



Office of Citizenship and  
Migration Affairs  
Republic of Latvia



# REPORT ON MIGRATION AND ASYLUM IN LATVIA

## REFERENCE YEAR 2017

Riga, April 2018

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 program of activities. The topics of studies are related to the area of migration of third-country nationals.

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This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the authors, and the European Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information included therein.



The project is co-funded by the European Union Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund

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## SUMMARY

The annual report on the migration and asylum in Latvia (hereinafter - the Report) provides an overview of the most important and most significant implemented and planned changes in the migration and asylum policy, by implementing the requirements of the European Union (hereinafter - EU) legal acts, as well as reflects public discussion on certain issues of the migration and asylum area, as well as statistics for the time period from 1 January to 31 December 2017 and in the beginning of 2018.

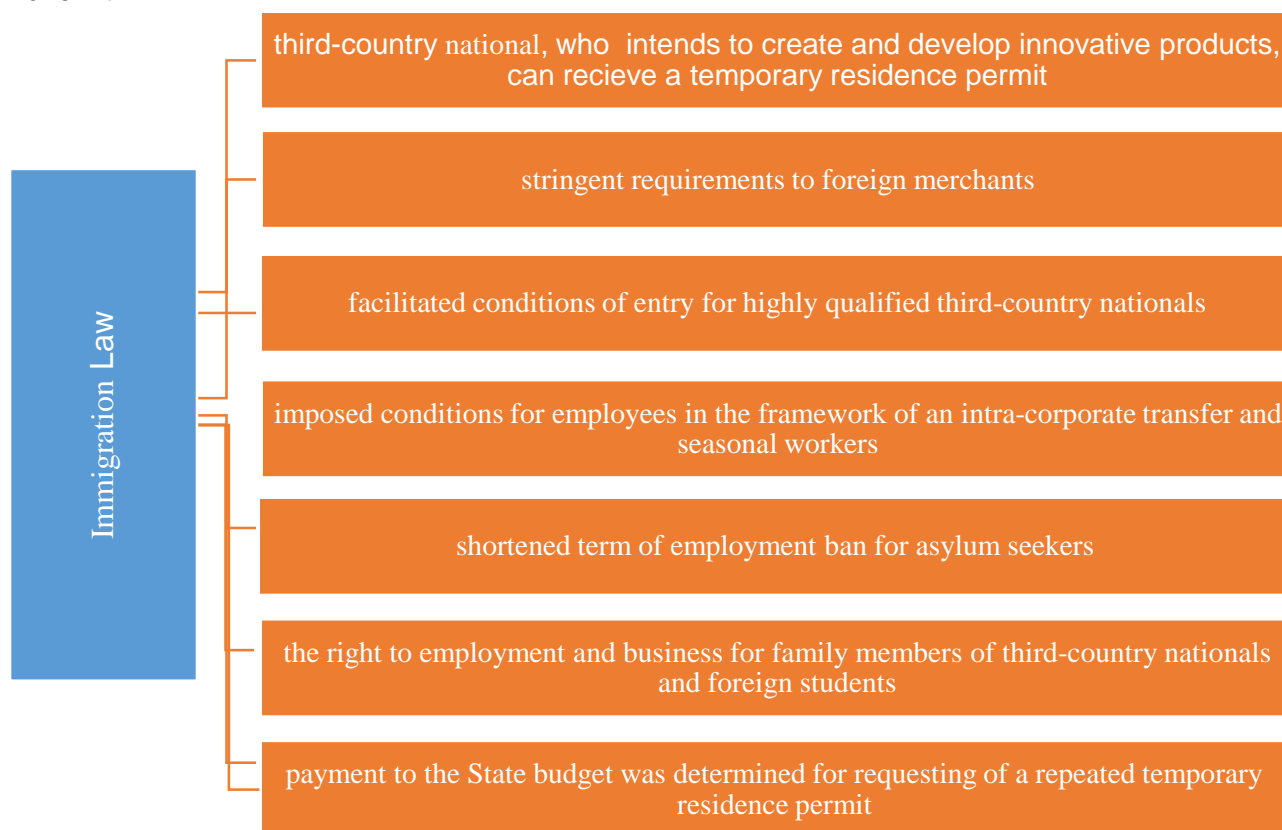
The migration and asylum area in Latvia is determined by the Asylum Law and Immigration Law, where amendments were made in 2017.

Pursuant to amendments to the Asylum Law:

- functions of authorities were changed for granting a support to receivers of international protection;<sup>1</sup>
- also the procedure for pay-out of benefits was changed <sup>2,3</sup>.

New Cabinet Regulations were adopted and the current ones were amended in the asylum area, in relation to the procedure for performance of health checks of asylum seekers and support standards at the accommodation places.

The following amendments to the Immigration Law were made in 2017 and in the beginning of 2018<sup>4,5</sup>:



<sup>1</sup>As amended by the Asylum Law of 20 April 2017 - *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No. 90, 10.05.2017 - [came into force on 24.05.2017]

<sup>2</sup>Law "Amendments to the Asylum Law". - *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No. 90, 10.05.2017 - [came into force on 24.05.2017]

<sup>3</sup>Cabinet Regulation No. 302 "Regulations On the Single Financial Support and a Benefit for Covering of Expenses of Staying for a Refugee and the Person Acquiring the Alternative Status", adopted on 6 June 2017 - *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No.114, 08.06.2017. - [came into force on 09.06.2017; applicable as of 01.06.2017]

<sup>4</sup>Law "Amendments to the Immigration Law" - *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No. 36, 16.02.2017. - [came into force on 02.03.2017]

<sup>5</sup>Law "Amendments to the Immigration Law" - *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No. 242, 06.12.2017. - [came into force on 01.01.2018]

New Cabinet Regulations were adopted and the current ones were amended in the immigration area in relation to the amount of financial means necessary for foreigners, where the amount of financial means to be proved for a minor child is reduced from 60 to 30 percent from the minimum labour payment in the state. Amendments to the Regulations Regarding Residence Permit facilitate entry for employees of start-ups, as well as facilitate employment of third-country nationals, where shortage in the labour force is expected.

Similar to other EU countries, the migration flows have a trend to increase also in Latvia. The number of temporary residence permits issued for the first time, which has slightly increased, indicates on that. 1985 first residence permits out of them were issued in relation to family reunification, 2042 first residence permits were issued to third-country nationals in relation to employment. The increase is mainly based on the growth of the number of employees and students.

The number of asylum seekers remained in the level of the previous years in total, although a slight increase was observed in 2017, when 395 persons submitted asylum applications during a year. 158 out of them were relocated from Greece and Italy, but 40 persons were resettled from the refugee camps in Turkey.

The number of unaccompanied minors entering the country during the reporting period, has decreased, 14<sup>6</sup> unaccompanied minors came to Latvia, 11<sup>7</sup> of them requested asylum in Latvia.

In 2017 several projects were implemented by the state and non-governmental organisations for improvement of the proficiency of Latvian for migrants. The Society “Shelter “Safe House”” provided support to 316 persons in total.

The number of third-country nationals detained for irregular crossing of the “green” border has decreased. Similarly to the previous year, the key groups of detained persons consisted of the nationals of Vietnam, Bangladesh, India, Iraq, Russia and DR of Congo. In 2017 the biggest risk of irregular border crossing existed on the Latvian - Russian border.

In 2017, the number of refusals of entry on the borders increased in comparison with 2016, including for third-country nationals, who could enter Latvia without a visa - the nationals of Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. The key reason for refusal of entry - the nationals of these countries could not substantiate the reason for their entry into the EU or they were short of sufficient financial means.

The State Border Guard participated in ten joint operations organised by Frontex that provided support both, to the EU Member States as well as third countries.

In 2017 compulsory return was applied for 271 persons, but 1029 persons returned voluntary. The Riga office of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) provided support for voluntary return to 63 persons in 2017.

Two third-country nationals were recognized as victims of trafficking in human being. A status of international protection was granted to both and support is provided to them as the receivers of international protection as well as victims of trafficking in human being.<sup>8</sup> A status of suspects is determined for 4 persons and 4 persons are sentenced for organization of trafficking in human beings within the framework of initiated criminal proceedings.

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<sup>6</sup>Data source: State Border Guard.

<sup>7</sup>Data source: The Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs.

<sup>8</sup>Source: Ministry of the Interior

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Report provides an overview of the most significant changes in the migration and asylum policy, regarding amendments to regulatory enactments, including implementing the requirements of the European Union law, reflects discussions in the parliament and public regarding the certain topics of migration and asylum.

The Report was developed on the basis of the specification developed by the European Commission and approved by the National Contact Points of the European Migration Network (hereinafter - the EMN), enabling to collect single and comparable information about all Member States. The Synthesis Report on the migration and asylum situation in 2017 in EU after drawing up thereof will be available on the EMN website [www.emn.lv](http://www.emn.lv).

Information necessary for development of the Report was acquired by sending requests for information and summarising replies from the Ministry of the Interior, the State Border Guard, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Consular Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Welfare, the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Health, International Organization for Migration Riga Office and the Society Integration Foundation. Experts from the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs and the State Border Guard were involved in the development of the work.

In order to reflect opinions dominant in the society and review the discussions held in the political environment, articles, opinions and assessments published on various news and public policy portals as well as information available on websites of other public authorities were used in this work. All items of used sources and literature are included in the list of used sources and literature.

There were also data collected by the national data providers and EU Statistical Bureau Eurostat used in the paper. Data have been coordinated with the experts of migration and asylum areas.

All terms used in this paper correspond with the definitions determined in the EMN Asylum and Migration Glossary<sup>9</sup>.

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

### General changes in the migration and asylum area

On 14 November 2017 the Cabinet approved the Informative Report submitted by the Minister of the Interior “Regarding execution of measures provided for in the Action Plan for Movement and Admission in Latvia of Persons who Need International Protection”<sup>10</sup>. The Report analyses the execution of the Action plan and gives recommendations for further work. It was concluded in the Report that Latvia has actually fulfilled liabilities in full with regards to relocation of asylum seekers from Greece, where 99% were relocated, but 84% were resettled from Turkey and 14% were relocated from Italy.<sup>11</sup> Countries of origin of relocated asylum seekers are Syria, Eritrea and Iraq. There were

<sup>9</sup>Available at [www.emn.lv](http://www.emn.lv).

<sup>10</sup> Informative report “Regarding fulfilment of measures provided by Action Plan for Movement and Admission in Latvia of Persons who need International Protection” - Available: <http://tap.mk.gov.lv/lv/mk/tap/?pid=40440003&mode=mk&date=2017-10-31>.

<sup>11</sup>Decisions adopted on the EU level provides for relocation of 531 asylum seekers to Latvia - 295 persons from Greece, 186 from Italy and 50 persons from Turkey.

in total 367 persons relocated to Latvia by the end of 2017 and the admission of the remaining 164 persons is gradually continuing.<sup>12</sup> It is planned to implement resettlement by the middle of 2018.

Pursuant to the Cabinet Order No. 61 of 15 February 2018, “Conceptual Report on Immigration Policy”<sup>13</sup>, where all important entries of third-country nationals in the perspective of legal migration (family reunification, labour migration, commercial activity, studies) were reviewed, was supported. The Report analyses the administrative procedures for admission of third-country nationals and provides recommendations or improvement of the current situation that would be necessary to include in the new draft law “Immigration Law”, which should replace the Immigration Law, adopted on 31 October 2002 and currently being in force. The Cabinet supported the 1st solution included in the Conceptual Report on Immigration Policy, determining to the Minister of the Interior to prepare the draft Immigration Law and to submit it to the Cabinet until 31 March 2019.<sup>14</sup>

Significant changes have occurred during the reference period in the legal acts in the area of regular migration - Immigration Law and the subordinate Cabinet Regulations, in order to overtake two EU Directives<sup>15</sup>. Both directives are related to the area of economic migration.

### Discussions in the area of economic immigration

Discussions in mass media, government and the Saeima (the Parliament) on the attraction of third-country nationals to the Latvian labour market and integration of persons, who have received international protection, in the society of Latvia were continued in 2017.

Representatives of the Foreign Investors Council and Latvian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, by referring to the shortage of highly qualified employees, indicated to the politicians working in the Employment sub-commission of the Social and Labour Affairs Commission of the Saeima on the need to facilitate conditions for employment of third-country nationals in Latvia.<sup>16</sup> Lack of specialists is currently observed for a number of companies; in particular in the processing industry and ICT<sup>17</sup> industry that limits the economical growth of Latvia, productivity increase of companies and attraction of investments.<sup>18</sup>

The opinion of employers was supported also by Morten Hansen, the Head of the Economics Department of Stockholm School of Economics in Riga, indicating *that some may still deny it, but the signs of overheat of the labour market are clear and existing already for long. It is expected that it will not only continue in 2018, but also get worse.* He substantiated his opinion with 10 signs of overheat of the labour force market.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>12</sup>Informs about the achievements in admission of asylum seekers.- Available: <https://mk.gov.lv/lv/aktualitates/informe-par-paveikto-patveruma-mekletaju-uznemsana>.

<sup>13</sup>Cabinet Order No. 61 “Regarding the conceptual report “Conceptual Report on Immigration Policy””, adopted on 15 February 2018 - *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No. 35, 19.02.2018 - [came into force on 15.02.2018]

<sup>14</sup> Cabinet Order No. 61 “Regarding the conceptual report “Conceptual Report on Immigration Policy””, adopted on 15 February 2018 - *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No. 35, 19.02.2018. - [came into force on 15.02.2018]

<sup>15</sup>Directive 2014/36/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 February 2014 on the conditions of entry and stay of third-country nationals for the purpose of employment as seasonal workers;

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

<sup>16</sup>Entrepreneurs encourages government to simplify the selection of third-country nationals for work.- Available: <http://nra.lv/latvija/205274-uznemeji-mudina-valdibu-vienkarsot-treso-valstu-pilsonu-uznemsanu-darba.htm>.

<sup>17</sup>Information and communication technologies.

<sup>18</sup>The Cabinet supports application of facilitated conditions for attraction of highly qualified specialists from foreign countries.- Available: <https://mk.gov.lv/lv/aktualitates/mk-atbalsta-atvieglotu-nosacijumu-piemerosanu-augsti-kvalificetu-specialistu-piesaistei>.

<sup>19</sup>10 reasons for why the labour market will be Latvia’s biggest economic headache in 2018.- Available:

<https://irir.lv/2017/12/21/10-reasons-labour-market-will-latvias-biggest-economic-headache>

2018?utm\_source=email+marketing+Mailigen&utm\_campaign=Ir+Svar%C4%ABg%C4%81kais+22.12.2017.&utm\_medium=email.



It should be noted that as employers' interest in the workforce from third countries increases, the National Alliance "All For Latvia!" - "For Fatherland and Freedom/LNNK" (*Nacionālā apvienība "Visu Latvijai!" - "Tēvzemei un Brīvībai/LNNK"*)<sup>20</sup> was against the competition with the local labour force that may be caused by immigrants.<sup>21</sup>

Taking into account the above mentioned discussions and upon agreeing with the need to promote access of third-country nationals to the Latvian labour market, the Ministry of Economics developed the Cabinet Regulation during 2017, including professions that will have facilitated conditions for third-country nationals for receipt of the rights to employment. This Regulation was adopted on 20 February 2018<sup>22</sup>, including 237 professions and specialities on the list.

### Discussions in the area of integration of persons, who have received asylum/ international protection

Discussions on the integration of persons, who have received asylum and international protection, were mostly related to the Action Plan for Movement and Admission in Latvia of Persons who Need International Protection (hereinafter - the Action Plan).<sup>23</sup> Implementation of the Action Plan was assessed by both, public authorities as well as non-governmental organisations.

In May 2017 the State Audit Office published assessment on the use of funds granted for implementation of the Action Plan<sup>24</sup>. According to the opinion of the State Audit Office, the results of measures performed within the framework of the Action Plan should be assessed, accordingly reviewing the amount of funding to be granted in the coming years, as well as the State Audit Office and the Society "Shelter "Safe House"" recommend to designate an institution, which would be responsible for execution of the Action Plan and coordination of activities.

Researchers of the Centre for Public Policy PROVIDUS have expressed their opinion on the results of the Action Plan<sup>25</sup>, emphasizing that it should be worth continuing the measures covered by the Action Plan by improving them, paying particular attention to solutions that would facilitate further stay of refugees in Latvia.

Journalists of the Public media of Latvia followed the results of the pilot project lasting for half a year in *Jelgava*, where the local government provided support to refugees and persons acquiring the alternative status, providing them with a dwelling. Journalists prepared four stories about how the activities are being implemented in the kindergarten, schools and workplace.<sup>26</sup> The role of the local government was emphasized in particular for provision of support during the initial stage by both, providing a dwelling as well as involvement of social and educational services.

<sup>20</sup>National conservative party.

<sup>21</sup>The National Alliance is against cheap labour force from foreign countries.- Available: <http://nra.lv/latvija/202907-nacionala-apvieniba-pret-letu-darbaspeku-no-arzemem.htm>.

<sup>22</sup>Cabinet Regulation No. 108 "Specialities (Professions), Where Significant Shortage of Labour Force is to be Expected and Where Foreigners May be Invited for Work in the Republic of Latvia", adopted on 20 February 2018. - - [came into force on 07.03.2018]

<sup>23</sup>Cabinet Order No. 759 "Action Plan for Movement and Admission in Latvia of Persons who Need International Protection", adopted on 2 December 2015 - *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No. 238. 04.12.2015. - [came into force on 02.12.2015]

<sup>24</sup>Use of funds granted for the Action Plan for Movement and Admission in Latvia of Persons who Need International Protection.- Available: <http://www.lrvk.gov.lv/uploads/reviziju-zinojumi/vkontrol-patve%CC%84ruma-mekle%CC%84ta%CC%84ji-v06.pdf>.

<sup>25</sup>Agnese Lāce and Rasmuss Filips Geks "Two years of training in the admission of refugees: to improve or throw away?". Available: <http://providus.lv/article/divu-gadu-macibas-beglu-uznemsana-pilnveidot-vai-izmest>.

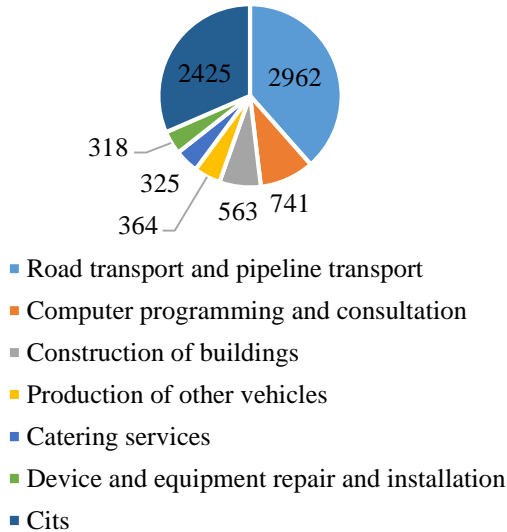
<sup>26</sup>How special support helps refugees to settle in Latvia. Four stories from Jelgava.- Available: <http://www.lsm.lv/raksts/zinas/zinu-analize/ka-begliem-latvija-palidz-iejusties-ipass-atbalsts.-cetri-stasti-no-jelgavas.a264448/>.

### 3. LEGAL MIGRATION AND MOBILITY

The total number of issued first temporary residence permits in 2017 has increased in comparison with the previous year - 6399 (6002 - in 2016).

#### Economic migration

#### Right to employment in 2017



The total number of rights to employment granted to third-country nationals in 2017 has increased - 7688 (6007 - in 2016), out of which the majority are employed in the area of road transport and pipeline transport (2952), computer programming and consultation area (741), area of construction of buildings (563), production of other vehicles (364), catering services (325) and in the area of repair and installation of devices and equipment (318)<sup>27</sup>.

The number of residence permits issued to third-country nationals for the first time for the purpose of employment has increased: in 2016 - 1736<sup>28</sup>, in 2017 - 2042.

#### Rights to employment granted to third-country nationals and first issued residence permits in relation to employment



The most significant changes in the area of economic migration are related to Amendments to the Immigration Law<sup>29</sup>. Number of amendments was made in order to solve the lack of workforce.

- entry conditions are facilitated for highly qualified third-country nationals in professions, where significant shortage of workforce is forecasted;

<sup>27</sup>Data source: The Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs.

<sup>28</sup>Data source: 2012.-2016. Eurostat, 2017. - The Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs.

<sup>29</sup>Law "Amendments to the Immigration Law" - *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No. 36, 16.02.2017. - [came into force on 02.03.2017]

- a possibility to receive the EU Blue Card also for the persons, who have not acquired the appropriate education in the industry, but who has the appropriate professional experience of at least five years in the area of the planned employment. The time period for review of documents (10 days) for receipt of the EU Blue Card was reduced. EU Blue Card applicants who will be employed in a profession included in the list of professions approved by the Cabinet of Ministers<sup>30</sup>, where a significant shortage of labour force is forecasted, the salary is determined according to the average monthly gross pay of employees in Latvia during the previous year applying a coefficient of 1.2<sup>31</sup>;
- the rights to employment shall be granted to all family members of the employed.

In order to promote foundation of start-ups, a new purpose of stay is integrated into amendments to the Immigration Law, which is related to the Law on Aid for the Activities of Start-up Companies<sup>32</sup>. Amendments to the Immigration Law stipulates that a temporary residence permit may be issued to a third-country national for a time period not exceeding three years, if the third-country national plans to create or develop an innovative product in Latvia.<sup>33</sup> The requirements, providing for the minimum period of operation of one year, shall not be referred to such enterprises, before the member of the board is entitled to request for a temporary residence permit, as well as shall not determine the minimum amounts for tax payments that has to be paid in order the member of the board - a third-country national - would be able to continue to stay in Latvia with a temporary residence permit.

At the same time changes were made in the Regulations Regarding Residence Permits<sup>34</sup>, easing the receipt of a residence permit for foundation of a start-up: third-country nationals shall not require a sponsorship neither when requesting, nor registering the residence permit. Founders of a start-up shall have the right to request for a temporary residence permit still before foundation of a start-up, as well as during the first two years of operation of a start-up there are no additional requirements made with regards to payment of taxes in certain amount. The Regulation impose also certain duties to a recipient of the permit: he or she shall establish a start-up within a time period of three months after receipt of the permit and within a time period of 18 months shall attract investments of a qualified risk capital

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<sup>30</sup>Cabinet Regulation No. 108 "Specialities (Professions), Where Significant Shortage of Labour Force is to be Expected and Where Foreigners May be Invited for Work in the Republic of Latvia", adopted on 20 February 2018. - The list includes 237 professions and specialities. Facilitation of the regulation on the employment of third-country nationals is necessary in order to eliminate the lack of work force on the short-term perspective that significantly eliminates the economical growth of Latvia, in particular in such sectors as processing industry and information and communication technologies, as well as in order to promote productivity in sectors with high added value.

The following preferences will be applied for attraction of specialists included in the list of professions:

- if an employee would like to receive the EU Blue Card - the minimum salary shall not be below the average gross labour payment in Latvia in the previous year, multiplied by coefficient 1.2 (instead of the previous coefficient 1.5);
- in other cases - a foreigner could be attracted for the vacant position that is registered with the State Employment Agency for at least 10 working day (previous requirement - for at least a month).

<sup>31</sup>Cabinet Regulation No.225 "Regulation On the Establishment of the Amount of Financial Means and Existence of Financial Means Necessary for a Foreigner", adopted on 25 April 2017. - *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No. 97, 18.05.2017 - [came into force on 19.05.2017]

Law On Aid for the Activities of Start-up Companies- *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No. 241, 10.12.2016 - [came into force on 01.01.2017]

<sup>33</sup>In case if after the issue of a temporary residence permit the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs has established fulfilment of such provisions: a) within a time period of three months afterwards, when a decision has been made regarding granting a temporary residence permit, a third-country national is registered as a member of the board for not longer than a capital company registered with the Commercial Register a year ago, within the framework of which he or she plans to create or develop an innovative product, b) the total investment of the qualified risk capital investor made to the equity capital of the above mentioned capital company within a time period of six months after the issue of a temporary residence permit issued for the implementation of the first and the same activity has reached at least EUR 30 000 and within a time period of 18 months after the issue of a temporary residence permit - at least EUR 60 000, c) maximum five third-country nationals stay in Latvia with a temporary residence permit for the implementation of one and the same activity, related to creation or development of an innovative product, in Latvia. If all third-country nationals fail to submit an application for requesting of a temporary residence permit for implementation of one and the same activity related to creation or development of an innovative product simultaneously, the temporary residence permit shall be granted for a term not exceeding the time, for which it is granted to the first third-country national, who has received a temporary residence permit for the implementation of such activity, d) a third-country national, to whom a temporary residence permit has been issued in accordance with the provisions of this paragraph, is not employed by another employer or is not an official of another capital company registered with the Commercial Register.

<sup>34</sup>Cabinet Regulation No. 300 "Amendments to the Regulation No. 564 "Regulations Regarding Residence Permits", adopted on 21 June 2010", adopted on 6 June 2017 - *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No. 114, 08.06.2017 - [came into force on 09.06.2017]

investor in the amount of EUR 60 000. It is expected that these amendments will facilitate establishment of enterprises, producing innovative products, in Latvia.<sup>35</sup>

Amendments to the Immigration Law set forth additional requirements for representative offices of third-country merchants, the representatives of which request for a temporary residence permit. Further on such third-country company shall be registered abroad for at least five years, it shall employ at least 50 employees and the annual turnover thereof shall reach 10 million EUR. Such a regulation is included in order to provide only prospective companies and forms of cooperation entering the Latvian market. Currently the most often residence permits are refused for representatives of the representative offices of third-country merchants, because it is established that majority of such representative offices actually do not operate and do not provide any economical benefit to Latvia.<sup>36</sup> In order to prevent that, on 6 June 2017 Cabinet Regulation No. 300 “Amendments to the Cabinet Regulation No. 564 “Regulations Regarding Residence Permits”, adopted on 21 June 2010”<sup>37</sup>, was issued, stipulating that a third-country national, who wants to stay in Latvia as a representative of the representative office of a foreign merchant, shall submit the business plan, confirming that the business strategy of the foreign merchant for operation in Latvia will facilitate development of the production or service area. A foreign company shall not have any tax debts.

In addition to that, the amendments to the Immigration Law determine entry conditions for intra-corporate transferees and seasonal workers. They take over the legal regulation determined within the framework of Directive 2014/66/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 May 2014<sup>38</sup> on the conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals in the framework of an intra-corporate transfer. Amendments to the Immigration Law define the concept of an intra-corporate transferee, as well as it provides that such persons shall not need a certification on the right to employment with the certain employer, if they enter within the framework of short-term mobility, and the duration of the residence permit to be issued shall be determined, depending on the type of employment. On 19 May 2017 the Cabinet Regulation No.225 “Regulations Regarding the Amount of Necessary Financial Means for a Foreigner and Procedures for the Determination of the Existence of Financial Means”<sup>39</sup> came into force, which stipulates that the minimum amount of labour payment of seasonal workers in the agriculture, forestry and fishery sector shall be in accordance with the average monthly gross salary of employees in the planned employment sector of the third-country national. This Regulation also stipulates that an amount of financial means to be proved for a minor child shall be 30 percent from the minimum labour payment in the state instead of the previous 60 percent. The minimum amount of financial means was reduced in order to simplify the process of receipt of residence permits for families, having more children and difficulties to prove the previously determined minimum financial means (for example, in the family with both parents and three children, previously the monthly minimum financial means to be proved were EUR 1406 per month).<sup>40</sup>

<sup>35</sup>Source: The Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs.

<sup>36</sup>Source: The Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs.

<sup>37</sup>Cabinet Regulation No. 300 “Amendments to the Regulation No. 564 “Regulation Regarding Residence Permits”, adopted on 21 June 2010”, adopted on 6 June 2017 - *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No. 114, 08.06.2017 - [came into force on 09.06.2017]

<sup>38</sup>Directive 2014/66/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 May 2014 on the conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals in the framework of an intra-corporate transfer. - *Official Gazette*, L 157, 27.05.2014.

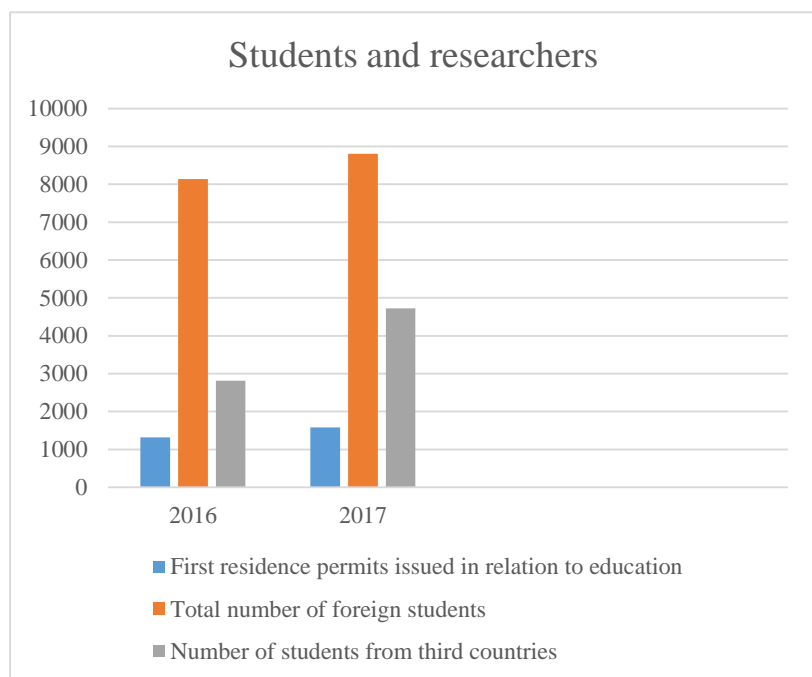
<sup>39</sup>Cabinet Regulation No.225 “Regulations Regarding the Amount of Necessary Financial Means for a Foreigner and Procedures for the Determination of the Existence of Financial Means”, adopted on 25 April 2017. - *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No. 97, 18.05.2017 - [came into force on 19.05.2017]

<sup>40</sup>Annotation of the draft Cabinet Regulation “Regulations Regarding the Amount of Necessary Financial Means for a Foreigner and Procedures for the Determination of the Existence of Financial Means”. - Available: [http://tap.mk.gov.lv/doc/2017\\_04/IEMAnot\\_200417\\_fin.2640.doc](http://tap.mk.gov.lv/doc/2017_04/IEMAnot_200417_fin.2640.doc).

The next draft amending law is already developed for the Immigration Law<sup>41</sup>, pursuant to which the Directive 2016/801/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 May 2016<sup>42</sup> is being taken over, as well as where it is planned to determine more beneficial employment conditions for representatives of representative offices of foreign airline companies registered in Latvia and third-country nationals, who stay in Latvia on the basis of the youth work holiday programmes. The amendments aim to reinforce the verification of the criteria for the economic activity of the company, in order to reduce the number of cases, when a residence permit in relation to employment is arranged only in order to obtain the residence rights for a non-effectively operating company, failing to fulfil the criteria of tax payment.<sup>43</sup>

On 13 February 2018 “Conceptual Report on Immigration Policy”<sup>44</sup> of the Ministry of the Interior was supported during the meeting of the Cabinet, providing recommendations for improvement of the current situation that would be necessary to include in the new draft law “Immigration Law”, which should replace the Immigration Law, currently being in force and adopted on 31 October 2002. Currently the work is commenced on the development of the new Immigration Law.

### Students and Researchers



1581 first residence permits were issued in 2017 in relation to education (in 2016 - 1314).

The number of foreign students has grown in Latvia by 8 percent during 2017. The number of foreign students in the academic year 2017/2018 in Latvia was 8806 (2016/2017 - 8137)<sup>45</sup>, 4724 out of which were third-country nationals.

The Law “Amendments to the Immigration Law”<sup>46</sup> supplements the regulation by stipulating that the right to work up to 20 hours a week is also for students who have received a long-term visa for the students exchange.

<sup>41</sup> Draft law “Amendments to the Immigration Law” annotation.- Available: <http://tap.mk.gov.lv/lv/mk/tap/?pid=40444736&mode=mk&date=2018-03-20>.

<sup>42</sup>Directive (EU) 2016/801 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 May 2016 on the conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals for the purposes of research, studies, training, voluntary service, pupil exchange schemes or educational projects and au pairing.

<sup>43</sup>A transitional period is determined for this regulation - it is planned to apply it as of 2 January 2019.

<sup>44</sup>Cabinet Order No. 61 “Regarding the conceptual report “Conceptual Report on Immigration Policy””, adopted on 15 February 2018 - *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No. 35, 19.02.2018 - [came into force on 15.02.2018]

<sup>45</sup>Data source: by the Ministry of Education and Science.

<sup>46</sup>Law “Amendments to the Immigration Law” - *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No. 36, 16.02.2017. - [came into force on 02.03.2017]



On 19 May 2017 the Cabinet Regulation No.225 “Regulations Regarding the Amount of Necessary Financial Means for a Foreigner and Procedures for the Determination of the Existence of Financial Means” came into force, which stipulates that

- 1) the amount of financial means necessary for third-country nationals, who will stay in Latvia for longer than 30 days, is determined lower by equalising the necessary amount to the one that is determined for a third-country national, who requests for a residence permit in Latvia. Such a solution has been selected in order to create equal staying conditions for foreign students, who stay in Latvia on the basis of visa, and those, who stay on the basis of a temporary residence permit. Currently the minimum amount of financial means for persons requesting for a visa is EUR 14 per day, that is approximately EUR 420 per month, while for persons requesting for a residence permit - in the amount of the minimum salary - EUR 430;
- 2) it is determined that foreign students and minor children, who stay in Latvia, can prove their financial means by submitting a relevant guarantee from parents or legal representatives also in the cases, when they do not stay in Latvia. Previously such a guarantee could be provided only by a person, who stays in Latvia;
- 3) it is planned that for third-country nationals, who are being transferred to Latvia by a legal person registered in a foreign country, such legal person can also guarantee the financial means. Regulation previously being in force allowed for a possibility to guarantee the financial means of a third-country national only by legal persons registered in Latvia.<sup>47</sup>

On 22 November 2017 the agreement between the government of the Republic of Latvia and the government of the People's Republic of China on cooperation in the area of education was signed by *Māris Selga*, the Ambassador of Latvia, and *Chen Baosheng*, the Minister of Education of China, at the Ministry of Education of China in Beijing. The agreement provides that both parties will facilitate experience and information exchange in the area of education, will support and promote cooperation between the higher and vocational education institutions as well as will facilitate mobility of students, education officials, academic staff, experts and specialists.<sup>48</sup>

In order to transpose the Directive 2016/801/EU<sup>49</sup> into the draft law of Amendments to the Immigration Law,<sup>50</sup> it is planned to make amendments by including definitions for the terms “volunteer”, “trainee”, “student” and “researcher” therein, to determine more beneficial employment conditions for students and researchers, to grant visa in relation to voluntary work or participation in the education exchange programme.

More beneficial employment conditions for foreign students and researchers are proposed also in the “Conceptual Report on Immigration Policy”<sup>51</sup>:

<sup>47</sup>Annotation of the draft Cabinet Regulation “Regulations Regarding the Amount of Necessary Financial Means for a Foreigner and Procedures for the Determination of the Existence of Financial Means ”.- Available: [http://tap.mk.gov.lv/doc/2017\\_04/IEMAnot\\_200417\\_fin.2640.doc](http://tap.mk.gov.lv/doc/2017_04/IEMAnot_200417_fin.2640.doc).

<sup>48</sup>The new agreement between the government of the Republic of Latvia and government of People’s Republic of China on cooperation in the area of education is signed.- Available: <http://www.izm.gov.lv/lv/aktualitates/2686-parakstits-jaunais-latvijas-republikas-valdibas-un-kinas-tautas-republikas-valdibas-ligums-par-sadarbibu-izglitiba-joma>.

<sup>49</sup>Directive (EU) 2016/801 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 May 2016 on the conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals for the purposes of research, studies, training, voluntary service, pupil exchange schemes or educational projects and au pairing. - Official Journal L 132, 21.05.2016.

<sup>50</sup>Draft law “Amendments to the Immigration Law” annotation.- Available: <http://tap.mk.gov.lv/lv/mk/tap/?pid=40444736&mode=mk&date=2018-03-20>.

<sup>51</sup>Cabinet Order No. 61 “Regarding the conceptual report “Conceptual Report on Immigration Policy””, adopted on 15 February 2018 - *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No. 35, 19.02.2018. [came into force on 15.02.2018]

- to cancel the requirement for an employer to register a vacant work position with the State Employment Agency, if the reason for invitation of a third-country national is employment on the basis of a employment contract, and the third-country national has acquired the full time study programme in the territory of Latvia with the duration of at least three semesters<sup>52</sup>, and has acquired a diploma of the higher education recognized by the stated regarding acquisition of the study programme.
- to grant to third-country researchers, who have concluded the scientific cooperation agreement with a scientific organisation registered in Latvia, an access to the labour market for performance of the pedagogical work.

## Family Reunification

In 2017 the number of first residence permits issued to third-country nationals due to family reunification has slightly decreased - 1985 (in 2016 - 2109). Changes are related to decrease of the number of foreign investors, who request first temporary residence permits in relation to contribution to the Latvian economy.

The Law “Amendments to the Immigration Law”<sup>53</sup>, in accordance with the provisions of the Council Directive 2003/86/EC of 22 September 2003 on the right to family reunification, grants the right to employment and commercial activity to family members of third-country nationals, who are permitted to work in Latvia. This Law determines the right to family reunification for the children of third-country nationals, who have reached the age of majority and who received the first temporary residence permit in Latvia, while being in the minor age.

In the draft law of Amendments to the Immigration Law<sup>54</sup> it is planned to equate the time period for review of applications for residence permits of family members of the EU Blue Card with the time period of review of applications of requesters of the EU Blue Card.<sup>55</sup>

“Conceptual Report on Immigration Policy” in the area of family unification initiates:

- the right to stay to spouses, minor children of spouses and parents of the citizens of Latvia, non-citizens of Latvia and third-country nationals, who stay in Latvia on the basis of a permanent residence permit, as well as adult children of citizens of Latvia shall be granted for six years, increasing the interval between the registration terms of a residence permit;
- when performing registration of a temporary residence permit, not to request the inviter to prepare a sponsorship.

## Information on routes to and conditions of legal migration

In order to promote understanding about the use of legal migration ways, the public authorities of Latvia have improved the information availability on websites and have organized several workshops and educational promotions in 2017.

Information about the procedure for submission of applications for visas was regularly updated on the websites of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and representative offices of Latvia in foreign

<sup>52</sup>bachelor's, master's or doctoral programme

<sup>53</sup>Law “Amendments to the Immigration Law” - *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No. 36, 16.02.2017. - [came into force on 02.03.2017]

<sup>54</sup>Draft law “Amendments to the Immigration Law” - Available: <http://tap.mk.gov.lv/lv/mk/tap/?pid=40444736&mode=mk&date=2018-03-20>.

<sup>55</sup>10 days.

countries and applicants for visas were provided with informative booklets about other issues, when being in present, in 2017.

The Ministry of Economics in cooperation with the Investment and Development Agency of Latvia and Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs has prepared electronic informative guide in English regarding the process of arrangement of the rights to employment for those third-country nationals, who are not nationals of the Member States of the EU or European Economic Area and who are planned to be employed in Latvia. The informative guide is available on the site <http://workinlatvia.liaa.gov.lv> and will help employers as well as employees from foreign countries to become familiar with the process for arrangement of residence permits and rights to employment. Further on this guide will be supplemented with information about other types of arrangement of the rights to employment (for example, issuing a work permit together with visa), materials in other languages and more detailed information about the immigration, employment and related regulation in Latvia.<sup>56</sup>

Diplomatic and consular representative office of Latvia in foreign countries in cooperation with tourism companies, higher education institutions of Latvia, Latvian Association of Hotels and Restaurants and other participants have organised workshops regarding the entry procedure to Latvia and Schengen area in general. Also information about the medical tourism and education possibilities in Latvia has been provided during the workshops.<sup>57</sup>

In September 2017 the State Employment Agency together with EURES<sup>58</sup> organised a campaign “On the way to employer through Baltic states”, during which the representatives of the State Employment Agency visited employer at the site. Officials of the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs joined the representatives of the State Employment Agency in order to discuss with companies the issues related to employment of third-country nationals.<sup>59</sup>

Officials of the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs participated in the 11th International Education Exhibition (Baku, Expo Centre) within the framework of the EU project “Support to the Implementation of the Mobility Partnership with Azerbaijan” (MOBILAZE).<sup>60</sup> The above mentioned officials consulted the persons willing to study about the requirements for entry and stay that should be taken into account, when entering Latvia.<sup>61</sup> Besides, within the framework of the project, Latvian experts participated also in the development of the informative booklet on studying in the EU Member States, where the above mentioned issues of entry and staying were discussed.<sup>62</sup>

## Citizenship and Naturalisation

In 2017 the number of persons admitted to the Latvian citizen on the basis of naturalisation procedure decreased - 915 (in 2016 - 987).<sup>63</sup> Similarly to 2017, the biggest proportion of persons acquiring the citizenship consists of non-citizens of Latvia - 89%. In comparison with 2016 (106), the number of

<sup>56</sup> An informative guide on the process of arrangement of work permits for foreigners has been established. - Available: <https://em.gov.lv/lv/jaunumi/15882-izveidots-informativs-celvedis-par-darba-atlaju-noformesanas-procesu-arzemniekiem>.

<sup>57</sup>Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs

<sup>58</sup>European Employment Services Network

<sup>59</sup>Source: The Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs.

<sup>60</sup>One of the purposes of the MOBILAZE project in the area of legal immigration is to improve awareness of the society of Azerbaijan about the mobility possibilities between the EU and Azerbaijan.

<sup>61</sup>Source: The Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs.

<sup>62</sup>Informative booklet is available at: [https://www.icmpd.org/fileadmin/2017/MOBILAZE\\_Booklet\\_Studying\\_in\\_the\\_EU\\_2018.pdf](https://www.icmpd.org/fileadmin/2017/MOBILAZE_Booklet_Studying_in_the_EU_2018.pdf)

<sup>63</sup>Data source: The Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs.



third-country nationals, who has received the citizenship of Latvia on the basis of naturalisation procedure, has slightly decreased in 2017 - 102.<sup>64</sup>

### Long-term Residence and Intra-EU Mobility

In order to transpose the Directive 2016/801/EU<sup>65</sup>, it is planned in the draft law of amendments to the Immigration Law<sup>66</sup> that researchers and students will have the right to stay in Latvia on the basis of visas and residence permits issued by other EU Member States. The period of stay acceptable for researchers shall not exceed 180 days during any time period of 360 days, but for students, who are participating in the EU mobility programmes - 360 days. During this period of stay researchers and students shall have the right also to employment. In cases of short-term mobility of researchers and mobility of students Latvia will not request a notification on the planned mobility, but researchers, who will require a long-term mobility within the framework of the research project, will have to request for a residence permit in Latvia.

### Other Aspects of Legal Migration

On 22 November 2017 amendments to the Immigration Law were adopted. They stipulate that receivers of temporary residence permits for investments into immovable property, capital companies and subordinate banking liabilities, shall have to make a payment to the State budget, when repeatedly requesting for a temporary residence permit. Payment in the amount of EUR 5000 shall be made by one payment at the moment of receipt of the repeated temporary residence permit or by instalments, making the first partial payment in the amount of EUR 1000 at the moment of receipt of the repeated temporary residence permit and further payments - each in the amount of 1000 - each year, when registering the temporary residence permit.<sup>67</sup>

It is planned in the draft law of amendments to the Immigration Law<sup>68</sup> to clarify the delegation to the Cabinet of Ministers for issuing of the document, confirming the status of stay of military persons, being in the employment of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the EU Member States as well as civilians employed by armed forces and their dependants in Latvia (hereinafter - certification), providing that such a certification may be issued also for military persons. Current wording of the Immigration Law does not provide to issue such a certification to military persons, but it shall be necessary in order to ensure their possibility to move across the territory of the countries of the Schengen area.

In order to ensure that, on 23 January 2018 the Cabinet has adopted Regulation No.44 "Regulation On the Issuing of a Certification for Civilians, Being Employed by the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and Armed Forces of the EU Member States, as well as Dependants of These Civilians and Military Persons of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and Armed Forces of EU Member States and Other Persons Related to Armed Forces, Regarding the Right to Stay in The Republic of

<sup>64</sup>Data source: The Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs.

<sup>65</sup>Directive (EU) 2016/801 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 May 2016 on the conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals for the purposes of research, studies, training, voluntary service, pupil exchange schemes or educational projects and au pairing. - Official Journal L 132, 21.05.2016.

<sup>66</sup>Draft law "Amendments to the Immigration Law" annotation. - Available: <http://tap.mk.gov.lv/lv/mk/tap/?pid=40444736&mode=mk&date=2018-03-20>.

<sup>67</sup>Law "Amendments to the Immigration Law" - *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No. 242, 06.12.2017. - [came into force on 01.01.2018]

<sup>68</sup>Draft law "Amendments to the Immigration Law" annotation. - Available: <http://tap.mk.gov.lv/lv/mk/tap/?pid=40444736&mode=mk&date=2018-03-20>.

Latvia"<sup>69</sup>. The new procedure shall determine the authority, issuing a certification regarding the right of civilians, being employed by the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and armed forces of the EU Member States, as well as dependants of such civilians and military persons of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and armed forces of the EU Member States and other persons related to armed forces, to stay in Latvia, the form and content of the certification as well as procedure for issue of the certification.

On 23 February 2018 UNHCR regional representative office in the Northern Europe in cooperation with the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs organized the meeting of experts about identification and protection of stateless persons - good practices, policy action possibilities and challenges. The meeting of experts provided to in total 24 participants from Island, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Lithuania, France, Hungary and Latvia, a good opportunity to acquire in-depth knowledge on the procedures for determination of the status of a stateless person.<sup>70</sup>

## Managing Migration

On 7 April 2017 the Regulation (EU) 2017/458 of the European Parliament and of the Council<sup>71</sup> came into force, introducing the systematic checks against databases at the moment of entry and exit to the persons, being entitled to freely move, in accordance with legal acts of the Union, namely, citizens of the EU, European Economic Area and Swiss Confederation (hereinafter - EU/EEA/CH). In accordance with the requirements of the Regulation No. 2017/458, the systematic check of the citizens of EU/EEA/CH shall include:

- personal identity and nationality check and check of authenticity and validity of the travel document provided for border crossing, including checking information against relevant databases, in particular Schengen Information System (SIS), Interpol database of Stolen and Lost Travel Documents and national databases of countries, containing information about stolen, unlawfully misappropriated, lost and annulled travel documents;
- ascertaining that the citizen of EU/EEA/CH is not deemed a person, causing threat to the public order, internal security, public health or international relations of any Member State, including checking information against SIS and other relevant databases of the Union;
- for passports and travel documents, including storage medium, as it is mentioned in Article 1(2) of Council Regulation (EC) No 2252/2004 of 13 December 2004 on standards for security features and biometrics in passports and travel documents issued by Member States, the authenticity of the data of microcircuits shall be checked.

Thus since 7 April 2017 systematic checks against relevant databases at the moment of entry and exit are performed both, for third-country nationals as well as citizens of EU/EEA/CH.<sup>72</sup>

## Visa policy

<sup>69</sup>Cabinet has adopted Regulation No.44 "Regulation On the Issuing of a Certification for Civilians, Being Employed by the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and Armed Forces of the EU Member States, as well as Dependants of These Civilians and Military Persons of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and Armed Forces of EU Member States and Other Persons Related to Armed Forces, Regarding the Right to Stay in The Republic of Latvia", adopted on 23 January 2017. - *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No. 18, 25.01.2018 - [came into force on 26.01.2018]

<sup>70</sup>Source: The Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs.

<sup>71</sup>Regulation (EU) 2017/458 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 March 2017 amending Regulation (EU) 2016/399 as regards the reinforcement of checks against relevant databases at external borders. - Official Journal L 74, 18.03.2017.

<sup>72</sup>Source: State Border Guard.

The total number of visas issued in 2017 has slightly decreased, reaching 168,729 (in 2016 - 169,758). 164 175 out of them – Schengen visas, 4554 - long-term (D) visas.<sup>73</sup>

Table 3-2.  
Total Number of Issued Visas According to Type Thereof, 2016-2017.<sup>74</sup>

	2016	2017
<b>Schengen visas</b>	165,613	164,175
<b>Long-term (D) visas</b>	4,145	4,554
<b>In total</b>	<b>169,758</b>	<b>168,729</b>

In 2017 the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs continued the implementation of the project “Use and Development of the National Visa Information System (NVIS) (Stage 1)”.<sup>75</sup> There were measures performed within the framework of the project in order to improve the operational quality of information technologies used during the process of processing applications for visas, provide the appropriate work environment for NVIS users and necessary trainings for work with NVIS.

There were necessary preparatory works performed during the reference period in order to ensure improvement of the functionality of the NVIS software, the equipment was acquired for equipment of work places for processing of applications for visas in the Latvian missions in foreign countries and for providing NVIS trainings, as well as trainings were provided for work with VIS and NVIS.<sup>76</sup>

In accordance with the mutual agreement, Hungary has ceased to represent Latvia for the issue of visas in Yekaterinburg (the Russian Federation) as of 1 December 2017, but cooperation with the outsourcing company Pony Express was commenced instead. On 1 February 2018 the visa representation agreement with Lithuania will come into force, which will represent Latvia in the issue of Schengen visas of Latvia in Ireland (Dublin).

In 2018 the cooperation with the outsourcing company VF Worldwide Holding Ltd will be commenced in the United Arab Emirates for acceptance of application of Schengen visas. The cooperation agreement provides that applications for Schengen visas will be accepted not only in the United Arab Emirates, but also other countries of the region - Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman and Saudi Arabia.

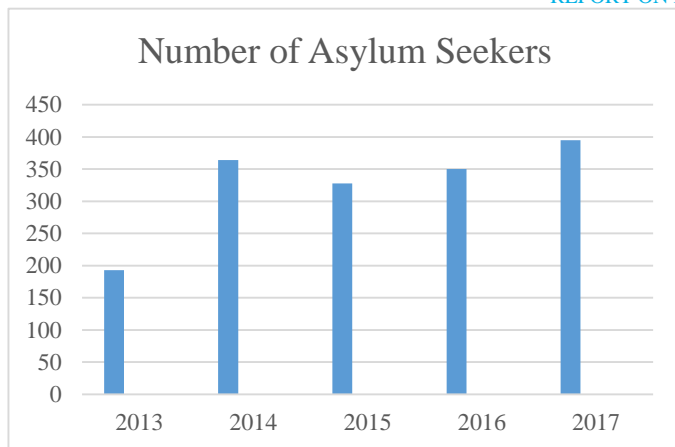
#### 4. INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION

<sup>73</sup>Data source: The Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs.

<sup>74</sup>Data source: The Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs.

<sup>75</sup>Multiple year project of the national programme of the Internal Security Fund for 2014 - 2020.

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



In comparison with 2016, the number of asylum seekers in 2017 has increased up to 395 (in 2016 - 350) persons, which is the biggest number ever. 158 out of the total number of asylum seekers were relocated from Greece and Italy, but 40 persons were resettled from the refugee camps in Turkey. In comparison with the previous years, the number of asylum seekers from Syria has increased - 179 (in 2016 - 149), from Vietnam - 40 (in 2016 - 4) and from Eritrea - 19 (in 2016 - 10), but the number from Afghanistan

has decreased - 13 (in 2016 - 35) and from India - 7 (in 2016 - 20).<sup>77</sup>

### Cooperation with Third Countries

Within the framework of mobility partnership the officials of the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs participated in the project implemented by the Estonian Academy of Security Sciences with Georgia regarding the issues of training on the asylum area in 2017. The purpose of the project “HIGH FIDELITY – Exercising for Asylum Procedures”<sup>78</sup> is to improve the knowledge of employees of Georgian asylum authorities by using solutions of innovative and interactive trainings. During the implementation of the project<sup>79</sup> three officials of the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs participated in the activities of the project, developing content for the virtual simulation training tool as well as leading trainings on the assessment of evidence and information of the country of origin. 26 officials of the Ministry of the Affairs of Refugees and Moved Persons of Georgia participated in trainings regarding assessment of evidence and information of countries of origin.

In the second half of 2017, in accordance with Training Agreement approved by the EU Twinning project “Strengthening of Kosovo Institutions in Effective Management of Immigration”<sup>80</sup>, an event took a place in Kosovo (Prishtina), during which the head of Asylum Affairs division of the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs together with Dutch expert performed preparation of draft regulatory enactments subject to the law in relation to accommodation of asylum seekers and procedure for review of application for asylum. Regulatory enactments were developed in relation to accommodation of asylum seekers and procedure for review of application for asylum.<sup>81</sup>

### Implementation of the Common European Asylum System

In 2017 the fingerprint information system for identifying asylum seekers (EURODAC) was improved, ensuring the link with the National Visa Information System and Interpol General Secretariat’s Information System<sup>82</sup>. But in the beginning of 2018 the link with the Schengen

<sup>77</sup>Data source: The Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs.

<sup>78</sup>Funded by the EU and implemented by the Estonian Academy of Security Sciences.

<sup>79</sup>March - November 2017.

<sup>80</sup>No. KS 14 IB JH 04

<sup>81</sup>Source: The Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs.

<sup>82</sup>Source: State Border Guard.

Information System is provided. In addition, it is planned in 2018 to ensure a possibility to compare fingerprints with the fingerprints available in the central EURODAC system for the purpose of law enforcement, in accordance with the provisions of the EURODAC Regulation.<sup>83</sup>

## Reception of Applicants of International Protection

Changes have taken place in admission of persons submitting an application for international protection in 2017 that are related with accommodation conditions of asylum seekers and detained foreigners, the possibilities and rights of such persons as well as cooperation forms of involved authorities.

The area of premises, provided for accommodation of third-country nationals, was significantly increased at *Ropaži* region, *Mucenieki*, in 2017. Another building for accommodation of asylum seekers was opened in the asylum seekers accommodation centre, where also the multifunctional centre for inhabitants of *Mucenieki* was arranged at the same time.<sup>84</sup> Thus 450 asylum seekers can be currently placed at the same time in the asylum seekers accommodation centre in *Mucenieki*.<sup>85</sup>

At the same time with changes in the accommodation premises, changes were made in legal acts in order the involved authorities would provide equal possibilities for asylum seekers and detained foreigners, regardless of the place of accommodation:

- The State Border Guard determined equal maintenance standards, scope of hygiene and the basic need for the asylum seeker accommodated in the premises of the asylum seekers accommodation centre of the State Border Guard and a foreigner placed in the accommodation centre of the State Border Guard<sup>86</sup>. Cabinet Regulations were drawn up in order to determine equal maintenance standards for a foreigner regardless of the place of accommodation<sup>87</sup>.
- Common procedure is determined at the asylum seekers accommodation places of the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs and the State Border Guard regarding sanitary processing of asylum seekers, as well as it is planned to perform health checks for all asylum seekers, regardless of their place of accommodation.<sup>88</sup> Before that the regulatory enactment did not provide for any procedure for performance of health examinations of asylum seekers, who do not stay in the asylum seekers accommodation centre or accommodation premises of the State Border Guard, but settle down at the place of residence selected by them in Latvia.

In 2016 and 2017 within the framework of the project “Support Measures for Persons in Need of International Protection, Reception and Accommodation in Latvia” of the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund<sup>89</sup> implemented by the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs, medical support was provided to asylum seekers in case of need.

<sup>83</sup>Source: State Border Guard.

<sup>84</sup>The renewed building of the Asylum Seekers Centre and Multifunctional Centre for inhabitants of Mucenieki is being opened. - Available: [http://www.iem.gov.lv/lat/aktualitates/informacija\\_medijiem/?doc=33924](http://www.iem.gov.lv/lat/aktualitates/informacija_medijiem/?doc=33924).

<sup>85</sup>Source: The Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs.

<sup>86</sup>Cabinet Regulation No.223 “Regulation On the Maintenance Standards, Scope of Hygiene and the Basic Needs For the Asylum Seeker Accommodated in the Premises of the Asylum Seekers Accommodation Centre of the State Border Guard and A Foreigner Placed in the Accommodation Centre of the State Border Guard or A Foreigner Placed in the Temporary Staying Room of the State Border Guard”, adopted on 23 May 2017. - *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No. 103, 26.05.2017 - [came into force on 27.05.2017]

<sup>87</sup>Draft Cabinet Regulation “Regulation On the Maintenance Standards, Scope of Hygiene and the Basic Need For the Asylum Seeker Accommodated in the Premises of the Asylum Seekers Accommodation Centre of the State Border Guard and A Foreigner Placed in the Accommodation Centre of the State Border Guard”, annotation - available: [http://tap.mk.gov.lv/doc/2017\\_05/IEMAnot\\_100417\\_uzturs\\_higiiena.805.docx](http://tap.mk.gov.lv/doc/2017_05/IEMAnot_100417_uzturs_higiiena.805.docx).

<sup>88</sup>Cabinet Regulation No. 686 “Procedure According to Which the Examination of Health Condition and Sanitary Treatment of Asylum Seeker Shall be Performed and Results Thereof shall be Registered”, adopted on 21 November 2017. - *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No. 232, 23.11.2017 - [came into force on 24.11.2017]

<sup>89</sup>Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund.



The Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs has prepared an informative guideline<sup>90</sup> in English, Russian, Arabian, French, Dari, Farsi, Pashto and Tigrinya language, in order to inform asylum seekers about receipt of personal identity documents (passport and residence permit), the right to employment and receive a single-time financial support and benefit to persons, to whom the international protection status has been granted. The Society "Shelter "Safe House"" has updated the informative material for asylum seekers and receivers of the international protection "Latvia - a country near the Baltic Sea"<sup>91</sup>, providing with translation thereof also in Arabic, Dari, English and French languages in addition to Latvian.

In order to facilitate the socialization of asylum seekers, maintenance of work skills and a possibility to supplement financial means for provision of daily needs, the Law "Amendments to the Immigration Law"<sup>92</sup> reduced the pre-set period of nine months for six months after the accession, if the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs has not taken a decision on his application for granting refugee status or alternative status, and this has not happened due to the asylum seeker's fault shall be granted with the right to engage in an unlimited employment measures.

The changes are related also to the persons, who have received a status of a refugee or alternative status. On 24 May 2017 the Amendments to the Asylum Law came into force, where:

- The distribution of responsibility between the ministries, when granting a support to the receivers of international support, has been changed. A single-time financial support shall be paid by the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs of the Ministry of the Interior, but the benefit shall be paid by the State Social Insurance Agency of the Ministry of Welfare. Changes are made in order to provide the persons, to whom a status of international protection has been granted, with effective receipt of the financial support right after granting of the status of international protection, as well as facilitate the social inclusion of the aforementioned persons during the further period through employment, providing support measures in case of need. Performed changes provide that the total volume of financial means to be paid out shall be maintained with regards to the persons, to whom the status of international protection has been granted;
- Payment procedure of benefits is also changed<sup>93,94</sup>: a refugee shall have the right to receive a benefit for 10 months during the period of 12 months from the day of acquisition of a refugee status and for a person with alternative status - for 7 months during the period of 12 months from the day of acquisition of alternative status.

In its turn, in order to ensure sooner commencement of independent life and integration in Latvia, the persons, who have acquired the refugee or alternative status, are exempted from the State fee for the issue of a travel document and residence permit, when receiving the aforementioned documents for the first time.<sup>95</sup>

<sup>90</sup>Guideline for asylum seekers in Latvia.- Available: <http://www.pmlp.gov.lv/lv/sakums/jaunumi/aktualitates/2018/01/15/ce%C4%BCvedispatv%C4%93ruma-mekl%C4%93t%C4%81jiem-latvij%C4%81/>.

<sup>91</sup>General information about Latvia; personal identity documents in Latvia; rights, obligations and responsibility of inhabitants of Latvia; history of Latvia; official holidays (days off); Latvian climate and weather conditions; public transportation; banks; road traffic rules in Latvia; telephone, postal service and internet; rights and obligation of an asylum seeker; health care; social security network in Latvia; social support system in Latvia; looking for apartments and apartment market; education; employment and looking for a job; possibilities for spending leisure time; religion; acquisition of Latvia; where to call in emergency cases.

<sup>92</sup>Law "Amendments to the Immigration Law" - *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No. 36, 16.02.2017. - [came into force on 02.03.2017]

<sup>93</sup>Law "Amendments to the Asylum Law". - *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No. 90, 10.05.2017 - [came into force on 24.05.2017]

<sup>94</sup>Cabinet Regulation No. 302 "Regulations On the Single Financial Support and a Benefit for Covering of Expenses of Staying for a Refugee and the Person Acquiring the Alternative Status", adopted on 6 June 2017 - *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No.114, 08.06.2017. - [came into force on 09.06.2017; applicable as of 01.06.2017]

<sup>95</sup>Cabinet Regulation No. 92 "Amendments to Cabinet Regulation No. 133 "Regulations Regarding the State Fee for the Issuance of Personal Identification Documents, adopted on 21 February 2012", adopted on 21 February 2017. - *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No. 41, 23.02.2017 - [came into force on 24.02.2017]

## Challenges of the asylum system

On 14 November 2017 the Cabinet approved the Informative Report (hereinafter - the Report) about fulfilment of measures provided in the Action Plan for Movement and Admission in Latvia of Persons who Need International Protection<sup>96, 97</sup>. The report indicates on several issues and provides the relevant measures for solution thereof accordingly:

- Regardless of measures so far performed by all involved parties, it is necessary to perform further improvement of the integration area with regards to persons, to whom the status of international protection has been granted.
- Special work should be performed for provision of availability of dwellings.
- The minimal possibilities of social workers and social mentors to provide support in order to find a dwelling to great extent cause the secondary movement process of persons. Accordingly, after return to Latvia there is a possibility that the time has passed for persons, during which they could apply for a special social support.
- With regards to the integration issues it was established that coordination between public authorities as well as in the operation of local governments and non-governmental sector is missing. Therefore, it was concluded in the Report that it shall be necessary to determine one coordinating authority that would ensure regular monitoring of the situation, as soon as possible problem solving and particular recommendations for possible solutions, including changes in legal acts in the area of social support.
- It was concluded that the social support system for a person, to whom the alternative status has been granted, is currently subject to the type of the residence permit, therefore the person receiving alternative status is being placed in an unequal position in comparison with the person, to whom a refugee status has been granted.
- In order to improve the integration possibilities of persons, to whom the international protection status is granted, the following measures were performed:
  - 1) support measures during the asylum procedure (a social worker and social mentor is attracted to each person, training of Latvian in the volume of 120h, basic information is provided about life in Latvia),
  - 2) informative measures for involvement of civil society, training of specialists, consultations for specialists of various areas about the work with third-country nationals,
  - 3) availability of employment services is provided to the persons, who have acquired the status of international protection.

At the same time the Cabinet of Ministers expect solutions for solving of the above mentioned issues, establishing separate work groups, which shall develop detailed recommendations for submission to the Cabinet during the first quarter of 2018.

## Relocation and Resettlement

There were 139 persons from Greece relocated (294 out of 205 persons were relocated in total within two years) and 19 persons were relocated from Italy (27 out of 186 persons were relocated in total

<sup>96</sup>Cabinet decision by minutes No.57 of 14 November 2017 - *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No.231, 22.11.2017

<sup>97</sup>Informative report "Regarding fulfilment of measures provided by Action Plan for Movement and Admission in Latvia of Persons who Need International Protection" - Available: <http://tap.mk.gov.lv/mk/tap/?pid=40440003>.

within two years) in 2017. Relocation of persons from Greece was terminated, because Greece ceased to forward personal files of persons since 26 September 2017. The issue regarding relocation of 29 persons is still being solved with Italy, which was delayed due to the problems with medical statements. Another 7 persons were relocated from Italy in 2018.

40 persons were resettled from Turkey to Latvia during 2017 (in total 46 out of 50 persons were resettled within two years).

### Use of the EMN results

In 2017 the Latvian Contact Point of EMN developed the national report for EMN study “The Changing Influx of Asylum Seekers in 2014 - 2016: responses from Member States”<sup>98</sup>. It was stated in the National Study that the number of asylum seekers did not significantly change in Latvia during this period of time, therefore it was not necessary to overcome challenges in relation to mass influx of asylum seekers. Information was provided in the study regarding the measures implemented in the state for improvement of asylum system and provision of socio-economical integration. Synthesis Report on the responses of EU Member States and Norway in cases of the changing number of asylum seekers will be available in 2018 on the website of the EMN Latvian Contact Point [www.emn.lv](http://www.emn.lv).

## 5. UNACCOMPANIED MINORS AND OTHER VULNERABLE GROUPS <sup>99</sup>

There were 3<sup>100</sup> unaccompanied minors, who were detained for staying in Latvia without valid travel documents, and were delivered to the responsible authorities of the country of origin in 2017. 11<sup>101</sup> unaccompanied minors requested for asylum in Latvia. The biggest number of unaccompanied minors from third countries was from Vietnam.

### Unaccompanied minors, searching for Asylum

In 2017 the authorities involved in the migration processes have performed activities, expanding the knowledge of employees about unaccompanied minors. Officials of the State Border Guard participated in the workshop organised by the Society “Shelter “Safe House”” - in the discussion “Refugees in Latvia and World”. The workshops covered topics related to protection of vulnerable persons.

The State Inspectorate for Protection of Children’s Rights has developed the draft guidelines “Provision of Representation of Unaccompanied Minor Foreigners in Latvia and Cooperation between Authorities”.

### Unaccompanied minors, not searching for Asylum

<sup>98</sup>[www.emn.lv](http://www.emn.lv)

<sup>99</sup>“Particularly protectable groups” include unaccompanied minor persons, juvenile victims of trafficking in human beings, disabled persons, older persons, pregnant women, single parents with minor children, persons with mental health problems and persons exposed to torture, rape or other forms of serious psychological, physical or sexual violence, on the basis of the definition of the definition of “Particularly protectable groups” recommended for the revised edition of the Directive, determining mandatory standards for reception of asylum seekers (“Reception Directive”).

<sup>100</sup>Data source: State Border Guard.

<sup>101</sup>Data source: The Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs.



In 2017 the Ministry of Welfare, in order to specify the settlement of the issues of accommodation of unaccompanied minors, commenced to develop the procedure that will determine, how the coverage of expenses will be provided for accommodation of the unaccompanied children, in a foster family, family of a guardian or care institution, to whom a refugee or alternative status has been denied and expulsion decision is suspended for a definite period of time, or who are irregularly staying in Latvia, but not being asylum seekers. The need for definition of such mechanisms has been established, when evaluating certain cases. It was established that the current legal framework do not include situations of such children, thus coming to conflict with the principle of protection of the rights of children, pursuant to which protection and safety shall be provided for every child.<sup>102</sup>

The Ministry of Welfare develops a recommendation for amendments to the Law on Protection of the Rights of the Child<sup>103</sup> in order to determine distribution of competencies between authorities (the Ministry of the Interior and its subordinate authorities (State Border Guard, Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs) as well as the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Orphan's and Custody Court etc.), performing search of parents of a child and establishing a possibility to return to the family. It was established that the current legal framework is being differently applied in practice, causing a risk that the best interests of unaccompanied children, are observed with regards to the issue regarding search of parents of children and reunification possibilities.

### Other Vulnerable Groups

17 rooms suitable for families with children are arranged in the new asylum seekers accommodation centre in *Mucenieki*. The pilot project for provision of the pre-school education programme in the asylum seekers accommodation centre in *Mucenieki* was implemented in 2017 within the framework of the project “Support Measures for Persons in Need of International Protection, Reception and Accommodation in Latvia” of the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund<sup>104</sup> implemented by the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs, thus ensuring looking after and education of children.<sup>105</sup>

A separate block is established in the detained foreigners accommodation centre “*Mucenieki*”, provided for accommodation of women, children and families. A minor third-country national is accommodated in this block, if the person is detained in accordance with the procedure of the Immigration Law or he or she is accommodated pursuant to request of the detained parents in order to maintain union of the family. 84 persons can be accommodated at the same time at the Detained Foreigners Accommodation Centre “*Mucenieki*”.<sup>106</sup>

Officials of the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs started to use the tool developed by the Asylum Support Office “Identification of Persons with Special Needs” for identification of persons with special protection within the asylum procedure in 2017.<sup>107</sup>

## 6. INTEGRATION

### Promoting Integration through Socio-economic Participation

<sup>102</sup>Source: Ministry of Welfare

<sup>103</sup>Law on Protection of the Rights of the Child. - *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No. 199/200, 08.07.1998 - [came into force on 22.07.1998]

<sup>104</sup>Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund.

<sup>105</sup>Source: The Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs.

<sup>106</sup>Source: State Border Guard.

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

The Cabinet of Ministers had approved the Implementation Plan for the Guidelines on National Identity, Civil Society and Integration Policy for 2017-2018.<sup>108</sup> With regards to third-country nationals, the plan considers that the most important aspects of socio-economical inclusion are the right to employment, dwelling, education and social protection, at the same time indicating the available information should be provided in order third-country nationals would be aware of their rights and obligations. In accordance with the plan, a coordinating system for participation support of third-country nationals will be established, which will include provision of information and consultations to third-country nationals, preparation of transparent and easily understandable information, acquisition of the introductory course on the socio-economical inclusion by asylum seekers, refugees and persons with alternative status. Third-country nationals will have a possibility to acquire Latvian. Educative measures are provided also for representatives of mass media. Non-governmental organisations are attracted for implementation of the plan, providing informative support for integration of third-country nationals.

Experts' report of 2017 "Strengthening of a Unifying National Identity and Cultural Space of Latvia. Proposals for the Society Integration Policy Plan for 2019-2015"<sup>109</sup> was published in the beginning of 2018. Objective of the report is, upon using the current studies in the area of civil society development, statistical data, reports of authorities and information published on mass media, to provide formulation of issues, directions for solutions as well as recommendations on the results and performance results (indicators) of the policy of the area for inclusion into the Society Integration draft plan.<sup>110</sup>

Centre for Public Policy PROVIDUS has collected information in the beginning of 2018 regarding social integration support services currently available in Latvia<sup>111</sup>. The summary is created as a part of the project RACCOMBAT<sup>112</sup>, the purpose of which is to implement the elements of rule of law in the acquisition of social skills of nationals of other countries, to promote inclusion of the issues of integration in the creation of relevant policies, as well as to introduce society with good practice in the acquisition of social skills.<sup>113</sup> Authors of the summary consider that social integration measures of receivers of international protection have become more systematic and broader since 2015, while the integration activities of third-country nationals are still irregular and being implemented only in the form of projects.

### Promoting integration through civic participation, including access to rights and obligations, achieving equal treatment and belonging

Integration promotion events in 2017 were mostly implemented by non-governmental organisations. The Society "Shelter "Safe house"" continued to provide services of a social worker and social mentor to asylum seekers, refugees and persons with alternative status, as well as updated the informative material issued in 2015 for asylum seekers "Latvia - a country near the Baltic Sea". The booklet is prepared in Latvian, Arabian, Dari, English and French. Latvian version of the informative material

<sup>108</sup>Cabinet Order No. 268 "Regarding implementation plan of the Guidelines on National Identity, Civil Society and Integration Policy (2012–2018) for 2017 - 2018" of 31 May 2017 - *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No. 108, 02.06.2017 - [came into force on 31.05.2017]

<sup>109</sup>Study "Strengthening of the unifying identity and cultural space of Latvia".- Available: [https://www.km.gov.lv/uploads/ckeditor/files/Sabiedribas\\_integracija/Petijumi/Ekspertu%20zinojums%20vienojosas%20nacionalas%20identitates%20un%20kulturtepas%20nostiprinasanai.pdf](https://www.km.gov.lv/uploads/ckeditor/files/Sabiedribas_integracija/Petijumi/Ekspertu%20zinojums%20vienojosas%20nacionalas%20identitates%20un%20kulturtepas%20nostiprinasanai.pdf).

<sup>110</sup>Study "Strengthening of the unifying identity and cultural space of Latvia".- Available: <http://providus.lv/article/petijums-vienojosas-nacionalas-identitates-un-latvijas-kulturtepas-nostiprinasana>.

<sup>111</sup>You may become acquainted with the summary here: [http://providus.lv/article\\_files/3453/original/Mapping\\_Social\\_Orientation\\_LV\\_LATVISKI\\_26.03..pdf?1522063966](http://providus.lv/article_files/3453/original/Mapping_Social_Orientation_LV_LATVISKI_26.03..pdf?1522063966).

<sup>112</sup><http://providus.lv/article/racombat-rasisma-un-ksenofobijas-noversana-un-apkarosana-attistot-citu-valstu-pilsonu-socialas-prasmes>

<sup>113</sup> Scientific summary: Social integration support activities for newcomers in Latvia.- Available: <http://providus.lv/article/petnieciskas-apkopojums-jauniebrauceju-socialas-integracijas-atbalsta-aktivitates-latvija>.

is provided, mostly, for local specialists of different fields. The booklets includes in total 22 topics: general information about Latvia; rights, obligations and responsibility of the inhabitants of Latvia; history of Latvia; health care; social support system in Latvia; dwelling; education; employment and other issues important for the target audience.<sup>114</sup>

The Societies “Cooperation Platform”, “Innovation Support Centre” and society of the Daugavpils University “Intelligence Park” are implementing the integration programme for third-country nationals, which include training courses<sup>115</sup> and socialisation events. Implementers of the projects plan to train 990 third-country nationals in these integration courses by December 2018.

### Promoting the integration of specific categories of third-country nationals

In 2017 measures promoting integration and the range of social services driven towards asylum seekers, receivers of international protection and stateless persons were expanded.

In order to motivate receivers of international protection to faster look for opportunities to commence independent life in Latvia, the procedure for receipt of financial support was changed. The previous benefit was divided into a single financial support<sup>116</sup> and a benefit for covering expenses of staying<sup>117</sup>, accordingly reducing the time period for payment of the benefit.<sup>118,119</sup> For refugees the period of payment of the benefit was reduced from 12 months to 10 months, but for persons with alternative status - from 9 months to 7 months. The State Social Insurance Agency shall pay the benefit within 12 months from the day of acquisition of the status. Such a distribution was introduced in order to promote faster promotion of refugees and persons with alternative status in society and permanent life in Latvia, in particular a possibility to cover the first lease payment for apartment. In order to receive the benefit, the applicant for it shall submit an application to the State Social Insurance Agency regarding granting the benefit. Amendments to the Asylum Law link the receipt of the benefit by persons being in the age of capable to work with employment during the first three months and registration in the State Employment Agency<sup>120</sup>.

Individual consultations for asylum seekers regarding the possibilities of finding a job afterwards, when they have acquired the refugee or alternative status take place in the Asylum Seekers Accommodation Centre in *Mucenieki* since 2017. E-booklet is published on the website of the State Employment Agency for asylum seekers, refugees and persons with alternative status “First steps on the way to work” in Latvian, English, Russian, Arabian and Tigrinya language.<sup>121</sup> The booklet provides information regarding services of the State Employment Agency as well as the issues of employment, dwelling and social support.

The Latvian Language Agency<sup>122</sup> has in total educated 531 asylum seekers by the end of 2017 (281 persons have acquired Latvian in 2017), as well as developed a new electronic language acquisition

<sup>114</sup>The informative material “Latvia - a country near the Baltic Sea” was updated - Available:aktualizets-informativais-materials-latvija-valsts-pie-baltijas-juras.

<sup>115</sup>Length of courses from 16 to 30 academic hours.

<sup>116</sup>shall be paid by the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs in the amount of two monthly benefits.

<sup>117</sup>shall be paid by the State Social Insurance Agency.

<sup>118</sup>An adult person shall be due to a single-time benefit in the amount of EUR 278, if the persons are married, then EUR 278 for one person, EUR 194 - for the other spouse, EUR 194 - for the minor person. The amount of the benefit for a minor person shall constitute EUR 139.00 per month, if the persons are married, then EUR 139.00 for one person, EUR 97.00 - for the other person per month, EUR 97.00 - for a minor person per month.

<sup>119</sup>Cabinet Regulation No. 302 “Regulations On the Single Financial Support and a Benefit for Covering of Expenses of Staying for a Refugee and the Person Acquiring the Alternative Status”, adopted on 6 June 2017 - *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No.114, 08.06.2017 - [came into force on 09.06.2017]

<sup>120</sup>The Law “Amendments to the Asylum Law” - *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No. 90, 10.05.2017. - [came into force on 24.04.2017]

<sup>121</sup>The link to the booklet is available here: <https://begluintegracija.nva.gov.lv/>.

<sup>122</sup>The project of the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund of the Ministry of the Interior LVA/PMIF/2016/2 “Initial acquisition of language for asylum seekers”.

tool “Latvian for adults: preparatory course for acquisition of Latvian”<sup>123</sup>. In 2018 9 groups will continue to acquire the language.

In order to settle the issue of accommodation of recipients of the international protection, the Society Integration Foundation (hereinafter - SIF) started to implement the pilot project in the autumn of 2017, where the support for provision with a dwelling is provided to three families with a refugee or alternative status. The need of such activity was approved during the meeting of the Cabinet of Ministers on 8 August 2017. The cooperation agreement is concluded with Jelgava city local government regarding cooperation. In its turn, the SIF has concluded agreements with each of the families, stipulating the obligations and responsibility of the parties. Parents have to learn Latvian, work or be in the status of job seekers with the State Employment Agency, but the children have to attend educational institutions.<sup>124</sup>

State Education Development Agency in cooperation with the local governments, education institutions and State Employment Agency of Latvia implements the project of the European Social Fund “Improvement of the Professional Competence of Employed Persons”<sup>125</sup>. The objective of the project is to improve the professional competence of employed persons in order to prevent non-compliance of the qualification of the labour force with the demand of the labour market, facilitate competitiveness and increase of work productivity of employed persons in a timely manner. It is planned in the project that in the case of big number of applications, refugees and persons with alternative status will have admission preferences.

The right to receive the minimum of the state funded medical aid has been determined to persons receiving the status of a stateless person.<sup>126</sup>

Centre for Public Policy PROVIDUS commenced to implement the project “Assessment and Improvement of Integration of Receivers of International Protection” in March 2017<sup>127</sup>. The purpose of the project was to establish the integration assessment system to be used to improvement of integration policy and practice of refugees and receivers of international protection on the national level in the Member States of the project.<sup>128</sup> In May PROVIDUS organised a discussion regarding improvement of the integration policy for asylum seekers and refugees in Latvia, with a purpose to pay bigger attention to the persons, during the admission and integration process of whom, the specific needs have to be faced due to their health condition, age or disability.

In 2017 the society “Shelter “Safe House”” continued to implement the project “Providing Services of a Social Worker and Social Mentor to Asylum Seekers and Persons with Refugee and Alternative Status”<sup>129</sup>, which was commenced in December 2016. Support of social workers and social mentors in total was provided to 316<sup>130</sup> asylum seekers and persons receiving the status of international protection during 2017.

<sup>123</sup> Available: <http://maciummacies.valoda.lv/>.

<sup>124</sup> The Society Integration Foundation informs about the achievements in admission of asylum seekers.- Available: [http://www.sif.gov.lv/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=10325%3ASabiedribas-integracijas-fonds-informe-par-paveikto-patveruma-mekletaju-uznemsana&catid=14%3AJaunumi&Itemid=186&lang=ru](http://www.sif.gov.lv/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=10325%3ASabiedribas-integracijas-fonds-informe-par-paveikto-patveruma-mekletaju-uznemsana&catid=14%3AJaunumi&Itemid=186&lang=ru).

<sup>125</sup> About the project.- Available: <http://www.macibaspieaugusajiem.lv/par-projektu>.

<sup>126</sup> Health Care Funding Law - *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No. 259, 31.12.2017 - [came into force on 01.01.2018]

<sup>127</sup> Assessment and improvement of integration of receivers of international protection.- Available: <http://providus.lv/article/starptautiskas-aizsardzibas-sanemeju-integracijas-izvertesana-un-uzlabosana>.

<sup>128</sup> in Bulgaria, Belgium, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Great Britain.

<sup>129</sup> Provision of services of a social worker and social mentor to asylum seekers and persons with a refugee or alternative status.- Available: <http://www.patverums-dm.lv/lv/sociala-darbinieka-un-sociala-mentora-pakalpojumu-nodrosinasa-patveruma-mekletajiem-un-personam-ar-beglavai-alternativo-statusu>.

<sup>130</sup> Data source: The Society Integration Foundation

## Non-discrimination

A Union of persons SIA Comperio, SIA Safege Baltija, SIA Prospero developed the strategy of measures for increase of public awareness and information in the first half of 2017, which serves as a ground for further activities promoting understanding and information activities during the period of implementation of the project<sup>131</sup> from 2017 to 2022. The campaign for increase of public understanding and information was developed on the basis of the above mentioned strategy. It will increase understanding of various public groups about discrimination, promote tolerance and public union between different groups of persons subject to the risk of discrimination as well as will promote understanding about the importance of social inclusion and availability of services to target groups. Activities of the campaign started in the 3rd quarter of 2017 and will continue until the 4th quarter of 2022, and they shall leave a long-term impact to the level of public awareness about the issues of anti-discrimination and diversity.<sup>132</sup>

In order to improve the competence of specialists of three regions of Latvia for cross-culture communication, the society “Shelter “Safe House”” organised three workshops of two days each between groups of professions regarding the work with third-country nationals, including refugees, within the framework of the project “Information Centre for Immigrants”.

## 7. IRREGULAR MIGRATION

104 third-country nationals were detained in 2017 for irregular crossing of the “green” border (in 2016 - 369). The key groups of detained persons consisted of the nationals of Vietnam (61), Bangladesh (11), India (6), Iraq (5), Russia (5) and DR of Congo (4). Still the majority of person irregularly crossing the border consisted of the nationals of Vietnam, but in comparison with 2016 the number thereof decreased by 76%.

The risk of irregular border crossing of the nationals of Bangladesh, India and African countries increased in 2017. The trend - transfer from independent attempts to cross the border to organised ones.

In 2017 the biggest risk of irregular border crossing existed on the Latvian - Russian border.

In 2017 the number of refusals of entry to Latvia (1064) increased by 33% in 2017 in comparison with 2016 (797).

Most often the entry was refused to the nationals of Russia (290), Belarus (200), Ukraine (196), Moldova (85), Tajikistan (56) and Uzbekistan (20). The key reasons for refusal of entry - no valid visas or residence permits (522), no documents, confirming the purpose and circumstances of stay (401).<sup>133</sup>

In 2017 visas of the countries of the Schengen area were annulled to 173 third-country nationals (in 2016 - 237, which is decrease by 27%). Most often visas were annulled to: nationals of Russia (63), Belarus (56) and Ukraine (22).

The total performance results of the State Border Guard for 2017 show that the number of cases, when third-country nationals have misused the visa and non-visa regime as well as asylum procedure, has

<sup>131</sup>Project “Promotion of Diversity” of the measures 9.1.4.4 “Promotion of Diversity (Prevention of Discrimination) of the specific support measures 9.1.4 “To increase the integration of people at risk of discrimination into society and the labour market” of the Action programme of the European Social Fund of the Society Integration Foundation “Growth and Employment”.

<sup>132</sup>A strategy for raising public awareness and information increase measures for promotion of anti-discrimination and diversity. - [http://www.sif.gov.lv/images/files/nodevumi/ESF\\_Da%C5%BE%C4%81d%C4%ABbas/Infometibas\\_paaugstinanas\\_pasakumu\\_strategija.pdf](http://www.sif.gov.lv/images/files/nodevumi/ESF_Da%C5%BE%C4%81d%C4%ABbas/Infometibas_paaugstinanas_pasakumu_strategija.pdf).

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



increased in the area of irregular immigration. The most significant risk was created by the nationals of Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia, establishing the non-visa regime with the EU countries, as well as the nationals of Russia and Belarus, by using visas that were received by providing false information about the entry purposes.

In 2017 a new Detained Foreigners Accommodation Centre “*Mucenieki*” was opened, which is provided for accommodation of detained third-country nationals.

### Border management at the external border

The following measures were performed for control and supervision of the external border in 2017<sup>134</sup>:

- On 31 December 2017 a construction of a fence in the length of 64 km was performed on the Latvian - Russian border;
- new presence detection systems (sensors) were acquired - 90 sets;
- the state border area between Latvia - Russia in the length of 113.8 km was arranged (including the fence of 64 km).

The following measures are planned in 2018:

- to continue equipping of the state border area and building of the fence on the border between Latvia - Russia;
- equipping of the state border area between Latvia - Belarus.

Acquisition of the following border control technical devices was performed in 2017 in order to strengthen the border control process:

- 15 video spectral comparators (infrared radiation equipment);
- 11 portable ionising radiation check devices;
- 20 vehicle in-depth examination devices (endoscopes);
- 6 vehicle in-depth examination devices (for determination of metal heterogeneity).

It is planned in 2018 to start the installation of ABC gates (planned implementation period: 2018 - 2019).

In order to reduce the effect of systematic checks on the permeability of the flow of border crossing persons and vehicles, the actual number of staff on the border control point of I category of the State Border Guard Riga Board Riga Airport was increased by 17% in 2017.

1466 officials successfully acquired the qualification increase programmes and trainings developed and organised by the State Border Guard College in 2017:

- personnel of the State Border Guard – 1185;
- personnel of the National Armed Forces and State Revenue Service – 281.<sup>135</sup>

### Preventing and tackling of misuse of legal migration channels

<sup>134</sup>Source: State Border Guard.

<sup>135</sup>Source: State Border Guard.

Officials of the State Border Guard constantly reviewed the results of border checks, where changes in irregular border crossing committed by nationals of Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia, were analysed. The results were included in the two-month analytical reports of the State Border Guard and identified as risk profiles, the established trends were analysed and assignments were given regarding inclusion of these risk profiles in border check assignments.

Officials of the State Border Guard, when analysing the common trends, has established the key routes for entry of such persons into the EU:

1) for nationals of Ukraine: land: Ukraine - Belarus - Latvia - (air route) - Riga - Great Britain/Finland. Purpose of entry - looking for a job. The number of nationals of Ukraine, looking for job also in Latvia, has increased - part of them irregularly. The State Border Guard detained 49 nationals of Ukraine in 2017 for illegal employment.

2) nationals of Georgia: air: Georgia - Latvia - Great Britain/Ireland Purpose of entry - request for asylum or in the Nordic countries - illegal work.

The State Border Guard, when determining the nationals of Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia as risk profiles, paid attention during border checks to interviewing of the nationals of these countries in order to establish their actual reasons for entry into the EU. As a result of that the number of citizens of these countries, to whom the entry was denied, significantly increased:

In 2017 entry was refused to:

- 49 nationals of Georgia (in 2016 – 23);
- 86 nationals of Moldova (in 2016 – 28);
- 195 nationals of Ukraine (in 2016 – 55).

The key reason for refusal of entry - the nationals of these countries could not substantiate the reason for their entry into the EU or they were short of sufficient financial means. As a result of that the officials of the State Border Guard concluded that these persons cause the risk of irregular immigration (actual purpose - illegal work, part of nationals of Georgia also wants to request asylum in another EU Member State).

The number of asylum seekers from these countries has not significantly increased in Latvia and it is insignificant (there are no such persons from Moldova at all).<sup>136</sup> At the same time the data provided by FRONTEX Agency indicate that the purpose of entry for a significant part of nationals of Georgia is requesting for asylum (in 2017 the number of asylum seekers from Georgia has significantly increased in Ireland and Great Britain).

In order to transpose the Directive 2016/801/EU<sup>137</sup> into the draft law of amendments to the Immigration Law,<sup>138</sup> it is planned to include a provision that a student's permit may be annulled if insufficient progress in studies is achieved. Besides, it is planned to annul the temporary residence permit if the provisions set forth for the granted right to employment have not been obeyed. This ground for annulment may be applied, if, for example, the employment of the student has exceeded the permitted number of hours or in other cases, when a third-country national fails to comply with the provisions included in the granted rights.

<sup>136</sup>Source: State Border Guard.

<sup>137</sup>Directive (EU) 2016/801 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 May 2016 on the conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals for the purposes of research, studies, training, voluntary service, pupil exchange schemes or educational projects and au pairing. - Official Journal L 132, 21.05.2016.

<sup>138</sup> Draft law "Amendments to the Immigration Law" annotation.- Available: <http://tap.mk.gov.lv/lv/mk/tap/?pid=40444736&mode=mk&date=2018-03-20>.

## Fight against facilitation of irregular migration ('smuggling') and prevention of irregular stay

On the basis of information provided by the State Border Guard<sup>139</sup>, several companies were closed in the Russian Federation, inviting nationals of Vietnam to Russia, who later on irregularly crossed the state border of Russia - Latvia with a purpose to enter the EU.

Cooperation with officials of the Police and Border Control Department of Estonia as well as Border Control Service of Lithuania:

- In March 2017 the officials of the State Border Guard of Latvia in cooperation with officials of the Police and Border Control Department of Estonia performed joint measures, as a result of what 17 immigrants from Vietnam as well as 4 nationals of the of Estonia and one national of the Russian Federation (carriers) were detained in the territory of Latvia (*Inčukalns* region);
- In November 2017 the check of two vehicles, driven by a national of Latvia and a non-national of Latvia, was performed in the territory of Lithuania on the motor road Kaunas - *Mariampole* - *Suwalki* (in the direction to Poland) There were ten nationals of Vietnam without any valid travel documents detected in one of the cars. Officials of the State Border Guard provide active support to the officials of the State Border Guard Service of Lithuania during the above mentioned investigation.

In cooperation with the officials of the responsible services of the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus:

- In February and March 2017 there were joint operative measures performed in cooperation with the investigation services of the Russian Federation, as a result of which in total 6 persons were detained for irregular crossing of the state border (4 nationals of the DR of the Congo and 2 nationals of the Federal Republic of Nigeria). Two criminal proceedings were initiated regarding irregular crossing of the State border of Latvia;
- In September 2017 the officials of the State Border Guard, in cooperation with the officials of the Border Guard of the Russian Federation, detained ten nationals of Vietnam in Latvia (*Vārkava* parish) for irregular crossing of the state border<sup>140</sup>;
- At the end of October 2017, in cooperation with the officials of the State Borders Committee of Belarus, two nationals of Tunisia were detained in the territory of Latvia for irregular crossing of the state border. A criminal proceeding has been initiated regarding irregular crossing of the state border;
- In November 2017 during the joint international operation with the responsible services of the Russian Federation, a detention of ten nationals of Vietnam was performed in the territory of Latvia on the motor road *Gulbene* - *Balvi*, as well as a detention of one national of Latvia, who moved the above mentioned Vietnamese by his vehicle.<sup>141</sup>

<sup>139</sup>The State Border Guard, on the basis of the agreement with the Central Department on the Affairs of Migration of the Ministry of the Interior of the Russian Federation, regularly exchange with information about the established channels of irregular migration.

<sup>140</sup>A criminal proceeding was commenced regarding irregular moving of a large number of persons across the state border as well as deliberate provision of persons with a possibility to irregularly stay in Latvia. Two citizens of Latvia were detained within the framework of the commenced criminal procedure.

<sup>141</sup>A criminal proceeding is initiated regarding the event for irregular moving of persons across the state border as well as deliberate provision of persons with a possibility to irregularly stay in Latvia.



There is also participation of Latvia in the international operation (within the framework of priority of EMPACT SOCTA “irregular migration”) planned during 2018 in order to combat organised crime in relation to irregular movement of persons. Germany, Austria, Sweden, Poland, Norway, Finland, Lithuania, Estonia, Slovakia will participate in this international operation and it will be supported by Europol, Interpol and Eurojust.<sup>142</sup> In 2017 the State Border Guard performed joint border operations with the border guard services of Belarus and the Russian Federation - “KORDON 2017”.

### Training

In January 2017 the liaison officer of the State Border Guard organized a training workshop in the Embassy of Latvia in Belarus about:

- current trends for use of falsified and documents of another person;
- motives and purposes for use of falsified (documents of another person) documents;
- basic methods for determination of falsified documents.

Representatives of the Consular Department of the Embassy of Latvia in Minsk, who accept and review applications for receipt of visas, participated in the training workshop.

The liaison officer of the State Border Guard, in cooperation with the liaison officer of Netherlands (document expert) in Moscow and the liaison officer of Germany (document expert), organised two training workshops in the airport Minsk about the issues of border crossing, Schengen visas and types thereof, trends of irregular immigration, when using falsified documents, as well as primary methods for detection of falsified documents. Representatives of the airline company Belavia and bus company Ecolines as well as employees of the servicing service of the airport Minsk, who perform documents check at the airport before check-in of passengers for flights, as well as officials of the State Borders Committee of Belarus participated in the training workshop.<sup>143, 144</sup>

In September 2017 in accordance with the Training Agreement approved by the EU Twinning project “Strengthening of Kosovo Institutions in Effective Management of Immigration”<sup>145</sup> the event took place in Kosovo (Prishtina), during which two officials of the State Border Guard together with the expert of Netherlands performed:

- Assessment of the current procedure for border control and migration control of Kosovo;
- Assessment of the procedure for identification of irregular immigrants, in particular vulnerable groups, on the border.

During both events experts assessed the compliance of the legal acts of Kosovo with the EU regulation.

### Cooperation with Frontex

During the reference period the State Border Guard participated in ten joint operations organised by Frontex that provided support both, to the EU Member States as well as third countries:

<sup>142</sup>Source: State Border Guard.

<sup>143</sup>Liaison officer of the State Border Guard organizes training workshops in Belarus.- Available: <http://www.rs.gov.lv/?id=1031&top=0&from=2017-1&rel=4807>.

<sup>144</sup>Liaison officer of the State Border Guard organises a meeting and training workshop in Belarus.-Available: <http://www.rs.gov.lv/?id=1031&top=0&from=2017-6&rel=5069>.

<sup>145</sup>No. KS 14 IB JH 04

***Joint operations on the land borders:***

- FLEXIBLE OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES 2017 LAND (host states - Bulgaria/ Croatia), 74 representatives of the State Border Guard were involved in the operation;
- COORDINATION POINTS 2017 LAND (host states - Moldova/Macedonia<sup>146</sup>/Albania/Ukraine), 6 representatives of the State Border Guard were involved in the operation;
- FOCAL POINTS 2017 LAND (host states - Lithuania/Estonia/Finland/Poland/Hungary/Croatia/ Romania/Bulgaria/Greece), 27 representatives of the State Border Guard were involved in the operation.

***Joint operations on the sea borders:***

- POSEIDON 2016 with extension /POSEIDON 2017 (host state - Greece), 97 representatives of the State Border Guard were involved in the operation;
- TRITON 2016 with extension /TRITON 2017 (host state - Italy), 34 representatives of the State Border Guard were involved in the operation;
- MINERVA 2017 and INDALO 2017 (host state – Spain), 38 representatives of the State Border Guard were involved in the operation.

***Joint operations on the air borders:***

- FOCAL POINTS Air 2017 - Intermediate Managers (host state - Portugal), 1 representative of the State Border Guard was involved in the operation;
- FOCAL POINTS Air 2017 - Regular Officers (host states – Sweden and Norway), 2 representatives of the State Border Guard were involved in the operation;
- COORDINATION POINTS 2017 AIR (host state - Ukraine), 1 representative of the State Border Guard was involved in the operation;
- ALEXIS 2017 (host states – Bulgaria and Romania), 2 representatives of the State Border Guard were involved in the operation.

Confirming its support to the Frontex agency, the State Border Guard involved also two experts of the State Border Guard in the National Coordination Centre in Rome, Italy, and one expert of the State Border Guard in Frontex Situation Centre in Poland, Warsaw.

285 participants of the State Border Guard participated in joint Frontex operations during 2017.<sup>147</sup>

**8. RETURN****Voluntary return**

The number of return decisions issued to third-country nationals did not significantly change in 2017 - 1029 (in 2016 - 1027)<sup>148</sup>. Mostly they were issued to the nationals of Russia, Belarus and Ukraine.

<sup>146</sup>former Republic of Yugoslavia

<sup>147</sup>Source: State Border Guard.

<sup>148</sup>Data source: <sup>148</sup>The Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs.

## Main national developments in the field of return, including return decision, (assisted) voluntary return)

Riga Office of IOM continued in 2017 to implement the project of the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund “Providing Support for Voluntary Return and Reintegration in Latvia, 2016 - 2018”<sup>149</sup>. In order to minimize the irregular migration, IOM ensured realization of the sustainable voluntary return and reintegration management system and implementation of the relevant policy in Latvia. Assistance to 63 persons was provided for voluntary return in 2017 within the framework of the project. It is planned to provide assistance to 70 - 100 persons for voluntary return in 2018.

The number of forcibly expelled persons has decreased in 2017, reaching the number of 271 (in 2016 - 336<sup>150</sup>). The biggest number of third-country nationals forcibly expelled was from Vietnam.

## Strengthening cooperation with third countries of origin and transit on return and reintegration management

In 2017 the State Border Guard in cooperation with the Ministry of the Interior assessed and provided their comments regarding the developed draft Implementing protocols, provided for implementation of agreements concluded between the EU and third countries: with Georgia, Azerbaijan and Ukraine.

Besides the work on the bilateral agreement between Latvia and third countries and development of draft Implementing Protocols was performed in 2017, namely:

- measures for coordination of the readmission draft agreement and Implementation draft protocol between Latvia and Kyrgyzstan were performed;
- the topic about entering into the readmission agreement and Implementation protocol between Latvia and Vietnam was updated. Since 2016 there is no reply received from the part of Vietnam regarding the assessment of the above mentioned drafts, as well as the part of Vietnam has failed to respond to the invitation made by the part of Latvia in 2017 to perform discussions about the above mentioned projects in 2017.

While, in 2018 it is planned to continue to proceed with the above mentioned draft Implementation protocols regarding the readmission agreements concluded between the EU and third countries and bilateral readmission agreements concluded between Latvia and third countries (Kyrgyzstan and Vietnam).

In the second half of 2017, the competent authorities of Latvia, responsible for the readmission agreement between the EU and the Russian Federation, using diplomatic channels, sent the Russian side, an opinion on the understanding of the provisions of the said agreement concerning the practical application of the return clause of third-country nationals. In addition to the aforementioned, it was also requested to the Russian part to provide an opinion about the problems of readmission of third-country nationals.<sup>151</sup>

<sup>149</sup>Provision of the support for voluntary return and reintegration in Latvia, 2016-2018 - available at: <http://iom.lv/lv/projekts-p>.

<sup>150</sup> Third-country nationals who have left the territory by type of return and citizenship. - Available: <http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/submitViewTableAction.do>.

<sup>151</sup>Source: State Border Guard.

## Use of the EMN results

Latvian contact point of the EMN developed the study “The effectiveness of return in Latvia: challenges and good practices linked to EU rules and standards”<sup>152</sup>, the purpose of which is to analyse the impact of the EU regulations on return, including the impact of the Return Directive and other related legal acts to the return policy and practice implemented by the EU Member States, thus studying the effectiveness of the issued return decisions across all EU Member States. It includes the information about:

- overview of the national situation concerning the return procedure for third-country nationals in Latvia;
- systematic issue of expulsion decisions and removal orders;
- risks of absconding;
- effective enforcement of expulsion decisions and removal orders;
- procedural safeguards and remedies;
- family life, children and state of health;
- voluntary departure;
- entry bans.

### Conclusions of the study:

- Summary of information show that the standards for return procedure determined in the Return Directive are properly transposed into the legal acts of Latvia. When evaluating the judgements adopted by the European Court of Justice regarding interpretation of norms of the Return Directive, it was concluded that the Latvian practice is being in compliance with the interpretation given in judgements.
- A confirmation has been acquired that there are difficulties existing in relation to control of enforcement of voluntary return decisions. At the same time the State Border Guard considers that after adoption of the legal act of the EU regarding use of SIS for the purposes of return of third-country nationals, it will be possible to determine a mechanism for control of enforcement of voluntary return decisions issued by Member States at the level of the Member States of the EU.
- Upon transposition of the norms of the Return Directive, Latvia has made several changes in the national regulatory enactments, as well as there were several measures performed, in order to increase the cross-institutional cooperation and increase the institutional capacity during the return process.

Latvian contact point of the EMN developed the study “Challenges and practices for establishing applicants’ identity in the migration process in Latvia”, the purpose of which is to provide an overview of the most important challenges and practices of Latvia in identifying and verifying the

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<sup>152</sup>[www.emn.lv](http://www.emn.lv)

identity of third-country nationals in various migration procedures related to asylum, return and legal migration<sup>153</sup>.

The study includes the migration field, regulating establishing of the identity of third-country nationals during the asylum, return and legal migration. It includes the information about:

- challenges of Latvia for establishing of the identity of third country nationals during different migration processes;
- methods for establishing of identity;
- decision making process;
- databases and data procedures;
- discussions and assessments of databases.

Latvian contact point of the EMN organised in cooperation with the Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (EDSO) conference on 22-23 March 2017 regarding the third-country nationals, whose removal or return to the country of origin is not possible. Purpose of the conference was to improve the knowledge and understanding of officials regarding the rights of irregular migrants, to whom the removal or voluntary return is postponed, using discussions of experts and exchange of good practice. Representatives from ten countries of the EU, as well as Norway, Georgia, Ukraine, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Moldova, mostly being experts of responsible immigration services, participated in the conference. There were also representatives of IOM, UNHCR and Council of the Baltic Sea States among the representatives of the event.

## 9. ACTIONS ADDRESSING TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS

### National Strategic Policy Developments

Two third-country nationals were recognized as a victim of trafficking human beings in 2017. A status of international protection was granted to both and support is provided to them as the receivers of international protection as well as victim of trafficking in human beings.<sup>154</sup>

A status of a suspect is determined for 4 persons and 4 persons are sentenced for organization of trafficking in human beings within the framework of initiated criminal proceedings.

Latvia continues to implement the “Guidelines on Prevention of Trafficking in Human Beings for 2014 - 2020”. In 2017 the development of amendments to the Cabinet Regulation No. 889 “Regulation on Criteria for Recognition of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings and Procedure for Provisions of Social Rehabilitation Services to Victims of Trafficking” was commenced. It is performed by the Ministry of Welfare in cooperation with institutions involved in combating of trafficking in human beings and specialised NGOs, providing support to victim of trafficking in human beings, in order to provide specialized and victims oriented support to children, as well as to improve cross-institutional cooperation in the cases of identification in cases, when third-country nationals are recognized as victims of trafficking in human beings. It is planned that amendments will be adopted in 2018.<sup>155</sup>

<sup>153</sup>Including temporary, long-term visas and residence permits.

<sup>154</sup>Source: Ministry of the Interior

<sup>155</sup>Source: Ministry of the Interior

## Coordination and Cooperation between Key Participants

Within the framework of the project co-funded by the Secretariat of the Council of the Baltic Sea States “Strengthening the Role of Municipalities in the Work against Trafficking in Human beings” (STROM II) there were “Training workshops for local experts in local governments” implemented in Latvia, where 85 local specialists from *Liepaja* and *Valmiera* municipalities participated.

- On 26 April 2017 lectures, discussions, practical tasks took place at Liepaja City Council, which were based on the principles of informal education in order to unify and strengthen the cross-institutional team for work with victims of trafficking in human beings, in order clients could receive as much effective support as possible. 19 participants participated in lectures;
- On 11 May 2017 the training “Workshop for career consultants and social workers on trafficking in human beings” was held for employees of the local government in *Liepaja*, in the premises of State Police for 31 participants;
- On 16 May and 30 May 2017 training workshops “Common action for prevention of trafficking in human beings” were held in *Valmiera* Culture Centre for specialists of Valmiera local government. 35 participants were present in both workshops.<sup>156</sup>

The Ministry of the Interior in cooperation with the national cross-institutional work group, which was established from the group of institutions combating trafficking in human beings, including ministries, law enforcement authorities, state and local authorities and relevant NGO, developed and published “General Model: Functional Analysis of the Action of First Access Institutions Involved in the Cross-Institutional Cooperation and Action for Recognition, Identification of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings, Provision of Aid and Support”<sup>157</sup>.<sup>158</sup> This document was published on 13 December 2017 and it has a status of open document, which means that in case of need it will be possible to make amendments and supplementations. Further work will be devoted to the development of descriptions of assistance, social rehabilitation and support services as well as measures to protect victims of trafficking in human beings.

Training of employees on trafficking in human being, identification of victims and cross-institutional cooperation is constantly taking place in order to ensure effective provision of help to victims. The State Border Guard College provides training to border guards, who perform further education of border guards at border crossing points and immigration divisions.

On 19 December 2017 the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs organized the workshop “Identification of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings”. This workshop was a part of the national level training module of the European Asylum Support Office (ESAO) regarding identification of victim of trafficking in human beings in relation to international protection. Officials of the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs as well as the State Border Guard participated in the workshop.

## Cooperation with third countries

<sup>156</sup>Trainings of the STROM II project in Liepaja and Valmiera municipalities.- Available: <http://www.cilvektirdznieciba.lv/lv/projekta-strom-ii-macibas-liepajas-un-valmieras-pasvaldibas/163>.

<sup>157</sup>Link is available here: <http://www.cilvektirdznieciba.lv/lv/starpinstitutiju-sadarbiba>.

<sup>158</sup>Informative material on cross-institutional cooperation for recognition and identification of victim of trafficking is published.- <http://www.cilvektirdznieciba.lv/lv/publicets-informativais-materials-par-starpinstitutiju-sadarbibu-cilveku-tirdzniecibas-upuru-atpazisana-un-identificesana/176>.



The Ministry of the Interior will ensure partnership in the project “Strengthening of the Ability of Moldova in Combating Trafficking in Human Beings” in 2018<sup>159</sup>. The general objective of the activity is to combine the EU and international standards and practice in order to support strengthening of Moldova ability to combat and neutralise criminal networks and organisations, acting in trafficking in human beings, as well as in order to ensure effective cooperation in the area of law enforcement and protection of victims.<sup>160</sup>

## 10. MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT POLICY

On 14 March 2017 the Cabinet of Ministers approved the Development Cooperation Policy Plan for 2017 drawn up by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.<sup>161</sup> The plan was developed in order to promote the implementation of the priorities of Latvia's Development Co-operation and set out concrete measures for the development of practical implementation of the Latvia's Development Cooperation Policy Guidelines 2016-2020. Within the framework of planned funds they continued the competition of grant projects for implementation of development cooperation projects for the support of the Eastern Partnership Countries and support of the Central Asian Countries, as well as co-funding competition for projects of civil society organisations. The training programme for the representatives of the EU Neighbourhood Policy countries, Central Asia and Western Balkan countries is implemented already for the fourth year.

In 2017 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has made contribution in the amount of EUR 250,000 from funds for unexpected cases into the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa for addressing root causes of irregular migration, switching the contribution for the North Africa region, being in the most urgent financial needs. The funding helps to address the socio-economical and socio-political issues, for example, addressing the improvement of development in third countries on site, strengthening the capabilities of the state administration authorities for solving the migration issues, creating jobs (in particular for youth), as well as for combating the smuggling of migrants and trafficking in human beings.<sup>162</sup>

An agreement between the government of Latvia and the government of Vietnam was signed on 19 October 2017 on the avoidance of double taxation and the prevention of fiscal evasion with respect to taxes on income and protocol thereof. When signing the agreement, a stable and clearer tax payment regime will be established for potential investors of Latvia and Vietnam in the other contracting party, which shall not be affected by amendments in tax regulations of the other part.

<sup>159</sup>Duration of the project February 2018 - July 2018.

<sup>160</sup>Source: Ministry of the Interior

<sup>161</sup> Cabinet Order No. 114 “Regarding the Development Cooperation Policy Plan for 2017” of 14 March 2017.- *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No. 56, 16.03.2017. - [came into force on 14.03.2017]

<sup>162</sup>Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs

**ANNEX 1 INTRODUCTION OF LAWS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION**

It was continued to introduce the requirements laid down in the EU legal acts into the Latvian legal acts during the reporting year. To display the course of transposition of the current EU legal acts laws in the field of migration and asylum into the laws Latvia, they are distributed separately in the table.

	Laws of the European Union	National laws, in which the requirements of the European Union have been introduced
1.	Directive 2014/36/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 February 2014 <sup>163</sup> on the conditions of entry and stay of third-country nationals for the purpose of employment as seasonal workers.	Immigration Law.  Cabinet Regulation No.552 “Procedures for Approval of Invitations and Drawing up of Written Requests”, adopted on 21 August 2010.  Cabinet Regulation No.676 “Visa Regulations”, adopted on 30 August 2011.
2.	Directive 2014/66/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 May 2014 <sup>164</sup> on the conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals in the framework of an intra-corporate transfer.	Immigration Law  Cabinet Regulation No. 564 “Regulations Regarding Residence Permits”, adopted on 21 June 2010.

<sup>163</sup>Directive 2014/36/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 February 2014 on the conditions of entry and stay of third-country nationals for the purpose of employment as seasonal workers.- Official Gazette, L 94/375, 28.03.2014

<sup>164</sup>Directive 2014/66/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 May 2014 on the conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals in the framework of an intra-corporate transfer. - Official Gazette, L 157, 27.05.2014.



**ANNEX 2. INTRODUCTION OF LEGAL ACTS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION**

## Latvian legal acts

Law on Protection of the Rights of the Child. - *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No. 199/200, 08.07.1998 - [came into force on 22.07.1998]

Law On Aid for the Activities of Start-up Companies- *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No. 241, 10.12.2016 - [came into force on 01.01.2017]

Law “Amendments to Immigration Law” - *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No. 36, 16.02.2017 - [came into force on 02.03.2017]

Law “Amendments to the Asylum Law”. - *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No. 90, 10.05.2017 - [came into force on 24.05.2017]

Law “Amendments to Immigration Law” - *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No. 242, 06.12.2017 - [came into force on 01.01.2018]

Health Care Funding Law - *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No. 259, 31.12.2017 - [came into force on 01.01.2018]

Cabinet Regulation No. 92 “Amendments to Cabinet Regulation No. 133 “Regulations Regarding the State Fee for the Issuance of Personal Identification Documents, adopted on 21 February 2012”, adopted on 21 February 2017. - *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No. 41, 23.02.2017 - [came into force on 24.02.2017]

Cabinet Regulation No.225 “Regulations Regarding the Amount of Necessary Financial Means for a Foreigner and Procedures for the Determination of the Existence of Financial Means”, adopted on 25 April 2017. - *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No. 97, 18.05.2017 - [came into force on 19.05.2017]

Cabinet Regulation No. 223 “Regulations On the Maintenance Standards, Scope of Hygiene and the Basic Needs For the Asylum Seeker Accommodated in the Premises of the Asylum Seekers Accommodation Centre of the State Border Guard and A Foreigner Placed in the Accommodation Centre of the State Border Guard or A Foreigner Placed in the Temporary Staying Room of the State Border Guard”, adopted on 23 May 2017. - *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No. 103, 26.05.2017 - [came into force on 27.05.2017]

Cabinet Regulation No. 300 “Amendments to the Regulation No. 564 “Regulations Regarding Residence Permits”, adopted on 21 June 2010”, adopted on 6 June 2017 - *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No. 114, 08.06.2017 - [came into force on 09.06.2017]

Cabinet Regulation No. 302 “Regulations On the Single Financial Support and a Benefit for Covering of Expenses of Staying for a Refugee and the Person Acquiring the Alternative Status”, adopted on 6 June 2017 - *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No.114, 08.06.2017. - [came into force on 09.06.2017; applicable as of 01.06.2017]

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