

Estonia



Official name: Eesti Vabariik
(Republic of Estonia)

Form of government: unitary
multiparty republic with a single
legislative house (Riigikogu, or
Parliament [101])

Head of state, President: Kersti
Kaljulaid

Head of government, Prime

Minister: Jüri Ratas

Capital: Tallinn

Official language: Estonian

Official religion: none

Monetary unit :euro (€)1

Population (2016 est.): 1,317,000

Total area (sq mi): 17,462

Urban-rural population

Urban: 67.6%

Rural: 32.4%

Literacy rate: 98.8%

Life expectancy at birth

Male: 72.3 years

Female: 81.5 years

GNI per capita (U.S.\$): 18,840

INTRO

Estonia, country in northeastern Europe, the northernmost of the three Baltic states. Estonia's area includes some 1,500 islands and islets; the two largest of these islands, Saaremaa and Hiiumaa, are off mainland Estonia's west coast.



Estonia has been dominated by foreign powers through much of its history. In 1940 it was incorporated into the U.S.S.R. as one of its constituent republics. Estonia remained a Soviet republic until 1991, when, along with the other Baltic states, it declared its independence. Since then Estonia set about transforming its government into a parliamentary democracy and reorienting its economy toward market capitalism

LAND and Climate

Except in the southeast, where the land is hilly, the ground is flat with many lakes, streams, and marshes. The temperate and humid climate of Estonia differs sharply from the climates of regions to the east (in Russia) at the same latitude. The country lies in an air path off the North Atlantic Ocean that carry warm air in winter and cool air in summer. The mean temperature is 17 to 23 °F in January and 61 to 63 °F in July.

About 60 species of mammals live in Estonia. The largest of these is the elk; roe deer, red deer, and wild pigs also are found. Foxes, badgers, otters, rabbits and mink are fairly common. Birds are numerous and migratory; more than 300 species have been identified.

PEOPLE and CULTURE

The Esths, or Estonians, are a blond people related to the Finns and make up about 70 percent of the population. Their language is much like Finnish, which is Mongolian and not European in its origins.

A law enacted in 1993 restructured education in Estonia and raised the level of compulsory attendance to age 17 or completion of the 9th grade. Education is conducted primarily in Estonian, but Russian continues to be the language of instruction in a number of school.



Boating is a passion in Estonia, with yacht clubs dotting the coastline of the mainland and the islands of Saaremaa and Hiiumaa. In fact, the yachting events of the 1980 Moscow Olympic Games were held in the waters off Tallinn. Canoeing is also popular. In the summer, city dwellers flee to country cottages or the country's many sandy beaches to swim and sailboard.

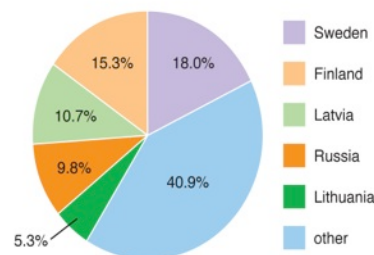
ECONOMY

Dairying is a major industry. The chief crops are rye, wheat, oats, and barley. Agriculture was collectivized at the end of World War II, when small, private farms were converted into collectives and state farms. After independence in 1991 the old collective system began to be dismantled and private ownership reintroduced.

The most significant mineral is oil shale, from which petroleum and fuel gas are obtained. Estonia produces great quantities of oil shale, and one fifth of its industrial workers are employed in its production.

The shale-processing industry was also responsible for 75 percent of the Soviet Union's synthetic gas, and it contributes to the production of thermal electric power for all the Baltic states.

Major export destinations (2014)



Woodworking has long been a traditional industry in Estonia, but exploitation of the forests threatened the enterprise until extensive reforestation policies were recently implemented. Estonia is also noted for its textiles, especially cotton cloth. It produces wool, linen, silk, knitted and woven garments, and shoes.

HISTORY

Little is known of the early history of Estonia. In the 11th and 12th centuries, the Danes and the Swedes tried to Christianize the Estonians, without success. Between 1030 and 1192, the Russians made 13 incursions into Estonia but failed to establish supremacy.

But the Danes held the north from 1219. In 1346 they sold it to German landholders—the so-called Balts, or Baltic barons—who held the south. Later the land was divided between Sweden and Poland. Sweden ruled all of Estonia for about 100 years until 1721, when it was lost to Peter the Great of Russia.

Estonia won its freedom after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, becoming an independent republic. Estonia's later destiny was decided by a nonaggression pact signed by Germany and the Soviet Union in August 1939. A secret protocol assigned Estonia and other Eastern European nations to the Soviets. In 1940 during World War II, Soviet forces occupied the Baltic states, and Estonia became the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic. The next year the Germans drove out the Soviets. With the return of the Soviet Army in 1944, about 30,000 Estonians escaped to Sweden and 33,000 to Germany. Peasant farms were brought into collectives, and industries were nationalized.



In 1988 Estonia's constitution was amended to give the republic the right to veto Soviet laws, and Estonian was made the official language. Then an Estonian congress - completely outside the official Soviet structure - called on the Soviet's restore the "free and independent republic of Estonia" and declared Soviet rule over its territory – and its required military service - to be illegal. It did so without violence and gathered to sing in unity and support in the "Singing Revolution." The Soviet defense ministry responded in January 1991 by sending thousands of army paratroops to Estonia and six other republics to enforce military enlistments.

In an open vote held March 3, 1991, Estonia voted overwhelmingly for independence. On Sept. 6, 1991, following an unsuccessful coup in Moscow, the Soviet Union's new ruling council recognized Estonia's independence. In June 1992 a new constitution was adopted, and in September legislative and presidential elections were held.

Despite allegations of corruption and abuse of power by some top officials, by the end of the 1990s Estonia had developed a stable democracy. Estonia's economy was fairly robust despite financial problems in Europe and Russia. In foreign affairs, the country sought to improve its often tense relations with Russia and reoriented itself toward the West. In 1999 Estonia joined the World Trade Organization (WTO), and in 2004 it became a full member of both the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU).

FUN FACT: More than two-thirds of Estonians live in apartment buildings.

FUN FACT: Estonians inventing the weird sport of Kiiking, where you stand on swing and attempt to complete a 360-degree loop around the top bar.

FUN FACT: Estonia was the first country in the world to use online voting.

FUN FACT: Estonia is the least religious country in the world with only 14% of the population claiming any religious beliefs.