

CHANGES IN THE NATIONALITY STRUCTURE OF POLAND IN THE FIRST DECADES OF THE 21ST CENTURY IN THE LIGHT OF THE RESULTS OF THE CENSUSES (2002–2021)

INTRODUCTION

Determining the size of national and ethnic minorities in Poland in the second half of the 20th century was very difficult, mainly due to numerous migration flows, political conditions unfavourable to nationality declarations, and especially the lack of official nationality statistics (Eberhardt 1996, 2006, 2008; Sobczyński 2000; Gawryszewski 2005). The question of nationality was only included in the first post-war population census of 1946, but its results were, for a number of reasons, unreliable and unsuitable for an analysis of Poland's nationality structure at the time. It was mainly organised to determine the population losses caused by the war and occupation and to determine the size and distribution of the German population subject to displacement. The census was conducted in a very unstable, dynamic demographic situation, during ongoing resettlements of Germans, Ukrainians, Lemkos, Belarusians, Lithuanians, as well as resettlements of the Polish population from the lands occupied by the USSR. In addition, the census questionnaire only distinguished between Poles, Germans and "others", and those for whom rehabilitation or verification proceedings were underway, and therefore did not give any information on the numbers of, for example, Jews, Ukrainians or Belarusians at the time (Olejnik 2003; Eberhardt 2010; Barwiński 2015b).

In five consecutive censuses (1950, 1960, 1970, 1978, 1988), questions on nationality, native language and religion were not included. Contrary to the facts, the communist authorities concluded that after the border changes and population resettlements, Poland was transformed into an ethnically homogeneous country and the issue of national minorities became marginal. The size of the non-Polish

population was determined only on the basis of various types of more or less reliable estimates. This very significantly limited geographical research, both quantitatively and spatially, on national minorities living in Poland (Barwiński 2015a). In official questionnaires, the section on nationality survived until the late 1980s in personal forms submitted in order to obtain an identity document or passport, but this data remained the exclusive responsibility of the Ministry of the Interior, which, however, did not formally produce analyses of the nationality structure (Sobczyński 2012).

Moreover, only a few censuses in Poland, both in the 20th and 21st centuries, met all the theoretical criteria for conducting them. According to the demographer Z. Holzer (1989), a census, if it is to establish the structure of the population according to selected characteristics, must be carried out in a strictly defined time and territory by means of individual acquisition of information on the entire population under study. On the other hand, population geographer A. Gawryszewski (2005) draws attention to the four basic criteria of population censuses: universality (covers all inhabitants), simultaneity (is carried out over the whole territory according to the state on a specific date), naming (each person is surveyed by name) and directness (answers are obtained from the surveyed person).

The absence of official census data on the nationality structure of Poland in the second half of the twentieth century necessitated estimates of the size of national minorities. However, despite the unquestionable occurrence of assimilation processes, including Polonisation, among national minorities in the last few decades, they were not reflected in various estimates of their numbers. According to them, the number of representatives of the so-called traditional national minorities in Poland (such as Germans, Ukrainians, Belarusians, Lithuanians, Slovaks), starting from the 1950s, either remained at a similar level or increased slightly, although systematically. However, the dissemination in the early 1990s of estimated data on the number of members of the then numerous ethnic organisations, the continued lack of official census data and the conviction of many researchers that during the communist period the authorities deliberately underestimated the size of the non-Polish population (e.g. Sakson 1991; Eberhardt 1996; Kurcz 1997; Chałupczak & Browarek 1998; Sobczyński 2000) resulted in a marked increase in the estimated size of particular national and ethnic minorities.

2002 CENSUS

It was not until the 2002 census, which included a question on nationality, that the official size of non-Polish communities on Polish territory was presented for the first time in several decades (tab. 1).

Table 1. The nationality structure of Poland at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries – a comparison of estimates from the 1990s and the results of the 2002 census

Nationality	Estimated population before 2002 census (thousands)	2002 census results (thousands)	
		total	with Polish citizenship
Poles	–	36 983.7	36 895.2
Silesians	–	173.2	172.7
Germans	300–360	152.9	147.1
Belarusians	200–300	48.7	47.6
Ukrainians	150–300	31.0	27.2
Roma	15–25	12.9	12.7
Russians	10–17	6.1	3.2
Lemkos	50–80	5.9	5.8
Lithuanians	9–25	5.8	5.6
Kashubians	370–500	5.1	5.1
Slovaks	10–25	2.0	1.7
Vietnamese	–	1.8	0.4
French	–	1.6	1.0
Americans	–	1.5	1.0
Greeks	–	1.4	0.8
Jews	5–15	1.1	1.1
Bulgarians	–	1.1	0.4
Armenians	5–15	1.1	0.3
Czechs	1–5	0.8	0.4
Tatars	2.5–5	0.5	0.4

Source: author's compilation based on M. Barwiński (2006: 348) and Central Statistical Office (GUS) data (2008). *Wyniki Narodowego Spisu Powszechnego Ludności i Mieszkań 2002 w zakresie deklarowanej narodowości oraz języka używanego w domu*. Retrieved from <http://www.stat.gov.pl/gus/> (15 July 2008).

The question on nationality was formulated in the simplest yet very direct way – *which nationality do you belong to?*¹ This was a clear reference to the first Polish census of 1921, while at the same time remaining in line with European norms

¹ The census form defines nationality as *a declarative (based on subjective feeling) individual characteristic of each person, expressing his or her emotional, cultural or genealogical (due to parental origin) connection with a particular nation*.

and the criteria for ethnicity prevalent in the literature. The question, asked in a face-to-face interview by the census taker, was open-ended and in the form of a subjective declaration; there was no list of nationalities to choose from, nor any opportunity to declare complex, dual, gradable identities.

The census showed a small size of non-Polish population – a nationality other than Polish was declared by only 471.5 thousand people (1.23%), 444.6 thousand of whom had Polish citizenship (1.16%)². These figures confirmed the commonly held thesis that Poland is one of the most ethnically homogeneous countries in Europe³. However, despite the small minority population, Poland's nationality structure proved to be extremely diverse and at the same time fragmented. The census identified as many as 109 different minorities, both national, ethnic and ethno-regional⁴.

The most surprising result of the census was the large number of declarations of Silesian nationality – 173.2 thousand. Silesians turned out to be the most numerous minority group in Poland. The reasons for this phenomenon can be found in the historical specificity of Silesia as a peculiar Polish-Czech-German border region, its cultural and economic uniqueness, the strong awareness of the regional distinctiveness of its inhabitants, as well as in the activities of various Silesian socio-political organisations, especially the Silesian Autonomy Movement. Certainly not without significance was also the very clear reluctance, persisting to this day, of the Polish authorities to officially recognise the Silesian nationality.

Another characteristic result was the demonstration of a very small number of so-called traditional (historical) national minorities, deviating sharply *in the negative* from earlier estimates. The difference between the estimates and the census results was up to tenfold. This was the case for both relatively numerous minorities, e.g. Ukrainians, Belarusians, Lemkos, as well as numerically marginal ones, such as Tatars, Armenians, Czechs or Jews (tab. 1).

Such large differences between the 1990s estimates and the census results may indicate two possibilities: that the actual numbers of individual minorities were previously overestimated, or that they were underestimated through the procedures used during the census. Both factors seem to have acted simultaneously.

² Based on Central Statistical Office (GUS) data (2008). *Wyniki Narodowego Spisu Powszechnego Ludności i Mieszkań 2002 w zakresie deklarowanej narodowości oraz języka używanego w domu*. Retrieved from <http://www.stat.gov.pl/gus/> (15 July 2008).

³ A country is considered ethnically homogeneous if national and ethnic minorities do not constitute more than 5% of its citizens; in the case of Poland in 2002, this share was almost five times lower.

⁴ Of the 109 nationalities listed in the census, the five most numerous (Silesian, German, Belarusian, Ukrainian and Roma) accounted for as much as 88.7% of the total number of declarations of non-Polish nationality. Together with the next five minorities (Russian, Lithuanian, Lemko, Kashubian, Slovakian), they represented as much as 96.4% of all persons declaring non-Polish nationality during the census (Szczygielski 2006).

Despite the very large number of studies published in the 1990s on the nationality structure of Poland, estimates of the size of the various minorities differed greatly from one another or were contained in wide ranges, which significantly limited their reliability and cognitive value (tab. 1). This was mainly a consequence of objective and subjective problems in the study of ethnic issues, the use of different research methods and minority criteria by researchers, underestimation of the intensity of assimilation and acculturation processes, varying reliability and representativeness of research. It can be assumed that these estimates were inflated; moreover, they referred to the total number of people from non-Polish backgrounds. This meant those with a very strong national identity and those of non-Polish “origin”, with a complex, gradable national identity, as well as those who have largely lost their sense of national distinctiveness and consider themselves Poles rather than members of national minorities (Barwiński 2006; Rykała 2014).

The results were also influenced by the method of conducting the census. In 2002, for the first time in decades, the census asked a question about nationality, phrased very directly and unambiguously. Such novelty was bound to cause consternation among parts of the non-Polish population, which may have resulted in them concealing their true ethnic origin or consciously choosing Polish nationality in the case of little sense of identity with one's own minority group. Prior to the census, representatives of individual minorities, especially members of the authorities of the main minority organisations, widely criticised the inclusion of a question on nationality in the census form (Łodziński 2006). They argued that members of minorities would be afraid to officially declare their own distinct national identity, thus making the census results unreliable, underestimating the actual numbers of individual minorities.

These concerns may have been justified. It should be borne in mind that the census is seen as an administrative undertaking of the state authorities, which, in the context of the negative historical experiences of some nationality groups (e.g. Germans, Ukrainians, Lemkos, Jews) and the various kinds of personal fears associated with this, may have resulted in a reluctance to reveal non-Polish identity, especially in a face-to-face interview with the census taker. A sense of anonymity, especially in rural and small-town environments, was also a factor that may have influenced the results. Not insignificant for such a small number of non-Polish nationalities shown during the census, was the still persisting low level of tolerance and negative stereotypes among Polish society, which may have caused an aversion to declare, among others, Roma, Jewish or Ukrainian nationality.

The 2002 census, showing a small number of national minorities, showed, on the one hand, the scale of overestimation and the intensity of the Polonisation processes that took place in the second half of the 20th century, and on the other, due to the adopted method of conducting the census and the structure of the question as well as social conditions, underestimated the number of national minorities

in Poland (including Babiński 2004; Łodziński 2004, 2005, 2006; Adamczuk & Łodziński 2006; Barwiński 2006; Chałupczak 2006). Its results, like all censuses of this type in democratic countries, were based solely on subjective declarations of citizens. They did not fully reflect the national structure of Poland at that time, but they cannot be fully disregarded. They did not show the actual number of individual minorities, but rather the state of national awareness of non-Polish nationalities at the beginning of the 21st century. The data obtained during this census should be treated as minimum values, or the number of people with a strongly established non-Polish national identity (Barwiński 2015b).

2011 CENSUS

The next population census was conducted less than a decade later, in 2011, under new social, political and legal conditions, related to, among others, Poland's acceptance of obligations related to the ratification of the *Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities*, the adoption of the *Act on National and Ethnic Minorities and the Regional Language*⁵, and Poland's accession to the European Union. These events empowered minorities, who were effectively included in discussions about how ethnic data was collected. Also, unlike the previous census, this time the leaders of minority organisations were very actively involved in mobilising their communities. The next census gave hope for verifying previous data and presenting changes in the nationality structure of Poland at the beginning of the 21st century. Unfortunately, in both censuses (2002 and 2011) completely different procedures and methods of obtaining data and presenting results were used, which made it difficult, although not impossible, to carry out comparative studies.

The 2011 census was conducted using a mixed method. It was divided into the so-called full survey (prepared mainly on the basis of data from administrative registers) and a much more extensive sample survey, which covered residents of 20% randomly selected households (over 8 million people), with the intention of generalising the data to the entire population. Other novelties were the optional possibility of individually completing the census via the Internet, declaring double

⁵ The Act defined the conditions under which the Polish state may recognize a given community as a national or ethnic minority, and granted official legal status to nine national minorities (Belarusian, Czech, Lithuanian, German, Armenian, Russian, Slovak, Ukrainian, Jewish) and four ethnic minorities (Karaim, Lemko, Roma, Tatar), providing them with legal protection and a number of privileges regarding, among others, education, bilingual place names, minority languages as an auxiliary language in offices. Moreover, it recognised the Kashubian language as the only regional language in Poland (Journal of Laws, 2005, No. 17, item 141).

national identity and (only in the sample survey) answering questions about religion and native language. Data was collected from various sources: administrative registers, an online self-census, a telephone interview conducted by a statistical interviewer and from an interview recorded on an electronic device conducted by a census taker. No paper forms were used. What is much more important, similarly to the 2002 census, there were no direct visits by the census taker at all homes. This form of conducting the census, although consistent with international recommendations and using modern technologies, was also caused by the need to save money (Gołata 2013, 2018; Barwiński 2014).

According to information published immediately after the end of the census on the website of the Central Statistical Office (GUS), in the sample survey, 100% of randomly selected apartments were listed, while in the full survey, complete data was obtained for 98.9% of the population. In 2011, only 12% of the population (approximately 4.5 million people) took advantage of the option of completing the census form themselves via the Internet. In this group, the share of people from national and ethnic minorities was probably significantly higher than indicated by nationality statistics. This was a consequence of active promotion of this form of census in non-Polish communities by national minority organisations and direct assistance in completing online forms during the census. The Central Statistical Office also informed that *if a given person was not contacted by the census taker or the phone interviewer, it means that all the information required by the thematic scope had been collected from the registers, and therefore, in accordance with the Census Act, the obligation to participate in the census has been fulfilled*⁶. From the administrative registers, the Central Statistical Office could obtain a number of information falling within the scope of the questions included in the census form, but data regarding, among others, nationalities could only be collected using survey techniques, as it was unavailable in any registers. This means that if someone did not take advantage of the opportunity to fill out the census form via the Internet, was not approached by a census taker or a phone interviewer, they were not able to declare their own national identity, and the Central Statistical Office, contrary to its own declarations, could not have reliable and reliable knowledge on this topic, and thus could only produce estimated data.

The Central Statistical Office emphasised that in 86 communes with the largest (over 10%) share of national minorities (according to data from the 2002 census), the full survey covered all residents who had the opportunity to declare their own national and linguistic identity⁷. This made it possible to collect data on

⁶ Based on *Komunikat Centralnego Biura Spisowego nt. uczestnictwa w Narodowym Spisie Powszechnym Ludności i Mieszkań 2011*. GUS (2011). Retrieved from http://www.sosnowiec.pl/_upload/file/POZ_Komunikat_3006_1115.pdf (3 April 2013).

⁷ Based on *Zasady opracowania wyników Narodowego Spisu Powszechnego Ludności i Mieszkań 2011 w zakresie mniejszości narodowych i etnicznych oraz języka regionalnego*.

nationalities with high territorial concentration, such as Germans, Belarusians and Lithuanians. In turn, in several hundred communes inhabited to a small extent by national and ethnic minorities, not all residents, including minority representatives, declared their national affiliation. Moreover, this method largely eliminated the possibility of collecting reliable statistical data for highly dispersed minorities, e.g. in 2002, Ukrainians constituted over 10% of the total population in only nine communes, Lemkos in a single commune, and, among others, Czechs, Armenians, Russians, Slovaks, Tatars or Jews – in none.

Due to little interest in the online self-census and the lack of a census taker's visit to many apartments, the 2011 census did not meet at least two of the four basic criteria of modern population censuses. In terms of ethnic questions, contrary to the claims of Central Statistical Office officials, it did not meet the criteria of universality and directness (not all information could be obtained from administrative registers and not all answers were obtained directly from the person being surveyed). It only met the criterion of simultaneity, but it is debatable whether, assuming its lack of universality, it met the criterion of naming.

Ethnic questions were formulated in a completely new way in the census forms. Although the basic question was the same as a decade ago, i.e. *What is your nationality?*, it was not an open question, but included a list of 14 nationalities (Polish and 13 alphabetically arranged minorities specified in the Act⁸) and the option "other", which in turn contained a list of as many as 177 nationalities, including, among others, Silesian, Kashubian, Masurian, Ruthenian, Boyko, Hut-sul. If someone still could not find a nationality that would be consistent with their sense of identity, it was possible to enter any unlisted identification.

However, the next question was completely new, included for the first time in Polish population censuses following the suggestions of leaders of national minority organisations: *Do you feel you also belong to another nation or ethnic community?* Including this question in the census form was a response to appeals from groups of non-Polish nationalities to give people with a complex, dual national identity a chance to express it. In practice, this meant the possibility of declaring two nationalities. What is very important, it was decided that people declaring that they belonged to a minority and at the same time to the Polish nation would be included in the minority, regardless of whether the minority declaration came first or second. However, in the case of two minority declarations, the order of declarations would determine whether a person was classified as a given mino-

GUS (2012). A note of the Department of Demographic Research for the 31st meeting of the Joint Commission of the Government and the National and Ethnic Minorities. Retrieved from http://www.stat.gov.pl/cps/rde/xbcr/gus/Notatka_KWRzMNiE_22-23_luty_2012.pdf (5 April 2013).

⁸ *Act on national and ethnic minorities and the regional language*. Journal of Laws, 2005, No. 17, item 141.

ity⁹. This method of calculating the nationality structure was innovative in Poland, especially the principle of superiority of the declaration of belonging to a minority over the Polish national identity, which had a very significant impact on the results obtained during the census¹⁰.

Therefore, the nationality structure of the Polish population in 2011, unlike the 2002 census, was developed on the basis of information obtained from only 12% of participants in the online self-census, and also using a random method among the inhabitants of 20% of households and 86 deliberately selected communes with the largest (over 10%) populations of minorities followed by extrapolations and estimates for the entire population, and not based on a direct conversation during a general census. The data that the Central Statistical Office obtained from administrative registers during the census were worthless in the case of ethnic issues. This method of conducting the census, obtaining data and determining the nationality structure significantly limited the cognitive value and reliability of the results obtained (Barwiński 2014; Rykała 2014).

At the same time, it should be emphasised that among statisticians and demographers there were many positive opinions about the methodology used and the organisation of the census. They emphasised the scale of organisational and methodological challenges, improving the efficiency and quality of research, the use of administrative registers in public statistics, statistical integration of data from various sources, compliance of the methodology with international recommendations, and the use of new technologies. They also drew attention to the fact that the 2011 census was the first in the history of censuses in Poland to examine ethnic issues on such a large scale. The solutions to ethnic questions were significantly expanded compared to the previous census and, for the first time, also allowed for the identification of complex identities. Moreover, the use of an online self-census in ethnic research, also for the first time, was treated as a guarantee of safety and anonymity (Gołata 2012, 2013, 2014, 2016).

During the 2011 census, 1,467.7 thousand people (3.81%) declared their nationality as other than Polish (in very different configurations). As many as 917.3 thousand people took advantage of the opportunity to express double identity people, the vast majority of whom (871.4 thousand) declared both Polish and other national-ethnic identity, most with Polish in first place (788.1 thousand). All these people (regardless of where they placed Polish nationality) were assigned to national or ethnic minorities, which did not always have to be consistent with

⁹ Position of the *Joint Commission of the Government and National and Ethnic Minorities* of September 16, 2010, Lublin.

¹⁰ All those who declared Polish nationality first and then *the feeling of belonging to another nation* during the census were not recognised by the Central Statistical Office as Poles, but as representatives of a national, ethnic or regional minority. There were almost 788,000 such people in 2011.

their intentions. This method of calculating the nationality structure turned out to be crucial for the more than three-fold increase in the number of national and ethnic minorities in Poland in the years 2002–2011. However, 596.3 thousand people (1.55%) declared their nationality to be exclusively non-Polish, including 45.9 thousand identified with two non-Polish nationalities. Thanks to the possibility of choosing nationality from the extensive dictionary of ethnonyms included in the form or freely writing any identity declaration, a total of over 200 non-Polish national, ethnic, regional and local identifications were recorded¹¹.

Among the nationality declarations, by far the most numerous concerned the ethnic distinctiveness of regional groups – Silesians and Kashubians, but, especially in the case of Kashubians, they were expressed mainly in the second question and were largely associated with the simultaneous feeling of Polish national identity. In terms of population, Silesians completely dominated the national structure in Poland. Declarations of Silesian nationality were more numerous than all other non-Polish ethno-national identifications combined (tab. 2).

This was a confirmation of their dominant position from the previous census in 2002, but such an impressive increase in number (from 173.2 thousand to 846.7 thousand people) in less than a decade was mainly a consequence of changes in the method of conducting the census (411 thousand people declared Silesian nationality second, most often after Polish nationality), the propagation and dissemination of the idea of the Silesian nation, group mobilisation, activity of Silesian organisations and media publicity and politicisation of the issue of Silesian nationality, including the persistent denial of the distinctiveness of this community by right-wing political groups.

The impressive result obtained by Silesians during the 2011 census resulted in the intensification of the efforts of the leaders of this community, ongoing since 2002, for the formal and legal recognition of Silesian nationality, including Silesians as an ethnic minority in the *Act on national, ethnic minorities and regional languages*¹², and on recognition of the Silesian language as the second regional language, apart from Kashubian. After many appeals and legal battles, in 2013 the Supreme Court decided that Silesians could not be recognised as a separate nation. This situation has not changed to this day, and Silesian nationality is still not legally recognised in Poland. The denial of the ethnic distinctiveness of Silesians is mainly politically motivated. The national aspirations of Silesians and the activity of organisations that awaken their awareness are considered by the state authorities, especially the right-wing ones, as a threat to the national unity of

¹¹ Based on the study by the Central Statistical Office (GUS) (2013), *Ludność. Stan i struktura demograficzno-społeczna*. Retrieved from <http://www.stat.gov.pl/> (9 April 2013).

¹² Silesians meet all the conditions regarding the status of an ethnic minority contained in the Act (Journal of Laws, 2005, No. 17, item 141).

Table 2. The national structure of Poland based on the results of the 2011 census

Nationality	Declared nationality during the 2011 census (thousands)				
	total	as first	of this as only one	as second	together with Polish
Poles	37 393.7	37 310.3	36 522.2	83.3	x
Silesians	846.7	435.8	375.6	411.0	430.8
Kashubians	232.6	17.7	16.4	214.8	215.8
Germans	147.8	74.5	44.5	73.4	63.8
Ukrainians	51.0	38.4	27.6	12.6	20.8
Belarusians	46.8	36.4	30.2	10.4	15.6
Roma	17.1	12.6	9.9	4.5	7.0
Russians	13.1	8.2	5.2	4.8	7.1
Americans	11.8	1.2	0.8	10.6	10.8
Lemkos	10.5	7.1	5.6	3.4	3.6
English	10.5	1.6	1.2	8.9	9.1
Italians	8.6	1.7	0.9	7.0	7.5
French	8.0	1.5	1.1	6.5	6.8
Lithuanians	7.9	5.6	4.8	2.3	3.0
Jews	7.5	2.5	1.6	5.0	5.4
Vietnamese	4.0	3.6	2.9	0.4	1.1
Spaniards	4.0	0.5	0.4	3.5	3.4
Dutch	3.9	0.9	0.5	3.1	3.3
Armenians	3.6	3.0	2.0	0.7	1.5
Greeks	3.6	1.1	0.7	2.5	2.9

Explanations: ^a applies to all persons, both with and without Polish citizenship; ^b the data do not add up, the answers come from two questions.

Source: author's elaboration based on data from Central Statistical Office (GUS) (2013). *Ludność. Stan i struktura demograficzno-społeczna*. Retrieved from <http://www.stat.gov.pl/> (9 April 2013).

Poles. Such behavior by politicians in a country with a small number of national and ethnic minorities, towards not only the largest but also indigenous nationality, is very difficult to defend¹³ (Michna 2013; Rykała 2014; Barwiński 2016).

The results of the 2011 census also clearly indicate an increase in the sense of ethnic distinctiveness of other regional groups, not only Silesians and Kashubians. For the first time in the history of Polish censuses, the following declarations of regional affiliations were recorded: Kociewie (3.1 thousand), Highlander (2.9 thousand), Greater Poland (1.5 thousand), Masurian (1.4 thousand), Cieszyn Silesian (0.9 thousand), Zagłębie (0.9 thousand), Tuchola (0.8 thousand), Masovia (0.3 thousand), Kurpie (0.3 thousand). In the vast majority (over 90%) they were, as in the case of Kashubians, declared second, along with Polish national identity, i.e. their appearance during the census was a direct consequence of the innovative method of formulating ethnic questions.

Among the so-called traditional minorities, as in the previous census, Germans, Ukrainians, Belarusians and Roma were most numerous represented, although the Belarusian and German minorities recorded a slight decrease in number compared to 2002. In the case of all other communities with the official status of national, ethnic minorities or minorities using a regional language in Poland, there was an increase in number, but it varied greatly depending on the configuration of answers to ethnic questions. This was mainly caused by people, whose national identifications were subject to a specific rule of gradation or were not fully crystallised. In several cases (Kashubians, Jews, Germans) it was extremely strongly associated with Polish national identity (tab. 2).

Also noteworthy is the number of American, English, Italian and French nationalities shown during the census, placing these communities among the dozen or so most numerous non-Polish nationalities living in Poland. However, it should be remembered that approximately 90% of these declarations are double identification with Polish nationality indicated first (tab. 2).

The main quantitative and qualitative differences between the results of the 2011 and 2002 censuses, i.e. a significant increase in the number of individual minorities and a very clear domination of regional groups in the nationality structure of Poland, were caused to a much greater extent by changes in the census methodology, and to a lesser extent by the evolution of the sense of national identity among minority groups.

¹³ The situation changed temporarily only after liberal-left parties took power in Poland. In April 2024, the Parliament adopted a resolution recognising Silesian as a regional language, which, among other things, gives the opportunity to voluntarily learn the Silesian language in schools, use it as an “auxiliary language” in offices, or use bilingual place names. However, in May 2024, President Andrzej Duda vetoed the act, so the adopted provisions did not enter into force. In the censuses (2011, 2021), approximately 0.5 million people declared that they spoke Silesian.

2021 CENSUS

The next census in 2021, unlike in 2011, was carried out as a full survey, using only one form, and, similarly to ten years earlier, utilising a mixed method, both using data from administrative sources and data collected from respondents. In 2021, it was not only decided to continue the digital form of the census, but for the first time in the history of Polish public statistics, self-registration online became mandatory (under penalty of a fine), and the online method was recognised as the most important and basic method of obtaining information. The telephone interview was treated only as an additional and supplementary method, and data from administrative registers were still useless in the case of ethnic issues. This created challenges for the organiser of the census, the Central Statistical Office (GUS), related to the lack of digital competences of part of the society and difficulties with access to the Internet. The Central Statistical Office used various forms of communication with the public, mainly through information campaigns on social media (Kubiczek & Hadasik 2022). Minority organisations also conducted intensive information, promotional and educational campaigns. They were visible mainly on the Internet, but also in public space in the form of posters, leaflets, billboards, announcements and broadcasts in local media. Large-scale assistance was also provided, mainly to older people, in registering online and filling out the census form. In the interest of all minorities, it was crucial to ensure that as many people as possible declared their non-Polish origin during the census, because the scale and amount of support from the Polish authorities depends mainly on the size of individual minorities and their legal status. Therefore, for activists of national and ethnic minorities, the census is the most important moment of mobilisation of their communities (Popieliński 2024). Activity promoting participation in the census and declaring non-Polish identity among national, ethnic and regional minorities was clearly greater than during the two previous censuses. The wording of the ethnic questions was also not questioned. They were widely considered justified and needed, equally by the state and local government authorities, and by the minorities themselves. At the same time, the insufficient consideration of the cultural and social specificity of some minority groups in the organisation of the census was emphasised (Łodziński 2022). An additional difficulty was the fact that the 2021 census was carried out in particularly difficult conditions related to the outbreak of the SARS-CoV2 epidemic, which made it impossible to organise most gatherings, meetings, and socio-cultural events, shifting this activity to the Internet.

For minority representatives, one of the most important issues related to the census was the ability to safely and anonymously declare their own national, ethnic or regional identity without fear of stigmatisation and discrimination, especially in the local environment. The online self-census method, unpopular ten years earlier, was already mandatory and widely used in 2021, provided a sen-

se of greater anonymity and certainty of entering data into the system, which, in the opinion of many minority representatives, was not provided by census takers. The technological exclusion of part of society remained a problem (Łodziński 2022). Similar to 2011, the 2021 electronic census form contained the same two questions regarding national and ethnic affiliation, both nationality and origin, and more specifically *the feeling of belonging also to another nation or ethnic community*. These questions were intended to allow for a declaration of a complex identity, two separate national and ethnic identifications. It was positively received and widely accepted in minority communities (Łodziński 2022).

The same form and content of ethnic questions in both recent censuses should be assessed positively, because it enables comparability of data that was not available between the two previous censuses. Likewise, the principle of collecting sensitive ethnic data using a mandatory, and therefore universal, online self-census, rather than a random sample survey as in 2011, was also a very positive change. It certainly increased the credibility of the results compared to the previous census. Also, the very structure of the question about “origin”, enabling the declaration of complex ethnic identities, is justified and necessary in Polish conditions. However, maintaining the controversial principle of the primacy of declarations of minority affiliation over Polish national identity, as in 2011, significantly influenced the ethnic results obtained during the census, overestimating the share of national, ethnic and regional minorities in the national structure of Poland.

Ultimately, during the 2021 census, 1,404.8 thousand people (3.69%) declared their nationality as other than Polish. As many as 1,006.9 thousand people took advantage of the opportunity to express double identity, with the vast majority (974.9 thousand) having both Polish and other national-ethnic identities, with most putting Polish in first place (879.4 thousand). Similarly to 2011, all these people, including those who declared Polish nationality in the first place, were assigned to national, ethnic or regional minorities, which did not always have to be in line with their intentions. However, 429.9 thousand people (1.13%) declared their nationality to be exclusively non-Polish, including 32.1 thousand identified with two non-Polish nationalities.

Among the nationality declarations, similarly to the previous census in 2011, by far the most numerous ones concerned the ethnic distinctiveness of regional groups – Silesians and Kashubians, but the number of both of these communities has clearly decreased over the course of ten years: Silesians in total by 250 thousand, to 596.2 thousand (by 29.6%), and Kashubians by 53 thousand, to 179.7 thousand (by 22.7%). In particular, the decline in the number of Silesians was spectacular, especially in the two most important response categories in terms of identity, i.e. the declaration of Silesian nationality in the first place and the declaration of this nationality as the only one. In both of these configurations, the decrease compared to 2011 reached 50% (tab. 2, 3). This may prove the validity of

the assumption that during the 2011 census, the very large number of declarations of Silesian nationality was caused not only by an increase in the sense of separateness and regional-ethnic identity among this group, but also to some extent was a political manifestation, a reaction to the politicisation of the issue of Silesian nationality and an opposition to the denial of its distinctiveness by some political groups (Michna 2013).

Despite declines in numbers, both regional communities, Silesians and Kashubians, are still the most numerous minority groups in Poland, together constituting 55% of all declarations of non-Polish nationalities during the census. Silesians once again confirmed their numerical dominance, becoming the most frequently declared non-Polish nationality in the third census in a row (tab. 3).

Among the so-called traditional minorities who have legal minority status in Poland, the decrease in number compared to 2011 concerned only Germans and Roma. However, the remaining communities from this group (including Ukrainians, Belarusians, Jews, Lemkos, Lithuanians, Czechs), saw in 2021 a significant increase in numbers, especially in the case of declarations in the first place and the only declaration of nationality (tab. 2, 3). This may indicate growing group mobilisation among these national and ethnic minorities, their awareness of the importance of the nationality declaration during the census, effective information and educational activities of various types of minority organisations, as well as inhibition of the processes of assimilation and Polonisation among traditional national and ethnic minorities. This increase was certainly also influenced by a different method used in 2021, i.e. the universal obligation to take an online self-census, as opposed to the estimation of the nationality structure practiced in 2011 based on a sample survey of 20% of randomly selected households and an optional, very small participation in online self-census. With small and scattered traditional national and ethnic minorities, the last census provided more reliable and credible data.

The nationalities that can be described as Western are a peculiar minority group, very clearly and surprisingly marked in numbers during the 2021 census. These include English, Americans, Italians, French, Irish, Dutch, Norwegians, Spanish. They are characterised by a very large number, considering Polish ethnic realities (from approximately 10,000 to over 55,000), an impressive (even 4–6 fold) increase compared to the results of the census from ten years earlier, and – unlike traditional minorities – a clear domination of submitted identity declarations, together with Polish nationality, in approximately 90% of them in first place (tab. 3). A common feature of these nationalities is the fact that they are directly related to the countries that have been the most popular migration destinations for Polish residents over the last few decades. This feature may be a starting point to explain the phenomenon of the increase in the number of these communities in the current nationality structure of Poland.

Table 3. The national structure of Poland based on the results of the 2021 census

Nationality	Declared nationality during the 2021 census (thousands)				
	total	as first	of this as only one	as second	together with Polish
Poles	37 595.1	37 499.7	36 620.2	95.4	x
Silesians	596.2	236.6	187.4	359.6	385.0
Kashubians	179.7	15.2	12.0	164.5	166.8
Germans	144.2	42.6	23.5	101.6	98.3
Ukrainians	82.4	64.9	45.8	17.5	34.1
Belarusians	56.6	43.7	35.4	12.9	20.0
English	54.4	4.7	3.1	49.7	50.7
Americans	27.8	2.6	1.7	25.1	25.6
Italians	20.0	3.4	2.2	16.6	17.4
Jews	17.2	8.1	6.0	9.1	9.7
Russians	16.0	11.0	7.8	5.0	7.0
French	14.7	2.1	1.3	12.7	13.1
Lemkos	13.6	9.2	7.3	4.4	5.1
Roma	13.3	9.0	7.1	4.3	5.8
Irish	11.6	0.9	0.6	10.7	10.9
Lithuanians	10.3	8.1	7.3	2.2	2.8
Dutch	10.3	1.1	0.7	9.2	9.3
Norwegians	9.0	0.5	0.3	8.5	8.5
Spaniards	8.5	1.0	0.7	7.5	7.6
Czechs	7.8	4.0	3.5	3.8	3.7

Explanations: ^a applies to all persons, both with and without Polish citizenship; ^b the data do not add up, the answers come from two questions.

Source: Author's elaboration based on data from Central Statistical Office (GUS) (2023). *Narodowy Spis Powszechny Ludności i Mieszkań 2021. Ludność. Stan i struktura demograficzno-społeczna w świetle wyników NSP 2021*. Retrieved from <http://www.stat.gov.pl/> (9 April 2013).

Some emigrants from the first period of Poland's accession to the European Union, for various reasons, including Poland's economic development, Brexit in Great Britain, political and socio-economic changes in Western European coun-

tries, decided to return to Poland in recent years. Hypothetically, during the census, some of them, in addition to their Polish nationality, could declare the nationality of the country in which they spent many years of their lives and often also founded families. A much larger group of migrants from Poland still stays in the United States and Western European countries. The census obligatorily covered all permanent residents of Poland, including people who stayed abroad (regardless of the period of stay) but retained permanent residence in Poland. They could have completed the online census form themselves in their country of residence or their household members residing in Poland could have done it. However, it did not cover immigrants staying in Poland temporarily¹⁴. Therefore, it did not contribute to a dynamic increase in the number of economic immigrants from Ukraine¹⁵, but caused an increase in the number of people who declared English, Irish, Italian, French or Norwegian nationality in addition to, or rather after, Polish. This may be partly the result of the mixed families in which some migrants live, partly of identification with the new homeland and its society. However, this is mainly the result of the formulation of the ethnic question and the possibility of a double declaration of national identity, and especially the principle adopted by the Central Statistical Office of superiority of the declaration of belonging to a minority (in this case, Western European) over the Polish national identity. It can be assumed that a large part of the English and Irish people shown in this way in the statistical results of the Polish census did not expect such an effect from their declarations regarding *the feeling of also belonging to another nation* and would be very surprised by this effect.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

A survey such as a general census can be viewed from different perspectives: as one of the statistical surveys presenting an objective, true, scientifically grounded image of society (Gołata 2008, 2012, 2014; Kubiczek & Hadasik 2022), one can also see it as an event important from the point of view of politics, a social fact influencing social and political reality, intergroup relations, and subjective self-determination of citizens (Adamczuk & Łodziński 2002; Kertzer & Arel 2002; Łodziński 2004, 2006, 2022; Chałupczak 2006; Simon 2012; Michna 2013). One can also try to look from both of these perspectives, because they are undoubte-

¹⁴ Based on Central Statistical Office (GUS) (2022). *Narodowy Spis Powszechny Ludności i Mieszkań 2021. Metodologia i organizacja badania*. Retrieved from <https://stat.gov.pl/spisy-powszechne/nsp-2021/> (12 March 2023).

¹⁵ Even more so, it did not show any war refugees from Ukraine because it was carried out several months before the outbreak of the war. Therefore, regardless of the census results, currently Ukrainians are by far the largest non-Polish nationality in Poland.

dly complementary – the census is both a wide-ranging statistical survey and an important socio-political event that mobilises various population groups, often changing their perception and behavior.

All nationality statistics, as rightly and repeatedly emphasised by, among others, P. Eberhardt (1996, 2006, 2008), D.I. Kertzer and D. Arel (2002), G. Babiński (2004), S. Łodziński (2004, 2006, 2022), A. Gawryszewski (2005), H. Chałupczak (2006), E. Gołata (2008, 2012, 2013, 2016), P. Simon (2012, 2017), A. Rykała (2014), C. Balestra and L. Fleischer (2018), concern issues that are very delicate, subjective and difficult to measure, therefore they will always be subject to errors, they will not provide “ideal” results nor present the actual nationality structure, and their results will arouse greater or lesser emotions and controversy and require very careful interpretation. Moreover, their credibility is often the result of the methodology used and current political and social conditions, as well as state policy towards individual minorities. These theses are also confirmed by the ethnic results of the last three censuses conducted in Poland. Z. Rykiel (2006) even states that nationality statistics are apparent numbers of individual ethnic groups.

The fact is that population censuses do not provide “ideal” results, as they are unable to do so, but they nevertheless provide valuable data necessary for demographic, social and economic analyses. They are considered one of the basic sources of information about the population of a given country, not only in terms of demographic, but also national diversity. They influence state policy towards minorities, and therefore play an important social and political role (Simon 2012). Despite this, according to international standards, nationality issues do not belong to the basic thematic scope of censuses, therefore including ethnic questions is treated as optional (Gołata 2013, 2018). Questions about citizenship are common, while strictly ethnic questions: about nationality, ethnic group membership and language are more sensitive and are used in approximately 50–60% of European countries (Simon 2007).

However, in the case of Poland, the provisions of the *Act on national and ethnic minorities and on the regional language* adopted in 2005 impose the need to include questions regarding national, ethnic, and linguistic identity in population censuses. The results of general censuses are not only the basic but also the only source of statistical information about national and ethnic minorities in Poland. In the context of this Act, one of the most important legal and practical consequences of the census for minorities is the fact that its results become official data that must be followed by central and local government institutions and bodies, among others when introducing the possibility of using bilingual place names or a minority language as an auxiliary language in a given commune¹⁶. The results of censuses are thus very important for representatives of national

¹⁶ Journal of Laws, 2005, No. 17, item 141.

minorities, especially leaders of national organisations, but also for state and local government authorities (Michna 2013; Barwiński 2014, 2015b; Łodziński 2022; Popieliński 2024).

Including questions about national identification in censuses raises arguments both “for” and “against”. Ethnic issues have a subjective dimension and constitute a very sensitive social and political problem, although they usually concern small groups (Adamczuk & Łodziński 2006). This is both an ethical and methodological challenge, related to concerns about the way data is collected and used, and a practical one, related to conducting policy towards national and ethnic minorities (Simon & Piché 2011). Nowadays, arguments emphasising the need for the state to have this type of data are becoming more and more important due to the need to protect minority rights and conduct anti-discrimination activities (Balestra & Fleischer 2018).

Ethnic questions in censuses mean additional difficulties and challenges for public statistics authorities. They raise legitimate concerns about confidentiality and privacy, and any reservations in this regard undermine the credibility and reliability of the census results. It is natural to ask about the reliability of the information obtained in the census, which is a consequence of the way it was conducted, its methodology, and the formulation of ethnic questions. The answer to ethnic questions is closely related to the personal, often delicate and sensitive, subjective feelings of individual people, which are difficult to assess objectively. The social climate and the atmosphere of trust in state administration and public statistics bodies, as well as fear of using information for political purposes, are also important. Since minorities may be exposed to ethnic or religious discrimination, census procedures recommend taking all precautions to ensure adequate data protection (Adamczuk & Łodziński 2006; Gołata 2013).

Despite many doubts and sensitive issues, including concerns about maintaining privacy and undermining the credibility and reliability of the results, minority organisations in Poland, especially after the adoption of the *Act on national and ethnic minorities and the regional language* in 2005, demand the collection of ethnic information. Polish state is obliged to do it anyway. These data determine their public status, have real and practical “official” significance, increase group mobilisation, help ensure appropriate conditions for maintaining national and cultural identity, as well as their presence in the Polish public space, including participation in the social and political life of the country (Łodziński 2006, 2022; Barwiński 2016; Popieliński 2024). In the case of some minority groups, such as Silesians, they are also the basis for demanding recognition of their distinctiveness and a change in their legal status (Michna 2013).

Poland is one of the countries where the issue of nationality in censuses, within the meaning of international standards, is treated in an exceptionally comprehensive manner. Despite the relatively homogeneous national structure, ethnic issues,

especially in the last two censuses, were included more broadly than in other countries with a much more complicated nationality structure, such as France or Germany (Gołata 2013).

In 2002, after several dozen years of break in research on nationality statistics and a 45-year period of lack of freedom of speech and democracy, in the reality of a practically monoethnic country, a clear way of asking questions about nationality and a direct method of obtaining statistical data by census takers were adopted. However, social conditions, and especially the fear of some minorities about declaring non-Polish nationality, justified by negative historical experiences, contributed to the underestimation of its results, which, combined with inflated estimates of the nationality structure of Poland at that time, resulted in numerous allegations regarding the reliability of this census. At the same time, it sparked discussions and controversies surrounding Silesian nationality, which continue to this day, and influenced the adoption of many legal solutions empowering national and ethnic minorities in Poland in the following years.

In turn, the 2011 census was conducted using a very diverse method and an approach completely different from all previous ones. The scope of ethnic questions was expanded to include questions about “ethnic origin”, native language and religion. The changes were introduced mainly under the influence of suggestions and demands from national organisations. The formulation of questions regarding nationality, and especially the calculation, or rather estimation, of the nationality structure for the first time significantly overestimated, and not underestimated, its results and limited its credibility. The factor that had the greatest impact on the deformation of the results was the possibility of declaring double national identification with the simultaneous “automatic” assignment to national or ethnic minorities of people who declared the “minority” identity second, along with the dominant Polish identification. In addition, a methodology was used to combine various data sources and randomly select households for a sample survey, which forced estimates in the case of dispersed or small minorities. It may be assumed that declarations of double national identity, used together with the principle of superiority of belonging to a minority over Polish national identity, distorted the results of the 2011 census more strongly by overestimating the number of non-Polish nationalities than the method of conducting the census in 2002 and the social conditions at that time influenced the underestimation of national and ethnic minorities.

Positive changes were introduced in the methodology of the latest census, in 2021, which increased the credibility and reliability of ethnic data. The most important was the departure from a random sample survey and two separate census questionnaires, as well as an optional online self-census, and replacing it with a full survey based on mandatory online forms. The wording of the ethnic

questions was not changed, which increased the comparability of the results obtained. As in previous censuses, the concept of “subjective nationality” was maintained, according to which the affiliation of people to a national or ethnic group was determined by a free declaration of nationality of the people being surveyed. This freedom was increased by the method of universal online self-census, in which the answers are direct and independent of the influence of the environment, including the census taker. However, they are declarative and subjective in nature, which means that there will always be doubts as to whether they represent the actual situation.

With all these positive changes, it should be emphasised that in 2021, the controversial principle introduced ten years earlier of the superiority of the declaration of belonging to a minority over the Polish national identity was maintained, which, similarly to 2011, significantly influenced the results obtained during the census, overestimating the share of minorities in Poland’s national structure. Due to the adoption of such a method of summing ethnic results, in both recent population censuses, the majority of people (53.7% in 2011, 62.6% in 2021) who were “classified” by the Central Statistical Office as representatives of national, ethnic or regional minorities, declared Polish nationality first, and only then *the feeling of also belonging to another nation or ethnic community*. Despite this, they were not recognised as Poles. One can only assume that it was not always in line with their intentions. This had a very significant impact, especially on the population of regional minorities (e.g. Kashubians and Silesians) and western minorities (e.g. English, Americans, Italians, French, Irish, Norwegians), among whom over 90% declared, first of all, Polish nationality.

In terms of ethnic questions, none of the three population censuses discussed was fully reliable, and for the numerical determination of the nationality structure of Poland in the first decades of the 21st century, the varied statistical methods used during the censuses, the formulation of ethnic questions, and especially the adopted method of calculating the structure were of greater importance.

As emphasised above, no census will provide “ideal” results because no census is capable of doing so. And within each census, questions regarding nationality issues are among the most personal, sensitive and subjective, and are also strongly dependent on the census methodology and the current socio-political situation. Therefore, ethnic results will never be fully credible and acceptable to everyone, they will always arouse emotions. This does not change the fact that for many reasons, not only statistical and cognitive, but also social, it is worth asking this type of questions during the census, even though the results obtained should be assessed and interpreted very carefully.

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