

Issues Relating to the Course of the Holocaust During World War 2

1. *Einsatzgruppen*: An Overview.¹

Einsatzgruppen means ‘special action groups’ or ‘mobile killing units’.

Whenever Nazi Germany’s army marched into a country, *Einsatzgruppen* of the Security Police and the SS intelligence service immediately followed to secure newly seized territory. Their tasks included identifying and neutralising potential enemies of German rule, seizing important sites and preventing sabotage, recruiting collaborators and establishing intelligence networks. When Germany attacked Poland in September 1939, the *Einsatzgruppen* also killed civilians perceived as enemies. Together with units of the Waffen SS, German Order Police, and local collaborators, they shot thousands of Jews and tens of thousands of members of the Polish elites.²

With the start of Hitler’s war against the Soviet Union in June 1941, the scale of *Einsatzgruppen*’s mass murder operations vastly increased. The main targets were Communist Party and Soviet state officials, Roma, and above all, Jews of any age or gender. Under the cover of war and using the pretext of military necessity, the *Einsatzgruppen* organised and helped to carry out the shooting of more than half a million people, the vast majority of them Jews, in the first nine months of the war. For example, over two days in September 1941, a small detachment of *Einsatzgruppe C* along with larger units of Waffen SS, Order Police and Ukrainian auxiliaries shot 33,771 Jews in Baby Yar (Russian) or Babin Yar (Ukrainian), a ravine outside Kyiv (Kiev) in Ukraine.

One-third of all Jewish Holocaust victims died as a result of mass shootings.

¹ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, *Holocaust Encyclopaedia: Einsatzgruppen: An Overview* <<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/einsatzgruppen>> [accessed 13 June 2022].

² The manner in which ordinary people in occupied Europe responded to the persecution of Jews varied depending on factors, such as country, region, degree of Nazi control, existing hostility toward Jews, and perceptions about whether Germany would win the war and remain the master of Europe. The motives of non-Germans who participated in the persecution and murder of Jews also varied. Auxiliary police forces and militias may have been motivated by Nazi antisemitism, while others had more banal motives - the need for employment, income and food or the opportunity of gain, including self-enrichment from looted property. Others aimed to show their loyalty to their new German masters. Radical nationalists in Ukraine and the Baltics (Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia) cooperated with the Germans because they wanted to establish independent, ethnically homogeneous states.

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*Einsatzgruppen massacres in eastern Europe.*³

Image: [United States Holocaust Memorial Museum](https://www.ushmm.org/learn/encyclopaedia/entries/einsatzgruppen-massacres-in-eastern-europe/).

2. Final Solution: An Overview.⁴

The term 'Final Solution of the Jewish Question' was a euphemism used by Nazi Germany's leaders. It referred to the mass murder of Europe's Jews. It brought an end to policies aimed at encouraging or forcing Jews to leave the German Reich and other parts of Europe. Those policies were replaced by systematic annihilation.

It is unclear when exactly the Nazi leadership decided to murder Europe's Jews. The decision was probably made sometime in 1941, with the invasion of the Soviet Union.

³ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, *Holocaust Encyclopaedia: Einsatzgruppen massacres in eastern Europe* <<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/map/einsatzgruppen-massacres-in-eastern-europe>> [accessed 13 June 2022].

⁴ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, *Holocaust Encyclopaedia: 'Final solution': Overview* <<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/final-solution-overview>> [accessed 13 June 2022].

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The Germans deported Jews from all over occupied Europe to extermination camps in Poland, where they were systematically killed, and also to concentration camps, where they were used for forced labour. Transit camps such as Westerbork, Gurs, Mechelen, and Drancy in western Europe and concentration camps like Bolzano and Fossoli di Carpi in Italy, were used as collection centres for Jews, who were then deported by rail to the extermination camps.

Six million Jewish men, women, and children were murdered during the Holocaust—two-thirds of the Jews living in Europe before World War Two.



Major Nazi camps in Europe, January 1944.⁵

Image: [United States Holocaust Memorial Museum](https://www.ushmm.org/content/en/map/major-nazi-camps-in-europe-january-1944).

⁵ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, *Holocaust Encyclopaedia: Major Nazi camps in Europe, January 1944* <<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/map/major-nazi-camps-in-europe-january-1944>> [accessed 13 June 2022].