

Conference

Current Human Rights Issues in Latvia – An NGO Perspective

22 October 2026

Sabiedrības integrācijas fonds

LATVIJAS CILVĒKTIESĪBU CENTRS

LATVIAN CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

The conference is held as part of the project "Strengthening the Human Rights Culture in Latvia". The project is financially supported by the Society Integration Foundation from the Latvian state budget.

Sources on the Human Rights Situation in Latvia in 2026 (including 2025)

- **Various sources on the human rights situation in Latvia in 2026 (2025)**

Independent and state institutions

- Ombudsperson's Annual Report on Human Rights (2025)
- Latvia's representative in international human rights institutions (2025)
- **UN, European Union, Council of Europe**
- Universal Periodic Review (11 May 2026): 243 recommendations from 80 countries
- Violence against women in Latvia (GREVIO report, 15 September 2026)
- 2026 Rule of Law Report on Latvia (European Commission, July 2026)

NGOs

NGOs (Latvian)

LATVIA: CIVICUS Monitor update (September 2026)

LATVIAN CIVIL SOCIETY MONITORING AND CIVIC SPACE REPORT

Latvian Centre for Human Rights: Human Rights in Latvia 2025

Thematic NGO reports (Trends in Hate Speech in Latvia II), and surveys, such as the 2025 survey of the LGBT+ community

Global indices

World Justice Project Rule of Law Index – Latvia ranked 21st out of 143 countries

World Press Freedom Index (RSF) – 180 countries

Latvia: 17th in 2026, 15th in 2025, 12th in 2024

Topics

Electoral Rights and Political Context	Right to a Fair Trial	Hate Crimes and Hate Speech	Preventing Discrimination
Preventing Violence against Women and Domestic Violence	Freedom of Speech	Freedom of Religion and Belief	Freedom of Association
Freedom of Assembly	Rights of National Minorities and Society Integration	Citizenship and Residence Rights	Rights of asylum seekers and refugees

Context

- Russia’s war against Ukraine and its impact on Latvia
- The situation on the Latvia–Belarus border and various forms of hybrid warfare
- The Saeima voted to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention and its implications
- The fall of the government and the pre-election campaign (a rise in anti-migration rhetoric in political and public discourse, and debate about the role and funding of civil society, including the Society Integration Foundation)

Violence against women and domestic violence

- The Saeima’s decision to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention and its impact
- **The Venice Commission warns that withdrawal from international human rights treaties, including the Istanbul Convention, generally weakens human rights protection**
- **GREVIO’s first report – October 2026:**

Progress has been made, but further action is needed

The role of investigative journalism in exposing cases of sexual violence and enabling victims to obtain justice, even decades after the events

- In March 2026, the court found immunologist J. Ņikiforenko guilty of sexual abuse against several patients, sentencing him to 13 years' imprisonment, five years of probation supervision, a seven-year ban on practising medicine, and compensation payments of between €2,000 and €10,000 to the victims. (The offences dated back to the mid-2000s.)
- In April 2026, the Riga Regional Court sentenced artist P. Postažs to 10 years' imprisonment for sexual abuse committed 30 years earlier, including the rape of a minor, committing indecent acts with a person under the age of 16, and sexual intercourse with a person under the age of 16. He had initially received a three-year suspended prison sentence.
- In 2026, prosecutors charged neurologist L. Viškers with sexual abuse against nine patients in connection with alleged offences committed between 2020 and 2024. His medical licence was suspended, and proposals were made to strengthen the regulatory framework for the supervision of medical practitioners.

Role of Re: Baltica, LTV De facto, LR podcast“Dokumentārijs”

Freedom of expression

- Latvia fell three places in the Press Freedom Index, from 12th in 2024 to 15th in 2025 and 17th in 2026 (out of 180 countries)

Reporters Without Borders note that Latvian journalists generally work in a safe environment, but face verbal attacks in public and online.

- Concerns about growing political efforts to discredit the media
- Problems with access to reliable and pluralistic information, particularly for Russian-speaking residents

Freedom of expression

- Positive development: adoption of the Law on the Protection of Persons Involved in Matters of Public Interest (Anti-SLAPP Directive)
- The law entered into force on 7 May 2026 and expands protection for journalists, activists and civil society representatives against strategic lawsuits intended to restrict public participation

Hate speech and hate crimes – statistics

	Section 78 of the Criminal Law (incitement to racial, ethnic, national or religious hatred)	Section 74.1 (justification of genocide, war crimes and other crimes)	**Section 150 (incitement to social hatred)**
2019	5	2	2
2020	5	1	11
2021	4	1	6
2022	32	28	6
2023	10	14	1
2024	26	18	4
2025	26	31	6

Hanovs v. Latvia

- **9 November 2020 – homophobic attack (five police and prosecution decisions appealed)**
- 17 August 2022 – application by DH to the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) – the victim was represented by the Latvian Centre for Human Rights
- **18 July 2023 – ECtHR judgment awarding €10,000 in non-pecuniary damages; violations of Articles 8 and 14**
- 16 August 2024 – the Prosecutor General's Office reopens the pre-trial investigation (the ECtHR judgment treated as a newly discovered circumstance)

Court hearings

- 11 June 2025 (the hearing had originally been scheduled for 29 October 2025)
- 24 September 2025 – the defendant failed to appear; the judge ordered compulsory attendance
- 29 October 2025 – compulsory attendance was not possible because the defendant was not at either of the two addresses checked
- 19 February 2026 – hearing. The defendant pleaded not guilty and requested examination of the evidence.
- 29 April 2026 – hearing. The victim gave evidence; the witnesses were agreed.
- 14 July 2026 – hearing. Witnesses gave evidence. The defendant requested time to prepare his own testimony. The prosecutor pointed to delays in the proceedings. After consulting his defence counsel, he gave evidence. The hearing of the case was concluded.
- 13 October 2026 – closing arguments were due to take place, but the defendant did not appear; the judge ordered compulsory attendance.
- **Closing arguments scheduled for 17 November 2026.**

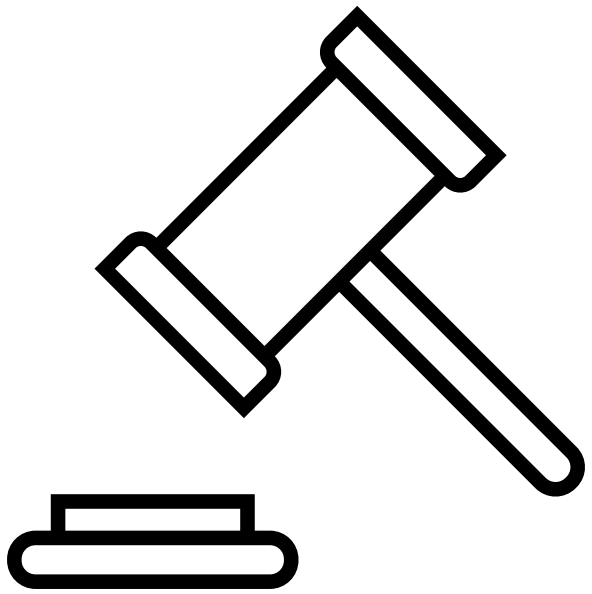
Hate speech

Hate speech, particularly on social media, increased:

- In connection with the change of government and J. Dombrava becoming Minister for the Interior, including the minister's activities
- The Sabile Wine Festival, where Indians were mockingly caricatured
- Statements by certain Riga City Council members and raids targeting migrants
- Many racist comments were directed at Indians

The Latvian Centre for Human Rights received complaints about racist speech, including racial harassment in public places

- In several cases, we helped draft complaints to the State Police and the State Security Service



Hate speech

- The Prosecutor General's Office warns the "Stability" party, noting, among other things, that its activities are aimed at inciting national hatred and discord
- A case has been referred to court against Riga City Council member, "Stabilitātei!" leader and former Saeima member Aleksejs Rosļikovs (S) for inciting national and ethnic hatred

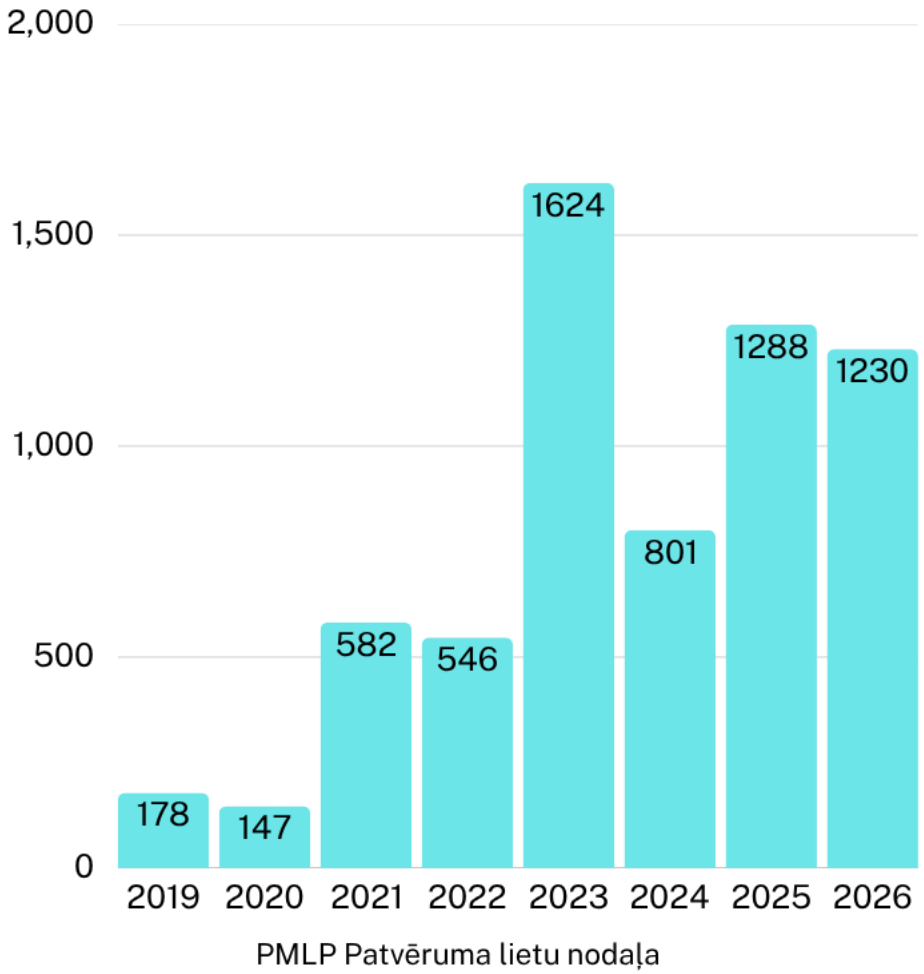
Hate speech (case law)

- Latgale District Court (2025) – five offences committed between 2022 and 2024, including incitement to national hatred and glorification of war crimes
- A TikTok account was created in Ireland and videos were posted, receiving 488,000 views
- Videos targeting Ukrainians and refugees used offensive, degrading and dehumanising language, portrayed Ukrainians as a threat, targeted Ukrainians in Ireland and praised war crimes
- Final sentence: 4.5 years' imprisonment (including 1.5 years for inciting national hatred, plus two years' imprisonment and one year of probation supervision)

Hate speech (case law)

- In its judgment of 24 October 2025, Riga City Court found that the defendant had deliberately posted content on social media and commented on other people's posts, making hateful, aggressive, offensive and derogatory statements targeting other ethnic groups, members of a particular religious group and Black people.
- Under a video concerning immigrants, the individual posted the comment: "There is no place among people for those who are smoked (kūpinātajiem). Deport them all."; in a reposted discussion concerning Muslims, the individual posted the comment: "All Muslims are animals"; on their own profile, the individual published the post: "One thing is the de-Russification of Latvia, but we also need to start talking about the shitty problem in Riga. We have far too many of those shitting 'students' here." The individual was sentenced to **two years of probation supervision**.

Number of asylum seekers



Statuses granted up to 4 October 2026

Refugee status – 37 people
Subsidiary protection status – 69 people

Top three countries of origin of asylum seekers: Afghanistan, Pakistan and Somalia

Dublin cases in 2025:

- 772 requests were received from EU Member States;
- Latvia sent 51 requests to EU Member States;
- 108 asylum seekers were transferred to Latvia, while six asylum seekers were transferred to the responsible EU Member State.

Developments and challenges

- Since 12 June 2026 – the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum;
- Draft Asylum Law;
- The amended Immigration Law has been in force since 15 September 2026;
- Border procedure and screening;
- Construction of a multifunctional centre in Rauda, Augšdaugava Municipality;
- A decision not to increase the daily allowance to €5; it currently stands at €3 (for food, transport and other expenses).

- Visiting Russia or Russian-occupied territories has been a new ground for loss of status since 1 January 2026; in practice, decisions are automatic, without an individual assessment of the circumstances;

- New requirements since August: male Ukrainian citizens must provide documentary evidence of exemption from military service and of having crossed the border lawfully.
- A long-term solution (still under discussion): a national permanent residence permit (not EU long-term resident status), where the person:



1. has resided continuously in Latvia for five years;
2. has sufficient financial resources;
3. has Latvian language proficiency at A2 level and has completed cultural courses

Freedom of association

Freedom of association is not under threat.

European Commission Rule of Law Report: civic space remains open and cooperation with the government remains positive, while civil society organisations report an increase in negative messaging and funding problems.

However, there are growing concerns about the operating environment for civil society in Latvia.

- Termination of contracts for projects already approved or in the process of implementation (two NGOs)
- Campaign to discredit and intimidate NGOs
- Risks include the possible abolition of the Society Integration Foundation, which administers major NGO support programmes

- **LATVIA: CIVICUS Monitor update – September 2026**

Freedom of assembly

- Well - established case law in Latvia
- Cases in which restrictions are justified on grounds of national security, public order or geopolitical threats

ECtHR judgment in Rodina and Borisova v. Latvia (2025)

- The ban on the march and assembly organised by the “Rodina” association, as well as the assembly proposed by A. Borisova, was justified and proportionate: the events’ true purpose was to glorify Russian supremacy, denigrate the Latvian language and people, oppose Ukraine’s territorial integrity and support Russia’s military actions in Ukraine.
- **The right to freedom of assembly cannot be used to undermine the values of a democratic society.** The Court found that Latvian courts had carefully assessed the necessity and proportionality of the ban in light of the geopolitical circumstances, security agencies’ assessments and the events’ actual purpose.

Supreme Court, March 2026

- In January 2024, Riga City Council banned a rally proposed by the “Free Palestine” group, citing an assessment by the State Security Service. The main risks identified were possible public disorder, social polarisation and insufficient information about how the event would be conducted.
- In 2026, the Supreme Court overturned the ban on the rally. It found that:
- the municipality had not sufficiently justified its decision, while the court of first instance had also relied on arguments that were not included in the original ban;
- The Court stressed that a court’s reasoning cannot substitute for the authority’s justification, and that slogans such as “From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free!” must be assessed in each case in its specific social, political and geopolitical context.
- Although in some European countries the slogan “From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free!” is associated with support for terrorism or denial of Israel’s right to exist, each case must be assessed individually.

Freedom of assembly

- The legal framework formally protects the right to freedom of assembly, but according to a report by the Civic Alliance of Latvia, organisers often face administrative and financial barriers in practice.
- The legal requirement for organisers to appoint a person responsible for security and public order who has at least two years' experience in organising security measures
- Compulsory third-party liability insurance places a disproportionate burden on protest organisers, small civil society organisations and social movements.

Minority rights and social cohesion

Areas

- **Public service media**
- **Education reform (“Unified School”) – transition to education solely in the state language**
- **VAT on books in Russian**

Proceedings before the Constitutional Court

Strengthening the state language and restricting the use of Russian

The Constitutional Court remains the main forum for substantive, high-quality debate on minority rights and social cohesion. These are sensitive issues, and discussion outside the Court is heated, making constructive debate beyond the courtroom difficult.

Education

Pupils from minority backgrounds

A total of 10,329 respondents (pupils, parents, teachers and school leaders) from 24 municipalities took part in the survey. 74% of pupils fully or mostly understand lessons delivered in Latvian, while 24% of respondents still find it difficult to understand the curriculum fully in the state language.

In 2025/2026, Latvia fully transitioned to teaching exclusively in the state language

In 2026, “Unified School” monitoring assessments were conducted for Grades 2 and Grades 5.

The government allocated €2.035 million for learning minority languages and cultures.

Russian citizens: language and financial requirements (as at March 2026)

Outcome	2022 amendments 25,316 people	2024 amendments 4,650 people	Total
EU long-term resident status	15 159	2 478	17 637
National permanent residence permit	1 238	575	1 813
Two-year residence permit (to learn the language to A2 level)	2 681	–	2 681
Other temporary residence permits	1 263	245	1 508
Departure orders	84	13	97
Forced removal decisions	22	–	22
Departed voluntarily	2 600	no data	2 600+
Under review by the State Border Guard	–	108	108
Initial checks in information systems	–	78	78
Other cases (pending, departed, legal proceedings, deceased, etc.)	2 269	1 153	3 422
Total	25 316	4 650	29 966

2026–2027

What to expect still in 2026/2027

- ECtHR – H.M.M. and Others v. Latvia (and cases against Lithuania and Poland) – 2026/2027
- Istanbul Convention – new parliament has to decide by December 2026
- CPT – regular visit to Latvia in 2027. Council of Europe enhanced supervision: Latvia's prison system is moving away from its Soviet (even Gulag-era) legacy concerning prisoner hierarchies and inter-prisoner violence.

Artificial intelligence – a poem

Ode to Civil Society

Kad skaļi skan populisma balss,
Jūs sargājat saprātu un brīvību.
Kad demokrātijai vajadzīgs balsts,
Jūs aizstāvat cilvēka cieņu un taisnīgumu.

Jo stipra valsts nav tikai vara,
Tā ir sabiedrība, kas neklusē.
Paldies par drosmi būt par sargu tam,
Kas demokrātijā visvairāk jāsaudzē.