

Latvia

February 2021

Refugee Protection: Latvia is signatory to refugee and human rights treaties, has established asylum/reception systems, and is undertaking integration efforts.

European Solidarity: Latvia successfully participated in EU relocation and resettlement efforts, a good practice which hopefully can be developed into a regular Latvian resettlement programme.

Protection of children: Latvia grants automatic citizenship to children of parents considered as 'non-citizens' born after 1 January 2020.

POPULATION OF CONCERN

Refugees	618
Asylum-seekers	21
Stateless people	216,851*

* includes persons of concern covered by two separate Latvian laws. 169 persons fall under the Republic of Latvia's Law on Stateless Persons of 17 February 2004; and 216,682 of the persons fall under Latvia's 25 April 1995 Law on the Status of those Former USSR Citizens who are not Citizens of Latvia or Any Other State ("Non-citizens"). In the specific context of Latvia, the "Non-citizens" enjoy the right to reside in Latvia ex lege and a set of rights and obligations generally beyond the rights prescribed by the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons, including protection from removal, and as such the "Non-citizens" may currently be considered persons to whom the Convention does not apply in accordance with Article 1.2(ii).

TOP THREE COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN

Refugees		Asylum-seekers	
Syrian Arab.	315	Azerbaijan	6
Afghanistan	62	Afghanistan	5
Russian Fed.	57	Turkey	5

Data source: UNHCR 2020 Mid-Year Statistical report / [data finder](#)

COVID-19 PREVENTION AND RESPONSE

Advocacy: UNHCR liaises with authorities and partners to ensure that persons of concern to UNHCR are included in pandemic prevention and response programmes.

Inclusion: Refugees in Latvia are included in the national response and provided with social support and other measures to mitigate their unemployment/income loss. However, there is a lack of contingency plans from both governmental and non-governmental sectors. Partners are monitoring the potential specific impact on vulnerable refugee families and preparing for potential intervention.

Communication with Communities: UNHCR's partners have modified their services to ensure assistance remotely. Other NGO partners also continue their outreach to refugee communities through various contact lists and groups on social media to provide timely information on COVID-19 in different languages.

HIGHLIGHTS

Asylum Applications

147 persons applied for asylum in Latvia in 2020.

Reception

Latvia has improved reception conditions for asylum-seekers with expanded premises for recreational facilities, vulnerable individuals, and families with children.

Protection sensitive border management

UNHCR and Latvia have developed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on border monitoring activities to support protection sensitive border management.

Statelessness

Latvia is one of twenty countries in the world with statelessness determination procedures.



Living library in Riga: Stories as means for promoting understanding

A Latvia-based NGO "*I Want to Help Refugees*" believes that stories can also be found outside of books – in voices of those who want to share their experiences. People's stories create a 'Living Library'. Read more [here](#)

Key Priorities

- **Advocacy:** UNHCR and partners advocate for support for EU legal and policy developments, and implementation of EU standards in accordance with international obligations.
- **Protection Sensitive Entry Systems:** Based on the MoU, UNHCR supports border monitoring activities to ensure that asylum-seekers have access to the territory and asylum, and assists with capacitation of border guards that all asylum requests are proactively identified and efficiently referred to the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs.
- **Detention:** UNHCR advocates for the use of detention as a measure of last resort, promotes alternatives to detention, and encourages to refrain from detention of children.
- **Asylum procedures:** UNHCR works with counterparts to ensure the quality and efficiency of asylum procedures, supports the contingency preparedness and dignified reception arrangements with due regard to living standards and special needs. The qualified state legal aid should be available for asylum-seekers at all stages of the asylum procedure.
- **Resettlement and Complementary Pathways:** UNHCR is advocating for Latvia to re-engage in resettlement and consider sustainable programmes, including complimentary education and employment pathways for admission of refugees.
- **Integration:** UNHCR encourages the development of a holistic integration strategy focusing on all beneficiaries of international protection to ensure their mainstreaming into social assistance programmes and provision of targeted support (language, housing and employment). UNHCR also supports regular public campaigns and awareness raising activities to promote the diversity and prevent intolerance and xenophobia against refugees and migrants.

Working with Partners

- UNHCR works with [the Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#), [the Ministry of the Interior](#), [the Office of Citizenship and](#)

[Migration Affairs](#), and [the State Border Guard](#) are the main governmental bodies responsible for policy/planning on asylum issues, matters related to “non-citizens” and persons with the status of stateless persons. On integration, UNHCR cooperates with [the Ministry of Welfare](#) and [the Ministry of Culture](#). UNHCR closely collaborates with [the Ombudsman’s Office](#) and NGOs: [Latvian Center for Human Rights](#), [Providus](#), [Patvērums “Drošā māja”](#) - Shelter “Safe House”, [Latvian Red Cross](#), and [I want to help Refugees](#).

- **External Engagement:** UNHCR is working with partners to raise awareness on asylum and statelessness issues. During key events, such as the World Refugee Day and the annual opinion festival “Lampa”, UNHCR promotes inclusion of refugee voices in national public debates.

Statelessness

- Latvia is a strong supporter of the UNHCR’s #Ibelong campaign to End Statelessness.
- There are two groups of concern to UNHCR: the “non-citizens”, and stateless persons determined in the Statelessness Determination Procedure. While the “non-citizens” in Latvia are entitled to rights that generally beyond the minimum rights prescribed by the 1954 Convention, and as such they may be considered persons to whom the Convention does not apply in accordance with Article 1.2(ii)> In comparison with the situation of citizens of Latvia, differences exist in access to employment, property purchases, political rights and pensions.
- UNHCR offers support to the Government in their efforts to find solutions to the situation of non-citizens and stateless persons through facilitating naturalization or by other measures.

UNHCR in Nordic and Baltic Countries

Staff:

14 National Staff
 10 International Staff

Offices:

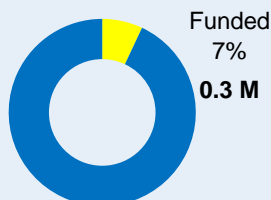
1 Regional Office in Stockholm
 1 Liaison Office in Copenhagen
 1 Liaison Office in Vilnius

Financial information* 28 February 2021

*Information relates to the Representation for the Nordic and Baltic countries, which includes Representation for Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway and Sweden

Financial requirements
USD 4.9 M

Funding gap
 93%
4.6 M



UNHCR is grateful to the major donors of unearmarked contributions* to the 2021 global programmes (USD, as of 28 February):

Norway 80 M | Sweden 66.9 M | Netherlands 36.1 M | Denmark 34.6 M | Germany 22.1 M | Switzerland 16.4 M | Ireland 12.5 M | Belgium 11.9 M

*Unearmarked contributions allow UNHCR for critical flexibility in how best to reach populations of concern who are in the greatest need and at the greatest risk. Above are donors of USD 10 million or more