



Weekly Briefing

Latvia social briefing:

Development of Latvian safety and health issues in February 2020

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Development of Latvian safety and health issues in February 2020

Latvia plans to create municipal Traffic Safety Index

Latvia has one of the biggest number of deaths rates in road traffic accidents in the European Union. ¹ Besides the majority of traffic accidents with injured people are registered in populated areas. Although the number of total deaths in road traffic accidents has decreased in the last years, the Ministry of Transport has decided to implement new tools to reduce the total number of road traffic accidents. ² The Ministry of Transport plans to establish a local government Traffic Safety Index that would be published annually stating both the most secure and most precarious list of municipalities in Latvia. The purpose of the Traffic Safety Index is to motivate the local governments to pay more focus on road safety improvements in their administrative areas. The proposal on the implementation of the Traffic Safety Index was supported by the Road Safety Board and in the upcoming time the Ministry will start to work on the development of methodology of the Traffic Safety Index. It is planned that the Index will consist of data about the number of accidents, population, cars, and other indicators.

Ministry of Welfare of the Republic of Latvia does not support Parliament's intention to impose a ban on the adoption of children abroad

The Ministry of Welfare has stated various risks which are related to the announcement of the Human Rights and Public Affairs Commission to establish a moratorium on the adoption of children abroad. Although the moratorium is planned only temporarily until stricter regulation is developed, the Ministry of Welfare has expressed concerns that the preparation process for the amendments to the law may take a long period of time in which for some children the possibility of adoption in families may be deprived.

The current Civil Law provides that a child can be adopted abroad only with the permission of the responsible minister and only if it is not possible to ensure the parenting process for the child in a family in adequate care. The regulatory framework provides that foreign adoption is the last solution to ensure quality childhood for children. At the same time, the Ministry of Welfare considers that local adoption should be promoted primarily. Therefore, topics such as strengthening prevention work for families with children so that the child must

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Road_safety_statistics_-_characteristics_at_national_and_regional_level&oldid=463733

² <https://www.csdd.lv/celu-satiksmes-negadijumi/celu-satiksmes-negadijumu-skaitis>

not enter the adoption system and as well as the development of the child rights protection system with a view to promoting better quality work in local governments in the field of protection of children's rights, without duplicating the functions of Orphan's courts and the social service should be considered first.

The minister of Welfare Ramona Petravica stated that even currently each case regarding the adoption of a child abroad is carefully evaluated and in order for a foreign family to adopt a Latvian child they must go through a sufficiently large investigation process. "Overall it is the only way for these children to become a part of a family, especially for teens and children with disabilities or major health problems. Undoubtedly, our priority will always remain and be given to Latvian families that are willing to adopt a child. However, if we are not able to ensure adoption for a child in Latvia, the child should not have to live in institutions for all its childhood."

Latvia launches new social project

There are currently approximately 20 thousand people in Latvia who are affected by mental disorders and for which the first or second disability group has been determined. Due to the stereotypes and prejudices of society, the social networking opportunities for people in Latvia suffering from mental disorders are limited. To explain to the general public the importance and potential of inclusion of these people the Ministry of Welfare has started an informative campaign. In the upcoming years, it is planned to implement deinstitutionalized care to include people with mental or physical disorders in the general public. As part of the campaign, the diagnosis of mental disorders such as autism, Duane syndrome, depression, schizophrenia, and vegetative dystonia will be discussed more often. It is planned to inform the general public about common mental disorders and about what is essential to remember in communication with people who suffer from them.

By the middle of the 20th century, providing services to long-term social-care institutions was the way how the state took care of people with mental disorders. The institutions used to provide the daily needs of the most vulnerable members of society and, at the same time, cordoned them to protect fellow people from possible aggression and other dangerous behavior. However, the development of medicine has helped to reduce the noticeable signs and symptoms of people who suffer from mental disorders. The practical need to separate people with mental disorders has been lost, and now knowledge, that is available to society, allows to see people behind their diagnosis – personality with both individual needs and rights. The existence of these institutions entails the separation of people with mental disorders from

the general society, so they are forced to live together. People with mental disorders do not have sufficient control over their lives and the decisions that affect them, and the rules of the institution are prioritized over the individual's needs.

There have been observed various disadvantages in institutional care such as lack of personality, strict routine, and social isolation. In the social care institutions, the personalities of the patients have been directly impacted – they are characterized by impersonality and lack of privacy. People living in institutions often do not have any personal property that symbolizes their individuality, including even private clothing and in most cases, they must share living space with others. The patients of the institutions must follow a strict routine and follow a regime that determines a daily sleeping schedule, eating habits and spare time schedule. People living in social care institutions often do not have the opportunities to participate in social inclusion activities – on the contrary, there is social alienation between people with mental disorders and others, because the events are mostly organized on the premises of the social care institution.

In the context of project “Deinstitutionalization”, it is planned to provide social services with an aim to include people with mental disorders in society and to strengthen the public awareness of the human rights of people with mental disorders as well. To strengthen the social inclusion for the vulnerable members of society in cooperation with 115 out of 119 municipalities of Latvia it is planned to offer various activities. For example, local governments will create group apartments or group houses where people with mental disorders will live permanently while receiving the necessary support, as well as day-care centers. In addition, the acquisition of employments skills for people with mental disorders will be promoted by established specialized workshops. Besides, the process of social inclusion support for the inclusion process will be provided by both support groups and consultations from various specialists as well. Within this project, it is planned that people with mental disorders, which require periodic support, will be able to receive additional care at home.

It has been stated by the organizers of the project that the expenses of institutional care and social services-based society are roughly the same. However, social services-based society provides a significantly better quality of life for people and therefore can be seen as a more efficient use of taxpayer's money.

Coronavirus reached also Latvia

Although there was not registered any official case of Coronavirus in Latvia in February 2020 it was confirmed by the Estonian Health Board that the some of the diagnosed patients of coronavirus in Estonia had traveled through the International Airport of Riga, which is the main airport in Latvia, and later drove to Estonia, where the patients had noticed the symptoms of the virus. In February 2020 the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Latvia had already been making virus containment measures prior. The State Operational Medical Commission decided to extend the control measures of coronavirus to include additional countries and territories such as China, South Korea, Iran, Italy, from which special precautions need to be taken upon return.

The outbreak of COVID-19 has impacted the development and economic tendencies of Latvia in 2020. It is worth noting that following the global economic development trends of 2020 it was previously forecasted that the growth of GDP in Latvia will experience decrement comparing to the previous years as well. However, during the prior analysis of economic growth in 2020, the potential economic impact of COVID-19 had not been taken into account. Therefore, in February 2020 the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Latvia announced that the growth of GDP in 2020 could only reach 2,2% and not 2,8% as initially planned. It is doubted that the total growth of GDP could potentially amortize the negative economic consequences created by the virus by that causing a potential economic recession. Since Latvia's economy is both small and open and is particularly affected by the global events the continuation of the outbreak of virus could affect the economy even further.

Summary

In February 2020 the Latvian government had taken on multiple actions to contribute to the social development of the country. Since Latvia has one of the biggest number of deaths rates in road traffic accidents in the European Union, the government of Latvia is planning to implement Traffic Safety Index to raise awareness of the local municipalities to pay more attention to road safety developments in their administrative areas. With the Ministry of Welfare disapproval of Parliament's intention to impose a ban on the adoption of children abroad and concerns about the impact of the amendments on orphans, the Ministry encourages to raise more attention to the current problems of children protection rights. In addition, to contribute to the inclusion in society of the people who suffer from mental disorders the Ministry of Welfare has started the deinstitutionalization process of social care institutions in Latvia.

Although in February 2020 the government of Latvia had been already making Coronavirus control measures, it is doubted that the economic growth could amortize the negative economic consequences caused by the virus.