

Estonians in Germany

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Short facts

Group: more recent language minority group, a “new minority” in Germany. ~ 4,840 speakers (Federal Statistical Office 2012).

History: Estonians have migrated to Germany for various reasons

- political factors such as WWII, the collapse of the Soviet Union and enlargement of the European Union
- economic reasons

Urban centres: Estonians generally live in larger urban centres such as München, Berlin or Hamburg.

Gender distribution: women aged between 25 and 40 are the most numerous among Estonian citizens in Germany.

The Estonian language

- belongs to the Finnic (Baltic-Finnic) language group of the Finno-Ugric (Uralic) language family.
- an agglutinating language but more fusional and analytic than the other languages belonging to the northern branch of the Finnic languages

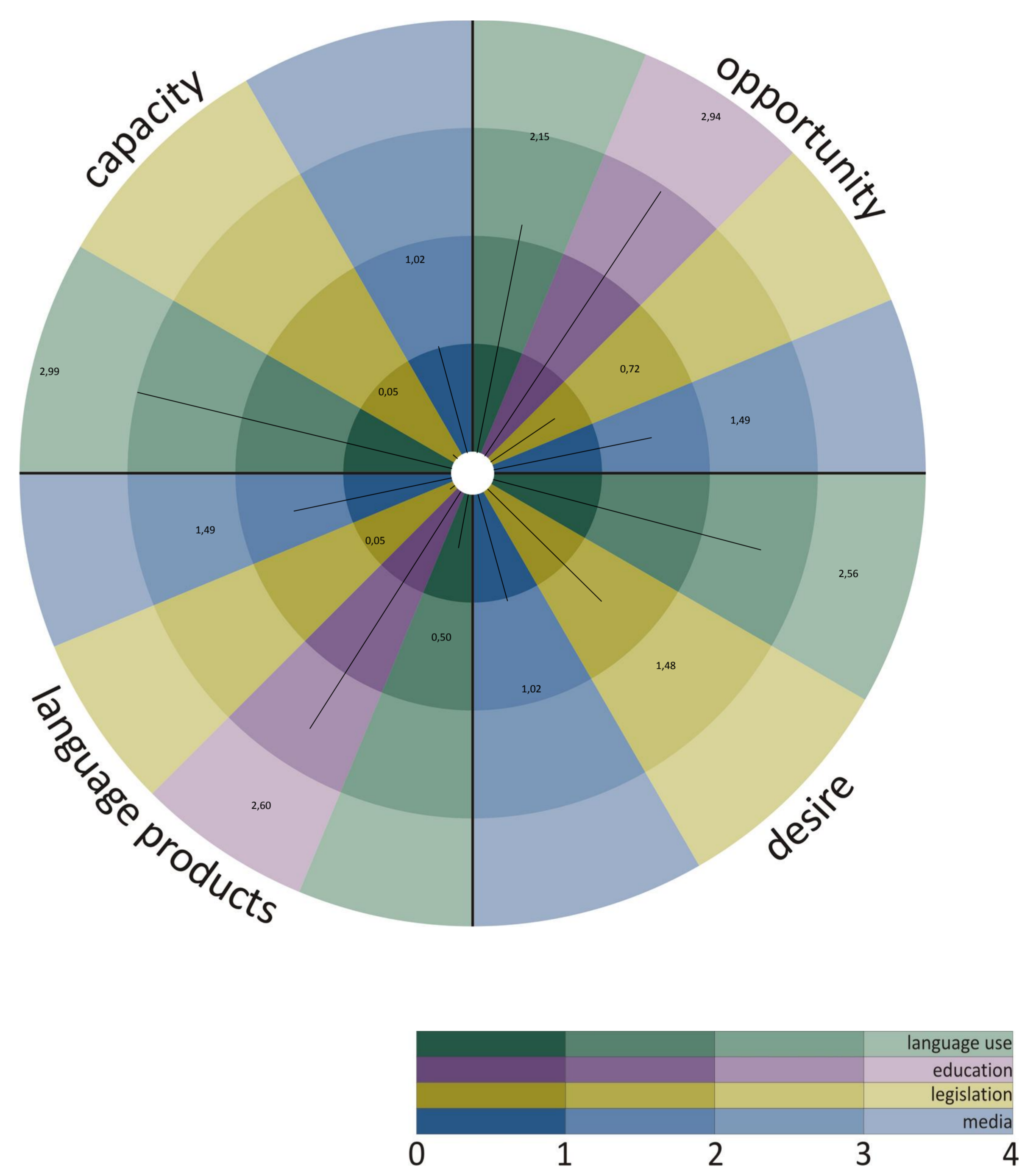
Most members of the Estonian community in Germany are **multilingual**.

ELDIA's results

- Estonians in Germany can be characterized by distinct linguistic identity: 94% of the respondents consider Estonian as their mother tongue. For most of them German is a foreign language which generally has been acquired in adulthood after emigrating to Germany. Approximately 75% use German fluently both in speech and writing. Foreign language skills are highly developed and most respondents speak several languages.
- Estonians in Germany have a positive attitude towards multilingualism. In the families, especially in everyday communication between spouses, different strategies and patterns of multilingual language use are practiced. However, in general, Estonians display a negative attitude towards language mixing (especially in family communication). Nevertheless, mixing languages it is acceptable in Estonian communities.
- Estonians in Germany have little or no opportunities to use Estonian outside their home. In addition to the public domains, German also dominates in public networks. Opportunities to communicate in Estonian outside the home are better for Estonians living in large cities, such as Berlin, Munich or Hamburg.
- For most of the respondents Estonian is not a necessity in any public domain. Respondents believed that Estonian can be considered as a marginal language in the context of “major” minority languages (i.e. minority languages that are more dominant in terms of the number of their speakers) in Germany.
- The use of German dominates in all relevant fields of media and culture except in internet environments. German is also prevalent in cultural practices at home (e.g. reading books, watching movies, listening to music etc.). Estonians in Germany are therefore rather consumers and not producers of Estonian-language media and culture. However, one cannot conclude that there is no wish or need for media and culture consumption and production in Estonian among Estonians in Germany. Most of the Estonians attach importance to different community activities for maintaining the Estonian language and culture.

EuLaViBar

Overall assessment of the EuLaViBar regarding sustainability of Estonian in Germany: speakers of Estonian are characterised by the linguistic capacity (2.67) and desire (2.40) to use their language, but limited opportunities to do so (1.89); there is also a lack of significant Estonian language products in Germany (1.49) which would support the use of the language in education, legislation, media and public spheres. Estonians living in Germany are characterised by the linguistic capacity to communicate in any situation in Estonian at the level of a native speaker (dimension: Capacity). Those who took part in the study consider the preservation of the language and its transmission to their children important (dimension: Desire). The language is considered to be one of the foundations of Estonian identity and a symbol of Estonian nationhood. At the same time, in Germany there are limited opportunities for use of Estonian outside of the home (dimension: Opportunity).



In interpreting the results of the study it is important to take into account the following aspects:

The results describe the linguistic capacity, language choices, attitudes of Estonians born and educated in Estonian-speaking areas and moving to Germany in early adulthood.

The Estonians taking part in the study do not represent the Estonians in Germany as a whole. The conclusions drawn on the basis of the sample do not extend to all of the Estonians living in the country.