# HUMAN RIGHTS IN LATVIA

2025

LATVIJAS CILVĒKTIESĪBU CENTRS

LATVIAN CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS









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# Introduction

The aim of the report *Human Rights in Latvia in 2025* is to provide independent and objective information on the human rights situation in Latvia during 2025.

Although the LCHR report does not claim to offer a fully comprehensive overview of the human rights landscape in Latvia, we seek to highlight progress, current challenges and key developments in the areas that fall within the Centre's focus. The report primarily addresses civil and political rights.

The review covers areas such as general context and electoral rights, the right to a fair trial, human rights issues in prisons, non-discrimination, hate crimes and hate speech, freedom of expression, freedom of religion and belief, freedom of assembly and association, minority rights and social cohesion, prevention of domestic violence and violence against women, citizenship and residence rights, and the rights of asylum seekers and refugees.

A wide range of sources were used in preparing the report, including research studies, reports, annual reports of state institutions, policy documents, legislative drafting materials, court judgments, information provided by the media, national news agency LETA and information obtained through LCHR's work (including institutional responses to LCHR information requests).

The human rights situation in Latvia was shaped by both domestic political developments and international events. Russia's invasion of Ukraine entered its fourth year, and Ukrainian civilians fleeing the war continued to arrive in Latvia. Tensions along the Latvia-Belarus border remained high, and a heightened border security regime remained in force in the parishes of Ludza, Krāslava and Augšdaugava municipalities, the city of Daugavpils, and the Kaunata parish of Rēzekne Municipality.

Government instability deepened when the Union of Greens and Farmers (ZZS) joined an initiative by several opposition parties to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention. In November, the Saeima's (parliament) decision to withdraw from the Convention triggered widespread public protests in Latvia and abroad. The President of Latvia declined to promulgate the law and returned it to the Saeima for reconsideration. The Saeima subsequently decided to postpone further consideration of the issue until the next parliamentary term. The Venice Commission of the Council of Europe warned that withdrawal from international human rights treaties could weaken human rights protection. The Council of Europe's expert group GREVIO carried out its initial evaluation visit to Latvia from 3 to 7 November 2025.

On 18 September 2025, the Saeima appointed Dr iur. Karina Palkova as Ombudsperson.

Construction of the new Liepāja Prison continued. The Council of Europe also continued to supervise Latvia's implementation of the judgment in *D. v. Latvia* concerning the prevention of the informal prisoner hierarchy and inter-prisoner violence. The European Committee for the Prevention of

Torture (CPT) published a highly critical report following its 2024 *ad hoc* visit to Latvia and subsequently visited the country for high-level talks on 3 March 2025. A separate National Preventive Mechanism Unit for the monitoring of closed institutions was established within the Office of the Ombudsperson.

Latvia ratified Protocol No. 16 to the European Convention on Human Rights, enabling the Supreme Court and the Constitutional Court to request advisory opinions from the European Court of Human Rights.

The Constitutional Court held that the legal provisions requiring the use of the state language in paid pre-election campaigning were compatible with the Constitution.

The State Security Service requested that the Prosecutor's Office initiate criminal proceedings against Riga City Councillor and leader of the party "Stability!" (Stabilitātei!) A. Rosļikovs for inciting hatred and hostility between Latvians and Russians. In December, the Prosecutor General's Office issued a warning to the party "Stability!", finding, among other things, that the party's activities were aimed at inciting national hatred and discord. In early 2025, following the ECtHR judgment in *D. Hanovs v. Latvia*, the Ministry of Justice, in cooperation with legal experts, updated its guidance on the classification of hate crimes. Several individuals were convicted for inciting hatred on social media. At the end of 2024, the Latvian Journalists' Association established a reporting platform for hate speech, violence and harassment in the media sector.

The Senate of the Supreme Court initiated cassation proceedings in a case concerning the registration in Latvia of a same-sex marriage concluded abroad.

The Administrative Regional Court found unlawful a decision of the National Electronic Mass Media Council (NEPLP) to revoke the broadcasting licence of the television channel TV Rain. The NEPLP subsequently lodged an appeal on points of law. The government approved the Journalists' and Other Media Professionals' Safety Plan 2025–2027, drafted by the Ministry of Culture in cooperation with media and journalists' organisations, as well as law enforcement authorities. The plan aims to strengthen media freedom in Latvia, protect journalists from violence, threats and harassment, and ensure a stable legal and institutional framework for their protection.

The Saeima adopted the Law on the Dievturi Community, thereby recognising an ethnic religion for the first time. In a separate case, three members of the religious organisation First Evangelical Jesus Congregation were sentenced to terms of imprisonment ranging from two years and seven months to two years and ten months for the unlawful provision of medical treatment during a home birth that resulted in the deaths of both the infant and the mother.

The financial situation of many NGOs was adversely affected by significant reductions or suspensions of United States support programmes, including USAID. The funding available under the 2025 call for proposals of the "NGO Fund" amounted to EUR 2.35 million. During discussions on the state budget,

proposals to abolish the Society Integration Foundation and reduce funding for civil society and the media were criticised but were ultimately not supported.

The exercise of freedom of assembly increased in 2025. On 6 November, pickets were held in Riga and other Latvian cities against Latvia's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention. In *Rodina and Borisova v. Latvia*, the European Court of Human Rights found that restrictions on events posing a threat to national security and contrary to democratic values were justified.

On 1 September 2025, Latvia completed the gradual transition to education solely in the state language, with the final groups of pupils (Years 3, 6 and 9) and pre-school children commencing education entirely in Latvian. Latvian Radio 4 (in Russian) ceased FM broadcasting on 31 December 2025. A large-scale survey found that 74% of minority pupils fully or mostly understood education delivered in Latvian, while 24% continued to experience difficulties in fully comprehending educational content in the state language. The government allocated EUR 2.035 million to support the teaching and preservation of minority languages and cultures.

Some members of the Saeima and public commentators expressed concern about the potential negative impact on social cohesion and media pluralism of restricting Russian-language content. The complete removal of Russian-language content could reduce access to reliable information and contribute to the spread of disinformation, particularly among communities that continue to consume media in Russian.

The number of people naturalised as Latvian citizens increased slightly. Since 2020, Latvian citizenship has been granted automatically to new born non-citizen children; however, 1,036 children aged 6-17 remained non-citizens. A total of 76.9% of applicants for Latvian citizenship passed the knowledge test (including history), while around 44% passed the Latvian language proficiency examination. The process stemming from amendments to the Immigration Law continued, requiring citizens of the Russian Federation to renew their residence permits in order to obtain EU long-term resident status.

The number of asylum seekers in 2025 (1,288) increased by approximately 1.6 times compared with 2024 (801). An oral hearing was held in the ECtHR case *H.M.M. v. Latvia*, but judgment has not yet been delivered. Human rights activist I. Raubiško was sentenced to 200 hours of community service.

The Latvian Centre for Human Rights hopes that this report will contribute to broader public awareness and understanding of various human rights issues, enable an assessment of progress and setbacks across different areas of human rights, and serve as an informative resource for educational institutions, state and municipal authorities, NGOs, the media and the wider public. LCHR also hopes that it will encourage other NGOs to prepare similar reports in their respective fields.

**Anhelita Kamenska**
Director, Latvian Centre for Human Rights

# Electoral Rights and Political Context

**Problems with vote counting in the local government elections led to the resignation of several public officials. Government instability deepened in September when the coalition government party Union of Greens and Farmers (ZZS), together with opposition parties in the Saeima, supported Latvia's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention. Attempts to buy votes were identified in several municipalities. The Constitutional Court ruled that the legal provisions requiring the use of the state language (Latvian) in paid pre-election campaigning are compatible with the Constitution.**



Voter turnout in the 2025 local government elections was 46.98%



Attempts at voter bribery were detected in several municipalities



### *Local government elections*

In the 2025 local government elections, 646,957 Latvian citizens eligible to vote cast their ballots, representing 46.98% of the electorate. Voter turnout was highest in Riga, at 52.30%, followed by Vidzeme (47.98%), Zemgale (43.61%), Kurzeme (42.31%) and Latgale (41.28%). The elections were held across 42 local authorities, comprising seven state cities and 35 municipalities.

When the counting of votes began, problems were identified in the ballot-scanning systems, and the votes consequently had to be

counted manually.[1] J. Liops, Director of the State Digital Development Agency and the official responsible for the election systems, was suspended from his duties. Subsequently, Inga Bērziņa, Minister for Smart Administration and Regional Development, resigned from office,[2] followed by Kristīne Saulīte, Chairperson of the Central Election Commission.[3]

These were the first municipal council elections held under the amendments to the Local Government Law and the Law on State Secrets adopted in 2024. Under these amendments, senior municipal officials, namely the chairperson of the council and the deputy chairperson, were required to obtain special security clearance granting access to state secrets. The amendments were submitted by President Edgars Rinkēvičs.

Several instances of voter bribery were identified on local council election day. In November, the State Security Service (VDD) requested that the prosecution service initiate criminal proceedings against two Latvian citizens for vote-buying in the municipal elections in Balvi Municipality. These individuals bribed several residents of the municipality to vote for a particular political party and a candidate for municipal councillor. In addition, one of the individuals used a private vehicle to transport several bribed voters to the polling station in an organised manner. In December, the VDD requested that the prosecution service initiate criminal proceedings against four Latvian citizens for vote-buying in the municipal elections in Jēkabpils Municipality. the voter-bribery scheme in Jēkabpils Municipality involved four individuals, including a candidate representing a particular political party, who was ultimately not elected. Unlawful attempts to influence voters' choices also occurred in the municipal elections in Cēsis Municipality.

### *Language of Pre-Election Campaigning*

On 13 February 2025, the Constitutional Court ruled that the provisions requiring the use of the official state language (Latvian) in paid pre-election campaigning are compatible with the Constitution. (For further details, see *"Freedom of Expression"*.)

### *Amendments to the Saeima Election Law*

On 12 June, amendments to the Saeima Election Law were adopted, stipulating that from 2030 political parties wishing to contest Saeima elections will be required to have 1,000 party members instead of the current 500, while electoral alliances will be required to have 1,500 members instead of the current 1,000 (Section 9). A political party wishing to stand in Saeima elections must have been established no later than one year before the election.

The security deposit payable by parties prior to elections has been substantially increased, from EUR 1,400 to an amount equivalent to 11 minimum monthly wages (Section 12(1)). The amount of the deposit had not been reviewed since the adoption of the Saeima Election Law in 1995, when it was set at 1,000 lats. The current deposit requirement will remain in force for the 2026 elections.

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[1] LSM.lv (2025). *Due to problems with the ballot-scanning system, ballots had to be counted manually; the Central Election Commission ordered that all votes be counted by 1 p.m. on Sunday*, 8 June 2025. Available at: LSM article.
[2] LSM.lv (2025). *Minister Bērziņa resigns over election-related failures*, 11 June 2025. Available at: LSM article.
[3] LSM.lv (2025). *CVK Chair Saulīte informs the Saeima of her resignation*, 11 June 2025. Available at: LSM article.

Persons convicted of particularly grave crimes - crimes against humanity, peace, war crimes, genocide, crimes against the state, or terrorism-related offences will not be permitted to stand as candidates in Saeima elections, regardless of whether their criminal record has been expunged or set aside (Section $5(3^1)$).

### *Changes in the Government*

In February 2025, Prime Minister Evika Siliņa (*New Unity*) requested the resignation of Minister for Transport Kaspars Briškens (*The Progressives*), Minister for Welfare Uldis Augulis (*Union of Greens and Farmers*), and Minister for Education and Science Anda Čakša (*New Unity*). They were replaced respectively by Atis Švinka (*The Progressives*), Reinis Uzulnieks (*Union of Greens and Farmers*), and Dace Melbārde (*New Unity*).

The reasons for these ministerial changes can be traced back to autumn 2024, when the Prime Minister expressed dissatisfaction with the performance of the Minister for Transport, particularly regarding the handling of problems associated with the Rail Baltica project.

Government instability deepened during the year when, in September, the Union of Greens and Farmers joined an initiative by the opposition parties *National Alliance*, *United List*, and *Latvia First Party* calling on the Saeima to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention (for further details, see *"Domestic Violence"*).

**Recommendations:**

- **Improve access to polling stations for individuals with mobility difficulties.**
- **Strengthen public resilience against disinformation during election periods by conducting targeted media literacy campaigns and raising awareness about the threats posed by deepfake technology, particularly in the pre-election phase.**

# Right to a Fair Trial

**Public trust in Latvia's courts increased slightly. The Constitutional Court held that the amount of state compensation available to several victims in cases involving the death of a person was incompatible with the Constitution.**

**Latvia ratified Protocol No. 16 to the European Convention on Human Rights, which will enable the Supreme Court and the Constitutional Court to request advisory opinions from the European Court of Human Rights.**



43% of the public trust courts



In 2025, the European Commission found that Latvia's justice system, overall, functions efficiently

### *Surveys*

In 2025, according to a public opinion survey, 43% of respondents expressed trust in the courts, an increase of 5 percentage points compared with 2024. Trust in the courts was more common among women, young people aged 18 to 34, persons with higher education, ethnic Latvians, public sector employees, and residents of the Vidzeme and Zemgale regions. By contrast, distrust of the courts was more frequently expressed by men, respondents aged 45 to 54 and those aged 65 and over. Distrust was also more common among respondents with only basic education, non-citizens of the Republic of Latvia, non-Latvians, unemployed persons, survey participants with low incomes, and residents of Riga and the Latgale region.

### *Crime victim compensation*

By its judgment of 27 June 2025 in Case No. 2024-07-01, the Constitutional Court declared the legal framework governing the amount of state compensation payable to multiple victims in cases

involving the death of a person to be incompatible with the third sentence of Article 92 of the Satversme.

The case was initiated following an application by the Administrative District Court. The applicant considered that, in cases involving the death of a person, the amount of state compensation payable to each victim is manifestly insufficient where the maximum amount of compensation is divided proportionately among several victims. The Constitutional Court emphasised that the primary obligation to provide adequate compensation lies with the perpetrator of the criminal offence and that the State is not required to assume full responsibility for compensation in the offender's place. The contested provisions form part of a broader system designed to ensure compensation for victims of criminal offences. The legal framework enables victims to seek compensation from the offender through criminal and civil proceedings, while state compensation provides timely support through a simplified procedure.

However, there may be situations in which victims are unable to obtain adequate compensation from the perpetrator and state compensation constitutes the only redress available for the harm suffered. Such compensation must not be merely symbolic or manifestly inadequate; its amount must also reflect the State's socio-economic circumstances. In the case at hand, the compensation awarded to each victim, namely EUR 620, could not be regarded as fair and proportionate. The Court found that such compensation failed to achieve its purpose and was contrary to human dignity.

In 2025, the European Commission (EC) concluded that, overall, Latvia's justice system functions effectively. At the same time, for several consecutive years the EC has continued to recommend that Latvia introduce safeguards against undue political influence in the existing procedure for appointing Supreme Court judges, in line with European standards on judicial appointments.

### *Judicial assistants*

The report highlights the high turnover of judicial assistants. For example, up to 41% of judicial assistants in Riga leave their positions each year. The main reasons for this turnover include low salaries (while the remuneration of judicial assistants in Latvia is close to the EU average, at around 70% of the national average wage, in Estonia it exceeds the average wage), perceived lack of career development opportunities within the judiciary, and the attractiveness of the private sector. The Latvian judicial system also faces difficulties in filling all judicial vacancies due to an insufficient number of qualified candidates.

Public and business perceptions of judicial independence in Latvia remain moderate. In 2025, 42% of the public and 41% of businesses considered the independence of courts and judges to be "fairly high" or "very high". This represents a significant decline compared with 2021, when 56% of the public and 53% of businesses rated judicial independence as "fairly high" or "very high".

Data from the 2025 *EU Justice Scoreboard* indicate that both the length of court proceedings and the number of pending cases in Latvia remain among the lowest in the European Union.[4]

At the end of November 2025, the Prosecution Office referred a criminal case to the court in which Riga District Court judge Inese Siliņeviča, a judicial assistant, and a third person unconnected with the judiciary were charged with fraud. All three individuals were accused of fictitious employment within the court system, through which a total of EUR 137,371.68 was fraudulently obtained from the budget of the Court Administration between 2006 and 2023. On 13 November, the Saeima authorised the initiation of criminal proceedings against the suspended judge.[5]

On 25 November 2025, Latvia ratified Protocol No. 16 to the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.[6] Following the Protocol's entry into force in Latvia on 1 March 2026, the Supreme Court and the Constitutional Court will be entitled to request advisory opinions from the European Court of Human Rights on questions of principle relating to the interpretation or application of the rights and freedoms guaranteed by the Convention and its Protocols. The conclusions contained in such advisory opinions are not legally binding. Nevertheless, they provide guidance and insight into the interpretation and application of Convention rights in disputed or previously unresolved matters.



## *Recommendations*

- **Develop a targeted public awareness campaign to strengthen trust in the judiciary, with a particular focus on minority communities.**
- **Design and implement a long-term human resources development strategy for the judicial system, including a clear career path for judicial assistants, competitive remuneration, and systematic succession planning for judges.**

[4] Latvia ranks seventh among countries with the shortest case-processing times for civil and commercial proceedings across all court instances. It also ranks seventh for the length of first-instance administrative proceedings, although such cases take considerably longer in Latvia than in some neighbouring countries, averaging 200 days compared with 80 days in Lithuania. By contrast, corruption cases are characterised by particularly lengthy proceedings, with an average duration of 1,000 days. Only France records a longer average processing time for such cases, at 1,100 days.

[5] Vestnesis. LV (2025). On the Saeima's Authorisation to Initiate Criminal Proceedings against Riga District Court Judge Inese Siliņeviča, 13 November.

[6] Likumi.lv (2025). Par Cilvēka tiesību un pamatbrīvību aizsardzības konvencijas 16. protokolu, pieņemts 09.10.2025, stājās spēkā 06.11.2025

# Prisons

**Construction of the new Liepāja Prison continued. The Council of Europe continued to monitor Latvia's implementation of the judgment in *D. v. Latvia* concerning the prevention of informal prisoner hierarchies and inter-prisoner violence. The CPT published a highly critical report on its 2024 *ad hoc* visit to Latvia and subsequently visited Latvia for high-level talks. A separate National Preventive Mechanism Unit was established within the Office of the Ombudsperson to monitor places of detention and other closed institutions.**

### *Statistics*

As of 31 December 2025, there were 3,588 prisoners held in Latvia's nine prisons. Of these, 2,735 (71.44%) were convicted prisoners and 853 (28.56%) were remand prisoners. A total of 3,353 were men and 235 were women (6.55%). Compared with 2024, the number of juvenile prisoners halved in 2025, with only 14 juveniles in custody (0.4%). Of the total prison population, 3,400 were Latvian nationals and 188 were foreign nationals (5.2%).

Construction of the new Liepāja Prison continued in 2025. The Government also continued to implement measures aimed at executing the European Court of Human Rights judgment in *D. v. Latvia*.

Council of Europe continued enhanced supervision in the case of ***D. v. Latvia*** concerning informal hierarchies in prisons

Number of prisoners:

2022 – 3229 persons

2023 – 3271 persons

2024 – 3505 persons

2025- 3588 persons

Number of minors in prisons:

2022 – 23 persons

2023 – 30 persons

2024 – 31 persons

2025 – 14 persons

### *Amendments to the Ombudsman's Law*

On 6 March 2025, the Saeima amended the Ombudsman Law, formally establishing the Ombudsman's duty to perform the functions of the National Preventive Mechanism under the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment[7] (Section 11(6)), as well as granting the right to visit places where persons are or may be deprived of their liberty within the meaning of Article 4 of the Optional Protocol (hereinafter, places of deprivation of liberty) in order to prevent torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (Section 12(11)).

According to the Ombudsman's 2025 Annual Report[8], and taking into account the recommendations issued by the UN Human Rights Committee in July 2025, the National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) was established as a separate structural unit within the Office of the Ombudsperson, namely the National Preventive Mechanism Unit. Previously, it had operated as part of the Civil and Political Rights Division. The creation of a separate unit strengthens the NPM's independence, specialisation, and capacity to systematically carry out its preventive mandate. In 2025, the NPM conducted 17 visits to prisons, including Daugavgrīva Prison, the Cēsis Correctional Facility for Juveniles, Riga Central Prison, Jelgava Prison, Jēkabpils Prison, Iļģuciems Prison, and Liepāja Prison.

### *Council of Europe Committee for the Prevention of Torture*

In February 2025, the Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) published a highly critical report on its *ad hoc* visit to Latvia in 2024.[9] One of the objectives of the visit was to assess developments since the Committee's 2022 visit. At that time, CPT had already expressed serious concerns that many of its recommendations, including those repeatedly made since its first visit in 1999, had still not been implemented or had been only partially implemented. Particular concern was expressed regarding the harmful effects of the informal prisoner hierarchy in Latvian prisons and the resulting inter-prisoner violence, the true extent of which was significantly underestimated due to ineffective investigations and because the rules of the hierarchy prevented prisoners from lodging complaints.

CPT concluded that progress remained lacking in several key areas. Dormitory-style accommodation had not been converted into cell-based accommodation, the harmful influence of the informal prisoner hierarchy had not been eliminated, and allegations of inter-prisoner violence continued to be inadequately recorded, reported and investigated. There was also a need for a substantial increase in prison staff numbers and for a stronger staff presence within prisons. Prisoner reintegration programmes needed to be further developed, and adequate support had to be provided for prisoners with substance addictions. The Committee conclude that Latvia remained far from fully meeting its obligation to protect prisoners from violence by other prisoners and to conduct effective investigations when such violence occurred.

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[7] Amendments to the Ombudsman Law, adopted on 6 March 2025, entered into force on 19 March 2025.

[8] Ombudsman of the Republic of Latvia (2025). *Annual Report 2025*, p. 117 (in Latvian), https://www.tiesibsargs.lv/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/tiesibsarga_gada_zinojums_2025.pdf

[9] Report of the CPT on its 2024 ad hoc visit to Latvia.

The influence of the informal prisoner hierarchy remains deeply embedded in nearly all aspects of daily prison life. The CPT reiterated that the situation of prisoners occupying the lowest caste within this hierarchy, which in some cases effectively amounts to contemporary forms of slavery through forced labour, may be regarded as a continuing violation of Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights. This provision prohibits all forms of inhuman or degrading treatment and imposes an obligation on State authorities to take measures to prevent such treatment, including where it is inflicted by private individuals, such as other prisoners.

Staffing levels remain so inadequate that prison personnel are unable to protect prisoners from harm caused by other inmates or prevent prohibited items, particularly drugs, from entering prisons. Current staffing levels and work organisation do not allow for the implementation of a dynamic security approach and do not facilitate meaningful contact between custodial staff and prisoners. As a result, staff are prevented from understanding prisoners' needs, assisting them with everyday issues, and motivating them to engage in meaningful activities.

The Committee called on the Latvian authorities to significantly intensify their efforts to eradicate the influence of the informal prisoner hierarchy throughout the prison system, as it undermines state authority, fosters inter-prisoner violence, and facilitates the availability of drugs within prisons.

On 3 March 2025, high-level talks took place in Riga between the Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture and the Latvian Minister of Justice, Inese Lībiņa-Egnere. The primary purpose of the discussions was to address measures taken by the Government to reduce inter-prisoner violence and limit the influence of the informal prisoner hierarchy.[10]

### *Recommendations:*

- **Continue eliminating the informal hierarchy among prisoners by training staff, phasing out dormitory-type accommodation, and ensuring prisoners' access to education, employment and resocialisation.**
- **Improve the complaints-handling system, ensuring its independence and confidentiality.**

[10] The Council of Europe anti-torture Committee (CPT) holds high-level talks in Latvia, 4 March 2025.

# Hate Crimes and Hate Speech

**The State Security Service (VDD) requested the prosecution service to initiate criminal proceedings against Aleksejs Rosļikovs, a member of Riga City Council and leader of the political party *For Stability!* (*Stabilitātei!*), on suspicion of inciting hatred and discord between Latvians and Russians. The Office of the Prosecutor General also issued a warning to the party *For Stability!*, finding, among other things, that its activities were aimed at inciting national hatred and discord.**

**In the summer, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) published its report following its 2024 visit to Latvia. In several cases involving hate speech and hate crimes, those found guilty were sentenced to terms of imprisonment.**

Initiated criminal proceedings according to Articles78, 74[1] and 150 of the Criminal Law

| | Article 78 | Article 74.[1] | Article 150 |
|---|---|---|---|
| **2020** | 5 | 1 | 11 |
| **2021** | 4 | 1 | 6 |
| **2022** | 32 | 28 | 6 |
| **2023** | 10 | 14 | 1 |
| **2024** | 26 | 18 | 4 |
| **2025** | 26 | 31 | 6 |

### *Statistics*

According to data from the Information Centre of the Ministry of the Interior[11], 26 criminal proceedings were initiated in 2025 under Section 78 of the Criminal Law, including 13 proceedings under Section 78(1), nine under Section 78(2), and four under Section 78(3). Most proceedings were initiated in Riga (16 cases), while two proceedings each were initiated in Daugavpils, Liepāja, Ventspils, and Alūksne Municipality, and one proceeding each in Jūrmala and Jelgava Municipality.

[11] Information Centre of the Ministry of the Interior (2025). Kriminālā statistika par 2025.gadu.

Six criminal proceedings were initiated under Section 150 of the Criminal Law in 2025, of which three were in Dobele Municipality, two in Riga, and one in Daugavpils.

A further 31 criminal proceedings were initiated under Section $74^1$ of the Criminal Law in 2025. Of these, eight were initiated in Riga, six each in Ventspils and Daugavpils, four in Rēzekne, two in Balvi Municipality, and one each in Augšdaugava, Kuldīga, Talsi, and Ventspils Municipalities.

According to the State Police Annual Report for 2025, in the section "Offences and Violations Related to Incitement to Hatred and the Justification of War Crimes",[12] 26 cases concerned violations of Section $74^1$ of the Criminal Law, 16 cases concerned Section 78, and six cases concerned Section 150. In addition, there were 227 cases involving the use of symbols of totalitarian regimes in public places (Section 13 of the Law on Administrative Liability), and 446 cases involving the use in public places of symbols glorifying military aggression and war crimes (Section $13^1$ of the same law).[13]

According to the State Security Service Annual Report for 2025,[14] the Service opened eight criminal proceedings on suspicion of hate speech directed against Latvia's national security interests: five for the public glorification and justification of war crimes (Section $74^1$ of the Criminal Law), two for incitement to national hatred and discord, and one for a call directed against the Republic of Latvia. In four identified cases, individuals had publicly justified and glorified Russia's crimes committed in Ukraine, while in one case an individual publicly justified and glorified the genocide of Jews carried out by Nazi Germany.

At the same time, the State Security Service continued to conduct preventive interviews with individuals whose online activities were aimed at justifying Russian aggression or inciting hatred against Latvians or Ukrainians, but where there were insufficient grounds to initiate criminal proceedings. In 2025, the VDD held preventive interviews with and warned more than 200 Latvian nationals about potential criminal liability after they had disseminated messages contrary to Latvia's national security interests on various online platforms. Overall, since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the number of internet users warned by the VDD about potential criminal liability has exceeded 2,000.

On 14 November, the State Security Service (VDD) requested that the prosecutor's office initiate criminal proceedings against Aleksejs Rosļikovs, a member of Riga City Council and leader of the political party *Stability!* (*Stabilitātei!*), on suspicion of inciting hatred and discord between Latvians and Russians. The criminal case was initiated in connection with statements made by Rosļikovs during

[12] Valsts policija (2025). Valsts policijas 2025.gada pārskats, p.59 https://www.vp.gov.lv/lv/media/31463/download?attachment

[13] These cases included the public justification and glorification of war crimes in public places and on social media; photographs posted on social networking profiles stylised with prohibited Soviet regime and pro-Kremlin symbols; various hate-inciting inscriptions on building facades and vehicles; desecration of the Ukrainian flag; and online comments inciting national, ethnic, and racial hatred and making threats.

[14] State Security Service (2025*). Public Annual Report 2025*, https://vdd.gov.lv/uploads/materials/41/lv/vdd-2025-gada-parskats.pdf.

a parliamentary sitting on 5 June 2025. Speaking from the parliamentary rostrum and criticising the advancement of the draft declaration *"On the Criminally Implemented Russification of Latvia by the Soviet Occupation Regime and the Elimination of Its Linguistic Consequences"*, he expressed a number of statements which, in the opinion of the VDD, were manipulative and capable of inciting hatred between Latvians and Russians. He also used offensive language and made rude gestures in Russian.

On 30 December 2025, following the completion of its review of the compliance of the political party *Stability!* (*Stabilitātei!*) with the requirements of the Political Parties Law, the Office of the Prosecutor General issued the party with a formal warning regarding the inadmissibility of continuing activities directed against Latvia's national security interests. During the review, the Prosecutor General's Office concluded that the party's activities were aimed at inciting national hatred and discord and that they exhibited elements of providing informational (propaganda) support to Russia.

## NGO

In 2025, the Latvian Centre for Human Rights (LCHR) received two complaints concerning alleged hate crimes. One case involved an assault on a Ukrainian national by a colleague. Administrative offence proceedings were initiated in the case. The second case concerned physical injuries inflicted on Sri Lankan nationals by their landlord. In both cases, the victims were provided with legal advice and assistance.

## Hate Crimes

In early 2025, following the ECtHR judgment in *D. Hanovs v. Latvia*, the Ministry of Justice, in cooperation with legal experts, updated its guidance[15] on the classification of hate crimes.

In April 2025, the Latgale Regional Court sentenced a man convicted of assaulting an LGBT community member in Daugavpils to ten months' imprisonment, increasing the custodial sentence by three months. On 14 October 2024, the Latgale District Court delivered its judgment in the case concerning a homophobic attack on Līvajs Amareins and his partner in Daugavpils on 4 May 2023. The court found the defendant guilty of hooliganism under Section 231(2) of the Criminal Law and sentenced him to seven months' imprisonment. The court recognised the defendant's homophobic motive as an aggravating circumstance under Section 48(1)(14) of the Criminal Law. It partially upheld the victims' claims for compensation for non-pecuniary damage, awarding €2,500 to Līvajs Amareins and €2,000 to the second victim. The prosecutor appealed the District Court's judgment, seeking a sentence of two years' imprisonment. The victims also lodged an appeal, requesting that their claims for compensation for non-pecuniary damage be granted in full. However, the Regional Court upheld the judgment of the court of first instance. The victims were represented by Jekaterina Tumule, a lawyer at the Latvian Centre for Human Rights.

[15] *Jurista Vārds* (2025). Ministry of Justice Updates Guidance on the Classification of Hate Crimes. *Jurista Vārds*, 1 April 2025, No. 13 (1383), pp. 23-28. Updated guidance on the classification of hate crimes

On 30 October, the Riga City Court approved a plea agreement[16] for two defendants who were found guilty of inciting national hatred and committing acts of violence, while one of them was also found guilty of intentional damage to property. One defendant was sentenced to one year's imprisonment and one year and six months' probation supervision, while the other was sentenced to two years' imprisonment and one year and six months' probation supervision. The offence was committed in July 2025 on trolleybus route No. 15 in Riga. The defendants publicly made hostile and offensive remarks directed against Latvians, including threats and statements intended to incite national hatred. They subsequently followed two female passengers after they had left the trolley bus and physically assaulted one of them by striking her on the head, pulling her hair and attempting to take her handbag. One of the defendants also damaged the victim's mobile phone when she attempted to contact the emergency services. In determining the sentence, the court considered the nature and seriousness of the offence, as well as the fact that both defendants fully admitted their guilt and cooperated with the investigation by opting for a simplified criminal procedure.

In its judgment of 21 February 2025, the Latgale District Court[17] found the defendant (Person A) guilty of committing five criminal offences between 2022 and 2024, including theft, hooliganism, criminal damage and causing bodily harm. He was also convicted of incitement to hatred and glorification of war crimes. While residing in Ireland, the defendant created a TikTok account through which he published video content accessible to an unrestricted audience, which collectively received nearly 488,000 views and more than 44,000 interactions. The videos were directed against Ukrainians as a national group and contained offensive, degrading and dehumanising language. They mocked Ukrainian refugees, portrayed Ukrainians as a threat to society, expressed support for Russia's war against Ukraine, and justified or glorified war crimes. Some of the statements were also directed against Ukrainians living in Ireland. The court concluded that the defendant's public statements exceeded the limits of freedom of expression and constituted serious criminal offences under Latvian law. Following the aggregation of sentences, the final sentence imposed was 4 years and 6 months' imprisonment, together with 1 year of probation supervision following release. For incitement to hatred, he was sentenced to 1 year and 6 months' imprisonment, while for the justification or glorification of war crimes he received 2 years' imprisonment and 1 year of probation supervision.

### *Hate Speech*

In December 2024, the Latvian Journalists' Association established a reporting platform (alert button) for incidents of hate speech, violence and harassment in the media sector.[18] The Association stated that the platform was needed to systematically collect information about such incidents.

[16] LSM.LV (2025). Diviem vīriešiem jādodas cietumā par vardarbību un naida kurināšanu pret latviešiem 15.trolejbusā, 5.11, https://www.lsm.lv/raksts/zinas/latvija/05.11.2025-diviem-viriesiem-jadodas-cietuma-par-vardarbibu-un-naida-kurinasanu-pret-latviesiem-15-trolejbusa.a621213/

[17] Latgale District Court, Case No. 18400002024, Court Archive No. K88-0503-25/9, ECLI: LV:LRT:2025:0221.18400002024.2.S, Rēzekne, 21 February 2025.

[18] LSM: Reporting hate speech and harassment against journalists and media workers

### *Court Judgments*

The Senate of the Supreme Court delivered a judgment concerning blogger Niks Endziņš's call to "eliminate the Chinese", made in a video address at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in January 2020.[19] The case was examined by the Senate for a second time. Initially, Endziņš was convicted of inciting national hatred and discord under Section 78(2) of the Criminal Law. At that time, the Senate found that the lower court had failed to assess several essential criteria. As a result, the Regional Court subsequently acquitted the defendant.

In its latest ruling, however, the Senate concluded that the appellate court had still failed to assess all the necessary criteria. For example, it had not examined the meaning of the word "eliminate" in the context of the statements as a whole or considered how the statements would be perceived from the standpoint of an objective observer. The court had also failed to take account of other circumstances established in the case, including the defendant's gestures when making the statement and comments posted by readers indicating that some had interpreted the remarks as a direct call for violence against a specifically identifiable group of persons.

The Senate further noted that the events must be assessed within their broader social context, including whether public concerns about the spread of COVID-19 at the time created an increased risk that such statements would be received more acutely by society and that the calls contained therein would be more likely to result in manifestations of hatred against the targeted group.

On 16 October, the Riga Regional Court set aside the part of the judgment of the Riga City Latgale District Court of 26 April 2021 concerning the sentence imposed on Endziņš for inciting national hatred. The court took into account the violation of the defendant's right to have criminal proceedings completed within a reasonable time and sentenced him to two months and seven days of short-term imprisonment. The period spent in pre-trial detention between 31 January 2020 and 6 April 2020 was credited towards the sentence.

### *Activities of the Latvian Centre for Human Rights*

In 2025, the Latvian Centre for Human Rights implemented the project *"Towards a More Tolerant Environment in Riga Schools"* and launched the project *"Against Hate Speech in Schools and Online"*. As part of these projects, five seminars on preventing and countering hate speech were organised for young people and educators. A total of 117 young people and 25 teachers participated in the seminars.

In 2025, the Centre received 10 complaints concerning possible hate speech: five related to hate speech online and five concerned verbal abuse in public places. Five complaints were based on skin colour or national origin, three on nationality, one on religion, and one on other grounds. The Centre also continued its monitoring of online hate speech.

[19] Senate of the Criminal Cases Department of the Supreme Court of the Republic of Latvia, Decision of 21 March 2025 in Case No. 11817001020, SKK-9/2025, ECLI:LV:AT:2025:0321.11817001020.6.L.

### *ECRI Report*

In summer 2025, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) published its report following its monitoring visit to Latvia in 2024. ECRI welcomed progress made in Latvia, including the introduction of the KiVa anti-bullying programme in schools, the adoption of a legal framework for civil partnerships, measures to combat hate crime, the establishment of support systems for migrants and persons with international protection status, and initiatives promoting Roma inclusion.

At the same time, ECRI identified several challenges, including a lack of data on racist and anti-LGBTI incidents in schools, the absence of an LGBTI equality strategy, the prevalence of hate speech and hate crime, and continuing difficulties relating to Roma inclusion. ECRI therefore recommended strengthening incident monitoring, establishing mechanisms for monitoring LGBTI equality and hate crime, improving the implementation of Roma inclusion measures, and ensuring an inclusive approach to the application of language requirements. ECRI also noted that the process of regularising the residence status of citizens of the Russian Federation in Latvia continued to create difficulties for some individuals and required additional support.



### *Recommendations*

- **Provide regular training for law enforcement agencies on recognising, investigating, and preventing illegal hate speech and hate crimes.**
- **Improve the collection of statistical data on hate crimes by eliminating fragmentation based on the responsible authority and including cases where hate motivation is applied as an aggravating circumstance.**
- **Develop and implement targeted preventive measures to reduce youth radicalisation, with a specific focus on limiting the spread of skinhead subculture ideology.**
- **Carry out targeted awareness-raising initiatives for vulnerable groups to encourage reporting of hate crimes and hate speech.**

# Non- Discrimination

**The Administrative District Court found that the recall of diplomat K. Rimša from her post in Brussels constituted discrimination on the grounds of sex and pregnancy. The political party *Latvia First* (*Latvija pirmajā vietā*) introduced several legislative proposals directed against LGBT+ rights, while the Senate initiated cassation proceedings in a case concerning the registration in Latvia of a same-sex marriage concluded abroad.**

In the Gender Equality Index, Latvia ranked **24th** out of the 27 EU Member States

According to a large scale survey the LGBT+ community continues to experience discrimination on a regular basis (82%), while 58% report being subjected to hate speech

According to the European Gender Equality Index 2025, Latvia ranks 24th among the 27 European Union Member States, with a score of 56.7 points. Latvia achieved its highest score across all domains in employment, where it scored 77.6 points and ranked 3rd. This result was driven primarily by its participation rate, for which Latvia scored 91.0 points, placing it 4th in the European Union. In 2024, Latvia ranked 19th.

### *Court cases*

In June 2025, the Administrative District Court upheld a claim brought by diplomat K. Rimša against the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, finding that her recall from a posting in Brussels constituted discrimination on the grounds of sex and pregnancy.[20] The court annulled the Ministry's decision, ordered it to provide the diplomat

[20] LSM.lv. (2025). Diplomat Rimša wins first-instance case against the Ministry of Foreign Affairs over sex discrimination, 18 June.

with an equivalent position within three months, and issued an ancillary decision to the Cabinet of Ministers. The Ombudsperson's Office identified systemic problems and shortcomings in the Ministry's internal regulatory framework concerning new mothers in the diplomatic service. The Ministry denied that discrimination had occurred, arguing that the assignment had been temporary and that budgetary and staff rotation constraints applied, and appealed the judgment to the Administrative Regional Court.

In 2025, the Constitutional Court examined several cases concerning Article 91 of the Constitution, which guarantees equality before the law and prohibits discrimination. In the case concerning restrictions on social scholarships[21], the Court assessed provisions of the Higher Education Institutions Law and concluded that the territorial limitation of social scholarships, namely the exclusion of support for studies abroad, was not discriminatory. The Court found that the restriction pursued a legitimate aim: to integrate specific social groups into Latvia's higher education system and labour market.

### *Ombudsperson's Office*

In 2025, the Ombudsperson's Office received 194 complaints concerning possible discrimination, including alleged discrimination on the grounds of disability (46 cases), sex (25), age (23), and language (15).[22] Most complaints concerned possible discrimination in the public sector, employment, and access to goods and services in the private sector.

In 2025, the Office continued its research into various discrimination-related issues, including sexual harassment in Latvian higher education institutions. As a result, recommendations were issued to all higher education institutions in Latvia, additional informational materials were developed, and the video lecture *"No Means No!"* was published.

In 2025, the Ombudspersons's Office's Discrimination Prevention and Digital Rights Unit employed five staff members (four lawyers and one sociologist).[23] The Unit was joined by a lawyer specialising in issues related to artificial intelligence.

### *Other Public Authorities*

### *Consumer Rights Protection Centre*

In 2025, the Consumer Rights Protection Centre (CRPC)[24] received two complaints regarding possible breaches of the prohibition of discrimination. The first concerned a service provider's refusal to replace equipment based on the consumer's age. The CRPC concluded that the dispute related to equipment leasing and that age was considered when assessing creditworthiness; therefore, the consumer could apply to the Ombudsperson's Office if they wished to pursue the matter. The second

[21] Constitutional Court (2025). Lieta Nr. 2025-06-0106 , 27 April.
[22] Ombudsman of the Republic of Latvia. (2026). *Annual Report of the Ombudsman of the Republic of Latvia for 2025*. Available at: Annual Report of the Ombudsman of the Republic of Latvia for 2025.
[23] Ombudsman (2025), Discrimination Prevention and Digital Rights Unit, Employee Contacts.
[24] Consumer Rights Protection Centre (2025). Written response No. 2.-4/4691 of 17 April 2026 to the submission of the Latvian Centre for Human Rights.

complaint partly concerned discrimination and related to a senior citizen discount available only in person upon presentation of a pensioner's certificate. The CRPC noted that businesses are entitled to determine their own discount policies and found no indication of unfair commercial practice. In 2025, the CRPC did not initiate any administrative offence proceedings or impose sanctions for breaches of the prohibition of discrimination.

### *State Labour Inspectorate*

In 2025, the State Labour Inspectorate received 26 complaints concerning possible discrimination.[25] In six out of nine complaints regarding the determination of remuneration during prolonged absence from work, the information provided was confirmed. One complaint concerning alleged discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation was not substantiated, and another concerning the organisation of work duties in relation to place of residence was likewise not substantiated. However, a complaint concerning a discriminatory job advertisement containing unjustified requirements related to sex and age was confirmed.

In fourteen complaints concerning possible discrimination during employment relationships, such as remuneration, non-payment of bonuses, organisation of work, or the granting of annual paid leave, the information provided was not substantiated. As a result of the complaints received, six administrative offence proceedings were initiated, and six employers were held liable. In five cases, a warning was issued, while in one case a fine of EUR 350 was imposed.

### *LGBTIQ+ Rights*

Administrative courts examined several cases involving applicants who had entered into same-sex marriages abroad and sought registration of this information in the Register of Natural Persons. In one such case, the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs (OCMA) rejected the application, arguing that the Law on the Register of Natural Persons does not provide for the collection of data on marriages not recognised in Latvia. Both the first-instance court and the appellate court dismissed the application, holding that the applicants were not discriminated against because they had the opportunity to obtain legal recognition and visibility by registering a partnership in Latvia.[26] In this case, the Senate initiated cassation proceedings.

In 2025, the political party *Latvia First* (LPV) initiated several legislative proposals directed against LGBTIQ+ rights. In June, the Saeima referred to the Legal Affairs Committee LPV's proposed amendments to the Law on the National Flag of Latvia, which would prohibit the display of the LGBTQIA+ rainbow flag and its variants together with the Latvian national flag. The party also called for a ban on displaying such flags at state and municipal buildings. The proposal was opposed by the Ministry of Justice, the Ombudsman's Office and the State Heraldry Commission.

[25] State Labour Inspectorate (2025). Letter in response to the Latvian Centre for Human Rights' request for information, April 2026.
[26] Judgment of the Administrative Regional Court of 6 March 2025 in Case No. A420194022.

LPV also submitted amendments to the Law on Meetings, Processions and Pickets, providing that "minors shall be prohibited from participating in events that promote LGBT ideas and values", and proposed amendments to the Child Protection Law, stipulating that a child's freedom of association may be exercised only insofar as it does not endanger their health, life or morality.

On 18 September, the Saeima referred to parliamentary committees LPV-initiated amendments to the Criminal Law. The proposals provide for criminal penalties in relation to gender reassignment procedures for minors, including puberty blockers and cross-sex hormone therapy carried out for the purpose of gender transition, as well as for encouraging minors to undergo such medical interventions.

By the end of 2025, none of these legislative proposals had progressed to a first reading.

### *Complaints of Alleged Discrimination Received by the Latvian Centre for Human Rights*

In 2025, the Latvian Centre for Human Rights (LCHR) received 13 complaints concerning possible discrimination. Nine of these complaints were anonymous, making it impossible to verify the facts in detail or provide legal advice to the complainants. Five complaints concerned access to goods and services, four related to education, two to housing, one to employment, and one concerned both education and housing. Eleven complaints related to alleged discrimination on the grounds of skin colour and/or national origin, one on the grounds of sex, and one on the grounds of disability.

All anonymous complaints concerned possible discrimination against foreign nationals, primarily Indian nationals living in Latvia, on the grounds of skin colour or national origin. Four complaints were submitted by Indian students alleging racist treatment by academic staff at a higher education institution. Another four anonymous complaints concerned refusals to admit Black individuals to various nightclubs in Riga. One anonymous complaint concerned the refusal to rent a flat to a student from India.



### *Recommendations:*

- **Organise targeted campaigns to raise public awareness about discrimination and the available legal protection mechanisms, especially for more vulnerable groups – people with disabilities, Roma, Ukrainians, individuals with darker skin, seniors, and the LGBTQI+ community.**
- **Expand free legal consultations and legal aid support for victims of discrimination across various sectors.**

# Violence against Women and Domestic Violence

**In autumn 2025, Latvia was shaken by the Saeima's decision to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention, triggering widespread public protests. President Edgars Rinkēvičs refused to promulgate the law. The Saeima subsequently decided to postpone any further decisions until the 2026 parliamentary elections.**
**In early November, the *GREVIO* Committee conducted its first evaluation visit to Latvia. The European Commission for Democracy through Law (the Venice Commission) of the Council of Europe published an opinion on the legal consequences of Latvia's potential withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention, warning that such a step could weaken human rights protections and standards.**

The Parliament's decision to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention led to large-scale public protests.





The Venice Commission of the Council of Europe warned of a potential weakening of human rights standards



Electronic monitoring began to be applied to particularly dangerous domestic abusers

### *Legal amendments*

On 27 February 2025, the Saeima amended the Civil Procedure Law proposed by the Ministry of Justice, which entered into force on 1 April. The purpose of the amendments is to ensure much more effective and timely temporary protection against violence. The amendments reduce the possibility of applying to the court with unfounded requests to revoke temporary protection against violence, as applications for the revocation of protection measures are often submitted repeatedly even though the factual circumstances of the case have not changed. If an application for the replacement or revocation of temporary protection measures is received less than three months after the examination of a previous such application, the court may examine it through a written

procedure and the court's decision is not subject to appeal. This reduces the possibility of bringing unfounded requests before the court while also preventing delays in proceedings.

The time limit for completing the violent behaviour reduction programme has been shortened to encourage earlier participation and allow individuals to benefit from the programme sooner. Defendants will be required to complete the programme within six months of the court decision instead of the previous one-year period. If the programme is commenced within three months, the participant will pay 10% of the course fee; if commencement is delayed beyond three months, the full cost of the programme must be covered by the participant.

On 1 July 2025, amendments to the Criminal Procedure Law entered into force, providing for electronic monitoring of particularly dangerous perpetrators of violence. The State Police forecast that this mechanism would protect approximately 400 women and children each year. The application of electronic monitoring is decided by an investigating judge, while its implementation is supervised by the police.

### *Saeima (parliament) votes to withdraw from Istanbul Convention*

On 25 September 2025, the Saeima voted to begin the process of Latvia's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention, formally the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence.[27] The initiative was advanced by opposition members of parliament and was also supported by the Union of Greens and Farmers, although it had voted as part of government coalition in favour of ratification of the Convention in 2023. On 30 October, under an urgent procedure, the Saeima adopted a decision to withdraw (56 votes in favour, 32 against, and 2 abstentions).[28] Earlier, Latvia ratified the Convention on 30 November 2023, and it entered into force on 1 May 2024.

On 16 October, the Saeima adopted a declaration on preventing and eradicating violence against women and domestic violence. Through the declaration, the Saeima instructed the Cabinet of Ministers to develop a comprehensive Law on the Prevention and Eradication of Violence against Women, Children and Domestic Violence, as well as Violence in General. The law is to cover all forms of violence against women and children, including domestic violence, and will also apply to all victims of violence, with particular attention given to women. The declaration states that the Government must submit the draft law to the Saeima by 1 March 2026.

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[27] On Withdrawal from the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (1058/Lp14), referral to committees, https://titania.saeima.lv/LIVS14/SaeimaLIVS2_DK.nsf/0/C9869754A55D9EC3C2258D11000AFD8F?OpenDocument

[28] Saeima (2025). *Saeima supports Latvia's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention*, 30 October, https://www.saeima.lv/lv/aktualitates/saeimas-zinas/35166-saeima-atbalsta-latvijas-izstasanos-no-stambulas-konvencijas

### *Public protests against the withdrawal from Instanbul Convention*

The withdrawal process triggered widespread public protests: around 5,000 people gathered in Riga on 29 October and more than 10,000 on 6 November[29]. Demonstrations were also held elsewhere in Latvia and abroad, including outside Latvian embassies in Europe and North America. The protests were organised by the women's resource centre “Marta”, together with approximately ten other non-governmental organisations.

A public initiative calling on President Edgars Rinkēvičs to return the law to the Saeima for reconsideration collected more than 68,000 signatures on www.manabalss.lv and became the most popular initiative of its kind.[1] Three days after the vote, the President refused to promulgate the law and returned it to the Saeima, stating that ratifying the Convention and then denouncing it within a single parliamentary term sends a contradictory signal and creates an unprecedented situation for Latvia in the context of its human rights obligations.

In its repeated consideration of the matter, the Saeima decided to postpone any further decisions until the 2026 parliamentary elections. If the withdrawal were completed, Latvia would become the first EU Member State to withdraw from the Convention.

From 3 to 7 November 2025, the Council of Europe expert group GREVIO carried out its baseline evaluation visit to Latvia.[30]

### *Opinion of the Council of Europe Venice Commission*

On 15 December, the Venice Commission published its opinion on the draft law “On Withdrawal from the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention)”.[31] The opinion was issued at the request of the Minister of Justice to assess the possible legal consequences of withdrawal.

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[29] LSM.LV (2025). *VIDEO: At least 10,000 people protest in Dome Square against Latvia’s withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention*, 6 November, https://www.lsm.lv/raksts/zinas/latvija/06.11.2025-video-vismaz-10-000-cilveku-doma-laukuma-proteste-pret-latvijas-izstasanos-no-stambulas-konvencijas.a621286/

[30] *GREVIO carries out its baseline evaluation visit to Latvia*, 3-7 November, https://www.coe.int/en/web/istanbul-convention/-/grevio-carries-out-its-baseline-evaluation-visit-to-latvia

[31] European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), *Latvia – Opinion on the draft law "On the withdrawal from the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence" (Istanbul Convention)*, Opinion No. 1264/2025, CDL-AD(2025)053, adopted by the Venice Commission at its 145th Plenary Session on 12–13 December 2025. Available at: Venice Commission Document CDL-AD(2025)053-e.

**In its opinion, the Venice Commission warns that withdrawal from international human rights treaties, including the Istanbul Convention, generally weakens the protection of human rights.** Any withdrawal must take place in accordance with proper legal procedures, be duly justified, and comply with the principles of democracy and the rule of law; political or ideological motives alone do not constitute sufficient grounds. The Commission stresses that decisions must be transparent, inclusive, and take into account the views of those groups protected by the Convention. The Council of Europe's human rights system is based on multilayered international monitoring, and GREVIO is the only independent body responsible for assessing implementation of the Convention in the field of preventing violence against women and domestic violence. National legislation cannot replace the importance of international monitoring. The Commission rejects the argument that an EU directive could replace the Istanbul Convention and recommends that Latvia remain a party to it.

At the beginning of 2025, the Baltic Centre for Investigative Journalism Re:Baltica and Latvian Television published an extensive investigation revealing that neurologist L. Viškers had carried out acts of a sexual nature on female patients without their consent during consultations, using hypnosis or meditation techniques. Criminal proceedings were initiated against him, and he was charged with sexual abuse involving several patients, several of whom were formally recognised as victims in the criminal proceedings. Throughout the trial, Viškers denied any wrongdoing. In autumn 2025, Viškers briefly attempted to resume treating patients. However, by the end of the year, a court ruling and a ban imposed by the Health Inspectorate preventing him from practising medicine had entered into force, and his neurologist's certificate was suspended.

Several women had previously lodged complaints with the Health Inspectorate and his then employer in 2020 and 2022. The Inspectorate fined the doctor €200, not for the alleged misconduct itself, but for practising hypnosis without the required certification. It also failed to notify his employers of the complaints.



***Recommendations:***

- **Latvia should not withdraw from the Istanbul Convention**
- **Continue raising awareness of the purpose and provisions of the Istanbul Convention, countering myths and disinformation**
- **Continue improving legislation and practice eradicating domestic violence and violence against women**
- **Improve the collection of data on cases of domestic violence.**

# Freedom of Expression

**Latvia ranks 15th out of 180 countries in the Press Freedom Index. The Administrative Regional Court ruled that the decision of the National Electronic Mass Media Council (NEPLP) to revoke the broadcasting licence of the television channel *TV Rain* was unlawful. The Saeima also approved, at first reading, the Law on the Protection of Persons Acting in the Public Interest.**



**Latvia in the Press Freedom Index**

2020 – 22nd place
2021 – 22nd place
2022 – 22nd place
2023 – 16th place
2024 – 12th place
2025- 15th place



The Administrative Regional Court ruled that the decision of the National Electronic Mass Media Council (NEPLP) to revoke the broadcasting licence of the television channel *TV Rain* was unlawful.

### *Mass Media*

According to the 2025 ranking published by the international organisation Reporters Without Borders (RSF), Latvia ranks 15th out of 180 countries in the Press Freedom Index, down three places from 12th position in 2024.

The index notes that journalists in Latvia operate in a relatively free and safe environment. However, access to reliable and diverse information, particularly among Russian-speaking residents, remains a significant challenge. Although the police have signed a memorandum on the protection of journalists, concerns remain regarding its effective implementation in practice. Political attacks on the media and attempts to discredit journalists are increasingly taking place not only during election campaigns but also outside them.

A study on media literacy among Latvia's population conducted by the National Electronic Mass Media Council (NEPLP) found a slight

increase over the past year in the proportion of residents who believe that freedom of expression may justifiably be restricted. Eighty per cent of respondents considered restrictions on freedom of expression acceptable in certain circumstances, an increase of five percentage points compared with the previous year. By contrast, 20% believed that freedom of expression should not be restricted in such circumstances, down from 25% a year earlier. The view that freedom of expression should never be restricted was expressed most frequently by young people aged 15 to 25 (27%). Most respondents considered restrictions justified where disinformation is deliberately disseminated (60%) or where published content may cause physical harm or moral suffering (59%). Significantly fewer supported restrictions in cases involving criticism of the Church or offence to religious beliefs (10%), the political views of others (9%), or criticism of the government and public authorities (4%).

In the spring, the Corruption Prevention and Combating Bureau (KNAB) requested information from Re:Baltica and the news agency LETA regarding their content planning ahead of the municipal elections. Representatives of the journalistic community pointed to the risk that such practices could encourage self-censorship and have a negative impact on the environment for independent journalism in Latvia.

### *Case of "TV Rain"*

The Administrative Regional Court ruled that the decision of the National Electronic Mass Media Council (NEPLP) to revoke the broadcasting licence of the exiled independent Russian language television channel *TV Rain* was unlawful. The court found that NEPLP had failed to provide sufficient grounds for revoking the licence, had not heard the broadcaster's representatives, had not fully established and examined all relevant facts and evidence, and had drawn overly broad conclusions regarding the channel's editorial activities. Disagreeing with the judgment, NEPLP lodged an appeal on points of law with the Senate. Further information on the revocation of *TV Rain*'s licence is available in *Human Rights in Latvia 2019–2023* (Human Rights in Latvia 2019–2023).

On 11 November 2024, the Cabinet of Ministers approved the Ministry of Culture's *Journalists' and Other Media Professionals' Safety Plan for 2025–2027*, developed in cooperation with media and journalists' organisations as well as law enforcement authorities. The plan aims to strengthen media freedom in Latvia, protect journalists from violence, threats and harassment, and ensure a stable legal and institutional framework for their protection. It also emphasises the importance of raising public awareness of the role of journalists and the risks associated with their work, involving not only civil society but also the police, prosecution service and courts.

The measures set out in the plan are structured around three main areas: ensuring a safe working environment for journalists and media professionals, promoting awareness and education on journalists' safety, and protecting journalists in specific situations or risk groups, including women, members of minority groups, journalists working in conflict zones, and those covering protests. The plan also provides for psychological support for journalists working under high levels of stress and incorporates initiatives by non-governmental organisations, including Media HUB Riga. It is based on the European Commission's Anti-SLAPP Directive, the *Media Policy Guidelines of Latvia 2024–2027*, and a range of recommendations and studies concerning journalists' safety.

In December 2025, the Saeima approved, at first reading, the Law on the Protection of Persons Acting in the Public Interest and related amendments to the Civil Procedure Law. The purpose of these measures is to strengthen protection against strategic lawsuits targeting individuals acting in the public interest. The amendments are expected to reinforce freedom of expression and the public's right to receive comprehensive and high-quality information by enhancing the independence of journalists, media outlets, civil society activists and researchers, while protecting them against abusive litigation and reducing the risk of self-censorship.



### *Recommendations*

- **Strengthen public media literacy, including by improving understanding of what constitutes an independent media outlet.**
- **Adopt the Law on the Protection of Persons Acting in the Public Interest and the related amendments to the Civil Procedure Law.**

# Freedom of Religion and Belief

**The Saeima adopted the Law on the Dievturi Community. A case was initiated before the Constitutional Court concerning the procedure by which religious organisations may obtain a special status established by a separate law, granting additional rights not available to other denominations. The Deputy Mayor of Riga reignited discussions about banning mosques. No Muslim congregation has sought permission to build a mosque in Riga or elsewhere in Latvia in recent years.**

The Saeima adopted the Law on the Dievturi Community (an ethnic religion)



The court sentenced three members of the religious organisation "First Evangelical Jesus Congregation" to prison terms ranging from two years and seven months to two years and ten months for providing unauthorised medical assistance at a home birth that resulted in the deaths of an infant and the infant's mother.

### *Statistics*

As of 16 January 2026, a total of 1,273 religious organisations and their institutions were registered in the Register of Religious Organisations and Institutions of Latvia.[32] According to the annual reports submitted by religious organisations, the total number of congregation members was 1,286,431. The largest denominations

[32] Ministry of Justice, Sectoral Policy Department (2025). *Report on the Annual Reports on Activities Submitted by Religious Organisations to the Ministry of Justice in 2025*.

were Lutheran, with 701,118 members, Roman Catholic with 304,759 members, and Orthodox Christian with 250,240 members.

According to the report data, the number of adherents belonging to smaller denominations (fewer than 1,000 members) included 602 Dievturi, 231 Vaishnavas[33], and 175 Muslims.[34]

The largest number of registered religious organisations were Lutheran (294), followed by Roman Catholic (290) and Orthodox Christian (149) organisations. Latvia has also registered religious organisations representing other faiths, including 14 Dievturi organisations, 11 Islamic organisations, four Buddhist organisations, two Hindu organisations, one Sikh organisation, and others.

### *Dievturi*

On 9 October 2025, the Saeima adopted the Law on the Latvian Dievturi Fellowship. For the first time, an ethnic religion was granted the status of a traditional religion. The law provides Dievturi with the right to register marriages and regulates their participation in chaplaincy services. This is also the first known case within the European Union of an ethnic religion being formally recognised in this manner.

### *Jehovah's Witnesses*

On 14 October 2025, the Constitutional Court initiated a case following an application submitted by the Union of Jehovah's Witness Congregations, challenging provisions of the Law on Religious Organisations. According to the application, the legal framework does not establish clear criteria or procedures through which a religious organisation may obtain a special status conferred by a separate law, a status that grants certain denominations additional rights, such as the registration of marriages or the provision of chaplaincy services in public institutions. The case directly raises issues concerning freedom of religion guaranteed under Article 99 of the Constitution and the principle of equality enshrined in Article 91, highlighting potential discrimination between religious communities and systemic inequalities within the regulatory framework.

### *Conviction of Members of the "First Evangelical Jesus Congregation" for Unauthorised Medical Practice – Home Births*

In February 2025, the Zemgale District Court[35] found three individuals guilty and sentenced them to imprisonment (one to two years and ten months, and two to two years and seven months) for the

[33] Vaishnavism is one of the principal traditions within Hinduism, whose followers worship Vishnu as the supreme deity. The Hare Krishna movement forms part of the Vaishnava tradition.
[34] Number of adherents reported in the religious organisations' annual returns.
[35] Tiesas.lv (2025). *In the criminal case concerning a home birth, the court sentences one defendant to two years and ten months' imprisonment and two defendants to two years and seven months' imprisonment*. Available at: Courts of Latvia news release.

unlawful provision of medical treatment in connection with a home birth during which an infant died. The defendants, who were members of the "First Evangelical Jesus Congregation", also failed to provide assistance to the child's mother while she was in a life-threatening condition and unable to care for herself, resulting in her death. The defendants had agreed to organise, supervise and assist with the delivery despite knowing that they lacked the necessary medical qualifications, equipment and capacity to provide medical assistance or appropriate patient care if required.

The "First Evangelical Jesus Congregation" had been officially registered in Latvia. In 2022, the then Prosecutor General, Ēriks Kalnmeiers, brought proceedings before the court seeking the termination of the religious organisation, relying on facts established during the related criminal proceedings. At first instance, the Vidzeme District Court dismissed the claim on 26 August 2022 but issued a warning to the congregation. On appeal, the Vidzeme Regional Court upheld the Prosecutor General's claim, and the Senate of the Supreme Court[36] subsequently refused to initiate cassation proceedings against the appellate judgment.

At the beginning of 2026, the investigative magazine *Ir* reported that despite the court-ordered dissolution of the congregation, its community continued to exist.

The issue of a possible ban on mosques in Latvia was raised in public debate by Riga Vice Mayor Edvards Ratnieks. In addition to public statements made through the media, he sent a letter to the Minister of Justice, calling for amendments to legislation that would prohibit the construction of mosques throughout Latvia. Mr Ratnieks argued that the construction of mosques could have implications for public security and increased immigration. However, in recent years no Muslim congregation has applied for permission to build a mosque either in Riga or elsewhere in Latvia.

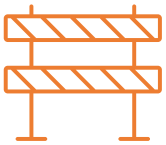
[36] Senate of the Republic of Latvia (2023). *Decision of the Preparatory Session*, 12 April 2023, ECLI:LV:AT:2023:0412.C71196120.12.L, Case No. C71196120, SKC-518/2023.

# Freedom of Association

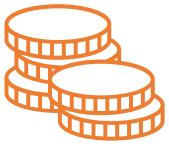
**The financial situation of many NGOs was adversely affected by the substantial reduction or suspension of US support programmes, including USAID. Funding available under the 2025 NGO Fund call for project proposals amounted to EUR 2.35 million. During discussions on the state budget, proposals to abolish the Society Integration Foundation and reduce funding for civil society and the media were criticised but ultimately not supported.**



**Registered in Latvia:**
**27 699** associations and foundations
**84** political parties and their associations
**1269** religious organisation



Significant challenges in the NGO sector include staff recruitment, financial sustainability, and organisational activity



Funding of EUR 2,350,000 was made available under the 2025 “NGO Fund” call for project proposals

### *Statistics and Developments in the NGO Sector*

By the end of 2025, the number of associations and foundations in Latvia exceeded 27,800, including 1,288 newly established organisations.[37] Latvia also had 85 registered political parties and party alliances, as well as more than 1,270 religious organisations.

Funding available under the SIF NGO Fund for the implementation of NGO projects in 2025 and 2026 amounted to EUR 2,350,000. The maximum funding available per project was increased to EUR 13,000 for micro-projects (previously EUR 11,000), EUR 40,000 for macro-projects (previously EUR 36,000), and EUR 80,000 for macro-projects with a duration of up to 22 months.

[37] Latvian Civic Alliance (2026), *Civil Society Monitoring and Civic Space Report 2025*, p. 12.

According to an NGO survey on the civil society development strategy conducted by the Latvian Civic Alliance (LPA), there was a strong emphasis on the need to strengthen human capital, civic competences and regional engagement. NGOs also highlighted the importance of sustainable funding as a critical precondition for the stability and impact of associations and foundations. The financial situation of many NGOs was adversely affected by changes related to the substantial reduction or suspension of US support programmes, including USAID.

Concerns arose over proposals submitted in November for the 2026 state budget that envisaged abolishing the Society Integration Foundation and significantly reducing funding for several programmes, including support for civil society and the media. These proposals were criticised by civil society organisations and were ultimately not adopted.

The non-commercial left-wing community centre "Maiznīca" reported increased scrutiny of its activities by the State Security Service (VDD). One of Maiznīca's activists, a Russian citizen, had his residence permit revoked and was placed on a blacklist on the grounds of promoting communist ideas, maintaining links with foreign extremist organisations, and engaging in activities deemed to pose a threat to Latvia's national security and public order. Another visitor to the centre reported that he had previously been recruited by the VDD as an informant to report on the activities of Maiznīca and the climate protest movement Fridays for Future. On 28 July, Maiznīca announced that it was ceasing its activities at its premises at Lastādijas Street 60, alleging that the owner of the premises had imposed unacceptable conditions, including the disclosure of the names of all attendees at events organised by the centre. The statement further indicated that Maiznīca's activists had been informed by the property owner that the VDD had contacted him.[38]



***Recommendation:***

- **Ensure sustainable funding for the state budget programme "NGO Fund" at no less than its current level, as an important instrument of partnership between the state and civil society.**

[38] Satori, P.F. Timofejevs, Would the Security Service Also Expel Rainis?, 20 August 2025.

# Freedom of Assembly

**The number of public assemblies and demonstrations increased in 2025. On 6 November, pickets were held in Riga and other Latvian cities to protest against Latvia's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention.**
**In the case of *Rodina and Borisova v. Latvia*, the European Court of Human Rights found justified a ban on events that threaten national security and are contrary to democratic values. The political party Latvia First submitted amendments to several laws proposing to prohibit minors from attending events promoting LGBT issues.**

On 6 October, one of the largest public demonstrations in 21st-century Latvia took place, protesting against Latvia's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention.



The Latvian Civic Alliance reported increasing polarisation, negative attitudes towards assemblies organised by certain groups, and threats directed at their organisers



### *Statistics*

The Latvian Civic Alliance (LPA) reported an increase in the exercise of freedom of assembly in 2025.[39] By October 2025, a total of 424 pickets, marches and public meetings had taken place across Latvian municipalities, including 238 in Riga and 58 in Rēzekne. New forms of protest and public assembly were also observed, including silent protests, solidarity actions, symbolic gatherings in public spaces and hybrid forms of assembly. For example, the flash protest "Climate Choir" opposed amendments to the Forest Law that would have permitted the felling of younger trees.

On 6 November, pickets were held in Riga and other Latvian cities against Latvia's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention. A picket organised by the Centre "Marta" in Dome Square attracted around 10,000 participants, while approximately 600 people attended in Liepāja,

[39] NGO House (2025). Monitoring of the Associations and Foundations Sector 2025.

around 270 in Cēsis, and about 50 in Daugavpils. It was one of the largest protest actions in Latvia in recent years. Participants expressed support for retaining the Convention and protested against the draft law adopted by the Saeima (see the *Section on the prevention of domestic violence and violence against women for further details*). The event was peaceful. At the same time, the State Police detained two individuals in Riga.[40] In one case, a person disrupted public order and failed to comply with lawful police instructions. In the other, a man used physical violence against a participant in the event.

On 28 June, the Pride march took place, attracting several thousand participants. The event passed without incident, although a small number of people protested.

The LPA[41] also reported increasing polarisation and negative reactions towards gatherings organised by certain groups, including emotional abuse and threats directed at organisers. This may create risks of self-censorship and discourage certain groups from exercising their rights.

On 18 September, the Saeima referred for committee consideration draft amendments to the Law on Meetings, Processions and Pickets[42] and the Child Protection Law.[43] The amendments were submitted by MPs from *Latvia First* and proposed prohibiting minors from attending events promoting LGBT ideas and values. By the end of 2025, the amendments had not yet been considered at first reading.

## *Case Law*

## *European Court of Human Rights*

On 10 July 2025, the European Court of Human Rights delivered its judgment in *Rodina and Borisova v. Latvia*.[44] The Court found that the refusal to permit the association "Rodina" and A. Borisova to organise a march on 9 May 2014 and a picket on 23 September 2014, respectively, was compatible with Articles 10 (freedom of expression) and 11 (freedom of assembly and association) of the European Convention on Human Rights. The Court held that restricting events that are contrary to the values of a democratic state and pose a threat to national security may be justified.

The association "Rodina" (the first applicant) intended to organise a demonstration and a "Russian march" on 9 May 2014 from Strēlnieku Square to the former monument in Victory Park, while A. Borisova (the second applicant) intended to organise a picket outside the Ukrainian Embassy in Riga on 23 September 2014. The declared aims of these events were to "unite Russians living in Latvia in

[40] LETA. Two persons detained for violence and failure to comply with police orders during the protest in Dome Square, 6 November 2025 (behind paywall).
[41] NGO House (2025). Monitoring of the Associations and Foundations Sector 2025, p. 18.
[42] Grozījumi likumā "Par sapulcēm, gājieniem un piketiem" (Nr. 1045/Lp14).
[43] Grozījumi likumā "Bērnu tiesību aizsardzības likums" ((1046/Lp14)).
[44] *Rodina and Borisova v. Latvia*, nos. 2623/16 and 2299/16, ECtHR 10 July 2025, https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/fre?i=001-244004

a human chain" in support of "Russian schools" and to hold a "demonstration calling for an end to the armed conflict in Ukraine".

According to the assessment of the security authorities and domestic courts, however, the declared aims concealed support for Russia's military actions in eastern Ukraine, war propaganda and the glorification of separatist groups. It was found that the events could foster intolerance, social tension and division, promote notions of Russian national superiority and the implicit denial of the Latvian nation and language, and threaten Latvia's security and democratic order.

The Court held that the restrictions were necessary in a democratic society. Taking into account Latvia's geopolitical situation, Russia's aggression against Georgia and Ukraine, and the risks associated with Russia's "compatriots' policy", the Court agreed with the conclusions of the national authorities regarding an elevated threat to public order. The Court also emphasised the timing and location of the events, namely 9 May at the Victory Park monument and the picket outside the Ukrainian Embassy, which heightened their provocative character.

### *Supreme Court*

The Senate of the Supreme Court upheld a judgment of the Administrative District Court[45], dismissing a complaint against a decision of the Executive Director of Riga City prohibiting a public meeting in Town Hall Square on 13 May 2022. The meeting was intended to protest against the Riga City Council's removal of flowers laid at the foot of the Victory Park monument on 9 and 10 May. The Court found that there had been a high risk that the event would become a platform for justifying Russia's aggression and glorifying war crimes, thereby threatening the democratic constitutional order. Although freedom of assembly is an essential component of democracy, the restriction was considered proportionate and legitimate in the circumstances. The appeal on points of law was dismissed, and the judgment is final and not subject to further appeal (SKA-12/25).

[45] *Jurista Vārds* (2025). *The Senate: the prohibition on holding an assembly in Town Hall Square to protest the removal of flowers from the foot of the Victory Park monument was lawful*, 7 March. https://juristavards.lv/zinas/286436-senats-aizliegums-ratslaukuma-rikot-sapulci-lai-protestetu-pret-ziedu-novaksanu-no-uzvaras-parka-pie/

# Rights of National Minorities and Social Cohesion

**The Constitutional Court found the requirement that paid pre-election campaigning be conducted in the state language to be compatible with the Constitution. Latvijas Radio 4 ceased FM broadcasting on 31 December 2025. A major survey found that 74% of minority pupils fully or mostly understood instruction in Latvian, while 24% continued to experience difficulties in fully comprehending educational content delivered in the state language. The government allocated EUR 2.035 million to support the teaching and preservation of minority languages and cultures.**



**Latvian residents, by ethnicity**

| | 2025 | % |
|---|---|---|
| **Latvians** | 1,182,008 | 64 |
| **Russians** | 434,243 | 23 |
| **Belarussians** | 53,207 | 3 |
| **Ukrainians** | 52,266 | 3 |
| **Poles** | 35,140 | 2 |
| **Lithuanians** | 19,809 | 1 |
| **Other ethnicities, including unknown and not specified** | 80,259 | 4 |
| **Total** | 1,856,932 | 100 |

### *Statistics*

According to data from the Central Statistical Bureau, as of mid-2026, Latvia had a population of 1,845,096, of whom 1,176,880 (63.8%) were Latvian, 426,408 (23.1%) Russian, 51,943 (2.8%) Belarusian, 51,867 (2.8%) Ukrainian, 34,585 (1.9%) Polish, 19,439 (1.1%) Lithuanian, 4,834 (0.3%) Roma and 4,114 (0.2%) Jewish, while 73,687 (4.0%) belonged to other, unspecified or unknown ethnic groups.

In 2025, the government allocated €2.035 million to municipalities for the teaching of minority languages and cultures within extracurricular education programmes. This funding enables minority pupils to further develop their language skills and preserve their ethnic and cultural identity outside the formal education system.

### *Constitutional Court*

### *Election campaigning*

On 13 February 2025, the Constitutional Court delivered its judgment in case No. 2024-06-01. The case was initiated following an application submitted by the political party "Harmony Social Democratic Party". Section 5.1 of the Pre-Election Campaign Law establishes the principle that paid election campaigning[46] must be conducted in the official language (Latvian), including the Latgalian written language and the Livonian language. The provision also allows, prior to European Parliament and municipal council elections, the dissemination of campaign materials accompanied by translations into official languages of the European Union. The applicant argued that the contested provision restricted its freedom of expression by prohibiting paid election campaigning in a foreign language that is not an official EU language [Russian].

The Constitutional Court found that the requirement to conduct paid election campaigning in the official language was justified and compatible with the Constitution, as it contributes to protecting Latvia's information space from Russian influence and propaganda, which intensifies particularly during election periods. The Court emphasised that Latvia's geopolitical situation and Russia's aggressive policies create heightened security risks; therefore, restricting the use of foreign languages in political advertising is necessary to reduce manipulation of public opinion. The restriction applies only to paid campaigning and only during the election period, whereas unpaid communication with voters may take place in any language. The Court also noted that the Latvian language, the Latgalian written language and the Livonian language form part of Latvia's constitutional identity, and that strengthening the official language is essential for safeguarding democracy and public security. Consequently, the Court concluded that the restriction established by law was proportionate, served the public interest and did not violate freedom of expression.

### *Education*

On 1 September 2025, Latvia completed the gradual transition to education exclusively in the official language (Latvian), with the final groups of pupils (Years 3, 6 and 9) and pre-school children beginning their studies entirely in Latvian. In October-November 2025, a survey was conducted on the implementation and results of the transition, involving education authorities, teachers, school management, parents and pupils. A total of 10,329 respondents (pupils, parents, teachers and school leaders) from 24 municipalities participated.

Overall, 74% of minority pupils reported that they fully or mostly understood lessons taught in Latvian, while 24% continued to experience difficulties fully understanding educational content delivered in the official language. Among surveyed minority pupils in Years 7 and 9 (84% of whom

[46] In radio and television broadcasts, in public outdoor and indoor spaces, in periodical publications (newspapers and magazines), bulletins, books and other printed materials, and on the internet.

reported Russian as their sole native language), 33% also use Latvian at home. In younger age groups, such as Year 1 pupils, this proportion is even higher, reaching 42%.

To support the transition to education in the official language, the state allocated an additional EUR 20.68 per pupil to cover teachers' remuneration.

According to the evaluation of the 2024/2025 school year carried out by the Education Quality Service, the transition to the unified school model has, overall, been successful and the quality of change management has improved. Eighty-eight per cent of the evaluated educational institutions received ratings of "good" or "very good"; teaching takes place in Latvian, and most schools and pre-schools provide an appropriate environment for learning the official language. At the same time, significant challenges remain: some pupils continue to have insufficient Latvian language skills, particularly after Year 9; shortcomings in change management were identified in several schools; shortages of teachers and support staff persist; and language use outside school is limited by insufficient parental involvement and the dominance of minority languages in informal communication.

### *Russian as a second foreign language*

On 27 May 2025, the Cabinet of Ministers approved amendments to the national general upper secondary education standard, stipulating that from 1 September 2026, a second foreign language may only be an official language of a Member State of the European Union (EU) or the European Economic Area (EEA), or another foreign language whose teaching is provided for under intergovernmental agreements in the field of education.[47]

In the 2020/2021 academic year, Russian was taught as the only second foreign language in 315 of 685 schools; in 2021/2022, in 320 of 668 schools; and in 2022/2023, in 282 of 647 schools. The Ministry of Education and Science indicated that some educational institutions did not offer an alternative to Russian language instruction.[48]

### *Inspections in schools*

In 2025, the State Language Centre conducted Latvian language proficiency assessments for 2,734 teachers across Latvia. Of these, 98 teachers did not meet the required C1 level of Latvian proficiency. Sixteen subsequently demonstrated the required level after suspension from their duties.[49] Thus, only 3% of teachers failed to meet the required level of Latvian language proficiency.

### *Public service media*

[47] Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Latvia. Legislative Projects (TAP) Portal. Available at: TAP Portal document

[48] LSM.LV (2024). Historic decision: Latvian schools to begin phasing out Russian as a second foreign language from the 2026/2027 school year, 23 April, https://www.lsm.lv/raksts/zinas/latvija/23.04.2024-vesturisks-lemums-latvijas-skolas-no-20262027-macibu-gada-jasak-atteikties-no-krievu-valodas-ka-otras-svesvalodas.a551480/

[49] LSM.LV (2026). Transition to education in the official language: what is the reality in schools?, 14 April, https://www.lsm.lv/raksts/zinas/latvija/14.04.2026-pareja-uz-macibam-valsts-valoda-kada-ir-realitate-skolas.a642726/

In July 2025, Latvia's Public Service Media (LSM) adopted new strategic priorities for 2026-2029, under which content in foreign languages, including Russian, English and Ukrainian, will in future be produced and distributed exclusively through digital platforms, while linear radio broadcasting will be entirely in Latvian from 2026.

This decision directly affected Latvian Radio 4 (LR4), the former Russian-language channel of Latvian Radio, as part of a broader reorganisation following the merger of Latvian Radio and Latvian Television into the LSM structure on 1 January 2025. LR4 ceased FM broadcasting on 31 December 2025. Russian-language radio will no longer be broadcast in a linear format, although some minority-language content in Russian, Ukrainian and English will remain available on the digital platform LSM.lv.

Officially, these changes have been justified as part of efforts to develop a more integrated and digitally focused public service media sector while reducing editorial segmentation along linguistic lines.

However, on 28 September 2023, the Saeima approved the revised National Security Concept, which explicitly states that publicly funded media content should be in Latvian or in a language belonging to the “European cultural space”, effectively ending state-produced Russian-language broadcasting.

Several members of parliament and public commentators expressed concerns about the potential negative impact on social cohesion and media pluralism resulting from restrictions on Russian-language content. The complete removal of Russian-language content could reduce access to reliable information and contribute to the spread of disinformation, particularly among communities that continue to consume Russian-language media. As an alternative measure to strengthen the media environment, especially in eastern Latvia where many Russian-speaking residents live, LSM plans to establish a regional studio in Latgale, scheduled to open in Daugavpils in early 2026.

### *Public Electronic Mass Media*

Following the expiry of the terms of office of the members of the Public Electronic Mass Media (SEPLP), an independent institution tasked with representing the public interest in the governance of Latvia’s public service media, the process of selecting new members commenced in May 2025. The SEPLP consists of three members approved by the Saeima: one nominated by the President of Latvia, one by the Saeima, and one by the Memorandum Council for Cooperation between Non-Governmental Organisations and the Cabinet of Ministers.

On 19 June, the Saeima approved two candidates, Una Klapkalne and Sanita Upleja-Jegermane, nominated respectively by the Saeima and the President. At the same time, the Saeima declined to approve the Memorandum Council’s nominee, former Latvian Television Director General Ivars Belte. On 13 November, the Saeima also rejected the second candidate nominated by the Memorandum Council, former SEPLP member and former Head of Latvian Radio Jānis Siksnis.

These rejections prompted strong criticism from civil society organisations and the Latvian Media Ethics Council, which accused the Saeima of disregarding the views of civil society and undermining its role in public decision-making. The process was described as an “imitation of democracy”, and reforms were called for to reduce political influence over appointment procedures.

The third candidate nominated by the Memorandum Council, researcher Andris Saulītis, was approved by the Saeima on 18 December.

### *Roma*

Roma remain one of the least socially protected groups in Latvia. According to the Central Statistical Bureau, 4,834 Roma lived in Latvia in 2026.[50] Among Roma, the proportion of persons who have not completed compulsory basic education remains significantly higher than among the general population. Among persons aged over 25, 1.1% of Latvia's population as a whole had not completed basic education, compared with 32.5% of Roma.[51]

According to the study on the situation of Roma in Latvia, 47.7% of Roma children do not wish to attend school because of negative attitudes from other pupils, 44% due to early family formation practices, and 41.4% because they experience difficulties in learning. Employment levels among Roma also differ significantly from the national average, in 2025 the employment rate among Latvia's population aged 15 and above was 54.6%, compared with 20.8% among Roma. Unlike the broader trend in Latvia, the employment rate of Roma women exceeded that of Roma men, at 22.4% and 20.2% respectively.[52] The main causes of unemployment among Roma are lack of education and discrimination.[53]

Housing conditions within the Roma community are among the poorest in Latvia. For example, three out of five Roma live in homes without central heating, compared with only one in five residents nationwide. Furthermore, 45.3% of Roma households lack a bathroom or shower, compared with the national average of 13.8%.[54]

On 10 December 2024, the government approved the allocation of the necessary co-financing and pre-financing for the next phase of the project *Latvian Roma Platform VIII*, to be implemented from 1 May 2025 to 30 April 2027. Ninety per cent of the project budget, amounting to EUR 199,491, is financed by the European Commission. Although the project covers the costs of Roma mediators, the mediators themselves have indicated that the funding has remained very limited for a long time.[55] The project also envisages the preparation of a study on the situation of Roma in Latvia.

[50] Central Statistical Bureau, Population by ethnicity at the beginning of the year.
[51] Central Statistical Bureau, Population by ethnicity at the beginning of the year.
[52] Central Statistical Bureau, Social Inclusion. Education.
[53] Official Statistics Portal (2024), Social Inclusion. Employment.; SIA "Civitta Latvija" (2023), Study on the Situation of Roma in Latvia.
[54] Central Statistical Bureau, Social Inclusion. Housing Conditions.
[55] Information presented at the coordination meeting of the Latvian Roma Platform on 29 April 2025.

### *Recommendations*

- **Improve the procedure for appointing members of the Public Electronic Mass Media Council (SEPLP), ensuring meaningful civil society participation and greater independence of the process from political decision-making.**
- **Continue and strengthen social cohesion initiatives involving people of different ethnic backgrounds, particularly at the municipal level, while evaluating the effectiveness of measures implemented to date.**
- **Continue producing content for minority audiences (Russian, Ukrainian, Belarusian and Polish) within Latvia's public media, including content in smaller languages such as Romani, thereby ensuring access to high-quality content for diverse groups in society and reducing the risks of disinformation.**
- **Continue providing schoolteachers with state language training and appropriate teaching methodologies to ensure high-quality instruction within the framework of the unified school model.**
- **The Ministry of Education and Science should conduct regular monitoring of the educational situation of Roma pupils.**
- **Improve the collection of data on Roma across state and municipal institutions in order to more accurately identify the challenges and needs of the Roma community.**
- **Municipalities should support the work of Roma mediators by providing adequate funding for their activities.**
- **Introduce targeted measures aimed specifically at improving employment and educational opportunities for Roma.**

# Citizenship and Residence Rights

**The number of naturalised Latvian citizens increased slightly. Since 2020, Latvian citizenship has been granted automatically to non-citizen children aged 0-5. As of 1 January 2026, 1,036 children aged 6-17 remained non-citizens. A total of 76.9% of applicants for Latvian citizenship passed the knowledge examination (including the history component), while approximately 44% passed the Latvian language proficiency examination. The process related to amendments to the Immigration Law continued, requiring citizens of the Russian Federation to renew their residence permits in order to obtain European Union long-term resident status.**

As of 2 June 2026, Latvia's population was **1,845,096**, comprising:

- 1,694,930 Latvian citizens (87.9%)
- 159,742 non-citizens (8.7%)
- 62,836 citizens of other countries (3.4%).

Non-citizen children aged 6-17: 1,036

**Number of naturalised persons:**

2020 – 725 persons
2021 – 419 persons
2022 – 518 persons
2023 – 595 persons
2024 – 694 persons
2025 – 724 persons

### *Statistics*

According to data from the Central Statistical Bureau, as of 2 June 2026, Latvia had a population of 1,845,096, of whom 1,622,518 (87.9%) were Latvian citizens, 159,742 (8.7%) were non-citizens, and 62,836 (3.4%) held another citizenship, including 17,209 Ukrainian refugees and 29,462 citizens of the Russian Federation.

According to Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs (OCMA) data as of 1 January 2026, Latvia had 1,988,792 residents, of whom 1,694,930 (85.2%) were Latvian citizens, 167,340 (8.4%) were Latvian non-citizens, 31,111 (1.6%) held temporary protection status, 158 were stateless persons, 511 held alternative status, and 648 held refugee status. A further 94,058 residents were citizens of other countries, including 40,109 citizens of the Russian Federation (4.73%).

According to Central Statistical Bureau data, at the beginning of 2026, 97.2% of all children were Latvian citizens, 0.4% were Latvian non-

citizens, and 2.4% were citizens of other countries. By ethnicity, 72.3% of children were Latvian, 12.0% Russian, 1.7% Ukrainian, 0.5% Polish and Belarusian, while 13.0% belonged to other ethnic groups.

According to OCMA data for 2025[56], 787 naturalisation applications were received. Latvian citizenship was granted to 724 persons (including 212 citizens of the Russian Federation), representing the highest number of naturalised persons since 2020.

In 2025, 1,678 persons sat naturalisation examinations. Overall, 953 of the 1,678 candidates (56.8%) passed the examinations, compared with 1,153 of 1,994 (57.8%) in 2024. The Latvian language proficiency examination was passed by 43.9% of candidates in 2025 (449 of 1,023 persons), compared with 45.3% in 2024 (555 of 1,226 persons). The examination on knowledge required by the Citizenship Law, including Latvian history, was passed by 76.9% of candidates in 2025 (504 of 655 persons), compared with 77.9% in 2024 (598 of 768 persons).

### *Non-citizen Children*

Since 2020, children born to non-citizens have automatically acquired Latvian citizenship. As of 1 January 2026, 1,036 children aged 6-17 held non-citizen status.

*Table 1. Non-citizen Children by Year of Birth*

| | |
|---|---|
| 2025 | 0 |
| 2024 | 0 |
| 2023 | 0 |
| 2022 | 0 |
| 2021 | 0 |
| 2020 | 0 |
| 2019 | 28 |
| 2018 | 32 |
| 2017 | 41 |
| 2016 | 38 |
| 2015 | 64 |
| 2014 | 65 |
| 2013 | 101 |
| 2012 | 135 |
| 2011 | 154 |
| 2010 | 173 |
| 2009 | 205 |

*Source: Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs (OCMA), Distribution of the Population of Latvia by Year of Birth and Citizenship as at 1 January 2026*

[56] Data as of 31 December 2025.

A total of 258,627 Latvian nationals reside abroad, including 253,572 citizens of the Republic of Latvia and 4,947 non-citizens.

### *Russian Federation Citizens and Residence Permits*

Pursuant to amendments to the Immigration Law adopted in autumn 2022 and June 2024, citizens of the Russian Federation were required to submit documents to the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs (OCMA) to apply for EU long-term resident status, including proof of having successfully passed a State language proficiency test at A2 level. In total, these requirements affected approximately 30,000 Russian Federation citizens. For more detailed information on the legislative amendments and related developments, see Human Rights in Latvia 2024 and HUMAN RIGHTS IN LATVIA 2019–2023.

| Status | 2022 amendments (25 316 persons) | 2024 amendments (4 650 persons) | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| **EU permanent resident status** | 15,159 | 2,478 | **17,637** |
| **National permanent residence permit** | 1,238 | 575 | **1,813** |
| **A two-year residence permit**[57] | 2,681 | – | **2,681** |
| **Other temporary residence permits** | 1,263 | 245 | **1,508** |
| **Departure orders** | 84 | 13 (t.sk. 5 executed voluntarily, 1 appealed) | **97** |
| **Decisions on Forced Removal** | 22 | – | **22** |
| **Voluntarily departed** | 2,600 | No data | **2,600+** |
| **Checked by the State Border Guard** | – | 108 | **108** |
| **Initial verification in information systems** | – | 78 | **78** |

[57] Russian Federation citizens who failed to pass the Latvian language proficiency test at A2 level (the basic level) are granted an additional two years in which to meet the requirement.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Other cases (under review, departed, deceased, etc.)** | 2,269 | 1,153 | **3,422**[58] |
| **Total** | **25,316** | **4,650** | **29,966** |

*Source: Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs, Table: LCHR.*

According to data from the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs (OCMA), the number of Russian Federation citizens residing in Latvia with valid residence permits decreased by 11,858 between 1 July 2022 and 1 January 2026.



***Recommendations:***

- **Consider amending the law so that children aged 6 to 15 born in Latvia to non-citizen parents automatically acquire Latvian citizenship.**
- **Continue to provide and expand support for Latvian language learning and naturalisation courses.**
- **Ensure that, before deciding on the forced removal from Latvia of Russian citizens whose residence permits were not renewed, each individual's circumstances are assessed on a case-by-case basis, including humanitarian considerations.**

[58] 1901 people were deceased.

# Asylum Seekers and Refugees

**The number of asylum seekers in 2025 increased by approximately 50% compared with 2024. Oral hearings were held before the ECtHR in the case of *H.M.M. v. Latvia*, but judgment has not yet been delivered. The situation at the Latvia-Belarus border remains tense. Human rights activist I. Raubiško was sentenced to 200 hours of community service. The organisation "I Want to Help Refugees" reported that 11 people have died in the Republic of Latvia after crossing the Latvia-Belarus border.**



Number of Asylum Seekers in Latvia
In 2022 – 546
In 2023 – 1,624
In 2024 – 801
In 2025 – 1,228



Refugee status was granted to 55 and alternative status to 99 individuals

7,139 Ukrainian civilians received temporary protection in Latvia.



The State Border Guard prevented 12,046 individuals from attempting to illegally cross the Latvia–Belarus border.

### *Asylum Seekers – Statistics*

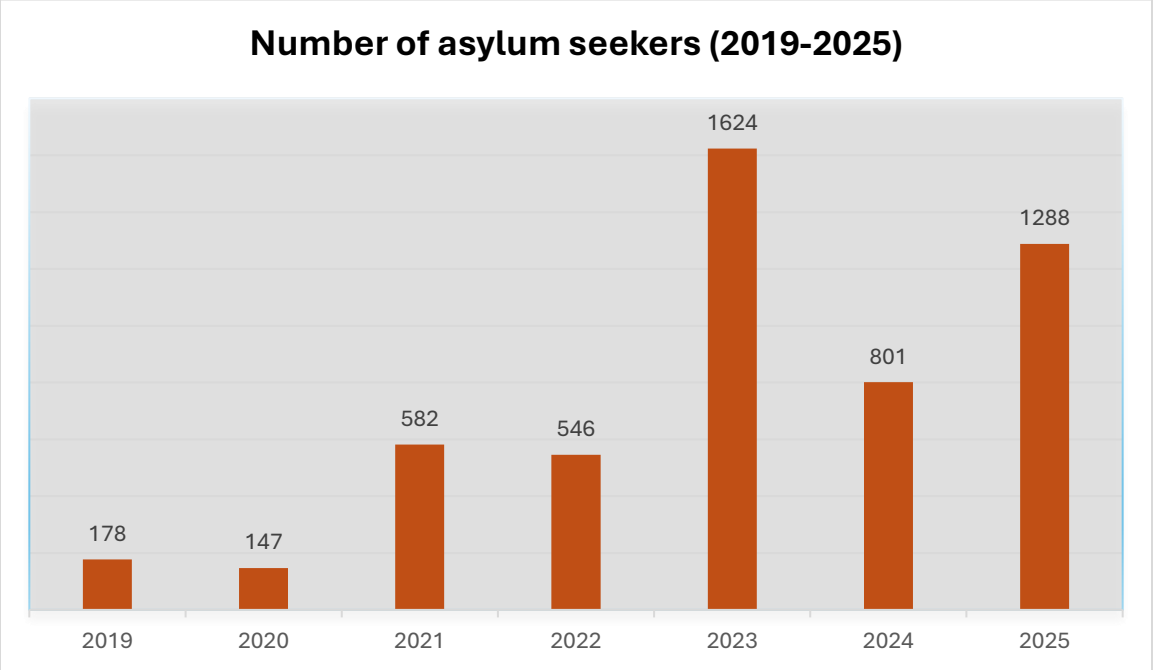
In 2025, 1,288 people sought asylum in Latvia.[59] The largest numbers came from Somalia (241), Afghanistan (142) and Ethiopia (108).[60] Applications were also submitted by individuals from many other countries, including Morocco, Tajikistan, Sudan, Algeria, Egypt, Eritrea, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Yemen, Guinea, Russia, Syria, Belarus, India, Iran, Cameroon, Sri Lanka, Senegal, Ukraine, the Union of the Comoros, Mali, Vietnam, Cuba, Nepal, Iraq, the Gambia, Uzbekistan, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Togo, Turkey, Azerbaijan, Chad, Ghana, Kyrgyzstan, Kenya, China and Nigeria, as well as Palestine.

In 2025, the State Security Service (VDD) initiated checks on 1,238 asylum seekers and completed 200 cases carried over from the previous year. The VDD found that 826 applicants came from countries associated with

[59] Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs: Patvēruma meklētāju statistika
[60] Written information provided by the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs to the Latvian Centre for Human Rights on 11.03.2026.

terrorism risks, 27 from the aggressor state Russia, 20 from Belarus, and the remaining 365 from other countries. From the cases examined, the VDD issued negative opinions regarding nine individuals (five from Russia and four from other countries), identifying intelligence risks or potential threats to national or public security, and in one case, terrorism risks.[61]

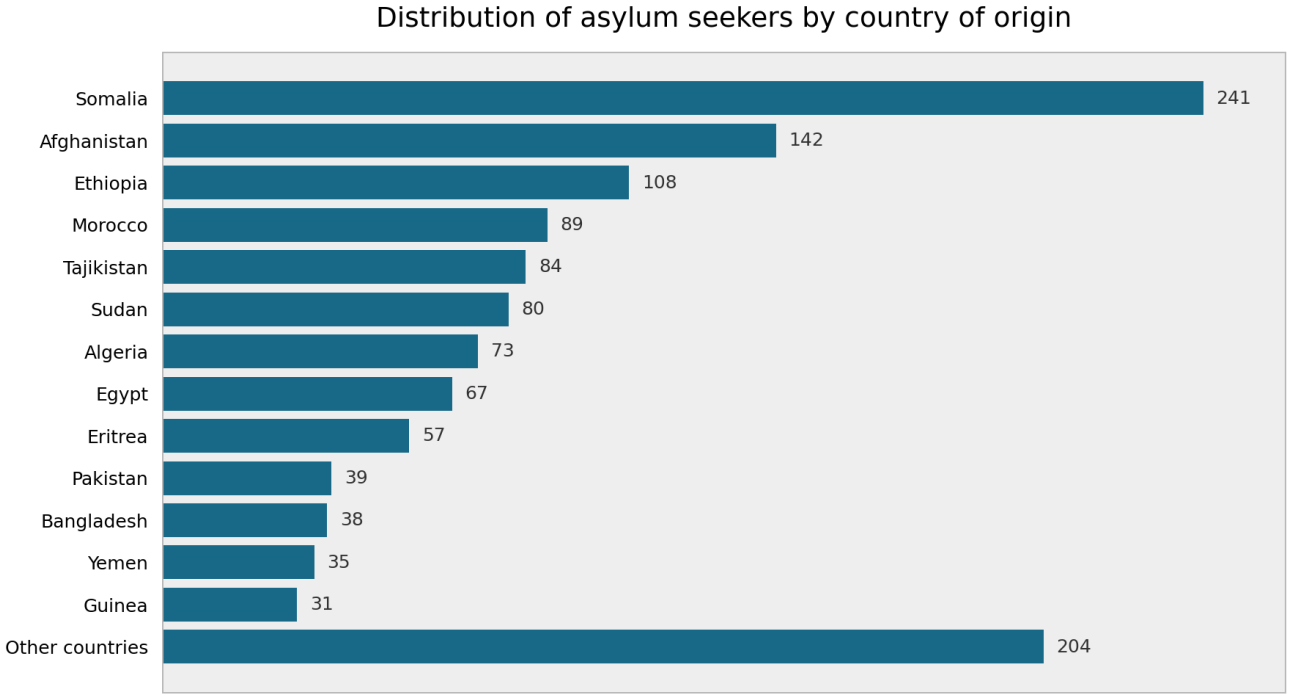
According to the case law of Latvia's Administrative District Courts, which is based on the jurisprudence of the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU judgment of 22 September 2022 in Case C-159/21), only the competent authority or a court may make a substantive decision on whether to grant or refuse refugee status or subsidiary protection.[62] A negative opinion issued by the State Security Service does not, in itself, automatically entail the refusal of international protection, as it constitutes only one piece of evidence that the authority or court must assess in conjunction with all other individual circumstances of the case.




*Source: Citizenship and Migration Affairs*

[61] State Security Service (2025). Annual Report 2025, https://vdd.gov.lv/uploads/materials/42/en/annual-report-2025.pdf

[62] Administrative Distirct Court decision 15.12.2022. case No. A42-02464-22/20, https://manas.tiesas.lv/eTiesasMvc/nolemumi/pdf/493935.pdf




*Source: Citizenship and Migration Affairs*

With the Cabinet Order No. 871 of 22 December 2025, "Amendment to Cabinet Order No. 184 of 12 March 2024 'On the Declaration of a Reinforced Border Guarding Regime'", the reinforced border-guarding regime was extended until 30 June 2026.[63]

A total of 12,046 people were prevented from illegally crossing the Latvia-Belarus border, while 31 individuals were admitted on humanitarian grounds. In 2024, 5,388 people were prevented from crossing the border, and 26 individuals were admitted on humanitarian grounds. Compared with 2024, the number of people prevented from crossing doubled in 2025, whereas the number admitted on humanitarian grounds remained virtually unchanged, staying at the previous year's level.[64]

On 18 July 2025, the UN Human Rights Committee's report on Latvia was published. The Committee expressed concern about serious human rights violations at the Belarusian border between 2021 and 2023, including allegations of ill- treatment by border guards, military personnel and police officers. It also raised concerns about the failure to provide for basic needs and the lack of effective access to asylum procedures. [65]

On 12 February 2025, the European Court of Human Rights held oral hearings in three cases: *H.M.M. and Others v. Latvia* (No. 42165/21), as well as related cases against Lithuania and Poland. All three cases concern events that took place at the Belarusian border from 10 August 2021 onwards. The

[63] Cabinet of Ministers (20250. Cabinet of Ministers Order No 186 of 22 December 2025 Grozījums Ministru kabineta 2024. gada 12. marta rīkojumā Nr. 184 "Par pastiprināta robežapsardzības sistēmas darbības režīma izsludināšanu"
[64] State Border Guard, 31 December 2024 at the State Border and Within the Country.
[65] United Nations Human Rights Committee. Concluding observations on the fourth periodic report of Latvia.

proceedings attracted a significant number of third-party interventions, including four organisations and nine European states (Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Croatia, Estonia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland and Finland).[66]

Between June 2024 and December 2025, two people died in the border region after crossing the Latvia-Belarus border. Since 2023, 11 people have died in the area.[67]

According to information compiled by the organisation "I Want to Help Refugees", the Emergency Medical Service received 137 calls between August and December 2021, 124 calls in 2022, 144 calls in 2023, 21 calls in 2024, and 20 calls in 2025 (up to November). The number of people hospitalised was 37 in 2021 (from August onwards), 58 in 2022, 71 in 2023, 71 in 2024, and 12 in 2025 (up to November). Based on information received concerning injuries and health conditions, the organisation concluded that various injuries, poisoning, the effects of other external factors, as well as respiratory and digestive disorders, may have been linked to prolonged exposure to life-threatening and unsuitable conditions, or may even have been the result of violence.[68]

The organisation "I Want to Help Refugees" also published a report on access to healthcare in detention centres, concluding that the most common reasons for Emergency Medical Service call-outs were "injuries, poisoning and other consequences of external causes (including multiple fractures), as well as mental and behavioural disorders (such as reactions to severe stress and adjustment disorders)".[69]

In his 2025 report, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus, Nils Muižnieks, recommended carrying out effective, impartial and transparent investigations into the deaths of third-country nationals at Belarus's borders with European Union Member States. [70]

### *Refugee Status Determination Procedure*

According to data provided by the OCMA,[71] in 2025, **international protection was granted to 192 persons in Latvia: 55 persons were granted refugee status** (50 by a decision of the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs (OCMA) and 5 on the basis of judgments of the Administrative District Court), and **99 persons were granted alternative status** (95 by OCMA decision and 4 on the basis of judgments of the Administrative District Court).

[66] Ministry of Foreign Affairs: The Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights to hear H.M.M. and Others v. Latvia.
[67] Beaten Back at Europe's Borders 2025: Annual Report on Pushbacks.
[68] "I Want to Help Refugees": Border Monitoring Report, Latvia.
[69] "I Want to Help Refugees": Border Monitoring Report, Latvia.
[70] Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, Nils Muižnieks
[71] Written information provided by the OCMA to the Latvian Centre for Human Rights on 11 March 2026.

The OCMA granted **refugee status** to 11 Afghan nationals (8 men, 3 women and 1 minor), 19 Belarusian nationals (12 men, 4 women and 3 minors), 15 Russian nationals (7 men and 8 women), one Pakistani national, one Tajik national, and two Uzbek nationals (men).

The OCMA granted **alternative status** to 68 Afghan nationals (men), 10 Syrian nationals (men), 6 Eritrean nationals (5 men and 1 woman), 5 Yemeni nationals (4 men and 1 minor), 4 Ukrainian nationals (3 men and 1 minor), 1 Palestinian national and 1 Sudanese national.

### *Temporary Protection for Ukrainian Civilians*

According to the OCMA, 7,139 Ukrainian civilians were granted temporary protection in Latvia in 2025.[72] The total number of temporary protection statuses granted since 2022 reached 63,594. Compared with previous years, a new OCMA practice emerged in 2025 whereby decisions were issued refusing temporary protection, with the number of such refusals reaching 416. These refusals were primarily linked to the fact that the individuals concerned had already been granted temporary protection in another European Union Member State.

On 13 June 2025, the Council of the European Union adopted a decision extending temporary protection until 4 March 2027. From 1 May 2025, the non-taxable minimum for personal income tax purposes granted to Ukrainian civilians was increased from €250 to €510 per month.[73]

On 3 December 2025, amendments were adopted which entered into force on 1 January 2026 and reduced the scope of rights available to Ukrainian civilians. The right to use public transport free of charge, including the carriage of luggage, now applies only to passengers falling within categories entitled to fare concessions under national legislation. The employment and self-employment start-up allowance is no longer provided. Accommodation and food allowances have been reduced to 60 and 30 days respectively. Costs related to meeting mandatory animal health requirements and animal registration are no longer covered.[74]

Ukrainian civilians are required to acquire the state language within two years of being granted temporary protection, at least to Basic Level 2 (A2).[75] Within five years of being granted temporary protection, they must attain the level of state language proficiency prescribed by the Cabinet of Ministers for their particular profession or position. A person loses temporary protection status if they have visited the Russian Federation or Russian-occupied territories of Ukraine.[76]

### *The Work of the Latvian Centre for Human Rights with Asylum Seekers*

[72] Written information provided by the OCMA to the Latvian Centre for Human Rights on 11 March 2026.
[73] Amendment to the Law on Support for Ukrainian Civilians.
[74] Law on Support for Ukrainian Civilians, Section $7^1$(1) and Section 12(1).
[75] Ibid. Section 16($1^1$) and Section 16($1^2$)
[76] Ibid. Section 23(1)(4)

In 2025, under the UNHCR-funded project “Legal Assistance for Asylum Seekers and Beneficiaries of International Protection”, the Latvian Centre for Human Rights (LCHR) provided legal consultations to 63 individuals from the following countries: Ukraine, Afghanistan, Belarus, Bangladesh, the Central African Republic, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Iraq, Iran, India, The Gambia, Morocco, Nigeria, Cameroon, Kuwait, Russia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, China, Syria, Tajikistan, Turkey and Uzbekistan. Legal assistance was provided to asylum seekers, persons with refugee status, persons with alternative status, and persons granted temporary protection. The Centre's clients also included particularly vulnerable individuals, including one unaccompanied minor, one victim of human trafficking, two LGBTQI+ persons, and two persons over the age of 60.

As a result of LCHR's work, the Administrative District Court in Rēzekne, by its judgment of 8 April 2025, annulled an Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs (OCMA) decision ordering the transfer of an asylum seeker from Tajikistan to Hungary as the Member State responsible for examining the asylum application. As a result of LCHR's advocacy, the OCMA also changed its practice and no longer extended the examination of Syrian asylum applications to the maximum period permitted by law. Legal assistance before the Administrative District Court, including the drafting of applications and representation during oral hearings, was provided in two refugee status determination cases involving persons from Ethiopia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Legal assistance was also provided to six families in family reunification procedures, covering a total of 33 individuals: four families from Afghanistan (refugee status holders) and two families from Syria (holders of alternative status).

On 16 April, LCHR organised its first training seminar for professional interpreters working on asylum cases. The webinar was attended by 28 participants: 13 interpreters and translators, 8 court interpreters and translators, and 7 representatives of various institutions and non-governmental organisations. Educational events were also organised for legal aid providers: an online seminar on 21 July, an in-person seminar on 14 November, and a webinar on 17 December. These seminars addressed current developments in asylum law and updates relating to the EU’s Pact on Migration and Asylum. LCHR also organised four educational events (on 20 May, 23 September, 4 November and 19 November) for 130 school pupils and university students on asylum law and human rights. Two newsletters, *Developments in Asylum Law*, were published and distributed (March and September).

LCHR also identified a gap in Latvian legislation whereby persons granted alternative status are not entitled to state-funded technical aids, including prosthetic devices.[77] By contrast, persons with refugee status and those benefiting from temporary protection are entitled to such support.[78]

[77] Law on Social Services and Social Assistance, Section 3(1) and Section 3(1[1]).
[78] Law on Social Services and Social Assistance, Section 3(1)(2), and the Law on Support for Ukrainian Civilians, Section 7(1)(4).

### *The case of human rights activist Ieva Raubiško*

On 19 August 2025, Ieva Raubiško delivered her final statement, and the following day, on 20 August, the abridged judgment was delivered.[79] The Latgale District Court in Rēzekne found Ieva Raubiško guilty of aiding the illegal crossing of the state border and sentenced her to 200 hours of community service. The charges were based on Section 20(2) and Section 284(2) of the Criminal Law, which provide for criminal liability for organising the illegal crossing of the state border. However, the court found that: "I. Raubiško committed a criminal offence under circumstances different from those described in the indictment, namely, she aided a group of Syrian nationals in intentionally crossing the state external border illegally." In delivering the abridged judgment, the court stated that her motive had been assessed as humanitarian, but that the methods she had chosen were unlawful.

In support of Ieva Raubiško, several organisations signed an open letter addressed to President of Latvia Edgars Rinkēvičs, Prime Minister Evika Siliņa, Speaker of the Saeima Daiga Mieriņa, and members of the Saeima. [80]

The delivery of the full judgment was postponed several times, and the full judgment was ultimately published in 2026.[81] Ieva Raubiško appealed the judgment, and the Latgale Regional Court scheduled a court hearing for 25 November 2026.[82]

## *Recommendations*

- **Refrain from applying detention measures to particularly vulnerable groups of asylum seekers, including families with children.**
- **Ensure that the principle of non-penalisation of refugees (Article 31 of the 1951 Refugee Convention) is upheld in practice and that asylum seekers are not penalised for their irregular entry into the country.**
- **Ensure that asylum seekers have effective access to the asylum procedure, including an individual assessment of the risk of inhuman or degrading treatment if they were returned to their country of origin or to a third country.**
- **Increase the daily allowance provided to asylum seekers (currently €3 per day), ensuring that it is sufficient to cover their basic needs.**

[79] The Court Sentences Ieva Raubiško to 200 Hours of Community Service for Aiding the Illegal Crossing of the State Border | Court Administration.
[80] Open Letter from Civil Society on the Court Ruling in the Criminal Proceedings against Ieva Raubiško – Gribu palīdzēt bēgļiem.
[81] Both parties have appealed the judgment in the Raubiško case.
[82] Information available in the elieta.lv section "Legal proceedings data tracking", No. of the case 18200002023.