

DYNAMICS OF THE ETHNIC STRUCTURES IN THE BALTIC COUNTRIES IN THE 21st CENTURY

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The purpose of this paper is to present changes in the ethnic structure in three Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) and to analyze the population change of the titular ethnicities (ethnic Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians) and largest ethnic minorities. Although each of the Baltic State has had a different history, they have experienced a broadly similar fate from the 18th century when they were absorbed into the Russian empire. These countries were politically independent only for two decades in the 1920s and 1930s and have regained political independence since beginning of the 1990s.

The Baltic States have historically formed traditions in the field of analysis of ethnodemographic development (especially in Estonia and Latvia). As a result, we have the information about the ethnic structure in these countries for a longer period. However, we focus our analysis on the post-soviet period. The publication of results of the 2000-2011 round censuses makes it possible to analyze the dynamics of ethnic structure and patterns of the titular ethnicities and ethnic minorities during more than two decades since independence regained.

Table 1

Ethnic composition in the Baltics in 1989-2011 (in thousand)

Ethnicity	1989	2000	2011	Change 2011/1989	% Change 2011/1989
Lithuanians	2 962	2 943	2 588	-374	-12.6
Latvians	1 395	1 376	1 289	-106	-7.6
Estonians	968	939	905	-63	-6.5
Russians	1 725	1 278	1 060	-665	-38.5
Poles	321	297	247	-75	-23.2
Belarussians	211	158	117	-94	-44.4
Ukrainians	185	115	85	-100	-54.2
Jews	40	17	12	-28	-71.2
Other (incl. not indicated)	101	112	107	6	5.7
Total	7 907	7 234	6 408	-1 499	-19.0

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the regaining of political independence in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania cardinally changed social and economic conditions, the directions and intensity of migration and natural movement of population. The Baltic States from countries of immigration became countries of emigration. During the Soviet period three Baltic republics were ahead other European countries concerning high relative net migration. The main migration inflows which were

characteristic to the Soviet period turned into main outflows. The level of emigration and repatriation reached peak in 1992, when the former Soviet military forces and their family members left the Baltic region.

Another distinctive feature of the demographic development of the Baltic countries in the 1980s was fertility increase. The mortality stagnation had reached an alarming stage, and natural growth was low, especially for the titular ethnicities. The Slavic peoples with fertility rates below replacement level gained a solid natural increase because of a younger age structure (as a result of the influx of predominately younger immigrants).

Around the turn of the millennium, contrary to the Soviet period, natural movement balance is distinctly negative. The excess of deaths over births has been since 1991, and in relative terms the greatest natural population losses are among minorities which are ageing faster than ethnic Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians. As we can see in Table 2, the negative natural change is typical feature for all seven larger ethnoses in Latvia, including titular ethnicity.

Table 2

Natural decrease of ethnicities in Latvia (yearly average)

Ethnicity	1993-1997	1998-2002	2003-2007	2008-2012
Latvians	-6498	-5792	-3493	-2224
Russians	-5816	-4886	-4649	-4149
Belarussians	-1069	-1029	-1078	-1041
Ukrainians	-268	-357	-430	-393
Poles	-723	-616	-529	-445
Lithuanians	-277	-252	-261	-240
Jews	-248	-144	-115	-87

As a result of ethnically selective migration movements and cardinal changes in nature of population reproduction in the last two decades, the proportion of minorities population in all three states has decreased while proportion of titular ethnicities has increased.

A characteristic feature of the ethnodemographic development after regained independence is the decrease of the population (depopulation) both the titular ethnicities and minorities. The total number of population in the Baltics decreased from 7.9 million in 1990 to 6.4 in 2011, or by 19%. Thus, the Baltic States have one of the highest population loss indicators in the world. According to the 1989 and 2011 censuses, the population of three titular ethnoses has decreased from to 5.3 million to 4.8 million, or by 10% but the population of different minorities has decreased more substantially (by 37%). At the beginning of 2013, in the Baltics lived 2.7 million ethnic Lithuanians, 1.2 million ethnic Latvians and about 900 thousand ethnic Estonians. The share of population for minorities which formed one -third of total population in the Baltics in 1989 has decreased to one - fourth with a clear tendency to further drop. Thus, the population in every Baltic State has become less diverse. However, the proportion of

minorities is still high in comparison with many other countries, particularly in Latvia (38%, in capital city Riga 54%).

Some minorities are weakly integrated in the societies therefore much attention in each republic is devoted to build up a common political identity for people living in these countries. However, 2011 was a year of political radicalization in Latvia and the long lasting hidden discursive tensions between titular ethnicity and so-called “Russian-speaking” minorities were intensified by building process of the referendum on Russian language official status in Latvia. The referendum took place on February 18, 2012 and $\frac{3}{4}$ voted against making Russian the official state language.

The largest ethnic minority by size in every Baltic State is Russians. Their total number within intercensuses period (1989 -2011) decreased by one-third (almost by 660,000) and during the first decade of this century-by one-fifth (by about 200,000). However, their numerical strength is still, impressive. The number of Russians (1.05 million in 2012) is only slightly less than the number of Latvians and exceeds the number of Estonians living in the Baltics. More than a half of the Russians residing in the region live in Latvia (about 550 thousand), 320 thousand in Estonia and about 170 thousand in Lithuania. In many cities, including one of the largest city of the Baltic sea region Riga, and rural settlements of eastern parts of Estonia and Latvia there is a dominance of the Russian environment and language. This language is often used also by non-Russians. At present, the former so-called „Russian towns” and „Russian zones” are the most problematic from the point of view of integration.

The second largest minority by size is Poles. Their number is about 240 thousand and have a weak tendency to decrease. The great majority (more than 80%) of them reside in Lithuania, about 45 thousand in Latvia and only about 1,600 in Estonia.

The Belarussians are the third largest ethnic minority. In Latvia the Belarussian is even the second largest minority, and in Eastern Latvia (Latgale) they have their local national roots. The majority of them are Russian speakers. They have a negative net migration and natural decrease. Besides, the Belarussian community has decreased due to assimilative processes.

The Ukrainians are the fourth largest minority and the seventh ethnic group by size in the Baltics. Half of them are residents of Latvia. In demographic terms, Ukrainians are a younger ethnic group and have slightly integrated in the Baltics. Approximately half of them speak only Russian and, similar to the Belarussians, about 90% families are ethnically mixed. The age structure of Ukrainians is relatively young, therefore their depopulation began a little later and it is not as profound when compared to other minorities. They are relatively well educated. Ukrainians living in the Baltic States were denied Ukrainian citizenship by their officials, and therefore their repatriation to the Ukraine was more marked than of other Slavic ethnicities to their home countries. For that reason the number of Ukrainians who have obtained citizenship in the Baltics, is very low.

The number of Jews in comparison with the abovementioned minorities is small and it has decreased substantially during the last two decades. Since the regaining of political independence their number in the Baltics has more than halved. Large part of them resides in Latvia, mainly in capital city Riga. Their fertility rate is very low and an old age structure can be observed; emigration was also extremely high. Among them the percentage of citizens is rather high.

Two other ethnic groups live in the Baltics whose numerical amount is about 10,000 persons. These are Finns and Gypsies (Romanies). Large part of the Baltic Gypsies live in Latvia (about 6,500) while Finns live mainly in Estonia (7,500).

Each Baltic State has a relatively small number of titular ethnicities of the neighbouring Baltic States. Lithuanians in Latvia make up the greatest number but Estonians in Lithuania account for the least number. According to estimates based on 2011 censuses data there are 33 thousand representatives of such minorities from the neighbouring countries which account for only 0.5% from the total population in the Baltics.

The baseline demographic scenario indicates population decline for almost all ethnicities in each of the three Baltic States by 2030. The research data show that at least 4/5 of respondents know titular language. Knowledge of Russian language is slightly lower. It is evident that correlation between individuals' ethnic origin and their language mostly spoken at home is close. However, Russian serves as a mother tongue or mostly spoken at home for the significantly large proportion of non-titular and non-Russian ethnic groups.

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