



**International
Human Rights
Instruments**

Distr.
GENERAL

HRI/CORE/1/Add.123
25 June 2003

Original: ENGLISH

**CORE DOCUMENT FORMING PART OF THE REPORTS
OF STATES PARTIES**

LATVIA

[26 February 2002]

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I. LAND AND PEOPLE

General information

1. The Republic of Latvia is an independent and democratic State situated in north-eastern Europe on the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea covering 64,589 square kilometres. The State borders with the Republic of Estonia in the north, with the Republic of Lithuania in the south and with the Republic of Belarus and the Russian Federation in the east. The landscape of the country is marked by lowland plains and rolling hills and most of the countryside is less than 100 metres above sea level. The country historically and culturally is divided into four regions: Kurzeme, Latgale, Zemgale and Vidzeme. There are 7 cities, 69 towns, 26 districts and 483 local municipalities in Latvia.

2. The capital of the Republic of Latvia is Riga. The official language of the State is Latvian, which is one of the oldest of the Indo-European languages and is spoken by approximately 70-75 per cent of the population. The national currency is the lats (LVL), officially pegged to the SDR (Special Drawing Rights) basket of currencies at the rate of 0.7997 SDR/LVL.

3. The table below represents the basic statistical data on the characteristics of the Latvian population for the year 2000/01.

Population breakdown (2001)	75.4% citizens 21.9% non-citizens 2.7% foreigners
Breakdown of sex (2001)	54.0% women 46.0% men
Age (2001)	Under 15 years 17.3% From 15 to 59 years 61.2% 60 years and over 21.5%
Urban population (2001)	68.2%
Marital status (2001)	41.9% single 44.4% married 6.2% widowed 7.5% divorced
Population breakdown by ethnic origin (2000)	57.7% Latvians 29.6% Russians 4.1% Byelorussians 2.7% Ukrainians 2.5% Poles 1.4% Lithuanians 0.4% Jews 1.6% other
Believers (2001)	1 305 944

Table (continued)

Religion (2001) (according to the data provided by communions of the Republic of Latvia)	500 000 Roman Catholics 400 300 Evangelical Lutherans 298 000 Orthodox 70 000 Old-believers 6 367 Baptists
Infant mortality (2000)	10.4 per 1,000 births
Birth rate (2000)	8.5 children per 1,000 inhabitants
Total fertility rate (2000)	1.24
Life expectancy (2000)	Women: 76 years Men: 64.9 years
Gross domestic product (2000)	LVL 4 333 million (approximately US\$ 7 150 million)
Gross domestic product per capita (2000)	LVL 1 825.9 (US\$ 3 013)
Inflation rate (2000)	1.8%
Unemployment rate, end of the year (2000)	7.8%
Illiteracy (2000)	Total among inhabitants of Latvia: 0.25% Among women: 0.21% Among men: 0.29%

Demographic characteristics

4. In year 2000 the population census was held throughout the country. There were 2,375,000 inhabitants, approximately 1,093,000 males and 1,282,000 females, permanently residing in the territory of Latvia.

5. At the beginning of the year 2001 408,700 Latvians were under 15, 1,448,400 aged from 15 to 59 and 509,000 aged 60 and over. According to the previous population census held in 1989, the percentage of the population under 15 fell from 21.4 per cent to 17.3 per cent but the percentage of the population aged 60 years and over increased from 17.4 per cent to 21.5 per cent. The overall decline in the State's population since 1996 is given below.

Year	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
Total	2 468.1	2 443.4	2 419.2	2 397.6	2 375.0	2 366.1

(Population figures have been revised on the basis of the results of the 2000 population census.)

6. As a consequence of tremendous political and socio-economic changes in the State since 1991, the natural population growth has been negative. However, in 1999 the natural growth slowly improved. In 1999, the number of children born in comparison with 1998 increased by 5.4 per cent. Furthermore, in 2000 the death rate per 100,000 residents was 1,357 - slightly lower than in 1999. The natural population growth is given below.

Year	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Total	-12 438	-17 501	-17 336	-14 538	-14 703	-15 790	-13 448	-11 957

7. The death rate of newborns has decreased from 15.8 per 1,000 in 1996 to 10.4 per 1,000 in 2000. The number of cases of maternal death per 100,000 babies born alive had decreased from 40.4 in 1996 to 24.8 in 2000. The Government has taken appropriate measures to improve the demographic situation; thus, the Ministry of Welfare elaborated and the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Latvia in February 2001 adopted "The Strategy of Health Care of Mother and Child in Latvia".

Ethnic characteristics

8. During the 1990s the proportion of ethnic Latvians slightly increased while the proportion of Russians, Byelorussians, Ukrainians, Poles and other ethnic groups decreased. During 2000 the number of Latvians was also slightly higher, compared with other national groups living in Latvia.

9. The distribution of Latvia's population by ethnic origin between 1935 and 2001 is shown in the table below.

	1935 %	1979 %	1989 %	2000 %
All inhabitants	100	100	100	100
Including:				
Latvians	77.0	53.7	52.0	57.7
Russians	8.8	32.8	34.0	29.6
Byelorussians	1.4	4.5	4.5	4.1
Ukrainians	0.1	2.7	3.5	2.7
Poles	2.5	2.5	2.3	2.5
Lithuanians	1.2	1.5	1.3	1.4
Jews	4.9	1.1	0.9	0.4
Gypsies	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.3
Germans	3.3	0.1	0.1	0.2
Estonians	0.4	0.1	0.1	0.1
Other nationalities	0.2	0.8	1.0	1.1

10. Long-term historical cohabitation and friendly relations among different ethnic groups have made Latvia a place where significant conflicts among various ethnic and religious groups have not been possible. After regaining independence, the Government elaborated a policy to accommodate its various groups and their many cultural and religious traditions. The model which was chosen could be called “a national State with a multicultural society”: national in the sense that a condition of integration is one official State language and a unified territory, and multicultural in the sense that there is no common or State-supported religion and there are schools with different languages of instruction and conditions promoting development of all cultures.

11. Since 1999 the State Programme of Integration of Society has been carried out and a special institution - the Fund for the Integration of the Society - is in the process of formation. The goals of the programme are to form a democratic, consolidated civil society founded on shared basic values, to provide for all people permanently residing in Latvia access to contemporary living standards, and to promote welfare, education, security and favourable relations between the various ethnic groups.

Economic indicators

12. Latvia has made significant advances in its economic, financial and social development since regaining its independence in 1990, and has embraced comprehensive market economy reform. During the last several years, Government agreed on and continued the structural reform of the economy by accelerating privatization, strengthening the banking sector and the financial system in general, and stabilizing the overall situation in industry and agriculture.

13. GDP growth has been based on a broad range of developments. Particularly strong advances have been made during the last decade in the transportation and financial sectors, in communication services and commerce. Since the beginning of the transition to a market economy, the Government has implemented a strict fiscal policy through a major revenue mobilization combined with expenditure restraint. Latvia has made substantial progress in establishing the State institutions needed for fiscal management in a market economy. Consistently tight monetary and successful financial policies have been reflected in the continuous fall of inflation from 958.6 per cent in 1992 to 23.1 per cent in 1995, 13.1 per cent in 1996 and 7.0 per cent in 1997. In 1998 the annual inflation rate fell to 2.8 per cent, in 1999 the annual inflation rate was at 3.2 per cent and in 2000 it was 1.8 per cent.

14. The table below shows the key indicators of economic development of the State (the data for 2001 are estimates).

Indicators/year	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
GDP, constant prices, % over the previous year	3.3	8.6	3.9	1.1	6.6	8.0
Private consumption, constant prices, % over the previous year	10.3	5.0	2.4	9.0	4.9	8.0

Table (continued)

Indicators/year	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
General government budget fiscal balance (less privatization revenues), % of GDP	-1.4	0.6	-0.9	-4.2	-2.8	-1.8
Central government debt, % of GDP	14.4	12.0	10.4	13.1	13.2	13.4
Foreign trade balance, % of GDP	-15.6	-15.1	-18.5	-15.4	-14.9	-15.0
Current account balance, % of GDP	-5.5	-6.1	-10.6	-9.7	-6.9	-6.2
Foreign direct investment (flows)	7.4	9.3	5.8	5.2	5.7	5.0
Registered unemployment rate	7.2	7.0	9.2	9.1	7.8	7.5
Share of job-seekers (% of economically active people)	19.4	14.8	14.0	13.5	13.2	13.0
Exchange rate of LVL against SDR (end of period)	0.7997	0.7997	0.7997	0.7997	0.7997	0.7997

15. The unemployment rate since 1998 has been decreasing slightly, although the rate is still relatively high. In order to address this issue, the National Employment Plan is elaborated annually. The main aims of the Plan are to prevent young unemployed people from becoming long-term unemployed; to eliminate barriers to business and restrictions to starting entrepreneurial activity; to strengthen cooperation between the Confederation of Employers and the Confederation of Free Trade Unions; to implement measures aimed at ensuring equal opportunities for women and men in the labour market; to reduce gender inequality in the area of employment and revenues; and to encourage family-friendly social and labour policies. The basic detailed unemployment data in Latvia are the following:

Year	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Unemployed persons, number	90 819	84 934	111 383	109 497	93 283
Unemployment rate, %	7.2	7.0	9.2	9.1	7.8
Long-term unemployed/total unemployed, %	31.2	38.1	26.3	31.1	29.0
Unemployed women/total unemployed, %	54.7	59.4	58.5	57.4	57.6
Unemployed young persons (15-24 years)/total unemployed, %	20.0	18.1	16.4	14.8	14.7
Pre-pension age unemployed/total unemployed, %	11.4	12.4	13.2	13.7	14.7

16. The gross wage earned by people employed in the national economy in 2000 grew on average by 6.1 per cent in comparison with the preceding year and reached almost 150 lats. The table below indicates the income of residents of the Republic of Latvia.

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Average monthly wage in the economy:					
in LVL gross	98.73	120.03	133.30	140.99	149.53
in LVL net	78.65	88.34	97.47	102.73	108.55
in US\$ gross	179.18	206.59	225.93	241.01	246.75
in US\$ net	142.74	152.05	165.20	175.61	179.13
Disposable income of households, average per member (in LVL)	51.50	55.45	62.33	64.73	69.19
Value of goods and services basket of complete subsistence minimum, per capita	73.78	78.78	82.15	83.18	84.47
Real wage index of people employed (percentage against the respective period of the preceding year)	91.1	103.6	105.3	102.9	103.0

17. The Government recognizes that notwithstanding the country's substantial development and economic growth, the polarization of the society still continues. The results of the household budget surveys show that average household income per person is increasing, but simultaneously the income of the poorest members of society is decreasing even more.

II. POLITICAL STRUCTURE

Historical background

18. Historically, the territory of Latvia has always been regarded as a trading and transportation crossroads and has long served as a bridge between Western Europe and Russia. The ancestors of the Latvian nation settled on Latvian soil more than 4,000 years ago. Today Latvia has a multi-ethnic society and culture that has developed because of the historical, economic and social evolution of the country, providing good possibilities for using Latvia as a stable location to work in the Eastern and Western markets.

19. The Republic of Latvia as a national State was proclaimed on 18 November 1918 in accordance with the principles of international law, and since then its de iure legal personality has never been interrupted. Latvia was granted international recognition in 1920 and became a member of the League of Nations in 1921. It has been continuously recognized as a State by other countries since 1920 despite occupations by the Soviet Union (1940-1941, 1945-1991) and Nazi Germany (1941-1945).

20. The will and the right to self-determination of the people of Latvia was expressed in April 1920 when the people of Latvia gave their mandate to the Constitutional Assembly chosen in universal, equal, direct and proportional elections. The nation was united by the Latvian Provisional Government and on 11 August 1920 a peace treaty with Russia was signed in which Russia recognized Latvia's independence. In February 1922, the Assembly adopted the Constitution of the Republic of Latvia, which is still in force with some amendments, among them chapter VIII on Fundamental Human Rights, adopted in 1998.

21. Until 1940, Latvia witnessed impressive economic growth, a flourishing cultural life and a marked improvement in its standard of living. To guarantee the State's economic and social stability, the Government of Latvia launched a programme of agrarian reform. Latvian culture was encouraged and ethnic minorities, which comprised around 25 per cent of the population, were granted educational rights.

22. The ultimatum of 16 June 1940 from the Government of the Soviet Union to the Latvian Government, asking for its resignation, and the ensuing military aggression, resulted in the occupation of Latvia. The elections of 14 and 15 July 1940 of the Parliament (Saeima) of occupied Latvia were held under conditions of political terror after an illegal and unconstitutional elections law had been adopted. Of the 17 lists of candidates submitted, only one was permitted in the elections - the list of the Working People's Bloc. The pre-election platform of the Bloc did not include any demand to establish Soviet power in Latvia or to join the Soviet Union. Furthermore, the results of the elections were falsified. The illegally and fraudulently formed Parliament did not represent the will of the Latvian people. It had no constitutional powers to change the system of government and bring to an end the sovereignty of Latvia. Only the people had the right to decide these matters, but no referendum was held. The incorporation of Latvia into the Soviet Union in 1940 is considered to be invalid also in accordance with international law.

23. The will of the people of Latvia for freedom was expressed in the elections of the Latvian Supreme Council in 1990 of which a majority afterwards expressed the determination to restore the independence of Latvia. The Declaration of the Supreme Council of the Latvian SSR "On the Renewal of the Independence of the Republic of Latvia" was adopted on 4 May 1990. Being determined to restore de facto the free, democratic and independent Republic of Latvia, the Supreme Council of the Latvian SSR on that date declared illegal the joining of Latvia to the Soviet Union. Furthermore, it decided to re-establish the authority of the Constitution of the Republic of Latvia, adopted by the Constitutional Assembly on 15 February 1922, in the entire territory of Latvia.

24. On 17 September 1991 Latvia became a full-fledged member of the United Nations. Since 1995 it has been a member State of the Council of Europe. On 12 June 1995, an Association Agreement was signed with the European Community and its member States, which came into force in February 1998.

Political framework

25. The legislative power is granted to the Saeima (Parliament) as well as to the people to the extent provided for by the Satversme (Constitution). Furthermore, the Saeima approves the appointment of the judges of courts of all levels and declares amnesties. It consists of 100 Saeima members elected in general, direct, secret and proportional elections. The Saeima is elected for a period of four years. The Saeima elects the President of the State for a period of four years and the same person cannot hold the office of President of the State for more than two consecutive terms. The President of the State fulfils rather representative functions, however, it is the President of the State who nominates the Head of the Government - the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister forms the Government (the Cabinet of Ministers) - the executive power of the State - and receives the confidence of the Saeima (Parliament).

26. Latvia has a three-level court system - district/city courts, regional courts and the Supreme Court. The establishment of the Satversme Court (Constitutional Court) in 1996 completed the judicial reform in Latvia. The Public Prosecutor's Office, the Collegium of Sworn Advocates and the Collegium of Notaries are the indispensable elements of the judicial system of the Republic of Latvia.

III. GENERAL LEGAL FRAMEWORK WITHIN WHICH HUMAN RIGHTS ARE PROTECTED

27. Article 1 of the Constitution of the Republic of Latvia (Satversme) provides that Latvia is an independent democratic republic. This principle sets forth certain exact requirements for the Latvian legal system, which also influence the implementation of the obligations under the international human rights instruments.

28. On 4 May 1990 the Supreme Council of the Soviet Republic of Latvia being concerned about the compliance of national law with international law principles in the sphere of human rights, adopted the Declaration on Accession to International Acts of Human Rights. By the Declaration Latvia acceded to 51 international documents (declarations and conventions), inter alia the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

29. The Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights entered into force on 22 September 1994; thus, the Republic of Latvia recognizes the competence of the Human Rights Committee to receive and consider communications from individuals who claim to be victims of a violation by the State of the human rights set forth in the Covenant. Moreover, on 27 June 1997 the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of 4 November 1950 entered into force in the Republic of Latvia. Thus, Latvia has accepted the jurisdiction of the European Court of Human Rights and accordingly an individual may complain about a violation of his/her rights provided for by the European Convention directly to the Court.

30. In October 1998, the Constitution of Latvia (Satversme) was amended and chapter VIII on Fundamental Human Rights was included. The adoption of these amendments clarified the debate concerning the role and legal status of human rights in the State's legal system. It also added a more concrete understanding to the principle of democracy, as embodied in article 1 of the Satversme. Accordingly, article 89 states: "The State shall recognize and protect fundamental human rights in accordance with the present Constitution, laws and international agreements binding upon Latvia."

31. Article 91 of the Constitution encompasses both the principle of equality and the principle of non-discrimination. This article states: "All human beings in Latvia shall be equal before the law and the courts. Human rights shall be secured without discrimination of any kind." Other newly included articles of the Constitution list fundamental human rights guaranteed by the State and also provide for possible restrictions on the exercise of these rights imposed by the State.

32. International human rights treaties are directly applicable in the domestic legal system. They override norms of statutory law in case of a conflict of norms. It should be emphasized that international human rights norms are understood to have special status in relation to statutory laws because of their special aim and object and a direct link to the principle of democracy as embodied in Satversme. Thus, Satversme and international human rights treaties binding for Latvia provide for the catalogue of human rights and freedoms in the State.
33. Regarding the institutional protection of human rights, the independent judiciary and the administrative process are the key elements.
34. The courts are the main judicial institutions having jurisdiction over issues of respect and observance of human rights. According to the Law on the Judicial Power Latvia has a three-level court system. The district/city courts try civil, criminal and administrative cases; they function mostly as courts of first instance. There are regional courts in each of the regions of Latvia and in the capital, Riga, that try those civil and criminal cases that fall within their authority under the Law on Civil Procedure and the Code of Criminal Procedure; regional courts are also the courts of appeal for those cases that have been tried by district/city courts. The Supreme Court is the court of appeal and cassation for all cases tried by regional courts and district/city courts. The Supreme Court acts also as the first instance court for several cases according to the Law on the Judicial Branch.
35. According to article 3 of the Law on the Judicial Branch every individual has the right to be protected by the court against infringements upon his/her life, health, personal freedom, honour, reputation and property. All individuals have equal rights to have their case heard fairly and publicly by an independent and impartial court, which determines his/her civil rights and obligations, or the validity of any criminal charge against him/her.
36. Article 4 of the above-mentioned Law states that all individuals are equal before the law and the court, and have an equal right to be protected by law. Justice is administered by the court irrespective of the person's origin, social status and property, race and nationality, sex, education, language, religious affiliation, type and nature of occupation, place of residence, and political or other views.
37. According to article 17 of the Law on the Constitutional Court (Satversme Court) individuals whose fundamental rights guaranteed by the Constitution have been violated have the right to "submit an application to initiate a case regarding compliance of laws and international agreements signed or entered into by Latvia - even before the Saeima has confirmed the agreement - with the Constitution; compliance of other normative acts or their parts with the legal norms (acts) of higher legal force; as well as compliance of national legal norms of Latvia with international agreements entered into by Latvia which are not contrary to the Constitution".

38. In 1995, the Regulations on the Process of Administrative Acts of the Cabinet of Ministers were adopted, establishing the procedure by which individuals may ask for, or complain about, or appeal against an administrative act adopted by a public institution. There are two main situations where an individual may appeal before the court against an administrative act: when the administrative act violates his/her rights provided in the Constitution of Latvia, international human rights instruments binding on Latvia or a statutory law; or when the procedure governing the adoption of an administrative act has been abused.

39. The law on the Prosecutor's Office and the Law "On the Police" provide that the Prosecutor's Office and the police also protect individuals against infringements upon their life, health, personal freedom, honour, reputation and property.

40. According to the Law "On the Repayment of Damages or Losses Caused by Unlawful or Unfounded Acts of Investigators, the Prosecutor's Office or the Court", material compensation is paid to individuals who have suffered from unlawful or unfounded acts by State officials.

41. Furthermore, the State Human Rights Office, the independent national institution, has a duty to review any claim of infringement of human rights in Latvia and immediately react on a violation of an individual's rights, and on its own initiative, to investigate.

IV. INFORMATION AND PUBLICITY

42. Whenever the Republic of Latvia concludes an international agreement, the text of the agreement is translated into Latvian and published in the official newspaper, *Latvijas Vēstnesis*. In addition, the text in the original language of the agreement is published as well (usually in English). This procedure applies also to international human rights instruments. Furthermore, the State institutions have access to the normative acts and international treaties and conventions in force in Latvia in the electronic database of the State. In addition, information on various international human rights instruments have been published in booklets by the State Human Rights Office.

43. UNDP, UNHCR, UNESCO and UNICEF have opened representative offices that are functioning, with good results, in Latvia. Publications about human right issues have appeared and have been made available to any member of the society: "Guidebook of Human Rights Tolerance", "Human Rights Album" (published by the European Union), "Concise Explanation of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights" and others. Booklets on the rights of the child have been published and distributed by the Children Rights Protection Centre.

44. The Latvian Human Rights Institute, which is the independent section of the State University quarterly, publishes a legal journal - *Latvian Human Rights Quarterly* - which contains articles on human rights issues in Latvia and abroad, international treaties and national laws, decisions of the European Court of Human Rights as well as of national courts concerning violations of human rights, as well as information on various activities (conferences, seminars, courses on human rights) provided by the Latvian Human Rights Institute or other institutions in Latvia.

45. The national reports on the implementation of the human rights conventions in Latvia are prepared by working groups consisting of representatives of ministries and other State institutions and headed by the Representative of the Government before International Human Rights Organizations.

46. Although the publication of reports is not required in national legislation, the practice to do so is developing. As a result of the cooperation between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Latvian Human Rights Institute, the report and debate concerning the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights was published in the *Official Gazette* and the *Latvian Human Rights Quarterly*. The Views of the Human Rights Committee on individual applications concerning possible violations of the Covenant were also published in the *Official Gazette*.
