

The Situation of the North Transylvanian Holocaust Survivors Reflected in the 1946 Survey of the World Jewish Congress The questionnaires of the World Jewish Congress

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THE ROMANIAN Section of the World Jewish Congress (henceforth: WJC) conducted a national survey among the Jewish survivors of the Holocaust in 1946. The objective of the survey was to assess the human and material losses and record the grievances suffered by the surviving Jewish population. In addition to this the statistical data gathered was intended to serve as a basis during the negotiations of the Peace conference ending World War II and for compensation claim. This study analyses the survey and its few results regarding three towns from Northern Transylvania (Cluj, Carei and Oradea) which belonged to Hungary during the Holocaust period.¹

In the autumn of 1944 the Soviet and Romanian troops took over the control over Northern Transylvania thus after a few months of Soviet military administration the territory became part of Romania. The Romanian Section of the WJC was re-established on 19 November 1944 and extended its activity to Northern Transylvania as well.² The organisation had multiple objectives as they outlined in a publication from 1945: *Studies and documentation about the Romanian Jewry, Economic and social activities, Work related to refugees and deported persons, Legal and political activity.*³

So the main activities of the WJC after WWII included conducting surveys among the Jewish population which resulted in two statistical summaries published in 1945 and 1947. The first survey included data before 1942 on

Jews from both Northern and Southern Transylvania and from other parts of Romania.⁴ The second publication included also statistical data concerning the period after the Holocaust as well using the results of the survey from 1946.⁵

This survey was carried out not only on territories belonging to Romania during the Holocaust but in Northern and Southern Transylvania as well. Bilingual questionnaires (in Hungarian and Romanian language) were printed for the Jewish survivors from the territories which belonged to Hungary between 1940–1944 in accordance with the mother tongue, language competence and cultural background of the Jewry from Northern and Southern Transylvania while monolingual questionnaires were used in other regions of Romania. A completion guide (in Hungarian and Romanian) and a letter from the Romanian Section of the WJC were enclosed with the questionnaires. The letter formulated in Romanian referred to the objective and the importance of the survey and also to the fact that the results were important for the Peace Conference from Paris (though the questionnaires were not designed for the sake of vengeance or individual interests but for documenting the sufferings of the European Jewry).

Inquiring about the survivors and victims the 20 page-long questionnaires consisted of 10 questions and several subsections. Not only the head of the family but also the other family members had to complete personalized questionnaires thus many data overlapped. The respondents were required to provide personal data (name, age, place of birth, residence, marital status, education and occupation) information about their citizenship, and describe the anti-Semitic discrimination and the grievances they suffered during the deportations. They also were asked to give details about their expropriated properties and material losses, and provide information about their life conditions and incomes before the deportation began. A separate set of questions referred to the forced labour service, ghettoization and deportations. The respondents were asked to give the names of their family members and acquaintances who died but also those of their surviving relatives. At the end of the questionnaires space was left blank for respondents wanting to describe in detail the horrors they experienced.

The WJC only partially processed the questionnaires completed in Northern Transylvania similarly to the data gathered in other regions of Romania. The results were published in the *Așezărilor evreilor* showing the size of the population, the age structure and gender distribution of the Jews at country and regional levels.⁶ There has not been written any in-depth analysis based on the material which makes the remaining questionnaires all the more valuable.

After the completion of the survey the fate of the questionnaires remained unknown. We only know that during the Communist years the original material was kept in the basement of the *Revista Cultului Mozaic* (today: *Realitatea Evreiască*), a Jewish newspaper with its headquarters in Bucharest. The water

infiltrating in the basement destroyed a large amount of the questionnaires. Presently the Archives of the *Romanian Jewish Historic Centre* (*Centrul pentru Studiul Istoriei Evreilor din România, Bucharest*) keeps the remaining material, although a significant part is in unusable condition.⁷ The questionnaires which can be used for research provide only partial information for each Romanian settlement; and only a fraction of the questionnaires have been found with regard to the three towns from Northern Transylvania which are in the focus of this study.⁸

We have found 228 questionnaires completed in Cluj in total: the highest serial number is 750 so we can suppose that at least 750 questionnaires had been completed in this town. However, considering that in March 1946 approximately 6,000 number of Jews were living in Cluj (of whom only 3,500 persons were originally from Northern Transylvania),⁹ it is likely that more than a thousand questionnaires were completed there. Although we cannot determine neither the exact number of the Jewish population from Cluj at the time of the survey nor the persons who had been born in this town (i.e. who did not settle there in 1945–1946) we can also assume that many survivors did not complete the questionnaires.

The situation is similar in the case of the two other towns analysed. We have 78 questionnaires in Carei and 112 in Oradea: although the highest serial number appearing on the forms completed in Carei is 187 around 400–500 Jewish persons could have lived in that town at the time of the survey.¹⁰ In the case of the questionnaires completed in Oradea the highest serial number is 1022; however, it is known that during the survey (spring 1946) the Jewish population of the town was around 3,500 persons who lived in Oradea before 1944 as well and 2,000–3,000 Jews migrated from other regions.¹¹

Thus, our analysis is based on 418 questionnaires in total.¹² The persons completing these questionnaires reported additional 112 survivors and almost 2,000 family members and acquaintances who died.¹³ In our study we focus exclusively on data concerning the survivors.

In spite of its fragmentary character, the material remains a very valuable source for the research of the social history of the Holocaust. Even if the results do not allow us to produce general statistical data on the losses, social stratification and demographic features of the Transylvanian Jewry after 1945 they enable us to present tendencies and individual life-paths. Questionnaires are valuable sources also because they offer an early and complex assessment of the damages. In addition to recording data they also allowed the survivors to tell their stories of suffering. Many respondents made use of the opportunity to recount and write down their grievances.

The WJC conducted similar surveys not only in Romania but also in other

countries from the region. In Hungary some 165,000 Jews were recorded in the course of the survey carried out between 1945–1946. The results of this survey were published in *The News Bulletin of the Statistical Department of the Hungarian Section of the WJC* between 1947–1949.¹⁴ The fate of the original questionnaires remains unknown, only a few of them have been preserved in the *Hungarian Jewish Archive (Magyar Zsidó Levéltár)* in Budapest.¹⁵

Two similar surveys were carried out in Bucharest (1945), where the personal narratives of some 800 Hungarian Jews were recorded, and in Budapest, where, according to common criteria, the *National Committee for Attending Deportees (Deportáltakat Gondozó Országos Bizottság – DEGOB)* recorded the personal stories of some 5,000 Holocaust survivors between 1945 and 1946.¹⁶ In both cases the testimonies were recorded in minutes (and not written down by the survivors).

The most similar source to our analysis is a survey conducted by Lajos Róth in Northern Transylvania. Róth defended his doctoral dissertation entitled *Az erdélyi zsidóság gazdasági és szociális helyzetképe a második világháború után (The economic and social situation of the Transylvanian Jewry after World War II)* at the Bolyai University in Cluj based on a survey he completed in early 1947.¹⁷ This survey is very similar to that of the WJC; Lajos Róth questioned Jews living in two smaller towns near Cluj (Dej and Gherla). His questionnaire included 93 questions and four tables. As the high number of questions show, his survey was much more complex than that conducted by the WJC. Apart from personal data, the fate and the anti-Semitic atrocities endured by the respondents, the researcher inquired also about political opinion, membership in the Jewish Parish Community and cultural consumption habits. Furthermore, the respondents were asked about their possible Christian benefactors and also indicate the persons who committed crimes against the Jews and who in their view should be held responsible for their crimes before the law.

In the following analysis of the WJC questionnaires we will use the survey completed by Róth as a control source because both surveys applied similar methodology.

Age and gender of the survivors

AS WE HAVE already mentioned the WJC questionnaires inquired also about the following personal data: name, age, place of birth, residence, gender, marital status, education, occupation, and the number of persons living within the respondent's household. In the following we will deal only with the age and gender of the survivors.

According to the literature mainly the persons of middle generation survived the Holocaust.¹⁸ In the case of our three cities the respondents and the persons they reported were from the age groups which had more chances to survive by avoiding the gas chamber, i.e. the age groups of 16–35 and 36–48 years. When selecting the deportees for extermination the lower age limit had been usually 12–16 years, while the upper age limit had been set around 50 years. Similarly, in the case of men drafted for into forced labour the survival rate was higher for those aged between 18–48 years.

Although the numbers differ by town, the highest proportion of returnees were between 16–35 years old in all three cases: 141 (61.8%) out of 268 persons in Cluj, 58 (74.4%) out of 78 persons (Carei), and 47 (42%) out of 112 persons (Oradea). The returnees between 36–48 years old constituted the next group (26.3 percent in Cluj, 17.9 in Carei, and 40.2 in Oradea). The different proportions have resulted, on the one hand, because of the randomness of the questionnaires left, on the other hand, because of the distribution of those drafted for labour service and those deported, and the different proportion of men and women. Thus, among the respondents in Oradea the men and those who were drafted for forced labour constituted a higher proportion compared to Cluj and Carei. Also the surviving returnees between 49–60 years old were overrepresented (12.5 percent) in comparison with the same age-groups registered in the two other towns (5.7% and 5.1%).

The Jews below 15 years old and those above 61 had the smallest chances to survive, except for a few deported persons, they could escape only if they succeeded in avoiding somehow the ghettoization and deportation.

On the basis of all the completed questionnaires we can conclude that the respondents (418 in total) fell into the following age groups: 246 persons (58.9 percent) were between 16–35 years and 119 persons (28.5 percent) were between 36–48 years old. As the table below shows, 87 percent of the survivors were in these two age groups.

Age of survivors	Cluj, Carei and Oradea	
		Percent %
below 15 years (1929–1944)	14	3.3
16–35 years old (1909–1928)	246	58.9
36–48 years old (1896–1908)	119	28.5
49–60 years old (1884–1895)	31	7.4
over 61 years (born before 1883)	5	1.2
Unknown	3	0.7
Total	418	100

The survey carried out in Dej and Gherla by Lajos Róth in 1947 revealed similar results: 718 persons (94.5 percent) out of the 760 Jews affected by the Holocaust were between 15–49 years old.¹⁹

This distribution of the age groups can be considered as characteristic for the Hungarian Jews of the entire region. According to the similar survey carried out between 1945–1946 by the Hungarian section of the WJC the survivors in the territories attached to Hungary after 1938 (except for Budapest) had the following age distribution: the 0–20 years age group represented 16.2 percent, the 20–40 age group represented 47.9 percent, those between 40–60 years constituted 29.2 percent, while persons above 61 years made up 6.9 percent of the survivors.²⁰

The overrepresentation of the young and middle-aged caused many problems among the survivors after the war. There was hardly any family that did not have a member who died in the Holocaust; in most cases even the partners or couples lost one of the members. Therefore, it is important to analyse the gender distribution of the respondents from the point of view of restarting and rebuilding of the individual lives.

Gender of Survivors	Cluj, Carei and Oradea	
		Percent %
Men	259	62
Women	159	38
Total	418	100

In all three towns men represented approximately two-thirds while women constituted only one-third of the survivors. From among the respondents in Cluj 140 were men (61.4%) and 88 were women (38.6%); in Carei men constituted 60.3 percent (47) while women 39.7 percent (31); in Oradea men constituted 64.3 percent (72) while women 35.7 percent (40). With regard to the gender distribution of all respondents the percentage of men was 62% (259) while that of women was 38% (159). The proportion was similar in the case of the survivors from Dej and Gherla, where men constituted 57.8 percent in 1947.²¹

Comparing the gender distribution with the distribution by age group we find that men represented the majority in all age-groups (64.3 percent of those below 15 years, 54.9 percent of the 16–35 age group, 73.9 percent of the 36–48 age group, 77.4 percent of the 49–60 age group, and 60 percent of those aged over 61 years were men.

Age	Cluj, Carei, Oradea				Age groups by gender	
	Men		Women		Men	Women
		%		%	%	%
below 15 years (1929–1944)	9	3.5	5	3.1	64.3	35.7
16–35 years (1909–1928)	135	52.1	111	69.8	54.9	45.1
36–48 years (1896–1908)	88	34.0	31	19.5	73.9	26.1
49–60 years (1884–1895)	24	9.3	7	4.4	77.4	22.6
over 61 years (born before 1883)	3	1.2	2	1.3	60	40
No answer	-	-	3	1.9	-	100
Total	259	100	159	100	62	38

The over-representation of men may be due to the fact that a significant part of the able-bodied men were drafted into forced labour during the Holocaust. Although the forced labour service did not guarantee homecoming it provided chances of survival much higher than the deportation.

We can also see that the majority of the survivors below 15 years old and over 61 years were men. Among them only five 15 years old were liberated from the concentration camps (3 boys and 2 girls who had been born in 1929, so they must have been considered “borderline cases” at the selections). The rest of the survivors from the two age groups escaped the Holocaust by running away, hiding or residing in Budapest.

Compared to Northern Transylvania the gender distribution in other territories of Hungary was quite different: for e.g., in a list including the names of 857 survivors from Uzhhorod (now in Ukraine) women represented 58.5 percent while men only 41.5 percent. The data concerning the survivors from Budapest also shows significantly different proportions: women constituted 63 percent while men only 37 percent. The picture is far more nuanced if we look at Hungary after the Treaty of Trianon: although women were in slight majority in the 14–40 years age-group (constituting 51.5 percent), the proportion of men dominated the 40–60 years old age group (61 percent).²² The gender difference between the two age groups was due, on the one hand, to the fact that significantly less women than men had been spared during the selections in Auschwitz; on the other hand, men had been more brutally treated. And, according to some, because men usually burn more calories it was harder for male deportees to bear deprivation; moreover, men’s chances for survival decreased by doing forced labour more frequently than women.²³

Thus, we can conclude that the following factors influenced the gender imbalance among the Northern Transylvanian Jewish survivors: 1. the higher survival chances of male forced labourers, favoured also by the fact that the

region had been liberated already in the autumn 1944, thus many forced labourers could return home; 2. On arrival to Auschwitz significantly more men aged between 12–16 and 40–50 years had been selected to do forced labour; 3. both the mothers who would not separate from their babies and the female family members who would not separate from the children entrusted to them were sent to gas chamber.²⁴

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Notes

1. For the complete analyse see: Gidó Attila, Sólyom Zsuzsa, *The Jewish Survivors from Cluj, Carei and Oradea. The 1946 Survey of the World Jewish Congress*, Working Paper No. 35, Institutul pentru Studiarea Problemelor Minorităților Naționale, Cluj-Napoca, 2010. (<http://www.ispmn.gov.ro/uploads/35%20pt%20web%20final.pdf>)
2. Andreescu, Andreea–Nastasă, Lucian–Varga, Andrea, *Minorități etnoculturale. Mărturii documentare. Evreii din România (1945–1965)*, Fundația CRDE, Cluj-Napoca, 2003, p. 17.
3. *Populația evreiască în cifre. Memento statistic*, Congresul Mondial Evreiesc. Secțiunea din România, București, 1945, pp. 3–4.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Așezările evreilor din România. Memento Statistic*, Congresul Mondial Evreiesc. Secțiunea din România, București, 1947
6. *Ibid.*
7. Cioflâncă, Adrian, Mărturii în premieră despre pogromul de la Iași, in *Ziarul de Iași* 29th June 2007, <http://adriancioflanca.blogspot.com/2007/10/marturii-in-premiera-despre-pogromul-de.html>
8. Here we would like to thank Stefano Bottoni who drew our attention to the material. The questionnaires were digitalized in March 2007 as part of a Yad Vashem project which collects Holocaust documents concerning Transylvania (the digitalization processes were conducted by Attila Gidó). The copies of the questionnaires can be found in the archives of the Yad Vashem.
9. *Arhivele Naționale Istorice Centrale* (the Central Historical National Archives from Bucharest – ANIC in what follows), collection no. 1037, file no. 3/1946, p. 26.
10. *Așezările evreilor*, 1947, p. 185.
11. Braham, Randolph L. (ed.), *Az észak-erdélyi holokauszt földrajzi enciklopédiája*, Park Könyvkiadó, Koinónia, Budapest, Kolozsvár, 2008, p. 90.
12. Data from the questionnaires has been processed in SPSS. The database development and the data entry have been co-ordinated by Sólyom Zsuzsa.
13. For the list of survivors and the victims reported by them see: Gidó Attila, Sólyom

- Zsuzsa, *The Jewish Survivors*, pp. 123–171.
14. Stark Tamás, *Hungarian Jews During the Holocaust and After the Second World War, 1939–1949. A Statistical Review*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2000, p. 88.
 15. *Magyar Zsidó Levéltár (Hungarian Jewish Archive)*, file no. XVIII-A-1, 74 150., pp. 1–4.
 16. Gerlach, Christian – Aly, Götz, *Az utolsó fejezet. Reálpolitika, ideológia és a magyar zsidók legyilkolása 1944/1945*, Noran, Budapest, 2005, p. 299, Horváth Rita, *A Magyarországi Zsidók Deportáltakat Gondozó Országos Bizottsága (DEGOB) története*, Magyar Zsidó Levéltár, Budapest, 1997, p. 46, Id., *Jews in Hungary after the Holocaust: The National Relief Committee for Deportees, 1945–1950*, in *The Journal of Israeli History*, No. 2, 1998, pp. 69–91. The online database (in Hungarian and partially in English) of the DEGOB protocols is available at: <http://degob.hu/index.php>, <http://degob.org/>
 17. Róth Lajos, *Az erdélyi zsidóság gazdasági és szociális helyzetképe a második világháború után*, Kézirat. A Kolozsvári Bolyai Tudományegyetem Jog- és Közgazdaságtudományi Karához benyújtott doktori értekezés, Kolozsvár, 1947
 18. Gerlach–Aly, *Az utolsó fejezet*, pp. 325–326.
 19. Róth, *Az erdélyi zsidóság*, pp. 78–79.
 20. *The News Bulletin of the Statistical Department of the Hungarian Section of the World Jewish Congress (Zsidó Világkongresszus Magyarországi Tagozata Statisztikai Osztályának Közleményei)*, No. 10, 1949, p. 3.
 21. Róth, *Az erdélyi zsidóság*, pp. 92–93.
 22. Gerlach–Aly, *Az utolsó fejezet*, p. 326.
 23. *Ibid.*, p. 326.
 24. Horváth Rita, [She] Was Not Married *at All*: The Relationship between Women’s Pre-deportation Social Roles and Their Behavior upon Arrival in Auschwitz, in: Mazur, Zygmunt et al. (eds.), *The Legacy of the Holocaust: Women and the Holocaust*, Jagiellonian UP, Kraków, 2007, pp. 193–202.

Abstract

This study analyses the survey conducted by the World Jewish Congress among the Jewish survivors of the Holocaust in 1946 and its few results regarding three towns from Northern Transylvania (Cluj, Carei and Oradea) which belonged to Hungary during the Holocaust period. The WJC’s survey is a very valuable source for the research of the social history of the Holocaust. Even if the results do not allow us to produce general statistical data on the losses, social stratification and demographic features of the Transylvanian Jewry after 1945 they enable us to present tendencies and individual life-paths. Questionnaires are valuable sources also because they offer an early and complex assessment of the damages. In addition to recording data they also allowed the survivors to tell their stories of suffering. Many respondents made use of the opportunity to recount and write down their grievances.

Keywords

Jewish, World Congress, 1946, Oradea, Questionnaires