

# COUNTRY FACTSHEET: Latvia 2015

## 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 2015, including latest statistics.

### 2. Common European Asylum System

The transposition of the recast Asylum Procedures Directive (2013/EU/32)<sup>1</sup> and Reception Conditions Directive (2013/EU/33)<sup>2</sup> was completed with the adoption of the new Asylum Law on 17<sup>th</sup> December 2015, published and entered into force in January 2016.

The biggest challenge of the year in Latvia was in the area of **reception and integration of asylum seekers and persons granted international protection**, in particular in relation to promoting language learning and access to the labour market, and ensuring the granting of the State benefit, as well as accommodation and social support during the asylum procedure. In response to these challenges, on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2015, Latvia adopted the **Action Plan on relocation and reception of persons in need of international protection**. The Action Plan regulates the activities to be performed by the Ministries of the Interior, Welfare, Health, Education and Science, and the Ministry of Culture in cooperation with non-governmental organisations to ensure provision for the rights set forth by law to asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection.

At the level of the asylum procedure, the division of competences in the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs changed. More specifically, the Asylum Affairs Division became responsible for reviewing asylum applications whilst the Asylum Seeker Accommodation Division was put in charge of the accommodation of asylum seekers. At the same time, the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs took over the task of asylum interviews from the State Border Guard. In addition, the amount of benefit for the beneficiaries of international protection was reduced due to constraints of the national budget and the estimated increase in the number of asylum seekers.

With the aim of ensuring a more efficient application of the Dublin III Regulation (604/2013/EU),<sup>3</sup> fixed terms have been introduced for the procedure of appeal against transfer decisions. The asylum seeker is entitled to appeal such decisions within 15 working days, and the Administrative District Court must adopt its decision within five business days from the appeal.

With regard to **relocation and resettlement activities**, in 2015 Latvia accepted the relocation of 776 asylum seekers, among which 531 persons to be relocated in two years. Also, in July 2015 Latvia agreed to accommodate 50 resettled persons from refugee camps in Turkey by 2017.

### 3. Unaccompanied Minors and other Vulnerable Groups

The new Asylum Law of 17<sup>th</sup> December 2015 clearly defined a person that is deemed vulnerable, identified special procedural and accommodation needs as well as the rights of such person during the asylum procedure.

<sup>1</sup> Directive of 26 June 2013 on common procedures for granting and withdrawing international protection

<sup>2</sup> Directive of 26 June 2013 laying down standards for the reception of applicants for international protection.

<sup>3</sup> Regulation (EU) No 604/2013 establishing the criteria and mechanisms for determining the Member State responsible for examining an application for international protection lodged in one of the Member States by a third-country national or a stateless person

Moreover, the law made clear the duties and functions of the institutions involved in the work with unaccompanied minors (UAMs), by paying special attention to the identification of those UAMs that could be victims of trafficking.

## 4. European Policy on Legal migration and Integration

### 4.1. PROMOTING LEGAL MIGRATION CHANNELS

During 2015, informative events, the so called 'tourism workshops' were organised in the embassies and consulates of Latvia in Russia and Belarus. During the workshops, participants familiarised with issues related to the procedure of entry and issuance of visas. Representation offices abroad also started to distribute to visa applicants individual informative material on Schengen visas, together with the travel document.

In 2015, the Society Integration Foundation, which is a public foundation established by the law on the 'Society Integration Fund' implemented several activities to develop the understanding of migration issues among the public. First, the social campaign 'Our People' promoted public support for the integration of third-country nationals by informing the public opinion about their contribution to Latvia and their role in the society. Other information activities aimed at involving the media in supporting the process of integration and forming a more tolerant society. Ad-hoc information targeted journalists and future journalists, whilst several publications about integration were issued.

### 4.2. ECONOMIC MIGRATION

As from January 2015, a **new temporary five-year residence permit** may be issued to a third-country national upon purchase of interest-free state securities for a value of 250,000 euros, and payment of 25,000 euros into the State budget. Holders of this permit, unlike other categories of migrants, are not required to register their temporary residence permit annually.

Also, during 2015, the discussion continued about draft amendments to the **rules on the admission of investors**. The amendments aim to increase the number of investors in limited companies from three to ten persons and the amount of the investment from 35,000 to 50,000 euros, by setting out a one-time additional payment of 10,000 euros per each investor into the State budget. At this stage, a procedure has been introduced in the draft which verifies the actual payment of the taxes by the limited company, and further points have been clarified to avoid ambiguous interpretations of the law.

Several developments occurred in the field of **migration for study reasons**. An amendment to the Immigration Law would allow migrant students to work for 20 hours per week, and students enrolled in the last year of their Master's or Doctoral studies to engage in paid employment without time limitation.

### 4.3. FAMILY REUNIFICATION

### 4.4. NO DEVELOPMENTS WERE REPORTED UNDER THIS AREA IN 2015. INTEGRATION

In 2015, the **right to receive social services and social assistance was extended** to all third-country nationals residing in Latvia with a permanent residence permit, including persons having alternative status and their family members residing in Latvia. Such rights include, among others: the guaranteed minimum income; shelter and night-shelter services; information and consultations of the social service; housing benefit as well as special care services for minors.

The Society Integration Foundation implemented the project '**National Integration Centre**', whose main goal was to provide for and to improve labour market integration support services to third-country nationals. Activities of the project included information on healthcare, education, employment as well as legal and psychological counselling. Also, the Latvian Language Agency implemented the project '**Inter-Cultural Training for Parents, Teachers and Students**', within which parents were informed about enrolment of children in Latvian schools and familiarised with the institutions that can provide assistance in the event of problems. Throughout the year, several seminars based on the experience of teachers working with third-country nationals were held in five regions attended by 120 employees of institutions.

In the context of the project '**Diverse Solutions for Public Education and Integration 3**', the society 'Shelter 'Safe House'' provided counselling on education, pre-school education, extracurricular education, language courses and recognition of qualifications in Latvia.

### 4.5. MANAGING MIGRATION AND MOBILITY<sup>4</sup>

As from 2015, the registration of **biometric data of visa applicants is effective** in all diplomatic representations of Latvia. Administrative, technical and data safety issues were improved to that purpose. Moreover, the scheduled Schengen assessments took place in May 2015 with positive results.

<sup>4</sup> "Managing migration and mobility" refers to the following themes: visa policy, Schengen governance and border monitoring.

In May 2015 it was decided that the Border Guard will also register, edit and delete information on border crossings and **entry bans in the Schengen Information System** (SIS II).

The Ministry of Interior assessed the reaction of the institutions confronted with to the **large influx of asylum seekers** in 2015. Based on the findings, some changes were initiated. In August, a draft bill was produced which regulates the use of material resources in the event of mass arrival of asylum seekers. Also, the State Border Guard regulation for prevention of emergency situations was revised and a new plan was developed for events of mass influx of irregular immigrants, and mass influx of asylum seekers.

In the second half of 2015 the Detained Foreigners' Accommodation Centre Daugavpils became overcrowded. To expand capacity, the construction of a second Detention Centre accommodating up to 84 people in Ropažu Municipality was decided.

#### 4.6. EXTERNAL DIMENSION OF EU MIGRATION POLICY

In April 2015, the European Commission approved the **Twinning proposal** developed by the Netherlands, Sweden, Austria, Belgium, Poland and Latvia for the project Strengthening Kosovo institutions in effective management of migration. The project was planned to start in March 2016.

Furthermore, the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs and the State Border Guard were involved in the project **'Support to the Implementation of the Mobility Partnership with Azerbaijan'**. This project will be implemented in 2016.

## 5. Irregular Migration and Return

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

In 2015, the State Border Guard observed that smugglers opt for facilitating the illegal border crossing of three to five persons at a time, on account of the relatively lower severity of the criminal sanctions applicable in this case. To counteract this trend, the State Border Guard has prepared amendments to increase punishment for smuggling of persons across the border.

### 5.2. RETURN OF IRREGULAR MIGRANTS

The Ombudsman's Office completed the development of **Guidelines for Implementation of the Supervision Mechanism of Removable Persons**, a methodology for monitoring the return process. Moreover, the Ombudsman performed a study regarding reception, stay and return of unaccompanied minors in Latvia. Considering the results of the study, the Ombudsman requested improvements of the existing legal regulations.

## 6. Actions against Trafficking in Human Beings

The Ministry of Welfare together with the cooperation partners agreed on the need to develop the legal framework with respect to the protection of minor victims of trafficking in compliance with their rights and to ensure their best interests. At the same time, work has started on the improvement on a medium term and long term support programme for children that have suffered from violence.

In 2013-2015, the State Border Guard, in cooperation with the respective authorities of Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, and Romania, as well as the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) participated in the implementation of the project **'Eastern Partnership Cooperation in Fighting Irregular Migration – Implementing the Prague Process Action Plan'**. The project promoted increased strategic and operational cooperation in the region of Eastern Partnership countries (in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine) to prevent cross-border crime and by paying special attention to irregular migration, including trafficking.

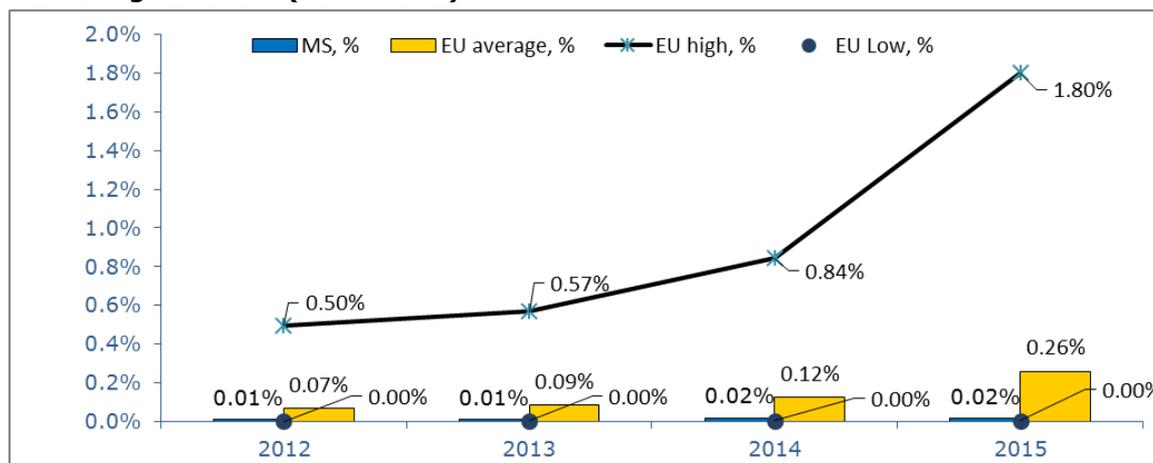
### STATISTICAL ANNEX

The Statistical Annex provides an overview of the latest available statistics for Latvia on aspects of migration and asylum (2013-2015), 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: Immigration and Asylum in Latvia (2012-2015)

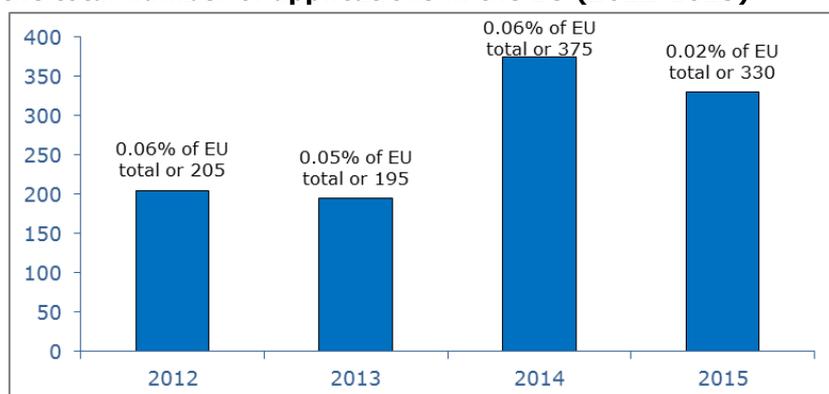
## 1. COMMON EUROPEAN ASYLUM SYSTEM

**Figure 1: Asylum applications as a share of the total population in Latvia, EU average and EU high and low (2012-2015)**



Source: Eurostat migration statistics (migr\_asyappctza), data extracted 04/07/2016

**Figure 2: Number of asylum applications and as a share of the total number of applications in the EU (2012-2015)**



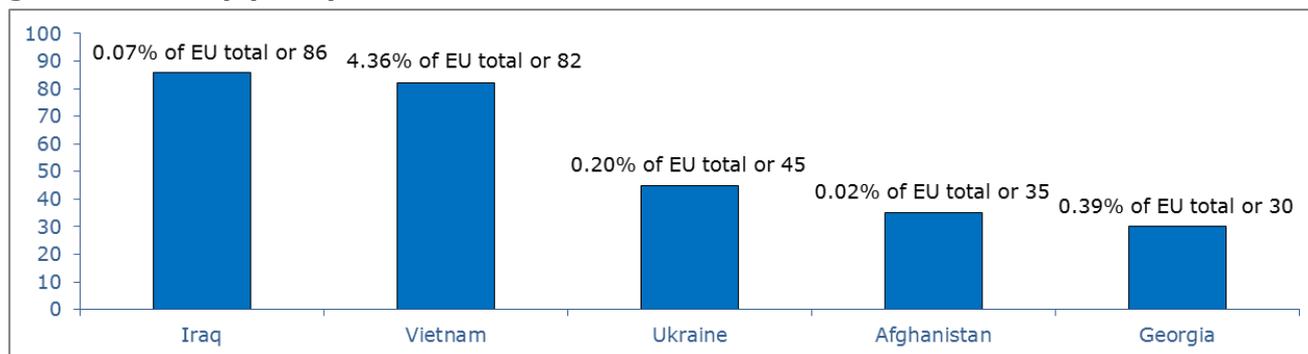
Source: Eurostat migration statistics (migr\_asyappctza), data extracted 04/07/2016

**Table 1: Asylum applications: Top five third-country nationalities (2012-2015)**

2012			2013			2014			2015		
Nationality	Nr	% of total	Nationality	Nr	% of total	Nationality	Nr	% of total	Nationality	Nr	% of total
Georgia	105	51%	Georgia	145	74%	Georgia	175	47%	Iraq	86	26%
Congo	25	12%	Syria	15	8%	Ukraine	75	20%	Vietnam	82	25%
Syria	20	10%	Russia, Egypt, Uzbekistan, Afghanistan	5	3%	Syria	35	9%	Ukraine	45	14%
Afghanistan	15	7%				Iraq	20	5%	Afghanistan	35	11%
Russia	10	5%				Afghanistan	15	4%	Georgia	30	9%

Source: Eurostat migration statistics (migr\_asyappctza), data extracted 04/07/2016 and National data for 2015

**Figure 3: Asylum applications: Top five third-country nationalities as a share of EU total per given nationality (2015)**



Source: Eurostat migration statistics (migr\_asyappctza), data extracted 04/07/2016

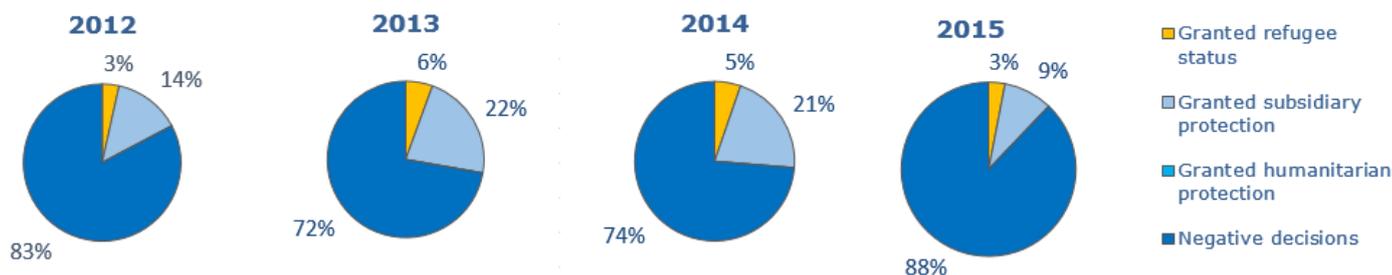
Note: the figure reads as: Latvia received 82 asylum applications from Vietnam or 4.36% of all asylum applications lodged by Vietnam in EU in 2015

**Table 2: Asylum applications - First instance decisions by outcome (2012-2015)**

	Total decisions	Positive decisions	Of which:		Humanitarian reasons	Negative decisions
			Refugee status	Subsidiary protection		
<b>2012</b>	145	25	5	20	NA	120
<b>2013</b>	95	25	5	20	NA	65
<b>2014</b>	95	25	5	20	NA	70
<b>2015</b>	170	20	5	15	NA	145

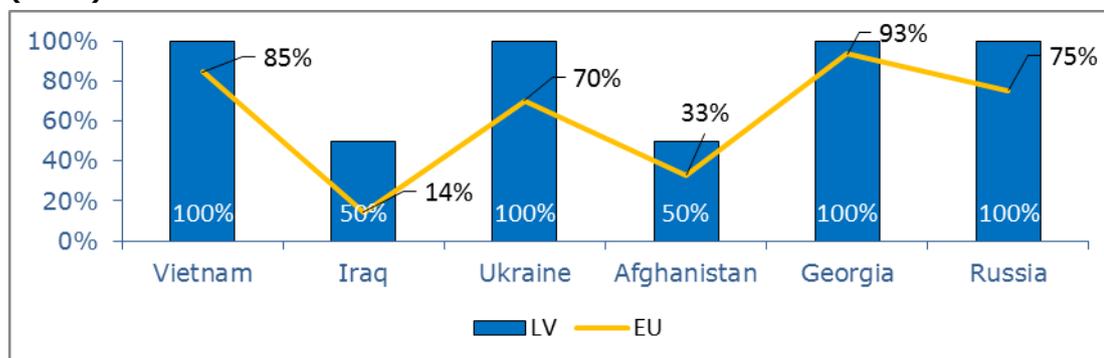
Source: Eurostat migration statistics (migr\_asydcfst), data extracted 04/07/2016

**Figures 4-7: Asylum applications - First instance decisions by outcome (2012-2015)**



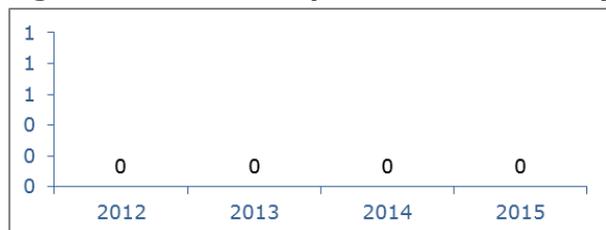
Source: Eurostat migration statistics (migr\_asydcfst), data extracted 04/07/2016

**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 (2015)**



Source: Eurostat migration statistics (migr\_asydcfst), data extracted 04/07/2016

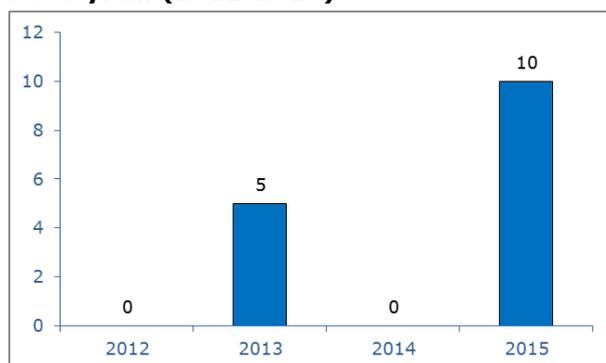
**Figure 9: Third-country nationals resettled (2012-2015)**



Source: Eurostat migration statistics (migr\_asyresa), data extracted 04/07/2016

## 2. UNACCOMPANIED MINORS

**Figure 10: Unaccompanied minors applying for asylum (2012-2015)**



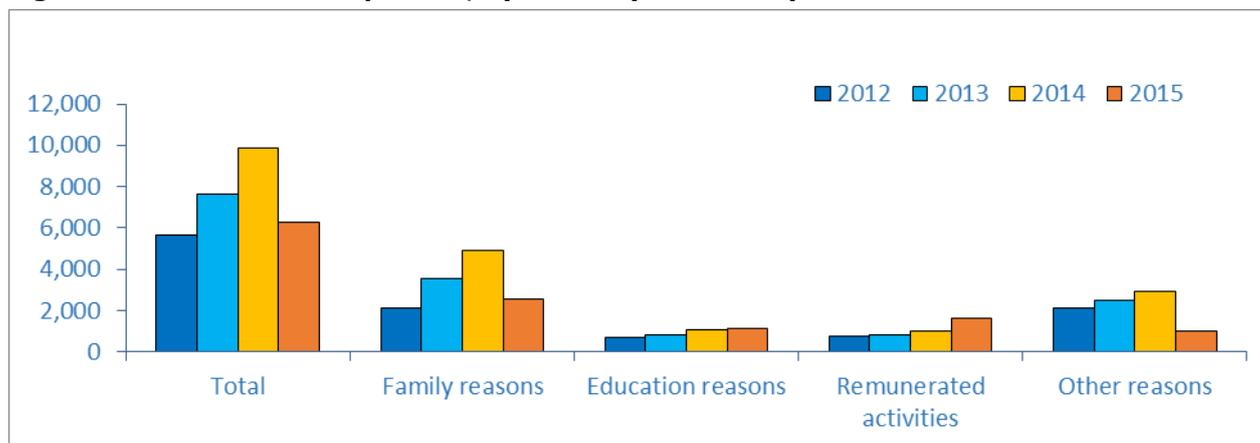
Source: Eurostat Asylum applicants considered to be unaccompanied minors by citizenship, age and sex Annual data (rounded) [migr\_asyunaa], data extracted 23/07/2015; EMN NCPs

**Table 3: Unaccompanied minors (2012-2015)**

	2012	2013	2014	2015
<b>Unaccompanied minors (total)</b>	NA	NA	NA	38
<b>Unaccompanied minor asylum applicants</b>	0	5	0	10

## 3. EUROPEAN POLICY ON LEGAL MIGRATION AND INTEGRATION

**Figure 11: First residence permits, by reason (2012-2015)**



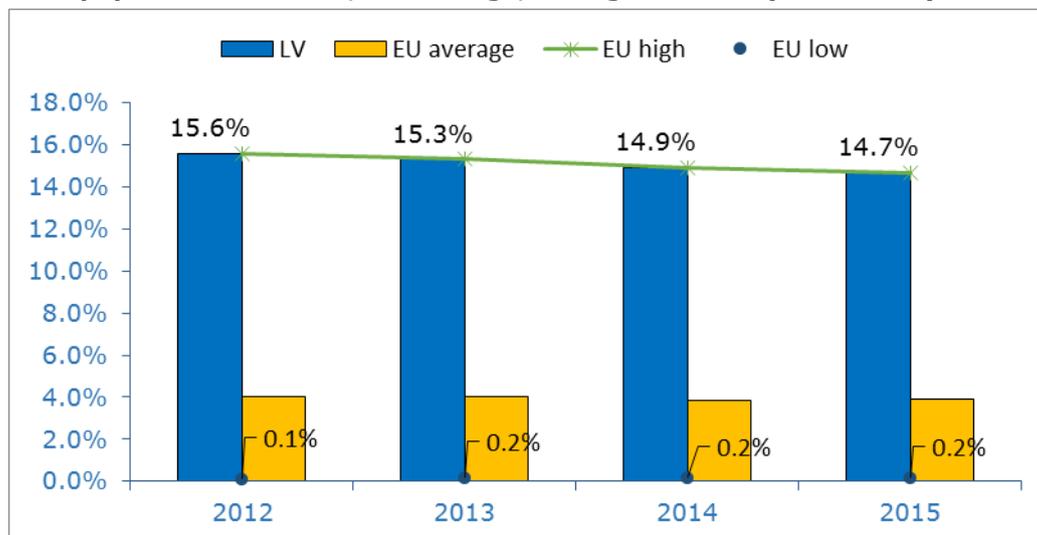
Source: Eurostat (migr\_resfirst), data extracted 04/07/2016; EMN NCPs

**Table 4: First residence permits: Top five third-country nationalities (2012-2015)**

2012		2013		2014		2015	
Nationality	Number	Nationality	Number	Nationality	Number	Nationality	Number
Russia	2,732	Russia	3,764	Russia	5,104	Russia	2,084
Ukraine	733	Ukraine	678	Ukraine	1,316	Ukraine	1,591
Belarus	292	Uzbekistan	477	China (including Hong Kong)	699	Belarus	451
Recognised Non-Citizens	287	Recognised Non-Citizens	436	Uzbekistan	657	Uzbekistan	444
Uzbekistan	217	China (including Hong Kong)	416	Belarus	470	India	353

Source: Eurostat migration statistics (migr\_resfirst), data extracted 04/07/2016

**Figure 12: Resident population of third-country nationals as a share of total population in Latvia, EU average, EU high and low (2012-2015)**



Source: Eurostat migration statistics (migr\_pop1ctz), data extracted 04/07/2016

#### 4. IRREGULAR MIGRATION AND RETURN

**Table 5: Number of third-country nationals refused entry at external borders (2012–2015)**

Third country nationals:	2012	2013	2014	2015
Refused entry at external borders	1,820	2,050	2,050	875
Found to be illegally present	205	175	265	745
Ordered to leave	2,070	2,080	1,555	1,190
Returned following an order to leave	2,065	2,070	1,550	1,030

Source: Eurostat migration statistics (migr\_eirfs)(migr\_eipre)(migr\_eiord), data extracted 04/07/2016

**Table 6: Third-country nationals returned (2012-2015)**

	Returned as part of forced return measures	Returned voluntarily	Returned through an Assisted Voluntary Return Programme
2012	54	2,019	89
2013	33	2,047	82
2014	363	1,580	66
2015	392	1,225	34

Source: EMN NCPs

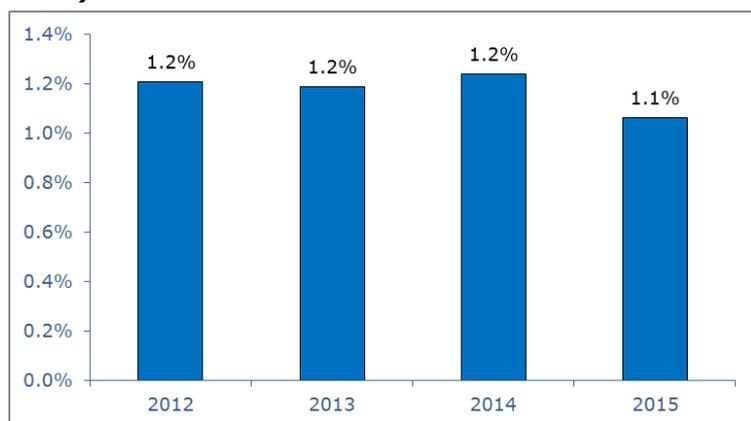
#### 5. SECURING EUROPE'S EXTERNAL BORDERS

**Table 7: Number of Schengen visas applications (2012–2015)**

	2012	2013	2014	2015
Uniform visas (short-stay visas)	182,496	205,230	207,185	164,000

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

**Figure 13: Uniform visa applications received in Latvia as a share of the total number of uniform visa applications in all Schengen states consulates (2012-2015)**



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 Latvia was lodged**

2011		2012		2013		2014	
Country	Number	Country	Number	Country	Number	Country	Number
Russia	123,653	Russia	122,395	Russia	104,608	Russia	73,397
Belarus	33,400	Belarus	56,698	Belarus	71,315	Belarus	56,461
Ukraine	12,537	Ukraine	11,995	Ukraine	11,873	Ukraine	14,276
Georgia	2,760	Uzbekistan	2,938	China	4,326	Georgia	7,671
Azerbaijan	2,706	Georgia	2,832	Georgia	4,127	Uzbekistan	3,249

Source: DG Migration and Home affairs

## 6. ASYLUM AND MIGRATION EU FUNDING SOURCES (2007-2013 AND 2014-2020)

**Table 9: Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) allocation in euro per area**

Areas	AMIF 2014-2020
Asylum	3,204,872
Legal Migration and Integration	6,362,152
Return	2,428,404
Technical Assistance	1,756,347
Special cases (resettlement/transfer)	NA
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>13,751,777</b>

Source: DG Migration and Home affairs

**Table 10: Internal Security Fund (ISF) allocation in euro per area**

Areas	ISF 2014-2020
ISF Borders	15,521,704
ISF SA Frontex	450,000
ISF SA Consular cooperation	NA
ISF Borders Emergency Assistance	NA
ISF Police	16,941,431
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>32,913,135</b>

Source: DG Migration and Home affairs

**Table 11: SOLID funds allocation in euro and share of total funds allocated to the Latvia (2007-2013)**

SOLID FUNDS	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	TOTAL
European Refugee Fund (ERF)	NA	502,498 (0.7%)	505,451 (0.5%)	509,479 (0.5%)	512,520 (0.5%)	516,928 (0.5%)	542,513 (0.5%)	<b>3,089,391 (0.5%)</b>
European Return Fund (RF)	NA	525,276 (0.9%)	527,894 (0.9%)	545,523 (0.7%)	559,678 (0.5%)	601,522 (0.4%)	780,772 (0.4%)	<b>3,540,665 (0.6%)</b>

<b>SOLID FUNDS</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
<b>European Fund for the Integration of TCN (EIF)</b>	1,069,587 (1.6%)	1,143,581 (1.5%)	15,062,037 (15.4%)	1,356,637 (1.2%)	1,528,935 (1.2%)	1,748,691 (1.1%)	1,948,859 (1.1%)	<b>23,858,327 (2.9%)</b>
<b>External Borders Fund (EBF)</b>	1,516,647 (1%)	1,768,170 (1.3%)	2,043,260 (1.3%)	1,863,916 (1%)	2,293,373 (1%)	3,197,746 (1%)	4,147,732 (1%)	<b>16,830,844 (1%)</b>

Source: DG Migration and Home affairs