

POLAND

Poland is located on the Baltic Sea and is known for its medieval architecture and Jewish heritage. It is located at a geographic crossroads that links the forested lands of northwestern Europe to the sea lanes of the Atlantic Ocean and the fertile plains of the Eurasian frontier. It shares borders with Germany, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Ukraine, Belarus, Lithuania, and the Russian exclave, Kaliningrad. Poland has a proud cultural heritage and traces its roots back over 1,000 years. There have been periods of independence as well as periods of domination by other countries. Poland became a member of the European Union in May 2004, five years after joining NATO and 15 years after the end of communist rule. Warsaw, the country's capital, combines modern buildings with historic architecture, most of which were heavily damaged during World War II but have since been faithfully restored in one of the most thorough reconstruction efforts in European history. Polish is the official language and the currency is the zloty.



Population
38,476,269



120,728 MI²
Slightly smaller than
New Mexico

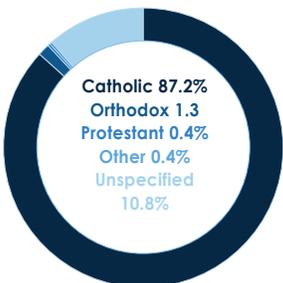


Literacy rate
99.8%

Ethnicities

Polish 96.9%
Silesian 1.1%
Other 2%

Religions



FAMILY LIFE

In Poland, it is common for 2-3 generations to live in the same household. Generally, both parents work and are considered equal authority figures and responsible for financial matters in the family. Meals are commonly eaten together, but family members may have meals separately depending on schedules.

Teenagers often spend time alone in their rooms and it is considered normal for family members to have time to themselves. Belongings are considered to be one's own and not the shared property of siblings. When siblings want to borrow something from each other, it is generally understood that they must ask first.

Children are responsible for specific household chores, which often do not follow traditional gender roles. Chores for both genders may include doing one's own laundry, cleaning the bathroom, and cooking. Although parents generally do the grocery shopping, children are expected to prepare their own lunch for school.

Teenagers are responsible for managing their own time, transportation, and commitments. It is not uncommon for teenagers to have part-time jobs or to receive allowance from their parents. Teenagers are expected to take an active role in decision making concerning their commitments, with the assistance of their parents. Communication between children and parents is usually direct, but it still may be considered rude to openly disagree with adults.

Owning pets is common. Families in apartments tend to own cats and small dogs and in private houses and in the country, larger dogs are used for security and are kept outside. Usually, pets are not treated as family members.

FRIENDSHIP

Friendships are often formed in schools and during extracurricular activities. It is acceptable for teenagers to socialize in groups or one-on-one with friends of both genders. Teenagers prefer to have many acquaintances and just a few friends. The term "friend" is used sparingly and only to refer to very close relationships.

Sharing money between friends is normal, but it is always expected to be returned. Teenagers are accustomed to maintaining personal space when interacting with other people. They do not stand or sit extremely close to each other while talking, but rather maintain a distance equivalent to an arm's length.

SCHOOL LIFE

Students generally take 7-10 subjects at a time and are primarily evaluated on homework, class participation and periodic exams. It is common for students to remain in the same classroom while teachers rotate to different rooms. Students have little flexibility in choosing their academic classes and study each subject at the same level of difficulty. Few schools have uniforms and most students tend to dress informally to school, wearing jeans, t-shirts, and even sweatpants. It is common for students to dress up on the first and last day of school and during final exams. Despite severe consequences, cheating is still common in some Polish schools. Being suspended or expelled are common consequences for fighting or for the use of drugs or alcohol.

Students and teachers maintain a very formal relationship in the classroom. Most Polish parents are in frequent and direct contact with their children's teachers and pay close attention to their academic progress via report cards and teacher meetings throughout the school year.

Students are often very involved in school-based extracurricular activities, and these activities are where most students develop their friendships. Participation in clubs or sports activities outside of school are also common and usually involve a fee.

FOOD

Portion sizes tend to be smaller in Poland. Most people prefer to finish all of the food they have been served and it is not common to take food home from restaurants. Vegetarianism and special diets are becoming more common in Poland.

RELIGION

Some Poles attend religious services regularly and there are many who attend only during holidays. Most people consider themselves Roman Catholic but there are a growing number of those who are atheist or agnostic. Churches do not serve as community centers.

PERSONAL CARE

Polish teenagers shower and change clothes daily and are expected to help out with general cleanliness in the shared areas of the house.



The Future Leaders Exchange (FLEX) program is sponsored by the U.S. Department of State. FLEX provides competitively selected secondary school students from 21 countries in Europe and Eurasia with the opportunity to spend the academic year in the U.S. living with a volunteer host family and attending a host high school. Begun in 1993, FLEX now has over 27,000 alumni.