

# The Formation and Development of the Estonian Diaspora

Tiit Tammaru, Kaja Kumer-Haukanõmm and Kristi Anniste

*The Estonian diaspora was formed by two major, completed, waves of emigration and one further, emerging, wave of out-migration. The first mass emigration started in the mid-nineteenth century and lasted until World War I. During this period, demographic transition was taking place, yet there were limited options for urbanward migration within Estonia. This situation forced many Estonians to look for alternative destinations. Russia attracted migrants to its new agricultural lands and thus the Eastern sub-diaspora of Estonia took shape. The Western sub-diaspora emerged as a result of a second mass emigration in the form of a refugee exodus during World War II. The third and ongoing wave of emigration began at the end of the 1980s, and has broadened the geographical extent of the Western sub-diaspora. This paper outlines the formation of the Estonian sub-diasporas in the East and West, and clarifies the spatial and temporal changes they have undergone. While the formation of the Eastern sub-diaspora is relatively well studied, there are research gaps on the development of the Western one. This paper presents new archival evidence that documents the formation of the Western sub-diaspora, particularly in relation to the period following the Soviet era. We also present data on emigration since Estonia regained independence. Key findings indicate that the Eastern sub-diaspora continues to contract, while the size of the Western element of the diaspora has remained stable throughout the postwar period. The continued viability of the Western sub-diaspora is a result of new emigration since the collapse of the Soviet Union, but this outwards migration is smaller in scale than the two earlier periods of mass emigration.*

*Keywords: Estonia; Emigration; Diaspora; Return Migration*

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## Introduction

The number of Estonians living abroad was modest until the mid-nineteenth century, accounting for just 3 to 4 per cent of the total population (Kulu 1992; Maamägi 1980; Rosenberg 1998; Tepp 1994a, 1994b). The subsequent formation of the Estonian diaspora was made up of two main (completed) waves and a further, emerging, wave of emigration. The first mass emigration to Russia started in the mid-nineteenth century and lasted until World War I, resulting in the formation of the Eastern sub-diaspora. The Western arm of the Estonian diaspora emerged as a result of a great refugee exodus during World War II, and has continued to grow since Estonia regained independence in 1991. The aim of this paper is to outline the formation of the Estonian diaspora, and the spatial and temporal changes that it has undergone. We initially focus on the changes in the Eastern and Western sub-diasporas, before presenting results relating to key host countries. The distinction between the Eastern and Western components of the diaspora is analytically important because their formation and later development diverge significantly. The Eastern sub-diaspora includes areas that were part of the former Soviet Union (excluding the Baltic states of Latvia and Lithuania); the Western sub-diaspora covers all other host countries. Russia is the major host country to the east, while the United States, Canada, Sweden and Finland have the largest Estonian communities in the West.

Although the first wave of emigration has been relatively well studied, the opening of archival materials for researchers after the demise of the Soviet Union enables us to shed some new light. Moreover, the changes in the diaspora in both the East and the West since the collapse of the Soviet Union have also remained largely unexplored. Finally, our knowledge of new emigration since Estonia regained independence in 1991 is modest. The major contribution of this paper comes from its focus on the long-term spatial and temporal evolution of the Estonian diaspora, including recent changes. In the first section, we describe the formation of the Eastern and Western sub-diasporas. The overview on the formation of the Eastern element of the diaspora is based primarily on a review of the existing literature. We also incorporate the different arguments presented by demographers and historians: whereas demographers focus on the formation of the potential for emigration as a result of the demographic transition in Estonia (Katus 1989; Kulu 1992), historians stress the role of societal conditions and the pull factors operating in Russia (Must 2007; Rosenberg 1998). The second section of the paper presents an overview of the formation of the Western sub-diaspora, based on recent archival work (see also Kumer-Haukanõmm 2005, 2006). In the third section, the data for our study are introduced. Much of the data for the period 1945–90 are drawn from Kulu's (1992) study. However, they are supplemented by the most recent world census figures—from around 2000. The fourth and fifth sections analyse the development of the Eastern and Western sub-diasporas since their formation, and the final section concludes the paper.

### **Formation of the Eastern Sub-Diaspora**

From the beginning of the eighteenth century until World War I, Estonia was part of the Russian Empire. However, Baltic Germans, endorsed by the Russian Empire, oversaw the day-to-day governance of the population and were the landlords in Estonia. Before the mid-nineteenth century, the Estonian diaspora accounted for only 3 to 4 per cent of the total population and, of these emigrants, most lived in Russia (Kulu 1992; Kulu and Tammaru 2000; Maamägi 1980; Rosenberg 1998; Tepp 1994a, 1994b). A smaller number of emigrants were to be found in Finland and Sweden—mostly young men seeking refuge from the 25-year military service that awaited them in the Russian Empire at that time (Tannberg 2006). About 660,000 Estonians lived in Estonia, with an additional 30,000 living abroad in 1850. The country was one of the forerunners of the demographic and economic change in the Russian Empire; the steady increase in life expectancy signalled the start of the demographic transition in the middle of the nineteenth century, resulting in considerable rural population growth (Katus 1989). Estonia also became one of the most important centres of industrialisation in the then Russian Empire (Renter 1958). However, state policy at that time favoured immigrant labour over Estonians; thus, not only Russian industrial workers, but also clerks, teachers and people of many other occupations, came to work in the cities of Estonia (Laar 1992; Raun 1987). This effectively closed part of the emerging urban industrial labour market to Estonians who might otherwise have migrated to the cities from rural areas. In this way, the processes of rural out-migration during the demographic transition and industrialisation were not as closely connected in Estonia as in other parts of nineteenth-century Europe.

Industrialisation was related to the immigration of Russians into the major cities of Estonia. The fact that demographic transition and industrialisation were separated in Estonia also had very important long-term implications for the formation of the Estonian identity, with the effect that rural identity remained very strong. Although the urbanward migration of the Estonian rural population was limited, the potential for out-migration continued to grow as a result of demographic transition. Changes undertaken in the legal framework in the nineteenth century enabled the conversion of this potential into increasing mobility rates. First, serfdom was abolished by the 1816 and 1819 peasant laws. Although this did not have an immediate impact on migration, as the land remained the property of Baltic German landlords, manors continued to be the main units of production, and farmers were forced to rent their land (Jansen 2007). But conflicts between peasants and landlords increased within the new legal framework that led farmers to search for new lands outside Estonia (Maamägi 1980; Rosenberg 1998; Vassar 1975; Võime 1992). At the same time, since the mid-nineteenth century, the central government of the Russian Empire intensified the colonisation of its southern lands, and news of this policy began to spread through the rural areas of Estonia (Must 2007). Second, the enforcement of the passport law in 1863 removed several legal obstacles to mobility and had a direct impact on the increase in migration (Raag 1999). Thus, the combination of these four

important contextual factors—the formation of the out-migration potential in rural areas, removal of restrictions to rural out-migration, the closure to Estonians of part of the emerging urban labour market, and the policy of colonising new lands in the Russian Empire—triggered a mass emigration of Estonians to Russia.

Several other factors contributed to this emigration:

- an increasing number of deportees (mainly prisoners) were sent to Siberia from the mid-nineteenth century from the European regions of the Russian Empire, including Estonia (Kulu 1997);
- unfavourable natural conditions and related famines in the middle of the nineteenth century resulted in an increase in the out-migration rate from Estonia (Jansen 2007; Raag 1999; Rosenberg 1998; Võime 1992);
- peasants were informed that having the same religion as the Czar of the Russian Empire would grant them free land in Russia, and an influential religious leader advocated conversion and resettlement in the fertile lands of the Crimean peninsula (Kask 2006); and
- Estonians increasingly began to aspire to attaining higher education from the mid-nineteenth century onwards; although Estonia had its own university in Tartu, peasants could not study there by law, and their closest option was St Petersburg in Russia (Jansen 2007).

While there were diverse reasons for emigration, a critical factor facilitating it was the connection of Estonia to the Russian railway network. The Tallinn–St. Petersburg railway began operations in 1870, followed by the opening of the trans-Siberian railway to Omsk in 1894 (Karma 1952; Kulu 1997; Paidra 1962; Raag 1999). The trans-Siberian railway was an especially important part of the migration and resettlement policy in Russia. It was built under difficult conditions in an extremely challenging natural environment, primarily by exploiting the labour of deportees. Once completed, the railway not only facilitated further deportations to Siberia, but also attracted voluntary migrants to the remote region (Kulu 1997). The central government of the Russian Empire started to pay resettlement benefits in the 1890s, and the resettlement policy for farmers further intensified following the 1905 revolution in Russia.

By the beginning of World War I, Estonia had lost a total of approximately 200,000 people, or 20 per cent of its population, as a result of emigration to Russia (Kulu 1992; Kulu and Tammaru 2000). Most of the emigrants found a new home in the rural regions, but many also settled in urban areas. Geographically, more than 300 Estonian settlements were established all across Russia, including Siberia and the Far East, but 90 per cent of Estonians lived in the neighbouring European parts of Russia by the end of this wave of mass emigration (Kask 2006). The most important ethnic concentration emerged in the city of St. Petersburg (Pullat 1981). Overall, about one third of the Estonian diaspora lived in urban areas, comparable to the level of urbanisation in Estonia at that time (Tammaru 2001). The most important rural settlements were established in the regions of St. Petersburg, Pskov and Novgorod in

European or North-Western parts of Russia, along the Volga River in the Samara and Saratov regions, and in the Crimea, Caucasia and Siberia (Jansen 2007; Rosenberg 1998). Local ethnic concentrations of Estonians (often originating from the same municipality) were to be found in the form of Estonian villages, where Estonian remained the main language for both everyday communication and the schooling of the children (Kulu 1997, 2000). Ethnic minorities had a right to establish their own language schools in Russia at that time (Maamägi 1980) and there was an Estonian school in every large Estonian village (Kulu 2000). Estonian emigrants did not change their economic sector or occupation (most remained farmers), but their social position improved considerably: former tenants in Estonia became landlords in Russia (Laas 1987). The housing was also of a higher quality and this tied Estonians strongly to their villages, thus reducing both their redistribution within Russia and the likelihood of return migration to Estonia. As a consequence, we find that migration within Russia occurred mainly between Estonian villages, and no more than 10 to 20 per cent of the emigrants returned to Estonia. The total number of Estonians living abroad in 1917 was 215,000: 200,000 in the East (mainly in Russia) and about 15,000 in the West. This constituted 19 per cent of the total world population of Estonians at that time and, as such, represents the historical maximum size of the diaspora in both absolute and relative terms.

### **Formation of the Western Sub-Diaspora**

Estonia gained independence in 1918, and this effectively ended the mass emigration to Russia. The potential for out-migration also decreased as the process of demographic transition in Estonia was completed (Katus 1989). At this time, the size of the Estonian diaspora outside Russia was still relatively small. This Western sub-diaspora resided mainly in North America—the major destination of European emigrants at that time (Livi-Bacci 2000; Raag 1999; Rosenberg 1998). There are four identifiable groups of Estonians who settled in North America: emigrants from the coastal areas of Estonia; Estonian sailors absconding from the Russian military and cargo ships; political emigrants fleeing the 1905 revolution; and onward migrants from Russia (Katus 1989; Kulu 1992; Pennar *et al.* 1975; Raag 1999; Võime 1992). Estonians emigrating to the United States in the nineteenth century were chiefly motivated by the widely publicised Homestead Act and the California gold rush (Raag 1999). Migration continued at a modest level during the interwar period, when Estonia was an independent state. About 16,000 people (75 per cent of whom were Estonians) left Estonia between 1924 and 1938. Of these, 41 per cent went to Europe, 30 per cent to the Americas, 19 per cent to Russia, 8 per cent to Australia, and 2 per cent elsewhere (Kulu 1992). Immigration to the US ceased after legal restrictions were imposed on immigration from Eastern and Central Europe in 1924, with the result that South America became the most important new destination, and sizeable Estonian communities were established in Argentina and Brazil in the 1920s and 1930s (Kulu 1997b). Emigration to European countries intensified in the 1930s

(Kumer-Haukanõmm 2005; Laas 1987; Raag 1999). The total size of the Estonian diaspora in Western countries is estimated to have been no more than 30,000 people by 1939 (Kulu 1992). Nonetheless, this figure indicates that the Western sub-diaspora had roughly doubled in size during the interwar period.

To a large extent, the Estonian diaspora in Western countries developed as a result of the events of World War II, as was the case for the other Baltic states of Latvia and Lithuania (see Kangeris 2006; Kumer-Haukanõmm 2006; Saldukas 2006). This period of emigration from Estonia began when 4,000 Estonians accompanied the Baltic Germans returning to Germany in 1939 (Kumer-Haukanõmm 2006; Tiit 1993). During World War II, Estonia was alternately occupied by the Soviets and the Germans. About 7,000–8,000 people left Estonia during the first Soviet occupation in 1940–41 (Kumer-Haukanõmm 2006), but the more substantial wave of emigration took place at the time of the subsequent German occupation, 1941–44. One cause of this emigration was the employment of about 10,000 Estonians in Germany during these years. A further 5,000 young Estonians, who had been conscripted to the German Army, escaped to Finland (Raag 1999; Uustalu and Moora 1992), and there was a general increase in the level of emigration towards the end of the German occupation when the US government facilitated, mainly through its embassy in Stockholm, the emigration of the Baltic elite (1,000 people, including 275 from Estonia) in 1944.<sup>1</sup> The Swedish government also assisted in the emigration of a Swedish minority in Estonia, and about 2,000 used this opportunity to move to Sweden (Kumer-Haukanõmm 2006).

Emigration peaked in Autumn 1944 as Soviet troops were approaching the Baltics, and the three countries—Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania—were finally incorporated into the Soviet Union. It is difficult to estimate the total number of those who left during that great exodus, because there is little certainty about the number who died on the journey, the number of children, the effect of the manipulation of personal identification documents, the number of soldiers who died, or the number of people who failed to return to Estonia for a variety of reasons. While there are reliable data recording the death toll of major bombings and the sinking of large ships, many people left on small boats over the stormy Baltic Sea in the Autumn of 1944. Nonetheless, gross estimates can still be provided of the number of refugees and on this basis it is believed that about 70,000–80,000 people left for Western countries during World War II, and as many as 6 to 9 per cent of the them died on the journey (Kumer-Haukanõmm 2006; Tiit 1993). A total of 40,000 people reached Germany (Kumer-Haukanõmm 2006), and 27,000 landed in Sweden (Andrae 2005; Reinans 2006). A small number of refugees reached other destinations, including neighbouring Finland. Some were later repatriated to Soviet Estonia, but most stayed in the West. The estimated number of return migrants ranges between 1,000—according to Western archives<sup>2</sup> and data from refugee organisations—to 11,000, on the basis of Soviet archive data.<sup>3</sup> A further clarification is needed for the exact number of forced and voluntarily repatriates. Together with earlier out-migrants, the estimated size of

the Western sub-diaspora in 1945 was at least 90,000 people (Kulu 1992). The total size of the Estonian world diaspora was then approximately 200,000 people.

### **Research Data**

Our data on the changes to the Estonian diaspora in the East and West from the time of their formation until 2000 come from multiple sources and vary depending on the methods of collection and dissemination used in host countries. The different principles of data collection also affect our definition of an Estonian living abroad. Broadly speaking, countries use three definitions in their statistics that could be used for analysing the size of the Estonian diaspora in the host country (cf. Herm 2007). One group of countries, including those that were part of the former Soviet Union, collects data on nationality on the basis of the self-identification of individuals. A second group of countries, including North America and Australia, uses the individual's country of origin (including the origin of parents) as the main variable, and this, too, could be used to define the size of the Estonian diaspora. A third group—most Western European countries—collects data on citizenship and country of birth. There are clear disadvantages in using these last two definitions: firstly, not all the members of the Estonian diaspora have Estonian citizenship; and, secondly, an individual's country of birth does not always match with his or her nationality.

Substantial differences in the methods of collecting and disseminating data mean that it is clearly not possible to apply a single—even broadly applicable—definition to delineate our research population: Estonians living abroad. There are two main sources from which data may be obtained: population registers and censuses. Most Western European countries use registers as the main data source while, in the countries of the former Soviet Union and North America, census collections are the dominant source. Despite the shortcomings of varying definitions and data sources across countries, diachronic variations in data-processing methods are smaller because each country's definitions have remained relatively unchanged over time. It follows that strict comparisons in the size of the Estonian diaspora could not be made between countries; however, the data sources relating to changes in the diaspora over time within countries or regions are more consistent.

### **Development of the Eastern Sub-Diaspora since its Formation**

In addition to differences in formation of the two subsets of the Estonian diaspora, their later development also diverged considerably: return migration characterised the Eastern sub-diaspora, while onward migration from the initial migrant destinations characterised the Western one.

We focus first on the changes in the Eastern sub-diaspora. Estonia gained independence during World War I, and this had a considerable impact on the size and development of the Eastern sub-diaspora. Estonians living in Russia and the Ukraine could opt for Estonian citizenship and repatriate to Estonia (Kask 2006). About

52,000 people wanted to return—more than expected—but only 37,500 were able to do so. There were several reasons for return migration to Estonia. Firstly, the manor system was demolished in Estonia and land was distributed among the farmers (Raag 1999). This meant that peasants became landowners which, together with the independence of Estonia, operated as a pull factor. There were also push factors in Russia. Many Estonians were conscripted from the villages during World War I and later during the civil war in Russia, and some did not return. The villages were ravaged by ‘red and white terror’,<sup>4</sup> horses and provisions were requisitioned under the policy of the war on communism (1917–21), and Estonian schools—the cornerstones of ethnic identity in the villages in Russia—were badly affected when the supply of textbooks from Estonia was restricted by Estonian independence. As a result, the number of potential repatriates was high, and an age cap and other restrictions were imposed to limit the number of applicants. For example, people over 50, those who were inactive, and other population groups, were prohibited from returning to Estonia (Kask 2006). The number of return migrants from neighbouring North-Western Russia, including St. Petersburg, was high, while the number was particularly modest from the more distant, mainly rural, areas. The share of Estonians living in urban areas in Russia declined to 23 per cent according to the 1926 census (Kulu 2000), which indicates that urban dwellers were the more eager to return. The late 1920s was a period of relative prosperity in Estonian villages (Kulu 1997). However, the situation worsened considerably in the 1930s due to the brutal collectivisation taking place all across the Soviet Union (Fitzpatrick 1994), purges and exile of the wealthy peasant families to Siberia, other repressions in the villages (Getty and Manning 1993) and the elimination of the Estonian language from cultural and educational life (Kulu 2000). Of the 143,000 Estonians living in Russia before the Great Terror in 1937–38, 110,000 remained in 1945.

All in all, Estonia lost almost half of its Eastern sub-diaspora between 1917 and 1945. Given that the estimated number of Estonians living in the West was 90,000 in 1945, the total size of the diaspora can be estimated at approximately 200,000 people (Table 1). In absolute terms, this is less than in 1917 but, at 19 per cent of the total Estonian population, the share of diaspora population was the same in both 1917 and 1945 due to a decrease in the number of Estonians living in Estonia as a result of World War II (Table 1).

The size of the Eastern sub-diaspora declined further after World War II, despite the arrival of a considerable number of new, mainly forced, immigrants: a total of 50,000 Estonians reached Russia as a result of deportations and mobilisation by the Soviet Red Army. However, the size of the Estonian diaspora decreased from 143,000 in 1937–38, to 95,000 according to the first postwar census in the Soviet Union in 1959 for a number of reasons. First, 50,000 descendants of the earlier Estonian emigrants moved from the Soviet Union back to Estonia in the 1940s or after the war (Kulu 2000) leaving emigration and immigration flows more or less balanced. The return of Estonians loyal to the Soviet system played an important role in establishing new power structures in Soviet Estonia. About 1,000, mainly Estonian, Communist



**Table 1.** Estonians at home and abroad, 1850–2000

	Estonians in Estonia	Eastern sub-diaspora	Western sub-diaspora	Total diaspora	Total Estonians
1850	660,000	30,000		30,000	690,000
1897	880,000	125,000		125,000	1,005,000
1917	900,000	200,000	15,000	215,000	1,115,000
1926	970,000	155,000	25,000	180,000	1,150,000
1939	1,000,000	145,000	30,000	175,000	1,175,000
1945	830,000	110,000	90,000	200,000	1,030,000
1959	890,000	95,000	85,000	180,000	1,070,000
1970	925,000	80,000	85,000	165,000	1,090,000
1979	950,000	70,000	85,000	155,000	1,105,000
1989	965,000	65,000	85,000	150,000	1,115,000
2000	930,000	40,000	85,000	125,000	1,055,000

Party members moved to Estonia in 1940–41; in 1945, 30 per cent of the leaders of the Estonian Communist Party, including the head of the government of Soviet Estonia, were diaspora Estonians returning from Russia (Kulu 1997). Many people were carefully selected and schooled in special education centres in Russia before they were sent to Estonia.

Although the ideological return migrants formed only a small minority among the total 50,000 return migrants from Russia, they created a negative impression in Estonia of the Eastern sub-diaspora for several decades. This return migration continued throughout the Soviet period, but at a much slower pace than in the 1940s. There were 9,000 return migrants in the 1950s—some of whom were former deportees who were able to move to Estonia (but not to their previous place of residence) after the death of Stalin in 1953—11,000 in the 1960s, 7,000 in the 1970s, and 1,000 in the 1980s. Return migration was dominated by those born in the 1910s and 1920s who lived in Estonian villages in Russia but received their early education in Estonia. Only a small number of ‘return’ migrants represented the younger generations, born in the changed social context of rural Russia.

The substantial war losses are a second factor that contributed to the decrease of the number of Estonians in Russia. It is exceptionally difficult to estimate how many of the 50,000 forced migrants actually survived in Russia. According to the comprehensive study by Anne Applebaum (2003), direct losses could account for up to 50 per cent of the population of different ethnic groups who reached Russia during and after World War II as deportees and prisoners.

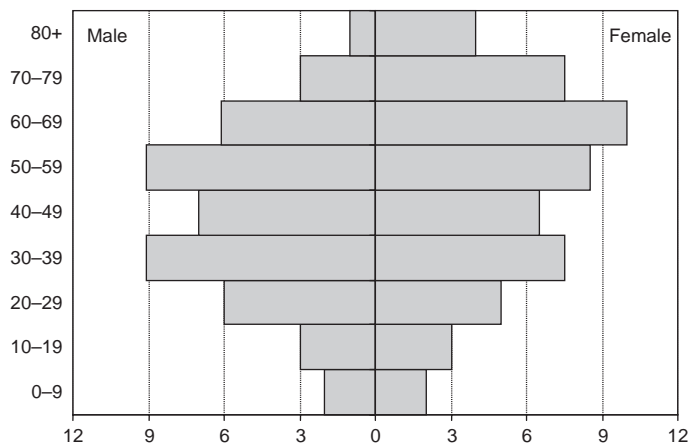
A third reason for the decrease in the size of the Eastern sub-diaspora was the assimilation process that took place in Russia. One of the main policy ideas driving the massive deportations was to force the absorption of the civil, social, religious and ethnic structures into the enlarged Soviet Union (Applebaum 2003). Such political motivations had a strong influence on both rural–urban migration and mixed marriages (assimilation) in Russia after World War II.

Urbanisation and assimilation in Russia continued until the end of the Soviet period. According to the last Soviet census held in 1989, 65 per cent of the Eastern sub-diaspora lived in urban areas (Kulu 2000); again, this figure is comparable to the rate of urbanisation of Estonians in Estonia (Tammaru 2001). With regard to assimilation, data on Estonians living in Siberia show that 54 per cent of the marriages were between Estonians in 1936, while only 6 per cent of the children born in 1992–94 had two Estonian parents (Kulu 1997). Thus, the Estonian villages, which were the centres of Estonian identity in Russia, have been slowly disappearing due to the natural changes in the age structure of those who stayed there. Most of the diaspora Estonians have moved to the cities in Russia, where intermarriage with Russians has led to their assimilation.

By the end of the Soviet period, one third of Eastern sub-diasporic Estonians were of retirement age, while only 1 in 10 was under 20 years (see Figure 1). This ageing demographic structure is the most influential factor in the contraction of the Eastern sub-diaspora since the demise of the Soviet Union, due to modest return migration rates—just 1,500 between the 1989 and 2000 censuses. This figure is high compared to the 1980s, but lower than during the interwar period, when a considerable part of the Estonian diaspora returned. There is thus no evidence of a mass return migration since Estonia regained its independence in 1991. Overall, the Eastern sub-diaspora decreased from 65,000 Estonians in 1989 to 40,000 in 2000. Given the very old age profile of the population, it is also evident that the Estonian diaspora in the East is not viable in the longer term.

### Development of the Western Sub-Diaspora since its Formation

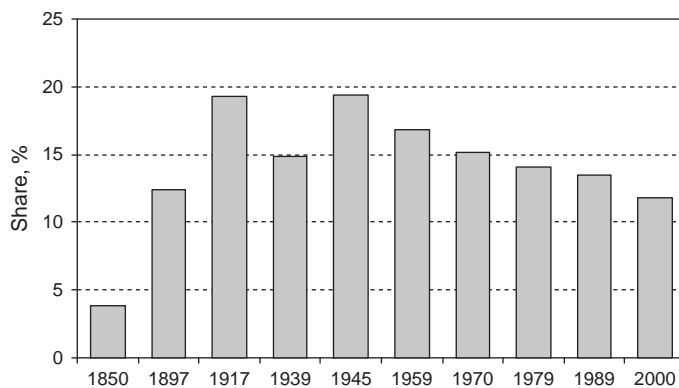
The number of Estonians living in the diaspora totalled 200,000 by 1945; 110,000 in the territories of the former Soviet Union and 90,000 in the West. This is slightly less than in 1917 in absolute figures but, as the number of Estonians in Estonia decreased



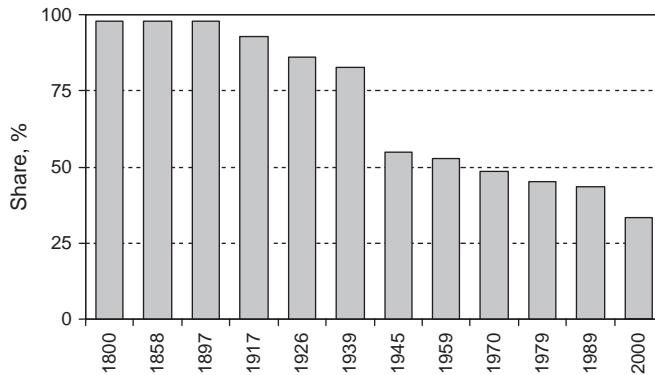
**Figure 1.** Estonians in the Soviet Union by age and gender (%), 1989

considerably as a result of World War II, we find an equal peak of 19 per cent in the proportion of diaspora Estonians both in 1917 and 1945 (Figure 2). While about 93 per cent of the diaspora Estonians lived in the East in 1917, this figure dropped to 55 per cent in 1945 after the great exodus to the West in 1944 (Figure 3). Unlike the Eastern sub-diaspora, the size of the Western one has remained constant over the last 60 years. During the Soviet period several thousand Estonians emigrated to the West (Pihlau 2003), but the number was too small to have had any major influence on the size of the Western sub-diaspora. Since the Eastern diaspora decreased, the proportion of the diaspora who reside in the West has also increased over time and accounts for two-thirds of the 125,000 Estonians living abroad today. The size of the total diaspora also steadily decreased during the postwar period, and now accounts for 12 per cent of all Estonians.

Although the size of the Western sub-diaspora has remained stable, we find considerable changes in the distribution and composition of the diaspora population over time. The two first destinations of the Estonian war refugees were Germany, 40,000, and Sweden, 27,000 (Andrae 2005; Kangro 1976; Kumer-Haukanõmm 2006; Reinans 2006). Most of the refugees who reached Sweden stayed there (22,000), but there was also some onward migration, mainly to Canada (Reinans 2006). Most of the refugees who reached Germany were concentrated in the displaced persons camps, and were initially considered as future repatriates. However, it quickly became evident that most of the refugees from Eastern Europe, including Estonia, did not want to return to their country of origin due to the communist takeover in their homelands. Most of the Estonians left Germany for Great Britain, Australia, Canada and the United States (Haas and Siska 1988; Kumer-Haukanõmm 2006; Kurlents 1975). Immigration laws were strict in host countries just after the war, these countries accepting only younger refugees with suitable skills, but such restrictions were eased considerably in 1948 (Holborn 1956). In total, Great Britain accepted about 5,500–6,000 Estonian refugees, mainly from Germany; 6,000 Estonians moved to Australia; 11,000 to Canada; 12,000 to the US; and about 2,000–3,000 remained in



**Figure 2.** Share of diaspora in the total Estonian population, 1850–2000



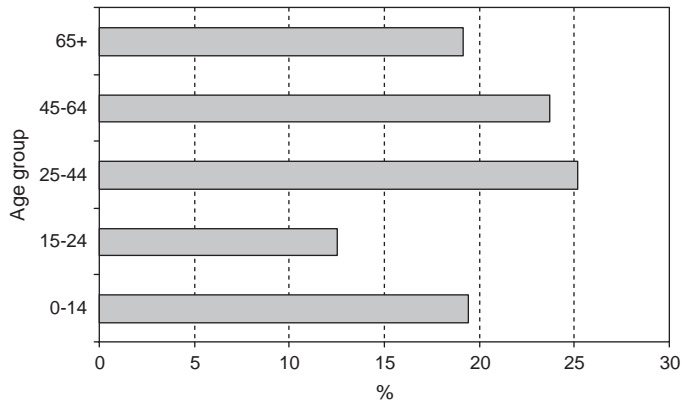
**Figure 3.** Share of Eastern sub-diaspora in total Estonian diaspora, 1850–2000

Germany (Aun 1985; Kool 1999; Kumer-Haukanõmm 2006; Pennar *et al.* 1975). The US and Canada thus became the major host countries for Estonians outside Russia, because most members of the Western sub-diaspora were already settled in North America before the great exodus of 1944.

When Estonia regained independence in 1991, the biggest Estonian community (46,000 people) was still in Russia. By 2000, the number of Estonians living in Russia had dropped to 28,000, on a par with the Estonian community in the US and Canada (Table 2). However, the composition of the Estonian diaspora following the great exodus is rapidly changing, as illustrated with data from Canada. First, the number of single-origin Estonians dropped from 65 per cent in 1980 to 45 per cent in 2000, mainly on account of the younger generations' increasing tendency to assimilate through mixed marriage. Secondly, the Estonians in this population are rapidly ageing (Figure 4). Although the age groups are of equal size, single-origin Estonians dominate the older groups, while people born to mixed marriages dominate the younger. A drop in fertility might also be expected to have an impact on the population because fewer members in the 15–24 age groups are approaching the family age. This means that the Western sub-diaspora that emerged during World War II is shrinking as well, though at a slower pace than the older, Eastern sub-diaspora. The difference in the West is that the shrinkage of the diaspora is predominantly related to assimilation and the natural evolution of the age structure, as return migration from the West is considerably lower than that from the East.

**Table 2.** Estonians by major host countries, 1990 and 2000

	1990	2000	Definition	Source
Russia	46,000	28,000	Ethnicity	Census 2002
United States	27,000	25,000	Origin	Census 2000
Canada	20,000	22,000	Origin	Census 2001
Finland	1,000	13,000	Citizenship	Register 2002
Sweden	12,000	10,000	Place of birth	Register 2002



**Figure 4.** Age distribution of Estonians in Canada, 2001

Census data for 2000 reveal that 1,000 Estonians who lived in Western countries in the 1989 census had returned to Estonia. The total number of return migrants—about 2,500—was therefore less than during the interwar period, when a significant part of the Eastern sub-diaspora returned to Estonia.

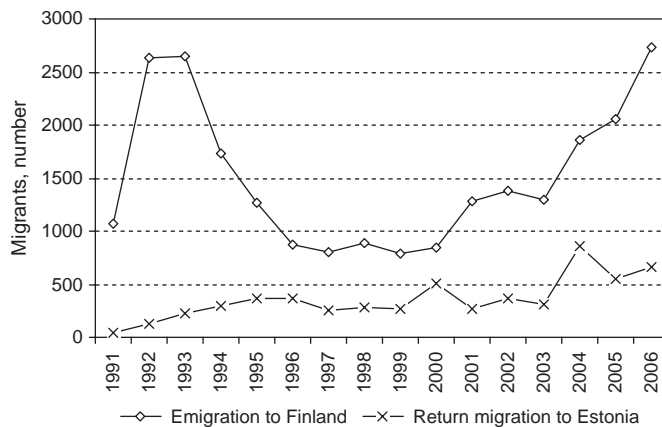
In the context of assimilation and the ageing of the 1944 refugee generation and their children, the overall stability in the size of the Western sub-diaspora is due to the new, third wave of emigration to Western Europe since 1991. Unfortunately, we do not have reliable statistics on emigration in Estonia, and are not able to separate new emigrants from the total number of Estonians in most host countries. However, we are able to shed some light on the volume of emigration. The most important new destination for Estonians is neighbouring Finland, where register data show both emigration and the size of the Estonian population. It is evident that the first peak in post-1991 emigration occurred at the beginning of the 1990s, and included Ingrian Finns.<sup>5</sup> This migration flow is thus specific to Finland and we do not expect to observe it in other new destinations. The Finnish data also show that in-migration intensified again after Estonia became a member of the European Union in 2004 (Figure 5).

**Table 3.** Estonians by origin in US and Canada, 1980 and 2000

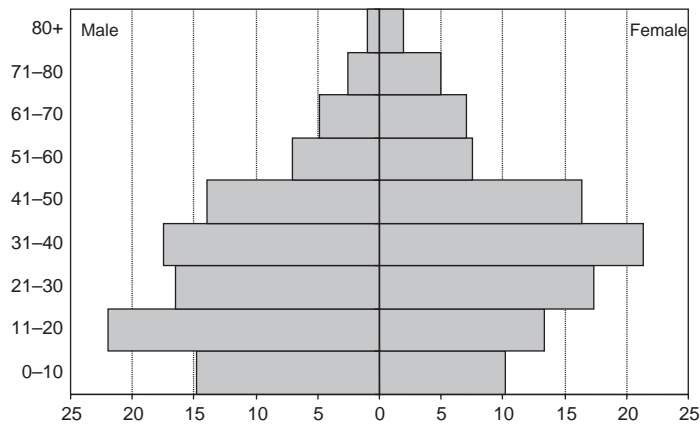
	1980		2000	
	Number	%	Number	%
<b>United States</b>				
Single origin	17,000	65	20,000	80
Multiple origin	9,000	35	5,000	20
Total	26,000	100	25,000	100
<b>Canada</b>				
Single origin	13,000	65	10,000	45
Multiple origin	7,000	35	12,000	55
Total	20,000	100	22,000	100

Although return migration is increasing, there is also growth in the number of Estonians living in Finland since 2004. While the Estonian community—just 1,000 people—was almost non-existent in Finland in 1991, their number reached 19,000 in 2006. Other destinations for the newly emerging Estonian diaspora include the US, Sweden, Great Britain, Germany and Belgium, all with only a few thousand emigrants. We can make indirect calculations on the emigration of Estonians for the period 1989 and 2000, because the 2000 census gives us information about population figures, vital events and immigration patterns. The residual (that is, the population change between 1989 and 2000, minus natural decrease, plus immigration) of 17,000 people includes both the possible census undercount for Estonians and emigration. This residual does not include ethnic minorities (one third of the total population) who could also contribute to westward migration. It would appear that these two factors more or less counterbalance each other, and that the number of emigrants was between 15,000 and 20,000 during the intercensus period. We also know that 13,500 people from Estonia emigrated to Finland at the same time—another 10,500 between 2001 and 2006—and that the proportion of total emigrants moving to Finland decreased somewhat once Estonia became a member of the European Union in 2004 (Herm 2007). It is therefore possible to estimate that about 35,000–40,000 people emigrated to the West between 1991 and 2006.<sup>6</sup>

As expected, we find younger people dominating among the post-1991 emigrants to the West. The age structure of Estonians living in Finland is highly representative of the age composition of the emerging diaspora, in that the population is considerably younger (Figure 6) than the old diaspora communities in the East and West. It is also interesting to note that there are only minor differences in the gender composition of Estonian immigrants to Finland (53 per cent are women over the 1991–2006 period), whereas at 63 per cent, men dominate the return migrants to Estonia. But the over-representation of (young) women in the newly emerging



**Figure 5.** The migration of Estonians between Estonia and Finland, 1991–2006



**Figure 6.** Estonians in Finland by age and gender (%), 2000

Estonian diaspora is more evident in other European countries, including Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Holland and Belgium, where age and gender data are available.

### Conclusions

This paper has analysed the formation and development of the Estonian diaspora since the nineteenth century. We have distinguished three main waves of emigration from Estonia. The first wave took place between the mid-nineteenth century and World War I, when Estonia was part of the Russian Empire, and approximately 200,000 Estonians migrated to Russia. The emigration potential was high in Estonia due to early demographic transition compared to most of the other parts of the Russian Empire and was related to rapid population growth in rural areas on the one hand, and several social, economic and political factors triggering immigration to Russia on the other. The total size of the Estonian diaspora was at its historical peak (215,000 people) in 1917 and formed 19 per cent of the total number of Estonians. However, the Eastern sub-diaspora began to decrease significantly after World War I. The main reasons for this contraction include the return migration of Estonians to independent Estonia during the interwar period, and later to Soviet Estonia, the assimilation of Estonians living in Russia during the Soviet era, waves of terror in Russia, and high mortality as a result of the rapidly ageing population of the present-day Eastern sub-diaspora. Considering the increase in the effect of these factors in recent times, there is doubt as to its future viability.

The second major wave of emigration from Estonia took place during World War II in the form of a great refugee exodus, and about 90,000 Estonians had taken up residence in Western countries by 1945. The total size of the diaspora was 200,000 people—19 per cent of all Estonians. This was the second peak in the size of the diaspora population as a proportion of the total number of Estonians. The largest Estonian communities emerged in the US, Canada, Sweden and Australia, and the number of Estonians in Western countries has since remained stable. There are two

main reasons for this. Firstly, return migration was almost non-existent from the West during the Soviet period. Secondly, although both the Eastern and the Western sub-diasporas have been affected by an ageing population and the assimilation of new generations, the stability of the Western sub-diaspora is assured by the third wave of emigration to the West since 1991. Compared to the first two waves of emigration, the scale of this third, ongoing wave is smaller, with a total of 35,000–40,000 people. However, emigration has increased since 2004, when Estonia became a member of the European Union; it is also evident that temporary labour mobility is much more intense compared to permanent residential changes. Finland, Germany and other EU member-states are the main destination countries for this new emigration. The Estonian community is also very viable in those countries due to its younger age profile. Today, the total size of the Estonian diaspora is 125,000 people and it forms 12 per cent of the total world population of Estonians. While most of the diaspora Estonians lived in the East at the beginning of World War I, this share has now dropped to 33 per cent, and Finland will soon replace Russia as the host of the largest Estonian community.

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### Notes

- [1] NARA (US National Archives and Records Administration) RG 59 M 1284 Roll 49-50 RG 59: Refugees and DPs.
- [2] NARA RG 278: Records of Displaced Persons Commission, Box 47; ERA (*Eesti Riigiarhiiv*–Estonia State Archive) 1608-2-496 L.124 Fond 1608 *Eesti Peaksonulaat New Yorgis, nimistu 2*.
- [3] ERA R-1789-1 Fond R-1789, *nimistu 1. Eesti NSV Ministrite Nõukogu juures asuv Repatrieerimise Osakond*.
- [4] The Bolshevik Red Army, often in temporary alliance with other leftist pro-revolutionary groups, was fighting the forces of the White Army, the loosely allied anti-Bolshevik forces.
- [5] Finnish rural peasants of Ingria (now part of Leningrad Oblast, Russia). They were forced to relocate to other parts of the Soviet Union, including Estonia, during the Soviet period. Many moved to Finland after the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991.
- [6] We should remember that a considerable return migration of Russians back to Russia occurred in Estonia at the beginning of the 1990s as well (Tammaru and Kulu 2003).

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