

Latvia



Population: 2,231,503 (July 2009 est.)

Population Growth Rate: -0.614% (2009 est.)

Birth Rate: 9.78 births/1,000 population (2009 est.)

Life Expectancy: *total population:* 72.15 years; *male:* 66.98 years; *female:* 77.59 years (2009 est.)

Literacy Rate: *total population:* 99.7%; *male:* 99.8%; *female:* 99.7%

Net Migration Rate: -2.3 migrant(s)/1,000 population (2009 est.)

Unemployment Rate: 5.5% (2008 est.)

Gross Domestic Product Per Capita: \$17,800 (2008 est.)

Religions: Lutheran 19.6%, Orthodox 15.3%, other Christian 1%, other 0.4%, unspecified 63.7% (2006)

Languages: Latvian (official) 58.2%, Russian 37.5%, Lithuanian and other 4.3% (2000 census)

Ethnic Groups: Latvian 57.7%, Russian 29.6%, Belarusian 4.1%, Ukrainian 2.7%, Polish 2.5%, Lithuanian 1.4%, other 2% (2002)

Capital: Riga¹

Trafficking Routes

Latvia is primarily a country of origin for trafficking in women. Destination countries for trafficked victims include the United Kingdom, Italy, Spain, Switzerland, Denmark, and Portugal. In addition, its geographical location makes Latvia a convenient transit country for women trafficked from neighboring Eastern European countries, in particular Belarus, Ukraine, and Moldova.² Internal trafficking has also been reported, where victims were transported from rural areas to brothels and sex clubs in large cities like Riga, Liepaja, and Ventspils.³

Factors That Contribute to the Trafficking Infrastructure

Latvia's worsening economic situation contributes to the vulnerability of women trafficked for sexual exploitation.⁴ After the British market was opened to European Union members, many Latvian women fled the country for better economic opportunities. However, a lack of awareness when seeking jobs abroad contributed to

¹ CIA, THE WORLD FACTBOOK 2009, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/LG.html> (Last visited Feb. 2010).

² Latvia's Human Stock Exchange. Nov. 25, 2005. <http://www.janes.com/articles/Foreign-Report-2005/Latvia-s-human-stock-exchange.html>.

³ EVA BUCHHOLZ, TRAFFICKING OF WOMEN AND GIRLS INTO SEXUAL EXPLOITATION IN EU 25: THE IMPACT OF THE EASTERN ENLARGEMENT OF THE EUROPEAN UNION ON TRAFFICKING AND COUNTER-TRAFFICKING MEASURES IN THE BALTIC STATES. (Oct. 15, 2006), available at: <http://www.childcentre.info/projects/traffickin/dbaFile14961.pdf>.

⁴ Kate McIntosh, *Latvia's Human Trade in Misery*, THE BALTIC TIMES, May 7, 2009, available at: <http://www.baltictimes.com/news/articles/22865/>.

their being intercepted by traffickers and exploited through the migration process.⁵ Also, an increase in fictive marriages, a union arranged between two people with no existing relationship for the purpose of immigration, has left women victims of abusive relationships and terrible conditions upon arrival in their destination country.⁶

Gender discrimination in government implementation of policy and in the workplace in regard to wages continues to place women in difficult positions, especially when 29 percent of single parent women are the primary money-earners. Also, awareness campaigns and assistance to women are hindered by the lack of funding from the government for organizations involved in preventing trafficking and protecting women from traffickers. In this climate, complex international trafficking rings are operating successfully and adapting to any changes in law enforcement or nongovernmental organization (NGO) involvement.⁷

Additionally, the State Language Law, which orders the use of Latvian in all transactions with public institutions, essentially victimizes linguistic minorities. For example, Russian speakers constitute a large portion of the population and are therefore at a disadvantage in receiving economic and social rights.⁸ Consequently, minorities are then subject to irregular migration and become vulnerable to traffickers.

Forms of Trafficking

In Latvia, women are victims of trafficking in the commercial sex industry to countries including, but not limited to, Sweden, Finland, Norway, China, and Japan.⁹ Latvian women searching for work abroad are deceived by traffickers into believe they will work as dancers in high-end clubs, but instead find themselves working as strippers in slave-like conditions where their fundamental human rights are abused by the traffickers.¹⁰

Government Responses

The criminal code prohibits compelling or causing a person to engage in prostitution.¹¹ The punishment for compelling a person to engage in prostitution is a fine or imprisonment for up to three years. If, by using fraud or taking advantage of the dependence or vulnerability of a person, someone causes that person to engage in prostitution, the punishment is a fine or imprisonment for up to five years. Imprisonment

⁵ Latvia's Human Stock Exchange, *supra* note 2.

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ Kate McIntosh, *supra* note 4.

⁸ Economic and Social Council, Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, *Consideration of Reports Submitted by States Parties under Articles 16 and 17 of the Covenant*, U.N. Doc. E/C.12/LVA/CO/1 (Jan. 7, 2008),

available at: <http://www.universalhumanrightsindex.org/documents/827/1275/document/en/doc/text.doc>.

⁹ Human Trafficking: Situation in Estonia. <http://www.lft.ee/?keel=eng&meny=3&menyy=1-0-2> (last visited Feb. 23, 2010).

¹⁰ Annie Sweeney, *Surviving Chicago's Sex Slave Trade*, August 7, 2005, available at: http://www.ipsn.org/organized_crime/prostitution/surviving_chicago.htm.

¹¹ The Criminal Law of the Republic of Latvia, [14 December 2006] Article 164.

may increase to six years in cases involving minors¹² and up to 12 years in cases involving juveniles.¹³

The criminal code also prohibits living on the money transacted in prostitution.¹⁴ Taking material or financial advantage of a person in prostitution is punishable by up to four years' imprisonment. The punishment increases to up to eight years' imprisonment if the act is committed by an organized criminal group or against a minor.¹⁵

International trafficking of a person for sexual purposes is punishable by imprisonment for up to six years. In cases involving minors or when the purpose of the act is material gain, the punishment increases to up to 10 years' imprisonment. The punishment lengthens to up to 15 years' imprisonment if the act is committed against a juvenile or by an organized criminal group.¹⁶

The Law on the Entry Into and Residence in the Republic of Latvia of Aliens and Stateless Persons prohibits issuing a residence permit to anyone who has been found guilty of a crime committed in Latvia or elsewhere and for which punishment is imprisonment for a term exceeding three years.¹⁷ The law also prohibits the entry into Latvia of anyone who has intentionally submitted false information in order to receive a residence permit,¹⁸ who has invalid travel documents,¹⁹ or who is a member of an organized criminal group.²⁰ Similarly, the law prohibits issuing a residence permit to anyone who is an illegal resident in the country or who has helped another person to enter the country illegally.²¹ The law provides for the nullification of a residence permit in cases involving fictitious marriages.²²

A person who is subject to deportation must leave the country within seven days after being notified of the expulsion order.²³ The deported person bears the cost of deportation.²⁴

The constitution provides that all people have "the right to freely choose their employment and workplace according to their abilities and qualifications. Forced labor is prohibited."²⁵

The 2008 Law on the Prevention of Laundering the Proceeds From Criminal Activity (Money Laundering) and of Terrorist Financing criminalizes the laundering of proceeds derived from criminal activity as defined in the Criminal Procedure Law.²⁶ The law requires the reporting of unusual and suspicious financial transactions to the

¹² Article 164(3). For the purposes of article 164, a minor is a person who has not attained the age of 16.

¹³ Article 164(4).

¹⁴ Article 165

¹⁵ In cases involving juveniles, the punishment is imprisonment for up to 12 years.

¹⁶ Article 165(1).

¹⁷ The Law on Entry into and Residence in the Republic of Latvia of Aliens and Stateless Persons. [18 December 1996] Section 35(3).

¹⁸ Section 35(6).

¹⁹ Section 35(7).

²⁰ Section 35(9).

²¹ Section 35(11).

²² Section 36(9).

²³ Section 40.

²⁴ Section 42.

²⁵ Article 106. The article also states, "Participation in the relief of disasters and their effects, and work pursuant to a court order, shall not be deemed forced labor."

²⁶ Article 4.

Financial Intelligence Unit, whereby data and records on customer identification, due diligence, and transaction monitoring are stored.²⁷

In 2006, a meeting in Copenhagen reinforced the Ministry of Welfare's cooperation with other governmental representatives from the Ministries of Welfare, Justice, Interior, Foreign Affairs, and Children and Family Affairs in addressing the problem of trafficking in persons in Latvia.²⁸

As of September 2006, the Latvian court completed 13 cases on charges under article 165 (sending a person for sexual exploitation) of the criminal code. In the same year there were only two criminal cases completed on charges of human trafficking under article 154 of the criminal code.²⁹

Nongovernmental and International Organization Responses

The Gender Problem Center in Latvia runs a shelter for repatriated women and works to prevent prostitution among adolescents.³⁰ The center also offers health and psychological services, and staff continually stay abreast of trafficking-related issues, particularly prevention methods, by attending workshops and seminars.³¹

A joint project with the European Women's Lobby and the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women supports local NGOs in 13 countries, including Latvia, in antitrafficking programs that address gender equality, the demand for trafficking, and "the links between trafficking and prostitution."³² A campaign organized by the Resource Center for Women "Marta" is targeting Riga International Airport. Volunteers hand out informational materials to alert women leaving the country about "their rights in foreign countries and where to seek help." The campaign is also targeting sex tourism by warning tourists entering the country about the penalties of engaging in illegal sexual activities.³³

The International Organization for Adolescents (IOFA) is a nonprofit organization based in the United States that supports program development, technical assistance, and research—primarily in combating youth trafficking.³⁴ In 2008, IOFA held a "train-the-trainers program" in Riga to encourage university professors to incorporate human trafficking and antitrafficking legislation into their curricula.³⁵

²⁷ Article 7(6-7).

²⁸ Embassy of the Republic of Latvia in Copenhagen, *Foreign ministry discusses elimination of human trafficking with other ministries*, (June 29, 2006), <http://www.am.gov.lv/en/copenhagen/news/latvian-news/template/?pg=7819>.

²⁹ Rasma Zvejniece, *Improvement regulations of the Criminal Law on human trafficking and sending of persons for sexual exploitation initiated*, (Mar. 13, 2007), available at: <http://www.at.gov.lv/en/information/about-notable-events/2007/march/20070313/>.

³⁰ Child Centre, *Information About Latvian Gender Problem Centre*, available at: <http://www.childcentre.info/10877/> (last visited July 1, 2010).

³¹ *Id.*

³² Coalition Against Trafficking in Women International, *Measures to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings for Sexual Exploitation*, available at: http://www.change.org/coalition_against_trafficking_in_women_international_catw/projects/view/measure_s_to_combat_trafficking_in_human_beings_for_sexual_exploitation.

³³ *Id.*

³⁴ *International Organization for Adolescents available at:* <http://www.humantrafficking.org/organizations/354> (last visited Feb. 24, 2010).

³⁵ International Organization for Adolescents, *Events*, available at: <http://www.iofa.org/events.php> (last visited Feb. 24, 2010).

Prevention, Investigation, and Repatriation of Victims of Human Trafficking in Latvia is a joint project with IOFA. The project is intended to increase cooperation between NGOs, police, and other investigating authorities [repeats] in alleviating trafficking and assisting its victims.³⁶

The Project for the Prevention of Adolescent Trafficking in Latvia is another joint project with IOFA. This program assists youth health centers in providing necessary materials on human trafficking and safe migration practices appropriate for adolescents.³⁷

Multilateral Initiatives

From 2008, Latvia has acted as president of the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS). One of the main goals proposed by the Latvian administration was civil security. The Task Force Against Trafficking in Human Beings was established to develop better cooperation between governments and NGOs. Various seminars have been held to promote a victim-centered approach to trafficking and ensure the reintegration of victims into society. Additionally, the Baltic Sea Regional Study on Adolescents' Sexuality was initiated to address the effects of new media on violence and abuse of children.³⁸

³⁶ IOA, *supra* note 35.

³⁷ *Id.*

³⁸ WORK ACCOMPLISHED DURING 1ST HALF-YEAR OF LATVIA'S PRESIDENCY IN COUNCIL OF THE BALTIC SEA STATES (CBSS), AND PLANNED ACTIVITIES FOR 2ND HALF OF TERM, (May 2, 2008), *available at*: http://www.am.gov.lv/data/CBSS%202007-2008/apkopojums_eng.doc.