

Franet National contribution to the Fundamental Rights Report 2024

Latvia

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1. Impact of the cost-of-living crisis and rising poverty in the EU

1.1. Legal measures impacting on vulnerabilities of persons affected by the rising costs of living and energy.

Several legal measures have been introduced aimed at reducing the pressure caused by rising energy prices:

Firstly, the Law on Measures to Reduce the Extraordinary Increase in Energy Resource Prices came into effect on 29 January 2022. The law provides for termed support measures that reduce the negative impact on households and the national economy caused by the extraordinary increase in the prices of energy resources¹. The support is applicable to households which use electricity, natural gas, wood briquettes, wood pellets or firewood, or the centralized heating service for heating. The support offered varies depending on the source of energy used in the household and has been provided for purchases that were made between 1 May 2022 and 30 April 2023. In addition to compensation for heating costs, all households have been compensated for the increase in the price of electricity for the first 100 kWh each month by applying a fixed fee of 160 EUR/MWh, with the state compensating the remaining difference from the market price.

Secondly, on 20 September 2022, the Government of the Republic of Latvia approved amendments to the Cabinet of Ministers' Regulations of 28 September 2010, No. 906 "Rules for Sanitary Maintenance of a Residential House", temporarily allowing the lowering or reduction in the hot water temperature for the 2022/2023 heating season, creating considerable savings in the long term.²

¹ Latvia, Law on measures to reduce the extraordinary increase in energy resource prices ([Energoresursu cenu ārkārtēja pieauguma samazinājuma pasākumu likums](#)), 29 January 2022, Art.2.

² Latvia, Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers No 906 "Rules for sanitary maintenance of a residential house" of 28 September 2010 ([Ministru kabineta 28.09.2010. noteikumi Nr. 906 "Dzīvojamās mājas sanitārās apkopes noteikumi"](#)), Art. 19.

Thirdly, the Government of the Republic of Latvia also approved amendments to the Cabinet of Ministers' Regulations of 28 September 2010, No, 907 "Rules on Inspection, Maintenance and Regular Repairs of a Residential Building" on 20 September 2022, stating that during the period from 1 October 2022 to 30 April 2023, a manager of a residential building must provide appropriate heating system settings so that the air temperature in apartments does not exceed +19 °C, and cannot be lower than +18 °C in the room with the lowest air temperature.³

Fourthly, with respect to support for entrepreneurs, legal entities were fully compensated from 1 October 2022 to 30 April 2023 for the electricity system service fee, i.e. the distribution and transmission tariff costs for all system operators. In addition, support measures for energy-intensive manufacturing companies were provided in the form of a grant (donation) from 1 February 2022 until 31 December 2022. Grant support to compensate for the price increase of natural gas and electricity resources for an enterprise was set at up to 30% of the attributable costs for natural gas or electricity, but not exceeding 2 million euros in total for one enterprise. In total, 50,000,000 EUR were allocated for these support measures from the state budget.⁴

Fifthly, on 22 August 2023, the Government of the Republic of Latvia approved amendments to the Regulations of the Trade Service of the Protected User. A payment reduction of up to EUR 25 will be applied to all groups of protected users (in total, more than 160,000 people, including poor or low-income households, families caring for a child with a disability, families with many children or persons with severe disability)⁵ from 1 August 2023 to 31 December 2023.⁶

³ Latvia, Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers No 907 "Rules on inspection, maintenance and regular repairs of a residential building" of 28 September 2010 ([Ministru kabineta 28.09.2010. noteikumi Nr. 907 "Noteikumi par dzīvojamās mājas apsekošanu, tehnisko apkopi un kārtējo remontu"](#)), Art.26.

⁴ Latvia, Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers No 638 "Arrangements for granting and administering support to energy-intensive manufacturing businesses to mitigate the economic impact of Russia's military aggression against Ukraine" of 2 December 2022 ([Ministru kabineta 02.12.2022. noteikumi Nr.638 " Kārtība, kādā tiek piešķirts un administrēts atbalsts energoietilpīgiem apstrādes rūpniecības komersantiem, lai mazinātu Krievijas militārās agresijas pret Ukrainu radītās sekas uz ekonomiku"](#)), Art. 3, 4, 7.

⁵ Latvia, Cabinet of Ministers (*Ministru kabinets*) (2023). Will increase support for covering electricity bill costs for protected users ([Palielinās atbalstu elektroenerģijas rēķina izmaksu segšanai aizsargātajiem lietotājiem](#)), 22 August 2023.

⁶ Latvia, Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers No 345 "Regulations of the trade service of the protected user" of 1 September 2021 ([Ministru kabineta 01.09.2021. noteikumi Nr. 345 " Aizsargātā lietotāja tirdzniecības pakalpojuma noteikumi"](#)), Art. 38².

Finally, as regards the heating season 2023/2024, the Ministry of Climate and Energy of the Republic of Latvia developed the Law on Energy Supply Cost Support which entered into force on 8 December 2023.⁷ The support will be provided for compensating the costs of energy resources for households with a low and medium-low income level in situations where the prices of energy resources are extremely high. Support will be determined in a targeted manner - for specific groups of households with a low and medium-low income level, that is, households whose monthly expenses per member for housing could make up 30% of the household's income. The support is not planned to be applied permanently - throughout the heating season, but to be granted in situations where an extraordinary increase in the price of energy resources is detected in the market (stock exchange).⁸

In addition, on 23 November 2023, the Parliament adopted amendments to three different laws related to the energy sector: Electricity Market Law, Energy Law, and Law "On Public Service Regulators". According to the amendments, the Parliament has approved medium and long-term solutions for limiting the rapid increase in electricity distribution tariffs for the following years. This is aimed to ensure a more sustainable approach and predictability of changes for the population in the future. The changes in the laws entered into force on 1 January 2024.⁹

1.2. Policy measures impacting on vulnerabilities of persons affected by the rising costs of living and energy.

There are three public authorities sharing responsibility for policy development that impacts on the vulnerability of persons affected by rising living costs:

1. the Ministry of Economics of the Republic of Latvia;
2. the Ministry of Climate and Energy of the Republic of Latvia;

⁷ Latvia, Law on Energy Supply Cost Support ([Energoapgādes izmaksu atbalsta likums](#)), 7 December 2023.

⁸ Latvia, Law on Energy Supply Cost Support ([Energoapgādes izmaksu atbalsta likums](#)), 7 December 2023, Art.2 and Art. 3.

⁹ Latvia, Ministry of Climate and Energy of the Republic of Latvia (2023). The Saeima supports solutions for limiting the rapid increase in distribution tariffs ([Saeima atbalsta risinājumu sadales tarifu strauja pieauguma ierobežošanai](#)), 23 November 2023.

3. the Ministry of Welfare of the Republic of Latvia.

In 2022, Latvia faced a rapid increase in inflation. The government implemented various support measures to reduce energy resource price growth (discussed in the previous section) so as to decrease consumer price growth. The Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Latvia assessed that these support measures may have caused the slowdown in consumer price growth.¹⁰ Despite the fact that the inflation rate is continuing to decrease in 2023, it can be argued that relatively high prices for utilities, food, electricity and heat, as well as water supply, will place significant pressure on household spending, especially on low income households.¹¹

The Central Bank of Latvia has claimed that the decrease in the inflation forecast for 2023 was mainly determined by lower energy and food prices and assumptions about the development of these prices in the coming years. The inflation forecast for 2023 has been lowered to 10.0% (-0.9 percentage points compared to the forecast provided in December 2022), for 2024, to 2.7% (-1.7 percentage points), and for 2025, to 2.6% (-0.4 percent points).¹²

As regards the assessment on the actual impact and effectivity of the measures taken to address the rising costs of living and energy, the inflation in Latvia decreased to 1.0% in annual terms in November 2023, which was the lowest increase in consumer prices in more than two and a half years. Inflation in the second half of this year decreased a little faster than expected, and therefore the average increase in consumer prices in 2023 will be 9.0 - 9.1%.¹³

¹⁰ Latvia, Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Latvia (*Latvijas Republikas Finanšu ministrija*) (2022). State support mechanisms slow down inflation in October ([Valsts atbalsta mehānismi bremzē inflāciju oktobrī](#)), 8 November 2022.

¹¹ Latvia, Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Latvia (*Latvijas Republikas Finanšu ministrija*) (2023). The lowest annual inflation since the end of 2021 was recorded in July ([Jūlijā fiksēta zemākā gada inflācija kopš 2021. gada beigām](#)), 8 August 2023.

¹² Latvia, Central Bank of Latvia (*Latvijas Centrālā banka*) (2023). Overview of Macroeconomic Developments 2023 ([Makroekonomisko Norišu Pārskats 2023](#)), 21 March 2023.

¹³ Latvia, Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Latvia (2023). Ministry of Finance: Latvia's inflation in November was one of the lowest in the eurozone ([FM: Latvijā inflācija novembrī bija viena no zemākajām eirozonā](#)), 8 December 2023.

Policy measures addressing rising living and energy costs

In 2023, a total of more than 820 million euros has been planned to be diverted from state budget support instruments to various support programs.¹⁴ As summarized in the “Measures to Tackle Energy Poverty and Rising Energy Prices: Latvia”¹⁵ report provided for the European Commission, government support measures to specifically combat energy poverty by directly improving the affordability of energy, can be classified into two main categories:

1. Specific income support measures to help people cope with high energy prices (e.g. heating allowances):
 - 1.1 State allowance for the compensation of energy costs;
 - 1.2 Protected user support;
 - 1.3 Support for households using electricity for heating;
 - 1.4 Support for households using pellets and briquettes for heating;
 - 1.5 Support for households using firewood for heating;
 - 1.6 Support for households using propane-butane gas or fuel diesel for heating;
 - 1.7 Support for the compensation of central heating service costs.
2. Caps on energy prices or reduction in energy tariffs:
 - 2.1. Support to compensate for the increase in the price of electricity;
 - 2.2. Support for households using natural gas for heating.

Four main measures can be highlighted with regard to government support measures to cushion the impact of high inflation in general (and indirectly combat energy poverty),:

An increase in the statutory minimum wage was provided from 1 January 2023 (from 500 EUR to 620 EUR). Reacting to rising costs of living, on 14 November 2023, the Government adopted the changes in the national minimum monthly wage, namely, as

¹⁴ Latvia, Cabinet of Ministers (*Ministru kabinets*) (2023). State aid to citizens for compensation of energy resource price increases (<https://www.mk.gov.lv/lv/valsts-atbalsts-iedzivotajiem-energoresursu-cenu-pieauguma-kompensacijai>), 29 August 2023.

¹⁵ Latvia, Klave, E., Rajevska, O. (2023). Measures to tackle energy poverty and rising energy prices – Latvia. European Social Policy Analysis Network, Brussels: European Commission, p. 5-13. The report was provided by email on 27 September 2023 based on the written request to the Ministry of Welfare of the Republic of Latvia.

of 1 January 2024, the national minimum monthly wage is increased from 620 euros to 700 euros.¹⁶ The indexation of pensions.

Taking the significant rate of inflation into consideration, starting from 1 October 2023, an index of 1.0640 is being applied to all state pensions - retirement, disability, survivor's pensions and benefits. In 2023, the size of pensions and compensation or part thereof, not exceeding 609 euros, will be revised, i.e. 50% of the average insurance contribution salary within the country for the previous calendar year. This means that the entire pension amount and remuneration will be indexed if it does not exceed 609 euros. On the other hand, a part of the allocated amount will be indexed - the already mentioned 609 euros for those pensions and benefits that are greater than 609 euros. The increase will depend on both the amount of pension and compensation, and the applicable index. Exceptions are: the politically repressed, people with group I disabilities and participants in the cleanup of the consequences of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant accident, for whom the entire amount of the pension will be indexed.¹⁷

3. The housing benefit calculation from 1 October 2022 to 31 May 2023.¹⁸
4. In 2024, mortgage borrowers are compensated for the total interest payment of 30% of the loans.

On 6 December 2023, the Parliament approved amendments in the Law on Consumer Rights Protection stating that compensation of interest payments will apply to mortgage loans for which the contract was concluded until 31 October 2023 and the balance of which does not exceed 250 thousand euros.¹⁹

¹⁶ Latvia, Regulation of the Cabinet of Ministers No 656 "Regulation on the amount of the minimum monthly wage within normal working hours and the calculation of the minimum hourly rate" of 24 November 2015 ([Ministru kabineta 24.11.2015. noteikumi Nr. 656 "Noteikumi par minimālās mēneša darba algas apmēru normālā darba laika ietvaros un minimālās stundas tarifa likmes aprēķināšanu"](#)), Art. 2.

¹⁷ Latvia, Ministry of Welfare of the Republic of Latvia (*Latvijas Republikas Labklājības ministrija*) (2023), This year, a coefficient of 1.0640 will be applied in pension indexation ([Šogad pensiju indeksācijā tiks piemērots koeficients 1,0640](#)), 10 August 2023.

¹⁸ Latvia, Klave, E., Rajevska, O. (2023). Measures to tackle energy poverty and rising energy prices – Latvia. European Social Policy Analysis Network, Brussels: European Commission, p. 15-14. The report was provided by email on 27 September 2023 based on the written request to the Ministry of Welfare of the Republic of Latvia.

¹⁹ Latvia, Law on Consumer Rights Protection ([Patērētāju aizsardzības likums](#)), 15 April 1999, Art. 8.⁴

Support measures for vulnerable groups of persons

From 1 July 2023, support for orphans, and children left without parental care after reaching the age of maturity, has been increased. The size of the benefits is now tied to the median minimum income and will be reviewed annually. This was foreseen by the amendments to the Cabinet of Ministers' Regulations No. 857 "Regulations on Social Guarantees for Orphans and Children left Without Parental Care who are in Out-of-home Care, as well as after the End of Out-of-family Care" of November 15, 2005, which were adopted by the government on 27 June 2023.²⁰

In addition, social benefits were granted automatically from 1 November 2022 to 31 May 2023 to various low-income groups, the amount of which depended on their income.²¹ From 1 October 2022 to 30 April 2023, people with low income were able to receive housing benefits by applying to local governments.²²

From 1 January 2024, the amounts of the minimum income thresholds are increased. They apply to recipients of state social security benefits, recipients of minimum age, disability and survivor's pensions, recipients of social assistance in the municipality, as well as orphans and children left without parental care who have reached the age of majority. As the Ministry of Welfare of the Republic of Latvia and the European Commission jointly implement the reform of the minimum income thresholds included in the European Union's Recovery and Resilience Mechanism plan, which determines the commitment to promote the reduction of income inequality, 100,000 residents will feel a positive impact.²³

Also, from 1 January 2024, the amount of care allowance will be increased by 100 euros to 413.43 euros per month for people with disabilities who are over 18 years of age and

²⁰ Latvia, Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers No 857 "Regulations on social guarantees for orphans and children left without parental care who are in out-of-home care, as well as after the end of out-of-family care" of November 15, 2005 ([Ministru kabineta 15.11.2005. noteikumos Nr.857 "Noteikumi par sociālajām garantijām bārenim un bez vecāku gādības palikušajam bērnam, kurš ir ārpusģimenes aprūpē, kā arī pēc ārpusģimenes aprūpes beigšanās"](#)), Art. 26.

²¹ Latvia, Cabinet of Ministers (*Ministru kabinets*) (2023). Will increase support for covering electricity bill costs for protected users ([Palielinās atbalstu elektroenerģijas rēķina izmaksu segšanai aizsargātajiem lietotājiem](#)), 22 August 2023.

²² Latvia, Cabinet of Ministers (*Ministru kabinets*) (2023). State aid to citizens for compensation of energy resource price increases ([Atbalsts iedzīvotājiem strauju energoresursu cenu pieauguma apstākļos](#)), 29 August 2023.

²³ Latvia, Ministry of Welfare of the Republic of Latvia (2023). The new minimum income thresholds come into effect on 1 January 2024 ([No 1. janvāra stājas spēkā jaunie minimālo ienākumu sliekšņi](#)), 28 December 2023.

whose disability is caused by an illness from childhood.²⁴ In addition, from 1 January 2024, the supplement to the family state allowance for a child with a disability will be increased from 106.72 euros to 160 euros per month.²⁵

Projects and funds available for energy efficiency

Several initiatives may be listed with regard to available funds and projects related to optimising energy costs:

1. Latvia has outlined significant funds for achieving climate goals (676.2 million euros or 37% of all RRF funding) within the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF). Significant investments are planned in the field of energy efficiency - in the insulation of multi-apartment buildings and increasing energy efficiency throughout Latvia. Investments in electricity networks and infrastructure are also planned, which will potentially reduce the price of electricity for consumers by 3-5%. In addition, significant investments are planned for increasing the energy efficiency of companies. Entrepreneurs will be given the opportunity to create energy efficiency projects for business infrastructure with the help of financial instruments.²⁶ Unfortunately, the implementation of projects has been delayed due to the development of national regulations. In 2023, several calls were announced regarding the improvement of municipal buildings and infrastructure, promoting transition to the use of renewable energy technology and improving energy efficiency, and the purchase of zero-emission vehicles necessary for the implementation of municipal functions and the provision of services.²⁷
2. The Central Finance and Contracts Agency (*Centrālā finanšu un līgumu aģentūra*) announced an open selection of projects with the support of European Union

²⁴ Latvia, Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers No 1608 "Provisions for benefits for persons with disabilities who require care" of 22 December 2009 ([Ministru kabineta 22.12.2009. noteikumi Nr. 1608 "Noteikumi par pabalstu personām ar invaliditāti, kurām nepieciešama kopšana"](#)), Art. 2.

²⁵ Latvia, Regulation of the Cabinet of Ministers No 864 "The procedure for granting and disbursing the family state allowance and supplement to the family state allowance for a child with a disability" of 21 December 2021 ([Ministru kabineta 21.12.2021. noteikumi Nr. 864 "Kārtība, kādā piešķir un izmaksā ģimenes valsts pabalstu un piemaksu pie ģimenes valsts pabalsta par bērnu ar invaliditāti"](#)), Art. 6.

²⁶ Latvia, Central Finance and Contracts Agency (*Centrālā finanšu un līgumu aģentūra*) (2023), Recovery and Resilience Facility ([Atveseļošanas fonds](#)), 20 September 2021.

²⁷ Latvia, Central Finance and Contracts Agency (*Centrālā finanšu un līgumu aģentūra*) (2023), Project selections for Recovery and Resilience Facility ([Atveseļošanas fonda projektu atlases](#)), 28 August 2023.

funds, for the installation of centralized heating connections in residential houses up until the 25 July 2023. Three million euros of funding from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) were allocated in the first call for the selection of objectives.²⁸

3. In addition, the Central Finance and Contracts Agency announced an open selection of projects in which 3.5 million euros of ERDF funds were earmarked until 25 September 2023, for the improvement of household heating systems.²⁹

In 2023, several large-scale infrastructure projects were carried out aimed at the improvement of energy efficiency. For example, a new boiler house was opened in Jūrmala on 3 March 2023, where thermal energy is being produced using a local energy resource - wood chips,³⁰ and the improvement of energy efficiency in educational institutions in municipalities³¹.

Table 1 – Promising practice

Promising practice	
Title (original language)	<i>Vadlīnijas īstermiņa un ilgtermiņa enerģijas patēriņa samazināšanas pasākumiem</i>
Title (EN)	Guidelines for Short-term and Long-term Energy Consumption Reduction Measures
Organisation (original language)	<i>LR Ekonomikas ministrija un Elektrum Energoefektivitātes centrs</i>
Organisation (EN)	Ministry of Economics of the Republic of Latvia and the Elektrum Energy Efficiency Centre
Government / Civil society	Government

²⁸ Latvia, Central Finance and Contracts Agency (*Centrālā finanšu un līgumu aģentūra*) (2023), Central Finance and Contracts Agency starts accepting submissions for EU fund support for household district heating connections ([CFLA sāk pieņemt iesniegumus par ES fondu atbalstu mājsaimniecību centralizētās siltumapgādes pieslēgumiem](#)), 26 May 2023.

²⁹ Latvia, Central Finance and Contracts Agency (*Centrālā finanšu un līgumu aģentūra*) (2023), Central Finance and Contracts Agency accepts applications for EU fund support for the installation of heat pumps in households ([CFLA pieņem iesniegumus par ES fondu atbalstu siltumsūkņu uzstādīšanai mājsaimniecībās](#)), 26 July 2023.

³⁰ Latvia, Central Finance and Contracts Agency (*Centrālā finanšu un līgumu aģentūra*) (2023), A new wood chip boiler house was discovered in Dubulti ([Dubultos atklāta jauna šķeldas katlumāja](#)), 14 March 2023.

³¹ Latvia, Central Finance and Contracts Agency (*Centrālā finanšu un līgumu aģentūra*) (2023), Energy efficiency has been improved in Druva secondary school with the support of EU funds ([Druvas vidusskolā ar ES fondu atbalstu uzlabota enerģoefektivitāte](#)), 22 February 2023.

Promising practice	
Funding body	State budget
Reference (incl. URL, where available)	https://www.em.gov.lv/lv/energotaupiba https://www.em.gov.lv/lv/darbiniekiem-iedzivotajiem https://www.em.gov.lv/lv/eku-apsaimniekotajiem
Indicate the start date of the promising practice and the finishing date if it has ceased to exist	The Guidelines for Short-term and Long-term Energy Consumption Reduction Measures for the 2022/ 2023 heating season were published on 14 September 2022
Type of initiative	Informative campaign
Main target group	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Households 2. Employees 3. Building managers
Indicate level of implementation: Local/Regional/National	National
Brief description (max. 1000 chars)	The Ministry of Economics, together with the Elektrum Energy Efficiency Centre, has prepared guidelines on how to save energy in the short and long term (behaviour change measures as short-term solutions and technology improvement or replacement measures as long-term solutions. The advice gathered in the guidelines is useful for institutions, organizations, businesses and households. Energy efficiency measures are both activities and engineering solutions, the implementation of which results in the efficient use of energy. In addition, attractive visual materials are being prepared with possible solutions.
Highlight any element of the actions that is transferable (max. 500 chars)	Similar guidelines with visual elements are easily distributed in social media, thereby achieving a wide target audience.
Give reasons why you consider the practice as sustainable (as opposed to 'one off activities')	In the provided guidelines, a wide range of short-term and long-term solutions have been collected that are useful for households in general, as well as being specially targeted for building managers and employees. All these recommendations have been developed taking into consideration recent developments in national regulations and policies. In addition, the

Promising practice	
	<p>recommendations provided incorporate best practices for sustainable development, e.g. building managers are being invited to organise the renovation process for buildings and to use digital solutions for monitoring the temperature, while households are being encouraged to wash clothes at lower water temperatures and use natural light as much as possible.</p>
<p>Give reasons why you consider the practice as having concrete measurable impact</p>	<p>Despite the fact that all the gathered recommendations may be considered obvious or well-known, it is important to educate households, employees and building managers about easy-to-implement solutions on how to save energy. It is possible to create significant savings by changing habits. At the same time, there may be an issue in measuring the impact of these activities as various factors may have an impact on the saving of energy.</p>
<p>Give reasons why you consider the practice as transferable to other settings and/or Member States?</p>	<p>This practice is considered as transferable to other Member States as the recommendations on energy saving are quite universal. In addition, they have been formed in a visually attractive solution (as an image dedicated for social media).</p>
<p>Explain, if applicable, how the practice involves beneficiaries and stakeholders in the design, planning, evaluation, review assessment and implementation of the practice</p>	<p>Not applicable</p>
<p>Explain, if applicable, how the practice provides for review and assessment</p>	<p>Not applicable</p>

2. Threats to democratic values - Protecting civic space, strengthening meaningful participation and the rights to freedom of association, peaceful assembly and expression

2.1. Major threats to democracy as reflected in national legal and political developments and the discourse at national level.

Table 2 – Challenges

Based on a scan of legislative and policy and other developments and the public discourse please identify **three major challenges** to democracy emerged in the course of 2023.

Challenges	Justification/explanation: description of issue at stake and its overall relevance compared to other challenges to democracy and the civic space. Please provide examples and references.
Attacks and threats to the safety of civil society organisations, human rights defenders and journalists	
Legal and administrative constraints, harassment,	

Challenges	Justification/explanation: description of issue at stake and its overall relevance compared to other challenges to democracy and the civic space. Please provide examples and references.
intimidation, and reprisals against civil society organisations, human rights defenders (including SLAPPs - strategic lawsuits against public participation)	
Lack of media freedom a/o media pluralism; disinformation (incl. online)	<p>In the current period, the national media regulator, the National Electronic Mass Media Council (NEMMC), adopted several decisions as a result of media supervision.³² However, two of the decisions initiated a rigorous public debate in Latvian society and media.</p> <p>Firstly, on 6 December 2022, the NEMMC revoked the broadcasting licence of the Russian independent television channel Dozhd (TV Rain).³³ As explained in the 14-page long decision, it was due to several reasons, including a threat to national security and public order.³⁴</p> <p>This decision was immediately objected by the Latvian Association of Journalists as disproportionate³⁵ and was mentioned in the European Commission's 2023 Rule of Law Report.³⁶</p>

³² Latvia, National Electronic Mass Media Council (*Nacionālā elektronisko plašsaziņas līdzekļu padome*) (2023), '[Decision of the Electronic Mass Media Council](#)', 22 September 2023.

³³ Latvia, National Electronic Mass Media Council (*Nacionālā elektronisko plašsaziņas līdzekļu padome*) (2022), '[Decision No 436/1-2](#)', 6 December 2022

³⁴ Latvia, National Electronic Mass Media Council (*Nacionālā elektronisko plašsaziņas līdzekļu padome*) (2022), '[Decision No 436/1-2](#)', 6 December 2022.

³⁵ Latvia, Latvian Association of Journalists (*Latvijas žurnālistu asociācija*) (2022), 'Latvian Association of Journalists considers the decision of the NEMMC annulling the licence of "Dozhd" disproportionate' ([NEPLP lēmumu par "Doždi" licences anulēšanu LŽA uzskata par nesamērīgu](#)), 7 December 2022.

³⁶ European Commission, '2023 Rule of Law Report. Country Chapter on the rule of law situation in Latvia', Brussels, 5 July 2023.

Challenges	Justification/explanation: description of issue at stake and its overall relevance compared to other challenges to democracy and the civic space. Please provide examples and references.
	<p>At the moment, the television channel has appealed the decision to the administrative court. From the publicly available case-law database, it is possible to identify (even though the name of the company is anonymised) that the decision No. 436/1-2 of the NEMMC has been upheld by the first instance court.³⁷ The judgment is appealed and is under the review of the Administrative Regional Court.</p> <p>Secondly, on 18 May 2023, the NEMMC decided to punish the independent internet news portal “TVNET GRUPA” with a EUR 8500 financial penalty.³⁸ As explained in the 29-page long decision, it was due to several reasons, including insufficient accuracy and neutrality.³⁹ As reasoned in the NEMMC decision, the problematic of the violation is related to the fact that the hosts – journalists – were not diligent enough and did not explain to the auditoria the wrong usage of the term “deportation” by their guest.⁴⁰ The term “deportation” is very painful to Latvian society due to Soviet repressions against Latvians.⁴¹</p> <p>Latvian Media Ethics Council immediately objected the decision of the NEMMC stating that the punishment imposed on TVNET is disproportionate and not democratic.⁴² Even the new President of the Republic of Latvia who is active on his X (Twitter) account objected the decision of the NEMMC stating</p>

³⁷ Latvia, Administrative District Court, [Judgment No. A420112823](#), 4 July 2023.

³⁸ Latvia, National Electronic Mass Media Council (*Nacionālā elektronisko plašsaziņas līdzekļu padome*) (2023), [‘Decision No 199/1-2 \(18012000000723-2\)’](#), 18 May 2023.

³⁹ Latvia, National Electronic Mass Media Council (*Nacionālā elektronisko plašsaziņas līdzekļu padome*) (2023), [‘Decision No 199/1-2 \(18012000000723-2\)’](#), 18 May 2023.

⁴⁰ Latvia, National Electronic Mass Media Council (*Nacionālā elektronisko plašsaziņas līdzekļu padome*) (2023), [‘Decision No 199/1-2 \(18012000000723-2\)’](#), 18 May 2023, para 15.

⁴¹ Latvia, National Electronic Mass Media Council (*Nacionālā elektronisko plašsaziņas līdzekļu padome*) (2023), [‘Decision No 199/1-2 \(18012000000723-2\)’](#), 18 May 2023, para 2.2.3.

⁴² Latvia, Latvian Media Ethics Council (*Latvijas Mediju ētikas padome*) (2023), ‘The Latvian Media Ethics Council considers NEMMC’s decision punishing TVNET to be disproportionate, not democratic and bureaucratic’ ([Latvijas Mediju ētikas padome uzskata par nesamērīgu, nedemokrātisku un birokrātisku NEPLP lēmumu par TVNET piemēroto sodu](#)), 18 May 2023

Challenges	Justification/explanation: description of issue at stake and its overall relevance compared to other challenges to democracy and the civic space. Please provide examples and references.
	<p>that “the decision is incomprehensible and raises many questions”.⁴³</p> <p>The internet news portal “TVNET GRUPA” on 23 December 2023 informed that they have appealed the decision of the NEMMC to the court, but the first instance court with its judgment has dismissed their complaint. However, the judgment has been appealed to the court of appeal.⁴⁴</p>
Foreign interference	
Lack of (processes for) transparent, accountable, democratic and pluralistic participation in law and policymaking; incl. access to information	<p>Criminal proceedings were initiated against two members of an NGO “I Want to Help Refugees” which provided assistance to migrants in the border area of Belarusian-Latvian border. The accused persons deny the allegations of border guards that they have helped the migrants to illegally cross the border, stating that they only provided humanitarian assistance to people who were already in Latvia.⁴⁵ The criminal proceedings have been condemned by civil society in Latvia and representatives of international organizations who have claimed that it not only threatens the activities of non-governmental organizations, but also illustrates the lack of transparency of the border management.⁴⁶</p>
Lack of election integrity (incl. electoral process, political campaigning and party financing)	

⁴³ Latvia, President of the Republic of Latvia (2023), ‘[Twitter \(now the “X” post\)](#)’, 29 May 2023.

⁴⁴ Latvia, Internet news portal “TVNET GRUPA” (2023), ‘The appeal court will review the dispute between TVNET and NEPLP in February’ ([Apgabaltiesa TVNET un NEPLP strīdu iztiesās februārī](#)), 23 December 2023.

⁴⁵ Gribu Palīdzēt Bēgļiem (2023), ‘[Open letter on the opening of criminal proceedings against representatives of “I want to help refugees”](#)’ (“[Atklāta vēstule par kriminālprocesa pret “Gribu palīdzēt bēgļiem” pārstāvjiem uzsākšanu](#)”), 17 January 2023.

⁴⁶ UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders, ‘[Latvia: alleged undue use of criminal proceedings against human rights defenders Ieva Raubiško and Egils Grasmanis \(joint communication\)](#)’, 8 May 2023.

Challenges	Justification/explanation: description of issue at stake and its overall relevance compared to other challenges to democracy and the civic space. Please provide examples and references.
<p>Disproportionate use of law enforcement measures (surveillance, police violence, unlawful arrest etc.)</p>	<p>On 16 April 2023, Latvian society was shocked by the murder of a woman committed by her former spouse in front of their child in the city of Jēkabpils.⁴⁷</p> <p>Fierce public debate started after more information was revealed: the police, prosecuting and judicial authorities were aware of the situation of the woman – the woman reported to the police several times that she was stalked, harassed, and threatened by her former spouse for a long time. There were also reports from her relatives, friends, and colleagues to the competent authorities. Several administrative offence proceedings and criminal proceedings were initiated against the former spouse, but nothing, in fact, prevented him from the murder.⁴⁸</p> <p>This tragedy triggered fierce public debate (articles in journals, TV discussions, interviews with politicians etc.) about domestic violence and the inability of law enforcement institutions to identify and handle these types of crimes. Initially, law enforcement institutions started to blame each other. However, the politicians and highest authorities, including the Council of Justice⁴⁹ admitted systemic problems in the protection of victims of such crimes and undertook collective responsibility.⁵⁰</p> <p>The President of the Republic of Latvia sent to the Prime Minister a letter requesting to pay a just compensation of EUR 50 000 to the minor child of the victim for the inability of the state to protect the mother’s life.⁵¹</p> <p>Even though there is the necessary legislation in place, this particular case highlighted the more substantive problem in law enforcement – the negligence in the field of law enforcement.</p> <p>Although this case does not concern excessive use of force or special equipment, it still is connected with policing and the safety of democratic society. It illustrates how inactivity of the police can make the society to feel threatened. The debate this horrible murder caused, on the other side, showed that this is a topic that the society cares for.</p>

Challenges	Justification/explanation: description of issue at stake and its overall relevance compared to other challenges to democracy and the civic space. Please provide examples and references.
Corruption, including misuse of EU funds	
Lack of (effective judicial protection by) independent and impartial courts	
Threats to (the independence of) the fundamental rights institutional landscape (NHRIs, equality bodies, data protection authorities and similar bodies), incl. closure of fundamental rights bodies, legal changes, budget cuts and harassment	
Institutional issues linked to checks and balances (lack of parliamentary oversight, lack of implementation of	As to the issues related to checks and balances, in 2023 Latvia has adopted a new Law on the Municipalities, ⁵² inter alia aiming to facilitate the participation of civil society in local decision-making. This positive aspect was highlighted also by the

⁴⁷ Gailīte, D. (2023), '[Slepkavība Jēkabpilī](#)', *Jurista Vārda*, Vol. 17 (1283), p. 2.

⁴⁸ Gailīte, D. (2023), '[Slepkavība Jēkabpilī](#)', *Jurista Vārda*, Vol. 17 (1283), p. 2.

⁴⁹ Latvia, Council of Justice (*Tieslietu padome*) (2023), "[Decision No. 36](#)", 16 June 2023.

⁵⁰ Latvia, Council of Justice (*Tieslietu padome*) (2023), "[Decision No. 36](#)", 16 June 2023.

⁵¹ Latvia, The President of the Republic of Latvia (*Latvijas Valsts prezidents*) (2023), 'The President requests the Cabinet of Ministers to grant a compensation to the minor child of the victim of murder in Jēkabpils' ([Valsts prezidents aicina Ministru kabinētu piešķirt vienreizēju kompensāciju Jēkabpils slepkavības lietā noqalinātās sievietes nepilngadīgajiem bērniem](#)), 1 August 2023.

⁵² Latvia, The Law on Municipalities ([Pašvaldību likums](#)), 1 January 2023.

Challenges	Justification/explanation: description of issue at stake and its overall relevance compared to other challenges to democracy and the civic space. Please provide examples and references.
final court decisions by executive, etc.)	<p>European Commission's 2023 Rule of Law Report.⁵³ The new law provides a so-called participatory budget that enables residents to participate more directly in decision making processes and have a more determinative role in deciding how a certain part of the budget shall be spent on development issues; introduces a so-called advisory resident councils in municipalities that will be elected and will maintain close dialogue between residents and municipal councils; introduction of the possibility to submit a collective submission to the city council or even to organise municipal referenda.</p> <p>However, in this regard in Latvia in 2023 some activities took a completely different course of action. Namely, the Riga City Council decided that the threshold for the initiation of public consultation will be 20 000 signatures (previously it was 2 000 signatures).⁵⁴ Transparency International LATVIA immediately objected to this new regulation stating that the high minimum threshold of signatures for the initiation of the public consultation is disproportionate, unreasonable, and contradictory to the new Law on Municipalities.⁵⁵ However, the objections were not taken into consideration.</p>
Other major developments threatening democratic values	Please explain

⁵³ European Commission, '2023 Rule of Law Report. Country Chapter on the rule of law situation in Latvia', Brussels, 5 July 2023.

⁵⁴ Latvia, Riga City Council (*Rīgas dome*) (2023), Work of Riga Municipality will be Regulated by the New Regulation (*Rīgas pašvaldības darbu regulēs jauns nolikums*), 30 August 2023.

⁵⁵ Latvia, Transparency International LATVIA (*Sabiedrība par atklātību – Delna*) (2023), Will the Riga City Council limit residents' participation opportunities? (*Vai Rīgas dome ierobežos iedzīvotāju līdzdalības iespējas?*)

2.2. Legislative and policy measures having an impact on the freedom of assembly/association/expression of civil society actors.

As for the freedom of expression and access to information, it must be stressed that these freedoms in Latvia are constitutionally and legislatively safeguarded (Article 100 of the Constitution (*Latvijas Republikas Satversme*)⁵⁶). Access to information is guaranteed by the Freedom of Information Law.⁵⁷ In April 2023, the parliament amended some provisions of the Freedom of Information Law that raised objections from NGOs and the Ombudsman. Namely, the Freedom of Information Law qualifies different categories of information that shall be considered as “restricted access information” (that, however, is still available to the public if there is a good reason). However, the parliament decided that one of the categories named “Information for Official Use Only” (“informācija dienesta vajadzībām”) must be requalified as a “state secret.” Thus, the “information for official use only” that used to be only “restricted access information” in the future will be a “state secret” and thus less accessible to the public.

These amendments were objected to by the Latvian Association of Journalists which insisted that the legislative process should be slowed down and such important amendments should be discussed more extensively.⁵⁸ Also, the Ombudsman stated that the amendments were adopted too speedy and without sufficient consultations with NGOs.⁵⁹ However, it should be noted that according to Article 18 of the State Secret Law⁶⁰ administrative courts have the competence to review these types of cases (refusal to issue the Information for Official Use Only) and, moreover, are competent to verify if the qualification of the information as “Information for Official Use Only” is justified.

⁵⁶ Latvia, Constitution of the Republic of Latvia (*Latvijas Republikas Satversme*), 15 February 1922.

⁵⁷ Latvia, Freedom of Information Law (*Informācijas atklātības likums*), 29 October 1998.

⁵⁸ Latvia, Latvian Association of Journalists (*Latvijas žurnālistu asociācija*) (2023), ‘Call to postpone the amendments to the Freedom of Information Law’ (*Aicinājums atlikt grozījumus Informācijas atklātības likumā*), 4 April 2023.

⁵⁹ Latvia, Ombudsman (*Latvijas Republikas tiesībsargs*) (2023), ‘Letter to the Parliament No 1-8/11’ (*Vēstule Saeimai Nr. 1-8/11*), 11 April 2023.

⁶⁰ Latvia, State Secret Law (*likums “Par valsts noslēpumu”*), 17 October 1996.

Thus, the current legislation provides balancing measures and safeguards for the freedom of expression.

As mentioned in Chapter 2.1., in 2023 the parliament of Latvia adopted a new Law on the Municipalities,⁶¹ inter alia seeking to facilitate the participation of civil society in local decision-making processes (see above). However, the Riga City Council (the capital city and the biggest city of Latvia) increased considerably the minimum threshold for initiating public consultations,⁶² thus making initiation of public consultations less available for civil society. This was objected to by the NGO (Transparency International LATVIA) which considered the high minimum threshold provided by the Riga City Council as disproportionate, unreasonable, and contradictory to the new Law on Municipalities.⁶³

In 2023, there were no amendments to the Law on Meetings, Processions, and Pickets.⁶⁴ Thus, the existing laws in relation to the freedom of assembly are stable and have not been amended.

Table 3 – Case law

Case law	
Deciding body (in original language)	Augstākās tiesas Senāta Administratīvo lietu departaments
Deciding body (in English)	Supreme Court of Latvia, Department of Administrative Cases
Case number (also European Case Law Identifier ECLI , where applicable)	Case No A420214120 (ECLI:LV:AT:2023:0428.A420214120.7.S)
Parties	Private individual Riga City Municipality
Decision date	28 April 2023

⁶¹ Latvia, The Law on Municipalities ([Pašvaldību likums](#)), 1 January 2023.

⁶² Latvia, Riga City Council (*Rīgas dome*) (2023), Work of Riga Municipality will be Regulated by the New Regulation ([Rīgas pašvaldības darbu regulēs jauns nolikums](#)), 30 August 2023.

⁶³ Latvia, Transparency International LATVIA (*Sabiedrība par atklātību – Delna*) (2023), Will the Riga City Council limit residents' participation opportunities? ([Vai Rīgas dome ierobežos iedzīvotāju līdzdalības iespējas?](#))

⁶⁴ Latvia, the Law on Meetings, Processions, and Pickets ([likums "Par sapulcēm, gājieniem un piketiēm"](#)), 16 January 1997.

Case law	
Web link to the decision (if available)	https://manas.tiesas.lv/eTiesasMvc/nolemumi/pdf/505131.pdf
Which fundamental freedoms of (peaceful assembly, association and/or expression) were referred to in the case?	Freedom of expression (access to state-held information)
Key facts of the case (max. 250 words)	<p>Note that this executive summary needs to be sufficiently comprehensive for the reader to understand:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. the facts of the case (so the “real life story”) presented in a chronological, short, and concise way 2. the legal background against which the case unfolded (what are the relevant legal norms that are applied) <p>The administrative case relates to a simple civil dispute between neighbours of the multihousehold building where one of the apartment owners is a local municipality. Namely, the private individual asked the local municipality to provide information whether the local municipality (as the property owner) has consented to the substantial reconstruction works in one of the neighbour’s apartments (according to the national law joint proprietors (neighbours of the multifamily residential) must consent to the substantial reconstruction of the building). The municipality did not provide the information requested by the individual.</p> <p>The individual brought legal proceedings to the administrative court requesting to provide the information requested from the local municipality based on Article 10 of the Freedom of Information Law.⁶⁵ The Court partially satisfied the application, but partly rejected it. The judgment was appealed to the Supreme Court.</p>

⁶⁵ Latvia, [Freedom of Information Law](#) (*Informācijas atklātības likums*), 29 October 1998.

Case law	
<p>The key legal question raised by the Court</p>	<p>Please describe in a succinct way the key legal problem/question</p> <p>The key legal question of the case was whether a private individual is entitled (according to the Freedom of Information Law) to request information of such a nature that falls under the scope of action of an institution in the field of private law.</p> <p>Namely, according to the Latvian legal administrative theory state (including all its public entitles) can act either in the field of public law (for example, when adopting administrative acts or real actions that are subjected to the control of administrative courts) or in the field of private law (for example, when purchasing goods or renting property - activities that are subjected under the control of courts of general jurisdiction).</p>
<p>Result of the case in terms of factual outcome, and in terms of assessment of the legal question raised</p>	<p>Please make sure the reader understands the significance of the case in terms of how the application of the relevant legal provisions in the context of the freedom of association/assembly/expression expands or limits civil society space</p> <p>The Supreme Court referred to its previous case-law⁶⁶ and ruled that the Freedom of Information Law also extends to the acts of municipality in the field of private law under the condition that the private individual can reason that the information requested is important for society (contributes to civil society).</p> <p>Thus, the Supreme Court annulled the judgment of the lower court and sent the case for re-examination.</p> <p>This case-law extends the right to access to state-held information and thus is seen as a tool for fighting bribery and corruption, squandering of public (taxpayers') money as well as comprehensively contributing to public sector transparency.</p> <p>It is worth mentioning that within the course of administrative proceedings, upon performing its obligation, a court itself (ex officio) objectively determines the circumstances of a case and</p>

⁶⁶ Latvia, Supreme Court, Judgment No. [A420418311](#), 11 April 2014; Supreme Court, Judgment No. [A420169118](#), 18 April 2019.

Case law	
	provides a legal assessment of these circumstances ⁶⁷ , therefore the person is not obliged to prove to the court the public interest in releasing the information to the society. In addition, the general presumption is that any information is accessible to the public in all cases unless the Freedom of Information Law specifies otherwise. ⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Latvia, Administrative Procedure Law (Administratīvā procesa likums), 1 February 2004, Article 103.

⁶⁸ Latvia, [Freedom of Information Law \(Informācijas atklātības likums\)](#), 29 October 1998, Article 2.
