

EMN

European Migration Network



LATVIA



Office of Citizenship and
Migration Affairs
Republic of Latvia

REPORT ON MIGRATION AND ASYLUM IN LATVIA REFERENCE YEAR 2022



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IN LATVIA
REFERENCE YEAR 2022

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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 of 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

Responses to the influx of persons fleeing the war in Ukraine

On 3 March 2022, the Law on Assistance to Ukrainian Civilians¹ was adopted, which provides support for Ukrainian refugees during the Russian invasion, as well as general support to the Ukrainian society. A number of Cabinet regulations were issued on the basis of the Law on Assistance to Ukrainian Civilians.

Legal migration

In 2022, 19 236² first temporary residence permits were issued, which is by 58% more than in 2021. On 7 April 2022³ and on 22 September 2022⁴ amendments to the Immigration Law were introduced significantly restricting the entry and stay of the citizens of the Russian Federation and Republic of Belarus in the Republic of Latvia. Amendments of 22 September 2022 to the Immigration Law⁵ stipulate that for the citizens of the Russian Federation, who were citizens of Latvia or non-citizens of Latvia before acquisition of the citizenship of the Russian Federation and have received permanent residence permits in accordance with the Immigration Law⁶, these residence permits shall become invalid on 1 September 2023. In order for these persons to be entitled to continue their stay in the Republic of Latvia, they must pass the State Language Proficiency Testing (level A2) and request a new permanent residence permit or the long-term European Union resident status. On 20 April 2023, amendments to the Immigration Law⁷ entered into force providing the possibility for those nationals of the Russian Federation who by 1 September 2023 have failed to complete the State Language Proficiency Testing to do so again by 30 November 2023. These amendments also provide for an extension of the time limit for examining applications for the long-term European Union resident status, in order to enable the responsible authorities to take informed decisions.

International protection and asylum

The number of asylum seekers has decreased - there were 546⁸ asylum seekers in 2022.

Unaccompanied minors and other vulnerable groups

The number of unaccompanied minors entering Latvia decreased - in 2022, five unaccompanied minors entered Latvia and all of them applied for asylum.

¹ [Law on Assistance to Ukrainian Civilians](#). - *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No 45A, 04.03.2022. - [entered into force 05.03.2022]

² Data source: OCMA.

³ Law "[Amendments to the Immigration Law](#)" - *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No 70A, 08.04.2022. - [entered into force 09.04.2022]

⁴ Law "[Amendments to the Immigration Law](#)" - *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No 185A, 23.09.2022. - [entered into force 24.09.2022]

⁵ Law "[Amendments to the Immigration Law](#)" - *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No 185A, 23.09.2022 - [entered into force 24.09.2022]

⁶ Section 24, Paragraph one, Clause 8

⁷ Law "[Amendments to the Immigration Law](#)". - *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No 115, 15.06.2022. - [entered into force 29.06.2022]

⁸ Data source: OCMA.

Integration

In 2022, 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 and receive the support of a social mentor. State and non-governmental organizations provided integration and Latvian language courses for asylum seekers and third-country nationals, including Ukrainian civilians.

Citizenship and naturalization

In 2022, 518 persons were admitted to Latvian citizenship through naturalization.⁹ The majority of people who received Latvian citizenship (65%) were non-citizens of Latvia. Compared to the previous years' trends, the share of non-citizens among persons who received citizenship in 2022 has decreased. The number of third-country nationals who received Latvian citizenship through naturalization has increased - in 2022, 171 individual became citizens of Latvia.¹⁰

Border control, visas and Schengen management

In the municipalities of Ludza, Kraslava and Augsdaugava and in the city of Daugavpils continued the emergency situation declared on 11 August 2021. It was prolonged until 10 May 2023.¹¹

The State Border Guard participated in joint operations organized by Frontex¹² that provided support to both EU Member States and third countries.

Irregular migration

From 28 September 2022 to 27 December 2022, during the declared emergency situation at the administrative territories along the state border of the Republic of Latvia and Russian Federation, as well as at the border crossing points¹³ the State Border Guard was instructed to carry out reinforced border control of the state border of the Republic of Latvia and Russian Federation and carry out reinforced border control of entering citizens of the Russian Federation.

Trafficking in human beings

Six persons have been identified as suspects in criminal proceedings for trafficking in human beings and seven persons have been convicted. Four third-country nationals have been recognized as victims of trafficking in human beings.

⁹ Data source: OCMA.

¹¹Cabinet of Ministers Order No 61 of 1 February 2023 "Amendment to the Cabinet of Ministers Order No 518 of 10 August 2021 "[Regarding Declaration of the Emergency Situation](#)". - *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No 25, 03.02.2023 - [entered into force 01.02.2023]

¹²European Border and Coast Guard Agency.

¹³Cabinet of Ministers Order No 671 of 27 September 2022 "Regarding Declaration of the Emergency Situation" - *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No 188A, 28.09.2022 - [entered into force 27.09.2022]

Return and readmission

In 2022, 49 people were removed and 1957 returned voluntarily to their country of residence. In 2022, the Riga Office of the International Organization for Migration (hereinafter - IOM) provided assistance to 105 persons for the implementation of voluntary return.

INTRODUCTION

The Annual Report on the Migration and Asylum in Latvia (hereinafter - the Report) provides information on the most notable changes in the migration and asylum policy in Latvia in the period from 1 January to 31 December 2022 and at the beginning of 2023. 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 National Contact Points of the European Migration Network (hereinafter - EMN), which allows to compile uniform and comparable information on all EU Member States and EMN observer countries. Once fully drawn up, the synthesis report on the migration and asylum situation in 2023 in the EU and EMN observer countries 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, State Border Guard (hereinafter - SBG), Consular Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Welfare, Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Health, IOM Riga Office, Society Integration Fund, society „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 Asylum and Migration Glossary ¹⁴.

¹⁴Available: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/networks/european-migration-network-emn/emn-asylum-and-migration-glossary_en.

OVERVIEW OF CHANGES IN ASYLUM AND MIGRATION POLICY

General changes in the field of migration

On 14 December 2022, the Parliament (Saeima) expressed its trust in the new Cabinet of Ministers, which is already the second consecutive government led by the Prime Minister Krišjānis Kariņš.

There are new ministers in the Cabinet of Ministers: Minister of Economics Ilze Indriksone, Minister of the Interior Māris Kučinskis, Minister of Education and Science Anda Čakša, Minister of Welfare Evika Siliņa, who are responsible for the field of migration and asylum. Minister of Foreign Affairs Edgars Rinkēvičs and Minister of Culture Nauris Puntulis have retained their positions.

The parties forming the government have agreed on further operational directions and as priorities in the government declaration are mentioned state security and foreign affairs, education, energy, climate and environment, competitiveness and quality of life improvement. The government undertakes the following in the field of migration in the declaration:

- To implement an efficient strategy, preventing irregular immigration and cross-border organized crime risks on the external border;
- To support the attraction of a highly qualified and professional labour force, in particular by promoting re-emigration.

The processes of migration and their administration in 2022 were significantly affected by the events taking place both abroad in the context of the war in Ukraine caused by Russia and in Latvia in relation to the situation on the Latvian-Belarusian border.

In 2022, the precarious situation on the Latvian-Belarusian border continued. The majority of migrants were from Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan. The government authorities of Belarus deliberately did not create any obstacles for border crossing in order to weaken the border security and the capacity of the asylum system of the European Union. Such activity was described as hybrid war against the European Union. On 1 February 2022, the Cabinet supported the extension of the emergency situation in the border area with Belarus¹⁵, as the migration situation on the border

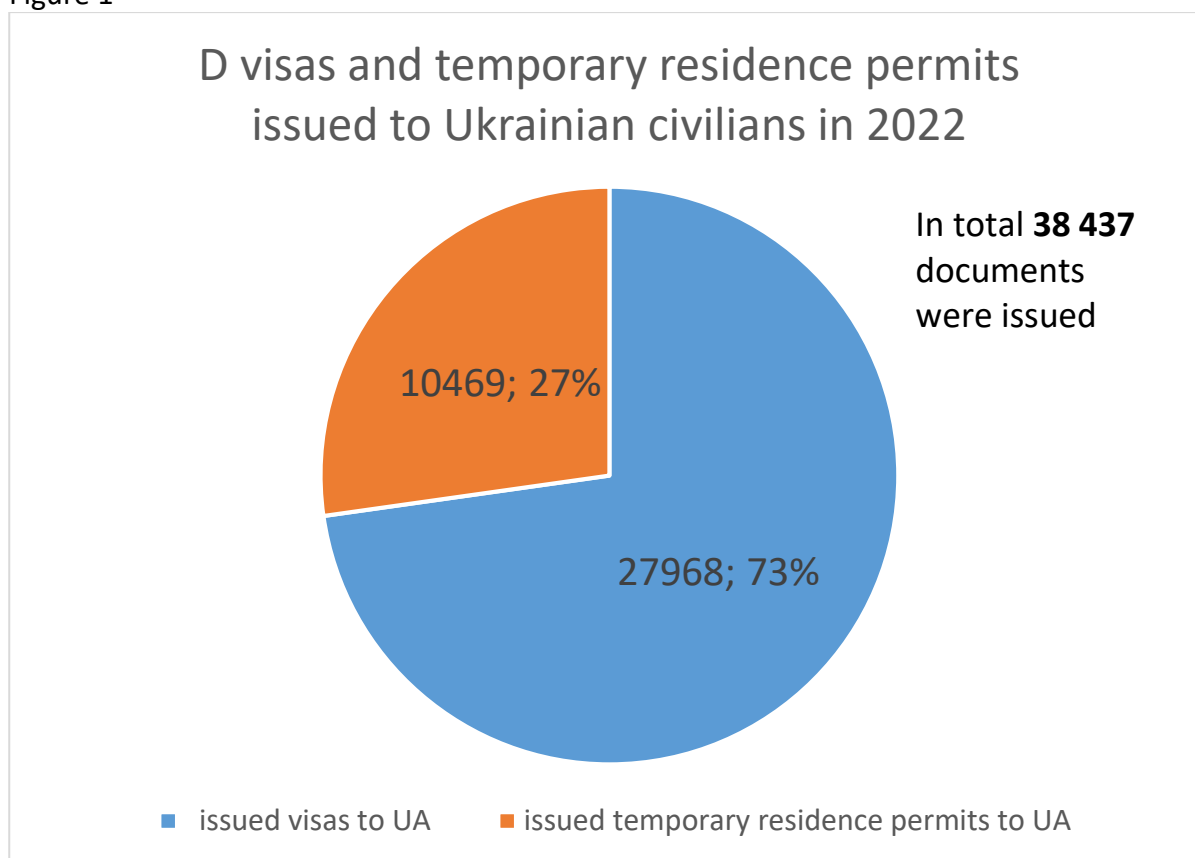
¹⁵ Cabinet of Ministers Order No 45 of 1 February 2022 "[Amendment to the Cabinet of Ministers Order No 518 of 10 August 2021 "Regarding Declaration of the Emergency Situation"](#)". - *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No 24, 03.02.2022 - [entered into force 01.02.2022];

remains tense. The emergency situation in 2022 was extended several times¹⁶ - in the municipalities of Ludza, Kraslava and Augsdaugava, as well as in Daugavpils. During the emergency situation the National Armed Forces and State Police provided assistance to the SBG in ensuring border surveillance on the Latvian - Belarusian border in order to prevent irregular border crossing, including the right to use the means available at their disposal to prevent the persons from the irregular crossing of the Latvian - Belarusian border.

¹⁶ Cabinet of Ministers Order No 45 of 1 February 2022 "[Amendment to the Cabinet of Ministers Order No 518 of 10 August 2021 "Regarding Declaration of the Emergency Situation"](#)". - *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No 24, 03.02.2022 - [entered into force 01.02.2022]; Cabinet of Ministers Order No 254 of 6 April 2022 "[Amendment to the Cabinet of Ministers Order No 518 of 10 August 2021 "Regarding Declaration of the Emergency Situation"](#)". - *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No 69, 07.04.2022 – [entered into force 06.04.2022]; Cabinet of Ministers Order No 324 of 11 May 2022 "[Amendment to the Cabinet of Ministers Order No 518 of 10 August 2021 "Regarding Declaration of the Emergency Situation"](#)". - *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No 90A, 11.05.2022 – [entered into force 11.05.2022]; Cabinet of Ministers Order No 552 of 10 August 2022 "[Amendments to the Cabinet of Ministers Order No 518 of 10 August 2021 "Regarding Declaration of the Emergency Situation"](#)". - *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No 153B, 10.08.2022 – [entered into force 10.08.2022]; Cabinet of Ministers Order No 794 of 3 November 2022 "[Amendment to the Cabinet of Ministers Order No 518 of 10 August 2021 "Regarding Declaration of the Emergency Situation"](#)". - *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No 216, 07.11.2022 – [entered into force 03.11.2022]

RESPONSES TO THE INFLUX OF PERSONS FLEEING THE WAR IN UKRAINE

Figure 1



On 28 February 2022, the Cabinet of Ministers approved a Plan in the event of mass arrivals of people from Ukraine to Latvia¹⁷. The aim of the Plan is to identify measures to be implemented and resources to be used by public authorities, municipalities and businesses to ensure coordinated and immediate action to receive and host ten thousand persons who could arrive en masse from Ukraine. The Plan is necessary because of the unprovoked, large-scale Russian military aggression against Ukraine, which was launched on 24 February 2022. The Plan of Measures applies to persons who have arrived en masse from Ukraine and are seeking asylum in Latvia or applying for a visa on

¹⁷ Cabinet of Ministers Order No 131 of 28 February 2022 "On the Plan of Measures in Case of Mass Arrival of Persons from Ukraine in Latvia" - *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No 43, 02.03.2022 - [entered into force 28.02.2022]

humanitarian grounds. The Plan had foreseen that up to 10 000 people from Ukraine could arrive in Latvia.¹⁸

In order to introduce the provisions set forth by the Asylum Law¹⁹ in relation to the temporary protection in compliance with the Council Directive [2001/55/EC](#) of 20 July 2001, in accordance with the Council Implementing Decision (EU)²⁰ 2022/382 of 4 March 2022 establishing the existence of a mass influx of displaced persons from Ukraine within the meaning of Article 5 of Directive 2001/55/EC, and having the effect of introducing temporary protection, on 3 March 2022 the Law on Assistance to Ukrainian Civilians was adopted²¹.

The Law provides support to Ukrainian refugees during the Russian invasion, as well as general support to the Ukrainian society. Ukrainian civilians within the meaning of the law are Ukrainian citizens and members of their families, as well as persons who have received a permanent residence permit in Ukraine, stateless status or status of international protection, and their family members. The Law provides for temporary protection of Ukrainian civilians in the Republic of Latvia within the meaning of the Asylum Law. In the context of the ongoing armed conflict between Ukraine and the Russian Federation, it was necessary to determine the actions of the relevant authorities (OCMA, SBG and the Consular Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) in providing support to Ukrainian civilians and Ukrainian society.

A number of Cabinet regulations were issued on the basis of the Law on Assistance to Ukrainian Civilians:

- Cabinet Regulation No. 172 “On the information necessary to ensure the provision of aid to Ukrainian civilians”²², which determines the information necessary to ensure the provision of aid to Ukrainian civilians, as well as the amount of information, the procedures for gathering and using it and the time limits for storage.
- The Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No 235 “Regulations on the Number of Ukrainian Civilians to be Accommodated in the Municipalities”²³ provide for the number of Ukrainian civilians to be accommodated in the municipalities taking into account the possible number of civilians arrived from Ukraine and the number of residents declared in the municipalities.
- Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No 339 “Regulations on the Provision of Primary Support to the Civilian Population of Ukraine”²⁴ provide for the procedure for organizing primary support to persons. The provision of primary support to Ukrainian civilians is coordinated by the State Fire and Rescue Service in cooperation with the

¹⁸ The Cabinet of Ministers approves a plan in case of a mass influx of people from Ukraine to Latvia. - Available at: <https://www.iem.gov.lv/lv/jaunums/ministru-kabinets-apstiprina-planu-gadjumam-ja-latvija-masveida-ieradisies-cilveki-no-ukrainas-0>.

¹⁹ [Asylum Law](#). – *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No 2, 05.01.2016 – [entered into force 19.01.2016]

²⁰ Council Directive 2001/55/EC of 20 July 2001 on minimum standards for giving temporary protection in the event of a mass influx of displaced persons and on measures promoting a balance of efforts between Member States in receiving such persons and bearing the consequences thereof. - Official Journal, p 212, 07.08.2001.

²¹ [Law on Assistance to Ukrainian Civilians](#). - *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No 45A, 04.03.2022 - [entered into force 05.03.2022]

²² Cabinet of Ministers Regulation of 15 March 2022 No 172 "[Regulations on Information Necessary to Ensure the Provision of Support to the Civilian Population of Ukraine](#)" - *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No 53A, 16.03.2022 - [entered into force 17.03.2022]

²³ Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No 235 of 12 April 2022 "[Regulations on the number of Ukrainian civilians to be accommodated in municipalities](#)" - *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No 74A, 14.04.2022 – [entered into force 15.04.2022]"

²⁴ Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No 339 of 8 June 2022 "[Regulations on Provision of Primary Support to Civilians of Ukraine](#)" - *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No 113, 13.06.2022 - [entered into force 01.07.2022]

SBG and the Civil Protection Commissions of the municipalities of the cooperation area.

On 29 April 2022, the Cabinet of Ministers approved the Plan of Measures for Supporting Ukrainian Civilians in the Republic of Latvia²⁵, which provides for coordinated and immediate action by state institutions, municipalities and businesses to host, accommodate and provide social support to up to forty thousand Ukrainian civilians fleeing the war. A new plan was drawn up in light of the continued arrivals of Ukrainian civilians in Latvia due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The Ministry of the Interior in cooperation with other ministries prepared the planned follow-up to the continued influx of refugees into Latvia, including measures and support for Ukrainian civilians after the primary period of support to be provided, taking into account the capacity of state and municipal institutions involved in the admission of refugees and provision of support.

In order to ensure the provision of support to the Ukrainian civilians, the measures included in the Plan of Measures are structured in twelve sections. Ukrainian civilians were guaranteed the right to reside in the Republic of Latvia, the right to employment, the amount of support within the limits set by the Law on Assistance to Ukrainian Civilians, as well as the right to education. The protection of personal and property rights and the interests of minors that are Ukrainian civilians entering the Republic of Latvia without being accompanied by a parent was ensured.

The amount of possible support per Ukrainian civilian is based on the principle that the amount of services and support provided does not exceed the amount of support available to the Latvian population.

Accommodation for persons in need for up to 90 days is provided on a priority basis, with referrals to voluntary host households, including reimbursement to households upon an application from the respective household of 100 euros for the first person and 50 euros for each additional person, up to a maximum of 300 euros per month per dwelling.

It also provides for the possibility of concluding rental agreements with private individuals for the transfer of residential premises for the use of Ukrainian civilians at a rent not exceeding 400 euros per month per dwelling, including all payments related to the use of the residential premises (utilities).

Finally, persons may be directed to accommodation in municipal accommodation or tourist hostels, with accommodation costs of up to 15 euros per person per day.

However, meals or groceries for up to 30 days were provided up to a maximum of 10 euros per person per day, except for those accommodated in voluntary host households.

The plan also provides for preventive measures in the areas of state security, border security, prevention of trafficking in human beings, public order and security, as well as protection of the rights and freedoms of the Ukrainian civilians.²⁶

²⁵ Cabinet of Ministers Order No 302 of 29 April 2022 "On the Plan of Measures for the Provision of Support to the Civilian Population of Ukraine in the Republic of Latvia" - *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No 83B, 29.04.2022 - [entered into force 29.04.2022]

²⁶Annotation to the Order "Plan of measures for the provision of support to the civilian population of Ukraine in the Republic of Latvia" - Available: <https://tapportals.mk.gov.lv/annotation/be3aeb7e-2fd4-421e-a47f-8ee02ce236c5>.

On 5 April 2022 Cabinet Regulations No 223 "Amendments to the Cabinet Regulations No 68 of 24 January 2012 "Procedures for Granting Scholarships to Foreigners"" were adopted²⁷, the purpose of which is to provide Ukraine civilians with the right to receive state support as a study scholarship for the time period from 01.03.2022 to 30.06.2022 or a research scholarship for the time period from 01.03.2022 to 31.08.2022, equivalent to the inhabitants of Latvia, which shall be paid as of entry into force of this Regulation, so that a Ukrainian civilian could continue to pursue studies of higher education as well as academic or scientific activity in Latvia, which has been interrupted in Ukraine.²⁸

Students of all study levels enrolled in the Latvian state or private higher education institutions, including colleges, were able to receive a scholarship in the amount of 140 euro from the day of enrollment until the end of semester on 30 June 2022. In solidarity with the academic community of Ukraine, Latvian scientific institutions included in the Register of Scientific Institutions may establish employment relationship with Ukrainian researchers or offer internships at their institutions. If a scientific institution offers an internship to Ukrainian researchers (without remuneration), the state provides a research scholarship for scientific and academic work of 900 euros per month until 31 August 2022.

The state education information system data show that since 24 February 2022 higher education establishments have enrolled 312 Ukrainian civilians. In the period from 1 September 2022 to 31 December 2022 scholarships for studies in the amount of 140 euros per month were received by 94 Ukrainian civilians.²⁹

On 28 February 2023 the Cabinet Regulations No 78 "Amendments to the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No 68 of 24 January 2012 "Procedures for Granting Scholarships to Foreigners""³⁰ were adopted to continue the provision of support to the Ukrainian civilians until 31 December 2023 in compliance with the Law on Assistance to Ukrainian Civilians,³¹ providing for the scholarship fund in the amount of 688 000 euros. Amendments also provide for the facilitating of the scholarship administration process for the Ukrainian civilians. From now on the State Education Development Agency together with a respective educational or scientific institution shall enter an agreement on payment of the studies scholarship or research scholarship, paying out the studies or research scholarship to the Ukrainian civilians once a month for the current month.³²

On 5 May 2022, the ministers of the interior of the Baltic states and Poland met in Kyiv to sign a declaration, the aim of which is to strengthen transnational cooperation and renew peace and security in the European region. With the help of this declaration necessary conditions shall be created for strengthening cooperation in the field of interior affairs and providing harmonized and

²⁷Cabinet of Ministers Regulation of 5 April 2022 No 223 "[Amendments to Cabinet of Ministers Regulation of 24 January 2012 No 68 "Procedure for Granting Scholarships to Foreigners"](#)" - *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No 69, 07.04.2022 - [entered into force 08.04.2022]

²⁸Annotation to the draft legislation "Amendments to the Cabinet of Ministers Regulation of 24 January 2012 No 68 "Procedure for Granting Scholarships to Foreigners"" - Available: <https://tapportals.mk.gov.lv/annotation/d707fe7d-8e75-447f-9cb2-3f220be2a5d7>.

²⁹ Support in the amount of 688 000 euros is available to students and researchers from Ukraine this year. – Available: <https://www.lsm.lv/raksts/zinas/latvija/studejosajiem-un-petniekiem-no-ukrainas-sogad-pieejams-atbalsts-688-000-eiro-apmera.a498571/>

³⁰Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No 78 of 28 February 2023 "Amendments to the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No 68 of 24 January 2012 "[Procedure for Granting Scholarships to Foreigners](#)" - *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No 44, 02.03.2023 - [entered into force 03.03.2023]

³¹Annotation to the draft legislation "Amendments to the Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No 68 of 24 January 2012 "Procedure for Granting Scholarships to Foreigners"" - Available: <https://tapportals.mk.gov.lv/annotation/9539ba08-bcbb-493f-af45-638bf71933db>

³² Support in the amount of 688 000 euros is available to students and researchers from Ukraine this year. – Available: <https://www.lsm.lv/raksts/zinas/latvija/studejosajiem-un-petniekiem-no-ukrainas-sogad-pieejams-atbalsts-688-000-eiro-apmera.a498571/>

prompt support to the Ukrainian interior affairs services. The declaration will strengthen the fight against cross-border crime, including the irregular movement of people across borders, by working together to combat trafficking in human beings. Particular attention will be paid to vulnerable groups such as people with disabilities and unaccompanied children crossing borders. Close cooperation is planned to contribute to the reconstruction of Ukraine's interior affairs infrastructure. The declaration also states that the interior affairs services will provide support, within the limits of their competence, with experts and human resources.³³

Since the beginning of the war in Ukraine the OCMA has ensured the preparation and issuing of residence permits and visas with the right of employment to the Ukrainian civilians, and from 15 June 2022, the OCMA has also ensured short-term accommodation in the Asylum Seekers Accommodation Centre "Mucenieki" for the Ukrainian civilians who then travel to another country. Until the end of 2022 the OCMA provided short-term accommodation in the Asylum Seekers Accommodation Centre "Mucenieki" to 2122 Ukrainian civilians having secured significant support - accommodation, a food package, issuing of household and hygienic goods and if required - provision of medical services.³⁴ Part of the provided support is possible because of the 1 October 2022 EEA and Norwegian grant initiative, which provides targeted support for overcoming the European refugee crisis in Latvia, including providing practical assistance to Ukrainian civilians. Since the beginning of the initiative until the spring 2023, the support has been provided to 3300 Ukrainian civilians. The framework of the project:

- 10 specific workstations were acquired and integrated for issuing residence permits and asylum seekers' identity cards with the aim to ensure:
 - Issue of residence permits to the Ukrainian civilians who wish to receive international or temporary protection in Latvia;
 - Issue of personal identity documents to asylum seekers, mainly to the Ukrainian civilians, as well as other third-country civilians (asylum seekers);
 - Issue of residence permits to third-country nationals who due to the war of the Russian Federation against Ukraine want to relocate their business to Latvia³⁵.

In 2022, from the beginning of March till the end of December in total 17 452 Ukrainian civilians who obtained the right to start employment relationship in Latvia received support from the State Employment Agency (hereinafter - SEA). 1310 Ukrainian civilians applied for the SEA support in March, in April - 2216, in May - 2198, in June – 1563, in July – 2679, in August – 1942, in September – 1525, in October – 1373, in November – 1460 and in December – 1186.³⁶ SEA employees provide consultations to the Ukrainian civilians, help them to find job opportunities and contact employers, accept and administer applications for the employment and self-employment starting allowances. In order to receive the SEA support, the Ukrainian civilians do not have to register with the SEA in a status of an unemployed person or a job seeker; however, if a Ukrainian

³³ Ministers of the interior of the Baltic States, Poland and Ukraine sign a declaration of cooperation in Kyiv. - Available: <https://www.iem.gov.lv/lv/jaunums/baltijas-valstu-polijas-un-ukrainas-iekšlietu-ministri-kijiva-paraksta-sadarbibas-deklaraciju>.

³⁴In 2022, the EEA and Norway grant initiative allowed the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs to provide significant support to the Ukrainian civilians. - Available: <https://www.pmlp.gov.lv/lv/jaunums/eez-un-norvegijas-grantu-iniciativa-pilsonibas-un-migracijas-lietu-parvaldei-2022-gadavusi-sniegt-butisku-atbalstu-ukrainas-civiliedzivotajiem>.

³⁵ EEA and Norway grants for 2014 - 2021. - Available: <https://www.pmlp.gov.lv/lv/projekts/eez-un-norvegijas-granti-2014-2021gadam>.

³⁶ Source: SEA.

civilian wants to obtain a status of an unemployed person or a job seeker, he or she can register with the SEA as an unemployed person or a job seeker and continue cooperation with the SEA already as a registered client using the services intended for registered unemployed persons and job seekers. From the beginning of March 2022 till the end of December 4168 Ukrainian civilians were registered as unemployed persons, and 30 persons were registered as job seekers. At the end of December there were 2025 Ukrainian civilians in the status of an unemployed person and 11 Ukrainian civilians - as job seekers in the records of SEA. The number of Ukrainian civilians - participants of the SEA preventive and active employment activities in 2022 was 1182. Most actively the Ukrainian civilians used the opportunity to learn Latvian language (165 participants) and receive career consultations (765 participants), and also participated in other active employment activities (252 participants).

In March 2022, the SEA started payment of a one-off start-of-employment allowance in the amount of 500 euros to the Ukrainian civilians who had started legal employment relationship in Latvia and in October - a one-off start-of-self-employment allowance in the amount of 500 euros as well. In 2022, 10 303 Ukrainian civilians received start-of-employment allowance and 79 Ukrainian civilians received start-of-self-employment allowance. In 2023, the amount of both allowances has been increased to 620 euros.

Latvian employers actively offer job opportunities to Ukrainian civilians. Around 900 Latvian employers already at the beginning of March had submitted more than 7000 workplaces for the Ukrainian civilians. At the end of December 2022, in the SEA database there were 1413 available workplaces offered to the Ukrainian civilians by 155 Latvian employers. At the end of December, the majority of vacancies for Ukrainian civilians were in areas of activity such as information technologies/telecommunications (463 workplaces), construction/real estate (347), production (196), transport/logistics (99), agriculture/environment (88), services (56), trade/marketing (42), catering/food industry (33).

A single website in Latvian, Ukrainian, Russian and English has been set up to support Ukrainian civilians - <https://www.ukraine-latvia.com/lv>, which summarizes information on the types of support for Ukrainian civilians, as well as those who wish to support them.

Ukrainian civilians continue receiving targeted need-based support in the support centers for Ukrainian civilians all around Latvia as well as receiving toll-free consultations at the unified call center "Help to Ukrainians in Latvia".³⁷

Financing for the admission of Ukrainian civilians

On 13 December 2022 a financing agreement between the European Commission Directorate General for the Migration and Home Affairs and the Ministry of the Interior was signed whereby the European Commission allocates to the Ministry of the Interior 7.8 million EUR to

³⁷toll-free unified consultation call center "Help to Ukrainians in Latvia" [+371 27380380](tel:+37127380380)

financially support Latvia's ongoing efforts in strengthening the migration administration system and the admission capabilities of the Ukrainian civilians.³⁸

On 17 February 2023, the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) in cooperation with the Ministry of the Interior started implementation of the Regional refugee protection plan in Latvia³⁹. It is planned that it will affect more than four million refugees from Ukraine in ten European countries and with the help of coordinated support between more than 240 partners will supplement national action plans developed by governments, municipalities and other institutions.

The Latvian refugee protection plan is part of a bigger regional plan which was already developed almost a year ago as soon as Russia's invasion of Ukraine began. At the beginning it included five countries; however, it has expanded and now includes 10 countries, including Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia. This connection to a bigger plan is mainly aimed at uninterrupted help to Ukrainian refugees in Latvia which is provided both by the state and to a great extent - by non-governmental organizations as well. For the implementation of the Latvian plan it is intended to spend 12 million dollars in total (around 11.2 million euros); spending will include a variety of areas, however, a representative of the UN Refugee Agency highlighted refugee accommodation and employment as two issues that require the most prompt solution⁴⁰.

³⁸ European Commission has allocated to Latvia 7.8 million EUR for admission of Ukrainian civilians. – Available: <https://www.iem.gov.lv/lv/jaunums/eiropas-komisija-pieskirusi-latvijai-78-miljonus-eiro-ukrainas-civiliedzivotaju-uznemsanai>.

³⁹ Ukraine Situation: Regional Refugee Response Plan - January-December 2023. – Available: https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/97958#_ga=2.167261886.1072678189.1676879808-1232447005.1673365454.

⁴⁰ Regional refugee protection plan in Latvia revealed. - Available: https://www.lsm.lv/raksts/zinas/latvija/atklaj-regionalo-beglu-aizsardzibas-planu-latvija.a496892/?utm_source=lsm&utm_medium=widget-v2&utm_campaign=widget-v2.

LEGAL MIGRATION

The total number of temporary residence permits issued for the first time in 2022 increased by 58 % compared to the previous year: 19 236⁴¹ (8138 in 2021) temporary residence permits were issued. 10 469 first temporary residence permits were issued to Ukrainian civilians who have received temporary protection in Latvia.

On 7 April 2022⁴² and on 22 September 2022⁴³ amendments to the Immigration Law were introduced, significantly restricting entry and residence of citizens of the Russian Federation and Republic of Belarus in the Republic of Latvia. Amendments to the Immigration Law of 7 April 2022 provides for the cease of issuance of first temporary residence permits to the citizens of the Russian Federation and Republic of Belarus who enter as employee, businessmen, founders of start-up companies and investors, not stipulating the restriction only for those categories of persons who enter in accordance with regulations determined by the European Union legislation.

The amendments to the Immigration Law of 7 April 2022 provided for significant restrictions on nationals of both the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus, terminating the issuance of first residence permits. The amendments did not affect the registration process of residence permits: permits are still registered, as well as the right to receive first residence permits in cases of family reunification or residence permits under European Union legislation (EU Blue Card, transferred specialists, students, researchers, etc.).

The amendments of 22 September 2022 further narrowed the possibility for nationals of the Russian Federation to obtain temporary residence permits, including restrictions on repeat temporary residence permits, while for nationals of the Republic of Belarus the possibility was extended regarding both first and repeat temporary residence permits, compared to the framework set out in the amendments of 7 April 2022.

The nationals of Russian Federation may request first and repeat temporary residence permits in the following cases:

1. In relation to family unification (spouses, minors, persons in guardianship or trusteeship, parents of Latvian citizens and non-citizens who have reached the retirement age, guardians and trustees, adult children of Latvian citizens);
2. European Union Blue Card requestors and intra-corporate transferees – specialists, managers and trainees;
3. Researchers and students (including researchers and students for nine months – following the completion of a research project or master's or doctoral study program);
4. Persons who have been granted a temporary protection or alternative status in Latvia;

⁴¹ Data source: OCMA. The original data on temporary residence permits, which are compiled by Eurostat, will be adjusted later.

⁴² Law on [Amendments to the Immigration Law](#) - *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No 70A, 08.04.2022 - [entered into force 09.04.2022]

⁴³ Law on [Amendments to the Immigration Law](#) - *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No 185A, 23.09.2022 - [entered into force 24.09.2022]

5. Persons who had been granted a status of long-term resident of the European Union in Latvia or such status had been granted in another European Union Member State;
6. Any person irrespective of the reason of issuing a temporary residence permit (a start-up company, any temporary residence permit related to employment or commercial activity, investment, etc.) who for the last free months before requesting a repeat temporary residence permit was employed in Latvia and for whom personal income tax payments were made, as well as if a person continues exercising its right to employment.

Nationals of Belarus may request first and repeat temporary residence permits:

1. For a private visit (once in a calendar year for six months - to a Latvian citizen, non-citizen or a foreigner who has received a permanent residence permit - a relative);
2. An individual merchant, a self-employed person, an official registered with the commercial register, a representative of representation of a foreign merchant, a founder of a start-up company;
3. An employed person (for any type of employment);
4. A pupil, student, researcher, trainee;
5. A person who is placed in an inpatient medical treatment institution;
6. In case of unification of a family (spouses, minors, persons in guardianship or trusteeship, parents of Latvian citizens and non-citizens who have reached the retirement age, guardians and trustees, adult children of Latvian citizens);
7. Persons who have been granted a stateless person, a temporary protection or alternative status in Latvia;
8. For carrying out religious activity;
9. Person who had been granted a long-term resident status of the European Union in Latvia or such status had been granted in another European Union member state;
10. Any person irrespective of the reason of issuing a temporary residence permit (a start-up company, any temporary residence permit related to employment or commercial activity, investment, etc.) who for the last free months before requesting a repeat temporary residence permit was employed in Latvia and for whom personal income tax payments were made, as well as if a person continues exercising its right to employment.

In addition to the aforementioned, Amendments of 22 September 2022 to the Immigration Law⁴⁴ stipulate that for the nationals of the Russian Federation, who have been citizens of Latvia or non-citizens of Latvia before acquisition of citizenship of the Russian Federation and have received permanent residence permits in accordance to Section 24, Paragraph one, Clause 8 of the Immigration Law⁴⁵, these residence permits shall become invalid on 1 September 2023.

The person, who wishes to continue staying in the Republic of Latvia without losing the status of a permanent resident shall receive a new permanent residence permit or a status of a long-term resident of the European Union by 1 September 2023 which can be obtained if an applicant can submit certification of proficiency of the state language (A2 language proficiency level). If a third-country national fails to submit certification of proficiency of the state language, a

⁴⁴ Law [on Amendments to the Immigration Law](#) - *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No 185A, 23.09.2022 - [entered into force 24.09.2022]

⁴⁵Section 24, Paragraph one, Clause 8

permanent residence permit shall become invalid. Amendments to the Immigration Law are related to a necessity to strengthen national security due to the war started by the Russian Federation in Ukraine.

In order to ensure that responsible institutions are able to take considered decisions and the nationals of Russia who wish to continue residing in Latvia have enough time to submit required documents for requesting the status of a permanent resident of the EU, on 5 April 2023 the Parliament (Saeima) supported amendments to the Immigration Law⁴⁶ which were recognized as urgent. Amendments set forth:

- For a national of Russia who prior to acquiring the Russian citizenship was a citizen or non-citizen of Latvia a permanent residence permit in Latvia is valid until 1 September 2023.
- If a person wishes to continue residing in Latvia, before 1 September 2023 he or she shall submit certification of passing the State Language Proficiency Testing and an application for requesting a European Union long-term resident status.
- Amendments to the Immigration Law stipulate that a permanent residence permit for the nationals of Russia who will fail to submit the requested documents to the OCMA shall be valid until 1 September 2023.
- The permanent residence permits shall be valid until 31 December 2023 for the nationals of Russia who will have taken State Language Proficiency Testing at least once until 1 September 2023 and to whom a repeated State Language Proficiency Testing shall be determined until 30 November 2023.
- The permanent residence permits for the nationals of Russia who have submitted required documents shall be valid until the date when final decision takes effect.
- An application of a national of Russia for a European Union permanent resident status to the OCMA shall be reviewed within one year from the date of its receipt.
- For the nationals of Russia who are subject to the aforementioned amendments to the law sufficient subsistence provision for requesting the status of EU long-term resident is also the pension granted to the person

Amendments to the Immigration Law were required because, taking into account the application review process as well as a possible large number of those in a short period (approximately 25 000 persons), a situation may occur that a person has fulfilled the requirements of the Immigration Law; however, his or her permanent residence rights are not valid before review of an application for the European Union permanent resident status, therefore a person loses its right to health care, education, employment and similar rights related to permanent residence⁴⁷.

⁴⁶ Law on [Amendments to the Immigration Law](#) - *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No 115, 15.06.2022 - [entered into force 29.06.2022]

⁴⁷ More time for review of residence permits of Russian nationals allocated. Available: <https://lvportals.lv/skaidrojumi/350673-dod-vairak-laika-uzturesanas-atlauju-krievijas-pilsoniem-izskatsanai-2023>.

On 2 June 2022, amendments to the Immigration Law were adopted⁴⁸ which provide for the right to third-country nationals to request a long-term visa for one year if he or she wants to stay in Latvia while being in an employment relationship with an employer registered outside the Republic of Latvia or being a self-employed person registered abroad (a person is not in an employment relationship with an employer but provides individual services, for example, legal consultations, translation services, IT services and similar) and one's job responsibilities can be fulfilled remotely⁴⁹. The aim of the amendments to the Immigration Law is to facilitate entry of highly qualified persons to Latvia.

On 14 July 2022, the Cabinet of Ministers adopted Regulations No 440 "Amendments to Cabinet of Ministers Regulations of 21 June 2010 No 564 "Regulations Regarding Residence Permits""⁵⁰ which stipulate that third-country nationals shall submit documents for requesting a repeat residence permit or registration of a residence permit electronically or by post, or in case of requesting the first residence permit - by post (if a third-country national resides in the Republic of Latvia) or using the official electronic address.⁵¹ Amendments to the Cabinet of Ministers regulations were developed to plan changes in the procedure of issuance of residence permits and sponsorships which were started to be applied in accordance with the provisions of the Law on the Management of the Spread of COVID-19 Infection. Taking into consideration that the application of norms set forth by the Law on the Management of the Spread of COVID-19 Infection was ceased on 30 June 2022, a decision was made to adopt them in the legal acts regulating the field of migration that are continuously in force.

On 30 August 2022, the Cabinet of Ministers adopted the Regulations No 540 "Amendment to the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations of 21 June 2010 No 554 "Regulation Regarding States for the Citizens of which in Issuing a Visa or a Residence Permit an Additional Assessment shall be Performed""⁵². According to these amendments the Russian Federation and Republic of Belarus are included in the list of countries with increased risk of terrorism and requests for visas and residence permits of the nationals of these countries are additionally assessed by the state competent security authorities. Amendments to the Cabinet of Ministers regulations were initiated by the Ministry of the Interior based on the unstable security situation in the region. Their aim is to reduce endangerment to the state security affected by the armed conflict in Ukraine caused by Russia.

With the aim to promote understanding of the drawing up process of residence permits the OCMA has developed an informative tool⁵³ which is available on the website of the institution and helps interested persons to receive easily perceivable information about the process of drawing up residence permits. The tool's development was facilitated by restriction of in-person visits during

⁴⁸ Law on [Amendments to the Immigration Law](#) - *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No 69A, 06.04.2023 - [entered into force 20.04.2023]

⁴⁹ Annotation to the draft law "Amendments to the Immigration Law". - Available: <https://titania.saeima.lv/LIVS13/SaeimaLIVS13.nsf/0/FE0867D3D7E07392C22587E2006177DE?OpenDocument#b>.

⁵⁰ Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No 440 of 14 July 2022 "Amendments to Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No 564 of 21 June 2010 "Regulations Regarding Residence Permits"". - *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No 136, 18.07.2022 - [entered into force 19.07.2022]

⁵¹ Annotation to the draft law "Amendments to Cabinet of Ministers Regulations of 21 June 2010 No 564 "Regulations Regarding Residence Permits"". - Available: <https://tapportals.mk.gov.lv/annotation/57fba531-5077-4cea-a7b3-d93d61c2c658>.

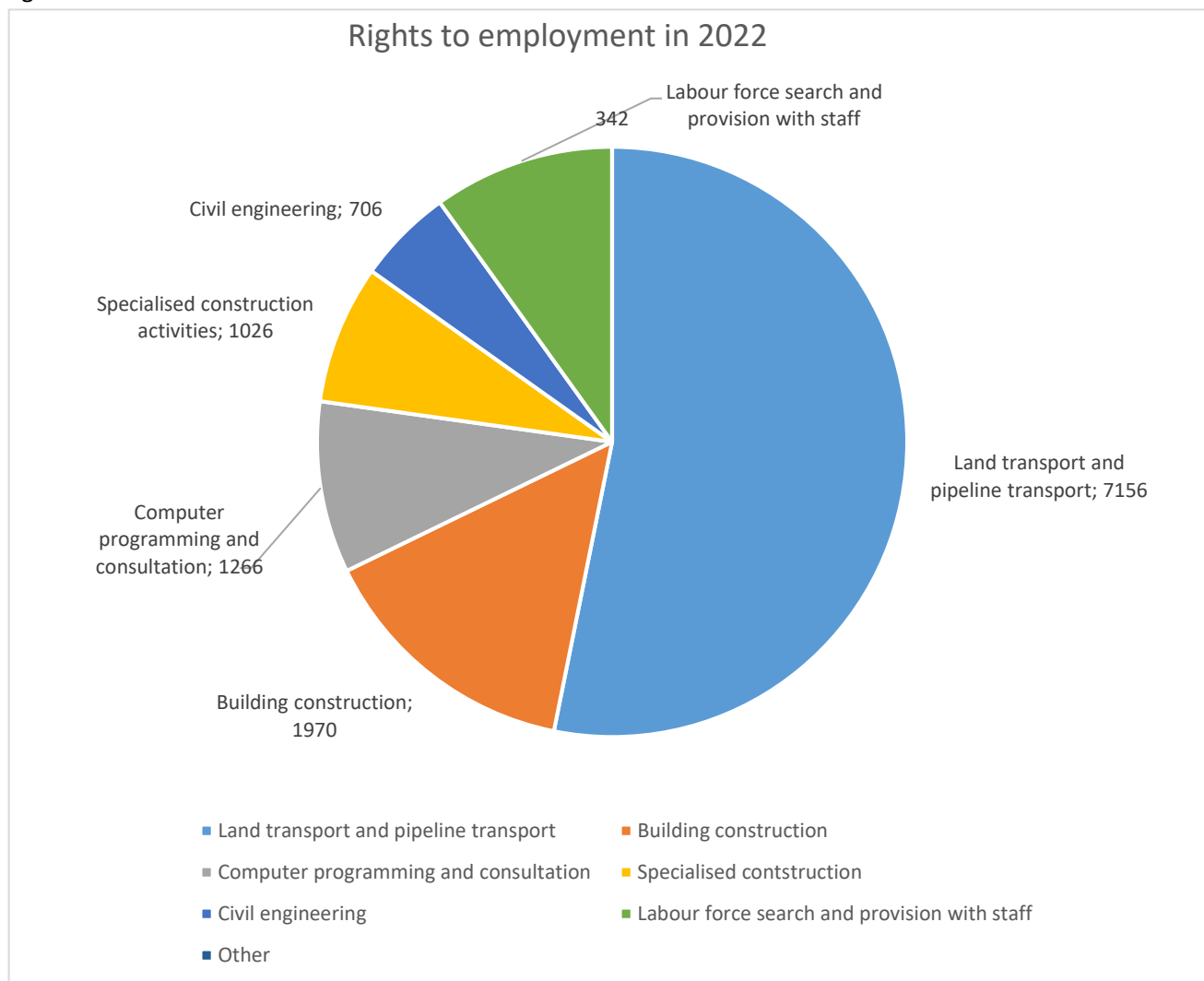
⁵² Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No 540 of 30 August 2022 "Amendment to the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations of 21 June 2010 No 554 "Regulation Regarding States for the Citizens of which in Issuing a Visa or a Residence Permit an Additional Assessment shall be Performed"" *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No 169, 01.09.2022 - [entered into force 02.09.2022]

⁵³ <https://vissparmigraciju.pmlp.gov.lv/>

the spread of COVID-19 infection and the related restriction to in-person consultations regarding the drawing up process of residence permits.

Economic migration

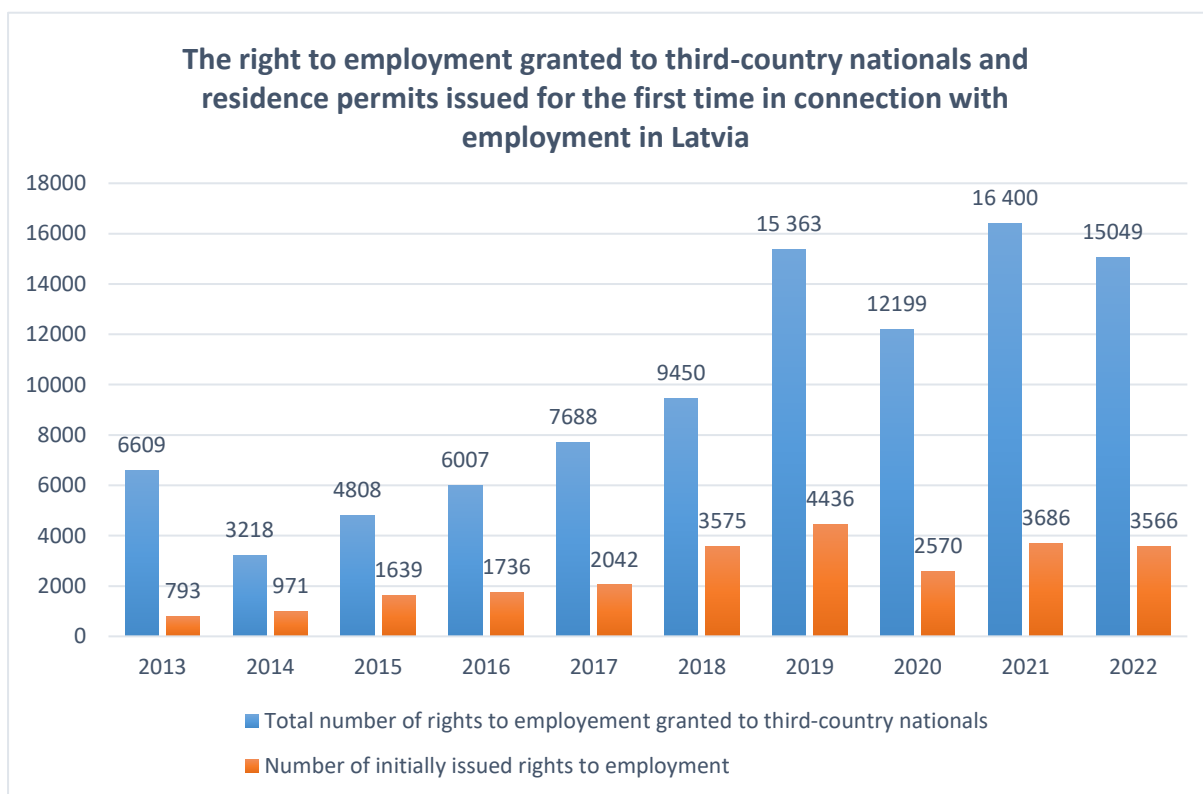
Figure 3-1



The total number of employment rights granted to third-country nationals in 2022 (both on the basis of a visa (8593) and a temporary residence permit) increased by 20.31% (16 400 – in 2021 and 19 731 – in 2022). The majority of third-country nationals work in the field of land transport and pipeline transport (7156), labour force search and provision with staff (1336), building construction (1970), computer programming and consulting (1266), specialised construction activities (1026), and civil engineering (706). In 2022, the majority of employment rights were granted to the nationals of Uzbekistan (4855), Belarus (3932) and Ukraine (3581).⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Data source: OCMA.

Figure 3-2.



The number of first residence permits issued to third-country nationals for employment has decreased: in 2021 – 3686; in 2022 – 3566.

On 14 July 2022 amendments to the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations of 21 June 2010 No 564 “Regulations Regarding Residence Permits” were adopted⁵⁵ by which a requirement was cancelled when inviting a transferred employee within the framework of an intra-company transfer to submit a document that acknowledges his or her qualification except for the case if he or she shall be employed in a regulated occupation. The amendments were adopted in order to harmonize the national law with the European Union legislation – Directive 2014/66/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 May 2014 on the conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals in the framework of an intra-corporate transfer⁵⁶.

The OCMA, in view of an increasing necessity to attract foreign labour force, has developed an informative video guide⁵⁷ for Latvian entrepreneurs about actions to be taken in order to invite guest workers for work in Latvia. The aim of the guide is to promote entrepreneurs’ understanding of the employment procedures regarding guest workers set forth by the Immigration Law.

⁵⁵ [Cabinet of Ministers Regulations of 14 July 2022 No 440 "Amendments to Cabinet of Ministers Regulation of 21 June 2010 No 564 "Regulations Regarding Residence Permits""](#), - *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No 136, 18.07.2022 - [entered into force 19.07.2022]

⁵⁶ Directive 2014/66/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 May 2014 on the conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals in the framework of an intra-corporate transfer. - *OV P 157*, 27.5.2014

⁵⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yZ3n0o9sKs8>

On 16 June 2022 amendments to the Labour Law⁵⁸ were adopted that take over the requirements of the Directive (EU) 2019/1152 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019⁵⁹ on transparent and predictable working conditions in the European Union. These requirements refer to every employee (inter alia third-country nationals who are legally employed). Amendments to the Labour Law were required to ensure the rights of every employee to receive written information on his or her rights and responsibilities arising from the labour relationship.

Studies and discussions on migration

In relation to the armed conflict in Ukraine caused by the Russian Federation, in the Latvian society and Parliament (Saeima) there were ever increasing discussions over restricting of entry of nationals of the Russian Federation and Belarus to Latvia in order to reduce security endangerment to Latvia. As a result, on 7 April 2022⁶⁰ amendments to the Immigration Law were introduced, significantly restricting entry and residence of nationals of the Russian Federation and Republic of Belarus in the Republic of Latvia. Amendments to the Immigration Law of 7 April 2022 stipulated to cease issuance of first temporary residence permits to nationals of the Russian Federation and Republic of Belarus who enter the country as businessmen, founders of start-up companies and investors.

In August 2022, the governing coalition agreed to change the principles according to which nationals of Russia and Belarus in Latvia renew previously issued temporary residence permits⁶¹. Thus, on 22 September 2022 amendments to the Immigration Law⁶² stipulated entry and residence restrictions in addition also to requestors of repeat residence permits - nationals of the Russian Federation. Restrictions were mitigated in relation to the nationals of the Republic of Belarus renewing a possibility to request both first and repeat temporary residence permit for the officials registered with the commercial register, individual merchants, self-employed persons and founders of start-up companies.

⁵⁸Law "[Amendments to the Labor Law](#)". – *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No 128, 128, 06.07.2022 – [entered into force on 01.08.2022]

⁵⁹[Directive \(EU\) 2019/1152 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on transparent and predictable working conditions in the European Union.](#) – *Official Journal P 186, 11.7.2019*

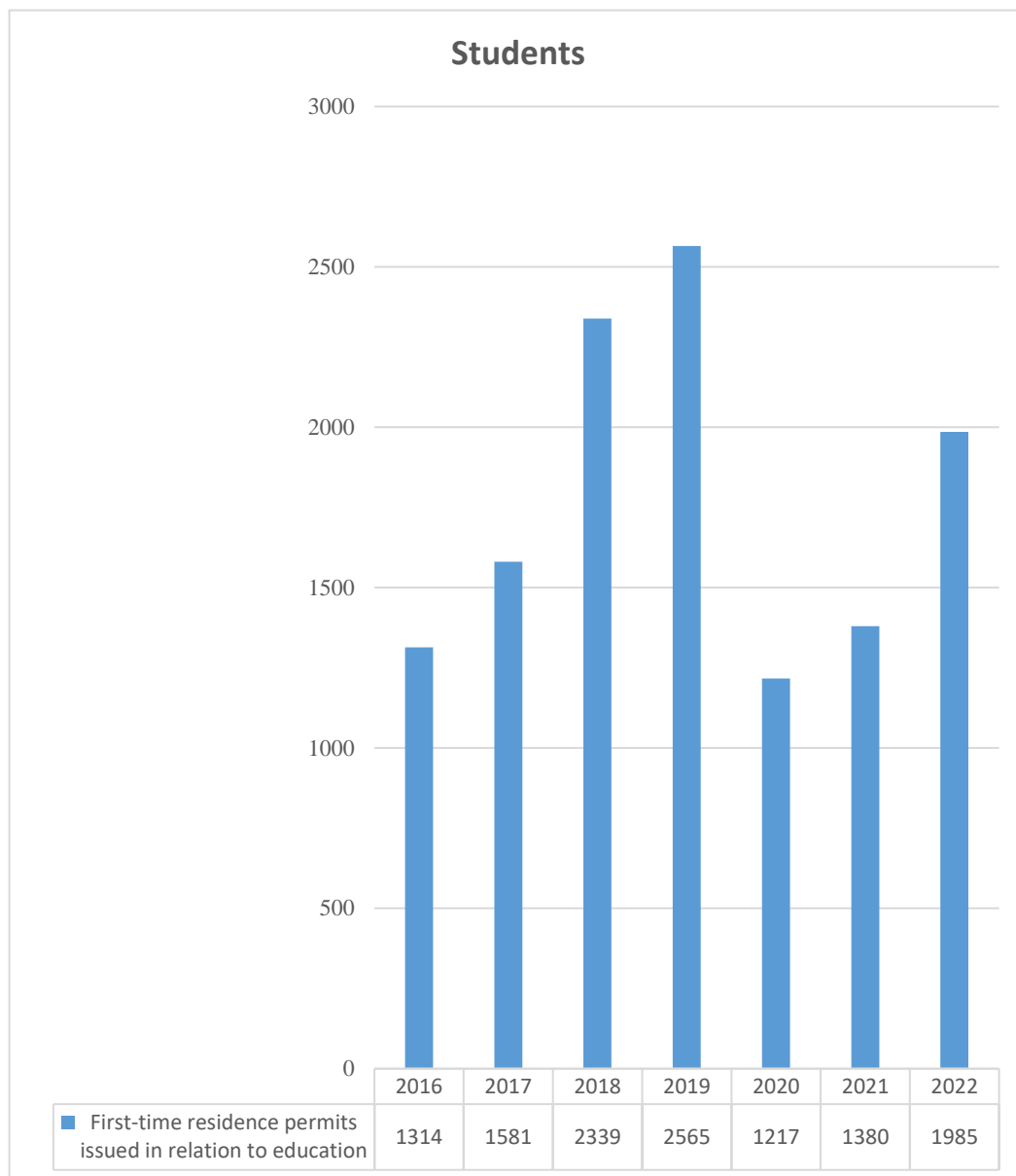
⁶⁰Law on [Amendments to the Immigration Law](#) - *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No 70A, 08.04.2022 - [entered into force 09.04.2022]

⁶¹ Impeded possibilities to continue labour relations with guest workers from Russia and Belarus. – Available: <https://www.leta.lv/home/important/FCE964ED-ABD5-4C57-B337-2E56F50E9F85/>.

⁶²Law on [Amendments to the Immigration Law](#) - *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No 185A, 23.09.2022 - [entered into force 24.09.2022]

Students and scientists

Figure 3-3



In connection with education, 1985 first residence permits were issued in 2022 (1380 in 2021), which is an increase compared to the previous year.

Family reunification

In 2022, the number of first residence permits issued to third-country nationals in connection with family reunification slightly increased and was 2199 (2146 in 2021).

INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION

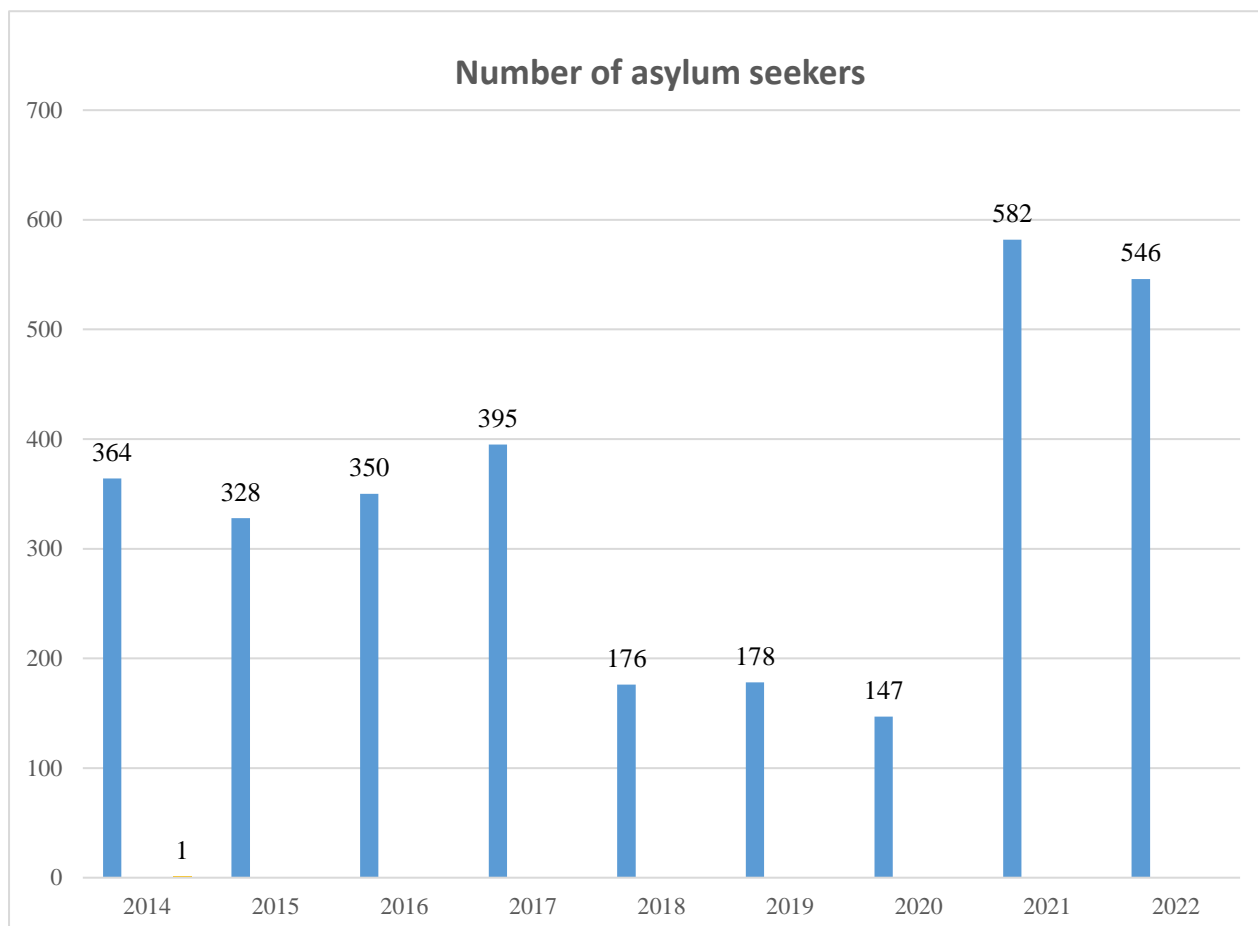


Figure 4-1

Compared to 2021, the number of asylum seekers in 2022 decreased - 546 (582 in 2021) and the dominant countries of origin of asylum seekers have slightly changed - most asylum seekers have come from Russia - 120 (29 - in 2021), Afghanistan - 111 (71 - in 2021), Belarus - 65 (55 - in 2021), Iran - 58 (7 in 2021) and Iraq - 52 (347 in 2021).⁶³

⁶³Data source: OCMA.

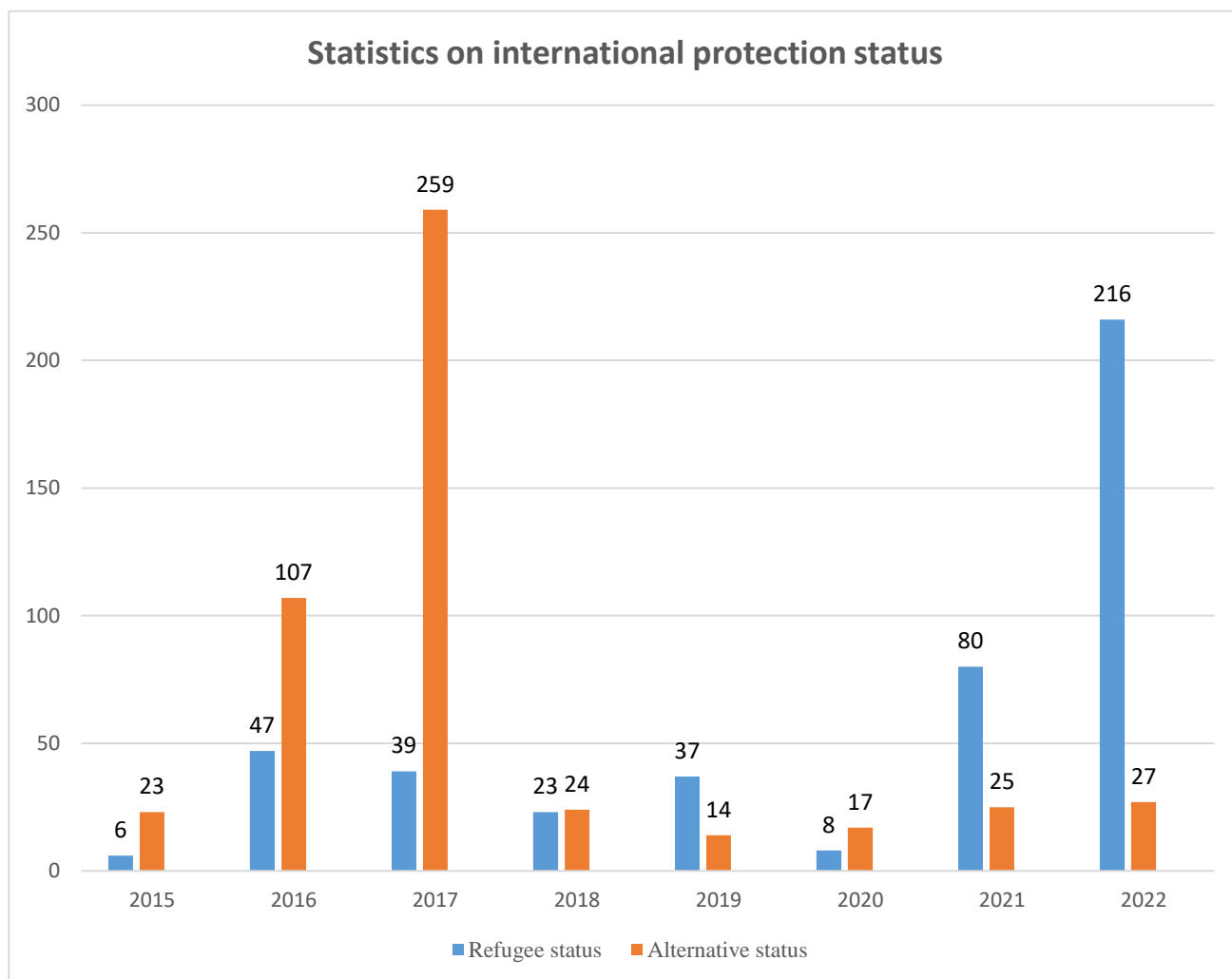


Figure 4-2

In 2022, 243 persons received international protection in Latvia. Refugee status has been granted to 216 persons, alternative status - to 27 persons.

In 2022, 72 asylum seekers were transferred to Latvia within the framework of the Dublin regulation.

Measures to implement the Common European Asylum System

Taking into consideration that on 10 August 2021 the Cabinet of Ministers Order No 518 "Regarding Declaration of the Emergency Situation"⁶⁴ entered into force, and it had several amendments in 2022 and at the beginning of 2023⁶⁵ which prolonged the emergency situation until

⁶⁴Cabinet of Ministers Order No 518 of 10 August 2021 "[Regarding Declaration of the Emergency Situation](#)" - *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No 152A, 10.08.2021 - [entered into force 10.08.2021]

⁶⁵Cabinet of Ministers Order No 45 of 1 February 2022 "[Amendment to the Cabinet of Ministers Order No 518 of 10 August 2021 "Regarding Declaration of the Emergency Situation"](#)". - *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No 24, 03.02.2022 - [entered into force 01.02.2022]; Cabinet of Ministers Order No 254 of 6 April 2022 "Amendment to the Cabinet of Ministers Order No 518 of 10 August 2021 "Regarding Declaration of the Emergency Situation"". - *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No 69, 07.04.2022 – [entered into force 06.04.2022]; Cabinet of Ministers Order No 324 of 11 May 2022 "[Amendment to the Cabinet of Ministers Order No 518 of 10 August 2021 "Regarding Declaration of the Emergency Situation"](#)". - *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No 90A, 11.05.2022 – [entered into force 11.05.2022]; Cabinet of Ministers Order No 552 of 10 August 2022 "[Amendment to the Cabinet of Ministers Order No 518 of 10 August](#)

10 May 2023 at the following administrative territories: Ludza Regional Municipality, Kraslava Regional Municipality, Augsdaugava Regional Municipality, Daugavpils State City Municipality and in the structural units of SBG and in other institutions located in the territory where an emergency situation is declared, no applications of persons for the granting a refugee or alternative status are accepted. The aforementioned does not apply to the border control points located at these territories, as well as to the Accommodation Center for Detained Foreigners “Daugavpils” of the Daugavpils Board of the State Border Guard.

In order to continue support to the Latvian asylum system in relation to the situation on the Latvian and Belarusian border on 29 March 2022 an Operating Plan was signed between the Ministry of the Interior and the European Union Agency for Asylum regarding the support to the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs in ensuring the asylum procedure. The plan determines to continue the provision of support that was started in accordance with the Plan of Measures signed in September 2021. The period of activity of the Plan of Measures is from 1 April 2022 to 31 December 2022. The received support included securing availability of translation services for effective conduct of the asylum procedure – when interpreting at interviews, introducing an asylum seeker to a decision of the institution and providing state-paid legal assistance, as well as for securing the rights of asylum seekers at the time of admission. Training of the employees that work with or could be involved in the reception of the asylum seekers was organized within the framework of the plan

In accordance with the Law on Register of Natural Persons⁶⁶, from 1 July 2022 the data including about the asylum seekers are included the Register of Natural Persons, inter alia personal identity numbers, in order to ensure that information about the mentioned persons is automatically included in the information systems (for example, Unified Electronic Health Sector Information System and State Education Information System) the services of which are received by an asylum seeker.

In accordance with the Law on the Register of Natural Persons the State Border Guard includes and updates information in the Register regarding the asylum seekers using the state information system, to which an online data broadcasting regime with the Register of Natural persons has been created. New technical functionality has been created for data exchange between the Register of Natural Persons and the subsystem “Register of Asylum Seekers” of the Unified Migration Information System in order to ensure initial registration in the Register of Natural Persons of the asylum seekers to whom no personal identity number has been granted in the Republic of Latvia.

On 31 May 2022 the State Border Guard internal regulations No 23.1-8.2/12 “Procedure for implementing measures in the field of asylum within the framework of the competence of the State Border Guard” took effect. To lay down the procedure according to which the SBG implements measures:

[2021 “Regarding Declaration of the Emergency Situation”](#). - [Latvijas Vēstnesis No 153B, 10.08.2022](#) – [entered into force 10.08.2022]; Cabinet of Ministers Order No 794 of 3 November 2022 “Amendment to the Cabinet of Ministers Order No 518 of 10 August 2021 “Regarding Declaration of the Emergency Situation””. - [Latvijas Vēstnesis No 216, 07.11.2022](#) – [entered into force 03.11.2022]; Cabinet of Ministers Order No 61 of 1 February 2023 “Amendment to the Cabinet of Ministers Order No 518 of 10 August 2021 “Regarding Declaration of the Emergency Situation””. - [Latvijas Vēstnesis No 25, 03.02.2023](#) – [entered into force 01.02.2023]

⁶⁶ [Law on the Register of Natural Persons](#) - [Latvijas Vēstnesis No 259, 31.12.2017](#) - [entered into force 28.06.2021]

- 1) when receiving an application of a third-country national or a stateless person regarding the granting of a refugee or alternative status in the Republic of Latvia;
- 2) for ensuring action that is prompt, harmonized and clearly defined for all involved officials of the territorial administration of the State Border Guard in cases when at any of the structural units of the territorial administration of the State Border Guard a mass influx of asylum seekers is identified;
- 3) for the purpose of extradition of a detained asylum seeker;
- 4) to provide for the procedure according to which the State Border Guard takes measures for implementation of relocation and resettlement of persons to the Republic of Latvia from the European Union Member States, European Economic Area states, Swiss Confederation and third countries.

Accommodation of applicants for international protection

In early 2022, during an emergency meeting Aluksne Municipal Council took a decision to transfer to the Provision State Agency for a time period of four years for use without compensation a municipal property – the building and auxiliary building of a former boarding-school and part of the land plot of 0.66 ha. By the AMIF Emergency financial instrument project “Addressing urgent accommodation and humanitarian needs resulting from an increased number of asylum seekers in Latvia”⁶⁷ a Temporary Accommodation Centre for Asylum Seekers (hereinafter - ACAS) is created in Liepna, Aluksne municipality, for 250 asylum seekers by adjusting and equipping the premises with required equipment as well as ensuring the provision of different services.⁶⁸

Planned launch into operation of the Liepna Temporary Accommodation Centre for Asylum Seekers is in July 2023.⁶⁹

Relocation and Resettlement

On 31 May 2022, the State Border Guard internal regulations No 23.1-8.2/12 “Procedure for implementing measures in the field of asylum within the framework of the competence of the State Border Guard” took effect, which lay down the procedure according to which the State Border Guard carries out measures within the implementation of relocation and resettlement of persons to the Republic of Latvia from the European Union Member States, European Economic Area countries, Swiss Confederation and third countries. In 2022, no persons were relocated and resettled to Latvia.

⁶⁷ No HOME/2021/AMIF/AG/EMAS/TF1/LV/0003

⁶⁸Project implementation period: 01.03.2022 – 31.12.2023 ensuring sustainability of the project (i.e. operation of the created ACAS) for at least 3 years following completion of the project. The project is implemented by: Ministry of the Interior in cooperation with the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs and State Procurement Agency.

⁶⁹The project “Addressing urgent accommodation and humanitarian needs resulting from an increased number of asylum seekers in Latvia”. - Available: <https://www.pmlp.gov.lv/lv/projekts/projekts-steidzamu-izmitinasanas-un-humanas-palidzibas-vajadzibu-risinasana-ko-rada-palielinats-patveruma-mekletaju-skaits-latvija>.

MINORS AND OTHER VULNERABLE GROUPS

In 2022, 5⁷⁰ unaccompanied minors in Latvia applied for asylum in Latvia.

The Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No 11 of 11 January 2022 “Procedures for Enrolling Educatees in General Education Programmes and Discharging from Them, and also the Mandatory Requirements for Moving Educatees up into the Next Grade” ⁷¹ lay down the procedure according to which an educatee of another country who has not previously been obtaining education in Latvia is entitled to complete education in Latvia.

On 10 March 2022, amendments to the Law on Social Services and Social Assistance were adopted ⁷² which stipulate that children who have been recognized as asylum seekers with special reception needs or less protected persons in the removal procedure by the institutions involved in the relevant procedure have the right to receive social rehabilitation for children who have suffered from violence. Children who do not belong to the groups listed in this section also have the right to receive the abovementioned service if the responsible institutions have provided an opinion on the necessity of the social rehabilitation services. Law amendments were developed with the aim to improve the process of provision of social services.

On 31 May 2022, the State Border Guard internal regulations No 23.1-8.2/12 “Procedure for implementing measures in the field of asylum within the framework of the competence of the State Border Guard” took effect which provide for the action in cases when minor children have arrived together with a detained adult asylum seeker – they are accommodated in the accommodation premises for asylum seekers of the State Border Guard together if signed acknowledgment regarding the lack of objections for their accommodation together is received and following assessment of best interests of a child. The lack of objections is recorded in the Protocol on the detainment of an asylum seeker. An immediate respective record is made regarding common accommodation in the accommodation section of the sub-system “Register of Asylum Seekers” of the Unified Migration Information System.

⁷⁰Source: OCMA.

⁷¹Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No 11 of 11 January 2022 [“Procedures for Enrolling Educatees in General Education Programmes and Discharging from Them, and also the Mandatory Requirements for Moving Educatees up into the Next Grade”](#). - Latvijas Vēstnesis No 8, 12.01.2022 – [entered into force 13.01.2022] The Regulations were developed in the basis of an action policy planning document “Government action plan for the implementation of the Declaration of planned activity of the Cabinet of Ministers led by Arturs Krisjanis Karins” (approved by the Cabinet of Ministers Order No 210 of 7 May 2019 “On the government action plan for the implementation of the Declaration of planned activity of the Cabinet of Ministers led by Arturs Krisjanis Karins”), Task 120, Activity 120.1 of the action area “Education” “To enable availability of quality education and development of network of general education institutions by means of improvement of the regulatory framework”.

⁷² Law [“Amendments to the Law on Social Services and Social Assistance”](#). - [Latvijas Vēstnesis No 57, 22.03.2022 – \[entered into force 01.04.2022\]](#)

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 Foundation and non-governmental organizations are also involved in the implementation of this policy.

On 18 January 2022, the Cabinet of Ministers approved the Development Plan for a Cohesive and Active Civic Society for 2022-2023⁷³. The plan is being implemented in three directions of action: National identity and belonging, Culture of democracy and inclusive citizenship, and Integration. In Action 3 – Integration, measures are incorporated to include third-country nationals and beneficiaries of international protection (refugees, people with alternative status and asylum seekers) in Latvian society. The following measures are included:

- Establishment of a national coordination system to provide support for the participation of immigrants who have received the right to reside in the territory of Latvia;
- Development of the use of the Latvian language in the public space, including a diverse approach to learning the Latvian language;
- Involvement of third-country nationals in the social life of Latvia, including support for the participation of vulnerable persons (women, children, elderly people) and beneficiaries of international protection;
- Integration of third-country nationals into Latvian society, involving the media in this process;
- Intercultural communication training for professionals;
- Early integration support measures for beneficiaries of international protection (integration courses, Latvian language courses, provision of services of rare language interpreters, provision of counselling and intercultural communication training for specialists);
- Support measures for beneficiaries of international protection (refugees and persons granted alternative status);
- Setting up a one-stop agency, promoting the integration of new arrivals into the local community, providing a uniform and high-quality basket of services.

The objective of the plan is to ensure development of a national, united, open and civically active society through implementation of three actions provided for by the “Guidelines for the Development of a Cohesive and Civically Active Society for 2021-2027”⁷⁴:

⁷³ Cabinet of Ministers Order No 32 of 18 January 2022 [“On Guidelines for a Cohesive and Civically Active Society Development for 2021 - 2027”](#) - *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No 15, 21.01.2022 - [entered into force 18.01.2022]

⁷⁴ Cabinet of Ministers Order No. 72 of 5 February 2021 [“On the Guidelines for the Development of a Cohesive and Civically Active Society for 2021-2027”](#) - *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No 28, 10.02.2021 - [entered into force 05.02.2021]

1. National identity and belonging;
2. Culture of democracy and inclusive citizenship;
3. Integration.

The Development Plan for a Cohesive and Civically Active Society for 2022-2023 has been prepared to ensure the accomplishment of the goals and objectives laid down in the Guidelines for a Cohesive and Civically Active Society Development for 2021 - 2027⁷⁵, as well as in the National Development Plan for 2021-2017⁷⁶.

In 2022, a report on integration policy in Riga City Municipality⁷⁷ was prepared within the MILE (Migrant Integration through Locally designed Experiences) Project. The evaluation in the report uses criteria that include the accessibility of the inclusion and participation mechanisms for newcomers in the policy-making process on a local level. This report presents data on the inclusion of newcomers in the policy-making process in the Riga City Municipality, focusing on integration issues, civic participation and diversity policies and participation mechanisms in the city, reflecting on the results achieved in the municipality over the last 10 years.

Promoting integration for socio-economic participation

Practical measures for the integration of third-country nationals in 2022 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 responsibilities, the Information Center for Newcomers of the Society "Shelter "Safe House"" continued to work in several Latvian cities.⁷⁸

Information relating to the integration of third-country nationals in Latvia and services available to third-country nationals was updated on the website <http://www.integration.lv/>.⁷⁹ Here support resources for Ukrainian civilians are available also in English and Russian.

The Public Integration Foundation (hereinafter referred to as the PIF) continued to implement the project "Promoting diversity" co-financed by the European Social Fund, which includes the provision of services of a social worker and a social mentor to asylum seekers, refugees and persons with alternative status. The PIF has signed a cooperation agreement with the foundation *Caritas Latvija*, which as of 1 February 2022 provides the services of social workers and social mentors to asylum seekers and persons with refugee or alternative status in Latvia. In 2022, the PIF in cooperation with the foundation *Caritas Latvija* provided social worker's and social mentor's support to 351 asylum seekers and persons with a refugee or alternative status. The largest

⁷⁵ Approved by the Cabinet of Ministers Order No 72 of 5 February 2021 "[Guidelines for a Cohesive and Civically Active Society Development for 2021 - 2027](#)" - *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No 28, 10.02.2021 - [entered into force 05.02.2021]

⁷⁶ Approved by the Parliament (Saeima) decision of 2 July 2020 "[On the Latvian National Development Plan for 2021-2027 \(NAP2027\)](#)". *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No 127, 06.07.2020 - [entered into force 02.07.2020]

⁷⁷ Report on the inclusion of newcomers in policy making in Riga City Municipality. – Available: <https://providus.lv/en/raksti/report-on-the-inclusion-of-newcomers-in-policy-making-in-riga-city-municipality/>.

⁷⁸ In 2021, the project "Information Centre for Newcomers", provided by association „Patvērums „Drošā māja””. - Available: <https://www.patverums-dm.lv/lv/informācijas-centrs-iebraucējiem-ii>

⁷⁹ The 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.

number of people who have received support come from countries affected by war or political instability – Afghanistan (138), Belarus (59), Russia (34), Iraq (43) and other countries.⁸⁰

In 2022, 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. Seven Latvian language learning projects were implemented⁸¹. They were implemented by the “Innovation Support Center”, association “Education Development Center”, Latvian Language Agency, association “Creative Ideas”, association “Cooperation Platform” and University of Daugavpils. The projects were implemented till 30 September 2022. In 2022, 1364 persons completed Latvian language courses.

As of 2 January 2023, the PIF started the development of a new service – a One-Stop Agency (OSA) for foreigners. The objective of the OSA will be the provision in one place of information support and services to third-country nationals and recipients of international protection which are required when relocating to Latvia for successful socio-economical inclusion of persons.

Initially at the OSA in-person and online individual consultations in Latvian, English and Russian (with an interpreter if necessary) it will be possible to receive information about⁸² the admission of third-country nationals, residence conditions, social protection, employment, taxation system, education, health, housing and other matters. In January it started providing interpretation into rare languages, such as, Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Tajik, Vietnamese, Mandarin and other, assessing the individual needs of a person.

Upon concluding the agreement on the introduction of the project between the Ministry of Culture and PIF, provisionally in 2023, it is planned to gradually also provide individual consultations of a lawyer, psychologist and other specialists, as well as written translation into rare languages. It is also planned to create a regional OSA network in the largest Latvian cities. The OSA will continue to maintain and develop platform www.integration.lv which was previously maintained by the Society “Shelter “Safe House””.

Integration in labor market

In 2022, 142 persons with refugee or alternative status were registered in the SEA (unemployment or a job seeker status granted), several of them were re-registered. Overall, since the SEA project was launched in January 2016, 369 (women – 141, men – 228) persons with refugee or alternative status have been registered in the SEA.

In 2022, the SEA continued to provide consultations in person or remotely via e-mail, telephone and remote video conferencing. 10 persons with a refugee or alternative status have been involved in the Latvian language courses. Latvian language was acquired at A1 level (5 persons), A2 level (3 persons) and B1 level (2 persons). 2 introductory lectures “Labour market in Latvia” were organized, in which 23 persons participated. 18 individual consultations for the asylum

⁸⁰ In 2022, social inclusion support was provided to 351 recipients of international assistance. - Available: ⁸⁰ <https://www.sif.gov.lv/lv/jaunums/2022gada-351-starptautiskas-palidzibas-sanemejiem-sniegts-socialas-ieklausanas-atbalsts>.

⁸¹The Ministry of Culture is a delegated institution of the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (hereinafter - AMIF) for the planning period of 2014-2020.

⁸²The OSA services shall be available to a target group which includes third-country nationals who have been granted the right to reside on the territory of Latvia and persons which require international protection (refugees, persons with an alternative status and asylum seekers) and who reside on the territory of Latvia legally. The target group does not include the citizens of the European Union Member States and European Economic Area and Swiss Confederation.

seekers were held. Consultations for asylum seekers on job-finding opportunities at the Asylum Seekers Centre “Mucenieki” take place at the request of a person. 21 persons were involved in the active employment and preventive measures: e-training (3), remote training in Google programs (3), activities improving competitiveness (3), informal education (11), pupils’ summer employment (1).

In 2022, 35 persons with a refugee or alternative status got a job, in occupations such as a building constructor (2), programmer (2), product labeler (2), sales assistant-consultant (1), dental technician (1), packer (1), information technologies project manager (1), cleaner (1), gas welder (1), food production operator (1), chef (1), kitchen employee (1), interpreter (1), assembler (1), fish processor (1), warehouse employee (1), electrician (1), journalist (1), warehouse worker (1), auxiliary worker (1).

The most common reasons mentioned on why people with refugee or alternative status are refusing job offers are: the work is too hard, it cannot be combined with parenting, insufficient remuneration.

In 2022, the SEA held regular activities on seasonal jobs. Vacancies were available in a wide variety of agricultural, fishery and forestry sectors. Unfortunately, none of the clients with an asylum or alternative status wished to participate in these activities.

It is still observed that clients who are proactive and are not afraid of new challenges are able to adapt to Latvia's work culture and challenges and are able to achieve successful results and employers are prepared to raise wages and enable growth.

Basic services

On 29 January 2022, the Law on Measures for reduction of extreme Energy Prices⁸³, which provides for support measures for certain population groups, entered into force. For the period from 1st of January 2022 to 30 April 2022, the State shall pay the aid of EUR 50 per month for each child to a person who during the support period is: a parent, guardian, foster family of a child or the head of a long-term social care and social rehabilitation institution, if the child has been granted refugee or alternative status during the period of support and the support of EUR 50 per month for the child has not been disbursed on another basis.

On 10 March 2022, amendments to the Law on Social Services and Social Assistance⁸⁴ were adopted laying down the right to receive social rehabilitation at the expense of the State budget for persons who have suffered from violence and reside in the Republic of Latvia with a temporary residence permit, and also persons who are third-country nationals or stateless persons who do not have legal basis to reside in the Republic of Latvia and who are detained (until the time of their removal or departure) to whom an alternative measure to detention has been applied, or foreigners for whom the return decision has been suspended or for whom a time period for voluntary departure has been determined. The law was developed with the aim to improve the process of provision of social services.

⁸³ Law on [Measures to Reduce the Extraordinary Increase in Prices of Energy Resources](#) - *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No 20A, 28.01.2022 - [entered into force 29.01.2022]

⁸⁴ Law “[Amendments to the Law on Social Services and Social Assistance](#)”. - *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No 57, 22.03.2022 – [entered into force 01.04.2022]

Non-discrimination

In 2022, the capacity strengthening program of non-governmental organizations (NGO) “On the Road to More Tolerant Society” concluded. The program was implemented by the association “Joint Participation Platform” and Latvian Human Rights Centre. The aim of the program was to strengthen the ability of non-governmental organizations to react to expressions of intolerance, in particular to discrimination and hate speech/crimes. The program consisted of three stages: five online training seminars, a period of implementation of NGO initiatives and an in-person seminar for assessment and experience sharing. The program took place from 18 February to 30 June 2022 and involved 28 participants who represented of 24 associations from different Latvian regions.⁸⁵

EMN National Report for study:

Integration of applicants for international protection in the labour market

In 2022, the EMN Latvian contact point developed [a report on the integration of applicants for international protection in the Latvian labour market](#)⁸⁶ to provide information to the EMN study on the integration of applicants for international protection in the European Union labour market. The EMN study will be published in 2023.

The general objective of the study is to inform about the access of applicants for international protection to labour market, identifying effective laws, policy and measures in relation to integration of applicants into the labour market, good practice examples and challenges in the period from January 2017 to June 2022.

The study refers to third-country nationals who have applied for international protection in the EU Member States and EMN Observed Countries and gain benefit from access to the labour market within the framework of Section 15 of the Reception Standards Directive 2013/33/EU (recast) or within the framework of any other legislation that regulates access of applicants for international protection to the labour market.

Information included in the study:

- Data from the beginning of 2017 to June 2022;
- Policy documents and laws in August, September, October 2022;
- Support measures in August, September, October 2022

⁸⁵ [The capacity strengthening program of non-governmental organizations \(NGO\) “On the road to more tolerant society” has concluded.](https://cilvektiesibas.org.lv/lv/news/noslegusies-nvo-kapacitates-stiprinanas-programm-567/) – available: <https://cilvektiesibas.org.lv/lv/news/noslegusies-nvo-kapacitates-stiprinanas-programm-567/>.

⁸⁶ Integration of applicants for international protection in the labour market. – Available: <https://www.emn.lv/starptautiskas-aizsardzibas-pieteikumu-iesniedzēju-integrācija-darba-tirgu/>.

CITIZENSHIP AND NATURALIZATION

In comparison to 2021, the number of persons admitted to Latvian citizenship through naturalization has increased - 518 (in 2021 - 419).⁸⁷ As in 2021, the majority of individuals who have become citizens is former non-citizens of Latvia - 65%. However, compared to the previous years' trends, the share of non-citizens among persons who received citizenship in 2022 has decreased. 171 persons who have acquired Latvian citizenship are third-country nationals.

The OCMA in cooperation with the Information Center of the Ministry of the Interior continued implementation of the AMIF 2014-2020 national program project "Improvement and development of information systems and related processes supporting naturalization"⁸⁸ which aims to increase the quality of the naturalization process. In 2022, the following has been accomplished:

- Equipped workplaces for employees working with migration and naturalization issues;
- New sets of audio material have been recorded for the audible part of the naturalization test;
- An electronic tool for self-testing the language skills and knowledge for acquiring Latvian citizenship has been developed;
- Development of the Citizenship Acquisition and Loss Information System continued;
- A technical solution for the data exchange with CALI regarding administrative violations has been created (activity of the Information Center of the Ministry of the Interior);
- The monitoring tool of the persons who have committed a criminal offence has been supplemented with the functionality including in it CALI required audits (activity of the Information Center of the Ministry of the Interior);
- Information campaign activities of naturalization of third-country nationals and non-citizens have been implemented;
- Training for OCMA employees on the Electronic self-testing tool and naturalization trends has taken place;
- Video surveillance at the naturalization tests has been modernized⁸⁹.

On 7 March 2023, the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No 98 "Regulations regarding the Citizenship Acquisition and Loss Information System"⁹⁰ were adopted and stipulate the amount of data to be included in the Citizenship Acquisition and Loss Information System (hereinafter -

⁸⁷Data source: OCMA.

⁸⁸ Project implementation period: 09.04.2019 - 31.03.2023

⁸⁹ Improvement and development of information systems and related processes supporting naturalization. - Available: <https://www.pmlp.gov.lv/lv/projekts/naturalizacijas-atbalstoso-informacijas-sistemu-un-saistito-procesu-pilnveidosana-un-attistiba>.

⁹⁰Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No 98 of 7 March 2023 "[Regulations regarding the Citizenship Acquisition and Loss Information System](#)". - *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No 49, 09.03.2023 – [entered into force 01.04.2023]

System), its inclusion and deletion procedure and retention period, as well as institutions which shall be granted access to the data included in the information system and its amount. The system is the state information system which includes data on persons in relation to which it is decided on the acquisition or loss of the Latvian citizenship, it also stores information about the process of the acquisition or loss of the Latvian citizenship.

As the mentioned system was technically outdated and it was necessary to regulate operation of the system in a legislative act, within the framework of the project No PMLP/PMIF/2018/3 "Improvement and Development of Corresponding and Related Processes of Naturalization" of the OCMA Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund for 2014-2020 a new Citizenship Acquisition and Loss Information System was developed and the required legal framework to ensure the operation of the system was prepared⁹¹.

⁹¹ Annotation to the draft law "Regulations regarding the Citizenship Acquisition and Loss Information System". - Available: <https://tapportals.mk.gov.lv/annotation/2f311324-2d77-47ef-a19e-c01b825929c5>.

BORDER CONTROL, VISAS AND SCHENGEN MANAGEMENT

Management of external borders

On 24 March 2022, amendments to the Immigration Law⁹² entered into force which determined the competent institutions and their responsibilities and rights within the introduction of the European Travel Information and Authorisation System. The law amendments will come into effect when the European Travel Information and Authorisation System (hereinafter - ETIAS) starts operation in compliance with Section 88 of the Regulation No 2018/1240⁹³.

On 15 September 2022, the Parliament (Saeima) adopted Amendment to the Law on the Agreement of the Government of the Republic of Latvia and Government of the Republic of Belarus on the Simplification of Mutual Travel of Residents of the Border Territories of the Republic of Latvia and Republic of Belarus⁹⁴ the aim of which is to suspend validity of the Agreement from 10 October 2022 until the moment when the Republic of Belarus ceases international rights violations in relation to Ukraine and fully reimburses Ukraine for already committed violations of the international rights.

On 1 February 2022, the Cabinet supported the extension of the emergency situation in the border area with Belarus⁹⁵, as the migration situation on the border remains tense. In 2022, the emergency situation was extended several times⁹⁶ in the municipalities of Ludza, Kraslava, Augsdaugava, as well as in Daugavpils.

On 1st of February 2022, the Cabinet approved the provisions "Regulations for the placement and maintenance of the National Border lanes, Patrolling lanes and Border Label

⁹²Law "Amendments to the Immigration Law". - *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No 49, 10.03.2022 – [entered into force on 24.03.2022]

⁹³Regulation (EU) 2018/1240 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 September 2018 establishing a European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS) and amending Regulations (EU) No 1077/2011, (EU) No 515/2014, (EU) 2016/399, (EU) 2016/1624 and (EU) 2017/2226 – Official Journal P 236, 19.9.2018.

⁹⁴[Amendment to the Law "On the Agreement of the Government of the Republic of Latvia and Government of the Republic of Belarus"](#). - *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No 181B, 19.09.2022 – [entered into force 20.09.2022]

⁹⁵Cabinet of Ministers Order No 45 of 1 February 2022 "[Amendment to the Cabinet of Ministers Order No 518 of 10 August 2021 "Regarding Declaration of the Emergency Situation"](#)". - *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No 24, 03.02.2022 - [entered into force 01.02.2022];

⁹⁶Cabinet of Ministers Order No 45 of 1 February 2022 "[Amendment to the Cabinet of Ministers Order No 518 of 10 August 2021 "Regarding Declaration of the Emergency Situation"](#)". - *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No 24, 03.02.2022 - [entered into force 01.02.2022]; Cabinet of Ministers Order No 254 of 6 April 2022 "Amendment to the Cabinet of Ministers Order No 518 of 10 August 2021 "Regarding Declaration of the Emergency Situation"". - *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No 69, 07.04.2022 – [entered into force 06.04.2022]; Cabinet of Ministers Order No 324 of 11 May 2022 "[Amendment to the Cabinet of Ministers Order No 518 of 10 August 2021 "Regarding Declaration of the Emergency Situation"](#)". - *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No 90A, 11.05.2022 – [entered into force 11.05.2022]; Cabinet of Ministers Order No 552 of 10 August 2022 "Amendment to the Cabinet of Ministers Order No 518 of 10 August 2021 "Regarding Declaration of the Emergency Situation"". - *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No 153B, 10.08.2022 – [entered into force 10.08.2022]; Cabinet of Ministers Order No 794 of 3 November 2022 "Amendment to the Cabinet of Ministers Order No 518 of 10 August 2021 "Regarding Declaration of the Emergency Situation"". - *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No 216, 07.11.2022 – [entered into force 03.11.2022]

Monitoring lanes”⁹⁷, which define the State border lanes determined both along the external State border and along the internal State borders, the organization of the patrol lane and the maintenance of the border marks and the maintenance of the surveillance zone requirements. This will ensure effective performance of SBG functions, as well as the rapid and efficient construction of the country's external border infrastructure on the State border of the Republic of Latvia with the Republic of Belarus and the Russian Federation⁹⁸. These Regulations shall also comply with the recommendations contained in the State Audit Office Report of 8 January 2020 regarding the placement and maintenance of the State border zone, ensuring the economical use of State budget resources in conformity with regulatory enactments. Part of the State control recommendations were already fulfilled by the requirements of the Law “Amendments to the State Border Law of the Republic of Latvia”, which entered into force on 3 September 2021⁹⁹.

On 27 September 2022, the Cabinet of Ministers Order No 671 “Regarding Declaration of the Emergency Situation”¹⁰⁰ was adopted, the aim of which was to declare an emergency situation from 28 September 2022 to 27 December 2022 in the regional municipalities of Aluksne, Balvi and Ludza, as well as to close the Pededze border crossing point of the Vilaka administration of the State Border Guard. In the order the State Border Guard was instructed to carry out reinforced border control of the state border of the Republic of Latvia and the Russian Federation and carry out reinforced border control of entering Russian Federation nationals. The National Armed Forces, State Police and State Security Service were instructed to provide assistance to the State Border Guard to ensure border control of the state border of the Republic of Latvia and the Russian Federation.

On 28 December 2022, on the basis of the Cabinet of Ministers Order No 671 “Regarding Declaration of the Emergency Situation” the emergency situation was cancelled in the administrative territories set forth by the order and Pededze border crossing point of the Vilaka administration of the State Border Guard was opened. On 21 February 2022, a decision was made in the Russian Federation on the initiation of partial mobilization. Therefore, the number of nationals of the Russian Federation willing to leave the Russian Federation has significantly increased¹⁰¹.

Within the framework of 2022 the State Border Guard has carried out infrastructure adjustment measures within the context of the introduction of the Entry/Exit System at the border crossing points. Minimum adjustment measures were carried out at all airport and port border crossing points (for example, ergonomic placement of external windowsills of manual booths, provision of additional lighting, specification of the location of stationary equipment, etc.). The

⁹⁷Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No 79 of 1 February 2022 "[Regulations on the Establishment and Maintenance of the State Border Zone of the Republic of Latvia, the Patrol Zone and the Border Marker Surveillance Zone](#)" - *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No 24, 03.02.2022 - [entered into force 04.02.2022]; Cabinet of Ministers Order No 61 of 1 February 2023 "Amendment to Order No 518 of 10 August 2021 of Cabinet of Ministers "[Regarding Declaration of the Emergency Situation](#)" - *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No 25, 03.02.2023 - [entered into force 01.02.2023]

⁹⁸ Annotation to the draft Cabinet of Ministers Regulation "Regulations on the Establishment and Maintenance of the State Border Zone, Patrol Zone and Border Marker Surveillance Zone of the Republic of Latvia" - Available: https://tapportals.mk.gov.lv/attachments/legal_acts/document_versions/8a4ba61f-21b1-491b-bc0e-2babad30724d/download.

⁹⁹ The requirements for the placement and maintenance of national borders, patrolling and border marking lanes shall be determined. - Available: <https://www.iem.gov.lv/lv/jaunums/nosaka-valsts-robezas-patrulesanas-un-robezimju-uzraudzibas-joslu-iekartosanas-un-uzturesanas-prasibas>.

¹⁰⁰Cabinet of Ministers Order No 671 of 27 September 2022 “On the Declaration of an Emergency Situation”. - *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, 188A, 28.09.2022 - [entered into force on 27.09.2022]

¹⁰¹ Annotation to the draft law of the Cabinet of Ministers Order No 671 of 27 September 2022 “Regarding Declaration of the Emergency Situation”. - Available: <https://tapportals.mk.gov.lv/annotation/7e734114-f3c6-45d3-8f67-d2c9dfb1f3f5>.

mentioned measures had to be implemented with the aim to introduce the requirements set forth by the Regulation (EU) 2017/2226 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 November 2017 establishing an Entry/Exit System (EES) to register entry and exit data and refusal of entry data of third-country nationals crossing the external borders of the Member States and determining the conditions for access to the EES for law enforcement purposes, and amending the Convention implementing the Schengen Agreement and Regulations (EC) No 767/2008 and (EU) No 1077/2011¹⁰².

On 2 March 2023, Amendments to the Law on Construction of the External Land Border Infrastructure were adopted¹⁰³ which provide for prompt and efficient process of construction of technical means of the border control which are part of infrastructure required for the protection of the external land border - presence detection systems and surveillance equipment and related infrastructure delegating it to the state joint stock company "Latvian State Radio and Television Center". In order to ensure the inviolability of the state border, inviolability of the state border and its infrastructure objects at the border, to eliminate such endangerment to the territory of the Republic of Latvia as hybrid war, as well as in order to ensure the ability within real time to react to criminal offences that are related to irregular crossing of the state border, as well as other threats, the priority issue is strengthening the security of the state border.¹⁰⁴

Cooperation with third countries in the field of border control

On 15 May 2022, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the State Border Guard of the Republic of Latvia and Patrol Police of the Ministry of the Interior of Georgia on the implementation of the project "Strengthening the Abilities of the Georgia Border Police for the Monitoring of the Green and Sea Border" The objective is to carry out necessary activities aimed at successful implementation of the Project, as well as preparation and implementation of the Partnership Request and other documents. The involved parties i.e. the State Border Control and Border Police of Georgia undertake to exchange information and organize joint meetings (video conferences) and *ad hoc* meetings of expert groups in accordance with the Project description. In accordance with the project the State Border Guard shall transfer a helicopter and training personnel to the Georgian side.

Operation of the liaison officers in Ukraine was planned till 31 December 2022; however, considering the invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation, within the framework of the European Commission Internal Security Fund project No VRS/IDF/2019/8 "Continuation of operation of the state border guard liaison officers in Georgia, Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus (Stage 2)" the immigration liaison officer point of the State Border Guard was moved to Kishinev from 14 March to 31 December 2022.

¹⁰² [Regulation \(EU\) 2017/2226 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 November 2017 establishing an Entry/Exit System \(EES\) to register entry and exit data and refusal of entry data of third-country nationals crossing the external borders of the Member States and determining the conditions for access to the EES for law enforcement purposes, and amending the Convention implementing the Schengen Agreement and Regulations \(EC\) No 767/2008 and \(EU\) No 1077/2011](#). - Official Journal P 327, 09.12.2017.

¹⁰³ Law "[Amendments to the Law on Construction of the External Land Border Infrastructure](#)" - *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No 47, 07.03.2023 - [entered into force on 08.03.2023]

¹⁰⁴ Annotation to the draft law "Amendments to the Law on Construction of the External Land Border Infrastructure". - Available: <https://titania.saeima.lv/LIVS14/SaeimaLIVS14.nsf/0/CFEA8DAF1FADB62AC225895000514D98?OpenDocument>

The objective of the operation of the liaison officer is to eliminate existing irregular migration risks, as well as to ensure support to the officials of the Embassy of the Republic of Latvia in the Republic of Moldova.

In 2022, a SBG liaison officer continued to perform his duties in Georgia. On the basis of bilateral cooperation plans, SBG shall implement cooperation with the State Border Guard Service of the Republic of Moldova, the Border Police of the Georgian Ministry of Interior, the Migration Department and the Patrol Police, as well as the Ukrainian Border Guard Service.

Schengen Management

On 21-25 November 2022, the official of the Schengen Department of the Consular Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs took part in the Schengen assessment mission in India. The work of the Embassies of Malta, Luxembourg and Iceland and its conformity to the Schengen *acquis* was assessed during the mission. It is planned that a report of the European Commission on this assessment mission shall be completed in January 2023.¹⁰⁵

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

The results of the project:

1. The system improvement works specified in the eu-LISA technical documentation have been performed (releases introduced);
2. 30 biometric data processing kits were purchased. Each set consists of: a finger and palm scanner, desktop computer, computer monitor, SLR camera, pull-out, roll-up photography background with a ruler.
3. Development of the functionality for ensuring united accounting and search process of objects and persons has been carried out;
4. 2 security tests have been performed.¹⁰⁶

On 7 March 2023, the enhanced Schengen Information System became operational, a first major step towards the interoperability of the European Union's large-scale information systems for security, border and migration management. The improved system will help strengthen the fight against serious crime and terrorism, ensuring a high level of security in the EU, and help manage migration. In the future it will be possible to enter new categories of alerts in the Schengen Information System:

- Alerts issued for the purpose of investigative checks (obtaining information on persons or objects related to them for the purpose of prosecuting criminal offences and preventing threats to public or national security);

¹⁰⁵ Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs

¹⁰⁶ Improvement of the Schengen Information System. - Available: <https://www.pmlp.gov.lv/lv/projekts/sengenas-informacijas-sistemas-pilnveidosana>.

- Alerts on unknown suspects or wanted persons;
- Preventive alerts for children at risk of abduction by their parents, as well as for vulnerable children who should be prevented from travelling for their own safety (e.g. where travel would result in a risk of forced marriage, trafficking or gender-based violence);
- Return alerts (alert in the context of return decisions issued to illegally staying third-country nationals).¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ Significant improvements are made to the Schengen Information System for the prevention and detection of serious crime and terrorism. – Available: <https://www.iem.gov.lv/en/article/significant-improvements-are-made-schengen-information-system-prevention-and-detection-serious-crime-and-terrorism>.

VISA POLICY

In 2022, the total number of issued visas increased by 73% reaching 61 527 (in 2021 – 16 903); the number of issued long-stay visas has also increased. Of the visas issued, 47 908 were Schengen visas and 13 619 were long-term (D) visas. Additional 27 968 long-term visas were issued to Ukrainian civilians.¹⁰⁸

Table 8-1.

Total number of issued visas by type, 2021-2022.¹⁰⁹

	2021	2022
Schengen visas	16 189	47 908
Long-stay (D) visas	714	13 619
Total	16 903	61 527

The Cabinet of Ministers Order No 599 of 9 September 2022 “Regarding the Entry of the Nationals of the Russian Federation into the Republic of Latvia”¹¹⁰ laid down restrictions for the entry of the nationals of the Russian Federation into the Republic of Latvia. This was a coordinated decision of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia. It entered into force on 19 September 2022 in all three Baltic States. The mentioned decision restricts the entry of the nationals of the Russian Federation – holders of short-term visas for non-significant purposes (for example, for tourism and recreation, culture and sport purposes). Simultaneously, entry was permitted on the basis of individual assessment for politically persecuted persons, human rights defenders and independent journalists as well as in cases related to human considerations, for family members, holders of residence permit, for the provision of freight and transportation services, for representatives of diplomatic missions. On 24 February 2022, Russia started war against Ukraine and unrestricted travel of Russian nationals could cause risks to public order and security. Therefore, at the informal meeting of the ministers of foreign affairs of the EU Council on 30-31 August 2022 in Prague an agreement was reached that Member States on a national level may take measures to restrict entry of the nationals of the Russian Federation to the EU in accordance with the Schengen Border code.

¹⁰⁸ Data source: OCMA.

¹⁰⁹ Data source: OCMA.

¹¹⁰ Cabinet of Ministers Order No 599 of 9 September 2022 “[Regarding the Entry of the Citizens of the Russian Federation into the Republic of Latvia](#)” - *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No 175B, 09.09.2022 – [entered into force 09.09.2022 / end of validity 01.07.2023]

IRREGULAR MIGRATION INCLUDING MIGRANT SMUGGLING

In 2022, 251 third-country nationals were detained for irregular crossing of the “green” border (455 in 2021). The main groups of detainees were nationals of Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan. The majority of persons were detained at the Latvian-Belarusian border as Latvia is used as a transit state for getting to other EU Member States.¹¹¹

The SBG refused an entry to Latvia for 2277 persons, which is by 164.46% more than in 2021 (861 persons). In 2022, most often entry was denied to the nationals of Russia, Moldova and Ukraine.¹¹²

In 2022, the SBG withheld 5286 persons from an attempt to cross the Latvian-Belarusian state border irregularly (in 2021 - 4045 persons). Hence in 2022, taking into account that Russia and Iran have started close cooperation and within the framework of this cooperation the number of flights from Iran to Russia has increased, which in turn causes the increasing number of irregular migrants. The majority of third-country nationals travelling from Iran wish to enter the EU through the borders of Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. At the moment one of the identified irregular immigration routes: Iran – Moscow/Saint-Petersburg – Minsk – border of Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. In addition, in 2022 cross-border criminal groups (paid carriers and supporters) with the help of Belarusian authorities are involved in referring third-country nationals to the Latvian, Lithuanian and Polish borders.¹¹³

The visas of the Schengen States were revoked for 341 third-country nationals (91 in 2021).

Preventing the abuse of legal migration routes

In 2022, the number of third-country nationals detained by SBG officials for illegal employment in Latvia increased by 55% - a total of 152 persons in 2022.¹¹⁴

On 5 July 2022, Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers No 399 “Amendments to Cabinet Regulation No 846 of 10 October 2006 “Regulations Regarding Requirements, Criteria and Procedures for Appointment in Study Programs”” were adopted¹¹⁵ in order to promote a more responsible recruitment of foreign students, supplementing the rules of admission of higher education institutions and colleges with a provision regarding the conducting and storage of interviews with foreigners. In order to prevent people with low previous education level or those

¹¹¹ Source: SBG.

¹¹² Data source: SBG.

¹¹³ Source: SBG.

¹¹⁴ Source: SBG.

¹¹⁵ Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers No 399 of 5 July 2022. "[Amendment to Cabinet of Ministers Regulation from 10th October 2006 No 846 "Regulations on Requirements, Criteria and Procedure for Admission to Study Programs"](#)". - *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No 129, 07.07.2022 - [entered into force 08.07.2022]

who are unable to enrol in the universities of their country of residence or origin, it is necessary to ascertain the motivation of the potential student and his or her ability to study in the selected study program by conducting an in-depth interview with each candidate.

On 22 September 2022, “Agreement on good practice in attracting foreign students and providing studies between the Republic of Latvia Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of the Interior and 15 universities” was signed. The aim of the agreement is to promote the attraction of students conforming to high quality standards to the higher education institutions accredited in Latvia and to ensure the reputation of Latvian higher education and improve the process of attracting foreign students.

Forged travel documents

In 2022, 105 third-country nationals were detained for the use of forged documents¹¹⁶.

Cooperation with Frontex

Latvia’s participation in common operational activities organized by the FRONTEX agency (301 officials in total, 28 of them - employees of the State Police and 10 2nd category experts of the State Border Guard):

- Joint operational activities at the external land and air borders (*Terra / Coordination Points Land / Moldova Land / Serbia Land / Coordination Points Air / Focal Points Air / Focal Points Operational Activities at Air BCPs*) – 86 experts;
- Joint operational activities at the external sea borders (*Indalo / Themis / Poseidon / Minerva / Albania Sea / Montenegro Sea / FRONTEX Situation Centre*) – 204 experts;
- Joint operational activities, in which participated 2nd category experts of the Standing Corps of the Frontex agency from Latvia (*Terra / Coordination Point / Flexible Operational Activities Land / Albania Land / Themis / Serbia Land / Flexible Operational Activities Return*) – 11 experts.

Latvian officials took part in the operational activities in the following countries – Greece, Bulgaria, Albania, Spain, Romania, Italy, Poland, Serbia, Montenegro, Finland, Estonia, Croatia, Slovakia, Georgia, Moldova, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Germany and Lithuania.

From 10 October 2022 to 4 December 2022, the practical part (practice) of the 1st category basic training program of the standing corps of the European Border and Coast Guard (FRONTEX) took place at the SBG Vilaka and Ludza Department. Each 1st category expert of the standing corps underwent basic training to prepare for disposition during common operational activities coordinated by the Frontex agency. Therefore, following recruitment of the 1st category experts of the standing corps they undergo required basic training of the border guard or basic training related to return, inter alia in relation to basic rights, according to expert specializations and taking into consideration their previous qualifications and professional experience in respective areas.

¹¹⁶ Source: SBG.

Basic training ensures that experts possess necessary skills to work together in any specific area of activity in full compliance with the applicable EU legislation and ethical standards.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁷Practical part of basic training of emerging experts of standing corps of the European Border and Coast Guard (FRONTEX) is held in Latvia. – Available: <https://www.rs.gov.lv/lv/jaunums/latvija-norisinās-eiropas-robežu-un-krasta-apsardzes-agentūras-frontex-toposo-patstāvīga-korpusa-ekspertu-pamatapmacības-praktiskā-dala>.

PREVENTION OF TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS

In 2022, six persons have been identified as suspects in criminal proceedings for trafficking in human beings and seven persons has been convicted. Four third-country nationals have been identified as victims of trafficking in human beings.¹¹⁸

On 21 February 2022, the Council of Europe Group of Experts against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA) published its third evaluation report on the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings in Latvia¹¹⁹ The GRETA Recommendations Summary¹²⁰ lists the recommendations made to Latvia, which include, for example, the right to information, legal aid and free legal assistance, psychological assistance, compensation and other areas related to the prevention of trafficking in human beings and support of the victims.

In 2021 and 2022, thanks to the financial support of the Embassy of United Kingdom the association “Center MARTA” carried out research on “Support and Social Rehabilitation Services for Children Who Have Suffered from Trafficking in Human Beings”.¹²¹ Within the framework of the research organizations from Belgium, United Kingdom, Italy and Lithuania were interviewed with the aim to summarize good practices of foreign organizations. The objective of the research report was to improve the social rehabilitation program for children – victims of trafficking in human beings in Latvia which at the moment is developed on the basis of the needs of adult victims and is not efficient in relation to children. Based on the interview data of four organizations and empirical evidence acquired from literature analysis, a range of recommendations and good practice examples were identified to improve the provision of assistance and support to the minor victims of trafficking in human beings and which it would be recommended to use in the situation of Latvia. Five initial priorities have been identified in this summary and their implementation will allow the development of services and support forms that will be more suited to the experience of a child who has suffered, the consequences of this experience and needs for successful recovery, integration and full-fledged life.

- Prolongation of availability of the current support program;
- Holistic assessment of needs and the preparation and implementation of a comprehensive plan of needs;
- Care based on the understanding of trauma;

¹¹⁸Data source: Ministry of the Interior.

¹¹⁹EVALUATION REPORT LATVIA GRETA(2022)02 Third evaluation round Access to justice and effective remedies for victims of trafficking in human beings. - Available: <https://www.iem.gov.lv/lv/media/8068/download>.

¹²⁰ Summary of recommendations made to Latvia in the third round of the Council of Europe GRETA evaluation, in Latvian. – Available: <https://www.iem.gov.lv/lv/media/8071/download>.

¹²¹ Support and Social Rehabilitation Services for Children Who Have Suffered from Trafficking in Human Beings. - Available: http://www.cilvektirdznieciba.lv/uploads/files/marta_report_final_thb_lv.pdf.

- Development of quality standards for the of trafficking in human beings' support/services program and regular assessment of provided services/support based on the defined quality standards;
- Information, identification and prevention work with high risk youth groups.¹²²

On 18 October 2022, the newest report of the Council of the Baltic Sea States on the prevention of trafficking in human beings in the states of the Baltic Sea region was published.¹²³ The report is divided into three thematic parts and includes valuable information about various activities and best practices implemented in the Baltic Sea region. The first part is devoted to the activities in the states of the Baltic Sea region to eliminate the risks of trafficking in human beings among the people who flee from the war in Ukraine. In the second part of the report the most significant activities and projects of the Council of the Baltic Sea States' Action Group for the Prevention of Trafficking in Human Beings are described. Meanwhile, the third part of the report includes detailed information about various best practices in the countries of the region.¹²⁴

Training and awareness raising

During the reporting period, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) with the support of the Ministry of the Interior organized a training in Riga on the activities for reducing risks of trafficking in human beings among the Ukrainian civilians. Within the framework of the training an assessment tool prepared by the OSCE, which allows monitoring of the extent to which the countries have implemented different measures for reducing the trafficking in human beings' risk, was tested. Approximately 20 officials from the Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Welfare, Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments, State Labour Inspectorate, State Employment Agency, Society Integration Foundation, Ombudsman's Office of the Republic of Latvia, non-governmental organizations and others participated in the training.

In 2022, with changing global geopolitical situation, increased interest of the third-country nationals, in particular of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, was observed regarding the opportunity to enter Latvia for employment. Taking into consideration the increased interest, the number of third-country nationals arriving in Latvia with the purpose of employment, as well as a trend that third-country nationals in Latvia become possible victims of trafficking in human beings, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in cooperation with the Society "Shelter "Safe House"", center "Marta", the Ministry of the Interior and Ministry of Welfare updated the information for the third-country nationals who plan to be employed in Latvia. The material was prepared in English, Russian and in the languages of residence states. It provides information about minimum requirements when starting labour relationship in Latvia. Similarly, the information material includes institutions

¹²²Research work on the support and social rehabilitation services for children who have suffered from trafficking in human beings. – Available: <http://www.cilvektirdznieciba.lv/lv/izpetes-darbs-par-atbalsta-un-socialas-rehabilitacijas-pakalpojumiem-berniem-kuri-cietusi-no-cilveku-tirdzniecibas/267>.

¹²³The report prepared by the Council of the Baltic Sea States on the prevention of trafficking in human beings in the states of the Baltic Sea region. – Available: <https://cbss.org/publications/human-trafficking-baltic-sea-region-round-up-report/>.

¹²⁴The newest report by the states of the Baltic Sea region on the activities for the prevention of trafficking in human beings. – Available: <http://www.cilvektirdznieciba.lv/lv/jaunakais-baltijas-juras-valstu-regiona-zinojums-par-aktivitatem-cilveku-tirdzniecibas-noversana/278>.

which can be contacted if the provisions of the employment contract of the third-country national are not complied with or if the person is exploited. The information material is available on the consular reception premises of the of Latvian representation. The visa recipients' attention is directed to the available information material, which contains a reminder to familiarize oneself with the employment contract and one's rights.

At the end of 2022, the Ombudsman in the social media carried out a campaign "All that glitters is not gold" to explain the trafficking in human beings' issue in Latvia. Currently the campaign stories in a summarized format are also available in the informative and educational material. The Ombudsman draws special attention to the digital environment in particular, where people often notice some very tempting work and dating offers; however, they are not attentive enough, make mistakes and finally find themselves in terrible, life-endangering conditions or even disappear without trace. The material will be useful to everyone, in particular those who use social media and different websites for communication with other people, especially strangers.¹²⁵

Coordination and cooperation of key participants

In 2022, within the framework of the CAPE project "Competence building, Assistance Provision and Prosecution of Labour Exploitation Cases in the Baltic Sea Region" assessment of the referral of victims of trafficking in human beings between the countries of the Baltic Sea region was carried out. It is applicable to cases where, for example, a person is recognized in Germany but his or her country of origin is Latvia. Therefore, safe referral of a possible or identified victim from one country to another is required.

Within the framework of the research experts from all countries of the Baltic Sea region were interviewed. Overall, it was concluded that different referral mechanisms exist among the EU Member States; however, the biggest difficulties arise in cases when it is necessary to refer victims from third countries, in particular EU neighbour countries. As a result of the research, recommendations on the required improvements have been made – Guidelines for referral of the victims of trafficking in human beings among the Baltic Sea states¹²⁶. The main purpose of these recommendations is to develop guidelines that would be useful for professionals who work with third country nationals.

To gather information about approaches of the states of the Baltic Sea region in referral of the victims of trafficking in human beings, as well as required improvements.

Identification of victims of trafficking in human beings

The association "Center MARTA" with the support of the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) organized an interactive educational seminar "Problems of trafficking in human beings. How to recognize a victim and refer him/her for assistance"? Mainly different non-governmental organizations which have dealt with the Ukrainian civilians took part in it therefore the seminar was taking place in two languages. The objective of the seminar was to promote the participants'

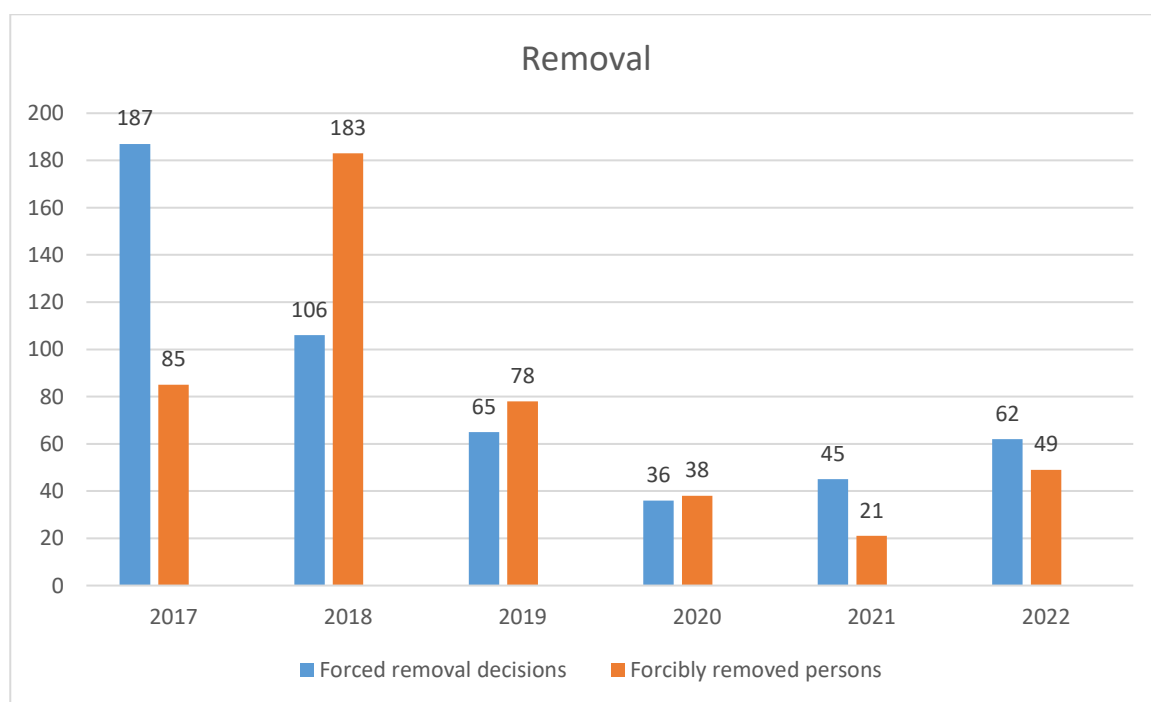
¹²⁵ Informative and educating material on the risks of trafficking in human beings in the digital environment has been developed. - Available: <https://www.tiesibsargs.lv/news/izstradats-informativi-izglitojoss-materials-par-cilveku-tirdzniecibas-riskiem-digitalaja-vide/>

¹²⁶ Transnational Referral Mechanism. – Available: <https://bsr-trm.com/about-trm/>

understanding of the problems of trafficking in human beings and current trends in Latvia, to draw particular attention to the risks of the Ukraine war refugees to be exploited, as well as to train the skills of recognizing potential victims of trafficking in human beings. During the seminar there was an opportunity to gain additional knowledge about the types of exploitation of trafficking in human beings, popular recruitment methods and also how to recognize a potential victim of trafficking in human beings by specific characteristics and refer him/her to receiving assistance. The objective of the seminar was to promote the participants' understanding about the problems of trafficking in human beings and its current trends in Latvia, drawing particular attention to the risks of the Ukraine war refugees to be exploited, as well as to train the skills of recognizing potential victims of trafficking in human beings.

RETURN AND READMISSION

In 2022, the number of persons who left Latvia voluntarily increased – 1957 (in 2021 – 742). In most cases, they were nationals of Ukraine and Uzbekistan.¹²⁷ 105 persons received assistance for voluntary return. In 2022, the number of forcibly removed persons increased two times reaching 49 (in 2021 – 21¹²⁸). The largest numbers of forcibly removed third-country nationals were from Iraq.



During the emergency situation on Latvia's border with Belarus, the International Organisation for Migration actively implemented a voluntary return programme for foreigners admitted to the Republic of Latvia on humanitarian grounds. An information campaign was carried out to inform foreigners about the possibility of migrating to their home country, leaflets were distributed. All foreigners who expressed a wish to leave voluntarily were referred to the International Organisation for Migration to organise their departure.

Strengthening cooperation with third countries of origin and transit on removal and readmission management

Since the brutal invasion of the territory of Ukraine by the Russian Federation cooperation between the State Border Guard and Federal Border Protection Service of the Russian Federation has ceased completely, minimum operational cooperation is continued within the framework of the

¹²⁷ Data source: OCMA.

¹²⁸ Source: SBG.

Authorized Border Representative of the Republic of Latvia at the state border of the Republic of Latvia - Russian Federation. During this period within the framework of the apparatus of authorized border representatives 24 persons in total were transferred to the Russian side: 12 nationals of Cuba, 1 national of Morocco, 1 national of Algeria and 10 nationals of Vietnam.¹²⁹

Similar as with Russia, cooperation with Belarus between institutions has been practically ceased as well, and only cooperation within the state border framework of the Authorized Border Representative of the Republic of Latvia at the border of the Republic of Latvia - Belarus is continued.

At the moment acceptance/transfer of persons within the framework of authorized persons takes place only in cases where only nationals of Latvia or Belarus are detained on the territories of both sides. Acceptance/transfer of irregular migrants (from Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, etc.) is not carried out as the Belarussian side does not admit that there are any irregular border crossing cases despite the evidence. The Latvian side also has evidence, including migrant testimonies, that the authorities of the Republic of Belarus are involved in supporting the move of migrants across the state border of the Republic of Latvia – Republic of Belarus¹³⁰.

¹²⁹ Source: SBG.

¹³⁰ Source: SBG.

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ABBREVIATIONS USED

EU - European Union

EMN - European Migration Network

IOM - International Organization for Migration

SEA - State Employment Agency

OCMA - Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs

PIF - Public Integration Foundation

SBG - State Border Guard

AMIF - Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund