Annex IV: Country Information

Each of the reports is based on a combination of data derived from the following sources:

- Interviews with 2 respondents-HRAW leaders or informed observers of NGO landscape from a particular country. In total 21 interviews were held during February, March, April 2010 with respondents from 10 countries. Each interview was recorded and transcribed without attribution;
- Research of literature, publications and reports on the NGO sustainability, situation in the area of human rights, accountability and watchdog as well as about funding of NGOs;
- Web-search of sites of HRAWs and donor organizations relevant to the subject of the study.

At the beginning of each report we provide a summary of key human rights, accountability and watchdog issues that are relevant for a given country. These are based on various reports of international and domestic organizations that monitor the situation. The list of issues provides a context for the need of activities performed by the HRAWs. The list of selected HRAWs with their short description comes next and provides the reader with a sense of who are the major HRAW NGO actors in a given country. Lists are not exhaustive, but to some degree representative.

The next section in a country report looks at the sustainability situation of HRAWs and presents the key challenges and issues that these organizations face. The information in this section is based mostly on the analysis of conducted interviews.

The final section deals with the funding sources, both existing and potential ones and analyzes them from the perspective of HRAWs.

Given a very heterogeneous and to some extent incomplete information, it was not possible to formulate conclusions for each country, however for some countries we offer summary of findings and conclusions, especially when the available data allowed us to do so.

Each report also includes the list of resources and publications used, a list of HRAW web addresses and list of respondents without identification.

5.1 Latvia

1. Human Rights, Accountability and Watchdog Issues

According to the US State Department 2009 report the human rights issues in Latvia included:

- serious police abuse of detainees and arrestees;
- poor conditions at police detention facilities, and over-crowding in prisons;
- judicial corruption;
- violence against women and child abuse;
- trafficking in persons;
- abusive behavior targeting ethnic and racial minorities that involves hate speech on the Internet¹.

Additional Latvia-specific issues of a concern relate to the status of non-citizens including stateless persons, majority of whom were born in Latvia or lived there for most of their lives. According to the

¹ http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2009/eur/136040.htm
Amnesty International report in 2009 about 400,000 people remained stateless, leaving them exposed to various forms of discrimination, e.g. participation in political processes, rights to employment in civil service and private sector, or restricted abilities on property ownership. Apart from this, migrants and Roma were victims of discrimination and racially motivated attacks. Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people also faced discrimination².

Despite recent improvements in corruption perception according to Transparency International Corruption Perception Index 2009, Latvia still ranks low among other new EU member countries, equal to Slovakia and followed by Romania and Bulgaria³.

2. Key Human Rights, Accountability and Watchdog NGOs

Some of the HRAW NGOs include:

- Latvian Center for Human Rights⁴ (LCHR) was established in 1993 to promote human rights and tolerance in Latvia through monitoring, research, advocacy, legal assistance and training activities. LCHR main focus is human rights in closed institutions, and social integration, including all minority-related and tolerance issues. LCHR staff lawyer provides free-of-charge legal assistance to individuals with human rights cases. LCHR publishes a Human Rights Report about the main developments and problems of the previous year in Latvia, which attracts significant media and public attention. The LCHR is actively involved in advocacy for change, ranging from raising public awareness to specific policy and legislative change. The NGO funds its activities mostly from foreign sources, the EU, the OSI network and foreign government sources, e.g. embassies, bilateral programs.

- Latvian Human Rights Committee⁵ was founded in 1990. LHCR deals with social, economical and minority rights. It provides assistance to people that faced or face problems such as social security, dwelling issues, residence permits, receiving personal identification documents, acknowledging citizenship of Latvia. LHCR publishes reports on human rights in Latvia and its members have led legal cases before international human rights institutions. LHRC is a member of international human rights organizations FIDH⁶, UNITED⁷, ENAR⁸ and AEDH⁹.

- Transparency International – Latvia (DELNA)¹⁰ was established in 1998 as a Latvian chapter of the global anti-corruption movement. Its mission is to promote formation of a democratic society that is free of corruption in politics, business and mutual relations. TI Latvia maintains leading positions in the publicity index and is considered a trustworthy source of information. TI Latvia demands accountability from public institutions and officials. It started a public debate about regulating political party financing, was involved in preventing illegal construction in the dunes area of the Baltic Sea. TI Latvia covers issues of freedom of information, political party financing, business ethics, misuse of state administrative resources, prevention of illegal construction, territorial

⁴ http://www.humanrights.org.lv
⁵ http://www.rakurs.lv/fidh1/?lang=en
⁶ International Federation of Human Rights, http://www.fidh.org/-english-
⁸ European Network Against Racism, http://www.enar-eu.org/
¹⁰ http://www.delna.lv
planning, conflicts of interest of public officials, state and municipal procurement and other public watchdog functions.

- Center for Public Policy – Providus\textsuperscript{11} was established at the end of 2002 by the Soros Foundation-Latvia and several individuals and has since developed as the leading think-tank in Latvia. PROVIDUS mission is to facilitate comprehensive policy change in areas important for Latvia’s development. It also provides expertise to other countries undergoing democratic transformation. PROVIDUS is both a source of expertise and an “agent of change” in good governance, including anti-corruption, criminal justice policy, tolerance and inclusive public policy, European policy. It also provides institutional home for the largest on-line policy resource in Latvia – politika.lv. PROVIDUS has 18 full and part-time employees. Its main sources of funding come mostly from foreign resources (OSI network, foundations and EU and foreign public sources).

- There are also other NGOs that deal with specific issues. For example, Apeirons\textsuperscript{12} is concerned with persons with physical disabilities; Marta\textsuperscript{13} focuses on protecting women's rights, Zelda\textsuperscript{14} focuses on persons with mental disability.

3. Situation of the HRAW NGOs and their Sustainability

In 2008 USAID rated Latvia as a country where NGOs' sustainability is consolidated and the country gets similar ranking in a number of indicators as Lithuania and follows Estonia which, based on these index rankings, is the Baltic leader.\textsuperscript{15}

Freedom House in its 2009 report mentions that the NGO activity is “in a state of flux because of the loss of financing by foreign donors and reorientation to self-sustainability. Government funding and especially seed money to access European Union (EU) funds have provided some relief …. Latvian NGOs face many problems besides financing. Organizational capacity is low. Most NGOs are small groups composed of about two dozen individuals who often lack basic training in financial, legal, administrative, and public relations skills. They greatly depend on part-time volunteers who do not have the time or energy to plan and focus on long-term strategies. Even those organizations with paid staff often find themselves tied to specific projects rather than having a continuous source of personnel financing. As one activist claimed, this “Russian roulette” financing militated against long-term planning.”\textsuperscript{16}

The two key factors that seem to shape the sustainability situation of Latvian HRAW NGOs are the financial resources and human resources.

In terms of the public interest NGOs, in which HRAW NGOs shall be included, their financial situation has been worsening since accession to the EU. The initial impetus and excitement after the entry was followed by the challenges in securing funding from the EU sources and in competing with more developed NGOs from abroad. The capacity of the HRAW NGOs has not been sustained over time, i.e. retaining and developing permanent staff became very difficult.

“…the human resources, the ability to retain staff is very tied to the finance, it’s something that cripples many NGOs” (a Latvian NGO representative).

Similarly as in other countries, this has been partly solved by orientation towards project funding, which

\textsuperscript{11} http://www.providus.lv
\textsuperscript{12} http://www.apeirons.lv
\textsuperscript{13} http://www.marta.lv
\textsuperscript{14} http://www.zelda.org.lv
\textsuperscript{16} The rating for civil society remains at 1.75 according to the Freedom House, Nations in Transit, Country Report, 2008, Latvia.
allowed these organizations to maintain some capacity, although, not allowing them for increasing their specialisation, quality and expertise. The funding problems were aggravated by the fiscal crisis in Latvia in 2008/2009.

Many of these NGOs are personality driven, which weakens their sustainability. The committed individuals among staff, volunteers, experts are an important asset of HRAW NGOs in Latvia and keeps these organizations alive. At the same time they contribute to risk that organizations will decline once these staff discontinue their affiliation with the organization. This example is symptomatic to a situation in the broader region of CEE, where HRAW NGOs are able to shape and step into policy discourses with significant impact, but that happens often with very inadequate organizational setting and support.

4. Overall funding situation in particular for HRAW NGOs.

The funding situation of NGOs in Lithuania is considered by the 2008 USAID NGO Sustainability Index as still in transition and slightly deteriorating due to the impacts of the financial crisis on the Latvian economy. The crisis affected government funding for NGOs, which seems to hit the sector harder, than in neighboring Lithuania or Estonia. This was confirmed through interviews with Latvian HRAW NGOs.

For the HRAW NGOs the funding situation has been deteriorating and different sources report almost full reliance on international funding. The fact, that majority of funding of HRAW NGOs is of foreign origin has some advantages – one of them is that it allows the HRAW NGOs to maintain their independent stance vis-à-vis governmental institutions in Latvia.

HRAW NGOs in Latvia draw their resources primarily from traditional donors, such as Open Society Institute and its network members or from the EU originated funding – mostly from Brussells based (DGs) or with co-funding from national sources.

The EU funding from the Commission includes different calls for proposals from various DGs and their agencies. They represent an important source of income of the HRAW NGOs in Latvia. This type of funding seems to have two secondary effects.

1) Oftentimes these funds stimulate their recipients to intensify their involvement with cooperating partners from other European countries, which is considered as a good practice in general and it opens the perspective to a broader European level dialogue. The negative aspect of this is that the HRAW NGOs have less capacity to address domestic issues in such scope and quality as it would be needed.

2) Second, these partnerships are often only project based and do not develop into longer-term or sustainable relationships.

Nevertheless, this funding is considered as useful as it allows to human rights NGOs to fully exert their independence in their judgements towards domestic issues. Similar to the EU funding, there are also some smaller funding opportunities within other intergovernmental cooperation entities such as the Nordic Council or the Council of the Baltic Sea States.

The decreased national funding for national issues (i.e. in-country activities) is also reflected by the

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17 Interview with HRAW NGO.
18 Information in the section is based on interviews with Latvian HRAW NGO representatives and reports of HRAW NGOs.
19 Interviews with Latvian HRAW NGO representatives, February, March 2010
20 http://www.cbss.org
decreased ability of NGOs to address national issues more intensively, which are – as it is shown in the beginning of this chapter – still very relevant and important for the Latvian society.

The role of private donations (individuals and corporate) in HRAW NGOs funding portfolio is insignificant. The NGOs are eligible for acquiring a public benefit statues allowing tax deductions on donations from taxpayers. The orientation of corporate contributions is primarily on such issues such as children, health, handicapped, etc.

Some NGOs are able to generate a more than just insignificant share of income from their service provision, but that relates more to education, training and consulting work in the policy area, rather than in the area of watchdog, human rights and accountability.

There is public funding available from government sources, however, HRAW NGOs feel that this funding limits them in their independent stance on various domestic issues. In this category one may include also the Social Integration Fund, Norwegian Financial Mechanism and Swiss Financial Mechanism, that are operated by national agencies. There are reports that these funding schemes are quite bureaucratic and demanding in terms of reporting.

Funding from the EU structural funds, for example from the European Social Fund, has not been relevant for human right or watchdog activities. There are no signs of using revenues from privatisation or from lottery funds.

5. Potential funding for HRAW NGOs

The potential of private sector for supporting NGOs is not disputed, however, it is not perceived as realistic in any near future. It is unlikely that it may replace public funding for HRAW NGOs, mainly due to the fact that the issues that HRAW NGOs deal with are controversial and uneasy for local philanthropic culture.

There is a shared view that the long term answer to the financial problems of public interest NGOs is perceived to be the domestic funding. Unfortunately, there are no specific potential sources that would be opening up in Latvia beyond the existing ones, based on the reports from the HRAW NGOs and from the research from other sources. One of the key strategies in this regards is to influence general public opinion, so that it will create a greater support and backing up for these NGOs. One of the responents estimated that these efforts, if taken in effective manner, may bring fruit after 10 years or more.

Due to the recent fiscal crisis in Latvia, fiscal regulations have been changing in a fast pace, which theoretically may represent an opportunity to work towards a more stimulating tax environment for private giving, as one respondent noted. This remains a speculative option, as there are no signs of such initiative reported.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

The situation of HRAW NGOs in Latvia is similar to other countries in the nearer region of Baltic countries – Lithuania and Estonia. HRAW activities are important, however, without backing from the broader population. There is a limited understanding of the role of such organizations in the government as well. The funding base of HRAW NGOs is almost fully foreign based, which allows for reasonable independence

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21 Interview with latvian NGO representative, March 2010
regarding domestic issues, but at the same time makes these organizations' vulnerable to changing donors' priorities.

Good practice is seen in active involvement in international human rights and good governance networks that increase options as well as in use of domestic networks of experts and volunteers. Sometimes this also dilutes the capacity of these organizations to issues that are not in their primary focus.

It is very likely, that HRAW NGOs in Latvia, similarly as in other countries of the region will continue to use variety of opportunities to use funding for their purposes, however, their internal challenges such as the dependency on several personalities will change very slowly. It is important for the sector to ensure the long-term quality of HRAW staff and their development.

Given this situation, it is not surprising that there is a general view that foreign funding will be for the time being the only realistic funding available for the human rights and watchdog activities in Latvia. In line with this thought, one of the respondents suggested that for HRAW NGOs in the region it would be useful to establish some sort of regional grant competition from EU resources for particularly human rights organizations and watchdog NGOs on the regional Baltic level. This proposal has been mentioned only as an idea without any further assessment of its feasibility.

### 5.2 Latvia: Sources

#### A. List of Selected HRAW NGOs

- Center for Public Policy – Providus, [www.providus.lv](http://www.providus.lv),
- Transparency International – Latvia (DELNA), [www.delna.lv](http://www.delna.lv)
- Apeirons – Organization of People with Disabilities and their Friends, [www.apeirons.lv](http://www.apeirons.lv)
- Marta – The Resource Center for Women, [www.marta.lv](http://www.marta.lv)
- Zelda – The Resource Center for People with Mental Disability, [www.zelda.org.lv](http://www.zelda.org.lv)
- Civic Alliance – Latvia (CAL), [www.nvo.lv](http://www.nvo.lv)

#### B. Literature and Resources

1) Interview with human rights NGO director, February 2010
2) Interview with observer of the NGO scene, March 2010
6) http://www.cbss.org (Council of Baltic Sea States)
7) http://www.zelda.org.lv
8) http://www.apeirons.lv
9) http://www.marta.lv