

“Things are very bad there”

Experiences of Poles and Jews Deported to the General Government 1939–1941 and Survival During the Holocaust

Abstract: Between late 1939 and spring 1941, Polish and Jewish families from the annexed western Polish territories were deported to the General Government. This article examines two main aspects of these early deportations before the Holocaust: firstly, the experiences and chances of escape for the two groups differed significantly, with Jewish families facing harsher treatment and fewer opportunities to avoid deportation. Secondly, it emphasizes the importance of analysing in detail the living conditions of deported families, as the chances of survival of Jewish families in the General Government were different from those of the local Jewish population. Despite deteriorating conditions, many deportees adapted, although their situation changed dramatically with the onset of the Holocaust.

Keywords: deportations, Holocaust, forced exile, Polish-Jewish relations

In contrast to the later deportations to ghettos and extermination camps from Germany and other countries during the Holocaust, the early deportations of Polish citizens from the territories annexed by the German Reich to the General Government between autumn 1939 and spring 1941 are often overlooked by studies of later survival in occupied Poland. Although these early deportations were not aimed at the physical extermination of the deportees, but rather at the reorganization and ‘Germanization’ of the occupied territories, they still caused great suffering for those affected. During the double occupation of Poland by Germany and the Soviet

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Hannah Riedler, Department of History, University of Klagenfurt, Universitätsstraße 65–67, 9020 Klagenfurt am Wörthersee, Austria; hannah.riedler@aau.at

Union, a total of 408,525 Polish citizens were forcibly evicted from their homes in the annexed territories and subsequently deported.¹

This article explores the impact of these deportations on those affected. What challenges did they face, how did they manage to adapt to their situation, and how did the forced resettlement influence their survival after 1941? Two aspects will be highlighted. Firstly, Polish and Jewish families deported from the annexed western Polish territories to the General Government between late 1939 and spring 1941 experienced different conditions during their forced displacement. However, once they arrived in the General Government, their living conditions were largely the same. This situation changed drastically with the beginning of the Holocaust, which fundamentally altered the fate of the Jewish deportees. Secondly, it is essential to examine the living conditions of the deportees and how they changed over time, in order to shed light on the different survival prospects of the deportees in contrast to the region's local Jewish population. The often overlooked early deportations are thus crucial to understanding not only the early phase of the German occupation in Poland but also the survival strategies later on, during the Holocaust.

The study is based primarily on first-person testimonies of Jewish and non-Jewish survivors. The aim is to make the deportations comprehensible from a micro-historical perspective, focusing on the experiences of the individuals affected, while at the same time placing them in a broader context.² Nevertheless, the strength of survivor testimonies as a source – namely their focus on individual experience – is also their limitation.³ When working with survivor testimonies, it is important to keep in mind the difference between the events themselves and the memory of them. Repressed, secret, or communal memories are often absent from the testimonies while collective memories of repression and occupation can influence them.⁴

The content and quality of the testimonies also depended on whose experiences they recorded. For the experiences of Poles, especially Ryszard Dylński's collection of *relacje* ('testimonies') *Wysiedlenie i poniewierka* (Expulsion and Hardship) – based on writing competitions – is central.⁵ In order to recount the experiences of

1 Alexa Stiller, *Völkische Politik. Praktiken der Exklusion und Inklusion in polnischen, französischen und slowenischen Annexionsgebieten 1939–1945*, Göttingen 2022, 424.

2 Jan Grabowski/Barbara Engelking, Preface, in: idem (eds.), *Night without End. The Fate of Jews in German-Occupied Poland*, Indianapolis 2022, vii–xxxviii, ix; Claire Zalc/Tal Bruttman, *Microhistories of the Holocaust*, New York 2017.

3 Natalia Aleksy, *Survivor Testimonies and Historical Objectivity. Polish Historiography since Neighbors*, in: *Holocaust Studies* 20/1–2 (2014), 157–178, 161.

4 Christopher Browning, *Holocaust History and Survivor Testimony. Challenges, Limitations, and Opportunities*, in: Ezra Mendelsohn/Steffani Hoffman/Richard I. Cohe (eds.), *Against the Grain. Jewish Intellectuals in Hard Times*, New York/Oxford 2013, 277–284, 281 f.

5 Ryszard Dylński (ed.), *Wysiedlenie i poniewierka. Wspomnienia Polaków wysiedlonych przez okupanta hitlerowskiego z ziem polskich 'wcielonych' do Rzeszy 1939–1945* [Expulsion and Hardship.

Jews, the more numerous testimonies recorded in the Visual History Archive (VHA) of the University of Southern California (USC) Shoah Foundation⁶ or the *Żydowski Instytut Historyczny im. Emanuela Ringelbluma* – ŻIH (Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute) in Warsaw were used. While for non-Jewish Poles deportation was usually the main form of repression, for Jews it was generally the beginning. Thus, experiences of ghettoization, forced labour, and extermination are often more present. The way in which one's own experience was conveyed depended on when the testimony was produced. Compared to those written at the end of the twentieth century, the immediate post-war testimonies are characterized by their proximity to the events and the lack of extensive knowledge about the Holocaust, which took place later.⁷ Yet they are often brief and give little insight into the (family) background or the emotional world of those affected. Later testimonies do include these aspects, but were challenged by the fading memories of the survivors as well as by the different contexts of their origins and 'ecologies'.⁸ Because of these differences and the large number of Jewish testimonies, a certain bias must be taken into account.⁹ This can be mitigated to some extent by using a variety of sources. The aim is to provide an "integrated history"¹⁰ of the early deportations by juxtaposing German administrative documents, survivors' testimonies, and the files of Polish and Jewish aid organizations.¹¹

Memoirs of Poles Displaced by the Nazi Occupiers from Polish Territories Annexed to the Reich, 1939–1945], Poznań 1985.

- 6 USC Shoah Foundation, Visual History Archive (VHA): <https://vha.usc.edu/home> (11 February 2025).
- 7 The earliest were written in 1944: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny (ŻIH) [Jewish Historical Institute], 301/2, Testimony of Dwojra Szczucińska, 4 September 1944 in Lublin; Freda Hoge, Introduction. The Early Testimonies of She'arit Hapletah in the Aftermath of World War II, in: idem (ed.), *Tragedy and Triumph. Early Testimonies of Jewish Survivors of World War II*, Clayton 2018, 1–15, 2; Laura Jockusch, Introduction, in: idem (ed.), *Khurbn-Forshung. Documents on Early Holocaust Research in Postwar Poland*, Göttingen 2021, 11–74, 13.
- 8 Browning, *Holocaust History*, 2013, 283; Hannah Pollin-Galay, *Ecologies of Witnessing. Language, Place, and Holocaust Testimony*, New Haven/London 2018, 260–267. For an overview on this topic, see Henry Greenspan, *On Listening to Holocaust Survivors. Recounting and Life History*, Westport 1998.
- 9 Daniel Schuch, *Transformationen der Zeugenschaft. Von David P. Boders frühen Audiointerviews zur Wiederbefragung als Holocaust Testimony*, Göttingen 2021, 27–33; Jan Taubitz, *Holocaust Oral History und das lange Ende der Zeitzeugenschaft*, Göttingen 2016, 39–49.
- 10 Frédéric Bonnesoeur/Hannah Wilson/Christin Zühlke (eds.), *New Microhistorical Approaches to an Integrated History of the Holocaust*, Berlin/Boston 2023. The term was coined by Saul Friedländer.
- 11 On the Jewish aid organization, Żydowska Samopomoc Społeczna [Jewish Social Self-Help], see Archiwum Ringelbluma [The Ringelblum Archive] 27 (2017): Żydowska Samopomoc Społeczna w Warszawie 1939–1943 [Jewish Social Self-Help in Warsaw, 1939–1943], ed. by Aleksandra Bańkowska and Maria Ferenc Piotrowska. On the Polish aid organizations, see Archiwum Akt Nowych (AAN) [Archive of New Files], 2/125/0.

1. The deportations

Following the signing of the so-called Hitler-Stalin Pact in August 1939, Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union secretly agreed on the division of Eastern Europe into spheres of interest. On 1 September 1939, Germany attacked Poland, soon followed by the Soviet invasion. Poland was subsequently divided between the two powers.¹² With the war, large-scale population transfers took place in the occupied territories. Hundreds of thousands – especially Jews – fled to the Soviet occupation zone.¹³ Others did not leave voluntarily but were expelled by the Germans.¹⁴ The cities of Kalisz, Łódź, and Poznań were particularly badly affected.¹⁵ Initial plans were made to resettle Jews, initially from Upper Silesia and Vienna – within the German occupation zone to eastern regions. However, this project, known as the ‘Nisko-Plan’, failed after just a few weeks in October 1939.¹⁶

The German occupation zone was soon divided almost in half, with some areas being annexed to the German Reich (such as the Warthegau) and others forming the General Government. The annexed territories, where Poles formed the majority alongside sizeable German and Jewish minorities,¹⁷ were to be ‘Germanized’ through resettlement. ‘Undesirable’ groups, such as Jews or the Polish intelligentsia,

12 Claudia Weber, *Der Pakt. Stalin, Hitler und die Geschichte einer mörderischen Allianz 1939–1941*, Bonn 2021.

13 The Warsaw teacher Chaim Kaplan (1880–1942) describes the mass exodus of Jews across the German-Soviet demarcation line on 15 November 1939, see DOK. 37, *Handschriftliches Tagebuch von Chaim Kaplan*, Eintrag vom 15.11.1939, printed in: Klaus-Peter Friedrich/Andrea Löw (eds.), *Die Verfolgung und Ermordung der europäischen Juden durch das nationalsozialistische Deutschland, 1933–1945 (VEJ)*, vol. 4: Polen September 1939–Juli 1941, Munich 2011, 135–137; Eliyana Adler, *Hrubieszów at the Crossroads. Polish Jews Navigate the German and Soviet Occupations*, in: *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 28/1 (2014), 1–30, 2; Markus Nesselrodt, *Dem Holocaust entkommen. Polnische Juden in der Sowjetunion, 1939–1946*, Berlin/Boston 2019, 46.

14 See the anonymous report on the expulsion of Jews from Poznań and the surrounding area to the General Government in November 1939: DOK. 48, *Handschriftlicher Bericht für das Untergrundarchiv des Warschauer Gettos*, aufgez. ca. Ende 1940, printed in: Friedrich/Löw (eds.), *Polen September 1939–Juli 1941 (VEJ 4)*, 2011, 162–165.

15 In Łódź, around October 1939, the German police forced their way into Jewish homes, pushing thousands of people to flee eastwards, see ŻIH, 301/157, *Testimony of Tron Mendel*, 1945 in Łódź, 2. In the second half of October, the Jewish population of Pleszew (consisting of 16 families) was deported. Andrzej Szymański, *Hitlerowskie wysiedlenia Polaków z Ziemi Pleszewskiej i Jarocińskiej w latach 1939–1945* [Nazi Deportations of Poles from the Pleszew and Jarocin Areas in 1939–1945], Pleszew 2006, 24 f.

16 Klaus-Peter Friedrich, *Einleitung*, in: Friedrich/Löw (eds.), *Polen September 1939–Juli 1941 (VEJ 4)*, 2011, 13–56, 33 f.; Seev Goshen, *Eichmann und die Nisko-Aktion im Oktober 1939. Eine Fallstudie zur NS-Judenpolitik in der letzten Etappe vor der “Endlösung”*, in: *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 29/1 (1981), 74–96; David Cesarani, *Adolf Eichmann. Bürokrat und Massenmörder*, Berlin 2012, 117–120.

17 The size of the Jewish minority varied greatly from place to place, ranging from 1.3% in the west to 15% in the east of the annexed territories. Cf. Michael Alberti, *Die Verfolgung und Vernichtung der Juden im Reichsgau Wartheland 1939–1945*, Wiesbaden 2006, 25.

were to be deported to the General Government.¹⁸ In November 1939, Hans Frank, the Governor General of the region, expressed the belief that 2.5 to 3 million Poles and Jews could be accommodated from the annexed territories.¹⁹ This would later prove to be a gross miscalculation.

In order to implement these plans and additionally reconcile the deportations with the resettlement of ethnic Germans from the Soviet sphere of influence (initially from the Baltic states, later from Volhynia, Bessarabia, and other places) in the annexed territories, central deportation plans were drawn up in the Reich Security Main Office.²⁰ While during the so-called *Erster Nahplan* (First Short-Range Plan) and *Zwischenplan* (Intermediate Plan) it was still possible to accommodate the arriving Germans in houses that had belonged to Jews, to members of the intelligentsia or associations deemed 'anti-German', this became increasingly difficult in the course of 1940.²¹ Although the original *Zweiter Nahplan* (Second Short-Range Plan) had envisaged the deportation of the entire Jewish population of the Polish territories annexed to the Reich (estimated at around 600,000 people), from spring 1940 a different group was targeted. As the ethnic Germans arriving from Volhynia were mostly farmers, it was the wealthy non-Jewish Polish landowners who were forced to give up their property and were deported.²² The Jewish population, on the other hand, faced ghettoization, partly to facilitate their later forced resettlement.²³ The deportations thus continued almost entirely without Jews. From December 1939 until that time, however, about half of all deportees (approximately 43,000 to

18 Phillip Rutherford, *Prelude to the Final Solution. The Nazi Program for Deporting Ethnic Poles, 1939–1941*, Lawrence 2007, 40–62; Maria Wardzyńska, *Wysiedlenia ludności polskiej z okupowanych ziem polskich włączonych do III Rzeszy w latach 1939–1945* [Expulsions of the Polish Population from Occupied Polish Territories Annexed to the Third Reich, 1939–1945], Warsaw 2017, 18–33, 39–65; Alexandra Pulvermacher, *Early Deportations of Jews in Occupied Poland (October 1939–June 1940). The German and the Soviet Cases*, in: *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 36/2 (2022), 125–153; Czesław Zenon Wartel, *Wysiedlenia niemieckie, 1939–1945. Losy mieszkańców powiatu Nowy Tomysł/Grodzisk, Opalenica* [German Expulsions, 1939–1945. The Fates of the Inhabitants of Nowy Tomysł/Grodzisk County and Opalenica], Poznań 2002, 51; Maria Rutowska, *Ausiedlungen von Polen und Juden*, in: Jacek Kubiak (ed.), *Vertriebene von 1939*, Poznań 2015, 28–47.

19 Alberti, *Verfolgung und Vernichtung*, 2006, 132.

20 Gerhard Wolf, *The East as Historical Imagination and the Germanization Policies of the Third Reich*, in: Paolo Giaccaria/Claudio Minca (eds.), *Hitler's Geographies. The Spatialities of the Third Reich*, Chicago/London 2016, 93–109, 95; Ingo Haar, *Biopolitische Differenzkonstruktionen als bevölkerungspolitisches Ordnungsinstrument in den Ostgauen. Raum- und Bevölkerungsplanung im Spannungsfeld zwischen regionaler Verankerung und zentralstaatlichem Planungsanspruch*, in: Jürgen John/Horst Möller/Thomas Schaarschmidt (eds.), *Die NS-Gaue. Regionale Mittelinstanzen im zentralistischen „Führerstaat“?*, Munich 2007, 105–122, 105–107; Stiller, *Völkische Politik*, 2022, 83 f.

21 Dieter Pohl, *Nationalsozialistische Verbrechen, 1939–1945*, Stuttgart 2022, 97–103.

22 Götz Aly, *Endlösung. Völkerverschiebung und der Mord an den europäischen Juden*, Frankfurt am Main 1995, 80–83.

23 Martin Broszat, *Nationalsozialistische Polenpolitik, 1939–1945*, Frankfurt am Main 1965, 93.

65,000 people) were Jews.²⁴ Their experiences differed significantly from those of their non-Jewish compatriots.

2. Roundups, camps, and transports

Units of the German police, gendarmerie, or *Selbstschutz* usually arrived at the apartments or houses of the families selected for deportation at night to escort the families to a collection camp or directly to the train station. The early phase of German forced resettlement – when Jews were still a major target – was particularly chaotic. But Jews were also treated differently from other deportees targeted at the same time. Rather than being rounded up individually by the police, Jewish families were sometimes ordered by the local Jewish council to gather at a specific place.²⁵ If such an order did not produce the desired result, the Germans, for example in Łódź, designated entire streets for deportation and rounded up all the Jews living there indiscriminately.²⁶ All deportees – Jewish and non-Jewish – were only allowed to take one suitcase with clothing, a blanket, food, and some money.²⁷ However, while non-Jewish Poles could bring 200 and later 80 złoty, the amount allowed for Jews was significantly less: 80 and later 20 złoty.²⁸ In addition to these restrictions, the units carrying out the expulsions often enriched themselves:²⁹

“An ethnic German was standing over my aunt with a rifle [...] giving orders, and while he was putting the valuable little items she had just put in the suit-

24 Stiller, *Völkische Politik*, 2022, 413 f.

25 ŻIH, 301/4280, Testimony of Herman Feliks, 11 November 1946 in Katowice, 3; Transport from Bojanowo, Rawicz, Poznań, Poland to Tomaszów Mazowiecki, Ghetto, Poland on 12/12/1939, in: Yad Vashem. The World Holocaust Remembrance Centre, <https://deportation.yadvashem.org/index.html?language=en&itemId=14306956&ind=-1> (11 February 2025); Transport from Katowice, Katowice, Śląsk, Poland to Nisko, Nisko, Lwów, Poland on 20/10/1939, in: *ibid.*, <https://deportation.yadvashem.org/index.html?language=en&itemId=11414731&ind=-1> (11 February 2025); Transport from Lubien, Włocławek, Warszawa, Poland to Szymanów, Sochaczew, Warszawa, Poland on 11/12/1939, in: *ibid.*, <https://deportation.yadvashem.org/index.html?language=en&itemId=13703963&ind=-1> (11 February 2025).

26 Pulvermacher, *Early Deportations*, 2022, 128.

27 Instytut Pamięci Narodowej (IPN) [Institute of National Remembrance], Główna Komisja (GK) [Main Commission] 69/1, Richtlinien zur Durchführung der Evakuierungsaktionen im Reichsgau Wartheland im Zuge der Ansetzung von Volksdeutschen, 23 October 1940, 37.

28 Szymon Datner/Janusz Gumkowski/Kazimierz Leszczyński, Wyszłanie ludności z ziem polskich wcielonych do Rzeszy [Expulsion of the Population from Polish Territories Annexed to the Reich], in: Biuletyn Głównej Komisji Badania Zbrodni Hitlerowskich w Polsce [Bulletin of the Main Commission for the Investigation of Nazi Crimes in Poland] 12 (1960), 23–31, 28; Transport from Konin, Konin, Łódź, Poland to Ostrowiec, Opatów, Kielce, Poland on 30/11/1939, in: Yad Vashem, <https://deportation.yadvashem.org/index.html?language=en&itemId=12815464&ind=-1> (11 February 2025).

29 IPN GK 68/107, Protokoll der Besprechung vom 23.11.1939, 14.

case into his pocket, he cautiously checked whether his colleague at the table was watching him; at the same time he put his finger to his lips and ordered my aunt to be quiet.^{29,30}

While non-Jewish Polish deportees reported being robbed by ethnic German neighbours,³¹ there were also accounts of non-Jewish Poles stealing possessions from Jewish deportees as they were being taken away.³²

After packing, the deportees were taken to assembly points or makeshift transit camps, usually public buildings such as schools or synagogues.³³ The time the deportees spent there ranged from a few hours to several weeks and was used for abuse and further robbery.³⁴ The filth in these camps, combined with inadequate medical care, resulted in numerous cases of illness and death.³⁵ Until spring 1940, the most important of these camps was the Główna camp in Poznań, on the premises of an old factory, with a relatively conventional camp structure.³⁶ Jews and non-Jews were separated in these camps.³⁷ Some transit camps were particularly makeshift and housed only Jews. In Kalisz, for example, some 10,000 Jewish deportees were crammed into an open market hall.³⁸

In the spring of 1940, when Jews were no longer the main target of deportation, the procedure was changed. A system of 'selection' was set up to ensure that Pol-

30 Henryk Szymański, Akcja 'Aussiedlung' w Nowym Mieście nad Wartą [Action 'Aussiedlung' in Nowe Miasto nad Wartą], in: Dyliński (ed.), *Wysiedlenie i poniewierka*, 1985, 418–430, 421.

31 Stiller, *Völkische Politik*, 2022, 342.

32 Transport from Lubien to Szymanow (see footnote 25); Alberti, *Verfolgung und Vernichtung*, 2006, 115, 135.

33 Institut für Zeitgeschichte München (IfZ), MA (Mikrofilmbestand A) 708/5, Meldung über Anfang November freiwerdende Kriegsgefangenenlager, 29 October 1939, 345; Bernard Szeląg, W Tomaszowie Mazowieckim [In Tomaszów Mazowiecki], in: Dyliński (ed.), *Wysiedlenia i poniewierka*, 1985, 406–417, 407; USC Shoah Foundation, VHA, Interview 46992 with Abraham Marber, 3 October 1998.

34 Klara Michalska, *Wysiedlenie z Konina – transport trzeci* [Expulsion from Konin – Third Transport], in: Dyliński (ed.), *Wysiedlenie i poniewierka*, 1985, 243–251, 243; Eugeniusz Talejko, *Z kart mojego kalendarza* [From the Pages of My Calendar], in: *ibid.*, 431–440, 433; Szymański, *Akcja 'Aussiedlung'*, 1985, 423.

35 Datner/Gumkowski/Leszczyński, *Wysiedlanie ludności*, 1960, 28.

36 Maria Rutowska, *Obóz przesiedleńczy na Główniej (1939–1940)* [Resettlement Camp on Główna Street], in: *Kronika Miasta Poznania* [Chronicle of the City of Poznań] 2 (2002), 301–308; Talejko, *Z kart mojego kalendarza*, 1985, 438.

37 Transport from Buk, Nowy Tomysl, Poznan, Poland to Südhof, Camp, Poland on 07/12/1939, in: Yad Vashem, <https://collections.yadvashem.org/en/deportations/13613895> (18 September 2025); Transport from Südhof, Camp, Poland to Szymanow, Sochaczew, Warszawa, Poland on 10/12/1939, in: *ibid.*, <https://collections.yadvashem.org/en/deportations/13614012> (18 September 2025); Transport from Słupca, Konin, Lodz, Poland to Niepolomice, Bochnia, Krakow, Poland on 11/02/1940, in: *ibid.*, <https://deportation.yadvashem.org/index.html?language=en&itemId=12815976&ind=-1> (11 February 2025).

38 USC Shoah Foundation, VHA, Interview 4157 with Siegmund Listwa, 21 July 1995.

ish agricultural labourers were not exclusively sent to the General Government.³⁹ In camps run by the Central Resettlement Office (*Umwandererzentralstelle*, UWZ) in Łódź, the deportees were first ‘screened’ for their ability to work and their potential for ‘Germanization’ in a camp on *Wiesenstraße*.⁴⁰ If they were deemed suitable for resettlement to Germany, they were sent to the *Konstanynow* camp just outside of Łódź. All others were taken to the *Luisenstraße* camp for the deportation to the General Government. Despite the new system, conditions in these camps were appalling.⁴¹ As the average length of stay in the camps increased towards the end of 1940, so did malnutrition and death rates.⁴² Escape attempts were rarely successful.⁴³ Since Jews were collectively deemed unfit for ‘Germanization’ and were generally not deported to the General Government after the spring of 1940, they never experienced the UWZ camps. As they were mostly targeted in the early stages of the deportations, they were more likely to suffer from the more chaotic and therefore longer transports to the General Government than from a long stay in these camps in Łódź. These early transports could take up to eight days to reach their destination.⁴⁴

3. Evading deportation

The deportations were public and news of them spread like wildfire.⁴⁵ Many in the annexed territories thus tried to find a way to avoid them. Zofia Walczak’s father managed to get her out of a resettlement camp by appealing on her behalf to local ethnic Germans.⁴⁶ But this was an isolated case. Most tried to find other ways of

39 IPN GK 68/109, Auswahl von Arbeitskräften im Rahmen der Aussiedlungsaktion, 1 April 1940, 17; Michael G. Esch, *Die Umwandererzentralstelle im besetzten Polen 1939–1944*, in: Jochen Oltmer (ed.), *Migration steuern und verwalten. Deutschland vom späten 19. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart*, Göttingen 2003, 177–206, 191.

40 Rutowska, *Aussiedlungen*, 2015, 38.

41 Bartosz Wójcik, *Vernichtungsalltag. Die Deutsche Ordnungspolizei in den annektierten polnischen Gebieten 1939–1945. Fallstudie Łódź/Litzmannstadt*, Hamburg 2021, 345.

42 Wardzyńska, *Wysiedlenia ludności polskiej*, 2017, 190; Cecylia Fabisch, Poznań, printed in: Marianna Grynia (ed.), *Wypędzeni. Polskie ofiary niemieckiego obozu koncentracyjnego w Konstantynowie Łódzkim* [Expelled. Polish Victims of the German Concentration Camp in Konstantynów Łódzki], Warszawa 2018, 245.

43 Rutherford, *Prelude*, 2007, 170.

44 AAN, 2/125/0/4.2/1031, letter by ROP (Rada Opiekuńcza Powiatowa) [District Welfare Council; regional branch of the RGO] Piotrków to the central RGO (Rada Główna Opiekuńcza) [Committee for Welfare], 22 February 1941, 16.

45 Talejko, *Z kart mojego kalendarza*, 1985, 433 f.; IPN GK 68/107, Auswahl von Arbeitskräften im Rahmen der Aussiedlungsaktion, 23 November 1939, 18.

46 Zofia Walczak, *Tragiczne przeżycia* [Tragic Experiences], in: Dyliński (ed.), *Wysiedlenie i poniewierka*, 1985, 441–447, 441.

avoiding being targeted in the first place. According to German reports, members of the Polish intelligentsia, for example, disguised themselves as ordinary workers.⁴⁷ Even before the widespread existence of the *Deutsche Volksliste* (DVL, German People's List), the grey areas of artificial German 'racial' categories were exploited. Many emphasized their German descent, became involved in ethnic German organizations, or donated to German charities.⁴⁸ Even stressing Russian origin and conversion to the Russian Orthodox Church were apparently used to try to avoid deportation.⁴⁹ This was only possible for non-Jewish Poles and other Slavs, for whom there was no equivalent to the Nuremberg Laws.⁵⁰ It was not possible for Jews, as they were part of a 'racial' category clearly defined by the occupiers. Some, however, tried to move to the General Government on their own terms, although this was not allowed.⁵¹

As time passed and the deportations continued, more and more families managed to escape.⁵² As mentioned above, these were mainly non-Jewish Polish families in the countryside, as Jews were no longer targeted. On average, about 40 per cent escaped later resettlement actions⁵³ because families regularly spent the night in nearby forests, fields,⁵⁴ or with relatives.⁵⁵ In some places, as few as ten per cent of those scheduled for deportation were apprehended in April 1940.⁵⁶ The German authorities lamented that the Poles knew of the impending deportations because local ethnic Germans in the know informed them so that they could then buy cattle or tools from them at low prices.⁵⁷ Ethnic Germans who had taken over the farms

47 IfZ MA 441/3, 2 – 753308–9 – CdS (Chef der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD)/Amt III Reichssicherheitshauptamt (RSHA), Meldungen aus dem Reich, 24 February 1941, 3297–3316.

48 IfZ MA 441/1, 2 – 750770–71 – CdS/Amt III RSHA, Meldungen aus dem Reich, 7 February 1940, 0768–0780; Stiller, *Völkische Politik*, 2022, 427.

49 IfZ MA 441/3, 2 – 753308–9 – CdS/Amt III RSHA, Meldungen aus dem Reich, 24 February 1941, 3297–3316; IfZ MA 441/1, 2 – 750911 – CdS/Amt III RSHA, Meldungen aus dem Reich, 26 February 1940, 0906–0925.

50 John Connelly, *Nazis and Slavs. From Racial Theory to Racist Practice*, in: *Central European History* 32/1 (1999), 1–33.

51 IPN GK 69/41, *Berichte der Umwandererzentralstelle (UWZ) Hohensalza*, 12; IPN GK 68/4, letter (copy) from Albert Rapp to Wilhelm Koppe, 7 November 1939, 6–7; Wojciech Sterczyński, *Smutny los [A Sad Fate]*, in: Dylński (ed.), *Wysiedlenie i poniewierka*, 1985, 393–405, 400; Maria Skworzowa, *Bezsilni wobec przemocy [Powerless in the Face of Violence]*, in: *ibid.*, 351–357, 355.

52 IfZ MA 441/3, 2 – 573523–24 – CdS/Amt III RSHA, Meldungen aus dem Reich, 27 March 1941, 3511–3537, III; IPN GK 69/519, letter from the Strickau (Stryków) gendarmerie to the UWZ, 20 September 1940, 96.

53 Aly, *Endlösung*, 1995, 94.

54 IPN GK 68/169, *Auszug aus dem Abschnittsgebiet Litzmannstadt*, 3 June 1941, 3.

55 Michalska, *Wysiedlenie z Konina*, 1985, 243; Edmund Makowski, *Uczieczki, wysiedlenia i ewakuacja [Escapes, Expulsions, and Evacuations]*, in: Dylński (ed.), *Wysiedlenie i poniewierka*, 1985, 197–221, 200–202.

56 IPN GK 68/130, *Aktenvermerk Wolhynienaktion*, 20 April 1940, 74–76.

57 IPN GK 68/169, *Abschrift Tagesrapport Nr. 4 Gestapo Litzmannstadt*, 25 July 1940, 6.

of escaped deportees also secretly employed them as labourers.⁵⁸ However, fugitives were put on lists by the authorities and often apprehended. Some claimed that they had not deliberately evaded deportation.⁵⁹ In individual cases they admitted that they had done so on purpose. Janina A. stressed that she had not wanted to join her husband in forced exile, “because I’ve heard that things are very bad there and there’s very little to eat”.⁶⁰

Continuing to evade capture could take a heavy emotional toll on those affected.⁶¹ Over time, many ceased to actively resist deportation. A German report from February 1941 noted a growing ‘indifference’ to the deportations.⁶² Many felt that the situation in the General Government could not be worse than their own.⁶³ They thus prepared themselves as best they could for possible deportation.⁶⁴ Each member of Eugeniusz Talejko’s family, for example, always carried a “waterproof bag containing a piece of paper with their name, address, and date of birth, as well as some money”. They also had their packed suitcases ready.⁶⁵ More and more people began to sell property, slaughter cattle, or leave some of their valuables with relatives or acquaintances,⁶⁶ as such preparations could seriously affect their survival in exile.

4. Arrival and survival in forced exile

The transport was a similar ordeal for Jews and non-Jews alike. The latter were not treated any better. However, conditions depended very much on the specific transport. Even if transports could be “relatively civilized”, as Blanche Pavony or Bala

58 Stiller, *Völkische Politik*, 2022, 513; Vincent Hoyer, ‘Volksgemeinschaft’ im Werden?, *Baltendeutsche’ im Warthegau 1939–1941*, in: *Rocznik Polsko-Niemiecki/Deutsch-Polnisches Jahrbuch* 27 (2019), 31–43.

59 IPN GK 69/520, letter from the Zdunska-Wola gendarmerie to the UWZ, 8 February 1941, 39; IPN GK 69/515, Vernehmungsniederschrift Kazimiera B., 4 January 1940, 2.

60 IPN GK 69/515, Vernehmungsniederschrift Janina A., 4 January 1940, 7; Michalska, *Wysiedlenie z Konina*, 1985, 243.

61 Józef Niewiedział, *Nad popradem [By the Poprad River]*, in: Dyliński (ed.), *Wysiedlenie i poniewierka*, 1985, 274–295, 274–276.

62 IfZ MA 441/3, 2 – 75 3308–9 – CdS/Amt III RSHA, Meldungen aus dem Reich, 24 February 1941, 3297–3316; IfZ MA 441/3, 2 – 57 3523–4 – CdS/Amt III RSHA, Meldungen aus dem Reich, 27 March 1941, 3511–3537, III.

63 Archiwum Państwowe w Bydgoszczy [State Archive in Bydgoszcz], 96/7, Aus dem UWZ-Lager Thorn entlassene Evakuierte aus Krs. Strassburg, without date, 5.

64 Sterczyński, *Smutny los*, 1985, 393–395; Jerzy Mierzawa remembers his mother constantly waiting for their deportation: Jerzy Mierzawa, *Poznań*, printed in: Grynia (ed.), *Wypędzeni*, 2018, 259.

65 Talejko, *Z kart mojego kalendarza*, 1985, 434.

66 IPN GK 68/131, Besprechung Landsratsamt Gostynin, 7 February 1940, 29; Karol Sługocki, *Wysiedlenie z Kalisza [The Expulsion from Kalisz]*, in: Dyliński (ed.), *Wysiedlenie i poniewierka*, 1985, 358–378, 358 f.

Sklarz – both Jewish – recall, deportees died or went mad during the train journey.⁶⁷ Each train was supposed to consist of about 32 carriages – 27 freight wagons and five passenger carriages reserved for guards, medical personnel, the elderly and the sick.⁶⁸ In practice, around forty people were usually crammed into each wagon.⁶⁹ The journey took several days and was marked by freezing temperatures and hunger.⁷⁰

While the deportees selected for labour or ‘Germanization’ in Germany were immediately allocated accommodation and work, those deported to the General Government were left to fend for themselves. On arrival at their destination, the transports were, in theory, to be met by the local authorities. However, especially until early 1940 – when most Jewish deportees arrived in exile – transports were chaotic, poorly coordinated, and some districts refused to take in (especially Jewish) deportees.⁷¹ Jewish deportees in particular described horrific scenes on arrival, as they were beaten or even raped before being forced to find accommodation with the local population.⁷² Hersz Feldman witnessed the arrival of Jewish deportees in Lublin:

“The Germans rang the doorbells, and when the people opened the gates, they shouted an order, ‘Everybody out’, and they started beating all the Jews, forcing them inside. People were pushed through the gates, wounded on the head and legs, bleeding. The Jews of Lublin took these unfortunate people into their homes.”⁷³

Those who could not find shelter froze to death.⁷⁴ In the spring of 1940, a less chaotic procedure was introduced. Responsibility for the new arrivals was transferred to

67 USC Shoah Foundation, VHA, Interview 5487 with Blanche Pavony, 14 August 1995; USC Shoah Foundation, VHA, Interview 28911 with Bala Sklarz, 14 May 1997.

68 Pulvermacher, *Early Deportations*, 2022, 125–153.

69 Transport from Bojanowo to Tomaszów Mazowiecki (see footnote 25).

70 USC Shoah Foundation, VHA, Interview 5609 with Felice Nitzky, 9 November 1995; Sługocki, *Wysiedlenie z Kalisza*, 1985, 364; IfZ MA 158/1, *Lagebericht des Kreis-Hauptmannes Neu Sandez*, 31 December 1940, 1–3.

71 Dokument 12, *Vermerk zur Besprechung im RSHA*, 8 January 1940, in: *Biuletyn Głównej Komisji Badania Zbrodni Hitlerowskich w Polsce* 12 (1960), 37F; IfZ MA 158/3, *Monatlicher Lagebericht des Kreis-Hauptmannes Busko*, 28 February 1941, 8, 28. In the area around Zakopane up to Nowy Targ, the deportees were not allowed to settle, cf. Karolina Panz, *Nowy Targ County*, in: Grabowski/Engelking (eds.), *Night without End*, 2022, 295–348, 299.

72 USC Shoah Foundation, VHA, Interview 27755 with Alexander Zelkowitz, 31 March 1997; Transport from Poznan, Poznan, Poland to Ostrow, Wlodawa, Lublin, Poland on 13/12/1939, in: *Yad Vashem*, <https://collections.yadvashem.org/en/deportations/13270769> (18 September 2025).

73 Transport from Sieradz, Ghetto, Poland to Lublin, Lublin, Poland on 11/1939, in: *Yad Vashem*, <https://deportation.yadvashem.org/index.html?language=en&itemId=13778869&ind=-1> (23 May 2025).

74 Transport from Zgierz, Lodz, Lodz, Poland to Głowno, Ghetto, Poland on 27/12/1939, in: *Yad Vashem*, <https://deportation.yadvashem.org/index.html?language=en&itemId=13667728&ind=-1> (23 May 2025).

newly established welfare organizations alongside civil administrative authorities. The Main Committee for Welfare (*Rada Główna Opiekuńcza* – RGO), the Jewish Social Self-Help (*Żydowska Samopomoc Społeczna* – ŻSS), and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (AJJDC) were responsible for non-Jewish and Jewish deportees respectively.⁷⁵ On arrival, the newcomers were temporarily housed in larger buildings near the train station, such as schools, synagogues, or monasteries, where they were provided with a meal and basic sanitary facilities.⁷⁶ The reception of hundreds of thousands of new arrivals throughout the General Government, however, still required the help of the local community. After being cared for by the welfare organizations, the newcomers were distributed by the local Polish Sołtys or the Jewish Council in the town or surrounding villages and stayed with local Jewish or non-Jewish families.⁷⁷

5. Relations with locals

After arrival, the situation of Jews and non-Jews was generally similar. Those who were placed with families were usually looked after by them, and in return helped with housework, farming, or childcare, often mentioning the hardship that taking in strangers meant for their hosts.⁷⁸ The (especially Jewish) population in many regions had declined as a result of flight to the Soviet-occupied territories.⁷⁹ Instead of being placed with families, some deportees were thus given rooms or houses for themselves, where they lacked everything.⁸⁰ Even though they were assigned vari-

75 Aleksandra Bańkowska/Maria Ferenc Piotrowska, Wstęp [Introduction], in: Archiwum Ringelbluma 27 (2017), xxxix–xlv; Klaus-Peter Friedrich, Einleitung, in: idem (ed.), Die Verfolgung und Ermordung der europäischen Juden durch das nationalsozialistische Deutschland 1933–1945 (VEJ), vol. 9: Polen: Generalgouvernement August 1941–1945, Berlin/Boston 2013, 13–49, 18.

76 USC Shoah Foundation, VHA, Interview 27698 with Bella Marchewka, 8 April 1997; AAN, 2/125/0/4.2/1031, Informacja o transportach wysiedlonych [Information on Resettlement Transports] by the ROP Wolbrom, 6 March 1941, 33.

77 Transport from Poznań (see footnote 72); Agnieszka Łuczak, Verjagt und enteignet. Die Aussiedlung des polnischen Landadels aus Großpolen 1939, in: Jacek Kubiak (Hg.), Vertriebene 1939. Deportationen von polnischen Bürgern aus den ins Dritte Reich eingegliederten Gebieten (Ausstellungskatalog), Poznań 2015, 48–70, 56–58.

78 Michalska, Wysziedlenie z Konina, 1985, 249; Ryszard Stawicki, Wyrzucińcy [The Exiles], in: Dyliński (ed.), Wysziedlenie i poniewierka, 1985, 379–392, 381; Jason Tingler, A Local History of the Sobibór Death Camp and Nazi Occupation, in: Christian Gerlach (ed.), On the Social History of Persecution, Berlin/Boston 2023, 225–242, 230.

79 Alina Skibińska, Biłgoraj County Before and after 1939. Parallel Worlds, in: Grabowski/Engelking (eds.), Night without End, 2022, 55–108, 116.

80 AAN, 2/125/0/1.3/115, Polnischer Hauptausschuss, Jahresbericht über die Tätigkeit in der Zeit vom 1. April 1940 bis zum 31. März 1941, 63; USC Shoah Foundation, VHA Interview 27698 with Bella Marchewka, 8 April 1997.

ous farms from which they were to receive food in turn, and were given cards (*karty ewidencyjne*) enabling them to go to soup kitchens, the situation was dire.⁸¹ Malnutrition and inadequate living conditions led to various diseases, such as scabies or tuberculosis, and death.⁸² Wojciech Sterczyński's family survived because relatives still in the annexed territories sent food parcels.⁸³ Aid organizations struggled to get small sums of money left with relatives for the deportees, usually without success.⁸⁴ They were also involved in attempts to recover lost luggage – efforts which (it seems) were largely recorded only for non-Jewish deportees. In May 1941, for example, Walenty Bociański, who had arrived at the General Government more than five months earlier, had still not received his suitcase, which had been transported separately from him. A list of the contents of the suitcase in question illustrates the dire situation. Apart from shoes, a set of clothes, soap, bed linen, a prayer book, and a master's diploma, Bociański had brought nothing.⁸⁵

Just as the disappearance of people from the annexed territories had a lasting effect there, so their arrival changed the communities that took them in. In the Jarosław district close to the German-Soviet demarcation line alone, people arrived in large numbers from Pomorze, Poznań, Bydgoszcz, Sosnowiec, Toruń, Włocławek, changing the composition of the population.⁸⁶ According to an RGO report, by March 1940 around 200,000 people had found free accommodation in private homes in 1,000 communities in the General Government. In February 1941, Chełm Lubelski housed the largest number of deportees, 20,788 people.⁸⁷ Although the communities affected by the reception of the newcomers were given a quota of additional food rations by welfare organizations, the deportees were a growing burden.⁸⁸ There was a housing shortage, which encouraged the spread of diseases such

81 Bańkowska/Piotrowska, *Wstęp*, 2017, xxxix–xlv; Stawicki, *Wygnańcy*, 1985, 382.

82 AAN, 2/125/0/1.3/115, Polnischer Hauptausschuss, Jahresbericht über die Tätigkeit in der Zeit vom 1. April 1940 bis zum 31. März 1941, 64.

83 Sterczyński, *Smutny los*, 1985, 397. Edward Matyklański went even further and smuggled food from the Warthegau to the deportees, cf. Szeląg, W Tomaszowie Mazowieckim, 1985, 411.

84 AAN, 2/125/0/4.2/1581, letter from the RGO to Leon Cwiek, 2 May 1941, 18; *ibid.*, letter from the RGO to Abteilung Bevölkerungswesen und Fürsorge bei der Regierung des Generalgouvernements [Department of Population Affairs and Welfare at the Government of the General Government], 29 April 1941, 40. The letter discussed confiscated assets.

85 AAN, 2/125/0/4.2/1580, Nachforschung von Gepäck von Aussiedlern, das auf dem Transport vom Reich ins Generalgouvernement verloren gegangen ist, 28 May 1941, 219.

86 AAN, 2/125/0/4.2/1033, Komunikat Transportów wysiedlonych [Report on Resettlement Transports], 30 May 1941, 7.

87 AAN, 2/125/0/1.3/115, Polnischer Hauptausschuss, Jahresbericht über die Tätigkeit in der Zeit vom 1. April 1940 bis zum 31. März 1941, 63.

88 AAN, 2/125/0/4.2/1031, Informacja o transportach wysiedlonych, ROP Wolbrom, 6 March 1941, 33–34; Jean-Charles Szurek, Łuków County, in: Grabowski/Engelking (eds.), *Night without End*, 2022, 173–233, 180.

as typhus.⁸⁹ The transfer of able-bodied and ‘Germanizable’ (*eindeutschungsfähige*) Poles to the ‘Old Reich’ meant that many elderly and sick people, as well as children, settled in the General Government.⁹⁰

In general, relations were initially described as “warm”.⁹¹ This clearly distinguished their experience from that of the (non-Jewish) Poles brought to Germany. Forced labourers there faced harsh discrimination, hunger, and hard labour,⁹² and those selected for ‘Germanization’ described physical abuse and poor treatment by the families who took them in.⁹³ Ryszard Stawicki, on the other hand, emphasized that it was clear to him that in the General Government he was “in Poland and among Poles”.⁹⁴ The actual reception of the new arrivals also depended on the time of the deportation, the exact place of arrival, and the background of the deportees. Mayors could refuse to provide deportees with adequate supplies, such as firewood, as some communities were “naturally very poor [...] and the farmers were overwhelmed by the displaced persons”.⁹⁵ Regions such as Biłgoraj County were economically underdeveloped, with no sewage system or electricity in many places. The population lived in a much more rural environment than many of the (early) deportees were familiar with.

Jews in particular sometimes described feeling like outsiders in the communities to which they were taken.⁹⁶ In smaller towns in the east, the Jewish population often lived more separately from their Polish neighbours than what the deportees were used to. The Jews of Biłgoraj County, for example, were very religious, significantly less assimilated than in other parts of Poland, and spoke Polish with an accent.⁹⁷ Many of the deportees, however, spoke German or Polish much better than Yid-

89 Bogdan Musiał, Ursprünge der “Aktion Reinhardt”, in: idem (ed.), “Aktion Reinhardt”. Der Völkermord an den Juden im Generalgouvernement 1941–1944, Osnabrück 2004, 49–86, 56–58.

90 IfZ MA 158/3, Monatlicher Lagebericht Kreis-Hauptmann Warschau-Land, 5 March 1941, 2, 27.

91 AAN, 2/125/0/4.2/1031, Informacja o transportach wysiedlonych, ROP Wolbrom, 6 March 1941, 33.

92 Mark Spoerer, Zwangsarbeit unter dem Hakenkreuz. Ausländische Zivilarbeiter, Kriegsgefangene und Häftlinge im Deutschen Reich und im besetzten Europa, 1939–1945, Stuttgart 2001; Gregorz Hryciuk (ed.), Zwangsumsiedlung, Flucht und Vertreibung, 1939–1959. Atlas zur Geschichte Ostmitteleuropas, Bonn 2009, 77–80; Maria Korzeniewska, Taka ... taka jest prawda [That ... That Is the Truth], Pleszew 2006, 46–48.

93 IPN GK 642/38, Bericht über den Verlauf der Eindeutschung von rassisch wertvollen Fremdstämmigen, 19 December 1942, 14; IPN GK 642/35, letter (translated) from Kazimiera K. to the Vormundschaftsverwaltung (guardianship administration) of resettled ethnic Germans, 1 May 1942, 1; IPN GK 642/35, letter (translated) from Josef L. from Korbach to the Litzmannstadt camp, 10 May 1942, 4.

94 Stawicki, Węgnańcy, 1985, 381.

95 AAN, 2/125/0/4.2/1580, letter from the ROP Jasło to the Kreishauptmann (district chief) in Jasło, 21 April 1941, 17. In this letter, the ROP Jasło called for aid for various communities.

96 Mira Feldman, for example, recalled that she did not understand the local Jews. Everyone looked “like a rabbi” to her. Cf. USC Shoah Foundation, VHA, Interview 23342 with Mira Feldman, 12 December 1996.

97 Skibińska, Biłgoraj County, 2022, 56.

dish.⁹⁸ Bala Sklarz stressed that the local Jews “thought that my mother was a goy” because she spoke Polish so flawlessly.⁹⁹ Lisbeth Brodie felt a stark contrast between the wealthy and not very resilient “German Jews” on her transport and the “very primitive religious Jewish people” who received them in Ostrów Lubelski.¹⁰⁰

Particularly in the early days of the deportations, when, in addition to Jews, the main targets were supposedly “anti-German” Poles and members of the Polish elite – especially people from larger cities – they were sometimes perceived by the communities that took them in as part of the “intelligentsia”, as “semi-intellectuals” (in the German terminology), or even as criminals who stood out from the local (rural) population.¹⁰¹ Conversely, some deportees felt so strongly that they did not belong in the General Government that they tried to reverse their deportation. On 15 March 1941, for example, Josef Stefanski wrote to the district captain of Chełm that he was “German-minded” and that, as a veteran of World War One, he was asking for the return of his property, not least because his shop was now empty after the newly arrived ethnic Germans had abandoned it after a short time.¹⁰² Apart from a few exceptions where early deportees were retrospectively recognized as being “of German descent” (*deutschstämmig*), such petitions led to nothing.¹⁰³ For Jews, of course, this was never an option. All non-Jewish Poles deported after April 1940 who had passed through a UWZ camp had also been ‘selected’ and did not have this option. Most newcomers thus had to find ways to survive in forced exile.

6. Work and mobility

Having been robbed of almost everything they owned, deportees generally had nothing to lose. Jews who were only affected by the early, particularly chaotic deportations were often extremely poorly equipped.¹⁰⁴ As the general economic situation worsened, many resorted to begging¹⁰⁵ or found other ways to improve their situation. Although this became increasingly difficult, Jews in particular attempted to

98 Carlos Aberto Haas, *Das Private im Ghetto. Jüdisches Leben im deutsch besetzten Polen, 1939 bis 1944*, Göttingen 2020, 70–72.

99 USC Shoah Foundation, VHA, Interview 28911 with Bala Sklarz, 14 May 1997.

100 USC Shoah Foundation, VHA, Interview 16316 with Lisbeth Brodie, 16 June 1996.

101 AAN, 2/125/0/4.2/1031, Informacja o transportach wysiedlonych, ROP Wolbrom, 6 March 1941, 33–34; Sługocki, *Wysiedlenie z Kalisza*, 1985, 367.

102 IPN GK 69/76, letter (copy) from Josef Stefanski to the Kreishauptmann of Chełm, 15 March 1941, 1.

103 Bundesarchiv Berlin (BArch), R 49/730, letter by the Reichskommissar für die Festigung deutschen Volkstums to the RSHA, 18 June 1940, 9.

104 However, as mentioned above, there were also cases of Poles whose luggage had been lost.

105 Skibińska, *Biłgoraj County*, 2022, 62.

cross the demarcation line into the Soviet occupation zone.¹⁰⁶ Such decisions could have unforeseen consequences, as many such refugees were arrested or eventually deported to the interior of the Soviet Union, where they had to work and live in terrible conditions, but were saved from the Holocaust.¹⁰⁷

Others – Jews and non-Jews alike – crossed the border back into the annexed territories. This was, of course, strictly forbidden.¹⁰⁸ Although the customs border had moved following the annexation of the western Polish territories, the police border still coincided with the former Reich border. This meant that the Warthegau could not be entered or left without official permission, presumably to better shield Himmler's population policy measures from the outside world.¹⁰⁹ Nonetheless, in the months following the first deportations, many returned with official permits. German reports in the annexed territories mention “an extremely high percentage” of deportees who had received leave certificates from municipal and district authorities, as well as Wehrmacht departments in the General Government, entitling them to settle their “personal affairs” in the Warthegau and elsewhere within four weeks.¹¹⁰ In the Inowrocław administrative district, it is estimated that up to 20 per cent of the deportees had returned.¹¹¹

The authorities assumed that the returnees intended to bring hidden valuables and sums of money “discreetly across the border” to the General Government.¹¹² This was indeed the case for some Jewish deportees who managed to return to their place of forced exile with recovered valuables.¹¹³ On the other hand, others – mainly non-Jews, it seems – never returned to their place of exile and simply stayed in the annexed territories. Tadeusz Modrzycki's uncle decided to return home and soon

106 ŻIH, 301/1776, Testimony of Samuel Druck, 23 March 1946 in Kraków, 3; USC Shoah Foundation, VHA, Interview 9967 with David Gelbart, 11 December 1995.

107 ŻIH, 301/7146, Testimony of Mieczysław Prygoniker, April 1984 in Polanica Zdrój, 1–18; Gosudarstvennyj Archiv Rossijskoj Federatsii GARF [State Archive of the Russian Federation] 9479-1-60, letter from Juferev (first name unknown) to Michail Konradov, 4 March 1941, 24; Anna Zapalec, Obywatele Polscy deportowani na teren Syberii Zachodniej i Wschodniej w latach 1940–1941. Główne skupiskai charakterystyczne problemy życia codziennego [Polish Citizens Deported to Western and Eastern Siberia in 1940–1941. Main Concentrations and Characteristic Problems of Everyday Life], in: Dzieje Najnowsze [Contemporary History] 45/2 (2013), 67–80.

108 Transport from Strykow, Brzeziny, Lodz, Poland to Glowno, Ghetto, Poland on 29/12/1939, in: Yad Vashem, <https://collections.yadvashem.org/en/deportations/13673003> (18 September 2025). Tron Mendel reported that many Jews who had been deported from Łódź in October 1939 returned to the city: ŻIH, 301/157, Testimony of Tron Mendel, 2.

109 Alberti, *Verfolgung und Vernichtung*, 2006, 54.

110 IPN GK 69/16, Erfahrungsbericht (Abschrift) über die Umsiedlung von Polen und Juden aus dem Reichsgau „Wartheland“, 26 January 1940, 20.

111 Alberti, *Verfolgung und Vernichtung*, 2006, 141.

112 IPN GK 69/16, Erfahrungsbericht (Abschrift) über die Umsiedlung von Polen und Juden aus dem Reichsgau „Wartheland“, 26 January 1940, 20.

113 Transport from Lubien to Szymanow (see footnote 25); USC Shoah Foundation, VHA, Interview 19088 with David Irwin, 27 August 1996.

asked his family to join him, as the ethnic German settlers who had taken their place were using the returnees as farm labourers.¹¹⁴ In January 1940, the gendarmerie in Aleksandrów reported a “significant influx” of previously deported individuals.¹¹⁵ In the Wieluń district alone, at least 200 returnees were registered.¹¹⁶ In some cases, returnees were recaptured by the German authorities. Those with permits were simply sent back, those without were handed over to the Gestapo.¹¹⁷ For his unauthorized return, Czesław Maruszewski was sentenced to four months’ imprisonment and subsequent return to the General Government.¹¹⁸ From February 1941, returnees were to be punished by imprisonment in concentration camps.¹¹⁹

For Jews, another form of mobility seems to have been more common – like non-Jews, they often moved within the General Government. Some left their places of exile almost immediately, others after a few months to be with family or to earn money.¹²⁰ As a result, the transports were soon spread throughout the General Government.¹²¹ Warsaw, however, stood out among the Jewish deportees.¹²² The influx of people there was so great that it was almost impossible to accommodate them.¹²³ Once settled in the General Government, the deportees tried to survive. Aid organizations often attempted to find work for the deportees by bringing them to the attention of the German authorities:

“Ing. Feliks Karabiński, resident of Krakow, Barska 41. W.5, [...] is a road construction engineer by profession, has a perfect command of the German language and, in connection with his profession, is also well versed in office

114 Tadeusz Modrzycki, *Powrót był zbrodnią* [The Return Was a Crime], in: Dyliński (ed.), *Wysiedlenie i poniewierka*, 1985, 261–273, 267.

115 IPN GK 68/169, *Auszug aus Bericht d.(er) Gend.(armerie) b.(ei) d.(er) Reg.(ierung) in Posen*, 31 January 1940, 1.

116 Stiller, *Völkische Politik*, 2022, 437 f.

117 IPN GK 62/300, letter (copy) from the Reich Governor to the Regierungspräsident in Posen, 18 September 1940, 1.

118 IPN GK 69/520, letter from the gendarmerie to the UWZ, 13 January 1941, 11; *ibid.*, *Vernehmungs-niederschrift Czeslaw Maruszewski*, 29 January 1941, 29.

119 Stiller, *Völkische Politik*, 2022, 436–439.

120 USC Shoah Foundation, VHA, Interview 27755 with Alexander Zerkowicz, 31 March 1997; USC Shoah Foundation, VHA, Interview 5487 with Blanche Pavony, 14 August 1995; USC Shoah Foundation, VHA, Interview 46876 with Dora Wartska, 13 October 1998.

121 Transport, Train 1059 from Włocławek, Włocławek, Warszawa, Poland to Włoszczowa, Włoszczowa, Kielce, Poland on 14/02/1940, in: Yad Vashem, <https://deportation.yadvashem.org/index.html?language=en&itemId=13679816&ind=-1> (12 September 2024).

122 Leah Prais, *Displaced Persons at Home. Refugees in the Fabric of Jewish Life in Warsaw*, September 1939–July 1942, Jerusalem 2015.

123 Doc. 106, *Raport wysłannika Rządu Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej na uchodźstwie z dnia 10 stycznia 1941 r.* [Report from an Envoy of the Exile Government, 10 January 1941], in: Halina Czarnocka/Józef Garliński/Kazimierz Iranek-Osmecki (eds.), *Wrzesień 1939–czerwiec 1941*, vol. 1: *Armia Krajowa w dokumentach 1939–1945* [September 1939–June 1941, vol. 1: *The Home Army in Documents 1939–1945*], Wrocław et al. 1990, 384.

work, cash and stock accounting, etc. He has a family of three to support and is in an extremely critical financial situation.”¹²⁴

Finding work was difficult for both Jewish and non-Jewish deportees, because craftsmen and merchants had to leave their tools and goods behind. This is how Heller Ascher explained his dire situation.¹²⁵ Bernard Szeląg survived by doing odd jobs, such as forestry work, which the locals did not want to do.¹²⁶ Others were fortunate enough to return to their former professions.¹²⁷ This was the case with teachers, for example. Cyryl Ratajski, the former mayor of Poznań who had himself been deported in 1939, was responsible for the underground West Office of the Polish government in exile, which supported teachers, scientists, and artists entrusted with underground education. In 1943–44, they looked after more than 2,000 students.¹²⁸ Other deportees found employment with aid organizations. Janina Matraś, for example, looked after other displaced families in her area.¹²⁹ Those (non-Jewish) deportees who had a good knowledge of German generally had an easier time finding work in the occupation administration.¹³⁰

Some families – Jewish and non-Jewish alike – adjusted to the conditions. When Ralph Jordan’s Jewish father found work with a non-Jewish watchmaker, he emphasized that the family’s life in exile even became “somewhat normal”.¹³¹ This changed with the German attack on the Soviet Union and the progress of the war, as well as the increasing repression in occupied Poland. Initially, Jews and non-Jews faced similar obstacles during their deportation and upon arrival in exile. Yet soon, a general obligation for Jews to work in the General Government was introduced on 26 October 1939.¹³² During 1940 and especially afterwards, the situation of Jews deteriorated. Even though there were no official, closed ghettos everywhere, Jews were much more restricted in their freedom of movement after 1940.¹³³ As much as we can talk about Jews and non-Jews initially facing similar hardships, later their trajectories changed.

124 AAN, 2/125/0/4.2/1580, letter from the RGO to the Department of Economy regarding Feliks Karabinski, 20 June 1941, 257.

125 ŻIH, 301/678, Testimony by Heller Ascher, 15 July 1945 in Przemyśl, 1.

126 Szeląg, *W Tomaszowie Mazowieckim*, 1985, 410.

127 Sługocki, *Wysiedlenie z Kalisza*, 1985, 370; USC Shoah Foundation, VHA, Interview 27698 with Bella Marchewka, 8 April 1997.

128 Pertti Aho et al., *People on the Move. Forced Population Movements in Europe in the Second World War and Its Aftermath*, Oxford/New York 2008, 119 f.

129 Janina Matraś, *Z Włocławka do Warszawy [From Włocławek to Warsaw]*, in: Dylński (ed.), *Wysiedlenie i poniewierka*, 1985, 228 f.; Szeląg, *W Tomaszowie Mazowieckim*, 1985, 410.

130 Łuczak, *Verjagt und enteignet*, 2015, 56–58; Maren Röger, *Von Fischotter und seiner Frau. Besatzungsalltag und NS-Rassenpolitik am Beispiel eines deutsch-polnischen Paares im Generalgouvernement*, in: *Historische Zeitschrift* 299/1 (2014), 70–98, 83.

131 USC Shoah Foundation, VHA, Interview with Ralph Jordan, 13 October 1996.

132 Alberti, *Verfolgung und Vernichtung*, 2006, 125.

133 Skibińska, *Biłgoraj County*, 2022, 62.

7. The Holocaust and its implications

This period of German-Soviet cooperation ended with Germany's attack on the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941. The war in the East marked a new escalation of violence, particularly against the Jewish population. As the war progressed, the material situation throughout Poland worsened. This hit the newcomers hard in their already dire situation. Non-Jewish deportees were particularly vulnerable to being selected for forced labour in Germany.¹³⁴ Some were also subjected to further expulsions. Families deported to the Zamość area, for example, became victims of Operation Zamość from 1942, which aimed at the violent 'Germanization' of the region.¹³⁵ The worsening material conditions also affected the quality of relations between the local population and the deportees. After the arrival of 375 deportees in the village of Sobibór, the locals were initially generous and made many donations to help the new arrivals. By July 1942, however, Polish aid organizations began to notice a growing indifference to the fate of the deportees. As poverty became more widespread, the deported families were sometimes envied because they were to some extent provided for by the relief organizations.¹³⁶

The situation of the Jewish deportees was, of course, much worse. When they arrived, almost no ghettos had been set up.¹³⁷ The first ghetto in occupied Poland was established in Piotrków Trybunalski (Petrikau) in September 1939. Until the spring of 1941, ghettoization was mainly carried out at the instigation of local authorities in an attempt to solve a wide variety of problems, many of which had been caused by the authorities themselves. With preparations for the attack on the Soviet Union came further waves of ghettoization in the winter of 1941/42. In many places, however, ghettoization only took place in the course of Operation Reinhardt.¹³⁸ Even though not all Jews were in ghettos at the beginning of 1942, their treatment by the German occupying forces, in particular, deteriorated, as did their general living conditions.¹³⁹

134 Stawicki, Wygnańcy, 1985, 383.

135 Alexandra Pulvermacher, 'Aktion Zamosc' and its Entanglements with the Holocaust, in: Henning Borggräfe/Akim Jah (eds.), *Deportations in the Nazi Era. Sources and Research*, vol. 2, Berlin/Boston 2023, 509–528, 509.

136 Tingler, *A Local History*, 2023, 230–234.

137 The Ghetto in Piotrków Trybunalski, in: Yad Vashem, <https://www.yadvashem.org/communities/piotrkow-trybunalski/ghetto.html> (23 May 2025); USC Shoah Foundation, VHA, Interview 33788 with Miriam Young, 29 September 1997.

138 Jacek Andrej Młynarczyk, *Organisation und Durchführung der "Aktion Reinhardt" im Distrikt Radom*, in: Musiał (ed.), *"Aktion Reinhardt"*, 2004, 165–196, 167 f.

139 David Silberklang, *Die Juden und die ersten Deportationen aus dem Distrikt Lublin*, in: Musiał (ed.), *"Aktion Reinhardt"*, 2004, 141–164, 142–144.

Because as time progressed, the German authorities also increased the number of requests for Jewish forced labourers.¹⁴⁰

Due to their high mobility, some deportees managed to avoid the ghetto by moving from place to place, but eventually there was nowhere left to go.¹⁴¹ Once in a ghetto, leaving without permission was punishable by death.¹⁴² Unless they could survive on false papers or otherwise pass as non-Jews, most were increasingly trapped. Life in the ghetto varied from place to place. But as strangers, the deportees were in a dire situation everywhere.¹⁴³ Like most other newcomers deported from Germany or elsewhere to ghettos in the General Government, they often lived as lodgers in overcrowded rooms.¹⁴⁴ In his testimony, Leon Burzynski stresses that those who had “lived there before” were in a much better situation.¹⁴⁵ Living conditions could be improved by an extensive network of acquaintances and wealth – both of which the deportees typically lacked. As German repression began to be felt more, Jewish deportees, like their non-Jewish compatriots, could no longer count on the support of the local population.¹⁴⁶ This is illustrated by the reports on the condition of the children of refugees and evacuees in the Warsaw Ghetto:

“Under the influence of foreign persecution, the soul of the child did not bend, the character of the persecuted and beaten Jew did not break. What the foreign [German] violence did not destroy, the indifference of our society did.”¹⁴⁷

140 Wolf Gruner, *Jewish Forced Labor Under the Nazis. Economic Needs and Racial Aims 1938–1944*, Cambridge 2006, 237; USC Shoah Foundation, VHA, Interview 19088 with David Irwin, 27 August 1996.

141 USC Shoah Foundation, VHA, Interview 46876 with Dora Wartska, 13 October 1998.

142 Musiał, *Ursprünge der “Aktion Reinhardt”*, 2004, 56–58; see also DOK. 13, *Dritte Verordnung über Aufenthaltsbeschränkungen im Generalgouvernement*, printed in: Friedrich (ed.), *Polen: Generalgouvernement August 1941–1945* (VEJ 9), 2013, 92–93: On 15 October 1941, Governor General Frank ordered that any Jew leaving the ghetto without permission would be punished by death.

143 USC Shoah Foundation, VHA, Interview 28911 with Bala Sklarz, 14 May 1997; Doc. 323, *Wniosek KOM (Komitet opiekuńczy miejski) o przyznanie pożyczki na założenie warsztatów*, skierowany do dyr. (Icchaka) Gitermana [Application for a Loan by the KOM (Municipal Welfare Committee) to Establish Workshops, Addressed to Director (Icchak) Giterman], in: *Archiwum Ringelbluma* 27 (2017), 1074.

144 Doc. 310, *Pismo Dawida Erslera do Sekcji Opieki nad Uchodźcami i Pogrzelcami w sprawie reorganizacji Wydziału Ziomkostw* [Letter by Dawid Ersler to the Welfare Section for Refugees and Fire Victims Regarding the Reorganization of the Homeland Associations Department], in: *Archiwum Ringelbluma* 27 (2017), 1045.

145 USC Shoah Foundation, VHA, Interview 40846 with Leon Burzynski, 22 April 1998; USC Shoah Foundation, VHA, Interview 5034 with Izi Landau, 13 October 1995.

146 USC Shoah Foundation, VHA, Interview 19088 with David Irwin, 27 August 1996.

147 Doc. 287, *W. Braun, Raporty z wizytacji internatów s świetlic w punktach dla uchodźców* [Reports from Inspections of Boarding Houses and Community Centers at Refugee Points], 24 January – 1 March 1942, in: *Archiwum Ringelbluma* 27 (2017), 960–966, 964 f.

As strangers in forced exile, the deportees were even more dependent on aid organizations. Ten per cent of the refugee population were so destitute that they had to find shelter in one of the houses set up by the aid organizations. Conditions were catastrophic. Most rooms were unheated and filthy, as people lacked the strength to get up to relieve themselves. In some places the mortality rate was as high as 25 per cent.¹⁴⁸ Such conditions made Jews particularly vulnerable to the impending deportations of Operation Reinhardt, as the destitute and sick were targeted first.¹⁴⁹

8. Operation Reinhardt – death and survival

Even before the German invasion of the Soviet Union, Hitler promised General Governor Hans Frank that the General Government in occupied Poland would soon be ‘free of Jews’. The initial plan was to deport Jews from German-controlled areas to the newly conquered eastern territories. However, as the war against the Soviet Union stalled, these deportations became unfeasible. By the end of 1941 and early 1942, Nazi officials openly discussed plans for the Final Solution.¹⁵⁰ Operation Reinhardt involved the organized mass murder of Jews in the General Government and the Białystok region utilizing extermination camps at Bełżec, Sobibór, and Treblinka, which were linked to Majdanek and Auschwitz in terms of logistics and functionality. Deportations from ghettos such as Lublin and Lviv to these camps began in March 1942.¹⁵¹ They continued until late 1943, resulting in the murder of around 1.7 million Jews.¹⁵²

During Operation Reinhardt, most of the early deportees perished in the extermination camps together with the other inhabitants of the ghetto.¹⁵³ Particularly after the liquidation of the ghettos or camps, the Polish *Policja Granatowa* often participated in the hunt for Jews who had fled or were hiding in the General Government. They executed both Jews and their helpers, also on their own initiative.¹⁵⁴ Non-Jewish deportees were also involved in the persecution of Jews. Poles forcibly resettled from the annexed territories were more easily recruited into the police and administrative

148 Bańkowska/Piotrowska, Wstęp, 2017, liii.

149 Marcel Reich-Ranicki, *Mein Leben*, Hamburg 2006.

150 Friedrich, Einleitung, 2013, 19–34.

151 Dieter Pohl, Die “Aktion Reinhardt” im Licht der Historiographie, in: Musiał (ed.), “Aktion Reinhardt”, 2004, 15–47, 15 f.

152 Janina Kielboń, Judendeportationen in den Distrikt Lublin (1939–1943), in: Musiał (ed.), “Aktion Reinhardt”, 2004, 111–140, 133. See also Stephan Lehnstaedt/Robert Traba, Einleitung, in: idem (eds.), *Die “Aktion Reinhardt”. Geschichte und Gedenken*, Berlin 2019, 9–26.

153 Those deported from Poznań to Ostrów Lubelski, for example, most likely perished in Bełżec, Sobibór, and Treblinka (see footnote 72).

154 Engelking/Babrowski, Preface, 2022, xviii.

apparatus of the General Government because of their difficult material situation. Deportees who became members of the Polish police were often particularly dutiful in fulfilling German demands.¹⁵⁵ When five Jews escaped from a train bound for the Sobibór extermination camp in October 1942, they asked a member of the village guard, Stanisław Osękowski, for food in the village of Karolinów. The village guard reported their presence to the village headman and took them, along with another member of the village guard, to the *Granatowa Policja* Station in the General Government. Both members and the head of the police had been deported from the Warthegau to the Sobibór area in 1940. The same police station was also notified in February 1943 after two Jews were caught trying to escape from the train to Sobibór. It was now under the command of Jan Wielebski from Poznań. The young refugees were shot at the police station by Wielebski's 17-year-old son.¹⁵⁶ The deportations of Polish citizens therefore included both willing collaborators and particularly vulnerable victims.

Jewish deportees from the annexed territories sometimes managed to survive Operation Reinhardt, either in labour camps or in hiding.¹⁵⁷ For those in hiding, it was generally important to be able to rely on Polish or Ukrainian friends or acquaintances for protection.¹⁵⁸ Non-Jews who took in or hid Jews faced the death penalty.¹⁵⁹ Meanwhile, those who reported wandering Jews and their helpers were offered a reward.¹⁶⁰ The deportees benefited from the “social capital” needed to survive, but this only happened in isolated cases.¹⁶¹ In the spring of 1942, a member of the Jewish Council in Izbica asked a colleague in Warsaw to look after his brother-in-law from the annexed territories, as he was “a stranger in the Warsaw area”. In return, the author promised to protect a certain Israel Gross, who had also come to Izbica from the annexed territories.¹⁶² As most deportees could not rely on such con-

155 Jan Grabowski, *Hunt for the Jews. Betrayal and Murder in German-Occupied Poland*, Bloomington 2013, 102.

156 Tingle, *A Local History*, 2023, 235 f.; Haas, *Das Private im Ghetto*, 2020, 321.

157 USC Shoah Foundation, VHA, Interview 28575 with Frajda Baum, 1 April 1997; USC Shoah Foundation, VHA, Interview 15571 with Esther Zembow, 26 May 1996. See also the interviews with Irwin, Landau, Sklarz, and Marchewka.

158 Natalia Aleksion, *Gender and the Daily Lives of Jews in Hiding in Eastern Galicia*, in: *Journal of Jewish Women's Studies & Gender Issues* (2014), 38–61.

159 DOK. 2, *Anordnung des Kreishauptmanns von Grójec*, gez. Zimmermann, in: *Grójec an die Bürgermeister des Kreises vom 16.8.1941*, printed in: Friedrich (ed.), *Polen: Generalgouvernement August 1941–1945* (VEJ 9), 2013, 70: On 16 August 1941, the district governor of Grójec prohibited from taking in or employing Jews.

160 DOK. 27, *Bekanntmachung des Kreishauptmanns von Grojec vom 19.12.1941*, printed in: Friedrich (ed.), *Polen: Generalgouvernement August 1941–1945* (VEJ 9), 2013, 162: On 19 December 1941, the district governor of Grójec offered a reward for information about wandering Jews and their helpers. Cf. Młynarczyk, *Organisation und Durchführung der “Aktion Reinhardt”*, 2004, 183.

161 Skibińska, *Biłgoraj County*, 2022, 96.

162 Doc. 319, Szymon Szwartz, *Pismo do CKU (Centralna Komisja Uchodźców) z informacją o wysiedleniach z Izbicy* [Letter by Szymon Szwartz to the Central Commission for Refugees with Informa-

nections, survival in hiding was more difficult for them, as obtaining “Aryan papers” also depended on acquaintances in the local non-Jewish population administration or the Polish underground.¹⁶³ But it was not just the papers that were important. After Bala Sklarz narrowly escaped a roundup in the ghetto, she describes not knowing where to go: “I didn’t know the district. I didn’t know the people. I didn’t know where to eat or sleep.” However, because of her perfect Polish and “non-Jewish appearance”, she managed to persuade a woman to help her.¹⁶⁴ Many of the early deportees who survived passed as non-Jews, at least temporarily.¹⁶⁵

Survival “on the surface” was reserved for the assimilated, who knew Catholic practices and spoke Polish without an accent.¹⁶⁶ Unlike the local Jews, the deportees had the advantage of being both more anonymous and more assimilated, and in many cases were able to pass successfully as ethnic Poles.¹⁶⁷ Blanche Pavony, for example, a young deportee, stressed that she had found it easier to pass because she had grown up more assimilated than most of the local Jewish population.¹⁶⁸ Ralph Jordan explained his survival by stating “none of us looked Jewish. We all had a good command of the Polish language.”¹⁶⁹ Of course, this did not apply to everyone. In particular, Orthodox Jews from the annexed territories found themselves in a doubly difficult situation. Both as newcomers with no money or connections and as outwardly recognizable, the more religious Jews belonged to the group least likely to survive.¹⁷⁰ To pass as non-Jewish, they had to convince not only the occupy-

tion Regarding Those Resettled from Izbica], March 1942, in: *Archiwum Ringelbluma* 27 (2017), 1068.

163 Engelking/Baberowski, Preface, 2022, xxv.

164 USC Shoah Foundation, VHA, Interview 28911 with Bala Sklarz, 14 May 1997.

165 USC Shoah Foundation, VHA, Interview 46876 with Dora Wartska, 13 October 1998; USC Shoah Foundation, VHA, Interview 21519 with Ralph Jorden, 13 October 1996; see below for more examples.

166 Jan Grabowski, Węgrow County, in: Grabowski/Engelking (eds.), *Night without End*, 2022, 109–172, 148; Skibińska, Biłgoraj County, 2022, 73. As the example of Warsaw shows, it was much easier for highly assimilated Jews to go into hiding. Around 5% of the Jewish population there went into hiding, at least temporarily. This was because a large number of assimilated Jewish families lived in Warsaw and the liquidation of the ghetto was carried out relatively late and lasted longer. Gunnar S. Paulsson, *Das Verhältnis zwischen Polen und Juden im besetzten Warschau*, in: Musiał (ed.), “Aktion Reinhardt”, 2004, 383–404, 385. This also meant that this form of survival was unavailable to those deported from other parts of Europe later on. Robert Kuwalek, *Die Durchgangsgghettos im Distrikt Lublin* (u. a. Izbica, Piaski, Rejowiec und Trawniki), in: Musiał (ed.), “Aktion Reinhardt”, 2004, 197–232, 212–223.

167 However, there were also differences, of course. While over 98% of the Jewish population in Łódź declared Yiddish as their mother tongue, in the Poznań voivodeship it was closer to 41%. Alberti, *Verfolgung und Vernichtung*, 2006, 33.

168 USC Shoah Foundation, VHA, Interview 5487 with Blanche Pavony, 14 August 1995.

169 USC Shoah Foundation, VHA, Interview 21519 with Ralph Jorden, 13 October 1996.

170 USC Shoah Foundation, VHA, Interview 15571 with Esther Zembow, 26 May 1996; Haas, *Das Private im Ghetto*, 2020, 321.

ing forces but also Polish neighbours. Due to the widespread antisemitism in Polish society, many people participated in the search for hidden Jews or denounced them. Many Jews who had fled also concealed their Jewish identity from Polish partisan groups,¹⁷¹ as generally only Jewish or Soviet partisans took in Jews.¹⁷² But although some survivors described their interactions with these groups in positive terms,¹⁷³ there are also accounts of antisemitic behaviour¹⁷⁴ and even the murder of Jews.¹⁷⁵ In general, the chances of survival were severely limited, and the majority of Jewish deportees died during the Holocaust. Although the non-Jewish Polish deportees faced similarly poor conditions on arrival in the General Government, they survived the war in large numbers and in some cases participated in the persecution of their Jewish compatriots.

9. Conclusion

Between late 1939 and spring 1941, Polish and Jewish families from the annexed western Polish territories were deported to the General Government. The aim of this article was to show two main aspects of these early deportations before the Holocaust. Firstly, while both groups faced hardship, their experiences of deportation and their chances of escape were very different. And secondly, it is essential to examine these deportations and the living conditions of the displaced families more closely, as the chances of survival of Jewish families deported to the General Government differed from those of the local Jewish population.

Although both Jews and non-Jews were affected by resettlement measures in the early stages of the German occupation, their experiences differed significantly. Most Jewish families who faced deportation in this early phase did so by the spring of 1940. Compared to non-Jewish Polish families deported at the same time, they found it more difficult to avoid deportation, for example by emphasizing German origins. They were allowed to take less money into exile and were treated more harshly than non-Jewish Poles. But once they arrived in the General Government, their living

171 USC Shoah Foundation, VHA, Interview 19088 with David Irwin, 27 August 1996; USC Shoah Foundation, VHA, Interview 5034 with Izi Landau, 13 October 1995.

172 Engelking/Baberowski, Preface, 2022, xxv; ŻIH, 301/286, Testimony of Leja Romanowska, 5 July 1945 in Łódź, 1–2; Norman Davies/Antony Polonsky, Introduction, in: idem (eds.), *Jews in Eastern Poland and the USSR, 1939–1946*, New York 1991, 1–59, 33.

173 ŻIH, 301/111, Testimony of Chila Hering, 8 April 1945; ŻIH, 301/298, Testimony of Uszer Zalcsztejn, 5 July 1945 in Łódź, 1.

174 ŻIH, 301/299, Testimony of Zoja Baler, 6 July 1945 (no place), 1–2.

175 ŻIH, 301/156, Testimony of Jankiel Reznik, 1945 in Radom. Fima Gelfand recounts the rape of her sister and the subsequent murder of the only witness, her uncle, by Soviet partisans, ŻIH, 301/714, Testimony of Fima Gelfand, 1945 in Gliwice.

conditions as 'newcomers' were largely the same or very similar to those of non-Jews. In the General Government, all deportees initially suffered similar hardship and neglect at the hands of the German occupation authorities, but received help from both aid organizations and the local population. Many were able to improve their situation by moving around the General Government, the Soviet occupation zone, or even back to the annexed territories. Despite the adverse circumstances, many deportees managed to adapt to the new situation and even achieved some form of everyday life. This situation changed fundamentally with the onset of the Holocaust.

As the material situation worsened and German repressive measures increased the pressure on the population as a whole, both Jewish and non-Jewish deportees were disproportionately affected. Both victims of the initial German deportation policy, they often found themselves on opposing sides during the Holocaust, as non-Jewish Polish deportees made up a disproportionate number of the Polish police. Although most Jewish deportees were worse off than the local population during the Holocaust due to a lack of networks and money, some managed to survive.