

# National and Ethnic Minorities with regard to the 2021 Population and Housing Census in Poland

Paweł Popieliński

Institute of Political Studies, Polish Academy of Sciences, Poland

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## Abstract

*The article is dedicated to the issue of ethnic and national minorities in Poland, shedding light on the behind-the-scenes preparations and campaigns of these minorities before and during the 2021 Population and Housing Census in Poland. In this respect, the author aims to explore a broad spectrum of minority issues. Initially, the focus is on detailing the preparation for the census, the minority registration process, and the challenges encountered on the way. To provide some context, the author begins by introducing readers to what censuses are, how many of them have been conducted in Poland, and to what extent they are significant, particularly for minorities in Poland.*

**Keywords:** Census in Poland in 2021, national and ethnic minorities in Poland

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## Introduction

In democratic Poland, in 2005, after 15 years of waiting, the parliament passed Act on National and Ethnic Minorities and on Their Regional Languages, which establishes the criteria for being recognized as a member of an ethnic or national minority. The act is designed to maintain the cultural heritage of ethnic, national and language minorities and to protect their rights, as well as to implement the principles of equal treatment regardless of a person's national, ethnic or racial origin. In other words, it codifies, regulates and determines all the rights that ethnic and national minorities in Poland are entitled to. Thanks to it, the Polish state has the opportunity to finance the cultural activities of the minorities. According to the act,<sup>1</sup> (hereafter referred to as Act on Minorities), there are nine recognized national minorities in the territory of Poland: Czech, Slovakian, German, Armenian, Lithuanian, Russian, Belarusian, Ukrainian, and Jewish. Additionally, there are four recognized ethnic minorities: the Lemkos, Karaims, Romani and Tatar. The Kashubian language has been granted the status of a regional language.

The article is devoted to the ethnic and national minorities' campaign before and during the Population and Housing Census in 2021 (at that time referred to as the census or the 2021 census). The author focuses on several significant aspects of this census, primarily from the perspective of the minorities. First, he introduces readers to what censuses are, how many of them have been conducted in Poland, and what they mean, particularly for the minorities. Subsequently, he explores a broad spectrum of minority issues during the most recent census in Poland. First and foremost,

1. See: Ustawa z dnia 6 stycznia 2005 r. o mniejszościach narodowych i etnicznych oraz o języku regionalnym [Act of January 6, 2005 on national and ethnic minorities and on the regional language], DzU z 2005 r. nr 17, poz. 141, as amended.

**E-mail addresses and ORCID digital identifiers of the authors**

Paweł Popieliński • e-mail: popielinski@isppan.waw.pl • ORCID: 0000-0001-7137-813X

attention is given to the preparation for the census and the minority campaign along with the problems and challenges encountered on the way. Due to the fact that until recently were not published the results of the census concerning the national and ethnic minorities, the author refrains from analyzing the census results in depth; instead, he only mentions their publication and general trends in the national and ethnic identities of census respondents.

The article is primarily based on a critical analysis of the sources collected during the author's research—these were mainly magazines and online portals of national and ethnic minorities in Poland.

## 1 Censuses in Poland

In 2021, the third (after 1989) census of population was conducted in Poland. In principle, such censuses are conducted every ten years. The respondents answer numerous questions concerning not only their level of education, marital status, professional standing, housing conditions, or internal and external migrations but also their ethnic and national affiliations.

In the history of Poland, between 1921 and 2021, ten censuses were conducted altogether. In five of them specifically (those conducted in 1921, 1931, 2002, 2011, and 2021), various questions about nationality and ethnicity, language, and religion were included (Strzelecki 2009; Strzelecki and Toczyński 2002). Those censuses were carried out using various methods under different socio-political conditions, which could have influenced the obtained results of demographic changes in Polish society and the evolution of the citizens' sense of national belonging.

During the communist period in Poland, the censuses conducted in 1950, 1960, 1970, 1978, and 1988 did not address ethnic issues. (No questions about nationality were included.) This omission stemmed from ideological beliefs assuming a permanent ethnic-linguistic (cultural) homogeneity of Polish society. The Polish communist authorities took it for granted that after World War II, following changes in state borders and post-war migrations, Poland was a single-nation country. The issue of national minorities was considered socially marginal (Kersten 1969, 365). The number of Polish citizens of non-Polish origin was determined only on the basis of scientific estimates (Barwiński 2015, 60–61; Kwilecki 1963).

In the early 1990s, in new political conditions and after more than 40 years of no ethnicity data collection, there was a need to have such statistical information. The first census in democratic Poland was supposed to take place at the end of the 1990s. However, due to budget problems, the decision to conduct the census was postponed until the spring of 2002.

In the 2002 census two ethnic questions were introduced, marking a significant change in the state's census policy. This change signified the acknowledgment of national and ethnic diversity in the country's population. It also marked an important moment in legitimizing the necessity for census questions in this regard, which was related not only to the need to understand the ethnic and linguistic structure of the entire society, but also, and above all, to recognize the minorities and acquire the knowledge necessary to implement policies protecting their rights (Adamczuk and Łodziński 2006).

The question about the respondents' nationality was direct, open, and in the form of a subjective declaration. At the same time, it did not provide the respondents with an opportunity to declare their complex or gradable ethnic identities. On the census form, "nationality" was defined as "a declarative (based on subjective feelings) individual feature of every person, expressing their emotional, cultural, or genealogical connections (understood as their parents' origin) with a specific nation."<sup>2</sup>

However, the announcement of including both of those questions in the census form sparked public discussion and protests of associations of almost all ethnic and national minorities in Poland. Their representatives, remembering some negative historical experiences, opposed the introduction

2. See: "Raport z wyników Narodowego Spisu Powszechnego Ludności i Mieszkań 2002" [Report on the results of the National Population and Housing Census 2002], report published by Statistics Poland on June 16, 2003, available at <https://stat.gov.pl/spisy-powszechno/narodowe-spisy-powszechno/narodowy-spis-powszechny-2002/raport-z-wynikow-narodowego-spisu-powszechnego-ludnosci-i-mieszk-2002,3,1.html>, page 39.

of the questions due to their concerns about the consequences of disclosing their nationality in the census. They emphasized that, out of fear, many people would deliberately conceal their ethnic identity, declaring their Polish nationality during the census (Popieliński 2015a; b, 40–41).

In the 2011 census, for the first time in the history of Polish censuses, the residents were given the opportunity to express their complex national and ethnic identities. Unlike in the previous census, which had asked only one question about nationality, there were now two questions, allowing the respondents to declare their multiple national and/or ethnic identities.<sup>3</sup> This was the first census in which no paper questionnaires were used. The participants could register via the Internet or seek assistance from statistical interviewers by phone, while census enumerators were equipped with special electronic devices.

The census was divided into two survey types, differing in the number of questions on the form: a comprehensive survey and a more elaborate representative survey. The latter covered the residents of 20% of selected households (approximately 8 million people), and its results were intended as the basis for generalizing the data so as to represent the entire census population (Barwiński 2014, 221). The census was conducted primarily by making maximum use of the existing registers and information systems. Data from the registers was supplemented with information obtained in both full and representative censuses.<sup>4</sup>

Just like the 2002 census, the 2011 census evoked a lot of emotions and raised fears in minority communities. This time, representatives of the minorities living in Poland expressed their concerns about the census methodology. The rules that were to be applied in determining its findings were not fully known, which may have distorted or marginalized the results. It should be emphasized that since 2010, minority organizations have been actively involved in national and ethnic issues, presenting their demands during meetings of the Parliamentary Committee on National and Ethnic Minorities (hereafter referred to as the Parliamentary Committee) and the Joint Commission of the Government and National and Ethnic Minorities (hereafter referred to as the Joint Commission).

The 2011 census altered the nature of the wording and the number of questions about ethnicity. The focus shifted towards the study of subjective ethnic criteria, often acknowledging their complex (dual) nature. The other ethnic census questions, related to the respondents' native language, religious denomination, citizenship, and country of birth, gained additional importance. The application of combined methodology during the censuses and the increase in the number of questions about ethnicity (including the possibility of mixed declarations) and language made it difficult to compare the results of the 2011 census with those of the 2002 census (Barwiński 2015, 69). There was also the problem of officially estimating the number of people belonging to particular communities with non-Polish national identification. It was to be determined by the number of declared answers to the first and second question. In a situation in which the interviewed person declared their Polish nationality in their answer to the first question and indicated belonging to a non-Polish group in their answer to the second question, they were assigned a specific non-Polish nationality. However, in a situation in which the person declared belonging to two "non-Polish" ethnic (national) groups, they were assigned the nationality declared in their answer to the first question (Gudaszewski 2015; Gudaszewski, Łodziński, and Warmińska-Zygmunt 2015).

The third population census in Poland commenced on April 1, 2021. Originally planned to conclude by the end of June 2021, it was extended until September, 2021,<sup>5</sup> due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The extension of the deadline was intended to facilitate the collection of data from individuals included in the census in the summer months, when a decline in COVID-19 cases could be expected. For the first time in the history of Polish public statistics, online self-registration was

3. See: Ustawa z dnia 4 marca 2010 r. o narodowym spisie powszechnym ludności i mieszkań w 2011 r. [Act of March 4, 2010 on the national census of population and housing in 2011], DzU z 2010 r. nr 47, poz. 277.

4. See: "Wyniki Narodowego Spisu Powszechnego Ludności i Mieszkań 2011. Podstawowe informacje o sytuacji demograficzno-społecznej ludności Polski oraz zasobach mieszkaniowych" [Results of the National Census of Population and Housing 2011. Basic information on the demographic and social situation of the Polish population and housing resources], Statistics Poland, study prepared for the Demographic Congress on March 22-23, 2012, available at [https://stat.gov.pl/download/cps/rde/xbcr/gus/lu\\_nps2011\\_wyniki\\_nsp2011\\_22032012.pdf](https://stat.gov.pl/download/cps/rde/xbcr/gus/lu_nps2011_wyniki_nsp2011_22032012.pdf), page 3.

5. See: Ustawa z dnia 9 sierpnia 2019 r. o narodowym spisie powszechnym ludności i mieszkań w 2021 r. [Act of August 9, 2019 on the national census of population and housing in 2021.], DzU z 2019 r., poz. 1775.

made mandatory. Every resident of Poland was obliged to register through an interactive web application available on the website of the Central Statistical Office<sup>6</sup> (hereafter referred to as GUS—an abbreviation for the Polish name *Główny Urząd Statystyczny*) in so-called online self-registration. This method was regarded as the primary method of obtaining census information, although telephone interviews or interviews with enumerators were conducted as well.

The census included all Polish citizens living in Poland and foreigners living permanently or staying temporarily on 31 March 2021 in the country's territory (regardless of their registration status in Poland). Additionally, Polish citizens staying abroad who had not deregistered their permanent residence in Poland due to their permanent departure abroad, as well as homeless people, were included.

Similarly to the 2011 census, in the 2021 census form two questions about the respondents' national and ethnic belonging were included. Those questions were designed in such a way as to permit the respondents to express two distinct national and ethnic affiliations. However, it is important to note that only one nationality could be declared in response to each question. The form also included a question about the language used on a daily basis at home. However, there was no longer a question about the "mother tongue", which had been included in the 2011 census survey. Additionally, there were questions about the respondents' citizenship and country of birth (based on current state borders). The respondents had the option to voluntarily answer the question about their religious denomination. An explanation and official guidelines on how to answer those questions were included in the available guidance material for online self-registration.<sup>7</sup>

It should be noted that the census results including citizens' declarations are determined by the methods of collecting and counting data. In the last three censuses, various types of census methodologies were used, mainly in terms of ethnic issues. Therefore, the changes in the methodology of the last three censuses make the measurements comparable only to a limited extent, which can be interpreted as a limitation to the knowledge and understanding of the minority communities.

## 2 Why conduct censuses and what significance do they have?

Censuses are regarded as fundamental sources of information about a country's population and ethnic diversity (Krywult-Albańska 2012, 275–276). They constitute significant social and political events, crucial for both census organizers, such as government agencies (in the case of Poland, this is the GUS), and all the individuals listed. They hold particular importance for the communities of national and ethnic minorities residing in a given country.

Data collected during a census always plays an important social and political role. It influences the state's policy towards these communities, shaping their public presence and determining the strength of their activity. This is particularly true for data obtained from censuses that include information about the national and ethnic identity, language, religion, citizenship, and country of birth. This information is often the primary and only source of statistical information about the ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity of a given country's population (Simon 2012, 1368). Other methods of collecting data on this topic, such as sociological surveys, do not encompass all ethnic groups due to their small number or dispersion across the country (Balestra and Fleischer 2018, 15–19).

Based on the census results, the Polish government is obliged to implement not only the provisions of Act on Minorities but also those outlined in the Constitution and The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and Framework Convention of the Council of Europe for the Protection of National Minorities. First and foremost, this pertains to co-financing the cultural life of minorities, which is primarily related to cultivation and development of their cultural heritage and supporting their association activities, including cultural events and others. Additionally, the support involves minority education, such as teaching minority languages in educational institu-

6. [Current official English name of GUS is Statistics Poland—Ed.].

7. See: Wytyczne do samospisu w Narodowym Spisie Powszechnym 2021 [Guidelines for self-collection in the 2021 National Census] published by Statistics Poland, available at [https://spis.gov.pl/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/NSP2021\\_Wytyczne-do-samospisu\\_20210311\\_jezyk-polski.pdf](https://spis.gov.pl/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/NSP2021_Wytyczne-do-samospisu_20210311_jezyk-polski.pdf), pages 32–34.

tions and using bilingual names or minority languages as auxiliary languages in municipal offices. However, it is worth noting that most minorities in Poland may face challenges in utilizing these provisions due to their small size or dispersion in a given area (Popieliński 2013, 131–132).

The 2021 Population and Housing Census in Poland, like the two previous censuses, posed a significant challenge for individuals declaring a nationality and/or ethnic identity other than Polish. For representatives, leaders, and other activists of national and ethnic minorities, censuses present a crucial time for the mobilization of their ethnic group. They provide the minorities with a special opportunity to work on awakening their identity and fostering mobilization among their communities, encouraging as many people as possible to declare their minority identity. The intensification of discussions about a group's status and national belonging before and during the census stimulates the crystallization of the identity of its members. It is also a significant factor that makes identity issues a subject of reflection and prompts answers to such important questions as “Who am I?” “What is my nationality?” and “What language do I speak every day?” For people belonging to the majority, such questions may seem simple and obvious, but for individuals from minority communities, they are often complex and not always easy to answer.

One of the fundamental concerns of a census is assessing the reliability of the obtained data and determining whether the answers to ethnic questions are consistent with individuals' personal and established beliefs about their nationality, language, and religion. It should be remembered that carrying out a census and obtaining reliable results largely depends on the minority's sense of security and a positive social atmosphere. On the one hand, census results can reflect the state and condition of individual communities; on the other hand, they are influenced by the state's policy towards minorities, public sentiment, and the methods of preparing, promoting and conducting the census.

### 3 Fears and expectations—the census as perceived by the minorities

The 2021 census, similarly to the two previous censuses, presented considerable challenges to national minorities and ethnic communities in Poland. Those challenges were not only related to specifying the minorities' national and ethnic identification, language, and religion but also to cooperation with the GUS and the online self-registration method (Gołata 2018, 77–83).

The census questions about ethnicity no longer aroused as much criticism as during the previous two censuses. Generally, they were considered useful from the perspective of financing cultural activities, implementing the regulations included in Act on Minorities, and attempting to demonstrate the existence and number of minority groups. This is evidenced by the scale of preparation and mobilization for the census, and especially by the number of the activities organized and media initiatives undertaken within minority communities that promoted the idea of the census and encouraged conscious participation in it. It should be noted, however, that there were fears of declaring one's minority identity, particularly among older individuals in minority communities, due to potential stigmatization and other adverse consequences. Historical conditions had caused some people belonging to minorities, especially older individuals, to be afraid to openly declare their identity during the censuses.

Minority communities closely monitored the preparations for the 2021 census. Discussions about conducting the census and the questions included in it, particularly those related to identity, language, and religion, took place during several meetings of the Joint Commission at the parliamentary committee forum.

In this context, it should be mentioned that in January 2021, representatives of the GUS, during the meetings of the Joint Commission and the Parliamentary Committee, outlined plans to promote the census among minority communities. The census was intended to be promoted in minority and regional media, mainly in order to disseminate information about the obligation to participate in the census to all citizens. One of the GUS's ideas was a “census ambassador”: a designated person cooperating with minority communities and promoting the census among them. On March 2, 2021, an important online meeting of the Joint Commission representing minorities, the management of the GUS, and the directors of provincial statistical offices was held.



On all those occasions, minority representatives alerted GUS representatives to potential issues in conducting the census, particularly those concerning national and ethnic matters. They also expressed the expectations of minority communities regarding the preparation and execution of the census, emphasizing the importance of ensuring that the data collected on ethno-linguistic declarations during the census would not lead to stigmatization of the respondents. They called for activities aimed at minority communities to ensure the census produced the most reliable results, emphasizing the significance of reflecting a true picture of reality in the census results.

A few weeks before the census began, representatives of national and ethnic minorities in Poland noted that the GUS lacked specific measures to promote the census in those communities. The representatives were particularly critical of the absence of information materials promoting the census in minority languages. After the census began, the website of the GUS still lacked such materials in German and several other minority languages (Urban 2021).

The preparation of informational census materials in minority languages by the state body (the GUS) was extremely important for the minority communities. While individuals belonging to the minorities typically have a good command of Polish, the creation of such materials holds symbolic significance for these communities. It demonstrates to minority members that their language and identity are acknowledged and accepted by the state, serving as an encouragement for them to openly declare their identity and language during a census.

Among the minorities, there were fears not only about the promotion of the census and its reliability but also about its technical security. In addition, there were serious concerns regarding self-registration, as older people often found it difficult to fill out the online census form by themselves. Also, many citizens did not have access to the Internet. Despite the assurances of the GUS that in each commune office a room would be prepared for residents without access to the Internet, where they could self-register and receive technical support, minority representatives were quite skeptical about it, pointing out the people's unwillingness to use that solution for fear of losing anonymity or being unable to answer the questions freely.

Because of that, before the upcoming census, many people from the minority communities did not know how it would be carried out and what it was supposed to entail exactly. Consequently, representatives of those communities began educating their members, using all available means, about the importance of the census and the way it should be filled out.

They began their census campaigns several months before the 2021 census. Through those campaigns, they aimed to reach as many people as possible, including not only the members of their organizations (especially those who might have difficulty defining themselves during the census) but also individuals who did not belong to those organizations but had non-Polish origins.

It is worth mentioning that, especially during the census, there was criticism of the way the answers to the identity questions on the census form were constructed. In particular, the criticism concerned the necessity to find and indicate a nationality from among those listed in subsections "a" to "n" (which included Polish nationality and all recognized national and ethnic minorities) and then go to the "other" option to find or manually enter the ethnonym of one's ethnic-national affiliation.

## 4 Preparations and the census campaign

In the interest of all minorities, it is crucial to ensure that as many people as possible acknowledge their roots during censuses. The amount of support from the Polish authorities depends on the number of the censuses organized by them. Minority organizations actively participate in promoting the censuses, recognizing their significance for their communities. Despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, which diverted public attention from ethnic issues and the census, minority organizations made efforts to conduct a vigorous information campaign encouraging people to declare their minority identification during the census. Preparations began at least several months before the census, no later than January 2021. The minorities started publicizing the census through their own organizational methods and channels, primarily using websites and social networks due to the ongoing pandemic, as that method was deemed the most advisable (safe) and effective. The organizations focused on creating original promotional materials for the census campaign.

The significance of the census for the minorities was evident in the preparations made by minority organizations and their efforts to develop appropriate ethnic strategies for the census. This was particularly noticeable in minority magazines and social media, which focused on determining the appropriate answers to ethnic questions to accurately define the respondents' common national and ethnic identity. The authorities of those organizations and their leaders (e.g., Bernard Gaida, chairman of the umbrella organization of the German minority in Poland) published special census appeals to their members (and non-members) in the minority mass media. They emphasized the necessity to provide answers to census questions about one's nationality and native language, and also specified which identity option should be selected along with a justification for a given choice, thus formulating a census identity strategy. It is worth mentioning that for some minorities (such as Ukrainian, Belarusian, or Tatar), religious issues were an important part of that strategy.

During the census, various types of census information and mobilization strategies were used. Two types of campaigns were employed: top-down and bottom-up. The top-down campaigns were based on the activity of minority organizations, including large groups, such as the Germans, Kashubians, and Silesians, as well as smaller communities, such as the Ukrainians, Russians, and Tatars. The bottom-up campaigns extended beyond the organizational structure, appealing to social activity and relying on volunteering, especially involving young people from groups such as the Lithuanians, Belarusians, Lemkos, Mazurians, and Vilamovians. It should be noted that it was not only the recognized minorities but also other groups demanding a change in their status, as well as those seeking visibility in the public space, that were active (Mieczkowski 2022).<sup>8</sup> In addition, minorities such as the Silesians or Mazurians do not have a regulated legal status, which puts them in a more difficult (e.g., organizational and financial) situation than the officially recognized minorities in Poland.

Minority organizations, including minority magazines, actively participated in preparing and disseminating information about the upcoming and mandatory census self-registration. One of the key elements of the promotional campaigns was the creation of informational materials about the census in minority languages. The census information was often presented bilingually, in both Polish and a minority language. A graphic form of information, such as census posters prepared by the GUS in the languages of the recognized minorities, was used. However, it should be noted that the GUS was late in having the posters and information leaflets about the census translated into minority languages, especially into German. The minorities themselves created their own posters, which were printed and shared on the Internet.

On the websites and Facebook profiles of those organizations, special census tabs were created, where the latest information about the census was posted. This included details about various census events, organizational meetings, notable individuals who had already completed self-registration, and interviews with minority leaders and "celebrities." Those updates served as important evidence of the legitimacy of participating in the census and choosing a specific identity option.

Minority organizations, mainly representing the Germans, Kashubians, and Silesians, launched a broad promotional campaign for the census, visible not only on the Internet but also in the public space of their regions in the form of posters, leaflets, billboards, advertisements in the local press, or special broadcasts in local radio and television stations. Some of them prepared special videos promoting the census, which were available on YouTube.<sup>9</sup>

Minority organizations paid special attention to assisting elderly and disabled individuals, especially in completing online self-registration. To facilitate this, special jobs were introduced in the offices of minority organizations in order to assist people facing difficulties with self-registration. Those in need of support could personally visit the organizations' offices. Additionally, individuals,

8. See also: "Niech nas zobacz!" Mniejszości narodowe i etniczne w Polsce wobec spisów powszechnych ["Let them see us!" National and ethnic minorities in Poland in the face of general censuses] video presentation by Marta Raczyńska-Kruk and Małgorzata Wojtaszczyk, October 25, 2021, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gQcE7N1qaXQ>, accessed 2023-10-18.

9. For example: Pyszne sia Lemkamy, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pSCjiKUk2-g> (published on July 9, 2021); Jo!/Tak! Jô jem Kaszëba/Mikołaj Rydygier/Narodowy Spis Powszechny Ludności i Mieszkań 2021 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Jcp3qKpmV8> (published on April 7, 2021); A co by było gdyby...? - Spis Powszechny 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wt337oy0oMY> (published on March 31, 2021), all accessed 2023-10-19.



**Figure 1.** Campaign material promoting the census among the German minority. #You count. What is your story?

Source: Website of Association of German Social and Cultural Societies and Volkszählung 2021 / NSP 2021 (fanpage of the German minority on Facebook).



**Figure 2.** Campaign material promoting the census among the Kashubian minority

Source: Website of the Kashubian-Pomeranian Association.



**Figure 3.** Campaign material promoting the census among the Silesian (minority) community

Source: Website of the Uotwarty Ślůnsk.



particularly those from the organizations' management boards and their young members, were delegated to the homes of the respondents requiring assistance.<sup>10</sup> Many people also sought help from their families or neighbors during the census.

## 5 Census results

The census concluded on September 30, 2021. Nevertheless, information regarding the number of people who had declared a non-Polish nationality and used a non-Polish language at home was not immediately available. The General Statistical Office (GUS) was expected to announce the results concerning the national and ethnic minorities in autumn 2021. However, this did not occur (Krzyk 2022; Urban 2022). Representatives of the national and ethnic minorities expressed their serious concern about the lack of such a publication. In their view, the prolonged waiting for the results had a negative impact on the minority communities' already limited trust in state statistics. This may result in a decreased interest in participating in the next census and giving truthful answers to ethnic questions.

The first, incomplete, results were presented at the meeting of the Parliamentary Committee in December 2022, more than a year after the census. Those results included only the basic division into "Polish" and "non-Polish" nationality and mother tongue, as well as a large numerical category of "undetermined" results (i.e., missing data, which included Polish residents who had not answered the question about their national and ethnic belonging or had not participated in the census survey).<sup>11</sup> The publication of those results sparked a widespread discussion within the minority communities about the possible reasons for the delay in presenting the complete census results. Some suggested a political reason, arising from the fear that the results could be inconvenient for those in power, although representatives of the GUS strongly rejected this argument. A more comprehensive publication of the results was announced for April 2023.

The GUS's presentation of the ethnic and language results in April met with a similar reaction in the minority communities as before—i.e., in December 2022. The lack of comprehensive census results raised concerns about the reliability of the survey and the intentions of the institution that had conducted it. According to the published results, individuals with Polish national identity amounted to nearly 37,150,000, constituting 97.7% of the total population of Poland. Those who had declared a non-Polish nationality accounted for nearly 1,340,000, or 3.5%. Preliminary data indicate a continuing sense of ethnic distinctiveness in regional communities in Poland. The most numerous national-ethnic declarations, apart from those of Polish identity, include Silesian, Kashubian, German, Ukrainian, Belarusian, and English nationalities.<sup>12</sup> The vast majority of Polish citizens use Polish at home (almost 37,430,000—i.e., 98.4% of the total population) and most of them (close to 35,890,000—i.e., 94.3%), use it as their only language. The most frequently mentioned languages other than Polish were English, Silesian, German, Kashubian, Russian, and Ukrainian.<sup>13</sup>

10. See: "Ważne pytania" [Important questions] by Bogna Piter, article published in 2021 at Association of German social-cultural societies in Poland [Verband der deutschen sozial-kulturellen Gesellschaften in Polen] website (<https://vdg.pl/>), accessed 2023-10-19 [currently not available—Ed.].

11. See: Pełny zapis przebiegu posiedzenia Komisji Mniejszości Narodowych i Etnicznych (nr 65), z dnia 13 grudnia 2022 r. [Full record of the meeting of the Committee on National and Ethnic Minorities (No. 65) of December 13, 2022], Kancelaria Sejmu, Biuro Komisji Sejmowych, available at <https://orka.sejm.gov.pl/zapisy9.nsf/0/8A329A5C6D17929FC125892100383DF4/%24File/0333309.pdf>, pages 5–7; Wyniki Narodowego Spisu Powszechnego Ludności i Mieszkań 2021 w zakresie ludności oraz struktury narodowo-etnicznej. Materiał na posiedzenie Komisji [Results of the 2021 National Census of Population and Housing in terms of population and national and ethnic structure. Material for the meeting of the Committee].

12. See: "Wstępne wyniki Narodowego Spisu Powszechnego Ludności i Mieszkań 2021 w zakresie struktury narodowo-etnicznej oraz języka kontaktów domowych" [Preliminary results of the 2021 National Census of Population and Housing in terms of national-ethnic structure and language of household contacts], Statistics Poland, April 11, 2023, available at <https://stat.gov.pl/spisy-powszechne/nsp-2021/nsp-2021-wyniki-wstepne/wstepne-wyniki-narodowego-spisu-powszechnego-ludnosci-i-mieszk-2021-w-zakresie-struktury-narodowo-etnicznej-oraz-jezyka-kontaktow-domowych,10,1.html>, page 2.

13. See: Pełny zapis przebiegu posiedzenia Komisji Mniejszości Narodowych i Etnicznych (nr 70), z dnia 11 kwietnia 2023 r. [Full record of the meeting of the Committee on National and Ethnic Minorities (No. 70) of April 11, 2023], Kancelaria Sejmu, Biuro Komisji Sejmowych, available at <https://orka.sejm.gov.pl/zapisy9.nsf/0/97129E5942772F8CC125899F0048302C/%24File/0363709.pdf>, page 6.

On September 28, 2023, the GUS published the first tables with final results regarding the respondents' national-ethnic affiliations and mother tongues. The most frequently declared national and ethnic identities were as follows: Silesian—over 566,000; Kashubian—close to 180,000; German—over 144,000; Ukrainian—almost 82,500; Belarusian—over 55,500; English—close to 54,500. However, the languages most frequently used at home, apart from Polish, were English (714, 000), Silesian (over 412,000), German (close to 208,500), Kashubian (nearly 87,500), Russian (close to 58,500), and Ukrainian (over 47,000).<sup>14</sup>

The results presented by the GUS were described as preliminary or partial because there was still no data on the number of people belonging to a given nationality by counties and communes. The final results including analyses related to this thematic area and more detailed summaries of the results, along with information on the methodology of data processing, were presented on November 27, 2023. However, on December 20, 2023, two additional detailed reports were published.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, it can be assumed that all minority census data have already been published.

## Conclusion

Censuses are likely to contribute to the strengthening and development of minority identity since before and during them minority groups are mobilized to declare their identity and language. For many people, this serves as an impulse for deeper reflection on their own identity, potentially leading to their conscious decisions regarding identity issues in the future.

In the case of the 2021 census in Poland, the aim of the information and mobilization campaigns was to achieve the best possible results by encouraging people to participate in it. This was especially important to those members of ethnic groups who may have had difficulty defining themselves, as well as unaffiliated persons of non-Polish origin, who were not associated with any organizations. The campaigns were accompanied by ethnic activism related to the fear of “ethnic dilution” in Polish society.

Compared to the previous censuses, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the associated limitations had a disorganizing effect on the activities of national and ethnic minority organizations, as well as communities using regional languages. This was due to restrictions on gatherings, public meetings, cultural events, and others. Because of those challenges and the predominant use of online self-registration as the main census technique, there was a significant ethnic revival on the Internet.

The role of the websites of minority organizations and social media as sources of information about the census, including instructions on how to answer its questions, greatly increased. They became the primary information channels, at the same time hosting discussions about census ethnic strategies. Those platforms facilitated the exchange of census information and experiences related to the organization of the campaigns aimed at encouraging members of the minorities to declare their identification. Importantly enough, they also contributed to the integration of minority communities. Those websites served as places for digitally mediated ethnic identity politics (Khazraee and Novak 2018, 3-4). During the minority census campaigns and the census itself, there was also a crucial awareness of demographic challenges, which emphasized the importance of promoting the census among both the youth and the older generation of a given community.

Additionally, representatives and ordinary members of the minorities were highly critical of the preparation of the census by the GUS, and, in particular, of the prolonged waiting time for official, detailed, and complete results regarding the answers to the ethnic questions, which were finally published at the end of December 2023. This data will enable a full and detailed analysis of the issue of national and ethnic identification during the census of 2021. It will also contribute to the knowledge about the current national and ethnic structure of the Polish population and support the implementation of the Polish minority policy in accordance with the provisions of Act on Minorities.

14. See: *Tablice z ostatecznymi danymi w zakresie przynależności narodowo-etnicznej, języka używanego w domu oraz przynależności do wyznania religijnego* [Tables with final data on national and ethnic affiliation, language spoken at home and religious affiliation], Statistics Poland, available at <https://stat.gov.pl/spisy-powszechne/nsp-2021/nsp-2021-wyniki-ostateczne/tablice-z-ostatecznymi-danymi-w-zakresie-przynaleznosci-narodowo-etnicznej-jezyka-uzywanego-w-domu-oraz-przynaleznosci-do-wyznania-religijnego,10,1.html>.

15. See: *Tablice z ostatecznymi danymi...*, op. cit.

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