

AGING TRENDS

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THE BALTIC NATIONS

The societies of the Baltic nations (Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia) face a myriad of immediate economic issues, the resolution of which depends in part on an understanding of demographic processes. As the experience of Western neighbors has shown, one crucial change that all of the former Soviet republics, especially the Baltics, must consider is the major shift in population age structure occurring throughout much of today's world and the implications for the economy and society that accompany population aging.

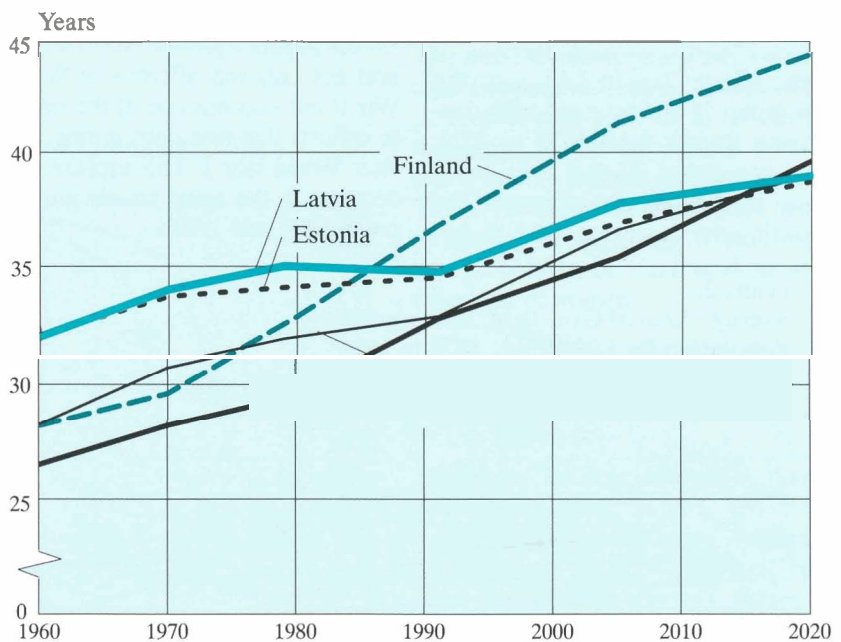
Baltics Oldest of Former Soviet Republics

The Baltic nations are the oldest of the former Soviet republics with

Table 1.
Percentage of Population in Older Age Groups: 1991 to 2020

Country	Year	55 and over	65 and over	75 and over
Latvia	1991	24.0	12.3	5.2
	2005	26.3	15.8	6.7
	2020	30.0	17.1	8.2
Lithuania	1991	22.1	11.2	4.7
	2005	24.6	14.8	6.5
	2020	29.2	16.3	8.0
Estonia	1991	23.3	11.9	5.0
	2005	25.2	14.9	6.2
	2020	28.9	16.4	7.2
Finland	1991	23.7	13.6	5.8
	2005	29.6	16.1	7.6
	2020	36.7	22.9	9.6
Poland	1991	20.2	10.3	4.0
	2005	22.9	13.1	5.6
	2020	30.2	17.7	6.9

Figure 1.
Median Population Age: 1960 to 2020



more than 11 percent of the nearly 8 million people living in the area over the age of 64 in 1991. This makes their populations slightly older than that of Poland, which is one of the youngest countries in Eastern Europe, and slightly younger than Finland, which is one of their closest neighbors to the west. By the year 2020, the three Baltic nations are projected to have over 16 percent of their populations aged 65 and over.

Baltic Nations Aging Slowly...

The Baltic nations are aging slower than either Poland or Finland. This is evident in both table 1 and figure

1. In table 1, the Baltics had higher percentages of their populations aged 65 and over in 1991 than did Poland. However, by the year 2020, Poland will surpass the Baltics in terms of percentage of the population in this age category. Figure 1 also shows that both Poland and Finland are aging faster than the Baltics as both of these countries' median ages are increasing more quickly than the median ages of the Baltics. As late as 1975, the Baltic nations were older than both Finland and Poland in terms of the median age of the population (the age that divides the population into numerically equal parts of younger and older

persons). By 2020, both Finland and Poland will have populations older than any of the Baltic nations. The reason Finland is aging more rapidly than the Baltics is its relatively lower fertility. Poland is also aging faster than the Baltics in spite of its historically higher fertility rates, which would normally be associated with a slower pace of aging. Rather, Poland's more rapid aging can be explained by the past immigration of young adults into the Baltics from other areas of the Soviet Union, which serves to depress the median ages in the Baltics.

... Because of World War II

The average annual percentage growth of certain age groups is another way to examine the rate of aging (figure 2a). In Lithuania, the age group 55 and over will have continuous growth from 1970 to 2020. The age group 70 and over has a more unusual pattern of growth: the growth rate decreased until it be-

came negative in the mid-1980's, then increased, and will again begin to decrease at the turn of the century. The initial decrease can be understood better by examining the average annual growth rate of the age group 70 and over by gender (figure 2b). Although there was a decrease in the growth rate for both males and females, the decrease in the male growth rate was much more dramatic. The main cause of this decrease was an echo effect of World War II. The men that entered the age group 70 and over between 1979 and 1989 are the men who were 20 to 30 during World War II. This is exactly the age group that was the most decimated by the war and, thus, was a smaller-than-average cohort by the time it reached age 70. This accounts for the negative growth rate. This cohort not only was affected by World War II but also was one of the smaller cohorts that was born during and after World War I. This explains the decrease in the aging female growth rate for the mid-1980's.

Figure 2a. Average Annual Growth of Total and Older Population for Lithuania: 1970 to 2020

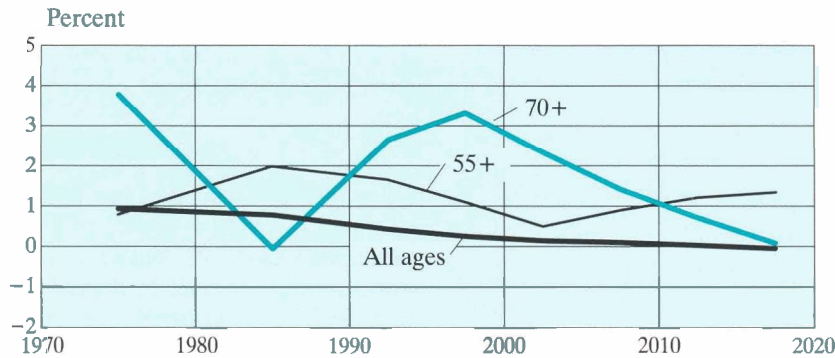


Figure 2b. Average Annual Growth of Persons 70 Years and Older for Lithuania, by Sex: 1970 to 2020

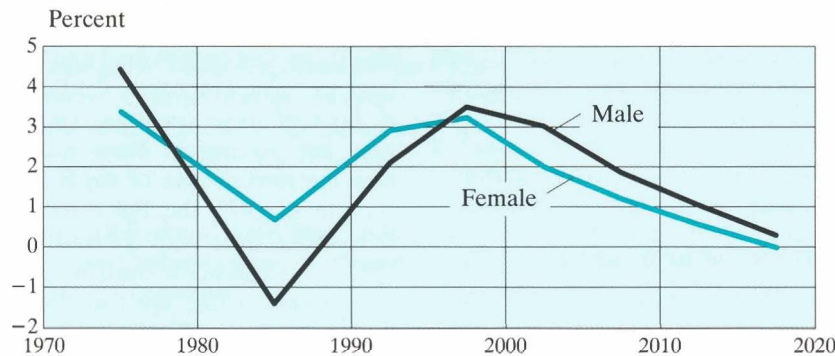


Table 2. Expectation of Life at Birth: 1930 to 1991 (In years)

Country	Year	Male	Female
Latvia	1934-36	55.4	60.9
	1958-59	65.2	72.4
	1979-80	63.6	73.9
	1991	66.0	76.2
Lithuania	1958-59	65.0	71.0
	1979-80	65.5	75.4
	1991	67.4	77.8
Estonia	1934	53.1	59.6
	1959	64.3	71.6
	1979-80	64.2	74.2
	1991	66.3	75.8
Finland	1931-40	54.5	59.6
	1956-60	64.9	72.4
	1975-80	68.0	76.6
	1991	71.4	80.0

By 2020, Elderly Support Ratios in Baltics Relatively Low

The elderly support ratio is a rough indicator of the potential social "burden" that may evolve from shifting age structures. It is defined as the number of people aged 65 and over per 100 people in the "productive" ages (20 to 64). As life expectancy increases and fertility decreases over time, elderly support ratios increase. This is true for the Baltics (figure 3). Of the three Baltic countries, Latvia has the highest elderly support ratio; however, all three countries are very similar. In 1991, the elderly support ratios for the Baltic countries fell between those of Finland and Poland. However, because the Baltic nations are aging less rapidly than either of these countries, elderly support ratios in the Baltics are not increasing as quickly. By 2020, Poland's elderly support ratio will be higher than any of the three Baltic countries.

Baltic Nations Have Large Sex Differentials in Expectation of Life

In 1991, all three Baltic nations had lower life expectancy at birth than Finland (table 2); however, this has not always been the case. During the 1930's, Latvia had a higher expectation of life than Finland, and Estonia's was very similar. Even in the

Figure 3.
Elderly Support Ratios: 1991, 2005, 2020
 (Persons 65 years and older per
 100 persons 20 to 64 years)

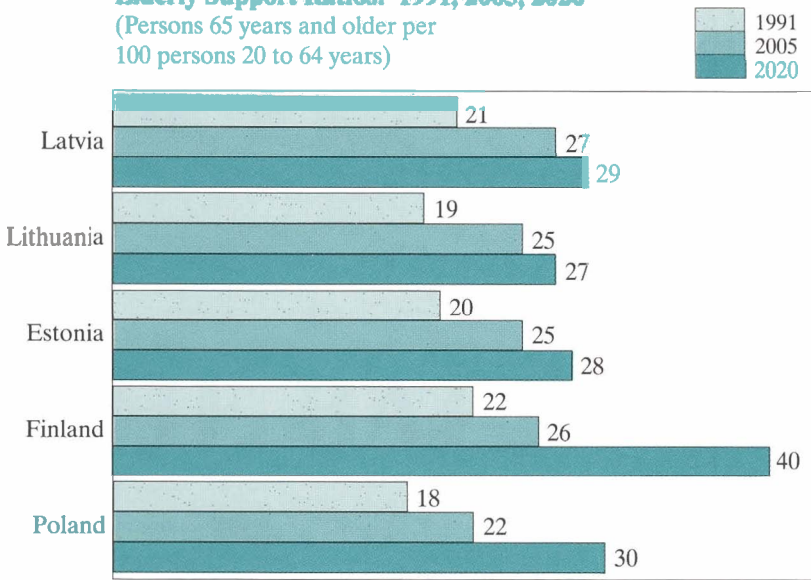
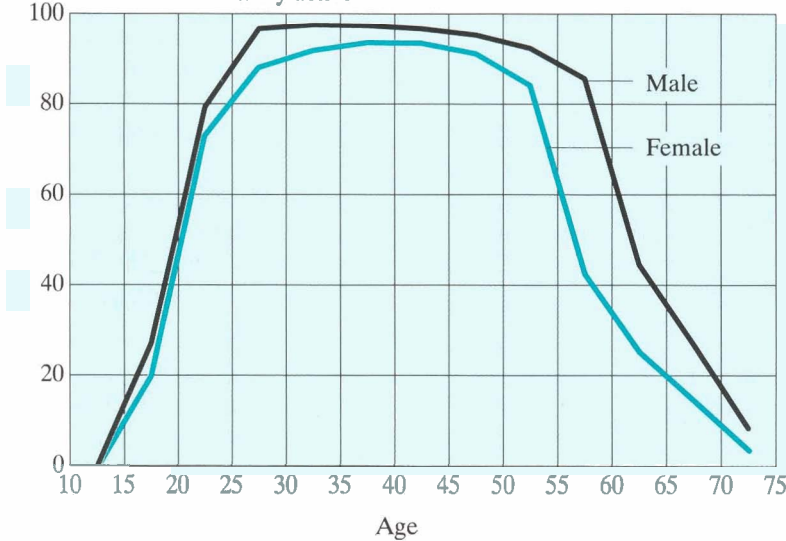


Figure 4.
Labor Force Participation Rates for Lithuania: 1989
 Percent economically active



late 1950's, Latvia's expectation of life was slightly higher than Finland's (Valkonen, et al., 1991). However, the Baltic countries, along with many East European countries and other republics of the Soviet Union, experienced a stagnation in their expectation of life during the 1960's and 1970's. Finland, on the other hand, underwent a continuous increase in life expectancy during this same period. This stagnation in the Baltics was mainly because of an increase in adult male mortality especially from circulatory diseases and accidents and injuries (Anderson

and Silver, 1986; Chruszcz, Pamuk, and Lentzner, 1991; Torrey and Kingkade, 1990). As a result, current estimates suggest that women outlive men by about 10 years on average; this puts the Baltics at or near the top of the world list in terms of the male-female differential in life expectancy at birth.

Large Percentage of Older Persons Work

Although the majority of the older citizens in Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia receive pensions, many contin-

ue to work past the official retirement ages of 55 for women and 60 for men. In Lithuania, over 34 percent of women aged 55 to 64 and over 44 percent of men aged 60 to 64 are still active in the labor force (figure 4). The figures for those still economically active are even higher for Estonia: 52 percent of men aged 60 to 64 and 46 percent of women aged 55 to 64. One reason for these high rates of participation is the income levels of the elderly. In 1989, the average monthly pension for people of retirement age was 85 rubles a month. This was less than 40 percent of the average monthly wage, which makes it difficult for the elderly to survive without working.

Men have higher labor force participation rates than women at every age, and the differential widens with age. For instance, in Lithuania, 44 percent of men aged 60 to 64 were still active in the labor force compared with 25 percent of the women. This relative gap increases with age so that for the age group 70 and over the proportion of men working is twice that of women.

Older Lithuanians Have Lowest Educational Levels in the Baltics

The latest available data show that of the three Baltic nations, Estonia has the highest percentage (85) of persons aged 60 and over with at least a completed primary education. The lowest percentages are found in Lithuania: 61 percent for men and 44 percent for women (figure 5). The population in rural areas of Lithuania have even lower primary completion rates: 54 percent of men and 33 percent of women aged 60 and over. As in most countries, older men are more highly educated than older women. Five percent of the men aged 60 and over in Estonia had completed college-level education compared with less than 2 percent of women.

Nearly 70 Percent of Women Aged 70 and Over in Latvia are Widowed

Because of the higher mortality rates for men at almost every age, there

Figure 5.
Population Aged 60 and
Over With at Least Complete
Primary Education: 1979

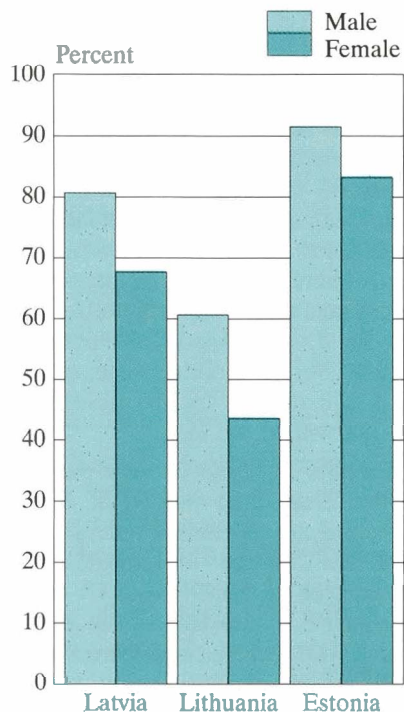
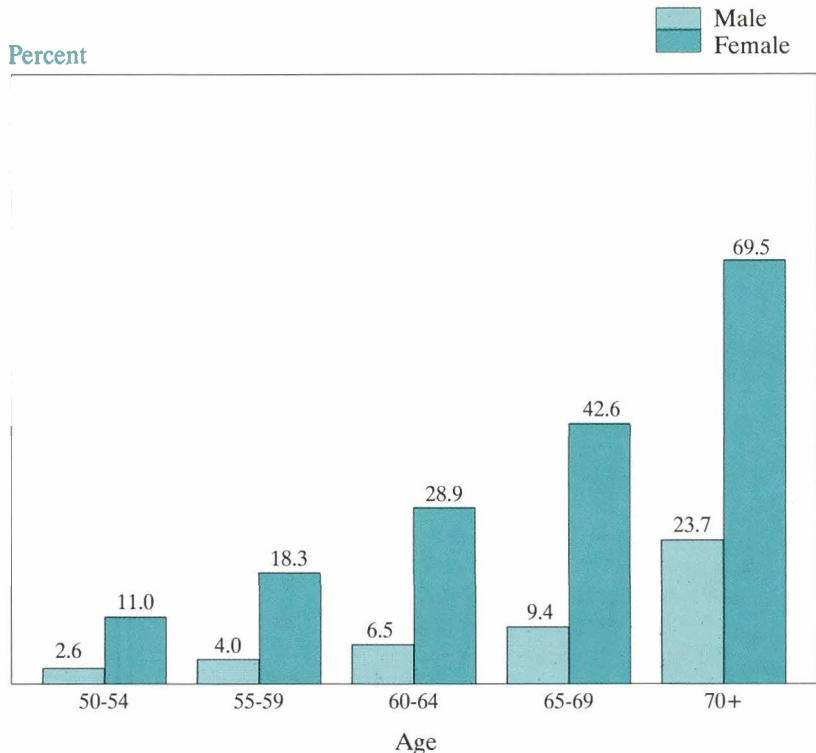


Figure 6.
Widowed at Older Ages
for Latvia: 1989



are nearly twice as many women as men in the older age groups in the Baltics. Consequently, women are much more likely than men to be widowed. By age 70, almost 70 per-

cent of women in Latvia were widowed compared with less than 25 percent of men (figure 6). This is not only because of higher male mortality rates but also because older di-

vorced or widowed men are much more likely to remarry than older women. Similar gender differentials in marital status can also be seen in Estonia and Lithuania.

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Demographic data for the Baltics in this report are taken from preliminary U.S. Bureau of the Census projections of 1989 census data that do not explicitly consider international migration. A revised set of projections will be used in a forthcoming Bureau of the Census report on aging and health in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet republics.

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