

# Expulsions of Germans from Poland

## In the aftermath of World War II

The flight and expulsion of Germans from Poland was the largest of a series of flights and expulsions of Germans in Europe during and after World War II. The German population fled or was expelled from all regions that are currently within the territorial boundaries of Poland ... including the former eastern territories of Germany and parts of pre-war Poland.

The first mass movement of German civilians followed the Red Army's advance and was composed of both spontaneous flight driven by rumors of Soviet atrocities, and organized evacuation starting in the summer of 1944 and continuing through to the spring of 1945.

About 3.5 million people were involved, mainly driven by fear of the advancing Soviet Army. In 1945, the eastern territories of Germany (most of Silesia and Pomerania, East Brandenburg, and East-Prussia) as well as Polish areas annexed by Nazi Germany (especially Warthegau and Reichsgau Danzig-West Prussia) were occupied by the Soviet Red Army and Polish military forces. Early expulsions in Poland were undertaken by the Polish Communist military authorities even before the Potsdam Conference ("wild expulsions"), to ensure the later integration into an ethnically homogeneous Poland as envisioned by the Polish Communists.

Between 700,000 and 800,000 Germans were affected. Germans were defined as either Reichsdeutsche, people enlisted in 1st or 2nd Volksliste groups, and those of the 3rd group, who held German citizenship. About 1.1 million German citizens of Slavic descent were "verified" as "autochtone" Poles, 900,000 of whom natives of Upper Silesia and Masuria. Of those, most were not expelled, yet hundreds of thousands emigrated to Germany after 1950, including most Masurians.

The Soviet Union transferred territories to the east of the Oder-Neisse Line to Poland in July 1945. All Germans were expropriated and placed under restrictive jurisdiction. Subsequent to this, under the authority of Potsdam Agreement, most remaining Germans were expelled from pre-war Poland and the so-called "Recovered Territories" to the territories west of the Oder-Neisse line. From the spring of 1946 the expulsions gradually became better organized, and less lethal, affecting another three million people. Some German civilians, prior to their expulsion, were used as forced labor in Communist administered camps. Besides large camps, some of which were re-used Nazi concentration camps, numerous other forced labor, punitive and internment camps, urban ghettos, and detention centers sometimes consisting only of a small cellar were set up. An estimated million of Germans considered "indispensable" for the Polish economy were retained until the early 1950s, and all had virtually left by 1960. Close to 165,000 Germans were transported to the Soviet Union for forced labor where most of them perished.

The attitude of Polish civilians, many of whom had experienced brutalities only surpassed by the treatment of the Jews during the preceding Nazi occupation, was varied. Many engaged in looting, robberies, beatings and even murders and rapes. On the other hand, there were incidents when Poles, even freed slave laborers, protected Germans, for example by disguising them as Poles. The attitude of the Soviet soldiers was also ambivalent. Many committed numerous atrocities, most prominently rapes and murders, and did not always distinguish between Poles and Germans, often mistreated them alike. Other Soviets were taken aback by the brutal treatment of the Germans and engaged in their protection.

There are estimates of 7 million expelled during both "wild" and "legal" expulsions from the "Recovered Territories" until 1948, joined by an additional 700,000 from areas of pre-war Poland. Approximate totals of those evacuated, migrated, or expelled between 1944–1950 from East Prussia: 1.4 million to Western Germany, 609,000 to Eastern Germany; from West Prussia: 230,000 to Western Germany, 61,000 to Eastern Germany; from the former German area East of the Oder-Neisse: 3.2 million to Western Germany, 2 million to Eastern Germany.

## Background

### Historical background

German settlement in the former eastern territories of Germany and pre-war Poland dates back to the medieval Ostsiedlung. Nazi Germany used the presence and the alleged persecution of Volksdeutsche as propaganda tools in

preparation for the invasion of Poland in 1939. With the invasion, Poland was partitioned between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union according to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. This was followed by population exchanges, mostly Baltic Germans were resettled to occupied Poland.

Nazi Germany's Generalplan Ost strategy for Central and Eastern Europe envisioned the creation of a Greater Germany, which was to be built by means of removing a variety of non-Germans from Poland and other areas in Eastern Europe, mainly Slavs and Jews believed by Nazis to be subhuman. These non-Germans were targeted for slave labor and eventual extermination. While Generalplan Ost's settlement ambitions did not come into full effect due to the war's turn, some Germans mostly from Eastern Europe were settled by the Nazis to replace Poles removed or killed during the occupation. Nazi Germany deported millions of Poles either to other territories, to concentration camps or as slave workers. Many others were deported by the Soviet Union.

### Allied decisions: Tehran, Yalta and Potsdam conferences



Allied map used to determine the number of Germans that would have to be expelled from the eastern German territories using different border scenarios

Though initially hesitant to support widespread post-war population transfers, the British government began signaling approval already in late 1940, after German bombing attacks on British cities had radicalized British public opinion. However, British officials were sharply divided on the extent and speed of the transfers.

In 1943, the War Office opposed the Foreign Office's intentions to move Polish borders as far as the Oder-Neisse line and deport the millions of Germans who would be left inside the new borders of Poland. Such a move, the Director of Military Intelligence wrote, would yield an overpopulated and revisionist Germany bordering an underpopulated and weak Poland, and would "sow the seeds of another war." The Foreign Office countered with the argument that German salient in the East were even more dangerous and rendered Poland strategically vulnerable. Just

as important, argued the Foreign Office, Britain had a moral obligation to Poland, which would have to be compensated for its losses to the Soviet Union.

Representatives of the Polish Government were not present at any of those conferences and felt betrayed by their western Allies who have decided about future Polish borders behind their backs.



Retreating Wehrmacht, eastern Germany, March 1945

Following the Tehran Conference (November-December 1943) Joseph Stalin and Winston Churchill made it clear that the Soviets would keep the Polish territories east of the Curzon line and offered Poland territorial compensation in the West.

The final decision to move Poland's boundary westward, preconditioning the expulsion of Germans, was made by Britain, the Soviet Union, and the United States at the Yalta Conference in February 1945, when the Curzon line was irrevocably fixed as the future Polish-Soviet border. The precise location of the

Polish western border was left open and, though the Allies had agreed on population transfers, the extent remained questioned. Concerning the post-war western frontier of Poland, the agreement simply reads: "If a specific problem such

as the frontiers of liberated Poland and the complexion of its government allowed no easy solution, hopes were held out for the future discussion of all outstanding problems in an amicable manner." Upon gaining control of these lands, the Soviet and Polish-Communist authorities started to expel the German population.



Potsdam Conference: Joseph Stalin (left), Harry Truman (center), Winston Churchill (right)

In July 1945, at the Potsdam Conference, the Allies placed most former eastern territories of Germany east of the Oder Neisse line under Polish administration. Article XIII concerning the transfer of Germans was adopted at the Potsdam Conference in July 1945. It was an emergency measure, drafted and adopted in great haste, a response to the wild expulsions of Germans from Czechoslovakia and Poland, which had created a chaotic situation in the American and British zones of occupation. The Soviet Union transferred territories to the east of the Oder-Neisse Line to Poland in July 1945. Subsequently, most of the remaining Germans were expelled to the territories west of the line.

President Harry S. Truman complained that there were now five occupation zones because the Soviets had turned over the area extending along the Oder and western Neisse to Poland and was concerned about Germany's economic control and war reparations. Churchill spoke against giving Poland control over an area in which some eight million Germans lived. Stalin insisted that the Germans had all fled and that the Poles were needed to fill the vacuum. On July 24, the Polish communist delegation arrived in Berlin, insisting on the Oder and western Neisse rivers as the frontier, and they vehemently argued their case before the foreign ministers, Churchill, and Truman, in turn. The next day Churchill warned Stalin: "The Poles are driving the Germans out of the Russian zone. That should not be done without considering its effect on the food supply and reparations. We are getting into a position where the Poles have food and coal, and we have the mass of (the) population thrown at us." To the Soviets, reparations were more important than boundaries, and Stalin might have sold out the Poles if they had not so vociferously protested when, in spite of his 'illness', he consulted with them during the evening of July 29.

## Polish attitudes



Władysław Gomułka, Polish Communist leader, organized expulsions in his "Ministry for the Recovered Territories"

As early as in 1941, **Władysław Sikorski** of the Polish government in exile insisted on driving "the German horde (...) back far [westward]", while in 1942 memoranda he expressed concern about Poland acquiring Lower Silesia, populated with "fanatically anti-Polish Germans". Yet as the war went on, Lower Silesia also became a Polish war aim, as well as occupation of the Baltic coast west of Szczecin as far as Rostock and occupation of the Kiel Canal. Expulsions of Germans from East Prussia and pre-war Poland had become a war aim as early as in February 1940, expressed by Polish Foreign Minister August Zaleski.



Stanisław Mikołajczyk, Polish prime minister of the Polish Government in Exile, supported the expulsions

After Sikorski's death, the next Polish Prime Minister **Stanisław Mikołajczyk** in a letter to Roosevelt expressed his concerns about the idea of compensating Poland in the west. However, pressed by Churchill, he was forced to accept the Tehran decision, which was the direct cause of his resignation from his post. The next Polish Prime Minister, Tomasz Arciszewski made a stated that Poland did not "want neither Breslau nor Stettin".

Although the Polish government in Exile was recognized by the Allies at that time, the Soviet Union broke off all diplomatic relations with it in April 1943 after Polish government demanded the investigation of the Katyn massacre. On April 20, 1944, in Moscow, the Soviet sponsored Polish Communist cell founded the Polish Committee of National Liberation (PKWN) on Stalin's initiative. Just one week later, the representatives of the PKWN and the Soviet Union signed a treaty regulating the new Polish-Soviet border. A year later, before the Potsdam Conference, the western Allies followed Stalin, recognized the Soviet-sponsored government, which accepted the shift of the borders westwards, and withdrew their recognition for the Polish government in Exile.

When Stanisław Mikołajczyk joined the "Government of National Unity" as a deputy prime minister in 1945, he justified the expulsions of Germans by national terms following communist Władysław Gomułka, but also as a revolutionary act, freeing the Poles of exploitation by a German middle and upper class.

### Flight and evacuation following the Red Army's advance



Dead Germans in Nemmersdorf, East Prussia. Soviet atrocities, exaggerated and spread by Nazi propaganda, fueled the spontaneous flight of the German population

After the Red Army had advanced into the eastern parts of post-war Poland in the Lublin–Brest Offensive, launched on 18 July 1944, Soviet spearheads first reached eastern German territory on 4 August 1944 at northeastern East Prussia and Memelland, causing a first wave of refugees. These refugees temporarily returned when the German army, Wehrmacht, was able to regain territory in Operation Doppelkopf.

On October 5, the Red Army launched the Memel Offensive, and eleven days later the Gumbinnen Offensive into East Prussia. In the same month, Volkssturm units were formed out of the not yet drafted male population deemed fit for military service. While Nazi Gauleiter Erich Koch refused to evacuate the civilian population, Wehrmacht and the East Prussian president (Regierungspräsident) evacuated more than 600,000 people from a 30 kilometer wide strip behind the frontline, a measure which the Gauleitung finally approved in

late October. When the Wehrmacht repelled the Soviet Gumbinnen Offensive throughout the fall of 1944, news were spread by the Nazi propaganda machine about a Soviet massacre in Nemmersdorf and other atrocities. People were now aware of the Soviet reprisals on German civilians and apprehensive regarding the pending Soviet takeover - "Die Russen kommen!" ("Russians approaching!") became the desperate slogan of the time.



Refugees cross the frozen Frisches Haff, 1945

With the Soviet Vistula–Oder Offensive, launched on 12 January 1945, and the parallel East Prussian Offensive launched on 13 January 1945, Soviet gains of pre-war German and annexed Polish territory became permanent. With the subsequent East Pomeranian, Lower Silesian and Upper Silesian Offensives in February and March, the Red Army seized control of virtually all territories east of the Oder river. Wehrmacht counter-offensives like Operation Solstice and Operation Gemse were repelled, and only shrinking pockets like Breslau, Danzig, Heiligenbeil, Hela, Kolberg, Königsberg, and Pillau remained German controlled.

Soviet soldiers committed reprisal rapes and other crimes. In most cases, implementation of the evacuation plans was delayed until Soviet and Allied forces had defeated the Nazi forces and advanced into the areas to be evacuated. The responsibility for leaving millions of Germans in these vulnerable areas until combat conditions overwhelmed them can be attributed directly to the draconian measures taken by the Nazis against anyone even suspected of 'defeatist' attitudes [as evacuation was considered] and the fanaticism of many Nazi functionaries in their execution of Hitler's 'no retreat' orders. Hitler and his staff refused to accept Soviet military superiority. Hitler called the Red Army "gleaned punks" and "booty divisions," who were not able to win decisive battles. Himmler called the preparation of the early 1945 Soviet offensive "the biggest bluff since Dshingis Khan".



Refugee trek in East Prussia, March 1945

The first mass movement of German civilians in the eastern territories was composed of both spontaneous flight and organized evacuation, starting in the summer of 1944 and continuing through the early spring of 1945. Conditions turned chaotic in the winter, when miles-long queues of refugees pushed their carts through the snow trying to stay ahead of the Red Army. From the Baltic coast, thousands were evacuated by ship in Operation Hannibal. Since February 11, refugees were shipped not only to German ports, but also to

Nazi occupied Denmark, based on an order issued by Hitler on 4 February. Of 1,180 ships participating in the evacuation, 135 were lost due to bombs, mines, and torpedoes, an estimated 20,000 died. Between 23 January 1945 and the end of the war, 2,022,702 people were transported via the Baltic Sea, between 200,000 and 250,000 of them to occupied Denmark.



When the land evacuation routes were already intercepted by the Red Army, tens of thousands remaining Germans were evacuated by ship in Operation Hannibal. Depicted liner MV Wilhelm Gustloff was sunk by a Soviet submarine, 9,000 drowned.

Most of the evacuation efforts commenced in January 1945, when Soviet forces were already at the eastern border of Germany. About six million Germans had fled or were evacuated from the areas east of the Oder-Neisse line before Soviet and the attached Polish Army took control of the region. Refugee treks and ships which came into reach of the advancing Soviets suffered high casualties when targeted by low-flying aircrafts, torpedoes, or were rolled over by tanks. The most infamous incidents during the flight and expulsion from the territory of later Poland include the sinking of the refugee liner MV Wilhelm Gustloff by a Soviet submarine with a death toll of some 9,000 people; the USAF bombing of refugee-crowded Swinemünde on 12 March 1945 killing an estimated 23,000 to 25,000; the desperate conditions under which refugees crossed the frozen Frisches Haff, where thousands broke in, froze to death, or were killed by Soviet aircrafts; and the poorly organized evacuation and ultimate sacrifice of refugee crowded Breslau by the local Nazi authorities headed by Karl Hanke.

The Nazi German Ministry for Inner Affairs passed a decree on 14 March 1945 allowing abortion to women raped by Soviet soldiers.

### After the Soviet and Polish take-over



Soviet forces enter Danzig (Gdansk), March 1945

Many refugees tried to return home when the fighting in their homelands ended. Before June 1, 1945, some 400,000 crossed back over the Oder and Neisse rivers eastward, before Soviet and Polish communist authorities closed the river crossings; another 800,000 entered Silesia from Czechoslovakia.

Soviet troops, as well as Polish civilians and militias exacted revenge on ethnic Germans and German nationals. While many Germans had already fled ahead of the advancing Soviet Army, millions of Reichs- and Volksdeutsche remained in East and West Prussia, Silesia, Pomerania, the Sudetenland, and in pockets throughout Central and Eastern Europe.



Volkssturm to defend the Oder, February 1945

The Polish courier Jan Karski warned US President Franklin Delano Roosevelt of the possibility of Polish reprisals, describing them as "unavoidable" and "an encouragement for all the Germans in Poland to go west, to Germany proper, where they belong."

### Deportation to the Soviet Union

On February 6, 1945, Soviet NKVD ordered mobilization of all German men (17 to 50 years old) in the Soviet-controlled territories. Many of them were then transported to the Soviet Union for forced labor. In the former German territories the Soviet authorities did not always distinguish between the Poles and Germans and often treated them alike. Some 165,000 Germans were rounded up randomly and deported in 1945, they were not allowed to "return" (that is, not to their former homes but to either East or West Germany) until 1955; most of them perished.

## Internment and forced labor in Poland

In territories that belonged to Poland before the war, Germans were treated even more harshly than in the former German territories. Deprived of any citizen rights, many were used as forced labor prior to their expulsion, sometimes for years, in labor battalions or in labour camps such as Glaz, Milecin, Gronowo, Sikawa, Central Labour Camp Jaworzno, Central Labour Camp Potulice, Łambinowice (run by Czesław Gęborski), Zgoda labor camp and others. The death toll was between twenty and fifty percent, and as the guards were not paid regular salary they forcefully extracted their wage from the inmates. When Gęborski was tried by the Polish authorities in 1959 for his wanton brutality, he stated his only goal was to exact revenge for his own treatment during the war.

Zayas states that "in many internment camps no relief from outside was permitted. In some camps, relatives would bring packages and deliver them to the Polish guards, who regularly plundered the contents and delivered only the remains, if any. Frequently, these relatives were so ill treated that they never returned. Internees who came to claim their packages were also mistreated by the guards, who insisted the internees should speak Polish, even if they were Germans born in German-speaking Silesia or Pomerania."

Among the interned were also German POWs. Up to 10% of the 700,000 to 800,000 POWs of the respective battlegrounds were handed over to the Poles by the Soviet military for the use of their work force. Their number in 1946 was 40,000 according to the Polish administration, of whom 30,000 were used as miners in the Upper Silesian coal industries. 7,500 Germans alleged of crimes against Poles were handed over to Poland by the Western Allies in 1946 and 1947. A number of German Nazi war criminals were imprisoned in Polish jails, at least 8,000 remained in jail in 1949, many of them also being POWs.

## Pre-Potsdam "wild" expulsions (May - July 1945)



Refugee's trail, eastern Germany 1945

In 1945, the former eastern territories of Germany (Silesia, most of Pomerania, East Brandenburg and East-Prussia) were occupied by Soviet and Soviet controlled Polish military forces. Polish militia and military started expulsions already before the Potsdam Conference, referred to as "wild expulsions" (German: Wilde Vertreibungen), affecting between 700,000 and 800,000 Germans. The Polish communists ordered the expulsion of Germans: "We must expel all the Germans because countries are built on national lines and not on multi-national ones" was demanded by participants of a Plenum of the Central Committee of the Polish Workers Party in May 20-21, 1945. On the same Plenum, the head of the Central Committee, Wladyslaw Gomulka, ordered: "There has to be a border patrol at the border [Oder-Neisse line] and the Germans have to be driven out.

The main objective has to be the cleansing of the terrain of Germans, the building of a nation state". To ensure the Oder Neisse line would be accepted as the new Polish border at a future Allied Conference (Potsdam Conference), up to 300,000 Germans living close to the rivers' eastern bank were expelled subsequently. On May 26, 1945, the Central Committee ordered all Germans to be expelled within one year and the area settled with some 3.5 million ethnic Poles; 2.5 million of them were already re-settled by summer.

Germans were defined as either Reichsdeutsche or Volksdeutsche resembling the 1st or 2nd category in the Nazis' Volksliste, people who had signed a lower category were allowed to apply for "verification", that was to determine whether they would be granted Polish citizenship as "autochtones". Polish military drove 400,000 Germans across Poland's new western border in June and July.

Many Germans evacuated during the war were not allowed to return to their homes. Before June 1, 1945, some 400,000 managed to cross the Oder and Neisse rivers eastward before Polish authorities closed the river crossings, another 800,000 entered Silesia from Czechoslovakia, bringing up Silesia's population to 50% of the pre-war level. This led to the odd situation of treks of Germans moving about in all directions, to the east as well as to the west, each warning the others of what would await them at their destination.

## Expulsions following the Potsdam Conference



Oder-Neisse line at Usedom

After the Potsdam Conference, Poland was officially in charge of the territories east of the Oder Neisse line. Despite the fact that article 8 of Potsdam agreement from August 2, 1945 stated that "population transfer" should be performed in ordered and humane manner, and should not commence until after the creation of an expulsion plan approved by the Allied Control Council, the expulsions continued without rules and were associated with many criminal acts. While the Polish administration had set up a State Repatriation Office (Państwowy Urząd Repatriacyjny, PUR), the bureau and its administrative subunits proved ineffective due to quarrels between Communists and opposition and a far too low equipment for the giant task of expelling Germans as well as resettling Poles in an area devastated by war. Furthermore, rivalry occurred between the Soviet occupation forces and the new installed Polish administration, a phenomenon dubbed *dwuwładza* (double administration). The Soviets kept trains and German workers regardless of the Polish ambitions and plans.



Expellees from Pomerania, West and East Prussia arrive in Berlin, 1945

The waves of expulsions after the Potsdam conference must also be seen in the context of the contemporary, likewise unorganized, and resettling of displaced or homeless Poles. Polish settlers, who themselves had been expelled from areas east of the Curzon line, arrived with about nothing, putting an even higher pressure on the remaining Germans to leave. For the Germans, the Potsdam Agreement eased conditions only in one way - because now the Poles were more confident in keeping the former eastern territories of Germany, the expulsions were performed with less haste, which meant the Germans were duly informed about their expulsions earlier and were allowed to carry some luggage.

Another problem the Germans and, to a lesser extent, even the newly arrived Poles were facing was an enormous crime wave, most notably theft and rape, committed by gangs not only consisting of regular criminals but also Soviet soldiers, deserters or former forced laborers (*Ostarbeiter*), coming back from the west. In Upper Silesia, a party official complained about some Polish security forces and militia raping and pillaging the German population and a general loss of sense for right and wrong. Much abuse also came from large Soviet contingents stationed in Poland after the war. A high number of crimes committed by regular Soviet soldiers - on both German and Polish populace - had been reported, as well as a high death toll of the few Polish officials who dared to investigate these cases. Yet, Soviet troops played an ambiguous role, as there are also cases where Soviets freed local Germans imprisoned by Poles, or delayed expulsions to keep German workforce, for example on farms providing Soviet troops (for instance in *Słupsk*).



Refugees from East Prussia, 1945

The damaged infrastructure and quarrels between the Allied authorities in the occupation zones of Germany and the Polish administration caused long delays in the transport of expellees, who were first ordered to gather at one of the various PUR transportation centers or internment camps and then often forced to wait in ill-equipped barracks, exposed both to criminals, aggressive guards and the cold and not supplied sufficiently with food due to the overall shortages.

The "organized transfer" as agreed on at the Potsdam Conference only began in early 1946 and subsequently evolved in a process coordinated with British and Soviet authorities in occupied Germany in 1946 and 1947. Yet due to the lack of heating facilities, the cold winters of both 1945/46 and 1946/47 continued to claim many lives.

## "Autochthones"

Another problem that Polish authorities were faced with was the disposition of the so-called "Germanized Poles" or "autochthons." Of close to three million residents of Masuria (Masurs), Pomerania (Kashubians) and Upper Silesia

(Silesians) of Slavic descent, many did not identify with Polish nationality, were either bilingual or spoke German or Germanized dialects only. Large numbers of these had registered with the German Deutsche Volksliste during the war. While those who had signed Volksliste category "I" were expelled. The Polish government aimed to retain as many as "autochthons" as possible, as they were needed both for economic reasons and also for propaganda purposes, as their presence on former German soil was used to indicate an intrinsic "Polishness" character of the area and justify its incorporation into the Polish state as "recovered territories".

"Verification" and "national rehabilitation" processes were set up to reveal a "dormant Polishness" and to determine which were redeemable as Polish citizens, few were actually expelled. "Autochthons" not only disliked the subjective and often arbitrary verification process, but they also faced discrimination even once verified. Polish settlers coveted autochthon property, and they resented and distrusted the verified autochthons. Many autochthons fled to occupied Germany in despair at their treatment, although the situation in Germany was little better. As one Silesian wrote, "In Poland, I'm a German. In Germany, a Pole. Perhaps they should create a state for us on the moon. There we might finally feel at home."

The verification procedure varied in different territories and was changed several times. Initially, the applicants had to prove their past membership in a Polish minority organization of the German Reich, and in addition needed a warrant where three Polish locals testified their Polishness. In April 1945, the Upper Silesian voivode declared the fulfillment of only one of these requirements to be sufficient. In the areas like Lower Silesia and Pomerania, where the Polish authorities suspected only Germans, verification was handled much more strictly than in the former German-Polish borderlands. Of the 1,104,134 "verified autochthones" in the census of 1950, close to 900,000 were natives of Upper Silesia and Masuria.

### **"Rehabilitation"**

While most of the ethnic German population of pre-war Poland fled or was expelled, some were "rehabilitated" and offered their pre-war Polish citizenship back. "Rehabilitation" was offered to people who had been subject to forced labour before, spoke Polish and were rated as not constituting a threat. Once granted Polish citizenship, they were encouraged to Polonize their names, or to re-Polonize them if they had been Germanized during the war. Numbers of how many were offered to stay in Poland as Poles and eventually did are not available, but it is assumed that the vast majority had rather opted and left for Germany by 1960. Those of mixed descent from within or without the borders of pre-war Poland were also allowed to stay on the premise of Polonization, yet likewise no comprehensive data exists.

### **"Indispensable Germans"**

Some Germans were exempted from expulsion and retained because of their professional skills, if no Pole was at hand to replace them. These Germans were treated second class regarding salary and food supply. So-called "abandoned wives", whose husbands found themselves in post-war Germany and were not able to return, were compelled to "seek divorce" and were not allowed to leave for Germany before 1950-1952. The other ones retained were not allowed to leave before 1956, these measures also included the families of the retainees or the parts thereof remaining with them. About 250,000 had been issued East German passports in the 1950s, ending their former statelessness. Many were concentrated in the areas of Wroclaw (former Breslau), Walbrzych (former Waldenburg), and Legnica (former Liegnitz), all in Lower Silesia, and in Koszalin (former Köslin) in Pomerania. How many actually left is uncertain, though it is generally assumed that the majority emigrated. The German society of Walbrzych has maintained a continuous existence since 1957.

### **Repopulation**

People from all over Poland moved in to replace the former German population in a process parallel to the expulsions. While the Germans were interned and expelled, up to 5 million settlers were either attracted or forced to settle the area. The settlers can be grouped according to their background:

- settlers from Central Poland moving in on a voluntary basis (majority)
- Poles that had been freed from forced labor in Nazi Germany (up to two millions)



- Repatriates- Poles expelled from the Kresy areas east of the Curzon line annexed by the Soviet Union, who made up for less than 10% of the overall Polish population, were preferably settled in the new western territories where they made up for 26% of the population (up to two millions)
- Non-Poles forcefully resettled during Operation Wisla in 1947. Large numbers of Ukrainians were forced to move from southeastern Poland under a 1947 Polish government operation, termed Operation Wisla, which aimed at dispersing, and therefore assimilating, the Ukrainian population, which had not been expelled eastward already, throughout the newly acquired territories. Belarusians living around the area around Białystok were also pressured into relocating to the areas vacated by fleeing German population for the same reasons. This scattering of members of non-Polish ethnic groups throughout the country was an attempt by the Polish authorities to dissolve the unique ethnic identity of groups like the Ukrainians, Belarusians and Lemkos, and broke the proximity and communication necessary for strong communities to form.
- Tens of thousands of Jewish Holocaust-survivors, most of them being "repatriates" from the East, settled mostly in Lower Silesia creating Jewish cooperatives and institutions - the largest communities were founded in Wrocław (Breslau, Lower Silesia), Szczecin (Stettin, Pomerania), Dzierżoniów (formerly Reichenbach)) and Walbrzych (Waldenburg, Lower Silesia). However, most of them later left Poland.

Polish and Soviet newspapers and officials encouraged Poles to relocate to the west - "the land of opportunity." These new territories - known in Poland as the Recovered or Regained Territories - were described as a place where opulent villas abandoned by fleeing Germans waited for the brave; fully furnished houses and businesses were available for the taking.. These were the just rewards for the hardships and bitter losses of the war. The papers urged, "Go! Tomorrow might be too late."

### **Formal end of the expulsions**

After 1 January 1948, Germans were primarily shipped to the Soviet occupation zone (after 3 October 1949, the German Democratic Republic), based on a Polish-Soviet agreement. Most Germans had been expelled by the end of 1947. In entire 1948, a relatively small number of 42,700 were expelled, and another 34,100 in 1949. In 1950, 59,433 Germans were expelled following a bi-lateral agreement between the People's Republic of Poland and the German Democratic Republic (GDR), 26,196 of who however headed for West Germany. Between October 1948 and December 1950 all 35,000 German prisoners of war detained in Poland were shipped to Germany.

On 10 March 1951, the Polish "Bureau for Repatriation" (PUR) was disbanded; all further resettlement from Poland to Germany was carried out in a non-forcible and peaceful manner by the Polish state travel agency Orbis.

### **Demographic estimates**

According Polish census in 1946, there were still 2,036,400 Germans in the "Recovered Territories", 251,900 in the pre-war Polish territories (primarily eastern Upper Silesia, Pomerelia and Wielkopolska) and the former Free City of Danzig, and 417,000 in the process of "verification" as "new" Poles. The census data did not include former German citizens already "verified" as ethnic Poles, Germans in forced labor or detention camps and otherwise detained Germans, and Germans employed by the Soviet administration.

According to records, 3,109,900 Germans were expelled to the Soviet and British occupation zones and thereby registered by Polish officials between 1945 and 1950. Registration by Polish officials was not exhaustive, especially in 1945. An unknown number left without formal registration or was expelled by Soviet military authorities without notifying Polish officials responsible for statistics. Especially in 1945, many Germans returned to their former homes and some were expelled more than once.

There are estimates of 7 million expelled during both "wild" and "legal" expulsions from the "Recovered Territories" until 1948, joined by an additional 700,000 from areas of pre-war Poland. It is stated that about 5 million had fled from the former eastern territories of Germany, and 500,000 from pre-war Poland in 1944 and 1945, that another 3.325 million were expelled from the former German territories in 1946-1948, emphasizing these numbers are not exhaustive.

Approximate totals of those evacuated, migrated, or expelled between 1944–1950 from East Prussia: 1.4 million to Western Germany, 609,000 to Eastern Germany; from West Prussia: 230,000 to Western Germany, 61,000 to Eastern Germany; from the former German area East of the Oder-Neisse: 3.2 million to Western Germany, 2 million to Eastern Germany.

Of around 12.4 million Germans residing within the lands of post-war Poland in 1944, 3.6 million were expelled, one million were certified as Poles, 300,000 remained in Poland as a German minority, and up to 1.1 million are unaccounted for and presumed to be dead (killed).

About 3.5 million people had fled before the organized expulsions began, mainly driven by fear of the advancing Soviet Army, between seven hundred and eight hundred thousand Germans were affected by the "wild" expulsions, and another three millions were expelled in 1946 and 1947.

## Legacy

### Post-war

In Communist Poland, the expulsions were not to be questioned, and ideologically defended by propaganda. The anti-German argument was an important element for the communists to gain acceptance with Polish population, large parts of which were anti-communist. The expulsions were perceived by many Poles as just with respect to the former Nazi policies, injustices were balanced off with the injustices during the contemporary "repatriation" of Poles. Except for the use in official anti-German propaganda, the expulsions became a taboo in Polish politics, public, and education for decades. German expellee organizations who did not accept the post-war territorial and population changes fueled Communist propaganda dismissing them as far-right revanchists.

In the first years after the war, the bishop of Katowice **Stanisław Adamski** criticized the expulsion of Germans as inhumane. In 1965, a group of Polish bishops made a particularly important overture by sending a letter to their German counterparts in whom they asked forgiveness for the wrongs perpetrated during the expulsion and at the same time offered forgiveness for German war crimes. Attempts were made by **Znak**, a group of Catholic members of parliament, and the oppositional Clubs of Catholic Intelligentsia (**Kluby Inteligencji Katolickiej, KIK**) to attain a somewhat less ideologue picture of the Germans. This new perspective also meant dealing critically with the question of how the expulsion of Germans was to be incorporated into the self-image of Polish society.

Pre-1989 Polish historiography has in general either under-estimated or concealed the role of force during the expulsions. This was caused on the one hand by censorship, and on the other hand by the interpretation of the registration forms the expellees had signed as acquiescence to "voluntary emigration".

### Post-communist (1989-present)

Since the beginning of the 1990s, there has been a lively debate in Poland regarding the post-war expulsion of the Germans. The Polish role in the expulsions could not be contemplated in Poland until the end of the Cold War. After the signing of the German-Polish treaty on borders and neighborly relations as well as the visible congruence of Germany's and Poland's interests in a Europe which was reuniting in the first half of the 1990s, it was not only Poland's political and intellectual elites who dealt with the Polish role in the expulsions, but also larger parts of the general public. In regions from which the Germans had been expelled, Polish citizens began looking for traces of German cultural heritage and German traditions (as, for instance, a German-Polish network set up in the border regions).

In the Polish-German border and neighborhood treaties of 1990 and 1991, the term "expulsion" for the first time replaced the old and euphemistic Communist term "resettlement" or the Potsdam term "population transfer", which were used by Polish officials before. Though "**Wypędzenie**", the Polish term for "expulsion", is since widely used officially, in regular linguistic practice it is still an emotionally loaded term, not as it were, something that is being acknowledged, and closely attached to the question of "right" or "wrong". Polish and joint German-Polish scholarly research and public debates in Poland were now concerned with issues like moral examination of the expulsions, responsibility for the inflicted suffering, terminology, numbers, and whether the expellee's status was that of a political subject or object.

In 1995, Polish foreign minister **Władysław Bartoszewski** expressed regret about the suffering of innocent Germans during the expulsions in a speech held before German parliament and federative council. In 1996, Polish public opinion

research institute CBOS polled public opinion about a phrase in the letter of reconciliation the Polish bishops wrote in 1965: "We forgive and ask for forgiveness" ... 28% agreed; 45% agreed with the offering of forgiveness, but rejected that the part that asked for forgiveness; 22% disagreed altogether.

However the desire for reconciliation was tempered when shifts in German remembrance culture became evident at the turn of the millennium. When members of organizations like Preussische Treuhand prepared law suits aiming at compensation to the expelled and their descendants, many Poles feared that the importance attached to Nazi war crimes in Poland and the related Polish suffering might decrease, and that Poland would be liable for reclaimed property worth billions of euros.

In addition, anxiety is growing in Poland about the legal and moral claim to Poland's post-war territorial gains. The legal aspects have been investigated by various international law experts coming to different conclusions, prompting both Germany and Poland to employ a joint expert team that gave an overall negative answer to chances for such legal challenges. Polish government made some efforts to sue Germany for damages inflicted on Poland during World War II in return. The advancing German project of erecting a Centre against expulsions depicting the fate of German expellees is controversially discussed in Poland, and was described by former Polish Prime Minister **Jarosław Kaczyński** as "equating the victims with the persecutors." The Polish reaction was severely criticized in Germany.

Nevertheless the personal relations between the former and the modern inhabitants of these areas are often exceptional good, e.g. active members of refugee organizations are honorary citizens of their birth towns.

Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poland>