



ANNUAL REPORT
OF THE JUDICIAL
COUNCIL OF
THE REPUBLIC
OF LATVIA

2024

TIESLIETU

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INTRODUCTORY REMARKS BY AIGARS STRUPIŠS, CHAIR OF THE JUDICIAL COUNCIL

Another busy and active year in the judicial system has passed. The Annual Report of the Judicial Council, which is being published for the third time, helps us to look back on the past year, thus establishing a lasting tradition of the judicial system and providing information on its work. This information is important not only for the judiciary and its members, but also for the wider public in order to strengthen understanding of the work and development of the courts.

Public trust in the judiciary continues to grow. According to a study by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 48% of Latvians trust the courts, which is the highest score in history. This shows that the judicial system is developing in the right direction, ensuring high quality and transparent justice. This is the result of our joint work.

The year 2024 was marked by a number of important steps in strengthening the judiciary: measures were taken to strengthen the independence of the judiciary, balance the workload of judges and increase the efficiency of the courts. One of the most important tasks of the past year was the launch of the reform of the administrative management of the courts. The reform is now planned to take place in two phases: initially by strengthening the involvement of the Judicial Council in the functional planning of the courts' administrative support system, as well as in the budgeting and administrative supervision of the courts. The next phase, which will take several years to implement, will involve institutional reform of the



Court Administration, developing it as an independent institution of the judiciary.

The development of the judicial support staff system is another key component of the work of the Judicial Council, which continues in 2025. The Judicial Council is working closely with the Ministry of Justice to ensure that the judiciary has qualified and adequately remunerated legal staff.

Work on the Judicial Academy was also completed in 2024. The activities of the Academy are aimed at implementing a comprehensive approach to the development of the professional competences of the judiciary, developing both initial training (including training for judicial candidates) and qualification development programmes, as well as competences in innovation, research and international cooperation. The Judicial Academy will implement long-term training programmes that complement each other in a sequential manner, so that a culture of learning will be part of professional responsibility and will foster an appropriate environment for the sustainability of learning outcomes.

This Annual Report includes a new section, Court news, which brings together information and views received from all Latvian court presidents on the most significant challenges faced by the courts in 2024.

It is one of the functions of the court's president to see the court he or she heads in the judicial system as a whole and to be able to see development trends and perspectives. This section focuses in particular on the standards of case processing times, increasing the efficiency of the courts and promoting uniform case law. This information is essential to strengthen the transparency of the work of the courts and to enhance public understanding of judicial developments.

Preparations are now complete and the General Assembly of the European Network of Councils for the Judiciary (ENCJ) will soon take place in Riga in June 2025, with the central theme of "Challenges to judicial independence in today's world". This will be an important event not only for the Latvian judicial system, but also at European level, which will allow the Judicial Council to strengthen international cooperation and share experience with other European judicial councils.

Looking ahead, 2025 will not be easy and will be full of challenges. It will require finding solutions to activate the internal reserves of the judiciary and to ensure the right to a fair trial, as well as facilitating the involvement of new judges and judicial staff in the judicial system.

In conclusion, I would like to express my gratitude to the members of the Judicial Council, all Latvian judges, employees of the judicial system, the Administration of the Supreme Court, the Court Administration, the Ministry of Justice, as well as the Secretariat of the Judicial Council for their work. Our common task is to ensure the rule of law, to protect fundamental human rights, to strengthen the independence of the judiciary and to ensure a high quality and efficiency of judicial work. I am confident that, by working together, we will continue to develop the judicial system, ensuring accessible and effective justice for the public.

Aigars Strupišs,
President of the Supreme Court and the Judicial Council

JUDICIAL COUNCIL AND ITS WORK PRIORITIES

About the Judicial Council

The Judicial Council is a collegial body that participates in the development of judicial policy and strategy, as well as in the improvement of the organisation of judicial work. Its aim is to strengthen the independence of the judiciary, promote self-organisation of the work of the judiciary and ensure unified representation of the judiciary in relations with other branches and institutions of state power.

As an independent, democratic and country governed by the rule of law, Latvia has three branches of power – the legislative, executive and judiciary – which are exercised by independent and autonomous institutions, in accordance with the principle of separation of powers. This principle guarantees balance, mutual control and promotes moderation. In a democratic state governed by the rule of law, the three branches of government complement each other, none is superior to the others and none dominates. However, in order to ensure fair and impartial court proceedings, the independence of the judiciary must be particularly protected by the state. The development of constitutionalism in Europe has highlighted the need for an independent institution representing the judiciary, which can express the collective opinion of the judiciary and strengthen the independence of the judiciary from the executive.

In Latvia, the Judicial Council plays a decisive role in both solving the problems of the judicial system, improving the efficiency and quality of the work of the courts, and building public confidence in the courts. The Judicial Council was established on 1 August 2010, following the entry into force of amendments to the law “On Judicial Power”, which added a new Chapter 131 titled “Judicial Council”. The first meeting of the Judicial Council was held on 4 October 2010, when the Rules of Procedure of the Judicial Council were approved and the first issues related to the organisation of judicial work were examined.

12 February 2018 was a date of a significant milestone in the development of the functions of the Judicial Council, when amendments to the law “On Judicial Power” entered into force, extending the competence of the Judicial Council to include the right to decide on the career development of judges, the procedure for selecting court presidents and judges. These amendments were made in order to strengthen the independence of the judiciary by limiting the influence of the executive and legislative powers in these matters.

The functions of the Judicial Council can thus be broadly divided into three areas: conceptual and organisational issues of the management of the judicial system, career issues of judges, and cooperation with other branches of state power.



1. Conceptual and organisational issues of the judicial system

- Determination of the territories of operation of district (city) courts and regional courts.
- Determination of the number of judges in district (city) courts, regional courts and Supreme Court departments.
- Approval of the reorganisation plan for district (city) courts.
- Establishing the procedures for the selection of candidates for judicial office, for the traineeship and for the qualification examination.
- Approval of the procedure for testing the professional knowledge of judges and the model documents required.
- Approval of the basic principles for the specialisation of judges and the procedure for determining caseload indicators.
- Approval of standards for case processing times.
- Approval of the content of training programmes for judges and court staff.

2. Career issues of judges

- Assignment of judicial duties to newly appointed judges.
- Transfer of a judge to a court of the same level, to a higher or lower court.
- Assignment of judicial duties in the event of a vacancy or temporary absence of a judge.
- Appointment or dismissal of a president of a district (city) court and a president of a regional court.
- Awarding the status of judge emeritus.

3. Cooperation with other branches of government

- Providing an opinion on budgetary requests of courts.
- Providing an opinion on candidates for the office of judge of the Constitutional Court.
- Providing an opinion on a candidate for the office of President of the Supreme Court.
- Selecting a candidate for the office of Prosecutor General and submitting the candidate to the Saeima (parliament) for confirmation.
- Exercising the right to submit an application to the Constitutional Court on issues of importance to the judicial system.

The priorities of the Judicial Council are set out in its approved work planning and strategic documents. Particularly noteworthy is the **Judicial Council's Operational Strategy 2021-2025**, approved on 12 March 2021, which highlights four main lines of action:

- Strengthening the independence of the judiciary;
- Strengthening the functionality and role of the Judicial Council;
- Ensuring an efficient and high-quality judiciary;
- Promoting public confidence in the judiciary.

Each year, priority areas of action are identified for the whole year in order to effectively coordinate the work to be carried out and to ensure the implementation of the Judicial Council's Operational Strategy 2021-2025.

In 2024, the Judicial Council set a number of key priorities for its work, including:

- Approval of the concept for the transfer of administrative support functions of the judiciary from the executive to the judiciary;
- Assessment of the results of the judicial reform to date, including the impact of the reorganisation of courts of first instance on the implementation of judicial functions and productivity, the implementation of land registry case management functions in courts and the prospects for the development of this system, as well as the accessibility of courts in the regions and the possibilities for optimising court locations;
- Assess the possibilities for developing the standards of office and remuneration system for judicial support staff.

COMPOSITION OF THE JUDICIAL COUNCIL



First row from left: Judge Baiba Ozoliņa of the Riga City Court, Senator Rudīte Viduša of the Supreme Court's Department of Administrative Cases, Chair of the Latvian Council of Sworn Bailiffs Iveta Kruka, Chair of the Latvian Council of Sworn Advocates Jānis Rozenbergs, Chair of the Saeima Legal Affairs Committee Andrejs Judins, Minister of Justice Inese Lībiņa-Egnere, President of the Supreme Court Aigars Strupiņš, President of the Constitutional Court Irēna Kucina, Prosecutor General Juris Stukāns, Chair of the Latvian Council of Sworn Notaries Aigars Kaupe, Judge Ilze Celmiņa of the Riga Regional Court, and President of the Vidzeme District Court Līga Ašitoka. Second row from left: President of the Zemgale Regional Court Juris Siliņš, Chair of Valmiera Courthouse of the Administrative District Court Guntars Ploriņš and President of the Kurzeme District Court Madars Plepis.

The Judicial Council has fifteen members – eight permanent members and seven elected members. The permanent members represent the highest judicial institutions and the most important positions in the judicial system: the President of the Supreme Court, the President of the Constitutional Court, the Minister of Justice, the Chair of the Legal Affairs Committee of the Saeima (parliament), the Prosecutor General, the Chair of the Council of Sworn Advocates, the Chair of the Council of Sworn Notaries and the Chair of the Council of Sworn Bailiffs. The elected members are represented by judges of all three courts: a senator of the Supreme Court, two judges of regional courts and four judges of district (city) courts elected at the Latvian Judges Conference.

According to the law “On Judicial Power”, the President of the Supreme Court is also the Chair of the Judicial Council. The Judicial Council elects a deputy chair

from among the judges it represents. On 18 October 2024, the members of the Judicial Council elected Ilze Celmiņa, Judge of the Riga Regional Court, as Deputy Chair of the Judicial Council. Previously, this position was held by Dzintra Balta, Senator of the Supreme Court, who served as Deputy Chair of the Judicial Council from 15 October 2018 until 10 September 2024.

The term of office of an elected member of the Judicial Council is four years. A judge may be re-elected to the Judicial Council, but not more than twice in succession. The status of an elected member of the Judicial Council shall not be compatible with the duties in the Judicial Disciplinary Committee, the Disciplinary Court, the Judicial Qualification Committee or the Judicial Ethics Commission in order to prevent conflicts of interest and ensure the independence and impartiality of the judiciary.

15 members of the Judicial Council

Eight permanent members (officials) of the Judicial Council are:

- President of the Supreme Court;
- President of the Constitutional Court;
- Minister of Justice;
- Chair of the Legal Affairs Committee of the Saeima (parliament);
- Prosecutor General;
- Chair of the Council of Sworn Advocates;
- Chair of the Council of Sworn Notaries;
- Chair of the Council of Bailiffs.

Seven elected members (judges) of the Judicial Council are:

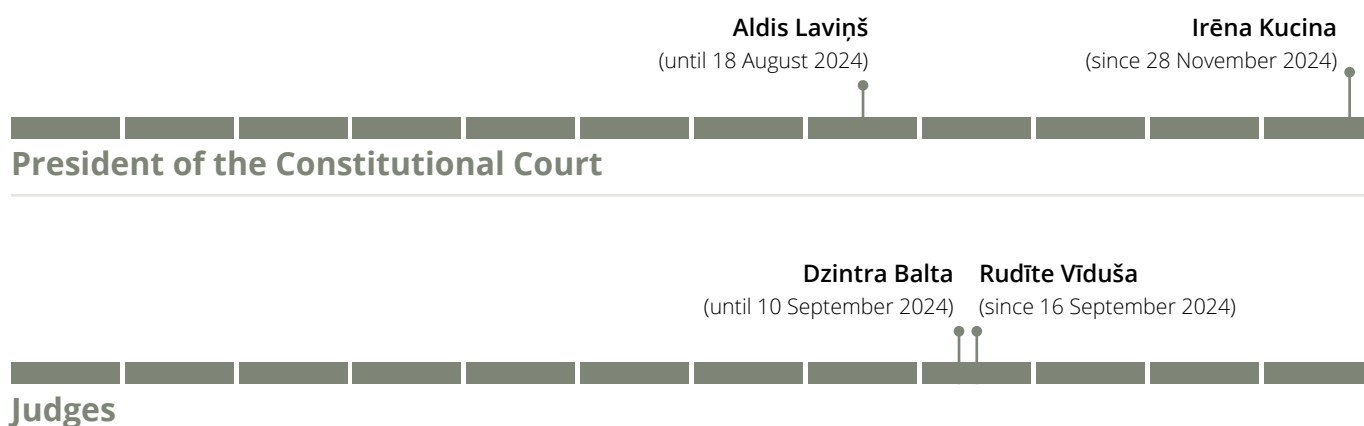
- Senator of the Supreme Court, elected at the Plenary Session of the Supreme Court;
- Two regional court judges, elected at the Latvian Judges Conference;
- Four district (city) court judges elected at the Latvian Judges Conference.

The Ombudsman, the Director of the Court Administration or their authorised representatives, a representative delegated by experts in legal sciences approved by the Latvian Academy of Sciences, as well as representatives of judicial associations may participate in the work of the Judicial Council in an advisory capacity.

The composition of the Judicial Council changed in 2024:

- On 28 November 2024, Irēna Kucina was elected President of the Constitutional Court, as on 18 August 2024 the term of office of the former President of the Constitutional Court, Aldis Laviņš, expired.
- On 16 September 2024, Rudīte Viduša, Senator of the Supreme Court, was elected to the Judicial Council, replacing Senator Dzintra Balta, whose term of office as a member of the Judicial Council expired.
- On 17 September 2024, Ilze Celmiņa, Judge of the Riga Regional Court, was re-elected as a member of the Judicial Council.
- On 26 September 2024, Judge Juris Siliņš, President of the Zemgale Regional Court, was re-elected as a member of the Judicial Council.

Changes to the composition of the Judicial Council in 2024



**Aigars Strupiņš**

President of the
Supreme Court
(since 15.06.2020)

**Ilze Celmiņa**

Judge of the Riga Regional
Court (elected 17.09.2024)

**Irēna Kucina**

President of the
Constitutional Court
(since 28.11.2024)

**Inese Lībiņa-Egnere**

Minister of Justice
(since 14.12.2022)

**Andrejs Judins**

Chair of the Saeima
Legal Affairs Committee
(since 23.11.2022)

**Juris Stukāns**

Prosecutor General
(since 12.07.2020)

**Jānis Rozenbergs**

Chair of the Council
of Sworn Advocates
(since 06.05.2022)

**Aigars Kaupe**

Chair of the Council
of Sworn Notaries
(since 08.12.2023)

**Iveta Kruka**

Chair of the Council
of Sworn Bailiffs
(elected 21.04.2022)

**Rudīte Vīduša**

Senator of the Department
of Administrative Cases of
the Supreme Court
(elected 16.09.2024)

**Juris Siliņš**

President of the Zemgale
Regional Court
(elected 08.09.2020)

**Madars Plepis**

President of the
Kurzeme District Court
(elected 26.10.2023)

**Guntars Ploriņš**

Chair of Valmiera
Courthouse of the
Administrative District Court
(elected 15.09.2022)

**Līga Ašitoka**

President of the Vidzeme
District Court
(elected 10.11.2021)

**Baiba Ozoliņa**

Judge of the Riga City
Court
(elected 28.09.2022)

Secretariat of the Judicial Council



From left: Adviser Dace Šulmane, Head of the Secretariat Alla Spale, Legal research counsel Rihards Veinbergs, Legal adviser Linda Kalniņa, Consultant Irina Čaša and Communications adviser Lana Mauliņa.

According to Section 8910 of the law “On Judicial Power”, the work of the Judicial Council is ensured by the Secretariat of the Judicial Council, which is a structural unit of the Supreme Court. In order to strengthen the management of the Judicial Council and to ensure a logistical framework appropriate to its objectives, competences and scope of activities, a permanent support structure – the Secretariat – was established in 2017. Since 2021, the Secretariat of the Judicial Council has been headed by Alla Spale.

The functions of the Secretariat are defined in the law “On Judicial Council” in accordance with the competences of the Judicial Council and the Chair of the Judicial Council, and include:

- Arranging meetings of the Judicial Council;
- Preparing issues for consideration by the Judicial Council;
- Drafting decisions, opinions, resolutions and other documents;
- Record-keeping of the Judicial Council;
- Organisation of the Latvian Judges Conference in cooperation with the Court Administration;

- Developing and improving organisational guidelines, internal and external laws and regulations of the judicial system;
- Conducting research on topical issues;
- Ensuring the work of the working groups set up by the Judicial Council;
- Maintaining the Judicial Council's communication with the public and the media;
- Maintaining the Judicial Council's international cooperation, including with the European Network of Councils for the Judiciary (ENCJ) and the European Commission;
- Representing the Judicial Council in cooperation with state and local government institutions, self-governing bodies of the judiciary, and international organisations.

The functions set out enable the Secretariat to effectively support the work of the Judicial Council and contribute to the improvement and development of the judicial system.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE JUDICIAL COUNCIL IN 2024

Meetings, decisions, laws and regulations

The work of the Judicial Council is mainly organised in a meeting format, and the issues discussed at the meetings are reflected in the decisions adopted by the Judicial Council. An overview of the quantitative indicators of the Judicial Council's work and the most important decisions adopted in 2024 is therefore provided.



In 2024, the Judicial Council adopted 77 decisions, including

- **47 decisions on judicial career issues:**
 - on determining the place of execution of judicial duties for newly appointed judges;
 - on the transfer of a judge;
 - on the appointment of the deputy president, the president of a court and the chair of a courthouse;
 - on the appointment of the acting president, acting deputy president of a court.
- **22 decisions on conceptual and organisational issues of the judicial system:**
 - on the lines of action of the Judicial Council;
 - on the establishment of working groups of the Judicial Council;
 - on the reassignment of judicial posts;
 - on preparing for the Latvian Judges Conference;
 - on policy planning documents;
 - on guidelines for drafting judicial decisions;
 - on the training plan for judges, court staff, prosecutors and assistants to prosecutors;
- **8 other decisions and opinions:**
 - an opinion on the candidates for the office of Justice of the Constitutional Court;
 - views on court budget issues.



In 2024, 37 meetings of the Judicial Council were held, including:

- 11 in-person meetings;
- 18 written decision-making procedures;
- 8 preparatory meetings.



Regulations on work organisation of the judicial system approved and/or amended by the Judicial Council in 2024:

- Amendments to the procedure for nomination and appointment of a President, a Vice-President of a District (City) Court and a Regional Court and a Chair of the Courthouse (Decision No 5 of the Judicial Council of 19.01.2024);
- Procedure for allowing a person who has committed a criminal offence negligently to participate in the selection of candidates for the office of judge or prosecutor (Decision of the Judicial Council No 14 of 12.02.2024);
- Standard of case processing times in 2024 (Decision of the Judicial Council No 18 of 08.03.2024);
- Guidelines for writing of court decisions in criminal cases for first instance courts and appellate courts (Decision of the Judicial Council No 25 of 24.05.2024);
- Guidelines for writing judgments in administrative violation cases for first instance courts and appellate courts (Decision of the Judicial Council No 29 of 10.06.2024);
- Amendments to the Procedure for Selection of Candidates for the Office of District (City) Court and Regional Court Judge (Decision of the Judicial Council No 53 of 23.07.2024);
- Conditions and procedure for the application for the post of the Director of the Judicial Academy, as well as the procedure for the selection and evaluation of applicants (Decision of the Judicial Council No 73 of 19.11.2024).

Case processing time standards in 2024

Each year, the Judicial Council approves the average time limits for the handling of cases by the courts, taking into account the resources of the courts and the need to ensure a person's right to a trial within a reasonable timeframe, as well as other basic principles of case handling. By 1 February of each year, the presidents of the courts shall submit to the Judicial Council their proposals on the standards for the handling of cases for the following year.

At its meeting on 8 March 2024, the Judicial Council assessed the performance of the courts in the previous year and approved the case examination time standards for 2024.

Until a judgement is passed in a civil case, in 2024 the foreseen average timeframe for the case examination at the first instance was 7.5 months, 5.6 months at the appellate instance and 18 months in cassation.

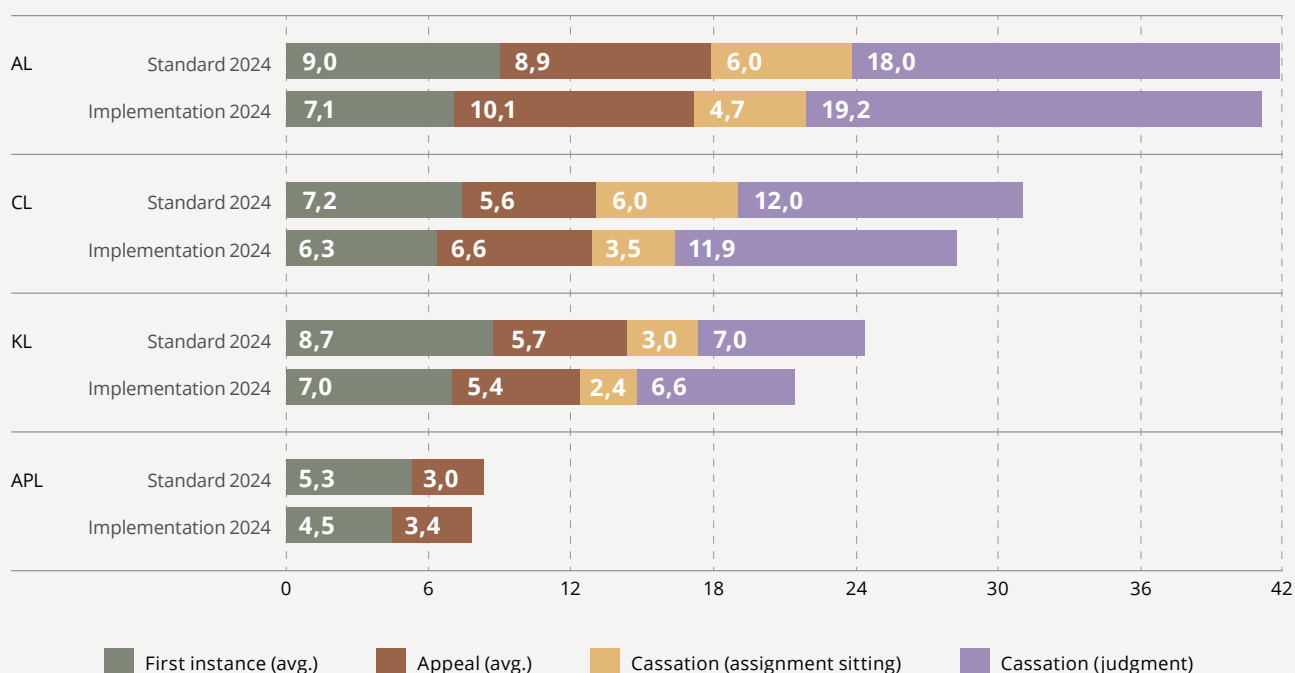
As to criminal cases, in 2024 the average time taken to complete the examination of a case at the first instance was 8.7 months, 5.7 months at the appellate instance, and 10 months in cassation.

What regards administrative cases, in 2024 the foreseen average timeframe for the case examination at the first instance was 9 months, 8.9 months at the appellate instance and 24 months in cassation.

For the examination of administrative violation cases, in 2024 the average timeframe at the first instance was 5.3 months and 3 months at the appellate instance.

Data on average case processing times show that courts have mostly dealt with cases within shorter timeframes than it was planned by the case processing time standards.

Average timeframes per sector 2024 / 2025



Guidelines for writing judgments in criminal cases and administrative violation cases

In 2024, the Working Group for Court Efficiency's work on the development of guidelines for writing judgments for courts of first instance and courts of appeal was completed. In cooperation with the Supreme Court's Division of Case-law and Research, two documents were drafted for approval by the Judicial Council: 'Guidelines for Writing Judgments in Criminal Cases by Courts of First Instance and Courts of Appeal' (approved by the Judicial Council on 24 May 2024) and 'Guidelines for Writing Judgments in Administrative Violation Cases by Courts of First Instance and Courts Appeal' (approved by the Judicial Council on 10 June 2024). The aim of the Guidelines is to improve the quality of judgments and to ensure a uniform approach to the writing of judgments in all courts.

The Guidelines for Writing Judgments in Criminal Cases for Courts of First Instance and Courts of Appeal contain uniform recommendations for the opening part of judgments, so that every judgment is drafted and laid out in the same way, regardless of the judicial district or the court in question. In the course of drafting the guidelines, judges were interviewed about their experience of writing court judgments in criminal cases and courts were asked to select and submit examples of good and criticizable judgment writing practice. A total of 61 examples of good practice and 68 examples of judgements to be criticised were sent in by the courts of all three instances. As an added value, the guidelines include a compilation of the Senate's practice on acquittal and conviction, as well as on the reasoning of judgments. When drafting these guidelines, particular attention has been paid to the reasoning of the court's judgment in relation to the presentation of the evaluation of evidence. A number of criteria for the assessment of judgments emerged, which can at the same time serve as a basis for writing a quality judgment, including the inclusion in the judgment of information that is relevant to the examination of a case (e.g. only information about the defendant's personality that is relevant to the case and

affects the conclusions regarding the sentence to be imposed on him or her is included);

thoughtful reference to procedural rules (quoting sections of the Criminal Procedure Law cannot become an end in itself, nor can it replace the court's reasoning in its ruling).

The Guidelines for Writing Judgments in Administrative Violation Cases for Courts of First Instance and Court of Appeal also include insights expressed in the context of other branches of procedural law. These insights reflect various aspects of the right to a fair trial and also contain potentially relevant theses on the reasoning of a judgment in administrative violation cases. Generalizing from the judges' views expressed in the interviews and the courts' comments, a number of criteria for assessing judgments can be identified, which at the same time can serve as a basis for a qualitative judgment, such as the proper delimitation of the claims and issues raised in the complaint or protest, the exclusion of information that goes beyond these limits (except in cases where the court has doubts about the guilt of the person or about aggravating circumstances); the evidence, its relevance, admissibility and reliability are duly assessed; the reasoning includes references not only to the decisions of the courts of the Republic of Latvia, but also to the case-law of the Court of Justice of the European Union and the European Court of Human Rights. There is no cassation procedure in administrative violation cases; therefore, ensuring uniform case-law and the development of case-law is the task of the court of appeal. In the absence of specific tools to systematise case-law, it is the task of the courts to ensure uniform interpretation and application of legal provisions. The findings of the court of appeal on the interpretation of the applicable legal provisions are equivalent to those of case-law.

The Guidelines for Writing Judgments in Administrative and Civil Cases for Courts of First Instance and Courts of Appeal were approved by the Judicial Council on 16 June 2023.

All the guidelines for drafting judicial decisions are available on the Judicial Council's website in the section "**Documents**".

Candidates for the office of judge of the Constitutional Court

According to Section 8911, Paragraph three of the law "On Judicial Power", one of the functions of the Judicial Council is to hear the candidates for the office of a Constitutional Court judge and to provide the Saeima (parliament) with an opinion on them. The Judicial Council gives its opinion on the basis of the candidate's professional authority and professional achievements, contribution to the development of the legal system, professional and personal reputation and vision of the place and role of the Constitutional Court in the country.

The Judicial Council has heard and given its opinion on three candidates for the office of judge of the Constitutional Court in 2024. By Decision No 7 of 26 January 2024 of the Judicial Council, Mārtiņš Mits, who was nominated by the Members of the Saeima, was recognised as a suitable candidate for the office of judge of the Constitutional Court. Mārtiņš Mits previously served as a judge at the European Court of Human Rights. On 23 March 2024, the Judicial Council heard and nominated Senator Veronika Krūmiņa for the post of judge of the Constitutional Court, whose candidature was selected from among all judges of Latvia (Judicial Council Decision No 19 of 23 March 2024). On 18 October 2024, by Decision No 69, the Judicial Council nominated Prosecutor General Juris Juriss, who was selected by the Cabinet of Ministers, for the post of judge of the Constitutional Court.

All candidates for the office of a Constitutional Court judge have been approved by the Saeima and have started to perform their duties at the Constitutional Court in 2024.

European Union Technical Support Instrument for the Strengthening of the Judiciary project

On 6 September 2024, the Judicial Council with funding from the European Union Technical Support instrument launched a project to improve the efficiency of the judiciary and the capacity of budget planning for structural reforms. The project "Improving judicial efficiency and budgeting in Latvia" is implemented by PricewaterhouseCoopers EU Services and the European Commission's Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support, bringing together PricewaterhouseCoopers Latvia and strategic partners.

The project will cover 18 months of activities: a report on the current situation of the Latvian judicial system; recommendations and a roadmap for institutional reform of the judicial system; a statistical model for workload assessment and budget planning, as well as methodology testing, training and a manual on judicial data collection, methodology and resource assessment.

The Judicial Council is represented on the Project Management Board by Juris Siliņš, Member of the Judicial Council and President of the Zemgale Regional Court.

Budget for the judiciary in 2025

On 5 July 2024, the Judicial Council reviewed and gave its opinion on the priorities for the budget of the judiciary for the period 2025-2028.



The following initiatives are supported in the Supreme Court's Budget Priority Action Plan:

- Maintaining a competitive remuneration system for Supreme Court staff, an increase of EUR 274 101;
- Implementation of international cooperation activities: (General Assembly of the European Network of Councils for the Judiciary in Riga and support to the Ukrainian Judicial Council in the context of EU integration, one-time activity of EUR 40 000);
- Implementation of artificial intelligence solutions to support the functions of the Supreme Court, an increase of EUR 204 900;
- Introduction of comprehensive health insurance, an increase of EUR 17 548



The following initiatives are supported in the Priority Action Plan for Regional and District (City) Courts:

- Ensuring competitive remuneration in courts, an increase of EUR 2 135 549;
- Coverage of health insurance policies, an increase of EUR 370 404;
- Coverage of rent of court premises and land rent, an increase of EUR 6 594

In its decision, the Judicial Council notes that the priority measure proposed by the Ministry of Justice for the budget of district (city) courts and regional courts for the next four years, namely the remuneration increase of 6% for judicial staff, will not make them competitive

in the legal market, as it still would be below the remuneration of similarly qualified lawyers working in the public administration, and would not contribute to the modern and efficient functioning of the judicial system, which is an integral part of national security and a guarantee of the protection of fundamental human rights. This objective would require an increase of at least 12% in 2025 and at least 10% in 2026. Moreover, it should aim at linking the salary of a judicial assistant to the remuneration of a judge and should reach at least 50% of it in the near future. The Judicial Council also invites the Ministry of Justice to cooperate with the Judicial Council in developing a procedure for discussing the budgetary priorities of the institutions represented in the Judicial Council. This would create the conditions for responsible budgeting and good governance throughout the justice sector and improve the current practice of uncoordinated budgeting within each institution without mutual information exchange.

The Chair of the Judicial Council, Aigars Strupišs, stressed that the inadequately low remuneration of judicial assistants over a long period of time had created problems with the renewal of the judicial corps. Currently, it is impossible to fill vacancies in the judicial corps due to a lack of qualified candidates, and the main source of candidates is the corps of judicial assistants. The inadequately low salaries, which are the lowest among lawyers at a similar level, make it difficult to recruit and retain sufficiently qualified lawyers in the corps of assistant judges.

„The judicial function is a fundamental function of the state, and the internal and external security of the state directly depends on the quality of the performance of this function, which is particularly acute in the current geopolitical situation. Therefore, excuses about the financial problems in ensuring the basic functions of the state are unacceptable in a situation where, due to inadequate remuneration of judicial assistants and other court staff, which has been maintained for decades, the judicial system is unable to ensure that judicial vacancies are filled. All the more so as this is not about huge sums of money against the overall background of the national budget,” said Aigars Strupišs.

Pursuant to Section 50(2) of the law “On Judicial Power”, the Judicial Council examines and gives its opinion on the budget requests prepared by the Administration of the Supreme Court and the Court Administration. On 18 October 2024, the Judicial Council endorsed the budget requests received:

- For the Supreme Court – EUR 10 183 787, an increase of EUR 427 942 compared to 2024;
- For regional and district (city) courts – EUR 95 295 728, an increase of EUR 2 643 195 compared to 2024.

Most of the budget increase is intended to boost the competitiveness of the remuneration system of judicial staff.

Audit of the State Audit Office: availability and development of human resources in Latvian courts

In 2024, the State Audit Office published an audit report on the availability of human resources in Latvian courts. The State Audit Office acknowledged that, in general, the preconditions for providing district (city) courts and regional courts in Latvia with professional and competent human resources have been created. However, the adoption of measures for human resources development is too slow and a crisis may occur in the coming years, as concluded in the **audit report of State Audit Office**.

- Latvia has not formulated a long-term strategic vision for the development of judges and court staff.
- The number of vacant judicial posts is increasing and more than 28% of the current judges may retire in the next few years.
- The human resources situation is particularly critical for judges with specialisation in land registry cases.
- Judicial staff are under-utilised and under-valued, resulting in unacceptably high turnover.
- One in ten judges has received training less than

once a year in the last four years, despite constant changes in the legal framework.

„Human resources are the backbone of the judicial system and their development must be a top priority. Without sufficient and quality human resources, the search for justice in the courts can become a marathon without a finish line. While modern court facilities are essential, quality and sustainable judicial human resources are crucial to ensure the right to a fair trial. It is therefore essential that Latvia has a strategic vision for human resources development and long-term planning,” said Gatis Litvins, a member of the Council of the State Audit Office.

Number of judges decreases

Every year the number of vacant judicial posts increases. At the end of 2023, there were 54 judicial vacancies, or 10% of the approved judicial posts were vacant. In addition, the number of judges over 61 years of age is increasing. More than 28% of the current judges may retire in the next few years.

The audit concluded that the number of judges released from office exceeds the number of appointed judges. The number of candidates who have passed the selection procedure is not sufficient to fill the existing vacancies. This means that the trend of increasing judicial vacancies may continue and the judicial system may lack judges to ensure the effective functioning of the courts.

„In order to solve these problems, it is necessary to evaluate the functions and work organisation of judges, as well as to review the number of judges needed in Latvia,” explained Gatis Litvins, a member of the Council of the State Audit Office.

Critical situation with judges specialising in land registry cases

The number of vacancies for judges specialising in land registry cases is increasing every year. The audit revealed that since 2017, only two judges specialising in land registry cases have started working in the judicial system, while 16 judges have ceased to perform their

duties. At the end of 2023, out of 71 judicial posts for judges specialising in land registry cases, nine or 13 % stayed vacant. 18 judges or 29% of the actual number of judges specialising in land registry cases are likely to retire in the next few years.

It has also not been possible to extend the competence of judges specialising in land registry cases to other categories of cases, as foreseen in the 2018 reform of the Land Registry Divisions.

Underutilisation of the human resources potential of judicial assistants

The reform and development of the institution of judicial assistants has been discussed in the judiciary for 20 years, but no significant progress has been made.

The position of judicial assistant still does not have appropriate educational requirements, and the competences and responsibilities of a judicial assistant have not been expanded, thus reducing the possibilities to increase the uncompetitive level of remuneration of a judicial assistant and the motivation of existing employees, to attract new qualified employees and to fully employ them to relieve the workload of judges.

The audit reveals that the judicial system has failed to effectively develop the institution of judicial assistants in the long term. As a result, the turnover of judicial assistants is unacceptably high, especially in the courts in Riga, where it reaches up to 41 % per year.

Not all judges take sufficient care to develop their knowledge and skills

Although the training system for judges and court staff has been set up, and the prerequisites to improve the knowledge and skills of judges and court staff have been created, one in ten judges has attended training less than once a year in the last four years.

„Not all judges take sufficient care to improve their knowledge and skills, despite the rapid changes in society and the legal framework. Judges need to adapt quickly to the changing circumstances, and this is not possible without quality organisation of training and active participation in training,” said Gatis Litvins, a member of the Council of the State Audit Office.

From 1 January 2025, the training system for judges and court staff will change. The Judicial Academy should commence its operation, but the project has been delayed in several activities and there is a high risk that the Judicial Academy will not be operational on 1 January 2025 under the envisaged training model.

Post-audit recommendations

The audit includes five recommendations to the Ministry of Justice. As a result of their implementation, human resources management and development in Latvian courts are expected to improve, including:

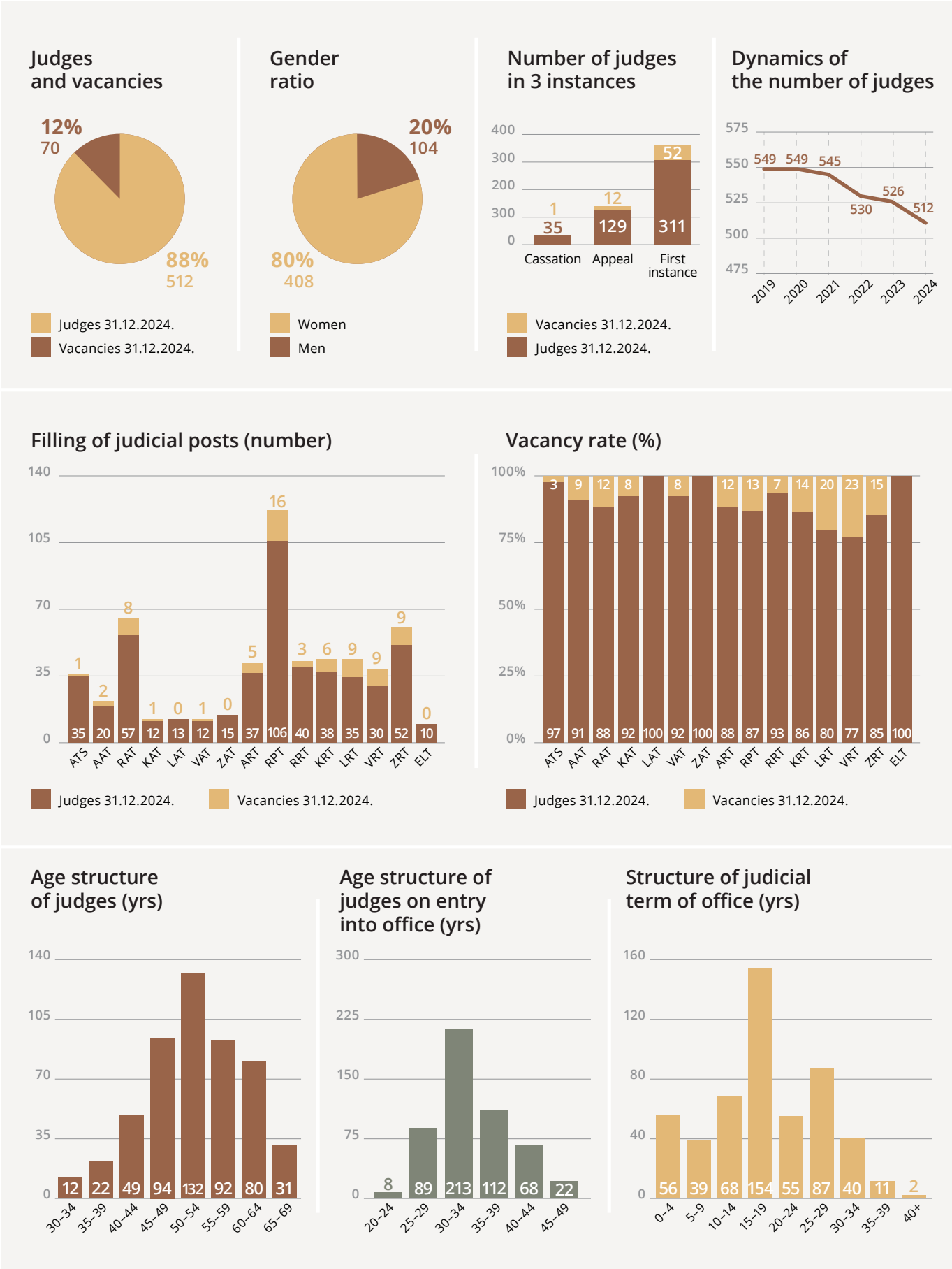
1. improved planning of the number of judges;
2. ensuring efficient and sustainable registration of property rights;
3. increased competence and scope of responsibility of judicial assistants;
4. increased motivation of judicial assistants to work in court, and reduced staff turnover;
5. increased (and will continue to increase) the motivation of judges to attend training.

Information taken from [a press release](#) on the State Audit Office website.

An [infographic](#) of the State Audit Office provides a more detailed insight.

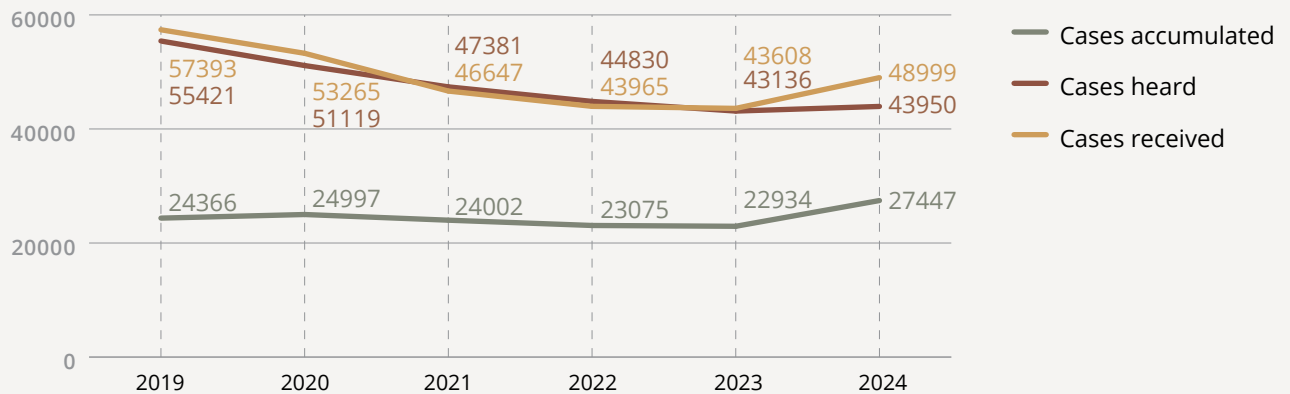
For a more in-depth study, all the materials of the audit report are available [on the website](#) of the State Audit Office.

COURT PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

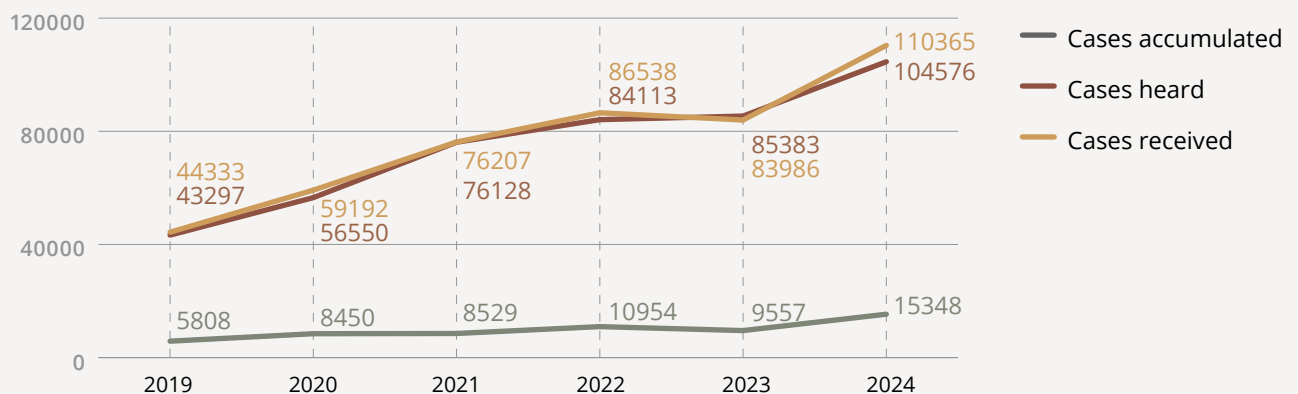


Case turnover in the judicial system in 2024 (aggregated data of all courts)

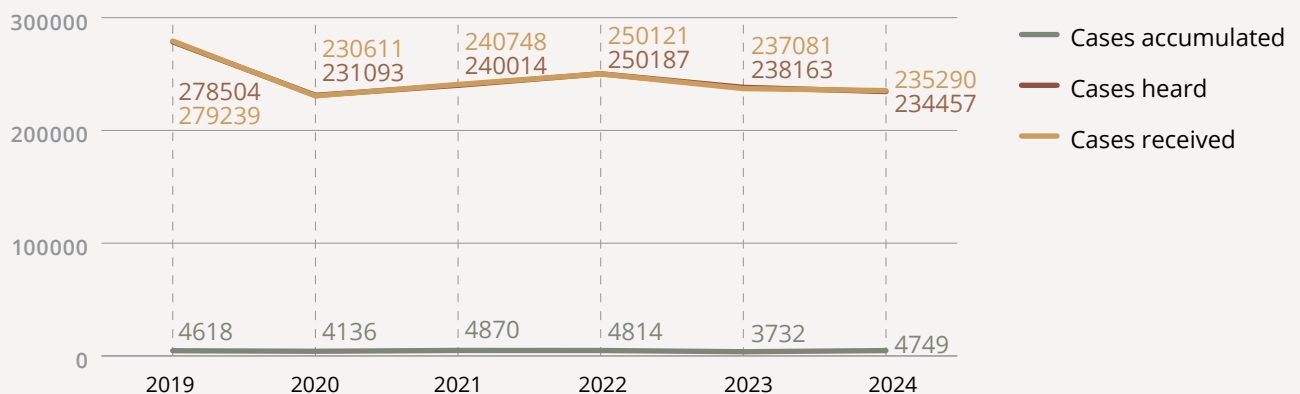
Case turnover in the judicial system (litigation cases)



Case turnover in the judicial system (uncontested cases)

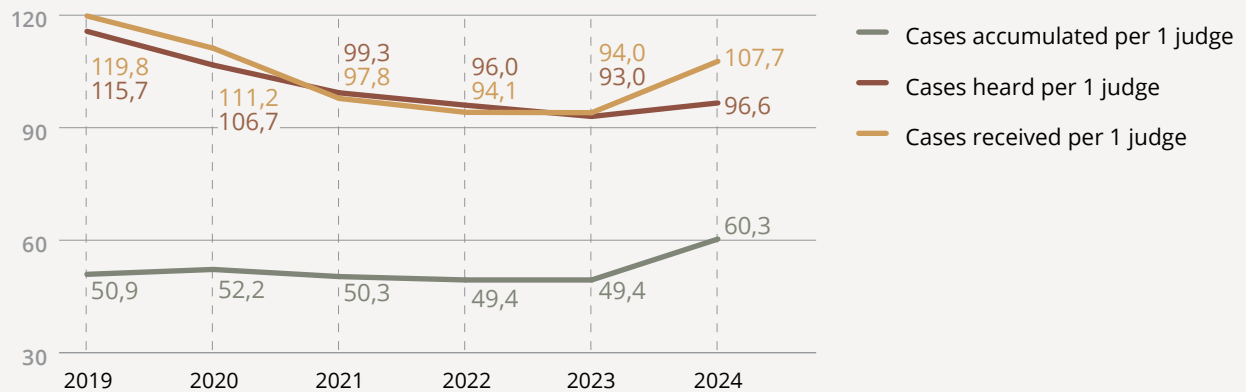


Case turnover in the judicial system (Land Registry cases)

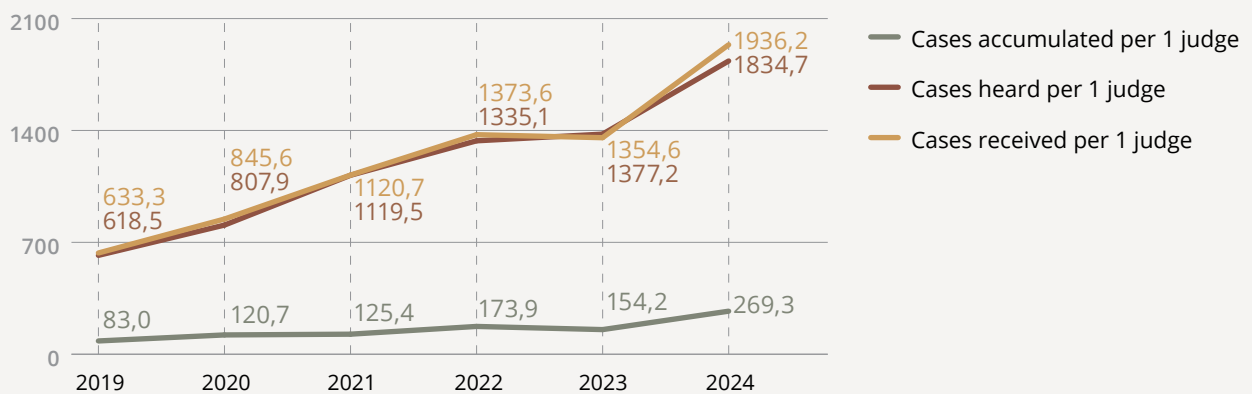


Case turnover in the judicial system in 2024 (aggregated data of all courts per judge of the relevant specialisation)

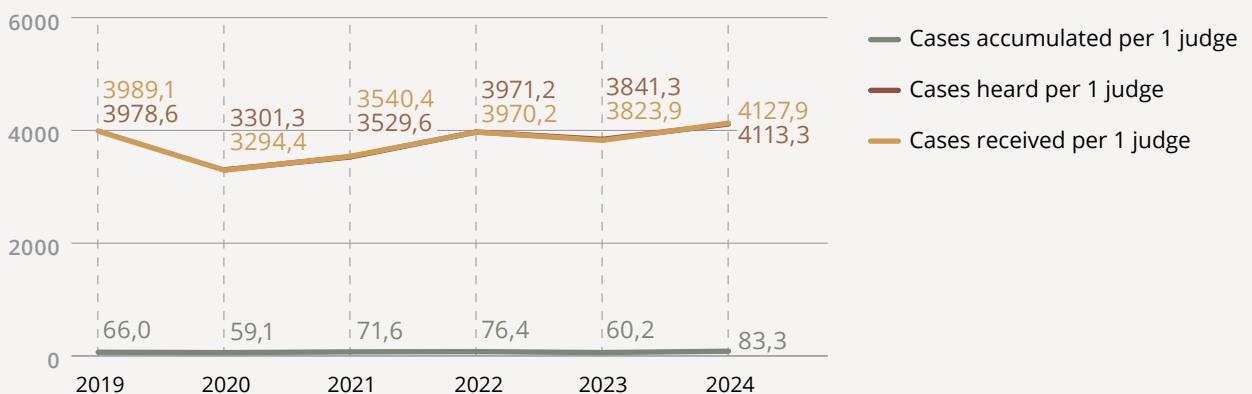
Case turnover per judge (litigation cases)



Case turnover per 1 judge (uncontested cases)



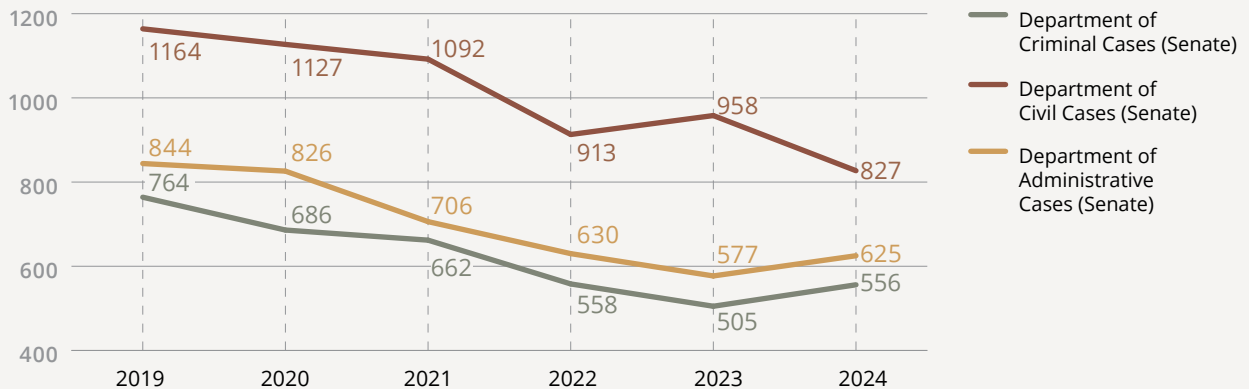
Case turnover per 1 judge (Land Registry cases)



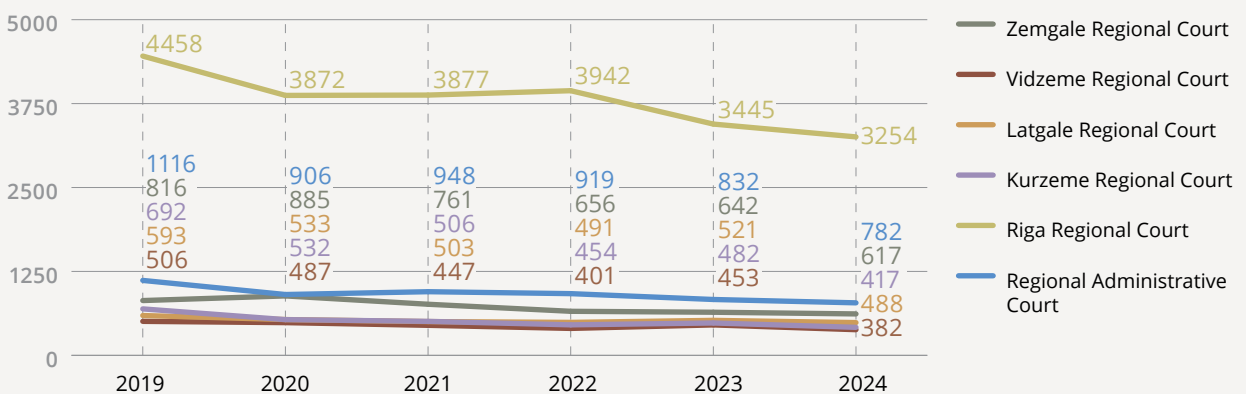
Case turnover in individual courts (litigation cases only)

Number of cases received

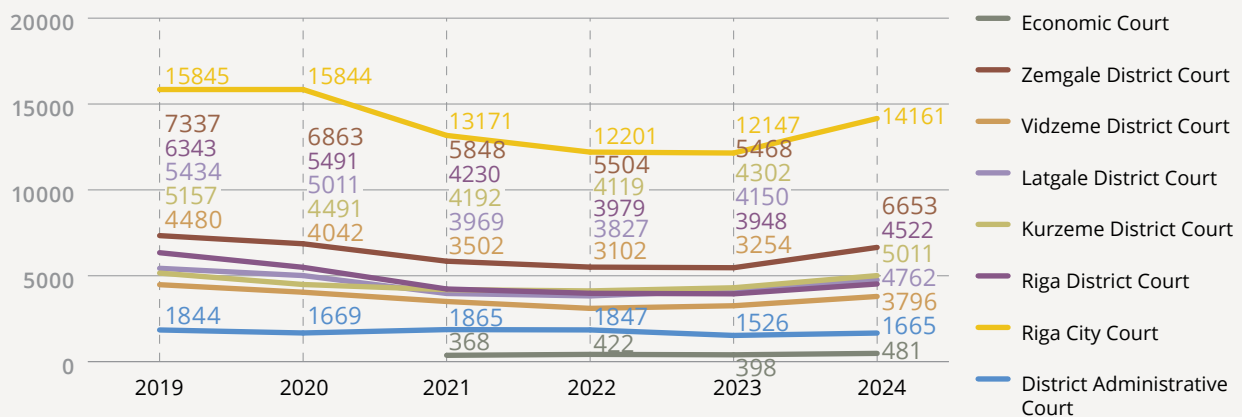
Cases received (cassation)



Cases received (appeal)

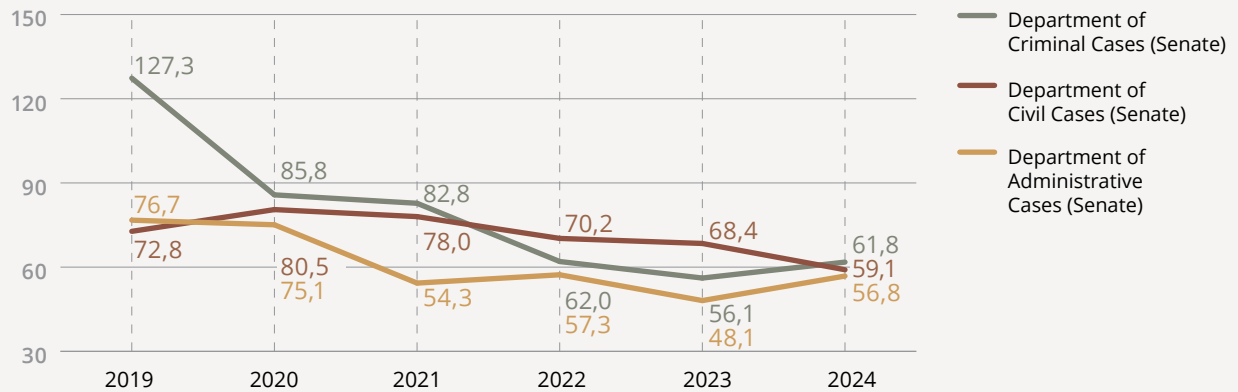


Cases received (1st instance)

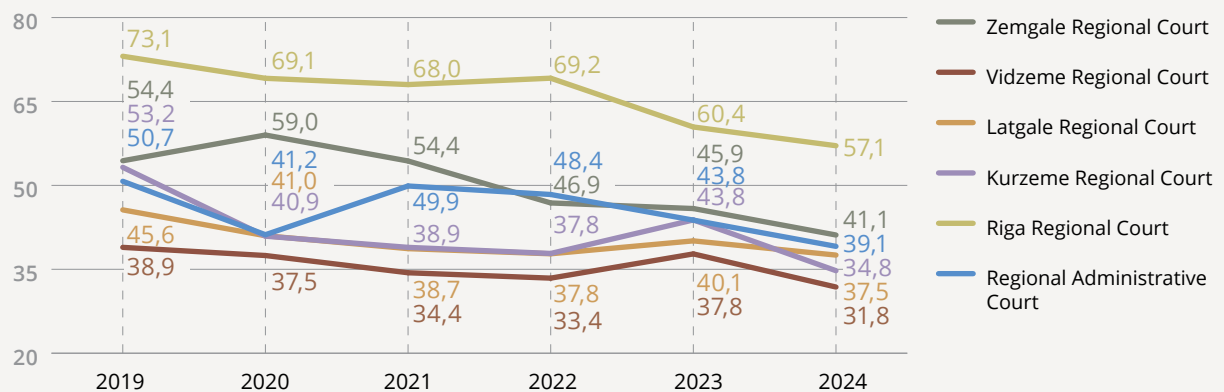


Number of cases received per judge

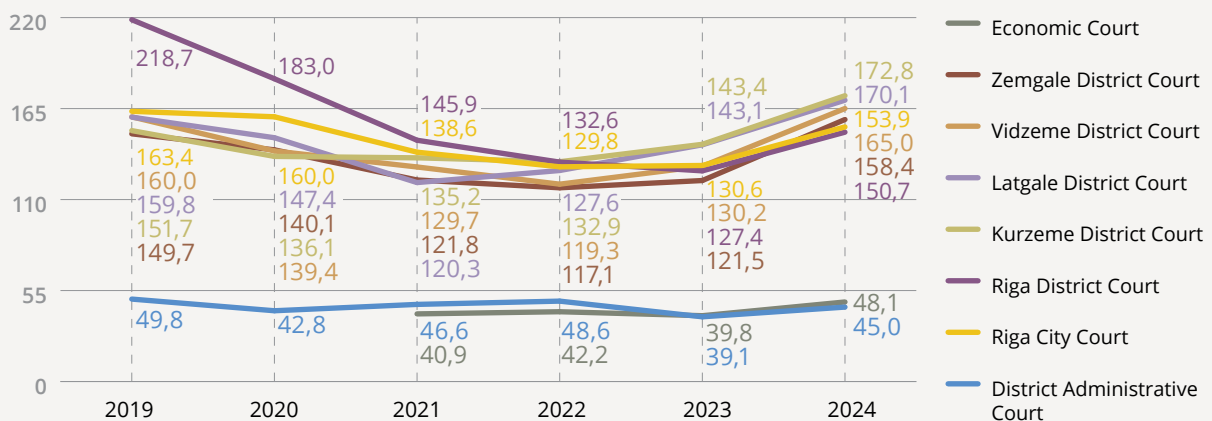
Cases received per 1 judge (cassation)



Cases received per 1 judge (appeal)

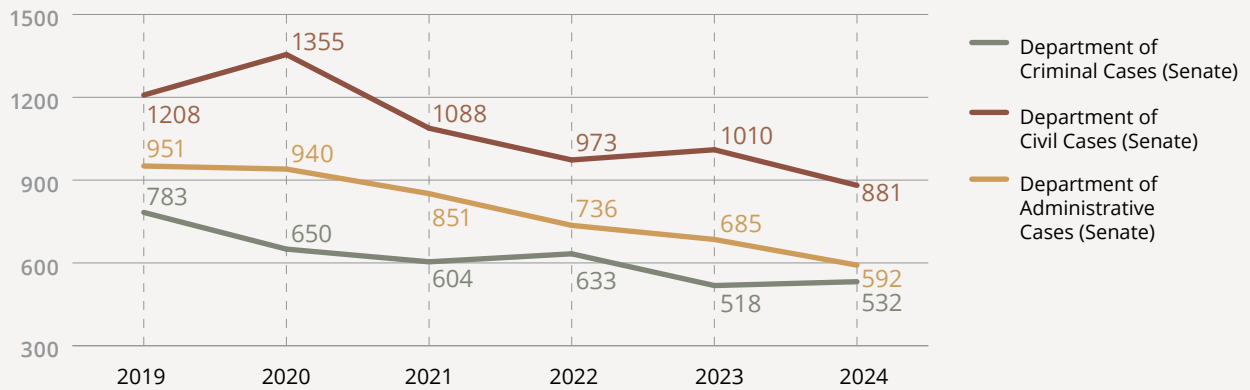


Cases received per 1 judge (1st instance)

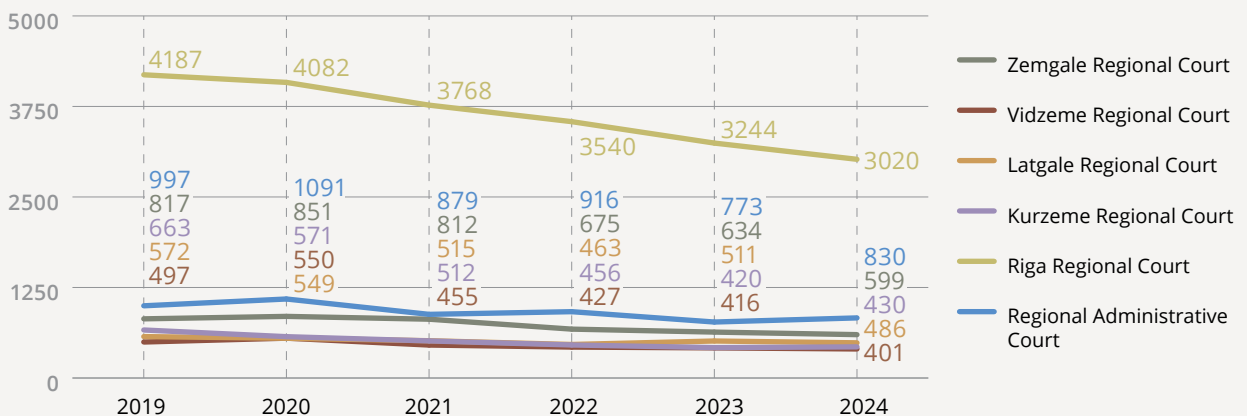


Number of examined cases

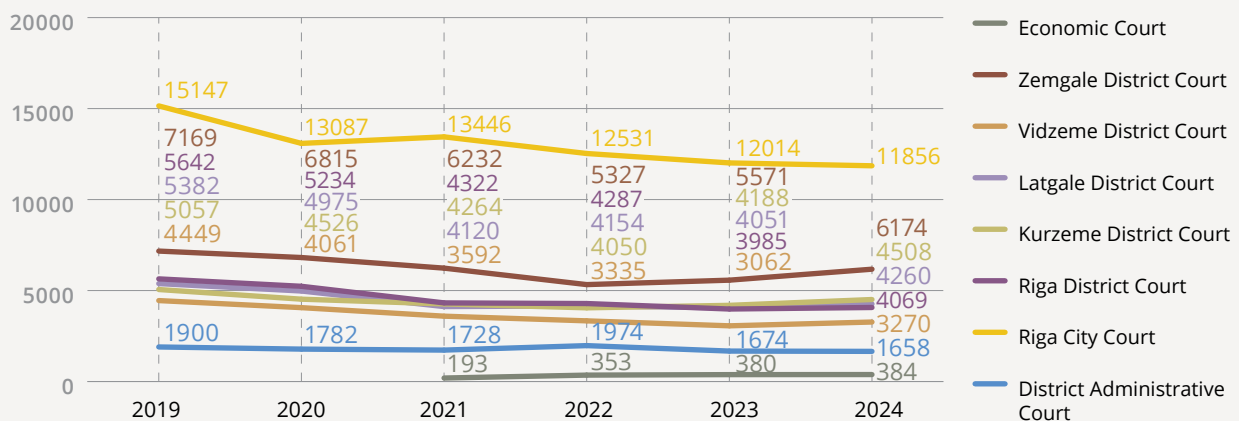
Examined cases (cassation)



Examined cases (appeal)

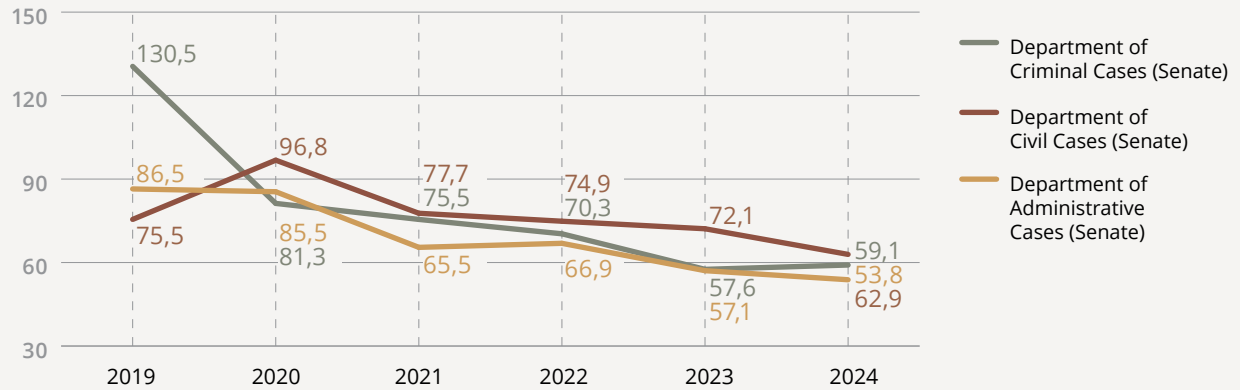


Examined cases (1st instance)

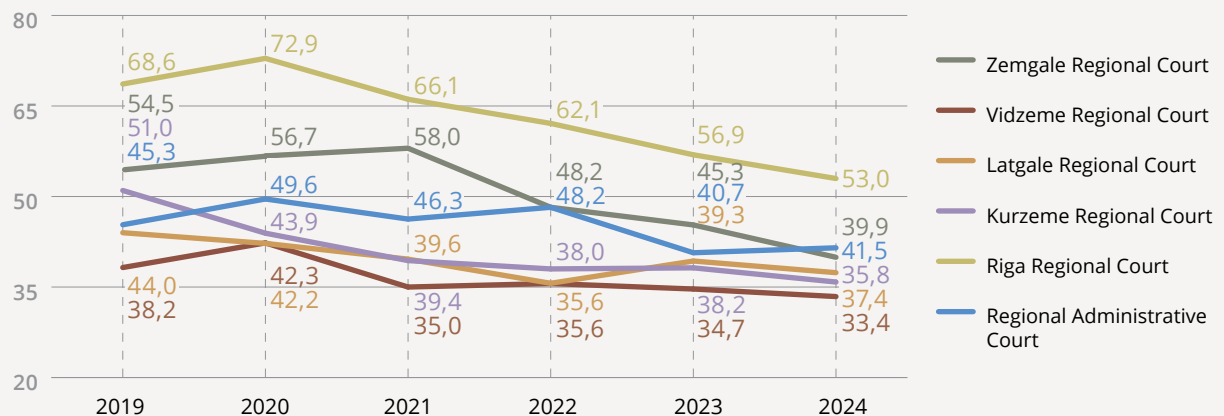


Number of cases examined per judge

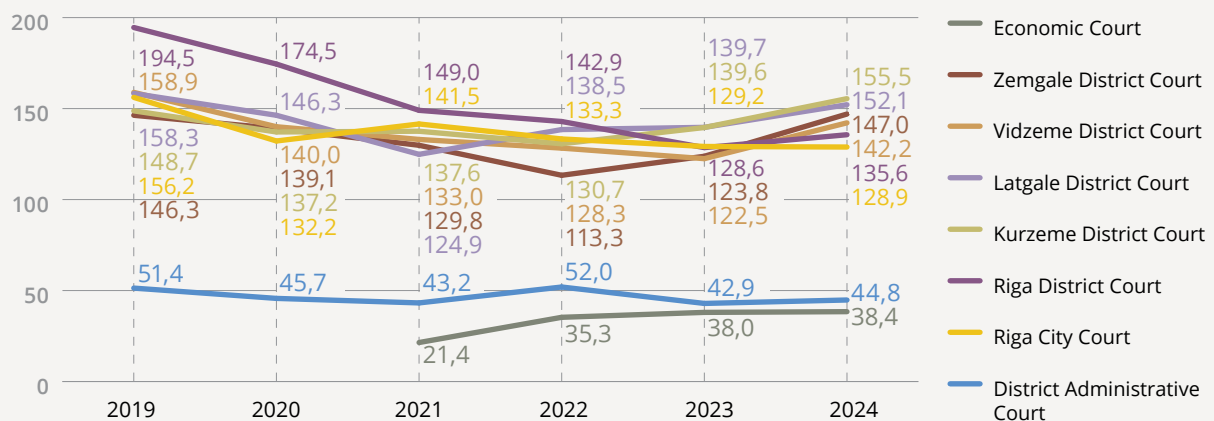
Cases examined per 1 judge (cassation)



Cases examined per 1 judge (appeal)

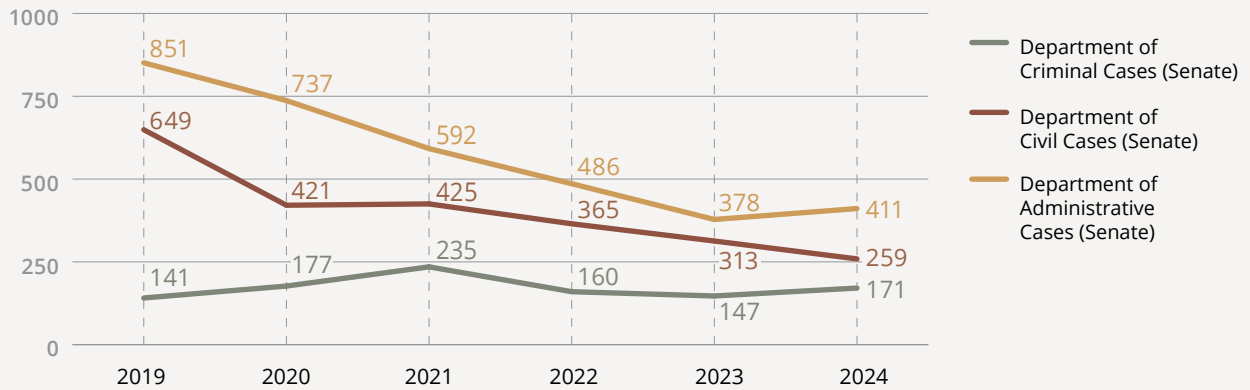


Cases examined per 1 judge (1st instance)

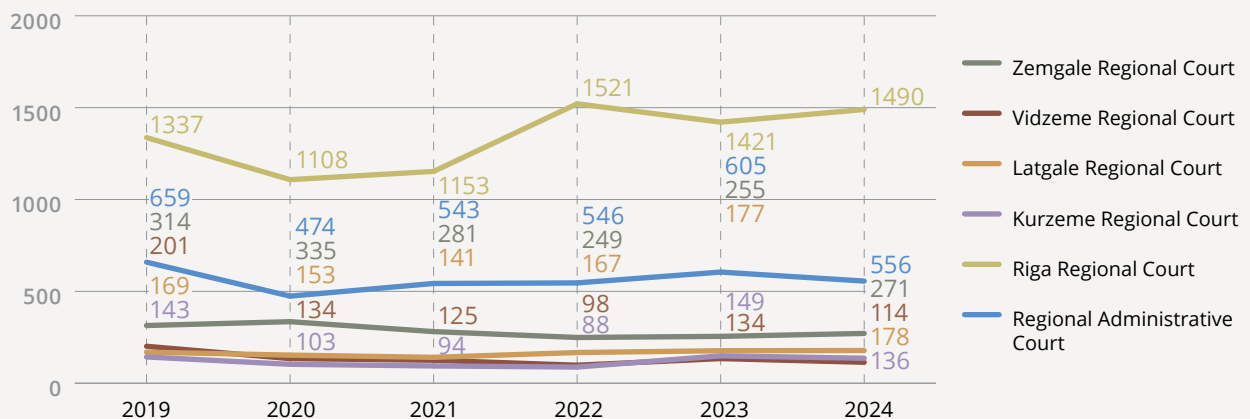


Number of accumulated cases

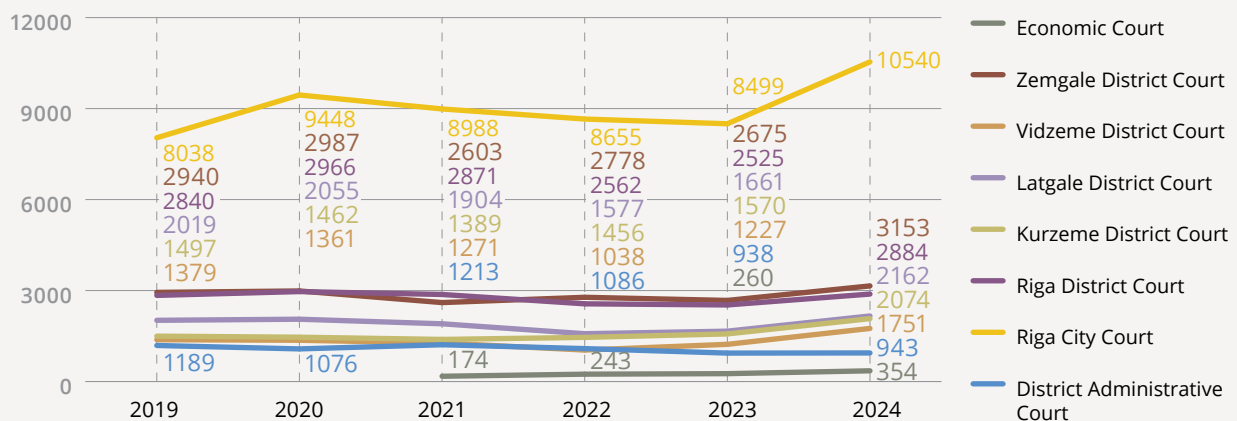
Accumulated cases (cassation)



Accumulated cases (appeal)

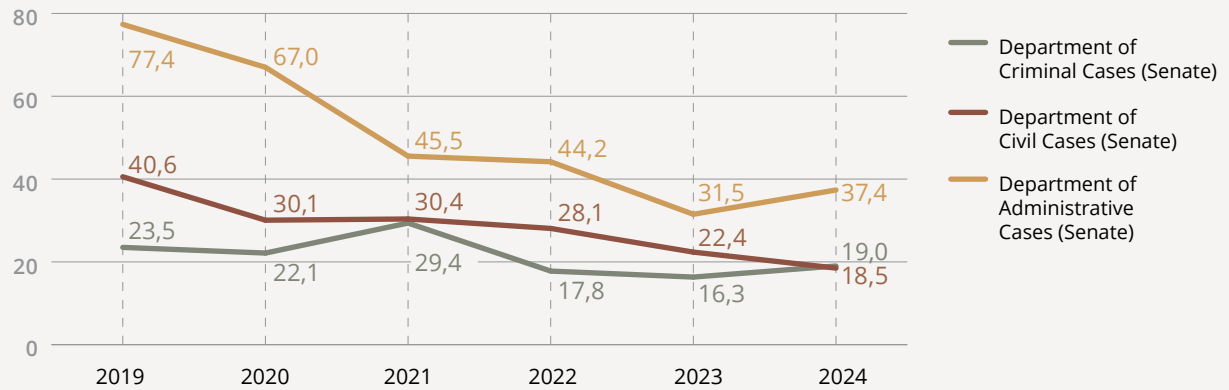


Accumulated cases (1st Inst.)

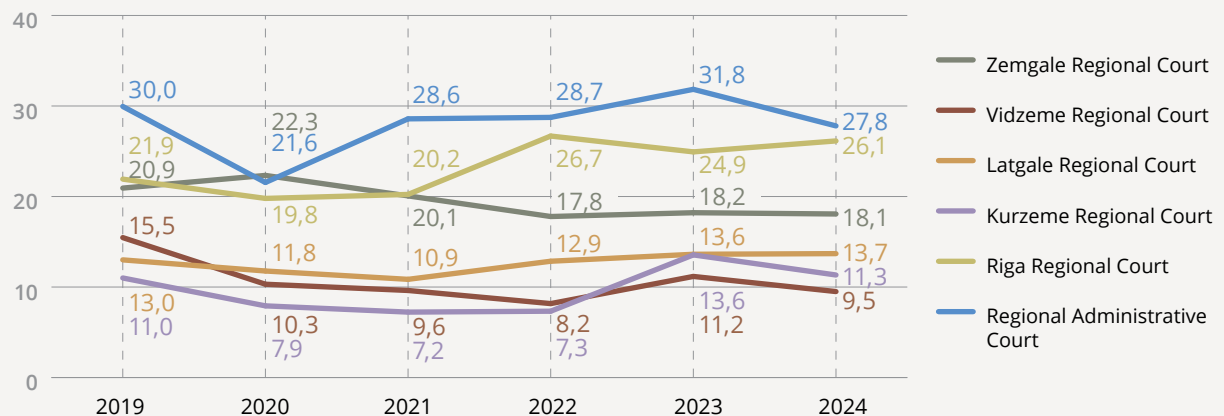


Number of accumulated cases per judge

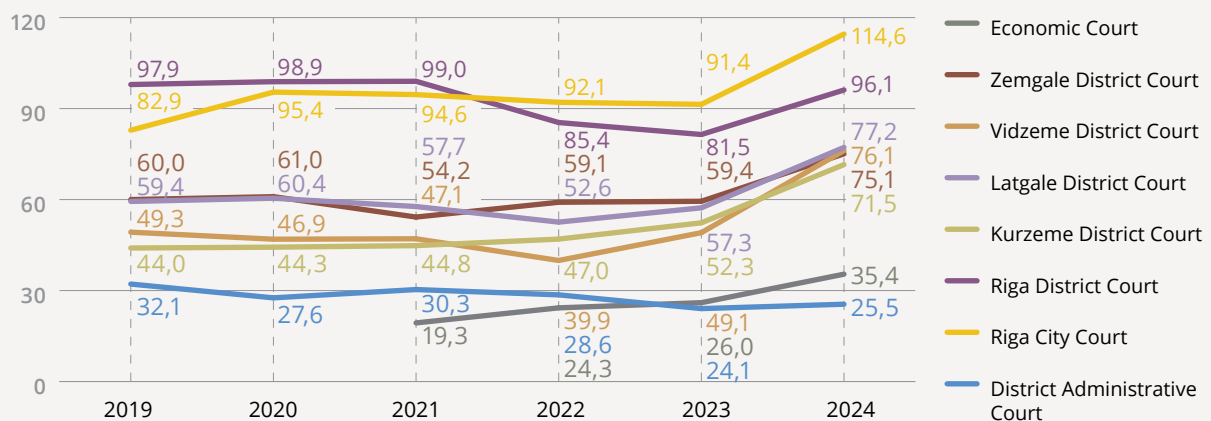
Cases per judge (cassation)



Cases per judge (appeal)

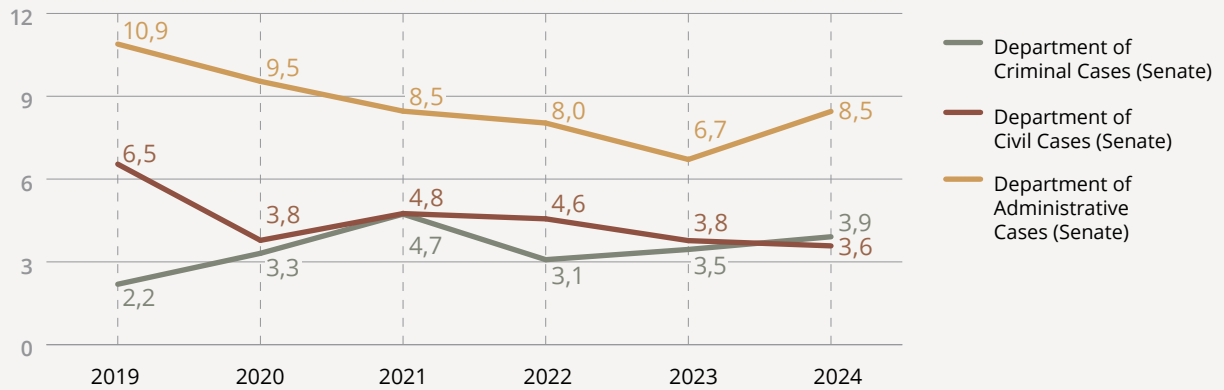


Cases per judge (1st instance)

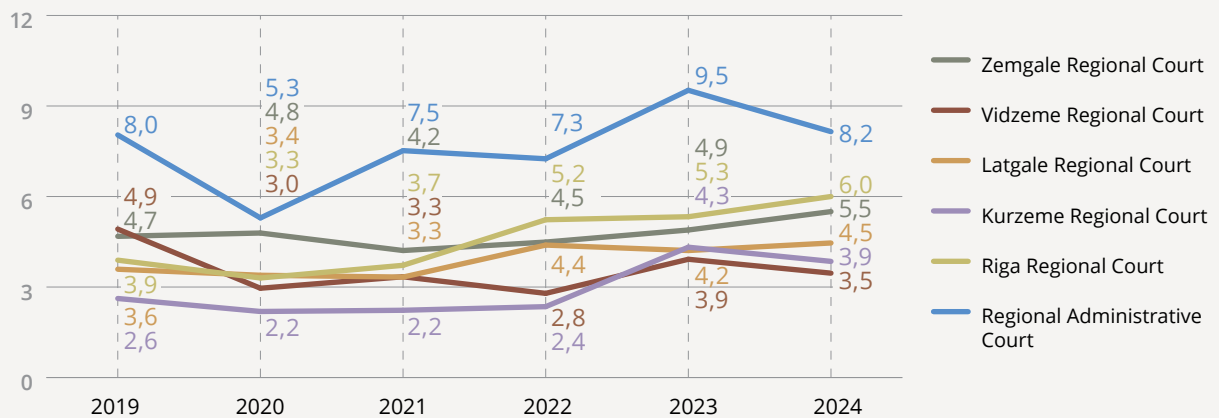


Disposition time

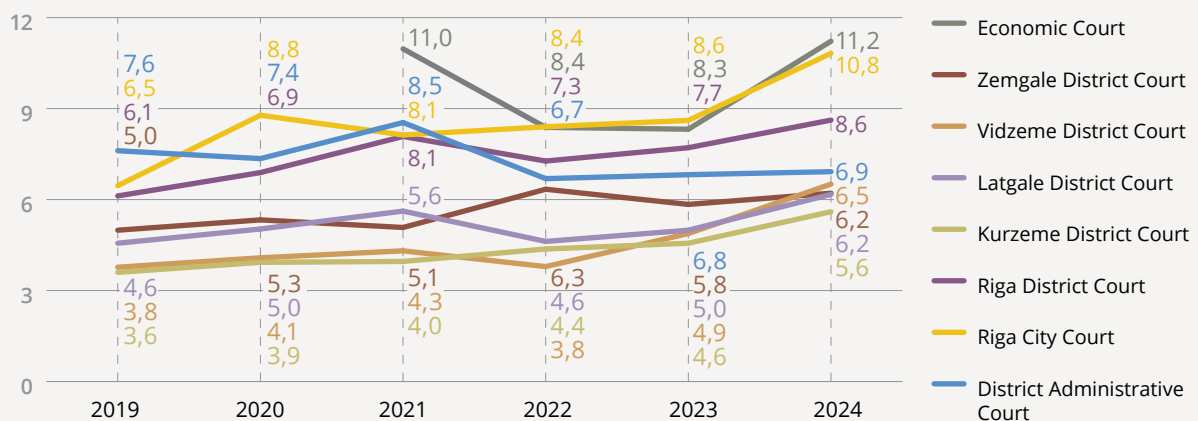
Disposition time (m) (cassation)



Disposition time (m) (appeal)

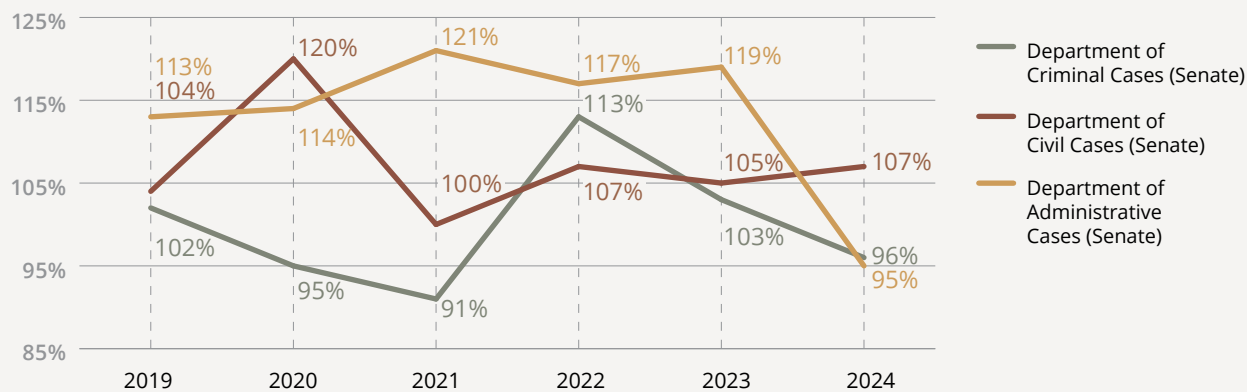


Disposition time (m) (1st inst.)

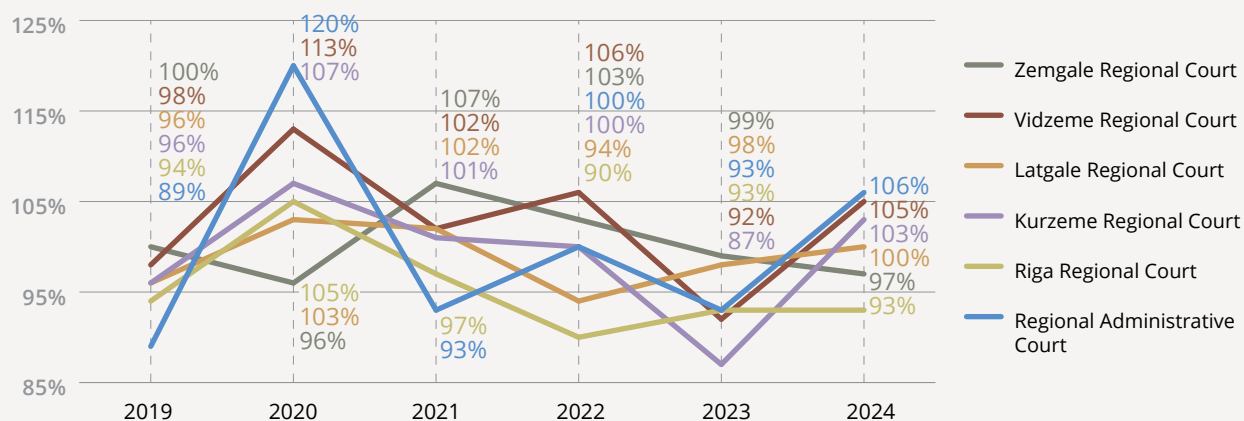


Clearance rate

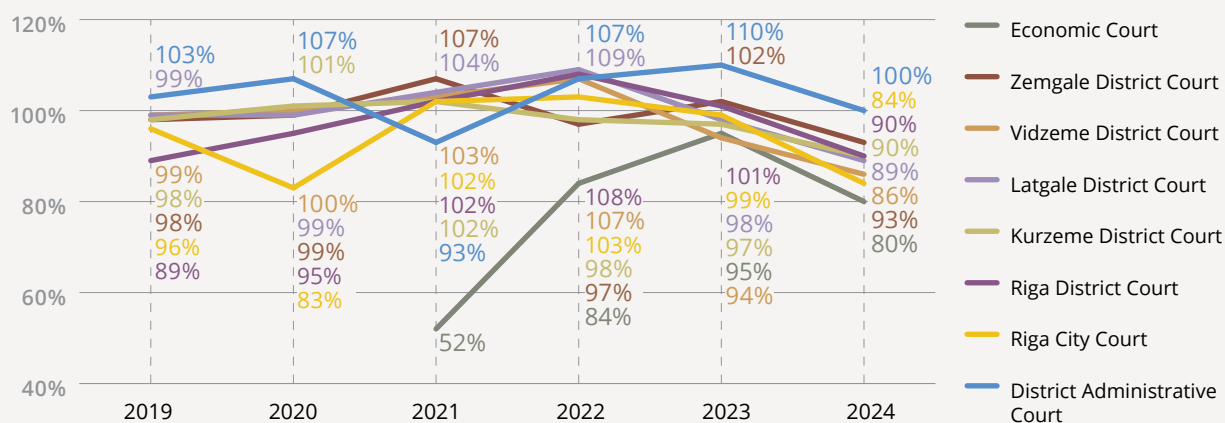
Clearance rate (cassation)



Clearance rate (appeal)

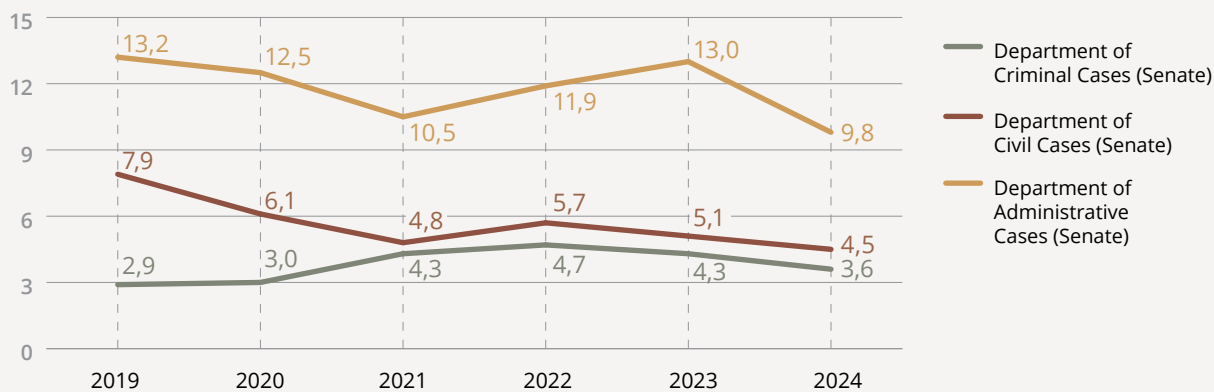


Clearance rate (1st instance)

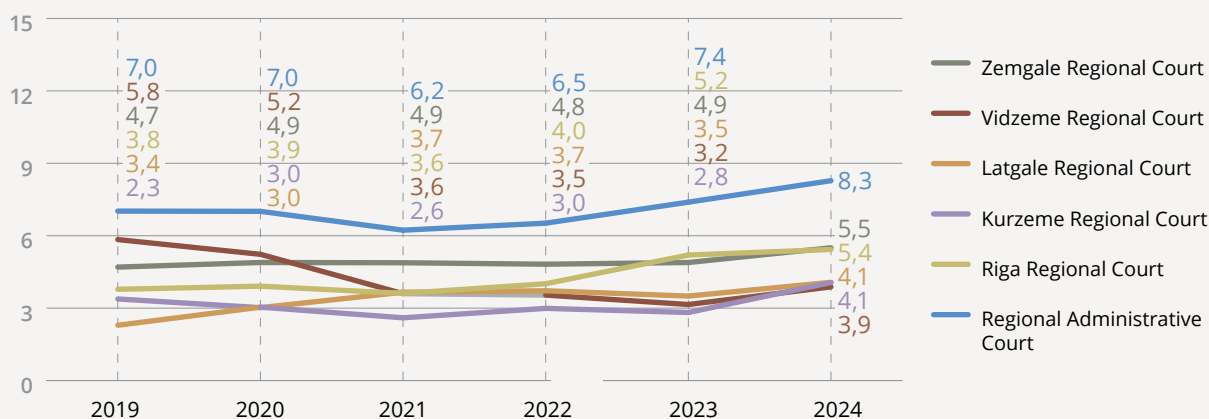


Average case examination times

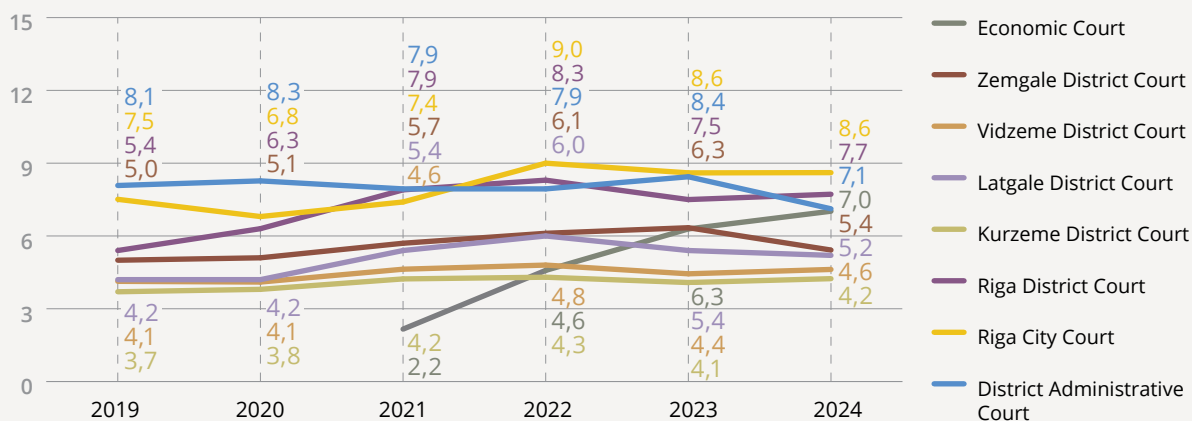
Average time (m) for examination of cases (cassation)



Average time (m) for examination of cases (appeal)

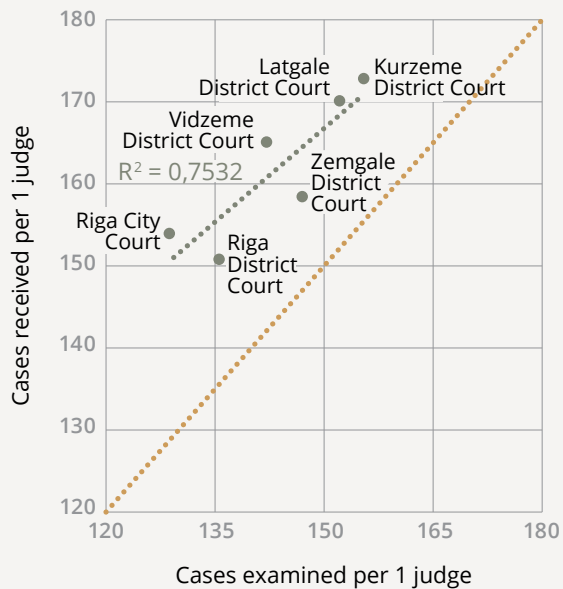


Average time (m) for examination of cases (1st instance)

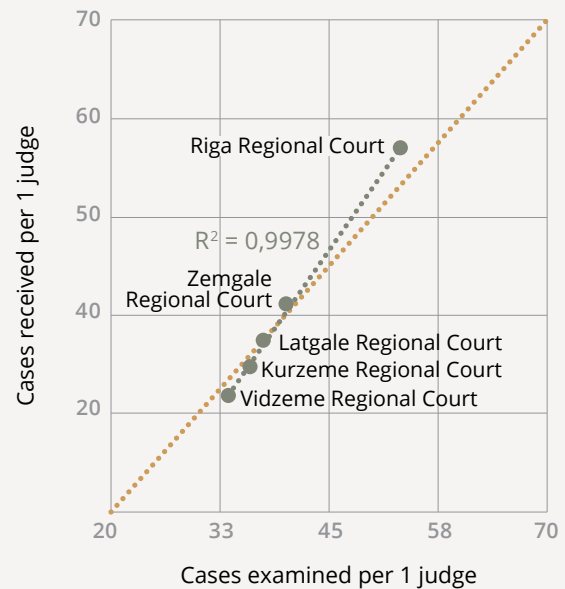


Combined judicial performance indicators

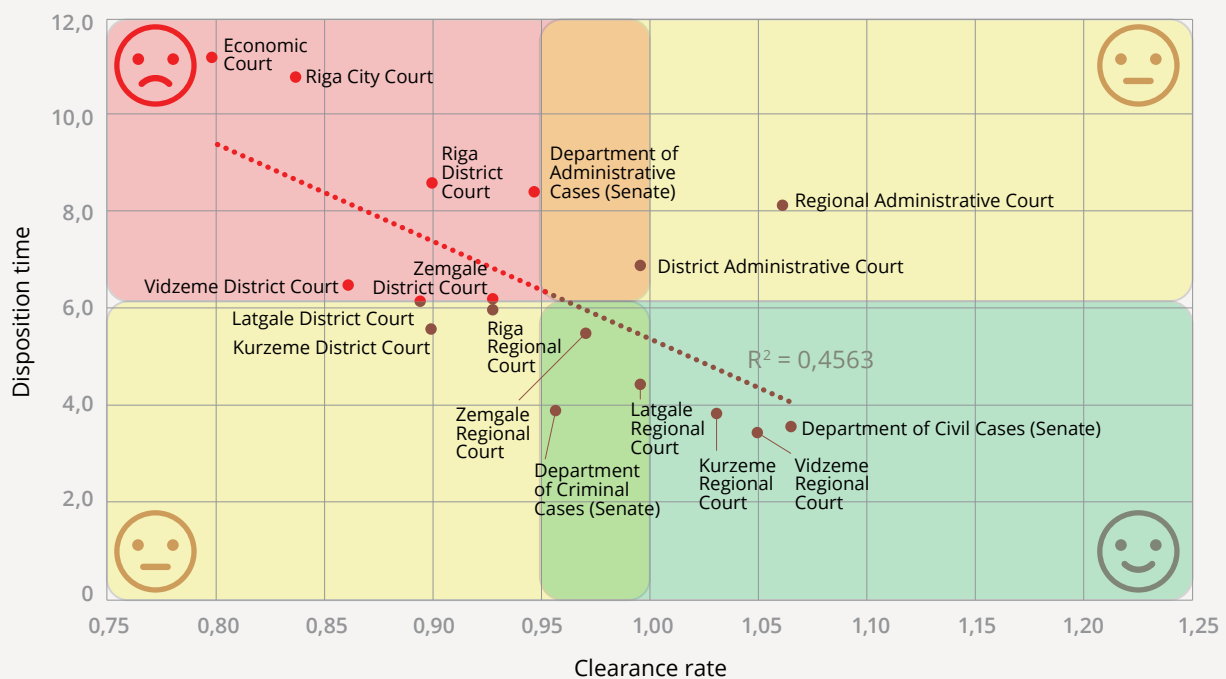
Ratio of cases received to cases examined (1st instance, 2024)



Ratio of cases received to cases examined (appeal, 2024)

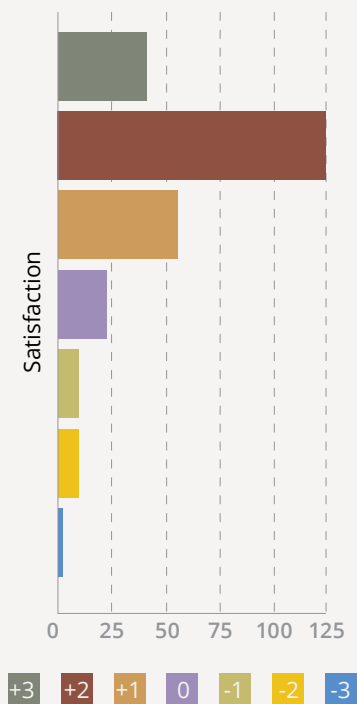


Assessment of court performance in 2024

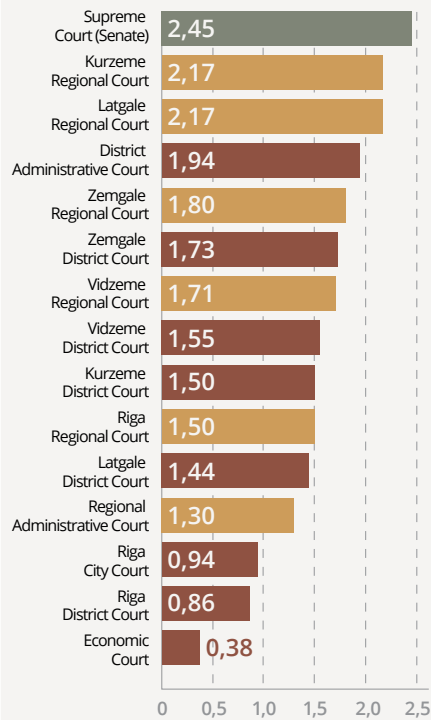


Survey of judges 2024

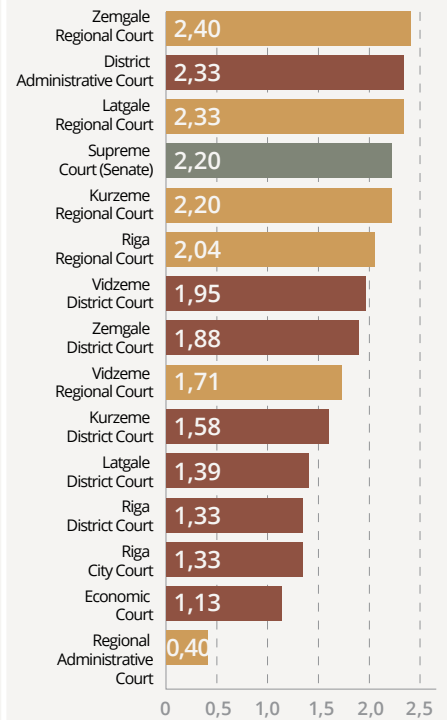
Rate your overall satisfaction with your work as a judge



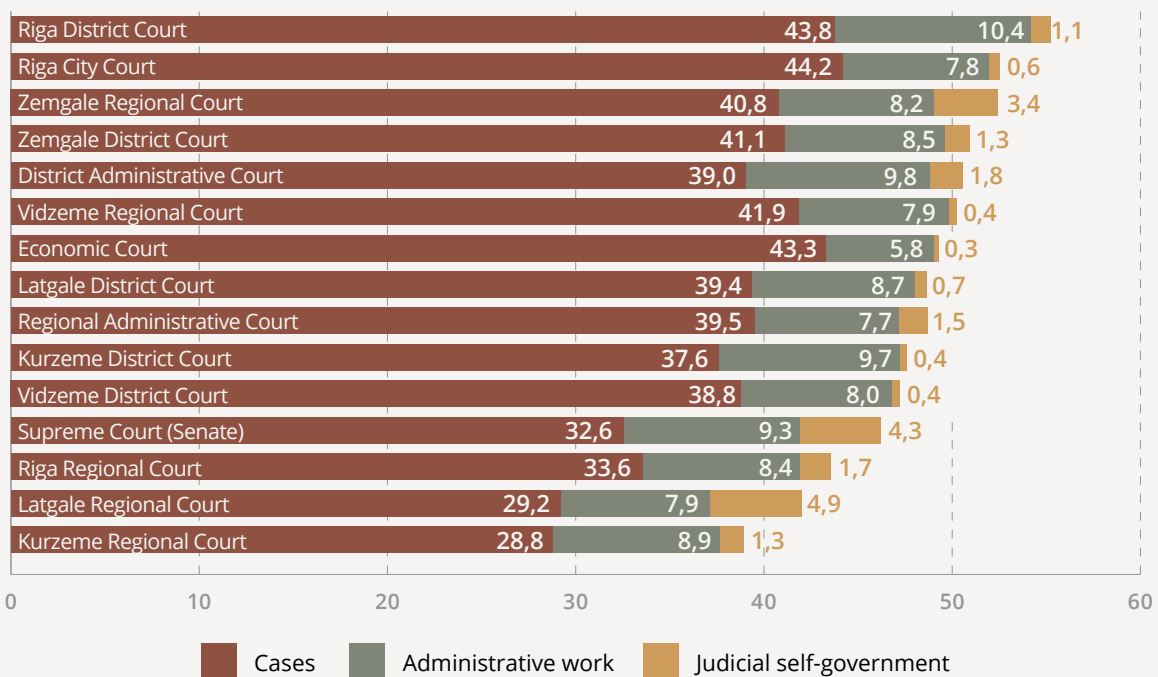
Overall job satisfaction as a judge



Performance evaluation of a court president



Hours worked per week (self-assessment of judges, broken down by court)



HIGHLIGHTS OF THE JUDICIAL SELF- GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS IN 2024

Latvian Judges Conference

The Latvian Judges Conference is the supreme body of self-government of judges, where judges of the Supreme Court, judges of regional courts and judges of district (city) courts participate with voting rights. The Conference is convened by the Judicial Council. The competence of the Conference is laid down in Section 92 of the law "On Judicial Power".

Latvian Judges Conference

1. examines topical case-law issues;
2. submits to the President of the Supreme Court submissions on questions of interpretation of legal norms to be discussed at the Plenary Session of the Supreme Court;
3. discusses material and social security and other relevant issues concerning the work of judges;
4. by secret ballot, elects the members of the Judicial Council for a term of four years;
5. by secret ballot, elects the Judicial Qualification Committee for a term of four years;
6. by secret ballot, elects the Judicial Disciplinary Committee for a term of four years;
7. by secret ballot, elects the Judicial Ethics Commission for a term of four years;
8. approves the provisions of the Code of Judicial Ethics.

Three Judicial Conferences were organised in 2024:

- Latvian Judges Conference on-site (17.05.2024, 296 judges participated);
- Latvian Judges Extramural Conference (15-16.04.2024, 426 judges participated);
- Latvian Judges Extramural Conference (16-17.09.2024, 438 judges participated).

On 17 May 2024, the Latvian Judges Conference discussed the topic "The Judge in 21st Century Society".



At the opening of the conference, Aigars Strupiņš, Chair of the Judicial Council, pointed out that in the 21st century the judiciary, the judicial system and judges must be viewed through a prism of high professionalism, including the ability to identify available resources and mobilise them effectively. „*The theme of this year's Latvian Judges Conference should be relevant for every 21st century judge, because a modern judge is a high-level professional who is fully aware of his or her constitutional status, responsibility to the people of Latvia and the citizens of the European Union, and is able to identify problems, seek solutions, express a reasoned opinion, take responsibility and be constructively self-critical,*” said Aigars Strupiņš.

The Chair of the Judicial Council also presented insights into the current challenges faced by the judicial system, in terms of case examination times and national security issues.



In his address, Aldis Laviņš, President of the Constitutional Court emphasised that law is one of the tools of governance of a modern, democratic state governed by the rule of law. *“Intelligent, knowledgeable and wise Latvian judges participate in the governance of our country through the application of law.”* At the same time, Aldis Laviņš pointed to the importance of dialogue with society: *“It is important for us to ensure that society actively participates in and monitors the successful functioning of the judiciary. In the 21st century, it is time to recognise that judges also have an important role in protecting the democratic order, environmental sustainability and national security of our country, considering both the climate change and geopolitical contexts!”*



Inese Lībiņa-Egnere, Minister of Justice, acknowledged that the conference is an excellent platform for judges to indulge in discussions and reflections about themselves, the judge's role and its importance in today's Latvia and the world. Such discussions are much-needed for a democratic country.

The Minister of Justice stressed that the timing of the conference is complex and needs to be taken into account by both policy makers and law enforcers. *„In the 21st century Latvian society, a judge must not only be a civic patriot, but also knowledgeable about the legal protection of national security. A judge must be civically courageous and vigilant in observing the totality of circumstances that underlie reasonable state restrictions on private individuals,”* oted Minister of Justice Inese Lībiņa-Egnere.



Professor Zanda Rubene, describing contemporary society, stressed that stability is the exception, not the rule. She said that we now live in a society that lacks unifying values and is permeated by asceticism and a philosophy of renunciation. Judges who took part in the survey also responded that today's society is mainly characterised by divisiveness, turbulence, fragmentation and diversity.



Ineta Ziemele, Judge of the Court of Justice of the European Union, pointed out that the strength and future role of the judge, as well as the judiciary, lies in ensuring stability. Outlining the requirements of a 21st

century European judge, Ineta Ziemele emphasized: „The ideal judge, in a highly interconnected world, keeps abreast of developments in society, in the country, in Europe, and thus understands the context in which a given legal relationship is to be judged. He or she decides the case in such a way that the judgment is consistent with the principle of unity and coherence of the Latvian legal system, as well as with European law in those areas where Latvia has transferred jurisdiction to the European Union.”



Senator Rudīte Vīduša, a member of the Judicial Qualification Committee, shared her thoughts on the “real” judge. These insights have been gained in the process of assessing the professional performance of judges in the judicial selection process. Rudīte Vīduša described judges as diverse, as their values, knowledge and views have evolved in very changing circumstances. However, it is important for today's judge to be able to use the existing range of legal instruments to find a fair solution.



Psychotherapist Ansis Jurgis Stabingis explained from the perspective of mindfulness teaching what

shapes and influences human decision-making. He acknowledged that people do not have free will, because many factors influence their decisions. At the same time, the mindfulness teaching presupposes that a person is capable of understanding the factors that influence his or her decision-making.



In the second part of the conference, Marika Senkāne Senator of the Supreme Court, Madars Plepis, President of the Kurzeme District Court and member of the Judicial Council, Silva Reinholde, Deputy President of the Kurzeme Regional Court and Chair of the Judicial Qualification Committee, Andris Vilmanis, Deputy President of the Latgale Regional Court and member of the Commission for the Selection of Candidates to the Office of a Judge, Adrija Kasakovska, Deputy President of the Zemgale District Court and President of the Latvian Association of Judges, discussed how to find a balance between the ideal, real and practical judge. The judges discussed the circumstances that influence and shape the daily working life of judges and what needs to be taken into account in order to achieve the requirements of the “ideal” judge. The discussion was moderated by Veronika Krūmiņa, Senator of the Supreme Court. At the conclusion of the conference, Solvita Kalniņa-Caune, Director of the Latvian Judicial Training Centre, spoke about the activities of the Latvian Judicial Training Centre over the last 29 years. Laila Jurcēna, consultant to the Ministry of Justice on the establishment of the Judicial Academy, informed about the progress of the project “Judicial Academy”.

In 2024, two Latvian Judges Extramural Conferences were organised for the election of members of the self-government institutions of judges.

The elections at the Latvian Judges Extramural Conference of 15-16 April 2024 were held in two rounds (16.04.2024 and 23.04.2024):

- Iveta Salaka, President of the Zemgale District Court, was elected as a member of the Judicial Qualification Committee;
- Sanita Osipova, Senator of the Department of Civil Cases of the Supreme Court, was elected as a member of the Judicial Ethics Commission;
- Anita Misiuna, Judge of the Zemgale Regional Court, was elected as a member of the Judicial Ethics Commission;
- Uldis Apsītis, Judge of the Riga Regional Court, was elected as a member of the Judicial Ethics Commission;
- Līga Biksiniece-Martinova, Judge of the District Administrative Court, was elected as a member of the Judicial Ethics Commission;
- Gita Zenfa, Judge of the Zemgale District Court, was elected as a member of the Judicial Ethics Commission;
- Anda Kraukle, President of the Riga City Court, was elected as a member of the Judicial Ethics Commission.

The elections at the Latvian Judges Extramural Conference of 16-17 September 2024 were held in three rounds (17.09.2024, 26.09.2024 and 03.10.2024):

- Ilze Celmiņa, Judge of the Riga Regional Court, was elected as a member of the Judicial Council;
- Juris Siliņš, President of the Zemgale Regional Court, was elected as a member of the Judicial Council;
- Silva Reinholde, Judge of the Kurzeme Regional Court, was elected as a member of the Judicial Qualification Committee;
- Indra Meldere, Senator of the Department of Administrative Cases of the Supreme Court, was elected as a member of the Judicial Qualification Committee;
- Ilze Freimane, Judge of the Riga District Court was elected as a member of the Judicial Qualification Committee;
- Sanita Strakše, Judge of the Riga City Court, was elected as a member of the Judicial Qualification Committee.



Judicial Qualification Committee



Silva Reinholde,

Chair of the Judicial Qualification Committee

According to Section 93, Paragraph one of the law “On Judicial Power”, the Judicial Qualification Committee (hereinafter - the Committee) is a self-governing body of judges, which carries out the evaluation of the professional activity of judges.

The Committee operates within the framework of the powers established by the law “On Judicial Power” and in accordance with the Rules of Procedure of the Judicial Qualification Committee approved by the Judicial Council on 25 February 2022 (hereinafter also – the Rules of Procedure of the Committee).

In 2024, the Committee was composed as follows:

- **Silva Reinholde**, Judge of the Kurzeme Regional Court and Chair of the Committee (elected as a member of the Committee on 17.09.2024; elected as Chair of the Committee on 24.10.2024);
- **Marianna Terjuhana**, Judge of the Zemgale Regional Court (elected as a member of the Committee on 26.10.2023; elected as Deputy Chair of the Committee on 24.10.2024);
- **Sanita Kanenbergā**, Judge of the Regional Administrative Court (elected on 15.09.2022);

- **Ināra Garda**, Senator of the Department of Civil Cases of the Supreme Court (elected on 20.12.2023);
- **Ivars Bičkovičs**, Senator of the Department of Criminal Cases of the Supreme Court (elected on 18.04.2023).

Taking into account that the Deputy Chair of the Committee, Senator Rudīte Vīduša, was nominated and elected as a member of the Judicial Council, as well as the fact that the members of the Committee – Kristīne Zdanovska, Judge of Riga City Court, Judge Ināra Zariņa, Deputy President of the Riga District Court, and Judge Inga Zālīte, Deputy President of the Zemgale District Court, – had their term of office expired. Following members were elected to the Committee and started their work in 2024:

- **Indra Meldere**, Senator of the Department of Administrative Cases of the Supreme Court (elected on 26.09.2024.);
- **Sanita Strakše**, Judge of Riga City Court (elected on 03.10.2024);
- **Ilze Freimane**, Judge of the Riga District Court (elected on 03.10.2024);
- **Iveta Salaka**, President of the Zemgale District Court (elected on 23.04.2024).

According to Section 93, Paragraph six of the law “On Judicial Power”, the activities of the Committee are ensured by the Court Administration. The Court Administration shall request, collect and forward to the Committee all necessary evaluation materials from the parties involved, as well as appoint the Secretary of the Committee from among the employees of the Court Administration, who shall keep records, organise and record the meetings of the Committee and perform other duties related to ensuring the work of the Committee.

The Court Administration also provides the Committee with meeting rooms.

The Committee expresses its gratitude to the Court Administration for its support, especially to Liene Jākobsone, Secretary of the Committee, for her diligent and responsible work.

To support the work of the Committee and strengthen its internal capacity, an assistant has also been recruited. These duties are performed by Līga Skalde, Assistant to the President of the Kurzeme Regional Court for Research and Analytical Issues.

Pursuant to Section 93, Paragraph three of the law “On Judicial Power”, the Chair of the Saeima Legal Affairs Committee, the Minister of Justice, the Prosecutor General, the President of the Supreme Court or persons authorised by them, a representative delegated by experts in legal sciences approved by the Latvian Academy of Sciences, as well as representatives of the associations of judges may participate in the meetings of the Committee in an advisory capacity. In 2024, the President of the Supreme Court, the Prosecutor General, the Minister of Justice and the Latvian Association of Judges exercised their right to do so by delegating their representatives to participate in the meetings of the Committee.

One of the 2024 tasks was the extraordinary assessment of the professional skills of candidates who applied for the post of a regional court judge in an open competition, in accordance with the improved regulation introduced by Decision No 69 of the Judicial Council of 8 September 2023 amending the Rules of Procedure of the Committee. It can be concluded that the developed description of the levels of professional skills and the corresponding assessment system contribute to a more detailed analysis of the professional skills of judges. The reviews prepared by higher instance judges provide a broader analysis of the decisions and understanding of the judge’s work, while at the same time it is acknowledged that this requires more work from the reviewers for quality preparation of the reviews.

The Committee continues to collect and analyse the information on training needs included in the judges’ self-assessment questionnaires in order to make proposals, in cooperation with the Judicial Council and a judicial training institution, on the training needs which, in the judges’ own opinion, are necessary for their professional development.

The aim of the Committee for the next work year is to further develop the effectiveness of the evaluation of the professional performance of judges in order to ensure the comprehensibility of the processes and to promote the comprehensive professional development of judges, prioritising cooperation, process improvement, internal capacity building and performance analysis.

It should also be noted that in 2024, in cooperation with the Judicial Council, representatives of the Committee participated in regional visits to courts in Latgale, Vidzeme and Kurzeme, which provided an opportunity to have conversations with colleagues, giving them a broader view of the work of the Committee. This cooperation will continue in 2025.

26 meetings of the Committee were held in 2024, at which the Committee, within the scope of its competences, from 2024

1 January to 31 December 2024 assessed professional performance of 151 judges, including professional activities of 115 judges of district (city) courts, 26 judges of regional courts and 10 Supreme Court judges.

139 

judges received positive assessment of their professional performance

11 

judges received positive assessment of their professional performance with recommendations for improvement

1 

judge received negative assessment of professional performance



Judges received following recommendations to improve professional performance:

- to pay due attention to the requirements of the Criminal Procedure Law when making decisions;
- to improve the ability to conduct court proceedings in a neutral and respectful manner;
- to improve the ability to analyse one's own actions and listen to criticism;
- to improve work organisation skills when planning judgement-drafting
- to improve work organisation skills;
- to improve the ability to analyse one's own actions;
- to improve judgment-drafting skills;
- to improve skills of reasoning judgements;
- to improve skills of drafting and reasoning judgments;
- to attend training for improving these skills.

In addition to assessing the professional performance of judges, the Committee issued five opinions on the transfer of a judge to another court or courthouse and held two qualification examinations for candidates for the office of a Supreme Court judge.

Observing requirements of Chapter 6 of the Rules of Procedure of the Committee, 16 judges undergone extraordinary evaluations in the competition for the post of judge of civil and criminal collegiums of a regional court.

Judicial Ethics Commission



Photo from the Supreme Court archive

Diāna Makarova,

Chair of the Judicial Ethics Commission

According to Section 911, Paragraph one of the law "On Judicial Power", the Judicial Ethics Commission (hereinafter – the Commission) is a self-government body of judges, which issues opinions on the interpretation of norms and violations of judicial ethics, as well as interprets norms of judicial ethics.

Composition of the Commission

Chair of the Commission:

- **Diāna Makarova**, Senator of the Department of Administrative Cases of the Supreme Court, (elected on 15 September 2022; elected as Chair of the Commission on 12 June 2024);
- **Dace Skrauple**, Judge of the Zemgale Regional Court (term of office expires on 25 May 2024).

Deputy Chair of the Commission:

- **Adrija Kasakovska**, Judge of the Zemgale District Court (elected on 15 September 2022).

Members of the Commission:

- **Uldis Apsītis**, Judge of the Riga Regional Court (elected on 16 April 2024);
- **Madara Ābele**, Judge of the Riga Regional Court (term of office expires on 25 May 2024);
- **Līga Biksiniece-Martinova**, Judge of the District Administrative Court (elected on 16 April 2024);
- **Aiva Daidere**, Judge of the Kurzeme Regional Court (elected on 18 April 2023);
- **Jānis Grīnbergs**, Judge of the Vidzeme Regional Court (elected on 21 September 2022);
- **Aija Jermacāne**, Judge of the Rezekne Court (term of office expires on 25 May 2024);
- **Anda Kraukle**, Judge of the Riga City Court (elected on 16 April 2024);
- **Baiba Lielpētere**, Judge of the Vidzeme District Court (term of office expires on 25 May 2024);
- **Anita Misiuna**, Judge of the Zemgale Regional Court (elected on 16 April 2024);
- **Sanita Osipova**, Senator of the Department of Civil Cases of the Supreme Court (elected on 23 April 2024);
- **Inese Laura Zemīte**, Senator of the Department of Criminal Cases of the Supreme Court (term of office expires on 25 May 2024);
- **Gita Zenfa**, Judge of the Zemgale District Court (elected on 16 April 2024).

Meetings of the Commission

During the reporting period, 13 meetings of the Commission were convened. One meeting was held in the Kurzeme Regional Court in Liepāja. During this meeting, a conversation was held with judges of the Kurzeme judicial area on recusal and dismissal of judges, judges' communication with the parties to proceedings, judges' statements and behaviour in court hearings, as well as other issues and topicalities related to judicial ethics.

Progress of documents received by the Commission

During the reporting period, the Commission received 42 applications and complaints. All applications and complaints were examined by the Commission and written replies were provided.

Issues addressed:

43% No grounds established for discussing the issue of breach of judicial ethics

21% It has been established that circumstances set out in the applications and complaints concern such procedural issues related to examination of a case, which do not fall within the Commission's area of responsibility

29% No infringement of judicial ethics found

7% Infringement of judicial ethics found in three cases

Explanations and opinions of the Commission

During the reporting period, the Commission has prepared:

- 1 explanation of the judge's impartiality. The question whether the fact that a member of a judge's family served in the military service of the USSR before the restoration of Latvia's independence may in itself indicate a lack of impartiality of the judge in the consideration of a case or case materials in which a person is suspected or prosecuted for a crime against the state, and whether this circumstance constitutes grounds for the judge to recuse himself from the consideration of the case, has been assessed. Also, whether any public expression of political views by judge's family members/relatives/friends may call into question the judge's impartiality if the judge

is dealing with a case or case materials in which a person is suspected or prosecuted for a crime against the state.

- 3 opinions:
 - on the activities performed by a judge in the Court Information System and its databases;
 - on combining the office of judge with additional work;
 - on administrative violations committed by a judge.

In these cases, when the opinions were drawn up, the Commission found that the judges had violated the norms of the Code of Judicial Ethics, considering them to be gross violations, and, on the basis of Section 1(1) (3) of the Judicial Disciplinary Liability Law, adopted a decision on initiating disciplinary proceedings and referred the cases to the Judicial Disciplinary Committee.

Other activities

The Commission prepared for publication the second collection of opinions and explanations "Collection of Opinions of the Judicial Ethics Commission (2017-2023)". The collection was launched on 12 January 2024.

On 26 January 2024, the Chair and the Deputy Chair of the Commission attended a meeting of the Judicial Council, where they reported on the Commission's activities.

On 22 February 2024, representatives of the Commission participated in the event "Lunch of the Senses" organised by the Latvian Judicial Training Centre and the Association of People with Disabilities and their Friends "Apeirons".

On 14 and 15 March 2024, members of the Commission visited the Supreme Court of Lithuania for an exchange of experience and met with the President of the Supreme Court of Lithuania, the President of the Civil Division and members of the Lithuanian Judicial Ethics and Discipline Commission. During the meeting,

participants discussed issues related to judicial ethics and the role of the Ethics Commission in the judicial system. The experience of Lithuanian colleagues in cases where complaints about judges are made during the course of proceedings, i.e. when a judge has not yet completed a case, was discussed. This issue has become topical because the complaints received by the Commission in some cases indicate the applicants' intention to use the Commission as a tool to obtain the replacement of a judge in a particular case.

On 24 July 2024, the Chair and the Deputy Chair of the Commission participated in a seminar on constitutional law policy organised by the Public Law Institute, where issues and developments related to professional ethics were discussed with the members of the judiciary. The discussions stressed that the public right to a fair trial also includes that principles of collegiality and professional ethics are ensured. It was concluded that there exists a sufficient theoretical basis for ethical issues, namely there is the Code of Judicial Ethics with canons of conduct containing the basic principles of ethics, explanations and opinions. The task of judges is to ensure that ethical principles are observed in practice. The most discussed situations were those arising in the courtroom in interaction with litigants, emphasising the judge's duty to treat litigants with respect and also ensure respectful relations between parties to proceedings.

On 6 December 2024, the Chair and the Deputy Chair of the Commission participated in a meeting organised by the Ministry of Justice, which was also attended by representatives of the Prosecutors' Attestation Commission. During the meeting, the issues of the conduct of judges and prosecutors in cases where parties to proceedings make threats against judges and prosecutors were discussed. As a result of the meeting, the representatives of the Commission and the Prosecutors' Attestation Commission agreed on further cooperation on the development of joint guidelines on the conduct and recusal of judges and prosecutors in cases where judges and prosecutors are threatened by parties to proceedings.

The Commission's anonymised opinions and explanations – currently 86 in total – are available on the website www.tiesas.lv, as well as in the section **Judicial Ethics Commission** of the website of the Judicial Council.

On the website, you will also find all the information related to the Commission: its composition, the Code of Judicial Ethics, the Bangalore Principles of Judicial Conduct, the Commission's Rules of Procedure and contact information.

Judicial Disciplinary Committee



Photo from the Supreme Court archive

Valerijs Maksimovs,

Chair of the Judicial Disciplinary Committee

The Judicial Disciplinary Committee of Latvia (hereinafter – the Disciplinary Committee) is a self-government body of judges, which examines cases concerning disciplinary violations of judges of district (city) courts, regional courts and the Supreme Court. Its activities are regulated by the Judicial Disciplinary Liability Law and the Regulation of the Judicial Disciplinary Committee.

The Judicial Disciplinary Liability Law provides that a judge may be held liable for:

- deliberate misconduct in a court case;
- failure to perform their duties or gross negligence in the handling of a case;
- disrespectful conduct or gross violation of the rules of the Code of Judicial Ethics;
- refusal to give up their membership of a party or a political organisation;
- non-compliance with the restrictions and prohibitions laid down in the law “On Prevention of Conflict of Interest in Activities of Public Officials”.

Composition of the Judicial Disciplinary Committee:

- **Valerijs Maksimovs**, Chair of the Committee, Senator of the Department of Civil Cases of the Supreme Court (elected on 24 October 2023);
- **Kaspars Berķis**, Deputy Chair of the Committee, Judge of the Regional Administrative Court (elected on 24 October 2023);
- **Līvija Slica**, Senator of the Department of Administrative Cases of the Supreme Court (elected on 24 October 2023);
- **Aivars Uminskis**, Senator of the Department of Criminal Cases of the Supreme Court (elected on 21 September 2021);
- **Lelde Grauda**, Judge of the Civil Division of the Riga Regional Court (elected on 1 November 2023);
- **Līga Baltmane-Zepa**, Judge of the Collegium of Criminal Cases of the Zemgale Regional Court (elected on 26 October 2023);
- **Kristīne Vanaga**, Judge of the Zemgale District Court (elected on 1 November 2023);
- **Aija Reitupe**, Judge of Riga City Court (currently Judge of the Riga Regional Court) (elected on 28 September 2022);
- **Ilze Andruškina**, Judge of the District Administrative Court (elected on 24 October 2023).

In 2024, the Judicial Disciplinary Committee received three disciplinary cases brought against judges of first instance courts and two cases brought against judges of regional courts, of which:

- 1 case brought by the President of the Supreme Court;
- 1 case brought by the Minister of Justice;
- 3 cases brought by the Judicial Ethics Commission.

In 2024, the Judicial Disciplinary Committee heard five cases, including:

- 1 case for deliberate violation of law in examination of a case and failure to perform duties;
- 1 case of gross negligence in examination of a case;
- 3 cases of gross violation of norms or judicial ethics.

Disciplinary decisions taken in 2024:

- in 2 cases reprimand as a disciplinary measure was adopted;
- 1 case was closed due to the withdrawal of the status of judge;
- in 1 case, the Judicial Disciplinary Committee limited itself to hearing the case without imposing a disciplinary sanction on the judge;
- in 1 case, the Judicial Disciplinary Committee decided to send the case file to the Prosecutor General's Office for a decision on whether to initiate criminal proceedings.

The decisions of the Judicial Disciplinary Committee adopted in 2024 have not been appealed before the Disciplinary Court.

In addition, in 2024, the Judicial Disciplinary Committee examined 25 complaints from individuals.

JUDICIAL COUNCIL COMMISSIONS AND WORKING GROUPS

Selection Commission of Candidates for District (City) Court and Regional Court Judges



Photo from the Supreme Court archive

Dzintra Balta,
Chair of the Selection Commission

In 2020, the Judicial Council established the Selection Commission of Candidates for District (City) Court and Regional Court Judges (hereinafter – the Selection Commission), whose main objective and main task is to select highly qualified lawyers with impeccable reputation and appropriate professional skills.

Composition of the Selection Commission in 2024:

- **Dzintra Balta**, Chair of the Selection Commission, Senator of the Department of Civil Cases of the Supreme Court (appointed on 27.10.2023);
- **Sandra Kaija**, Senator of the Department of Criminal Cases of the Supreme Court (appointed on 27.10.2023);
- **Ieva Višķere**, Senator of the Department of Administrative Cases of the Supreme Court (appointed on 27.10.2023);
- **Adrija Buliņa**, Judge of the Collegium of Civil Cases of the Riga Regional Court (appointed on 27.10.2023);
- **Andris Vilmanis**, Judge of the Collegium of Criminal Cases of Latgale Regional Court (appointed on 10.03.2023);
- **Ilze Freimane**, Judge of the Regional Administrative Court (appointed 10.03.2023);
- **Elita Stivriņa**, Judge of the Latgale District Court (appointed on 10.03.2023);
- **Madars Plepis**, President of the Kurzeme District Court (appointed on 10.03.2023);
- **Kristīne Brokane**, Judge of the District Administrative Court (appointed on 10.03.2023).

The main objective and main task of the Selection Commission is to ensure an objective, transparent and high-quality process in the selection and appointment of judges. Each selection round has a specific role to play in this process. The Selection Commission may assess reputational aspects throughout the selection process – at each stage. Experience gained in previous years has shown that the first round, which examines compliance with the formal criteria, usually results in the rejection of only a few candidates. A second round, or test, is designed to test basic professional knowledge. It is in this test that the majority of applicants fail. In the subsequent rounds, there are fewer failures, but they do occur if the applicant does not demonstrate his/her professional skills or behavioural competences in accordance with the pass criteria defined in the selection procedure. The selection is not made with a view to select a candidate for a specific judicial post, but to establish a list of shortlisted candidates who can take up the judicial post when it becomes vacant. Therefore, all legal professionals who meet the standard of judicial office are selected from the applicants who have applied on each occasion. There is a competition for a place on the list, as the highest-ranking candidate is the first to be offered the post.

At the same time, the Selection Commission ensures that information on the selection process is publicly available to all potential candidates in a transparent manner, and has therefore participated in the creation of an infographic and is involved in informing the public and judges about the selection process as well as the vacancies. The Chair of the Selection Commission participates in regular visits of the Judicial Council to the courts.

In 2024, as previously and since September 2020, when the new selection procedure for judges came into force, judicial selections took place simultaneously for all courts in the relevant area of specialisation.

The four judicial selection competitions launched in 2023 continued in January and February 2024 (the 3rd selection round) and concluded in March 2024 (the final – 4th selection round):

- 9 candidates were selected for the 4th round of the selection procedure for the post of district court judge. At the end of the selection process, 8 candidates were included in the list of candidates; 8 were appointed to the judicial office;
- no non-judicial candidates were nominated to the 4th round of selection of candidates for the post of judge of the Collegium of Civil Cases of a regional court. At the end of the selection process, 4 of them (all judges of the court of first instance) were included in the list of candidates for the post of judge; in 2024, 4 judges from the list were transferred to the regional court;
- the selection of candidates for the post of judge of the Collegium of Criminal Cases of a regional court was closed,
- 5 candidates (all judges of first instance) were included in the list of candidates for the post of judge; 4 judges were transferred from the list to regional courts, while 1 candidate (a judge) is on the list of candidates;
- no candidate (from among non-judicial candidates) was nominated to the 4th round of selection of candidates for the post of judge of the Regional Administrative Court. At the end of the selection process, 7 of them (all judges of the court of first instance) were included in the list of candidates for the post of judge; 3 judges were transferred from the list to the regional court, while 4 candidates (judges) were awaiting the opening of the vacancy.

In 2024, vacancies were announced for both district (city) court and regional court judges in all specialisations.

- On 2 September 2024, a competition was announced for the judges of courts of general jurisdiction. 40 candidates applied, 38 of whom were selected for the 2nd round, 12 for the 3rd round, and 7 for the 4th round. The selection continues in 2025.
- On 2 September 2024, a vacancy notice was published for the post of judge of the Collegium of Civil Cases of a regional court of general jurisdiction. 9 applicants (6 of them judges) applied. 3 applicants of the non-judicial applicants were invited to the 2nd round, 1 applicant was invited to the 3rd round and no applicant was invited to the 4th round. The Judicial Qualification Committee will promote judges for the final round of selection in 2025.
- On 2 September 2024, a vacancy notice was published for the post of judge of the Collegium of Criminal Cases of a regional court of general jurisdiction. 7 applicants (4 of them judges) applied. 2 applicants of the non-judicial applicants were advanced to the 2nd round, 1 to the 3rd round and no applicants to the 4th round. The Judicial Qualification Committee will promote judges to the final round of selection in 2025.

Commission for the Evaluation of Candidates for the Office of President and Deputy President of District (City) Court and Regional Court and Chair of Courthouse



Guntars Ploriņš,
Chair of the Commission

In 2024, the Commission for the Evaluation of Candidates for the Office of President and Deputy President of District (City) Court and Regional Court and Chair of Courthouse (hereinafter – the Commission) continued to consist of three permanent members: two members delegated by the Judicial Council from among judges – Ilze Celmiņa and Guntars Ploriņš, as well as a representative authorised by the Minister of Justice – Inita Ilgaža, Deputy State Secretary of the Ministry of Justice. As the fourth member of the Commission, a judge of relevant court in each competition was selected, and thus the Commission last year included 12 judges of the respective courts.

In 2024, the trend of previous years that one to two candidates applied for vacant posts in the management of the courts (in one competition there were three candidates) continued. Moreover, it is oftentimes that the number of candidates is one, as it was in 12 out of 15 competitions.

A total of 19 candidates entered these 15 competitions, 18 of whom were heard and assessed by the Commission (one candidate withdrew before the Commission's meeting).

The basis for the Commission's activity: the Procedure for the Nomination and Appointment of President, Deputy President of District (City) Court and Regional Court and Chair of Courthouse (approved by Decision No 6 of the Judicial Council of 15 March 2019).

Composition of the Commission

- **Guntars Ploriņš**, Chair of the Commission, President of Valmiera Courthouse of the District Administrative Court;
- **Ilze Celmiņa**, Judge of the Riga Regional Court;
- **Inita Ilgaža**, Deputy State Secretary on Court Issues, Ministry of Justice;
- **12** ad hoc judges of the relevant courts.

In 2024, a total of 15 competitions were launched for vacant posts of Presidents and Deputy Presidents:

- Deputy President of the Riga District Court;
- Deputy President of the Zemgale District Court;
- President of the Latgale District Court;
- Deputy President of the Vidzeme District Court;
- President of the Riga Regional Court;
- Deputy President of the Kurzeme District Court;
- President of Liepāja Courthouse of the District Administrative Court;
- Deputy President of the Riga City Court;
- Deputy President of the Riga District Court;
- Deputy President of the Regional Administrative Court;
- Deputy President of the Zemgale District Court;
- Deputy President of the Latgale District Court;
- Deputy President of the Riga District Court (two positions);
- Deputy President of the Vidzeme Regional Court.

Working Group for Court Efficiency



Juris Siliņš,

Chair of the Working Group for Court Efficiency

In order to implement the tasks mentioned in the third action line of the Judicial Council Strategy 2021-2025 “Efficient and High-Quality Judiciary”, the Working Group for Court Efficiency was reconstituted with a new composition by Decision No 2 of the Judicial Council of 19.01.2024:

- **Juris Siliņš**, Chair of the Working Group, President of the Zemgale Regional Court;
- **Līga Ašitoka**, President of the Vidzeme District Court;
- **Juris Stukāns**, Prosecutor General;
- **Jānis Rozenbergs**, Chair of the Latvian Council of Sworn Advocates;
- **Aigars Kaupe**, Chair of the Latvian Council of Sworn Notaries;
- **Iveta Kruka**, Chair of the Latvian Council of Sworn Bailiffs;
- **Inita Ilgaža**, Deputy State Secretary on Court Issues, Ministry of Justice..

The Judicial Council set the following tasks for the Working Group in 2024:

- to assess the results of the territorial reform of the courts;
- to assess the possibilities of balancing the workload of judges;
- to assess the availability of courts in the regions and the possibilities to optimise court locations;
- to assess the possibilities for developing the employment standards and remuneration system for the support staff of the judiciary;
- to assess the adequacy of the functions of court presidents and deputy presidents to the needs of a modern judicial system, and to develop a methodology for assessing the performance of court management;
- to assess the competence of the courts as defined by the laws and regulations and identify activities that are not inherent to the judicial function;
- to raise other issues related to improving the efficiency of the justice system.

The Working Group for Court Efficiency, in cooperation with judges, as well as the Supreme Court, the Ministry of Justice and the Court Administration, worked on the implementation of the tasks set out in the Action Plan and analysed the State Audit Office report “Availability and development of human resources in the Latvian judicial system”. The main results of the Working Group in 2024:

- The Judicial Council approves the report on “Evaluation of the territorial reform of courts”;
- Guidelines for writing judgments in criminal cases for courts of first instance and courts of appeal have been developed and approved by the Judicial Council (24.05.2024);
- Guidelines for writing judgments in administrative violation cases for courts of first instance and courts of appeal have been developed and approved by the Judicial Council (10.06.2024).

Working Group on Specialisation of Judges



Ilze Celmiņa,
Chair of the Working Group

Taking into account the role of the Judicial Council in strengthening the efficiency of the judicial system and improving the organisation of judicial work, as well as in order to implement the task set out in sub-point 3.6 of the third action line of the Judicial Council Strategy 2021-2025 – to develop standards of specialisation of judges, the following Working Group was established:

- **Ilze Celmiņa**, Chair of the Working Group, Judge of the Riga Regional Court;
- **Baiba Ozoliņa**, Judge of Riga City Court;
- **Inita Ilgaža**, Deputy State Secretary on Court Issues, Ministry of Justice.

Taking into account the need to cover issues in all areas of specialisation, the Working Group involved

Signis Grīnbergs, Judge of the Collegium of Criminal Cases of the Riga Regional Court, Inguna Helmane, Judge of Riga City Court, who specialises in land registry cases, and Aiga Putniņa, President of the District Administrative Court.

The Judicial Council set the following tasks for the Working Group:

- to assess the basic principles of specialisation of judges and the possibilities for their improvement (Decision of the Judicial Council No 66 of 17 October 2016), including the implementation of land registry case management functions in courts;
- to raise other issues related to strengthening the specialisation of judges.

Key performance results of the Working Group in 2024:

- inter-institutional discussion on “Specialisation of land registries in the civil law sector of courts” (20.06.2024);
- Judicial Council approves report “Basic Principles for the Specialisation of Judges” (29.11.2024);
- Judicial Council approves the report on “Specialisation in land registry cases in courts” (29.11.2024).

Working Group for Management of Time Limits for the Examination of Cases



Madars Plepis,
Chair of the Working Group

Decision No 4 of 19 January 2024 of the Judicial Council established the Working Group for Management of Time Limits for the Examination of Cases, which aims to strengthen the judicial system by improving the processes for managing time limits for the handling of cases, as well as by implementing other tasks included in the operational strategy of the Judicial Council. The main tasks of the Working Group are to develop guidelines for court presidents, to monitor the time limits for handling lengthy criminal proceedings and to propose solutions for streamlining judicial processes. In cooperation with the Court Administration and the presidents of courts, the Working Group carries out in-depth analyses to identify problem areas and find effective solutions for the timely processing of cases.

Composition of the Working Group:

- **Madars Plepis**, Chair of the Working Group, President of the Kurzeme District Court;
- **Jānis Rozenbergs**, Chair of the Latvian Council of Sworn Advocates;
- **Juris Stukāns**, Prosecutor General;
- **Andris Munda**, Director of the Court Administration.

The Working Group's activity to date has focused in particular on the identification and analysis of criminal cases that have been pending for a long time. It has identified 2 404 cases pending for more than two years, including 311 criminal cases, which has now been pending for more than five years. An assessment of the reasons for the lengthy proceedings shows that the absence of the parties to the proceedings, technical obstacles and the need for additional procedural steps have a significant role. Based on this analysis, proposals have been developed to promote more efficient case management and the involvement of court presidents in the process. In addition, the Working Group is also actively working on the development of digital tools, including the improvement of the functioning of the Court Information System.

To facilitate the examination of cases within reasonable time frames, work with advocates should continue, i.e. advocates should find their own substitutes when they cannot attend a hearing, and the court's discretion should be strengthened to substitute an advocate whose caseload delays the hearing of a case.

While the development of separate new guidelines on time management processes is not considered necessary, the Working Group proposes to complement the existing guidelines by including the basic principles of time management in examination of cases. The guidelines could contain clearer risk factors, such as the absence of judges or unforeseen changes in workload affecting time frames, as well as the possibility to exclude from the time frames the period during which proceedings in a case are suspended.

In conclusion, the activities of the Working Group contribute to a comprehensive and data-driven approach to the management of judicial deadlines, which can improve the organisation of court work and reduce delays in the long term.

Commission Deciding on the Permission to Participate in the Selection of Candidates for the Office of Judge or Prosecutor for a Person Who Has Committed a Criminal Offence due to Negligence

On 15 December 2022, the Constitutional Court adopted a judgment in Case No. 2021-41-01, declaring Section 55(3) of the law "On Judicial Power" to be incompatible with Article 101, Paragraph one and the first sentence of Article 106 of the Constitution of the Republic of Latvia. The Constitutional Court assessed the restriction on standing for judicial office. The Constitutional Court noted that the termination of criminal proceedings on non-rehabilitating grounds applied to different criminal offences committed by a person, the gravity of which would not necessarily pose a threat to the judicial system and the democratic order if the person were allowed to stand as a candidate for judicial office, however, the regulation contained in Section 55 of the law "On Judicial Power", regardless of the non-rehabilitating circumstance, provides for an automatic prohibition for a person to stand as a candidate for judicial office in all cases where criminal proceedings are terminated on such grounds.

In accordance with the judgement, Section 55 of the law "On Judicial Power" was amended to provide for the possibility to assess and determine in which cases of termination of criminal proceedings on non-rehabilitative grounds the circumstances are such that, without jeopardising public confidence in the judiciary and the reputation of the judiciary, a person may still become a candidate for the office of a judge. The legal framework was supplemented by providing for individual assessment of persons by a special commission. Following persons may apply for such assessment:

1. who have been previously convicted of a criminal offence or a less serious crime committed due to negligence, if the conviction has been expunged or quashed;
2. against whom criminal proceedings have been discontinued on non-rehabilitating grounds, if a
3. criminal offence or a crime committed by a person is less serious and was committed due to negligence, if at least eight years have elapsed since the decision to discontinue criminal proceedings on non-rehabilitating grounds;
4. who have previously committed a crime or a less serious criminal offence, and the offence was committed due to negligence, but have been released from serving their sentence by reason of a statute of limitations, amnesty or pardon, provided that not less than eight years have elapsed after the decision to release them from serving their sentence by reason of a statute of limitations, amnesty or pardon.

The competence for assessing a person is transferred to the joint judicial and prosecutorial candidates' assessment commission established by the Judicial Council, which will assess the admissibility of a person to participate in the selection of candidates for judicial office.

The law "On Judicial Power" sets out the criteria for the assessment. In order to determine the impact of a person and the crime or less serious criminal offence committed by him/her on the reputation of the judiciary, the Commission shall assess the nature and character of the offence and the attitude of the person towards it, as well as the possible impact of the criminal offence on the performance of the duties of a judge. In addition, the person's activities during the period between the commission of the offence and the date on which the person applied for authorisation to stand for judicial office, as well as the possible risks and impact on public confidence in the judiciary and the reputation of the judiciary shall be assessed. According to the first criterion of the assessment, the Commission shall examine the seriousness of the crime or less serious criminal offence committed by the person and the public interest affected, as well as the person's attitude towards the offence, in order to ascertain whether the circumstances in question are

such as to be incompatible with the office of a judge. The second criterion assesses the person's actions after the crime or offence has been committed, in order to ascertain whether the person has drawn any conclusions after the event and, for example, changed his or her life, has worked for the public good and has a positive reputation in the eyes of the public. The third criterion determines whether granting a person permission to stand as a candidate for judicial office will affect public confidence in the judiciary and the reputation of the judiciary. The Commission is entitled to receive information from state and local authorities, as well as from private persons, in order to be able to assess the information in accordance with the above criteria. The scope of the information to be requested and the subjects from whom such information may be requested are set out in the Cabinet of Ministers' regulations in order to comply with all the requirements for data protection, acquisition, processing and storage set out in the regulatory enactments.

Taking into account the nature of a decision adopted by the Commission, allowing or prohibiting a person to participate in the selection process of candidates for the office of judge or prosecutor, the person shall have the right to appeal against the decision in accordance with the procedure established by the Administrative Procedure Law.

The establishment of the procedure for the Commission to decide whether to grant authorisation is left to the Judicial Council. On 12 February 2024, by Decision No 14, the Judicial Council approved the relevant regulation "Procedure for allowing a person who has committed a criminal offence due to negligence to participate in the selection of candidates for the office of judge or prosecutor". Decision No 17

of the Judicial Council of 1 March 2024 established a commission to decide on granting the authorization to participate in the selection of candidates for the office of judge or prosecutor for a person who has committed a criminal offence due to negligence in the following composition:

- **Agris Dreimanis**, Chair of the Commission, Judge of the Regional Administrative Court, representative of the Latvian Association of Administrative Judges.
- **Aiva Daidere**, Judge of the Kurzeme Regional Court, representative of the Judicial Ethics Commission;
- **Liene Eglāja**, Prosecutor of the Southern Kurzeme Prosecution Office, representative of the Latvian Prosecutors' Association;
- **Sandra Kaija**, Senator of the Department of Criminal Cases of the Supreme Court, representative of the Selection Commission of Candidates for District (City) Court and Regional Court Judges;
- **Agnis Pormalis**, Prosecutor at the Division for Coordination of Defence of Persons and State's Rights of the Department for Supervision of Operation and International Cooperation of the Prosecutor General's Office, representative of the Prosecutors' Attestation Commission;
- **Andris Zutis**, Judge of the Latgale Regional Court, representative of the Latvian Association of Judges.

In 2024, the Commission has evaluated one application and granted a person permission to participate in the selection of candidates for judicial office.

Selection Commission for the Director of the Judicial Academy

Article 5 of the Law on the Judicial Academy stipulates, inter alia, that the Minister of Justice shall nominate a candidate for the post of the Academy's Director for appointment upon the proposal of the Judicial Council, and that the Judicial Council shall determine the conditions and procedure for the application for the post of the Academy's Director, as well as the procedure for the selection and evaluation of candidates. The selection of candidates for the post of the Academy's Director shall be carried out by a commission established by the Judicial Council. The Commission shall include representatives of the judiciary and the executive in equal numbers.

On 19 November 2024, by Decision No 73, the Judicial Council approved the conditions and procedure for the application for the post of Director of the Judicial Academy, as well as the procedure for the selection and evaluation of applicants, which stipulated that the Commission shall consist of three representatives of the judiciary nominated by the Judicial Council and three representatives of the executive branch nominated by the Minister of Justice.

The Selection Commission for the Director of the Judicial Academy was established by Decision No 75 of 29 November 2024 and is composed of:

- **Guntars Ploriņš**, Chair of the Commission, President of Valmiera Courthouse of the District Administrative Court;
- **Inga Niedre**, Chief Prosecutor at the Pre-trial Criminal Procedure and Judicial Proceedings Coordination Division of the Criminal Justice Department of the Prosecutor General's Office;
- **Rudīte Vīduša**, Senator of the Department of Administrative Cases of the Supreme Court;
- **Lauma Paegļkalna**, Parliamentary Secretary of the Ministry of Justice;
- **Inita Ilgaža**, Deputy State Secretary on Court Issues, Ministry of Justice;
- **Andris Munda**, Director of the Court Administration.

The Commission started its work on 17 December, when it held its first meeting. Candidates were evaluated in three selection rounds. The candidate for the post of the Director of the Judicial Academy, nominated by the Selection Commission, was considered at the meeting of the Judicial Council on 24 January 2025. In turn, on 18 February 2025, the Cabinet of Ministers passed the final decision confirming Laila Jurcēna as Director of the Judicial Academy.

COURT NEWS IN 2024



Fotogrāfija no Augstākās tiesas arhīva

Supreme Court

President of the Supreme Court
Aigars Strupiņš

The work of the Supreme Court in 2024 was focused on efficiency and quality.

In 2024, 35 senators and 115 staff members worked at the Supreme Court. Sanita Osipova, Inese Grauda and Laura Konošonoka were confirmed as senators, while Aldis Laviņš returned from the Constitutional Court. Senators Inta Lauka and Artūrs Freibergs terminated their judicial duties. Veronika Krūmiņa was confirmed as a judge of the Constitutional Court. With her departure, the leadership of the Department of Administrative Cases changed – Anita Kovaļevska has been the Chair of the Department since September.

Case statistics

Last year, there was a balance in the numbers of cases received and examined in the Senate: 2008 cases were received and 2005 cases were completed. The examination of cases in cassation proceedings involves the analysis of substantial questions of law, so the current workload – an average of 50-60 cases per Senator per year – is optimal and allows the Senate's core function, the development of uniform case-law, to be carried out in a high-quality manner.

The number of cases heard by the Senate has decreased – by 14% in the Department of Administrative Cases and by 13% in the Department of Civil Cases. This is mainly due to the suspension of cases due to preliminary questions referred to the Court of Justice of the European Union and applications submitted to the Constitutional Court, as well as due to changes in the composition of the Senators.

In the Department of Civil Cases and the Department of Criminal Cases, the time limits for hearing cases (4.5 and 3.6 months respectively) are nearly optimal. The Department of Administrative Cases has also managed to successfully reduce the backlog of “lengthy” cases, as well as to improve the average time taken to examine a case (9.8 months). Whereas, the Department of Criminal Cases has managed to cope with the short-term challenge of “heavy” cases, such as the so-called Zolitūde case, through skilful organisation of its work.

Senators discussed how to make the work of the Senate more efficient at an internal conference on “Efficiency and Development Prospects of the Cassation Instance”.

Case-law

Predictable case-law increases the security of the legal system and confidence in the courts, and the availability of Senate’s case-law plays a special role in this. In 2024, more than 270 Senate’s decisions were added to the archive of case-law decisions on the Supreme Court’s website, representing 14% of the decisions adopted. Case-law findings were added to 56 decisions of the Department of Civil Cases, to 27 decisions of the Department of Criminal Cases, and to 127 decisions of the Department of Administrative Cases. In the past year, there has been no departure from earlier case-law, which is a positive trend, as it increases confidence in stable judicial practice.

In 2024, 11 summaries of Senate’s case-law were published: two for the Department of Civil Cases, four for the Department Administrative Cases, and five for the Department of Criminal Cases.

Two new sections have been created on the website of the Supreme Court – “Dialogue with the Constitutional Court” and

“Dialogue with the Court of Justice of the European Union”, which include information not only on preliminary questions referred to the CJEU from the Senate, but also from all Latvian courts, and applications to the Constitutional Court.

Dialogue with the parties to proceedings

In 2023, the Supreme Court developed guidelines for the preparation of cassation appeals, and last year, information leaflets on this topic were also prepared. However, the quality of the cassation appeals received has not improved, including those prepared by advocates. The Division of Case-law and Research of the Supreme Court has been tasked with a more detailed review of these practices in order to find solutions.

In cooperation with the Centre for Public Policy “Providus”, the Supreme Court conducted a survey of legal professionals involved in court proceedings (advocates, prosecutors, institutional lawyers) on their assessment of the Supreme Court’s work. The professionals’ assessment is high – 87% trust the Senate. In addition, 83% believe that the Senate’s judgments and decisions are fair. In order to continuously monitor the evaluation of the parties to proceedings, a permanent questionnaire has been introduced which is sent to the parties electronically together with the Senate’s ruling.

Dialogue with Latvian courts

In 2024, five judges of lower courts served their traineeships at the Supreme Court. The day of newly appointed judges was held. The senators of Supreme Court departments met with judges of regional courts and courts of first instance in various formats. Senators gave lectures and conducted seminars at the Latvian Judicial Training Centre.

International cooperation

The Supreme Court represents Latvia in the Network of the Presidents of the Supreme Judicial Courts of the European Union and the Association of the Councils of State and Supreme Administrative Jurisdictions of the European Union (ACA-Europe). In the framework of the judicial exchange programmes, the Supreme Court was joined by colleagues from the Supreme Court of Poland and the Supreme Administrative Court of Austria.

Last year, the annual meeting of the Supreme Courts of the Baltic States took place in Lithuania.

A delegation of the management and the Administration of the Supreme Court visited the Supreme Court of the Czech Republic for an exchange of experience. Senators gained experience at the Court of Justice of the European Union and the European Court of Human Rights. The legal research counsels had an experience visit to the Supreme Court of Estonia.

In connection with the 20th anniversary of Latvia's accession to the European Union, the Supreme Court organised an international conference on "Values of the European Union – Responsibility of Every National Judge". A meeting of the Circle of European Trademark Judges was held at the Supreme Court.

Dialogue with the public

The Supreme Court's communication is open and proactive. The Supreme Court Bulletin is published. Almost 300 press releases have been issued, the accounts of X and YouTube have been kept up to date. A media survey, Media Day for journalists who write about law, and a press conference on the so-called Zolitūde case were organized. Open Days for both law and communication students took place. More than 900 students participated in law classes at the Supreme Court. Three videos on the courts were produced for schoolchildren, as well as videos introducing the positions of a senator's assistant and a legal research counsel were created.

2025 priorities

This year's major project will test the possibilities and limits of AI tools in the work of the Court, focusing on the possibility of tools to select uniform cases in the first phase of the project.

Monitoring of the practice of the use of guidelines prepared by the Supreme Court, dialogue with courts of appeal and courts of first instance, as well as identification of opportunities to improve the quality and efficiency of courts will continue.

Further efforts will also be made to relieve judges of their duties in various extrajudicial activities, in order to leave the administration of justice and participation in self-government as primary responsibilities of judges. This proposal has been referred to the Judicial Council for detailed consideration.

The year 2025 will also be significant in the life of the Supreme Court, as the first term of Aigars Strupišs as President of the Supreme Court ends in June. The election of the President of the Supreme Court will take place. It will also be a significant year in that October will mark 30 years since the Senate, the cassation instance, was reinstated in the Supreme Court. An international conference will be held to mark the occasion, and publications summarising the history of the Senate will be prepared.



Photo from the archives of the Regional Administrative Court

Regional Administrative Court

President of the Regional Administrative Court

Ojārs Priedītis

The past year of work of the Regional Administrative Court has been marked by the 20th anniversary of the existence of the administrative courts in Latvia, during which we have looked back at what has been done in the past, as well as looked forward to the future and the challenges that lie ahead, including the improvement of the judicial system, balancing the workload of judges, and ensuring more efficient and faster case processing in order to strengthen public confidence in the judiciary.

Addressing the performance indicators of the Regional Administrative Court for 2024, it can be seen that the Court has managed to reduce its backlog by 7.65% in 2024. The number of cases pending before the Court also increased by 5.26% in 2024. At the same time, the fact that the number of cases received by the Regional Administrative Court has also decreased by around 7% is noteworthy for the future perspective. While the overall performance of the Court generally follows a positive trend, the Court should continue to work on improving its performance indicators by collecting

and analysing information on case processing times, with a focus on reducing the backlog.

The legal relationships at issue in these cases are constantly evolving and adapting to changing societies, technologies and international processes, and the rules of law must be interpreted to ensure that a fair solution is found in each case. In this respect, the cooperation of the Regional Administrative Court with the Constitutional Court and the Court of Justice of the European Union is essential. The Court has made two applications to the Constitutional Court in the past year, but in both cases the Constitutional Court refused to accept the application. Moreover, in the past year, the Regional Administrative Court decided in two proceedings to refer questions on the interpretation of European Union law to the Court of Justice of the European Union for a preliminary ruling.

For the past few years, the Regional Administrative Court has been operating with unfilled judicial vacancies. The year 2024 has been positive in this respect and the composition of the judges of the Court has undergone changes. In particular, in 2024, a highly respected and highly valued colleague – Judge Margarita Osmane retired. Whereas, Judge Laura Konošonoka was transferred to the position of

Senator in the Department of Administrative Cases of the Senate. At the same time, two new colleagues – Judges Ieva Dambe and Daiga Lubāne – started working at the Regional Administrative Court, as well as Judge Ilze Freimane, who had previously temporarily performed the duties of a Senator at the Department of Administrative Cases of the Senate, started working at the Regional Administrative Court. These changes in the composition of the judges demonstrate the maturity of the administrative court system and its ability to adapt to changing circumstances. However, in the coming years, the number of judges reaching retirement age is expected to have an impact on the work of the Regional Administrative Court. This process may create additional challenges as vacancies will need to be filled. Therefore, attracting and integrating new judges into the work of the Regional Administrative Court will be of particular importance. In addition, the workload of judges will need to be monitored in order to avoid creating excessive workload and to ensure the efficient functioning of the judicial system in the long term.

Quality support staff are equally important in our daily work. While much work has been done in recent years on the remuneration of support staff, the work of the Court continues to be affected by staff turnover. In addition, the fact that the Court is finding it increasingly difficult to attract new qualified staff poses challenges. In order to mitigate the impact of staff turnover, it is necessary not only to strengthen training and support programmes, but also to improve working conditions and create a stable working environment to motivate staff to remain with the Court. In this context, the possibilities to motivate long-serving judicial staff to choose a career in the judiciary by offering them clear development opportunities and appropriate support mechanisms should be explored. This would not only help to ensure stability in the judicial system, but also encourage the entry of experienced and well-trained professionals into the judiciary, which in turn would strengthen the independence and quality of the judiciary.

The fast-growing technological era also plays a role in the work of the Regional Administrative Court, as more and more electronic cases are being received at the Court. It is expected that the number of electronic cases will continue to increase in the coming years, which will allow for faster and more efficient case processing. However, such changes also require an appropriate infrastructure, as well as training of judges and staff in the new technologies. The active involvement of the judges and staff of the Regional Administrative Court in the Working Group for Implementation of the e-Case System is therefore commendable.

In 2025, the Regional Administrative Court will continue to focus on improving efficiency, developing the professional skills of judges and staff and expanding the use of technology. Emphasising the importance of strengthening public confidence, the team of judges and staff of the Regional Administrative Court will fulfil their duties to ensure the transparency, accessibility and speed of the judicial system, adapting to both changing circumstances and the demands of society.



Photo from the archives of the Riga Regional Court

Riga Regional Court

President of the Riga Regional Court
Māris Vigants

Last year was a year of gradual changes at the Riga Regional Court, marking a new vector of development for the largest regional court in Latvia. We will be able to assess the results in the longer term, but history is being made today, in our everyday lives. Outside the court, these changes may not have been as visible, but they have been felt by every colleague, every person working at the Regional Court, and they are also seen and appreciated by visitors to the court.

The working conditions and environment in which we work, along with other important factors, ensure our ability to perform our duties and provide a quality adjudication service in our nation's capital and the Riga region. The Riga metropolitan area is home to the majority of Latvia's gross national product, so the provision of the judicial function here requires flexible solutions from the management.

We are grateful to our colleagues in other Latvian courts for their support, and I believe that we can be satisfied with the results of our cooperation so far.

We are also pleased with the positive assessment of our work by the Chair of the Judicial Council, which was voiced at the Plenary Session of the Supreme Court, namely that the share of cases brought before

the court of cassation is decreasing in the Senate, as the quality of work of the appellate courts is improving. Looking at the performance indicators of the past year, we can see that, alongside the courts of first instance and other regional courts in Latvia, the Riga City Courts and Riga District Courts are successfully dealing with their duties.

The Riga Regional Court has managed to forecast the timeframes needed for case examination in 2024 that are close to the actual timeframes and to organise the administration of justice in accordance with the average timeframe standard set by the Judicial Council. This confirms the predictability of the length of proceedings in Latvia; thus, every client of the court can plan the time necessary for the case to be heard.

The deadlines for civil cases in the Riga judicial area continue to be significantly affected by the large number of cases and the possibility to transfer cases to other courts for faster consideration. The performance indicators of the Collegium of Civil Cases of the Riga Regional Court show a decrease in the number of pending cases, but there is an urgent need to balance the workload of judges in the appellate courts. Last year, more than half of the cases, excluding those transferred to other regional courts, were dealt with within the first three months of their receipt at the regional court. Civil cases have been dealt with in line with the forecast average time taken to deal with cases, with the exception of debt recovery cases,

although the regulation introduced during Covid-19 on the extended possibilities for appeals to be dealt with by written procedure is no longer in force.

When I took office as President of the Riga Regional Court, I expressed the view that the filling of vacancies in the Collegium of Civil Cases should be put on hold until the Judicial Council studies the issue of balancing the workload of judges, as well as until the case-weighting to determine a fair workload is introduced in the appellate courts.

When forecasting the time limits for the handling of cases in 2025, judges have repeatedly found it impossible to reduce the time limits for the handling of civil cases due to the planned involvement of the judges of the Collegium of Civil Cases in the examination of cases of the Collegium of Criminal Cases. Due to long-standing vacancies, the workload at the Collegium of Criminal Cases of the Riga Regional Court has increased significantly over the last year, affecting also the time limits for the examination of cases and the number of pending criminal cases. To balance the workload, the transfer of criminal cases to other courts in Latvia was organised in 2024 and is planned to continue this year.

The Riga Regional Court has jurisdiction over appeals against decisions in cases heard by the Economic Court, including proceedings concerning criminally acquired property. The number of pending proceedings on criminally acquired property has increased significantly over the past year, as in many cases the Riga Regional Court has adopted decisions to suspend proceedings in relation to the provisions of the regulation challenged before the Constitutional Court. The Constitutional Court's ruling on the legality of this regulation expected in early 2025 will have a significant impact on the future work of the entire judicial system.

Despite the pressure of their core duties, the judges of both Collegiums have made a significant contribution, both in the selection of judges and in the training of new judges, in the development of further training programmes and in the management of student internships, as well as Evaluating the conduct of moot courts in both criminal and civil law. In 2024, we

organised three moots on civil procedure issues for students undergoing traineeship.

High participation rates!

This time has been very important for the unity of the Riga Regional Court team, reinforcing the belief that every judge and court employee is an asset. Every employee's opinion counts, regardless of their position, which is why at the Riga Regional Court, where two hundred people work in two separate buildings, we asked for nominating colleagues who stand out from the crowd in our year-end survey.

A team-building event was organised at Christmas with the Court's own efforts and resources, with 90% of the Court's members taking part. We organised several activities and got to know each other better. The team decided to donate the proceeds from the auction, organized within these activities, to an animal shelter. This has contributed to a broad involvement in corporate activities and events aimed at strengthening the unity of the team.

We have continued our tradition of organising a day of newly appointed employees, inviting also those people who have rejoined the Riga Regional Court after a long absence. Last year, we introduced the tradition of the Family Day for the relatives of colleagues to get to know our work and the Riga Regional Court.

I am grateful that with the support of the team we are able to move towards the goal that every judge and court employee working in the Riga Regional Court will positively evaluate their workplace, its environment and feel that they belong to the Riga Regional Court. By strengthening the sense of belonging to the country and to the Court in celebrating important events, we create a favourable working environment, a harmonious and collegial atmosphere within the team.

In 2025 we will celebrate the 30th anniversary of the renewal of regional courts in Latvia. May this be a time to get to know the traditions of all regional court teams better and to create new ones, continuing the exchange of experience for the establishment of a unified court of appeal in Latvia!



Photo by Līga Skalde, Assistant to the President of the Kurzeme Regional Court for Research and Analytical Issues

Kurzeme Regional Court

President of the Kurzeme Regional Court

Didzis Aktumanis

The year 2024 in the Kurzeme Regional Court could be described as dynamic, full of various challenges and unprecedented staff changes.

In 2024, there were changes in the composition of both judges and staff. From February 2023 to June 2024, four judges were serving in the Collegium of Civil Cases due to retirements of judges. As from 10 June 2024, Judge Igors Klugačs was transferred to the Kurzeme Regional Court, and on 15 July 2024 – Judge Inguna Gaile. Thus, the full-fledged work of two judicial panels is now ensured.

Ināra Rozīte, Judge of the Collegium of Criminal Cases, who has devoted 36 years of service to the justice system, and for which she deservedly received the Award of the Justice System at the end of her career, retired in 2024.

There have also been changes in the composition of the workforce, where 12.5% of the staff have changed.

We are proud that one of our long-standing judicial assistants, Ilze Vasiljeva, has continued her career development and is now a judge of a district (city) court.

In 2024, the Kurzeme Regional Court participated in the internal dialogue of the judiciary, sharing its experience and discussing topical issues in the work of the courts with both judges of first instance courts and representatives of the Senate. On 5 April 2024, the annual seminar with the Kurzeme District Court was held, during which topical legal issues in the field of criminal and civil law were discussed, as well as an overview of the summaries prepared by the Regional Court, which include analysis of appealed decisions of courts of first instance, was presented. On 24 May 2024, a meeting of the judges of the Kurzeme Regional Court with representatives of the Senate's department of Criminal Cases took place, and on 18 October – a meeting was held with the Chair of the Senate's Department of Civil Cases.

On 15 February 2024 at the Kurzeme Regional Court the judges of the Collegium of Civil Cases met with the Chair of the Council of Certified Mediators, during

which the judges were informed about current developments in the field of mediation, with particular emphasis on the court's role in promoting mediation in cases of family disputes.

In this respect, it should be emphasised that in civil cases the judges of the Kurzeme Regional Court are actively involved in discussing alternative ways of dispute resolution with litigants, including trying to reconcile the parties, discussing the benefits of mediation as a solution, as well as discussing with litigants in court hearings specific options of a possible settlement or compromise, thus promoting the search for solutions to disputes acceptable to both parties within the framework of the principle of cooperation. Such activities are time-consuming and often do not result in a single court session, but the overall results are positive.

On 12 April 2024, the judges of the Kurzeme Regional Court met with members of the Judicial Ethics Commission to discuss issues related to the conduct of court proceedings and procedural hooliganism. On 23 September 2024, representatives of the Judicial Council visited the Court to inform about the current activities of the Judicial Council and to discuss with the judges the workload of judges, selection of judges and other issues.

The Kurzeme Regional Court judges and employees actively participated in various justice system improvement activities, for example, in the working group for the implementation of the e-Case management system and record keeping, in the permanent working groups on civil procedure, criminal procedure and criminal law, as well as performed duties of members of various self-government bodies. Judge Aiva Daidere is a member of the Judicial Ethics Commission, judicial assistant Nelda Ose serves in the Judicial Staff Ethics Commission, and Judge Silva Reinholde was re-elected to the Judicial Qualification Committee, where she also continues to serve as the Chair.

In 2024, several awards of the Ministry of Justice and the Court Administration were received for the contribution to the development of the justice system and for the professional performance of duties. The Ministry of Justice's 1st degree Certificate of Recognition and the Golden Feather were awarded to Aija Āva, Judge of the Collegium of Criminal Cases. Ilja Grigorjevs, Judge of the Collegium of Civil Cases was awarded the Diploma of Honour of the Ministry of Justice. Sandra Mertena, Judge of the Collegium of Criminal Cases received the Certificate of Honour of the Court Administration. Judicial assistant Nelda Ose and court secretary Solvita Kangīzere were awarded the Certificate of Appreciation of the Court Administration, while court secretary Liene Biguna and court interpreter-archivist Dagnija Šmita were awarded the Certificate of Recognition of the Court Administration.

At the end of each year, an internal vote within the Court identifies and the best employees who are awarded. In 2024, Ilona Bobko was voted the best judicial assistant, Vlads Šumska was awarded as the best court secretary, and Aiga Laugale was the best court consultant.

In order to promote team unity, internal events have been organised for judges and employees, including the annual tradition of decorating the premises for the solstice, as well as sports and educational activities in nature (boating, excursion, participation in sports games organised by the Kurzeme District Court).

For more than 10 years, the Kurzeme Regional Court has been developing good cooperation and friendship with its colleagues from the Šiauliai Regional Court in Lithuania. Joint conferences and meetings are organised annually. Unfortunately, in 2024, for various objective reasons, such a joint meeting did not take place, so we hope for a positive continuation of cooperation and a meeting in 2025.

We are also looking forward to the judicial selection process, which will lead to an appointment of a new judge in the Collegium of Criminal Cases in 2025.



Photos from the archives of the Latgale Regional Court

Latgale Regional Court

President of the Latgale Regional Court
Alla Šilova

In 2024, the Latgale Regional Court operated in a composition of 13 judges – 7 judges in the Collegium of Civil Cases and 6 judges in the Collegium of Criminal Cases. In this context, it should be particularly noted that in 2025 there will be changes in the composition of the judges due to the retirement of Silvija Vasiļevska, Judge of the Collegium of Civil Cases, and Jurijs Vasiļkovskis, Judge of the Collegium of Criminal Cases. Two judges of the Latgale Regional Court will continue to work until they reach retirement age.

This circumstance is important in the organisation of the Court's work, because changes in the composition of judges and staff at the Latgale Regional Court are rare; they have remained unchanged for a long time, but now we are at a stage when there will be a generational change due to the fact that several judges have the right to a retirement pension. We look forward to the future when the vacancies will be filled and the Latgale Regional Court will have the appropriate number of judges, because the full-fledged work can take place when each Collegium has two sets of judges.

Last year, particular attention was paid to the quality of judgments, with the adoption of guidelines for writing judgments, which is an essential support for ensuring uniform case-law. The parties to proceedings and anyone else reading a judgment must understand it; the judgment must be persuasive. Judgments should be logically structured, dealing with issues of facts and law in a sequential manner. The judge must be able to state the facts of the case in a way that is comprehensible without losing legal precision. Judgments must not be excessive or inadequate in length and must avoid redundancy and repetition of arguments and conclusions. A good writing culture must be maintained. The principle of collegiality in the administration of justice should be developed and strengthened by promoting the awareness of each judge of the importance of individual responsibility in the adoption and drafting of collegial decisions.

As for any court in Latvia, it was a great challenge for the Latgale Regional Court to start working with the new module of record keeping, which was not very easy, but with the support of the Court Administration it was done. Also, from time-to-time issues were raised and discussed, solutions were sought in the process of e-Case implementation.

In 2024, the Latgale Regional Court received 34

criminal cases and 47 civil cases from other courts for faster processing. When designating cases for examination, the Court managed to meet the workload of prosecutors and advocates by allowing remote handling of cases where possible. Joint work and cooperation contributed to balancing of the caseloads in the appellate courts, as shown by MicroStrategy.

With the changing political situation in the world, due to its location near the borderland, the judges of the Latgale Regional Court were faced with unprecedented situations and cases of illegal border crossing, illegal resettlement of refugees, which is a great challenge to correct adjudication of cases, respecting human rights, correctly applying supranational legislation, ensuring justice and fair rights.

In 2024, the Latgale Regional Court participated in and developed the internal dialogue of the judiciary by sharing experience and discussing topical issues in the work of courts with judges of first instance courts, prosecutors and representatives of the Supreme Court. On 31 May 2024, the annual seminar with judges of the Latgale District Court was held, during which topical legal issues in the field of criminal law were discussed. The meeting was attended by prosecutors of the Eastern and Southern Latgale judicial districts and the Latgale judicial district. On 8 November 2024, a meeting of Latgale Regional Court judges with the Chair of the Department of Civil Cases of the Senate, Normunds Salenieks, was held, with the participation of Latgale District Court judges.

With the representatives of the Judicial Council there were discussions on the workload of judges, the selection of judges and other issues of importance to judges. The judges consider it significant and relevant to organise such events to strengthen the efficiency of the judicial system and to understand the processes taking place.

Judges and employees of the Latgale Regional Court actively participate in various activities aimed at improvement of the justice system – in the working group for the implementation of e-Case management system and record keeping, in the permanent working groups on civil procedure, criminal procedure and

criminal law, as well as in the Judicial Selection Commission.

The Latgale Regional Court is proud of its judges and employees, who annually receive awards from the Ministry of Justice and the Court Administration. The year 2024 has been no exception. The Ministry of Justice's 2nd degree Certificate of Recognition and the Silver Feather were awarded to Valentīna Lohova, Chair of the Collegium of Civil Cases, for exemplary, honest and creative performance of her duties. The Honorary Diploma of the Ministry of Justice was awarded to judicial assistants Aija Muravjova and Dzidra Stauža for long-standing, honest and creative performance of their duties. The Certificate of Honour of the Court Administration for significant contribution and outstanding achievements in the development of the judicial system and for selfless performance of duties was awarded to Inguna Tabore, Judge of the Collegium of Civil Cases, and Jurijs Vasiļkovskis, Judge of the Collegium of Criminal Cases. Valentīna Sokolova, Judge of the Collegium of Civil Cases, was awarded the Certificate of Appreciation of the Court Administration for exemplary performance of her duties and significant contribution to the development of the courts. Lolita Semjonova, a court secretary of the Collegium of Criminal Cases, was awarded the Certificate of Recognition of the Court Administration for the faithful and creative performance of her duties, contributing to the development of the courts.

In 2024, the Latgale Regional Court continued the established traditions of jointly celebrating the birthday of our country, Christmas, Easter and Midsummer holidays. A professional and united team is the key to the Court's stability and development. In order to promote cohesion and motivate judges and employees, we try to get to know each other better during the social events aimed at strengthening communication and growth of the team.

We will continue to contribute to strengthening the rule of law in our country by working with integrity, improving our knowledge and skills, participating in self-government and being open to cooperation.



Photo from the archives of the Vidzeme Regional Court

Vidzeme Regional Court

President of the Vidzeme Regional Court
Modris Lapiņš

The Vidzeme Regional Court started its activities on 31 March 1995. The work has been carried out in a calm and cohesive permanent team until the generational change started. The challenges at the Court began with the retirement of several judges. It is, of course, a well-deserved rest after 30 years of stressful, creative and yet hard work.

In 2024, three judges of the Collegium of Civil Cases, Elga Sudāre, Inguna Pinne and Agris Bukavs, took a well-deserved rest. We thanked them very much and wished them to enjoy the beauty of life.

The team provided a favourable working environment for professional development to experienced judges from district courts – Jānis Grīnbergs, Inese Tumanova and Santa Bernharde.

One vacancy for a judge and therefore a judicial assistant in Valmiera remained open throughout 2024.

The Chairs of the Collegiums will have major concerns in 2025, as the Court will continue to undergo generational change and four judges will retire within the foreseeable future.

The team has very high hopes for the Judicial Council's mobility in the selection of new candidates, as there is

currently a shortage.

We have received a letter of appreciation from the Minister of Justice for our cooperation in nominating a representative of our court, Judge Inese Tumanova, to participate in the Commission for the Uniform State Professional Qualification Examination of Lawyers.

As of the very beginning of the Court's operation, there are still six employees: the President of the Court Modris Lapiņš and Judge Ginta Gita Kukaine, Assistant to the President Tija Skrapste, Judicial Assistants Viktorija Aizpuriete, Larisa Leiduma and Māra Sīle.

We are especially proud that our judges Inguna Pinne, Ginta Gita Kukaine and Modris Lapiņš were awarded with the Second-Degree Honorary Badge of the Justice System for their long-term significant contribution to the development of the justice system and selfless performance of their duties. For the honest and creative performance of their duties, contributing to the development of the judicial system, judicial assistants Inga Eņģele and Evija Miglava and court archivist Ingrīda Rodina were awarded the Certificate of Recognition of the Court Administration.

As it has been all these years, the priority of the Vidzeme Regional Court is to handle various categories of cases in accordance with the standard of case planning, without losing the quality of the judgments.

Although the trend of decreasing number of incoming

criminal cases from the Vidzeme District Court continued, it is noteworthy that until the middle of the year we unpredictably, as in 2023, received criminal cases from the Riga Regional Court for appellate review. In most cases, due to their complexity, they had to be heard orally in several hearings, with the participation of an interpreter, which considerably extended the time limits for hearing the cases.

In 2024, the number of complaints received and handled against decisions of investigating judges increased, reaching an all-time high for this category of cases and ensuring intensive work throughout the year for one judicial composition of the Court.

The biggest challenge for the Madona Courthouse of the Vidzeme Regional Court in 2024 was the fact that only two judges remained in the courthouse, which made it impossible to ensure the composition of the court of appeal. For several months until the autumn of 2024, a colleague travelled to Madona from Valmiera to ensure the success of the work, which was a challenge. Case hearing dates had to be coordinated not only with the workload of the parties, but also with colleagues in Valmiera. Thanks to the responsiveness of our colleagues, we met this challenge successfully.

The technical improvements and increased use of modern technologies that have been initiated in the past and continued in 2024 have clearly improved the circulation of documents in the Court, with faster circulation (receipt, sending) of cases and documents. Before the introduction of the record keeping module in the Court Information System 2 environment, there were concerns about its functionality, but after working with it in the second half of the year, it can be said that the introduction of the module has facilitated the work of the Registry. It is easier to organise documents and to select them according to different criteria. The module is aligned with the court's document classification scheme, which makes it possible to store any document in a digital environment and, if necessary, to filter by classification group. Digitalization of case files ensures electronic production of court documents and their electronic circulation between the Court and the parties.

Technical solutions can be used to monitor whether a party has received the documents sent to him or her. Since the beginning of the introduction of electronic filing in December 2021, the skills of judges and staff in the electronic environment, both in the circulation of documents and in the handling of cases, have continued to improve significantly.

In the next year, 2025, we are looking forward to improving and streamlining the work of the Court Information System, as well as offering training to court staff on e-cases and Court Information System 2. In our opinion, the training should definitely be in person, as the training offered in the Cloud system is superficial, time-consuming and there is no opportunity to ask questions.

The technical equipment of courtrooms, as well as the material and technical support of judges and staff, has been further improved. In 2024, the third courtroom has already been equipped with equipment for conducting hearings by videoconference.

Due to the wide range of legislative amendments that will enter into force on both 1 January 2025 and 1 March 2025, it will also be a challenge to master all the new legislation and implement it in daily work, which would also require additional training for both judges and judicial assistants.

Dialogue should continue not only with the judges of the court of first instance, but also with the judges of the court of cassation, discussing topical issues in the adjudication of cases and improving the quality of rulings, which is an important contribution to the development of uniform case-law.

In 2024, the professional, selfless and team-work of every judge and staff member is commendable, which, despite the daily difficulties, allowed the Vidzeme Regional Court to achieve good performance indicators and to ensure a high quality of judgments.



Photos from the Zemgale Regional Court archive

Zemgale Regional Court

President of the Zemgale Regional Court
Juris Siliņš

The year 2024 has been intense and full of changes for the Zemgale Regional Court

15 judicial posts have been confirmed in the Zemgale Regional Court, nine of which are in Jelgava, and six – in Aizkraukle Courthouse. For several years, the Collegium of Criminal Cases had not filled all the judgeships, creating a greater workload for the existing judges. At the end of 2024, all vacant judgeships have been filled.

28 June 2024 was the last working day for long-serving Zemgale Regional Court Judge Dace Skrauple, who retired from service.

Two new judges started work at the Zemgale Regional Court – on 1 October 2024 it was judge Ramiro Grandāns, who moved from the Zemgale District Court, and on 1 November 2024 – judge Ilze Vanaga, who moved from Riga City Court.

In 2024, four judicial assistants – Andra Audze, Valda Zujeva, Eva Stūrmane, Mārīte Reitere, an interpreter Sandra Rudovska, a court administrator Igors Devjatko and a support worker Vasilijs Zagoruiko started working at the Zemgale Regional Court.

Performance indicators in 2024

In 2024, the Zemgale Regional Court received 295 civil cases, 359 criminal cases, 18 penalty enforcement cases and 71 administrative violation cases. Compared to 2023, the number of civil cases received was 9.8% lower, and the number of enforcement cases was 33.3% lower, the number of administrative violation cases

was 11.3% lower, and the number of criminal cases was 9.1% higher than the year before.

319 civil cases, 230 criminal cases, 19 penalty enforcement cases and 60 administrative violation cases were completed. Compared to 2023, the number of civil cases handled was 9.4% lower, the number of enforcement cases was 29.6% lower, the number of administrative offence cases was 33.3% lower and the number of criminal cases was 23.7% higher.

104 civil cases, 148 criminal cases, 1 penalty enforcement case and 19 administrative violation cases are pending.

The average case processing time for all incoming cases in 2024 was 5.4 months, 5.2 months for civil cases and 6.8 months for criminal cases, in line with the planned and approved case processing time standard for 2024.

In 2024, the Zemgale Regional Court also continued to actively participate in the development of the judicial system and the promotion of legal education

Judges and employees of the Zemgale Regional Court are active in the judicial self-government and various working groups.

The President of the Zemgale Regional Court Juris Siliņš serves on the Judicial Council, Judge Anita Misiuna – on the Judicial Ethics Commission, Judge Marianna Terjuhana – on the Judicial Qualification Committee, Judge Līga Baltmane-Zepa – on the Judicial Disciplinary Committee.

Judges Inga Putra and Aigars Sniedzītis are elected to the Board of the Latvian Association of Judges.

Judge Aigars Sniedzītis is a member of the Working Group on Amendments to the Civil Procedure Law.

Judge Raimonds Rinčs is a member of the working groups for the drafting of amendments to the Criminal Procedure Law and the Criminal Law.

Judges Līga Baltmane-Zepa and Aigars Sniedzītis participate in a working group to improve the model for determining the degree of complexity of cases in regional courts.

Judge Līga Baltmane-Zepa serves on the Commission for the Uniform State Professional Qualification Examination of Lawyers.

At the end of 2024, Judge Līga Baltmane-Zepa started an internship in the Senate's Department of Criminal Cases.

In 2024, assistant to the President Inese Čābūte worked in the working group "Development of the Procedure for Selection of Judicial Staff and Criteria for Positions", while judicial assistant Inga Bērze, court secretary Marta Saliniece, court interpreter Tatjana Zemzare, and assistant to the President Inese Čābūte worked in the working groups for development of new training programmes of the Latvian Judicial Training Centre.

In 2024, seminars and trainings were organised at the Zemgale Regional Court to improve the knowledge and skills of judges and court staff.

Every year, the Zemgale Regional Court organises a meeting of judges of the Court with judges of the court of first instance to discuss the latest developments in case-law and the most frequent reasons for annulment and amendment of decisions.



Photo from the archives of the District Administrative Court: a photo of the Riga Courthouse building and lilacs in 2024, planted in to mark the centenary of administrative justice in 2021. The name of the lilac variety is 'Amicus curiae' or 'A court's friend'

District Administrative court

President of the District Administrative Court

Aiga Putniņa

The year 2024 at the District Administrative Court was marked by festivities, as the administrative courts celebrated their 20 years anniversary, while the regional courthouses of the District Administrative Court in Jelgava, Liepāja, Rēzekne and Valmiera celebrated 15 years of their creation. Looking back at the Court's activities, there is no doubt that the establishment of the administrative courts and the development of access to justice in the regions have been justified. Although technology has become more important in the Court's work over time, the availability of on-site services in the regions is still important for people, and the regional courthouses provide important support in balancing the workload of the Riga Courthouse.

Overall, the number of cases received and the number of cases dealt with in the past year are in balance (1665 cases received, 1658 cases dealt with). We have managed to cope with a significant increase in the number of asylum cases, while at the same time

respecting the shortened time limits set by law for the examination of these cases. The average time limits for the examinations of other cases are considered optimal, and litigants can usually expect a judgment from the court of first instance in less than a year.

Alongside the positive results, there are also challenges. Throughout the year, there have been changes in the composition of both judges and staff. Three judges were transferred to the Regional Administrative Court, which undeniably had an impact on the Court's capacity. It has also become increasingly difficult to retain and attract qualified staff to work at the Court, in particular judicial assistants, whose support for judges is an essential prerequisite for the efficient organisation of work and the administration of justice.

In addition to their direct duties, the judges also served on various judicial self-government bodies, commissions and working groups. The Deputy President Ilze Andruškina was elected to the Judicial Disciplinary Committee, while Judge Līga Biksinièce-Martinova – to the Judicial Ethics Commission. Kristīne Brokane, Chair of the Liepāja Courthouse, served on the Commission for the Selection of Candidates to the Office of a Judge. The Chair of the Valmiera Courthouse, Guntars Ploriņš, continued his work in the Judicial Council and was also elected to the Commission for the Selection of Court Presidents, where he performs the duties of its Chair. We appreciate the contribution of these judges to strengthening the self-governance and independence of the judiciary!

Judges also make active use of training and experience exchange opportunities. In March 2024, Judge Agnese Karnīte started a year-long exchange of experience in the Senate's Department of Administrative Cases, while in autumn 2024, Judge Romāns Dončenko returned from a year-long traineeship at the European Court of Human Rights. These exchanges not only provide experience for an individual judge, but also strengthen the dialogue and exchange of knowledge between courts.

To strengthen the inter-institutional dialogue, the District Administrative Court, together with the

Regional Administrative Court, met with judges of the Constitutional Court to discuss the role of administrative courts in verifying the constitutionality of a legal norm and in submitting an application to the Constitutional Court. The annual dialogue with the judges of the Senate's Department of Administrative Cases and the Regional Administrative Court, which has already become a tradition, was also continued. Taking into account the number of tax cases and their volume, a meeting was also held with representatives of the State Revenue Service in order to identify the priorities of the Service for the Court's work planning, as well as to unify the formal requirements for electronic documents submitted to the Court, taking into account the development of e-Case Management System.

Although the gradual transition to electronic handling of administrative cases is still in progress, the Court's representatives were very actively involved in the e-Case implementation working groups and in testing the new tools. The Court also set up an internal working group to develop common guidelines for electronic case flow within the Court. There is no shortage of issues to be addressed in this area and new challenges are emerging, but judges and staff are becoming increasingly open to work in an electronic environment.

We are also proud of the contribution of the judicial assistants to promoting uniform case-law and to informing the public via the magazine "Jurista Vārds". Judicial assistant Aldis Čerņiņš made extensive additions to his previously compiled internal case-law summary on tax enforcement cases, as well as published an article on the problems of establishing the transfer of undertakings. Judicial assistant Madara Lindāne, building on her earlier compilation of case-law, published an article on ensuring court efficiency at the stage when an application is decided, and is currently conducting research on enforcement issues in construction cases. Jurgita Spigule, Assistant to the President for Research and Analysis (specialising in asylum cases), in her publications provides insight into the non-appealable rulings of the District

Administrative Court in asylum cases, and therefore informing the public on these issues is particularly important.

The significant increase in the number of asylum cases has led the Court to consider training all judges in handling asylum cases, as until now only specialised judges have handled this category of cases. In cooperation with the Latvian Judicial Training Centre and a project of the Judicial Academy, several days of training were organised for judges and their assistants on the theoretical and practical aspects of handling these cases.

Last year, the Court also engaged in a number of educational activities. On the Shadow Day, pupils were given an insight into the work of the Court and the daily life of the judicial profession. During four visits, 12th graders of the Riga English Gymnasium were introduced to the structure of the judicial system and the competence of administrative courts. Internships were also provided for law students.

In addition to their judicial work, the Court team was actively involved in informal events and activities throughout the year, thus fostering team spirit and fun. Easter was celebrated with colourful outfits, while the Midsummer festival was marked with songs and dances. The week of the Independence Day celebrations was marked with a variety of Latvian flavours, patriotic stories and an educational quiz. Christmas was celebrated with gifts from secret elves and activities led by newly joined colleagues. In between, there was a joint hike in the Ozolnieki area, an educational excursion to Daugavgrīva Fortress, as well as support for Ukraine.

The year 2024 has been a busy and eventful one. This was and is possible thanks to the contribution and professional work of every judge, court staff member and cooperating institutions! May 2025 inspire each one of us to reach new goals and give us the satisfaction of a year of achievements!



Photo from the Riga City Court archive

Riga City Court

President of the Riga City Court

Anda Kraukle

The Riga City Court is one of the newest courts established after the territorial reform of the courts, and 2024 was the second year of operation of the Court after the merger of the Riga city courts.

In addition to their daily work related to the examination of cases, in 2024 the judges of the Riga City Court have been actively involved in various working groups related to the planning of the judicial system policy, as well as in the drafting of various draft laws and have taken part in various discussions.

Judges Inguna Helmane and Ināra Jaunzeme have participated in the work of the working group "Determination of Judges' Specialisation" established by the Judicial Council, as well as Judge Ināra Jaunzeme has participated in the work of the working group established by the Judicial Council on the action plan for reducing the administrative burden in the field of real estate development. Judges Inguna Helmane and Dainis Locs have participated in the discussions on amendments to the Law "On the Entering of Immovable Property in Land Registers" regarding the issues of registration of structures of undetermined ownership in the Land Register. And Judge Dainis Locs has expressed an opinion on the proposed

amendments at a meeting of the Saeima's Legal Affairs Committee.

The Riga City Court judges have also participated in various discussions on the current case-law on the process of approval of real estate auction deeds and on issues related to the registration of buildings and residential properties in the Land Register on the basis of construction notices.

Judge Sanita Strakše has participated in the work of a group of think-tanks established by the Ministry of Justice, which brings together experts from various child protection institutions to identify gaps and necessary amendments and improvements in the legal framework for the protection of children's rights and the settlement of family disputes and its application. Judge Aelita Ignatjeva participated in a discussion organised by the Ministry of Justice together with non-governmental organisations to draft a document facilitating persons to apply to court as to limitation of their legal capacity or review of the limitations imposed.

Representatives of the Riga City Court have regularly participated in the meetings of Contact Points of the European Judicial Network in Civil and Commercial Matters organised by the European Commission. Judge Sanita Strakše participated in the 22nd Annual Meeting of Contact Points held in Brussels at the end

of January 2024, in the 96th Meeting of Contact Points on the application of the Brussels IIb Regulation held in Bruges in May 2024, in the 97th Meeting of Contact Points on the application of Council Regulation (EC) No 4/2009 (on cross-border maintenance enforcement cases).

At the invitation of the Ministry of Justice, Judge Guntra Kuple participated in the preparatory process and on-site visit of the Moneyval 6th round evaluation organised by the Financial Intelligence Unit of Latvia. The purpose of the Moneyval 6th round evaluation visit was to obtain the necessary information to assess the effectiveness of Latvia's system for preventing and combating money laundering and the financing of terrorism and proliferation (AML/CFT) and its compliance with the Financial Action Task Force standards, giving the Moneyval assessment team the opportunity to gain an in-depth insight into the functioning and effectiveness of Latvia's AML/CFT system.

It should also be noted that in 2024 representatives of the Riga City Court have responded to the invitation of the Ministry of Justice to participate in the production of several podcasts aimed at informing the public about the regulation of various legal issues, such as international child abduction cases, mediation in family disputes.

In 2024, the Riga City Court has been involved in various international activities and within the framework of these activities has hosted delegations from several countries to share Latvia's experience in issues related to the use of information technologies in the daily work of the court, to present the work of the court of first instance, the distribution of cases in court and other issues.

Within the framework of the European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice (CEPEJ) project "Establishing a balanced workload distribution in the judicial system in Bulgaria", a delegation of Bulgarian judges visited the Riga City Court on 16 May to discuss issues about the distribution of workload in court, ways of measuring workload and the tools available to the President of the Court to do so.

On 5 June 2024, the Riga City Court hosted participants of the exchange programme for judges and prosecutors organised by the European Judicial Training Network, in order to present the work of the court of first instance.

On 3 October 2024, a delegation from the Ministry of Justice of Kosovo visited the Riga City Court. During the meeting issues related to the use of information technologies in the daily work of the court and the challenges related to the implementation of e-Case system faced by judges, court employees and court clients were discussed.

On 10 December 2024, the Court was visited by representatives of the Armenian law enforcement authorities, whose purpose was to learn about Latvia's experience in the field of international judicial cooperation in criminal matters, in particular in the application of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court in the context of the ongoing reform of the justice system in Armenia.

As one of the objectives of the merge of the Riga city courts was to optimise the court's resources, on 1 February 2024 the building at 8a Abrenes Street, which houses the Riga City Court Archive, was completed and put into operation, and work is underway to process court documents for transfer to the State Archives.

In 2024, the modernisation of the premises of the Riga City Court building at 58 Daugavgrīvas Street, Riga, continued, and one of the objectives of the project, namely to ensure environmental accessibility requirements for persons with reduced mobility was implemented. A courtroom and a sanitary unit were built and the possibility for every person to independently receive court registry services was created. The new courtroom is equipped with an acoustic loop to prevent exposure of hearing-impaired people to noise.

Riga District Court

President of the Riga District Court
Ieva Čudina

In 2024, a number of measures were taken to achieve the goal set out in the Concept of Development of the Riga District Court by the President of the Riga District Court Ieva Čudina – to ensure that cases falling within the jurisdiction of the Riga District Court are heard in an efficient, expeditious and qualitative judicial procedure.

First, the work of the investigating judges was streamlined, and out of four investigating judge posts in two court buildings, two investigating judge posts were retained in one building.

Secondly, the territorial distribution of civil cases was abandoned and it was established that all civil judges of the Riga District Court would hear all civil cases falling within the jurisdiction of the Riga District Court, regardless of the category of the case, the place of filing or the location of the court, with the exception of a separate specialisation in adoption cases. Also, in order to balance the workload, all civil judges were involved in the examination of applications of the State Border Guard for detention of asylum seekers and illegal immigrants.

Thirdly, two judges were reassigned to examine administrative violation cases, with criminal judges being assigned to this category of cases only when necessary to replace the specialised judges for administrative violation cases.

These measures contributed to equalising and balancing the workload of judges and reducing the backlog of cases pending for a long time. The most effective result was observed in administrative violation cases, i.e. the number of cases dealt with increased by 77.3%. Similarly, other specialisations also showed positive signs, as in 2024 cases were dealt with in line with the 2024 standard for case processing times approved by the Judicial Council.

In order to successfully implement the second phase of the e-Case programme and the transition of court work to a fully digital format, as well as to improve the functionality of the Court Information System, judges and employees of the Riga District Court participated in the activities of the working group “Improvement of Litigation Processes” established by the Court Administration.

In 2024, work on the introduction of the e-Case system continued actively. Compared to 2023, the number of civil cases handled electronically increased by 50.1%.

When addressing staff management issues in order to improve the administrative capacity and efficiency of the Court, to balance the workload of court staff, to streamline the circulation of Court documents and to improve the quality of reception of court visitors, the Court Registry was reorganised and the workload of court staff was reallocated.

As part of the reform, the Riga District Court in Riga, Aiviekstes Street, has modernised the court's customer service centre, where court visitors can get acquainted with case files and obtain the necessary information. As part of the reorganisation of the Registry, it was relocated closer to the infrastructure, which is adapted for persons with special needs, and a queue number system was introduced. This solution facilitates accessibility to the Court, makes it easier for visitors to receive services and improves the quality of the services provided to visitors, as well as allows staff to organise their working time more efficiently.

In 2024, in accordance with the Concept of Development of the Riga District Court, participation of judges in seminars and international experience exchange events was promoted, as a result of which judges Inga Jaunzeme, Guntis Lauskis, Vineta Mazure, Madara Štorha, Santa Bernharde and the Court President Ieva Čudina acquired new skills at international seminars.



Photos from the Riga District Court archive: photos from swearing-in ceremonies of newly appointed judges Sindija Zemīte (22.08.2024) and Zane Ozoliņa (11.09.2024) at the Riga Castle

Judges of the Riga District Court Inga Jaunzeme and Guntis Lauskis visited the Court of Justice of the European Union in Luxembourg, where they got acquainted with the procedure for preparing and hearing cases before the Court. The judges gained valuable insights into the scale and complexity of the application of European Union law, as well as the opportunity to compare the processes and procedures of the European Court of Justice and national courts. They observed how legal facts are established and how they are evaluated. In experience sharing, Judge Inga Jaunzeme welcomed the opportunity to learn more about the Court's organisational structure, the roles of judges, advocates-general, legal assistants and court staff in preparing cases and passing decisions. Judge Guntis Lauskis highlighted the use of case names to designate a specific case, as opposed to case numbering – an innovation introduced by the Court of Justice of the European Union to facilitate the identification of cases.

In 2024, Judge Aija Briede interned at the Senate's Department of Criminal Cases of the Supreme Court

of the Republic of Latvia. During the internship, the judge analysed trends in case-law, drafted decisions and opinions on legal issues, participated in the preparation of case-law summaries and research. Sharing her experience, the judge acknowledged that the knowledge acquired during the traineeship had improved her skills in handling cases and drafting decisions.

In 2024, to promote the involvement of judges in the activities of judicial self-government institutions, Judge Ilze Freimane was elected a member of the Judicial Qualification Committee.

Riga District Court judges Inguna Gaile, Baiba Jakobsone and Santa Bernharde were transferred to the regional court, and Sindija Zemīte, a legal research counsel to the Department of Criminal Cases of the Supreme Court, and Zane Ozoliņa, a judicial assistant at Riga District Court, became Riga District Court judges.

For their honest and creative work in promoting the development of the justice system and the Latvian

legal system, Riga District Court Judges Inga Lipska and Dainida Sarma were awarded Honorary Diplomas of the Ministry of Justice.

In order to raise the issue of the importance of the court staff and to recognise their contribution to the Court's work, In 2024, following awards were presented: judicial assistant Aiva Augšciema-Sabule was awarded the Certificate of Appreciation of the Ministry of Justice, President's assistant Linda Legzdiņa was awarded the Honorary Diploma of the Ministry of Justice, judicial assistant Līga Pommere was awarded the Honorary Certificate of the Court Administration, court secretary Inga Grīnberga was awarded the Certificate of Appreciation of the Court Administration, judicial assistant Guna Kradiņa and court secretary Maruta Cimža received Certificates of Recognition of the Court Administration.

In order to ensure an inter-institutional dialogue to promote cooperation and improve the quality of court services in 2024, Riga District Court judges met with prosecutors from the Pierīga Prosecutor's Office, the Council of Certified Mediators, sworn bailiffs of the Riga District Court area of activity, as well as participated in civil and criminal law days organised by the Riga Regional Court in order to unify judicial practice and raise awareness of legal issues.

In cooperation with the Court Administration and the Courthouse Agency, in order to ensure a comfortable working environment for judges and court staff, equipped with the necessary technical means and technologies for handling of electronic cases, as well as to ensure fast, high-quality and efficient court work, several courtrooms were equipped with conference facilities, more efficient computer equipment was installed, as well as several workplaces were refurbished.

The Riga District Court is spread over four buildings in three cities, which requires increased attention to building a cohesive team. In order to implement the objective of the Court's Concept of Development, namely to promote team-building, in 2024, meetings were held for staff and judges from all buildings on court work issues, as well as informal team-building events were organised to create a positive work culture and strengthen team unity.



Photo from the Kurzeme District Court archive

Kurzeme District Court

President of the Kurzeme District Court
Madars Plepis

The year 2024 was a dynamic one for the Kurzeme District Court, filled with various challenges and achievements. During the year, the Court received a significant number of litigation cases (5011), while the average case processing time remained very low - 4.2 months, despite the fact that the number of cases received per judge has increased compared to 2023. The Kurzeme District Court has also been able to lend a helping hand to the Riga City Court and the Riga District Court to ensure faster processing of cases, receiving 37 civil cases and 34 criminal cases from these district (city) courts.

In order to ensure a more efficient organisation of work, a new case distribution plan has been developed, which has helped and will continue to equalise the workload of judges throughout the Kurzeme District Court, including cases of Liepāja, Ventspils, Kuldīga, Saldus and Talsi courts in one case distribution "basket". This means abandoning territorial distribution

within the court of all category cases. In view of the increasing number of civil cases per judge, certain judges have changed their specialisation. Two judges who had previously specialised in criminal law have taken up their duties as investigating judges, while two investigating judges have taken up civil cases.

The transition to the e-Case system continues to create additional challenges and workloads for court staff. The development of the Court Information System and the improvement of the working environment are ongoing, and accordingly, the staff needs to ensure continuity of case-flow, as well as to respond to new requirements and provide access to case files for parties to proceedings. In addition, the communication workload has increased significantly: the staff has to provide explanations to court clients on the use of the system, the volume of electronic communication has increased proportionally, and the court staff has to spend considerably more time answering telephone calls from litigants.

The biggest challenge in 2024 was related the introduction of a new filing system in the Court

Information System, which created additional workload for the staff and the need to undertake extensive training to ensure efficient workflow. In addition, amendments to legislation, in particular procedural rules, require court staff to adapt quickly to changing circumstances.

The land registry sector has also revealed a major challenge: a high percentage of requests for registration submitted electronically by persons without notarial mediation are ignored or partially granted, which creates additional workload for the Court.

Despite these challenges, the Court achieved significant results. The average number of cases received (litigation cases) per judge in 2024 was 172.8 and the average number of cases heard was 155.4, representing the highest per judge rates in the country among general district (city) courts. Moreover, with the highest number of cases received in the country, the processing time (4.2 months) and the backlog of cases (71.5) per judge are the lowest in the country, which is remarkable as in 2024, 2023 and 2022, respectively, the Kurzeme District Court has been receiving the highest number of cases per judge. The number of decisions in land registry cases reached 29 326, maintaining a stable level compared to the previous year.

To improve the quality and efficiency of the work, a special commission was set up to assess the individual qualifications and competences of court staff.

In addition to their official duties, judges and court staff actively participated in various public events, seminars and charity campaigns, thus strengthening the Court's ties with society.

In recognition of the contribution of the Kurzeme District Court judges and employees, among them four Kurzeme District Court judges, Ligita Viksna, Daina Alksne, Sandra Eglīte, Ilze Valbaka, and President's assistant Anita Olejarčika, were awarded with Honorary Diplomas of the Ministry of Justice.

Court employees were also awarded with Court Administration awards – Certificate of Honour was received by President's assistant Velga Luka, Certificate of Appreciation was received by Head of Registry Office Larisa Pevko, and Certificates of Recognition were given to court secretary Aiva Prole, interpreter Kristīne Lībe-Gūtmane, and judicial assistant Svetlana Štarka.

The Minister of Justice and representatives of the Ministry visited the Court to discuss the development of the justice system and the quality of legal education. The President of the Judicial Council and the Supreme Court also paid a separate visit to the Court, together with his colleagues, to report on the strategic directions and work tasks of the Judicial Council. The visit also focused on the work of the self-government bodies of judges, the procedure for the selection of candidates for judicial office, the upgrading of judges' qualifications and the challenges of court workload. Klaipėda Court judges from Lithuania were welcomed for an exchange visit to further develop cooperation between judges from both countries, thus gaining new professional experience and exchanging ideas for the future development of the court work.

In the future, the Court's development plans are geared towards further digitalization, with the increasing introduction of modernised solutions and process automation. The plan is to continue training judges and staff, to strive to stabilise and keep case processing times at the current level, while maintaining the backlog of cases without increasing dynamics, given that the number of judges in the Court has not increased and a reduction in the number of judges is anticipated.

Overall, the year 2024 was full of dynamic changes and achievements for the Kurzeme District Court. Through continuous development and active involvement of its staff, the Court will continue to provide quality justice, adapting to modern requirements and providing a high-quality service to society.



Photos from the archives of the Latgale Regional Court

Latgale District Court

President of the Latgale District Court
Pēteris Novičenoks

At the end of 2024, the Latgale District Court celebrated its small one-and-a-half-year anniversary since Daugavpils and Rēzekne courts were merged into one joint court. Today, the Latgale District Court stretches from the Lubāns hills to the Daugava River and is housed in eight buildings in six cities. Although the court reform and the busy work planning period for the newly established court ended on 1 July 2023, we are still analysing and evaluating ways to improve and streamline the work of the Court to ensure the fastest and highest quality of communication with the Court and to ensure a comfortable judicial process.

The year 2024 is marked by an increase in the number of cases received. Total number of cases received by the Court has increased significantly compared to 2023. The number of civil cases brought before the

Court increased by 16.3%, while the number of criminal cases increased by 37.1%. Despite the increase in the number of cases received and unfilled judgeships, the number of cases heard by the Latgale District Court in 2024 has also increased – +13.9% as to civil cases and +21.4% for criminal cases.

We keep up-to-date with developments in the e-Case system implementation process. Latgale District Court employees actively and productively participate in permanent e-Case development working groups of all specialisations. We are still trying, testing and approving e-Case solutions in court work, trying to ensure that digitalisation tools are helpful both for the parties to proceedings to easily track the proceedings and exchange information with the Court, as well as to make the work of court staff and judges easier and more efficient.

Thanks to the investment of the Court Administration in the court infrastructure, the Latgale District

Court is in the process of replacing the old-style videoconferencing systems with new equipment, and the number of videoconferences in almost all courthouses has been significantly increased, thus expanding the possibilities for parties to proceedings to participate in court hearings remotely by visiting their nearest courthouse. The increase in the number of videoconferences also enables judges to plan their work more easily and flexibly, which also speeds up the processing of cases in court. The Court also provides the possibility to connect to the court proceedings by videoconferencing through so-called external links, which allow prosecutors, advocates, litigants and other persons involved in the proceedings to participate in the court proceedings using a personal computer or any smart device with an internet connection, regardless of the location of a party to proceedings. With such solutions, for example, prosecutors or advocates can stay at their workplace or office, yet manage to attend several hearings in different courthouses within one working day. Such a maximally flexible approach to the remote organisation of court proceedings saves both time and resources for the parties and reduces competition between different courts or judicial panels for the participation of the same party.

We are grateful for the visit of the Minister of Justice to the Court, during which the daily problems of the Court's work and the future activities for reaching a joint goal were discussed. We also appreciate the meeting with representatives of the Judicial Council, during which the strategic directions and future challenges for the development of the judicial system

were discussed. Moreover, we are grateful for the meeting of the judges of the Latgale judicial area with senators and advisors of the Senate's Department of Civil Cases and Department of Criminal Cases of the Supreme Court, during which discussions were held on current issues of the application of substantive and procedural legal norms.

We should also mention the appreciation extended to the judges and staff of the Latgale District Court for honest and selfless performance of their duties. In 2024, the Deputy President of the Latgale District Court, Ivars Dzindzuks, was awarded the Certificate of Honour of the Court Administration; Judge Tatjana Maļinovska and the Head of the Court Registry on Land Registry Issues Jūlija Beļavska were awarded the Certificate of Appreciation of the Court Administration; judicial assistant Airita Solovjova and court secretary Inese Stepule were awarded the Certificate of Recognition of the Court Administration.

Looking ahead, it is clear that the main challenges for the Court will be related to the digitalisation processes in the area of the e-Case system and the Court's ability to deal with incoming cases within reasonable deadlines in a situation where there is a shortage of judges.



Photo by Patrīcija Strazdiņa, consultant at the Vidzeme District Court

Vidzeme District Court

President of the Vidzeme District Court
Līga Ašitoka

The Vidzeme District Court operates in seven buildings in Valmiera, Alūksne, Cēsis, Gulbene, Limbaži, Madona and Valka, with 31 judges.

The year 2024 has been a challenging one for the Vidzeme District Court, given that in 2024 four judges retired from their judicial duties and one judge moved to a regional court. This inevitably increased the workload of the other judges and court staff.

New judges Sandra Kalniņa, Zane Actiņa and Kaspars Kukmilks have also joined the Vidzeme District Court in 2024.

Despite the existing vacancies of judicial post, the Vidzeme District Court has been able to comply with the established standards of case handling, has successfully coped with the increase in the number of cases received, i.e. the number of cases at the Vidzeme District Court in 2024 has increased significantly:

- The number of criminal cases received increased by 34%, but the number of criminal cases dealt with also increased by 15%;
- There was a 9.5% increase in the number of civil cases received, but also a 2.4% increase in the number of civil cases examined;
- There was an 18% increase in the number of decisions on requests for registration in land registers.

On 3 May 2024, a general meeting of judges specialising in civil cases was held in Cēsis, during which a meeting with representatives of the Council of Certified Mediators was organised.

In civil cases, the judge's ability to reconcile the parties and to encourage the parties to resolve their dispute amicably plays an important role. In a conversation with representatives of the Council of Certified Mediators, the judges were informed about current statistics, strategies for using mediation, promotion of mediation, ways to get parties interested in using mediation to resolve disputes. An overview of the mediation process was provided.

In connection with the report of the Working Group on the organisation of judicial work in cases related to domestic violence and threats to the life or health of a person, a discussion was organised for judges on the current issues of the institute of temporary protection against violence for the development of uniform judicial practice.

On 25 November 2024, a general meeting of judges of the Vidzeme District Court was held in Valmiera, where judges met with representatives of the Judicial Council, the Judicial Qualification Committee and the Selection Commission. During the meeting, the issues of career development of judges, the procedure and results of selection of new judges, the organisation of court work and the workload of judges were discussed. The members of the Judicial Council listened to the judges' proposals on the organisation of judicial work.

Meetings with experts in the field on issues of relevance to judges of each specialisation were organised in separate sections for civil and criminal judges. The civil judges met with Ilze Celmiņa, Deputy Chair of the Judicial Council, Judge of the Riga Regional Court, who informed the judges about current developments in examination of civil cases (temporary protection against violence, family disputes). The judges were informed about the development of the judicial policy on issues related to land registry judges and cases. A valuable discussion on the issues of interest took place between the judges and Ilze Celmiņa, and solutions to civil procedure problems were found together.

Kaspars Kukmilks, Judge of the Vidzeme District Court, having reviewed 293 judgements available in the Court Information System, prepared an overview of case-law on Vidzeme District Court rulings for the period from January 2023 to 17 August 2024, providing an opportunity to learn about Vidzeme judicial area case-law of the relevant period.

Whereas, Sandra Kalniņa, Judge of the Vidzeme District Court, has carried out extensive research on criminal cases heard by the Court in the period from June 2023 to October 2024 in which the Vidzeme Regional Court has overturned in whole or in part a judgment of the Vidzeme District Court in criminal cases.

Judges specialising in land registry matters have started working with the Financial Intelligence Service to provide information on risky real estate transactions.

In 2024, Judges Lauris Šņepsts, Maija Bogdane, Antra Bušmane and Aija Grāve were awarded the Honorary Diploma of the Ministry of Justice for their honest and creative work in promoting the development of the justice system and the Latvian legal system.

Four employees of the Vidzeme District Court, Inga Rezakova, Renāte Krūmiņa, Sarmīte Sprance and Milvi Djomina, were awarded with the Certificate of Recognition of the Court Administration for honest and creative performance of their duties, contributing to the development of the judicial system.

Judge Evita Kaužēna was interviewed for DelfiTV's "Tiesības zināt" programme on family dispute resolution issues.

In 2024, we have gone on two hikes – in May we strengthened the unity of the team on a hike in Valka, and in autumn we enjoyed a hike in Gulbene region.

We are also active walkers and take part in the Step Challenge of the Court every spring, which runs for six weeks from 18 March to 28 April. In total, we walked 11 715 175 steps!



Courthouses of the Zemgale District Court

Zemgale District Court

President of the Zemgale District Court

Iveta Salaka

On 1 March 2018, at the end of the territorial reform of the courts, the Zemgale District Court was established, merging seven district courts of Jelgava, Tukums, Dobeles, Bauska, Ogre, Aizkraukle and Jēkabpils. On 1 June 2019, seven land registry divisions were also integrated into the Zemgale District Court.

The courthouses of the Zemgale District Court are located at the sites of the previous district (city) courts. The main courthouse with the court registry is located in Jelgava.

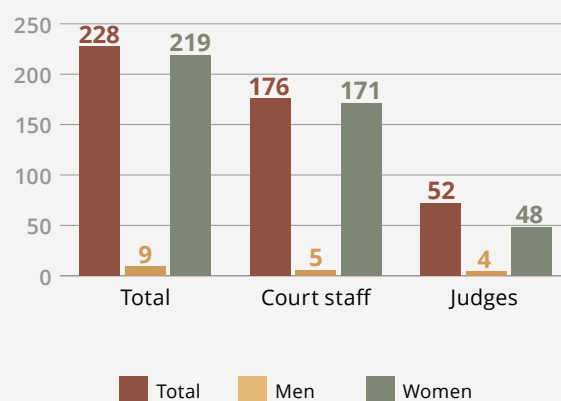
Statistics

The Zemgale District Court has 176 staff members (171 women and five men) and 52 judges (48 women and four men).

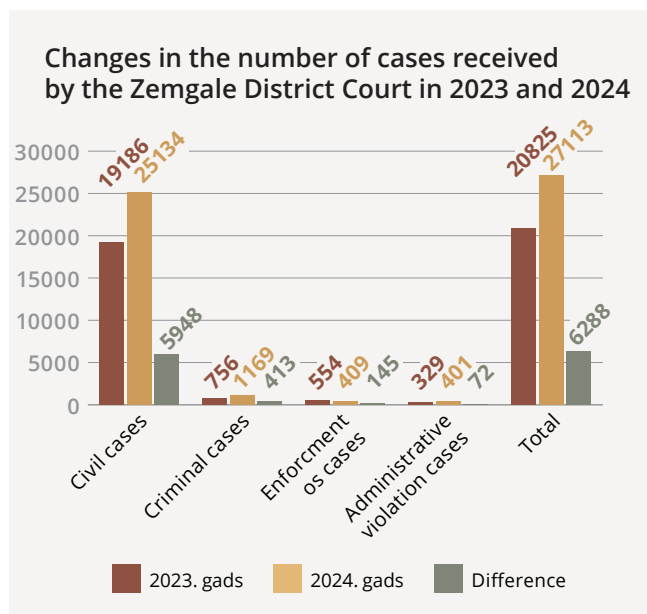
The Court also has nine vacant judicial posts, three of which were created in 2024.

The Zemgale District Court hears civil, criminal, administrative violation and land registry cases.

Numbers of judges and staff at the Zemgale District Court

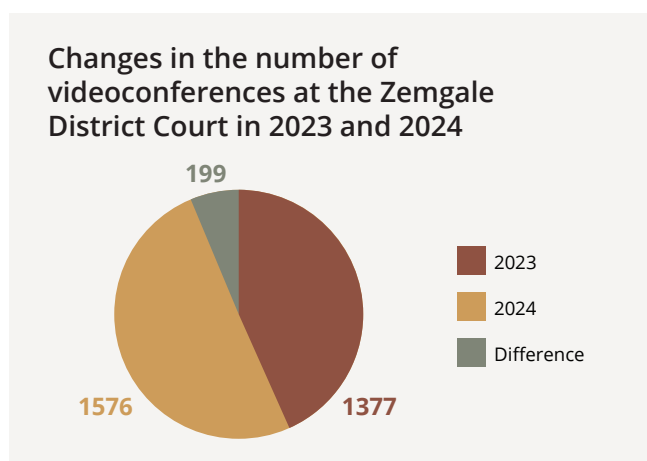


Number of judges and employees at the Zemgale District Court



Changes in the number of cases received at the Zemgale District Court 2023 and 2024

In 2023, the Zemgale District Court received 19 186 civil cases, 756 criminal cases, 554 penalty enforcement cases and 329 administrative violation cases. In 2024, 25 134 civil cases, 1169 criminal cases, 409 penalty enforcement cases and 401 administrative violation cases were received, which is 30% more than last year. These statistics show an increase in the number of cases received, with a decrease in the number of judges.



Changes in the number of videoconferences organised at the Zemgale District Court 2023 and 2024

The Zemgale District Court has also increased its technical possibilities and capacity to hear cases via videoconferencing. In 2024 1576 videoconferences

have been held, which is 199 more videoconferences than in 2023 (1377 videoconferences).

We are proud!

The Zemgale District Court is proud of its court.

In 2024, four judges and four court employees received awards from the Ministry of Justice and the Court Administration.

On 12 May 2024, before her retirement, Inga Zālīte, Deputy Chair of the Zemgale District Court, was awarded the **Ministry of Justice's 3rd degree Honorary Badge** for many years of exemplary, honest and creative performance of duties in the field of justice.

Iveta Andžāne, Judge of the Zemgale District Court in Bauska, has been awarded the **Ministry of Justice's 2nd degree Certificate of Recognition and the Silver Feather** for her significant contribution to the development of the Latvian legal system at a ceremony held on 14 November 2024.

On 3 December 2024, the Court Administration presented awards to judges, employees of courts and the Court Administration for significant contributions and outstanding achievements in the development of the judicial system and for the professional performance of their duties. Jolanta Bebriša, Judge of the Zemgale District Court in Aizkraukle, was awarded the Certificate of Honour of the Court Administration. Lilita Kosoja, Judge of the Zemgale District Court in Bauska, and court secretary Līva Krūziņa and judicial assistant Iveta Gaidamaviča of the Zemgale District Court in Jelgava were awarded the Certificate of Gratitude of the Court Administration for exemplary performance of their duties and significant contribution to the development of judicial system. Judicial assistant Sandra Polenca and court secretary Inga Cimburova of the Zemgale District Court in Jelgava were awarded the Certificate of Recognition of the Court Administration for honest and creative performance of their duties, contributing to the development of the judicial system.

Traditions

The Zemgale District Court is united by its traditions and distinctive marks.

On 3 May 2024, a new tradition was established at the Court as a team-building event – “Cleanliness Day”, during which judges and staff members worked together to clean and polish their courthouse. The activities of this event were documented in photographs in each courthouse, which were then combined in a video presentation.

The results of the event: team building, physical activity to improve health with a good dose of optimism, a tidy courthouse as a guarantee of a pleasant working environment and a positive mood.

The greatest asset of the Zemgale District Court is its judges and employees, whom we publicly congratulate on their anniversaries by sending a beautiful congratulatory email, appreciating each other's contribution, rejoicing in each other's achievements.



Photo of the painting “Themis” by Zita Studente

The Zemgale District Court is also united by a unifying yet different symbol at each courthouse, namely the

painting “Themis”, donated by Judge Zita Studente and placed in each Zemgale District Court building.

Publications

The names of the Zemgale District Court and its active, knowledgeable and competent judges and staff members are also quite often positively recognized in various publications.

On 22 November 2024, the Latvian court portal www.tiesas.lv featured the opinion of Iveta Salaka, President of the Zemgale District Court, on **hybrid warfare tools that a judge should be familiar with in order to determine a fair sentence**.

On 26 September 2024, the Delfi news portal (www.delfi.lv) published the conclusions of Judge Zita Studente on the **increasing number of criminal proceedings for failure to comply with the judgement on temporary protection against violence**.

In the publication of the Latvian Courts Portal of 16 September 2024, Judge Laura France welcomes the Supreme Court's compilation of the Senate's Department of Criminal Cases opinions and excerpts from decisions in plea bargaining cases from 2022 to 2024, acknowledging that **“for a judge, any compilation of case-law is like an arrangement of Latvian folk songs”**.

On 9 August 2024, the Latvian Courts Portal published an explanation by Judge Valdis Muižnieks on the **deficiencies in the content of the application, which may be an obstacle to the progress of the review of issues of legal capacity**.

On 8 April 2024 the Latvian Courts Portal published information about the **meeting of the judges of the Collegium of Civil Cases of the Zemgale Regional Court and civil judges of the Zemgale District Court with Normunds Salenieks, Chair of the Department of Civil Cases of the Supreme Court, that took place on 5 April 2024 at the Zemgale District Court in Jēkabpils**. Judges discussed topical issues of civil law.

On 8 February 2024, the official publisher “Latvijas

Vēstnesis" published an article by Linda Nīkone, titled "Conditional deprivation of liberty could be replaced with probation supervision - what is the difference?", on the website www.lvportals.lv in which LV Portāls shares the opinions of Zemgale District Court Judge Zita Studente, lawyer Vita Studente and Professor Valentija Liholaja of the Department of Criminal Law at the University of Latvia on the draft laws conceptually supported by the Saeima, namely "Amendments to the Criminal Law" and "Amendments to the Criminal Procedure Law".

Other activities

To ensure the quality of the Court's work, information and news are checked, compiled and sent to each judge and employee on a daily basis on the information platforms maintained by the official publisher "Latvijas Vēstnesis" (www.lv.lv): the website of the official publication "Latvijas Vēstnesis" www.vestnesis.lv, the website of the magazine "Jurista Vārds" www.juristavards.lv and the website of the platform "LV portāls" www.lvportals.lv. A summary of the practice of the Zemgale District Court on appealed judgements is prepared periodically and discussed at meetings of judges.

Rusiņš case highlighted and updated the importance of inter-institutional cooperation, in particular in cases related to domestic violence and their impact on the efficiency of judicial work, which led to a meeting organised in April 2024 at the Court, attended by representatives of the Zemgale District Court, the Zemgale Regional Court, the Zemgale Regional Department of the State Police and the Prosecutor's Office of the Zemgale Judicial Region.

The judges of the Zemgale District Court are active in the self-government of judges: the President of the Court Iveta Salaka participates in the Judicial Qualification Committee, the Deputy Presidents Adrija Kasakovska and Gita Zenfa take part in the Judicial Ethics Commission, and Kristīne Vanaga in the Judicial Disciplinary Committee.

On 27 June 2023, the Judicial Staff Ethics Commission, in which the employees of the Zemgale District Court also actively participate, started its activities. From the very beginning, Sanita Titova, Head of the Registry of the Zemgale District Court in Jelgava, has made a significant contribution to the work of the Ethics Commission, including the development of the newly established Code of Ethics for Judicial Staff. At the end of 2024, Sintija Mežale, a court secretary of the Zemgale District Court in Jēkabpils, took over these duties and continues to actively perform them today.

The Zemgale District Court is also very active in organising the Shadow Day, hosting students from various educational institutions in Latvia. The pupils get acquainted with the courthouses, take part in court hearings, and after the court proceedings all participants of the Shadow Day have the opportunity to ask questions about the work of the courts.

Moreover, the Zemgale District Court celebrates festivals, participates in sports games, organises off-the-job team-building events, goes on experience exchange trips outside Latvia and hosts partners from European Union countries.



Photo from the archives of the Economic Court

Economic Court

President of the Economic Court

Miķelis Zumbergs

On 12 January 2024, a delegation of the Economic Court visited the Constitutional Court. Judges of both courts discussed issues related to the suspension of proceedings in cases where proceeds of crime are obtained, as well as case-law developments, while staff members shared their experience on the specifics of their work and research methods.

Appointment of judges

On 22 February 2024, the Saeima approved eight judges of the Economic Court, Miķelis Zumbergs, Oksana Pulle-Čižova, Dagnija Muceniece, Vija Kalniņa, Katarīna Sniedze, Ieva Jankovska, Aivars Latkovskis and Kaspars Vecozols, as judges without limitation of the term of office.

The President of the Court, Miķelis Zumbergs, said that the first three years as a judge are an important reference period during which the work done is seriously evaluated, and that confirmation for life is a sign of great trust. On behalf of himself and the judges of the Court the President expressed his gratitude to

his colleagues within the judiciary and to the members of the Saeima who had recognised the judges as worthy of this trust, and stressed that the mission of the Economic Court would remain the creation of a safe business environment, both by resolving disputes between entrepreneurs and by adjudicating cases of offences that threaten the fair competition among entrepreneurs.

The staff of the Economic Court informally congratulated the judges on their achievements and expressed their good wishes.



Photo from the archives of the Economic Court

Experience exchange in the USA

From 3 to 14 April, representatives of the Economic Court gained experience in ensuring efficient criminal proceedings in the United States of America (USA). Within the framework of the Open World Programme – Justice funded by the US Government, several judges of the Economic Court, together with representatives of the Senate's Department of Criminal Cases and the Riga Regional Court, participated in a professional experience exchange visit to the USA.

The Latvian delegation listened to several presentations at the US Library of Congress, gaining insight into the US judicial system and the role of judges, the jurisdiction of federal and state courts, as well as the role of the public defender.

The Latvian delegation visited the Supreme Court of the State of Ohio, as well as the Office of the Attorney General of the State of Ohio and the Criminal Identification Bureau and the Grove City Police Department. When discussing the effectiveness of the criminal procedure, the representatives of the Office of the Attorney General highlighted that plea bargaining is a popular form of completing criminal proceedings, as in about 95% of cases an accused knows the severity of the sentence passed by a court if found guilty of charges. This encourages persons to accept a simplified procedure and a correspondingly milder sentence.



Photo from the archives of the Economic Court

Shadow Day at the Economic Court



Photo from the archives of the Economic Court

On 4 April 2024, as part of the Shadow Day, the Economic Court hosted two students, who shadowed a judge and wished to pursue their future careers in the legal sector. The students had the opportunity to attend a court hearing and to meet the judge after the hearing to ask questions.

Round Table Discussions at the Riga Regional Court

On 12 April 2024, judges of the Economic Court and judges of the Collegium of Civil Cases of the Riga Regional Court participated in a round table discussion, addressing examples of good practice in the examination of civil cases and outlined the main reasons for passing rulings that are opposite to those adopted by the court of first instance.



Photo from the archives of the Economic Court

The judges of the Collegium of Civil Cases of the Riga

Regional Court stated that the court of appeal positively evaluated the quality of the work of the specialised court, as it mainly received well-structured rulings in which evidence is properly assessed, and also made recommendations for improvement.

The judges of the Collegium of Civil Cases of the Riga Regional Court answered the topical civil-law questions, especially procedural questions on the jurisdiction of a claim before the Economic Court, as well as on the court's conduct when deciding on the acceptance of the claim, etc.

On 22 March 2024, the judges of the Economic Court met with the judges of the Collegium of Criminal Cases of the Riga Regional Court for an analogous discussion. Participants welcomed the opportunity to meet and discuss in person.

Judicial assistants of Riga Regional Court visit the Economic Court

On 16 May 2024, judicial assistants of the Riga Regional Court visited the Economic Court to share experience with colleagues at the court of first instance and to exchange views on strengthening the role of the judicial assistant in court work.

At the meeting opening, the President of the Economic Court, Miķelis Zumbergs, acknowledged that he was well aware of the importance of such an exchange of experience, given that he himself had worked as judicial assistant.



Photo from the archives of the Economic Court

Laura Buholta, a judicial assistant at the Collegium of Civil Cases of the Riga Regional Court, and Beāta Ukrainska, a judicial assistant at the Collegium of Criminal Cases of the Riga Regional Court, gave a presentation "The Role of the Judicial Assistant in Ensuring Effective Work of the Court", answered questions from colleagues and drew attention to the most typical mistakes made in first instance courts.

Participation in the seminar organised by the Investigator Training Centre of the State Police College "Current Issues in Money Laundering in terms of Chapter 59 of the Criminal Procedure Law"

On 23 May 2024, judges of the Economic Court presented topical case-law and shared practical tips on how to prepare a case for trial.



Photo from the archives of the Economic Court

The think-tank was attended by the President of the Economic Court Miķelis Zumbergs, Judges Ļubova Kovaļa and Katarīna Sniedze. 230 participants attended the seminar in person and remotely.

DIALOGUE

Judicial Council's dialogue with courts and regional visits

In order to ensure a direct and effective exchange of information and views with judges, representatives of the Judicial Council also made several visits to Latvian courts in 2024. The purpose of the visits was to discuss with judges the current issues of the Judicial Council, the work of the courts and the procedure for the selection of judicial candidates with representatives of the Commission for the Selection of Candidates to the Office of a Judge and the Judicial Qualification Committee. In 2024, members of the Judicial Council visited a total of three district (city) courts and three regional courts.

Visits to the Latgale Regional Court and the Latgale District Court



On 13 and 14 May 2024, the Chair of the Judicial Council Aigars Strupiņš, the Deputy Chair of the Judicial Council, the Chair of the Selection Commission, Senator Dzintra Balta and the Deputy Chair of the Judicial Qualification Committee, Senator Rudīte Vīduša met with judges of the Latgale Regional Court and the Latgale District Court to discuss current issues in the work of the courts and the Judicial Council, as well as to address the selection procedure for candidates applying for judicial office.

The Chair of the Judicial Council Aigars Strupiņš presented to the judges the work done by the Judicial Council in 2023, as the last visit to the Latgale Regional Court and the Latgale District Court took place in 2022.

Dzintra Balta and Rudīte Vīduša informed about the tasks of the Selection Commission and the Judicial Qualification Committee in the judicial selection process, explaining the separation of competences of the two institutions and answering the judges' questions on the evaluation principles in the selection process. Rudīte Vīduša and the Latgale Regional Court judges discussed the issues related to the preparation of reviews for the evaluation of professional performance of judges of the court of first instance.



The judges of the Latgale District Court drew the attention of the members of the Judicial Council to the fact that the competitions have failed to select candidates for the posts of judges of the Latgale District Court, resulting in an increase in the workload of existing judges. The judges also pointed to the lack of qualified judicial assistants, stressing that judicial assistants are reluctant to participate in the selection as judicial candidates because they do not feel sufficiently supported in preparing for the selection process.

The judges stressed the need to address the problem of workload of court interpreters to ensure respect for procedural rights and to prevent delays in hearing of cases. The judges also pointed to shortcomings in the preparation of criminal cases, which significantly hinder the work of both investigating judges and judges in the examination of criminal cases.

In addition, the guidelines for writing judgments for courts of first instance and courts of appeal, approved by the Judicial Council, were discussed. The judges recognised that the guidelines are a valuable tool which is actively used in the preparation of judgments.

More information is available [on the website of the Judicial Council](#).

Visits to the Kurzeme Regional Court and the Kurzeme District Court



On 23 and 24 September 2024, the Chair of the Judicial Council Aigars Strupišs, the Deputy Chair of the Judicial Council, the Chair of the Selection Commission, Senator Dzintra Balta and the Chair of the Judicial Qualification Committee, Judge of the Kurzeme Regional Court Silva Reinholde visited the Kurzeme District Court and the Kurzeme Regional Court.

Aigars Strupišs informed the judges of the Kurzeme District Court and the Kurzeme Regional Court about the priorities of the Judicial Council for 2024 and their implementation.

The issue of judicial workload was a topical one in both courts. The judges of the Kurzeme District Court called on the Judicial Council to develop guidelines that would establish common criteria and principles for the transfer of cases. At the same time, the members of the Judicial Council informed the judges that the Ministry of Justice was in the process of drafting a regulation providing for a uniform distribution of administrative violation cases among the regional courts. In the long term, it is planned to extend the range of categories of cases for unified distribution among courts.

Discussing the workload of judges and the organisation of court work, judges pointed out that there is a low turnover of court staff, but judges lack qualified

support staff, which has a significant impact on efficiency. The judges stressed that the requirements and remuneration of judicial assistants should be urgently addressed. The judges also called on the Judicial Council to seek modern solutions to unify the organisation of judicial work in all courts, including the handling of cases in an electronic environment, as well as what regards the competences, functions and evaluation of judicial staff.

Dzintra Balta pointed out that the Judicial Academy planned to provide training for candidates for judicial office in order to give them an opportunity to prepare for the judicial selection process. The judges suggested considering the possibility of indicating the required specialization or the specific region where a judge is to work in the competition for the post of a district (city) court judge. The principles of the establishment and functioning of the list of candidates for judicial office were also discussed. Silva Reinholde asked the judges to consider the Judicial Qualification Committee as a supporting institution aimed at improving the professional performance of judges. She also gave an insight into the importance of self-assessment of a judge's professional performance in its evaluation.

Aigars Strupišs emphasised that one of the biggest challenges of the judicial system is not only attracting new and qualified lawyers, but also that the Judicial Council, taking into account the existing resources of judges, the workload and the length of proceedings, must make objective decisions on the number of vacancies to be filled in order to ensure the efficient functioning of the judicial system.

More information is available [on the website of the Judicial Council](#).

Visits to the Vidzeme District Court and the Vidzeme Regional Court



On 25 November 2024, the Chair of the Judicial Council Aigars Strupiņš, the Chair of the Selection Commission, Senator Dzintra Balta, and a member of the Judicial Qualification Committee, Judge of the Zemgale Regional Court Marianna Terjuhana met with judges of the Vidzeme District Court and the Vidzeme Regional Court to discuss the efficiency of the judicial system, the evaluation of judges and the judicial selection process.

Aigars Strupiņš informed the judges about the priorities of the Judicial Council for 2024 and the progress of their implementation. In addition to administrative issues, the guidelines developed to ensure a uniform and structured approach to the preparation of judgments in administrative violation cases, criminal cases, civil cases and administrative cases were also discussed. The progress of the Judicial Academy project was also addressed.

Dzintra Balta and Marianna Terjuhana discussed the competence of the Selection Commission and the Judicial Qualification Committee in the judicial selection process. Dzintra Balta stressed that the selection of judicial candidates is based on high quality criteria to ensure that highly qualified lawyers with impeccable reputation, appropriate professional skills and personal qualities become judges. Marianna Terjuhana and the judges discussed the evaluation criteria of professional skills when judges of a district (city) court apply for the post of a regional court judge.

She also drew attention to the importance of the separate references given by a court's president and three judges of a higher instance court in the judicial selection process.

Dzintra Balta and Marianna Terjuhana stressed that after the conclusion of the judicial selection process or the evaluation of professional performance, the Selection Commission and the Judicial Qualification Committee shall provide feedback and recommendations to judicial candidates and judges on the results of the judicial selection process and the improvement of professional performance.

More information is available [on the website of the Judicial Council](#).

Judicial Council's dialogue with other branches of government

Judicial Council's dialogue with the President of Latvia



At its meeting on 9 February 2024, the Judicial Council and the President of Latvia Edgars Rinkēvičs discussed a number of issues related to the development of the judicial system.

The Chair of the Judicial Council Aigars Strupiņš informed the President of Latvia about the activities of the Judicial Council and the priorities of its work in 2024. Aigars Strupiņš pointed out that the work of the Judicial Council was aimed at improving the efficiency of the judicial system,

improving the capacity of judges and the professional qualifications of court staff, as well as developing quality methodology.

When discussing the issue of strengthening the independence of the judiciary, Guntars Ploriņš, a member of the Judicial Council and President of the Valmiera Courthouse of the District Administrative Court, reported on the original idea regarding the status and functions of the Judicial Council when Latvia was planning to join the European Union. In the context of the independence of the judicial system, the Chair of the Judicial Council Aigars Strupiņš noted that *„the institutional independence of the judiciary should definitely be strengthened. The functioning of the judicial system has been negatively affected by the fact that the executive power is in charge of overseeing the administrative functions and budget of district (city) courts and regional courts. In cooperation with the Ministry of Justice, we are developing a concept to take over the administrative functions of the judiciary from the executive”*.

The President of Latvia Edgars Rinkēvičs pointed out that much has been done to strengthen the independence of the judiciary, but much remains to be done. At the same time, the President of Latvia said that independence is not absolute and in a state governed by the rule of law everyone should do what is written in the Constitution.

To increase public confidence in the judiciary, the President of Latvia called on the judiciary to explain its decisions. The President also drew attention to the role of the Judicial Council in the internal security of the country, when the courts adjudicate lawfully and fairly. The Chair of the Judicial Council Aigars Strupiņš agreed, pointing out that the judiciary is the final link in the law enforcement system, which is why this link should be the strongest, as it is the one that has the final say in ensuring the rule of law in the country.

Judicial Council's dialogue with the Cabinet of Ministers

On 19 September 2024, Aigars Strupiņš, President of the Supreme Court and Chair of the Judicial Council,

participated in an extraordinary meeting of the Cabinet of Ministers, at which an information report on priority measures to be included in the draft national budget law from 2025 to 2028 was reviewed.



Addressing the members of the Cabinet of Ministers, Aigars Strupiņš, President of the Supreme Court and Chair of the Judicial Council, said, *„After conversations with Minister of Justice Inese Lībiņa-Egnere and Minister of Finance Arvils Ašeradens, it is obvious that the situation with the state budget is serious. The judiciary respects the country's external security as the current top budgetary priority, which is why the judiciary will not insist on a 6% salary increase for judicial staff this year.”*

However, Aigars Strupiņš stressed that as a representative of the judiciary, he has a duty to inform the executive about the existing situation in the courts and what it would be like in three- or four-years' time, namely *„If the salaries of court employees are not increased sufficiently in the future, a significant shortage of judges and court employees is expected in the judicial system. The judiciary has long faced a serious problem in filling vacancies of judges and judicial assistants due to a lack of qualified candidates. The corps of judicial assistants is the main source of judicial candidates, but judicial assistants are among the lowest paid lawyers in the country, unable to compete with the private sector. The inadequately low remuneration of the paralegal corps thus makes it difficult to attract and retain a sufficient number of qualified lawyers. Staff turnover in the courts, especially in Riga, is as high as 20-40% per year.”*

Aigars Strupiņš also pointed out that Latvian judges are rapidly approaching retirement age and

in the medium term, this could lead to even more vacancies and difficulties in filling vacant judicial posts.. „If today there are 67 unfilled judicial vacancies, then in three years' time there will be 150 or even 200 unfilled judicial vacancies” said Agars Strupišs.

“The effective functioning of the judicial system is not possible without high quality and sustainable support staff. The judicial function is a fundamental function of the state, and the internal and external security of the state directly depends on its quality performance,” noted Aigars Strupišs.

Judicial Council's dialogue with society

The Judicial Council's dialogue with the public is an essential tool to promote transparency, openness and trust in the legal system. The Judicial Council's strategy for 2021-2025 sets strengthening public trust in the judiciary as one of its key priorities. To this end, the Judicial Council regularly informs the public through various channels and tools, providing updates on its activities and topicalities. This approach helps to build public awareness of the role of the Judicial Council and its decisions in the development of the justice system.

In 2024, the Judicial Council actively informed the media through press releases in order to effectively and quickly communicate information to the media, the public and other stakeholders. The Secretariat of the Judicial Council sent out a total of around 70 press releases, mainly informing about the Judicial Council's meetings and decisions, thus raising public awareness of its activities. Last year, the Judicial Council was most frequently mentioned in publications of the national information agency LETA (107 articles), on the platform „LV portāls” of the official publisher “Latvijas Vēstnesis” (95 articles), on the portal www.juristavards.lv of the law magazine “Jurista vārds” (92 articles), in the magazine “Jurista Vārds” (45 articles), as well as on the Latvian Public Media portal www.lsm.lv (15 articles) and on Latvian Radio 1 (15 publications).



Publicity of the Judicial Council in the media in 2024

107	articles in LETA publications
95	articles on the platform „ LV portāls ” of the official publisher “Latvijas Vēstnesis”
92	articles on “Jurista Vārds” portal www.juristavards.lv
45	articles in the law magazine „ Jurista Vārds ”
15	articles on the Latvian Public Media portal www.lsm.lv
15	publications on Latvijas Radio 1

The most media coverage of the Judicial Council's activity took place on 19 January 2024, when the Plenary Session of the Supreme Court was held. The national information agency LETA published a news item “Strupišs: First instance courts have problems with reasoning in judgements”, which pointed out that first instance courts have problems with the methods of hearing cases and reasoning in judgments. On the same day, a press release sent out by the Secretariat of the Judicial Council on the Judicial Council's work priorities for 2024 was also widely covered. Also on 9 February 2024, the Judicial Council was widely covered in the media, when the Council representatives met with the President of Latvia Edgars Rinkēvičs to discuss issues of the development of the judiciary.

The Judicial Council regularly publishes updates on the social networking platform "X". In 2024, around 130 posts were published to the Council's account. The most public interest was generated by a post on the 2024 case processing time standards adopted by the Judicial Council.

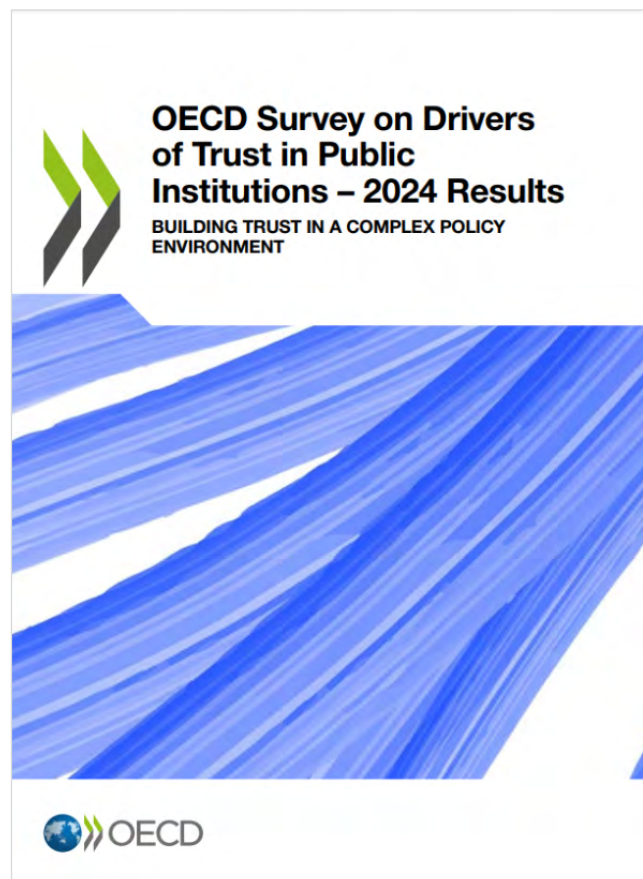
The Judicial Council meetings are streamed live on YouTube. In 2024, the highest number of views (243) was recorded at the meeting on 13 December, which discussed issues related to the provision of electronic court proceedings by 31 May 2026, as well as on the guidelines for court communication and the results of the 2024 survey of judges on the organisation of judicial work.

The aim of the Judicial Council to inform the public about its developments will always be relevant, regardless of the strategy of the Judicial Council, because public understanding and awareness of legal processes and decisions is essential to promote respect for the rule of law and trust in the judicial system. It helps to ensure transparency, accountability and promotes the active participation of citizens in the development of the legal environment.

Public trust in the courts

In July 2024, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) published a study on citizens' trust in public authorities in 30 countries. The study found that by 2023, the trust of Latvians in the courts and the judicial system had risen to 48%, the highest level since Latvia's independence.

„The measures taken in recent years to strengthen and develop the judicial system, the introduction of new selection procedures, the adoption of guidelines for writing judgments and stricter control of deadlines have had an impact and are being felt by the public. This shows that we are moving in the right direction,” said Aigars Strupiņš, Chair of the Judicial Council and President of the Supreme Court.



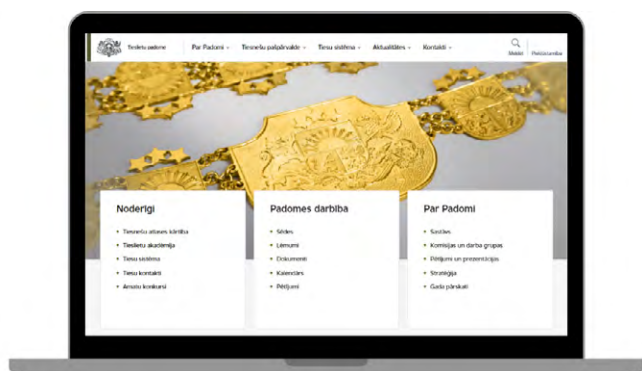
Since 2021, the Latvian public's trust in the courts and the judicial system has increased from 43% to 48%. Only other people (60%) and the police (52%) are trusted slightly more. Approximately

40% of Latvians trust international organisations, local governments, the civil service and the media.

The OECD study also takes a broader look at trust in government in Latvia and other OECD countries. In 2023, 29% of Latvians reported high or medium trust in government, which is lower than the OECD average (39%). The lowest levels of trust are in the legislature (25%) and in political parties (13%). However, there is a positive trend of increasing public trust in both policy makers and the media.

This is the second OECD study on public trust in public authorities and its evolution since 2021. The 2024 OECD study on public trust in public authorities in Latvia can be found [on the OECD website](#).

The new website of the Judicial Council



As the representative body of the judiciary, which participates in the development of the policy and strategy of the judicial system, as well as in the improvement of the organisation of judicial work, it is essential for the Judicial Council to ensure access to up-to-date information for both the public and the employees of the judiciary. Therefore, as of 14 June 2024, all news items of the Judicial Council are being published on the website www.tieslietupadome.lv.

The new website is designed to provide user-friendly, transparent and accessible information to all users. It offers intuitive navigation, a search function and clearly structured sections that allow users to quickly find the material needed, such as agendas and decisions taken at Judicial Council meetings. The website is also accessible to people with visual, hearing and mobility impairments and meets high security standards to protect users' data.

The website contains information not only on the issues discussed and decisions adopted at the meetings of the Judicial Council, but also on the Council's commissions, working groups and judicial self-government bodies.

Since the launch on 14 June 2024 and by the end of the year, it had been visited by around 3 900 users. The largest numbers of visitors came from Latvia, Germany and France. The most visited sections during this period were the homepage of the Judicial Council, the agendas of the Judicial Council meetings, and the news and decisions sections.

The Judicial Council has joined the unified platform for national and local government websites. The unified website platform, developed by the State Chancellery, provides a user-friendly, recognisable and simple environment where it is easy to find the information one needs and to communicate with state and local authorities. The platform is designed to be easy to use from a variety of devices and to be accessible to people with visual, hearing and mobility impairments.

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION OF THE JUDICIAL COUNCIL

Membership of the European Network of Councils for the Judiciary

The European Network of Councils for the Judiciary (ENCJ) is an international network of European Councils for the Judiciary. The ENCJ is based in Brussels. Madeleine Mathieu, representative of the Conseil Supérieur de la Magistrature of France, is the President of the ENCJ since 2024.

The ENCJ works in project-specific working groups, whose members meet periodically and present the results of their work to the General Assembly each year.

In 2023-2024, the ENCJ continued to develop several projects – “Independence, Accountability and Quality of the Judiciary” and “Dialogue Group on the Attractiveness of Judicial Career”, coordinated by the Belgian and Latvian Judicial Councils. Latvia’s position in the ENCJ working groups is represented by the Chair of the Judicial Council, Aigars Strupiņš, the Adviser to the Chair of the Supreme Court on the Judicial Council, Solvita Harbaceviča, and the Adviser to the Secretariat of the Judicial Council, Dace Šulmane.

In March 2024, Latvia hosted a meeting of the ENCJ Dialogue Group to discuss ways to strengthen the professional attractiveness of a judicial career, and representatives of the national judicial councils shared their experiences on working conditions and remuneration of judges.



Photo from the ENCJ archive

In June 2024, the General Assembly adopted the Declaration “Access to Justice” in Athens, which highlights the need to ensure access to justice for vulnerable groups and the role of judicial councils in the proportionate and controlled use of digitalization and artificial intelligence in courts. ENCJ recommendations on how to attract, select, retain the most competent and talented people for judicial office to ensure quality justice, as well as recommendations related to organisational and working conditions in the judicial system were adopted.

ENCJ members have the possibility to initiate remote workshops to discuss developments in the organisation of judicial work:

- Legal Needs Surveys (January 2024);
- Rule of law decay (March 2024);
- The situation of the judiciary in Poland (April 2024);
- Situation of the Judicial Council of Bosnia and Herzegovina (May 2024);
- European Commission Rule of Law Report (September 2024);
- Innovations in judiciaries (October 2024);
- Central and Eastern European Law Initiative Institute (CEELI) Guidelines on Judicial Vetting (December 2024).

EU Justice Scoreboard

The European Commission’s 2024 EU Justice Scoreboard includes new indicators reflecting access to justice, such as on the accessibility of the legal profession for persons with disabilities; on access to justice for consumers in the exercise of representative actions, protecting their collective interests; on the salaries of judicial and prosecutorial staff; on notaries and their powers in inheritance procedures.

The 2024 edition also includes, for the first time, new elements on judicial independence, such as the appointment of court presidents, national systems for income declarations and the dismissal of prosecutors-general.



Looking at the number of civil and commercial cases litigated per capita, Latvia has an average low litigation activity (similar to Slovenia), while in terms of the number of administrative cases, Latvia has the fifth lowest number of incoming cases in Europe.

When comparing the time limits for examination of disputed civil and commercial cases in first instance courts, the Latvian average of 200 days is considered optimally good (Germany, Finland, France and other countries have longer time length of proceedings). Latvia ranks 8th in examination of administrative cases in first instance courts (compared to 2023 EU Justice Scoreboard there is a reduction of length of proceedings). The Justice Scoreboard devotes a section to comparing the length of time taken by courts/other responsible institutions to deal with certain categories of cases. For example, the length of examination of

anti-money laundering cases in Latvian first instance courts has decreased (220 days in 2021; 180 days in 2022).

When analysing the budgetary expenditure of the judiciary against the background of gross domestic product (GDP), Latvia ranks 6th (0.4% of GDP).

The latest report compares the salaries of judges and prosecutors with the national average. The level of remuneration (a coefficient above the average of 2 monthly salaries) is average in Latvia (about half of the EU Member States). At the same time, the salary coefficient for Supreme Court judges is higher than in Latvia in about two thirds of Member States.

Latvia continues to maintain a high number of judges per 100 000 inhabitants (around 29 judges), ranking 6th in Europe.

Looking at the latest Eurobarometer surveys on public perception of judicial independence, there are slowly emerging positive trends. While in 2023, 41% of the Latvian population rated the independence of the judiciary as good or almost good, in 2024, already 43% of respondents gave a positive assessment.

The 2024 EU Justice Scoreboard shows that Member States are continuing to improve the digitalisation of their justice systems, and Latvia is among the European leaders according to these indicators.

The full report is available [on the website of the European Commission](#).

EU Rule of Law Report

Every summer, the European Commission publishes its Rule of Law Report, which looks at developments in Member States in the area of the rule of law under four pillars: the justice system, the fight against corruption, media freedom and pluralism, as well as broader institutional issues relating to the functioning of the principle of checks and balances. The European Commission conducts an annual monitoring cycle which follows how Member States are progressing in implementing the recommendations and in implementing new justice reforms in line with the principles of law recognised in democracies and

countries governed by the rule of law. In the Report, the European Commission presents its assessment of the main developments of the year under review in all four areas. This overview provides a summary of the Report's justice pillar.



On 24 July 2024, the European Commission published its annual Report. The section on justice system highlights key developments and trends in the justice systems of the Member States of the European Union, including many issues affecting the functioning of national justice systems.

As to Latvia, the Report notes that the Latvian justice system has continued to function efficiently, with further initiatives to improve case management and the efficient use of judicial resources. At the same time, while the remuneration of judges and court staff has been significantly increased, the relatively low remuneration of judicial assistants leads to a significant staff turnover. The report notes the amendments to the law "On Judicial Power", adopted in compliance with the judgment of the Constitutional Court regarding the eligibility and individual assessment of candidates for the office of judge and prosecutor who have been found guilty of criminal offences. It is noted that discussions on the extension of the competence of the Economic Court continue. Reference is made to the findings of the Judicial Council's working group of late 2023 on systemic deficiencies in the handling of domestic violence cases. Separate mention is made of the establishment in 2024 by the Judicial Council of a new working group on the specialisation of judges. The European Commission did not make any new recommendations to improve the justice system in 2024, while maintaining the recommendation already made in the 2023 Report to introduce appropriate safeguards against undue political influence in the appointment procedure of Supreme Court judges.

The full report is available [on the website of the European Commission](#).

JUDICIAL ACADEMY



Progress towards the Judicial Academy in 2024

In 2024, work continued on the reform of the legal training system and the establishment of a single training centre, the Judicial Academy. In particular, at the end of 2022, the project “Judicial Academy” (hereinafter – the Project) was launched with the financing of the European Union, with a view to establishing a permanent and unified qualification development training institution as from 1 January 2025, ensuring a unified approach to training planning for judges, prosecutors, court staff, prosecutors’ assistants and investigators (hereinafter – the target audience) in the competences essential for the effective conduct of judicial proceedings. According to the Project conditions, the Ministry of Justice in cooperation with the Judicial Council shall supervise the implementation of the reform. The implementation of the reform is carried out by the Court Administration in cooperation with the Prosecutor General’s Office, the Supreme Court and the Ministry of the Interior.

Curriculum development

In 2024, one of the main objectives of the Project was achieved: ten professional development training programmes were developed for:

1. newly appointed judges;
2. newly appointed prosecutors;
3. judges with experience;
4. prosecutors with experience;

5. newly appointed court staff;
6. newly appointed prosecutors’ assistants;
7. court staff with experience;
8. prosecutors’ assistants with experience;
9. managers in courts and prosecutors’ offices;
10. investigators for interdisciplinary issues, which are essential for the effective administration of justice.

The programmes are designed to strengthen the rule of law, improve the efficiency of judicial processes and ensure a high level of professional training for those working in the justice sector.

One of the first steps in the curriculum development process was to clearly define what competences, knowledge and skills judges and prosecutors need. To ensure a qualitative and multi-faceted approach, curriculum development working groups were established as early as 2023 to conduct in-depth research and analysis of training needs, identifying areas for professional development. Judges, prosecutors, court staff and representatives of the Court Administration participated in the curriculum development working groups. The development of the judicial programmes was managed by the Latvian Judicial Training Centre, while the development of the prosecutorial programmes was managed by the Court Administration and external methodological experts.

Each curriculum contains a structured and comprehensive set of training topics reflecting the diversity of duties and competences required of judges and prosecutors, as well as court and prosecution staff. The programmes for newly appointed judges and prosecutors shall include specific training activities to be completed over a period of time in order to ensure successful professional preparation. For experienced judges and prosecutors, training programmes are a dynamic resource to be adapted to current needs. The content of training programmes serves both as a basis for identifying priority topics for the relevant year and as a tool for keeping track of the diversity and development of long-term learning provision.

Training programmes for court staff and prosecutors' assistants are designed to strengthen these positions by providing professional development and career advancement opportunities in the judicial system. The content of the training programme for investigators is based on topics that have been identified during the development of the programmes for judges and prosecutors as essential for the effective administration of justice.

Curriculum implementation

Professional development training programmes provide the opportunity for a long-term, well-considered design of annual training offers. In particular, the Training Plan 2025 for Judges, Court Staff, Prosecutors and Assistants to Prosecutors (hereinafter – the Plan), which was approved by the Judicial Council on 18 October 2024, has been prepared taking into account the training needs expressed by the target groups for the coming year, recommendations in policy planning documents, additions recommended by the Prosecutor's Office, the Ministry of Justice and self-government institutions of judges and prosecutors, as well as the instructions of the relevant programme development working groups on priority training topics. The Plan follows a common approach to the provision of training to various target groups and provides for the possibility for judges and prosecutors to participate in joint training. The training needs identified during professional development training for judicial staff were taken into account in the development of the Plan for judicial staff.

Since 2023, various training activities have already been provided to the target audience in the pilot version. Training on legal topics is delivered by the most experienced members of the judiciary and prosecution services, who share the skills and knowledge they have gained in their work. In order to provide training requiring expertise from other disciplines, public procurement is organized.

Training events provided in 2024, giving participants valuable experience and knowledge include the listed below.

1. For example, the training course "A Victim-Centred Approach in the Justice System" consisted of 9 sessions over 9 weeks. In their evaluation of the course, the participants particularly highlighted the opportunity to get to know social service providers and their perspectives, as well as the visit to the Child Protection Centre unit "Bērnu māja". The second group started training in November 2024 and will finish it in early 2025.
2. Several seminars have been held on topical security issues and related legal issues. One of the main topics was the national security situation in the context of Russia's continued aggression in Ukraine. The Summer School gave participants the opportunity to hear first-hand the views of a Ukrainian expert on international law issues relevant to Russia's aggression against Ukraine. A seminar on hybrid warfare instruments and related crimes was also organised. Experts from various countries participated in the seminar. Moreover, there were two seminars with the participation of experts from the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs of Latvia and the UN Refugee Agency in response to the increase in asylum cases.
3. Several trainings related to the improvement of professional knowledge were organised, for example, the judges' understanding of the issue of submitting an application to the Constitutional Court and European Union law issues was strengthened, issues of money laundering, terrorism and proliferation financing risks were studied in cooperation with the Financial Intelligence Service, etc.
4. Taking into account the professional perspective and experience of the judges, in cooperation with the General Prosecutor's Office, training for prosecutors on the preparation and presentation of a quality indictment, with particular emphasis on the importance of evidence analysis and the accuracy of argumentation was organized.
5. Non-legal skills were also developed by acquiring and improving knowledge of legal English and

French, communication and interpersonal skills. The ability to recognise and deal with crisis situations in a timely manner was strengthened by attending supervision and coaching sessions.

6. More than 40 missions were organised, involving representatives from different areas of justice. 22 representatives of courts and prosecutors' offices visited the Court of Justice of the European Union in Luxembourg to gain valuable experience and broaden their understanding of the practice of European courts.

Establishment of the Judicial Academy

On 24 October 2024, the Saeima (parliament) adopted the Law on the Judicial Academy, defining the status of the Judicial Academy and providing for its tasks and rights. The Judicial Academy is a derived public entity, whose institutional oversight is exercised by the Cabinet of Ministers through the Minister of Justice, while the functional oversight of the Judicial Academy is exercised by the Judicial Council.

The Judicial Academy will implement a comprehensive approach to the development of professional competences of the judiciary, developing both initial training and qualification development programmes, as well as competences in innovation, research and international cooperation. The Judicial Academy will implement long-term training programmes that complement each other in a sequential manner, thus ensuring a culture of learning as part of professional responsibility and fostering an appropriate environment for the sustainability of learning outcomes.

From 1 January 2025, the Judicial Academy will take over the functions of the Court Administration, which were previously performed by the Latvian Judicial Training Centre on the basis of a delegation agreement, i.e. planning and organising training for judges and court staff, and collecting information on the training provided and attendance.

The transitional provisions of the law "On Judicial Power" provide that the Court Administration shall ensure that the training activities initiated under the Project are carried out in accordance with the Training Plan approved by the Judicial Council. Therefore, the Judicial Academy will gradually take over the function of training provision.

At the end of the year, the Ministry of Justice launched an open competition for the post of Director of the Judicial Academy. Until the appointment of the Director of the Judicial Academy was confirmed, the duties of the Director of the Judicial Academy were performed by the State Secretary of the Ministry of Justice, Mihails Papsujevičs. In parallel, the Court Administration, as the Project implementer, announced open competitions for the following positions in the Administrative Department of the Judicial Academy: Finance Director, Procurement Specialist-Lawyer, Personnel Specialist-Lawyer and Administration Clerk.

In 2024, the Court Administration carried out all necessary activities to ensure the functioning of the Judicial Academy as from 1 January 2025, such as drafting the necessary internal regulations, draft orders and other draft documents, started cooperation with the responsible institutions to provide the Judicial Academy with a filing system, domain registration, website development, IT infrastructure maintenance, data protection officer services, etc.

Adaptation of premises of the Judicial Academy

The Judicial Academy is currently located at 4 Pils laukums, Riga. From the second half of 2025, the Judicial Academy will be located at 31 11. Novembra krastmala, Riga.

The adaptation works for the premises of the Judicial Academy have been extended until the end of Q2 2025.



The classrooms will be located on the fourth, fifth and partly on the third floor of the building. The adaptation work will provide a modern and contemporary learning environment, ensuring energy efficiency and sustainability. The third floor of the Judicial Academy will be used for staff offices, while the fourth and fifth floors will training facilities: an auditorium (100 persons), a lecture hall (up to 40 persons), a computer room, working group rooms and a moot courtroom.

At the same time, a contract was concluded for equipping the premises of the Judicial Academy with audiovisual solutions and their maintenance. As well as a contract for the development of a design concept for the premises of the Judicial Academy was concluded, including the development and characterisation of the visual and functional layout of the premises, thus providing for a complex furnishing of the premises.

In 2024, the demolition of the building was completed, the slabs were reinforced and rebuilt and the interior walls were rebuilt, 70% of the floor structure was installed, windows on the 3rd, 4th and 5th floors were replaced, walls were plastered and plasterboard partitions were built. In the building, 50% of the heating system has been installed, the heating unit has been built and connected, and 40% of the ventilation system has been installed. 60 % of the building's electrical wiring and electrical communication systems have been installed, and finishing works have started on the 3rd, 4th and 5th floors. In 2025, adaptation works will continue.

Until the adaptation works are completed, training will be provided in the available premises of courts and prosecutor's offices, conference centres and online.

PRIORITIES OF THE JUDICIAL COUNCIL IN 2025

In order to achieve the goals and objectives set out in the Judicial Council's Operational Strategy 2021-2025, the Judicial Council has identified the following priority areas of action for 2025:

1. Implementing the transition of the administrative support functions of the judiciary from the executive to the judiciary by enshrining it in the law "On Judicial Power";
2. Enhancing the attraction of legally qualified staff to the justice system by improving the standard of positions and the remuneration system for justice support staff;
3. Strengthening the role of the Judicial Academy in implementation of a sustainable and effective training system for the quality performance of judicial and prosecutorial functions.



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