



**Office of
Citizenship and
Migration Affairs**

2007

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1. GENERAL INFORMATION

1.1. Legal Status, History and Organizational Structure

The Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs (hereinafter –OCMA) is a direct government entity under the supervision of Ministry of the Interior; it has its own seal carrying the supplemented small coat of arms of the Latvian State and the full name of the OCMA, and it has a budget account with the State Treasury.

19 April 1991 Resolution No. 108 of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Latvia established a new state institution –the Department of Migration Affairs – with a mandate to implement the state migration policy.

14 January 1992 Resolution No. 14 of the Council of Ministers liquidated the Department of Migration Affairs and established the Department of Citizenship and Immigration.

12 November 1996, the Department of Citizenship and Immigration was renamed the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs.

In accordance with Regulations No. 811 of the Cabinet of Ministers of 3 October 2006 “By-Law of the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs” the structural units of the OCMA are departments and their divisions, permanent principal divisions and regional divisions. Structural units function in accordance with Regulations No. 811 of the Cabinet of Ministers of 3 October 2006 “By-Law of the Office and Citizenship and Migration Affairs” and their own respective mandates.

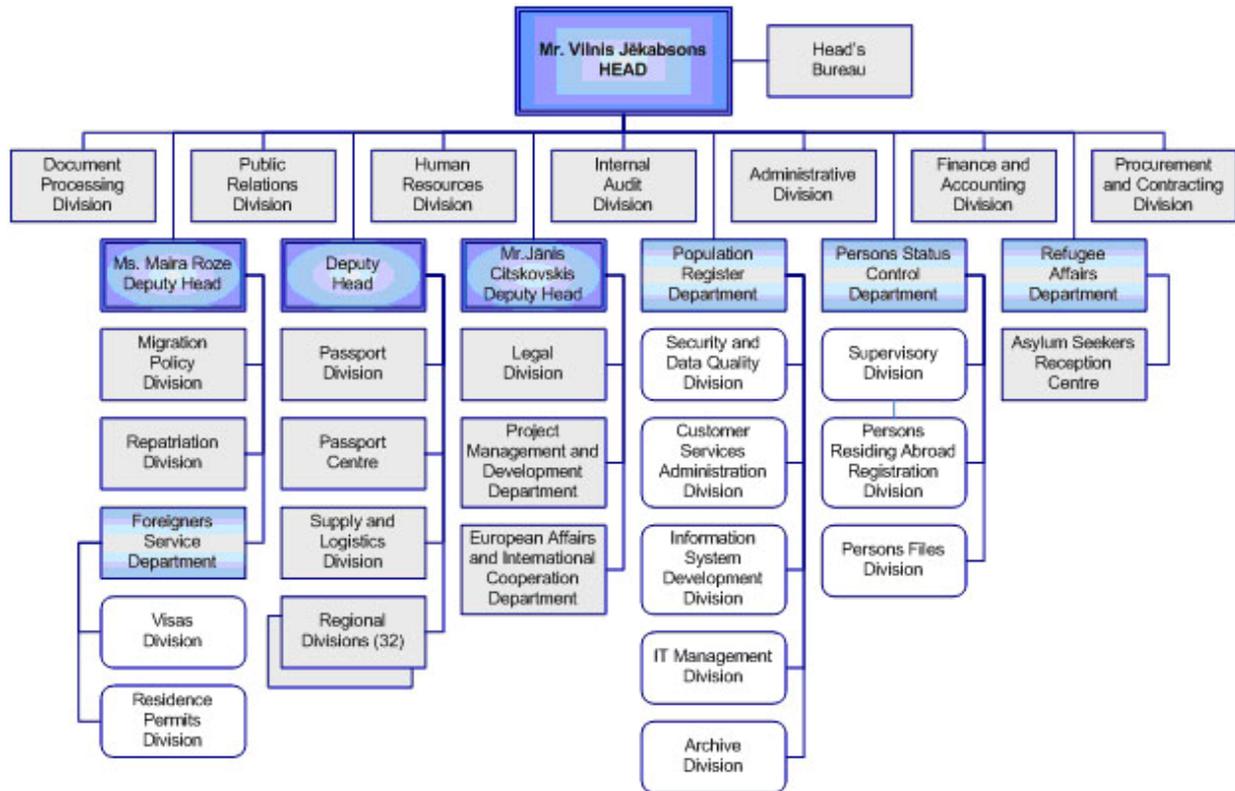
The main tasks of the principal departments of the OCMA, while implementing the development strategy of the OCMA:

- ✦ co-ordination and control of the regional divisions;
- ✦ methodological management of the regional divisions;
- ✦ enhancing professional qualifications of personnel;
- ✦ providing the necessary capital resources to the divisions within the limits of the state budget;
- ✦ upgrading IT and communication system;
- ✦ maintaining and developing IT systems;
- ✦ drafting legislative acts;
- ✦ drafting and implementing development programs;
- ✦ expanding international co-operation within the limits of the mandate of the OCMA;
- ✦ providing services to general public within the limits of the mandate.

The task of the regional divisions of the OCMA is to practically implement the functions listed in the By-Law of the OCMA and to provide services to general public.

Provision of the service quality is a set of activities, which includes information to the population about the functions of the OCMA and its administrative process by ensuring accessibility to the information, staff training and upgrading their qualifications, improvement of the OCMA information systems, capital provision, working environment and working conditions for employees.

Organizational structure of the OCMA:



1.2. Directions of Policy and Activities

The main tasks and priorities of the OCMA are:

- to implement the state policy on migration and asylum;
- to determine the legal status of individuals in the country;
- to issue persons' identification documents;
- to ensure maintenance of the Population Register and registration of residents.

➤ **When implementing the state policy on migration and asylum, the OCMA:**

- drafts and supplements legislative acts of the Republic of Latvia in the area of migration and asylum in accordance with legislative acts of the European Union;
- co-operates with international organizations and non-governmental organizations, as well as migration services of other countries;
- analyzes the experience of Latvia and other countries in tackling migration issues;
- analyzes statistic data related to visa and residence permit issues;
- in co-operation with other state and municipal institutions, controls entry and residence of foreign nationals in the Republic of Latvia;
- analyzes processes of migration and asylum-seeking;
- reviews matters and makes decisions with respect to:
 - ◆ approving letters of invitation,
 - ◆ issuance, refusal, cancellation and annulment of visas,
 - ◆ issuance, registration and annulment of residence permits to third country nationals,
 - ◆ issuance and annulment of registration certificates to citizens of member states of the European Union, European Economic Area and the Confederation of Switzerland,
 - ◆ issuance of work permits to foreign nationals;

- consults individuals on issues related to moving permanently to foreign countries;
- reviews matters on subsidizing the relocation of Russia's military pensioners and their family members;
- reviews matters and makes decisions on issuing or revoking deportation orders and compulsory expulsion, or delaying deportation;
- reviews matters and makes decisions on prohibiting entry, cancelling or lowering entry restrictions;
- reviews applications from individuals and makes decisions on granting refugee or alternative status or denial to grant it;
- ensures issuance of persons' identification documents to:
 - ◆ refugees,
 - ◆ individuals who have been granted alternative status;
- ensures housing of asylum seekers;
- in co-operation with other state, municipal or non-governmental organizations, ensures refugee integration;
- accepts documents for repatriation;
- grants the status of a repatriate;
- issues documents certifying the status of a repatriate;
- makes decisions with respect to issuance of residence permits to repatriates who are not citizens of Latvia, and to their family members;
- carries out other activities related to integration of repatriates.

➤ **When determining the legal status of individuals in the country, the OCMA:**

- reviews matters and makes respective decisions whether an individual is a citizen or non-citizen of Latvia, or a stateless person, except the cases when these decisions are made by the Saeima (Parliament) or the Cabinet of Ministers;
- reviews matters and makes decisions with respect to granting the status of a refugee or an alternative status;
- reviews matters and makes respective decisions with respect to revoking status of a non-citizen of Latvia or a stateless person;
- reviews matters and makes decisions with respect to issuing, revoking of deportation orders and compulsory expulsion, or delaying deportation;
- reviews matters and makes decisions with respect to prohibiting entry, cancelling or lowering entry restrictions.

➤ **When ensuring the issuance of identification and travel documents, the OCMA:**

- ensures the issuance of travel documents and issues travel documents to citizens of Latvia, non-citizens of Latvia, refugees, individuals to whom the alternative status has been granted, and stateless persons who have received permission to reside in the Republic of Latvia;
- keeps abreast with the processes in the world in the field of issuance of identification documents and ensures introduction of identification documents in accordance with international standards binding to the Republic of Latvia;
- prepares proposals for introducing new identification documents or replacement of the existing ones;
- registers the identification and travel documents.

➤ When ensuring maintenance of the Population Register and registration of residents, the OCMA:

- registers individuals in the Population Register and verifies the information submitted by the persons to be registered;
- updates and processes the information included in the Population Register;
- maintains and improves:
 - ◆ the IT system of the Population Register,
 - ◆ the archive of documents for registration of individuals in the Population Register,
 - ◆ the Passport IT system,
 - ◆ the unified Visa IT system,
 - ◆ the IT system for the Electoral Register. When ensuring the maintenance and development of the Electoral Register IT system, the OCMA processes the data listed in the Electoral Register and ensures preparation and issuance of voters' lists for election committees to facilitate a successful run of elections;
- provides the required information to individuals, merchants and state administration institutions, as determined by legal acts.

1.3. Changes in the OCMA Activities During Survey Year

During the survey year, the OCMA carried out activities as determined by policy documents passed by the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Latvia, including activities for implementing various requirements of the Indicative Action Plan to meet Schengen acquis.

To improve co-operation among the institutions involved in control of the migration process and to make the visa issuance process more efficient, as well as to facilitate the possibilities for prevention of entry and residence of terrorist orientation foreigners in the Republic of Latvia, Regulations No. 107 "Regulations on Procedure for Verification of Available Data when Reviewing Application Documents for Visa or Residence Permit of Foreign Persons" were approved by the Cabinet of Ministers. The Regulations provide the procedure for verification of available data so that entry of a foreign person would not constitute threat to the state security or public order and security, as well as responsible institutions who shall verify such information.

On 10 March 2007 Amendments to Regulations No. 217 "Visa Regulation", entered into force. The new Regulations facilitate visa issuing to foreign nationals who enter the Republic of Latvia for business. In order to facilitate and simplify the visa receiving process, the validity term of letters of invitation has been prolonged: from three to six months. Validity term for a photograph of a visa requesting person has been also prolonged.

On 16 June 2007 Amendments to Regulations No. 183 "Procedure for Approval of Invitations", entered into force that supplement the existing Regulations with a standard which serves as the basis in non-approval of a letter of invitation for entry of a foreign national in Latvia and, namely, if obtained information does not evidence sustainable link of the foreign national with his or her country of residence and there is a basis to deem that the foreign national causes a risk of illegal immigration.

The Saeima approved the law "Amendments to Immigration Law", which enforced the European Council Directive 2004/8 EC of 29 April on a residence permit issued to third country nationals who have become victims of human trade or who have been assisted to illegally immigrate and who co-operate with competent authorities; the European Council Directive 2004/114 EC of 13 December 2004 on the conditions of accepting third country citizens for studies, student exchange, practice or in-service training programs without remuneration or for the purpose of voluntary work, as well as The European Council Directive 2005/71 EC of

12 October 2005 on a specific procedure of accepting third country nationals for purposes of doing research work.

Since 21 December 2007 Latvia has joined Schengen Agreement. In order to implement Resolution No. 2004/512 of 8 June 2004 on developing Visa Information System (VIS) which determines the legal basis for its implementation, the OCMA has set up Latvian National Visa Information System within the Schengen Facility Program which provides issuance of Schengen visas. This means that Latvia has accessed to the European Union common VISION consultation mechanism which was one of the pre-conditions for the participation of Latvia in Schengen Agreement.

To implement Council Directive 2004/83/EC of 29 April 2004 on mandatory standards for the qualification and status of third country national or stateless person as refugee or as person who otherwise needs international protection and Council Directive 2005/85/EC of 1 December 2005 on minimum standards on procedures in Member States for granting and withdrawing refugee status, a draft law "On Asylum" has been devised. The objective of the law is to ensure individuals' rights to receive asylum, be granted a refugee or alternative status, or receive temporary protection in the Republic of Latvia in accordance with the accepted international principles of human rights.

In accordance with European Council Resolution of 8 June 2004 on implementation of a common passport design and in accordance with European Union Council Regulations (EC) 2252/2004 of 13 December 2004 on standards for security features and biometrics in passports and travel documents, new identification and travel documents (passports) were introduced on 20 November 2007, and now are issued to citizens of Latvia, non-citizens, stateless persons, refugees and individuals who have been granted the alternative status. The passport data page includes a chip with person's biometric data – a face image for increasing the security of passport. The quality of a passport data page has been improved considerably by supplementing it with several security and anti-counterfeit features.

In 2007, representatives from the OCMA participated in the following working meetings of the EU Council and the European Commission:

- ✦ Strategic Committee on Immigration, Asylum and Frontiers;
- ✦ Working Group on Migration and Expulsion;
- ✦ High Level Working Group;
- ✦ Visa Working Group;
- ✦ Asylum Working Group;
- ✦ VIS Working Group;
- ✦ VISION Working Group;
- ✦ Dublin II Contact Committee;
- ✦ EURODAC System Users' Working Group;
- ✦ Committee of Section 6;
- ✦ Immigration and Asylum Committee;
- ✦ European Migration Network Expert Working Group;
- ✦ EURASIL Expert Meeting.

During the survey year, within the framework of the European Migration Network project, the following reports were developed by the OCMA:

- ✦ Policy Report on the migration and asylum situation in the Republic of Latvia in 2006;
- ✦ Statistic reports on migration, asylum and expulsion in the Republic of Latvia in 2004 and 2005;
- ✦ small scope study "Family reunion in the Republic of Latvia in 2002–2006".

In 2007, Schengen Facility projects were implemented:

- ✦ “Development of Latvian National Visa Information System”. The National Visa IT system of Latvia was put into operation;
- ✦ “To Arrange and Equip the Premises of the OCMA Central Servers”. The server rooms were ready for use on 22 June 2007;
- ✦ “Language Training for OCMA Officials”. 93 employees were trained English and 4 employees were trained French including a study visits to the United Kingdom and France respectively.

Work was continued on project implementation of the European Reconstruction and Development Fund (ERDF):

- ✦ “Digitalization of the Population Register and Migration Archive Documents”.

In autumn 2007, the implementation of the draft program for 2006 of the European Union Transition Facility was commenced:

- ✦ “Strengthening Administrative Capacity in the Areas of Visa Issuance, Migration and Implementation of the Schengen Information System (SIS II)”

In December 2007, the European Community initiative EQUAL project

- ✦ “Step by Step” which lasted three years was concluded. Project “Step by Step” developed a support system for asylum seekers in co-operation of the OCMA as the project leading institution and Liepāja City Council, The Latvian Red Cross, the International Migration Organization and Establishment “Caritas Latvija”.

In 2007, the Common Migration Information System was improved by introducing a sub-system of residence permits and files.

By ensuring availability of services and improving the quality of services to be provided to customers, modern customer service systems were introduced in 5 regional divisions and an electronic queuing system was installed in 2 regional divisions during 2007.

2. RESULTS ACHIEVED

2.1. Main Priorities of Survey Year and their Implementation

The OCMA has set the following priorities:

➤ **Execute the government policy on migration, complying with the requirements of the European Union legislative acts and aligning with migration and asylum policy of the European Union.**

In accordance with the priorities stated by the European Union on migration and asylum, the OCMA carried out tasks for introduction of the European Union legislative acts during the survey year. The OCMA continued implementation of the tasks stated in the Indicative Action Plan for fulfilling the requirements for Schengen acquis. The National Visa Information System of Latvia was developed.

➤ **Implement the requirements of 13 December 2004 European Council Regulations that determine that passports issued by the European Union Member States must contain an individual's biometric information: a face image and fingerprints.**

Representatives of the governments of the European Union Member States signed a resolution on 8 June 2004, which supplements the Resolution of 23 June 1981, 30 June 1982, 14 July 1986 and 10 July 1995 on introduction of a common passport format. Representatives of the governments of the Member States agreed that new Member States, including Latvia, will commence issuance of passports in accordance with the provisions of the said Resolution.

In Latvia the OCMA commenced issuing passports complying with the requirements of the European Union and the international standards on 20 November 2007.

➤ **Digitalize the archive containing information on existing persons' data and develop a new electronic document archive.**

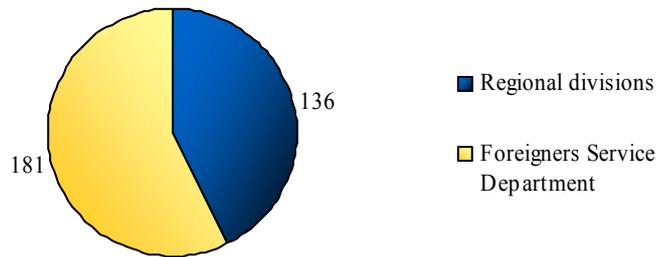
Work will be continued to ensure the implementation of ERDF project "Digitalization of Documents Related to Population Record Keeping and Migration Process" with the purpose to develop a common digital record keeping archive of Latvian population and the migration process of foreigners in order to provide the requested information on an individual, its processing and utilization in the form of documents and electronically. Within the framework of the project, new information system-Archive Information System will be created and the document archive in Riga City Latgale District Division of the OCMA will be digitalized.

➤ **Improve the system of Population Register, exchange electronic data and ensure person's data protection**

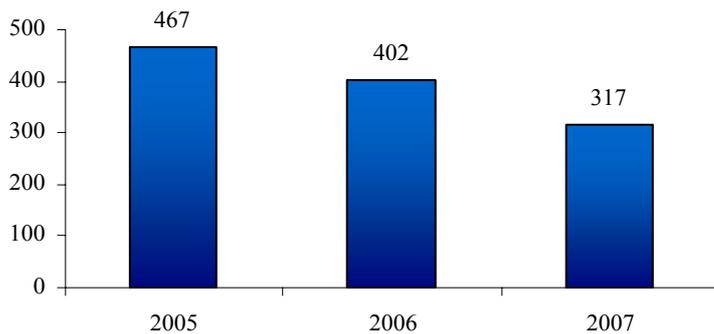
In order to improve the system of Population Register, work was continued on the Common Migration Information System which includes Population Register and Foreigners Register and ensures joint processing of information. The subsystem of Residence Permits and Cases has been introduced. Work in production environment was carried on to provide unified registration and identification of individuals and the implementation of up-to-date information technology when processing person's data. The information system will broaden the scope and types of services provided to other state and municipal institutions enabling the access to the processed data of persons included in other information systems.

2.2. Year 2007 in Figures

Visas Issued in 2007



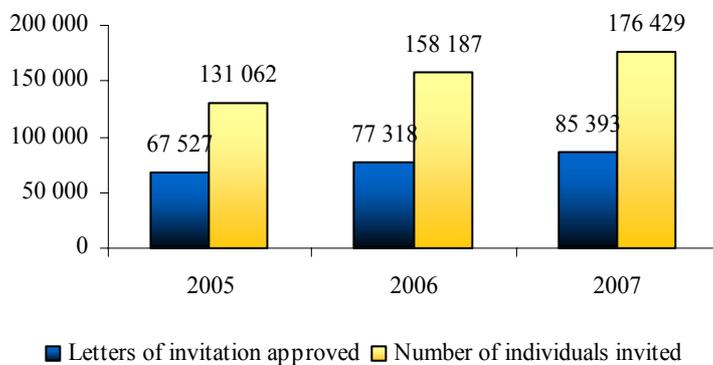
In the survey period, 317 visas were issued, 181 of which were issued by the Foreigners Service Department and 136 by the OCMA regional divisions.



Visas Issued from 2005 –2007

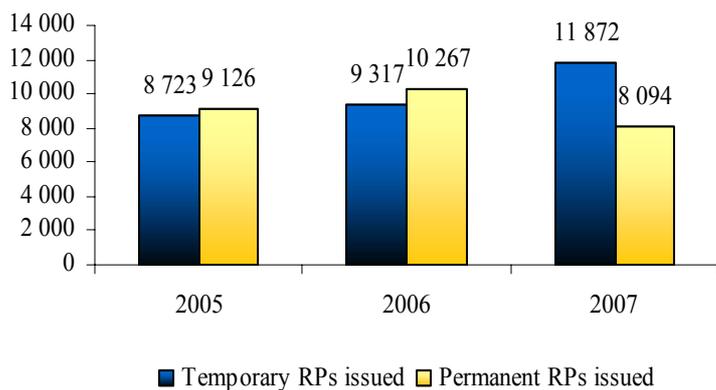
Decrease in the number of issued visas is explained with more strict Schengen acquis rules that provide issuance of visas domestically only in specially well-grounded cases, when it relates to the national interests, international obligations, force majeure or humanitarian considerations.

Approved Letters of Invitation and Number of Individuals Invited 2005-2007



The increase in the number of letters of invitations is related to the development of tourism industry in Latvia and the increasing interest in Latvia as one of the EU Member States. Approval of a letter of invitation also facilitates and makes the visa issuance procedure quicker, thus persons who send letters of invitation most often choose to approve a letter of invitation instead of proving the purpose of travel with other documents.

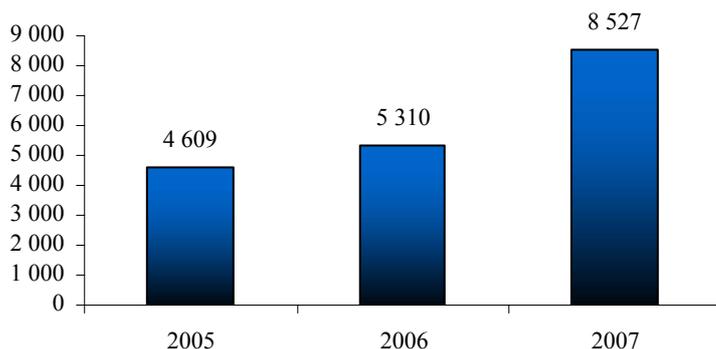
Residence Permits Issued 2005–2007



In 2007, compared with 2005 and 2006, the number of issued permanent residence permits decreased, which can be explained by the fact that the number of non-citizens who wish to become citizens of another country (most often, Russia) is gradually decreasing, as well as sufficiently many foreigners have issues with acquiring the official language but the Latvian language proficiency according to level 1 B is one of the pre-conditions for issuance of a permanent residence permit.

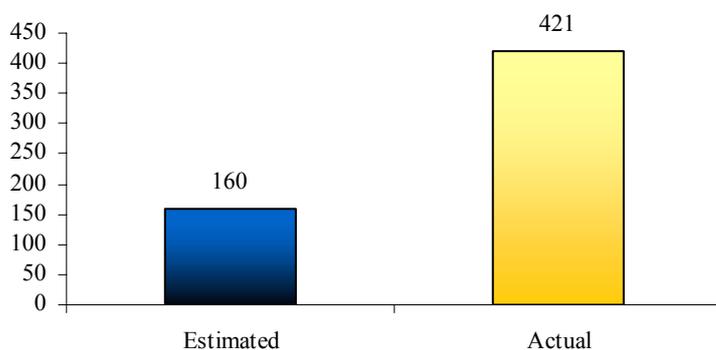
The increase in the number of temporary residence permits issued can be explained by the rapid growth of Latvian economy, Latvia’s participation in the European Union and the strained situation in Latvia’s labour market that has created necessity for businessmen to employ foreign nationals.

Work Permits Issued 2005–2007



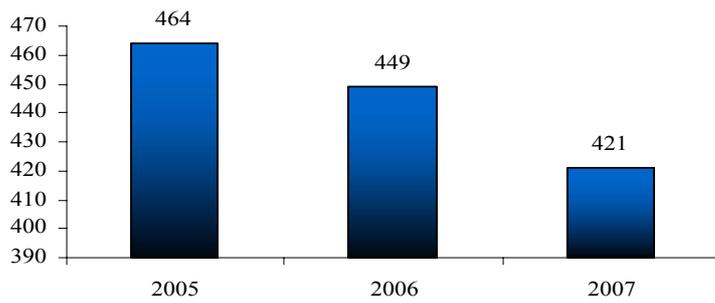
In comparison with the previous years, the number of work permits issued in 2007 increased rapidly since there has been growing interest among entrepreneurs in Latvia after accession of Latvia to the EU.

Number of Repatriation Cases



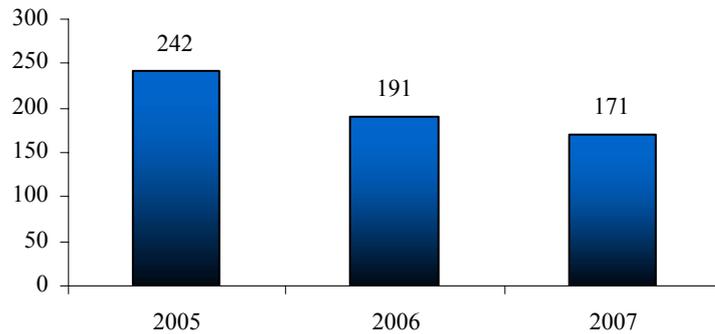
The estimated number of repatriation cases has been fulfilled. When granting the status of a repatriate, both the status of the repatriate and his or her family members is reviewed.

Repatriation Cases Reviewed 2005–2007



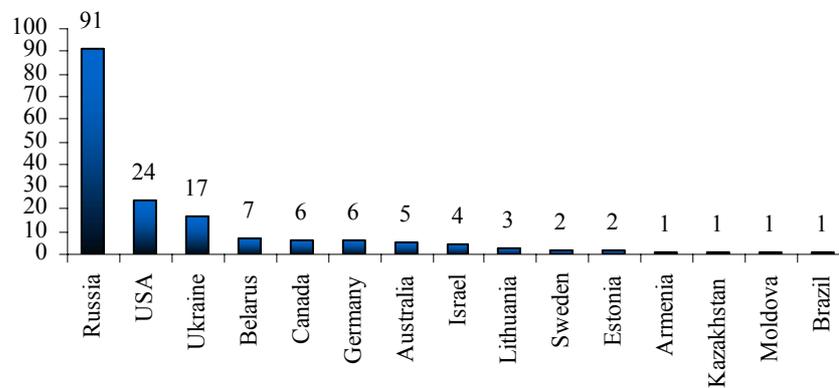
Compared to 2005 and 2006, the number of repatriation cases reviewed has only slightly decreased.

Status of Repatriate Granted 2005–2007



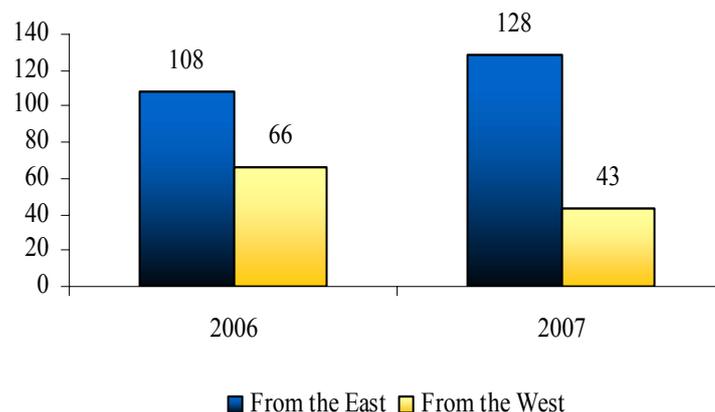
Compared to 2005 and 2006, the number of persons who have been granted the status of repatriate has slightly decreased. 171 individuals returned to Latvia for permanent residence by repatriation in 2007.

Repatriate Source Countries in 2007



Most repatriates to Latvia came from Russia (91), as well as from the USA (24) and Ukraine (17).

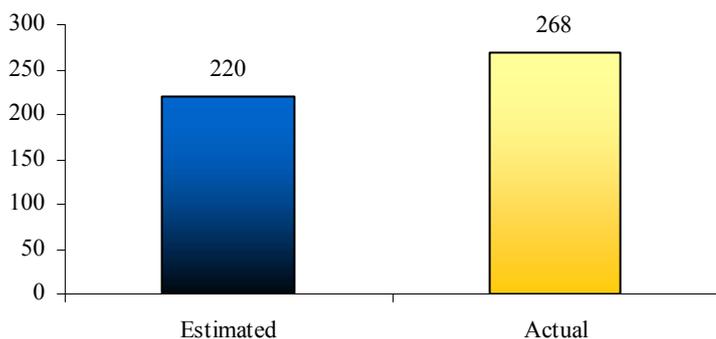
Number of Repatriates from the East and the West 2006–2007



Analysis of repatriate source countries, assuming that all repatriates are categorized as coming either from the West or from the East, shows that the number of individuals coming from the East (Russia, Ukraine, etc.) increased and the number of people arriving from the West slightly decreased in the survey year. Similarly to 2006, the greatest number of repatriates (128) in the

survey year was from the East and only 43 individuals arrived from the West.

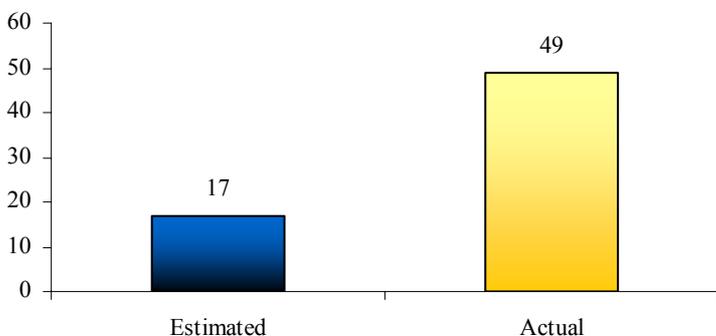
Beneficiaries of Repatriation Allowance



The number of repatriation allowances has been estimated in accordance with the funds granted for this purpose in the OCMA budget. Since the expenses of moving of repatriates in 2007 were lower than estimated, more allowances could be granted. In 2007, more applications than planned were received,

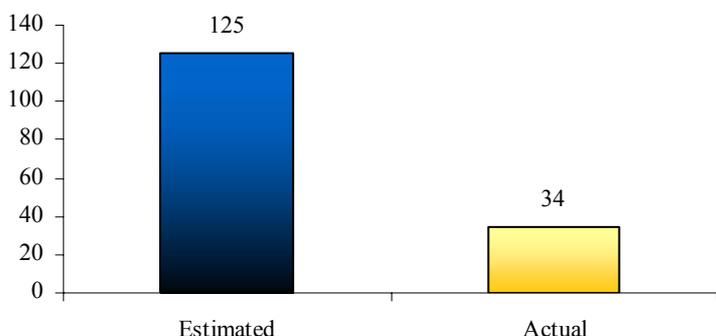
thus respectively there were more beneficiaries of the said allowance than planned.

Travel Allowances to Military Pensioners of the Russian Federation



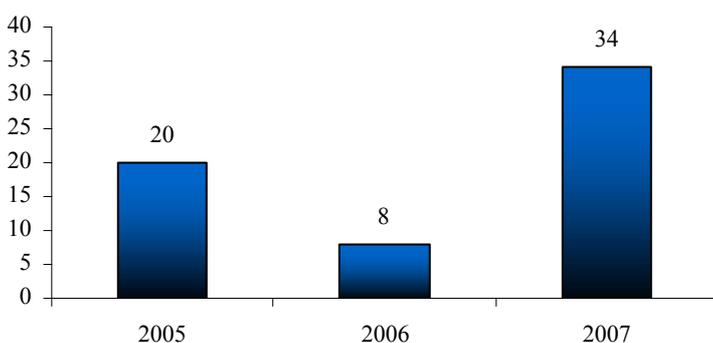
The number of travel allowances had been planned according to the funds granted for this purpose in the OCMA budget. However, in 2007 a travel allowance was requested by 32 individuals more than estimated.

Number of Asylum Applications



The number of asylum seekers is difficult to forecast as it depends on the following circumstances: 1) political and economic situation in the country of origin of asylum seekers; 2) economic situation in the recipient country.

Asylum Seekers 2005-2007



Compared to 2005 and 2006, the number of asylum seekers increased rapidly in 2007.

After accession of Latvia to the European Union on 1 May 2004, Council Regulations No. 343/2003 (Dublin Regulations) is binding to Latvia, which provide the criteria and mechanisms in order

to determine a Member State responsible for reviewing an application for asylum from a third country citizen that has been submitted to a Member State.

In 2007, Latvia received 18 applications: from Germany (3), Lithuania (4), Slovakia (2), Sweden (5), the United Kingdom (1) and the Czech Republic (3) with a request to evaluate the responsibility of Latvia for reviewing such applications for asylum. Latvia agreed to take responsibility in 9 of the cases for reviewing of an application for asylum and rejected 9 requests. Latvia sent two requests for taking responsibility for reviewing an application for asylum.

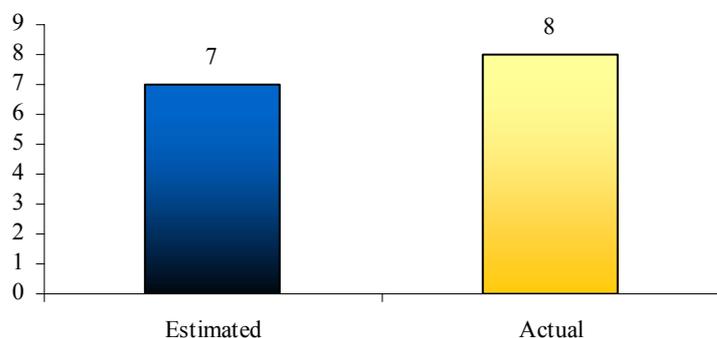
Statistics on Asylum Seekers

Asylum seeker's source country	Asylum seekers 1998-2007	Asylum seekers 2007	Refugee status granted 1998-2007	Refugee status granted 2007	Alternative status granted 2002- 2007	Alternative status granted 2007
Afghanistan	11		1			
Algeria	2					
Angola	1					
Armenia	13	4				
Azerbaijan	17	4	4	4		
Belarus	10	1	1		4	1
Bangladesh	6	6				
Egypt	4		1			
Georgia	11					
Ghana	1	1				
India	1					
Iraq	15	2	2	1		
Japan	1					
Lithuania	1					
Kazakhstan	2	1				
Kenya	2	2				
Congo	1					
DR Congo	1		1			
Russia	47	3	1		7	
Cuba	2	2			2	2
Morocco	1					
Moldova	1					
Mongolia	2	2				
Nigeria	3	1				
Pakistan	7		3			
Palestine	1	1				
Rumania	1					
Sierra Leone	1	1				
Sudan	1		1			
Slovakia	9					
Somalia	7				7	
Tajikistan	3					
Turkey	1	1				
Ukraine	5	1				
Uzbekistan	2	1				
Vietnam	8					
Kyrgyzstan	1					
TOTAL	203	34	15	5	20	3

Since 1998, when the asylum procedure was commenced, 203 individuals have applied for asylum. In 2007, individuals applied for asylum in Latvia from the African countries (5), from the Asian countries (11), from the former USSR Republics (15), from Cuba (2) and from Turkey (1).

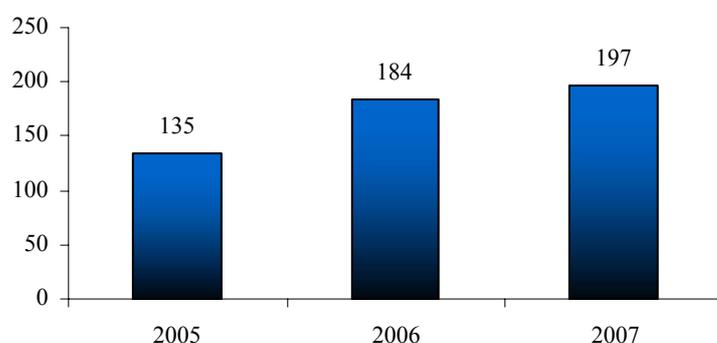
In the period from 2002 to 2007, the alternative status was granted to 20 individuals: 4 from Belarus (3 adults, 1 child); 7 from Russia (4 adults, 3 children); 7 from Somalia (5 adults, 2 children), from Cuba (2 adults).

Beneficiaries of Refugee Benefit



The number of beneficiaries of refugee allowances is planned by taking into account statistical data in the EU, which shows that the protection status is granted, on average, in 20% of all the cases of submitted applications for asylum.

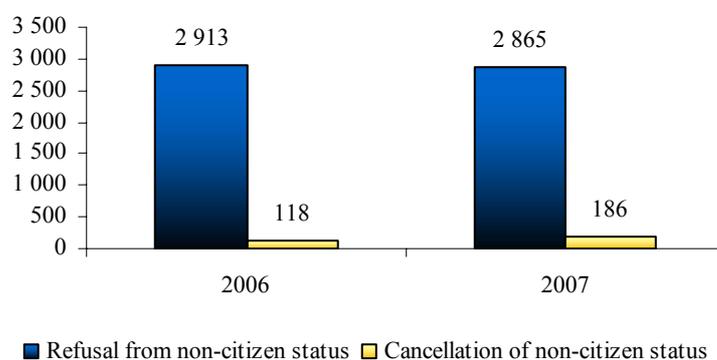
Deportation Orders Issued and Decisions Made on Compulsory Expulsion 2005–2007



The number of deportation orders and decisions on compulsory expulsion has increased because the State Border Guard has improved efficiency of controlling movement of foreign nationals, thus identifying more and more foreign nationals who reside in Latvia illegally. Similarly, the increase in the number of deportation orders and decisions on

compulsory expulsion can be explained by the fact that the number of third country citizens arriving in Latvia in order to enter Latvia's labour market, without obtaining a residence or work permit, has increased.

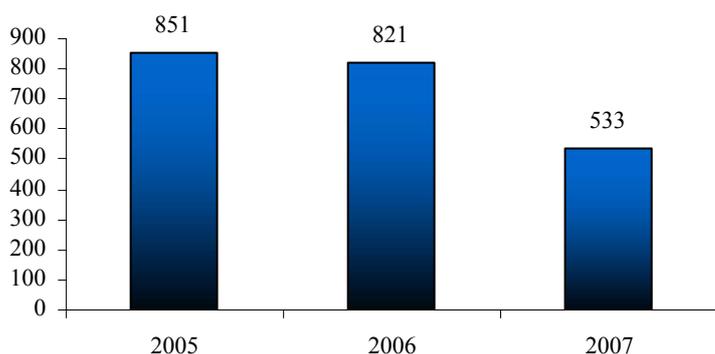
Non-Citizen Status Lost 2006–2007



Loss of the status of a non-citizen of Latvia includes refusal from the non-citizen status and cancellation of the non-citizen status. The OCMA apprehends more and more non-citizens, who do not meet the requirements of the status, incl. those who have resided outside Latvia for a long-time and have obtained the citizenship of another country and

therefore can not keep the status of a non-citizen of Latvia. A contributing factor to the process is a successful co-operation with Latvia's diplomatic and consular offices abroad.

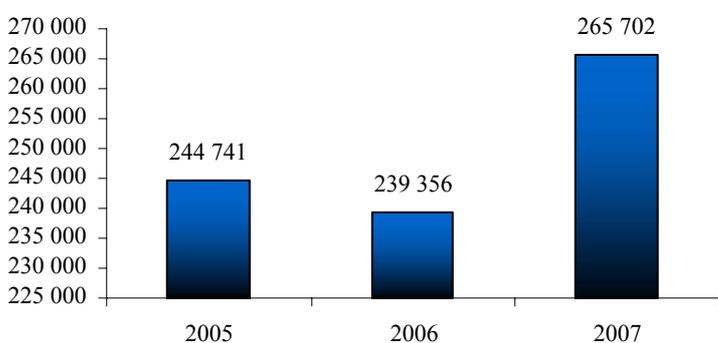
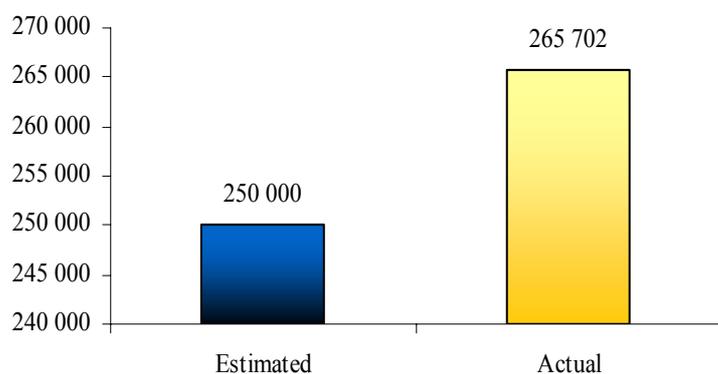
Number of Individuals who Left Latvia for Foreign Countries 2005–2007



In comparison with year 2006, the number of persons who applied to the OCMA and went through formalities in order to leave Latvia for permanent residence abroad decreased rapidly.

Issuance of Citizen Passports

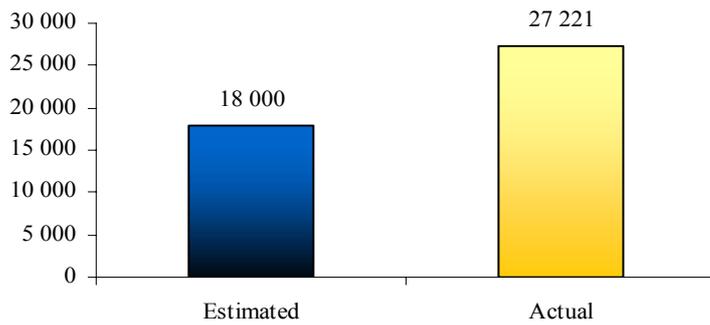
The number of citizen passports issued exceeds by 15,702 the estimated number. From 20 November 2007, the issuance of the new design passports compliant with the EU requirements and the international standards started and citizens had higher interest in such passports than estimated.



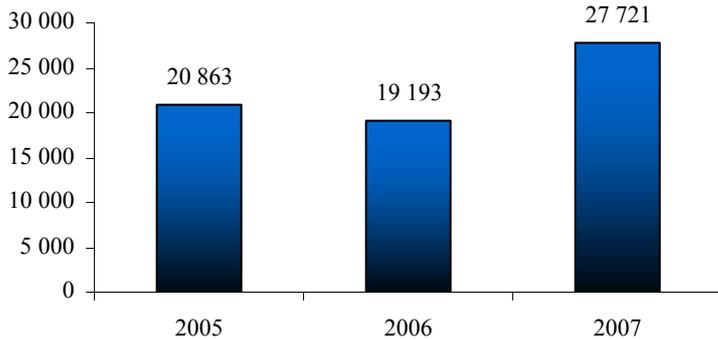
Fewer passports were issued in 2005 and 2006 than in 2007. In 2007, 265 702 citizen passports were issued, out of them 42% to the individuals whose validity term of passports had expired, 17% received their first passport, 12% received passports because the old passport was not valid for travelling, 7% –due to naturalization, 8% wanted to obtain the

new design passport, 7% of the individuals had lost their old passport and 7% indicated another reason.

Issuance of Non-Citizen Passports



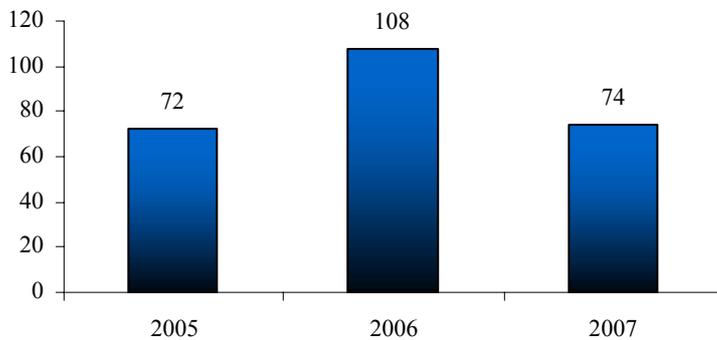
The number of non-citizen passports issued exceeds the estimated number by 9,221 because many non-citizens, similarly to citizens, wanted to receive a passport of the new design to replace their previous valid passports.



The number of non-citizen passports issued increased rapidly. Out of 27,721 issued non-citizen passports, 44% of the non-citizens indicated as a reason for obtaining a new passport that their passport was not valid for travelling, 10% mentioned an expired passport, 19% had lost their old passport, 12% received a

passport for the first time, and 12% indicated another reason.

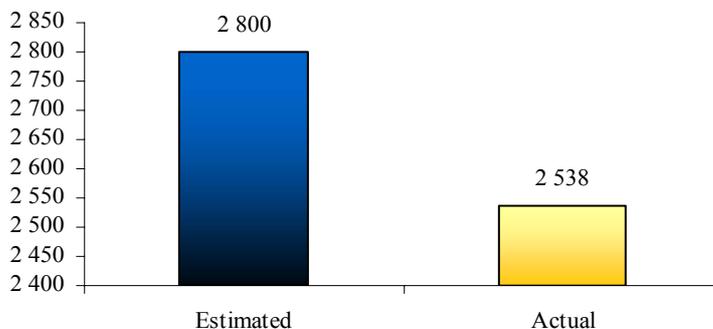
Issuance of Travel Documents for Stateless Persons 2005–2007



The number of travel documents issued to stateless persons decreased due to the Amendments to the Law on Stateless persons and the Amendments to the Law on Identification Documents that excluded an opportunity to issue a travel document to stateless person without using the Population Register data and without

entering an identity code therein.

Number of Cases for Return Certificate

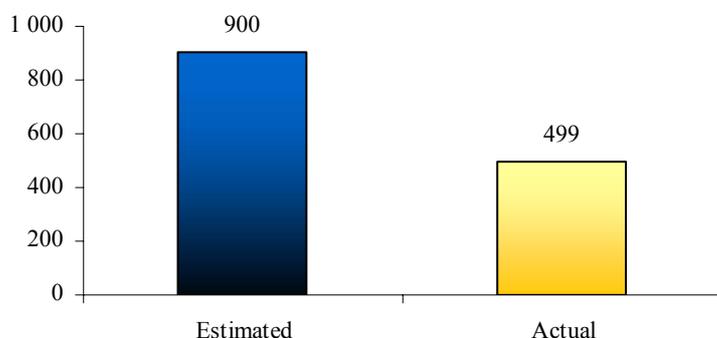


The number of return certificates issued was lower than estimated. It can be explained by the fact that people related to the Republic of Latvia more often choose to receive a new identification document in a representation office of Latvia instead of receiving a return certificate.

Declarations of Residence Received 2007

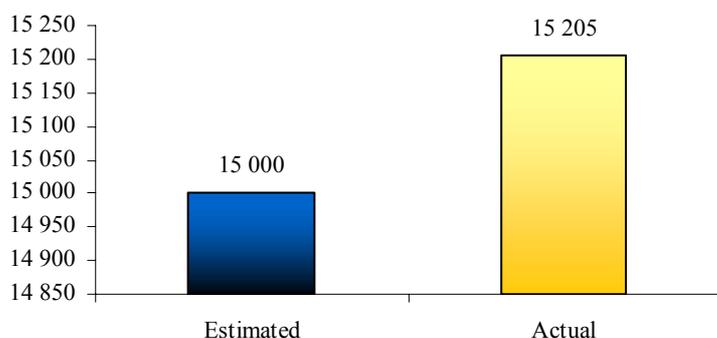
During the survey year, a total of 152,726 declarations of residence were received. All the information has been entered in the Population Register.

Number of On-Line Data Exchange Systems



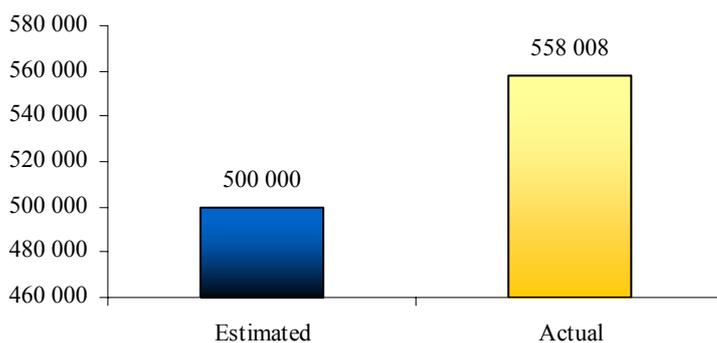
Establishment of new on-line data exchange systems is delayed by the process of conclusion of interagency agreement, since co-ordination of such documents may last one and even more years.

Number of Physical Users of the Maintained Information Systems



The number of physical users of the Population Register slightly exceeds the planned number (15,000) because the availability of data transmission channels has improved in the country in general, and institutions are better equipped with computers.

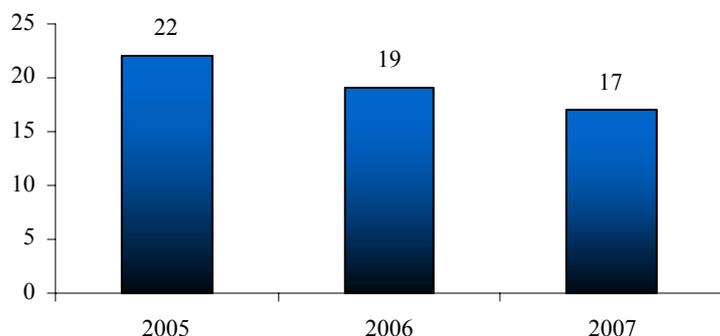
Updated Information Units Included in the Population Register



The volume of updated information in the Population Register has increased (planned: 500,000) due to more often declaration of residence of individuals.

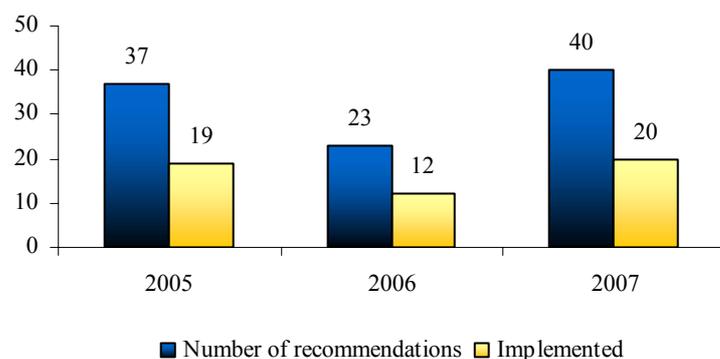
2.3. Information on Systems Towards Improving Management and Operations of the OCMA to Achieve Greater Efficiency

Audits Performed 2005–2007



By performing audits on a regular basis, most risk fields are exposed and evaluated, which helps to fulfil the tasks of maintaining the internal control system of the OCMA. By evaluating its effectiveness and usefulness, the recommendations for possible improvements are made through audit.

Recommendations of Internal Audit 2005–2007



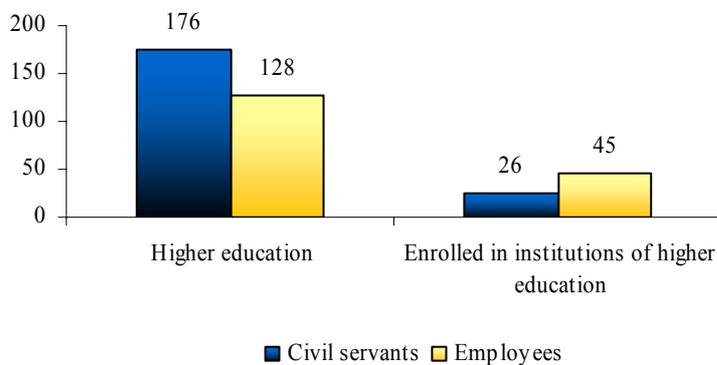
The implemented recommendations relate to optimal planning and distribution of the OCMA employees' work duties and alignment and updating of the databases of legal acts the OCMA could perform its functions efficiently and within due time.

3. PERSONNEL

Every year, as well as after the accession to Schengen space, the requirements for personnel qualification have increased since professional approach is needed for implementation of the functions of the authorities under Ministry of the Interior in the field of migration and asylum within the framework of the enlarged EU, as well as in the fields of IT and electronic services.

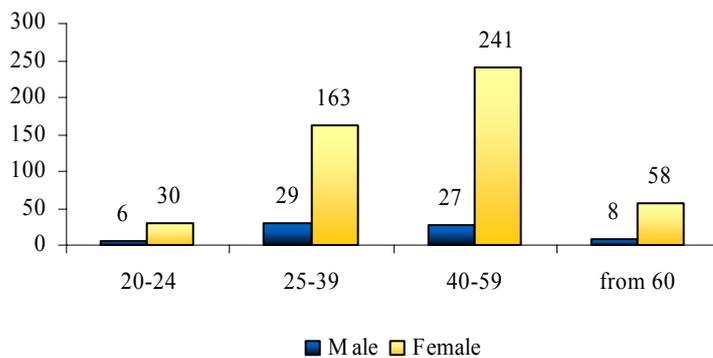
Similarly to 2006, the issue in the OCMA during the survey period was a large employee turnover due to relatively low remuneration of employees and civil servants. In 2007, labour relations were terminated with 84 employees, but only 67 new employees were engaged. In the survey year, 384 employees and 178 general civil servants were employed in the OCMA.

Education Level of Employees and Civil Servants



In 2007, 128 employees acquired higher education and 45 employees continued their studies in institutions of higher education. 176 general civil servants have higher education and 26 continue their studies. To ensure a better quality and accessibility to services, the qualification of the OCMA personnel was upgraded.

Groups and Gender



Number of Employees by Age

The majority of the OCMA personnel belong to the age group of 40 to 59, the next bigger group is aged 25 to 39. Comparatively small is the number of the OCMA personnel in the age group of 20 to 24—only 36 individuals. The majority of the OCMA personnel are female: of the total number of employees 492 are female and only 70 employees are male.

4. COMMUNICATION TO PUBLIC

4.1. Co-operation with Non –governmental Sector

Within the framework of the European Refugee Fund, a steering committee has been established in the OCMA, which evaluates, selects the submitted projects and performs the supervision of project implementation. The Latvian Red Cross and Establishment “Caritas Latvija” are represented in the steering committee.

In the process of implementing the European Community initiative EQUAL project “Step by Step” (project implementation started in February 2005 and finished in December 2007) whose general purpose was to establish an efficient system for social and professional integration of asylum seekers, the OCMA co-operated with the following non-governmental organizations:

- ✦ The Latvian Red Cross, which within the framework of the project performed the secretariat functions of the Consultation Council, in the matters of asylum;
- ✦ Establishment “Caritas Latvija”, the task of which was to develop a method for interviewing asylum seekers by adapting the audit skills used in other EU Member States to the situation in Latvia,
- ✦ The Latvian Human Rights Centre, which was a representative in the matters of asylum in the Consultation Council established within the framework of the project.

4.2. Results of Public Survey

According to the results of a public opinion poll in Latvia, the OCMA is constantly rated as an institution the public needs to have. More than 90% of the respondents have heard about the OCMA, but Latvians are better informed about it –95.7% of the polled Latvians knew the institution, while among the respondents of other nations this figure was 81.5%. Compared to 2006, this figure has grown by 8.4%.

Distribution of information on the OCMA has improved, reaching 70.5% in 2007. Most of the respondents have obtained information from TV (81.7%), the press (42.5%) or the radio (29.6%). The respondents acknowledged that the information about the OCMA has become more accessible and the information channels –diversified. Compared to the previous years, the importance of the Internet in provision of information has significantly increased. In the survey year, information about the services offered by the OCMA on the Internet was drawn by 25.7% of the respondents, which is 2 times more compared to 2005 (12.1%) and 3 times more compared to 2004 (8.1%).

As the distribution of information has improved, the trust in the OCMA has improved by 8.5%, and the number of the respondents who are informed about the Head of the OCMA and his work has increased slightly. According to the statistics, the level of trust in 2007 was the highest in the last four years, despite the “corruption scandal”, which was brought up by the press and which was discussed also by the focus group members. To their mind, corruption is more related to high-rank officials, not that much to the daily service providers and the institution as a whole.

The respondents mainly associate the OCMA with passports and related issues (42.7%). The second most popular answer was visas and related services (22.3%), followed by naturalisation issues and granting of citizenship (20.4%).

The rate of respondents who have never personally used the services of the OCMA has reduced significantly in the recent years – in 2005 it was 40.5%, in 2006 – 33.1%, and in 2007 – 24.8%. Last year 86% of the respondents used the services of the OCMA at least once, most of them in the age group up to 18 years (29.7%), but in the age group over 65 this number was the lowest.

The most popular service used by the respondents was issuing of passports (63.3%), followed by visas and related services (48.2%), and declaration of residence by mail or electronically (23%).

Compared to previous years, the ratio of unsatisfied clients has reduced by 7.4%, while the number of satisfied clients has grown by 14.7%. This proves that the work of the OCMA has improved substantially. The most satisfied are the respondents who have requested information from the Population Register.

The major concern of the respondents is the long waiting time to receive a service and the long queues, high service prices, and inappropriate attitude of the employees. During the discussions, it was concluded that the attitude of the staff towards the visitors depends on how well the visitor is informed and has prepared for solving the particular issue; accordingly, the employees often are not sure what is required and how to deal with the particular situation or issue.

Despite the imperfections, on the whole, the time of service provision by the OCMA is not longer than at other Government establishments or than in previous years. As regards the services and activities of the OCMA, the respondents were most positive about the modernisation of the client service system and regional divisions of the OCMA (86.1%), issuing of the new design passports (75.4%), improvements in services related to migration (69.5%), and informative campaigns to pupils on the new passports (62.2%). Only 24.4% of the respondents have rated positively the facilitation of the procedure for the invitation of guest workers.

On the whole, in the last year the rating of the public as regards the obliging attitude in relation to service provision, professionalism, attitude towards the clients, activities in relation to new services and provision of the information of the OCMA has not changed substantially and remains positive; nevertheless, improvements in all areas are possible.

5. PLANS FOR THE NEXT YEAR

5.1. Priorities for Next Year

The OCMA has set the following priorities for 2008:

- ✦ implement the state migration and asylum policy complying with the requirements of the European Union legislative acts and migration and asylum policy of the European Union;
- ✦ ensure the issuance of identification and travel documents in compliance with the EU and international standards requirements;
- ✦ implement the digitalization of data stored in documents and the establishment of the OCMA electronic archive;
- ✦ implement the maintenance of information systems at the disposal of the OCMA, extension of the functionality of the Common Migration Information System and ensuring the data protection.

In 2008, the OCMA will introduce the digital images of prints of the individual's both forefingers in passport chips starting from the summer of 2008. In 2008, work on technical specification of persons' identification cards (ID cards) will start.

To implement the tasks related to the Schengen acquis requirements, as set by the Indicative Action Plan, up-dating of information in the information system of FADO (False and Authentic Documents On-line) will be ensured.

The maintenance of the European Migration Network's National Contact Point of Latvia, up-dating and exchange of information related to the asylum and migration issues will be ensured.

The maintenance of system Eurodac for comparison of fingerprints to prevent abuse of the asylum procedure in the EU will be ensured.

Requirements will be elaborated and work will be commenced, in order to ensure the procedure for issuance of visas and residence permits in accordance with the EU and Schengen acquis requirements, thus ensuring biometrics gathering and storage in the information system.

The maintenance and improvement of the Common Migration Information System, data protection and security of information system will be ensured.

Work will be commenced to improve the Election Register and ensure electronic registration of voters and electronic voting.

Work will be continued on ERDF project, within the framework of which the digitalization of the archive of persons' documents in the OCMA will be ensured and the electronic document archive and a new information system will be created.

Work will be continued to establish the OCMA persons' registration document archive, to store documents centrally by ensuring physical security of such documents.

Work will be continued on implementation of the Transition Facility project "Improvement of Circulating, Processing and Safekeeping of Immigration Case Files" and "Strengthening Administrative Capacity in the Areas of Visa Issuance, Migration and Implementation of the Schengen Information System (SIS II)".

Accessibility to the services will be extended, including work on projects for introduction of electronic services. In co-operation with the Secretariat of the Minister for Special Tasks in the electronic matters the work will be continued on the project of digitalization of possible services, by envisaging introduction of the following electronic services:

- ✦ Receipt of full print-out of person's data from the Population Register;
- ✦ Submission of documents for confirmation of a letter of invitation;
- ✦ Request for receipt of a statement about oneself from the Population Register;

- ✦ Request for receipt of a statement about a third party from the Population Register;
- ✦ Submission of documents for confirmation of a letter of call;
- ✦ Persons' electronic declaration of residence in the Republic of Latvia;
- ✦ Registration of residence abroad;
- ✦ Application for permission to use person's body tissues and organs after his or her death;
- ✦ Verification whether an individual has been registered in the Population Register and whether such an individual is dead or alive;
- ✦ Verification whether an individual has declared his or her residence at the indicated address.

New customer service halls will be arranged according to modern requirements in the OCMA Daugavpils, Dobeles and Ludza Regional Divisions.

5.2. International Projects

By complying with the European Union requirements, the OCMA has to fully utilize the European Union funding programmes and projects in the fields of migration, asylum and visas. The OCMA plans to participate in various European Union projects and programs –European Refugee Fund, Transition Facility program, the European Reconstruction and Development Fund (ERDF).

The following projects will be continued:

- ✦ European Reconstruction and Development Fund project "Digitalization of Documentation of the Population Register and the Migration Archive", in order to ensure accessibility to documents, as well as storage thereof. The aim of the project is to create a digital archive and to ensure electronic document circulation in the OCMA persons' registration systems.
- ✦ Implementation of the Transition Facility Twinning projects:
 - ◆ "Improvement of Circulating, Processing and Safekeeping of Immigration Case Files";
 - ◆ "Strengthening Administrative Capacity in the Areas of Visa Issuance, Migration and Implementation of the Schengen Information System (SIS II)".

5.3. Planned Researches

In 2008, the OCMA plans to conduct the following research study within the framework of the European Migration Network project:

- ✦ "How the Policy on Migration and Asylum is organized in the Republic of Latvia".