

Introduction

The **Latvia Human Development Report 2002/2003** is about human security – a theme never comprehensively addressed in any publication in Latvia and crucial for understanding the state of human development.

As a result of Latvia's transition from Soviet occupation to independence, from oppressive rule to democracy, and from a State-run economy to a market economy, the inhabitants of Latvia have experienced substantial changes in their lives over the last fifteen years. While these changes have led to the country's rapid, but at times erratic economic growth, the accompanying polarization of society is a serious concern that current and future governments will have to address.

The opening of international borders, along with the ease of access to means of communication and sources of information, has generated new opportunities for people to interface with a seemingly wider world. At the same time, individuals have had to become more competitive in a changing job market, and adapt to fundamental changes in the country's health and social care system. The fall of the Soviet regime resulted in new types of relations between the government and society, and between the government and the individual. People who had been expected to rely on the government for essential goods and services are now compelled to rely more on themselves.

Many people in Latvia have viewed these changes as opportunities. They have pro-actively taken measures

to increase their well-being and that of those around them. These people have a high degree of *securitability*, meaning that they can easily return to a sense of security after exposure to insecure situations without experiencing serious anxiety or other severe consequences.

Those who exhibit a low degree of *securitability* generally see changes as threats and are unable to act decisively for their own benefit. Feelings of insecurity interfere with their ability to cope with, prevent or mitigate the risks associated with change.

A combination of certain factors analyzed in this **Report** may result in severe or chronic insecurity. The consequences of such insecurity may be anxiety, depression or other stress-related illnesses. These may be accompanied by a diminished awareness of one's personal liberty, a reduction in one's ability to make choices, a loss of trust in others, and the failure to perceive a sense of meaning in one's life.

When part of a country's population suffers from insecurity, the entire nation also suffers and is restricted in its capacity to develop. Currently it is impossible to establish how many people in Latvia feel extremely insecure, and it is impossible to measure precisely the degree of security or insecurity that people feel, since the perception of security changes from day to day based on individual factors, external events and perceptions of actual and possible events. However, it is necessary to acknowledge and deal with these perceptions and the issues that cause them, as well as to analyze the anatomy of human security.

Why study human security in Latvia?

- To strengthen the capacity of Latvia's inhabitants to cope with change;
- To increase the *securitability* of the people of Latvia (i.e. their capacity to be and to feel secure);
- To encourage individuals, society and the State to be pro-active in preventing situations in which people might reach critical thresholds of insecurity;
- To explore ways in which individuals, society and the State can cooperate in increasing *securitability* in the country.

Latvia is on the threshold of European Union membership. As global citizens, the people of Latvia are likely to continue to encounter momentous changes. The ability of the country as a whole to anticipate and deal constructively with these changes will depend on each and every individual's ability to maintain high levels of *securitability*.

As Latvia's social structure changed in the 1990s, many people developed skills to ensure their own security and learned to cope with insecure situations. However, certain people continue to suffer from anxiety and other consequences of insecurity because they have lacked access to resources that could help them to develop such skills, because surrounding conditions have not provided them with visible opportunities to increase their well-being, and because some of their *securitability factors* are weak.

The number of people experiencing a high degree of insecurity in Latvia must be reduced. Widespread insecurity affects not only the insecure, but also those around them. It influences successive generations, and is slowing Latvia's rate of *human development*. Individuals must acquire an increased ability to take action. The State must stimulate the enhancement of *securitability factors* as well as prevent insecurity in realms that are within its purview and beyond individual control. It is the responsibility of the government to forestall the development of conditions in which certain groups of people fall below a critical security threshold.

Aims of the Report

The main objective of this **Report** is to encourage initiatives that would decrease the high levels of insecurity experienced by wide segments of the population in Latvia and to increase the *securitability* of society as a whole. The **Report** urges both the people and the government to develop the ability to act appropriately for dealing with potentially insecure life situations.

The Report will have achieved its objectives if within two years of its publication:

- People in Latvia become familiar with the notion of *human security* and have an opinion on how to reduce their levels of insecurity;
- Readers of the **Report** will find the information it conveys relevant to enhancing their own and their families' and other peoples' capacity to reduce, prevent, and overcome insecurity;

- People will improve their social networking environment to increase their security;
- Policymakers, politicians and civil servants will see human security as a crucial consideration in policy planning.

As a result, the population's ability to increase its sense of security and state of security and to cope with insecure circumstances will have increased. At the same time, the government's ability to address issues related to insecurity will have been enhanced.

To achieve these goals, the **Report**:

- Provides an overview of the human security situation in Latvia;
- Identifies the main perceived risks to the security of the people of Latvia in 2002/2003;
- Highlights the determining characteristics of individuals who risk falling below a security threshold and the consequences of extreme insecurity;
- Identifies *securitability factors* and provides recommendations on how to enhance them.

A detailed analysis of the main perceived risks to people's security is not within the scope of this **Report**. Each concern deserves consideration in its own right and one limited **Report** would not do justice to all of the issues. A person with a high degree of *securitability* will read potential threats as early warning signals and develop strategies to prevent, mitigate and/or cope with them.

The development of the concept of *securitability* is the main contribution of this **Report** to a growing global discussion on the nature of human security. The word *securitability* (*drošumspēja*) was developed by this **Report's** Latvian authors and has no direct equivalent in the English language. It is defined as "a set of thoughts, feelings and behaviours that allow a person to feel secure and return to a sense of security following any type of insecure situation." *Securitability* prevents a person from sliding under a critical *security threshold*. This security threshold is the level below which an individual feels helpless in dealing with a given situation. He or she experiences trauma and depression, develops an addiction or addictive behaviour as a maladaptive attempt to cope, and may even attempt to suicide. This Latvian **Report** is unique among studies on human security by postulating the existence of five basic *securitability factors*, which are instrumental in helping people to improve both their actual state and sense of security.

The importance of a sense of security

The success of Latvia as a constituent member of the European Union will depend on the ability of Latvia's State structures, organizations and individuals to work in a constructive, pro-active manner on issues of concern at the national, European and global levels. The State owes it to its people to deal with issues of human security, but it is just as much the individual's responsibility to take the initiative and enhance the security of his or her surrounding environment.

In 1991, while standing guard on barricades to prevent Soviet troops from entering Riga, their capital city, the people of Latvia were united. They were in real physical danger, but felt secure in their determination to achieve the peaceful restoration of their

country's independence. A common expression during this independence struggle was: "We want our freedom, even if we have to walk in leather sandals to get it" (meaning that people were willing to endure economic hardship to obtain their country's sovereignty).

The chain of events since then has led to the polarization of society and to a rise in the number of people experiencing poverty. Economically deprived individuals are among some of the most insecure people in Latvia, but there are many others as well. This **Report** encourages those who are active and reasonably able to ensure their own security to transfer their *securitability factors* to those with a high sense of insecurity. It also seeks to help those experiencing high levels of insecurity to find a way forward. Both measures are necessary for the nation as a whole, so that everyone in Latvia can continue along the path of human development.