

## General Information on Poland



### Geography

Poland's total surface area is 322,500 sq km (312,600 sq km of land, 1,200 sq km of inland waters, and 8,700 sq km of territorial waters). This makes it the ninth largest country in Europe, after Russia, Ukraine, France, Spain, Sweden, Germany, Finland and Norway, and the 63rd largest in the world.

To the west, Poland has a border of 467 km with Germany, to the south with the Czech Republic (790 km) and Slovakia (541 km); to the east and north-east with Ukraine (529 km), Belarus (416 km), Lithuania (103 km) and Russia (210 km). The total length of Poland's land and sea borders is 3,496km.

Nature has bestowed Poland generously with both non-renewable and renewable resources. The latter, such as wind and solar energy, are used more and more frequently, their growing popularity supported by great advances in technology.

Poland is a country rich in minerals. It is among the world's biggest producers of hard and brown coal, copper, zinc, lead, sulphur, rock salt and construction minerals.

As early as in antiquity, the country was famous for its amber and today Poland remains a major supplier of this material, with its resources estimated at 12,000 tons.

### Population

In 2003 Poland's population stood at 38,111,000. This figure makes it the 29th most populated country in the world and the 8th in Europe. Before, it ranked seventh, but was surpassed by the independent Ukraine. It is forecast to regain the seventh place position roughly by 2030, surpassing Spain.

### Gender Structure

In 2001 females made up 51.4% of Poland's total population while males made up 48.6%. 61.8% of Poles live in towns and 38.2% live in rural areas.

Women account for 52.3% of the urban population and men for 47.7%.

In the rural population, 50.1% are women and 49.9% are men.

Urban women constitute 32.3% of Poland's total population; rural women - 19.1%;

Urban men - 29.5%; and rural men - 19.1%.

## Age structure and growth rate

Over the last few years life expectancy in Poland has been increasing steadily and the forecasts for the future are optimistic. For men, this rate is predicted to grow from the current 69 years to 74 years in 2025, while for women, from 78 to 81 years (compared with respectively 56 and 61.6 years in 1950).

Polish society is not young, but it cannot be called old yet. An average Pole is almost 35 years old (for women, it is 37 years; for men, 33 years). 56.2 percent of Poles are below 40 (24.1 percent are under 17; 11.8 percent between 18 and 24; 20.3 percent between 25 and 39). 27.1 percent are in the 40-59 bracket and 16.7 percent are above 60 (14.7 percent between 60 and 79; 2 percent are 80 years old or more).

Polish women have a lower life expectancy than women in Switzerland, Italy, Norway and Sweden, but higher than females in Hungary, Ukraine, Turkey and Russia. Polish men live longer than males in Russia, Turkey, Ukraine and Hungary, but shorter than men in the Czech Republic, France, Portugal and Britain.

The birth rate is on the decline. While in 1996 there were 428,200 births, in 2003 the figure dropped to just 351,000 (compared with a record 723,000 babies born in 1983).

## Education

In the 2000/2001 academic year 1,584,800 students were enrolled in 310 higher-education institutions, with 410,800 of them at 15 universities; 28,100 at 10 medical academies; 332,100 at 94 economic schools; 137,500 at 19 teacher's schools; 12,000 at 21 arts schools; and 9,200 at 14 theological schools. 640 800 osób podnosiło swoje wykształcenie trybem dziennym, a 708 500 - zaocznym. Compared with the previous academic year (1999/2000), the total number of students increased by 152,900. There were 115 state and 195 private higher-education institutions. Of the 1,584,800 students, 472,340 were enrolled in private schools.

The number of people with higher education employed in all sectors of Poland's economy (agriculture excluded) grows rapidly; for example, between 1958 and 1994 it tripled. Most MA degree holders work in education and science institutions (40-50 percent) and justice (over 30 percent). An increasing number of young Poles seek to gain higher education as the diploma has become a valuable asset on the job market, especially when they look for the most attractive, prestigious and well-paid positions.

## Ethnic structure

Ethnically, modern Poland is almost homogenous. According to the 2002 Census, the minorities account for about 3-4 percent of the population, which is equivalent to some 1.5 million people. In the inter-war period (1918-1939) the Second Republic of Poland had 11.3 million citizens of non-Polish nationality, who constituted 35 percent of the entire population (as surveyed in 1931). This dramatic change in ethnic structure was due to the atrocities of the Second World War and the post-war policy of Poland's communist authorities. About 6 million lives were lost as a result of military operations and mass extermination; another 6.5 million found themselves outside the changed Poland's borders, and 1.7 million people were deported or forced to emigrate.

The biggest minority in today's Poland is the Germans. Their number is estimated as about 150,000 (800,000 in 1931) and they live mainly in Silesia. The second biggest Tgroup is the Belorussians, who number about 49,000 (1.9 million in 1931) and live mainly in the east. The third largest minority is the Ukrainians, who after the war were forced to resettle in the new territories in the west and north part of the country. Their number is about 31,000 (5 million in 1931).