are financed from the State budgetary funds of the ministries under whose authority the educational establishments concerned fall.

Municipal and private institutes of education and national institutions of higher-education running pre-school programmes for children from the age of five, general lower or upper general secondary education programmes, as well as minority language and cultural history education programmes, are eligible for funding for the purchase of teaching material, provided that the educational establishments or their founders have entered and validated, by 5 September of the previous year, information on the number of students (by year/group and relevant educational programmes) in the National Education Information System as of 1 September of that year.

Based on the above information on the number of pupils, the IZM, in accordance with the State budgetary funds allocated to the ministry under the Law on the State budget for the current year for the purchase of teaching materials, calculates the funding for the purchase of teaching materials for the current calendar year and, by 1 May of the current calendar year, distributes State budgetary funds to municipalities, national institutions of higher education that have established educational institutions

<sup>69</sup> <https://piensaugliskolai.lv/lv/par-programmu/jaunumi/>.

<sup>70</sup> <https://www.lad.gov.lv/lv/katalogs/piens-un-augli-skolai>.

and founders of private education institutions for the purchase of teaching literature, games, methodological aids and reference books that comply with the national early education guidelines and national standards for primary and general secondary education, as well as for the purchase of or subscription to learning management platforms and the purchase of teaching materials for the implementation of minority language and cultural history education programmes.

The municipalities allocate this funding to institutes of education set up by the municipality that run early childhood education programmes for children from the age of five, or general primary and secondary education programmes, and to implementers of minority language and cultural history education programmes. National institutes of higher education allocate this funding to institutes of secondary education running general secondary education programmes.

In accordance with the State budget resources allocated for the purchase of teaching aids under the Law on the State budget for the current year, the IZM calculates funding for the purchase of teaching material intended for the implementation of the 'Latvijas mācība' [Latvian classes] course for the current calendar year, taking into account the information on the number of students in international education programmes as of 1 September of the previous year, entered and approved by international schools in the system by 5 September of the previous year. The IZM distributes State budgetary resources for the acquisition of teaching material for Latvian classes to the founders of international schools by 1 May of the current year.

In accordance with the State budgetary funds allocated under the Law on the State budget for the current year for the purchase of teaching materials, the IZM calculates additional funding for the purchase of teaching materials for the current calendar year for pupils in the first stage of basic education programmes who studied minority education programmes in the previous academic year, taking into account the information on the number of such pupils as of 1 September of the previous year, as entered and approved by the founders of educational establishments or educational establishments in the system by 5 September of the previous year. The IZM distributes additional State budgetary funds for the purchase of teaching materials for the implementation of the first stage of primary education programmes for pupils who studied minority education programmes during the previous school year to the founders of educational establishments by 1 May of the current year.

In accordance with the competence of municipalities as defined in the Law on education, municipalities finance from the municipal budget the purchase of or subscription to teaching materials in accordance with the national early education guidelines and standards governing national primary education, general secondary education, vocational secondary education and vocational training for educational establishments under their jurisdiction by transferring funds to the said educational establishments or by organising the centralised procurement of teaching materials in accordance with the Law on public procurement.

In accordance with Article 7 point (h) of the European Child Guarantee ('provide high speed connectivity, digital services and adequate equipment necessary for distance learning to ensure access to educational content online, as well as to improve digital skills of children in need and teachers and make the necessary investment to tackle all forms of digital divide'), on 8 February 2022 the Cabinet approved Cabinet Regulation No 111 on the procedure for organising and delivering distance learning (hereinafter 'CR No 111'). Paragraph 5 of CR 111 states that distance learning and studies must be implemented as an effective, high-quality, meaningful and inclusive component of in-person learning and study to allow pupils to achieve the results scheduled under the learning and study curriculum and develop cross-cutting skills, ensuring that pupils enjoy a nuanced, personalised and interdisciplinary programme of learning and studies.

Depending on the distance learning objective, purpose and possibilities, use may be made of:

- 1) combined learning, including individual and group work, consultations, and project work;
- 2) multiple sites, including libraries, laboratories, research institutes, museums, the natural and home environments;
- 3) combined learning resources, including hi-tech solutions.

In accordance with subparagraph 7.2 of CR No 111, in order to organise the types of distance learning referred to in the CR, an educational institute planning to deploy IT-based distance learning must, in collaboration with its founders (other than institutes of general and vocational training set up by the State or national universities), provide an online technical learning environment that supports synchronous and asynchronous distance learning and provides learners with access to digital learning materials, bearing in mind that:

- 1) synchronous distance learning solutions must provide the necessary hardware for video and audio streaming and recording, as well as software for synchronous online video and audio communication with screencasting support;
- 2) asynchronous distance learning solutions must provide an environment for the deployment of digital learning materials, the creation and submission of students' own work and communications between students and teachers.

The educational establishment, in agreement with its founder (other than institutes of general and vocational training set up by the State or national universities), shall use internal regulations to lay down the procedures governing the organisation of distance learning, including inter alia:

- 1) the procedure by which the educational establishment identifies whether technical means are available to learners for the provision of distance learning, as well as the procedures for securing these technical means where they are not available to learners;
- 2) the procedure for recording learner participation in distance learning and the completion of homework assignments;
- 3) the action to be taken where a student is unable to participate in distance learning or where this is hampered for technical reasons;
- 4) the procedure for ensuring compliance with security requirements during distance learning, and the procedure for contacting the legal representatives of a pupil who is a minor in the event of a threat to security or health;
- 5) the procedure governing how distance learners use the educational institute's resources and infrastructure (premises, library and the like);
- 6) the action to be taken where violence is identified or violence towards the learner is suspected.

In accordance with the recommendation made in paragraph 7 point (h) of the European Child Guarantee ('provide transport to early childhood education and care and education establishments, where applicable'), Article 6(4) of the Law on public transport services states that the public transport services route network must be configured so as to satisfy residents' demand for public transport services and guarantee that the network serves institutes of education, healthcare establishments, places of work and central and municipal government institutions during their normal (standard) opening hours. In accordance with the subsection referred to above, configuration of the route network outside urban areas must primarily allow schoolchildren to get to their place of study.

In accordance with Article 14(2) of the Law on public transport services, the Cabinet lays down the passenger categories that are eligible for subsidised transport on the route network, along with the



procedure governing the use and amount of such subsidies. Paragraph three of that article provides that municipalities may lay down travel subsidy rates within their administrative territory where the losses which these subsidies cause the carrier are compensated in full from the municipal budget.

In accordance with paragraph 2 of CR No 414 of 22 June 2021 on travel subsidies, passengers who are eligible for travel subsidies under the procedure outlined in this CR fall into the following categories (by social status):

- 1) children who under the Law on general education have not yet commenced primary education ('children of pre-school age');
- 2) persons with a Group I or Group II disability, persons with a disability who are under 18 and a person accompanying a person with Group I disability or a person with a disability who is under 18;
- 3) orphans and children deprived of parental care who are in foster care, guardianship, childcare institutions or studying in general and vocational education institutions, as well as in universities and colleges until they reach the age of 24;
- 4) politically repressed persons and members of a national resistance movement;
- 5) pupils attending an institute of general primary education (years 1-9) who live outside urban areas;
- 6) pupils attending an institute of general secondary education (years 10-12) who live outside urban areas;
- 7) persons from large families and families looking after a child with a disability or a person of the age of majority but under the age of 24 who has been assessed as Group I or II disability and who holds a certificate issued under the State-sponsored 'Latvian family of honour' programme<sup>71</sup>.

Children of pre-school age enjoy free public transport on regional passenger transport routes.

Persons assessed as group I or II disability, persons under 18 with a disability or persons accompanying a person with a group I disability or a person under 18 with a disability are entitled to free public transport on urban and regional passenger transport routes.

Orphans and children without parental care who are in foster care, guardianship, childcare institutions or studying in institutes of general or vocational education, on adducing a certificate securing social guarantees, enjoy free public transport on the regional passenger transportation network.

Persons (*a child's parents or other carers*) from large families and families caring for a child with a disability or a person who has reached the age of majority, is under 24 and has been assessed as group I or II disability who adduce a Latvian Family of honour '3+ family card or a Latvian Family of

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<sup>71</sup> In accordance with Article 26(6) of the Latvian Law on the Protection of Children's Rights, when assessing a contribution and with a view to enhancing social prestige and promoting and supporting the voluntary involvement of the municipalities, economic operators and other persons in supporting large families and families which care for a child with a disability or in which there is a person who is under 24 years of age and who has been assessed as Group I or II disability, the SIF implements the State-sponsored programme entitled 'the Latvian family of honour certificate programme'. The procedures for implementing the abovementioned programme, including the cases and procedures for granting, issuing, using and cancelling the Family of honour certificate, as well as restrictions on its issue, are laid down by the Cabinet. The Cabinet may determine additional target groups eligible for support under the Latvian family of honour programme. The catalogue of discounts coming under the State aid programme can be found on the SIF website at: <https://katalogs.godagimene.lv>.

honour certificate and the relevant ID, are entitled to a travel discount of 50% of the full fare for the journey and 40% of the price of the travel pass on the regional passenger transportation network.

Persons (*children and youngsters*) from large families and families caring for a child with a disability or a person who has reached the age of majority, is under 24 and has been assessed as group I or II disability who are attending a general institute of primary or secondary education and who adduce a Latvian Family of honour '3+ family card or a Latvian Family of honour certificate and the relevant ID are entitled to a travel discount of 90% of the full fare for a journey on the regional passenger transportation network.

On 4 May, 11 November and 18 November, persons from large families and families caring for a disabled child or an adult under 24, if they have been assessed as disability group I or II, receive a 100 % travel discount (on public transport carrying passengers on a regional route) on the journey ticket.

Students attending institutions of general primary education (years 1-9) residing outside an urban area are entitled to 100% compensation for travel expenses related to travelling during the school year from their place of residence to the educational establishment and back in the territory of the municipality using public transport carrying passengers on urban and regional routes.

Students attending institutions of general primary education (years 10-12) residing outside an urban area are entitled to 50% compensation for travel expenses related to travel during the school year from their place of residence to the educational establishment and back in the territory of the municipality using public transport carrying passengers on urban and regional routes.

Pupils residing outside an urban area whose municipal territory does not have an institution of general primary education (years 1-9) or an institution of general secondary education (years 10-12) are entitled to 50% compensation for travel expenses related to journeys during the school year from their place of residence to an education institution located in the administrative territory of another municipality and back using public transport carrying passengers on urban and regional routes.

As regards implementation of the recommendation set out in paragraph 7 point (j) of the European Child Guarantee ('ensure equal and inclusive access to school-based activities, including participation in school trips and sport, leisure and cultural activities'), please note that Article 3 of the Law on education lays down the right of each individual to high-quality and inclusive education. In accordance with Article 4 of the Law on education, it is compulsory to prepare children for basic education from the age of five and to complete or continue basic education until the age of 18.

In accordance with Article 12(1) of the Law on education, the fee for the acquisition of pre-school education, basic education, secondary education at a State or local government institution, or at a secondary education institution of State higher education institutions, is to be covered from the State budget, local government budgets, or budgets of State higher education institutions in accordance with the procedures laid down by the Cabinet. A private educational establishment may set its own tuition fee.

In accordance with Article 17(1) of the Law on education, each municipality must ensure that the children whose declared place of residence is in the administrative territory of that municipality are

able to access pre-school education and basic education at the local government educational establishment closest to the child's place of residence, to ensure that young persons are able to access secondary education, and allow interest-based education to be implemented and extracurricular activities, including children's camps, to be supported.

As regards implementation of the recommendation made in paragraph 7 point (k) of the European Child Guarantee ('develop a framework for cooperation of educational establishments, local communities, social, health and child protection services, families and social economy actors to support inclusive education, to provide after school care and opportunities to participate in sport, leisure and cultural activities, and to build and invest in educational establishments as centres of inclusion and participation'), we would point out that in accordance with Article 18 of the Law on education, municipalities are required to set up an education authority to implement their functions in terms of education provision and guaranteeing the quality of education. The remit of an education authority is to:

- 1) arrange methodological, scientific, informative and other types of intellectual support for learners, educators, learners' parents and institutes of education (other than universities and colleges) in a bid to guarantee high-quality education;
- 2) coordinate cooperation between institutes of education located within the municipality;
- 3) promote public participation in education, including cooperation between institutes of education and central and municipal government bodies, employers, social partners, non-governmental organisations, and keep the public briefed on the development of the municipality's education ecosystem, its achievements and the range and quality of its educational programmes;
- 4) support learner participation in subject-specific olympiads, competitions, exhibitions, projects and sports competitions;
- 5) contribute to the upbringing of children and young people, provide career education and interest-based education;
- 6) in cooperation with central and municipal government bodies, develop a system of support measures for the municipality's pupils and their families.

### Child's right to free healthcare

With regard to the recommendation made in Article 8 point (a) of the European Child Guarantee ('facilitate early detection and treatment of diseases and developmental problems, including those related to mental health, ensure access to periodic medical, including dental and ophthalmology, examinations and screening programmes; ensure timely curative and rehabilitative follow-up, including access to medicines, treatments and supports, and access to vaccination programmes'), we would point out that in accordance with Article 12(2) on the Law on the Protection of Children's Rights, children are entitled to the free healthcare laid down in the national programme. The State provides early developmental assessments for all children between the ages of 18 months and three years to help identify developmental disorders and possible special needs at an early stage.

In accordance with Article 5(1) of the Law on patients' rights, every person has the right to receive medical treatment appropriate to their state of health. In accordance with Article 3 (2) of the Law on medical treatment, the healthcare of a pregnant woman, a child and a person with a predictable disability is a priority. The Cabinet lays down the procedure for organising, financing this priority and providing human resources for it.

Article 5(2) of the Law on patients' rights provides that a patient is entitled to a respectful attitude and high-quality and qualified treatment, irrespective of the nature and seriousness of their illness. Paragraphs four and five of that article stipulate that patients have the right to timely treatment and the right to continuity of treatment from all medical institutions involved in their treatment.

Cabinet Regulation No 555 of 28 August 2018 on the procedure for the organisation and payment of healthcare services lays down the procedure for organising and financing healthcare for pregnant women, persons under the age of 18 ('children') and persons with a predictable disability, and for providing human resources for such care.

The State pays the following for children: doctors' consultations; preventive check-ups (carried out by a family doctor or paediatrician under State contracts); vaccinations; physiotherapy services laboratory tests; diagnostic tests; dental practitioner services; rehabilitation services; surgical assistance.

A list of the guaranteed health services for children (screening for newborn babies, tests, health checks, child checkups by doctors, scheduled vaccinations, child development assessment, visits to the dentist, etc.) by age, starting from birth, is available on the NVD (National Health Service) website.<sup>72</sup>

Cabinet Regulation No 899 of 31 October 2006 laying down the procedure for the reimbursement of expenditure on medicinal products and medical devices for outpatient treatment lays down the procedure for the reimbursement of expenditure on medicinal products and medical devices for outpatient treatment. The reimbursement procedure includes a set of measures that allows the patient to purchase medicines and medical devices, the cost of which, under this CR, is covered partially or fully by the funds earmarked for the reimbursement of the purchase costs of medicines in the Law on the State budget for the current year (hereinafter 'funds earmarked for reimbursement'). The aim of the measures included in the reimbursement procedure is to ensure that the funds earmarked for reimbursement provide the broadest range of patients with medicines and medical devices, achieve the optimum price for medicines and medical devices subject to reimbursement and allocate the savings achieved to improving patient health and meeting treatment targets.

The system of reimbursement for the purchase of medicines allows patients to purchase the pharmaceutical products required for the treatment of certain diseases, these being subject to full or partial reimbursement by the State as featured in the government list of pharmaceutical products subject to reimbursement.<sup>73</sup>

In compliance with paragraph 8 point (b) of the European Child Guarantee ('provide targeted rehabilitation and habilitation<sup>74</sup> services for children with disabilities')<sup>75</sup>, an approved list of measures to prevent or reduce the risk of disability for persons with a predictable disability<sup>76</sup> and mitigate the consequences of disability for persons with disabilities can be found in the Law on disability. The

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<sup>72</sup> <https://www.vmnvd.gov.lv/lv/berniem>.

<sup>73</sup> <https://www.vmnvd.gov.lv/lv/kompensejamo-zalu-saraksti>.

<sup>74</sup> Habilitation sounds very similar to rehabilitation, but it's markedly different. Whereas rehabilitation focuses on re-learning something that was once known, habilitation involves learning and mastering brand-new skills, particularly if the person learning those skills is developmentally disabled. These skills might involve motor skills, specific tasks, or even communication skills.

<sup>75</sup> A disability is a long-term or persistent very severe, severe or moderate functional limitation that affects a person's mental or physical abilities and their ability to work, look after themselves and integrate into society.

<sup>76</sup> A predictable disability is a functional limitation caused by illness or injury which, if not treated and rehabilitated, might lead to disability.

Law lays down the procedure for carrying out expert reports of foreseeable and actual disabilities, and the support measures needed to reduce the risk of disability and the consequences of disability.

The Law is implemented based on:

- 1) participation of persons with predictable disabilities and persons with disabilities in support measures to mitigate the risk of disability (in the case of predictable disability) and the consequences of disability, within the participatory framework defined in the Law on social security;
- 2) involving society in solving problems relating to disability, and cooperation between central and municipal government bodies with the National Council for disability affairs and with associations and foundations that represent persons with predictable or actual disabilities, and with professional rehabilitation organisations;
- 3) a uniform rehabilitation process guaranteed by central and municipal government for people with predictable or actual disabilities.

A person up to the age of 18 is recognised as disabled, with no breakdown by group.

An individual rehabilitation plan must be drawn up for a person with a predictable disability. The need to draw up an individual rehabilitation plan for a person with a disability is determined by the State Medical Commission for the assessment of health condition and working ability ('VDEĀVK'). The types and timing of measures to be included in the individual rehabilitation plan for a person with a predictable or actual disability, as well as the procedure for drawing up and implementing the plan forms and the plan is laid down by the Cabinet.

The treating physician must:

- 1) on the basis of the recommendations of the VDEĀVK and the specialists involved in the treatment of the person with a predictable disability, draw up an individual rehabilitation plan for the person with a predictable disability in a timely manner and monitor its implementation;
- 2) when developing and implementing an individual rehabilitation plan for a person with a predictable disability, cooperate with the municipal social services of the person's declared place of residence, the VDEĀVK, other specialists, and the individual in question;
- 3) after implementation of the measures laid down in the individual rehabilitation plan for a person with a predictable disability, refer the individual concerned for a repeat disability assessment by an expert.

The municipal social service must:

- 1) draw up an individual rehabilitation plan for a person with a disability and monitor its implementation if the person concerned has submitted to the service recommendations from a VDEĀVK official (if medical and social rehabilitation services are required to reduce or eliminate a functional limitation of a person with a disability, a VDEĀVK official submits recommendations on the individual rehabilitation plan to the social service of the municipality of the person's declared place of residence, this also including details of further treatment and medical rehabilitation services as prescribed by the treating physician);
- 2) cooperate with the individual's treating physician, other specialists if necessary, and the person's legal representative when drawing up and implementing the individual rehabilitation plan for the person with a disability.

A person with a predictable or actual disability, along with their legal representatives, have the right to receive information from the treating physician or the municipal social services, in a form that they understand, about the measures included in the individual rehabilitation plan and the likely outcome.

The risk of disability for a person with a predictable disability must be prevented or mitigated by:

- 1) implementing the measures set out in the individual rehabilitation plan;

- 2) safeguarding their right to receive, as a matter of priority, the State-funded services outlined in the rehabilitation plan. The type and scope of service and the conditions and procedure governing their delivery are laid down by the Cabinet;
- 3) implementing other support measures provided for in legislation.

The consequences of disability for persons with disabilities must be mitigated by:

- 1) implementing the measures set out in the individual rehabilitation plan;
- 2) for persons with a disability, guaranteeing the right to access the services of a State-funded assistant in the municipality of their declared place of residence;
- 3) guaranteeing the right of pupils in pre-school education, general basic education, basic vocational education, vocational training and institutes of general secondary and vocational training (except special education institutions that receive maintenance grants from the State budget), and of persons studying at universities and colleges, where they have a disability, to access the service of a State-funded assistant for mobility support and self-care;
- 4) for persons aged 5 to 18 with disabilities who have significant mobility impairments and do not receive an assistant service in the municipality, except for persons in a long-term social care institution, in-patient medical institution or place of imprisonment, guaranteeing the right to access the services of a State-funded companion in the municipality of their declared place of residence;
- 5) for persons aged 5 to 18 with disabilities who have pronounced and severe functional limitations, except for persons in a long-term social care institution, in-patient medical institution or custodial facility, guaranteeing the right to access a State-funded care service in the municipality of their declared place of residence;
- 6) guaranteeing the right to access the services of a State-funded sign language interpreter for educational purposes;
- 7) guaranteeing the right to access the services of a sign language interpreter to enable communications with other natural and legal persons;
- 8) for persons up to the age of 18 with a disability and an individual accompanying a person up to the age of 18 with a disability, guaranteeing the right to use, free-of-charge, all types of State-funded means of public transport throughout the territory of the Republic of Latvia, other than air transport, taxis and passenger conveyance on inland waterways;
- 9) for a person up to the age of 18 who has had a disability recognised for the first time and who lives with their family, and for their legal representative, guaranteeing the right to access the State-funded services of a psychologist;
- 10) implementing other support measures provided for in legislation.

In compliance with the recommendation made in paragraph 8 point (c) of the European Child Guarantee ('implement accessible health promotion and disease prevention programmes targeting children in need and their families, as well as professionals working with children'), please note that the Ministry of Health, as the country's leading authority in the field of public health, is framing a public health promotion policy and at national and regional level monitors implementation of the public health promotion policy.<sup>77</sup>

The Centre for Disease Prevention and Control ensures that the general public is informed about health promotion and disease prevention. The Centre also runs the Latvian national network of healthy municipalities and the Latvian national network of schools promoting health.

From 1 November 2016 to 31 December 2023 the Ministry of Health implemented the project 'Integrated health promotion and disease prevention measures' (ID No 9.2.4.1/1/16/I/001, implementation period 1 November 2016 to 31 December 2023) under measure 9.2.4.1 ('Integrated health promotion

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<sup>77</sup> <https://www.vm.gov.lv/lv/veselibas-veicinasana>.

and disease prevention measures’) forming part of specific support objective 9.2.4 (‘Improving access to health promotion and disease prevention measures, particularly for those at risk of poverty and social exclusion’) under the ‘Growth and employment’ operational programme of the European Social Fund.

The aim of this project is to improve access to health promotion and disease prevention services for the entire population of Latvia, especially those at risk of territorial, poverty and social exclusion, by implementing nationwide activities in four priority health areas - cardiovascular, oncology, perinatal/neonatal care and mental health.

The planned total eligible funding is EUR 16 691 510, comprising EUR 14 187 783 from the European Social Fund and EUR 2 503 727 of funding from the State budget.

For further details of the measures implemented under the project, cf. [in LV] <https://esparveselibu.lv>.

### Healthy nutrition

In line with the recommendation made in paragraph 9 point (a) of the European Child Guarantee (‘With a view to guaranteeing effective access to sufficient and healthy nutrition for children in need, including through the EU school fruit, vegetables and milk scheme, Member States are recommended to support access to healthy meals also outside of school days, including through in-kind or financial support, in particular in exceptional circumstances such as school closures;’), we would inform you that, in a bid to ensure the continued provision of free milk, fruit and vegetables in Latvian educational establishments, on 24 January 2023 the Cabinet approved the amendments proposed by the Ministry of Agriculture to the rules on the procedure for granting State and EU aid for the programme entitled ‘Milk and fruit for school’. The increased support will reflect the market situation and will cover the drastically increased production costs for milk producers. The revision of the aid rates in the school scheme, with amendments to Cabinet Regulation No 485 of 2017 on procedures for granting, administering and monitoring State and European Union aid for the supply of fruit, vegetables and milk to educational establishments, has increased the aid rates for milk distributed during the 2022/2023 school year. For example, for milk cartons over 250 ml, the aid rate has increased from EUR 1.04 to EUR 1.20 per litre, and for milk cartons up to 250 ml from EUR 1.28 to EUR 1.38 per litre. The distribution costs in relation to the overall aid rate for a product are also laid down, so for example, in the above-mentioned aid rate for a carton of milk over 250 ml, EUR 0.18 comprises the distribution cost. For both fruit and vegetables and milk, part of the aid rate is the cost of distributing the products in educational establishments, or the cost of serving, preparing for serving and washing up after serving, which was not previously laid down.

As the aid budget for the programme is limited and the cost of products has risen considerably, the amended rules allow products to be distributed fewer than three times a week, but at least once a week. In the past, it was obligatory to distribute products three times a week, but the amendments have made for greater flexibility in the planning of the supply and distribution of products.

To provide free products for pupils, the total budget for the school scheme in Latvia for the 2022/2023 school year is EUR 4.2 million. The bulk of the funding, just under EUR 2.9 million, or 68%, comes from the Latvian budget (EUR 2.2 million for milk and EUR 688 000 for fruit and vegetables). EU

funding from the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund (EAGF) for the current school year is just shy of EUR 1.4 million (EUR 711 000 for milk and EUR 658 000 for fruit and vegetables).

The aim of the School Scheme is to promote healthy eating habits from a young age by encouraging the use of fresh and healthy products in the daily diet, as well as to increase knowledge about healthy eating and awareness of the School Scheme. The scheme has proved popular in Latvia, and since its inception (from the 2004/05 school year for milk, and from the 2010/2011 school year for fruit and vegetables), almost 43 000 tonnes and almost 10 000 tonnes of fresh fruit and vegetables have been distributed under it.<sup>78</sup>

To provide critical support to persons in crisis and reduce social inequalities between different groups in society, the Social Integration fund (SIF) implements a programme under the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived to provide food and basic material support, and to promote social inclusion through various accompanying measures.

The Fund brings together and mobilises major partner NGOs in the aid sector<sup>79</sup> throughout Latvia, including the Samaritan Foundation, the Latvian Samaritan Foundation, the Latvian Red Cross and the Salvation Army, which see to the distribution of food and basic material assistance packages, meal preparation and distribution and the implementation of additional measures.

Under the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived, aid may be granted to families or individuals living alone who<sup>80</sup>:

- 1) qualify as a poor household;
- 2) are in crisis;
- 3) qualify as a disadvantaged household with a monthly income not exceeding EUR 376 for the first or only person and EUR 264 for each subsequent person in the household.<sup>81</sup>

Under the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived, individuals are eligible for the following assistance:

- 1) food parcels;
- 2) packages of hygiene and household products;
- 3) food parcels for young children (three types depending on child's age);
- 4) packages of hygiene products for young children (four types depending on child's age);
- 5) school supplies (for children aged 5 to 16).

With the aid provided by the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived, Latvia runs 29 soup kitchens providing meals. Individuals do not need to show a certificate of household status to get meals.

Operational programme funding totals EUR 68 060 650, including EUR 48 956 110 from the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived, EUR 8 639 315 from the State budget and EUR 10 465 225 from State budget over-commitments.

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<sup>78</sup> <https://www.zm.gov.lv/lv/jaunums/programma-piens-un-augli-skolai-20222023-macibu-gada-palielinatas-atbalstalikmes-piena-izdalei-0>.

<sup>79</sup> <https://www.atbalstapakas.lv/partnerorganizacijas>.

<sup>80</sup> Individuals must apply to their municipal social services to obtain a certificate attesting to the household's status as poor, disadvantaged or in crisis.

<sup>81</sup> [https://www.sif.gov.lv/lv/eiropas-atbalsta-fonds-vistrucigakajam-personam?utm\\_source=https%3A%2F%2Fduck-duckgo.com%2F](https://www.sif.gov.lv/lv/eiropas-atbalsta-fonds-vistrucigakajam-personam?utm_source=https%3A%2F%2Fduck-duckgo.com%2F).



In accordance with paragraph 9 points (b) and (c) of the European Child Guarantee ('ensure that nutrition standards in early childhood education and care and education establishments address specific dietary needs; limit advertisement and restrict the availability of foods high in fat, salt and sugar in early childhood education and care and educational establishments'), we would point out that Latvia is implementing a long-term policy to promote healthy nutrition for children - dietary standards have been laid down for educational establishments, the sale of energy drinks to minors has been banned, a reduced rate of tax is applied to food for infants and for fresh fruit (including berries) and vegetables, and other measures introduced to improve nutrition and help maintain healthy nutrition habits. Dietary standards for menus in educational establishments make provision for the inclusion of foods rich in nutrients, including minerals, that also contain iodine to promote adequate iodine intake.

In accordance with paragraph 9 point (d) of the European Child Guarantee ('provide adequate information to children and families on healthy nutrition for children'), we would point out that between 2020 and 2022 a pilot project was run to determine and reduce cardiovascular risk factors for children, as part of which a 'healthy habits' programme was devised and implemented, containing a set of informative and practical activities relating to nutrition, physical activity and the reduction of addictive substances and processes. Under the pilot project, children were encouraged to take part in various types of activity to encourage healthy eating - visits to farms, fruit and vegetable tasting, food preparation, etc. Given that the recommendation is to eat fish at least twice a week to prevent cardiovascular disease, iodine intake was also promoted through the activities of this pilot project, fish being one of the richest sources of dietary iodine.

In 2021, as part of the ESF project implemented by the Ministry of Health entitled 'Integrated health promotion and disease prevention measures', an educational film was produced for pupils in years 1 to 5 to promote awareness of the basic principles of healthy nutrition. This film provides teaching staff and parents with useful teaching material. The film provided information on the intake of minerals and protein (including fish, one of the richest sources of dietary iodine). Further details of the measures implemented under the ESF project can be found at: <https://esparveselibu.lv>.

In line with recent recommendations in the field of nutrition, in 2021 and 2022 the Ministry of Health, in conjunction with the SPKC and associations of healthcare professionals updated the previous healthy nutrition recommendations for children in two age groups, 2 to 10 and 11 to 18, including visual presentations publicity material and of the recommendations in printed format. The recommendations include information on the impact of sufficient minerals, including iodine, in the diet.

## Assistance in resolving housing issues (adequate housing)

### Types of assistance in resolving housing issues

We would point out that Latvian legislation does not provide for the category of 'homeless children' as set out in paragraph 10 point (a) of the European Child Guarantee, which recommends that Member States ensure that homeless children and their families receive adequate accommodation, prompt transfer from temporary accommodation to permanent housing and provision of relevant social and advisory services; This section ('Assistance in resolving housing issues (adequate housing)') will therefore provide an overview of the measures implemented by central and municipal government to help families with children needing help in resolving housing issues. The inclusion of such a target

group, as provided for in the European Child Guarantee recommendation, in the range of aid beneficiaries for the resolution of housing issues was considered neither relevant nor necessary.

In accordance with the recommendation made in paragraph 10 point (b) of the European Child Guarantee ('assess and revise, if necessary, national, regional and local housing policies and take action to ensure that the interests of families with children in need are duly taken into account, including addressing energy poverty and preventing the risk of homelessness; such assessment and revision should also include social housing or housing assistance policies and housing benefits and further improve accessibility for children with disabilities'), we would point out that Latvia's housing policy aims to promote quality and accessible housing, provide a legislative basis for the effective management of residential housing, encourage the creation of rental housing stock in municipal areas and support energy-saving measures in residential buildings. In a bid to ensure the qualitative maintenance and management of residential housing, 2009 saw the adoption of the Law on the management of residential buildings, which is based on the following principles: continuity of the management process;

- selection of optimum management methods;
- maintaining and improving the ambient environment of residential buildings;
- preventing harm to the health and safety of individuals;
- maintaining the quality of residential buildings.

To improve the process of managing residential buildings, the housing policy department of the Ministry of the Economy has drawn up a Cabinet regulation on requirements governing the sanitary maintenance of residential buildings, on the procedure for keeping and updating housing records, on the activities to be carried out as part of maintenance, routine repair, renovation and reconstruction of residential buildings, on keeping and updating the register of managers of residential buildings and on the minimum requirements for ensuring the energy efficiency of residential buildings.<sup>82</sup>

The Law on the electricity market provides that protected users, meaning poor or disadvantaged households (persons), large families or families (persons) with children with disabilities, and persons of disability group I - are entitled to a protected user trading service. This service comes in the form of assistance for electricity bills, resources from the State budget being used to offset a portion of the monthly electricity bill.

Since 1 January 2020, the State Construction Control Bureau of Latvia has been responsible for checking compliance with protected user status and for allocating aid (payment reductions).

The protected user service is regulated by CR No 345 of 1 June 2021 regulating the protected user trading service.

Provision of this services involves applying a reduction to the amount invoiced to the protected user. This may relate to electricity, system services and the mandatory procurement component, but does not include the relevant value added tax (hereinafter 'payment reduction'). The payment reduction is applied as follows:

- 1) for a poor or disadvantaged household (person) - EUR 20;
- 2) for a family (person) caring for a child with a disability - EUR 20;
- 3) for a person classified as group I disability or their guardian - EUR 20;
- 4) for a family with many children - EUR 25.

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<sup>82</sup> <https://www.em.gov.lv/lv/majoklu-politika>.

1 September 2021 saw the introduction of a new mechanism for service provision featuring the following improvements compared with the previous arrangements:

- the aid need not be applied for, it is granted automatically as a discount on the electricity bill - this is the first aid system of its kind in Latvia;
- the service may be provided by any electricity trader, so customers are not restricted in their choice, nor is free competition on the electricity market;
- thanks to an automated procedure and the possibility of any electricity trader supplying the service, aid is provided to multiple protected users (of which there are some 170 000 in Latvia);
- solution developed so that sub-users (residents of multi-apartment dwellings, social housing residents and tenants) can also receive the service by applying to the service provider and indicating the contract No under which the sub-user receives electricity;
- simplified support amount introduced, i.e. a fixed and known amount of support;
- protected users falling into several categories receive a cumulative aid amount (e.g. - a large family with a child with a disability receives 20 + 15 = 35 euro per month);
- maintenance debtors do not receive support;
- a definition of the status of protected user can be found at: [www.latvija.lv](http://www.latvija.lv).<sup>83</sup>

As regards the recommendation made in paragraph 10(c) of the European Child Guarantee ('provide for priority and timely access to social housing or housing assistance for children in need and their families'), we would point out that the procedure whereby assistance is granted to individuals to resolve housing issues is laid down in the Law on assistance with the resolution of housing issues.

In accordance with Article 3 of the law on assistance with the resolution of housing issues, the following types of aid are allocated by the State to help resolve housing issues:

- 1) the renting out of accommodation owned or leased by the municipality;
- 2) the renting out of social housing;
- 3) the provision of temporary accommodation;
- 4) the exchange of rented accommodation owned or leased by the municipality for other rented accommodation owned or leased by the municipality;
- 5) material assistance to cover payment of expenditure relating to the use of housing ('housing allowance');
- 6) allocation of a housing allowance for orphans or children deprived of parental care ('housing allowance for children deprived of parental care');
- 7) allocation of one-off assistance for the repair of residential premises or residential housing;
- 8) allocation of a one-off allowance to vacate residential premises;
- 9) repair of residential premises;
- 10) help with the rental, purchase or construction of residential premises;
- 11) assistance with the renovation or restoration or with making housing and its environs more accessible.

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<sup>83</sup> <https://www.em.gov.lv/atbalsts-ekstroenergijas-pateretajiem>.

Persons eligible for support with the resolution of housing issues:

Article 13(1) of the Law on assistance with the resolution of housing issues states that the municipal council or a body delegated by it shall provide assistance<sup>84</sup> to the following persons who urgently need assistance:

- 1) a person whose rented or owned dwelling or house has been damaged as a result of an act of terrorism, natural disaster, accident or other catastrophe - if the person has declared his/her place of residence in the dwelling or house and does not own other premises or housing suitable for residential occupation in the administrative territory of the municipality;
- 2) a person who rents out residential space in a house that has been denationalised or returned to the legal owner and has used it until the restoration of property rights, has declared his/her residence there, is registered for the aid referred to in Article 3 (1) or (2) of the Law on assistance with the resolution of housing issues, where a decision has been adopted in accordance with the procedure established in legislation regulating construction preventing residential space from being used (the building has been found to be dangerous, as the requirements set out in Article 9 (1), (2) or (4) of the Law on construction have not been complied with).

In accordance with Article 14 of the Law on assistance with the resolution of housing issues, the following persons are to be provided with assistance as a matter of priority:

- 1) persons who are evicted from rented residential accommodation by a court order as provided for in Article 24 of the Law on the rental of residential premises, where they are:
  - a. disadvantaged individuals who have reached retirement age or are disabled,
  - b. disadvantaged individuals living with at least one dependent minor child, a person under guardianship, a disadvantaged person who has reached retirement age or a disadvantaged person with a disability,
  - c. other persons living in the territory of the municipality belonging to the category of persons determined by the municipal council to whom the municipality provides assistance, where these have been evicted from the rented residential premises,
  - d. politically repressed persons who have been evicted from housing where no other suitable accommodation is available to them,
  - e. families and persons living with a dependent minor with a disability or persons with a disability caused by a childhood illness;
- 2) persons who have been evicted from an apartment belonging to them, where the property is subject to a recovery order for payment of services relating to the use, maintenance, running and repair of the residential premises, and where they are:
  - a. disadvantaged individuals who have reached retirement age or are disabled,
  - b. disadvantaged individuals<sup>85</sup> living with at least one dependent minor child, a person under guardianship, a disadvantaged person who has reached retirement age or a disadvantaged person with a disability,
  - c. politically repressed persons where no other viable housing is available to them;
- 3) children without parental care, where they have reached the age of majority and their foster care has come to an end;

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<sup>84</sup> Provision is made for the following types of assistance:

- 1) the renting out of accommodation owned or leased by the municipality;
- 2) the renting out of social housing;
- 3) the provision of temporary accommodation;
- 4) allocation of one-off assistance for the repair of residential premises or residential housing.;

<sup>85</sup> A person is recognised as disadvantaged if their income and material situation does not exceed the income threshold for a disadvantaged household as determined by the ordinance issued by the municipality of the municipality in question, in accordance with the Law on social services and social assistance.

- 4) returnees who emigrated from Latvia before 4 May 1990 and who cannot be housed in the accommodation they occupied prior to their departure from Latvia in accordance with the procedure established by law, or returnees who were born abroad or emigrated from Latvia after 4 May 1990 and were minors at the time of their departure;
- 5) disadvantaged politically repressed persons;
- 6) disadvantaged persons who have been released from prison after serving their sentence, where they lived in the administrative territory of the municipality concerned prior to their conviction and cannot be accommodated in accordance with the procedure laid down by law in the accommodation they formerly occupied;
- 7) other categories of disadvantaged persons as defined by the municipality of the municipality in question.

In accordance with Article 15 of the Law on assistance with the resolution of housing issues, the municipal council may lay down in an ordinance other categories of persons who are not mentioned Articles 13 and 14 of that law (other than persons who need urgent assistance and persons who need to be provided with living space as a matter of urgency) and who need assistance with finding rented accommodation.

In accordance with Article 19<sup>1</sup> of the Law on assistance with the resolution of housing issues, the municipality, in applying the provisions of the Civil Law, may agree with the owners or managers of residential housing (and with capital companies) on renting out to the municipality residential housing which they own or manage and which has not been rented out or the renting out of specific unrented residential accommodation.

#### Social housing

In accordance with Article 21<sup>6</sup> of the Law on assistance with the resolution of housing issues, social housing may be rented out to any of the following types of disadvantaged party:

- 1) a person living with a dependent child with a disability, where the latter does not have a separate room or where the living space has few or no amenities or has been declared unfit for use (even where the person in question owns the premises);
- 2) a person living alone with a group I or II disability (even where the person in question owns the premises);
- 3) a person living alone who has reached pensionable age (even where the person in question owns the premises);
- 4) a family in which all the family members have reached pensionable age and have a group I or II disability;
- 5) a person who has left a social rehabilitation and care institution and, in the opinion of the social service, is able to live independently.

The local authorities may use an ordinance to lay down other categories of individuals who must be provided with assistance in renting social housing.

#### Temporary accommodation

In accordance with Article 23 of the Law on assistance with the resolution of housing issues, an individual shall be provided with temporary accommodation where they require urgent assistance and where:

- 1) the individual's residential premises or residential building has been completely or partially destroyed and cannot be rebuilt and, in accordance with the procedure laid down in legislation on construction, where a decision has been taken preventing residential space from being used,

- until such time as the municipal council or a body delegated by it takes a decision to rent out residential premises which it owns or leases;
- 2) the residential premises or residential building has been partially damaged but can be repaired - until such time as the residential premises or building has been repaired, but for no longer than 12 months.

Individuals must also be provided with temporary residential accommodation until such time as the municipality rents out residential accommodation, where they are classified as individuals to be provided with accommodation as a matter of priority, where they are registered for renting accommodation owned or leased by the municipality.

#### One-off assistance for the repair of residential premises or residential housing

In accordance with Article 26(1) of the Law on assistance with the resolution of housing issues, if residential premises or housing rented or owned by an individual has been affected by an act of terrorism, a natural disaster, accident or other catastrophe but can be repaired, and if the individual has declared his or her place of residence as being in those residential premises or buildings and there is no other viable accommodation or housing within the territory belonging to the municipality, the municipal council or a body authorised by it may allocate one-off assistance for the repair of the residential premises or building in question. The municipality may use an ordinance to lay down other categories of individuals to be provided with assistance in the form of one-off assistance for the repair of residential premises or housing they rent or own.

#### Assistance for disadvantaged persons with the repair of rented accommodation

In accordance with Article 27 of the Law on assistance with the resolution of housing issues, the municipality may provide disadvantaged persons with assistance by carrying out repairs on residential premises rented by the latter where those premises are not let out by the municipality, or by carrying out repairs to residential property owned by such persons. The municipality may not provide this type of assistance to individuals who have already received one-off assistance for the repair of residential premises or housing under Article 26 of this Law (where residential premises or housing have been affected by an act of terrorism, a natural disaster, accident or other catastrophe). The procedure governing the granting of such aid and the amounts thereof are laid down by municipal ordinance.

#### Assistance provided by the State to cover part of the outstanding debts of a borrower in respect of a loan taken out for the purchase or construction of a dwelling

Under Article 27.1 of the Law on assistance with the resolution of housing issues, the State shall provide assistance by partially covering the borrower's outstanding debt on a loan taken out for the purchase or construction of a dwelling (guarantee for a bank loan for the purchase or construction of a dwelling for families with children who have a stable income but do not have sufficient savings for a downpayment<sup>86</sup>). The Cabinet designates the body that administers the provision of aid and the criteria and procedure for doing so. This aid may be granted to:

- 1) a person under the age of 24 living with at least one dependent child;
- 2) a person who has completed secondary vocational or higher education and who is under the age of 35;
- 3) armed forces personnel.

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<sup>86</sup> <https://www.altum.lv/pakalpojumi/iedzivotajiem/majoklu-atbalsts-gimenem-ar-berniem?tab=1>.

The procedure whereby the State grants aid by partially covering the borrower's outstanding debt and/or by granting a subsidy on a loan taken out for the purchase or construction of a dwelling and [appoints] an institution that administers the provision of assistance and the criteria for providing State assistance for the purchase or construction of a dwelling is laid down by Cabinet Regulation No 95 of 20 February 2018 on State assistance for the purchase or construction of residential housing.

The aid in question is granted and administered by Altum, a State-owned development finance institution ('guarantor'), which issues a guarantee within the meaning of the Law on the development finance institution or issues a 'Balsts' [support] subsidy under the assistance programme. The guarantor makes guarantees available in the form of individual or portfolio guarantees.

The borrower is entitled to receive a guarantee and (or) a subsidy under the 'Balsts' support programme in cases where a mortgage loan is granted by a credit institution registered in Latvia, a credit institution registered in a Member State, its branch or a branch of a foreign credit institution which has concluded a cooperation agreement with a guarantor and is authorised to issue loans in Latvia, where the lender has confirmed in writing that the loan will be granted to a cohabiting person with at least one dependent child or to an expectant mother, or to the father of an unborn child, and the amount of the transaction does not exceed EUR 250 000.

The amount of this guarantee is:

- 1) 5% -10% of the amount of the loan to a maximum of EUR 10 000 for a person living with a dependent child, or an expectant mother, or a child's father;
- 2) 5% -15% of the amount of the loan to a maximum of EUR 15 000 for a person living with two dependent children, a woman living with a dependent child and expecting another, or a child's father;
- 3) 5% - 20% of the amount of the loan to a maximum of EUR 20 000 for a person living with three dependent children, a woman living with two dependent children and expecting another, or a child's father;
- 4) 5% - 30% of the amount of the loan to a maximum of EUR 30 000 for a person living with four or more dependent children, a woman living with three dependent children and expecting another, or a child's father;

In the above-mentioned cases the amount is increased by no more than 5%, and by no more than EUR 5 000 in total, for purchasing residential property, or taking out a loan for the construction of a property corresponding to at least the A building energy efficiency class or a nearly-zero-energy building in accordance with legislation regulating the energy efficiency of buildings.

For the persons referred to in subparagraphs 6.3 and 6.4 of Cabinet Regulation No 95 of 20 February 2018 on State aid for the purchase or construction of residential property<sup>87</sup> in whose name the ownership rights to the residential property to be purchased or constructed are entered in the Land Register and who were considered domestic taxpayers (residents) for the last 12 months with average income subject to personal income tax of no more than EUR 17 000 gross for the previous tax year, provided they do not own another property, a one-off subsidy under the 'Balsts' support programme is available from budgetary funds up to a maximum of 50% of the amount of the transaction for the purchase or construction of a residential property, for the following amounts:

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<sup>87</sup> A person who lives with three dependent children or a person who lives with two dependent children and is expecting a third, or the child's father, and a person who lives with four or more dependent children or a person who lives with three dependent children and is expecting, or the child's father.

- 1) for a person living with three dependent children, or a person living with two dependent children and expecting a third, or the child's father -
  - a. EUR 8 000;
  - b. if the property meets the requirements for nearly-zero-energy buildings - EUR 10 000;
- 2) for a person living with four or more dependent children, or a person living with three dependent children and expecting a fourth, or the child's father -
  - a. EUR 10 000;
  - b. if the property meets the requirements for nearly-zero-energy buildings - EUR 12 000.

#### Municipal assistance with the purchase or construction of a residential property

In the event of a residential property being purchased or built, the municipality can provide assistance in accordance with the procedure described, and for the amount stipulated, in the municipal ordinance, fully or partly covering the interest paid on the loan. This aid is available to a person living with at least one dependent minor, and to a tenant or his/her family member where they are using residential space in a house that has been denationalised or returned to its rightful owner, and were using it up until the restoration of ownership rights.

In accordance with Article 27<sup>2</sup>(2) of the Law on the resolution of housing issues, the municipality may provide assistance to the owner(s) of a house or flat by allocating funds for the following purposes:

- 1) for the restoration of a residential property recognised as a cultural monument of national significance;
- 2) for the renovation of a residential property where its technical condition has been recognised as hazardous to human life or health in accordance with the procedure set out in legislation;
- 3) for the renovation of a residential property to remedy the consequences of act of terrorism, disaster, natural disaster or other catastrophe;
- 4) to carry out energy efficiency measures in a residential property;
- 5) for the development of the plot of land belonging to a residential property;
- 6) for the renovation of the public facades of residential buildings;
- 7) to secure access to housing and environs.

#### Out-of-family care

In the light of the recommendation made in paragraph 10 point (d) of the European Child Guarantee ('take into account the best interests of the child as well as the child's overall situation and individual needs when placing children into institutional or foster care; ensure transition of children from institutional or foster care to quality community-based or family-based care and support their independent living and social integration'), we would point out that in accordance with Article 6(2) of the Law on the Protection of Children's Rights, all actions with regard to the child, irrespective of whether these are taken by central or local government authorities, civil society organisations or other natural and legal persons and courts and other law enforcement authorities, priority must be given to ensuring the rights and best interests of the child.

In accordance with Article 27(1) of the Latvian Law on the Protection of Children's Rights, a child may be separated from its family if:



- 1) the life, health or development of the child is seriously threatened as a result of violence or justified suspicion of violence against the child, or as a result of lack of care or home circumstances (social environment);
- 2) the child is seriously jeopardising its health or development by using alcohol, narcotics or toxic substances.
- 3) the child has committed a criminal offence.

In the circumstances referred to in paragraphs 1 and 2 of Article 27(1), a child may be separated from its family if the circumstances detrimental to the child's development cannot be remedied with the child remaining in the family. The eviction of a family from its home may not be considered a reason for separating a child from its parents.

If out-of-family care is ordered because the child's life, health or development is seriously threatened by violence or there are suspicions of violence against the child, or because of a lack of care or conditions in the home (social environment):

- children from the same family may not be separated, other than under exceptional circumstances where this is done in the children's interests;
- the child's view is taken into account when the type of out-of-family care is being chosen.

In accordance with Article 4(4) of the Law on social services and social assistance, orphans and children deprived of parental care shall be provided with care in a family environment, i.e. in a foster family or with a guardian, and only if these is not possible is care provided by a long-term social care and social rehabilitation institution.

In accordance with Article 32 of the Law on the Protection of Children's Rights, the aim of out-of-family care is to create a sense of protection for the child, to provide conditions for his/her development and well-being, to prepare the child for independent life in society, respecting his/her individuality as much as possible and taking into account his/her abilities and interests.

In accordance with Article 4(5) of the Law on social services and social care, as long as an orphan or child deprived of parental care is in a long-term social care and social rehabilitation institution, the municipality's social services and the Orphan's and Custody Court, in conjunction with staff from the care institution in question, shall take steps to encourage the child's return to its family, keep communication channels open between the child and its parents and, if necessary look into the possibility of providing child care with another family.

Work in long-term social care and rehabilitation institutions shall be organised in such a way as to make the environment of the institution more like a family environment and ensure the acquisition of independent life skills for orphans and children deprived of parental care.

In accordance with Article 36<sup>1</sup> of the Law on the Protection of Children's Rights, the State provides financial assistance with the provision of out-of-family care services in line with the resources available under the Law on the State budget for the current year. Assistance with the provision of out-of-family care is provided by the support centre for out-of-family care. In accordance with paragraph 12 of Cabinet Regulation No 355 of 26 June 2018 on the statute of the support centre for out-of-family care, the centre is responsible for the following:

- 1) attracting new foster families, guardians, adoptive parents and host families, in particular by increasing the number of specialised foster families;
- 2) providing training for foster families and specialised foster families in accordance with a training programme agreed with the Inspectorate;

- 3) providing training for guardians in accordance with a training programme agreed with the Inspectorate;
- 4) drawing up and implementing a plan to support foster and specialised foster families and the individual development of children placed with them;
- 5) providing psychosocial support for foster and specialist foster families, including the children placed with those families;
- 6) arranging consultations between psychologists and support groups for adoptive parents, guardians, host families, and at the request of a Orphan's and Custody Court , issuing opinions;
- 7) at any time of the day or night, providing a Orphan's and Custody Court or the police with information on emergency foster families that can immediately take a child into their care;
- 8) arranging consultations between social workers and guardians/adoptive parents;
- 9) discharging other duties referred to in the Cabinet Regulation.

Out-of-family care comes to an end when the child's parents are able to provide a family environment that is conducive to the child's development, or when the child turns 18. A child may stay for a longer period in a care institution, with a guardian or with a foster family until the end of schooling, where the child continues his or her studies. When the guardianship or foster care of a child in a foster family or child care institution comes to an end, the municipality, in accordance with the Law on assistance with the resolution of housing issues, provides an orphan or a child who has been left without parental care with housing and, in accordance with the social guarantees established by the Cabinet of Ministers, other assistance<sup>88</sup>, even once the child has turned 18. A person maintains the right to unused social guarantees only until they turn 24.

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<sup>88</sup> CR No 857 of 15 November 2005 on social guarantees for orphans and children without parental care in out-of-family care and once out-of-family-care comes to an end.

## Resultative indicators and planned measures

The action plans resultative indicators and planned measures are also in line with the resultative indicators and planned measures for children in need contained in:

- 1) The social protection and labour market policy guidelines 2021-2027.<sup>89</sup>
- 2) The education development guidelines 2021-2027<sup>90</sup>;
- 3) The public health guidelines 2021-2027<sup>91</sup>;
- 4) The housing accessibility guidelines 2023-2027<sup>92</sup>;
- 5) The child, youth and family development guidelines for 2022-2027<sup>93</sup>;
- 6) The regional policy guidelines 2021-2027<sup>94</sup>.

The action plan is an integral part of the planning documents for the policy in question.

In the light of the above, the information already contained in these planning documents on resultative indicators, planned measures and EU funds ensuring implementation of the recommendation made in the European Child Guarantee will not be duplicated in the action plan.

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<sup>89</sup> <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/325828-par-socialas-aizsardzibas-un-darba-tirgus-politikas-pamatnostadnem-2021-2027-gadam>.

<sup>90</sup> <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/324332-par-izglitibas-attistibas-pamatnostadnem-20212027-gadam>.

<sup>91</sup> <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/332751-sabiedribas-veselibas-pamatnostadnes-2021-2027-gadam>.

<sup>92</sup> <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/347211-par-majoklu-pieejamibas-pamatnostadnem-2023-2027-gadam>.

<https://likumi.lv/ta/id/338304-par-bernu-jaunatnes-un-gimenes-attistibas-pamatnostadnem-20222027gadam>

<sup>94</sup> <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/310954-par-regionalas-politikas-pamatnostadnem-2021-2027-gadam>.