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Poland

Poland,^[c] officially the **Republic of Poland**,^[d] is a country located in Central Europe.^[15] It is divided into 16 administrative provinces, covering an area of 312,696 km² (120,733 sq mi), and has a largely temperate seasonal climate.^[9] Poland has a population of nearly 38.5 million people, and is the fifth-most populous member state of the European Union.^[9] Warsaw is the nation's capital and largest metropolis. Other major cities include Kraków, Łódź, Wrocław, Poznań, Gdańsk, and Szczecin.

Poland's territory extends from the Baltic Sea in the north to the Sudetes and Carpathian Mountains in the south. The country is bordered by Lithuania and Russia (Kалининград Oblast) to the northeast, Belarus and Ukraine to the east, Slovakia and the Czech Republic to the south, and Germany to the west.^[16]

The history of human activity on Polish soil spans thousands of years. Throughout the late antiquity period it became extensively diverse, with various cultures and tribes settling on the vast Central European Plain. However, it was the Western Polans who dominated the region and gave Poland its name. The establishment of Polish statehood can be traced to 966, when the pagan ruler of a realm coextensive with the territory of present-day Poland embraced Christianity and converted to Catholicism.^[17] The Kingdom of Poland was founded in 1025 and in 1569 cemented its longstanding political association with Lithuania by signing the Union of Lublin. This union formed the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, one of the largest (over one million square kilometres or 400,000 square miles in area) and most populous nations of 16th and 17th century Europe, with a uniquely liberal political system which adopted Europe's first modern constitution, the Constitution of 3 May 1791.^{[18][19][20]}

With the end of the prosperous Polish Golden Age, the country was partitioned by neighbouring states at the end of the 18th century, and regained independence in 1918 with the Treaty of Versailles. After a series of territorial conflicts, the new multi-ethnic Poland restored its position as a key player in European politics. In September 1939, World War II began with the invasion of Poland by Germany, followed by the Soviets invading Poland in accordance with the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact. Approximately six million Polish citizens, including three million of the country's Jews, perished during the course of the war.^{[21][22]} As a member of the Eastern Bloc, the Polish People's Republic proclaimed forthwith was a chief signatory of the Warsaw Treaty amidst global Cold War tensions. In the wake of the 1989 events, notably through the emergence and contributions of the Solidarity movement, the communist government was dissolved and Poland re-established itself as a democratic republic.

Poland is a developed market,^[23] and a middle power; it has the sixth largest economy in the European Union by nominal GDP and the fifth largest by GDP (PPP).^[24] It provides very high standards of living, safety and economic freedom,^{[25][26][27]} as well as free

Republic of Poland	
<i>Rzeczpospolita Polska (Polish)</i>	
	
Flag	Coat of arms
Anthem: <i>Mazurek Dąbrowskiego</i> "Poland Is Not Yet Lost"	
0:00	MENU
	
<input checked="" type="radio"/> Show globe <input type="radio"/> Show map of Europe <input type="radio"/> Show all	
Location of Poland (dark green) – in Europe (green & dark grey) – in the European Union (green) – [Legend]	
Capital and largest city	Warsaw 52°13'N 21°02'E
Official languages	Polish ^[1]
Ethnic groups (2011 ^{[2][3]})	98% Poles ^[note 1] 2% Others or not stated
Religion (2019 ^[4])	90% Christianity —86% Catholicism —4% Other Christian 6% No religion 1% Others 3% Unanswered
Demonym(s)	Polish · Pole
Government	Unitary parliamentary republic ^[5]
• President	Andrzej Duda
• Prime Minister	Mateusz Morawiecki
Legislature	Parliament

university education and a universal health care system.^{[28][29]} The country has 17 UNESCO World Heritage Sites, 15 of which are cultural.^[30]

Poland is a member state of the Schengen Area, European Union, European Economic Area, Council of Europe, United Nations, NATO, OSCE, WTO, OECD, Three Seas Initiative, Visegrád Group.

Contents

Etymology

History

[Prehistory and protohistory](#)

[Piast dynasty](#)

[Jagiellonian dynasty](#)

[Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth](#)

[Partitions](#)

[Era of insurrections](#)

[Second Polish Republic](#)

[World War II](#)

[Post-war communism](#)

[1990s to present](#)

Geography

[Geology](#)

[Waters](#)

[Land use](#)

[Biodiversity](#)

[Climate](#)

Government and politics

[Law](#)

[Foreign relations](#)

[Military](#)

[Law enforcement and emergency services](#)

[Administrative divisions](#)

Economy

[Tourism](#)

[Energy](#)

[Transport](#)

[Science and technology](#)

Demographics

[Languages](#)

[Religion](#)

[Health](#)

[Education](#)

Culture

[Holidays and traditions](#)

[Music](#)

[Art](#)

[Architecture](#)

[Literature](#)

[Cuisine](#)

[Fashion and design](#)

[Cinema](#)

Upper house	Senate
Lower house	Sejm
Formation	
Baptism of Poland ^[a]	14 April 966
Kingdom of Poland	18 April 1025
Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth	1 July 1569
Partitions of Poland	24 October 1795
Second Republic	11 November 1918
Government-in-exile	17 September 1939
People's Republic	19 February 1947
Third Republic	31 December 1989 ^[7]
Area	
Total	312,696 ^[8] km ² (120,733 sq mi) ^[b] (69th)
Water (%)	1.48 (as of 2015) ^[10]
Population	
2020 estimate	▼ 38,268,000 ^[11] (38th)
Density	123/km ² (318.6/sq mi) (83rd)
GDP (PPP)	
Total	▲ \$1.525 trillion ^[12] (19th)
Per capita	▲ \$40,341 ^[12] (39th)
GDP (nominal)	
Total	▲ \$720 billion ^[12] (22nd)
Per capita	▲ \$19,056 ^[12] (44th)
Gini (2019)	▲ 28.5 ^[13] low
HDI (2019)	▲ 0.880 ^[14] very high · 35th
Currency	Złoty (PLN)
Time zone	UTC+1 (CET)
Summer (DST)	UTC+2 (CEST)
Date format	dd.mm.yyyy (CE)
Driving side	right
Calling code	+48
ISO 3166 code	PL
Internet TLD	.pl
Website	
poland.pl (https://poland.pl/)	

[Media](#)
[Sports](#)

See also

[Notes](#)

[References](#)

[External links](#)

Etymology

The country's native name *Polska* is derived from the Lechitic tribe of Western Polans, who inhabited the Warta river basin of present-day Greater Poland region starting in the mid-6th century.^[31] The tribe's name itself stems from the Proto-Indo European **pleh₂-* (flatland) and the Proto-Slavic word *pole* (field).^{[31][32]} The etymology alludes to the topography of the region and the flat landscape of Greater Poland.^[33] The English name *Poland* was formed in the 1560s from Middle High German *Pole(n)* and the suffix *land*, denoting a people or nation.^{[34][35]} Prior to its adoption, the Latin form *Polonia* was widely used throughout medieval Europe.^[36]

In some languages, such as Hungarian, Lithuanian, Persian and Old Norse, the country's exonym stems from Lechia, which derives from Lech, a legendary ruler of the Polish tribes (*Lechites*),^[37] or from the Lendians who dwelled on the south-easternmost edge of present-day Lesser Poland region.^[31] The origin of the tribe's name lies in the Old Polish word *lęda* (plain), which is a cognate of the German "das Land", Spanish "landa" and English "land".^[38] Initially, both names *Lechia* and *Polonia* were used interchangeably when referring to Poland by chroniclers during the Early and High Middle Ages.^{[39][40]}

History

Prehistory and protohistory



Reconstruction of a Bronze Age, Lusatian culture settlement in Biskupin, 8th century BC

The first Stone Age archaic humans and *Homo erectus* species settled what was to become Poland approximately 500,000 years ago, though the ensuing hostile climate prevented early humans from founding more permanent encampments.^[41] There is evidence that sporadic groups of gatherer-hunter Neanderthals penetrated southern Polish regions during the Eemian interglacial period (128,000–115,000 BCE) and in the subsequent millennia.^[42] The arrival of *Homo sapiens* and anatomically modern humans coincided with the climatic discontinuity at the end of the Last Glacial Period (10,000 BC), when Poland became habitable.^[43] Neolithic excavations indicated broad-ranging development in that era; the earliest evidence of European cheesemaking (5500 BC) was discovered in Polish Kuyavia,^[44] and the Bronocice pot is incised with the earliest known depiction of what may be a wheeled vehicle (3400 BC).^[45]

The early Bronze Age in Poland began around 2400 BC, while the Iron Age commenced in approximately 750 BC.^[46] During this time, the Lusatian culture, spanning both the Bronze and Iron Ages, became particularly prominent. The most significant archaeological find from the prehistory and protohistory of Poland is the Biskupin fortified settlement (now reconstructed as an open-air museum), dating from the Lusatian culture of the late Bronze Age, around 748 BC.^[47]

Throughout antiquity (400 BC–500 AD), many distinct ancient ethnic groups populated the territory of present-day Poland, notably Celtic, Scythian, Germanic, Sarmatian, Slavic and Baltic tribes.^[48] Furthermore, archaeological findings confirmed the presence of the Roman Legions.^[49] These were most likely expeditionary missions sent out to protect amber trade along the Amber Road. The Polish tribes emerged in the course of the Migration Period in the mid-6th century.^[50] These were predominantly West Slavic and Lechitic in origin, but also comprised assimilated ethnic groups who inhabited the area for thousands of years.^[51] The earlier tribal communities may have been associated with the ancient Wielbark and Przeworsk cultures.^{[52][53]}

Piast dynasty

Poland began to form into a recognizable unitary and territorial entity around the middle of the 10th century under the [Piast dynasty](#). Poland's first historically documented ruler, [Mieszko I](#), accepted Western Christianity as the rightful religion under the auspices of the Latin Church with the [Baptism of Poland](#) in 966 AD.^[54] In 1000, [Boleslaus I the Brave](#), continuing the policy of his father Mieszko, held a [diplomatic congress](#) and established the metropolis of [Gniezno](#) followed by dioceses in [Kraków](#), [Kołobrzeg](#), and [Wrocław](#).^[55] Otto III, Holy Roman Emperor, assented to the creation of bishoprics and bestowed upon Boleslaus royal [regalia](#) and a replica of the [Holy Lance](#), which were used for his coronation as the first [King of Poland](#) in circa 1025.^[56] He expanded the realm considerably by seizing parts of German [Lusatia](#), Czech [Moravia](#), [Upper Hungary](#) and the eastern provinces.^[57] However, the transition from [paganism](#) proved difficult and was not an instantaneous process for the rest of the population as evident from the [pagan reaction of the 1030s](#).^[58] His son, [Mieszko II Lambert](#), lost the title of king and fled amidst the struggles for power in 1031, but was reinstated as duke in 1032.^[59] The unrest led to the transfer of the capital to Kraków in 1038 by Casimir I the Restorer.^[60]



Poland under the rule of Duke Mieszko I, whose acceptance of Western Christianity and the subsequent Baptism of Poland marked the beginning of statehood in 966



Earliest known contemporary depiction of a Polish monarch, King Mieszko II Lambert of Poland, who ruled between 1025 and 1031

In 1076, [Boleslaus II](#) briefly re-instituted the office of king, but was banished in 1079 for murdering his opponent Bishop Stanislaus, who was then proclaimed a martyr and patron saint.^[61] In 1109, [Boleslaus III Wrymouth](#) defeated the King of Germany Henry V at the [Battle of Hundsfeld](#), thus stopping the German incursion into Poland. The clash was documented by Gallus Anonymus in [Gesta principum Polonorum](#), the oldest Polish chronicle.^[62] In 1138, Poland fragmented into several smaller principalities when Boleslaus divided his lands among his sons.^[63] These comprised the Duchies of [Lesser Poland](#), [Greater Poland](#), [Silesia](#), [Masovia](#) and [Sandomierz](#), with [Pomerania](#) ruled by vassals. The division allowed each province to develop its own cultural identity and wealth, but made the country more vulnerable militarily.^[64] In 1226, [Konrad I of Masovia](#), one of the regional dukes, invited the [Teutonic Knights](#) to aid in combating the [Baltic Prussian pagans](#); a decision that led to centuries of warfare with the Knights.^[65]

In the mid-13th century, the Silesian branch of the Piast dynasty ([Henry I the Bearded](#) and [Henry II the Pious](#)) nearly succeeded in uniting the dukedoms.^[66] Their efforts were hindered by the [Mongols](#), who pillaged the southern and eastern regions of Poland, and defeated the combined Polish forces at the [Battle of Legnica](#) (1241) where Henry II was killed.^[67] The Mongols raided twice more in the second

half of the century, but were defeated and driven out by the Poles. In 1264, the [Statute of Kalisz](#), or the General Charter of Jewish Liberties, introduced unprecedented rights for the Polish Jews, leading to a nearly autonomous "nation within a nation".^[68] Cities began to grow during this period and new settlements were granted town privileges under [Magdeburg Law](#), which also favoured German migration into Poland.^[69]

In 1320, after an earlier unsuccessful attempt at unification by [Premislaus II](#), [Ladislaus the Short](#) consolidated his power, took the throne and became the first king of a reunified Poland.^[70] He was the first sovereign crowned at [Wawel Cathedral](#) with [Szczercowiec](#) ("Jagged Sword"), which symbolised the permanent restoration of kingship.^[71] His son, [Casimir III](#) (reigned 1333–1370), gained wide recognition for improving the country's infrastructure, reforming the army and strengthening diplomacy.^{[72][73]} He also extended royal protection to Jews, and encouraged them to settle in Poland.^{[72][74]} Casimir hoped to build a class of educated people, especially lawyers, who could codify the country's laws and administer the courts and offices. His efforts were finally rewarded when [Pope Urban V](#) granted him permission to open the University of Kraków in 1364, one of the oldest institutions of higher learning in Europe.^[75] Under his authority, Poland was transformed into a major European power.^[76]

The [Black Death](#), a plague that ravaged Europe from 1347 to 1351, did not significantly affect Poland, and the country was spared from a major outbreak of the disease.^{[77][78]} The reason for this was the decision of Casimir to quarantine the nation's borders. Furthermore, the concept of [Golden Liberty](#) began to develop under his rule

– in return for military support, the king made a series of concessions to the nobility and establishing their legal status as superior to that of the townsfolk.^[79] When Casimir the Great died in 1370, leaving no legitimate male heir, the Piast dynasty came to an end.^[80]

In November 1370, Casimir's nephew and closest male relative, Louis of Anjou, was crowned king at Wawel.^[81] He ruled Poland, Hungary and Croatia in a personal union. Like his uncle, Louis I had no sons and persuaded his subjects to acknowledge the right of his daughters to succeed him in both Poland and Hungary by granting privileges.^[82] Upon his death and a two-year interregnum, his younger daughter Hedwig (in Poland known as Jadwiga) became the first female monarch of the Kingdom of Poland in 1384.^[81] However, she was stylised as "king" during her reign because the Polish law had no provision for a queen regnant, but did not specify that the monarch had to be male.^{[83][84]}



Casimir III the Great is the only Polish king to receive the title of *Great*. He built extensively during his reign, and reformed the Polish army along with the country's legal code, 1333–70.

Jagiellonian dynasty



The Battle of Grunwald was fought against the German Order of Teutonic Knights, and resulted in a decisive victory for the Kingdom of Poland, 15 July 1410.

In 1385, Jadwiga was expected to marry William Habsburg of Austria, but the noble lords were apprehensive about the match believing that it would not secure national interests against the Luxembourgs, who controlled Bohemia and Brandenburg.^[85] She eventually wedded the Lithuanian Grand Duke Jogaila (Władysław II Jagiełło), thus forming the Jagiellonian dynasty (1386–1572) and the Polish–Lithuanian union that spanned the late Middle Ages and early Modern Era. The partnership brought the vast multi-ethnic Lithuanian territories into Poland's sphere of influence and proved beneficial for the Poles and Lithuanians, who coexisted in one of the largest European political entities of the time.^[86]

In the Baltic Sea region, the struggle of Poland and Lithuania with the Teutonic Knights continued and culminated at the Battle of Grunwald in 1410, where a combined Polish-Lithuanian army inflicted a decisive victory against them.^[87] In 1466, after the Thirteen Years' War, King Casimir IV Jagiellon gave royal consent to the Peace of Thorn, which created the future Duchy of Prussia under Polish suzerainty.^[88] The Jagiellonian dynasty at one point also established dynastic control over the kingdoms of Bohemia (1471 onwards) and Hungary.^{[89][90]} In the south, Poland confronted the Ottoman Empire and the Crimean Tatars, and in the east helped Lithuania fight Russia.^[91]

Poland was developing as a feudal state, with a predominantly agricultural economy and an increasingly powerful landed nobility. In 1493, John I Albert sanctioned the creation of a bicameral parliament composed of a lower house, the Sejm, and an upper house, the Senate.^[92] The Nihil novi act adopted by the Polish General Sejm in 1505, transferred most of the legislative power from the monarch to the parliament, an event which marked the beginning of the period known as "Golden Liberty", when the state was ruled by the "free and equal" Polish nobility.^[93]

The Protestant Reformation movements made deep inroads into Polish Christianity, which resulted in the establishment of policies promoting religious tolerance, unique in Europe at that time.^[94] This tolerance allowed the country to avoid most of the religious turmoil that spread over Europe during the 16th century.^[94] In Poland, Nontrinitarian Christianity became the doctrine of the so-called Polish Brethren, who separated from their Calvinist denomination and became the co-founders of global Unitarianism.^[95]



Wawel Castle in Kraków, seat of Polish kings from 1038 until the capital was moved to Warsaw in 1596. The royal residence is an example of Renaissance architecture in Poland.

The European Renaissance evoked under kings Sigismund I the Old and Sigismund II Augustus a sense of urgency in the need to promote a cultural awakening.^[96] During this period Polish culture and the nation's economy flourished; changes and contributions to architecture, cuisine, language and customs were made at the behest of Sigismund the Old's wife, the Italian-born Bona Sforza, daughter of the Duke of Milan.^[97] In 1543, Nicolaus Copernicus, an

astronomer from Toruń, published his epochal work *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium* (*On the Revolutions of the Celestial Spheres*) and thereby became the first proponent of a predictive mathematical model confirming the heliocentric theory, which became the accepted basic model for the practice of modern astronomy.^[98]

Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth



The Warsaw Confederation extended religious freedoms and tolerance in the Commonwealth, and was the first of its kind act in Europe, 28 January 1573.

The 1569 Union of Lublin established the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, a more closely unified federal state with an elective monarchy, but which was governed largely by the nobility.^[99] The Warsaw Confederation (1573) guaranteed religious freedom for the Polish nobles (*szlachta*) and townsfolk (*mieszczanie*).^[100] However, the peasants (*chłopi*) were still subject to severe limitations imposed on them by the nobility, and confined to private folwerk farmsteads.^[68] The establishment of the Commonwealth coincided with a period of stability and prosperity, with the union thereafter becoming a European power and a major cultural entity, occupying approximately 1 million km² (390,000 sq mi) after the Truce of Deulino.^[101] It was the largest state in Europe at the time.^[102] Poland was the dominant partner and acted as an agent for the dissemination of Western culture, Catholicism and Polish traditions through Polonization into areas of North-Eastern Europe which it controlled following the union. Certain

factions of Lithuanian nobility were apprehensive about the merger, fearing that it would lead to the loss of Lithuania's cultural identity.^[103]

In 1573, Henry de Valois, son of Henry II of France and Catherine de' Medici, was proclaimed King of Poland and Grand Duke of Lithuania in the first election.^[104] He hesitantly instituted the Henrician Articles which determined the principles of royal governance, thus further limiting the power of a monarch.^[105] Henry's reign was brief; he was dethroned in 1575 after fleeing to succeed his brother, Charles IX, in France.^[105] His successor, Stephen Báthory from Transylvania, proved to be a capable military commander. Báthory's involvement alongside Sweden and successful campaign in the Livonian War against Ivan the Terrible granted Poland more territories in the Baltic states.^[106]

In 1592, Sigismund III of Poland succeeded his father, John Vasa, in Sweden.^[107] Under his authority, the Commonwealth and Sweden temporarily united in what was known as the Polish-Swedish union. Sigismund was a talented figure, but a Catholic fanatic and a despot who hoped to reintroduce absolutism.^[108] He was a strong advocate of Counter-Reformation, funded the Jesuits, and furtively supported repressions against the Protestants and other religious minorities. In 1599, he was deposed in Sweden by his Protestant uncle Charles, which ended the union.^[109] Sigismund's long reign in Poland was described as the Silver Age due to his investments and patronage over artists, scholars and architects.^[110] In politics, he undermined parliament and imposed expansionist policies.^[111]

Taking advantage of a civil war in neighbouring Russia, Sigismund invaded the country in 1609.^[112] In 1610, the Polish army and winged hussar units under the command of Hetman Stanisław Żółkiewski seized Moscow after defeating the Russians at the Battle of Klushino.^[112] The humiliated Vasili IV of Russia was caged and sent to Poland where he paid tribute in Warsaw and was later murdered in captivity.^[113] The Poles were eventually driven out of ruined Moscow after two years by a local uprising. Sigismund also countered the Ottoman Empire in the southeast; at Khotyn in 1621 the Commonwealth forces under Jan Karol Chodkiewicz achieved a decisive victory against the Turks.^[114] Their defeat and subsequent Janissary revolt marked the downfall of Sultan Osman II.^[115] Sigismund's liberal son, Ladislaus IV Vasa, successfully defended Poland's territorial possessions, but his death ended the centuries-long era of relative stability.^[116]

From the middle of the 17th century, the nobles' democracy, suffering from internal disorder, gradually declined, thereby leaving the once powerful Commonwealth vulnerable.^[117] The Polish and Catholic domination of present-day Ukraine resulted in the 1648 Khmelnytsky Uprising, which engulfed much of the eastern parts of



The Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth at its greatest extent after the Truce of Deulino. During the first half of the 17th century, the Commonwealth covered an area of about 1,000,000 square kilometres (390,000 sq mi).



King John III Sobieski defeated the Ottoman Turks at the Battle of Vienna on 12 September 1683.

reaching progress in the areas of education, intellectual life, art, and especially toward the end of the period, evolution of the social and political system. The most populous capital city of Warsaw replaced Gdańsk (Danzig) as the leading centre of commerce, and the role of the more prosperous urban population increased.^[123]

Partitions

The royal election of 1764 resulted in the elevation of Stanislaus II Augustus (a Polish aristocrat from the Poniatowski family, connected to the Familia faction of magnates) to the monarchy.^[124] His candidacy was extensively funded by his sponsor and former lover, Empress Catherine II of Russia.^[125] The new king spent much of his reign maneuvering between his desire to implement necessary reforms to save the country from internal disorder, and the necessity to remain in a political relationship and at peace with surrounding states.^[126] This led to the formation of the 1768 Bar Confederation, a rebellion of nobles directed against the Polish king and all external influence, which ineptly aimed to preserve Poland's sovereignty and privileges held by the nobility.^[127]

The failed attempts at reform as well as the domestic turmoil caused by the Confederation proved the country's weakness and provoked its neighbours to intervene.^[128] In 1772 the First Partition of the Commonwealth by Prussia, Russia and Austria took place; an act which the Partition Sejm, under considerable duress, eventually "ratified" as a *fait accompli*.^[129] Disregarding the territorial losses, in 1773 the king established a plan of the most necessary reforms, in which the Commission of National Education, the first government education authority in Europe, was inaugurated.^[130] Corporal punishment of schoolchildren was officially prohibited in 1783. Poniatowski was the head figure of the Polish Enlightenment, encouraged the development of industries and embraced "republican" Neoclassical architecture.^[131] For his contributions to the arts and sciences he was awarded a Fellowship of the Royal Society, where he became the first royal member outside British royalty.^[132]

The Great Sejm (1788–1792) convened by Stanislaus Augustus successfully adopted in 1791 the 3 May Constitution, the first set of modern supreme national laws in Europe.^[133] However, this document, accused by detractors of harbouring revolutionary sympathies, generated strong opposition from the Commonwealth's aristocracy and conservatives as well as from Catherine, who, determined to prevent the rebirth of a strong Commonwealth set about planning the final dismemberment of the Polish-Lithuanian state. Russia was aided in achieving its goal when the Targowica Confederation, an organisation of Polish nobles, appealed to the Empress for help. In May 1792, Russian forces crossed the Commonwealth's eastern frontier, thus beginning the Polish-Russian War.^[134]

The defensive war fought by the Poles ended prematurely when the King, convinced of the futility of resistance, capitulated and joined the Targowica Confederation, hoping to save the country. The Confederation then took over the government. Russia and Prussia, fearing the reemergence of a Polish state, understanding, that despite



Stanislaus II Augustus, the last King of Poland, ascended to the throne in 1764 and reigned until his abdication on 25 November 1795.



Constitution of 3 May, enactment ceremony inside the Senate Chamber at the Warsaw Royal Castle, 1791

the current influence they still cannot control the country, arranged for, and in 1793 executed, the Second Partition of the Commonwealth, which left the country deprived of so much territory that it was practically incapable of independent existence. In 1795, following the failed Kościuszko Uprising, the Commonwealth was partitioned one last time by all three of its more powerful neighbours, and with this, effectively ceased to exist.^[135] The 18-century British statesman and philosopher Edmund Burke summed up the partitions: "No wise or honest man can approve of that partition, or can contemplate it without prognosticating great mischief from it to all countries at some future time".^[136]

Era of insurrections

Poles rebelled several times against the partitioners, particularly near the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century. An unsuccessful attempt at defending Poland's sovereignty took place in 1794 during the Kościuszko Uprising, where a popular and distinguished general Tadeusz Kościuszko, who had several years earlier served under Washington in the American Revolutionary War, led Polish insurrectionists. Despite the victory at the Battle of Raclawice, his ultimate defeat ended Poland's independent existence for 123 years.^[138]

In 1807, Napoleon I of France temporarily recreated a Polish state as the satellite Duchy of Warsaw, after a successful 1806 uprising against Prussian rule. In accordance with the Treaty of Tilsit, the duchy was ruled by his ally, Frederick Augustus I of Saxony. The Polish troops and generals aided Napoleon throughout the Napoleonic Wars, particularly those under Józef Poniatowski, who became the only foreign Marshal of the French Empire shortly before his death at the Battle of Leipzig.^[139] In the aftermath of Napoleon's exile, Poland was again split between the victorious powers at the Congress of Vienna in 1815.^[140] The eastern part was ruled by the Russian tsar as Congress Poland, which temporarily held a liberal constitution. The Prussian-controlled territory of western Poland came under increased Germanization. Thus, in the 19th century, only Habsburg-ruled Austrian Poland and the Free City of Kraków in the south, allowed free Polish culture to flourish.



The partitions of Poland, carried out by the Kingdom of Prussia (blue), the Russian Empire (brown), and the Austrian Habsburg Monarchy (green) in 1772, 1793 and 1795



Tadeusz Kościuszko was a veteran and hero of both the Polish and American wars of independence.^[137]

In 1830, the November Uprising began in Warsaw when young non-commissioned officers at the Officer Cadet School rebelled.^[141] Although the numerically smaller Polish forces successfully defeated several Russian armies, they were left unsupported by France and the newborn United States. With Prussia and Austria deliberately prohibiting the import of military supplies through their territories, the Poles accepted that the uprising was doomed to failure. After the defeat, the semi-independent Congress Poland lost its constitution, army and legislative assembly, and its autonomy was abolished.^[142]

During the European Spring of Nations, Poles took up arms in the Greater Poland Uprising of 1848 to resist the Prussians. Initially, the uprising manifested itself in the form of civil disobedience but eventually turned into an armed struggle when the Prussian military was sent in to pacify the region. Subsequently, the uprising was suppressed and the semi-autonomous Grand Duchy of Posen, created from the Prussian partition of Poland, was incorporated into Prussia, and in 1871 into the German Empire.^[143]

In 1863, a new Polish uprising against Russia began. The January Uprising started out as a spontaneous protest by young Poles against conscription into the Imperial Russian Army. However, the insurrectionists, despite being joined by high-ranking Polish–Lithuanian officers and numerous politicians, were still severely outnumbered and lacking in foreign support. They were forced to resort to guerrilla warfare tactics and failed to win any major military victories. Consequently, the Poles resorted to fostering economic and cultural self-improvement. Congress Poland was rapidly industrialised towards the end of the 19th century, and successively transformed into the Empire's wealthiest and most developed subject.^{[144][145]}

Second Polish Republic

Following World War I all the Allies agreed on the reconstitution of Poland that United States President Woodrow Wilson proclaimed in Point 13 of his Fourteen Points. A total of 2 million Polish troops fought with the armies of the three occupying powers, and 450,000 died. Shortly after the armistice with Germany in November 1918, Poland regained its independence as the Second Polish Republic (*II Rzeczpospolita Polska*). It reaffirmed its independence after a series of military conflicts, the most notable being the Polish–Soviet War (1919–1921) when Poland inflicted a crushing defeat on the Red Army at the Battle of Warsaw, an event which is considered to have halted the advance of Communism into Europe and forced Vladimir Lenin to rethink his objective of achieving global socialism. The event is often referred to as the "Miracle at the Vistula".^[146]

During this period, Poland successfully managed to fuse the territories of the three former partitioning powers into a cohesive nation state. Railways were restructured to direct traffic towards Warsaw instead of the former imperial capitals, a new network of national roads was gradually built up and a major seaport, Gdynia, was opened on the Baltic Coast, so as to allow Polish exports and imports to bypass the politically charged Free City of Danzig. Also, the Polish government embarked on the creation of the Central Industrial Region (*Centralny Okręg Przemysłowy*). The project's goal was to create an industrial center in the middle of the country that included steel mills, power plants and factories.



Chief of State Marshal Józef Piłsudski was a hero of the Polish independence campaign and the nation's premiere statesman from 1918 until his death on 12 May 1935.



Map of Poland during the Interwar period, 1921–1939

The inter-war period heralded in a new era of Polish politics. Whilst Polish political activists had faced heavy censorship in the decades up until the First World War, the country now found itself trying to establish a new political tradition. For this reason, many exiled Polish activists, such as Ignacy Paderewski (who would later become prime minister) returned home to help; a significant number of them then went on to take key positions in the newly formed political and governmental structures. Tragedy struck in 1922 when Gabriel Narutowicz, inaugural holder of the presidency, was assassinated at the Zachęta Gallery in Warsaw by a painter and right-wing nationalist Eligiusz Niewiadomski.^[147]

In 1926, a May coup, led by the hero of the Polish independence campaign Marshal Józef Piłsudski, turned rule of the Second Polish Republic over to the nonpartisan Sanacja (*Healing*) movement in an effort to prevent radical political organizations on both the left and the right from destabilizing the country.^[e] The movement functioned with relative stability until Piłsudski's

death in 1935. Following Marshal Piłsudski's death, Sanation split into several competing factions.^[151] By the late 1930s, due to increased threats posed by political extremism inside the country, the Polish government became increasingly heavy-handed, banning a number of radical organizations, including communist and ultra-nationalist political parties, which threatened the stability of the country.^[152]

World War II



Polish Army 7TP tanks on military manoeuvres shortly before the invasion of Poland in 1939

World War II began with the Nazi German invasion of Poland on 1 September 1939, followed by the Soviet invasion of Poland on 17 September. On 28 September 1939, Warsaw fell. As agreed in the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact, Poland was split into two zones, one occupied by Nazi Germany, the other by the Soviet Union. In 1939–1941, the Soviets deported hundreds of thousands of Poles. The Soviet NKVD executed thousands of Polish prisoners of war (inter alia Katyn massacre) ahead of the Operation Barbarossa.^[153] German planners had in November 1939 called for "the complete destruction of all Poles" and their fate as outlined in the genocidal Generalplan Ost.^[154]

Polish intelligence operatives proved extremely valuable to the Allies, providing much of the intelligence from Europe and beyond,^[155] and Polish code breakers were responsible for cracking the Enigma cypher.^[f]

Poland made the fourth-largest troop contribution in Europe^[g] and its troops served both the Polish Government in Exile in the west and Soviet leadership in the east. Polish troops played an important role in the Normandy, Italian and North African Campaigns and are particularly remembered for the Battle of Monte Cassino.^{[160][161]} In the east, the Soviet-backed Polish 1st Army distinguished itself in the battles for Warsaw and Berlin.^[162]

The wartime resistance movement, and the Armia Krajowa (*Home Army*), fought against German occupation. It was one of the three largest resistance movements of the entire war,^[h] and encompassed a range of clandestine activities, which functioned as an underground state complete with degree-awarding universities and a court system.^[169] The resistance was loyal to the exiled government and generally resented the idea of a communist Poland; for this reason, in the summer of 1944 it initiated Operation Tempest, of which the Warsaw Uprising that began on 1 August 1944 is the best known operation.^{[162][170]}

Nazi German forces under orders from Adolf Hitler set up six German extermination camps in occupied Poland, including Treblinka, Majdanek and Auschwitz. The Germans transported millions of Jews from across occupied Europe to be murdered in those camps.^{[171][172]}



Pilots of the 303 Polish Fighter Squadron during the Battle of Britain, October 1940



Map of the Holocaust in German occupied Poland with deportation routes and massacre sites. Major ghettos are marked with yellow stars. Nazi extermination camps are marked with white skulls in black squares. The border in 1941 between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union is marked in red.

Altogether, 3 million Polish Jews^{[173][174]} – approximately 90% of Poland's pre-war Jewry – and between 1.8 and 2.8 million ethnic Poles^{[175][176][177]} were killed during the German occupation of Poland, including between 50,000 and 100,000 members of the Polish intelligentsia – academics, doctors, lawyers, nobility and priesthood. During the Warsaw Uprising alone, over 150,000 Polish civilians were killed, most were murdered by the Germans during the Wola and Ochota massacres.^{[178][179]} Around 150,000 Polish civilians were killed by Soviets between 1939 and 1941 during the Soviet Union's occupation of eastern Poland (Kresy), and another estimated 100,000 Poles were murdered by the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) between 1943 and 1944 in what became known as the Wołyń Massacres.^{[180][181]} Of all the countries in the war, Poland lost the highest percentage of its citizens: around 6 million perished – more than one-sixth of Poland's pre-war population – half of them Polish Jews.^{[22][182][183]} About 90% of deaths were non-military in nature.^[184]

In 1945, Poland's borders were shifted westwards. Over two million Polish inhabitants of Kresy were expelled along the Curzon Line by Stalin.^[185] The western border became the Oder-Neisse line. As a result, Poland's territory was reduced by 20%, or 77,500 square kilometres (29,900 sq mi). The shift forced the migration of millions of other people, most of whom were Poles, Germans, Ukrainians, and Jews.^{[186][187][188]}

Post-war communism

At the insistence of Joseph Stalin, the Yalta Conference sanctioned the formation of a new provisional pro-Communist coalition government in Moscow, which ignored the Polish government-in-exile based in London. This action angered many Poles who considered it a betrayal by the Allies. In 1944, Stalin had made guarantees to Churchill and Roosevelt that he would maintain Poland's sovereignty and allow democratic elections to take place. However, upon achieving victory in 1945, the elections organized by the occupying Soviet authorities were falsified and were used to provide a veneer of legitimacy for Soviet hegemony over Polish affairs. The Soviet Union instituted a new communist government in Poland, analogous to much of the rest of the Eastern Bloc. As elsewhere in Communist Europe, the Soviet influence over Poland was met with armed resistance from the outset which continued into the 1950s.

Despite widespread objections, the new Polish government accepted the Soviet annexation of the pre-war eastern regions of Poland^[189] (in particular the cities of Wilno and Lwów) and agreed to the permanent garrisoning of Red Army units on Poland's territory. Military alignment within the Warsaw Pact throughout the Cold War came about as a direct result of this change in Poland's political culture. In the European scene, it came to characterize the full-fledged integration of Poland into the brotherhood of communist nations.

The new communist government took control with the adoption of the Small Constitution on 19 February 1947. The Polish People's Republic (*Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa*) was officially proclaimed in 1952. In 1956, after the death of Bolesław Bierut, the régime of Władysław Gomułka became temporarily more liberal, freeing many people from prison and expanding some personal freedoms. Collectivization in the Polish People's Republic failed. A similar situation repeated itself in the 1970s under Edward Gierek, but most of the time persecution of anti-communist opposition groups persisted. Despite this, Poland was at the time considered to be one of the least oppressive states of the Eastern Bloc.^[190]

Labour turmoil in 1980 led to the formation of the independent trade union "Solidarity" ("Solidarność"), which over time became a political force. Despite persecution and imposition of martial law in 1981, it eroded the dominance of the Polish United Workers' Party and by 1989 had triumphed in Poland's first partially free and democratic parliamentary elections since the end of the Second World War. Lech Wałęsa, a Solidarity candidate, eventually won the presidency in 1990. The Solidarity movement heralded the collapse of communist regimes and parties across Europe.



At High Noon, 4 June 1989 — political poster featuring Gary Cooper to encourage votes for the Solidarity party in the 1989 elections

1990s to present



Poland became a member state of the European Union on 1 May 2004.

A shock therapy programme, initiated by Leszek Balcerowicz in the early 1990s, enabled the country to transform its socialist-style planned economy into a market economy. As with other post-communist countries, Poland suffered temporary declines in social and economic standards,^[191] but it became the first post-communist country to reach its pre-1989 GDP levels, which it achieved by 1995 thanks largely to its booming economy.^[192]

Most visibly, there were numerous improvements in human rights, such as freedom of speech, internet freedom (no censorship), civil liberties (1st class) and political rights (1st class), as ranked by Freedom House non-governmental organization. In 1991, Poland became a member of the Visegrád Group^[193] and joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) alliance in 1999^[194]

along with the Czech Republic and Hungary. Poles then voted to join the European Union in a referendum in June 2003, with Poland becoming a full member on 1 May 2004.^[195]

Poland joined the Schengen Area in 2007,^[196] as a result of which, the country's borders with other member states of the European Union have been dismantled, allowing for full freedom of movement within most of the EU.^[197]

On 10 April 2010, the President of the Republic of Poland, Lech Kaczyński, along with 89 other high-ranking Polish officials died in a plane crash near Smolensk, Russia. The president's party was on their way to attend an annual service of commemoration for the victims of the Katyń massacre when the tragedy took place.^[198]

In 2011, the ruling Civic Platform won parliamentary elections.^[199] Poland joined the European Space Agency in 2012,^[200] as well as organised the UEFA Euro 2012 (along with Ukraine).^[201] In 2013, Poland also became a member of the Development Assistance Committee.^[202] In 2014, the Prime Minister of Poland, Donald Tusk, was chosen to be President of the European Council, and resigned as prime minister.^[203]

The 2015 and 2019 elections were won by the conservative Law and Justice Party (PiS),^{[204][205]} resulting in increased friction between Poland and the EU.^{[206][207]} In December 2017, Mateusz Morawiecki was sworn in as the new Prime Minister, succeeding Beata Szydło, in office since 2015. They both represented ruling Law and Justice party, led by party chairman Jarosław Kaczyński.^[208] President Andrzej Duda, supported by Law and Justice party, was narrowly re-elected in the 2020 presidential election.^[209]



Flowers in front of the Presidential Palace following the death of Poland's top government officials in a plane crash over Smolensk in Russia, 10 April 2010

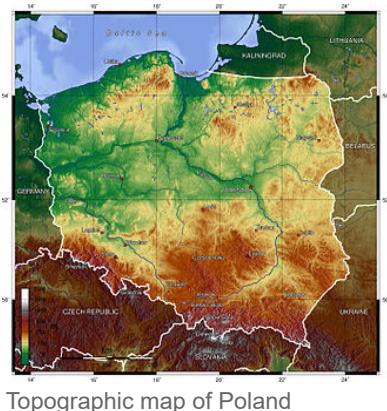
Geography

Poland covers an area of approximately 312,696 km² (120,733 sq mi), of which 98.52% is dry land and 1.48% is water.^[210] Extending across several geographical regions, the country is the 9th-largest by area in Europe and 69th largest in the world. Topographically, Poland is diverse and has access to the sea, the mountains and open terrain.^[211] Although most of the central parts of the country are flat, there is an abundance of lakes, rivers, hills, swamps, beaches, islands and forests elsewhere.^[211]

In the north-west is the Baltic seacoast spanning from the Bay of Pomerania to the Gulf of Gdańsk. The coast is marked by several spits, coastal lakes (former bays that have been cut off from the sea), and dunes.^[212] The largely straight coastline is indented by the Szczecin Lagoon, the Bay of Puck, and the Vistula Lagoon.

The central and northern parts of the country lie within the North European Plain. Rising above these lowlands is a geographical region comprising four hilly districts of moraines and moraine-dammed lakes formed during and after the Pleistocene ice age, notably the Pomeranian Lake District, the Greater Polish Lake District, the Kashubian Lake District, and the Masurian Lake District.^[213] The Masurian Lake District is the largest of the four and covers much of north-eastern Poland. The lake districts form a series of moraine belts along the southern shore of the Baltic Sea.^[213]

South of the Northern European Plain are the regions of Lusatia, Silesia and Masovia, which are marked by broad ice-age river valleys.^[214] The extreme south of Poland is mountainous; it runs from the Sudetes in the west to the Carpathian Mountains in the east. The highest part of the Carpathian massif is the Tatra Mountain range, along Poland's southern border.^[215]



Topographic map of Poland

Geology



Morskie Oko alpine lake in the Tatra Mountains in southern Poland, the range averages 2,000 metres (6,600 ft) in elevation

The geological structure of Poland has been shaped by the continental collision of Europe and Africa over the past 60 million years and, more recently, by the Quaternary glaciations of northern Europe.^[216] Both processes shaped the Sudetes and the Carpathian Mountains. The moraine landscape of northern Poland contains soils made up mostly of sand or loam, while the ice age river valleys of the south often contain loess. The Polish Jura, the Pieniny, and the Western Tatras consist of limestone, whereas the High Tatras, the Beskids, and the Karkonosze mountain ranges are made up mainly of granite and basalts. The Polish Jura Chain has some of the oldest rock formations on the continent of Europe.^[217]

Poland has over 70 mountains over 2,000 metres (6,600 feet) in elevation, all situated in the Tatras.^[218] Poland's highest point is the north-western summit of Mount Rysy at 2,501 metres (8,205 ft) in elevation.^[219] At its foot lie the mountain lakes of Czarny Staw (Black Lake) and Morskie Oko (Eye of the Sea), both naturally-made tarns.^[220] Other notable uplands include the Pieniny and Holy Cross Mountains, the Table Mountains noted for their unusual rock formations, the Bieszczady in the far southeast of the country in which the highest peak is Tarnica at 1,346 metres (4,416 ft),^[221] and the Gorce Mountains whose highest point is Turbacz at 1,310 metres (4,298 ft).^[222] The highest point of the Sudeten massif is Mount Śnieżka (1,603.3 metres (5,260 ft)), shared with the Czech Republic.^[223]

The lowest point in Poland – at 1.8 metres (5.9 ft) below sea level – is at Raczki Elbląskie, near Elbląg in the Vistula Delta.^[224]

In the Zagłębie Dąbrowskie (the Coal Fields of Dąbrowa) region in the Silesian Voivodeship in southern Poland is an area of sparsely vegetated sand known as the Błędów Desert. It covers an area of 32 square kilometres (12 sq mi).^[225] It is not a natural desert and was formed by human activity from the Middle Ages onwards.^[226]

The Baltic Sea activity in Słowiński National Park created sand dunes which in the course of time separated the bay from the sea creating two lakes. As waves and wind carry sand inland the dunes slowly move, at a rate of 3 to 10 metres (9.8 to 32.8 ft) per year. Some dunes reach the height of up to 30 metres (98 ft). The highest peak of the park is Rowokol at 115 metres or 377 feet above sea level.^[227]



The Table Mountains are part of the Sudetes range in Lower Silesia.

Waters



The Vistula is the longest river in Poland, flowing the entire length of the country for 1,047 kilometres (651 mi).

The longest rivers are the Vistula (Polish: *Wisła*), 1,047 kilometres (651 mi) long; the Oder (Polish: *Odra*) which forms part of Poland's western border, 854 kilometres (531 mi) long; its tributary, the Warta, 808 kilometres (502 mi) long; and the Bug, a tributary of the Vistula, 772 kilometres (480 mi) long. The Vistula and the Oder flow into the Baltic Sea, as do numerous smaller rivers in Pomerania.^[228] Poland's lengthy waterways have been used since early times for navigation; the Vikings ventured up the Polish rivers in their longships.^[229] In the Middle Ages and in early modern times, the shipment of tangible goods down the Vistula toward Gdańsk and onward to other parts of Europe took on great importance.^[230]

With almost ten thousand closed bodies of water covering more than 1 hectare (2.47 acres) each, Poland has one of the highest numbers of lakes in the world. In Europe, only Finland has a greater density of lakes.^[231] The largest lakes, covering more than 100 square kilometres (39 sq mi), are Lake Śniardwy and Lake Mamry in Masuria as well as Lake Łebsko and Lake Drawsko in Pomerania. The lake with the greatest depth—of more than 100 metres (328 ft)—is Lake Hańcza in the Wigry Lake District, east of Masuria in Podlaskie Voivodeship.

The Polish Baltic coast is approximately 770 kilometres (478 mi) long and extends from Świnoujście on the islands of Usedom and Wolin in the west to Krynica Morska on the Vistula Spit in the east.^[232] For the most part, Poland has a smooth coastline, which has been shaped by the continual movement of sand by currents and winds. This continual erosion and deposition has formed cliffs, dunes, and spits, many of which have migrated landwards to close off former lagoons, such as Łebsko Lake in the Słowiński National Park.

The largest spits are Hel Peninsula and the Vistula Spit. The coast line is varied also by Szczecin and Vistula Lagoons and several lakes, including Jamno. The largest Polish Baltic island is Wolin, located within Wolin National Park. The largest sea harbours are Szczecin, Świnoujście, Gdańsk, Gdynia, Police and Kołobrzeg and the main coastal resorts – Świnoujście, Miedzyzdroje, Kołobrzeg, Leba, Sopot, Władysławowo and the Hel Peninsula.



The Masurian Lake District, located in the Masuria region of Poland, contains more than 2,000 lakes.

In the valley of Pilica river in Tomaszów Mazowiecki there is a unique natural karst spring of water containing calcium salts, that is an object of protection at Blue Springs Nature Reserve in the Sulejów Landscape Park. The red waves are absorbed by water, hence only blue and green are reflected from the bottom of the spring, giving the water atypical colour.^[233]

Land use

Forests cover about 29.6% of Poland's land area based on international standards.^[234] Its overall percentage is still increasing. Forests of Poland are managed by the national program of reforestation (KPZL), aiming at an increase of forest-cover to 33% in 2050. The largest forest complex in Poland is Lower Silesian Wilderness.^[234]

More than 1% of Poland's territory, 3,145 square kilometres (1,214 sq mi), is protected within 23 Polish national parks.^[235] Three more national parks are projected for Masuria, the Polish Jura, and the eastern Beskids. In addition, wetlands along lakes and rivers in central Poland are legally protected, as are coastal areas in the north. There are 123 areas designated as landscape parks, along with numerous nature reserves and other protected areas under the Natura 2000 network.^[236]

In 2017, approximately 16,400,000 hectares (164,000 km²) of land was occupied by farms and farmsteads, over half of Poland's total area.^[237]



Wheat fields in Greater Poland



Białowieża Forest, an ancient woodland in eastern Poland and a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is home to 800 wild wisent.

Phytogeographically, Poland belongs to the Central European province of the Circumboreal Region within the Boreal Kingdom. According to the World Wide Fund for Nature, the territory of Poland belongs to three Palearctic Ecoregions of the continental forest spanning Central and Northern European temperate broadleaf and mixed forest ecoregions, as well as the Carpathian montane conifer forest. The most common deciduous trees found across the country are oak, maple, and beech; the most common conifers are pine, spruce, and fir.^[238] An estimated 68.7% of all forests are coniferous.^[239]

Poland has historically been home to rare species of animals, as well as the two largest European mammals: the wisent (*żubr*) and aurochs (*tur*). The last aurochs of Europe became extinct in 1627 in the Polish Jaktorów Forest, while the wisent survived until the 20th century only at Białowieża. It has been since reintroduced to other countries.^[240] Other wild species include the brown bear in Białowieża, in the Tatras, and in the Beskids; the gray wolf and the Eurasian lynx in various forests; the moose in northern Poland; and the beaver in Masuria, Pomerania, and Podlaskie.^[241]

Game animals such as red deer, roe deer, and wild boar are found in most woodlands. Eastern Poland abounds in ancient woods, like the Białowieża Forest, that have not been disturbed by human or industrial activity. There are also large forested areas in the mountains, Greater Poland, Pomerania, Lubusz Land, and Lower Silesia. The Lubusz Voivodeship is currently the most arboreaceous province in the country; 52% of its territory is occupied by forests.^[243]

Poland is also a significant breeding ground for a variety of European migratory birds.^[244] One quarter of the global population of white storks (40,000 breeding pairs) live in Poland,^[245] particularly in the lake districts and the wetlands along the Biebrza, the Narew, and the Warta, which are part of nature reserves or national parks.

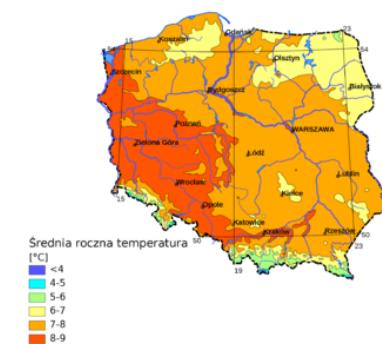


Poland is host to the largest white stork population in Europe.^[242]

Climate

The climate is mostly temperate throughout the country. The climate is oceanic in the north-west and becomes gradually warmer and continental towards the south-east. Summers are generally warm, with average temperatures between 18 and 30 °C (64.4 and 86.0 °F) depending on the region. Winters are rather cold, with average temperatures around 3 °C (37.4 °F) in the northwest and -6 °C (21 °F) in the northeast. Precipitation falls throughout the year, although, especially in the east, winter is drier than summer.^[246]

The warmest region in Poland is Lower Silesia (Lower Silesian Voivodeship) in the southwest of the country, where temperatures in the summer average between 24 and 32 °C (75 and 90 °F) but can go as high as 34 to 39 °C (93.2 to 102.2 °F) on some days in the warmest months of July and August. The warmest cities in Poland are Tarnów in Lesser Poland, and Wrocław in Lower Silesia. The average temperatures in Wrocław are 20 °C (68 °F) in the summer and 0 °C (32.0 °F) in the winter, but Tarnów has the longest summer in all of Poland, which lasts for 115 days, from mid-May to mid-September. The coldest region of Poland is in the northeast, around the area of Suwałki within the Podlaskie Voivodeship, where the climate is affected by cold fronts coming from Scandinavia and Siberia. The average temperature in the winter in Podlaskie ranges from -6 to -4 °C (21 to 25 °F). The biggest impact of the oceanic climate is observed in Świnoujście and Baltic Sea seashore area from Police to Słupsk.^[247]



Average annual temperatures

Average daily maximum and minimum temperatures for the largest cities in Poland^[248]

Location	July (°C)	July (°F)	January (°C)	January (°F)
Warsaw	25/14	77/58	1/-4	33/24
Kraków	25/13	77/56	1/-5	33/23
Wrocław	26/14	78/57	3/-3	37/26
Poznań	25/14	77/57	2/-3	35/26
Gdańsk	21/13	71/55	1/-4	34/25

Government and politics



Andrzej Duda
President



Mateusz Morawiecki
Prime Minister

Poland is a representative democracy, with a president as the head of state.^{[249][250]} The government structure centers on the Council of Ministers, led by a prime minister. The president appoints the cabinet according to the proposals of the prime minister, typically from the majority coalition in the Sejm. The president is elected by popular vote every five years. The current president is Andrzej Duda and the prime minister is Mateusz Morawiecki.^[251]

Polish voters elect a bicameral parliament consisting of a 460-member lower house (Sejm) and a 100-member Senate (Senat). The Sejm is elected under proportional representation according to the d'Hondt method, a method similar to that used in many parliamentary political systems. The Senat, on the other hand, is elected under the first-past-the-post voting method, with one senator being returned from each of the 100 constituencies.^[252]

With the exception of ethnic minority parties, only candidates of political parties receiving at least 5% of the total national vote can enter the Sejm. When sitting in a joint session, members of the Sejm and Senat form the National Assembly (the *Zgromadzenie Narodowe*). The National Assembly is formed on three occasions: when a new president takes the oath of office; when an indictment against the President of the Republic is brought to the State Tribunal (*Trybunał Stanu*); and when a president's permanent incapacity to exercise his duties due to the state of his health is declared. To date, only the first instance has occurred.^[253]

The judicial branch plays an important role in decision-making. Its major institutions include the Supreme Court (*Sąd Najwyższy*); the Supreme Administrative Court (*Naczelny Sąd Administracyjny*); the Constitutional Tribunal (*Trybunał Konstytucyjny*); and the State Tribunal (*Trybunał Stanu*). On the approval of the Senat, the Sejm also appoints the ombudsman or the Commissioner for Civil Rights Protection (*Rzecznik Praw Obywatelskich*) for a five-year term. The ombudsman has the duty of guarding the observance and implementation of the rights and liberties of Polish citizens and residents, of the law and of principles of community life and social justice.^[254]



The Sejm is the lower house of the parliament of Poland.

Law

The Constitution of Poland is the enacted supreme law, and the Polish legal system is based on the principle of civil rights, governed by the code of civil law. The current democratic constitution was adopted by the National Assembly of Poland on 2 April 1997; it guarantees a multi-party state with freedoms of religion, speech and assembly, prohibits the practices of forced medical experimentation, torture or corporal punishment, and acknowledges the inviolability of the home, the right to form trade unions, and the right to strike.^[256]

The judiciary incorporates a four-tier court system composed of the Supreme Court, the Supreme Administrative Court, Common Courts (District, Regional, Appellate) and the Military Court.^[257] Judges are nominated by the National Council of the Judiciary and are appointed for life by the president.^[258] The Constitutional and State Tribunals are separate judicial bodies, which rule the constitutional liability of people holding the highest offices of state and supervise the compliance of statutory law, thus protecting the Constitution.^[259]



The Supreme Court of Poland

Historically, the most significant Polish legal act is the [Constitution of 3 May 1791](#), the first modern constitution in Europe.^[255] Instituted as a [Government Act](#), it was designed to redress long-standing political defects of the [federative Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth](#) and its [Golden Liberty](#). Previously, only the [Henrician Articles](#) (1573) signed by each of Poland's elected monarchs could perform the function of a set of basic laws. The new Constitution introduced political equality between [townspeople](#) and the [nobility \(szlachta\)](#), and placed the [peasants](#)

under the protection of the government. It abolished pernicious parliamentary policies such as the [liberum veto](#), which permitted any deputy to rescind all the legislation passed in the interest of a foreign power. The 3 May Constitution sought to supplant the existing anarchy fostered by some of the country's [reactionary magnates](#), with a more [egalitarian](#) and democratic [constitutional monarchy](#). The Constitution influenced many later [democratic movements](#) across the globe.^{[260][261]} Tax-paying women were allowed to take part in Polish political life until the [third partition in 1795](#). In 1918 the [Second Polish Republic](#) became one of the first countries to introduce universal women's suffrage.^[262]

Poland has a low [homicide rate](#) at 0.7 murders per 100,000 people, as of 2018.^[25] Rape, assault and violent crime remain at a very low level, although not all cases are recorded by the authorities.^{[263][264][265]}

Abortion is permitted only in cases of rape, incest or when the woman's life is in danger.^[266] Congenital disorder and [stillbirth](#) are not covered by the law, forcing some women to seek abortion abroad, and others to seek the assistance of psychiatrists willing to testify on the negative psychological impact of stillbirth.^[267] Poland does not criminalize [homosexuality](#), and its legality was confirmed in 1932.^{[268][269]} The [Polish Constitution](#) defines [marriage](#) as a union between a [man](#) and a [woman](#).^[270]

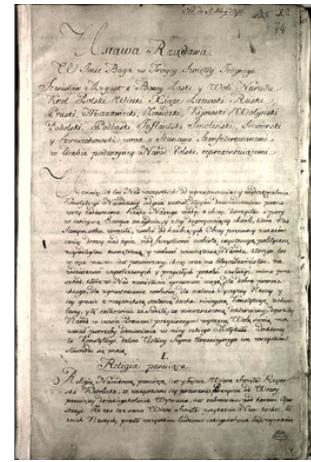
Foreign relations

Poland is the [fifth most populous member state](#) of the European Union and has a grand total of 52 representatives in the [European Parliament](#) as of 2020.^[271] Since joining the union in 2004, successive Polish governments have pursued policies to extend the country's role in European and international affairs. Poland is an emerging [regional power](#) in [Central Europe](#).^[272] The capital of [Warsaw](#) serves as the headquarters for [Frontex](#),^[273] the European Union's agency for external border security as well as [ODIHR](#), one of the principal institutions of the [Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe](#).^[274]

Apart from the European Union, Poland has been a member of [NATO](#) since 1999, the [UN](#), the [World Trade Organization](#), the [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development](#) (OECD) since 1996, [European Economic Area](#), [International Energy Agency](#), [Council of Europe](#), [Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe](#), [International Atomic Energy Agency](#), [European Space Agency](#), G6, [Council of the Baltic Sea States](#), [Visegrád Group](#), [Weimar Triangle](#), [Schengen Agreement](#), [Lublin Triangle](#) and [Bucharest Nine](#).

Over the past two decades, Poland significantly strengthened its ties with the United States, thus becoming one of its closest allies in Europe.^{[275][276]} Poland was part of the US-led coalition force during the [Iraq War](#) in 2003, and sent its troops in the first phase of the conflict, jointly with the [United Kingdom](#) and [Australia](#). Along with [NATO](#), Poland maintains military presence in the [Middle East](#), the [Baltic states](#) and in the [Balkans](#).^{[277][278]} Historically, Poland has had particularly friendly [relations with Hungary](#); this special relationship was recognized by the parliaments of both countries in 2007 with the joint declaration of March 23 as "The Day of Polish-Hungarian Friendship".^[279]

Military



The [Constitution of 3 May](#) adopted in 1791 was the first modern constitution in Europe.^[255]



The [Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#), located in [Warsaw](#)



Polish Air Force F-16s, a single-engine multirole fighter aircraft

The Polish Armed Forces are composed of five branches – Land Forces (*Wojska Lądowe*), Navy (*Marynarka Wojenna*), Air Force (*Sily Powietrzne*), Special Forces (*Wojska Specjalne*) and the Territorial Defence Force (*Wojska Obrony Terytorialnej*). The military is subordinate to the Ministry of National Defence of the Republic of Poland. However, its commander-in-chief in peacetime is the President of the Republic, who nominates officers, the Minister for National Defence and the chief of staff.^{[280][281]} Polish military tradition is generally commemorated by the Armed Forces Day, celebrated annually on 15 August.^[282]

As of 2018, the Polish Armed Forces have a combined strength of 144,142 soldiers.^[283] The Polish Navy primarily operates on the Baltic Sea and

conducts operations such as maritime patrol, search and rescue for the section of the Baltic under Polish sovereignty, as well as hydrographic measurements and research. The Polish Air Force routinely takes part in Baltic Air Policing assignments. In 2003, the F-16C Block 52 was selected as the new general multi-role fighter for the air force. In January 2020, Poland has approved the delivery for F-35 Lightning II combat aircraft.^{[284][285]} Poland is currently spending 2% of its GDP on defence (approximately US\$13.5 billion in 2020), which is expected to grow to 2.5% by 2030.^[286] According to SIPRI, the country exported EUR€487 million worth of arms and armaments to other countries, primarily to the United States, Chile, France and South Africa.^[287]

The mission of the armed forces is the defence of Poland's territorial integrity and Polish interests abroad.^[288] The country's national security goal is to further integrate with NATO and European defence, economic, and political institutions.^[288] Compulsory military service for men was discontinued in 2008. From 2007, until conscription ended in 2008, the mandatory service was nine months.^[289] Polish military doctrine reflects the same defensive nature as that of its NATO partners and the country actively hosts NATO's military exercises.^[290] From 1953 to 2009 Poland was a large contributor to various United Nations peacekeeping missions.^{[288][291]} The Polish Armed Forces took part in the 2003 invasion of Iraq, deploying 2,500 soldiers in the south of that country and commanding the 17-nation multinational force in Iraq. Poland also maintains troops in the Middle East, the Baltic states and in the Balkans; 1,650 soldiers were deployed in 2019.^[292]



Soldier from the Naval Special Forces Unit, JW GROM

Law enforcement and emergency services



A Mercedes-Benz Sprinter patrol van belonging to the Polish State Police Service (*Policja*)

Law enforcement in Poland is performed by several agencies which are subordinate to the Ministry of Interior and Administration – the State Police (*Policja*), assigned to investigate crimes or transgression; the Municipal City Guard, which maintains public order; and several specialized agencies, such as the Polish Border Guard.^[293] Private security firms are also common, although they possess no legal authority to arrest or detain a suspect.^{[293][294]} Municipal guards are primarily headed by provincial, regional or city councils; individual guards are not permitted to carry firearms unless instructed by their superior commanding officer or commandant.^[295]

The Internal Security Agency (ABW, or ISA in English) is the chief counter-intelligence instrument safeguarding Poland's internal security, along with Agencja Wywiadu (AW) which identifies threats and collects secret information abroad.^[296] The Central Investigation Bureau of Police (CBŚP) and the Central Anticorruption Bureau (CBA) are responsible for countering organized crime and corruption in state and private institutions.^{[297][298]}

Emergency services in Poland consist of the emergency medical services, search and rescue units of the Polish Armed Forces and State Fire Service. Emergency medical services in Poland are operated by local and regional governments,^[299] but are a part of the centralized national agency - the National Medical Emergency Service (*Państwowe Ratownictwo Medyczne*).^[300]

All emergency services personnel are uniformed and security services can be easily recognized during regular patrols in both large urban areas or smaller suburban localities.^[301]

Administrative divisions

Poland's current voivodeships (provinces) are largely based on the country's historic regions, whereas those of the past two decades (to 1998) had been centred on and named for individual cities. The new units range in area from less than 10,000 square kilometres (3,900 sq mi) for Opole Voivodeship to more than 35,000 square kilometres (14,000 sq mi) for Masovian Voivodeship. Administrative authority at the voivodeship level is shared between a government-appointed *voivode* (governor), an elected regional assembly (*sejmik*) and a voivodeship marshal, an executive elected by that assembly.

The voivodeships are subdivided into *powiats* (often referred to in English as counties), and these are further divided into *gminas* (also known as communes or municipalities). Major cities normally have the status of both *gmina* and *powiat*. Poland has 16 voivodeships, 380 powiats (including 66 cities with *powiat* status), and 2,478 *gminas*.



Voivodeship		Capital city or cities
<i>in English</i>	<i>in Polish</i>	
Greater Poland	Wielkopolskie	Poznań
Kuyavian-Pomeranian	Kujawsko-Pomorskie	Bydgoszcz / Toruń
Lesser Poland	Małopolskie	Kraków
Łódź	Łódzkie	Łódź
Lower Silesian	Dolnośląskie	Wrocław
Lublin	Lubelskie	Lublin
Lubusz	Lubuskie	Gorzów Wielkopolski / Zielona Góra
Masovian	Mazowieckie	Warsaw
Opole	Opolskie	Opole
Podlaskie	Podlaskie	Białystok
Pomeranian	Pomorskie	Gdańsk
Silesian	Śląskie	Katowice
Subcarpathian	Podkarpackie	Rzeszów
Świętokrzyskie (Holy Cross)	Świętokrzyskie	Kielce
Warmian-Masurian	Warmińsko-Mazurskie	Olsztyn
West Pomeranian	Zachodniopomorskie	Szczecin

Economy

Poland's economy and Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is currently the sixth largest in the European Union by nominal standards, and the fifth largest by purchasing power parity. It is also one of the fastest growing within the Union.^[307] Around 60% of the employed population belongs to the tertiary service sector, 30% to industry and manufacturing, and the remaining 10% to the agricultural sector.^[308] Although Poland is a member



Economic indicators

of EU's single market, the country has not adopted the Euro as legal tender and maintains its own currency – the Polish złoty (zł, PLN).

Poland is the regional economic leader in Central Europe, with nearly 40 per cent of the 500 biggest companies in the region (by revenues) as well as a high globalisation rate.^[309] The country's largest firms compose the WIG20 and WIG30 indexes, which is traded on the Warsaw Stock Exchange. According to reports made by the National Bank of Poland, the value of Polish foreign direct investments reached almost 300 billion PLN at the end of 2014. The Central Statistical Office estimated that in 2014 there were 1,437 Polish corporations with interests in 3,194 foreign entities.^[310]

Having a strong domestic market, low private debt, low unemployment rate, flexible currency, and not being dependent on a single export sector, Poland is the only European economy to have avoided the recession of 2008.^[311] The country is the 20th largest exporter of goods and services in the world and its most successful exports include machinery, furniture, food products, clothing, shoes, cosmetics and video games.^{[312][313][314]} Exports of goods and services are valued at approximately 56% of GDP, as of 2020.^[315] Poland's largest trading partners include Germany, Czech Republic, United Kingdom, France and Italy.^{[316][317]} In September 2018, the unemployment rate was estimated at 5.7%, one of the lowest in the European Union.^[318] In 2019, Poland passed a law that would exempt workers under the age of 26 from income tax.^[319]

The Polish banking sector is the largest in the region,^[320] with 32.3 branches per 100,000 adults.^{[321][322]} The banks are the largest and most developed sector of the country's financial markets. They are regulated by the Polish Financial Supervision Authority. Poland's banking sector has approximately 5 national banks, a network of nearly 600 cooperative banks and 18 branches of foreign-owned banks. In addition, foreign investors have controlling stakes in nearly 40 commercial banks, which make up 68% of the banking capital.^[320]

Products and goods manufactured in Poland include: electronics, buses and trams (Solaris, Solbus), helicopters and planes (PZL Świdnik, PZL Mielec), trains (Pesa, Newag), ships (Gdańsk Shipyard, Szczecin Shipyard), military equipment (FB "Łucznik" Radom, Bumar-Łabędy, Jelcz), medicines (Polpharma, Polfa), food (Tymbark, Hortex, E. Wedel), clothes (LLP), glass, pottery (Bolesławiec), chemical products and others. Well-known brands and companies include Alior Bank, Orlen&Lotos Group, Inglot Cosmetics, Plus, Play, Brainly, Netguru, GOG.com, CD Projekt, Trefl and Allegro. Poland is also one of the world's biggest producers of copper, silver, coal, furniture, automotive parts and soft drink.^{[323][324][325]}

Tourism

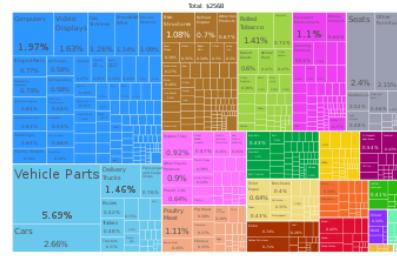


The Old City of Zamość is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Poland experienced a significant increase in the number of tourists after joining the European Union in 2004.^{[326][327]} With nearly 21 million international arrivals in 2019, tourism contributes considerably to the overall economy and makes up a relatively large proportion of the country's service market.^{[328][329]}

Tourist attractions in Poland vary, from the mountains in the south to the sandy beaches in the north, with a trail of nearly every architectural style. The most visited city is Kraków, which was the former capital of Poland and serves as a relic of the Polish Golden Age and the Renaissance. Kraków also held royal coronations of most Polish kings and monarchs at Wawel, the nation's chief historical landmark. Among other notable sites in the country is Wrocław, one of the oldest cities

<u>GDP (PPP)</u>	\$1.412 trillion (2021)	[12]
<u>Nominal GDP</u>	\$655 billion (2021)	[12]
<u>Real GDP growth</u>	4.5% (2019)	[302]
<u>CPI inflation</u>	2.2% (2019)	[303]
<u>Employment-to-population ratio</u>	55% (2019)	[304]
<u>Unemployment</u>	3.5% (2020)	[305]
<u>Total public debt</u>	\$274 billion (2019)	[306]



A proportional representation of Poland exports, 2019



The Warsaw Stock Exchange is the largest exchange by market capitalization in East-Central Europe.

in Poland which was a model for the founding of Kraków. Wrocław is famous for its dwarf statues, a large market square with two town halls, and the oldest Zoological Gardens with one of the world's largest number of animal species. The Polish capital Warsaw and its historical Old Town were entirely reconstructed after wartime destruction. Other cities attracting countless tourists include Gdańsk, Poznań, Lublin, Toruń as well as the site of the German Auschwitz concentration camp in Oświęcim. A notable highlight is the 13th-century Wieliczka Salt Mine with its labyrinthine tunnels, a subterranean lake and chapels carved by miners out of rock salt beneath the ground.

Poland's main tourist offerings include outdoor activities such as skiing, sailing, mountain hiking and climbing, as well as agritourism, sightseeing historical monuments. Tourist destinations include the Baltic Sea coast in the north; the Masurian Lake District and Białowieża Forest in the east; on the south Karkonosze, the Table Mountains and the Tatra Mountains, where Rysy – the highest peak of Poland, and Eagle's Path mountain trail are located. The Pieniny and Bieszczady Mountains lie in the extreme south-east.^[330] There are over 100 castles in the country, most in the Lower Silesian Voivodeship, and also on the Trail of the Eagles' Nests.^[331] The largest castle in the world by land area is situated in Malbork, in north-central Poland.^[332]



Aquarium in the Zoological Garden in Wrocław

Energy



Bełchatów Power Station is a lignite-fired power station that produces 27–28 TWh of electricity per year or twenty per cent of the total power generation in Poland.

The electricity generation sector in Poland is largely fossil-fuel-based. Many power plants nationwide use Poland's position as a major European exporter of coal to their advantage by continuing to use coal as the primary raw material in the production of their energy. In 2013, Poland scored 48 out of 129 states in the Energy Sustainability Index.^[333] The three largest Polish coal mining firms (Węglowoks, Kompania Węglowa and JSW) extract around 100 million tonnes of coal annually.

biofuels, photovoltaics, construction of wind farms on the land and the Baltic Sea, hydroelectric stations and nuclear power plant.

Poland has around 164,800,000,000 m³ of proven natural gas reserves and around 96,380,000 barrels of proven oil reserves. These reserves are exploited by energy supply companies such as PKN Orlen ("the only Polish company listed in the Fortune Global 500"), PGNiG. However, the small amounts of fossil fuels naturally occurring in Poland are insufficient to satisfy the full energy consumption needs of the population and industry. Consequently, the country is a net importer of oil and natural gas. Therefore, since the second decade of the 21st century, Poland has been strongly developing the so-called North Gate in which the most important components are the Baltic Pipe, the Świnoujście LNG terminal and Floating Storage and Regasification Unit in Port of Gdańsk.

The five largest companies supplying Poland electricity are PGE, Tauron, Enea, Energa and Innogy Poland.

Transport

Transport in Poland is provided by means of rail, road, marine shipping and air travel. The country is part of EU's Schengen Area and is an important transport hub along neighbouring Germany due to its strategic position in Central Europe.^[335] Some of the longest European routes, including the E40, run through Poland.

The country has a good network of highways, composed of express roads and motorways. At the start of 2020, Poland had 4,146.5 km (2,576.5 mi) of highways in use.^[336] In addition, all local and regional roads are monitored by the National Road Rebuilding Programme, which aims to improve the quality of travel in the countryside and suburban localities.^[337]



PKP Intercity Pendolino at the Wrocław railway station

In 2017, the nation had 18,513 kilometres (11,503 mi) of railway track, the third longest in Europe after Germany and France.^[338] The Polish State Railways (PKP) is the dominant railway operator in the country. In December 2014, Poland began to implement high-speed rail routes connecting major Polish cities,^[339] and started passenger service using the New Pendolino train, operating at 200 km/h on the Central Rail Line (CMK). Polish regulations allow trains without ETCS to travel at speeds up to 160 km/h, trains with ETCS1 up to 200 km/h, and trains with ETCS2 at over 200 km/h. Most inter-regional connections rail routes in Poland are operated by PKP Intercity, whilst regional trains are run by a number of private operators, the largest of which is Polregio. The largest passenger train station in terms of the number of travelers is Wrocław Główny.

The air and maritime transport markets in Poland are largely well developed. Poland has a number of international airports, the largest of which is Warsaw Chopin Airport, the primary global hub for LOT Polish Airlines. It was established in 1928 from a merger of Aerolloyd (1922) and Aero (1925). Other major airports with international connections include John Paul II International Airport Kraków–Balice, Copernicus Airport Wrocław, Gdańsk Lech Wałęsa Airport. Poland has begun preparations for a construction that can handle 100 million passengers of the Central Communication Port.

Seaports exist all along Poland's Baltic coast, with most freight operations using Świnoujście, Police, Szczecin, Kołobrzeg, Gdynia, Gdańsk and Elbląg as their base. Passenger ferries link Poland with Scandinavia all year round; these services are provided from Gdańsk and Świnoujście by Polferries, Stena Line from Gdynia and Unity Line from the Świnoujście. The Port of Gdańsk is the only port in the Baltic Sea adapted to receive oceanic vessels.



LOT Polish Airlines is Poland's flag carrier, originally established in 1928.

Science and technology



Physicist and chemist Maria Skłodowska-Curie was the first person to win two Nobel Prizes. She also established Poland's Radium Institute in 1925.^[340]

Over the course of history, the Polish people have made considerable contributions in the fields of science, technology and mathematics.^[341] Perhaps the most renowned Pole to support this theory was Nicolaus Copernicus (Mikołaj Kopernik), who triggered the Copernican Revolution by placing the Sun rather than the Earth at the center of the universe.^[342] He also derived a quantity theory of money, which made him a pioneer of economics. Copernicus' achievements and discoveries are considered the basis of Polish culture and cultural identity.^[343]

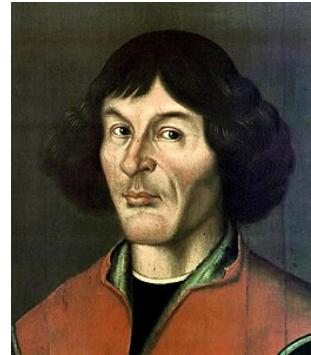
Poland's tertiary education institutions; traditional universities, as well as technical, medical, and economic institutions, employ around tens of thousands of researchers and staff members. There are hundreds of research and development institutes.^[344] However, in the 19th and 20th centuries many Polish scientists worked abroad; one of the most important of these exiles was Maria Skłodowska-Curie, a physicist and chemist who lived much of her life in France. In 1925 she established Poland's Radium Institute.^[340]

In the first half of the 20th century, Poland was a flourishing centre of mathematics. Outstanding Polish mathematicians formed the Lwów School of Mathematics (with Stefan Banach, Stanisław Mazur, Hugo Steinhaus, Stanisław Ulam) and Warsaw School of Mathematics (with Alfred Tarski, Kazimierz Kuratowski, Waclaw Sierpiński and Antoni Zygmund). Numerous mathematicians, scientists, chemists or economists emigrated due to historic vicissitudes, among them Benoit Mandelbrot, Leonid Hurwicz, Alfred Tarski, Joseph Rotblat and Nobel Prize laureates Roald Hoffmann, Georges Charpak and Tadeusz Reichstein. In the 1930s, mathematician and cryptologist Marian Rejewski invented the Cryptographic Bomb which formed the basis of the effort that allowed the Allies to crack the Enigma code.

Over 40 research and development centers and 4,500 researchers make Poland the biggest research and development hub in Central and Eastern Europe.^{[345][346]} Multinational companies such as: ABB, Delphi, GlaxoSmithKline, Google, Hewlett-Packard, IBM, Intel, LG Electronics, Microsoft, Motorola, Siemens and Samsung all have set up research and development centres in Poland.^[347] Companies chose Poland because of

the availability of highly qualified labour force, presence of universities, support of authorities, and the largest market in East-Central Europe.^[345] According to a KPMG report from 2011, 80% of Poland's current investors are content with their choice and willing to reinvest.^[348] Poland was ranked 38th in the Global Innovation Index in 2020, up from 39th in 2019.^{[349][350][351][352]}

Poland has a very well-developed e-administration, thanks to which many official matters can be easily and quickly settled via the Internet. In the UN ranking, Poland is in the top twenty countries with the best-rated e-administration in the world.

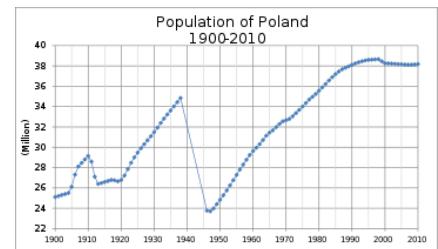


Nicolaus Copernicus, the 16th century Polish astronomer who formulated the heliocentric model of the solar system that placed the Sun rather than the Earth at its center.

Demographics

Poland, with approximately 38.5 million inhabitants, has the ninth-largest population in Europe and the fifth-largest in the European Union. It has a population density of 122 inhabitants per square kilometre (328 per square mile). The total fertility rate in 2020 was estimated at 1.44 children born to a woman, a considerable rise from previous years.^[353] In contrast, the total fertility rate in 1925 was 4.68.^[354] Furthermore, Poland's population is aging significantly and the median age in 2018 was 41.1 years.^[355] The crude death rate in 2020 stood at 10.3 per 1,000 people.^[356]

Around 60% of Poles and Polish citizens reside in urban areas or major cities and 40% in more rural zones.^[355] The most populous administrative province or state is the Masovian Voivodeship and the most populous city is the capital, Warsaw, at 1.8 million inhabitants with a further 2-3 million people living in its metropolitan area.^{[357][358][359]} The metropolitan area of Katowice is the largest urban conurbation in Poland with a population between 2.7 million^[360] and 5.3 million residents.^[361] The least populous and the smallest province in size is the Opole Voivodeship, with just under 1 million people living within its borders. Hence, a substantial portion of the total population is concentrated in the south of Poland, roughly between the cities of Wrocław and Kraków.



Population of Poland from 1900 to 2010 in millions of inhabitants

In the 2011 Polish census, 37,310,341 people reported Polish identity, 846,719 Silesian, 232,547 Kashubian and 147,814 German. Other identities were reported by 163,363 people (0.41%) and 521,470 people (1.35%) did not specify any nationality.^{[2][3]} Once prominent but now statistically insignificant minority groups include Polish Jews, Lipka Tatars, Armenians, Greeks, Lemkos, the Romani people and the Vietnamese. Ethnic Poles themselves can be divided into many diverse regional ethnographic sub-groups, most notable being the Kashubians, Silesians and Gorals (Highlanders). The statistics do not include recently arrived migrant workers.^{[362][363]} More than 1.7 million Ukrainian citizens worked legally in Poland in 2017.^[364]

There is a very strong Polish diaspora around the world, notably in the United States, Germany, United Kingdom and Canada.^[365] A strong Polish minority is still present in the territories of contemporary western Ukraine and Belarus, eastern Lithuania, eastern and central Latvia, and northeastern Czech Republic, which were part of Poland in the past. Altogether, the number of ethnic Poles living abroad is estimated to be around 20 million.^[366]

Largest cities or towns in Poland

Central Statistical Office population report for 30.06.2020 (<https://bdl.stat.gov.pl/BDL/start>)

Rank	Name	Voivodeship	Pop.	Rank	Name	Voivodeship	Pop.
1	Warsaw	Masovian	1,793,579	11	Katowice	Silesian	291,774
2	Kraków	Lesser Poland	780,981	12	Gdynia	Pomeranian	245,867
3	Łódź	Łódź	677,286	13	Częstochowa	Silesian	219,278
4	Wrocław	Lower Silesian	643,782	14	Radom	Masovian	210,532
5	Poznań	Greater Poland	533,830	15	Toruń	Kuyavian-Pomeranian	201,106
6	Gdańsk	Pomeranian	471,525	16	Sosnowiec	Silesian	198,996
7	Szczecin	West Pomeranian	400,990	17	Rzeszów	Podkarpackie	196,821

8	<u>Bydgoszcz</u>	<u>Kuyavian-Pomeranian</u>	346,739	18	<u>Kielce</u>	<u>Świętokrzyskie</u>	194,218
9	<u>Lublin</u>	<u>Lublin</u>	339,547	19	<u>Gliwice</u>	<u>Silesian</u>	178,186
10	<u>Białystok</u>	<u>Podlaskie</u>	297,585	20	<u>Olsztyn</u>	<u>Warmian-Masurian</u>	171,853

Languages

Polish is the only official and predominant spoken language in Poland, but it is also used throughout the world by Polish minorities in other countries as well as being one of the official languages of the European Union. The deaf communities use Polish Sign Language belonging to the German family of Sign Languages. Polish is also a second language in parts of Lithuania, where it is taught in Polish-minority schools.^{[367][368]} Contemporary Poland is a linguistically homogeneous nation, with nearly 97% of respondents declaring Polish as their mother tongue.^{[369][370]}

Poland's once multi-ethnic population communicated in numerous languages and lects which faded or disappeared along the course of history. There are currently 15^[371] minority languages in Poland, including one recognized regional language, Kashubian, which is spoken by around 366,000 people in the northern regions of Kashubia and Pomerania.^{[372][373][374]}

Languages having a minority status are Armenian, Belarusian, Czech, German, Yiddish, Hebrew, Lithuanian, Russian, Slovak and Ukrainian. Languages having the status of ethnic minority's language are Karaim, Lemko-Rusyn, Tatar and two Romani languages; Polska Roma and Bergitka Roma.^[375] Official recognition of a language provides certain rights under conditions prescribed by Polish law, including education and state financial support for promoting that language. Poland recognized secondary administrative languages or auxiliary languages in bilingual municipalities.^[376] Currently, German and Kashubian hold such status in 19 municipalities (gminas), Belarusian in 9 and Lithuanian in 1. Bilingual signs, names and advertisements are commonplace in those localities. Silesian and Wymysorys (Vilamovian) are not legally recognized or acknowledged as separate languages with a minority status.

More than 50% of Polish citizens declare at least basic knowledge of the English language, followed by German (38%).^{[377][378]}

Religion

According to the 2015 census, 92.9% of all Polish citizens adhere to the Roman Catholic Church. An estimated 94.2% of the population are believers and 3.1% are irreligious, making Poland one of the more devout countries in Europe.^[380] Around 61.6% of all respondents outlined that religion is of high or very high importance.^[380] However, church attendance has decreased in recent years; only 38% of worshippers attended mass regularly on Sunday in 2018.^[381] Freedom of religion is guaranteed by the Polish Constitution,^{[382][383]} and the concordat guarantees the teaching of religion in state schools.^[384]

Religions in Poland (2015)		
Roman Catholic		92.9%
Irreligion		3.1%
No answer		2.7%
Other faiths		1.3%
Numbers from the Central Statistical Office: ^[379]		

For centuries the tribes inhabiting the lands of modern-day Poland have practised various forms of paganism known as *Rodzimowierstwo*, or "native faith".^{[385][386][387]} In the year 966, Duke Mieszko I converted to Christianity, and submitted to the authority of the Roman Catholic Church.^{[388][389]} This event came to be known as the Baptism of Poland.^{[390][391][392]} However, this did not put an end to pagan beliefs in the country. The persistence was demonstrated by a series of rebellions in the 1030s known as the pagan reaction, which also showed elements of a peasant uprising against medieval feudalism.^{[393][394]}

Religious tolerance was an important part of Polish political culture, though it varied at times. In 1264, the Statute of Kalisz granted Jews unprecedented legal rights not found anywhere in Europe. In 1573, the Warsaw Confederation marked the formal beginning of extensive religious freedoms in Poland. It was partially influenced by the 1572 St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre in France, which prompted the nobility to prevent the



Dolina Jadwigi — a bilingual Polish-Kashubian road sign with the village name



Jasna Góra Monastery in Częstochowa is a shrine to the Black Madonna of Częstochowa, and a major pilgrimage site for Poland's many Catholics.

Contemporary religious minorities include Christian Orthodox (506,800),^[9] various Protestants (150,000) — including 77,500 Lutherans of the Evangelical-Augsburg Church,^[9] 23,000 Pentecostals in the Pentecostal Church in Poland, 10,000 Adventists in the Seventh-day Adventist Church and other smaller Evangelical denominations^[9] — Jehovah's Witnesses (126,827),^[9] Eastern Catholics, Mariavites, Jews, Muslims (Tatars) and neopagans, some of whom are members of the Native Polish Church.



The Old Synagogue of Kraków is the oldest standing synagogue in Poland. Hasidic Judaism originated in the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth during the 18th century.

an all-inclusive insurance system; state subsidised healthcare is available to all citizens covered by the general health insurance program of the National Health Fund (NFZ). Private medical complexes exist nationwide; over 50% of the population uses both public and private sectors.^{[402][403][404]}

Hospitals are organised according to the regional administrative structure, resultantly most towns, counties or municipalities possess their own provincial hospital or medical clinics.^[405] There are six types of hospital facilities, each with a particular area of medical expertise – I Grade Hospitals for general surgery, internal illnesses and obstetrics; II Grade Hospitals for child surgery, neurology, cardiology and ophthalmology; III Grade Hospitals including teaching hospitals for infectious diseases, nephrology, orthopedics, toxicology and transplantology; Oncology Hospitals for cancer treatment and brachytherapy; Pediatric Hospitals for child care; and Nationwide Hospitals for general and acute care.^[406]

According to the Human Development Report from 2020, the average life expectancy at birth is 79 years (around 75 years for an infant male and 83 years for an infant female),^[407] the country has a low infant mortality rate (4 per 1,000 births).^[408] In 2019, the principal cause of death was ischemic heart disease; diseases of the circulatory system accounted for 45% of all deaths.^{[409][410]} In the same year, Poland was also the 15th-largest importer of medications and pharmaceutical products.^[411]

Education

monarch from carrying out reprehensible atrocities in Poland based on religious affiliation.^[395] The religious tolerance also spurred many theological movements such as the Calvinist Polish Brethren, a number of Protestant groups and atheists like Casimir Liszinski, one of the first atheist thinkers in Europe.^[396] Anabaptists fleeing 16th-century persecution in the Netherlands and Germany settled in Poland and became known as the Vistula delta Mennonites. From 16 October 1978 until his death on 2 April 2005, Cardinal Karol Józef Wojtyła was head of the Roman Catholic Church as Pope John Paul II.^{[397][398][399]}



Karol Wojtyła was the first Pole to become a Roman Catholic Pope (John Paul II). He held the papacy between 1978 and 2005.

Famous sites of Roman Catholic pilgrimage in Poland include the Monastery of Jasna Góra in the city of Częstochowa, Basilica of Our Lady of Lichen, Kraków's Sanctuary of Divine Mercy and Święta Lipka (Holy Linden) in Masuria. Tourists also visit the family home of John Paul II in Wadowice outside Kraków. Christ the King in Świebodzin is the one of the tallest statues of Jesus in the world.^[400] Christian Orthodox pilgrims visit Mount Grabarka near Grabarka-Klasztor and the Hasidic Jews travel annually to the grave of a great rabbi in Leżajsk.^[401]

Health

Medical service providers and hospitals (szpitale) in Poland are subordinate to the Ministry of Health; it provides administrative oversight and scrutiny of general medical practice, and is obliged to maintain a high standard of hygiene and patient care. Poland has a universal healthcare system based on

The Jagiellonian University founded in 1364 by Casimir III in Kraków was the first institution of higher learning established in Poland, and is one of the oldest universities still in continuous operation.^[412] Poland's Commission of National Education (*Komisja Edukacji Narodowej*), established in 1773, was the world's first state ministry of education.^{[413][414]}

The framework for primary and secondary schooling in contemporary Poland is established by the Ministry of National Education. Kindergarten attendance is optional for children aged between three and five, with one year being compulsory for six-year-olds.^{[415][416]} Primary education traditionally begins at the age of seven, although children aged six can attend at the request of their parents or guardians.^[416] Elementary school spans eight grades, at the end of which an obligatory three-part exam on Polish, mathematics and a foreign language is to be undertaken.^[417] Secondary schooling is dependent on student preference – either a four-year high school (*liceum*), a five-year technical school (*technikum*) or various vocational studies (*szkoła branżowa*) can be pursued by each individual pupil.^[416] A liceum or technikum is concluded with a maturity exit exam (*matura*), which must be passed in order to apply for a university or other institutions of higher learning.^[418]

The standards of higher tertiary education are imposed by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education. In Poland, there are over 500 university-level institutions,^[419] with technical, medical, economic, agricultural, pedagogical, theological, musical, maritime and military faculties.^[420] The University of Warsaw and Warsaw Polytechnic, the University of Wrocław, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań and the University of Technology in Gdańsk are among the most prominent.^[421] There are three conventional academic degrees in Poland – *licencjat* or *inżynier* (first cycle qualification), *magister* (second cycle qualification) and *doktor* (third cycle qualification).^[422]

In 2018, the Programme for International Student Assessment, coordinated by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, ranked Poland's educational system higher than the OECD average; the study showed that students in Poland perform better academically than in most OECD countries.^[423]

Culture

The culture of Poland is closely connected with its intricate 1,000-year history and forms an important constituent in western civilization.^[424] The Poles take great pride in their national identity which is often associated with the colours white and red, and exuded by the expression *biało-czerwoni* ("whitereds").^[425] National symbols, chiefly the crowned white-tailed eagle, are often visible on clothing, insignia and emblems. The appreciation of Poland's traditions and cultural heritage is commonly known as Polonophilia.^[426]

With origins in the customs of the tribal Lechites, over time the culture of Poland has been influenced by its connection to Western culture and trends, as well as developing its own unique traditions such as Sarmatism.^[427] The people of Poland have traditionally been seen as hospitable to artists from abroad and eager to follow cultural and artistic trends popular in foreign countries, for instance, the 16th- and 17th-century tradition of coffin portraits (*portret trumienny*) was only observed in Poland and Roman Egypt.^[428] In the 19th and 20th centuries the Polish focus on cultural advancement often took precedence over political and economic activity. These factors have contributed to the versatile nature of Polish art.^[427]

The architectural monuments of great importance are protected by the National Heritage Board of Poland.^[429] Over 100 of the country's most significant tangible wonders were enlisted onto the Historic Monuments Register,^[430] with further 17 being recognized by UNESCO as World Heritage Sites. Poland is renowned for its brick Gothic castles, granaries and churches as well as diversely-styled tenements, market squares and town halls. The majority of Polish cities founded on Magdeburg Law in the Middle Ages evolved around central marketplaces, a distinguishable urban characteristic which can be observed to this day.^[431] Medieval and Renaissance cloth halls were once an abundant feature of many towns.^[432]



Jagiellonian University in Kraków



The Polish White Eagle is Poland's enduring national and cultural symbol

Holidays and traditions



All Saints' Day on 1 November is one of the most important public holidays in Poland.

There are 13 government-approved annual public holidays – New Year on 1 January, Three Kings' Day on 6 January, Easter Sunday and Easter Monday, Labour Day on 1 May, Constitution Day on 3 May, Pentecost, Corpus Christi, Feast of the Assumption on 15 August, All Saints' Day on 1 November, Independence Day on 11 November and Christmastide on 25 and 26 December.^[433]

Particular traditions and superstitious customs observed in Poland are not found elsewhere in Europe. Though Christmas Eve (*Wigilia*) is not a public holiday, it remains the most memorable day of the entire year. Trees are decorated on 24 December, hay is placed under the tablecloth to resemble Jesus' manger, Christmas wafers (*oplatek*) are shared between gathered guests and a twelve-dish meatless supper is served that same evening when the first star appears.^[434] An empty plate and seat are symbolically left at the table for an unexpected guest.^[435] On occasion, carolers journey around smaller towns with a folk *Turoń* creature until the Lent period.^[436]

A widely-popular doughnut and sweet pastry feast occurs on Fat Thursday, usually 52 days prior to Easter.^[437] Eggs for Holy Sunday are painted and placed in decorated baskets that are previously blessed by clergymen in churches on Easter Saturday. Easter Monday is celebrated with pagan *dyngus* festivities, where the youth is engaged in water fights.^{[438][437]}

Cemeteries and graves of the deceased are annually visited by family members on All Saints' Day; tombstones are cleaned as a sign of respect and candles are lit to honour the dead on an unprecedented scale.^[439]

Music

Artists from Poland, including famous musicians such as Chopin, Rubinstein, Paderewski, Penderecki and Wieniawski, and traditional, regionalized folk composers create a lively and diverse music scene, which even recognizes its own music genres, such as sung poetry and disco polo.^[440]

The origins of Polish music can be traced to the 13th century; manuscripts have been found in Stary Sącz containing polyphonic compositions related to the Parisian Notre Dame School. Other early compositions, such as the melody of *Bogurodzica* and *God Is Born* (a coronation polonaise tune for Polish kings by an unknown composer), may also date back to this period, however, the first known notable composer, Nicholas of Radom, lived in the 15th century. Diomedes Cato, a native-born Italian who lived in Kraków, became a renowned lutenist at the court of Sigismund III; he not only imported some of the musical styles from southern Europe but blended them with native folk music.^[441]

In the 17th and 18th centuries, Polish baroque composers wrote liturgical music and secular compositions such as concertos and sonatas for voices or instruments. At the end of the 18th century, Polish classical music evolved into national forms like the polonaise. Wojciech Bogusławski is accredited with composing the first Polish national opera, titled *Krakowiacy i Górale*, which premiered in 1794.^[442]

Traditional Polish folk music has had a major effect on the works of many Polish composers, and no more so than on Fryderyk Chopin, a widely recognised national hero of the arts. All of Chopin's works involve the piano and are technically demanding, emphasising nuance and expressive depth. As a great composer, Chopin invented the musical form known as the instrumental ballade and made major innovations to the piano sonata, mazurka, waltz, nocturne, polonaise, étude, impromptu and prélude, he was also the composer of a number of polonaises which borrowed heavily from traditional Polish folk music. It is largely thanks to him that such pieces gained great popularity throughout Europe during the 19th century. Several Polish composers such as Szymanowski drew inspiration from Chopin's folk-influenced style. Nowadays the most distinctive folk music can be heard in the towns and villages of the mountainous south, particularly in the region surrounding the winter resort town of Zakopane.^[443]



Fryderyk Chopin was a renowned classical composer and virtuoso pianist.



Artur Rubinstein was one of the greatest concert pianists of the 20th century.

Poland today has an active music scene, with the jazz and metal genres being particularly popular among the contemporary populace. Polish jazz musicians such as Krzysztof Komeda created a unique style, which was most famous in the 1960s and 1970s and continues to be popular to this day. Poland has also become a major venue for large-scale music festivals, chief among which are the Open'er Festival, Opole Festival and Sopot Festival.^[445]

Art



Lady with an Ermine (1490) by Leonardo da Vinci.

Though not Polish in its origin, the painting symbolizes Poland's cultural heritage and is among the country's most precious treasures.

Henryk Siemiradzki dominated with his monumental Academic Art and ancient Roman theme.^[452]

Since the inter-war years, Polish art and documentary photography has enjoyed worldwide fame and in the 1960s the Polish School of Posters was formed.^[427] Throughout the entire country, many national museum and art institutions hold valuable works by famous masters. Major museums in Poland include the National Museum in Warsaw, Poznań, Wrocław, Kraków, and Gdańsk, as well as the Museum of John Paul II Collection, and the Wilanów Museum. Important collections are also held at the Royal Castle in Warsaw, Wawel Castle and in the Palace on the Isle. Contemporary art galleries include Zachęta, Ujazdów, and MOCAK.^[453] The most distinguished painting of Poland is *Lady with an Ermine* by Leonardo da Vinci, held at the Czartoryski Museum in Kraków. Although not Polish, the work had a strong influence on Polish culture and has been often associated with Polish identity.^[454]

Architecture

Polish cities and towns reflect a whole spectrum of European architectural styles. Romanesque architecture is represented by St. Andrew's Church, Kraków, and St. Mary's Church, Gdańsk, is characteristic for the Brick Gothic style found in Poland. Richly decorated attics and arcade loggias are the common elements of the Polish Renaissance architecture,^{[455][456]} as evident in the City Hall in Poznań. For some time the late renaissance style known as mannerism, most notably in the Bishop's Palace in Kielce, coexisted with the early baroque style, typified in the Church of Saints Peter and Paul in Kraków.^[457]

History has not been kind to Poland's architectural monuments. Nonetheless, a number of ancient structures have survived: castles, churches, and stately homes, often unique in the regional or European context. Some of them have been painstakingly restored, like Wawel Castle, or completely reconstructed, including the Old Town and Royal Castle of Warsaw and the Old Town of Gdańsk.^[458]



Interior of the National Museum in Wrocław, which holds one of the largest collections of contemporary art in the country

Art in Poland has always reflected European trends while maintaining its unique character. The Kraków Academy of Fine Arts, later developed by Jan Matejko, produced monumental portrayals of customs and significant events in Polish history.^[446] Other institutions such as the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw were more innovative and focused on both historical and contemporary styles.^[447] Notable art academies include the Kraków School of Art and Fashion Design, Art Academy of Szczecin, University of Fine Arts in Poznań and the Geppert Academy of Fine Arts in Wrocław.

Perhaps the most prominent and internationally admired Polish artist was Tamara de Lempicka, who specialized in the style of Art Deco.^[448] Lempicka was described as "the first woman artist to become a glamour star."^[449] Another notable was Caziel, born Zielenkiewicz, who represented Cubism and Abstraction in France and England.^[450]

Prior to the 19th century only Daniel Schultz and Italian-born Marcello Baciarelli had the privilege of being recognized abroad. The Young Poland movement witnessed the birth of modern Polish art, and engaged in a great deal of formal experimentation led by Jacek Malczewski, Stanisław Wyspiański, Józef Mehoffer, and a group of Polish Impressionists.^[451] Stanisław Witkiewicz was an ardent supporter of Realism, its main representative being Józef Chełmoński, while Artur Grottger specialized in Romanticism. Within historically orientated circles,

Henryk Siemiradzki dominated with his monumental Academic Art and ancient Roman theme.^[452]



Interior of the National Museum in Wrocław, which holds one of the largest collections of contemporary art in the country



St. Mary's Basilica on the Main Market Square in Kraków is an example of Brick Gothic architecture



Ratusz, the 16th-century Renaissance City Hall in Poznań designed by Italian architects

The architecture of Gdańsk is mostly of the Hanseatic variety, a Gothic style common among the former trading cities along the Baltic Sea and in the northern part of Central Europe. The architectural style of Wrocław is mainly representative of German architecture since it was for centuries located within the Holy Roman Empire. The centres of Kazimierz Dolny and Sandomierz on the Vistula are good examples of well-preserved medieval towns. Poland's ancient capital, Kraków, ranks among the best-preserved Gothic and Renaissance urban complexes in Europe.^[459]

The second half of the 17th century is marked by baroque architecture. Side towers, such as those of Branicki Palace in Białystok, are typical for the Polish baroque. The classical Silesian baroque is represented by the University in Wrocław. The profuse decorations of the Branicki Palace in Warsaw are characteristic of the rococo style. The centre of Polish classicism was Warsaw under the rule of the last Polish king Stanisław II Augustus.^[460] The Palace on the Isle is a chief example of Polish neoclassical architecture. Lublin Castle represents the Gothic Revival style in architecture,^[461] while the Izrael Poznański Palace in Łódź is an example of eclecticism.^[462]

Traditional folk architecture in the villages and small towns scattered across the vast Polish countryside was characterized by its extensive use of wood and red brick as primary building materials, common for Central Europe.^[463] Some of the best preserved and oldest structures include ancient stone temples in Silesia and fortified wooden churches across southeastern Poland in the Beskids and Bieszczady regions of the Carpathian mountains.^{[464][465]} Numerous examples of secular structures such as Polish manor houses (dworek), farmhouses (chata), granaries, mills, barns and country inns (karczma) can still be found in some Polish regions. However, traditional construction methods faded in the early-mid 20th century, when Poland's population experienced a demographic shift to urban dwelling away from the countryside.^[466]



Kazimierz Dolny, the town exemplifies traditional provincial Polish folk architecture.

Literature

The earliest examples of Polish literature date to the 12th century,^[467] when Poland's official language was Latin, and early published works were predominantly written by foreigners. Gallus Anonymus, a monk of disputed origin, was the first chronicler who meticulously described Poland's culture, language and territories in Gesta principum Polonorum (c. 1112–1118).^[468] Latin remained the principal tool of literary expression in Poland until the 18th century, when it was replaced in favour of Polish and French. Historically, Polish literature concentrated extensively around the themes of true drama and poetic-expressive romanticism than on fiction. Patriotism, spirituality and aphorisms were paramount and political or social allegories were common moral narratives.^{[469][470]}

The first documented phrase in the Polish language reads "*Day ut ia pobrusa, a ti poziwai*" ("Let me grind, and you take a rest"), reflecting the use of quern-stone in early Poland.^[471] The phrase was recorded by an abbot in the Latin-based Liber fundationis from 1269 to 1273, which outlined the history of a Cistercian monastery in the Silesian village of Henryków. The sentence has been included in the UNESCO Memory of World Register.^[472] The oldest extant manuscript of fine prose in Old Polish is the Holy Cross Sermons, and the earliest religious text is the Bible of Queen Sophia.^[473] One of the first printing houses was established by Kasper Straube in the 1470s, while Jan Haller was considered the pioneer of commercial print in Poland. Haller's Calendarium cracoviense, an astronomical wall calendar from 1474, is Poland's oldest surviving print.^[474]

The tradition of extending Polish historiography in Latin was subsequently inherited by Vincent Kadłubek, Bishop of Kraków in the 13th century, and Jan Długosz in the 15th century.^[475] This practice, however, was abandoned by Jan Kochanowski, who became one of the first Polish Renaissance authors to write most of his works in Polish, along with Nicholas Rey.^[476] Other writers of the Polish Renaissance include Johannes Dantiscus, Andreus Fricius Modrevius, Matthias Sarbievius, Piotr Skarga and Klemens "Ianicus" Janicki, who



Adam Mickiewicz was an untiring promoter of Poland's culture and heritage. His national epic poem *Pan Tadeusz* is considered a masterpiece of Polish literature.



Joseph Conrad, one of the greatest novelists of all time. He was the author of popular books such as *Nostromo* and *Heart of Darkness*.

was lauded by the Pope. The leading figure of the Polish Reformation was theologian and writer John Laski, who, with the permission of King Edward VI of England, created the European Protestant Congregation of London in 1550.^[477]

During the Baroque era, the Jesuits greatly influenced Polish literature and literary techniques, often relying on God and religious matters.^[478] The leading baroque poet was Jan Andrzej Morsztyn, who incorporated Marinism into his publications. Jan Chryzostom Pasek, also a respected baroque writer, is mostly remembered for his tales and memoirs reflecting sarmatian culture in the Polish-



Banquet in Nero's Palace, an illustration from a 1910 print of *Quo Vadis*, a historical novel written by Nobel Prize laureate Henryk Sienkiewicz

Lithuanian Commonwealth.^[479] Subsequently, the Polish Enlightenment was headed by Samuel Linde, Hugo Kołłątaj, Izabela Czartoryska and Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz. In 1776, Ignacy Krasicki composed the first milestone novel entitled *The Adventures of Mr. Nicholas Wisdom*.^[480]

Among the best known Polish Romantics are the "Three Bards" – the three national poets active in the age of foreign partitions – Adam Mickiewicz, Juliusz Słowacki and Zygmunt Krasiński.^[481] The narrative poem *Pan Tadeusz* by Mickiewicz is Poland's national epic and a compulsory reading (*lektura*) in the country's schools.^[482] Joseph Conrad, the son of dramatist Apollo Korzeniowski, came to fame with his English-language novels and stories that are informed with elements of the Polish national experience.^{[483][484]} Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, *Nostromo* and *Lord Jim* are believed to be one of the finest works ever written, placing him among the greatest novelists of all time.^{[485][486]} Modern Polish literature is versatile, with its fantasy genre having been particularly praised.^[487] The philosophical sci-fi novel *Solaris* is an acclaimed example of Stanisław Lem's literary legacy, whereas *The Witcher*, a fantasy series by Andrzej Sapkowski, is a much-celebrated work of contemporary Polish fiction.^[488]

In the 20th century, five Polish authors were awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature – Henryk Sienkiewicz for *Quo Vadis*, Władysław Reymont for *The Peasants*, Isaac Bashevis Singer, Czesław Miłosz and Wisława Szymborska.^{[489][490]} In 2019, Polish author Olga Tokarczuk was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature for the year 2018.^[491]

Cuisine



Selection of hearty traditional comfort food from Poland including bigos, cabbage rolls, żurek, pierogi, oscypek and specialty breads

Polish cuisine has evolved over the centuries to become highly eclectic due to Poland's history. Polish cuisine shares many similarities with other Central European cuisines, especially German and Austrian^[492] as well as Jewish,^[493] French, Italian and Turkish culinary traditions.^[494] Polish-styled cooking in other cultures is often referred to as *cuisine à la polonaise*.^[495]

Polish dishes are usually rich in meat, especially pork, chicken and beef (depending on the region), winter vegetables (sauerkraut cabbage in *bigos*), and spices.^[496] It is also characteristic in its use of various kinds of noodles, the most notable of which are *kluski*, as well as cereals such as *kasha* (from the Polish word *kasza*)^[497] and a variety of breads like the world-renowned *bagel*. Polish cuisine is hearty and uses a lot of cream and eggs. Festive meals such as the meatless Christmas Eve dinner (*Wigilia*) or Easter breakfast could take days to prepare in their entirety.^[498]

The main course usually includes a serving of meat, such as roast, chicken, or *kotlet schabowy* (breaded pork cutlet), vegetables, side dishes and salads, including *surówka* [su'rufka] – shredded root vegetables with lemon and sugar (carrot, celeriac, seared beetroot) or sauerkraut (Polish: *kapusta kiszona*, pronounced [ka'pusta k̥iʃɔna])

'sona]). The side dishes are usually potatoes, rice or cereal. Meals conclude with a dessert such as sernik (cheesecake), makowiec (poppy seed pastry), or napoleonka (cream pie).^[499]

The Polish national dishes are bigos ['bigɔs]; pierogi [piɛ'rɔgij]; kielbasa; kotlet schabowy ['kɔtlet sxa'bɔvi] breaded cutlet; gołąbki [gɔ'wɔpkij] cabbage rolls; zrazy ['zrazi] roulade; pieczeń roast ['piɛtʃɛn]; sour cucumber soup (zupa ogórkowa, pronounced ['zupa ɔgur'kɔva]); mushroom soup, (zupa grzybowa, ['zupa ɔgɔ'bɔva]) quite different from the North American cream of mushroom); zupa pomidorowa tomato soup pronounced ['zupa pɔmido'rɔva];^[500] rosół ['rɔeuw] variety of meat broth; żurek ['zurek] sour rye soup; flaki ['flakij] tripe soup; barszcz [barʂtʂ] and chłodnik ['xwɔdɲik] among others.^[501]



Bagels, made from yeasted wheat dough, originated in Poland.

Traditional alcoholic beverages include honey mead, widespread since the 13th century, beer, wine and vodka (old Polish names include okowita and gorzala).^[502] The world's first written mention of vodka originates from Poland.^[503] The most popular alcoholic drinks at present are beer and wine which took over from vodka more popular in the years 1980–1998.^[504] Tea remains common in Polish society since the 19th century, whilst coffee is drunk widely since the 18th century.^[505] Other frequently consumed beverages include various mineral waters and juices, soft drinks popularized by the fast-food chains since the late 20th century, as well as buttermilk, soured milk and kefir.^[506]

Fashion and design

The particular clothing styles in Poland evolved with each century. In the 1600s high-class noblemen and magnates developed a strong sympathy for Orientalism, which was also common in other parts of Europe and became known as Sarmatism.^[507] The attire mediated between Western and Ottoman styles^[507] and outfits included a zupan, delia, kontusz, pas, decorative karabela swords and less often turbans brought by foreign merchants. The period of Polish Sarmatism eventually faded in the wake of the 18th century.



Traditional Polish polonaise dresses, 1780–1785

The Polish national dress as well as the fashion and etiquette of Poland also reached the royal court at Versailles in the 1700s. French dresses inspired by Polish attire were called à la polonoise, meaning "Polish-styled". The most famous example is the robe à la polonoise, a woman's garment with draped and swagged overskirt, worn over an underskirt or petticoat.^[508] Another notable example is the Witzchoura, a long mantle with collar and hood, which was possibly introduced by Napoleon's Polish mistress Maria Walewska. The scope of influence also entailed furniture; rococo Polish beds with canopies became commonplace in French palaces during the 18th century.^[509]



Reserved is Poland's most successful clothing store chain, operating in over 20 countries

Several Polish designers and stylists left a lifelong legacy of beauty inventions and cosmetics, most notable being Maksymilian Faktorowicz and Helena Rubinstein. Faktorowicz created a line of cosmetics company in California known as Max Factor and coined the term "make-up" based on the verb phrase "to make up" one's face, now widely used as an alternative for describing cosmetics.^[510] Faktorowicz also raised to fame by inventing modern eyelash extensions and by providing services to Hollywood artists.^{[511][512]}

As of 2020, Poland possesses the fifth-largest cosmetic market in Europe.^{[513][514]} Founded in 1983, Inglot Cosmetics is the country's largest beauty products manufacturer and retailer active in 700 locations worldwide, including retail salons in New York City, London, Milan, Dubai and Las Vegas.^{[515][516]} Established in 1999, the retail store Reserved is Poland's most successful clothing store chain, operating over 1,700 retail shops in 19 countries.^{[517][518][519]} Internationally successful models from Poland include Anja Rubik, Joanna Krupa, Jac Jagaciak, Kasia Struss, Małgosia Bela, and Magdalena Frąckowiak.^[520]

Cinema

The history of Polish cinema is as long as the history of cinematography itself. Over the decades, Poland has produced outstanding directors, film producers, cartoonists and actors that achieved world fame, especially in Hollywood. Moreover, Polish inventors played an important role in the development of world cinematography and modern-day television. Among the most famous directors and producers, who worked in Poland as well as abroad are Roman Polański, Andrzej Wajda, Samuel Goldwyn, the Warner brothers (Harry, Albert, Sam, and Jack), Max Fleischer, Lee Strasberg, Agnieszka Holland and Krzysztof Kieślowski.^[521]



Andrzej Wajda was one of the greatest Polish film directors, and the recipient of a Honorary Oscar, the Palme d'Or, as well as Honorary Golden Lion and Golden Bear Awards.

In the 19th century, throughout partitioned Poland, numerous amateur inventors, such as Kazimierz Prószyński, were eager to construct a film projector. In 1894, Prószyński was successful in creating a Pleograph, one of the first cameras in the world. The invention, which took photographs and projected pictures, was built before the Lumière brothers lodged their patent.^[522] He also patented an Aeroscope, the first successful hand-held operated film camera. In 1897, Jan Szczepanik, obtained a British patent for his Telecroscope. This prototype of television could easily transmit image and sound, thus allowing a live remote view.^[522]

Polish cinema developed rapidly in the interwar period. The most renowned star of the silent film era was Polish actress Pola Negri. During this time, the Yiddish cinema also evolved in Poland. Films in the Yiddish language with Jewish themes, such as *The Dybbuk* (1937), played an important part in pre-war Polish cinematography. In 1945 the government established 'Film Polski', a state-run film production and distribution organization, with director Aleksander Ford as the head of the company. Ford's *Knights of the Teutonic Order* (1960) was viewed by millions of people in the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia and France.^[523] This success was followed by the historical films of Jerzy Hoffman and Andrzej Wajda. Wajda's 1975 film *The Promised Land* was nominated at the 48th Academy Awards.^[524]

In 2015, *Ida* by Paweł Pawlikowski won the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film.^[525] In 2019, Pawlikowski received an Academy Award for Best Director nomination for his historical drama *Cold War*. Other well-known Polish Oscar-winning productions include *The Pianist* (2002) by Roman Polański.^[526]

Media



Headquarters of the publicly funded national television network TVP in Warsaw

Poland has a number of major media outlets, chief among which are the national television channels. TVP is Poland's public broadcasting corporation; about a third of its income comes from a broadcast receiver licence, while the rest is made through revenue from commercials and sponsorships. State television operates two mainstream channels, TVP 1 and TVP 2, as well as regional programs for each of the country's 16 voivodeships (as TVP 3). In addition to these general channels, TVP runs a number of genre-specific programmes such as TVP Sport, TVP Historia, TVP Kultura, TVP Rozrywka, TVP Seriale and TVP Polonia, the latter is a state-run channel dedicated to the transmission of Polish language television for the Polish diaspora. Poland has several 24-hour news channels such as Polsat News, TVP Info and TVN 24.^[527] Poland also possesses a variety of free-to-air television channels, chiefly TVN, Polsat and TV4.

In Poland, there are also daily newspapers like *Gazeta Wyborcza* ("Electoral Gazette"), *Rzeczpospolita* ("The Republic") and *Gazeta Polska Codziennie* ("Polish Daily Newspaper") which provide traditional opinion and news, and tabloids such as *Fakt* and *Super Express*. Weeklies include *Tygodnik Angora*, *W Sieci*, *Polityka*, *Wprost*, *Newsweek Polska*, *Gość Niedzielny* and *Gazeta Polska*.^[528]

Poland has also emerged as a major hub for video game developers in Europe, with the country now being home to hundreds of studios. Among the most successful ones are CD Projekt, Techland, CI Games and People Can Fly.^[529] Some of the most popular video games developed in Poland include *The Witcher* trilogy.^{[530][531]} Katowice hosts Intel Extreme Masters, one of the biggest eSports events in the world.^[532]

Sports



The Stadion Narodowy in Warsaw, home of the national football team, and one of the host stadiums of Euro 2012.

Volleyball and Association football are among the country's most popular sports, with a rich history of international competitions.^{[533][534]} Track and field, basketball, handball, boxing, MMA, motorcycle speedway, ski jumping, cross-country skiing, ice hockey, tennis, fencing, swimming, and weightlifting are other popular sports.

The golden era of football in Poland occurred throughout the 1970s and went on until the early 1980s when the Polish national football team achieved their best results in any FIFA World Cup competitions finishing 3rd place in the 1974 and the 1982 tournaments. The team won a gold medal in football at the 1972 Summer Olympics and two silver medals, in 1976 and in 1992. In 2012, Poland co-hosted the UEFA European Football Championship.^[535]

As of May 2021, the Polish men's national volleyball team is ranked as 2nd in the world.^[537] Volleyball team won a gold medal in Olympic 1976 Montreal and three gold medals in FIVB World Championship 1974, 2014 and 2018.^{[538][539]} Mariusz Pudzianowski is a highly successful strongman competitor and has won more World's Strongest Man titles than any other competitor in the world, winning the event in 2008 for the fifth time.^[540]

Poland has made a distinctive mark in motorcycle speedway racing thanks to Tomasz Gollob and Bartosz Zmarzlik, highly successful Polish riders. The top Ekstraliga division has one of the highest average attendances for any sport in Poland. The national speedway team of Poland is one of the major teams in international speedway.^[541]

Poles made significant achievements in mountaineering, in particular, in the Himalayas and the winter ascending of the eight-thousanders. Polish mountains are one of the tourist attractions of the country. Hiking, climbing, skiing and mountain biking and attract numerous tourists every year from all over the world.^[330] Water sports are the most popular summer recreation activities, with ample locations for fishing, canoeing, kayaking, sailing and windsurfing especially in the northern regions of the country.^[542]



Intel Extreme Masters, an eSports video game tournament in Katowice



Motorcycle speedway (żużel) racing is a very popular motorsport in Poland.^[536]

See also

- [List of Poles](#)
- [Outline of Poland](#)
- [List of sovereign states and dependent territories in Europe](#)
- [Central Europe](#)

Notes

1. Many declared more than one ethnic or national identity. The percentages of ethnic Poles and minorities depend on how they are counted. 94.83% declared exclusively Polish identity, 96.88% declared Polish as their first identity and 97.10% as either first or second identity. Around 98% declared some sort of Polish as their first identity.
- a. The adoption of Christianity in Poland is seen by many Poles, regardless of their religious affiliation or lack thereof, as one of the most significant events in their country's history, as it was used to unify the Polish tribes.^[6]
- b. The area of Poland, as given by the Central Statistical Office, is 312,679 km² (120,726 sq mi), of which 311,888 km² (120,421 sq mi) is land and 791 km² (305 sq mi) is internal water surface area.^[9]
- c. [Polish: Polska](#) [ˈpɔlska] (▶ listen)

- d. Polish: *Rzeczpospolita Polska* [ʐɛtʂpoˈspɔlita 'pɔlska] (▶ listen)
- e. The Polish word "sanacja" is defined identically as "[aciński]: uzdrowienie (*L[atin]*: healing) in *Słownik wyrazów obcych* [Dictionary of Foreign Expressions], 1918 (8 years before Piłsudski's May Coup),^[148] and in *M. Arcta słownik wyrazów obcych* [*Michał Arct's Dictionary of Foreign Expressions*], 1947.^[149] *Słownik wyrazów obcych PWN* [PWN Dictionary of Foreign Expressions], 1971,^[150] defines the expression as follows: "sanacja łac. sanatio = uzdrowienie" (*sanation*, from Lat[in] *sanatio* = healing) 1. w Polsce międzywojennej — obóz Józefa Piłsudskiego, który pod hasłem uzdrowienia stosunków politycznych i życia publicznego dokonał przewrotu wojskowego w maju 1926 r.... (1. in interwar Poland, the camp of **Józef Piłsudski**, who worked in a military coup in May 1926 under the banner of healing politics and public life...) 2. rzad[ko używany]: uzdrowienie, np. stosunków w jakiejś instytucji, w jakimś kraju. (2. rarely used]: healing, e.g., of an institution, of a country.)
- f. British code-breaker *Gordon Welchman* said: "Ultra would never have gotten off the ground if we had not learned from the Poles, in the nick of time, the details both of the German military version of the commercial Enigma machine, and of the operating procedures that were in use."^[156]
- g. Numerous sources state that Polish Army was the Allies' fourth biggest fighting contingent. *Steven J. Zaloga* and *Richard Hook* write that "by the war's end the Polish Army was the fourth largest contingent of the Allied coalition after the armed forces of the Soviet Union, the United States and the United Kingdom".^[157] *Jerzy Jan Lerski* writes "All in all, the Polish units, although divided and controlled by different political orientation, constituted the fourth largest Allied force, after the America, British and Soviet Armies."^[158] *M. K. Dziewanowski* has noted that "if Polish forces fighting in the east and west were added to the resistance fighters, Poland had the fourth largest Allied army in the war (after the USSR, the U.S. and Britain)".^[159] The claim of the fourth biggest Ally needs to be reconsidered, however. Throughout the war, Poland's position varied from the 2nd biggest Ally (after the *fall of France*, when Polish army outnumbered the French) to perhaps the 5th at the end of it (after the US, Soviet Union, China and Britain). Please see the analysis in *Polish contribution to World War II*.
- h. Sources vary with regards to what was the largest resistance movement during World War II. The confusion often stems from the fact that as the war progressed, some resistance movements grew larger – and others diminished. Polish territories were mostly freed from Nazi German control in the years 1944–45, eliminating the need for their respective (anti-Nazi) partisan forces in Poland (although the *cursed soldiers* continued to fight against the Soviets). Several sources note that Polish *Armia Krajowa* was the largest resistance movement in Nazi-occupied Europe. *Norman Davies* wrote: "Armia Krajowa (Home Army), the AK, which could fairly claim to be the largest of European resistance";^[163] *Gregor Dallas* wrote "Home Army (Armia Krajowa or AK) in late 1943 numbered around 400000, making it the largest resistance organization in Europe";^[164] *Mark Wyman* wrote "Armia Krajowa was considered the largest underground resistance unit in wartime Europe".^[165] Certainly, Polish resistance was the largest resistance till German *invasion of Yugoslavia* and *invasion of the Soviet Union* in 1941. After that point, the numbers of *Soviet partisans* and *Yugoslav partisans* began growing rapidly. The numbers of *Soviet partisans* quickly caught up and were similar to that of the Polish resistance.^{[166][167]} The numbers of Tito's *Yugoslav partisans* were roughly similar to those of the Polish and Soviet partisans in the first years of the war (1941–42), but grew rapidly in the latter years, outnumbering the Polish and Soviet partisans by 2:1 or more (estimates give Yugoslavian forces about 800,000 in 1945, to Polish and Soviet forces of 400,000 in 1944).^{[167][168]}

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