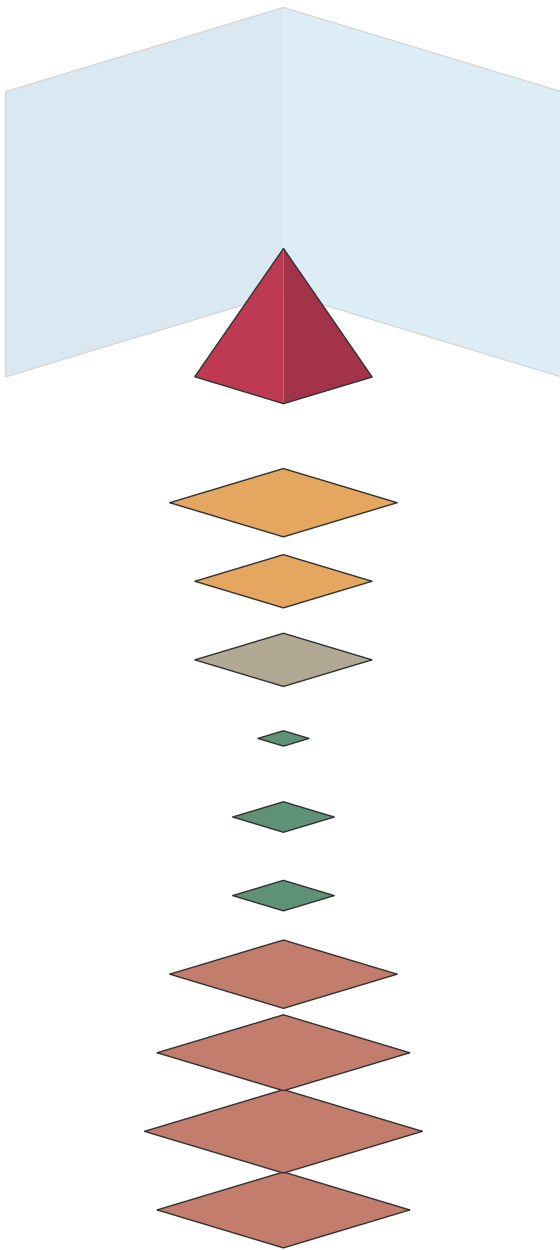


# **LATVIA**



## 3.51 CRIMINALITY SCORE

164<sup>th</sup> of 193 countries  
36<sup>th</sup> of 44 European countries  
5<sup>th</sup> of 8 Northern European countries



### CRIMINAL MARKETS **3.65**

HUMAN TRAFFICKING	4.50
HUMAN SMUGGLING	3.50
ARMS TRAFFICKING	3.50
FLORA CRIMES	1.00
FAUNA CRIMES	2.00
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	2.00
HEROIN TRADE	4.50
COCAINE TRADE	5.00
CANNABIS TRADE	5.50
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	5.00



### CRIMINAL ACTORS **3.38**

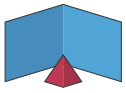
MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	3.50
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	3.50
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	2.00
FOREIGN ACTORS	4.50



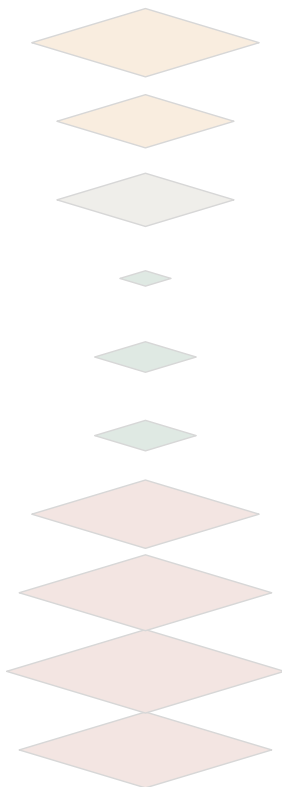
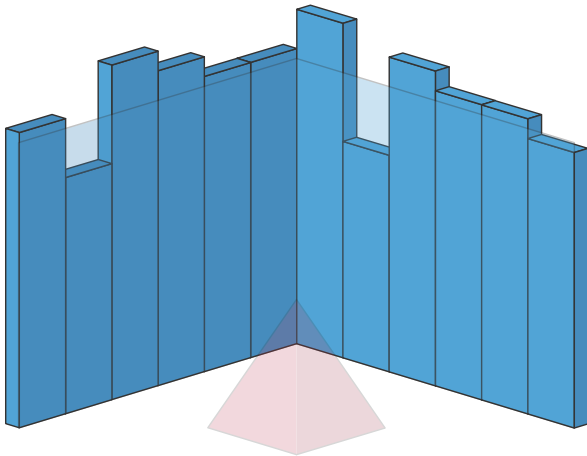
## 7.42 RESILIENCE SCORE

18<sup>th</sup> of 193 countries  
12<sup>th</sup> of 44 European countries  
7<sup>th</sup> of 8 Northern European countries





# **LATVIA**



**7.42**

## **RESILIENCE SCORE**

18<sup>th</sup> of 193 countries

12<sup>th</sup> of 44 European countries

7<sup>th</sup> of 8 Northern European countries

POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE	<b>7.50</b>
GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	<b>6.00</b>
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION	<b>8.50</b>
NATIONAL POLICIES AND LAWS	<b>8.00</b>
JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND DETENTION	<b>7.50</b>
LAW ENFORCEMENT	<b>7.50</b>
TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY	<b>8.50</b>
ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING	<b>5.50</b>
ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY	<b>8.00</b>
VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT	<b>7.50</b>
PREVENTION	<b>7.50</b>
NON-STATE ACTORS	<b>7.00</b>



**3.51**

## **CRIMINALITY SCORE**

164<sup>th</sup> of 193 countries

36<sup>th</sup> of 44 European countries

5<sup>th</sup> of 8 Northern European countries



**CRIMINAL MARKETS**

**3.65**



**CRIMINAL ACTORS**

**3.38**



# CRIMINALITY

## CRIMINAL MARKETS

### PEOPLE

Latvia is mainly a source country for human trafficking. Women are trafficked both domestically and to other parts of Europe, where they are commonly recruited for brokered marriages in Western Europe. Most victims are underaged and are vulnerable to sex trafficking, domestic servitude and forced labour. Children living in state orphanages are also vulnerable to sexual exploitation. There is evidence that traffickers are increasingly targeting people with developmental and physical disabilities or addictions, using psychological and emotional violence rather than physical force. Organized crime groups are known to facilitate labour trafficking to Germany and Ukraine.

Latvia's shared borders with Belarus, Estonia, Lithuania and Russia, as well as a maritime border with Sweden makes it an attractive transit country for regional organized crime groups looking to carry out smuggling activities between Asia and Europe. Latvia mainly functions as a transit country for smuggled persons intending to reach the Scandinavian countries. Riga, Latvia's capital, has been identified as a smuggling hub. Overall, there has been a decrease in the number of persons detained for irregular crossings in recent years, which the State Border Guard attributes to a more intensive border surveillance on the Russian side and the construction of border zone infrastructure. Human smuggling in Latvia is largely facilitated by local actors living in border communities who are responsible for the transportation of migrants. Generally, actors involved in human smuggling utilize the internet and other online social networks for the recruitment of victims, logistics, exploitation of victims, and as a platform for advertising prostitution. However, levels of human smuggling have fallen sharply in the wake of stricter border controls put in place as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

### TRADE

The arms trade in Latvia is relatively small, but the country's location makes it a potential transit hub for stolen weapons. The trafficking of reactivated firearms and modified gas pistols abroad is increasing, with most criminal offences being associated with the illegal excavation and adaptation of these weapons. Authorities have reported an intraregional trafficking route that runs from the Netherlands and transits through Lithuania to Latvia. There has also been evidence of a significant degree of smuggling between Latvia and Russia. In 2019, in the Latvian city of Rezekne was exposed as a location for the illicit manufacturing of weapons.

### ENVIRONMENT

There is no established or well-developed criminal market for flora in Latvia. However, there is speculation that some illegal logging is involved in the country's export of softwood sawn timber birch plywood, oriented strand board and pellets, although evidence is minimal. While fauna crimes are not widespread, there is some evidence that the country is both a source and destination for exotic and endangered animals. Latvia also has been listed among the top origin countries in Europe for the illegal export of wildlife to Mexico. Moreover, there are reports that unregistered dogs and cats are also being illegally imported into Latvia from Belarus and Ukraine. As for non-renewable resource crimes, there is minimal evidence to suggest there is a criminal market for this in Latvia. Nevertheless, Latvian banking institution have allegedly been used in the past to channel bribes related to a gold mining concession abroad. Sporadic instances of smuggling of gold and other precious metals across Latvian borders have also been recorded.

### DRUGS

Due to its geographical location, Latvia is mainly a transit country for a heroin market dominated by Russian organized crime groups. While heroin usage is uncommon among the general population and has decreased annually, the drug remains the second most popular in the country. Although instances of local production have been reported, narcotics trafficking likely occurs primarily along the Latvian-Russian border and on ferry lines from Western Europe to Latvia. The internet, cryptocurrencies, postal services and courier services all facilitate the transfer and sale of heroin. Moreover, the drug is typically smuggled among legal goods. Heroin use in the country has largely been replaced by its cheaper and stronger synthetic alternative, Carfentanil. In general, synthetic drugs in Latvia are mainly imported from European countries but are also produced in smaller quantities in Latvia, where they are consumed mostly by young people. Domestic production of synthetic drugs has been increasing, and there is evidence of the existence of multiple clandestine laboratories within the country. There is also evidence that raw materials used to produce synthetic drugs are transported from Latvia to Russia and Belarus.

Latvia is also a transit and source country for cannabis, which is also the most commonly used illicit drug domestically. Herbal cannabis from the Netherlands, the UK and Germany, and cannabis resin from Morocco arrives in Latvia, usually bound for Russia. Marijuana cultivation is carried out both indoors and outdoors in Latvia, often in uninhabited spaces. While the police have reported a growing number of cultivation sites over the past decade, the number of

cannabis plants confiscated has declined considerably. Nevertheless, the country continues to have high rates of marijuana distribution. Drug use is popular among young adults between the ages of 15 and 34 years. Although the use of cocaine is relatively uncommon among the general population in Latvia, evidence suggests that cocaine smuggling is increasing. Unlike other drugs, cocaine is trafficked from west to east and in Latvia, eastern Baltic nationals have been observed working as couriers for cocaine trafficking. There have also been cases of Latvians being involved in trafficking from Latin America to Western Europe. As with heroin, cocaine is typically smuggled among legal goods.

## CRIMINAL ACTORS

Small criminal groups of about two to five people operate in Latvia, but these loose networks are not pervasive. These groups are dynamic, especially since they are constantly being broken up by law enforcement officers. Mafia-style groups also operate in the country and engage in illicit drug trafficking, the illegal movement of excisable goods, various types of theft ranging from burglaries and car theft, fraud, armed robbery, as well as money laundering. It is believed

that there is a legitimate head of organized criminality in Latvia who has close relationships with Russian organized criminal groups and similar groups in Europe, especially in Germany. There are an estimated 80 organized crime groups in Latvia. Numerous outlawed motorcycle gangs are also active in the country, with close connections to Russian organized crime gangs.

Foreign criminal structures, however, are the criminal entities that dominate Latvia's organized crime landscape. Several organized crime groups have grown along ethnic lines, with most having Latvian citizenship. The most predominant foreign mafia-style groups operating within Latvia are Russian. They are involved in trafficking of migrants, illicit trade in tobacco products, drug trafficking, theft and money laundering. A key feature of Russian groups is their low level of interaction with locals, partially due to language and cultural barriers. Meanwhile, crimes involving public officials are not typical within Latvia. However, between 2018 and 2020, criminal proceedings have been instituted against several members of parliament for abuses of power. However, in general, the involvement of public officials in organized crime is occasional and exceptional.

# RESILIENCE

## LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Abuse of power is somewhat of an issue in Latvia and public levels of trust in the government and parliament are low. Several institutions such as law enforcement and border officials the judiciary, tax authorities and the privatization office have all been accused of corrupt practices. There is a risk of corruption for businesses dealing with the judiciary, and a moderate risk when dealing with the various administrations. While the risk of corruption when dealing with the police is low, they are perceived to be fairly unreliable in protecting citizens from crime and promoting the rule of law. Although the Latvian government made an effort to fight corruption and money laundering, the country have not been fully successful in tackling corrupt politicians because of the inability of institutions to establish and strengthen their roles and authority. There also is a notable lack of transparency about the functioning of state companies and public procurement processes. However, despite these issues, Latvia has tried to reduce the extent of organized crime in the country and the broader region. The government has implemented a special plan for preventing and combating organized crime and it is reportedly trying to improve transparency and accountability, including in the fight against organized crime.

Latvia's international cooperation in the field of combating organized crime is active and purposeful. It cooperates with several international organizations and has ratified international conventions in this regard. Latvia is also part of other forms of international cooperation, including extradition and mutual legal assistance. It also collaborates with INTERPOL, Europol and other police services, and has collaborated with foreign law enforcement agencies on drug trafficking cases. Latvia is part of a regional task force that aims to enhance international cooperation in curbing human trafficking and sharing information in the Baltic Sea Region. At home, Latvia has implemented several policies to combat transnational organized crimes. Its criminal code also prohibits all forms of human trafficking, human smuggling, money laundering, arms crime, drug crimes as well as fauna and flora crimes. Latvian law also prohibits illegal organ harvesting and activities related to bribery in both the private and public sector.

## CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

While the Latvian justice system is assessed as being efficient, it has been criticized for issues related to judicial independence and for not meeting the high expectations of Latvian society regarding judicial power. The independence of the judiciary has been strengthened by its growing role

in the selection of candidates for the positions of judge and prosecutor general, as well as in the appointment of court presidents. However, problems remain with the prosecution of corruption cases and their adjudication in the courts, where proceedings are often lengthy. Furthermore, the overloaded justice system has led to a delay in investigations, with almost half of all criminal cases being over five years old. Notable gaps include training for judges, prosecutors and law enforcement officers, particularly in the area of human trafficking, including working with victims, evidence collection and understanding psychological intimidation. Law enforcement is perceived to be fairly unreliable in protecting citizens from crime and upholding the rule of law. Nevertheless, Latvia is assessed as having a sufficiently resilient system that allows authorities to fight organized crime. The adequate coordination of anti-organized crime activities of law enforcement agencies ensured by a specialized body has a large role to play in that.

With regard to territorial integrity, Latvia is part of the Schengen Agreement and thus has no permanent and physical border controls with Lithuania and Estonia or a maritime border with Sweden. However, the border with Russia is well protected and Latvia completed the construction of a fence along the border in 2019. There are plans for a similar fence to be built on the border with Belarus.

## ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Although criminal groups in Latvia are active in a number of economic sectors and implicated in money laundering, they do not exert control over any of them. Moreover, there is no indication that criminals seriously affect the ease of doing business in the country. Thus, the economy is assessed to be among the freest in the world. Money laundering, as reported, is a problem, with Latvian banks often used to legalize foreign proceeds. Riga is considered to be a money-laundering hub but combatting this crime is a national priority and some progress in identifying and addressing key vulnerabilities has been made.

## CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

The Latvian government is increasing efforts to implement victim support services within the country. Victims are eligible for a state-funded victim assistance programme, which offers medical and psychological assistance, legal representation, housing and reintegration services. Written procedures for identifying victims exist for law enforcement, immigration and social services. However, the government's human trafficking working group reports that most government agencies lack either the practical experience or willingness to carry out these mandates. Additionally, identifying child victims who have been trafficked for sexual exploitation remains a challenge domestically. There are also concerns about Latvia's legal prostitution industry, where law enforcement is focused on fines for individuals who violate

prostitution regulations or other criminal statutes rather than on identifying potential trafficking victims.

In terms of prevention, Latvia's efforts differ across the spectrum depending on the organized crime markets, but the government is focused on combatting human trafficking and migrant smuggling. Two human trafficking task forces have been established at the municipal. The government has also amended labour regulations to include the requirement of licensed placement agencies to ensure a minimum wage for workers hired for employment outside Latvia. NGOs run most of the government-funded victim assistance programmes offering medical and psychological assistance, legal representation, housing and reintegration services for victims of human trafficking. Overall, Latvia is considered to have a free press. However, there are a growing number of verbal attacks against journalists on social media.

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