



## **POLICY REPORT ON MIGRATION AND ASYLUM SITUATION IN LATVIA. REFERENCE YEAR 2015**

Riga, April 2016

Pursuant to Council Decision 2008/381/EC of 14 May 2008, the European Migration Network was established, its objective shall be to meet the information needs of European Union institutions and of Member States' authorities and institutions, by providing up-to-date, objective, reliable and comparable information on migration and asylum, with a view to supporting policymaking in the European Union in these areas. The European Migration Network also serves to provide the general public with information on these subjects.

The Network is composed by the European Commission and the contact points designated by the Member States. Each contact point establishes a national migration network.

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

The Latvian Contact Point of the European Migration Network is the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs.

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## SUMMARY

The annual policy report on the migration and asylum situation in Latvia provides a comprehensive overview of the most important and the most significant changes in the migration and asylum policies, changes in the laws upon introduction of requirements of laws of the European Union (hereinafter the EU) as well as reflects the discussions in the Parliament and the public on certain issues of the area of migration and asylum during the period from 1 January 2015 until 31 December and in early 2016.

### International Protection and Asylum

Compared to 2014, the number of asylum seekers in 2015 has slightly decreased to 328<sup>1</sup> (364 in 2014). A new Asylum Law was adopted on 17 December 2015<sup>2</sup>.

It was developed to introduce the following requirements of the EU laws:

- Directive 2013/32/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 on common procedures for granting and withdrawing international protection<sup>3</sup> (revised version, hereinafter the Directive 2013/32/EU);
- Directive 2013/33/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 laying down standards for the reception of applicants for international protection<sup>4</sup> (revised version, hereinafter the Directive 2013/33/EU);

The law was developed to determine the aspects related to the application of the following Regulations:

- Regulation (EU) No 604/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 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<sup>5</sup> (revised version, hereinafter the Regulation No. 604/2013);
- Regulation (EU) No 603/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 on the establishment of 'Eurodac' for the comparison of fingerprints for the effective application of 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 and on requests for the comparison with Eurodac data by Member States' law enforcement authorities and Europol for law enforcement purposes, and amending Regulation (EU) No 1077/2011 establishing a European Agency for the operational management of large-scale IT systems in the area of freedom, security and justice<sup>6</sup> (revised version, hereinafter the Regulation No. 603/2013).

To ensure the effectiveness of the asylum procedure, when the number of asylum seekers has substantially increased, and to prevent its abuse, the law lays down a special procedure for the examination of the application if the application is filed at the border crossing point or transit zone

<sup>1</sup> There were 328 first-time applications and 2 repeated ones for granting the refugee or alternative status received in 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Asylum Law.- Latvijas Vēstnesis, No. 2, 05.01.2016 - [entered into force on 19.01.2016]

<sup>3</sup> Directive 2013/32/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 on common procedures for granting and withdrawing international protection (revised version). Official Journal, L 180, 29.06.2013.

<sup>4</sup> Directive 2013/33/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 laying down standards for the reception of applicants for international protection (revised version). Official Journal, L 180, 29.06.2013.

<sup>5</sup> Regulation (EU) No 604/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 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

<sup>6</sup> Regulation (EU) No 26 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 2013 June 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 Official Journal, L 180, 29.06.2013.

and there are conditions for making a decision on the abandonment of the application without examination.

In accordance with the provisions of the law, the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs takes over the interviewing of the asylum seeker regarding the substance of his application from the State Border Guard.

### Unaccompanied Minors and other Vulnerable Groups

During 2015, 26<sup>7</sup> unaccompanied minors entered Latvia and were detained for stay in Latvia without valid travel documents. Of them, 12<sup>8</sup> unaccompanied minors requested asylum in Latvia.

There are clearly defined criteria in the new Asylum Law now that set forth which asylum-seekers are considered vulnerable<sup>9</sup> and have specific procedural and admission needs, as well as it defines the rights of such persons during the asylum procedure.

### Legal Migration and Mobility

The total number of temporary residence permits issued for the first time has decreased in 2015 by a third compared to the previous year, 6,293 (9,803 in 2014).

With the financial support from the European Third-Country National Integration Fund, several projects for integration of third - country nationals were implemented in 2015, which were mainly related to Latvian language training and cultural activities to promote the integration of third-country nationals in the Latvian society.

During the report period, the State Border Guard participated in five joint operations arranged by FRONTEX that provided support to the EU Member States: Bulgaria, Greece, Italy, France and the Netherlands.

### Irregular Migration

There were 463 third - country nationals detained in 2015 for illegal crossing of the "green" border (139 third - country nationals detained in 2014). Compared to 2014, the number of irregular immigrants detained on the "green" border in 2015 increased almost 3 times.

The main risk groups of the illegal "green" border crossers were formed by third - country nationals from Vietnam (309), Iraq (70), Afghanistan (30) and the Russian Federation (25, a portion of them-being the carriers at the same time).

There was a significant drop in the number of refusals of entry on the border in 2015 when entering was refused to 869 third - country nationals.

The number of refusals drawn up for persons who could not justify the purpose of entry or could not produce a health insurance policy continued to decrease in 2015: 177 (Belarus - 51, Russia - 40, Ukraine - 15). There were 305 instances found in 2014.

### Return

The number of return decisions<sup>10</sup> issued to third - country nationals continued to decrease in 2015: 1,225<sup>11</sup> (1,459<sup>12</sup> in 2014). Mostly they were issued to Russian, Ukrainian and Belarusian citizens.

<sup>7</sup> Source of data: State Border Guard.

<sup>8</sup> Source of data: Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs

<sup>9</sup> Minors, disabled persons, persons of the age, upon reaching which a retirement pension is granted in Latvia, pregnant women, a parent with a minor child, victims of human trafficking, persons requiring special care due to state of health, persons with mental disorders, persons that have been subjected to torture, rape or other forms of serious psychological, physical or sexual abuse, or other specially protected persons whose ability to use rights and perform the duties during the asylum procedure are limited

<sup>10</sup> Return decision - an administrative or judicial decision or act, stating or declaring the stay of a third-country national to be illegal and imposing or stating an obligation to return.

<sup>11</sup> Source of data: Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs

<sup>12</sup> Source of data: Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs

The number of third - country nationals who used the voluntary return programme has significantly decreased: 34<sup>13</sup> (94 in 2014). The reduction of numbers is explained also by the fact that the IOM Riga Office project "Provision of Assistance for Voluntary Return and Reintegration in Latvia, 2014-2015" ended in June 2015, therefore no funding was available for the voluntary return during the second half of the year.

The number of resolutions regarding the removal order<sup>14</sup> adopted in 2015 has increased four times by reaching 392 (98 in 2014). In 85% of cases, the removed ones have been citizens of Vietnam.

A draft bilateral agreement regarding the readmission of persons and a draft execution protocol between the Republic of Latvia and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam were developed in 2015.

In addition, the agreement between the competent authorities of the Republic of Latvia and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam regarding cooperation in combating irregular migration and return issues was sent to the Vietnamese side for evaluation and provision of opinion.

### Human Trafficking

The status of suspect has been determined for 16 persons and they have been detained within the criminal proceedings initiated regarding organisation of human trafficking.<sup>15</sup>

The Ministry of Welfare, together with its cooperation partners, upon performance of the task in the guidelines<sup>16</sup>, agreed on the need to develop a regulatory framework for minors and observation and protection of their rights and interests. Simultaneously work has been started on improvement of the medium-term and long-term support programme for children that have been victims of human trafficking.<sup>17</sup>

During 2015, upon cooperation between the national, municipal authorities and non-governmental organisations, a series of information campaigns, activities and training was organised to improve public awareness of human trafficking, its risks and consequences, about the assistance, support and protection to victims of human trafficking provided for by the state.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The policy report on the migration and asylum situation in Latvia in 2015 and early 2016 (hereinafter the policy report) provides an overview of the most important changes in the migration and asylum policies, changes in the laws upon introduction of requirements of laws of the EU, reflects the discussions in the Parliament and the public on certain issues of migration and asylum.

The policy report has been developed based on the specification developed by the European Commission and approved by the European Migration Network (hereinafter-the EMN) national contact points, which allows summarising uniform and comparable information about all Member States. A synthesis report on the migration and asylum situation in the EU in 2015, when developed, will be available on the EMN website.<sup>18</sup>

The information required for the development of the policy report was obtained by sending the requests for information and by compiling the answers from the Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Consular Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Welfare, the State Border Guard, the International Migration Organisation (hereinafter the IOM)

<sup>13</sup> Source of data: IOM Riga Office

<sup>14</sup> Removal order – an administrative deed, in which the fact of illegal stay of a foreigner is justified and removal of the foreigner to his or her country of citizenship, the third country, from which he or she has entered, or another country, which he or she has the right to enter, is determined

<sup>15</sup> Source of data: Ministry of the Interior.

<sup>16</sup> 21 January 2014 Ordinance of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 29 "Regarding the human trafficking prevention guidelines for 2014-2020" - Latvijas Vēstnesis, No. 16, 23.02.2014.

<sup>17</sup> Source: Ministry of the Interior.

<sup>18</sup> Available at [www.emn.lv](http://www.emn.lv)

Riga Office and the Office of the Ombudsman. Experts from the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs were involved in the development of the work.

To reflect public opinions and to review the discussions in the political environment, the work used articles, opinions and assessments published on various news and public policy sites as well as the information available on websites of other governmental institutions. All units of sources and literature used in the work are included in the list of used sources and literature.

The work used the data summarised by the national data providers and the EU Statistics Office Eurostat. Data have been coordinated with the experts of the migration and asylum areas.

All terms used in this work correspond to the definitions specified in the Glossary of terms of asylum and migration.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Available at [www.emn.lv](http://www.emn.lv)

## 2. OVERVIEW OF CHANGES IN THE ASYLUM AND MIGRATION POLICY

### 2.1. Political Changes

No significant political changes in state administration have taken place during the Latvia's Presidency of the Council of the European Union, but the capacity of the existing political structures of Latvia was strengthened.

Significant changes in the operation of the government began in late 2015, already after the implemented Latvia's Presidency of the Council of the European Union. On 7 December 2015, the Prime Minister Laimdota Straujuma announced her resignation.<sup>20</sup> On 11 February 2016, the Parliament approved the government of *Māris Kučinskis* (Union of the Green and the Farmers). Two new ministers started working in the Cabinet of Ministers: Minister of Economics Arvils Ašeradens and Kārlis Šadurskis, who had repeatedly become the Minister of Education and Science. The existing posts were retained by eight ministers while three ministers are leading other ministries.<sup>21</sup> The posts were retained also by ministers responsible for the area of migration and asylum: the Minister of the Interior Rihards Kozlovskis and the Minister of Culture Dace Melbārde.

Declaration regarding the proposed actions of the Cabinet of Ministers led by Māris Kučinskis in the field of migration:

- to strengthen the external border of the EU;
- in the area of the EU migration policy, to insist on solving the causes for the long-term migration crisis that would stop the uncontrolled migration flows by simultaneously creating a uniform and effective mechanism of returning the persons who do not qualify for the international protection status and who have no legal basis to stay in the territory of the European Union.<sup>22</sup>

### 2.2. General Changes in the Migration and Asylum Area

No significant changes in the structure of the political system governing the areas of migration and asylum have taken place in 2015. In the context of the new Asylum Law<sup>23</sup>, changes have been made in the distribution of functions between the institutions involved in the asylum procedure in Latvia. Conducting personal interviews to assess compliance of the application with the criteria for granting the refugee or alternative status has been taken over from the State Border Guard by the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs.

#### Discussions in the Area of Asylum

The main discussion in the Parliament, the Government and the wider public was related to the relocation<sup>24</sup> and resettlement of the asylum seekers set forth in the EU Council decisions<sup>25</sup>,<sup>26</sup> and the conclusions<sup>27</sup> of the representatives of the Member States' Governments<sup>28</sup>,<sup>29</sup>. A part of the

<sup>20</sup> Statement of the Prime Minister Laimdota Straujuma. Available at: <http://www.mk.gov.lv/lv/aktualitates/ministru-prezidentes-laimdotas-strajumas-pazinojums-0>. [researched on 07.12.2015.]

<sup>21</sup> The Government of Māris Kučinskis starts its work.-Available at: <http://www.mk.gov.lv/lv/aktualitates/darbu-sak-mara-kucinska-valdiba>. [viewed on 13.02.2016.]

<sup>22</sup> Declaration regarding the proposed actions of the Cabinet of Ministers led by Māris Kučinskis. Available at: [http://www.mk.gov.lv/sites/default/files/editor/20160210\\_mkucinskis\\_vald\\_prior\\_gala\\_vers\\_0.pdf](http://www.mk.gov.lv/sites/default/files/editor/20160210_mkucinskis_vald_prior_gala_vers_0.pdf). [researched on 15.02.2016.]

<sup>23</sup> Asylum Law.- Latvijas Vēstnesis, No. 2, 05.01.2016 - [came into force on 19.01.2016]

<sup>24</sup> Relocation - relocation of the applicants for international protection between the European Union Member States.

<sup>25</sup> Council Decision (EU) 2015/1523 of 14 September 2015 establishing provisional measures in the area of international protection for the benefit of Italy and of Greece. - Official Journal, L 239/146, 15.09.2015.

<sup>26</sup> Council Decision (EU) 2015/1601 of 22 September 2015 establishing provisional measures in the area of international protection for the benefit of Italy and of Greece. - Official Journal, L 248/80, 24.09.2015.

<sup>27</sup> Outcome of the council meeting. Available at: <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/jha/2015/07/20/>. [viewed on 21.04.2016.]

<sup>28</sup> Resettlement - **resettlement** of persons in need of international protection from the Middle East, the Horn of Africa and North Africa to the European Union Member States and the Dublin system associated states.

<sup>29</sup> The Cabinet of Ministers of Latvia has adopted a political decision regarding the reception of 776 asylum seekers.

public in Latvia supports reception of asylum seekers by organising charity campaigns<sup>30</sup> and rallies, but a part of the public is against the reception of asylum seekers by emphasising the negative historical experience of the Latvia in their rallies<sup>31</sup>. In December 2015, the Research Centre SKDS gathered data to determine the attitude of residents of Latvia towards the reception of asylum seekers in Latvia. 78.3% of respondents were against the reception of asylum seekers from the Middle East and North Africa. Only 15.7% of respondents believe that Latvia should admit asylum seekers.<sup>32</sup>

The crisis in the EU in the area of asylum generally generated the unprecedented interest in asylum matters and their impact on society as a whole as well as in-depth discussions between all parties involved both in the course of development and adoption of the new Asylum Law, and when discussing the issues related to relocation of the asylum seekers. The key issues during the discussions were about the challenges related to the asylum seekers: the conditions for accommodation and social support provided to them during the asylum procedure as well as the challenges related to the integration of persons after receiving international protection status: learning the language and involvement in the labour market, the amount and conditions for receipt of benefits provided by the state.<sup>33</sup>

As the result of discussions, on 22 December 2015, the Cabinet of Ministers adopted the Regulation No. 792 "Amendments to the 22 April 2014 Regulation of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 210 "Regulations regarding the benefit for a refugee and a person that has been granted alternative status""<sup>34</sup>. This Regulation reduces the amount of benefit<sup>35</sup> for the refugee and the person with alternative status.

### Action Plan

On 22 July 2015, by the Decree of the Prime Minister No. 306 "About the working group"<sup>36</sup> a working group was set up with the task to develop, after evaluating the experience of other countries, a suitable model for Latvia for the reception of asylum seekers from other countries, as well as for the integration of refugees and persons with alternative status in Latvia.<sup>37</sup>

The working group formed by the Government prepared and on 2 December 2015 by Decree No. 759 the Cabinet of Ministers approved the action plan for the relocation and receipt in Latvia of persons in need of international protection. The action plan provides for the aggregate of measures to be taken by the Ministries of the Interior, Welfare, Health, Education and Science and Culture in cooperation with non-governmental organisations to ensure the rights provided by legal acts to the asylum seekers and persons that have been granted the international protection status. The provisions of the action plan will apply to all asylum seekers and persons that have received international protection status, irrespective of type of their arrival in Latvia.

### Irregular Migration

Lately, the number of irregular immigrants that are trying to arrive in Latvia by crossing the borders of Russia and Belarus has increased. They mostly are citizens of Vietnam, but during recent months many detained are Iraqi nationals and representatives from Afghanistan have been found as well. This increasingly worrying trend has encouraged the Minister of the Interior Rihards

<sup>30</sup>Associations and foundations regarding refugees. - Available at: <http://providus.lv/article/biedribas-un-nodibinajumi-par-begliem>. [researched on 15.09.2015.]

<sup>31</sup> One person detained during the campaign against the reception of refugees at the Government. - Available at: <http://www.irir.lv/2015/8/4/akcija-pret-beglu-uznemsanu-pie-valdibas-viens-aizturetais>. [viewed on 04.08.2015.]

<sup>32</sup> Study: The society does not want migrants. Against refugees – 78.3%. -Available at: <http://nra.lv/latvija/159845-petijums-sabiedriba-migrantus-negrib-pret-begliem-78-3.htm>

<sup>33</sup> Source: Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs

<sup>34</sup> 22 December 2015 Regulation of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 792 "Amendments to the 22 April 2014 Regulation of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 210 "Regulations regarding the benefit for a refugee and a person that has been granted alternative status"". - Latvijas Vēstnesis, No. 254, 30.12.2015. [came into force on 01.01.2016.]

<sup>35</sup> From EUR 256.12 to EUR 139.00 per month.

<sup>36</sup> 22 July 2015 Decree of the Prime Minister No. 306 "About the working group". -Latvijas Vēstnesis No. 142, 23.07.2015.

<sup>37</sup> Head of the working group - State Secretary of the Ministry of the Interior; working group members: State Secretaries of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Welfare, Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development and Ministry of Economics.

Kozlovskis to bring up the issue of more severe penalties for the caught carriers of irregular immigrants by mentioning the example of Greece, where punishment for each illegally transported person can reach up to 10 years in prison.<sup>38</sup> To implement this task, the State Border Guard prepared the draft law "Amendments to the Criminal Law"<sup>39</sup> that provides for increasing punishment for illegal movement of persons across the border. The Parliament approved this draft amendment on 21 January 2016.<sup>40</sup>

### 2.3. Latvia's Presidency of the Council of the European Union

Latvia acquired the status of the state presiding the Council of the European Union on 1 January 2015 by taking over the "baton" from Italy. Latvia's Presidency of the EU Council has used all possibilities provided to it and has achieved considerable progress in the priorities put forward: *Competitive Europe, Digital Europe and Involved Europe*, while being able at the same time to provide immediate and quality response to challenges to the internal security of the EU and the EU migration and asylum policy. The following were involved in solving migration and asylum issue in the Presidency activities: Ministry of the Interior, Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs, the State Border Guard, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Consular Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

During Latvia's Presidency of the Council of the European Union, 6 events in the areas of migration and asylum took place in Latvia:

- The Informal meeting of Standing Committee on Operational Cooperation on Internal Security (COSI<sup>41</sup>) took place on 6 and 7 May. The meeting was attended by the EU Member States, the justice and home affairs agencies of the European Free Trade Area and the European Union, the European External Action Service, the European Commission and the General Secretariat of the Council of the European Union. The meeting discussed the renewed EU Internal Security Strategy - the European Agenda on Security<sup>42</sup> for the period 2015-2020.
- The EU-US meeting on the justice and home affairs ministerial level took place on 2 and 3 June. During the meeting, the issues were discussed regarding the EU-US cooperation in the field of justice and home affairs: migration, personal data protection issues, judicial cooperation, foreign combatants, fight against terrorism and organised crime.
- A meeting of the Eastern Partnership migration and asylum expert panel on legal labour issues co-organised by representatives from Latvia was successfully held in Minsk on 6 and 7 May 2015;
- To stop the irregular migration flows and to address the root causes of these flows, preventive and comprehensive cooperation with countries of origin and transit of migrants, development cooperation as well as strengthening the EU delegations in third countries was implemented. In the Foreign Affairs Council meeting on 26 May 2015 the EU development ministers stressed the importance of development cooperation and agreed that there is a need for comprehensive approach and concrete actions particularly focusing on fighting the root causes of migration;
- A meeting of the Eastern Partnership Integrated Border Management experts was organised in Riga on 16 June 2015. During the panel discussions, attention was devoted to the latest topical issues: the challenges of irregular migration, border security, customs issues, transit procedures and transport networks of the Eastern partner countries;<sup>43</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Irregular immigrants have entered Latvia, who had been involved in criminal activities in their own country. -Available at: <http://apollo.tvnet.lv/zinas/latvija-iekluvusi-nelegalie-imigranti-kuri-sava-valsti-bijusi-iesaistiti-kriminalas-darbibas/707678>. [viewed on 09.10.2015.]

<sup>39</sup> Adopted by the Parliament in the 1st reading on 8 October 2015.

<sup>40</sup> Draft Law "Amendments to the Criminal Law." -Available at: <http://titania.saeima.lv/LIVS12/SaeimaLIVS12.nsf/0/30EDC058E283C869C2257F6A003B9620?OpenDocument>. (viewed on 22.01.2016.)

<sup>41</sup> Standing Committee on Operational Cooperation on Internal Security

<sup>42</sup> *European Agenda on Security*.

<sup>43</sup> Results of Latvia's Presidency of the Council of the European Union. -Available at: [https://eu2015.lv/images/news/EU2015LV\\_rezultati\\_lv.pdf](https://eu2015.lv/images/news/EU2015LV_rezultati_lv.pdf). [viewed on 14.03.2016.]

- 19 and 20 March 2015 Riga hosted the Annual Conference of the European Migration Network “Attracting and Retaining Talent in Europe”.<sup>44</sup>

The Conference brought up the one of the priorities defined by the President of the European Commission Jaen-Claude Juncker in the context of migration. It foresees the development of such policy of legal migration for Europe to become one of the favourite destinations for talented migrants, thus addressing the economic growth and demographic problems that Europe could face in the future.

Five panel discussions were held within the Conference: global challenges in talent attraction; readiness of the EU to attract talented migrants by competing with other countries; EU and national policies to attract talent; role of the host culture to retain talented migrants in the EU; perspective of the countries of origin and migrants.

During the discussion the Conference participants also discussed the issues of cooperation of business representatives and the social partners in attracting talented migrants in Europe as well as the improvement of educational system and other public services for immigrants and their families.

The main conclusion of the Conference was that EU migration policies need to incorporate an external dimension that involves cooperation with third countries by developing interaction in the areas of migration, employment and social policies.

The Conference was attended by high level officials: William Lacy Swing, Director General of the IOM, Belinda Pyke, European Commission, Directorate-General of Migration and Home Affairs, Director of Migration and Mobility as well as migration issue experts, researchers and scientists from Latvia and other EU Member States, and experts from New Zealand, Canada and India.

During Latvia's Presidency of the Council of the European Union, the following results were achieved in the areas of migration and asylum:

- The Council of the EU (Coreper II) approved the mandate of the Council for the amendments of the Dublin Regulation (604/2013) for the triilogue with the European Parliament;
- The first common agenda on migration and mobility (CAMM), between the EU and Nigeria, was signed within the framework of the Council of Justice and Home Affairs of 12 and 13 March 2015;
- On 12 June 2015 Coreper II, and on 15 June the Council approved the draft Declaration for the Mobility Partnership with Belarus. [The EU and Belarus have agreed on the content of the Declaration.]
- The first compromise proposals for amendments to the Visa Code, which were discussed in the March - June visa working group meetings, were developed during the Presidency. Compromise was reached on certain issues.
- Reviewing the initial proposals for the Travelling visa was completed.
- A triologue with the European Parliament was launched regarding the draft student/scholar directive: the first informal meeting took place, technical meetings took place nearly every week since February, as did 3 political triologues.
- On 25 February 2015 Coreper II, and on 2 March the Council approved the changes in the mandate of the Commission for negotiations with Belarus on visa facilitation agreement (to cancel visa requirements for holders of diplomatic passports);
- Work was completed on a number of EU and third-country agreements in the area of visas:
  - visa-free agreements were signed and began to apply with the United Arab Emirates, East Timor, Grenada, Dominica, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Samoa, Trinidad and Tobago and Vanuatu;

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<sup>44</sup>Conference of the European Migration Network “Attracting and Retaining Talent in Europe”. -Available at: <http://www.emn.lv/?p=1736>. [viewed on 18.004.2016.]

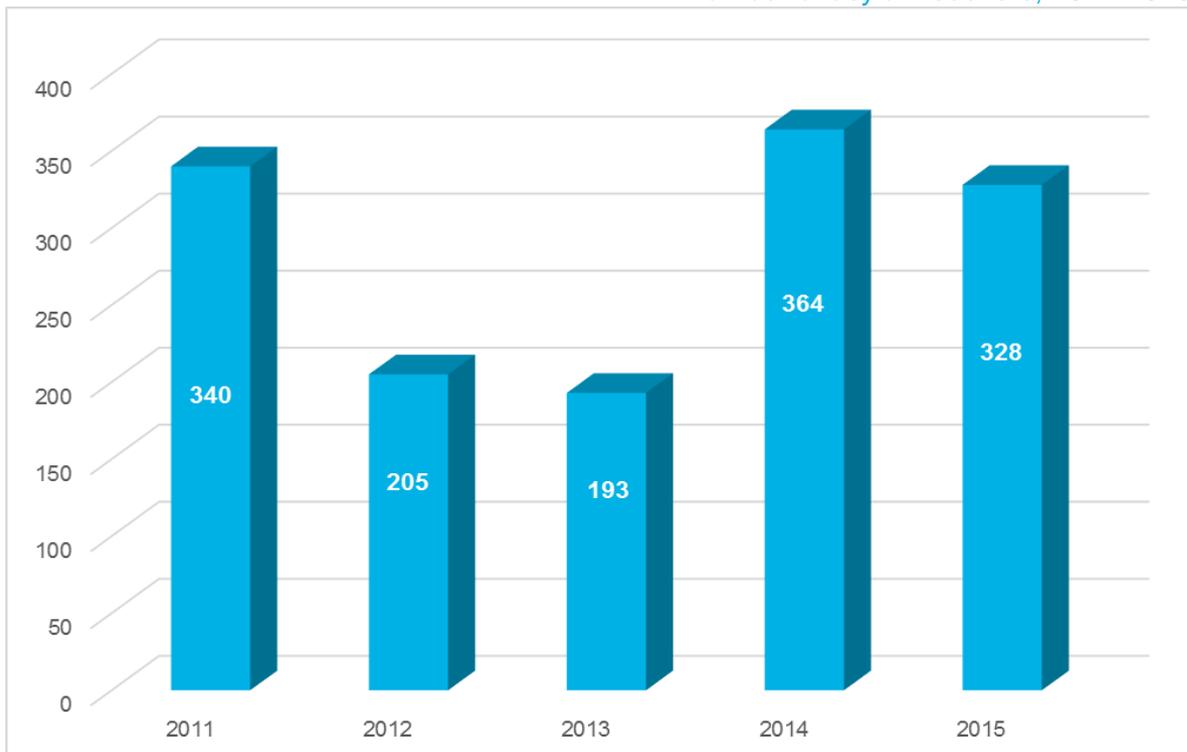
- negotiations were completed and visa-free agreements were initialled with Peru and Colombia.
- On 5 February 2015, Coreper II approved the new timetable for the launch of the Visa Information System (VIS roll-out);
- Agreement was reached about the termination of operation of the Schengen Consultation Network (VISION).

### 3. INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION AND ASYLUM

Compared to 2014, the number of asylum seekers in 2015 has slightly decreased to 328<sup>45</sup> (364 in 2014). In 2015, compared to the previous years, increase is evident in the number of asylum seekers from Iraq - 86 (21 in 2014), Vietnam - 82 (11 in 2014), Afghanistan - 34 (13 in 2014) while it has decreased from Ukraine – 47 (75 in 2014) and Georgia - 29 (166 in 2014).

Schedule 3-1

Number of asylum seekers, 2011-2015



Only 9% of the applicants for asylum requested it at border crossing points. While 199 persons requested the asylum only after they were detained for illegal crossing of the "green" border. Upon arrival to the Asylum Seeker Centre Mucenieki, a large portion of such persons tried to leave it to go to their destination countries in Western Europe. Most asylum applicants are abusing this procedure by requesting it only after detention to avoid removal. Within the asylum procedure, they used Latvia only as a transit country to go further to Western European countries.

#### 3.1. International Protection Procedures

During 2015, changes were made to the allocation of functions in the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs, which is the main administrative body in the context of the asylum procedure. The previously existing Asylum Affairs Division was split into two separate Divisions: The Asylum Affairs Division is responsible for the asylum procedure issues with respect to consideration of the application for asylum, but the Asylum Seekers Accommodation Division provides for accommodation for asylum seekers.<sup>46</sup>

A new Asylum Law was adopted on 17 December 2015<sup>47</sup>. It was developed to introduce the following requirements of the EU laws:

<sup>45</sup> There were 328 first-time applications and 2 repeated ones for granting the refugee or alternative status received in 2015.

<sup>46</sup> Source: Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs

<sup>47</sup> Asylum Law.- Latvijas Vēstnesis, No. 2, 05.01.2016 - [came into force on 19.01.2016]

- Directive 2013/32/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 on common procedures for granting and withdrawing international protection<sup>48</sup> (revised version, hereinafter the Directive 2013/32/EU);
- Directive 2013/33/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 laying down standards for the reception of applicants for international protection<sup>49</sup> (revised version, hereinafter the Directive 2013/33/EU);

The law was developed to determine the aspects related to the application of the following Regulations:

- Regulation (EU) No 604/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 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<sup>50</sup> (revised version, hereinafter the Regulation No. 604/2013);
- Regulation (EU) No 603/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 on the establishment of 'Eurodac' for the comparison of fingerprints for the effective application of 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 and on requests for the comparison with Eurodac data by Member States' law enforcement authorities and Europol for law enforcement purposes, and amending Regulation (EU) No 1077/2011 establishing a European Agency for the operational management of large-scale IT systems in the area of freedom, security and justice<sup>51</sup> (revised version, hereinafter the Regulation No. 603/2013).

The new Asylum Law entered into force on 19 January 2016. The Law introduces or clarifies the following terms used in the area of asylum according to the definitions in the Directives 2013/32/EU and 2013/33/EU: application for international protection, vulnerable person, asylum seeker requiring specific procedural guarantees, asylum seeker with special reception needs, detention of the asylum seeker, material reception conditions.

To ensure the effectiveness of the asylum procedure, when the number of asylum seekers has substantially increased, and to prevent its abuse, the law lays down a special procedure for the examination of the application if the application is filed at the border crossing point or transit zone and there are conditions for making a decision on the abandonment of the application without examination.

In accordance with the provisions of the law, the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs takes over the interviewing of the asylum seeker regarding the substance of his application from the State Border Guard.

Crisis in the EU in the area of asylum caused delays in adoption of the draft law because it generated unprecedented interest in asylum matters and their impact on society in general, and in-depth discussions between all parties involved. In the light of the above, a provision has been incorporated in the new Asylum Law, which sets forth that in matters concerning the reception of asylum seekers in Latvia from other Member States or third countries in response to the extraordinary influx of asylum seekers at the external borders of the European Union, within the

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<sup>48</sup> Directive 2013/32/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 on common procedures for granting and withdrawing international protection (revised version). Official Journal, L 180, 29.06.2013.

<sup>49</sup> Directive 2013/33/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 laying down standards for the reception of applicants for international protection (revised version). Official Journal, L 180, 29.06.2013.

<sup>50</sup> Regulation (EU) No 604/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 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

<sup>51</sup> Regulation (EU) No 603/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 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 Official Journal, L 180, 29.06.2013.

developed asylum seeker relocation or resettlement mechanisms as well as within the development of such mechanisms, the Cabinet of Ministers shall adopt resolutions and shall express the position of the Republic of Latvia (including in the EU institutions) based on the decision of the Parliament.

On 22 December 2015, the Cabinet of Ministers adopted the Regulation No. 792 "Amendments to the 22 April 2014 Regulation of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 210 "Regulations regarding the benefit for a refugee and a person that has been granted alternative status""<sup>52</sup>. This Regulation reduces the amount of benefit for the refugee and the person with alternative status. The Benefit was reduced upon assessing fiscal possibilities of the national budget and the expected increase in the number of asylum seekers over a prolonged period of time.<sup>53</sup>

On 5 April 2016, the Cabinet of Ministers adopted the "Amendments to 17 December 2013 Regulation of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 1529 "Procedure of health care organisation and financing", which set forth that the following health care services for asylum seekers shall be paid for from the national budget funds: emergency medical assistance, childbirth assistance, dental assistance in acute cases, primary health care, psychiatric help and medical assistance to minors, as well as the events specified in the Epidemiological Safety Law and medications required for tuberculosis treatment.<sup>54</sup>

### 3.2. Acceptance of Applicants for International Protection

The new Asylum Law<sup>55</sup> sets forth that a person is entitled to express the wish to obtain the status of refugee or alternative status verbally also to the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs, the State Police and the Prison Administration. In such event the official of the authority concerned shall immediately contact the State Border Guard that shall perform the activities to enable the asylum seeker filing the application and the State being able to register such. If there are indications that a third-country national or a stateless person, who is located at the border crossing point or at the border crossing transit zone at the external borders of Latvia, or is in the place of detention, could express the wish to obtain the refugee or alternative status (the person is afraid to return to the country of origin or there are other circumstances indicating the need for international protection), the State Border Guard, the State Police or the Prison Administration shall provide him/her with the information about the opportunity to do so. Previously, a third-country national could not request the refugee or alternative status verbally.

The State Border Guard shall register the application of the asylum seekers not later than within three business days after receiving such. If the application is simultaneously filed by a large number of third - country nationals or stateless persons and it is not possible to observe the term of three business days, the term for registration of the application may be extended up to 10 business days. A person, with respect to which final decision is made regarding the refusal to grant the refugee or alternative status, is entitled to file a repeated application with the State Border Guard. A person is obliged to indicate in the repeated application the evidence that demonstrate that circumstances, upon which the respective decision was based, have changed considerably.

In early 2016, the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs started to implement the project "Support measures for reception and accommodation in Latvia of persons in need of international protection". The aim of the project is to raise standards of reception of asylum seekers in the Asylum Seekers Accommodation Centre and to strengthen the capacity of the asylum procedure. The project is implemented from 1 January 2016 to 31 December 2017. Activities planned in the project:

<sup>52</sup> 22 December 2015 Regulation of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 792 "Amendments to the 22 April 2014 Regulation of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 210 "Regulations regarding the benefit for a refugee and a person that has been granted alternative status"". - Latvijas Vēstnesis, No. 254, 30.12.2015. [came into force on 01.01.2016.]

<sup>53</sup> Pursuant to Subparagraph 3.4 of the Action Plan for the Relocation and Receipt in Latvia of Persons in Need of International Protection.

<sup>54</sup> 5 April 2016. Regulation of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 202 of "Amendments to 17 December 2013 Regulation of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 1529 "Procedure of health care organisation and financing"". - Latvijas Vēstnesis, No. 67, 07.04.2016. [came into force on 08.04.2016.]

<sup>55</sup> Asylum Law.- Latvijas Vēstnesis, No. 2, 05.01.2016 - [came into force on 19.01.2016]

- support for asylum seekers (material, psychological, medical, informational assistance, translation);
- adaptation of the Asylum Seekers Accommodation Centre for a larger number of asylum seekers (building construction, equipment);
- equipment of the Asylum Seekers Accommodation Centre building "*Bunduliši*";
- purchase of vehicles to provide for the needs of asylum seekers, for the work of the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs in the field of asylum;
- training of staff involved in the area of asylum (EU training, forums, seminars);
- equipment of premises for interviewing asylum seekers;
- 24-hour security of buildings and the territory of the Asylum Seekers Accommodation Centre.

The performed activities will result in increased standards and capacity of reception of asylum seekers as well as reduced pressure of asylum applicants on migration and asylum systems of other EU Member States.<sup>56</sup>

To move the asylum seekers to Latvia, liaison officers or coordinators for cooperation with Italy and Greece have been appointed.

At the end of December 2015, two liaison officers went to Greece and they are carrying out inquiries about the existence of files of persons appropriate to the profile of Latvia, and have started cooperation with the European Asylum Office, representatives of UNHCR and IOM in Greece.<sup>57</sup>

Latvia has successfully launched the implementation of the EU relocation programme:

- The first two asylum seeker families were relocated to Latvia on 5 February 2016 (Eritreans and Syrians, six people altogether)<sup>58</sup>;
- Four families were relocated to Latvia on 13 April 2016 (from Iraq and Syria, 15 people altogether);<sup>59</sup>
- On 18 April 2016, 2 Eritreans were relocated to Latvia from Italy.<sup>60</sup>

## Use of the EMN Results

On 17-18 March 2016 the EMN Latvian contact point organised the expert workshop in Riga on the language learning and civil integration possibilities and requirements faced by different categories of third-country nationals in other countries<sup>61</sup>. Representatives from the institutions involved in the process of integration of third-country nationals from Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia participated in the seminar. Representatives from the countries that already have considerable experience in organising integration activities: Austria, Denmark, Finland, Great Britain participated as experts, and there was also an expert from Moldova. Thomas Huddleston, Migration Policy Group Programme Director, provided an overview of the requirements imposed by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Member States and the support provided to migrants in the area of language learning and integration.

The event was organised in cooperation with the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

<sup>56</sup> According to the information provided by the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs.

<sup>57</sup> Criteria for the reception of asylum seekers have been sent to Greece; cooperation coordinators appointed.

Available at: [http://www.iem.gov.lv/lat/patveruma\\_mekletaji\\_es\\_un\\_latvija/?doc=30928](http://www.iem.gov.lv/lat/patveruma_mekletaji_es_un_latvija/?doc=30928). [viewed on 19.04.2016.]

<sup>58</sup> Latvia has relocated two families from Greece under the EU relocation programme. Available at: [http://www.iem.gov.lv/lat/aktualitates/informacija\\_medijiem/?doc=31080](http://www.iem.gov.lv/lat/aktualitates/informacija_medijiem/?doc=31080) [viewed on 06.02.2016.]

<sup>59</sup> Latvia has relocated four families from Greece under the EU relocation programme. Available at: [http://www.iem.gov.lv/lat/aktualitates/informacija\\_medijiem/?doc=31452](http://www.iem.gov.lv/lat/aktualitates/informacija_medijiem/?doc=31452). [viewed on 14.04.2016.]

<sup>60</sup> Two more asylum seekers from Eritrea have arrived in Latvia on Monday evening. Available at: <http://www.diena.lv/latvija/zinas/pirmdienas-vakara-latvija-ieradusies-vel-divi-patveruma-mekletaji-no-eritrejas-14137628>. [viewed on 19.04.2016.]

<sup>61</sup> Expert seminar on the integration of migrants. Available at: <http://www.emn.lv/?p=2286> [viewed on 23.03.2016.]

### 3.3. Integration of Asylum Seekers, Refugees and Persons with Alternative Status

In summer 2015, the inter-institutional working group<sup>62</sup> was established, the purpose of which was to develop a system suitable for the conditions of Latvia for the reception of asylum seekers as well as for integration of refugees and persons that have acquired alternative status in Latvia. Results of the governmental working group were required in order to prepare for participation in the relocation activities and to receive the persons in need of international protection in accordance with the provisions of the Council resolutions<sup>63,64</sup>. The working group formed by the Government prepared and on 2 December 2015 by the Decree No. 759 the Cabinet of Ministers approved the action plan for the relocation and receipt in Latvia of persons in need of international protection.<sup>65</sup>

The objective of the Action Plan is to develop a system suitable for the Latvian circumstances for the reception of asylum seekers, as well as social and economic inclusion of refugees and persons that have acquired alternative status. The Action Plan includes three lines of action: selection, relocation and resettlement of persons, reception and accommodation of asylum seekers as well as measures for social and economic inclusion.

To prepare for the implementation of the Action Plan, several events took place in 2015. Training of social work specialists from municipal social services and other social service providers established by local governments was implemented within the project "Development of Professional Social Work in Municipalities" carried out by the Ministry of Welfare. In 2016, it is planned to start the development of methodologies for the social workers of municipal social services to work with various client target groups, including refugees and asylum seekers.<sup>66</sup>

In the end of 2015 the State Employment Agency implemented a pilot project, within which it provided information about employment opportunities in Latvia to asylum seekers.

On 11 September 2015, the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs agreed on cooperation with charity organisations *Ziedot.lv*, *Caritas Latvija* and *Svētā Jāņa Palīdzība*. During the meeting, solutions were found to provide material support to asylum seekers staying in the Asylum Seekers Accommodation Centre Mucenieki.<sup>67</sup>

With the financial support from the Ministry of Culture, the society Shelter "Safe House" has issued the informative booklet about Latvia intended for the asylum seekers.<sup>68</sup> The informative booklet has been prepared in three languages: Latvian, English and Arabic. One thousand copies of the booklet have been prepared.<sup>69</sup>

In the study performed by the UNHCR Regional Representation for Northern Europe in 2015, it is recommended to establish a coordinating institution in Latvia that could provide assistance to the persons that have received international protection.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>62</sup> 22 July 2015 Ordinance of the Prime Minister No. 306 "About the working group". -Latvijas Vēstnesis No. 142, 23.07.2015.

<sup>63</sup> Council Decision (EU) 2015/1523 (14 September 2015) establishing provisional measures in the area of international protection for the benefit of Italy and of Greece. - Official Journal, No. L 239. 15.09.2015.

<sup>64</sup> Council Decision (EU) 2015/1601 (22 September 2015) establishing provisional measures in the area of international protection for the benefit of Italy and of Greece. - Official Journal, No. L 248. 24.09.2015.

<sup>65</sup> 2 December 2015 Ordinance of the Cabinet of Ministers of No. 759 "Action Plan for the Relocation and Receipt in Latvia of Persons in Need of International Protection" - Latvijas Vēstnesis, No. 238.04.12.2015 - [came into force on 02.12.2015.]

<sup>66</sup> According to the information provided by the Ministry of Welfare.

<sup>67</sup> Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs will cooperate with charity organisations to help asylum seekers. - Available at: [http://www.iem.gov.lv/lat/aktualitates/informacija\\_medijiem/?doc=30454](http://www.iem.gov.lv/lat/aktualitates/informacija_medijiem/?doc=30454). [viewed on 15.09.2015.]

<sup>68</sup> The booklet provides general information about Latvia by informing about the largest cities, currency, official language, number of population and its ethnic composition as well as the bordering countries and political system of Latvia.

<sup>69</sup> An informative booklet about Latvia devoted to asylum seekers has been issued. - Available at: [http://www.km.gov.lv/lv/jaunumi/?news\\_id=7227](http://www.km.gov.lv/lv/jaunumi/?news_id=7227). [viewed on 19.04.2016.] on 15.01.2016.]

<sup>70</sup> Study performed by the UNHCR Regional Representation for Northern Europe "Integration of refugees in Latvia: Participation and Empowerment", 2015. Available at: [http://www.unhcr-northern-europe.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Documents/PDF/Latvia/2015-Latvia-Integration-Report.pdf](http://www.unhcr-northern-europe.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Documents/PDF/Latvia/2015-Latvia-Integration-Report.pdf). [viewed on 19.10.2015.]

In the open project proposal selection within the EU Asylum, Migration and Integration fund in spring 2016 it is planned to implement the project “Service Coordination and Information Centre for Supporting Immigrants”, where it is planned to develop a functional information exchange and coordination centre by providing for regional coverage and developing cooperation with local governments and specialists of those local governments where third - country nationals are residing. It is planned to offer and provide in the Centre the consultation for the target group in social, legal, education, employment and other issues as well as consultations of the psychologist.<sup>71</sup>

### 3.4. Measures for the Implementation of the Common European Asylum System

#### Training

Employees of the Asylum Affairs Division of the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs have participated in training organised by EASO<sup>72</sup>: 2 experts mastered the Evidence Assessment module, 1 expert – the Exclusion<sup>73</sup> module, and 4 experts participated in the regional training Interview Techniques.

#### Use of the EMN Results

Officials of the Asylum Affairs Division of the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs used the summaries of ad-hoc questions of the European Migration Network in their work. A summary of replies from Member States to the Finnish contact point ad-hoc question about the asylum seekers from Iraq was particularly useful in 2015. It provided useful information about policies and practices of other EU Member States in providing international protection to asylum seekers from Iraq.

## 4. UNACCOMPANIED MINORS AND OTHER VULNERABLE GROUPS<sup>74</sup>

During 2015, 26<sup>75</sup> unaccompanied minors entered Latvia and were detained for stay in Latvia without valid travel documents. Of them, 12<sup>76</sup> unaccompanied minors requested asylum in Latvia. Compared to 2014, the number of unaccompanied minors has increased almost 3 times, however, it remains very small in comparison with other EU Member States. Increase in numbers of unaccompanied minors may be explained with the increase of the total number of detained irregular migrants.

In relation to the development of the new Asylum Law, the involved institutions particularised mutual distribution of duties and functions in the work with unaccompanied minors (looking for the family, election of guardian, accommodation, funding for accommodation, education, etc.) by paying special attention to the identification of unaccompanied minors that could be victims of human trafficking.

It is planned to make amendments to the legal acts providing legal framework for the reception, accommodation and return to the host country of the minor third-country nationals that are in Latvia unaccompanied by their legal representatives as well as setting forth the procedure of their accommodation during organisation of their removal procedure.

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<sup>71</sup> Source: Ministry of Culture

<sup>72</sup> EASO-European Asylum Support Office.

<sup>73</sup> Exclusion

<sup>74</sup> Vulnerable persons - minors, unaccompanied minors, disabled people, elderly people, pregnant women, single parents with minor children, victims of human trafficking, persons with serious illnesses, persons with mental disorders and persons who have been subjected to torture, rape or other serious forms of psychological, physical or sexual violence, such as victims of female genital mutilation. The definition of "Vulnerable persons" has been included in the redrafted Acceptance Directive.

<sup>75</sup> Source of data: State Border Guard.

<sup>76</sup> Source of data: Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs

The new Asylum Law now clearly defines the criteria determining which asylum seekers are deemed vulnerable<sup>77</sup> and have special procedural and accommodation needs as well as defines the rights of such persons during the asylum procedure.

## 5. LEGAL MIGRATION AND MOBILITY

The total number of temporary residence permits issued for the first time has decreased in 2015 by a third compared to the previous year, 6293 (9803 in 2014). The decrease is explained by the amendments to the Immigration Law<sup>78</sup> that significantly increase the value of the real property, upon purchase of which a third-country national may apply for receipt of the temporary residence permit.<sup>79</sup>

There were 1,477 temporary residence permits issued to the citizens of Ukraine for the first time in 2015, which slightly exceeds the number of temporary residence permits issued in 2014 (1,199).<sup>80</sup> Experts explain that Ukrainian citizens are entering Latvia mostly in connection with employment (1077 temporary residence permits issued for the first time in connection with the work) and family reunification. Ukrainian citizens are employed in areas where Latvia lacks manpower: ship building, IT sector and truck driving. Additional encouragement for leaving is the unsafe political and economic situation in Ukraine.

### Use of the EMN Results

The EMN Latvian contact point has developed a small-scale research work "Change of the immigration status and purpose of stay: review of Latvia's approach"<sup>81</sup>, which covers the field of legal immigration that regulates the right of third-country nationals to change the purpose of stay without leaving Latvia.

The purpose of the small-scale research work is to look at the criteria for issuing particular types of residence permits<sup>82</sup> by comparing and confronting such, to describe the legal framework of Latvia that allows legally admitted third-country nationals to transfer from one purpose of stay to another. The main conclusions of the research work:

- Latvian legal acts governing immigration allow a wide range of change of the purpose of stay;
- Statistics show that, overall, a numerically frequent change of the purpose of stay is not observed in Latvia;
- A wider range of social rights is available to persons involved in the asylum procedure and the victims of human trafficking, the other categories of third - country nationals receive employment-related social benefits;
- More extensive rights to unlimited employment can be obtained by third - country nationals, the purpose of stay of which is family reunification and those who have received residence permits as business owners and investors;
- More extensive mobility rights are received by these third - country nationals who change the purpose of stay to scientific activities, education and the EU Blue card;

<sup>77</sup> Minors, disabled persons, persons of the age, upon reaching which a retirement pension is granted in Latvia, pregnant women, a parent with a minor child, victims of human trafficking, persons requiring special care due to state of health, persons with mental disorders, persons that have been subjected to torture, rape or other forms of serious psychological, physical or sexual abuse, or other specially protected persons whose ability to use rights and perform the duties during the asylum procedure are limited

<sup>78</sup> Law "Amendments to the Immigration Law" - Latvijas Vēstnesis, No. 98, 22.05.2014. - [came into force on 01.09.2014.]

<sup>79</sup> Before the amendments to the Immigration Law entered into force, a third-country national was entitled to request a temporary residence permit for five years ago if he had purchased and owned one or several real properties in Riga planning region or the republican cities, the total real property value of which was not less than LVL 100,000 (~ EUR 142,287), one or several real properties outside of Riga planning region or the republican cities and the total real property value was not less than LVL 50,000 (~EUR 71,143).

<sup>80</sup> Source of data: Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs

<sup>81</sup> www.emn.lv

<sup>82</sup> Family, education, research, the EU Blue card, a highly qualified employee, employee, self-employed, entrepreneur, seasonal worker, an employee transferred within the company, investor, a long-term visa holder, asylum seeker, a victim of human trafficking.

- The greatest challenge of any change of purpose of stay is the ability of the immigrant to meet the statutory time limit, i.e. to change the status during the term of validity of the previous residence permit.

## 5.1. Economic Migration

In 2015, the number of residence permits issued to third - country nationals for the first time for the purpose of employment, compared to 2014 (971), has grown by two thirds - 1639. Overall, in 2015 the right to employment was granted to 4,808 third-country nationals (3,218 in 2014), most of whom are employed in land transportation and pipeline transportation sectors (2,287), production of other means of transport (336), software programming and consulting sector (301), catering services (200) and building construction sector (144).<sup>83</sup>

Table 5-1  
The total number and the number of employment-related,  
initially issued residence permits, 2010-2015<sup>84</sup>

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
<b>Employment - related</b>	397	519	597	737	971	1,639
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,329</b>	<b>3,982</b>	<b>4,579</b>	<b>6,609</b>	<b>3,218</b>	<b>4,808</b>

The Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs has developed a draft law "Amendments to the Immigration Law" where it is envisaged to set forth in Section 9 that students may work for 20 hours per week.<sup>85</sup> Students enrolled in the last year of Masters or PhD studies will be able to work without time limitation.

The Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs has developed a draft Conceptual Report on Immigration Policy.<sup>86</sup> Coordination of the report with other institutions has been started at the beginning of 2016 and after the receipt of the opinions it will be submitted to the Cabinet of Ministers.

There are several incentives foreseen for the employees from third countries in the draft Conceptual Report on Immigration Policy<sup>87</sup>:

- to develop and regularly renew the list of professions where substantial labour shortages have been found, and not apply the labour market test to a third - country national in those professions;
- not to apply the labour market test in respect of a third - country national who has been employed in Latvia for at least two years;
- to allow third - country nationals who have stayed in Latvia for at least a year in connection with employment to change employers and not to revoke the residence permit until finding a new employer, if the period of unemployment does not last for more than two months and the third - country national continues the work corresponding to the position held by him/her earlier;
- to cancel the requirement to receive new entitlement to employment for a third - country national changing the position within a company after six months of employment in it;

<sup>83</sup> Source of data: Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs

<sup>84</sup> Source of data: 2009-2012 – Eurostat, 2013 - Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs

<sup>85</sup> Currently, it is not specified in the Immigration Law.

<sup>86</sup> In Paragraph 157.1 of the Government action plan for implementing activities intended by the Cabinet of the Ministers chaired by Laimdota Straujuma the Ministry of the Interior was given the task to develop the concept of immigration policy, <http://www.mk.gov.lv/lv/content/dokumenti>.

<sup>87</sup> Draft Conceptual Report on Immigration Policy discusses all major areas of immigration of third country nationals (family reunification, work migration, commercial activity, studies) as well as analyses the administrative procedures for the admission of third country nationals. Proposals for the improvement of the existing situation have been provided for each area, which could be included in the new draft Immigration Law that would replace the one in force now, the Immigration Law adopted on 31 October 2002.

- to set forth the minimum salary criteria - 75 percent of the average salary in the country in the previous year;

- to establish the procedure for seasonal workers and employees sent within the company are entering and staying in Latvia.

### International Cooperation

On 10 and 11 February 2016 in Riga, the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs in cooperation with the GDISC (General Directors' Immigration Services Secretariat) hosted an expert workshop on labour migration, which was attended by representatives from 12 countries as well as the representative of the OECD (Organisation for economic cooperation and development) and a representative from the TREDEA (Tampere Region Economic Development Agency). Experts in different areas shared experiences and discussed the needs of the labour market and migration as one of the ways of addressing these needs.

Experts emphasised that collaboration between employers, entrepreneurs, policy makers at both national and regional level is of great importance for facilitating growth. A representative from the TREDEA noted that the objective of Tampere in attracting foreign talent is to promote the diversity of ideas that will serve as the basis for the growth of the region.

At the same time, in the context of migrant crisis, there was a discussion about what challenges the countries will have to face to integrate the persons that have received international protection in the labour market by mentioning the recognition of their diplomas and determining their actual skills and competences as some of the examples.<sup>88</sup>

### Use of the EMN Results

The focussed study " Determining Labour Shortages and the Need for Labour Migration from Third Countries in Latvia "<sup>89</sup> developed by the EMN Latvian contact point provides an overview of the field of legal migration where the mutual link of labour shortage and migration of the labour force is characterised. Officials of the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs used the information on the experience of various Member States in determining labour shortage and using migration policy to address the labour shortage summarised in the synthesis report of the research work when developing the draft Conceptual Report on Immigration Policy. The most substantial conclusions of the research work:

- Migration policy in Latvia is not being developed with the purpose to prevent labour shortages in some specific professions;
- The current situation of the labour market in Latvia is still a challenge, new jobs are created slowly, so the discussion regarding the need to attract labour force to sustain possible medium-term or long-term needs is not the most topical issue at this moment, however, emigration from the country and the increasing trend of population ageing indicates a need for a more proactive approach to attracting highly qualified labour from third countries in future rather than the current approach, which only responds to the existing labour market needs.

## 5.2. Family Reunification

There were 2,553<sup>90</sup> residence permits issued for the first time in 2015 (4,849<sup>91</sup> in 2014) in connection with family reunification. The reduction is explained by the amendments to the Immigration Law that significantly increase the value of the real property, upon purchase of which a

<sup>88</sup> Source: Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs

<sup>89</sup> www.emn.lv

<sup>90</sup> Source of data: Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs

<sup>91</sup> Source of data: Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs

third-country national, together with the family members, may apply for receipt of the temporary residence permit.

The draft Conceptual Report on Immigration Policy, in the area of family reunification, provides for:

- granting the right to family reunification to registered partners of citizens of Latvia, non-citizens of Latvia and third - country nationals;
- granting the right to family reunification to adult age children of third - country nationals that are receiving the first temporary residence permit in Latvia while being minors;
- granting the right to employment to family members of third - country nationals if the third - country national, the principal applicant, is entitled to work in Latvia;
- granting the residence right to spouses of citizens of Latvia, non- citizens of Latvia and third - country nationals that are residing in Latvia based on the permanent residence permit, the minor children and parents of spouses as well as children of citizens of Latvia of mature age for six years and increasing the interval between the terms for registration of the residence permit;
- upon registration of the a temporary residence permit, not requiring the inviter to draw up the sponsorship.

### 5.3. Students and Scientists

There were 1,117<sup>92</sup> residence permits issued for the first time in 2015 (1050<sup>93</sup> in 2014) in connection with education.

During 2015, the number of foreign students in Latvia has increased by 44 percent. The number of foreign students in Latvia in 2015/2016 academic year was 6,465 (4,475 in 2014/2015)<sup>94</sup>, of which the number of third - country nationals amounted to almost one half - 3,559<sup>95</sup>. The increase in number of third - country students should be related to activities carried out by the higher education institutions in third countries.

On 16 February 2015, the Riga Technical University Study and Information Centre was opened in Colombo, the capital of Sri Lanka. It was established to promote studies offered by Riga Technical University among young people of Sri Lanka<sup>96</sup> as well as to promote mutual cooperation between researchers in science.<sup>97</sup>

A cooperation agreement between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs, the State Border Guard and JSC "Transport and Telecommunication Institute " regarding attracting students from the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka was signed and entered into force in 1 September 2015. The agreement permits the students from Sri Lanka to submit documents for receipt of entry documents by intermediation of the Honorary Consul of Sri Lanka, which substantially makes easier and shortens the period of reviewing the entry documents. Future students do not have to travel to the nearest representation of Latvia, the one in India, anymore.

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<sup>92</sup> Source of data: Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs

<sup>93</sup> Source of data: Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs

<sup>94</sup> Source of data: Ministry of Education and Science.

<sup>95</sup> Source of data: Ministry of Education and Science.

<sup>96</sup> RTU and the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs have entered into the cooperation agreement in 2012 regarding attracting students from the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, which permits the students from Sri Lanka to submit documents for receipt of entry documents by intermediation of the Honorary Consul of Sri Lanka.

<sup>97</sup> RTU opens a Study and Information Centre in Sri Lanka. Riga Technical University website, available at:

On 29 April 2015, the Latvian Ministry of Education and Science and the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology signed a memorandum of understanding on cooperation in the areas of education, science, youth, sports and culture.<sup>98</sup>

In the draft Conceptual Report on Immigration Policy, in the area of reception of third - country students, it is planned:

1) to foresee the possibility for those studying in Bachelor's programmes to file documents for requesting temporary residence in Latvia if the student is from a country, with respect to citizens of which no additional verification in the competent national security authorities is performed upon issuing a visa or a residence permit;

2) to include a condition in the Immigration Law that a residence permit may be annulled if the student fails to make certain progress in his/her studies;

3) to issue a residence permit to those studying in the last year of studies that exceeds the term of the academic year by three months so that students may devote time to looking for the job in Latvia or to perform activities to start their business. After expiry of these three months, to implement the above goals, a residence permit for another six months could be issued.

## 5.4. Integration, Citizenship and Naturalisation

### 5.4.1. Integration

The Ministry of Welfare has made amendments to Social Services and Social Assistance Law<sup>99</sup> by expanding entitlement of third - country nationals and persons having alternative status to social services. Since 2 December 2015, persons having alternative status and their family members residing in Latvia are entitled to receive the following social services and social assistance:

- a benefit for ensuring the guaranteed minimum level of income, shelter and night-shelter services as well as information and consultations of the social service;
- a housing benefit from the social service of the local government equal to the residents of the respective local government territory;
- relevant types of social services of services of shelter and night-shelter are not applicable to such person due to functional limitations or lack of social skills of the person;
- the minors are entitled to receive social care services and social rehabilitation services set forth in Part One of Section 13 of the Law on Social Services and Social Assistance.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Latvia strengthens cooperation with Japan in the areas of education, science, youth, sports and culture, available at: <http://www.izm.gov.lv/lv/aktualitates/593-latvija-nostiprina-sadarbibu-ar-japanu-izglibas-zinatnes-jaunatnes-sporta-un-kulturas-jomas>. [viewed on 09.03.2016.]

<sup>99</sup> Law "Amendments of the Social Services and Social Assistance Law". - Latvijas Vēstnesis, No. 235, 01.12.2015. - [came into force on 02.12.2015]

<sup>100</sup> 1) vocational rehabilitation of disabled persons;

2) social rehabilitation of persons with impaired vision and hearing;

3) social rehabilitation services for adult persons who have suffered from violence. The type, amount and content of social rehabilitation services, the conditions for the receipt and granting of services shall be determined by the Cabinet of Ministers;

4) social rehabilitation in appropriate institutions for children who have become addicted to narcotic, toxic or other intoxicating substances;

5) technical aids services;

7) social rehabilitation of victims of human trafficking. The Cabinet of Ministers shall determine the procedures for the receipt of social rehabilitation and the criteria for the recognition of a person as a victim of human trafficking;

8) support programme for children suffering from coeliac disease by continuing the provision of support to such persons after reaching adult age if they are studying in the general education or vocational education institution and are not more than 20 years old, or are studying in the day department of the higher education institution (full time presence) are not more than 24 years old. The amount of support and the conditions for the receipt thereof shall be determined by the Cabinet of Ministers;

9) support for the implementation and development of professional social work in local governments. The type and amount of support and the conditions for the receipt thereof shall be determined by the Cabinet of Ministers;

Minor asylum seekers are entitled to receive social rehabilitation as children that have suffered from violence. The right to receive such service rests also upon children not belonging to the groups listed in this Section if the responsible institutions have provided the conclusion regarding the need for the social rehabilitation service. The Ministry of Welfare is providing for<sup>101</sup> the availability of the social rehabilitation services to asylum seekers relevant to the assessment of the state of health to ensure the ability of the person to participate in the social and economic inclusion activities.

In 2015, the Advisory Council for the Integration of Third - Country Nationals of the Ministry of Culture discussed the issues of accepting asylum seekers in Latvia, including about the institutional distribution of responsibility in the area of acceptance and integration of asylum seekers, implementation of Latvian language and integration courses, involvement of local governments in the process of acceptance of asylum seekers, experience of educational institutions in working with the children of asylum seekers and other issues.

Several projects for third - country nationals were implemented in Latvia in 2015 that were mainly related to Latvian language training and organising information activities<sup>102</sup>, the purpose of which was to promote the integration of third - country nationals in the Latvian society:

- 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. Experiences of teachers in working with third - country nationals were summarised during the project. Seminars were held in five regions of Latvia and, in the aggregate, they were attended by 120 employees of institutions;
- Within the project Diverse Solutions for Public Education and Integration 3, the society “Shelter “Safe House”” provided support for third - country nationals by answering questions topical for such persons: about education, pre-school education, extracurricular education, free Latvian language courses and certification of education documents in Latvia;
- On 25-27 March 2015, the society “Shelter “Safe House”” organised a three-day training course the “A Third Country National – a Client of the Institutions”. The aim of the training course was to improve the competence of various specialists in inter-cultural communication as well as improve their knowledge of the third - country nationals’ acceptance and integration issues in the regions of Latvia;<sup>103</sup>
- The Society Integration Foundation implemented the project National Integration Centre, within which availability of different kinds of support services to third - country nationals was ensured for the purpose of helping them integrating into the Latvian society more successfully. Consultations in person and consultations by means of electronic communications were provided during the project implementation about social, healthcare, education, legal, psychological, employment and other important issues;
- Until 30 November 2015, Society Integration Foundation was implementing the project “Different people. Different experience. One Latvia II”<sup>104</sup>. The aim of the project was increasing public understanding, improving professional skills of employees of the public sector by promoting variety management in work places, non-discrimination and equal opportunities. There were 21 multipliers trained from various state administration and local government institutions, non-governmental, private and education sector. Video stories “7 stories about us” were prepared,

10) social rehabilitation services for persons who have committed violence. The type, amount and content of social rehabilitation services, the conditions for the receipt and granting of services shall be determined by the Cabinet of Ministers.

<sup>101</sup> Pursuant to the Action Plan for the Relocation and Receipt in Latvia of Persons in Need of International Protection.

<sup>102</sup> There were 15 agreements concluded in the Ministry of Culture within the European Integration of Third Country Nationals Fund programme 2013 activity "Development of language and adaptation programmes for the integration of third country nationals and formation of cohesive society". Overall, approximately two thousand third country nationals participated in the Latvian language and integration courses. Latvian language courses were organised in several regional towns of Latvia, for example in Riga, Liepaja, Saldus, Ventspils, Daugavpils and its municipality, Olaine, Stopiņi, Alūksne and Balvi.

<sup>103</sup> Training “A Third Country National – a Client of the Institutions”. Available at:

<http://www.patverums-dm.lv/lv/apmacibas-treso-valstu-valstspiederigais-instituciju-klients>. [viewed on 23.02.2016.]

<sup>104</sup> Within the European Community Employment and Social Solidarity Programme PROGRESS 2007–2013, section Combating Discrimination and Diversity

which depict unjustified different attitude due to some feature of difference or discriminating reason. They are available on the website of the Society Integration Foundation<sup>105</sup>.

The State Employment Agency implemented a pilot project, within which the asylum seekers were provided with information about employment opportunities in Latvia.

Within individual projects of the Third - Country National Integration Fund, the third - country nationals performed volunteer work, thus gaining knowledge and skills in the area of volunteer work, which is a substantial component of public activity.

Informative events within the projects of the Third - Country National Integration Fund have facilitated integration of third - country nationals in the local community. They ease their access to quality support, adaptation services to provide for the possibilities for wholesome participation in the public life of Latvia.

Riga City local government has got involved in implementing projects in the area of integration of migrants: there is a brochure developed in several languages about the services available from the local government, two international projects have been started for inclusion of newcomers in the society and public education.

### Use of the EMN Results

In 2015, the EMN developed the research work "Integration of beneficiaries of international/humanitarian protection into the labour market in Latvia: policies and good practices"<sup>106</sup>, the aim of which is to identify measures implemented in Latvia for promoting integration of the international/ humanitarian protection recipients in relation to access of the protection recipients to the labour market and participation in it, to describe the existing policies and examples of good practices.

Conclusions of the research work:

- Employment possibilities of refugees and persons with alternative status are limited. Factors extending the adaptation period are not knowing the official language, low level of education, lack of professional qualification or low professional qualifications, high anxiety level and difficulties in meeting basic needs (housing, health, overall material condition);
- Refugees and persons that have been granted alternative status, upon receipt of the permanent or temporary residence permit, automatically acquire the right to work in Latvia without restrictions;
- The same integration measures are available to refugees and persons having alternative status as to other third - country nationals legally residing in Latvia.

#### 5.4.2. Citizenship and Naturalisation

There were 971 persons accepted to the citizenship of Latvia in naturalisation procedure in 2015, thus slightly exceeding the indicator of 2014 (939). Also in 2015, the greatest proportion of individuals that have acquired citizenship is formed by non-citizens of Latvia – 90%. Compared to 2014 (76), in 2015 the number of third - country nationals who received citizenship of Latvia in naturalisation procedure has slightly increased - 79.<sup>107</sup>

### 5.5. Management of Migration and Mobility

#### 5.5.1. Visa Policy and Schengen Administration

<sup>105</sup>[http://www.sif.gov.lv/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=9838%3AVideo-stasti-par-cilveku-daudzveidibu-un-dazadibu&catid=2%3Afonds&lang=lv](http://www.sif.gov.lv/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=9838%3AVideo-stasti-par-cilveku-daudzveidibu-un-dazadibu&catid=2%3Afonds&lang=lv)

<sup>106</sup> [www.emn.lv](http://www.emn.lv)

<sup>107</sup> Source of data: Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs

The total number of issued visas has reduced in 2015 by 29% and it has reached 165,133 (213,100 in 2014).<sup>108</sup> Of those, 162,110 were Schengen visas and 3,023 were long-term (D) visas.

Table 5-2

Total number of issued visas as to their type, 2014-2015.<sup>109</sup>

	2014	2015
<b>Schengen visas</b>	207,907	162,110
<b>Long-term (D) visas</b>	5,193	3,023
<b>Total</b>	<b>213,100</b>	<b>165,133</b>

### Visa Information System

According to the Visa Information System (VIS) introduction schedule, obtaining biometric data of visa applicants was started in the diplomatic and consular representations of Latvia in Azerbaijan, Georgia, Belarus, Ukraine, Russia, China, Japan, India, Great Britain, Ireland, Belgium, Sweden, Poland and France. Taking biometric data of visa applicants has been started in all representative offices of Latvia. The representations of Latvia in foreign countries continued cooperation with the outsource service provider Pony Express, with the intermediation of which visa applications were accepted in Russia, Belarus, Ukraine and Kazakhstan. Administrative, technical and data safety issues were improved to enable the above company obtaining biometric data of persons for the needs of VIS. On 7 September 2015, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs entered into the cooperation agreement with the outsourcing company *VF Worldwide Holding Ltd.* regarding accepting visa applications in Azerbaijan, China, Georgia, India, Lebanon, Turkey, Great Britain, Uzbekistan and South Korea. Practical cooperation with the above company was started in early 2016. Cooperation with the outsource service provision company substantially improves the possibilities of visa applications to submit the required documents in the place and manner more convenient to them as well as makes the work of Consular Sections of representations of Latvia in foreign countries, where the number of visa applications is relatively high, considerably easier.

Of all Schengen visas issued in 2015 (162,110), 49,939 were biometric visas.<sup>110</sup>

### Visa Representation

The following new visa representation agreements have been concluded in 2015:

- France is representing Latvia in Cambodia (since 14.12.2015.) and Belgium is representing Latvia in Congo (since 01.01.2015.);
- Latvia is representing Switzerland in Uzbekistan (since 01.07.2015) and Austria in Belarus (since 01.11.2015.).

According to the mutual agreement, Estonia has terminated representing Latvia in issuing visas in Australia (Sydney) as of 01.01.2015; Latvia has terminated representing France in issuing visas in Russia (Pskov) as of 28.08.2015.

### Schengen Administration

Within the new Schengen management mechanism, 6 Schengen assessments scheduled by Member States (representatives of the State Border Guard have participated in two of them) and 7 Schengen assessments not announced by Member States have taken place in the EU in 2015.

<sup>108</sup> Source of data: Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs

<sup>109</sup> Source of data: Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs

<sup>110</sup> Source: Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs

Latvia was assessed within this mechanism as the second, in May 2015. The results of the assessment were positive, no shortcomings were established during the assessment, no recommendations were proposed in the approved report.

In 2015, 3 Officials of the State Border Guard (20 all together) mastered the basic course of Schengen assessors' training organised by the Training Team of Frontex Agency and will participate in the Schengen assessment commissions in future and perform assessment of the EU Member States.

### Migration Management System

In 2015, in response to the increase in the number of migrants in the EU, the following activities were performed in Latvia to improve the migration management system:

- The Ministry of the Interior summarised the initial activities (reaction) of the involved institutions upon receipt of the information about mass influx and updated the information about the offer of local governments with respect to housing of asylum seekers in the event of mass influx;<sup>111</sup>
- The regulation of the State Border Guard regarding the plans for elimination of emergency situations was revised and a new plan was developed in the State Border Guard units for action in emergency situations in the events of mass influx of irregular immigrants, and the plan for activities the events of mass influx of asylum seekers was particularised as well;
- On 17 March 2016, the "Amendment to the State Material Reserves Law"<sup>112</sup> was adopted, which provides for the use of material reserves in the event of mass influx of asylum seekers.

Starting from the second half of 2015, the existing State Border Guard Daugavpils Authority Detained Foreigners' Accommodation Centre Daugavpils is overcrowded. To ensure accommodation of detained foreigners, developing the second Detained Foreigners' Accommodation Centre is planned in 2016. For the purpose of developing such Centre, two buildings in *Ropažu* Municipality, not far from the Asylum Seekers' Accommodation Centre, will be reconstructed. The Centre is estimated for accommodating 84 detained foreigners. Residents of *Mucenieki* village are objecting to such plans as they believe it can significantly affect the villagers and the possibilities for development of the village.<sup>113</sup> Possible court proceedings may suspend the construction for a number of years, which is not admissible because Latvia has assumed international obligations in respect of persons in need of international protection, their relocation and admission to Latvia. In order to avoid initiating legal proceedings by third parties regarding the suspension of construction, on 23 March 2016 the Ordinance of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 225 "On determining the status of the object of national interest for the Detained Foreigners' Accommodation Centre Mucenieki" was adopted.

### Assistance Provided to the EU Member States

In response to the request of Slovenia, Latvia provided humanitarian assistance to Slovenia for solving the migration crisis by sending in October 2015 the resources from the state material reserves (3,000 pcs. bed sheets, 4,000 pcs. blankets, 1,000 pcs. mattress covers, 1,000 pcs. pillow cases, 200 pcs. pillows).<sup>114</sup>

In November 2015, 20 employees of the State Police went to Slovenia to assist in the issue of regulating the flow of asylum seekers. The main tasks of policemen in Slovenia included providing for public order, prevention of possible trespassing and patrolling together with their Slovenian

<sup>111</sup> In relation to the conclusions of the desk training regarding the Action Plan for coordinated activities of institutions in relation to possible mass arrival of asylum seekers in Latvia from the countries affected by crisis organised by the Ministry of the Interior in October 2014.

<sup>112</sup> Law "Amendment to the State Material Reserves Law" - Latvijas Vēstnesis, No. 57, 22.03.2016. - [entered into force on 05.04.2016.]

<sup>113</sup> Residents of Ropaži Municipality opposed to the construction of the Detained Foreigners' Accommodation Centre in Mucenieki. Available at: <http://www.diena.lv/latvija/zinas/ropazu-novada-iedzivotaji-iebilst-pret-aiztureto-arzemnieku-centra-izbuvi-muceniekos-14130166>. [viewed on 08.04.2016.]

<sup>114</sup> According to the information provided by the Ministry of the Interior.

colleagues. The Police employees spent one month on their assignment<sup>115</sup>, during which Latvian policemen provided support as well as gained substantial experience.<sup>116</sup>

In response to the request of Greece, Latvia provided humanitarian assistance to Greece for solving the migration crisis by sending 5 power generators, 2,500 blankets and 1,000 towels in the end of March 2016.<sup>117</sup>

### 5.5.2. Border Control

On the external border of Latvia, in 2015, the technical provision for the first line (passport data page readers, single finger scanners) was fully renewed, the connection to the Interpol database was provided, mobile equipment was purchased for using it in trains and seafaring vessels as well as for immigration control inland.

Complete reconstruction of the border crossing point *Vientuļi* on the external border was performed and the border crossing point started operating on 8 February 2016.

On 28 May 2015, amendments to the Law on Operation of the Schengen Information System<sup>118</sup> were adopted, which set forth that the officials of the State Border Guard are including, editing and deleting messages in the SIS as well.

On 30 June 2015, a project was completed whereby the tasks of Stage 1 of introduction of EUROSUR<sup>119</sup> were fulfilled: Regional Coordination Centres (Operative Control Departments of territorial authorities of the State Border Guard) and Local Coordination Centres (Border Guarding Departments of territorial authorities of the State Border Guard), all together 19 State Border Guard structural units, were developed and equipped with new information processing, exchange and archiving equipment: computers, servers, widescreen monitors, video surveillance, recording and control equipment. Specialised software was purchased additionally, and in connection with the new equipment, it permitted developing a Border Control and Monitoring System and provide for exchanging video surveillance information between the State Border Guard structural units in real time.

In course of implementation of EUROSUR, the Border Control and Monitoring System will become the basis for developing the Latvian National Situation Picture, thus providing for further development of EUROSUR in Latvia according to the plan approved earlier. There is a possibility already to receive the information in the National Coordination Centre about the topical situation on all EU borders (on the digital map) in real time as well as to perform viewing/surveillance of border districts by using all video surveillance systems that have been installed on the land border.

### Cooperation

Cooperation Protocol of the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Latvia and the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Belarus was signed on 3 March 2015 in Belarus (Minsk). The Protocol was concluded with the aim of strengthening and developing cooperation between the countries. The Protocol particularises the procedure of cooperation within the Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Latvia and the Government of the Republic of Belarus on Cooperation against Organised Crime, Illegal Circulation of Narcotic Substances, Psychotropic Substances and Precursors, Terrorism and other Criminal Offences<sup>120</sup>. The officials of the State

<sup>115</sup> Costs of stay in Slovenia were paid by the Slovenian side.

<sup>116</sup> Latvian policemen in Slovenia will assist in regulating the flow of asylum seekers for one month. Available at: <http://www.diena.lv/pasaule/latvijas-policisti-slovenija-menesi-palidzes-patveruma-mekletaju-plusmas-regulesana-14118663>. [viewed on 08.12.2015.]

<sup>117</sup> Latvia will provide humanitarian aid to Greece for solving the existing migration crisis. Available at: [http://www.iem.gov.lv/lat/aktualitates/informacija\\_medijiem/?doc=31403](http://www.iem.gov.lv/lat/aktualitates/informacija_medijiem/?doc=31403). [viewed on 29.03.2016.]

<sup>118</sup> Amendments to the Law on Operation of the Schengen Information System. - *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No. 118, 18.06.2015. [came into force on 01.07.2015.]

<sup>119</sup> European border surveillance system.

<sup>120</sup> Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Latvia and the Government of the Republic of Belarus on Cooperation in fighting Organised Crime, Illegal Circulation of Narcotic Substances, Psychotropic Substances and Precursors, Terrorism and other Criminal Offences. - *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No. 196, 06.12.2007. [came into force on 21.11.2007.]

Border Guard met with their colleagues from Belarus and coordinated further bilateral cooperation and activities for the prevention of illegal trafficking of persons over the border.<sup>121</sup>

The cooperation of the State Border Guard with the Russian Federal Migration Service was continued based on the Agreement on Cooperation in the Fight Against Irregular Migration, within which information was exchanged about the illegal migration channels, routes and carriers.

### 5.5.3. Cooperation with FRONTEX

During the report period, the State Border Guard participated in five joint operations arranged by FRONTEX that provided support to the EU Member States: Bulgaria, Greece, Italy, France and the Netherlands:

- Joint operation FLEXIBLE OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES 2015 LAND with extension (host country - Bulgaria). There were 73 State Border Guard representatives involved in the joint operation;
- Joint operation POSEIDON 2015 SEA/ RAPID INTERVENTION with extension (host country - Greece). There were 123 State Border Guard representatives involved in the joint operation;
- Joint operation TRITON 2014/2015 with extension (host country - Italy). There were 21 State Border Guard representatives involved in the joint operation;

In addition, 2 State Border Guard representatives participated in two air border control operations organised by FRONTEX in the Netherlands and France.

The State Border Guard took part in the joint operation COORDINATION POINTS 2015 organised by FRONTEX, the aim of which was to improve border management coordination between the EU Member States and third countries (host countries: Moldova/Ukraine). There were 2 State Border Guard representatives involved in the joint operation;

On 2 April 2016, 12 officials from the State Border Guard and 20 from the State Police Special Task Battalion went to Greece, Lesbos Island, to provide support in the solution of the migration crisis within the FRONTEX operation.

The purpose of FRONTEX operation was to implement the measures for the return of irregular migrants from Greece to Turkey. The State Border Guard and the State Police responded to the call of FRONTEX by sending 12 border guards and 20 policemen to the operation in Greece, and they will provide support the expulsion measures until 30 April.<sup>122</sup>

## 6. MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT POLICY

The panel meeting of Eastern Partnership migration and asylum experts *Legal Workforce Migration: Practical Aspects of Acceptance and Control*, organised by Belarus and co-organised by Latvia, was held in Minsk on 6-7 May 2015. During the meeting, the migration experts from the Eastern Partnership and the EU countries discussed such issues as the practical aspects of the workforce admission, admission of specific categories, cooperation between the public and private sectors upon sending workforce to and admission of workforce from foreign countries as well as practical problems and their solutions concerning illegal employment of labour migrants.<sup>123</sup>

In late 2015, the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs and the State Border Guard confirmed to the International Migration Policy Development Centre (ICMPD) their readiness to engage in a project Support to the Implementation of the Mobility Partnership with Azerbaijan. This project will be implemented within the thematic programme Global Public Goods and Challenges for 2016-2018, which is funded from the Development Cooperation Instrument programmed and

<sup>121</sup> Source: State Border Guard.

<sup>122</sup> Border guards and policemen go to provide support to Greece. - [http://www.iem.gov.lv/lat/aktualitates/informacija\\_medijiem/?doc=31436](http://www.iem.gov.lv/lat/aktualitates/informacija_medijiem/?doc=31436), [viewed on 04.04.2016.]

<sup>123</sup> Source: Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs

managed by the Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development of the European Commission<sup>124</sup>.

The general objective of the project is to support implementing the mobility partnership with Azerbaijan with a specific focus on strengthening administration capacity to develop and implement the national migration policy of Azerbaijan. The specific objective of the project: to strengthen the capacity of Azerbaijan to increase the impact of migration on development and to develop and implement a migration policy in accordance with the international standards in those priority areas that have been identified in the mobility partnership Joint Declaration and its Annex. The project was launched on 15 January 2016 and Latvia shall coordinate the component of legal migration as well as plans to participate in the activities of the asylum, document security and return components.

In April 2015, the European Commission has approved the proposal developed by the Netherlands, Sweden, Austria, Belgium, Poland and Latvia for the project **Strengthen Kosovo Institutions in Effective Management of Migration** within the programme *EuropeAid*<sup>125</sup>. The Twinning Contract regarding the implementation of this project was signed on 19 February 2016 in Pristina (Kosovo), and it started on 1 March 2016.<sup>126</sup> Specialists from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Culture, Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs and the State Border Guard will participate in the project.

### Use of the EMN Results

At the meeting of the Eastern Partnership migration and asylum panel experts "Legal workforce migration: practical aspects of admission and control", the official from the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs presented to the meeting the main conclusions and results of the EMN Annual Conference on sustainable attraction of talented migrants to Europe.

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<sup>124</sup> The Commission's Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development.

<sup>125</sup> The Directorate-General EuropeAid Development & Cooperation of the European Commission.

<sup>126</sup> Source: Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs

## 7. IRREGULAR MIGRATION

There were 463 third - country nationals detained in 2015 for illegal crossing of the "green" border (139 in 2014). Compared to 2014, the number of irregular immigrants detained on the "green" border in 2015 increased almost 3 times.

The main groups of the illegal "green" border crossers were formed by citizens of Vietnam (309), Iraq (70), Afghanistan (30) and the Russian Federation (25, a portion of them-being the carriers at the same time). Illegal border crossing in the direction to the EU countries by citizens of these countries was affected by the adverse economic, political and security situation in the home countries of such persons.<sup>127</sup>

Compared to 2014 (1,942<sup>128</sup>), there was a significant drop in the number of refusals of entry on the border in 2015 - entry was refused to 869 third - country nationals. Most often entry was refused to citizens of Russia (202), Belarus (158) and Georgia (144).<sup>129</sup>

The number of refusals drawn up for persons who could not justify the purpose of entry or could not produce a health insurance policy continued to decrease in 2015: 177 (Belarus - 51, Russia - 40, Ukraine - 15) occasions. There were 305 instances found in 2014.

The number of detected infringements relating to abuse of the legitimate types of entry when third - country nationals, upon receipt of the Schengen visa, are providing untrue information about the purpose of entry into Latvia or another country in the Schengen zone has decreased in 2015 - 109 (including 27 Russian citizens, 15 citizens of Belarus, 15 citizens of Ukraine). There were 139 cases of visa annulment in 2014.<sup>130</sup>

In 2015, the State Border Guard has observed that, upon organising illegal trafficking of persons over the state border, the trespassers are opting to illegally move 3-5 persons at a time, recognising that relatively less severe criminal punishment may be applied to them for such illegal activities. Based on such trend, the State Border Guard has prepared a draft law "Amendments to the Criminal Law", the purpose of which is to increase punishment for illegal trafficking of persons over the border. The Parliament approved this draft amendment on 21 January 2016.

### Cooperation with Third Countries

Cooperation with third countries in the area of combating irregular migration in 2015 was implemented by the State Border Guard.

Cooperation Protocol of the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Latvia and the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Belarus was signed on 3 March 2015 in Belarus (Minsk). The Protocol was concluded with the aim of strengthening and developing cooperation, but it is not considered a treaty that is binding under the international law. The essence of the Protocol is to particularise the procedure of cooperation within the Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Latvia and the Government of the Republic of Belarus on Cooperation against Organised Crime, Illegal Circulation of Narcotic Substances, Psychotropic Substances and Precursors, Terrorism and other Criminal Offences (signed on 17.05.2007.). The officials of the State Border Guard met with their colleagues from Belarus and coordinated further bilateral cooperation and activities for the prevention of illegal trafficking of persons over the border.

In 2015, 3 State Border Guard Immigration Liaison Officers<sup>131</sup> represented the State Border Guard (as well as the State Border Guard Service of the Republic of Lithuania and the Police and

<sup>127</sup> Source: State Border Guard.

<sup>128</sup> Source of data: State Border Guard.

<sup>129</sup> Source of data: State Border Guard.

<sup>130</sup> Source: State Border Guard.

<sup>131</sup> As the result of activities of liaison officers, information is obtained that is used to prepare the State Border Guard risk analysis, which is helping in managing migration flows in general as well as in preparing the required guidelines.

Border Guard Authority of the Republic of Estonia) in Russia, Belarus and Georgia, and there was 1 document expert as well (in Georgia).

The State Border Guard liaison officer in Belarus, in cooperation with representative office of the IOM in Belarus and the officials of governmental institutions of Belarus, prepared the analytical overview about the situation in the field of irregular immigration in Belarus.

The State Border Guard liaison officer in Russia, based on Paragraph 1 of Article 6 of the Council Regulation (EC) No 377/2004 of 19 February 2004 on the creation of an immigration liaison officers<sup>132</sup>, developed in 2015 the immigration liaison officer network report on the situation in the Russian Federation in the field of immigration.<sup>133</sup>

The State Border Guard liaison officers are providing great support to the employees of Consular Sections of Embassies of Latvia and other EU countries by taking part in verification of documents filed for obtaining the visa and travelling routes on regular basis. As the result of such cooperation, Latvian liaison officers have detected several events when forged documents are filed with the Embassies to obtain the visa.

The State Border Guard is cooperating with third countries (Russia, Belarus): meetings are taking place to exchange topical information and, if required, joint activities are implemented in cases regarding illegal trafficking of persons over the state border.

Within the cooperation with the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation a joint border operation "Kordon-2015" was implemented in 2015.

## 8. RETURN

### 8.1. Voluntary Return<sup>134</sup>

The number of return decisions<sup>135</sup> issued to third - country nationals continued to decrease in 2015: 1,225<sup>136</sup> (1,459 in 2014<sup>137</sup>). Mostly they were issued to Russian, Ukrainian and Belarusian citizens. The reduction of the number of return decisions is related to the fact that both the number of third - country nationals who have violated their conditions of stay found within the country (1,204 in 2014, 1,146 in 2015)<sup>138</sup> and a number of third - country nationals that have violated their conditions of stay and it is found when they are leaving the country (1,069 in 2014, 183 in 2015) is continuing to reduce.<sup>139</sup>

The number of third - country nationals who used the voluntary return programme has significantly decreased: 34<sup>140</sup> (94 in 2014). The reduction of numbers is explained also by the fact that the IOM Riga Office project "Provision of Assistance for Voluntary Return and Reintegration in Latvia, 2014-2015" ended in June 2015, therefore no funding was available for the voluntary return during the year. The IOM Riga Office is the only institution in Latvia implementing voluntary return.

<sup>132</sup> A Member State holding the Presidency of the Council of the European Union or, if this Member State is not represented in the respective country or region then the Member State executing the functions of the presiding state, is preparing, by the end of each half-year, a report to the Council and the Commission on the operation of those immigration liaison officer networks, in which it has a representative, as well as on the situation in the host country in connection with illegal immigration.

<sup>133</sup> Source: State Border Guard.

<sup>134</sup> Voluntary return - a supported or independent return to the country of origin, transit or third country, based on the free will of the returnee. Source: EMN Glossary v3. Available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/european\\_migration\\_network/docs/emn-glossary-en-version.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/european_migration_network/docs/emn-glossary-en-version.pdf).

<sup>135</sup> Return decision - an administrative or judicial decision or act, stating or declaring the stay of a third-country national to be illegal and imposing or stating an obligation to return. Source: EMN Glossary v3. Available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/european\\_migration\\_network/docs/emn-glossary-en-version.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/european_migration_network/docs/emn-glossary-en-version.pdf).

<sup>136</sup> Source of data: Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs

<sup>137</sup> Source of data: Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs

<sup>138</sup> Source of data: State Border Guard.

<sup>139</sup> Source of data: Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs

<sup>140</sup> Source of data: IOM Riga Office

Voluntary return programme activities resumed in February 2016, when the IOM Riga Office started the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund project "Provision of Voluntary Return and Reintegration Assistance in Latvia, 2016-2018". The project will be implemented by 31 December 2018.

## Use of the EMN Results

The EMN Latvian contact point has developed a small-scale research work "Dissemination of information on voluntary return: how to reach irregular migrants not in contact with the authorities"<sup>141</sup>, the aim of which is to summarise national legislation and practices of the involved institutions to ensure that irregular migrants are informed about the return options, including voluntary return and assisted voluntary return. The focussed study discusses provision of information to irregular migrants about voluntary return.

Conclusions of the research work:

- The IOM Riga Office is the only organisation in Latvia providing voluntary return and reintegration assistance. Such service recipient target group are asylum seekers<sup>142</sup>, irregular migrants, persons that have no legal reason to stay in Latvia, persons with expired visas or temporary residence permits, for example, students;
- Experts believe that, on average, 5 - 10% of irregular migrants are such who do not have any contact with authorities and who have themselves requested the voluntary return assistance from the IOM office;
- The number of irregular migrants in Latvia would rather grow than decline in future, including those that are not in sight of public authorities, so it would be important to find the most appropriate solutions how to inform them about the possibilities of assisted voluntary return<sup>143</sup>. Latvia would be interested in learning good practices from other countries.

## 8.2. Forced Return

The number of removal orders<sup>144</sup> adopted in 2015 has increased four times by reaching 392 (98 in 2014). In 85% of cases, the removed ones have been citizens of Vietnam. The routes of movement of Vietnamese citizens did not change significantly compared to 2014. At the same time one could conclude that there was an increased number of cases when Latvia was used as a transit country for the irregular immigrants from Vietnam. Irregular immigration of Vietnamese nationals from the Russian Federation to the EU was continuously promoted by both stricter immigration and employment policies implemented and special operations against the irregular immigrants carried out by the Russian Federation, and the fall in the value of the Russian rouble that made the residing environment unattractive to cheap labour from third countries. Irregular immigration of Vietnamese citizens through the Baltic States and other Member States of the EU was also largely affected by already established Vietnamese communities in Germany and Poland. These communities are continuing to promote and financially support entry of their compatriots to the EU.

A draft bilateral agreement regarding the readmission of persons and a draft execution protocol between the Republic of Latvia and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam were developed in 2015. The draft agreement on readmission of persons and its draft execution protocol with Kosovo was particularised.

In addition, the agreement between the competent authorities of the Republic of Latvia and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam regarding cooperation in combating irregular migration and return issues was sent to the Vietnamese side for evaluation and provision of opinion.

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<sup>141</sup> [www.emn.lv](http://www.emn.lv)

<sup>142</sup> Asylum seekers that have voluntarily expressed the wish to receive the IOM return and reintegration assistance.

<sup>143</sup> Voluntary return or exit with logistics, financial and/or other kind of material support. Source: EMN Glossary v3. Available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/european\\_migration\\_network/docs/emn-glossary-en-version.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/european_migration_network/docs/emn-glossary-en-version.pdf).

<sup>144</sup> Removal order – an administrative deed, in which the fact of illegal stay of a foreigner is justified and removal of the foreigner to his or her country of citizenship, the third country, from which he or she has entered, or another country, which he or she has the right to enter, is determined

Since July 2015, the officials of the State Border Guard are also including the entry prohibitions into the Register of Expelled Foreigners and Entry Prohibitions (it was done earlier by the officials of the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs only). Afterwards, the officials from SIRENE<sup>145</sup> Latvian office are approving the reports and including them in the SIS.

## Supervision of Compulsory Return

Within the project of the European Return Fund, the Ombudsman's Office completed the development of Guidelines for Implementation of the Supervision Mechanism of Forcibly Expellable Persons, a methodology for supervising the expelling process, and performed a study regarding acceptance and residing in the Republic of Latvia of unaccompanied underage third country nationals as well as their return to the country of origin. Considering the results of the study and that it is a duty of the state to especially protect the rights of each child that has been left without parental care, the Ombudsman requested the responsible institutions perfecting the legal regulation.<sup>146</sup> On 22 July 2015, the Ministry of the Interior acknowledged that it would be useful to make amendments to legal acts concerning legal regulation regarding acceptance, supporting and returning to the country of origin of underage third country nationals that are not accompanied as well as to establish the procedure, in which the children are placed and maintained in the Underage Persons' Prevention Section and delivered to the guardians.

## 9. PREVENTION OF TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS

Not a single residence permit has been issued in 2015 in connection with the fact that a person has been recognised as a victim of human trafficking.<sup>147</sup> The status of suspect has been determined for 16 persons and they have been detained within the criminal proceedings initiated regarding organisation of human trafficking.<sup>148</sup>

The Ministry of Welfare, together with its cooperation partners, upon performance of the task in the guidelines<sup>149</sup>, agreed on the need to develop a regulatory framework for minors and observation and protection of their rights and interests. Simultaneously work has been started on improvement of the medium-term and long-term support programme for minors that have been victims of human trafficking.<sup>150</sup>

One may mention it as a new trend that there was an instance of trafficking of minors for the purpose of sexual abuse found in Latvia in 2015, regarding which the criminal proceedings for human trafficking were initiated.

There were 10 victims of human trafficking identified in Latvia in 2015: 3 were identified by the State Police and 7 by the association Resource Centre for Women "Marta". In 2015, the association Resource Centre for Women "Marta" has provided social rehabilitation services to 8 persons: 1 man and 7 women. 12 people, 5 men and 7 women, continued to receive rehabilitation services started in 2014 that were provided for by the society "Shelter "Safe House"". <sup>151</sup> During 12 months of the reporting period the specialists of the society have received 182 calls on a 24-hour Trust Hotline.

At the same time, it should be noted that Latvia is a country of origin of the victims of human trafficking, which means that Latvian nationals come into exploitative conditions in other countries. There is a constant trend remaining of the recruiters providing false information to victims of human

<sup>145</sup> SIRENE – Supplementary Information Request at the National Entry.

<sup>146</sup> Including the 16 December 2003 Cabinet Regulation No. 707 "Procedures by which Alien Minors Enter and Reside in the Republic of Latvia Unaccompanied by Parents or Guardians".

<sup>147</sup> Source: Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs

<sup>148</sup> Source of data: Ministry of the Interior.

<sup>149</sup> 21 January 2014 Ordinance of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 29 "Regarding the human trafficking prevention guidelines for 2014-2020" -Latvijas Vēstnesis, No. 16, 23.02.2014.

<sup>150</sup> Source: Ministry of the Interior.

<sup>151</sup> Source: Ministry of the Interior

trafficking about the working conditions abroad. There were several instances established when third - country nationals used a marriage certificate letterhead issued in Cyprus with obvious alterations (name, surname and fictitious personal codes of citizens of Latvia used) to apply for the residence permits in Sweden and Ireland.<sup>152</sup>

## International Cooperation

In 2013-2015, the State Border Guard, in cooperation with the Ministry of the Interior of Hungary, Border Guard of Poland, Police of Slovakia, European Affairs and International Relations Directorate of Romania and the International Migration Policy Development Centre participated in the implementation of the project "Eastern Partnership cooperation in the fight against irregular migration- Supporting the implementation of the Prague Process Action Plan".

Within the project, the representatives from governmental institutions of the EU 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 human trafficking. During the project implementation, the officials of the State Border Guard familiarised the representatives from the Eastern Partnership countries with their experience in fighting irregular migration and other cross-border threat.

Upon implementation of the international project STROM "Strengthening the Role of Local Governments for Work in Fighting Human Trafficking in the Baltic Sea Region", the Ministry of the Interior, in cooperation with the Council of the Baltic Sea States Task force against Trafficking in Human Beings, the Ministry of Security and Justice of the Netherlands and the municipality of Amsterdam, organised a conference Local Governments against Human Trafficking in Riga on 19 - 20 May 2015. The objective of the conference was to provide a platform for the exchange of knowledge and experience to deal with human trafficking cases at the local government level, to identify common challenges and good practices to combat human trafficking at local level in the Baltic Sea region, to provide the cooperation partners in the local governments with expert knowledge and tools required to effectively address human trafficking cases as well as to expand national and regional cooperation networks by strengthening the role of local governments in the support mechanism for victims of human trafficking.<sup>153</sup> Guidelines for local governments "Strengthening activities of local governments against human trafficking"<sup>154</sup> were issued in December 2015.

## Training

One of the priorities proposed in the Council of the Baltic Sea States Task force against Trafficking in Human Beings (CBSS TF-THB<sup>155</sup>) Strategic Plan 2015 – 2017 .is training of consular officers on issues of human trafficking prevention, identification and provision of support to victims of human trafficking. The Human Trafficking Prevention Guidelines 2014 – 2020 approved on 21 January 2014 also set forth the task to carry out training of consular officers on issues of human trafficking.

To implement the above priority, the Ministry of the Interior, which is providing for the representation of Latvia in CBSS TF-THB, in cooperation with the CBSS Secretariat and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, on 13 April 2015 organised training for consular officials of the foreign diplomatic and consular missions residing in Latvia. The consular training was attended by diplomats and consular officials from the Embassies of the United States of America, United Kingdom, Austria, Belarus, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Georgia, Ireland, Canada, Russian

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<sup>152</sup> Source: Ministry of the Interior.

<sup>153</sup>International conference "Local Governments against Human Trafficking" will take place in Riga. - Available at: <http://www.cilvektirdznieciba.lv/lv/riga-norisinasies-starptautiska-konference-pasvaldibas-pret-cilvektirdzniecibu/65>. [viewed on 10.03.2016.]

<sup>154</sup> Guidelines for local governments "Strengthening activities of local governments against human trafficking". -Available at: [http://www.cilvektirdznieciba.lv/uploads/files/lv\\_web.pdf](http://www.cilvektirdznieciba.lv/uploads/files/lv_web.pdf). [viewed on 10.03.2016.]

<sup>155</sup> Council of the Baltic Sea States Task force against Trafficking in Human Beings.

Federation, Lithuania, Poland, Spain, Hungary, Uzbekistan, Germany and Sweden in the Republic of Latvia.<sup>156</sup>

The educational seminar "Educating Organisations of the NGO Coalition on working with victims of human trafficking and potential risk groups" took place on 8 and 9 September 2015.

Participants of the seminar mastered/ supplemented knowledge on the following topics:

- creation, development and improvement of interprofessional and interinstitutional cooperation;
- dynamics of the support and self-help groups; basic principles for quality service provision, evaluation of results of individual social cases;
- taking over international experience in working with victims of human trafficking.<sup>157</sup>

On 10 and 11 September 2015, the Latvian Judicial Training Centre hosted the international seminar "Combating human trafficking – towards a more comprehensive approach" organised by the Academy of European Law (ERA) and the Latvian Judicial Training Centre. It was attended by judges, prosecutors, lawyers, police officers, policy planners, representatives of NGOs and the European Parliament from Latvia and the EU Member States: Portugal, Spain, the Netherlands, Ireland, Finland, Bulgaria, Germany, Greece, Norway, Austria and Italy.<sup>158</sup>

## Implemented Information Measures

In the first half of 2015 to local government of Riga funded<sup>159</sup> a project, the aim of which was the promotion of awareness of human trafficking problems. In course of the project "Preventive activities for minimisation of human trafficking – 2015", heads of social institutions, social work professionals, municipal police officers, social educators and other industry professionals were trained. Awareness of this topical problem was facilitated by means of inter-institutional seminars, discussions and exchange of examples of good practices. In addition to the awareness raising campaign, within the project, qualified professionals provided assistance to persons who had been victims of human trafficking.

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<sup>156</sup> Training for consular officials of the foreign diplomatic and consular missions residing in Latvia. - Available at: <http://www.cilvektirdznieciba.lv/lv/macibas-latvija-rezidejoso-arvalstu-diplomatisko-un-konsularo-parstavniecibu-konsularajam-amatpersonam/58>. [viewed on 11.03.2016.]

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<sup>159</sup> Funds of the Public Oder Maintenance Fund.

## Annex 1. Introduction of Regulatory Enactments of the European Union

Introduction of the requirements specified in the laws of the European Union into the laws of Latvia was continued during the report year. To display the course of transposition of current European Union laws in the field of migration and asylum into the laws of Latvia, they have been individually displayed in the table.

	Laws of the European Union	National laws, in which the requirements of the European Union have been introduced
1.	Directive 2013/32/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 on common procedures for granting and withdrawing international protection;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Asylum Law.</li> </ul>
2.	Directive 2013/33/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 laying down standards for the reception of applicants for international protection;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Asylum Law.</li> </ul>

## Annex 2. List of Sources and Literature

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### Annex 3 Definitions of terms used in the work

**Vulnerable persons** - minors, unaccompanied minors, disabled people, elderly people, pregnant women, single parents with minor children, victims of human trafficking, persons with serious illnesses, persons with mental disorders and persons who have been subjected to torture, rape or other serious forms of psychological, physical or sexual violence, such as victims of female genital mutilation. The definition of "Vulnerable persons" has been included in the redrafted Acceptance Directive<sup>160</sup>.

**Relocation**<sup>161</sup> - relocation of the applicants for international protection between the European Union Member States.

**Resettlement**<sup>162</sup> - resettlement of persons in need of international protection from the Middle East, the Horn of Africa and North Africa to the European Union Member States and the Dublin system associated states.

**Voluntary return**<sup>163</sup> - a supported or independent return to the country of origin, transit or third country, based on the free will of the returnee.

**Assisted voluntary return**<sup>164</sup> - voluntary return or voluntary departure supported by logistical, financial and / or other material assistance.

**Return decision**<sup>165</sup> - an administrative or judicial decision or act, stating or declaring the stay of a third-country national to be illegal and imposing or stating an obligation to return.

**Removal order**<sup>166</sup> – an administrative deed, in which the fact of illegal stay of a foreigner is justified and removal of the foreigner to his or her country of citizenship, the third country, from which he or she has entered, or another country, which he or she has the right to enter, is determined

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<sup>160</sup> Directive 2013/33/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 laying down standards for the reception of applicants for international protection (revised version). Official Journal, L 180, 29.06.2013.

<sup>161</sup> EMN Asylum and Migration Glossary 3.0 Available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/network/european\\_migration\\_network/docs/URemn-glossary-en-version.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/network/european_migration_network/docs/URemn-glossary-en-version.pdf).

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.