THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD
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REPORT ON THE SITUATION OF INFANT AND YOUNG CHILD FEEDING IN LITHUANIA

August 2013

Prepared by:
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Lithuania
This document has been sent to the highest authorities such as Seimas, Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education of the Republic of Lithuania, all Universities and Medical colleges and faculties of the country during the World Breastfeeding Week in 2011.

No any answer received or measures taken so far after two year.

We wish to share the document with the Committee on the Rights of the Child hoping that the Committee will be in a position to discuss some of these issues with the government and provide related recommendations.

Declaration on Breastfeeding Support and Related Issues in Lithuania

Vilnius, 26 July 2011

In Lithuania, executive health policy does not direct any attention towards an integral programme on protection, support and promotion of breastfeeding. Dissemination of evidence-unbased information and misleading advertising is the key reason for refraining from breastfeeding or choosing a comparatively short period of breastfeeding. Such information results in erroneous and health-harming attitudes among mothers, health specialists and the entire society as well as creates conditions for violations of international and national legislation and preconditions other problems pertaining to protection, support and promotion of breastfeeding:


Article 24 of the Convention of the Rights of the Child establishes that a child has the right to access the best health care. On the basis of recommendations offered by the World Health Organization (hereinafter — WHO) and the United Nations Children’s Fund (hereinafter — UNICEF), all progressive world countries unanimously agree that breastfeeding is the most appropriate and the least expensive method for health strengthening among newborns, infants and small children as it has a positive long-lasting effect on health for the entire duration of human life. Item e) of the Part 2 of the Article 24 provides that the states parties to the Convention shall inform all groups of the public — with a special focus on parents — regarding benefits of nursing as well as undertake developing related education.

Inpatient maternity institutions and primary health care facilities of Lithuania provide parents with small children with no appropriate information regarding breastfeeding; and consulting physicians do not encourage mothers to breastfeed due to subjective beliefs or a lack of required knowledge. As the provision of the aforementioned international piece of legislation is inappropriately implemented while no mechanisms exist for control of its implementation, a comparatively large number of

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1 Our organization received 1 answer from local authority - an information about plans to consider the declaration at new committee of breastfeeding support at Lithuania. NGO "Pradžių pradžia" delegated 1 member to the committee. There was 1 session at committee that consider to follow by declaration. No any real action has followed after that.
mothers continue refraining from or choose especially short periods of breastfeeding. Consequently, the right of children to access the best health care, which is established in the Convention on the Rights of the Child are constantly violated.

2. **Wasting the Lithuanian health care funds.**

Progressive countries are economically interested in promotion of breastfeeding as data of clinical researches conducted around the world have proven that bottle-feeding of newborns and infants has a negative impact on physical and mental health of children while mothers refraining from breastfeeding are more susceptible to various chronic diseases.

Thus, responsible state bodies that do not take action to encourage mothers to feed infants in a natural way, fail implementing public health strengthening actions based on disease prevention, which results in increased personal health care costs and sickness benefits, i.e. wasting of funds of the health system and the entire state.

3. **Defective system of qualifications for health care specialists.**

Part 1 of the Article 10 of the Law on the Medical Practice of the Republic of Lithuania as well as Part 3 of the Article 13 and Part 3 of the Article 14 of the *Law on Nursing and Obstetric Practices of the Republic of Lithuania* obligate medical doctors, general practice nurses and obstetricians to upgrade their professional qualifications as per procedure established by the Minister of Health. Currently, no substantial actions are taken to upgrade breastfeeding-related qualifications of paediatricians, neonatologists, family doctors and other medical professionals involved in health care of infants, children and mothers. Certain seminars on nutrition of infants and children for health care specialists are supported and organised by companies distributing breastmilk substitutes (formulas). Subsequently, inaccurate information is provided as well as arguments based on interpretations of subjective researches.

Furthermore, free means to encourage bottle-feeding are distributed (See ANNEX). This violates the *International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes* and Item 2 of the Order No V-612 of the Minister of Health on “Requirements of the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes in health care institutions” of 27 August 2004 (hereinafter — Requirements on the Marketing Code).

In case of health care professionals working with infants and children, the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Lithuania should establish the procedure and content of the mandatory breastfeeding and lactation management training that corresponds to contemporary research literature, recommendations of the WHO and the European Communities as well as the Requirements of the Marketing Code.

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2 Statistical data of research made at Health authority of Lithuania show that: just 30% of infant are breastfeed more than 0,5 year. For more see: [http://www.tavovaikas.lt/kudikis/mitvba-ir-sveikata/isaiskejo-kiek-sutaupo-seima-per-metus-maitinant-kudiki-krutimi.d?id=62015889](http://www.tavovaikas.lt/kudikis/mitvba-ir-sveikata/isaiskejo-kiek-sutaupo-seima-per-metus-maitinant-kudiki-krutimi.d?id=62015889)
4. **Violations of patient rights.**

Consultations of health care specialists provided to mothers on issues of breastfeeding and/or other types of feeding are to be regarded as personal health care services that aim to strengthen health of children and prevention of diseases (Part 2 of the Article 6.725 of the Civil Code of the Republic of Lithuania and Part 6 of Article 2 of the Law on Health System). As per Part 1 of Article 3 of the Law on the Rights of Patients and Compensation of Damages to their Health of the Republic of Lithuania, a patient has the right to high-quality health care services; and Part 3 of the Article 5 of the Law establishes that the patient (in this case — the representative of the patient, i.e. the mother) has the right to receive full information. The content of information provided to mothers regarding breastfeeding of children is established by Item 5 of the Requirements on the Marketing Code.

However, neither medical doctors nor other health specialists observe this provision in practice. As health care institutions provide incorrect or partial information regarding breastfeeding and alternative infant feeding methods, patient (children’s) rights to access high quality services are violated and the rights of patient representatives (mothers) to receive information are breeched. Control mechanisms should be established to avoid such violations, such as monitoring of indicators on breastfeeding initiations and complications at maternity institutions, changes in numbers of breastfeeding mothers, distribution of exclusive breastfeeding and mixed feeding; identification of influencing factors; analysis and continuous development of improvement measures. Furthermore, it is essential to ensure implementation of the Item 10 of the Requirements of the Marketing Code establishing the prohibition for health care professional and their family members to accept any material reward from producers or distributors of milk substitutes.

5. **Failure to ensure health care accessibility.**

Health of newborns is entrusted to neonatologists and paediatricians, while health of infants— to paediatricians and family doctors. However, in need of breastfeeding-related help, breastfeeding mothers are forced to address yet another specialist. Management of lactation is neither the field of neonatology, nor paediatric care or general practice. A breastfeeding woman cannot address a mammology specialist either as breastfeeding is not a breast diseases. In Lithuania, inpatient maternity institutions do not consult women post labour or discharged breastfeeding mothers. This indicates that accessibility to personal health care services for breastfeeding women is not sufficiently communicated and organised (Part 10 of Article 2 or the Law on Health System of the Republic of Lithuania).

Breastfeeding mothers have to be provided with a possibility to be referred to a breastfeeding and lactation management specialist. According to evidence-based recommendations, one qualified breastfeeding and lactation specialist should be available per one thousand of post-labour women. However, such speciality of medical practice and/or nursing is not provided for in legal documents. Subsequent to approval by the Minister of Health of curricula and respective medical norm — that would be drafted and agreed with higher education institutions that would train such specialists and/or a respective professional association — the list of types of professional qualifications of
medical practice or the list of specialised fields of nursing could be supplemented with an a new area of medical practice or nursing (Item 2.4 of the Order No V-469 of the Minister of Health on “Approval of the list of types of professional qualifications of medical practice” of 28 June 2004; and Item 3.2 of the Order No V-1037 of the Minister of Health on “Approval of the list of specialised fields of nursing” of 17 December 2009). Therefore, higher education institutions that train health care specialists should design new breastfeeding and lactation management curricula that would ensure an integrated and specialised evidence-based training. Draft curricula and medical norms should be submitted for approval of the Ministry of Health.

6. **Patient discrimination on the grounds of the place of residence.**

According to Item 3 of Part 2 of the Article 1 of the Law on the Rights of Patients and Compensation of Damages to their Health of the Republic of Lithuania, discrimination is prohibited on any grounds. The majority of inpatient health care institutions having newborn-friendly status (hereinafter — NFS) are located in Kaunas, which has three such health care institutions; Vilnius, Panevžys, Marijampol, Pasvalys and Vilkaviškis have only one each; meanwhile Klaipda and Šiauliai as well as other cities of Lithuanian have no such institutions. Consequently, in other health care institutions mothers and newborns are provided with lower quality services or receive no services that ensure successful breastfeeding. Limited by time and distance, a birth-giving mother cannot freely choose a health care institution. Mothers and newborns experience discrimination as they end up in a hospital without the NFS status.

Thus, the voluntary implementation of the NPL initiative established by the Order No V-613 of the Minister of Health on “Approval of temporary rules for assessment of inpatient personal health care institutions on the basis of Requirements for Newborn-Friendly Hospital ” of 27 August 2004 should be revisited to ensure that international NFS standards established by the WHO and UNICEF would become accepted by all maternity inpatient institutions of Lithuania.

On the basis of the above-state information, we have asked national authorities:

1. To initiate amendments of legislative acts, design and implementation of control mechanisms as well as undertake all action required to ensure resolution of aforementioned issues to ensure no provisions of legislative acts would remain in violation;

2. To inform the Public Institution “Pradžių pradžia” (Traidenio g. 34–5, LT-08116 Vilnius) about all measure planned to be taken in order to resolve the aforementioned issues as well as provide a possibility to delegate breastfeeding specialists to working groups and/or provide consultative assistance on related issues.

Signed by the initiative group of breastfeeding mothers and breastfeeding promoters of NGO "Pradžių pradžia", Lithuania
Summary of our recommendations

- Inpatient maternity institutions and primary health care facilities as well as physicians should promote breastfeeding and provide mothers with adequate information.

- The Government should protect and promote breastfeeding as an intelligent public health prevention strategy which will lower future personal health care costs and sickness benefits.

- Breastfeeding-related qualifications of paediatricians, neonatologists, family doctors and other medical professionals involved in health care of infants, children and mothers should be upgraded. Trainings on breastfeeding should not be sponsored by breastmilk substitute producers and manufacturers.

- Free samples and other means to encourage breastfeeding should be banned, in line with the national measure implementing the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes.

- Establish control mechanisms to ensure implementation of the Item 10 of the Requirements of the Marketing Code establishing the prohibition for health care professional and their family members to accept any material reward from producers or distributors of milk substitutes.

- Control mechanisms should be established to make sure that patient (children’s) rights to access high quality services and the rights of caregivers (mothers) to receive adequate and adequate information while in hospital facilities are fulfilled. Such mechanisms should include monitoring of indicators on breastfeeding initiations and complications at maternity institutions, changes in numbers of breastfeeding mothers, distribution of exclusive breastfeeding and mixed feeding; identification of influencing factors; analysis and continuous development of improvement measures.

- Include lactation management in the curricula of health care specialists.

- Breastfeeding mothers should be provided with a possibility to be referred to a breastfeeding and lactation management specialist. According to evidence-based recommendations, one qualified breastfeeding and lactation specialist should be available per one thousand of post-labour women.

- Newborn-friendly standards established by the WHO and UNICEF would become accepted by all maternity inpatient institutions of Lithuania, to avoid discrimination on the grounds of geographical location.