

Population 1881–2000

A country's population usually grows or diminishes due to the influence of two factors: rate of natural increase, which is the difference between births and deaths, and rate of mechanical increase, which is the difference between immigration and emigration. Population size can also change as a result of national border changes, as has happened in Estonia a few times. During the 120 years from the first census to the 2000 census, Estonia's population has generally grown, with the exception of two periods: World War II and the restoration of independence. The growth rate was the highest between 1897 and 1922, but we must also consider that it was one of the longest periods between two censuses. If decades are compared, Estonia experienced the fastest population growth in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s.

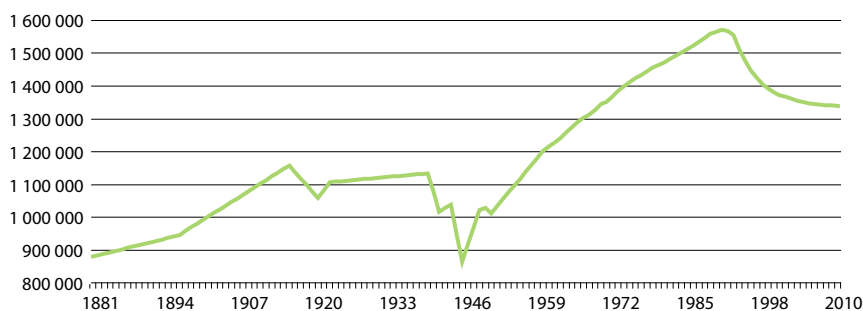
Table 1. Population of Estonia and change in population by census year

	Population	Change in population (%)
1881	881 455	
1897	958 351	8.7
1922	1 107 059	15.5
1934	1 126 413	1.7
1941	1 017 475	-9.7
1959	1 196 791	17.6
1970	1 356 079	13.3
1979	1 464 476	8.0
1989	1 565 662	6.9
2000	1 370 052	-12.5

The first census covering more or less the entire Estonian territory was conducted on 29 December 1881. The populations of the Estonian, Livonian and Courland Provinces were enumerated simultaneously. The enumeration area did not include the city of Narva and the settlement of Kreenholmi, which belonged to the St. Petersburg Province, and the Setomaa region with Pechory, which belonged to the Pskov Province. By the time of the 1922 census, these areas had been added to the Estonian territory, and the areas east of the Narva River were also a part of Estonia.

The first four censuses in Estonia, conducted between 1881 and 1934, registered an increase in population. However, there was a sharp decline in population in the period of 1939 to 1941 (as a result of World War II, a large wave of emigration and deportation). In 1941, the German authorities organised a quick population registration. This is not always counted as a census, but it is included in this list because the results meet the basic criteria for censuses, even if the number of questions was small – the enumeration was exhaustive, uniform throughout the country, and had a fixed census moment. The Soviet authorities denied the authenticity of these results. However, without these figures, we would not be able to see the extent of population decline in that period or the subsequent growth. After this census, the population of Estonia decreased further as a result of war losses, mobilisation of Estonians into the German army, mass refugee outflow and diminished territory.

Figure 1. Population in census years



1881	1897	1922	1934	1941	1959	1970	1979	1989	2000
881 455	958 351	1 107 059	1 126 413	1 017 811	1 196 791	1 356 079	1 464 476	1 565 662	1 370 052

Despite the loss of the areas east of the Narva River and in Petseri county (meaning that about 5% of the total population found themselves outside the new borders), the number of residents in Estonia had become larger than ever before by the time of the 1959 census. This growth occurred in the second half of the 1940s and in the 1950s as a result of the immigration of workers and military staff, mainly from the territory of Russia. This migration was organised for political and ideological reasons in order to russify the Estonian territory as quickly as possible. In the 1960s, immigrants started to come to Estonia for economic reasons. Continued industrialisation increased the demand for additional workforce, which caused the second large wave of immigration. In the period of 1959 to 1970, Estonia's population increased by 1.2% per year, which is the fastest growth rate during the entire period studied here (from the 1881 census up to the 2000 census). This rate of increase was primarily achieved through migration, because the rate of natural increase in Estonia was the lowest of all countries in the Soviet Union.

There were major changes in Estonia's political and economic situation at the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s. These resulted in a reversal of the direction of migration – Estonia was no longer a destination for immigration and net migration was negative. An estimated 80,000 people left Estonia during the period of 1989 to 1994. These were mainly people of Russian and other ethnicity who did not want to be integrated into the Estonian society or had now the opportunity to return to their actual homeland (Jews, Finns, Germans). Many Estonians left in the second half of the 1990s, to go to developed countries in Europe and elsewhere in search of economic welfare. As a result of emigration and negative natural increase, Estonia's population decreased by 12.5% by the time of the 2000 census, which means an average annual decrease of more than 1% over the 11-year period.

Geographic distribution and migration of the population

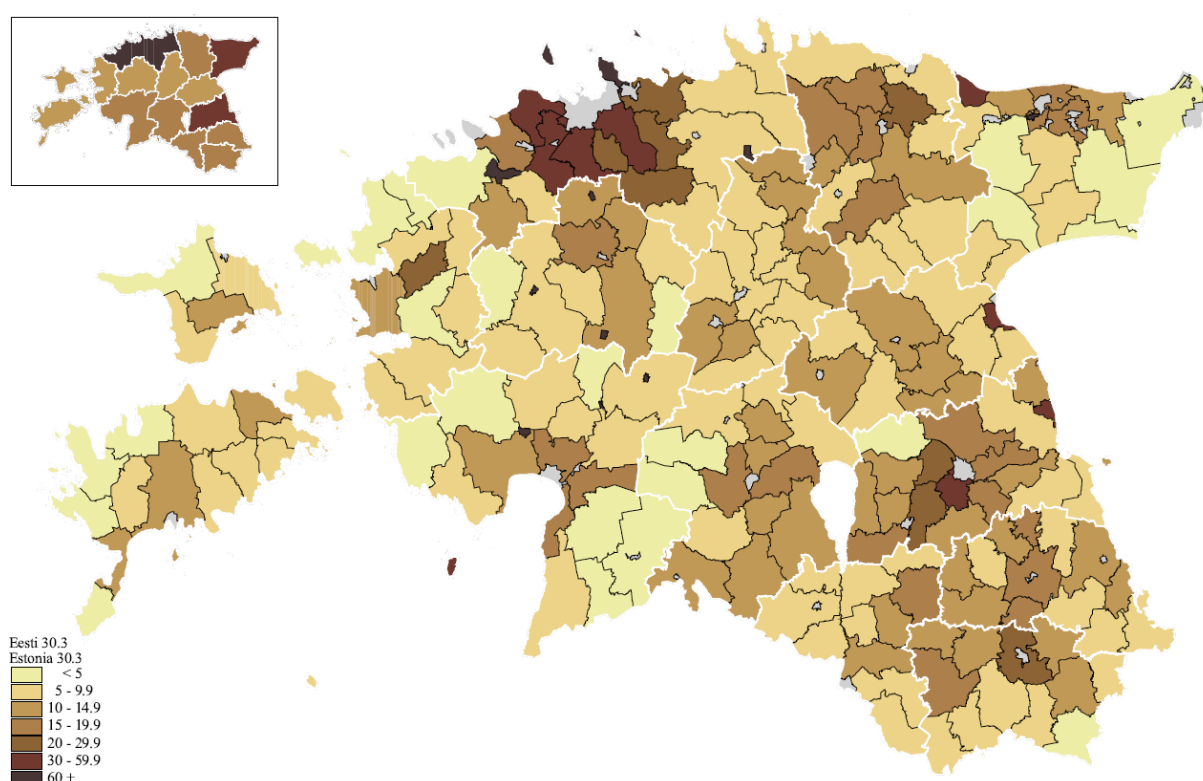
A country's population is never uniformly distributed over the territory and population density can change variably over time in different regions – some areas of agglomeration may become depopulated in subsequent periods. The concentration or dispersion of population at different locations within a country's territory is faster if supported by migration (both external and internal migration). Most of the censuses have included a question on the previous place of residence and/or length of stay at a place of residence. In the Soviet era, the question on the place of birth, which also helps to draw conclusions about people's origin and migration, was included only in the 1989 census.

One of the main parameters describing the geographic distribution of population is the division into urban and rural population. In the period 1881–2000, the share of urban population in Estonia increased considerably. A similar trend occurred in most countries. With advances in technology, fewer workers were required in agriculture while additional labour was needed by the industrial sector and later also the service sector developing mainly in cities. In 1881, the urban population comprised only 13% of all inhabitants in Estonia, while 68% of the people lived in cities over a century later, in 2000. This indicator was 3.5 percentage points higher in 1989, but the large-scale emigration in the early 1990s meant that many Russian immigrants, who were mainly living in cities, left Estonia.

Table 2. Urban and rural population in census years

	Urban population	Share of urban population, %	Rural population	Share of rural population, %	Tallinn	Tartu	Pärnu
1881	114 230	13.0	767 225	87.0	50 488	29 974	12 966
1897	148 778	15.5	809 573	84.5	64 572	42 308	12 898
1922	298 873	27.0	791 934	71.5	122 419	50 342	18 499
1934	349 826	31.1	767 535	68.1	137 792	58 876	20 334
1959	675 515	56.4	521 276	43.6	281 714	74 263	41 029
1970	881 168	65.0	474 911	35.0	369 583	90 459	50 224
1979	1 016 826	69.4	447 650	30.6	441 800	104 381	54 051
1989	1 118 829	71.5	446 833	28.5	499 421	113 420	56 937
2000	931 888	68.0	438 164	32.0	400 378	101 169	45 500

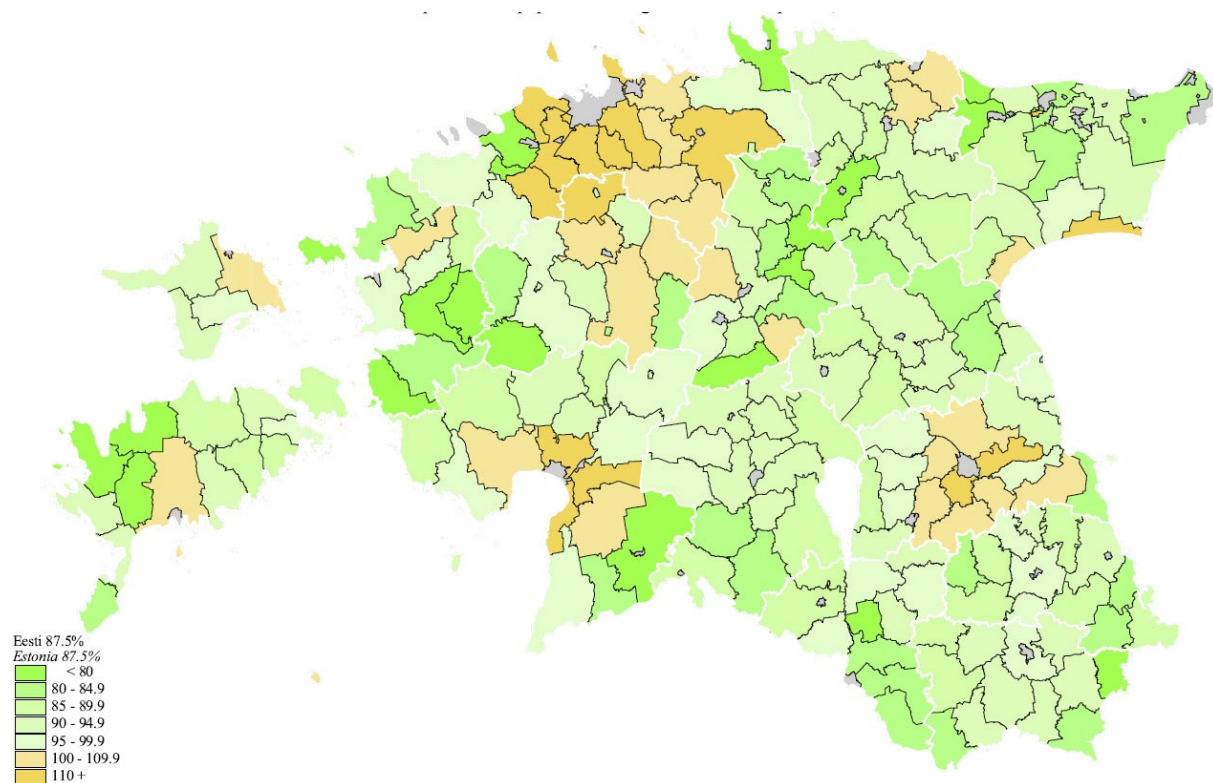
Thematic map 1. Population density (inhabitants per km²), 2000



The population of Tallinn underwent an almost eightfold increase over the period 1881–2000. The growth was the fastest in the period 1897–1922 and in the Soviet era, especially in the 1950s. Population growth in Tartu was slower and steadier, without any sudden surges, but Tartu’s population still more than tripled in these 120 years. The population of Pärnu increased sharply after World War II due to immigration. As a result, the population decline in the 1990s was proportionally higher in Tallinn and Pärnu – the city of Tartu lost one tenth of its population after the restoration of independence, while Pärnu and Tallinn lost two tenths. There was also rapid growth in the cities of Ida-Viru county, which were among the main destinations of immigration in addition to Tallinn, the capital. For example, the population of the city of Narva tripled over the period of 1922 to 1989.

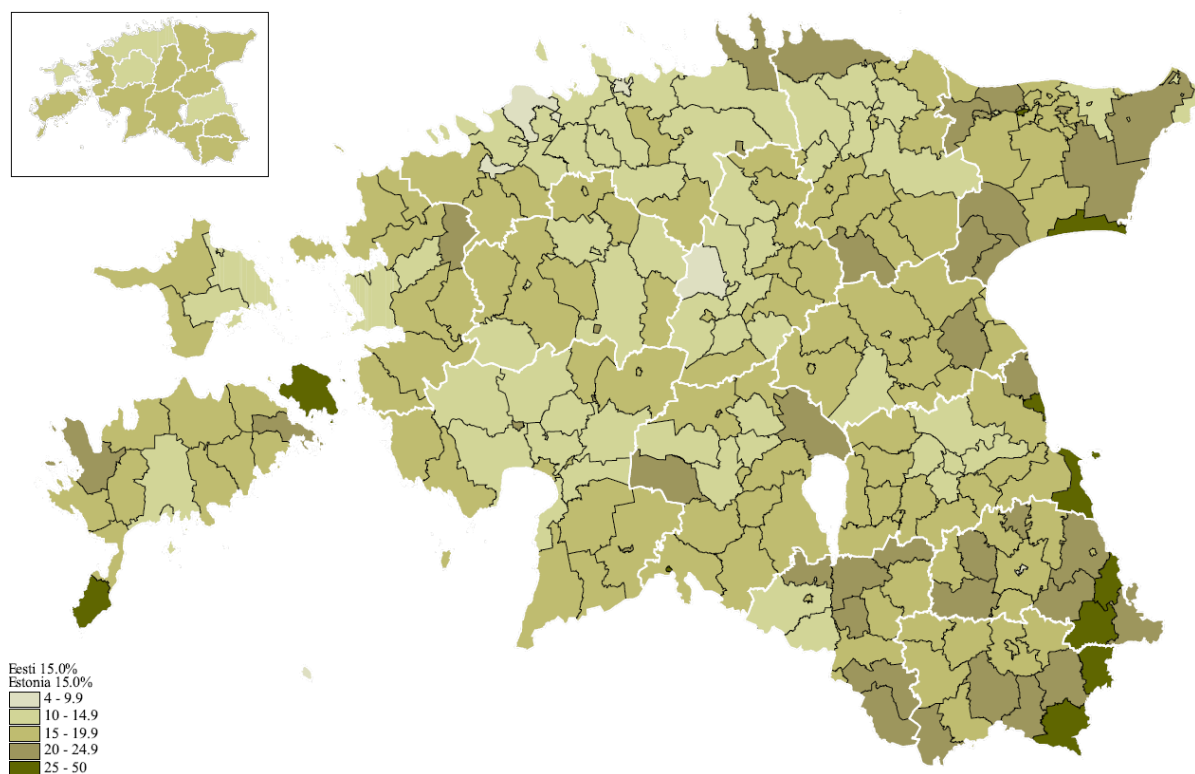
Emigration from Estonia at the beginning of the 1990s varied across different regions, with more than 70% of the emigrants coming from Harju and Ida-Viru counties. The number of emigrants in Tartu and Lääne-Viru counties was also somewhat higher than in other counties. This means that emigration was most extensive in the counties that had had the highest numbers of immigrants and where large industrial plants and military facilities were located.

Thematic map 2. Change in population in counties, 1989–2000



In the 2000 census, respondents were asked to specify their place of residence at the time of the previous census of 1989. The responses help to track the internal migration of the Estonian population and the origins of people who came from abroad.

Thematic map 3. Change of place of residence, 1989–2000



Sex and age structure

The sex distribution of the population indicates that the number of women has been considerably higher than the number of men in all census years. However, the results are not as uniform when sex distribution by age is considered – at birth, the number of boys was usually higher and the share of women only increased at a later age. The difference between the share of men and women was smaller in the 19th century, as childbirth was a major risk factor for women at the time. The first post-war census in 1959 indicated that there were 128 women per 100 men. This is the largest recorded difference in the period 1881–2000 and can be explained by the fact that many men died in the 1940s.

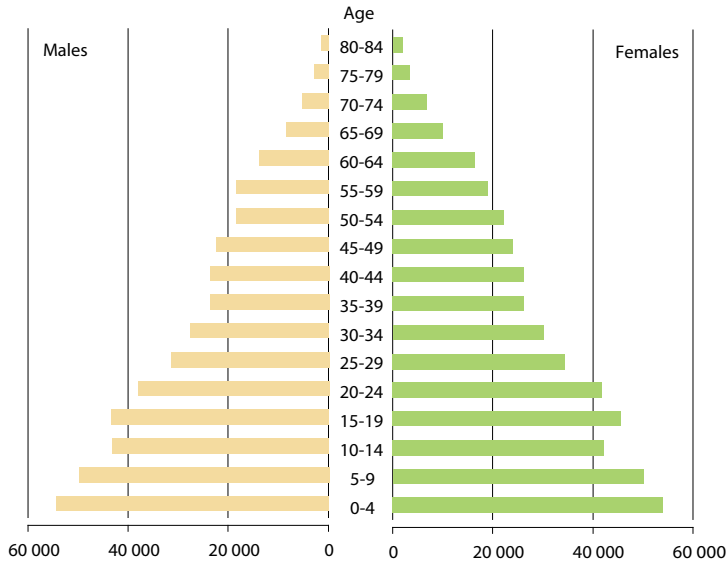
Table 3. Sex distribution of the population in census years

	Males	Females	Females per 100 males
1881	425 342	456 113	107
1897	463 145	495 206	107
1922	520 239	586 820	113
1934	528 888	597 525	113
1959	525 090	671 701	128
1970	620 195	735 884	119
1979	677 274	787 202	116
1989	731 392	834 270	114
2000	631 851	738 201	117

Figure 2 indicates the sex and age structure of the population as recorded in the 1881 census. It has the standard structure: younger generations are larger and the sizes of older generations decrease steadily. A population pyramid with such a shape is characteristic of a population before demographic transition, when both birth and death rates are high.

Demographic transition is the transition of a population from the traditional to the modern type of population reproduction. It means the transition from population reproduction with high death and birth rates to reproduction with low death and birth rates. Every population strives to have the existing generations replaced by new generations. According to the theory of demographic transition, all populations in the world go through a transition from the traditional to the modern type of population reproduction, but this occurs at different times and at different speed.

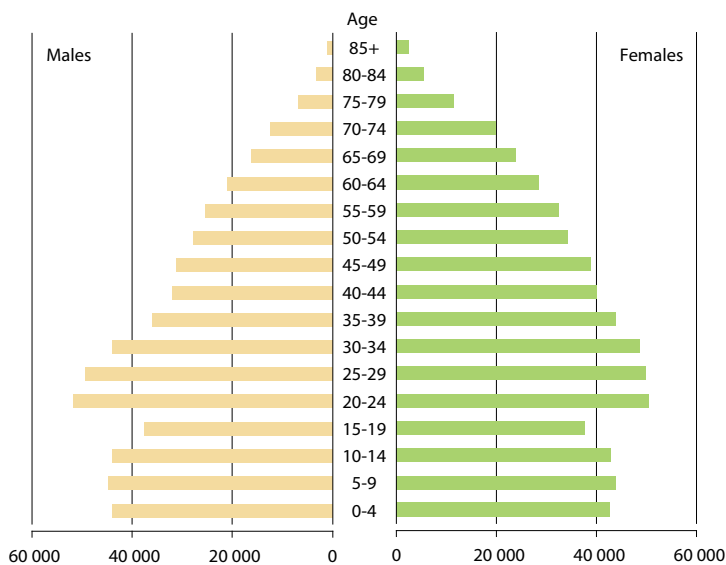
Figure 2. Sex and age structure of the population, 1881



By the time of the 1922 census, the population had already entered the process of ageing. In the pyramid, the number of children aged 0–9 was lower than the number of people in older age groups. The factors contributing to changes in the population included the War of Independence, World War I, the emigration of military workers of the Russian Empire, and the return of Estonians from Russia.

By 1934, Estonia was a country with a stable population.

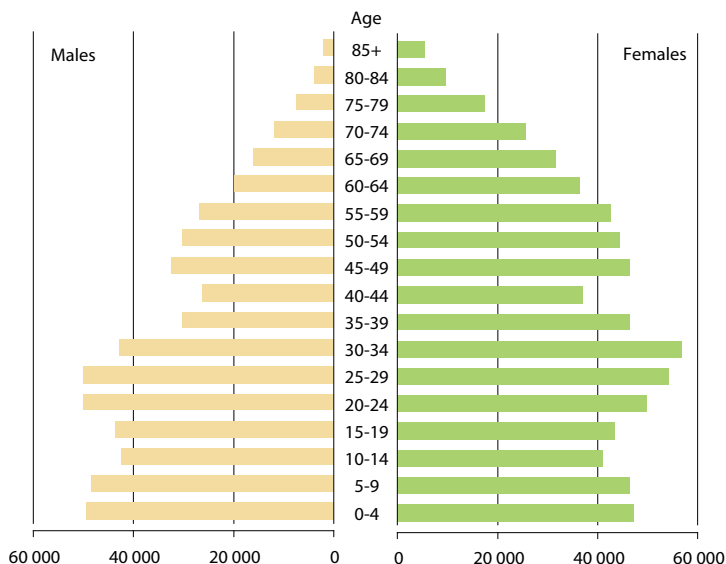
Figure 3. Sex and age structure of the population, 1934



The population pyramid for the year 1941 already indicated human losses, especially among working-age men and women. Estonia's population between this and the next census can only be estimated.

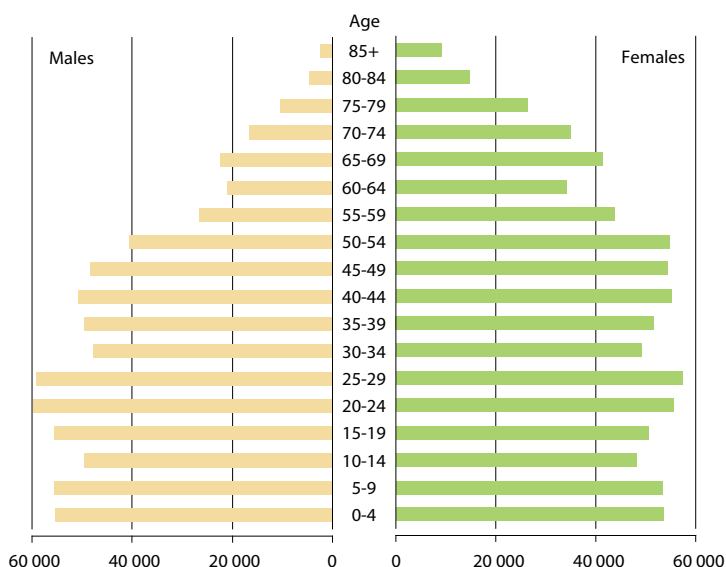
By 1959, Estonia had lost about 5% of the population due to diminished territory. The pyramid shows gaps associated with war losses and a decreased birth rate. The increased share of the working-age population was mainly caused by extensive labour immigration at the end of the 1940s and in the 1950s, mainly from the territory of Russia.

Figure 4. Sex and age structure of the population, 1959



The population pyramid of 1979 indicates several larger waves of immigration. The large number of immigrants had a significant impact on the age structure of the Estonian population, because the share of young people among the immigrants was significantly higher than in the local population, resulting in a marked increase in the generation aged 20–30. Every large wave of immigration boosted this age group the most. The immigration of young people (i.e. people most likely to start a family) meant that the number of children was also relatively high.

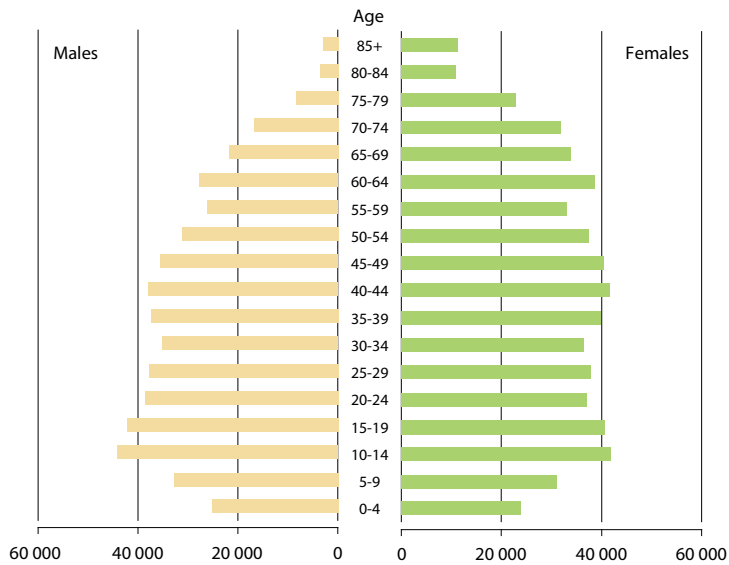
Figure 5. Sex and age structure of the population, 1979



The population pyramid based on data from the 2000 census still reflects most of the waves caused by immigration over the 50 years of Soviet rule. In addition, the figure shows a decreasing number of

children after the restoration of independence. The birth rate probably fell due to two reasons: women's higher age at childbirth and unfavourable economic conditions.

Figure 6. Sex and age structure of the population, 2000



Ethnicity and mother tongue

Before World War II, Estonia was ethnically one of the most homogeneous regions in Europe: 88% of the people living in the territory of the Republic of Estonia in 1934 were Estonians. If we consider only the territory within the current state borders (excluding Petseri county and areas east of the Narva River), the share of Estonians was even higher at 92%. Most of the ethnic minorities originated from regions that were geographically and culturally quite close to Estonia, and had usually been living in Estonia for a long time. Most of them also spoke Estonian.

Figure 7. Population of Estonians, Russians and other ethnic nationalities, 1881–2010

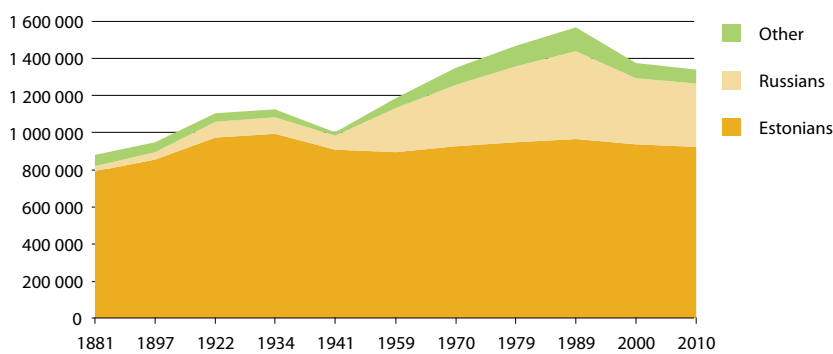
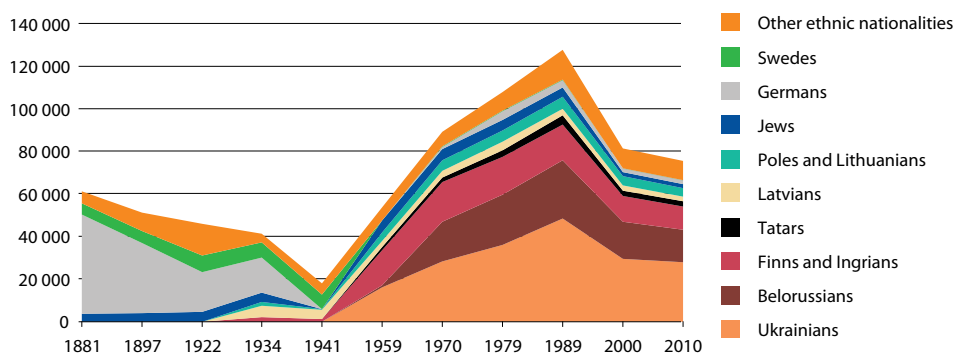


Figure 8. Ethnic minorities in Estonia (excl. Russians), 1881–2010



World War II caused severe losses for the Estonian population. The number of Estonians decreased in the period 1939–1945 due to both voluntary and forced departure from the country. World War II also caused the disappearance of the majority of ethnic minorities in Estonia: most of the Germans and Swedes left Estonia immediately before or during the war; the Jewish community was completely destroyed during the first months of the German occupation; the number of Latvians decreased considerably after the mixed-population rural municipalities in Petseri county were annexed by Russia in 1945. After World War II, the share of Estonians in Estonia was 97%. The years 1946 and 1947 saw an extremely large number of immigrants arriving from the Soviet Union. Most of them were ethnic Russians, but there were also Ukrainians and Belarusians. Most of the immigrants were blue-collar workers, mid-level engineers and military personnel.

Although World War II caused the very extensive emigration of people who had been born elsewhere, the share of Estonians decreased to 62% by 1989 due to mass immigration. These immigrants mainly settled in larger cities. In the 1990s, the share of Estonians rose again, reaching 68%, with the exception of the cities in Ida-Viru county where the share of Estonians continued to fall (Table 2).

Table 4. Change in the share of Estonians according to censuses, 1934–2000

Year	Urban population			Rural population	Total population
	Total	Tallinn	Narva, Kohtla-Järve, Sillamäe		
1934	85.0	85.8	64.8	89.6	88.2
1959	61.9	60.2	27.6	91.0	74.6
1970	57.4	55.7	21.0	88.2	68.2
1979	54.7	51.9	16.7	87.5	64.7
1989	51.2	47.4	12.9	87.4	61.5
2000	56.6	53.7	9.4	91.3	67.9