

# An update on developments regarding civic space in the EU and an overview of the possibilities for human rights defenders to enter EU territory

Latvia

2023

Contractor: Latvian Centre for Human Rights

Authors: Latvian Centre for Human Rights:

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# 1. Civic space developments in 2022

## 1.1. A new Accounting Law adopted

Area	Financing framework
Topic	Accounting and auditing
Impact	Minor

A new Accounting Law<sup>1</sup> was adopted, which entered into force on January 1, 2022. Corresponding government regulations for associations, foundations, trade unions on annual reports and accounting registers in single-entry system were adopted on 14 July and entered into force on 19 July of the same year.<sup>2</sup> The new law allows volunteers to perform accounting functions in associations and foundations, as long as the management body has entered into a written agreement with them that specifies the obligations, rights, and liability of such persons. Associations, foundations, trade unions and their associations, and religious organizations can now keep accounting registers in a single-entry system as long as their turnover from economic transactions during the two previous consecutive reporting years does not exceed € 100,000 per year, instead of the previous € 40,000.

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<sup>1</sup> Latvia, Saeima (2022). [Accounting Law \(Grāmatvedības likums\)](#), 10 June 2021.

<sup>2</sup> Latvia, Cabinet of Ministers (2022). [Regulations No 439 "Regulations on annual reports of associations, foundations and trade unions and accounting in a single entry system" \(Ministru kabineta 2022. gada 14. jūlija noteikumi Nr. 439 "Noteikumi par biedrību, nodibinājumu un arodbiedrību gada pārskatiem un grāmatvedības kārtošanu vienkāršā ieraksta sistēmā\)](#), 14 July.

## 1.2. A new Local Government Law hopes to facilitate civic participation

Area	Participation and cooperation with authorities
Topic	Civil dialogue (dialogue/cooperation between authorities and civil society organisations); Public participation (citizen participation)
Impact	Major

On 20 October the *Saeima* (parliament of the Republic of Latvia) adopted a Local Government Law,<sup>3</sup> which replaced the old 1994 law<sup>4</sup>. The new law will come into force on 1 January 2023. It sets out mechanisms for ensuring civic participation in the work of the local government with the overall aim of increasing the quality of the work of the municipality and its relevance to the interests of the residents. The envisaged participation budget is voluntary for 2023 and 2024, and mandatory from 2025, which will enable residents themselves to determine how much of the local government budget is spent on development issues. The law provides for the establishment of advisory resident councils in municipalities, which would be elected at general meetings of residents and maintain a dialogue between the local population and the council. The possibility for residents of the local government to send a collective submission to the county and city council is also envisaged. The law also foresees municipal referenda from 1 January 2024 on specific decisions of municipal councils, sustainable strategy of the municipality or its amendments, and the dismissal of the council. At the same time, experts note that lack of motivation may be a hurdle in engaging residents in the new councils.

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<sup>3</sup> Latvia, Saeima (2022). [Local Government Law \(\*Pašvaldību likums\*\)](#), 20 October.

<sup>4</sup> Latvia, Saeima (1994). [On Local Governments \(\*Par pašvaldībām\*\)](#), 19 May.

## 2. Promising practice in 2022

### 2.1. Government funding to NGOs to support Ukrainian refugees and Ukraine

Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Latvia had access to increased government funding in 2022 to address the needs of Ukrainian refugees and activities in support of Ukraine. SIF (Society Integration Fund), a public agency which administers government funds, made € 360,000 available to NGOs for the support of Ukrainian refugees. SIF also made € 200,000 available to NGOs for the support of activities for Latvian and Ukrainian families with children, to facilitate the inclusion of Ukrainian families in Latvia.<sup>5</sup> NGOs have been instrumental in coordinating public and civil society support for Ukrainian civilians, including through volunteer co-ordination, fundraising campaigns, creation and maintenance of various platforms (e.g. housing support, mapping humanitarian aid points across Latvia), advocating for continued government support, transportation from Ukraine, supporting Ukrainian civilians in transit, etc. Eight NGOs were also recipients of grants supporting Latvian language training to Ukrainian civilians. The total amount of support is [EUR 3 028 375](#), the estimated number of persons receiving language training – 7000 at A1 level (120 hours). NGO contribution in support of Ukraine and Ukrainian civilians has also been recognized by the government and the State President.

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<sup>5</sup> Society Integration Fund (*Sabiedrības integrācijas fonds*). [NGO Activity in Support of Ukrainian Civilians Strengthened by Allocating EUR 300 000](#), 5 August.

## 3. Visa for human rights defenders

### 3.1. Entry and stay for human rights defenders (HRDs) at risk

Dedicated visa scheme for HRDs at risk available in your country	No
Other type of visa or alternative legal entitlement or derogation clause applied to HRDs	No

Even though there is no normative regulation for entry and stay specifically for human rights defenders, in practice persons at risk have received visas based on humanitarian grounds. According to the Commissioner for Human Rights of Council of Europe, Latvia “has developed a comprehensive relocation system for human rights defenders and independent journalists from Russia and Belarus, by providing them with travel documents, long-term visas and residence permits”.<sup>6</sup>

After the adoption of the laws on the “fake news” in Russia, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Latvia E. Rinkēvičs informed on his Twitter account about the preparedness of Latvia to welcome journalists of independent media.<sup>7</sup> According to the available information 247 independent media employees and their 206 family members have received a Latvian visa.<sup>8</sup> The representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs V.Makarovs stated that strict criteria were introduced in order to ensure that “people undesirable to Latvia do not enter hiding behind the phrase “I hate Putin”.<sup>9</sup> According to V.Makarovs, the process was based on serious assessment on each individual case.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Commissioner For Human Rights of Council of Europe. [Support Russian and Belarusian civil societies and human rights defenders](#). 21 August, 2022.

<sup>7</sup> Public broadcasting of Latvia. [Strategic hospitality: Why Latvia gave refuge to Russian independent media](#). 7 October, 2022.

<sup>8</sup> TV3 news (2022). [Visas has been issued to almost 250 employees of Russian independent media at Latvian representative offices](#). 2 August.

<sup>9</sup> Public broadcasting of Latvia (2022). [Strategic hospitality: Why Latvia gave refuge to Russian independent media](#). , 7 October.

<sup>10</sup> Public broadcasting of Latvia (2022). [Strategic hospitality: Why Latvia gave refuge to Russian independent media](#). , 7 October.

