

# Migration flows of Estonians during the last century

Ene-Margit Tiit, Mare Vähi, University of Tartu, Estonia

Estonia was created 90 years ago as an ethnically quite homogeneous country: from its 1,1 million population about 88% were ethnic Estonians. At this time about 200 000 ethnic Estonians lived abroad, mainly in Russia, quite few in other European countries but neighbors Latvia and Finland and several thousands also in USA.

Nobody has made exhaustive survey about emigration and immigration of Estonians during the last century, although there exist many researches on different time-periods and special research flows. By the data of World Bank [2] there lives more than 170 000 Estonians (about 15% of the whole population of Estonians), abroad. This fact has lifted series of questions: when are they emigrated? What does it mean – are they Estonian citizens, people who have borne in Estonia, ethnical Estonians or people, who have roots in Estonia? Somewhat more is known about immigration to Estonia, as nowadays more than 30% of population living in Estonia are not ethnic Estonians, most of them are either immigrants or their descendants.

The principal aim of given paper is to analyze and interpret the migration data of WB, to compare these data with migration data from Eurostat and local statistics. As the database (DB) used has been completed on censuses, then it is evident that the time of estimates should be 2000/2001, the critical moment of the last wave of censuses. The big problem here is that in different countries the “nationality” is defined in different way – either as citizenship (50 cases in DB), either ethnicity (the last way was used in Soviet countries, but is not common in censuses nowadays). The place of birth (used in 165 cases in DB) was not asked in all countries at all. For Estonia one more problem is important – Estonian citizenship was given only in time-periods 1918—1940 and from 1991, hence not all emigrants from Estonia did not have the citizenship. Mainly it concerns migration flows between Soviet countries, especially Ukraine and Byelorussia. Another problem concerning citizenship is that it can be changed during life-course and some countries (US) allow to a person to have more than one citizenship. It has been estimated that up to 1500 persons per year changes his/her Estonian citizenship to get a citizenship of another country. Also it is possible that some people (children of Estonians) living permanently abroad will gain Estonian citizenship.

To get the data reflecting the current migration trends the net migration can be used, but it is well-known that this number is not very reliable – especially in the case of emigration. Still, comparing the data on international level, it is possible to get more or less reliable estimates on the emigration flows of Estonians (hereby for simplicity sake we do not differentiate people having Estonian citizenship and borne in Estonia, as it has been done in DB).

It is rational to differentiate the following periods of emigration from Estonia:

1. 1918—1940
2. 1940—1945

3. 1945—1990
4. 1990 and later.

***The first period that began with remarkable immigration*** belongs to the newly formed Estonian Republic. The country started with definition its population about 1,1 MI persons and citizenship (0% Estonians). The population of Estonia was ethnically quite homogeneous (about 88% were ethnical Estonians, from them about 4% immigrated from Soviet Russia by bilateral agreement). Still about 200 000 ethnic Estonians remained to live in different areas of Russia. During the period 1918—1938 migration was quite modest, annual net migration was about 1000 people or less. Several thousands emigrated (to different countries of the world including Northern and Southern America). In 1939 the first large emigration flow started – the Baltic German population (about 14 000 persons) emigrated to Germany (more exactly – to Poznan area that belongs now to Poland) after Hitler-Stalin treaty.

***The second period was characterized with large emigration.*** Soviet occupation (1940—41), German occupation (1941—1944) and the Second World War (1941—1945) Estonia lost more than 20% of its population. The following migration flows are most important: Almost 100000 people migrated to Russia (deported, mobilized to Red Army and escaped as war refugees). About the same number were mobilized to German Army or migrated to Germany. About 70 000 people escaped Estonia in autumn 1944 before the second Soviet occupation. Part of this population returned Estonia (from armies) but a big number remained in Western Europe or moved ahead to other continents, They form majority of Estonians living in USA, Canada, Australia, South America (more than 20000) but also in Europe, mainly in Sweden and Germany (almost the same number).

***The third period was the period of heaviest immigration.*** But this time the migration was restricted with Soviet Union only. In spite of the fact that during 45 years the net migration was positive (the population increased for about 50%), still quite big number of Estonians emigrated – among them these who were deported, but also people learning and working in Russia or other countries such as Ukraine, Byelorussia etc. For this time from Estonian population ethnical Estonians formed 61%, the share of Russians had reached (due to politically forced immigration) more than 1/3 of whole population.

***The fourth period – time of independent Estonia – has been again period of emigration.***

During the period 1989—1991 from Estonia emigrated about 100 000 people, among them majority formed late immigrants from Russia and other parts of Soviet Union. Not all of them have been counted among Estonians abroad, as they did not have Estonian citizenship and were not ethnic Estonians. The number of Estonians in Russian Federation and Kazakhstan is by DB almost 70000, but the data about Ukraine, Byelorussia and other parts of former Soviet Union (but Latvia and Lithuania) are unfortunately lacking.

Among European countries the most popular place for Estonians has been Finland, close to Estonians by distance and language. The number of Estonian emigrants in Finland is not clear: by WB it is 37000, Eurostat estimates give almost twice less. Probably the

reason is that part of Estonian immigrants in Finland are illegal or migrate permanently between Estonia and Finland. Sweden, Germany, UK and Ireland have been popular countries of emigration for Estonians during the last 10—15 years. Total emigration to west during the fourth period can be estimated as about 50 000 persons that forms 3—4% of population. During the last few years the immigration and emigration flows have been almost in balance.

## References

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