

Living arrangements of middle-aged and older people in Estonia under societal change: findings from four censuses 1979–2011.

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This study intends to identify changes that have occurred in living arrangements of middle-aged and older people through the period from the end of the state socialism to the present in Estonia. The literature reveals relatively small interest in living arrangements of people in their older age in the Eastern European countries, whereas, in general, the rapid changes in family composition and behaviour in the 1990s have been closely followed. For example, Thornton & Philipov (2009) analysed changes occurring in family and demographic behaviour after Soviet regime collapsed. Iacovou & Skew (2011) assessed whether it is possible to integrate Eastern Europe family typologies to the structure used in countries of Western Europe, or whether family behaviour in these countries differs from the West. Even if changes in family formation concern mostly younger adults, the effects of these changes will reach directly or indirectly older people as well. In general, dynamics of living arrangements are well researched in Europe and elsewhere, yet even among these studies only a few distinguish people in their second half of life (e.g. Fokkema & Liefbroer 2008). Household financial situation, poverty and living standards have been investigated for Eastern Europe more extensively and among these studies, some include the role of living arrangements (Steinführer & Haase, 2007; Ahmed & Jean Emigh, 2005; Wagner & Valdés Cifuentes, 2014). However, only a handful of them considered older people more specifically (e.g. De Jong Gierveld, Dykstra & Schenk 2011). Regarding Estonia, population ageing has been extensively analysed at the turn of the century (Katus et al 2002) but these studies understandably could not yet include dynamics of the population in 21st century. Also, Estonia appears only in very few relevant comparative studies (e.g. De Vos & Sandefur 2002, Iacovou & Skew 2011).

Research question

According to Iacovou & Skew (2011), based on the evidence from European Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC), Estonia distinguished among 27 EU member states with the highest proportion of single persons aged 65 and over, as well as with the highest share of single persons living with adult children. At the same time, the share of people living in married couples was among the smallest among the older population. De Vos & Sandefur (2002) based on the 1990 census data found that the living arrangements of older people in Estonia presented a different pattern compared with both East-South and Northern European countries. Since 1990s the conditions and possibilities to choose how to organise a personal life, the availability of housing, freedom to choose the place of residence and move across state borders, have markedly changed in Estonia. One could expect that such developments had an impact on living arrangements of older people, and could change the structure of living arrangements compared with the Soviet period. Against that background, the research question is how the societal changes from the end of state socialism to current social and economic situation have modified living arrangements of Estonian middle-aged and older adults of whom the majority spent their adult life prior to the major societal changes.

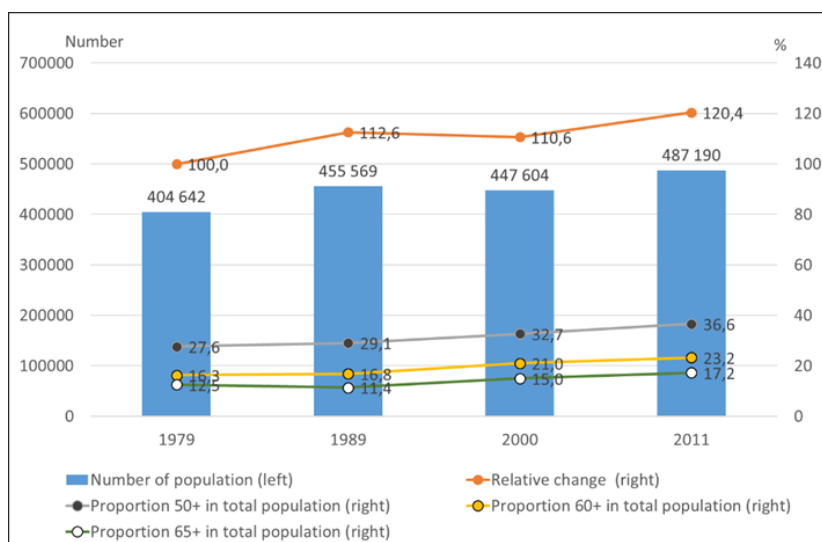
Data and method

We use individual-level microdata from four Estonian censuses – 1979, 1989, 2000 and 2011 – for compiling a comparable typology of individual living arrangements across time. These data, even if characterising only time points, perfectly cover the period from before major changes occurred in the society to the present, thus allowing to analyse the changes during this transformation. Census data are suited for identifying new appearing features in a population as well as for capturing small population groups, but the census methodology has changed with each census. The household data was collected through a reference person in 1979 and 1989 that hinder the analysis of family relationships in multigenerational households. In contrast, the 2000 census mapped only links between partners and children. Only the 2011 census described all relationships between household members by the aid of an ad hoc matrix. With support from the Estonian Research Project IMO (Infotechnological Mobility Observatory) project, the data of three last censuses (1989, 2000 and 2011) have been harmonised. This enabled us to construct a comparable typology of living arrangements: persons i) living alone, ii) with a spouse/ partner, iii) with children or parents and with other people at older age. The data of 1979 census was added and harmonised for this contribution. A variety of explanatory characteristics such as marital status, home ownership, level of education, number of children born to a woman, are available from the censuses. However, in the current study co-residence with partner and with children opposed to living alone is of main interest.

Results

In Estonia, the proportion of older population increased persistently from the 1880s to the 1940s but large inflows of post-war immigration and mortality stagnation kept the proportion of older population nearly constant for nearly four decades. In the European context, such development can be regarded as the major peculiarity of the ageing process of the Estonian population. However, with societal change of the 1990s this situation came to an end (Figure 1). Against the backdrop of the decrease of total population from nearly 1,6 million in 1989 to 1,3 million in 2011, the proportion of middle-aged and older persons has increased, reaching over a third of the total population in 2011. This increase has occurred both due to larger cohorts reaching age 50 since 2000 as well as better survival of older cohorts, doubling the age group.

Figure 1. Dynamics of population aged 50 and older in Estonia, 1979, 1989, 2000 and 2011 censuses.

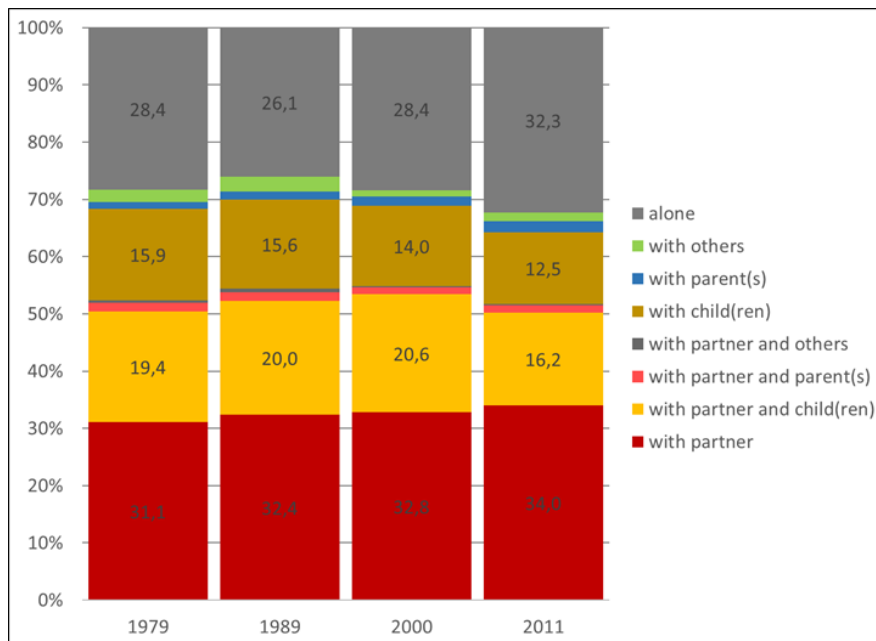


What are the changes in the living arrangements of middle-aged and older persons?

About 70 % of the Estonian population aged 50 and older lives either with a partner (married or cohabiting) or child(ren) (or child(ren)'s family) or both, but trend from 1979 to 2011 reveals that living with child(ren) has become less frequent recently (Figure 2). About half of the middle-aged and older adults is living with their partner alone or with partner and others. Among the latter, a very small proportion still lives with their elderly parents whereas most live with their child(ren). Less than a third is living alone but the share of this living arrangement is increasing. When living with a partner has become slowly but steadily more frequent over the period of study, the share of those living with partner and child(ren) has decreased, and the share of those living with child(ren) but without partner has decreased, also. Altogether, this has resulted in an increase in the proportion of middle-aged and older people living alone.

Although the distribution of population aged 50 and over by living arrangement has not changed dramatically from 1979 to 2011, a turning point in the trend can still be observed between 1989 and 2000. From 1979 to 1989, the proportion of individuals living in couple with partner or with partner and child(ren) increased, in parallel with a decrease in the share of those living alone and of those living with child(ren) only. In 1989, 26.1% of people in this age group lived alone compared with 28.4% in 1979. Altogether, the living arrangements' pattern was more diversified in 1989 compared to 1979, i.e. living arrangements with parent(s) or more distant family member(s) in household had become more prevalent. Between 1989 and 2000, the proportion of those living in couple or with partner and child(ren) continued to increase but the proportion of those living alone started to increase as well. It occurred largely at the expense of decreasing share of those who lived with their child(ren). As a result, the pattern became more homogenous as the proportion of individuals living with others than partner decreased. From 2000 to 2011, the proportion of those living in couple and living alone continued to increase, the latter more (from 28.4% to 32.3%) than the former (from 32.8 to 34.0). The share of living arrangements involving child(ren) decreased, with a more pronounced decrease in living with partner and child(ren) (from 20.6% to 16.2%). Generally, over the whole observation period, the proportion of people living with his/her partner (with or without children) increased until 2000 but then declined sharply (from 52.4% in 1979 to 51.8% in 2011). The figure 2 shows that the highest proportion of those living with partner was in 2000 (54.9%). In the light of major improvements in survival, with increase in life expectancy by 6 years between 2000 and 2011 (70.4 in 2000 and 76.2 in 2011 (Statistics Estonia)), we anticipated that more people in old age would be living with their partner. However, the trends in living arrangement do not support this expectation. Living in couple with partner is increasingly frequent, but the share of all other choices of living arrangement with partner became smaller. Only living in couple and alone has rapidly increased among those 50 and older during two last decades.

Figure 2. Share of people aged 50 and over by living arrangement, 1979, 1989, 2000 and 2011 censuses.



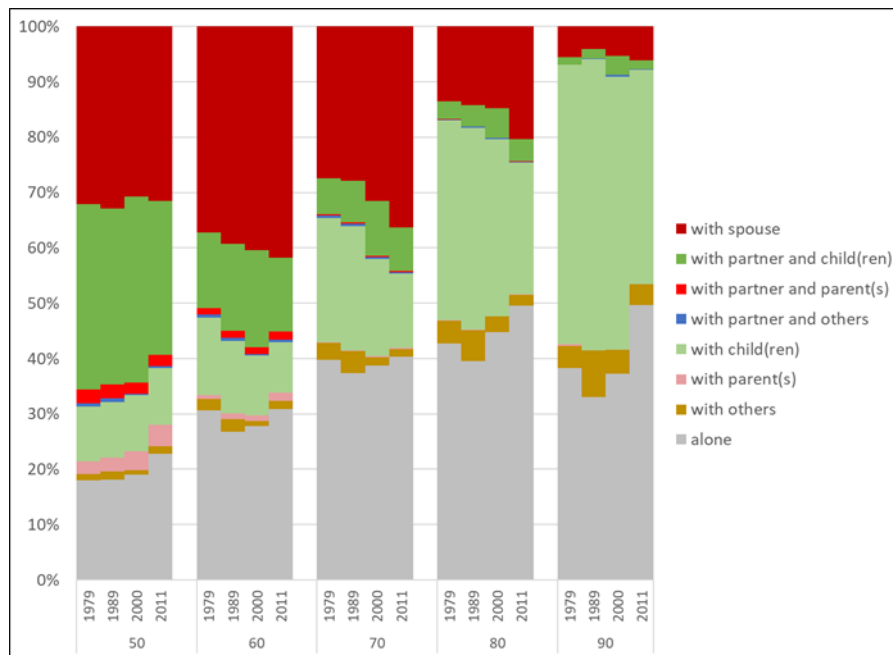
As expected, trends in living arrangement are different for people at relatively younger and older ages. More specifically, the changes over time are different for those in their 50s compared with 60s and 70s, and then again different among those 80+. As shown in Figure 3, the trend of increase in the proportion of individuals living with a partner appears in all ages except the youngest (50–59) and the oldest (90+). The increase of proportion of persons living with their partner and child(ren) mainly occurred among people aged 60–79 while in age 50–59 it did not follow the same trend, from 1979 till 2000. By contrast, from 2000 to 2011 the decrease in the proportion of those living with a partner and child(ren) occurred mostly in younger ages, concurrently with increase in the proportion of those living alone.

The proportion of those living with child(ren) but without partner increases rapidly with age, but in 2011 this living arrangement was less frequent among people in their seventies and also among older people than previously (Figure 3). Compared with 1979, the 1989 census enumerated somewhat higher proportions of people living with child(ren) but without a partner. Also, the 1989 census found relatively more people who lived with others (not partner or child) than previously. These shifts obviously contributed to decrease in the proportion of those living alone in 1989. However, that situation turned to a change and at the next censuses (2000 and 2011) the proportion of middle-aged and older people living with child(ren) (but without a partner) decreased strongly starting from age 70. For younger age groups, it was counterbalanced by an increase in the proportion of individuals living with their partner only, and in later ages increasingly by those living alone.

In younger age groups (50–69) the proportion of people living with their parent, having no partner or child in the household increased steadily, and became twice higher among those aged 60–70 in 2011. Reasons for this could be both improved survival of parents but also individuals joining parental household after change of their marital status. However, their share is very small in total population, even at age 50–59 where it is the highest (4% in 2011). Comparatively, the proportion of those living in the same household with their partner and parent have been always very small (the highest was 2,6% in age-group 50–59 in 1989). The proportion of these decreased over the period in youngest

ages whereas for the age-groups 60–79 it increased, showing that children in their sixties and seventies are increasingly caregivers for their oldest old parents.

Figure 3. Dynamics of living arrangements by age groups over period 1979–2011



On-going research and plans

On this stage of study, only preliminary results are available. The analysis will be further detailed before presentation by adding variety of explanatory characteristics such as marital status, origin, home ownership, level of education, number of children born to a woman. Further research aims to focus comparatively on recent trends of living arrangements of older people of Estonia compared to other countries, and to study individual living arrangement transitions that will help to explain the various changes in the structure of the population by living arrangements presented in this contribution.

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