



Nodarbinātības valsts aģentūra



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## FIRST STEPS TO EMPLOYMENT

Useful information for asylum seekers, refugees,  
and persons with a subsidiary protection status

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# **FIRST STEPS TO EMPLOYMENT**

Useful information for asylum seekers, refugees,  
and persons with a subsidiary protection status

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## **WELCOME TO THE STATE EMPLOYMENT AGENCY!**

As soon as you have obtained the status of a refugee or an alternative (subsidiary protection) status and have received a residence permit and travel document, you have the right to undertake a job.

A person can search for a job by him-/herself or appeal for help from the State Employment Agency.

The State Employment Agency (SEA) is an institution which helps the residents of Latvia, including refugees and persons who have obtained an alternative status, to find a job. The SEA will offer you information on vacancies and support in job search. The SEA also organizes Latvian language and vocational training courses, offers career advice and counselling on starting a business.





## RESIDENCE PERMIT

- The Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs has granted you a residence permit in Latvia.
- You receive a personal identity code and an identity document – a travel document.
- Your path to employment starts here!



## MENTOR

- A mentor helps you start an independent life in Latvia – advises you on how to find accommodation, enrolls your children in school or kindergarten, opens a bank account.
- A mentor helps you arrange your first meeting with a State Employment Agency advisor.



## VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

- You can broaden and hone your professional skills.
- You can acquire a new profession.



## JOB

- Look for appropriate vacancies by yourself or together with a SEA advisor.
- Take up a subsidised job or start on-site training.
- Start working independently.





## INTERVIEW AT SEA

- A State Employment Agency advisor will ask you about your education and work experience in the country you come from.
- You will be granted the unemployed or job seeker's status.
- You will jointly draw up a career plan and a Latvian language learning plan.



## LATVIAN LANGUAGE CLASSES

- You will learn Latvian free of charge.
- Learning without an intermediary language by using Latvian on a daily basis.
- You will receive an allowance of EUR 100.



## HOW TO BECOME A SEA CLIENT?

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### Where and how to register?

To become a SEA client you have to register at any of the 28 SEA offices in Latvia. You can do it upon arrival at the office in person or after arranging an appointment in advance by telephone +371 25704510 in Latvian, English or Russian. The visit must be pre-booked so that an interpreter can be invited to help you in communicating with a SEA official.

### What documents to bring?

Make sure you bring the following:

- a personal identity document (a passport or an identification card – eiD) or a travel document;
- a residence permit;
- education certificates, if you have any.

### How does registration take place?

On the first visit, you will have a conversation on your abilities and skills, work experience and interests. Together with a SEA advisor you will prepare an individual job search plan that contains advice on training and job vacancies or other SEA support services.

Although a specialised SEA advisor will be there to assist you in job search, you must actively seek employment by yourself.

## HOW TO MAINTAIN THE UNEMPLOYED STATUS?

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To keep your unemployed status, you have to regularly contact your employment advisor (e.g., by phone or e-mail), attend all courses and other training events listed in your individual job search plan, actively seek employment, and consistently arrive at the SEA on the set date and time.

Your employment advisor may invite you to visit him or her some other time. You must reply to the invitation and arrive at the SEA in three working days' time.



## HOW DO I BENEFIT FROM BEING REGISTERED AS UNEMPLOYED?

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SEA clients are entitled to receive all SEA services in support of job search free of charge. At first you will be offered to learn the Latvian language. To live and work in Latvia you must be able to speak its official language – Latvian. Once you have mastered the basics you will be able to start job search and work, as well as use other SEA services.

## THE LATVIAN LANGUAGE

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LV

At the SEA language courses Latvian is taught without the help of any other language and on various levels of language competence (see more below). You can take a course in the Latvian language free of charge. While attending the courses you will receive a **monthly study allowance of EUR 100** to cover learning costs, in addition to benefits granted to a refugee or an alternative status holder.

Take into mind that there may be waiting lists for Latvian classes. If so, wait for your employment advisor to contact you and let you know when the next course is expected to start. If you fail to start at the time offered, you may lose your place on the list.

Latvian classes take place in small groups every weekday for 3 to 4 hours. A course on each level lasts for 120 academic hours, namely, 6 to 8 weeks. After completing the course on any level, the trainees have an opportunity to take a Latvian language exam at the National Centre for Education.

Upon successfully passing the Latvian language exam, you will receive a certificate that will serve as proof to your employer and education institutions of your ability to communicate in Latvian.

To make steady progress with your language studies, use your newly-acquired knowledge in daily life to communicate with locals and enhance your skills by using self-instruction books and internet resources.

**Once you have started a course, classes must be attended regularly till the end, otherwise you will have to reimburse study fees that the SEA has spent and the allowance paid to you.**



## Latvian language skill levels

The level of Latvian language skills in Latvia is assessed in accordance with a common European six-level system.

At the Latvian language courses you can learn the language in 3 proficiency level groups: basic user – A, independent user – B, and proficient user – C. Each proficiency level group has two levels: lower – level 1 and higher – level 2.

### Level group A – Basic User

**Level 1 (A1)** – a person can interact in a simple way on basic daily topics; can do simple jobs that do not require much interaction with people, for instance, a street sweeper, kitchen worker, cattle-farm worker.

**Level 2 (A2)** – a person can communicate on daily and professional topics he or she is familiar with, reads and understands simple texts on daily life and work; can be employed as a construction worker, plumber, welder, dressmaker.

### Level group B – Independent User

**Level 1 (B1)** – a person can express his or her opinion, reads and understands simple texts on various topics. This level of language skills is needed for trade and professions involving provision of services, e.g. chef's assistant, hairdresser, manicurist, driver.

**Level 2 (B2)** – a person can communicate on daily and professional topics, clearly formulate his or her opinion, reads and understands texts on various topics, can compose documents needed for work. This level of language skills is needed for, e.g., an accountant, shop assistant, mechanic. Upon mastering the language at B2 level, you can take up the SEA vocational education courses and receive other services that are provided in Latvian.

### Level group C – Proficient User

**Level 1 (C1)** – a person can freely interact, freely express and substantiate his or her opinion on various topics, read and understand texts of various content and complexity level, write varied business correspondence. This skill level is required from, e.g., teachers, doctors, architects, CEOs.

**Level 2 (C2)** – a person has near-native language skills. This level is required from senior public officials, people whose work involves document processing and management, as well as translators and interpreters.



## PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION

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If you know Latvian at the level that enables you to interact and study and you want to enhance your professional knowledge or learn a new trade, you can enroll on **professional education courses** and **master a profession that is being offered**, for instance, that of a dressmaker, carpenter or welder. If you pass the exam after the completion of the course, you will be issued with a professional qualification certificate, which will enable you to work in the given field.

If you already have a profession, but want to **expand or improve your professional knowledge** and obtain a certificate of your skills issued in Latvia, the SEA offers courses for, e.g., hairdressers, accountants, social workers.

In a conversation with a SEA consultant you can find out which courses could help you in building your future career and when they are available (some courses are in high demand and there is a waiting list).

Upon taking up the course, in addition to benefits granted to you as a refugee or an alternative status holder, you will receive a monthly allowance of EUR 100 to cover study-related costs.

## ON-SITE TRAINING

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Some employers offer an opportunity to work in their company while also learning a trade. This is done under the training programme “Practical on-site training”.

Upon joining the programme you will:

- undergo a six-month practical training,
- get a qualified mentor,
- be employed for at least six months, if an employment contract is signed with you after completion of the on-site training,
- be paid at least a minimum wage.

**On-site training takes place in the Latvian language and therefore your knowledge of Latvian should be at least at the intermediate level (B).**

## PAID TEMPORARY COMMUNITY SERVICE

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If you have not been employed over the past year, you have an opportunity to take up a temporary job for the local government and work for the public good. This may mean cleaning up a city park or premises in public buildings or other work.

For doing paid temporary community service you will receive a monthly **allowance of EUR 150** in addition to benefits granted to you as a refugee or an alternative status holder. You may work **no longer than four months within a 12 month period** without interruption or by taking breaks. You may also join the scheme repeatedly.

## SUBSIDISED JOBS

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If you have been unemployed for at least 12 months and your education and work experience meet the employer's needs, the SEA will offer you to consider a subsidised job. Under a subsidised job scheme public funds are used to partly pay the wages to you and your mentor for one or two years.

Upon joining the scheme you will:

- get a qualified mentor,
- be paid at least the minimum wage.

## COMPETITIVENESS BUILDING MEASURES

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The SEA offers one or several day courses, seminars and lectures (5 to 63 academic hours), for instance, on the development of business plans, improving Latvian language skills, use of e-services, preparing CVs and application letters – this will add to a more successful job search. Ask your employment advisor for a full offer of courses, lectures and workshops.

**Courses, seminars, lectures and consultations are held in the Latvian language. Your knowledge of Latvian should be at least at the intermediate level (B) for you to follow.**



## SUPPORT FOR SELF-EMPLOYMENT OR STARTING A BUSINESS

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At the SEA you can also receive counselling and financial support for starting a business or becoming self-employed. Applicants should have an education certificate in business, business management or other equivalent areas.

During the programme you will receive advice on how to draw up a business plan. The implementers of the most promising business plans selected by experts will also receive counselling during their first year and a subsidy for setting up their business.

## SEA SUPPORT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

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The young unemployed have access to special support programmes promoting the engagement of young people in the labour market. A part of those schemes are similar to support programmes targeting adults – such as support in job search, courses, seminars, vocational education – while others have been tailor-made for young people in particular.

### Workshops for young people

Young people are offered an opportunity to try out three vocational education programmes, both in terms of theory and practice, from the list provided by the SEA. Each education programme can be tested for two weeks, so that it would be easier for the young people to choose which educational and vocational career path to pursue in future.

The workshops are meant for young unemployed people aged 15 to 24, who have not acquired any vocational qualifications and have not worked in any occupation before.

The programme's duration is six weeks and an additional monthly **allowance of EUR 60** is paid to a young person with a refugee or alternative status.

### Job skill development in the non-governmental sector

The young unemployed aged 18 to 24 can obtain job experience by working for public good in non-governmental organisations.

They have to work five days a week no less than 4 hours and no more than 8 hours per day in accordance with a schedule set out in a contract with the young unemployed person.

In addition to their benefits as refugees or persons with alternative status, these young people receive a **monthly allowance of 90 EUR** in proportion to the number of days they have worked that month.

### First work experience

Young people aged 18 to 29, who have acquired vocational or professional qualifications or higher education, can get their first workplace experience with an employer. The monthly wage paid to a full-time employed young person is not less than the statutory minimum wage in the country. Young people are not involved in unskilled or low-skilled labour.

### JOB SEEKER STATUS

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You can also register with the State Employment Agency when you are seeking employment but cannot obtain the unemployed status for some reason. In these cases the SEA will help you in job search and you will be entitled to free Latvian language courses; however, you will not be paid an allowance for such a course.

WORK



## WORK

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Refugees and persons with an alternative status have the same right to employment and wages as any other resident of Latvia.

### Work culture in Latvia

Work culture in Latvia is based on equality: employees and management treat each other with respect regardless of position. It is the employers' duty to ensure work and safe working conditions. Employees must follow instructions from the management and do their work responsibly.

In workplaces it is important to stick to agreements and keep promises. Delays and going back on one's words are seen as impolite.

### Before starting employment

It is easier to start employment if you have made inquiries about the company or the organisation you would like to start working for. This can be done, for instance, by visiting the company's website. Besides, acquaint yourself with the Labour Law of Latvia and ask your future employer about working terms and recommendations.

### Work contract

Before starting work sign an employment contract. It should bear both your signature and that of the employer. Get the contract signed in two copies and keep one copy. Never sign a contract if you do not understand its provisions.

### In the workplace

In Latvia punctuality is important in any workplace and people observe working hours. If the workday starts at eight you must be ready to start work at eight. You will be seen as unreliable, if you are often late for work.



## Equality

Gender equality must be observed in any workplace. Women receive the same treatment as men, and foreign nationals – the same treatment as the residents of Latvia. Women and men receive an equal pay for equal work. Setting different tasks to employees with different levels of education, professional experience, job and language skills cannot be considered as discrimination.

## Language skills

Knowledge of Latvian is an advantage in job search; however, employers in Latvia often also look for candidates who speak English or Russian. Be active and open for various opportunities!

## Disagreement in the workplace

If you have issues with your employer, work conditions or performance of your employment contract and you are unable to resolve them by talking it over with your employer, turn to the State Labour Inspectorate.

### **State Labour Inspectorate**

**Address:** Kr.Valdemāra iela 38 k-1, Rīga

**Consultation phone:** +371 67186522, +371 67186523

**E-mail:** vdi@vdi.gov.lv

**Website:** www.vdi.gov.lv



**OTHER  
IMPORTANT  
INFORMATION**





## HOUSING

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### **Municipality support**

For persons, who are poor and in the low-income bracket, the municipality provides assistance with finding accommodation. There are municipality-owned social flats for people who require assistance. Their number, however, is limited and usually there is a long waiting list, so probably you will have to find your own flat to rent.

The municipality also assists with rent payments. The amount paid by the municipality varies and is subject to regulations on social assistance and financial capability of each individual municipality. To find out if you qualify for such assistance, please contact the social services of the respective municipality or ask your mentor for help.

### **Finding a flat and rental prices**

You can do your own internet search on rental websites, municipality advertisement websites or opt for housing agency services. Rental prices depend on the location, size and condition of the flat, for example, a flat in the city centre will cost considerably more than a flat in the suburbs; a flat in a small town will be cheaper than a flat in a large city.

### **Security deposit**

Please take into account the fact that landlords will often require to pay in advance the rent for the first month along with a security deposit, which is normally the equivalent of one or two months' rent. After your lease ends the landlord will return the safety deposit. The landlord might not return the safety deposit if you have unpaid rental bills or the condition of the flat has seriously deteriorated as a result of your presence.

### **The lease agreement**

Always secure a lease agreement and make sure that you understand the terms and conditions before signing it. You should also find out whether the landlord does not mind you declaring your place of residence in the apartment.

## Moving

When moving from one place of residence to another several things must be remembered:

- The previous lease agreement must be terminated before moving to a new residence. You should notify the landlord of your intentions to move out at least a month before or as specified in the lease agreement.
- You should thoroughly clean the apartment before moving out.
- You have to declare your place of residence within a month of moving to the new apartment. Foreign nationals with residence permits issued in the Republic of Latvia can declare their place of residence at the **Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs**.

**Info phone:** 8300

**E-mail:** [pmlp@pmlp.gov.lv](mailto:pmlp@pmlp.gov.lv)

**Website:** [www.pmlp.gov.lv](http://www.pmlp.gov.lv)

## EDUCATION



Education is crucial! Everyone in Latvia has the right to receive education. Education will help you and your children to find a job that you enjoy and where your skills and qualities can be used.

### Kindergartens and day-care centres

If possible, children aged 1.5 to 5 should attend kindergarten – it will foster their development, help them befriend locals, and they will learn the language through play. The better their language skills are, the easier their schooling will be.

- Ask mentors at the Centre for Asylum Seekers on the possibility of sending your child to the local kindergarten.
- Once international protection has been granted, you should contact the municipality or the chosen kindergarten on the possibility of your child's attendance. Ask mentors for help if necessary.
- Please do not hesitate to inform the relevant institution about your wish to send your children to kindergarten. In Latvian cities there is often a long waiting list for a place in municipal kindergartens, therefore it is advisable to sign your child up right after birth or as soon as possible.
- Preschool education is mandatory for children aged five and more. Its purpose is to prepare the child for school. It is the duty of the parents to sign their children up for a kindergarten or a school so that they can receive this education.



## Basic education

- Basic education from grade one to grade nine is mandatory for all children in Latvia.
- Basic education is not mandatory for adults; nevertheless, it can be received at evening schools.
- Basic education has two stages – grades one through four and grades five through nine. Schools with grades one through four are called primary schools.
- Study books for pupils are provided by the school. Parents, according to their ability, have to provide their children with individual necessities, such as writing and painting utensils, clothing, including school uniforms, footwear, etc.
- Ask mentors for help to sign your child up for school.
- To sign up for school several documents will be required – ID documents for parents, the child's passport or birth certificate, the child's photograph and a medical record card. In case of specific questions regarding the documents, please contact the school.
- If your child has attended school, but there are no documents to confirm that, the school will test his or her level of education.
- If your child does not speak Latvian the school must provide Latvian lessons.

## Secondary education

After basic education you do not have to continue studies; however, this is advisable because it helps you compete in the job market. If you have attained a Certificate of Basic Education you can continue studies in a general upper secondary school or vocational school.

- You are free to choose the town, school and education programme.
- After finishing secondary school you will receive a Certificate of Secondary Education. After that you can continue studies to acquire higher education. Schools have multiple educational profiles – comprehensive education, the humanities and social sciences programme, the mathematics, natural science and technical science programme.
- If you choose a vocational school, in addition to secondary education you will also learn a profession. After graduating from such schools you can either work in the acquired profession or continue your studies.
- After graduating from a vocational school you can continue studies in the chosen profession or pursue a completely different line of higher education.

## Higher education

If you have attained general or professional secondary education you can continue studies in a higher education institution. There you can attain an academic or professional bachelor's, master's or doctoral degree.

- In most higher education institutions there is a tuition fee.
- Some study programmes have places with tuition fees covered by the state. Their number is limited and only students with the best exam results are entitled to them.
- Some higher education institutions also provide study programmes in English.

### Adult education

In Latvia adults are free to study a new profession or to continue any unfinished studies.

- Adults are free to study the same content that young people do. They can receive higher, vocational, secondary or basic education. Adults can receive secondary or basic education in evening schools. In these schools lessons are held in the evenings. This way you can work during the day and attend classes in the evening.
- There are higher education programmes with lectures in the evenings or on weekends, as well as extramural courses (you only have to attend certain lectures, the rest of the time you study at home).
- Adults can also learn through various lifelong education courses. There could be language, culinary, sport or dance courses. Usually there is a charge for the course, but there are also some offers for free.
- If you are unemployed, please contact the State Employment Agency, which provides free-of-charge courses for raising your qualification or learning a new profession so that you can find a job.

### Recognition of previously attained education

If you have documents confirming academic or professional education attained abroad it is advisable to submit them for formal recognition. This way it will be easier for you to compete in the job market or to continue studies. Please inquire the Academic Information Centre on formal recognition of educational documents.

#### Academic Information Centre

**Address:** Dzirnavu iela 16, 3rd floor, Riga

**Phone:** +371 67225155

**E-mail:** aic@aic.lv



Social benefits	Asylum seekers	Persons with an alternative status	Refugees
Family State Benefit	✗	✗	✓
Allowance for Child (till the age of 1.5) Care	✗	✗	✓
Allowance for Child (till the age of 2) Care	✗	✗	✓
Benefit to Custodian for Supporting a Child	✗	✗	✓
Consideration for Performing Custodian's Duties	✓	✓	✓
Allowance for the Fulfilment of Foster Family Duties	✗	✗	✓
Allowance for the Care of an Adopted Child	✗	✗	✓
Disabled Child Care Benefit	✗	✗	✓

## SOCIAL SECURITY AND SERVICES



You are entitled to social assistance and benefits for a fresh start in Latvia, if you are without means of subsistence and you have been granted a refugee or alternative status.

### Residence allowance

The allowance for covering initial subsistence costs is received by persons with a refugee or alternative status.

### Social benefits

Social benefits are determined by the state in order to provide material support for certain groups of people.

## State social security benefits

If you are employed and have made social insurance contributions you are entitled to State Social Security Benefits.

The state social security system guarantees a certain replacement in case of lost income – unemployment, sickness, before and after childbirth, in case of an accident at work or occupational disease, in case of loss of a supporter, etc. The amount of social security payments (pensions, benefits and allowances) is individual and depends on the amount of income, from which social security contributions have been made.

Here are the benefits you are entitled to if you are employed, if you have a refugee or alternative status and if the rest of the requirements are fulfilled:

- Unemployment Benefit
- Sickness Benefit
- Maternity Benefit
- Paternity Benefit
- Parents' Benefit
- Old Age Pension
- Disability Pension
- Compensation Related to an Accident at Work or Occupational Disease

Detailed information on benefits and their amount is available at the **State Social Security Agency** ([www.vsaa.lv](http://www.vsaa.lv)), Latvian, English and Russian versions are provided.

**The e-mail for consultations:** [konsultacijas@vsaa.lv](mailto:konsultacijas@vsaa.lv)

**Website:** [www.vsaa.lv](http://www.vsaa.lv)

## BE PATIENT – THINGS TAKE TIME!



Sometimes it might be hard to get accustomed to a foreign country and its culture. To help you adjust to the new community, there are various non-governmental organisations, which are there to advise, offer practical assistance, and organise different cultural and recreational activities.

**Latvian Red Cross** – offers assistance to all who are in crisis, regardless of their nationality, race, religious beliefs, social position or political affiliations.

**Website:** [www.redcross.lv](http://www.redcross.lv)



Society “Shelter “Safe House”” consults victims of human trafficking, legal immigrants, including asylum seekers, refugees and persons granted an alternative status.

**Phone consultations for third-country nationals:** +371 25565098

**E-mail:** [drosa.maja@gmail.com](mailto:drosa.maja@gmail.com)

**Website:** [www.patverums-dm.lv](http://www.patverums-dm.lv)

## OTHER USEFUL CONTACTS



**Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs** – issues personal ID documents and travel documents, maintains the Civil Register.

**Info phone:** 8300

**E-mail:** [pmlp@pmlp.gov.lv](mailto:pmlp@pmlp.gov.lv)

**Website:** [www.pmlp.gov.lv](http://www.pmlp.gov.lv)

**Academic Information Centre** – conducts formal academic recognition of foreign education documents.

**Phone:** +371 67225155

**E-mail:** [aic@aic.lv](mailto:aic@aic.lv)

**Website:** [www.aic.lv](http://www.aic.lv)

**Road Traffic Safety Directorate (CSDD)** – conducts vehicle registration, driving license examination, issues driving licenses, ensures technical inspections, maintains the State Register of Vehicles and Drivers, and informs and educates traffic members.

**Phone:** +371 67025777

**E-mail:** [csdd@csdd.gov.lv](mailto:csdd@csdd.gov.lv)

**Website:** [www.csdd.lv](http://www.csdd.lv)

**Joint State and Municipal e-Services Portal [www.latvija.lv](http://www.latvija.lv)** – provides virtual access to services of the state and municipal institutions, information on how to apply and receive the services, on related payments and service descriptions.

**State Employment Agency** – specialized consultant for refugees and persons with an alternative status.

**Phone:** +371 25704510 (in Latvian, English or Russian)

**E-mail:** [nva@nva.gov.lv](mailto:nva@nva.gov.lv)

**Website:** [www.nva.gov.lv](http://www.nva.gov.lv)