

Returning to Poland

Country Background:

Profile

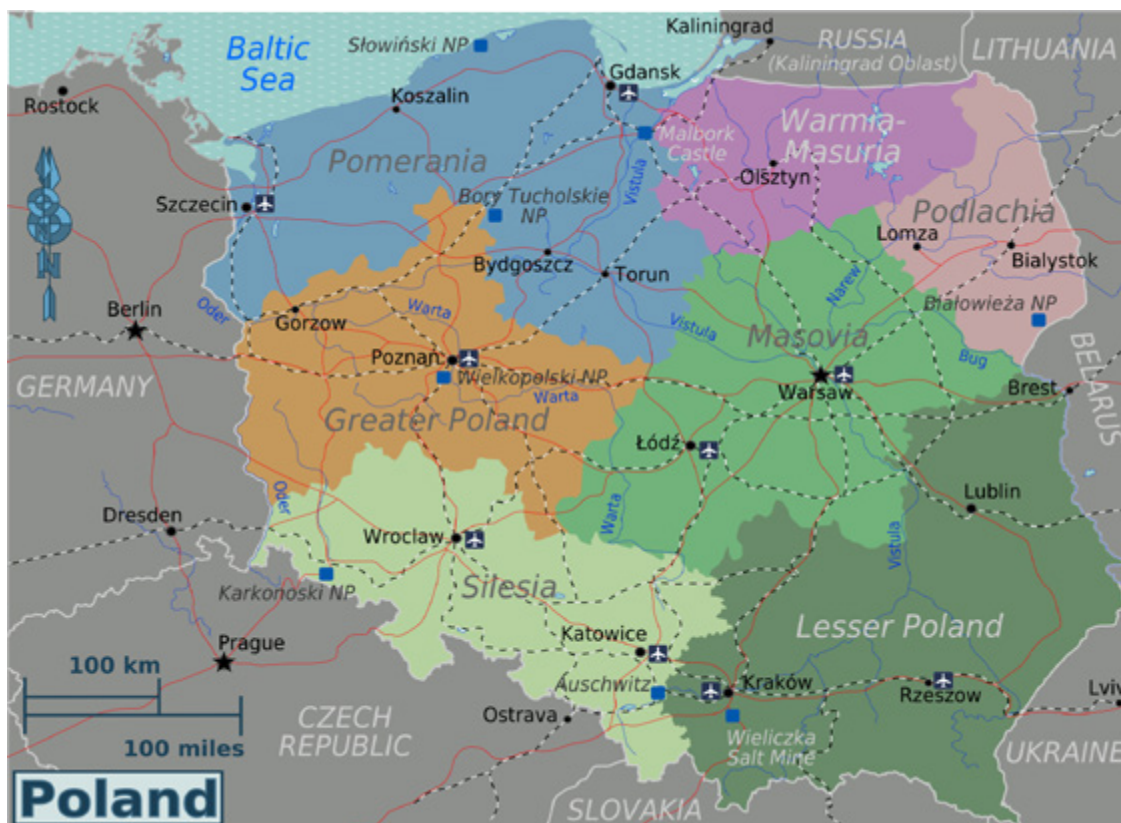
Population: 38,415,284 (July 2012)

Capital: Warsaw

Major Languages: Polish (97.8%), Other & unspecified (2.2%) (2002 Census)

Major Religion: Roman Catholic (89.8%), Orthodox (1.3%), Protestant (0.3%), Unspecified (8.3%) and Other (0.3%)

Currency: Zloty (1 Zloty= 0.20 GBP) Time Difference: +1Hour International Dialling Code: 0048/+48



History

The foundation of a Polish state took place in 966. Poland became a kingdom in the year 1025, and in 1569 formed union with Lithuania. Throughout the greatest part of its own history, the Republic of Poland was a multiethnic and multi-religious state.

In 1795 Poland was partitioned among three invaders: Prussia, Russia and Austria. Poland regained its independence after the World War I. During World War II the country was invaded by Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. During the war over 6 million Poles were killed. After the war Poland became a socialist republic under the strong influence of the Soviet Union. In 1989 there was a change of political system to parliamentary democracy, as well as change to a capitalist economy.

A program of radical reforms during the early 1990s enabled the country to transform its economy into one of the most robust in Central Europe. Poland joined the EU, along with a number of other central and eastern European countries, on May 1, 2004.

Economy

The economic system in the Polish People's Republic (PPR) from 1945 to 1989 was modelled on the Soviet system. Its main feature was the subordination of economic goals to political goals.

Since 1989 the Polish economy has gone through a transformation from a centrally directed economy to a market economy. Small and medium-sized state-owned companies were privatised and new laws for the establishment of companies enabled the construction of the private sector within the economy. Poland's economy did better than most in the European Union during the 2008-09 economic downturn.

Although EU membership and access to EU structural funds have provided a major boost to the economy, GDP per capita remains significantly below the EU average while unemployment continues to exceed the EU average. Poland's further economic development is hampered by several issues including an inefficient commercial court system, a rigid labour laws, bureaucratic red tape, burdensome tax system, and persistent low-level corruption.

Employment

One of the biggest problems of the Polish economy is unemployment. The employment rate in Poland is almost 60% and is one of the lowest in the EU. Only one in three people between the ages of 55-64 years is in employment.

Since June 2011 the unemployment benefit is 761.40 PLN gross for the first three months, after which the amount is reduced to 597.90 zł gross. The benefit is given for 6 months.

Cost of Living

The minimum wage for a full-time worker is currently 1500 PLN gross (approx. 350 EURO). The average gross monthly salary in December 2010, in the corporate sector amounted to almost 4000 PLN (approx. EUR 920).

As with many countries the cost of living is highest in the capital and other large cities. A family of four would need at least 3 500 PLN (almost 700 EURO) to survive on.

Around 20% of the population and 25% of children live below the poverty line. These ratios are close to the EU average.

Social Problems

Poland has a lack of affordable and suitable housing. Much accommodation is in poor condition and overcrowded. As a result 70% of people aged between 18 and 30 years old live with their parents.

Another major social problem is very low level of social trust. Around half of Poles do not trust people who they are not familiar with. Poles often trust only the people within their family and close circle of friends. The level of public confidence in Poland is among the lowest in Europe.

There are also problems of social exclusion. This is reflected in lack of opportunities in rural areas and low social mobility.

Health Care

Health care in Poland is delivered through a publicly funded health care system, which is free for all citizens of Poland. According to Article 68 of the Polish Constitution everyone has a right to a free health care. Citizens are granted equal access to publicly funded healthcare system. In particular, the government is obliged to provide free healthcare to children, pregnant women, disabled people and elderly. However, according to a study conducted by Strategia Poland in 2013, 65% of Polish citizens and 91% of pregnant women used private healthcare.

National Health Fund

The Polish healthcare system is state-financed through the National Health Fund (NFZ). Everyone working in Poland is required to contribute to this. Employee contributions are taken directly from wages by employers, while self-employed people need to make their own

contributions direct to the NFZ. Poles pay a health premium of approximately nine percent of their income.

People who are covered by the national health insurance system, and their dependents, are entitled to free primary health care, specialist out-patient care, hospital treatment, dental treatment and ambulance transport. They are required to present their medical insurance card when seeking treatment. All EU nationals visiting Poland who hold an E111 form are also provided with free medical care.

Standards of medical care are generally good in Poland. A few hospital facilities, however, may lack the standard of other, more contemporary Western counterparts. Emergency services may be lacking in some rural areas. Most specialist forms of healthcare are available in the larger cities. It is acceptable to approach specialists direct without General Practitioner referral. However, most hospital waiting lists are long.

Education

The Polish education system was reformed in 1999 and changes have been implemented over several years. Education is now compulsory from 7 till 18 but there are some non school alternatives from 16, including apprenticeships. There is a statutory entitlement to a year of pre school education.

1. Pre-school

Compulsory schooling begins at the age of 6 in class zero, where the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic are acquired.

2. Primary and lower secondary school

Primary schooling is of 6 years' duration and concluded with an examination merely serving as an indicator of the level which has been achieved.

Primary schooling is followed by the 3-year lower secondary level (Gimnazjum). This concludes with a compulsory examination. The marks achieved form the basis of access to a higher school, some schools conducting additional entrance examinations.

Intermediate school education is followed by a choice of attending a general upper secondary school, a specialist upper secondary school, a technical specialist school or a basic vocational school.

3. Upper secondary education

Both the general upper secondary school and the specialist upper secondary schools are of 3 years' duration and conclude with the upper secondary school leaving certificate.

Aside from general education, specialist upper secondary schools provide broad-based basic vocational education and training in areas including engineering and technology,

the environment and agricultural technology, service industries, culture, transport, electro technology and information management.

It is also possible to attend a 4-year technical specialist school concluding with the upper secondary school leaving certificate and a vocational examination.

To gain an upper secondary school leaving certificate pupils sit a written examination and an oral test, the latter remaining within the responsibility of the individual schools. Performance in the upper secondary school leaving certificate now determines access to the institutes of higher education, the entrance examinations having been abolished.

4. Vocational education and training

Vocational education and training is of 2 - 3 years' duration, takes place predominantly in full-time schools and concludes with a vocational examination. The possibility exists of acquiring VET within an alternating (dual) scheme in craft trades and commercial companies. Around 10 - 15 % of all pupils at vocational schools undergo an apprenticeship in the dual system, attending parallel theoretical lessons in state-run vocational schools.

5. Higher education

The number of higher education students in Poland has risen considerably since the early 1990s. Whereas in 1991 13.1 % of those aged between 19 and 24 were attending an institute of higher education, by 2005 the number had risen to 48.5 %. In European comparative terms, this figure is one of the highest. Higher education study may take place at a university or at an institute of higher education (Universities of Applied Sciences). 3 to 4 year vocational courses of study, concluding with a bachelor degree, are offered (the universities also providing such courses.) This may be followed by a Masters course of study. Doctorates are possible at institutes of higher education, institutes of the Polish Academy of Sciences and at research and development institutes.

<http://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/17282.html> http://www.hanse-parlament.org/images/images/pdf/es_poland.pdf

Transport

Metro

At present Warsaw is the only Polish city with a metro system. The system is relatively new, having commenced in 1995, and does not cover the whole city.

Trams

Most of Poland's larger cities have a tram system, although tram routes are usually not as extensive as bus routes. The ticketing system is different from city to city.

Buses

Buses are the most common and convenient mode of public transport. Bus tickets in cities are usually bought at kiosks near the stop, and tickets are validated once you board the bus. Some but not all buses sell tickets on board.

For longer trips, you can buy tickets at the station or on the bus. If you travel longer distances between larger cities, buses usually are slower than trains. However, buses travel to some of the more out-of-the-way places where trains don't go.

Taxis

Taxis are available in most cities and towns. Although there are taxi ranks this is more expensive than telephoning to book a taxi. The price of the fare should be agreed before you get into the cab.

Domestic Trains

Poland has an extensive train network. The national train service is known as PKP. There are three types of trains in Poland: Ekspres, Pospieszny, and Osobowy - express, fast, and slow(est), respectively. The Ekspres and Pospieszny trains offer both first- and second-class cars. Reservations are obligatory on express trains and recommended on the fast trains, especially for second-class travel.

Culture

Poland is a predominantly Roman Catholic country and traditionally the church plays a strong role in cultural and social life.

National Documentation

National identity card- Every Polish citizen over 18 who is resident in Poland must have an Identity Card (Dowód osobisty) issued by the local administration. Polish citizens living permanently abroad are entitled to have a card but it is not compulsory for them to have one. Identity Cards are issued for the period of 10 years (5 years if owner is under 18 at the date of issuing).

Passport- Polish passports are issued to Polish citizens to travel outside of Poland. The passports are issued by the Ministry of the Interior and applications are filed at voivodeship offices which have a passport office and are valid for ten years. Full Polish passports are issued for a period of ten years, whilst those issued to minors are valid up to an initial maximum of five years.

Driving Licence- A Driving licence in Poland (Prawo jazdy) is a document issued by the relevant government agency, regional or local government, confirming the rights of the holder to drive motor vehicles.

Emergency Phone Numbers

From fixed phones:

- 999: Ambulance
- 998: Fire Brigade
- 997: Police
- 981: Road Assistance
- 986: Municipal Police

Using mobile phones: remember to dial the local code before the number, for example:

22 - 997 to call the police in Warsaw.

Emergency calls from phone boxes are free of charge. If you do not know the local code, dial the general emergency number for mobile phones: 112. The operator will request the appropriate emergency unit. However, in some areas the general emergency number (112) does not work properly.

Resettlement Assistance in Poland

Embassy of the Republic of Poland

47 Portland Place, London W1B 1JH Tel: 0207 2913 520

Fax: 020 7323 4018 www.polishembassy.org.uk

Barka UK

Barka is a charity which can assist people to reconnect with families in Poland. Tel/Fax: 0207 275 7768

Free helpline: 0800 171 2926

www.barkauk.org

Caritas Poland

Skwer Kardynała, Wyszynskiego 9, 01-015, Warszawa Poland Tel: +48 22 33 48 585

Fax: +48 22 33 48 558

Email caritaspolska@caritas.pl

www.caritas.pl

Caritas Poland's mission is to support domestic and overseas projects to meet the needs of the poor and disadvantaged. Services include soup kitchens, single-mother centres, programmes that care for victims of forced prostitution, counselling for migrants and refugees to integrate into society, occupational therapy workshops and day care centres for children and the elderly.

Polish Red Cross

Red Cross in Poland provides a range of services including night shelters, day centres, food parcels, short term aid and medical and psychological care. A list of Red Cross care centres in Poland can be downloaded from their website

Their central contact details are: Biuro Zarządu Głównego Polskiego

Czerwonego Krzyża

ul. Mokotowska 14, 00-561 Warszawa,

Sekretariat: info@pck.org.pl, zarzad.glowny@pck.org.pl, head.office@pck.org.pl tel. (22) 326-12-86, fax: (22) 628-41-68

Centrala telefoniczna: (48 22) 326-12-00

Polish Community in the UK

There is a long tradition of Polish people seeking asylum in the UK, underlined by the fact that the Polish Government in Exile moved to the UK in 1939/40. Polish Jews also came to the UK in the 1930s and 40s. Many Poles fought for Britain in the war. The Polish Resettlement Act of 1947 helped many of those Poles to settle in the UK. The next major wave of Polish immigration came when many professionals left Poland after martial law was declared in response to the setting up of Solidarity, the first independent trade union in 1981.

With the fall out from the collapse of the former Soviet regime and subsequent accession of Poland into the EU in 2004, many more Polish people came to the UK in search of work. Polish Roma also came to escape discrimination.

Until May 2011 Polish citizens in the UK had restricted rights to access benefits and were required to register on a scheme known as the Workers Registration Scheme when they took up employment (this was the same for other countries who joined the EU at the same time who were often referred to as A8 countries). This is no longer the case and all Poles in the UK have the same rights and entitlements as other EU members.

www.multicultural-mattes.com/polish_community.htm

There are about 2 million Poles living in the UK. There are about 100 Polish societies and associations in the UK and many services such as Alcoholics Anonymous and hostels and day centres now have Polish speaking groups and services.

Details of many of these services can be found on the Homeless Link website: [http:// homeless.org.uk/cee-directory](http://homeless.org.uk/cee-directory)

Lodynek (www.lodynek.net) is a UK Polish community online that provides people to search accommodation, jobs.