



# COUNTRY FACTSHEET: LATVIA 2016

## EUROPEAN MIGRATION NETWORK

### 1. Introduction

This EMN Country Factsheet provides a factual overview of the main policy developments in migration and international protection in Latvia during 2016, including latest statistics.

### 2. International Protection including Asylum

The amendments introduced into the Asylum Law – which were adopted on 19<sup>th</sup> January 2017- brought in changes in relation to **access to the territory** by providing that, if an asylum seeker present in a third country did not have a valid travel document, and could not obtain one through diplomatic or consular services, a **temporary travel document should be issued in order to facilitate entry into Latvia**.

Two regulations modified the **reception conditions** offered to asylum seekers. Firstly, the Cabinet Regulation No.499 on the “Amount of Expenses for Food, Hygiene and Basic Needs Products for an Asylum Seeker and Procedure for Covering of Such Expenses”, in force since 15<sup>th</sup> July 2016, increased the allowance granted to asylum seekers from EUR 2.15 to EUR 3.00 per day. Secondly, the Cabinet Regulation No.574 ‘Amendments to the Cabinet Regulation No.1520 on the “Procedure for Organisation and Funding of Health Care”’ (originally adopted on 17<sup>th</sup> December 2013) came into force on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2016 and made provisions about the health care services to be offered to asylum seekers as well as payment for such services.

Moreover, with regard to **relocation activities**, in 2016 Latvia accepted the relocation of 155 persons from Greece and eight persons from Italy.

### 3. Unaccompanied Minors and other Vulnerable Groups

The amended Asylum Law specified that, as well as being accommodated in reception centres for asylum seekers and childcare institutions, **unaccompanied minors** could also be placed in a foster families. The

decision regarding the placement of an unaccompanied minor shall be made by the orphan’s court in cooperation with the social service, upon receiving the opinion of the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs. An unaccompanied minor may be accommodated in the asylum seekers’ accommodation centre or child care institution until the day when the appropriate care is provided to him/her with the appointment of a guardian or the placement in a foster family, or if it is established that the appointment of a guardian or placement in a foster family is not suitable in a specific case.

In addition, the Ministry of the Interior developed the Cabinet Regulation No.370 on the “Procedure, According to which the Expenses of the Local Government for the Accommodation of Minor Asylum Seekers are covered From the State Budget” which defines the procedure according to which the expenses incurred by municipalities for the reception of unaccompanied minors are funded.

### 4. Legal Migration and Mobility

#### 4.1. PROMOTING LEGAL MIGRATION CHANNELS

Latvian embassies and consulates held **information workshops** targeted to tourism companies and university representatives to raise awareness of the procedures applicable to enter Latvia, and the Schengen area more generally; the services related to tourism, including medical tourism; and the education opportunities available in Latvia.

#### 4.2. ECONOMIC MIGRATION

Most of the changes which took place in the area of economic migration resulted from the **amendment of the Immigration Law**. The changes introduced included the following:

- ★ The Cabinet, upon assessing the impact of the number of third-country nationals residing in Latvia, and in particular the effects of their concentration in certain geographical areas on national security or economic growth, will be entitled to decide if the

**issuance of residence permits** to certain categories of third-country nationals should be **suspended** for a specific period;

- ★ Third-country national **students** shall have a **right to employment** without any restrictions during the last two study semesters of their full-time Master's or doctoral studies followed at an accredited Latvian university, if their studies are not interrupted during this period of time;
- ★ A new purpose of stay, related to the Law on Aid for Start-up Companies, was also introduced. It provided for the **issuance of a temporary residence permit** for a third-country national for a duration not exceeding three years if he/she planned to **create or develop an innovative product** in Latvia.

#### 4.3. FAMILY REUNIFICATION

The amendments of the Immigration Law also had an impact on family reunification. The reform introduced a right to family reunification for the children of third-country nationals who had reached the age of majority and who received the first temporary residence permit in Latvia while being minors, in accordance with the [EU Family Reunification Directive \(Council Directive 2003/86/EC\)](#).

#### 4.4. MANAGING MIGRATION AND MOBILITY<sup>1</sup>

In 2016 Latvia **outsourced the processing of visa applications** in several countries (Azerbaijan, China, Georgia, India, Kirgizstan, Tajikistan, Turkey and the United Kingdom) to private companies.

In addition, nine experts of the State Border Guard joined the **Schengen evaluation commissions**. This provided them with the opportunity to become acquainted with the practice of other Member States in the implementation of the Schengen acquis, view a view to launch the preparations of the Schengen evaluation of Latvia in 2018.

### 5. Integration

Actions in the field of integration focused, among other areas, in improving **communication and information dissemination**. For example, an information booklet entitled '[First steps to employment](#)' was developed for refugees and persons with subsidiary protection in Latvian, English and Arabic. In addition, information events were organised at the Information Centre for Immigrants with a view to facilitate access by third-country nationals to high quality support and supporting their participation in the public life.

Other, more general, changes also had an impact on the field of integration. For example, refugees were identified as a priority target group of the '**Plan for**

**implementation of the adult education governance model for 2016-2020**', adopted on 5<sup>th</sup> May 2016. Furthermore, the 'Action Plan for Movement and Admission in Latvia of Persons who Need International Protection' foresaw specific measures on the social integration of migrants and refugees, such as the provision of a support in practical life situations – for instance, to arrange personal identity documents, look for housing and find a school for their children.

### 6. External dimension of EU Migration Policy

No relevant changes were reported in 2016.

### 7. Irregular Migration and Return

#### 7.1. THE FIGHT AGAINST FACILITATION OF IRREGULAR MIGRATION

On 27<sup>th</sup> September 2016 the border guard service and the police service of Latvia concluded a **quadripartite agreement** with their counterparts in Lithuania to define the procedure for **organising and implementing joint patrols**.

In addition, the **Criminal Code** was amended to increase the penal sanctions imposed for criminal offences relating to the facilitation of irregular entry and stay. The amendments entered into force on 7<sup>th</sup> April 2016.

Other measures to counter irregular migration focused on **modernising infrastructure** in crucial areas, for example:

- ★ The new passenger's terminal in Riga Airport started operations in November. Border control booths as well as other service premises for the performance of basic duties were established, according to the requirements of the State Border Guard.
- ★ The local video surveillance system was modernized in four external border crossing points.

#### 7.2. RETURN OF IRREGULAR MIGRANTS

The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) launched a project on **Providing Support for Voluntary Return and Reintegration assistance in Latvia, 2016 – 2018**'. The project, which was funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), aimed at promoting sustainable voluntary return and implementing a voluntary return and reintegration management system in Latvia. Within the framework of this project, support for voluntary return was provided to 75 persons in 2016.

<sup>1</sup> "Managing migration and mobility" refers to the following themes: visa policy, Schengen governance and border monitoring.

## 8. Actions against Trafficking in Human Beings

A number of amendments were introduced to the legal framework in 2016 to implement the requirements of the [EU Anti-Trafficking Directive \(2012/29/EU\)](#). A new Section 961 on 'A Victim of Special Protection' was introduced in the **Criminal Procedure Law** to provide special protection to children or victims of trafficking in human beings.

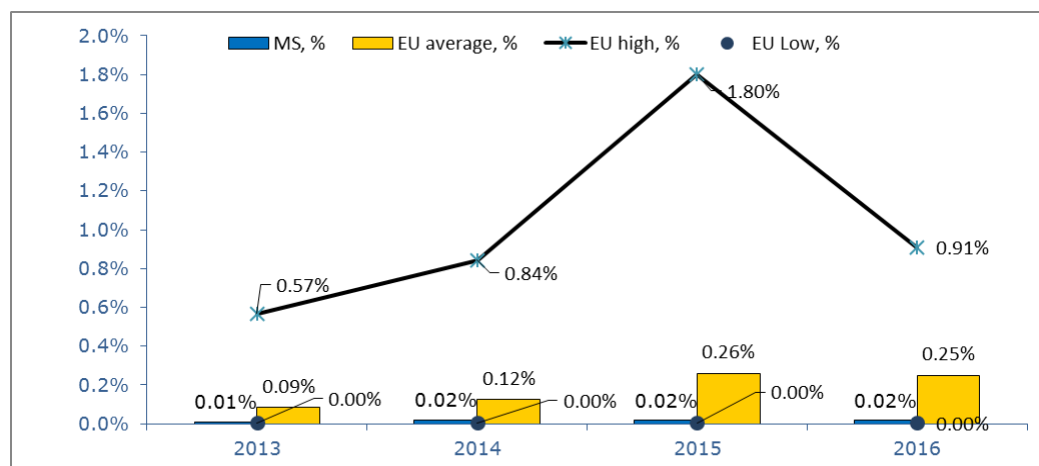
### STATISTICAL ANNEX

The Statistical Annex provides an overview of the latest available statistics for Latvia on aspects of migration and asylum (2013-2016), including residence, asylum, unaccompanied minors, irregular migration, return and visas. Where statistics are not yet available, this is indicated in the Annex as 'N/A'.

## Statistical Annex: Migration and Asylum in Latvia (2013-2016)

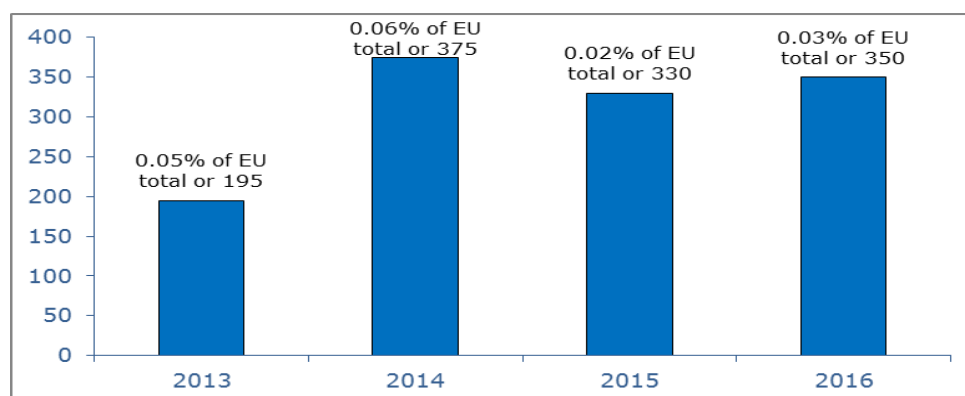
### 1. INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION AND ASYLUM

**Figure 1: Asylum applications as a share of the total population in Latvia, EU average and EU high and low (2013-2016)**



Source: Eurostat migration statistics ([migr\\_asyappctza](#)), data extracted 28/07/2017

**Figure 2: Number of asylum applications and as a share of the total number of applications in the EU (2013-2016)**



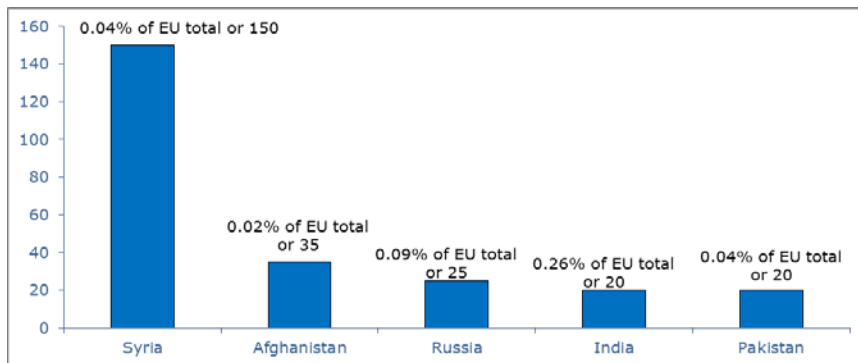
Source: Eurostat migration statistics ([migr\\_asyappctza](#)), data extracted 28/07/2017

**Table 1: Asylum applications: Top five third-country nationalities (2013–2016)**

2013			2014			2015			2016		
Nationality	No.	% of total	Nationality	No.	% of total	Nationality	No.	% of total	Nationality	No.	% of total
Georgia	145	74%	Georgia	175	47%	Vietnam Iraq	85	26%	Syria	150	43%
Syria	15	8%	Ukraine	75	20%	Ukraine	45	14%	Afghanistan	35	10%
Russia Egypt Uzbekistan Afghanistan	5	3%	Syria	35	9%	Afghanistan	35	11%	Russia	25	7%
			Iraq	20	5%	Georgia	30	9%	India	20	6%
			Afghanistan	15	4%	Russia	10	3%	Pakistan	20	6%

Source: Eurostat migration statistics ([migr\\_asyappctza](#)), data extracted 28/07/2017

**Figure 3: Asylum applications: Top five third-country nationalities as a share of EU total per given nationality (2016)**



Source: Eurostat migration statistics ([migr\\_asyappctza](#)), data extracted 17/04/2017

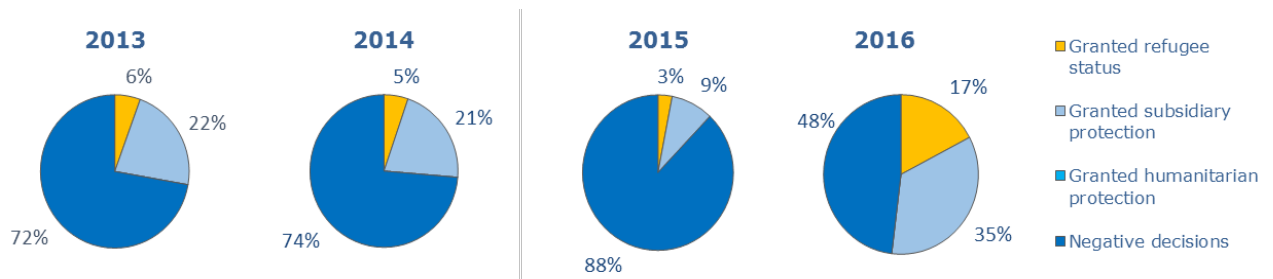
Note: the figure reads as: Latvia received 150 asylum applications from Syria or 0.04% of all asylum applications lodged by Syria in EU in 2016.

**Table 2: Asylum applications - First instance decisions by outcome (2013-2016)**

Year	Total decisions	Positive decisions	Of which:		Humanitarian reasons	Negative decisions
			Refugee status	Subsidiary protection		
2013	95	25	5	20	N/A	65
2014	95	25	5	20	N/A	70
2015	170	20	5	15	N/A	145
2016	260	135	45	90	N/A	125

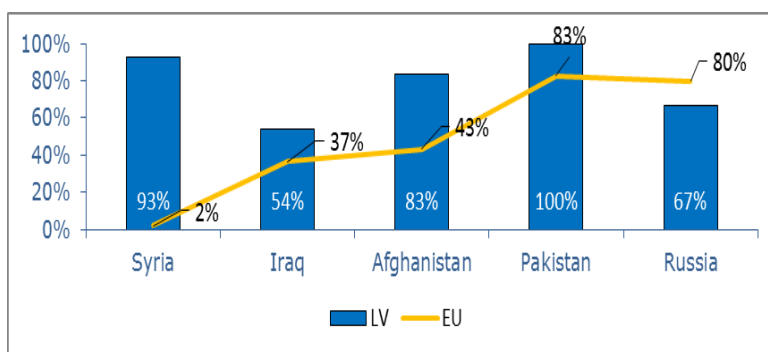
Source: Eurostat migration statistics ([migr\\_asydcfsta](#)), data extracted 17/04/2017

**Figures 4-7: Asylum applications - First instance decisions by outcome (2013-2016)**



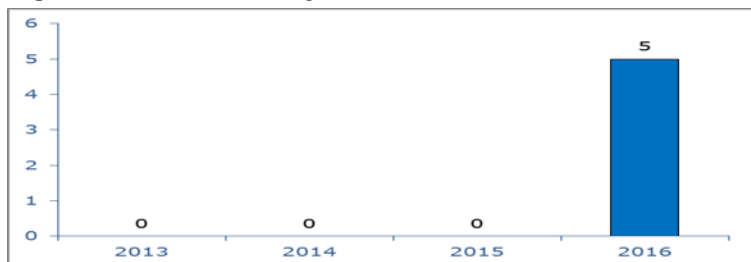
Source: Eurostat migration statistics ([migr\\_asydcfsta](#)), data extracted 17/04/2017

**Figure 8: Negative decision rate for the top five nationalities of applicants at the first instance in comparison with EU for the same given nationality (2016)**



Source: Eurostat migration statistics ([migr\\_asydcfsta](#)), data extracted 17/04/2017

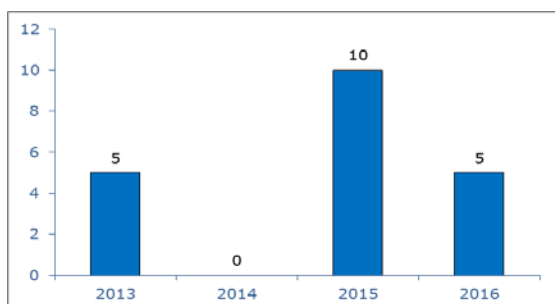
**Figure 9: Third-country nationals resettled (2013-2016)**



Source: Eurostat migration statistics ([migr\\_asyresa](#)), data extracted 09/05/2017

## 2. UNACCOMPANIED MINORS

**Figure 10: Unaccompanied minors applying for asylum (2013-2016)**



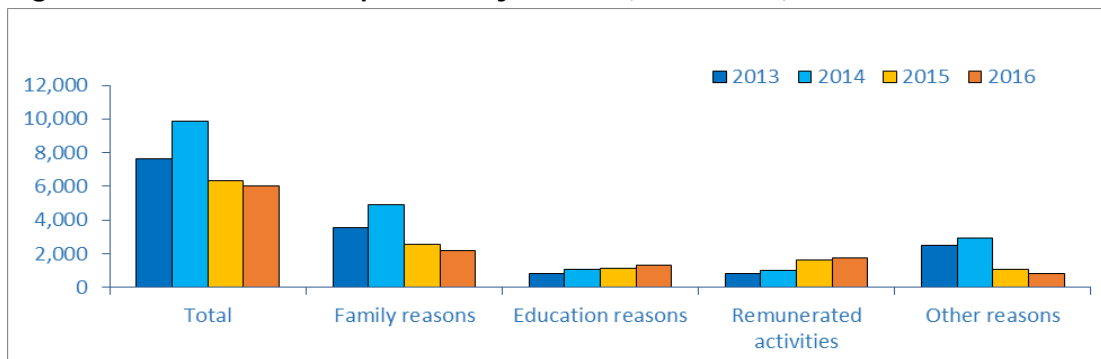
**Table 3: Unaccompanied minors (2013-2016)**

	2013	2014	2015	2016
<b>Unaccompanied minors (total)</b>	N/A	N/A	38	33
<b>Unaccompanied minor asylum applicants</b>	5	0	10	5

Source: Eurostat Asylum applicants considered to be unaccompanied minors by citizenship, age and sex Annual data (rounded) ([migr\\_asyunaa](#)), data extracted 17/04/2017; EMN NCPs

## 3. LEGAL MIGRATION AND MOBILITY

**Figure 11: First residence permits, by reason (2013-2016)**



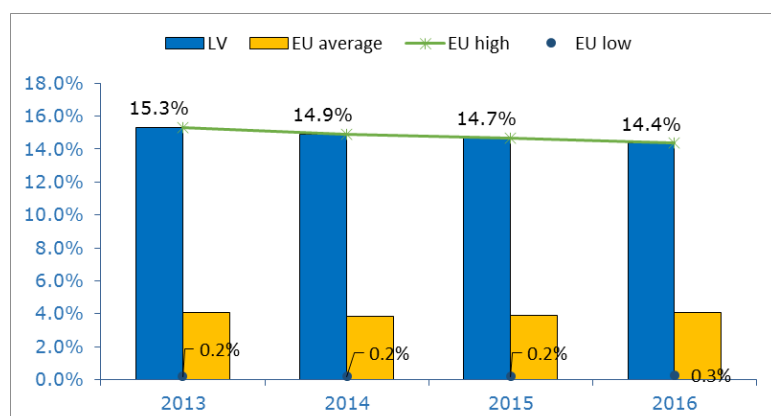
Source: Eurostat ([migr\\_resfirst](#)), data extracted 17/04/2017; EMN NCPs

**Table 4: First residence permits: Top five third-country nationalities (2013–2016)**

2013		2014		2015		2016	
Nationality	Number	Nationality	Number	Nationality	Number	Nationality	Number
Russia	3,764	Russia	5,104	Russia	2,084	Russia	1,653
Ukraine	678	Ukraine	1,316	Ukraine	1,591	Ukraine	1,435
Uzbekistan	477	China (incl. Hong Kong)	699	Belarus	451	India	470
Recognised Non-Citizens	436	Uzbekistan	657	Uzbekistan	444	Belarus	438
China (incl. Hong Kong)	416	Belarus	470	India	353	Uzbekistan	394

Source: Eurostat migration statistics ([migr\\_resfirst](#)), data extracted 17/04/2017

**Figure 12: Resident population of third-country nationals as a share of total population in Latvia, EU average, EU high and low (2013-2016)**



Source: Eurostat migration statistics ([migr\\_pop1ctz](#)), data extracted 17/04/2017

#### 4. IRREGULAR MIGRATION AND RETURN

**Table 5: Number of third-country nationals refused entry at external borders (2013–2016)**

Third country nationals:	2013	2014	2015	2016
Refused entry at external borders	2,050	2,050	875	800
Found to be illegally present	175	265	745	745
Ordered to leave	2,080	1,555	1,190	1,450
Returned following an order to leave	2,070	1,550	1,030	1,355

Source: Eurostat migration statistics ([migr\\_eirfs](#))([migr\\_eipre](#))([migr\\_eiord](#)),([migr\\_eirtn](#)) data extracted 09/05/2017

**Table 6: Third-country nationals returned (2013-2016)**

Year	Returned as part of forced return measures	Returned voluntarily	Returned through an Assisted Voluntary Return Programme
2013	33	2,047	82
2014	363	1,580	66
2015	392	1,225	34
2016	336	1,027	75

Source: EMN NCPs

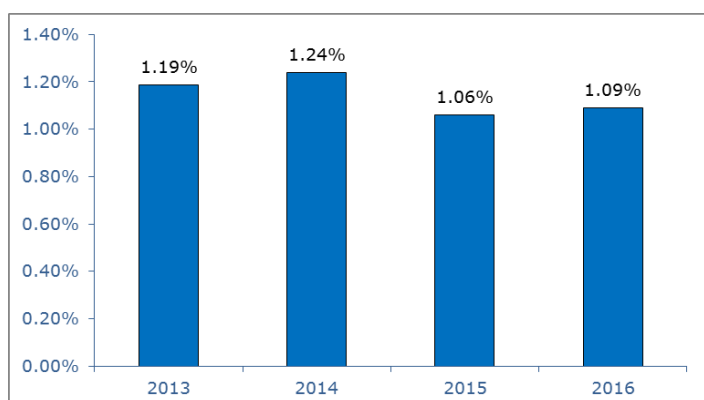
#### 5. SECURING EUROPE'S EXTERNAL BORDERS

**Table 7: Number of Schengen visas applications (2013–2016)**

	2013	2014	2015	2016
Uniform visas (short-stay visas)	205,230	207,185	164,000	165,814

Source: DG Migration and Home – Complete statistics on short-stay visas issued by the Schengen States

**Figure 13: Uniform visa applications received in MS as a share of the total number of uniform visa applications in all Schengen states consulates (2013-2016)**



Source: DG Migration and Home affairs – Complete statistics on short-stay visas issued by the Schengen States

**Table 8: Top five countries in which the highest number of visa applications for MS was lodged (2013-2016)**

2013		2014		2015		2016	
Countries	Number	Countries	Number	Countries	Number	Countries	Number
Russia	122,395	Russia	104,608	Russian Federation	73,397	Russian Federation	75,403
Belarus	56,698	Belarus	71,315	Belarus	56,461	Belarus	49,655
Ukraine	11,995	Ukraine	11,873	Ukraine	14,276	Ukraine	16,847
Uzbekistan	2,938	China	4,326	Georgia	7,671	Georgia	7,912
Georgia	2,832	Georgia	4,127	Uzbekistan	3,249	Uzbekistan	4,218

Source: DG Migration and Home affairs