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Annual report of the Judicial Council of the Republic of Latvia

2023

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INTRODUCTORY REMARKS BY AIGARS STRUPIŠS, CHAIR OF THE JUDICIAL COUNCIL

Another year of work is over. The Judicial Council not only continues to carry out its day-to-day functions, mainly deciding on career issues of judges, but is also active in strengthening the work of the judiciary. In this respect, particular attention should be paid to the approved guidelines for drafting of judgments in civil and administrative cases for courts of first instance and courts of appeal, which are an important support for ensuring uniform case law.

Looking back at the work of the judicial system in the previous year, I would like to highlight the survey of court clients conducted by the Centre for Public Policy "Providus" and the Court Administration. The results of the survey showed that the work of the courts of first instance and courts of appeal is assessed highly positively by their clients. The highest rating was given to the work of judges, as well as to the assistance and support provided by court staff in court proceedings. It is important to point out that the survey results show an objective view of the work of courts, as the opinions were given by people who have experienced real contact with the courts.

The main challenge for the next period is to start the separation of first- and second-instance courts from the executive, taking over the functions related to finances and administration of the judiciary from the Court Administration and the Ministry



of Justice. In 2023, a conceptual agreement was reached with the Ministry of Justice on the need for such reform and a discussion was initiated on possible institutional reform scenarios. This year, however, work is ahead on the elaboration and implementation of a detailed concept. This is the first priority for 2024. Without such a reform, we cannot speak of full independence of the judiciary from the executive. This fiscal and organisational dependence is also one of the reasons why for decades issues that are crucial for the efficiency of the judicial system have not been addressed: the issue of judicial remuneration (which has more or less been resolved after two Constitutional Court judgments), the huge differences in workload among courts, the lack of adequate effectiveness control and monitoring mechanisms in the judicial system, and the inadequate remuneration of court staff compared to what is required of them. At the same time, it should be understood that this reform will not be a panacea that will solve everything on its own. No, it will take serious, methodical work to sort these issues out, and this will not be the work of the Judicial Council alone. If we want faster results,

every judge must take his or her part in developing the judicial system – by participating in self-government institutions, by voting responsibly and in the public interest for members of self-government institutions, and by coming forward with proposals and communicating with a president of a court and colleagues.

Another key challenge for the next period is to find a specific solution to the inadequate remuneration of judicial support staff. This is not a matter of a primitive salary increase. It is about developing a modern court support service, redefining the profession and role of judge's assistant and developing a standard and selection procedure for this position, which together would provide an objective basis for salary increase. Work in this direction has already been started in the previous period and should be completed this year resulting in a specific, detailed conceptual solution and the launch of its implementation.

The third task is to assess, on the basis of the planning, statistical analysis and methodology developed in the previous period, the judicial reforms carried out in previous periods – from all previous territorial reorganisations of courts, their impact on workload balancing and access to justice for the public, to the reform of land registry judges. Simultaneously, we will improve and refine

the planning and analysis methods developed in the previous period.

As a member and representative of the Judicial Council on the Board of the European Network of Councils for the Judiciary (ENCJ), I have taken part in the thematic dialogue group on the attractiveness of the judicial career, as it turns out that the shortage of qualified candidates for judicial office is a problem not only in Latvia, but also in the rest of Europe. The ENCJ's recommendations on this issue will soon be prepared and we will also have to think about ways to improve the situation in Latvia. Therefore, although they have not been identified as priorities, we will also focus on developing the judicial selection system in new directions as far as possible, in particular by finding opportunities to prepare candidates before selection. I have high hopes for the Academy of Justice, which is currently being set up under the auspices of the Ministry of Justice.

In conclusion, I would like to thank all Latvian judges, employees of the judicial system, the Secretariat of the Judicial Council and the staff of the Court Administration for the successful cooperation and work carried out in the previous period, and to wish strength and high success in strengthening the rule of law in our country.

Aigars Strupiņš
Chair of the Judicial Council

JUDICIAL COUNCIL AND ITS WORK PRIORITIES

The Judicial Council is a collegial body that participates in the development of judicial policy and strategy, as well as in improving the organisation of the work of the judicial system. The purpose of establishing the Judicial Council is to strengthen the independence of the judiciary and the self-organisation of judicial work, as well as to ensure a unified representation of the judiciary in relation to other branches of state power and institutions.

As an independent and democratic country governed by the rule of law, the Latvian government is made up of three branches: legislative, executive and judicial. In accordance with the principle of separation of powers, these branches are represented by independent and autonomous institutions. The principle of the separation of powers guarantees balance among them and mutual control and promotes moderation. In a democratic state governed by the rule of law, the three branches of power 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, it is the Judicial Council that is expected to take a decisive part in solving the issues of the judicial system, in improving the efficiency and quality of court work, and in efforts to increase public confidence in the judiciary.

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 Judicial Council held its first meeting 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 an important milestone in the development of the Judicial Council's functions, when amendments to the law On Judicial Power entered into force, extending the competence of the Judicial Council to decide on the career development of judges, the procedure for the selection, appointment and dismissal of presidents of courts of first instance and courts of appeal, as well as the selection, traineeship and qualification examinations of candidates for judicial office at all levels of courts. These important amendments to the law have been made in order to strengthen the independence of the judiciary, while limiting the influence of the executive and legislative powers in these matters.

The priorities of the Judicial Council are set out in its work planning documents. In this regard, the Judicial Council's Strategy for 2021-2025, approved on 12 March 2021, is particularly noteworthy, as it focuses on a number of key areas: judicial training; strengthening the functioning of judicial self-government institutions; strengthening the fiscal independence of the judicial system; and remuneration that is commensurate with the judicial office and competitive for judicial staff.

The Judicial Council has set out four main lines of action in its Strategy for 2021-2025:

1. strengthening the independence of the judiciary;
2. strengthening the functionality and role of the Judicial Council;
3. ensuring the efficient and high-quality judiciary;
4. promoting public confidence in the judiciary.

In order for the work to be carried out in a transparent manner and to contribute to the implementation of the Judicial Council's Strategy 2021-2025, the Judicial Council's priority areas of action are established also for each year.

The functions of the Judicial Council can be broadly divided into three areas, namely into conceptual and organisational issues of the judicial system, career issues of judges, and cooperation with other branches of government.

1. Conceptual and organisational issues of the judicial system:

- defining the territories of operation of district (city) courts and regional courts;
- determining the number of judges in district (city) courts and regional courts, as well as in Supreme Court departments;
- approving the reorganisation plan for district (city) courts;
- determining the procedures for the selection of candidates for judicial office, for the traineeship and for the qualification examination;
- approving the procedure and content of the examination of judges' professional knowledge and the samples of documents required for the examination;
- approving the basic principles for the specialisation of judges and the procedure for determining caseload indicators;
- approving the standard of length of proceedings;

In 2023, the Judicial Council nominated three priority lines of action.

1. establishing the fiscal independence of courts as a constitutional body (Strategy, clause 1.1), launching a discussion on the status and functions of the Judicial Council (Strategy, clause 2.1), taking over the necessary functions from the executive branch, developing the administrative capacity of the Judicial Council (Strategy, clause 2.3);

- approving the content of the training programme for judges and court staff.

2. Career issues of judges:

- assigning or changing duties of newly appointed judges;
- transferring a judge to a court of the same level, to a higher or lower court;
- assigning judicial duties in the event of a vacancy or temporary absence of a judge;
- appointing or dismissing 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:

- approving the budget request of courts;
- providing an opinion on candidates for the office of a Constitutional Court judge;
- 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 approval;
- exercising the right to submit an application to the Constitutional Court on issues of importance to the judicial system.

2. continuing to contribute to the development of a model of competitive remuneration for judges and court staff (Strategy, clause 1.6), contributing to the development of a common assessment methodology and a unified remuneration system of court staff (Strategy, clause 3.9);
3. strengthening the efficiency of courts, optimising internal resources of the judicial system (Strategy, clause 3.3).

COMPOSITION OF THE JUDICIAL COUNCIL

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 Latvian Council of Sworn Advocates;
- Chair of the Latvian Council of Sworn Notaries;
- Chair of the Latvian Council of Sworn Bailiffs.

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

- one 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 Judicial Council has a total of fifteen members – eight permanent members and seven elected members. The eight permanent members of the Judicial Council are 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 Latvian Council of Sworn Advocates, the Chair of the Latvian Council of Sworn Notaries and the Chair of the Latvian Council of Sworn Bailiffs.

The seven elected members of the Judicial Council include one senator of the Supreme Court, elected at the Plenary Session of the Supreme Court, two regional court judges and four district (city) court judges, elected at the Latvian Judges Conference.

According to the law On Judicial Power, the President of the Supreme Court, Aigars Strupišs, is also the Chair of the Judicial Council. The Deputy Chair of the Judicial Council is elected by the Judicial Council from among the judges represented therein. Currently, the position of Deputy Chair is held by Dzintra Balta, Senator of the Supreme Court.

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, yet not more than twice in a row. The status of an elected member of the Judicial Council shall not be compatible with the duties of a member of the Judicial Disciplinary Committee, the Disciplinary Court, the Judicial Qualification Committee or the Judicial Ethics Commission.

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 and representatives of judges' associations may participate in the work of the Judicial Council in an advisory capacity.

In 2023, there were minor changes in the composition of the Judicial Council. The term of office of the member of the Judicial Council, Aija Āva, Judge of Kurzeme Regional Court, came to an end. On 26 October 2023, at the Latvian Judges Conference, the President of Kurzeme District Court, Madars Plepis, was elected as a member of the Judicial Council to replace Aija Āva. On 8 December 2023, Aigars Kaupe was elected Chair of the Latvian Council of Sworn Notaries, thus replacing the previous Chair of the Latvian Council of Sworn Notaries, Jānis Skrastiņš.

Changes to the composition of the Judicial Council in 2023:

Jānis Skrastiņš | Aigars Kaupe
(until 08.12.2023.) | (from 08.12.2023.)

Chair of the Latvian Council of Notaries

Aija Āva | Madars Plepis
(until 26.10.2023.) | (from 26.10.2023.)

Judges



1st row from left: Judge of the Riga Regional Court Ilze Celmiņa, Chair of the Legal Affairs Committee of the Saeima Andrejs Judins, Minister of Justice Inese Lībiņa-Egnere, Chair of the Judicial Council Aigars Strupišs, President of the Constitutional Court Aldis Laviņš and Prosecutor General Juris Stukāns. 2nd row from left: Chair of the Latvian Council of Sworn Notaries Aigars Kaupe, Chair of Zemgale Regional Court Juris Siliņš, Chair of Valmiera Courthouse of the District Administrative Court Guntars Ploriņš, Chair of Vidzeme District Court Līga Ašitoka, Judge of Riga City Court Baiba Ozoliņa, Chair of the Latvian Council of Sworn Advocates Jānis Rozenbergs, Chair of the Latvian Council of Sworn Bailiffs Iveta Kruka and Chair of Kurzeme District Court Madars Plepis.

Composition of the Judicial Council



Aigars Strupiņš

President of the Supreme Court (since 15.06.2020.)



Dzintra Balta

Senator of the Supreme Court (elected 11.09.2020.)



Aldis Laviņš

President of the Constitutional Court (since 10.03.2022.)



Inese Lībiņa-Egnere

Minister of Justice (since 14.12.2022.)



Andrejs Judins

Chair of the Legal Affairs Committee of the Saeima (since 23.11.2022.)



Juris Stukāns

Prosecutor General (since 12.07.2020.)



Jānis Rozenbergs

Chair of the Latvian Council of Sworn Advocates (since 07.04.2017.)



Aigars Kaupe

Chair of the Latvian Council of Sworn Notaries (since 08.12.2023.)



Iveta Kruka

Chair of the Latvian Council of Sworn Bailiffs (elected 21.04.2022.)



Ilze Celmiņa

Judge of the Collegium of Civil Cases of Riga Regional Court (elected 16.09.2020.)



Juris Siliņš

President of Zemgale Regional Court (elected 08.09.2020.)



Madars Plepis

President of Kurzeme District Court (elected 26.10.2023.)



Guntars Ploriņš

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



Līga Ašitoka

President of Vidzeme District Court (elected 10.11.2021.)



Baiba Ozoliņa

Judge of Riga City Court (elected 28.09.2022.)

Secretariat of the Judicial Council

In accordance with 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 logistical support appropriate to its objectives, competences and scope of activities, a permanent support structure – the Secretariat – was established in 2017 to ensure the proper functioning of the Judicial Council. Until the establishment of the Secretariat, the work of the Judicial Council was ensured by the Administration of the Supreme Court.

The functions of the Secretariat are defined in the law On Judicial Power, in accordance with the competences of the Judicial Council and the Chair of the Judicial Council, and they are as follows:

- Organization of Judicial Council meetings;
- Preparation of issues for consideration by the Judicial Council;
- Drafting decisions, opinions, resolutions and other documents;

- Keeping the records of the Judicial Council;
- Organisation of the Latvian Judges Conference in cooperation with the Court Administration;
- Development and improvement of organisational guidelines, internal and external laws and regulations of the judicial system;
- Carrying out research on topical issues;
- Ensuring the work of the Working Group for Court Efficiency established 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 when cooperating with state and local government institutions, self-governing bodies of the judiciary, and international organisations.



From left: Legal advisor Linda Kalniņa, Consultant Irina Čaša, Advisor Dace Šulmane, Head of the Judicial Council Alla Spale, Legal research counsel Rihards Veinbergs and Communications advisor Lana Mauliņa.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE JUDICIAL COUNCIL IN 2023

Meetings, decisions, regulations

The work of the Judicial Council is mainly organised in a meeting format, while the issues dealt with at meetings are reflected in the decisions adopted by the Judicial Council. An overview of the quantitative indicators of the work of the Judicial Council and its most important decisions adopted in 2023 is therefore provided.



In 2023, the Judicial Council held 36 meetings, including:

- 12 meetings in person or via videoconference;
- 20 written decision-making procedures;
- 4 preparatory meetings.



Regulations on work organization of the judicial system approved and/or amended by the Judicial Council in 2023

- Standard for the length of proceedings 2023 (JC Decision No 5 of 10.02.2023);
- Re-organisation plan for Daugavpils Court and Rēzekne Court (JC Decision No 20 of 24.03.2023);
- Guidelines for writing judgments in civil cases for first instance courts and appellate courts (JC Decision No 31 of 16.06.2023);
- Guidelines for writing judgments in administrative cases for first instance courts and appellate courts (JC Decision No 32 of 16.06.2023);
- Amendments to the Procedure for Selection of Candidates to the Office of District (City) Court and Regional Court Judge (JC Decision No 68 of 08.09.2023);
- Amendments to the Rules of Procedure of the Judicial Qualification Committee (JC Decision No 69 of 08.09.2023).



In 2023, the Judicial Council adopted 88 decisions, including:

- 54 decisions on judicial career issues:
 - on determining the place of execution of judicial duties for newly appointed judges;
 - on transferring a judge;
 - on replacing a judge;
 - on appointing a court president and a vice-president;
 - on appointing an acting president and an acting vice-president of a court.
- 26 decisions on conceptual and organisational issues of the judicial system:
 - on the lines of action of the Judicial Council;
 - regarding district (city) courts;
 - on the number of judges and judicial posts in courts;
 - on preparing for the Latvian Judges Conference;
 - on policy planning documents;
 - on curriculum content.
- 8 decisions on opinions and proposals:
 - on the actions of the Prosecutor General;
 - on reconciliation of the courts' budget;
 - on setting up a working group to assess the organisation of court work in cases involving domestic violence and threats to a person's life or health.

Reorganisation of Daugavpils Court and Rēzekne Court

One of the topical issues for the Judicial Council in 2023 was the balancing of workload of judges in courts. Therefore, on 24 March 2023, the Judicial Council adopted a decision on the merger of Daugavpils Court with Rēzekne Court as of 1 July 2023, while changing the name of the reorganised court to Latgale District Court.

As part of the territorial reform of the courts on 1 February 2016, two courts were established in the Latgale judicial region – Daugavpils Court and Rēzekne Court. This was the first merger of court territories outside the Rīga judicial region. In order to avoid risks to organisation of court work and to accessibility of courts, the solution was to create two district (city) courts in the territory of operation of Latgale Regional Court. However, the Judicial Council's Working Group for Court Efficiency considered it necessary to continue the territorial reform of courts and to assess the issue of the number of district (city) courts in Latgale.

In 2022, the Working Group carried out an assessment of the adequacy of the number of approved judicial posts in relation to the volume of cases under the jurisdiction of the Court and concluded that the resources of the two courts – Daugavpils Court and Rēzekne Court – would be complementary and that merging the courts would help to reduce the backlog of cases in these courts and balance the judicial workload between the judges of the two courts. On the basis of the assessment, it was decided to continue with the territorial reform of the courts initiated in 2016. Thus, with the support of the Ministry of Justice, **the reorganisation plan for the district (city) courts of general jurisdiction in the Latgale judicial region** was developed and approved by a decision of the Judicial Council of 24 March 2023.

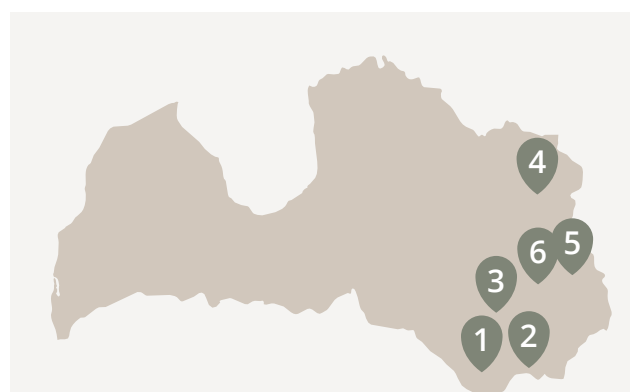
The Judicial Council supported the merger of Daugavpils Court with Rēzekne Court in order to:

- increase the efficiency of Daugavpils Court and Rēzekne Court by balancing the capacity of

judges and making efficient use of other court resources;

- contribute to balancing the number of cases received and handled per judge by ensuring accessibility to the court in any of the court's locations;
- balance the workload of judges;
- provide more opportunities for judges to specialise.

Whereas, in accordance with the competence of the Judicial Council established by the law On Judicial Power, by the decisions of the Judicial Council of 30 June 2023 it was decided that the Latgale District Court shall be composed of 44 judges (and with 158 posts of court staff) and its territorial jurisdiction shall refer to Augšdaugava Municipality, Balvi Municipality, Daugavpils City, Krāslava Municipality, Līvāni Municipality, Ludza Municipality, Preiļi Municipality, Rēzekne Municipality and Rēzekne City. Citizens are provided with access to the Latgale District Court and the possibility to file documents with the Court at any of the locations of the Latgale District Court.



Latgale District Court locations:

1. Daugavpils (37 18. novembra Street and 11 Ģimnāzijas Street);
2. Krāslava (19 Lāčplēša Street);
3. Preiļi (2 Talsu Street);
4. Balvi (7a Bērzpils Street);
5. Ludza (44 Stacijas Street);
6. Rēzekne (24 Dārzu Street).

Guidelines for writing judgments

By Decision No 31 of the Judicial Council of 16 June 2023 and by Decision No 32 of the Judicial Council of 16 June 2023 the **Guidelines for writing judgments in administrative cases for first instance courts and appellate courts** and the **Guidelines for writing judgments in civil cases for first instance courts** and appellate courts were approved. The Guidelines have been drawn up with a view to enhancing the quality of judgments and ensuring a uniform approach to the writing of judgments in all courts.

The Guidelines for Writing Judgments in Administrative and Civil Cases for First Instance Courts and Appellate Courts were developed by the Division of Case-law and Research of the Supreme Court in response to the call of the Working Group for Court Efficiency established by the Judicial Council and for the implementation of the Judicial Council's objective to strengthen court efficiency.

The Guidelines for Writing Judgments in Administrative and Civil Cases for First Instance Courts and Appellate Courts were developed by the Division of Case-law and Research of the Supreme Court in response to the call of the Working Group for Court Efficiency established by the Judicial Council and for the implementation of the Judicial Council's objective to strengthen court efficiency.

In the course of drafting the guidelines, 4 judges of administrative courts of first instance and appellate instance were interviewed on their experience in writing judgments in administrative cases. As well as, 42 examples of good practice judgments and 18 examples of judgments to be criticised, submitted by all three court instances, were analysed, and the comments made by the courts were generalised, identifying the following criteria used to assess a judgment, which can also serve as a basis for drafting a quality judgment:

- clarity and brevity of an application and of a summary of contents of a judgment of a first instance court;
- clarity, sufficiency and coherence of an argumentation structure;

- validity, clarity and unambiguity of conclusions;
- sufficiency, comprehensiveness and impartiality of evidence assessment;
- clarity and intelligibility of the interpretation of legal provisions;
- proper application of case-law;
- proper responding to arguments of parties to administrative proceedings;
- properly articulated agreement with the reasoning of a lower court's judgment;
- clear and comprehensible indications of the errors committed by a first instance court;
- scope of a judgment is appropriate to the objective necessity.

Alongside the recommendations on writing judgments, the guidelines include the Senate's views on the form, content and reasoning of a judgment.

In the course of drafting the guidelines, 12 judges of first instance courts and appellate courts were interviewed on their experience of writing judgments in civil cases. A total of 42 examples of good practice judgments and 40 examples of judgments to be criticised were analysed, and the comments made by the courts were generalised, identifying the following criteria used to assess a judgment, which can also serve as a basis for drafting a quality judgment:

- compliance with legal provisions;
- a well-reasoned judgment (a fully disclosed line of reasoning to support a specific outcome of a case);
- use of ancillary sources of law (case-law in particular);
- a well-structured judgment (navigating from the most important points of law to the merits of a case, chronological analysis of facts, and sequential assessment of claims);
- response to objections to each claim, analysis of arguments put forward by both sides;
- thorough and detailed analysis of evidence;

- clear and easy to understand language, no unnecessary verbiage, use of right legal terms;
- sufficiently brief judgement, focused descriptive part, optimal balance between descriptive and reasoning parts;
- clear layout of the text (use of numbering, separated parts of a judgment, no unnecessary emphasis, italics, etc.);
- a judgment of an appellate court clearly addresses a judgement of a first instance court, explicitly stating what is wrong with the judgment of the first instance court.

Alongside these recommendations, the guidelines include the Senate's views on the grounds, form and content of a judgment.

Standard for the length of court proceedings

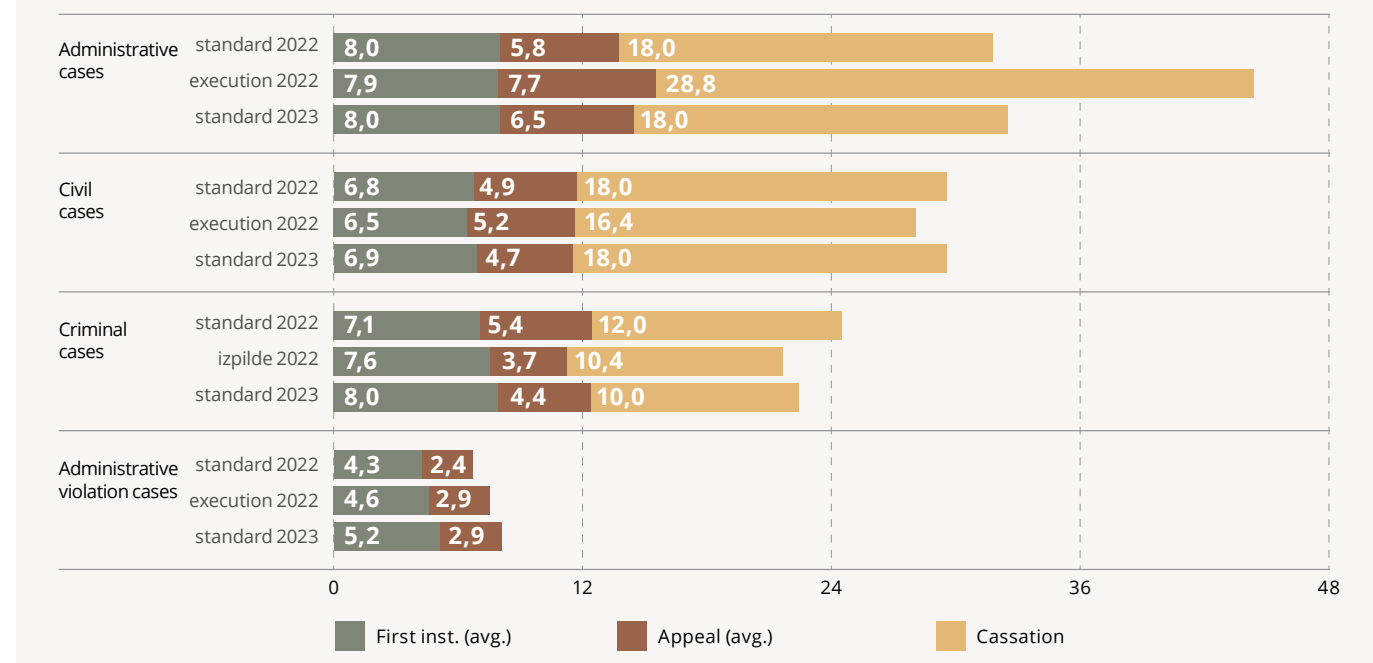
By Decision No 5 of the Judicial Council of 10 February 2023 the **standard for the length of court proceedings** was approved. Time limits for handling cases are indicators of the efficiency of the judicial system, reflecting the length of time taken to process cases and allowing for an assessment of

compliance with the principle of timely handling.

Based on the forecasts submitted by court presidents, the Judicial Council approved the standard for the length of court proceedings 2023 for each court, as well as the average time taken per court instance. The establishment of case handling deadlines enables litigants to predict the duration of court proceedings, to compare case processing performance and to identify cases that do not meet the established or planned case handling deadlines.

According to Section 27¹ of the law On Judicial Power, the management of time limits for handling of cases before a court is the responsibility of a court president, who, in cooperation with judges, plans and determines the court's work objectives regarding the average time limits for handling of cases before the court, and submits them to the Judicial Council for approval by 1 February of each year. The standard for the length of proceedings shall be determined taking into account the resources of a court and the need to ensure the observance of person's right to handling of a case within a reasonable time-frame, and other fundamental principles of case handling.

Average length of proceedings and standards per legal sector



Opinions and decisions of the Judicial Council

In 2023, amendments were made to the Procedure for Selection of Candidates to the Office of District (City) Court and Regional Court Judges and to the Rules of Procedure of the Judicial Qualification Committee in order to improve the selection procedure of candidates for the office of regional court judge and the evaluation of judges' professional performance.

The amendments to the Rules of Procedure of the Judicial Qualification Committee clarify the separation of competences of the Judicial Qualification Committee and the Commission for the Selection of Candidates to the Office of District (City) Court and Regional Court Judges in the selection process of first instance court judges, as well as improve the process of assessing the professional performance of judges by clearly and comprehensively describing the professional skills to be assessed. Accordingly, by Decisions No 68 and No 69 of the Judicial Council of 8 September 2023, amendments are made aiming to improve the selection procedure of district (city) court judges applying for the office of regional court judge, including:

- separation of the assessment of professional skills and behavioural competences, providing that the professional skills of a first instance court judge are assessed by the Judicial Qualification Committee, while behavioural competences are assessed by the Commission for the Selection of Candidates to the Office of District (City) Court and Regional Court Judges;
- the procedure for assessing the professional skills of judges is laid down in the Rules of Procedure of the Judicial Qualification Committee;
- a positive opinion on the transfer of a judge to the office of judge of a regional court (on the basis of which the judicial candidate is included on the list of candidates) is given by the Judicial Qualification Committee, taking into account the overall successful assessment of professional

skills and behavioural competences obtained in the selection process. If any of the assessments is not successful, the Judicial Qualification Committee refuses to give a positive opinion for the transfer of a judge to a regional court;

- successful assessment of both professional skills and behavioural competences is required for a candidate to be included on the list of candidates for judicial office. The sum of the two scores determines the place on the list of candidates for judicial office and, consequently, the possibility of filling an existing vacancy as a matter of priority.

Evaluation of the number of vacancies

The number of judges in each court is a matter of shared competence. On the one hand, the maximum number of judges allowed in each of the three institutional levels of the judiciary is set by the Saeima (parliament), on the other hand, the number of judges required in each court is set by the Judicial Council.

In deciding on the number of judges required in each court and on the filling of vacant judicial posts, the Judicial Council heard the views of court presidents on the development of judicial institutions, as well as examined studies conducted by the Court Administration and the Secretariat of the Judicial Council on court performance indicators, case turnover and the number of judges required to ensure a balanced workload.

In order to strengthen the efficiency of court work and to ensure the balancing of judges' workload in courts, on 27 October 2023 the Judicial Council adopted a decision on the number judicial posts to be filled as a matter of priority in Latvian courts in 2024. At the same time, while recognising the limited circle of suitably qualified candidates for judicial office, the Judicial Council also decided on vacancies which are not planned to be filled in 2024.

In 2024, the Court Administration, in cooperation with the Secretariat of the Judicial Council, will continue work on the compilation and analysis of

court performance indicators, while the Judicial Council will return to this issue in early 2025.

The decision of the Judicial Council on filling vacant judicial posts is available on the website of the Judicial Council.

Opinions and decisions of the Judicial Council

At its meeting on 28 April 2023, the Judicial Council expressed its support for the introduction of a model for determining the degree of complexity of a case in first instance courts. The case complexity model is designed to analyse the workload of first instance courts and to plan the number of resources and vacancies in the court system.

The decision of the Judicial Council on the determination of the degree of complexity of a case is available on the website of the Judicial Council.

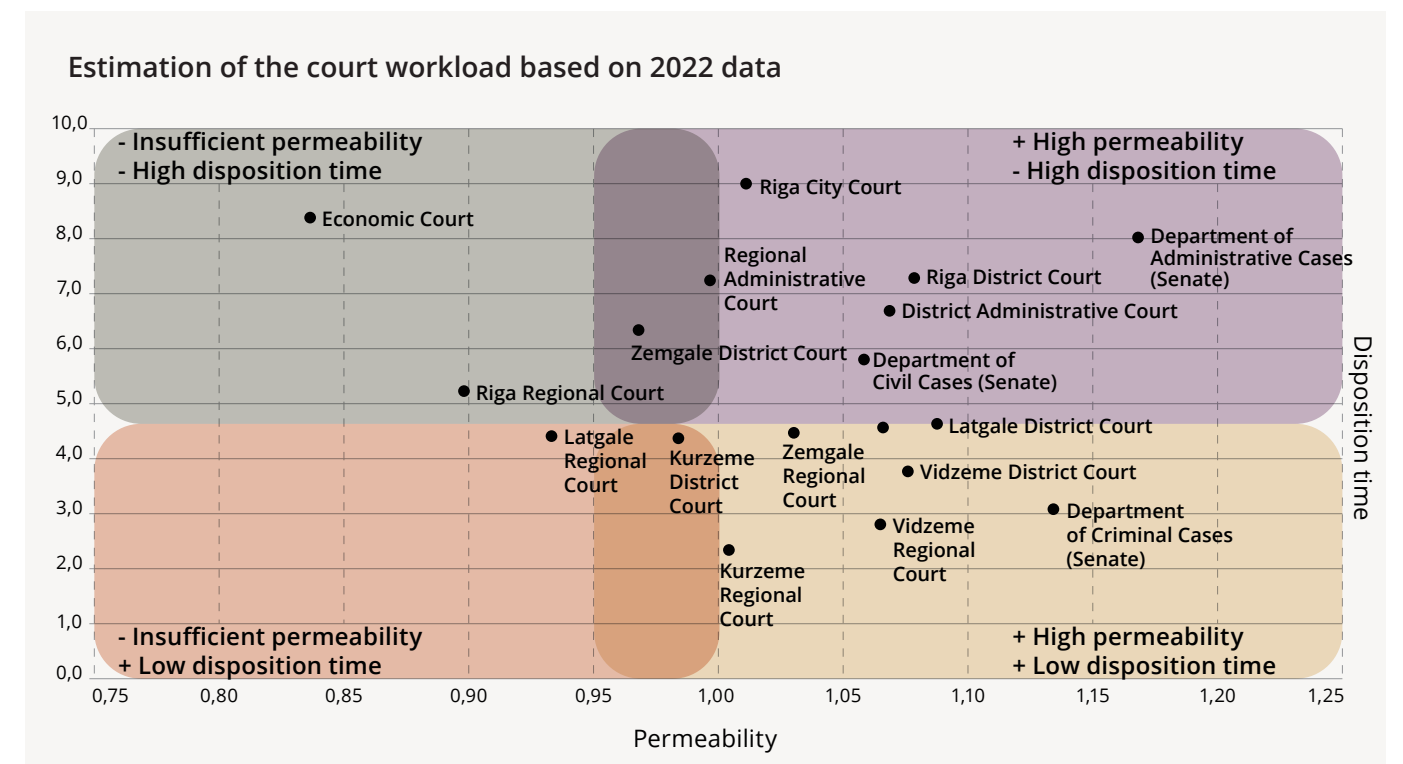
At its meeting on 16 June 2023, the Judicial Council, at the suggestion of the Latvian Council of Sworn Advocates, has assessed the actions of the Prosecutor General and expressed its opinion on the matter. The Judicial Council found unacceptable the statement made by the Prosecutor General in an interview for the journal "Ieva".

The decision of the Judicial Council on the statements expressed by the Prosecutor General

and on the request of the Latvian Council of Sworn Advocates to assess the conduct of the Prosecutor General is available on the website of the Judicial Council.

At its meeting on 16 June 2023, the Judicial Council expressed its opinion on proposals to amend Section 55, Clause three of the law On Judicial Power in relation to the prohibition of a person against whom criminal proceedings have been terminated on non-rehabilitating grounds to stand for the office of a judge in order to comply with the judgment of the Constitutional Court of 15 December 2022 in Case No 2021-41-01, by which such restriction was declared incompatible with Article 101, Paragraph one and the first sentence of Article 106 of the Satversme (constitution). The Judicial Council supported the conceptual solution developed by the working group established by the Ministry of Justice on the individual assessment of candidates for the office of judge (prosecutor) in the event that a candidate has committed a criminal offence or a less serious crime due to negligence. Yet at the same time the Judicial Council called for clarification of the proposal as regards the institutional solution envisaging the establishment of a new commission..

The decision of the Judicial Council on the proposed amendments to the law On Judicial Power and the Office of the Prosecutor Law is available on the website of the Judicial Council.

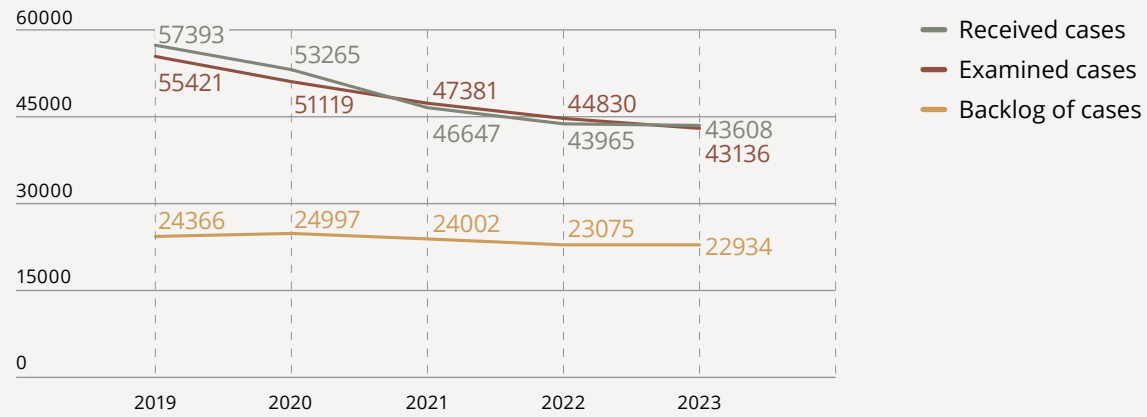


COURT PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

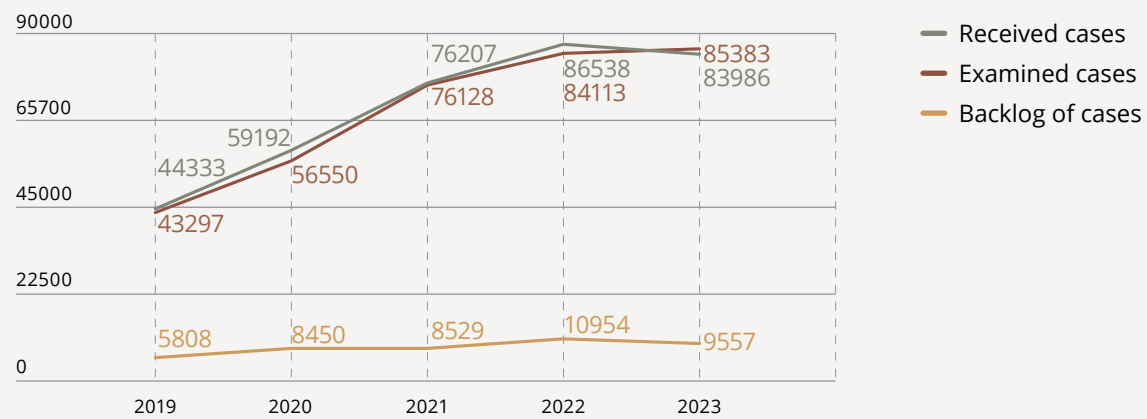
*pp. 16-17 all case categories / pp. 18-27 litigation cases only

Case turnover in the judicial system in 2023 (sum of all courts)

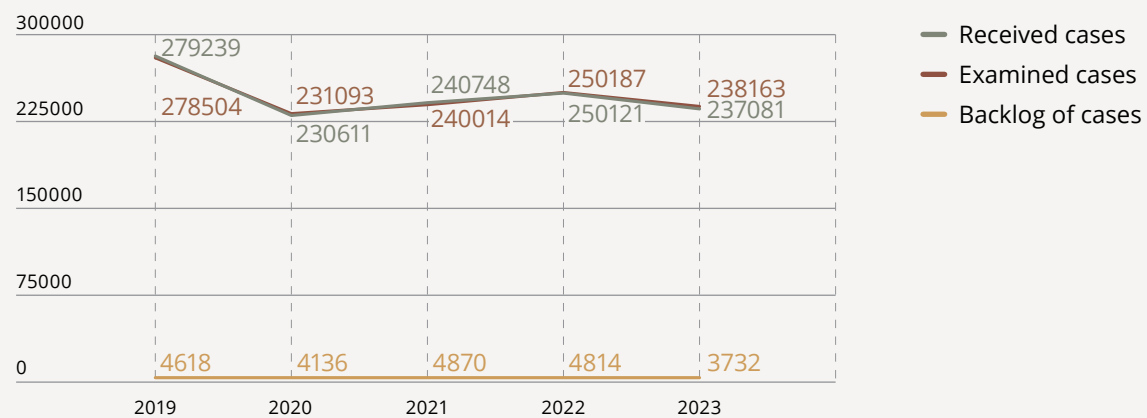
Case turnover in the judicial system (litigation cases)



Case turnover in the judicial system (uncontested cases)

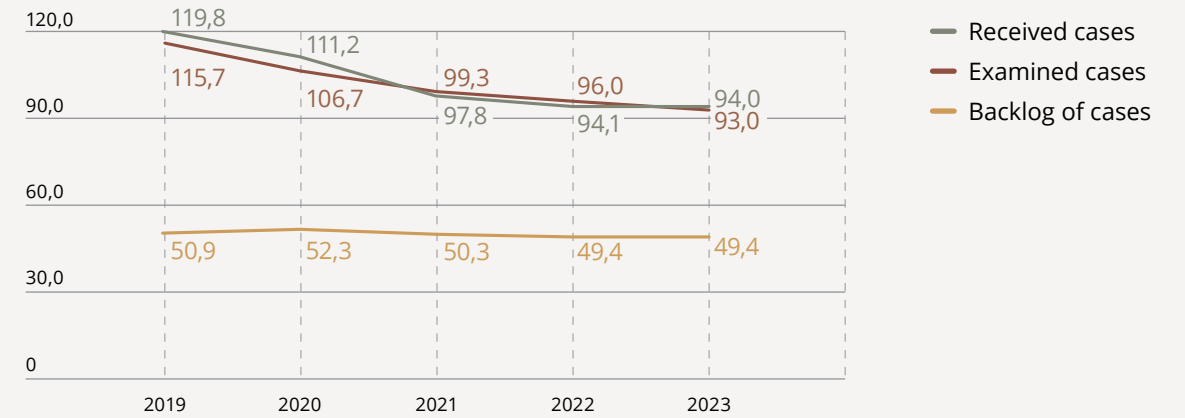


Case turnover in the judicial system (land registry cases)

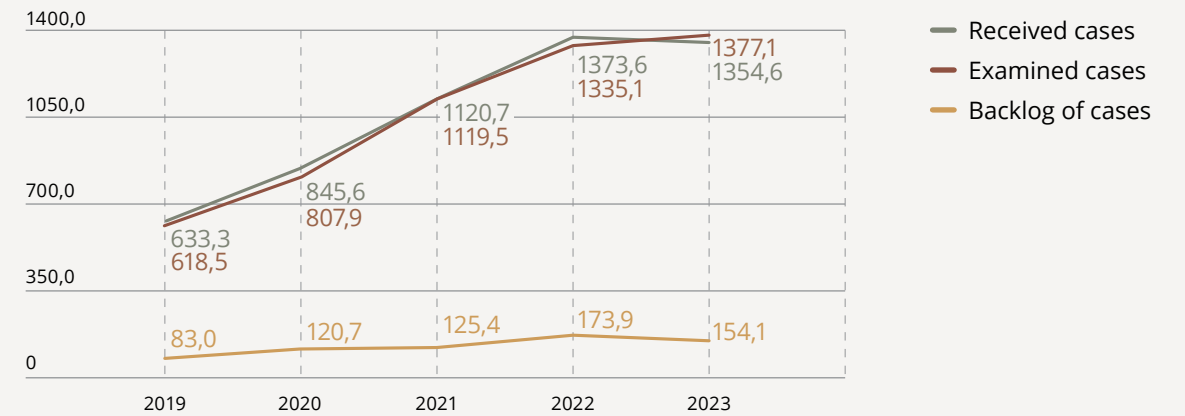


Case turnover in the judicial system in 2023 (average across all courts per judge of the relevant specialisation)

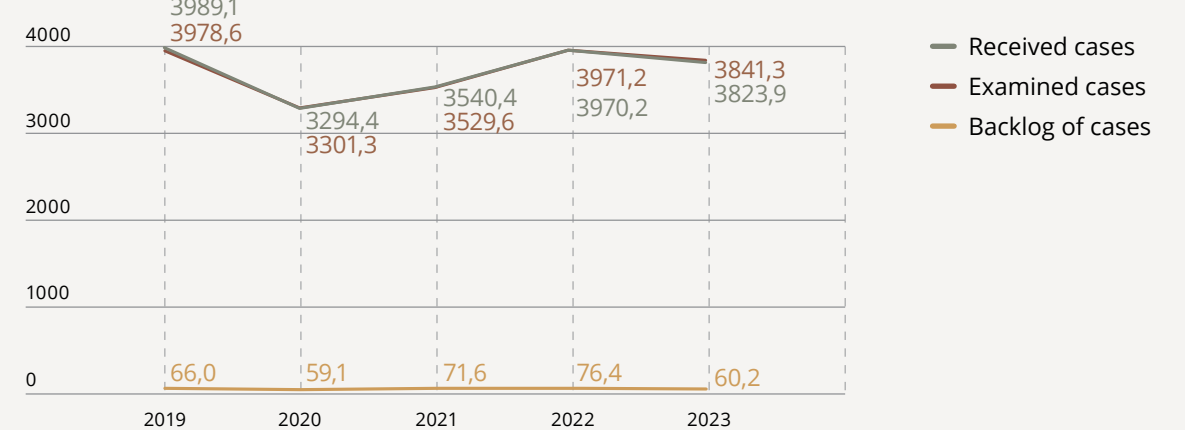
Case turnover per judge (litigation cases)



Case turnover per judge (uncontested cases)

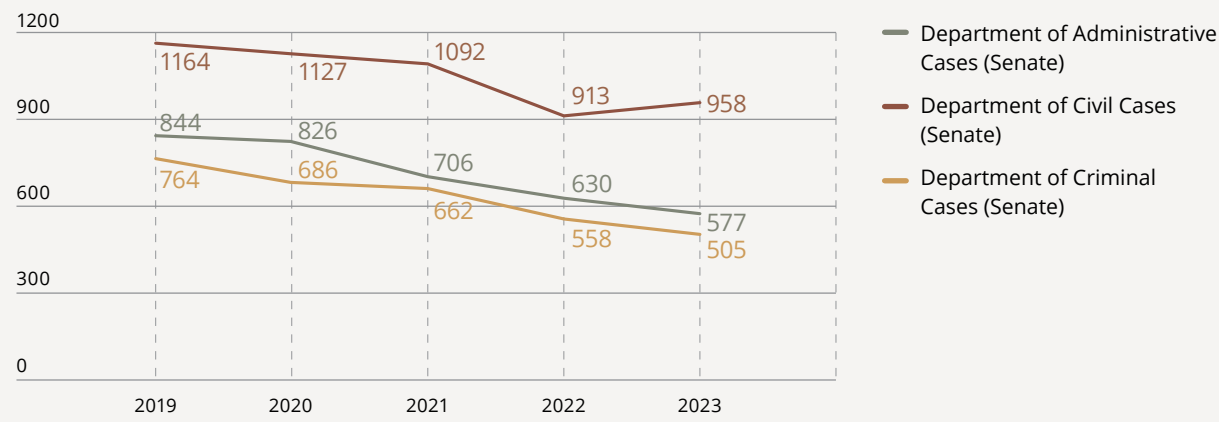


Case turnover per judge (land registry cases)

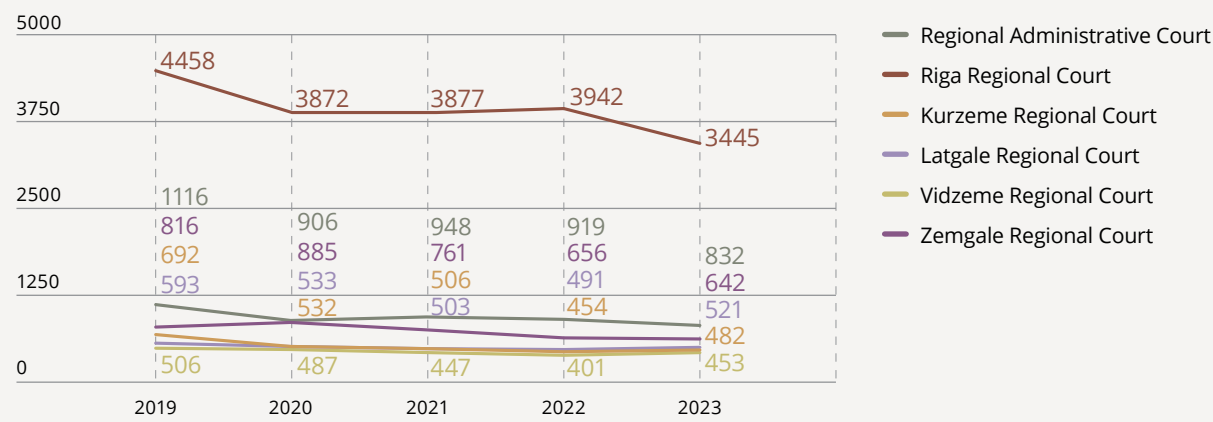


Number of received cases

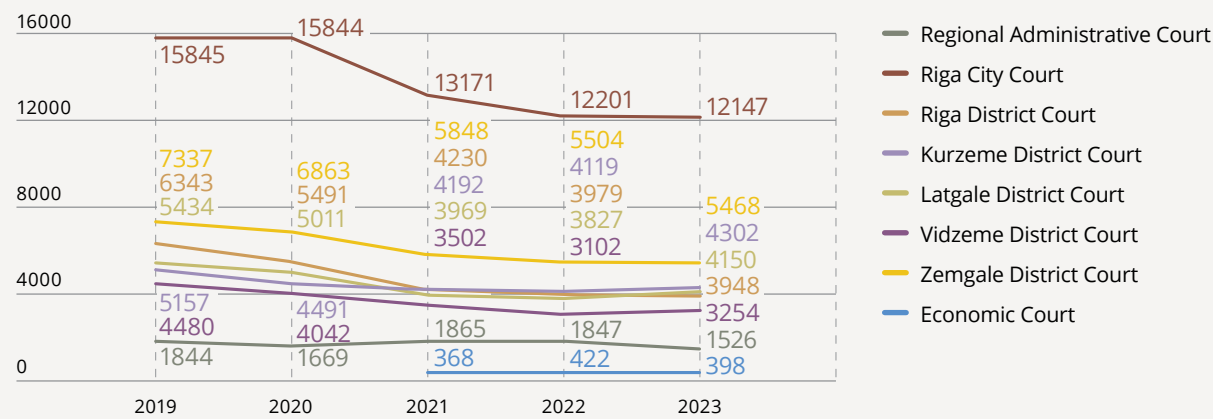
Received cases (cassation)



Received cases (appellate courts)

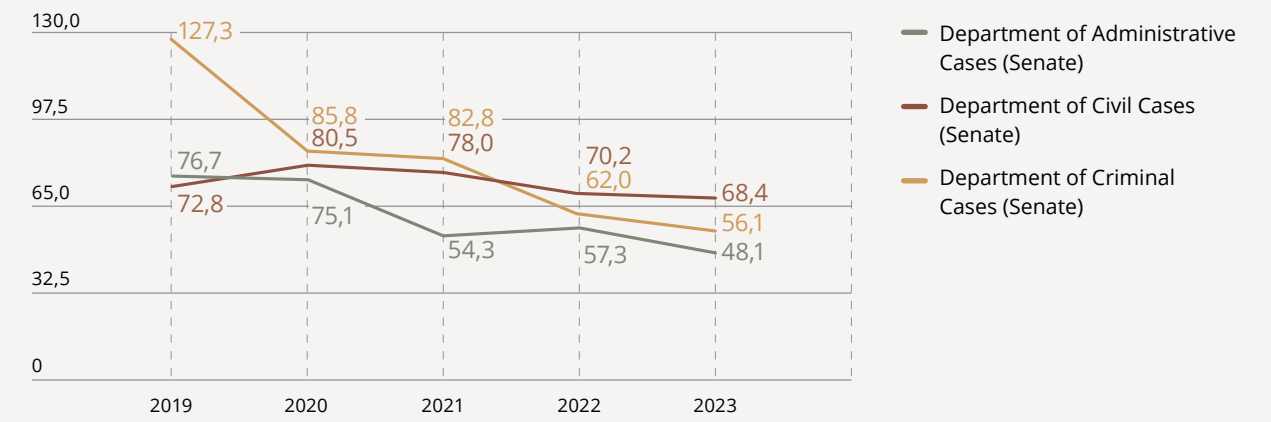


Received cases (first instance courts)

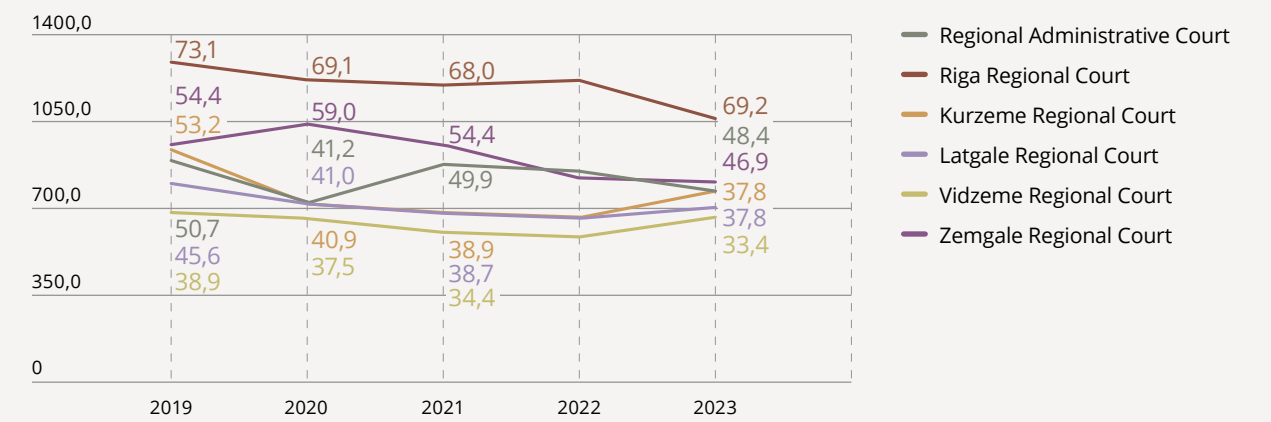


Number of cases received per judge

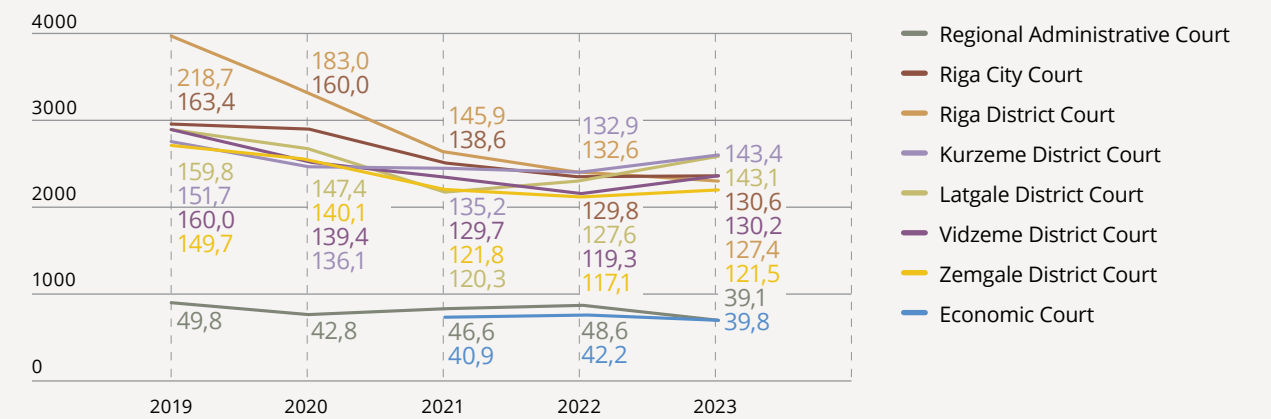
Cases received per judge (cassation)



Cases received per judge (appellate courts)

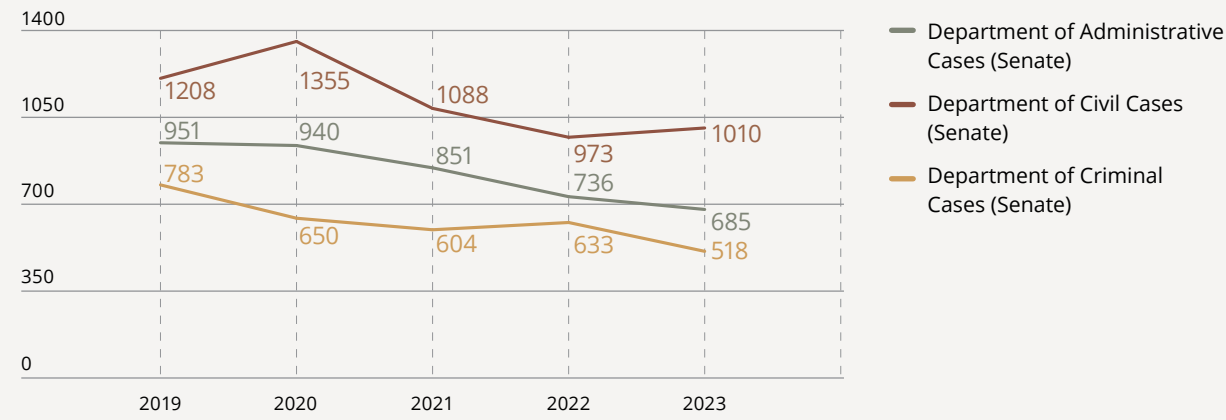


Cases received per judge (first instance courts)

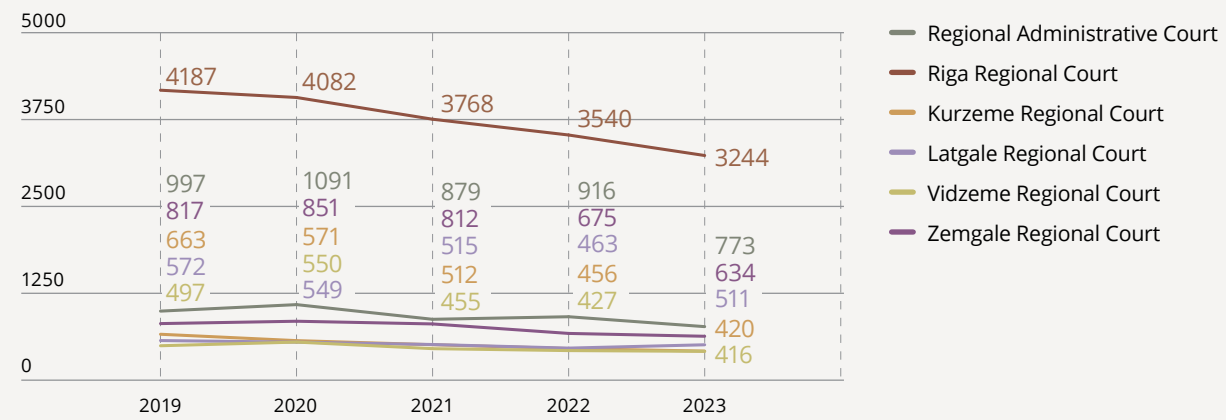


Number of examined cases

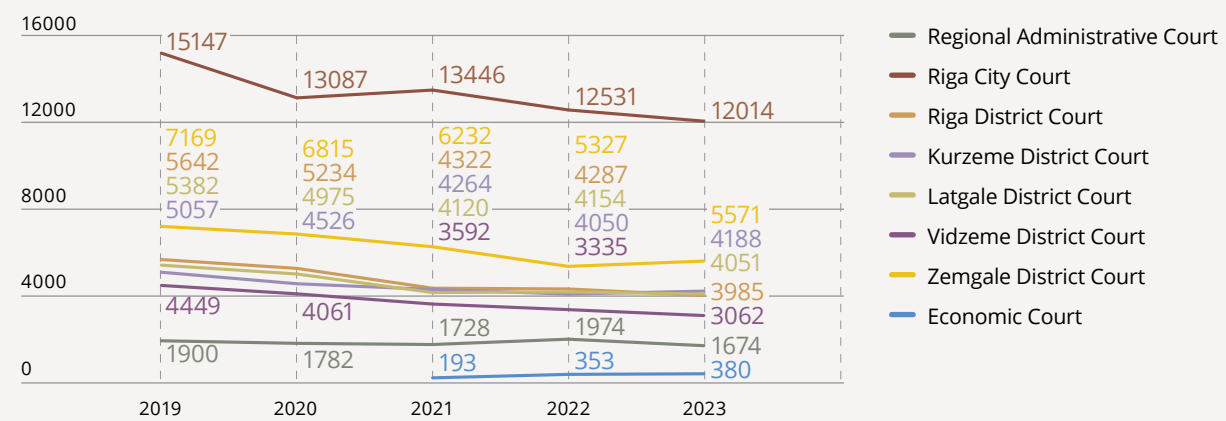
Examined cases (cassation)



Examined cases (appellate courts)

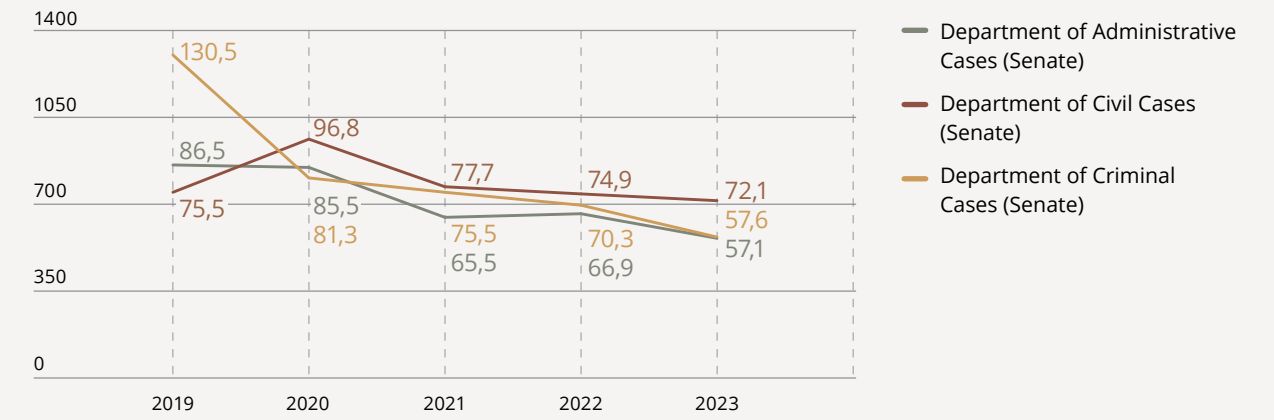


Examined cases (first instance courts)

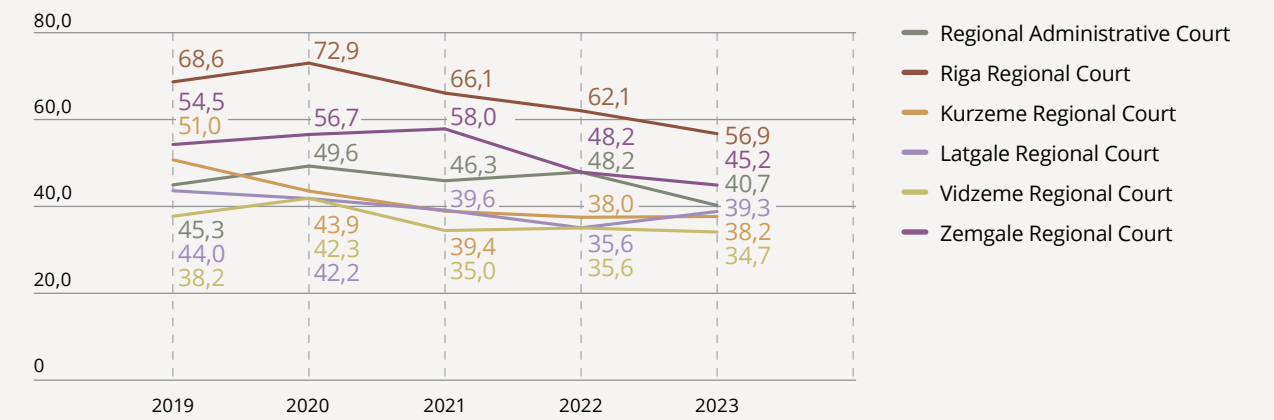


Number of cases examined per judge

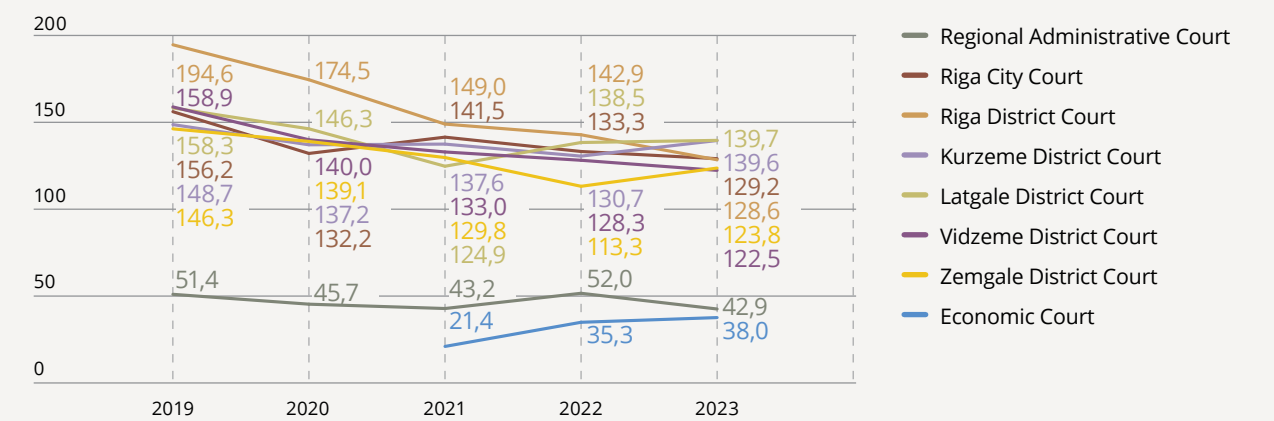
Cases examined per judge (cassation)



Cases examined per judge (appellate courts)

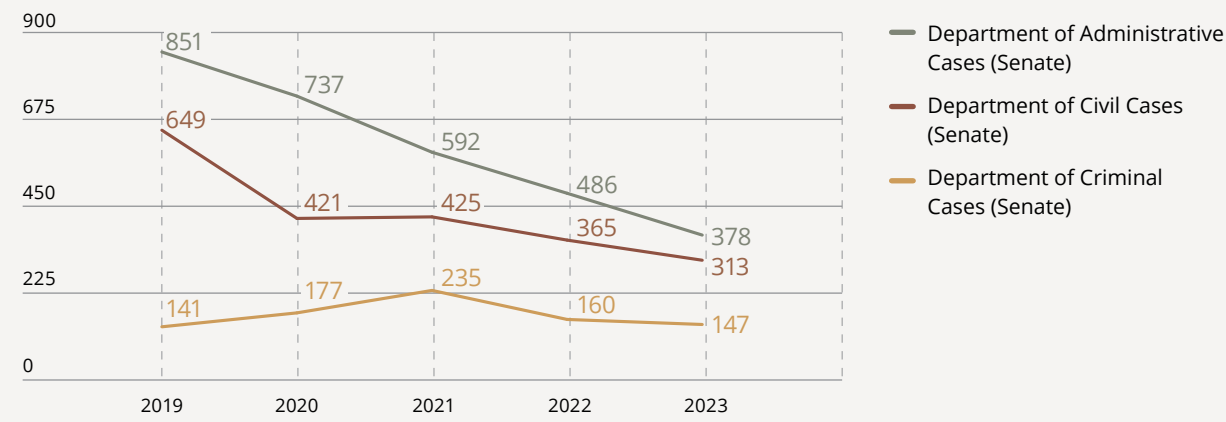


Cases examined per judge (first instance courts)

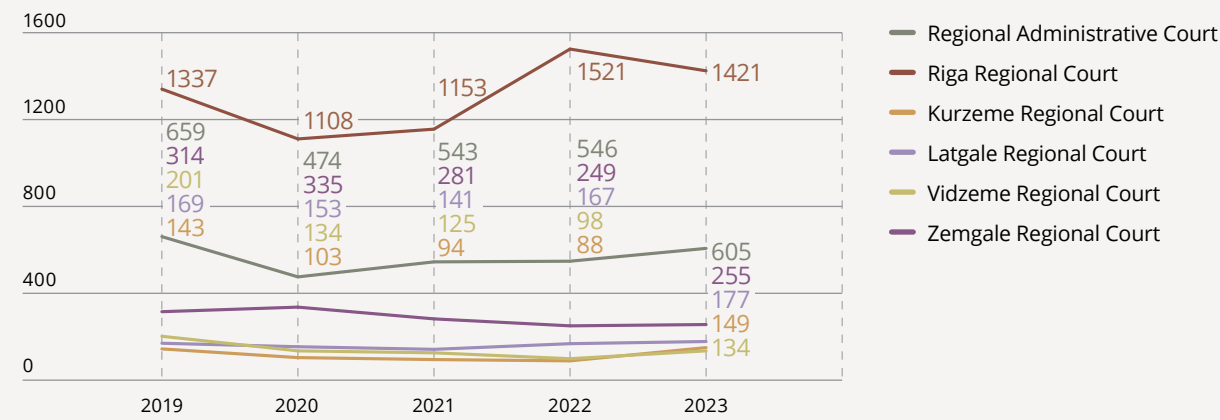


Number of accumulated cases

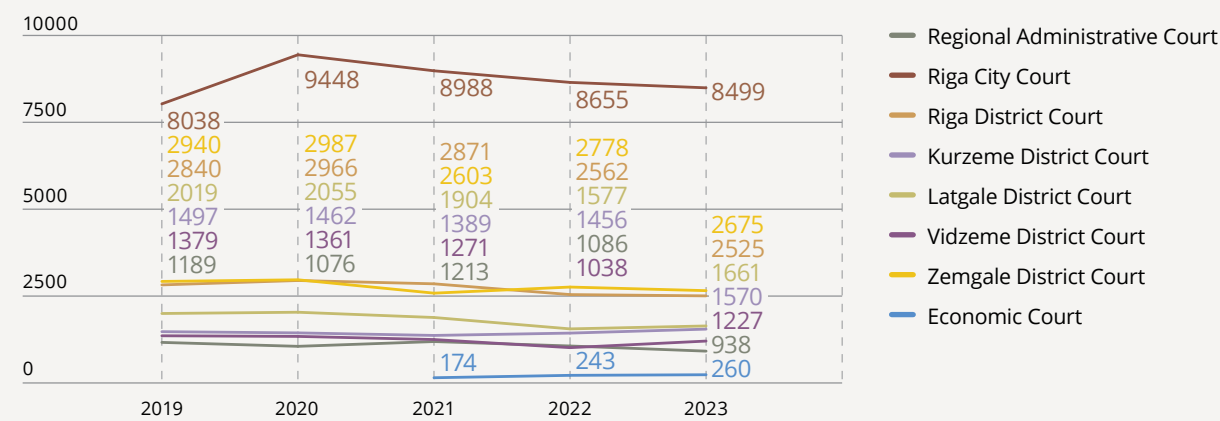
Accumulated cases (cassation)



Accumulated cases (appellate courts)

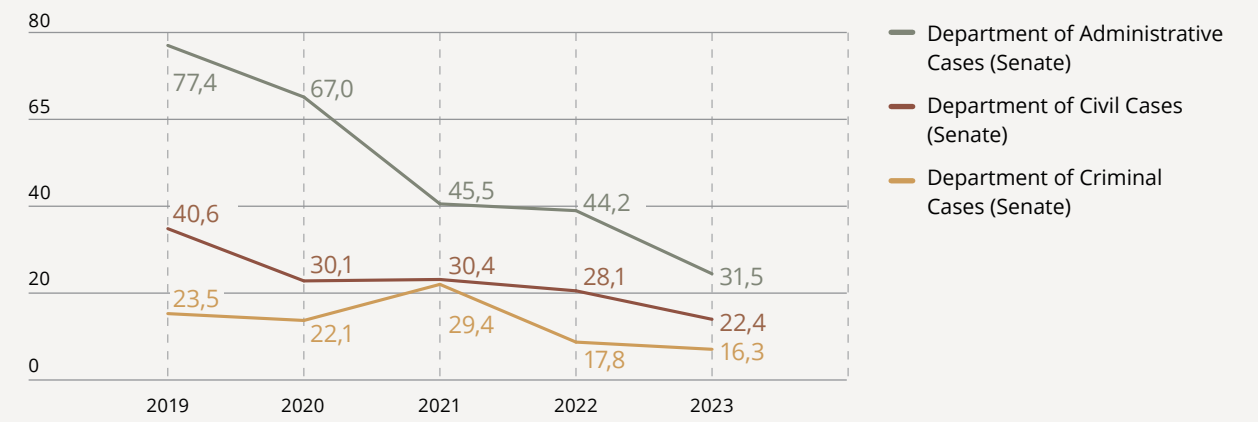


Accumulated cases (first instance courts)

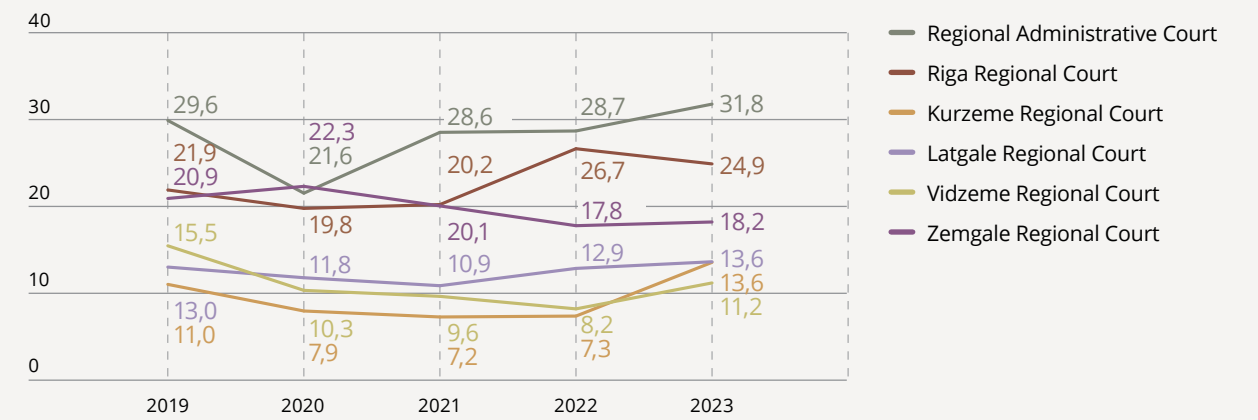


Number of accumulated cases per judge

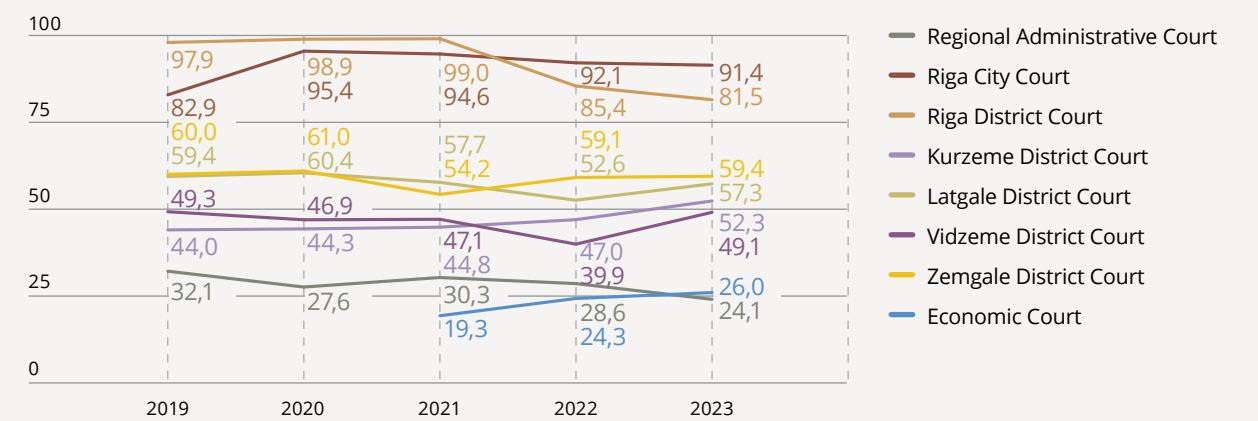
Cases per judge (cassation)



Cases per judge (appellate courts)

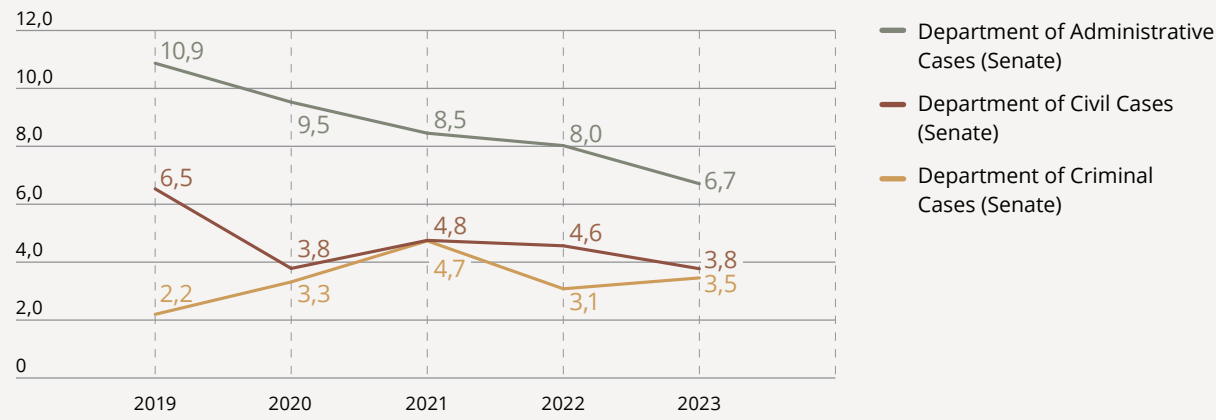


Cases per judge (first instance courts)

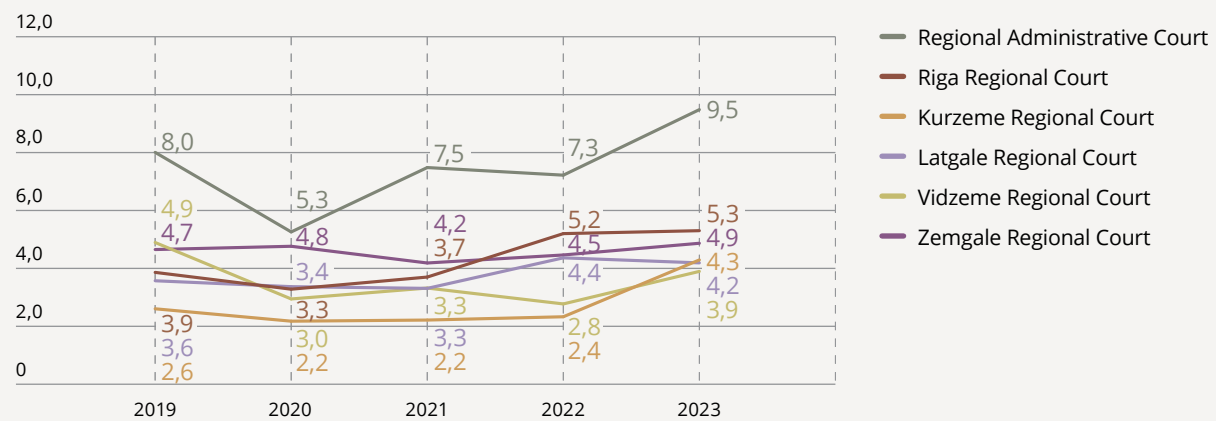


Disposition time

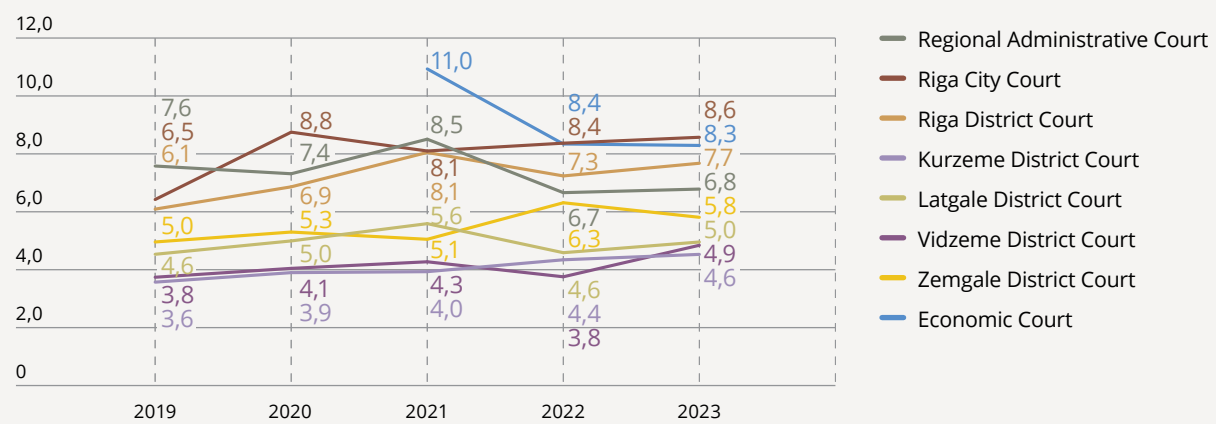
Disposition time (m) (cassation)



Displacement time (m) (appellate courts)

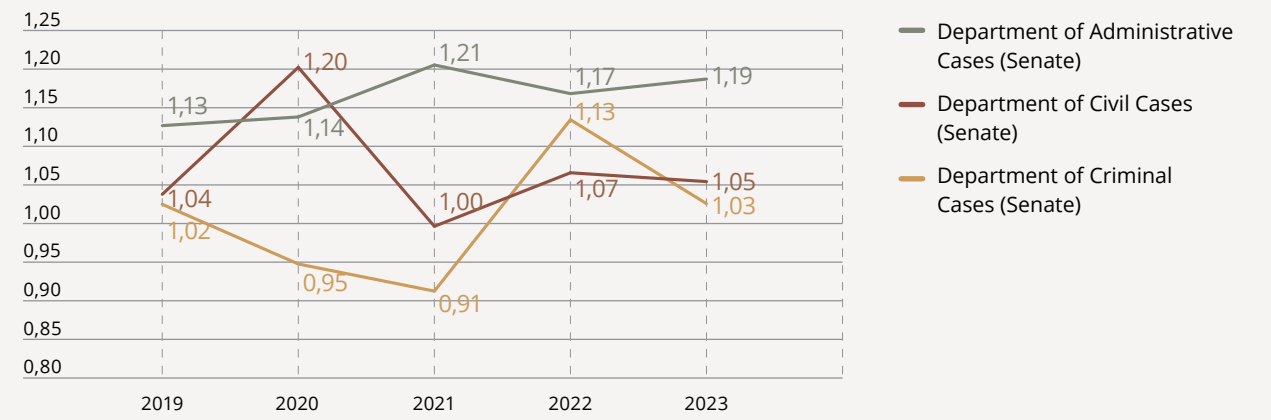


Disposition time (m) (first instance courts)

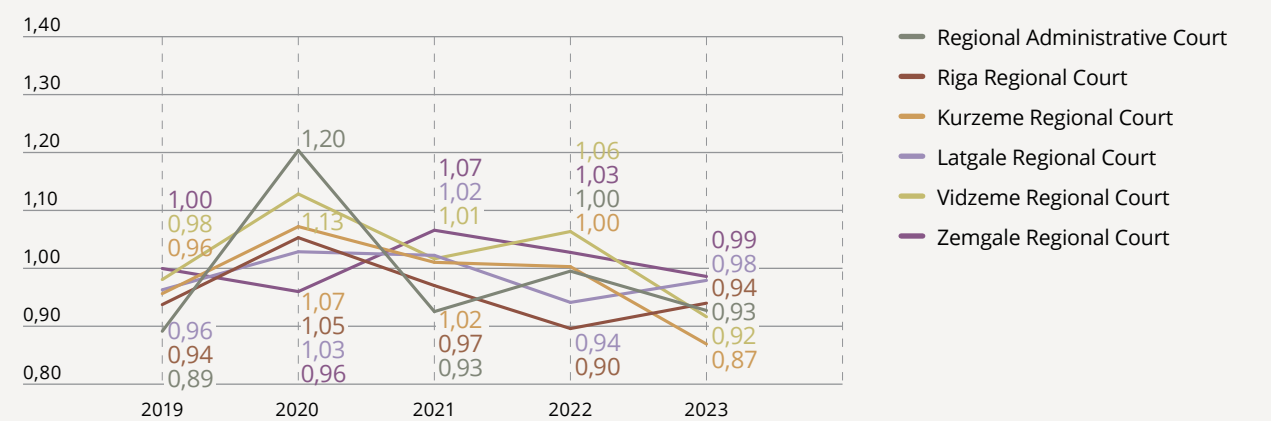


Permeability

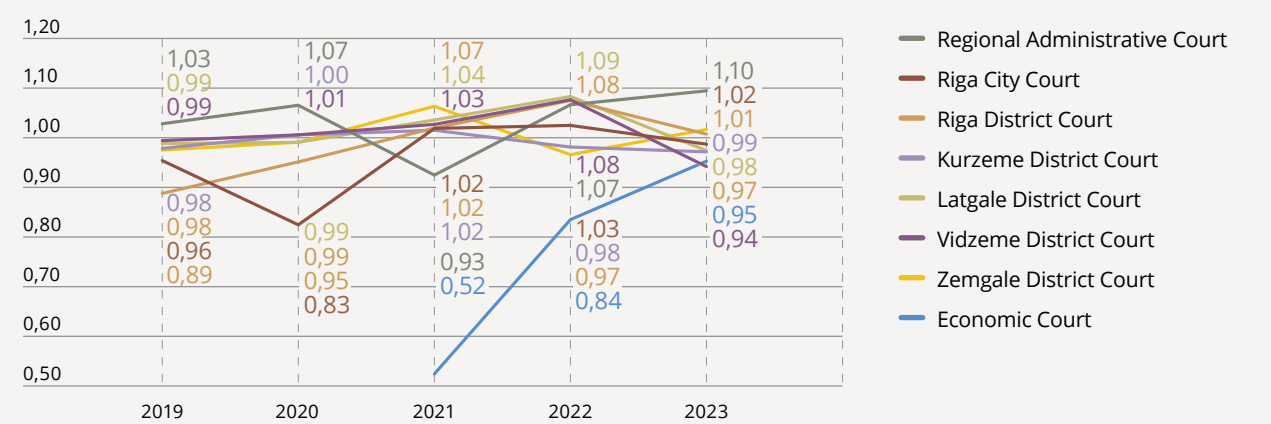
Permeability (cassation)



Permeability (appellate courts)

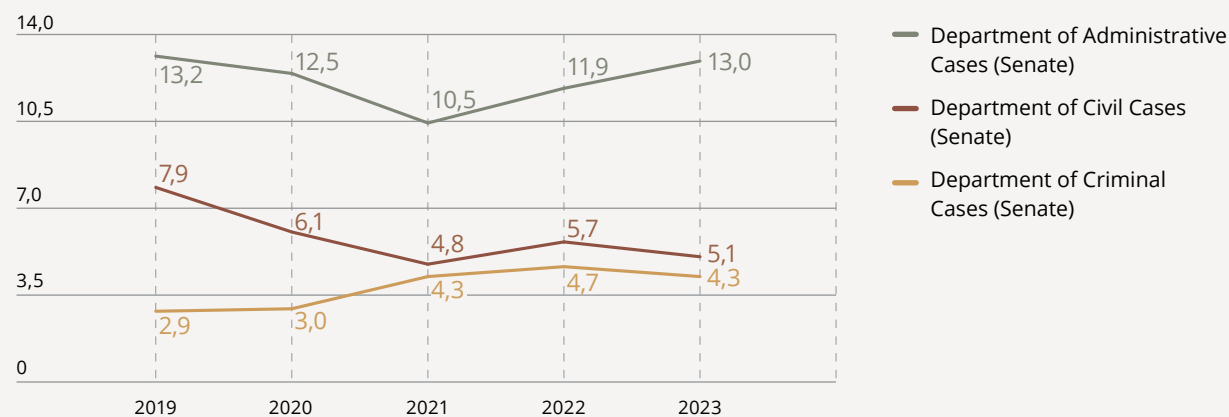


Permeability (first instance courts)

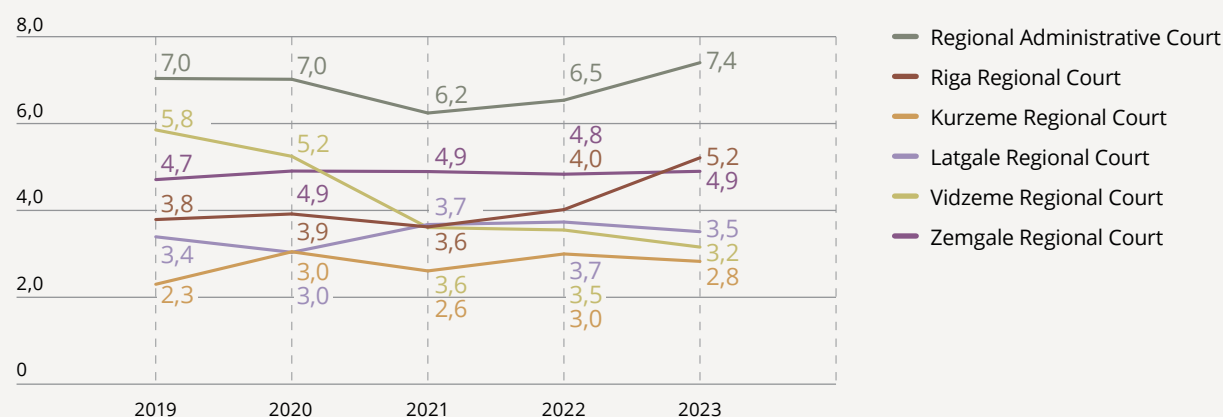


Average case examination time

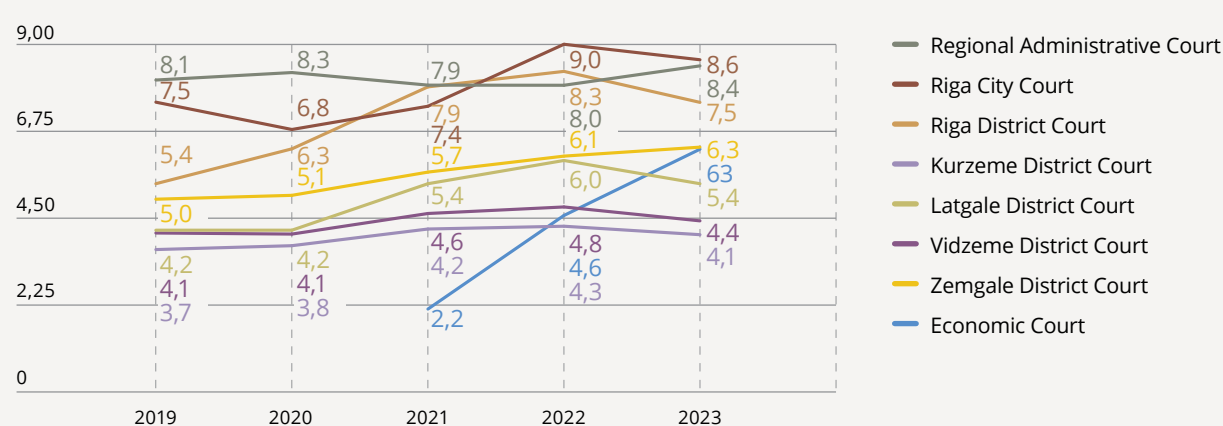
Average case examination time (m) (cassation)



Average case examination time (m) (appellate courts)

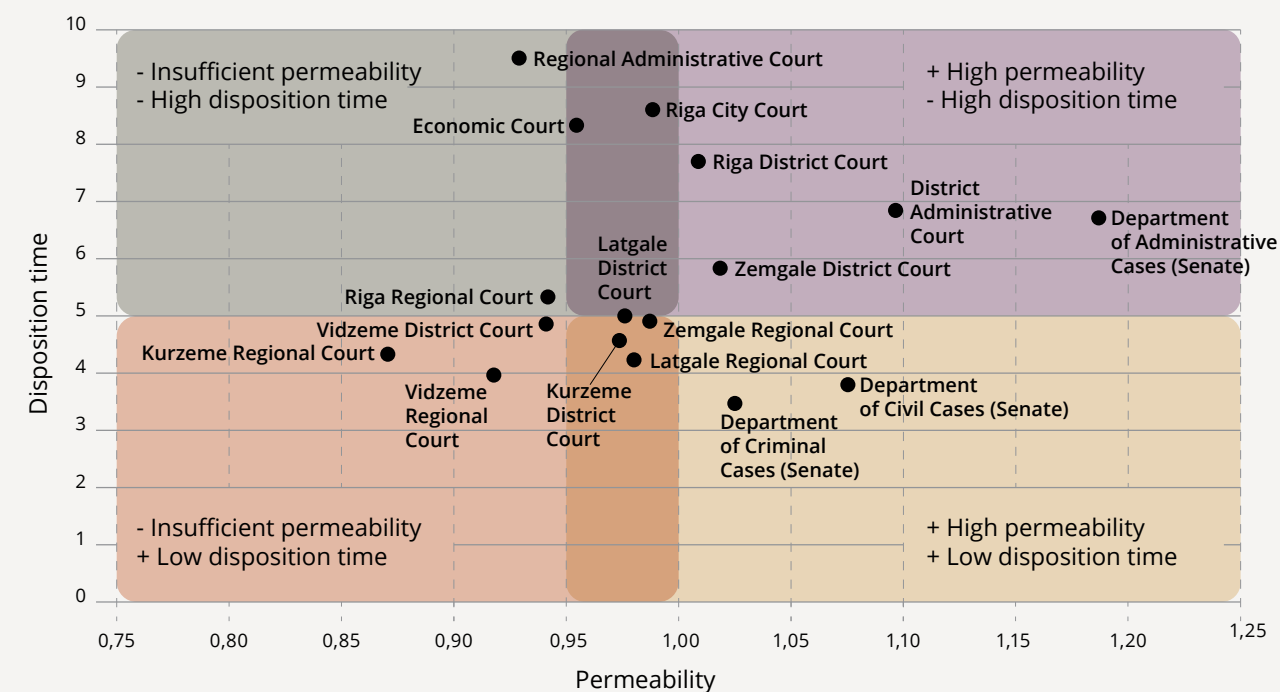


Average case examination time (m) (first instance courts)

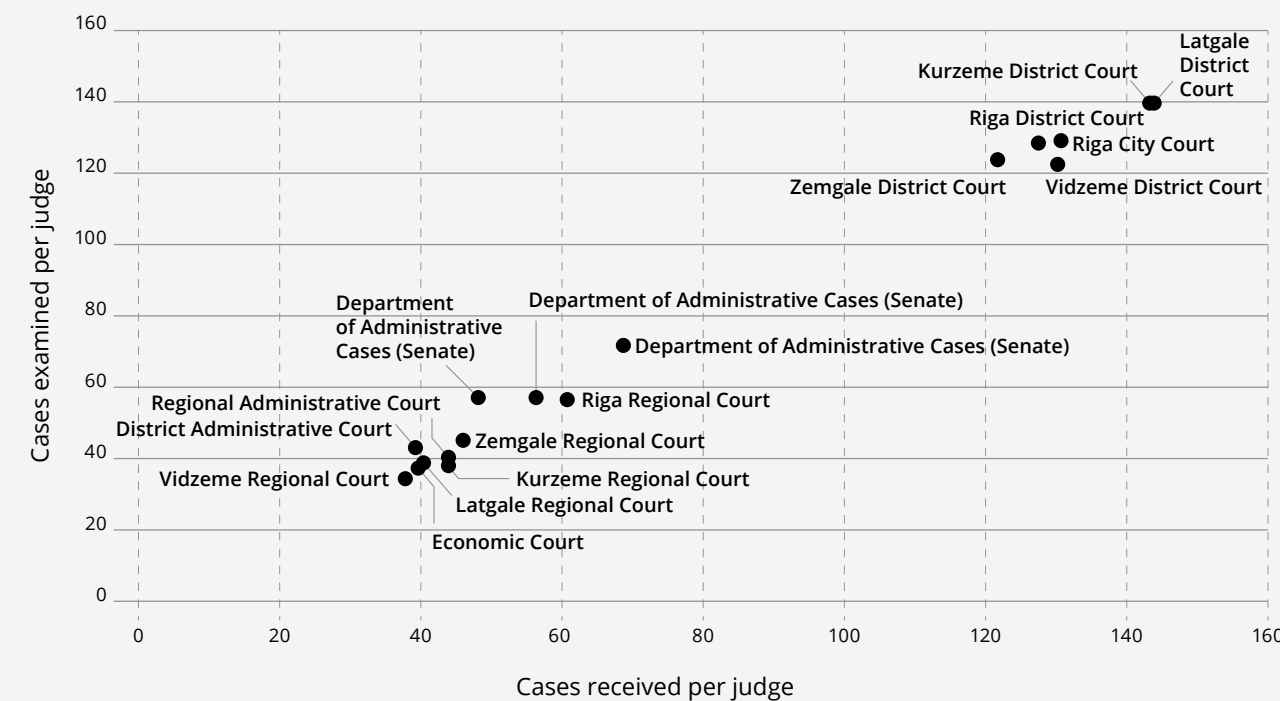


Combined judicial performance indicators

Estimation of the court workload based on 2023 data



Cases examined per judge / cases received per judge



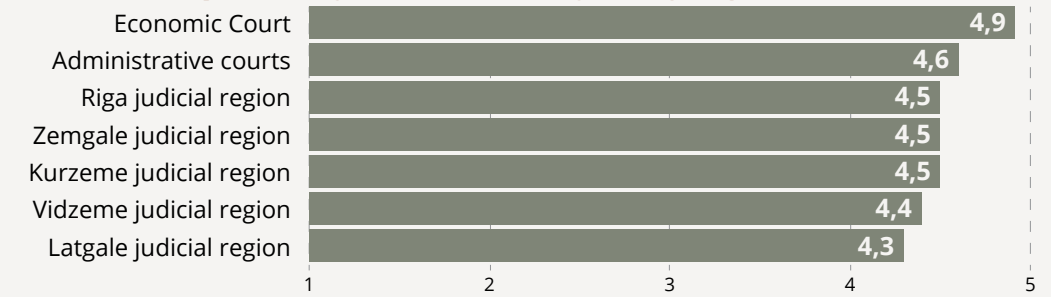
Centre for Public Policy PROVIDUS

In order to find out the objective opinion of court clients on the work of courts and to improve the judicial proceedings, the Court Administration in cooperation with the Providus think tank organised a survey of court visitors. The survey took place from January 2022 to March 2023 and involved three months of interviews with court clients in each judicial region of Latvia. A total of 991 completed questionnaires were received.

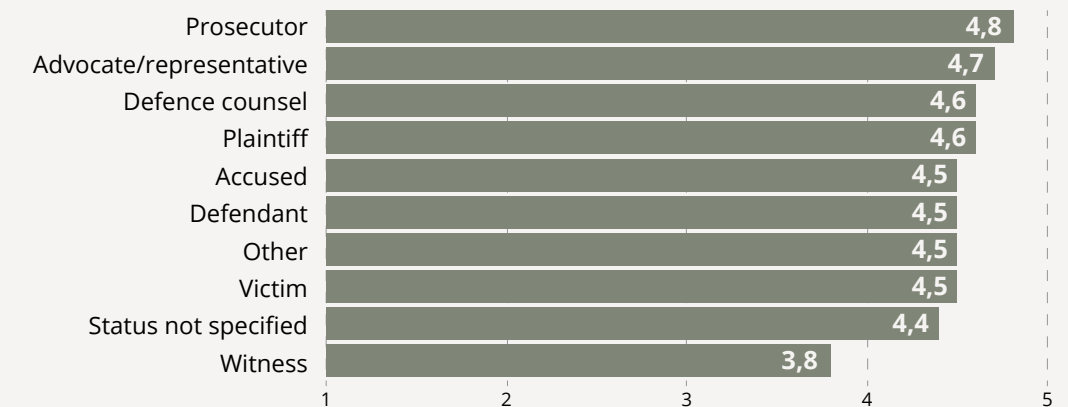
The overall results of the survey show that court clients have a positive attitude towards the work of courts, appreciating both the work of judges and the assistance and support of court staff in the conduct of court proceedings. The overall results of the survey are presented below.

The full report of Providus and the Court Administration on the court client survey is available on the Latvian Courts Portal www.tiesas.lv in the News section and on the website of the Judicial Council.

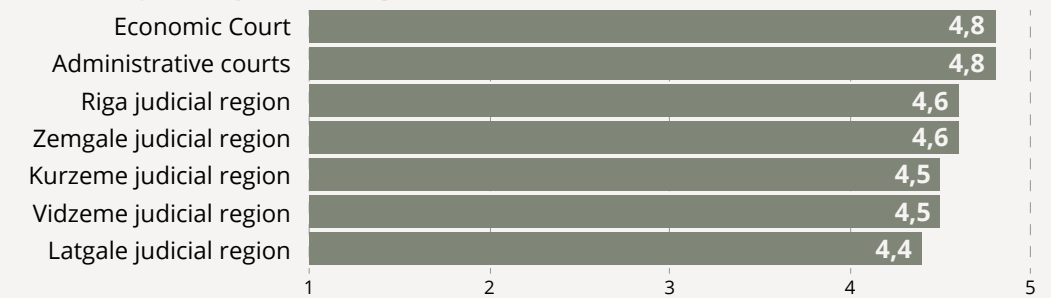
Assessment of the impartiality and neutrality of a judge



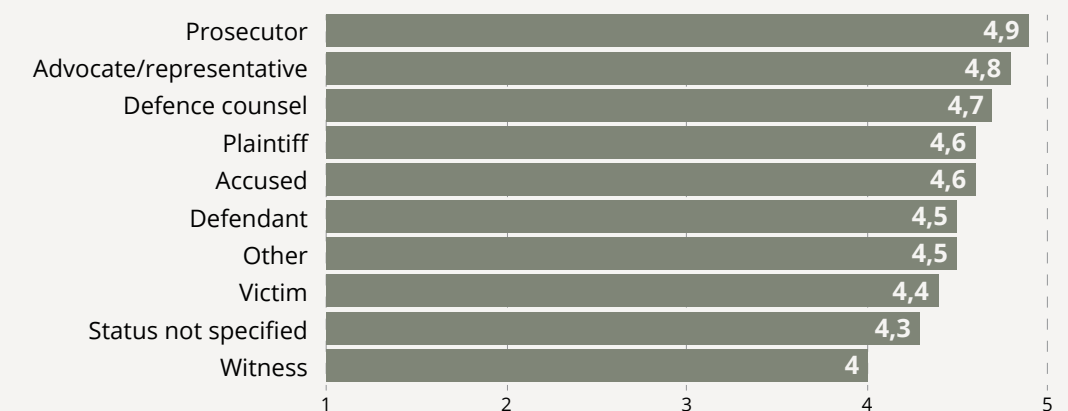
Assessment of the impartiality and neutrality of a judge depending on the respondent's procedural status



Comprehensibility of rights and procedures



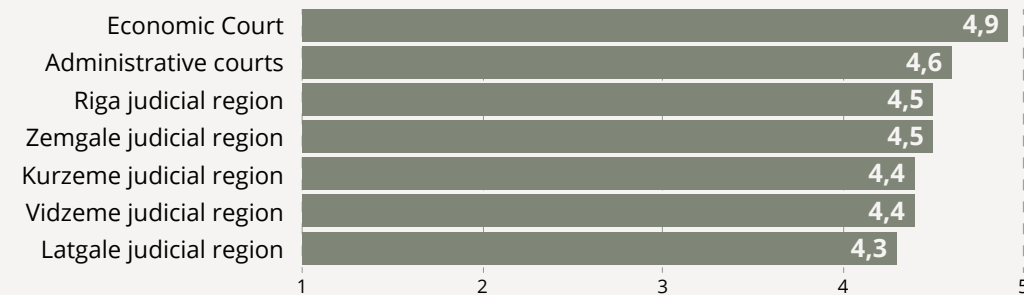
Assessment of the comprehensibility of proceedings and the observance of order at hearing, depending on the respondent's procedural status



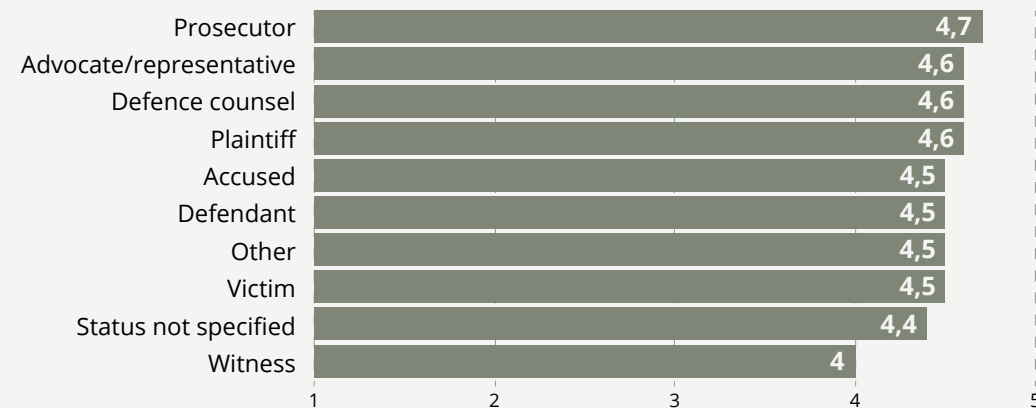
Court client assessment of the work of courts in 2022-2023



Assessment of the attitude of judges



Assessment of the attitude of judges



NEWS OF JUDICIAL SELF-GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS

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 the right to vote. 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:

- examines topical issues of case-law;
- 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;
- discusses material provisions and social securities and other relevant issues concerning the work of judges;
- by secret ballot, elects the members of the Judicial Council for a term of four years;
- by secret ballot, elects the Judicial Qualification Committee for a term of four years;
- by secret ballot, elects the Judicial Disciplinary Committee for a term of four years;
- by secret ballot, elects the Judicial Ethics Commission for a term of four years;
- approves the norms of the Code of Judicial Ethics

Four Latvian Judges Conferences were organized in 2023:

- Latvian Judges Conference on-site (19.05.2023, 360 judges participated)
- Latvian Judges Extramural Conference (17.-18.04.2023, 450 judges participated)
- Latvian Judges Extramural Conference (23.-24.10.2023, 425 judges participated)
- Latvian Judges Extramural Conference (18.-20.12.2023, 391 judges participated).

On 19 May 2023, the Latvian Judges Conference addressed the topic "The right to a fair trial: the interaction of court instances".



In his address to the conference participants, the President of Latvia, Egils Levits, emphasised the importance of dialogue between higher and lower court instances, pointing out that the structure of court instances presupposes a dialogue-like discourse between higher and lower instances. The lower instance judge must convince the higher instance judge of the correctness of his or her judgment. This also works the other way round – also Supreme Court judges have to convince lower court judges of the quality and validity of their judgements, because the lower court judge is independent, including independent of higher courts and case-law.

The Chair of the Judicial Council, Aigars Strupišs, pointed to the public demand for the professional, efficient and impartial court, stressing that the judiciary has a duty to ensure this. *"Today's judge must understand his or her place in the structure of the constitutional organs of the state and be fully aware of his or her duties to society, not only in hearing cases, but also in ensuring the quality, trustworthiness and prestige of the judicial system. Strong, active, impartial self-government, quality selection and training of judges, guidelines for writing judgments, methodology for handling cases, normal objective statistics – this is the only way to ensure the professionalism of the courts in the public interest in the long term," emphasised Aigars Strupišs, Chair of the Judicial Council.*



The Minister of Justice, Inese Lībiņa-Egnere, addressed the conference, pointing out that an independent, democratic state governed by the rule of law can exist if all branches of power work respectfully alongside each other. Ideological and political preconditions have no place in deciding the career issues of judges. The judiciary must be trusted to organise itself internally and to govern itself to meet the challenges of judicial qualifications, ethics and professional responsibility, as well as to deal with the courts' own budgets.



In the first part of the conference, Dr. iur. Sanita

Osipova, Professor of the University of Latvia, discussed the genesis and evolution of the three-tier judicial system.



Kristīne Līce, the representative of Latvia to international human rights institutions, informed the judges about the development of the case-law of the European Court of Human Rights in Latvian court cases since 2012, as well as provided an insight into the principles established by the European Court of Human Rights regarding appeals against court decisions and written proceedings.



Gatis Šūka presented a caricaturist's view of judges.



In the second part of the conference, the interaction between court instances with regard to litigation process was discussed by the President of Kurzeme Regional Court Didzis Aktumanis, the President of Vidzeme District Court Jānis Grīnbergs, Senator Inese Meldere, Sworn Advocate Inese Nikuļceva

and the Prosecutor General Juris Stukāns. The participants discussed the issue of written and oral proceedings in the context of court efficiency and ensuring the right to a fair trial. When asked how judges themselves perceive the interaction among court instances in the litigation process, the majority of judges agreed that there is a lack of professional discussion among court instances and that there should be more systemic exchange of information.

When discussing the interaction among court instances with regard to professional development of judges, the judges pointed out that the interaction regarding the professionalism of judges is intensive, as there are meetings of judges, workplace discussions, trainings, etc. Senator Ermins Darapolskis, Senator and member of the Commission for the Selection of Candidates to the Office of District (City) Court and Regional Court Judges Sandra Kaija, Judge Emeritus Edite Vernuša, Judge of Zemgale District Court and member of the Judicial Qualification Committee Inga Zālīte, as well as Judge of Latgale Regional Court Andris Zutis participated in the discussion. The discussions were moderated by Anita Zikmane, Head of the Division of Case-law and Research of the Supreme Court.

In a survey conducted at the end of the conference, judges indicated that quality judicial support staff and professional development of judges play a crucial role in improving the efficiency of court work.

The presentations given at the Latvian Judges Conference are available on the website of [the Judicial Council](#).

A video recording of the Latvian Judges Conference is available on the Court Administration's [YouTube channel](#).

In 2023, several Latvian Judges Extramural Conferences were organised for the election of members of the self-governing bodies of judges.

On 17-18 April 2023, at the Latvian Judges Extramural Conference:

- Ivars Bičkovičs, Senator of the Supreme Court, was elected as a member of the Judicial Qualification Committee;

- Aiva Daidere, Judge of Kurzeme Regional Court, was elected as a member of the Judicial Ethics Commission from among the candidates nominated by judges of regional courts.

On 23-24 October 2023, at the Latvian Judges Extramural Conference the elections were held in three rounds (24.10.2023, 26.10.2023 and 01.11.2023):

- Madars Pļepis, Judge of Kurzeme District Court, was elected as a member of the Judicial Council;
- Marianna Terjuhana, Judge of the Collegium of Civil Cases of Zemgale Regional Court, was elected as a member of the Judicial Qualification Committee;
- Valerijs Maksimovs, Senator of the Supreme Court, was elected as a member of the Judicial Disciplinary Committee;
- Līvija Slica, Senator of the Supreme Court, was elected as a member of the Judicial Disciplinary Committee;
- Kaspars Berkis, Judge of the Regional Administrative Court, was elected as a member of the Judicial Disciplinary Committee;
- Līga Baltmane-Zepa, Judge of the Collegium of Criminal Cases of Zemgale Regional Court was elected as a member of the Judicial Disciplinary Committee;
- Lelde Grauda, Judge of the Collegium of Civil Cases of Riga Regional Court, was elected as a member of the Judicial Disciplinary Committee;
- Ilze Andruškina, Judge of the District Administrative Court, was elected as a member of the Judicial Disciplinary Committee;
- Kristīne Vanaga, Judge of Zemgale District Court, was elected as a member of the Judicial Disciplinary Committee.

On 18-20 December 2023, at the Latvian Judges Extramural Conference:

- Ināra Garda, Senator of the Supreme 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 professional activity of judges. The Committee shall act within the framework of the powers laid down in 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 referred to as the Rules of Procedure of the Committee).

The Committee, in accordance with its statutory powers and competences:

- conducts a regular evaluation of judge's professional performance before nominating a district (city) court judge for reappointment or confirmation in office without limitation of term of office;
- carries out a professional performance evaluation of all judges every five years;
- assesses the professional qualifications of a candidate for the office of a judge of the Supreme Court by conducting a qualification examination;

- carries out an extraordinary evaluation of judge's professional performance when deciding on the transfer or replacement of a judge, as well as on the basis of a decision of the Judicial Disciplinary Committee or a proposal of a court president;
- re-evaluates the professional performance of judges if a judge has received an unfavourable opinion in a regular or extraordinary evaluation of his/her professional activity (in cases where the extraordinary evaluation is carried out on the basis of a decision of the Judicial Disciplinary Committee or a proposal of a relevant court president).

Composition of the Judicial Qualification Committee:

- **Silva Reinholde**
Chair of the Committee, Deputy President of Kurzeme Regional Court (elected on 6 October 2020);
- **Rudīte Vīduša**
Deputy Chair of the Committee, Senator of the Department of Administrative Cases of the Supreme Court (elected on 15 September 2022);
- **Aivars Keišs**
Senator of the Department of Civil Cases of the Supreme Court (elected on 15 September 2022, Member of the Committee until 31 December 2023);
- **Ivars Bičkovičs**
Senator of the Department of Criminal Cases of the Supreme Court (elected on 18 April 2023);
- **Marianna Terjuhana**
Judge of Zemgale Regional Court (elected on 26 October 2023);
- **Sanita Kanenberga**
Deputy President of the Regional Administrative Court (elected on 15 September 2022);
- **Kristīne Zdanovska**
Judge of Riga City Court (elected on 6 October 2020);

- **Ināra Zariņa**

Deputy President of Riga District Court (elected on 6 October 2020);

- **Inga Zālīte**

Deputy President of Zemgale District Court (elected on 7 April 2020).

Until 28 February 2023, a member of the Committee was Artūrs Freibergs, Senator of the Department of Criminal Cases of the Supreme Court, who will be replaced on 18 April 2023 by Ivars Bičkovičs, Senator of the Department of Criminal Cases of the Supreme Court.

Considering that on 31 December 2023 Aivars Keišs, Senator of the Department of Civil Cases of the Supreme Court, terminated his judicial duties, on 20 December 2023, Ināra Garda, Senator of the Department of Civil Cases of the Supreme Court, was elected to the Committee, thus taking up this position in 2024.

Priorities and objectives of the Judicial Qualification Committee

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

During the reporting period, the Committee has cooperated with the Judicial Council and the Commission for the Selection of Candidates to the Office of a Judge to improve the review process of issues regarding judicial career. Decision No 69 of the Judicial Council of 8 September 2023 amended the Rules of Procedure of the Committee by establishing a new regulation on the procedure for assessing the professional skills of judges, who apply for the position of regional court judge. In order to be able to fully evaluate the applicant's professional skills, a description of the levels of professional skills and a corresponding evaluation

system were developed.

Since the feedback of higher instance court judges has an important role in the evaluation of the professional performance of judges, in order to establish as objectively and accurately as possible the compliance of professional skills with the levels of professional skills described in the Rules of Procedure of the Committee, on 19 October 2023 at the meeting of the Committee the "Guidelines for the preparation of the feedback of a higher instance court judge" were approved.

Currently, one of the most important objectives of the Committee is the application of the new regulation in practice by assessing the professional skills of applicants for the position of regional court judge. Once this selection phase is completed, it will be possible to assess the effectiveness of the regulation and the results of the work of the Committee.

One of the work priorities is to further strengthen the internal capacity of the Committee and the skills of the members of the Committee in the process of professional performance evaluation, with a particular focus on the conduct of interviews and the provision of feedback. The members of the Committee participated in the training "Respectful selection Interview. Giving feedback to the candidate".

The Committee continues to identify the information on training needs included in the self-assessment questionnaires of judges in order to provide, in cooperation with the Judicial Council and the judicial training institution, proposals on training needs that are relevant for the professional development of judges.

Meetings of the Judicial Qualification Committee

Pursuant to Section 93, Paragraph three of the law On Judicial Power, the meetings of the Committee may be attended in an advisory capacity by the Chair of the Legal Affairs Committee of the Saeima, 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 judges' associations.

At present, persons authorised by the President of the Supreme Court and the Minister of Justice participate as observers in the meetings of the Committee on a permanent basis. The participation of these persons in the meetings of the Committee ensures mutual cooperation, facilitating the timely and immediate flow of information between the institutions.

In 2023, the Committee held 24 meetings, both in person and remotely via videoconference.

Statistics on the activities of the Judicial Qualification Committee

The Committee, within the scope of its competence, has assessed the professional performance of 133 judges as of 1 January 2023 until 31 December 2023. Recommendations for improvement of professional performance were given to nine district (city) court judges and one regional court judge. However, no unfavourable opinions were given during the period.

In addition to the regular evaluation of judges' professional performance, 12 extraordinary evaluations of judges were carried out in accordance with the Rules of Procedure of the Committee, Chapter 6, in a competition for the post of judge of a regional court.

During the said period, the Committee has delivered one opinion on the transfer of a judge to another court or courthouse.

Judges are provided with the following recommendations for improving professional performance:



- Improving skills in passing court rulings by

analysing relevant information, including sources of law;

- Improving judgement reasoning skills and skills in analysing evidence;
- Improving the ability to analyse one's own actions and listen to criticism;
- Improving the ability to analyse information in order to make informed conclusions;
- Improving skills in legal reasoning and presentation of judgements;
- Improving work organization and time management skills;
- Improving skills in writing of judgements;
- Improving skills in reasoning and drafting of judgements;
- Improving skills in managing court proceedings.

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 specified in the Rules of Procedure of the Committee from the parties involved, as well as it shall appoint a Secretary of the Committee from among the employees of the Court Administration, who shall keep the records, organize and record the meetings of the Committee and perform other duties related to ensuring the work of the Committee. At present, Liene Jākobsone performs the duties of the Secretary with a high sense of responsibility and diligence. To support the work of the Committee and to strengthen its internal capacity, an assistant has been recruited to perform these duties – Līga Skalde, Assistant to the President of Kurzeme Regional Court for Research and Analytical Issues.

Thank you to the Court Administration for the support!

Judicial Ethics Commission



Dace Skrauple

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 an institution of self-government of judges, which provides opinions on the interpretation and violations of ethical norms, as well as interprets the ethical norms applicable to judges.

Composition of the Judicial Ethics Commission:

- **Dace Skrauple**
Chair of the Commission, Judge of Zemgale Regional Court (elected on 26 May 2020);
- **Adrija Kasakovska**
Deputy Chair of the Commission, Deputy President of Zemgale District Court (elected on 15 September 2022);
- **Inese Laura Zemīte**
Senator of the Department of Criminal Cases of the Supreme Court (elected on 26 May 2022);
- **Diāna Makarova**
Senator of the Department of Administrative Cases of the Supreme Court (elected on 15 September 2022);

- **Aiva Daidere**
Judge of Kurzeme Regional Court (elected on 18 April 2023);
- **Madara Ābele**
Judge of Riga Regional Court (elected on 26 May 2020);
- **Aija Jermacāne**
Judge of Latgale District Court (elected on 26 May 2020);
- **Anda Kraukle**
Judge of Riga City Court (elected on 2 June 2020);
- **Baiba Lielpētere**
Judge of Vidzeme District Court (elected on 26 May 2020);
- **Jānis Grīnbergs**
Judge of Vidzeme District Court (elected on 21 September 2022).

Organisation of the Commission's work

In accordance with the Commission's Rules of Procedure, the Commission meets as necessary, but at least every 3 months. During the period under review 10 Commission meetings have taken place. The Commission discussed and provided written replies to 32 applications from individuals.

Issues addressed:



53% - no grounds for a substantive examination of an issue have been established;

25% - no violation of ethical norms by a judge has been established;

3% - violation of ethical norms by a judge;

19% - procedural issues.

If signs of a possible violation of judicial ethics are identified, the persons involved are asked to explain the situation, yet in most cases no violation of the Code of Judicial Ethics is found. The Commission shall adopt one of the following decisions when considering applications and complaints:

- acceptance of a request or application for consideration by the Commission;
- rejection to consider a request at a meeting of the Commission;
- sending of received documents to a competent authority for examination;
- examination of an alleged breach of an ethical norm at a meeting of the Commission on its own initiative.

In 2023, the Commission conducted a survey of judges on the need to receive assistance from a professional specialist (psychologist) with regard to the performance of their duties, and asked the Latvian Judicial Training Centre to provide information on the current possibilities for judges to receive assistance from a psychologist. After compiling the results of the survey, the Commission sent a proposal to the Judicial Council on the need for such a specialist.

The Commission has prepared for publication a second collection of its opinions and explanations "Collection of Opinions of the Judicial Ethics Commission (2017-2023)", which demonstrates the willingness of judges to grow and improve, rather than to hide from challenges.

Commission's opinions, explanations and decisions

During the reporting period, the Commission has prepared:

- one explanation of deciding the recusation of a judge and a judge's recusal from conducting proceedings;
- one opinion on judge's conduct in contacting the State Police and not accepting the recusation and/or not recusing himself/herself from a civil case at the time when the judge contacted the police.

The Commission's anonymised opinions, explanations and decisions (currently 82 in total) are available on the Latvian courts' portal www.tiesas.lv. All information related to the work of the Commission is also available there: the composition of the Commission, the text of the Latvian Code of Judicial Ethics, the Bangalore Principles of Judicial Conduct, an extract from the law On Judicial Power, the text of the Commission's Rules of Procedure, and the Commission's contact information.

Judicial Disciplinary Committee



Valerijs Maksimovs

Chair of the Judicial Disciplinary Committee

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

Composition of the Judicial Disciplinary Committee:

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

In 2023, the Judicial Disciplinary Committee initiated three disciplinary proceedings against district (city) court judges, including:

- 1 case upon the initiative of a court president
- 2 cases upon the initiative of the Minister of Justice.

In 2023, the Judicial Disciplinary Committee heard three cases, including:

- 1 case of intentional violation of law in examination of a case;
- 1 case of failure to comply with work obligations;
- 1 case of intentional violation of law in examination of a case and failure to perform duties.

Outcomes of cases considered by the Judicial Disciplinary Committee in 2023:

- reprimand in two cases;
- disciplinary proceedings terminated due to loss of judicial status – in one case.

The decisions of the Judicial Disciplinary Committee 2023 have not been appealed before the Disciplinary Court.

In 2023, the Judicial Disciplinary Committee examined 31 complaints from individuals.

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

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

JUDICIAL COUNCIL COMMISSIONS AND WORKING GROUPS

Commission for the Selection of Candidates to the Office of a Judge



Dzintra Balta,

Chair of the Commission for the Selection of Candidates to the Office of a Judge

In 2020, the Judicial Council established the Commission for the Selection of Candidates to the Office of a Judge (hereinafter – the Selection Commission), whose main objective is to select highly qualified lawyers with an impeccable reputation and appropriate professional skills. In 2023, the work of the Selection Commission continued, both by completing the two judicial selection procedures launched in 2022 and by launching new selection procedures.

In January 2023, the two competitions for the selection of candidates for the position of a judge (the final, 4th round, of selection), which started in 2022, was concluded:

- 6 candidates were invited to the final round of selection of candidates for the position of a judge of a Collegium of Civil Cases of a regional court

and, at the end of the selection procedure, 5 out of them (all first instance court judges) were included in the list of candidates for judicial office; in 2023, 1 listed judge was transferred from the list to work in a regional court;

- 7 candidates were nominated for the final round of selection of candidates for the position of a judge of a Collegium of Criminal Cases of a regional court, and at the end of the selection procedure, 6 of them (all first instance court judges) were included in the list of candidates for the position of a judge; 5 listed judges were transferred to work in regional courts.

In 2023, vacancies were opened for judges of all specialisations at both district (city) and regional courts.

- On 21 September 2023, a competition was announced in courts of general jurisdiction. 60 candidates applied, of whom 57 were selected for the second round and 11 for the third round. The selection will continue in 2024.

- On 22 September 2023, a competition was announced for the position of a judge of a Collegium of Civil Cases of a regional court of general jurisdiction. 13 applicants (8 of them judges) applied. From among non-judicial applicants, 5 applicants were selected for the second round and 1 applicant for the third round. The Judicial Qualification Committee has advanced 6 judges to the final round of selection. The selection will continue in 2024.

- On 22 September 2023, a competition was announced for the position of a judge of a Collegium of Criminal Cases of a regional court of general jurisdiction. 11 applicants (8 of them judges) applied. From among non-judicial applicants, 3 applicants were selected for the second round (test). None of these candidates passed the test. The Judicial

Qualification Committee has promoted 7 judges to the final round of selection. The selection will continue in 2024.

- On 22 September 2023, a competition was announced for the position of a judge of the Regional Administrative Court. 11 candidates (9 of them judges) applied. From among non-judicial candidates, 2 candidates were advanced to the second round and 1 candidate to the third round. The Judicial Qualification Committee has advanced 7 judges to the final round of selection. The selection will continue in 2024.

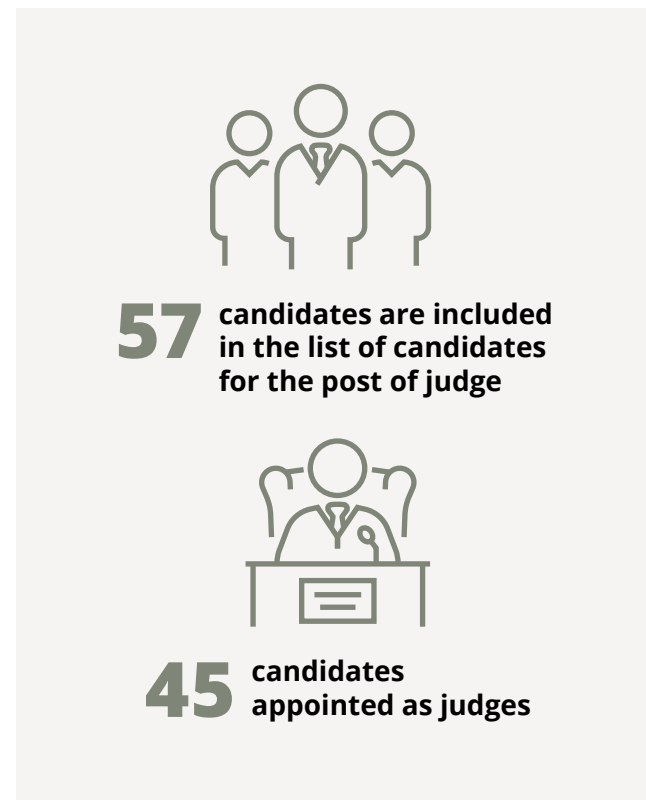
Amendments to the Procedure for the Selection of Candidates to the Office of District (City) Court and Regional Court Judge

The year 2023 was marked by an active work on the improvement of the legal framework of the selection procedure, which was organised by the Selection Commission in cooperation with the Judicial Council, the Judicial Qualification Committee and experts in the field of personnel selection.

By Decisions No 68 and No 69 of 8 September 2023 of the Judicial Council, amendments were made to the Procedure for the Selection of Candidates to the Office of District (City) Court and Regional Court Judge and to the Rules of Procedure of the Judicial Qualification Committee. As regards judges of first instance courts who are candidates for the position of a regional court judge, the assessments of professional skills and behavioural competences were clearly separated, providing that professional skills shall be assessed by the Judicial Qualification Committee and behavioural competences by the Selection Commission. For more information on the amendments made, see the section "Work of the Judicial Council in 2023".

Overview of the Selection Commission's three years of work

Taking into account that the term of office of the first composition of the Selection Commission expired in October 2023, the Chair of the Selection Commission, Dzintra Balta, presented a report on the work of the Commission since its establishment on 20 October 2020 at the meeting of the Judicial Council on 27 October 2023. In total, the Commission has examined 351 applications for the judicial position in the last three years. As a result of the selection process, 57 applicants were included in the list of candidates for the judicial position. From among these candidates, 45 have been appointed as judges. From among the judges appointed, 16 were judges of first instance courts who had applied for the judicial position in regional courts, 15 were judge assistants, 6 were advocates, 4 were prosecutors and 4 were other applicants who had not previously worked in the judicial system.



On the composition of the Selection Commission

In 2023, the composition of the Selection Commission was changed to observe the term of office of the Selection Commission members (initially 3 years, amended to 4 years) as set out in the selection procedure, as well as the career progression of some of the Commission members.

By Decision No 16 of 10 March 2023, the Judicial Council updated the composition of the Selection Commission. The changes in the composition of the Commission for the Selection of Candidates to the Office of a District (City) Court and Regional Court Judge were made because three members of the Commission, the judges from among judges of district (city) courts – Judge Adrija Buliņa, Judge Signe Grīnberga and Judge Ilze Freimane – were transferred to regional courts. However, two members of the Commission from among the judges of regional courts – Silva Reinholde, Judge of Kurzeme Regional Court, and Sanita Kanenberga, Judge of Regional Administrative Court, who were previously members of both the Selection Commission and the Judicial Qualification Committee, chose to perform the duties of a member of the Judicial Qualification Committee only (subject to amendments to the selection procedure which did not allow for combining these positions in future). In total, 16 judges were nominated to serve in the Selection Commission – nine district (city) court judges and seven regional court judges.

On 27 October 2023, the Judicial Council reconfirmed four members of the Selection Commission whose first term of office had expired – Dzintra Balta, Senator of the Department of Civil Cases of the Supreme Court, Sandra Kaija, Senator of the Department of Criminal Cases of the Supreme Court, Ieva Višķere, Senator of the Department of Administrative Cases of the Supreme Court, and Adrija Buliņa, Judge of Riga Regional Court.

Composition of the Selection Commission:

- **Dzintra Balta**
Chair of the Commission, Senator of the Department of Civil Cases of the Supreme Court (appointed on 27 October 2023);
- **Sandra Kaija**
Senator of the Department of Criminal Cases of the Supreme Court (appointed on 27 October 2023);
- **Ieva Višķere**
Senator of the Department of Administrative Cases of the Supreme Court (appointed on 27 October 2023);
- **Adrija Buliņa**
Judge of the Collegium of Civil Cases of Riga Regional Court (appointed on 27 October 2023);
- **Andris Vilmanis**
Judge of the Collegium of Criminal Cases of Latgale Regional Court (appointed on 10 March 2023);
- **Ilze Freimane**
Judge of the Regional Administrative Court (appointed on 10 March 2023);
- **Elita Stivriņa**
Judge of Latgale District Court (appointed on 10 March 2023);
- **Madars Plepis**
President of Kurzeme District Court (appointed on 10 March 2023);
- **Kristīne Brokane**
Judge of the District Administrative Court (appointed on 10 March 2023).

Commission for the Selection of Court Presidents



Guntars Ploriņš

Chair of the Commission for the Selection of Court Presidents

The basis for the Commission's work is the Procedure for Nomination and Appointment of a President, Deputy President of a District (City) Court and Regional Court and a President of a Courthouse (Decision No 6 of the Judicial Council of 15 March 2019).

As in previous years, also in 2023 the tendency remained that one or two candidates applied for vacant positions in the management of courts. A total of 17 candidates applied for the 12 competitions and were heard and assessed by the Commission.

In 2023, a total of the following vacancies of court presidents and deputy presidents were announced and the following persons were appointed:

- Judge Madars Plepis appointed President of Kurzeme District Court;
- Judge Iveta Salaka appointed President of Zemgale District Court;
- Judge Līga Ašitoka appointed President of Vidzeme District Court;
- Judge Ieva Čudina appointed President of Riga District Court;
- Judge Inguna Amoliņa appointed Deputy President of Riga Regional Court and Chair of the

- Collegium of Criminal Cases of the said Court;
- Judge Andris Vilmanis appointed Deputy President of Latgale Regional Court, Chair of the Collegium of Criminal Cases of the said Court;
- Judge Sanita Strakše appointed Deputy President of Riga City Court;
- Judge Elita Stivriņa appointed Deputy President of Latgale District Court;
- Judge Ivars Dzindzuks appointed Deputy President of Latgale District Court;
- Judge Lolita Laure appointed Deputy President of Kurzeme District Court;
- Judge Jānis Bumbieris appointed Deputy President of Kurzeme District Court;
- Judge Santa Bernharde appointed Deputy President of Riga District Court;
- The competition for the position of Deputy President of Zemgale District Court ended without result.

In 2023, the Commission for the Evaluation of Candidates to the Office of a President, Deputy President of a District (City) Court and Regional Court and a President of a Courthouse (hereinafter – the Commission) continued its work in the composition 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. The fourth member of the Commission selected in each of the competitions was a court representative, thus 10 judges of the respective courts were engaged in the work of the Commission last year.

The composition of the Commission::

- **Guntars Ploriņš**
Chair of the Commission, Chair of Valmiera Courthouse of the District Administrative Court;
- **Ilze Celmiņa**
Judge of Riga Regional Court;
- **Inita Ilgaža**
Deputy State Secretary of Court Issues, Ministry of Justice;
- One member from among judges of a respective court.

Working Group for Court Efficiency



Aija Āva

Chair of the Working Group for Court Efficiency

In order to implement the objectives, set out in the Judicial Council's Strategy 2021-2025, Action Line 3 "Efficient and High-Quality Judiciary", the Judicial Council adopted Decision No 55 of 14 June 2021 to establish a Working Group for Court Efficiency.

In 2023, the Working Group for Court Efficiency continued to work in accordance with the Action Plan approved by the Judicial Council, which identifies four priority areas for action:

- balancing the workload of judges in Latvia;
- an optimal and efficient court staffing model;
- ensuring the quality of judgements;
- organisation of court work.

The Working Group for Court Efficiency, in cooperation with judges, as well as the Supreme Court, the Ministry of Justice and the Court Administration, is working to implement the tasks set out in the Action Plan. The main outcomes of the Working Group in 2023 are as follows:

- The Judicial Council has approved the report "On the Further Development of the Institution of Judge Assistants";
- The Judicial Council has approved the report "On the evaluation of the reform of the integration of land registry judges in district (city) courts";
- **Guidelines for writing judgments in administrative cases for first instance courts and appellate courts** have been developed and approved by the Judicial Council;
- **Guidelines for writing judgments in civil cases for first instance courts and appellate courts** have been developed and approved by the Judicial Council;
- **Reorganisation Plan of District (City) Courts of General Jurisdiction in Latgale Judicial Region** has been developed in cooperation with the Ministry of Justice. Thus, the Judicial Council supported the merger of Daugavpils Court with Rēzekne Court as of 1 July 2023, changing the name of the reorganised court to Latgale District Court. Members of the Working Group for Court Efficiency include:
 - **Aija Āva**
Chair of the Working Group, Judge of Kurzeme Regional Court;
 - **Inita Ilgaža**
Deputy State Secretary on Court Issues, authorised representative of the Minister of Justice;
 - **Ilze Celmiņa**
Judge of Riga Regional Court;
 - **Jānis Rozenbergs**
Chair of the Latvian Council of Sworn Advocates;
 - **Juris Stukāns**
Prosecutor General.

Working Group for Evaluating the Organization of Judicial Work in Cases Related to Domestic Violence and Threats to a Person's Life and Health



Aigars Strupišs
Chair of the Working Group

In response to the public's confusion about the circumstances of the murder in Jēkabpils, the Judicial Council, by Decision No 25 of 22 May 2023, established the Working Group for Evaluating the Organization of Judicial Work in Cases Related to Domestic Violence and Threats to a Person's Life and Health. The Working Group was given three tasks:

- to analyse the practice of work organisation of the judicial system and to identify gaps in inter-institutional cooperation in cases related to the protection of a person against domestic violence and threats to a person's life and health;
- to develop proposals to effectively ensure the right to protection of victims in cases of domestic violence and threats to life or health;
- to develop proposals for improving court communication in crisis situations to ensure the provision of impartial, comprehensive information to the public, thereby increasing public confidence in the judiciary.

Having examined the materials of the Jēkabpils case and other cases of a similar nature, the Working Group analysed a number of problems arising from the work of police, the prosecutor's office and the courts. On 17 November 2023, the Working Group presented a report to the Judicial Council which included a number of proposals for improving the work of the courts and other institutions in dealing with domestic violence situations. The report contains information on deficiencies in the organisation of the work of the police, the prosecutor's office and the courts, as well as on shortcomings in the legislative framework, the allocation of responsibilities and what has been done to address these deficiencies.

The full text of the report can be found [on the Judicial Council's website](#).

Members of the Working Group for Evaluating the Organization of Judicial Work in Cases Related to Domestic Violence and Threats to a Person's Life and Health include:

- **Aigars Strupišs**
Chair of the Working Group, President of the Supreme Court, Chair of the Judicial Council;
- **Ilze Celmiņa**
Judge of the Collegium of Civil Cases of Riga Regional Court, Member of the Judicial Council;
- **Sandra Kaija**
Senator of the Department of Criminal Cases of the Supreme Court;
- **Liene Mikulāne**
Judge of Riga City Court;
- **Inita Ilgaža**
Deputy State Secretary on Court Issues, Ministry of Justice;
- **Dana Rone**
Representative of the Latvian Association of Sworn Advocates, Sworn advocate;
- **Inga Niedre**
Head Prosecutor of the Pre-trial Criminal Procedure and Judicial Proceedings Coordination Division of the Prosecutor General's Office.

ACADEMY OF JUSTICE

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Progress of the Academy of Justice project in 2023

The need for professional development in the judiciary has been identified at both national and international level. 2022 has been an important year for the judiciary to invest in the future by starting work on the establishment of the Academy of Justice. Policy planning documents of the European Union and Latvia focus on strengthening the capacity of personnel in courts and law enforcement institutions as a priority area. At the beginning of 2021, the Judicial Council identified strengthening the independence of the judiciary as one of the action lines of its strategy for 2021-2025, including taking over the responsibility for training of judges. On the basis of this strategy, on 18 June 2021, the Judicial Council gave its conceptual support to the reform of the system of qualification development of judges and prosecutors, i.e. the establishment of a single training centre. The Academy of Justice is being established with the aim of creating a single long-term continuing education model for the target audience, in order to implement training that will promote and support the growth of the judiciary. The establishment of a single training centre is essential to develop strong, competent and independent judiciary and law enforcement institutions, thereby, inter alia, strengthening public confidence in the judiciary.

In order to make the continuing education process efficient and sustainable, the Academy of Justice project (hereinafter – the Project) for the establishment of a single judicial training centre, by attracting European Union funding, was launched at the end of 2022. In 2023, this work was continued.

One of the tasks of the Academy of Justice is to

ensure the strengthening of the role of the Judicial Council in defining and shaping curricula, including by developing and improving the approach to curriculum development currently being implemented by the Latvian Judicial Training Centre. It is envisaged that the Judicial Council will exercise functional oversight of the Academy of Justice, it will define strategic goals and directions of training, as well as orientations for the development of training programmes, approve the annual training programme, as well as participate in the evaluation of candidates for the position of Director of the Academy of Justice, with the most suitable candidate being proposed to the Cabinet of Ministers for approval.

The Academy of Justice can be discussed in relation to two aspects: within the framework of the Project financed by the European Union Recovery Fund and implemented by the Court Administration, as well as the establishment of the Academy of Justice itself, which will be established as a state institution.

The Project aims to:

- develop a new state institution (Academy of Justice), which shall commence its work in 2025;
- develop ten competency development training programmes;
- launch the programmes, i.e. organising training, providing exchanges, developing training materials;
- purchase learning resources (books, access to legal literature databases);
- renovate and adapt the premises to the needs of the Academy of Justice, so that future training for a target group could be provided in one training centre.

Project monitoring

When implementing projects with external funding, close attention is paid to both the implementation of quality control (internal framework, monitoring documents, guidelines) and to ensuring multiple levels of supervision. In 2023, in addition to the development of the framework foreseen in the Project, a three-tier governance has also been established – the Steering Committee, the Advisory Board and the Supervisory Board.

The Steering Committee supports the implementation of the Project in accordance with the objectives and activities of the Project, provides information on the development activities and reforms of the institution it represents, policy planning documents and recommendations relevant to the curriculum, and ensures prompt communication between the institutions involved for the implementation of the Project. The members of the Committee include representatives of the Project partner institutions (the Supreme Court, the Prosecutor General's Office, the Ministry of the Interior), the Judicial Council, the Ministry of Justice and the Latvian Judicial Training Centre.

The Advisory Board reviews, recommends and provides advisory opinions on the programmes to be developed under the Project, their updating, the planning and implementation of training activities, and facilitates the linking of training programmes with other institutional development activities and reforms. It is composed of representatives of the Judicial Council, the Ministry of Justice, the Court Administration, the Project partners (the Supreme Court, the Prosecutor General's Office, the Ministry of the Interior), the Latvian Judicial Training Centre and self-governing bodies of judges and prosecutors related to professional development, and professional associations.

The Supervisory Board shall review the progress of the Project, the results achieved, the use of funding, and shall issue instructions to the implementer of the Academy of Justice Project and monitor their

implementation. The Supervisory Board is composed of the State Secretary of the Ministry of Justice, a representative of the Office of the Minister of Justice, the Deputy State Secretary for Foreign Cooperation and Strategy Issues of the Ministry of Justice, the Deputy State Secretary on Court Issues of the Ministry of Justice, a representative of the Project Department of the Ministry of Justice and representatives of the Judicial Council. The Judicial Council is represented by its Chair Aigars Strupišs, the Prosecutor General Juris Stukāns and the Head of the Secretariat Alla Spale.

Working groups on curriculum development

By the start of the Academy of Justice's activities, ten training programmes are planned to be developed, each of which will contain a set of all the training topics required for a specific post and guidelines for their delivery, including the frequency of delivery. The preparation of such competency development curricula will enable the Academy of Justice to develop its annual training offerings to the target audience for the long-term, in a well-thought-out manner. This means that, in addition to the annual updates, the Academy will also monitor all training needs for the development of the post. Regular and broad-based development of justice professionals can improve the work of the justice system and avoid the risk of neglecting some skills.

To this end, in 2023, working groups for the development of training programmes for judges and prosecutors have been set up with the main objective of developing ten competency development training programmes (for managers in courts and prosecution services, for judges and prosecutors with and without previous experience, and for court and prosecution office staff with and without previous experience) which will support the preparation of a targeted annual training offer in the long term.

For developing training programs, the working groups will take into account:

- the skills and competences required by those working in the justice system;
- the Judicial Council's guidelines for training organization, and the strategy for the justice system;
- the target group's assessment of the training provided in the past and current training needs;
- the objectives of policy planning documents and recommendations of international institutions relevant to the target group;
- international practice;
- the need to provide regular training for the target audience on topical sectoral issues, the geopolitical context and understanding of the social (social diversity) context.

Training events

Alongside the curriculum development, various training activities for the target audience are already being provided in a pilot version. Training on legal topics or on the transfer of professional values, professional skills and knowledge gained from work practice and experience is delivered by the most experienced members of the judiciary and prosecution services. However, public procurement is necessary to provide training that requires the involvement of experts from other fields.

In 2023, a procurement procedure was carried out and contracts concluded for the provision of legal English and French language training for the judiciary. Developing legal language skills is essential to ensure dialogue between legal practitioners, which in turn promotes mutual trust in cross-border litigation. Foreign language training helps legal professionals to understand foreign legal systems and legal concepts and increases their opportunities to participate in cross-border training activities.

In 2023, a price consultation was organised and an agreement was concluded with the association "Centrs MARTA" on the coordination of the

development and provision of the training course "A Victim-centred Approach to the Needs of Victims of Violence in the Justice System". The target audience of the course includes judges, prosecutors and investigators. Due to the topicality of the issue in the justice system, it was necessary to organise tailor-made training on topics related to the needs of a victim of violence when entering the justice system. The Court Administration approached associations that provide support to victims of violence and are directly involved with victims and their struggles when coming into contact with the justice system. In order to identify the needs of the justice system and the topics to be covered by the course, representatives of various institutions were interviewed, such as of the Supreme Court, the Public Prosecutor's Office, the State Probation Service, district and regional courts, the Ministry of the Interior, as well as representatives of organisations providing rehabilitation services to victims of crime - the Crisis and Counselling Centre "Skalbes", "Centrs Dardedze" and "Centrs MARTA".

The inclusion of this topic in the curricula of the Academy of Justice will strengthen the competences of judges and prosecutors in recognising different forms of violence, especially in cases of domestic violence, where the dynamics between a victim and a perpetrator can be misleading.

In the first half of 2024, the draft training course content will be finalised and the training will be offered to the target audience.

In 2023, a public procurement procedure was organised and a contract was concluded for the provision of supervision to the judiciary. Supervision is a consultative support to an employee. It is necessary in professions where there is intensive and close contact with people. This is particularly true about professions which deal with emotionally difficult issues. One of the tasks of supervision is the early identification and prevention of crisis situations. Experience and research have shown that employees who have timely and regular supervision are less likely to burn out and are more

empathetic when working with clients.

In addition, a procurement procedure has been launched in 2023 to provide training on information and communication technology skills and communication skills to the judiciary.

Fitting-out of the premises of the Academy of Justice

The Academy of Justice building will be located in Riga, at the address of 31 11. novembra krastmala. The classrooms will be located on the fourth, fifth and partly on the third floor of the building. The premises will be adapted to the needs of the Academy of Justice, resulting in a modern and contemporary learning environment based on sustainability, using the latest solutions and ensuring energy efficiency of the premises. The third floor of the Academy of Justice will be used for staff working space, while the fourth and fifth floors will be used for classrooms: an auditorium (100 persons), a lecture hall for up to 40 persons, computer rooms, working group rooms and a moot court room.

In 2023, the development of a project for the reconstruction of the Academy of Justice building and the adaptation of the classrooms started. The project has been submitted to the City Development Department of Riga City Council for approval.

The visual identity of the Academy of Justice

In 2023, within the Project, in collaboration with the design studio "H2E", the visual identity of the Academy of Justice was created.

The graphic marks used are symbolic of balance and poise, clarity and certainty, awareness of and respect for fundamental values, as well as classical traditions in a contemporary expression.

The image of a stylised column inspired by the beginnings of the development of modern legal system – the culture of Ancient Rome – encompasses core values and values for growth, also indicating

the direction of Academy's work, such as using knowledge as a core value and striving for initiative that allows existing knowledge to be used in creative and innovative ways.



The colour palette of the logo is both formal and elegant. The olive-green shades symbolise poise and stability, while the warm orange complements and enhances the green tones.

The slogan of the Academy of Justice "Excellence for Law-based Latvia!" was created with the idea of a learning environment that promotes and supports the growth of the judiciary, building a learning and teaching culture as part of professional responsibility and fostering a supportive environment to ensure the sustainability of learning outcomes.

The project will run until June 2026. In 2025, a new state institution will be established – the Academy of Justice, which will be a single training centre for judges, prosecutors, court staff and assistants to prosecutors, as well as for an interdisciplinary audience (investigators) on issues relevant to the effective administration of justice (hereinafter – the target audience). The goal of the Academy of Justice will be to implement a systematic training strategy in the field of the judiciary.

DIALOGUE

Judicial Council's dialogue with courts and regional visits

In order to ensure a direct and effective exchange of information and opinions with judges, representatives of the Judicial Council visited Latvian courts on several occasions in 2023. The purpose of the visits was to discuss with the judges the topical issues of the Judicial Council and the work of the courts. In 2023, members of the Judicial Council visited a total of six district (city) courts and the Regional Administrative Court.



On 3 February 2023, the Chair of the Judicial Council, Aigars Strupišs, and the Deputy Chair of the Judicial Council, Dzintra Balta, met with the judges of Riga City Court. The judges called on the Judicial Council to continue its work on balancing the workload of judges throughout the country. As one of the solutions, the Riga City Court judges proposed a uniform distribution of cases in administrative offences and more active transfer of cases to courts outside Riga. More information is available [on the website of the Judicial Council in the section News](#).

On 13 March 2023, the Chair of the Judicial Council, Aigars Strupišs, and the Deputy Chair of the Judicial Council, Dzintra Balta, visited Kurzeme District Court. The judges of Kurzeme District Court stressed the need for more training for assistants to judges to

motivate and encourage them to become judges. More information is available [on the website of the Judicial Council in the section News](#).



On 8 May 2023, the Chair of the Judicial Council, Aigars Strupišs, and the Deputy Chair of the Judicial Council, Dzintra Balta, visited Zemgale District Court. The judges of Zemgale District Court expressed their support for the establishment of a working group aimed to carry out an in-depth analysis of the flow of information in cases related to the protection of persons against violence or threats to a person's life and health. More information is available [on the website of the Judicial Council in the section News](#).





On 15 May 2023, the Chair of the Judicial Council, Aigars Strupišs, and the Deputy Chair of the Judicial Council, Dzintra Balta, met with the judges of the Regional Administrative Court, who called on the Judicial Council to consider the possibility of expanding the representation of the judges of the largest Latvian courts and administrative courts in the self-government bodies of judges. More information is available [on the website of the Judicial Council in the section News](#).



On 14 June 2023, the Deputy Chair of the Judicial Council, Dzintra Balta, met with the judges of the District Administrative Court. The judges of the District Administrative Court also asked the Judicial Council to consider the possibility of ensuring the representation of administrative court judges in the self-government bodies of judges. At the same time, the judges pointed out that there is a very high turnover of court staff and the main reason for this is salaries. More information is available [on the website of the Judicial Council in the section News](#).



On 20 June 2023, the Chair of the Judicial Council, Aigars Strupišs, and the Deputy Chair of the Judicial Council, Dzintra Balta, paid a working visit to Riga District Court. During the discussion on the selection procedure of judges, the judges of Riga District Court pointed out that there is a problem to select judges who could work with land register cases. According to the judges of Riga District Court, this is due to the lack of clarity on the future of specialisation in land registry cases, i.e. whether this function will continue to fall within the jurisdiction of the courts. More information is available [on the website of the Judicial Council in the section News](#).



On 26 September 2023, the Chair of the Judicial Council, Aigars Strupišs, and the Deputy Chair of the Judicial Council, Dzintra Balta, met with the judges of Vidzeme District Court. The judges of Vidzeme District Court pointed out that additional training is needed for judge assistants, both in applying for selection to judicial posts and for improving their qualifications. They also called for the development of a common manual for judge assistants, which would make the work of courts more efficient and ensure better quality of preparation of cases. More information is available [on the website of the Judicial Council in the section News](#).

Judicial Council's dialogue with other branches of government

One of the prerequisites for a democratic and law-governed country is the principle of separation of powers, which divides the country's powers between the legislative, executive and judiciary branches. The Judicial Council is a collegial body representing the position of the judiciary. In 2023, several important meetings were held with the President of Latvia, the legislative and executive branches.



On 12 January 2023, the Chair of the Judicial Council, Aigars Strupišs, met with the Minister of Justice, Inese Lībiņa-Egnere. During the meeting, the issue of remuneration of judicial staff in 2023 was discussed. The two officials also agreed to establish a working group to strengthen the status of the Judicial Council and the independence of the judiciary, as well as to cooperate on the implementation of the Academy of Justice project. More information is available [on the website of the Judicial Council in the section News](#).



On 1 March 2023, the Chair of the Judicial Council, Aigars Strupišs, participated in a meeting organised by the President of Latvia, Egils Levits, with the heads of the institutions of the justice system to discuss topical issues of the development of the justice system. Aigars Strupišs spoke about the priorities of the Judicial Council for 2023. At the same time, Aigars Strupišs expressed the opinion that the judiciary has problems in recruiting highly qualified judges, judge assistants and scientific and analytical advisors. The President of the Constitutional Court Aldis Laviņš, the Minister of Justice Inese Lībiņa-Egnere, the Chair of the Saeima (parliament) Legal Affairs Committee Andrejs Judins and the Chair of the Subcommittee on Constitutional and Judicial Policy of the Legal Committee of the Saeima Inese Kalniņa also participated in the conversation with the President of Latvia. More information is available [on the website of the Judicial Council in the section News](#).



On 16 May 2023, the Chair of the Judicial Council, Aigars Strupišs, met with the Speaker of the Saeima, Edvards Smiltēns. During the meeting public officials discussed how to establish a dialogue between the

judiciary and the legislature, providing MEPs with direct information on the work of the judiciary and the rule of law in the country. They also discussed the appointment and confirmation process of judges in the Saeima and agreed to work on improving the existing regulation so that the Saeima does not have to repeatedly decide on the confirmation of a first instance court judge. More information is available [on the website of the Judicial Council in the section News](#).



On 17 July 2023, the Chair of the Judicial Council, Aigars Strupišs, met with the President of Latvia, Edgars Rinkēvičs, to discuss topical issues of the judiciary and the work of the Judicial Council. President of Latvia Edgars Rinkēvičs expressed support for the implementation of the priority of the Judicial Council's Strategy 2021-2025 on strengthening the independence of the judiciary. The two officials also discussed the need for clarification of court judgments, penal policy in corruption and national security cases, as well as the selection procedure for new judges and the development of judicial training in the context of the Academy of Justice project. More information is available [on the website of the Judicial Council in the section News](#).

Judicial Council's dialogue with public

One of the action lines of the Judicial Council's Strategy 2021-2025 is to strengthen public confidence in the judiciary. To achieve this, informing the public about the latest developments in the work and decisions of the Judicial Council is an essential task.

In 2023, the Secretariat of the Judicial Council sent out 75 press releases to the media, informing them about the Judicial Council's meetings and the decisions adopted therein, as well as about other topicalities in the work of the Judicial Council. In 2023, the press releases of the Secretariat of the Judicial Council were often published and the Judicial Council was mentioned in publications of the national information agency "LETA" (144 articles), the portal "LV portāls" (128 articles), the magazine "Jurista Vārds" (88 articles) and in news of "Latvijas Radio 1" (81 mentions), as well as in the official publisher of the Republic of Latvia "Latvijas Vēstnesis" (69 articles).

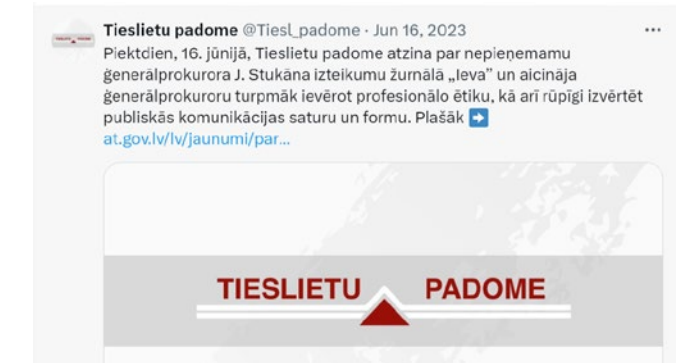


- 144** Publications of the National Information Agency "LETA"
- 128** Articles on the portal "LV portāls"
- 88** Articles in the magazine "Jurista Vārds"
- 81** "Latvijas Radio 1" news broadcasts
- 69** Articles of the official publisher of the Republic of Latvia "Latvijas Vēstnesis"



The Chair of the Judicial Council, Aigars Strupišs, has given several media interviews to inform about topical events of the Judicial Council. The most widely covered interview was given on 9 January 2023 on "Latvijas Radio 1", in which the Chair of the Judicial Council informed about the problems with judicial staff remuneration. The following interviews given by the Chair of the Judicial Council Aigars Strupišs have also been widely published: the interview on 12 January 2023 after his meeting with the Minister of Justice Inese Lībiņa-Egnere, the interview on 1 March 2023 after his meeting with the President of Latvia Egils Levits, the interview on 12 April 2023 in "Rīta Panorāma" about the implementation of the Academy of Justice project, the interview on 15 June 2023 for the "Latvijas Radio 1" programme "Krustpunktā", the interview on 16 June 2023 on the Judicial Council's condemnation of Prosecutor General Juris Stukāns for his remarks in an interview for the magazine "Ieva" and the Judicial Council's decision to establish a working group to evaluate the work of courts in cases involving domestic violence and threats to a person's life and health, the interview on 17 July 2023 on the penal policy in corruption and state security cases after his meeting with the President of Latvia Edgars Rinkēvičs, the interview on September 21 2023 with "Latvijas Radio 1" on the length of court proceedings in Latvian courts, the interviews on 17 November 2023 on the evaluation of the Judicial Council' working group on the work of the judicial system in cases of violence.

The Judicial Council's news is also published on the social network "X" (formerly Twitter). 121 news items were published in the Judicial Council's account in 2023. The post of 16 June 2023 has generated the most public interest, as the Judicial Council found the statements made by the Prosecutor General Juris Stukāns in an interview with the magazine "Ieva" unacceptable (viewed ~ 15 000 times).



Similar public interest has been generated by the Judicial Council's post of 6 July 2023 regarding the Judicial Council meeting scheduled for 7 July 2023 to assess the results of the reform of land registry offices (viewed ~ 13 000 times). What regards the Youtube channel, the most viewed meeting of the Judicial Council took place on 16 June 2023 (412 views). For the second year, the Judicial Council, in cooperation with the institutions of the judicial system, participated in the Lampa Conversation Festival with its "Themis Tent".



In 2023, the festival lasted from 9 June to 10 June. "Themis Tent" offered a wide and varied programme of nine events for different target audiences.



The Judicial Council organised a discussion in the "Themis Tent" titled "Perception of justice at a news' distance". Judges and journalists discussed how to improve communication between the courts and the media in order to develop public perception and trust in the judiciary. The discussion was moderated by journalist, TV and radio presenter Arnis Krauze and was attended by Senator Dzintra Balta, the Deputy Chair of the Judicial Council, Juris Siliņš, the President of Zemgale Regional Court, Ivo Leitāns, a Board Member of the Latvian Association of Journalists, a journalist of LTV News Service, and Kārlis Arājs, a national news editor of "Delfi" portal. The participants agreed that in recent years progress has been observed in judicial communication and judicial cooperation with the media. At the same time, there is a need for improvements in communication on the part of the judiciary – proactive communication, consistent action by the courts to make public hearings accessible to the media, thoughtful headlines of press releases to attract public and media attention to the news, etc. With regard to the work of the media, participants to the discussion pointed out that the media should think about quality coverage of the work of the courts, recognising that this can have a significant

impact on public opinion and perceptions of the work of the courts. The participants agreed that the dialogue between the judiciary and the media should continue in order to improve and develop both their work and cooperation, as this is done for the benefit of the country.



A short informative video has been created to inform the public about the Judicial Council and published on the Judicial Council's account of the social network "X" and on its YouTube channel.

The Judicial Council will continue to keep the public informed about topical developments. One can follow the Judicial Council's news:

on the Judicial Council's website:
<https://www.tieslietupadome.lv/en>

On the Judicial Council's "X" (Twitter) account:
www.twitter.com/Tiesl_padome

On the Judicial Council's YouTube channel:
www.youtube.com/@tieslietupadome6414

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 cooperation among European judicial councils. ENCJ is based in Brussels. Since December 2022, the President of the ENCJ is Dalia Vasarienė, a representative of the Lithuanian Judicial Council.

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. At the 2023 Assembly, the Latvian Judicial Council was elected to the ENCJ Board, where it is to be represented for the next two years by the Chair of the Judicial Council, Aigars Strupiņš.

A key decision taken by the Assembly was the admission of Ukraine, Moldova and Bosnia-Herzegovina as observer states of the ENCJ. The General Assembly concluded with the adoption of the Ljubljana Declaration "Courts fit for the future", which supports the vision of a judicial corps that reflects the entire composition of society. The Declaration also notes the importance of digitalization and the need to develop ethical artificial intelligence solutions, as well as the importance of judicial communication through traditional and social media.

In the period 2023-2024, the ENCJ continues to develop a number of projects: "Judicial Independence, Accountability and Quality", "Digital Justice Forum", "Internal Organisation Project" and "Dialogue Group on the Attractiveness of the Judicial Career", coordinated by the Belgian and Latvian Judicial Councils. Latvia's position in the ENCJ working groups is represented by Aigars Strupiņš, Chair of the Judicial Council, Solvita Harbaceviča, Adviser to the President of the Supreme Court on Issues of the Judicial Council, and Dace Šulmane, Adviser to the Secretariat of the Judicial Council.

In 2023, the ENCJ produced a number of reports and reviews, which were presented at the ENCJ Annual General Assembly in Ljubljana on 7-9 June:

- Indicators of judicial independence, accountability and quality – strengthening judicial protection;
- Report on codes of conduct of members of Judicial Councils;
- Quality framework for Judicial Councils.

ENCJ members may initiate remote workshops to discuss current developments in the organisation of judicial work:

- The latest report on situation in Poland (February 2023);
- Judicial reviews (April 2023);
- Presentation of the book "Judicial Governance and Democracy in Europe" (May 2023);
- 2023 Rule of Law Report (September 2023);
- Artificial intelligence in courts (October 2023);
- Relations between the judiciary and the media and freedom of expression of judges (November 2023).



The European Commission's 2023 EU Justice Scoreboard includes new indicators on the state of examination of corruption cases in courts, as well as on the appointment of judges and prosecutors.

When assessing the overall workload in civil and commercial cases, the report finds that Latvia has a moderately low litigation activity, while in terms of the number of administrative cases, Latvia has the third lowest number of incoming cases per capita in Europe. When comparing the time taken to resolve disputed civil and commercial cases in first instance courts, Latvia's average indicator (220 days, 11th place) is behind Lithuania (100 days, 1st among EU Member States) and Estonia (150 days, 6th among EU Member States).

In response to EU developments and the development of the single market, a new sixth category of cases was added in 2023 – anti-corruption cases. In Latvia, cases in this category are heard in first instance courts in an average of 200 days, thus Latvia ranks eighth (following Bulgaria,

Denmark, Finland, Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, and Austria).

Analysing the budget expenditures of the judiciary against the gross domestic product, Latvia ranks fourth (following Bulgaria, Poland, and Slovenia) among the countries with the highest expenditures for the functioning of the judiciary, while Estonia ranks 17th and Lithuania 22nd. By comparison, Latvia ranked fifth in the 2022 report (Croatia's position has been changed).

The latest report compares the salaries of judges and prosecutors with the average monthly salary in the country. It shows that the salaries of judges and prosecutors in Latvia at the start of their careers (which is more than double average salary in the country) are proportionally similar to those in the Czech Republic and Spain (higher than in Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, Lithuania, Slovenia). Whereas, salary levels in the segment of judges and prosecutors of higher instances are similar to Estonia (average salary level).

The full report is available on the European Commission's website under [EU Justice Scoreboard](#).

EU Rule of Law Report

For several years now, the European Commission has been presenting the Rule of Law Report (hereinafter – the Report), which examines developments in the rule of law in the Member States 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 has developed a kind of annual monitoring cycle, which tracks the progress of the Member States in implementing the recommendations and new justice reforms in line with the principles of law recognised in democratic 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 section “justice system”.

On 5 July 2023, the European Commission published its Annual Report. The section “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 Judicial Council has continued to improve procedures for the selection and performance evaluation of judges and is working to increase its role in the governance of the justice system. It notes that Latvia is also continuing to digitalize its judicial system, improving the electronic case management system and developing a project for an online dispute resolution system, as well as preparatory work for the establishment of the Academy of Justice is going on. New guidelines for the management of length of proceedings in courts have been approved.

The report notes that the Judicial Council merged Riga city courts in the previous year in order to balance the workload of judges and to improve the efficiency of the judicial system. Overall, the Latvian justice system continues to operate efficiently, with a number of initiatives aimed at improving case management and the efficient use of judicial resources.

With regard to improvements to the judicial system, the Report recommends that Latvia “ensures adequate safeguards to prevent undue political influence in the appointment process of Supreme Court judges, taking into account European standards on the appointment of the judiciary representatives”.

On average, the Report provides three recommendations to the EU Member States. The exception is Estonia, which did not receive any recommendations for improving the justice system in the 2023 Report. The recommendations are mostly the European Commission's reaction to developments in the Member States, as well as an encouragement to national authorities to continue to look for solutions to systemic problems or specific aspects of improving the justice system. The wording

of recommendations tends to be very similar, but the content can be adapted and implemented according to the specific circumstances of each Member State.

For example, Belgium, Denmark, France, Portugal, Romania and France are recommended to continue their efforts to ensure adequate human resources in the judiciary. For Belgium and Denmark, the European Commission recommends a more in-depth focus on the financial resources of the judiciary, taking into account European standards. The need to improve the remuneration situation of judges is highlighted in recommendations to Lithuania (for prosecutors and judicial staff), as well as to Germany, Croatia, Portugal and Slovenia.

Bulgaria has been reminded of the need to avoid long-term secondments of judges to vacant posts, taking into account European standards on secondments of judges, as well as to improve the functioning and composition of the Supreme Judicial Council and to avoid the risk of political influence, in particular when involving the judiciary in the selection of members of the Judicial Council. The renewal of the composition of the Judicial Council (the mandate of its members expired several years ago) has been highlighted as a matter of particular priority in Spain. In Slovakia, the need to ensure judicial guarantees for the judges elected to the Judicial Council has been highlighted in particular.

Improvement of the principles of prosecutorial performance has been highlighted with regard to a number of countries. The Czech Republic has been invited to continue to proceed with the prosecutorial reform, while maintaining the original objective of introducing safeguards against unjustified dismissals of the Prosecutor General and other chief public prosecutors, taking into account European standards on prosecutorial independence and autonomy. Spain should strengthen the status of the Prosecutor General, especially in relations with the executive. In Cyprus, the independence but also the accountability of the prosecution should

be strengthened by providing for the possibility to appeal against prosecutorial decisions in line with European standards. Austria is recommended to continue reforms to establish an independent federal prosecutor's office in line with European standards on prosecutorial independence and autonomy, including ensuring the independence of the specialised anti-corruption prosecutor's office.

Several countries have received specific guidance on speeding up judicial proceedings and improving the handling of high-level corruption cases. According to the European Commission, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Greece, Spain, Croatia, Hungary, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, and Slovakia have problems with investigating and examining such cases in court.

The European Commission has requested Ireland to ensure that European standards are taken into account in the reform of judicial appointments and promotions, including in the composition of the Judicial Appointments Commission. In Greece, steps need to be taken to involve the judiciary in the selection of candidates for the position of heads of the Council of State and the Supreme Court. In Malta, the procedure for the appointment of the president of the Supreme Court also needs to be brought into line with the recommendations of the Venice Commission. In Lithuania, the focus is on transparency in the appointment of Supreme Court judges. In Austria, the European Commission has recommended that the judiciary be involved in the selection of candidates for the office of presidents of administrative courts.

The European Commission's recommendations also address the tension between the legislature and the judiciary in Slovenia, namely the requirement

that Parliament's requests for information to the judiciary include adequate safeguards for the independence of judges and prosecutors in line with European standards. In Slovakia, the existing criminal liability of judges for decisions taken is a problem. In Finland and Sweden, the European Commission has highlighted the need to reassess further developments in the institution of presiding judges. In Ireland and Luxembourg, according to recommendations by the European Commission, work is needed to reduce court fees to ensure access to justice. Digitalization of courts (publication of court judgments) is a problem in France, Italy and the Netherlands. In Hungary, reforms to strengthen the Judicial Council and the appointment of the Curia judges are noted, yet there is a need to improve case allocation processes in first instance courts. Transparency of case allocation and electronic case allocation are areas for improvement in Portugal in the next reporting period. The problem of case examination time-frames is highlighted in the case of Malta.

Overall, the standards of judicial independence developed in Europe, as well as the opinions of the Venice Commission, are an important yardstick for the Member States to self-critically analyse and improve their justice systems, which is not always happening at the desired pace. The diversity of problems in the justice systems illustrates the different institutional set-ups of European countries, which require individual solutions.

The full report is available on the European Commission's website under "[Rule of law mechanism](#)".

Judicial Council's exchange visit to Japanese courts



On 13-15 September 2023, Aigars Strupišs, the Chair of the Judicial Council, Dzintra Balta, the Deputy Chair of the Judicial Council, a Senator of the Department of Civil Cases of the Supreme Court, Guntars Ploriņš, a member of the Judicial Council, the Chair of Valmiera Courthouse of the District Administrative Court, and Alla Spale, the Head of the Secretariat of the Judicial Council, paid an exchange visit to the courts of Japan. The aim of the visit was to get acquainted with the work of Japanese courts, to identify the main factors that facilitate and ensure the functioning of Japanese courts, as well as to strengthen cooperation between Latvian and Japanese judicial institutions.



The members of the Judicial Council visited all three levels of courts in Tokyo – the Tokyo District Court (court of first instance), the Tokyo High Court (court of appeal) and the Supreme Court of Japan, as well as the Legal Training and Research Institute of Japan.

Japan recognises the importance of legal education for the functioning of a democratic country, and therefore sets a higher standard of legal knowledge and skills for certain legal professions, which is not only free of charge, but also supported financially by the state (scholarships).

The collegial judicial panels in Japanese courts are created from pre-established groups of 4-6 judges. This allows a more in-depth look at specific issues that come before the judges.

There are about 9,000 court employees per every 3,800 judges, 70% of whom are court clerks, i.e. lawyers who have passed the unified national examination. Thus, one of the factors influencing the relatively small number of judges in Japan is the support from court staff, both in terms of numbers and quality.



In Japan, judges rotate within the country every 2-3 years, changing their specialisation in a particular area of law (civil, criminal) if necessary.

Aigars Strupišs, Chair of the Judicial Council, acknowledged, "*The key to the efficiency of the Japanese judicial system is the quality of legal education and continuing judicial education, the provision of which is a strategic objective of the country. At the same time, judges in Japan adhere to certain procedural principles, which, among other things, discipline the parties to proceedings.*"

JUDICIAL COUNCIL PRIORITIES FOR 2024



The Judicial Council will continue to work towards the 2021-2025 Strategy's goal of ensuring the independence, quality, development and accountability of the judiciary. Thus, also in line with the Strategy, the Judicial Council has defined its work priorities for 2024.

Firstly, it is necessary to approve the concept of transferring the administrative support functions of the judiciary from the executive to the judiciary.

Secondly, the results of the judicial reforms carried out so far have to be assessed, including:

- the impact of the reorganisation of first instance courts on the exercise of judicial functions and productivity;

The 2023 Annual Report of the Judicial Council features photographs taken by the Secretariat of the Judicial Council, the Supreme Court, "LV portāls", the Chancery of the President of the Republic of Latvia, and the European Network of Councils for the Judiciary.

- the implementation of land registry case management functions in courts and the prospects for the development of this system;
- the access to justice in the regions and possibilities for optimization of court locations.

Thirdly, the possibilities for the development of occupational standards and remuneration systems for the support staff of the judiciary have to be analysed.

Information on the progress of the Judicial Council with the planned work will be available in next year's report.

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