

The issues of discrimination of non-citizens in the Baltic states

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In recent years, the international community has begun to pay more attention to the issue of so-called non-citizens and their rights.

For example, recently the UN Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights has prepared a study on the rights of non-citizens.

However, there is a serious gap between those rights that guaranteed by international human rights law, and the reality that non-citizens in the countries of residence are dealing with. In particular, almost all categories of non-citizens are affected by official and unofficial discrimination. The problem of non-citizens is especially acute in the two Baltic states - Latvia and Estonia.

Non-citizens of Latvia and Estonia are persons who permanently live in one of these two countries but are not citizens of Latvia and Estonia or any other country.

The majority of non-citizens are former USSR citizens who lived in Latvia and Estonia and were deprived of the right to receive its citizenship after the collapse of the USSR. Approximately two thirds of them are ethnic Russians, followed by Belarusians, Ukrainians, Poles and Lithuanians.

Non-citizens in Latvia and Estonia are deprived of most political rights, including the right to vote and run for local government elections, national and European parliaments, and to participate in national referendums.

They cannot serve in the army. They are restricted in their professional activities: they cannot work in law enforcement and public service; they cannot work as lawyers, notaries, pharmacists, etc. They are also restricted in social and economic rights: in the acquisition of real estate, in retirement rights, in the right to keep and bear arms, in the right to travel without visas to a number of countries, etc.

The process of naturalization and integration of non-citizens is extremely slow. Now, more than 25 years after the proclamation of the independence of the Baltic republics, the number of non-citizens in Latvia is about 252,000 (11.75 percent of the total population), and about 90,000 in Estonia (6 percent).

It should be noted that there have recently been certain efforts of the Estonian government to address this problem. For example, since 2016 children of non-citizens in Estonia began to receive Estonian citizenship from the moment of birth. Nevertheless, children of non-citizens in Latvia automatically receive the status of non-citizens, despite the fact that they were born in Latvia.