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Latvia Rules to Grant Citizenship to Immigrants' Children

October 28, 2019

Vladimir Starkov / ITAR-TASS

Latvia's parliament has ruled to grant citizenship to all children born in the country, regardless of their parents' citizenship status, in new legislation that has been described as "historic."

An estimated 230,000 people in Latvia, or more than 10 percent of the population, hold "non-citizen passports" that bar them from voting or holding certain government positions and are passed down to children. A majority are ethnic Russians who remained in the country after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

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Latvian lawmakers passed legislation earlier this month granting automatic citizenship to children born to non-citizens, the Baltic News Network reported. The Latvian Public Broadcasting organization called the Latvian parliament's vote "historic."

“I welcome the Latvian Parliament taking a decisive step toward eliminating child statelessness,” said Dunja Mijatović, the Council of Europe’s human rights commissioner.

“I regret however that the parliament did not extend automatic citizenship to all stateless children in Latvia who are currently under 15,” Mijatović said. She estimates there are almost 4,900 non-citizen children under 15 in Latvia.

Many Baltic Russians carry more than two decades of grievances over citizenship, language and cultural policies that have these communities feeling marginalized from mainstream political and economic life in the countries that they call home.

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