

Latvia - Human Rights Scorecard ¹

Latvia, officially the Republic of Latvia, is one of the Baltic States of Northern Europe, named so because of its proximity to the Baltic Sea. Latvia was forcibly incorporated into the Soviet Union at the onset of the Second World War, gaining its independence in a peaceful revolution in 1991.² Today, Latvia is a highly developed country and an EU member state. Due to its history of Russian occupation, many ethnically-Russian populations continue to reside in Latvia.

Official language: Latvian

Ethnic groups: 62.2% Latvian; 25.2% Russian; 3.2% Belarusians; 9.4% Other

Government: Unitary parliamentary constitutional republic

- President: Raimonds Vējonis
- Prime Minister: Māris Kučinskis

Population: 1.9 million

Life expectancy: 74.3 years

Under-5 mortality: 17 per 1000

Adult literacy: 87%

Death penalty: Abolished



Section 1: Overall Development

The overall development of a country – considering education, health, income, and other factors – is a strong indicator of whether average citizens have a reasonable chance to enjoy social and economic well-being and mobility.

Human Development (UNDP Human Development Index (HDI)) ³



0.830 – Very High Human Development ⁴

According to the UNDP, Latvians enjoyed a gross national income per capita of \$22,589, and have on average 11.7 years of schooling. Compared to other countries with similar gross national income per capita, this is a high HDI.

Section 2: Respect for the Integrity of the Person

Respect for the integrity of the individual is the most fundamental of human rights groupings. It guarantees protection of the person to ensure the right to life, and freedom from torture. It also prevents arbitrary detention, and disappearances, and ensures the right to a free and fair trial when accused.

Freedom from arbitrary or unlawful deprivation of life



Respected ⁵

There are no reports of unlawful or arbitrary killings on behalf of the government.

Freedom from disappearance



Respected ⁶

There are no reports of enforced disappearances in Latvia.

Freedom from torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment



Partially respected ⁷

There are a few reports backed by medical evidence which allege prison officials use excessive force against inmates.

Freedom from arbitrary arrest or detention



Respected ⁸

Latvian law prohibits arbitrary arrest and allows citizens to challenge the legality of their arrest. The government generally respects these provisions.

Freedom from denial of fair public trial



Partially respected⁹

The government generally respects the right to an independent judiciary, though allegations of judicial corruption and lengthy court proceedings persist.

Freedom from arbitrary interference with privacy, family, home or correspondence



Respected¹⁰

There are no reports of government violations of these rights.

Section 3: Respect for Civil Liberties

Civil liberties are a basic category of internationally recognized human rights. They include the freedoms of expression, assembly, association, education, and religion. These are inalienable rights which should not be breached by government, and should ensure the rights of all, including women and minority groups.

Freedom of speech and press (*Reporters Without Borders Press Freedom Index*)¹¹



Score: 19.63, Rank: 24 / 180 – Mostly free, diverse, and independent¹²

The independent media is active and express a wide variety of views without restriction. There are some ongoing problems with biased news sources, as well as legal obstacles that do not favour the media or media sources.

Freedom from academic censorship



Respected¹³

There are no government restrictions on academic freedom.

Freedom of peaceful assembly and association



Respected¹⁴

The government generally respects the right to free assembly with few restrictions on organizing demonstrations.

Freedom of religion



Partially respected¹⁵

The Latvian constitution protects religious freedoms, though there are instances of hate speech, anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim discrimination. "Traditional" religious groups often receive certain rights and privileges that other groups are not afforded.

Freedom of movement



Respected¹⁶

The government generally respects Latvian rights to internal and international movement.

Protection of refugees and stateless persons



Partially respected¹⁷

The government has measures in place to ensure accessibility to the asylum process. Approximately 12% of Latvia's population is stateless ethnically non-Latvians who came to Latvia in the Soviet era. Nonetheless, citizenship applications amongst this population remains low.

Overall protection of civil liberties (*FreedomHouse Civil Liberties Index*)^{18 19}



2 / 7 – Free²⁰

Despite certain forms of societal discrimination, Latvia remains a relatively free country that respects civil liberties.

Section 4: Respect for Political Rights

Political rights ensure all members of society are able to influence the political process. The assessment of political rights includes an examination of the electoral process and the selection of representatives, the political empowerment of the general public, the tolerance of dissent, the accountability of government, etc.

Overall protection of political rights (*FreedomHouse Political Rights Index*)²¹



2 / 7 – Free²²

Latvians enjoy fair and periodic elections based on universal suffrage to choose their government. Nevertheless, Latvia's large stateless and non-citizen population is not able to participate. Parties may organize without restriction.

Section 5: Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government

The civil, political, economic and social rights exercised within a country are often modulated by the degree of transparency and freedom from corruption. Various international metrics assess transparency and corruption, including the OECD anti-bribery convention, the Bribe Payers Index, and the Open Budget Index.

Transparency and freedom from corruption (*Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index*)²³



Score: 58%, Rank: 40 / 180 – Some corruption²⁴

In Latvia, corruption remains a systemic problem that the government seldom addresses. Large amounts of Latvians believe bribes are an acceptable way to get things they want from public employees.

Section 6: Governmental Response to Criticism

This section deals specifically with the response heads of state have to civil society or international human rights reports.

Governmental attitudes vis-à-vis independent investigations of alleged human rights violations



Respected²⁵

Human rights organizations operate within Latvia without restriction, and government officials generally cooperate with their views.

Section 7: Discrimination and Societal Abuses

Legal and social discriminatory practices related to sex, race, creed or sexual orientation, are violations of human rights. Countries with strong civil liberty traditions should have a fair legal system that ensures the rule of law, allows free economic activity, and ensures equality of opportunity for all.

Endangered Minorities (*Peoples Under Threat – Minority Rights Group International*)²⁶



No threat listed – Limited dangers to minorities²⁷

According to Minorities Rights Group International, Latvia does not have any minorities which face an immediate threat of violence.

Rights of women (*World Economic Forum Gender Gap Index*)²⁸



Score: 76.9%, Rank: 15 / 142 – Somewhat equal rights²⁹

Though domestic abuse remains a pertinent issue in Latvia, punishments are tough. Latvia also implements tough punishments for issues of sexual harassment. However, there are some cases of reluctance by police to implement these punishments and regulations.

Rights of Children (*KidsRights Index Overall Score*)³⁰



Score: 88.1%, Rank: 15 / 182 – Protected³¹

Children born to non-citizen or stateless parents are eligible for Latvian citizenship. Nonetheless, violence against children remains a persisting problem. Over 1,000 Latvian children live in orphanages despite their legal right to "grow up in a family."

Rights of persons with disabilities



Partially respected³²

The government generally protects persons with disabilities from discrimination, and the government provides free services and counseling to children with disabilities and their parents. However, only 2% of the country's buildings are accessible to persons with mobility disabilities.

Rights of national/racial/ethnic minorities (e.g. discrimination, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism etc.)



Partially respected³³

There are very few complaints of racial or ethnic discrimination, though it is thought to be underreported. The Romani population in particular faces widespread societal discrimination, unemployment, and illiteracy.

Freedom from abuse and discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity



Largely disrespected^{34 35}

Intolerance and discrimination against LGBTQ+ persons are widespread issues in Latvia.

Section 7: Workers' Rights

Workers' rights are a group of legal rights relating to labour relations between workers and their employers. At their core are things like the ability to negotiate pay, benefits, terms of employment, and safe working conditions. These rights often devolve from the right to unionize and access to collective bargaining.

Rights to freedom of association and to collective bargaining



Respected³⁶

Freedom of association and collective bargaining are generally respected, with some restrictions on striking in the public safety sector.

Freedom from forced or compulsory labour



Respected³⁷

There are regular inspections of workplaces and there are no reports of forced labour.

Freedom from forced labour for children, and a minimum age of employment



Respected³⁸

There are no reports of child labour abuses in Latvia, and regulations regarding child workplace safety are rigid.

Right to acceptable conditions of work



Respected³⁹

Work condition standards were usually upheld, though difficult to enforce in the informal economy.

Right to employment



10.9% - High unemployment⁴⁰

Though an improvement from soaring unemployment rates of the late 2010s (nearly 20%), unemployment in Latvia remains high and is expected to remain at similar levels in the coming years.

¹ A hybrid human rights and freedoms model, leveraging both legal principles and intuitive classifications, has been used for this human rights assessment. The CJPME Foundation has sought to integrate as many independent sources and metrics into its summary analysis as possible. In many cases, for qualitative material pertaining to the respect for a particular right in a country, the CJPME Foundation has drawn on material from Human Rights Watch and the US State Department country reports. Human Rights Watch (HRW) publishes a World Report which assesses the respect for human rights in each country. HRW uses a methodology of local reporting and interviewing, combined with research and analysis to assess the level of respect of human rights. The U.S State Department keeps an updated publication on the state of human rights internationally. Their system of research and accountability draws from the research of official US State Department officials, as well as local civil-society and international human rights organizations.

² Commonly-known information on the country is drawn from various Internet sources, including Google country pages, and Amnesty International. For death penalty see: "Death sentences and executions in 2013." Amnesty International. March 24, 2014. Accessed May 15, 2015. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/act50/001/2014/en/>.

³ The UN Development Program HDI was created to emphasize that people and their capabilities should be the ultimate criteria for assessing the development of a country, not economic growth alone. The HDI can also be used to question national policy choices, asking how two countries with the same level of GNI per capita can end up with different human development outcomes. These contrasts can stimulate debate about government policy priorities. The Human Development Index (HDI) is a summary measure of average achievement in key dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, being knowledgeable and have a decent standard of living. Accessed Jan. 8, 2017 <http://hdr.undp.org/en/composite/HDI>

⁴ "Table 1: Human Development Index and its components, Latvia" UNDP, based on 2014 or the most recent year available. Accessed Jan. 8, 2017.

<http://hdr.undp.org/en/composite/HDI>.

⁵ "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013 Latvia." U.S Department of State. January 1, 2013. Accessed November 23, 2014.

<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/#wrapper>.

⁶ Ibid. U.S Department of State. For purposes of the present analysis, a "disappearance" is different than simple arbitrary detention because a "disappearance" is considered permanent.

⁷ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

⁸ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

⁹ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

¹⁰ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

¹¹ The Press Freedom Index published by Reporters Without Borders ranks the level of freedom of information in 180 countries. This is determined through the polling of local NGOs and freedom of expression civil society organizations across the globe. This index is also determined by local correspondents and follow-up work done on reports of infringement to press freedom where ever it takes place. Their methodology looks at six different indicators: 1) Media pluralism, 2) Media independence, 3) Media atmosphere and self-censorship, 4) the Law around media, 5) Media transparency, and 6) Media infrastructure. The score from these six indicators is combined with a rating for the violence against journalists in the country to create an overall score. The CJPME Foundation classifies the Press Freedom Index as follows: 0 – 14.99 (16 countries), Largely free, diverse and independent; 15 – 24.99 (37 countries), Mostly free, diverse and independent; 25 – 29.99 (31 countries), Partially free, diverse and independent; 30 – 39.99 (39 countries), Partially controlled, limited or intimidated; 40 & higher (57 countries), Highly controlled, limited or intimidated.

¹² "World Press Freedom Index." Reporters Without Borders: For Freedom of Information. January 1, 2014. Accessed November 23, 2014.

<http://rsf.org/index2014/en-index2014.php>.

¹³ "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013 Latvia." U.S Department of State. January 1, 2013. Accessed November 23, 2014.

<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/#wrapper>.

¹⁴ "Latvia." World Report 2014: Latvia. January 1, 2014. Accessed November 25, 2014. <http://www.hrw.org/world-report/2014/country-chapters/Latvia>.

¹⁵ "Latvia." International Religious Freedom Report for 2013. January 1, 2013. Accessed November 25, 2014.

<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>.

¹⁶ "Latvia." World Report 2014: Latvia. January 1, 2014. Accessed November 25, 2014. <http://www.hrw.org/world-report/2014/country-chapters/Latvia>.

¹⁷ "Latvia." World Report 2014: Latvia. January 1, 2014. Accessed November 25, 2014. <http://www.hrw.org/world-report/2014/country-chapters/Latvia>.

¹⁸ Freedom House is an internationally recognized NGO based in the U.S which documents and rates the quality of democratic practice in a given country. Freedom House splits its grading system between the two areas of civil and political rights in a country. On each scale, the Freedom House rating is 1-2.5 (free), 3-5.5 (partly free) and 6-7 (not free).

¹⁹ Freedom House's Civil Liberties index measures things such as a) freedom of expression and belief, b) associational and organizational rights, c) the rule of law, and d) personal autonomy and individual rights. Freedom House rates countries as 1-2.5 (free), 3-5.5 (partly free) and 6-7 (not free). Accessed Dec. 9, 2014

<https://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world-2014/methodology#.VldwWzHF98F>

²⁰ "Latvia." Freedom in the World 2014: Latvia. January 1, 2014. Accessed November 25, 2014. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2014/Latvia-0#.VIIIHLzGG9e8>.

²¹ See footnote about the Freedom House organization above. The Freedom House Political Rights assessment looks at a) the electoral process, b) political pluralism and participation, and c) the functioning of government. Accessed Dec. 9, 2014 <https://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world-2014/methodology#.VldwWzHF98F>

²² "Latvia." Freedom in the World 2014: Latvia. January 1, 2014. Accessed November 25, 2014. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2014/Latvia-0#.VIIIHLzGG9e8>.

²³ Transparency International (TI) publishes a "Corruption Perceptions Index" annually, which is based on independent research and polling. The main categories of corruption are broken down within the index to provide particulars on issues including things such as perceptions of corruption, control of corruption, and financial secrecy. A country receives a score on 100; the higher the score, the less corrupt the society. The CJPME foundation has classified them into categories as follows: 80-100 (11 countries): Very limited corruption; 60-79 (27 countries): Limited corruption; 40-59 (41 countries): Some corruption; 20-39 (80 countries): Highly corrupt; 0-19 (15 countries): Extremely corrupt

²⁴ "Latvia." Corruption by Country. January 1, 2014. Accessed November 25, 2014. <http://www.transparency.org/country#BHR>.

²⁵ "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013 Latvia." U.S Department of State. January 1, 2013. Accessed November 23, 2014.

<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/#wrapper>.

²⁶ The Peoples under Threat assessment by Minority Rights Group International highlights countries most at risk of genocide and mass killing. The ranking is created by compiling data on the known antecedents to genocide or mass political killing. Accessed Jan. 8, 2017 <http://peoplesunderthreat.org/>.

²⁷ "Latvia." Peoples under Threat, Minority Rights Group International. 2015, or most recent data. Accessed Jan. 8, 2017. <http://peoplesunderthreat.org/>.

²⁸ This metric is based on the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Index. 0.00 denotes inequality between the sexes, and 1.00 denotes fully equality between the sexes. This index looks at four subdomains: economic participation and opportunity; educational attainment; health and survival; and political empowerment. Each country is given a percentage score; the higher the percentage, the better the protections. The CJPME Foundation classed the percentages as follows: 80-100% (5 countries): Almost equal rights; 70-79% (60 countries): Somewhat unequal rights; 0-69% (77 countries): Very unequal rights

²⁹ "Latvia." World Economic Forum. January 1, 2014. Accessed November 25, 2014. <http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2014/economies/#economy=BHR>.

³⁰ This metric is based on the KidsRights Index Overall Score. This index has five subdomains: life expectancy and maternal mortality; health; education; protection; and child rights environment. Each country is given a percentage score; the higher the percentage, the better the protections. KidsRights classes the countries according to these percentages, and the CJPME Foundation has given each class a term as follows: 70-100% (77 countries): Protected; 60-70% (29 countries): Somewhat protected; 45-50% (33 countries): Slightly vulnerable; 30-45% (12 countries): Highly vulnerable; Lower than 30% (11 countries): Extremely vulnerable

³¹ "The KidsRights Index: Overall Ranking." The KidsRights Index. Accessed November 25, 2014. <http://www.kidsrightsindex.org/>

³² "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013 Latvia." U.S Department of State. January 1, 2013. Accessed November 23, 2014.

<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/#wrapper>.

³³ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

³⁴ "ILGA World Map." International Lesbian Gay and Intersex Association. January 1, 2014. Accessed November 25, 2014. <http://ilga.org/>. See also Ibid. U.S Department of State.

³⁵ ILGA, the International, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association, was founded in 1978 on the principle of highlighting state sponsored homophobia where it exists around the world. ILGA annually publishes a map with an accompanying report on sexual and gender based harassment, which focuses on both the legal and non-legal acts of state sponsored discrimination.

³⁶ "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013 Latvia." U.S Department of State. January 1, 2013. Accessed November 23, 2014. <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/#wrapper>.

³⁷ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

³⁸ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

³⁹ Ibid. U.S Department of State. See also a well-done Wikipedia comparison of wage, income and work week metrics across countries at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_minimum_wages_by_country

⁴⁰ "Global Employment Trends." International Labour Organization. January 1, 2013. Accessed December 7, 2014. http://www.ilo.org/global/research/global-reports/global-employment-trends/2014/WCMS_233936/lang--en/index.htm.