

# JEAN MONNET CHAIR EUROPEAN MIGRATION STUDIES

## ECONOMICS OF MIGRATION IN EUROPE (ECMEU)

REPORTS PRESENTATION

COUNTRY: ESTONIA

2022/2023

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**UNIVERSITÀ  
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## **COUNTRY REPORT:**

### **MIGRATION IN ESTONIA**



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ACCADEMIC YEAR 2022/2023

## INTRODUCTION

The recent history of the Baltic tigers has its origins in 1991, when these three states distanced themselves from Russia. Before earning the appellation 'tigers' Estonia and Latvia followed the Lithuanian example by achieving a painful independence from the USSR.

In the 1970s and 1980s, Estonia's labour economy was largely helped by the large-scale Russian migration that replenished the Baltic country's workforce over the years. As is often the case when emigrating from a highly populous country to a less populous one, major social changes took place. In fact, ethnic Estonians dropped from 90 percent in 1945 to 60 percent in 1989, to the benefit of the Russians, who make up 29.7 percent of the population.

This strong dichotomy has led leading political figures to set very marked boundaries for access to citizenship. Estonians today are those who held citizenship on 16 June 1940 (the day Soviet troops entered the country) and their descendants. For everyone else, access to citizenship is severely restricted in terms of time and language. Symbolic of a society that has become dual are the two different passports: grey for non-citizens, blue for citizens.

The drastic reduction of the population is the other problem afflicting Estonia: since 1991, the resident population has in fact decreased by 15 per cent, as a consequence of both the emigration rate (in 2008, there were about 22,600 Estonians living in Finland) and the low birth rate (1.64 between 2005 and 2012).

The three white tigers got this appellation, after the 'divorce' from their Russian wife and the entry in the EU in May 2004, aided by a sensational economic boost, but will also be the states to suffer most from the 2009 crisis. Despite the highly restrictive policies, one of the main drivers of Estonia's post-crisis recovery has been immigration, again Russian, but also Finnish and Ukrainian, which has breathed new life into a struggling country. Another very important factor in Estonia's economic recovery was definitely its entry into the eurozone on 1 January 2011.<sup>1</sup>

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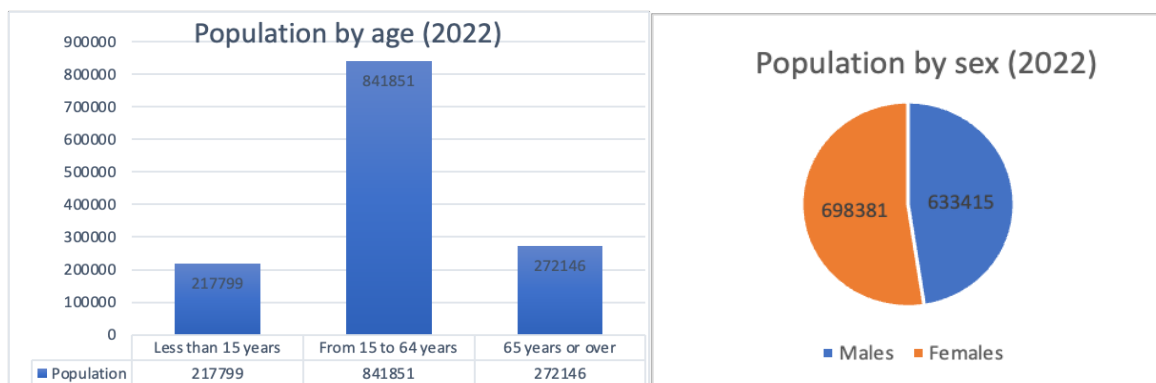
<sup>1</sup> Source: Limes "Vent'anni e non sentirli: i paesi baltici dopo il crollo dell'URSS".

## STOCK TOTAL POPULATION

The current stock of total population of Estonia is 1,329,003 as of Wednesday, April 12, 2023, based on Worldometer elaboration of the latest United Nations data.

Overall, the charts show us that in 2022, the age range 15-64, which can be described as the “working age” range, constitutes the highest portion of Estonian stock population; this is due to the increased labour mobility following the enlargement of the EU, which created more job opportunities for natives and foreigners.

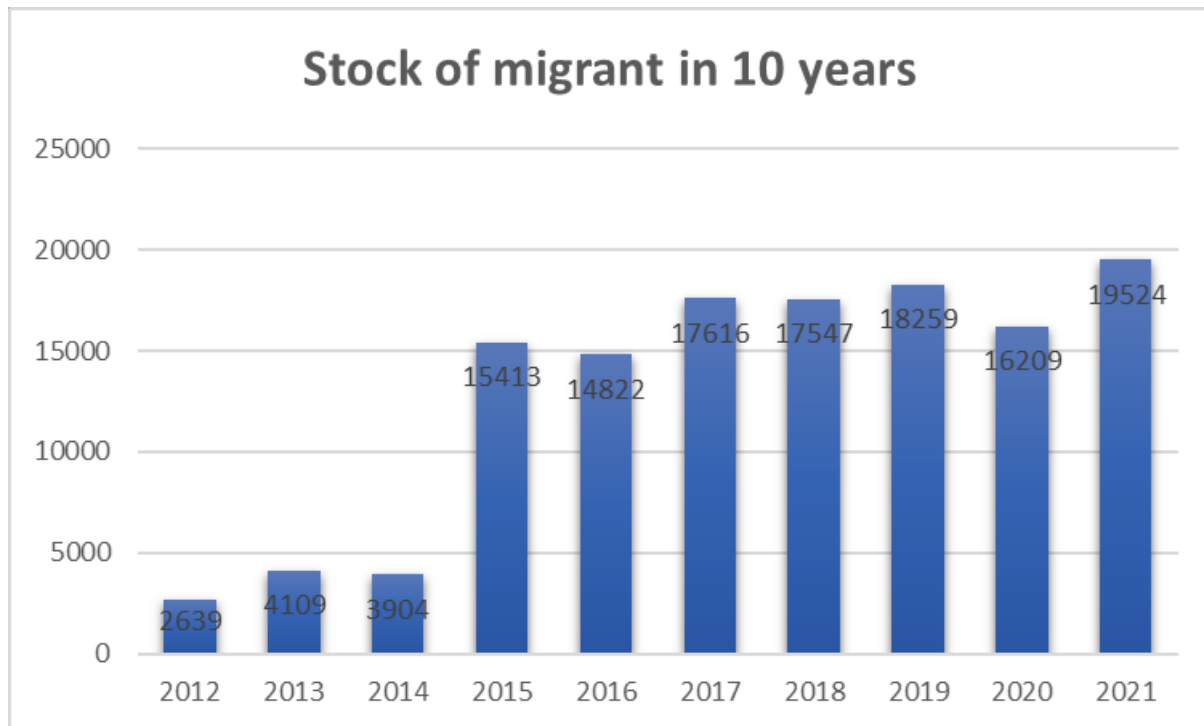
In more detail, it can be seen that the male population is smaller than the female population by about 65.000.



Source: EUROSTAT [DEMO\_PJANBROAD]

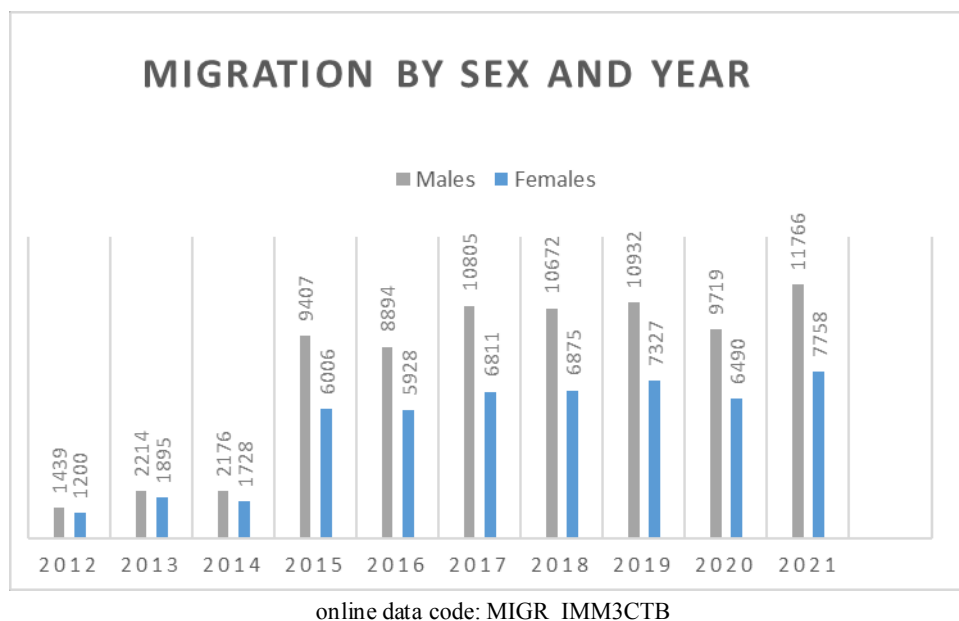
## STOCK OF MIGRANTS IN THE LAST 10 YEARS

In this second section we are going to analyse a series of data about the migration stock and flows in Estonia, considering a period of time that embraces the last 10 years.

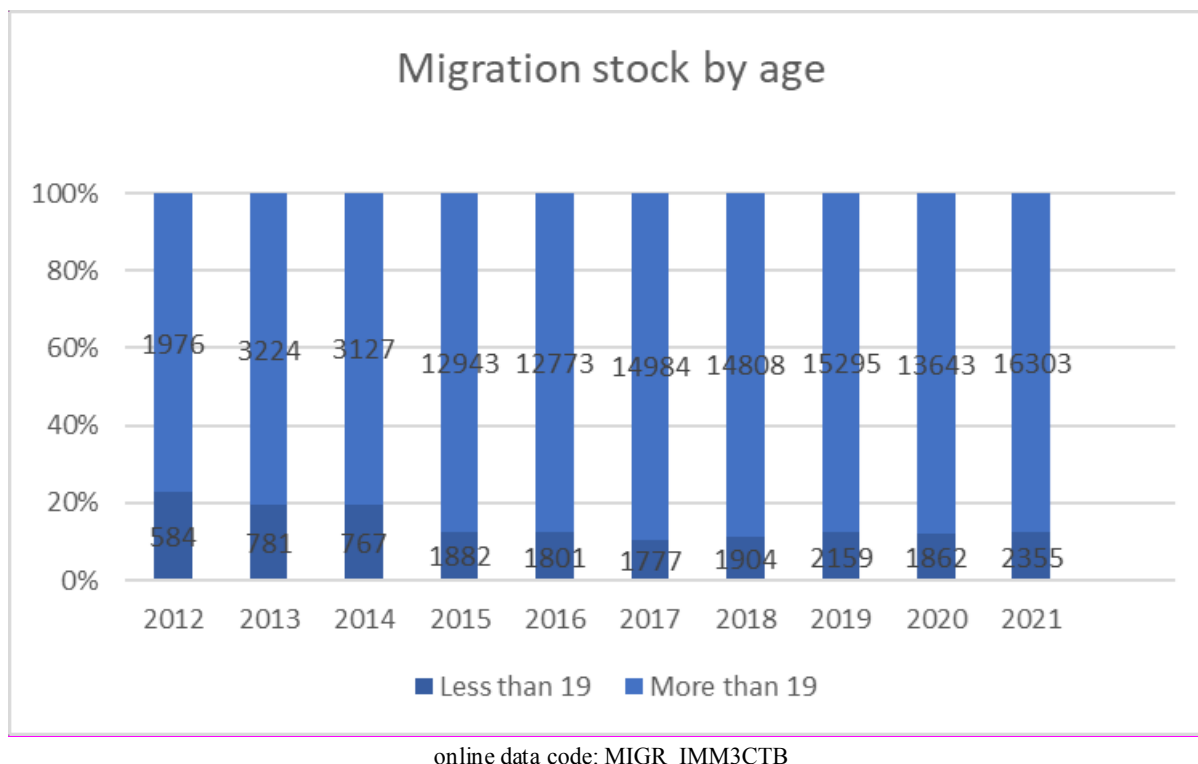


Source: Eurostat, Foreign-born population  
data code online: MIGR\_IMM8

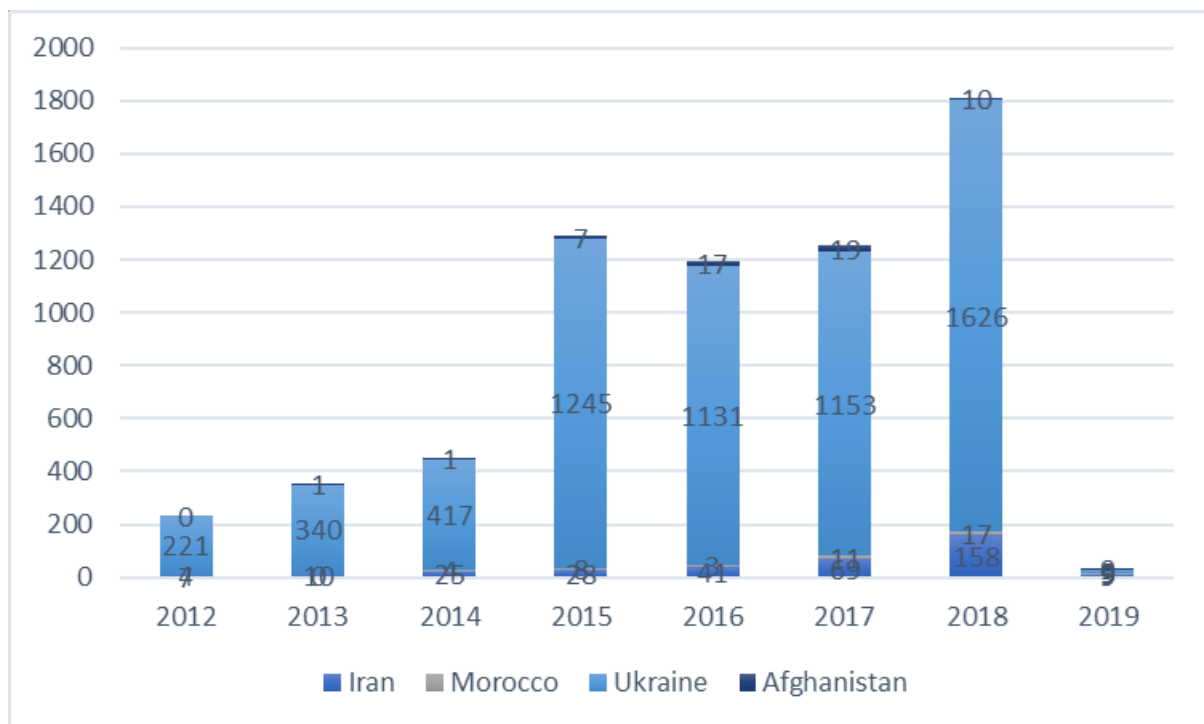
Data comes from Eurostat database. It shows the total number of long-term immigrants in Estonia during the reference year. The last given data are from 2012 because a long-term migrant is a person who moves in a country for a period of at least a year, therefore the country of destination effectively becomes his or her new country of usual residence.



The table shows the immigration stock by sex group in the last ten years, including total age and age reached during the year. We can see a greater presence of female migrants than male migrants except for the last three years where there is instead a slight increase in the male population.

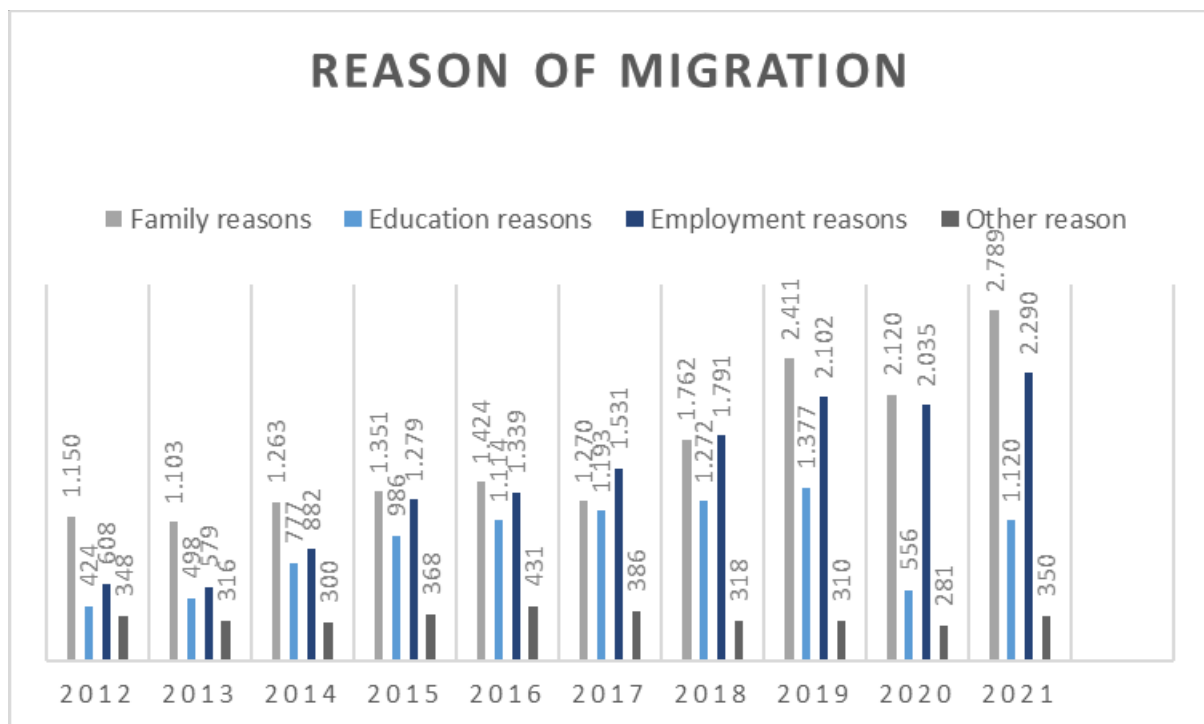


## Immigrant stock by country of birth



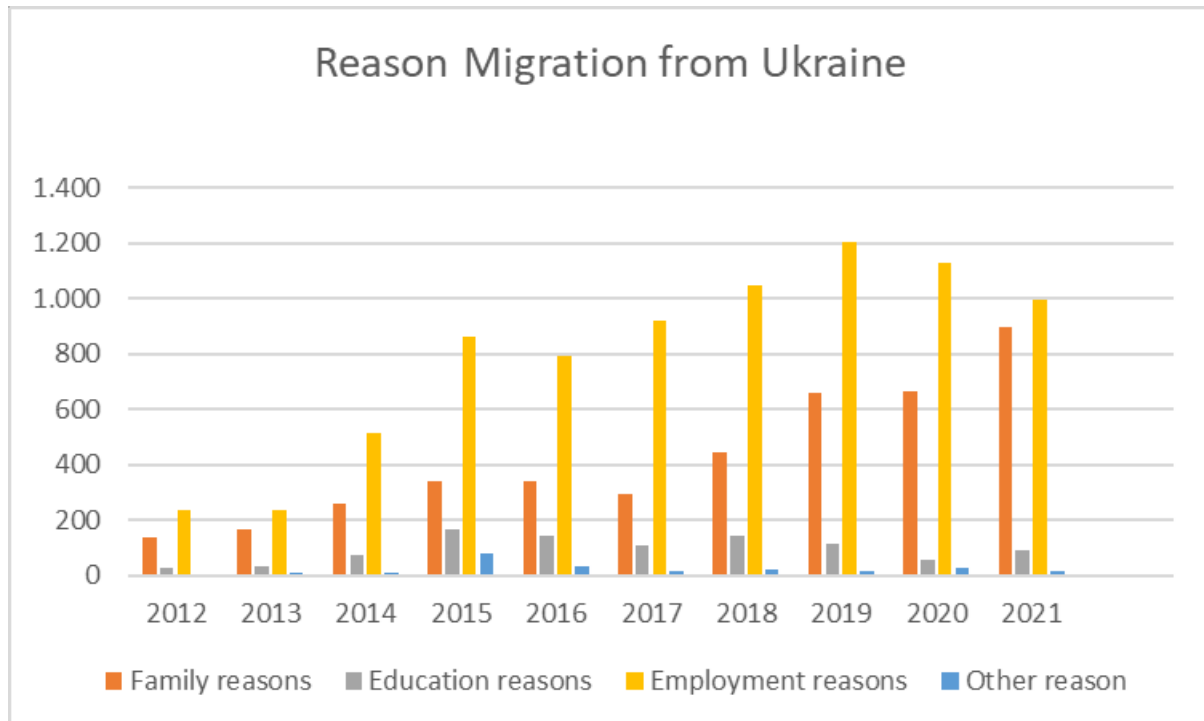
online data code: MIGR\_IMM3CTB

In this graph we can see that the inflow of migrants to ESTONIA from Iran, Morocco and Afghanistan is extremely low, mainly due to geographical reasons. As for Ukraine, the data show significantly higher numbers



online data code: MIGR\_RESFIRST

The graph shows that the main reasons for immigrations are due to family reasons and for job search, especially in 2021 we see a strong upswing in the data due to the 2020 restrictions due to the health emergency from COVID-19.



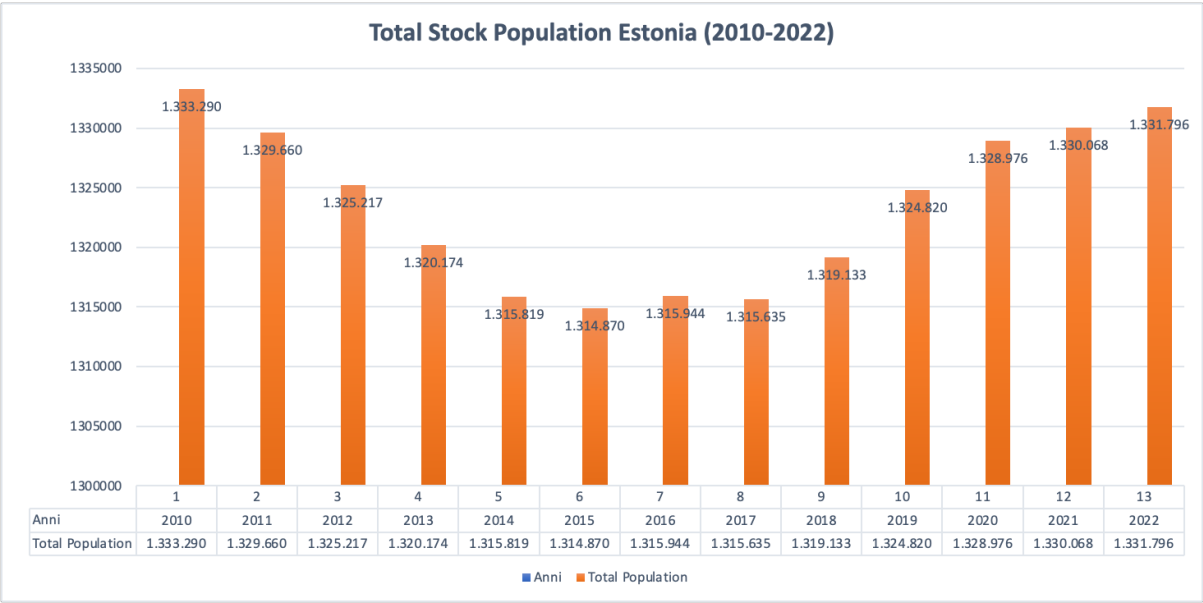
online data code: MIGR\_RESFIRST

The analysis just made shows that the number of migrants in Estonia is mainly from Ukraine. Therefore, we analysed the main reasons why the Ukrainian population migrates to Estonia, always taking into consideration the last ten years. What emerges is that the main motivations are related to the search for employment and for family reasons, in particular in 2019 there was a peak that declined in 2020 (due to the COVID-19 pandemic and its restrictions) and in 2021 there is a slight recovery although not on par with the data for 2019.



# POPULATION GROWTH

Over the past 13 years, the Estonian population has remained stable with a low peak in 2015 and a gradual upward climb to almost identical values in 2010 and 2022.

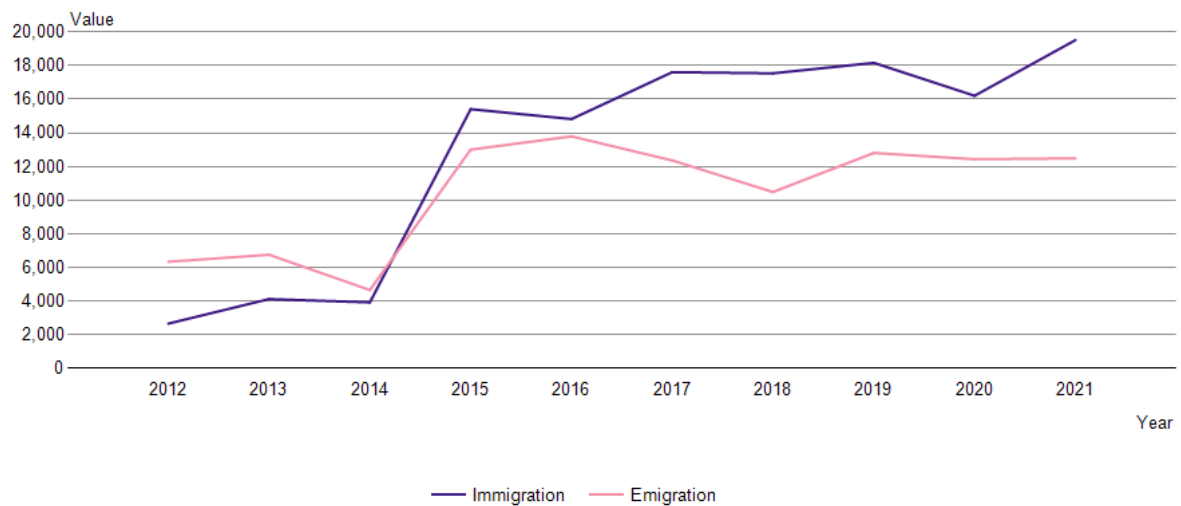


Source : EUROSTAT [demo \_pjan]

## IMMIGRATION FLOW (BY GENDER, AGE, COUNTRY OF BIRTH AND REASON OF MIGRATION)

### Immigration flow by gender group

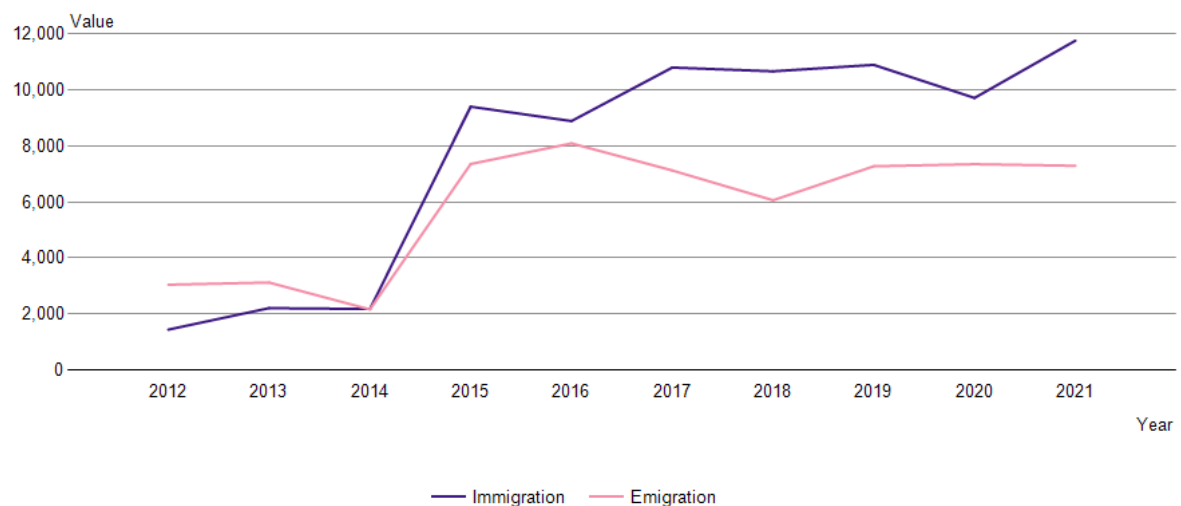
RVR03: MIGRATION by Indicator and Year. Males and females, External migration.



Source: Statistics Estonia

### Male flow:

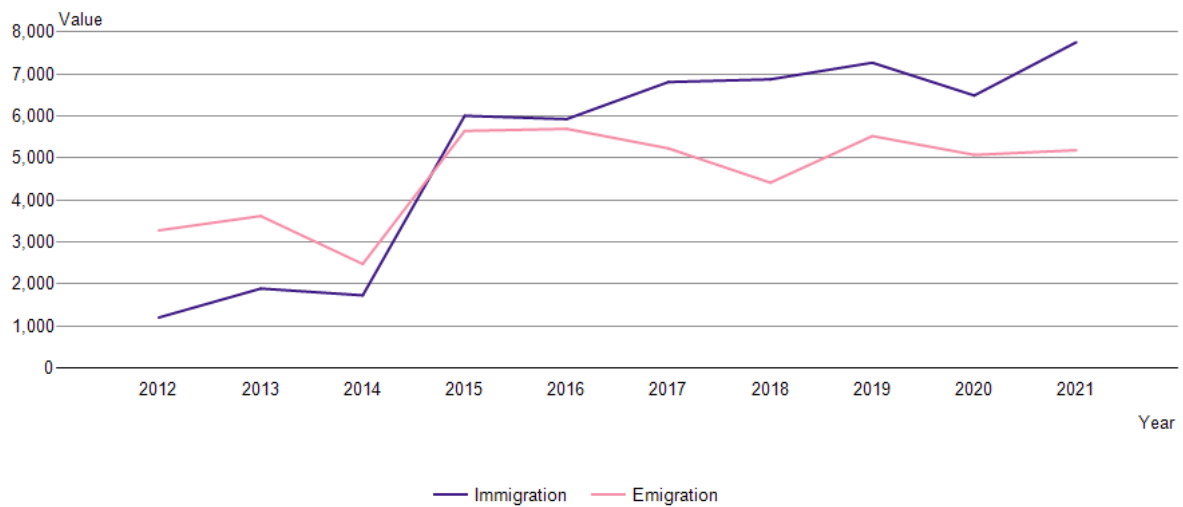
RVR03: MIGRATION by Indicator and Year. Males, External migration.



Source: Statistics Estonia

Female flow:

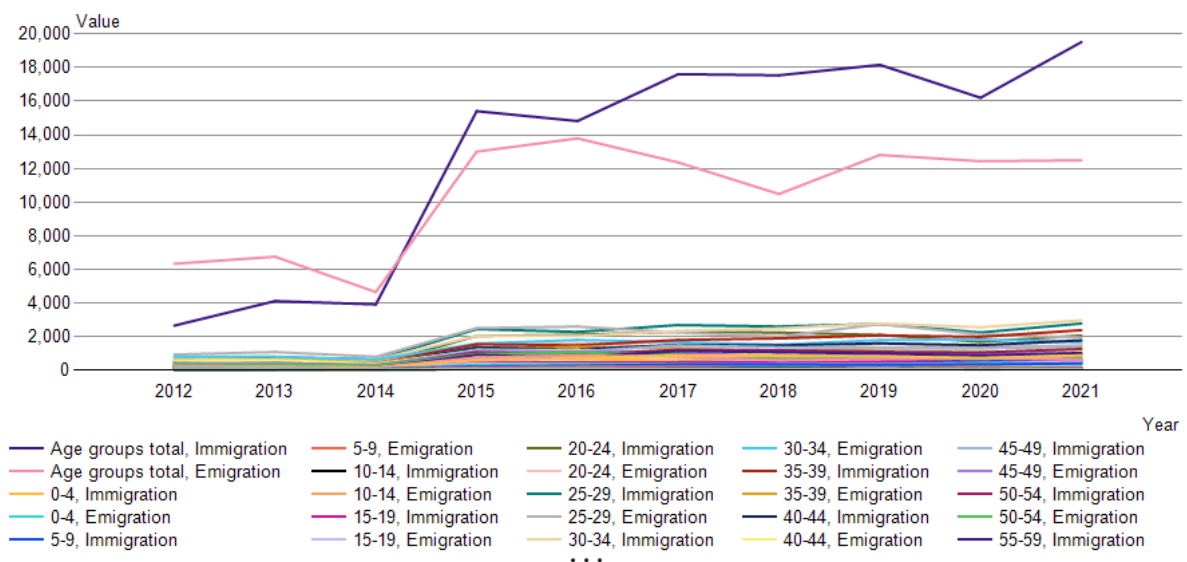
RVR03: MIGRATION by Indicator and Year. Females, External migration.



Source: Statistics Estonia

Age group:

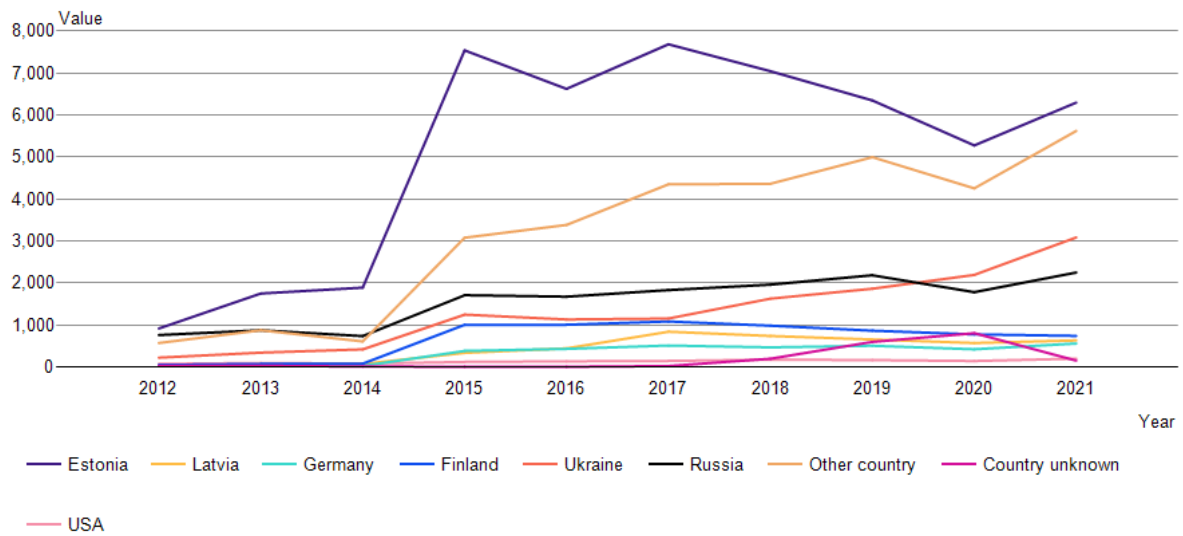
RVR03: MIGRATION by Age group, Indicator and Year. External migration.



Source: Statistics Estonia

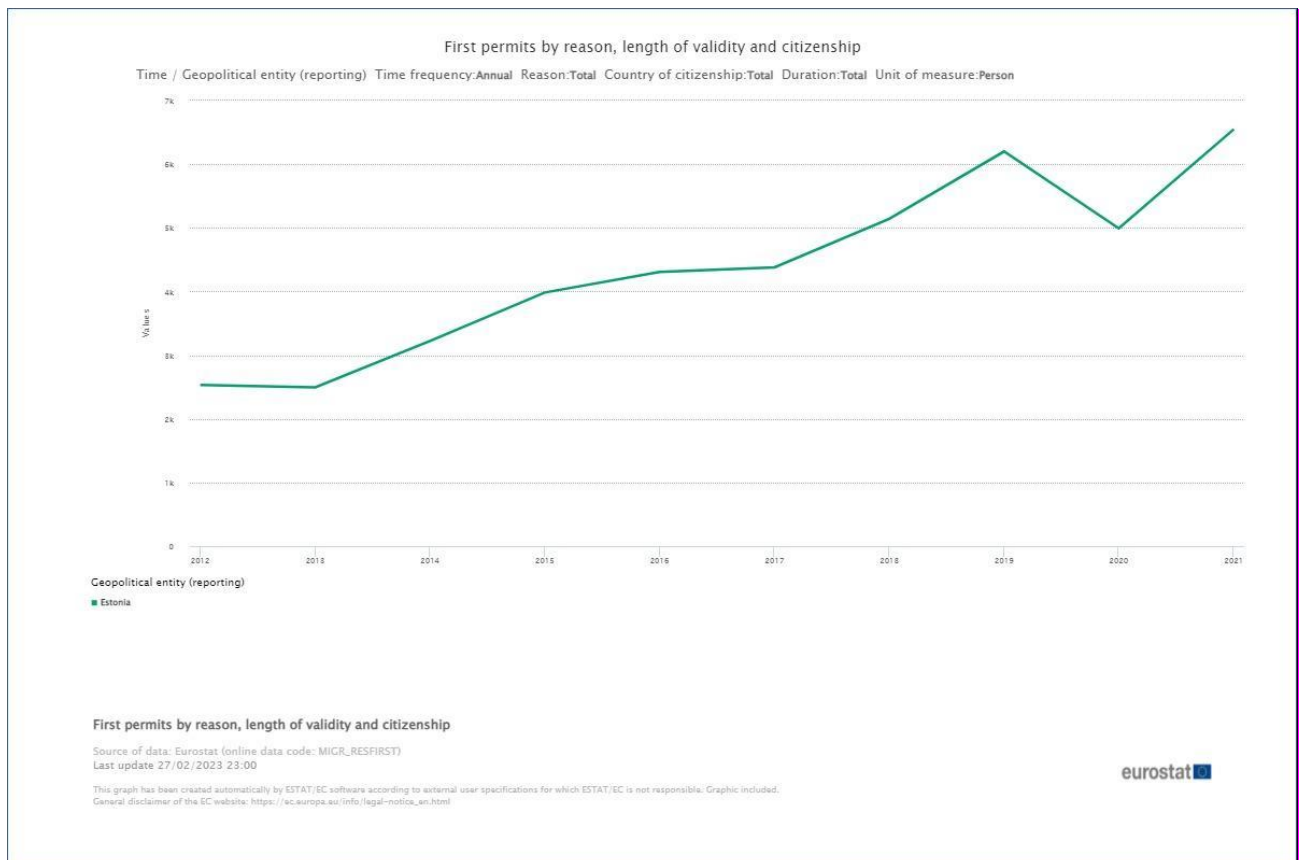
## Immigration flow by country of birth:

RVR09: IMMIGRANTS by Country of birth and Year.



Source: Statistics Estonia

## Immigration flow by reason for migration:



## **A CLOSE UP FROM 2018 TO 2020**

In 2018, 4 900 new immigrants obtained a residence permit longer than 12 months in Estonia (excluding EU citizens), 22% more than in 2017. This figure comprises 35.1% labour migrants, 34.5% family members (including accompanying family), 25% who came for education reasons and 5.3% other migrants. Around 58 short-term permits were issued to international students and 87 to temporary and seasonal labour migrants (excluding intra-EU migration). In addition, 3 200 intra-EU postings were recorded in 2018, an increase of 5% compared to 2017. These posted workers are generally on short-term contracts.

Ukraine, Russia and Finland were the top three nationalities of newcomers in 2018. Among the top 15 countries of origin, Ukraine registered the strongest increase (500) and Latvia the largest decrease (-100) in flows to Estonia compared to the previous year.

In 2019, the number of first asylum applicants increased by 11.1%, to reach around 100. The majority of applicants came from Russia (30) and Turkey (20). The largest increase since 2018 concerned nationals of Russia (+20) and the largest decrease nationals of Pakistan (-10). Of the 90 decisions taken in 2019, 50% were positive.

The Citizenship Act was amended in 2019 to enlarge access to Estonian citizenship. A minor whose parent or grandparent lived in Estonia prior to the restoration of the Republic of Estonia independence (20 August 1991) may now apply for citizenship under a simplified procedure. Another amendment to the Citizenship Act provides free Estonian language training classes to adult applicants for citizenship who have been legally residing in Estonia for at least five years and are eligible for naturalisation. Language classes can involve paid study leave from work. The language examination does not apply to those who studied in Estonia and applicants aged 65 or older need to pass only the oral language examination.

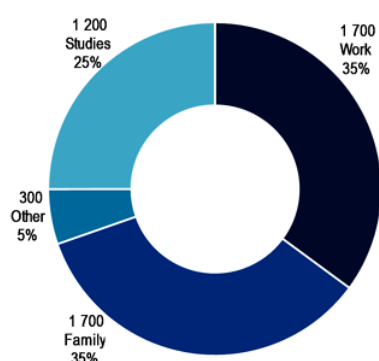
A new national initiative, called the e-Residency 2.0 White Paper, was launched in December 2018 to continue to expand Estonia's global influence. Based on cooperation between the public and private sector, E-Residency 2.0 includes 49 recommendations to make e-Residency more beneficial for everyone in Estonia.

In early 2020, to improve public knowledge of Estonia's cultural diversity and its immigrants, Estonia intends to create a cross-media programme. The project would allow Estonians to know immigrants living in the country, the reasons for their arrival into the country and their experience of living in Estonia.

Estonia reacted to the COVID-19 crisis by providing multilingual information and medical care to immigrants, and by covering all costs of their diagnosis and treatment of COVID-19, even for those who are not insured in the public health system. In addition, all migration proceedings were temporarily suspended as of 16 March and for immigrants with temporary visas who were unable to return, they were automatically extended. Estonia temporarily reintroduced border controls on 17 March.

Migration services only processed applications for short-term employment for foreigners already living in the country. Streamlined procedures were introduced for foreign-born physicians and agriculture workers. Personal interviews for asylum seekers were suspended and the Dublin transfers (transfer of immigrants to their first country of entry to the EU) postponed.

**Grants of long-term residence permits**  
2018 (Source: Eurostat)



**Temporary migration**  
(Source: Eurostat)

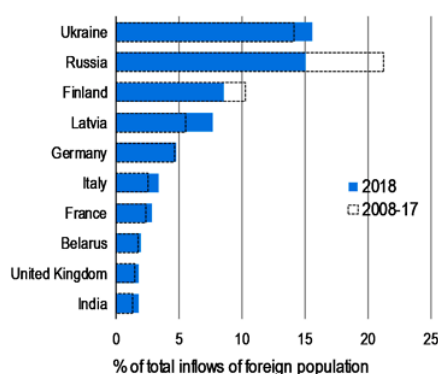
**Temporary migration (non-EU citizens)**

	2018	2018/17
Remunerated activities reasons	90	+ 26%
Family reasons	90	- 17%
Education reasons	60	- 67%
Other	60	+ 7%

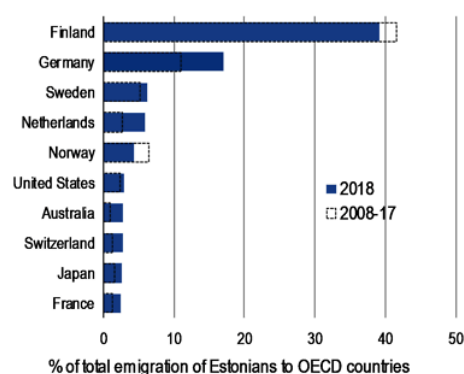
**Humanitarian**

	2019	2019/18
Asylum seekers	100	+ 11%

**Inflows of top 10 nationalities**  
(national definition)



**Emigration of Estonians to OECD countries**  
(national definition)



**Components of population growth**

	2019 Per 1 000 inhabitants	2019/18 difference
Total	3.1	-1.2
Natural increase	-1.0	+0.0
Net migration plus statistical adjustments	4.1	-1.2

**Annual remittances**

	Million current USD	Annual change %	Share in GDP %
Inflows (2019)	575	+1.5	1.9
Outflows (2018)	234	+55.3	0.8

## TOTAL NUMBER OF REFUGEES

First of all, one may underline the difference between **asylum seeker and refugee**.

The UN Refugee Agency defines an asylum seeker an individual who is seeking international protection. In countries with individualize procedures, an asylum-seeker is someone whose claim has not yet been finally decided on by the country in which the claim is submitted.

**Not every asylum-seeker will ultimately be recognized as a refugee, but every refugee was initially an asylum-seeker.**

A refugee is a person who has fled their own country because they are at risk of serious human rights violations and persecution there. The risks to their safety and life were so great that they felt they had no choice but to leave and seek safety outside their country because their own government cannot or will not protect them from those dangers. Refugees have a right to international protection.<sup>2</sup>

These char from UNHCR site shows the total number of refugee population in Estonia between 2012 and 2022.

The term refugees in this char includes those in a similar situation to refugees.

Year ↑↓	Country of Origin	Country of Asylum	Refugees under UNHCR's mandate	Asylum-seekers	IDPs of concern to UNHCR
2022*	-	Estonia (EST)	28.600	174	0
2021	-	Estonia (EST)	321	15	0
2020	-	Estonia (EST)	277	5	0
2019	-	Estonia (EST)	331	33	0
2018	-	Estonia (EST)	319	30	0
2017	-	Estonia (EST)	405	36	0
2016	-	Estonia (EST)	312	43	0
2015	-	Estonia (EST)	158	73	0
2014	-	Estonia (EST)	82	84	0
2013	-	Estonia (EST)	52	15	0
2012	-	Estonia (EST)	48	0	0

Source: <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/download/?url=89SkSe>

We can notice that there was a peak of refugees in two specific years, in 2017 and 2022.

The 2017 peak includes all those people who moved for work, family and study reasons mainly from Russia, Ukraine, Finland and Turkey.

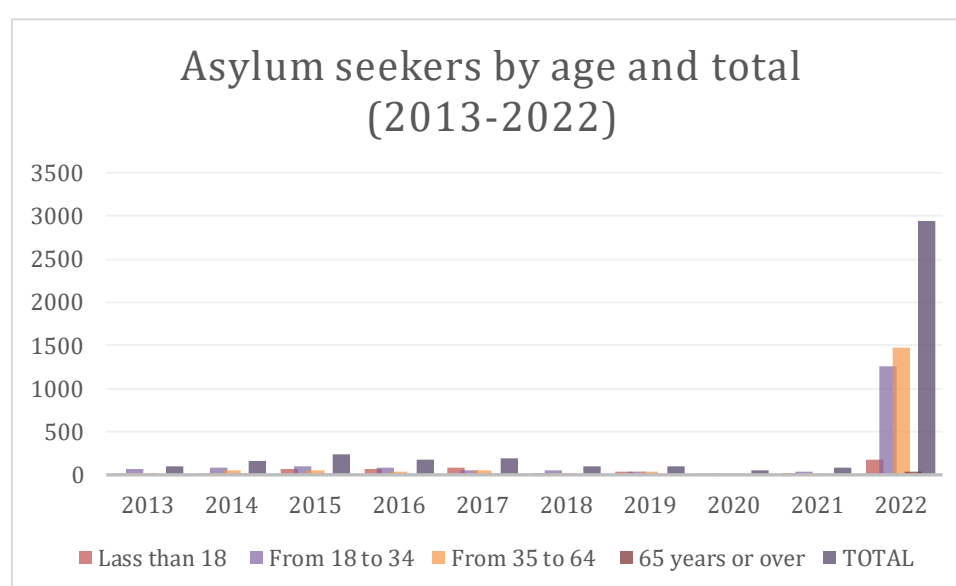
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<sup>2</sup> UNHCR GLOSSARY OF TERMS: <https://www.unhcr.org/glossary/>

The trend then turns out to be downwards due to the Covid-19 pandemic, where migration procedures were changed and suspended. While the refugee data for 2022 is available up until the mid-year so it is not possible to know for sure but we could assume a strongly increasing trend, logically due to the outbreak of war in Ukraine. It is sufficient to note that already in July 2022 Estonia received more than forty thousand refugees and the highest percentage of Ukrainian citizens with temporary protection status in September 2022 was recorded in Estonia (1.8 with temporary protection per thousand inhabitants), followed by Poland (1.4) and Lithuania, Latvia and Ireland (all 1.0).

This dynamic will also reflect in the following graphs.

This more specific graph analysed asylum seekers by age group from 2013 to 2022.



Source :Eurostat: Asylum and first time asylum seekers by age -annual data.  
CODE:MIGR\_ASYAPPCTZA. Last update: 23/03/2023

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Less than 18 years	10	15	70	65	80	20	35	10	20	180
From 18 to 34 years	60	85	105	80	55	55	35	15	40	1250
From 35 to 64 years	25	50	50	30	50	20	30	25	20	1475
65 years or over	0	5	10	0	5	0	0	0	0	40
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>175</b>	<b>190</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>2945</b>

The following graph and data table, which show more specific numbers, it can be noted that the data relating to the age of the total number of asylum seekers are very variable and not constant.

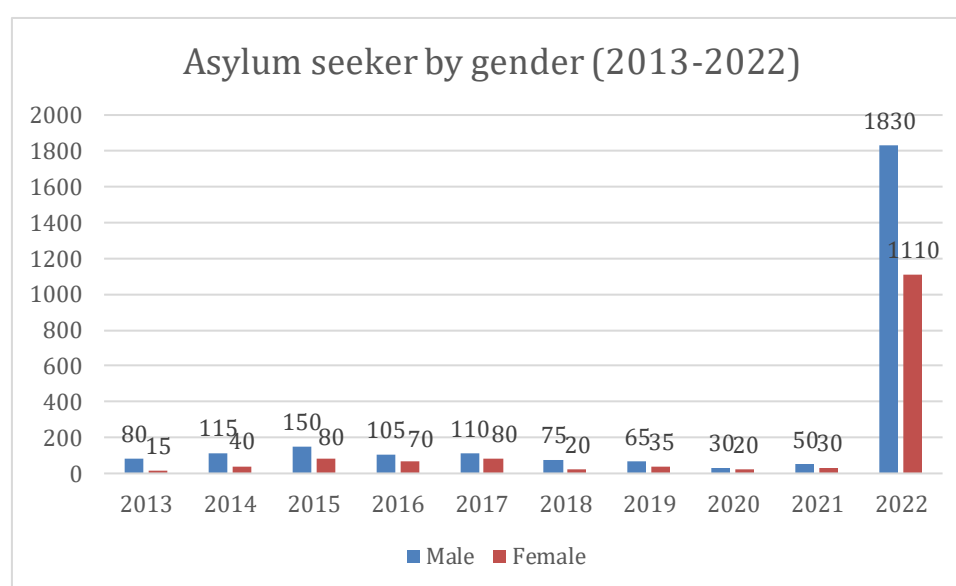
In the years taken into consideration, the average age range of asylum seekers is always fairly constant and high between 18 and 34 years followed by that between 35 and 64 years.



While the number of asylum seekers over 65 in the same examination years is very low.

In general, it is observed that asylum applications were subject to a significant recovery in 2015 because it was a year of the refugee crisis in Europe and the most recent and strong surge in 2022 caused by the outbreak of war between Russia and Ukraine.

With regard to gender-specific asylum seekers, we can see that there is an important and significant constant discrepancy between women and men. They predate the high male turnouts always, with strong detachment, except for the years 2020 and 2021 where the difference was found less, as well as the flows themselves.

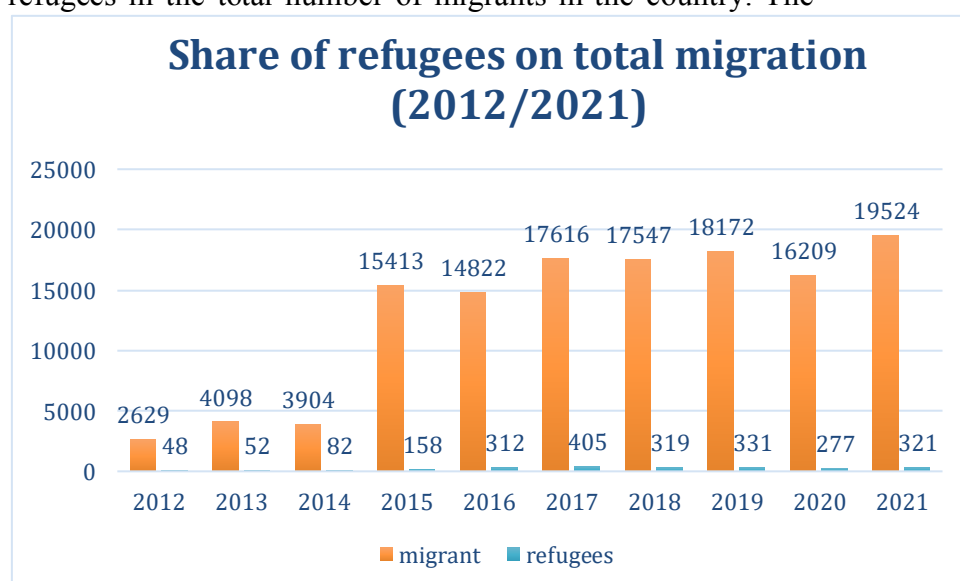


Source: Eurostat: Asylum and first time asylum seekers by sex -annual aggregated data.  
CODE:MIGR\_ASYAPPCTZA. Last update: 23/03/2023 11:00

## SHARE OF REFUGEES ON TOTAL MIGRATION

The table shows the share of refugees in the total number of migrants in the country. The number of people recognized with refugee status is very low. If we consider the year 2021, that's the year with more migrations, the share of refugees to the total number of migrants is 1.62%.

We could say that it constitutes just over 1% of total migration.



## MIGRANT INTEGRATION INDICATOR IN ESTONIA

Eurostat, in the 2020 report "*Migrant integration statistics*", articulates its definition of the concept of "integration" in four dimensions, called "integration indicators". These are:

1. employment
2. education
3. social inclusion
4. active citizenship

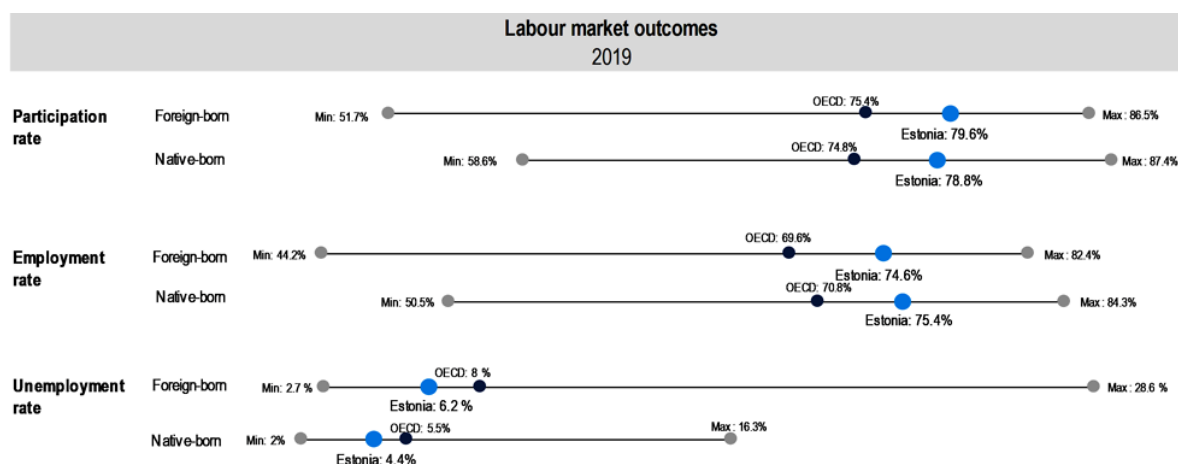
Since Estonia is a country that until a few years ago was still a country of emigration, little is known about the integration of immigrants and the various services provided by the Estonian State to encourage integration; and about the efforts that immigrants themselves make towards integration in Estonia.

The phenomenon of integration in the country is therefore quite recent, it has manifested itself since 2018.

In April 2018, the government adopted a national action plan to prevent and tackle illegal employment. At the end of that year, the one-stop-shop service centre called International House of Estonia opened in Tallinn. The aim of the centre is to provide consultation and public authority services for international newcomers in Estonia and for local employers.

It mostly targets specialists who have come to Estonia to work or study, but also for their spouse, and for the company that hires foreign specialists.

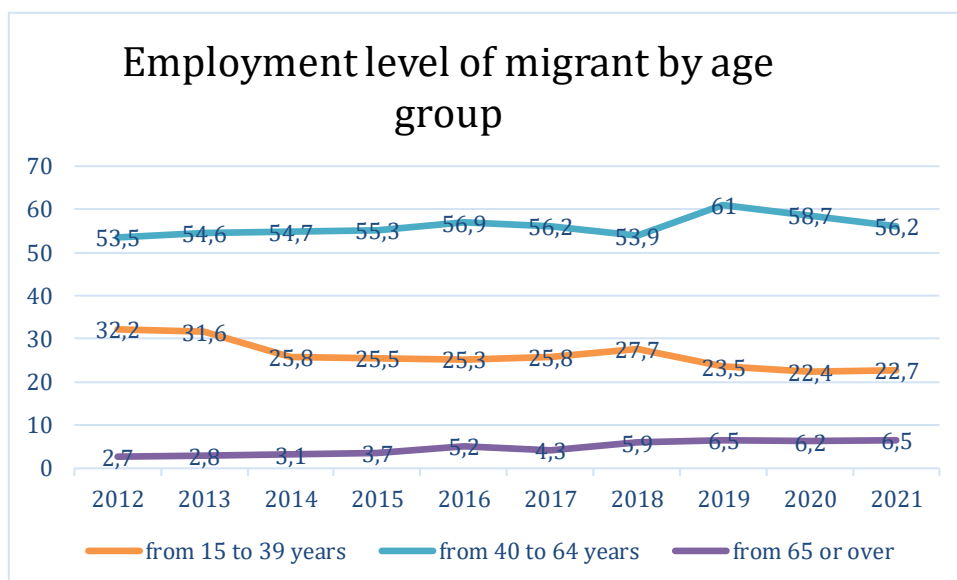
In early 2020, the government proposed changes to the Alien's Act, Income Tax Act and Taxation Act to prevent the misuse of employment regulations, as well as to limit tax evasion from enterprises and to ensure that they pay foreign workers the required Estonian average monthly wage. Moreover, the Ministry of the Interior proposed changes to the Aliens Act and Study Support and Study Loans Act to regulate the conditions for study migration and family migration in Estonia.



This will mostly aim at better meeting the needs of the Estonian labour market.

In this work we analysed how migrants are placed in the labour market in Estonia in last 10 years.

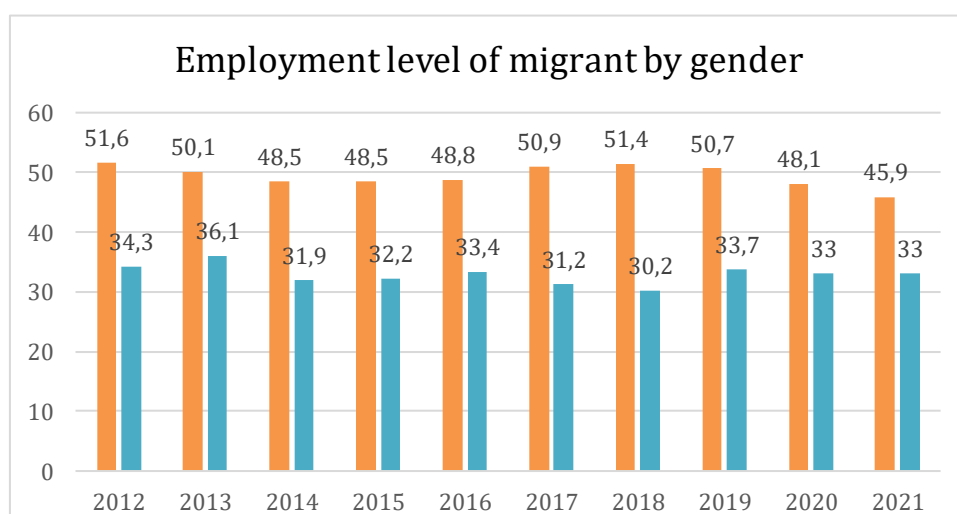
What has emerged has been reported in the following graphs.



Source: Eurostat: Population by sex, age, citizenship and labour status  
 Thousand person, Non-EU27 countries (from 2020) nor reporting country [1/7] Activity and employment status: Employed persons [1/6] data code: LFSA\_PGANWS, last update: 23/03/2023

We can see that for tow age groups, between 40 and 64 years and those over 65, the level of employment has always been increasing.

While in the younger age group, from 15 to 39 years, where therefore minors are also included, the level of employment is falling precisely because there is greater regulation of employment contracts, especially against minors.



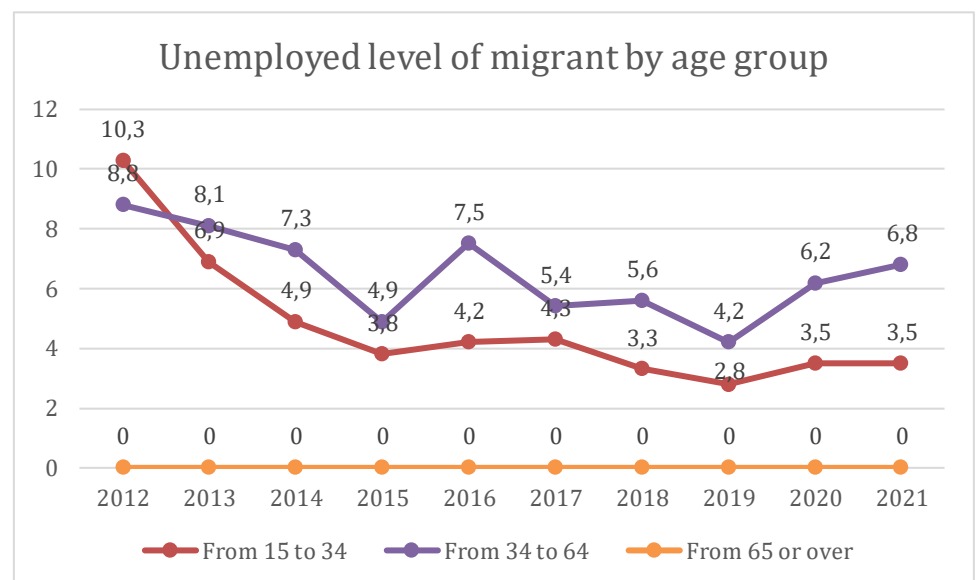
Source: Eurostat: Population by sex, age, citizenship and labour status  
 Unit of measure: Thousand persons  
 Country of citizenship: Non-EU27 countries (from 2020) nor reporting country [1/7] Age class: From 15 to 64 years [1/32] Activity and employment status: Employed persons [1/6]  
 online data code: LFSA\_PGANWS last update: 23/03/2023

We can observe an employment rate for both kinds constant, with slight fluctuations. There aren't drastic changes in flows but, summarily, employment for men since 2012 has slightly decreasing trends.

However, it is evident that female employees are in fact less and less than male employees.

As regards unemployment, it is clear, again from Eurostat data, that the level of unemployment among migrants has generally been declining since 2012. This is a positive fact.

In general, the biggest fall in unemployment was recorded for all age groups in 2019, and the 2018 reforms began to bear fruit.



Source: Eurostat: Population by sex, age, citizenship and labour status

Unit of measure: Thousand persons

Country of citizenship: Non-EU27 countries (from 2020) nor reporting country [1/7] Activity and employment status: Unemployed persons [1/6]

data code: LFSA PGANWS last update: 23/03/2023 23:00

A pleasantly decreasing trend is observed especially for the age group between 15 and 34 years.

For the 34-64 age group, the trend is less homogeneous.

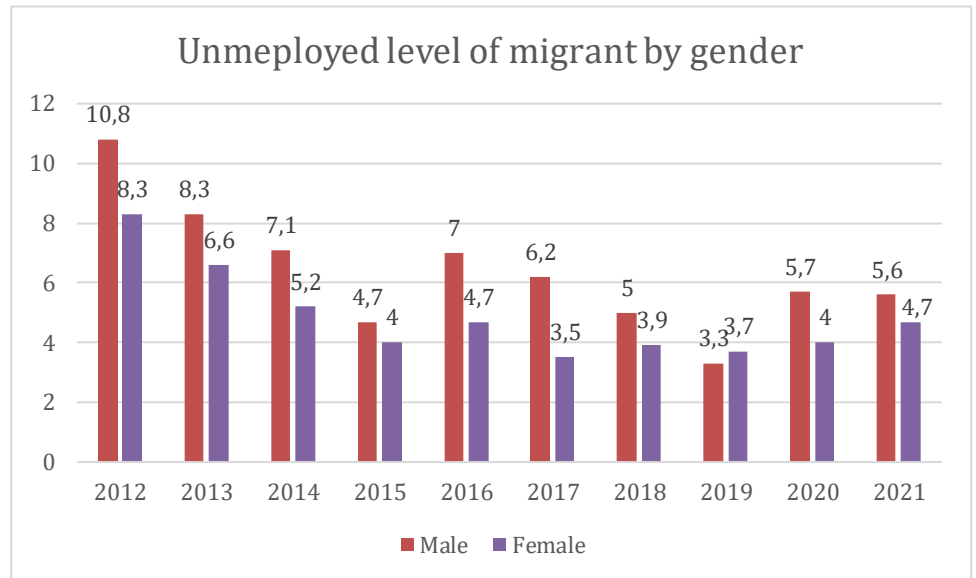
For the group of unemployed migrants over the age of 65 there are no reliable data. Reliable sources are lacking.

It would be interesting to understand the employment situation of older migrants who may have been in this country for longer.

As for the unemployment of migrants divided by gender, here too we note that the trend has suffered a sharp decline in 2012.

It can be observed that unemployed male migrants are actually more than females.

Only in 2019 is there a change of perspective, where 3.7 of women are unemployed compared to a value of 3.3 of unemployed men.



Source: Eurostat: Population by sex, age, citizenship and labour status, Country of citizenship: Non-EU27 countries (from 2020) nor reporting country [1/7], Age class: From 15 to 74 years [1/32]  
Activity and employment status: Unemployed persons. data code: LFSA\_PGANS last update: 23/03/2023

There are certainly improvements in the integration of migrants into the Estonian labour market, but there is still a long way to go to complete and accurate integration.