

Latvia

Latvia is an independent republic, and a recent member of the European Union. It has a substantial Russian-speaking population. It has a population of 2.2 million and close links with Estonia and Lithuania.

Constitution and government	Education and children's rights	Family, community, society, religious courts and tribunals	Freedom of expression advocacy of humanist values
<u>There is systematic religious privilege</u> <u>State-funding of religious institutions or salaries, or discriminatory tax exemptions</u>			
<u>Official symbolic deference to religion</u>	<u>State-funded schools offer religious or ideological instruction with no secular or humanist alternative, but it is optional</u>		<u>Some concerns about political or media freedoms, not specific to the non-religious</u>
		<u>No religious tribunals of concern, secular groups operate freely, individuals are not persecuted by the state</u>	

Legend

Constitution and government

Latvia has a relatively high percentage of people indicating they were atheist, 18.3%
<<http://www.livescience.com/19972-atheism-belief-god-countries-ranked.html>

The 2014 Latvian constitution states that everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. The church shall be separate from the State. There is no state religion, but the law provides eight religious groups with rights and privileges denied to other religious groups, and non-believers. The eight are Lutherans, Catholics, Orthodox Christians, Old Believers, Baptists, Methodists, Seventh-day Adventists, and Jews.

These groups are a part of the government's Ecclesiastical Council, which (chaired by the Prime Minister) advises the government on religious matters. There is no equivalent provision for non-religious people. These groups have the right to officiate at marriages.

Religious privileges

Although the government does not require religious groups to register, the law accords registered religious groups a number of rights and privileges, including legal entity status for owning property

and conducting financial transactions, as well as tax benefits for donors. Registration allows religious groups to hold services in public places such as parks or public squares. Non-religious groups cannot register or secure these benefits.

Education and children's rights

The eight privileged religious groups can teach their religion in public schools, with state financial support, in first to third grades, and to those who elect to take such classes. Depending on the grade level, courses in public schools range from "doctrinal instruction by church-approved instructors, to include non-denominational Christian teachings, to overviews of major world religions." Parents can also register their children for voluntary, non-religious ethics classes.

<refworld.org/docid/53d9075610.html>

Freedom of expression, advocacy of humanist values

The constitution states that everyone has the right to freedom of expression, which includes the right to freely receive, keep and distribute information and to express his or her views. Censorship is prohibited. The government generally respects freedom of the press, but investigative journalists and whistleblowers sometimes face criminal charges as a result of their reporting.

<refworld.org/docid/53b2b8bd14.html>