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**Submission – Universal Periodic Review 4<sup>th</sup> Cycle**

**LATVIA**

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The Latvian Centre for Human Rights (LCHR)<sup>1</sup> was established in 1993 as an independent non-governmental organisation. Over three decades LCHR has worked with integration (minority rights and promotion of tolerance) issues, elimination of discrimination and hate crimes/speech, asylum, migration and fundamental rights issues, as well as human rights observation in places of detention (prisons, immigration detention facilities.)

LCHR conducts human rights monitoring, research and policy analysis, training of different target groups, provides legal aid to victims of human rights violations, including their representation before domestic and international courts. The LCHR provides expert opinions both locally (to government, parliament, media, educational institutions, courts, and lawyers), as well as internationally. The LCHR is involved in advocacy for change, ranging from raising public awareness to specific policy or legislative change.

***Ratification of & accession to international instruments***

Latvia ratified the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention Against Torture (OPCAT) in December 2021, designating the Ombudsman's Office as the national preventive mechanism (NPM). OPCAT came into force on 9 January 2022. On 2 April 2025, amendments to the Ombudsman Law<sup>2</sup> entered into force, strengthening the Ombudsman's role in implementing the tasks of the NPM. They also explicitly grant the Ombudsman the right to issue recommendations on the treatment of persons in places of detention, and to receive information on the outcomes of those recommendations.

Latvia ratified the Istanbul Convention in November 2023. However, in September 2025, conservative politicians, ahead of next year's parliamentary elections, launched a campaign

<sup>1</sup> Latvian Centre for Human Rights (2023). [LATVIAN CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS - 30 YEARS ACTIVITY REPORT](#)

<sup>2</sup> Grozījumi Tiesībsarga likumā, adopted on 06.03.2025, in force from 02.04.25,  
<https://www.vestnesis.lv/op/2025/55.4>

advocating withdrawal.<sup>3</sup>

## ***Hate Crimes/Hate Speech***

### ***Positive developments***

On 6 July 2021, the Saeima adopted amendments to Article 48, Paragraph 14 of the Criminal Law, introducing "social hatred" as an aggravating circumstance for criminal offences. Prior to this amendment, the law recognized racist, national, ethnic, and religious motives as aggravating factors. The term "social hatred" encompasses characteristics listed in Article 150 of law, such as gender, disability, age, and other personal attributes. Judicial practice has further broadened this interpretation to include sexual orientation and migrant status.

Despite several legislative efforts to explicitly include sexual orientation as a hate motive in the Criminal Law, these proposals have not been adopted due to insufficient political support.

Against the background of war in Ukraine combatting hate crimes/hate speech has for the first time been included among the priorities of the State Police in the Strategy of the Ministry of Interior 2023-2027.<sup>4</sup>

As a result of State Police structural reforms, since 1 January 2023, a unit in the Riga Regional Police is responsible for the centralised investigation of hate crimes in the Riga region.<sup>5</sup> However, there is no such equivalent unit at the national level across Latvia.

Following the ruling *Hanovs v Latvia*, the Ministry of Justice issued a circular in 2025, to guide police in identifying and investigating homophobic crimes.<sup>6</sup>

### ***Context***

At the end of April 2024, the State Security Service (*Valsts drošības dienests, VDD*) warned about the risks of increasing right-wing extremism<sup>7</sup> in society, especially among young people. According to the VDD's assessment, this trend is linked to the rise in the number of immigrants in Latvia, whom right-wing extremists are targeting. In 2024, 11 skinheads were detained, including the leaders of two informal skinhead groups, who remain in custody.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The Baltic Times (2025). Society suffers because of 'political theatre' over Istanbul Convention - PM Silina, 07.10, [https://www.baltictimes.com/society\\_suffers\\_because\\_of\\_political\\_theatre\\_over\\_istanbul\\_convention\\_-\\_pm\\_silina/](https://www.baltictimes.com/society_suffers_because_of_political_theatre_over_istanbul_convention_-_pm_silina/)

<sup>4</sup> Iekšlietu ministrija (2022). Iekšlietu nozares stratēģija 2023.-2027. gadam, <https://www.iem.gov.lv/lv/media/9988/download?attachment>

<sup>5</sup> Lvportals.lv (2023). Valsts policijas strukturālās reformas turpinās ar pārmaiņām Rīgas reģiona pārvaldes Kriminālpolicijas pārvaldē, 2.janvāris <https://lvportals.lv/dienaskartiba/347788-valsts-policijas-strukturalas-reformas-turpinas-ar-parmainam-rigas-regiona-parvaldes-kriminalpolicijas-parvalde-2023>

<sup>6</sup> Tieslietu ministrija (2025). Aktualizēts skaidrojums par naida noziegumu kvalifikāciju, 01.04, <https://m.juristavards.lv/zurnals/286530-aktualizets-skaidrojums-par-naida-noziegumu-kvalifikaciju/>

<sup>7</sup> LSM.LV (2024). The Security Service warns about the increasing risks posed by right-wing extremism in society (*Drošības dienests brīdina par labējā ekstrēmisma radīto risku pieaugumu sabiedrībā*), 22.04, <https://www.lsm.lv/raksts/zinas/latvija/22.04.2024-drosibas-dienests-bridina-par-labeja-ekstremisma-radito-risku-pieaugumu-sabiedriba.a551340/>

<sup>8</sup> Latvian State Security Service (2024). Annual Report 2024, <https://vdd.gov.lv/uploads/materials/40/en/annual-report-2024.pdf>

Xenophobic attitudes have been further amplified by certain political parties. Following the municipal elections in Riga in 2025, in August the deputy mayor from the right-wing National Alliance publicly called on illegal migrants to leave Riga and Latvia within a month. Migration was a central theme in the party's campaign leading up to the elections. However, official data shows that only 24 illegal migrants were detained in Riga in 2023, 23 in 2024, and 22 in 2025.<sup>9</sup>

LGBT+ community is often subject to intolerant comments and sometimes violent attacks. Not only do the comments come from social media but also the parliament.<sup>10</sup>

In July 2023, the ECtHR ruled in *Hanovs v. Latvia* that authorities failed to investigate a homophobic attack as a hate crime. The court stressed Latvia's duty to prosecute such offenses and awarded the victim €10,000. The Latvian Centre for Human Rights represented the victim.

In January 2024, a trial began in Daugavpils over a homophobic attack in May 2023, where a drunk man assaulted a gay victim with over 20 blows to the head.<sup>11</sup> The case was reopened after intervention by the Prosecutor General and legal support from the Latvian Centre for Human Rights. On October 14, 2024, Latgale District Court sentenced a man to seven months in prison for attacking L. A. and his partner in Daugavpils. The victims were awarded €2,500 and €2,000 in damages. In 2025, the sentence was appealed by the victim and the prosecutor. LCHR represented the victims.

Hate speech increased during both the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine, particularly online. In recent years the State Security Service (VDD) has carried out comprehensive monitoring of Latvia's information space to identify activities threatening national security. The aim has been to document pro-Kremlin content, statements inciting national hatred, and posts glorifying Russia's war crimes.<sup>12</sup>

Between January 2021 and November 2023, the Latvian Centre for Human Rights identified 2,414 instances of hate speech in Latvian and Russian user-generated content online.<sup>13</sup> Most cases (1,607) appeared on global platforms like Facebook, TikTok, Twitter (X), YouTube, and Instagram, while 807 were found on Latvian news sites, mainly two - nra.lv and neatkariga.nra.lv. Monitoring was done proactively and through complaints, with removal rates tracked on global platforms under the EU Code of Conduct.

Of the content, 30% involved calls for violence or its justification, 28% were insults, 26% dehumanisation, 8% calls for discrimination, 6% spread prejudice, and 2% denied or trivialised war crimes, including the Holocaust. Targets included LGBT+ people (50%), ethnic or national

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<sup>9</sup> LETA (2025). Riga vice mayor exaggerates problem of illegal migrants in capital - border guard chief, 20.08, <https://www.leta.lv/eng/regions/news/item/79459EB5-4BC2-4851-B58D-E6509A6D9801/>

<sup>10</sup> ENG.LSM.LV (2023). Latvian Radio investigates LGBT+ issues in eastern Latvia, 26.06, <https://eng.lsm.lv/article/features/features/26.06.2023-latvian-radio-investigates-lgbt-issues-in-eastern-latvia.a514236/>

<sup>11</sup> ENG.LSM.LV (2023). Latvian Radio investigates LGBT+ issues in eastern Latvia, 26.06, <https://eng.lsm.lv/article/features/features/26.06.2023-latvian-radio-investigates-lgbt-issues-in-eastern-latvia.a514236/>

<sup>12</sup> State Security Service (2025). Annual Report 2024, <https://vdd.gov.lv/uploads/materials/40/en/annual-report-2024.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> Latvian Centre for Human Rights (2024), Hate speech in Latvia - trends and challenges 2023, available in Latvian, [https://cilvektiesibas.org.lv/media/attachments/08/05/2024/Naida\\_runa\\_petijums\\_2023final.pdf](https://cilvektiesibas.org.lv/media/attachments/08/05/2024/Naida_runa_petijums_2023final.pdf)

origin (20%), xenophobia (18%), racism (6%), religion (2%), gender (1%), and other social groups (3%). Ethnic hatred was predominantly directed against Russians, Latvians, and Ukrainians.

### ***Recommendations***

*In 2025 report on Latvia the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) recommended<sup>14</sup> authorities establish an interinstitutional working group tasked with monitoring hate speech and hate crime. This group should include representatives of the relevant authorities, civil society organisations and the Ombudsman, respecting the institution's independence.*

*Include sexual orientation and gender identity among hate motives in the Criminal Law.*

*Ensure that all police officers receive basic training on hate crimes*

*Establish a dedicated national unit to coordinate the investigation of hate crimes*

*Enhance hate crime data collection by including cases where a hate motive is applied as an aggravating circumstance*

*Support civil society efforts in monitoring online hate*

### ***Non-citizen children***

#### **Positive developments**

On January 1, 2020, Latvia took an important step towards reducing the number of non-citizens by automatically granting Latvian citizenship to all newborn children born to non-citizen families. There are no children under the age of five, born to non-citizen parents, who do not hold Latvian citizenship.

According to the OCMA as of 1 July 2025<sup>15</sup>, there were still 860 children without Latvian citizenship in the age group between 6-15 who were born to non-citizen parents (29 born in 2019, 35 born in 2018, 41 born in 2017, 39 in 2016, 63 in 2015, 66 born in 2014, 101 in 2013, 139 in 2012, 165 in 2011, 182 in 2010). There were a further 441 children in the age group 16-17 (208 born in 2009, 233 in 2008).

#### ***Recommendation***

*To amend the relevant law to ensure that all children born in Latvia to non-citizen parents aged 6-15 who would otherwise be without nationality are granted citizenship automatically.*

### ***Roma***

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<sup>14</sup> ECRI Report on Latvia (sixth monitoring cycle), adopted on 18 March 2025, published on 19 June 2025, <https://rm.coe.int/sixth-report-on-latvia/1680b66aea>

<sup>15</sup> PMLP (2025). Latvijas iedzīvotāju sadalījums pēc dzimšanas gada un valstiskās piederības, <https://www.pmlp.gov.lv/lv/media/14033/download?attachment>

The number of Roma in Latvia is small.<sup>16</sup> Roma remain one of the most socially vulnerable groups in Latvia. Among them, the proportion of individuals without compulsory basic education is significantly higher than the rest of the Latvian population—1.1% of all residents over the age of 25 have not completed primary school, compared to 32.5% of Roma individuals. **According to a 2023<sup>17</sup>, 47.7% of Roma children do not wish to attend school due to negative attitudes from other students, 44% avoid school due to early family formation practices, and 41.4% face difficulties in studies.** Additionally, the employment rate among the Roma population is three times lower than the national average. The primary reasons for Roma unemployment include a lack of education and discrimination.

Housing conditions for the Roma community are among the worst in Latvia. For example, three out of five Roma residents live in homes without central heating, whereas only one in five residents nationwide lives under similar conditions. Furthermore, 45.3% of Roma individuals lack access to a bathroom or shower in their homes, compared to the national average of 13.8%.

### *Positive Developments and Concerns*

On 12 March 2021, the Latvian government approved a strategic framework plan for Roma-related measures for 2022-2023. The plan aims to promote Roma participation in various aspects of society, including education, employment, healthcare, housing, civil society, and culture. For instance, the plan includes provisions for Romani teaching assistants in schools with Roma students, ensuring individualised collaboration with parents. It also seeks to establish a preschool monitoring mechanism to track Romani children who do not attend early education institutions. However, the majority of funding for social measures within the plan comes from EU sources or general social programmes intended for all residents.

Educational monitoring data from 2016-2017 revealed that 34.2% of Romani schoolchildren followed special education programmes. Romani students accounted for 22.4% in learning difficulty programmes and 39% in special education programmes designed for children with intellectual disabilities. The share of Roma in special education programmes has since diminished, however, **in 2022, Latvia's Ombudsman also found that Romani children were possibly being assigned to special education programmes intended for those with congenital cognitive disabilities<sup>18</sup>.** Consequently, the Ombudsman recommended an assessment of local pedagogical-medical commissions to prevent unwarranted placement of Romani children in special education institutions or programmes. The 2023 study on the Roma in Latvia concludes that Roma student numbers in schools have not been officially monitored since the 2016-2017 school year.<sup>19</sup>

Since 2016, with European Commission support, Latvia has developed the Latvian Romani Platform - a coordination mechanism aimed at improving collaboration, communication, experience-sharing, and awareness among stakeholders in Romani integration efforts. One of the platform's key contributions has been supporting Romani mediators in various Latvian

<sup>16</sup> According to the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs, there were 6,376 Roma in Latvia in the beginning of 2025, see PMLP (2025). Latvijas iedzīvotāju sadalījums pēc nacionālā sastāva un valstiskās piederības

<sup>17</sup> Civitta (2023). PĒTĪJUMS PAR ROMU SITUĀCIJU LATVIJĀ (in Latvian), <https://www.km.gov.lv/lv/media/35865/download?attachment>

<sup>18</sup> [https://www.tiesibsargs.lv/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/romu\\_situacija\\_latvija\\_2022\\_1648646871.pdf](https://www.tiesibsargs.lv/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/romu_situacija_latvija_2022_1648646871.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> Civitta (2023). PĒTĪJUMS PAR ROMU SITUĀCIJU LATVIJĀ (in Latvian), <https://www.km.gov.lv/lv/media/35865/download?attachment>

municipalities. However, their work is funded through project resources in a limited capacity and is generally low-paid.

### ***Recommendations***

*Implement measures specifically aimed at improving Roma employment and educational opportunities*

*Allocate state funding for Roma mediators in municipalities with significant Roma populations*

*Collect anonymised, disaggregated data on Roma educational attainment (ensuring data protection) to better assess disparities and develop targeted policies*

### ***Migrants, asylum seekers and refugees***

Latvian authorities, municipalities, NGOs, and the public have shown remarkable solidarity with Ukraine, welcoming nearly 45,000 refugees since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. However, in certain areas support for Ukrainian civilians has exceeded that offered to others with refugee or alternative status, many of whom also flee conflict or persecution.

Following EU sanctions, Belarusian leader A. Lukashenko increased the flow of third-country nationals to the EU-Belarus border. Latvia declared a state of emergency in August 2021 and introduced a special border regime in 2024, raising ongoing concerns about asylum seekers' access to the territory. Reports of alleged ill-treatment against asylum seekers by certain special forces have surfaced repeatedly.<sup>20</sup> These claims, particularly report by *Amnesty International*<sup>21</sup>, have been challenged by both the Ombudsman<sup>22</sup> and the State Border Guard (SBG), who questioned the findings. Between August 2021-1 October 2025, the SBG reported over 39,000 instances of pushbacks at the “green border” with Belarus.<sup>23</sup> On several occasions, UNHCR has raised concerns with relevant authorities about the risk of violations of the right to seek asylum and the principle of non-refoulement.<sup>24</sup>

On 20 August 2025, the Latgale District Court found human rights defender Ieva Raubiško from the NGO "I Want to Help Refugees" guilty of aiding the illegal crossing of the Belarus-Latvia border by five Syrian asylum seekers in January 2023. She was sentenced to 200 hours of

<sup>20</sup> European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman and Degrading Treatment (2023). CPT/Inf (2023) 16. [Report to the Latvian Government on the periodic visit to Latvia carried out by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment \(CPT\) from 10 to 20 May 2022](#)

<sup>21</sup> Amnesty International (2022). LATVIA: RETURN HOME OR NEVER LEAVE THE WOODS, at <https://www.amnesty.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/EUR-52-5913-2022-Latvia-report.pdf>

<sup>22</sup> LSM.LV (2022). Tiesībsargs: «Amnesty International» ziņojums par Latvijas slikto izturēšanos pret migrantiem – melīgs,10.08, <https://www.lsm.lv/raksts/zinas/latvija/tiesibsargs-amnesty-international-zinojums-par-latvijas-slikto-izturesanos-pret-migrantiem--meligs.a468734/>

<sup>23</sup> According to the Ministry of the Interior, this included 4,045 in 2021; 5,203 in 2022; 13,863 in 2023; and 5,388 in 2024. During the period [from January to 1 October 2025, 10 313 pushbacks were reported](#). Non-admission cases may involve the same individuals multiple times, meaning the figures do not represent unique persons.

<sup>24</sup> UNHCR (2024). Submission by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in the case of H.M.M. and Others v. Latvia (Application No. 42165/21) before the Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights, 18 October, <https://www.refworld.org/jurisprudence/amicus/unhcr/2024/en/148873>

community service.<sup>25</sup> The asylum seekers were protected by an interim measure from the ECtHR, which instructed Latvia not to push them back and to provide humanitarian aid. She has appealed the sentence.<sup>26</sup>

### ***Recommendations***

*Ensure that foreign nationals have effective access to an asylum procedure which includes an individual assessment of the risk of ill-treatment if returned to their country of origin or to a third country.*

*To the Ombudsman's Office: Strengthen the monitoring of human rights compliance at the border, with particular emphasis on preventing risks of ill-treatment.*

*Decriminalise humanitarian aid to asylum seekers at the border and protect providers of essential assistance—such as food, water, medical care, and shelter—from legal sanctions. Ensure legal frameworks clearly distinguish aid from irregular migration activities.*

*Implement European Migration and Asylum Pact by increasing the number legal aid providers and providing relevant training*

### ***Media freedom***

In 2020, 2021, and 2022— Latvia ranked 22<sup>nd</sup> in Press Freedom Index published by Reporters Without Borders (RFS). In 2023, Latvia moved up to 16<sup>th</sup> place. In 2025, **Latvia ranked 15<sup>th</sup> in the world**, slightly lower than its 13<sup>th</sup> place in 2024.<sup>27</sup>

According to RFS Latvian journalists continue to work in a fairly free and safe environment, but access to reliable and pluralistic information, especially for the Russian-speaking population, remains a challenge.

### ***Recommendations:***

To combat Russian disinformation by ensuring that representatives of national minorities have access to credible, fact-checked information through public media, including content in Russian, Ukrainian, and Belarusian

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<sup>25</sup> ENG.LSM.LV (2025). Refugee rights activist Raubiško given community service, <https://eng.lsm.lv/article/society/society/20.08.2025-refugee-rights-activist-raubisko-given-community-service.a611098/>

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/case/human-rights-defender-ieva-raubisko-sentenced-helping-asylum-seekers>

<sup>27</sup> Latvia's neighbours Estonia and Lithuania ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> respectively. Russian Federation ranked 171<sup>st</sup> and Belarus – 167<sup>th</sup> <https://rsf.org/en/index>