

Migration Trends

The Beginning

The presence of Polish people on the Australian continent dates back to Captain Cook's voyages of exploration in 1772-75, through two Polish born naturalists who were part of the expedition. The first known Polish settler to arrive to Australia was a convict named Joseph Potaski (originally Potowski) who was sentenced to seven years transportation and arrived in Port Phillip in October 1803. Potaski went on to be one of the earliest and most successful wheat farmers in Tasmania where he finally settled down. Throughout the 1800s small numbers of Poles settled first in South Australia and Queensland and later in Melbourne and Sydney.

Immigrants from Poland were first enumerated separately in the 1921 Census, when they numbered 1,780 persons, the majority of whom are believed to have been Jewish.

After the Second World War

There was a substantial expansion in immigration of Poles to Australia after the end of the Second World War, with the bulk of these immigrants being Displaced Persons (currently referred to as refugees). The 60,000 Polish refugees who were accepted in Australia between 1947 and 1954 constituted the largest group of refugees to have ever been admitted to this country at any one time to this day. Due to the fact that many of them were single men, the Polish community in Australia today has an unbalanced and atypical age profile in the older age range.

The decades that followed were characterized by only small numbers of Polish immigrants arriving to Australia, a fact that resulted in a decrease of the Polish-born population.

Solidarity Movement Wave

The second major wave of Polish immigrants, sometimes referred to as the Solidarity Movement wave due to the political changes taking place in Poland at the time of their arrival, started coming to Australia at the beginning of the 1980s. As a result of this wave of migration, in the decade between 1981 and 1991, over 25,000 Polish immigrants settled in Australia. The 1986 Census recorded almost 68,000 Polish-born persons resident in Australia, the highest number ever.

Since then only small numbers of Poles have been settling in Australia largely through the Family Reunion, Independent, Fiancée and Spouse Categories. The most recent migrations from Poland have been very sporadic, however, migration has been an ongoing part of Poland's history and its people.

21st Century

In 2001 there were more than 20,400 Polish people living in Victoria, 40.6% of whom were over the age of 65. The increase in numbers of aged Poles places particular demand on governments, service providers and relevant migrant organizations to develop appropriate strategies of response. The aim of such strategies is to aid in dealing with issues that are fundamental to this age group, such as the need for culturally and linguistically appropriate service responses, to best meet the requirements of this group.

