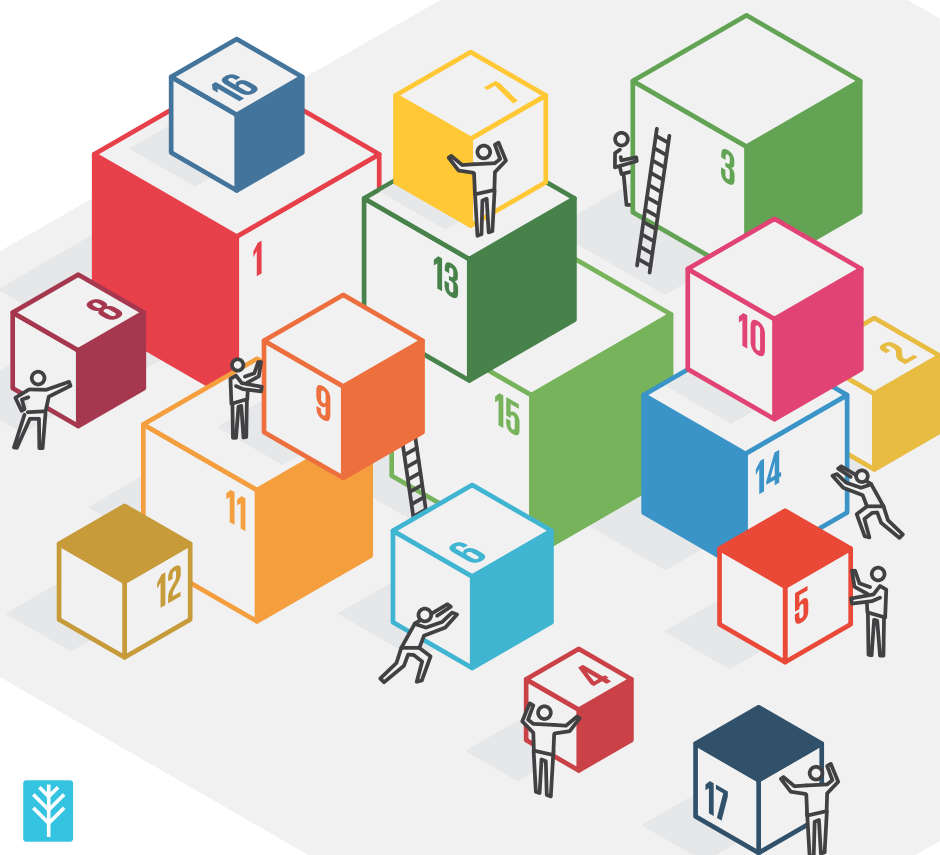


Sustainable development of Latvia: analysis of NGO participation

Spotlight Review on the Report by Government of Latvia on Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in Latvia



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The Latvian Platform for Development Cooperation LAPAS was founded in 2004 and unites 34 non-governmental organisations working in the field of global education and development cooperation and includes national unions, associations, and cooperation networks.

*Author of the report:
Latvian Platform for Development Cooperation*

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Summary

By honestly revealing a part of the challenges the country faces, the Voluntary National Review by the Government of Latvia on Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals defines a range of positive development directions for sustainable development. However, if this is not included in national documents and there is no institutional mechanism, these can remain as just “nice words written on paper”, as happened with the Sustainable Development Strategy Latvia2030.

Stagnating and comparatively high income inequality, a lack of political will to create support mechanisms for groups at a high poverty risk, and reform of the health care system in a way that will have negative impact on less advantaged groups - this confirms that the “economic breakthrough” of the National Development Plan 2020 without balanced development serves only the interests of narrow groups of the society.

Replacing civic dialogue with social dialogue, reducing accessibility of finance by introducing a poorly considered tax reform, diminishing the amount of foreign funding, and narrowing the legal environment for NGOs are the consequences of decreasing the importance of civic society in order to benefit economic interests.

This report by non-governmental organisations, by following a structure similar to that of the government review, analyzes the process of the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals from the point of view of the national development planning. It also points out specific matters, including the principle of “leaving no one behind”, the institutional mechanism, public awareness, and global responsibility.

The second part of the report contains 17 stories how NGOs in Latvia are making this world more sustainable and better.



Introduction

At the end of 2015, the UN adopted 17 Sustainable Development Goals (hereinafter – SDG) or Global Goals. They were developed in the extensive process also involving civil society. The goals represent a part of the global agreement on sustainable development by 2030 or **Agenda 2030**.

Different from the Millennium Development Goals, these goals are **universal** and applicable to all countries globally. Every country should look for both national implementation mechanisms and assume global responsibility for implementation of the goals on a global scale – there are policy areas where by national or local actions we impact globally. This is referred to as **policy coherence for sustainable development**. For example, supervision of the Latvian finance sector impacts cross-national financial flows, which, in turn, affect the development possibilities of other countries.

Each of the 17 goals has a range of **targets and performance indicators**. There can be a situation when some of the targets or indicators is not important on the national level, however, it is indirectly affected, for example, via action for minimisation of the negative impact of the climate change.

Also, the crosscutting principles that should be followed in implementing all the goals are equally important, these are the so-called 5 Ps: People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace, and Partnership.



PEOPLE

Ending poverty and hunger, ensuring that all human beings can fulfil their potential in dignity and equality and in a healthy environment.



PLANET

Protecting the planet from degradation through sustainable consumption and production, sustainable management of its natural resources and taking urgent action on climate change, to support the needs of the present and future generations.



PROSPERITY

Ensuring that all human beings can enjoy prosperous and fulfilling lives and that economic, social and technological processes occur in harmony with nature.



PARTNERSHIP

Mobilising the means required for implementing this Agenda through global partnership based on solidarity and particularly focused on the needs of poorest and most vulnerable human beings.



PEACE

Fostering peaceful, just and inclusive societies that are free from fear and violence.

Since 2015 every country has worked for **national** implementation of SDGs. Also, Latvia as a responsible country, as a Member State of the European Union and OECD, has been working for evaluation of SDGs and their integration with the national development planning. This process has been coordinated by the Cross Sectorial Coordination Centre, which is the leading national development planning institution in Latvia. At the same time, other parties have

implemented various activities, in particular, local governments, companies, non-governmental organisations, and people.

This report focuses on analysis of the SDGs implementation process **from the perspective of non-governmental organisations** (hereinafter – NGO's) by emphasising some important aspects in addition to the Voluntary National Review by the government on implementation of SDGs in Latvia.

The structure of the report is similar to that of the government review:

- review of the development priorities of the civic society – social capital and human security;
- major development planning documents and challenges from the NGO perspective;
- integration of SDGs in the national development planning and major challenges;
- implementation of the horizontal principle “leaving no one behind”, including gender and health issues;
- analysis of the institutional mechanism of implementation of SDGs;
- public awareness raising and education on SDGs;
- global responsibility perspective.

Development of the new National Development Plan will start in 2019. The national parliament election will take place in Latvia in October 2018. LAPAS expresses hope that the analysis and recommendations included in the spotlight report will serve as the basis for improvement of the development planning process and content considering the needs of people and sustainable development principles.

Process of elaboration of the report

Latvian non-governmental organisations started active participating within the process of the Sustainable Development Goals as early as in 2014 when NGO's of various fields cooperated in developing the positions for the **post-2015** process. Public consultations were led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Latvian Platform for Development Cooperation (hereinafter – LAPAS) and sector specific NGOs, for example, in the field of gender equality, were involved.

The Latvian Presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2015 allowed LAPAS to mobilise additional resources for involvement in policy planning, participation in activities on development and foreign affairs matters of the European and global scale. For example, LAPAS was able to work on financing for development. Also, a report on **non-financial means for development**¹ and **glocalisation methodology** were developed for working with social groups in Latvia.²

Based on the glocalisation methodology, also after 2015, jointly with its member organisations, and environmental organisations, the Association of Local Governments of Latvia, and other partners, LAPAS continued **educating society on Sustainable Development Goals** and organising cross sectorial cooperation events for implementation of the SDGs.

In parallel to the work carried out by non-governmental organisations, local governments implemented thematic events and projects, and a non-formal public administration task force worked at the Cross Sectorial Coordination Centre (CSCC).

At the end of 2017, when the decision that Latvia will provide the **Voluntary National Review (VNR)** on implementation of SDGs was announced, LAPAS engaged in active interaction with the Cross Sectorial Coordination Centre and got involved in processes related to the VNR on the global scale by learning the practice of other countries, following international recommendations, etc.

On 28 November 2017 LAPAS in cooperation with its members the “Green Freedom” and the “Education Initiatives Centre” organised a **cross sectorial workshop** on elaboration of the VNR. Thanks to support from the Embassy of Sweden, a representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Sweden participated and shared experience of elaboration of the Swedish VNR. Also, the Head of the Sustainable Development Committee of the Saeima (parliament of Latvia), representatives of ministries and government institutions, local governments and NGOs attended the event. Representing the public administration, there was a presentation by the CSCC, and international NGO practice was shared by LAPAS. This event should be considered the turning point in the process of NGO participation in elaboration of the VNR.

In December LAPAS took part and presented information on NGO participation at meetings of the Sustainable Development Committee of the Saeima and Council for Implementation of the Memorandum of Co-operation between Non-Governmental Organisations and the Cabinet of Ministers. At the end of the year, at the meeting of the Council for Implementation of the Memorandum of Co-operation between Non-Governmental Organisations and the Cabinet of Ministers, the CSCC invited to nominate representatives of NGOs for participation in an informal working group for elaboration of the VNR by using a transparent procedure for this.

Several NGO representatives were included in the **informal working group**, five representatives of the members of LAPAS being among them, in particular, the “Green Liberty” (environment), the

1 <http://lapas.lv/en/our-works/presidency-project/research/>

2 <http://lapas.lv/en/our-works/presidency-project/glocalization-methodology/>

“Latvian Rural Forum” (regional development), “Be good!” (youth and community cooperation development), the “Education Initiatives Centre” (education), and the “Corporate Social Responsibility Platform” (the private sector). The process of the working group was transparent, however the time limit prevented broader consultations with the whole sector of non-governmental organisations. Although LAPAS provided vast information to NGOs on participation possibilities by using various newsletters, social media and other channels, the NGO activity was very low.

There are several possible reasons behind this:

- 1) NGO awareness of SDGs and their role in achievement of them is still low;
- 2) NGO participation and the relevant feedback by the government institutions has been low in development planning processes, therefore NGOs are not willing to participate;
- 3) NGOs work more on the level of sectorial policies because the NGO involvement in the planning processes at the national level is not well developed.

The NGO report was elaborated in two stages: by asking NGOs to submit their policy positions on particular SDGs and the best practice examples on implementation of goals in various areas. Similar to the case of the government review, comparatively few organisations participated in preparation of the NGO report. This confirms the necessity to continue working on raising awareness on implementation of SDGs in the civic society sector, in particular, outside the areas of environment and development.

Acknowledgements

LAPAS would like to express gratitude to all its member organisations for active participation in the process of elaboration of the report, as well as to its other partners. In particular - the Association of Local Governments of Latvia, UNESCO Latvian National Committee, the Latvian Civic Alliance, and the Latvian Youth Council.

Personal thank you to Ruta Zilvere, Roberts Osis, Iveta Ķelle, Kristīne Zonberga, Ilze Dalbiņa, Mudīte Priede, Elita Kresse, Inga Belousa, Daiga Zaķe, Agita Hauka, Kristiāna Plāte, Andris Gobiņš, Agnese Alksne, Santa Krastiņa, Jānis Brizga, Krišjānis Liepa, and Elgars Felcis.

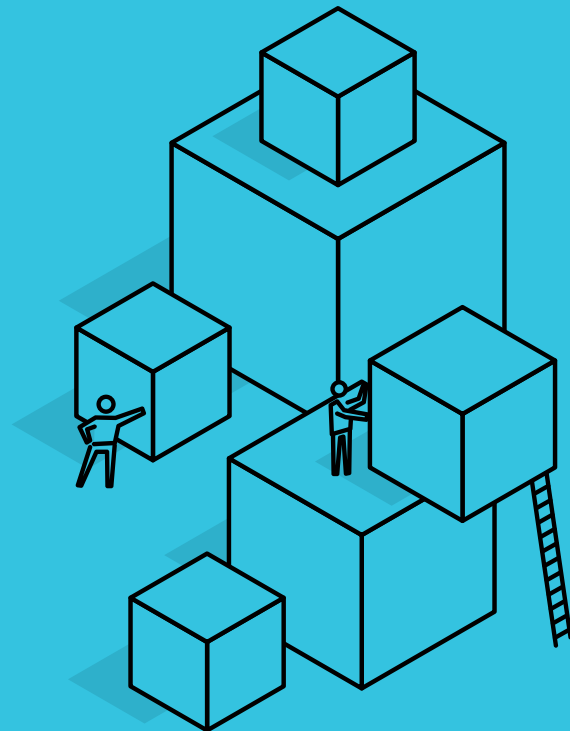
We also share our gratitude with our permanent regional partners – educational establishments, libraries, youth centres and culture centres who actively participate in organisation of sustainable development events of LAPAS in regions.

Special thank you to LAPAS staff - Sandra Rubene, Ieva Strazdiņa and trainees - Jessica Oudmaijer, Alina Mihaela Mures, Luddovico Ruggieri, Giulia Di Marco, Zelma Sergejeva for their selfless working hours.

Each story that we have listened to has inspired us to work for a better world and to collect many more initiatives on the power of individuals and interest groups, non-governmental organisations, communities and social movements for development of our Latvia. Look for the stories on www.lapas.lv under Global Goals.

Thank you to all who responded and told their stories to us!

1. Importance of the civic society in development



In the course of planning national development, the individual is often perceived as a **resource for promoting common prosperity** – a successful entrepreneur, a prudent employee, a responsible politician, a good student, etc. Irrespective of what role we have in our country, first, we are **human beings** – with our possibilities and failures, concerns and care, achievements and moments of joy.

In order to achieve **change** on all levels, the individual's ability and responsibility to be a participatory part of the global and national development should be strengthened.

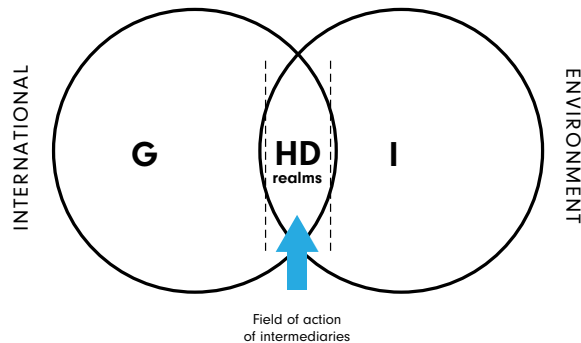
Civil society – non-governmental organisations, interest groups, communities, social movements and initiatives, encourage an individual's comprehensive and efficient participation in one's own and national development.

1.1. Human security

The Latvian development planning documents define the principle “**Human being in the first place**”. At the same time, the approach to how the state views an individual is important, i.e. whether he/ she is a tool for creating economic prosperity, or he/ she is free from concerns of the future and makes a responsible choice of creating it independently.

Human security is “freedom from fear” and “freedom from poverty”. A human being cannot develop if he/ she is afraid of

himself/ herself and the future, or is forced to live in poverty. Human security is the security of every individual which also affects the community, the district, the state and the region where he/ she lives. Human security looks at the individual at the particular place and time by identifying what he/ she is missing in various dimensions, e.g. economic, nutrition, health, ecological, personal, community and political.



The human security model studies the person's relations with the state, however, between the person and the state there are also **intermediaries** - NGOs, the family, the community, friends who know both what assistance can be offered by the state and what co-operation would be possible for solving the individual's problems. For human security both **empowerment** and a **protective approach** in situations of threat and crisis are important.³

Physical security for the narrow purpose of this concept is a topical issue worldwide now and has an essential impact upon the NGO sector. By trying to improve the physical security of people, **the freedom of assembly and the freedom of speech are threatened, the democracy is narrowed.** The legal environment has reduced the freedom of NGOs also in Latvia by providing the possibility to the public administration to use security considerations as a mechanism for restricting the NGO activities.

In practice, the role of security intermediaries and people themselves in minimising their problems and improving human security is reduced, **by increasing the impact of the state in solving an individual's problems.** This approach also requires more re-distribution of resources for defence, monitoring and control functions, thus narrowing the supportive and free environment for the individual's development.

The Latvian National Development Plan has set securitability as one of the priorities, however, the medium-term assessment of its implementation confirms that this has not been among the national development priorities.

1.2. Social capital

The Review of Implementation of the SDGs by the Latvian government sets innovative and eco-efficient economy and reduction of inequality of income and opportunities as the primary development goals. The Report on implementation of SDGs by non-governmental organisations emphasises **the importance of social capital for the national development.**

Social capital is a concept that involves the potential of individuals to secure benefits and invent solutions to problems through membership in social networks. Social capital revolves around three dimensions: interconnected networks of relationships between individuals and groups (social ties or social participation), levels of trust that characterize these ties, and resources or benefits that are both gained and transferred by virtue of social ties and social participation.⁴

Social capital encourages formation of the human security intermediaries by **helping people to solve their problems and to empower them** to prevent problems on the local and the national level.

³ http://www.nvo.lv/site/attachments/24/11/2014/Nodevums3_LV.pdf

⁴ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/social-capital>

Various initiative groups are active on the local level, most often these are informal. **The number of non-governmental organisations in regions is comparatively low** – more than a half of them are located in Riga region and a majority in the big cities⁵. In some regions specialised NGO centres implement various capacity strengthening and NGO environment improvement programs.

Although the legal environment in Latvia provides the possibility for public participation, actual participation in decision-making processes requires a lot of resources. **Very low financing from the national budget for protection of their interest** is available to the non-governmental organisations. For example, only 77 thousand EUR were available for all the projects for protection of interests in the national NGO fund⁶.

Permanent financing of NGOs is still a major challenge because neither membership fees (1.66% of revenue), nor donations (9.5% of revenue) form the core revenue of NGOs⁷. Although the national NGO fund was established in 2016, its total annual financing has never exceeded 0.5 million EUR. Also, **the new tax reform has considerably restricted the ability of NGO to attract donations** from private individuals and entities, and projects of public importance are being closed. It can be expected that the amount of donations will decrease 6 to 7 times⁸. As regards external funding for financing the civic society, the Latvian government has reduced EEA funding by 1.5 million below the level of the preceding year and by 2.5 million below the donors' proposal.

De facto, **the government has prohibited EU citizens to be members of NGO boards** by requirement that board members should have state language knowledge of the highest level, which is disproportionate when compared to requirements for members of the Saeima and local governments.

The **Law on Voluntary Work** which entered into force in 2016 and will afford protection to volunteers in the same way as any other employed person is a positive aspect. The regulations on classification of unions and foundations which will allow improving collection of statistics and more efficient implementation of the national policy also entered into force in 2016.

The **Law on Social Enterprises** providing for several support measures entered into force in 2018. Limited liability companies that implement creative economic operations with beneficial social impact, for example, provide social services, create inclusive civic society, encourage education, support science, work for the environment protection and preservation, ensure protection of animals or contribute to cultural diversity, can receive this status⁹.

Like everywhere in the world, there have been **changes in the structure of the civic society** in Latvia. Social movements and informal interest groups where people cooperate to solve their own or topical public issues are formed increasingly often. For example, when migration issues became topical, an active local entrepreneur with a group of other people thinking alike created a page on Facebook "I want to help refugees" where several thousands of people cooperated to share immediate assistance. There are also pickets at the Saeima on issues important for the society, for example, sexual and reproductive health, animal welfare and others. Along with such **short-term initiatives, there is a challenge to continue promoting systemic and legal amendments**, which is the permanent working advantage of non-governmental organisations. Thus, in order to encourage change in Latvia, it is necessary to cooperate with both short-term and target-focused initiatives and NGOs that permanently work to monitor and improve various areas.

5 http://www.nvo.lv/site/attachments/29/04/2016/NVO_PARSKATS-2015-23.04.pdf

6 http://www.sif.gov.lv/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&id=414&Itemid=127&lang=lv

7 http://www.nvo.lv/site/attachments/29/04/2016/NVO_PARSKATS-2015-23.04.pdf

8 <http://www.nvo.lv/lv/news/publication/jaunas-nodoklu-politikas-ietekme-uz-ziedosanu-8352/>

9 <https://www.socialauznamejdarbiba.lv/aktualitates/2017/10/13/saeim-pieemts-socil-uzmuma-likums>

FACTS:

- Only 19% of residents trust the national parliament and 28% trust the government. However, the trust of the EU level has increased and is above the average in the EU, i.e. 49%¹⁰.
- 52% of residents are satisfied with the operation of democracy in Latvia. Only 7% of residents think that their viewpoint matters in the country, 30% would rather agree to this¹¹.
- In Latvia there are approximately 23 thousand NGOs and their number grows every year. There were 10.5 NGOs per 1000 people in 2016. 4.7% of residents are active in an organisation and 15.8% in an interest group.
- 2649 organisations had the status of public benefit, which is a particular status approved by the state and allows their donors to benefit from tax reliefs.
- 35.3% of residents had participated in an NGO activity during the last three years. The public trust in unions and foundations is 34.7%¹².
- In 2015 the NGO sector's contributions to the budget amounted to 38.7 million EUR, of which 2.2 million EUR were VAT, 14.7 million EUR were Personal Income Tax and 21.8 million EUR were mandatory social insurance contributions.
- In 2015 the NGO sector employed 18,247 people. NGOs ensure employment of various groups of the society.
- A portrait of an NGO activist is as follows: a female, with a university degree, aged up to 44 years, financially prosperous, from a big family, a Latvian.

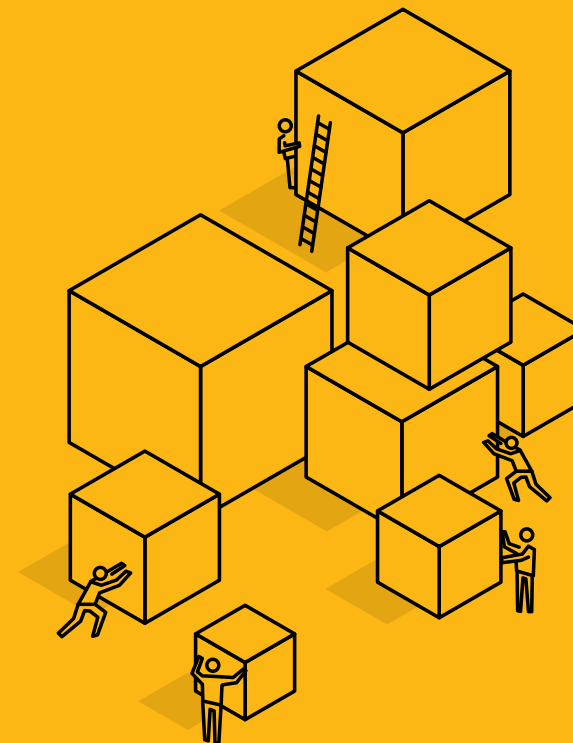
¹⁰ <http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/STANDARD/surveyKy/2180>

¹¹ <http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/STANDARD/surveyKy/2143>

¹² http://www.nvo.lv/site/attachments/29/04/2016/NVO_PARSKATS-2015-23.04.pdf

2.

Goals and priorities of Latvia and their implementation



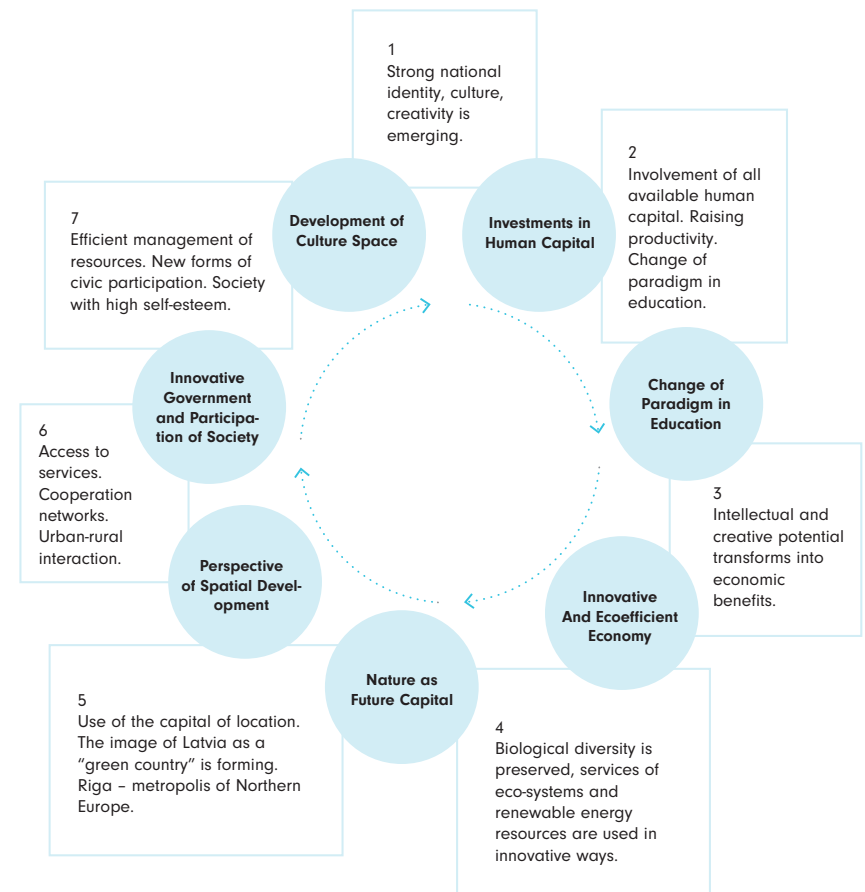
As regards implementation of the sustainable development concept, Latvia has been ahead of global processes. The Sustainable Development Strategy of Latvia (SDSL or Latvia2030) providing for balanced development was approved early in 2010. Its implementation was detailed and priorities were set by the National Development Plan 2020 (NDP). Although the non-governmental sector was not satisfied about the process of development of the NDP because it did not sufficiently reflect environment and social areas in the national planning, the plan also contained the human securitability priority. However, implementation of this priority is disputable on the basis of the medium-term evaluation of the NDP.

2.1. Latvia2030

In 2010, Saeima approved the Sustainable Development Strategy of Latvia until 2030¹³. This process had lasted for more than two years and involved several thousand people representing various generations and professions. This was a **unique practice** of involving the society in national development planning on such a broad scale, thus creating the feeling of affiliation and responsibility for the future of one's own country.

The strategy **centred on sustainable development** as a response to global challenges by using the approach of the capitals - the national wealth or values. **The strategic principles include in-**

¹³ https://www.pkc.gov.lv/sites/default/files/inline-files/LIAS_2030_en_1.pdf



novation, tolerance, cooperation, participation, which, in essence, should be created via development of the human capital and, in particular, the social capital.

In practice, Latvia as a country made a responsible step for implementation of sustainable development even before the UN Sustainable Development Goals by including also the national specific view, for example, development of the culture space and innovation as a

“Latvia – our home – green and smart, creative and accessible from anywhere in the world – our responsibility in the name of future generations.”

part of it, by basing the national identity on unique inherited and newly created material and moral values. The strategy sets **investments in human capital as a priority** – by securing participation of all human capital, in particular the groups exposed to the risk of poverty and social exclusion, on the labour market, improved efficiency of health, social care and social security, and life-long learning. **Change of paradigm in education** is set as a precondition for change of the economic model and the ability to respond to the challenges of global competitiveness. It is planned to base innovative, eco-efficient and competitive entrepreneurship onto creation and commercialisation of new ideas, knowledge transfer and research, science and innovations, creation of products and services with low carbon emissions and energy intensity, creation of renewable energy resources, and healthy food and eco systems.



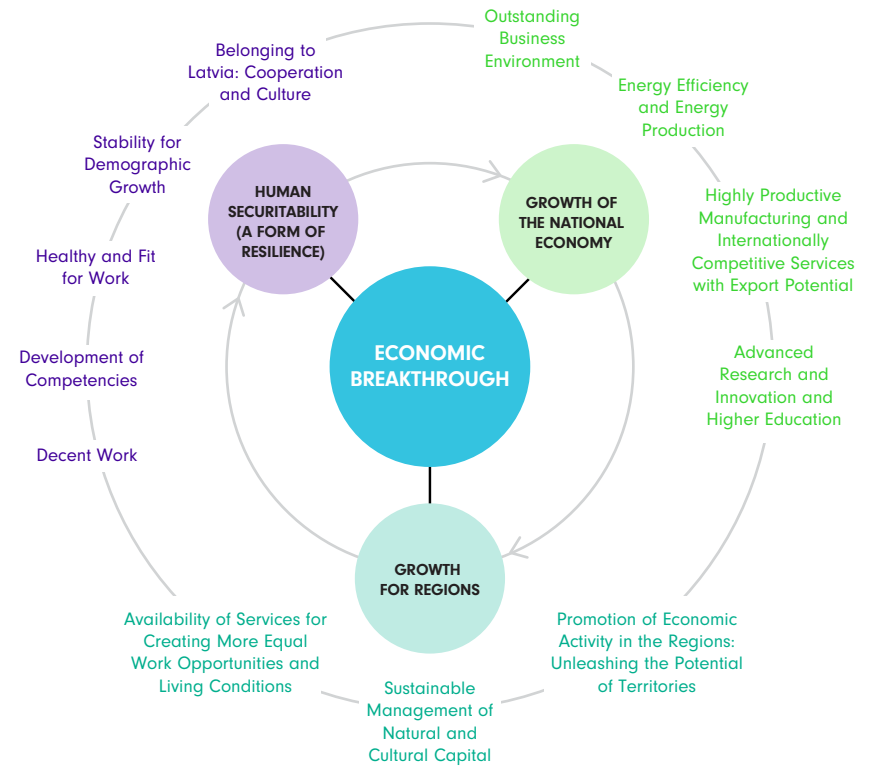
RECOMMENDATION:

Mapping of the SDG targets, sub-targets and performance indicators vs. Latvia2030.

The strategy defines targets, directions of action and solutions for each of the priorities, thus detailing their implementation models and indicators for performance evaluation. The role of the strategy within the whole national planning systems is also shown by identifying the necessity to secure coordination and alignment of all the policy documents, as well as their tie with budget and the institutional implementation mechanisms.

2.2. National Development Plan

In 2012 the National Development Plan 2014-2020 was approved¹⁴. It centres on the “**economic breakthrough**” – competitiveness and productivity, business environment, research and innovation, energy efficiency, competences, work, health, demography, cooperation, participation and culture, natural capital, potential of territories, availability of services.



14 https://www.pkc.gov.lv/sites/default/files/inline-files/NDP2020%20English%20Final_.pdf

Gross Domestic Product, the inequality S80/S20 quintile index, and change of population have been set as the NDP strategic indicators. But it does not include the **strategic indicators** referred to in the SDSL that would secure more balanced development instead of only economic development – dispersion of the regional GDP per capita, the nation development index, the ecologic footprint.

Although non-governmental organisations and society were involved in the process of elaboration of the NDP, many of them expressed their dissatisfaction with the result because the NDP did not include important priorities and measures for reducing the environment degradation and improving the quality of life – “money will make you richer, but not happier”¹⁵. Actually, **the NDP no longer includes the vision of the sustainable and balanced national development** defined by Latvia2030.



RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. The principles of balanced and sustainable development, goals, directions of action and their performance indicators contained in Latvia2030 should be followed in the course of creating the next NDP.
2. NGOs and other civic society organisations should be comprehensively involved in the process of creating the next NDP.
3. Meaningful civic dialogue should be implemented in the development planning process by not narrowing it to social dialogue.

The **mid-term evaluation of the NDP**¹⁶ was prepared in 2017. **Non-governmental organisations are critical** as regards their involvement in preparing the evaluation. Only the organisations selected by the administration were involved in the expert survey, and approval of the report was done fairly quickly, which is also confirmed, by the low number of NGOs that submitted opinions. Nor were answers regarding conclusions and proposals received. The

insufficient representation of the viewpoints of all groups is also attested to by the ranking of priorities provided by experts, where the highest priority has been assigned to economic priorities and lower priority assigned to reduction of inequality and development of equal opportunities in regions, although the data suggest the contrary.

The non-governmental organisation sector was also **dissatisfied with the thematic NDP evaluation conference**, because a representative of trade unions was involved in the civil society panel discussion on the public participation as the cornerstone of human security and democracy instead of representatives and experts of non-governmental organisations. In the result, **the discussion was narrowed** to social dialogue and social partners instead of the civil society as such.

The mid-term evaluation of the NDP confirms that the best results have been achieved in the strategic priorities where the biggest financing was invested, in particular, GDP and development of e-governance, promotion of employment, sustainable use of the culture capital resources, strengthening of the use of the Latvian language in the society. At the same time, **lower results** have been achieved in the education policy, regional development, science, research, and innovation – the human capital that was in the focus of the long-term strategy Latvia2030.

Also, the investment of finance for achievement of priorities is disputable, for example, as regards the direction “Human security”¹⁷ the most essential expense items consist of provision of remuneration to officials of the authorities of the system holding specific service ranks, increase of wages of health care workers and implementation of demographic measures, although initially it was not planned to include wage issues under this priority.

The **politicizing of the budget process** had a major impact on implementation of the NDP because the development budget was not allocated in compliance with the policy planning documents, but in accordance with the political priorities of the members of

15 <http://providus.lv/article/nap-jus-padaris-bagatakus-bet-ne-laimigakus>

16 https://www.pkc.gov.lv/sites/default/files/inline-files/NAP2020%20vidusposma%20zinojums%20final_1.pdf

17 https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=26&v=V70FG8Y8pus

the government and Members of the Parliament. For example, only 18.9% of the requests of ministries for new policy initiatives were financed in 2016. Neither did the ministries follow the defined provisional financing of the NDP in their requests. For example, the increase of development cooperation funding was intended for financing non-governmental organisations, however, it was extended to the area as a whole by allocating only a part of the available funding to non-governmental organisations¹⁸.

Non-governmental organisations have drawn attention to the necessity to involve them in the budgeting process in line ministries and the government as a whole by improving the representation of the needs of various groups of the society and the possibility of providing updates.



RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Budget creation should be based on valid policy documents, the priorities and facts defined therein, by reducing the proportional share of political decisions.
2. NGOs should be involved in the budgeting process on the level of sectors and horizontally by allowing organisations to submit proposals on trans-sectorial issues.
3. The NDP and its provisional financial framework should be followed in the budget and policy planning process.

2.3. SDG mapping

For the purpose of verifying compliance of the Latvian policy planning documents with the Sustainable Development Goals, the Cross Sectorial Coordination Centre coordinated the work of the policy planning experts of ministries in **SDG mapping**¹⁹.

Non-governmental organisations were not involved in developing of the mapping by considering that they should have been involved in the policy planning process in line ministries.

Although formally a legal framework is provided and the possibilities for participation in the process of policy planning and legislation drafting are provided to NGOs, in practice **there are various challenges:**

- 1) NGOs are involved at the final stage of the document when it is presented to the meeting of Secretaries of State, thus limiting the possibilities of quality participation in the drafting process of the document;
- 2) Implementation of valid legislation on the procedure of the public participation in the process of policy planning and legislation drafting is not controlled and monitored based on its essence, thus ministries and local government may avoid its application or apply it very formally;
- 3) Sections of websites where documents that are being drafted should be identified are often not sufficiently clear or this information is not updated;
- 4) NGO representatives to working groups are not proposed in an open process, thus restricting representation of views and involvement of various groups;
- 5) The NGO sector cannot ensure permanent involvement in development of any area because little and fragmented national funding is available and there is insufficient national co-financing for projects of international funders.

¹⁸ <https://www.pkc.gov.lv/valsts-attistibas-planosana/nacionalais-attistibas-plans/nap2020-pieejamais-finansejums>

¹⁹ <https://www.pkc.gov.lv/valsts-attistibas-planosana/ano-ilgtspejigas-attistibas-merki/iam-kartejums>

Considering these challenges, **public participation in governance is rather not a legally provided process, but a reflection of the culture of the particular institution.** Although there are individual positive cases, for example, the process organised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the area of the development cooperation policy planning with broad involvement of various stakeholders and implementation in the area directed towards the SDG achievement also on the global scale, NGO participation is limited or superficial in a range of policy areas.

Limited NGO participation causes a situation when **SDGs are not fully implemented or even are not taken into account** within the current context. The approach of sectorial policies prohibits bringing up SDG topics that are not included in the current policy planning documents for political or other considerations.

Mapping exclusively on the basis of policy planning documents can cause a situation when compliance with the SDG is determined in the area that is referred to in documents, however, **there are no actual activities or they are of a little scope**, for example, in the field of smart specialisation for strengthening of science and regional competitiveness.

Also, **the system of indicators** presents a major challenge, as in the beginning it was planned to involve also non-governmental organisations in development. However, at the last stage of the review this was not done. The annex of indicators of the VNR of Latvia contains only the viewpoint of the administration regarding necessary measurements, thus providing a restricted view of the matters in essence in many aspects.

As there is a result-based planning system in Latvia, the annex of indicators is a tool of critical importance, as it indicates what is measured and how it is used for achieving particular goals. For example, in Latvia there isn't a well-organised system that would allow collecting and analysing data on health trends in an in-depth, systematic and regular manner. **High quality data collection and analysis** would allow reducing development of general and inefficient plans by focusing on detailed groups of society and adapting to their specific needs of improving health.

The situation is similar also in other areas, in particular, the ones that are not comprehensively integrated in policy planning documents.



RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Involvement of NGOs in updating SDGs both in policy sectors and generally should be organised.
2. NGOs should be consulted regarding SDG performance indicators and they should be supplemented accordingly.
3. If possible, the data and studies created by NGOs should also be used in policy planning.
4. NGO participation in the policy process essence should be encouraged, and the supervision and regular analysis of this process on the national level should be improved.
5. Monitoring of implementation of valid legislation should be ensured, inter alia, on the level of the local governments.

EXAMPLE



Association “Papardes zieds” [Latvia’s Family Planning and Sexual Health association] indicates that the area of sexual and reproductive health complies with several SDGs: 3.1, 3.3, 3.7, 3.8, 4.1, 4.7, 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.6, 6.2, 8.5, 10.2, 10.3, 10.4, 16.1, 16.2 and 16.3. The Latvian performance indicators for only one of these targets are stated in the report of Latvia, in particular, the data on the number of newly identified cases of HIV infection (No. 21) and the fatalities caused by AIDS (No. 22) that correspond to SDG 3.3.1 indicator.

Latvia2030 and the NDP support the position of caring for public health, however, the plans referred to in these documents use phrases like reproductive health or sexual health, which is a major and indispensable part of everybody’s health, mentioned only once.

This reflects the problems related to implementation of SDG 3.7 in Latvia, in particular, provision of general access to sexual and reproductive health care services, including for the purpose of family planning and education and inclusion in the state strategies and programs on reproductive health.

In between performance results of this target there are also statistical data like the proportional share of women at the reproductive age whose needs for modern family planning methods have been satisfied (indicator 3.7.1), and the birth rate of under-age mothers (indicator 3.7.2). None of these indicators are included in the Review developed by the government of Latvia.

The authors of the Latvian review refer to the plan for restriction of spreading of HIV, sexually transmitted infections, B and C hepatitis approved in 2017 and the Plan for improvement of the health of the mother and the child approved in 2018 as positive examples which comply with the SRHR [Sexual and reproductive health and rights]

questions compliant with the 3rd SDG. Still, it has to be pointed out that inclusion of these issues in relevant plans is only the result of long-term, persistent and continuous activity of various NGOs.

In the statistics annex to the Latvian review there is nothing that would be related to provision of sustainable education under the indicators related to education, moreover, nothing that would correspond to any section of indicator 4.7.1.

There are major challenges in the area of promotion of the health of the Latvian society and these are directly linked with the content of health, including sexual and reproductive health, topics and the quality of education at schools.

Although on page 47 of the NDP, under the direction of action “Healthy and Fit for Work”, inclusion of health education in school curricula is defined as one of the measures to be carried out within this direction of action, but developments in the health education at schools attest to the contrary.

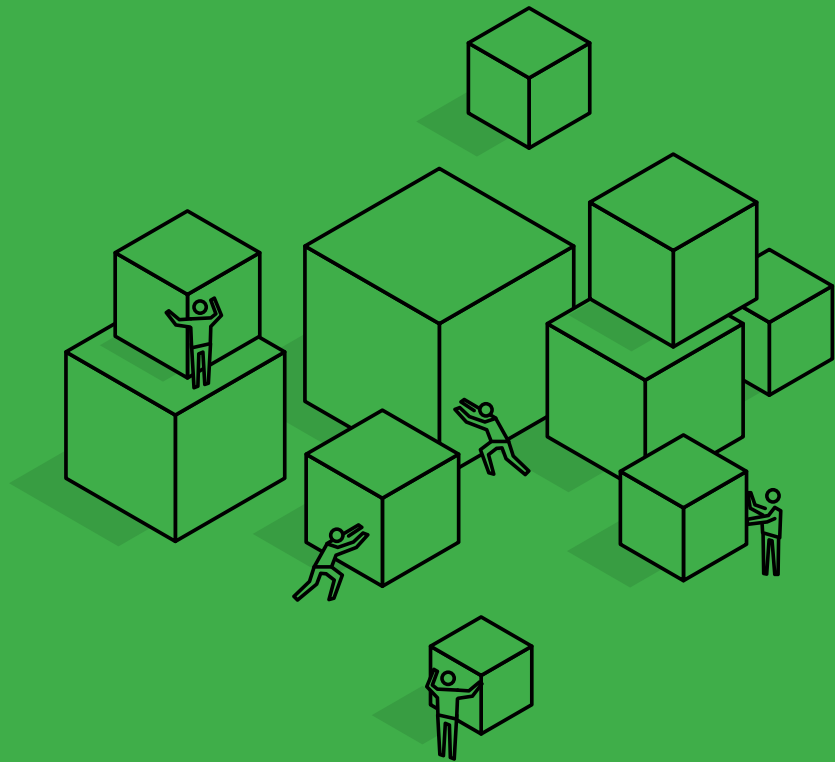
In particular, health education has not been a mandatory subject for many years. At present, the issues of sexual and reproductive health are only partially covered within various subject areas, like biology or social sciences. Moreover, the issues of the SRHR are not covered at all in secondary school. The coverage of health related topics is unclear in the new education reform focused on development of competences.

Above all, in 2015 the controversial “morality amendments” to the Law on Education were adopted, and they have contributed to the lack of understanding and created obstacles to the motivation of teachers to speak about SRHR topics with students.

Finally, among the targets of the 5th SDG which are directly important for Latvia, target 5.6 could be mentioned providing for provision of general access to the SRHR, thus supplementing and strengthening the targets referred to above. It should be mentioned that as regards the performance indicators of this target, it is taken into account to what extent the environment in the country is supportive for women to take and implement informed decisions on their sexual and reproductive health (indicator 5.6.1), including what legislation there is providing the possibility to receive services, to apply modern methods and to obtain information (indicator 5.6.2).

3.

Leaving no one behind



The principle of “Leaving no one behind” is a cross-cutting approach to the sustainable development Agenda2030. This approach means ending poverty, reducing inequality, focusing on the society groups where help is most needed.

3.1. Ending poverty

Although the poverty risk for families and children has decreased considerably thanks to the increasing employment of parents, and improvements in the area of child care and family benefits, **the poverty risk is still very high for single-parent families** – approximately one third of them belong to the poverty risk group. The political priority of demography and the flourishing of national conservative values have set big families as the focus of the provision of state aid by leaving the single-parent families in the “invisible zone” and considerably affecting the possibilities of children from these families to have comprehensive development, access to education and other services.

The gap between the income of poor people and the mean public income is increasing. The Latvian review does not refer to serious risks of poverty and exclusion, like **homelessness, moral retardation, alcohol and drug addiction.**

Particularly high risks begin emerging in the area of housing because **single seniors present the highest poverty risk group** and there is the threat of being left without a home because of inability to pay rent, utilities or property tax.

Reduction of poverty has mainly been **left as a task to local governments**. Some local governments implement support measures for risk groups, however, taking into account stagnation of the area, **action on the national level would be required** for reducing inequality and for social protection.

Non-governmental organisations perform huge work to reduce social inequality and inequality of opportunities as both interest protectors and providers of social services, as well as within various projects. In 2015, organisations most often defended the interests of children, poor people and seniors, have worked for their benefit. Involvement of NGOs in the area of out-of-family care of children has increased and it has slightly decreased in the area of the rights of women and disabled persons. It can be admitted that these data indicate polarisation in the area of social and economic prosperity. Financially disadvantaged persons, unemployed persons and pensioners are the ones who have approached non-governmental organisations most often²⁰.



RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Quality and meaningful involvement of NGOs in sectorial policy planning should be encouraged.
2. The sectorial policy and budgeted allocation should be based on data and facts about the groups of the society requiring additional support by avoiding politicisation of poverty.
3. Financial and institutional support should be provided to non-governmental organisations working with poverty risk groups, in particular, the ones not receiving specific state aid.
4. Immediate actions should be developed for reducing inequality of income and opportunities, and this should be set as the priority in taking decisions of re-allocation of resources from the budget of 2019.

3.2. Reduction of inequality

The situation is stagnating as regards reduction of the income inequality: in 2016 the quintile ratio S80/S20 equals 6.3, which is exactly the level of 2012. The Latvian review refers to new policy initiatives for reduction of the inequality of income and the new tax reform, however, it **impact is rather targeted at political priority groups** and not the ones which are subject to the highest poverty risk according to the data, i.e. single-parent families and single seniors.

Tax reform has also negatively impacted the ability of NGOs to attract donations and to help social exclusion risk groups by various charity projects. Although the Latvian NGOs drew the attention of the government to this issue within the process of elaborating the tax policy, there was no positive response. Considering the fact that the national NGO fund has access to very little financing from the state budget, **there is a high risk that the situation of the poorest groups of the society will deteriorate.**

The Eurobarometer (89) of spring 2018 attests that 37% of people in Latvia are worried about health and social security (23% in the EU on average), and 31% are worried about inflation, the costs of living, and increasing prices (17% in the EU on average). 28% of people are worried about tax matters and this is four times more than in the EU on average²¹.

At the same time, it should be pointed out that as from year 2014 the assessment of poor people of accessibility of health care services has been gradually improving and continues improving, the number of people who have stated that they could not receive medical assistance because they could not afford it financially is decreasing. However, **introduction of distorted health care causes concern.**

²⁰ http://www.nvo.lv/site/attachments/29/04/2016/NVO_PARSKATS-2015-23.04.pdf

²¹ <http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/STANDARD/surveyKy/2180>

This is scheduled starting from 2019 and presents a serious political mistake from the many points of view. The worst aspect is that this **will reduce accessibility of health care in the lowest income segment**, and will increase both the death rate and the number of untreated chronic diseases. This will happen not only because people will not have the right to receive needed treatment, but also because the heavy bureaucratic procedure will increase the insecurity of people and the lack of understanding of their rights.

Also in the area of health, patient NGOs play an important role in solving particular and important matters. For example, broader support for cancer patients has been implemented, however, also arrangement of processes in the way that is favourable and understandable to patients is important.

The **high regional inequality** is a critical aspect in the inequality existing in Latvia and it has not been reduced despite considerable resources invested in development of regions. At the same time, **initiatives of local communities have developed in regions**, which encourage the local securitability and cooperation of people for improving the quality of life. These are mostly **voluntary initiatives** because local governments allocate little aid for supporting local non-governmental organisations, and quite often the civic activity is mixed up with culture, sports and religious initiatives. There are almost no organisations of protection of interests on the level of local governments. Although the interest and ability of people to solve their community issues has improved, **continuous and strategic support is needed** for such initiatives on the national level by creating supportive environment.

Small scale family farms have traditionally formed sustainable rural environment in Latvia. As stated also in the VNR of Latvia, the state aid policy has been insufficient in this area and rather focused on supporting big farms. Availability of high subsidies has not contributed to the productivity of these farms. By providing higher support to family farms, these farms can be the ones creating the middle class in the society gaining stable income sufficient for a prosperous person from agricultural, forestry, fishery production and sale within the value added chains.



RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Tax policy instruments which have had a negative impact upon donations to NGOs should be reviewed.
2. The reform of the health care system should be reviewed by reducing its negative impact upon lower income groups.
3. Responsible mechanisms for reducing regional inequality should be created.
4. Accessibility of financing for local community initiatives should be provided on both the national and the local government level.

3.3. Gender equality

The situation in the area of gender equality is interesting in Latvia because, on one side, **there are positive achievements in women's employment, managerial positions, and involvement in research**. However, on the other side, there are strong stereotypes regarding the gender roles, and family violence. Only 10.7% consider that men should cooperate in encouraging gender equality²².

In Latvia 67% (51% in Europe on average) consider that the gender equality has been achieved in politics and equally in the work. Latvia has the leading position with 69% regarding the equality of women in managerial positions²³.

In 2016 **the gender pay gap** in Latvia amounted to 17%. It is interesting to note that typically the biggest gap refers to the private sector, however, in Latvia it is in the public sector (16.9% in the public sector and 14.1% in the private sector). It is biggest within the age group 35 – 44 years (21%) and lowest for youth below 25 years (13.2%)²⁴.

In Latvia several important problems that need to be solved can be found – **myths regarding violence in the family still prevail in**

22 <http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/SPECIAL/surveyKy/2154>

23 <http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/SPECIAL/surveyKy/2154>

24 http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Gender_pay_gap_statistics

the society, violence in the family is accepted. The EIGE study reveals that violence against women costs approximately 442 million per year in Latvia. Out of all the identified cases of violence against women, 40% took place in the family.

The public opinion survey indicates that 15.8% of the respondents say that violence against the woman in the family can be excused. The opinion that family violence is an internal matter of the relevant family where nobody else should interfere still prevails in the society. 46.5% of the respondents in the public opinion survey indicate that they would not interfere in cases of violence in the family. Very often cases of violence in the family are not recognised²⁵.

Also an unequal division of roles between a woman and a man in the family is popular, and this is rooted in the model of the patriarchal society (the role granted to a man provides more beneficial social economic conditions to him compared to a woman).

In the index of stereotypes Latvia has the fourth lowest place in the EU - only 77% consider that men may cry, 83% consider that women take decisions based on emotions, 74% consider that the most important role for a woman is to take care of the family, and 68% consider that a man's role is to earn money²⁶.

The above referred to split of roles is among the reasons why a woman chooses to accept violence in the family. In the public opinion survey on the most frequent reasons that a woman chooses to stay with the violent man, insufficient financial resources for supporting herself and children are mentioned (54%), as well as the lack of another safe home (43.6%), which both clearly prove the victims' financial dependence on violators²⁷.

Also, discussions about the Istanbul Convention proved that there is prejudice regarding gender equality, the lack of awareness which is used by political forces for their own benefit in order to distort the public opinion and to use it for their own interests.

Non-governmental organisations in Latvia perform enormous work in the area of gender equality – by both educating the society and various target groups, and providing social services and ensuring protection of interests.



RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Topics on gender equality should be included in the education content.
2. Active work should be commenced for reducing the gender pay gap, in particular, in the public sector.
3. The work of ratification of Istanbul Convention should be continued.
4. Compliance of gender equality in projects of non-governmental organisations financed by the state should be encouraged.

3.4. Youth

Pursuant to the Law on Youth, **a young person in Latvia is aged from 13 to 25 years.** Generally, 74% of young people in Latvia are satisfied with their life. Women (27%, 16% of men) aged from 13 to 15 years (24%) engage in various activities.

Young people most trust the army (63%), youth organisations – 48%, the European Union more than local governments (47% and 45%). The number of young people who engage in voluntary work a minimum of once a year is increasing – it was 62% in 2015. **The young people themselves view the solution of youth employment as a priority area (34%)²⁸.**

In 2017, **youth unemployment in the age group 15-24 is highest among all age groups** – 17% (8.7% average in the country), and it is higher among men (18.3%) than women (15.4%)²⁹

Although in the area of youth there is a range of national and global challenges, **in Latvia the recognition of this area on the po-**

25 <http://www.marta.lv/marta-darbiba/vardarbiba>

26 <http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/SPECIAL/surveyKy/2154>

27 <http://www.marta.lv/marta-darbiba/vardarbiba>

28 <http://www.izm.gov.lv/lv/jaunatne>

29 http://data.csb.gov.lv/pxweb/lv/Sociala/Sociala__ikgad__nodarb/NB0020.px/table/tableViewLayout2/?rxid=

litical agenda has decreased. The Youth Advisory Council has been established on the national level. Although formally the Council is led by the Prime Minister, in practice this has only happened in 2014. There were four meetings of the Council in 2015, and just one meeting per year in 2016 and 2017.

There is a separate list of youth organisations maintained by the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES). At present there are 35 organisations in this list which is a comparatively low number. It would be necessary to review the functionality and meaning of the list by **implementing meaningful support to youth organisations.**

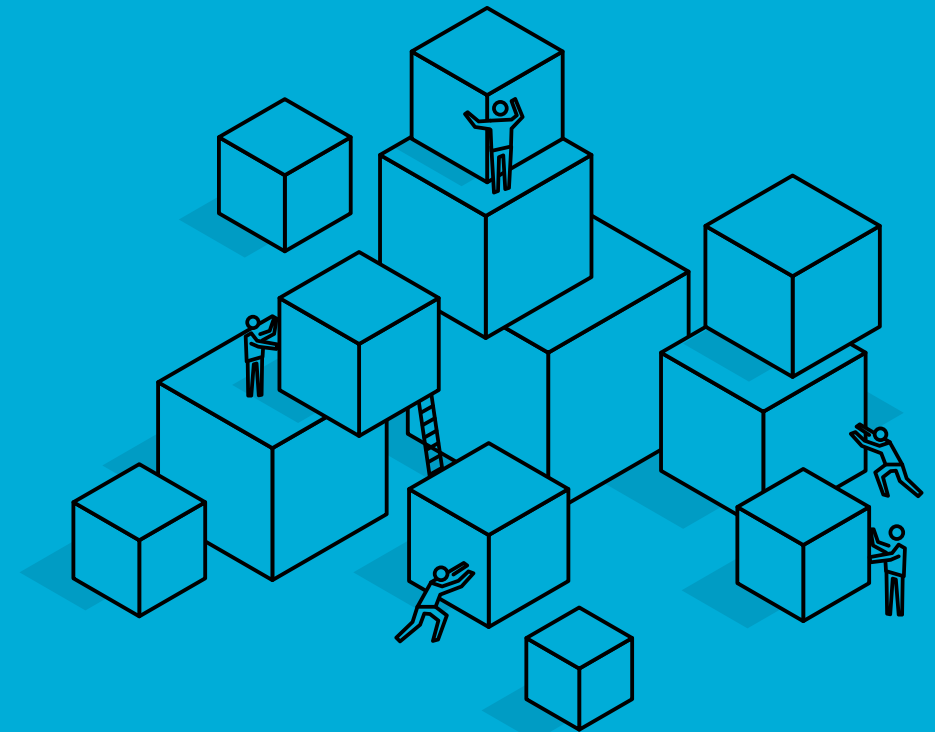
On the level of local governments there are various mechanisms – coordinators of youth matters, advisory councils, and youth centres. However, the impact of these mechanisms upon the youth situation as a whole should be evaluated, including employment, health, education and other areas instead of the narrow approach of seeing this only as improvement of opportunities for spending free time. Within the context of regional development strengthening of the role of the youth on the level of local governments is of critical importance.

Youth organisations have not started active work in the area of SDG. However, they support their implementation. Introduction of the UN Youth Delegate Program in Latvia could serve as an additional mechanism for creating interest in the area. This would demonstrate that the government of Latvia trusts young people and allocates responsibility for representing the country to them.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Immediate action for reducing youth unemployment should be started.
2. The work of the national Youth Advisory Council should be evaluated and improved.
3. The functionality of the list of youth organisations should be evaluated and improved.
4. The focus on youth policy in policy planning documents on the level of local municipalities should be encouraged.
5. The UN Youth Delegate Program should be introduced.

4. Institutional mechanism



4.1. Government dialogue

The National Development Council is a collegiate coordinating institution established in 2014 and ensuring planning and evaluation of the long-term national development. The Prime Minister is the Head of the Council and its members are the Minister of Economics, the Minister of Environmental Protection and Regional Development, the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Education and Science, representatives of employers and trade unions, the Chairperson of the Association of Local Governments of Latvia, and the representative of the President of the State. Representatives of civic society are not included in this Council.

The Council met four times in 2015 and once in 2016 which was its last meeting. **The Council has not reviewed important development issues like the medium term report on the National Development Plan**³⁰.

At the same time, the National Tripartite Cooperation Council (NTCC) works actively and coordinates and organises the tripartite social dialogue between employer organisations, state institutions, and trade unions. In the NTCC there are various thematic sub-councils, also on topics related to broad development areas, like health care, environmental protection, regional development, public security and others³¹.

The national development planning dialogue is currently viewed in a narrow manner within the framework of the social dialogue, however, civic dialogue or the possibility for representation of all stakeholders are equally important instead of just narrow decision making from the perspective of employment and economic development.

For example, at the European Economic and Social Committee within the dialogue with the European Union three parties are represented, namely, employers, employees and “various interests” (family, women rights, youth, small business, consumer and environment organisations, etc.). Also within the framework of the social dialogue the term “tripartite plus” is used by involving civic organisations in discussions where their view is necessary or is even required based on the international best practice³².

The dialogue between the government and the civic society is implemented within the framework of the Memorandum of Co-operation between Non-Governmental Organisations and the Cabinet of Ministers (hereinafter – the Memorandum). The Memorandum was developed in 2005 and 424 organisations have joined now. For the purpose of implementation of the Memorandum the Council was established where there is the Director of the State Chancellery, the Secretaries of State of the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Welfare, the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development, the Ministry of Justice, the Head of the Cross Sectorial Coordination Centre and eight openly elected representatives of non-governmental organisations. The Council meetings take place monthly and review horizontal civic society development issues, propose NGO representatives for various advisory groups³³.

Although the efficiency of the work of the Memorandum Council has improved over years, there is a **range of challenges from the point of view of both capacity and content management**. NGOs that work in the Memorandum Council do not receive compensation

30 <https://www.mk.gov.lv/lv/content/nacionalas-attistibas-padome>

31 <https://www.mk.gov.lv/lv/content/nacionala-trispusejas-sadarbibas-padome>

32 https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_dialogue/---dialogue/documents/publication/wcms_231193.pdf

33 <https://www.mk.gov.lv/content/informacija-par-nvo-un-ministru-kabineta-sadarbibas-memorandu>

for their work or travel expenses, therefore the number of NGOs who can provide active participation is limited. Also, the issues for review only refer to the area of the civic society and not the national development as a whole because the sectorial public participation is managed on the level of ministries. This approach causes the situation where it is not possible to focus on thematic cross sectorial issues and to initiate new national cross sectorial policies.

In order to increase the capacity of NGO participation by representing the interests of various groups of the society in the civic dialogue with the government, **horizontal support mechanisms should be created** in the same way as it is implemented with social partners, i.e. by not just formally recognising the importance of NGOs, but also **strengthening them by means of financial aid and institutional recognition by the state.**

The Civic Alliance of Latvia (eLPA) is the national NGO platform aimed at strengthening the civic society in Latvia by supporting the common interests of the Latvian non-governmental organisations and creating favourable environment for operation of associations and foundations. There are also sectorial NGO platforms and networks, interest protection organisations, still eLPA is the only organisation which continuously follows development and representation of interests of the whole civic society³⁴.

34 <http://www.nvo.lv/lv/news/page/par-mums-153/>



RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. The work of the National Development Council should be restored, regular meetings on important national development matters should be organised.
2. A representative of NGOs should be included in the National Development Council.
3. Implementation of the Memorandum of Cooperation of NGO and the Cabinet should be strengthened from the institutional and content point of view – by reviewing issues important for development of this area.
4. The “tripartite plus” dialogue should be developed within the NTCC.
5. The capacity of eLPA and networks of representation of interests of sectorial NGOs should be strengthened.
6. The amount of funds for interest protection projects should be increased in the NGO fund.

4.2. Political supervision

In the Saeima there is the Sustainable Development Committee³⁵ which supervises the national strategic development and matters related to that. The Committee has reviewed various sectorial topics, for example, regional development, problem issues in the area of provision of housing, and it has supported establishment of the Latvian innovation and technology development fund. Representatives of the state administration and academic sector are continuously providing information to the Committee. Various thematic conferences are organised, for example, on the climate change and education.

The Head of the Committee and individual Members of the Saeima have participated in NGO events on sustainable development topics and NGO representatives have been invited to meetings when the matters of Sustainable Development Goals were reviewed.

35 <http://ilgtspējigaattistiba.saeima.lv>

Generally, political SDG matters are reviewed separately from the national development planning by integrating them on the sectorial level based on the initiative of the sectors and not the essence. This approach does not allow achieving SDG in essence because they are not reviewed in an integrated and balanced manner, eventually contradicting policy directions are not considered.

At the same time, it is positive that Saeima engages in regular consultations with the society at annual events – the Saeima and NGO Forum, the Youth Saeima, and individual committees involve NGOs in their daily work. However, the efficiency of these events should be evaluated, for example, for the purpose of supervising implementation of recommendations of the Saeima and NGO Forum.

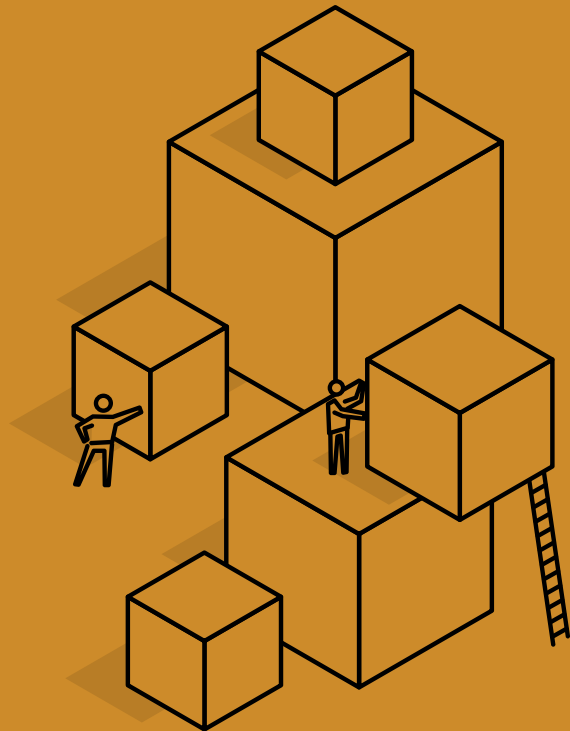


RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. The Parliamentary supervision for implementation of SDGs should be strengthened.
2. The Saeima Sustainable Development Committee should develop continuous cooperation with NGOs working in the area of SDG.
3. Efficiency and productivity of involvement of NGOs at annual events, the work of committees and the work of the Saeima as a whole should be improved.



5. Public awareness raising and education



The thematic Eurobarometer of 2016 reveals that only 6% of surveyed respondents are aware of SDGs and know what these are. 28% are aware of SDGs (% above the average in the EU), however, are not aware of the content and 65% are not aware of SDGs³⁶.

Non-governmental organisations **have implemented various initiatives** for public awareness raising and education about SDGs, for example:

- in 2016 LAPAS in cooperation with the Association of Local Governments of Latvia and with the support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs carried out regional cross sectorial discussions on SDGs where local examples of implementation of SDGs were researched³⁷;
- in 2017 LAPAS, with the support of the Environmental Protection Fund, developed methodological materials on SDGs that were distributed to educational establishments of Latvia and other stakeholders with the support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs³⁸
- the association *homo ecos*: with the support of the Environmental Protection Fund carried out training for young people on SDGs in the whole territory of Latvia;

³⁶ <http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/SPECIAL/surveyKy/2069>

³⁷ <http://lapas.lv/lv/musu-darbi/projektu-arhivs/diskusija-par-ilgtpejigas-attistibas-merkiem/>

³⁸ <http://lapas.lv/lv/globalie-merki/informativs-un-metodisks-materials-par-iam/>

- the association “Zaļā Brīvība” [Green Freedom] issued five electronic publications “Development cooperation news” where also various SDG perspectives were reviewed³⁹;
- every year during the UN General Assembly LAPAS implements a campaign in regions by informing the society on global topics.

Various NGOs within their areas have implemented broad campaigns and awareness raising measures, in particular, these have been environmental organisations.

The topics related to SDGs **are also covered in various other training and information topics**, for example, in the topic on migration, by providing a broader global development and change context.

A large part of information activities **have been carried out in education establishments**. Still, also other target groups have been involved, i.e. youth, social workers, entrepreneurs.

Other **partners carry out educational activities** where they involve NGO representatives or broader groups of the society. For example, the Association of Local Governments of Latvia implemented projects “Local governments – promoters of development education and public awareness” and “Working together for providing possibilities to local and regional government for encouraging development in the EU partner countries”. In these projects, youth and students were involved in awareness raising on SDGs. There is also continuous cooperation with UNESCO LNK within the World’s Largest Lesson.

Implementation of **global education** in Latvia has been led only by the sector of non-governmental organisations for a long time. NGOs have performed studies, have developed methodologies, and have trained teachers. These topics are covered in the education content in an integrated manner, still, from the NGO perspective this has not been sufficient and often only within the context of intercultural education.

In 2015 LAPAS developed and published a **glocalisation methodology**⁴⁰ which explains the ties and the interaction between the global and the local. This methodology is aimed at encouraging change in the area of understanding, experience and attitudes by learning the world and oneself as a part of the world and participating therein.

The **reform of the content of education** is currently taking place in Latvia, therefore NGOs are carefully following implementation of the concept of global education because there is a concern that it will not be comprehensively reflected.

Civic education is related to global education topics, but still the new education content causes concern that it also will be narrowed down to the movement of “jaunsardze” [Youth Guard]. In Latvia there are individual initiatives of **education for sustainable development**, which is a concept related to the global education. There are also broad activities in the area of **environmental education** – the movement of Eco schools, information campaigns, and large-scale events.

Although various fields of education where global and sustainable development topics are touched upon can be identified, it is necessary to maintain the overview and the link with the global scale in the new education content.

As global education is not recognised on the national level, **there are limited possibilities to obtain financing** projects on these topics. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs provides support to co-financing of global education. But, this financing is proportionally very low, i.e. approximately 20 thousand EUR per year to all NGOs. The lack of the national financing prevents the possibility to apply for grants provided by other funders, for example, project tenders of the European Commission, where the minimum thresholds of projects are very high in comparison to the situation of the Latvian NGOs. Thus, Latvian NGOs do not have access to the EC or national financing in the area of the global education, which makes further development of the area almost impossible.

39 <http://www.zalabriviba.lv/publikacijas/attistibas-sadarbibas-vestis/>

40 <http://lapas.lv/en/our-works/presidency-project/glocalization-methodology/>

At the time when the polarisation of the public viewpoint is increasing, it is important to continue public awareness raising on the global context and responsibility of their lives and actions.



RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. The topics of the global education and civic education should be clearly distinguished in the new education content.
2. Financing should be granted from the state budget for focusing on global topics, including sufficient co-financing to projects supported by other funders.

6. Global responsibility



Policy coherence for sustainable development is implemented on the national level via the policy coordination mechanism. At the same time, within the framework of the planning system there is no evaluation of the impact of national policies on the global sustainability, except the cases when this is provided for by legislation.

The challenges of the finance sector **have encouraged the discussion** on the national responsibility on the global level. Still, very little attention is focused on the issues of the impact of national policies on the international situation, in particular, in the areas not related to foreign affairs and environmental policy.

Global responsibility is mainly viewed narrowly within the context of development cooperation, which is not a high ranking priority in the Latvian overall development planning or in the area of foreign affairs, or it is narrowly viewed on the level of national interests.

Latvia is still **among the smallest funders of official development cooperation in the EU** and development cooperation is rather perceived as a mechanism of national political interests instead of cooperation for sustainable development in essence. This is reflected also in the process of allocating finance, by primarily providing support to administrative projects or projects implemented in cooperation with administrative authorities.

From the policy planning perspective, in the area of development cooperation, by involving society, **comprehensive and strategic policy guidelines have been developed**, but still incorporation of their essence also with the financing mechanism should be improved.

It should be viewed positively that **50% of the financing of the open tender for grants are targeted to NGOs**. Still, practice shows that the support is mainly received by NGOs representing the administration or business interests and there are few possibilities for starting new projects. As the threshold of the European Commission projects is above the level feasible for the Latvian NGOs, the national financing is critical importance also for truly civic society projects.

Recently, the **Ministry of Foreign Affairs has considerably improved cross sectoral coordination** and support to project implementers, information and education provision for them. The institutional mechanisms of this cooperation should be still improved, for example, by developing a discussion on essence in the advisory council.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has also been cooperating with LAPAS for public awareness raising and education, also by providing annual financing. This support should be viewed positively because it allows reaching various groups of the society and also representing the Latvian NGOs internationally.



RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. The scope of official development cooperation should be gradually increased also in future.
2. Discussions should be continued and globally responsible decisions should be taken in the area of development cooperation and other areas.
3. The amount of financing should be increased for NGO projects within the framework of bilateral financing of development cooperation.

Conclusions and further steps

The process of the voluntary national review has brought up a major challenge, i.e. the necessity to evaluate whether the generally balanced long-term sustainable development strategy of Latvia Latvia2030 and the development planning system as a whole will just be “nice words on paper” due to politicisation of processes.

The defined medium-term priority of the “economic breakthrough” has caused a negative impact on the processes of democracy, by both narrowing the civic dialogue to the social dialogue on the national scale, by preferring social partners instead of representatives of all the groups of the society, including NGOs, in consultations and also by implementing policy mechanisms and legislation that reduces the capacity of NGOs and accessibility of financing in this sector.

The lack of the civic dialogue on the national level has affected also the public participation process on the sectorial level, which is well arranged “on paper”, and this is rather the reflection of the institutional culture instead of a mandatory component of the planning process. Along with outstanding best practices of the public participation and administration development there are also clearly negative and even antagonistic examples of the administration rhetoric on the civic society and the sector of non-governmental organisations.

The lack of cross sectorial dialogue on the national level, non-involvement of high ranking officials in discussion important topics creates a negative environment for political and institutional responsibility.

Without waiting for the process of the new National Development Plan, it is possible to introduce immediate mechanisms for more balanced development, by focusing on this area on the national level instead of the level of sectorial policies, by organising meetings of the National Development Council and securing representation of all the stakeholders, including the civic society.

Implementation of sustainable development is only possible in partnership with people.

The recommendations contained in the report will be submitted for discussion at the Council for Implementation of the Memorandum of Co-operation between Non-Governmental Organisations and the Cabinet of Ministers, and by deciding on further joint activities for securing implementation of SDGs.



17 Sustainable development stories

There are people behind the names of non-governmental organisations and titles of projects and initiatives. They are the ones making this world more sustainable and better. The present report contains seventeen stories from Latvia, however, all together there are hundreds, thousands and millions of us. Each of us is a part of this planet.



Ilze Skuja,
foundation
"Palīdzesim.lv"



ILZE SKUJA has chosen to dedicate her life to helping kids and youngsters with special needs.

The support of the Latvian government offered to families and kids with such needs is negligent, and this is exactly why Ilze, together with Elina Meinarte, decided to found "Palīdzēsīm" [Let's help] more than nine years ago. Its aim is to help at least part of the kids and the families in Latvia that just aren't lucky enough to have a normal life. Now, after years of tireless effort, they finally have a space where they can host the more than 500 children and youngsters they help each year. But it hasn't always been like this: in the beginning it was very hard to find some funding to invest in their activities, they started from zero, they worked from anywhere: from home, cafés, even from their car.

www.palidzesim.lv

They organize different kind of activities, like summer camps, hikes, skiing, marathons, classes and activities with professionals (actors, drama, psychologist, etc.). This is meant to distract the kids, improve their psychological situation, make them feel part of society and community. It makes them more positive and confident. They started a new project one year ago with the mums of the kids. They stay with their kids and take care of them so that the mums can have some time for themselves and relax – when mums are happy children are happy. Sometimes just a few hours for themselves can make a difference.

But it's not always easy and quick to see the results and the impact of what she does. It takes many years before one can see the kids grow up and maybe find a job or start studying. This is because they mainly work on



their mental well-being and personal attitude, or on serious physical problems, especially on individuals with health and mental issues. It is difficult to measure the results, and these are long term goals that can't be reached with one activity. Notwithstanding this, to see kids that used to be fragile and shy coming back after years talkative and confident is all that matters for Ilze and her team. It is a hard job, but helping even five, ten, or thirty kids makes all the difference in the world, and it gives them the energy to keep going.

When Ilze told us her story her eyes were shining with pride; what she manages to give these kids every day of her life makes her happy.



1 NO POVERTY





**Agita
Kraukle,**
Latvian
Samaritan
Association



This is the story of AGITA KRAUKLE, an energetic young woman from Riga. Born in a family of doctors, she has observed her parents work hard day and night to help other people since she was a child, they were heroes in her eyes. Following their example, Agita signs up to the faculty of Medicine, but she soon realizes that the studies there are not for her. At the beginning it wasn't easy to accept that she wouldn't be like her parents, both because she was afraid of disappointing them, and because in some way they had transferred their altruism to her, and how else could one better help other people if not through becoming a doctor?

At the time Agita didn't realize it, but there are numerous ways to help others, and in fact she soon find hers. Having graduated from the University of Agriculture, she starts an

internship at the Ziedot foundation, and right after is hired, and works through a number of positions to finally become project manager of "Latvian Food Bank", initially started by Ziedot, and later passed on to the Samaritan Association. This project was born after the financial crisis of 2008, well-known for its devastating impact on a large part of the European population. In Latvia a lot of people lost their jobs, falling behind the poverty line; many didn't even have access to primary alimentary goods. The government started to take some measures but the entangled bureaucratic processes left a lot of families out of the reach of the alimentary benefits. This was exactly the gap that the Latvian Food Bank decided to fill. Every month this organization helps about 2000 people, families that aren't covered by social services. The project is simple but effective, Agita and her team cooperates with Rimi and a lot of local farmers: Rimi donates to the organization all their products with "visual defects", that can't be sold because they don't fit their standards, on a daily basis; local farmers mostly donate vegetables. Agita makes a great effort every day

"I would like all people to wake up every day for actually living, instead of just existing."

- AGITA KRAUKLE

to collect and gather these donations, pack the food, and distribute it to the families in need, she does pretty much everything, she rightly feels like some kind of wonder-woman!

Still today, her parents don't fully understand what her job consists of, which saddens her a little... but there is a member of the family that makes her proud and happy for what she does, her grandma: "When my Grandma sees me on some TV interview she feels so excited and she always calls me to congratulate me!". And for Agita this is more than enough, because she loves her job, she knows the difference she makes every day, and even though this is not the greatest thing for her parents, it is so for the thousands of people that thanks to her and her team have the possibility to eat properly and live with dignity.





**Madara
Mazjane,**
MARTA Centre



The story of MADARA MAZJANE is a story about luck, love, courage, justice, and struggle. Madara's good fortune has been to grow up in a family that has loved, understood, and supported her in every moment of her life. Growing up in a household in which relations are based on love and mutual respect gave her the possibility to be the self-confident, sensitive and brave woman that she is today, but more than everything it gave her a healthy and optimistic vision of interpersonal relationships. "In my world everything is possible, I've never been victim of violence or neglected by the people whom I love; this is why I know the importance of healthy relationships. I don't want this to be perceived as a

privilege anymore, I want it to be the rule." Unfortunately, not everybody lives in Madara's world, many people have grown up in an environment in which violent and aggressive behavior is perceived as normality. Many women are victims of sexist stereotypes embedded in our society; women across the whole planet suffer from abuse, taboos, ignorance and violence every single day.

All this is unacceptable for Madara, she knows that life can be different, which is why she has decided to put as much effort as she can to help people that haven't been lucky enough to have what she has. In order to reach her goal, Madara has managed to make a job out of her struggle: for 8 years she has been working for Marta Centre as a youth programme coordinator.

Marta Centre is an organization, founded in 2000 in Riga, that attends to victims of violence, especially domestic violence, and women involved in prostitutions, giving them psychological, sanitary and legal support. In particular, Madara deals with teenagers, her job consisting in visiting schools and trying to sensitize and educate youngsters on topics such as gender equality and identity, women's right, consent, and prostitution, but most of all Madara tries to help these kids to be able to recognize healthy and unhealthy relationships, with the hope that in the future, their world could look like hers.





**Alina
Karpeļceva,**
Riga Tech Girls



ALINA KARPEĻCEVA is a Latvian girl who's always been animated by a strong passion.

Now, many of you are probably thinking: what could this girl's passion possibly be? Maybe dancing? Painting? Or sewing? And how about cooking?!

I'm sorry... you got it wrong. This sweet girl is nothing less than a little tech genius! That's right, Alina is a web developer, unusual job for a woman, but not for her, for her the fact that only few women work in the tech industry is just absurd, a waste of talent. Unfortunately though, we live in a society where stereotypes that see women confined to certain kind of jobs are still very strong, and this needs to be eradicated. And we can firmly say that this girl is really fight-

ing for this cause. In fact, in 2016, Alina became one of the founders of Riga Tech Girls. This organization is the first community in Latvia dedicated to educating and inspiring girls and women about technology. The idea behind RTG was born in November of 2015, in a tech meeting in Riga, where between the participants there were some women presenting their success stories. In that same event Laurel Freyja, an American woman, found herself hearing some silly comments made by some men that perfectly embodied the stereotypes on women's skills in the IT fields. Maybe, with hindsight, we should thank them, because that was the fuse that lit the desire in that woman to show how wrong they were. And so Latvian women's technological revolution started!

The organization promotes two kinds of events: workshops, where basic coding and IT skills are taught to participants; and meetups, where women that work in the tech industry are invited to tell their success stories, and by sharing their experience they become a source of inspiration for other women.

Today, there are a lot of stories of women that found a job or developed a career in IT thanks to Riga Tech Girls; one of the most inspiring is certainly the one of a doctor that after attending several workshops decided to start her own virtual reality start-up to help autistic children.

But this is just of the many stories that make Alina proud, this is the kind of change that motivates her to keep educating lots of women around the country, with the hope that one day women in tech will be the rule, and not the exception.





Džemma Sudraba,
Women Standup



“It’s great to see that more and more young women start to be part of our public and participants, to see that they don’t take traditional and conservative values for granted, that they don’t take the shit anymore. This is the kind of change I want to see.”

- DZEMMA SUDRABA

stories. The main activity consists of training acting techniques, with the difference that, for the most part, actresses play fictional roles, while the women of Woman Standup put their personal story on stage. According to Džemma, these activities change the perception that women have of themselves, making them more confident and aware of their value. The aim of Women Standup is twofold, on one hand it enhances women’s awareness, on the other it transmits to the public what it means to be a woman, today, in Latvia, with all its difficulties and all its pleasures.

and if you are into a topic it is likely that you will know of the people that work on it. This is precisely what happened to Džemma; when she heard about this project she was immediately captured by it, and she decided to support the idea and to contribute to its realization and expansion. And so it started - Women Standup! Thanks to this project a larger and larger group of Latvian women started to meet twice a week to learn to tell their

The story DZEMMA told us begins in the 8th of March of 2014, when a Latvian poetess, Inga Gaile, decided to transform her deception for the lack of initiatives on Women’s Day into something useful. For her that was an important day, a day to remember the social, economic, and political achievements, the discrimination and the violence of which women have been, and still are subject to in every corner of the world. That was a day when women had to stand up! And so she decided to organize something herself, to make that day even more special and meaningful. She organized an event in which five women had to stand on a stage and simply tell their stories, freely, without any specific reason or aim. The event was attended by a lot of people, and the performance was largely appreciated. Latvia is a small country,



Elina Kolāte,
WWF Latvia



ELINA KOLATE is a graduate in Environmental Science at the University of Latvia. Working as a freelancer and thus being able to organize her time as she pleased while also earning a satisfactory salary, she knew that she would only have accepted a full-time job for something that she really felt interested in. So it was, about three years ago, that she received an email from a colleague, who was working at the Hydro-ecology Institute of Latvia, saying that they were looking for a manager of the Baltic Sea and Fresh Water Program. She didn't know this project, but after doing some research she understood that it was just the kind of job for which she would have conceded a change in her working life, and so she accepted the proposal. The Baltic Sea and Fresh Water Program is part of WWF Latvia, and it works in close coop-

“I think that this is the best way to convince politicians, they are not afraid of us, but they are afraid of the fact that people could not vote for them, so if we manage to convince society, then we will manage to also convince them.”

- ELINA KOLATE

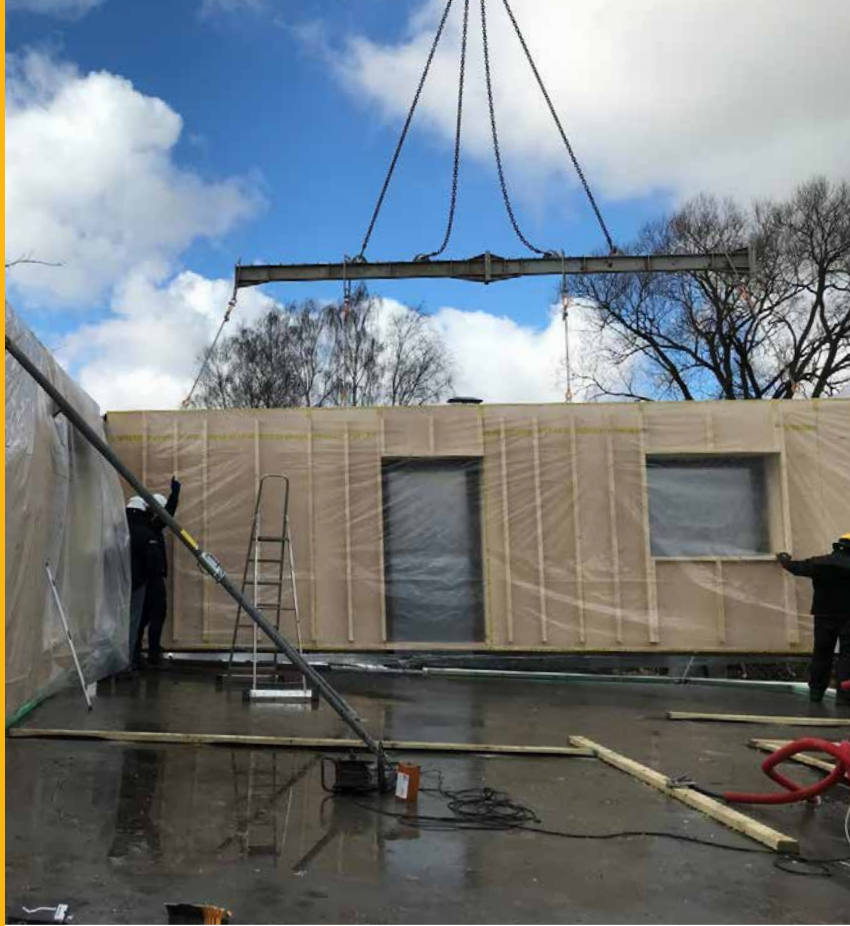
eration with all the countries bordering the Baltic Sea. One of the biggest problems they are dealing with is the phenomenon of the algal bloom. This is a plague caused by excessive use of fertilizers in agriculture, which stimulates an extreme proliferation of algae, ultimately contaminating the waters and in the worst cases making them toxic for absence of oxygen. Understandably this is a very serious problem, and even though it still hasn't affected the water coming from rivers that 50% of Latvian use for drinking, the peril is that this scenario could be nearer than expected. In fact, this is something that is currently happening in Poland, a neighboring country, which is worrying. Solving this problem is a real challenge be-

cause nobody really knows how to do it, the technology is just not advanced enough to face such a threat on a large scale – in other words, better safe than sorry. Elina's job is to create and share knowledge and awareness about this kind of topics, through constant work on research, spreading of information, and lobbying. People think the ministry that mostly deals with environmental issues is the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development: this is not true. The ministry that has more power and resources in this sector is the Ministry of Agriculture. Unfortunately though, the dialogue with them is almost non-existent. Apparently, they have no consideration whatsoever about civil society and environmental protection, they still seem to be living in the Soviet era, and they have no intention of working with them. This is the main obstacle in Elina's work towards the protection of fresh water reserves, since changing agricultural practices is the only way to really solve this problem.





Kārlis Grīnbergs,
Passive House



What does a Passive House mean? This term has been around for a long time, however the director of “Passive House Latvia” KĀRLIS GRĪNBERGS says that this has been a working concept in Latvia for no more than 10 years. When it comes to energy efficiency a passive house consumes in between 80 and 90 percent less energy than an average Latvian house (60-70% for new built houses). However in a passive house one thing takes priority over efficiency and this is livability and the perfect microclimate.

PHL is increasing their public activity after a short break which took place mainly because there was more of a focus on education related matters and working together with the industry in order to improve the implementation of the passive house standard. Kārlis shares that another big obstacle

“Lets meet in a year – a lot will have been done.”

- KĀRLIS GRĪNBERGS

for promoting energy efficiency has been companies that used misinformation of clients and experts for their financial benefit – like, for example, “nano-paint”, which is a paint that was said to work in the same way as a mineral wool insulation layer. Theoretically the paint is only functional in vacuum e.g. space because of the reflective properties, but that somehow did not make it into the marketing materials. Also the term “Passive House” has been used a lot without any real understanding about the concepts and quality standards. Thus it comes without a surprise that PHL website has a separate section called “Myths about passive houses”.

However it’s not like Kārlis was sitting idly during this period – instead together with a team of various experts (ranging from energy auditors to engineers and architects) they were quickly expanding by training experts and collaborating over boards with an enterprise called CMB. In this way they were (and still are)

able to provide quality training for both designers and builders of passive houses. Trainings that are conducted by PHL are internationally recognized and the certificate is only granted if an international exam is passed.

When it comes to specifics of promoting energy efficiency in Latvia, Kārlis is happy to explain that it is getting better – building codes are being improved annually (there is a built in mechanism of improving energy efficiency towards nearly zero energy buildings) and the public has access to more education on the topic, thus the importance of PHL as a promoter of passive houses and a hub for experts is only going to increase. Traditional building methods do not go well together with energy efficiency according to Kārlis, however wood as an efficient, durable and long lasting material is a personal favorite, in addition to the fact that it’s subjectively the greatest resource Latvia has to offer.





**Baiba
Altēna,**
Kurland
Woodcakes



“Kurland Woodcake” started as any other successful business – there was a problem. The author of the idea and a proactive mother BAIBA realized that most of the board games for children available in the market do not address the need of them being educating, naturally made and durable, thus she reached out to her acquaintance Anna, who is a designer, and they came up with an alternative for expensive cardboard games. During the aftermath of an economic crisis, this was also seen as a more predictable safety net. Together they came up with the complete production cycle and Baiba was not afraid to get her hands dirty, so she created the first wooden games from scratch with the designs of Anna.

“It is not a secret that children have a very clear and universal perception of things.”

- BAIBA ALTENA

The company name in Latvian – “Kokmaizītes” [Woodcake] was the idea of Baiba’s son, who was 4 at the time and it came as a mixture of having breakfast and the topics of environment protection.

As foreseen- educational, affordable, wood-based board games with a clever design were seen as an idea worth developing. Since these games had an emphasis on Latvian culture and language, soon enough some financing became available from the Culture department of Kurland as well as from Latvian Culture Capital Fond and the idea was taken to production.

From the birth of idea back in 2009 to now, Kurland Woodcakes has put at least 11 board games through production in more than 11 thousand copies and has received several awards for both visual design as well as board game mechanics design. As the amount grew, they started looking for partnerships for large-scale production and later found themselves collaborating with several of the biggest wooden material production companies in Latvia.

An important question rests in Baiba’s mind – if in a very long time some of their games would be found in an excavation, would they be looked at like Latvian cultural heritage, like we tend to look at different artifacts found these days.





EMILS LUKJANSKIS is about to turn 24, and he is the managing director of one of the most known science centers in Latvia: Zinoo. His story begins in Cesis, a charming town just under two hours away from Riga where Emils was born and raised, and where he started his university course in journalism. In his hometown, he also started to actively participate in the community's social life by taking part in the Youth Council. Things began to change for Emils when one day, participating in the municipality council as he usually did to represent the interests of Cesis' youth, he found himself in a heated discussion with a local entrepreneur: Paul Irbins. Some days later, Emils received a phone call: his fervid discussant had a proposal for him, he asked Emils to join

Zinoo's team and work for him. Paul Irbins is an entrepreneur, a science lover who founded Zinoo Science Center in 2011 in Cesis. Apparently, the willfulness and the intelligence of that young man had impressed Paul, and so he thought that Emils could just be what his organization needed. Emils was surprised by this proposal, but he didn't think twice and he accepted the challenge.

This is how his work and life experience in Zinoo Science Center began. When he started this job he was in his second year of journalism, but soon he realized that he wanted to focus all his power on his new job, and so he left the studies to later become director of the organization.

Paul had made the right choice to trust that young man, and he did the same with many others like him, he trusts young people: "you know, we make mistakes all the time, but we have great curiosity and creativity, which can really make a difference" says Emils. Today, the organization

has about 40 employees, with an average age of about 29.

What kindled Emils' passion for this job, bringing him to such a prestigious position at the age of 23, was the mission pursued by this organization: to foster the interest for science in children.

Thus, through bizarre interactive exhibitions in four centers across the country, and workshops constantly organized in schools, Zinoo Science Center attracts more than 30000 children every year to the world of science, with the hope to shape lots of little scientists that in a near future would use science to bring Latvia towards a path of sustainable development.



Emils Lukjanskis,
Zinoo Science
Center





Andrs Hermanis,
BlindArt



This is the story of ANDRS, a young Latvian that transformed his passion for art into a mission against social exclusion and inequality.

This story starts 11 years ago, in 2007, when one day Andrs, who at the time was working as a photographer, during one of his exhibitions, observing the faces of the people that were looking at his photos, was struck by their glance. In that moment he realized how much it meant for him to share his art, and he felt happy, but the next moment another thought crossed his mind. Andrs would have liked to share that feeling with the whole world, but suddenly he became sad, realizing that it was not possible, because thousands of people wouldn't have the chance to enjoy such beauties, because they were devoid of one of the greatest gift of nature: sight.

It was at that exact moment that Andrs understood what to do: find a way to give blind people the opportunity to experience visual art.

In a world where disability is perceived by society exclusively as a limit or as a lacking something, Andrs decided that he wanted to turn this perception upside down, and show everybody that even sightless people, with the right tools, could actively participate in the world of art, that they also had an enormous artistic potential that could and should be expressed and shared with the rest of society. From this reflection came the will to create a social enterprise; no NGO or charity organization, Andrs' activity and the blind people that would take part in it would generate profits like any other company. He rolled up his sleeves and together with a handful of friends and colleagues he created BlindArt. At the beginning the project consisted of organizing photo and tactile painting exhibitions and workshops for children (and later also for adults) run by blind artists

“It’s not easy to tell a child that no, he won’t be a pilot when he grows up, but the great value of this job lays also in this, to teach children to explore their talent and steer them towards the right path.”

- ANDRS HERMANIS

who taught others their technique and sold their artworks, usually held in malls and other similar venues which offered to host them. For ten long years Andrs and his small team brought about their project, involving about 300 blind people - children and adults, but during all this time they didn't manage to actually turn it into a company, mostly for lack of funding.

Finally, six months ago, thanks to the unlocking of some EU social funds, Andrs project was awarded with a grant that gave it the possibility to become a social enterprise. Today BlindArt employs nine people, of whom four are blind women that actively teach art and create incredible artworks.





Kaspars Spunde,
Ciekurkalns
Neighborhood
Development
Society



KASPARS SPUNDE is one of the almost 8000 citizens of Ciekurkalns, one of the most historical of the 58 districts of Riga. Walking through its streets and parks with Kaspars, one immediately gets the impression that he is well-known around the place, people at every corner say hello or share a smile, and you can definitely feel a sense of community. But Ciekurkalns hasn't always been like this. No more than three years ago Kaspars was just like any other citizen of the neighbourhood, going about his daily life, taking his children to school, and living in it without any particular tie to his fellow neighbors that goes beyond customary politeness and good manners. But one day things changed for him, and with that the whole life of this to-be community was affected and changed as well. Everything started about three years ago at an intersection, which ironically turned out to be an important crossroads for the people of Ciekurkalns. This was a very dangerous intersection, difficult to cross both for pedestrians and for cars. Accidents happened almost every other day, so that at one point, Kaspars decided to start a pe-

tition to push the municipality to do something about it and make it safer for the inhabitants. The answer he received was shocking: the gravity of the accidents just was not bad enough, there had been no casualties yet, the municipality was going to do nothing. Did that mean that they would have to wait for somebody to die to make the intersection safer? Wait for the worst to happen before changing things? No, Kaspars couldn't accept this, and so he decided to take action and on June 12th 2015 he founded "Ciekurkalns Neighborhood Development Society".

Initially the new-born NGO was formed only by Kaspars and two friends of his; today more than fifty people actively participate in the forum, and about forty people are members of the organization, all residents of the neighborhood. This is not common in Latvia, people initially thought they were paid and doing this for personal gain, only later did they realize that all the members do it voluntarily. They do it because they want a better community for their kids. It's an attitude. Elderly people are the ones that struggle the most to understand Kaspars' effort; he told us how an old lady once told him during one of the many events: "What a good mayor we have!".

Their major source of funding comes from partnerships and sponsorships with entrepreneurs and hand-craftsmen. For instance, this is how they financed the construction of the famous "Latvian swing". This huge swing, placed right in front of the infamous intersection, not only serves as a place for people to meet and have fun, but most importantly represents a useful tool for the whole community: according to an old Latvian tradition in fact, having a good swing during the Easter holiday assures you a summer free of mosquito bites!

Speaking of the intersection, what happened with the issue that got all of this started? Unfortunately, that problem is yet to be solved, but six months ago the municipality promised to build a roundabout to replace the crossing within a year – Kaspars and his fellow citizens are carefully following the execution of this promise.

“Don't worry about what Ciekurkalns can do for you, but instead, think about what you can do for Ciekurkalns!”

- KASPARS SPUNDE





Krišjānis Liepa,
RepairCafe Rīga

KRIŠJĀNIS LIEPA is a cheerful 26 years old young man. Born in Bauska, a little town near Riga, like many youngsters after high school he didn't really know what he would do in his life. The only thing that he thought about when he was 18 and had to choose his course of studies was to be successful and earn money. So, he enrolled in the prestigious Riga Stockholm School of Economics. During these years of study Krišjānis was immersed in the mainstream world of economics, the one where they teach you that profit is the engine of every other thing and that producing and consuming more and more is key to economic growth. But while his fellow schoolmates were beginning to feel as part of a prestigious élite that would one day have earned a lot of money, for Krišjānis this starts to be a minor factor, a rejection

towards those kind of values slowly grows in him, and even more so towards that kind of economic thinking. Krišjānis started to ask himself some questions: what is the environmental impact of that economic model? Is it really right that only a small élite of people benefit from economic growth? Is this economic structure actually the only one possible?

The answers weren't late, and Krišjānis understood that wasn't the world he wanted to be part of.

Nevertheless, after graduating in Business and Administration, Krišjānis didn't abandon economics, but he decided that he would use his knowledge to promote a completely different form of economy: one that is fair and sustainable, where the engine that moves everything is not profit and unrestrained consumption, but recycling, low environmental impact and sharing.

And so it was that Krišjānis, together with some friends, founded Repair Café Riga in August 2017.

The main aim of the newborn NGO is to organize events to teach people how to repair and recycle waste and items. It is a place to share and spread knowledge, with the goal of expanding the culture and practice of responsible and sustainable consumption. This idea is successfully spreading and, with the help of Krišjānis and his friends, a community of repair cafés is rapidly growing around Latvia.

“Some events have been organized with neighborhood associations, this means that there has been a lot of participation by senior citizens and pensioners. We realized that elderly people are a precious source of technical knowledge and repairing skills; they grew up in the Soviet Union, not in the throwaway culture like us young generations. I really think that creating a space where distant generations meet and share their knowledge gives an added value to our work”

- KRIŠJĀNIS LIEPA





Daiga Krumina,

Daugavkrasts
Partnership
Association



DAIGA KRUMINA is the administrative manager of the local action group “Daugavkrasts Partnership Association”. In August the organization will turn 10 years old, but she’s only been a part of it since 2016. She used to work for the Rural Support Service of Latvia, but she decided to change her job in order to develop closer ties with the community she had chosen as her home just some years before. She has three kids going to school in Kekava county, and she wants them to grow up in a beautiful and stimulating environment. The aim of the organization is to push people to participate actively in the life of the community, to make it better and more responsive to the needs of its inhabitants. They help NGOs, entrepreneurs, and individuals, they organize forums in which anybody can express his or her interests, needs and

problems, and then use this information to establish a local development strategy.

One of the most successful projects organized by Daiga is called “Ladder”. This is a project about sustainable development. Through physical activities, interactive games and workshops on topics of waste sorting and environmental protection, she hopes to have taught the values of sustainable development to a lot of children of her community. Her own children always participate in this kind of events as well, they enjoy it a lot, it shows Daiga that what she’s doing really works. The project involved about 1500 people directly and they assess that, indirectly, it affected almost 30000. The success of this project was so impressive that they are now planning to change their strategy, and to include more activities and events on the topics of sustainable development. According to Daiga, sustainable development is something that affects us all as citizens of the planet, taking care of it is not an option, it is a duty.

“Children are incredible, they learn so fast and when they get home they even teach their parents about all the interesting things they’ve learned. That is why we need to start with them if we want to save our planet. They are our future, they are our hope.”

- DAIGA KRUMINA





Sanita Ribena,
Mana Jūra



Photo: Krišjānis Piliņš

SANITA RIBENA is a Latvian woman, a free spirit that has transformed her environmental vacation into her job. A graduate in philosophy, Sanita has always felt she needed to do something for the benefit of the society, and at the same time she's always had a profound sensitivity for the environment: "we are all part of nature, protecting it should be an instinct". But unfortunately she knows that it is not always like this: "the environment is not a priority for a lot of people, the first obstacle is in the people's mind". For this reason, Sanita started working at the Mana Jūra [My Sea] project in 2016, a project started in 2012 by the Foundation for Environmental Education, an international NGO.

"We are all part of nature, protecting it is something natural and instinctive for me."

- SANITA RIBENA

The aim of this project is twofold: on one hand it promotes community sensitization and education towards environmental protection, on the other it organizes actual expeditions to clean the coast. Every July, their voluntaries start their journey from the Lithuanian border and go along almost 500km of the Latvian coast, cleaning it all the way up to Estonia. For Sanita it is a joy to see so many people that cooperate for such an important common good. In addition to collecting trash, the materials they collect are cataloged and analyzed, so that in the long run it is possible to individuate the main sources of pollution and work with the municipalities to prevent it and keep the sea and the beaches clean.

In particular, Sanita deals with public relations and with the distribution of information and data through social media. Her personal objective is to create a network that shares the same values about collective responsibility and care for the environment. Only then people will actually mobilize to make the place where they live better.





Zane Ruģēna,
Friends of the Earth



100 kailcirtes Latvijas simtgadei ir vairāku organizāciju un privātpersonu aizsākta iniciatīva, lai vērstu sabiedrības uzmanību uz Zemkopības ministrijas ierosinātajiem grozījumiem Ministru kabineta "Notekumos par koku ciršanu mežā". Grozījumi attiecas uz kailcirtes Rīgas jūras un Baltijas jūras piekrastē, kā arī samazinātu izcirtamo koku caurmēru visā Latvijā, tādējādi atļaujot cirst arvien jaunākus mežus.

PAR INICIATĪVU NĒ GROZĪJUMIEM ATKLĀTĀ VĒSTULE FOTOKONKURSS

ZANE RUĢĒNA is an environment activist with experience of more than 10 years of active participation also in the association Zemes draugi [Friends of the Earth]. Her passion of being active and working for the benefit of the society is based on her vision of life, in particular, that upon seeing injustice the environment should be created for searching a solution.

The top goal of the initiative “100 clear fellings for the centenary of Latvia” was to encourage adoption of democratic decisions on the forest resources owned by the state by involving the society and by defending the values of the nature within a broader context.

There were proposals for amendments of legal enactments allowing clear fellings in particular areas on Riga Gulf and the Baltic Sea coast and reducing the mean diameter in the whole territory of Latvia. These amendments proposed by the Ministry of Agriculture did not contain sufficient environmental impact assessment, objections by environmental organisations were listened to in a minimum scope and even the economic assessment was not sufficient by considering the part of the forest outside the felling area and the benefits for it.

The campaign was implemented at the same time as preparations for the celebration of the centenary of Lat-

<http://www.100kailcirteslatvijai.lv/akcija>

via, when the values and the beauty of our nature are in the centre of focus, when hundred years old trees are searched. And in parallel to this, there was the proposal for amendments which could considerably impact both the landscape and the ecology of Latvia. A logical question emerged: “Are these new clear fellings a present to the centenary of Latvia?”

The campaign expanded as a cooperation platform among various organisations and activists by forming task forces, plans. The campaign was developed from nothing and it was aimed at involving the society in decision making. Seven NGO’s joined forces and increasingly more volunteers whose daily life is not related to environment protection applied. Active people who truly care found each other and worked together!

The Friends of the Earth, being an environment organisation for which the issue of democracy and environment law is also important, emphasized in this campaign that the forest does not only mean cubic meters and profit, these are our rights to have clean and safe environment and natural resources. We are the owners of the state forests, but how much do we know about their actual status and to what extent can be participate in taking decisions on their maintenance? One person associates this with the

landscape, another as picking mushrooms or walking in the forest. The forest presents the environment which is important for the society being a unique value of nature at the same time, possessing its own ecosystem which should be preserved and sustainably cared for and maintained.

“It is not our goal to go out to the streets and to initiate any disturbances, or to destroy the national economy, instead it is to provide and to promote balance between economic and public interest, by encouraging involvement of the society in the matters which directly affect its entitlement to the environment and obligation towards protection of the nature. The forests of this country are owned by you, me and all of us! These are our rights and our responsibility because forests present the nature that needs to be protected.”

- ZANE RUĢĒNA



Miks Muizarajs,
Saldus Protection
Society



MIKS MUIZARAJŠ is a young citizen of Saldus, a Latvian town that has a little more than 12000 inhabitants. Like many others at the age of 20, notwithstanding the attachment to his land and to his family, and despite the fact that he had a job in the television sector, one day Miks decided to get out of his tranquil and routine life and to leave for a new adventure. His journey starts in Ethiopia – this country would teach him a lot, here he would learn a very important lesson: “it’s better to give something to society instead of just taking”. Working for the University of Addis Abeba he discovers the world of international cooperation, and he understands that this will be his path. It was then that he decided to leave once more, this time to the USA, to study international development in New York. After graduating, for years Miks continued to travel, putting his knowledge at the service of some of the poorest countries in the world, like Ecuador and Timor Leste. The day came, after all his travelling, when Miks felt the need to stop: something was telling him that it was time to do something for his country. So, in 2016, his long journey around the world came to an end; Miks went home and his return to Saldus marked the beginning of a new story.

It just so happened that as soon as he got back, Miks started taking part in public consultation organized by local activists about the opening of a new facility of hazardous waste disposal just 600 meters from the town. It was a Wednesday, and at noon in that meeting there were more than 300 people, all well informed and determined to denounce the gravity of such an initiative for the environmental and sanitary safeguard of the community. Miks remembers that day very well, he was looking at that angry crowd, united and determined to fight for a common good, and was struck by such strength. In that moment he understood that that strength could be used for a purpose if channelled well. Thus, at the end of that meeting, Miks proposed to transform that single initiative into a real and permanent organization, and this is how Saldus Protection Society was founded. This organization was born to fight against the opening of a polluting industrial facility, but unfortunately it is all too well known how hard it is to win such a battle when a small community has to face a colossal corporation and the local and national institutions that protect it.

In fact, unluckily, the facility is still open, running and polluting – despite the fact that a court case is still ongoing - but this partial defeat hasn’t stopped SPS. Today, this organization fosters with great commitment the active and constructive participation of the community in the decision making process of the local governmental institution, and thanks to this it has become more and more difficult for the municipality to make controversial decisions against the interest of the community.

With its ups and downs, the rising of SPS in the political debate has certainly brought turbulence to this little town, ready to fight with force for its rights. For Miks this is just the beginning of another journey, a journey towards the sustainable development of Saldus’ region for the interests of the whole society.





Imants Breidaks, Mana Balss



Atbalsti ManaBalss.lv. Ja katrs no mums ziedotu vismaz 5 eiro, mēs varētu nosegt gada izmaksas un attīstīt jaunas digitālās demokrātijas platformas, lai tu varētu ietekmēt politiku Latvijā.

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Positīvais iznākums ir pateicoties sabiedriskajai aktivitātei vairāk nekā divarpus gadu garumā - ManaBalss iniciatīvai Par sievietes tiesībām lemt par savu ķermeni, ar tās palīdzību jautājumam pievērstajai uzmanībai, sabiedrības iesaistei gan skaidrojošajā darbībā sabiedrībai un medijiem, kā arī iniciatīvas parakstītāju un atbalstītāju organizētajiem 3 piketiēm.

Šis lēmums ir apliecinājums, ka pilsoniskajai sabiedrībai ir būtiska loma lēmumu pieņemšanas procesā, un joprojām ir iespējams mainīt deputātu lēmumus ar argumentiem!

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Mums ir daudz labu launumu - oribam dar



An experience transfer project is a story about maintaining and growing democracy both at home and in the neighbourhood. IMANTS BREIDAKS, the Head of the Foundation "Sabiedrības Līdzdalības Fonds" [Society Participation Foundation], which is better known as Manabalss.lv, is assured that this is the last independence of Latvia and therefore we should do everything in order to make Latvia our dream-land. The experience of Manabalss.lv shows that at the moment when an organisation is stable and has stable values it should grow in its development and be prepared to give and to do more.

ManaBalss.lv is a society participation platform providing an opportunity to change their country Latvia to its users. New ideas about new laws can be proposed by delivering

them to the decision makers in the Saeima [the Parliament of Latvia]. This is the most successful platform of this type globally and in the field of digital economy Latvia has achieved a very good result serving as a successful role model to other countries.

Collective cooperation exerts pressure on policy makers which is very important in new democracies. The Head of Manabalss.lv emphasises that this is the way to make Latvia better, more stable and more successful.

"I would like to see that also other organisations become aware that democracy is a value that needs to be protected by implementing actual measures. The freedom of the word is now successfully used for deconstructing democracy."

- IMANTS BREIDAKS

The first experience transfer project was implemented with the support provided by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This was support for development of democratic and civic society in Ukraine Miy golos. This is an experience transfer project implemented by Manabalss.lv. The

"Not doing anything does not help anybody!"

- IMANTS BREIDAKS

platform Miy golos has been officially started and it ensures developing of digital democracy in Ukraine.

The first stage of the project, in particular, establishment of the team and the platform, was implemented with the attracted financing for development cooperation provided by the ministry. However, a big amount of financing for the information campaign was missing for delivering the platform to the residents of Ukraine.

Essential challenges emerged during the process of experience transfer, for example, a different political and media environment prohibiting access to the media environment under the conditions of lack of financing. Also adjustment of methodology and practice to a country which is 20 times bigger is a true challenge, as Imants Breidaks, the Head of ManaBalss.lv emphasises.



Paula Anskena and Emils Anskens



“On the 21st of June me and Paula Anskena became one family. As people like to watch wedding photo-shoots, we decided to give it an added value. We want to highlight the UN sustainable development goals, therefore, we chose 8 goals, that in our opinion, are very relevant to Latvia and which has not been fully implementation in Latvia. You can see extracts from the Latvian national report to UN about the implementation of SDGs in the pictures highlighting a problem, that has not only not been resolved, but in some cases, even got worst.”

- EMILS ANSKENS



GOAL 1:
End poverty in all its forms everywhere
“The poverty risk for people over 65 years of age has increased by 30%”



GOAL 3:
Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages
“The number of people in Latvia infected with HIV / AIDS has risen by a quarter”



GOAL 4:
Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning
“More young people choose general rather than professional education”



GOAL 8:
Promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all
“Regional income inequality has increased”

GOAL 9:
Build resilient infrastructure, promote sustainable industrialization and foster innovation
“Support for research has decreased by a third”



GOAL 10:
Reduce inequality within and among countries
“The Gini index has increased”



GOAL 12:
Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns
“The amount of household waste has increased”





Latvian Platform
for Development Cooperation
2018