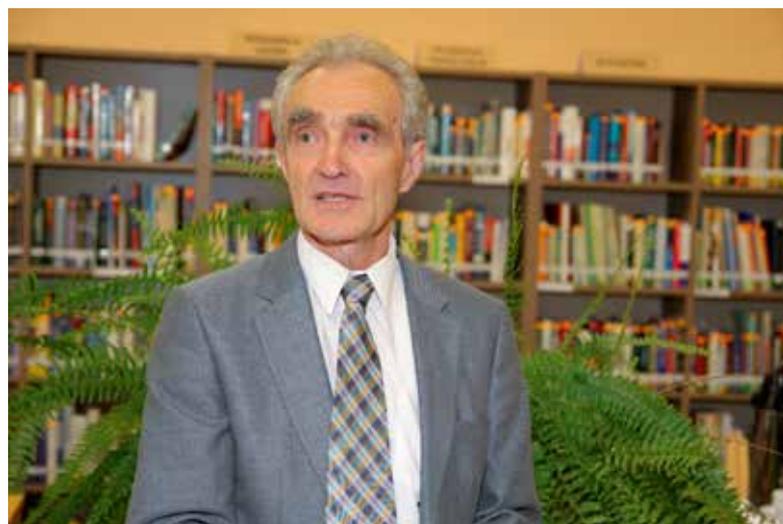


DEMOGRAPHIC DEVELOPMENTS IN LATVIA

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The article seeks to provide a brief overview of demographic developments in Latvia and to sketch potential near-term future developments. The evolution of total population and its composition will be assessed in terms of major demographic processes in our present century.

Already at the end of the Soviet occupation period, population dynamics showed a clear tendency of a falling rate of population growth. At the time of restoring Latvia's national independence in the late 20th century, its population had reached the maximum thus far (2.67 million). On 21 August 1991, the day of the *de facto* restoration of independence, the population of the Republic had already fallen by more than 20 thousand. At the beginning of 2014, the number of residents fell below two million, and,



subsequently, regularly continued to decrease. At present the total population (less than 1.90 million) is even smaller than that at the beginning of 1940. Some 750 000 residents have been lost during the three recent decades of independence.

Table 1. Changes in the population of Latvia from 1991 onwards

Year	Overall change thousands	Including		Relative weight of international migration in the decrease of the number of residents %
		due to natural causes	due to international migration	
1991–1995	–188.6	–51.2	–137.4	72.8
1996–2000	–116.2	–70.4	–45.8	39.4
2001–2005	–125.5	–59.3	–66.2	52.8
2006–2010	–153.2	–44.0	–109.2	71.3
2011–2015	–105.7	–40.2	–65.5	62.0
2016–2019	–61.3	–33.0	–28.3	53.8
2020*	–11.6	–9.6	–2.0	17.2
1991–2020	–762.1	–307.7	–454.4	59.6

Source: CSB database and author's calculations

*Author's estimates (numbers for October–December have been extrapolated)

Table 1 shows that there has been a negative balance of natural movement and international migration. In the period from 2008 to 2017, more residents were lost due to emigration than as a result of excess mortality over birth. Only in the last four years, has the loss of human resources due to outmigration been lower than that due to natural decline.

From the early 1990s onwards, Latvia pursued active diplomatic efforts to have Russian troops leave Latvia, a process which began in March 1992 and was completed on 31 August 1994. A large number of family members of Soviet army officers and security personnel also left during this period of time. The process was facilitated by reluctance of many former immigrants to remain in Latvia due to job losses in former factories and institutions, and also due to their lacking knowledge of the state language.

Exodus of the population was also facilitated by a

drastic change in the economic system and social policy, with a pronounced increase in unemployment as well as numbers of those living in poverty. The economic downturn was pronounced during the first half of the 1990s, and also during the years of economic crisis. Outmigration of the young individuals and middle-aged people was exacerbated by Latvia's accession to the EU in 2004. In the period from 2006 to 2010, the decrease due to migration was 109.2 thousand, or on average, 21.8 thousand per year, accounting for 71% of the total decrease of the population.

The number of registered immigrants has increased significantly over the past decade (an average of 5.6 thousand per year in 2001–2010 (see Table 2), and more than 10 thousand in 2011–2020). On the other hand, there is also a decrease in numbers emigrating, after having reached a definite maximum in 2008–2011.

Table 2. The extent of international migration in over the period 1991–2020

Year	Immigration		Emigration		Net migration flow	
	total	annual average	total	annual average	total	annual average
1991–1995	30 842	6168	168 230	33 646	–137 388	–27 478
1996–2000	17 079	3416	62 844	12 569	–45 765	–9153
2001–2005	27 616	5523	93 833	18 767	–66 217	–13 244
2006–2010	28 149	5630	137 386	27 477	–109 237	–21 847
2011–2015	51 680	10 336	117 171	23 434	–65 491	–13 098
2016–2020	49 355	9871	79 695	15 939	–30 340	–6068
incl: 2016	8345		20 574		–12 229	
2017	9916		17 724		–7808	
2018	10 909		15 814		–4905	
2019	11 223		14 583		–3360	
2020*	8962		11 000		–2038	
1991–2020	204 721	6824	659 159	21 972	–454 438	–15 148

Source: CSB database (in particular the dataset "Long-term migration (ledzīvotāju ilgtermiņa migrācija)" IBG010 etc.) and the author's own calculations

*Author's forecast

It should be noted that many migrants today do not show traditional hallmarks, with a length of stay of more than a year and a change of place of residence. From 2012 onwards, the total population of the Republic of Latvia has been determined by the CSB (Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia) using a logistic regression model. According to this model, the resulting migration indicators are determined from calculations based on data held by various national administrative entities. In the beginning of 2020, 2.08 million people have declared their place of residence in Latvia, but according to CSB estimates, the number of permanent residents is about 180 thousand lower, showing up weaknesses in the records of international migration. The forthcoming census in 2021 will be conducted for the first time on the basis of registered data and administrative units, without recourse to a population survey. There is some reason to believe that the number of inhabitants included in the Population Register is exaggerated, because tens of thousands of people have not cancelled their residence declaration.

In terms of the rate at which depopulation is occurring, Latvia is one of the leading states in the Baltic Sea Basin region, in the EU, and also in the world. Of the ten countries in the Baltic Basin, the population decline in our country has been the fastest, from 1990 onwards (around 30%). In Lithuania, this indicator is comparable, whereas in Estonia the decline has also been high but is lower.

Eurostat recently (2019) compiled data on the developments in the demographic situation in EU member states. The depopulation rate was greater only in Bulgaria. In this list Latvia is followed by Rumania, Croatia and Italy. According to data published by the UN Population Division, Latvia in regard to depopulation rate regularly is located in the list of the top five states and territories so affected. Thus, in 2010–2019, a faster rate of depopulation was found in Syria, Puerto Rico, Lithuania, and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The gender and age structure of the resident population play an important role in the analysis of demographic resources, especially the numerical ratios of men and women at the age of starting a family. The proportion of economically active people, the workload of the population of working age

with children and pensioners, the extent of labour resources, the extent of aging of the population, etc. all depend on quantitative relations between various population age groups of people, etc. The most favourable ratio between the number of men and women in Latvia was found at the end of the 19th century. As a result of the two world wars, not only did the population decrease significantly, but the extent of the disproportion between men and women also increased. At the end of the 1950s, there were one-quarter fewer men than women. The proportion of men in the country (43.9%) was one of the lowest in the world. The numerical relationship between men and women gradually levelled off during peaceful times, but even after restoration of independence, the relative predominance of women has been one of the highest in the world.

It is easy to see systematic aging of the population from analyses of changes in the age structure. The number of children under the age of 14 halved during the years of independence, while for the group working age it fell by almost one-third, and there was a marked increase of the age of retirement. The average age of the population increased from 36 years to 42.5 years (45 years for women, 39 years for men). Latvia is among the leading countries in the world in respect of aging. The rate of the population aging will also continue to be quite high over the coming two to three decades.

Aging of society is an objective and, generally, a progressing phenomenon that reflects global objective issues since transition in society occurs towards a more rational type of generational change, with higher population viability and lower birth rates. However, excessive rates of aging, as observed in Latvia (most notably in Latgale, where the average age of contemporaries has reached 45), lead to serious socio-economic problems. The main reasons for aging of the Latvian population are a declining birth rate, outmigration of young people of working age, and, in part, an increase in life-expectancy. If the number of people in a country decreases and they age, it is important to compensate for these losses, at the very least by raising the quality of human resources, through increasing education, professional training and higher work productivity.

Analysis of the employment rate of the population shows a gradual annual increase up to and including 2008 and a decrease following the economic crisis in 2009–2010. From 2011 onwards, the situation in the labour market has been slowly improving, including lower levels of unemployment (from 16.3% in 2011 to 6.3% in 2019). About half of all employees are women. Labour productivity is also on the rise. At the turn of the century, the value added by workers in our country lagged behind the EU average by 60%; today this gap has shrunk to one-third.

Progress has been made in Latvia in the field of education. The share of persons with higher education among the adult population has increased from 11.5% to one quarter. The average time spent in education has increased to 12 years. The level of education achieved by women is significantly higher than that of men. These gender gaps in education are among the largest in the EU. Lifelong learning is still relatively underdeveloped. In terms of adult education, Latvia lags significantly behind the most economically developed countries. A particularly unfavourable situation has developed with respect to the numbers engaged in research, mainly scarce employment opportunities for doctors of science. If in 1991 there were

about 16 thousand scientists resident in Latvia, now only 3 thousand are at work in the country (in terms of equivalent normal working hours, 5.9 thousand). A critical mass has been lost, one capable of generating ideas and driving a necessary change in a number of scientific disciplines and in society as a whole.

There were approximately 730 thousand families resident in Latvia at the end of the Soviet period. A further 132 thousand family members lived separately from the rest of the family, and a further 251 thousand were single, i.e. without any family members. The approximate number of families has now dropped to 500 thousand; the 2011 census recorded 860 thousand households, with an average number of 2.38 persons per household. This figure is now among the 10 lowest in the world, according to the US Population Reference Bureau (2.2)

Changes in the ethnic make-up of the population and evolution of the titular ethnic group of the population are important aspects in assessing demographic resources. These aspects are especially important for formerly occupied and ethnically diverse countries, a group that includes Latvia. The data of Table 3 shows that the number of Latvians decreased both in the period before and after the turn

Table 3. Dynamics of the number of Latvians and members of the largest minorities, 1989–2020 (at the beginning of each year, thousand people)

Ethnicity	1989	2000	2020	2020 vs 2000	
				thousands	%
Latvians	1387.8	1370.7	1192.3	-178.4	87
Russian	905.5	703.2	471.2	-232.0	67
Belorussian	119.7	97.2	60.1	-37.1	62
Ukrainian	92.1	63.6	42.9	-20.7	67
Poles	60.4	59.5	38.0	-21.5	60
Lithuanians	34.6	33.4	21.9	-11.5	66
Roma	7.0	8.2	4.9	-3.3	60
Jews	22.9	10.4	4.4	-6.0	42
Germans	3.8	3.5	2.5	-1.0	71
Estonians	3.3	2.7	1.6	-1.1	59
Others	29.5	25.0	67.9	+42.9	272

Source: CSB database. "Resident population by ethnicity at the beginning of the year (Pastāvīgie iedzīvotāji pēc tautības gada sākumā)" (IRG069) and the author's own calculations

of the century. In comparison with the results of the last Soviet census of 1989, there were 17 thousand fewer Latvians counted in the 2000 census. In this century the decline was noticeably faster. By the beginning of 2020, there were an additional 178 thousand fewer Latvians; in total, over the years of restored independence there has been a loss of 195 thousand. No year has seen a positive balance. This speaks of serious mistakes in governance and, in particular, in the implementation of socio-demographic policies. A small natural increase of the number of Latvians was noted only in 2015–2016, however, this did not lead to an increase in the total number of Latvians, as outmigration dominates immigration by a factor of two to three.

The number of Russians and other major ethnic minorities decreased even faster than that of Latvians. The number of Jews has decreased most significantly (by more than a factor of 2 during our century alone), the number of Ukrainians has decreased relatively less than the number of Russians, Belarusians and other ethnic minorities. Consequently, the share of Latvians in the total population has risen from 52% in 1989 to 60.5% in 2000 and 62.5% today.

The tragic situation of the Latvian people must also be seen in a longer historical perspective and, in particular, when compared with ethno-demographic developments in other countries. At present, there are over a hundred thousand fewer Latvians living in their country (1192 thousand) than during the first census of tsarist Russia in 1897 (1318 thousand) or about 300 thousand less than shortly before the First World War in early 1914 (about 1500 thousand). Almost equally large differences can be seen when comparing the present situation with that obtained before the occupation of Latvia in 1940 (Latvian numbers about 1500 thousand). There are no other nations in Europe whose losses of human resources in their country have been greater.

Demographic processes are imbued with inertia, so that obviously it is not possible to arrest depopulation in the coming years: the total population, and also the total number of Latvians will continue to decline. Neither Latvian nor international specialists, such as UN or EU demographers, predict population stabilisation in their medium-term forecasts. According to the most recent baseline forecast by

Eurostat for 2019 (the most plausible version), numbers will continue to fall through 2095, when there will be 1 million 81 thousand residents in Latvia. By 2050, numbers will have decreased to 1 million 395 thousand, which is an even more pessimistic scenario than was forecast three years ago. According to these predictions, Latvia is expected to demonstrate the highest rate of population decline in the EU. About 80% of the projected reduction relates to international outmigration. Forecasts by the UN Population Division issued in 2019 are slightly more optimistic. The main scenario predicts that by the middle of the century in Latvia there could be 1.48 million residents, but at the end of the century, 1.11 million. With such rates of depopulation, the total number of Latvians will drop to less than one million by the middle of the century. The US Population Reference Bureau predictions for Latvia give similar results. On the other hand, long-term forecasts issued by 24 American specialists, published in the journal *The Lancet*, are quite pessimistic. According to their projections, 80 years from now there will be between 220 and 770 thousand residents in Latvia (most probably around 430 thousand). This will be the largest population decrease in the world. In our opinion, their rate of depopulation is exaggerated, but the long-term systematic narrow replacement of generations, at the same time as the predominance of emigration over immigration gives serious warning of the possibility of population extinction.

Considerably better results could be achieved through urgent implementation of demographic policies and a comprehensive long-term recovery programme. Awareness of demographic theories about programmed management, together with some experience in regulating (even managing) demographic processes will provide confidence that these excessively pessimistic scenarios can be avoided. The example of Estonia or the cardinal change of the development in Latvia in the second half of the 1980s indicate real possibilities to slow down the drain of the state's human resources and prevent depopulation in the long term.

In our opinion, implementation of a well-thought-out policy for dealing with generational reproduction change as well as internal and external migration

must become a priority for sustainable development of the country. An increase in birth rate and vitality must be achieved to address not only outmigration, but also immigration issues. In our century, a significant increase in the fertility has been achieved (the total fertility rate in 2000 was 1.24, in 2011 – 1.34, in 2016 – 1.74, while in 2019 – 1.61) and also in the average life expectancy (70 years in 2000–2001 and 75.6 years in 2019). There are significant reserves in this area, especially with the birth of a second child, an increase in healthy life styles and a significant reduction in premature male mortality. However, reducing outmigration is crucial, especially for the younger and middle-aged working age groups. Statistics on births, deaths and, in particular, public health, are expected to be left outdated by the Covid-19 epidemic. From a global perspective, these effects on the demographic picture ought not to be significant.

Forecasts show that the role played by Rīga and Greater Rīga (Pierīga) in the social and economic development of our country will continue to grow. Their share of the total population has exceeded 50%, and this will increase in the coming years. Therefore, the population distribution in the country and the search for optimisation of regional development need more attention, including studies by academic institutions.

In 2012, the Latvian Academy of Sciences issued an extraordinary statement on the unfavourable demographic situation in our country, as well as on insufficient provision for public information in this area. In our opinion, there has been no real improvement over the past eight years, except that information provided by public authorities has become more extensive and reliable. Five years ago, the Demography Centre of the University of Latvia ceased to function, and there are no other comparable demographic research institutions in the country, reducing the international potential of the sector. Participation in international research is weak, and training of highly qualified demographers has ceased.

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