

PROBLEMS IN IMPLEMENTING CHILDREN'S RIGHTS FOR CHILDREN WITHOUT PARENTAL CARE AND CHILDREN AT RISK OF LOSING PARENTAL CARE IN LITHUANIA

Vida Česnuitytė

Mykolo Romerio universitetas, Socialinės politikos fakultetas, Socialinės politikos katedra
Ateities g. 20, LT-2005 Vilnius
Telefonas (8 5) 2714715
Elektroninis paštas v.cesnuityte@mruni.eu

Dr. Laima Okunevičiūtė-Neveauskienė

Vilniaus Gedimino technikos universitetas, Darbo ir socialinių tyrimų institutas
Saulėtekio al. 11, LT-10223 Vilnius
Telefonas (8 5) 2752235
Elektroninis paštas laima.okuneviciute@dsti.lt

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Abstract

The objective of this article is to review the results of a children's rights study of children without parental care or at risk of losing parental in Lithuania. In conducting the analysis, the following research methods were applied: expert interview and focus group. Analysis of the situation showed that the main problems and obstacles preventing institutions from effectively implementing the rights of children from target groups are as such: lack of qualified specialists, insufficiently developed infrastructure, value judgements in society. To ensure that children without parental care or at risk of losing parental care grow up in a harmonious environment, provision of information and social welfare to social risk families should be continued. Additionally, the following services should be developed in the future: individual and group consultations for parents held by different specialists, parenting education, building mutual relationships, summer camps and other socio-cultural services for children. Development of the following services would be appropriate: individual and group consultations for children held by different specialists, group and individual child development activities, activities in children's day care centres.

Keywords: children's rights, children without parental care, children at risk of losing parental care

1. Introduction

In the National Report on strategies of Lithuania for social protection and social inclusion (2008) family, children and young people were indicated among the priority goals. Meanwhile, social studies (Bedorf et al., 2006; Kabašinskaitė, 2007; Žemaitaitytė, 2008; etc.) and statistical data (www.socialiniszemelapis.lt) reveal the need for special attention to children's rights protection for children without parental care or those at risk of losing parental care. In 2007, there were 7560 children without parental care placed in family-based care in Lithuania (www.socialiniszemelapis.lt). 2129 children were cared for in non-biological families, while the others were cared for by grandparents, older siblings, aunts or uncles. However, the majority of children without parental care live in children's homes. At the end of 2007, 5350 children were living in state or municipal institutions. The most frequently violated right of children without parental care is the right to grow up in a family: when a child is taken from a biological family, in the majority of cases, the result is him having no further connection with the parents for the rest of his life. Studies reveal that living in a children's home in-

creates the child's dependence on the system. Lack of appropriate institutions, cooperation, initiative and efforts to return the child to the original biological family and society in general usually "programs" the child to fail at integrating into society (Bedorf et al., 2006; Egger, 1999; Life after institutional care). In fact, alternative care for the child should be the last measure applied only in exceptional cases.

Every child growing up in a social risk family is in danger of losing parental care. In Lithuania, a social risk family is a family with children under 18 years where one or both parents abuse alcohol, narcotics, psychotropic or toxic substances, are addicted to gambling, are unable to care for their children due to lack of social skills or ineptitude, resort to psychological, physical or sexual abuse, spend state benefits in ways contrary to the interests of the family resulting in danger to the physical, mental, emotional and/or moral development and safety of their children. This category also includes families where the child is placed in temporary institutional care. As of 31 December 2007, there were 11958 social risk families raising 27881 children, or 3.7% of all children in Lithuania, according to records of social risk families kept by the State Children's Rights Protection and Adoption Agency (www.socialiniszemelapis.lt). The following rights of children at risk of losing parental care are most rarely violated: the right to education; the right to quality health care; the right to life and growing up; the right to state support and assistance (Kairienė et al., 2007; Renoux, 2008; Think Family: Improving the Life Chances of Families at Risk, 2006).

The aim of this article is to present the results of a study concerning the implementation of children's rights in Lithuania. The main object of analysis is children's rights among children without parental care or those at risk of losing parental care. The *key tasks* in the analysis are the following:

- An overview of the responsible officials and their strategies for the implementation of children's rights in different institutions in Lithuania.
- Identification of the main obstacles for the implementation of children's rights for children from target groups in the country.
- Recommendations for the development of an implementation of children's rights for children without parental care or at risk of losing parental care in Lithuania.

Methodology. In most studies on children's rights protection, quantitative social research methods are used. In view of the said objective, qualitative research methods were applied. Expert interview and focus group methods were used.

The objective of *expert interviews* was the identification of the services needed by children without parental care or at risk of losing parental care in Lithuania. Interviews were conducted with representatives of state and municipal institutions and non-governmental organisations directly responsible for ensuring children's rights in the country: Social support department of Alytus City Municipality, Children's Rights Protection Agency (Agency) of Alytus District Municipality, Agency of Jonava District Municipality, Agency of Kaunas City Municipality, Family and Child Welfare Centre of Klaipėda City, Agency of Mazeikiai District Municipality, Social support department of Pakruojis District Municipality, Agency of Šiauliai City Municipality, Agency of Vilnius City Municipality, Social support department of Vilnius City, Agency of Visaginas Municipality and Agency of Zarasai District Municipality. In total, interviews were conducted with 12 experts. Field work was carried out in February 2009. Summarized results of the interviews are included in this study.

A *focus group* was an appropriate way to gather people with similar experiences to discuss the implementation of children's rights for children from the target groups. In the discussion, 9 experts represented various governmental and municipal institutions and non-governmental organisations, all having professional expertise and experience working with social risk families and children. Experts represented the following institutions: Social work and social services department of the Ministry of Social Security and Labour, Social support centre of Vilnius City, the Children's Rights Ombudsman Institution of the Republic of Lithuania, non-governmental organisation Save the Children, Child Rights Protection Department of Trakai Municipality, Trakai Child children's home, other charity and support foundations in Lithuania. Objectives of the focus group were to identify: (a) the nature of activities in institutions of different levels responsible for the protection of children's rights; (b) effectiveness of services to target families and their children; (c) the need for the development of services to target families and their children. The group discussion allowed for the participants to agree or disagree with each other in order to provide insight into how the group thinks about an issue, their experiences and practices. Group discussion took place on February 17, 2009 in Vilnius. Outcomes of the discussion were processed, analysed and summarized results included in this study.

2. Strategies and distribution of responsibilities for children's rights protection for the target groups

The Concept of State Policy on Child Welfare (2003) instituted a reform of the child care system, first of all based on the natural child support network, by promoting the development of services to families and organising alternative child care with the following three priorities in mind:

- Return to the biological family;
- Adoption;
- Long-term institutional care.

The role of State Children's Rights Protection and Adoption Agency. Based on the Strategy of State Policy on Child Welfare and the 2005–2012 Action Plan for the Implementation of the Strategy (2005) and a number of subsequent pieces of legislation, the State Children's Rights Protection and Adoption Agency was charged with coordinating the work of ministries on the national level and ensuring the cooperation of state and municipal institutions and establishments in the field of child welfare. The Agency coordinates the work of institutions responsible for children in institutional care, participates in the creation and implementation of programmes which reduce problems of integration into society faced by minors. Municipal children's rights protection agencies organize preventive work with parents or legal guardians of children and provide consultations to parents, teachers, educators and children on issues of protection of their rights, care, adoption and prevention of violations of children's rights. Therefore, ultimate responsibility for work with social risk families and children in the stages of both prevention and intervention nearly in all cities and districts is borne by the Children's Rights Protection Agency.

For the purpose of tracking violations of children's rights, Lithuania has a special institution – the Children's Rights Ombudsman Institution.

State financial support for children. Lithuania has a wide financial support system intended to help families, especially social risk families and children without parental care. Families with children receive state benefits pursuant to the Law on Child Benefits (2004), which ensures that each child growing up in a family is supported from birth until reaching legal age. Benefits are paid from the state budget irrespective of the family's income and irrespective of whether adults are covered by the state social insurance scheme. The Law provides for disposable and monthly benefits: (a) a disposable benefit upon birth of a child or child adoption, disposable benefit to pregnant women, monthly benefit per each child raised in a family, monthly benefits to a conscript's children; (b) children in institutional care receive monthly orphan's benefits, and one disposable benefit to purchase accommodation or settle upon reaching legal age. The amount of child benefits is linked to the minimum living standard (MLS). As of 2009, families raising three or more children receive child benefits. Families raising one or two children receive child benefits only if determined that the family is struggling financially.

Financially challenged families raising children may apply for state financial assistance. The Law on Financial Social Assistance to Low Income Families and Single Residents (2003) creates a uniform system for the provision of financial aid based on an assessment of income and wealth. Persons with low income receive social benefits which guarantee minimum means for food, including compensations to cover a part of utility costs (compensations).

In 2007, in the framework of the Law on child benefits, children cared for by a natural or legal person as guardian, including state and municipal child care institutions, during their entire time in care, receive a monthly guardian's benefit of 4 MLS (520 LTL). Until 1 January 2007, all children in foster care, extended families or non-governmental care institutions were eligible for this benefit.

Support to families raising children isn't limited to financial assistance. Families with low income receive other social support (social benefits, compensations to cover the costs of utilities, free meals for children at school, assistance to prepare a child for school, concessions on costs for kindergarten etc.).

Institutional child care system. In 2007, the government approved the Strategy on the Reorganisation of the Child Care System and the 2007–2012 Action Plan for the Implementation of the Strategy. At the same time, Lithuania became an official license holder of the PRIDE programme designed for prospective foster and adoptive parents and has an exclusive right to apply programme in training and evaluating prospective foster and adoptive families, as well as providing them with qualified support. In the course of the training, prospective foster or adoptive parents are familiarized with problems and ways of solving them, support opportunities when raising a young person. However, due to public insecurity and absence of tradition, the process is slow. There is still a need for services to foster families, which face various problems.

The role of the municipality. According to subjective expert opinion, the municipality is the institution which protects the rights of target group children most effectively. When fulfilling their duties and working with a family, employees of the municipality:

- Pay special attention to whether there are any violations of the child's rights and legitimate interests in the family;
- Provide social services to the social risk family, perform social supervision;
- Represent the rights of the child in court;
- If needed, make arrangements for the child's placement in care;
- If a child is placed in out-of-home care, ensure a safe living environment for the child;
- Make arrangements for the institutional care of children without parental care and provide the child with comprehensive assistance through social services.

Help for children suffering from domestic violence is provided by municipalities as well: social work takes place with the family; the child is provided counselling by a psychologist or a school counsellor. Counselling is usually provided to children living in urban areas, while there are no possibilities of providing counselling to children and families in rural areas. The Implementation of the National Programme of Prevention of Violence against Children and Support for Children (2005) includes annual calls for projects of short-term and long-term integrated support provision for children suffering from abuse in their families. In 2006, funding was allocated for 15 Lithuanian establishments; 200,000 LTL were earmarked for partial funding of projects by these establishments. Projects benefited more than 700 children suffering from abuse by providing them with psychological, legal and social support. The majority of projects which received funding in 2007 were implemented in the Kaunas District – 4 projects, the Vilnius District with 3 projects and Klaipeda, Siauliai and Marijampolė Districts – 1 project each (www.socialiniszemelapis.lt).

Social workers for work with social risk families. In 2007, to ensure a more effective implementation of the rights of target group children and provision of versatile support to families, municipalities created 556 additional positions for social workers to cover work with social risk families. Because of the new staff, the number of social risk families declined significantly and their situation improved. Yet problems remain: not all positions have been filled due to lack of specialists. Especially in rural areas, some people working in this position lack qualification and professionalism. Experts affirm that in some areas, the shortage of professionals is a result of simple reluctance on behalf of qualified professionals to go to remote areas – not to mention that the job is demanding and low paid.

Children's day care centres. Integrated services to social risk families and families in need of social benefits on the community level are provided by child day care centres. From 2005 to 2007, the Ministry of Social Security and Labour implemented the National Programme of Child Day Care Centres (CDC). In the framework of this programme, a total of 151 CDC Projects were funded in 2007 – almost 33% of the projects were implemented in rural areas (20% in 2006), 67% in urban areas (80% in 2006). Over the course of the year, the centres accommodated 5.5 thousand children, 4.5 thousand of whom received regular social and educational services. 3.2 thousand families attended the day care centres, 2.7 thousand of whom received services on a regular basis (www.socialiniszemelapis.lt). Child day care centres are the place where social work with parents takes place. Parents are encouraged to take better care of their children, as well as their education. Parents are provided with necessary psychological, pedagogical and legal aid. Preventive work is carried out with social risk families.

The role of school. Because children spend a lot of their time at school, it is worth taking note of its role. In addition to its key function of providing education, the school provides state funded meals (until 2009 this covered all children, starting from 2009 - covers only children of parents with low income). The Law on Social Assistance for School Children (2006) came into effect on 1 January 2007 and provides for two types of social assistance for school children: free meals for children and provision of school supplies at the beginning of a school year. If needed, the school acts as a mediator between the family, the child and other institutions. The school also organises extracurricular activities, provides other social services. Non-governmental organisations also contribute to these functions.

The role of society. Close community and neighbours of social risk families have the possibility of notifying state institutions (police, the Children's Rights Protection Agency, etc.) on potential threats to the safety of minors in the family. However, experts were sceptical of the community's practical intervention on the issue of children's rights protection of the target groups, attributing problems to the traditional nature of communal living, lack of active civil participation, etc.

To summarize, in the field of children's rights protection, most valued are the efforts of public institutions which participate directly in the resolution of problematic situations. Subjectively estimated, the role of guardians (other than relatives) and relatives, foster care establishments, school and non-governmental organisations is less important. Still, institutions which are not active or those whose role is not so apparent have their role in ensuring the rights of children in the Lithuania.

3. Obstacles to children's rights implementation and possibilities for their elimination

Every institution, in one way or another related to children without parental care or children at risk of losing parental care, faces problems in its activities. However, experts say that the economic and political situation in the country, flaws in the legal system, lack of inter-institutional cooperation, bureaucracy, access to information, scope of social risk, staff motivation and responsibility, and links with risk families are not the greatest obstacles to implementing the rights of risk group children. The key problems and obstacles, according to subjective opinions, which prevent institutions from effectively implementing the rights of children without parental care or at risk of losing parental care, are:

- Lack of qualified specialists;
- Underdeveloped infrastructure;
- Value judgements in society.

Lack of qualified specialists. Psychologists are mentioned among the most demanded specialists. Experts pointed out that social risk families and children are in particular need of psychological assistance. Yet this type of assistance is the least accessible to social risk families and children, mainly because there are few qualified psychologists in rural areas and small towns. Professional psychologists in the majority of cases work in major cities and travel to rural areas and small towns for consultations or giving lectures at best. Secondly, only a fraction of social risk families can afford a psychologist's paid services because of insufficient personal income. Under these circumstances, social risk families and children could benefit from free psychological help lines. The psychological help line for children already has a long tradition in Lithuania. However, there is a third obstacle – because of cultural prejudice, the use of counselling services are not wide spread. These services are mostly used by people from certain social classes and in the majority cases, these people do not fall into the category of social risk families.

Experts also mentioned a shortage of professional social workers. Not all people working such jobs have the necessary education, while those with adequate education don't all have a calling. This means that there are cases of violated privacy and confidentiality of children and families. It happens that if social workers do not fully understand the nature of social work, they take over the responsibilities of families, e.g. house cleaning, cooking meals for children of the family, etc.. Thus, instead of empowerment of the families, a contrary result is observed – an increasing number of families who do not take responsibility for their children and family life, resulting in the formation of socially “disabled” families. Despite the mentioned imperfections, many social workers are well motivated, though lacking in knowledge, competence and skills. One effective measure to promote the empowerment of families is making a “contract with the family”, i.e. laying down the responsibilities of both parties – the assisting institution and the family. This way, the members of the family, the parents are encouraged to acquire new skills or relearn lost ones.

Experts believe that teachers who have regular contact with children should also be more socially sensitive, i.e. notice violations of children's rights, observe children whose rights might be violated and report these cases to social workers, the Children's Rights Protection Agency or any other responsible authority. These actions would allow for more effective help to children and their families. Currently we observe an opposite trend – some schools, in particular ones of a higher status, avoid and even refuse to accept children from social risk families or children's homes. There were several examples where a school waited until the child reached 17 years of age and dropped him from the student roster despite the fact that it was the middle of the school year and the child had no chances of transferring to another school.

Underdeveloped infrastructure. Experts listed several problems related to insufficiently developed infrastructure which hinder the effective implementation of the rights of risk group children. These were: poor transportation service, particular features of the secondary education network, underdeveloped network of preschool education establishments, few crisis centres for women and children.

The combination of the transportation service and secondary education network is most problematic as far as children living in rural areas are concerned. In the last decade, following the secondary education reform, some schools were merged due to demographic and economic situation in the country (declining number of children and rational distribution of funding). Once secondary schools, and in many cases elementary schools, were closed down in rural areas many children were forced to transfer to schools located at long distances from their homes. These children travel to school on so called “yellow buses”. The buses run on a strict schedule and when it comes to extracurricular activities, the child has to choose – neglect the activities in order to catch a yellow bus or participate in the activities and miss the bus. If they decide to miss the bus, there is a problem of how to get home. One of the possible solutions to this problem could be public transport, but currently the service isn't fre-

quent, especially to remote areas (once in the morning and once in the evening at best). Experts confirm that there have been cases where motivated children chose to attend extracurricular activities and then had to walk home on foot as far as 5-10 kilometres regardless of the weather.

The preschool education network is more developed in urban areas of Lithuania, whereas in rural areas there is still a shortage of such facilities. This is partly due to the cultural heritage – rural families more so that urban ones are likely to have several generations living together and sharing the responsibilities and duties of bringing up and educating children. This eliminates the need of sending children to preschool. In such cases, however, the children are not guaranteed the possibility of education and acquisition of new diverse skills which form in early childhood.

Value judgements in society. The efforts of many institutions in implementing the rights of children from social risk families fail due to the reluctance of parents to change or obstacles faced by parents who are motivated to change.

To illustrate, experts provided the example of alcohol-abusing fathers (and/or mothers). Experts provided the following picture of a typical day in a rural community: because of highly prevalent unemployment in rural areas, many community members (mostly men) find nothing better to do than drink. Because of unemployment, they have no money for buying alcohol so they spend all of their free time solving the problem of how to get money or alcohol. Thus, alcohol dependence becomes something of a lifestyle which is almost impossible to reverse. In rare cases, when a person wants and tries to leave this lifestyle behind he faces a number of problems, e.g. environment in which this culture thrives; problems related to treatment from alcohol dependence (geographical accessibility to services, price of services), etc.. Services for treatment from alcohol dependence are available only at specialized establishments – Lithuania has only a small number of them. In the majority of cases, a person in need of these services not only cannot afford the services (around 800 LTL) but must also travel to the establishment, meaning that personal initiative is basically doomed to fail. Outside assistance is needed. Experts mentioned that one municipality had found a solution – the municipal board decided to cover the costs of treatment from alcohol dependence to persons wishing to undergo the treatment covered by the municipal budget.

Another problem is mediation by society and community and assistance to social risk families and their children. Neighbours of social risk families tend to avoid interfering in the problems of another family. In cases of children's rights violations they could contribute as active members of society and community. However, communal traditions and the tradition of active participation in civil society have been interrupted in Lithuania. Recent years have seen work on resuming these traditions, but they remain weak. If needed, inclusive of when a person witnesses a violation of children's rights, involvement is slow. In the discussion group, experts voiced the opinion that sometimes neighbours do make reports to state institutions (police, the Children's Rights Protection Agency etc.) about threats to the safety of a minor in a family, but later refuse to stand as witnesses in court. The most frequent excuse is fear of retribution and doubts as to whether authorities will be able to protect them.

Access to information. Inter-institutional sharing of information would facilitate more effective assistance to children and families. Because of data privacy protection and other reasons, the Children's Rights Protection Agency might not even know about some events or becomes aware of them too late, when help is difficult or virtually impossible. For example, if a child suffers abuse, this is reported only to law enforcement institutions and the Agency is left out. If parents or other legal representatives duly represent the abused child, information might not get to municipal child rights protection agencies even during the pre-trial investigation.

Responsibility for the elimination of obstacles in implementing children's rights. Experts believe that obstacles to the implementation of the rights of children without parental care or at risk of losing parental care are more linked to cultural issues and lifestyle rather than normative aspects. It was also mentioned that the Government of Lithuania has many great projects and programmes to protect the rights of children. The state also has institutions to organize, implement and supervise these efforts.

Yet, there is little conscious civic participation in protecting the rights of every child in the country. For example, long-term institutional child care – the most common form of child care in Lithuania – could be replaced by adoption. But very few families (or persons) resolve to take the responsibility and adopt a child. Sadly, cultural and lifestyle specifics in the country's population are more difficult to alter as compared to introducing a new law or piece of legislation, establishing or reforming children's education institutions, promoting the preparation of professional specialists or expanding the supply of services etc.. Motivating a person to change, changing value judgements of a person or society is a far more challenging task – it requires not only knowledge, but also goodwill and time.

Experts believe that ultimately, institutions closest to social risk families and their children should be the ones responsible for the elimination of obstacles hindering the implementation of the

rights of children in the target groups. These institutions include relatives, community and municipality. A less important role should be that of the President's Office and international organisations.

In the discussion group, experts expressed their opinion that more effort should be put into promoting social work in society and in specific communities. Since the institution of social work appeared in Lithuania after 1990, society does not yet fully understand the role of the social worker, the benefits of social work to society, etc.. An opinion was expressed that more should be done to increase the visibility of social work on television and other mass media. Indeed, media has a great impact in the area of educating society and changing prejudices and lifestyles.

When launching initiatives in specific areas, members of communities should be informed about the goals of these initiatives, the available instruments and the potential outcomes. Practice shows that the absence of such information leads to mistrust, envy, and disagreements within the community and thus becomes an obstacle to successful action.

Cooperation between institutions implementing children's rights. The Children's Rights Protection Agency, social support units and their social partners providing assistance to children and families cooperate on an institutional level. Public institutions work together with schools, guardians and non-governmental organisations. For example, the Children's Rights Protection Agency cooperates with social partners to determine the need of social services to social risk families. This responsibility is shared with people organising social work in townships, social support units, the police, NGOs.

Experts affirm that the State Children's Rights Protection Agency is one the major partners in the work towards the protection of children's rights. The Children's Rights Ombudsman Institution provides great assistance in complicated cases.

Non-governmental organisations cooperate very effectively with child day care centres simply by sharing information, referring children to these centres, etc..

Schools were mentioned among the more passive partners. For example, even in cases of small schools with a small numbers of students, they fail to collect and provide information on children from social risk families. Even when schools have had such information, they have been reluctant to share it.

Little volunteering activity is evident. It was noted that in the majority of cases, volunteers are college students who work only on the condition that their work will result in school credit. This practice has some positive aspects to it – students receive practice with children, hold various events, sometimes establish themselves in the institution and stay there for work. However, because a student does not have the necessary work experience, knowledge and competence, he/she cannot participate in direct work with the family or elsewhere where special skills are needed. There is a shortage of volunteers with certain qualifications and time to spare for needed work.

In general, only one expert out of all 11 municipalities said that this type of cooperation was not taking place. Meanwhile, an expert from Alytus City Municipality described and highlighted programmes that were implemented in the city by the Charity and support foundation SOS Children's Villages Association of Lithuania. According to the expert, the programme helped prevent children in 12 social risk families from losing parental care. The most effective measure to achieve this result was a programme of social skills conducted by social workers of the project. The programme also led to the creation of communal self-help networks which are very important as far as revival of communal life is concerned.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

The study revealed that:

1. The most violated right of children without parental care in Lithuania is the right to grow up in a family. Whereas most frequent violations of children's rights at risk of losing parental care are the right to education, the right to qualified health care, the right to life and growing up, and the right to state support and assistance.

2. The authority delegated with the duties of coordinating children's rights protection on the national level is the State Children's Rights Protection and Adoption Agency. The Agency ensures cooperation between state and municipal institutions, and establishments in the field of child welfare. For the purposes of tracking violations of children's rights in Lithuania, the Children's Rights Ombudsman Institution of the Republic of Lithuania was created. Municipal children's rights protection services organize preventive work with parents, consultations to parents, teachers, educators and children on issues of children's rights protection, guardianship, adoption and prevention of violations of children's rights.

3. In the field of children's rights protection subjectively most valued are efforts by public institutions which participate directly in the resolution of problematic situations, for example municipalities. Contributions of the Government, foster care establishments, schools, non-governmental organisations, guardians (other than relatives), neighbours of risk families and even relatives are regarded as less significant.

4. Analysis of the situation among Lithuanian children at risk of losing parental care has shown that all children falling into this group receive social care. Almost half of them are provided information, mediation, individual and group consultations by different specialists. However, services of parenting training, activities of building mutual relationships or organisation of self-help groups are essentially not provided or provided very rarely. Noticeably less common are services of summer camps, field trips and other events, individual and group consultations with different specialists.

5. Most frequently, children without parental care receive the following services: support with educational and school supplies, support with food products, activities in child day care centres.

6. Social risk families should continue to receive information and social supervision. Additionally, the following activities should be organized: individual and group consultations with different specialists, parenting education, building mutual relationships.

7. To ensure that children without parental care or at risk of losing parental care in the future grow up in a harmonious environment, development of summer camps, field trips and other events should be continued and financial support given: support with food products, medicines, educational and school supplies. Moreover, the following services should also be developed: individual and group consultations to children held by different specialists, group and individual child development activities, activities in child day care centres. Specialized schools are required for children with special needs.

8. To ensure that social services provided to children and families in the target group are more effective, it is necessary to: avoid unprofessional behaviour, dogmatic approaches and rash decisions by specialists; encourage parents to be responsible for their child or children rather than passing the responsibility onto other people or institutions; encourage social risk families not to abuse the services they receive; encourage society not to judge social risk families and instead support them so that children remain with their families.

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VAIKŲ, NETEKUSIŲ TĖVŲ GLOBOS ARBA GALINČIŲ JĄ PRARASTI, TEISIŲ ĮGYVENDINIMO PROBLEMAS LIETUVOJE

Vida Česnuitytė

Mykolo Romerio universitetas

Dr. Laima Okunevičiūtė-Neverauskienė

Vilniaus Gedimino technikos universitetas

Santrauka

Straipsnio tikslas – apžvelgti vaikų, netekusių tėvų globos arba galinčių jos netekti, teisių įgyvendinimo Lietuvoje analizės rezultatus. Tėvų globos netekusių arba galinčių jos netekti vaikų teisių būklės Lietuvoje analizei atlikti taikyti tyrimo metodai: ekspertų apklausa ir fokus grupė. Lietuvoje vaiko teisės dažniausiai pažeidžiamos esant tarpusavyje susijusių problemų kompleksui: bent vieno iš tėvų piktnaudžiavimas alkoholiu, psichologinis ir fizinis smurtas šeimoje, bent vieno iš tėvų bedarbiškumas, tėvų skurdas. Pagrindinės problemos ir barjerai, dėl kurių institucijos negali efektyviai įgyvendinti vaikų, netekusių tėvų globos arba galinčių jos netekti, teisių, subjektyviai vertinant, yra: profesionalių specialistų stoka; nepakankamai išplėtotą infrastruktūrą; visuomenės vertybinės nuostatos. Siekiant užtikrinti tikslinės grupės vaikų teises tikslinga plėtoti tokias palaugas: individualias ir grupines įvairių specialistų konsultacijas vaikams; grupinius ir individualius vaikų ugdymo užsiėmimus; užimtumą vaikų dienos centruose. Socialinės rizikos šeimoms toliau turėtų būti teikiamos informavimo bei socialinės priežiūros paslaugos. Papildomai reikėtų organizuoti: individualių ir įvairių specialistų grupinių konsultacijų paslaugas; tėvystės įgūdžių mokymus; tarpusavyje santykių formavimo užsiėmimus. Siekiant, kad tikslinės grupės vaikams ir šeimoms teikiamos socialinės paslaugos būtų efektyvesnės reikėtų: vengti specialistų neprofesionalumo, kategorizavimo, skubotų sprendimų; skatinti tėvus prisiimti atsakomybę už savo vaiką(-us), neperkelti jos kitoms asmenims arba institucijoms; skatinti socialinės rizikos šeimas nepiknaudžiauti joms teikiama paslaugomis; skatinti visuomenę nesmerkti socialinės rizikos šeimų, o bandyti joms padėti, kad vaikai nebūtų paimti iš šeimos.

Pagrindinės sąvokos: vaiko teisės, tėvų globos netekę vaikai, galintys netekti tėvų globos vaikai.