

Tehran Children

Group of Polish Jewish children who reached Palestine in February 1943 via Tehran, Iran.

When World War II broke out in September 1939, some 300,000 Jews fled Poland for the Soviet Union. This flight included grave hardships, such as illness, starvation, and cold, and many children lost their parents along the way.

In 1942 the Polish government-in-exile and the Soviet authorities agreed to allow the emigration of some 24,000 of these Polish refugees. Included were 1,000 Jewish children, mostly orphans, and 800 Jewish adults. From April to August 1942 the entire group was taken to Tehran. When they arrived, the adult Jewish refugees set up an orphanage with the help of the Jewish community there.

As soon as the Jewish Agency heard about the Jewish refugees in Iran, they sent emissaries to help run the orphanage and set up a Palestine Office in Tehran. By January 1943 the Jewish Agency had procured a ship and immigration permits from the British authorities, so the children and their attendants sailed to Suez, and then transferred to trains. On February 18, 1943, some 861 children and 369 adults reached Palestine, where they were welcomed with great joy and fanfare. Ultimately, most were taken to live on *kibbutzim* (communal settlements).