Voluntary immigrants choose moving to another country to improve their and their families' future perspectives. These can be people who find job abroad, possibilities to study or invest, as well as people who have already member of their family living in this country; it means that they immigrate for the families to live together. The reason why a person has moved to another country can change, for instance, a student can find a permanent job after graduation and become an employment-based immigrant or if he/she establishes his/her family in this country he/she may receive permit to stay and live in the country due to that reason. Also the person's plans may change – short-term immigration plans may lead to long-term solutions. People known as third country nationals are considered immigrants in the European Union – nationals of those countries which are not Member states of the European Union.

Involuntary immigrants are forced to emigrate from their countries to save their lives or keep their freedoms because their countries are facing internal conflicts, nature or other disasters, or they can be exposed to persecution for various reasons. The UN Convention 1951 states that a refugee is a person who lives outside his/her country of origin and is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion. A refugee has already acquired the protection status and a permission to reside in another country, whereas asylum seekers are people who strive to receive such status. Those who do not qualify for the status of a refugee or international protection after the assessment procedure may be sent back to their countries of origin.
for human resources, workforce and professional competence, the main challenges for Latvia in this aspect are to find balance between the duties and rights of immigrants, as well as create conditions for immigrants to have a possibility to learn Latvian. One of the considerations which may burden immigrants’ daily life in Latvia is the rather negative public opinion on immigration.

The objective of this summary is to help knowledge-based decision making in the field of immigration policy by outlining global processes of immigration, situation with immigration in Latvia and rights and possibilities of immigrants, thus also dispelling myths on immigration in Latvia.

Global context
Immigration is not a process to be evaluated unambiguously. On one hand, it can be evaluated as a positive phenomenon which helps solving demographic problems of the host country and contributes significantly to the development of its economic and cultural processes. On the other hand, immigrants are often considered a burden or even a threat to the host country by placing a social burden too heavy and competing with locals for jobs. Frequently, immigrants have to face problems related to discrimination – they are more exposed to unemployment risk, often work in jobs for which they are over-qualified, receive lower wages and suffer from the lack of qualitative health care. Moreover, part of those people, wishing to find better living conditions, become victims of human trafficking or even risk their lives. According to the information from the International Organisation for Migration, at least 4500 people have died during the process of migration in 2013.6

Immigration trends keep looming brighter and brighter on the maps of Europe and the whole world making cross-border movement of people an essential factor in planning both national and international action policy. According to the information available for the United Nations Organisation (UN), approximately 232 million people or 3.2% of the total population of the world lived in a country which was not their country of origin in 2013. Moreover, since 1990 the number of international migrants has increased by 50%. Only 15.7 million or 7% of the international migrants were refugees, which
A big part of immigrants – approximately 136 million – live in the developed countries, while 96 million immigrants live in the developing countries. European and Asian countries have become home countries for approximately two thirds of international migrants. In 2013, Europe hosted 72 million international migrants, whereas Asian countries – 71 million. The third place belongs to North American countries where in 2013 there lived 53 million immigrants, besides since 1990 the number of immigrants in North America has increased most rapidly – approximately by 1.1 million immigrants annually. The United States of America hosted approximately one fifth (approximately 46 million) of all international immigrants in 2013. In general, half of all international immigrants lived only in 10 countries – the USA, which was already mentioned, and Russia, Germany, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, France, Canada, Australia and Spain. Now (2010 – 2013) the largest migration flows are in what are known as migration corridors from Mexico to the USA, from Sudan to South Sudan, from the State of Palestine to Jordan, from Myanmar to Thailand, and from India to the United Arab Emirates. The majority of people who are forced or choose to live in another country are able-bodied (approximately 74% are between the ages of 20 and 64), while almost every tenth person is under the age of 20. The largest communities living in other countries come from Asia and Latin American countries. For instance, in 2013, 19 million people from Asian countries lived in Europe and 16 million – in North America. The number of migrants of Latin

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Third country (not from the European Union) nationals in Latvia</th>
<th>How was it then?</th>
<th>How is it now?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of temporary residence permits issued for the first time</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family reunion (a spouse, children or parents already live in Latvia, including if one of the parents has Latvian citizenship)</td>
<td>747</td>
<td>679</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employees (with monthly salary no lower than the average gross salary in the previous year: at the moment - 716 EUR)</td>
<td>480</td>
<td>762</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualified workforce (a person with the higher education and work in the occupation corresponding to acquired education)</td>
<td>301</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investments</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3409</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. in real estate (at least 140 000 EUR in Riga and its surroundings or at least 71 000 EUR in any other place in Latvia)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3409</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. in a company (at least 35 570 EUR investment in a company with at least 50 employees, paying at least 28 570 EUR taxes per year)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3409</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. in a credit institution (not less than 285 888 EUR of investment in a subordinated capital)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3409</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studies</td>
<td>303</td>
<td>902</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People with refugee or alternative status (acquired due to reasonable threat of persecution for the person’s race, religion, nationality or political affiliation in the person’s home country)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
American origin, in its turn, reached 26 million – mostly they live in North America, for instance, from 1990 to 2000 approximately 500 thousand Mexican nationals entered the USA each year.

Also the European Union (EU) countries are attractive targets for several thousands of others or third country nationals. In 2004, there were 16.4 million third country nationals living in the EU, whereas in 2012 the number reached 21.2 million. The main countries of origin for the immigrants are Turkey, Morocco, Albania, China, Ukraine, Russia, India, Algeria, Ecuador and also the United States. Within the EU, the largest number of other country nationals live in Luxembourg (43.8% population), Cyprus (21%), and also Latvia (16.3%). However, the absolute majority of those people in Latvia are Latvian non-citizens which are considered as third country nationals in accordance with the EU legal context because they do not have citizenship of the European Union or Latvia.

Data from 2006 – 2011 show that the Baltic Sea Region and Russia serve as a significant ‘source of immigration’ in Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania. Similarly to Latvia, also Estonia and Finland host people mostly from Ukraine and Russia.

Although the last decades show a greater cooperation among the EU countries in this issue, the EU legislation does not provide for the immigration policy in the Member states – each country decides whom and how many people it grants the rights to live in their country. Nevertheless, the EU legislation stipulates common minimum standards regarding the entry requirements and rights for several groups of immigrants – students, researchers, seasonal workers and highly-skilled immigrants, as well as asylum seekers and refugees. For instance, the EU legislation stipulates that only one spouse can benefit from the right to family reunification and receive residence permit (polygamy is not recognised). The status of a long-term resident of the EU – after 5 years of residence in the country and fulfilling the requirements – grant the immigrant the same rights as the local population have regarding employment, education and social rights.

In order to raise benefits from immigration processes both for the societies hosting immigrants and for immigrants themselves, the EU pays a lot of attention to the immigrant integration. The EU supports the Member states, for instance, to help immigrants acquire local language skills and enhance the cooperation among local inhabitants and immigrants. From 2008 till 2015, approximately 13 million EUR were available for immigrant integration activities in Latvia. It is planned that a similar amount of funding will be available also for the next 7 years (25% out of the funding is co-funding from the State of Latvia).

**Immigration in Latvia: present**

Latvia also becomes more and more attractive target country for immigrants – since 2004 the number of requests for residence permits has increased three times, almost in every group of immigrants. There is an increase in number of the nationals from the European Union and other countries who live in Latvia both with

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**Temporary residence permits** are issued for a limited period of time (maximum 5 years). They ensure limited rights and limited access to public services. After this period of 5 years, if the person has resided in Latvia on permanent basis, he/she may apply for the permanent residence permit fulfilling particular requirements, for instance, proving his/her knowledge of the Latvian language and regular income.

**Permanent residence permit** is issued for unlimited period of time. After living at least 5 years in Latvia with the permanent residence permit, a person may apply for Latvian citizenship passing the naturalisation tests.
temporary and permanent residence permits. In 2014, there are 23,857 other country nationals with temporary residence permits living in Latvia, whereas 48,724 people have permanent residence permits.\textsuperscript{16}

The reasons why other country nationals choose to live in Latvia have changed over the last decade:

- Some years ago (in the pre-crisis period) the majority of residence permits were issued due to family reunification – people had spouses, parents or other relatives already living in Latvia (Latvian citizens and non-citizens, as well as citizens of other countries with valid residence permits).

- From 2008 to 2010 the most popular reason for immigration was employment (40-45% of all the issued residence permits). Most often immigrants are employed in the fields of industry, transport and logistics, as well as trade. Before the crisis many people worked also in building sector (36% of work permits in 2007 were issued in building sector, while in 2010 this rate was only 3%).

- Last year and now residence permits are mostly required regarding investments in Latvia. Since July 2010 investments in real estate, share capital or credit institution has served as the reason for issuing approximately 7000 permits.\textsuperscript{17} This possibility is mainly used by citizens of Russia, Ukraine and Kazakhstan. It is credible that soon this possibility will be used by a smaller number of immigrants because from September 2014 the minimum value of real estate which allows requiring temporary residence permits will be doubled: instead of 71,000 – 140,000 EUR now the value of a property has to be at least 250,000 EUR in any place in Latvia, besides, requiring the permit for the first time, the person will have to pay 5% of the real estate value to the national budget.\textsuperscript{18}
Comparing to 2004, the number of third country nationals who come to Latvia for studies have tripled. In total, 4475 foreign students study in Latvia in the academic year 2013/2014 which is approximately 5.5% of the total number of students. Beyond the European Union countries, the largest number of students come from Russia (483 students), Ukraine (233), and Turkey (199).

Also asylum seekers come to Latvia, although their number is rather small in comparison to the statistics of other countries. From 1998 till 2010, shelter was requested by 367 people, 29 of them received the status of a refugee whereas 45 people have received alternative status.

### Duties, rights and possibilities for immigrants

In general, people with short-term or temporary residence permits have more limited possibilities than those who have already acquired rights to live in Latvia for unlimited period of time. In some aspects, however, the differences are bigger than in other.

Unlimited access to labour market is granted for those immigrants who have come to Latvia due to family reunification, joining the spouse who is a citizen or non-

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>People with temporary residence permits</th>
<th>People with permanent residence permits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Language requirement</strong></td>
<td><strong>In order to obtain the permit, the required minimum knowledge of the Latvian language is A2 (elementary level) which means that a person has to be able to communicate in a simple way in typical everyday situations and about familiar topics, to read and understand simple texts about daily life and work, to fill in the necessary typical documentation types.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of the language is not required</td>
<td><strong>Possibility to change work freely while staying in Latvia.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Limited access to labour market. The person is dependent on the employer who has to ask the employer to come to Latvia. There is no possibility to change work freely.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Possibility to receive healthcare services.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>No rights to receive state-funded healthcare</strong></td>
<td><strong>Rights to receive legal and social assistance, as well as unemployment benefit.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>No rights to receive legal and social assistance and unemployment benefit (these expenditures have to be cover by the person himself/herself).</strong></td>
<td><strong>Note: The employed has the right to receive sickness benefit, maternity and paternity benefit, family allowance, burial allowance, disability allowance, as well as compensation related to accident at work.</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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19 Also asylum seekers come to Latvia, although their number is rather small in comparison to the statistics of other countries. From 1998 till 2010, shelter was requested by 367 people, 29 of them received the status of a refugee whereas 45 people have received alternative status.

20 Duties, rights and possibilities for immigrants

In general, people with short-term or temporary residence permits have more limited possibilities than those who have already acquired rights to live in Latvia for unlimited period of time. In some aspects, however, the differences are bigger than in other.

Unlimited access to labour market is granted for those immigrants who have come to Latvia due to family reunification, joining the spouse who is a citizen or non-
citizen of Latvia or holds a permanent residence permit. Equally, any employer can employ highly-skilled immigrants (for instance, scientists, sportsmen and artists), as well as foreign students although they may not work more than 20 working hours per week as their main reason of residence in Latvia is studying. Those temporary resident permit holders who come to Latvia for employment reasons, in their turn, have limited access to labour market in Latvia. They depend on the employer who invites the immigrant to work in Latvia. As his/her residence permit in Latvia is attached to the particular employment agreement, the immigrant cannot change employers freely. In order to start a new job or even a new position at the same employer, a permission to employ a citizen from a foreign country has to be received. It is possible if no Latvian citizen or non-citizen as well as citizen of another EU country who would be suitable for the job position applies for the vacancy within a month. Moreover, as the immigration policy is aimed at the protection of the local workforce, it is mandatory to grant a third country national a wage which is at least average gross wage in the previous year – at the moment it corresponds to 716 EUR a month (including taxes). As the result of these regulations employers have no legal possibilities to attract workers from third countries in particular fields where the level of average wage is lower, for instance, in agriculture or fish processing. It is important to mention that possibilities to work in Latvia depend also on the knowledge of Latvian because many professions require a particular level of command of Latvian stipulated by the legislation.

### People with temporary residence permits

- **Rights to receive primary and secondary education.**
- **Rights to form an NGO or join an existing NGO and trade unions, to participate in demonstrations and protests (without the right to organise them).**

### People with permanent residence permits

- **Rights to receive primary and secondary education.**
- **Rights to form an NGO or join an existing NGO and trade unions, to participate in demonstrations and protests (with the right to organise them).**

### Education

- Non-resident children have the right to receive pre-school, primary and secondary education.

### Participation

- No rights to participate in elections as a voter or candidate, to join political parties and form political unions.
- Possibility to become citizens after passing the naturalisation tests.
People with temporary residence permits do not have rights to receive state-funded health care, legal and social assistance, as well as unemployment benefit. If a third country national has come to Latvia on the basis of an employment agreement, the person has to pay taxes similarly to local inhabitants, however all expenses related to medical, legal and social assistance have to be covered by the immigrant himself/herself. Immigrants do not receive even state-funded emergency medical services therefore it is a mandatory need to have a health insurance card. Employees have the right to receive a number of benefits and allowances, for instance, illness benefit or compensation for work related injury. Immigrants who have Latvian citizen or non-citizen spouses can also receive limited range of assistance, for instance, prenatal care and labour and delivery care. At the same time, people with permanent residence permits receive the same rights as Latvian non-citizens. Namely, they can receive health care services and unemployment benefit. Also the children of third country nationals are included in the system of social security and receive health care services similarly to Latvian citizens and non-citizens.

In order not to have the immigrant and his/her family increasing the number of people who need social assistance, the legislation of Latvia stipulates minimum financial resources needed for foreigners to acquire residence permit in Latvia. For employment-based immigrants it is the mentioned amount of the minimum wage (at the moment – 716 EUR gross per month). If the immigrant is willing to engage in business, the amount has to be twice as big (at the moment – 1432 EUR a
month). If the person comes to Latvia for family or study reasons, he/she will have to prove financial resources in the amount of at least minimum wage (320 EUR).²³

Third country nationals who have valid residence permits in Latvia have the right to receive state primary and secondary education free of charge. Similarly to other children in Latvia, immigrant children have to attend preschool educational institutions from the age of 5 and they have to acquire primary education or continue schooling until 18 years of age. The third country national has to pay for the acquisition of higher education programme in accordance with the agreement concluded with the particular institution of higher education. It has to be noted that many immigrants find the possibility congenial to educate their children in minority schools, for instance, in schools with Russian, Ukrainian, Belorussian and Hebrew language of conduct in addition to the acquisition of the Latvian language.

Immigrants in Latvia have very poor opportunities for participation – they do not have right to vote or stand as candidates in elections (neither for national nor local governments) and they do not have rights to become members of political parties or form political unions. They can establish non-governmental organisations (NGO) or join existing NGOs and trade unions, as well as participate in marches and protests, although not all of them have the right to organise such events. If the person resides in Latvia on permanent basis for at least 10 years, he/she may qualify for Latvian citizenship acquiring full opportunities for participation after passing naturalisation exams. However, for a part of third country nationals the choice to receive Latvian citizenship means resigning their own citizenship because dual citizenship in Latvia is allowed only with a limited number of countries.²⁴

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1 National Action Plan foresees to develop the concept of Immigration policy until October, 2014 (Activity 124.1 of the Action Plan).
2 (2013), Izmēģinājums par priekšlikumiem reemigrācijas atbalsta pasākumiem, Ministry of Economics.
3 Ibid.
4 Highly skilled immigrants in the USA receive resident permits – known also as ‘green cards’. Similar to these cards, the EU has created ‘blue cards’ or resident permits for highly skilled immigrants.
5 (2011), Migrant Integration Policy Index, Migration Policy Group, British Council.
7 According to ANO datiem, 175 million people were international migrants in 2000, and 154 million – in 1990.
8 The group of countries with a high level of economic development and life quality – the majority of countries in Europe, North America and East Asia.
According to the classification by the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), these are all the countries which appear as recipients on the List of Aid Recipients, for instance, Afghanistan, Armenia, Georgia, Bangladesh, Haiti, Turkey, Moldova, Uzbekistan, Venezuela etc.

ANO dati about 2013.

International Migration Report (2013), United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs/Population Division.

Ibid.

Duszczyk M., Matuszczyk K. (2014), Migration in the 21st century from the perspective of CEE countries – an opportunity or a threat?, Central and Eastern Europe Development Institute, Warsaw, Poland.

37.5% of residence permits issued in Estonia are received by Ukrainian citizens, 35% – by Russian citizens; in Finland – 12.7% and 26.7%, respectively. Source: Baltic Consulting (2013), Expatriates in Latvia, Social networks and immigration related services for soft departure and soft landing.

In Latvia, the requirements are: passing the Latvian language test, regular income (at least minimal wage during the last year and taxes paid), as well as permanent residence in Latvia. More information is available on the website of the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs (OCMA) mājas lapā.

OCMA dati.

Amendments to the Immigration Law grozījumi, which will come into force on September 1, 2014.


OCMA dati.

European Migration Network (2014), Latvijas sociālās drošības sistēmas un veselības aprūpes pieejamība migrantiem (politika un prakse).

Exceptions are Ukrainian citizens and Russian citizens at retirement age.

Noteikumi par ārzemniekam nepieciešamo finanšu līdzekļu apmēru un finanšu līdzekļu esības konstatēšanas kārtību.

For the member states of the EU, European Free Trade Association, NATO, as well as citizens of Australia, Brazil and New Zealand, or in other cases with a special permit from the Cabinet of Ministers. Source: Amendments to the Citizenship Law, which came into force in October, 2013.