

## **News from the Ombudsman's Office**

**December 2022**

### [Winners of the “Annual Award for Supporting People with Disabilities” Have Been Awarded](#)

On 3 December, the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, the Ombudsman, in cooperation with the Association of Disabled People and their Friends “Apeirons” and the National Library of Latvia (LNB), held the 8th consecutive award ceremony of the “Annual Award for Supporting People with Disabilities”. The in-person ceremony celebrated the winners of 2022, as well as those who had received awards in previous years – to compensate for the lack of an in-person ceremony due to the pandemic. The ceremony also honoured those who received recognition awards or special jury’s awards. The Award has become an integral tradition of the Ombudsman’s Office and its partners - a way to support the people and organisations that have actively represented the interests of people with disabilities.

### [Ombudsman’s Annual Conference on Human Rights and Good Governance](#)

The Ombudsman’s annual human rights and good governance conference took place on 8 December. The theme was — “Respectful engagement as the foundation of democracy”. The conference consisted of three panels, looking at respectful engagement at different stages of a person’s life, starting with children and young people, continuing with people of a mature age, and concluding with seniors as participants and facilitators of social and political engagement.

### [The 5<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Interinstitutional Memorandum of Cooperation on the Protection of the Rights of Latvia’s Children Abroad](#)

On December 14, the Ombudsman celebrated the 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Interinstitutional Memorandum of Cooperation on the Protection of the Rights of Latvia’s Children Abroad. Five years ago, the Ombudsman often saw cases where Latvian families’ custody rights were suspended due to violations of children’s rights abroad, and the children were placed in new families. The situation has improved over the years, but preventive action needs to be continued and parents’ awareness of children’s rights needs to be increased.

### [The Ombudsman Reiterates His Support for the Establishment of Family Courts in Latvia](#)

The Ombudsman has previously expressed his support for the establishment of family courts. He has stressed the need to ensure the child's right to judicial protection, as is the case for adults. At present, in Latvia, children's fate is decided by institutions outside the judicial system — Orphan's and Custody Courts. In the opinion of the Ombudsman, the decision-making function of Orphan's and Custody Courts should be transferred to the courts within the judicial system in order to avoid legal nihilism, while the other functions should be transferred to the social services of local governments. Social services could maintain the function of the 'here and now', i.e. immediate removal of a child from the family if there are circumstances that endanger the child's safety, health, or life. The Ombudsman stresses that the best interests of the child must be a primary consideration and should be assessed at all levels — legislative, executive, and judicial.