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CONFLICT AND DISPLACEMENT

COURSE COMPANION

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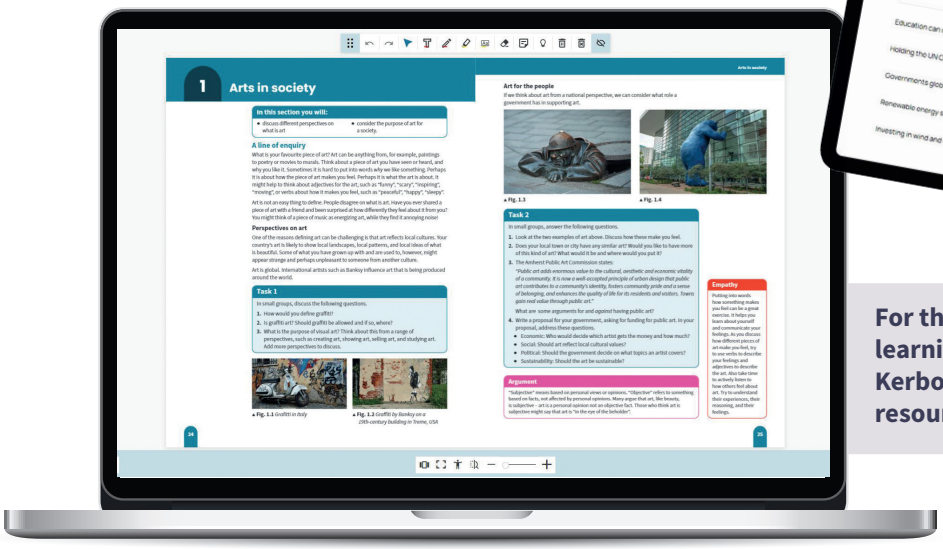

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Contents

Refugees, stateless persons and displaced persons

The terms used in this focused study have specific meanings. These meanings are internationally accepted today, although in the period following the Second World War, they were not yet as fully defined.

- A refugee is a person who has fled their country because of war, violence or persecution. They are outside their home country and may not return safely.
- A stateless person is someone who is not considered a national by any country. They may have fled their country. They may have lived their whole lives in a country but be denied nationality.
- A displaced person (DP) is anyone who has been forced to leave their usual place of residence. Internally-displaced persons (IDPs) are forced to leave their home but remain in their own country.

The Second World War resulted in massive displacement, as you learned in the previous unit. This was due to a number of causes, including the Nazi policies of forced labour and attempts to exterminate people they considered inferior or dissident, as well as the combat operations of the war. The closing days of the war and the bitter fighting led to internal and external displacement at unprecedented levels.

Once the fighting had ended, governments needed to deal with these millions of people. Ideological differences meant that many people feared to return to their homes and in some cases refused to do so because their beliefs clashed with those now in control of their home countries. Governments had to seek alternate solutions, such as encouraging emigration to countries like Australia, Britain, the United States and Canada. At the same time, a shortage of labour in several countries meant that those in charge encouraged people to migrate into their countries. In other cases, people were repatriated—sent back to their home countries. This was an enormous undertaking, and it was a period of chaos and uncertainty for millions of people.

1.2.1 Displaced persons camps, migration, emigration and repatriation

Key concepts

Perspectives

- What value do different kinds of sources provide as we study the displaced persons camps?

Significance

- How did the existence of the camps help make people aware of the Holocaust and other atrocities of the Second World War?

Cause and consequence

- How did the varied origins of the people in the displaced persons and prisoner of war camps affect the way they were treated in the camps?

Continuity and change

- How did the treatment of the displaced persons in the camps change over time?

Key term

Provenance: The origins, history and context in which an item was created, encompassing details about its creator, date, location, nature and purpose.

While they were waiting for help, many people stayed in camps, some for years. This topic will look at who the displaced people were, the camps they stayed in and the options available to them.

Displacement in Germany

For Germans, *die Stunde Null* or "Zero hour" was 30 April 1945, the day Hitler ended his life; but the actual end of the war came on 8 May 1945.

Source skills

Source A

Frederich Luft, a theatre critic, experienced the end of the war by hiding in a basement in Berlin. He recalls the smell of blood, smoke, sweat and gunpowder. He felt safer hiding in the basement than being on the street where he could be caught in the crossfire of the Germans and the Red Army.

> "It was an inferno outside. If you peered outside you saw a helpless German tank pushing its way through the blazing rows of houses, stopping firing, turning around. Every now and again, a civilian darting from shelter to shelter, stumbled along badly bombed streets. A mother with her pram rushed from a bullet-riddled, burning house towards the nearest bunker."

Questions

1. How reliable are eyewitness sources such as Source A? (Tip: look at the **provenance** of the source.)
2. How do such sources provide an understanding of the chaos that followed at the end of the Second World War?

The German words, *die Stunde Null*, denote a sense of relief, but the reality was that Germany was wrecked. The hours leading up to and beyond VE day saw the government collapsing. Some soldiers were trying to fight the Allied forces; others were trying to abandon their uniforms and slip into the crowds where they would not be recognized. The German uniform was no longer something to be proud of; rather, it was to be disposed of, burned or destroyed. Many senior officials preferred to kill themselves rather than be held accountable for their actions during the war. People broke into food stores and abandoned apartments looking for food and a place to sleep. There was no protection for anyone as the previous authority had broken down and nothing else had taken its place.

Historians vary in their assessment of the damage caused by the conflict, but all agree that the damage was great. It is certain that the end of the Second World War did not end the bloodshed for the Germans. As many as 16.5 million Germans would be driven out of their homes and 250 000 of them would die during their expulsions from southern and Eastern Europe. Other historians suggest that this second figure might be over 2 million. It was clear that the horrors of the raids on the German cities, the destruction of the war in Europe and the fact that about 6% of Europe's population had been killed would not be easily forgotten.

However, in Germany there was also a sense that this was a new beginning. Some writers in Berlin, such as journalists Ruth Andreas Frederich and Marta Hillers, who wrote under the pen name Anonyma, recorded their observations and insights into the days following the end of the war in Berlin, and recognized that the end of the Third Reich marked the beginning of something new.

The end of the war in Europe

There are three dates for the official capitulation of Germany.

- 7 May: General Alfred Jodl signed the unconditional surrender of Germany in Reims (France), the official headquarters of Field Marshal Dwight D. Eisenhower.
- 9 May: At Stalin's insistence, Germany surrendered again at the Soviet headquarters in Berlin, Germany.
- Victory in Europe Day (VE Day) is celebrated on the day between these, 8 May.

ATL Approaches to learning

Thinking and research skills

Task 1: Research the aftermath of the war and create three journal entries of 500 words each for the following people:

- a German soldier on the run
- a German soldier returning from the Western Front
- a Berliner who has lived through the Battle for Berlin.

The journal entries could span a month from mid-April to mid-May 1945. Focus on:

- the writer's emotions before and following the surrender
- what the person saw, experienced and endured personally
- the one thing that they would want the most.

Task 2: Research life for Germans in the days following the war and present the information as an American journalist for readers back home.

Assessment advice

To understand the context of a source such as Source B, consider these key questions.

- **Who?** Think about the creator of the source.
- **When**? Consider the time of creation of the source: the chronological date/month/year. Was the source created before, during or after the event?
- **Why**? Think about the intent of the creator.
- **Who?** Consider the intended audience.
- **What?** This asks you to identify the message of the source. This could be implied or overt.
- **How reliable is the source?** Does this source inform the historian about an event? What biases does the historian need to be aware of?

Initially it will take some time to answer these questions about a source, but with practice, it will become easier to use these question words to work out the context of a source.

Source skills

Source B

Wolfgang Borchert, a former German soldier, managed to escape from a POW camp and walk 600 miles to his home city in Hamburg. The destruction he saw there was captured in his essay "Generation without Farewell". He described a generation whose past had literally been blown to pieces.

> We are the generation without ties and without depth. Our depth is an abyss. We are the generation without happiness, without a home and without farewell. Our sun is narrow, our love cruel and our youth is without youth. ...
>
> We are a generation without a homecoming, because we have nothing that we could come home to. But we are a generation of arrival. Perhaps we are a generation filled with arrival on a new star, in a new life. Filled with arrival under a new sun, to new hearts. Perhaps we are a filled with arrival to a new life, to a new laughter, a new God. We are a generation without farewell, but we all know that the arrival belongs to us.

Question

Analyze the content of Source B. To what extent can this source be used to understand the experiences of displaced people after the Second World War?

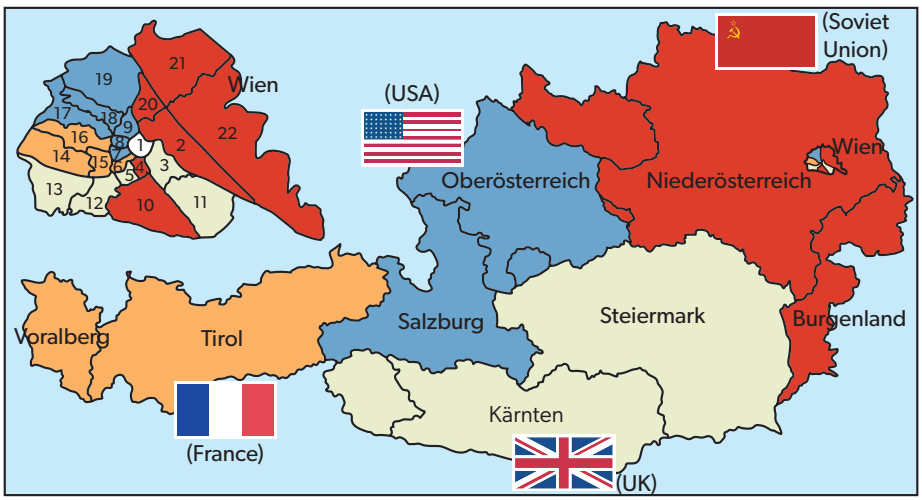
Austria after the war

Germany annexed Austria in 1938 in what was known as the *Anschluss*, as part of Hitler's drive to unite ethnic Germans in one Reich (empire). Nazi policies were immediately applied to Austria, and the country saw rising anti-semitism and repression of dissent.

In October 1943, Allied leaders met in Moscow where they discussed their intention of treating Austria as a separate country from Germany, but agreed that the country should be held responsible for its actions when it was aligned with the Nazis. At the Yalta conference in February 1945, they agreed to divide Austria into four zones, each administered by one of the Allies (see Figure 1.13). The capital, Vienna, was also to be divided into four zones.

In March 1945, the Red Army entered Austria and by 8 April it had taken Vienna (see Figure 1.14). The Viennese initially welcomed the Red Army and their liberation from the Nazis. However, the liberation was chaotic, and systematic looting for food and goods as well as rapes were reported. The Soviet commanders tended to ignore the situation. As the Germans withdrew from Austria, they took their police, and so law and order broke down completely. In Vienna, and across Austria, there were huge numbers of foreign workers drafted by the Germans, and some of them may have been involved in the looting. Nazi offices and buildings were targeted and shops and businesses were looted. Soon there were food shortages in the city. People were foraging in the woods for food and in the streams for fish.

The arrival of the Americans towards the end of April was welcomed by the Austrians. The Americans and British refused to recognize the government



▲ Figure 1.13 Map of Allied-occupied Austria

▲ Figure 1.14 Red Army soldiers after Soviet forces occupied Vienna in April 1945

installed by the Soviet Union in the days after they had arrived in Austria. By the end of April 1945, Austria was occupied by the Allied forces and by VE Day the occupation of Austria was complete.

Like Berlin, Vienna too had sustained heavy damage because of the war. More than 80 000 homes had been partially or completely destroyed and at least 35 000 people had nowhere to live. Large parts of the city had no gas, electricity or telephones. In the initial days, food was in short supply and lorries of food were sent to deal with the 1.5 million people living in the city. Rationing was introduced; it was to continue in the Soviet zone into the 1960s. Soup kitchens were set up to provide Austrians with food at nominal prices.

Food scarcity was exacerbated when ethnic Germans who had been expelled from Czechoslovakia arrived, but they were not generally welcomed. In the early days of the occupation, Austria struggled to cope with 1 million refugees and about 350 000 troops (see Figure 1.15).

▲ Figure 1.15 A Soviet soldier and her friend walking through occupied Vienna, 1946

ATL Approaches to learning

Thinking skills

Compare the experience of displacement in Austria and Germany. How were they different? How were they similar?

The liberation of Bergen-Belsen

A truce between the Germans and the British and Canadian troops allowed Allied troops to advance on the camp at Bergen-Belsen, near Hanover, in April 1945. The troops entered without a fight. What they saw was beyond belief. The troops met with a stomach-churning vista of death, and a scale of human suffering that was unbelievable. The troops calculated there were 13 000 unburied corpses and a further 60 000 emaciated, diseased, frail, almost ghost-like survivors standing or lying among them. Nearly 14 000 people died there after liberation. The vast majority were Jewish people. Others included Soviet POWs, Sinti and Roma, and gay people.

What makes the liberation of Bergen-Belsen unique was that the camp was found virtually intact. As the Red Army had advanced, the Nazis had tried to close down camps in Poland, destroying the evidence, burning records, and forcing inmates to march towards Germany, to avoid the scale of the atrocities coming to light. The conditions at Bergen-Belsen were documented and publicized, making people all over the world aware of what had happened there, and in other camps. It showed the need for post-war cooperation in providing humanitarian aid.

By June 1945, the Allies were taking steps to restore law and order. The Allies appointed High Commissioners to deal with the administration of their zones. Each worked with a number of committees to deal with denazification, the return of property and the issues relating to the influx of displaced persons (DPs). Elections were held in 1945, and the new Austrian government was recognized. The High Commissioners were given the rank of ministers.

By December 1945, as winter set in, the Allies had to give orders for trees to be cut down to be used as firewood. The challenge of feeding the Viennese remained. The major food-producing areas were in the Soviet zone. Prior to the war this area had produced 65% of the food needed. The Allies struggled to provide even 800 calories of food per day for the people. Stories from this time describe harrowing scenes, such as of children begging for food from soldiers, having lost their parents and living in holes in the ground.

Political wrangling between the Allies compounded the problem. The Soviets had little sympathy for the people in Austria, saying that Austrians had not sought freedom from Hitler. Attempts by the UN to feed the Austrians were blocked. Efforts by the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) were only successful beginning in March 1946.

Across Austria, by 1947 the country was still coping with about 600 000 DPs. This included ethnic Germans from different regions and about 170 000 Jewish people. The Americans and the British put the DPs under the care of the Austrians but the former German labour camps were used to house the former forced labourers. The Soviet zone had a camp at Meik, but it was overstretched. There were demands in Austria to expel the ethnic Germans.

The Allied occupation lasted until 1955. During this time, the Allied Commission for Austria coordinated overall governance and decisions, and organizations such as UNRRA and then later the International Refugee Organization (IRO) helped to manage the DP crisis. As in Germany, these people included Jewish people, former concentration camp inmates, *Ostarbeiter* and POWs, as well as ethnic Germans who had been expelled from areas such as Czechoslovakia. However, unlike Germany, Austria remained unified at the end of the occupation, and regained its full independence as a united country in 1955.

Displaced persons (DP) camps

The millions of displaced people in Germany and other countries needed assistance in the immediate and longer term—medical and humanitarian assistance and then relocation, repatriation and migration.

Allied troops were ill-prepared to handle the scope of the situation facing them. The end of combat meant their role was transformed overnight with responsibility for maintaining law and order; preventing violence; coping with sickness, death and destruction; and dealing with homeless and DPs. The troops had not trained for how to deal with people traumatized by war.

The Allied push into Germany and the liberation of the camps confirmed what the Soviet Union had made public when they liberated Auschwitz and Majdanek in Poland. Their stories were so horrific that they were initially discredited as

propaganda. The liberation of Bergen-Belsen in Germany on 28 April was so shocking that reporters were not allowed to report it at first.

Types of camps

At the end of the war, a number of different types of camps were set up to manage the enormous numbers of displaced people. They served different purposes and were run by different organizations, including the Allied military forces, UNRRA and, later, the IRO. Some camps served several purposes and it is not always possible to define a camp as one sort or another.

- DP camps: These housed civilians displaced by the war, including concentration camp survivors, forced labourers and former prisoners. They were run by Allied military forces and UNRAA (later by the IRO), and were later known as refugee camps or IRO resettlement camps.
- POW camps: These held captured soldiers from the Axis forces. They were run by Allied and Soviet military forces.
- Stalags: These were German POW camps where Allied POWs were held. They continued holding prisoners for a short time after the hostilities had ended.
- Internment camps: These held civilians who were considered a threat, such as collaborators. The people held in these camps were screened to see if they should be tried for war crimes.
- Repatriation and transit camps: People passed through these camps quickly, as they processed people on their way back to their country of origin, or another destination. They provided some health services and help with transport and documentation.

Most camps were situated in Germany, in the US, French and British zones, but there were also camps in Austria, Italy and other countries. A number of different types of buildings were used. In some cases, the camps were set up in former labour or concentration camps, such as Bergen-Belsen, which was traumatizing for the liberated inhabitants of these camps. Other buildings were former army barracks, although they initially lacked adequate heating, plumbing and sanitation. Public buildings such as schools and church properties were used, although they were not suitable for long-term use. Some people were also housed in tented camps or makeshift huts. These were more common in Italy and France.

The camps ended up being organized, in part, by religion and ethnicity, to make it easier to address the needs of specific groups.

Aid in the camps

Newly liberated people often had to deal with a lack of understanding of what they had endured. Aid was provided to try to send people back to their countries of origin, but governments often missed the human element of the traumas faced through their well-meaning efforts at relocation and repatriation.

Aid was provided by the governments of the countries involved, as well as aid agencies such as UNRRA and the International Red Cross.

Theory of knowledge

1. Is empathy more important in history than in other areas of knowledge?
2. On what criteria can a historian evaluate the reliability of their sources? What features of knowledge can have an impact on their reliability?

Source skills

Source C

Babenhausen was a camp for Jewish DPs in the US zone of Germany. It had been a camp for Soviet POWs during the war. This photograph shows a young baby sitting in a carriage next to a Quonset hut, a lightweight prefabricated structure.

Source D

Although the camps were meant to be temporary, some people lived in them for several years. This photo shows a refugee family living in the former concentration camp Dachau, in the early 1950s.

Question

What do these sources tell us about the facilities used as refugee camps, and how governments and aid agencies were able to deal with the vast numbers of DPs?

Link

Read more about aid agencies such as UNRRA and the International Red Cross in sections 1.2.2 and 1.2.3.

Governments cooperated to:

- set up aid organizations such as UNRRA and the IRO
- set up DP and other camps
- create legislation to help refugees with legal protections
- provide financial aid
- create legislation that allowed migration to various countries.

Independent organizations were formed to offer help to Jewish DPs in particular, as did existing organizations. The Organization for Rehabilitation through Training (ORT) helped and provided support in different ways, such as providing schooling for young children and vocational training for adults so that DPs could emigrate and build a new life. The Hebrew Immigration Aid Society (HIAS) tried to track down missing families—with some success—and helped Jewish DPs with paperwork, transportation and sponsorship in the immigration process.

Relocation and migration

In looking at people's experiences of displacement in the period after the Second World War we will focus on relocation, migration and emigration. Some groups of people migrated, such as the German people who were

forcibly expelled from Poland and Czechoslovakia after the borders were redrawn at the end of the war. We will also look briefly at how the Yalta and Potsdam agreements were crucial for the mass migration after the war.

Migration, relocation and the Yalta and Potsdam agreements

Before the war ended, Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin met at Yalta in February 1945 to discuss the post-war organization of Europe. The leaders of the three countries met again at Potsdam in July–August 1945.

The Yalta and Potsdam agreements were crucial in shaping the mass migration that followed the war. The agreements helped redraw borders.

- Poland experienced a westwards shift, as you learned in previous topics. It gained territory from the eastern parts of Germany.
- The Soviet Union gained territory that had been eastern Poland.
- The Soviet occupation of much of Eastern Europe was confirmed.

The Potsdam agreement specified that millions of ethnic Germans should be relocated from Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and elsewhere into Germany. This population transfer was the largest forced relocation in European history. The Allies sanctioned these relocations as part of a large-scale attempt to make the countries in Europe more ethnically homogenous. However, the relocations themselves were often chaotic and marked by suffering.

The Yalta agreement committed the Allies to the "orderly return" or repatriation of all liberated and displaced persons to their country of origin. This included civilians, forced labourers, military forces, Soviet citizens, Jewish survivors, Poles and Balts. By the time of the Potsdam agreement, it was clear that many people would resist this, complicating the repatriation efforts considerably, and forcing authorities to allow emigration as well as relocating people.

A further agreement between the Soviet Union, Britain and the United States, signed days after VE Day, on 23 May 1945, reinforced each country's commitment to the repatriation of all civilians and prisoners of war. It also set out exchange points, regulated the number of persons to be processed daily and established the repatriation of Allied citizens as a post-war priority.

Any discussion about the experience of DPs from Eastern Europe involves multiple countries. Some, such as Austria and Czechoslovakia, had been occupied by Germany prior to the war. Some, like Yugoslavia, had supported the Nazis, while others like Romania, had initially supported Germany but later joined the Allies.

After relocation and migration

Relocation and migration were generally traumatic and chaotic. When people were forced to relocate, they were often rounded up, allowed to take few belongings and loaded onto overcrowded trains or wagons. The journey to their destination was dangerous and many people died on the way, of starvation, exposure or disease.

Relocation, migration and emigration

Relocation is the planned or organized movement of people by an authority such as a government. Relocation may happen to achieve political, economic or military goals. It is often involuntary, and it can be temporary or permanent.

Migration is the movement of people away from their usual place of residence to a new place of residence, either across an international border or within a state. There are two main types of migration.

- International migration occurs when people cross state boundaries to live in another country for a minimum length of time.
- Internal migration is when people move within the same country.

Emigration is a type of migration. It involves moving across an international border and settling permanently in another country. Emigration is generally voluntary, although people may emigrate because they are unhappy with the circumstances in their home country. (Note that the term "emigrate" means to move out of a country, while "immigrate" means to move into a country. They are used to denote the same process but from opposite sides.)