

Documenting the Holocaust

From *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*¹

The Holocaust was the systematic, bureaucratic, state-sponsored persecution and murder of six million Jewish men, women and children by the Nazi regime and its collaborators.

During the era of the Holocaust, German authorities also targeted and killed other groups, including at times their children, because of their perceived racial and biological inferiority: Roma (Gypsies), Germans with disabilities, and some of the Slavic peoples (especially Poles and Russians). Other groups were persecuted for political or ideological reasons, or on the basis of what the Nazi regime considered to be criminal behavior. Among these groups were Communists, Socialists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and gay men.

Because the Nazis advocated killing children of “unwanted” groups, children—particularly Jewish and Romani children—were especially vulnerable in the era of the Holocaust.

Calculating the numbers of individuals who were killed as the result of Nazi policies is a difficult task. There is no single wartime document created by Nazi officials that spells out how many people were killed in the Holocaust or World War II.

There are three obvious and interrelated reasons for the lack of a single document:

1. Compilation of comprehensive statistics of Jews killed by German and other Axis authorities began in 1942 and 1943. It broke down during the last year and a half of the war.
2. Beginning in 1943, as it became clear that they would lose the war, the Germans and their Axis partners destroyed much of the existing documentation. They also destroyed physical evidence of mass murder.
3. No personnel were available or inclined to count Jewish deaths until the very end of World War II and the Nazi regime. Hence, total estimates are calculated only after the end of the war and are based on demographic loss data and the documents of the perpetrators. Though fragmentary, these sources provide essential figures from which to make calculations.

¹ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. “DOCUMENTING NUMBERS OF VICTIMS OF THE HOLOCAUST AND NAZI PERSECUTION.” Holocaust Encyclopedia. <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/documenting-numbers-of-victims-of-the-holocaust-and-nazi-persecution>. Accessed on April 23, 2023.

Group	Number of Deaths
Jews	6 million
Soviet civilians	around 7 million (including 1.3 Soviet Jewish civilians, who are included in the 6 million figure for Jews)
Soviet prisoners of war	around 3 million (including about 50,000 Jewish soldiers)
Non-Jewish Polish civilians	around 1.8 million (including between 50,000 and 100,000 members of the Polish elites)
Serb civilians (on the territory of Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina)	312,000
People with disabilities living in institutions	up to 250,000
Roma (Gypsies)	between 250,000 and 500,000
Jehovah's Witnesses	around 1,900
Repeat criminal offenders and so-called asocials	at least 70,000
German political opponents and resistance activists in Axis-occupied territory	undetermined
Homosexuals	hundreds, possibly thousands (possibly also counted in part under the 70,000 repeat criminal offenders and so-called asocials noted above)