

Inland waterways transport in Poland in 2022

31.07.2023


40.1%

A decrease in cargo transport against 2021


9.7%

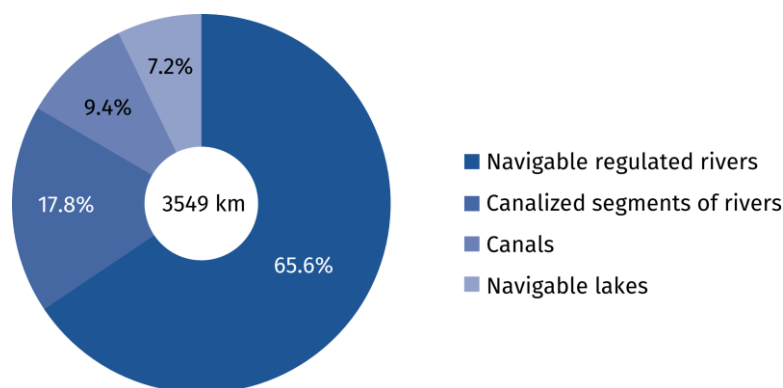
A decrease in transportation performance against 2021

The layout and length of Poland's inland waterways have remained at a similar level for years, while the volume of the cargo carried by Polish fleet owners by inland waterways decreases. Among the factors directly impacting the decrease in cargo transport and transport performance in inland shipping is insufficient development of waterways and unfavourable navigation conditions determining the basic structural parameters of the rolling stock, i.e. relatively low capacity of barges. With a small scale of inland waterways transport, the volume of transported cargo measured in tonnes is subject to large fluctuations resulting from the nature of these transports.

Inland waterways

The main factors determining the efficiency of inland waterways transport are the navigability of waterways and the adaptation of their navigational conditions to a level appropriate for waterways of international importance.

Chart 1. The structure of inland waterways in use in Poland in 2022



The inland waterways in Poland were 3768 km long in 2022 (and remained unchanged in comparison to 2021), of which 2523 km represented navigable regulated rivers, 656 km – canalized segments of rivers, 335 km – canals, and 255 km – navigable lakes. 3549 km (94.2%) of the waterways were in use. The requirements for roads of international¹ importance (classes IV and V) in 2022 were met by 5.5% of the length of waterways (206 km) in Poland. The rest of the waterways network consisted of waterways of regional importance (classes I, II and III), whose total length in 2022 was 3562 kilometres.

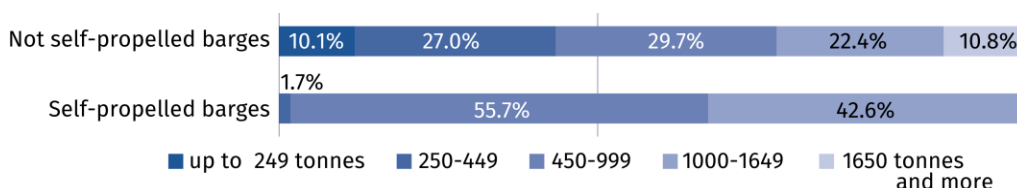
¹ Classification of inland waterways accepted by the European Economic Commission of the UN and ECMT in 1992.

Inland waterways transport fleet

The number of pushers and tugboats belonging to the inland waterways towing fleet in Poland in 2022 amounted to 124, i.e. the same as the previous year. The passenger fleet consisted of 116 vessels, i.e. 4 less than in the previous year. The number of self-propelled barges was reduced by 9 vessels (to the level of 62). However, the number of non-self-propelled barges (push barges) increased by 3 vessels (to the level of 177). Push vessels prevailed in the structure of the barges by type (74.1% of the barges), and they carried 943.6 thousand tonnes of cargo (45.4% of total cargo transported with the inland waterways navigation) in 2022. The barge fleet group was dominated by vessels of poorer construction parameters, requiring lower technical standards of water infrastructure.

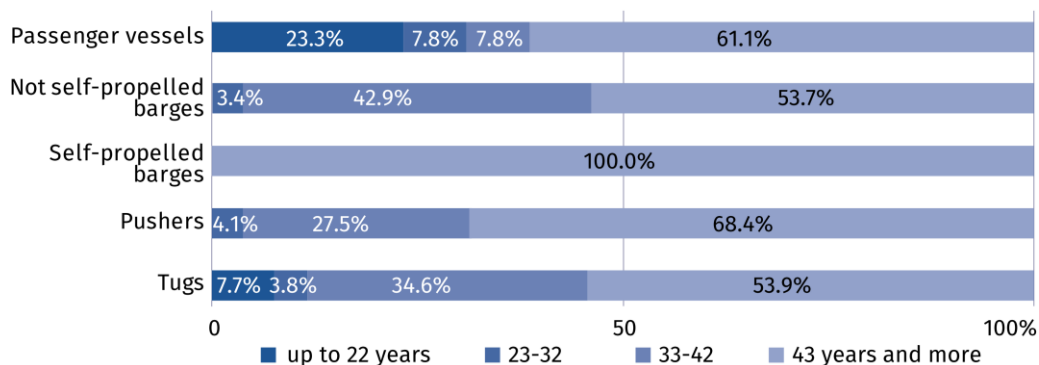
74% of barges is represented by non-self-propelled vessels, and over half of them was manufactured in the years 1949-1979

Chart 2. The structure of inland waterways barges by load capacity groups in 2022



The majority of the inland waterways fleet has been decapitalized and needs to be replaced. Its age significantly exceeds its normative service life, and the fleet might continue its operation only thanks to regular repairs. According to 2022 data, the majority of used pushers (68.4%), over half of push barges (53.7%) and all self-propelled barges were manufactured during the years 1949-1979.

Chart 3. The structure of inland waterways fleet by age in 2022

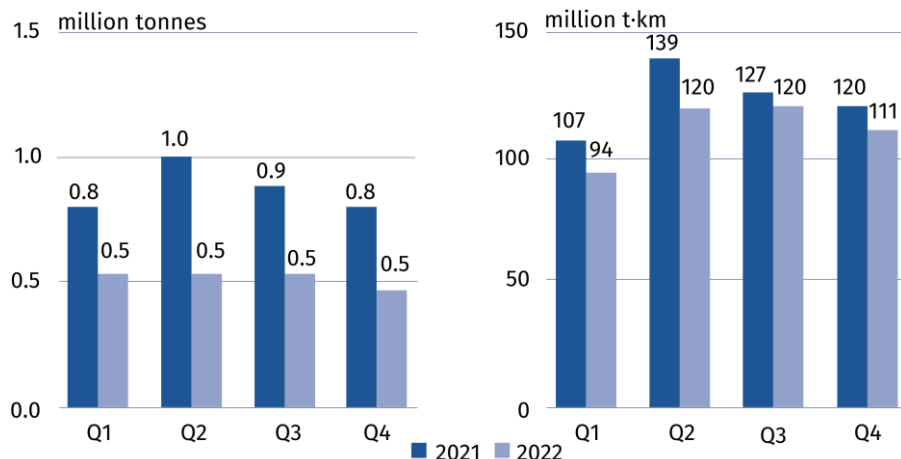


Inland waterways carriages

Insufficient development of navigable waterways in Poland, both in terms of their character (canalized rivers, free-flowing rivers, canals) and navigational parameters (dimensions of locks, depth and width of routes, heights of bridges) affect the specificity of inland navigation and cause it to play a minor role in the Polish transport system. Transportation volume carried by inland waterways in 2022 amounted to 2076.4 thousand tonnes of cargo and performance of 445.1 million tonne-kilometres. In comparison to the previous year these values were lower by 40.1% and 9.7%, respectively. The largest annual declines in the freight volume and transport performance were recorded in the second quarter by 46.5% and 13.7%, respectively.

In 2022, the share of inland waterways transport in the total cargo transport volume decreased from 0.15% to 0.09% on an annual basis

Chart 4. Cargo carried by inland waterways transport, quarterly

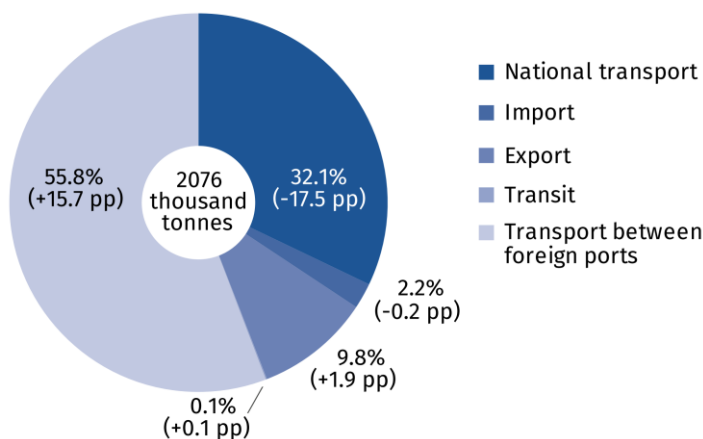


In 2022, the average distance of 1 tonne of cargo carried in international transport amounted to 294.7 km (259.7 km in the previous year), and 44.8 km in domestic transport (22.8 km, respectively). In comparison to 2021, the domestic carriages volume decreased by 61.1% (to the level of 667.7 thousand tonnes) and transport performance – by 23.5% (to 29.9 million tonne-kilometres). Declines in the freight were recorded in almost all cargo groups, with the most severe ones in the groups of: wood and products of wood and cork (except furniture), metal ores and other mining and quarrying products; coal and lignite; crude petroleum and natural gas. Growths concerned only the groups of machinery and equipment n.e.c. as well as coke and refined petroleum products.

In 2022 more than half of the inland waterways freight by Polish fleet owners was carried in international transport (67.8%). The carriages between foreign ports decreased by 16.7% comparing to previous year. Nevertheless, their share in total international transport was still dominant and amounted to 82.2% in 2022 (increased by 2.7 percentage points). Exported and imported cargo declined by 25.5% and 45.2%, respectively. Exports accounted for 14.4% of the total international freight, with Germany as the main direction. The contribution of carriages on this route amounted to 81.0% of all exports of goods by inland waterways.

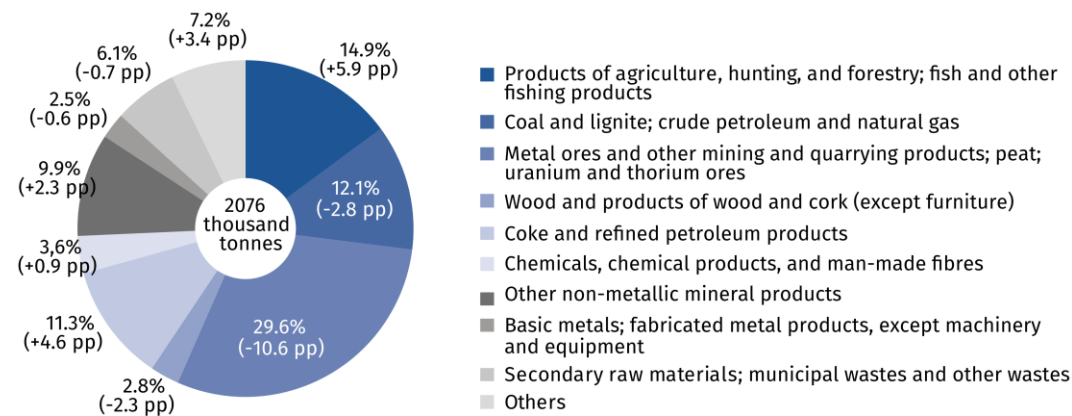
The average distance of 1 tonne of cargo increased in both domestic and international transport

Chart 5. The structure of cargo transport by inland waterways by directions 2022 and its changes compared to the previous year



Similarly to the previous years, in the structure of freight in 2022 dominated metal ores and other mining and quarrying products, peat; uranium and thorium ores (29.6%).

Chart 6. The structure of cargo transport by inland waterways by main cargo groups in 2022 and its changes compared to the previous year



As part of tourist traffic, 116 inland waterways passenger vessels carried a total of 1100.9 thousand persons, and transport performance of 13548.7 thousand passenger-kilometres in 2022, i.e. 11.6% and 4.8% more than the previous year, respectively.

The number of persons carried by inland waterways fleet grew 11.6% on an annual basis

Table 1. Inland waterways transport of passengers

Specification	2021	2022
Number of passenger seats	11 436	11 017
Number of passengers	986 415	1 100 941
Number of passenger-kilometres	12 926 572	13 548 681
Average distance travelled by 1 passenger in km	13	12

Inland transportation remains one of the safest modes of transport. In 2022, there were 12 navigation accidents recorded in registers kept by the competent inland waterways transport offices, and none of those events involved the carriages of hazardous cargo.

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Related information

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[Inland waterways transport in Poland in 2020-2021](#)

[Transport – activity results in 2021](#)

Data available in databases

[Domain Knowledge Base Transport and Communications](#)

Terms used in official statistics

[Inland waterways](#)

[Inland waterways transport fleet](#)

[Tugs fleet](#)

[Barges fleet](#)

[Inland waterways transport of goods](#)

[International inland waterways transport of goods](#)

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[Passenger-kilometres by inland waterways](#)