

The Deportations from Romania during the Holocaust

Key enquiry questions and learning from topic study.

- What role did Romania play in the Holocaust?
- How did Romanian authorities contribute to the Holocaust?

Historical Background on the Deportations from Romania

According to census data, there were 756,930 Jews living in Greater Romania in 1930. The fascist Iron Guard, a right-wing movement, were popular with their demands that Jews residing in Romania be removed from powerful positions and then expelled from the country. However, the Romanian authorities met this antisemitic movement with hostility and so, the Iron Guard and the authorities clashed from 1938–39. In September 1940, King Carol II abdicated and General Ion Antonescu came to power with the Iron Guard. Soon after on 20 November 1940, Romania officially became an Axis power, which lasted until 1944. Yet, even before this alliance Romania conducted harsh antisemitic policies, and due to the rise in antisemitism, Jews were often falsely linked to communism in areas like the eastern borderlands. This demonstrates the role of other non-German perpetrators of the Holocaust and raises awareness of the role countries like Romania had in aiding the Holocaust.

Deportations and Persecutions

- In October 1940, deportation of Jews and seizing of their properties began in rural areas and 10,000 became refugees to cities. On 18 June 1941, Antonescu officially ordered rural Jews moved and by 31 July, there were 40,000 evacuees. This began the order for camps to be established.
- In late June 1941, pogroms in the city of Iasi, where 45,000 Jews lived, were launched by Romanian authorities, and in the 1948 Romanian War Crimes trials, it was ruled over 10,000 had been massacred.
- Those who survived, around 4,300, were arrested and deported to towns such as Calarasi and Podul Iloaei by train with 120 to 150 people in each car, but an estimated 2,600 never reached their destination as they died from dehydration, illness, or starvation on the journey.
- Soon after, in Bessarabia, northern Bukovina, and Transnistria, the Romanian army murdered thousands of Jews and survivors of approximately 11,000 were forced into a ghetto and made to work.
- In October 1941, the survivors were deported to Transnistrian camps and ghettos, along with Jews from South Bukovina and the Dorohoi region,

where many died en route by starvation or disease, while others were killed by German or Romanian units.

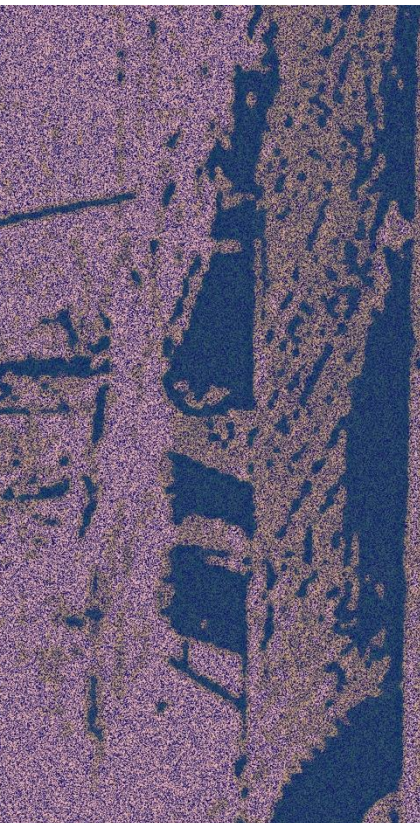
- By November 1941, 54,000 had been deported to Bogdanovka, a camp where approximately 40,000 Jews were massacred by Romanian troops in December 1941.
- From 1941 to 1942 Romanian authorities operated the Pechora and Vapniarka concentration camps and very few Jews survived.
- It is estimated that between 280,000 and 380,000 Romanian and Ukrainian Jews died in the territories under Romanian administration (according to International Commission Final Report).
- While Ion Antonescu was convicted in 1946, many Romanian perpetrators were never caught.

Testimony of Ester Gelbelman about the Bogdanovka concentration camp killing pits run by Romanian authorities, where she had been deported.

'What happened there? Romanian soldiers stood there with rifles, eight soldiers in a line. From the line of people standing there they took eight people – children, women, men, positioned them on the edge of the pit, inside which there was a fire and killed them, shot them from a meter away.' [...] ' There were mountains of clothes, mountains of what they'd taken from people – each person had a small bag. One didn't know where one was going. One stood in one spot, it was like a park, and on the other side of the park was the pit. Those standing on one side didn't know that people were being killed on the other, so they carried clothes and whatever they had with them. Everything was taken from them. Women worked there. We worked by the pit for over a month, by the heaps of clothes, they robbed.' (Yad Vashem)

The Roma

- The Jews were not the only group persecuted, deported, and killed during the Second World War. A minority called the Roma, suffered under Romanian authorities.
 - The persecution began through policies and government agenda. With suggestions made that marriage should be illegal between the Roma and Romanians, and then the introductions of ghettos. Soon after, the Roma were victims of the Iron Guard's racial policies and focus on eugenics.
 - This led to Antonescu overseeing the deportation of 25,000 Roma to Transnistria, where on the journey nearly half perished due to starvation and disease, such as typhus.
 - On 1 July 1942, the first wave of Roma were targeted, and soon approximately 11,441 people were taken and deported. Then, in September 1942, 13,176 were deported.
 - However, it took decades for the Roma's sufferings to be recognised as well as to admit the role of the Romanian authorities. It took over 70 years in Romania for the Roma's persecutions during the Second World War to be in history textbooks.
 - During Antonescu's trial for his crimes in 1946, the Roma's sufferings were only mentioned four times, the focus remained mostly on the Jews.
 - In 2015, at the Museum of Romani Culture in Bucharest, the first memorial dedicated to the Roma who died was established.





This image depicts Antonescu signing an agreement with Hitler on November 1940. From library of Congress in United States Holocaust Memorial Museum "Romania." [Romania joins the Axis alliance. Holocaust Encyclopaedia.](#)

- It is important to note that a lot of perpetrators were not German and played vital roles in the Holocaust. As well as observing that other groups were persecuted and the victims of genocide during the Second World War.
- Antisemitism existed prior to the rise of Nazism across Europe and was crucial for creating the conditions in which the Holocaust could happen.
- Romanians were perpetrators during the war, but this was marginalised in public discourse under communism and is only beginning to emerge in education and commemoration since 1989. This is why survivor testimonies are essential to learning about the deportations and killings of Roma and Jews.

[Testimony of Vasile Ionita on being deported to Transnistria](#)

'A year before, articles started to appear in the press, talking about this deportation... We didn't believe that it was going to happen. We didn't expect to be sent there. Before the deportation, it was perfect in the country.

We lived in peace with the people. We accepted each other. We were taken by surprise, unprepared. People should have reacted then; many should have woken up. There were people who protested, some intelligent people with book learning, but without any effect.'

'On the road to Transnistria we were beaten, [but] beaten less by the Romanian constables. On the other hand, when we passed Bessarabia there

everybody beat us. Antonescu hated the Gypsies. He was the one who hated and harmed us. When we arrived there, they made fun of us and put us to hard labour, working us like animals. They kept us there for two years without us being spared any suffering... There were all kinds of Gypsies there. The first to be deported were nomads and then the semi-nomads. But after this also those who didn't speak the language [Romani] were sent. However, we had an easier life compared to the nomadic Gypsies, who were sent outside [of the barn]. They made earth houses and had to live there.'

Testimony of Sara Shapira on being deported

'We were evicted by the Romanians on Succot of '41, three transports of Jews left Radauti, Bukovina. We reached Otaci, it was muddy and freezing cold, and then they sent us across the Dniester where Romanian soldiers shot at people. The Dniester was full of blood. They sent us across on rafts. Crammed together, we were terrified of drowning, of falling off, there was nothing to hold onto. Grandma Malka was the first victim, she fell off and drowned. We reached Mogilev and they marched us on from there. We went on foot to a place called Kuzmintsy, where they threw us into a stable. Typhus broke out and the first to die of typhus and starvation was Uncle Itzik. Then my sister Bina died and only my mother and I were left. But she couldn't function at all. We would lie on the floor until one night I was sleeping with her, I had a habit of caressing her cheek all night and in the morning, I awoke, and she was gone. She had died. That was devastating. I was alone, an 8-year-old girl. I was taken to an orphanage in Mogilev where eight children shared a bed. Whoever was at the end didn't get any blanket, so we kept trading places.'



Romania, 1942

US Holocaust Memorial Museum

This image, taken from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum website, demonstrates the changing geographies of Romania during the 1930s and 40s, most essentially highlighting its changes in the Second World War. To the right we can see Transnistria, a place where thousands of Roma were deported to and killed, and to the west of Transnistria Iasi, where many Roma were massacred. It is important to address these changing geographies with students (see resource suggestions below) and to recognise the difficulty this poses in reporting numbers of deaths according to nationality.

[United States Holocaust Memorial Museum "Romania." Holocaust Encyclopaedia.](#)



Romanian Jews as forced labourers under conscription behind the Eastern Front in 1944 at the Baldovinești suburb of Brăila in Romania. Unknown Author. [Public domain via Wikimedia commons.](#)



Romanian military physicians examine Jews during the stop of the Iasi-Calarasi death train in Sabaoani.jpg. July 3, 1941. Unknown Author. [Public domain via Wikimedia commons](#)

Summary of Key Dates and Figures

- It is estimated that between 280,000 and 380,000 Romanian and Ukrainian Jews died in the territories under Romanian administration (according to International Commission Final Report).
- Approximately 25,000 Roma were deported to Transnistria, and within this over 11,000 died.
- On 20 November 1940, Romania under dictator Ion Antonescu officially became an Axis power. Romanian authorities participated cooperatively in antisemitic policies and the Holocaust.
- Victims were deported to areas controlled by Romanian authorities such as Transnistria, Bukovina, and Bessarabia.
- Approximately 6,000 to 14,000 Roma survived the camps when they were liberated in 1944.

Key Resources for Teacher Subject Knowledge Development

- Simon Geissbuhler, *Romania and the Holocaust: Events – Contexts – Aftermath* (2016, Ibidem Verlag). – This book offers the author's main insights into the Holocaust in Romania; a list that is useful in teaching young students. Geissbuhler conveys the importance of recognition of non-German perpetrators.
- Michelle Kelso, 'And Roma were victims, too.' *The Romani Genocide and Holocaust Education in Romania. Intercultural education, 2013, Vol.24 (1-2), p.61-78.* – This resource not only delves into the facts of the Romani Genocide but also explores what the current education system in Romania teaches about the Holocaust and Romania's involvement in it, as well as examples of what teachers could do in Romania to explore the genocide of the Roma. This resource would be very useful when

researching about the Roma and considering how to better present this topic to young students.

- [Holocaust Survivor Testimony: Sara Shapira](#) – from the Yad Vashem YouTube channel, this is a short testimony by Sara Shapira who was among the Jewish Romanians deported to Transnistria. She explains her experiences during the deportations and her destination. This is useful for understanding what happened, as well as a potential resource to show in a classroom.
- [International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania, Final Report \(2004\)](#) – This report is heavily detailed about the Holocaust in Romania including the antisemitic and anti-Roma policies, the deportations, as well as identifying the different groups persecuted. However, the Executive Summary at the start is worth consulting.
- [The JUST Act Report: Romania](#) – From the US Department of State, this report gives important statistics on the deportations in Romania. This would be useful for further reading if a teacher needs a brief overview.
- European Holocaust Memorial Day for the Sinti and Roma, [The Holocaust in Romania and deportations of Roma to Transnistria](#) – A good short overview on the Holocaust in Romania and the deportations there, focusing mainly on the deportations of the Roma to Transnistria. This is useful when learning about other groups who were persecuted.

Existing Resources for the Classroom

- [Romania. Holocaust Encyclopaedia. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum](#): This resource shows the background of Romania with images of its changing geography in the 1930s and 40s which can be confusing. It is essential to show students, as the names and places will most likely be unfamiliar. It also demonstrates Romania's role as a perpetrator during the Holocaust. This article has embedded in it a recording of Ion Antonescu's trial as a war criminal in 1946, which would help students understand the extent of the atrocities and how justice was attempted after the Axis powers were defeated.

Council of Europe: [Project Education of Roma Children in Europe](#). This resource is an essential piece to display in the classroom due to its excellent information regarding the deportations and persecution of the Roma. It includes testimonies of survivors of the deportations in great detail as well as a part of a report signed by an intelligence agent under the Romanian authorities. This piece of research will be useful in the classroom because it is part of a project to educate children on the atrocities the Roma faced and so provides suitable images and information understandable to younger audiences.

Yad Vashem, [Murder of the Jews of Romania](#). This website, but especially this article, would be useful in the classroom because it shows not only important information on the massacres of Jewish people by Romanian authorities, but it also contains useful photos, most of which are suitable for classroom content, artifacts and testimonies which are a key source for

discovering Holocaust events. Another important article on the Yad Vashem website is Round up of Jews during a Pogrom in Iasi, Romania, June 1941, which highlights an infamous massacre of Jewish residents and eventual deportation of survivors. This would be useful in the classroom setting because it gives a detailed view of the Holocaust through a specific event and allows them to understand the atrocities Romanian authorities committed.