***UN Working Group***

***On discrimination against women and girls***

*Answers of the Republic of Latvia to the information request*

***I. Nature, modalities and trends of girls’ and young women’s activism***

The Constitution of Latvia provides that all human beings in Latvia shall be equal before the law and the courts. Human rights shall be realised without discrimination of any kind. The prohibition of differential treatment regardless of gender is furthermore enshrined in the Latvian legislation. For example, the Labour Law of Latvia, regulating employment relationship, the Education Law, regulating rights for education, and the Criminal Law that foresees criminal liability for infringement of the prohibition of discrimination.

In 2021, the Government of Latvia adopted the plan developed by the Ministry of Welfare *On the Promotion of Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men 2021-2023*. The aim of the plan is to ensure an integrated, targeted and effective policy that promotes equal rights and opportunities for women and men. Measures to promote girls' leadership skills are included, as well as measures that emphasize gender equality for young people in general. One of the actions of the plan is to strengthen gender mainstreaming in sectoral policies, which would promote gender mainstreaming in various policy areas and levels, as well as the visibility of women and girls in decision-making and activism.

***II. Enabling factors and good practices***

National Centre for Education (VISC**)** in cooperation with the British Council Latvia and supported by the SEB bank and various other partners implemented an experience based and role-model led leadership and entrepreneurship development programme *Future Heroes* (October 2020 - March 2021). *Future Heroes* is a growth mindset-driven leadership and entrepreneurship programme for girls aged 14 -17 to unlock their potential and create positive impact in the world.

- **47 girls from various parts of Latvia** graduated the programme in June 2021.

- Through the **10 skills workshops** facilitated by well-established experts and leading field professionals Future Heroes programme’s participants have developed such personal and professional skills and competences as leadership, entrepreneurship, design and critical thinking, problem-solving, media literacy, presentation, idea creation, digital and online communication skills, financial skills, project management skills, teamwork, English language, etc.

- Through **the team project work** the young leaders had a chance to put the acquired skills to practice and learn by doing, to take responsibility, to think strategically, as well as learn from their mentors and from the challenges in communication and project management, at the same time raising awareness and making change by solving various aspects of local community life.

- Through **inspirational speeches** presented by role-models and opinion leaders, and the following discussions participants have increased their understanding of such values as respect, responsibility, diversity, integrity, open-mindedness, honesty, self-discipline, leadership, one’s own potential, etc. which could already be observed during the implementation of team projects.

- Programme’s participants represent diverse linguistic communities (Latvian, Russian and Estonian language speakers); they are from cities, small towns and rural areas from all over Latvia, including from socially deprived areas with very little opportunities for growth and development; they come from families of various social backgrounds.

Together they implemented ten team projects around common agendas and engaged in discussions and workshops facilitated in English language thus building bridges for open, honest, trustful and respectful value-based collaboration.

By organising various activities and events (Zoom lectures/discussions with role-models and experts, charity events, openings of community fridge chain, social actions, interactive quizzes/tests, podcasts, hand-made game, etc.) the young leaders:

* Identified, raised awareness and provided advice on various problems and challenges specific to adolescents, such as social anxiety, mental health, healthy lifestyle, etc.;
* Offered various support mechanisms, such as the circulation of unused food through the creation of community refrigerator chains, and the promotion of eco-products from local small producers;
* Developed understanding of such concepts and issues as the effect of glass ceiling, how to better engage in dialogue with deaf and low hearing people, the possibilities of reusing jeans, the positive impact of electric cars on the environment, as well as other environmental issues, their impact and solutions.

In this way, the Future Heroes programme has contributed to supporting the growth of a new brave generation of ethical, confident, inclusive, diverse and socially aware future leaders, as well as to promoting cross-community social cohesion. They have gained knowledge, skills and experience in entrepreneurship, project management, active citizenship empowered through coaching and mentoring, as well as engaging in diverse collaboration with peers and local communities.

Currently, girls aged 14-17 are invited to apply for the second round of programme *Future Heroes*, which will be implemented from **October 2021 to March 2022.** The programme will consist of 8 workshops, all held in English and free of charge. It aims to **empower the next generation of female leaders and change-makers** by equipping them with a unique voice and will, increased self-awareness, confidence, empathy and resilience, as well as by developing their life skills - leadership, entrepreneurship, decision-making and problem-solving, financial, digital and media literacy.