

## Children During the Holocaust



Two young brothers, seated for a family photograph in the Kovno ghetto. One month later, they were deported to the Majdanek camp. Kovno, Lithuania, February 1944.

— *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*

Children were especially vulnerable in the era of the [Holocaust](#) because they were thought of as the next generation of “unwanted” and “dangerous” groups. The Germans and their collaborators killed as many as 1.5 million children, including over a million Jewish children and tens of thousands of [Romani \(Gypsy\)](#) children, German children with physical and mental disabilities living in institutions, Polish children, and children residing in the occupied Soviet Union. The chances for survival for Jewish and some non-Jewish adolescents (13-18 years old) were greater, as they could be deployed at [forced labor](#).

The fate of Jewish and non-Jewish children can be categorized in the following way: 1) children killed when they arrived in [killing centers](#); 2) children killed immediately after birth or in institutions; 3) children born in [ghettos](#) and [camps](#) who survived because prisoners hid them; 4) children, usually over age 12, who were used as laborers and as subjects of [medical experiments](#).

Upon arrival at [Auschwitz-Birkenau](#) and other killing centers, the camp authorities sent the majority of children directly to the gas chambers. The German authorities also incarcerated a number of children in concentration camps and transit camps. Nazi physicians and medical researchers used a number of children, including twins, in concentration camps for medical experiments that often resulted in the deaths of the children. Concentration camp authorities deployed adolescents, particularly Jewish adolescents, at forced labor in the concentration camps, where many died because of conditions.

The prisoners' day began at 4:30 a.m. with a roll call; if anyone was missing during roll call, prisoners would stand outside for hours until they were found. After roll call, the *Kommando*, or working groups, would walk to their place of work, five abreast, wearing striped camp fatigues, no underwear, and wooden shoes without socks, most of the time ill-fitting, which caused great pain. The working day lasted 12 hours during the summer, and a little less in the winter. No rest periods were allowed. One prisoner would be assigned to the latrines to measure the time the workers took. Workers who were injured or failed from exhaustion would be the next to be taken to the gas chambers. All elements of the work day were closely monitored.

After work, there was another mandatory evening roll call. After roll call, there were individual and collective punishments, depending on what had happened during the day, and after these, the prisoners were allowed to retire to their blocks for the night to receive their bread rations and water; sometimes, there was watery soup. They went to bed under strict supervision, wearing their full clothing and uncomfortable shoes in order to prevent theft.



