

From Despair to Cargoes of Hope: WWII's Displaced Persons

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The United States Displaced Persons Act

During what was hoped to be the last months of World War II, the United States military undertook the task of preparing for the end of the war and the ever-growing Displaced Persons' (DP) problems. The Truman administration and various citizen organizations also tried to alleviate the suffering of the DPs with various measures with not much success—the backing of Congress and the American people were needed.

Eventually, Congress passed the Displaced Person Act of 1948 (S. 2242; Pub.L. 80-774; 62 Stat. 1009). President Truman signed it – with all its flaws – because he did not want the DPs to have to wait. The purpose of the act, and its amendments, was “To authorize for a limited period of time the admission into the United States of certain European displaced persons for permanent residence, and for other purposes.” Based on specific criteria, eligible DPs could be admitted to the U.S. if they would not become a public charge and have safe and sanitary housing and employment without displacing some other person. The displaced person or refugee was the concern of the International Refugee Organization. For the U.S., the Displaced Persons Commission was put in place to oversee the Act's enactment.

Some of the Many Organizations

United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA)

- Established in 1943; became a part of the United Nations in 1945.
- It was abolished in 1947.
- Had a major role in assisting DPs in repatriation.
- “Records of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration 1943-1948.” *United Nations Archives and Records Management Section.*
<https://archives.un.org/content/records-united-nations-relief-and-rehabilitation-administration-1943%E2%80%931948>

International Refugee Organization (IRO)

- Established in 1947 as a United Nations organization; it was the successor to the UNRRA.
- It was responsible for “registering, repatriating, and resettling refugees and displaced persons residing in Austria, Germany, and Italy.”
- Abolished in 1952. Functions were transferred to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees established in 1951.
- “Constitution of the International Refugee Organization.” *Library of Congress.*
<https://www.loc.gov/law/help/us-treaties/bevans/m-ust000004-0284.pdf>

Displaced Persons Commission (DPC)

- 25 Jun 1948 to 31 Aug 1952 provided supervision of the U.S. displaced persons organization.
- National Archives Record Group 278 (Policy and administrative files).
- "Records of the Displaced Persons Commission (DPC)." *The National Archives*.
<https://www.archives.gov/research/guide-fed-records/groups/278.html>

National Catholic Welfare Conference (NCWC)

- Established in 1919 from the National Catholic War Council.
- In 1920 established a Bureau of Immigration to assist immigrants coming into the United States.
- Settled approximately 151,700 persons.
- "Archive." *Center for Migration Studies (CMS)* <https://cmsny.org/about/archive/>
- "Explore Archival Collections." *Center for Migration Studies (CMS)*.
<https://cmsny.org/about/archive/collections/>

Church World Service (CWS)

- Established in 1946.
- A Christian cooperative ministry providing refugee assistance.
- Settled approximately 51,000 persons.
- "Guide to the Church World Service Records." *Presbyterian Historical Society*.
<https://www.history.pcusa.org/collections/research-tools/guides-archival-collections/rg-529>

National Lutheran Council

- A Lutheran cooperative agency established in 1918. In 1966 it was replaced by the Lutheran Council in the United States of America.
- Settled approximately 42,000 persons.
- Email sent 3 February 2023
- "Archives." *Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)*.
<https://www.elca.org/archives>

United Service for New Americans (Jewish)

- Established in 1946 from a merger of the National Refugee Service and the Service to Foreign Born Department of the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW)
- Settled approximately 38,500 persons.
- "Records of the United Service for New Americans. *Center for Jewish History*.
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Resources

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 - "Archive." *Center for Migration Studies (CMS)* <https://cmsny.org/about/archive/>
 - "Explore Archival Collections." *Center for Migration Studies (CMS)*. <https://cmsny.org/about/archive/collections/>
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8. *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*. <https://www.ushmm.org/>
 - "Displaced Persons." *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*. <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/displaced-persons>
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10. "Displaced Persons Act of 1950." *Library of Congress*. <https://maint.loc.gov/law/help/statutes-at-large/81st-congress/session-2/c81s2ch262.pdf> [P.L. 555 -- 81st Cong., Ch. 262 -- 2d Sess.]
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12. Displaced Person Immigration Correspondence, 1948-1952. FSL Film 2,021,286, FamilySearch Library, Salt Lake City, UT
13. "Displaced Persons – Policy and Unnamed Cases." Records of U.S. Occupation Headquarters, World War II, 1923-1972, Record Group 260. Entry No. A1-176, Container 19. National Archives, College Park, Maryland.
14. "Displaced Persons Newspapers, 1947-1947." Records of United States Army, Europe, 1942-1991, Record Group 549. Entry No. A1-19, Container 656. National Archives, College Park, Maryland.
15. "DP: Inquiries Concerning Displaced Persons." Records of the War Department, General and Special Staffs, 1860-1952, Record Group 165. Entry No. NM84 476, Container 829. National Archives, College Park, Maryland.
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