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Research “Portrait of Third-Country Nationals in Latvia”

Summary

The research “Portrait of Third-Country Nationals in Latvia” is implemented in the framework of the project “Portrait of Third-Country Nationals in Latvia” (grant agreement No. IF/2013/2/1) implemented by Society Integration Foundation and co-financed by European Fund for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals. This is the second largest research on third-country nationals in Latvia since 2009¹, the direct target audience of which are third-country nationals living in Latvia². The research accomplished in 2009 was implemented with introduction of the Multiannual programme of the European Commission Fund for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals for the years of 2007 – 2013 in Latvia. During the period of seven years it has been the most significant European Union policy support instrument for improvement of the situation of third-country nationals in Latvia. The objective of the research of 2015 is the analysis of dynamics of the situation of third-country nationals in comparison with the year of 2009, assessment of opportunities for integration and identification of problems, establishing the necessary improvements for effective implementation of the integration policy. Quantitative and qualitative data are acquired for attainment of objective, encompassing areas like employment, education, health care, social inclusion, Latvian language acquisition, civic participation, and reduction of discrimination.

In the period of time from 2009 till 2015 the total number of aliens in Latvia has increased from 49,871 person in 2009 to 84,037 persons in 2015. In the context of the research target group it should be accentuated that 51,029 persons with permanent residence permits and 33,244 persons with temporary residence permits resided in Latvia in the beginning of 2015, out of which 23,671 persons are third-country nationals³. In comparison with 2009 the number of third-country nationals with temporary residence permits has nearly tripled. A major importance in this process belongs to the changes in the Latvian immigration policy, providing for issue of temporary residence permits by way of investment in Latvia. The research shows that the number of those third-country nationals grows who plan to stay in Latvia permanently. These indices witness of a growing necessity to not only lay down requirements and conditions for people who arrive in Latvia for a shorter or longer period but also provide this target group with options of integration in various areas of social life.

The direct target group of the present research is the third-country nationals (citizens) who have arrived in Latvia in the period of the previous five years and reside legally in the territory of the republic of Latvia (third-country nationals with temporary residence permits). The target group of the opinion poll made in the framework of this research is wider, including the third-country nationals who reside in Latvia with temporary residence permits and permanent residence permits up to five years, from five to ten years and

¹ *Imigranti Latvijā: iekļaušanās iespējas un nosacījumi*. Immigrants in Latvia: Options and Conditions for Integration. Sc.ed. Zepa, B., Šūpule, I. (2009). Riga: Baltic Institute of Social Sciences.

² Third-country nationals are persons who possess the nationality of neither the Republic of Latvia nor any other European Union Member State, European Economic Area or the Swiss Confederation. For the purpose of the present research the term ‘third-country citizens’ is used as a synonym.

³ Statistic data of the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs (PMLP). Source: www.pmlp.gov.lv

for more than ten years but not longer than for twenty years. In data analysis differences of the aforementioned groups are taken into consideration and explained.

The statistic portrait of third-country nationals

In line with the data of the Population Register of the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs (*PMLP*) for January 1, 2015 the population of Latvia was 2.1 million, 84% of which are Latvian citizens, 12% Latvian non-citizens, 2.5% Russian citizens and the rest 1.35% third-country nationals. For January 1, 2015, out of more than 85 thousand aliens with residence permits 51,029 persons resided in Latvia with permanent residence permits (PRP) whereas 33,244 aliens resided with temporary residence permits (TRP), 29% of the latter were EU/EEA nationals while 71% or **23,671 were the third-country nationals.**

The most frequent **grounds for residence** of third-country nationals with TRP **in Latvia** are investments in realty (49%), family reunion (19%), work in Latvia (13%) and studies at the Latvian higher educational establishments (8%). The total number of persons who have received TRP as a result of some type of investment is 16,067. If to examine the size of investment against the number of issued TRPs, it is apparent that the biggest investments on the individual level are made by investing in credit institutions – on average 127,159 EUR per person; the second place is taken by investments in royalty - 80,102 EUR per person. As regards investments in royalty, the summarized information shows that in the period from July 2010 till April 2015 most of the royalty was purchased in Riga and Jūrmala. The most popular places for purchase of royalty in regions were Ozolnieki and Cēsis regional communities.

Division of third-country nationals with TRP **according to the country of their origin** witness that in the beginning of 2015 the Russian citizens constituted the biggest proportion (56%); the Ukrainian citizens is the second biggest group (12%), followed by the Uzbek and Belarus (6% and 5%) citizens. In comparison to 2009, the greatest increase of aliens applies to the number of Russian, Uzbek, Chinese and Kazakh citizens with TRP in Latvia. Russian citizens are also the most frequent investors in royalty (72%), capital enterprises (57%) and investors in credit institutions (56%).

In the Latvian higher educational establishments and colleges in the study year of 2014/2015 **the total number of students was 5,293**, out of which 2,844 were third-country nationals. In comparison to 2009 the number of third-country national students in Latvia has essentially increased (in the study year of 2008/2009 there were only 894 third-country national students in Latvia). The most frequent third-country national students are from Uzbekistan (22%), Russia (18%) and Kazakhstan (9%).

Conversely, **380** third-country national **students attended the comprehensive schools** of Latvia in the study year of 2013/2014. The greatest part of the third-country national students are Russian citizens (57% or 216 students), the second place is taken by US nationals – 10% or 37 students, followed by the nationals of the Ukraine and Belarus.

Further on the results of the opinion poll of third-country nationals are summarized together with the conclusions drawn and recommendations given for further activities in order to improve the opportunities and conditions for integration of this target group in the Latvian society.

Arrival and residence

Two of the most frequent **reasons mentioned for arrival** in Latvia is family reunion (incl. reunion with parents) (51.6%) and purchase of royalty (22.2%). The following most frequent reasons given are studies and work, respectively 12.1% and 7.8%. Out of all the respondents 78.4% reside in Latvia with TRP, 19.9% have PRP but 1.5% have stated that they live in Latvia without residence permit. Evaluating **the procedure of acquisition of residence permit**, 48.6% of the respondents stated that the procedure is very simple, whereas 40.8% regard it as complicated. In comparison with the results of the opinion poll performed in 2009, it can be concluded that the situation with receiving residence permit has improved since before it was evaluated

as simple by 32.2% but as complicated by 54.4% percent of the third-country nationals. 57.9% of third-country national respondents want to stay in Latvia permanently (in 2009 such were 33.8 from the respondents) while 28% want to stay for more than five years (in 2009 – 20.6%). If in 2009 22.3% of third-country nationals planned to stay in Latvia no longer than for one year, then in 2015 only 2% of the respondents have such plans. In general **a tendency of planning a longer or permanent stay in Latvia** can be observed. The proportion of responders who want to stay in Latvia permanently is bigger among the ones who have PRP (81.1%); respectively the proportion among the ones with TRP is 52.3%.

Employment

From all the third-country national respondents in 2015 **40.5% are employed** (49.1% in 2009), out of which 23.4% are full-time or part-time employees, 6.6% are self-employed and 4.5% are company owners or co-owners. From all the employed 23.5% work in their profession, 16% work in a similar profession but 49.2% work in another profession. Results of opinion polls made in 2015 witness that most of the third-country national responders are employed in **trade, catering and tourism industries** (28.9%), whereas 17.9% work in the area of education and health care but the third place is taken by the area of transport, logistics and communications, which comprises also IT industry (12.7%). In comparison to 2009 the proportion of employment in trade, catering and tourism has increased while employment in industry, energetics and construction has diminished. Out of those who are not working 89.6% would like to work in Latvia. The most common **reason for not working is lack of knowledge of Latvian** – as indicated by 70.5% of the respondents. Among the rest of more frequently stated reasons for not working is difficulty to find employment in one's profession (29.5%) and overly high requirements for the knowledge of Latvian (24.4%).

Latvian language acquisition

83.5% of the respondents at some point **have studied Latvian**, which is over 25% more than in 2009 (58.5%). During the past three years 73.2% of the respondents have learned Latvian. 90.2% of them have attended some courses of the official language and are satisfied with the quality of tuition. 81.2% of the respondents evaluate the accessibility of the language courses as good. Three **main groups of motives for acquisition of the Latvian language** is as follows: (1) wish or necessity to obtain permanent residence permit, for acquisition of which one should pass the language proficiency test in A2 level; (2) necessity to communicate with the local people and integrate in the Latvian society; (3) wish to alight with the legal labour market. The main **necessary improvements in the area of Latvian language acquisition** in evaluation of the responders is (1) to continue providing free courses of Latvian; (2) to ensure wider opportunities for the language practice – to include attending various cultural and social events, or organizing different thematic clubs for conversations, in the language tuition; (3) to improve the organization of language courses – time and location of the courses (closer to the place of residence, incl. in regions), their continuity, providing for succession of the levels of language acquisition.

Sense of belonging to Latvia

Nearly two thirds from the third-country national responders have confirmed having a sense of belonging to Latvia. 60% of the respondents have admitted feeling very close (14.6%) or close (45.4%) belonging to Latvia, accordingly 40% have indicated feeling not particularly close or none (4.3%) belonging to Latvia. In general, **number of the ones who feel closely connected with Latvia has increased** in comparison with 2009 when this indicator was 56.1%. **91.1%** of the third-country national responders **would like to attend integration courses** on the history and way of life of Latvia as well as on authorities and organizations offering services to third-country nationals.

General education

Regardless of the fact that compulsory pre-school and primary school education is established by the Latvian law, free general education was not available for a long time to the children of third-country nationals residing in Latvia. The amending law of 4 March 2010 (into force from 26 March 2010) to the Education Law changed this situation, granting third-country nationals a right to free compulsory education, thus essentially improving the accessibility of education to the immigrant children. The responders with children up to the age of 18 have admitted that **in 90.5% of cases their children had no difficulty to receive corresponding education** at the Latvian pre-schools and primary schools. Positive dynamism can be observed in comparison with 2009 when 71.6% of the responders stated non-existence of difficulty.

Health care

Health care problems are the third most frequently mentioned group of problems, faced by third-country nationals residing in Latvia. Accessibility of health care services essentially differs for third-country nationals with TRP and PRP. In line with the Latvian legislation, **persons with TRP have no right to state-funded health care**. Such right does not apply also to employed third-country nationals with TRP, irrespective of the effected payments of the social tax, as the national insurance services are attracted not only to effectuation of social contributions (employment) but also to long-lasting stay in Latvia. Conversely, third-country nationals residing in Latvia with PRP have the same right to health care services as Latvian non-citizens.

41.3% of the respondents have admitted that they or their family members have had difficulties to receive health care in Latvia. 32.8% have faced no such difficulty, whereas 26% of the third-country national respondents stated that they have had no health problems. Those respondents who admit that they or their family members have faced difficulty of receiving health care services in Latvia mainly emphasize one problem – that with TRP in Latvia it is **possible to receive only paid health care service** (60%). 14% of the respondents indicate that they are facing difficulty with inaccessibility of health insurance.

Social inclusion

In total only 3.6% of third-country nationals do not make friends with the local Latvians, Russians or representatives of other ethnicities. There are more friends and acquaintances amidst the locals to those third-country nationals who reside in Latvia for a longer time. Third-country nationals most often contact the local Latvians, Russians and representatives of other ethnicities on the streets, in shops, in the public transport (respectively 85.3%, 84.3% and 67%). Third-country nationals most frequently contact the local Latvians in public and municipal agencies (75.1%), meeting the neighbours (60.5%) and spending together their leisure time, at entertainment and having a rest (58.3%). Third-country nationals most frequently contact the local Russians spending together their leisure time (71%), meeting as neighbours (65.7%) and visiting them at home or receiving visitors (6.3%).

Out of doors the greatest part of responders (84.6%) use Russian, which is explained by the fact that Russian is the native language of 65.6% of the responders and the sociolinguistic functions of this language in the Latvian society are still very wide. The second most widely used language is English (25.4%) (36.9% in 2009), while **24.1%** of the respondents speak mostly Latvian in their everyday life (15.4% in 2009).

Political and civic participation

Opportunities of political participation – right to stand for a candidate and participate at municipal elections, right to become the members of political parties and associations as well as found a political party – are very limited for third-country nationals. Consultative institutions are another instrument of political participation

for involvement in decision making. In 2013 “Consultative Board for Integration of Third-Country Nationals” was established at the Ministry of Culture, but assessment of the activities of the council has not been performed by now so that it was possible to make conclusions about the effectivity of the consultative institution for third-country nationals, to provide for transparent and objective consultative process where immigrants and organizations representing their interests could validly get involved in formation of policies directly affecting this group.

Opportunities of civic participation for third-country nationals – to participate at activities of NGOs and trade unions as well as establish them – are not forbidden but only some organizations in Latvia represent this target group or provides services for it. Results of the poll show **that 58.3% of third-country nationals in Latvia in total get involved in the activities organized by NGOs and interest groups**, out of which 13% do it frequently but 45.3% - sometimes. Analysis of the existing situation witness that the third-country nationals basically get involved in social activities as participants rather than their initiators.

Reduction of discrimination

More than a half of the surveyed (56.9%) indicated that they have not faced unjust or offensive behaviour. Among the respondents (43.1%) who have at least once experienced discriminating attitude three of the most frequently mentioned situations are as follows: first, on the street; second, in the public transport (21.5%); third, at public agencies or in contacts with the representatives of public agencies (Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs, border guard, police) (14%) and health care institutions (12.4%). Third-country nationals with TRP have experienced discriminating situations at public agencies more often than respondents with PRP (respectively 15.5% and 9.9%).

Approximately one fourth of all the respondents have experienced unjust or insulting attitude due to their national status (25.9%). At the same time, 17.3% of the respondents have faced such an attitude due to their ethnic or religious belonging. The situation has improved in comparison with 2009 since in the poll of 2009 42.3% of the third-country national respondents had experienced discrimination due to ethnic and religious belonging. Most frequently unjust or insulting attitude was experienced by the citizens of China and other Asian countries (for example, Bhutan, India, Japan, Korea, Myanmar, Pakistan, Singapore, Thailand) as well as nationals of another states (Argentine, USA, Brazil, South Africa, Egypt, Israel, Cameroon, Cuba, Macedonia, Nigeria, Peru, Turkey), which can be explained with the visual distinctions characteristic to the citizens of these countries and, in point of fact, witnesses of traits of racial discrimination in Latvia.

Main conclusions

The research results show that **the most essential improvements** as regards the opportunities of integration of third-country nationals in Latvia in comparison with the year of 2009 are as follows: first, the procedure for issue of residence permits, which, in evaluation of the target group, has become simpler; second, accessibility of the Latvian language courses; third, accessibility of free compulsory pre-school and primary education for third-country nationals. The results of the poll witness that also the situation improves as regards the decrease of discrimination – the proportion of those third-country nationals has diminished who have experienced unjust or insulting attitude due to their national, ethnical or religious belonging. Indicators characterizing the experience of third-country nationals in their contacts with the employees of public and municipal agencies have also improved. Simultaneously, traits of racial discrimination as regards the groups of visually distinctive third-country nationals persist.

Activities implemented from 2009 till 2015 in the framework of the multiannual programme for the years of 2007 – 2013 of European Fund for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals was an essential contribution to improvement of the situation of third-country nationals. This financial instrument has been the main source of funding for integration of third-country nationals in different areas of social life within the period of time from 2009 till 2015, analysed in the present research. Activities organized in the framework of this

programme were funded in the extent of 75% by the European Fund for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals and in the extent of 25% by the Latvian state. Access and availability of services to third-country nationals established by the laws and regulations is permanently provided for from the state budget.

The most significant problem areas, which are simultaneously **the main directions for further activities** towards improvement of integration and development of opportunities for third-country nationals residing in Latvia, are, first, provision of accessibility of health care services; second, expansion of opportunities for civic and political participation, first of all by developing and supporting the activities of the established consultative institutions and by favouring the increase of initiative of third-country nationals in the area of public activities; third, notwithstanding that policy for protection of the local labour market is implemented in Latvia, in order to promote the integration of those third-country nationals in the Latvian society who have acquired legal residence permits, to contribute to the employment of this group in Latvia. In this context, irrespective of the established improvements in the area of accessibility of the official language courses, it should be advanced, taking into consideration that lack of knowledge of Latvian is the main reason for the difficulty of integration in the legal labour market of Latvia.

Considering that the activities for integration of third-country nationals have by now been implemented mainly in the framework of the Multiannual programme for the years of 2007 – 2013 of European Fund for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals, ending in Latvia in June, 2015, a significant direction for further activities is to ensure implementation of the on-going activities in order to comply with the principles of continuity and succession.