RESOURCE 4

During World War II, millions of people fell victim to mass execution, deportation, starvation, forced labour, concentration camps and bombin gs.

Refugees and expellees

Serbs expelled from the independent state of Croatia, a satellite state of Nazi Germany

Europe had 40 million refugees at the end of the war. While totalitarian ideologies clashed in a bloody conflict, it was the non-combatants who bore the brunt of forced migration.

Source: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Muzej Revolucije Narodnosti Jugoslavije, © U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum
Evacuees

Photograph showing a small boy carrying his luggage as he left London for the country with a party of other evacuees on 5 July 1940

3.5 million British people, mainly children, were evacuated *en masse* away from possible air raids in the big cities. It was one of the biggest social upheavals the country had ever seen and had a dramatic impact on the whole generation. Similar evacuation campaigns took place elsewhere in Europe.

*Source: Imperial War Museum, London, UK, © Imperial War Museums*
Deportees

Illegally taken photograph of a freight wagon in which thousands of ‘state enemies’ were subjected to deportation to a Gulag camp, 1941

It has been estimated that some 6 million people were affected by internal forced migrations in the USSR. Deportations of large numbers of people (both by the Nazis and the Soviets) were carried out as a means of weakening support bases for the resistance and changing ethnic proportions in favour of the occupying power.

Source: Museum of the Occupation of Latvia, Riga
Forced labourers from the Soviet Union working in the German armaments industry, 1945

From 1939 to 1945, more than 13 million people were assigned to forced labour in the German Reich and the territories it had annexed. Forced labourers were employed primarily in agriculture, the armaments industry, mining and construction. In many instances forced labour was used as a method of extermination.

Source: Bundesarchiv, Koblenz, Germany, © Bundesarchiv/Bundesbildstelle
Siege and famine

Siege of Leningrad, Winter 1941-42 – starving children

Hundreds of thousands of civilians died in the Second World War sieges of Budapest, Warsaw and Malta mostly due to hunger and hunger-related diseases. Deliberate administrative anarchy and blockades of food supplies in occupied territories resulted in hundreds of thousands of deaths across the continent.

Source: Archiv für Kunst und Geschichte, Berlin, Germany, © AKG-Images / Paul Botzenhardt
Bombing casualties

Ruins of the Holy Cross Church Warsaw – people coming out from prayer

The strategic bombing of civilian areas during World War II was deployed on an unprecedented scale by all sides and killed hundreds of thousands of people. It remained an unsurpassed method of mass destruction unimpeded by the Hague Conventions which had not included an article on aerial warfare before the war started.

Source: © Warsaw Rising Museum, Warsaw, Poland
Death camp victims

Photograph showing a view of a filled in mass grave (Bergen-Belsen Camp, Germany, 1945). The grave marker reads ‘Grave No 2: 5000 lie buried here’

After liberating the concentration camps, Allied forces discovered the unimaginable consequences of Nazi ethnic policy. Signs have been erected at the entrance to the former camps denouncing Nazi atrocities as well as markers like these which record and indicate the number of people buried in mass graves.

Source: Imperial War Museum, London, UK, © Imperial War Museums
Prisoners of war

There were about 8,000 camps for prisoners during and after the war in Europe. Between 1941 and 1945, the Axis powers took about 5.7 million Soviet prisoners, around 3 million of whom died in captivity. At the end of war about 3,155,000 German prisoners were captured by the Red Army. The Americans captured 3.8 million prisoners, the British 3.7 million prisoners, etc.
Civil and armed resistance

Resistance fighters before execution in Minsk, German-occupied Belarus, 26 October 1941. The writing on the board states: ‘We are partisans and have shot German troops.’

Hundreds of thousands of civilians got involved in partisan movement in various ways and in various places in Europe. Partisans at times played both the role of victim and perpetrator and for many of them the war did not end in 1945. For example, the number of men and women involved in partisan activities between 1944 and 1959 in western Ukraine probably reached 400,000.

Source: Bundesarchiv, Koblenz, Germany, © Bundesarchiv/Bundesbildstelle
Executed without trial

Civilians hanged by Germans, Kharkov, Soviet Union (now Ukraine), 1941

In Soviet Russia and Yugoslavia in particular, but also in many other places, state sanctioned mass murders without trial took place. They demonstrate the indiscriminate will to eliminate the enemy by any means with a blatant disregard for international law.

Displaced persons

Photograph showing Polish detainees leaving the displaced persons camp within the grounds of Hamburg Zoo.

After the Second World War vast numbers of civilians were detained in displaced persons camps – a temporary facility for displaced persons mainly from Eastern Europe coerced into forced migration as refugees, prisoners or slave labourers. The number of displaced persons varies from 11 to 30 million depending on the source.

Source: Imperial War Museum, London, UK © Imperial War Museums