

LATVIA

EMN COUNTRY FACTSHEET

2018

MAIN DEVELOPMENTS IN MIGRATION AND INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION, INCLUDING LATEST STATISTICS



LEGAL MIGRATION AND MOBILITY

PROMOTING LEGAL MIGRATION CHANNELS

Amendments to the Immigration Law¹ were adopted as a result of the Students and Researchers Directive ((EU)2016/801)². Following this transposition, the law amendments provided that third-country nationals studying in another Member State may enter and reside in Latvia for a period of one year without a residence permit, as well as those who have obtained permit for study in Latvia can be employed for up to 20 or 40 hours a week³. With regard to researchers, the law provided that third-country researchers who have received a long-term visa or residence permit for this purpose in another Member State of the European Union may enter and stay in Latvia for 180 days without a visa or residence permit issued by Latvia, and such researchers may work as teaching staff in Latvian educational institutions.

ECONOMIC MIGRATION

Latvia adopted two new regulations in relation to the EU Blue Card. Regulation No. 108 of 20 February 2018⁴ provided that applicants for an EU Blue Card who will be employed in a profession included in the

¹ Law on "Amendments to the Immigration Law".- *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No. 132, 04.07.2018 - [came into force on 18.07.2018]

² Directive 2016/801/EU 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.



KEY POINTS

Following the transposition of the Students and Researchers Directive ((EU)2016/801), third-country nationals studying in another Member State are now able to enter and reside in Latvia for a period of one year without a residence permit. Also, those who obtained a study permit are allowed to work for up to 20 or 40 hours a week.



The State Border Guard and State Inspectorate for the Protection of Children's Rights developed guidelines on ensuring representation of foreign unaccompanied minors and asylum seekers and cooperation with involved authorities.



The State Employment Agency established cooperation with 47 new employers who are ready to employ refugees and persons with an alternative status.

list of professions where significant shortage of labour force is expected, will be subject to a lower salary threshold. Furthermore, following Regulation No. 566

³ Bachelor students can work up to 20 hours a week while Master and PhD students can work up to 40 hours a week.

⁴ Cabinet Regulations No. 108 of 20 February, 2018 "Specialties (professions) Where Significant Shortage of Labour Force is to be Expected and Where Foreigners Maybe Invited for Work in the Republic of Latvia".- *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No.47, 06.03.2018 - [came into force on 07.03.2018]

of 11 September 2018,⁵ third-country nationals are no longer required to have acquired higher education in the relevant sector or profession to receive the EU Blue Card. A minimum of five years of professional experience is now considered equivalent to a higher education certificate.

As regards seasonal workers, Regulation No.331 of 12 June 2018⁶ extended the list of sectors in which seasonal workers can be employed.

Further amendments to the Immigration Law⁷ related to entrepreneurs, introducing the requirement for a third-country national entrepreneur to prove the economic operation of an enterprise when applying for an extension of the residence permit. The purpose of this condition is to reduce the instances in which a permit for the purpose of employment is issued solely to obtain a right of residence in an inefficiently operating company that does not fulfil the tax criteria.



INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION INCLUDING ASYLUM

Latvia provided support to several Member States facing strong pressure on their asylum systems by sending three experts to Italy (Dublin Unit and registration issues), four experts to Greece (accommodation of asylum seekers) and one expert to Bulgaria (project management).



UNACCOMPANIED MINORS AND OTHER VULNERABLE GROUPS

In 2018, the State Border Guard in cooperation with the State Inspectorate for the Protection of Children's Rights, developed guidelines on ensuring representation of foreign unaccompanied minors and asylum seekers and cooperation with involved authorities.



INTEGRATION

In 2018, the Cross-sectoral Dialogue Platform was established as part of the project "Information Centre for Immigrants." Aiming to facilitate integration of the third-country nationals, it provided them information on their rights and obligations in different areas of life. The project involved representatives of public authorities, municipalities, non-governmental organisations and private institutions, as well as representatives of business.

In 2018, the State Employment Agency established cooperation with 47 new employers ready to hire refugees and third-country nationals with an alternative status.



CITIZENSHIP AND STATELESSNESS

An information campaign was launched in 2018 informing parents of non-citizens⁸ and stateless children residing in Latvia about the possibility to acquire Latvian citizenship for such children.



BORDERS, SCHENGEN AND VISA

An agreement was signed between the State Border Guard and the Latvian National Guard on the involvement of national guards in the search operations and detention of state border offenders.

The joint project of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia named "Development of the Baltic States Information Exchange Mechanism" is implemented within the framework of the European Union Internal Security Fund 2014 - 2020 from 1 January 2018 to 31 December 2019. The project *inter alia* aimed at developing information exchange at local, regional and national levels and ensuring direct exchange of up-to-date information about cross-border incidents between Latvian, Estonian and Lithuanian border guard institutions along the borders of Russia and Belarus. In

⁵ Cabinet Regulation No. 566 of 11 September 2018 "Amendments to the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No. 564 "Regulations Regarding Residence Permits" - *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No. 182, 13.09.2018 [came into force 14.09.2018]

⁶ Cabinet Regulations No. 331 "Amendments to the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No. 272 "Rules for Seasonal Works"- *Latvijas Vēstnesis* No. 118, 14.06.2018 - [came into force on 15.06.2018]

⁷ Law on "Amendments to the Immigration Law".- *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, No. 132, 04.07.2018 - [came into force on 18.07.2018]

⁸ Former citizens of the USSR who possess neither Latvian nor other country citizenship.

2018, several meetings were held to discuss the progress of the project and technical solutions.



IRREGULAR MIGRATION INCLUDING MIGRANT SMUGGLING

In 2018, two border operations were carried out in cooperation with the State Border Guard of Belarus and Russia. As a result of this cooperation, the number of persons who were detained for irregular crossing of the Russian-Latvian border increased significantly on the side of Russia. Between April 2018 and October 2018, 57 persons, mostly Vietnamese nationals, were arrested in Latvia for irregular crossing of the state border.

In 2018, the number of refusals of entry for Ukrainian nationals was four times higher (797) than in 2017 (198). The increase can be explained by the entry into force of Ukraine's visa-free regime.⁹

Furthermore, Latvia approved action plans for cooperation on preventing irregular migration and strengthening the border for two years (2018-2019) with Belarus and Georgia.

agreement and its implementation protocol, as well as the conclusion of a bilateral agreement on combating irregular migration.

STATISTICAL ANNEX

The Statistical Annex provides an overview of the latest available statistics for Latvia on aspects of migration and international protection (2015-2018), including residence, asylum, unaccompanied minors, irregular migration, return and visas. Where statistics are not yet available, this is indicated in the Annex as "N/A".



TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS

Latvia, together with Lithuania and Moldova, implemented a project to enhance Moldovan capacities in fighting against trafficking in human beings funded by ICMPD. The Ministry of the Interior of Latvia also supported and participated actively in the project.



RETURN AND READMISSION

The Riga Office of the International Organization for Migration continued to implement the project "Providing Support for Voluntary Return and Reintegration in Latvia" funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund and 58 persons received support in voluntary assisted return in 2018.

In mid-2018, the State Border Guard organised an official visit to Vietnam to launch negotiations on the conclusion of the Latvia-Vietnam readmission

⁹Visa liberalisation came into force for Ukraine in 2017 (Regulation (EU) 2017/850))

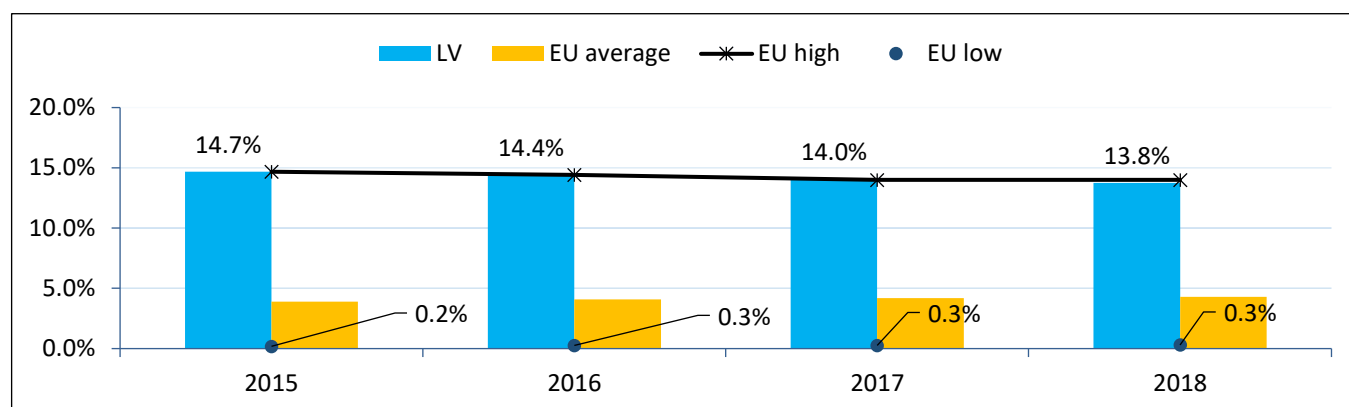
STATISTICAL ANNEX: MIGRATION AND ASYLUM IN LATVIA (2015-2018)



LEGAL MIGRATION AND MOBILITY

Eurostat data on first residence permits for 2018 was not available at the time of writing. Please consult the 2018 ARM Statistical Annex for statistics on the number of first residence permits by reason (to be published in July 2019).

Figure 1: Resident population of third-country nationals* as a share of total population in Latvia, EU average, EU high and low (2015-2018)



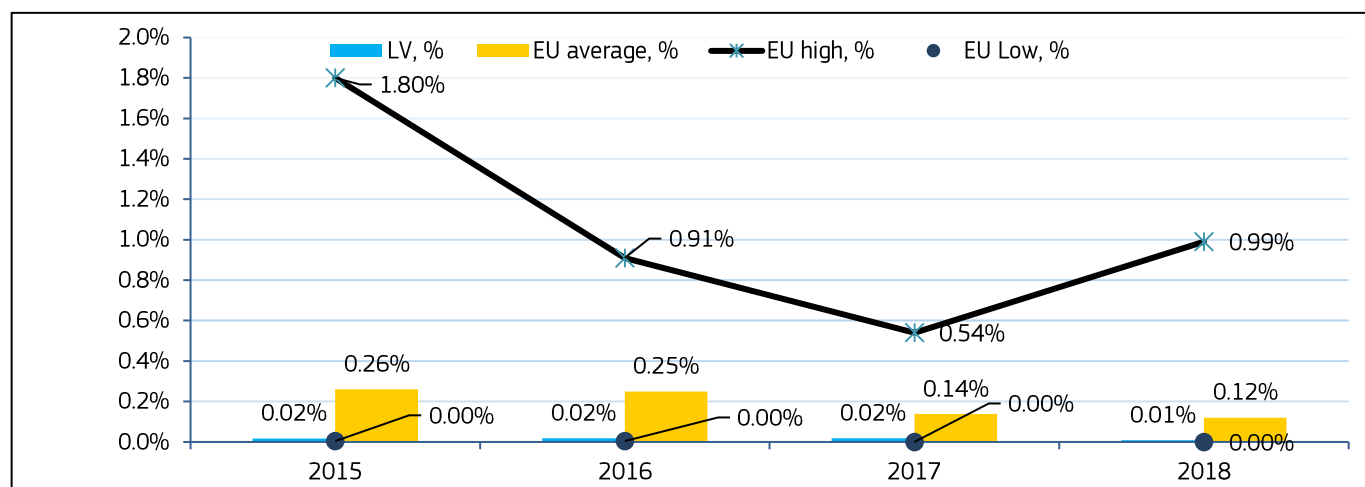
Source: Eurostat migration statistics ([migr_pop1ctz](#)), data extracted 02.05.19.

*the Eurostat definition also includes Latvian non-citizens as third-country nationals. The laws of the State of Latvia clearly separate non-citizens, on the one hand, and stateless persons and foreigners, on the other, by granting higher protection to non-citizens.



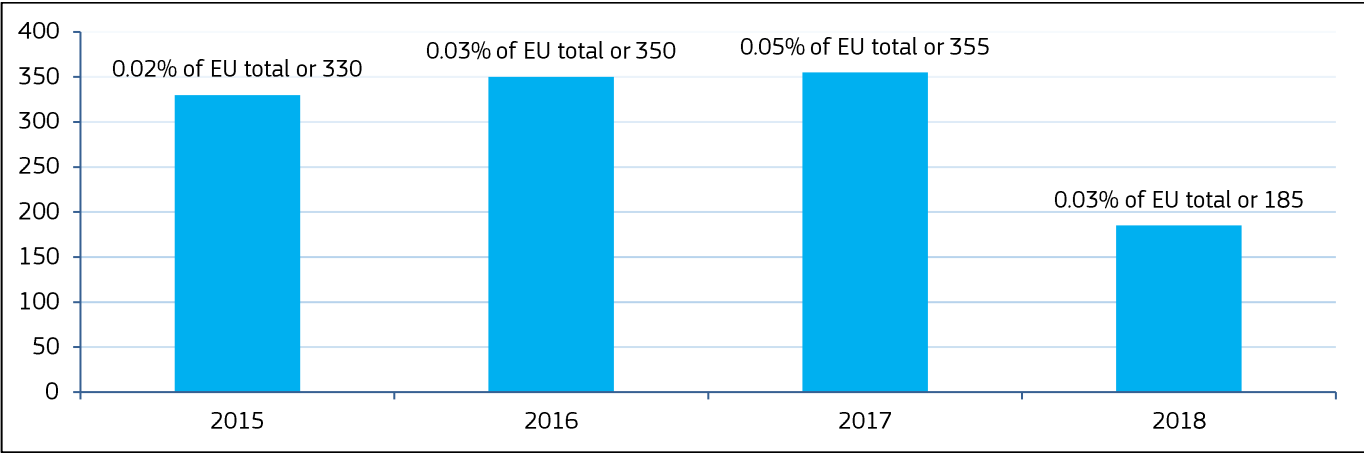
INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION INCLUDING ASYLUM

Figure 2: Asylum applications as a share of the total population in Latvia, EU average and EU high and low (2015-2018)



Source: Eurostat migration statistics ([migr_asyappctza](#)), data extracted 26.04.19

Figure 3: Number of asylum applications and as a share of the total number of applications in the EU (2015-2018)



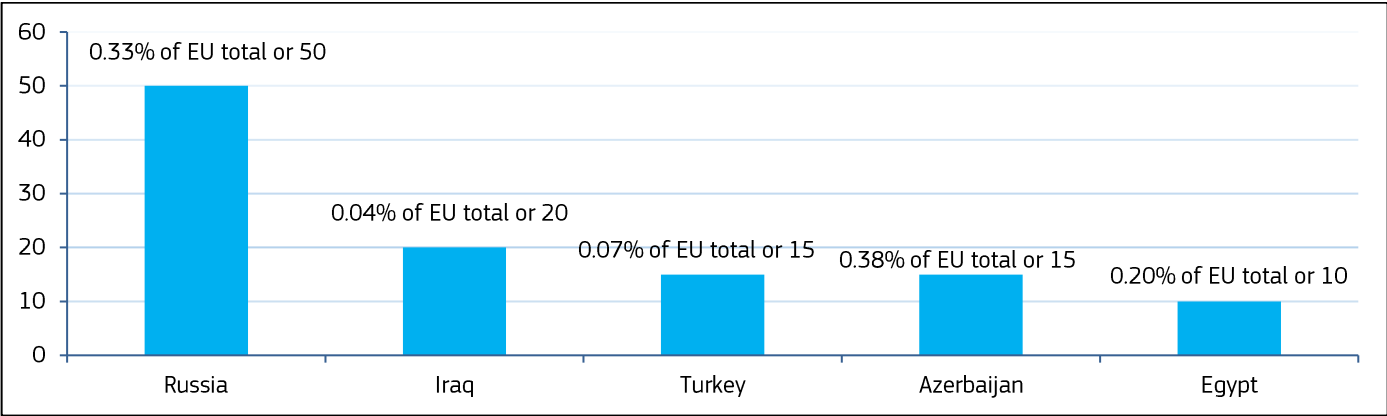
Source: Eurostat migration statistics ([migr_asyappctza](#)), data extracted 26.04.2019

Table 1: Asylum applications: Top five third-country nationalities (2015-2018)

2015			2016			2017			2018		
Nationality	No.	% of total	Nationality	No.	% of total	Nationality	No.	% of total	Nationality	No.	% of total
Vietnam, Iraq	85	26%	Syria	150	43%	Syria	140	39%	Russia	50	27%
Ukraine	45	14%	Afghanistan	35	10%	Vietnam	40	11%	Iraq	20	11%
Afghanistan	35	11%	Russia	25	7%	Russia	30	8%	Turkey	15	8%
Georgia	30	9%	India	20	6%	Eritrea	20	6%	Azerbaijan	15	8%
Russia	10	3%	Pakistan	20	6%	Kazakhstan	15	4%	Egypt	10	5%

Source: Eurostat migration statistics ([migr_asyappctza](#)), data extracted 29.04.2019

Figure 4: Asylum applications: Top five third-country nationalities as a share of EU total per given nationality (2018)



Source: Eurostat migration statistics ([migr_asyappctza](#)), data extracted 26.04.2019

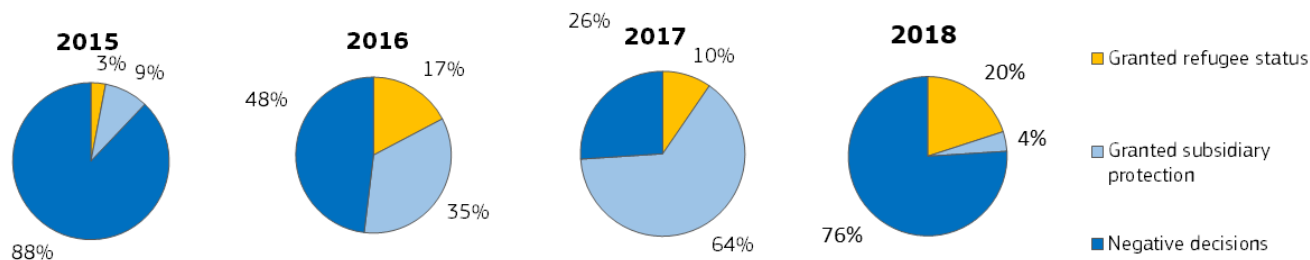
Note: the figure reads as: Latvia received 50 asylum applications from Russians or 0.33 % of all asylum applications launched by Russians in EU in 2018.

Table 2: Asylum applications – First instance decisions by outcome (2015-2018)

	Total decisions	Positive decisions	Of which:		Humanitarian reasons	Negative decisions
			Refugee status	Subsidiary protection		
2015	170	20	5	15	:	145
2016	260	135	45	90	:	125
2017	360	265	35	235	:	95
2018	125	30	25	5	:	95

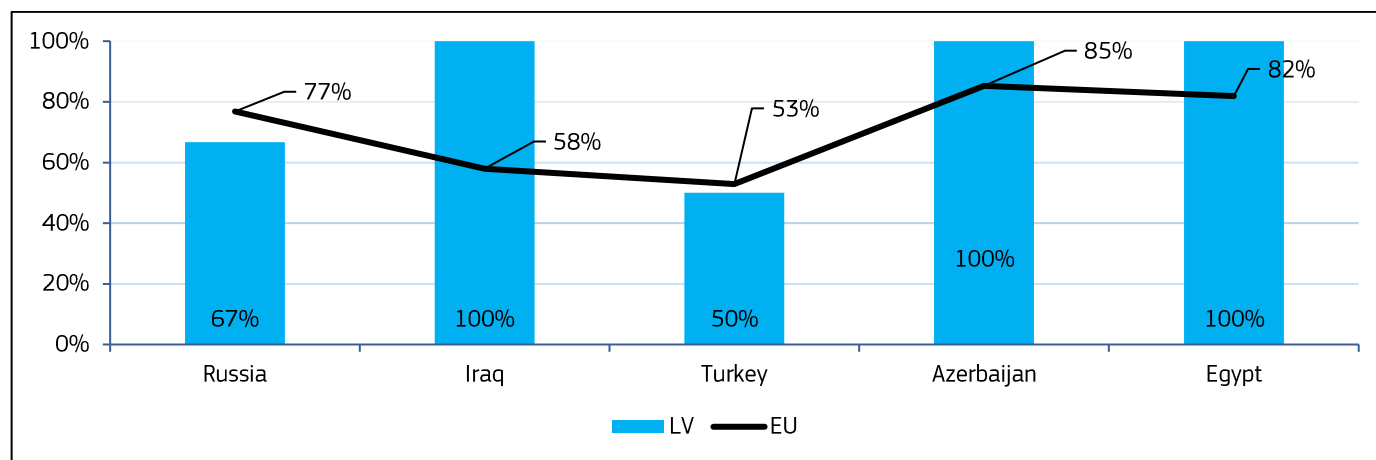
Source: Eurostat migration statistics ([migr_asydcfst](#)), data extracted 29.04.2019

Figure 5: Asylum applications – First instance decisions by outcome (2015-2018)



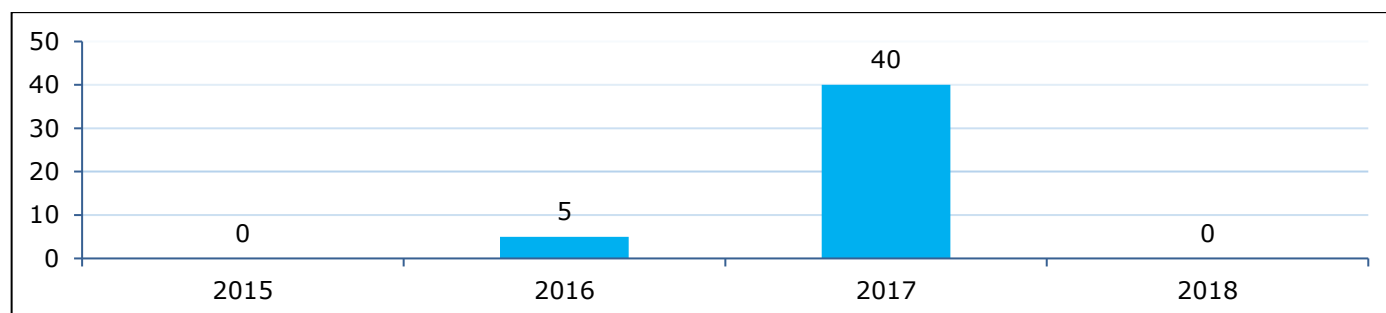
Source: Eurostat migration statistics ([migr_asydcfst](#)), data extracted 30.04.19

Figure 6: Negative decision rate for the top five nationalities of applicants at the first instance in comparison with EU for the same given nationality (2018)



Source: Eurostat migration statistics ([migr_asydcfst](#)), data extracted 30.04.19

Figure 7: Third-country nationals resettled (2015-2018)

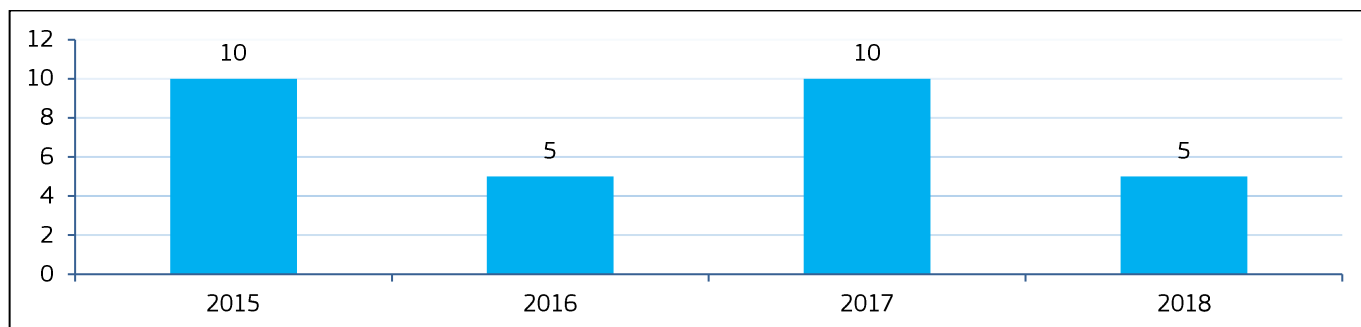


Source: Eurostat migration statistics ([migr_asyresa](#)), data extracted 02.05.19



UNACCOMPANIED MINORS

Figure 8: Unaccompanied minors applying for asylum (2015–2018)



Source: Eurostat. Asylum applicants considered to be unaccompanied minors by citizenship, age and sex Annual data (rounded) ([migr_asyunaa](#)), data extracted 02.05.19.



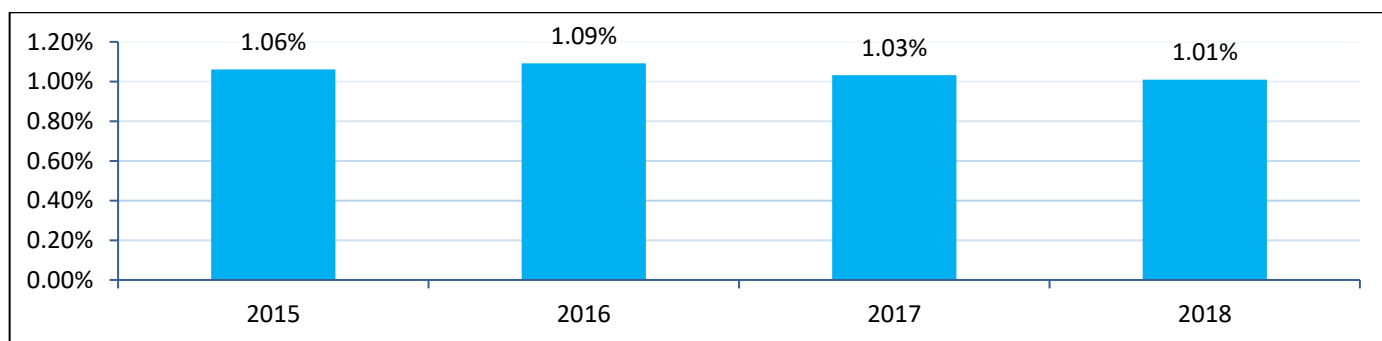
BORDERS, SCHENGEN AND VISA

Table 3: Number of Schengen visas applications (2015–2018)

	2015	2016	2017	2018
Uniform visas applications (short-stay visas)	164 000	165 814	166 800	161 709

Source: DG Migration and Home – Complete statistics on short-stay visas issued by the Schengen States

Figure 9: Uniform visa applications received in Latvia as a share of the total number of uniform visa applications in all Schengen states consulates (2015–2018)



Source: DG Migration and Home Affairs – Complete statistics on short-stay visas issued by the Schengen States

Table 4: Top five countries in which the highest number of visa applications for Latvia was lodged (2015–2018)

2015		2016		2017		2018	
Country	Number	Country	Number	Country	Number	Country	Number
Russian Federation	73 397	Russian Federation	138 967	Russian Federation	80 854	Russian Federation	82 175
Belarus	56 461	Belarus	49 655	Belarus	60 026	Belarus	58 897
Ukraine	14 276	Ukraine	16 847	Ukraine	8 656	Uzbekistan	4 946
Georgia	7 671	Georgia	7 912	Uzbekistan	4 122	Azerbaijan	3 470
Uzbekistan	3 249	Uzbekistan	4 218	Azerbaijan	3 325	Ukraine	2 784

Source: DG Migration and Home Affairs – Complete statistics on short-stay visas issued by the Schengen States



IRREGULAR MIGRATION

Table 3: Number of third-country nationals refused entry at external borders, found to be illegally present, ordered to leave and returned following an order to leave (2015–2018)

Third-country nationals:	2015	2016	2017	2018
Refused entry at external borders	875	800	1 065	1 685
Found to be illegally present	745	745	400	395
Ordered to leave	1 190	1 450	1 350	1 540
Returned following an order to leave	1 030	1 355	1 275	1 465

Source: Eurostat migration statistics ([migr_eirfs](#))([migr_eipre](#))([migr_eiord](#))([migr_eirtn](#)) data extracted 03.05.2019



RETURN

Table 4: Third-country nationals returned (2015–2018)

Year	Returned as part of forced return measure	Returned voluntarily	Returned through an Assisted Voluntary Return Programme
2015	392	1 225	34
2016	336	1 027	75
2017	271	1 029	63
2018	103*	1 214	58

Source: EMN Latvia. * 3 persons who were returned as part of forced return measures had return decisions issued in 2017.