

Estonia

Ethnicity in Estonia

Power relations

Estonians are the politically dominant majority in Estonia. The Slavic speaking minorities, **Russians**, **Ukrainians** and **Byelorussians**, are powerless.

After independence in 1991, Estonia granted citizenship only to these non-Estonians, who came to Estonia before Soviet times. The preservation of the Estonian culture is an important political issue, and it is popular to see the non-Estonian inhabitants as a threat for the survival of the Estonian identity ⁽¹⁶⁶³⁾. The immigrants from Russia, Ukraine and Belarus who came during Soviet times did not receive the Estonian citizenship. Consequently, approximately 32 percent of the Russian speakers were non-citizens as of 1992. Some of them took the Russian citizenship but many remain stateless. In the early 1990s, “certain sections of the Russian population of Ida-Viruuma dreamed of establishing an autonomous Narva Republic”, but this is not an issue anymore ⁽¹⁶⁶⁴⁾.

All non-Estonians are in principle seen as foreigners with no voting rights on the national level. Integration is only possible through naturalization ⁽¹⁶⁶⁵⁾, but naturalization is a difficult process in Estonia and bound to a high knowledge of Estonian language. The minorities, however, often do not have sufficient Estonian language skills, because during Soviet times, Russian language was much more widely spoken. Especially elderly people are disadvantaged, because the younger now learn Estonian in school. Other ethnicities than Estonians are also disadvantaged in the working sector, again mostly owing to language requirements. In 2014, approximately 8 percent of the Russian speaking minority remain without citizenship rights.

In general, the Russian-speaking population suffers from socio-economic discrimination. Yet, the younger generation is better integrated into and accepted in the Estonian society ⁽¹⁶⁶⁶⁾. Also, there are two national parties representing the Russian minorities ⁽¹⁶⁶⁷⁾.

While the Ukraine crisis created tensions in the region, the status of neither ethnic group has significantly changed. However, the number of Ukrainian asylum seekers increased ⁽¹⁶⁶⁸⁾.

¹⁶⁶³ [Lagerspetz Maier, 2010]

¹⁶⁶⁴ [Eremeyev, 2017]

¹⁶⁶⁵ [Van Elsuwege, 2004]

¹⁶⁶⁶ [Eremeyev, 2017]

¹⁶⁶⁷ [Lagerspetz Maier, 2010]

¹⁶⁶⁸ [Corkhill, 2014]

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Political status of ethnic groups in Estonia

From 1991 until 2017

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Estonians	0.679	DOMINANT
Russians	0.256	POWERLESS
Ukrainians	0.021	POWERLESS
Byelorussians	0.013	POWERLESS

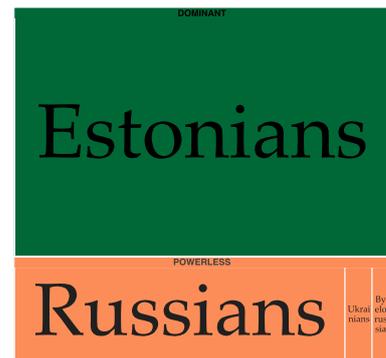


Figure 292: Political status of ethnic groups in Estonia during 1991-2017.

Geographical coverage of ethnic groups in Estonia

From 1991 until 2017

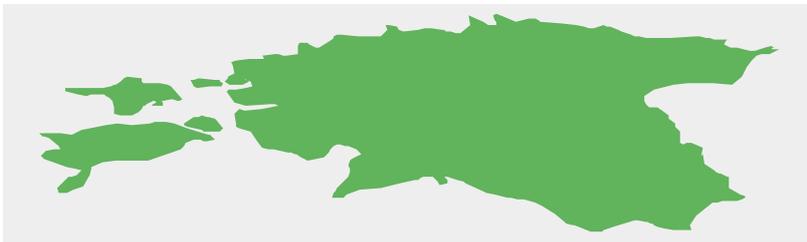


Figure 293: Map of ethnic groups in Estonia during 1991-2017.

	Group name	Area in km ²	Type
■	Estonians	43 903	Statewide
	Byelorussians		Urban
	Ukrainians		Urban
	Russians		Urban

Table 97: List of ethnic groups in Estonia during 1991-2017.