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**DEMOGRAPHICAL SITUATION IN LATVIA  
(ACCORDING TO THE POPULATION CENSUS OF THE YEAR 2000)**

**ABSTRACT.** The article presents demographic situation of Latvia based on data collected during the last Census in 2000. Considering statistics, author makes a characteristic of changes within Latvian population, age and nationality structure of inhabitants, spatial diversification of the education level. Also, the decrease of the population number is visible. It is caused mainly by low natural increase and negative net migration (result of national minorities' members emigration to their homelands).

**KEY WORDS:** Latvia, demographic structure, nationality structure.

According to the Population Census of 2000, the population of Latvia amounted to 2,375 thousand as of March 31, 2000. The number of population has decreased by 292 thousand (10.9%) since the previous Population Census of 1989. The number of urban population decreased by 13.5%. The number of rural population decreased by 5.1%. The decrease in the number of population was mainly caused by immigration of non-Latvians to their ethnic homeland and low birth rate. In fact, the death rate in Latvia is considerably higher than the birth rate. The following major cities had the largest decrease in the number of population: Liepaja – 22%, Riga – 16%. Only five minor cities faced a slight increase in the number of population.

Demographic indicators are deteriorating. The population is getting older. The average age of population increases. The number of persons employed diminishes but the number of retired persons increases. It is estimated that the number of population in Latvia will diminish to 2,170 thousand by the year 2050.

Table 1. Population of Latvia

Year	Number (thousand)
1935	1,906
1959	2,080
1970	2,352
1979	2,503
1989	2,667
2000	2,375

According to the Population Census of 2000, the 46% of the population were men and 54% – women. The highest proportion of women was registered in such cities as Preiļi (55.0%), Rīga (55.4%), Jūrmala (55.4%), Ogrē (55.4%) and Gulbene (55.5%).

The following changes took place in the time period between the Population Census of 1989 and 2000: a) the number of children (age 0–14) decreased by 146 thousand (26%); b) the number of persons available for employment (age 15–59) decreased by 184 thousand (11%); c) the number of retired persons (age 60 and older) increased by 39 thousand (9%).

Compared to the data of 1989, the most drastic decrease in the number of children (age 0–14) took place in such cities as Liepāja (36% decrease), Ventspils (32% decrease) and Rēzekne (30% decrease). According to the prognosis made by *Eurostat*, the proportion of children (age 0–14) in Latvia will diminish to 15% of the total population by the year 2020. Increase in the birth rate can avoid such a negative prognosis to come true.

Table 2. Population by Age in 1989 and 2000

Age	Number of population, 1989		Number of population, 2000	
	thousand	%	thousand	%
All ages	2666,6	100,0	2375,3	100,0
0–14	570,9	21,4	424,2	17,8
15–59	1632,6	61,2	1448,3	61,0
60 and older	463,1	17,4	503,4	21,2

The number of population in the age group of 60 years and older increased in all cities. The largest growth took place in Daugavpils (20% increase), Ventspils (17% increase) and Rēzekne (15% increase). The same situation was observed in 12 regions of Latvia out of 26. The largest growth in the number of people aged

60 and older took place in Riga region (29% increase), Ogre region (19% increase), Valmiera region (11% increase) and Limbazi region (11% increase).

The average age of people of Latvian nationality is less than the average age of people of other nationalities living in Latvia, except for Romans. The people of Latvian nationality have the highest proportion of children and the smallest proportion of elderly people. Still, the average age of the people of Latvian nationality is high (approximately 40 years).

Table 3. Population Growth Rate by Ethnic Nationality (‰)

Ethnic Nationality	Year	
	1992–1995	1999
Latvians	-3,5	-4,5
Russians	-6,2	-6,1
Belorussians	-8,7	-10,2
Ukrainians	-1,8	-4,2
Poles	-12,0	-12,1
Romans	-	+14,5
Jews	-	-19,8

The average number of children per woman of fertile age is very low in Latvia. A woman of fertile age had 1.09 children in 1998. A slight improvement was observed in 1999 compared to 1998. A woman of fertile age had 1.16 children in 1999. In 1999, this was the second worst indicator in Europe (the Czech Republic had 1.13). The ratio needed for full replacement of population is 2.2–2.3 children per woman of fertile age. The insufficient birth rate can cause labor shortage in the near future.

Latvia – the homeland for ethnic Latvians – is the only place on the world where Latvian language is spoken and national traditions and heritage is maintained. The number of Latvians decreased from the high 80% of the total population in 1940 to 57.7% in 2000. In the time period of 1992–2000, the deaths of ethnic Latvians exceeded the births by approximately 50 thousand persons. As a result, the total number of ethnic Latvians in the year 2000 was 20 thousand less than in the year 1989, when the previous Population Census was carried out. According to the Population Census of 2000, the total number of ethnic Latvians amounted to 1,369,432 persons. The current number of ethnic Latvians is less than the respective number before the First World War and the Second World War. Some researches indicate that children that are born in the families of mixed nationalities (one of the parents is an ethnic Latvian and the other one has different nationality) prefer to consider themselves as ethnic Latvians.

Table 4. Population by Ethnic Nationality (% of Total Population)

Ethnic Nationality	Year		
	1935	1989	2000
Latvians	77,0	52,0	57,7
Russians	8,8	34,0	29,6
Belorussians	1,4	4,5	4,1
Ukrainians	0,1	3,5	2,7
Poles	2,5	2,3	2,5
Lithuanians	1,2	1,3	1,4
Jews	4,9	0,9	0,4
Romans	0,2	0,3	0,3
Germans	3,3	0,1	0,1
Estonians	0,4	0,1	0,1
Other	0,2	1,0	1,1

The total number of ethnic Latvians is decreasing. The total number of persons of other nationalities is decreasing even more rapidly. As a result, the number of ethnic Latvians as a percentage of total population has slightly risen from 52.0% in the year 1989 to 57.7% in the year 2000. The number of ethnic Latvians is low in such major cities as Daugavpils (15.9% of total population), Riga (41.0%) and Rezekne (42.6%). The major cities that have the highest proportion of ethnic Latvians are Ventspils (51.6% of total population) and Jelgava (51.0%). The regions that have the highest proportion of ethnic Latvians are Talsu region (91.9% of total population) and Kuldīga region (91.2%). The proportion of ethnic Latvians is expected to rise because the number of persons of other nationalities decreases more rapidly than the number of ethnic Latvians.

Russians are the second largest nationality in Latvia. The major cities that have the highest proportion of Russians are Daugavpils (55.2% of total population), Rezekne (50.7%) and Riga (43.8%). The regions that have the highest proportion of Russians are located in Latgale. Latgale is the area of Latvia that borders with Russia and Belorussia. These are Rezekne region (Russians compose 38.9% of total population), Daugavpils region (37.9%), Ludza region (36.1%) and Preiļi region (27.0%). The regions that have the lowest proportion of Russians are located in Kurzeme, the western part of Latvia. These are Kuldīga region (Russians compose 3.3% of total population), Liepāja region (3.5%), Talsi region (3.6%) and Ventspils region (4.9%).

Large Polish minorities live in Daugavpils city and in the Daugavpils region. The Poles compose 15% of total population of Daugavpils and 11.8% of

total population of the Daugavpils region. The Poles compose 2.5% of total population of Latvia.

A large number of persons that live in Latvia are not able to communicate (speak and understand) in Latvian. According to the Population Census of 2000, 53.7% of Ukrainians, 54.6% of Belorussians, 58.5% of Russians, 65.0% of Poles, 68.9% of Jews, 69.8% of Germans, 76.3% of Romans, 80.5% of Estonians and 88.7% of Lithuanians are able to communicate in Latvian.

Education is one of the most often used indicators to describe the quality of population. During the Population Census of 2000, all persons in the age group of 15 and older were asked to specify their education.

Table 5. Population by Education in the Year 2000

Education	% of total population in the age group of 15 and older
University	13,9
High School (secondary, professional)	51,1
Basic	26,5
Primary	6,1
Less than 4 grades	1,6
No education	0,8

Compared to the data of 1989, the proportion of persons with university, high school (secondary, professional) and basic education has risen. At the same time, the proportion of persons with primary and less than 4 grades education has decreased. The highest proportion of persons with university education was noted in such cities as Riga (22.4% of persons in the age group of 15 and older have university education), Jurmala (16.5%), Jelgava (15.4%) and in such regions as Riga region (13.8%) and Ogre region (12.9%). The least proportion of persons with university education was noted in such areas as Ventspils region (5.9%), Liepaja region (6.4%) and Rezekne region (6.4%). The proportion of persons with high school (secondary, professional) education was higher in Riga and other major cities than in the regions. The high school (secondary, professional) education had 55.0% of the persons in the age group of 15 and older in Liepaja city and 54.4% – in Riga city. The highest proportion of persons with primary education was noted in Daugavpils region (12.6%), Kraslava region (12.1%), Balvi region (12.0%) and Rezekne region (11.3%).

In the year 2000, 139 persons out of 1000 (age group of 15 and older) had university education and 511 persons had high school (secondary, professional) education. In the year 1989, the respective figures were 115 and 489.

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