Forced to Work – Willing to Survive

Forced Labour in the Past and the Present. Examples from Austria, Italy and Poland.

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Look – ...

Empoli / Włodawa / Mauthausen – Gusen – St. Georgen

IMPRINT

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Cover Image 1: Burgenland Roma were forced to perform forced labour for the railway construction in Hinterberg near Leoben, 1939/1940 **/ Collection A. Kräuter, Leoben** **Cover Image 2:** A Czech civilian worker **/ DTZF Archive Prague** **Cover Image 3:** Polish civilian workers in the Reich were only assigned duties, but no rights were granted **/ NÖLA**

Empoli / Mauthausen – Gusen – St. Georgen / Włodawa 2024

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… don‘t turn away!

Agriculture, household, crafts, armaments industry, road construction. In all sectors of the economy, foreign workers were forced to perform slave labour during the Nazi reign of terror. The workers had fewer or no rights at all, were underpaid or not paid at all, and suffered from hunger, cold, illness, and abuse. Often, the National Socialists used forced labour for physical exploitation until death.

/ voestalpine Archive Linz

/ ILO Geneva

The starting point of this exhibition is the forced labour of people of all ages from across Europe during the Nazi regime. The focus is on case studies from Italy, Austria, and Poland. These three countries differed significantly: Austria was part of the German Reich, with many Austrians involved in Nazi crimes; Poland was occupied by Nazi Germany in the fall of 1939, its country and population exploited and murdered; Italy, under Benito Mussolini‘s fascist government, was an important ally of Nazi Germany until 1943. After Mussolini was deposed and the Repubblica Sociale Italiana (RSI), a puppet government of the Nazi regime in northern Italy, was formed, and after the occupation by Nazi forces, deportations of the Jewish population to extermination camps and of political opponents to concentration camps began.

One might think that things are different today. Unfortunately, that is not the case. The exhibition not only explains historical examples but also focuses on current developments. Although forced and slave labour was outlawed in 1948 by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and although labour protection and safety are legally regulated in many countries, there are – even in Europe – renewed attempts to limit legal protection for certain workers, such as foreign workers.

Editor’s Note:
All testimonies of former forced labourers were recorded and can be listened to using the corresponding QR codes. We have used largely gender-neutral language. Where the focus is specifically on men or women, or in cases where we wanted to emphasize the individuality of the people, we have used „men“ or „women“ or the binary „women and men,“ which for us conceptually includes inter* and non-binary people.

This exhibition was created as part of the Erasmus+ project titled **„Forced Labour: Development of an Exhibition and Pedagogical Materials for Schools“** in a collaborative process with participants from the following organizations:

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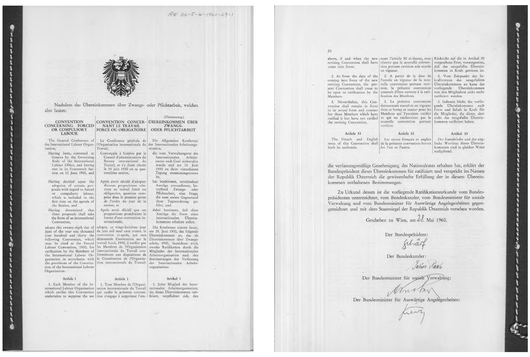
Mit Unterstützung von Bund, Land und Europäischer Union

International condemnation of forced labour after World War 1.

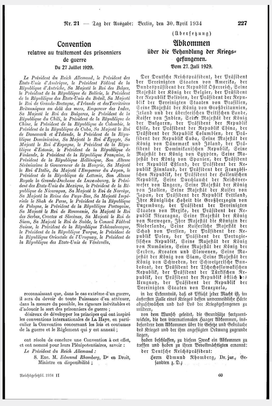
The „Forced Labour Committee“ of the ILO in 1930
/ Historical Archive of the ILO in Geneva

The exploitation of civilians and prisoners of war as forced labourers was part of general warfare during World War 1. To prevent this crime in the future, the International Labour Organization (ILO), which was subordinate to the League of Nations, was founded after the war. Based on the premise that „world peace […] must be founded on social justice,“ the ILO regulated all forms of forced labour in 1930 through the Convention on Forced or Compulsory Labour. Forced labour was understood as „all work or service which is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered himself voluntarily.“ In the future, only men between the ages of 18 and 45 were to be required to perform „forced or compulsory labour”, only in their place of residence and for a maximum of 60 days per year, and they were to be compensated according to local conditions.



Cover and last page of Austria's ratification of the ILO Forced Labour Convention in 1960
/ Historical Archive of the ILO in Geneva

By means of the Geneva Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War of July 27, 1929, the League of Nations additionally regulated the employment of prisoners of war. Prisoners were to be „humanely treated and protected, particularly against acts of violence, insults and public curiosity.“ The Geneva Convention expressly forbade the employment of prisoners of war in armaments production. Not all nations ratified these international agreements. This omission cost many citizens of European states dearly during the Nazi regime. Many men, women, and children paid with their lives.



First page of the Geneva Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War
/ NB Vienna

/ Private collection Erich Schneilechner

/ Archive PNM Warsaw

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Groups of forced labourers in the Nazi system

KZ-Häftlinge des Konzentrationslagers Mauthausen bei Erdarbeiten, 1942
/ NARA

After the National Socialists came to power in 1933, the German Reich left the ILO. This was the first step towards the exploitation of around 20 million foreign workers during World War II and towards securing the German war economy.

Four groups of forced labourers are distinguished:

1. Civilian workers: Civilians from all over Europe were compelled to work through recruitment, pressured advertising, coercion, or arbitrary violence and raids. Citizens of allied nations were to be treated like German workers, all others according to racially determined criteria.

Czech civilian workers in a barracks camp in Linz, 1943
/ voestalpine Archive Linz

2. Prisoners of war: The adherence to international agreements on the protection of prisoners of war was contrary to the Nazi regimes radical goals of exploitation. Therefore an agreement was reached with the collaborating Vichy regime to relax these protections, the Poles were granted only the protection of the Hague Convention of 1907, all protection was denied to Soviet citizens, and for Italian soldiers, the category of „Italian Military Internees“ was invented, thus circumventing international protection.

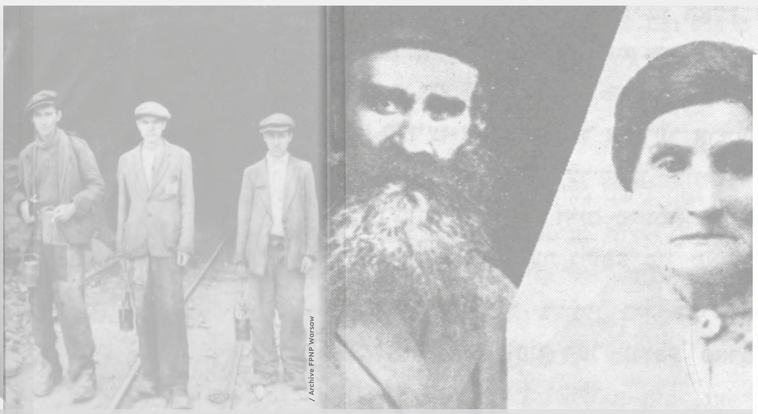
Soviet prisoners of war had their markings painted on their uniforms
/ voestalpine Archive Linz

3. Concentration camp inmates: People detained in concentration camps for political or racial reasons were exploited without regard for their lives. For them, the maxim „extermination through labour“ was applied.

4. Jewish forced labourers: „Extermination through labour“ also applied to the particularly discriminated Jewish civilians. The exploitation of their labour and life was initially practiced in the occupied territories, to which German and Austrian Jews were also deported. Due to the increasing labour shortage in the Reich, the still living and able-bodied labourers were brought to the Reich, exploited, and killed in the last years of the war.

Jewish men with an improvised Star of David in Mogilev/Mahilijou (Soviet Union, now Belarus), July 1941
/ BArch, Photographer Rudolf Kessler

/ Archive IPNP Warsaw



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/ Muzeum Zespół Synagogalny we Włocławku

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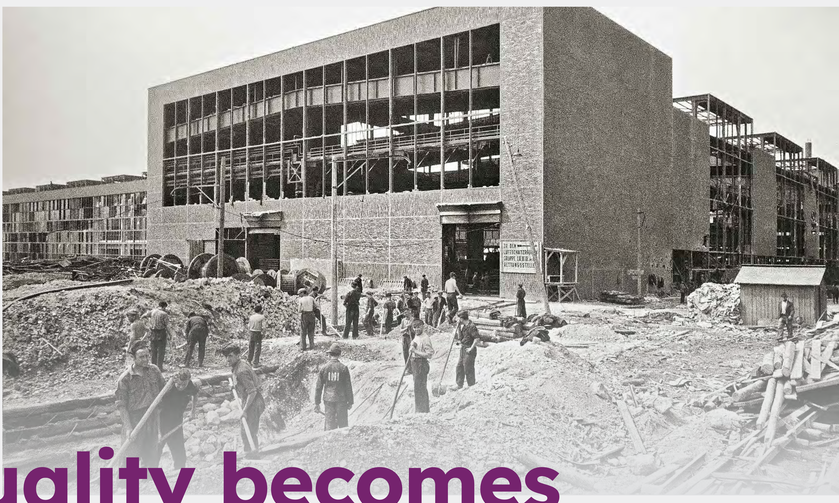

Inequality becomes a method in the German Reich

Forced labourers marked as IMI during bomb disposal work in Linz
/ voestalpine Archive Linz

The treatment of foreign forced labourers in the Reich was based on racist conceptions. Through decrees, a racist hierarchy was implemented for the foreign workforce. At the lowest level of this hierarchy of all European workers were Jews and the Eastern European forced labourers, who were considered inferior. While the former were excluded from society by the „Nuremberg Laws“ of September 15, 1935, special regulations were created for Eastern European civilian workers.

Polish civilian workers had to wear a badge on their clothing from 1940 onwards. Possession of private photos could be dangerous, as Polish workers were not allowed to own cameras. Moreover, the image of Zbigniew Olszewski (front center) with prisoners of war depicted what was considered forbidden contact.

/ Archive FPNP Warsaw

As early as March 8, 1940, the so-called Polish decrees for Polish workers came into effect, and on February 20, 1942, the so-called „Ostarbeiter“ decrees for Soviet workers followed. These decrees prohibited these people from leaving their place of residence or using public transportation or bicycles. They had to constantly wear a badge, received less or only inferior food, were not allowed to visit public places, and had to avoid any contact with Germans outside of work. This so-called forbidden contact was punished by internment in labor education camps or concentration camps. Particularly serious in the eyes of Nazi ideologists was sexual intercourse. Polish and Soviet men were executed for this.

Soviet civilian workers with OST – meaning EAST – badges in Silbertal in the Tyrol, 1942. The image of Hitler was scratched after the end of the war.

/ Private archive Johannes Breit (collection Nikolaus Telitschko)

For Soviet prisoners of war, the national socialist racial ideology was life threatening. Considered inferior, they were initially not to be used for labour. About three million Soviet prisoners of war were left to their fate under guard. This fate was called hunger, exhaustion, disease, and death. When later, due to the increasing labour shortage in the Reich, Soviet prisoners of war were also to be deployed for heavy labour, nearly half of these prisoners had already died.

/ Private collection Lucia Pergreffi

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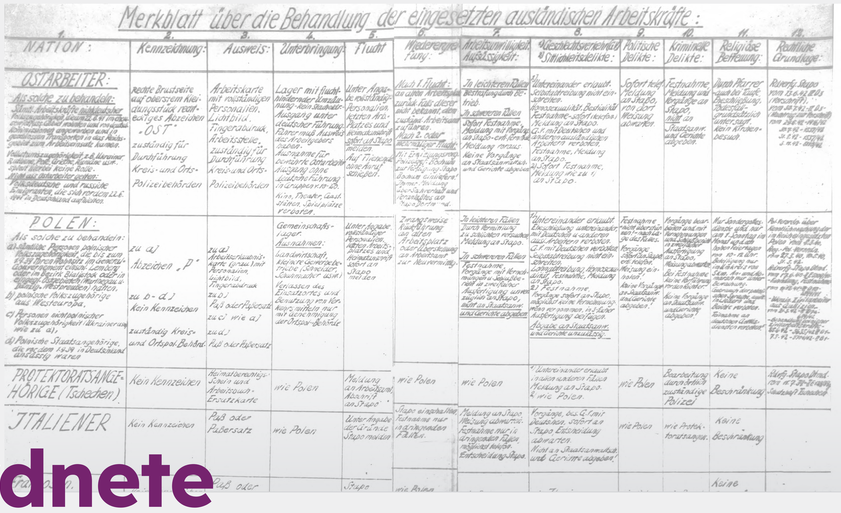
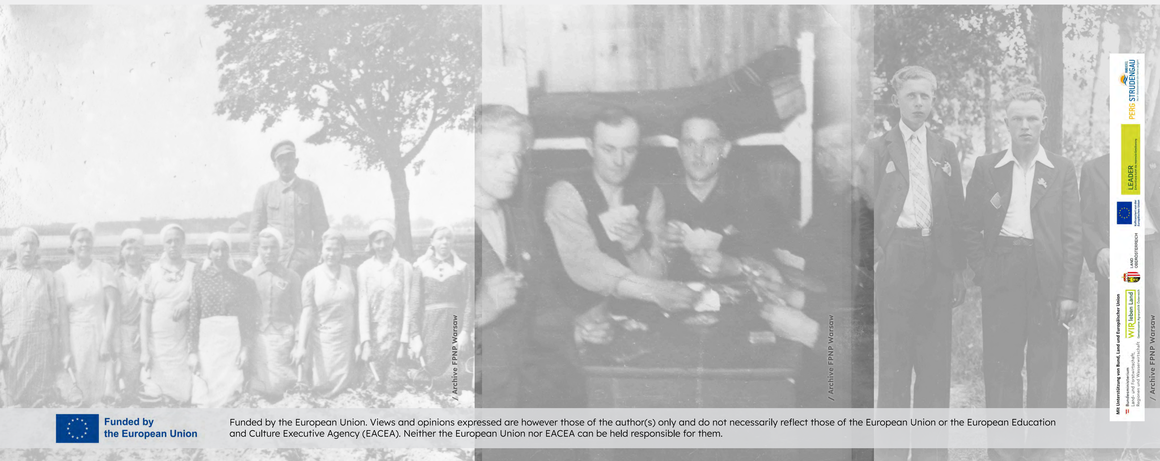


Verordnete Hierarchie unter den Zwangsarbeitenden

The leaflet shows the national socialist regime's ideas for a racially differentiated treatment of foreign civilian labourers
/ Kreisarchiv Unna

Information sheet concerning the treatment of deployed foreign workers

1.	Nationality:	"OSTARBEITER": To be treated as such are: All workers of non-German descent who on June 22nd 1941 living in former Sovjet-russian territory, were recruited by German commissions and were sent to the Reich for deployment of labour in closed transports. Ethnicity e.g.: Ukrainian, Ruthenian, Polish, Greek, Romanian and so on is of no concern. Not considered "Ostarbeiter" are: Ethnic 'Germans and Russian emigrants who resided in Germany before June 22nd 1941.	POLES: To be treated as such are: a) All persons of polish ethnicity, who before September 1st 1939 resided inside the "General Gouvernement" including Lemberg, in the Bialystock district or the integrated eastern territories (Warthegau including Danzig and Western Prussia). b) Ethnic Poles from western Europe. c) Persons of non-polish ethnicity (Ukrainians etc. as defined in a), d) Polish citizens who resided in Germany prior to September 1st 1939	CITIZENS OF THE PROTECTORATE (Czechs)	ITALIANS	Frenchmen, Belgians, (Flams, Walloons) Dutch, Croats, Slovaks, Romanians, Bulgarians, others …
2.	Labelling:	On the right side of the chest on top of the outer layer of clothing: Rectangular Label "OST" local or regional Police authority is responsible for implementation	for a) Label „P" for b-d) No labels, local or regional Police authority is responsible for implementation	No labels	No labels	No labels
3.	Identification:	Workers card including full particulars, photograph, fingerprints, place of employment. local or regional Police authority is responsible for implementation	for a) Workers permit (Grey) including particulars, photograph and fingerprints for b) passport or passport substitute for c) like a) for d) passport or passport substitute	homeland eligibility ticket and workbook – substitute card	passport or passport substitute	passport or passport substitute
4.	Housing:	Camps with flight-preventing enclosure – no barbed wire. Escorted leave under German supervision. Supervisor must have employer ID card. Exception for reliable "Ostarbeiter". Leave without German supervision in groups of 10-20. Cinema, theatre, pubs and playgrounds are forbidden	Communal camps. Exceptions: Agriculture, smaller businesses (tailor, shoemaker act.) Leaving the place of deployment and using means of transport only with permission of the local police authority	Like the Poles	Like the Poles	Like the Poles
5.	Flight:	Immediately report to state police indicating complete particulars, latest place of employment and home address. Shoot at escapees without warning.	Immediately report to state police indicating complete particulars, latest place of employment and home address.	Notification of employment office, copy to state police	Notify state police, indicate reasons	Notify state police
6.	Capture:	After first escape: Return to previous place of employment. If said place is unknown, transfer to the responsible employment office. After second or repeated escape: Admit to Bochum Police prison with investigation procedures, at the disposal of the Bochum state police. Always inform Dortmund state police about facts of the case and measures taken.	Compulsory return to previous place of employment or transfer to employment office for new deployment	Like the Poles	Include state Police, arrest only in urgent cases	Like the Poles
7.	Unwillingness to work, truculence:	In less serious cases: Punishment by the company In severe cases: Immediate arrest, Notification of state police including information on the incident – maybe notification by phone in advance. No involvement of district attorneys or courts.	In less serious cases: Attempt to conciliate through mediation. Report to state police. In severe cases: Arrest. Immediate report to state police including proceedings and interrogations and 2 copies of final report. No involvement of district attorneys or courts.	Like the Poles	Notification of State police. Await instructions. Arrest only in urgent cases, if possible decision via telephone. Decision by state police.	Like the Poles
8.	1) Sexual intercourse (GV) 2) Indecency offences:	1) Allowed amongst each other. No prevention of self-inflicted abortions. Homosexuality, bestiality: Arrest – immediate (by phone) report to the state police. GV with Germans or other foreign workers forbidden. Arrest. Report to state police. 2) Immediate arrest, report to state police as in 1)	1) Allowed amongst each other. Marriage amongst each other, to Germans and other foreign workers forbidden, GV with Germans forbidden. No prevention of self-inflicted abortions. Paid abortion, homosexuality: arrest. Report to state police. 2) Arrest. Report proceedings to state police immediately, if possible no interrogation, if interrogated ad 3 copies. Involvement of district attorneys impermissible	1) Allowed amongst each other, in all other cases notification of state police 2) Like the Poles	Report occurrences, especially GV with Germans, immediately to state police, await decision. No involvement of district attorneys or courts.	Like the Italians
9.	Political offences:	Report to state police by phone immediately, await instruction from there	Arrest. Do not act precipitately! Depending on the case. Report proceedings immediately to state police, maybe receive instructions by phone! Do not hand over proceedings to district attorneys or courts!	Like the Poles	Like the Poles	Like the Poles
10.	Criminal offences:	Arrest, Report including proceedings to state police. No involvement of district attorneys or courts.	Handle proceedings and send to state police with interrogations and final report in 2 copies, await instructions. In case of arrest no presentation to a judge. No involvement of district attorneys or courts!	Processed by locally responsible Police	Like citizens of the protectorate	Like citizens of the protectorate
11.	Religious supervision:	By a priest – even in cases of baptism, marriage or death – forbidden as a matter of principle. No church visits.	Only special service and only on the first Sunday of the month and high holidays at 10-12 o'clock. Participation only within a 5 km radius. March to and from under guard. Usage of the Polish language also in songs and during confession forbidden. Participation in German services forbidden.	No restrictions	No restrictions	No restrictions
12.	Legal basis:	(…)	(…)	(…)	(…)	(…)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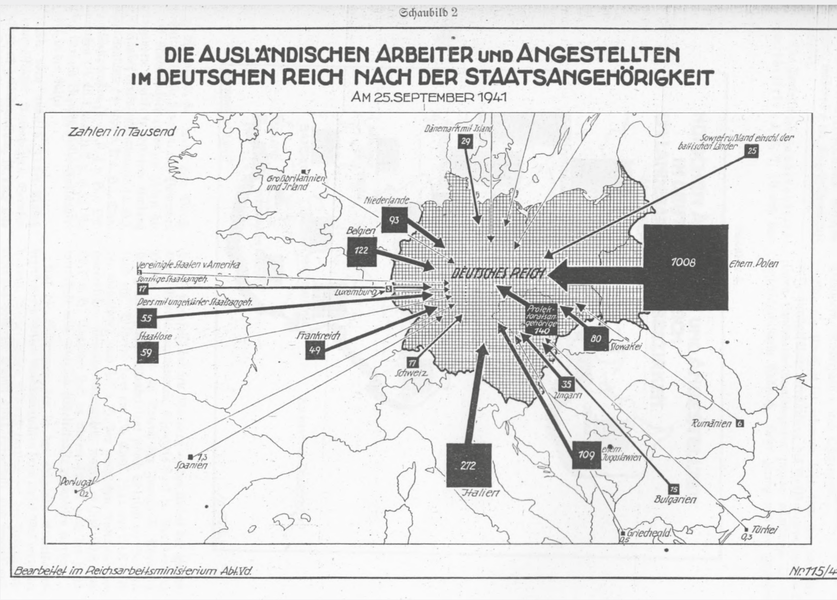
Foreign forced labourers –

An approach in numbers

people in the German Reich and the occupied territories into forced labour. At least three million ethnic Poles alone had to perform forced labour in the Reich from 1939 onwards. The number of people forced into labour in occupied Poland, whether as civilian workers, in ghettos, or in forced labour camps, reaches into the millions.

From Italy, up to 500,000 civilian workers came to the Reich starting in 1938. From 1943, another 100,000 civilian workers followed, along with about 650,000 prisoners of war, the so-called Italian Military Internees (IMI). Additionally, about 8,700 Jews and about 24,000 politically persecuted people from Italy were deported to the German concentration camps.



Foreign labourers from all over Europe were exploited in the German Reich
/ Journal „Der Arbeitseinsatz im Deutschen Reich“, November 20, 1941

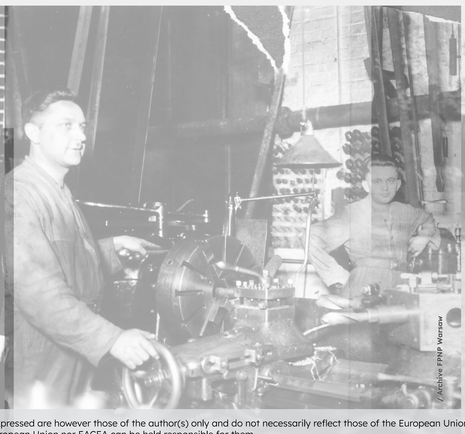
On the territory of present-day Austria, the number of employed civilian workers reached its peak in September 1944 with around 580,000 people. They came from all over Europe. The largest groups were the Polish workers with around 110,000 people and the Soviet citizens with around 180,000 people. About 70% of the forced labourers were men, 30% women and girls.

In addition, there were around 110,000 prisoners of war, including around 50,000 French and around 30,000 Soviets. Around 15,000 were Serbian, and from autumn 1943, around 33,000 Italian prisoners of war followed.

In the Mauthausen concentration camp and its sub-camps, as well as in the sub-camps of the Dachau concentration camp on Austrian territory, around 200,000 concentration camp prisoners were exploited.

Jewish labourers were employed on Austrian territory mainly in the last years of the war. The largest groups were the approximately 70,000 Hungarian Jews who, from 1944 onwards, had to toil in agriculture or in the construction of fortifications, and those Jews evacuated from concentration and extermination camps in the occupied territories who were still able to work.


/Archive FPNP Warsaw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Bundesministerium Kunst und Kulturpolitik Medien und Sport
VHS Salzburg Land
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Forced labour in agriculture

German guards controlled female labourers and French prisoners of war in Lower Austria.
/ WStLA

On the territory of present-day Austria, the former Ostmark, up to 200,000 foreign civilian workers were employed in agriculture and forestry, around 37,500 of them in the Gau Upper Danube. They were mostly housed by their employers. Whether they were treated well or poorly, whether they were given enough food, whether they were provided with clothing, whether they were beaten or even denounced, largely depended on the behaviour of the farmers, farmwomen, farmhands, and maids at the estates. Denunciation was often synonymous with sending the forced labourers to a labour re-education camp or a concentration camp.

Sergej Zakharovich Ragulin

was born in 1928 in the Orlovsky Oblast, Russia. In 1942, he was deported to the Reich together with his mother. At a sort of „cattle market," both were selected by the Krisch brothers, Ernst and Adolf, from Zwerndorf. The 13-year-old was primarily assigned to do auxiliary tasks.

Photo and video interview:
/ Collection Hornung / Langthaler / Schweitzer

According to the national socialist ideology, women and girls were considered particularly suitable for agricultural labour. In Austria, around 70% of the forced labourers employed in agriculture were women and girls. All agricultural workers were required to be available for work around the clock, and women and girls were often subjected to sexual exploitation as well.

Helene Pawlik

Born in 1915 near Krakow, she was forced under threat to work in the Reich from April 1940 onwards. She was sent to the farmer Franz Bauer in Hafnerbach. In 1941, she became pregnant by a Polish worker and gave birth to a son. After the war, she stayed in Austria and continued working for the Bauer couple.

Photo and video interview:
/ Collection Hornung / Langthaler / Schweitzer

Personal contact between the local population and the forced labourers was prohibited and strictly monitored. The police authorities gave special attention to intimate relationships. If a Polish or Soviet citizen was found to have had sexual intercourse with a German woman, he was executed on the spot. His fellow compatriots were forced to witness the execution. German and Austrian women faced the threat of being sent to a concentration camp.

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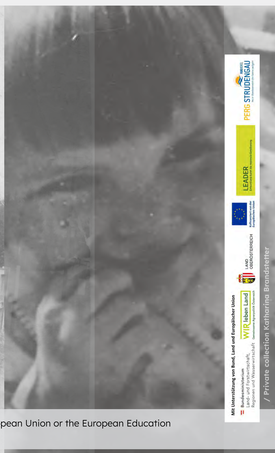

/ Private collection Katharina Brandstätter

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Forced labour at the Hermann Göring Factory in Linz

East European Forced Labourers in Linz
/ Lentia-Verlag Linz

In May 1938, the construction of the Reichswerke AG „Hermann Göring“ (HGW) in Linz, now voestalpine AG, began. In this war-essential armaments corporation, steel was produced, and from 1939 onwards, tanks were manufactured. Both the construction of the armaments factory and the production of weaponry would not have been possible without at least 30,000 male and 4,000 female civilian foreign workers from across Europe. From 1942 onward, an additional 7,000 concentration camp prisoners from the Mauthausen concentration camp ensured the continuation of tank production. To accommodate them, the subcamps „Linz I“ and „Linz III“ were established on the factory grounds.

The civilian foreign workers were also housed in camps, separated by nationality and gender. This national distinction allowed for different treatment, particularly regarding the quality and quantity of food provided.

Oleksij Panasowytsch Krhlyk

was born in 1924 in a small village in the Kyiv region and was deported to Linz in 1942 together with his later wife, Nina. He was forced to work in production at the HGW, while Nina worked as a cleaning lady. They were housed in different camps, separated by barbed wire.

Photo: **/ voestalpine Archive Linz**
Excerpt from: **Karl Fallend, ZwangsarbeiterInnen: (Auto-)Biographische Einsichten, (NS-Zwangsarbeit: Der Standort Linz der „Reichswerke Hermann Göring AG Berlin“ 1938-1945, Ed. Oliver Rathkolb, Vol. 2, Vienna – Cologne – Weimar 2001**

The living conditions of the workers were largely determined by the behaviour of the camp supervisors, guards, and foremen. Corruption in food distribution was a daily reality. Food that foreign men, women, and children needed for their daily survival was withheld. Whether a foreman gave „his“ workers a piece of bread or not could mean the difference between life and death for them.

Lina Rodgers geb. Kusovkova

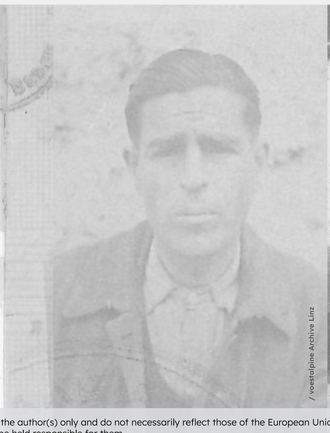
Born in 1925, she was deported from her birthplace, Vinnytsia, to the HGW. She was initially forced to work at the blast furnaces before being transferred to a laboratory at the experimental facility. There, she was constantly exposed to ammonia fumes but received half a liter of milk and butter as a reward.

Photo: **/ voestalpine Archive Linz**
Excerpt from: **Karl Fallend, ZwangsarbeiterInnen: (Auto-)Biographische Einsichten, (NS-Zwangsarbeit: Der Standort Linz der „Reichswerke Hermann Göring AG Berlin“ 1938-1945, Ed. Oliver Rathkolb, Vol. 2), Vienna – Cologne – Weimar 2001**

From the summer of 1944, Allied bombings targeted Linz and the factory grounds. Foreign workers, especially Soviet prisoners and concentration camp inmates, were prohibited from using the air-raid shelters.

/ Archive DTZF Prague

/ voestalpine Archive Linz



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11

Concentration Camp Forced Labour in the Tunnel Construction at St. Georgen / Gusen

Drawing „In the Tunnel“ by former concentration camp prisoner Jean Bernard Aldebert
/ Archive of the Mauthausen Concentration Camp Memorial

In the final years of the war, many munitions factories were relocated to underground tunnel systems. The three largest tunnel projects in Austria were in Ebensee, Melk, and St. Georgen / Gusen. Beginning in 1944, the SS used thousands of concentration camp prisoners to build tunnels in St. Georgen. While the tunnel construction was still ongoing, starting in the fall of 1944, prisoners were also forced to manufacture parts for the Messerschmitt Me 262 jet aircraft.
The prisoners were housed in the newly established Gusen II camp. The living conditions were marked by hunger, cold, harassment, and terror inflicted by the guards and functionary prisoners. The camp was filthy and overcrowded, with bodies lying everywhere, transmitting diseases and plagues. The food, which was already insufficient, was regularly seized by the guards and functionary prisoners.

Jerzy Osuchowski

Born in 1911 in Krakow, he was arrested shortly after the German invasion of Poland for being a political opponent. After passing through various prisons, transit camps, and concentration camps, he arrived at Gusen I in 1940. After returning to Poland, he wrote books so the inhumanities in Gusen I would not be forgotten.

Photo: **/ Collection Rudolf A. Haunschmied**
Excerpt from: **Jerzy Osuchowski. Gusen. Vorhof zur Hölle, Norderstedt 2023**

Every day the prisoners were brought under guard to St. Georgen via a so-called drag railway and had to work there in shifts of eight to twelve hours. After the grueling shifts, they were subjected to hours of harassment from the guards. Particularly cruel was the camp elder of Gusen II, Johann Van Loosen, born in 1914. In the last days of April 1945 alone, he was involved in the murder of several hundred prisoners of Gusen II.

Karl Littner

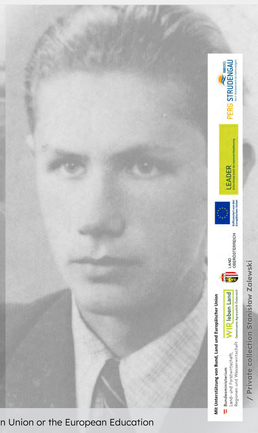
Born in 1924 in Oświęcim/Auschwitz to Jewish parents, he was deported for forced labor to various Nazi concentration camps starting in 1941. At the end of February 1945, he arrived at „Bergkristall.“ Despite all the deprivation and mistreatment, he survived Gusen II and the forced labor.

Photo: **/ Collection Rudolf A. Haunschmied**
Excerpt from: **Karl Littner. Life Hanging on a Spider Web. From Auschwitz-Zasole to Gusen II, Norderstedt 2011**

Most of the more than 10,000 prisoners at Gusen II survived there for only a few months. They died agonizing deaths caused by hunger, exhaustion, work accidents, diseases, and the brutal mistreatment by the guards.

/ Collection Musée de Bretagne, Rennes, Cliché R. Binet

/ MHC (Fotografia Amical de Mauthausen).



/ Private Collection Stanisław Żółkowski

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12

Civilian Forced Laborers from Italy

„Italian Workers! Report! Greater Germany will protect you.“
Recruitment poster for labourers in Italy
/ Istituto Storico Toscano della Resistenza e dell'Età contemporanea, Fondo Roberto Caspoli

In 1922, Benito Mussolini was tasked with forming a government and subsequently transformed the liberal state into a fascist regime, which included the imprisonment and execution of regime critics. Militarily, the regime allied itself with Nazi Germany through the so called Steel Pact of 1939. This military and political alliance lasted until summer of 1943.

On July 25, Mussolini was deposed by the Italian king and arrested. On September 8, the armistice with the Allies was announced. Following this, German forces occupied Italy, freed Mussolini, and established the collaborating *Repubblica Sociale Italiana* (RSI) in northern Italy.

Emma Casagranda (1914-2000)

Originally from the Trentino region, she worked from 1936 onwards in the household of a Jewish family in Milan. Due to the racial laws introduced in 1938, she lost this job. In 1942, she was recruited as a labourer for Nazi Germany and worked in a large agricultural enterprise in the Region of Brandenburg.

Photo and video interview: **/ Private collection Lucia Pergreffi**

Following an agreement between the Italian and German governments, around 400,000 Italian workers were sent to the Reich, starting in 1938. They were given contracts that guaranteed relatively good wages and a right to return. After the armistice with the Allies in 1943, the approximately 100,000 workers already in the Reich were forced into labour. Previously privileged foreign workers from a friendly state were now denied all rights and labeled „traitors.“

Mario Taddei (1927-2019)

On July 28, 1944, shortly before the liberation of this region of Tuscany, he was arrested by the Germans and sent to the transit camps of Fossoli di Carpi and Peschiera del Garda. Assigned for labor in the Reich, he was transferred via several stations to a foundry in Jenbach, Tyrol.

Photo: **/ Private collection Marco Taddei**
Excerpt from: **Due testimonianze, una Storia, Lavorare per il Reich, Florence 2012**

Around 100,000 additional workers were brought into the Reich. They were forced into labor due to destitution, pressure, or were captured during raids by the Nazi occupation forces or the collaborating RSI organizations.

/ Private collection Family Arnostiti

/ Private collection Family Arnostiti

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13

Capture and Forced Labor of Italian Military Internees

Gefangennahme italienischer Offiziere durch deutsche Fallschirmjäger in Italien, vermutlich 1943
/ BArch / Photographer Albert Heinrich

After September 8, 1943, the German army occupied most of Italy. The Italian army was disarmed, and the soldiers were sent to German prisoner-of-war camps, where they were forced into labour. The Nazi authorities were determined to exploit the labour of Italian prisoners of war, whom they regarded as traitors, in the most brutal way. However, international agreements would have hindered this plan. Therefore, the Nazi regime decided to establish a new category for Italian prisoners of war: the Italian Military Internees (IMI). This classification meant they were not protected by the 1929 Geneva Convention and could not receive support from the International Red Cross.

Licio Baldacci (1921-2010)

Drafted in January 1942, Licio was stationed in the border region between Slovenia and Croatia. After September 8, 1943, he was arrested and deported to the Reichsgau Sudetenland. In Ledvice, he was forced to work in coal mines and on railway lines. After being liberated by the Soviet Army, he returned to Vinci in September 1945.

Photo: **/ Private collection Paolo Baldacci**
Excerpt from: **Due testimonianze, una Storia. Lavorare per il Reich, Florence 2012**

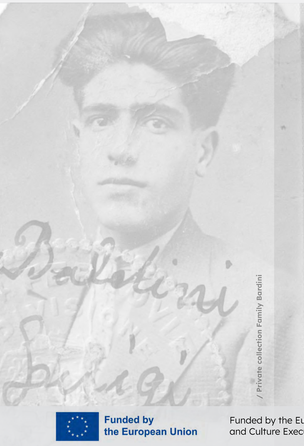
Italian soldiers who had been deployed outside of Italy during the war were disarmed at the site of capture and transported by foot, rail, or ship to the Stalags in the Reich.

Igino di Giusto (1920-2015)

The mechanic from Friuli was drafted in 1940 and stationed in Albania from 1941 onwards. On September 9, 1943, he was captured and taken to Stalag 398 near Linz, where he was forced to work under horrific conditions in the HGW for the German war industry.

Photo: **/ Private collection Sergio Di Giusto**
Excerpt from: **Davide Zoratti (Hg.), Da Tirana a Linz. La testimonianza inedita di Igino Di Giusto Internato Militare Italiano, Pasian di Prato 2020**

Until August 1944, the IMI were interned in camps administered by the German Wehrmacht. After that, they were reclassified as civilian forced laborers and transferred to labor camps. With the exception of the officers, all were used as workers for the German economy. Of the approximately 650,000 IMI, around 50,000 died during their captivity due to extremely hard labor, malnutrition, or violence from the guards.



/ Private collection Family Bandini

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14

Forced Labour of Italians in Concentration Camps

Female Prisoners of Ravensbrück Concentration Camp
/ BArch / Photographer unknown

With the *Dichiarazione sulla Razza* (Declaration on Race) in October 1938, the persecution of Jews in Italy began. However, the full implementation of the Nazi extermination program only started after September 8, 1943. Raids were conducted to arrest and deport the Jewish population, with significant collaboration from the RSI. During the evacuation of the Jewish quarter in Rome on October 16, 1943, 1,020 people were deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Those who were able to work were assigned to forced labour, while others were immediately murdered in the gas chambers.

Frida Misul (1919-1992)

Frida, from a Jewish family in Livorno, was arrested on April 1, 1944, and deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau. There, she was forced to work in the effects warehouse, sorting the belongings of those who were murdered.

Photo: **/ Private collection Roberto Rugiadi**
Excerpt from: **Ilda Verri Melo (Hg.), La Speranza tradita. Antologia della Deportazione politica toscana (1943-1945), Florence 1992**

During the occupation, the Nazi authorities sent thousands of Italians, labeled as political opponents, partisans, saboteurs, or resistance sympathizers, to concentration camps in the German Reich. Many more civilians, who were often simply in the wrong place at the wrong time, were killed or arrested during police operations and raids conducted by German and RSI authorities and were also deported to German concentration camps.

The wave of arrests after the strikes in early March 1944 was particularly severe. In the Empoli district alone, 117 men were deported to Mauthausen concentration camp and its subcamps. Only 19 of them survived.

Aldo Rovai (1913-2003)

grew up in Montelupo Fiorentino (Tuscany). In 1921, fascists murdered his father. Aldo worked as a glassmaker in Empoli. After the March strikes, he was arrested on March 8, 1944, and deported to Mauthausen concentration camp. He experienced liberation on May 5, 1945.

Photo: **/ Private collection Virgilio Rovai**
Excerpt from: **Ilda Verri Melo (Hg.), La Speranza tradita. Antologia della Deportazione politica toscana (1943-1945), Florence 1992**

At least 951 political deportees were taken from Tuscany to concentration camps.

/ Private collection Family Frilozzi

/ Private archive Aldo Rolli, Creative Commons License

/ Private collection Family Cabellini

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Forced labour of the Polish population for the German occupying forces

"Let's go to agricultural work in Germany. Register immediately with your mayor."
Recruitment poster, 1940/1941
/ Narodowe Archiwum Cyfrowe

„Close your heart to compassion. Brutal behaviour. The stronger has the right." –
This was the motto of the war against Poland that Adolf Hitler issued on August 22, 1939. This motto also applied to the recruitment of Polish forced labourers. It was implemented through a policy of terror in various ways, from individual arrests to large-scale raids.
In Włodawa, for example, around 50 predominantly young scouts were arrested in April 1941 and deported to concentration camps via the prison in Lublin. Men were mainly sent to the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp, women to Ravensbrück.

Henryka Bartnicka-Tajchert

was arrested on May 1, 1941, for conspiratorial activities with the scouts. She was first taken to the camp in Ravensbrück and later to the Bergen-Belsen camp. After her liberation, she was convalescing from typhus and was transferred by the International Red Cross to Malmö, returning to Poland in November 1945.

Photo and interview: **/ Muzeum Zespól Synagogalny we Włodawie**

The recruitment for forced labour into the Reich began as early as 1939. In 1942, it was intensified by the Decree on Employment issued by the Nazi occupation forces, which allowed even subordinate authorities to force any Polish man or woman to change their workplace. Pressure was exerted through the arrest of family members, confiscation of property, or the threat of being sent to a concentration camp.

Władysław Dyrek

The head of the primary school in Włodawa was arrested on May 20, 1941, and subsequently went through the concentration camps of Auschwitz-Birkenau, Neuengamme, Buchenwald, and the labour camp in Bochum. After liberation, he returned to his homeland.

Photo: **/ Państwowe Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau**

The Polish forced labourers employed in the Reich were liberated in the spring of 1945. Some of them quickly returned to their homeland, while others initially stayed in Germany and Austria and were housed in makeshift camps for so-called Displaced Persons (DPs). Many did not want to return to their homeland, which was now under Soviet influence. They stayed for years in DP camps or emigrated to the United Kingdom or overseas.

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German policemen in the market square of Włodawa
/ Muzeum Zespól Synagogalny we Włodawie

The Ghetto in Włodawa –

an intermediate stage in the extermination of the Jewish population

In Poland, the national socialist occupiers established more than 600 ghettos for the Jewish population, officially referred to as Jewish residential quarters.

The ghetto in Włodawa was established in January 1940. It was fenced off and consisted of a few residential buildings. The Jewish population of Włodawa was stripped of their shops, businesses, and workshops and moved into the ghetto. Jews from other regions of Poland (such as Kalisz, Krakow, Mielec) and from numerous European countries, including Austria were sent there as well. The living conditions for the more than 10,000 detainees were catastrophic. Food rations were extremely limited. The internees were subjected to increasing repression. They had to perform hours of forced labour, such as draining the Włodawa pond, the Krowie Bagno swamp, regulating rivers, and building the extermination camp Sobibór. Many residents of the ghetto died from diseases, epidemics, or from exhaustion and malnutrition.

Yehezkel Huberman

was born in 1924 in Włodawa. He and his brother Baruch managed to hide in the ghetto and thus escaped murder in the Sobibór extermination camp – unlike their family members. He joined the local partisan units. After the war, he emigrated to Israel.

Photo and interview: **/ Muzeum Zespól Synagogalny we Włodawie**

The survivors of the ghetto were deported to the nearby Sobibór extermination camp and murdered there during five liquidation operations. Among the victims was Rabbi Mendele Morgensztern.

Mendele Morgensztern

was elected rabbi of Włodawa in 1939 at the age of 23. In July 1942, he accompanied around 600 children destined for liquidation from the assembly camp at the sports field to the Sobibór extermination camp. All of them were immediately murdered.

Photo and recollection by Mosche Knopmacher: **/ Muzeum Zespól Synagogalny we Włodawie**

The last deportation of Jews from Włodawa to the gas chambers of Sobibór took place from May 1 to May 3, 1943. After this operation, the Nazi occupiers declared the city „free of Jews.“

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Forced labourers from Bernhard Falkenberg's labour camp during river regulation near Włodawa
/ Yad Vashem

German camps in Poland –

the example of Włodawa and its surroundings

In occupied Poland, including the Włodawki district, there were forced labour camps, prisoner-of-war camps, as well as concentration and extermination camps.

From 1940, the Nazi authorities established 16 **forced labour camps** in the Włodawa district. In a camp established in 1940 for Bernhard Falkenberg's company, about 600 Jewish labourers had to drain swamps and regulate rivers for 12 hours a day. They were also used for the construction of the Sobibór extermination camp. On April 30, 1943, the labour camp was liquidated, and the internees were murdered in Sobibór. Only a few managed to escape.

Bernhard Falkenberg

The German company owner was considered the „good German" in Włodawa because he warned his employees about deportations to Sobibór or hid them. He was denounced, ended up in the Mauthausen concentration camp, and survived. In 1969, Yad Vashem recognized him as Righteous Among the Nations.

Photo and interview: **/ Muzeum Zespół Synagogalny we Włodawie.**
Statement by: **Bernhard Falkenberg at the Sobibór trial**

From July 1941, the **Prisoner-of-war camp Stalag** 319 E existed in Włodawa. During its three-year existence, between 12,000 and 15,000 prisoners of war from the Soviet Union, France, Great Britain, Belgium, and Italy died of hunger or due to violence by the guards.

The SS **extermination camp Sobibór** existed from early May 1942 until mid-October 1943. During this period, most of the Jews from Włodawa, as well as Jews and Romani from Poland, the Netherlands, Austria, Germany, Czechoslovakia, and the Soviet Union were murdered there. In total, around 170,000 people perished in the gas chambers of Sobibór. On October 14, 1943, prisoners led by Lejba Feldhendler and Aleksander Peczerski organized an uprising. About 300 people managed to escape. Many of them were killed during the following manhunt.

Alexander Aronowitsch Peczerski

The Jewish lieutenant of the Red Army was captured by the Germans in October 1941. Through a labour camp in Minsk, he arrived at the Sobibór extermination camp in September 1943. There he co-organized the uprising of October 14, 1943. After the escape, he joined a Soviet partisan unit.

Photo: **/ Muzeum Zespół Synagogalny we Włodawie**
Excerpt from: **Storm into Immortality. Memories**

About 1,000 prisoners had to perform forced labour in the camp. Between 200 and 300 prisoners were tasked with removing bodies from the gas chambers and burying them.

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The international anchoring of human rights

Eleanor Roosevelt, as a member of the UN Human Rights Commission involved in drafting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, presents the Declaration in 1949
/ FDR Presidential Library & Museum

Through the actions of Nazi ideologues, camp guards, police, and ordinary men and women, millions of people were deprived of all their rights, discriminated against, mistreated, exploited, and murdered.

As a lesson learned, the United Nations (UN), founded in 1945, aimed to prevent future crimes against humanity or to punish them severely. The basis for this was to be the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the General Assembly on December 10, 1948.

The formulation of the 30 articles incorporated knowledge of Nazi crimes as well as the personal experiences of former prisoners.

Stéphane Hessel (1917-2013)

As a member of the French Resistance, he was arrested by the Gestapo in 1944, tortured, and deported to the concentration camps of Buchenwald and Mittelbau-Dora. After the war, he became a diplomat. From 1948 onwards, he was the secretary of the UN Human Rights Commission and a co-author of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Photo: **/ Superbass / CC-BY-SA-3.0 (via Wikimedia Commons)**
Excerpt from: **Stéphane Hessel, Tanz mit dem Jahrhundert, Zurich – Hamburg 2011**

With the Declaration, the General Assembly formulated the general civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights of all human beings. In addition to general civil rights and the right to life and liberty, all forms of discrimination were prohibited, a ban on torture was formulated, asylum rights and protection against arrest and expulsion were guaranteed. Slavery and the slave trade were banned, and a right to social security, work, and equal pay was proclaimed.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted with 48 votes in favour – including China – 0 votes against, and 8 abstentions – the Soviet Union, Poland, Ukraine, Belarus, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Saudi Arabia, and South Africa. Up to the present day, 192 UN member states have ratified the Declaration.

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Mit Unterstützung von Bund, Land und Europäischer Union
Bundesministerium Landwirtschaft, Regionen und Tourismus
VVR Schon Land
LEADER
PERG SPRUNGRAU

19

Modern Slavery

Global Facts and Figures on Forced Labour, 2022
/ ILO

Despite all the efforts of former forced labourers and international organizations, slavery and forced labor have not disappeared. The phenomenon of the exploitation of people historically described as „forced labour" is now referred to as „Modern Slavery." This term also includes forced marriages and human trafficking.

According to current studies by the International Labour Organization (ILO), around 27.6 million people worldwide live in situations of forced labor, with the trend increasing. Of these, 17.3 million work in the private sector, including countless women, men, and children who are sexually exploited. Women are disproportionately affected (in sexual exploitation, their share rises to 98%), along with children (3.3 million), and migrants.

According to the ILO's Global Estimate of Forced Labour from 2012, around 880,000 people in the **European Union** were in a forced labour relationship, including 464,000 women. 270,000 were victims of sexual exploitation and 610,000 were subjected to forced labour.

Forced labour continues to be exploited in nearly all economic sectors: about 5.5 million in the service sector, 3.2 million in manufacturing, 2.8 million in construction, and 2.1 million in agriculture. Furthermore, there are increasing efforts to restrict workers' rights by governments, political parties, businesses, or employers.

The following stories are examples of current restrictions on labour protection and exploitation in Italy, Austria, and Poland. The protagonists remain largely anonymous, as naming them could be harmful or even life threatening.

Abdul-Azim

/ undok-augustin2021-web.pdf

He is engaged with the „Union des Sans Papiers pour la Régularisation" in Belgium. „Sans-papiers" refers to people without residence permits. In 2021, many began a 60-day hunger strike to raise awareness of their situation and demand residence and work permits.

Ana S. (Name changed)

/ undok-augustin2021-web.pdf

She came to Vienna from Southeaster Europe in 2014. She worked without papers as a helper in several restaurants. As a mother of young children, she needed the money. However, her employer did not pay the promised wage. She only received the outstanding wages with the help of the Austrian Trade Union Federation, UNDOK counselling, and the Chamber of Labour.

Soumaila Sacko

/ Domani, August 12, 2021

was shot and killed on June 2, 2018, in the Italian region of Calabria. The 27-year-old agricultural worker from Mali was a young union activist and land workers' advocate. His murder occurred near an abandoned factory in Rosarno, one of the centres where hundreds of workers, mostly of African descent, are employed during the citrus harvest.

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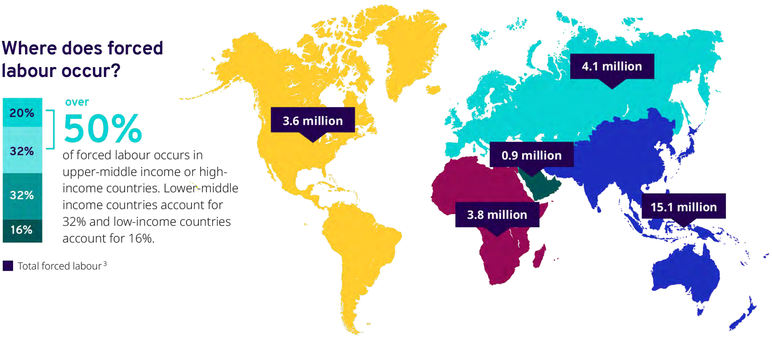
20

Where does forced labour occur?



Global Facts and Figures on Forced Labour, 2022
/ ILO

Ayo M. (Name changed)

/ undok-augustin2021-web.pdf

He applied for asylum in Austria in 2004. As an asylum seeker, the possibility to work officially was extremely limited: he could only work temporarily and earn a maximum of 110 euros per month. His asylum procedure was only completed positively in 2013.

Chŏn

/ Trafikoteka

came from North Korea to Poland to work as a welder. He never received a work contract, his passport was taken from him, and he worked 6 days a week, 12 hours a day. Chŏn died during work in Poland.

Jennifer

/ contenuti.savethechildren.it/sh/storie-di-piccoli-schiavi-invisibili/

Coming from Benin, Jennifer wanted to emigrate to Italy with her brother and a family friend. Like many other minors, mostly from Nigeria or Romania, she was forced into street prostitution.

Kanja S.

/ MenVia

from India arrived legally in Italy in 2016. He moved to Vienna in 2019 and worked as a package delivery person. He only learned at the time of his arrest that he did not have a legal residence permit for the entire EU.

Maria

/ Trafikoteka

Came to Poland to work and support her family in Ukraine. She had spent all her savings on the trip. The grueling work as a cook in a restaurant was very poorly paid. She fell seriously ill multiple times.

Sorin Oprişiu

/ www.sezonieri.at/wp-content/uploads /2018/02/Willkommen_bei_der_Erdbeerernte.pdf

from Romania worked as a harvest worker in the Tyrol. He did not receive overtime, vacation, or Christmas pay and had to cover the costs of accommodation, food, and work equipment himself. The 40-year-old was a co-initiator of a workers' strike for harvest workers.

Sadri B.

/ MenVia

from Kosovo arrived in Vorarlberg in 2017, invited by his father's cousin, a construction contractor. In order to enter the EU, the 18-year-old began working as an ironworker in his relative's company. He was given a passport under a Slovakian name and was registered for social security as a part-time helper.

Satnam Singh

/ ANSA, July 19, 2024

from India worked with his wife for a farmer south of Rome for several years. In mid-June 2024, his arm was severed by a machine at work. His employer put him and his wife on his truck. Contrary to the wife's belief that they were going to the hospital, the employer dropped the severely injured Satnam at his quarters. Satnam Singh died.

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Mit Unterstützung von Bund, Land und Europäischer Union

For a Fair (Labour) World

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations
/ UNO

International agreements and national legislations actually prohibit all forms of discrimination, exploitation, forced or slave labour, and human trafficking. The fact that the United Nations‘ 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development also calls for decent work for all under Goal 8 shows that these phenomena still exist – even right at our doorstep. Numerous international and local human rights organizations and trade unions are working to ensure that inhuman practices disappear from our planet and that social justice becomes a reality. They offer help to those affected, run informational campaigns to change our everyday behaviour, and provide opportunities for individual engagement.

We are all called to act!

What does this have to do with me?

How can I contribute to eliminating injustices?

What regulations or laws would I introduce?

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