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**STATUS OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF LATVIA
FOR THE 52ND SESSION OF THE
UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW**

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Status of Human Rights in Latvia for the 52nd Session of the Universal Periodic Review

Introduction

1. The European Centre for Law and Justice (ECLJ) is a non-governmental organization dedicated to promoting and protecting human rights around the world. The ECLJ also holds Special Consultative status before the United Nations Economic and Social Council. This report discusses the status of human rights in the Republic of Latvia (Latvia) for the 52nd session of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR).

Background

2. Latvia is a country located in northeastern Europe and has a population of approximately 1.8 million people.¹ The population is predominantly Christian, with approximately 19% identifying as Roman Catholic, 16% as Russian Orthodox, 13% as other Orthodox, 14% as Lutheran, and 26% as nonreligious.²

3. Latvia's last review was held on May 11, 2021.³ As a result of the review, Latvia received 244 recommendations, 145 of which it supported.⁴ It was recommended by Paraguay, and supported by Latvia, that the government "[a]dopt comprehensive laws to combat trafficking in persons in accordance with international standards, to improve procedures to identify victims of trafficking and establish a national mechanism to refer victims to relevant services, in line with Sustainable Development Goal 8 and related goals."⁵ No recommendations were made regarding religious freedom. In our last report on Latvia, we also expressed concern over the human trafficking problem in the country.

Legal Framework

4. Under Article 106 of the Constitution of Latvia, "[e]veryone has the right to freely choose their employment and workplace according to their abilities and qualifications. Forced labour is prohibited."⁶

5. Human trafficking is prohibited under Section 154.1 of the Criminal Code of Latvia. Under sec. 154.1 of this law anyone who is convicted of trafficking another person is punished with up to eight years in prison.⁷ If an individual is convicted of trafficking a minor, he shall be sentenced to prison for three to twelve years.⁸ In cases where the human trafficker has endangered the life of a victim, he shall be sentenced to prison for five to fifteen years.⁹

¹ Aivars Stranga et. al., *Latvia*, BRITANNICA (July 14, 2025), <https://www.britannica.com/place/Latvia>.

² *Id.*

³ *Universal Periodic Review – Latvia*, OHCHR, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/lv-index>.

⁴ *Infographic – Latvia*, OHCHR, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2021-12/Infographics-LATVIA.pdf>.

⁵ OHCHR, UPR of Latvia (3rd Cycle – 38th Session) Thematic List of Recommendations, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2021-12/Infographics-LATVIA.pdf>.

⁶ SATVERSME [SV] [CONSTITUTION] Jan. 1, 2019, art. 106 (Lat.), https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Latvia_2016.

⁷ CRIMINAL CODE OF LATVIA §154.1, <https://antislaverylaw.ac.uk/country/latvia/?dataset=adld>.

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ *Id.*

6. Latvia is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).¹⁰ Article 8 of the ICCPR states that “No one shall be held in slavery; slavery and the slave-trade in all their forms shall be prohibited. No one shall be held in servitude.”¹¹

7. Additionally, Latvia is a party to the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.¹² Under Article 9 sec. 1 of this Protocol:

1. States Parties shall establish comprehensive policies, programmes and other measures:

(a) To prevent and combat trafficking in persons; and

(b) To protect victims of trafficking in persons, especially women and children, from revictimization.¹³

Human Trafficking

8. Since Latvia’s last UPR, the country has increasingly become a target for human trafficking.¹⁴ In Latvia, labor and sexual exploitation are the predominant forms of human trafficking.¹⁵ For labor exploitation, men make up the majority of victims, but women have also been targeted. For sexual exploitation, women are the predominant victims.¹⁶ Between 2021 and 2023, authorities identified 111 victims of human trafficking, with the majority of the victims being Latvian citizens.¹⁷ Further, out of all the victims identified, one was a minor.¹⁸ Unfortunately, these numbers likely do not represent the full scope of the human trafficking in Latvia because many cases go unreported or uninvestigated, as cases are difficult to identify.¹⁹ In 2023, Latvia recorded only three cases of human trafficking, compared with ten cases the previous year.²⁰ This was the lowest amount of human trafficking cases recorded in Latvia since 2015.²¹ Limited resources being allocated to fight human trafficking and a lack of

¹⁰ *Status of Ratification Interactive Dashboard*, OHCHR, <https://indicators.ohchr.org/>. (follow the URL, then choose “Latvia” from the scroll menu on the left side of the page).

¹¹ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights art. 8, *adopted* Dec. 16, 1966, 999 U.N.T.S. 171, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights>.

¹² Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime art. 9 § 1, Nov. 15, 2000, G.A. Res. 55/25, U.N. Doc. A/RES/55/25, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/protocol-prevent-suppress-and-punish-trafficking-persons>.

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ *Police: Latvia is Starting to Become a Human Trafficking Country*, LSM+ (Jan. 31, 2022), <https://eng.lsm.lv/article/society/crime/police-latvia-is-starting-to-become-a-human-trafficking-country.a441289/>.

¹⁵ *Campaign “Spot the Threat of Trafficking in Human Beings!” Reaches Conclusion*, OFF. OF CITIZENSHIP AND MIGRATION AFF. REPUBLIC OF LAT. (May 24, 2024), <https://www.pmlp.gov.lv/en/article/campaign-spot-threat-trafficking-human-beings-reaches-conclusion>.

¹⁶ *Id.*

¹⁷ *Id.*

¹⁸ *Id.*

¹⁹ *Police: Latvia is Starting to Become a Human Trafficking Country*, *supra* note 14.

²⁰ *Latvia Records Low Level of Human Trafficking*, LSM+ (Apr. 3, 2024), <https://eng.lsm.lv/article/society/crime/03.04.2025-latvia-records-low-level-of-human-trafficking.a593606/.n>.

²¹ *Id.*

education regarding victim identification have contributed to the small number of identified cases.²²

9. Below, we have highlighted some cases of human trafficking that have been investigated since Latvia's last UPR. While this list is not exhaustive, it does show how victims are treated and exploited by human traffickers.

10. In September 2024, the Riga Court Prosecutor's Office initiated criminal proceedings for three individuals who were arrested for human trafficking on November 27, 2023.²³ The three individuals were involved in trafficking Indian nationals from India to Latvia and forced to work as cooks and cleaners in a restaurant.²⁴ The victims were forced to work sixteen-hour days with no pay and were required to live on the restaurant's premises.²⁵ If the victims refused to comply, they were threatened to be physically harmed.²⁶

11. On September 24, 2024, authorities raided a "gentleman's club" that was providing prostitution services.²⁷ Authorities revealed that four people had been operating as pimps and were exploiting women for financial gain.²⁸

12. In July 2022, three individuals were arrested for trafficking a woman and forcing her to engage in prostitution for several months.²⁹ They lured the woman with false promises of being able to earn money, but she was instead forced to provide sexual services and live with her traffickers in an apartment.³⁰

13. On November 23, 2021, authorities initiated criminal proceedings against two individuals who were accused of human trafficking.³¹ The two individuals had recruited three victims to work in a factory.³² None of the victims received the compensation they were promised.³³

14. To address Latvia's human trafficking problem, the government has drafted an Action Plan for the Prevention of Human Trafficking for 2025-2027.³⁴ This new action plan focuses on victim support, prosecution and accountability, and policy coordination.³⁵ For victims, this

²² Kelsey Jensen, *Human Trafficking in Latvia*, BORGENT PROJECT (July 28, 2022), <https://borgenproject.org/human-trafficking-in-latvia/>.

²³ *LTV: Restaurant Owners in Rīga Accused of Human Trafficking*, LSM+ (Sep. 13, 2024), <https://eng.lsm.lv/article/society/crime/13.09.2024-ltv-restaurant-owners-in-riga-accused-of-human-trafficking.a568712/>.

²⁴ *Id.*

²⁵ *Id.*

²⁶ *Id.*

²⁷ *Group Detained in Rīga on Suspicion of Pimping*, LSM+ (Oct. 11, 2024), <https://eng.lsm.lv/article/society/crime/11.10.2024-group-detained-in-riga-on-suspicion-of-pimping.a572183/>.

²⁸ *Id.*

²⁹ *Police Bust Suspected Human Trafficking Ring*, LSM+ (July 27, 2022), https://eng.lsm.lv/article/society/crime/police-bust-suspected-human-trafficking-ring.a466992/?utm_.

³⁰ *Id.*

³¹ *Human Trafficking Found at Fish Processing Plant in Latvia*, LSM+ (Jan. 27, 2023), https://eng.lsm.lv/article/society/crime/human-trafficking-found-at-fish-processing-plant-in-latvia.a493630/?utm_.

³² *Id.*

³³ *Id.*

³⁴ *Human Trafficking on the Rise in Latvia – Government Promises a New, Stricter Action Plan*, BALTIC NEWS NETWORK (May 20, 2025), <https://bnn-news.com/human-trafficking-on-the-rise-in-latvia-government-promises-a-new-stricter-action-plan-267827>.

³⁵ *Id.*

action plan focuses on procedures that allow authorities to identify victims of human trafficking and quickly refer them for protection and support services.³⁶ The plan also strengthens procedures regarding investigations and prosecutions.³⁷ Further, it prescribes enacting stricter penalties for those who knowingly engage in services provided by victims of human trafficking.³⁸ On the topic of policy recommendation, the action plan involves the creation of an independent rapporteur on human trafficking, as well as creating a permanent working group.³⁹ However, this action plan has yet to be approved by the government.⁴⁰

Recommendations

15. We urge Latvia to immediately adopt and implement its Action Plan for the Prevention of Human Trafficking for 2025-2027. We hope that, with the implementation of this plan, Latvian authorities will be better equipped to investigate and prosecute cases of human trafficking. This is extremely important, especially given the low number of human trafficking cases that have been registered. Further, we are encouraged that the new action plan creates procedures for identifying victims, a recommendation we made in our last report for Latvia.

³⁶ *Id.*

³⁷ *Id.*

³⁸ *Id.*

³⁹ *Id.*

⁴⁰ *Id.*