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2020

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

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

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SUMMARY

Changes in the general national migration policy

On 12 March 2020, the country declared the first emergency situation related to the spread of Covid-19 infection. Throughout the year, a number of legal acts¹ were passed in the country, determining the actions of institutions and people to limit the spread of the pandemic. This legislation included legal provisions that must also be observed in the management of migration flows. It set out procedures for the stay, entry and exit of third-country nationals, changes in the work of migration authorities, reduced the number of on-site services, the possibility of revoking residence permits or visas in case of breach of Covid-19 isolation or quarantine rules as well as restrictions on entry during the period of Covid-19 infection. The legislation will remain in place for as long as it is necessary to limit the spread of Covid-19 infection. It should be noted that their impact will be of a lasting nature, as the range of remotely available electronic services has been successfully expanded and the procedure for receiving services has been changed. These principles are also intended to be transposed into existing legislation, which lays down the procedures for the entry and residence of third-country nationals.

Legal migration

As in other European Union (hereinafter - EU) countries, Latvia in 2020 saw decreased migration flows due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This is evidenced by the decline in the number of

¹Law on the Management of the Spread of COVID-19 Infection. – Latvijas Vēstnesis No. 110A, 09.06.2020. – [entered into force on 10.06.2020], Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers of 9 June 2020 No. 360 “Epidemiological Safety Measures for the Containment of the Spread of COVID-19 Infection”. - Latvijas Vēstnesis No. 110B, 09.06.2020. – [entered into force on 10.06.2020]

first-time temporary residence permits issued. In order to reduce the spread of Covid-19 infection, the legal acts set out the measures that foreigners must follow when entering and staying in Latvia, as well as the preconditions that inviters must follow in order to attract third-country students and migrant workers.

International protection and asylum

The number of asylum seekers remained relatively low, with 147 asylum seekers in 2020. Five persons who had received international protection status in Latvia have been returned to Latvia as part of the readmission process.²

During the emergency situation declared throughout the country, changes were introduced in the interviewing of asylum seekers: the interviews were conducted remotely - in the form of video conferences.

Unaccompanied minors and other vulnerable groups

The number of unaccompanied minors entering Latvia continues to decrease: in 2020, less than five unaccompanied minors entered Latvia. Only few of them applied for asylum in Latvia.

In 2020, amendments to the Law on the Protection of the Children's Rights³ entered into force, determining the procedure and amount for covering municipal expenses for unaccompanied minors in a childcare institution, guardian's family or foster family, if this person does not have asylum, refugee or alternative status.

²Source: SBG

³Amendments to the Law on the Protection of the Children's Rights. - Latvijas Vēstnesis, No.257A, 23.12.2019.- [entered into force on 06.01.2020].

Integration

In 2020, immigrants from third countries were able to learn the Latvian language, get to know life in Latvia, as well as attend integration courses and receive help to find a job more successfully; they also had the opportunity to receive the support of a social mentor. State and non-governmental organizations implemented integration and Latvian language courses for asylum seekers and third-country nationals online.

Citizenship and naturalization

In 2020, 725 persons were admitted to Latvian citizenship through naturalization.⁴ The majority of people who received Latvian citizenship (81%) were non-citizens of Latvia. The number of third-country nationals who received Latvian citizenship through naturalization has increased - in 2020, 139 individuals became citizens of Latvia.⁵

Border control, visas and Schengen management

On 1 December 2020, the State Border Guard Law⁶ entered into force aimed at ensuring legal and effective operation of the State Border Guard.

On 2 February 2020, the visa representation agreements with Lithuania, Estonia and Hungary were amended to reflect changes to the Visa Code. The amendments stipulated that in

⁴ Source: OCMA.

⁵Source: OCMA.

⁶State Border Guard Law. – Latvijas Vēstnesis, No. 223, 17.11.2020. – [entered into force on 01.12.2020]

future the representing state would be responsible for the whole visa processing process without the involvement of the represented state.

Latvia's action plan to address the shortcomings identified during the Schengen visa evaluation process and to implement the recommendations has been fully completed.

The State Border Guard (hereinafter - SBS) participated in joint operations organized by Frontex⁷ which provided support to both EU Member States and third countries.

Irregular migration

On 1 July 2020, the Law on Administrative Liability⁸ entered into force which increases the maximum penalty for administrative offenses, including breach of migration rules.

Trafficking in human beings

Six persons have been identified as suspects in criminal proceedings for human trafficking and one person has been convicted. 31 third-country nationals have been identified as victims of trafficking in human beings.

Return and readmission

In 2020, 38 people were removed and 870 returned voluntarily to their home country. In 2020, the Riga Office of the International Organization for Migration (hereinafter - IOM) provided assistance to 62 persons for the implementation of voluntary return.

⁷European Border and Coast Guard Agency.

⁸[Law on Administrative Liability](#). - Latvijas Vēstnesis, 225, 14.11.2018. – [entered into force on 01.07.2020]

In the second half of 2020, readmission cooperation was launched with the Republic of Belarus on the basis of an agreement between the European Union and the Republic of Belarus on the readmission of persons residing without authorization.

International cooperation

The following international documents under development: the draft agreement between the Republic of Latvia and the Russian Federation on the border regime and the “Agreement between the State Border Guard of Latvia and the State Border Guard Service of Ukraine on cooperation in border protection issues”. Migration experts have participated in a number of migration forums and projects to share and gain experience in cooperating with third countries.

INTRODUCTION

The Annual Report on the Migration and Asylum Situation in Latvia (hereinafter - the Report) provides information on the most significant and notable changes in the migration and asylum policy in Latvia in the period from 1 January to 31 December 2020 and at the beginning of 2021. The report includes information from migration policy makers, implementers, as well as published research and media analysis.

The report is based on the specification developed by the European Commission and the National Contact Points of the European Migration Network (hereinafter - EMN), which allows to compile uniform and comparable information on all EU Member States. Once fully drawn, the synthesis report on the migration and asylum situation in the EU in 2020 will be available on the website of the EMN Latvia contact point www.emn.lv.

The information required for the Report was obtained from the Ministry of the Interior, SBG, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Consular Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Welfare, Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Health, IOM Riga Office, Society Integration Fund, Association "Shelter "Safe House"" and Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs (hereinafter - OCMA).

In order to reflect the prevailing opinions in the society and to view the discussions that took place in the political environment, the Report used articles, opinions and assessments published on various news and public policy portals, as well as information available on the websites of other state institutions. Literature and other sources used in the Report are included in the list of literature and other sources. The data collected by national data providers and Eurostat are used in the Report. The data are coordinated with migration and asylum experts. All terms used in this Report correspond to the definitions available in [the EMN Glossary of Asylum and Migration Terms](#)⁹.

⁹Available: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/european_migration_network/glossary_en.

OVERVIEW OF CHANGES IN ASYLUM AND MIGRATION POLICY

General changes in the field of migration

In 2020, the world was hit by the Covid-19 pandemic and the ensuing restrictions. International migration was also significantly restricted in Europe and Latvia. From March 12 to June 10 and from November 9 to 7 April 2021, an emergency situation was declared in Latvia.

A number of laws and regulations were adopted to control the spread of Covid-19 infection. They also included legal provisions directly related to the management of migration flows:

- [Law on the Management of the Spread of COVID-19 Infection](#).¹⁰This law determines the basic principles of operation of state institutions, rights and obligations that must be observed by both institutions and individuals. This law obliges public authorities to continue to provide services as remotely as possible, or to ensure safe receipt of the services in person. Section 32 of the Law stipulates that during an emergency situation and in the future the invitation of a third-country national shall take place electronically, using the e-service portal www.latvija.lv or by signing documents with an electronic signature. The documents required for the registration of the residence permit must be sent by post or confirmed with an electronic signature. An application for requesting or registering a repeated residence

¹⁰ Law on the Management of the Spread of COVID-19 Infection. Latvijas Vēstnesis, 110A, 09.06.2020

permit can be submitted both while staying in Latvia and abroad. The existence of sufficient financial resources or the requirement to perform active economic activity in 2020 shall not be assessed when issuing, registering or revoking a residence permit to third-country nationals who have legally resided in Latvia until 10 June 2020. There are certain periods in which absence from Latvia does not affect the receipt of a permanent residence permit and is not considered a reason for revocation of a residence permit. It is stipulated that a third-country national has the right to register or obtain a repeated residence permit if his/her travel document has expired after 12 March 2020. This law gives the OCMA the right to revoke a temporary residence permit or visa or to cancel the issuance of these documents if it is established that a third-country national has violated the rules of isolation or quarantine or restrictions on assembly.

- Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers of 9 June 2020 No. 360 "[Epidemiological Safety Measures for the Containment of the Spread of COVID-19 Infection](#)". Article 27 of these Regulations stipulates that colleges and universities shall determine the procedures by which an educational program or a part thereof may be implemented remotely if foreign students are unable to attend the Republic of Latvia in person due to restrictions. Not later than two weeks before the beginning of the study semester, educational institutions must inform the foreign applicant and the student about the requirements mentioned in these regulations, including the need to present a negative Covid-19 test result when entering Latvia, as well as self-isolation conditions. The universities must collect information on the time of arrival of a foreign student and the address of his/her place of residence in the Republic of Latvia, as well as provide him/her with the opportunity to comply with self-isolation requirements if the foreign student has informed the college or university about the arrival in the Republic of Latvia for attending the study program in person. These regulations set additional requirements if a foreign student self-isolates on the premises of a college or university dormitory.

Article 36 of the Regulations, on the other hand, prohibits, starting with 10 June 2020, the movement of persons and vehicles through EU external border crossing points from/to countries published on the website of the Center for Disease Prevention and Control where the prevalence of Covid-19 infection is known to pose a serious risk to public health, with

the exception of freight transport. The Regulations also restrict the entry of holders of temporary residence permits for non-essential reasons; all permitted grounds for entry are referred to in Article 37 of these Regulations. In order to maintain economic migration, employers may submit to the Latvian Investment and Development Agency (hereinafter - LIDA) a certificate on the compliance of these migrant workers with the entry criteria, their health condition and capacity to provide treatment to migrants, if the immigrant is diagnosed with Covid-19.¹¹

- Order No. 103 of the Cabinet of Ministers of 12 March 2020 “[On the declaration of an emergency situation](#)” declaring a state of emergency throughout the country until 9 June 2020 with the aim of limiting the spread of Covid-19. The order expired on 10 June 2020 when Regulations No. 360 “Epidemiological Safety Measures for the Containment of the Spread of COVID-19 Infection” entered into force. Article 4 of this Order established the participation of the LIDA in the safe attraction of third country employees, established restrictions on the movement of persons and vehicles through airports, ports, railways and roads at the EU external border crossing points.
- Order of the Cabinet of Ministers of 6 November 2020 No. 655 “[On the declaration of an emergency situation](#)”¹²

Discussions on migration

Following the announcement of the results of the presidential elections in Belarus in August 2020, the political situation in Belarus worsened, which led many companies in the country and their employees to look for opportunities to move to another country. Latvia, taking into account its

¹¹Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers of 9 June 2020 No. 360 “Epidemiological Safety Measures for the Containment of the Spread of COVID-19 Infection”, Articles 59 and 60. Latvijas Vēstnesis, 110B, 09.06.2020.

¹²Order of the Cabinet of Ministers of 6 November 2020 No. 655 “On the declaration of an emergency situation”. 216A, 06.11.2020. Ceased to be in force on 07.04.2021.

geographical location, tried to attract high-tech companies of this country, thus creating new jobs in Latvia, as well as attracting highly qualified employees to its companies. Riga, Ventspils, Liepaja and other municipalities have shown interest in attracting Belarusian companies with specific offers. Municipalities are trying to attract Belarusian companies with vacant office space, special economic zones, and are ready to look for individual solutions to support the relocation of companies from Belarus to Latvia.¹³ The LIDA has played an important role in attracting companies by implementing active communication with Belarusian technology companies.

Thanks to successful joint work between the OCMA, the Ministry of Economics, LIDA, SBG and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a solution has been found to facilitate the entry conditions of Belarusian citizens and the first Belarusian companies have already started operating in Latvia. At the end of the active part of LIDA's campaign, several Belarusian companies have already decided to move fully or partially to Latvia, but at the end of 2020, negotiations continued with about 50 other companies. According to LIDA calculations, the 17 investment projects attracted from Belarus in 2020 could make an annual contribution of at least 40 million euros to the economy.¹⁴

At the end of 2020, representatives of Latvian institutions and non-governmental organizations continued to look for opportunities to reduce various restrictions and expand support for Belarusian civil society, so that people coming from Belarus could get a job faster and open a bank account more easily. Support was obtained for Belarusian students continuing their studies in Latvia.¹⁵

As a result of various discussions, the Ministry of the Interior drafted amendments to the Immigration Law¹⁶ which were approved by the government on 18 February 2021. The amendments stipulate that asylum seekers will be granted the right to employment as early as three months after applying for asylum, as early employment enables third-country nationals to earn additional

¹³ Municipalities are ready to welcome Belarusian companies. - Available: https://www.delfi.lv/bizness/biznesa_vidē/pasvaldibas-gatavas-atplest-rokas-baltkrievijas-uznemumiem.d?id=52497341.

¹⁴ A "green corridor" for strategic investment must be opened up. Kaspars Rožkalns, Director of the Latvian Investment and Development Agency, 14.12.2020. Available: <https://www.liaa.gov.lv/lv/jaunums/liaa-jaatver-zalais-koridors-strategiskas-nozimes-investicijam>

¹⁵ It is planned to open a bank account for Belarusian refugees in Latvia and grant scholarships for Belarusian students. - Available: <https://www.lsm.lv/raksts/zinas/latvija/baltkrievijas-begliem-latvija-plano-vieglaku-bankas-konta-atversanu-baltkrievu-studentiem-stipendijas.a381949/>.

¹⁶ Draft Law "Amendment to the Immigration Law". - Available: <http://tap.mk.gov.lv/lv/mk/tap/?pid=40495883&mode=mk&date=2021-02-18>.

income, promotes individual growth and helps them not to lose their qualifications.¹⁷ Amendments to the law in April 2021 were not yet approved by the Parliament (Saeima).

¹⁷ From here on out, asylum seekers will be able to start a paid job more quickly. - Available: <https://www.iem.gov.lv/lv/jaunums/turpmak-patveruma-mekletaji-vares-atrak-sakt-stradat-algotu-darbu>.

LEGAL MIGRATION

The total number of temporary residence permits issued for the first time in 2020 has almost halved compared to the previous year: 5,669¹⁸ (10,060 in 2019) temporary residence permits were issued.

In 2020, changes in the management of legal migration were introduced by legislation related to the control of the spread of Covid-19 infection. The regulations will remain in force for as long as it is necessary to limit the spread of Covid-19 infection, but their impact will be permanent, as the range of electronic services has been expanded, and the procedure for the services provided by migration authorities has been changed, ensuring the possibility to receive such services remotely. It is planned to adopt these principles also in the permanently valid enactments, which determine the procedure for entry of third-country nationals.

In 2020, when considering the application of a third-country national for the issuance or registration of a residence permit or revocation of a residence permit, the mandatory requirement¹⁹ to prove sufficient financial resources was abolished if the third-country national entered Latvia and applied for a temporary residence permit by 10 June 2020. For persons applying for a first temporary residence permit after 10 June 2020, the requirements for meeting the national salary threshold or sufficient financial resources for third-country nationals are applied in full according to the salary threshold: crop and livestock production, hunting and related service activities - 887 euros ; forestry and logging - 1,183 euros; fisheries - 932 euros; others - 1,076 euros, students - 430 euros; family members (adult family members - 430, minors 129 euros); start-ups - 430 euros²⁰; investors – 2,152 euros.²¹

¹⁸ Source: OCMA. The original data on temporary residence permits, which are compiled by Eurostat, will be adjusted later.

¹⁹ Law on the Management of the Spread of COVID-19 Infection. Section 32. Latvijas Vēstnesis, 110A, 09.06.2020.

²⁰ It can be something else than salary.

²¹ Regulations regarding the amount of financial resources necessary for a foreigner and establishment of the existence of financial resources. Latvijas Vēstnesis, 97, 18.05.2017.

Economic migration

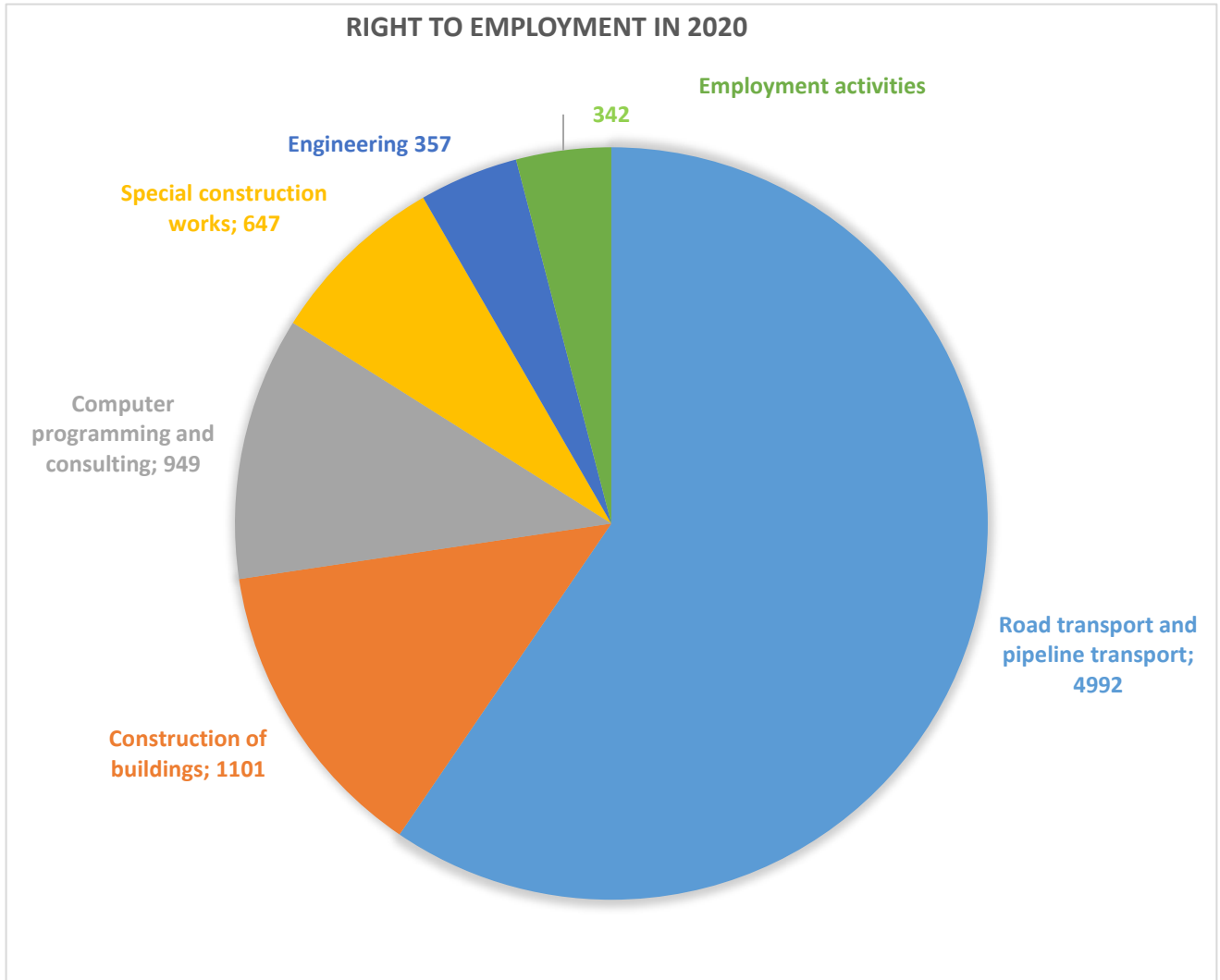


Figure 3-1

The total number of employment rights granted to third-country nationals in 2020 (both on the basis of a visa (2,657) and a temporary residence permit) has decreased by 21% (15,363 in 2019 and 12,199 in 2020). Most third-country nationals work in road transport and pipeline transport (4,992), building construction (1,101), computer programming and consulting (949), specialized construction work (647), and engineering(357).²²Other popular professions include truck drivers,

²² Source: OCMA.

cooks and builders. Most third-country nationals employed are nationals of Ukraine, Belarus, Russia, Uzbekistan and India.

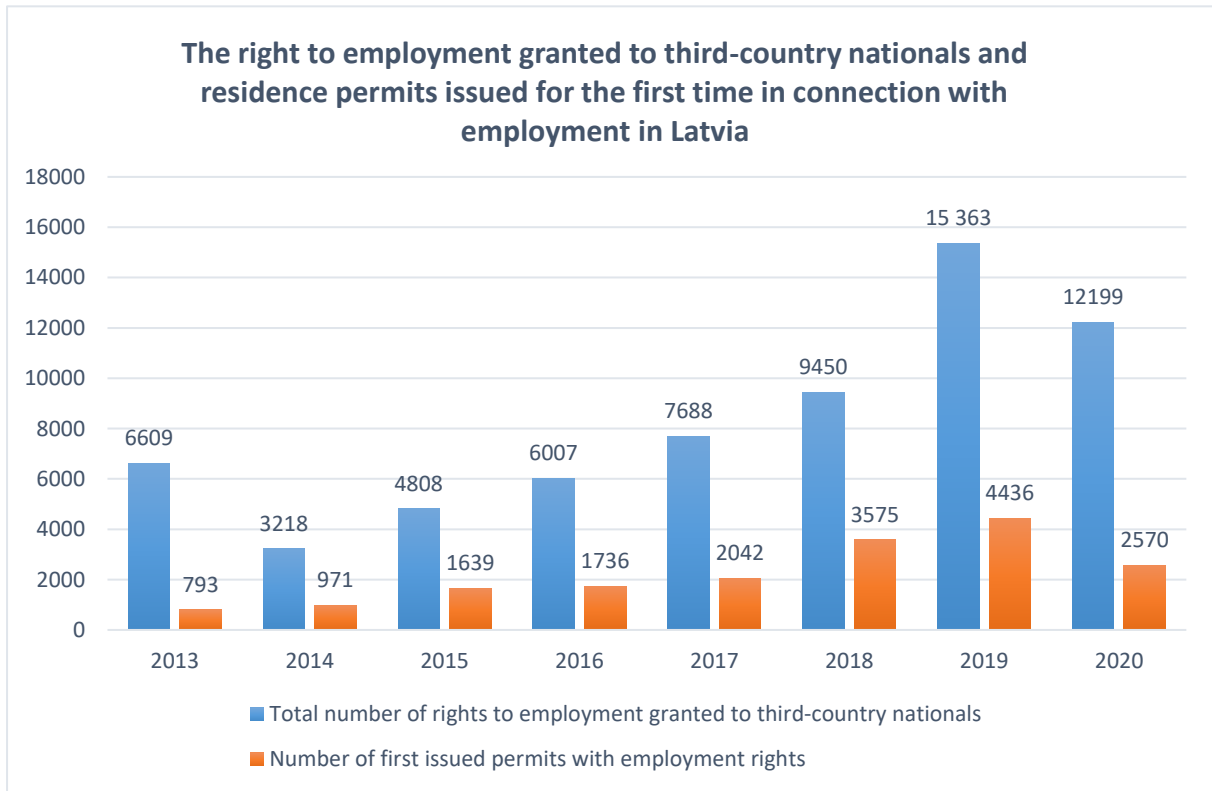


Figure 3-2.

The number of first residence permits issued to third-country nationals for employment has halved: In 2019 - 4,436; 2020 - 2,570.

The legal act on limiting the spread of Covid-19 infection²³ provides for the **entry of third-country nationals** crossing the external borders of the Schengen States, only if the migrant worker is a highly qualified employee, an intra-corporate transferee, a seasonal worker in the agricultural, forestry, fish farming and food production sectors, an employee of a transport and passenger transport service provider, a member of the crew of cargo or technical voyages who enters or leaves

²³Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers of 9 June 2020 No. 360 "Epidemiological Safety Measures for the Containment of the Spread of COVID-19 Infection", Articles 59 and 60. Latvijas Vēstnesis, 110B, 09.06.2020.

the Republic of Latvia while performing work duties; a seafarer who is required to board or return to his/her place of work on board a ship; an athlete or sports employee whose need to enter Latvia to fulfill the obligations of merchants has been confirmed by the LIDA and whose arrival in Latvia is related to:

- maintenance of equipment operated by a merchant registered in Latvia or installation of new equipment, if it cannot be provided by service providers in Latvia and if it is necessary for the production of goods or provision of services or fulfilment of obligations of the merchant related to public procurement obligations;
- certification, attestation or conformity assessment of products or services manufactured by a merchant registered in Latvia, as well as for the attraction of highly qualified employees in order to ensure the release of the relevant goods or services into public circulation or for the fulfilment of the merchant's contractual obligations;
- maintenance of equipment or structures owned by a commercial company important for national security or installation of new equipment, or construction works necessary to ensure the operation of the merchant or maintenance of critical infrastructure, or implementation of a construction plan (including engineering research), if it relates to an object for which the status of an object of national interest has been determined;
- fulfilment of obligations of a Latvian merchant regarding the implementation of an investment project in Latvia where the planned investment amount exceeds at least one million euros or the planned number of newly created jobs is more than 20, as well as the conclusion of an export transaction of goods or services produced in Latvia, if the value of the potential export transaction is more than one hundred thousand euros;
- the fulfilment of commitments concerning seasonal work in the agricultural, forestry, fish and food production sectors;

- the performance of the duties of an athlete or sports employee.²⁴

On 21 December 2020, amendments to the [Labour Law](#)²⁵ governing the posting of workers were adopted. This regulation also applies to the posting of third-country workers. When sending a third-country national to Latvia, an employer of a Member State of the European Union and the European Economic Area must submit to the State Labour Inspectorate a confirmation that the posted employee who is a third-country national is legally employed by an employer in a Member State of the European Union or a European Economic Area. At the same time, an employer of another Member State of the European Union and the European Economic Area who sends employees to work in Latvia must also fulfil a number of other requirements referred to in Sections 14 and 14.1 of the Labour Law. The Law "Amendments to the Labour Law" is designed to ensure more effective protection of the rights of posted employees in accordance with the regulation included in the legal norms of the European Union.²⁶ Even before the amendments, the Labour Law provided that a foreign employer, regardless of the law applicable to the employment contract and employment relationship, must ensure working conditions and employment conditions provided for in Latvian legal acts, as well as in collective agreements recognized as universally binding (*erga omnes*), with regard to working and rest time, annual leave, minimum wage rates, occupational safety and health, protection of employees in risk groups (e.g. young people, pregnant women), provision of labour services, equal treatment

The amendments add to this list the accommodation conditions for staff, as well as the reimbursement of business trip expenses. This means that a foreign employer will have to make sure whether in Latvia, at the time of posting, legislation or universally binding regulations provide for accommodation standards for employees. As explained in the annotation of the draft law, a foreign employer must take into account the Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No. 137 "Hygiene requirements for service hotels"²⁷ laying down hygiene requirements for accommodation and

²⁴Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers of 9 June 2020 No. 360 "Epidemiological Safety Measures for the Containment of the Spread of COVID-19 Infection" Article 59. - Latvijas Vēstnesis No. 110B, 09.06.2020. – [entered into force on 10.06.2020]

²⁵ Law "Amendments to the Labour Law" Section 14. – Latvijas Vēstnesis No. 247A, 22.12.2020. – [entered into force on 05.01.2021]

²⁶ Annotation of Draft Law "Amendments to the Labour Law". – Available: <http://titania.saeima.lv/LIVS13/SaeimaLIVS13.nsf/0/058B9FF01195FA88C2258601004D5D09?OpenDocument#B>.

²⁷ Cabinet of Ministers Regulations of 11 April 2000 No. 137 "[Hygiene Requirements for Official Accommodation Facilities](#)". - Latvijas Vēstnesis, No. 133/135, 14.04.2000. – [entered into force on 01.09.2000]

intended for the accommodation of persons during the professional or higher education studies or during the performance of work.

In order to fulfill the obligation to reimburse business trip expenses, the employer must apply Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No. 969 "Procedures for Reimbursement of Expenses Relating to Official Travels"²⁸. It should be noted that the requirements regarding the reimbursement of business trip expenses apply only to those cases when a foreign employer assigns employees from one place to another place within Latvia. Reimbursement of business trip expenses in connection with the departure of a foreign employee from another country to Latvia is regulated by the legal acts of another country.

The most significant change in the applicable rules concerns the remuneration to be paid to the employee. If previously the employer had to pay minimum wage rates, then with the amendments the employer will have to guarantee wages, including bonuses for work related to special risks, overtime work, night work, and work on public holidays, additional work. Wages and salaries do not include contributions to the supplementary pension capital made by the employer.

Previously, no maximum deadline was set for the posting of staff. The amendments introduce a maximum term of posting of 12 months. After this term, the posting of employees does not end and is not prohibited, but the foreign employer has an obligation to apply not only the Latvian minimum labour law standards, but also other employment regulations provided for in Latvian legal acts and generally binding collective agreements.

With the amendments, the legislator has additionally imposed a new obligation on the recipient of the service, stipulating that the Latvian company for whose benefit the work is performed may not allow the posted employee to perform the work if the foreign employer who posted the employee has not submitted proof that it has registered these employees in the State Labour Inspectorate.²⁹

²⁸Cabinet of Ministers Regulations of 12 October 2010 No. 969 "[Procedures for Reimbursement of Expenses Relating to Official Travels](#)". - Latvijas Vēstnesis, No. 169, 26.10.2010. – [enforced on 27.10.2010]

²⁹ Posting of employees: What new obligations of the employer are provided for in the amendments to the Labour Law. - Available: <https://arodbiedribas.lv/news/darbinieku-norikosana-kadus-jaunus-darba-deveja-pienakumus-paredz-darba-likuma-grozijumi/>.

Research and discussions on the development of economic migration in Latvia

The study by the Foreign Investors' Council in Latvia "Foreign Investment Environment Index 2015-2020"³⁰ reveals that the three main challenges for foreign investors in 2020 were as follows: financial issues, such as declining activity; adaptation to new work patterns (mainly teleworking), change of business models and adaptation to the changing market environment; addressing uncertainties (including in the tax system) and future business planning. Foreign investors also mentioned other challenges, including problems related to logistics, global supply chains, travel restrictions; ensuring the safety of employees and customers; communication with policy makers and/or policy action; financial sector (banking services); lack of staff, especially educated and skilled experts; fair competition and the shadow economy.

As a solution to the availability of labour force, the surveyed investors offer the entry of seasonal workers into the country, equating pay in the industry and simplifying the immigration process. Investors also emphasize that it is very important to attract people who have left Latvia, as well as to ensure smart immigration.

EMN study on seasonal workers

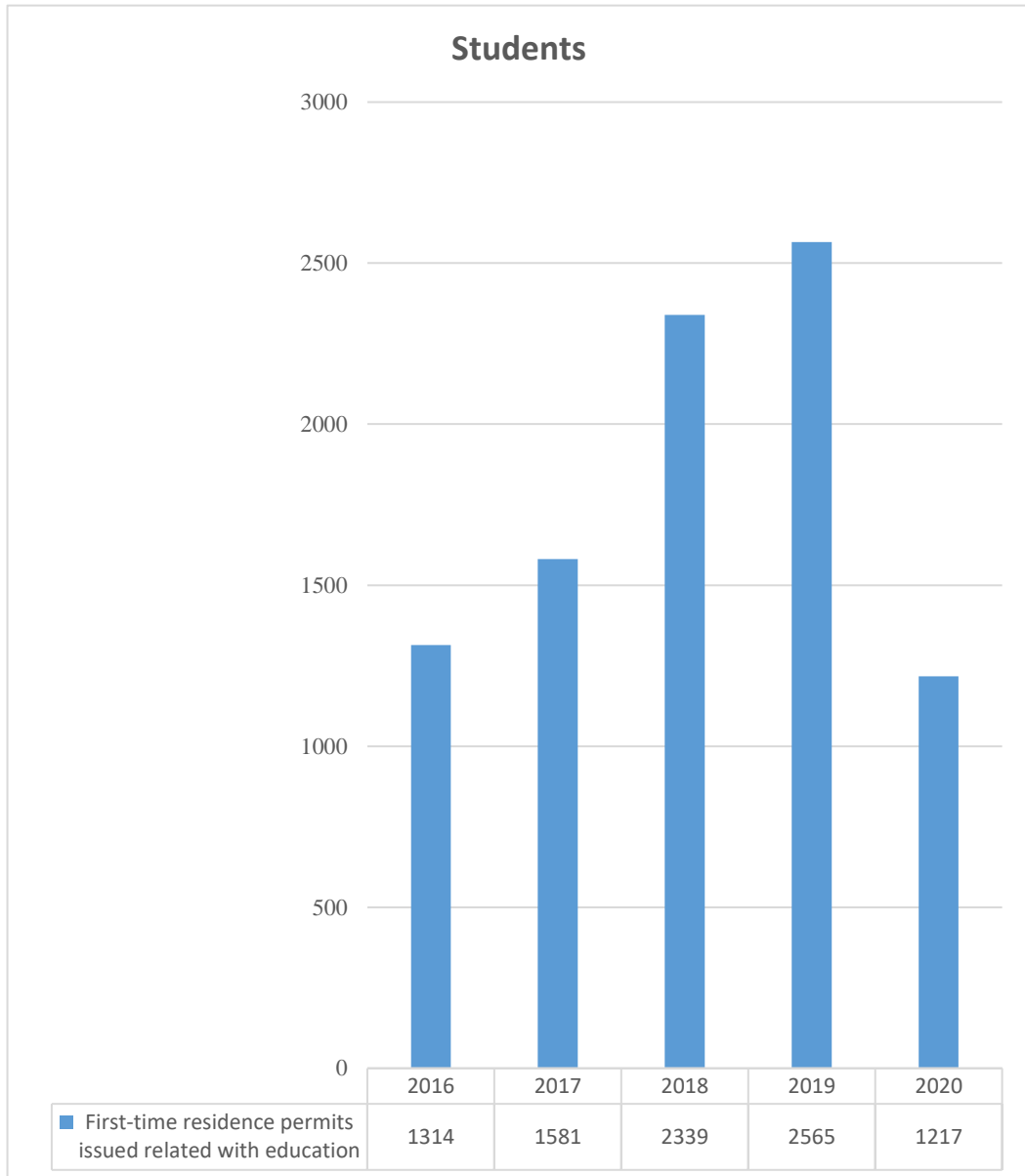
The EMN Latvia Contact Point developed a national report for the study "[Attracting and protecting the rights of seasonal workers from third countries](#)", the aim of which is to provide an overview of the profile of seasonal workers from third countries and the sectors in which they work in Latvia.

Although there are not many seasonal workers among the total number of people with employment rights, in 2019 this number had a significant tendency to increase: In 2018, 176 employees, but in

³⁰ FICIL Foreign Investment Environment Index 2015-2020. Opinions of foreign investors on the development of the investment climate in Latvia: The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. - Available: https://www.ficil.lv/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/ENG_2020_FICIL_Sentiment_Index.pdf

2019, 334 individuals. In 2020, the number of seasonal workers decreased due to the economic restrictions imposed by Covid-19.

Most often, seasonal workers represent the age group of 20 to 39 years. In 2018, most seasonal workers in Latvia were employed in agriculture, forestry and fishing.



Students and scientists

Figure 3-3

In connection with education, 1,217 first-time residence permits were issued in 2020 (2,565 in 2019), which is a significant decrease compared to the previous year.

Legislation related to the control of the spread of Covid-19 infection³¹ allows the entry of students from third countries even in the event that the entry of third-country nationals crossing the external border of the Schengen States is suspended. This is permissible if the entry is related to studies in a full-time and exchange program, if the higher education institution or college has issued a written confirmation regarding the admission of the student and the organization of studies in person. At the beginning of 2021, a written confirmation on the organization of full-time studies no longer needs to be submitted.³²

Entry of **researchers** and their family members is allowed if it is related to the performance of the duties of a leading researcher and researcher of a scientific institution at the invitation of a derived public person registered in the Register of Scientific Institutions - scientific institution, which is justified by the need to ensure the fulfilment of the obligations of this institution in the implementation of a scientific research project.

From 9 November 2020, full-time studies at higher education institutions were discontinued.³³ Exceptions are allowed in some final year study programmes in medicine and veterinary medicine.

Higher education institutions must inform students about the conditions of arrival in Latvia and the need to undergo the Covid-19 test. Upon arrival in Latvia, students must present a negative test result obtained not earlier than 72 hours before arrival in Latvia. On arrival, they have to spend ten days in self-isolation.

In order to reduce the consequences of Covid-19, the City of Riga Local Government provides support to foreign students to meet their basic needs. Other municipalities also provide assistance during the emergency situation and one month lifting the restrictions. Assistance is available to

³¹Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers of 9 June 2020 No. 360 "Epidemiological Safety Measures for the Containment of the Spread of COVID-19 Infection". - Latvijas Vēstnesis No. 110B, 09.06.2020. – [entered into force on 10.06.2020]

³²Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers of 21 January 2021 No. 42 "Amendments to the Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers of 9 June 2020 No. 360 "Epidemiological Safety Measures for the Containment of the Spread of COVID-19 Infection"". – Latvijas Vēstnesis No. 14A, 21.01.2021. – [entered into force on 22.01.2021]

³³ Cabinet of Ministers Order of 6 November 2020 No. 655 "On the declaration of an emergency situation". – Latvijas Vēstnesis No. 216A, 06.11.2020

persons who reside in Latvia with a temporary residence permit and have registered in a specific municipality. Several higher education institutions provide psychological support, as well as reliefs in the payment of tuition fees have been introduced.

Due to the political situation in Belarus, already in 2020, six Belarusian citizens studied full-time in master's study programs at Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences. Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences organized studies for these students from its internal financial resources, granting a 100% tuition fee discount. Whereas, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs creates an opportunity in its budget to allocate financial resources in the amount of 6,000 euros to provide targeted scholarships for Belarusian citizens studying at Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences in 2020. On 28 January 2021, the Latvian government decided to award a targeted scholarship of EUR 18,000 to such students from 1 January to 30 June 2021 and for the relocation and residence expenses of four researchers at Daugavpils University. The total funding required in 2021 is 55,600 euro, which will be allocated from contingencies funds.³⁴

Family reunification

In 2020, the number of first-time residence permits issued to third-country nationals in connection with family reunification decreased and was 1,435 (2,162 in 2019).

Legislation related to the limitation of spread of Covid-19 infection³⁵ allow third-country nationals to cross the external borders of the Schengen States only if they are:

- the nationals of the Republic of Latvia and their family members whose permanent place of residence is abroad;

³⁴ [The government supports the award of targeted scholarships to Belarusian students and researchers](https://www.izm.gov.lv/lv/jaunums/valdiba-atbalsta-merkstipendiju-pieskirsanu-balkrievu-studentiem-un-petniekiem). Available: <https://www.izm.gov.lv/lv/jaunums/valdiba-atbalsta-merkstipendiju-pieskirsanu-balkrievu-studentiem-un-petniekiem>

³⁵ Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers of 9 June 2020 No. 360 "[Epidemiological Safety Measures for the Containment of the Spread of COVID-19 Infection](#)" Section 37 - Latvijas Vēstnesis No. 110B, 09.06.2020. – [entered into force on 10.06.2020.]

- nationals of the European Union, the European Economic Area and Switzerland and their family members, as well as persons permanently residing in these countries, including the Republic of Latvia.

Attracting start-ups and innovative entrepreneurs from third countries

The legal act for limitation of spread of Covid-19 infection³⁶ allows entry of start-ups and innovative entrepreneurs from third countries when crossing the external border of the Schengen Agreement countries only if they meet any of the following criteria and their necessity in Latvia for fulfilling the obligations of merchants has been confirmed by LIDA:

- the arrival of the third-country national in Latvia is related to certification, attestation, or conformity assessment of products manufactured by or services of a merchant established in Latvia, and also to attraction of highly qualified employees in order to ensure the release of the release of goods or services for circulation governed by civil law or the fulfilment of the commitments of the merchant in relation to the fulfilment of the contractual commitments;
- arrival in Latvia is related to fulfilment of obligations of a Latvian merchant regarding the implementation of an investment project in Latvia, where the planned investment amount exceeds at least one million euros or the planned number of newly created jobs exceeds 20, as well as the conclusion of an export transaction of goods or services produced in Latvia, if the value of the potential export transaction is more than one hundred thousand euros.

In 2020, the fulfilment of the minimum tax payment threshold³⁷ for investors was abolished if they applied for a temporary residence permit before 10 June 2020.

³⁶ Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers of 9 June 2020 No. 360 "Epidemiological Safety Measures for the Containment of the Spread of COVID-19 Infection" Article 59. - Latvijas Vēstnesis No. 110B, 09.06.2020. – [entered into force on 10.06.2020]

³⁷ If investors invest in capital companies with no more than 50 employees and a balance sheet not exceeding 10 million euros, the minimum amount of taxes is 40,000 euros. If the investment is made in a capital company with more than 50 employees and its balance sheet exceeds 10 million euros, the minimum amount of taxes is 100,000 euros. In the case of officials registered in the Commercial Register, the company must pay taxes in the amount of at least 21,350 euros.

INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION

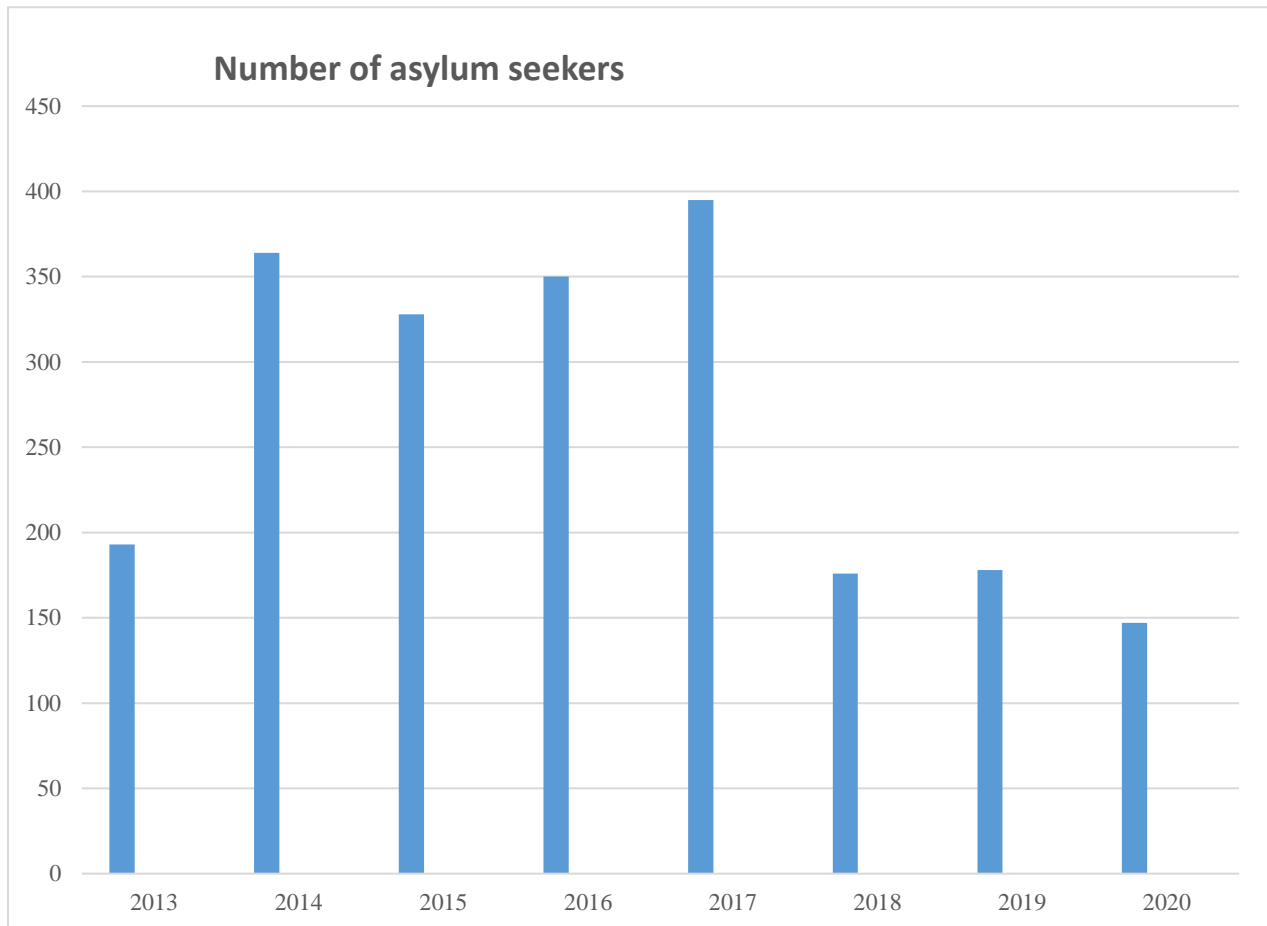


Figure 4-1

Compared to 2019, the number of asylum seekers in 2020 has decreased -147 (178 in 2019) and the dominant countries of origin of asylum seekers have changed - most asylum seekers have come from Belarus - 44 (2019 - 3) and Syria - 12 (2019 - 4), while the number of asylum seekers from Russia - 12 (2019 - 23) and Azerbaijan - 11 (2019 - 35) has decreased.³⁸ Applications of Belarusian

³⁸Source: OCMA.

citizens for granting international protection are considered as a matter of priority (shortened deadlines).

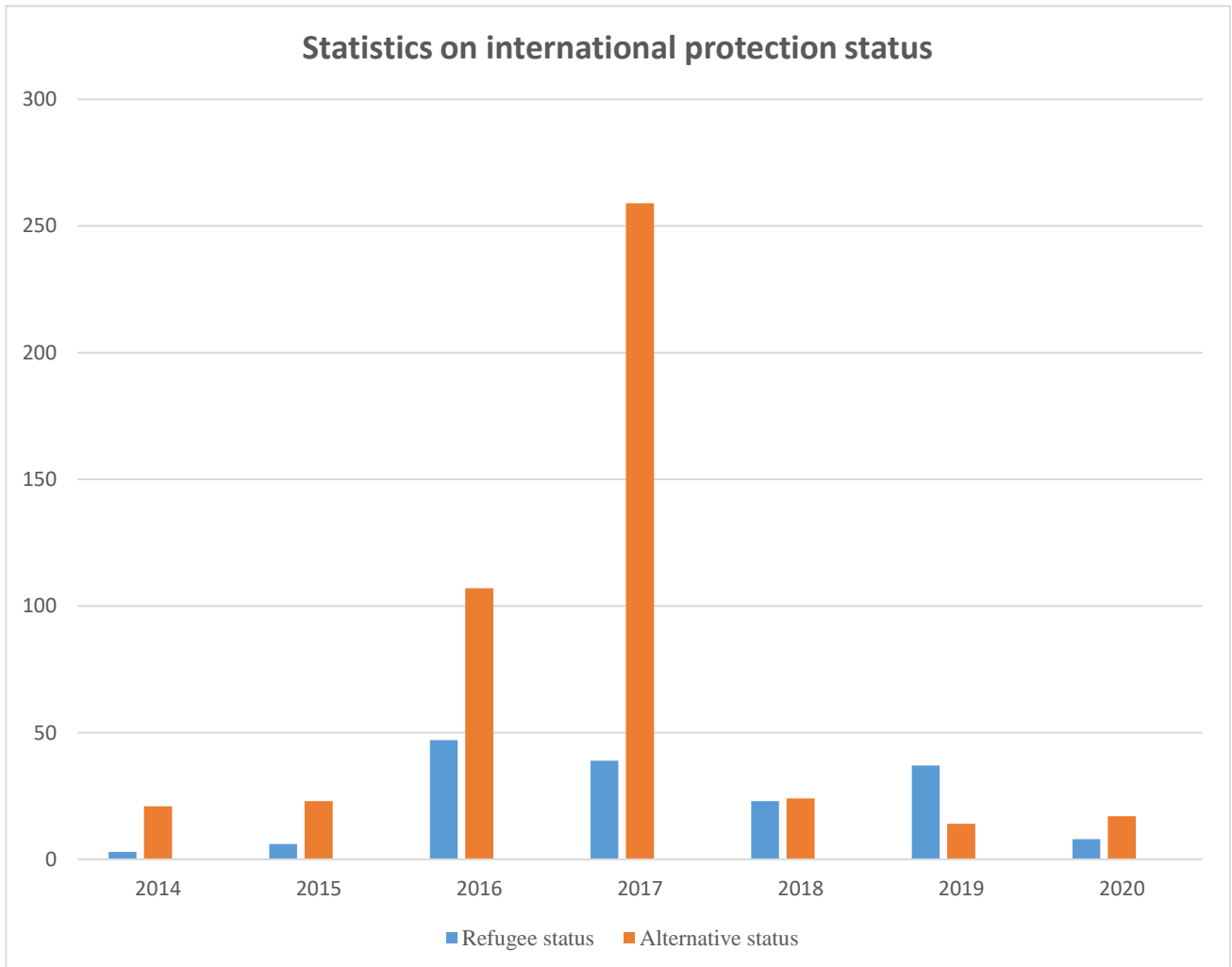


Figure 4-2

In 2020, 25 persons received international protection in Latvia. Refugee status has been granted to eight persons, alternative status to 17 persons.

In 2020, 35 asylum seekers were transferred to Latvia within the framework of the Dublin regulation. Half of them were from Germany.

Measures to implement the Common European Asylum System

In 2020, the project “Information Center for Newcomers” established by the Association “Shelter “Safe House””³⁹ provided consultations to 133 asylum seekers, 35 refugees and 23 persons with alternative status.

The OCMA continued the project of the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (hereinafter - AMIF) “Improvement and development of information systems and related processes supporting migration and asylum”. The aim of the project is to reduce the circulation of paper cases and ensure more efficient management of asylum workflows for those involved in the asylum process and to improve the optimal processing of asylum seekers' data and information to enable all parties involved, including the appellate body, to work with the electronic asylum process. In 2020, the SBG and OCMA officials underwent training in the work with the improved functionality of the Register of Asylum Seekers, using the prepared training material on the improved functionality of the register. New data warehouse solutions have been developed for statistics on the analysis of residence permits and asylum seekers' processes, as well as the transfer of asylum seeker data to the data warehouse and the selection of reports for the needs of the OCMA and the SBG.⁴⁰

In 2020, OCMA experts participated in support activities organized by the European Asylum Support Office for EU Member States facing disproportionate pressure on their asylum systems. Experts from the Asylum Division provided support to Cyprus as interviewers/case handlers/decision draftsmen at first instance, as well as in the field of accommodation (Kofinou Accommodation Center).

³⁹ The project implementation period is from 2 January 2018 to 30 June 2020. The project is implemented with the support of the AMIF. The task of the project is to ensure the establishment and operation of a national coordination structure to provide support to third-country nationals, including persons who have been granted international protection and who have received the right to reside in the territory of Latvia. The aim of the project is to increase participation in public processes and to promote the inclusion of these individuals in Latvian society by providing information tailored to the needs of third-country nationals on their rights and obligations in various spheres of life.

⁴⁰ Source: OCMA.

Reception of applicants for international protection

In 2020, the internal regulations of the State Border Guard were revised, as a result of which a new procedure was included regarding the immediate registration of the asylum seeker's application and the asylum seeker's identity in the Unified Migration Information System subsystem - Register of Asylum Seekers. As a result of the above-mentioned changes, the institutions subordinated to the Ministry of the Interior involved in the asylum procedure are immediately informed about the fact of applying for asylum. In addition, using the functionality of the Register of Asylum Seekers, a uniform procedure for issuing an asylum seeker's identity document, as well as indicating the place of accommodation or stay of an asylum seeker was ensured.

From 18 March to 9 June 2020 and from 9 November 2020 to 2021, during epidemiological restrictions in the country, the OCMA order imposed restrictive measures on the asylum seeker's accommodation to ensure its operation in the context of the Covid-19 epidemic, namely the establishment of a quarantine zone for asylum seekers admitted to the accommodation center.

If, at the time of the application for asylum, a person is found to have come from countries with a cumulative Covid-19 rate above 50 (14-day cumulative Covid-19 cases per 100 000 population in the EU, the European Economic Area, Switzerland and the United Kingdom, and other individual countries) and there are conditions for the detention of the asylum seeker in accordance with Section 16 of the Asylum Law, the asylum seeker shall be accommodated in a separate medical unit during the detention to ensure compliance with the provisions of Cabinet Regulations No. 360 "Epidemiological Safety Measures for the Containment of the Spread of COVID-19 Infection" (ensuring 10 days of self-isolation).

From 12 March 2020, when an emergency situation was declared in the country in connection with the Covid-19 pandemic, in order to ensure the asylum procedure within the deadlines set by the Asylum Law, interviews of asylum seekers were conducted remotely - in the form of video conferences.⁴¹ Court hearings on the detention of asylum seekers, as well as interviews with detained asylum seekers, were essentially conducted remotely via videoconference.

⁴¹ Source: OCMA

From 17 March 2020, the transfer and reception of asylum seekers in the context of the Dublin Regulation was completely suspended. The transfer and reception of asylum seekers resumed on 15 July 2020, following the instructions of the Center for Disease Prevention and Control, as well as assessing the individual situation of each asylum seeker.

Integration courses for asylum seekers take place complying with distancing rules or online.⁴²

In the spring of 2020, the PROVIDUS think tank organized an online meeting of Action Partners⁴³. It was attended by representatives from the Ministry of Welfare, Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Culture, Riga City Council, the UNHCR Northern Europe Regional Office, as well as various non-governmental organizations to discuss the impact of Covid-19 on the situation of individuals who are granted international protection in Latvia. The meeting discussed the situation in the Asylum Seekers' Accommodation Center, as well as the challenges in health care, education, employment, access to benefits and other problematic areas. The think tank prepared recommendations⁴⁴ for state, municipal and non-governmental institutions involved in the reception of asylum seekers and individuals for whom international protection status is granted. Experts recommend taking into account the experience of other countries, which show that those housed in a refugee accommodation center are at high risk of developing the disease and that an action plan needs to be drawn up to limit the spread of Covid-19 in the Asylum Seekers' Accommodation Center in Mucenieki; experts also recommend taking into account the difficult socio-economic integration process of individuals who are granted international protection and to extend the payment of benefits; providing a Latvian language assistant for the children of individuals who are granted international protection; ensuring the availability of up-to-date information; local governments need to review the possibilities of disbursing financial support to individuals who are granted international protection.

⁴²Source: OCMA

⁴³Meetings of action partners are held several times a year in the project NIEM (Evaluation and Improvement of the Integration of Beneficiaries of International Protection).

⁴⁴[Information on the impact of the emergency situation on the reception and integration of beneficiaries of international protection in Latvia](http://providus.lv/article/informacija-par-arkartejas-situacijas-ietekmi-uz-starptautiskas-aizsardzibas-sanemeju-uznemsanu-un-integraciju-latvija). – Available: <http://providus.lv/article/informacija-par-arkartejas-situacijas-ietekmi-uz-starptautiskas-aizsardzibas-sanemeju-uznemsanu-un-integraciju-latvija>.

EMN study on data management in the asylum procedure

In 2020, the Latvian Contact Point of the European Migration Network developed a [national report](#) for the EMN study “Data Management in the Asylum Procedure”.

The national report:

- sets out an approach to data management in the asylum procedure in Latvia;
- describes the procedural changes that have taken place to improve the exchange of data inside and outside asylum authorities and how they have affected the management of data in these processes;
- addressed challenges and good practices in data management.

In Latvia, data on asylum seekers are obtained at different stages of the asylum procedure: from the moment a person expresses an intention to submit an asylum application to the moment when a decision is made in the first instance. The study provides information both on data collected by participants in the asylum procedure and on data obtained in the context of the asylum procedure, but for other purposes.

A synthesis report on data management in the asylum process in the EU will be available in mid-2021 on the EMN Latvia Contact Point website www.emn.lv.

MINORS AND OTHER VULNERABLE GROUPS

In 2020, less than five⁴⁵ unaccompanied minors in Latvia applied for asylum in Latvia.

From 1 January 2020, the amount of the guardian's allowance for the maintenance of a child under guardianship has been increased⁴⁶:

- for a child under the age of seven, 107.50 euros per month;
- for a child from the age of seven, 129.00 euros per month.

This benefit applies to unaccompanied minor asylum seekers living with their guardians outside the asylum accommodation center.

In order to provide the necessary support to orphans and children left without parental care when starting an independent life, and to promote inclusion in society and education, the amount of individual benefits has been increased in accordance with the socio-economic situation in the country⁴⁷:

- 1) an one-time allowance for starting an independent life;
- 2) allowance for monthly expenses;
- 3) an allowance for the purchase of household items and soft equipment.

⁴⁵Source: OCMA.

⁴⁶ In accordance with the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations of 10 December 2019 No. 605 "Amendments to Cabinet of Ministers Regulations of 22 December 2009 No. 1643 "Procedures for Granting and Paying Benefit to a Guardian for Maintenance of a Child"". - Latvijas Vēstnesis No. 251, 13.12.2019. – [entered into force on 01.01.2020.]

⁴⁷Cabinet of Ministers Regulations of 17 December 2020 No. 829 "Amendments to the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations of 15 November 2005 No. 857 "Regulations Regarding Social Guarantees for an Orphan and a Child Left without Parental Care who is in Out-of-Family Care as well as After the Termination of Out-of-Family Care"". - Latvijas Vēstnesis No. 248, 23.12.2020. – [entered into force on 01.01.2021]

At the same time, the one-time benefit for starting an independent life and the benefit for monthly expenses are detached from the amount of the state social security benefit. The amendments to the regulations will ensure that the amount of allowances will be reviewed according to a unified approach and in compliance with the socio-economic situation in the country, promoting the social inclusion of orphans and children left without parental care. These conditions also apply to third-country minors who are orphans or children left without parental care who are in out-of-home care, as well as after the end of out-of-home care.

In 2020, the development of the Guidelines for Children, Youth and Family Policy 2021-2027 was started. The guidelines are also intended to include support measures for young people leaving out-of-home care after reaching the age of majority. If a young person from a third country who has been left without parental care legally resides in Latvia, he or she will also be subject to the measures planned in the guidelines in the same way as any other permanent resident of Latvia.

In 2020, the internal regulations of the SBG were revised, determining the procedure for accommodating children who have arrived together with an adult asylum seeker who has been detained as part of the procedure. The regulations stipulate that after evaluation of the best interests of the child and on the basis of an application for accommodation of children together with a parent, children shall be accommodated together with the detained asylum seeker in the SBG asylum seekers' accommodation premises.

On 6 January 2020, amendments to the Law on the Protection of the Children's Rights⁴⁸ entered into force, establishing a legal framework that entitles the local government to receive compensation for expenses incurred in connection with the accommodation of an unaccompanied minor referred to in the Asylum Law in a childcare institution, foster family or guardian, if this person does not have the status of an asylum seeker, refugee or alternative status. Namely, a mechanism was established to cover the expenses of the out-of-family care service provider also for the accommodation of a minor of a third-country national deprived of parental care who does not have the right to reside in Latvia (including a person who has not applied for asylum or been denied

⁴⁸ Law "[Amendments to the Law on the Protection of the Children's Rights](#)". - Latvijas Vēstnesis No 257A, 23.12.2019. – [entered into force on 06.01.2020]

international protection status in Latvia) in a child care institution, foster family or guardian's family until the person voluntarily leaves Latvia or is removed.

EMN report on children in migration

In 2017, the European Commission published a Communication to the European Parliament and the Council on "Protecting migrant children", which sets out measures to protect migrant children at all stages of the migration process. [The report on the situation in Latvia](#) provides information on the children of third-country nationals who have been forcibly displaced or migrated to or within the EU, with their families or individually, seeking asylum or not. Aspects of legal and family migration were not included in this report. The information presented in the [synthesis report](#) includes the situation in Latvia in 2019.

INTEGRATION

Integration policy in Latvia falls under the responsibility of the Ministry of Culture. The Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Welfare, the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development, the Ministry of the Interior, the Social Integration Fund and non-governmental organizations are also involved in the implementation of this policy.

On 20 October 2020, the [latest MIPEX assessment for Latvia](#)⁴⁹ was published. In the evaluation, Latvia ranked 37 out of 100, and this evaluation tends to improve. The evaluation concludes that over the past five years, Latvia has improved its integration policy by providing more equal opportunities and fundamental rights to health and citizenship. In 2019, the Law on citizenship for children of non-citizens was approved. At the same time, access to health care has been criticized

The meeting of the Cabinet of Ministers on 4 February 2021 approved the policy planning document submitted by the Ministry of Culture in the field of civil society and democracy policy "Guidelines for the Development of a Cohesive and Active Civil Society 2021–2027"⁵⁰. The Guidelines have been formed in compliance with the overarching goal of a cohesive society policy - a national, solidary, open and active society, the basis of which is the democratic values and human rights specified in the Constitution, the Latvian language and the Latvian cultural space. The following lines of action have been identified: national identity and belonging, a culture of democracy and inclusive citizenship, integration. The guidelines emphasize the overarching principle of inclusive participation and outline the following cross-cutting priorities: national identity, Latvian language,

⁴⁹ Migrant Integration Policy Index 2020. - Available: <https://www.mipex.eu/latvia>.

⁵⁰ Guidelines for the Development of a Cohesive and Active Civil Society 2021–2027. - Available: <http://tap.mk.gov.lv/lv/mk/tap/?pid=40490048&mode=mk&date=2021-02-04>.

trust, solidarity, cooperation. The direction of integration action includes measures promoting the integration of migrants, which include learning basic Latvian language and Latvian history.⁵¹

Promoting integration for socio-economic participation

Practical measures for the integration of third-country nationals in 2020 have been implemented by non-governmental organizations with AMIF funding.

In order for third-country nationals to have access to information about their rights and obligations, the Information Center for Newcomers of the Association "Shelter "Safe House"" continues to work in several Latvian cities.⁵² Under the 2020 project, assistance was provided to 1,091 third-country nationals from 63 countries.⁵³

Website <http://www.integration.lv/> updated information relating to the integration of third-country nationals in Latvia and services available to third-country nationals.⁵⁴ Information on restrictions and guidance related to the epidemiological situation with Covid-19 is published here in English and Russian.

In 2020, the Society Integration Fund in cooperation with the Latvian Red Cross provided assistance of social workers and social mentors to 117 asylum seekers and persons with refugee or alternative status in solving everyday problems and integrating into a new environment. Specialists have addressed issues related to the distance learning of minor asylum seekers, the provision of practical support to asylum seekers from Belarus, such as obtaining a driving license and starting employment.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Approves the Guidelines for the Development of a Cohesive and Active Civil Society 2021-2027. - Available: <https://www.km.gov.lv/lv/jaunums/apstiprina-saliedetas-un-pilsoniski-aktivas-sabiedribas-attistibas-pamatnostadnes-2021-2027-gadam>.

⁵² In 2018, the implementation of the project Information Center for Newcomers provided by the Association "Safe House Shelter" was continued.

⁵³Source: Association "Safe House Shelter".

⁵⁴The site is administered by the association "Safe House Shelter" within the project "Information Center for Newcomers". The project is implemented with the support of the AMIF. Source: Ministry of Culture.

⁵⁵ Last year, employment and social inclusion support was provided to 117 recipients of international assistance. - Available: <https://www.km.gov.lv/lv/jaunums/pern-117-starptautiskas-palidzibas-sanemejiem-sniegts-nodarbinatibas-un-socialas-ieklausanas-atbalsts>.

In 2020, in order to promote the socio-economic participation of third-country nationals, measures were implemented for the development of their social skills, learning Latvian language and start-up of employment or entrepreneurship.

The Association "Shelter "Safe House ""⁵⁶ organized integration training courses for asylum seekers, as well as refugees and persons granted alternative status. Latvian language courses were also provided. In 2020, 71 persons completed the integration course, but 28 persons completed the Latvian language course. Given the epidemiological situation in the country, the training was provided remotely.



At the beginning of 2020, the Latvian Language Agency launched a new Latvian language learning game "Word, word, sentence", which is easy to play not only on a computer, but also on mobile devices. The game is suitable for preschool and primary school students. In the game, children improve their Latvian vocabulary, learn grammatical forms and learn to describe the situations shown in the pictures. There are three levels of difficulty in the game, the length of the sentence to be formed determines the level of difficulty of the game - three, four or five words in a sentence. The game is available on the Latvian Language Agency's website „[Teach and learn Latvian](https://valoda.lv)”⁵⁷.⁵⁸ In 2020, the number of *Teach and Learn Latvian* visits reached 1.5 million.⁵⁹

⁵⁶Within the framework of the activity "Support measures for persons under international protection (refugees and persons granted alternative status)" the project "Support measures for persons under international protection II" was completed in 2020, and the implementation of a new project "Support measures for persons under international protection III" was started.

⁵⁷<http://maciunmacies.valoda.lv/images/speles/varduspele/>

⁵⁸ Again on your phone? Yes, I am playing the game "Word, word, sentence" and I am learning Latvian! - Available: <https://valoda.lv/page/17/>.

⁵⁹ In Latvia I speak Latvian. - Available: <https://valoda.lv/latvija-es-runaju-latviski/>.

In 2020, the implementation of three projects⁶⁰ continued. 536 persons have attended the Latvian language courses of the Association “Education Development Center” and “Innovation Support Center”, as well as Daugavpils University.⁶¹

In 2020, 39 persons with refugee or alternative status were registered with the State Employment Agency (hereinafter - SEA), several of them were re-registered. The SEA organized two introductory lectures “Labour Market in Latvia” for a total of six asylum seekers in Russian. Due to limited resources, individual consultations at the Asylum Seekers Accommodation Center at Mucenieki for asylum seekers on job opportunities take place at an individual request. In 2020, four individual consultations took place for asylum seekers from Belarus.

In 2020, 22 beneficiaries of international protection were employed, three of them women. Several people have been placed for employment repeatedly. Compared to previous years, the sectors in which clients have found employment have remained largely unchanged. It can be seen that as a result of the pandemic, there has been a greater demand for employees in the IT sector; several people from industrial sectors have moved to work in the IT sectors and work as customer service operators. There has also been a demand for workers in the construction sector, but given the specificities of the sector and changing working conditions, employment in these sectors was temporary.⁶²

During the emergency situation, the SEA continues to provide consultations remotely by e-mail, telephone and in the form of remote video conferencing. Persons with refugee or alternative status have mainly been involved in learning Latvian language; until 31 December 2020, beneficiaries of international protection have participated in Latvian language courses 21 times. Third-country nationals have mastered Latvian language at the language proficiency levels from A1 to B1.⁶³

⁶⁰“I live in Latvia - I am learning Latvian (Stage 2)”, “Latvian language - with pleasure!”, “Latvian language courses for third-country nationals “Language for communication””

⁶¹ Source: Ministry of Culture.

⁶²Source: Ministry of Welfare

⁶³ Source: Ministry of Welfare

A new e-platform www.startbusiness.today has been created within the project "Migrant Talent Garden"⁶⁴ which is implemented by the association "Shelter "Safe House"". In the created resource it is possible to get acquainted with information on how to build your business, what you need to know to start a business and other important information.⁶⁵

Within the framework of this project, the association's professionals, as well as the invited lecturers, gave four virtual lectures - in the lecture series "Help to develop the entrepreneurial gene" and two virtual lectures for Latvian entrepreneurs in the cycle "Employment of foreign citizens in Latvia":

- "Immigrant - an opportunity or challenge for a company";
- "Information Center for Newcomers".

The lectures are aimed at professionals working in the field of integration.

Non-discrimination

The Association "Shelter "Safe House"" has developed a modern and up-to-date audiovisual educational campaign to help reduce various prejudices against other races, cultures or ethnic groups in the media. It consisted of podcasts⁶⁶ with life stories of various third-country nationals, video series on the challenges of integration of third-country nationals in Latvia, and news that introduced general public with the daily work of the professionals of the Information Centre for Newcomers. The campaign will continue in 2021.

The Latvian Center for Human Rights⁶⁷ in cooperation with experts from the Association "Participation Platform" has organized six training seminars for pupils of Riga schools. A total of 137 both Latvian and minority pupils participated in the seminars. Due to the limitations associated with

⁶⁴The Migrant Garden project is funded by Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway through the EEA and the Norwegian Financial Mechanism. The project is co-funded by the Ministry of Culture.

⁶⁵ News of the project "Migrant Talent Garden". - Available: <https://www.patverums-dm.lv/lv/migrantu-talantu-darzs>.

⁶⁶ Now the second podcast of the Information Centre for Newcomers is also on the YouTube platform. - Available: <https://www.patverums-dm.lv/lv/tagad-informacijas-centra-iebraucejiem-otrais-podkasts-ari-youtube-platforma/1100>., The first podcast for the Information Center immigrants has been released. Topic: integration in Latvia.- Available: <https://www.patverums-dm.lv/lv/iznaxis-pirmais-informacijas-centra-iebraucejiem-podkasts-tema-integracija-latvija/1052>.

⁶⁷The City of Riga Council Department of Education, Culture and Sports co-financed project "United against Intolerance" Available: <http://cilvektiesibas.org.lv/lv/news/ir-istenots-projekts-vienoti-pret-neiecietibu-506/>.

the spread of Covid-19, student seminars were held both in person and online. The aim of the seminars was to raise young people's understanding of tolerance and human rights issues, while reducing stereotypes and prejudices between Latvian and minority youth, as well as promoting their cohesion and mutual communication. A two-day online training seminar for educators was also organized. It was attended by 26 teachers from 21 schools. In the seminar, educators looked at the causes of intolerance and prejudice, the impact on interpersonal relationships, their various consequences, what freedom of expression is and where its limits are, and how to talk to pupils about controversial topics. The seminar focused on the methodology of working with pupils, the examination and analysis of different methods, including methods that can be used in online lessons.

Promoting integration at local level

In 2020, the Latvian Red Cross Association implemented the project “Let's Get Together”, which was financed by the City of Riga Council Department of Education, Culture and Sports.

1. The overarching goal of the project was to promote the improvement of the quality of life and integration of refugees, asylum seekers and third-country nationals, aged 20-50, into society, promoting the formation of a cohesive society in Riga.
2. The direct aim of the project was to promote the active participation of refugees, asylum seekers and third-country nationals in community activities by attending the activities offered, encouraging them and providing opportunities to learn how to spend their free time with local people, promoting their integration into the local community.⁶⁸

During the project, three blocks of events were organized:

- The Living Library was an event where refugees, asylum seekers and third-country nationals were invited to share their life stories with local people, thus promoting tolerance, integration and dialogue between immigrants and locals. During the project, three events took place, where 11 foreigners shared their stories. Listening to the stories of “living books”,

⁶⁸Project "Let's Get Together". - Available: <https://www.redcross.lv/darbibas-jomas/projekti/projekts-pabusim-kopa/>.

the visitors of the event were invited to engage in a dialogue and thus reduce possible prejudices against strangers and foreigners in Latvia.

- Women's support group, where participants (women of all ages with refugee or asylum seeker status, as well as women, third-country nationals) met to discuss topics such as parenting, psychology, education, employment, skills and knowledge development. The group was chaired by a specialist with experience in organizing support groups. During the project, a total of eight women's support group sessions took place, involving a total of 26 people, including women with refugee or asylum seeker status, as well as third-country nationals and 3 interpreters, who were involved in cooperation with the Association "Shelter "Safe House "".
- Integration measures for young people with the participation of young people from Riga and young people who have been granted refugee or asylum status or who are third-country nationals. During the events, the co-operation capacity of young people, joint identification, and meaningful leisure time were promoted. The activities were organized based on the interests of the group, and the young people themselves were actively involved in organizing these activities. A total of 41 persons participated in youth integration activities (21 young people from Riga, 20 young people living in Latvia with refugee or asylum status, as well as third-country nationals).⁶⁹

CITIZENSHIP AND NATURALIZATION

Compared to 2019, in 2020 the number of third-country nationals who received Latvian citizenship by naturalization has increased by 29 persons, reaching - 139 persons.⁷⁰ However, the number of persons admitted to Latvian citizenship through naturalization has decreased - 725 (in 2019 - 808).⁷¹ As in 2019, the largest share of individuals who have become citizens is former non-citizens of Latvia - 81%.

The Law “On Termination of Granting Non-Citizen Status⁷² to Children”⁷³ provides for the automatic granting of Latvian citizenship to children born after 1 January 2020, unless the child's parents have agreed to grant citizenship of another country to the child.⁷⁴ Until now, the newborn of non-citizen parents could be registered as a Latvian citizen on the basis of the expressed will of at least one parent in the civil registration office simultaneously with the registration of the fact of the child's birth. In 2020, 142 children of non-citizens were registered as citizens.⁷⁵

The OCMA in cooperation with the Information Center of the Ministry of the Interior implements the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund 2014-2020 national program project “Improvement and

⁷⁰ Source: OCMA.

⁷¹ Source: OCMA.

⁷² According to the Law “On the Status of Citizens of the Former USSR who do not have the Citizenship of Latvia or Another State”, non-citizens are those citizens of the former USSR residing in the Republic of Latvia and in temporary absence and their children who simultaneously meet the following conditions:

- 1) on 1 July 1992 they were registered in the territory of Latvia, regardless of the status of the residential area indicated in the registration, or their last registered residence was in the Republic of Latvia before 1 July 1992, or a court judgment established the fact that by that date they had lived continuously in the territory of Latvia for at least 10 years;
- 2) they are not citizens of Latvia;
- 3) they are not and have not been citizens of another state.

⁷³ Law “[On the Termination of the Granting of the Status of a Non-citizen to Children](#)”. - Latvijas Vēstnesis, No. 224, 05.11.2019. - [entered into force on 19.11.2019]

This law applies to children of non-citizens of Latvia.

⁷⁵ Source: OCMA

development of information systems and related processes supporting naturalization”⁷⁶ which aims to increase the quality of the naturalization process. In 2020:

- Equipped workplaces for employees working with migration and naturalization issues.
- An agreement has been concluded on the development of an electronic tool for self-examination of language skills and knowledge for becoming a Latvian citizen, and its development has begun.
- The procurement of a design competition for the development of an information system for the acquisition and loss of Latvian citizenship has been completed. Further steps are being taken.
- New sets of audio material have been recorded for the audible part of the naturalization test.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Project implementation time: 09.04.2019. – 30.06.2022.

⁷⁷ Project NR. PMLP/PMIF/2018/ Improvement and development of information systems and related processes supporting naturalization. - Available: <https://www.pmlp.gov.lv/lv/projekts/naturalizācijas-atbalstoso-informācijas-sistemu-un-saistīto-procesu-pilnveidosana-un-attīstība>.

BORDER CONTROL, VISAS AND SCHENGEN MANAGEMENT

Management of external borders

The management of the external border was significantly affected by the restrictions on movement due to Covid-19, which were imposed by the legislation adopted.

Order of the Cabinet of Ministers of 12 March 2020 No. 103 “On the declaration of an emergency situation” **established that starting with 17 March up to 9 June 2020** the movement of persons and vehicles through airports, ports, railways and roads at the external border crossing points of the European Union, as well as at border crossing points intended for local border traffic, except for freight transport, shall be prohibited. The said prohibition did not apply to:

- employees of transport and passenger transport service providers and crews of passenger, cargo or technical voyages who arrive in Latvia or leave it while performing work duties;
- seafarers so that they can get to or from their place of work on board;
- third-country nationals, the necessity of whose transportation into Latvia for the fulfillment of obligations of merchants has been confirmed by the Latvian Investment and Development Agency.

In addition, the Minister of Foreign Affairs or the Chief of the State Border Guard was allowed to make exceptions regarding the movement of persons and vehicles. At the border control, support for the border guard was provided by the National Armed Forces.

In accordance with the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations of 9 June 2020 No. 360 “Epidemiological Safety Measures for the Containment of the Spread of COVID-19 Infection”,⁷⁸**starting with 10 June 2020, the movement of persons and vehicles across the external**

⁷⁸ Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers of 9 June 2020 No. 360 “Epidemiological Safety Measures for the Containment of the Spread of COVID-19 Infection”. - Latvijas Vēstnesis, No. 110B, 09.06.2020. – [entered into force on 10.06.2020.]

border crossing points of the European Union from/to the countries published on the Centre's website where the spread of Covid-19 infection which may pose a serious risk to public health has been prohibited, except for freight transport. The Chief of the State Border Guard or his/her authorized official has the right to make exceptions regarding the exit of citizens of the European Union (including the Republic of Latvia), European Economic Area countries, the United Kingdom and the Swiss Confederation through external border crossing points, if it complies with international law, national interests of Latvia or is due to force majeure or humanitarian considerations. Given that the emergency situation expired on 9 June 2020, but the unfavorable epidemiological situation with Covid-19 continued, it was necessary to transpose and consolidate the epidemiological precautionary measures set out in the Order⁷⁹ Given that the emergency situation expired on 9 June 2020, but the unfavourable epidemiological situation with Covid-19 continued, it was necessary to transpose and consolidate the epidemiological precautionary measures set out in the Order in the respective legislation with unlimited duration, including the development of new rules governing epidemiological precautionary measures and anti-epidemic measures to control the spread of Covid-19.

Cabinet of Ministers Order of 6 November 2020 No. 655 "On the declaration of an emergency situation"⁸⁰ and its amendments of 5 February 2021⁸¹ declared an emergency situation throughout the territory of the country **from 9 November 2020 to 6 April 2021**. On 2 December 2020, the Cabinet of Ministers Order No. [719 "Amendments to the Cabinet of Ministers Order of 6 November 2020 No. 655 "On the declaration of a state of emergency"](#)⁸² entered into force establishing that the SBG, in co-operation with the National Armed Forces and the State Police, will intensify monitoring **from 7 December 2020** whether persons who have entered Latvia fulfil the established obligation to submit a confirmation questionnaire in the personal information system (on the information system website (www.covidpass.lv)). The amendments were necessary in order

⁷⁹Order of the Cabinet of Ministers of 12 March 2020 No. 103 "On the declaration of an emergency situation".

⁸⁰Cabinet of Ministers Order of 6 November 2020 No. 655 "On the declaration of an emergency situation". - Latvijas Vēstnesis, 216A, 06.11.2020. - [entered into force on 06.11.2020.] Ceased to be in force on 07.04.2021.

⁸¹ Order of the Cabinet of Ministers of 5 February 2021 No. 74 "Amendments to the Order of the Cabinet of Ministers Order of 6 November 2020 No. 655 "On the declaration of an emergency situation"". - Latvijas Vēstnesis, 25A, 05.02.2021.- [entered into force on 05.02.2021.]

⁸²Order of the Cabinet of Ministers of 2 December 2020 No. 719 "Amendments to the Order of the Cabinet of Ministers Order of 6 November 2020 No. 655 "On the declaration of an emergency situation"". - Latvijas Vēstnesis, No. 233B, 02.12.2020. - [entered into force on 02.12.2020.]

for the National Armed Forces and the State Police to support the performance of the additional functions of the SBG in the performance of border control.

On 1 December 2020, the State Border Guard Law entered into force⁸³ aimed at ensuring the legal and efficient functioning of the SBG. The law ensures the coherence of the legal framework of the SBG with other regulatory enactments, as well as updates the legal framework of the SBG in accordance with the current situation. Regulation (EU) 2016/1624 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 September 2016 on the European Border and Coast Guard and amending Regulation (EU) 2016/399 of the European Parliament and of the Council and repealing Regulation (EC) No 863/2007 of the European Parliament and of the Council, Council Regulation (EC) No 2007/2004 and Council Decision 2005/267/EC (hereinafter - Regulation 2016/1624) directly affects the State Border Guard, therefore, in order to ensure the practical application of the requirements set out in Regulation 2016/1624, relevant provisions were included in the State Border Guard Law. In addition, the State Border Guard Law uses terminology in accordance with Regulation (EU) 2016/399 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 9 March 2016 on a Union Code on the rules governing the movement of persons across borders (Schengen Borders Code).

The SBG is implementing a project within the Internal Security Fund⁸⁴ “Further Development of Liaison Officers Point of the State Border Guard in Georgia and Belarus (Phase 2)”. The aim of the Liaison Officers in Georgia and Belarus is to strengthen the control of the EU external borders and to develop effective management of migration flows in line with the Schengen acquis. Liaison officers facilitate cross-border cooperation and the expansion of professional contacts between law enforcement agencies of EU Member States and third countries, thus reducing irregular cross-border activities and combating irregular migration to EU Member States from and through Georgia and Belarus. The operation of the SBG Liaison Officer's Point in Georgia is carried out to provide support to the State Border Guard of the Republic of Latvia in combating irregular immigration.

Cooperation with third countries in the field of border control

⁸³State Border Guard Law. – Latvijas Vēstnesis, No. 223, 17.11.2020. – [entered into force on 01.12.2020]

⁸⁴ No. VRS/IDF/2019/8. The project will continue until 31.12.2022.

In 2020, the following international documents are under development:

- a) The draft agreement between the Republic of Latvia and the Russian Federation on the border regime is under coordination at the Ministry of the Interior.
- b) "Agreement between the Latvian State Border Guard and the Ukrainian State Border Guard Service on co-operation in border protection issues". In accordance with the decision of the heads of the Latvian and Ukrainian border guard institutions, the text of the Agreement is being developed. The draft agreement was sent to the Ukrainian side in November 2020 for evaluation. The signing is planned for 2021.

Schengen governance

At the informal meeting of the Schengen Working Party on 15 December 2020, the European Commission informed that Latvia's action plan to address the shortcomings identified during the Schengen visa assessment and to implement the recommendations has been completed and is being closed.

The Information Center of the Ministry of the Interior in co-operation with the State Police and OCMA implements the Internal Security Fund 2014-2020 national program project "Improvement of the Schengen Information System" aimed at the development of the National Schengen Information System (SIS) II and the SIRENE traffic information system, as well as the related national information systems, in accordance with the requirements of the SIS package of 28 November 2018. As a result of the project in 2020:

1. The system improvement works specified in the EU-LISA technical documentation have been performed (releases introduced).
2. The integration of return decisions into the SIS II is ensured.
3. 30 biometric data processing kits were purchased.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Improvement of the Schengen Information System. - Available: <https://www.pmlp.gov.lv/lv/projekts/sengenas-informacijas-sistemas-pilnveidosana>.

VISA POLICY

In 2020, the total number of issued visas has decreased by 79%, reaching 36,339 (in 2019 - 171,670); the number of issued long-term visas has also decreased. Of the visas issued, 30,389 were Schengen visas and 5,950 were long-term (D) visas.⁸⁶

Table 8-1.

Total number of issued visas by type, 2019-2020.⁸⁷

	2019	2020
Schengen visas	163,948	30,389
Long-term (D) visas	7,722	5,950
Total	171,670	36,339

Prior to the entry into force of the amendments to the Visa Code on 2 February 2020, a number of visa representation agreements were amended to reflect the changes to the Visa Code. The amendments to the representation agreements were related to the change of the consultation mechanism and stipulated that in future the representing state would be responsible for the whole visa processing process without the involvement of the represented state. These amendments were made to the agreements with Lithuania, Estonia and Hungary.

The Consular Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is actively working with outsourcing companies, and in 2020 the cooperation with the outsourcing company VFS Global was expanded, starting the acceptance of visa applications in the USA, Thailand, Indonesia, Vietnam and Egypt. Also, innovations have been introduced in the acceptance of long-term visa applications in

⁸⁶ Source: OCMA.

⁸⁷ Source: OCMA.

2020, namely, in all cooperation places where agreements with an outsourced company have been concluded, it is possible to submit long-term visa applications.⁸⁸

In February 2020, face-to-face training of NVIS⁸⁹ users (12 employees of consular and diplomatic missions) was conducted in Latvian missions in Belarus - Minsk and Vitebsk.

With the spread of Covid-19, a decision was made not to carry out foreign missions in 2020, thus further co-operation with the Consular Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the SBG on the organization of NVIS distance learning took place throughout the year. Consequently, OCMA experts researched conference tools and practiced experimental training sessions within the project team to find the most appropriate solution for distance learning. As a result, experimental trainings took place, in which participants from the Latvian embassies in Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan took part. In 2020, trainings on the use of the visa information system were organized - for SBG, consular representation and OCMA employees.

In 2020, a total of 128 users of the Visa Information System were trained:

- 22 employees of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs;
- 78 SBG employees;
- 28 OCMA employees.

⁸⁸Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs

⁸⁹National Visa Information System

IRREGULAR MIGRATION AND MIGRANTS SMUGGLING

In 2020, 23 third-country nationals were detained for irregular crossing of the “green” border (53 in 2019). The main groups of detainees were citizens of Vietnam, Pakistan, Russia and Algeria. Most persons were detained on the Latvian-Russian border.⁹⁰

In 2020, the SBG refused entry to Latvia to 638 persons, which was almost three times less than in 2019 (1797 persons). In 2020, entry was most frequently denied to citizens of Russia, Belarus, Ukraine and Georgia who could not present a valid entry visa, residence permit, travel documents, as well as in cases where information provided by third-country nationals indicated a real threat of irregular entry and residence.⁹¹

Due to the measures taken in 2020 to limit the spread of Covid-19 infection, the irregular movement of persons across the state border of the Republic of Latvia significantly decreased.

In 2020, the SBG annulled Schengen visas for 163 third-country nationals (172 in 2019).

Prevention of abuse of legal migration routes

In 2020, the number of third-country nationals detained by SBG officials for illegal employment in Latvia decreased by 59% - a total of 124 persons (in 2019 - 299).⁹²

⁹⁰ Source: SBG.

⁹¹ Source: SBG.

⁹²Source: SBG.

On 1 July 2020, the [Law on Administrative Liability](#)⁹³ entered into force, increasing the maximum penalty for administrative violations of migration rules. One penalty unit is 5 EUR. The maximum administrative fine for a natural person is 400 fine units, but for a legal person 4,000 fine units. The specific amount of penalties for various violations of immigration rules is set out in the amendments to the Immigration Law⁹⁴.

As per Paragraph 50 of the Decision Minutes No. 49 of the meeting of the Cabinet of Ministers of 18 August 2020,⁹⁵ the Informative Report "On the necessary changes in the attraction of foreign students and studies in Latvian higher education institutions" has been approved, which sets out several tasks for changes in regulatory enactments to improve the education system in terms of attracting students and purposefully develop high-quality higher education export, eliminating beforehand the problems identified over several years, which pose significant risks to the reputation and national security of the state and higher education system. The report identified trends in irregularities in the selection of students, as well as in other fraudulent activities during the stay of foreign students, which necessitated changes in the legal framework.

Forged travel documents

On 27 August 2020, the SBG issued an order document designed to determine the actions of SBG officials in dealing with a person who has used a travel document with forged features or a foreign travel document, visa or residence permit with forged features.⁹⁶

In 2020, SBG officials detained 65 people for using forged travel documents.

Cooperation with Frontex

⁹³Law on Administrative Liability. - Latvijas Vēstnesis, 225, 14.11.2018. – [entered into force on 01.07.2020.]

⁹⁴Law "Amendments to the Immigration Law". - Latvijas Vēstnesis, 123, 19.06.2019. – [entered into force on 01.07.2019.]

⁹⁵ Decision Minutes No. 49 of the Cabinet of Ministers sitting of 18 August 2020. - Available: <http://tap.mk.gov.lv/mk/mksedes/saraksts/protokols/?protokols=2020-08-18>.

⁹⁶ Source: SBG.

During the reporting period, the SBG participated in thirteen joint operations organized by Frontex, providing support to EU Member States and third countries, providing experts and technical equipment: aircraft, helicopters, mobile surveillance complexes, ships and cutters.

Latvia's participation in joint operations organized by FRONTEX in 2020:

- Joint operations at the external land and air borders, return operations (*Rapid Border Intervention Evros / Rapid Border Intervention Aegean / Flexible Operational Activities Land / Flexible Operational Activities Western Balkans / Focal Points Land / Coordination Points Air / Focal Points Air / European Return centre (Poseidon Readmission Activities / Flexible Operational Activities in return) / FRONTEX Situation Centre*) – 78 SBG experts;
- Joint operations at the external maritime borders (Indalo / Themis / Poseidon / Minerva) - 252 SBG experts.

Latvia participated in operations in the following countries - Greece, Bulgaria, Albania, Hungary, Spain, Romania, Italy, Poland and Ukraine. In 2020, 330 SBG representatives participated in Frontex joint operations.⁹⁷

EMN study on the responses to long-term irregularly staying migrants

The EMN is conducting a study on the actions of EU Member States and Norway on long-term irregular migrants. In 2020, a [national report](#), was prepared, which includes the following information:

- the reasons why the residence of the person in the Republic of Latvia is irregular;
- social guarantees for long-term irregular migrants;
- termination of long-term irregular stay;
- regularization of legal status.

⁹⁷ Source: SBG.

The legislation of the Republic of Latvia does not include the term “long-term irregular migrant”, however, it can be deduced from the legislation that determines the actions of the responsible authorities in relation to a foreigner staying in the Republic of Latvia irregularly. The term “long-term irregular migrant” in this report applies to a person who has been staying irregularly in the Republic of Latvia for more than a year.

What are the reasons why a person's stay in the Republic of Latvia is irregular? This happens in the following cases:

- if it has not been possible to identify and determine the nationality of the person in the return procedure;
- if it is not possible for the person to obtain a travel document;
- in cases where the third-country national cannot leave for humanitarian reasons.

Latvia mostly deals with the stay of long-term irregular migrants, whose removal is not possible for legal or practical reasons, as well as third-country nationals whose visas or residence permits have expired, as well as individuals who, since the restoration of Latvia's independence (after the collapse of the USSR), have not taken actions to establish their legal status, and whose legal status is hindered by practical obstacles. The number of these long-term irregular migrants in the Republic of Latvia is not large. The circumstances of each long-term irregular migrant's case are assessed individually.

The range of state or municipal services available to long-term irregular migrants is not wide, as in most cases these services are available to persons residing legally. For example, for persons who have been issued a return decision but whose return has not taken place for legal or practical reasons, accommodation may be provided by municipalities or non-governmental organizations. These individuals have access to free emergency medical care, but all other types of medical care are available for a fee. Minors have access to state-paid medical care and basic education in municipal educational institutions. Long-term irregular migrants are entitled to state-paid legal aid in the event of an appeal against a return decision, and at their own expense in any case. Persons staying irregularly cannot be legally employed.

Support for long-term irregular migrants can be provided by non-governmental organizations according to their work profile, for example, “Shelter “Safe House””, “Latvian Red Cross”, Marta Center.

There are two options for terminating long-term irregular residence in Latvia. These include returning to the country of origin or another third country where the person has the right to enter and obtaining a residence permit or visa. Return to the country of origin is prioritized because it allows a third-country national to submit documents for a residence permit or visa to the mission of the Republic of Latvia abroad.

The synthesis report will be available in the middle of 2021 on the website of the EMN Latvia contact point www.emn.lv.

PREVENTING TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS

In 2020, the status of a suspect in the criminal proceedings initiated for the organization of human trafficking has been determined for six persons and one person has been convicted.⁹⁸ 31 third-country nationals (Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and India) have been identified as victims of trafficking in human beings. The increase in the number of victims of human trafficking is explained by the lack of local labour, especially in construction, food production and agriculture.⁹⁹

In the framework of the CAPE project “Competence building, Assistance provision and Prosecution of labour Exploitation cases in the Baltic Sea Region”, aimed at human trafficking for labour exploitation in all Council of the Baltic Sea States, a study was conducted in Latvia the aim of which is to reveal the connection between recruitment practices and human trafficking for the purpose of labour exploitation in Latvia. Evaluating the regulatory enactments in the field, it was concluded that human trafficking for the purpose of labour exploitation is not mentioned in the regulatory enactments and it is a relatively new term. It was concluded that by arranging migration and labour law regulations, the risks of labour exploitation as a form of human trafficking will be reduced.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸Source: Ministry of the Interior.

⁹⁹ Source: Ministry of the Interior.

¹⁰⁰Research on the link between recruitment practices and human trafficking for the purpose of labor exploitation. - Available: <http://www.cilvektirdznieciba.lv/lv/izpetes-darbs-par-saistibu-starp-darba-pienemsanas-praksem-un-cilveku-tirdzniecibu-darbaspeka-ekspluatacijas-noluka/246>.

Training and awareness raising

In September 2020, within the framework of the Joint Action Days of the European Union Policy Cycle for Combating Serious and Organized Crime “Human Trafficking” (EMPACT JAD 2020), the State Labour Inspectorate and the State Police were trained, including the development of tactics prior to the organization and conduct of joint raids. It was attended by officials working as identifiers for victims of human trafficking.

In October 2020, on the occasion of the European Union Anti-Trafficking Day, an awareness-raising campaign "Victims of Human Trafficking" was launched to reach people who may be victims of trafficking in need of support, assistance and protection, and to draw public attention to the issue of human trafficking for preventive purposes. As part of the campaign, posters and information materials are distributed throughout Latvia with the support of the Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments, the Ministry of Culture and the National Library, the Ministry of Welfare and Social Services, the State Labour Inspectorate, the State Employment Agency, OCMA, Riga Airport and non-governmental organizations. Videos and messages on sexual exploitation, labour exploitation and forced marriages of convenience and information on how to seek help were published on the websites and social networks of institutions and supporters, as well as on news portals.

Diplomatic notes with information on current issues in the prevention of human trafficking in Latvia, as well as information on assistance and services for victims of human trafficking and victims' rights, were sent to the Embassy of Uzbekistan in Riga, the Embassy of Tajikistan in Minsk and the Embassy of India in Stockholm. The specific embassies were selected on the basis of statistics on third-country nationals who have been victims of human trafficking in Latvia or who have been the victims of significant labour law violations. The annex to the notes included information and a booklet to be used for public information purposes, and it was offered to send videos made within the social campaign "Victim of human trafficking?"¹⁰¹

At the end of 2020, the Association “Shelter “Safe House”” implemented the project “Act Smart” for three months.¹⁰² The activities of the project focused on educating the public about human trafficking, with a special focus on labour exploitation, as well as two information materials, one video and one podcast on human trafficking - recruitment schemes, labour exploitation, slavery and sexual exploitation.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Source: Ministry of the Interior.

¹⁰² The project "Act Smart" is implemented in cooperation with LLC "Philip Morris Latvia".

¹⁰³ A podcast about human trafficking, recruitment schemes, labor exploitation and sexual exploitation. – Available: <http://www.cilvektirdznieciba.lv/lv/podkasts-par-cilveku-tirdzniecibu-vervesanas-shemam-darbaspeka-ekspluataciju-un-seksualo-ekspluataciju/252>.

In total, in 2020, 1,137 employees of state and local government institutions participated in educational activities on the issues of preventing and combating human trafficking.¹⁰⁴

Coordination and cooperation of key actors

During the implementation of the transnational project FLOW “Difficulties in Detecting Illicit Money Flows and Victims in Labour Exploitation”, a practical tool “Detection of Labour Trade - Investigation Tool for Law Enforcement and Checklist for Labour Inspectors” was developed¹⁰⁵, involving representatives of the Latvia State Police and the State Labour Inspectorate, as a result of which the common understanding and co-operation in recognizing and identifying victims of human trafficking from third countries has significantly improved. The developed investigation tool is a significant achievement in improving inter-institutional co-operation, as a result of which the understanding and ability of the State Police and the Labour Inspectorate to detect cases of labour exploitation and to identify and work with victims of human trafficking has been significantly improved.

Identification of victims of trafficking in human beings

The employees of the Ombudsman's Office in co-operation with the State Border Guard continued the project “Effective implementation of the monitoring and removal process (Phase 1)”¹⁰⁶, launched in 2019, where one of the project activities is to improve identification procedures for victims of trafficking in human beings. As a result of the project, a training material on the recognition of victims of trafficking in human beings in the process of removal has been developed, on the basis of which two training seminars were organized online to promote recognition of potential victims of human trafficking in forced return, as well as to strengthen cooperation between institutions. During two seminars, 42 participants from SBG, Orphans' and Custody Courts, State Inspectorate for Protection of Children's Rights, the Association “Shelter “Safe House””,

¹⁰⁴ Overview of preventing and combating human trafficking in Latvia in 2020. - Available: <http://www.cilvektirdznieciba.lv/lv/parskats-par-cilveku-tirdzniecibas-noversanu-un-apkarosanu-latvija-2020gada/253>.

¹⁰⁵ “Detection of Labor Trade - Investigation Tool for Law Enforcement and Checklist for Labor Inspectors”. - Available: http://www.cilvektirdznieciba.lv/uploads/files/flow_izmeklesanas_riks.pdf.

¹⁰⁶No.TSB/PMIF/2018/1

“Centre MARTA” and “Latvian Red Cross” were trained. As a result of the project, the survey of the forced return monitoring process was supplemented, as well as the guidelines for the implementation of the monitoring mechanism of forced returnees with information and issues related to trafficking in human beings. The results of the activity provide an important basis for further institutional capacity to identify victims of trafficking in human beings in the process of removal, and for inter-institutional cooperation in dealing with such victims, thus fulfilling the state's commitment to identify victims of trafficking in human beings, ensure their rights and protection measures.

RETURN AND READMISSION

In 2020, the number of persons who left Latvia voluntarily decreased significantly - 870 (in 2019 - 1,536). In most cases, they were citizens of Ukraine and Russia.¹⁰⁷ 62 persons received voluntary return assistance. In 2020, the number of forcibly returned persons decreased, reaching 38 (in 2019 - 58¹⁰⁸). The largest numbers of forcibly removed third-country nationals were from Vietnam and Russia.

Before carrying out assisted return, third-country nationals are subjected to a Covid-19 test to ensure a successful and safe return to their country of residence. Forcibly returned third-country nationals and accompanying SBG officials underwent Covid-19 tests shortly before the actual return operation in order to ensure a successful and safe forced return to the country of nationality/residence of the third-country national. Personal protective equipment was also used during the forced return operation. The translation of the Covid-19 test results into English facilitated the successful implementation of return operations to third countries.

In the second half of 2020, co-operation with the Republic of Belarus in the field of readmission was launched on the basis of the agreement between the EU and the Republic of Belarus on the readmission of persons residing without authorization, which entered into force on 1 July 2020.

On 24 November 2020, the Cabinet of Ministers approved the Implementation Protocol between the Republic of Latvia and Ukraine to the Agreement between the European Community and Ukraine on the readmission of persons. Latvia may take steps to sign a bilateral Implementation Protocol with Ukraine.

¹⁰⁷ Source: OCMA.

¹⁰⁸ Source: SBG.

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ABBREVIATIONS USED

EU - European Union

EMN - European Migration Network

IOM - International Organization for Migration

OCMA - Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs

SBG - State Border Guard

AMIF - Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund

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