

COUNTRY FACTSHEET: LATVIA 2012

EUROPEAN MIGRATION NETWORK

1. Introduction

This EMN Country Factsheet provides a factual overview of the main policy developments in migration and international protection in Latvia during 2012, including latest statistics. It has been prepared in conjunction with the European Commission's 4th Annual Report on Migration and Asylum (2012).

2. Legal Migration and Mobility

2.1. PROMOTING LEGAL MIGRATION CHANNELS

Latvia has minor immigration flows of third-country nationals, therefore no information campaigns about entry conditions are organised in the country. Information is regularly updated on the EU Immigration Portal and the **Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs** (OCMA) website, the latter has been indicated by third-country nationals as the main information source for entry and residence information.

2.2. ECONOMIC MIGRATION

The Ministry of Welfare and the Ministry of Economics are responsible for the **analysis of the labour market** and for the forecasts regarding necessary professions, social and professional basic skills in the market. In 2012 the number of first time residence permits issued to third-country nationals on the grounds of employment was still significantly below the pre-crisis volume (1,823 in 2008 compared to 597 in 2012) (See Figure 1). The current legislation does not limit the possibilities to attract third-country national workers, and it also allows the admission of **highly qualified workers**. Legislation in Latvia is considered to determine reliefs for entry conditions for highly qualified labour force, as well as for the entry and residence of investors and self-employed persons.¹ For example, the amendments to the Immigration Law prescribe simplified visa procedures for foreigners dealing with international shipment within the territory of the Republic of Latvia.

¹ Reference from the Annual policy report 2011

Furthermore, in July 2012, amendments regarding the required commercial activity indicators, applying to third-country nationals developing a commercial activity to be able to reside in Latvia, came into force. Also, on 9 May 2012 amendments to the Cabinet Regulation No.552 'Procedures for Approval of Invitations and Drawings up of Written Requests' came into force, thus providing a foreign legal entity employing an authorised person registered in Latvia, the right to request for an invitation approval or to draw up an invitation.

Finally, amendments to the **Support for Unemployed Persons and Persons Seeking Employment** Law provided that persons holding a temporary residence permit with right to employment, will have the right to obtain the status of an unemployed person or person seeking employment, therefore becoming eligible to receive unemployment benefits, with certain limitations.

2.3. FAMILY REUNIFICATION

In July 2012 draft **amendments to the Immigration Law**² were submitted for revision. Amendments provide an extended list of possibilities to issue long-term residence permits based on serious reasons. For example, illness of a close relative of a person or another unforeseen situation can be regarded as an eligible personal reason for prolonging the stay in Republic of Latvia.

2.4. INTEGRATION

In 2012, Latvia created the **National Integration Centre** which serves as a direct integration mediator, providing information, consultations and interpretations services to third-country nationals and, additionally, the centre serves as a long-term platform for cooperation between stakeholders. Several projects for integration of legally residing third-country nationals and provision of information to

² The draft law "Amendments to the Immigration Law" has been developed on 5 July 2012 and has been submitted for review at the meeting of State Secretaries. Available only in Latvian at www.pmlp.gov.lv section Tiesību akti (Legal acts)

the society of Latvia financed with the support of the **European Integration** and European **Refugee funds** were implemented in 2012.

In November 2012, the Government allocated additional financial means of the state budget therefore supporting integration measures as Latvian language courses, development of language portal, joint Latvian and minority school events, as well as organisation of camps for the children of the diasporas of Latvia. Also, the following activities were implemented in 2012:

- Development of on-line source 'Immigrant in Latvia. First Aid' aiming to provide guidance on available academic and financial sources in the field of integration.
- Informative campaign 'This is my story...or ours?' aiming to show the positive impact of migration on state development.
- Development of methodological material regarding requirements and procedures on registration of an organisation defending the interests of third-country nationals. Furthermore, third-country nationals were involved as volunteers in the implementation of projects to gain practical experience and cooperation skills.

2.5 MANAGING MIGRATION AND MOBILITY³

Since October 2011 Latvia started to use the **Central Visa Information System** (CVIS) and the connection of the **Latvian National Visa System** (NVIS) to CVIS. During 2012 Latvia continued to work on improving the functionality of NVIS, by improving the operation of the NVIS integrated biometrics equipment and the implementation of the VISION consultation 'A' mechanism amongst others. During the same year a draft regulation to amend Visa Regulations defining a longer term of validity for long-term visas issued on the basis of OCMA decisions and concerning issuance of a residence permit, was introduced.⁴

Regarding visa representation agreements, as from May 2012 Latvia represents Sweden, additionally to Tbilisi (Georgia), in Astana (Kazakhstan) while Sweden represents Latvia in Dhaka (People's Republic of Bangladesh) and Lusaka (Zambia).

Instructions for the consular officials in line with EC recommendations aiming to harmonise the visa issue practice between the Member States of the Schengen Agreement were also developed during 2012.

In order to ensure the activity of the European Border Surveillance System (EUROSUR) in Latvia, the **National Coordination Centre** at the Board of

Service Organisation of the Central Board of the State Border Guard was created in October 2012.

Training were also organised to ensure more efficient land, sea and air border control. Additionally, the State Border Guard (SBG) participated in the international training TRIANGLE and the sea operation 'Operation Baltic Tracking'.

3. International Protection and Asylum

Citizens of Georgia and Congo are mainly considered to use Latvia as a transit country within the scope of the asylum procedure, while the number of citizens of Syria is related to internal armed conflict escalation in the country, leading them to obtain an alternative status in Latvia.

Also, Latvia has actively participated on measures implemented by the **European Asylum Support Office** (EASO) by supporting its initiatives for the creation of the **Common European Asylum System**.

4. Unaccompanied Minors and other Vulnerable Groups

As there is no a major number of unaccompanied minors in Latvia (See Table 6), in 2012 there was no need to amend the existent legislation nor to improve or adjust accommodation conditions. The same applies to other vulnerable groups.

5. Actions against Trafficking in Human Beings

Trafficking in human beings is an issue of concern, especially in relation to marriages of convenience. During 2012 Latvia undertook a number of actions to prevent trafficking in human beings, such as:

- Guidelines for the identification of trafficking in human beings for the purpose of **labour exploitation**, developed by the Ministry of Interior and State Police in cooperation with the State Labour Inspectorate. The guidelines are intended for involved stakeholders that have been granted the right to provide services to victims;
- Meeting about **marriages of convenience** of the 'Programme for Prevention of Trafficking in Human Beings for 2009-2013' a trans-international working group organised by the Ministry of Interior;
- Information exchange seminar on investigation of the cases of trafficking in human beings, prosecution and conviction of criminals, organised by the Ministry of Interior in cooperation with the Nordic Council of Ministers' Office in Latvia;
- Informative seminars organised by non-governmental organisations in association with social services of municipalities;
- Continuous work on drawing up interstate agreements in the field of combating organised crime, including combating trafficking in human beings, with

³ "Managing migration and mobility" refers to the following themes: visa policy, Schengen governance and border monitoring.

⁴ A period of 30 days instead of the present 15 days

Argentina, Ecuador, Italy, Columbia, Kosovo, Tadjhikistan and Turkmenistan.

In order to set up an informal cooperation and coordination network dealing with the prevention and combating of forced labour and labour force exploitation, a first meeting for the network development took place at the end of 2012.

Also, several changes in legal acts were adopted by the end of 2012 in order to meet the requirements defined in **Directive 2011/36/EU**.

6. External Dimension of EU Migration Policy

OCMA has been appointed to develop the **Immigration Policy Plan**. It is planned to forecast and analyse the demand of labour market according to specific economy sectors.

Currently Latvia does not plan to implement policy or any measure that would provide support to third-country national diaspora groups in their countries of origin.

7. Irregular Migration

Overall the pressure of irregular migration decreased in 2012 compared to 2011 (See *Tables 7 and 8 and Figure 8*). As from 2 April 2012, Latvia issues residence permits in the form of an **identification card**.⁵ In addition, upon the reception of a residence permit, biometric data⁶ must be provided.

In order to support the implementation of the EU's readmission agreements, Latvia is focussing on cooperation with third countries⁷ in addition to the conclusion of **implementation protocols**. Thus, readmission expert exchange visits between Latvia and Russia were continued in 2012. During the same year, the SBG started working on the conclusion of **bilateral cooperation agreements** stipulating for closer cooperation and strengthening the control of the external border with third countries.⁸

Amendments to the Immigration Law were developed, to ensure basic needs and accommodation will be provided to persons subject to return procedure.

In 2012 the SBG also signed an agreement with the **International Organization for Migration (IOM)** in order to enhance cooperation in the field of voluntary return according to the **Return Directive**.

8. Provision and Exchange of Information to support Policy Development

Exchange of information in the context of the **European Migration Network** has been identified as an important vehicle for information exchange. In particular, the exchange of information between the national contact points to support policy-makers on specific questions from the field of migration and asylum within a written **ad-hoc query** system is emphasised.

STATISTICAL ANNEX

The Statistical Annex provides an overview of the latest available statistics for Latvia on aspects of migration and asylum (2010-2012), including residence, asylum, unaccompanied minors, illegal migration, return and visas. Where statistics are not yet available, this is indicated in the Annex as "N/A".

⁵ Cabinet Regulation No.134 'Regulations on Personal Identification Documents'

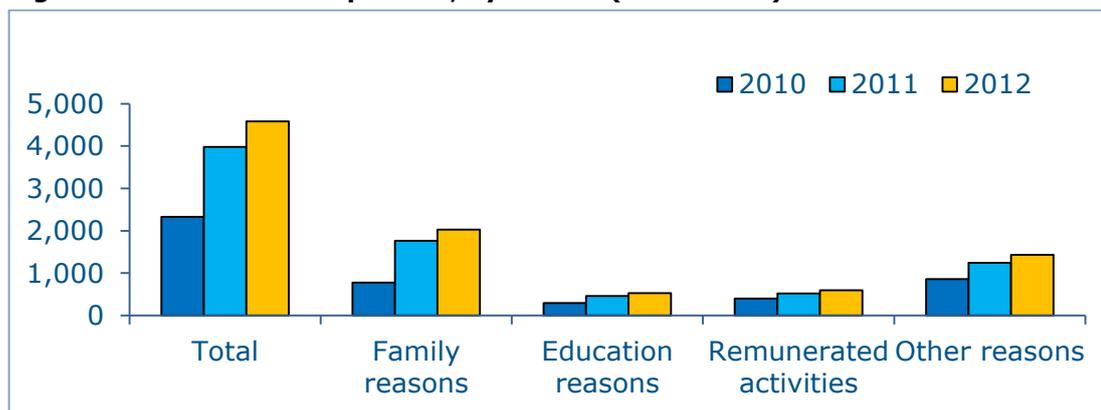
⁶ Fingerprints (starting from six years of age) and digital image of face

⁷ Serbia, Macedonia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina

⁸ Belorussia, Armenia, Tadjhikistan, the Ukraine and Uzbekistan

Statistical Annex: Immigration and Asylum in Latvia (2010-2012)

Figure 1: First residence permits, by reason (2010-2012)



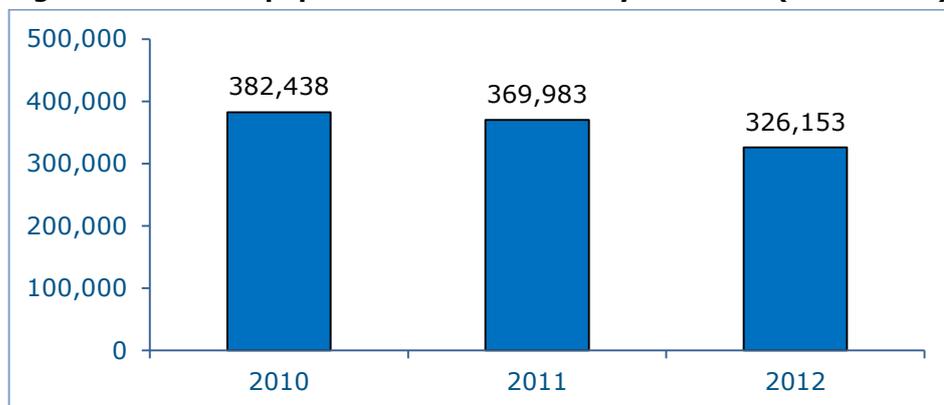
Source: Eurostat (*migr_resfirst*) for 2010 and 2011; preliminary data for 2012 from National contributions to EMN Annual Policy Report

Table 1: First residence permits: Top 5 nationalities (2010 - 2011)

2010	2011	2012
1. Russia – 725	1. Russia – 2,018	N/A
2. Recognised non-citizens- 524	2. Ukraine – 466	N/A
3. Ukraine – 267	3. Belarus – 255	N/A
4. United States – 124	4. Kazakhstan – 158	N/A
5. Belarus – 111	5. Uzbekistan – 137	N/A

Source: Eurostat migration statistics (*migr_resfirst*)

Figure 2: Resident population of third-country nationals (2010-2012)



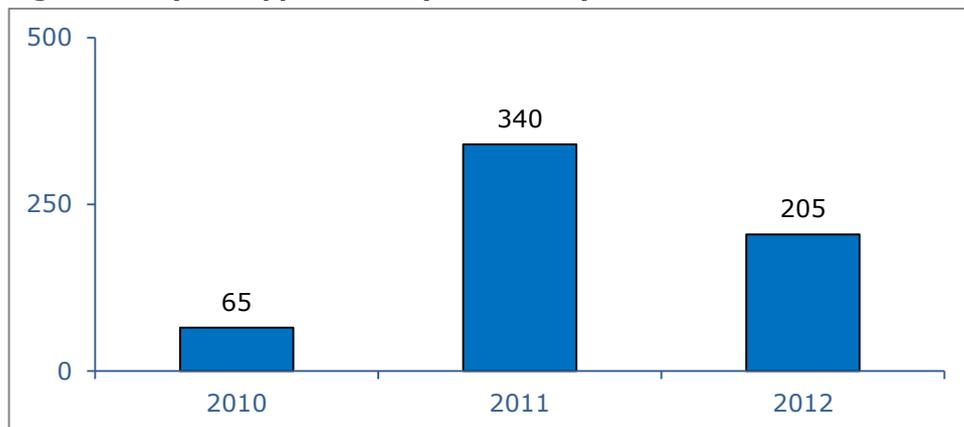
Source: Eurostat migration statistics (*migr_pop1ctz*)

Table 2: Resident population: Top 5 nationalities (2010 - 2011)

2010	2011	2012
1. Recognised Non-Citizens- 343,279	1. Recognised Non-Citizens - 332,826	N/A
2. Russia– 31,113	2. Russia – 36,100	N/A
3. Ukraine – 2,959	3. Ukraine – 2,891	N/A
4. Belarus – 1,904	4. Belarus – 1,925	N/A
5. Israel – 318	5. Israel – 322	N/A

Source: Eurostat migration statistics (*migr_pop1ctz*)

Figure 3: Asylum applications (2010-2012)



Source: Eurostat migration statistics (migr_asyappctza)

Table 3: Asylum applications: Top 5 nationalities (2010-2012)

2010	2011	2012
1. Afghanistan – 2,490	1. Georgia – 4,095	1. Georgia – 4,880
2. Russia – 2,375	2. Democratic Republic of the Congo – 3,165	2. Democratic Republic of the Congo – 3,250
3. Kyrgyzstan – 2,220	3. Russia – 2,190	3. Syria – 2,160
4. Democratic Republic of the Congo – 1,980	4. Syria – 1,665	4. Afghanistan – 1,455
5. Ghana – 1,675	5. Iran – 1,215	5. Russia – 1,340

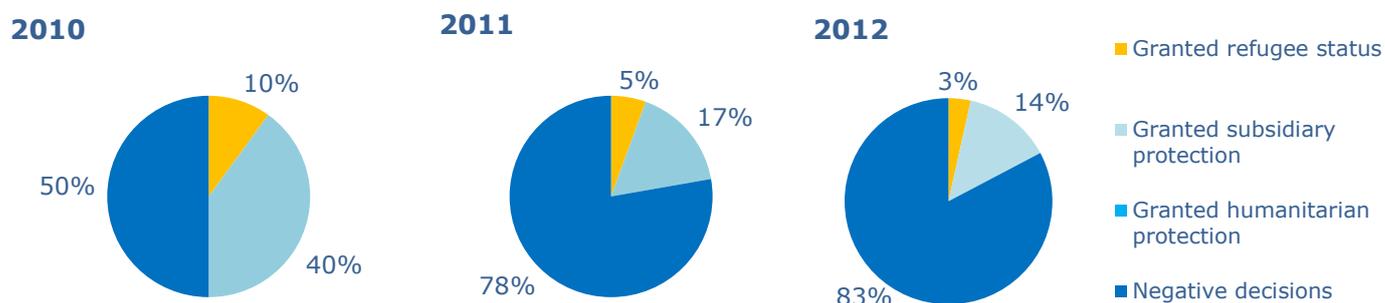
Source: Eurostat migration statistics (migr_asyappctza)

Table 4: Asylum applications - First instance decisions by outcome (2010-2012)

	Total decisions	Positive decisions	Of which:			Negative decisions
			Refugee status	Subsidiary protection	Humanitarian reasons	
2010	50	25	5	20	N/A	25
2011	90	20	5	15	N/A	70
2012	145	25	5	20	N/A	120

Source: Eurostat migration statistics (migr_asydcfsta)

Figures 4-6: Asylum applications - First instance decisions by outcome (2010-2012)



Source: Eurostat migration statistics (migr_asydcfsta)

Table 5: Third-country nationals relocated and resettled (2011-2012)

	2010	2011	2012
Third-country nationals relocated	N/A	N/A	0
Third-country nationals resettled	N/A	N/A	0

Source: Eurostat migration statistics (migr_asyresa)

Table 6: Unaccompanied minors (2010-2012)

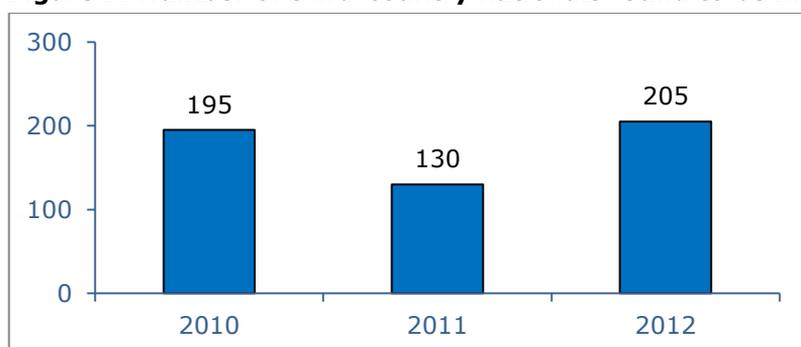
	2010	2011	2012
Unaccompanied minors (total)	5	0	1
Unaccompanied minors not applying for asylum	N/A	N/A	N/A
Unaccompanied minor asylum applicants	5	0	0

Source: National contributions to EMN Annual Policy Report

Table 7: Number of third-country nationals refused entry at external borders (2010-2012)

	2010	2011	2012
Third-country nationals refused entry at external borders	815	1,230	1,820

Source: Eurostat migration statistics (migr_eirfs)

Figure 7: Number of third-country nationals found to be illegally present (2010-2012)

Source: Eurostat migration statistics (migr_eipre)

Table 8: Third-country nationals returned (2010-2012)

	Third-country nationals ordered to leave	Returned as part of forced return measures	Returned voluntarily	Returned through an Assisted Voluntary Return Programme
2010	210	94	16	N/A
2011	1,060	50	1055	75
2012	2,070	51	2,019	9

Source: Eurostat migration statistics (migr_eiord) and National contributions to EMN Annual Policy Report

Table 9: Number of visas issued by type (2010-2012)

	2010	2011	2012
Total visas	N/A	N/A	188,083
Schengen visa (short-stay visas)*	134,178	156,307	174,921
National visa	N/A	3,020	9,416

Source: Commission Staff Working Documents on the Annual Report on Immigration and Asylum; *DG HOME Statistics on Visa Policy website: http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/borders-and-visas/visa-policy/index_en.htm