

The Uneven Landscape of Decline: Depopulation and Left-Behind Areas in Latvia



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RE
PLACE

'LEFT-BEHINDNESS' IN THE CONEXT OF EUROPE

- ❖ The term '**left-behind**' has gained significant attraction in both academic and popular discourse and has quickly taken common understanding;
- ❖ Recently emerged to describe places **negatively affected** by globalisation, austerity, digitalisation, socio economic & technological change, environmental hazards, political discontent;
- ❖ Label or shorthand for places that suffer or experiencing **decline or stagnation** on demographic, economic, social, or cultural dimensions in relation to more dynamic and prosperous places.

Sources:

Kemeny & Storper 2020; Dijkstra et al. 2020; Velthuis et al. 2023; Rodriguez-Pose et al. 2023; Pike et al. 2024

INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

in research of urban shrinkage

- ❖ Former industrial regions, cities & towns;
- ❖ Geographically peripheral regions and rural areas;
- ❖ Depopulation & demographic change (aging, out-migration);
- ❖ Lower employment rates & average salary;
- ❖ Lack in human capital (lower share of university educated);
- ❖ Higher share of jobs in industry;
- ❖ Higher share of lower socio-occupational groups

Sources:

Wiechmann & Pallagst 2012; Rink et al. 2014; Haase et al. 2016;
Martin et al. 2018; Rodriguez-Pose 2018; Tomaney et al. 2019

RESEARCH CONTEXT

Specific challenges in the case of Latvia

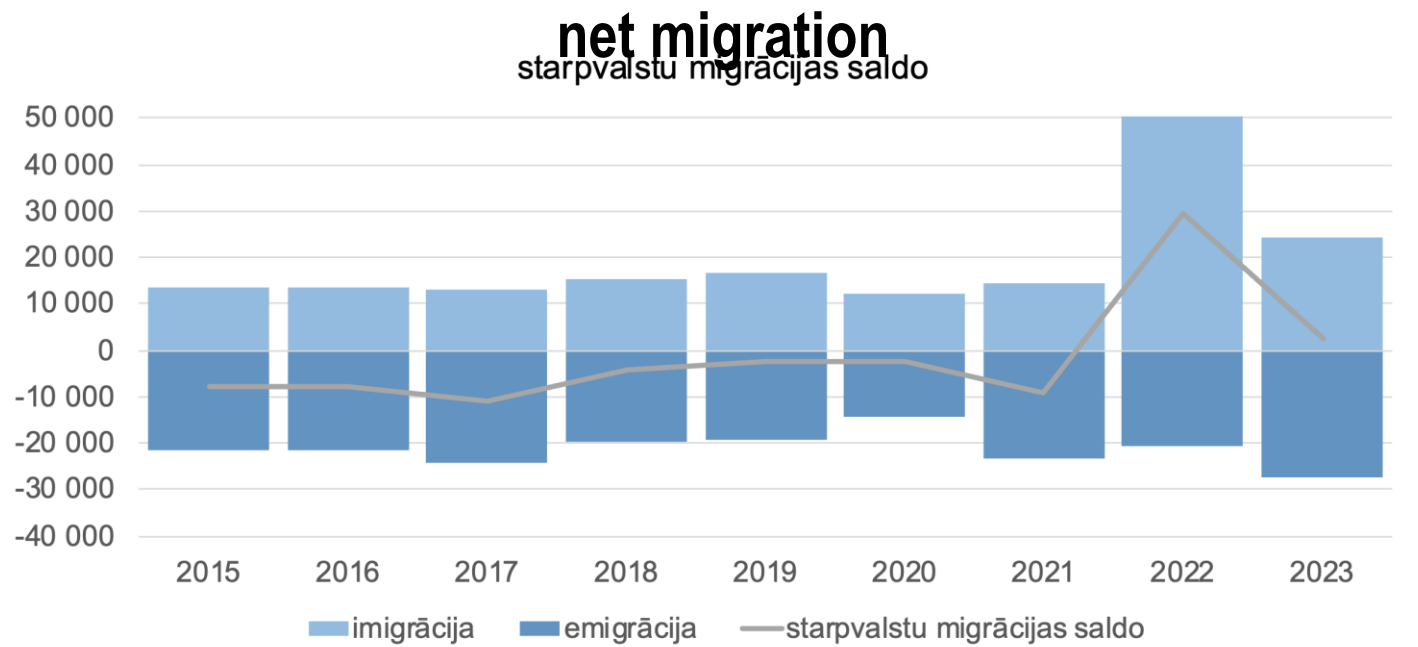
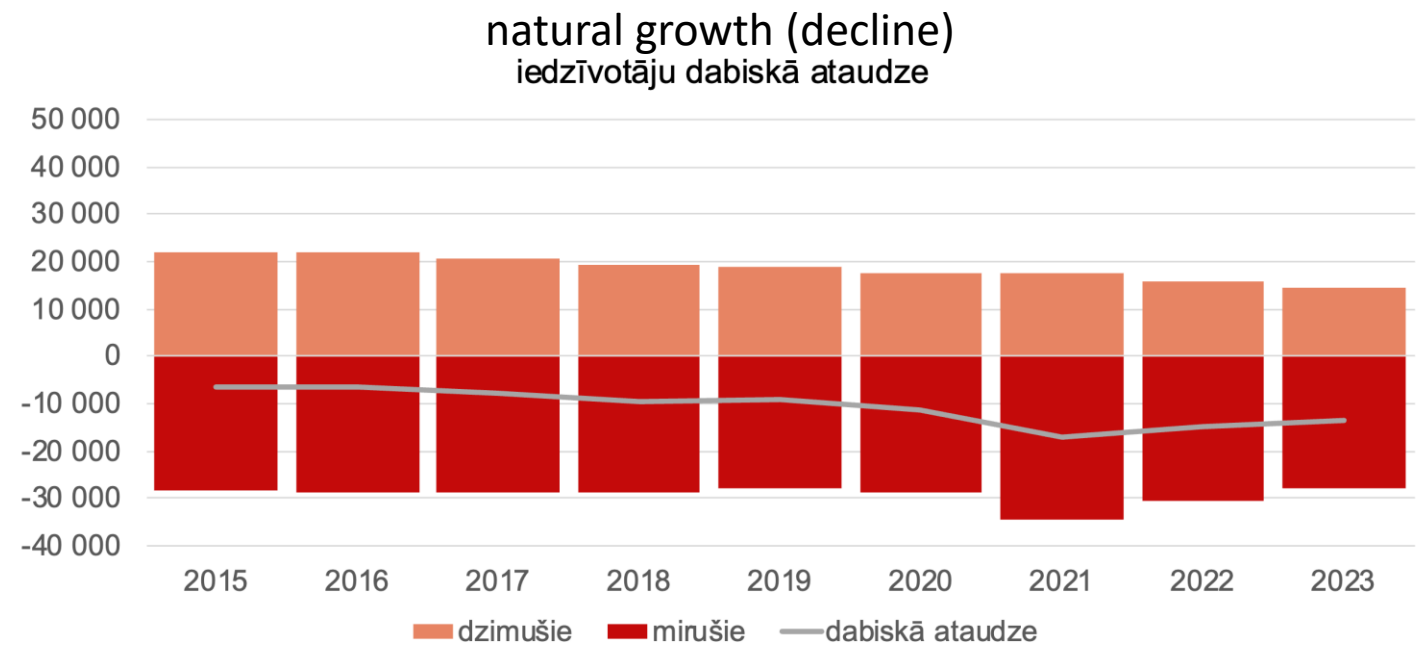
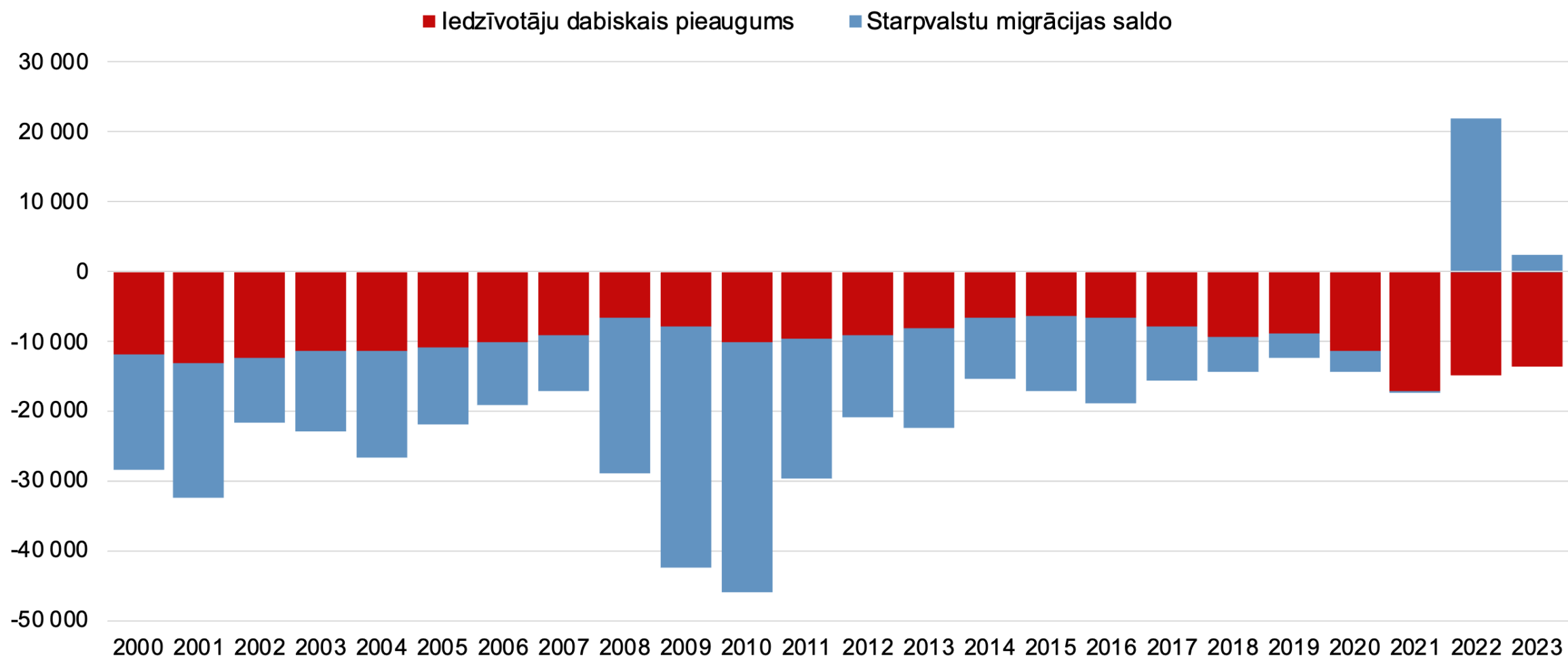
- ❖ **Depopulation:** country of emigration, long-lasting effect of negative natural growth, territorially uneven aging processes;
- ❖ **Economic restructuring:** de-industrialization, tertiarization, post-socialist transformations;
- ❖ **Urban change:** mono-centric urban system, suburbanisation, suburban sprawl, increasing socio-spatial differentiation;
- ❖ **Socio-spatial polarisation:** regional disparities, Europe's Eastern border, differences between the metropolitan and non-metropolitan regions, urban-rural divide.

Sources:

Krisjane & Berzins 2012; Puzulis & Kule 2016; Zvidrins 2021; Dahs et al. 2021
Lang et al. 2022; Krisjane et al. 2023

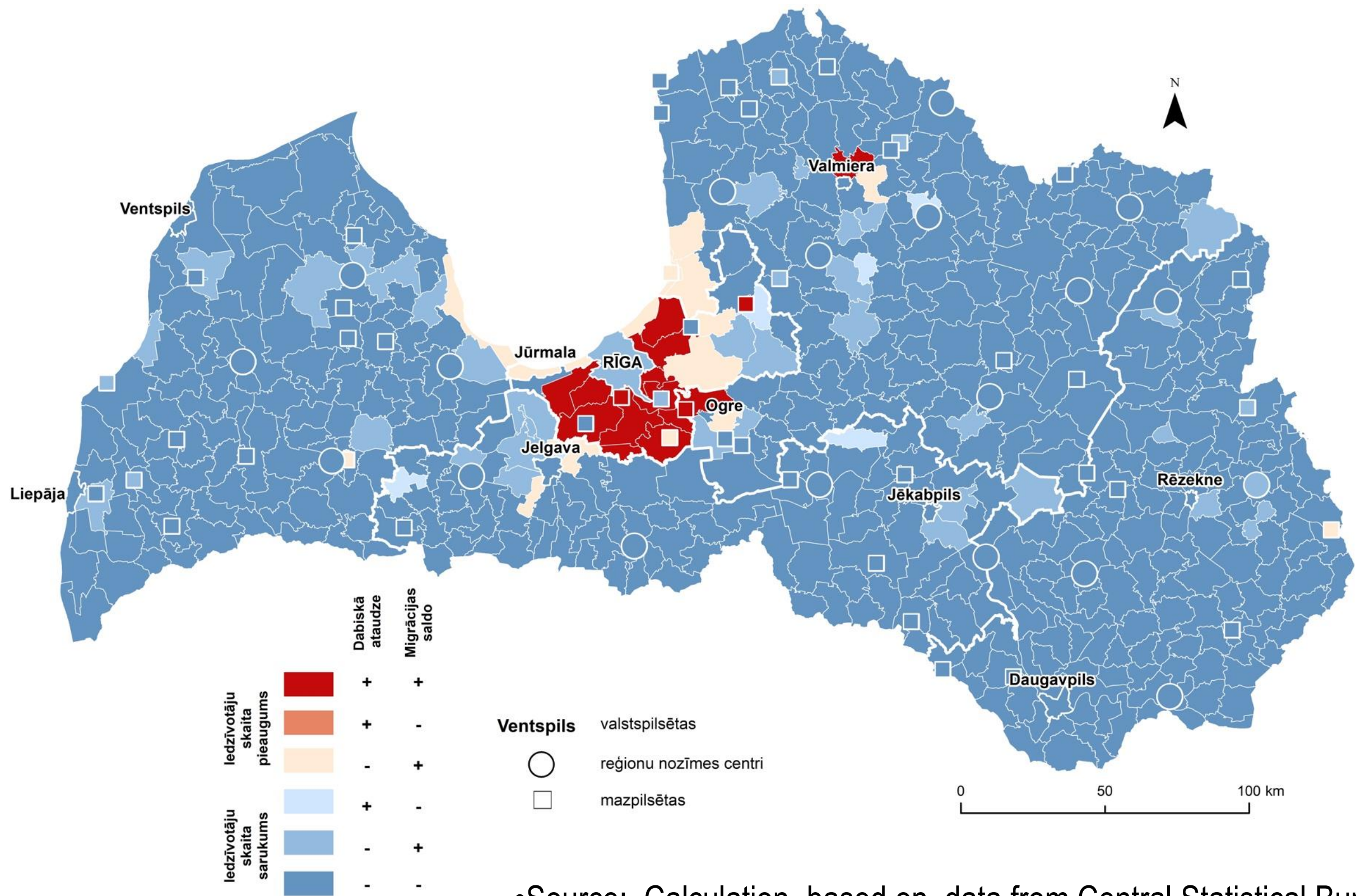
Population changes in Latvia: natural growth (decline) and net migration

2000-2023 and 2015-2023

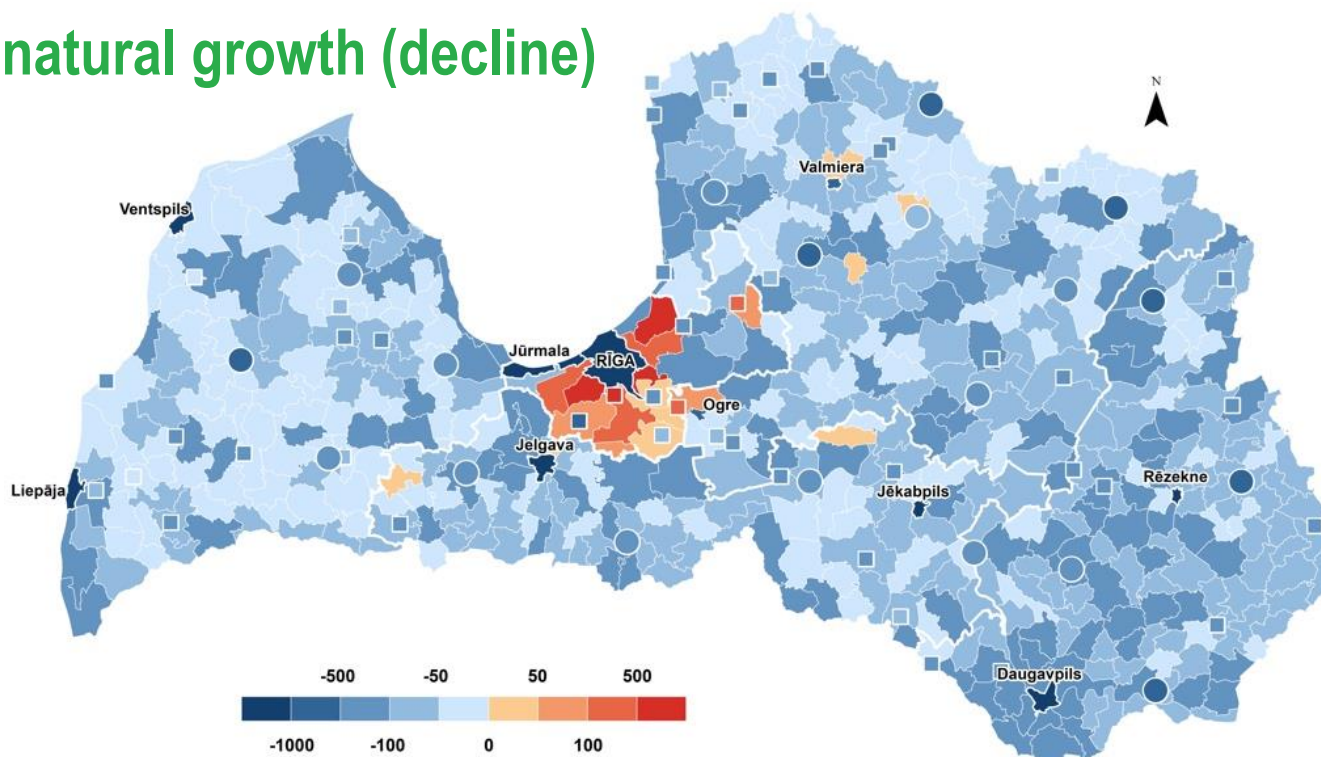


•Source: Calculation based on data from Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia data

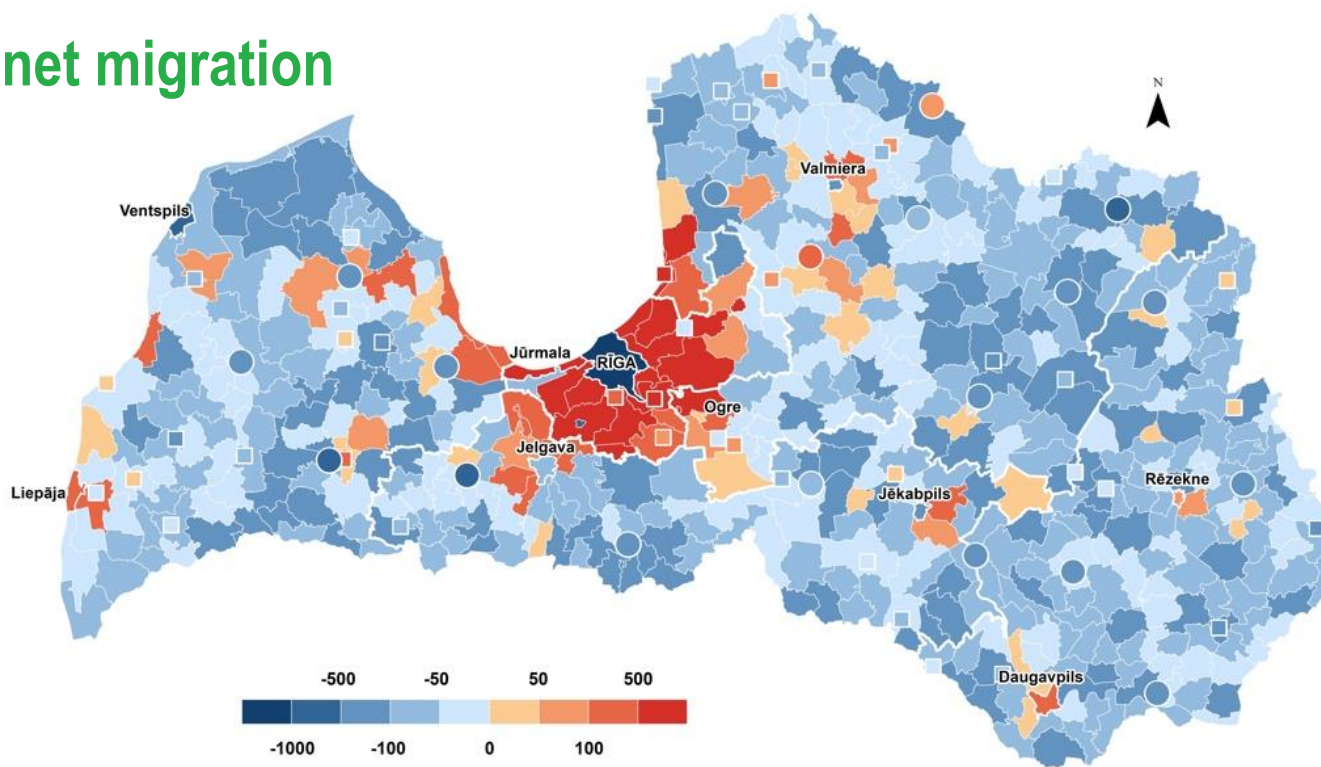
Population changes in Latvia 2000-2023



natural growth (decline)



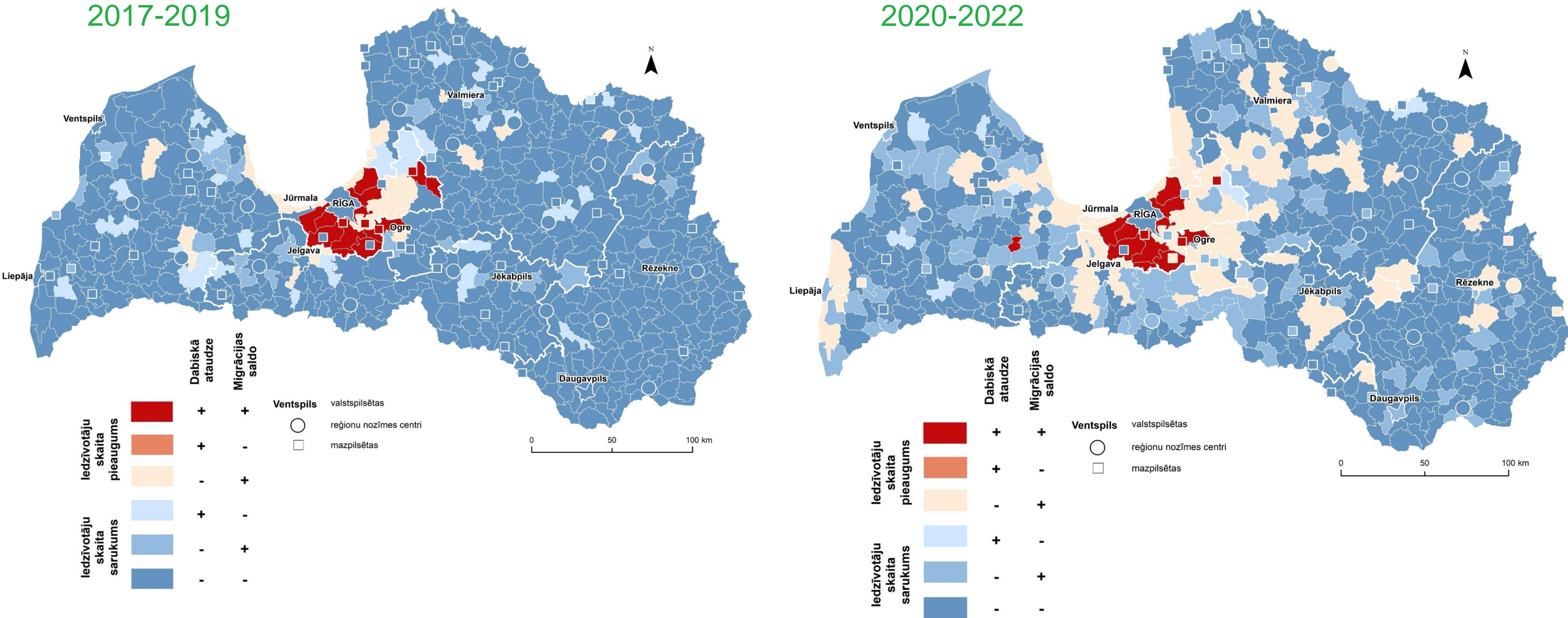
net migration



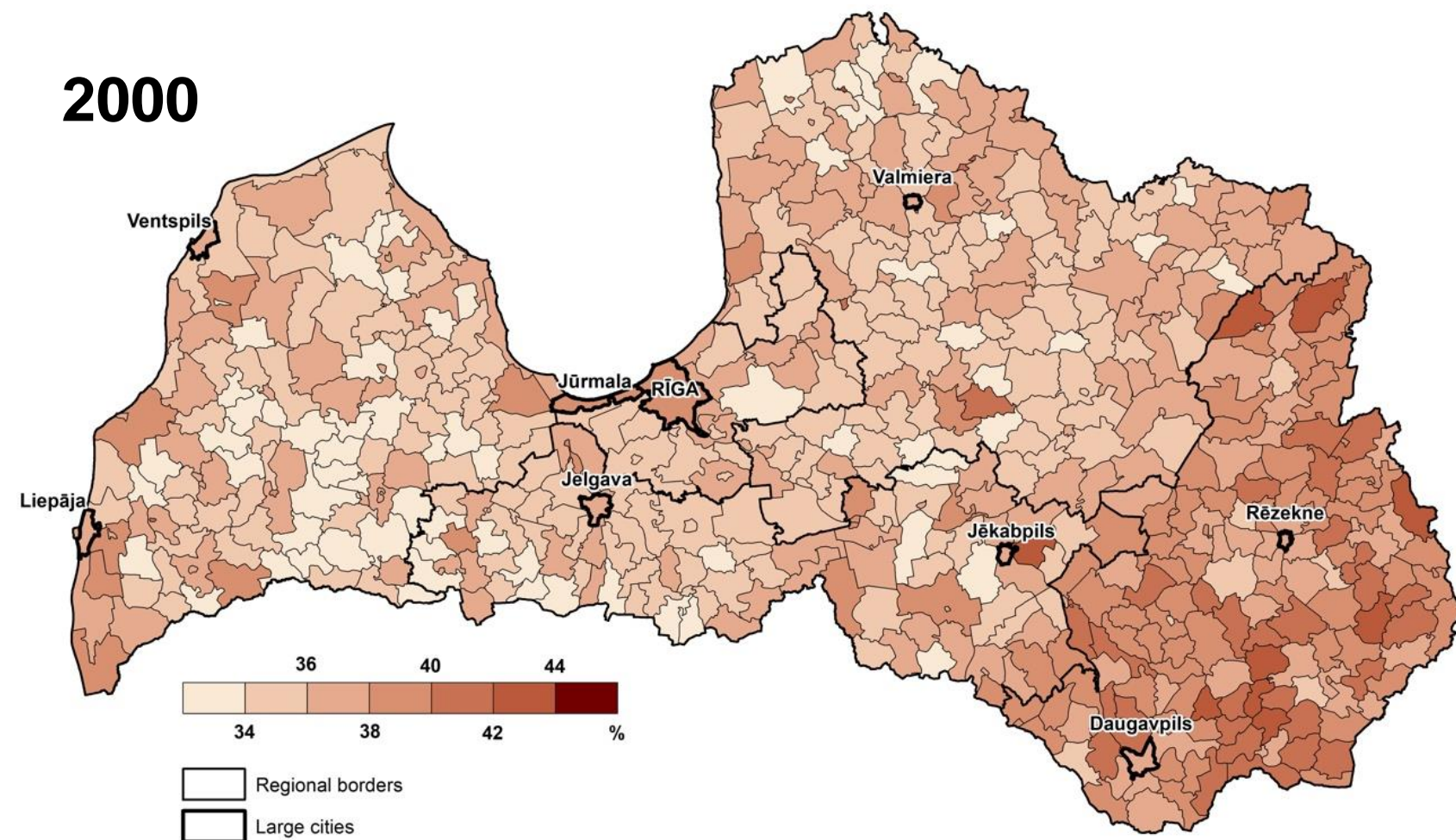
•Source: Calculation based on data from Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia data

Population changes in Latvia

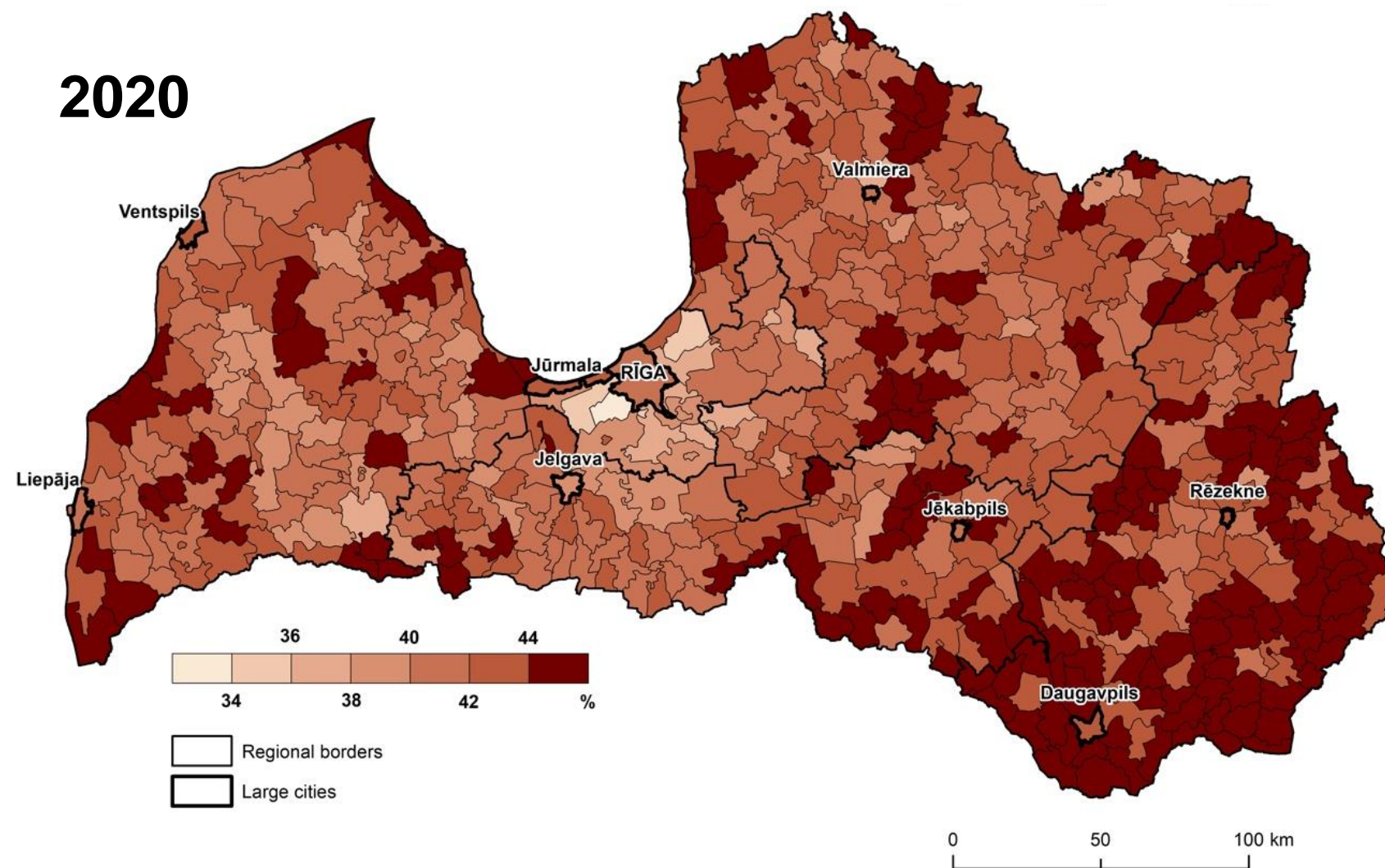
3-year period (2017-2019) before the crises and 3 years of the crisis (Covid-19 and the war in Ukraine)



2000

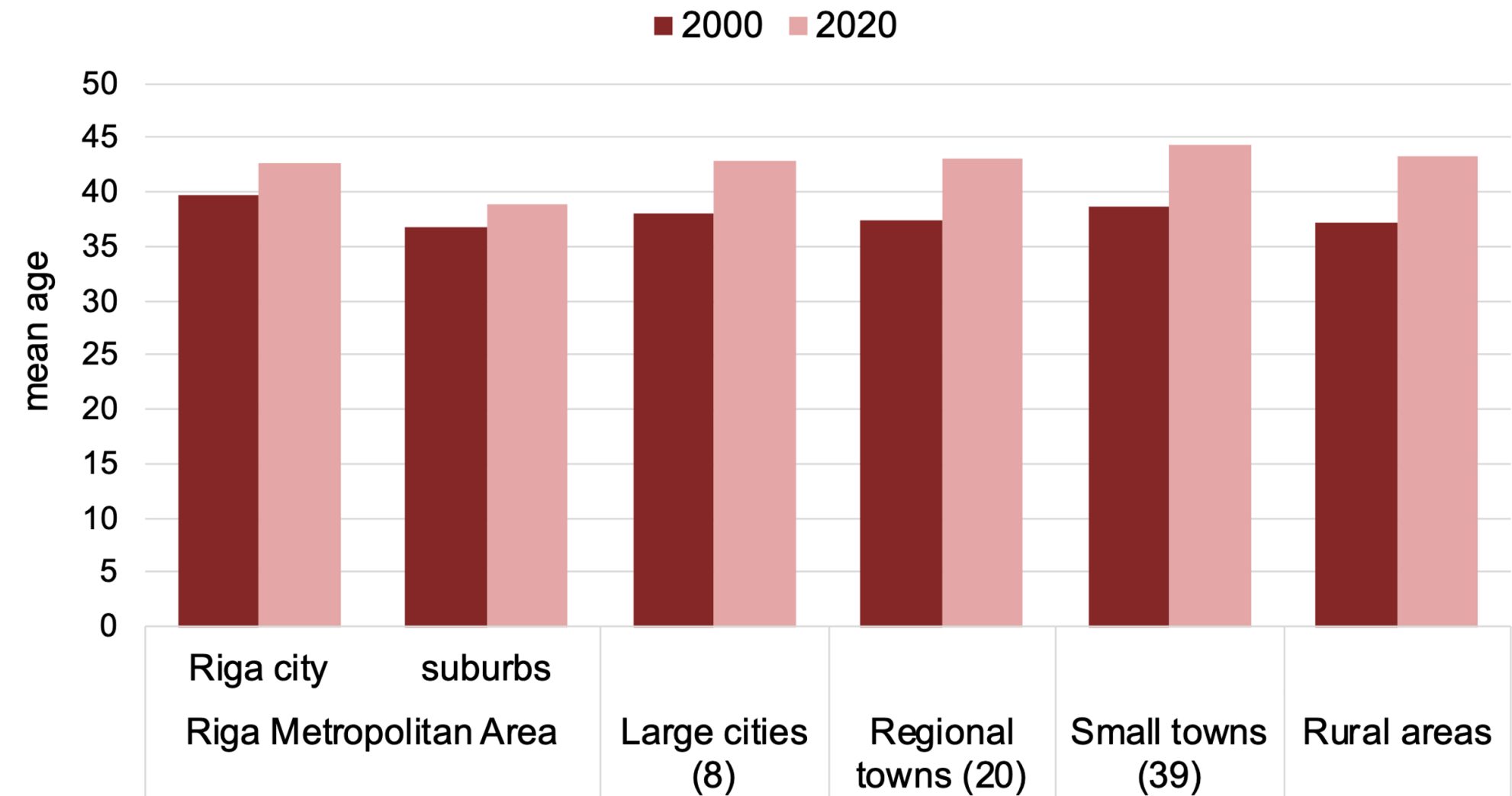


2020



Geographical patterns of ageing

Mean Age



Latvia

2000: 38.2

2020: 42.5

source: elaborated based on data of the Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia

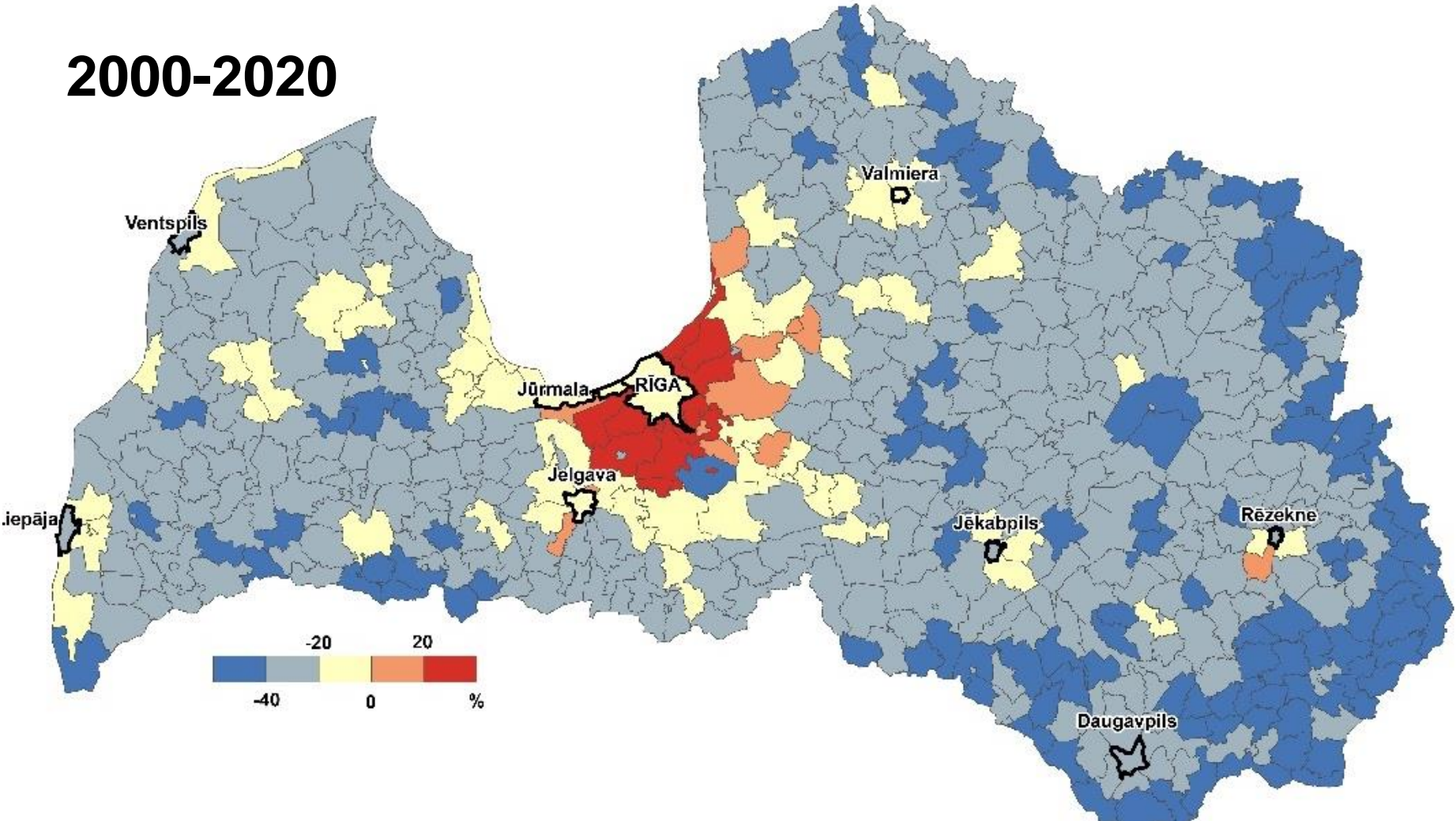
Geographical patterns of ageing

Population change and median age

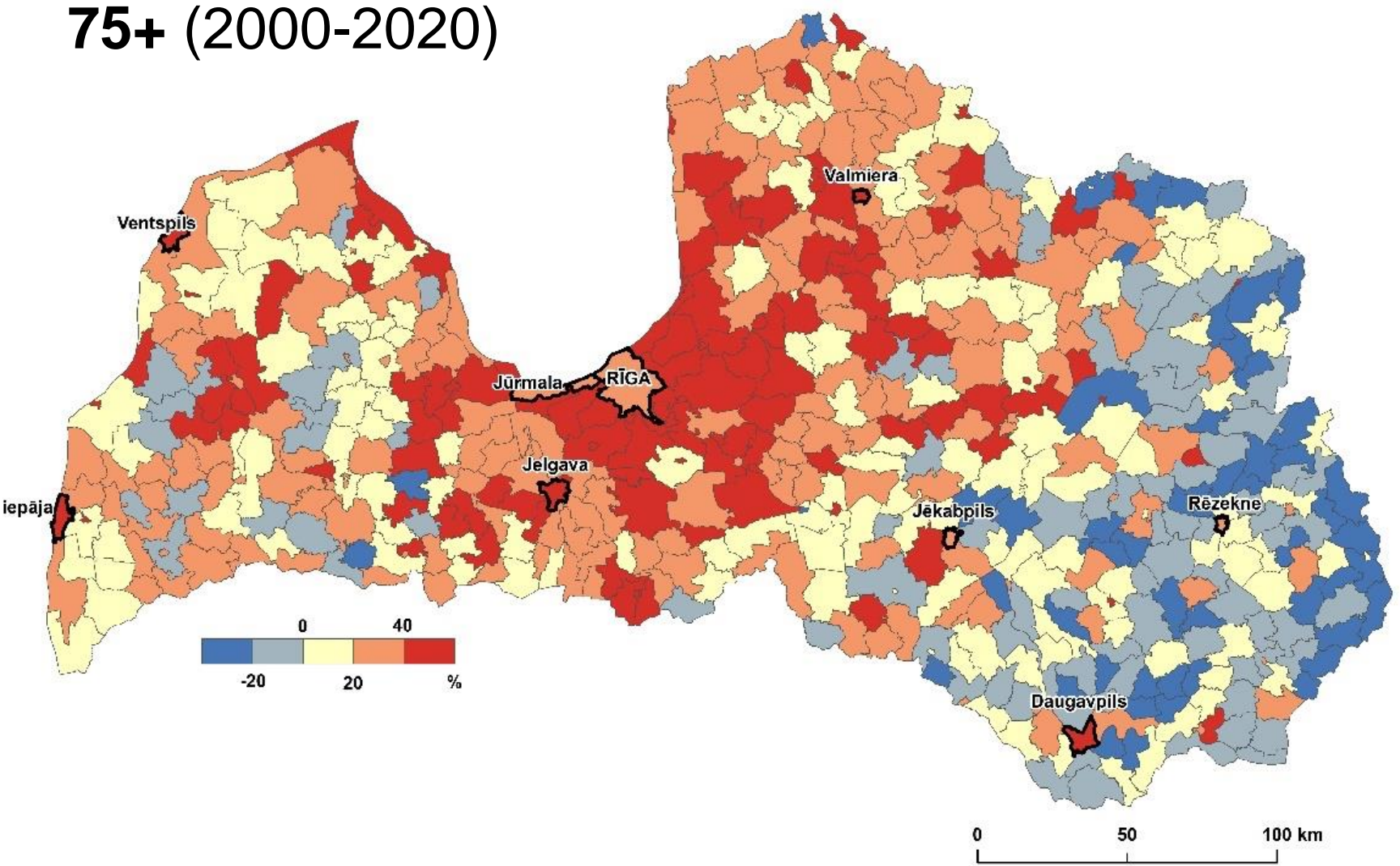
	Population in 2020		Population change %	Median age	
	Thousands	Distribution %	2000–2020	2000	2020
Riga metropolitan region	875	45.9	–10.2	39	42
Riga city	621	32.6	–19.0	39	42
Suburbs	254	13.3	+18.1	36	40
Nonmetropolitan regions	1,032	54.1	–26.6	36	44
Kurzeme	283	14.8	–24.8	36	44
Vidzeme	262	13.7	–25.4	36	45
Zemgale	230	12.1	–21.7	36	43
Latgale	257	13.5	–33.3	38	47
Latvia	1,907	100.0	–19.9	37	43

Source: Authors' calculations based on Central Statistical Bureau data (CSB) of Latvia, (2022).

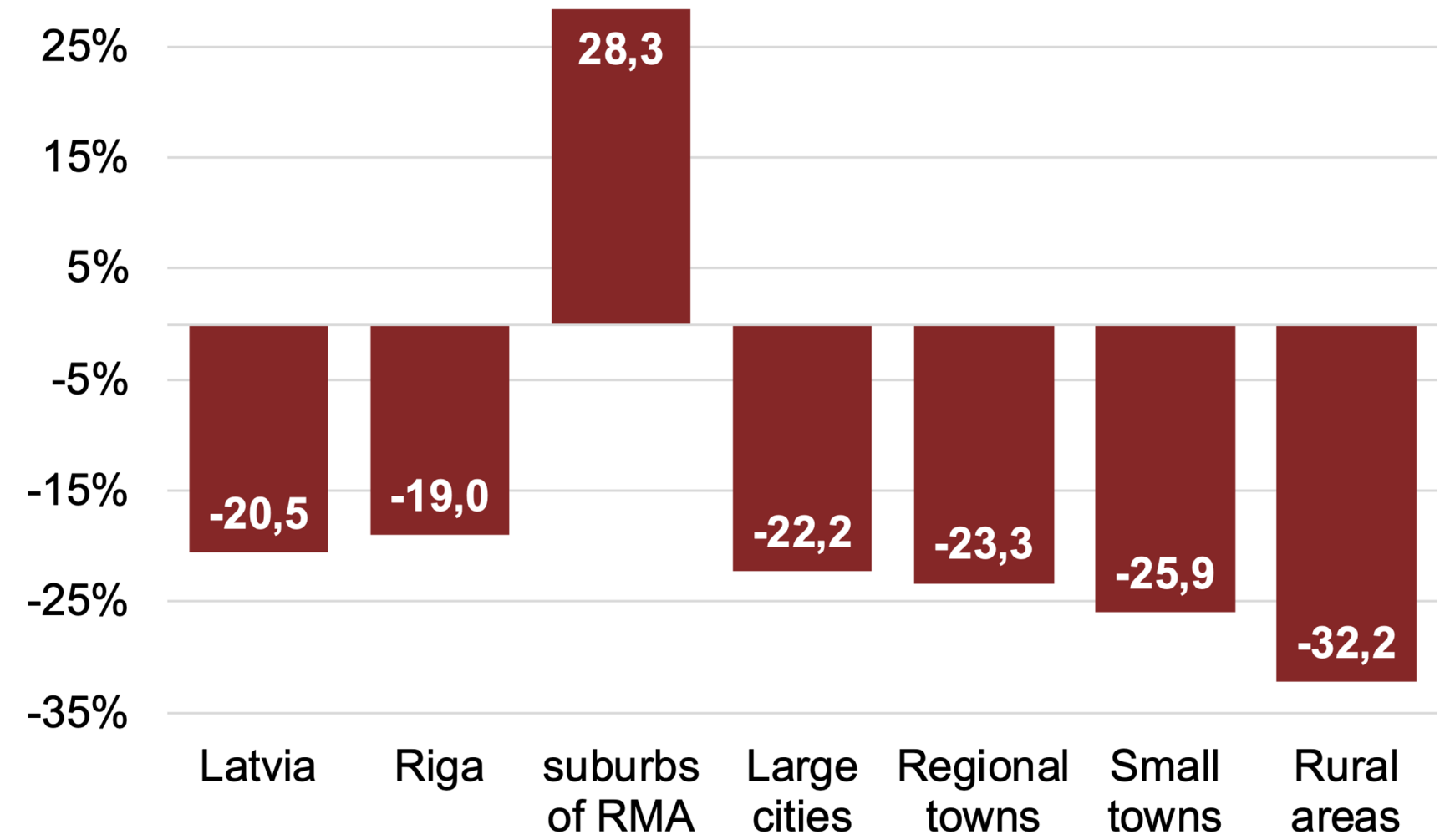
2000-2020



75+ (2000-2020)



Geographical patterns of ageing Population change



The changes in the number of elderly show an increase in the whole urban system.

source: elaborated based on data of the Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia

Concluding remarks

- **Latvia's population has been gradually ageing since the early 21st century.**
- **Demographic processes—particularly population change and the increase in elderly groups—display clear geographical variation across Latvia's urban system.**
- **Patterns of population ageing differ by spatial location, with distinct regional dynamics.**
- **The Riga metropolitan area exhibits less pronounced ageing due to positive demographic trends, including in-migration and relatively stable fertility rates.**
- **There is an emerging convergence in the residential distribution of younger and older populations within the Riga metropolitan region.**



Concluding remarks

- **Understanding population dynamics, depopulation pathways, and age-specific residential patterns is critical for shaping effective policies.**
- **The ageing population requires sustained investment in public services, infrastructure, and targeted support mechanisms.**
- **Latvia, like other Central and Eastern European countries, is ageing at a rapid pace by European standards.**
- **Policy strategies must be adaptive and forward-looking, especially as the elderly population becomes more geographically dispersed**



Thank You!

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