

## DEPOPULATION IN THE BALTIC STATES

Peteris Zvidrins

Centre of Demography, University of Latvia  
19 Rainis boulv., Riga, Latvia LV 1586,  
Phone: 371-67034787 or 371-29103629 (mob.)  
Fax: 371-67034787  
E-mail: [Zvidrins@lanet.lv](mailto:Zvidrins@lanet.lv)

The purpose of this paper is to characterize the level and dynamics of population reproduction in the three Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) in the last two decades and analyze determinants of population decline. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the regaining of political independence in the Baltic States cardinally changed social and economic conditions and demographic developments. This inevitably led to fundamental changes in reproductive and migratory behaviour of population. As a result, the net migration in all Baltic States has become negative since 1990, and only in Estonia and Lithuania it was slightly positive in some years around the turn of centuries. After the accession to the European Union in 2004 emigration from the Baltic States even increased. The excess of deaths over births has been since 1991.

A characteristic feature of the demographic development is the decrease of the population (depopulation) both the titular ethnicities (Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians) and ethnic minorities. The total number of population in the Baltics decreased from 7.9 million in 1990 to less than 7.0 in 2009, or by 12%. Thus, the Baltic States have one of the highest population loss indicators in the world.

Estonia and Latvia have had a low fertility rate since the beginning of the 20th century, and it has not ensured even a simple level of population replacement. For many years, Estonia and Latvia were the two republics in the former USSR with the lowest fertility rates. The period total fertility rate (TFR) fluctuated between 1.7 and 1.9 for a considerable time, but in the mid - 1960s it dropped to 1.7 births per woman. In Lithuania fertility rate in the soviet period was much higher, however it continuously decreased, reaching the minimum in the early 1980s (1.97 in 1980-1982), after which it slightly rose again as in other Baltic States. After such changes in all three Baltic States in mid-1980s an approximately equal level of fertility rate was reached and there was simple generational replacement during that period of time.

The Baltic States have undergone a severe demographic crisis. Many people saw a deterioration in their standard of living and moral breakdown. State support for kindergartens declined and subsidies for children products were eliminated. The absolute and relative numbers of marriages declined dramatically throughout the 1990s. As a result, the TFR dropped to 1.2 -1.4 in 1997-2005 (minimum in 2002), and only in the last years it was slightly higher, particularly in Estonia. Contrary to the soviet period and the first decade of the independent period now the lowest fertility is observed in Lithuania (1.3 in 2001 -2007). Adjusted TFR (free from the tempo effect) is considerably higher (1.6-1.85), indicating that most of the fall in TFR was driven by postponement of first births.

The intensity of mortality in the Baltics increased significantly in the first few years after the restoration of independence, largely because of reduced levels of medical care and the inability of many people to adapt to the new economic situation in the countries. The average life expectancy in the Baltics in mid of the 1990s was considerably lower than in 1990, especially for men. In deteriorating economic circumstances and mass unemployment men's behaviour appeared to be affected much more strongly than that of women. Calculations show that more than 80% of the decrease in life expectancy was due to a mortality increase in working ages. The incidence of deaths due to unnatural causes was three times higher than in economically developed countries of Europe. The situation improved in the last decade, although the average life expectancy of men in the Baltics (65-67 years) is among the lowest in Europe.

The Baltic States (and particularly Latvia) are among most ageing countries in the world. The mean age of population exceeded 40 years, which slightly surpasses even the European average. Therefore overall mortality rate in all Baltic States (14 deaths per 1000 population) is high and expected increase in life expectancy in circumstances of high tempo of ageing does not lead to decrease of these overall death rates.

The Baltic States have historically formed traditions in the fields of counting of population, in analysis and forecast of its development, especially in Estonia and Latvia. The development of a new cycle of demographic projections have been commenced since 2004, including those prepared in cooperation with the Eurostat. All of these calculations project a population decline in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. According to our projections, the TFR will increase. However, in all scenarios it will be below the replacement level. The medium version anticipates an increase of TFR to 1.6 - 1.8 by 2025-2030.

The medium version of the projections foresees that the average life expectancy is going to increase more strongly than in previous two decades and gender gap will decrease considerably. More realistic version of net migration anticipates negative values up to 2020 but thereafter the economic growth and living conditions in the Baltics will be improved enough for the population immigration to prevail. All in all, the scenarios of depopulation still prevail in the coming 15-20 years, and the speed of depopulation will be among highest in the world. According to projections of the Eurostat (2008) the total number of population in the Baltic States will decrease even to 5.4 million in 2060, or by almost 25%. The sharpest declines is projected for Latvia (-26%) and the lowest – for Estonia (-15%).

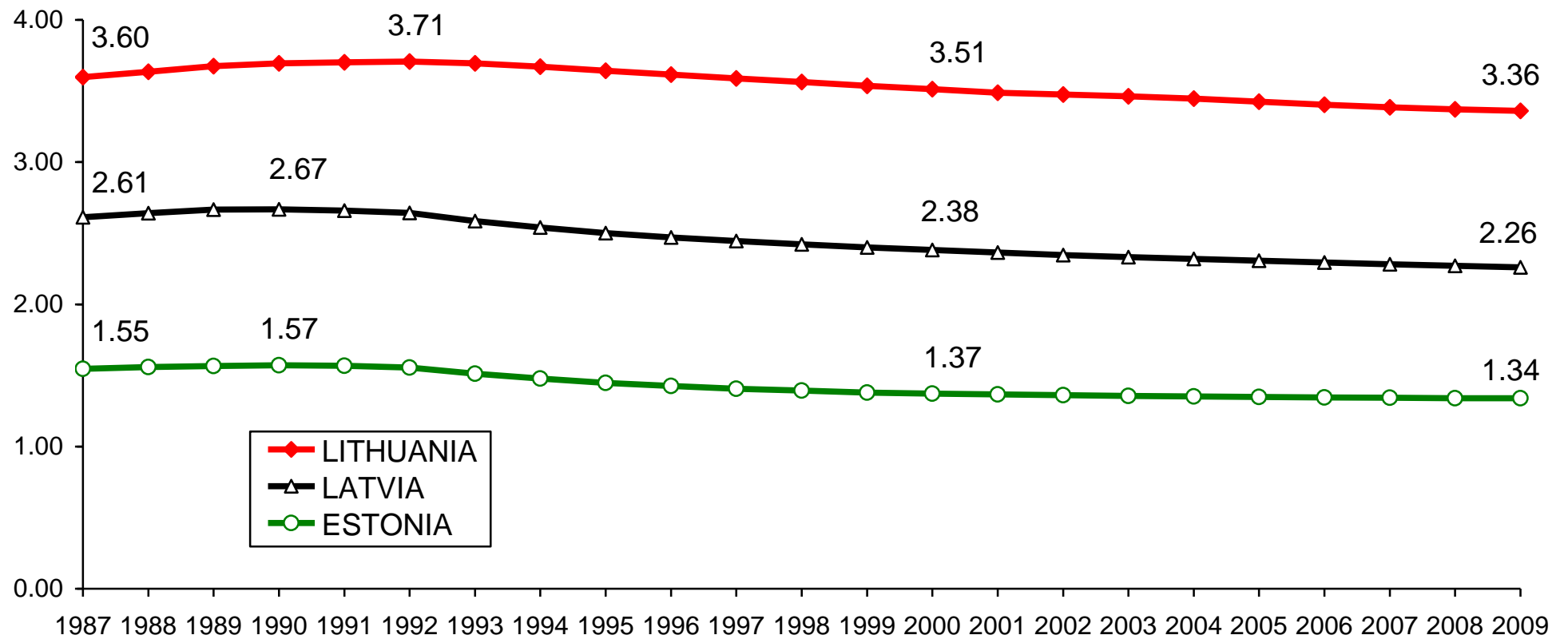
Various attempts had been made since the mid - 1950s to develop population policies. A complex program was implemented in Latvia in the second half of 1980s which led to significant improvement of demographic situation. Several measures were implemented also in other Baltic States. Since the Baltic States regained independence demographic policies have remained more passive. However, some governments have declared their intention to elaborate some pronatalist policy measures and even to implement a long - term programme for demographic recovery. According to the United Nations Ninth Inquiry (2007) all Governments of the Baltic States viewed population growth as „too low” and have implemented policies „to raise it”. During the period of 2004-2007, very rapid growth of GDP has reduced the backwardness of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania from the old European Union Member States and promoted also demographic achievements. However, since 2008, very rapid fall of economic development has been observed in all Baltic States. Ministries and other central public administration institutes have sharply decreased budget expenses for 2008 and particularly for 2009, including expenses for public procurements (in the primary health care, in assistance to families, etc.). For these reasons a reduction of the population in the nearest months and years will be even sharper than projected recently for this period. The population will decrease mainly due to the negative natural change but net migration also will be profoundly negative.

## Conclusions

1. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the regaining of political independence in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in 1991 cardinally changed the directions and intensity of migration and population reproduction. A sudden reversal of the demographic patterns in the Baltic States changed the population proportions of the titular ethnicities, Slavs and other minorities.
2. The Baltic States from countries of immigration became countries of emigration, particularly in the first half of the 1990s and since joining the European Union in 2004.
3. Natural movement balance is distinctly negative in all the Baltic States, and the greatest population losses are among minorities (Russians, Poles, Belarussians and others).
4. The proportion of titular ethnicities (ethnic Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians) has increased, however, the proportion of titular ethnicities in Estonia and Latvia still is one of the lowest in Europe. It is very low in the capital cities (especially in Riga and Tallinn).
5. Already from the 1930s Estonia and Latvia were referred to demographically aged countries. In the soviet period migration (predominately mass immigration of younger people) freezed the ageing process. Since the restoration of political independence the Baltic States experienced very rapid decrease in fertility, especially in Lithuania. At the turn of centuries the Baltic States had one of the world's lowest marriage and fertility rates. The intensity of fertility increased slightly in the last years, however, a deep depopulation situation exists also at this time. Never before have fertility and population reproduction level been so low. Average life expectancy at birth is almost the same as at the beginning of the 1960s. The dynamics of male mortality is especially unfavourable.
6. Demographic projections show that total of the Baltic's population will decrease systematically at least two decades. Current number of ethnic Estonians (about 900 thousand) and Latvians (1.3 million) is already very small, and the survival of these nations is seriously endangered. The consequences of the past 70 years require us implement affirmative action measures to overcome this demographic crisis and promote the survival of these small nations. International assistance is desirable.

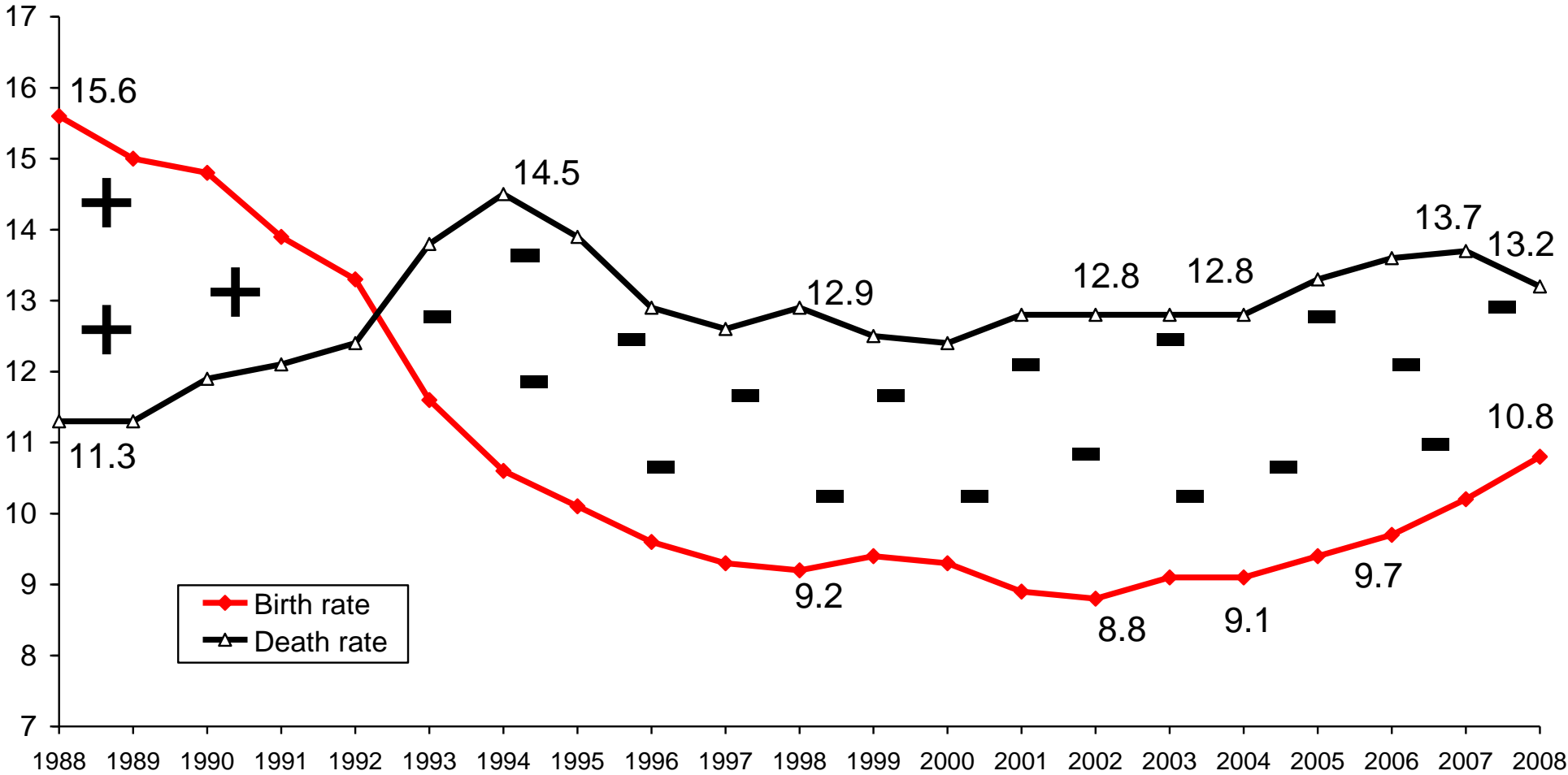
# 1. Population in the Baltic States

millions



# 2. Natural increase/decrease in the Baltic States

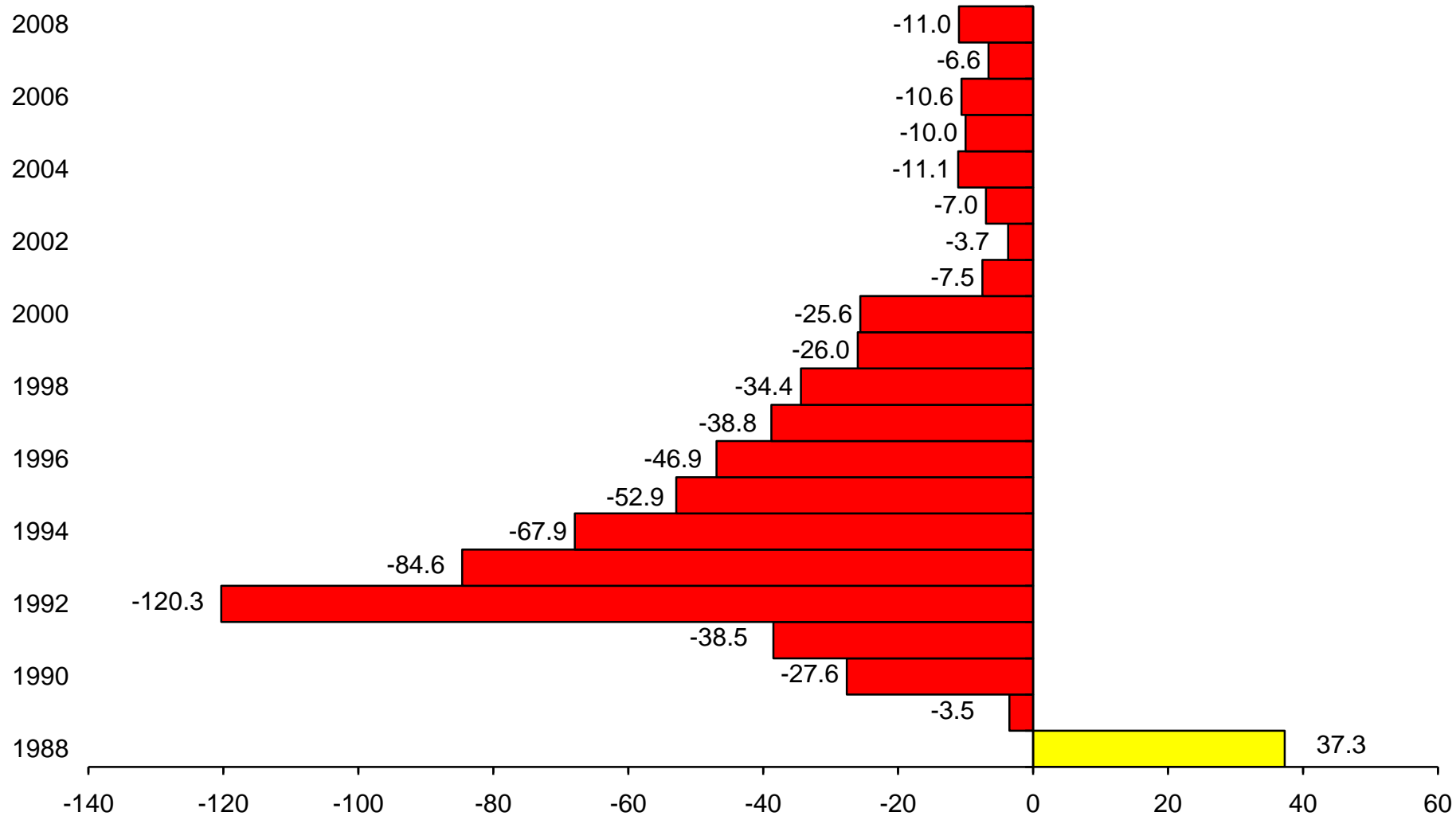
per 1,000 population



Source: calculated from publications of national statistical offices

### 3. Net migration in the Baltic States

thousands



## 4. Rank of the countries according ageing in 2007

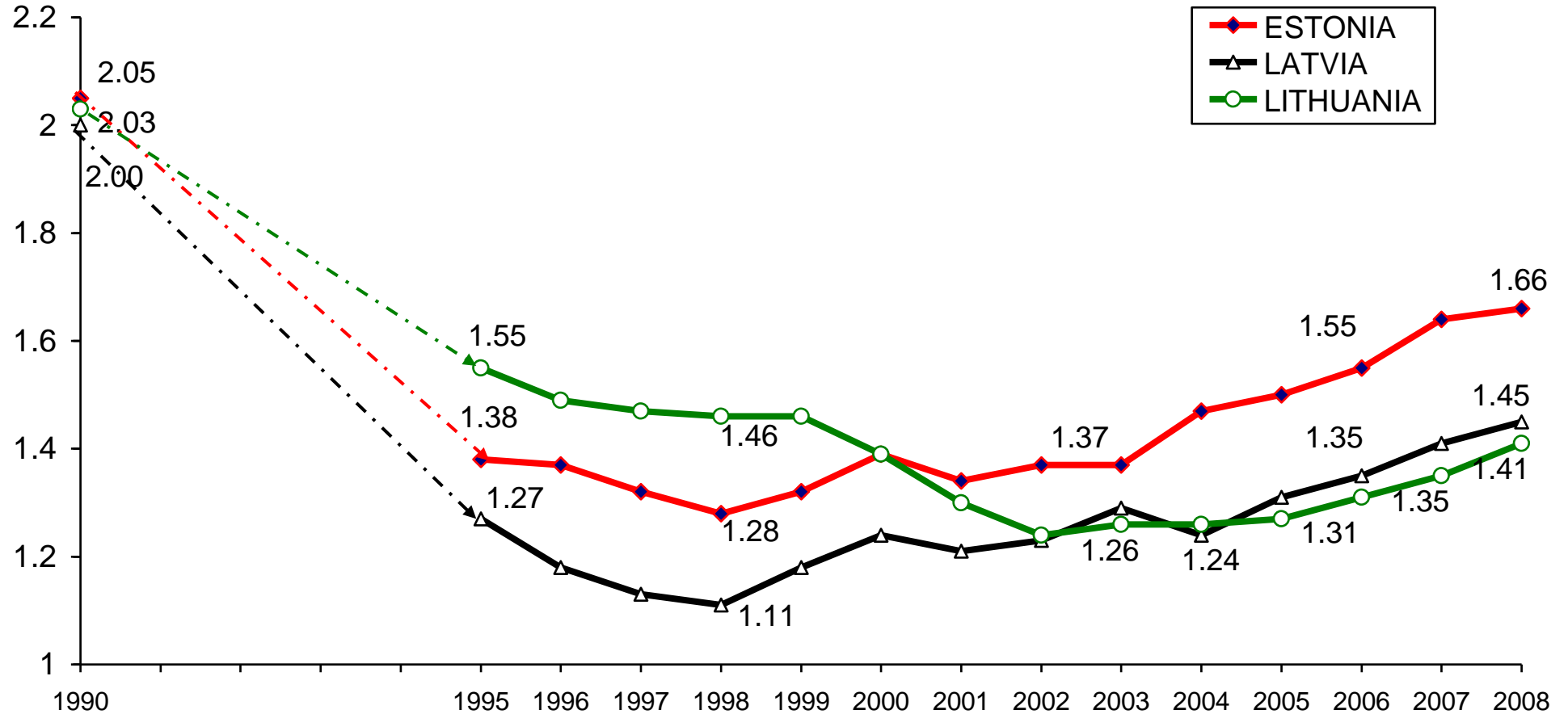
(in brackets – level of the indicators)

Country	60+(%)	Median age*	Ageing index	Sum of ranks	Rank by 3 indicators
Japan	1 (27.9)	1 (42.9)	1 (201)	3	1
Italy	2	2	2	6	2
Germany	3	3	3	9	3
Bulgaria	7	9	4	20	4
Austria	6	8	7	21	5
Greece	5	12	5	22	6
Latvia	9 (22.8)	15 (39.5)	6 (164)	30	7-8
Croatia	13	7	10	30	7-8
Sweden	4	11	16	31	9-10
Switzerland	11	5	15	31	9-10
.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
Estonia	16 (21.8)	23 (38.9)	13 (148)	52	17
Lithuania	23 (20.9)	31 (37.8)	19 (134)	73	24

Calculation of the author from: World Population Ageing 2007, pp. 64, 66, 69

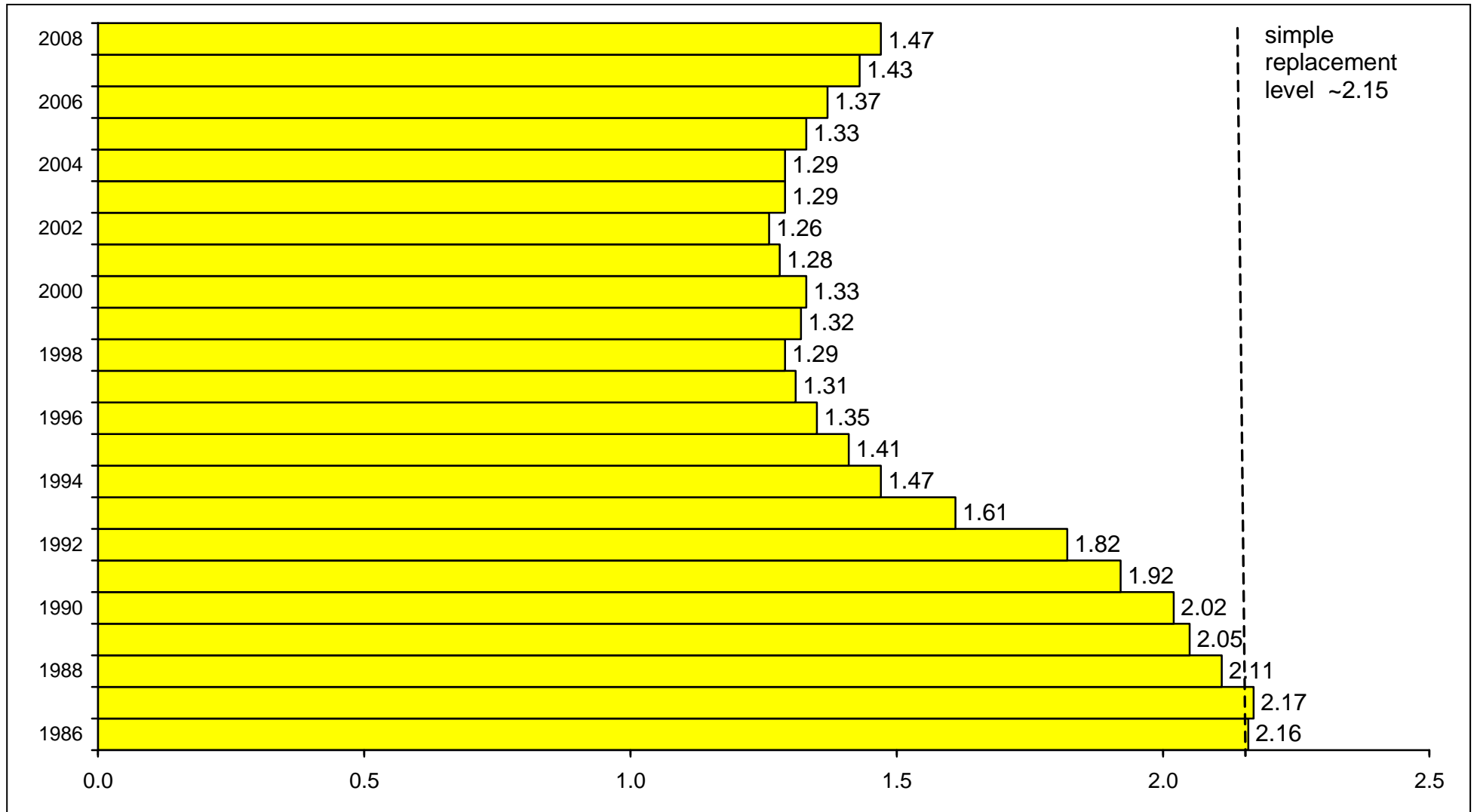
\*2005

## 5. Total fertility rate (TFR) in the Baltic States



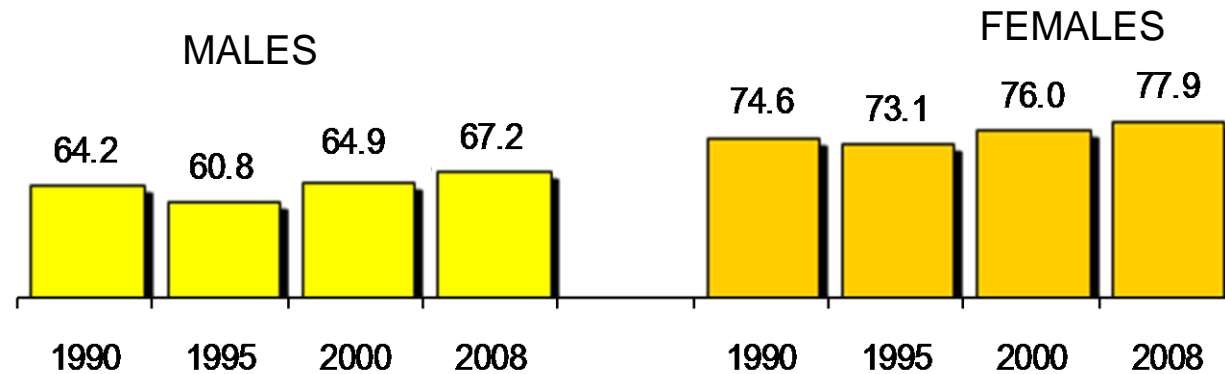


## 6. TFR in the Baltic States

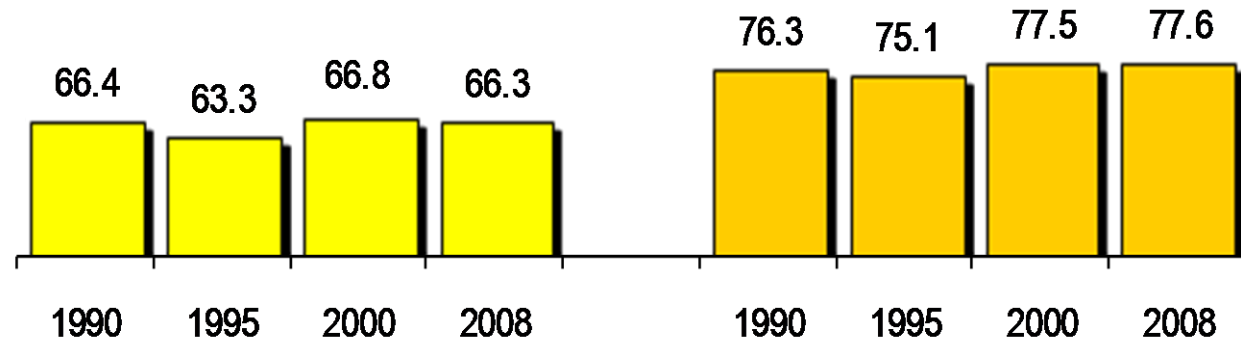


# 7. Dynamics of life expectancy in the Baltics: 1990-2008

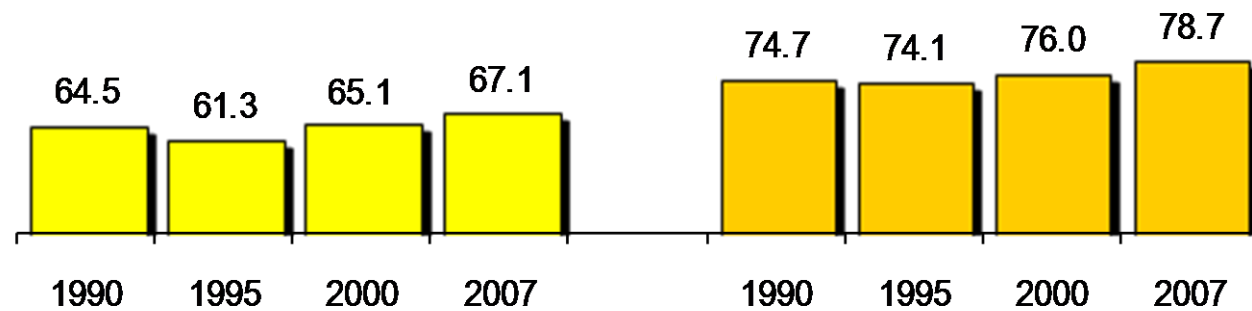
## LATVIA



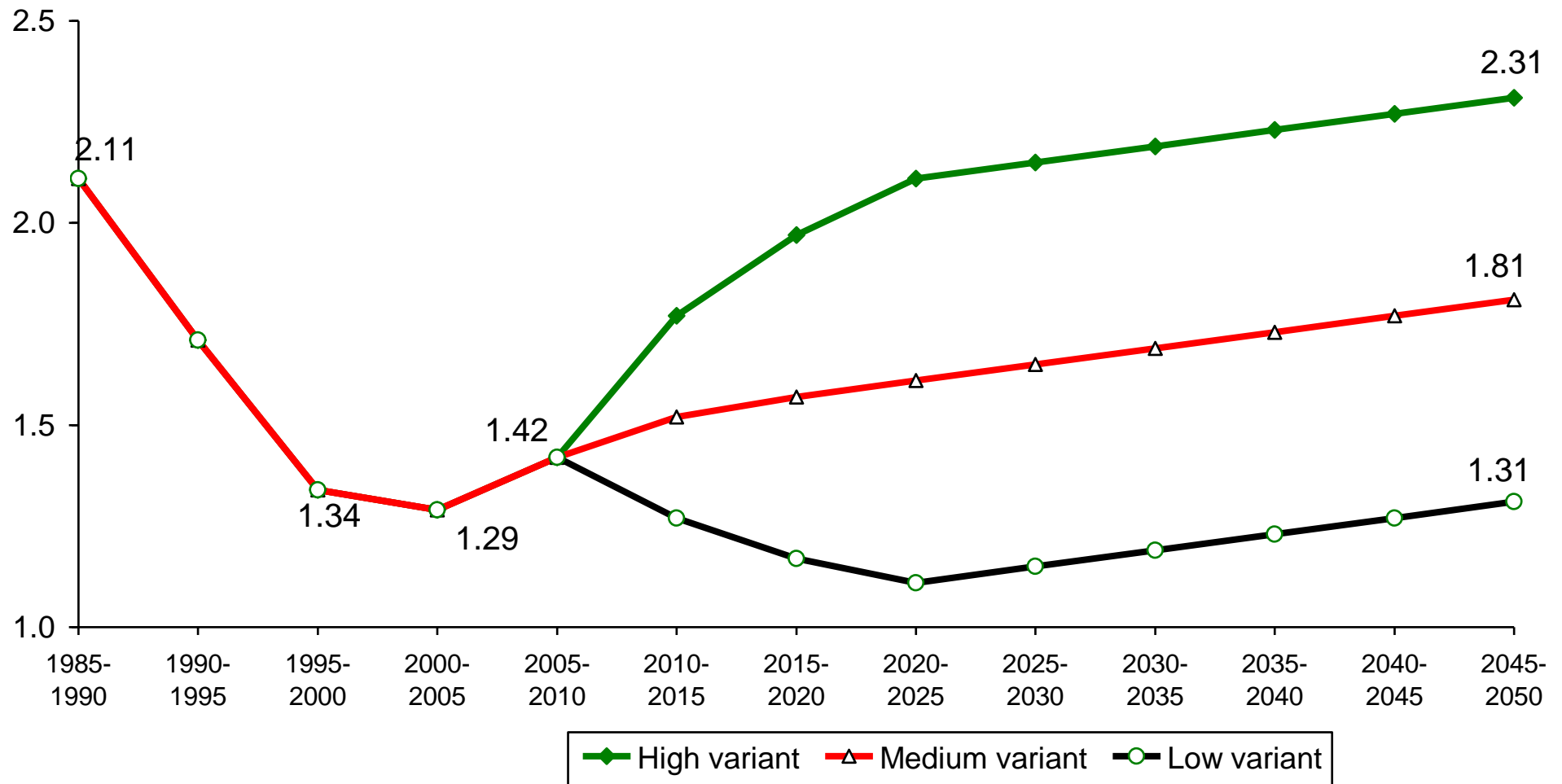
## LITHUANIA



## ESTONIA



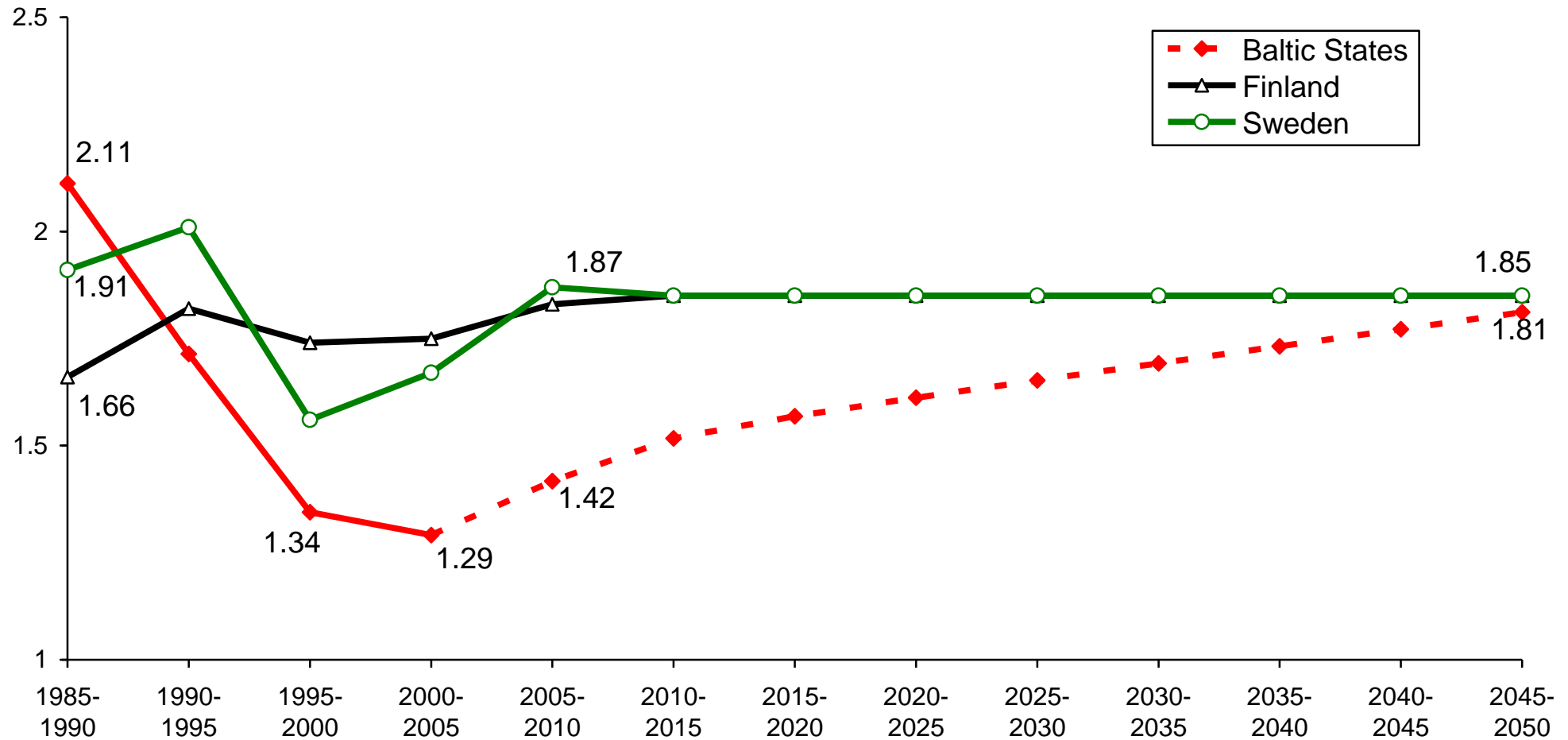
## 8. TFR in the Baltic States (for 2005-2050 projected variants)



Source: World Population Prospects. (<http://esa.un.org/unpp>)

# 9. TFR in the Baltic States, Sweden and Finland

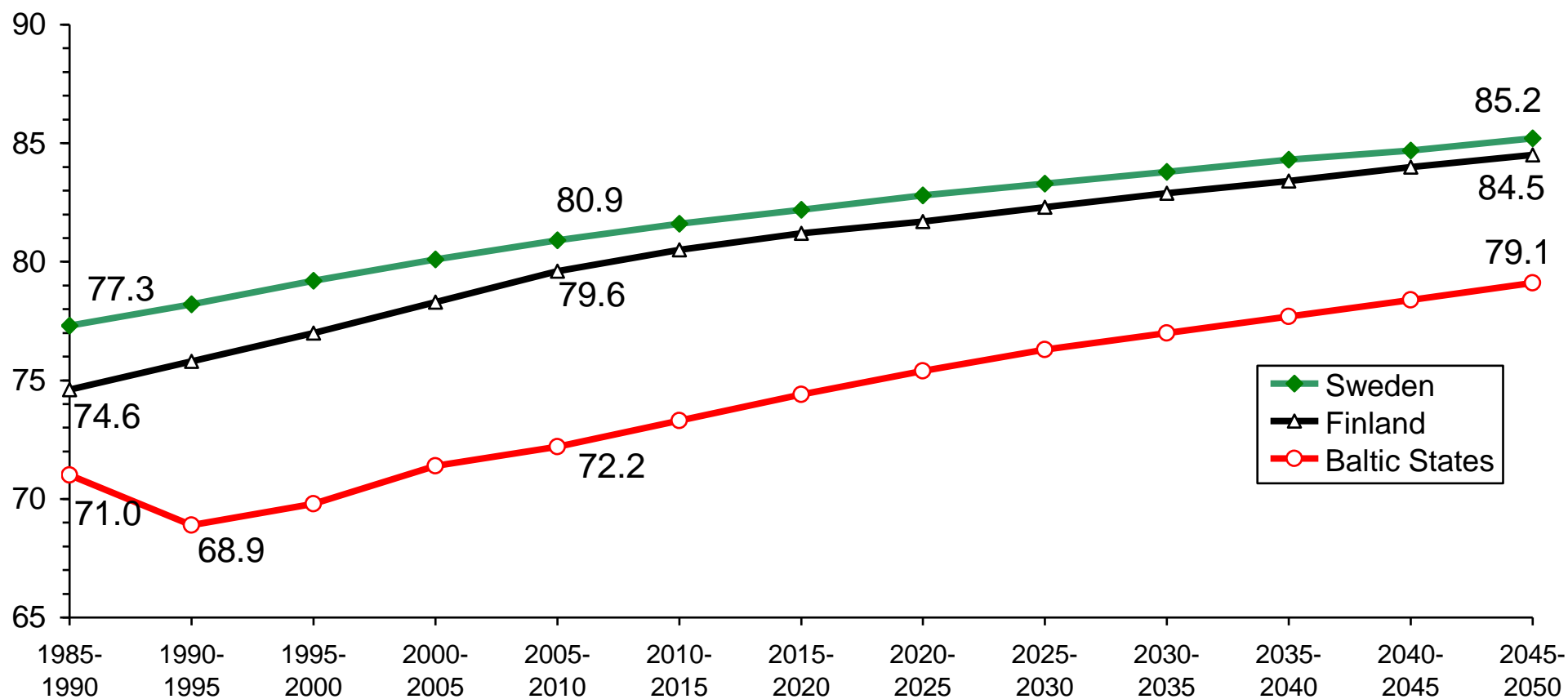
(for 2005-2050 projected medium variant)



Source: World Population Prospects. (<http://esa.un.org/unpp>)

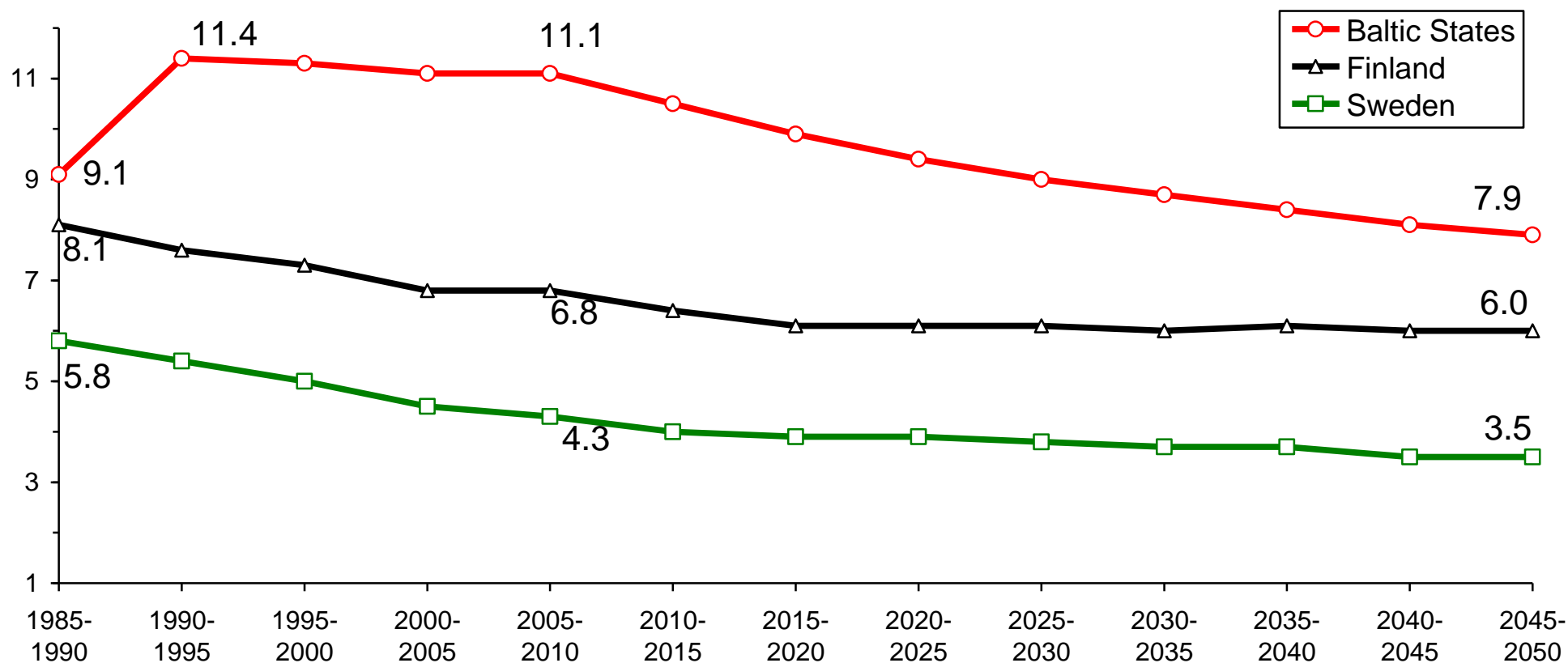
# 10. Life expectancy at birth in the Baltic States, Sweden and Finland

(for 2005-2050 projected medium variant)



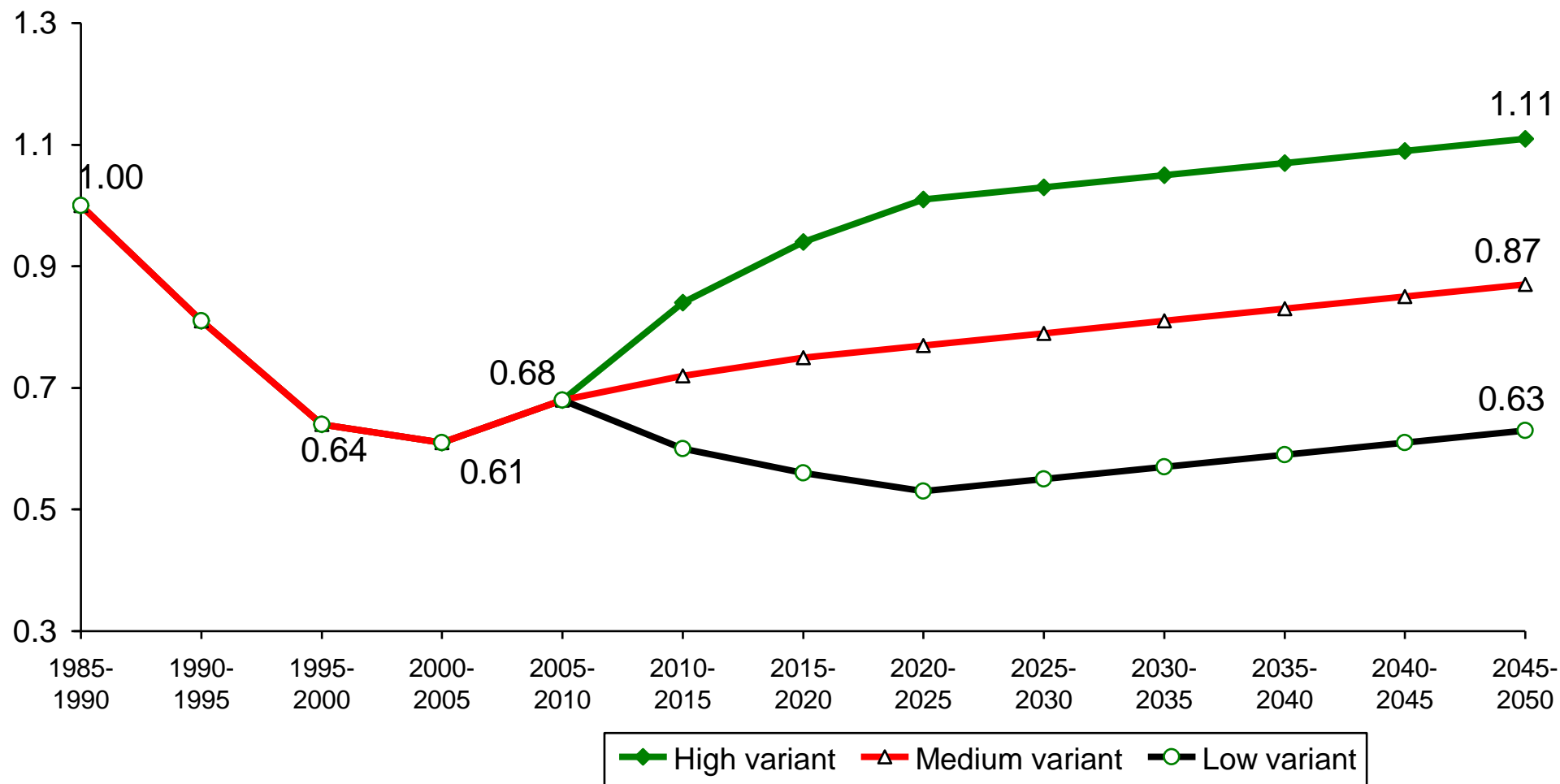
Source: World Population Prospects. (<http://esa.un.org/unpp>)

# 11. Gender gap (females-males) in life expectancy at birth in the Baltic States, Sweden and Finland (for 2005-2050 projected medium variant)



Source: World Population Prospects. (<http://esa.un.org/unpp>)

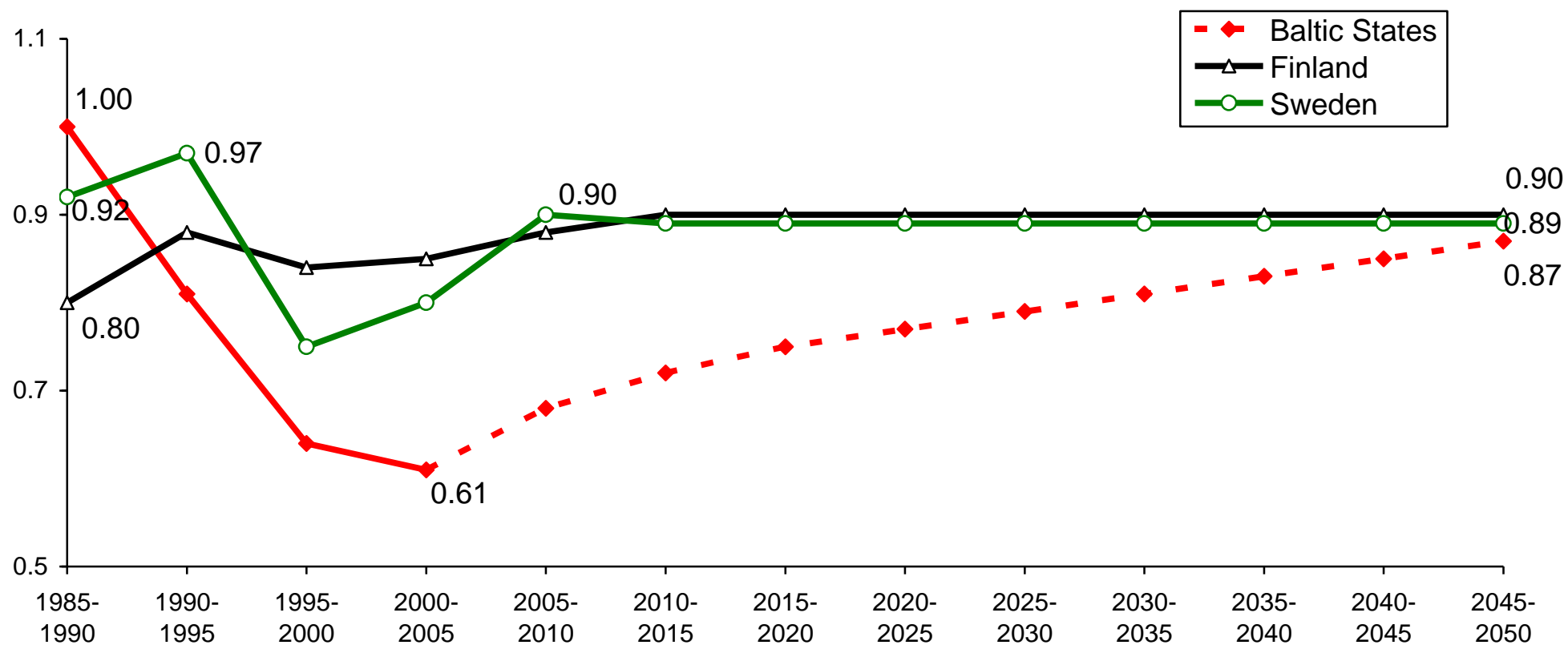
## 12. Net reproduction rate in the Baltic States (for 2005-2050 projected variants)



Source: World Population Prospects. (<http://esa.un.org/unpp>)

# 13. Net reproduction rate in the Baltic States, Sweden and Finland

(for 2005-2050 projected medium variant)



Source: World Population Prospects. (<http://esa.un.org/unpp>)