

## Ethnic and racial discrimination in Poland - overview

Poland remains a relatively homogenous country ethnically and racially. According to the General Census, in 2002, Poland's population was 38 230 thousand, of which 96,74% declared their nationality to be Polish. However, since accession to the European Union, the number of foreigners and migrants settling in Poland has been increasing.

For over 15 years, the Public Opinion Research Center (PORC) conducts annual surveys on Poles' attitudes toward other nations. Research from recent years indicates the level of declared national xenophobia is decreasing. Poles increasingly declare favorable attitudes toward members of other nations. The most liked nations include Spaniards, Italians, the English and Irish. The lowest level of sympathy (or even dislike) is declared towards Turks, Romanians, the Roma or Arabs (Arabs are merged into a single category). There is a noticeable overall tendency to treat representatives of highly developed countries, i.e. the USA as well as members of the "old" European Union, with greater affinity while poorer nations decrease in popularity.<sup>1</sup>

Daily life corresponds to PORC research. Foreigners and migrants from the "wealthy West" do not encounter discrimination or intolerance from Poles. They do not have problems with renting flats, are not refused entry to clubs or cafés, which happens to foreigners from the East. They are also unlikely to experience discrimination in employment. Clearly, the fact that foreigners from the West generally tend to be highly qualified specialists employed by large international corporations or as foreign language teachers is of significance here.

The situation of people from beyond the eastern border is more difficult. The decided majority of them work illegally in Poland, though they are present in Poland legally on tourist visas. Their occupational and salary conditions are inferior to that of Poles. However, the disproportion between earnings in their states and Poland is large enough that they prefer to work here. In addition, burdensome and costly procedures for obtaining work permits favor illegal employment of aliens. The number of illegal foreign workers significantly exceeds the number of foreigners employed legally in Poland.

The problem of unemployment also concerns refugees and those with tolerated stay permits - even though their status entitles them to employment permits in Poland. Their inability to find work results from numerous factors, including prejudice, lack of Polish language skills and lack of professional qualifications corresponding to those required in Poland. Poland's high rate of unemployment further compounds these difficulties.

Aside from a lack of employment, the biggest problem is access to housing. This problem is particularly acute for persons with tolerated stay permits, the decided majority of

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<sup>1</sup> CBOS, Komunikat z badań, Stosunek Polaków do innych narodów, [*Report On Research, Poles' attitudes toward other nations*] [http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2006/K\\_148\\_06.PDF](http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2006/K_148_06.PDF)

which are Chechens. Owners are quite unwilling to lease flats to foreigners, especially those from beyond the eastern border and few foreigners can afford to purchase a flat.

Immigrants from Vietnam, Armenia or Turkey constitute a separate category among migrants. It is difficult to evaluate discrimination with respect to those groups as these immigrants function mainly within their own communities. The majority own their own businesses or work for businesses owned by their community members. Research on Vietnamese children in Polish schools indicates they do not encounter discrimination, although teachers are unprepared to work with children from another culture.

Of the national and ethnic minorities residing in Poland, the situation of the Roma is most difficult. This group has an approximately 90% level of unemployment, which results in poverty, lack of medical care and generally bad living conditions. As a group, the Roma have the lowest level of education. Assistance programs implemented over the last few years have been improving the situation to a certain degree. However, more time is needed to bear out more quantifiable results of these programs (e.g. such as increased employment). Unfortunately, instances of impermissible discrimination against the Roma by authorities still occur. Officials of gmina (county) Limanowa used funds from the government program for the Roma community to build a water supply system. However, water was not connected to Roma homes. Officials assumed the Roma would not pay for the water, so they did not build the connections.

The material situation of other national and ethnic minorities is much better. All national minorities in Poland share a sense of "historic" discrimination resulting from unresolved issues from the past, though these differ for each community. This especially applies to the Ukrainian and Lemke, German, Lithuanian and Jewish minorities. Issues of compensation or return of property confiscated from minorities and compensation for repressions against the minorities during communism remain unsettled. Protection of places of remembrance, such as cemeteries, graves and monuments as well as placement of historic symbols, are difficult and additionally very sensitive matters.

Physical racist violence most often touches persons of a different appearance or skin color. Drastic cases, such as homicide or those causing grievous bodily injury, occur very infrequently. However, hate speech, i.e. insults due to ethnic origin or calling for hate based on ethnicity, is usually of an anti-Semitic nature. Press reports about events indicating a negative role by Islamic extremists sometimes result in increased aggression against Muslims.

Polish legislation only partially corresponds to European Union standards with respect to preventing ethnic discrimination. Despite the obligations arising under EU membership, Poland has failed to implement all recommendations contained in Directive 2000/43/EC (Racial Equality Directive). Currently, Polish legislation complies with European guidelines only with respect to preventing racial discrimination in employment. Meanwhile, the

Directive requires implementation of a prohibition against discrimination also in other areas of life, such as education, social protection (including welfare and health care), access to goods and services available to the public (including housing), membership and involvement in employee or employer organizations.

Poland has also failed to establish a special institution that would promote the principles of equal treatment for all irrespective of racial or ethnic origin. In accordance with Directive recommendations, the institution's tasks would include conducting independent research concerning discrimination, publishing independent reports and formulating recommendations as well as assistance to victims of discrimination.