



The Latvian Association of People with Mobility Impairment "PONTES"

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Report about Latvia.

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Chapter one: people with disabilities

Therefore one can conclude that the experience of our society regarding the integration of the disabled and people with special needs is only a little bit more than a decade old. The notion “people with special needs” itself is new and not yet widespread. “Invalid”, the loanword from Soviet times, is used most frequently.

There is little serious research on the attitudes of society towards people with special needs. Although some surveys devoted to other issues also contain some information on disability issues. Further we will mention data from two polls commissioned by the Ministry of Welfare and poll commissioned by the National Human Rights Office.

- Also the survey on the Latvian inhabitants' level of being informed on the issues of social assistance indicates that society has a low level of awareness on various types of social assistance for disabled. For instance, the largest part of respondents is not informed where to receive the allowance for elder person, for person with disabilities or family raising child with disabilities. Also people are not informed on the day care centres for mentally retarded and possibilities of recreation and rehabilitation in sanatoriums.¹

Definition

The definitions which are used for disability still are not clear in Latvia. For instance, the term “people with special needs” covers broader number of people, as not always persons with mental or physical disabilities succeed in obtaining a formal disability group.

Term of disability in Latvian sounds as *invalids* and many people are not satisfied with meaning of this word in other languages. Although this definition is used in Latvia legislation at the moment and it is impossible to change it immediately.

Understanding of different terms in general is used in these meanings:

¹ *Latvijas iedzīvotāju informētība par sociālās palīdzības jautājumiem*, pēc LM pasūtījuma veicis SKDS, 2001. gada aprīlis, 6., 7., 9. lpp.

People with special needs – people who have objective need to realise special needs, who have difficulties to function in the community and who need additional medical and social assistance. People with special needs are:

- 1) people with eyesight interference or blindness;
- 2) people with hearing interference or deafness;
- 3) people with speech interference;
- 4) people with emotional interference, mental retardation, learning difficulties or mental illnesses;
- 5) people with physical disabilities – might be only for some period of time or might be chronicle illness (including persons, using auxiliaries, elderly with moving difficulties, people with heart and cardio-vascular diseases, stroke, chronicle arthritis and AIDS).²

The situation of families of severely disabled children have improved when parents have been able enrol their child in special kindergarten or special school. But it must be pointed out that still the services cover just part of the needs and the most dramatic situation is in the rural areas.

Most of the families still struggle on their own without social, psychological and financial support apart from the small disability grant.

Almost no children with intellectual disabilities, have been included in ordinary schools despite a number of pilot projects. The reason for this slow progress is said to be “they are not yet adapted for such children”, “the staff is not trained” or “the society is not yet ready”. Due to the lack of support to the families such as transport, after school care or short stay homes it also becomes necessary for many parents to send their children to boarding schools. This situation is not stimulating positive emotional climate in the families.

Attitudes towards children with severe disabilities as objects of care still prevails and children with disabilities are seen us useless and not worth investing in.

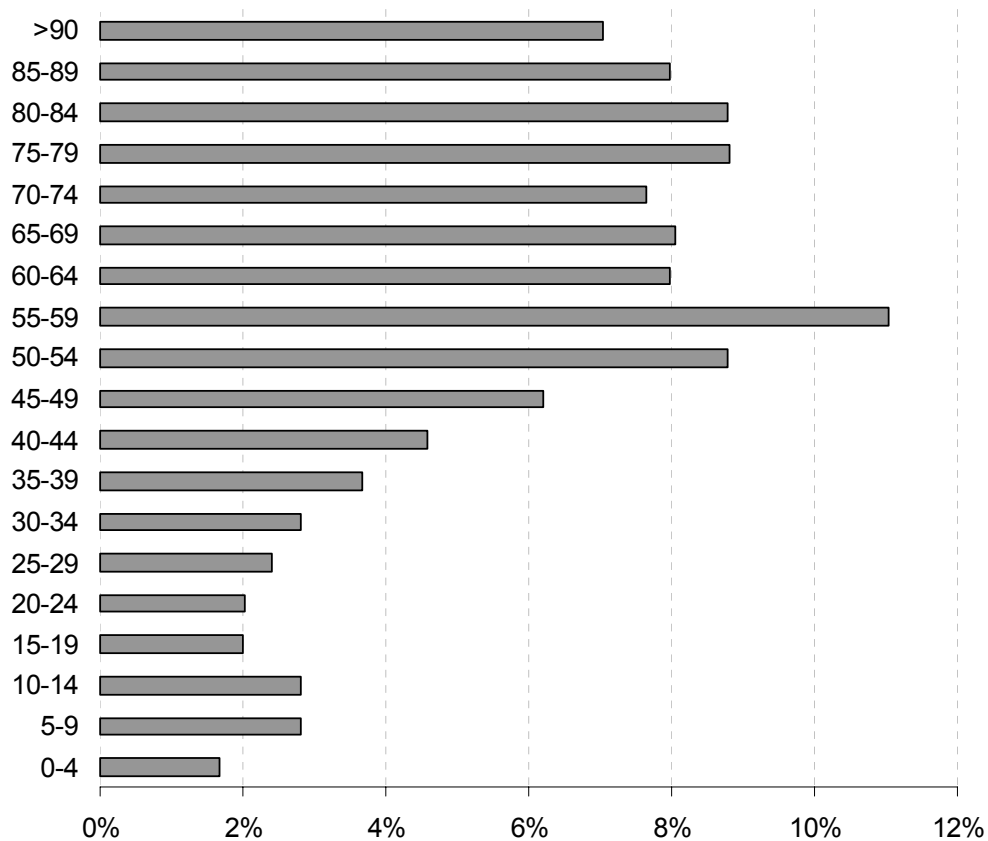
² Ed. by Dr. paed. L. Shilneva, *Sociala darba terminologijas vardnica*, “Attistiba”, Riga, 2000, p. 41

Disability is still seen as disease or a defect that must be corrected at the individual level – not as an issue to be addressed by changes in society and environment.

However, there is a great potential in organising and empowering parents. Their increased strength will not only benefit their own lives but also lead to demand on government to fulfil their obligations.

Proportions of people with disabilities in the different age groups (% of total number of inhabitants)

ve



age, years

Number of disability pensions receiver and dynamic of disability pensions amount

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Number (thousands)	6,7	6,2	5,9	5,6	5,1	4,9
<i>Changes</i>		-7,6%	-3,9%	-5,7%	-8,3%	-4,6%
<i>hereof:</i>						
<i>I group</i>	0,5	0,5	0,4	0,3	0,4	0,3
<i>Changes</i>		-5,4%	-13,2%	-24,2%	17,7%	-15,0%
<i>II group</i>	4,0	3,4	3,3	3,0	2,7	2,6
<i>Changes</i>		-13,8%	-2,7%	-9,5%	-8,4%	-5,4%
<i>III group</i>	2,3	2,3	2,2	2,3	2,0	2,0
<i>Changes</i>		3,0%	-3,9%	3,2%	-11,5%	-1,8%
Pension (lats, real price)	36,42	42,59	42,14	41,39	42,87	46,00
<i>Changes</i>		16,9%	-1,1%	-1,8%	3,6%	7,3%
<i>hereof:</i>						
<i>I group</i>	44,28	54,77	58,12	58,31	57,38	70,99
<i>Changes</i>		23,7%	6,1%	0,3%	-1,6%	23,7%
<i>II group</i>	40,29	48,23	47,62	47,98	49,87	54,13
<i>Changes</i>		19,7%	-1,3%	0,8%	3,9%	8,5%
<i>III group</i>	27,94	31,91	31,16	30,67	30,9	30,81
<i>Changes</i>		14,2%	-2,4%	-1,6%	0,7%	-0,3%

Number of disabled children 2002

Age (year)	Children of disability (registration)	% from population age grouping
0	152	0,8%
1	251	1,3%
2	345	1,7%
3	427	2,2%
4	440	2,4%
5	462	2,5%
6	513	2,7%
7	580	2,8%
8	665	2,9%
9	778	3,1%
10	842	2,8%
11	918	2,9%
12	991	2,9%
13	965	2,7%
14	1022	2,8%
15	1082	2,8%
16	561	1,5%
17	64	0,2%
18	3	0,0%
TOTAL	11 061	2,1%

First time registered as disabled – reasons (percentage)

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Cardio-vascular diseases	13,5	14,4	14,8	15,0	14,9	15,1
Injury	12,3	12,4	13,1	13,0	14,3	13,5
Psycho – social or mental diseases	10,9	10,0	10,8	12,2	12,0	12,6
Neurology	8,8	5,1	5,0	5,8	5,2	5,6
Oncology	22,4	24,5	22,6	21,0	22,4	22,1
Muscular, skeletal diseases	7,7	8,9	8,2	9,2	8,7	8,6
Other diseases	24,4	24,7	25,5	23,8	22,5	22,5

First time registered as disabled – gender, age disability group, 2002

	Number	hereof:		hereof age:			Disability group		
		men	women	16-39 year	40-59 years	> 60 years	I	II	III
TOTAL	8350	4720	3630	2491	4547	1312	778	4712	2860

Second time registered as disabled – reasons (percentage)

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Cardio-vascular diseases	17,3	16,6	16,0	16,1	16,0	15,8
Injury	10,3	8,2	8,7	9,2	8,9	9,0
Psycho – social or mental diseases	17,9	18,7	18,2	19,1	19,3	20,2
Oncology	12,4	11,5	12,2	12,1	12,4	12,1
Muscular, skeletal diseases	10,2	10,9	10,9	10,7	10,2	10,1
Other diseases	31,9	34,1	34,0	32,8	33,2	32,8

Second time registered as disabled – gender, age disability group, 2002

	Number	Hereof:		Hereof age:			Disable group			
		men	wome n	16-39 years	40-59 years	> 60 years	I	II	III	O
TOTAL	30227	16655	13572	8225	18164	3838	1621	16391	12215	1414

Chapter two: legislation

In order to implement the social integration of the disabled the National Concept "Equal Opportunities for All" has been adopted for the period from 1998 to 2010. There have been included also the task of development the programs for the support of social organisations for disabled and patients within the implementation plan of the Concept.

Concept "Equal Opportunities for All" accepted by Cabinet of Ministers on 30 June 1998 foresees activity implementation for promoting integration of disabled persons into society. Task to ensure the economic and social protection of disabled persons implies provision of timely and appropriate support and services for disabled persons and their families, creation of new services, particularly for persons with mental disorders.

In the field of the rights of disabled one should mention the Constitution of Latvia (called Satversme).

The questions related to protection of rights for people with disabilities are regulated by the law "**On medical and social protection of people with disabilities**". This prescribes that disabled people have the right to receive assistance. It also covers the provision of opportunities for the integration of disabled people into society.

The Latvian legislation theoretically is developed on the good way but lack of monitoring mechanisms and ineffective sanctions reduce its quality and often driven to situation where it does not work.

Chapter three: institutional background

The **Ministry of Welfare** is responsible for the state policies regarding people with disabilities. This ministry define policy in the spheres of social security, social assistance and social services. The policy is enforced either by state or municipal institutions or institutions and organisations founded by those institutions acting as service providers in the area of social security. **The State Labour Inspectorate)** with its regional branch offices enforce the state monitoring and control over the labour and employment area laws and compliance with the legislative norms in work places, including the issues of work for people with disabilities.

The work of the state social insurance system and the state benefit system is ensured by **State Social Insurance Agency** with its 33 regional branch offices. The implementation of state specified tasks in the social service area is ensured by the **Social Assistance Fund**. Social assistance and the majority of care services in the respective local municipality for its residents is provided by **municipalities** with their structural units – with the help of **municipal social service and social care institutions**. On the other hand, **natural or legal persons** act as providers of specific social care, social rehabilitation and other services to the residents on the basis of respective contracts with the state or the municipality.

Some principles of mainstreaming also are included in Latvia legislation – Ministry of the Education is responsible for implementation of idea of inclusive education, Ministry of Communication take care on accessible public transport.

At the moment disability NGOs are more and more actively involved in the policy making process. The Latvian Umbrella Body for Disability Organisations SUSTENTO participates in four working groups in ministry of Welfare, ministry of Health and Riga Authority.

On regional or local level often personalities and their private decisions are determinant of the policy in the field of disability. Active and open for cooperation disability movement is very important to start dialogues.

Chapter four: non-governmental organisations of disabled people

According to data from the NGO centre there are about 70 registered social organisations dealing with issues of disability. A number of the largest organisations have regional departments throughout Latvia. Some organisations are more active than others are and sometimes they have succeeded also in affecting governmental policy.

There still are some of the organisations represented special kinds of disability – e.g. physical disability. One of these organisations – Union of People with disabilities and their friends Apeirons consist in general of social workers who act on behalf of people with physical disabilities.

For many organisations in this field very important was financial support which for many years was provided by Scandinavian countries, in general Sweden.

NGOs require a legal basis which is progressive and allows NGOs to effectively conduct their work.

Latvian Parliament (Saeima) nearly adapted NGO legislation which including:

- The "Law on Associations and Foundations",
- The "Law on the Entry into force of the Law on Associations and Foundations",
- The "Law on Public Benefit Organisations".

Saeima set 1 May 2003 as the date to submit revisions for the three draft laws. Many disability nongovernmental organisations now is waiting to changes in this field.

There is not any special law for disability organisations.

It is important to look at NGOs impact on all aspects of society and not just focus on their role as service deliverers.

It must recognise their role as catalysts, generating active citizenship and community leadership and providing the bedrock for a Civic Society.

The links with otherwise marginalised and excluded groups like people with disabilities, provided by NGOs, are essential to the development of true democracy.

It is the aspect of NGO activity, and its vital importance for the State, that is currently unrecognised in Latvia.

Purchasing or commissioning their services is one source of financial support, however to be cost effective, the contract price will not include any funding to sustain the organisation and its broader activities.

Experience has shown that if the State and the Municipalities see NGO's as providers of services then they need an efficient and effective NGO sector with the capacity to deliver a wide range of services.

That capacity cannot be developed without long term investment in the infrastructure of NGOs.

The current situation, with the majority of funding coming from external sources, on a time limited and project focused basis, does not allow for any internal stability and will prevent any sustainable progress in terms of organisational development.

The challenge then, is **to develop a sustainable NGO sector** which maximises all its resources and which does not lose its essential character.

If NGOs have a vital role to play in the provision of services in Latvia and are essential to the process of developing the Civic Society, then some responsibility for sustaining them must **rest with the State**.

During last years cooperation of disability organisations gets better and better. It is also connected with new project opportunities which are provided only if more than one NGO apply for it.

In governmental level since 1997 there is National Council of Disabled Affairs. The aim of the council is the implementation of the National Concept "Equal Opportunities for All". The Council is a consultative body and the decisions regarding integration issues of disabled made by the council are advisory for state, municipal, as well non-governmental organisations. There are representatives from several ministries working in the Council, e.g. Ministry of Welfare, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Education and Science, as well representatives from the National Human Rights Office, Union of Local governments and representatives from the most active NGOs. Unfortunately Council is organised by Cabinet of Ministries and its work is strongly managed by it. Ministries have rights to decided which organisation have or have not opportunity to participate in the work of council. Also level of ministries represented in council is very low – in general they are officers who are not able to make any decisions.

As alternative to this structure the Latvian Umbrella Body of Disability organisations SUSTENTO was founded 2002. At the moment it has 23 national member organisations representing about 20 000 people with disabilities.

The **general objective** of SUSTENTO is to take care of the common interests of the member organisations.

The aim of the organisation is to promote opportunity of equal participation for all members of the society, to enable protection of rights of people with disabilities in order to provide inclusion of them in to society.

Chapter five: education

Policy framework

The “**Law on Education**” is the fundamental law of the educational system. According to this law there are four educational stages in Latvia – pre-school education, basic education, secondary education and higher education. Every subsequent stage of education can be entered after successful completion of the previous stage. There are three kinds of education – general education, professional education and academic education. Every kind of education is regulated at a more detailed level by its own respective laws, like the “**Law on General Education**”, the “**Law on Professional Education**”, and the “**Law on Higher Education Establishments**”. The special forms of general education are – special education, social correction, and pedagogic correction. On October 17, 2002 Latvian Saeima adopted “**The Concept Paper for the Development of Education 2002-2005**”.

The “**Law on General Education**” defines that local governments within their administrative territory must ensure preparation of pre-school children for learning in the basic level of education. The Law also determines that basic education is obligatory.

The proportion of paid higher education is increasing. The forms of state support for students are developing gradually, but children from social exclusion risk groups have very limited opportunities to use study credits due to criterion prescribed for receiving them. Basic vocational programs are offered for those young people who haven't completed basic education. Two vocational training centres for people with disabilities are in Latvia.

Locally in Latvia, current segregated education for the physically disabled, blind, deaf and similar groupings do not get equal access, and are discriminated against on the basis of being excluded from mainstream schooling. They do not socialise with their non-disabled peers in that important period of schooling. Their social death is brought upon as soon as they enter school. They remain as the most neglected group and their vulnerability will continue as long as segregation is in place.

Currently 64 special educational institutions offer education to pupils in cases of 11 different kinds of development disorders and diseases in Latvia. In special educational institutions 70% of children have several disorders of development.

Only few mainstream schools have accessibility. There is not provided special assistance for disabled pupils. Although from the beginning of this year in classes where are more than 5 pupils with disabilities (in general – special classes in mainstream schools) it is possible to have assistant teacher.

	2003./2004. school year	2002./2003. school year	2001./2002. school year	2000./2001. school year
Number of schools	1044	1052	1066	1074
Comprehensive day school	945	953	965	973
Comprehensive evening school	35	35	37	37
Special schools	64	64	64	64

2002./2003. school year

Number of special schools	64
Latvian	37
Russian	11
Latvian/Russian	16
Number of pupils	10250
Latvian	5173
Russian	2051
Latvian/Russian	3026

Disability NGOs are working very hard on idea of inclusive education. Special work group was organised to coordinate effort of different NGOs in this field. Special training programme is developed to introduce mainstream school teachers, parents and people from local authorities with idea of inclusive education.

Chapter six: employment and vocational training

Policy framework

The Labour Law is the “umbrella” law in the employment sector. The law regulates mutual legal relations between employees and employers, based on the labour contract. **The Law on the Support for Unemployed and Job Seeking Persons** specifies the active employment efforts and the preventive measures for unemployment elimination, state and municipality competencies in enforcing these efforts as well as defines the status of an unemployed person and a job seeker, their respective rights and obligations. The objective of the “**Law on Labour Disputes**” is to specify the institutions settling employment disputes and the procedure of the respective dispute settlement. **The National Employment Plan (NEP)** is an annual document that includes both the measures aimed at increasing competitiveness of labour force and unemployment elimination, and also the provision of gender equality (http://www.em.gov.lv/files/EMpl_180702.doc).

The basic principles for determining eventual growth of the minimum wage are defined by “**The Concept Paper on the Minimum Wage**”. The law “**On Municipalities**” determines for municipalities to promote entrepreneurship and take charge of reduction of unemployment in the respective administrative territory.

The Employment policy medium term strategic development directions are defined in both **The Joint Assessment Paper (JAP) agreed between the Latvian Government and European Commission** and the **Development Plan**.

The main directions of work in the promotion of employment can be divided into two groups: the maintenance and increase of employment and its quality and the reduction and prevention of unemployment. One of the vulnerable groups in this field is people with disabilities.

In Latvia people with disabilities have much less chance to be employed than their counterparts, who are not disabled. The same can be said, if comparison has to be made between employments of disabled people in Latvia with that in West European countries, let's say in Sweden. If we take situation of people with visual impairments as a characteristic example, rate of employment in Latvia is 18%, but in Sweden – up to 50%.

In our country traditionally many disabled people had been skilful in different kinds of handicrafts - sewers, shoemakers, basket-weavers, brush-binders, masseurs. In

Soviet occupation times for people with hearing and sight problems, there have been prosperous sheltered enterprises. Nowadays some of these enterprises continue to exist, though their dimensions, capacity and scope of activities have been drastically reduced. It means that many employees, who once worked there, currently are out of job. Many of disabled people are employed in not highly qualified jobs, such as cleaners, janitors, loaders, sanitarians, etc. In some cases person, in order to sustain his/her family, is forced to hold to this kind of job, though performing of tasks may require contribution, that goes well beyond the limit of one's actual physical capacities. Carrying out obligations in that situation makes life stressing, because (as it is generally with disabled people) person is very eager to do his/her work not worse, but even better than able-bodied colleagues.

Thus, employment situation in our country demands raising qualification and education level. During this transitional period we find that still insufficient number of disabled people work in information and communication areas, one of the main reasons being, that they either not skilful enough or cannot afford to use computers in everyday work.

There is no employment quota system as such in Latvia. Scheme of subsidized workplaces has been markedly developed during last few years (last year 500 workplaces were subsidized). Nevertheless, duration of period is rather short – only for up to 10 months. Thus in general people with disabilities feel strong need for stable long-term guarantees of employment, which state (at present) is not able to provide for them altogether. Sometimes this fact proved to be a main drawback that prevented our cooperation with potential foreign partners in occupational training.

There is ongoing discussion about most preferable way of employment support, expected from state. Of course, our employees – as society in general – has not yet got rid of some prejudices and commonplaces about people with disabilities and their actual abilities. Yet there is a feeling, that most effective and lasting help would be long-term financial support. Financial support should be orientated not on punishing for refusing to employ disabled person, but rather on encouraging employers with tax incentives or salary compensation schemes.

In this situation NGOs are insisting on developing better education opportunities, as well as on long-standing financial support for subsidized workplaces. These

measures will increase and stabilize rate of employment, as well as provide guarantees for future.

Though during couple of last years things are slowly getting better, NGOs for many a long day still will have to continue their cooperation with other stakeholders in order to normalize the situation.

Chapter seven: accessibility

Accessibility of environment

One of the major issues for people with disabilities is physical accessibility. Lack of access is a real barrier to the social integration of physically disabled people and is made worse by the total lack of public awareness of the problems they face.

- They can only partly physically enter buildings, both public and private, and this cuts them off from services and prevents them getting employment
- They can only partly travel on public transport and this imprisons them in their homes and prevents them taking an active part in society

This impacts on all aspects of life -

- children and young people with disabilities are denied equal opportunities in education, there are very few schools or college or university buildings that are accessible, therefore integrated education is the exception rather than the rule and the number of young people with disabilities who enter further or higher education is very small;
- people with disabilities are more likely to be unemployed, a major factor in this was the physical environment of workplaces and their unsuitability for people with disabilities;
- people with disabilities cite access to medical care as a real issue for them, many specialists have offices in buildings which are not accessible, many people with disabilities have problems getting out of their homes and even hospitals and polyclinics have access problems.

There have been many attempts to improve the physical accessibility. All standards are included in Latvia legislation. Ramps and slopes are starting to appear in towns and cities across Latvia. Situation is better in big towns and in capital – Riga.

However, because there is little or no information about standards for physical accessibility, many of these are too steep or too narrow for normal wheelchairs. All new public buildings should be accessible according Latvia legislation but very often they are not.

Streets are insufficiently furnished with suitable traffic lights (light signal should be accompanied by sound signal, as well). Almost nowhere – even, where wide

circulation of blind and partially-sighted people is to be most expected) premises and elevators are not provided with inscriptions in Braille or sound input and feedback.

Chapter eight: services for people with disabilities

Developing social services is one of the key political challenges admitted as essential to reduce poverty and social exclusion in the draft of Joint Inclusion Memoranda of Latvia. This means providing an opportunity for people to receive social services according to their needs and as close to their place of residence as possible. For achieving it improving the social services infrastructure and developing the network of social services is necessary alongside educating professionals and raising their qualifications.

Good thing is, that already for 11 years persons with severe disabilities are entitled to travel by public transport (except taxis) free of charge, but these with most severe disabilities are exempted from paying for their guide's travelling tickets.

Riga municipality finances special transportation services for persons who use technical auxiliaries (wheelchairs) or persons who can hardly use public transportation. Special cards with lump sum for year are provided for these people. This sum is enough to use one trip for about 35 km once per month. It is not possible to cover expenses to go to work or to school.

Therefore this service is provided only by Riga municipality people who live in other cities or in rural areas have not any opportunity to use special transport at all.

But broadly speaking, Services for people with disabilities are being provided insufficiently. For example, visually impaired person has to find a guide for him/herself and to pay for guide's services from his/her monthly income.

For intellectually disabled youth above school age the lack of services is even worse. Mostly after the finishing of special education establishment the young person with severe disability must stay at home what leads not only to the segregation of these youngsters, but also to the social exclusion of the whole family. It must be pointed out that in this situation at least one of the parents is not able to work.

Though rehabilitation services and services in day centres are available for respective disability groups without discrimination, it should be said, that this year has been marked with drastic decrease of state financial support. It lead to downsizing of

centres' scope, reducing services for clients, and in some extreme cases it ended up with shut-down of institution altogether. Aim of NGOs is to encourage, that during transition process needs of all disability groups are taken into account.

Chapter nine: pensions and social security benefits

In Latvia there are two kinds of monthly financial support for people with disabilities; Firstly, these, who have been employed and paid social security taxes at least for three years, are eligible to receive pension; secondly, these, who have not been able to fulfil above-mentioned requirements, are to suffice with social security benefit. According to legislation of Latvia people receive pensions and social security benefits irrespective of their work and salary. Nevertheless, taking into account employment situation mentioned in chapter 6, this proportion is rather small.

Pensions of people with disabilities, not speaking about social security benefits, are below statistically reckoned minimal subsistence (living) standards. Nonetheless, last year situation has been palpably improved. Minimal social benefit now is 50 Lats (80 Euroes), and accordingly minimal disability pensions have been raised within the range from 60 to 80 lats (100 – 130 Euroes).

Dynamic of disability pensions

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Number of disabled people (thousand, end of year)	108,9	105,8	102,7	100,5	98,2	94,7
<i>Changes</i>		-2,9%	-2,9%	-2,2%	-2,3%	-3,5%
Pension/ monetary compensation (lats, real price)	43,4	51,7	55,9	55,4	55,1	56,1
<i>Changes</i>		19,1%	8,2%	-0,9%	-0,6%	1,8%

Lack of financial support creates wide range of problems. The young ones (who mostly have to live on social security benefit) are in most unfortunate and endangered position. If level of income does not reach minimal living standard (which is reckoned to be approximately 100 Lats – 160 Euroes), how may one afford to create one's own family or to go to university, for education therein payment is required?

Though life is not altogether so hopeless, NGOs are obliged to remind government about financial situation of disabled people, which has been dramatically worsened

during last 10 or 15 years and together negotiate about best possible improvement solutions

Chapter ten: health and rehabilitation issues

The fundamental normative document regulating the organisation, funding of the health care system in the country, legal relations between the health care service providers and receivers is the law **"On Medical Treatment"** and the resulting Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers No.13 adopted on January 12, 1999, **"Regulations on Health Care Funding"**, the Pharmacy Law and the resulting Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers No.428 **"Reimbursement Procedures for the Purchase of Medication, Medical Devices and Goods for Ambulatory Use"**. In order to solve the existing problems in health care, several policy planning documents are developed (**"Strategy for the Health Care of the Mother and the Child"**, **Public Health Strategy**, **Strategy for Restricting the Spread of HIV and AIDS in Latvia**).

According to legislation the volume of state guaranteed medical assistance is not related to the contribution payments by residents or taxes, it is, however, based on the principle of residence. If a person has a legal status in Latvia, he or she has all rights to receive medical assistance. Immediate medical assistance is provided free of charge. Legislation provides for certain health care service benefits for poor persons and socially unprotected population groups like children, pregnant women and politically repressed persons, persons who suffered during the liquidation activities of Chernobyl nuclear energy plant and others.

Assistive technology is partly provided by state. There is specific list of equipment which is covered by governmental budget. Unfortunately many of important devices are not accessible for people – e.g. electrical wheelchair, hoists etc.