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Expulsion of Germans after World War II

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The **expulsion of Germans after World War II** was the forced migration of German nationals (*Reichsdeutsche*) and ethnic Germans (*Volksdeutsche)* in order to achieve the ethnic cleansing of German populations from the former eastern territories of Germany, former Sudetenland and other areas across Europe in the first five years after World War II.

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The **expulsion of Germans after World War II** was the forced migration of German nationals (*Reichsdeutsche*) and ethnic Germans (*Volksdeutsche)* in order to achieve the ethnic cleansing of German populations from the former eastern territories of Germany, former Sudetenland and other areas across Europe in the first five years after World War II.

It was the largest of a number of post-war expulsions and occurred in various Central and Eastern European countries, affecting many nationalities. The Allies had agreed on a policy of Ethnic German expulsions, and the Soviet Union implemented the policy with American and British acquiescence. The policy had been agreed on by the Allies as part of the reconfiguration of postwar Europe and revenge for the Nazi initiation of the war and subsequent brutal occupations and attrocities.

As the Red Army advanced towards Germany at the end of World War II, a considerable exodus of German refugees began from the areas near the front lines. Many Germans fled their areas of residence under vague and haphazardly implemented evacuation orders of the German government in 1943, 1944, and in early 1945. Most of those who remained or returned were forced to leave by local authorities between 1945 and 1950. Census figures in 1950 place the total number of ethnic Germans still living in Eastern Europe at approximately 2.6 million, about 12 percent of the pre-war

total.

The majority of the flights and expulsions occurred in the former eastern territories of Germany, Sudetenland and other regions of Poland and Czechoslovakia. Others occurred in Hungary, northern Yugoslavia (predominantly in the Vojvodina region), and other regions of Central and Eastern Europe.

The precise number of the Germans expelled after the war is unknown, but it has been estimated by various methods. Most of the past research provided a combined estimate of 13.5-16.5 million people, including those that were evacuated by German authorities, fled or were killed during the war. However, recent research places the number at more than 12 million, including all those who fled during the war or migrated later, forcibly or otherwise, to both the Western and Eastern zones of Germany and to Austria.
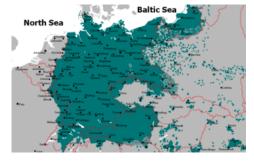
Recent analyses have led some historians to conclude that the actual number of deaths attributable to the flight and expulsions was in the range of 500,000 to 1.1 million. The earlier higher figures, up to 3.2 million, typically include all war-related deaths of ethnic Germans between 1939-45, including those who served in the German armed forces.

Background

Before World War II, Eastern and East-Central Europe generally lacked clearly shaped ethnic settlement areas. Rather, outside of certain ethnic majority areas, there were vast mixed areas and abundant smaller pockets settled by various ethnicities. Within these mixed-ethnic areas, including the major cities of Central and Eastern Europe, regular interaction between various ethnic groups took place on a daily basis. While not always harmonious, the ethnic groups interacted with each other on every civic and economic level.

With the rise of nationalism in the 19th century, ethnicity of the citizens became an issue in territorial claims, the self-perception/identity of states and claims of ethnic superiority. Prussia introduced the idea of ethnicity-based settlement in an attempt to ensure her territorial integrity.

The Treaty of Versailles resulted in creation of multiple states across Central and Eastern Europe, that before World War I had been integrated in the Habsburg and German empires. Although these countries were created and named on the basis of their respective ethnic majority, none of them were ethnically homogeneous. Attempts to change ethnic demographics were made, for example, in the newly recreated Poland by reducing the number of Germans in the Polish Corridor.

Beginning in 1933, Nazi Germany used prior historical German settlement areas as a basis for its territorial claims to justify the annexation of Austria Anschluss and the annexation of the Sudetenland in the Munich Agreement. A new dimension was introduced by the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, when Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union agreed on large scale population exchanges not following historic ethnic settlement patterns. Rather, the resettlement of the Baltic Germans into annexed Poland, accompanied by forced expulsions and mass murder of Jewish communities aimed at a completely new design for occupied territories. Following the racist concept of *lebensraum*, the Nazis devastated Eastern Europe during World War II, introducing previously unknown ethnic cleansing practices. Ethnicity during the war became a major factor determining people's fate, as people of the "wrong" ethnicity, such as Jews and Gypsies, were excluded from all community life, subjected to atrocities, and likely ended up murdered (as in the Holocaust. Other subject peoples, such as Russian prisoners of war, were often murdered (in concentration camps; others in Russian territory were sent to Gulags), resettled (e.g. Volga Germans) or enslaved (e.g. forced labour in Germany and in the Soviet Union). During the Nazi occupation of Eastern Europe, many citizens of German descent registered with the Deutsche Volksliste. Some of them held important positions in the hierarchy of Nazi administration or otherwise participated in Nazi atrocities, causing enmity against the Germans, which would later be used as the justification for their expulsion.

Evacuation and flight of Germans during the war

Late in the war, as the Red Army advanced westward, Germans of all political and religious outlooks, including for example Roman Catholic Religious Orders, were apprehensive regarding the pending Soviet takeover. Many people were aware of the Soviet propaganda which was encouraging reprisals on German civilians. Soviet soldiers committed reprisal rapes and other crimes, as reported in numerous German accounts, medical reports and ex-forced laborers' accounts after the War. News of these atrocities, like the Nemmersdorf massacre, were in part exaggerated and spread by the Nazi propaganda machine.

The plans to evacuate Ethnic German populations westwards from Eastern Europe and from the Former eastern territories of Germany into Germany proper, were prepared by various Allied authorities towards the end of the war. In most cases, however, implementation was delayed until Soviet and Allied forces had defeated Nazi forces and advanced into the areas to be evacuated. The responsibility for leaving millions of Ethnic Germans in these vulnerable areas until combat conditions overwhelmed them can be attributed directly to the draconian measures taken by the Nazis against anyone even suspected of 'defeatist' attitudes [as evacuation was considered] and the fanaticism of many Nazi functionaries in their execution of Hitler's 'no retreat' orders. The first mass movement of German civilians in the eastern territories was composed of both spontaneous flight and organized evacuation, starting in the summer of 1944 and continuing through spring of 1945. Most of the evacuation efforts commenced in January 1945, when Soviet forces were already at the eastern border of Germany. About six million Ethnic Germans were evacuated from the areas east of the Oder-Neisse line before Red Army and Polish Army under Soviet command took control of the region. Many refugees tried to return home when the fighting in their homelands ended. Before June 1, 1945, some 400,000 crossed back over the Oder and Neisse rivers eastward, before Soviet and Polish communist authorities closed the river crossings; another 800,000 entered Silesia from Czechoslovakia.

Expulsions following Germany's defeat

After Germany's defeat in May 1945, a series of expulsions of ethnic Germans occurred throughout the Soviet controlled Eastern European states. Now occupied by the Red Army these were attempts to create ethnically homogeneous nations, as perceived by the Allies to be the basis for future stability of these countries.

Of the many post-war forced migrations, the largest was the expulsion of Ethnic Germans from Central and Eastern Europe, primarily from the territories that became post-war Poland and Czechoslovakia. The postwar borders of Czechoslovakia included the former Sudetenland. Poland's postwar borders had been shifted west to the Oder-Neisse line, far into former German territory. The expulsions began in the Spring of 1945. The July 1945 Potsdam Agreement authorized "orderly" population transfers from Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary. However, the Potsdam Declaration requested that those three countries temporarily stop expulsions due to the refugee problems created by expulsions of Germans before the Potsdam meeting.

Poland did not only expel Ethnic Germans, but also expelled 482,000 and resettled 140,000 Ukrainians (Operation Wisla). In Czechoslovakia, not only were Sudeten Germans expelled, but also Hungarians during the *ocysta*. Also, the post-war Lithuania and Ukraine expelled not only Germans but also Poles, and the same happened to the remaining Polish population in Belarus.

"Wild" expulsions

Expulsions that took place before the Allies agreed on the actual terms at the Potsdam Conference are referred to as "wild" expulsions . They were conducted by military and civilian authorities in Soviet occupied post-war Poland and Czechoslovakia in the spring and summer of 1945.

These actions gave way in spring 1946 to a series of larger, better organized, and less lethal "forced resettlements" which continued through 1947. A final major wave of resettlement resumed in 1948 and 1949.

The Potsdam Agreement called for equal distribution of the transferred Germans between American, British, French and Soviet occupation zones in the post World War II Germany. In actuality, nearly twice as many expelled Germans found refuge in each of the three individual occupation zones that later formed "West Germany" than in "East Germany" (Soviet Zone), and large numbers of German expellees eventually went to other countries of the world, including the United States, Canada, Australia, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Spain.

As part of the nationalization that all citizens in Communist countries faced, property in the affected territory that belonged to Germany and Germans was confiscated and transferred to the Soviet Union, nationalized or redistributed among the local population.

In Czechoslovakia, large numbers of skilled Sudeten German workmen were forced to remain to labor for the country. Likewise in the Opole (Oppeln) region in Upper Silesia, natives who declared themselves as belonging to Polish nationality were allowed to stay. In fact, some of them (though not all of them) had uncertain national identity or considered themselves to be Germans. Their status as a national minority was accepted in 1955, along with state help in regard to economic assistance and education.
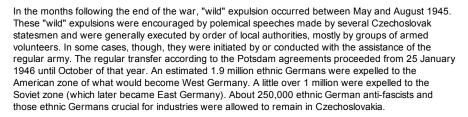
Czechoslovakia

See also: History of Czechoslovakia, Beneš decrees, Sudetenland, Ústí massacre, Brno death march

Before the 1938 German annexation of the Sudetenland, roughly 20% of the population in Czechoslovakia had been ethnic Germans.

During the German occupation of Czechoslovakia, especially after the Nazis' bloody reprisal for the assassination of Reinhard Heydrich, most of the Czech resistance groups demanded a solution to the "German problem" which would have to be solved by transfer/expulsion. These demands were adopted by the Government-in-Exile which, beginning in 1943, sought the support of the Allies for this proposal. The final agreement for the transfer of the German minority however was not reached until 2 August 1945 at the end of Potsdam Conference.

In the months following the end of the war, "wild" expulsion occurred between May and August 1945. These "wild" expulsions were encouraged by polemical speeches made by several Czechoslovak statesmen and were generally executed by order of local authorities, mostly by groups of armed volunteers. In some cases, though, they were initiated by or conducted with the assistance of the regular army. The regular transfer according to the Potsdam agreements proceeded from 25 January 1946 until October of that year. An estimated 1.9 million ethnic Germans were expelled to the American zone of what would become West Germany. A little over 1 million were expelled to the Soviet zone (which later became East Germany). About 250,000 ethnic German anti-fascists and those ethnic Germans crucial for industries were allowed to remain in Czechoslovakia.

Estimates of casualties among the expellees range between 20,000 and 200,000 people, depending on source. These casualties include violent deaths and suicides, deaths in internment camps and natural causes. Of these, several thousand died violently during the "wild" expulsion and many more died from hunger and illness as a consequence thereof.

Poland

At the Yalta (February 1945) and Potsdam (July 1945) conferences, the Allies agreed to place certain territories that had been part of Germany under Polish and Soviet administration. Upon gaining control of these lands, communist Polish and Soviet authorities started to expel the German population from pre-war Poland and the so-called "Recovered Territories".

Pre-war Poland

Of the pre-war ethnic German population of about 1.4 million within the 1937 boundary of Poland: 420,000 migrated, evacuated or were expelled to Western Germany; 268,000 to Eastern Germany; and 431,000 still lived in Poland in 1950.

Many were prior to their expulsion for years used as forced labor in Communist Polish camps such as those run in murderous fashion by Salomon Morel and Czeslaw Geborski. For example Central Labour Camp Jaworzno, Central Labour Camp Potulice, Lambinowice, Zgoda labour camp and others.

The real estate property left by the expellees was nationalized by the communist government just like other private property regardless of ethnic background.

Former eastern territories of Germany

Advance of the Red Army

Throughout 1944 and into the first months of 1945, as the Red Army advanced through the countries of Eastern Europe and the provinces of Eastern Germany, some Soviet and Allied troops (as well as nationalist militias and native populations who had suffered under the Nazis) exacted revenge on ethnic Germans and German nationals. While many Germans had already fled ahead of the advancing Soviet Army, millions of Reichs- and Volksdeutsche remained.

On February 6, 1945, the Soviet NKVD ordered the mobilization of all German men (17 to 50 years old) in the Soviet-controlled territories, many of whom were then transported to the Soviet Union for forced labor. In the East German territories, which the Soviet authorities had put under Polish administration, the Soviets did not always distinguish between Poles and Germans and often mistreated them alike.

German propaganda under Joseph Goebbels controlled and spun, at least partially, information regarding Red Army atrocities. A number of historians have expressed skepticism, backed up by historical study, regarding the extent of the Nemmersdorf massacre in this context. The Nazi propaganda machine disseminated overblown descriptions of this event, in gruesome and graphic detail, to boost the motivation of German soldiers. Julius Streicher published *The Horror in the East* in Der Stürmer, #8/1945.

Pre-Potsdam deportations (May - July 1945)

In 1945, the former eastern territories of Germany (most of Silesia, Pomerania, East Brandenburg, and East-Prussia) were occupied by Polish and Russian military forces. Early expulsions in Poland were undertaken by the Polish Communist military authorities even before the Potsdam Conference ("wild expulsions"). To ensure territorial incorporation into Poland, Polish Communists ordered that Germans were to be expelled: "We must expel all the Germans because countries are built on national lines and not on multinational ones," a citation from the Plenum of the Central Committee of the Polish Workers Party, May 20-21, 1945. Germans were defined as either *Reichsdeutsche*, people enlisted in 1st or 2nd *Volksliste* groups, and those of the 3rd group, who held German citizenship.

Post-July 1945 expulsions

The Soviet Union transferred territories to the east of the Oder-Neisse Line to Poland in July 1945. Subsequent to this, most Germans were expelled to the territories west of the Oder-Neisse Line. The approximate totals of those evacuated, migrated, or expelled from East Prussia between 1944–1950 are: 1.4 million to Western Germany, 609,000 to Eastern Germany; from West Prussia: 230,000 to Western Germany, 61,000 to Eastern Germany; from the former German area East of the Oder-Neisse: 3.2 million to Western Germany, 2 million to Eastern Germany.

Hungary

In Hungary the persecution of the German minority began on 22 December 1944 when the Soviet Commander-in-Chief ordered expulsions. Three percent of the German pre-war population (appr. 20,000 people) had been evacuated by the Volksbund before that. They went to Austria, but many of them returned to their homes the next spring. Overall, 60,000 Germans had fled. In January 1945 the Soviet Army collected 32,000 ethnic Germans and expelled them to the Soviet Union for slave labor. From some villages the entire adult population was deported to labour camps in the Donets Basin. Many of them died there as a result of hardships and ill-treatment. On 29 December 1945, the new Hungarian Government ordered the expulsion of every person who had declared him/herself German in the 1941 census, or was a member of the Volksbund, the SS or any other armed German organisation. In accordance with this decree, mass expulsions began. The first wagon departed from

Budaörs (Wudersch) on 19 January 1946 with 5788 people. Some 185,000 to 200,000 German-speaking Hungarian citizens were deprived of their rights and all possessions, and expelled to the Western zone of Germany. Up to July 1948, a further 50,000 people were expelled to the Eastern zone of Germany. Most of the expelled Germans found new homes in the western provinces of Baden-Württemberg, Bavaria, and Hesse. In 1947 and 1948, a forced population exchange took place between Hungary and Czechoslovakia. Some 74,000 ethnic Hungarians were expelled from Slovakia in exchange for about the same number of Slovaks from Hungary. They and the Székelys of Bukovina were settled in the former German villages of southeastern Transdanubia. In some parts of Tolna, Baranya, and Somogy counties, the original population was totally replaced by the new settlers. By the end of the expulsions only about 200,000 Germans remained in Hungary.

Yugoslavia

After World War II, the majority of the roughly 500,000 German-speaking people from Yugoslavia (mostly the Danube Swabians) left for Austria and West Germany. After 1950, thanks to the "displaced persons" act (of 1948), they also emigrated to the United States of America. Because of ethnic German support to Nazi Germany, specifically the mobilization of some in the 7th SS Volunteer Mountain Division Prinz Eugen, many ethnic Germans suffered persecution and sustained great personal and economic losses. Many perished as local population and partisans took revenge for Nazi Germany atrocities. But some ethnic Germans did remain in Yugoslavia, particularly those married to local partners. In Slovenia the German population at the end of World War I was concentrated in Styria, more precisely in Maribor, Celje and a few other towns. In total they numbered about 28,000 in 1931. The number was higher after 1941. Southern Slovenia was then occupied by Italian troops, who transferred ethnic Germans from the enclave of Kocevje to German-occupied Styria. When German forces began to retreat before the Soviet Army, many ethnic Germans fled with them in fear of reprisals. The Liberation Front of Slovenia expelled most of the remainder after it seized complete control in the region.

The government nationalized the property of those expelled on the basis of the *decision on the transition of enemy property into state ownership, on state administration over the property of absent persons, and on sequestration of property forcibly appropriated by occupation authorities* of November 21, 1944 by the Presidency of AVNOJ An estimated 27,000 Germans were deported to the Soviet Union for forced labour.

Romania

The flight of Germans from Romania started in the fall of 1944. Early in 1945, during the Soviet occupation of Romania, they initiated the expulsion of ethnic Germans from the territory. Tens of thousands of Romania's Germans were expelled, many of whom lost their lives in the process of emigration. Some expulsions were part of the Soviet plan for German war reparations in the form of forced labor, according to the 1944 secret Soviet Order 7161. Of a pre-war ethnic German population of 786,000, approximately 213,000 were evacuated, expelled, or migrated to Austria or Western Germany, and about 400,000 still resided in Romania in 1950.

Russia

Having been the capital of the Kingdom of Prussia, Königsberg (renamed Kaliningrad) was an important city in the history of Germany. It was where Immanuel Kant lived all his life. Under the Nazis, Königsberg belonged to the German province (Gau) of East Prussia, which had been an exclave of Weimar Germany between 1918 and 1939.

Many of the Germans from East Prussia were evacuated by Nazi authorities throughout the Operation Hannibal or fled in panic before the Soviet Army approached. After the war, most of the surviving ethnic Germans were expelled. Ethnic Russians and families of military staff settled in the region. In June 1946 114,070 German and 41,029 Soviet citizens were registered in the Kaliningrad Oblast, with an unknown number of disregarded unregistered persons. Between August, 24 and October, 26 1948 21 transports with in total 42,094 Germans left the Kaliningrad Oblast to the Soviet Occupation Zone. The last remaining Germans left in November 1949 (1,401 persons) and January 1950 (7 persons). Thousands of German children, called wolf children, were left unattended or died with their parents during a harsh winter without any food. Today, the area is an exclave of Russia, separated from the rest of the country by Lithuania and Poland.

Lithuania

A part of western Lithuania along the seacoast was annexed by Nazi Germany as *Memelland* in 1939, shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War. The area, including Klaipeda , an important Baltic seaport, had been part of East Prussia, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and then the German Empire until the Treaty of Versailles.

After the war, the area was claimed by the Soviet Union, (which included annexed Lithuania). Most of its German inhabitants fled to Germany, joining the exodus of those from Königsberg and other Eastern Prussian cities. Many Ethnic Germans from rural areas fled their homes by wagon, taking only a few essentials and non-perishable food items. They traveled for weeks in wagon train-like formations. Many made their way to the Baltic Sea, and horrifying accounts exist of wagons trying to cross the Baltic to escape to Germany, only to fall through the ice. Others turned back and made their way to port cities like Pillau, where they boarded overcrowded ships going to places like Denmark or Kiel. These ships then navigated the mine-strewn waters, a few falling prey to aircraft or submarines. Once there, many spent the rest of the war in refugee camps. Illnesses such as dysentery were not uncommon during this time, and many of the young and elderly died on foreign soil. After the war ethnic Lithuanians and other Soviet citizens replaced the ethnic German population. German civilian remnants were put on deportation trains in 1946. Unverified rumors state that a number of orphaned ethnic German children too young to go on the long trek as refugees were taken in by Lithuanian families.

The Netherlands

After World War II the Dutch wanted to expel 25,000 Germans living in the Netherlands. The Germans (who often had Dutch wives/husbands and children) were called 'hostile subjects' (*Dutch: vijandelijke onderdanen*). The operation started on 10 September 1946 in Amsterdam, where Germans and their families were taken from their homes in the middle of the night and given one hour to collect 50 kg of luggage. They were allowed to take 100 Guilders with them. The rest of their possessions went to the Dutch state. They were taken to internment camps near the German border, the biggest of which was Mariënbosch near Nijmegen. In total, about 3,691 Germans (less than 15 percent of the 25,000 total population of Germans in the Netherlands) were expelled, their possessions confiscated by the Dutch state.

The Allied forces that occupied the Western zone of Germany opposed this operation for fear that other countries might follow suit and the western zone was not in an economic condition to receive such large numbers of expellees. The British troops in Germany reacted by evicting 100,000 ethnic Dutch in Germany to the Netherlands.

The operation ended in 1948. On 26 July 1951, the state of war between the Netherlands and Germany officially ended, and the Germans were no longer regarded as state enemies.

Denmark

In the final weeks of the war, between February 11 and May 9, about 250,000 ethnic German refugees fled across the Baltic Sea, fleeing the advancing Soviet Army. For the most part, the refugees were from East Prussia, Pomerania, and the Baltic states. Many of the refugees were women, children, or elderly. A third of the refugees were younger than 15 years old.

The refugees were interned in hundreds of camps from Copenhagen to Jutland, placed behind barbed wire and guarded by military personnel. The largest camp, located in Oksbøl, on the west coast of Jutland, held 37,000 refugees. In the camps, both food rations and medical care were miserable. The Danish Doctors' Association decided not to provide medical care, and the Danish Red Cross likewise refused to take action. In 1945 alone, more than 13,000 people died, among them some 7,000 children under five who either starved to death or were unable to fight infections due to extreme malnutrition.

Denmark did not expel any Danish citizens of German ethnicity.

France

A number of Germans were expelled from Alsace and Lorraine. Some inhabitants of Kehl were forced

to leave, when the city was French (1945-1949).

Condition of the expellees after arriving in post-war Germany

Those who arrived were in bad shape - particularly in the harsh winter of 1945/46, trains were arriving carrying "the dead and dying in each carriage (other dead had been thrown from the train along the way)". Beatings, rapes and murders accompanied the expulsions and an estimated 200,000 to 2 million perished on their way west. Once they arrived, they found themselves in a country devastated by a self-instigated war, with housing shortage lasting until the 1960s, which along with other shortages led to social conflicts with the local population. The situation eased only in West Germany when in the course of the economic boom in the 1950s unemployment rates approached zero.

After the war, the area west of the new eastern border of Germany was crowded with expellees, some of them living in camps, some looking for relatives, some just stranded. Of the total population, between 16.5% and 19.3% were expellees in the western occupation zones, and 24.2% in the Soviet occupation zone. In Schleswig-Holstein, expellees made up 45% of the population, in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, expellees made up 40%; similar percentages were reached along the eastern border all the way to Bavaria, while in the westernmost German regions the numbers were significantly lower, especially in the French zone of occupation.

France wasn't invited to the Potsdam Conference. So it took its liberties to approve some decisions of the Potsdam Agreements and to dismiss others. As to the question of the expellees France maintained the position, that it didn't approve the expulsions therefore it was not responsible to accommodate and nourish the destitute expellees in its zone of occupation. While the few refugees, who had reached the area to become the French zone before July 1945, were taken care of, the French military government for Germany succeeded to keep off expellees deported from the East to come into the French zone.

Britain and the US protested at the French military government, but they weren't given any handle to force France to bear the consequences of the expulsion policy approved by them in Potsdam. France persevered its argument to clearly differentiate between war-related refugees and post-war expellees. In December 1946 it absorbed in its zone German refugees from Denmark, where 250,000 Germans had found a refuge before the Soviets by sea vessels between February and May 1945. But these clearly were refugees from the eastern parts of Germany, no expellees. Danes of German ethnicity remained untouched and Denmark didn't expel them. With this French humanitarian act, many were rescued, because German refugees had bad times in Denmark with a high death toll.

Until the summer of 1945, the allies had not yet decided on how to deal with the expellees. France suggested an emigration to South America and Australia and the settlement of "productive elements" in France, while the Soviet SMAD suggested a resettlement of millions of expellees in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

The Soviets, who encouraged and partly carried out the expulsions, only co-operated little with the Americans and Britons, who had to absorb the expellees in their zones of occupation. In contradiction to the Potsdam Agreements the Soviets neglected their obligation to provide supplies needed for the expellees deprived of any considerable means. It was agreed in Potsdam, that 15% of all equipment, especially from metallurgical, chemical and machine manufacturing industries, dismantled in Western zones, would be transferred to the Soviets in return for food, coal, potash (a basic material for fertilisers), timber, clay products, petroleum products etc.

When the Western deliveries started in 1946, they turned out to be a one-way road. The Soviet deliveries in return, so desperately needed to feed, warm and to endow the robbed expellees with basic housewares as well as to increase the agricultural production on the remaining cultivation area, didn't materialise. So the US stopped all deliveries on May 3, 1946, while the expellees from the areas under Soviet rule were deported in unabated numbers to the West until the end of 1947.

In the British and US zone the supply situation noticeably worsened. Especially in the British zone, which due to its location on the Baltic already harboured a great number of refugees, who had come over sea, the anyway modest rations had to be further shortened by a third in March 1946. In Hamburg e.g., the average living space per capita, which had dropped by air raids from 13.6 square metres in 1939 to 8.3 in 1945, was further reduced to 5.4 square metres in 1949 by billeting refugees and expellees. In May 1947 the trade unions organised a strike in Hamburg against too short rations, where protesters were also complaining about a too deliberate absorption of expellees.

The US and Britain had to import food into their zones, with Britain itself dependent on food imports and Britain's finances exhausted after having fought Nazi Germany for the entire war, partly as the single opponent, with France defeated, the US standing by, and the Soviet Union invading Eastern

Poland, the Baltic states and Finland as agreed with Nazi Germany in the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact.

So Britain had to run deeper into debts with the US, the US had to spend more for the survival of its zone, while the Soviets gained applause among many Eastern Europeans, who plundered – many of them as impoverished by German occupants and war actions as they were – the belongings of refugees and expellees, often even before they were actually expelled. Since the Soviet Union was the only power among the Allies, which allowed and encouraged the looting, murder and robbery in the area under its military influence, the perpetrators and profiteers blundered into a situation that they became dependent on a perpetuation of the Soviet rule in their countries in order not to be dispossessed again of their booty and to stay unpunished.

With ever more expellees sweeping into post-war Germany, the allies' aim changed toward a policy of assimilation, which was believed to be the best way of stabilizing both Germany and the peace in Europe by not creating another minority problem. This policy also gave way to the assignment of German citizenship to the expellees like the Volksdeutsche, who had been by citizenships Poles, Czechoslovaks, Hungarians, Yugoslavs, Romanians etc.

When the Federal Republic of Germany was founded, a law was drafted on 24 August 1952 primarily thought to easie the financial situation of the expellees. The law, termed "*Lastenausgleichsgesetz*", granted partial compensation and easy credit to the expellees, after the loss of their civilian property had been estimated 299.6 billion Deutschmarks (out of a total loss of German property due to the border changes and expulsions of 355.3 billion Deutschmarks).

Administrative organizations were set up to integrate the expellees into the post-war German society.

While the Stalinist regime in the Soviet occupation zone did not allow the expellees to organize and with most expellees assimilating into their host communities in the course of the next decades, in the western zones some expellees over time established a variety of organizations. The most prominent and still active one is the Federation of expellees.

Demographic estimates

During the period of 1944/1945 - 1950, possibly as many as 14 million Germans were forced to flee or were expelled as a result of actions of the Red Army, civilian militias, and/or organized efforts of governments of the reconstituted states of Eastern Europe.

The areas from which the Germans escaped, or which were expelled, were subsequently re-populated by nationals of the states to which they now belonged, many of whom were expellees themselves from lands further east.

In the first few decades after the end of the war, estimates of deaths associated with the expulsions were in the range of 2-3 million. Since the 1970s, however, some historians have suggested downward revisions to 600,000 to 1.1 million. However, some historians still support estimates of 2 million deaths. The higher numbers are now considered to include deaths from all war-related causes, not simply as a direct result of the flight and expulsions.

Many of these deaths were the result of ill-prepared German evacuation plans, Nazi fanaticism, and chaotic flight. Some were senseless killings by opportunistic mobs and individuals. Other deaths were caused by the privations of a forced migration in a postwar environment characterized by crime, chaos, famine, disease, and cold winter conditions. There were also incidents of direct, intentional actions of violence by militias. It is almost impossible to attribute accurate proportions of deaths to specific causes.

Due to a lack of accurate records, many estimates of population transfers and associated deaths depend upon a "population balance" methodology. Estimates of total populations expelled and deaths during the expulsions often include figures from the evacuation, because these people were not allowed to return, thus making it difficult to arrive at an accurate and undisputed estimate of population movements and deaths due solely to the expulsions.

Timing and causes of deaths

More importantly, these deaths are often reported as being "the result of the expulsions" but are arguably better characterized as "happening contemporaneously with the expulsions but not necessarily caused by the expulsions".

It is impossible to determine how many deaths happened "before" versus "after" the end of the war (i.e., before vs. after May 8, 1945). Any estimate of the number of deaths must be based on either a gross "population balance" methodology or on the examination of actual death records. The "population balance" methodology relies on census data that was taken years before the end of the war and years after the end of the war and thus cannot provide this kind of "before and after" comparison. Many deaths went unrecorded and thus actual death records substantially underestimate the actual number of deaths. The difficulty is that no one can say by how much the actual death records understate the actual deaths. Thus, it will never be possible to determine with certainty how many deaths happened before the war ended and how many afterwards. This question is important because it affects how many deaths should be attributed to evacuation, flight, pre-Potsdam "wild" expulsions, and expulsions that occurred after the Potsdam Agreements, which is seen by some as a general sanction for the expulsions.

Other people assert that the Potsdam Agreements called for suspending further expulsions and bringing them under Allied control.

It is also difficult, when using the "population balance" methodology, to attribute the number of deaths to specific causes (e.g. wartime bombing, evacuation casualties, disease in refugee camps). For example, at the time of the Allied bombing of Dresden, there were estimated to be between 200,000 and 300,000 refugees from the Eastern front taking refuge in the city. There is no official record of how many of those refugees perished as a result of the Allied bombing.

"War children" of German ancestry in Western and Northern Europe

In countries occupied by Nazi Germany during the war whose population was not dubbed "inferior" (*Untermensch*) by the Nazis, there were relations of Wehrmacht soldiers and indigenous women which in some cases resulted in offspring. After Wehrmacht's withdrawal, these women and their children of German descent were ill-treated. Though plans were made in Norway to expel the children and their mothers to Australia, these plans never were executed. For many war children, the situation would ease only decades after the war.

Reasons and justifications for the expulsions

Given the complex history of the affected regions and the divergent interests of the victorious Allied powers, it is difficult to ascribe a definitive set of motivations behind the expulsions. The respective paragraph of the Potsdam Agreement only states vaguely: "*The Three Governments, having considered the question in all its aspects, recognize that the transfer to Germany of German populations, or elements thereof, remaining in Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary, will have to be undertaken. They agree that any transfers that take place should be effected in an orderly and humane manner*". The major motivations revealed are:

- *A desire to create ethnically homogeneous nation-states*: This is presented by several authors as a key issue that motivated the expulsions.

- *View of a German minority as potentially troublesome*: From the Soviet perspective, shared by the Communist administrations installed in Soviet-occupied Europe, the remaining large German populations outside post-war Germany were seen as a potentially troublesome "fifth column", that would, furthermore, because of its social structure interfere, with the envisioned Sovietization of the respective countries. The western allies also saw the threat of a potential German "fifth column", especially in Poland after the agreed-to compensation with former German territory. In general, the western allies hoped to secure a more lasting peace by eliminating the German minorities, which they thought could be done in a humane manner.

- Another motivation was to *punish the Germans*, who were found by some to be collectively guilty of the Nazi war crimes.

A desire to create ethnically homogeneous nation-states

The creation of ethnically homogeneous nation states in Central and Eastern Europe was presented as the key reason for the official decisions of the Potsdam and previous Allied conferences as well as the resulting expulsions. The principle of every nation inhabiting their respective own nation state gave rise to a series of expulsions and resettlements of Germans, Poles, Ukranians and others who after the war found themselves outside their supposed home states.

As early as on September 9, 1944, Khrushchev and Osobka-Morawski of the Polish Committee of National Liberation signed a treaty in Lublin on population exchanges of Ukrainians and Poles living on the "wrong" side of the Curzon line. Czech Eduard Benes in his decree of May 19, 1945, termed Magyars and Germans "unreliable for the state" and made way to confiscations and expulsions.

View of a German minority as potentially troublesome

Distrust of and enmity

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One of the reasons given by Stalin for the population transfer of Germans from the former eastern territories of Germany was the claim that these areas were a stronghold of the Nazi movement. But Stalin and the other influential advocates of this idea gave the lie to this argument, because he and they didn't assert that expellees would be checked for their political attitudes, let alone for their activities. Even in the few cases when this happened and expellees were proven to have been bystanders, opponents or even victims of the Nazi regime, they normally were not spared from expulsion. Stalin also needed room to relocate the Poles to be expelled from east of the Curzon Line.

With German communities living within the pre-war borders of Poland, there was an expressed fear of disloyalty of Germans in Eastern Upper Silesia and Pomerelia, based on the wartime Nazi activities.. To Poles, expulsion of Germans was seen as an effort to avoid such events in the future and as a result, Polish exile authorities proposed a population transfer of Germans as early as 1941.

Preventing ethnic violence

The participants at the Potsdam Conference asserted that expulsions were the only way to prevent ethnic violence. As Winston Churchill expounded in the House of Commons in 1944, *"Expulsion is the method which, insofar as we have been able to see, will be the most satisfactory and lasting. There will be no mixture of populations to cause endless trouble... A clean sweep will be made. I am not alarmed by the prospect of disentanglement of populations, not even of these large transferences, which are more possible in modern conditions than they have ever been before"*. From this point of view, the policy achieved its goals: the 1945 borders are stable and ethnic conflicts are relatively marginal.

Poland compensated for territories lost to the Soviet Union

Poland lost 43 percent of its pre-war territory due to the fact that the Soviet Union insisted on keeping what it had annexed as a result of the partition of Poland between Germany and the Soviet Union in the beginning of the war. While some cities, like Gdansk (previously, the Versailles Treaty Free City of Danzig), were transferred to Poland as part of the "clean sweep" (see above) that eliminated minorities and strategically risky borders, other cities, like Wroclaw (Breslau) or Szczecin (Stettin), would hardly have been transferred to Poland had it not lost Vilnius (Wilno), Hrodna (Grodno) and Lviv (Lwów).

Punishment of ethnic Germans for Nazi aggression

The expulsions were also driven by a desire for revenge, given the brutal way Germans treated non-German civilians in the Nazi occupied territories during the war. Thus, the expulsions were motivated by the animus engendered by the war crimes, atrocities, brutalities and uncivilized rule of

the German conquerors. Czechoslovakian President Eduard Benes, in the National Congress, justified the expulsions on 28 October 1945 by stating that the majority of Germans had acted in full support of Hitler; he blamed all Germans as responsible for the Nazi actions during a ceremony in remembrance of the Lidice massacre. In Poland and Czechoslovakia, newspapers, leaflets and politicians across the political spectrum, which narrowed during the post-war Communist take-over, asked for revenge for wartime sorrow. Responsibility of the German population for Nazi crimes was also asserted by commanders of the late and post-war Polish military. Karol Swierczewski, commander of the 2nd Polish army, briefed his soldiers to "exact on the Germans what they enacted on us, so they will flee on their own and thank God they saved their lives".

The Allies' Nuremburg Trials did not hold the German people collectively responsible for the atrocities of the Nazis, but the Trials indicted and found guilty numerous top Nazis for crimes against humanity and a variety of war crimes.

Legality of the expulsions

The view of international law on population transfer underwent considerable evolution during the 20th century. Prior to World War II, a number of major population transfers were the result of bilateral treaties and had the support of international bodies such as the League of Nations.

The tide started to turn when the charter of the Nuremberg Trials of German Nazi leaders declared forced deportation of civilian populations to be both a war crime and a crime against humanity, and this opinion was progressively adopted and extended through the remainder of the century. Underlying the change was the trend to assign rights to individuals, thereby limiting the rights of nation-states to impose fiats which adversely affected them.

There is now little debate about the general legal status of involuntary population transfers: *Where population transfers used to be accepted as a means to settle ethnic conflict, today, forced population transfers are considered violations of international law.* (Denver Journal of International Law and Policy, Spring 2001, p116). No legal distinction is made between one-way and two-way transfers, since the rights of each individual are regarded as independent of the experience of others.

Thus, although the signatories to the Potsdam Agreements and the expelling countries may have considered the expulsions to be legal under international law at the time, there are historians and scholars in international law and human rights who argue that the expulsions of Germans from Central and Eastern Europe should now be considered as episodes of ethnic cleansing, and thus a violation of human rights. For example, Timothy V. Waters argues in *"On the Legal Construction of Ethnic Cleansing"* that if similar circumstances arise in the future, the precedent of the expulsions of the Germans without legal redress would also allow the future ethnic cleansing of other populations under international law.

There are some writers, such as Alfred de Zayas, who argue that the expulsions were war crimes and crimes against humanity even in the context of international law of the time. De Zayas writes:

> "...the only applicable principles were the Hague Conventions, in particular, the Hague Regulations, ARTICLES 42-56, which limited the rights of occupying powers – and obviously occupying powers have no rights to expel the populations – so there was the clear violation of the Hague Regulations"
> "And, obviously, if you want to apply the Nuremberg Principles to the German Expulsions, considering that the London Agreement was supposed to reflect, and not to create international law, so if that was applicable to the German crimes against the Poles with regard to deportation of Poles, and deportation of French for purposes of "Lebensraum," certainly it was applicable to the expulsions by the Poles of Germans and by the Czechs of Germans. So, if you apply these Nuremberg principles and the Nuremberg judgement, you would have to arrive at the conclusion that the Expulsion of the Germans clearly constituted war crimes and crimes against humanity."

De Zayas argues this point in greater detail in his seminal articles "International Law and Mass Population Transfers" (Harvard International Law Journal, Vol. 16, pp. 201-251, and "The Right to One's Homeland, Ethnic Cleansing and the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia" (Criminal Law Forum 1995).

Legacy of the expulsions

In the immediate post-war era, there was relatively little public criticism in the west about the

expulsions. Memories of Nazi atrocities were still a very raw wound, especially in Slavic Europe, which shed some light on the strong Allied policies by the West Germans and of post-war Soviet policies by the East Germans. There was some discussion of the expulsions in the first decade and a half after World War II, but serious review and analysis of the events was not undertaken until the 1990s.

The fall of the Soviet Union, the spirit of glasnost and the unification of Germany opened the door to a renewed examination of these events. In the early 1990s, the Cold War ended and the occupying powers withdrew from Germany. The issue of the treatment of Germans after World War II began to be re-examined, having previously been overshadowed by Nazi Germany's war crimes. The primary motivation for this change was the collapse of the Soviet Union, which allowed for a discussion of issues that had previously been marginalized, such as the allegations of crimes committed by the Soviet Army during the World War II and the expulsion of Germans from Eastern and Central Europe.

A controversial Centre against Expulsions is to be set up in Berlin.

See also

- Bakker-Schut Plan
- Demographic estimates of the German exodus from Eastern Europe
- Federation of Expellees
- Evacuation of German civilians during the end of World War II
- German exodus from Eastern Europe
- Treaty of Zgorzelec
- Pursuit of Nazi collaborators
- Organised persecution of ethnic Germans
- Operation Paperclip
- Population transfer in the Soviet Union
- Expulsion of Poles by Germany
- Ethnic cleansing
- Population transfer
- Victor Gollancz
- World War II-era population transfers

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External links

- *Children who lost their parents in the expulsions from historical Eastern Germany, seek their parent..*
- *Ethnic cleansing in post World War II Czechoslovakia: the presidential decrees of Edward Benes, 1945.. Available as MS Word for Windows file.*
- *Várdy, Steven Béla and Tooly, T. Hunt: Ethnic Cleansing in Twentieth-Century Europe Available as MS Word for Windows file (3.4 MB)*
- *Refugees camp 1950 Image*
- *Refugees Image*
- *Statistics Of Poland's Democide Democide Addenda By R.J. Rummel*
- *THE EXPULSION: A crime against humanity, By Dr. Alfred de Zayas A transcript of part of a lecture on the Expulsion given in Pittsburgh in 1988.*
- *Timothy V. Waters, On the Legal Construction of Ethnic Cleansing, Paper 951, 2006, University of Mississippi School of Law (PDF)*
- *Interest of the United States in the transfer of German populations from Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hun.., Foreign relations of the United States: diplomatic papers, Volume II (1945) pp. 1227-1327 (Main URL)*
- *Frontiers and areas of administration Foreign relations of the United States (the Potsdam Conference), Volume I (1945)*