ASYLUM AND MIGRATION OVERVIEW IN LATVIA

REFERENCE YEAR 2024



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Pilsonības un migrācijas lietu pārvalde

EMN Eiropas migrācijas tīkls LATVIJA

Pursuant to Council Decision 2008/381/EC of 14 May 2008, the European Migration Network was established; its objective is to meet the information needs of institutions of the European Union and its Member States by providing up-to-date, objective, reliable, and comparable information on migration and asylum, with a view to supporting policymaking in these areas in the European Union. The European Migration Network also serves to provide the general public with information on these subjects. The Network is composed of the European Commission and the contact points designated by the Member States. Each contact point establishes a national migration network.

The contact point of each state prepares studies, whose topics have been set in the respective annual program of activities. The topics of studies are related to the area of migration of third-country nationals.

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Summary

Legal migration

In 2024, 9024[1] first-time residence permits were issued, which is by 11.7% less than in 2023. 6738 first-time temporary residence permits were issued to Ukrainian civilians who have received temporary protection in Latvia.

On 23 May 2024, amendments to the Immigration Law were adopted[2] providing the right for the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs (hereinafter – the OCMA) to take a decision prohibiting a natural or legal person from inviting a third-country national if it is established that regulatory acts related to the entry and residence of third-country nationals have been violated.

International protection and asylum

Compared to 2023, the number of asylum seekers in 2024 has decreased by half – 801 people applied for asylum (1624 in 2023).

Temporary protection

On 21 November 2024, the Saeima of the Republic of Latvia (hereinafter – the Saeima) adopted amendments to the Law on Assistance to Ukrainian Civilians[3], which provide for extending the time-limited support measures specified in the Law until 31 December 2025. Long-term visas and temporary residence permits issued to Ukrainian civilians who have received temporary protection status in the Republic of Latvia until 31 December 2022 will be valid until 4 March 2025, regardless of the validity period indicated in these documents.

Unaccompanied minors and other vulnerable groups

In 2024, 20 unaccompanied minors were found in Latvia, all of whom applied for asylum.

Integration

In 2024, immigrants from third countries could learn the Latvian language, get to know life in Latvia, attend integration courses and receive help to find a job and support from a social mentor. State and non-governmental organisations provided integration and Latvian language courses for asylum seekers and third-country nationals, including Ukrainian civilians. On 17 December 2024, the Plan for the Development of a Cohesive and Civically Active Society for 2024–2027 was approved[4]. Three lines of action will be implemented according to the plan: National identity and Belonging; Culture of Democracy and Inclusive Citizenship; Integration.

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1 Data source: OCMA.

2 Law "Amendments to the Immigration Law". – *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No. 110, 07.06.2024. – [entered into force 08.06.2024]

3 Law on Amendments to the Law on Assistance to Ukrainian Civilians. – *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No. 231A, 27.11.2024. – [entered into force 11.12.2024]

4 Cabinet Order No. 1195 of 17 December 2024 "Plan for the Development of a Cohesive and Civically Active Society for 2024–2027". – *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No. 251, 28.12.2024. – [entered into force on 17.12.2024]

Citizenship and naturalisation

In 2024, 694 persons were admitted to Latvian citizenship through naturalisation.[5] The majority of those who received Latvian citizenship were non-citizens of Latvia (534). The number of third-country nationals who received Latvian citizenship through naturalisation has not changed – 155 persons in 2024 (154 in 2023).[6]

Border control, visas and Schengen management

On 18 December 2024, the Integrated Border Management Plan of the Republic of Latvia for 2024–2027 was approved[7], the objective whereof is to strengthen state border security and overall internal security, as well as to enhance the return of those third-country nationals who lack a legal basis to stay in Latvia and EU Member States.

Irregular migration

On 23 May 2024, amendments to the Immigration Law were adopted[8], which provide the right of a foreigner to request state-provided legal assistance also in cases of appeal against detention.

Trafficking in human beings

In criminal proceedings for organising trafficking in human beings, three persons have been classified as suspects. 17 third-country nationals have been recognised as victims of trafficking in human beings.

Return and readmission

In 2024, the number of forcibly removed persons increased by half to 103, whilst 1965 persons voluntarily returned to their country of residence.

In 2024, the State Border Guard joined the EU reintegration programme, the objective whereof is to promote the return of irregularly staying third-country nationals from the EU, offering the opportunity to receive reintegration support from Frontex.

5 Data source: OCMA.

6 Data source: OCMA.

7 Cabinet Order No. 1220 of 20 December 2024 "On the Integrated Border Management Plan of the Republic of Latvia 2024–2027". – *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No. 1, 02.01.2025. – [entered into force on 20.12.2024]

8 Law "Amendments to the Immigration Law". – *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No. 110, 07.06.2024. – [entered into force 08.06.2024]

Introduction

The Asylum and Migration Overview in Latvia (hereinafter – the AMO) provides information on the most significant changes in migration and asylum policy and legislation in Latvia in the period from 1 January to 31 December 2024 and at the beginning of 2025. The AMO includes information from migration policy makers and implementers, as well as published research and media analysis.

The AMO is based on a specification developed by the European Commission and National Contact Points of the European Migration Network (hereinafter – the EMN), which allows the collection of uniform and comparable information on EU Member States and EMN Observer Countries[9]. The Synthesis of the AMO 2024 of the EU and EMN Observer Countries will be available on the website of the EMN Latvian Contact Point, www.emn.lv, upon its development.

The information necessary for the preparation of the AMO was obtained from the Ministry of the Interior, the State Border Guard (hereinafter – the SBG), the Consular Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Welfare, the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Health, the Riga Office of the International Organization for Migration (hereinafter – the IOM), the Society Integration Foundation (hereinafter – the SIF) and the OCMA.

To reflect the prevailing views in society and to explore the discussions in the political environment, the authors drew on articles, opinions and assessments published on various news and public policy websites, as well as information available on the websites of other public institutions. All sources and literature used in the AMO are listed in the list of sources and literature used.

The AMO uses data compiled by national data providers and Eurostat – The Statistical Office of the European Union. Data has been coordinated with migration and asylum experts. All terms used in this paper correspond to the definitions included in the EMN Glossary of Asylum and Migration Terms[10].

9 Norway, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine, Montenegro, Armenia, Serbia, North Macedonia.

10 Available at: https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/networks/european-migration-network-emn/emn-asylum-and-migration-glossary_en.

1.

OVERVIEW OF CHANGES IN ASYLUM AND MIGRATION POLICY



General changes in the field of migration

On 16 January 2024, the Cabinet approved the Government Action Plan[11] for the implementation of the Declaration on the intended activities of the Cabinet of Ministers headed by Evika Siliņa. The Government Action Plan also confirms a number of priorities set by the interior sector and the Minister for the Interior Rihards Kozlovskis: strengthening the capacity of security institutions, personnel issues: faster salary increase for those working in the interior sector, bringing it in line with the salary in the National Armed Forces (NAF); improvement of material and technical support; construction of the Eastern border, including equipping it with smart technologies.

On 11 December 2024, the Ministry of the Interior established a high-level working group for implementation of the Pact on Migration and Asylum[12], to ensure a unified and coordinated approach to addressing all issues related to the implementation of the Pact on Migration and Asylum at the national level, including developing implementation plan for Latvian national Pact on Migration and Asylum and monitoring its implementation.

11 Cabinet Order No. 55 of 20 January 2024 "On the Government Action Plan for the Implementation of the Declaration on the Intended Activities of the Cabinet of Ministers Headed by Evika Siliņa" – *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No. 16, 23.01.2024. – [entered into force on 20.01.2024]

12 Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on a New Pact on Migration and Asylum, COM/2020/609 final. – Available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/LV/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52020DC0609

2.

LEGAL MIGRATION



The total number of residence permits issued for the first time in 2024, compared to the previous year, has decreased by 11.7% with 9024 residence permits issued[13] (10,220 in 2023). 6738[14] first-time temporary residence permits were issued to Ukrainian civilians who have received temporary protection in Latvia.

In 2024 and 2025, changes have been made in Latvian migration policy and regulatory framework. In order to strengthen state security, reduce dishonest practices in the area of migration and promote the integration of third-country nationals, several significant amendments to the Immigration Law have been adopted, as well as the relevant Cabinet regulations have been supplemented. This legislation establish stricter requirements for both third-country nationals and their inviting persons – legal entities and natural persons. The objective of the amendments is to ensure more effective supervision of migration processes, reduce the risks of malicious conduct and strengthen Latvian reputation as a lawful and secure state. At the same time, significant attention has also been paid to the accessibility of information and the development of explanatory materials to improve the involved parties' understanding of legal migration opportunities and requirements.

On 23 May 2024, amendments to the Immigration Law were adopted[15], which provide the OCMA with the right to make a decision imposing a prohibition on a natural or legal person from inviting a third-country national if it has been established that regulations related to the entry and residence of third-country nationals have been violated. The objective of the legislation is to restrict dishonest inviting persons (mainly employers), providing the OCMA with the right to make a decision imposing a prohibition for a period of up to three years on a natural or legal person from inviting third-country nationals if it has been established that regulations related to the entry and residence of third-country nationals have been violated, thereby also reducing reputational risks of Latvia.[16] Since July 2024, when the amendments to the Immigration Law entered into force, the OCMA has made decisions prohibiting 15 companies from inviting and employing third-country nationals in connection with identified violations in compliance with regulatory requirements. The majority of prohibitions have been applied for two or three years to companies that provide construction services, as well as to companies that provide labour recruitment, while the most common reason for imposing the prohibition is related to violations in ensuring salary payments to invited third-country nationals.[17]

The 20 June 2024, amendments to the Immigration Law[18] stipulate that those citizens of the Russian Federation who had a permanent place of residence in Latvia prior to acquiring Russian Federation citizenship and who have received permanent residence permits in accordance with Article 23.1 of the Law on Entry and Residence of Foreigners and Stateless Persons in the Republic of Latvia[19], must submit documents to the OCMA for requesting the status of the long-term resident of the EU by 30 June 2025, including a certificate of successful completion of the state language proficiency test. However, if a person has submitted all the necessary documents for requesting the EU long-term resident status within the specified time period, the

13 Data source: OCMA. Initial data on residence permits collected by Eurostat – to be adjusted at a later date.

14 Data source: OCMA.

15 Law "Amendments to the Immigration Law". – *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No. 110, 07.06.2024. – [entered into force 08.06.2024]

16 Annotation to the draft legislation "Amendments to the Immigration Law". – Available at: https://titania.saeima.lv/LIVS14/SaeimaLIVS14.nsf/0/53750F5C8BBCEA09C2258AA200467A81?OpenDocument

17 The Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs prohibits 15 companies from employing foreigners due to violations in the field of employment. – Available at: https://www.pmlp.gov.lv/lv/jaunums/pilsonibas-un-migracijas-lietu-parvalde-15-uznemumiem-aizliedz-nodarbinat-arzemniekus-par-parkapumiem-nodarbinatibas-joma

18 Law on Amendment to the Immigration Law. – *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No. 128A, 04.07.2024. – [entered into force 18.07.2024]

19 Law "On Entry and Residence of Foreigners and Stateless Persons in the Republic of Latvia". – *Latvijas Republikas Augstākās Padomes un Valdības Ziņotājs* No. 27/28, 09.07.1992. – [entered into force 01.07.1992, expires 01.05.2003]

current permanent residence permit[20] will remain valid until the day when the final decision on the status application enters into force. The objective of the Immigration Law amendments is to expand the range of Russian Federation citizens with permanent residence permits in Latvia to whom the requirement to certify the state language proficiency applies in order to receive the status of the long-term resident of the EU. The amendments were made based on the recommendation included in the Constitutional Court judgement No. 2023-04-0106 of 15 February 2024.[21]

On 18 March 2025, the Cabinet approved Regulation No. 176 "Amendments to Cabinet Regulation No. 157 of 8 March 2022 "Regulations Regarding the Extent of the Knowledge of the Official Language and the Procedures for Examining the Proficiency in the Official Language""[22], which establishes the procedures for examining the proficiency in the official language for nationals of the Russian Federation who, in order to obtain the status of the long-term resident of the EU, must demonstrate state language proficiency at least at level A2.

On 3 April 2025, amendments to the Immigration Law were adopted in the Saeima[23], which require citizens from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) member states to provide specific information about themselves, their relatives and the purpose of their journey before entering Latvia[24]. To ensure compliance with the obligation to provide the relevant information before entering Latvia, administrative liability is stipulated, establishing the possibility to impose a fine of up to four hundred fine units[25]. The amendments were necessary to enable proactive action for the protection of national security and to ensure the collection and analysis of comprehensive information about incoming foreigners (including foreigners entering without crossing the external state border). It is necessary to strengthen the migration control tools of the state institutions of the Republic of Latvia and monitoring capabilities for nationals from countries of intelligence risk, which would 1) provide the responsible authorities with comprehensive information about those foreigners entering Latvia (especially without crossing the border of the Republic of Latvia and the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus or arriving by ship at any of Latvian ports) and 2) increase the operational capabilities of the responsible services also within the international cooperation. The latter aspect is particularly significant at present – at a time when Russian intelligence and security services are actively and aggressively carrying out special operations against European Union (hereinafter – the EU) and NATO countries in the region, recruiting not only nationals of the Russian Federation but also nationals of other countries for operation implementation. Accordingly, information about the planned entry and stay of persons in the Republic of Latvia, including not only nationals of the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus, can be a valuable source for identifying potential risks and planning and deploying appropriate

20 The law stipulates that the OCMA decision must be made within one year from the date of receipt of documents. It is planned that during the aforementioned period, Russian citizens will have the right to employment without restrictions, as well as the right to receive the existing state-provided services, including pensions and benefits, if the person's declared place of residence is in Latvia.

21 Judgement in the name of the Republic of Latvia, adopted 15 February 2024, case No. 2023-04-0106. – Available at: https://www.satv.tiesa.gov.lv/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/2023-04-0106_Spriedums.pdf

22 Cabinet Regulation No. 176 of 18 March 2025 "Amendments to Cabinet Regulation No. 157 of 8 March 2022 "Regulations Regarding the Extent of the Knowledge of the Official Language and the Procedures for Examining the Proficiency in the Official Language"". – *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No. 57, 21.03.2025. – [entered into force 22.03.2025]

23 Law "Amendments to the Immigration Law". – *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No. 76, 17.04.2025. – [entered into force 01.09.2025]

24 1) purpose of travel (entry);
2) planned period and place of residence;
3) travel route;
4) contact information;
5) elected positions held by the person or the person's relative;
6) standing for election;
7) current or former status as a state or municipal official;
8) service in the armed forces, special service, border guard, customs or in the interior, justice or foreign affairs (including diplomatic) service.

25 a fine of up to 2000 euros.

measures and their intensity.[26]

On 26 November 2024, Cabinet Regulation No. 731 "Regulations Regarding State Fees for Migration Services" were approved[27], which increases all state fee rates for migration services. The objective of the amendments is to simplify the mechanism for collecting and calculating state fees for migration services by combining several state fee positions. To set state fee rates analogous to those provided for in EU regulatory documents for the provision of similar services (processing of visa applications). The increased state fee rates will motivate individuals to submit substantiated applications in a timely manner.[28]

On 10 December 2024, Cabinet Regulation No. 796 "Amendments to Cabinet Regulation No. 133 of 21 February 2012 "Regulations Regarding the State Duty for the Issuance of Personal Identification Documents"" were adopted[29], which stipulate:

- state fee for the issuance of a foreigner's identity card, increasing it. The issuance period remains unchanged – two working days[30];
- to increase the fee for the issuance of residence permits (eID cards)[31].

The objective of the amendments is to deter foreigners from unnecessarily obtaining Latvian identity cards, so that they are requested only by those who need them for the intended purpose. Practical evidence shows that foreigners often wish to obtain these identity documents, but do not actually use them for their intended purpose; for example, they initially attempted to use the aforementioned documents for travel.[32]

During 2024, the OCMA experts have prepared several informational videos (guides) on various topics related to the field of migration, for example, obtaining an EU Blue Card[33], entry of seasonal workers[34], entry of start-up founders[35], and drawing up an invitation[36]. The objective of the guides is to promote understanding of legal migration opportunities among third-country nationals and their inviting persons.

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26 Annotation to the draft law "Amendments to the Immigration Law". – Available at: https://titania.saeima.lv/LIVS14/SaeimaLIVS14.nsf/0/A05653338EE513DDC2258C19002685BA?OpenDocument

27 Cabinet Regulation No. 731 of 26 November 2024 "Regulations on State Fees for Migration Services". – *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No. 231, 27.11.2024. – [entered into force on 01.01.2025]

28 Annotation to the draft legislation "Regulations Regarding State Fees for Migration Services". – Available at: https://tapportals.mk.gov.lv/annotation/ba1d0e34-473a-45a7-99a2-3f2522d18b71

29 Cabinet Regulation No. 796 of 10 December 2024 "Amendments to Cabinet Regulation No. 133 of 21 February 2012 "Regulations Regarding the State Duty for the Issuance of Personal Identification Documents"". – *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No. 241, 11.12.2024. – [entered into force on 01.01.2025] Previously 80 euros, henceforth 170 euros.

30 Previously 80 euros, henceforth 170 euros.

31 Previously EUR 15 – henceforth EUR 45 if the residence permit is issued within 10 working days; Previously EUR 30 – henceforth EUR 80 if the residence permit is issued within two working days.

32 Annotation to the draft legislation "Amendments to the Cabinet Regulation No. 133 of 21 February 2012 "Regulations Regarding the State Duty for the Issuance of Personal Identification Documents"". – Available at: https://tapportals.mk.gov.lv/annotation/7de44872-279c-4129-b0cf-7f9b2d0622ee

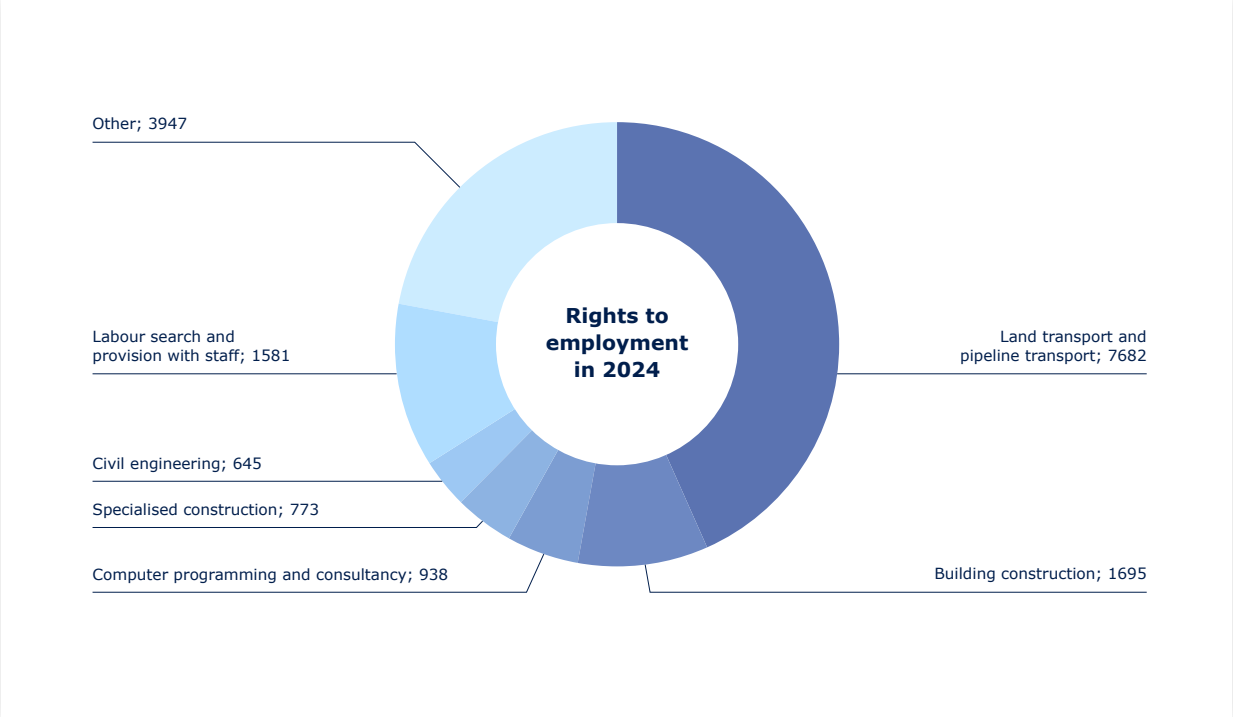
33 Guide: Obtaining a European Union Blue Card. – Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7CDCJ6V1Wko&t=9s

34 Guide to seasonal work in Latvia. – Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KwYLudUWSmA&t=1s

35 Guide: how can start-up founders apply for residence permits in Latvia. – Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m--4itZca1s&t=3s

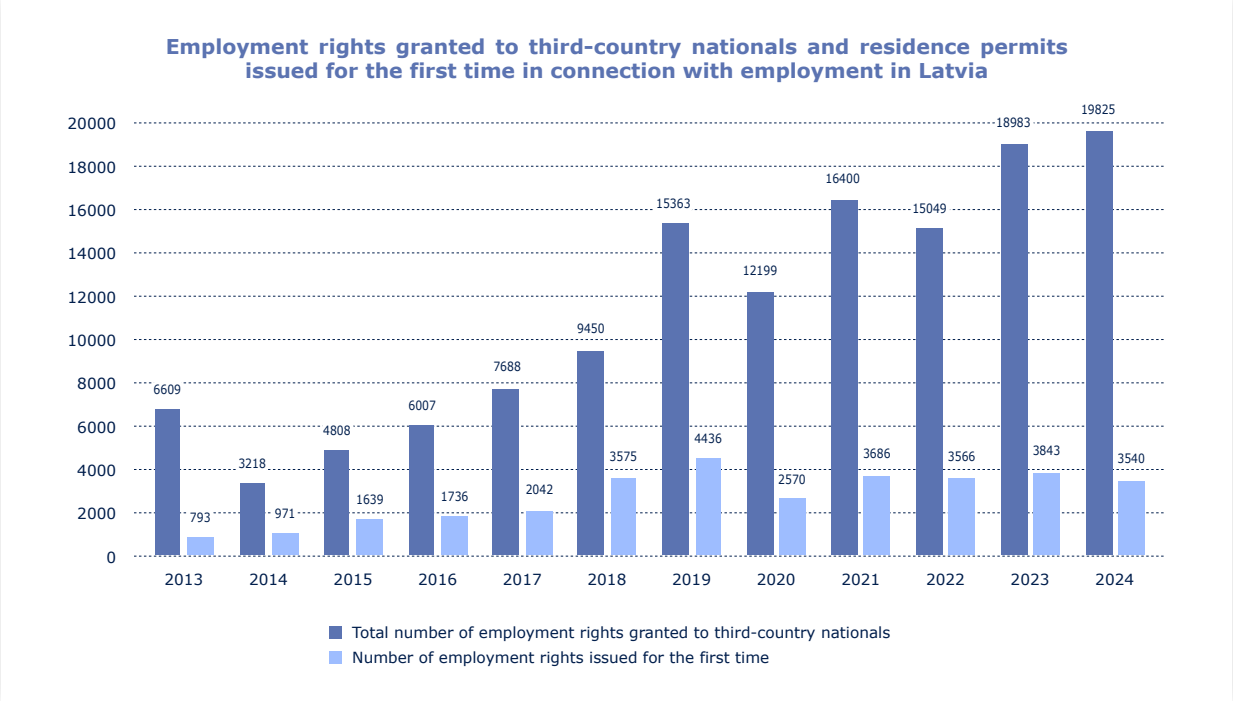
36 Guide: Drawing up an Invitation. – Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z-iCCSsEse4&t=1s

Economic migration



The total number of employment rights granted to third-country nationals in 2024 increased by 4.44% (19,825 in 2024; 18,983 in 2023). The majority of third-country nationals work in land transport and pipeline transport (7682), labour search and provision with staff (2120), building construction (1695), computer programming and consultancy (938), specialised construction (773), manufacture of fabricated metal products, excluding machinery and equipment (691). In 2024, the highest number of rights to employment was granted to nationals of Uzbekistan (6048), Belarus (3176) and Ukrainian (2356).[37]

37 Data source: OCMA.



The number of residence permits issued to third-country nationals for the first time for employment purposes has decreased: 3,843 in 2023, 3,540 in 2024.[38]

To ensure conformity of Latvian regulatory environment with the EU legislation and to promote effective implementation of migration and employment policies, several significant amendments were made to the Cabinet Regulations and the Immigration Law in 2024. These amendments address various aspects – visa and residence permit issuance procedures, protection of seasonal workers' rights, as well as employer cooperation with state institutions in the process of employing third-country nationals. The objective of the amendments is to simultaneously reduce the labour shortage in Latvian economy, prevent misuse of the system and make migration processes more transparent, digitally accessible and more efficiently manageable. These additions and clarifications to legislation strengthen both the protection of seasonal workers and the attraction of highly qualified specialists, whilst ensuring coordinated action by state administration institutions within implementation of migration policy.

On 16 January 2024, Cabinet Regulation No. 40 "Amendments to Cabinet Regulation No. 676 of 30 August 2011 "Visa Regulations"" were adopted[39], to ensure the implementation of the EU regulatory acts[40] requirements in the national regulatory acts of Latvia. The amendment to the regulations stipulates that the visa issuing authority has a duty, when issuing a visa to a seasonal worker, to inform them in writing about their rights and obligations, as well as about the complaint submission procedure. The written information

38 Data source: OCMA. Initial data on residence permits collected by Eurostat – to be adjusted at a later date.

39 Cabinet Regulation No. 40 of 16 January 2024 "Amendments to Cabinet Regulation No. 676 of 30 August 2011 "Visa Regulations"". – *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No. 13, 18.01.2024. – [entered into force 19.01.2024]

40 The condition provided for in Article 11 of the Directive 2014/36/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 February 2014 on the conditions of entry and stay of third-country nationals for the purposes of employment as seasonal workers, stipulating that when issuing a visa to a seasonal worker, they must be informed in writing about the rights and obligations arising from the aforementioned Directive, as well as about the complaint submission procedure.

to be issued to the person has been prepared by the OCMA in cooperation with the Ministry of Welfare, including the conditions to be observed in the field of entry and residence, as well as the person's rights to approach state institutions to submit complaints about violations in the field of labour rights. The websites of the OCMA[41] and the diplomatic and consular representations of the Republic of Latvia provide information available in several languages specifically for seasonal workers regarding the procedure for submitting a visa application and the documents to be attached.[42]

On 30 January 2024, Cabinet Regulation No. 74 "Amendments to Cabinet Regulations No. 225 of 25 April 2017 "Regulations Regarding the Amount of Financial Means Necessary for a Foreigner and the Determination of the Existence of Financial Means"" were adopted[43]. The regulation have been developed to reduce the negative impact of labour shortages on economic growth in all sectors of the economy and to ease the requirements regarding the amount of financial means necessary for third-country nationals who receive the right to employment. The amendments to the regulation stipulate that in all sectors of the economy, the minimum amount of financial means for third-country workers is at the level of the average salary in the sector or at the minimum salary specified by the general agreement of the sector, which has been concluded in accordance with the Section 18, Paragraph four of the Labour Law[44].[45]

On 5 March 2024, Cabinet Regulation No. 143 "Amendments to Cabinet Regulation No. 552 of 21 June 2010 "Procedures for Approval of Invitations and Drawing up of Written Requests" were adopted[46], the objective whereof is to ensure the implementation of the EU regulatory acts[47] requirements in the national regulatory acts of Latvia. The amendments stipulate that an employer, when inviting a seasonal worker, shall provide confirmation that the seasonal worker's place of residence will comply with the regulatory acts that determine the requirements for residential premises.[48]

In order to implement into national regulatory acts the provisions included in Directive (EU) 2021/1883 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 October 2021[49], on 23 April 2024, Cabinet Regulations No. 244 "Amendments to Cabinet Regulation No. 564 of 21 June 2010 "Regulations Regarding Residence

41 Information on the rights and duties of seasonal workers. – Available at: https://www.pmlp.gov.lv/lv/vizas-ielugumi-un-uzaicinajumi

42 Annotation to the draft legislation "Amendments to Cabinet Regulation No. 676 of 30 August 2011 "Visa Regulations"". – Available at: https://tapportals.mk.gov.lv/annotation/d1b93deb-77e4-441e-be6a-b3620f2e1ef9

43 Cabinet Regulation No. 74 of 30 January 2024 "Amendments to Cabinet Regulation No. 225 of 25 April 2017 "Regulations Regarding the Amount of Financial Means Necessary for a Foreigner and the Determination of the Existence of Financial Means"". – *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No. 27, 07.02.2024. – [entered into force on 08.02.2024]

44 If employers who have entered into the general agreement, a group of employers, an employer organisation or an association of employer organisations, including employers who have joined an already concluded collective agreement in a sector or territory, employ, according to the data of the Central Statistical Bureau, more than 50 percent of employees in a sector or their turnover of goods or volume of services is more than 50 percent of the turnover of goods or volume of services in the sector, then the general agreement is binding on all employers of the respective sector and applies to all employees employed by such employers. With respect to the abovementioned employers and employees, the general agreement shall come into effect no earlier than three months after the day of its publication in the official publication *Latvijas Vēstnesis* and no other later date of coming into effect has been specified therein. The general agreement shall be published in the official publication *Latvijas Vēstnesis* on the basis of a joint application by the parties.

45 Annotation to the draft legislation "Amendments to Cabinet Regulation No. 225 of 25 April 2017 "Regulations on the Amount of Financial Means Necessary for a Foreigner and the Determination of the Existence of Financial Means"". – Available at: https://tapportals.mk.gov.lv/annotation/463b6a0e-76b7-41e5-a3fe-aa1aebabd2f6.

46 Cabinet Regulation No. 143 of 5 March 2024 "Amendments to Cabinet Regulation No. 552 of 21 June 2010 "Procedures for Approval of Invitations and Drawing up of Written Requests"". – *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No. 48, 07.03.2024. – [entered into force on 08.03.2024]

47 Directive 2014/36/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 February 2014 on the conditions of entry and stay of third-country nationals for the purpose of employment as seasonal workers. – Official Journal L 94, 28.3.2014.

48 Annotation to the draft legislation "Amendments to Cabinet Regulation No. 552 of 21 June 2010 "Approval of Invitations and Drawing up of Written Requests"". – Available at: https://tapportals.mk.gov.lv/annotation/a7f0c30e-71da-4156-a1dd-a25d87b755e7

49 Directive (EU) 2021/1883 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 October 2021 on the conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals for the purpose of highly qualified employment, and repealing Council Directive 2009/50/EC. – PE/40/2021/REV/1 Official Journal L 382, 28.10.2021.

Permits"" were adopted[50], where:

1) it is specified that managers or senior specialists in the field of information and communication technologies need three years of experience (instead of five years) to qualify for requesting an EU Blue Card;

2) it is clarified that an EU Blue Card applicant does not need to submit educational documents if they have already been granted the right to employment in the Republic of Latvia and the field of employment does not change;

3) it is specified that a third-country national who has been issued an EU Blue Card in another EU state does not have to submit documents certifying education or experience in Latvia, unless they will be employed in a regulated profession;

4) it is specified that in the case of requesting an EU Blue Card, the employment contract must be for a period of at least six months;

5) it is specified that when an EU Blue Card holder changes employer, the person does not need to receive a new EU Blue Card, but the new employer must complete an invitation, after the approval whereof they can begin employing the third-country national. If the change of employer occurs at a time when the third-country national has already entered a period of unemployment or after the third-country national has already resided in the Republic of Latvia with an EU Blue Card for at least 12 months, the employer may begin their employment immediately after submitting the invitation application.[51]

On 23 April 2024, Cabinet Regulation No. 244 "Amendments to Cabinet Regulation No. 564 of 21 June 2010 "Regulations Regarding Residence Permits"" were approved[52], which provides that from November 2026, documents for requesting or registering a residence permit can be submitted electronically, using the electronic service package for the residence permit process developed by the OCMA. The objective of the amendments is to reduce the number of visits to Latvian diplomatic and consular representations abroad, as applications for residence permits can be submitted electronically, and the electronic submission option will reduce the processing time for residence permit applications, as applicants will not need to wait for an available appointment at the representation office. Residence permit applicants, as well as their inviting persons – natural persons, will have the opportunity to communicate promptly with the OCMA, resolving issues related to residence permit applications, for example, by submitting additional documents and explanations. The electronic service package for the residence permit process – the migration portal – will be developed within the framework of the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund 2021–2027 programme project "Modernisation of the Joint Migration Information System Software Platform (Phase 1)" implemented by the OCMA[53] by 1 November 2026.

Amendments to the Immigration Law were adopted on 23 May 2024[54], which delegate rights to the Cabinet to adopt regulation regarding changes to the procedure for inviting third-country workers and to establish criteria for the creation of the so-called 'green corridor', namely, to set requirements and criteria for companies which, when inviting foreigners, have employment documents accepted and reviewed, decisions

50 Cabinet Regulation No. 244 of 23 April 2024 "Amendments to Cabinet Regulation No. 564 of 21 June 2010 "Regulations Regarding Residence Permits"". – *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No. 80, 24.04.2024. – [entered into force on 25.04.2024]

51 Annotation to the draft legislation "Amendments to Cabinet Regulation No. 564 of 21 June 2010 "Regulations Regarding Residence Permits"". – Available at: https://tapportals.mk.gov.lv/annotation/e6f20869-b718-46db-911a-84702b22057b

52 Cabinet Regulation No. 244 of 23 April 2024 "Amendments to Cabinet Regulation No. 564 of 21 June 2010 "Regulations Regarding Residence Permits"". – *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No. 80, 24.04.2024. – [entered into force on 01.11.2026]

53 Modernisation of the Joint Migration Information System Software Platform (Phase 1). – Available at: https://www.pmlp.gov.lv/lv/projekts/vienotas-migracijas-informacijas-sistemas-programmaturas-platformas-modernizesana-1posms

54 Law on Amendments to the Immigration Law. – *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No. 110, 07.06.2024. – [entered into force 08.06.2024]

made and documents issued within shortened time lines. These amendments provide wider involvement of state administration institutions in regulating the migration process. The objective of the amendments is to reduce employers' opportunities to invite foreign employees in unjustified cases, as well as to improve the accessibility of migration services for specially supported companies.

On 10 December 2024, Cabinet Regulation No. 803 "Amendments to Cabinet Regulation No. 55 of 28 January 2014 "Regulations Regarding Employment of Foreigners"" were approved[55], which change the cooperation mechanism between the employer, the State Employment Agency (hereinafter – the SEA) and the OCMA. From now on, when registering a vacancy with the SEA, an employer must cooperate with the SEA: justify the number of vacancies, evaluate the candidates offered by the agency and also provide justification for rejecting candidates. If a suitable candidate is not found within 10 working days, the SEA will provide a positive opinion for attracting foreign labour, and the employer will be able to prepare an invitation or summons with the OCMA to invite a third-country national – employee. The amendments were necessary to reduce the risks of fraudulent use of the labour immigration system by establishing an obligation for employers planning to employ third-country workers to cooperate with the SEA, thereby promoting cooperation between employers[56] and state institutions for matching vacancies and job seekers and supporting the attraction of labour necessary for Latvian labour market. An agreement on the draft amendments was reached at the Human Capital Development Council meeting on 15 November 2023.[57]

Studies and discussions on migration

In 2024, discussions about the increasing number of third-country nationals in Latvia became more frequent. Within a year and a half, the number of residence permits has increased by 54%, and currently about 130 thousand foreign citizens have valid permits in Latvia[58].

Raul Eamets, Bigbank chief economist emphasises: "*If historically Latvia could be considered a country suffering from labour emigration, then currently the situation has begun to change. Namely, according to the latest data from the Central Statistical Bureau, at the beginning of this year, for the first time since 1990, more residents returned than left, with the positive migration difference comprising both re-emigrants and Ukrainian war refugees. Latvia is becoming an immigration country; therefore, alongside the question of how to reduce the loss of its human capital, it is also necessary to address what the state's immigration policy will be. Depending on this policy, the national economy can either gain or lose. Therefore, it is time to consider how immigrants will affect Latvian labour market and economy. To avoid negative aspects, immigration policy should focus on the integration of immigrants into the labour market.*"[59]

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55 Cabinet Regulation No. 803 of 10 December 2024 "Amendments to Cabinet Regulation No. 55 of 28 January 2014 "Regulations Regarding Employment of Foreigners"". – *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No. 242, 12.12.2024. – [entered into force on 01.01.2025]

56 The employer's cooperation with the agency means that the employer has indicated and, where necessary, specified information in the job advertisement so that the content of the advertisement complies with the provisions of the Labour Law and provides candidates with clear information about the offered remuneration, working hours, location and working conditions, as well as job-specific requirements; when submitting information on the vacancy, has indicated the justification to open the vacancy, has evaluated the candidates offered by the State Employment Agency and has substantiated the reasons for rejecting candidates.

57 Annotation to the draft legislation "Amendments to Cabinet Regulation No. 55 of 28 January 2014 "Regulations on the Employment of Foreigners"". – Available at: https://tapportals.mk.gov.lv/annotation/e97c100a-a595-4c64-9ab5-9ef02a011b19

58 Approximately 130,000 foreign citizens hold residence permits in Latvia; there is insufficient support for learning the Latvian language. – Available at: https://www.lsm.lv/raksts/zinas/ekonomika/10.10.2024-ap-130-000-arvalstu-pilsonu-ir-uzturesanas-atlauja-latvija-trukst-atbalsta-latviesu-valodas-apguve-precizets.a572069/

59 From an emigration to an immigration country – what benefits can it bring to Latvian economy? – Available at: https://www.db.lv/zinas/no-emigracijas-uz-imigracijas-valsti-kadu-labumu-tas-var-dot-latvijas-ekonomikai-516672

On 6 November 2024, a discussion on the control of residence rights and employment of third-country nationals took place at the meeting of the Saeima Committee for Citizenship, Migration and Social Cohesion. "*Foreigners – unregistered employees – most frequently work illegally in the catering sector. Their number is three times higher than that of irregularly employed foreigners in construction. These are kitchen staff, chefs most often in small eateries, where these employees, predominantly third-country nationals, work illegally," explains the head of the State Labour Inspectorate, Renārs Lūsis. "Is there anything that can be improved in the control mechanisms and supervision of foreigners' work? The short answer would be – yes. The State Border Guard admits that it rarely organises raids in cooperation with the police. The head of the State Labour Inspectorate admits that they cannot speak about detecting all cases of irregular employment, as the authority most likely does not become aware of all such cases. Meanwhile, the Director of the Tax Compliance Incentive Department of the State Revenue Service, Santa Garanča, indicated that she expects improvements in data exchange with employers of foreigners. For example – courier services, where according to official data 4630 third-country nationals have registered, but the authorities do not know the true extent of employment."*[60]

The Saeima Committee for Citizenship, Migration and Social Cohesion continued the discussions initiated on the residence rights of third-country nationals in the country in spring 2025 as well – at the meeting on 19 March, the Committee Chairman concluded that "*there are two gaps in the control of the residence of third-country nationals in Latvia: firstly, it is not entirely clear how many of them actually leave the country when the basis for residing in Latvia is lost, and secondly, there is insufficient control over higher education institutions that admit foreign students.*"[61]

Given the aforementioned, at the meeting of the Saeima Committee for Citizenship, Migration and Social Cohesion, the Ministry of Education and Science has committed to improve the admission of foreign students within two years, including by improving the regulatory framework. To promote the responsibility of Latvian educational institutions as inviting persons and to attract 'genuinely interested' foreign students to studies in Latvia, the Ministry has developed an action plan. According to this plan, it is intended to raise the academic requirements for the admission of foreign students, as well as to place greater emphasis on the issue of foreign students during the accreditation of higher education institutions. If a higher education institution has a high visa refusal rate, its rights to admit foreign students could be restricted. If the higher education institution does not report on the persons excluded from the student list, its rector can be held administratively responsible. It is also planned to develop internationalisation strategy for national higher education, as well as to review the possibilities of inviting students to short-cycle, secondary vocational, non-formal education and professional development programmes.[62]

The Ministry of the Interior has prepared the informative report "On the improvement of the legal framework for the residence of third-country nationals in Latvia"[63], evaluating the current trends in entry and residence of third-country nationals, data on the entry, residence and removal of third-country nationals, as well as summarising information provided by the supervisory state authorities on issues determined in practice and their possible solutions. To discuss the current situation and solutions for improving the supervision of legal migration, on 11 March 2025, the Ministry of the Interior organised an in-person meeting of the heads of all institutions involved in controlling the entry, employment and residence conditions of third-country

60 Responsible authorities acknowledge gaps in the monitoring of foreign employment. – Available at: https://www.lsm.lv/raksts/zinas/latvija/06.11.2024-atbildigas-iestades-atzist-robus-arvalstnieku-nodarbinatibas-kontrole.a575459/

61 Deputies point to migration issues – foreign students and insufficient control of removed persons. – Available at: https://www.lsm.lv/raksts/zinas/latvija/19.03.2025-deputati-norada-uz-problemam-migracija-arvalstu-studenti-un-nepietiekama-izraidito-kontrole.a592193/?utm_source=rss&utm_campaign=rss&utm_medium=links

62 Improvements to the admission process for foreign students promised within two years. – Available at: https://www.diena.lv/raksts/latvija/zinas/arvalstu-studentu-uznemsanu-sola-uzlabot-divu-gadu-laika-14333751

63 The informative report "On the improvement of the legal framework for the residence of third-country nationals in Latvia". – Available at: https://tapportals.mk.gov.lv/legal_acts/707e492f-8bfd-4dc1-801f-3a6b85abd733

nationals[64]. Representatives of the institutions discussed possibilities for improving the situation within their permanent functions and tasks. During the meeting, the heads of institutions agreed on additional measures to be taken to improve the supervision of the entry and residence of third-country nationals in the Republic of Latvia. For example, to introduce a deposit fee for all first-year students from third countries at universities; to prevent universities from inviting family members alongside bachelor's and master's level students; to implement enhanced control measures regarding private individuals who rent their owned properties to third-country nationals; to provide for the possibility of cancelling temporary residence permits for those third-country nationals who are systematically penalised for administrative offences, etc.[65]

The results of *PwC*[66] conducted survey "What is the current business climate in the Baltics? Baltic CEO Survey 2024" indicate that CEO are still facing challenges in labour availability. Although the situation has stabilised, it remains complex, especially in Latvia, where 64% of the surveyed company executives believe that employee recruitment has become more difficult. Only 7% of respondents in Latvia indicate that it has become easier for companies to attract new employees.[67]

The survey results are also confirmed by the statement of Kaspars Fogelmanis, CEO of "EcoLead": "*It must be emphasised – we very much want to employ local people, as we are aware that this 'warms up' domestic consumption and Latvian economy, but at present we are forced to invite people from Central Asian countries, Moldova and other countries to ensure the production process... I am convinced that Latvia will be able to develop and become more prosperous, so we need to prepare for an influx of workers, also taking into account the concerning demographic situation.*"[68]

A similar position was also expressed by the LDDK[69] Director General Kaspars Gorkšs: "*It is clear that Latvia will not solve the labour shortage with its internal human resources alone. Therefore, the attraction of foreign specialists must take place systematically and in a regulated manner, so that immigration policy provides solutions to our existing issues. A clear regulatory framework and targeted support for employers and job seekers from abroad are steps that need to be taken today. We must learn from both the positive and negative experiences of other countries to avoid preventable mistakes and achieve results as effectively as possible – an integrated and responsible society that increases productivity and contributes to economic development.*"

In September 2024, the magazine *Jurista Vārds* dedicated a series of four articles to the topic of asylum, examining the following themes in greater detail:

- unaccompanied minor asylum seekers in Latvia;
- an overview of the Administrative District Court's case law in asylum cases;
- insight into novelties of international asylum law;
- externalisation of international protection granting.[70]

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64 The meeting was attended by representatives from the State Border Guard, the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs, the State Security Service, the State Police, the Consular Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the State Revenue Service, the State Employment Agency, the State Labour Inspectorate, the Food and Veterinary Service, the State Education Development Agency, and the Riga Municipal Police.

65 The Interior sector has submitted proposals to improve the legal framework for the residence of third-country nationals. – Available at: https://www.iem.gov.lv/lv/jaunums/iekslietu-nozare-nodod-izskatisanai-priekslikumus-treso-valstu-pilsonu-uzturesanas-tiesiska-ietvara-pilnveidei

66 PricewaterhouseCoopers

67 What is the current business climate in the Baltics? Baltic CEO Survey 2024. – Available at: https://www.pwc.com/lv/lv/about/case-studies/baltijas-uznemumu-vaditaju-aptauja-2024.html

68 Kaspars Fogelmanis: Priority is given to Latvian employees, but there are insufficient people willing to work. – Available at: https://www.delfi.lv/898102/versijas/120051332/kaspars-fogelmanis-prioritate-latvijas-darbiniekiem-bet-stradatgribetaju-nepietiek

69 LDDK – Employers' Confederation of Latvia

70 Cover subject: Asylum rights – what asylum seekers are entitled to and how the state guarantees it. – Available at: https://m.juristavards.lv/zurnals/?laidiens_id=12472

At the beginning of 2025, discussions continued regarding possibilities to facilitate the employment of third-country workers. At the LOSP[71] representatives' meeting, the organisation's representatives emphasised the need to simplify and improve the transfer of third-country workers to other companies in situations where the company no longer needs the worker, but the worker still has an active residence permit. The Head of the Migration Division of the OCMA, Ilze Briede, mentioned that in the future there will be a new European Union (EU) directive on this issue, which will include regulations on employment change, addressing this problem. However, the regulations will not come into force this year, but is currently being worked on. The OCMA representative noted that the directive may allow an employee who obtains a residence permit for a year and, for example, works for six months in a berry growing company, then to continue working in another company through simplified procedures. The organisation had previously wanted to introduce such an option in the new Immigration Law, but employers had objected, believing that such regulation would allow other companies to easily poach employees who had been brought to Latvia by another company.[72]

EMN national report for study on labour migration during labour shortage

The main objective of the Latvian report[73] is to provide information for the EMN study on the role of labour migration regulation and practice in addressing current and future labour shortages in Latvia. The main focus is on the legislation and policies regulating labour migration, as well as practices regarding third-country nationals during the period from January 2021 until June 2024.

According to the medium and long-term labour market forecasts developed by the Ministry of Economics, overall, both in the medium and long term, demand will grow primarily for specialists in high-qualification professions. The most rapid decline in labour demand will be in low-qualification professions. This will affect all sectors.

Latvia is not in a unique situation; the EU has also achieved a record high employment level and historically lowest unemployment rate. However, nearly every sector is experiencing a shortage of workers – in some it is less pronounced, but in others the situation is so critical that it is impossible to fully complete work because there is no one to do it.

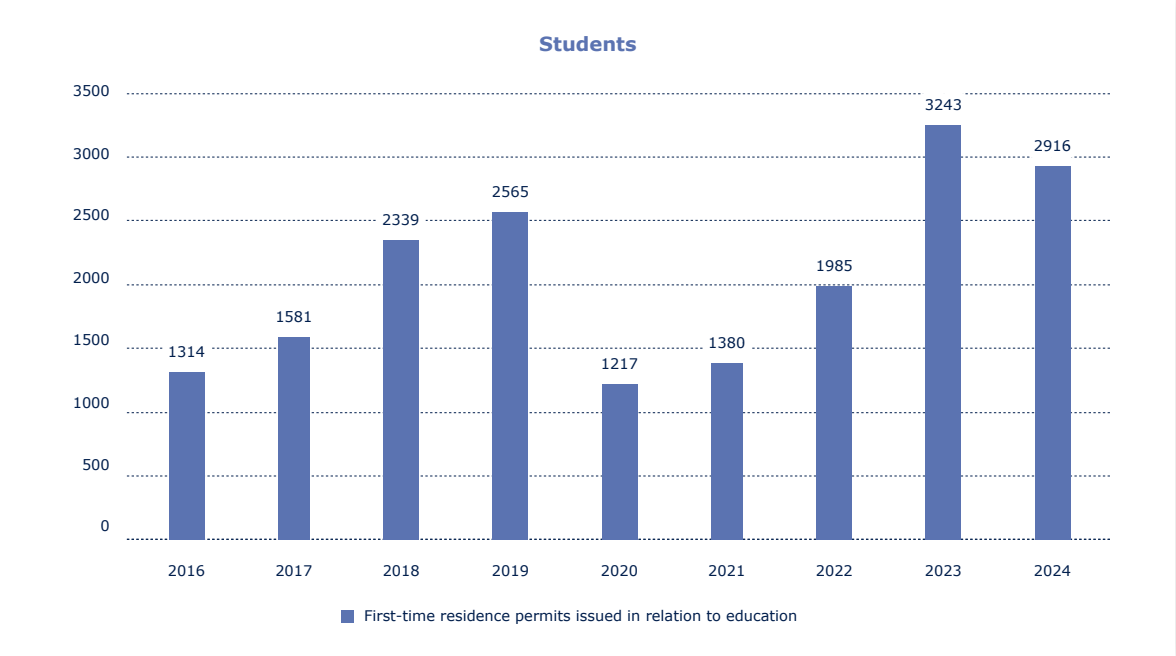
Latvia has begun to work on improving existing processes (made amendments to the Immigration Law, developing a *Green Corridor*) to make it easier for specialists in high-qualification professions to start work in Latvia.

71 LOSP – Agricultural Organisations Cooperation Council

72 LOSP: It is necessary to simplify and improve the transfer of guest workers to other companies. – Available at: https://www.db.lv/zinas/losp-nepieciesams-vienkarsot-un-uzlabot-viesstradnieku-nodosanu-citiem-uznemumiem-520294

73 Latvian report for the EMN study on labour migration during labour shortage. – Available at: https://www.emn.lv/latvijas-zinojums-emt-petijumam-par-darbaspeka-migraciju-darbaspeka-trukuma-laika/

Students and scientists



In relation to education, 2,916[74] first-time residence permits were issued in 2024 (3,243 in 2023)[75], a decrease compared to the previous year.

The total contribution of foreign students to Latvian economy was 385.2 million euros last year, according to estimates made by the Latvian Institute of Strategy and Economic Solutions researchers. 191.6 million euros constitute the direct contribution to Latvian economy: tuition fees, housing and living expenses, visitor spending. Additional 193.6 million euros is the indirect contribution of foreign students. In the policy review "Foreign Students in Latvia: a source of growth?"[76] the impact of foreign students on Latvian education sector, labour market and economic development was analysed.[77]

Family reunification

In 2024, the number of first-time residence permits issued to third-country nationals in relation to family reunification has slightly decreased to 1,672 (2,242 in 2023).[78]

74 OCMA. Initial data on residence permits collected by Eurostat – to be adjusted at a later date.

75 Data source: Eurostat

76 "Foreign Students in Latvia: a source of growth?". – Available at: https://www.rsu.lv/sites/default/files/imce/Zinas/laser_petijums_2025.pdf

77 Foreign students contributed 385 million euros to Latvian economy last year. – Available at: https://leta.lv/home/important/195E5E48-1659-4131-B671-AFF1FE38A81D/

78 OCMA. Initial data on residence permits collected by Eurostat – to be adjusted at a later date.

EMN national report for study: Family reunification of third-country nationals in the European Union: situation 20 years after the introduction of the Family Reunification Directive

The legal basis for the admission of third-country nationals for the purpose of family reunification is determined by the Immigration Law[79] and the Asylum Law[80] and the subordinate Cabinet Regulations.

In Latvia, the same residence permit issuance conditions apply to third-country nationals in both family reunification cases and cases of establishing a new family. Persons who have obtained international protection may reunite with family members if such a family already existed in the country of origin and the family members are abroad. In connection with family reunification in Latvia, a third-country national may obtain either a temporary residence permit or a permanent residence permit.

The main challenge in exercising the rights to family reunification in Latvia has been the correct preparation of the necessary documents. With regard to family members' access to education, employment and professional training, a significant obstacle is the lack of knowledge of the Latvian language. As examples of good practice, notable are the changes made to regulatory acts that resulted in unrestricted access to the work market for all family members of employed third-country nationals, and the establishment of a One-Stop Agency that provides tailored consultations and practical support to all third-country nationals legally residing in Latvia.

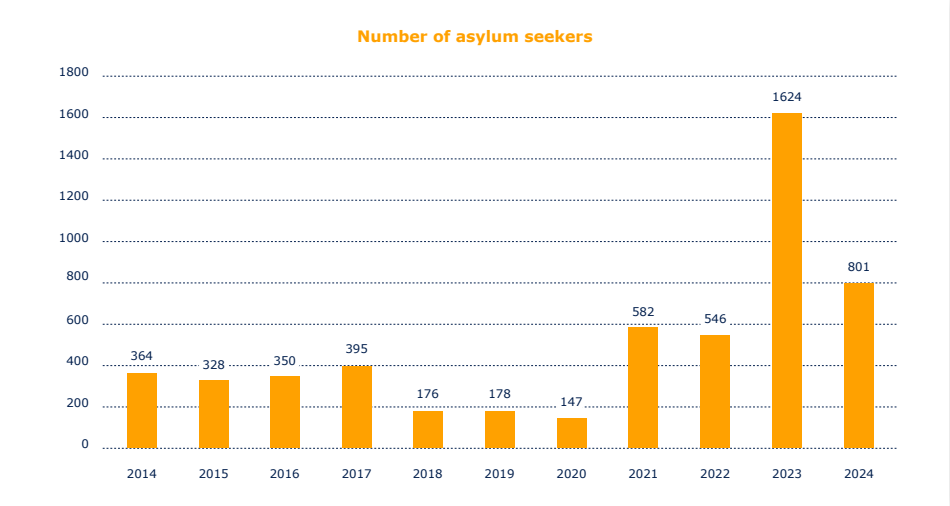
79 Immigration Law. – *Ziņotājs*, No. 169, 20.11.2002. – [entered into force 01.05.2003]

80 Asylum Law. – *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No. 2, 05.01.2016. – [entered into force 19.01.2016]

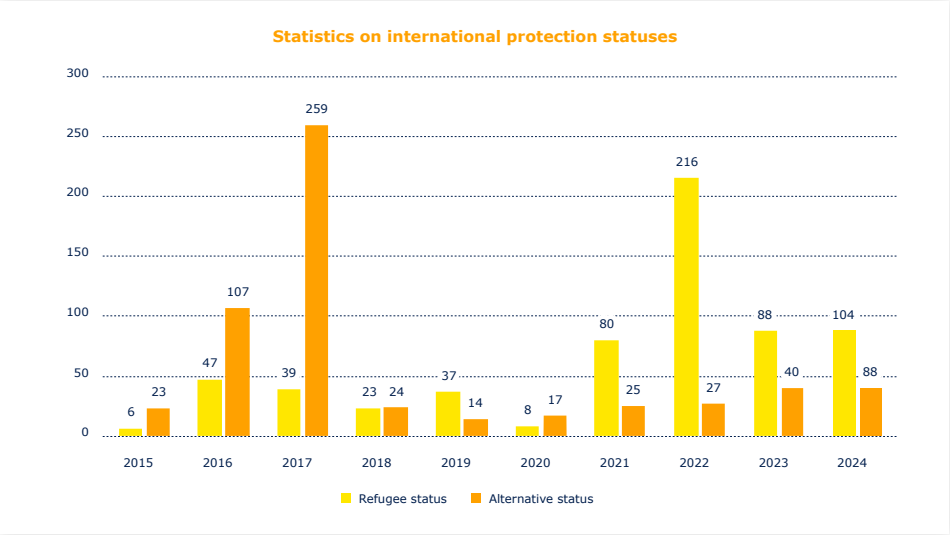
3.

INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION





Compared to 2023, the number of asylum seekers in 2024 has halved to 801 (1624 in 2023) and the predominant countries of origin of asylum seekers have changed – the largest number of asylum seekers came from Tajikistan – 163 (12 in 2023), Afghanistan – 149 (307 in 2023), India – 96 (167 in 2023), Bangladesh – 50 (39 in 2023), Russia – 42 (45 in 2023) and Syria – 40 (348 in 2023).[81]



In 2024, 192 persons received international protection in Latvia. Refugee status was granted to 104 persons, alternative status to 88 persons. Within the framework of the Dublin mechanism, 125 asylum seekers were transferred to Latvia in 2024.[82]

81 Data source: OCMA.

82 Data source: OCMA

Measures to implement the Common European Asylum System

In June 2024, there was a change in the practice regarding how non-detained asylum seekers are introduced to explanations of decisions to refuse refugee and/or alternative status. A concise explanation of the nature of the decision is prepared separately and translated into a language the asylum seeker understands. This is accompanied by a pre-prepared and translated explanation of the conditions for appealing the decision and the granting of state-provided legal assistance in a language the asylum seeker understands.

Explanations of the conditions for appealing the decision and the granting of state-provided legal assistance are translated into the most common languages used among asylum seekers and, where necessary, are additionally translated into the required language. Until then, for each non-detained asylum seeker, the decision to refuse refugee and/or alternative status had been translated in full from the reasoned part, including the conditions for appealing the decision and the granting of state-provided legal assistance.[83]

Accommodation of applicants for international protection

On 14 May 2024, European Commission representatives conducted a working visit to the asylum seekers accommodation centre (hereinafter – the ASAC) in Liepna, Alūksne municipality. The objective of the visit was to verify the successful utilisation of the EU funding in the establishment, improvement and development of the ASAC Liepna.

During the working visit, the European Commission representatives expressed appreciation for the targeted use of the EU funding and the significant work accomplished to transform the former Liepna boarding school into a successfully functioning the ASAC within a short timeframe, to train 17 staff members to work with asylum seekers, as well as to successfully provide a range of essential services for asylum seekers in their daily lives: healthcare, psychological services, medicine procurement and translation services.[84]

At the end of 2024, a contract was concluded within the project "Adaptation of the ASAC 'Liepna' for long-term operation" for the development of construction documentation for the building's long-term operational adaptation, construction works and author's supervision. During the project, it is planned to insulate the building, replace windows, renovate the heating system and refurbish the interior, thus improving the building's thermal retention and promote efficient use of energy resources, thereby extending the building's service life. It is also planned to carry out site improvement work, which includes the construction of access roads, installation of site lighting, construction of a parking area, as well as the reconstruction of the boiler house – garage. The project is being implemented from 1 May 2024 to 31 October 2027.

The project is being implemented under the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund within 2021. –2027 planning period, where the leading authority in Latvia is the Ministry of the Interior, and the cooperation partner is the OCMA.[85]

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83 Source: OCMA.

84 Representatives of the European Commission welcome development of the asylum seekers accommodation centre LIEPNA. – Available at: https://www.pmlp.gov.lv/lv/jaunums/eiropas-komisijas-parstavji-atzinigi-verte-patveruma-mekletaju-izmitinasanas-centra-liepna-attistibu

85 A contract has been signed on building adaptation for long-term operation at the ASAC Liepna. – Available at: https://www.pmlp.gov.lv/lv/jaunums/noslegts-ligums-par-ekas-pielagosanu-ilgtermina-ekspluatacijai-pmic-liepna

4.

TEMPORARY PROTECTION AND SUPPORT MEASURES FOR PERSONS FLEEING FROM THE WAR IN UKRAINE



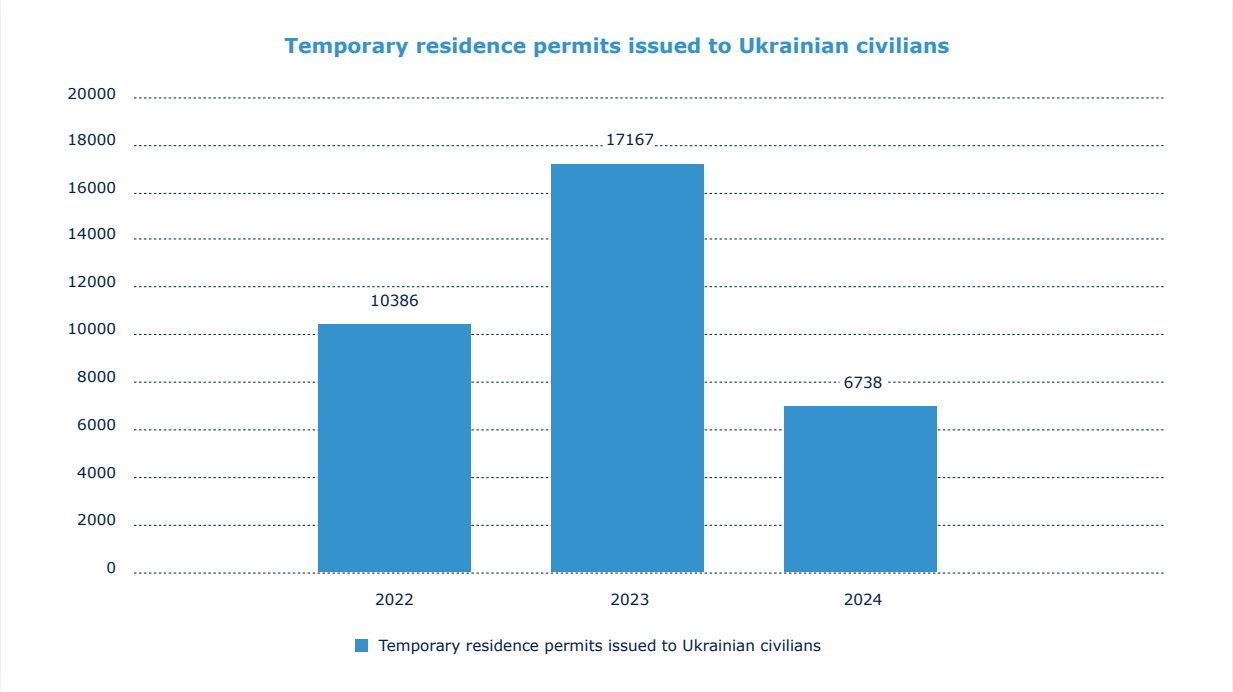


On 11 March 2025, the Cabinet acknowledged the informative report of the Ministry of the Interior "On the current situation regarding support to Ukrainian civilians", which summarises data on the support provided to Ukrainian civilians.

From October 2024 to January 2025, 6,359 Ukrainian nationals entered Latvia across the external border. The flow remains moderate and stable, with a declining trend. It should be noted that the majority of Ukrainian nationals cross Latvian territory for transit purposes. In 2024, the majority entered through Riga Airport – 78%.

As of 6 January 2025, 31,677 Ukrainian civilians were registered with the SEA, including 10,297 Ukrainian civilians who have been granted unemployment status. Also, as of 6 January 2025, 17,140 applications from Ukrainian civilians for employment commencement benefits have been registered with the SEA.[86]

86 On the current situation regarding support to Ukrainian civilians. – Available at: https://tapportals.mk.gov.lv/attachments/legal_acts/document_versions/90e10266-9065-447d-8677-689d38049085/download



On 19 December 2023, the Cabinet approved the Action Plan for Assistance to Ukrainian Civilians in the Republic of Latvia for 2024[87], which sets out the measures to be implemented and resources to be committed by state institutions, local governments, non-governmental organisations and business entities to ensure coordinated action to provide support to Ukrainian civilians – both those already residing in the Republic of Latvia and those Ukrainian civilians who, fleeing from the war, arrived in the Republic of Latvia in 2024.

On 18 December 2024, the subsequent Action Plan for providing support to Ukrainian civilians in the Republic of Latvia for 2025 was approved[88], which specifies the support measures to be provided to Ukrainian civilians for 2025 in accordance with the Law on Assistance to Ukrainian Civilians, and calculates the indicative funding required for their implementation.

On 4 March 2025, the term of long-term visas and residence permits issued in Latvia expired for approximately 15,000 Ukrainian civilians. The documents have to be renewed in order to continue receiving both benefits and other services in Latvia. To submit an application for an extension of the term, an application form or questionnaire must be submitted[89]. The OCMA has developed a solution – an interactive questionnaire and application form that will provide assistance to Ukrainian civilians in the residence permit application process. The interactive solution includes an explanation on completing the questionnaire and application form, providing more precise guidance on the information to be included in these documents.[90]

87 Law on Amendments to the Law on Assistance to Ukrainian Civilians. – *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No. 240A, 12.12.2022. – [entered into force 13.12.2022]

88 Cabinet Order No. 1109 of 18 December 2024 "On the Action Plan for the Provision of Assistance to Ukrainian civilians in the Republic of Latvia in 2025". – *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No. 250, 27.12.2024. – [entered into force 18.12. 2024]

89 Completion templates are available on the Office's website, in the section 'Extension of Temporary Protection Status: https://www.pmlp.gov.lv/lv/pagaidu-aizsardzibas-statusa-pagarinasana.

90 Digital template for filling in the residence permit form – support for Ukrainian civilians in Latvia. – Available at: https://www.pmlp.gov.lv/lv/jaunums/digitals-uzturesanas-atlaujas-anketu-aizpildisanas-paraugs-atbalsts-ukrainas-civiliedzivotajiem-latvija

In autumn 2024, a study conducted by the Providus think tank titled "Hate narratives about Ukraine and Ukrainians in Latvian social networks and society" was published[91].

Main conclusions:

- On platforms such as Telegram, TikTok, and YouTube, several social network channels are purposefully working to turn Latvia's Russian-speaking residents against Ukraine and Ukrainians.
- Social networks spreading hostile information use various methods intended for different target audiences – ranging from overt propaganda to mixing essentially neutral information with messages hostile to Ukraine and Ukrainians.
- Hostile narratives against Ukrainians contribute to social tension in Latvia, hamper Ukrainian refugees' access to housing and healthcare and create a sense of threat regarding their safety while living in Latvian society.

Based on the monitoring results, a summary of policy proposals has been compiled, offering recommendations on how to reduce the impact of hostile narratives about Ukraine and Ukrainians that are circulated in Latvian social media and society.

Policy proposals:

1) To require social media platforms to fulfil their obligation to moderate hate speech and prevent violations of laws;
2) To improve the methods of examining media consumption habits and attitudes towards sensitive issues within the Russian-speaking segment of Latvia's society;
3) To ensure fact-checking is also available in the Russian language;
4) To increase the visibility and engagement of Ukrainian refugees in Latvian society.[92]

A series of measures were implemented to support Ukrainian civilians in 2024 and early 2025:

1. Legal amendments to the Law on Assistance to Ukrainian Civilians:

On 21 November 2024, amendments to the Law on Assistance to Ukrainian Civilians were adopted[93], which stipulate that henceforth Ukrainians will be issued temporary residence permits for three years, rather than two, to reduce the administrative burden on both Ukrainian civilians and the OCMA. Unlike the amendments adopted in previous periods, there is no longer provision to extend the rights of Ukrainian civilians to remain in the Republic of Latvia without a valid residence permit. The aim of the amendments is to document all Ukrainian civilians residing in the territory of the Republic of Latvia in order to obtain more precise information about the number of persons who have been granted temporary protection in the Republic of Latvia. This was necessary since the responsible authorities faced difficulties in planning the extent of assistance to be provided to Ukrainian civilians, as the number of temporary protection recipients continuing to reside in the Republic of Latvia is unknown.

In April 2025, the OCMA updated information in the Register of Natural persons about 18.6 thousand

91 Study "Hate narratives about Ukraine and Ukrainians in Latvian social networks and society". – Available at: https://providus.lv/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Naida_narativi_petijums.pdf

92 Summary of policy proposals: How to reduce the impact of hostile narratives about Ukraine and Ukrainians in social media? – Available at: https://providus.lv/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Prieksliku mu_kopsavilkums_naida_narativi_.pdf

93 Law on Amendments to the Law on Assistance to Ukrainian Civilians. – *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No. 231A, 27.11.2024. – [entered into force 11.12.2024]

Ukrainian civilians who have lost their temporary protection status in Latvia as they had not applied for a new temporary residence permit within a month after the expiry of their visa or residence permit. This number includes both persons whose issued visas or residence permits expired in the first quarter of 2025 and persons whose document validity expired in 2022.[94]

2. Employment and professional development support:

On 6 June 2024, an experience exchange event took place "Employment of Ukrainian refugees: experience to date and future perspectives", attended by various organisations to share experiences and discuss further steps to promote the employment of Ukrainian refugees.

During the event, Memoranda of Understanding were signed with the Ministry of Economics, the SEA, the State Revenue Service, the SIF, the Latvian Association of Local Governments and the association *Your friends* ("Tavi draugi"). The memoranda affirm the commitment of the organisations involved to actively work on promoting the integration and employment of Ukrainian refugees.[95]

During 12 months of 2024, a total of 5,570 Ukrainian civilians received support from the SEA (3,379 of whom were women and 2,191 were men); 2,550 Ukrainian civilians obtained unemployed status, while 25 obtained job seeker status.

The SEA employees provide consultations to Ukrainian civilians, help them find work opportunities and communicate with employers, receive and administer applications for employment or self-employment start-up benefits.

During the 12 months of 2024, 1,722 Ukrainian civilians were involved in active employment and preventive measures. Ukrainian civilians most actively used the opportunity to obtain non-formal education (275), the opportunity to learn the Latvian language (256 participations), to receive career counselling (680 participations), to work in the summer employment programme for students (53 participations), as well as participated in other active employment measures.

Since March 2022, Ukrainian civilians who had begun employment relationships in Latvia have the opportunity to receive a one-time SEA employment start-up benefit in amount of 500 *euros* and since October 2022 – also a one-time self-employment start-up benefit of 500 *euros*. Since March 2024, the amount of both benefits has been increased to 700 *euros*. In the 12 months of 2024, 2379 Ukrainian civilians received the employment commencement benefit, whilst 221 received the self-employment commencement benefit.

3. Latvian language learning support for Ukrainian civilians:

In 2024, the SIF identified 33 organisations in an open application competition for service providers "Latvian language training for Ukrainian civilians" that will provide free Latvian language courses to Ukrainian civilians. The opportunity to learn the Latvian language will be available throughout Latvia, both in person, remotely, and also in a hybrid mode.

Free Latvian language training for adult Ukrainian civilians, including minors who have completed secondary education, was available for at least 120 academic hours, but not exceeding 150 hours from level A1. The total funding available for Latvian language training within the programme was 4.6 million EUR, providing

94 Information about 18.6 thousand Ukrainian civilians has been updated in the Register of Natural persons. – Available at: https://www.pmlp.gov.lv/lv/jaunums/fizisko-personu-registra-aktualizetas-zinas-par-186-tukstosiem-ukrainas-civiliedzivotaju

95 Latvian Chamber of Commerce and Industry signs Memoranda of Understanding for the integration of Ukrainian refugees into the labour market. – Available at: https://livelatvia.lv/lv/latvijas-tirdzniecibas-un-rupniecibas-kamera-paraksta-saprasanas-memorandus-ukrainas-beglu-integracijai-darba-tirgu/

the opportunity for 6375 persons to learn the language.[96] In total, 6,114 Ukrainian civilians actually attended, whilst 4,803 Ukrainian civilians completed the training.[97]

Participants who successfully completed the courses were provided with the opportunity, upon request, to take the state language proficiency test at the National Centre for Education. Latvian language training can be provided in person, remotely, or in a hybrid model.

Since January 2025, the Society "Shelter "Safe House"" has been implementing a new project "Latvian language learning sessions for Ukrainian doctors, medical personnel and Ukrainian citizens who work in the medical and first aid sectors in Latvia"[98].

The aim of the project is to provide support to Ukrainian civilians who work in Latvian medical institutions and receive services from medical institutions, as well as to enhance their level of Latvian language knowledge, practise language use in the process of providing first aid and improve well-being in the field of healthcare.

The Latvian language is being learned at levels A1, A2, B1 and B2. During the learning, listening, reading, speaking and writing skills are developed.[99]

On 4 February 2025, the Cabinet approved an allocation of 4,685,625 euros[100], so that the SIF could continue to provide Latvian language learning courses for Ukrainian civilians. It is planned that up to 6375 persons could attend free Latvian language courses in 2025.

The Latvian language training programme "Latvian language training for Ukrainian civilians" organised by the SIF will be available to Ukrainian civilians, including minors who have obtained secondary education in Ukraine, as well as persons who have reached the age of 16 and who are not registered in an educational institution registered in Latvia (general education, vocational secondary education or vocational education institution). Likewise, Ukrainian civilians from the age of 5 until reaching 18 years of age will be able to learn the Latvian language in non-formal education according to their initial level of Latvian language proficiency.[101] On 28 March 2025, the SIF approved the results of the competition for the programme "Latvian language training for Ukrainian civilians". 31 application has been approved in the competition, with total available funding of EUR 3,613,196. The target group of this competition is adult Ukrainian civilians, including minor Ukrainian civilians who have obtained secondary education in Ukraine, as well as persons who have reached the age of sixteen who are not registered in an educational institution registered in Latvia.

A training course is considered to have been successfully completed if the participant has attended at least 85% of the planned training hours in total. To ensure the effectiveness of the programme, this year's project competition regulations stipulate that every attendee of Latvian language training who is learning Latvian at A2 or higher language proficiency level must take the state language proficiency test at the National Centre for Education.

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96 Free Latvian language courses are available to Ukrainian civilians in Latvia. – Available at: https://www.sif.gov.lv/lv/jaunums/ukrainas-civiliedzivotajiem-latvija-pieejami-bezmaksas-latviesu-valodas-kursi

97 On the current situation regarding support to Ukrainian civilians. – Available at: https://tapportals.mk.gov.lv/attachments/legal_acts/document_versions/90e10266-9065-447d-8677-689d38049085/download

98 The courses will take place from 9 January until 30 April 2025. This project has been developed with the financial support of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), an organisation affiliated with the United Nations.

99 Latvian language learning sessions for Ukrainian doctors, medical personnel and Ukrainian citizens who work in the medical and first aid sectors in Latvia. – Available at: https://www.patverums-dm.lv/lv/latviesu-valodas-apguves-nodarbibas-ukrainas-arstiem-arstniecibas-personam-un-ukrainas-pilsoniem-kuri-strada-medicinas-un-pirmas-palidzibas-joma-latvija

100 Cabinet Order No. 73 of 4 February 2025 "On the redivision of appropriations". – *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No. 26, 06.02.2025. – [entered into force 04.02.2025]

101 €4.68 million allocated for Ukrainian residents for Latvian language learning. – Available at: https://www.lsm.lv/raksts/zinas/latvija/04.02.2025-ukrainas-iedzivotaju-latviesu-valodas-apmacibai-pieskir-468-miljonus-eiro.a586407/

To facilitate registration for Latvian language courses, a new registration platform LearnLatvian has been developed, where course participants will have the opportunity to select a training provider by evaluating the most convenient and appropriate training centre based on their place of residence, form of training and the class times offered. The platform will be available on the One-Stop Agency website www.livelatvia.lv upon contracts conclusion with the approved training providers.[102]

4. Social and psychological support:

Amendments of 21 November 2024 to the Law on Assistance to Ukrainian Civilians[103] provide for the extension of the following support measures until 31 December 2025:

- Primary support provided by the state: accommodation for up to 120 days and meals for up to 30 days;
- Payment of compensation for housing Ukrainian civilians;
- Accommodation for specially protected groups of society;
- Compensation for medicines and medical devices;
- Extension of the validity period of travel documents issued in Ukraine (until 28.02.2026);
- Commissioning of improved residential premises of municipalities for use by Ukrainian civilians.

Unaccompanied children from Ukraine who are under extraordinary guardianship, as well as after reaching the age of majority but not beyond the age of 19, are entitled to receive a certificate for social guarantees, which allows them to use fare concessions on local public transport.

To provide support for non-formal education activities for Ukrainian civilian children and young people, Latvian language learning, to reduce the psycho-emotional stress caused by war and to help them integrate more successfully into the Latvian education system and cultural environment, the government has provided funding of 780 thousand euros until 31 December 2024. This is stipulated by the order on the redivision of appropriation prepared by the Ministry of Education and Science[104], which was approved by the government on 12 March 2024. The planned support is particularly necessary for those Ukrainian children, adolescents and young people who study remotely at Ukrainian educational institutions and whose communication with peers in Latvia is limited, as well as for those pupils who simultaneously study at both Latvian and Ukrainian educational institutions and experience overload.[105]

At the Cabinet meeting on 26 March 2024, the proposal of the Ministry of Culture to allocate EUR 4,443,120 to the SIF as a result of budget redivision was supported[106], to provide cultural orientation courses and inclusion measures for Ukrainian civilians residing in Latvia. The redivision of funds is taking place in

102 Results of the competition Latvian Language Training for Ukrainian civilians were approved. – Available at: https://www.sif.gov.lv/lv/jaunums/apstiprinati-konkursa-latviesu-valodas-macibas-ukrainas-civiliedzivotajiem-rezultati

103 Law on Amendments to the Law on Assistance to Ukrainian Civilians. – *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No. 231A, 27.11.2024. –[entered into force 11.12.2024]

104 Cabinet Order No. 175 of 12 March 2024 "On the Redivision of Appropriations from the Programme 17.00.00 "Funding for the Implementation of Measures Specified in the Law on Assistance to Ukrainian Civilians" of the Department 74 "Financing to Be Redivided During the Implementation Process of the Annual State Budget" of the State budget". – *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No. 52, 13.03.2024. – [entered into force on 12.03.2024]

105 Non-formal education and Latvian language learning opportunities are provided for Ukrainian children and young in Latvia. – Available at: https://www.izm.gov.lv/lv/jaunums/ukrainas-berniem-un-jauniesiem-latvija-nodrosina-neformalas-izglitibas-un-latviesu-valodas-macibu-iespejas

106 Cabinet Order No. 217 of 28 March 2024 "On the Redivision of Appropriations from the Programme 17.00.00 "Funding for the Implementation of Measures Specified in the Law on Assistance to Ukrainian Civilians" of the Department 74 "Financing to Be Redivided During the Implementation Process of the Annual State Budget" of the State budget to the budget of the Society Integration Foundation". – *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No. 64, 02.04.2024. – [entered into force on 28.03.2024]

accordance with the Action Plan for the Provision of Assistance to Ukrainian civilians in 2024, which was approved by the government in December last year. To provide free cultural orientation courses and inclusion measures, the SIF, as in the previous year, will announce an open project competition with the aim of selecting suitable applications, the implementation whereof will make a significant contribution and ensure the availability of courses and activities for Ukrainian civilians in all regions of Latvia, as close as possible to their places of residence.

The National Centre for Education (hereinafter – the NCE) in cooperation with local authorities implemented two assistance programmes for Ukrainian children and young people in 2024: "Assistance for Ukrainian and Latvian children's and youth camps" and "Non-formal education activities, including Latvian language learning, for Ukrainian children and young people". The camps were organised with the aim of providing assistance for the socialisation and psycho-emotional well-being of Ukrainian children and young people, as well as for practising and improving Latvian language skills through communication and cooperation both amongst themselves and with Latvian children and young people in diverse creative events and educational activities in cultural education, environmental education, technical innovation, sports, healthy lifestyle and safety issues.

In 2024, 86 camps (64 day camps and 22 overnight camps) were held within the programme, with a total of 2,633 participants, 1,267 of whom were Ukrainian children and young people. The programme was implemented with the overarching aim of providing Ukrainian children and young people with the learning and practice of the Latvian language in non-formal education activities, strengthening Latvian language skills so that they could fully and successfully integrate into the Latvian education system and cultural environment.

During the implementation of the assistance programme, local authorities, in cooperation with service providers, ensured the participation of Ukrainian children in Latvian language learning classes, in diverse cultural and sports events, visiting cultural sites and institutions and engaging in creative activities.

According to the reports provided by local authorities, 796 Ukrainian children and young people aged 5 to 18 participated in the programme. The majority of participants were primary and basic school pupils.[107]

On 1 February 2025, the Society "Shelter "Safe House"" began implementing the project "Educational and Creative Activities as an Assistance for More Successful Integration of Ukrainian Residents"[108]. The aim of the project is to promote the active involvement of Ukrainian civilians in Latvian society through new skills and various interesting activities.

The Society will organise various educational and assistance activities. Assistance groups for Ukrainian women are planned to provide them with assistance during a particularly difficult period in their lives. Creative workshops for Ukrainian young people will also be organised, as well as a course on the Latvian work market planned for the autumn.

In February 2025, a memorandum of cooperation was signed between the Ministry of Welfare and the Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine. The aim of the memorandum is to develop partnership and implement the Latvian and Ukrainian agreement on long-term assistance and security commitments in the social sector, as well as to continue and develop cooperation between the two countries in the social protection sphere. The aim of the cooperation is also to support Ukraine on its path to the EU membership, particularly

107 Source: Ministry of Education and Science

108 A project supported by Riga City Council on integration activities for Ukrainian civilians in Riga has been launched. – Available at: https://www.patverums-dm.lv/lv/uzsakts-rigas-domes-atbalstits-projekts--par-ukrainas-civiliedzivotaju-integracijas-aktivitatem-riga/1854

by promoting the exchange of experience on social sector reforms.[109]

On 4 April 2025, the SIF approved the results of the competition "Non-governmental Organisation Activities for the Assistance of Ukrainian civilians". 7 applications have been approved for the competition, with a total available funding of EUR 234,776. The aim of the programme is to assist the continuation of NGO activities in Latvia for the assistance of Ukrainian civilians who are fleeing from Russian military aggression in Ukraine, including financing assistance measures for Ukrainian civilians at the state border.[110]

On 15 April 2025, the government[111] supported the solution proposed by the Ministry of Education and Science to organise day and overnight camps for children and young people to provide psycho-emotional assistance, promote Latvian language learning and encourage children integration of Ukrainian refugees. This is provided by the order on the redivision of appropriation prepared by the Ministry of Education and Science.

Funding amounting to 900 thousand euros has been secured until 1 November 2025, and the support programme will be implemented by the State Education Development Agency in cooperation with local authorities. The camps are planned to be organised for pupils from grades 1 to 12, inviting 50% Ukrainian and 50% Latvian pupils to participate.

The camp programmes for Ukrainian and Latvian young people offer both Latvian language classes and a variety of other activities and creative pursuits that will improve communication and interpersonal skills. At the same time, this is a way to promote social-emotional skills and strengthen psycho-emotional well-being, which, due to the geopolitical situation, is important for both Ukrainian and Latvian children and young people.[112]

5. Educational support for Ukrainian civilians:

In 2024, several amendments were made to Cabinet Regulation No. 488 of 26 July 2016 "Procedures by which Minor Asylum Seeker shall be Provided with Opportunities for Acquiring Education"[113] [114], which provide minor Ukrainian civilians with the opportunity to obtain education in general education and vocational education programmes, specifying the financing regulations for ensuring education for Ukrainian civilians, for the period until 31 August 2025.

The Latvian Language Agency (hereinafter – the LLA) provides methodological support to teachers of Latvian educational institutions working with newly arrived children from Ukraine and other countries: 12-hour courses were organised for 9 groups, 8 consultations were provided to educational institution staff and regular individual consultations as well. In 2024, 854 teachers were trained.

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109 A memorandum on cooperation in social sphere has been signed between the Ministry of Welfare and the Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine. – Available at: https://www.lm.gov.lv/lv/jaunums/parakstits-labklajibas-ministrijas-un-ukrainas-socialas-politikas-ministrijas-memorands-par-sadarbibu-socialaja-joma

110 Results of the competition "Non-governmental Organisation Activities for the Assistance of Ukrainian civilians" have been approved. – Available at: https://www.sif.gov.lv/lv/jaunums/apstiprinati-konkursa-nevalstisko-organizaciju-pasakumi-ukrainas-civiliedzivotaju-atbalstam-rezultati

111 Cabinet Order No. 212 of 16 April 2025 "On the Redivision of Appropriations from the Programme 17.00.00 "Funding for the Implementation of Measures Specified in the Law on Assistance to Ukrainian Civilians" of the Department 74 "Financing to Be Redivided During the Implementation Process of the Annual State Budget" of the State budget". – *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No. 77, 22.04.2025. – [entered into force on 16.04.2025]

112 Funding allocated for this year for the organisation of camps for Ukrainian and Latvian children. – Available at: https://www.izm.gov.lv/lv/jaunums/pieskir-finansejumu-sim-gadam-ukrainas-un-latvijas-bernu-nometnu-organizesanai-0

113 Cabinet Regulations No. 870 of 17 December 2024 "Amendments to Cabinet Regulation No. 488 of 26 July 2016 "Procedures by which Minor Asylum Seeker shall be Provided with Opportunities for Acquiring Education"". – *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No. 247, 18.12.2024. – [entered into force on 01.01.2025]

114 Cabinet Regulations No. 870 of 17 December 2024 "Amendments to Cabinet Regulation No. 488 of 26 July 2016 "Procedures by which Minor Asylum Seeker shall be Provided with Opportunities for Acquiring Education"". – *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No. 247, 18.12.2024. – [entered into force on 01.01.2025]

In 2024, the LLA continued to organise Latvian language learning courses for Ukrainian teachers, offering Latvian language learning at proficiency levels B1 and B2 (mixed group) – 15 teachers were participating in these language courses.

EMN national report for study: Application of the Temporary Protection Directive: challenges and best practice in 2023

The National Report for the European Migration Network (EMN) study "Application of the Temporary Protection Directive: challenges and best practice" provides an overview of the main changes in legislation, challenges and examples of solutions, as well as best practice in the legal, education, employment, health and social welfare areas for the period from 1 January 2023 to 1 July 2024 in Latvia.

5.

MINORS AND OTHER VULNERABLE GROUPS



In 2024, 20 unaccompanied minors were identified in Latvia[115] and all requested asylum in Latvia.

On 30 April 2024, Cabinet Regulation No. 275 "Amendments to Cabinet Regulation No. 857 of 15 November 2005 "Regulations Regarding Social Guarantees for an Orphan and a Child Left without Parental Care who is in Out-of-Family Care as well as After the Termination of Out-of-Family Care"" were approved[116], which stipulate additional support for orphans or children left without parental care to commence independent living upon reaching the age of majority. The planned assistance includes assistance in creating a support network, strengthening financial and budget management literacy and targeted assistance in obtaining education, as well as providing a social mentor service, which together significantly reduce various risks, including the risk of youth poverty in the future. The aim of the amendments is to provide assistance measures after reaching the age of majority to former children in out-of-family care and adopted children whose adoption has been revoked by a court judgment until the age of 21 or if they are studying at a general education or vocational education institution, or studying at a higher education institution, including a college – until reaching the age of 24.[117]

115 Source: OCMA.

116 Cabinet Regulation No. 275 of 30 April 2024 "Amendments to Cabinet Regulation No. 857 of 15 November 2005 "Regulations Regarding Social Guarantees for an Orphan and a Child Left without Parental Care who is in Out-of-Family Care as well as After the Termination of Out-of-Family Care"". – *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No. 86, 03.05.2024. – [entered into force 04.02.2024]

117 Annotation to the draft legislation "Amendments to Cabinet Regulation No. 857 of 15 November 2005 "Regulations Regarding Social Guarantees for an Orphan and a Child Left without Parental Care who is in Out-of-Family Care as well as After the Termination of Out-of-Family Care"". – Available at: https://tapportals.mk.gov.lv/annotation/344b6ec4-69e4-4315-bf2d-d692c0b9ec1e

6.

INTEGRATION



Integration policy in Latvia is the responsibility of the Ministry of Culture. The Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Welfare, the Ministry of Smart Administration and Regional Development, the Ministry of the Interior, the SIF and non-governmental organisations are also involved in the implementation of this policy.

On 17 December 2024, the Plan for the Development of a Cohesive and Civically Active Society for 2024–2027[118] (hereinafter – the Plan) was approved. Three lines of action will be implemented according to the plan: National identity and Belonging; Culture of Democracy and Inclusive Citizenship; Integration. In the Plan's 3rd direction of action – Integration, measures aimed at the inclusion of third-country nationals and recipients of international protection (refugees, persons with alternative status and asylum seekers) in Latvian society are included. The following measures are envisaged:

- Latvian language courses and conversation clubs;
- Introductory course for third-country nationals about life in Latvia;
- Consultative mechanism for the participation of third-country nationals;
- Development of a one-stop agency, promoting the inclusion of newcomers in the local community, ensuring a unified and quality service package;
- Promotion of the socio-economic inclusion of asylum seekers and recipients of international protection;
- Intercultural communication courses for media representatives;
- Training for professionals from various fields on society diversity and intercultural dialogue;
- Activities that provide an innovative approach to the participation of third-country nationals in society;
- Latvian language clubs in the Asylum Seekers Accommodation Centres *Mucenieki* and *Liepna*;
- Preliminary data research for the design of an information system to track the inclusion process of newcomers and plan support measures;
- Increasing the capacity of Latvian language learning availability.

On 17 February 2025, the State Audit Office published a performance audit report[119] on the cohesive society policy under the responsibility of the Ministry of Culture. The audit assessed the planning, implementation and monitoring of a narrow-scope cohesive society policy. Special attention was paid to providing Latvian language learning for adults as an essential measure for promoting cohesion.

The audit concluded that the development and implementation of the cohesive society policy under the responsibility of the Ministry of Culture lacks clear purpose. The established cooperation mechanism for the development and implementation of coordinated policy is not optimal. The institution specially established for the financial support of society integration – the Society Integration Foundation – is not only a policy implementer but also undertakes the tasks of a policy maker, whilst the Ministry of Culture, being the policy maker, is also involved in policy implementation measures. The activities carried out so far in the field of

118 Cabinet Order No. 1195 of 17 December 2024 "Plan for the Development of a Cohesive and Civically Active Society for 2024–2027". – *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No. 251, 28.12.2024. – [entered into force on 17.12.2024]

119 Cohesive society policy – unclear and uncoordinated. Audit report. – Available at: https://www.lrvk.gov.lv/lv/getrevisionfile/29703-TrunR1tvpeFUQLmyE62yFTRi0VBDd3T-.pdf

cohesive society have not been effective in creating a cohesive society and progressing towards the goals set in the National Development Plan 2021–2027.

The audit provided three recommendations, which, when implemented, will ensure:

1) Cohesive society policy will be clear and purposeful with defined priorities, target groups and measures, ensuring a clear role for institutions, coordination and public involvement in decisions.

2) A transparent monitoring system will be established with identified indicators, aggregated data, including on spent funding, with analysis, evaluation and institutional cooperation. There will be more effective monitoring.

3) An effective, coordinated Latvian language learning system will be established. Overlap of tasks will be eliminated, learning methodology will be improved, and learning will be accessible to all target groups.[120]

Discussions about integration measures for third-country nationals were also brought to the fore, with the SIF representatives acknowledging that: "the biggest challenge is the availability of Latvian language learning during the initial integration phase of these people, as the demand for learning is significantly higher than the supply. The availability of funding also greatly affects the availability of these courses, to avoid interruptions and to ensure that, for example, once a person acquires the level A1, they can quickly progress to the next language level. State budget funding is intended only for Ukrainian civilians and for third-country nationals accordingly and, for example, refugees or asylum seekers; these funds come only from the EU funding."[121]

In October 2024, based on the experience of providing Latvian language courses to Ukrainian civilians in Latvia and to return migrants and their family members, SIF officials developed a model for implementing a unified and accessible Latvian language learning system in Latvia, thereby ensuring that every newcomer has the opportunity to learn the Latvian language. For immigrants to successfully integrate into Latvian social and economic life, it is essential to develop a unified understanding of Latvian culture, traditions and history with language playing a central role in this process.[122]

Promoting integration for socio-economic participation

The Ministry of Culture is the delegated authority of the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (hereinafter – the AMIF) 2021–2027 planning period. To achieve the AMIF objectives, the Ministry of Culture regularly organises open project competitions. In 2024, the implementation of projects continued in the AMIF activity "Integration measures for third-country nationals to promote the inclusion of the target group into society".

The activity "Introductory course for third-country nationals about life in Latvia (phase 1)" is implemented by: the Society "Shelter "Safe House"", the association "Cooperation Platform" and SIA "*HOTEL SCHOOL*"

120 Cohesive society policy – unclear and uncoordinated. Audit report. – Available at: https://www.lrvk.gov.lv/lv/getrevisionfile/29703-TrunR1tvpeFUQLmyE62yFTRi0VBDd3T-.pdf

121 Approximately 130,000 foreign citizens hold residence permits in Latvia; there is insufficient support for learning the Latvian language (updated). – https://www.lsm.lv/raksts/zinas/ekonomika/10.10.2024-ap-130-000-arvalstu-pilsonu-ir-uzturesanas-atlauja-latvija-trukst-atbalsta-latviesu-valodas-apguve-precizets.a572069/

122 The number of newcomers is increasing in Latvia: can they be a solution to labour market challenges? – Available at: https://www.sif.gov.lv/lv/jaunums/latvija-palielinas-jaunpienaceju-skaits-vai-vini-var-risinajums-darba-tirgus-izaicinajumiem

[LLC HOTEL SCHOOL] Hotel Management College. The direct objective of the activity is to provide third-country nationals with an introductory course about life in Latvia tailored to their needs, by organising theoretical and practical knowledge acquisition training courses that promote the target group's inclusion in society, facilitate access to the work market, further education, as well as improve civic, cultural and everyday life skills.

From 1 January 2024 until 31 December 2024 One-stop agency provided individual consultations to 7,318 clients. From July 2024, a new service was introduced – Psychologist/psychotherapist consultations, which were provided to 104 persons (545 consultations). Legal services were provided to 70 persons (136 consultations). Interpretation and translation services were provided 1,126 times. Overall, the One-stop agency's clients were from 77 countries – individual consultations were used by nationals of Ukraine, India, Russia, Belarus, Sri Lanka, Georgia, Tajikistan and other third countries. The most common consultation topics were related to obtaining information on migration issues (residence permits), employment and education.[123]

To promote society cohesion, mutual cooperation and reduce prejudices against and between ethnic groups, nine projects were implemented in Riga, Rēzekne, Daugavpils, Preiļi, Sēlija and Jelgava with the support of the SIF under the "Ethnic Minorities and Society Cohesion Programme". The projects approved within the Programmes are designed for children, young people and their families.

The activities planned within the projects include individual and group support for ethnic minority children to learn the Latvian language, day camps, tolerance training, cultural education afternoons, joint festivals, educational excursions and theatre arts, stage speech and improvisation, as well as animation classes.

The activities are implemented by the associations "Cooperation Platform", "Community Network "Sēlijas salas"", "New Wings" ("Jaunie spārni"), "Your Friends" ("Tavi draugi"), "Rēzekne City Theatre-Studio Joriks", "Mežciems Association", "ERFOLG", "Jelgava Association of National Cultural Unities", "Kurzeme NGO Centre".[124]

On 2 January 2025, the Society "Shelter "Safe House"" in cooperation with the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) has begun implementing a new project "Multidisciplinary approach in the integration of asylum seekers and refugees". Several activities are planned within the framework of the project which will promote faster and more successful inclusion of target group representatives in Latvian society. Legal consultations are planned for asylum seekers and refugees, including Ukrainian civilians residing in Latvia. Integration activities are also planned at the asylum seekers accommodation centres in Mucenieki and Liepna, where asylum seekers will be able to participate in various educational and informational activities. Art therapy sessions for Ukrainian women residing in Latvia will also take place simultaneously.[125]

Integration into the labour market

In 2024, 156 persons with refugee or alternative status were registered with the SEA (granted unemployment or job seeker status) persons with refugee or alternative status. 14 persons with refugee or alternative

123 Source: SIF.

124 Nine projects will be implemented to carry out activities promoting ethnic minority cohesion. – Available at: https://www.sif.gov.lv/lv/jaunums/mazakumtautibu-saliedetibas-veicinasanas-aktivitasu-istenosanai-tiks-istenoti-devini-projekti

125 Multidisciplinary approach in the integration of asylum seekers and refugees. – Available at: https://www.patverums-dm.lv/lv/multidisciplinara-pieeja-patveruma-mekletaju-un-beglu-integracijas-procesa

status received career consultations and 19 persons were involved in active employment and preventive measures: e-career self-tests (6), information days (5), remote training in Google programmes (1), competitiveness enhancement measures (3). 10 persons were involved in Latvian language courses and one person started English language learning.

In 2024, 41 persons with refugee or alternative status were employed.

From 1 May 2024, the Society "Shelter "Safe House"" in cooperation with the Estonian Refugee Council (Tallinn), the Estonian Labour Inspectorate and the State Labour Inspectorate of Latvia has begun implementing INTERREG Central Baltic Programme co-financed project *EDGE UP (Employment Development and Growth for Everyone, with Refugee Youth and Older Adults*). The aim of the project is to provide various types of support to refugees when beginning their employment in a new country. It is planned that a total of 228 persons will be prepared in Latvia and Estonia to successfully integrate into the labour market.

During the training, lectures and interactive sessions were held on CV preparation, preparation for job interviews, information was provided on the legal framework in the field of employment with psychological preparation of participants at the same time. During the training, meetings between human resources managers from various companies and training participants also took place to learn how candidate selection for specific jobs practically happens and how one should prepare for a job interview. Where possible, practical training for participants within various companies are also planned.[126]

In mid-2024, the first group of participants successfully completed the Edge-Up employment programme, which is dedicated to improving the employment of refugees. During the programme, participants have acquired new skills and confidence, preparing them for a more successful start to their employment.

In total, 14 persons graduated from the first group. Among the participants were persons from Eritrea, Cameroon, Guinea, Senegal, Burundi, Afghanistan, Mexico, Algeria and Iran. Two rare language interpreters were engaged. Each graduate expressed immense satisfaction with the experience and acquired skills, which have given them the opportunity to achieve their career goals with greater confidence.[127]

Basic services

Social assistance

On 4 December 2024, amendments to the Law on Social Services and Social Assistance were adopted[128], which make changes to the social assistance system, affecting not only the country's permanent residents, but also third-country nationals and their family members. Amendments stipulate that the guaranteed minimum income (hereinafter – the GMI) threshold from 1 January 2025 is raised from 20% to 22% of the median income. Accordingly, in 2025, the GMI threshold for the first or only person in a household is 166 euros, but for each subsequent person in the household – EUR 116 (in 2024, the GMI threshold was EUR 137 for the first or only person in a household and EUR 96 for each subsequent person in the household).

126 *EDGE UP Employment Development and Growth for Everyone, with Refugee Youth and Older Adults*. – Available at: https://www.patverums-dm.lv/lv/edge-up

127 The first training group of the Edge-Up employment programme has been successfully completed. – Available at: https://www.patverums-dm.lv/lv/sekmigi-noslegusies-nodarbinatibas-programmas-edge-up-pirma-macibu-grupa/1765

128 Law on Amendments to the Law on Social Services and Social Assistance. – *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No. 248, 19.12.2024. – [entered into force on 01.01.2025]

The amendments were prepared and adopted based on the Judgement of the Constitutional Court of 5 October 2023 in case No. 2022-34-01 "On Conformity of Section 33, Paragraph One of the Law on Social Services and Social Assistance and Section 2.2, Paragraphs Two and Three of the Law on Social Security with Articles 1 and 109 of the Constitution of the Republic of Latvia"[129].

In connection with Directive (EU) 2021/1883 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 October 2021 on the conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals for the purpose of highly qualified employment, and repealing Council Directive 2009/50/EC[130] implementation, amendments were made to the Law on Social Services and Social Assistance, the Disability Law and the Support for Unemployed Persons and Persons Seeking Employment Law:

- The amendments of 7 November 2024 to the Law on Social Services and Social Assistance stipulate that the right to receive services referred to in Article 9.1[131] and Article 13, Paragraph one[132] of the Law and information and consultations from the municipal social service are available to an EU Blue Card holder issued in the Republic of Latvia and their family members who have been issued a temporary residence permit in the Republic of Latvia and whose permanent place of residence during the validity of the temporary residence permit is the territory of Latvia.
- Amendments of 7 November 2024 to the Disability Law[133], stipulate that persons who are EU Blue Card holders, as well as persons who are family members of the holder of this card and whose permanent place of residence during the validity of the temporary residence permit is the territory of the Republic of Latvia, are entitled to predictable disability assessment and disability examination.[134]
- On 21 November 2024, amendments to the Support for Unemployed Persons and Persons Seeking Employment Law were adopted[135], which stipulate that family members of EU Blue Card holders are also entitled to receive the support provided for in the Support for Unemployed Persons and Persons Seeking Employment Law.

Providing education

With the Cabinet Regulation No. 259 of 23 April 2024 "Amendments to Cabinet Regulation No. 747 of 27 November 2018 "Regulations Regarding the State Basic Education Standard and Model Basic Education Programmes""[136] Annex 11 of the regulations was supplemented with variant 2 of the model basic education programme – for the acquisition of basic education for a minor asylum seeker, refugee or person with alternative status. The aim of this programme model is to ensure comprehensive development and value

129 Judgement of the Constitutional Court of 5 October 2023 in case No. 2022-34-01 "On Conformity of Section 33, Paragraph One of the Law on Social Services and Social Assistance and Section 2.2, Paragraphs Two and Three of the Law on Social Security with Articles 1 and 109 of the Constitution of the Republic of Latvia". Summary. – Available at: https://www.satv.tiesa.gov.lv/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/2022-34-01_sprieduma_kopsavilkums.pdf

130 https://www.satv.tiesa.gov.lv/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/2022-34-01_sprieduma_kopsavilkums.pdf

131 State-funded services of long-term social care and social rehabilitation institutions.

132 (1) The State shall ensure in accordance with the funds allocated in the annual state budget law: 1) determination of professional suitability and professional rehabilitation for persons with functional disorders, persons with disabilities or persons with predictable disability.

133 Law on Amendments to the Disability Law. – *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No. 226, 20.11.2024. – [entered into force on 04.12.2024]

134 Annotation to the draft legislation "Amendments to the Disability Law". – Available at: https://titania.saeima.lv/LIVS14/SaeimaLIVS14.nsf/0/B98163B55C7DCEBFC2258B57003D8418?OpenDocument.

135 Law on Amendments to the Support for Unemployed Persons and Persons Seeking Employment Law, *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No 236, 04.12.2024. – [entered into force on 18.12.2024]

136 Cabinet Regulation No. 259 of 23 April 2024 "Amendments to Cabinet Regulation No. 747 of 27 November 2018 "Regulations Regarding the State Basic Education Standard and Model Basic Education Programmes"". – *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No. 81, 25.04.2024. – [entered into force on 26.04.2024]

orientation for the learner, integrating into the education system, and to provide additional support in the learning of the Latvian language, so that the pupil would want and be able to continue general education or acquire a profession, participate in society and develop into a happy and responsible person.

In 2024, the number of educational institutions that are prepared to admit and educate minor asylum seekers has been expanded: Aleksejs Grāvītis Liepna Primary School and Gaismas Primary School.

The teachers of Aleksejs Grāvītis Liepna Primary School are methodically prepared to work with minor asylum seekers, as they have completed the professional development programme implemented by the Latvian Language Agency on how to organise the learning process in a linguistically heterogeneous environment and develop individual learning plans for minor asylum seekers. Support is also provided by Rīga Dārzciems Secondary School, which is being developed as a methodological centre for the education of minor asylum seekers.

Gaismas Primary School is an educational institution that implements special primary education programmes for students with mental development and severe mental development disorders or several severe developmental disorders. It is supportive and ready to accept minor asylum seekers if they are identified as having a need to learn through a special education programme.

The State Education Development Agency is implementing the project "Support for Adult Education Based on Individual Needs of Adults" from 2 January 2024 until 30 November 2029. The aim of the project is to improve the skills of the employees and provide professional qualifications or retraining to improve the quality and capacity of the workforce, enhance the professional competence of employed persons in accordance with labour market needs, promote the ability of the employees to adapt more effectively to changing working conditions, thereby ensuring the resilience of the employees in the labour market, as well as to increase participation in adult education and establish an adult education quality monitoring system. The project target group is employed persons, including self-employed persons[137]:

- who have reached at least 18 years of age with no upper age limit, including working pensioners;
- with completed or incomplete education, including primary education, general secondary, vocational or higher education;
- new parents who are on parental leave and have an employment relationship.
- Priority assistance is given to:
- employed persons with a low level of education (completed or incomplete primary education or general secondary education);
- employed persons aged 50 and over;
- refugees and persons with alternative status.

Training is free of charge for employed persons from households that have been granted low-income or needy household status, as well as for persons who have obtained refugee or alternative status. Additionally, it is possible to receive support for the compensation of transport costs for educational programme acquisition. Support can be received for transport expenses to attend training or practice locations in person according to the duration of the training or practice.[138]

137 working and self-employed residents within the meaning of the Law on State Social Insurance.

138 Training for employed persons. – Available at: https://stars.gov.lv/macibas-nodarbinatajiem-mn-projekti.

Language learning

On 18 June 2024, the Cabinet supported the intention of the Ministry of Education and Science to establish a study programme at the University of Latvia to prepare at least 100 Latvian language teachers who will teach it as a foreign language to adults. The Ministry of Education and Science forecasts that 100 teachers will indicatively be able to provide Latvian language acquisition to 4,800 persons per year, facilitating the integration of adult foreigners in Latvian society and their inclusion in the labour market. It is envisaged that the University of Latvia will implement the programme in cooperation with the Latvian Language Agency.[139]

In 2024, the implementation of projects in the AMIF activity continued **"Inclusion of third-country nationals in the local society by promoting opportunities for using and learning the Latvian language".** As a result of the activity "Latvian language courses and conversation clubs (Phase 1)", projects are implemented by: the association "Education Development Centre", the Latvian Language Agency, Daugavpils University Lifelong Learning, Culture and Science Communication Association "Intellectual Park" and the association "Innovation Support Centre".

The direct objective of the activity is to provide Latvian language courses and conversation clubs for third-country nationals, expanding the availability of Latvian language acquisition opportunities and adapting them to the needs of different groups.

To ensure successful inclusion of third-country nationals in the environment of Latvian educational institutions and to assist teachers who work with these learners, the Latvian Language Agency develops support materials for teachers, which are intended for working with learners who do not know the Latvian language or have only limited knowledge of the Latvian language. Within the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund project "Latvian language acquisition to facilitate the inclusion of third-country nationals in the labour market 4" (contract No. PMIF/13.2./2023/1/05) implemented by the Latvian Language Agency, 261 person has already acquired the language, 170 persons continue their studies, including 39% Ukrainian civilians (according to information in the SIF unified database). The permissible age of Latvian language course participants is from 15 years (according to information in the SIF unified database, 3.3% of participants in the Latvian Language Agency courses are 15–19 years old). The Latvian Language Agency regularly organises language courses at the asylum seekers accommodation centre Liepna.

The Latvian Language Agency has developed and published the following educational material: Dambe, Z. The First Step (Pirmais solis). Workbook for newcomers. A0–A1. Grades 1–3. Part 2. Rīga: LLA, 2024 (Part 1 was published in 2023) A workbook for learners in grades 4–6 (beginners) is being prepared and planned to be published in 2025. The Latvian Language Agency also provides methodological support to teachers in Latvian educational institutions working with newcomer children from Ukraine and other countries: 12-hour courses were organised for 9 groups, 8 consultations were provided to educational institution staff and regular individual consultations. In 2024, 854 teachers were trained.

139 At least 100 Latvian language teachers to be trained for the integration of foreigners. – Available at: https://www.lsm.lv/raksts/zinas/latvija/18.06.2024-arzemnieku-integracijai-sagatavos-vismaz-100-latviesu-valodas-pedagogus.a558359/

Non-discrimination

On 24 October 2024, the SIF social initiative "Advantageous Journeys" was launched at the Galerija Centrs shopping centre, inviting people to embark on a free journey by listening to the experiences of fellow human beings and discovering a different world right beside us.

"Advantageous Journeys" is a social initiative created to draw society's attention to various forms of discrimination and to encourage society, especially young people, to become more open-minded in order to better understand the challenges faced by fellow human beings – people with disabilities, different ethnic backgrounds, various ages, etc.

The opening event concluded with a "Journey Through Experiences", during which all interested had the opportunity to stop at one of the improvised journey experience 'stations' symbolising different forms of discrimination, to understand the problems faced by fellow humans due to ageism, racism or disability-related discrimination. It was an opportunity to meet Paralympic champion Rihards Sniks, creator of the TikTok social experiment *Pensioner's Life* Marita Akmeņkalne and content creator, author of the TikTok account *Life in Latvia* Gokul – an Indian who has relocated to Latvia.

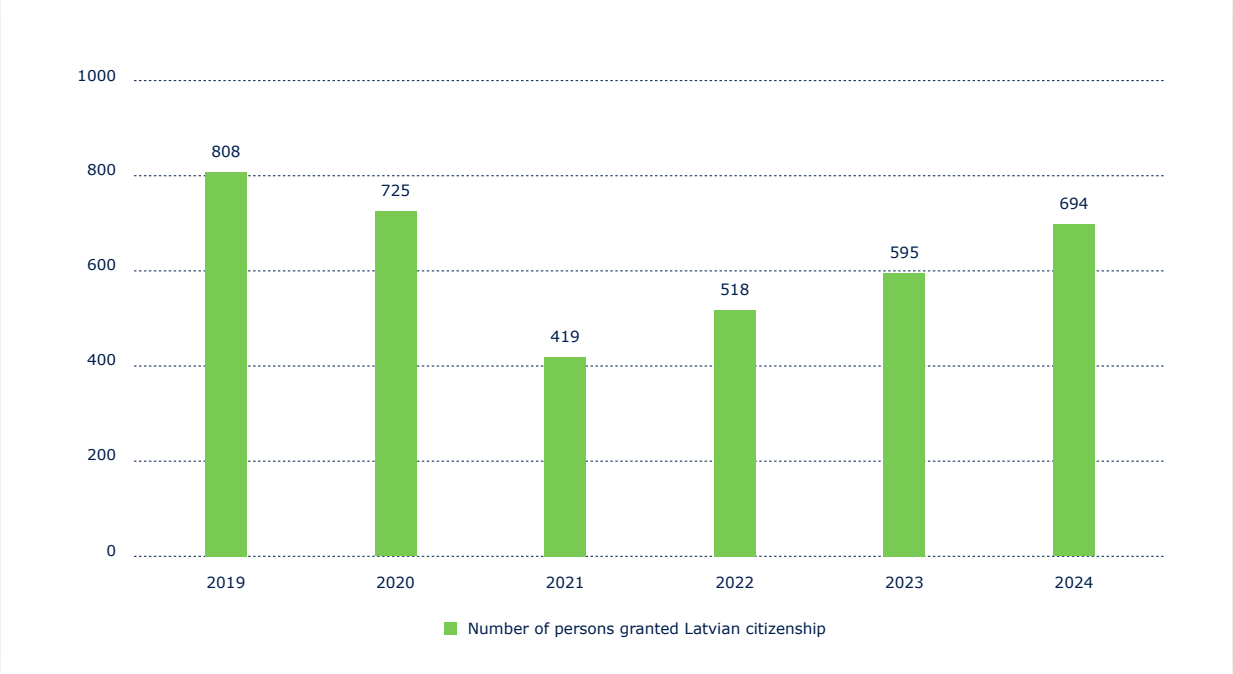
Everyone who stopped at one of the stations had to complete a test to determine whether they were ready to travel further. This opportunity is available to everyone by completing the test at izdevigiecelojumi.lv. Here you can learn more about discrimination and its manifestations, each person's opportunities to reduce discrimination and organisations where to seek help if you have experienced discrimination.[140]

140 Social initiative "Advantageous Journeys" ("Izdevīgie ceļojumi") launched to reduce discrimination. – Available at: https://www.sif.gov.lv/lv/jaunums/atklata-sociala-iniciativa-izdevigie-celojumi-diskriminacijas-mazinasanai

7.

CITIZENSHIP AND NATURALISATION





Compared to 2023, the number of persons admitted to Latvian citizenship under the naturalisation procedure has increased to 694 (595 in 2023).[141] As in 2023, the largest share of persons who have acquired citizenship is made up of Latvian non-citizens – 534. Among those who have acquired Latvian citizenship, 155 are third-country nationals.

141 Data source: OCMA.

8.

BORDER CONTROL, VISAS AND SCHENGEN MANAGEMENT



On 14 January 2025, the Cabinet approved the Action Plan for Economic Growth and Security Strengthening of Latvia's Eastern Border Region for 2025–2027, developed by the Ministry of Smart Administration and Regional Development in cooperation with sectoral ministries, local governments and other stakeholders interested in the development of the Eastern border region[142]. A total of 644.6 million euros has been allocated to 58 measures, including state budget funding of 269.6 million euros and EU funds and other foreign funding amounting to 375.0 million euros.

The plan has been developed taking into account the task given by the Cabinet, as well as the geopolitical situation in the Eastern border region of the EU following the full-scale war of aggression against Ukraine launched by Russia and the socio-economic challenges of the Eastern border region. It includes a series of initiatives in areas essential for the sustainable development of the region such as security, economy and human resources.

Improvements to the infrastructure of the state external land border are also planned, including infrastructure modernisation works and smart solutions to reduce border queues at three border crossing points – *Terehova, Grebņeva, Pāternieki.*[143]

Management of external borders

On 6 February 2024, the Cabinet decided not to restore the operation of the Silene border crossing point from 11 February 2024, as a disproportionately large number of cases of irregular crossing and attempted crossing of the state border between the Republic of Latvia and the Republic of Belarus had been detected[144]. The decision was made based on the need to prevent irregular border crossing and attempts to cross the Latvian – Belarusian state border, as well as the need to prevent potential threats to internal security of Latvia. *Pāternieki* border crossing point is currently the only road border crossing point through which it is possible to cross the Latvian–Belarusian state border.

Taking into account that the security threat caused by the Russian Federation continues, on 4 March 2024, a Cabinet Order[145] was announced and entered into force, which extends the previously established restriction period for the entry of nationals of the Russian Federation into the Republic of Latvia.

Order[146] stipulates that the SBG shall, from 19 September 2022 until 4 March 2025, allow entry into the territory of Latvia, by crossing the external border of Latvia, only to the following Russian nationals:

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142 Cabinet Order No. 32 of 20 January 2025 "On the Action Plan for Economic Growth and Security strengthening of Latvia's Eastern Border Region for 2025–2027". – *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No. 15, 22.01.2025. – [entered into force]

143 The Government approves an action plan for the security and development of the Eastern border region. – Available at: https://www.mk.gov.lv/lv/jaunums/valdiba-apstiprina-ricibas-planu-austrumu-pierobezas-drosibai-un-izaugsmei

144 In March 2024, persons were deterred from irregular crossing the state border – 695 cases; in April 2024, persons were deterred from irregular crossing the state border – 820 cases; in May 2024, persons were deterred from irregular crossing the state border – 543 cases; in June 2024, persons were deterred from irregular crossing the state border – 432 cases; in July 2024, persons were deterred from irregular crossing the state border – 1043 cases; and in August 2024 (until 18 August), persons were deterred from irregular crossing the state border – 300 cases.

145 Cabinet Order No. 153 of 4 March 2024 "Amendment to Cabinet Order No. 599 of 9 September 2022 "Regarding the Entry of the Citizens of the Russian Federation into the Republic of Latvia"". – *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No. 45A, 04.03.2024. – [entered into force 04.03.2024]

146 Cabinet Order No. 599 of 9 September 2022 "Regarding the Entry of the Citizens of the Russian Federation into the Republic of Latvia". – *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No. 175B, 09.09.2022. – [entered into force 09.09.2022]

- holders of residence permits of Latvia, EU, European Economic Area (EEA) or Swiss Confederation;
- holders of long-term visas of a Schengen Agreement Member State;
- nationals who have been issued a visa in accordance with Regulation (EC) No. 810/2009 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 July 2009 establishing a Community Code on Visas and who are:
- family members of Latvian nationals (spouses, parents, grandparents, children, grandchildren, as well as dependants);
- family members of nationals of EU, EEA countries or the Swiss Confederation;
- employees of transport and passenger transportation service providers, crew of cargo or technical flights, who arrive in or depart from Latvia while performing their work duties;
- seafarers who need to reach their workplace on a ship or who need to return from it;
- persons whose entry is connected with humanitarian considerations;
- staff of Russian diplomatic and consular missions accredited or sent to Latvia and their family members;
- Russian diplomatic couriers or ad hoc diplomatic couriers who present an official document indicating their status and the number of diplomatic mail packages;
- nationals travelling to the Russian Embassy in Latvia on a short-term mission to provide technical support;
- staff of Russian diplomatic and consular missions who transit through the territory of Latvia to perform official functions, and their family members, as well as nationals who transit through the territory of Latvia and are travelling on a short-term mission to provide technical support to the Russian Embassy in the host country;
- nationals who are holders of a Facilitated Transit Document (FTD) or Facilitated Rail Transit Document (FRTD) and who are travelling from Russia to the Kaliningrad Region of Russia and back.

On 12 March 2024, the Cabinet reissued a declaration of reinforced border security regime for six months[147], starting from 13 March until 12 September 2024. The reinforced border security regime will be in effect in Ludza municipality, Krāslava municipality, Augšdaugava municipality, Kaunata parish of Rēzekne municipality and Daugavpils. The Order has been issued to ensure the inviolability of the state border and prevention of threats to the state, as well as taking into account the current number of detected attempts of irregular crossing of the Latvian–Belarusian state border and their increasing trend. The SBG is already providing continuous protection of the eastern border. However, given the increasing number of irregular border crossing attempts, the State Police and the National Armed Forces have been tasked with providing the necessary support to the SBG in ensuring state border protection to prevent irregular crossing of the state border.[148]

147 Cabinet Order No. 184 of 12 March 2024 "On the announcement of a reinforced border security regime". – *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No. 51A, 12.03.2024. – [entered into force on 12.03.2024]

148 The Government Re-announces a Reinforced Border Security Regime from 13 March. – Available at: https://www.iem.gov.lv/lv/jaunums/valdiba-atkartoti-izsludina-pastiprinatu-robezapsardzibas-sistemas-darbibas-rezimu-no-sa-gada-13-marta.

On 12 September 2024, amendments to the Road Traffic Law were adopted[149], which stipulate restrictions on the use of vehicles registered in the Republic of Belarus in road traffic in the Republic of Latvia. In accordance with Article 10 of the said Law, it is prohibited to participate in road traffic in Latvia with vehicles registered in the Russian Federation or the Republic of Belarus, unless otherwise provided for by law. The aforementioned requirements are monitored by SBG officials at border crossing points where there are no officials of the Customs Board of the State Revenue Service, given that the Customs Board of the State Revenue Service is the responsible authority for sanctions control.

On 19 December 2024, Order No. 1213 "Amendment to Cabinet Order No. 184 of 12 March 2024 "On the announcement of a reinforced border security regime"" was adopted[150], which extends the reinforced border security regime until 30 June 2025 in Ludza municipality, Krāslava municipality, Augšdaugava municipality, Daugavpils city and Kaunata parish in Rēzekne municipality. The amendment was adopted to ensure the inviolability of the state border and prevention of threats to the state, to prevent persons from entering the country at undesignated places and times, as well as to prevent such attempts. Since 1 January 2024, persons have been deterred from irregularly crossing the state border – 5,388[151] cases.[152]

On 25 February 2025, Cabinet Regulation No. 123 "Regulations Regarding Restrictions on the Acceptance of Visa Applications and Entry of Third-country Nationals in the Republic of Latvia" were adopted[153], the purpose whereof is to strengthen Latvian security with the aim of reducing threats affecting national independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity, state power or the democratic state system from third countries, whilst establishing exceptions for certain categories of persons entering under essential purposes, who may be permitted to enter the Republic of Latvia[154]. The regulations determine for which third-country nationals restrictions on visa application acceptance and entry into the Republic of Latvia are established, and the terms of these restrictions.

On 19 March 2025, Cabinet Order No. 166 "On Establishing Requirements for Entry Only with Motor Vehicles at the Border Crossing Points "Pāternieki", "Terehova" and "Grebņeva"" was adopted[155], which provides that, in order to strengthen the border protection system and make border control more effective, from 19 March 2025, persons are permitted to cross the state border of the Republic of Latvia – the Republic of Belarus through the border crossing point Pāternieki and the state border of the Republic of Latvia – the Russian Federation through the border crossing points Terehova and Grebņeva, entering only with motor vehicles.

The decision to restrict the operation of the aforementioned border control points was made taking into account several significant security and public order aspects. One of the main reasons is the risks of hybrid threats and migration crisis, which continue to be created by the strategies implemented by Russia and Belarus, aimed at organising migration flows harmful to EU Member States, thus creating the need for restrictive measures.

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149 Law on Amendments to the Road Traffic Law. – *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No. 181A, 17.09.2024. – [entered into force on 18.09.2024]

150 Cabinet Order No. 1213 of 19 December 2024 "Amendment to Cabinet Order No. 184 of 12 March 2024 "On the announcement of a reinforced border security regime"". – *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No. 250, 27.12.2024. – [entered into force on 19.12.2024]

151 On Monday, 120 immigrants attempted to illegally enter Latvia from Belarus. – Available: https://leta.lv/search/browse/?_=1&s=valsts+robe%C5%BEsardze&t%5B1%5D=news&t%5B2%5D=foto&t%5B3%5D=pr_rel&cs=0&id=3AFA1742-A225-4067-AB8C-9D68B9753E0A

152 The Government extends a reinforced border security regime until 30 June next year. – Available at: https://www.iem.gov.lv/lv/jaunums/valdiba-pagarina-pastiprinatu-robezapsardzibas-rezimu-lidz-nakama-gada-30-junijam

153 Cabinet Regulation No. 123 of 25 February 2025 "Regulations Regarding Restrictions on the Acceptance of Visa Applications and Entry of Third-country Nationals in the Republic of Latvia". – *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No. 43, 03.03.2025. – [entered into force 04.03.2025]

154 Annotation to the draft legislation "Regulations Regarding Restrictions on the Acceptance of Visa Applications and Entry of Third-country Nationals in the Republic of Latvia "". – Available at: https://tapportals.mk.gov.lv/annotation/c3fef175-b623-4dba-baf0-0b53b0d07684

155 Cabinet Order No. 166 of 19 March 2025 "On Establishing Requirements for Entry Only with Motor Vehicles at the Border Crossing Points "Pāternieki", "Terehova" and "Grebņeva"". – *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No. 55B, 19.03.2025. – [entered into force on 19.03.2025]

Similarly, there are justified concerns that, as in Finland, where an increase in irregular border crossing attempts was observed in a short period before the closure of the Finnish – Russian border, the number of such cases could also increase at the Latvian border, especially using alternative means of transport, such as bicycles or scooters.[156]

On 3 April 2025, the Saeima adopted amendments to the Law on the State Border of the Republic of Latvia[157], stipulating that a border area pass[158] will henceforth be issued to CIS citizens only if written consent is received from the State Security Service. The State Security Service gives written consent if staying in the border area is necessary for the implementation of fundamental rights and no risks to national security are identified. The Amendments also stipulate that the already issued and valid fixed-term passes will be valid for no longer than two months from the entry into force of the amendments to the law.[159]

On 11 December 2024, the EU announced that Member States bordering Russia and Belarus have the right to restrict asylum rights for border violators who are used by Moscow and Minsk totalitarian regimes as tools to destabilise the bloc. Brussels also announced that it is allocating 170 million euros to six border countries to improve border surveillance.

Of these funds, Estonia will receive 19.4 million euros, Finland – 50 million euros, Latvia – 17 million euros, Lithuania – 15.4 million euros, Poland – 52 million euros and Norway – 16.4 million euros to modernise electronic surveillance equipment, improve telecommunication networks, deploy mobile detection equipment and combat drone intrusions, thereby ensuring real-time situational awareness and improving the mobility of border guard patrols, as stated in the EC announcement[160].[161]

Cooperation with third countries in the field of border control

Due to the geopolitical situation in the region, the SBG has decided to expand the field of activity of the Liaison Officer in Georgia, so that from 2024 the Liaison Officer will be responsible for Georgia and Azerbaijan.

Currently under development (sent to Moldova for evaluation and coordination) is the Agreement between the General Inspectorate of the Border Police of the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Moldova and the State Border Guard of the Republic of Latvia on cooperation and information exchange. The Agreement will be signed in 2025.

156 From 19 March, traffic at the border crossing points *Pāternieki, Terehova* and *Grebņeva* will be restricted. – Available at: https://www.iem.gov.lv/lv/jaunums/no-19-marta-ierobezos-kustibu-robezkontroles-punktos-paternieki-terehova-un-grebneva

157 Law on Amendments to the Law on the State Border of the Republic of Latvia. – *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No. 76, 17.04.2025. – [entered into force 18.04.2025]

158 Persons who have reached the age of 15, in accordance with Article 18 of the Law on the State Border of the Republic of Latvia, require a permanent or fixed-term special pass issued by the State Border Guard when staying in the border area.

159 Annotation to the draft law "Amendments to the Law on the State Border of the Republic of Latvia". – Available at: https://titania.saeima.lv/LIVS14/SaeimaLIVS14.nsf/0/81287360058D1EE1C2258C0D00294206?OpenDocument

160 Commission proposes measures to strengthen border security and counter hybrid threats. – Available at: https://commission.europa.eu/news/commission-proposes-measures-strengthen-border-security-and-counter-hybrid-threats-2024-12-11_en

161 Representatives of the European Commission welcome development of the asylum seekers accommodation centre LIEPNA. – Available at: https://www.pmlp.gov.lv/lv/jaunums/eiropas-komisijas-parstavji-atzinigi-verte-patveruma-mekletaju-izmitinasanas-centra-liepna-attistibu

Schengen governance

Regulation (EU) 2024/1717 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 June 2024 amending Regulation (EU) 2016/399 on a Union Code on the rules governing the movement of persons across borders[162] (Schengen Borders Code) was adopted. The amendments clarify the internal border control rules of the Schengen area. Internal border control may only be restored in the event of a serious threat to public order or security, after assessing its necessity and proportionality. The maximum duration is two years, but in emergency situations it may be extended by up to one year.

On 11 June 2024, amendments to Cabinet Regulations No. 134 "Regulations Regarding Personal Identification Documents" were adopted[163] and to Cabinet Regulation No. 708 "Regulations Regarding the Register of Invalid Documents"[164], which expand the scope of alerts to be included in the Schengen Information System, including alerts on vulnerable persons who should be prevented from travelling:

- children who should be prevented from travelling and in respect of whom there is a specific and obvious risk that they may be removed from the territory of a Member State, or leave it and become victims of trafficking in human beings, in connection with forced marriage, female genital mutilation or other forms of gender-based violence; become victims of or be involved in terrorist offences; may be conscripted into or involved with armed groups, or may be forced to actively participate in hostilities;
- adult vulnerable persons who should be prevented from travelling for their own protection, and in respect of whom there is a specific and obvious risk that they may be removed from the territory of a Member State, or may leave it and become victims of trafficking in human beings or gender-based violence.

The amendments to the aforementioned Cabinet Regulations were necessary to implement the EU legislation requirements within Latvian national regulations, as well as to improve Latvian security system.[165]

To ensure the application of the Schengen acquis in Latvia, an action plan for implementing the Schengen evaluation recommendations was developed in November 2024. In September 2024, a European Commission implementing decision establishing the report on the 2023 Schengen evaluation with regard to Latvia was adopted.

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162 Regulation (EU) 2024/1717 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 June 2024 amending Regulation (EU) 2016/399 on a Union Code on the rules governing the movement of persons across borders. – PE/40/2024/REV/1 Official Journal L, 2024/1717, 20.6.2024.

163 Cabinet Regulation No. 346 of 11 June 2024 "Amendments to Regulation No. 134 of 21 February 2012 "Regulations Regarding Personal Identification Documents"". – *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No. 113, 12.06.2024. – [entered into force on 13.06.2024]

164 Cabinet Regulation No. 347 of 11 June 2024 "Amendments to Cabinet Regulation No. 708 of 16 October 2012 "Regulations Regarding the Register of Invalid Documents"". – *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, 113, 12.06.2024. – [entered into force on 13.06.2024]

165 Annotation to the draft legislation "Amendments to Cabinet Regulation No. 708 of 16 October 2012 "Regulations Regarding the Register of Invalid Documents"". – Available at: https://tapportals.mk.gov.lv/annotation/19c073bf-f94e-4fce-acdf-08d917f4dbf9

Border management and visa policy

In 2024, the total number of visas issued continued to decrease, reaching 30,622 (33,602 in 2023). Of the visas issued, 16,213 were Schengen visas, 14,409 were long-term (D) visas.[166]

On 31 July 2024, the agreement between the Government of the Republic of Latvia and the Government of the Republic of Korea concerning a Working Holiday Programme was signed, which entered into force upon adoption of the Law on the Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Latvia and the Government of the Republic of Korea Concerning a Working Holiday Programme[167]. In 2019, the Korean side proposed to conclude an agreement on a Working Holiday Programme. The Republic of Latvia agreed to this proposal and began work on developing the agreement, which was completed at expert level in 2022. The Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Latvia and the Government of the Republic of Korea Concerning a Working Holiday Programme has been developed to promote closer cooperation between the two countries, as well as to provide their nationals, especially young people, with broader opportunities to appreciate the culture and general way of life of the other country while travelling there.[168]

Table 8-1. Total number of visas issued by type, 2023–2024.[169]

	2023	2024
Schengen visas	18,687	16,213
Long-term (D) visas	14,915	14,409
Total	33,602	30,622

From 1 January 2024, cooperation was initiated with the external service provider VFS Global in Belarus and Australia.

From 1 September 2024, the issuance of uniform visas commenced at Latvian Embassy in Ireland. In connection with the commencement of visa application processing at Latvian Embassy in Ireland, the visa representation agreement of 9 April 2010 with the Republic of Lithuania in Ireland (Dublin) was terminated as of 1 October 2024.[170]

From 18 to 19 September 2024, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs organised the annual training for consular officials of Latvian diplomatic and consular representations. The training provided an in-depth examination of topics related to current challenges in the migration and security fields, introduced and planned changes

166 Data source: OCMA.

167 Law on the Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Latvia and the Government of the Republic of Korea Concerning a Working Holiday Programme. – *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No. 26, 06.02.2025. – [entered into force on 20.02.2025]

168 Annotation to the draft legislation "On the Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Latvia and the Government of the Republic of Korea Concerning a Working Holiday Programme". – Available at: https://titania.saeima.lv/LIVS14/SaeimaLIVS14.nsf/0/BB46F3C5B7AA1C86C2258BA80021AE2F?OpenDocument

169 Data source: OCMA.

170 Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs

to regulatory acts, as well as practical skills in processing visa applications. During the training, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency Frontex was visited, where experts introduced consular officials to the latest trends in document forgery and current developments in the migration field.

On 26 and 27 March 2025, visa training for clerks from Latvian diplomatic and consular representations abroad, where visa applications are accepted, took place at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The aim of the training was to provide clerks involved in visa matters with the knowledge and skills necessary for their work. During the training, consular clerks enhanced their skills in accepting and processing visa applications, as well as capturing biometric data. Personal data protection issues were also examined. The training programme also included lectures that improve clerks' interpersonal skills in communicating with people of different nationalities, cultures and temperaments, thereby ensuring more efficient and customer-oriented service at Latvian representations abroad.

Experts from the OVMA, SBG and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as instructors from the State Administration School, participated as lecturers in the training. The training was attended by 16 consular clerks from Latvian representations abroad – local contracted staff, whose job duties include processing Schengen uniform visa applications.[171]

In 2024, the Information Centre of the Ministry of the Interior, in cooperation with the SBG and the State Police, has commenced the implementation of the European Union Instrument for Financial Support for Border Management and Visa Policy project "Phase 2 of the Implementation of the Entry/Exit System and ETIAS".

Within the framework of the project, with the EU financial support, the solutions necessary for the operation of the Entry/Exit System (EES) and the European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS) will be implemented.

The main activities of the project:

- Improvement of the State Border Guard's electronic information system to implement the functionality required for the operation of EES and ETIAS;
- implementation of the central access point solution with EES and ETIAS, implementation of the ETIAS watchlist solution, implementation of the ETIAS national unit solution;
- adaptation of SIRENE IS for ETIAS data processing;
- EES information campaign.

The project is planned to be implemented by 30 June 2025.[172]

To ensure compliance with the Entry/Exit System[173] requirements, the improvement of the Ventspils port border crossing point infrastructure in accordance with the Entry/Exit System requirements has been

171 Training for consular staff of Latvian diplomatic missions on visa matters held in Riga. – Available at: https://www.mfa.gov.lv/lv/jaunums/riga-norisinas-latvijas-parstavniecibu-arvalstis-lietvezu-macibas-vizu-jautajumos

172 With the EU support, the implementation of Entry/Exit System and European Travel Information and Authorisation System solutions has begun. – Available at: https://www.esfondi.lv/par-es-fondiem/zinas/ar-es-atbalstu-uzsak-iecelosanas-izcelosanas-sistemas-un-eiropas-celosanas-informacijas-un-atlauju-sistemas-risinajumu-ieviesanu

173 Regulation (EU) 2017/2226 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 November 2017 establishing an Entry/Exit System (EES) to register entry and exit data and refusal of entry data of third-country nationals crossing the external borders of the Member States and determining the conditions for access to the EES for law enforcement purposes, and amending the Convention implementing the Schengen Agreement and Regulations (EC) No 767/2008 and (EU) No 1077/2011. – Official Journal L 327, 9.12.2017

completed, with new border check booths and border check pavilions established. The adaptation of airport and airfield infrastructure to ensure compliance with the Entry/Exit System requirements has also been completed.[174]

On 18 December 2024, the Integrated Border Management Plan of the Republic of Latvia for 2024–2027 was approved[175], the objective whereof is to strengthen state border security and overall internal security, as well as to enhance the return of those third-country nationals who lack a legal basis to stay in Latvia and EU Member States. The aim of the plan is to ensure a close link between measures included in EU-level and national policy planning and strategic documents for achieving goals at the national level, in order to establish a joint, comprehensive and sustainable Latvian integrated state border management (NIBM) system in Latvia and strengthen the European Integrated Border Management (EIBM)[176].

174 Source: SBG

175 Cabinet Order No. 1220 of 20 December 2024 "On the Integrated Border Management Plan of the Republic of Latvia for 2024–2027". – *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No. 1, 02.01.2025. – [entered into force on 20.12.2024]

176 Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council of 14 March 2023, establishing the multiannual strategic policy for EIBM, COM(2023)146, and the ERKA TO EIBM approved by FRONTEX Management Board Decision 30/2023. – Available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52023DC0146

9.

IRREGULAR MIGRATION



In 2024, there were 122 third-country nationals detained for irregular crossing the 'green' border (509 in 2023). The main groups of detainees were nationals of Iraq and Iran. The majority of detained persons were found at the land border between Latvia and Belarus, however, there were also four cases where the Latvian – Russian border was crossed. Irregular border crossing can be explained by the Belarus regime's migration instrumentalisation process, as well as in certain cases, the purposes of crossing are individual.[177]

The SBG refused entry to Latvia to 3,073 persons, which is by 10.27% less than in 2023 (3,425 persons). In 2024, entry was most frequently refused to nationals of Belarus (209), Russia (690), Uzbekistan (141), Ukraine (516) and Moldova (1,047). In general, changes are observed, as the number of refusals due to security risks (threats) has increased for nationals of certain countries, despite the decrease in the total number of arriving persons.[178]

Information available to the SBG regarding the number of detected and prevented irregular border crossing attempts at the Latvian – Belarusian border indicates that 5,388 persons were identified in 2024. In 2025, the SBG has detected 719 cases of attempted irregular border crossing.[179]

Schengen countries' visas were annulled for 353 third-country nationals (321 in 2023); the increase in numbers can be explained by the fact that more cases related to violations of residence conditions and irregular employment were detected.[180]

Preventing the abuse of legal migration routes

In 2024, the number of third-country nationals detected by SBG officials for irregular employment in Latvia increased by 49.19% to 185 persons in total in 2024. The increase in the number of detected cases is explained by the increased number of inspections.[181]

Forged travel documents

In 2024, 314 third-country nationals were detained in Latvia for using counterfeit documents (travel and vehicle documents).[182]

Cooperation with Frontex

In 2024, SBG experts and technical equipment were actively involved in joint operations coordinated by the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) to strengthen the security of the EU external borders and effective migration management.

177 Source: SBG.

178 Data source: SBG.

179 Source: SBG.

180 Source: SBG.

181 Data source: SBG.

182 Data source: SBG.

Throughout the year, the SBG participated in 19 joint operations coordinated by Frontex and provided support to EU Member States[183] and third countries[184], involving 287 SBG experts.

In 2024, the SBG deployed 11 technical units: an aircraft, a helicopter, 4 patrol boats (on a rotational basis) and 5 mobile video surveillance systems.

Additionally, from 30 July to 30 October 2024, the multifunctional maritime operation MMO Baltic Sea 2024 was implemented in the Baltic Sea by the Frontex Agency, the European Fisheries Control Agency (EFCA) and the European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA), in which Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Finland participated with their technical resources. The SBG deployed its technical resources in the aforementioned operation – one vessel and three patrol boats – to control irregular migration in cooperation with other Baltic States and Finland, combat cross-border crime at sea, promote cooperation in law enforcement coastal guard activities, and support search and rescue operations at sea.

At the same time, the SBG, in cooperation with Frontex, coordinates the deployment of European Border and Coast Guard Standing Corps experts in the territory of Latvia. In total, 164 European Border and Coast Guard Standing Corps experts from various EU Member States were deployed in the State Border Guard units in 2024, providing significant support in ensuring border control measures and strengthening the EU external border.

In 2024, four guest experts were received at the focal points (border crossing points) established by the SBG as part of the staff exchange programme of the Frontex-coordinated joint operation Terra 2024. The aim of this staff exchange programme is to promote cooperation and exchange best practices.[185]

Services and legal assistance for irregular immigrants

On 23 May 2024, amendments to the Immigration Law were adopted[186], which provide the right of a foreigner to request state-provided legal assistance also in cases of appeal against detention. The amendments were necessary to implement the recommendation of the Schengen evaluation committee.

The Schengen evaluation committee, in its 2018 report on the evaluation of the Republic of Latvia in relation to the Schengen acquis application in the field of return, concluded that state-provided legal assistance should be available to foreigners not only in the case of appealing a return decision, but also when appealing a detention decision, including this conclusion in its recommendation to Latvia.

Prior to the amendments to the Immigration Law, a foreigner had the right to request state-provided legal assistance in cases where they wished to appeal a return order or a decision on forced removal. The aforementioned regulation establishes the right for a foreigner to request state-provided legal assistance also in cases of appeal against detention. Taking into account that the Ministry of Justice will require additional funds to provide state-provided legal assistance for the review of detention decisions, a transitional provision is also envisaged for the respective regulation, as amendments to the State-Provided Legal Assistance Law will also be necessary, which will be prepared by the Ministry of Justice.

183 Greece, Romania, Bulgaria, Estonia, Lithuania, Cyprus, Poland, Slovakia, Croatia, Italy, France, Spain, Malta.

184 Montenegro, Serbia, Albania.

185 On the involvement of the SBG in Frontex-coordinated joint operations in 2024. – Available at: https://www.rs.gov.lv/lv/jaunums/par-vrs-iesaisti-2024-gada-frontex-koordinetajas-kopigajas-operacijas

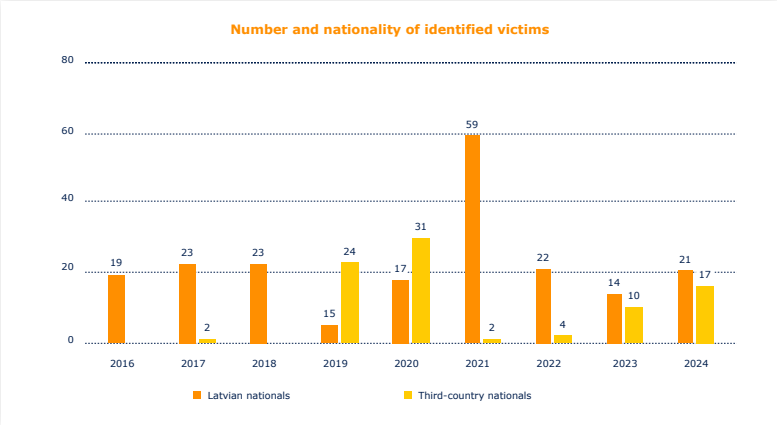
186 Law "Amendments to the Immigration Law". – *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No. 110, 07.06.2024. – [entered into force 08.06.2024]

10.

TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS



In 2024, 3 persons have been classified as suspects in criminal proceedings for organising trafficking in human beings. 17 third-country nationals are recognised as victims of trafficking in human beings.[187]



On 28 January 2025, the Cabinet acknowledged the informative report of the Ministry of the Interior "On the Implementation of the Human Trafficking Prevention Plan 2021 – 2023"[188], which reflects the progress made, challenges and the way forward in preventing trafficking in human beings.

In total, out of the 31 measures included in the plan, 22 measures were implemented, four measures were partially implemented and assessed, whilst five measures were assessed as not implemented. Thus, it can be concluded that the implementation of the plan has been successful. The plan is divided into four main directions – prevention, to increase public understanding and awareness, emphasising that trafficking in human beings is a social problem; protection, to improve the identification of victims of trafficking in human beings and ensure effective assistance and protection; bringing perpetrators to justice, to intensify efforts to prosecute persons involved in committing offences regarding trafficking in human beings; and cooperation, to strengthen collaboration and information exchange with partners in Latvia and abroad, as only coordinated and joint inter-institutional action can help prevent trafficking in human beings.

The most significant achievements in combating trafficking in human beings:

- Information campaigns and educational activities have been successfully organised, involving a broader section of society and specific risk groups;
- Informational materials have been prepared and distributed in several languages, promoting awareness about trafficking in human beings risks among various groups in society;
- Law enforcement authorities, social services and NGOs actively collaborated in identifying victims and providing support;
- A series of training sessions has been implemented for various specialists, including law enforcement authorities, prosecutors and judges;
- In 2021–2023, 111 victims of trafficking in human beings were identified, 95 of whom were Latvian nationals.

187 Data source: The Ministry of the Interior.

188 The informative report of the Ministry of the Interior "On the Implementation of the Human Trafficking Prevention Plan 2021 – 2023". – Available at: https://tapportals.mk.gov.lv/attachments/legal_acts/document_versions/4e52d3e9-d743-4aaa-a07d-a75b67557da5/download

However, the main challenges in the field of preventing trafficking in human beings are related to the lack of consensus on developing a unified regulatory framework to strengthen the cooperation of first-contact institutions in recognising trafficking in human beings and referring victims for support.

In certain cases, it is necessary to extend the social rehabilitation service for victims of trafficking in human beings. The current 180-day service is sometimes insufficient.

Emphasising the next steps in preventing trafficking in human beings, the next planning period must focus on implementing the recommendations made by the European Council, the Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings GRETA, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the US Department of State. Likewise, by July 2026, Latvian regulatory framework is expected to implement the requirements set out in Directive (EU) 2024/1712 of the European Parliament and of the Council[189].[190]

EMN national report for study: International dimension of the EU policy: prevention, combating of trafficking in human beings and protection of victims in Latvia

In the National report[191] you can learn about:

- policies and measures targeted at the international dimension of trafficking in third-country nationals;
- examples of good practice and challenges faced by Latvia in addressing the international dimension of trafficking in third-country nationals;
- an overview of the main results achieved in the context of the international dimension of trafficking in human beings;
- the needs of Latvia's responsible institutions to address the international dimension of trafficking in third-country nationals and the possibilities for institutions to seek ways to address these needs.

To date, Latvia has not developed a specific plan solely for addressing the problem of trafficking in third-country nationals. However, general principles and measures are included in the Human Trafficking Prevention Plan for 2021–2023, which provides for the implementation of training, research and closer cooperation with various institutions.

Latvian responsible institutions have acknowledged that the greatest challenges for cooperation with third countries are related to the implementation of preventive measures in third countries. In countries with which better cooperation has been established, cooperation partners have already been identified, for example, in Ukraine and Moldova. Similarly, communication channels, joint preventive measures and

189 Directive (EU) 2024/1712 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 June 2024 amending Directive 2011/36/EU on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims PE/14/2024/REV/1. – Official Journal L, 2024/1712, 24.6.2024.

190 Progress, challenges and the way forward in preventing trafficking in human beings. – Available at: https://www.iem.gov.lv/lv/jaunums/progress-izaicinajumi-un-turpmakie-uzdevumi-cilveku-tirdzniecibas-noversana.

191 International dimension of the EU policy: prevention, combating of trafficking in human beings and protection of victims in Latvia. – Available: https://www.emn.lv/es-politikas-starptautiska-dimensija-cilveku-tirdzniecibas-noversana-apkarosana-un-upuru-aizsargasana-latvija/

cooperation between law enforcement authorities to combat trafficking in human beings have already been successfully established with these countries. However, with other countries, such as Central Asian countries and India, such permanent cooperation has not been established.

Currently, it is important for Latvia to promote cooperation with Ukraine, Moldova, Central Asian countries, as well as India, which are the most common countries of origin for victims of trafficking in human beings in established cases of trafficking in human beings in Latvia.

The review period of this study covers policies and measures that were adopted or were being continued from 2021 to 2023.

Training and raising awareness

In spring 2024, the Riga office of the International Organization for Migration (hereinafter – the IOM) in cooperation with the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as the digital marketing agency *CreateIT* was implementing a digital communication campaign for the prevention of trafficking in human beings for Ukrainian civilians living in Latvia. The total duration of the campaign was two weeks – from 11 to 25 March. During the campaign, informative materials are distributed on social networks to remind people how to protect themselves from risks of trafficking in human beings and where to seek help.[192]

In spring 2024, the OCMA in cooperation with the Ministry of the Interior launched an informative campaign "Spot the threats of trafficking in human beings!" to raise awareness among Ukrainian civilians about possible trafficking in human beings risks and preventive measures.[193]

On 30 July 2024, World Day against Trafficking in Persons, the Society "Shelter "Safe House"" published a digital material to inform about the nature of trafficking in human beings and the risks to which potential victims are exposed: Brief overview of trafficking in human beings and related risks[194]. The digital material identifies significant situations that require attention from specialists working with Ukrainian refugees, the refugees themselves, and any socially responsible member of society. The material is useful for anyone who encounters immigrants in their work or voluntary work, as well as for any person who can observe and prevent the exploitation of themselves or their fellow human beings.[195]

From 1 September 2024, the Society "Shelter "Safe House"" under the non-governmental organisation *Cross Culture International Foundation* (Malta) leadership and in cooperation with the organisation *Step Up Stop Trafficking* (Cyprus) has begun implementing an Erasmus+ programme co-funded project *Film Making for Social Change.*

The aim of the project is to implement various preventive measures to reduce trafficking in human beings. Within the framework of the project, various activities will be implemented, such as conducting research

192 Digital campaign to prevent trafficking in human beings for Ukrainian civilians living in Latvia. – Available: https://www.iem.gov.lv/lv/jaunums/isteno-digitalo-kampanu-cilveku-tirdzniecibas-prevencijai-latvija-dzivojosajiem-ukrainas-civiliedzivotajiem

193 How to protect yourself from trafficking in human beings? – Available at: https://www.iem.gov.lv/en/how-protect-yourself-trafficking-human-beings

194 Brief overview of trafficking in human beings and related risks. – Available at: https://sites.google.com/view/buklets/home

195 Digital material "Brief overview of trafficking in human beings and its risks". – Available at: https://www.patverums-dm.lv/lv/digitals-materials-%E2%80%9Cisi-par-cilveku-tirdzniecibu-un-tas-riskiem%E2%80%9D/1763

and training seminars, as well as creating a documentary film about the issue of trafficking in human beings. Short films about trafficking in human beings will be produced in Latvia as well. The project will be implemented from 1 September 2024 to 28 February 2026.[196]

In October 2024 in Daugavpils, training was organised for regional experts (social services, border guard, police, crisis centres) to increase awareness of trafficking in human beings, methods for identifying potential victims and how to refer these potential victims to support services.

At the end of 2024, the Society "Shelter "Safe House"" launched a new project "Support measures for victims of trafficking in human beings and public awareness", which aims to provide support to victims of trafficking in human beings by organising a two-day camp for participants in the rehabilitation programme, as well as to promote public awareness of this issue to reduce the number of new victims.[197]

On 1 January 2025, the Society "Shelter "Safe House"" began implementation of the project "Sustainable Growth: strengthening the operations and the capacity of the Society "Shelter "Safe House""[198].

The aim of the project is to strengthen the capacity of the society and promote public awareness about trafficking in human beings, migration and integration issues. These activities aim to improve inter-institutional cooperation and ensure more effective resolution of these problems in Latvia.

To effectively address the issue of trafficking in human beings, the following activities are planned within the project:

- Strengthening the capacity of the society – professional training, supervision and improvement of management processes.
- Research and advocacy – research on recruitment processes in trafficking in human beings, discussions and policy initiative development.
- Public awareness and assistance to victims – art therapy sessions, educational materials, informative campaigns, as well as improvement of the society's website.[199]

Cooperation between EU countries

The Ministry of the Interior participates in the FRAUD project[200], the general aim whereof is to promote awareness, increase capacity and foster cooperation in combating trafficking in human beings in the Baltic Sea region, with a particular focus on fraud in the financial and benefit sectors. Fraud in the financial and benefit sectors in the Baltic Sea region has been a phenomenon with a clear connection to trafficking in human beings. The project is still ongoing.

196 Film Making for Social Change. – Available at: https://www.patverums-dm.lv/lv/filmu-veidosana-socialajam-parmainam

197 Support measures for victims of trafficking in human beings and public awareness. – Available at: https://www.patverums-dm.lv/lv/atbalsta-pasakumi-cilveku-tirdzniecibas-upuriem-un-sabiedribas-informesana

198 Sustainable Growth: strengthening the operations and the capacity of the Society "Shelter "Safe House"". – Available at: https://www.patverums-dm.lv/lv/ilgtspejiga-izaugsme-biedribas-patverums-drosa-maja-darbibas-un-kapacitates-stiprinasana

199 The project "Sustainable Growth: strengthening the operations and the capacity of the Society "Shelter "Safe House"" has been launched. – Available at: https://www.patverums-dm.lv/lv/uzsakts-projekts-ilgtspejiga-izaugsme-biedribas-patverums-drosa-maja-darbibas-un-kapacitates-stiprinasana/1855

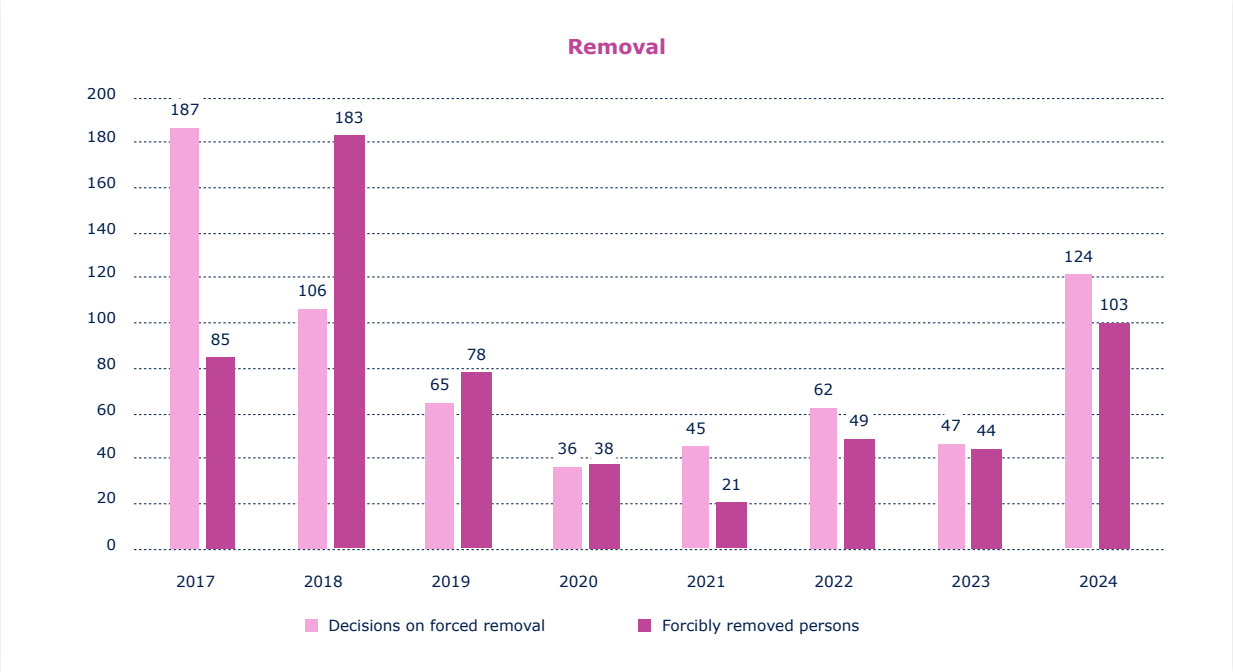
200 FRAUD. – Available at: https://cbss.org/projects-cbss/fraud/

11.

RETURN AND READMISSION



In 2024, the number of persons who left Latvia voluntarily slightly decreased to 1965 (1984 in 2023). Most of them were Uzbek and Ukrainian nationals.[201] 28[202] persons received voluntary return assistance. In 2024, the number of forcibly removed persons increased by half, reaching 103 (45 in 2023[203]). The largest number of forcibly removed third-country nationals came from Uzbekistan, India and Russia.



On 23 May 2024, amendments to the Immigration Law were adopted[204], which stipulates that henceforth the foreigner who has been detained for the purpose of executing an additional penalty – removal from the Republic of Latvia or in respect of whom the Minister for the Interior or the Minister for Foreign Affairs has taken a decision on imposing an entry and residence ban may be accommodated in the premises of the State Police. The amendments were necessary to implement the recommendation of the Schengen evaluation committee. According to the 2018 Schengen evaluation committee recommendation regarding the implementation of accommodation for foreigners subject to return, a situation where a foreigner detained in connection with irregular residence is placed in specially arranged and equipped premises of the State Police is not considered as an appropriate practice.

In 2024, the State Border Guard joined the EU reintegration programme, which aims to promote the return of irregularly staying third-country nationals from the EU by offering the opportunity to receive reintegration support from Frontex, thereby encouraging them to return and not misuse the asylum procedure. Departure and reintegration assistance will be available both to third-country nationals who leave the territory of EU Member States voluntarily, complying with the obligation to return, and to third-country nationals who are

201 Data source: OCMA.

202 Data source: IOM Riga office. The project operated for 5 months.

203 Source: SBG.

204 Law "Amendments to the Immigration Law". – *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No. 110, 07.06.2024. – [entered into force 08.06.2024]

to be forcibly removed.

In 2024, cooperation with the Russian Federation deteriorated significantly in the field of readmission, as it does not respond to readmission requests (during 2024, the SBG did not receive responses to three readmission requests submitted in August 2024).[205]

On 30 July 2024, a new project of the IOM Riga Office "Provision of Voluntary Return and Reintegration Assistance in Latvia, 2024–2026" was launched, within the framework of which it is planned to provide return support to 300 third-country nationals, 150 of whom are planned to receive reintegration assistance.

More vulnerable persons will also have access to reintegration assistance of EUR 1000 in their home country for urgent medical expenses; if necessary, they will be able to rent accommodation, acquire a profession, or, depending on their profession, purchase work tools or livestock to support themselves and their families. Before departure, a benefit of EUR 100 will be paid to provide transport home, as well as subsistence for the first week. If a person has nowhere to live until the day of departure, a bed in a hostel and minimal food allowance will also be covered.[206]

On 20 October 2024, the Implementation Protocol between the Government of the Republic of Latvia and the Cabinet of Ukraine to the Agreement between the European Community and Ukraine on the Readmission of Persons entered into force[207], which was signed on 28 November 2023 in Kyiv, and approved by Cabinet Regulation No. 693 of 24 November 2020[208].

205 Source: State Border Guard

206 Announcement on the project of the foreigners voluntary return launched by the International Organization for Migration. – Available at: https://www.leta.lv/press_releases/3D3CA38E-5D0B-4972-B25F-096452811E61/

207 On the entry into force of the international treaty. – *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No. 191, 01.10.2024. – [entered into force on 20.10.2024]

208 Cabinet Regulation No. 693 of 24 November 2020 "On the Implementation Protocol between the Government of the Republic of Latvia and the Cabinet of Ukraine to the Agreement between the European Community and Ukraine on the Readmission of Persons". – *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No. 234, 03.12.2020. – [entered into force on 04.12.2020]

12.

MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT POLICY



On 19 March 2025 in Paris, Latvia joined the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) as its 33rd member. DAC is the leading international forum for establishing standards and best practices in the field of development cooperation. Membership in DAC will provide a platform for implementing Latvia's political priorities, including supporting Ukraine and other EU Eastern Partnership countries at the international level, creating new partnerships and a more effective development cooperation policy system.

The current topics in which Latvia plans to engage in improving the established standards are public administration reforms and digitalisation, cooperation for improving partner countries' migration policy and border management, provision of non-financial support, and support for civilians in conflict-affected areas.

On 20 March 2025, Latvia, already as a full member state, participated in the DAC *High Level Meeting* (High Level Meeting), which is the main meeting format for high-ranking officials from DAC member states and partner countries. Countries discussed increasing development cooperation funding and providing more effective support in the context of current global challenges.[209]

209 Importance of Latvia in development cooperation is increasing – Latvia joins the OECD Development Assistance Committee. – Available at: https://www.mfa.gov.lv/lv/jaunums/latvijas-nozime-attistibas-sadarbiba-pieaug-latvija-klust-par-oecd-attistibas-palidzibas-komitejas-dalibvalsti

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Abbreviations used

EMN – European Migration Network

EU – European Union

Frontex – European Border and Coast Guard Agency

IOM – International Organization for Migration

LLA – Latvian Language Agency

SEA – State Employment Agency

ASAC – Asylum Seekers Accommodation Centre

AMIF – Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund

OCMA – Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs

PWC – PricewaterhouseCoopers

SIF – Society Integration Foundation

NCE – National Centre for Education

SBG – State Border Guard