

# HUMAN RIGHTS IN LATVIA

2024

LATVIJAS  
CILVĒKTIESĪBU  
CENTRS



LATVIAN CENTRE  
FOR HUMAN  
RIGHTS



# HUMAN RIGHTS IN LATVIA IN 2024

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# Content

Introduction .....	4
Electoral Rights and Political Context.....	7
Right to a Fair Trial .....	12
Prisons.....	15
Hate Crimes and Hate Speech.....	19
Non- Discrimination .....	29
Violence against Women .....	36
Freedom of Expression .....	40
Freedom of Religion and Belief .....	45
Freedom of Association.....	49
Freedom of Assembly.....	52
Rights of National Minorities and Social Cohesion .....	56
Citizenship and Residence Rights .....	65
Asylum Seekers and Refugees .....	72

# Introduction

The Latvian Centre for Human Rights (hereinafter – LCHR) continues the tradition, reinstated two years ago<sup>1</sup>, of publishing an annual human rights review and hereby presents the *Human Rights in Latvia in 2024* report.

The aim of the report *Human Rights in Latvia in 2024* is to provide independent and objective information on the human rights situation in Latvia during 2024. 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 reviews 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).

In 2024, the geopolitical situation continued to affect certain human rights issues in Latvia. In some areas, human rights restrictions were observed that were justified on national security grounds. The third year of Russia's invasion of Ukraine saw Ukrainian civilians continue to arrive in Latvia seeking refuge from the war. Since 24 February 2022, more than 69,000 Ukrainians have been issued temporary residence permits and long-term D visas. As of [1 December 2024](#), more than 47,000 Ukrainian civilians with valid temporary protection status were residing in Latvia. On average, 450–500 Ukrainian civilians per month newly registered in Latvia in 2024 and were granted temporary protection status. Over the year, Latvia provided military assistance to Ukraine amounting to more [than 0.25% of its GDP](#). Significant support was also provided to Ukrainian civilians, humanitarian aid, assistance to the Ukrainian government and reforms, as well as support for development and reconstruction.

The state of emergency declared in August 2021 due to increasing numbers of migrants at the Latvia–Belarus border was replaced by an enhanced border protection regime. This regime was introduced for the period from 13 March 2024 to 12 September 2025<sup>2</sup> in certain parishes of Ludza, Krāslava and Augšdaugava municipalities, in the city of Daugavpils, and in Kaunata parish of Rēzekne municipality.

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<sup>1</sup> Latvijas Cilvēktiesību centrs (2024). [Cilvēktiesības Latvijā 2019.–2023.](#), 85 p. (in Latvian)

<sup>2</sup> On 10 September 2024 and 19 December 2024, the enhanced border protection regime was extended until 31 December 2024 and 30 June 2025 respectively.

In 2024, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) delivered several significant judgments in cases against Latvia. In *D. v. Latvia*, the Court found that state authorities had not taken sufficient action to eliminate the informal hierarchy among prisoners in prisons. This was also the first case against Latvia in which the Court outlined specific measures that the judicial system must take to comply with the judgment. International human rights organisations and the Ombudsman had long pointed to the existence of this caste-like system.

In *Hanovs v. Latvia*, the ECtHR found a violation of the European Convention on Human Rights and awarded the victim of a homophobic attack EUR 10,000 in non-pecuniary damages. Several skinheads were detained for attacks on migrants, and the State Security Service warned of the growing risks of right-wing extremism in society.

At the beginning of the year, the Ombudsman's Office established a new Anti-Discrimination Department, and for the first time a separate budget—EUR 330,803 —was allocated specifically for promoting equality and preventing discrimination. On 1 July, the legal framework for partnerships, including same-sex partnerships, entered into force.

On 1 May, the Istanbul Convention came into force. Amendments to the Criminal Law were adopted to strengthen penalties for cruelty and violence against family members. The LTV programme *Kultūršoks* brought to public attention cases of sexual harassment at the Jāzeps Vītols Academy of Music, prompting widespread public debate. In 2024, the number of women reporting domestic violence to the State Police increased, a trend also confirmed by the [NGO MARTA Centre](#).

Several incidents related to freedom of expression sparked public debate, including a dispute between the Society Integration Foundation and Re:Baltica over the repayment of project funding, video performances by artist K. Brekte, and the content of children's sex education books. Legal proceedings continued regarding the revocation of the broadcasting licence of the Russian independent TV channel *Dozhd* (Дождь) in Latvia.

The State Security Service recommended prohibiting five public events, including a picket in solidarity with Palestinians. The police increased monitoring of gatherings on 9 May. The Supreme Court Senate upheld the prohibition of two protest actions related to the dismantling of Soviet monuments.

The death of a four-year-old unvaccinated boy from diphtheria triggered extensive debate on freedom of belief in the context of mandatory vaccination. Several priests were sentenced to imprisonment for sexual violence against children. In 2024, no progress was made regarding the request submitted by the Council of the Latvian Orthodox Church to the Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church, Kirill, seeking independent status for the Church.

The Constitutional Court ruled that the transition to education solely in the state language—both in public and private educational institutions—approved in 2022 was compatible with the Constitution.

Discussions continued regarding the permissibility of producing public media content in minority languages.

The number of naturalised people since the Citizenship Law entered into force in 1995 reached 150,000 in 2024. Amendments to the Immigration Law expanded the group of Russian Federation citizens (former Latvian citizens and non-citizens) required to demonstrate Latvian language proficiency at A2 level to obtain a permanent residence permit. The Constitutional Court ruled that these amendments adopted in 2022 were compatible with the Constitution.

Under the enhanced border protection regime, access to the Latvian territory for asylum seekers remained restricted. The organisation “I Want to Help Refugees” also reported that nine people had died after crossing the Latvia – Belarus border and had been buried in Latvia as unidentified persons.

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 reviews in their respective fields.

**Anhelita Kamenska**

Director, Latvian Centre for Human Rights

# Electoral Rights and Political Context



The Saeima dissolved the municipal council of the state city of Rēzekne. The European Court of Human Rights rejected T.Ždanoka's complaint regarding the removal of her candidacy from the list of candidates for the Saeima elections. Criminal liability was introduced for the use of deep-fake technology aimed at influencing the electoral process or discrediting candidates for public office.

## *European Parliament elections*

On 8 June 2024, 521,226 of Latvia's 1,541,102 eligible voters took part in the European Parliament elections<sup>3</sup>, amounting to 33.82% of the electorate. In the previous EP elections in 2019, voter turnout was 33.5%. The highest voter activity was recorded in Vidzeme, where 44.44% of voters cast their ballots, while the lowest turnout was in Latgale – 24.90%. In the Kurzeme region, 38.00% voted; in Zemgale – 38.04%; and in the Riga region – 26.70%.

The low voter turnout in the Riga electoral district is linked to the inclusion of voters abroad in Riga's statistics. Abroad, only 6,809 or 3.8% of the 178,761 registered voters (Latvian citizens) cast their ballots, while in Riga itself, 147,028 or 36.96% of the 397,814 registered voters participated.

On 8 June 2024, 33.82% of Latvia's population participated in the European Parliament elections



The Saeima dissolved the municipal council of the state city of Rēzekne



Criminal liability was introduced for the use of deep-fake technology aimed at influencing the electoral process

<sup>3</sup> Centrālā vēlēšanu komisija, [CVK apstiprina vēlēšanu rezultātus](#), 17.06.2024.

Sixteen candidate lists participated in the European Parliament elections in Latvia on 8 June 2024, of which seven secured nine seats<sup>4</sup>. The results were as follows: New Unity (JV) received 25.09% of the vote; National Alliance “All for Latvia”— “For Fatherland and Freedom/LNNK” (NA) 22.07%; Development/For! (A/P) 9.36%; United List – Latvian Green Party, Latvian Regional Alliance, Liepāja Party (AS) 8.18%; Progressives (P) 7.45%; Harmony Social Democratic Party (S) 7.13%; and Latvia First (LPV) 6.16%.

The elected Members of the European Parliament from Latvia were Valdis Dombrovskis (JV), Sandra Kalniete (JV), Roberts Zīle (NA), Rihards Kols (NA), Ivars Ījabs (LA), Reinis Pozņaks (AS), Mārtiņš Stakis (P), Nils Ušakovs (S), and Vilis Krištopans (LPV). Following Valdis Dombrovskis’s appointment as European Commissioner, Inese Vaidere (JV) became a Member of the European Parliament for the third time.

### ***Polling Station Accessibility***

In the European Parliament elections, only 21%—or 200—polling stations were accessible to individuals with mobility difficulties. The organisation “Apeirons,” representing people with disabilities and their allies, reported that the lack of accessibility not only hindered the right to vote but also limited opportunities to participate in the work of polling stations.<sup>5</sup>

### ***Government Changes***

The early months of the government led by Evika Siliņa were marked by extensive discussions surrounding the repeated use of private flights and overspending during the tenure of former Prime Minister Krišjānis Kariņš. [An audit by the State Audit Office](#) revealed at least €220,000 in unlawful spending related to these special flights, prompting the Prosecutor General’s Office to initiate criminal proceedings. On 28 March, Krišjānis Kariņš [announced his resignation](#) as Minister of Foreign Affairs and returned to the Saeima. The position of Foreign Minister was taken up by Baiba Braže, a long-serving career diplomat. Later, on 29 August, K. Kariņš relinquished his parliamentary mandate.

In June 2024, Minister for Culture Agnese Logina (P) announced her resignation. On 20 June, the Saeima approved Agnese Lāce (P), formerly the Parliamentary Secretary at the Ministry of Culture, as the new Minister for Culture.

### ***Local Government***

On 20 June, the Saeima [dissolved the municipal council of the state city of Rēzekne](#) (hereafter – Rēzekne council), citing violations of the Law on Budget and Financial Management, the Law on Municipal Budgets, and the Local Government Law. The council had failed to fulfil its legally mandated functions and had disregarded the interests of the state and the residents of the relevant

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<sup>4</sup> In the European Parliament elections, Latvia constitutes a single electoral district from which nine Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) are elected. The right to vote in these elections is granted to Latvian citizens, as well as to citizens of other European Union member states who have reached the age of 18 on election day. These were the first European Parliament elections in Latvia where voters were not tied to a specific polling station. An online electoral register was used throughout the voting process.

<sup>5</sup> Lsm.lv, [Eiroparlamenta vēlēšanās 21% iecirkņu – dalai vēlētāju nepieejami](#)

administrative territory. A temporary administration consisting of three members was appointed in Rēzekne.

At the end of summer 2023, the Rēzekne council faced serious financial difficulties, which led to the dismissal of Mayor Aleksandrs Bartaševičs (“Together for Latvia”). The political crisis was exacerbated by the council’s inability to adopt the 2024 municipal budget, a key condition for receiving a state loan of five million euros. However, the budget issue was not included on the council’s meeting agenda until the final day. Later, the municipality committed to reducing expenditures by 3.5 million euros to stabilise the financial situation, and on 29 February 2024, it approved a balanced budget. In March, a new chairperson was elected – the former deputy mayor Aleksejs Stecs (“Together for Latvia”).

The Constitutional Court (hereafter – CC) initiated a case concerning the compliance of Articles 1 and 4 of the Law on the dissolution of the Rēzekne municipal council, as well as point 2 of the third part of Article 1 of the Municipal Council Election Law, with Articles 1 and 101 of the Constitution of the Republic of Latvia. The application was submitted by the dismissed Rēzekne council, which argued that the temporary administration was not a democratically legitimised council, as it had not been elected by local residents. In the council’s view, the contested provisions were disproportionate and violated the principle of local government by denying the council the right to manage its administrative territory in the interests of its residents.

In deciding to initiate the case, the CC emphasised that appealing to the Constitutional Court was the only legal remedy available to the Rēzekne council. The court also stressed that the dissolution of a council is a constitutionally significant matter and a measure of last resort to assess the legality of a local government’s actions.

### ***ECtHR judgment in the case Ždanoka v. Latvia (No. 2)***

On 25 July 2024, the European Court of Human Rights (hereafter – ECtHR) delivered its judgment in the case of *Ždanoka v. Latvia* (No. 2)<sup>6</sup>, concluding that the applicant’s right to free elections had not been violated. The case examined the decision of the Central Election Commission (hereafter – CEC) to remove T. Ždanoka from the list of candidates, based on point 6 of Article 5 of the Saeima Election Law and the Constitutional Court’s 2018 ruling<sup>7</sup>, which clarified the interpretation of the law. The Court found that the restriction was established by law, pursued a legitimate aim, and was proportionate. Therefore, no violation was found.

The ECtHR concluded that the decision of the CEC was based on a clear legal foundation. The Saeima Election Law prohibits individuals who were active in the Latvian Communist Party after 1991 from standing for election, and the Constitutional Court expanded this provision by stating that the

<sup>6</sup> [Ždanoka v. Latvia](#) (No.2) App No 42221/18 (ECtHR, 25 July 2024)

<sup>7</sup> Satversmes tiesas 2018.gada 29.jūnija [spriedums lietā Nr.2017-25-01](#)

restriction applies to individuals who continue to pose a threat to Latvia's independence and the principles of a democratic state.

In assessing the legitimate aim and proportionality of the restriction, the ECtHR referred to its previous judgment in the case of *Ždanoka v. Latvia (No. 1)*<sup>8</sup>, recognising that Latvia has broad discretion to protect democratic order and national security. It emphasised that the purpose of the restriction was not to punish the applicant, but to ensure that individuals whose political activities may endanger democracy do not participate in elections. The Court also noted that the applicant had never distanced herself from the position of the Communist Party.

Furthermore, the EtCHR analysed the political and security context of the case, taking into account Russia's aggression in Georgia and Ukraine. The Court concluded that these geopolitical circumstances justified Latvia's caution in evaluating candidates' rights. It stressed that point 6 of Article 5 of the Saeima Election Law was proportionate and that similar restrictions exist in other areas of public administration. The Court found that the prohibition on standing in Saeima elections complied with the requirements of the Convention and did not violate the applicant's rights.

In 2017, the applicant appealed to the Constitutional Court, challenging the compliance of point 6 of Article 5 of the Saeima Election Law with the Constitution. The Constitutional Court concluded that the contested provision was in line with the Constitution. On 21 August 2018, the CEC removed the applicant from the candidate list of the "Latvian Russian Union" party. The CEC justified its decision by stating that the applicant had been active in the Latvian Communist Party after 13 January 1991, continued to act against the interests of the Republic of Latvia, and posed a threat to the independence of the Latvian state and the principles of a democratic rule-of-law state. On 3 September 2018, the Administrative Regional Court rejected the applicant's complaint.

### ***Amendments to Election Laws***

On 1 September 2024, the [Local Government Referendum Law](#) came into force, aiming to promote municipal residents' participation in decision-making on matters of local significance. A municipal referendum may be held on: 1) the municipality's sustainable development strategy or its amendments; 2) a council decision proposing the construction of a new public building or facility requiring an environmental impact assessment; 3) the dismissal of the council. Municipal referendums may be initiated by either local residents or municipal councils, and their outcomes are binding. From September 2024 to August 2025, participation will be possible only in person, but thereafter both in-person and electronic voting will be available.

On 20 November, [amendments to the Municipal Council Election Law](#) came into force, introducing a new Article 33.3. It stipulates that a single polling station may operate at multiple addresses. This

<sup>8</sup> This case is a continuation of the Grand Chamber judgment of the European Court of Human Rights delivered on 16 March 2006 in the case of *Ždanoka v. Latvia (No. 1)*. In that ruling, the Court concluded that the identical legal framework did not violate the applicant's right to free elections.

At the same time, in its previous judgment, the Court emphasised the necessity of periodically reviewing the provisions of the Latvian parliamentary election law.

arrangement allows polling stations to function for limited hours during advance voting days and on election day, as well as to organise mobile voting in sparsely populated areas where establishing a permanent station would not be efficient. It enables voters to cast their ballots closer to their location.

On 24 October, the Saeima amended election laws that introduce [a new ballot design](#) in Latvia. The changes alter the visual appearance of the ballot and the conditions for completing it. Under the new model, each candidate's name will be accompanied by two coloured boxes. Voters may shade the green box to express strong support for a candidate, or the red box if they find the candidate unacceptable. This change in ballot design was justified by the need to enable automatic vote counting in future elections and referendums.

### ***Amendments to the Criminal Law***

On 9 May, the Saeima adopted amendments to the Criminal Law (hereinafter referred to as "CL"), which entered into force on 22 May. These amendments introduce criminal liability for influencing the electoral process through the [use of deepfake technology](#). The Criminal Law was supplemented with a new Section 90.1, which establishes liability for "the deliberate creation or dissemination of false and defamatory information about a political party, its alliance, or a candidate for the Saeima, municipal council, or European Parliament, using deepfake technology, if committed during the pre-election campaigning period or on election day." The penalty for such an offence may include imprisonment for up to five years, short-term detention, probation supervision, or community service. These amendments were adopted ahead of the European Parliament elections.

On 26 September, the Saeima adopted further amendments to the CL, introducing [a new Section 90.2](#). This provision establishes criminal liability for the deliberate creation or dissemination of false information using deepfake technology with the intent to discredit a candidate for a public office elected, appointed, or approved by the Saeima, if committed during the legally prescribed process of election, appointment, or approval. This legal norm applies, for example, to candidates for the office of President of the State, members of the Saeima Presidium, the Auditor General, the Ombudsman, the President of the Bank of Latvia, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, and the Prosecutor General. These amendments entered into force on 22 October.



### ***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

The European Commission has recognised that, overall, Latvia's justice system functions effectively. Around 40% of the population trust the court system. The length of proceedings in first-instance courts and in cassation has decreased. The main challenges facing the judiciary are the lack of a long-term strategic vision, a growing number of judicial vacancies, and the risk that more than 28% of current judges will retire in the coming years.

The level of perceived judicial independence in Latvia continues to be average among the public, although it is higher among younger people and lower among national minorities. According to the [survey on Media Literacy of the Latvian Population](#) commissioned by the National Electronic Mass Media Council among all respondents 40.3% fully or tend to trust Latvia's judicial system; and 24.5% respondents tend to distrust or completely distrust it.

Meanwhile, [a study on Latvian residents' attitudes towards and experience with the judicial process](#) in 2024 shows slightly higher levels of distrust: 28% of respondents 'rather distrust' the courts, while 16% 'completely distrust' them. At the same time, 52% of respondents consider the courts in Latvia to be competent. Twenty-seven per cent believe that the courts are incorruptible, objective and independent, while 45% disagree.

Among national minority respondents, 30.1% fully or tend to trust Latvia's judicial system, and 21.4% tend to distrust or completely distrust the judicial system. Trust in the judicial system is highest among young people (15-25 years of age) – 48.5% fully or tend to trust, and 13.7% tend to distrust or



Forty per cent of the population trust the courts



Average length of court proceedings (in months)

Instance	2023	2024
First instance	3,1	2,9
Appeal instance	4,7	5,3
Cassation instance	7,5	6

completely distrust it. Among senior citizens (over 65) 38% fully or tend to trust it, and 24.4% tend to distrust or completely distrust it.<sup>9</sup>

In 2024, the European Commission (hereinafter – EC) recognised that, overall, Latvia's justice system functions effectively. At the same time, the EC recommended that Latvia take measures to ensure appropriate safeguards against undue political influence in the current procedure for appointing judges to the Supreme Court, in line with European standards on judicial appointments.

In March and July, the Judicial Council (hereinafter – JC) amended and clarified the procedure for nominating and appointing court presidents, their deputies and heads of court buildings. The amendments concern the composition of the selection commission and the criteria for evaluating candidates. Three main criteria will be considered when assessing candidates: reputation and authority within the judiciary, professional competence and understanding of the functioning of the judicial system, and a vision for the future development of the court.

In July, the JC supported the budget priorities proposed by the Ministry of Justice for district (city) courts and regional courts for the period 2025–2028, which include a 6% salary increase for court staff. However, the JC noted that the proposed salary increase for first- and second-instance court staff is insufficient. The additional funding for priority measures over the next four years provides for only a 2.6% increase in monthly salaries for court employees.

On 2 October, the State Audit Office (hereinafter – SAO) published a report titled *“Availability and Development of Human Resources in Latvian Courts.”* It concluded that the main problems in the judicial system are the lack of a long-term strategic vision, a growing number of judicial vacancies, and the risk that more than 28% of current judges will retire in the coming years. The situation is particularly critical among judges specialising in land register matters, while court staff face high turnover. According to SAO data, 17% of judges in 2023 were over 61 years old, and by 2027 this figure is expected to reach 28%. In September 2024, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, A. Strupišs, pointed to 67 vacant judicial positions in Latvian courts and stated that this number could rise to 150 in the coming years, as many judges are approaching retirement, while the most capable judicial assistants leave for the private sector.<sup>10</sup>

The report also noted that the judicial system has not effectively developed the position of judicial assistant. No educational requirements are set for the role, and their duties and competences have not been expanded. This has resulted in uncompetitive salaries, low motivation among the approximately 600 existing assistants, and difficulties attracting new qualified staff, leading to high turnover—particularly in Riga, where it reaches up to 41% per year.

On 1 November 2024, the Law on the Judicial Academy entered into force<sup>11</sup>. The Academy will provide training for judges, prosecutors and investigators. Its establishment is co-financed by the European Union's Recovery and Resilience Facility. The Academy began operating on 1 January 2025.

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<sup>9</sup> SKDS, [Pētījums par Latvijas iedzīvotāju attieksmi un saskarsmi ar tiesvedības procesu Latvija. Iedzīvotāju aptauja, 2024. gada augusts.](#)

<sup>10</sup> Tieslietu padomes (2024). Aigars Strupišs: [Tiesu sistēmas efektīva darbība nav iespējama bez kvalitatīva un noturīga atbalsta personāla,](#) 19.09.2024.

<sup>11</sup> [Law on Judicial Council](#), adopted 24.10.2024, in force from 01.11.2024.

## ***Duration of court proceedings***

Judicial statistics show that the duration of proceedings in first-instance courts and in cassation has decreased. According to data from the Court Administration, the average length of first-instance proceedings in 2024 was 2.9 months, which is slightly faster than in 2023 (3.1 months). The average duration of criminal cases was 7.3 months (2023 – 9.1 months), administrative cases 7.2 months (2023 – 8.4 months), and civil cases 2.6 months (2023 – 2.8 months).

In appellate courts, the average length of proceedings in 2024 was 5.3 months, which is longer than in 2023 (4.7 months).

In the Supreme Court Senate, the average duration of proceedings decreased in 2024. In the Administrative Cases Department, the average was 9.8 months (2023 – 13 months), in the Civil Cases Department 4.6 months (2023 – 5.1 months), and in the Criminal Cases Department 3.6 months (2023 – 4.3 months).<sup>12</sup>



## ***Recommendations***

- Develop a targeted public awareness campaign to strengthen trust in the judiciary, with a particular focus on young people and 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.

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<sup>12</sup> [Pārskats par Augstākās tiesas darbu 2024. gadā](#)



# Prisons

**On 11 January 2024, in the case of *D. v. Latvia*, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) found a violation of Article 3, noting that the state had not taken sufficient measures to prevent informal hierarchies in prisons. For the first time, the Court, based on Article 46 of the ECHR, specified concrete measures that Latvia must take to implement the judgment. The construction of Liepāja Prison continued.**

On 11 January 2024, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) in the case *D. v. Latvia*, found a violation of Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), which prohibits torture and inhuman or degrading treatment. The Court concluded that the Latvian authorities had failed to take sufficient action to address the informal prisoner hierarchy within prisons. Amendments to the Latvian Sentence Execution Code came into force, introducing a two-tier prison (closed and open) system.

In 2024,<sup>13</sup> there were 3,505 prisoners across nine prisons in Latvia. Of these, 2,504 (71.44%) were sentenced prisoners, while 1,001 (28.56%) were remand (pre-trial) prisoners. Compared to 2023, when the figure stood at 3,271, the prison population increased by 234, mainly due to a rise in remand cases. This was the first time since 2019 that the number of prisoners in Latvia exceeded 3,500. The largest prison populations were recorded at Riga Central Prison (1,043 prisoners) and Daugavgrīva Prison (1,070 prisoners). Construction of the new Liepāja Prison continued.

In the case of *D. v. Latvia*, the European Court of Human Rights found a violation by the state concerning informal hierarchies in places of detention.



Number of prisoners:

2021 – 3183 persons

2022 – 3229 persons

2023 – 3271 persons

2024 – 3505 persons



Number of minors in prisons:

2021 – 27 persons

2022 – 23 persons

2023 – 30 persons

2024 – 31 persons

<sup>13</sup> Data as of 31.12.2024. See Annual Report of the Prison administration.

There were 31 minors in prison, 19 of whom were convicted and 12 were in pre-trial detention. Of the total prison population, 3,316 (94.74%) were Latvian citizens, while 189 (5.4%) were foreign citizens. Men accounted for 93% of inmates (3,261 individuals), with women making up the remaining 7%.

In 2024, 90.93% of prisoners were released after serving their full sentence, meaning early releases were minimal.

According to the Prison Administration, 29 deaths were registered in prisons during 2024: 20 due to illness, 5 by suicide, and 4 related to drug use or overdose. As of 31 December, the following cases were recorded: 325 of hepatitis C (HCV), 251 of HIV, 29 of AIDS, and 2 of tuberculosis (TB).

On 1 September 2024, amendments to the Latvian Sentence Execution Code came into force, introducing a two-tier prison system.<sup>14</sup> From that date, adult prisoners serve their custodial sentences in either closed prisons (with higher or lower security levels) or open prisons. This transition was prompted by a ruling from the ECtHR.

On 11 January 2024, the ECtHR delivered its judgment in the case *D. v. Latvia*<sup>15</sup>, finding a violation of Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights (prohibition of torture and inhuman or degrading treatment). The Court concluded that Latvian authorities had failed to adequately address the informal inmate hierarchy present in prisons. This was the first case in which the ECtHR, under Article 46 of the Convention, outlined specific measures for the Latvian judicial system to implement to comply with the judgment.

The ECtHR found that in at least two prisons where the applicant had been held, an informal hierarchy existed, and the applicant belonged to the “lowest caste” within that system. The Court noted that state intervention had so far been ad hoc, and in the absence of a comprehensive strategy to address the root of the problem, Latvian authorities had not done enough to mitigate the risks associated with the applicant’s position in the hierarchy. The judgment called for Latvia to take measures to eliminate the systemic issue identified—namely, the social segregation of inmates belonging to the “lowest caste”, their subservience to criminal authorities within the prison, and the resulting inter-prisoner violence.

In its assessment, the ECtHR also considered broader evaluations of prison conditions in Latvia, including findings from the Ombudsman’s Office, the Council of Europe’s Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT), and national courts reviewing complaints against the Prison Administration.

The Cabinet of Ministers tasked the Ministry of Justice with preparing and submitting a [comprehensive action plan by 1 October 2024](#) to implement the ECtHR judgment. This plan was to assess prison conditions and propose improvements in infrastructure, staffing, and resocialisation efforts.

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<sup>14</sup> [Grozījumi Latvijas Sodu izpildes kodeksā](#), adopted on 20.06.2024, in force from 01.09.2024

<sup>15</sup> *D. v. Latvia*, Application no. [76680/17](#) (ECHR, 11 January 2024), at <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-229928>

The main areas of the action plan<sup>16</sup> include the construction of a new prison facility in Liepāja and the renovation of existing sites; the elimination of large-capacity dormitory cells; the introduction of dynamic security measures; improvements to the legal framework governing sentence enforcement; recruitment of additional prison staff and strengthening their professional capacity; and the enhancement of the social reintegration system. Reports on the implementation of this action plan are due by 31 December 2026 and 1 July 2028.

Between 22 and 31 May 2024, Latvia received an *ad hoc* visit from a delegation of the Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT)<sup>17</sup>. The purpose of the visit was to assess prison conditions and follow up on findings from the 2022 visit. The delegation paid particular attention to the actions taken by Latvian authorities in response to CPT's longstanding recommendations regarding inter-prisoner violence, the influence of informal prisoner hierarchies, and the provision of healthcare in prisons.

As of 31 December 2024, there were 488.4 vacant positions within the prison system. On 18 December, the [government decided to increase salaries](#) and introduce a new special allowance for officials of the Prison Administration, effective from 1 January 2025, with additional funding allocated for this purpose. The largest proportional salary increase is planned for guards, supervisors, and inspectors.

In 2024, the Ombudsman's Office carried out 11 visits, including to Daugavgrīva Prison, the Cēsis Correctional Institution for Minors, Riga Central Prison, Jelgava Prison, Jēkabpils Prison, Ilūciems Prison and Liepāja Prison. These visits formed part of the preventive monitoring mechanism.

In its 2024 report<sup>18</sup>, the Ombudsman paid particular attention to the prison regime reform, living conditions in places of detention and the effectiveness of resocialisation measures. Several preventive visits were conducted to assess the situation following the introduction of the new prison regime classification system, which entered into force on 1 September 2024. Problems were identified regarding the uniform implementation of the reform, as well as the availability of information to prisoners about their rights and the possibilities for moving to another regime level.

The Ombudsman again emphasised the need to improve living conditions, particularly about overcrowding, sanitary conditions and access to healthcare. The report also noted that not all places of detention provide sufficient access to education and resocialisation programmes, which are essential for successful reintegration into society.

The Ombudsman also called for strengthening the mechanisms for examining prisoners' complaints, ensuring their independence and effectiveness, and improving staff training in the field of human rights. The report expressed concern about insufficient access to psychological support, especially for prisoners with mental health disorders.

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<sup>16</sup> Ministru kabinets (2024), ["Par rīcību ieslodzīto neformālās hierarhijas mazināšanai ieslodzījuma vietās"](#), 08.10.2024, 21 p.; Also see D. v. Latvia, State of Execution: <https://hudoc.exec.coe.int/eng?i=004-65667>

<sup>17</sup> [Council of Europe anti-torture Committee \(CPT\) visits Latvia](#), Press Release, 03.06.2024

<sup>18</sup> Tiesībsargs. (2025). *Tiesībsarga 2024. gada ziņojums*. Pieejams: [https://www.tiesibargs.lv/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/tiesibargs\\_2024\\_gada\\_zinojums.pdf](https://www.tiesibargs.lv/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/tiesibargs_2024_gada_zinojums.pdf)



### ***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.



# Hate Crimes and Hate Speech

In July 2024, the ECtHR delivered its judgment in *Hanovs v. Latvia*, finding a violation of the ECHR. Several individuals were prosecuted for hate speech and hate-motivated crimes, including the first ever trial of a homophobic hate crime. The State Police detained several skinheads for attacks on migrants. The State Security Service warned of the growing risks of right-wing extremism in society, particularly among young people. In November, a smear campaign targeting LR4 journalist Olga Kņazeva spread online.

On 18 July 2024, the ECHR delivered its judgment in **Hanovs v. Latvia**, recognizing violations of the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms



Initiated criminal proceedings according to Articles 78, 74<sup>1</sup> and 150 of the Criminal Law

	Article 78	Article 74. <sup>1</sup>	Article 150
2019	5	2	2
2020	5	1	11
2021	4	1	6
2022	32	28	6
2023	10	14	1
2024	26	18	4



The State Police detained 11 skinheads

Deniss Hanovs was attacked in early November 2021 while walking near the Ķengarags market with his partner. Two aggressive men began insulting them, kicked Hanovs in the back, made sexual remarks, and attempted further assault, but Hanovs managed to take refuge in a flower kiosk. During the investigation, one of the attackers—whom police managed to identify—admitted that his actions were motivated by hostility toward homosexual people and that he wanted them to stop publicly expressing their sexual orientation.

The court determined that homophobic motives were established in the investigation. While Hanovs avoided physical injury, the incident reached the level of severity

<sup>19</sup>ECHR (2024). Hanovs v. Latvia (application no. 40861/22), 18 July, <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/fre?i=001-235016>

associated with Article 3 of the Convention. Furthermore, homophobic verbal attacks and threats of violence were deemed severe enough to violate Article 8, which guarantees the right to private life. The administrative offense proceedings did not provide either just compensation for Hanovs or an adequate penalty for the perpetrator.

The court emphasised that state authorities have a duty to prevent hate-motivated violence and investigate any potential connection between discriminatory motives and violent acts. Discriminatory treatment can amount to degrading behaviour when it reaches a level that infringes on human dignity. Discriminatory remarks and insults should always be considered an aggravating factor. The court stressed that impunity for hate crimes poses significant risks to fundamental rights protected under the Convention. If such incidents are not addressed, they can normalise hatred toward LGBTQI+ individuals, reinforce intolerance and discrimination, and contribute to the recurrence of such actions.

The European Court of Human Rights ordered Latvia to pay Hanovs €10,000 in moral compensation. Hanovs was represented in the case by Jekaterina Tumule, a lawyer from the Latvian Centre for Human Rights.

In response to the ruling, the Prosecutor General's Office reopened criminal proceedings against the attacker. The case was reclassified under Article 231, Part 2 of the Criminal Law, concerning gross public order violations that reflect obvious disrespect for society or brazen disregard for general conduct norms.

### ***Changes to the regulatory framework***

Amendments to the Criminal Law (CL), which entered into force on 4 July 2024, introduced a qualifying element—torture—into Section 149.<sup>1</sup> (violation of the prohibition of discrimination) and Section 150 (incitement of social hatred), paragraph three. This has strengthened criminal liability for breaches of the prohibition of discrimination and for inciting social hatred and discord when linked to acts of torture. It should be noted that similar amendments were not made to Section 78 of the CL, which concerns incitement of national, ethnic, or religious hatred.

The same amendments also removed non-custodial sanctions — community service and fines —from paragraph three of Section 150. This proposal was submitted by the Ministry of Justice, arguing that community service and fines do not effectively promote changes in a person's thinking or behaviour. At the same time, probation supervision was retained as an alternative to imprisonment for incitement of social hatred when associated with violence, threats, or torture.

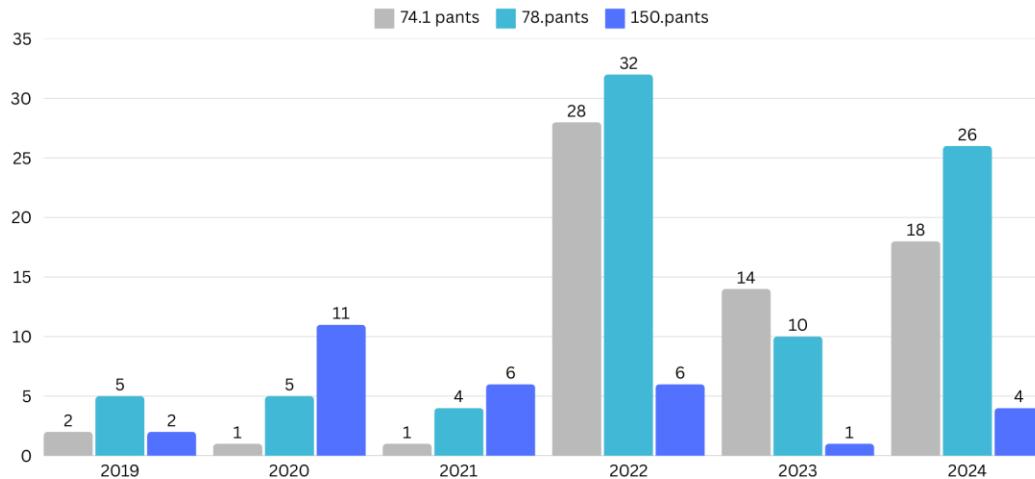
### ***Hate Crimes and Hate Speech***

#### *Official data<sup>20</sup>*

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<sup>20</sup> "In its criminal statistics reports, the Information Centre of the Ministry of the Interior compiles data on the total number of criminal proceedings initiated under specific provisions of the Criminal Law – Section 74<sup>1</sup> (justification of genocide, crimes against humanity, crimes against peace and war crimes), Section 78 (incitement of national, ethnic and racial hatred), and Section 150 (incitement of social hatred and discord). If the hate motive is considered an aggravating circumstance but the offence is classified under another provision of the Special Part of the Criminal Law,

According to the criminal statistics of the Information Centre of the Ministry of the Interior<sup>21</sup>, in 2024, 18 criminal proceedings were initiated under Article 74.1, 26 - under Article 78, and four - under Article 150. The statistics do not distinguish between hate crime and hate speech.



*Source: Information Centre of the Ministry of Interior*

In 2024, the State Security Service (VDD) launched 12 criminal proceedings related to hate speech.<sup>22</sup> Five of them were linked to statements that fuelled national hatred or discord, mostly targeting Latvians and Ukrainians (Criminal Law Section 78). Two cases were opened for justifying and glorifying war crimes (Criminal Law Section 74.1), while the remaining five involved elements of both offences.

At the end of April 2024, the VDD warned about the risks of increasing right-wing extremism<sup>23</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, who are targeted by right-wing extremists. Overall, in 2024, 11 skinheads were detained<sup>24</sup>, including the leaders of two informal skinhead groups, who remain in custody.

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such potential hate crimes are not included in the Information Centre's statistics. Information on criminal proceedings initiated under Sections 74<sup>1</sup> and 78 is also available in the annual reports of the State Security Service, while data on Sections 78 and 150 can also be found in the annual reports of the State Police

<sup>21</sup> Ministry of Interior Information Centre (2024). Criminal statistics, <https://www.ic.iem.gov.lv/lv/kriminala-statistika>

<sup>22</sup> Latvian State Security Service (2024). Annual Report 2024, <https://vdd.gov.lv/uploads/materials/40/en/annual-report-2024.pdf>

<sup>23</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>24</sup> Latvian State Security Service (2024). Annual Report 2024, <https://vdd.gov.lv/uploads/materials/40/en/annual-report-2024.pdf>

According to the 2024 annual report of the State Police<sup>25</sup>, 16 criminal proceedings were initiated under Section 78 of the Criminal Law, three under Section 150, and 47 under Section 74.1. These cases involve the justification and glorification of war crimes in public spaces and on social media, photos posted on social media profiles featuring stylised prohibited Soviet regime and pro-Kremlin symbols, various hate-inciting graffiti on building facades and vehicles, desecration of the Ukrainian flag, as well as comments expressed online.

**Number of criminal proceedings on hate crimes (2019-2024)<sup>26</sup>**

Criminal Law	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
	Charges brought				
Section 78	1	1	11	6	19
Section 150	0	4	0	2	1
Proceedings transferred to the court					
Section 78	0	0	4	3	15
Section 150	0	4	0	0	0
Sentenced (including by a prosecutor's injunction)					
Section 78	0	3	7	9	7
Section 150	1	3	0	0	1

*Source: Ministry of Interior, Office of the Prosecutor General*

## **Hate Motivated Violence**

On January 14, 2024, in central Riga, a man attacked two Indian citizens. The attack occurred next to a kebab house owned by one of the victims who owns Laims Cafe and Lebanese Shawarma. Initially, the attacker struck one victim, then began hitting the second, resulting in the victim being hospitalised with a broken nose, jaw, and facial injuries. The victims claim the attacker made racist remarks. Later that same day, approximately three hours after the incident, the attacker returned to the eatery owned by the victim and aggressively confronted its employees, including threatening with violence and making racist insults. A criminal case was initiated regarding the incident.<sup>27</sup>

15 June, two skinheads attacked a young man, robbed him, tore the Latvian flag from his clothing, forced him to speak Russian, and compelled him to praise the Russian people. The skinheads also filmed the assault themselves on a mobile phone. The attackers were detained, and criminal proceedings were initiated.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>25</sup> State Police (2024). Annual Report 2024 (in Latvian), <https://www.vp.gov.lv/lv/media/26091/download?attachment>

<sup>26</sup> Source: Replies to the list of issues in relation to the fourth periodic report of Latvia on the implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 16 December 1966, Annexes, p. 10.

<sup>27</sup> ENG.LSM.LV (2024). Indian businessman hospitalised by suspected racist attack in Riga, 3 February,

<https://eng.lsm.lv/article/society/crime/03.02.2024-indian-businessman-hospitalised-by-suspected-racist-attack-in-ridge.a541494/>

<sup>28</sup> Valsts policija, [Aizturēti skinhedu subkultūras pārstāvji par laupīšanu un naida izraisīšanu](https://www.vp.gov.lv/lv/media/26091/download?attachment), 18.06.2024.

On July 31, police officers of the Riga Regional Criminal Police Department of the State Police together with the State Security Service and with the support of the Special Task Battalion of the State Police, detained seven skinheads in the capital Riga in connection with an attack on food delivery couriers.<sup>29</sup> Searches were also conducted in several residences. On August 1, Riga Regional Criminal Police Department of the State Police detained another person also in connection with an attack on food delivery couriers. In total, seven individuals were detained, born in 2005, 2006, 2008, 2009, and 2010. Of those, five were remanded in custody. Criminal proceedings have been initiated under Section 78, Part 3 of the Criminal Law, specifically for actions aimed at inciting national, ethnic, racial, or religious hatred or discord, if associated with violence or threats, or if committed by an organised group. Such an offense is punishable by imprisonment for up to ten years, along with probation supervision for up to three years, or without it.

In July 2024, during a public event in Ance, Ventspils Municipality, a woman and her husband made offensive and hostile remarks toward a Ukrainian citizen, targeting him for his Ukrainian ethnicity. During the conflict, the man overturned a deep fryer filled with hot oil, which splashed and injured the Ukrainian citizen and two women, causing bodily harm. The police initiated a criminal case regarding the incident, and the case was sent to the prosecutor's office in December 2024 for prosecution.<sup>30</sup>

### **Civil society data**

In 2024, the Latvian Centre for Human Rights received reports about four possible hate crimes. Two cases were attacks on Indian nationals based on their skin colour. In one incident, on 14 January, a person assaulted two Indian nationals outside a café in Riga.<sup>31</sup> In the second case, which occurred on 2 March in Riga, a food delivery courier was attacked when someone sprayed pepper gas in his face.

The third incident involved an attempted attack on a Jewish man and his wife based on their ethnicity. Their neighbour, holding knives in both hands and brandishing them in the victims' direction, made offensive and hateful statements, declaring that Jews should be killed and exterminated. The incident took place on 29 October 2023, while the court proceedings commenced in November 2024.

The fourth case was linked to the harassment of a Ukrainian refugee family on 12 March 2024, where the letter "Z" was drawn near their residence in Salaspils, and their door was vandalised with paint.

The Latvian Centre for Human Rights provided consultations to all the victims and ensured legal representation for two of them during the criminal proceedings, including trial in one case.

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<sup>29</sup> State Police (2024). Six representatives of the skinhead subculture have been detained for committing a particularly serious crime, 03.08, (in Latvia) at <https://www.vp.gov.lv/lv/jaunums/papildinats-par-seviski-smaga-nozieguma-izdarisanu-aiztureti-6-skinhedu-subkulturas-parstavji>; ENG.LSM.LV (2024). Racist attacks on delivery drivers more common than they seem, say police, 12.08, <https://eng.lsm.lv/article/society/crime/12.08.2024-racist-attacks-on-delivery-drivers-more-common-than-they-seem-say-police.a564677/>

<sup>30</sup> Delfi.lv (2024). A Ukrainian citizen was doused with hot oil – police request charges against aggressive spouses (*Ukrainas pilsonim uzlēja karstu eļļu – policija lūdz apsūdzēt agresīvus laulātos*), 08.01, <https://www.delfi.lv/161/criminal/120056621/ukrainas-pilsonim-uzleja-karstu-ellu-policija-ludz-apsudzet-agresivus-laulatos>

<sup>31</sup> Also described in a media article above.

## Prosecutors/Court cases

In 2024, several individuals were prosecuted for hate-motivated crimes, including the first-ever trial in Latvia of a homophobic attack.

On April 9, 2024, the Kurzeme Regional Court sentenced a person to imprisonment for attacking a young man on May 20, 2022, who had a Ukrainian flag draped over his shoulders. The regional court overturned the initial court ruling that had imposed a suspended sentence and instead sentenced the accused to two years of imprisonment. The court concluded that a suspended sentence for the accused would not lead to a fair resolution of criminal legal relations and would not meet the purpose of punishment.<sup>32</sup> The Senate of the Supreme Court rejected the accused's request for cassation proceedings, thereby making the court ruling final.<sup>33</sup>

On August 19, 2024, the Riga City Court examined [a criminal case](#) involving two individuals affiliated with the skinhead subculture, who were held criminally liable for inciting national, ethnic, and racial hatred and discord within a group. According to the charges, the two young individuals, identifying as part of the radical "neo-Nazi skinheads" movement, assaulted and threatened two other youths in Vērmanes Garden, Riga, on February 22, 2024. While filming the incident, they forced the victims to perform the Nazi salute and praise Adolf Hitler, later distributing the footage via a Telegram channel. As a result, the court sentenced the adult perpetrator to 1 year and 6 months of imprisonment, followed by 2 years of probation supervision. Meanwhile, the minor was sentenced to four years of probation supervision.

On August 22, 2024, the Riga City Court<sup>34</sup> convicted a person for threatening to kill and inflict serious bodily harm (Article 132, Part One) against an individual of Turkic ethnicity. According to the ruling, the convicted person, driven by ethnic hatred, threatened the victim in the street, saying they would kill, burn, and cut him, all while keeping a hand in their pocket, where a knife was hidden.

On 5 December 2024, the Vidzeme District Court sentenced a man to one-and-a-half-year imprisonment for a racially motivated attack. He will also have to perform 96 hours of community service after serving the prison sentence. The racially motivated incident occurred in a restaurant in the resort town of Jūrmala on 13 June. The man who was intoxicated aggressively approached two men who were sitting at the table and who were of different racial and ethnic origin. He delivered a powerful kick to the back of the head of one man, then grabbed him by the hair and, pulling backward, toppled him to the floor along with the chair on the terrace. The racial motive was also confirmed by witnesses, other restaurant clients and staff. The victim sustained light injuries. The court concluded that "[g]iven that a deliberate and serious crime was committed with racist motives and involved violence, the defendant has shown no remorse for his actions. Furthermore, he has later committed other criminal offenses for which he has been convicted and is currently serving a

<sup>32</sup> Kurzeme Regional Court (2024). Case No. KA02-0046-24/9; ECLI:LV:KUAT:2024:0409.11095055222.5.S, 09.04.24

<sup>33</sup> Republic of Latvia Senate Decision (2024). Criminal Cases Department, Case No. 11095055222, SKK-391/2024, ECLI:LV:AT:2024:0725.11095055222.6.L /

<sup>34</sup> Riga City Court, Case archive No K77-3047-24/113 ECLI:LV:RPT:2024:0822.19720567124.2.S, 22.08.2024

sentence. Therefore, the court considers that he should be punished with actual imprisonment.”<sup>35</sup> (Articles 48, 231).

### ***Homophobic violence***

On October 14, 2024, the Latgale District Court delivered a verdict in a case concerning a homophobic attack on L. Amareins and his partner in Daugavpils on May 4, 2023. The court found the defendant guilty of committing a criminal offense under Article 231, Part 2 of the Criminal Law (hooliganism) and sentenced him to seven months of imprisonment. The court concluded that an aggravating circumstance in the defendant’s liability was the homophobic motive (Section 48, first paragraph, point 14 of the Criminal Law). The court partially granted the victims’ claims for moral damages, ordering the defendant to pay L. Amareins €2,500 in compensation and €2,000 to the second victim. In 2025, the case will be reviewed in the appeal instance following a protest by the prosecutor, as well as appeals from both the victims and the defendant. The victims are represented by the LCHR lawyer Jekaterina Tumule.

### ***Hate Speech***

In 2024, one publicly available prosecutor’s injunction<sup>36</sup> was issued under Section 78.2 of the Criminal Law. In this case, the hate speech was directed against Ukrainians. The convicted person was sentenced to 280 hours of community service.

In the publicly available court rulings from 2024, there are three first-instance court judgments in cases where individuals were convicted under Section 78, Part Two of the Criminal Law (hate speech on the internet). In one of the cases, the hate speech expressed online was directed against Latvians. The individual was sentenced by the court to one year of suspended imprisonment.<sup>37</sup>

In one case, two individuals posted a video online showing them first hitting the Ukrainian flag against a pole and later burning it while commenting that this was the end for Ukrainians and referring to the burning of the flag as “sounds of joy.” For this criminal offence, they were sentenced to community service of 170 and 160 hours, respectively.<sup>38</sup>

A verdict was also issued in a case where a person was convicted under both Section 74.1(2) of the Criminal Law (justification of genocide, crimes against humanity, crimes against peace, and war crimes online) and Section 78(2). In this case, the convicted individual had published a video online that justified Russia’s war crimes and genocide against Latvians, aiming to incite national and ethnic hatred and discord among Latvians, Ukrainians, and Russians. The individual was sentenced to three years of suspended imprisonment.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Vidzemes District Court in Madona, Case archive No K71-0334-24/18, ECLI:LV:VRT:2024:1205.14100079823.2.S, 05.12.2024

<sup>36</sup> 2024. gada 26. februāra prokurora priekšraksts par sodu krimināllietā Nr. Nr. 11840004222

<sup>37</sup> Kurzemes rajona tiesas 2024. gada 27. jūnija spriedums lietā Nr. 11510004823

<sup>38</sup> Rīgas pilsētas tiesas 2024. gada 26. septembra spriedums lietā Nr. K77-2386-24/121

<sup>39</sup> Vidzeme District Court in Madona, Case archive No K71-0485-24/11 ECLI:LV:VRT:2024:0829.18400000924.2., 29.08.2024

## **Digital Services Act**

On 17 February 2024, the EU Digital Services Act (hereinafter referred to as the DSA) entered into force. Its objective is to reduce the dissemination of illegal content, including hate speech, in the online environment. The coordinator for the implementation of the Act in Latvia is the Consumer Rights Protection Centre.

The DSA provides for the granting of “trusted flagger” status to experts who report illegal content or the use of illegal services to platform service providers. These reports carry particular significance, as they must be reviewed by the platforms as a priority.

To date, no recognised trusted flaggers have been registered in Latvia.

## **Hate Speech against Journalists**

In November 2025, an online smear campaign was launched against LR4 journalist Olga Kñazeva. During the LR4 programme *Open Conversation* on 21 November, the host, O. Kñazeva<sup>40</sup>, read out a listener’s comment about the Latvian language, which stated: “[...] when will Latvian politicians realise that the state language is not actually a language but merely a list of requirements for communication between the state and its citizens?” After reading the comment, the host asked the studio guests what could be done to reduce the prevalence of such opinions.

Shortly after, an internet blogger posted a YouTube video titled “*Latvian Language Is NOT a Language!*”, featuring Kñazeva’s photo. In the video, the blogger misrepresented the listener’s comment, presenting it as her own statement rather than something she was reading aloud. A clip from the video quickly spread across social media, including X, leading to a wave of hate speech and harassment against the journalist.

Latvian Radio condemned the attacks on journalists, stating that targeting them based on their ethnicity or nationality is unacceptable.<sup>41</sup> The Latvian Public Media Ombudsman, reviewing the controversy, noted that claims of misconduct in the programme and the host’s actions largely stemmed from social media posts. These posts featured isolated fragments from the broadcast, taken out of context. The ombudsman also pointed out that some publications appeared more focused on stirring controversy rather than ensuring the quality of public media content.<sup>42</sup> Despite O. Kñazeva filing a complaint, the police ultimately declined to initiate criminal proceedings.

The Latvian Journalists’ Association created a platform where anyone, including journalists themselves, can report instances of hate speech, violence, harassment, and intimidation directed at

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<sup>40</sup> LSM (2024). Latvijas Radio 4 journalist has turned to the State Security Service regarding defamation on social media (Latvijas Radio 4 žurnāliste vēršas drošības dienestā par nomelnošanu sociālajos medijos), 26.11, <https://www.lsm.lv/raksts/zinas/latvija/26.11.2024-latvijas-radio-4-zurnaliste-versas-drosibas-dienesta-par-nomelnosanu-socialajos-medijos.a577773/>

<sup>41</sup> LETA (2024), Latvian Radio has noticed a surge in online attacks against LR4 journalists, 02.12

<sup>42</sup> Latvian Public Electronic Media Ombudsman (2024). Official opinion on the LR4 programme “Atklātā saruna” and its host Olga Kñazeva’s actions (*Atzinums par VSIA “Latvijas Radio” programmas “LR4” 2024. gada 21. novembra raidījumu “Atklātā saruna” un tā vadītājas Olgas Kñazevas rīcību*), 06.12.2024. Nr. 29/6-3

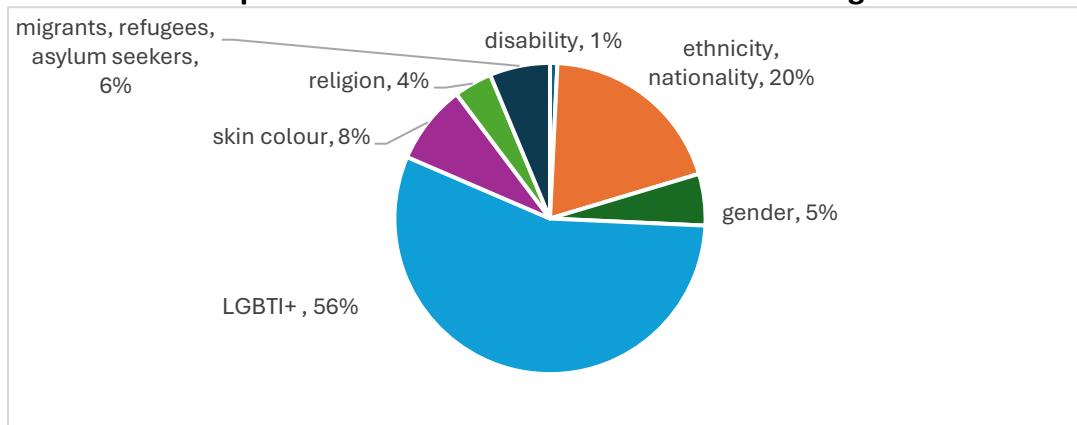
[https://lr1.lsm.lv/public/assets/userfiles/Atzinums\\_29\\_6-3\\_LR4\\_K%C5%86azeva\\_anonimizets.pdf](https://lr1.lsm.lv/public/assets/userfiles/Atzinums_29_6-3_LR4_K%C5%86azeva_anonimizets.pdf)

journalists and other media professionals—whether on social media or in everyday life. The LŽA website features a dedicated “[alert button](#)”, allowing individuals to submit reports of experienced violence, hate speech, or harassment. Reports can also be made anonymously. Both journalists and other observers who witness such incidents are encouraged to report them.

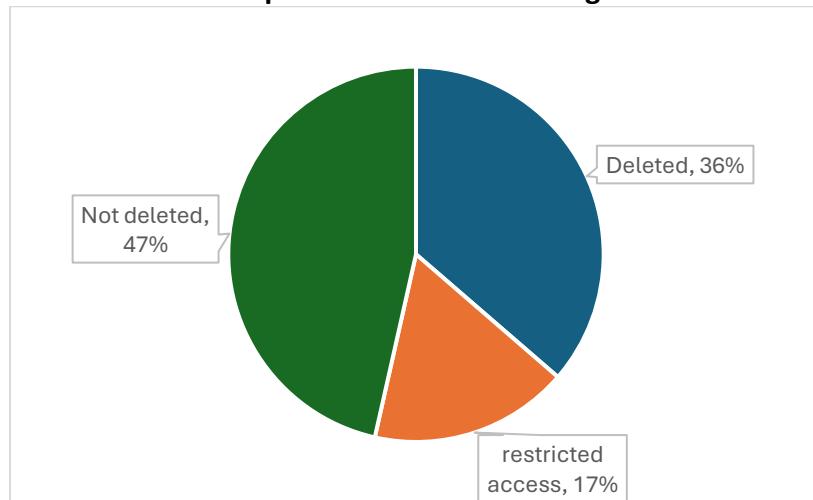
### **LCHR data**

In 2024, the Latvian Centre for Human Rights (LCHR) received reports of 28 cases of hate speech, including 23 online and five verbal attacks. Additionally, during its monitoring of online platforms, LCHR identified 553 instances of hate speech. Of those, 45% were directed at LGBTQI+ community; 20% based on ethnic or national identity, 11% related to gender identity, 8% targeting individuals due to race or skin colour. Regarding hate speech manifestations: 35% involved insults; 12% - dehumanisation, 16% - calls for violence, 16% involved incitement to hatred. In 36% of cases the hateful content was removed, in 17% of cases access to the content was restricted in Latvia, 47% of hateful content was not removed.

**Online Hate Speech – Overview Based on LCC Monitoring Data in 2024**



**% of Deleted Hate Speech – LCHR Monitoring Data in 2024**





## ***Recommendations***

- Introduce regular training for law enforcement agencies on recognising, investigating, and preventing illegal hate speech and hate crimes, with particular attention to the protection of LGBTQI+ rights and the safety of journalists.
- 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.
- Ensure consistency in the regulatory framework by including torture as a qualifying element in Article 78 of the Criminal Law.

# Non- Discrimination

On 2 January 2024, the Office of the Ombudsman's Department for the Prevention of Discrimination commenced its operations. For the first time, a dedicated budget of €330,803 has been allocated to promote equality and prevent discrimination. On 1 July, the legal framework for partnerships—including same-sex partnerships—entered into force. Although surveys conducted in 2024 indicate the presence of discrimination in both education and employment sectors, the number of legal proceedings in Latvia remains low.

## Surveys

Surveys conducted in Latvia in 2024 continue to reveal experiences of discrimination in both employment and educational settings.

According to data from [a survey](#) carried out in 2024 by the research company *Kantar*, commissioned by the Ministry of Education and Science, 36% of young people in Latvia have encountered discrimination due to their age, appearance, sexual orientation, or other reasons. 53% of respondents did not believe they had ever been discriminated against for these reasons, while 11% of young people found it difficult to answer the question.

In a [public opinion survey](#) conducted by the information technology group *Tietoevry* in cooperation with the research agency *Norstat*, 39% of respondents stated that they had been refused employment in the labour market due to discriminatory reasons. 22% believed they had been denied a job vacancy because of their age, while 6% attributed the refusal to their race or ethnic origin. A quarter of those surveyed reported experiencing workplace discrimination based on age, gender, sexual orientation, or other factors; 10%



36% young people have encountered discrimination.



In the Gender Equality Index, Latvia ranked 19th out of the 27 EU Member States.



38% LGBTQI+ persons have experienced discrimination in at least one life domain



Annual budget of the Ombudsman's Anti-Discrimination Department is EUR 330 803

encountered discriminatory jokes and remarks, and 8% experienced overt hostility from management and colleagues.<sup>43</sup>

According to the [European Gender Equality Index](#), Latvia ranked 19th among the 27 EU Member States in 2024. Since 2021, Latvia's score has increased by 1.1 points yet remains 8.4 points below the EU average. Despite these improvements, Latvia's position in the ranking has remained unchanged—19th place.

In the [LGBTQI+ survey published by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights in 2024](#), 19% of respondents in Latvia reported experiencing discrimination at work or during job searches in the year prior to the survey. Discrimination affects many areas of life, such as visits to cafés, restaurants, hospitals, or shops. Overall, 38% of respondents in Latvia experienced discrimination in at least one area of life during the year before the survey. Only 7% of those who experienced discrimination reported it to an equality body or another organisation.

## ***Legal Remedies in Cases of Discrimination***

### ***Ombudsman***

On 2 January 2024, the Office of the Ombudsman's Anti-Discrimination Division commenced its operations. The new unit is tasked with preventing discrimination, raising public awareness, providing legal assistance to victims of discrimination, and overseeing the implementation of international legal norms binding on Latvia, as well as national legislation in the field of anti-discrimination. The establishment of the division is linked to the adoption of two EU directives aimed at strengthening the role of equality bodies across the European Union. For this purpose, the Ombudsman was allocated funding from the state budget for 2024 amounting to €330,803. This marks the first time that a separate budget has been designated specifically for promoting equality and combatting discrimination. In 2024, the department employed four staff members – three legal experts and one sociologist.

In 2024, a series of studies were commissioned by the Ombudsman, including: ["The Concept of Discrimination in Latvian Media: 1 January 2022 – 30 June 2024"](#), ["Artificial Intelligence Systems and Aspects of Discrimination"](#), and ["Observance of the Principle of Non-Discrimination in Employment Relations with Parents of Young Children"](#). Given the sensitivity surrounding language requirements—particularly Russian, but also English—imposed by employers on potential employees, the Ombudsman commissioned surveys examining both [employee](#) and [employer attitudes](#) towards foreign language requirements in the workplace.

At the Ombudsman's request, the Baltic Institute of Social Sciences conducted a study titled ["Mapping Equality Data"](#). The research covered seven areas: physical safety of the population, legal protection, employment, education and science, social benefits and services, EU fund investments, and healthcare. The aim of the study was to assess the state of discrimination in the country and initiate dialogue with other public institutions on the need for data collection and publication.

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<sup>43</sup> The public opinion survey was conducted by Tietoevry in collaboration with Norstat in July 2024, polling 725 residents of Latvia aged between 18 and 74.

In 2024, several studies and surveys were published concerning the rights of persons with disabilities. [Survey results](#) indicate that over the past decade, public attitudes towards people with disabilities have become more inclusive. However, there has been a 20% increase in the number of individuals unwilling to defend their rights (compared to the data from the studies conducted in 2014 and 2019-2020). The least motivated groups include seniors (35%), non-Latvians (30%), and persons with mobility impairments (32%). Other studies and reports included surveys on "Taxi Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities and Parents of Young Children"<sup>44</sup> and "Website Accessibility for People with Disabilities"<sup>45</sup>.

In 2024, the Ombudsman's Office received [71 complaints alleging discrimination](#) (2.55% of all complaints). Forty-seven responses to complaints were prepared, and seven investigation procedures were initiated, six of which were completed. A total of 82 legal consultations were provided (2.45% of all consultations). In 2024, a significant number of complaints concerned possible discrimination on the grounds of sex (pregnancy) and disability (access to goods and services in the private sector, activities in the public sector). However, the largest number of complaints related to possible discrimination on the grounds of language (employment). Complaints regarding language use mainly concerned foreign-language requirements in job advertisements.

## ***Other State Institutions***

### ***State Labour Inspectorate***

In 2024, the State Labour Inspectorate (hereinafter – SLI) received 100 submissions concerning potential violations of the principle of equality (Section 7 of the Labour Law) and the prohibition of discrimination (Section 29 of the Labour Law). Eight of these submissions referred to possible discriminatory situations in the workplace. Five cases were based on ethnic origin/language, and one case each on gender, family status, and political beliefs. In three instances, the SLI initiated administrative infringement proceedings, but no breach of the prohibition of discrimination was established.<sup>46</sup>

### ***State Education Quality Service***

In 2024, the Supervision Department of the State Education Quality Service (hereinafter – SEQS) reviewed one submission regarding a possible breach of the prohibition of differential treatment in the admission of a pupil to basic education on the grounds of nationality. Following an investigation, SEQS did not confirm the claims made in the submission.

### ***Health Inspectorate***

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<sup>44</sup> Ombudsman (2024). Taxi accessibility for people with disabilities and parents of young children (*Taksometru piekļūstamība personām ar invalitāti un mazu bērnu vecākiem*), 10 October, <https://www.tiesibsargs.lv/resource/petijums-taksometru-pieklustamiba/>

<sup>45</sup> Ombudsman (2024). Accessibility of State and Municipal Institutions' Websites. Study – Technical Analysis (*Valsts un pašvaldības iestāžu tīmekļvietnu piekļūstamība. Pētījums – tehniskā analīze*), <https://www.tiesibsargs.lv/resource/valsts-un-pasvaldibas-iestazu-tīmekļvietnu-pieklustamiba-petijums-tehniska-analize/>

<sup>46</sup> Reply of the State Labour Inspectorate to the information request by the Latvian Centre for Human Rights. Letter No. 2025-01-07/105 03.04.2025.

In 2024, the Health Inspectorate reviewed one submission in which a patient's relative alleged possible discrimination against the patient on the grounds of age and nationality. The investigation did not confirm discrimination — the patient received timely and quality care. However, shortcomings in communication were identified at the medical institution, for which a warning was issued and instructions were given to comply with the provisions of the Patients' Rights Law in future.<sup>47</sup>

### ***Consumer Rights Protection Centre***

In 2024, the Consumer Rights Protection Centre (hereinafter – CRPC) received three submissions regarding possible discrimination. These concerned discrimination against a Ukrainian citizen due to insufficient knowledge of the official language, hotel services and accessibility for a wheelchair user, and refusal to provide courses due to disability status. The CRPC advised the individuals to contact the relevant institutions or service providers. The Centre did not initiate administrative proceedings or impose penalties for breaches of anti-discrimination provisions, while noting that its records of complaints may be incomplete.<sup>48</sup>

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

In 2024, the Latvian Centre for Human Rights (LCHR) received 25 complaints concerning possible discrimination. In 11 cases, the Centre established that the complaint clearly did not concern discrimination but rather was related to other potential legal issues.

Of the 14 complaints in which signs of discrimination were initially identified, seven concerned access to goods and services, two related to employment, two to housing, two to education, and one to social security.

Five complaints involved alleged discrimination on the grounds of skin colour, national origin, or ethnicity (all concerning Indian nationals residing in Latvia); three were based on citizenship; two on disability; one on language; one on age; one on gender identity; and one on both gender and age.

In one case, the Centre received a complaint regarding alleged "racial profiling" at an airport, involving discrimination based on skin colour. The complainant alleged that during immigration control, a State Border Guard (SBG) officer checked documents only of passengers with darker skin tones, while those with lighter skin were not inspected. The Centre contacted the SBG for clarification. In its response, the SBG stated that "the inspection was carried out in accordance with internal and external regulatory acts governing the activities of competent authorities, without allowing discriminatory bias." The SBG explained that within the Schengen area, immigration checks are conducted on a random basis and are guided by risk assessments identifying threats and risk profiles. It further clarified that "passenger flows are inspected according to developed risk analysis profiles and indicators, with the aim of optimally utilising personnel resources, avoiding delays for

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<sup>47</sup> Response from the Supervision Department of the State Education Quality Service to the information request submitted by the Latvian Centre for Human Rights. Letter No. 4ud-04e/434.

<sup>48</sup> Response from the Health Inspectorate to the information request submitted by the Latvian Centre for Human Rights. Letter No. 2.1.-6./3071, dated 8 April 2025.

other travellers, and ensuring effective control.” The complainant was informed of their rights and the procedures available should they wish to pursue the matter further.

Three complaints concerned refusal of entry to nightclubs in central Riga. In two cases, Indian nationals claimed they were denied entry while observing that individuals with lighter skin were admitted. In another case, men were refused entry on the grounds that “men under the age of 25 are not permitted,” while women under 25 were allowed in. Letters were sent to the nightclubs requesting clarification of the incidents and their customer service policies, but none of the establishments responded.

Two complaints related to housing rental. In one case, several Sri Lankan nationals reported potentially discriminatory treatment by a landlord. In the other, an Indian national was refused a rental on the grounds that the property was only available to locals.

Two complaints concerned access to hotel services for persons with disabilities. One complaint involved a potentially unjustified requirement for Russian language skills in a job advertisement. Another complaint concerned possible discrimination against a transgender person at a university.

## **Case Law**

### ***European Court of Human Rights***

In 2024, the European Court of Human Rights delivered two judgments in cases against Latvia, both of which involved Article 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights (prohibition of discrimination): *Hanovs v. Latvia* (see further **Hate Speech and Hate Crimes**), and *Djeri and Others v. Latvia* (see: **Minority Rights and Social Cohesion**).

### ***Constitutional Court Ruling***

On 11 July 2024, the Constitutional Court delivered its judgment in Case No. 2023-10-03, [“On the Compliance of Paragraph 3 of Binding Regulation No. 37 of the Jūrmala City Council of 11 October 2012 ‘On the Procedure for Granting Real Estate Tax Relief’ with Article 91 of the Constitution.”](#) The case was initiated following an application by the Supreme Court’s Senate, which was reviewing an administrative matter in which a private individual challenged the calculation of real estate tax (hereinafter – RET) without the application of relief.

The central issue in the case was whether the provision in the municipality’s binding regulations, which denies RET relief to individuals who are registered residents of the municipality but are neither citizens of EU Member States, EEA countries, or the Swiss Confederation, nor Latvian non-citizens, complies with the principle of non-discrimination.

The Constitutional Court found that all relevant RET payers are in comparable circumstances and that the contested provision establishes differential treatment based on citizenship or non-citizen status. The Court emphasised that even when granting relief to certain categories of RET payers, Latvia must adhere to applicable tax conventions and the principle of non-discrimination contained therein, as well as EU legal norms requiring equal treatment of third-country nationals.

The Court concluded that by categorising RET payers according to their nationality or non-citizen status, the municipality had exceeded the authority granted by the legislator in determining tax relief, as nationality is not an objective criterion for granting such relief. Consequently, the Court ruled that the contested provision was not issued in accordance with proper procedure and does not comply with Article 91 of the Constitution.

### ***LGBTQI+ rights***

On 1 July, amendments to eight laws came into force, establishing the legal framework for registered partnerships. [Amendments to the Law on the Register of Natural Persons](#) stipulate that information about registered partnerships in Latvia must be included and updated in the register. This information is entered by a sworn notary. Transitional provisions specify that details of family legal relationships established by court judgment<sup>49</sup> may be updated in the register by the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs (OCMA) upon request. As of March 2025, a total of 476 partnerships had been registered in Latvia, including 182 same-sex partnerships.<sup>50</sup> The legal institution of partnership applies exclusively to relationships established within Latvia and does not regulate the recognition of same-sex marriages or registered partnerships concluded in other countries. Following the registration of a partnership, partners gain certain rights, such as the ability to make decisions regarding each other's medical treatment, receive pension payments calculated for the deceased partner that were not disbursed prior to death, and benefit from personal income tax relief on mutual gifts and loans. The amendments do not regulate key aspects such as property relations between partners, inheritance rights, or contact rights with children.

The State Language Centre's Latvian Language Expert Commission reviewed the issue of [gender-neutral terminology for non-binary persons in Latvian](#). It concluded that it is not possible to create a specific gender-neutral pronoun in Latvian that conforms to grammatical norms. The Commission rejected proposed alternatives such as "viņ", "viš", and "viņo", stating that they distort the grammar of the Latvian language.

As the most linguistically appropriate terms, the Commission recommended using "[nebināra persona]" (non-binary person) or "[nebinārs cilvēks]" (non-binary human), which in text may be substituted with masculine or feminine pronouns depending on context. The Commission emphasised that the masculine gender in Latvian serves as the unmarked or neutral grammatical form.

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<sup>49</sup> Regarding the application submitted to the court by 30 June 2024.

<sup>50</sup> [Tieslietu ministre zvērinātu notāru kopsapulcē iezīmē prioritātes: paplašināt notāru pieejamību reģionos un bērnu tiesību stiprināšanai](#)



### ***Recommendations:***

- Improve the statistics of the Ombudsman Office's Anti-discrimination department regarding complaints related to discrimination, including breaking down the data by grounds of discrimination and indicating in how many cases a violation of the prohibition of discrimination was or was not confirmed.
- 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.
- Broaden the scope of rights arising from registered partnerships, including partners' property relations, inheritance rights, and contact rights with children.

# Violence against Women



On 1 May, the Istanbul Convention came into force. Amendments to the Criminal Law were adopted to prevent domestic violence, introducing harsher penalties for cruelty and abuse towards family members. The LTV programme *Kultūršoks* brought attention to cases of sexual harassment at the Jāzeps Vītols Academy of Music, sparking widespread public debate in Latvia. By the end of the year, administrative liability for sexual harassment was introduced. In December, the government approved the “Plan for the Prevention and Combating of Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence for 2024–2029”.

The State Police received 1,462 court decisions on temporary protection against violence



23% of respondents have experienced sexual harassment at universities



Sexual harassment is punishable by an administrative fine of up to

€700

In 2024, the number of women affected by violence who reported the incidents to the State Police increased. The rise in victim numbers was also [reported by the NGO MARTA](#).

According to [data from the State Police](#), the “Family Conflict” section of the Electronic Incident Register recorded 10,184 events in 2024—an increase of 1,950 compared to 2023. A total of 1,462 court decisions on temporary protection against violence were received, with 995 breaches of such rulings identified, leading to 823 criminal proceedings. Additionally, 115 breaches of police separation orders were recorded. In 2024, 5,171 individuals—an increase of 376 from 2023—were registered as subjects of court decisions on temporary protection against violence.

On 1 May 2024, the [Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence](#), also known as the Istanbul Convention, entered into force in Latvia. It had been ratified on 20 November 2023. Latvia also adopted [a declaration](#)

emphasising that the term “gender” included in the Convention does not entail an obligation to introduce any alternative understanding of “woman” and “man” into the Latvian legal and education systems, nor does it require a reinterpretation of the norms and values set out in the Constitution.

The purpose of the Convention is to protect women from all forms of violence and to prevent violence against women and domestic violence, to punish the perpetrators, and to implement all necessary measures to eliminate such violence. It also aims to develop a comprehensive policy and set of actions to protect all those who have suffered from violence against women and domestic violence. Seven years passed between the signing of the Convention in 2016 and its ratification.

On 6 June, the Saeima amended the Criminal Law by introducing [a new Article – 174.1 – on cruelty and violence against close persons](#). It provides that cruel or violent treatment of a person who is either a first- or second-degree relative of the offender, a current or former spouse, someone with whom the offender is or has been in a permanent intimate relationship, or someone with whom the offender shares a joint household, and where such behaviour causes physical or psychological suffering, is punishable by imprisonment for up to three years, short-term detention, or supervision under probation.

On 7 November, the Saeima amended the Criminal Procedure Law allowing for the use of [electronic monitoring](#) in cases involving violent individuals. To better monitor whether suspects or accused persons comply with certain security measures—such as a prohibition on approaching a particular person or place, staying at a specified location, police supervision, or house arrest—electronic surveillance may be applied. This means that a person may be fitted with a device that tracks their whereabouts. Such monitoring will be imposed if there are grounds to believe that the individual may pose a threat to someone else, particularly in cases of high risk of violence. A judge will decide on the application of electronic monitoring, based on a proposal from the case officer and after hearing the suspect or accused. Electronic surveillance will be introduced from 1 July 2025. These regulations aim to reduce domestic violence and will be applicable in criminal proceedings where an individual is charged with causing physical harm—whether serious, moderate or minor—against a close relative, current or former spouse, permanent partner, or a person with whom they share a household.

On 18 December, the government approved the [“Plan for Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence for 2024–2029”](#). The plan outlines the development of an integrated, targeted and effective policy to prevent and reduce violence against women and domestic violence.

To achieve this objective, four action directions have been defined: preventive measures to stop violence against women and domestic violence; provision and improvement of protection and support measures for victims; strengthening the accountability of perpetrators; and ensuring support and rehabilitation services. The plan also aims to establish a unified, coordinated and inclusive policy and legal framework concerning issues of violence against women and domestic violence.

Planned measures include the introduction of new therapy methods, the establishment of support centres for victims of sexual violence, and the provision of anonymous services, with a particular focus on meeting the needs of victims. In order to improve the situation, regular monitoring and data collection on incidents of violence are also planned, with dedicated funding for these processes.

## **Sexual harassment**

On 8 March 2024, the Latvian Television programme “Kultūršoks” aired information concerning [cases of sexual harassment by lecturers at the Jāzeps Vītols Latvian Academy of Music](#) (hereinafter JVLMA) involving female students. Seven students gave testimony, two of whom had previously informed the academy's rector. Latvian Television published six of the seven accounts. The broadcast revealed that on 8 February, the JVLMA rector had issued a directive outlining staff conduct rules, stating that any form of harassment is incompatible with commonly accepted standards of ethics and behaviour. At the beginning of February, the JVLMA Student Council conducted an anonymous survey regarding sexual misconduct within the university environment. According to the anonymous responses received by the JVLMA Council, 8.2% of participants reported having experienced sexually inappropriate behaviour, while 33.6% had heard someone recounting or describing contact with such behaviour at the academy.

Following allegations of sexual harassment involving female students, [two lecturers at the JVLMA were suspended](#). On 15 April, the academy's rector, Guntars Prānis, resigned from his post. Both dismissed lecturers filed lawsuits against JVLMA, seeking reinstatement and compensation, but their claims were rejected by the courts of first instance.

In March, the State Police initiated criminal proceedings related to alleged harassment by lecturers, with multiple individuals involved. In January 2025, the Riga Regional Court ruled the Academy's 9 April 2024 dismissal notice invalid and ordered the reinstatement of R. Kronlaks as Associate Professor at the Department of Composition, citing several serious procedural violations committed by the employer.

On 24 January 2025, the State Police [recommended that the Prosecutor's Office bring charges](#) against former lecturer M. Kupčs, Head of the Department of Early Music, for acts of sexual violence against female students.

In response to the events, JVLMA established a new Ethics Committee, updated its Code of Ethics, simplified reporting mechanisms for misconduct, and organised informative seminars. In collaboration with the JVLMA Student Council, a pilot project for a student mentoring system was also launched to support first-year students, alongside the development of digital material aimed at identifying and preventing violence.

[Other higher education institutions](#) similarly updated outdated ethical codes and improved reporting procedures. The Art Academy published informational booklets and hosted educational events.

On 10 December, amendments to the “Law on Administrative Penalties for Violations in the Areas of Governance, Public Order and the Use of the State Language” entered into force, introducing [administrative liability for sexual harassment](#). The new Section 11.2 of the law defines sexual harassment as physical, verbal or written behaviour of a sexual nature that is unwanted by the person and intended to violate their dignity, placing them in intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive circumstances. Such actions are punishable by a fine of up to 140 penalty units, equivalent to €700. Administrative offences related to sexual harassment will be investigated by the State Police.

According to the [Ombudsman's 2024 study on sexual harassment](#) in higher educational institutions, the highest risk group comprises women and first-year students. Of those affected, 77% were women, and harassment occurred during the first year of studies in 43% of cases. A total of 23% of respondents reported experiencing sexual harassment, while academic staff were significantly less affected. In 58% of cases, the perpetrator was a man, and in 15% of cases, multiple men were involved. Lecturers or teaching staff were responsible in 40% of cases. Harassment most frequently took place in lecture rooms and on university premises. Only 6% of victims reported the incidents, and in one-third of those reported cases, the perpetrator faced no consequences.



### ***Recommendations:***

- **Strengthen the capacity of universities and other educational institutions to identify and appropriately respond to cases of sexual violence and harassment and conduct information campaigns for students and pupils on how to act and where to report such cases.**
- **Improve data collection on cases of domestic violence.**
- **Ensure the establishment of support centres for victims of sexual violence.**

# Freedom of Expression



## Latvia in the Press Freedom Index

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

**Around 70% of the population either fully or partially trust Latvian media. On 1 October, the government approved the Media Policy Guidelines for 2024–2027. The merger of Latvian Radio and Latvian Television was initiated. Public debate was stirred by several events: a dispute between the Society Integration Foundation (SIF) and Re:Baltica over the repayment of project funding; the publication of the “Pig Comic” on lsm.lv; video performances by artist K. Brekte; and the content of books on sex education for children.**



### Mass Media

Latvia climbed four places in the [Press Freedom Index](#) — from 16th in 2023 to 12th in 2024. The index's author, *Reporters Without Borders*, notes that Latvian journalists mostly work in a safe environment, though they face verbal attacks in public spaces and online. The report highlights concern about increasing political efforts to discredit the media. *Reporters Without Borders* also points to issues with access to reliable and pluralistic information, particularly among Russian-speaking residents.

In October, National Electronic Mass Media Council (NEPLP) published the results of a study titled [“On Media Literacy Among Latvian Residents.”](#) The study showed that only 32% of the public consider information from Latvian public media to be mostly trustworthy, while 48% find it partially trustworthy. Content from commercial media is mostly trusted by 30% and partially trusted by 53%.

Under the Media Support Fund, 102 projects were supported, with a total value of €4.2 million.

Minority communities are significantly less likely to consider media-provided information as mostly trustworthy — only 15% trust public media and 16% trust commercial media. Partial trust among minority residents stands at 48% for public media and 56% for commercial media.

More than half of the public believe that the media lacks independence — 60% think that the government dictates and controls how news outlets report events. Meanwhile, 46% agree that it is acceptable for media owners to determine what topics should be covered and how they should be presented by the journalists working for them.

On 3 February, [amendments to the Law on Public Electronic Mass Media and Their Governance](#) came into force, providing for the establishment of a unified public media entity. The [merger of Latvian Radio and Latvian Television](#) began in early April.

On 1 October, the Cabinet of Ministers approved [the Media Policy Guidelines for 2024–2027](#), developed by the Ministry of Culture (KM). The aim of the guidelines is to strengthen the resilience, independence, security, and quality of Latvia's media environment. The guidelines outline four strategic directions: developing a strong media environment with high-quality and diverse public media content; creating a secure environment in which media organisations have continuity plans for crisis situations and the public possesses high media literacy; ensuring an independent media environment, including reinforcing the political independence of media oversight institutions and promoting industry self-regulation and access to information for journalists; and fostering quality content and professional journalism standards, including lifelong learning and professional development for journalists.

In 2024, the [Media Support Fund \(MAF\) supported 102 projects](#) with a total value of €4.2 million. Of this, €1.965 million was allocated to regional media, and €658,727 to media in Latgale. The Fund's objective is to support the creation of socially significant content and to strengthen the national cultural space in the Latvian language by promoting non-commercial, socially important journalism. Its goals include reinforcing the values enshrined in the Constitution, national awareness, Latvian cultural identity, critical thinking, media responsibility and quality, as well as social cohesion based on the Latvian language. Funding from the Fund is awarded through a competitive process.

In April 2024, the Society Integration Foundation (SIF), which administers funding from the Media Support Fund (MAF), requested that the investigative journalism centre [Re:Baltica repay](#) nearly €36,000 of the funding granted to them in 2023 for the implementation of the project "Šķelšanās" ("Division"). Re:Baltica reported that since the project's approval, it had attracted increased attention from politicians. The SIF's decision was based on the fact that [episodes of the "Šķelšanās" documentary series](#) produced within the project were subtitled in Russian rather than dubbed in Latvian. SIF argued that this breached the MAF's objective of creating and producing content in the official state language. Re:Baltica contested the decision. On 4 December, the [SIF board overturned the secretariat's ruling](#). In its decision, the board emphasised that, considering the content and aims of the project, the absence of translation into the state language was not an obstacle to strengthening the national cultural space, but rather a necessary means of understanding the current situation in order to promote social cohesion.

In July 2024, Edmunds Apsalons succeeded Anda Rožukalne as the Public Media Ombudsman. Over the course of the year, the Ombudsman issued a total of 32 opinions<sup>51</sup>. In five out of 19 of these, the Ombudsman identified violations either in the content produced by public media or in the conduct of its employees. Approximately half of the submissions received during the second half of 2024 concerned the use of the Russian language in public media or content published in Russian.

On 24 February, the website LSM.lv published artist Gundega Evelone's comic strip "Pig Comic", dedicated to the anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, under the title "Ukraine Must Win". The comic drew widespread criticism due to its depiction of Ukrainian soldiers as pigs. LSM.lv's Editor-in-Chief, Marta Cerava, explained that this contributor's column is published regularly and that characters in her comics are often portrayed as pigs. However, she acknowledged that the broader implications and potential interpretations of this imagery in the context of war had not been adequately considered. Latvian Public Media Ombudswoman Anda Rožukalne, in her opinion on the comic, stated that the creators did not intend to offend, insult, or ridicule the Ukrainian people's selfless and courageous resistance against the Russian Federation's invaders. Nevertheless, she concluded that the perception of the animal imagery and the timing of the publication had not been properly assessed. The Ombudsman found that the principles of editorial responsibility outlined in public media guidelines had been breached—particularly those requiring heightened sensitivity towards vulnerable and easily affected social groups, so as to avoid causing harm and to promote a sense of safety among their members.

### ***Protection of Journalistic Sources***

In 2024, the Latvian Journalists' Association reported two cases in which the police requested journalists to disclose their sources. In one instance, the request was directed at *Latvijas Avīze* journalist Ilmārs Randers, who had authored an article stating that the *Rail Baltica* reconstruction project at Riga Central Railway Station had undergone 100 changes over time. The article was published just days before the State Audit Office released its report, which had previously been classified as restricted-access. The journalist refused to reveal his sources. The police submitted a request to the court to compel the journalist to disclose the source. The court rejected the request, but the police appealed the decision.

The second case concerned sexual offences identified at the Jāzeps Vītols Latvian Academy of Music. In this instance, the police sought to uncover the sources of information used by Latvian Television's programme *Kultūršoks*, some of whom were also victims. Journalist Anete Ašmane-Vilsone refused to comply with the police's demand. The court also rejected the police's request to compel disclosure of the journalist's sources in this case.

### ***Court Cases***

On 16 July 2024, SIA *TVNET GRUPA* submitted a complaint to the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) concerning an administrative fine imposed for the use of the term "deportations" in one of its programmes. In 2023, during the *TVNET* programme series *Кто вам платит?* ("Who Pays You?"), Member of Parliament Aleksejs Rosljkovs (party *Stability!*) used the term "deportations" in

<sup>51</sup> Opinions are available (in Latvian): <https://www.seplp.lv/lv/atzinumi>

reference to the annulment of residence permits and potential expulsion of Russian Federation citizens from Latvia. The National Electronic Mass Media Council (NEPLP) fined *TVNET* €8,500, arguing that the broadcaster had failed to uphold principles of accuracy and neutrality. The NEPLP decision was appealed, but by a final judgment of 22 March 2024, the Riga Regional Court upheld that decision but reduced the amount of the fine to EUR 3,000. *TVNET* has lodged a complaint with the ECHR, citing violations of Article 6(1) (right to a fair trial) and Article 10 (freedom of expression) of the European Convention on Human Rights.

In 2024, legal proceedings continued regarding the revocation of the broadcasting licence of the independent Russian television channel *Dozhd* (Дождь) in Latvia. In December 2022, NEPLP annulled the channel's licence, citing threats to national security and public order. The first-instance court upheld NEPLP's decision. The channel's representatives appealed to the regional court. The announcement of the regional court's ruling was postponed twice—initially scheduled for 25 April 2024, then for 20 June 2024—before the court decided to reopen the case. A final judgment is expected in 2025.<sup>52</sup>

## Art and Literature

In 2024, two performance videos posted on social media by Kristian Brekte, a professor at the Latvian Academy of Arts, sparked public debate. One of the videos was released during Easter week and featured various egg preparation methods presented in a style reminiscent of occult rituals. The second video, published on 17 November as a greeting for Latvia's Independence Day, showed Brekte with a raw piece of beef at the Brothers' Cemetery near the Mother Latvia monument.

The latter video prompted several members of the National Alliance to file complaints with the police. National Alliance MP Ilze Indriksone stated that the video “offends our national core values, is inappropriate, unacceptable, and offensive.” In early 2025, the State Police [initiated criminal proceedings](#) against Brekte under Article 229 of the Criminal Law—pertaining to the destruction, damage, or desecration of a cultural monument.



## Children's Rights and Sex Education Materials

On 7 February 2024, the [Ombudsman published an opinion](#) regarding the content of several children's books on sexual education—*Tur lejā* (“Down There”), *Diena, kad tētis pārrunāja kutelīgus jautājumus* (“The Day Dad Talked About Awkward Questions”), *Rīta agrumā* (“Early Morning”), and *Laiks gulēt iet* (“Time for Bed”)—and their compliance with children's rights. The investigation was initiated following an open letter from non-governmental organisations, the National Library of Latvia, and the Latvian Librarians' Association, as well as submissions from parents.

The Ombudsman concluded that the books *Rīta agrumā* and *Laiks gulēt iet*, which depict same-sex relationships, do not contain harmful information for children. He noted that access to such content—especially for children growing up in same-sex families—supports the right to freedom of expression, including the right to receive age-appropriate information about diverse family

<sup>52</sup> LETA, Tiesa atsāks skatīt lietu par "TV Rain" apraides atļaujas anulēšanu Latvijā, 24.10.2024.

structures. Regarding the book *Tur lejā*, the Ombudsman found that its depiction of a preschool-aged child experiencing complex gender identity issues could create misleading impressions about the characteristics of male and female genders and the existence of a third gender. However, he emphasised that providing information about transgender individuals is not inherently harmful and may foster understanding and tolerance toward those experiencing gender identity challenges.

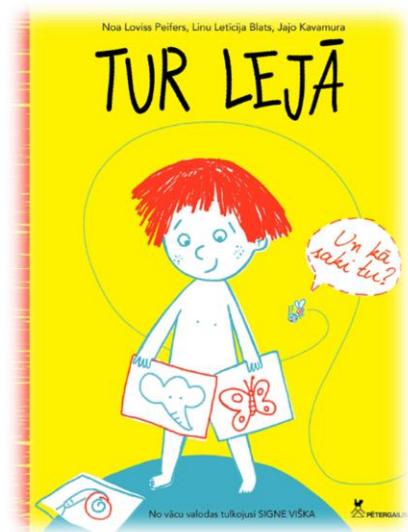
As for the book *Diena, kad tētis pārrunāja kutelīgus jautājumus*, which suggests that sexual activity may involve multiple partners simultaneously and that mutual romantic feelings are not a prerequisite for sexual relations, the Ombudsman stated that sexual education content is closely tied to the diverse values and beliefs of parents. Nevertheless, he stressed that the content of sexual education provided by the state in educational institutions must be strictly regulated.

In 2024, the Ombudsman also initiated an independent review of two methodological materials: *Harmful Sexual Behaviour Among Children: A General Guide for Professionals* by the foundation *Centrs Dardedze*, and *SENSOA Flag System: How to Respond to Children's and Young People's Sexual Behaviour* by the NGO *Papardes zieds*. In his findings, [the Ombudsman concluded](#) that the *Dardedze* guide complies with Latvian legislation, whereas the *Papardes zieds* material does not and is unsuitable for assessing the sexual behaviour of children under the age of sixteen. The material reportedly included pornographic content, justification of criminal acts against children, encouragement for adults to engage in indecent behaviour with minors, and support for harmful sexual conduct. The NGO *Papardes zieds* [disagreed](#) with the Ombudsman's position, viewing it as an attempt to challenge and control the work of professionals. Nevertheless, distribution of the material was suspended.



## Recommendations

- Ensure robust protection of journalistic sources and prevent political pressure on journalists.
- Strengthen media literacy across society, including fostering understanding of what constitutes an independent media outlet.
- Introduce effective mechanisms to safeguard journalists from verbal attacks online and in public spaces.
- Provide training for law enforcement authorities — including the police and prosecution services—on freedom of expression, including in the context of artistic expression.



# Freedom of Religion and Belief

The death of a four-year-old unvaccinated boy from diphtheria sparked widespread debate regarding freedom of belief in the context of mandatory vaccination. Several priests were sentenced to imprisonment for sexual abuse of children. A chaplaincy position has been introduced within internal affairs institutions where clergy are not otherwise available.



A Baptist pastor was sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment for paedophilia

## *Freedom of Belief in the Context of Mandatory Vaccination*

In the autumn of 2024, Latvia witnessed a tragic incident that ignited widespread public debate on freedom of belief in relation to compulsory vaccination. A four-year-old unvaccinated boy died from diphtheria. His family had refused vaccination, citing a lack of convincing information about vaccine ingredients and their religious convictions.

Following the child's death, his mother, disregarding medical advice, removed the family's two other children—also suffering from diphtheria—from hospital care, despite complications and prescribed mandatory treatment. As a result, the State Police initiated criminal proceedings, and the Orphan's Court suspended the parents' custody rights.

In response, the Ombudsman suggested that in cases where parents refuse to vaccinate their children, the Orphan's Court could be empowered to make decisions on the matter. Meanwhile, Minister for Health Hosams Abu Meri called for a discussion on strengthening parental responsibility, rather than introducing restrictive measures such as prohibiting unvaccinated children from attending educational institutions.

## **Church and Cases of Paedophilia**

In recent years, there have been three cases in Latvia involving clergy accused of sexual abuse against children.<sup>53</sup>

In spring 2024, the Kurzeme District Court sentenced a former Baptist pastor from Talsi, aged 83, to ten years' imprisonment and three years of probation supervision. He was accused of sexually abusing five girls between August 2018 and April 2022, who were aged between 7 and 16 at the time. According to the indictment, the man exploited the children's trust and his authority as a pastor to commit acts of a sexual nature, with four incidents occurring while the children were in a helpless state.

At the end of September 2024, the Riga City Court sentenced Catholic priest P. Zeile to six years and ten months in prison, with an additional four years and six months of probation supervision. Zeile, who had served in Rēzekne, was charged with human trafficking and engaging in unnatural sexual acts in a group setting, exploiting the victim's helplessness.

In another case, Roman Catholic parish [priest K. Dambergs](#) was accused of sexually abusing a minor. He denied the charges, and the legal proceedings are ongoing. According to the portal *katolis.lv*, Dambergs has been relieved of his duties as parish priest.

Following the issuance of a document by Pope Francis in 2019 establishing new standards for addressing sexual abuse and ensuring accountability among clergy, Latvia also developed its own guidelines. Courses on the prevention of sexual violence have since been implemented.

## **Jehovah's Witnesses**

On 10 October 2024, the Riga Regional Court dismissed a claim brought by Jehovah's Witnesses against the publishing house *Rīgas Vīlni*. The claim sought the retraction of an article published on the portal *Jauns.lv* concerning cases of sexual abuse against children within Jehovah's Witness communities abroad. The court ruled that the inclusion of information unfavourable to the claimants was not sufficient to establish a violation of rights warranting compensation. Furthermore, the court stated that a journalist's reliance on information provided by competent officials or experts could not be grounds for liability, as this would unjustifiably restrict investigative journalism and the public's right to be informed—an essential element of a democratic society. The Supreme Court Senate rejected the cassation appeal, and the judgment has entered into force.<sup>54</sup>

In connection with the introduction of mandatory national defence service in Latvia, Jehovah's Witnesses expressed criticism regarding the availability of alternative service options. Representatives of the organisation argued that the current model does not meet international standards for civilian alternative service, as it is administered directly under the supervision and control of the Ministry of Defence, with all options closely linked to military activity.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Lsm.lv, [Kad garīdznieku apsūdz seksuālā vardarbībā – Latvijā izskanējušās lietas](#), 18.10.2024.

<sup>54</sup> Latvijas Republikas Senāta Civillietu departamenta 2025. gada 5. februāra rīcības sēdes lēmums lietā Nr. C771207122; SKC-166/2025

<sup>55</sup> The European Association of Jehovah's Witnesses, Submission to the United Nations Human Rights Committee,

In February 2024, Jehovah's Witnesses reported an incident involving congregation members preaching in the village of Cibuļovka near Daugavpils. Two female members encountered aggressive behaviour from a resident, who verbally abused them and issued threats should they return to the village.<sup>56</sup>

### ***Orthodox Church***

In 2024, no progress was made regarding the request submitted by the Council of the Latvian Orthodox Church to Patriarch Kirill of the Russian Orthodox Church for the granting of independent status. In 2022, following the Russian Orthodox Patriarchate's support for Russia's military aggression against Ukraine, the Latvian Parliament adopted amendments to the law declaring the Latvian Orthodox Church to be fully autonomous and independent from any ecclesiastical authority outside Latvia. The amendments were proposed by then-President Egils Levits, who highlighted the risk that the leadership of the Russian Orthodox Church might unilaterally revoke the Latvian Church's autonomy and alter its canonical status *de facto*.<sup>57</sup> In October 2022, the Latvian Orthodox Church Council endorsed an appeal to Patriarch Kirill seeking a canonical resolution of the Church's status.<sup>58</sup>

At the end of 2024, shortly before Christmas, former President Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga called for the exemption of twenty Orthodox nuns—Russian citizens residing in a Latvian convent—from the official language requirements. These nuns use Old Church Slavonic and provide aid to the poor. She emphasised their age (over 70) and lifestyle, which significantly limits their ability to learn the language, and argued that they pose no threat to national security or cultural integrity. She urged Parliament and the government to grant them a dispensation. The Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs clarified that amendments to the Immigration Law do not permit exemptions for any category of persons from proving language proficiency, and that the matter must be resolved by Parliament.<sup>59</sup>

### ***Antisemitic and Islamophobic Incidents***

In 2024, no antisemitic incidents were reported in Latvia in connection with the Israel–Gaza conflict.

On 8 February 2024, the Vidzeme District Court sentenced an individual to two years' imprisonment under Section 79.6(1) of the Criminal Law for glorifying terrorism and distributing materials inciting terrorism. The convicted person had uploaded 18 videos to TikTok praising the terrorist organisation "Islamic State," promoting jihad, and encouraging violence against "enemies of Islam," among other content.<sup>60</sup>

On 8 November 2024, the Prosecutor's Office brought charges against a college student for possession of nearly half a kilogram of explosives and training for terrorism. According to the indictment, the individual stored 409 grams of TNT and sulphuric acid at his residence in Riga until May 2024. He had acquired knowledge of the production and use of explosives, firearms, hazardous

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Subsequent to the Adoption of the List of Issues 144th session (23 June–25 July 2025)

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> LV portāls, [Par Latvijas Pareizticīgās Baznīcas statusu](#), 22.09.2022.

<sup>58</sup> Lsm.lv, [Latvijas Pareizticīgā baznīca prasa neatkarību no Krievijas baznīcas](#), 25.10.2024.

<sup>59</sup> Jauns.lv, ["Manuprāt, tas nav humāni" Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga aicina nepieprasīt valsts valodas prasmes no 20 pareizticīgo mūkenēm](#), 23.12.2024.

<sup>60</sup> 2024. gada 8. februāra Vidzemes rajona tiesas spriedums lietā Nr. K-71-0159-24/17

substances, dangerous items and devices, as well as ideological and religious aspects of radical Islam.<sup>61</sup>

### ***Amendments to the Law on Religious Organisations***

[Amendments to the Law on Religious Organisations](#) have introduced the position of chaplain within internal affairs institutions where clergy are not otherwise available. These amendments are justified by the need to provide religious care, spiritual counselling, and support to clients, employees, and their families within such institutions.



### ***Recommendations:***

- **Ensure that alternative military service can also be carried out in institutions not affiliated with the Ministry of Defence.**

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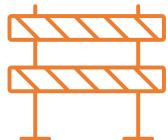
<sup>61</sup> LETA, Apsūdz koledžas studentu par teju puskilogramu trotila glabāšanu un apmācīšanos terorismam, 08.11.2024.



# Freedom of Association

There has been an increase in the proportion of residents actively involved in the work of civic organisations. Amendments to the Law on Associations and Foundations entered into force, improving the classification system for associations and foundations. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) criticised a draft law proposing that NGOs engaged in economic activities be subject to corporate income tax. By court ruling, the association *Latvijas Strādnieku fronte* (Latvian Workers' Front) was dissolved due to its promotion of communist ideology and activities directed against Latvia's independence.

**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**



**861,582 EUR** funding available in the 2024 call for project proposals under the 'NGO Fund

## *Statistics and Developments in the NGO Sector*

As of the reporting date, Latvia had 27,699 registered associations and foundations, 84 political parties and alliances, and 1,269 religious organisations.<sup>62</sup>

The Latvian Civic Alliance (LPA) identified key challenges within the non-governmental sector, including staff recruitment, financial sustainability, and organisational activity. LPA also noted a decline in both the volume of donations and the number of recipients.

According to the 2024 survey conducted as part of the study *Social Integration in Riga*, the proportion of residents involved in civic organisations increased from 12% in 2021 to 17% in 2024. The

<sup>62</sup> Aktuālā Uzņēmumu reģistra statistika pieejama: <https://www.ur.gov.lv/lv/jaunumi/statistika/>

primary motivation for participation was the desire to help others, while the main reason for non-participation was lack of time.

## ***Changes to Legal Framework***

On 20 March 2024, [amendments to the Law on Associations and Foundations](#) came into force, improving the classification system for NGOs. From 1 July 2024, NGOs are required to specify their field of activity according to the register's classification system.<sup>63</sup> Organisations may select up to five fields from a list of 22 and can update their selections at any time by notifying the Register. Newly established NGOs must declare their field during registration, while existing organisations must do so when submitting their 2024 annual report to the State Revenue Service.

The classification system aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the NGO sector, enabling analysis of trends, activities, financial indicators, and more. The need for such a system was previously highlighted by LPA<sup>64</sup>, which argued that the absence of a unified classification hindered data collection and increased risk assessments by financial institutions, complicating targeted support efforts.

The amendments also empower the Enterprise Register and the State Revenue Service to remove inactive organisations from the register, thereby reducing the proportion of dormant associations. Additionally, the law now allows for remote meetings and electronic voting, reflecting modern operational practices.

## ***Taxation Debate and Legislative Response***

In August 2024, [LPA and over 120 other NGOs](#) expressed concern over a draft law proposed by the Ministry of Finance, which would subject NGOs engaged in economic activity to corporate income tax (CIT). LPA argued that NGOs are not profit-oriented and use economic activity solely to support their core missions. Imposing CIT would create financial and administrative burdens, hinder goal achievement, and place NGOs at a disadvantage compared to businesses. On 28 November 2024, the government suspended further work on the draft law in response to these objections and the need for continued dialogue on more appropriate solutions.

## ***Legal Proceedings and Restrictions***

In 2024, the Rēzekne District Court began hearing a criminal case against Ieva Raubiško, an employee of the association *I Want to Help Refugees* (see section on **Asylum Seekers and Refugee Rights**).

A court ruling in 2024 formally dissolved the association *Latvian Workers' Front*. The Prosecutor General filed the case in 2022, citing an assessment by the State Security Service (VDD), which found that the organisation held regular "Marxist circles" promoting communist ideology. The association was also active online, including on social media, disseminating content aligned with Russian

<sup>63</sup> Ministru kabinets, noteikumi Nr. 398 "Biedrību un nodibinājumu klasificēšanas noteikumi", pieņemts 25.06.2024.

<sup>64</sup> Latvijas pilsoniskā alianse (2021), [Pētījums par pilsoniskās sabiedrības organizāciju sektorū Latvijā 2020-2024: Latvijas biedrību un nodibinājumu klasifikācijas problēmas un risinājumi](#), p.7

propaganda—such as claims of fascism, xenophobia, and censorship in Latvia—and criticism of the Latvian government.

The association had also published a newspaper justifying the Soviet invasion of Latvia and indirectly calling for violent revolution against state institutions. It promoted Marxist-Leninist ideology, which is closely linked to communism—a restricted ideology in Latvia. VDD concluded that the association’s activities served Russia’s foreign policy interests and attempted to justify crimes committed by the communist regime against Latvian citizens. Furthermore, the organisation encouraged societal division by advocating “class struggle.”

On 22 January 2024, the Regional Court ruled that the association violated Section 10(1.1) of the Law on Associations and Foundations.<sup>65</sup> The court found that the organisation opposed Latvia’s independence, promoted violent changes to the state order, openly propagated communist ideology, and incited discord—posing a threat to national and public security.<sup>66</sup> The Supreme Court Senate declined to initiate cassation proceedings.<sup>67</sup>

### **NGO Funding**

In 2024, the NGO Fund offered €861,582 in [project funding](#) (€391,582 for macro-projects and €470,000 for micro-projects). A total of 55 NGOs received support for initiatives aimed at strengthening civil society and democracy in Latvia. Additional funding was available through other grants administered by the Society Integration Foundation (SIF), including support for Ukrainian civilians, minority communities, and social cohesion.

NGOs could also apply for co-financing of projects funded by foreign donors (e.g. the European Union, European Economic Area Financial Mechanism, or other OECD sources) aimed at developing a cohesive and civically engaged society. Nine organisations [received](#) nearly €99,000 in total.



### **Recommendation:**

- **Increase funding for associations and foundations, and reduce the tax and administrative burden on NGO governance**

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<sup>65</sup> Section 10, Subsection 1.1 of the Law on Associations and Foundations:

An association or foundation must not, in its activities, act against the independence or territorial integrity of the Republic of Latvia; express or disseminate proposals for the violent alteration of the constitutional order of the Latvian state; incite non-compliance with laws where such non-compliance endangers national security, public safety, or public order; advocate violence or terrorism; promote overt ideologies of Nazism, Fascism, or Communism; propagate war; engage in actions aimed at inciting national, ethnic, racial, or religious hatred or discord; or glorify or encourage the commission of criminal offences.

<sup>66</sup> Rīgas apgabaltiesas Civillietu tiesas kolēģijas 2024. gada 22. janvāra spriedums lietā Nr. C771046922.

<sup>67</sup> Augstākās tiesas Senāta Civillietu departamenta 2024. gada 25. aprīļa rīcības sēdes lēmums lietā Nr. C771046922; SKC-466/2024

# Freedom of Assembly

The number of registered public events decreased in 2024. At the same time, the number of pickets, and marches held outside the capital, Riga, increased. The State Security Service recommended banning five public events, including one picket in solidarity with Palestinians. The police carried out enhanced monitoring of gatherings on 9 May. The Supreme Court Senate recognised the prohibition of two protest rallies related to the demolition of Soviet monuments as justified.



## Protest and solidarity actions

According to information compiled by the [Civic Alliance of Latvia](#), in 2024 local municipalities received 411 notifications for pickets, marches and assemblies, of which seven were refused. This represents a significant decline compared with 2023, when there were 636 applications and only one refusal. The data for 2024 cover the period up to October or November, whereas the 2023 figures reflect the entire year. In Riga, the number of pickets fell from 507 in 2023 to 266 by October 2024.

Several events were linked to support for Ukraine and protests against Russian aggression, solidarity with Georgian society, and backing for the non-violent resistance of Falun Gong practitioners against persecution in China (Riga, Kuldīga). Pickets also addressed current human rights issues in Latvia. On 8 March, around 150 participants joined a women's solidarity march against violence; outside the Saeima, a queer choir staged "singing" protests in favour of marriage equality and against hate speech directed at LGBTQI+ people. On 6 June, within the framework of "Baltic Pride 2024", a march entitled "*Until We Are All Equal*" took place, attracting approximately 7,000 participants. On 20 May, about 100 people picketed against pre-election debates being held in Russian. The Association for the Support of Russian-Language Schools (LAŠOR)

411 notifications for pickets, marches and meetings were received by local authorities.



In 7 cases, public rallies were not approved.

organised a picket opposing the discontinuation of teaching in Russian at pre-school and general education levels.

Several political parties and individual deputies also organised protests. For example, the New Conservative Party held a picket against the closure of small rural schools, while the Latvian Russian Union protested against the removal of the Barclay de Tolly monument and the renaming of several streets in Riga. Increasingly, protest activity has been linked to environmental issues, particularly opposition to tree felling. The number of pickets and marches held outside the capital, Riga, has grown.

The largest protests in numerical terms were organised by farmers. On 5 February, demonstrations took place in 16 Latvian towns and cities, including Liepāja, Saldus, Talsi, Tukums, Kuldīga, Jelgava, Dobele, Bauska, Jēkabpils, Aizkraukle, Daugavpils, Rēzekne, Valmiera, Gulbene, Limbaži and Ogre. Around 2,000 farmers participated, presenting demands to the government, including reducing bureaucracy and restricting food imports from Russia and Belarus. Other pickets were held against the construction of a shopping centre (Jelgava), against tree felling for the creation of a car park (Liepāja), and against school closures (Rāmuļi, Cēsis municipality).

### ***Restrictions on public events***

In 2024, the State Security Service (VDD) recommended prohibiting five public events. The VDD justified this on the grounds of risks associated with the use of attributes glorifying totalitarian Soviet rule, the possible justification or glorification of war crimes or terrorism, calls for aggression, and threats to public safety and order arising from a high likelihood of physical conflict. In the VDD's assessment, these events could have contributed to divisions within Latvian society, heightened ethnic tensions, and exacerbated international relations.<sup>68</sup>

On 5 January 2024, Riga Municipality prohibited a picket in solidarity with Palestinians that had been planned by the unregistered group *For a Free Palestine*. The decision to ban the event was based on an assessment by the State Security Service (VDD), which identified potential threats to public safety. The Service highlighted several risks, including the aggravation of international relations and threats to Latvia's foreign interests; increased societal division and polarisation of opinion in connection with the ongoing military conflict in the Middle East; possible criminal offences; and dangers to public safety and order due to the likelihood of conflicts at the event escalating from verbal disputes to physical violence. Additional concerns arose from the organiser's inability to provide estimates of participant numbers, details of security arrangements, or information on the slogans to be used. The municipality also noted that the slogan "*From the river to the sea – Palestine will be free!*", employed by the organisers on social media, had provoked negative and aggressive reactions online and could trigger similar responses during the picket itself. The organiser appealed the ban in court, but the first-instance court upheld the municipality's decision.<sup>69</sup> That ruling was subsequently challenged in cassation before the Senate of the Supreme Court.

<sup>68</sup> State Security Service (2025). [Publiskais pārskats 2024](#), p.40

<sup>69</sup> Administratīvās rajona tiesas 2024. gada 30. maija spriedums lietā Nr. A420108224

On 17 February, 27 April and 5 October 2024, three further assemblies in support of Palestinians were duly authorised and proceeded, each attended by approximately 100 persons.

Having regard to the statutory prohibition enacted in 2023 on gatherings, entertainment events and marches on 9 May in connection with the so-called “Victory Day”, the State Police in 2024 undertook enhanced supervision to ensure compliance with the ban. Notwithstanding these restrictions, instances of individuals laying flowers at burial sites were observed. The State Police reported the institution of 65 administrative offence proceedings and the commencement of two criminal proceedings, together with the detention of 19 individuals. The criminal proceedings, initiated in Daugavpils and Jelgava, concerned the justification of genocide, crimes against peace and war crimes. The administrative proceedings predominantly related to acts of glorification of military aggression and war crimes, including the public use of prohibited symbols, the laying of flowers at locations where Soviet monuments had been dismantled, the wearing of the St George’s ribbon (orange and black stripes), the public performance of Russian war songs, and the display of inscriptions and badges on clothing associated with the aggressor state.<sup>70</sup>

## Court cases

In 2024, the Administrative Cases Department of the Supreme Court Senate examined two cases related to restrictions on freedom of assembly. On 25 November, the Senate delivered a judgment dismissing an individual’s application challenging the prohibition of a march scheduled for 28 May 2022, the stated purpose of which was “to express protest against the actions of Latvia’s ruling parties in destroying monuments, banning traditions and prohibiting the use of minority native languages in education.” The ban on the march was justified by the need to protect the democratic order of the state and public safety.

The Senate held that, in circumstances where Russia is carrying out aggression against other states, Latvia must exercise particular caution to prevent the creation of conditions that could facilitate the expression of views justifying such aggression or otherwise supporting it, in order to safeguard its sovereignty, territorial integrity and democratic system. The Senate had no doubt that the planned march would provide a platform for views that divide society and support Russia’s aggression or the narratives used to justify it. Accordingly, the Senate agreed that prohibiting the march in this case was proportionate.<sup>71</sup>

On 28 December 2024, the Senate delivered a second judgment<sup>72</sup> concerning the prohibition of a protest planned for 22 August 2022 in Victory Park, Riga, the stated purpose of which was to express protest “against the immoral actions of the authorities in destroying historical heritage – monuments

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<sup>70</sup> <https://www.vp.gov.lv/lv/jaunums/9-maijs-2024-gads-valsts-policijas-aktuala-informacija>

<sup>71</sup> Augstākās tiesas Senāta Administratīvo lietu departamenta 2024.gada 25.novembra spriedums lietā Nr. A42020992, [SKA-112/2024](#)

<sup>72</sup> Augstākās tiesas Senāta Administratīvo lietu departamenta 2024.gada 28.decembra spriedums lietā Nr. A420247322, [SKA-135/2024](#).

to the people who defeated Nazism and preserved the lives of Europe's nations." In this judgment as well, the Senate emphasised the prevailing geopolitical context and the risks to public security arising from events that may facilitate disinformation and societal division, including the indirect justification or glorification of crimes committed by Russia against Ukraine.

The Senate also noted that the symbolism of the so-called Victory Monument, or the "Monument to the Soldiers of the Soviet Army – Liberators of Soviet Latvia and Riga from the German Fascist Invaders," cannot be viewed narrowly and solely in the context of victory over Nazism, while ignoring the fact that the entry of Soviet military forces into Latvia signified the restoration of the occupation carried out by the USSR in 1940.



Latvian residents, by ethnicity

# Rights of National Minorities and Social Cohesion

In 2024, the Constitutional Court of Latvia ruled that the transition to instruction solely in the official state (Latvian) language—applicable to both public and private educational institutions—was in line with the Constitution. The ongoing discussions about the permissibility of minority language content in public media. Latvian Public Television ceased producing programmes in Russian, while the “LSM+” platform began offering consolidated content in English, Russian, Ukrainian, Belarusian, and Polish. A majority of Latvian residents expressed support for welcoming Ukrainian refugees.

At the beginning of 2025, Latvia's population included 1,182,008 ethnic Latvians, making up 63.65% of the total population. Russians accounted for 434,243 people (23.38%), followed by 53,207 Belarusians (2.87%), 52,266 Ukrainians (2.81%), 35,140 Poles (1.89%), 19,809

	2025	%
Latvians	1,182,008	64
Russians	434,243	23
Belarusians	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
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,856,932</b>	<b>100</b>



84% of Riga residents believed that, in general, the traditions and customs of minority groups in Latvia should be respected less.



58% of respondents support Ukrainian refugees staying to live and work in Latvia long-term.

Lithuanians (1.07%), 4,812 Roma (0.26%), 4,168 Jews (0.22%), and 1,366 Estonians (0.07%). Additionally, there were 69,913 people (3.76%) of other ethnic groups.<sup>73</sup>

The highest share of national minorities was found in Daugavpils, where minorities made up 79% of the population—47% Russian, 13% Polish, and 8% other or unspecified. In Riga, minorities accounted for 52%, including 34% Russian, 5% Ukrainian, and 3% Belarusian. Rēzekne also had a 52% minority population, with 40% Russian and 6% other or unspecified. In Jūrmala, minorities made up 47%, including 32% Russian, 3% Belarusian, 3% Ukrainian, and 5% other or unspecified.

In 2024, the Riga City Council published its latest [study on social integration](#) in the capital. The findings showed a decline in residents' willingness to form close relationships across ethnic lines. Only 48% of respondents said they were open to close contact, including family ties, with ethnic Latvians—down from 57% in 2021. For Russians, the figure dropped from 51% to 34%. Willingness to form close ties with other ethnic groups fell from 34% to 25%, and with people of other “races” from 21% to just 11%.

Over time, openness to minority traditions and customs among Riga residents has slightly declined, though it remains high. In 2024, 84% of respondents believed that minority traditions should be respected in Latvia, compared to 91% in 2017.

A study published in 2024 by the think tank Providus, titled [Ukrainian Refugees in Latvia: Available Data, Experience and Public Attitudes](#), revealed that most Latvians have a positive view of Ukrainian refugees. 58% of respondents supported allowing Ukrainian refugees to live and work in Latvia long-term, and 59%—including 81% of young people—supported accepting new arrivals fleeing the war. Those with more negative views often cited fears about job competition and the perception that Ukrainians receive more support than local residents. The data also showed that Russian-speaking residents were significantly more likely to express negative attitudes towards both the continued presence of Ukrainian refugees and the arrival of new ones. When asked about future support, 36% of all respondents believed it should remain at current levels, 23% thought it should be reduced, and 20% felt it should be increased. The study also highlights the challenges faced by Ukrainians that hinder their integration into Latvian society. For instance, Ukrainian refugees often do not know how long they will be permitted to stay in Latvia; their Latvian language proficiency is typically at the lowest level; and they encounter discrimination or negative attitudes.

### ***Operation of Mass Media in Minority Languages***

In January 2024, Parliament [amended the Public Electronic Media and Governance Law](#) to allow one radio and one television programme—or part thereof—to be broadcast in foreign languages. However, the [2023 National Security Concept](#) called for public media content to be exclusively in Latvian or languages belonging to the European cultural space from 2026.

On 28 March, the Public Electronic Media Council (SEPLP) adopted a [conceptual decision](#) that, from 2026, the Latvian Public Media will implement “a new approach to engaging various minority communities, aiming to eliminate the existence of a two-community society.” At the same time, the

<sup>73</sup> Oficiālais statistikas portāls. [Iedzīvotāju skaits un īpatsvars pēc tautības un valstiskās piederības gada sākumā](#) 20112024.

SEPLP decision notes that the directive within the National Security Concept to abandon minority languages cannot be implemented literally. The SEPLP emphasised that such an approach would risk violating the Constitution, as it would prevent public media from producing content in the languages of several of Latvia's historical minority communities, including Russian, Romani, Hebrew, and Belarusian. The SEPLP instructed the Board of the Public Media to develop, by 1 July 2025, a conceptually new programme and service offering to be implemented from 2026. This initiative is to ensure content is available in minority languages and covers the history and everyday life of minority communities, while also deepening understanding of Latvia's regions and promoting broader access to minority cultures.

In summer 2024, the "RUS.LSM.LV" brand was renamed "[LSM+](#)" to distance itself from references to Russia and align with strategic goals. This step was underpinned by the decision to refrain from mentioning the name of the aggressor state [Russia], aligning more closely with the strategic objective of the minority communities platform. "LSM+" offers public media content in English, Russian, Ukrainian, Belarusian, and Polish. Plans are under way to gradually move away from editorial divisions based on ethnic or linguistic affiliation, to continue promoting Latvian language acquisition via the minority multimedia platform and the "Latvijas Radio 4" programme, and to adapt content from Latvian into minority languages. This approach aims to reduce the divide between the two societal communities.

On 5 September, SEPLP [approved changes](#) to the Minority Multimedia Platform Concept, stipulating that from 1 January 2025, LTV7 would broadcast exclusively in Latvian. Thus, programmes in Russian are no longer broadcast on public television.

On 26 November, the [Constitutional Court initiated proceedings](#) to assess whether provisions requiring minority language content in public media were constitutional. The application was submitted by deputies from the National Alliance (NA) and United List (AS) parliamentary factions. The case concerns the compatibility of provisions in the Law on Public Electronic Mass Media and Their Governance regarding the use of minority languages in public media with the Constitution. The applicants argue that Section 3, Paragraph 7 of the law, which stipulates that public media shall produce broadcasts in minority languages, and Section 8, Paragraph 4, which imposes an obligation to create content in minority languages, diminish the value of Latvian as the sole official language in a democratic society and pose a risk to national security.

The permissibility of Russian-language content in public media—including the Latvian Radio programme "Latvijas Radio 4 – Doma laukums"—was also [assessed by the Public Media Ombudsman](#), Edmunds Apsalons. He reviewed the legality of Russian-language content and concluded that it did not violate the law, though he noted that the law could be interpreted as either granting a right or imposing an obligation. He stated that constitutional interpretation should be provided by the Court.

## ***Pre-Election Campaigning***

In 2024, the planned European Parliament (EP) [pre-election debates](#) in Russian, organised by RUS.LSM.LV, sparked sharp criticism. The format envisaged that participants would be able to speak in Latvian, with simultaneous interpretation provided. On 20 May, around 100 people staged a protest against the debates being held in Russian. Several politicians called for the debates to be

cancelled, and a number of parties contesting the EP elections announced that their candidates would not participate in such debates. The State Language Centre declared that holding debates in Russian contradicts the status of Latvian as the official state language enshrined in the Constitution and undermines its role in societal integration. At an extraordinary meeting, the SEPLP considered [a proposal by board member Jānis Eglītis](#) to amend the public media commissioning guidelines, stipulating that EP pre-election debates may only be held in Latvian or in one of the official languages of the European Union. However, his proposal did not receive the Council's support.

Initially, the LTV Editorial Board maintained that there was no justification for cancelling the planned pre-election debates, describing the pressure to do so as [a deliberate attempt to influence not only editorial decisions](#) but also to undermine public trust in the national broadcaster. However, LTV later decided to cancel the debates. [In its statement](#), LTV said it had "taken into account the views expressed by various societal groups and the arguments put forward by experts, re-evaluated the situation through internal discussions, and considered the practical aspects of organising the debates, concluding that the debates with candidates for the European Parliament in Russian must be cancelled."

### ***State language proficiency checks***

The State Language Centre (hereinafter – SLC) conducted proficiency checks for two members of the "Stability!" parliamentary faction. Initially, the SLC assessed the Latvian language skills of Jefimījs Klementjevs ("Stability!") and imposed an administrative penalty, having found his knowledge insufficient. In October, following a request from several Members of Parliament, the Mandate, Ethics and Submissions Committee agreed to refer MP Viktors Pučka ("Stability!") for a state language proficiency check.<sup>74</sup>

In July 2024, the SLC reported that during the 2023/2024 academic year, 107 teachers were administratively penalised for failing to use the state language to the extent required for the performance of their professional and official duties. The highest number of penalties were issued to teachers in general secondary education institutions—51 in total. In pre-school institutions, 24 teachers received penalties; in vocational education institutions, 17; and in general basic education institutions, 13. Additionally, two teachers from vocational education institutions were penalised. Insufficient state language proficiency was most commonly identified among teachers in Riga, Liepāja and Daugavpils—52, 18 and 16 cases respectively.<sup>75</sup>

### ***Education Reform***

On 1 September 2024, the second phase<sup>76</sup> of Latvia's education reform began, marking a significant step towards the creation of a unified school system. Pupils in Years 2, 5, and 8 transitioned fully to instruction in the Latvian language. [According to a survey](#) conducted by the Ministry of Education and

<sup>74</sup> Ziņu aģentūra LETA, 23.10.2024. Saeimai būs jālemj par Stabilitātei" deputāta Pučkas nosūtīšanu uz valodas pārbaudi  
<sup>75</sup> Ziņu aģentūra LETA, 02.07.2024. Par valsts valodas nelietošanu pietiekamā apmērā aizvadītajā mācību gadā sodīti 107 pedagoji.

<sup>76</sup> Phase one – On 1 September 2023, pre-school education institutions, as well as pupils in Years 1, 4, and 7, transitioned to instruction solely in Latvian. Phase three – From 1 September 2025, the transition will apply to Years 3, 6, and 9.

Science (IZM) among education departments in cities and municipalities, 54% of respondents rated the implementation of the unified school approach in pre-school, Years 1, 4, and 7 (for pupils previously enrolled in minority education programmes) as good, 38% as fairly good, and 8% as satisfactory.

To support schools in this transition, the Advisory Council on Minority Education provided mentoring groups and organised experience-sharing seminars for teachers and educational institutions. Over 3,600 educators, methodologists, school and municipal representatives participated in 15 seminars held across various regions of Latvia. Schools also received support from expert groups representing the Ministry of Education and Science, the Latvian Language Agency, and the State Education Quality Service, along with access to newly developed methodological materials.<sup>77</sup>

In collaboration with the Ministry, the British Council's Latvia office launched a pilot project titled ["School Partnerships Supporting the Transition to Latvian-Language Instruction \(Support for the Unified School\)"](#). The project aimed to assist schools in adapting to a unified education system and instruction in the Latvian language.

As part of its evaluation of the reform process, [the Ministry identified](#) several areas requiring further support. These included assistance for pupils with limited Latvian language skills, expanded teaching resources for children with special needs, stronger cooperation with universities in teacher training, and the development of support mechanisms for schools with linguistically diverse learning environments. The Ministry also emphasised the importance of engaging parents—providing support for children and pupils, and involving families in local community activities.

By the end of 2024, municipalities were implementing extracurricular education programmes focused on minority languages and cultural heritage using both their own budgets and targeted state funding allocated for education.<sup>78</sup>

### ***Court Judgments***

In 2024, the Constitutional Court of Latvia delivered two rulings concerning the transition to instruction solely in the official state language within educational institutions, as approved in 2022. On 10 July, the Court issued its judgment in Case No. 2022-45-01, concerning private educational institutions. On 12 July, it ruled on Case No. 2023-15-01, concerning state and municipal schools. In both cases, the Court concluded that the legal provisions were in compliance with the Constitution.

The Court emphasised Latvia's historical context, particularly the consequences of Soviet-era russification and the segregation of the education system, as well as the deliberate transformation of the dual-stream system since the restoration of independence. Current geopolitical circumstances—including Russia's aggression against Ukraine and the spread of disinformation in Russian—were also cited as reinforcing the need to promote the use of the state language.

In the case concerning private institutions, the Court found that the contested provisions of the Education Law and related regulations were aimed at protecting the state language and enhancing

<sup>77</sup> IZM prezentācija ["Celā uz vienotu skolu: paveiktais 2023./2024. mācību gadā un celakarte turpmākajam"](#)

<sup>78</sup> LV.IV, [Valsts nodrošina finansējumu mazākumtautību valodas un kultūrvēstures apguvei interešu izglītībā](#)

language proficiency among persons belonging to national minorities across all levels of education. The Court stressed that the ability of minority groups to communicate effectively in the state language is essential for safeguarding democratic governance and is equally important for both minority communities and society at large. The provisions were also deemed to reduce segregation and self-segregation within educational institutions.

Assessing the balance between promoting the use of the state language and protecting minority rights in private education, the Court noted that the state had provided methodological and financial support for minority-focused educational programmes. It also affirmed that content related to minority languages, cultures, and identities could be included in extracurricular education programmes. Municipalities were recognised as having a duty to ensure free access to such programmes for minority pupils, covering language and cultural heritage.

In the case concerning state and municipal schools, the Court ruled that Article 112 of the Constitution (right to education) and Article 114 (minority rights to preserve and develop their language and culture) do not impose an obligation on the state to provide education in minority languages within public institutions. The Court stated that the state may support minority language and cultural preservation through other means, such as extracurricular education, currently offered for three hours per week. Municipalities were again noted to have a long-term obligation to provide free access to these programmes upon request. The Court also highlighted the duty to offer personalised support for children with special needs to acquire the state language effectively, including the use of their native language when it serves the child's best interests.

Three judges issued dissenting opinions in the case concerning private institutions. [Judge A. Kučs](#) argued that the legislature had breached the principle of good law-making by failing to adequately assess the reform's impact on education quality. He contended that the regulation lacked proportionality and did not sufficiently balance the promotion of the state language with the rights of minority pupils to preserve and develop their language, culture, and identity. He warned that reducing minority language use to extracurricular education undermines the essence of minority-founded private schools, whose purpose—under Article 13 of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities—is to preserve linguistic and cultural distinctiveness.

[Judge J. Neimanis](#) similarly expressed concern that the regulation renders the establishment of private minority schools meaningless, as they cannot offer instruction in minority languages. He also noted that the ruling creates inequality among minority groups—allowing those with bilateral agreements (e.g. Polish) to teach some subjects in their language, while others (e.g. Russian, Belarusian, Roma) lack such rights due to the absence of a “representative” state.

On 18 July 2024, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) delivered its judgment in [Djeri and Others v. Latvia](#), concerning the 2018 education reform that increased the proportion of Latvian-language instruction in pre-school education for minority groups. The applicants claimed that the reform infringed their rights as minority families to education in their native language and discriminated against their children based on language. The ECHR found no violation of the European Convention on Human Rights.

In assessing a potential breach of Protocol No. 1, Article 2 (right to education), the Court concluded that the state may take measures to address historical inequalities in Latvian language use in education, while still ensuring minority rights to preserve and develop their language, culture, and identity. The reform was deemed neither unforeseeable nor abrupt and did not eliminate Russian as a language of instruction entirely. Regarding complaints from two applicants involving children with special needs whose native language is Russian, the Court acknowledged that in certain circumstances, the state may be obliged to provide pre-school education in the child's native language. However, it found that Latvia's education system offers inclusive education for children with special needs through both specialised and general programmes, in which native language instruction remains available.

### ***Roma Community in Latvia***

Roma people remain one of the least socially protected groups in Latvia. According to the Central Statistical Bureau, at the beginning of 2025 there were 4,812 Roma living in Latvia<sup>79</sup>. Among them, the proportion of individuals who have not completed compulsory basic education is significantly higher than among the rest of the Latvian population – among those aged over 25, 1.1% of the total population have not completed basic education, compared with 32.5% of Roma<sup>80</sup>.

According to a survey conducted within the [2023 study on the situation of Roma in Latvia](#), 47.7% of Roma children do not wish to attend school due to negative attitudes from other pupils, 44% due to early family-formation practices, and 41.4% because the child has learning difficulties.

Employment levels among Roma also differ substantially from the average employment rate in Latvia. At the beginning of 2024, the employment rate among Latvia's population aged 15 and over was 55%, while among Roma it was 22.2%<sup>81</sup>. Contrary to the general trend in Latvia's employment indicators, Roma women have a higher employment rate than Roma men (22.4% and 20.2% respectively). The main causes of unemployment among Roma are lack of education and discrimination.<sup>82</sup>

Housing conditions within the Roma community are among the poorest in Latvia. For example, three out of five Roma residents live in homes without central heating, whereas nationwide only one in five residents live in such conditions. Furthermore, 45.3% of Roma households lack access to a bathroom or shower, compared with the national average of 13.8%.<sup>83</sup>

On 27 August, the government approved the Ministry of Culture's "[Plan for the Implementation of the Strategic Framework for Roma Inclusion 2024–2027](#)." The plan aims to promote equality, inclusion, and participation of the Roma community in Latvia. It was developed to fulfill the European Council's Recommendation of 12 March 2021 on Roma equality, inclusion, and participation 2021/C

<sup>79</sup>Central Statistical Board (2025). Population by Ethnicity at the Beginning of the Year – Ethnicity and Time Period (Iedzīvotāji pēc tautības gada sākumā - Tautība un Laika periods),  
<https://data.stat.gov.lv/sq/27757>

<sup>80</sup>Central Statistical Board, Social Inclusion. Education. <https://data.stat.gov.lv/sq/27755>

<sup>81</sup> Roma (čīgānu) īpatsvars un raksturojošie rādītāji - Tautība, Rādītāji un Laika periods (2025),  
<https://data.stat.gov.lv/sq/27756>

<sup>82</sup> SIA "Civitta Latvija" (2023), PĒTĪJUMS PAR ROMU SITUĀCIJU LATVIJĀ 60 lpp.

<sup>83</sup> Centrālā statistikas pārvalde, Sociālā iekļaušanās. Mājokļa apstākļi.

93/01. The plan outlines a range of measures, including annual awareness-raising events on issues relevant to the Roma community, continuation of the “Latvian Roma Platform” project, support for Roma NGOs, monitoring of Roma pupils’ education, promotion of Roma employment, and cultural initiatives.

The Ministry of Culture published an [impact assessment](#) of the previous “Plan for the Implementation of the Strategic Framework for Roma Inclusion 2022–2023.” The report identified the Roma mediator initiative and the established network as the most significant and effective support mechanism for the Roma community. However, it noted that this initiative was not formally included in the plan and that funding for mediator work remains limited, available only through various project-based sources.

As of May 2024, 24% of Roma children in educational institutions were enrolled in special basic education programmes, down from 34.2% in 2017. The report called for the Ministry of Education and Science to take greater responsibility for implementing the plan’s measures and to strengthen oversight of the quality of support provided in schools. The authors also highlighted a lack of data, which hindered analysis of the accessibility of support measures specifically for Roma individuals compared to other beneficiaries. The report recommended that the Central Statistical Bureau expand data collection on the Roma target group.

In 2024, the “[Latvian Roma Platform VII](#)” project employed eight Roma mediators in Riga, Ventspils, Jūrmala, Jelgava, Balvi Municipality, Daugavpils, Krāslava, and Augšdaugava Municipality. Between 1 October 2023 and 30 June 2024, the mediators supported 433 Roma individuals and their families. From 1 August 2024 to 30 April 2025, services were provided to 431 persons.<sup>84</sup> The project included various activities, such as communication skills [training for mediators](#) to improve dialogue and cooperation between the Roma community and professionals in state and municipal institutions. Roma community members also organised several initiatives, including [an inclusive football tournament](#) in Jūrmala, a charity campaign “[Joy Multiplies Joy!](#)” with donations to the Valmiera animal shelter, and [youth workshops under the programme “SĀRE KHETENE.”](#)

On 10 December 2024, the [government approved](#) the allocation of 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. The European Commission will fund 90% of the project, amounting to €199,491. Although the project covers the costs of mediator work, mediators have long pointed out that the funding remains insufficient.<sup>85</sup>

While the original concept envisioned that municipalities would eventually fund mediators, this has rarely occurred in practice. A notable exception is Viļaka Municipality, which covers one month of mediator work annually during the project’s planned break to ensure continuity. Viļaka also supports the mediator in other ways—providing transport for outreach, office space for consultations and events, and participation by municipal specialists in monthly information sessions organised for the Roma community. Ventspils Social Service also provides permanent office space for its mediator.<sup>86</sup>

<sup>84</sup> Summary of the activities implemented and results achieved within the project “Latvian Roma Platform VII” for the period from 1 September 2023 to 30 April 2025.

<sup>85</sup> The information was presented at the coordination meeting of the Latvian Roma Platform on 29 April 2025.

<sup>86</sup> Information by the Ministry of Culture.



## ***Recommendations***

- Continue and strengthen the implementation of social cohesion initiatives, particularly at the municipal level, involving representatives of different ethnic communities and evaluating the outcomes of previously implemented efforts.
- Maintain and expand content production in minority languages (Russian, Ukrainian, Belarusian, Polish) and English within Latvian public media, including in smaller languages such as Romani. This ensures access to high-quality content for diverse social groups and helps mitigate the risks of disinformation.
- Continue providing Latvian language training courses and appropriate methodology for teachers, ensuring a high-quality learning process within the framework of a unified school model.
- The Ministry of Education and Science should conduct regular monitoring of educational outcomes for Roma pupils.
- Improve data collection on Roma communities across national and municipal institutions to more accurately identify their challenges and needs.
- Municipalities should support the work of Roma mediators by allocating appropriate funding for their activities.

# Citizenship and Residence Rights

Since the Citizenship Law came into force in 1995, the number of naturalised persons reached 150,000 in 2024. The number of naturalisation applications declined, while the number of persons naturalised in 2024 increased. Amendments to the Immigration Law expanded the group of citizens of the Russian Federation who are required to demonstrate Latvian language proficiency at A2 level (lowest) to obtain a permanent residence permit. In 2022, the Constitutional Court ruled that the amendments to the Immigration Law—affecting the requirements for Russian Federation citizens (former Latvian citizens and non-citizens) to obtain residence permits—were in accordance with the Constitution of the Republic of Latvia.

## Statistics

According [to data from the Central Statistical Bureau](#) (hereinafter—CSB), at the beginning of 2025, Latvia had a population of 1,856,932.<sup>87</sup> This is 18,384 fewer people than at the beginning of 2024. 1,630,841 or 87.82% of the population are citizens of the Republic of Latvia, which is 1.72% more than in 2023. 165,871 or 8.93% of the population are non-citizens of the Republic of Latvia, which is 0.37% less than in 2023. 60,220 or 3.24% are residents with other state affiliations.



In 2024:  
**1,630,841** or 86.1% citizens of Latvia,  
**165,871** or 8.93% non-citizens,  
**60,220** or 3.24% citizens of other states resided in Latvia



The number of naturalised persons reached **150 thousand**



## Number of naturalised persons:

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

<sup>87</sup> In 2025, the CSB changed its method for estimating the population. Since 2012, a logistic regression model had been used, but going forward the Sol-Logit model will be applied. The population figures at the beginning of 2023 and 2024 have been recalculated using the new estimation method and therefore differ from previously published data. Statistics are available at:

Of the citizens of the Republic of Latvia, 1,181,145 or 72.4% are ethnic Latvians, 300,085 or 18.4% – ethnic Russians, 28,116 or 1.72% are ethnic Poles, 25,224 or 1.55% – ethnic Belarusians, 16,257 or 0.99% – ethnic Ukrainians, and 80,014 or 4.9% – other ethnicities.

Among the non-citizens of the Republic of Latvia, 109,232 or 66% are ethnic Russians, 23,410 or 14% – ethnic Belarusians, 16,515 or 10% – ethnic Ukrainians, 6,043 or 4% – ethnic Poles, and 6,823 or 3% – representatives of other ethnicities.

In the age group 0–4, there were no non-citizen children. In the age group 5–17, there were 1,580 non-citizen children, of whom 893 were aged 5–14.

According to data from the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs (OCMA), as of 1 January 2025, Latvia had a population of 2,024,584, of whom 1,706,482 were citizens of the Republic of Latvia, 173,729 were non-citizens, 47,654 were residents granted temporary protection in Latvia, 643 were refugees, 482 persons had been granted alternative status, 156 were stateless persons, and 95,438 were categorised as others. OCMA data is based on [the Population Register](#).

According to data from the Central Statistical Bureau (CSB), at the beginning of 2025, Latvia had 144 stateless persons. Meanwhile, according to [OCMA data](#) as of 1 January 2025, Latvia had 156 Latvian stateless persons, three Estonian stateless persons, two Belarusian stateless persons, one Lithuanian stateless person, one British stateless person, one Finnish stateless person, and one Uzbek stateless person.

### ***Naturalisation and Loss of Citizenship***

Since the Citizenship Law came into force in 1995, the number of naturalised persons reached 150,119 in 2024, including 14,678 minors who were naturalised together with their parents.<sup>88</sup>

According to [OCMA data](#), 774 naturalisation applications were received in 2024, which is 476 fewer than in 2023 and 401 fewer than in 2022. In 2024, 694 persons were granted Latvian citizenship through naturalisation, which is more than in 2023 (535 persons) and in 2022 (518 persons). Latvian language proficiency tests were passed by 45.3% of applicants for Latvian citizenship, while the history knowledge test was passed by 77.9%.

	2022	2023	2024
<b>Naturalisation applications</b>	1175	1250	774
<b>Number of naturalised persons</b>	518	535	694

<sup>88</sup> OCMA (2025). Information on the number of naturalisation applications and admissions to Latvian citizenship up to 31 December 2024 (PMLP, Informācija par naturalizācijas iesniegumu skaitu un uzņemšanu LR pilsonībā līdz 2024. gada 31.decembrim) at: <https://www.pmlp.gov.lv/lv/naturalizacija>

In 2024, 350 persons lost citizenship of the Republic of Latvia. Of these, 202 persons renounced their citizenship, while 148 persons had it revoked based on a decision by the OCMA). The status of non-citizen was revoked for 213 persons.<sup>89</sup>

## Case Law

### *Citizenship as an Obstacle to Granting Stateless Status<sup>90</sup>*

On 15 January 2024, the Senate of the Supreme Court of the Republic of Latvia issued a ruling in a case concerning the existence of citizenship of another country as an obstacle to granting stateless status. In this case, the applicant — a citizen of Cuba — applied to the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs (OCMA) requesting stateless status. The applicant had lived in Latvia since childhood and suffered from serious health problems that prevented him from working. He did not possess an identity document and was unable to obtain a residence permit. The applicant claimed to have attempted to renounce Cuban citizenship, but the Cuban Constitution does not provide for renunciation of citizenship. He did not wish to maintain ties with Cuba or obtain a Cuban passport.

Both the OCMA and the court rejected the applicant's request for stateless status. Upon reviewing the applicant's cassation complaint, the Administrative Cases Department of the Senate concluded that the existence of citizenship of any country constitutes an obstacle to granting stateless status. For a person to be recognised as stateless, a negative fact must be established — the absence of affiliation with another country (i.e. the person is not a citizen of another country and is not guaranteed citizenship of another country). Furthermore, neither international nor national legal norms require an assessment of the quality of the citizenship link, the individual's connection to their country of citizenship, or the possibility of renouncing citizenship when deciding on the granting of stateless status.

The international legal framework binding on Latvia is aimed not only at protecting stateless persons but also at reducing the number of cases of statelessness. Thus, although every person should be ensured affiliation with a country and the right to change that affiliation, these rights are not equivalent to a right to become stateless.

The Senate also held that stateless status cannot be granted on humanitarian grounds. Additionally, the regional court, having assessed the applicant's individual circumstances, concluded that the applicant had been issued a travel document to approach the Cuban Embassy in Finland to address the matter of renouncing Cuban citizenship or obtaining a Cuban passport, which would then allow him to proceed with applying for a residence permit in Latvia. However, the applicant did not make use of this opportunity.

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<sup>89</sup> PMLP, Personu tiesiskais statuss, pieejams: <https://www.pmlp.gov.lv/lv/personu-tiesiskais-statuss>

<sup>90</sup> Latvijas Republikas Senāta Administratīvo lietu departamenta 2024. gada 15. janvāra rīcības sēdes lēmums lietā Nr. A420153122, SKA-327/2024, [ECLI:LV:AT:2024:0115.A420153122.12.L](https://elis.cases.europa.eu/case/ECLI:LV:AT:2024:0115.A420153122.12.L)

*The child custody court is obligated to ensure the granting of Latvian citizenship to a child in state custody<sup>91</sup>*

The Supreme Court examined a case concerning the granting of Latvian citizenship to an adopted child who is a Latvian non-citizen. The child's legal representative requested Latvian citizenship from the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs (OCMA), but the Office refused, citing the child had lost their relationship with their biological parents, who were Latvian non-citizens. The adoptive parents are citizens of another state.

The claimant appealed to the court, which ruled in their favour, ordering the OCMA to issue an administrative act recognizing the child as a Latvian citizen. The court determined that the child had the right to become a Latvian citizen before adoption, but the OCMA failed to act. The court concluded that the OCMA's formal application of the Citizenship Law, which denied the child Latvian citizenship, was disproportionate and unjust. This did not ensure the child's rights and interests were prioritized in legal matters affecting them.

The Senate Administrative Cases Department, upon reviewing the OCMA's cassation complaint, has also recognised that adoption does not affect the decision regarding a person's right to become a Latvian citizen. The Senate stated that if a child is under state custody and the child custody court is responsible for the child's personal and property rights, it is the court's duty to submit the appropriate application to the OCMA to secure the child's right to citizenship. When assessing the legality of any decision made concerning a child, it must be evaluated through the lens of the best interest of the child. This includes the understanding that formal considerations are not grounds to deny a child Latvian citizenship.

*Requirement to Declare a Place of Residence and Actually Reside in Latvia as a Precondition for Naturalisation<sup>92</sup>*

The claimant, a Latvian non-citizen who was born and raised in Latvia, sought to become a Latvian citizen through naturalisation. He received a refusal from the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs (OCMA), which determined that at the time of his naturalisation application, his permanent residence in Latvia had not been at least five years, as required by Article 12, para 1)1. The claimant had studied in another state, having declared his place of residence there.

The Administrative Regional Court satisfied the plaintiff's claim, concluding that the plaintiff's absence was objectively justified and during that time, he had not established a permanent link with any other state. However, the LR Senate Administrative Cases Department, upon examining the OCMA's cassation complaint, concluded that the ruling of the regional court was incorrect. The Senate noted that the legislator had deliberately chosen to consider a person's permanent residence in Latvia for the five years immediately preceding the naturalisation application, including for non-citizens. Factors such as the person's birth, upbringing, and education in Latvia, as well as having relatives living in Latvia, are not legally significant in the application of the legal norm. The legislator

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<sup>91</sup> Supreme Court Senate Administrative Cases Department Decision of the Sitting on June 25, 2024, in Case No. A420176223, SKA-621/2024

<sup>92</sup> Senate Administrative Cases Department Judgement on 9 July 2024, Case No. A420263120, SKA-138/2024

has stipulated the necessity of being legally declared at a residence in Latvia, in addition to actually living (being) at that residence, which the person can prove by submitting relevant evidence. The Senate indicated that the legislator allows for short-term departures from Latvia (including for studies or scientific work), provided that the permanent residence is not changed, and, if necessary, to temporarily change permanent residence to another country for up to one year.

The Senate also indicated that a person, knowing that they intend to acquire Latvian citizenship through naturalisation in the future, should plan their actions in advance to meet the naturalisation requirements set by law.

### ***Citizens of the Russian Federation***

Several Russian Federation (RF) citizens whose rights were affected by the amendments to the Immigration Law adopted in 2022<sup>93</sup> submitted applications to the Constitutional Court. The applicants argued that the provisions of the Immigration Law were incompatible with the principle of legitimate expectations enshrined in Article 1 of the Constitution, the first sentence of Article 91 (legal equality), Article 96 (right to private life), as well as Article 4 of Protocol No. 4 of the European Convention on Human Rights (prohibition of collective expulsion of foreigners).

On 15 February 2024, the [Constitutional Court](#) ruled that the contested provisions were in compliance with the Constitution. The Court stated that the state has discretion to assess national security risks and to adjust its immigration policy accordingly. If a person does not even attempt to take the national language proficiency test, the revocation of a permanent residence permit and potential expulsion from the country cannot be considered disproportionate measures. The Court noted that the countries of citizenship of other foreigners are not neighbouring states to Latvia and have not historically posed a threat to Latvia's national security. The contested provision does not foresee automatic expulsion of foreigners from Latvian territory.

The judgment also clarified that there is a separate group of RF citizens to whom the contested provisions do not apply and who were not required to take the Latvian language proficiency test. These are RF citizens who had permanent residence in Latvia prior to acquiring RF citizenship and who received permanent residence permits under Article 23.1 of the Law "On the Entry and

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<sup>93</sup>To strengthen national security, in the autumn of 2022, the outgoing Saeima adopted amendments to the Immigration Law under an expedited procedure. These amendments affected citizens of the Russian Federation (hereinafter – RF) who had previously been Latvian citizens or non-citizens. In essence, the amendments revoked the simplified conditions previously granted to this category of RF citizens for obtaining permanent residence permits, aligning their requirements with those applicable to other RF and foreign nationals.

The transitional provisions of the law stipulated that, in order to extend a permanent residence permit, RF citizens must submit proof of Latvian language proficiency at least at A2 level, and meet other requirements, including continuous residence in Latvian territory and income at least equal to the minimum wage or a pension. Additionally, when submitting documents to the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs (OCMA), individuals were required to complete a questionnaire providing detailed information about their relatives and personal views, for example, regarding the occupation of Crimea and Russia's war against Ukraine.

For individuals who failed to submit the required documents, their residence permits would be revoked on 1 September 2023, and they would be required to leave Latvia by 2 December.

Residence of Foreigners and Stateless Persons in the Republic of Latvia.”<sup>94</sup> According to information from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, many individuals in this group are Russian military pensioners and their family members.<sup>95</sup>

To extend the language proficiency requirement to this category of RF citizens, the Saeima adopted [new amendments to the Immigration Law](#) on 20 June 2024. These amendments stipulate that by 30 June 2025, these RF citizens must submit documents to the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs (OCMA) to apply for European Union permanent resident status, including proof of successful completion of the national language test at A2 level. The amendments entered into force on 18 July and affect approximately 4,650 RF citizens.

The amendments provide that if an application is not received by 30 June 2025, the permanent residence permit will expire on 15 July 2025, and the individual must leave Latvian territory by 13 October 2025. However, if the person has attempted the language test unsuccessfully at least once by 16 June 2025 and has registered for a retest scheduled before 30 September 2025, the documents must be submitted by 31 October 2025.

For these RF citizens, Latvian language tests are scheduled between 1 April and 15 May 2025, according to the time and location specified by the National Centre for Education. Some 2,494 Russian citizens may be required to take the language test to obtain a permanent residence permit. In addition to language proficiency, RF citizens must also submit documentation proving regular financial means of at least the minimum monthly wage — €700 from 1 January 2024 and €740 from 1 January 2025 (based on the previous 12 months or proof of pension entitlement).

Previously, under Paragraph 58 of the Transitional Provisions of the 2022 Immigration Law, RF citizens who were Latvian citizens or non-citizens prior to acquiring RF citizenship were required to pass the Latvian language proficiency test at least at A2 level. A two-year period for acquiring Latvian language and passing the test was granted to 4,460 RF citizens.

By mid-December 2024, the OCMA had issued 76 departure orders to RF citizens who failed to comply with the requirements of the Immigration Law amendments and did not submit any documents to apply for a residence permit to live in Latvia.<sup>96</sup> In 2024, 19 Russian citizens were forcibly expelled from Latvia. No Belarusian citizens were forcibly expelled from Latvia in 2024.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> The individuals concerned, citizens of the Russian Federation, had already obtained a permanent residence permit in the Republic of Latvia, as they had been registered in the Republic of Latvia without a time limit on 1 July 1992 and entered in the Latvian Population Register.

<sup>95</sup> PMLP, [Jaunākie Imigrācijas likuma grozījumi attiecas uz aptuveni 4650 Krievijas Federācijas pilsoniem](#), 17.07.2024.

<sup>96</sup> LETA, PMLP līdz decembra vidum izdevusi 76 izbraukšanas rīkojumus Krievijas pilsoniem, 21.12.2024.

<sup>97</sup> Lvportals.lv, [2024. gadā no Latvijas piespiedu kārtā tika izraidīti 19 Krievijas pilsoni](#), 08.02.2024.

## Number of foreign nationals affected by the amendments to the *Immigration Law*<sup>98</sup>

Date of the amendments	Number of persons affected	Applications for residence permits	Permits issued	Persons returned	Number of persons that have left the State on their own initiative
22 September 2022	25 316	24 035	23 003	0	2221
20 June 2024	4 650	150	Applications are currently pending	92 76 (voluntary returns) 16 (involuntary return (expulsion))	No data

Table 2. Source: *Office of the Citizenship and Migration*



### Recommendations:

- Amend the law to ensure that all children born in Latvia to non-citizen parents, aged 6 to 15, who would otherwise remain stateless, automatically acquire Latvian citizenship.
- Continue to provide and expand support for Latvian language learning and naturalisation courses.
- Ensure that, before making any decisions regarding the forced deportation from Latvia of Russian Federation citizens whose residence permits were not renewed, each individual case is assessed, including humanitarian considerations.

<sup>98</sup> [Annexes](#) to the replies to the list of issues in relation to the fourth Periodic report of Latvia on the implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 16 December 1966.

# Asylum Seekers and Refugees



Number of Asylum Seekers in Latvia

In 2020 – 147
In 2021 – 582
In 2022 – 546
In 2023 – 1,624
In 2024 – 801



Refugee status was granted to 104 individuals

alternative status to 88 individuals

6,333 Ukrainian civilians received temporary protection in Latvia.

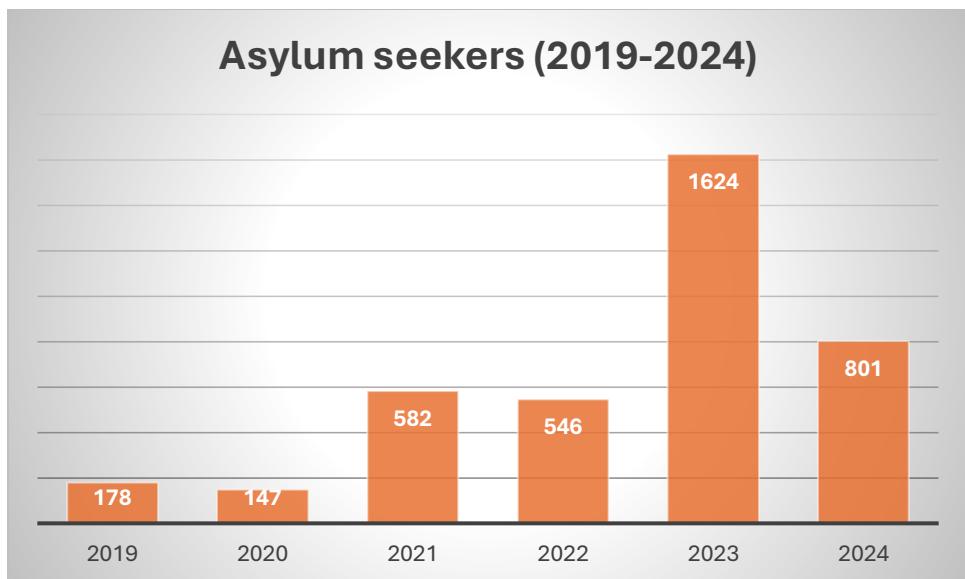


The State Border Guard prevented 5,388 individuals from attempting to illegally cross the Latvia–Belarus border.

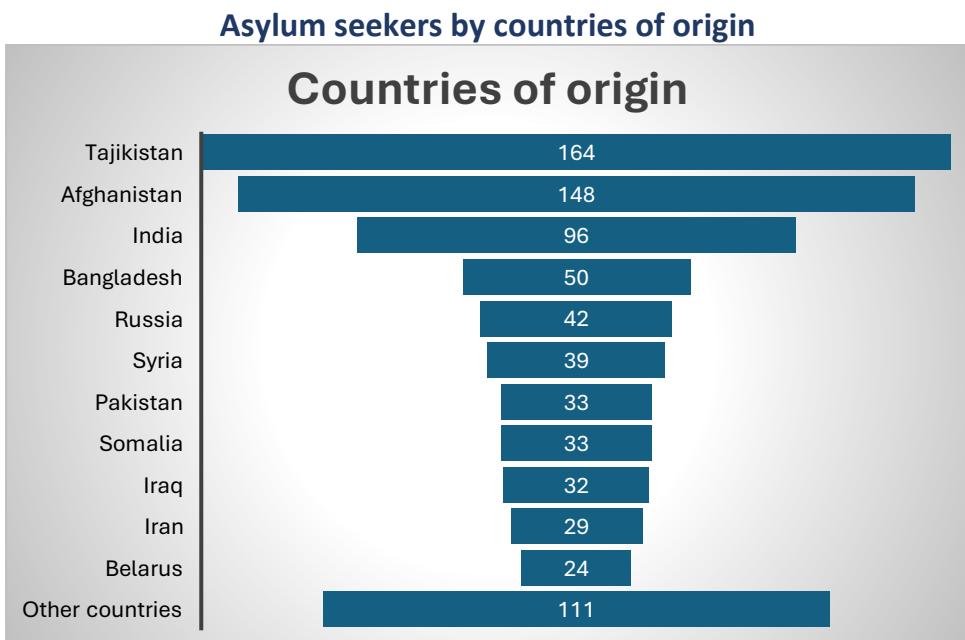
## Asylum Seeker Statistics

In 2024, a total of 801 individuals sought asylum in Latvia.<sup>99</sup> The highest number of applicants originated from Tajikistan (164), Afghanistan (149), and India (96). Asylum seekers also arrived from a wide range of other countries, including: Russia, Syria, Pakistan, Somalia, Iran, Iraq, Belarus, Sri Lanka, Uzbekistan, Nepal, Cameroon, Morocco, Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Algeria, Cuba, Turkey, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Moldova, The Gambia, the Central African Republic, Chile, Georgia, Yemen, Israel, Mexico, Palestine, Sudan, Venezuela, and Azerbaijan.

<sup>99</sup> Pilsonības un migrācijas lietu pārvalde: [Patvēruma meklētāju statistika](#).



Source: *Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs*



Source: *Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs*

### ***Situation at the Eastern Border***

On 12 March 2024, the Cabinet of Ministers issued [Order No. 184](#) to declare an enhanced border protection regime. This was based on [Article 35.1 of Latvia's State Border Law](#) and aimed to safeguard

the border and prevent national threats. The regime came into effect immediately and was set to last from 13 March 2024 to 12 September 2025. It applies to areas in Ludza, Krāslava, and Augšdaugava municipalities, the city of Daugavpils, and Kaunata Parish in Rēzekne Municipality.<sup>100</sup>

The decision followed forecasts from the State Border Guard predicting a rise in illegal border crossings due to changing weather conditions and Finland's closure of its border checkpoints with Russia.<sup>101</sup>

A total of 5,388 people were prevented from illegally crossing the Latvia–Belarus border, while 26 individuals were admitted for humanitarian reasons.<sup>102</sup>

In February 2025, several European NGOs published a report titled "[Pushed, beaten, left to die. European Pushback Report 2024](#)", which documented over 120,000 pushback incidents at borders. The report covered not only Latvia but also Lithuania, Poland, Hungary, Croatia, Bulgaria, and Greece, highlighting trends in border deterrence policies throughout 2024. The organisation "[I Want to Help Refugees](#)" reported that between October 2023 and June 2024, nine people who crossed the Latvia–Belarus border died and were buried in Latvia as unidentified individuals.

In terms of **status determination**, Latvia granted international protection to 192 individuals: 104 were granted refugee status (100 by decision of the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs (OCMA) and 4 by ruling of the Administrative District Court), and 88 were granted subsidiary protection status (82 by OCMA and 6 by court ruling).<sup>103</sup> In total, 10 individuals received international protection through legal proceedings.

**Refugee status** was granted by OCMA to 61 Afghan nationals (23 men, 20 women, and 18 minors), 23 Russian nationals (11 men, 9 women, and 3 minors), 11 Belarusian nationals (7 men, 2 women, and 2 minors), 3 Azerbaijani nationals (men), 1 Iraqi national (man), and 1 Uzbek national (man). **Subsidiary protection status** was granted by OCMA to 29 Syrian nationals (28 men and 1 minor), 28 Afghan nationals, 7 Ukrainian nationals (5 men and 2 women), 5 Eritrean nationals (4 men and 1 woman), 5 Yemeni nationals (men), 2 Russian minors, 5 Sudanese nationals (men), and 1 Uzbek minor.

In several cases, individuals appealed the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs' refusal to grant refugee or alternative status.

On 1 March 2024, the Administrative District Court ruled that subsidiary protection status should be granted to the wife and minor children of a Russian national, while the husband was denied subsidiary protection due to national security risks.<sup>104</sup> In this case, the court also assessed the criminal proceedings initiated against the husband in Russia and concluded that, since the wife and children

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<sup>100</sup> On 10 September 2024 and 19 December 2024, the enhanced operational regime of the border protection system was extended respectively until 31 December 2024 and 30 June 2025.

<sup>101</sup> Valsts kanceleja: [Tiesību akta projekta "Par pastiprināta robežapsardzības sistēmas darbības režīma izsludināšanu" sākotnējās ietekmes \(ex-ante\) novērtējuma ziņojums \(anotācija\)](#).

<sup>102</sup> State Border Guard, 31 December 2024 — at the national border and within the territory of the state.

<sup>103</sup> Written information provided by the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs to the Latvian Centre for Human Rights on 6 December 2024 and 6 March 2025.

<sup>104</sup> Administratīvās rajona tiesas Rīgas tiesu nama 01.03.2024 spriedums, lietas arhīva Nr. [A42-00768-24/20](#)

had already experienced manipulation by law enforcement authorities during procedural actions, there was a real risk that they could be subjected to serious harm in connection with the criminal case against the husband.

On 30 April 2024, the Administrative District Court, contrary to the decision of PMLP, recognised that an asylum seeker from Ghana qualified for refugee status, as the individual could face persecution in their country of origin due to their sexual orientation.<sup>105</sup> The court found the asylum seeker's account to be credible, consistent, and highly detailed.

On 25 July 2024, PMLP was ordered to grant subsidiary protection status to a Gambian national due to the risk of inhuman or degrading treatment in the country of origin, as defined in Article 41(2) of the Asylum Law. Upon reviewing publicly available information, the court was not convinced that the individual in Gambia would have access to the specific healthcare required to prepare for prosthetic treatment, nor to the necessary technical aids for prosthetics.<sup>106</sup>

On 11 October 2024, refugee status was granted to a Belarusian woman. Although she was not considered politically active, the court gave legal significance to the fact that her passport had expired and that her husband had already been granted refugee status in Latvia.<sup>107</sup> The court emphasised that crossing the border with such a passport could expose the applicant to increased scrutiny from border guards and possibly law enforcement officials. She would likely be required to answer questions such as where she had spent the past two years, which countries she had lived in, what she had been doing, why she had not obtained a new identity document in time, why she was entering Belarus from Latvia, and where her husband was located. In responding to these questions, the applicant might be compelled to reveal facts about her life in Latvia, her husband's refugee status, and their asylum application in Latvia—information that could attract heightened attention from Belarusian law enforcement authorities, including scrutiny of content posted on social media, thereby increasing the risk of persecution against her.<sup>108</sup>

### **Case H.M.M. v. Latvia**

On 12 February 2025, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) held oral hearings in three cases: H.M.M. and Others v. Latvia (No. 42165/21), as well as similar cases against Lithuania and Poland. All three cases concern events at the Belarusian border that began on 10 August 2021. A significant number of third-party interventions were involved in these proceedings—four organisations and nine EU Member States: Bulgaria, Czechia, Denmark, Croatia, Estonia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, and Finland.

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<sup>105</sup> Administratīvās rajona tiesas Rīgas tiesu nama 30.04.2024 spriedums, lietas arhīva Nr. [A42-00999-24/21](#).

<sup>106</sup> Administratīvās rajona tiesas Rīgas tiesu nama 30.04.2024 spriedums, lietas arhīva Nr. [A42-01700-24/18](#), 13. punkts.

<sup>107</sup> Administratīvās rajona tiesas Rīgas tiesu nama 11.10.2024 spriedums, lietas arhīva Nr. [A42-01638-24/7](#).

<sup>108</sup> Administratīvās rajona tiesas Rīgas tiesu nama 11.10.2024 spriedums, lietas arhīva Nr. [A42-01638-24/7](#), sprieduma 11. punkts.

On 11 October 2024, the Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights intervened as a third party in the ECtHR cases H.M.M. and Others v. Latvia<sup>109</sup>, C.O.C.G. and Others v. Lithuania<sup>110</sup>, and R.A. and Others v. Poland<sup>111</sup>. In each case, the Commissioner submitted observations analysing the legality of summary returns and potential human rights violations. The Commissioner noted that since 2021, Latvia has operated under an emergency regime that restricts access to asylum procedures for irregular border crossers, resulting in many migrants being returned to Belarus without individual assessment. Reports indicate incidents of violence, mistreatment, and forced returns, disregarding potential risks in Belarus, including torture. The Commissioner emphasised that Latvia's actions must comply with the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), particularly the principle of non-refoulement, which prohibits returning individuals to countries where they face torture or inhuman treatment. He warned that misinterpretation of the ECtHR judgment in N.D. and N.T. v. Spain could lead to neglect of asylum seekers' rights, such as failure to assess individual circumstances. The Commissioner criticised the practice of treating illegal border crossing as grounds for denying protection and stressed that human rights standards must be upheld even in emergency situations. He further noted that Latvia's approach limits real access to asylum procedures, for example, by restricting access to official border crossing points, which are often practically unreachable. He called for border control measures to be implemented in full compliance with human rights and cautioned that the instrumentalisation of migration—such as in the case of Belarus—must not be used to justify breaches of international obligations.

The [UN Refugee Agency \(UNHCR\)](#) highlighted that the practice introduced in Latvia during the 2021 emergency—returning individuals to Belarus without individual risk assessment—violates international protection standards and the principle of non-refoulement. UNHCR stated that access to territory and asylum procedures is being denied to several groups of individuals and stressed that even in emergency situations, states cannot deny access to asylum or carry out returns without individual assessment.

[Amnesty International argued](#) that the state of emergency declared by countries was neither proportionate nor necessary, as required by international law. The organisation condemned pushback practices and violence against asylum seekers and considered that Latvia had violated Article 4 of Protocol No. 4 of the ECHR, as well as Articles 2 and 3.

The [Rule of Law Clinic of the Central European University Democracy Institute](#) submitted that Latvian legislation adopted in response to increased border crossings from Belarus permitted forced returns to third countries without individual assessment of asylum claims. The Clinic argued that this practice contradicts the absolute principle of non-refoulement under Article 3 of the ECHR. It also addressed the concept of “instrumentalisation of migration,” asserting that authorities in Latvia, Lithuania,

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<sup>109</sup> Third party intervention by the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe: [Application no. 42165/21 H.M.M. and Others v. Latvia](#)

<sup>110</sup> Third party intervention by the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe: [Application no. 17764/22 C.O.C.G. and Others v. Lithuania](#)

<sup>111</sup> Third party intervention by the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe: [Third Party Intervention RA and Others v Poland](#)

Poland, and Finland use this term to justify restrictions on asylum rights. The Clinic maintained that the concept is vague, does not reflect the actual situation, and undermines the rule of law.

### ***LCHR's Work with Asylum Seekers***

In 2024, the Latvian Centre for Human Rights (LCC), under a UNHCR-funded project titled “Legal Assistance to Asylum Seekers and Beneficiaries of International Protection and Capacity-Building Activities in Latvia,” provided legal consultations to 77 individuals from the following countries: Ukraine, Afghanistan, Belarus, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Iraq, Iran, India, Gambia, Morocco, Nigeria, Cameroon, Kuwait, Russia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Syria, Tajikistan, Turkey, and Uzbekistan. Legal assistance was provided to asylum seekers, individuals with refugee status, those with subsidiary protection, and persons under temporary protection. Among the clients were vulnerable individuals, including two survivors of torture, one woman at risk, four persons over the age of 60, three LGBTQI+ individuals, and one person with traumatic experiences.

LCC lawyers provided legal support in the Administrative District Court, including drafting applications and representing individuals in oral hearings. In total, LCC lawyers participated in four oral court hearings.

### ***Family Reunification Cases***

In 2024, LCHR continued its work on family reunification cases. As a result of LCHR’s assistance, three individuals with refugee status in Latvia (from Russia, Kuwait/Iraq, and Afghanistan) and one individual with subsidiary protection status (from Russia) were successfully reunited with their family members.<sup>112</sup>

In one family reunification case involving Russian nationals, assistance was also provided in the Administrative District Court. Although the proceedings did not facilitate the reunification process, the court ruled that the Consular Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had failed to inform the applicants about the correct procedure, rendering the visa refusal decisions unlawful.<sup>113</sup> Two families from Afghanistan and Russia were reunited more quickly and without major difficulties.

The reunification process for a family from Kuwait/Iraq took three years. In December 2021, a stateless person from Kuwait was granted refugee status in Latvia, but his wife, an Iraqi national, and their two minor children remained in Iraq. The first major obstacle was obtaining travel documents for the children, which required nearly two years of communication with the OCMA, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and Iraqi institutions. Unable to resolve the issue remotely, the individual travelled to Iraq to arrange the children’s passports in person. Once travel documents were secured, the next hurdle was obtaining visas, which were initially refused by the Polish consulate in Erbil—representing Latvian interests—citing lack of competence. Consequently, the family had to travel to the Latvian embassy in Egypt, incurring significant financial

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<sup>112</sup> 11 persons in total.

<sup>113</sup> Administratīvās rajona tiesas Rīgas tiesu nama 04.04.2024. spriedums lietā Nr. [A42-00658-24/20](#).

costs. The visas were issued there, and on 7 November 2024, the wife and children finally arrived in Latvia.<sup>114</sup>

### ***Criminal Proceedings Against human rights activist I. Raubiško***

On 28 February, the first hearing was held in the criminal case against Ieva Raubiško, a staff member of the organisation “I Want to Help Refugees,” who was charged with intentionally organising the illegal crossing of the border by a group of individuals.<sup>115</sup> The charges stem from her assistance to five asylum seekers who had been granted an interim measure by the ECtHR, instructing the Latvian government to refrain from pushing them back to Belarus and to provide basic humanitarian aid.<sup>116</sup> In total, five hearings took place in 2024. Although the investigation was expected to conclude on 30 October 2024, the judge decided to reopen proceedings, citing the need for additional information regarding the status of the Syrian nationals assisted by Ms Raubiško. The trial will continue in 2025.

### ***Penalisation of Asylum Seekers for Irregular Entry***

LCHR is aware of at least two cases in which asylum seekers were subjected to administrative penalties for irregular entry into the country.

In one case involving a female asylum seeker from Pakistan, administrative proceedings were initiated because she entered Latvia using a forged visa. LCHR assisted in preparing written explanations, clarifying that the individual had arrived in Latvia in good faith to seek asylum, based on her personal circumstances and membership in a religious group persecuted in Pakistan. The State Border Guard was also asked to explain how the individual had been informed of the proceedings and through which interpreter she had been made aware of her procedural rights and the potential legal consequences. The written explanations were submitted on 17 September 2024, and the Border Guard imposed a €400 fine. However, based on the information provided in the written explanations, on 29 October 2024, the Border Guard officer revoked the fine on their own initiative, citing significant procedural violations and terminated the administrative proceedings.<sup>117</sup> The officer noted that there was no evidence the asylum seeker had been informed of the case hearing, nor proof of interpreter involvement. It was also questioned whether the individual had understood her rights, including the right to participate in the hearing and provide explanations with the help of an interpreter.

The second case concerns an asylum seeker from Syria who used a forged passport to enter Latvia. The individual received a notification from a bailiff regarding the obligation to comply with a ruling, with total enforcement costs amounting to €595.37. It was later established that on 28 June 2024, a decision had been made to impose a fine of €450. In response to a request for information about the

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<sup>114</sup> Further information on the family reunification process can be found in Newsletter No. 3 “Developments in Asylum Law” (in Latvian)

<sup>115</sup> ENG.LSM.LV (2024). [Human rights activist accused of organizing illegal border crossing in Latvia](#), 3 October.

<sup>116</sup> ECtHR (2023). [M.A. and Others v Latvia](#), Application no. [1134/23](#), lodged on 6 January 2023, communicated on 16 October 2023

<sup>117</sup> Decision No. 13071000159124-4 of the Ludza Division of the State Border Guard dated 29 October 2024, “On the annulment of an unlawful decision and the termination of administrative offence proceedings”.

administrative offence proceedings and procedural aspects, the State Border Guard (VRS) stated that the individual had been duly informed during the process. On 14 November 2024, the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs (PMLP) granted the individual subsidiary protection status. On 6 January 2025, the Sigulda Court accepted the individual's application to annul the VRS decision due to newly discovered circumstances. The application argued that the newly discovered fact—the PMLP decision to grant subsidiary protection—demonstrated that the asylum seeker had legitimately sought protection in Latvia and was covered by the principle of non-penalisation of refugees under Article 31 of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol.

### ***Temporary Protection for Ukrainian Civilians***

In 2024, a total of 6,333 Ukrainian civilians received temporary protection in Latvia.<sup>118</sup> By the beginning of 2025, nearly 17,000 Ukrainian war refugees were residing in Latvia (compared to 25,700 at the beginning of 2024).

On 25 June 2024, the [Council of the European Union](#) adopted a decision to extend temporary protection until 4 March 2026. To ensure continuity of support beyond 31 December 2024, Latvia adopted [amendments to the Law on Support for Ukrainian Civilians](#) on 21 November 2024, thereby extending the provision of assistance until 31 December 2025.



### ***Recommendations***

- **Ensure that foreign nationals have effective access to an asylum procedure that includes an individual assessment of the risk of ill-treatment if expelled to their country of origin or a third country.**
- **To the Ombudsman: Enhance the monitoring of human rights observance at the border, with particular attention to preventing risks of ill-treatment.**
- **To decriminalise the provision of humanitarian aid to asylum seekers at the border, ensuring that individuals and organisations offering vital assistance—such as food, water, medical care, and shelter—are protected from legal penalties. Clear legal frameworks should distinguish humanitarian aid from activities linked to irregular migration, allowing legitimate support without fear of prosecution.**
- **To provide humanitarian aid (particularly emergency assistance) to asylum seekers arriving at the Latvian-Belarus border**

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<sup>118</sup> Written information provided by the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs to the Latvian Centre for Human Rights on 6 March 2025