

## The Finnish National Programme to reduce long-term homelessness

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### A. Current situation

In Latvia data on the length of the waiting period for social housing unit are not collected. The waiting period usually takes several years.

Municipal vacant housing stock in 2008 was 2 376 flats. In turn, the dwellings for rent in 2008 were registered 12 856 persons, but of social housing for rent – 2 708 persons. However, it should be noted that in Latvia each municipality shall provide assistance for housing primarily for administrative area residents as well as the free housing is located in those municipalities where fewer job opportunities are.

In Riga, the capital of Latvia, which is home to approximately 1/3 of Latvia's population, vacant housing stock is negligible and of poor quality. In 2008 there were 6 560 persons registered for housing for rent and 1968 persons registered for social housing. Besides it is a small number of people who would like to radically change their domiciles.

In the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of 2008 the municipal 10 m<sup>2</sup> flat rent was 2.16 lats per month, but in the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of 2009 the rental charges increased by 3.75 lats. Thus, during the year the rent for municipal 10m<sup>2</sup> flat per month increased by 73.6%.

In Latvia data on the number of evictions as well as number of persons without any shelter or in insecure and/or inadequate accommodation are not collected.

Riga faces the major problem of homelessness in comparison to some other major cities. The Table 1 below illustrates the number of clients in Riga shelters/night shelters as well as the increase of the number of clients in Riga shelters/night shelters in comparison with the previous year.

**Table 1. Increase in the number of clients shelters/night shelters of Riga in 2008, 2007, 2006, 2005 and 2004 in comparison with the previous year \*\***

Year	Total number of clients	Increase in the total number of clients in comparison with the previous year		Incl. the number of women	Increase in the number of women in comparison with the previous year		Incl. the number of men	Increase in the number of men in comparison with the previous year		Incl. the number of families	Increase in the number of families in comparison with the previous year	
		persons	%		persons	%		persons	%		families	%
2009	2597	648	33%	594	183	45%	2003	530	36%	41	14	52%
2008	1949	-215	-10%	411	-22	-5%	1473	-163	10%	27	14	108%
2007	2164	-41	-2%	433	18	4%	1636	-61	-6%	13	-17	-57%
2006	2205	186	9%	415	92	28%	1697	80	5%	30	-18	37%
2005	2019	303	18%	323	5	2%	1617	275	20%	48	11	30%
2004	1716	225	15%	318	*	*	1342	*	*	37	*	*
2003	1491	* no accurate data on the total number of clients in 2003 in a breakdown by women, men and families										
2002	939	** the total number of clients is not precise; currently the Riga Shelter/night shelters do not have a uniform system for recording clients, i.e., in the course of a year one and the same client could be a recipient of the service at several night shelters.										

The main reasons for homelessness and housing exclusion in Latvia are as follows:

- Housing: high rent (up to the end of 2008); high costs of utilities (still remaining problem);
- Employment: unemployment or low-income employment;
- Personal factors: lack of social functioning ability; lack of motivation; addiction problems; insufficient qualification; homelessness as a life-style; bad health condition; stereotypes of the society that facilitate the exclusion of this particular group of the population;
- Population concentration in Riga, capital of Latvia, due to lower development level of other regions.

## B. Overall policy framework and governance

The Ministry of Economics develops and implements housing policy (including housing exclusion and social housing policy).

The Ministry of Welfare is responsible for development of policies related to social care, social rehabilitation services and municipal social assistance (including for homeless persons).

While implementation of policies for social care and social rehabilitation services, as well as social assistance, lays on local governments, i.e. local government shall ensure social assistance (social care) to residents (social assistance for poor families and socially vulnerable persons, ensuring places for elderly in social care centres, ensuring places for orphans and children without parental care in training and educational institutions, provision of overnight shelters for the homeless, and others) (Section 15, Law on Local Governments).

According to *Law on Social Services and Social Assistance* the duty of the local authority is to provide social assistance and social services to socially vulnerable individuals:

- For (municipal) social assistance (benefits) - to design the system in way, unrestricting access to municipal social assistance benefits for persons without a defined place of residence.
- For social care and social rehabilitation services – to promote homeless persons with shelters and social worker assistance for those, who would like to improve their situation.

In order to improve supporting system for citizens in standing of housing costs, in *Law on Social Services and Social Assistance* the housing benefit is set as one of two social assistance benefits that are obligatory paid out by municipalities .

Over the years problems of homelessness and begging have become increasingly more topical in Riga. In 2007 the Riga City Council approved the Action Plan “Provision of Assistance to the Homeless in Unfavourable Weather Conditions in Riga”, prescribing that the scale of assistance provided to the homeless during the winter period from 1 October till 30 April would be increased. In 2008 the Riga Council approved the Strategy for the Development of the Social Services and Social Assistance System of the Riga City for 2008 - 2013, which is a medium-term policy planning document covering goals of the local authority, areas of activities and their implementation programmes in the field of social services and social assistance to promote the growth of the life quality of Riga residents by ensuring a professional and efficient quality operation of the system of social services and social assistance in line with needs of the population. The approved Strategy states that individuals without permanent domicile will be provided with temporary accommodation and the most necessary services for satisfying self-care and other basic needs; to provide low-income residents with apartments in social houses or social apartments in order to prevent their risk of homelessness.

The following persons shall be provided with municipal dwelling space first:

- 1) Persons to whom assistance shall be provided in accordance with *the Law on Residential Tenancy* in cases if they are evicted from a rented dwelling space and if they are:
  - a) low-income persons, who have reached retirement age or who are disabled;
  - b) low-income persons, who live with and in whose care is at least one under-age child, a person under guardianship, a low-income person who has reached retirement age, or a low-income person who is disabled; and

- c) other persons living in the territory of a local government, who belong to the category of persons specified by the local government council to whom a local government provides assistance if they are evicted from the rented residential space.
- 2) Politically repressed persons, who are evicted from residential space, if they do not use other residential space;
- 3) Persons who are evicted from an apartment they own if recovery proceedings are applied against the property as a result of payments for services related to expenses for the residential space use, building maintenance, exploitation and renovation, and if they are:
  - a) low-income persons, who have reached retirement age or who are disabled
  - b) low-income persons who live with and in whose care is at least one under-age child, a person under guardianship, a low-income person who has reached retirement age, or a low-income person who is disabled, and
  - c) politically repressed persons, if they do not use other residential space
- 4) Orphans and children left without parental care and brought up in a child care and instructional institution, foster family or by a guardian – when they stay at the child care and instructional institution, in the foster-family or with the guardian has come to an end, or also when they have graduated from an educational institution if it is not possible for them to settle in accordance with the procedures specified by the Law into the previously occupied residential space;
- 5) Repatriates who have emigrated from Latvia in the period up to 4 May 1990 and for whom it is not possible to settle in accordance with the procedures specified by the law into the dwelling space they occupied before emigration from Latvia or repatriates who were born abroad or emigrated from Latvia after 4 May 1990 and at the moment of emigration were minors; and
- 6) Low-income politically repressed persons;
- 7) Low-income persons who have been released from prison after serving their sentence, if they were living in the administrative territory of the relevant local government before sentencing and it is not possible to settle in accordance with the procedures specified by the Law into the residential space they occupied previously. This provision does not apply to those persons, who have given consent to privatize a state or local government apartment they rent to another person and have concluded an agreement with that person regarding termination of the right to use the residential space, or upon whose consent the apartment has been sold or otherwise alienated and as a result of the transaction the persons have forfeited the right to use the relevant apartment; and
- 8) Other categories of low-income persons specified by the relevant local government council.

## Riga case

Riga is the capital of Latvia and the main industrial, business, financial and culture centre in the Baltic, important seaport. Riga is the biggest city in the Baltic. In the territory of Riga city there is living approximately 1/3 of entire population of Latvia, but within the Riga agglomeration (Riga and the ambit, including nearest cities) – 1.15 million people that is almost a half of the population of Latvia.

### *Riga shelter and night asylums*

Year after year the problem of homelessness and begging is live issue in Riga. Those people who were not able to adapt themselves to the rapid rhythm of modern life as often as not are begging, living in inappropriate living circumstances or else they are becoming homeless persons. This is indicated by increasing number of people that are receiving services of Riga shelter, night asylums and soup kitchens.

Homeless persons in Riga may receive services of Riga shelter, night asylums and social rehabilitation centre. Those services provide for short-term shelter, services of hygiene and feeding as well as consultations of social workers. In order to facilitate social integration of those persons social rehabilitation centre realizes social rehabilitation programs.

Riga shelter is municipal institution which can shelter 170 persons, in case of need, in winter – up to 230 persons.

There are not enough places in Riga shelter to shelter all the homeless persons of Riga, therefore since 2003 Riga municipality buys night asylum services from several organisations.

In 2009 **night asylum services** were provided by 5 nongovernmental organisations, in total up to 450 places were provided. Since the number of homeless persons in Riga is increasing, the number of bought places in night asylums is increasing as well.

**Table 27. Total number of the places in night asylums run by co-contractor organizations**

Year	Places
2007	305
2008	360
2009	450
2010	475

### *Social rehabilitation centre for homeless persons*

Social rehabilitation includes the body of activities fostering social and working skills, promoting to retrieve social status, integration in labour market and society, as well as preventing negative consequences in person's life caused by other factors according to client's individual social rehabilitation plan.

In 2009 Riga municipality financed services of social rehabilitation centre for homeless persons (hereinafter – SRC) provided by 2 organisations.

In 2009 SRC services received 9 men and 21 women, 3 of which returned to shelter/night asylum, but others have resolved their housing problems. Utmost residence term in SRC is one year.

In 2009 average number of persons that used services of Riga shelter/night asylum/SRC were 475 persons per month that is 43 persons or 9% more than in 2008. Most clients were registered in December – 614 persons. In winter average amount of homeless persons gradually increases, while in summer it decreases.

Increase of the number of clients might be explained by increase of unemployment. The number of able-bodied unemployed persons keeps increasing – in 2008 there were 35%, but in 2009 it reached up to 72% of all clients. Persons that have lost their jobs cannot afford to pay for rented space and are under the necessity to use previously named services. The number of able-bodied employed persons was 31% in 2008, but in 2009 it decreased to 6%. Mostly those persons have insufficient income to rent or buy dwelling.

In Riga shelters and night asylums in total reside on average 73% men and 27% women.

#### *Day care centre of Riga shelter*

Since May 21, 2009, Riga shelter is running its Day care centre for homeless and low-income persons (hereinafter – DCC) in Katoļu iela 57. DCC provides for social rehabilitation services, fostering of social skills and support- and self-help groups. Services provided are as follows:

- services of social work specialists;
- full time stay (week days from 9.00 to 17.00);
- acquirement of various skills (incl. working skills) a.o. social rehabilitation services;
- activities of support and self-help groups;
- services of family doctor at the level of primary health care;
- shower services, incl. use of hygiene means;
- services of disinfection;
- lunch for clients who take part at DCC activities and exercise responsibility of collaboration;
- self-service laundry.

DCC services are awarded in accordance with social worker's assessment of individual needs and resources of the client. In 2009 427 persons received DCC services, on average 70 - 155 persons daily, incl. services of family doctor – 10 persons, shower services – 10 persons, self-service laundry – 2 persons, 67 persons attended library and 64 persons were eating lunch daily.

### *Soup kitchens*

In Riga there are several venues of distribution of soup where homeless and low-income persons can receive hot meals. In 2009 Riga municipality co-financed soup kitchen services provided by 2 organisations, up to 500 portions daily, five times weekly. In 2009 were distributed 103825 portions in total.

### *Mobile team for street social work with homeless persons*

Mobile team for street social work with homeless persons (hereinafter – Mobile team) was established in November 2007 as a structural unit of Riga shelter. Mobile team informs homeless persons on how to receive social assistance, gathers information and regularly inspects homeless persons' assembly places, clarifies the situation, needs and problems of each person, motivates them to deal with their social problems and supports them according to the situation and needs.

Mobile team is composed of three team members – social worker, career and driver. This is one shift work from 9.00 to 17.00. The route is composed of soup kitchen addresses and supplemented with other homeless persons' assembly places. All Riga districts are inspected on location weekly. In 2009 Mobile team has consulted 3293 persons, received 766 phone calls, and conveyed 450 persons to night asylums or medical institutions. In comparison, in 2008 Mobile team has consulted 3195 persons, received 250 phone calls and conveyed 345 persons to night asylums or medical institutions. Mobile team reports that main problems of homeless persons are lack of dwelling, health problems and lack of information on various institutions, services and their receipt procedures.

### *Short-term stay services*

Since July 1, 2009 society „Latvijas Sarkanais Krusts” (Latvian Red Cross) provides paid service–short-term stay (42 places) service for persons of no fixed abode or persons that have come to crisis situation. This kind of service is appropriate for persons who are residing in Riga shelter or night asylum and are waiting in queue for municipal dwelling-space or services of long-term social care and rehabilitation institution. If the client cannot pay the whole amount of service pay Riga Social care centre co-finances by municipal regulations. In 2009 this service was co-financed for 5 persons.

### *The number of homeless persons in Riga*

Shelters and night asylums reports that during the period from 01.01.2010 to 30.04.2010 there were registered 304 women and 1032 men, outside the shelters – 177 persons who reside in

allotments. About 1% of clients were with unknown identity due to drunkenness and lack of personal identity documents. Riga municipality has registered 1513 persons of no fixed abode.

### **Jūrmala case**

Jurmala is a sea side resort city, 25 km from capital Riga, on the Baltic Sea Riga's Gulf. 55 000 inhabitants live at Jurmala. Jurmala takes 2nd place in territory and 5<sup>th</sup> place by numbers of inhabitants among 8 Latvian big cities. Jurmala territory is along 34 km.

Jurmala City Council makes efforts so that people would not be evicted from living places.

Jurmala City Orphan court carefully looks after situations, when family with children is in danger of loss of housing. According to regulations Orphan Court can suspend the issuing of the enforcement of the eviction until the family has other housing. At situations when have evicted poor and socially disadvantaged persons City Council provide social living place (it means room or flat, not an apartment at every case, with low expenditures) for 6 month, if necessary contract is extended for next 6 month.

Jurmala municipality do not have sufficient number of flat what municipality has to provide for inhabitants from different social groups according national law for Municipal Housing Support.

Principle „Housing first”, unfortunately, is not possible to realize for homeless people at nearest future.

Four „soup kitchens” provide satisfaction of basic needs for homeless along city territory.

Jurmala City Council provides social services, including Night Shelter.

Night Shelter provides 30 beds, 20 for men, 10 for women. The average occupancy rate is approximately 52 % (at warm time of year that is under 10 %, but at cold time of year till 98 %) We have listed annual average – 100 homeless people at year (102 – 2007; 98 – 2008; 110 – 2009). 24 % are women. Middle age of men is 54 years old, 57 years old for women)

The middle residence time for person per year is 90 days.

City rules gives person possibility to use night shelter and cooperate with social worker and to realize activities according individual social rehabilitation plan, without time limit, but at case, if person does not to go to contact with social service and cooperate, time limit is 90 days per year.

According to Social service agency dates – 10 % of clients have found permanent living place (rented flats or go back to family and relatives and at some cases to social institution).

At the other part we see trend go out of social service sight after social benefits are provided.

Jurmala city council has developed project (we already have land place and technical project), which will organize permanent living place for homeless people as a social service. We would see



living place with simple conditions, near methadone's therapy place, near „ soup kitchen” and under social service supervisory.

The economic crises stopped this project.

### C. Comments on debate issues

- The homelessness strategy: Latvia does not have national homelessness strategy. Development of such strategy mostly is a matter of resources.
- The principle of „Housing First”: homelessness is mostly a problem of big cities. Housing problem or lack of appropriate housing affect lot of people from different social groups. Due to that fact it is very questionable to single out only homeless.
- The focus on long-term homelessness and prevention is important issue. Prevention objectives are relevant to national contexts due to infection diseases and public safety reason. We would like to raise discussion about what kind of alternative services we could provide for homeless people and how to react in situations when we can not. How to find balance between human rights of homeless people and society safety?

### References:

Riga City Welfare Department Year-book „Social services and social assistance in Riga, 2009”  
[http://www.ld.riga.lv/tl\\_files/dokumenti/gadagramata-drukai2.pdf](http://www.ld.riga.lv/tl_files/dokumenti/gadagramata-drukai2.pdf)

Jurmla City Council Welfare Department Data