

Dwellings in Estonia according to Census Data

Terminology related to dwellings

A dwelling can be a single-family home (detached or semi-detached), a terraced house unit, an apartment or any other separated living space, which is suitable for permanent habitation and meets the commonly accepted minimum social and technical standards. Usually, 'dwelling' is synonymous with the concept of 'home'. The number and quality of dwellings in Estonia can be assessed through censuses and, in the period between censuses, through registers (Register of Construction Works). In addition, various social surveys provide information on the living conditions of households. The data in registers are based on documents submitted by residents and pertaining to dwellings (such as building permits and permits for use of construction works), whereas censuses enable to determine the total number and quality of dwellings directly through enumeration and the statements of respondents. In Estonia, dwellings have been enumerated during the censuses of 1922, 1934, 1989 and 2000.

In the census of 2000, a **dwelling** was defined as a housing unit designed for all-year-round habitation by a single household and not used, as a unit, for any other purposes at the time of the census. In addition, the definition of dwellings included housing units that were not designed for permanent habitation, but were used as a place of residence by at least one person at the census moment. Dwellings were further divided into conventional, non-conventional and accommodation dwellings. **Conventional dwellings** included family dwellings and parts thereof, apartments, and separate rooms. All conventional dwellings were enumerated, irrespective of whether somebody lived there during the census or not. **Non-conventional dwellings** included various rooms adapted for habitation (warehouses, mills, garages, etc.), summer cottages not suitable for all-year-round habitation, caravans, boat houses and ships, if these were used as a place of usual residence by at least one household at the census moment. **Accommodation dwellings** included dormitories, hotels, camping sites, sports and recreation centres, holiday resorts, guesthouses and other rooms designed, in principle, for temporary use (not owned by the household living there), but permanently inhabited by at least one person at the census moment.

Why do we need to study dwellings?

A home is one of the basic human necessities and its size, location, condition, level of amenities and suitability for the household are important indicators of the quality of life. In addition to the direct welfare of residents, the existence and quality of a dwelling are also related to wider social gains. Good living conditions increase the sense of security and social cohesion in the society as a whole. Conversely, poor living conditions are often associated with financial difficulties and the poverty risk of households, and can also cause certain health problems for residents. The location of the dwelling determines the availability of various services (shopping, education, medical care, hobby clubs), and the local community where the household belongs. A dwelling of poor quality or in a disadvantaged location can cause social exclusion – such buildings are often found in specific city districts or neighbourhoods. They are mainly inhabited by underprivileged households, while wealthier households tend to be concentrated in other areas. Problems with the availability of dwellings, unsuitable living conditions, and lack of social housing all contribute to homelessness and increase in crime.

The appropriate number, location and condition of dwellings in a country depend on the number and composition of households in different regions as well as on the socially accepted minimum standards for dwellings. Unfortunately, not all households live in dwellings that are suitable for them, and certain groups are more affected by problems associated with housing availability. For instance, it is more difficult for single people, single parents, families with many children and young families to become owners of a suitable dwelling.

How many dwellings are there in Estonia?

According to the 2000 census, there were 628,615 dwellings in Estonia, which means 459 dwellings per 1,000 inhabitants. Of these, 98.2% or 617,399 dwellings were conventional dwellings, 1% were accommodation dwellings and 0.2% were non-conventional dwellings. The exact type could not be identified in case of 0.6% of the dwellings. As conventional dwellings constituted the majority of dwellings and descriptive data were collected only on this type of dwellings, the following discussion will be restricted to conventional dwellings and the term 'dwelling' will be used to refer to conventional dwellings.

Given their larger population, urban settlements (cities and towns) had more dwellings than rural settlements (small towns and villages). In 2000, two thirds of dwellings were located in urban areas and one third in rural areas. Over one third of the dwellings were located in Harju county, followed by Ida-Viru and Tartu counties.

Occupied dwellings

A total of 565,441 households lived in the dwellings in 2000. It means that the number of dwellings was almost ten percent higher than the number of households. Since dwellings with no permanent residents were also enumerated during the 2000 census, the difference between the number of dwellings and the number of households was primarily due to unoccupied dwellings. However, the majority of dwellings (87.1% or 537,907 dwellings) were occupied, meaning that they were used by at least one permanent resident. The number of occupied dwellings was slightly lower than the number of households, as it is possible for several households to live in one dwelling.

The share of occupied dwellings was higher in regions with a higher level of economic activity (large cities and their surrounding areas) and lower in rural areas. In some regions, the vacancy of dwellings had also been caused by the departure of former Soviet military staff as well as by emigration and other factors. The share of dwellings with no permanent inhabitants was more than half on the islands of Ruhnu and Vormsi, in the rural municipalities of Ida-Viru county by the Russian border, and in some coastal rural municipalities in Northern Estonia.

Dwellings according to previous censuses

The first time that the dwellings in Estonia were enumerated was during the 1922 census. To an extent, dwellings were also studied in the 1881 census, but data comparisons with the 1922 census are possible only in case of the cities that were part of the Estonian province in 1881. Increasing overpopulation in rural areas, the creation of new jobs in cities as a result of industrial development, and immigration caused the movement of people to urban centres and the rapid development of cities at the end of the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century. The number of dwellings tripled in Tallinn and Rakvere and doubled in Paide in the period between the two censuses. The increase was relatively slow in Paldiski and Haapsalu where the number of dwellings increased roughly by half.

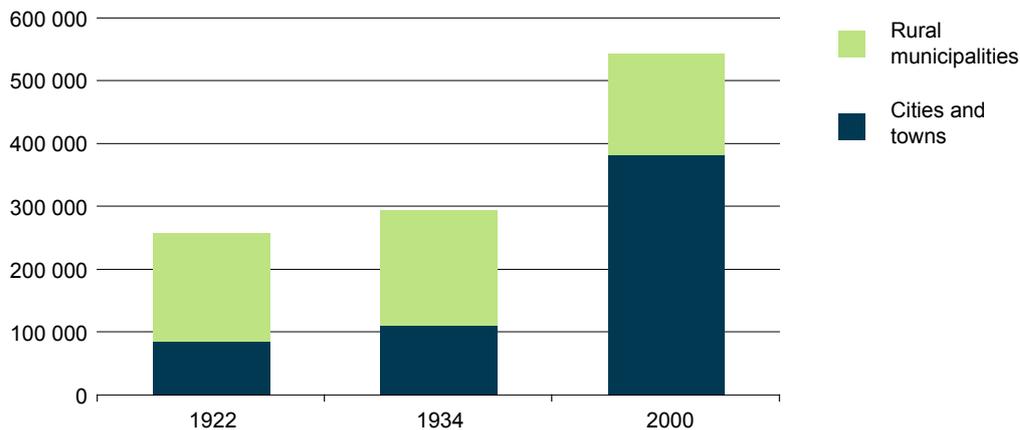
Table 1. Number of dwellings in Estonian cities, 1881 and 1922

	Tallinn	Paldiski	Rakvere	Paide	Haapsalu	Total
1881	10,997	208	785	441	749	13,180
1922	32,448	315	2,290	855	1,259	37,167
Increase, %	195	51	192	94	68	182

There were 252,480 occupied dwellings in Estonia in 1922, with one third located in urban and two thirds in rural areas. If vacant dwellings (which were also enumerated) are included, the total number of dwellings increases by 2%. During the 1922 census, detailed data on dwellings were collected only in cities and towns, because the shortage of dwellings was particularly severe in these areas.

The distribution of population between rural and urban areas became more balanced during Estonia's first period of independence, as a result of economic restructuring and land reform. Compared to 1922, the share of dwellings in urban areas increased by less than one third in 1934, while the number of rural dwellings remained virtually unchanged. The total number of dwellings increased by 15% in the period between the censuses.

Figure 1. Occupied dwellings in urban and rural settlements, 1922, 1934, 2000



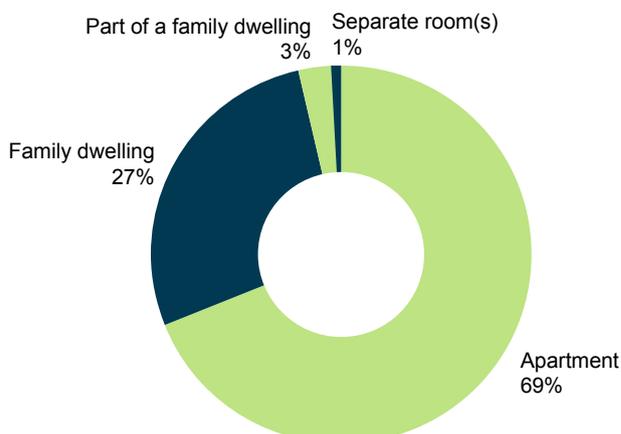
In the Soviet era, industrial development and large-scale immigration once again contributed to the rapid growth of cities, where many big apartment buildings were built. This increased the total number of dwellings. According to the 1989 census, there were 544,922 occupied dwellings in Estonia.^a

Towards the end of the Soviet era, construction in cities slowed down and the size of the rural population started to increase. The period after Estonia regained its independence was characterised by the increasing importance of the service sector, which facilitated the urbanisation of the population. At the same time, the increase in urban population was counterbalanced by the emigration of non-Estonians from Tallinn and the cities in North Eastern Estonia, and by increased housing development in the vicinity of cities. Also, there were several changes in Estonia's administrative division. By the time of the 2000 census, the period of restored independence had not been long enough for any significant changes to occur in the geographic distribution of dwellings. In 2000, over 70% of dwellings were located in cities. In 66 years, the share of urban and rural dwellings had been reversed. The number of dwellings in rural areas had remained roughly at the same level, while the number of dwellings in cities had increased 3.5 times.

Type of dwelling

People's living conditions largely depend on the type of their dwelling. The type of dwelling is associated with the dwelling's size and the amenities available – single-family dwellings are generally larger, while apartments tend to offer more amenities. The increasing importance of cities has meant that an apartment is currently the main type of dwelling. According to the 2000 census, apartments constituted more than two thirds of all dwellings in Estonia (424,768 units in total). The share of family dwellings (small houses with a single residential space, incl. farmhouses, semi-detached and terraced house units) was less than one third of all dwellings. Family dwellings divided into several separate residential spaces, and private rooms in dormitory-type houses (which were not used as an accommodation dwelling at the time of the census) constituted a relatively small share of dwellings. These two types of dwellings are usually included in the categories of family dwellings and apartments, respectively.

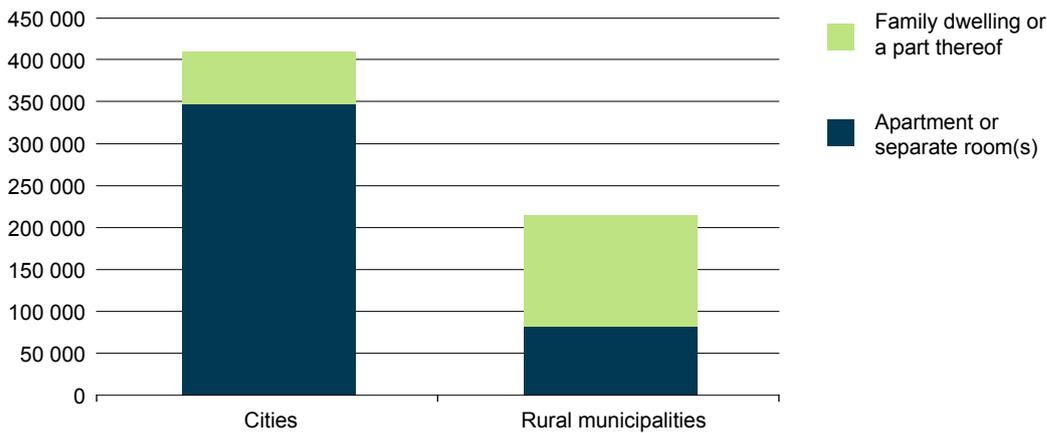
Figure 2. Dwellings by type, 2000



^a As a different methodology was used for the collection of dwelling data in 1989, direct comparisons with the data of 2000 cannot be made. This difference was also the main reason why the number of occupied dwellings was higher by 7,015 in 1989.

Apartment was the main type of dwelling in cities, accounting for 85% of urban dwellings. The increase in the number of urban dwellings was the fastest during the period of mass construction in the Soviet era, with the majority of new dwellings located in large multi-storeyed apartment buildings. Even though a considerable number of apartment buildings were also built in the rural municipalities surrounding cities and in collective farm centres, their number was still modest compared to cities. In 2000, the share of apartments in rural municipalities was more than two times lower than in cities, and four fifths of all apartments were located in cities. Family dwelling was the dominant type of dwelling in rural municipalities, with a share of just below two thirds. Conversely, family dwellings constituted only a small portion of dwellings in cities. Only one third of all family dwellings were located in cities.

Figure 3. Dwelling types in cities and rural municipalities, 2000

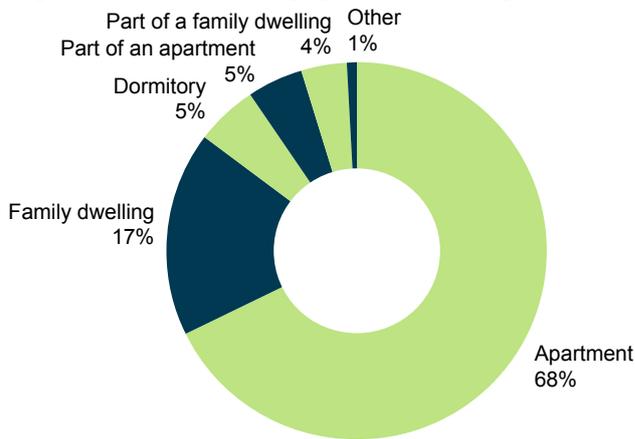


Looking at individual counties, we can see that the Soviet-era apartment policy had the least impact in Hiiu and Saare counties – in 2000, the share of family dwellings in Hiiu county was as high as two thirds of all dwellings. Even though this can partially be explained by the low level of urbanisation in these counties, the share of family dwellings was higher even when urban and rural dwellings were considered separately. This reflects the fact that living arrangements were indeed different on the islands. Among mainland counties, larger shares of family dwellings were registered in Põlva, Jõgeva, Rapla and Võru counties, where apartments constituted less than a half of all dwellings. Ida-Viru and Harju counties were at the opposite end, as the share of family dwellings in those counties was less than one fifth of all dwellings. Apartments were particularly predominant in the cities of Ida-Viru county, constituting up to 95% of all dwellings.

The distribution of inhabitants by dwelling type was similar to the distribution of dwellings. According to the 2000 census, 70% of people (i.e. 931,000 persons) lived in apartments and 27% (i.e. 404,000 persons) lived in family dwellings. 83% of city residents lived in apartments, while 59% of rural residents lived in family dwellings.

Unlike in the 2000 census, the determination of dwelling type in the 1989 census depended on whether the dwelling was occupied by one or several families (or single persons). In addition to conventional dwellings, the 1989 census also covered the population living in dormitories. Therefore, the results of the two latest censuses are not fully comparable. According to the 1989 census, the share of people living in apartments did not differ from the corresponding indicator in 2000 – more than two thirds (70%), or nearly 1.07 million people, were living in apartment buildings. However, family dwelling was much less common as a type of dwelling in 1989, with only one fifth of inhabitants living in this type of dwelling.

Figure 4. Population by type of dwelling, 1989

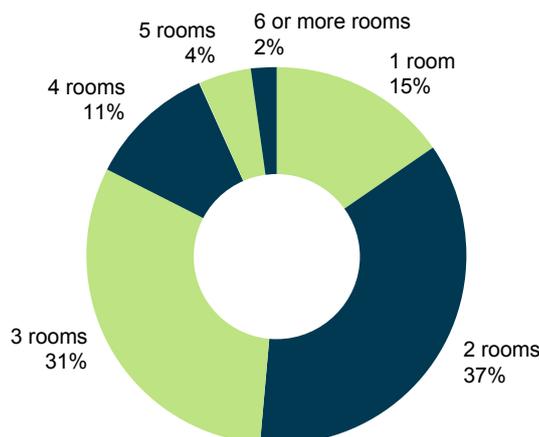


The 1989 census also covered the population living in dormitories, which was divided into three groups: (1) students living in the dormitories of higher education institutions and vocational schools; (2) employees and their families housed in the dormitories of enterprises; and (3) the residents of care homes. The total number of inhabitants living in dormitories was almost 80,000, which was slightly over 5% of the total population. If we were to disregard the people living in dormitories and non-residential premises, as was done in the 2000 census, the share of people living in apartments in 1989 would actually be higher. In that case, 77% of the people lived in an apartment and 23% in a family dwelling. Compared to 2000, the number of people living in apartments was higher, while family dwellings were less common at the end of the Soviet era. The change in the structure of dwellings was partially caused by a faster decrease in the population of cities due to the emigration of non-Estonians, and also by the decreasing share of new housing developments in cities.

How many rooms do dwellings have?

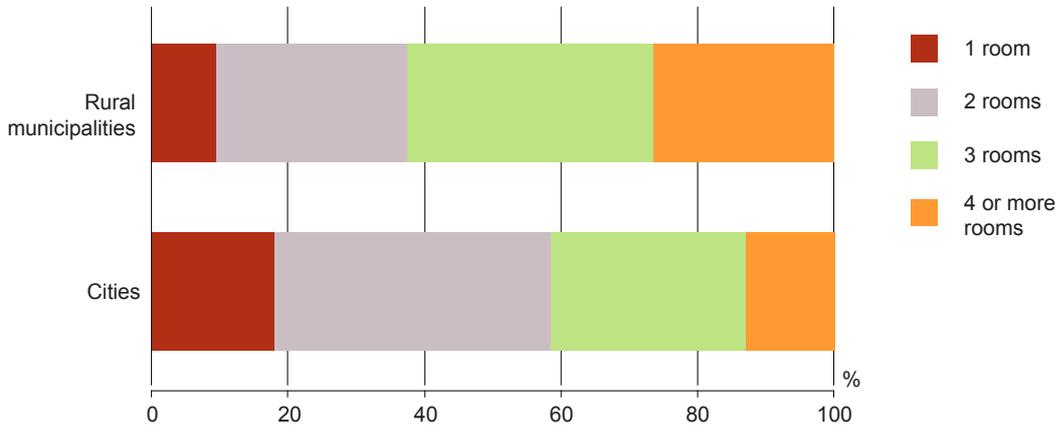
The size of the dwelling (the number of rooms) is an important indicator of the quality of the dwelling. On the one hand, a larger dwelling means better living conditions but, on the other hand, it also leads to higher housing expenses. The size of a dwelling is largely dependent on the location, time of construction and type of the building. Estonia's dwelling stock has been strongly affected by the standard apartments, built during the Soviet era according to standardised designs, which often were not adequate for the size or actual needs of households. As a consequence, smaller-sized dwellings were still predominant in 2000. Dwellings with 1 to 3 rooms constituted 82% of all dwellings, with dwellings with two or three rooms being the most common. The share of dwellings with four or five rooms was more or less the same as the share of dwellings with one room (15%), and only 2% of dwellings had six or more rooms. The average number of rooms in a dwelling was 2.6. Apartments were generally smaller than family dwellings, with 2.3 and 3.5 rooms, respectively. The majority (92%) of dwellings in apartment buildings had 1 to 3 rooms, while more than half of single-family homes had three or four rooms.

Figure 5. Dwellings by number of rooms, 2000



The average number of rooms per dwelling was significantly bigger in rural municipalities than in cities, with 3 and 2.4 rooms, respectively. In cities, dwellings with one room constituted a fifth of all dwellings, whereas only every tenth dwelling was of such a small size in rural municipalities. Large dwellings with at least four rooms were more likely to be found in rural areas, with every fourth dwelling being of this size. Regional differences can mainly be associated with the different share of apartment buildings and small residential buildings in cities and rural municipalities. It is notable that single-family homes in cities tended to have more rooms than similar houses in rural municipalities. The opposite was true for apartment buildings – rural apartments were, on average, larger than apartments in cities.

Figure 6. Dwellings by number of rooms and location, 2000



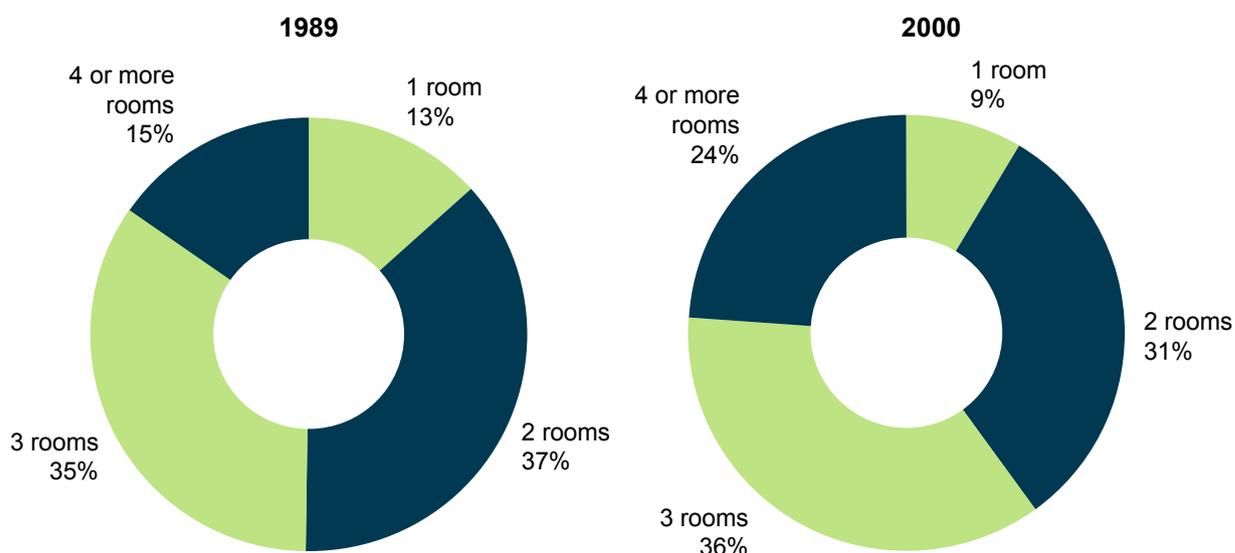
Number of rooms according to previous censuses

The number of smaller dwellings increased rapidly in cities at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. For example, the number of apartments with one room had increased 3.5 times in Tallinn between the censuses of 1881 and 1922, while the number of larger dwellings had only doubled in the same period. In 1922, dwellings with one room constituted two thirds of all dwellings in cities. The 1922 census did not collect data on the size of dwellings in rural areas.

Similarly, in 1934, the majority of dwellings had 1 to 3 rooms, and dwellings with at least four rooms constituted a quarter of all dwellings. Even back then, larger dwellings were more likely to be found in rural settlements and smaller dwellings in cities, but regional differences were not as large as in 2000. Since in the 1934 census dwelling data were only collected on occupied dwellings and the kitchen was also counted as a room, the data from different censuses are not fully comparable.

If the inhabitants of dormitories are disregarded, the data of the 1989 census indicate that half of the population lived in dwellings with 1 or 2 rooms, whereas 15% of the people had a dwelling with just one room. Only 15% of the population could afford a dwelling with more than three rooms. As a result of improved living conditions and changes in the type of buildings constructed, the average size of dwellings had slightly increased by the time of the last census, with almost a quarter of the population living in dwellings with at least four rooms.

Figure 7. Population by number of rooms in the dwelling, 1989 and 2000



Own room for everyone?

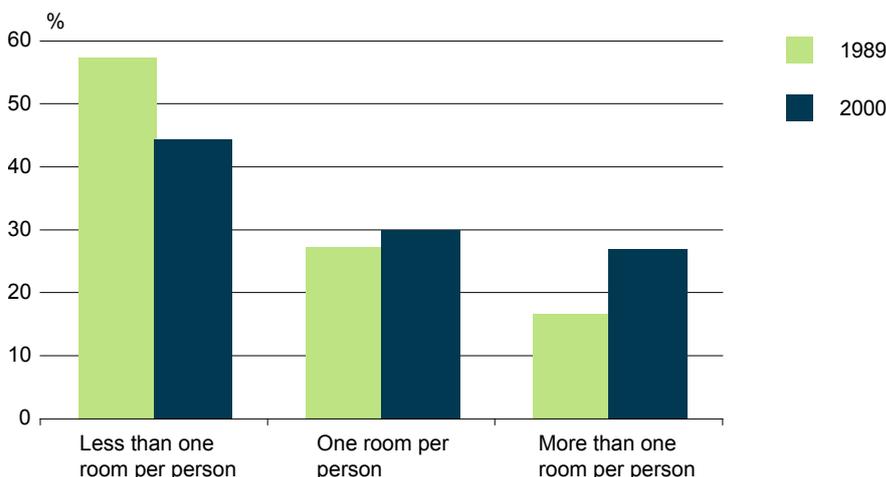
The privacy offered by a dwelling is an important indicator of the quality of life. The number of rooms alone does not reveal much about the living conditions of the inhabitants. The number of rooms suitable for a given household depends on the size of the household. For instance, an apartment with two rooms can be sufficient for two pensioners but is probably too small for a family with three children. The adequacy of the dwelling for the needs of the household is best reflected by the number of rooms per household member, or **crowding**. It is considered desirable for every household member to have their own room, with at least one additional room for shared use. The level of crowding is considered to be normal if the number of rooms equals the number of household members, and a dwelling is regarded as overcrowded if there are fewer rooms than inhabitants.

According to the 2000 census, there were, on average, 1.1 rooms per person in Estonia. This indicator was much smaller in apartments (compared to family dwellings) with less than one room per inhabitant. As the share of apartments was higher in cities, cities also had a smaller average dwelling size and fewer rooms per inhabitant than rural areas.

In 2000, a large part of the Estonian population had to live in relatively cramped conditions. 44% of the people lived in an overcrowded dwelling. Only about a quarter of the population lived in dwellings so large that the number of rooms exceeded the number of household members. This situation was more common among people living in rural areas and family dwellings. As the share of wealthy people was higher in cities, the living conditions were most spacious for residents of urban family dwellings, where the number of rooms exceeded the number of inhabitants in half of the cases. Overcrowding was the worst in the apartments in rural municipalities, where more than half of the inhabitants were able to use less than one room per person.

Compared to the 1989 census, living conditions had slightly improved by 2000, with fewer people living in overcrowded dwellings, since the share of family dwellings and their inhabitants had increased. Also, the average size of new dwellings (which is closely related to the number of rooms) had increased. Other factors contributing to more spacious living conditions were the fall in birth rate and decrease in average household size.

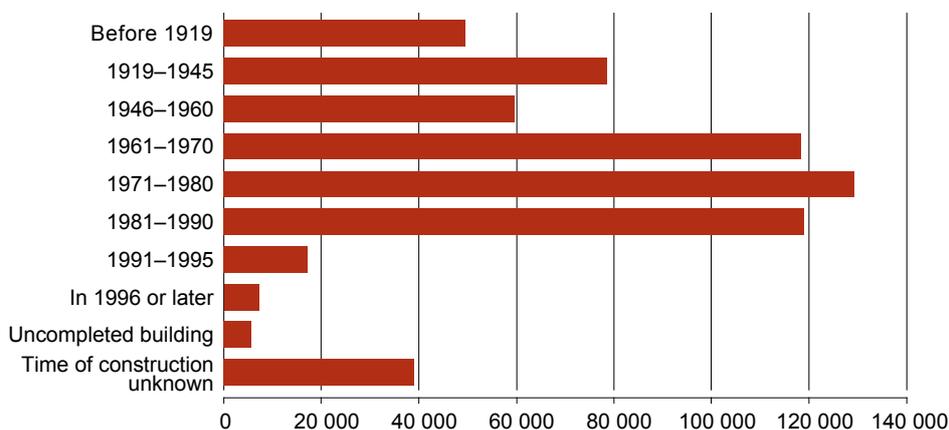
Figure 8. Population crowding, 1989 and 2000



When were the dwellings built?

The age of dwellings is the most important indicator of living conditions. The time of construction of the building often determines the size, quality and condition of the dwelling as well as the available amenities. Data on the time of construction, combined with building type and dwelling characteristics, provide an overview of the development of settlements and the volume of construction activity at different times and in different regions. Unfortunately, the collection of information on the time of construction is quite difficult, as residents are often unable to answer such questions. In the 2000 census, the time of construction remained unknown in case of 6.2% of the dwellings. Therefore, the data on the time of construction can only be used for monitoring general trends. When analysing the age of buildings, it is important to note that this does not reflect the number or share of dwellings built in different periods, because some dwellings have been decommissioned or rebuilt into non-residential premises, while some non-residential premises have been adapted for all-year-round habitation.

Figure 9. Dwellings by time of construction, 2000

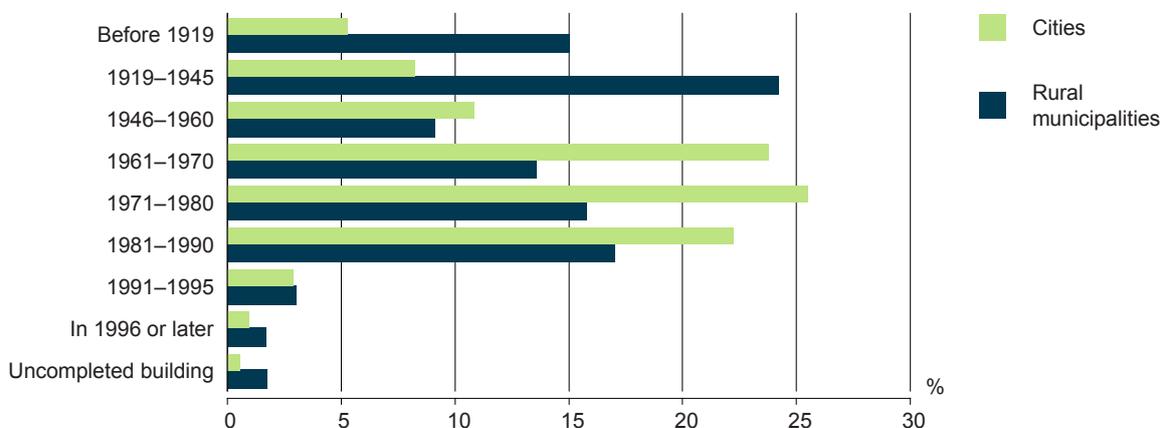


According to the 2000 census, more than a fifth of the dwellings, for which the time of construction was known, were built before 1946. The majority of dwellings were built during the period of mass construction from 1961 to 1990 – almost two thirds of all dwellings were built in this period. The share of new dwellings (built in the 1990s) in the dwelling stock was low – together with uncompleted buildings, they constituted less than 5% of all dwellings.

Where are older dwellings located?

In 2000, the dwellings located in rural municipalities were older, as a rule, whereas cities had significantly newer residential buildings. Among the dwellings with a known time of construction, the share of dwellings built before 1946 was 39% in rural municipalities, compared to just 13% in cities.

Figure 10. Dwellings by time of construction and location, 2000

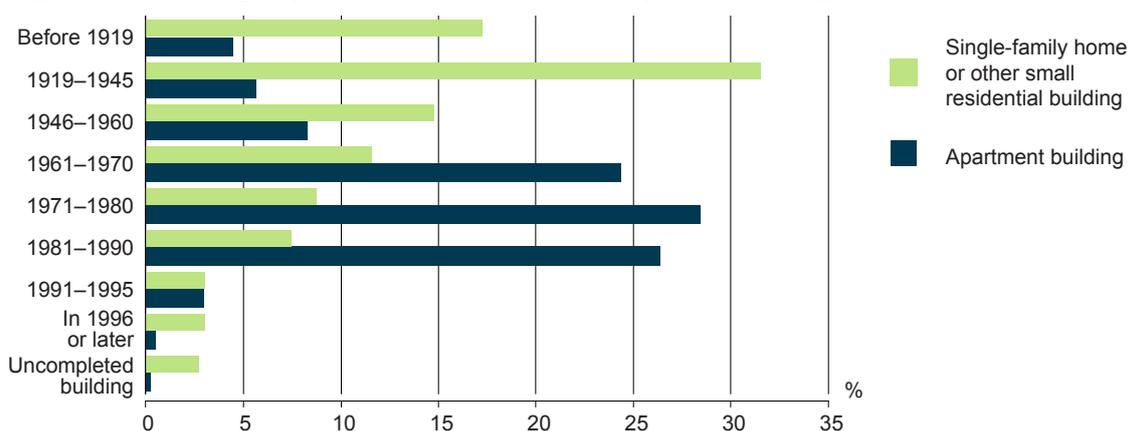


The age structure of dwellings in different regions generally indicates the distribution of population between cities and rural municipalities in different periods. At the beginning of the 20th century, people mainly lived in rural areas, which meant that more residential buildings were constructed in rural areas at that time. More than half (59%) of the dwellings built in that period were located in rural municipalities, according to the data from the 2000 census. Increasing urbanisation, changes in the political regime and economic structure, and the increased number of immigrants led to the construction of new dwellings mainly in cities. The rate of construction was particularly high in the period of 1961 to 1990, with 76% of the dwellings built in that period located in cities. In the 1990s, when the rate of residential construction dropped significantly, the share of new buildings in cities also decreased considerably.

Which buildings have older dwellings?

The age structure and share of apartment buildings and small residential buildings (single-family homes, semi-detached houses, terraced houses) have varied a great deal in different periods. Many small residential buildings were quite old, with as much as half of them built before 1946. Apartments this old constituted only one tenth of the dwelling stock. The number of apartments started to increase due to mass construction in the Soviet era, characterised by standardised designs and a distinct preference for apartment buildings. As much as 79% of all apartments – but only a quarter of small residential buildings – were built between 1961 and 1990. The volume of construction and the types of dwellings built both changed after the end of the Soviet era. After 1996, small residential buildings became, once again, the dominant type among new dwellings.

Figure 11. Dwellings by time of construction and type of building, 2000



Number of rooms in new and old dwellings

Changes in the number of rooms in different periods have mainly been caused by the varying shares of different types of dwellings in a given period, as well as by changes in the size of certain dwelling types. The share of small dwellings with one or two rooms was the greatest in houses built between 1961 and 1970. Dwellings with one or two rooms accounted for almost two thirds of all dwellings built in that period; and the share of new dwellings with four or more rooms was smaller than in any other period considered. The average size of a dwelling was only 2.4 rooms. By that time, the share of dwellings in apartment buildings had risen over 80%. The share of dwellings in apartment buildings continued to increase in the following years, but the average number of rooms per apartment increased as well. New constructions were the primary method for solving the housing shortage in that period – the main focus was on small apartments, with little attention paid to the renovation and maintenance of existing dwellings. Not only did this policy result in too small dwellings, it also meant that residential buildings fell into disrepair relatively fast. The number of rooms per dwelling started to increase again after Estonia regained its independence and abolished former construction regulations, which enabled more people to build single-family homes instead of large apartment buildings. The average number of rooms per dwelling was 3.1 in new constructions built from 1991 to 1995, and rose to 4.1 rooms in dwellings built in 1996 and later. Dwellings with at least four rooms constituted nearly two thirds of the dwellings built from 1996 onwards.

Figure 12. Dwellings by time of construction and number of rooms

