

## Latvia 2025

### Information from: Ombudsman's Office of the Republic of Latvia

## Independence, effectiveness and establishment of NHRIs

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### International accreditation status and SCA recommendations

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The Ombudsman of the Republic of Latvia was [reaccredited](#) with A-status in December 2020. Among the recommendations, the Sub-Committee on Accreditation (SCA) was of the view that the selection and appointment process enshrined in the Ombudsman Law was not sufficiently broad and transparent. It noted that the Latvian NHRI has proposed amendments to its enabling law to provide for the advertisement of vacancies and the ability for all interested candidates to submit their application prior to the proposal being made by the members of Parliament. The SCA encouraged the NHRI to advocate for the formalisation and application of a broad and transparent process.

With regard to the provisions on dismissal of the Ombudsman, the SCA took the view that the process does not provide sufficient procedural safeguards to ensure that it could not be undertaken for political reasons. It encouraged the Latvian NHRI to advocate for appropriate amendments to its Law to ensure an independent and objective dismissal process. Further, the SCA noted that the enabling Law is silent on the number of times the Ombudsman can be re-appointed. It encouraged the Latvian NHRI to advocate for amendments to its enabling law to provide for limits on the term of office.

Finally, the SCA encouraged the NHRI to advocate for the inclusion in its founding legislation of express provisions that clearly establish the functional immunity of the Ombudsman for actions taken in his or her official capacity in good faith.

The SCA will consider the reaccreditation of the Latvian NHRI in its second session in October 2025.

### Regulatory framework

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The national regulatory framework applicable to the Ombudsman's Office has

changed since January 2024. [Amendments to the Ombudsman Law](#) were adopted on 6 March 2025 and entered into force on 2 April 2025. The amendments include two main issues: including the function of the National Preventive Mechanisms in the Ombudsman Law and formalizing the procedure of accessing information and data included in the Court Information System, particularly with regard to rights and obligations for data security for the employees of the Ombudsman's Office.

## **NHRI enabling and safe space**

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Relevant state and local authorities have good awareness of the mandate, independence and role of the NHRI. Regarding steps taken to ensure prompt implementation of the Ombudsman's recommendations by public authorities: on average, implementation of Ombudsman's recommendations constitutes to 72% and above, which is also included in Ombudsman's [Annual Report](#) to the Parliament and the President as one of the most characteristic performance indicators.

### **Access to information and policy makers**

The Ombudsman, in carrying out the tasks and functions assigned by the Law, needs access to information and data of the Court Information System. Thus, a draft law on the amendments to the Ombudsman Law is now open to formalize the procedure of accessing the information (including rights and obligations for data security for the employees of the Ombudsman's Office).

### **Resources to carry out the full breath of the NHRI's mandate**

The Ombudsman's Office of Latvia has adequate resources, including for the performance of tasks of the national preventive mechanism, discrimination prevention and foreseeable monitoring of the implementation of the AI legislation.

### **Measures to ensure timely and reasoned responses to NHRI recommendations**

As reported previously, on average, implementation of Ombudsman's recommendations constitutes to 72% and above.

Since 2022, there have been two cases initiated before the Constitutional Court following the applications of the Ombudsman: one regarding [provision for the enrolment of six-year-olds](#) to 1st Grade in Riga municipal schools only in the event of free places; the other – [on the right of Latvian students studying abroad to receive the social scholarship](#).

## Measures to protect and support the NHRI

As regards measures to protect and support the NHRI, heads of institution and staff against threats and harassment, Criminal Procedure Law states that only the Prosecutor General shall initiate criminal proceedings against the Ombudsman. The ombudsman may be held criminally liable or arrested only with the consent of the Parliament. A decision on placing the Ombudsman under arrest, conveyance by force, detention, or subjection to a search shall be taken by a specially authorised Supreme Court judge. If the Ombudsman has been apprehended in the committing of a serious or especially serious crime, a decision on conveyance by force, detention, or subjection to a search shall not be necessary, but the specially authorised Supreme Court judge and the Prosecutor General shall be informed within 24 hours.

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## Human rights defenders and civil society space

### Practices negatively impacting civil society and human rights defenders

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In December 2024, a working group coordinated by the Ministry of Justice started working on draft legislation to transpose the EU's Anti-SLAPP directive.

### Activities of NHRIs to support civil society space and Human Rights Defenders

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**Initiatives to promote civil society space and human rights defenders**

The Ombudsman has taken several initiatives in 2024 to promote civil society space and human rights defenders.

On 7 March 2024, the Ombudsman in collaboration with the Riga Graduate School of Law and the Nordic Council of Ministers' Office in Latvia organised a conference on business and human rights "[Human Rights as the New Fuel for Business](#)". Speakers of the conference shared their experience in integration of

human rights principles in the everyday work and life of business, experts explained the meaning and role of the human rights due diligence and its realisation into practice.

On 5-6 July 2024, the Ombudsman's Office organised a [discussion](#) on the rights of inhabitants to favourable environment and the impact of environmental noise; as well as participated in discussions on [violence in the workplace](#) (mobbing and bossing) and [problems of small schools in the rural regions](#) and their role within the local community in the conversation festival "LAMPA" in Cēsis.

On 27 November 2024, the Ombudsman's Office organised a [discussion](#) on aggressive behaviour towards recognizable women (including journalists) in Latvia. With an analysis of practical examples, it looked at the negative impact of aggressive behaviour on the internet on respect for human rights, as well as how available and appropriate the existing redress mechanisms are.

On 4 December 2024, the Ombudsman, in cooperation with the Association of Disabled People and their Friends "Apeirons" and the National Library of Latvia (LNB), organised an inspirational [conference, "Human and Value"](#), an [event for CSOs representing people with disabilities](#) to share their experience and challenges and held the 10th consecutive [ceremony of the "Annual Award for Supporting People with Disabilities"](#).

On 10 December 2024, the Ombudsman [presented research results](#) and organised a discussion on the temporary protection of victims from violence in civil proceedings with the participation of representatives from courts, police, local governments, including Social Services, Orphan and Custody courts, lawyers and attorneys, and civil society organisations.

In October, the Ombudsman had an [info campaign on patient rights](#) explaining different situations in healthcare as myths and reality.

## **Initiatives to protect civil society space and human rights defenders**

The Ombudsman has also taken several initiatives in 2024 to protect civil society space and human rights defenders.

For example, in June 2024, representatives of the Ombudsman's Office participated in [observation of the elections to the European Parliament](#) by visiting the state social care centres and polling stations visited by the clients of the care centres (accessibility of the polling stations, access to information).

Within the framework of the National Preventive Mechanism, the Ombudsman performed [monitoring visits](#) to out-family care institutions for children, social care centres, day-care centres and group home for people with mental health difficulties, psychiatric hospitals, prisons, etc.

A new separate Discrimination Prevention Division within the Ombudsman's Office started operating since the beginning of 2024. Its main tasks set for the previous year were not only examining submissions but also doing base-line research on different aspect of possible discrimination in Latvia, as well as cooperation with the media answering their requests and participating in various broadcasts.

In 2024, the Ombudsman in cooperation with survey companies did research on topics like [carer's leave](#), [accessibility on websites and mobile applications of public institutions](#), [accessibility of banking services for people with restricted capacity](#), on rights of persons with disabilities – a [survey of general public and people with disabilities](#); [term 'discrimination' in Latvian media](#); [accessibility of taxi services for people with disabilities and parents of young children](#); [AI systems and discrimination aspects](#); [survey of employees and employers on requirement to know a foreign language](#); [compliance with the principle of non-discrimination in employment of parents of young children](#); [survey of students, employees and academic staff of Latvian higher education institutions on sexual harassment in higher education institutions](#), and the [experience of higher education institutions with artificial intelligence in the study process](#).

The Ombudsman also did several public opinion polls to get an insight into topics under examination: an online [survey](#) of parents of school children (pupils) about the start time of classes and how students get to school; an [online survey](#) of students and employees of higher education institutions (universities and colleges) on sexual harassment in close cooperation with the Student Union of Latvia.

## NHRI's recommendations to national and regional authorities

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On 27 January 2025 the [Constitutional Court has initiated a case](#) based on the Ombudsman's application regarding the right of Latvian students studying abroad to receive a social scholarship. The Ombudsman has previously called on the Parliament to eliminate this deficiency. Currently, the social scholarship for large families is awarded only to those studying at universities in Latvia, but not for those studying abroad. The Ombudsman considers this to be violating the principle of legal equality.

The Ombudsman recommends to the Parliament of Latvia:

1. To eliminate the deficiency created regarding the right of Latvian students studying abroad to receive a social scholarship.

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## Functioning of justice systems

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Based on the Ombudsman's human rights monitoring and reporting, the Ombudsman identified significant challenges affecting access to justice and/or effective judicial protection in several areas.

### **Shortage of judges in the judicial system and challenges concerning the remuneration of the court staff**

There is an alarming tendency regarding the judicial system as there may be a shortage of judges in the coming years. [State Audit Office audited](#) the development of human resources in the courts of Latvia and, inter alia, concluded that each year, a number of judge vacancies increases. At the end of 2023, 54 or 10% of the approved judge positions were vacant. Moreover, the number of judges over the age of 61 is increasing, thus more than 28% of the current judges may retire in the coming years. Court employees, including assistants of judges, are underutilized and undervalued, resulting in unacceptably high turnover. Also, the President of the Supreme Court has indicated that shortage of judges is an increasing concern.

On 4 February, President Edgars Rinkēvičs met with the President of the Supreme Court Aigars Strupišs and [discussed the work of the Latvian judiciary](#) in 2024 and addressed current priorities, including the quality and remuneration of court staff.

### **Changes to the legal aid system**

On 8 January 2025 [judges of the Constitutional Court met with the Minister of Justice](#) and discussed possible solutions to make the state legal aid in the preparation of a constitutional complaint more available to those socially less protected persons, whose possible violation of fundamental rights would be seen as a perspective of a favourable judgment of the Constitutional Court. The discussion on this solution will be continued with the Council of Sworn Advocates of Latvia, the Ministry of Justice and the Judicial Administration.

### **Election of a Latvian judge to the European Court of Human Rights**

On 16 April 2024, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, by an absolute majority of votes cast, elected Artūrs Kučs as Judge to the European Court of Human Rights in respect of Latvia.

## Ombudsman's actions to support the implementation of the European Courts' judgments

The Ombudsman initiates translation of the ECtHR rulings, especially those regarding Latvia, into Latvian, and informs relevant stakeholders on Court's argumentation, e.g., in the CASE OF E.K. v. LATVIA regarding contact rights of parents and children.

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## Media freedom, pluralism and safety of journalists

There are positive policy developments regarding protection of journalists. During 2024, several interdisciplinary working groups took place to discuss and improve the measures concerning the media space. Ministry of Culture coordinated a working group focusing on journalist safety and additionally concluded the work on [Media Policy Guidelines for 2024-2027](#). Representative of the Ombudsman's Office participates in this working group.

In Summer 2024, the Public Electronic Mass Media Council [approved](#) the new Public Media Ombudsman. Soon after his approval he initiated a meeting with the Ombudsman's Office, and we have been collaborating on several occasions and topics.

On 27 September 2024, the Annual Public Media Ombudsman's conference "[Latvian Public Media and Society 2024: Listen, See, Understand](#)" took place. As part of the conference, an expert conversation was held on the most vivid examples of content in public media in 2024 and their impact on trust in public media in general. Representative from Ombudsman's Office took part in this Conference and spoke about the use of personal data and the presumption of innocence when journalists discuss sensitive events.

Moreover, representative of the Ombudsman's Office participated with legal expertise in the [conference](#) on development of a stronger and more modern public media enterprise with wider reachability organised by the Public Electronic Mass Media Council.

On 27 November 2024, the Ombudsman's Office also organised a [discussion](#) on

aggressive behaviour towards recognizable women (including journalists) in Latvia. With an analysis of practical examples, it looked at the negative impact of aggressive behaviour on the internet on respect for human rights, as well as how available and appropriate the existing redress mechanisms are.

In December 2024, a working group coordinated by the Ministry of Justice started working on draft legislation to transpose the EU's Anti-SLAPP directive. A representative from the Ombudsman's Office is also a member of the working group. Additionally, Latvian Public Media has positively referred to an increase in their budget.

