

# AUSCHWITZ AS A CONCENTRATION CAMP

Throughout its existence, Auschwitz always functioned as a concentration camp. With time, it became the largest German Konzentrationslager. Initially, mainly Poles were sent there by the occupiers. The Nazis chose those whom they regarded as a particular threat: members of the Polish elite, political, social and spiritual leaders,

the intelligentsia, representatives of culture and science, people in the resistance and officers.

The first transport of Polish political prisoners, 728 prisoners in total, arrived at the camp from the prison in Tarnów on 14 June 1940. It is regarded that the camp started operating from this date on. The Nazis sent Poles to the camp throughout its existence. Among them were also people rounded up and taken to the camp during street raids or during operations to remove people from their homes, including entire families from locations earmarked for German settlement such as the Zamość area and from Warsaw during the 1944 uprising.

With time, the German authorities also started deporting groups of prisoners from other occupied countries as well as Romanies (Gypsies) and Soviet POWs. They were registered and given a number. From 1942, Jews were transported en masse to be executed

in Auschwitz. During selection by SS doctors, those classified as fit to work or selected to undergo criminal medical experiments, were registered in the camp.

Of the more than one million people deported to Auschwitz, around 400,000 people were registered and placed at the camp: approx. 200,000 Jews, almost 150,000 Poles, approx. 23,000 Romanies (Gypsies), approx. 15,000 Soviet POWs and 25,000 prisoners belonging to other nationalities. Of these more than 50% died in Auschwitz of hunger, excessive forced labour practices, terror, executions, appalling conditions, illness and epidemics, punishment, torture and criminal medical experiments. Some 200,000 prisoners were transferred by the Germans to other concentration camps, where a significant number of them died. At the time of liberation, there were about 7,000 people still in the camp.

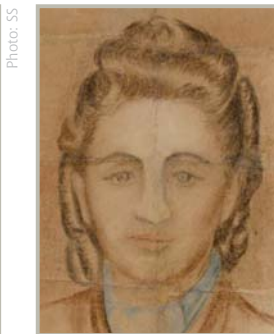


Photo: SS

Zofia Stepien-Bator, Auschwitz, 1944

Edward Galiński (a Polish political prisoner) and Mala Zimetbaum (a Jewish woman from Belgium) escaped from Auschwitz during the summer of 1944. Two weeks later the young couple who were in love with one another were caught and sentenced to death by the Gestapo.

## CATEGORIES AND MARKING OF PRISONERS AT KL AUSCHWITZ

	Jews	– from 1942 they were the most numerous group of prisoners in the camp. About 200,000 were registered.
	Political prisoners	– totalled around 160,000. Most of these were Poles arrested during various repressive operations, or for their activities in the resistance movement.
	Asocial prisoners	– this category mainly included registered Romanies (Gypsies) – more than 21,000.
SU	Soviet POWs	– approx. 15,000, of which 12,000 were registered.
EH	Correctional prisoners	– imprisoned for real or alleged breach of discipline at work. They are estimated to number 11,000.
PH	Police prisoners	– these were exclusively Poles. They were not formal KL Auschwitz prisoners. As a result of the nearby Gestapo prisons in Katowice and Mysłowice becoming overcrowded these prisoners were directed to the camp, where they were tried by summary court and usually sentenced to death by shooting. Their number is estimated to range in the thousands.
	Criminal prisoners	– primarily with German nationality and calculated at a few hundred. The camp authorities frequently chose from among them functionary prisoners to help the SS maintain order at the camp.
	Jehovah's Witnesses	– these were imprisoned in the camp for their religious behaviour and attitudes. There were at least 138 Jehovah's Witnesses, mainly of German origin, registered in this category.
	Homosexuals	– at least several dozen prisoners, mainly of German origin.



Photo: SS

KL Auschwitz II-Birkenau. Jews from Hungary on the unloading ramp. The gas chambers and crematoria can be seen in the background.

## AUSCHWITZ AND THE EXTERMINATION OF JEWS

In 1942, the camp was given a second role – it became the centre of extermination for European Jews. The only reason that they died was because they were Jews, irrespective

of their age, sex, profession, citizenship, or political convictions. After selection most of the new arrivals classed by SS doctors as unfit for work were murdered in the gas chambers.

These included the ill, the elderly, pregnant women, and children. These were never recorded in the camp as they were never registered and given numbers.



Photo: SS

The furnace hall area in the Gas Chamber and Crematorium No. II building in Birkenau.



Photo: Ryszard Domasik

An empty Cyclone B canister and clods of diatomaceous earth from which gas was released.





IN MAY AND JUNE 1944 THE NAZIS DEPORTED TO AUSCHWITZ ALMOST 440,000 JEWS FROM HUNGARY. DURING THIS PERIOD GERMAN PHOTOGRAPHERS TOOK ALMOST 200 PHOTOGRAPHS AT AUSCHWITZ II-BIRKENAU. THESE PHOTOGRAPHS INCLUDE IMAGES OF THE SS CARRYING OUT SELECTIONS ON NEW ARRIVALS, PEOPLE GOING TO THE GAS CHAMBERS OR AWAITING DEATH, AS WELL AS THE SORTING OF THINGS WHICH BELONGED TO THE MURDERED.





## COUNTRY<sup>a</sup> LIST OF JEWS TRANSPORTED TO AUSCHWITZ

Hungary	438,000 <sup>b</sup>
Poland	300,000
France	69,000
Holland	60,000
Greece	55,000
Bohemia and Moravia – Theresienstadt	46,000
Slovakia	27,000 <sup>b</sup>
Belgium	25,000
Germany and Austria	23,000
Yugoslavia	10,000
Italy	7,500
Latvia	1,000
Norway	690
Concentration camps and unknown locations	34,000
<b>Total:</b>	<b>1,100,000</b>

<sup>a</sup> pre-war borders

<sup>b</sup> borders during the war

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