Entry type: Concept
Entry ID: AWE2144

Poland Born Community of Australia

—

Summary

The first contact between Poland-born people and Australia occurred in 1696, when several citizens of the Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth were included in the crew of Captain Willem Vlamingh's Dutch expedition which explored the Western Australian coast. The first Polish settler in Australia was a convict who arrived in 1803 and became a successful wheat farmer in Tasmania.

Later arrivals included a group of Poland born people who established a community in South Australia which grew to about 400 people by the 1880s. Some Poles joined the goldrush to Australia in the 1850s. The 1921 Australian Census recorded 1,780 Poland born residents and by the 1933 Census their number had almost doubled.

Following World War II, many Polish refugees came to Australia and during the period between 1947 and 1954, the Poland born population increased from 6,573 to 56,594 people. Many refugees worked under a two-year contract in unskilled jobs and continued in similar work for a period after their contracts ended. There was further emigration from Poland to Australia after the Polish government relaxed its emigration laws with almost 15,000 Poland born people coming to Australia between the years 1957 and 1966. By the 1966 Census, the Poland-born population had reached 61,641 people.

In the early 1980s there was further Polish emigration from Poland to Australia. The emergence of the Solidarity trade union movement and the declaration of martial law in Poland at the end of 1981 coincided with a further relaxation of Polish emigration laws. During the period 1980-91 Australia granted permanent entry to more than 25,000 Poland-born settlers, many arriving as refugees. The Poland-born population of Australia peaked at 68,496 at the 1991 Census. Since then the improvement in living conditions in Poland, as well as more stringent migration criteria, have significantly reduced the levels of Polish migration to Australia from the high levels of 1981-85.

Details

The latest Census in 2001 recorded 58,070 Poland-born persons in Australia, a decrease of 11 per cent from the 1996 Census. The 2001 distribution by State and Territory showed Victoria had the largest number with 20,400 followed by New South Wales (16,870), South Australia (6,910) and Western Australia (6,400).

The median age of the Poland-born in 2001 was 54.7 years compared with 46.0 years for all overseas-born and 35.6 years for the total Australian population. The age distribution showed 1.5 per cent were aged 0-14 years, 7.5 per cent were 15-24 years, 20.3 per cent were 25-44 years, 32.2 per cent were 45-64 years and 38.4 per cent were 65 and over. Of the Poland-born in Australia, there were 27,260 males (46.9 per cent) and 30,810 females (53.1 per cent). The sex ratio was 88.5 males per 100 females.

At the 2001 Census, the rate*of Australian Citizenship for the Poland-born in Australia was 95.9 per cent. The rate for all overseas-born was 75.1 per cent.

Published resources

Edited Book
The Australian People: An Encyclopaedia of the Nation, Its People and Their Origins, Jupp, James, 2001

Archival resources

State Library of Western Australia
Gruszka Mietka papers

Author Details
Nikki Henningham

Created   18 June 2006
Last modified 20 November 2018