



# UNDERSTANDING THE HOLOCAUST

KS3

How and why did it happen?



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## The Pitel family

Look carefully at the 26 people in Figure 0.1. The photograph shows the members of a large Jewish family who lived in a small town in Eastern Poland. It was taken in 1938, one year before the Second World War began. Think about the lives these people might have lived, the hopes and dreams they may have had for the future.

Incredibly, just five years later, every person in this photograph, except for one, had been murdered.

The only person who survived beyond 1943 was Yosef Pitel (the man on the far right). He survived because soon after this photograph was taken, he left Poland to begin a new life more than a thousand miles away in a country which is now known as **Israel**.

In 1938, he had no idea just how precious this photograph would become – and that he would never see any of his family again.

**Figure 0.1 The Pitel family**



## The fate of the Pitel family

In September 1939, **Nazi Germany** invaded Poland. By 1943 all of the Pitel family, apart from Yosef, were killed. Some died in **ghettos**, others were murdered by gassing in a Nazi **death camp**. Millions of other innocent people just like them were murdered because they were Jewish. This mass killing is known as the Holocaust.

In this book you will learn about the Holocaust and how and why the Pitel family and millions of other victims were killed by the Nazis and their **collaborators**.

## What was the Holocaust?

Adolf Hitler and the Nazis came to power in Germany in 1933. Between 1933 and 1939, Jews in Germany faced terrible **discrimination** and **prejudice** and some were killed. However, it was during the Second World War (1939–1945) that the mass killing of approximately six million Jews across Europe occurred.

The Nazis and their collaborators wanted to totally destroy Jewish life in Europe. Jewish people were victims of **genocide**. Genocide

is any act committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group. The defeat of Nazi Germany and its **allies** in 1945 brought the killings to an end. However, by this time two-thirds of Jews who lived in Europe before the war were killed, including approximately 90 per cent of all Jewish children. If you look closely at the map on pages 8–9 you can see the scale of the murder in countries all over Europe.

## Persecution, murder, genocide

During this period the **Roma and Sinti** people (sometimes called ‘Gypsies’) also faced terrible discrimination, brutal treatment, and imprisonment in Nazi camps. An estimated 500,000 were murdered during the Second World War. The Roma and Sinti people were victims of genocide.

Many other groups were also victims of the Nazis and their collaborators. These included disabled people, gay men, **Jehovah’s Witnesses**, **political opponents**, Polish and Soviet civilians, and prisoners of war from the Soviet Union.

### The BIG question: How and why did the Holocaust happen?

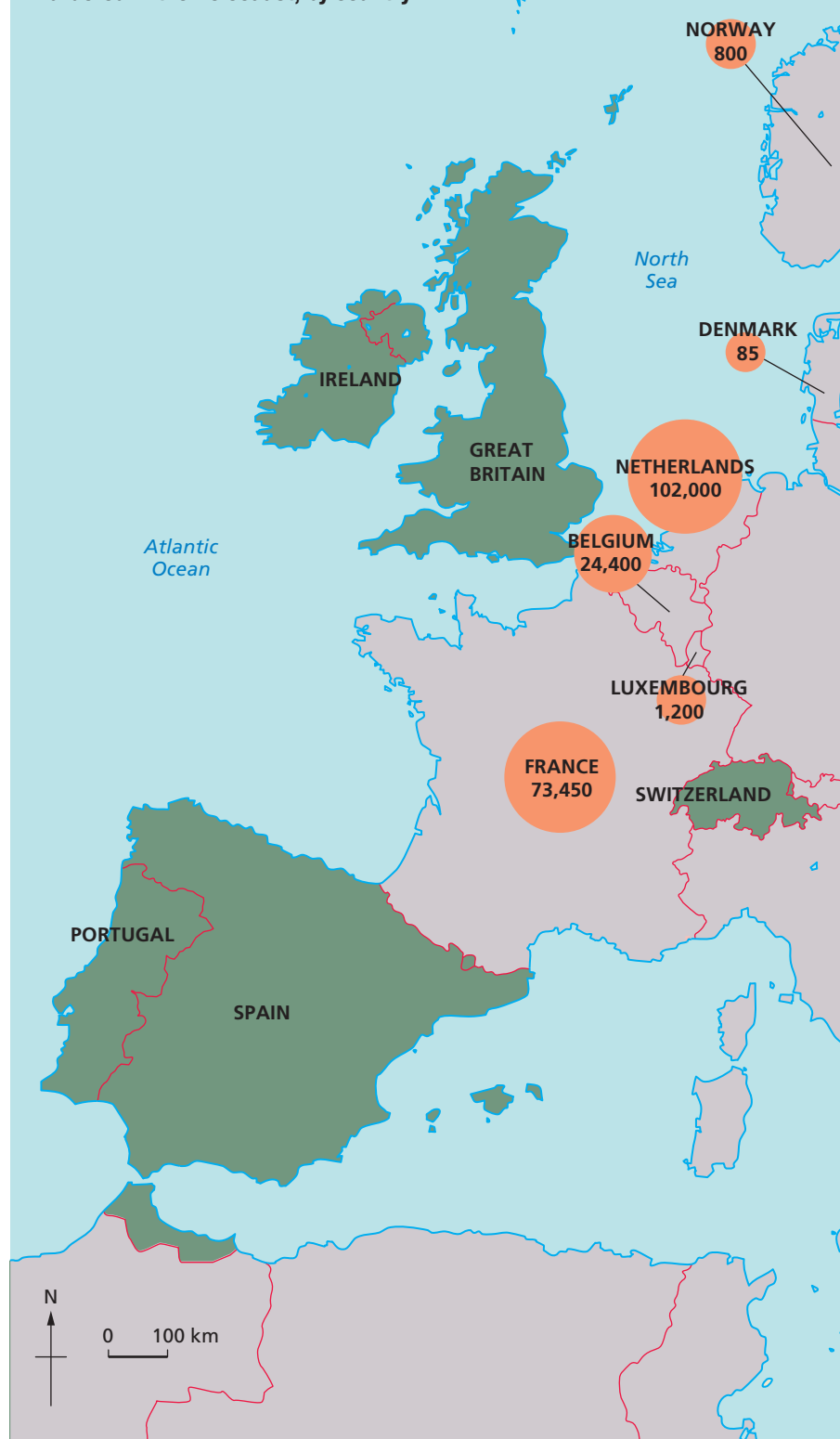
Before you begin the first unit, note down any ideas you have about how and why the Holocaust happened.

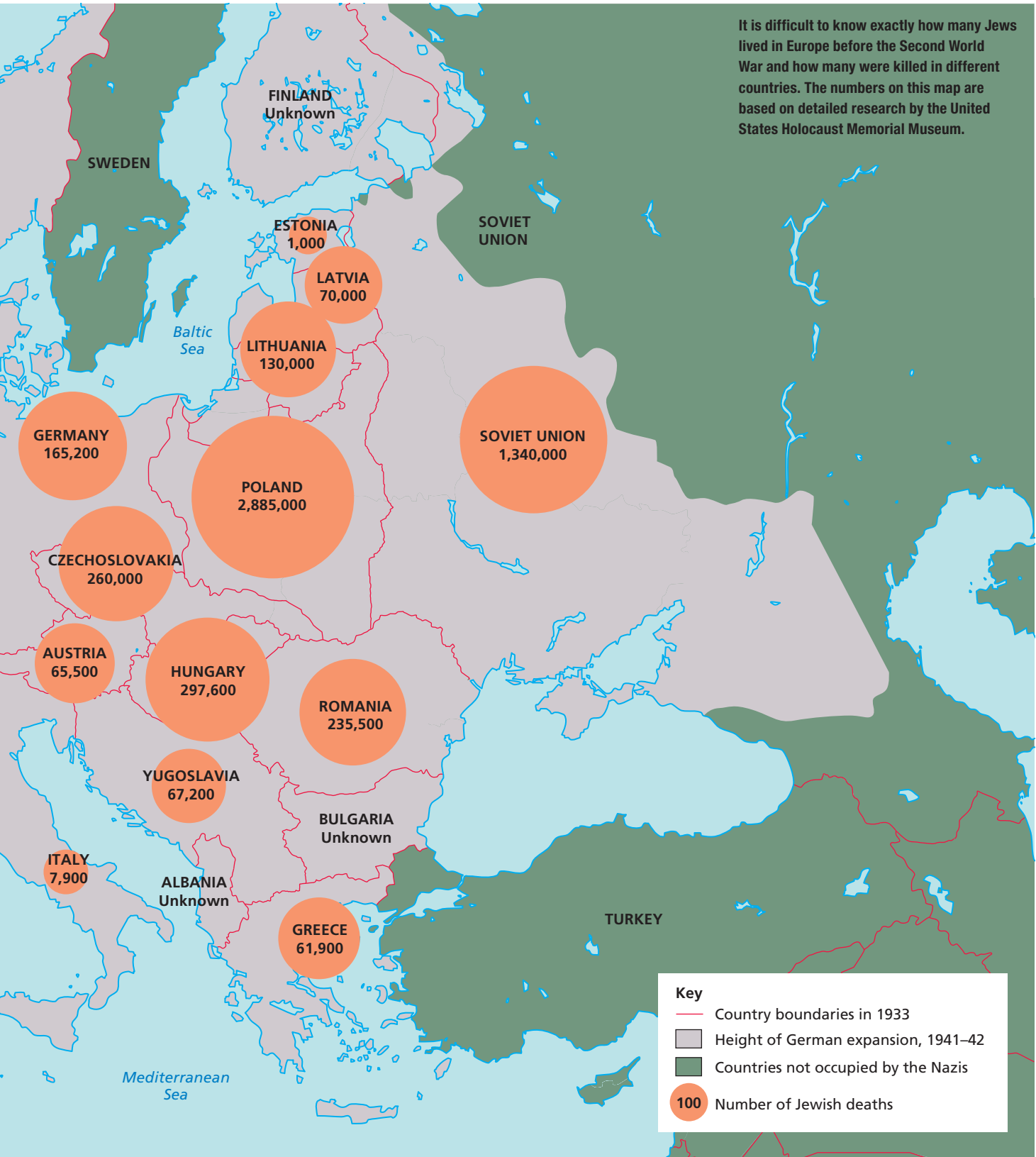


Country	Jewish population c.1933 in countries later controlled or occupied by the Nazis
Albania	200
Austria	191,000
Belgium	60,000
Bulgaria	48,500
Czechoslovakia	357,000
Denmark	5,700
Estonia	4,560
Finland	1,800
France	250,000
Germany	525,000
Greece	73,000
Hungary	445,000
Italy	48,000
Latvia	95,600
Lithuania	155,000
Luxembourg	2,200
Netherlands	156,000
Norway	1,400
Poland	3,000,000
Romania	756,000
Soviet Union	2,525,000
Yugoslavia	68,000

Country	Jewish population c.1933 in countries not occupied by the Nazis
Great Britain	300,000
Ireland	3,600
Portugal	1,200
Spain	4,000
Sweden	6,700
Switzerland	18,000

Figure 0.2 The number of Jewish people murdered in the Holocaust, by country.





### Develop knowledge and understanding



To deepen your knowledge and challenge common misunderstandings, you will learn:

- That before the Holocaust Jewish people lived in countries all across Europe.
- That Jewish people were employed in all types of jobs, and the majority were not wealthy.
- About some of the ways in which Jews contributed to their communities and countries.
- That Jewish people had many different beliefs and identities.
- That Jews in Germany were a very small minority – less than 1 per cent of the German population.
- That **prejudice** against Jews has existed in Europe for 2,000 years.
- About the many ways in which Jews have been **persecuted** throughout history.
- What **antisemitism** means and how it differs from religious prejudice.

### Think historically



#### Evidence

The chapters in this unit have a range of primary and secondary sources, both visual and written. Choose one of the statements below and find evidence which supports the statement.

*Statement 1: Jewish life in Europe before the Second World War was diverse.*

*Statement 2: Jews in Europe have faced prejudice across time.*

### Discuss



- What made someone Jewish?
- What prejudice and discrimination have Jewish people faced throughout history?
- Does antisemitism still exist?

## The BIG question: How and why did the Holocaust happen?

Look back at the notes you have previously written. As you are studying Unit 1, what new information, ideas or understanding do you have about this big question?



## 1.1 Who were the Jews of Europe before the Second World War?



### Activities

- 1 Look at the photographs on this page. What do these images tell us about Jewish people who lived in Europe before the Second World War?
- 2 On the next two pages, you will read about four individuals: Julius, Laura, Leon and Esther. Look back at the map on pages 8–9 and find the countries where they lived.
- 3 What can we learn about 'Jewish identity' from these individual case studies?

## Jewish people across Europe

### FACTS AND STATISTICS

#### Jews in Europe in 1933

- In 1933, 9.5 million Jews lived in Europe.
- Jewish people had lived in Europe for over 2,000 years.
- There were Jewish communities in every European country.
- More Jews lived in the east than in the west of Europe. Most lived in Poland, the Soviet Union and Romania.
- The majority of Jewish people were not wealthy.
- Many worked in trade and commerce, but Jewish people did all sorts of jobs.
- Not all Jews were religious, and religious Jews did not all believe the same thing.
- The majority were very passionate about the country in which they lived.

#### Julius Paltiel

Julius was born in Trondheim, Norway, in 1924. His grandfather had settled in Norway in the 1880s. When Julius was growing up there were around 250 Jews living in the city of Trondheim.

Julius's parents ran a clothes store and the family lived above the shop. He had a very happy childhood. He loved sports and, when he was 15, Julius became a manager in the family shop.



#### Laura Varon

Laura was born in 1926. Before the Second World War, Laura lived with her family on the Greek island of Rhodes. Her father's family came from Turkey and her mother's from Spain. Jews had lived on the island for over 2,000 years. In the 1930s, around a quarter of the island's population were Jewish.

Laura's family were **Orthodox Jews**. They took part in particular rituals and customs. Laura loved spending Saturday evenings listening to her father telling stories.

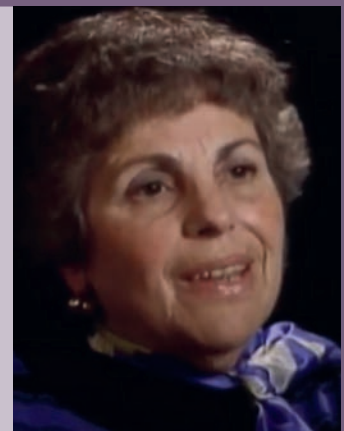


Photo credit: Holocaust Center for Humanity

## 1.1 Who were the Jews of Europe before the Second World War?

### Leon Greenman

Leon was born in Stepney Green, London, in 1910. His mother, who died when Leon was two years old, came from a family of Russian Jews. His father's parents came from Rotterdam in the Netherlands. Leon spent much of his childhood in the Netherlands.

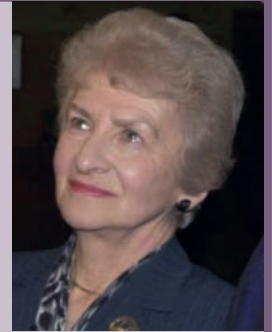
In the 1920s, Leon returned to London and trained as a hairdresser. He was not religious and preferred to spend his time boxing and singing. Leon married Else, in 1935. They decided to live in Rotterdam.



### Esther Brunstein

Born in 1928, Esther lived in Łódź, Poland. Łódź was a large industrial city, and about one-third of the population was Jewish.

Esther's father worked as a weaver in a factory. Both her parents were active in politics. They were members of the *Bund* – a political movement particularly concerned with the lives of workers. Esther's home was a happy one, and she was influenced by her parents' beliefs and her schooling. She had a strong sense of being both Jewish and Polish.



## Jews in Europe before the Second World War

Europe has been home to Jewish people for over 2,000 years. Throughout this time, Jews made a huge contribution to the countries and communities in which they lived.

The way Jews lived before the outbreak of the Second World War and the way they saw the world varied from place to place. For many Jewish people in Europe, being Jewish was not the only part of their identity. A Jewish person could have lots of different ideas, interests and beliefs – just like everyone else. And what a Jewish person thought or believed could change over time. For instance, from the eighteenth century, national identity (such as being British, or French, or German) became

very important to many Jews. You can learn about the experiences of Jewish people on the pages that follow.

### Source 1.1

There was no one way to be a Jew, they were traditional and modern, and orthodox and progressive and every shade in between. They were Nobel Prize winners and they were tailors and tradesmen. They were wealthy and they were so poor they couldn't afford shoes for their children in the winter. They went to religious schools, they prayed, and they respected the 2,000-year-old Jewish tradition. But they also went to the movies, played sports and danced the tango. They fell in love, had fun. They were busy with life, looking toward the future.

Sheryl Silver Ochayon, Holocaust educator

In 2016 the UCL Centre for Holocaust Education published a landmark study, *What do students know and understand about the Holocaust?* Almost 10,000 students aged 11 to 18 participated in the research. It was the largest of its kind anywhere in the world. The study indicated that the vast majority of young people found the subject interesting and relevant. However, it also revealed that many students did not have clear knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust.

Written in direct response to the findings of the 2016 national study, this textbook aims to improve understanding of the Holocaust in significant ways by:

- Providing you with an appropriate historical overview of key aspects of the Holocaust
- Helping you to understand the roots of antisemitism
- Deepening your knowledge of key individuals, places and events
- Encouraging you to challenge common myths and misconceptions (e.g., that Hitler was solely responsible for the Holocaust)
- Developing your understanding of key historical concepts (e.g., evidence, interpretation, causation, significance)
- Enabling you to answer the big historical question: How and why did the Holocaust happen?
- Helping you to appreciate the impact of the Holocaust on ordinary people across Europe
- Inviting you to consider the importance of the Holocaust and its significance today

This textbook is supported by additional materials and teacher guidance notes on the UCL Centre for Holocaust Education website ([www.ucl.ac.uk/holocaust-education](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/holocaust-education)).

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