

Human security and human development in Latvia – a review in 2014

Political and economic background:

The UN Office in Latvia closed in 2004-5, when Latvia joined the EU. Several of the initiatives started during UNDP and UN tenure in Latvia have continued, showing that countries which “graduate” out of programme country status, do continue and deepen conceptual and policy approaches that had initially evolved in the UN context.

Latvia was battered in 2008-2011 by the global economic and financial crisis; in 2009 GDP decreased by 18% and unemployment tripled within the same year. Government salaries were slashed, many officials were laid off. The country nearly defaulted as a result of its overexposure to foreign banks, but for political reasons wished to meet its commitments for Euro accession in 2014, thus leading to harsh austerity measures to meet the 3% deficit ceiling requirement. Views on the appropriateness and effectiveness of the policies adopted vary. See for example Gabriele Giudice et al, *The other perspective* http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/events/2012/2012-03-01-ly_seminar/pdf/fiscal_consolidation_inthe_en.pdf versus Jeffrey Sommers and Charles Woolfson, eds, *The Contradictions of Austerity*, Routledge 2014.

Some of the ideas developed, in Latvia and internationally, on human security thus resonate strongly in Latvia. The country has in the recent past experienced massive outmigration, and at this moment – similar to Poland, Estonia and Lithuania - feels at least indirectly threatened in its national sovereignty by the annexation of Crimea and subsequent events in Ukraine.

The following gives some examples of ongoing work in Latvia in the areas of human security and human development.

Human security in policymaking and NGO work:

At the applied policy level, the Latvian parliament, the Saeima, in 2012 adopted the *National Development Plan of Latvia 2014-2020* (NDP2020) which has “human securitability (a form of resilience)” as one of three priority areas (the others being “Growth of the National Economy” and “Growth for Regions” (see http://www.pkc.gov.lv/images/NAP2020_dokumenti/NDP2020_English_Final.pdf). The fiscal allocation for 2014-2016 for human security-related ministerial programmes and tax incentives is over 500 million EUR; additionally, approximately 900 million EUR are being programmed from EU structural funds in 2014-2020 to meet the priority securitability goals. This is a major achievement in terms of operationalising policy and its coordination, and is a noteworthy success for the securitability concept.¹ The Plan was prepared by the Cross-Sectoral Coordination Centre (CCSC) of the Prime Minister’s Office with Mara Simane as the lead advisor. The CCSC continuously monitors all policy papers presented to Cabinet to ensure that they are in tune with the NDP2020.

To follow up on implementation of the *Plan* across various ministries, experts meet to exchange experiences; in May 2014, the Cross-Sectoral Coordination Centre convened a government round table with officials from the Ministry of Justice; the State Employment Agency; the Ministry of Welfare; and others. It was covered by the Latvian press agency LETA – showing its significance.

A handbook on securitability, highlighting activities to empower families with children and poor family skills was published in 2014 by researchers at Vidzeme University of Applied Scientists and the Ministry of Welfare. A Handbook for Human Security for Community Groups and NGOs is in the pipeline, led by the Latvian Platform for Development Cooperation (LAPAS), which plans to use it both for domestic and development cooperation purposes.

¹ The concept of securitability roughly corresponds to the concept of resilience, as presented in the forthcoming UNDP 2014 *Human Development Report. Vulnerability and Resilience*.

Human security research:

Human security research is underway at the University of Latvia Advanced Social and Political Research Institute (ASPRI), headed by Dr Jānis Ikstens, and at a newly created Center for Strategic Studies, directed by Professor Zaneta Ozolina.

The University of Latvia and Vidzeme University of Applied Science both had four-year Latvian government research grants to study human security. This resulted in many publications at both institutions, with a large group of researchers engaged in the topic.

Several volumes have been published, including Zaneta Ozolina, editor, *Cilvēkdrošība Latvijā un pasaulē: no idejas līdz praksei* (Human security in Latvia and the World: from the idea to practice). Rīga: Zinātne, 2012. ISBN 978-9984-879-32-1. Copy available on http://gabrielekoehler.net/Data/Sites/1/userfiles/cilvekdrosiba_labots-2.pdf.

In 2012, University of Latvia researchers replicated the 2002 human security survey which was the basis of the UNDP *Latvia Human Development Report 2003/4 on Human Security*. The results of the 2012 survey are published in the volume above, see Zaneta Ozolina and Mara Simane. *Latvijas iedzīvotāju subjektīvais skatījums uz cilvēkdrošību*, op. cit. pp 60 – 72. (It would be useful if this were translated into English!).

New research on expanding the concept and examining human security policy applications was launched at a regional conference in May 2014: Human Security and Gender in the Baltic Sea Region, led by Professor Zaneta Ozolina and Dr Gunda Reire, with a regional and international group of researchers. The book will be launched by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in early 2015 in connection with Latvia's EU Presidency.

Human development research

Regarding the concept of human development, the University of Latvia Advanced Social and Political Research Institute (ASPRI) has been publishing Latvia Human Development Reports biennially since 2006. The University had won the UNDP competition in 2004 for the right to continue publishing a national HDR autonomously when UNDP left Latvia in 2004/5. The Latvian Human Development Report 2014 is entitled *Sustainability of the Nation* – addressing to the impact of outmigration from Latvia in the wake of the global financial crisis and the ensuing massive recession in Latvia. The editor in chief is Dr. Baiba Bela. See the website <http://www.lu.lv/eng/research/projects/other-projects/human-development-report-project/>.

Human development concept in practice

The American Chamber of Commerce in early 2014 created a Human Development Award for NGOs, businesses and citizens in four categories – health, education, CSR, and the future of Latvia. There was an open competition with 60 applicants applying, 16 of whom were shortlisted, with four receiving the award. At the Awards Ceremony, the Prime Minister of Latvia, Mme Straujuma, delivered the keynote address. Possibly, this type of civil society-based human development award is unique in the world.

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