

History of the Jews in Poland

The **history of the Jews in Poland** dates back at least 1,000 years. For centuries, Poland was home to the largest and most significant Ashkenazi Jewish community in the world. Poland was a principal center of Jewish culture, because of the long period of statutory religious tolerance and social autonomy which ended after the Partitions of Poland in the 18th century. During World War II there was a nearly complete genocidal destruction of the Polish Jewish community by Nazi Germany and its collaborators of various nationalities,^[5] during the German occupation of Poland between 1939 and 1945, called the Holocaust. Since the fall of communism in Poland, there has been a renewed interest in Jewish culture, featuring an annual Jewish Culture Festival, new study programs at Polish secondary schools and universities, and the opening of Warsaw's Museum of the History of Polish Jews.

From the founding of the Kingdom of Poland in 1025 until the early years of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth created in 1569, Poland was the most tolerant country in Europe.^[6] Historians have used the label *paradisus iudaeorum* (Latin for "Paradise of the Jews").^{[7][8]} Poland became a shelter for Jews persecuted and expelled from various European countries and the home to the world's largest Jewish community of the time. According to some sources, about three-quarters of the world's Jews lived in Poland by the middle of the 16th century.^{[9][10][11]} With the weakening of the Commonwealth and growing religious strife (due to the Protestant Reformation and Catholic Counter-Reformation), Poland's traditional tolerance^[12] began to wane from the 17th century.^[13] After the Partitions of Poland in 1795 and the destruction of Poland as a sovereign state, Polish Jews became subject to the laws of the partitioning powers, including the increasingly antisemitic Russian Empire,^[14] as well as Austria-Hungary and Kingdom of Prussia (later a part of the German Empire). Still, as Poland regained independence in the aftermath of World War I, it was the center of the European Jewish world with one of the world's largest Jewish communities of over 3 million. Antisemitism was a growing problem throughout Europe in those years, from both the political establishment and the general population.^[15] Throughout the interwar period, Poland supported Jewish emigration from Poland and, on the international arena, the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine. The Polish state also supported Jewish paramilitary groups such as the Haganah, Betar, and Irgun, providing them with weapons and training.^{[16][17]}

In 1939 at the start of World War II, Poland was partitioned between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union (see Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact). One-fifth of the Polish population perished during World War II; the 3,000,000 Polish Jews murdered in The Holocaust, who constituted 90% of Polish Jewry, made up half of all Poles killed during the war.^{[18][19]} Although the Holocaust occurred largely in German-occupied Poland, there was little collaboration with the Nazis by its citizens. Collaboration by individual Poles has been described as smaller than in other occupied countries.^{[20][21]} Examples of Polish attitudes to German atrocities varied widely, from actively risking death in order to save Jewish lives,^[22] and passive refusal to inform on them, to indifference, blackmail,^[23] and in extreme cases, participation in pogroms such as the Jedwabne pogrom.^[24]

In the post-war period, many of the approximately 200,000 Jewish survivors registered at Central Committee of Polish Jews or CKŻP (of whom 136,000 arrived from the Soviet Union)^{[24][25][26]} left the Polish People's Republic for the nascent State of Israel, North America or South America. Their departure was hastened by the destruction of Jewish institutions, post-war violence and the hostility of the Communist Party to both religion and private enterprise, but also because in 1946–1947 Poland was the only Eastern Bloc country to allow free Jewish aliyah to Israel,^[27] without visas or exit permits.^{[28][29]} Most of the remaining Jews left Poland in late 1968 as the result of the "anti-Zionist" campaign.^[30] After the fall of the Communist regime in 1989, the situation of Polish Jews became normalized and those who were Polish citizens before World War II were allowed to renew Polish citizenship. The contemporary Polish Jewish community is estimated to have between 10,000 and 20,000 members.^{[1][2]} The number of people with Jewish heritage of any sort may be several times larger.^[31]

Polish Jews

יהודי פולין
Polscy Żydzi



Monument to the Ghetto Heroes beside the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw

Total population
est. 1,300,000+
Regions with significant populations
 Poland 10,000–20,000 ^{[1][2]}
 Israel 1,250,000 (ancestry, passport eligible); ^[3] 202,300 (citizenship) ^[4]
Languages
Polish, Hebrew, Yiddish, German
Religion
Judaism

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Early history to Golden Age: 966–1572

Early history: 966–1385

The first Jews to visit Polish territory were traders, while permanent settlement began during the Crusades.^[32] Travelling along trade routes leading east to Kiev and Bukhara, Jewish merchants, known as Radhanites, crossed Silesia. One of them, a diplomat and merchant from the Moorish town of Tortosa in Spanish Al-Andalus, known by his Arabic name, Ibrahim ibn Yaqub, was the first chronicler to mention the Polish state ruled by Prince Mieszko I. In the summer of 965 or 966, Jacob made a trade and diplomatic journey from his native Toledo in Muslim Spain to the Holy Roman Empire and then to the Slavic countries.^[33] The first actual mention of Jews in Polish chronicles occurs in the 11th century, where it appears that Jews then lived in Gniezno, at that time the capital of the Polish kingdom of the Piast dynasty. Among the first Jews to arrive in Poland in 1097 or 1098 were those banished from Prague.^[33] The first permanent Jewish community is mentioned in 1085 by a Jewish scholar Jehuda ha-Kohen in the city of Przemyśl.^[34]

As elsewhere in Central and Eastern Europe, the principal activity of Jews in medieval Poland was commerce and trade, including the export and import of goods such as cloth, linen, furs, hides, wax, metal objects, and slaves.^[35]

The first extensive Jewish migration from Western Europe to Poland occurred at the time of the First Crusade in 1098. Under Bolesław III (1102–1139), Jews, encouraged by the tolerant regime of this ruler, settled throughout Poland, including over the border in Lithuanian territory as far as Kiev.^[36] Bolesław III recognized the utility of Jews in the development of the commercial interests of his country. Jews came to form the backbone of the Polish economy. Mieszko III employed Jews in his mint as engravers and technical supervisors, and the coins minted during that period even bear Hebraic markings.^[33] Jews worked on commission for the mints of other contemporary Polish princes, including Casimir the



Reception of Jews in Poland, by Jan Matejko, 1889



Early-medieval Polish coins with Hebrew inscriptions

Just, Bolesław I the Tall and Władysław III Spindleshanks.^[33] Jews enjoyed undisturbed peace and prosperity in the many principalities into which the country was then divided; they formed the middle class in a country where the general population consisted of landlords (developing into *szlachta*, the unique Polish nobility) and peasants, and they were instrumental in promoting the commercial interests of the land.

Another factor for the Jews to emigrate to Poland was the Magdeburg rights (or Magdeburg Law), a charter given to Jews, among others, that specifically outlined the rights and privileges that Jews had in Poland. For example, they could define their neighborhoods and economic competitors and set up monopolies. This made it very attractive for Jewish communities to pick up and move to Poland.^[37]

The first mention of Jewish settlers in Płock dates from 1237, in Kalisz from 1287 and a Żydowska (Jewish) street in Kraków in 1304.^[33]

The tolerant situation was gradually altered by the Roman Catholic Church on the one hand, and by the neighboring German states on the other.^[38] There were, however, among the reigning princes some determined protectors of the Jewish inhabitants, who considered the presence of the latter most desirable as far as the economic development of the country was concerned. Prominent among such rulers was Bolesław the Pious of

Kalisz, Prince of Great Poland. With the consent of the class representatives and higher officials, in 1264 he issued a General Charter of Jewish Liberties (commonly called the Statute of Kalisz), which granted all Jews the freedom of worship, trade and travel. Similar privileges were granted to the Silesian Jews by the local princes, Prince Henry Probus of Wrocław in 1273–90, Henry of Głogów in 1274 and 1299, Henry of Legnica in 1290–95 and Bolko of Legnica and Wrocław in 1295.^[33] Article 31 of the Statute of Kalisz tried to rein in the Catholic Church from disseminating blood libels against the Jews, by stating: "Accusing Jews of drinking Christian blood is expressly prohibited. If despite this a Jew should be accused of murdering a Christian child, such charge must be sustained by testimony of three Christians and three Jews."^[39]

During the next hundred years, the Church pushed for the persecution of Jews while the rulers of Poland usually protected them.^[40] The Councils of Wrocław (1267), Buda (1279), and Łęczyca (1285) each segregated Jews, ordered them to wear a special emblem, banned them from holding offices where Christians would be subordinated to them, and forbade them from building more than one prayer house in each town. However, those church decrees required the cooperation of the Polish princes for enforcement, which was generally not forthcoming, due to the profits which the Jews' economic activity yielded to the princes.^[33]

In 1332, King Casimir III the Great (1303–1370) amplified and expanded Bolesław's old charter with the Wiślicki Statute. Under his reign, streams of Jewish immigrants headed east to Poland and Jewish settlements are first mentioned as existing in Lvov (1356), Sandomierz (1367), and Kazimierz near Kraków (1386).^[33] Casimir, who according to a legend had a Jewish lover named Esterka from Opoczno^[41] was especially friendly to the Jews, and his reign is regarded as an era of great prosperity for Polish Jewry, and was nicknamed by his contemporaries "King of the serfs and Jews." Under penalty of death, he prohibited the kidnapping of Jewish children for the purpose of enforced Christian baptism. He inflicted heavy punishment for the desecration of Jewish cemeteries. Nevertheless, while for the greater part of Casimir's reign Jews of Poland enjoyed tranquility, toward its close they were subjected to persecution on account of the Black Death. In 1348, the first blood libel accusation against Jews in Poland was recorded, and in 1367 the first pogrom took place in Poznań.^[42] Compared with the pitiless destruction of their co-religionists in Western Europe, however, Polish Jews did not fare badly; and the Jewish masses of Germany fled to the more hospitable cities in Poland.



Casimir the Great and the Jews, by Wojciech Gerson, 1874

The early Jagiellon era: 1385–1505

As a result of the marriage of Wladislaus II (Jagiello) to Jadwiga, daughter of Louis I of Hungary, Lithuania was united with the kingdom of Poland. In 1388–1389, broad privileges were extended to Lithuanian Jews including freedom of religion and commerce on equal terms with the Christians.^[43] Under the rule of Wladislaus II, Polish Jews had increased in numbers and attained prosperity. However, religious persecution gradually increased, as the dogmatic clergy pushed for less official tolerance, pressured by the Synod of Constance. In 1349 pogroms took place in many towns in Silesia.^[33] There were accusations of blood libel by the priests, and new riots against the Jews in Poznań in 1399. Accusations of blood libel by another fanatic priest led to the riots in Kraków in 1407, although the royal guard hastened to the rescue.^[43] Hysteria caused by Black Death led to additional 14th-century outbreaks of violence against the Jews in Kalisz, Kraków and Bochnia. Traders and artisans jealous of Jewish prosperity, and fearing their rivalry, supported the harassment. In 1423 the statute of Warka forbade Jews the granting of loans against letters of credit or mortgage and limited their operations exclusively to loans made on security of moveable property.^[33] In the 14th and 15th centuries rich Jewish merchants and moneylenders leased the royal mint, salt mines and the collecting of customs and tolls. The most famous of them were Jordan and his son Lewko of Kraków in the 14th century and Jakub Słomkowicz of Luck, Wolczko of Drohobycz, Natko of Lvov, Samson of Zydaczow, Josko of Hrubieszow and Szania of Belz in the 15th century. For example, Wolczko of Drohobycz, King Ladislaus Jagiello's broker, was the owner of several villages in the Ruthenian voivodship and the soltys (administrator) of the village of Werbiz. Also, Jews from Grodno were in this period owners of villages, manors, meadows, fish ponds and mills. However, until the end of the 15th century, agriculture as a source of income played only a minor role among Jewish families. More important were crafts for the needs of both their fellow Jews and the Christian population (fur making, tanning, tailoring).^[33]

In 1454 anti-Jewish riots flared up in Bohemia's ethnically-German Wrocław and other Silesian cities, inspired by a Franciscan friar, John of Capistrano, who accused Jews of profaning the Christian religion. As a result, Jews were banished from Lower Silesia. Zbigniew Olesnicki then invited John to conduct a similar campaign in Kraków and several other cities, to lesser effect.

The decline in the status of the Jews was briefly checked by Casimir IV the Jagiellonian (1447–1492), but soon the nobility forced him to issue the Statute of Nieszawa,^[44] which, among other things, abolished the ancient privileges of the Jews "as contrary to divine right and the law of the land." Nevertheless, the king continued to offer his protection to the Jews. Two years later Casimir issued another document announcing that he could not deprive the Jews of his benevolence on the basis of "the principle of tolerance which in conformity with God's laws obliged him to protect them".^[45] The policy of the government toward the Jews of Poland oscillated under Casimir's sons and successors, John I Albert (1492–1501) and Alexander the Jagiellonian (1501–1506). In 1495, Jews were ordered out of the center of Kraków and allowed to settle in the "Jewish town" of Kazimierz. In the same year, Alexander, when he was the Grand Duke of Lithuania, followed the 1492 example of Spanish rulers and banished Jews from Lithuania. For several years they took shelter in Poland until he reversed his decision eight years later in 1503 after becoming King of Poland and allowed them back to Lithuania.^[33] The next year he issued a proclamation in which he stated that a policy of tolerance befitted "kings and rulers".^[45]



Casimir IV Jagiellon confirmed and extended Jewish charters in the second half of the 15th century

Center of the Jewish world: 1505–1572



Sigismund II Augustus followed his father's tolerant policy and also granted autonomy to the Jews.

Poland became more tolerant just as the Jews were expelled from Spain in 1492, as well as from Austria, Hungary and Germany, thus stimulating Jewish immigration to the much more accessible Poland. Indeed, with the expulsion of the Jews from Spain, Poland became the recognized haven for exiles from Western Europe; and the resulting accession to the ranks of Polish Jewry made it the cultural and spiritual center of the Jewish people.

The most prosperous period for Polish Jews began following this new influx of Jews with the reign of Sigismund I the Old (1506–1548), who protected the Jews in his realm. His son, Sigismund II Augustus (1548–1572), mainly followed his father's tolerant policy and also granted communal-administration autonomy to the Jews and laid the foundation for the power of the Qahal, or autonomous Jewish community. This period led to the creation of a proverb about Poland being a "heaven for the Jews". According to some sources, about three-quarters of all Jews lived in Poland by the middle of the 16th century.^{[9][10][11]} In the 16th and 17th centuries, Poland welcomed Jewish immigrants from Italy, as well as Sephardi Jews and Romaniote Jews migrating there from the Ottoman Empire. Arabic-speaking Mizrahi Jews and Persian Jews also migrated to Poland during this time.^{[46][47][48][49]} Jewish religious life thrived in many Polish communities. In 1503, the Polish monarchy appointed Rabbi Jacob Pollak the first official Rabbi of Poland.^[50] By 1551, Jews were given permission to choose their own Chief Rabbi. The Chief Rabbinate held power over law and finance, appointing judges and other officials. Some power was shared with local councils. The Polish government permitted the Rabbinate to grow in power, to use it for tax collection purposes. Only 30% of the money raised by the Rabbinate served Jewish causes, the rest went to the Crown for protection. In this period Poland-Lithuania became the main center for Ashkenazi Jewry and its yeshivot achieved fame from the early 16th century.

Moses Isserles (1520–1572), an eminent Talmudist of the 16th century, established his yeshiva in Kraków. In addition to being a renowned Talmudic and legal scholar, Isserles was also learned in Kabbalah, and studied history, astronomy, and philosophy. The Remuh Synagogue was built for him in 1557. *Rema* (רמ"א) is the Hebrew acronym for his name.^[51]

The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth: 1572–1795

After the childless death of Sigismund II Augustus, the last king of the Jagiellon dynasty, Polish and Lithuanian nobles (szlachta) gathered at Warsaw in 1573 and signed a document in which representatives of all major religions pledged mutual support and tolerance. The following eight or nine decades of material prosperity and relative security experienced by Polish Jews – wrote Professor Gershon Hundert – witnessed the appearance of "a virtual galaxy of sparkling intellectual figures." Jewish academies were established in Lublin, Kraków, Brześć (Brisk), Lwów, Ostróg and other towns.^[52] Poland-Lithuania was the only country in Europe where the Jews cultivated their own farmer's fields.^[53] The central autonomous body that regulated Jewish life in Poland from the middle of the 16th to mid-18th century was known as the Council of Four Lands.^[54]



Number of Jews in Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth per voivodeship in 1764

Decline

In 1648, the multi-ethnic Commonwealth was devastated by several conflicts, in which the country lost over a third of its population (over three million people). The Jewish losses were counted in the hundreds of thousands. The first of these large-scale atrocities was the Khmelnytsky Uprising, in which Bohdan Khmelnytsky's Ukrainian Cossacks massacred tens of thousands of Jews and Catholic Poles in the eastern and southern areas of Polish-occupied Ukraine.^[55] The precise number of dead is not known, but the decrease of the Jewish population during this period is estimated at 100,000 to 200,000, which also includes emigration, deaths from diseases and jasyr (captivity in the Ottoman Empire). The Jewish community suffered greatly during the 1648 Ukrainian Cossack uprising which had been directed primarily against the Polish nobility and landlords. The Jews, perceived as allies of the Poles, were also victims of the revolt, during which about 20% of them were killed.

Ruled by the elected kings of the House of Vasa since 1587, the embattled Commonwealth was invaded by the Swedish Empire in 1655 in what became known as the Deluge. The kingdom of Poland which had already suffered from the Khmelnytsky Uprising and from the recurring invasions of the Russians, Crimean Tatars and Ottomans, became the scene of even more atrocities. Charles X of Sweden, at the head of his victorious army, overran the cities of Kraków and Warsaw. The amount of destruction, pillage and methodical plunder during the Siege of Kraków (1657) was so enormous that parts of the city never again recovered. The Polish general Stefan Czarniecki defeated the Swedes in 1660.



A Polish Jew in an engraving from 1703

He was equally successful in his battles against the Russians.^[56] Meanwhile, the horrors of the war were aggravated by pestilence. Many Jews along with the townsfolk of Kalisz, Kraków, Poznań, Piotrków and Lublin fell victim to recurring epidemics.^{[57][58]}

As soon as the disturbances had ceased, the Jews began to return and to rebuild their destroyed homes; and while it is true that the Jewish population of Poland had decreased, it still was more numerous than that of the Jewish colonies in Western Europe. Poland continued to be the spiritual center of Judaism. Through 1698, the Polish kings generally remained supportive of the Jews. Although Jewish losses in those events were high, the Commonwealth lost one-third of its population – approximately three million of its citizens.

The environment of the Polish Commonwealth, according to Hundert, profoundly affected Jews due to genuinely positive encounter with the Christian culture across the many cities and towns owned by the Polish aristocracy. There was no isolation.^[59] The Jewish dress resembled that of their Polish neighbor. "Reports of romances, of drinking together in taverns, and of intellectual conversations are quite abundant." Wealthy Jews had Polish noblemen at their table, and served meals on silver plates.^[59] By 1764, there were about 750,000 Jews in the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth. The worldwide Jewish population at that time was estimated at 1.2 million.

In 1768, the Koliyivshchyna rebellion west of the Dnieper river in Volhynia led to ferocious murders of Polish noblemen, Catholic priests and thousands of Jews by the Ukrainian Haidamaka Cossacks.^[60] Four years later, in 1772, the military Partitions of Poland had begun between Russia, Prussia and Austria.^[61]

The development of Judaism in Poland and the Commonwealth

The culture and intellectual output of the Jewish community in Poland had a profound impact on Judaism as a whole. Some Jewish historians have recounted that the word Poland is pronounced as *Polania* or *Polin* in Hebrew, and as transliterated into Hebrew, these names for Poland were interpreted as "good omens" because *Polania* can be broken down into three Hebrew words: *po* ("here"), *lan* ("dwells"), *ya* ("God"), and *Polin* into two words of: *po* ("here") *lin* ("[you should] dwell"). The "message" was that Poland was meant to be a good place for the Jews. During the time from the rule of Sigismund I the Old until the Nazi Holocaust, Poland would be at the center of Jewish religious life. Many agreed with Rabbi David ben Shemu'el ha-Levi (Taz) that Poland was a place where "most of the time the gentiles do no harm; on the contrary they do right by Israel" (*Divre David*; 1689).^[62]

Jewish learning

Yeshivot were established, under the direction of the rabbis, in the more prominent communities. Such schools were officially known as gymnasiums, and their rabbi principals as rectors. Important *yeshivot* existed in Kraków, Poznań, and other cities. Jewish printing establishments came into existence in the first quarter of the 16th century. In 1530 a Hebrew Pentateuch (Torah) was printed in Kraków; and at the end of the century the Jewish printing houses of that city and Lublin issued a large number of Jewish books, mainly of a religious character. The growth of Talmudic scholarship in Poland was coincident with the greater prosperity of the Polish Jews; and because of their communal autonomy educational development was wholly one-sided and along Talmudic lines. Exceptions are recorded, however, where Jewish youth sought secular instruction in the European universities. The learned rabbis became not merely expounders of the Law, but also spiritual advisers, teachers, judges, and legislators; and their authority compelled the communal leaders to make themselves familiar with the abstruse questions of Jewish law. Polish Jewry found its views of life shaped by the spirit of Talmudic and rabbinical literature, whose influence was felt in the home, in school, and in the synagogue.



Late-Renaissance synagogue, Zamość, Poland, 1610–20

In the first half of the 16th century the seeds of Talmudic learning had been transplanted to Poland from Bohemia, particularly from the school of Jacob Pollak, the creator of *Pilpul* ("sharp reasoning"). Shalom Shachna (c. 1500–1558), a pupil of Pollak, is counted among the pioneers of Talmudic learning in Poland. He lived and died in Lublin, where he was the head of the *yeshiva* which produced the rabbinical celebrities of the following century. Shachna's son Israel became rabbi of Lublin on the death of his father, and Shachna's pupil Moses Isserles (known as the *ReMA*) (1520–1572) achieved an international reputation among the Jews as the co-author of the *Shulkhan Arukh*, (the "Code of Jewish Law"). His contemporary and correspondent Solomon Luria (1510–1573) of Lublin also enjoyed a wide reputation among his co-religionists; and the authority of both was recognized by the Jews throughout Europe. Heated religious disputations were common, and Jewish scholars participated in them. At the same time, the *Kabbalah* had become entrenched under the protection of Rabbinism; and such scholars as Mordecai Jaffe and Yoel Sirkis devoted themselves to its study. This period of great Rabbinical scholarship was interrupted by the Chmielnicki Uprising and The Deluge.

The rise of Hasidism

The decade from the Cossacks' uprising until after the Swedish war (1648–1658) left a deep and lasting impression not only on the social life of the Polish-Lithuanian Jews, but on their spiritual life as well. The intellectual output of the Jews of Poland was reduced. The Talmudic learning which up to that period had been the common possession of the majority of the people became accessible to a limited number of students only. What religious study there was became overly formalized, some rabbis busied themselves with quibbles concerning religious laws; others wrote commentaries on different parts of the Talmud in which hair-splitting arguments were raised and discussed; and at times these arguments dealt with matters which were of no practical importance. At the same time, many miracle-workers made their appearance among the Jews of Poland, culminating in a series of false "Messianic" movements, most famously as Sabbatianism was succeeded by Frankism.

In this time of mysticism and overly formal Rabbinism came the teachings of Israel ben Eliezer, known as the *Baal Shem Tov*, or *BeShT*, (1698–1760), which had a profound effect on the Jews of Eastern Europe and Poland in particular. His disciples taught and encouraged the new fervent brand of Judaism based on *Kabbalah* known as Hasidism. The rise of Hasidic Judaism within Poland's borders and beyond had a great influence on the rise of Haredi Judaism all over the world, with a continuous influence through its many Hasidic dynasties including those of Chabad-Lubavitch, Aleksander, Bobov, Ger, Nadvorna, among others.

The Partitions of Poland

In 1742 most of Silesia was lost to Prussia. Further disorder and anarchy reigned supreme in Poland during the second half of the 18th century, from the accession to the throne of its last king, Stanislaus II Augustus Poniatowski in 1764. His election was bought by Catherine the Great for 2.5 million rubles, with the Russian army stationing only 5 kilometres (3 mi) away from Warsaw.^[63] Eight years later, triggered by the Confederation of Bar against Russian influence and the pro-Russian king, the outlying provinces of Poland were overrun from all sides by different military forces and divided for the first time by the three neighboring empires, Russia, Austria, and Prussia.^[63] The Commonwealth lost 30% of its land during the annexations of 1772, and even more of its peoples.^[64] Jews were most numerous in the territories that fell under the military control of Austria and Russia.

The permanent council established at the instance of the Russian government (1773–1788) served as the highest administrative tribunal, and occupied itself with the elaboration of a plan that would make practicable the reorganization of Poland on a more rational basis. The progressive elements in Polish society recognized the urgency of popular education as the very first step toward reform. The famous *Komisja Edukacji Narodowej* ("Commission of National Education"), the first ministry of education in the world, was established in 1773 and founded numerous new schools and remodeled the old ones. One of the members of the commission, *kanclerz* Andrzej Zamojski, along with others, demanded that the inviolability of their persons and property should be guaranteed and that religious toleration should be to a certain extent granted them; but he insisted that Jews living in the cities should be separated from the Christians, that those of them having no definite occupation should be banished from the kingdom, and that even those engaged in agriculture should not be allowed to possess land. On the other hand, some *szlachta* and intellectuals proposed a national system of government, of the civil and political equality of the Jews. This was the only example in modern Europe before the French Revolution of tolerance and broadmindedness in dealing with the Jewish question. But all these reforms were too late: a Russian army soon invaded Poland, and soon after a Prussian one followed.

A second partition of Poland was made on 17 July 1793. Jews, in a Jewish regiment led by Berek Joselewicz, took part in the Kościuszko Uprising the following year, when the Poles tried to again achieve independence, but were brutally put down. Following the revolt, the third and final partition of Poland took place in 1795. The territories which included the great bulk of the Jewish population was transferred to Russia, and thus they became subjects of that empire, although in the first half of the 19th century some semblance of a vastly smaller Polish state was preserved, especially in the form of the Congress Poland (1815–1831).

Under foreign rule many Jews inhabiting formerly Polish lands were indifferent to Polish aspirations for independence. However, most Polonized Jews supported the revolutionary activities of Polish patriots and participated in national uprisings.^[65] Polish Jews took part in the November Insurrection of 1830–1831, the January Insurrection of 1863, as well as in the revolutionary movement of 1905. Many Polish Jews were enlisted in the Polish Legions, which fought for the Polish independence, achieved in 1918 when the occupying forces disintegrated following World War I.^{[65][66]}

Jews of Poland within the Russian Empire (1795–1918)

Official Russian policy would eventually prove to be substantially harsher to the Jews than that under independent Polish rule. The lands that had once been Poland were to remain the home of many Jews, as, in 1772, Catherine II, the *Tzarina* of Russia, instituted the Pale of Settlement, restricting Jews to the western parts of the empire, which would eventually include much of Poland, although it excluded some areas in which Jews had previously lived. By the late 19th century, over four million Jews would live in the Pale.

Tsarist policy towards the Jews of Poland alternated between harsh rules, and inducements meant to break the resistance to large-scale conversion. In 1804, Alexander I of Russia issued a "Statute Concerning Jews",^[67] meant to accelerate the process of assimilation of the Empire's new Jewish population. The Polish Jews were allowed to establish schools with Russian, German or Polish curricula. They could own land in the territories annexed from Poland. However, they were also restricted from leasing property, teaching in Yiddish, and from entering Russia. They were banned from the brewing industry. The harshest measures designed to compel Jews to merge into society at large called for their expulsion from small villages, forcing them to move into towns. Once the resettlement began, thousands of Jews lost their only source of income and turned to Qahal for support. Their living conditions in the Pale began to dramatically worsen.^[67]

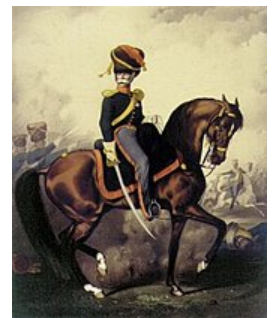
During the reign of Tsar Nicolas I, known by the Jews as "Haman the Second", hundreds of new anti-Jewish measures were enacted.^[68] The 1827 decree by Nicolas – while lifting the traditional double taxation on Jews in lieu of army service – made Jews subject to general military recruitment laws that required Jewish communities to provide 7 recruits per each 1000 "souls" every 4 years. Unlike the general population that



Jacob Frank



Jewish dress in 17th (top) and 18th centuries



Berek Joselewicz (1764–1809)



Jewish merchants in 19th-century Warsaw

had to provide recruits between the ages of 18 and 35, Jews had to provide recruits between the ages of 12 and 25, at the *gahal's* discretion. Thus between 1827 and 1857 over 30,000 children were placed in the so-called Cantonist schools, where they were pressured to convert.^[69] "Many children were smuggled to Poland, where the conscription of Jews did not take effect until 1844."^[68]

Pale of Settlement

The *Pale of Settlement* (Russian: Черта оседлости, *chertá osédlosti*, Yiddish: תּחוּם-הַמּוֹשָׁב, *tkhum-ha-moyshəv*, Hebrew: תְּחוּם הַמּוֹשָׁב, *thùm ha-mosháv*) was the term given to a region of Imperial Russia in which permanent residency by Jews was allowed and beyond which Jewish permanent residency was generally prohibited. It extended from the eastern *pale*, or demarcation line, to the western Russian border with the Kingdom of Prussia (later the German Empire) and with Austria-Hungary. The archaic English term *pale* is derived from the Latin word *palus*, a stake, extended to mean the area enclosed by a fence or boundary.

With its large Catholic and Jewish populations, the Pale was acquired by the Russian Empire (which was a majority Russian Orthodox) in a series of military conquests and diplomatic maneuvers between 1791 and 1835, and lasted until the fall of the Russian Empire in 1917. It comprised about 20% of the territory of European Russia and mostly corresponded to historical borders of the former Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth; it covered much of present-day Lithuania, Belarus, Poland, Moldova, Ukraine, and parts of western Russia.

From 1791 to 1835, and until 1917, there were differing reconfigurations of the boundaries of the Pale, such that certain areas were variously open or shut to Jewish residency, such as the Caucasus. At times, Jews were forbidden to live in agricultural communities, or certain cities, as in Kiev, Sevastopol and Yalta, excluded from residency at a number of cities within the Pale. Settlers from outside the pale were forced to move to small towns, thus fostering the rise of the *shtetls*.

Although the Jews were accorded slightly more rights with the Emancipation reform of 1861 by Alexander II, they were still restricted to the Pale of Settlement and subject to restrictions on ownership and profession. The existing *status quo* was shattered with the assassination of Alexander in 1881 – an act falsely blamed upon the Jews.

Pogroms in the Russian Empire

The assassination prompted a large-scale wave of anti-Jewish riots, called *pogroms* (Russian: погром;) throughout 1881–1884. In the 1881 outbreak, pogroms were primarily limited to Russia, although in a riot in Warsaw two Jews were killed, 24 others were wounded, women were raped and over two million rubles worth of property was destroyed.^{[70][71]} The new czar, Alexander III, blamed the Jews for the riots and issued a series of harsh restrictions on Jewish movements. Pogroms continued until 1884, with at least tacit government approval. They proved a turning point in the history of the Jews in partitioned Poland and throughout the world. In 1884, 36 Jewish Zionist delegates met in Katowice, forming the Hovevei Zion movement. The pogroms prompted a great wave of Jewish emigration to the United States.^[72]

An even bloodier wave of pogroms broke out from 1903 to 1906, at least some of them believed to have been organized by the Tsarist Russian secret police, the *Okhrana*. They included the Białystok pogrom of 1906 in the Grodno Governorate of Russian Poland, in which at least 75 Jews were murdered by marauding soldiers and many more Jews were wounded. According to Jewish survivors, ethnic Poles did not participate in the pogrom and instead sheltered Jewish families.^[73]

Haskalah and Halakha

The Jewish Enlightenment, *Haskalah*, began to take hold in Poland during the 19th century, stressing secular ideas and values. Champions of *Haskalah*, the *Maskilim*, pushed for assimilation and integration into Russian culture. At the same time, there was another school of Jewish thought that emphasized traditional study and a Jewish response to the ethical problems of antisemitism and persecution, one form of which was the Musar movement. Polish Jews generally were less influenced by *Haskalah*, rather focusing on a strong continuation of their religious lives based on Halakha ("rabbi's law") following primarily Orthodox Judaism, Hasidic Judaism, and also adapting to the new Religious Zionism of the Mizrachi movement later in the 19th century.

Politics in Polish territory

By the late 19th century, *Haskalah* and the debates it caused created a growing number of political movements within the Jewish community itself, covering a wide range of views and vying for votes in local and regional elections. Zionism became very popular with the advent of the Poale Zion socialist party as well as the religious Polish Mizrahi, and the increasingly popular General Zionists. Jews also took up socialism, forming the Bund labor union which supported assimilation and the rights of labor. The Folkspartei (People's Party) advocated, for its part, cultural autonomy and resistance to assimilation. In 1912, Agudat Israel, a religious party, came into existence.

Many Jews took part in the Polish insurrections, particularly against Russia (since the Tsars discriminated heavily against the Jews). The Kościuszko Insurrection (1794), November Insurrection (1830–31), January Insurrection (1863) and Revolutionary Movement of 1905 all saw significant Jewish involvement in the cause of Polish independence.



Map of Pale of Settlement, showing Jewish population densities



Caricature of Russian Army assailant in 1906 Białystok pogrom

During the Second Polish Republic period, there were several prominent Jewish politicians in the Polish Sejm, such as Apolinary Hartglas and Yitzhak Gruenbaum. Many Jewish political parties were active, representing a wide ideological spectrum, from the Zionists, to the socialists to the anti-Zionists. One of the largest of these parties was the Bund, which was strongest in Warsaw and Lodz.

In addition to the socialists, Zionist parties were also popular, in particular, the Marxist Poale Zion and the orthodox religious Polish Mizrahi. The General Zionist party became the most prominent Jewish party in the interwar period and in the 1919 elections to the first Polish Sejm since the partitions, gained 50% of the Jewish vote.

In 1914, the German Zionist Max Bodenheimer founded the short-lived German Committee for Freeing of Russian Jews, with the goal of establishing a buffer state (*Pufferstaat*) within the Jewish Pale of Settlement, composed of the former Polish provinces annexed by Russia, being *de facto* protectorate of the German Empire that would free Jews in the region from Russian oppression. The plan, known as the League of East European States, soon proved unpopular with both German officials and Bodenheimer's colleagues, and was dead by the following year.^{[74][75]}



A Bundist demonstration, 1917

Interbellum (1918–39)

Polish Jews and the struggle for Poland's independence

While most Polish Jews were neutral to the idea of a Polish state,^[76] many played a significant role in the fight for Poland's independence during World War I; around 650 Jews joined the Legiony Polskie formed by Józef Piłsudski, more than all other minorities combined.^[77] Prominent Jews were among the members of KTSSN, the nucleus of the interim government of re-emerging sovereign Poland including Herman Feldstein, Henryk Eile, Porucznik Samuel Herschthal, Dr. Zygmunt Leser, Henryk Orlean, Wiktor Chajes and others.^[76] The donations poured in including 50,000 Austrian kronen from the Jews of Lwów and the 1,500 cans of food donated by the Blumenfeld factory among similar others.^[76] A Jewish organization during the war that was opposed to Polish aspirations was the Komitee für den Osten (Kfdo)(Committee for the East) founded by German Jewish activists, which promoted the idea of Jews in the east becoming "spearhead of German expansionism" serving as "Germany's reliable vassals" against other ethnic groups in the region^[78] and serving as "living wall against Poles separatists aims".^[79]



Hasidic schoolchildren in Łódź, c. 1910s, during Partitions

In the aftermath of the Great War localized conflicts engulfed Eastern Europe between 1917 and 1919. Many attacks were launched against Jews during the Russian Civil War, the Polish-Ukrainian War, and the Polish-Soviet War ending with the Treaty of Riga. Almost half of the Jewish men perceived to have supported the Bolshevik Russia in these incidents were in their 20s.^[80] Just after the end of World War I, the West became alarmed by reports about alleged massive pogroms in Poland against Jews. Pressure for government action reached the point where U.S. President Woodrow Wilson sent an official commission to investigate the matter. The commission, led by Henry Morgenthau, Sr., concluded in its Morgenthau Report that allegations of pogroms were exaggerated.^[81] It identified eight incidents in the years 1918–1919 out of 37 mostly empty claims for damages, and estimated the number of victims at 280. Four of these were attributed to the actions of deserters and undisciplined individual soldiers; none was blamed on official government policy. Among the incidents, during the battle for Pińsk a commander of Polish infantry regiment accused a group of Jewish men of plotting against the Poles and ordered the execution of thirty-five Jewish men and youth.^[82] The Morgenthau Report found the charge to be "devoid of foundation" even though their meeting was illegal to the extent of being treasonable.^[83] In the Lwów (Lviv) pogrom, which occurred in 1918 during the Polish-Ukrainian War of independence a day after the Poles captured Lviv from the Sich Riflemen – the report concluded – 64 Jews had been killed (other accounts put the number at 72).^{[84][85]} In Warsaw, soldiers of Blue Army assaulted Jews in the streets, but were punished by military authorities. Many other events in Poland were later found to have been exaggerated, especially by contemporary newspapers such as The New York Times, although serious abuses against the Jews, including pogroms, continued elsewhere, especially in Ukraine.^[86] The above-mentioned atrocities committed by the young Polish army and its allies in 1919 during their Kiev operation against the Bolsheviks had a profound impact on the foreign perception of the re-emerging Polish state.^[87] The result of the concerns over the fate of Poland's Jews was a series of explicit clauses in the Versailles Treaty signed by the Western powers, and President Paderewski,^[88] protecting the rights of minorities in new Poland including Germans. In 1921, Poland's March Constitution gave the Jews the same legal rights as other citizens and guaranteed them religious tolerance and freedom of religious holidays.^[89]



Rabbi Baruch Steinberg before Warsaw Great Synagogue (1933), reading roll call of the fallen, organized by Union of Jewish Fighters for Polish Independence

The number of Jews immigrating to Poland from Ukraine and Soviet Russia during the interwar period grew rapidly. Jewish population in the area of former Congress of Poland increased sevenfold between 1816 and 1921, from around 213,000 to roughly 1,500,000.^[90] According to the Polish national census of 1921, there were 2,845,364 Jews living in the Second Polish Republic; but, by late 1938 that number had grown by over 16% to approximately 3,310,000. The average rate of permanent settlement was about 30,000 per annum. At the same time, every year around 100,000 Jews were passing through Poland in unofficial emigration overseas. Between the end of the Polish-Soviet War and late 1938, the Jewish population of the Republic had grown by over 464,000.^[91]

Jewish and Polish culture

The newly independent Second Polish Republic had a large and vibrant Jewish minority. By the time World War II began, Poland had the largest concentration of Jews in Europe although many Polish Jews had a separate culture and ethnic identity from Catholic Poles. Some authors have stated that only about 10% of Polish Jews during the interwar period could be considered "assimilated" while more than 80% could be readily recognized as Jews.^[92]



Warsaw Great Synagogue

According to the 1931 National Census there were 3,130,581 Polish Jews measured by the declaration of their religion. Estimating the population increase and the emigration from Poland between 1931 and 1939, there were probably 3,474,000 Jews in Poland as of 1 September 1939 (approximately 10% of the total population) primarily centered in large and smaller cities: 77% lived in cities and 23% in the villages. They made up about 50%, and in some cases even 70% of the population of smaller towns, especially in Eastern Poland.^[93] Prior to World War II, the Jewish population of Łódź numbered about 233,000, roughly one-third of the city's population.^[94] The city of Lwów (now in Ukraine) had the third-largest Jewish population in Poland, numbering 110,000 in 1939 (42%). Wilno (now in Lithuania) had a Jewish community of nearly 100,000, about 45% of the city's total.^[95] In 1938, Kraków's Jewish population numbered over 60,000, or about 25% of the city's total population.^[96] In 1939 there were 375,000 Jews in Warsaw or one-third of the city's population. Only New York City had more Jewish residents than Warsaw.

The major industries in which Polish Jews were employed were manufacturing and commerce. In many areas of the country, the majority of retail businesses were owned by Jews, who were sometimes among the wealthiest members of their communities.^[97] Many Jews also worked as shoemakers and tailors, as well as in the liberal professions; doctors (56% of all doctors in Poland), teachers (43%), journalists (22%) and lawyers (33%).^[98]



L. L. Zamenhof, creator of Esperanto

Jewish youth and religious groups, diverse political parties and Zionist organizations, newspapers and theatre flourished. Jews owned land and real estate, participated in retail and manufacturing and in the export industry. Their religious beliefs spanned the range from Orthodox Hasidic Judaism to Liberal Judaism.

The Polish language, rather than Yiddish, was increasingly used by the young Warsaw Jews who did not have a problem in identifying themselves fully as Jews, Varsovians and Poles. Jews such as Bruno Schulz were entering the mainstream of Polish society, though many thought of themselves as a separate nationality within Poland. Most children were enrolled in Jewish religious schools, which used to limit their ability to speak Polish. As a result, according to the 1931 census, 79% of the Jews declared Yiddish as their first language, and only 12% listed Polish, with the remaining 9% being Hebrew.^[99] In contrast, the overwhelming majority of German-born Jews of this period spoke German as their first language. During the school year of 1937–1938 there were 226 elementary schools^[100] and twelve high schools as well as fourteen vocational schools with either Yiddish or Hebrew as the instructional language. Jewish political parties, both the Socialist General Jewish Labour Bund (The Bund), as well as parties of the Zionist right and left wing and religious conservative movements, were represented in the Sejm (the Polish Parliament) as well as in the regional councils.^[101]

The Jewish cultural scene^[102] was particularly vibrant in pre-World War II Poland, with numerous Jewish publications and more than one hundred periodicals. Yiddish authors, most notably Isaac Bashevis Singer, went on to achieve international acclaim as classic Jewish writers; Singer won the 1978 Nobel Prize in Literature. His brother Israel Joshua Singer was also a writer. Other Jewish authors of the period, such as Bruno Schulz, Julian Tuwim, Marian Hemar, Emanuel Schlechter and Bolesław Leśmian, as well as Konrad Tom and Jerzy Jurandot, were less well known internationally, but made important contributions to Polish literature. Some Polish writers had Jewish roots e.g. Jan Brzechwa (a favorite poet of Polish children). Singer Jan Kiepura, born of a Jewish mother and Polish father, was one of the most popular artists of that era, and pre-war songs of Jewish composers, including Henryk Wars, Jerzy Petersburski, Artur Gold, Henryk Gold, Zygmunt Białostocki, Szymon Katarzek and Jakub Kagan, are still widely known in Poland today. Painters became known as well for their depictions of Jewish life. Among them were Maurycy Gottlieb, Artur Markowicz, and Maurycy Trebacz, with younger artists like Chaim Goldberg coming up in the ranks.



Isaac Bashevis Singer (Polish: Izaak Zynger), achieved international acclaim as a classic Jewish writer and was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1978

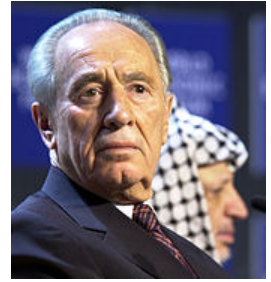
Many Jews were film producers and directors, e.g. Michał Waszyński (*The Dybbuk*), Aleksander Ford (*Children Must Laugh*).

Scientist Leopold Infeld, mathematician Stanislaw Ulam, Alfred Tarski, and professor Adam Ulam contributed to the world of science. Other Polish Jews who gained international recognition are Moses Schorr, Ludwik Zamenhof (the creator of Esperanto), Georges Charpak, Samuel Eilenberg, Emanuel Ringelblum, and Artur Rubinstein, just to name a few from the long list. The term "genocide" was coined by Rafał Lemkin (1900–1959), a Polish-Jewish legal scholar. Leonid Hurwicz was awarded the 2007 Nobel Prize in Economics. The YIVO (Jidiszer Wissenszaflecher Institute) Scientific Institute was based in Wilno before transferring to New York during the war. In Warsaw, important centers of Judaic scholarship, such as the Main Judaic Library and the Institute of Judaic Studies were located, along with numerous Talmudic Schools (Jeszybots), religious centers and synagogues, many of which were of high architectural quality. Yiddish theatre also flourished; Poland had fifteen Yiddish theatres and theatrical groups. Warsaw was home to the most important Yiddish theater troupe of the time, the Vilna Troupe, which staged the first performance of *The Dybbuk* in 1920 at the Elyseum Theatre. Some future Israeli leaders studied at University of Warsaw, including Menachem Begin and Yitzhak Shamir.

There also were several Jewish sports clubs, with some of them, such as Hasmonea Lwow and Jutrzenka Kraków, winning promotion to the Polish First Football League. A Polish-Jewish footballer, Józef Klotz, scored the first ever goal for the Poland national football team. Another athlete, Alojzy Ehrlich, won several medals in the table-tennis tournaments. Many of these clubs belonged to the Maccabi World Union.

Between antisemitism and support for Zionism and Jewish state in Palestine

An ever-increasing proportion of Jews in interwar Poland lived separate lives from the Polish majority. In 1921, 74.2% of Polish Jews listed Yiddish or Hebrew as their native language; the number rose to 87% by 1931,^[99] contributing to growing tensions between Jews and Poles.^[103] Jews were often not identified as Polish nationals, a problem caused not only by the reversal of assimilation shown in national censuses between 1921 and 1931, but also by the influx of Russian Jews escaping persecution—especially in Ukraine, where up to 2,000 pogroms took place during the Civil War, an estimated 30,000 Jews were massacred directly, and a total of 150,000 died.^{[104][105]} A large number of Russian Jews emigrated to Poland, as they were enticed by the Peace treaty of Riga to choose the country they preferred. Several hundred thousand refugees joined the already numerous Jewish minority of the Polish Second Republic. The resulting economic instability was mirrored by anti-Jewish sentiment in some of the media; discrimination, exclusion, and violence at the universities; and the appearance of "anti-Jewish squads" associated with some of the right-wing political parties. These developments contributed to a greater support among the Jewish community for Zionist and socialist ideas,^{[106][107]} coupled with attempts at further migration, curtailed only by the British government. Notably, the "campaign for Jewish emigration was predicated not on antisemitism but on objective social and economic factors".^[108] However, regardless of these changing economic and social conditions, the increase in antisemitic activity in prewar Poland was also typical of antisemitism found in other parts of Europe at that time, developing within a broader, continent-wide pattern with counterparts in every other European country.^[109]



Shimon Peres, born in Poland as Szymon Perski, served as the ninth President of Israel between 2007 and 2014

Matters improved for a time under the rule of Józef Piłsudski (1926–1935). Piłsudski countered Endecja's 'ethnic assimilation' with the 'state assimilation' policy: citizens were judged by their loyalty to the state, not by their nationality.^[110] The years 1926–1935 were favourably viewed by many Polish Jews, whose situation improved especially under the cabinet of Piłsudski's appointee Kazimierz Bartel.^[111] However, a combination of various factors, including the Great Depression,^[110] meant that the situation of Jewish Poles was never very satisfactory, and it deteriorated again after Piłsudski's death in May 1935, which many Jews regarded as a tragedy.^[112] The Jewish industries were negatively affected by the development of mass production and the advent of department stores offering ready-made products. The traditional sources of livelihood for the estimated 300,000 Jewish family-run businesses in the country began to vanish, contributing to a growing trend toward isolationism and internal self-sufficiency.^[113] The difficult situation in the private sector led to enrolment growth in higher education. In 1923 the Jewish students constituted 62.9% of all students of stomatology, 34% of medical sciences, 29.2% of philosophy, 24.9% of chemistry and 22.1% of law (26% by 1929) at all Polish universities. It is speculated that such disproportionate numbers were the probable cause of a backlash.^[114]

The interwar Polish government provided military training to the Zionist Betar paramilitary movement,^[115] whose members admired the Polish nationalist camp and imitated some of its aspects.^[116] Uniformed members of Betar marched and performed at Polish public ceremonies alongside Polish scouts and military, with their weapons training provided by Polish institutions and Polish military officers; Menachem Begin, one of its leaders, called for its members to defend Poland in case of war, and the organisation raised both Polish and Zionist flags.^[117]

With the influence of the Endecja (National Democracy) party growing, antisemitism gathered new momentum in Poland and was most felt in smaller towns and in spheres in which Jews came into direct contact with Poles, such as in Polish schools or on the sports field. Further academic harassment, such as the introduction of ghetto benches, which forced Jewish students to sit in sections of the lecture halls reserved exclusively for them, anti-Jewish riots, and semi-official or unofficial quotas (Numerus clausus) introduced in 1937 in some universities, halved the number of Jews in Polish universities between independence (1918) and the late 1930s. The restrictions were so inclusive that – while the Jews made up 20.4% of the student body in 1928 – by 1937 their share was down to only 7.5%,^[118] out of the total population of 9.75% Jews in the country according to 1931 census.^[119]



Student's book (*indeks*) of Jewish medical student Marek Szapiro at Warsaw University, with rectangular "ghetto benches" ("odd-numbered-benches") stamp

Although many Jews were educated, they were excluded from most of the government bureaucracy.^[120] A good number, therefore, turned to the liberal professions, particularly medicine and law. In 1937 the Catholic trade unions of Polish doctors and lawyers restricted their new members to Christian Poles (in a similar manner, the Jewish trade unions excluded non-Jewish professionals from their ranks after 1918).^[121] The bulk of Jewish workers were organized in the Jewish trade unions under the influence of the Jewish socialists who split in 1923 to join the Communist Party of Poland and the Second International.^{[122][123]}

Anti-Jewish sentiment in Poland had reached its zenith in the years leading to the Second World War.^[124] Between 1935 and 1937 seventy-nine Jews were killed and 500 injured in anti-Jewish incidents.^[125] National policy was such that the Jews who largely worked at home and in small shops were excluded from welfare benefits.^[126] In the provincial capital of Łuck Jews constituted 48.5% of the diverse multiethnic population of 35,550 Poles, Ukrainians, Belarusians and others.^[127] Łuck had the largest Jewish community in the voivodeship.^[128] In the capital of Brześć in 1936 Jews constituted 41.3% of general population and some 80.3% of private enterprises were owned by Jews.^{[129][130]} The 32% of Jewish inhabitants of Radom enjoyed considerable prominence also,^[131] with 90% of small businesses in the city owned and operated by the Jews including tinsmiths, locksmiths, jewellers, tailors, hat makers, hairdressers, carpenters, house painters and wallpaper installers, shoemakers, as well as most of the artisan bakers and clock repairers.^[132] In Lubartów, 53.6% of the town's population were Jewish also along with most of its economy.^[133] In a town of Luboml, 3,807 Jews lived among its 4,169 inhabitants, constituting the essence of its social and political life.^[127]

The national boycott of Jewish businesses and advocacy for their confiscation was promoted by the Endecja party, which introduced the term "Christian shop". A national movement to prevent the Jews from kosher slaughter of animals, with animal rights as the stated motivation, was also organized.^[134] Violence was also frequently aimed at Jewish stores, and many of them were looted. At the same time, persistent economic boycotts and harassment, including property-destroying riots, combined with the effects of the Great Depression that had been very severe on agricultural countries like Poland, reduced the standard of living of Poles and Polish Jews alike to the extent that by the end of the 1930s, a



Demonstration of Polish students demanding implementation of "ghetto benches" at Lwów Polytechnic (1937).

substantial portion of Polish Jews lived in grinding poverty.^[135] As a result, on the eve of the Second World War, the Jewish community in Poland was large and vibrant internally, yet (with the exception of a few professionals) also substantially poorer and less integrated than the Jews in most of Western Europe.

The main strain of antisemitism in Poland during this time was motivated by Catholic religious beliefs and centuries-old myths such as the blood libel. This religious-based antisemitism was sometimes joined with an ultra-nationalistic stereotype of Jews as disloyal to the Polish nation.^[136] On the eve of World War II, many typical Polish Christians believed that there were far too many Jews in the country, and the Polish government became increasingly concerned with the "Jewish question". Some politicians favored mass Jewish emigration from Poland. The Polish government condemned wanton violence against the Jewish minority, fearing international repercussions, but shared the view that the Jewish minority hindered Poland's development; in January 1937 Foreign Minister Józef Beck declared that Poland could house 500,000 Jews, and hoped that over the next 30 years 80,000-100,000 Jews a year would leave Poland.^[137] As the Polish government sought to lower the numbers of the Jewish population in Poland through mass emigration, it

embraced close and good contact with Ze'ev Jabotinsky, the founder of Revisionist Zionism, and pursued a policy of supporting the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine.^[138] The Polish government hoped Palestine would provide an outlet for its Jewish population and lobbied for creation of a Jewish state in the League of Nations and other international venues, proposing increased emigration quotas^[139] and opposing the Partition Plan of Palestine on behalf of Zionist activists.^[140] As Jabotinsky envisioned in his "Evacuation Plan" the settlement of 1.5 million East European Jews within 10 years in Palestine, including 750,000 Polish Jews, he and Beck shared a common goal.^[141] Ultimately this proved impossible and illusory, as it lacked both general Jewish and international support.^[142] In 1937 Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs Józef Beck declared in the League of Nations his support for the creation of a Jewish state and for an international conference to enable Jewish emigration.^[143] The common goals of the Polish state and of the Zionist movement, of increased Jewish population flow to Palestine, resulted in their overt and covert cooperation. Poland helped by organizing passports and facilitating illegal immigration, and supplied the Haganah with weapons.^[144] Poland also provided extensive support to the Irgun (the military branch of the Revisionist Zionist movement) in the form of military training and weapons. According to Irgun activists, the Polish state supplied the organisation with 25,000 rifles, additional material and weapons, and by summer 1939 Irgun's Warsaw warehouses held 5,000 rifles and 1,000 machine guns. The training and support by Poland would allow the organisation to mobilise 30,000-40,000 men.^[145]

By the time of the German invasion in 1939, antisemitism was escalating, and hostility towards Jews was a mainstay of the right-wing political forces post-Piłsudski regime and also the Catholic Church. Discrimination and violence against Jews had rendered the Polish Jewish population increasingly destitute. Despite the impending threat to the Polish Republic from Nazi Germany, there was little effort seen in the way of reconciliation with Poland's Jewish population. In July 1939 the pro-government *Gazeta Polska* wrote, "The fact that our relations with the Reich are worsening does not in the least deactivate our program in the Jewish question—there is not and cannot be any common ground between our internal Jewish problem and Poland's relations with the Hitlerite Reich."^{[146][147]} Escalating hostility towards Polish Jews and an official Polish government desire to remove Jews from Poland continued until the German invasion of Poland.^[148]

World War II and the destruction of Polish Jewry (1939–45)

Polish September Campaign

The number of Jews in Poland on 1 September 1939, amounted to about 3,474,000 people.^[149] One hundred thirty thousand soldiers of Jewish descent, including Boruch Steinberg, Chief Rabbi of the Polish Military, served in the Polish Army at the outbreak of the Second World War,^[150] thus being among the first to launch armed resistance against Nazi Germany.^[151] During the September Campaign some 20,000 Jewish civilians and 32,216 Jewish soldiers were killed,^[152] while 61,000 were taken prisoner by the Germans;^[153] the majority did not survive. The soldiers and non-commissioned officers who were released ultimately found themselves in the Nazi ghettos and labor camps and suffered the same fate as other Jewish civilians in the ensuing Holocaust in Poland. In 1939, Jews constituted 30% of Warsaw's population.^[154] With the coming of the war, Jewish and Polish citizens of Warsaw jointly defended the city, putting their differences aside.^[154] Polish Jews later served in almost all Polish formations during the entire World War II, many were killed or wounded and very many were decorated for their combat skills and exceptional service. Jews fought with the Polish Armed Forces in the West, in the Soviet formed Polish People's Army as well as in several underground organizations and as part of Polish partisan units or Jewish partisan formations.^[155]



Graves of Jewish-Polish soldiers who died in 1939 September Campaign, Powązki Cemetery

Territories annexed by the USSR (1939–1941)

The Soviet Union signed a Pact with Nazi Germany on 23 August 1939 containing a protocol about partition of Poland (generally known but denied by the Soviet Union for the next 50 years).^[156] The German army attacked Poland on 1 September 1939. The Soviet Union followed suit by invading eastern Poland on 17 September 1939. Within weeks, 61.2% of Polish Jews found themselves under the German occupation, while 38.8% were trapped in the Polish areas annexed by the Soviet Union. Based on population migration from West to East during and after the German invasion the percentage of Jews under the Soviet-occupation was substantially higher than that of the national census.^[157]

The Soviet annexation was accompanied by the widespread arrests of government officials, police, military personnel, border guards, teachers, priests, judges etc., followed by the NKVD prisoner massacres and massive deportation of 320,000 Polish nationals to the Soviet interior and the Gulag slave labor camps where, as a result of the inhuman conditions, about half of them died before the end of war.^[158]

Jewish refugees under the Soviet occupation had little knowledge about what was going on under the Germans since the Soviet media did not report on the goings-on in territories occupied by their Nazi ally.^{[159][160][161]} Many people from Western Poland registered for repatriation back to the German zone, including wealthier Jews, as well as some political and social activists from the interwar period. Instead, they were labelled "class enemies" by the NKVD and deported to Siberia with the others. Jews caught at border crossings, or engaged in trade and other "illegal" activities were also arrested and deported. Several thousand, mostly captured Polish soldiers, were executed; some of them Jewish.^[162]

All private property and – crucial to Jewish economic life – private businesses were nationalized; political activity was delegalized and thousands of people were jailed, many of whom were later executed. Zionism, which was designated by the Soviets as counter-revolutionary was also forbidden. In just one day all Polish and Jewish media were shut down and replaced by the new Soviet press,^[162] which conducted political propaganda attacking religion including the Jewish faith. Synagogues and churches were not yet closed but heavily taxed. The Soviet ruble of little value was immediately equalized to the much higher Polish zloty and by the end of 1939, zloty was abolished.^[163] Most economic activity became subject to central planning and the NKVD restrictions. Since the Jewish communities tended to rely more on commerce and small-scale businesses, the confiscations of property affected them to a greater degree than the general populace. The Soviet rule resulted in near collapse of the local economy, characterized by insufficient wages and general shortage of goods and materials. The Jews, like other inhabitants of the region, saw a fall in their living standards.^{[157][163]}

Under the Soviet policy, ethnic Poles were dismissed and denied access to positions in the civil service. Former senior officials and notable members of the Polish community were arrested and exiled together with their families.^{[164][165]} At the same time the Soviet authorities encouraged young Jewish communists to fill in the newly emptied government and civil service jobs.^{[163][166]}

While most eastern Poles consolidated themselves around the anti-Soviet sentiments,^[167] a portion of the Jewish population, along with the ethnic Belarusian and Ukrainian activists had welcomed invading Soviet forces as their protectors.^{[168][169][170]} The general feeling among the Polish Jews was a sense of temporary relief in having escaped the Nazi occupation in the first weeks of war.^{[85][171]} The Polish poet and former communist Aleksander Wat has stated that Jews were more inclined to cooperate with the Soviets.^{[172][173]} Following Jan Karski's report written in 1940, historian Norman Davies claimed that among the informers and collaborators, the percentage of Jews was striking; likewise, General Władysław Sikorski estimated that 30% of them identified with the communists whilst engaging in provocations; they prepared lists of Polish "class enemies".^{[166][172]} Other historians have indicated that the level of Jewish collaboration could well have been less than suggested.^[174] Historian Martin Dean has written that "few local Jews obtained positions of power under Soviet rule."^[175]

The issue of Jewish collaboration with the Soviet occupation remains controversial. Some scholars note that while not pro-Communist, many Jews saw the Soviets as the lesser threat compared to the German Nazis. They stress that stories of Jews welcoming the Soviets on the streets, vividly remembered by many Poles from the eastern part of the country are impressionistic and not reliable indicators of the level of Jewish support for the Soviets. Additionally, it has been noted that some ethnic Poles were as prominent as Jews in filling civil and police positions in the occupation administration, and that Jews, both civilians and in the Polish military, suffered equally at the hands of the Soviet occupiers.^[176] Whatever initial enthusiasm for the Soviet occupation Jews might have felt was soon dissipated upon feeling the impact of the suppression of Jewish societal modes of life by the occupiers.^[177] The tensions between ethnic Poles and Jews as a result of this period has, according to some historians, taken a toll on relations between Poles and Jews throughout the war, creating until this day, an impasse to Polish-Jewish rapprochement.^[170]

A number of younger Jews, often through the pro-Marxist Bund or some Zionist groups, were sympathetic to Communism and Soviet Russia, both of which had been enemies of the Polish Second Republic. As a result of these factors they found it easy after 1939 to participate in the Soviet occupation administration in Eastern Poland, and briefly occupied prominent positions in industry, schools, local government, police and other Soviet-installed institutions. The concept of "Judeo-communism" was reinforced during the period of the Soviet occupation (see Żydokomuna).^{[178][179]}

There were also Jews who assisted Poles during the Soviet occupation. Among the thousands of Polish officers killed by the Soviet NKVD in the Katyń massacre there were 500–600 Jews. From 1939 to 1941 between 100,000 and 300,000 Polish Jews were deported from Soviet-occupied Polish territory into the Soviet Union. Some of them, especially Polish Communists (e.g. Jakub Berman), moved voluntarily; however, most of them were forcibly deported or imprisoned in a Gulag. Small numbers of Polish Jews (about 6,000) were able to leave the Soviet Union in 1942 with the Władysław Anders army, among them the future Prime Minister of Israel Menachem Begin. During the Polish army's II Corps' stay in the British Mandate of Palestine, 67% (2,972) of the Jewish soldiers deserted to settle in Palestine, and many joined the Irgun. General Anders decided not to prosecute the deserters and emphasized that the Jewish soldiers who remained in the Force fought bravely.^[180] The Cemetery of Polish soldiers who died during the Battle of Monte Cassino includes headstones bearing a Star of David. A number of Jewish soldiers died also when liberating Bologna.^[181]

The Holocaust

Poland's Jewish community suffered the most in the Holocaust. Some six million Polish citizens perished in the war^[182] – half of those (three million Polish Jews, all but some 300,000 of the Jewish population) being killed at the German extermination camps at Auschwitz, Treblinka, Majdanek, Belzec, Sobibór, and Chełmno or starved to death in the ghettos.^[183]



Yiddish election notice for Soviet local government to the People's council of Western Belarus, Białystok



Jewish-Polish soldier's grave, Monte Cassino, Italy

Poland was where the German program of extermination of Jews, the "Final Solution", was implemented, since this was where most of Europe's Jews (excluding the Soviet Union's) lived.^[184]

In 1939 several hundred synagogues were blown up or burned by the Germans, who sometimes forced the Jews to do it themselves.^[149] In many cases, the Germans turned the synagogues into factories, places of entertainment, swimming pools, or prisons.^[149] By war's end, almost all the synagogues in Poland had been destroyed.^[185] Rabbis were forced to dance and sing in public with their beards shorn off. Some rabbis were set on fire or hanged.^[149]



Starving Jewish children, Warsaw Ghetto

The Germans ordered that all Jews be registered, and the word "Jude" was stamped in their identity cards.^[186] Numerous restrictions and prohibitions targeting Jews were introduced and brutally enforced.^[187] For example, Jews were forbidden to walk on the sidewalks,^[188] use public transport, enter places of leisure, sports arenas, theaters, museums and libraries.^[189] On the street, Jews had to lift their hat to passing Germans.^[190] By the end of 1941 all Jews in German-occupied Poland, except the children, had to wear an identifying badge with a blue Star of David.^{[191][192]} Rabbis were humiliated in "spectacles organised by the German soldiers and police" who used their rifle butts "to make these men dance in

their praying shawls."^[193] The Germans "disappointed that Poles refused to collaborate",^[194] made little attempts to set up a collaborationist government in Poland,^{[195][196][197]} nevertheless, German tabloids printed in Polish routinely ran antisemitic articles that urged local people to adopt an attitude of indifference towards the Jews.^[198]

Following Operation Barbarossa, many Jews in what was then Eastern Poland fell victim to Nazi death squads called Einsatzgruppen, which massacred Jews, especially in 1941. Some of these German-inspired massacres were carried out with help from, or active participation of Poles themselves: for example, the Jedwabne pogrom, in which between 300 (Institute of National Remembrance's Final Findings^[199]) and 1,600 Jews (Jan T. Gross) were tortured and beaten to death by members of the local population. The full extent of Polish participation in the massacres of the Polish Jewish community remains a controversial subject, in part due to Jewish leaders' refusal to allow the remains of the Jewish victims to be exhumed and their cause of death to be properly established. The Polish Institute for National Remembrance identified twenty-two other towns that had pogroms similar to Jedwabne.^[200] The reasons for these massacres are still debated, but they included antisemitism, resentment over alleged cooperation with the Soviet invaders in the Polish-Soviet War and during the 1939 invasion of the Kresy regions, greed for the possessions of the Jews, and of course coercion by the Nazis to participate in such massacres.

Some Jewish historians have written of the negative attitudes of some Poles towards persecuted Jews during the Holocaust.^[201] While members of Catholic clergy risked their lives to assist Jews, their efforts were sometimes made in the face of antisemitic attitudes from the church hierarchy.^{[109][202]} Anti-Jewish attitudes also existed in the London-based Polish Government in Exile,^[203] although on 18 December 1942 the President in exile Władysław Raczkiewicz wrote a dramatic letter to Pope Pius XII, begging him for a public defense of both murdered Poles and Jews.^[204] In spite of the introduction of death penalty extending to the entire families of rescuers, the number of Polish Righteous among the Nations testifies to the fact that Poles were willing to take risks in order to save Jews.^[205]

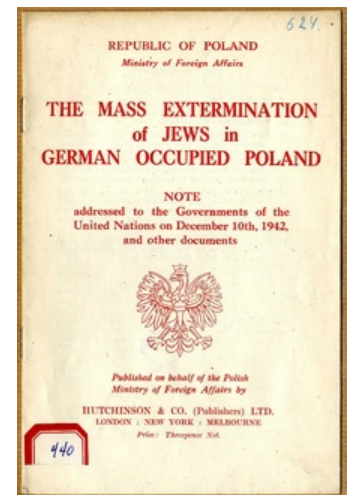
Holocaust survivors' views of Polish behavior during the War span a wide range, depending on their personal experiences. Some are very negative, based on the view of Christian Poles as passive witnesses who failed to act and aid the Jews as they were being persecuted or liquidated by the Nazis.^[206] Poles, who were also victims of Nazi crimes,^[207] were often afraid for their own and their family's lives and this fear prevented many of them from giving aid and assistance, even if some of them felt sympathy for the Jews. Emanuel Ringelblum, a Polish-Jewish historian of the Warsaw Ghetto, wrote critically of the indifferent and sometimes joyful responses in Warsaw to the destruction of Polish Jews in the Ghetto.^[208] However, Gunnar S. Paulsson stated that Polish citizens of Warsaw managed to support and hide the same percentage of Jews as did the citizens of cities in Western European countries.^[21] Paulsson's research shows that at least as far as Warsaw is concerned, the number of Poles aiding Jews far outnumbered those who sold out their Jewish neighbors to the Nazis. During the Nazi occupation of Warsaw 70,000–90,000 Polish gentiles aided Jews, while 3,000–4,000 were szmalcowniki, or blackmailers who collaborated with the Nazis in persecuting the Jews.^[209]

Ghettos and death camps

The German Nazis established six extermination camps throughout occupied Poland by 1942. All of these – at Chełmno (Kulmhof), Bełżec, Sobibór, Treblinka, Majdanek and Auschwitz (Oświęcim) – were located near the rail network so that the victims could be easily transported. The system of the camps was expanded over the course of the German occupation of Poland and their purposes were diversified; some served as transit camps, some as forced labor camps and the majority as death camps. While in the death camps, the victims were usually killed shortly after arrival, in the other camps able-bodied Jews were worked and beaten to death.^[210] The operation of concentration camps depended on Kapos, the collaborator-prisoners. Some of them were Jewish themselves, and their prosecution after the war created an ethical dilemma.^[211]



Map of the Holocaust in Poland under German occupation.



Polish Government-in-Exile, The Mass Extermination of Jews in German Occupied Poland, 1942, addressed to Poland's western Allies



Jewish Ghettos in German-occupied Poland and Eastern Europe

Between October 1939 and July 1942 a system of ghettos was imposed for the confinement of Jews. The Warsaw Ghetto was the largest in all of World War II, with 380,000 people crammed into an area of 1.3 sq mi (3.4 km²). The Łódź Ghetto was the second largest, holding about 160,000 prisoners. Other large Jewish ghettos in leading Polish cities included Białystok Ghetto in Białystok, Częstochowa Ghetto, Kielce Ghetto, Kraków Ghetto in Kraków, Lublin Ghetto, Lwów Ghetto in present-day Lviv, Stanisławów Ghetto also in present-day Ukraine, Brześć Ghetto in present-day Belarus, and Radom Ghetto among others. Ghettos were also established in hundreds of smaller settlements and villages around the country. The overcrowding, dirt, lice, lethal epidemics such as typhoid and hunger all resulted in countless deaths.

During the occupation of Poland, the Germans used various laws to separate ethnic Poles from Jewish ones. In the ghettos, the population was separated by putting the Poles into the "Aryan Side" and the Polish Jews into the "Jewish Side". Any Pole found giving any help to a Jewish Pole was subject to the death penalty.^[212] Another law implemented by the Germans was that Poles were forbidden from buying from Jewish shops, and if they did they were subject to execution.^[213] Many Jews tried to escape from the ghettos in the hope of finding a place to hide outside of it, or of joining the partisan units. When this proved difficult escapees often returned to the ghetto on their own. If caught, Germans would murder the escapees and leave their bodies in plain view as a warning to others. Despite these terror tactics, attempts at escape from ghettos continued until their liquidation.^[163]

Since the Nazi terror reigned throughout the Aryan districts, the chances of remaining successfully hidden depended on a fluent knowledge of the language and on having close ties with the community. Many Poles were not willing to hide Jews who might have escaped the ghettos or who might have been in hiding due to fear for their own lives and that of their families.

While the German policy towards Jews was ruthless and criminal, their policy towards Christian Poles who helped Jews was very much the same. The Germans would often murder non-Jewish Poles for small misdemeanors. Execution for help rendered to Jews, even the most basic kinds, was automatic. In any apartment block or area where Jews were found to be harboured, everybody in the house would be immediately shot by the Germans. For this thousands of non-Jewish Poles were executed.^[214]

Hiding in a Christian society to which the Jews were only partially assimilated was a daunting task.^[215] They needed to quickly acquire not only a new identity, but a new body of knowledge.^[215] Many Jews spoke Polish with a distinguished Yiddish or Hebrew accent, used a different nonverbal language, different gestures and facial expressions. Jews with the specific physical characteristics were particularly vulnerable.^[215]

Some individuals blackmailed Jews and non-Jewish Poles hiding them, and took advantage of their desperation by collecting money, or worse, turning them over to the Germans for a reward. The Gestapo provided a standard prize to those who informed on Jews hidden on the 'Aryan' side, consisting of cash, liquor, sugar, and cigarettes. Jews were robbed and handed over to the Germans by "szmalcowniki" (the 'shmalts' people: from *shmalts* or *szmalec*, Yiddish and Polish for 'grease'). In extreme cases, the Jews informed on other Jews to alleviate hunger with the awarded prize.^[216] The extortionists were condemned by the Polish Underground State. The fight against informers was organized by the Armia Krajowa (the Underground State's military arm), with the death sentence being meted out on a scale unknown in the occupied countries of Western Europe.^[217]

To discourage Poles from giving shelter to Jews, the Germans often searched houses and introduced ruthless penalties. Poland was the only occupied country during World War II where the Nazis formally imposed the death penalty for anybody found sheltering and helping Jews.^{[218][219][220]} The penalty applied not only to the person who did the helping, but also extended to his or her family, neighbors and sometimes to entire villages.^[221] In this way Germans applied the principle of collective responsibility whose purpose was to encourage neighbors to inform on each other in order to avoid punishment. The nature of these policies was widely known and visibly publicized by the Nazis who sought to terrorize the Polish population.

Food rations for the Poles were small (669 kcal per day in 1941) compared to other occupied nations throughout Europe and black market prices of necessary goods were high, factors which made it difficult to hide people and almost impossible to hide entire families, especially in the cities. Despite these draconian measures imposed by the Nazis, Poland has the highest number of Righteous Among The Nations awards at the Yad Vashem Museum (6,339).^[222]

The Polish Government in Exile was the first (in November 1942) to reveal the existence of Nazi-run concentration camps and the systematic extermination of the Jews by the Nazis, through its courier Jan Karski^[223] and through the activities of Witold Pilecki, a member of Armia Krajowa who was the only person to volunteer for imprisonment in Auschwitz and who organized a resistance movement inside the camp itself.^[224] One of the Jewish members of the National Council of the Polish government in exile, Szmul Zygielbojm, committed suicide to protest the indifference of the Allied governments in the face of the Holocaust in Poland. The Polish government in exile was also the only government to set up an organization (Żegota) specifically aimed at helping the Jews in Poland.



Walling-off Świętokrzyska Street (seen from Marszałkowska Street on the "Aryan side")



NOTICE
Concerning:
the Sheltering of Escaping Jews.
There is a need for a reminder, that in accordance with paragraph 3 of the decree of 15 October 1941, on the Limitation of Residence in General Government (page 595 of the GG Register) Jews leaving the Jewish Quarter without permission will incur the death penalty.

....According to this decree, those knowingly helping these Jews by providing shelter, supplying food, or selling them foodstuffs are also subject to the death penalty

....This is a categorical warning to the non-Jewish population against:
1) Providing shelter to Jews.
2) Supplying them with Food.
3) Selling them Foodstuffs.
 Dr. Franke – Town Commander –
 Częstochowa 9/24/42



Janusz Korczak's orphanage

The Warsaw Ghetto and its uprising

The Warsaw Ghetto^[225] and its 1943 Uprising represents what is likely the most known episode of the wartime history of the Polish Jews. The ghetto was established by the German Governor-General Hans Frank on 16 October 1940. Initially, almost 140,000 Jews were moved into the ghetto from all parts of Warsaw. At the same time, approximately 110,000 Poles had been forcibly evicted from the area. The Germans selected Adam Czerniakow to take charge of the Jewish Council called Judenrat made up of 24 Jewish men ordered to organize Jewish labor battalions as well as Jewish Ghetto Police which would be responsible for maintaining order within the Ghetto walls.^{[226][227]} A number of Jewish policemen were corrupt and immoral. Soon the Nazis demanded

even more from the Judenrat and the demands were much crueler. Death was the punishment for the slightest indication of noncompliance by the Judenrat. Sometimes the Judenrat refused to collaborate in which case its members were consequently executed and replaced by the new group of people. Adam Czerniakow who was the head of the Warsaw Judenrat committed suicide when he was forced to collect daily lists of Jews to be deported to Treblinka extermination camp at the onset of Grossaktion Warsaw.^[228]

The population of the ghetto reached 380,000 people by the end of 1940, about 30% of the population of Warsaw. However, the size of the Ghetto was only about 2.4% of the size of the city. The Germans closed off the Ghetto from the outside world, building a wall around it by 16 November 1940. During the next year and a half, Jews from smaller cities and villages were brought into the Warsaw Ghetto, while diseases (especially typhoid) and starvation kept the inhabitants at about the same number. Average food rations in 1941 for Jews in Warsaw were limited to 253 kcal, and 669 kcal for Poles, as opposed to 2,613 kcal for Germans. On 22 July 1942, the mass deportation of the Warsaw Ghetto inhabitants began.^[229] During the next fifty-two days (until 12 September 1942) about 300,000 people were transported by freight train to the Treblinka extermination camp. The Jewish Ghetto Police were ordered to escort the ghetto inhabitants to the Umschlagplatz train station. They were spared from the deportations until September 1942 in return for their cooperation, but afterwards shared their fate with families



Deportation to Treblinka at the Umschlagplatz

and relatives. On 18 January 1943, a group of Ghetto militants led by the right-leaning ŻZW, including some members of the left-leaning ŻOB, rose up in a first Warsaw uprising. Both organizations resisted, with arms, German attempts for additional deportations to Auschwitz and Treblinka.^[230] The final destruction of the Warsaw Ghetto came four months later after the crushing of one of the most heroic and tragic battles of the war, the 1943 Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.

When we invaded the Ghetto for the first time – wrote SS commander Jürgen Stroop – the Jews and the Polish bandits succeeded in repelling the participating units, including tanks and armored cars, by a well-prepared concentration of fire. (...) The main Jewish battle group, mixed with Polish bandits, had already retired during the first and second day to the so-called Muranowski Square. There, it was reinforced by a considerable number of Polish bandits. Its plan was to hold the Ghetto by every means in order to prevent us from invading it. — Jürgen Stroop, Stroop Report, 1943.^{[231][232][233]}

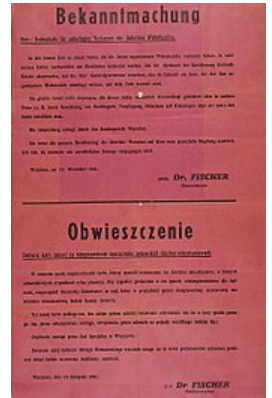
The Uprising was led by ŻOB (*Jewish Combat Organization*) and the ŻZW.^{[230][234]} The ŻZW (*Jewish Military Union*) was the better supplied in arms.^[230] The ŻOB had more than 750 fighters, but lacked weapons; they had only 9 rifles, 59 pistols and several grenades.^[235] A developed network of bunkers and fortifications were formed. The Jewish fighters also received support from the Polish Underground (*Armia Krajowa*). The German forces, which included 2,842 Nazi soldiers and 7,000 security personnel, were not capable of crushing the Jewish resistance in open street combat and after several days, decided to switch strategy by setting buildings on fire in which the Jewish fighters hid. The commander of the ŻOB, Mordechai Anielewicz, died fighting on 8 May 1943 at the organization's command centre on 18 Mila Street.



34 Mordechai Anielewicz Street, Warsaw, Poland

It took the Germans twenty-seven days to put down the uprising, after some very heavy fighting. The German general Jürgen Stroop in his report stated that his troops had killed 6,065 Jewish fighters during the battle. After the uprising was already over, Heinrich Himmler had the Great Synagogue on Tłomackie Square (outside the ghetto) destroyed as a celebration of German victory and a symbol that the Jewish Ghetto in Warsaw was no longer.

A group of fighters escaped from the ghetto through the sewers and reached the Lomianki forest. About 50 ghetto fighters were saved by the Polish "People's Guard" and later formed their own partisan group, named after Anielewicz. Even after the end of the uprising there were still several hundreds of Jews who continued living in the ruined ghetto. Many of them survived thanks to the contacts they managed to



Announcement of death penalty for Jews captured outside the Ghetto and for Poles helping Jews, November 1941



Ghetto fighters memorial in Warsaw built in 1948 by sculptor Nathan Rapoport



The cover page of The Stroop Report with International Military Tribunal in Nuremberg markings.

establish with Poles outside the ghetto. The Uprising inspired Jews throughout Poland. Many Jewish leaders who survived the liquidation continued underground work outside the ghetto. They hid other Jews, forged necessary documents and were active in the Polish underground in other parts of Warsaw and the surrounding area.

Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, was followed by other Ghetto uprisings in many smaller towns and cities across German-occupied Poland. Many Jews were found alive in the ruins of the former Warsaw Ghetto during the 1944 general Warsaw Uprising when the Poles themselves rose up against the Germans. Some of the survivors of 1943 Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, still held in camps at or near Warsaw, were freed during 1944 Warsaw Uprising, led by the Polish resistance movement Armia Krajowa, and immediately joined Polish fighters. Only a few of them survived. The Polish commander of one Jewish unit, Waclaw Micuta, described them as some of the best fighters, always at the front line. It is estimated that over 2,000 Polish Jews, some as well known as Marek Edelman or Icchak Cukierman, and several dozen Greek,^[236] Hungarian or even German Jews freed by Armia Krajowa from Gesiwka concentration camp in Warsaw, men and women, took part in combat against Nazis during 1944 Warsaw Uprising. Some 166,000 people lost their lives in the 1944 Warsaw Uprising, including perhaps as many as 17,000 Polish Jews who had either fought with the AK or had been discovered in hiding (see: Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński and Stanisław Aronson). Warsaw was razed to the ground by the Germans and more than 150,000 Poles were sent to labor or concentration camps. On 17 January 1945, the Soviet Army entered a destroyed and nearly uninhabited Warsaw. Some 300 Jews were found hiding in the ruins in the Polish part of the city (see: Wladyslaw Szpilman).



Freed prisoners of Gesiwka and the Szare Szeregi fighters after the liberation of the camp in August 1944

The fate of the Warsaw Ghetto was similar to that of the other ghettos in which Jews were concentrated. With the decision of Nazi Germany to begin the Final Solution, the destruction of the Jews of Europe, Aktion Reinhard began in 1942, with the opening of the extermination camps of Bełżec, Sobibór, and Treblinka, followed by Auschwitz-Birkenau where people were killed in gas chambers and mass executions (death wall).^[237] Many died from hunger, starvation, disease, torture or by pseudo-medical experiments. The mass deportation of Jews from ghettos to these camps, such as happened at the Warsaw Ghetto, soon followed, and more than 1.7 million Jews were killed at the Aktion Reinhard camps by October 1943 alone.



The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising of 1943 saw the destruction of what remained of the Ghetto

The Białystok Ghetto and its uprising

In August 1941, the Germans ordered the establishment of a ghetto in Białystok. About 50,000 Jews from the city and the surrounding region were confined in a small area of Białystok. The ghetto had two sections, divided by the Biała River. Most Jews in the Białystok ghetto worked in forced-labor projects, primarily in large textile factories located within the ghetto boundaries. The Germans also sometimes used Jews in forced-labor projects outside the ghetto.

In February 1943, approximately 10,000 Białystok Jews were deported to the Treblinka extermination camp. During the deportations, hundreds of Jews, mainly those deemed too weak or sick to travel, were killed.

In August 1943, the Germans mounted an operation to destroy the Białystok ghetto. German forces and local police auxiliaries surrounded the ghetto and began to round up Jews systematically for deportation to the Treblinka extermination camp. Approximately 7,600 Jews were held in a central transit camp in the city before deportation to Treblinka. Those deemed fit to work were sent to the Majdanek camp. In Majdanek, after another screening for ability to work, they were transported to the Poniatowa, Blizyn, or Auschwitz camps. Those deemed too weak to work were murdered at Majdanek. More than 1,000 Jewish children were sent first to the Theresienstadt ghetto in Bohemia, and then to Auschwitz-Birkenau, where they were killed.

On 15 August 1943, the Białystok Ghetto Uprising began, and several hundred Polish Jews and members of the Anti-Fascist Military Organisation (Polish: Antyfaszystowska Organizacja Bojowa) started an armed struggle against the German troops who were carrying out the planned liquidation and deportation of the ghetto to the Treblinka extermination camp.^[238] The guerrillas were armed with only one machine gun, several dozen pistols, Molotov cocktails and bottles filled with acid. The fighting in isolated pockets of resistance lasted for several days, but the defence was broken almost instantly. As with the earlier Warsaw Ghetto Uprising of April 1943, the Białystok uprising had no chances for military success, but it was the second-largest ghetto uprising, after the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. Several dozen guerrillas managed to break through to the forests surrounding Białystok where they joined the partisan units of Armia Krajowa and other organisations and survived the war.

Communist rule: 1945–1989

Number of Holocaust survivors

The estimates of Polish Jews before the war vary from slightly under 3 million to almost 3.5 million (the last nationwide census was conducted in 1931).^[239]

The number of Polish Jews who survived the Holocaust is difficult to ascertain. The majority of Polish Jewish survivors were individuals who were able to find refuge in the territories of Soviet Union that were not overrun by Germans and thus safe from the Holocaust. It is estimated that between 250,000 and 800,000 Polish Jews survived the war, out of which between 50,000 and 100,000 were survivors from occupied Poland, and the remainder, survivors who made it abroad (mostly to the Soviet Union).^[239]

Following the Soviet annexation of over half of Poland at the onset of World War II, all Polish nationals including Jews were declared by Moscow to have become Soviet nationals regardless of birth.^[240] Also, all Polish Jews who perished in the Holocaust behind the Curzon Line were included with the Soviet war dead.^[241] For decades to come, the Soviet authorities refused to accept the fact that thousands of Jews who

remained in the USSR opted consciously and unambiguously for Polish nationality.^[242] At the end of 1944, the number of Polish Jews in the Soviet and the Soviet-controlled territories has been estimated at 250,000–300,000 people.^[243] Jews who escaped to eastern Poland from areas occupied by Germany in 1939 were numbering at around 198,000.^[244] Over 150,000 of them were repatriated or expelled back to new communist Poland along with the Jewish men conscripted to the Red Army from Kresy in 1940–1941.^[243] Their families were murdered in the Holocaust. Some of the soldiers married women with the Soviet citizenship, others agreed to paper marriages.^[243] Those who survived the Holocaust in Poland included Jews who were saved by the Poles (most families with children), and those who joined the Polish or Soviet resistance movement. Some 20,000–40,000 Jews were repatriated from Germany and other countries. At its postwar peak, up to 240,000 returning Jews might have resided in Poland mostly in Warsaw, Łódź, Kraków, Wrocław and Lower Silesia, e.g., Dzierżoniów (where there was a significant Jewish community initially consisting of local concentration camp survivors), Legnica, and Bielawa.^[245]

The Jewish community in post-war Poland

Following World War II Poland became a satellite state of the Soviet Union, with its eastern regions annexed to the Union, and its western borders expanded to include formerly German territories east of the Oder and Neisse rivers. This forced millions to relocate (see also Territorial changes of Poland immediately after World War II).^{[239][246]} Jewish survivors returning to their homes in Poland found it practically impossible to reconstruct their pre-war lives. Due to the border shifts, some Polish Jews found that their homes were now in the Soviet Union; in other cases, the returning survivors were German Jews whose homes were now under Polish jurisdiction. Jewish communities and Jewish life as it had existed was gone, and Jews who somehow survived the Holocaust often discovered that their homes had been looted or destroyed.^[247]

Anti-Jewish violence and discrimination

Some returning Jews were met with antisemitic bias in Polish employment and education administrations. Post-war labor certificates contained markings distinguishing Jews from non-Jews. The Jewish community in Szczecin reported a lengthy report of complaints regarding job discrimination. Although Jewish schools were created in the few towns containing a relatively large Jewish population, many Jewish children were enrolled in Polish state schools. Some state schools, as in the town of Otwock, forbade Jewish children to enroll. In the state schools that did allow Jewish children, there were numerous accounts of beatings and persecution targeting these children.^[248]

The anti-Jewish violence in Poland refers to a series of violent incidents in Poland that immediately followed the end of World War II in Europe. It occurred amid a period of violence and anarchy across the country, caused by lawlessness and anti-communist resistance against the Soviet-backed communist takeover of Poland.^{[249] [250]} The exact number of Jewish victims is a subject of debate with 327 documented cases, and range, estimated by different writers, from 400^[251] to 2,000. Jews constituted between 2% and 3% of the total number of victims of postwar violence in the country,^{[26][252]} including the Polish Jews who managed to escape the Holocaust on territories of Poland annexed by the Soviet Union, and returned after the border changes imposed by the Allies at the Yalta Conference.^[253] The incidents ranged from individual attacks to pogroms.^[254]

The best-known case is the Kielce pogrom of 4 July 1946,^[255] in which thirty-seven Jews and two Poles were murdered. Following the investigation, the local police commander was found guilty of inaction.^[256] Nine alleged participants of the pogrom were sentenced to death; three were given lengthy prison sentences.^[256] The debate in Poland continues about the involvement of regular troops in the killings, and possible Soviet influences.^[257]

In a number of other instances, returning Jews still met with threats, violence, and murder from their Polish neighbors, occasionally in a deliberate and organized manner. People of the community frequently had knowledge of these murders and turned a blind eye or held no sympathy for the victims. Jewish communities responded to this violence by reporting the violence to the Ministry of Public Administration, but were granted little assistance.^[248] As many as 1500 Jewish heirs were often murdered when attempting to reclaim property.^[258]

Several causes led to the anti-Jewish violence of 1944–1947. One cause was traditional Christian anti-semitism; the pogrom in Cracow (11 August 1945) and in Kielce followed accusations of ritual murder. Another cause was the gentile Polish hostility to the Communist takeover. Even though very few Jews lived in postwar Poland, many Poles believed they dominated the Communist authorities, a belief expressed in the term Żydokomuna (Judeo-Communist), a popular anti-Jewish stereotype. Yet another reason for Polish violence towards Jews stemmed from the fear that survivors would recover their property.^{[25][248]}

Jewish property

After the war ended, Poland's Communist government enacted a broad program of nationalization and land reform, taking over large numbers of properties, both Polish- and Jewish-owned.^[259] As part of the reform the Polish People's Republic enacted legislation on "abandoned property", placing severe limitations on inheritance that were not present in prewar inheritance law, for example limiting restitution to the original owners or their immediate heirs.^[260] According to Dariusz Stola, the 1945 and 1946 laws governing restitution were enacted with the intention of restricting Jewish restitution claims as one of their main goals.^{[261][262]} The 1946 law^[263] carried a deadline of 31 December 1947 (later extended to 31 December 1948), after which unclaimed property devolved to the Polish state; many survivors residing in the USSR or in displaced-persons camps were repatriated only after the deadline had passed.^[258] All other properties that had been confiscated by the Nazi regime were deemed "abandoned"; however, as Yechiel Weizman notes, the fact most of Poland's Jewry had died, in conjunction with the fact that only Jewish property was officially confiscated by the Nazis, suggest "abandoned property" was equivalent to "Jewish property".^[262] According to Łukasz Krzyżanowski, the state actively sought to gain control over a large number of "abandoned" properties.^[264] According to Krzyżanowski, this declaration of "abandoned" property can be seen as the last stage of the expropriation process that began during the German



Page from a register of several hundred Jewish survivors who returned to Oświęcim after the war; created by a local Jewish Committee in 1945. Most remained for only a brief period.

wartime occupation; by approving the status-quo shaped by the German occupation authorities, the Polish authorities became "the beneficiary of the murder of millions of its Jewish citizens, who were deprived of all their property before death".^[264] A 1945 memorandum by the Joint states that "the new economic tendency of the Polish government... is against, or at least makes difficulties in, getting back the Jewish property robbed by the German authorities."^[263] Later laws, while more generous, remained mainly on paper, with an "uneven" implementation.^[263]

Many of the properties that were previously owned or by Jews were taken over by others during the war. Attempting to reclaim an occupied property often put the claimant at a risk of physical harm and even death.^{[261][263][265][266][267]} Many who proceeded with the process were only granted possession, not ownership, of their properties;^[264] and completing the restitution process, given that most properties were already occupied, required additional, lengthy processes.^[268] The majority of Jewish claimants could not afford the restitution process without financial help, due to the filing costs, legal fees, and inheritance tax.^[263] While it is hard to determine the total number of successful reclamations, Michael Meng estimates that it was extremely small.^[269]

In general, restitution was easier for larger organizations or well connected individuals,^[270] and the process was also abused by criminal gangs.^[264]

"Movable" property such as housewares, that was either given by Jews for safekeeping or taken during the war, was rarely returned willfully; oftentimes the only resort for a returnee looking for reappropriation was the courts.^[271] Most such property was probably never returned.^[264] According to Jan Gross, "there was no social norm mandating the return of Jewish property, no detectable social pressure defining such behavior as the right thing to do, no informal social control mechanism imposing censure for doing otherwise."^[271]

Facing violence and a difficult and expensive legal process,^{[263][266]} many returnees eventually decided to leave the country rather than attempt reclamation.^{[264][266][271]}

Following the fall of the Soviet Union, a law was passed that allowed the Catholic Church to reclaim its properties, which it did with great success.^{[270][272]} According to Stephen Denburg, "unlike the restitution of Church property, the idea of returning property to former Jewish owners has been met with a decided lack of enthusiasm from both the general Polish population as well as the government".^[272]

Decades later, reclaiming pre-war property would lead to a number of controversies, and the matter is still debated by media and scholars as of late 2010s.^[273] Dariusz Stola notes that the issues of property in Poland are incredibly complex, and need to take into consideration unprecedented losses of both Jewish and Polish population and massive destruction caused by Nazi Germany, as well as the expansion of Soviet Union and communism into Polish territories after the war, which dictated the property laws for the next 50 years.^[261] Poland remains "the only EU country and the only former Eastern European communist state not to have enacted [a restitution] law," but rather "a patchwork of laws and court decisions promulgated from 1945-present."^{[261][266][270]} As stated by Dariusz Stola, director of the POLIN Museum, "the question of restitution is in many ways connected to the question of Polish-Jewish relations, their history and remembrance, but particularly to the attitude of the Poles to the Holocaust."^[261]

Emigration to Palestine and Israel

For a variety of reasons, the vast majority of returning Jewish survivors left Poland soon after the war ended.^[274] Many left for the West because they did not want to live under a Communist regime. Some left because of the persecution they faced in postwar Poland,^[25] and because they did not want to live where their family members had been murdered, and instead have arranged to live with relatives or friends in different western democracies. Others wanted to go to British Mandate of Palestine soon to be the new state of Israel, especially after General Marian Spychalski signed a decree allowing Jews to leave Poland without visas or exit permits.^[28] In 1946–1947 Poland was the only Eastern Bloc country to allow free Jewish aliyah to Israel,^[27] without visas or exit permits.^{[28][29]} Britain demanded Poland to halt the exodus, but their pressure was largely unsuccessful.^[275]

Between 1945 and 1948, 100,000–120,000 Jews left Poland. Their departure was largely organized by the Zionist activists including Adolf Berman and Icehak Cukierman, under the umbrella of a semi-clandestine Berihah ("Flight") organization.^[276] Berihah was also responsible for the organized Aliyah emigration of Jews from Romania, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and Poland, totaling 250,000 survivors. In 1947, a military training camp for young Jewish volunteers to Hagana was established in Bolków, Poland. The camp trained 7,000 soldiers who then traveled to Palestine to fight for Israel. The boot-camp existed until the end of 1948.^[277]

A second wave of Jewish emigration (50,000) took place during the liberalization of the Communist regime between 1957 and 1959. After 1967's Six-Day War, in which the Soviet Union supported the Arab side, the Polish communist party adopted an anti-Jewish course of action which in the years 1968–1969 provoked the last mass migration of Jews from Poland.^[274]

The Bund took part in the post-war elections of 1947 on a common ticket with the (non-communist) Polish Socialist Party (PPS) and gained its first and only parliamentary seat in its Polish history, plus several seats in municipal councils. Under pressure from Soviet-installed communist authorities, the Bund's leaders 'voluntarily' disbanded the party in 1948–1949 against the opposition of many activists. Stalinist Poland was basically governed by the Soviet NKVD which was against the renewal of Jewish religious and cultural life. In the years 1948–49, all remaining Jewish schools were nationalized by the communists and Yiddish was replaced with Polish as a language of teaching.

Rebuilding Jewish communities

For those Polish Jews who remained, the rebuilding of Jewish life in Poland was carried out between October 1944 and 1950 by the Central Committee of Polish Jews (Centralny Komitet Żydów Polskich, CKŻP) which provided legal, educational, social care, cultural, and propaganda services. A countrywide Jewish Religious Community, led by Dawid Kahane, who served as chief rabbi of the Polish Armed Forces, functioned between 1945 and 1948 until it was absorbed by the CKŻP. Eleven independent political Jewish parties, of which eight were legal, existed until their dissolution during 1949–50. Hospitals and schools were opened in Poland by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and ORT

to provide service to Jewish communities.^[278] Some Jewish cultural institutions were established including the Yiddish State Theater founded in 1950 and directed by Ida Kaminska, the Jewish Historical Institute, an academic institution specializing in the research of the history and culture of the Jews in Poland, and the Yiddish newspaper Folks-Shtime ("People's Voice"). Following liberalization after Joseph Stalin's death, in this 1958–59 period, 50,000 Jews emigrated to Israel.^[11]

Some Polish Communists of Jewish descent actively participated in the establishment of the communist regime in the People's Republic of Poland between 1944 and 1956. Hand-picked by Joseph Stalin, prominent Jews held posts in the Politburo of the Polish United Workers' Party including Jakub Berman, head of state security apparatus Urząd Bezpieczeństwa (UB),^[279] and Hilary Minc responsible for establishing a Communist-style economy. Together with hardliner Bolesław Bierut, Berman and Minc formed a triumvirate of the Stalinist leaders in postwar Poland.^[279] After 1956, during the process of destalinisation in the People's Republic under Władysław Gomułka, some Jewish officials from Urząd Bezpieczeństwa including Roman Romkowski, Jacek Różański, and Anatol Fejgin, were prosecuted and sentenced to prison terms for "power abuses" including the torture of Polish anti-fascists including Witold Pilecki among others. Yet another Jewish official, Józef Świątło, after escaping to the West in 1953, exposed through Radio Free Europe the interrogation methods used the UB which led to its restructuring in 1954. Solomon Morel a member of the Ministry of Public Security of Poland and commandant of the Stalinist era Zgoda labour camp, fled Poland for Israel in 1992 to escape prosecution. Helena Wolińska-Brus, a former Stalinist prosecutor who emigrated to England in the late 1960s, fought being extradited to Poland on charges related to the execution of a Second World War resistance hero Emil Fieldorf. Wolińska-Brus died in London in 2008.^[280]

The March 1968 events and their aftermath

In 1967, following the Six-Day War between Israel and the Arab states, Poland's Communist government, following the Soviet lead, broke off diplomatic relations with Israel and launched an antisemitic campaign under the guise of "anti-Zionism". However, the campaign did not resonate well with the Polish public, as most Poles saw similarities between Israel's fight for survival and Poland's past struggles for independence. Many Poles also felt pride in the success of the Israeli military, which was dominated by Polish Jews. The slogan "our Jews beat the Soviet Arabs" (Nasi Żydzi pobili sowieckich Arabów) became popular in Poland.^{[281][282]}

The vast majority of the 40,000 Jews in Poland by the late 1960s were completely assimilated into the broader society. However, this did not prevent them from becoming victims of a campaign, centrally organized by the Polish Communist Party, with Soviet backing, which equated Jewish origins with "Zionism" and disloyalty to a Socialist Poland.^[283]

In March 1968 student-led demonstrations in Warsaw (*see Polish 1968 political crisis*) gave Gomułka's government an excuse to try and channel public anti-government sentiment into another avenue. Thus his security chief, Mieczysław Moczar, used the situation as a pretext to launch an antisemitic press campaign (although the expression "Zionist" was officially used). The state-sponsored "anti-Zionist" campaign resulted in the removal of Jews from the Polish United Worker's Party and from teaching positions in schools and universities. In 1967–1971 under economic, political and secret police pressure, over 14,000 Polish Jews chose to leave Poland and relinquish their Polish citizenship.^[284] Officially, it was said that they chose to go to Israel. However, only about 4,000 actually went there; most settled throughout Europe and in the United States. The leaders of the Communist party tried to stifle the ongoing protests and unrest by scapegoating the Jews. At the same time there was an ongoing power struggle within the party itself and the antisemitic campaign was used by one faction against another. The so-called "Partisan" faction blamed the Jews who had held office during the Stalinist period for the excesses that had occurred, but the result was that most of the remaining Polish Jews, regardless of their background or political affiliation, were targeted by the communist authorities.^[285]

There were several outcomes of the *March 1968 events*. The campaign damaged Poland's reputation abroad, particularly in the U.S. Many Polish intellectuals, however, were disgusted at the promotion of official antisemitism and opposed the campaign. Some of the people who emigrated to the West at this time founded organizations that encouraged anti-Communist opposition inside Poland.

First attempts to improve Polish-Israeli relations began in the mid-1970s. Poland was the first of the Eastern Bloc countries to restore diplomatic relations with Israel after these have been broken off right after the Six-Day's War.^[11] In 1986 partial diplomatic relations with Israel were restored,^[11] and full relations were restored in 1990 as soon as communism fell.

During the late 1970s some Jewish activists were engaged in the anti-Communist opposition groups. Most prominent among them, Adam Michnik (founder of Gazeta Wyborcza) was one of the founders of the Workers' Defence Committee (KOR). By the time of the fall of Communism in Poland in 1989, only 5,000–10,000 Jews remained in the country, many of them preferring to conceal their Jewish origin.

Since 1989

With the fall of communism in Poland, Jewish cultural, social, and religious life has been undergoing a revival. Many historical issues, especially related to World War II and the 1944–89 period, suppressed by Communist censorship, have been re-evaluated and publicly discussed (like the Jedwabne pogrom, the Koniuchy massacre, the Kielce pogrom, the Auschwitz cross, and Polish-Jewish wartime relations in general).

Jewish religious life has been revived with the help of the Ronald Lauder Foundation and the Taube Foundation for Jewish Life & Culture. There are two rabbis serving the Polish Jewish community, several Jewish schools and associated summer camps as well as several periodical and book series sponsored by the above foundations. Jewish studies programs are offered at major universities, such as Warsaw University and the Jagiellonian University. The Union of Jewish Religious Communities in Poland was founded in 1993. Its purpose is the promotion and organization of Jewish religious and cultural activities in Polish communities.

A large number of cities with synagogues include Warsaw, Kraków, Zamość, Tykoćin, Rzeszów, Kielce, or Góra Kalwaria although not many of them are still active in their original religious role. Stara Synagoga ("Old Synagogue") in Kraków, which hosts a Jewish museum, was built in the early 15th century and is the oldest synagogue in Poland. Before the war, the Yeshiva Chachmei in Lublin was Europe's largest. In 2007 it was renovated, dedicated and reopened thanks to the efforts and endowments by Polish Jewry. Warsaw has an active synagogue, Beit Warszawa, affiliated with the Liberal-Progressive stream of Judaism.



Lesko Synagogue, Poland

There are also several Jewish publications although most of them are in Polish. These include Midrasz, Dos Jidische Wort (which is bilingual), as well as a youth journal Jidele and "Sztendlach" for young children. Active institutions include the Jewish Historical Institute, the E.R. Kaminska State Yiddish Theater in Warsaw, and the Jewish Cultural Center. The Judaica Foundation in Kraków has sponsored a wide range of cultural and educational programs on Jewish themes for a predominantly Polish audience. With funds from the city of Warsaw and the Polish government (\$26 million total) a Museum of the History of Polish Jews is being built in Warsaw. The building was designed by the Finnish architect Rainer Mahlamäki.^[278]



Chief Rabbi of Poland – Michael Schudrich



Reform Beit Warszawa Synagogue

Former extermination camps of Auschwitz-Birkenau, Majdanek and Treblinka are open to visitors. At Auschwitz the Oświęcim State Museum currently houses exhibitions on Nazi crimes with a special section (Block Number 27) specifically focused on Jewish victims and martyrs. At Treblinka there is a monument built out of many shards of broken stone, as well as a mausoleum dedicated to those who perished there. A small mound of human ashes commemorates the 350,000 victims of the Majdanek camp who were killed there by the Nazis. Jewish Cemetery, Łódź is one of the largest Jewish burial grounds in Europe, and preserved historic sites include those located in Góra Kalwaria and Leżajsk (Elimelech's of Lizhensk ohel).^[278]

The Great Synagogue in Oświęcim was excavated after testimony by a Holocaust survivor suggested that many Jewish relics and ritual objects had been buried there, just before Nazis took over the town. Candelabras, chandeliers, a menorah and a ner tamid were found and can now be seen at the Auschwitz Jewish Center.^[278]



2005 March of the Living

The Warsaw Ghetto Memorial was unveiled on 19 April 1948—the fifth anniversary of the outbreak of the Warsaw ghetto Uprising. It was constructed out of bronze and granite that the Nazis used for a monument honoring German victory over Poland and it was designed by Nathan Rapoport. The Memorial is located where the Warsaw Ghetto used to be, at the site of one command bunker of the Jewish Combat Organization.

A memorial to the victims of the Kielce Pogrom of 1946, where a mob murdered more than 40 Jews who returned to the city after the Holocaust, was unveiled in 2006. The funds for the memorial came from the city itself and from the U.S. Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad.

Polish authors and scholars have published many works about the history of Jews in Poland. Notable among them are the Polish Academy of Sciences's Holocaust studies journal Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały as well as other publications from the Institute of National Remembrance. Recent scholarship has primarily focused on three topics: post-war anti-Semitism; emigration and the creation of the State of Israel, and the restitution of property.^[286]

There have been a number of Holocaust remembrance activities in Poland in recent years. The United States Department of State documents that:

In September 2000, dignitaries from Poland, Israel, the United States, and other countries (including Prince Hassan of Jordan) gathered in the city of Oświęcim (Auschwitz) to commemorate the opening of the refurbished Chevre Lomdei Mishnayot synagogue and the Auschwitz Jewish Center. The synagogue, the sole synagogue in Oświęcim to survive World War II and an adjacent Jewish cultural and educational center, provide visitors a place to pray and to learn about the active pre-World War II Jewish community that existed in Oświęcim. The synagogue was the first communal property in the country to be returned to the Jewish community under the 1997 law allowing for restitution of Jewish communal property.^[287]



President of the Republic of Poland, Lech Kaczyński, at the groundbreaking ceremony for the Museum of the History of Polish Jews, 26 June 2007

The March of the Living is an annual event in April held since 1988 to commemorate the victims of the Holocaust. It takes place from Auschwitz to Birkenau and is attended by many people from Israel, Poland and other countries. The marchers honor Holocaust Remembrance Day as well as Israel Independence Day.^[288]

An annual festival of Jewish culture, which is one of the biggest festivals of Jewish culture in the world, takes place in Kraków.^[289]

In 2006, Poland's Jewish population was estimated to be approximately 20,000;^[2] most living in Warsaw, Wrocław, Kraków, and Bielsko-Biała, though there are no census figures that would give an exact number. According to the Polish Moses Schorr Centre and other Polish sources, however, this may represent an undercount of the actual number of Jews living in Poland, since many are not religious.^[290] There are also people with Jewish roots who do not possess adequate documentation to confirm it, due to various historical and family complications.^[290]

Poland is currently easing the way for Jews who left Poland during the Communist organized massive expulsion of 1968 to re-obtain their citizenship.^[291] Some 15,000 Polish Jews were deprived of their citizenship in the 1968 Polish political crisis.^[292] On 17 June 2009 the future Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw launched a bilingual Polish-English website called "The Virtual Shtetl",^[293] providing information about Jewish life in Poland.



"Shalom in Szeroka Street", the final concert of the 15th Jewish Festival

In 2013, POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews opened.^[294] It is one of the world's largest Jewish museums.^[295] As of 2019 another museum, the Warsaw Ghetto Museum, is under construction and is intended to open in 2023.^[296]

Numbers of Jews in Poland since 1920

Historical core Jewish population (using current borders) with Jews as a % of the total Polish population
(Source: YIVO Encyclopedia & the North American Jewish Data Bank)

Year	1921	1939	1945	1946	1951	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010
Population	2,845,000 (+14.2%)	3,250,000 ^{[297][298]} (100%) 9.14% of the total	100,000 (-96.9%) 0.43%	230,000 (+130.0%) 0.97%	70,000 (-69.6%) 0.28%	31,000 (-55.7%) 0.10%	9,000 (-71.0%) 0.03%	5,000 (-44.4%) 0.01%	3,800 (-24.0%) 0.01%	3,500 (-7.9%) 0.01%	3,200 ^[298] (-8.6%) 0.01%

However, most sources other than YIVO give a larger number of Jews living in contemporary Poland. In the 2011 Polish census, 7,353 Polish citizens declared their nationality as "Jewish," a big increase from just 1,055 during the previous 2002 census.^[299] There are likely more people of Jewish ancestry living in Poland but who do not actively identify as Jewish. According to the Moses Schorr Centre, there are 100,000 Jews living in Poland who don't actively practice Judaism and do not list "Jewish" as their nationality.^[300] The Jewish Renewal in Poland organization estimates that there are 200,000 "potential Jews" in Poland.^[301] The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and Jewish Agency for Israel estimate that there are between 25,000 and 100,000 Jews living in Poland,^[302] a similar number to that estimated by Jonathan Ornstein, head of the Jewish Community Center in Kraków (between 20,000 and 100,000).^[303]

See also

- History of the Jews in Poland before the 18th century
- History of the Jews in 18th-century Poland
- History of the Jews in 19th-century Poland
- History of the Jews in 20th-century Poland
- Jewish-Polish history (1989–present)
- Timeline of Jewish-Polish history
- Galician Jews
- Golden age of Jewish culture in Spain
- History of the Jews in Austria
- History of the Jews in Germany
- History of the Jews in Russia
- Israel–Poland relations
- Jewish ethnic divisions
- Jewish Roots in Poland*
- List of Polish Rabbis
- Polin

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11. [The Virtual Jewish History Tour – Poland \(https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/vjw/Poland.html\)](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/vjw/Poland.html). Jewishvirtuallibrary.org. Retrieved on 22 August 2010.
12. *In accordance with its tradition of religious tolerance, Poland refrained from participating in the excesses of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation* "Central Europe: Enemies, Neighbors, Friends" by Lonnie R. Johnson Oxford University Press 1996
13. Although traditional narrative holds that as a consequence, the predicament of the Commonwealth's Jewry worsened, declining to the level of other European countries by the end of the eighteenth century, recent scholarship by Gershon Hundert, Moshe Rosman, Edward Fram, and Magda Teter, suggest that the reality was much more complex. See for example, the following works, which discuss Jewish life and culture, as well as Jewish-Christian relations during that period: M. Rosman *Lords' Jews: Magnate-Jewish Relations in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth during the Eighteenth Century* (Harvard University Press, new ed. 1993), G. Hundert *The Jews in a Polish Private Town: The Case of Opatów in the Eighteenth Century* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), E. Fram *Ideals Face Reality: Jewish Law and Life in Poland, 1550–1655* (HUC Press, 1996), and M. Teter *Jews and Heretics in Pre-modern Poland: A Beleaguered Church in the Post-Reformation Era* (Cambridge University Press, 2006).
14. [Beyond the Pale \(http://www.friends-partners.org/partners/beyond-the-pale/index.html\)](http://www.friends-partners.org/partners/beyond-the-pale/index.html) Online exposition
15. William W. Hagen, Before the "Final Solution": Toward a Comparative Analysis of Political Anti-Semitism in Interwar Germany and Poland, *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 68, No. 2 (Jun. 1996), 351–381.
16. "In 1937, the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs viewed the League of Nations as the right place for manifesting its support for the cause of developing a Jewish state in Palestine. This had been declared at the League by Foreign Minister Józef Beck.¹¹ He also supported the idea of an international conference and campaign for organising and facilitating Jewish emigration.¹² Talks were held with British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden, and in the US, with President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Jewish members of the Sejm who protested against the heightened antisemitism in Poland took pains to thank Beck for furthering the cause of establishing a Jewish state in Palestine." Szymon Rudnicki, Marek Karliner & Laurence Weinbaum, "Linking the Vistula and the Jordan: The Genesis of Relations between Poland and the State of Israel", *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs*, 8:1, 2014, pp. 103-114.
17. "Rydz Smigly agreed to support Irgun, The Zionists' military arm, for the fight in Palestine. Weapons were provided for 10,000 men, and Polish officers trained Irgun fighters in the Tatra Mountains located in southern Poland." Archibald L. Patterson, *Between Hitler and Stalin: The Quick Life and Secret Death of Edward Smigly*, p. 101.
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20. Paulsson, Gunnar S (2002). *Secret City: The Hidden Jews of Warsaw, 1940–1945* (<https://archive.org/details/secretcityhidden00paul/page/245>). New Haven: Yale University Press. p. 245 (<https://archive.org/details/secretcityhidden00paul/page/245>). ISBN 0-300-09546-5. "There were people everywhere who were prepared, for whatever motives, to do the Nazis' work for them. And if there was more anti-Semitism in Poland than in many other countries, there was also less collaboration.... The Nazis generally preferred not to count on outbursts of 'emotional anti-Semitism', when what was needed to realize their plans was 'rational antisemitism', as Hitler himself put it. For that, they neither received or requested significant help from the Poles."
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External links

Maps

- The Cossack Uprising and its Aftermath in Poland (<http://www.routledge.com/textbooks/0415236614/resources/maps/map48.jpg>), Jewish Communities in Poland and Lithuania under the Council of the Four Lands (<http://www.routledge.com/textbooks/0415236614/resources/maps/map47.jpg>), The Spread of Hasidic Judaism (<http://www.routledge.com/textbooks/0415236614/resources/maps/map50.jpg>), Jewish Revolts against the Nazis in Poland (<http://www.routledge.com/textbooks/0415236614/resources/maps/map65.jpg>) (All maps from *Judaism: History, Belief, and Practice*)

History of Polish Jews

- [Museum of the History of Polish Jews \(https://web.archive.org/web/20140104211006/http://www.jewishmuseum.org.pl/index.php?mild=2&lang=en\)](https://web.archive.org/web/20140104211006/http://www.jewishmuseum.org.pl/index.php?mild=2&lang=en)
 - [Virtual Shtetl \(http://www.sztetl.org.pl/?lang=en_GB\)](http://www.sztetl.org.pl/?lang=en_GB)
- [The Polish Jews Home Page \(http://polishjews.org\)](http://polishjews.org)
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- [Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland \(http://fodz.pl/?d=1&l=en\)](http://fodz.pl/?d=1&l=en)
- [Foundation for Documentation of Jewish Cemeteries in Poland \(http://cemetery.jewish.org.pl\)](http://cemetery.jewish.org.pl)

World War II and the Holocaust

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- [Warsaw Ghetto Uprising \(http://www.ushmm.org/museum/exhibit/focus/uprising/\)](http://www.ushmm.org/museum/exhibit/focus/uprising/) from the US Holocaust Museum. From the same source see:
 - [Non-Jewish Polish Victims of the Holocaust \(http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/\)](http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/)
 - [Bibliography of Polish Jewish Relations \(http://www.ushmm.org/research/library/index.php?content=bibliography/index.php%3fcontent=poles\)](http://www.ushmm.org/research/library/index.php?content=bibliography/index.php%3fcontent=poles) during the War
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