

UNDER THE AFRICAN SUN



In the nineteenth century, scientific and research expeditions as well as Catholic missionary activities led to a better understanding of Central Africa. Unexpectedly, as a result of hostilities during the Second World War, fate brought thousands of Poles to South East Africa. Fleeing the war, Poles ended up in Kenya, Southern Rhodesia (today's Zimbabwe), Northern Rhodesia (today's Zambia), Uganda, Tanganyika (today's Tanzania), and the Union of South Africa (today's South Africa). At that time, these countries were under the protectorate of Great Britain and varied in their degree of independence.

There were also Polish soldiers in the Union of South Africa, who were deployed in the military hospitals of Johannesburg, Pietermaritzburg, and Durban. Soldiers of the Polish Armed Forces also received military training in the Union of South Africa.

📍 Marabou storks overlooking an area that used to be Polish refugee settlements, Zimbabwe (Photo: Alamy/BE&W)

📍 Kilimanjaro (Photo: Alamy/BE&W)



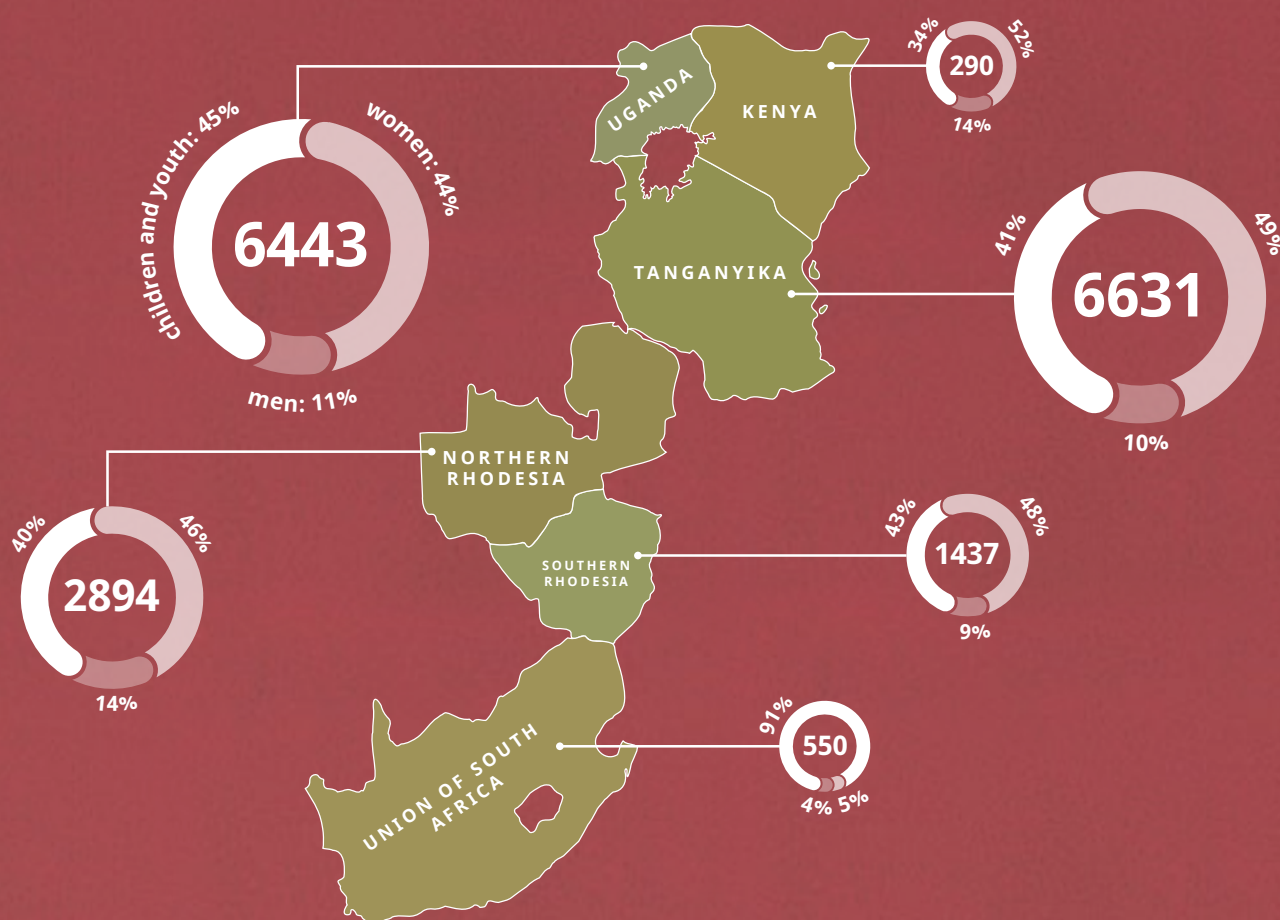
DISPERSED



📍 The opening of the Polish House on 3 May Constitution Day. Nairobi, Kenya, 3 May 1943 (Photo: Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum in London, courtesy of the KARTA Center Foundation)

The Polish population in East and South Africa, 3 December 1944

(based on: J. Wróbel, *Uchodźcy polscy ze Związku Sowieckiego 1942–1950*, Łódź 2003, p. 160)



📍 Polish women in Oudtshoorn, Union of South Africa (South Africa), 1940s (Photo: Archives of Center for Documentation of Deportations, Expulsions and Resettlements of the Pedagogical University of Krakow)



INTO THE UNKNOWN

As early as 1941, Poles arrived in Northern Rhodesia from Cyprus, where they had gone following the outbreak of the Second World War along an evacuation route which led through Romania and the Balkan countries.

The group was located, among others, in the Fort Jameston and Livingstone housing settlements. It is estimated that about 429 Poles displaced from Cyprus found refuge in this country.

The first ships of refugees from the Soviet Union reached the African continent on 27 August 1942. About 1,400 people ended up in settlements in Tanganyika and Uganda. In total, it is estimated that over 18,000 Polish citizens were transferred to 22 Polish settlements in South-East Africa.

📷 Poles beside a train. East Africa, 1943 (Photo: Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum in London, courtesy of the KARTA Center Foundation)



📷 Mombasa, Kenya (Photo: Alamy/BE&W)

📷 Mombasa (Photo: Archives of the Center for Documentation of Deportations, Expulsions and Resettlements of the Pedagogical University of Krakow)



LIVING CONDITIONS

Living conditions varied greatly. Some of the refugees lived in buildings resembling beehives, others were placed in ordinary houses with rectangular walls made of clay, and some in houses built of bricks.

Apart from residential buildings, the settlements also had a communal kitchen, administration buildings and the flat of the settlement commandant. There were also common rooms, religious buildings, small shops and craft workshops. As the settlements grew, more buildings were erected and schools opened.



Boys sit on a donkey surrounded by locals from around Lake Victoria. Koja, Uganda 1942-1948 (Photo: Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum in London, courtesy of the KARTA Center Foundation)

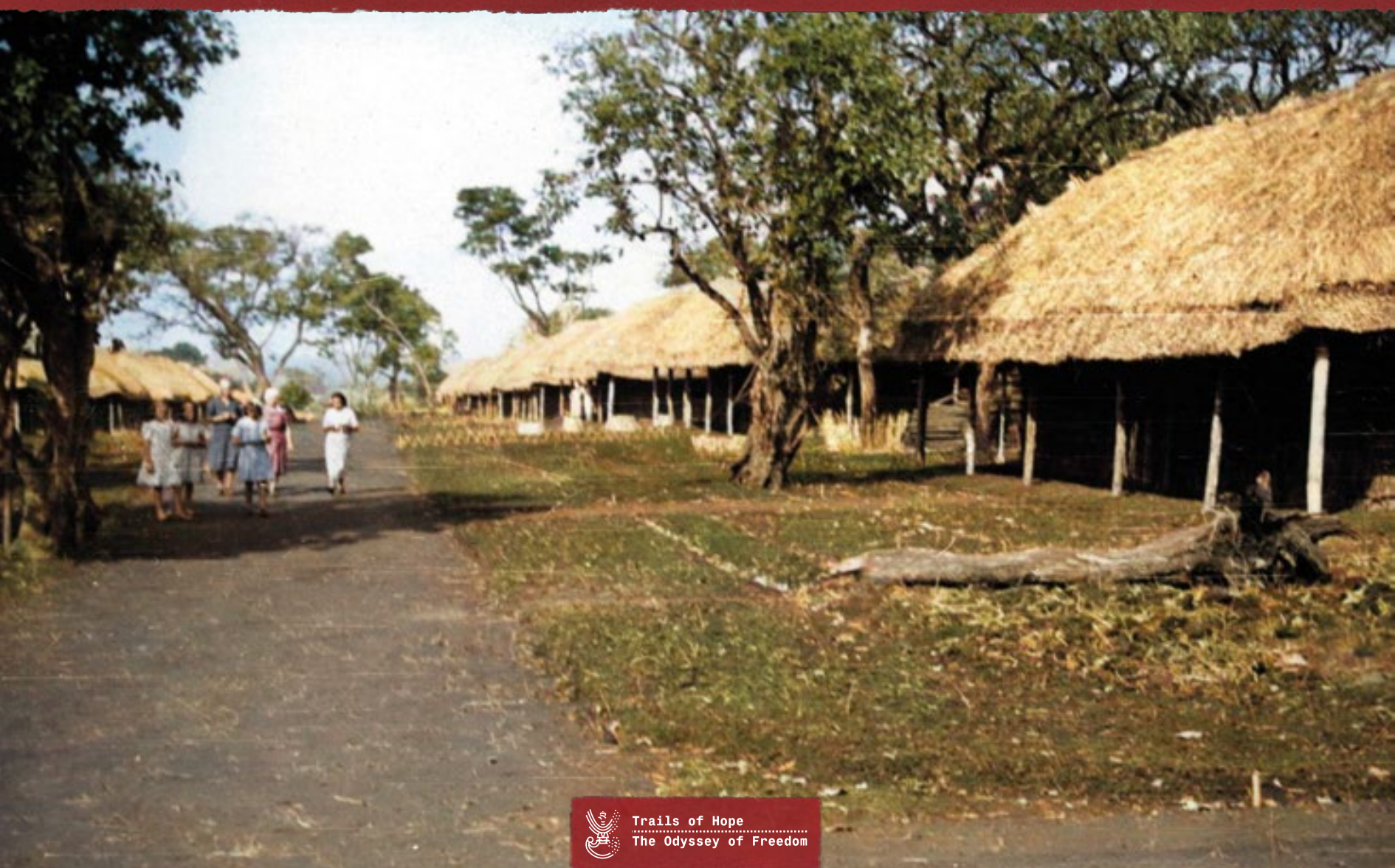
A woman in a farmyard. Rusape, Southern Rhodesia, 1943-1946 (Photo: Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum in London, courtesy of the KARTA Center Foundation)



The houses [...] were mostly masonry-built, they had a brick floor, thatched roofs. The bed was actually very primitive. There was no glass in the windows, they only had these, what could I call them, wooden shutters. These were shut at night. The climate was different there. The nights were very cool, the rainy season came once a year.

Archives of Center for Documentation of Deportations, Expulsions and Resettlements of the Pedagogical University of Krakow, Interview with Wiesława Świercz, conducted by Alicja Śmigieliska and Dr. Hubert Chudzio, Leeds, 12 April 2013

Polish settlement in Masindi, Uganda, December 1942 (Photo: Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum in London, courtesy of the KARTA Center Foundation)



EVERYDAY LIFE

📷 Bakery workers with bread. Tengeru, Tanganyika, 1942–1950 (Photo: Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum in London, courtesy of the KARTA Center Foundation)

📷 Shoemaker repairs shoes. Ifunda, Tanganyika, 1942–1943 (Photo: Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum in London, courtesy of the KARTA Center Foundation)



The adults worked for the settlement – they ran farms, staffed the communal kitchen, and worked with small crafts. They also tried to organize their free time, for example, in cafes, community centres, and even libraries. The people could go dancing, see a theater play, or go to a choir concert. In addition, all national and religious holidays were celebrated as far as was possible. The solemnity of these celebrations was enormous because their longing for the homeland was very strong.

At the beginning of April 1943, Polish programs began to be broadcast by a radio station in Nairobi, which commented widely on the course of the war. The radio probably reached all the Polish settlements.

Journalism also developed. In Nairobi, "Polak w Afryce" and "Głos Polski" were published, and in Tanganyika, "Głos Ifundy". The scout's newsletters "Czuj Duch" and "Znicz" also deserve mention.

📷 On a trip to Ngorongoro, 1948 (Photo: Archives of The Center for Documentation of Deportations, Expulsions and Resettlements of the Pedagogical University of Krakow 2016)



Trails of Hope
The Odyssey of Freedom

TRADITION



In addition to the daily duties, the culture and education of children and youth were nurtured. Scouting was quickly established and developed dynamically.

The inhabitants of the Polish settlements in Africa reflected the multicultural character of the Second Polish Republic. Among them were Catholics, Jews, and Protestants. Religious and state holidays were celebrated. They tried to cultivate the traditions brought from home. This was conducive to strengthening solidarity and brotherhood in difficult times.

📍 Abercorn, Northern Rhodesia (Zambia), 1940s (Photo: Archives of the Center for Documentation of Deportations, Expulsions and Resettlements of the Pedagogical University of Krakow)

📍 Mask of Bawenda tribe, Zimbabwe (Photo: Museum of Pabianice)

📍 Children in Krakow costumes perform "Down the Vistula River" in celebration of the Polish National Independence Day. Tengeru, Tanganyika, 11 November 1944 (Photo: Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum in London, courtesy of the KARTA Center Foundation)



SCHOOL



📍 A group of primary school pupils with their teacher Olga Jagielnicka. Rusape, Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), c. 1944. Inhabitants of the settlements tried to lead a normal life. Providing school care for around 8,000 Polish children was a great achievement. Each housing settlement ran its own educational institution (Photo: Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum in London, courtesy of the KARTA Center Foundation)

We went to school, completing two classes per school year. Among the inhabitants of the settlement was a large number of primary and secondary school teachers, so a middle school was also created, which I later attended. The full name of the middle school was Coeducational Middle School in Koja - Uganda - East Africa.

Aldona Piaścińska, Koja, 1942-1945, "Szlaki tulaczy" - a digital project carried out by the KARTA Center Foundation and Pracownia Otwierania Kultury

📍 In front of a Polish school in Rusape, Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), 1940s (Photo: Archives of the Center for Documentation of Deportations, Expulsions and Resettlements of the Pedagogical University of Krakow)

📍 The ceremony of awarding a banner to the Polish school. Masindi, Uganda, 1942-1946 (Photo: Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum in London, courtesy of the KARTA Center Foundation)



AFRICA BROUGHT THEM TOGETHER

Poles scattered around various settlements throughout their stay in Africa were aware that one day they would return to their homeland. They awaited the end of the war with great hope.

Mid-1945 saw the beginning of a campaign to register all the Poles living outside their country. This situation caused great concern to the Polish community in exile. Some people could not imagine returning to a Poland ruled by communists.

Poles were systematically leaving the African continent. The last Polish housing settlements were closed in the early 1950s. It is estimated that most people (as many as 11,129) from the African settlements left for Great Britain. Only around 3,500 of them returned to their homeland, while the remainder decided to emigrate in other directions.

Poles who died in exile will always remain in African soil. To this day, cemeteries bear witness to the Polish presence in these lands.

🌳 African Baobab, commonly known as the Tree of Life. The oldest specimens can live for up to 2,500 years. Tanzania (Photo: Alamy/BE&W)

🗿 Monument in the Bwana-Mkubwa settlement, Northern Rhodesia (Zambia), 1940s (Photo: Archives of The Center for Documentation of Deportations, Expulsions and Resettlements of the Pedagogical University of Krakow)

👥 Meeting of Siberian-Africans, Krzeszów 2013 (Photo: Archives of the Center for Documentation of Deportations, Expulsions and Resettlements of the Pedagogical University of Krakow)



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