

PROHIBITION AGAINST PHYSICAL AND HUMILIATING PUNISHMENT IN LITHUANIA



Save the Children



Photo: Mats Lignell/Save the Children

In February 2017, the Lithuanian Parliament – the Seimas – passed amendments to the Law on the Fundamentals of Protection of the Rights of the Child 1996. The reform makes Lithuania the 52nd state worldwide to prohibit corporal punishment of children in all settings and the 22nd European Union state to do so. All the Baltic states have now achieved a legal prohibition.

Save the Children Lithuania played a very important role in the long process towards the ban, which started 26 years ago, but intensified in the last ten years. Save the Children Sweden supported Gelbekit Vaikus (Save the Children Lithuania) since its foundation in 1991 and has worked together with Save the Children Lithuania to prohibit physical and humiliating punishment in the country since 2008.

Since physical and humiliating punishment is a sensitive issue in the country, Save the Children Lithuania chose a different strategy to tackle the problem: by starting to combat bullying in schools, which is far less sensitive than issues concerning the family. The work against bullying was carried out within the framework of the programme “Friends Across Borders”, which was based on the principles of democracy, including equality and the respect for other people and their opinions. The programme, which also included Estonia and Latvia, turned out to be very successful. Save the Children Sweden contributed with financial and thematic support and a consultant sharing knowledge and experiences from municipalities’ work against bullying in Sweden. It soon became evident that working against violence in schools required not only the participation of school staff and children, it was also crucial to involve parents, opening the door for stronger advocacy on physical and humiliating punishment in the home.

When the programme Friends Across Borders ended, Save the Children Sweden continued to support Lithuania financially. IKEA Foundation became one of the main donors of the new programme, which was partly based on the experiences from the Friends Across Borders Programme.

Save the Children Lithuania campaigned constantly for a legal prohibition of corporal punishment. The efforts were focused on communicating the negative effects of physical and humiliating punishment on the well-being of children, promoting the ideas of positive parenting as well as educating lawmakers and other decision-makers.

The final breakthrough came after Save the Children Lithuania started forming partnerships with newly-elected Members of Parliament, a younger generation of lawmakers who agreed that physical and humiliating punishment must finally come to an end.



We have worked and waited ten years for the approval of this law. Finally, we have committed our younger generation to transmit values which we ourselves did not receive from our parents, but which are values that we, as responsible citizens of a democratic country, have nurtured in our hearts and heads. This change in the mindset of our society makes me especially happy. We have turned a page on a new chapter in the history of Lithuania's children.

Rasa Dicipetriene, CEO, Save the Children Lithuania

Children have not been actively involved in the process, but have been visible in the campaign through statistics. According to unofficial statistics, an estimated two-thirds of Lithuania's children are subject to some kind of violence by their parents, either physical or psychological. A critical moment of the campaign came from a tragic event that caused public outrage and forced the Lithuanian Parliament to bring up the topic of corporal punishment through a fast-track process.

The tragedy was a four-year-old boy who was beaten to death by his young parents for not knowing how to properly count from one to ten. The incident went viral through Lithuania's media. Save the Children Lithuania's CEO, Rasa Dicipetriene, was the main advocate towards ending corporal

punishment in the majority of the media reports emerging at the time. The boy became the poster child behind the law's inception and the incident finally opened the eyes of Lithuania's society.

Now that the law is in place, Save the Children Lithuania will be involved in the next key steps of raising awareness of the law, and encouraging citizens to report any suspicions of corporal punishment to the authorities. In parallel, meetings will be arranged with the Ministry of the Interior to ensure that police officers who respond to reports of abuse as well as judicial officials are educated about the law. Save the Children Lithuania will also be engaged in monitoring the situation by arranging for the collection of statistics.



After leaving aside the discussions and the disagreements, we will now take care of the implementation of the approved law, and this first and foremost means creating new services for families, and strengthening those already in place. We will foster a feeling of citizenship by observing and reporting inappropriate behaviours towards children, not just when we see it happen among our neighbours, but also in our own families. Frequently we will have to go the extra mile and, instead of reacting impulsively, solve issues with our children through communication. A lot of work lies ahead, but Lithuania's society is marching in the right direction.

Rasa Dicipetriene, CEO, Save the Children Lithuania

In an unofficial 2013 opinion poll that involved a nationally representative sample of more than 1000 parents between 18-75 year olds, 54,2 % said they had physically punished their children; 45,5 % thought all corporal punishment should be prohibited.

Source: <http://www.endcorporalpunishment.org/progress/country-reports/lithuania.html>