

Population

Located at the geographic centre of Europe, Poland is strategically situated within a few hours of Germany, Hungary, Austria, Italy, the Czech and Slovak Federated Republic, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS - the former Soviet Union) and Scandinavia. It ranks seventh in Europe in terms of both area and population with 312,600 square kilometres and 38.3 million citizens.

Poland shares borders with Lithuania and the CIS (1244 km), Czechoslovakia (1310 km), and Germany (460 km). In the North, it is bounded by the Baltic Sea, which stretches along a maritime border of 524 km and affords easy access to Scandinavian ports and the North Sea. There are four major river systems: the Bug (772 km), the Warta (808 km), the Odra (854 km), and the Vistula (1074 km).

Size: At the end of 1991, Poland's population was estimated at 38,305,000, an increase of 7.2% since 1980, and 17.3% since 1970. Forecasts based on current trends suggest that the country's population will reach 39,547,000 in the year 2000 and 40,982,000 in 2010.

Age Profile: Approximately 21.9 million (57.3%) of Poland's people were of working age (18-64 years for males, 18-59 years for females). An additional 11.4 million (29.9%) were under 18 years old, and 4.9 million (12.8%) had reached the age of retirement.

Growth: Up to the middle of the 1980s, Poland was among the faster growing countries of the world with an annual population increase of 0.9%. This high rate of growth has leveled off in recent years, falling to only 0.3% in 1991. During that year, there were 547,000 births and 405,000 deaths, as well as some net emigration for a net increase of 122,000, the lowest since the Second World War.

Marriages and Divorces: There were 237,000 marriages registered in 1991, 18,000 fewer than in the previous year. At the same time, there were only 35,000 divorces, 8,000 fewer than in 1990. This continued a downward trend observable since 1984. The Polish marriage rate is comparable to rates in Canada and most other OECD countries, but is significantly lower than that in the United States. Conversely, the divorce rate in Poland is less than half that in Canada, and less than a third that in the United States. The low divorce rate reflects the influence of the Catholic

church in Poland, as well as the realities of a severe housing shortage and economic crisis.

Life Expectancy: Economic turmoil, pollution, and stress seem to be having an effect on life expectancy which has fallen, especially among males. In 1991, average life expectancy in Poland was 66.5 years for males and 75.5 years for women.

Female Participation: Low male life expectancy is partly responsible for the slight preponderance of women to men (105 to 100) in the Polish population. Female participation in the labour force is about equal to male participation, in spite of the fact that by law, women retire at 60 while men retire at 65. Interestingly, women predominate in the group under 24 years of age. Among those aged 25-40, males predominate by a narrow margin. Among older groups in the population, there are significantly more women than men, partly reflecting heavier male losses during World War II.

Trends: Poland's population is relatively young, about one-third below 20 years of age. Currently, another 12% is retired, but a gradual increase in both the numbers and proportion of this population segment is expected. In 1985, for every 1000 people of working age, there were 715 people who were either younger or older. By 1990, the proportion of the non-working age population had grown to 738 per 1000. Since the birth rate is falling, this increase is largely the result of a gradual aging of Poland's population similar to that occurring in many of the western industrialized nations.