AFTER THE GREAT WAR

A NEW EUROPE 1918 – 1923

AFTER THE GREAT WAR: Children's Perspectives

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This teaching resource includes **five topics** exploring the **impact of the First World War on children.** It aims to show how the turbulent post-war years shaped young people's lives through a variety of historical sources, mainly photographs and documents.

By working with these materials, students will:

- learn about the effects of different post-war phenomena on children,
- analyse a range of historical sources,
- reflect on the long-term consequences of the war on society.

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Military and Civilian Losses

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In the course of military operations, all the countries involved in the Great War lost nearly 10 million soldiers while over 21 million were wounded. Men of many different nationalities in East-Central Europe which did not have their own states had fought against each other in imperial armies.

For example, around 350 000 Poles were killed fighting in three armies: the Austro-Hungarian, the German and the Russian. Moreover, warfare, hunger and different diseases took the lives of millions of civilians. Hence, the war and its aftermath gave rise to a particularly vulnerable group of child victims: war orphans. This group included children whose fathers had fallen in battle, who had disappeared or who had not (yet) returned home. Some of these children have also lost their mothers. The loss of parents was perhaps the most life-changing experience for children who lived through war. The death of a parent was often the trigger for a child's displacement and **'the trauma of refugee life'**.

Orphans were often the consequence of the dispersal of families, caused by approaching armies, occupation and the spread of epidemic diseases, which separated children from their families. Most of Europe's war and post-war societies witnessed the massive presence of these child victims and responded in various ways to rescue the orphans and secure their future survival.

Poland in 1919

1

In his monograph War's Aftermath (1940), the American soldier William R. Grove, who went to Poland as a relief worker in 1919, recalled the fragility of children in the aftermath of the Great War:

They looked like little old men and women [. . .] Many of them seemed to carry the troubles of the years on their grave little faces. There were no smiles—only silence.
[. . .] These little fellows had gone through more suffering in their short years than most men endure in a lifetime. That is what war did to the children.
It was not through neglect by the parents. On the war's borderland men starved to death that their wives might live a little longer and sustain a child or children. To have food for their children, women went so long with little or no food that they finally succumbed. Parents on that borderland struggled, suffered and died for their children. Imagine the feeling of a mother who sees her children wasting away without a morsel of food obtainable by any possible sacrifice.

Source: W. R. Grove, War's Aftermath: : Polish Relief in 1919, New York, 1940, p. 169–70.

Poland in 1919

2

War orphans were cared for by post-war societies, often as heroes' children. Different social and religious organisations, local and state authorities organised fundraising campaigns, aid initiatives and special care centres for them. Below are two donation cards (cegiełki*) from Polish aid organisations collecting donations for war orphans. The cards clearly refer to Christian motifs.

*Cegiełka – a donation as part of a fundraising action for a social cause, usually made by purchasing a special coupon or card.

Source: Donation card For the victims of borderland wars, 1919

Poland in 1919

3

Donation card ‚For bread for the aged in old people's homes and orphans in nurseries', before 1924, Radom.

Source: Polona

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Forced Migration

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During the Great War, Central and Eastern Europe experienced displacement, evacuation and deportation on a massive scale.

From the outset of the conflict, the roads and pathways of East Prussia, Bukovina, Galicia and Serbia were filled with refugees. A few months later, the Russian army deported ‘suspects’ – German colonists and Jews –to the east, as well as the German-Austro-Hungarian offensive in the spring and summer of 1915 triggered a huge wave of semi-forced evacuation to the east. None of the fighting parties shied away from local displacements, which were justified on strategic grounds. The British historian Peter Gatrell has estimated about ten million migrants were expelled or displaced in Central and Eastern Europe, the Balkans and Russia, while around two million people were evacuated or deported from Belgium and France. However, all these figures remain only approximate estimates.

Undoubtedly, the largest group of forced migrants consisted of peasants and Jews from Eastern European shtetls (small towns), with the majority being women and children.

Therefore, we do not have many first-hand sources about their experiences. Escape and evacuation were obviously fraught with danger and fear. Migrants were often placed in special camps where living conditions were difficult and the risk of disease was high. During the escape, children were sometimes separated from their mothers and lost. Refugees, deprived of their possessions, lived from day to day in uncertainty. At the same time, they aroused hostility and resentment among the communities in which they found themselves, and were accused of crimes and of posing a threat to health and morality.

At the end of the war and afterwards, many people tried to return to their homes.

From revolutionary Russia, the so-called ***bieżeńcy*** – mainly Orthodox Christians, who had beenevacuated deep into Russia by the Russian authorities in 1915 and Poles, who had been exiled by the tsarist authorities to Siberia, as well as those doing business in Russia, tried to come back to Poland. The Austrian and Czechoslovak authorities tried to force war refugees to return to Galicia, a previous northernmost province of Austria-Hungary, region inhabited by Poles, Ruthenians / Ukrainians and Jews.

The emergence of nation states and border changes also led to new forced migrations. For example, there was a group of '**optants**', that is, citizens who could declare their national identity according to the Versailles Treaty. In the case of Poland, these people declared German citizenship and left Poland in the 1920s. The newly formed states attempted to control the movement of migrants, creating centres for returnees, where they were quarantined, but also subjected to checks and, in some cases, selection based on nationality. Aid organisations – American and European – came to the aid of the refugees.

Hungary – Galician refugees, 1918

War exile was supposed to be temporary: after the end of the hostilities people were to return to their homes. But the return was complicated, which depended not only on the warfare itself, but also on the economic situation in the area of return. Some people did not see returning as a possibility. For example, in September 1918, Josef Meier Plessner sent a letter to the Central Welfare Office for War Refugees [Zentralstelle der Fürsorge für Kriegsflüchtlinge] in Vienna on behalf of himself and the refugees staying in Szápár, a village located about 100 km west of Budapest. In the letter he wrote:

On August 15, we were ready to leave for Galicia, but we were not taken. The departure was delayed because of the holiday. Meanwhile, some of us went to Galicia. They say it is a poverty-stricken area. There is nowhere to live; they were told in the district office to get back to where they came from. . . . Therefore, we would like to know what to do. Should we spend the winter in Hungary or return to Galicia? [. . .] Please note that most of us are women with young children and a group of elderly people. We have no clothes or shoes and winter is coming. Since August 15, we have not been getting any money [benefits – K.R.] and since August 5, we have not received any flour. If we want to buy flour on our own, we find out we are strictly forbidden to do it. But we are easily allowed to die of hunger.

Source: ÖStA, AVA, MdI, Allg., Fasz. 19, Kt. 2026, Zl. 58129/1918 (translated from the German-language original by Kamil Ruszała), in Kamil Ruszała, 'Fellow Citizens or Aliens?: Galician Refugees during the First World War in Hungary', Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego. Prace Historyczne (Jagiellonian University Scientific Papers: Historical Works), 2021, History Notebooks, 2021, 148 (4), pp. 795–812: https://doi.org/10.4467/20844069PH.21.051.14027 (accessed 14 November 2025).

Poland in 1919

2

Types of Polish refugees in the refugee camp in Kovel. During their retreat in 1915, the Russians forcibly evacuated a significant part of the Polish population and destroyed their homes, leaving the enemy with a barren desert. Now these refugees are making their way through Polish lines into Poland, and it is estimated that between 1.25 and 1.5 million of them will return from Russia and Siberia between June and the onset of winter [1919].

In 1919 the Red Cross Inter-Allied Medical Commission arrived in Poland to investigate the threat of a typhus epidemic. In Warsaw, members of the commission met with the Minister of Public Health, with whom they agreed that the commission would travel to selected areas under civil administration and to the frontline areas in the south-east of the country. Members of the commission also visited centres where refugees were staying.

On the left is a photo of Joe T. Marshall from the camp in Kovel (in Polish: Kowel, now in Western Ukraine), among refugees representatives of the Inter-Allied Medical Commission

Source: Joe T. Marshall. Photograph Collection of the American National Red Cross, Library of Congress, LC-DIG-anrc-04487

Poland in 1919

Polish citizens, mainly of Orthodox faith, exiled during the war (referred to as the bieżeńcy) were also coming back home. Many children, who had spent most of their lives away from their homeland, felt more connected to their place of residence than to their country. Aneta Prymaka-Oniszk clearly showed this phenomenon in her widely acclaimed reportage:

'When I die, you won't even know where your family is,' cries Józef Szymusiuk's mother in Buzuluk near Orenburg. She is preparing to return home; life here has become a nightmare. But her children don't want to [leave]!
Józef is twelve, his sister is ten. They attend Russian schools, having previously studied at institutions run by Polish aid organisations. They plan to continue their education. They have friends here. The family their mother talks about means little to them. When they left, they were small children and hardly remember it. For them, the family might as well be here in Russia.
However, their mother does not listen to her children. She prepares rusks for the journey, has already ordered a cart and is looking for a horse. She has agreed with people from Chełm and Brest that they will travel together. They set off in the spring of 1920'.

Source: Aneta Prymaka-Oniszk, Bieżeństwo 1915. Zapomniani uchodźcy [Bieżeństwo 1915: the forgotten refugees], Wołowiec, 2016, published in Polish, quote translated by Izabela Mrzygłód, 2025

Estonia in 1919

4

The emergence of new nation states in Central and Eastern Europe, struggles over borders and independence led to further forced migrations. Below is a photograph of refugees from the Estonian War of Independence (1918–19). On the left you can see refugees, mostly children, beside a railway truck as they made their way from Perma to Navorrosisk in 1919.

Source: Unknown photographer, 1919, Novorossiysk, Krasnodar Kray, Russia. Imperial War Museum, London (HU 91791), http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/205125595 (accessed 14 November 2025).

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Epidemics

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From 1918 to 1920 more lives were lost due to the influenza pandemic, referred to as ‘Spanish flu’ at the time, than to war.

Estimates of the death toll of this pandemic vary from 21 million to 100 million lives worldwide. The mutated influenza virus first struck the United States in the spring of 1918, then spread via military and commercial shipping to Western Europe, Asia, Australia and North Africa by July. A second, much severer form of the virus probably spread from France to the rest of the world in the autumn of 1918. This time, the disease affected Central and Eastern Europe in its entirety. Over the next few months, this region suffered the most. People under the age of 18 most frequently fell victim to the flu virus.

Typhus was another epidemic that gave rise to a huge death toll during this period. Influenza mainly affected young people, while typhus affected the elderly. However, the two diseases were often confused with each other. According to some data, the typhus epidemic in post-war Poland was even more widespread than Spanish flu.

Spanish flu in the Slovak lands, 1918

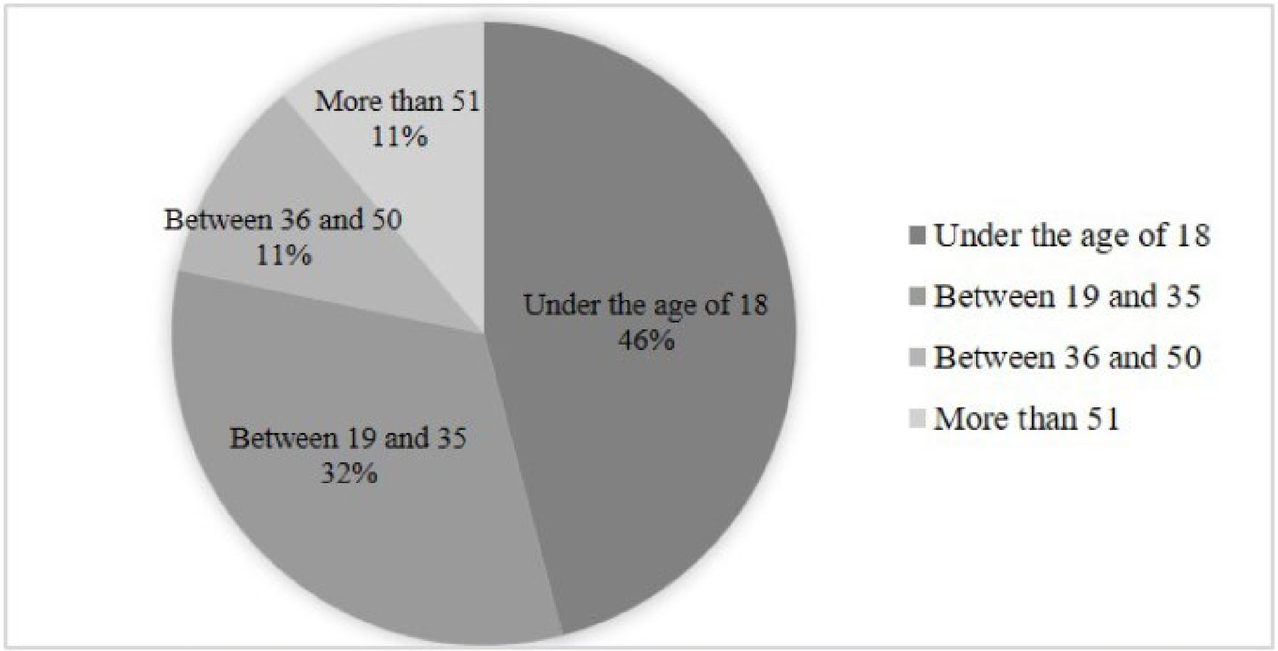

***Chart 5** Victim age in Košice calculated from the civil records of deaths.* Source: Štátny archív v Košiciach, Štátne matriky Košice, 1918

The Slovak lands were included into the Hungarian part of the Habsburg Empire and initially were incorporated into the short-lived Eastern Slovak Republic, which was declared on 11 December 1918 under the protection of Hungary. However, they were quickly integrated into Czechoslovakia. Other territories of the region also suffered. Hospitals in large cities such as Prague, Bratislava and Budapest were overwhelmed. Doctors did not know how to diagnose or treat the sick. At the peak of the epidemic, the mortality rate reached alarming levels. Everyday life came to a complete standstill: in some villages in Slovakia, almost everyone was ill, with the living lying next to the dead, as the survivors did not have the strength to bury the bodies.

Above are statistics on the deaths from Spanish flu and its most common complication, pneumonia, according to age in Slovak town Košice.

Spanish flu in the Slovak lands, 1918

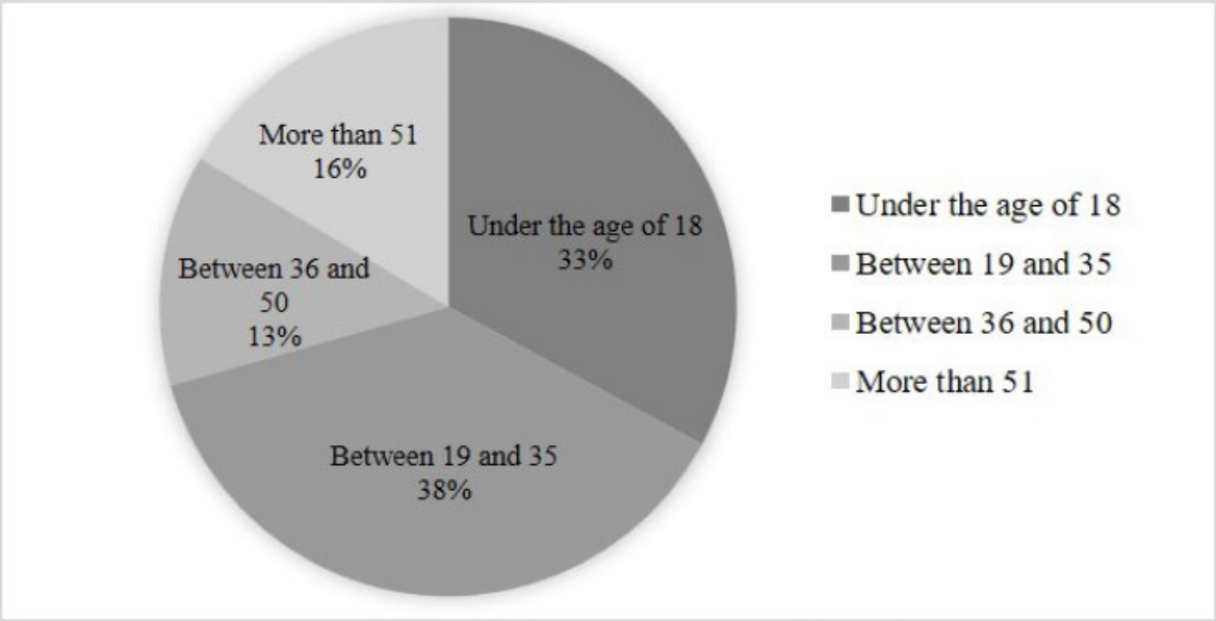

Chart 4 *Victim age in Bratislava calculated from the civil records of deaths.* Sources: Štátny archív v Bratislave, Štátne matriky úmrtia Bratislava – Staré mesto, zväzok 52, 1918.

Source: Veronika Szeghy-Gayer, 'The Spanish Influenza Pandemic in the Northern Regions of the Kingdom of Hungary in 1918', Historický časopis [Historical magazine], Bratislava 2024, 72, 3, pp. 547–64

Above are statistics on the deaths from Spanish flu and its most common complication, pneumonia, according to age in Slovak town Bratislava.

Spanish flu in Hungary, 1918

3

The story of this Hungarian family clearly illustrates the scale of the epidemic and the limitations of healthcare.

Read the following excerpt from Frederike Kind-Kovács's research and consider why the boy was not admitted to hospital?

Other contemporary Hungarian media captured horror stories of children's suffering from influenza. One of these stories, "The Tragedy of Kálmán Zsolnai," explains how a father lost his wife to influenza and how his son also got sick. One Tuesday morning in September 1918, Zsolnai returned home to his wife and two small children. The older child, Kálmán, was two and a half years old. The father was "more than surprised" to find his wife dead while his older son slept next to her cold body. On Wednesday, Kálmán developed a high fever. Because the father had to prepare his wife's funeral, Zsolnai's sister-in-law "carried the little sick child on her neck" to the city to bring him to a hospital.[34] Although the boy was sick, the Stefánia Hospital refused to admit him because he was contagious. They sent him to the White Cross Hospital, where he was again denied after a doctor diagnosed him with the Spanish flu and diphtheria. Kálmán was then sent to the Szent László Hospital, where he was also rejected. Only in the fourth hospital, the Szent István Hospital, did a Dr. Rosenberg write him a referral for admittance back at Szent László. They waited for hours with the referral in hand, but still Kálmán was never admitted and finally returned home. He was lucky and survived the disease. The story ends with an explanation of why Rosenberg did not admit the contagious child at Szent István: it would have put the other children in danger. This story conveys the experiences of masses of influenza victims with a single narrative. It furthermore criticizes the unprofessional and inappropriate handling of the little sick boy by the hospital.[35]

Friederike Kind-Kovács, Budapest's Children: Humanitarian Relief in the Aftermath of the Great War. Indiana University Press, Bloomington, IN, 2022, p. 97

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Typhus in Poland, 1919–20

4

In Poland, in addition to Spanish flu, typhus was also rampant. According to official data, 220,000 people were suffering from it in 1919. The reborn Polish state had limited capabilities to effectively combat these diseases. Polish health services were assisted by American, British and Swedish aid organisations. According to estimates, the material aid provided by the American Red Cross amounted to about one-third of the Polish budget for 1920. In November 1919, the Bulletin of the League of Red Cross Societies published a report on the situation in Poland entitled 'Investigating the Typhus Epidemic in Poland'(published in English). It was illustrated with photographs by Joe T. Marshall, and one of them was accompanied by the following description:

Typhus in Poland, 1919–20

5

„One of the most moving cases found by members of the Inter-Allied Medical Commission sent by the League of Red Cross Societies to investigate the threat of typhus in Poland took place in the village of Sokolniki near Lviv. The little boy seen in the photograph was found lying in front of a hut, his eyes closed, breathing heavily, in an advanced stage of typhus. His six-year-old sister was just recovering from the same disease. In the hut, his mother was ill with typhus, and his father had died of typhus and had been buried the previous day. The commission discovered that the current typhus epidemic was widespread and the number of deaths was enormous. Unless the most decisive measures are taken to remedy the situation, there will be a severe epidemic this winter, which will threaten not only Poland but also Western Europe and America. The Polish authorities are doing everything in their power to combat the infection, but they are seriously hampered by a lack of medicines, sheets, blankets, clothing and essential hospital equipment. The commission recommended that efforts be combined to deal with this situation, which has become a matter of international importance."

Typhus in Poland, 1919–20

6

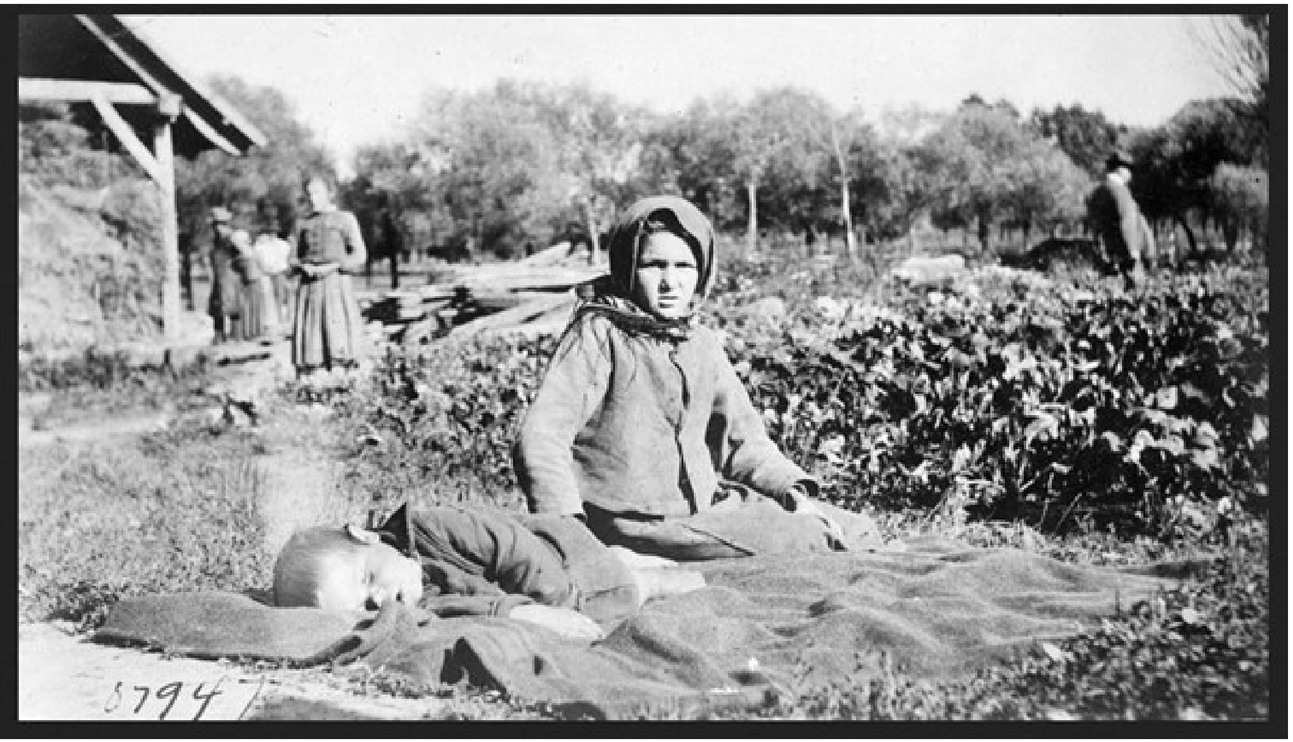

Photo: Joe T. Marshall. Photograph collection of American National Red Cross, Library of Congress, LC-DIG-anrc-04478

Typhus in Poland, 1919–20

7

Photo: Joe T. Marshall. Photograph collection of American National Red Cross, Library of Congress, LC-DIG-anrc-04478

AFTER THE GREAT WAR
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Dramatic Conditions of Everyday Life: Malnutrition and Famine

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The war and the blockade imposed by the Allies on the Central Powers led to serious problems in the supply of basic foodstuffs in Central and Eastern Europe.

At the end of the First World War, there were hunger riots in Vienna, Krakow, Leipzig and Berlin. However, the situation did not improve immediately after the end of the war. First, the blockade was not lifted at the end of the war. The Allies maintained it until Germany signed the Treaty of Versailles in July 1919. Secondly, fighting continued in many places, such as in Poland. Thirdly, harvests in Central and Eastern Europe in 1918–21 were very poor, amounting to only 60–70 per cent of pre-war harvests. This led to the threat of malnutrition and starvation for entire populations, including children and young people.

Nutritional deficiencies had a significant impact on children's development, as confirmed by demographic studies which, at the end of the war, recorded a decrease in the height of pupils in German schools and an increase in weight loss in girls and boys compared to children of the same age in 1914. The research also showed that children from working-class families were in a much worse situation, having experienced first-hand the low social status of their parents. The shortages of the war and post-war periods had an impact on their entire lives. Although a return to proper nutrition allows young bodies to quickly make up for lost time, children who experience the war and a return to normality usually remain slightly shorter than their peers.

In Central and Eastern Europe, the possibility of returning to proper nutrition for children was largely ensured by humanitarian organisations, primarily US President Herbert Hoover's American Relief Administration (ARA).

The ARA fed millions of children in the fledgling countries of Central Europe, followed by millions more children and adults in Soviet Russia and Ukraine during the famine of 1921.

In Central Europe, the ARA coordinated its activities with local medical institutions and the American Red Cross to combat the spread of contagious disease and supply hospitals and laboratories with urgently needed medicines and equipment. Children and young people were the main recipients of this aid.

Figure 7.3. Hunger Draws The Map. 'Hunger Draws the Map', The Pioneer (Bemidji, Minn., 23 December 1918), p. 4; the image was originally produced by the United States Food Administration. Hoover Institution Library and Archives.

1

A map published by the United States Food Administration in December 1918

Source: Mary Elisabeth Cox, Hunger in War and Peace: Women and Children in Germany, 1914-1924, Oxford 2019, p. 251.

Germany 1914–24

2

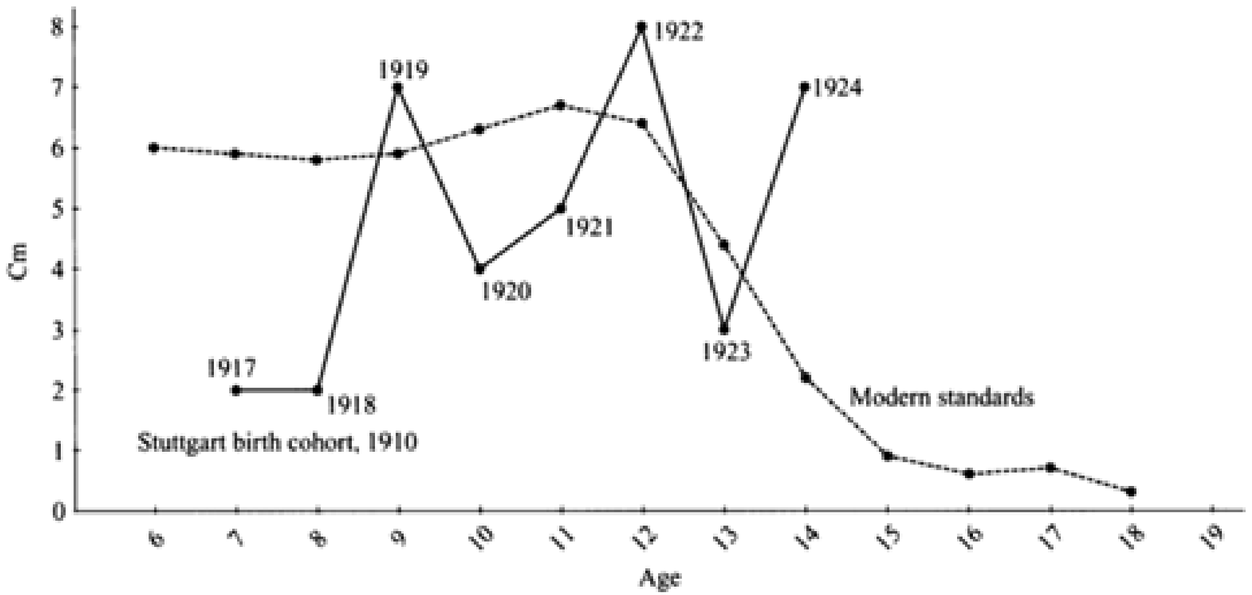
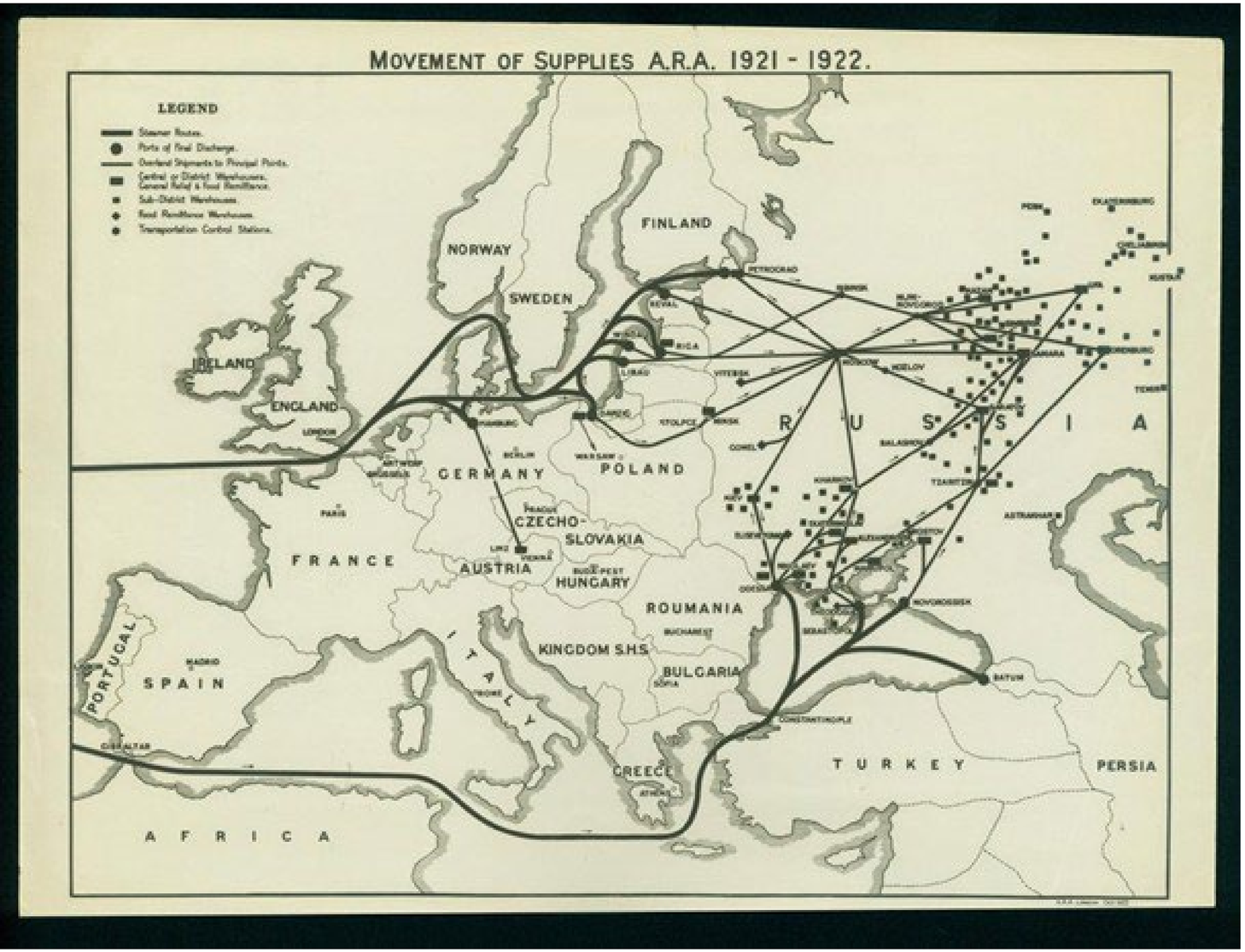


Figure 2. *Female growth velocity for 1910 birth cohort compared to modern standards*
Sources: As for fig. 1.

The graph shows the growth rate of girls born in 1910 in Stuttgart, which was highly variable between 1914 and 1924 compared to contemporary standards. The sudden spikes in the graph, as noted by researcher Mary E. Cox, suggest catch-up growth after periods of starvation.

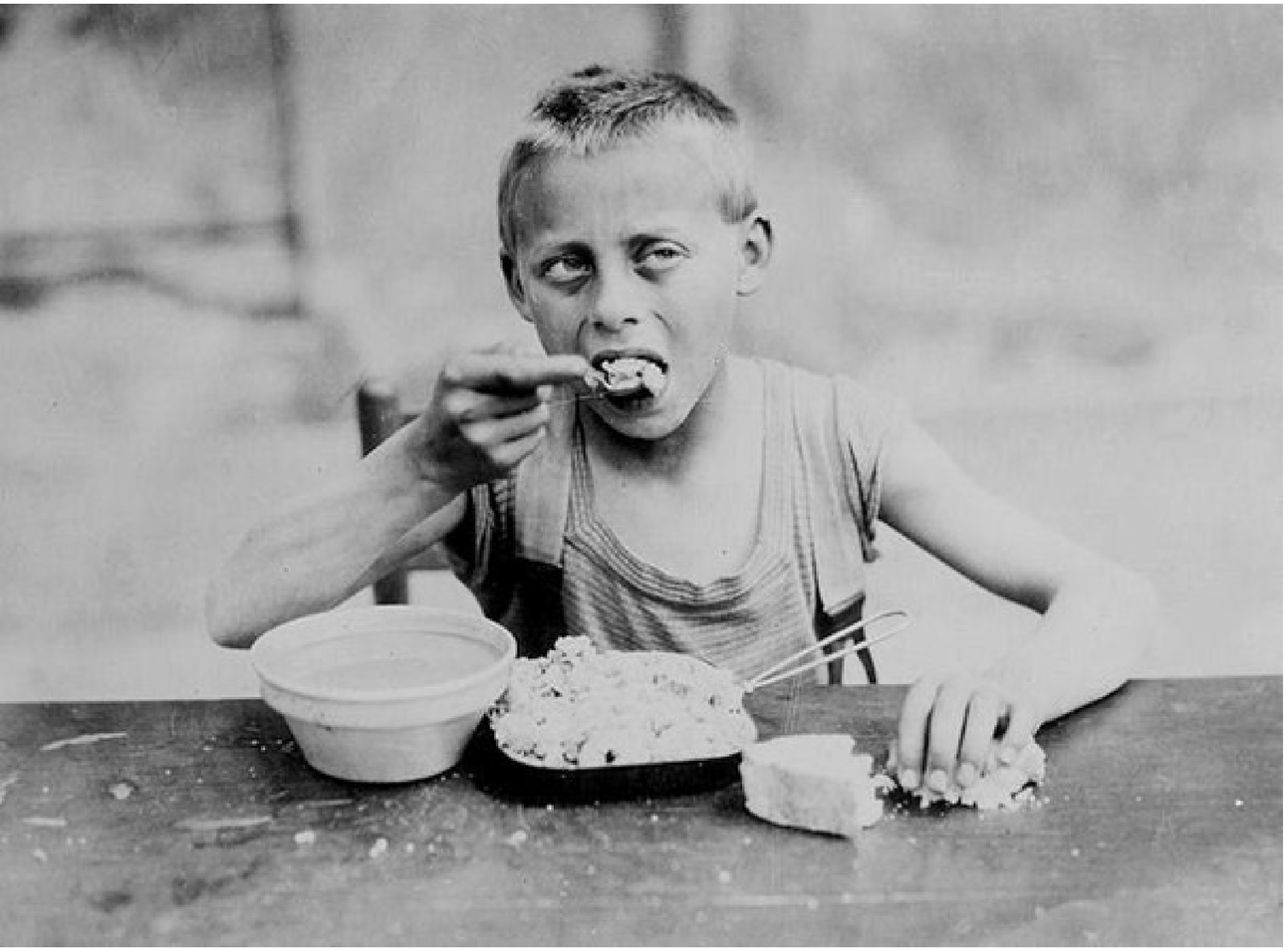
Source: Mary Elisabeth Cox, 'Hunger Games: Or How the Allied Blockade in the First World War Deprived German Children of Nutrition, and Allied Food Aid Subsequently Saved Them', The Economic History Review, 68 (2015), 2, p. 606.



Map of American humanitarian aid to countries and regions of Central and Eastern Europe in 1921–22.

Source: https://hoover.archives.gov/

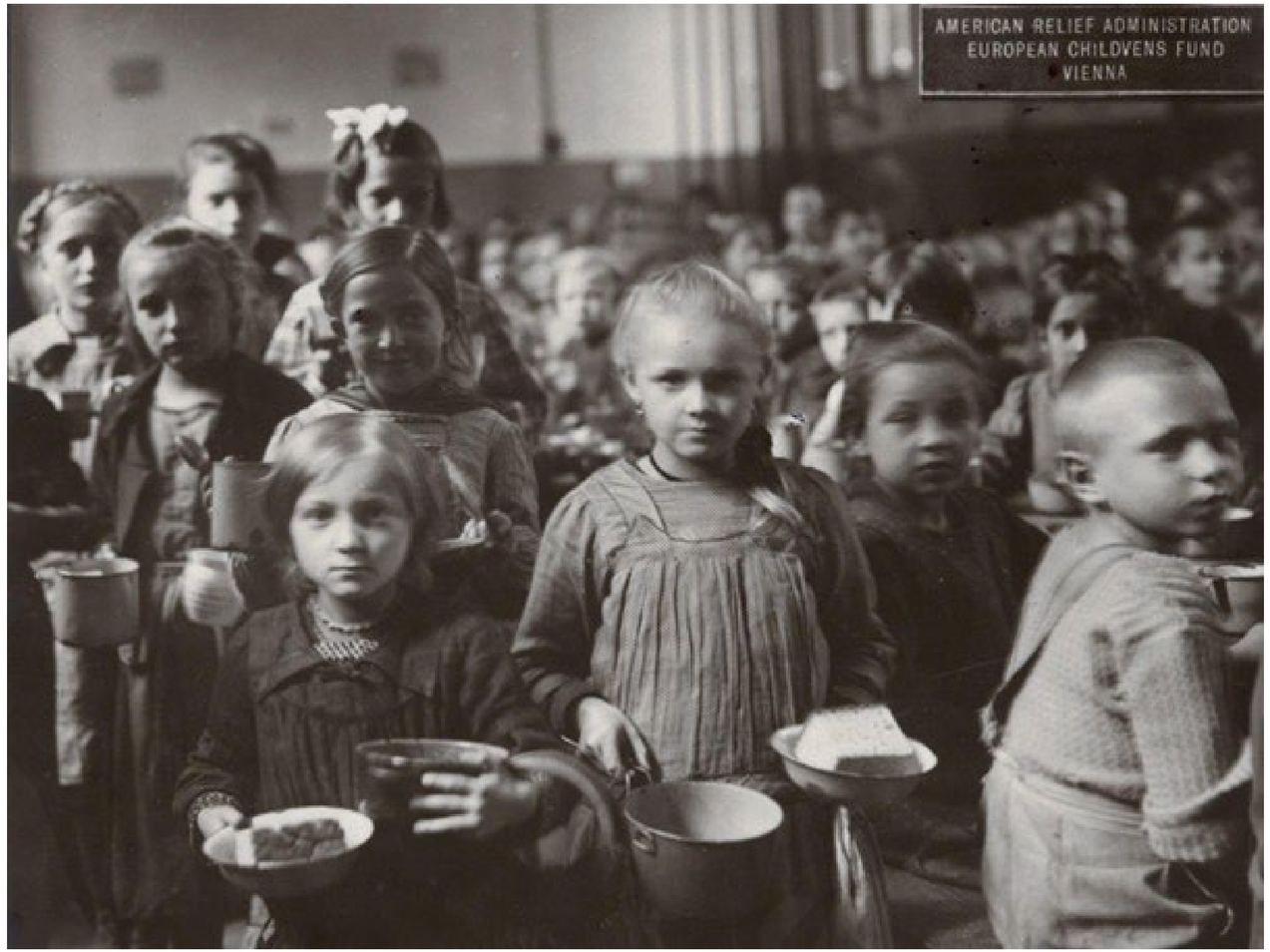
Austria – Vienna



The photo above shows a malnourished boy eating a meal in a soup kitchen

In Vienna, the capital of Austria-Hungary, food was in short supply at the end of the war. Hungary, which was the breadbasket of the country, stopped supplying food to the capital during the war. In 1918 hunger riots regularly broke out there. There were many children in need of food in Vienna. A study done by municipal leaders in 1919 stated that over 90 per cent of Viennese school children were suffering from malnourishment. Therefore, Vienna and its children became one of the main recipients of American humanitarian aid. By 1921, over 70 per cent of all school children in Vienna between the ages of six to fourteen were served a daily meal through international food aid.

Austria – Vienna



Children receiving ARA food aid.
Source: Hoover Institute, Washington, DC

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Poland

„A group of children in Jewish kitchen no. 13 in Kosovo. In order to comply with ritual regulations, which require that meals for Jewish children be prepared by a person of the same faith and that kosher fats be used, special kitchens have been organised for children of the Jewish faith. (...)

(...) In each municipality, the campaign to help children is supervised by a committee consisting of representatives of various religions, and in the borderlands – by representatives of various nationalities.

Of the total number of children receiving meals, 29% are Jewish. Although the Jewish population accounts for less than 15% of the total population of Poland, the relatively high percentage of Jewish children benefiting from the feeding programme can be explained by the fact that the programme was most intensively carried out in cities and towns where the Jewish population generally accounts for 20–80% of the total population".

Source: Photograph and text from the book American Relief Administration European Children's Fund Mission to Poland. Polsko-Amerykański Komitet Pomocy Dzieciom [Polish-American Children's Aid Committee], 1919–1922, Warsaw, 1922, p. 12.

AFTER THE GREAT WAR

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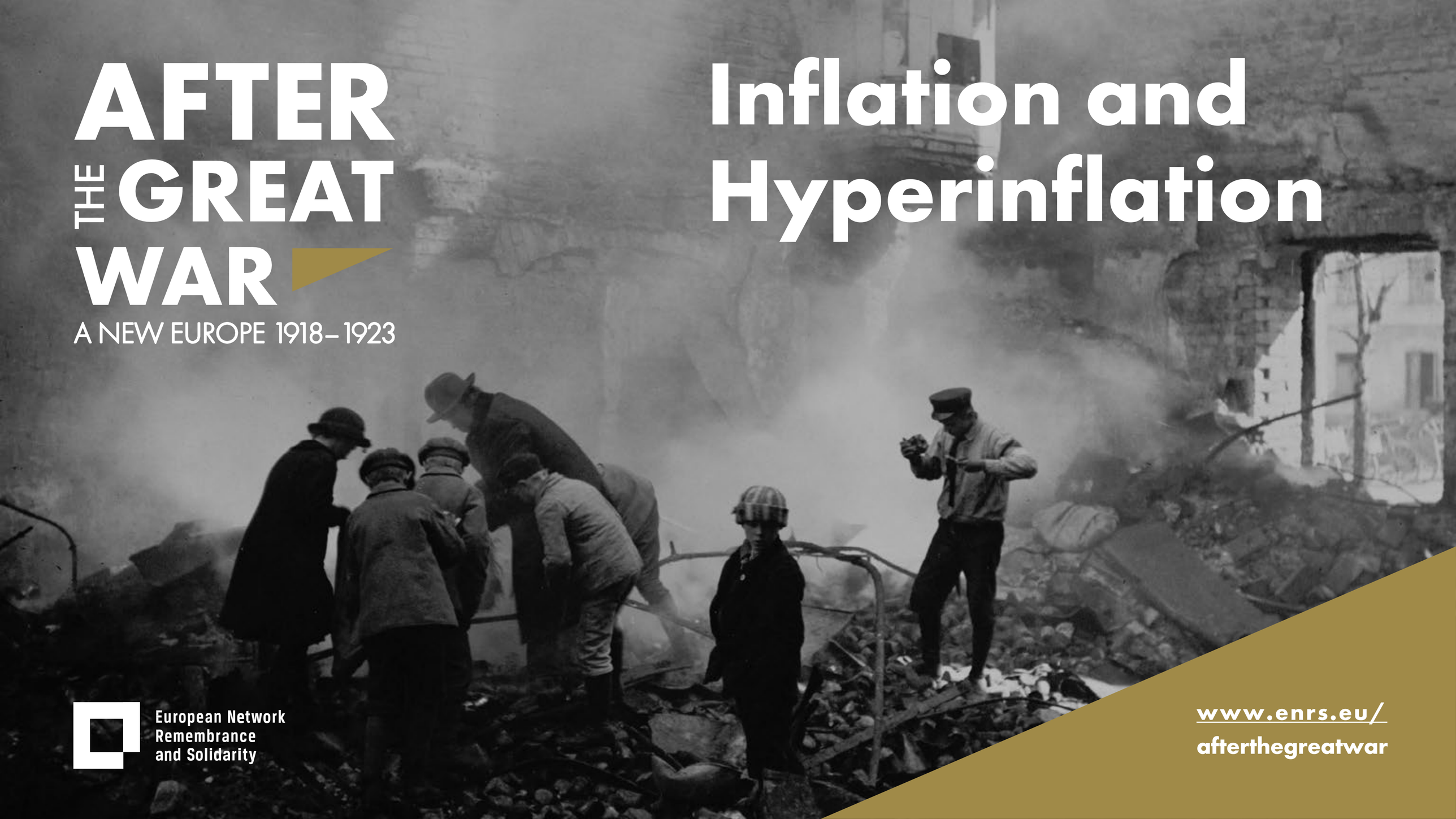
Inflation and Hyperinflation



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The year 1923 is important in European economic history because of widespread hyperinflation. Austria had already experienced rapid price increases in 1922, followed by similar situations in Germany, Poland and Hungary in 1923.

In Germany, post-war inflation reached unprecedented levels. In all these cases, hyperinflation was the final stage of a long inflationary process. The roots of this phenomenon lay in the financial policies of the Central Powers during the First World War. As early as 1914, Germany and Austria-Hungary suspended the convertibility of money into precious metals, thus destroying the gold standard system that had been developed in the 19th century. Other countries followed them. This decision enabled war expenditure to be financed through the limitlessly issuing unlimited issuance of paper money, resulting in a decline in its value and an increase in prices. During the war, however, this was hidden inflation (prices and wages were frozen), resulting in shops having empty shelves.

It was only after the war, when prices were liberalised, that the full effects of inflation became visible. In the former Central Powers, rising inflation was further worsened by the need to pay high war reparations and public debt. In Poland, however, the printing of money after 1918 allowed reconstruction following the war and covered the costs of the Polish-Bolshevik War (1919–21). Rising living costs and wages that failed to keep pace with them caused growing social discontent and impoverished society in all countries. The difficult situation faced by households impacted the living conditions of children.

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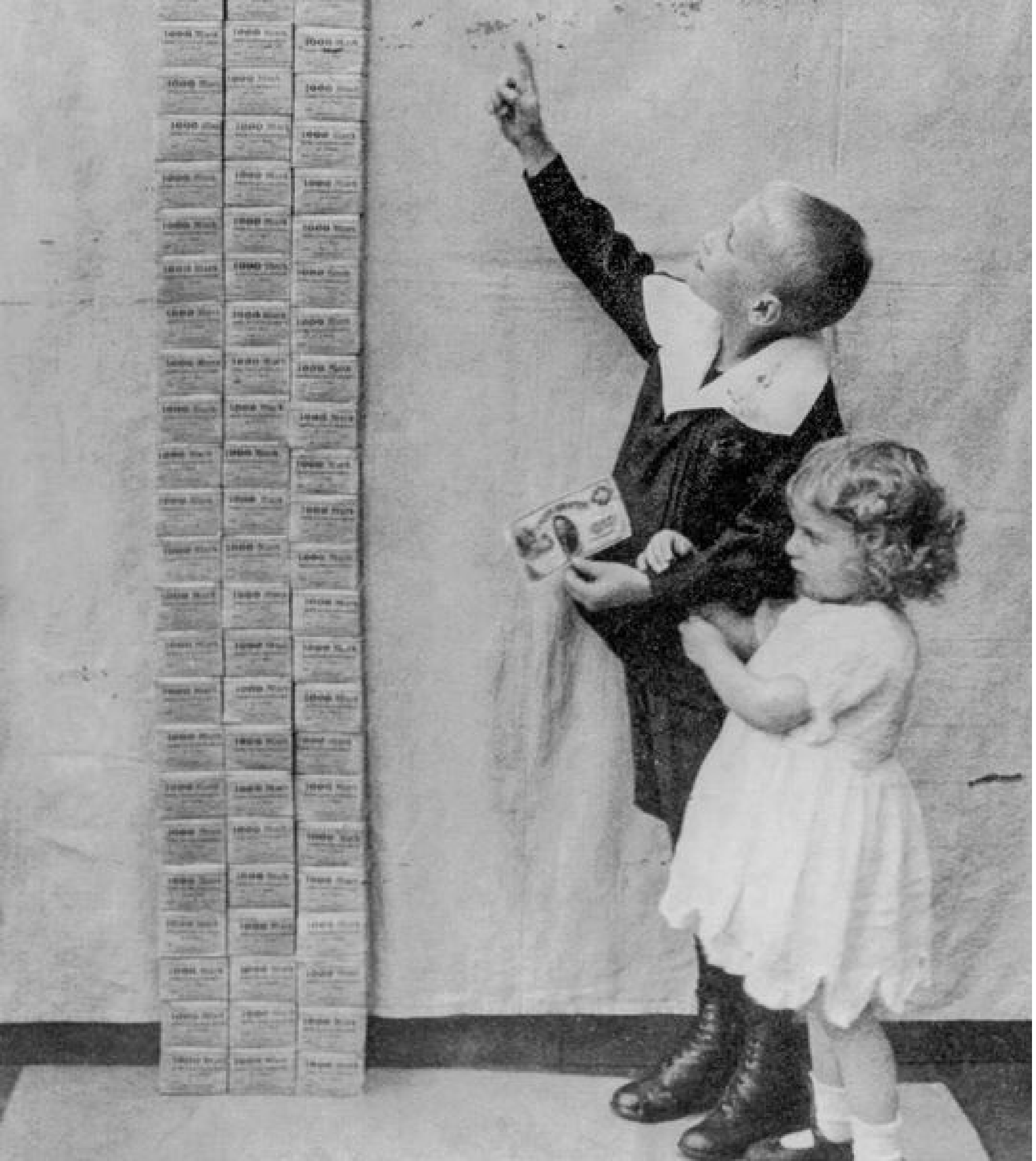

Germany 1922–23

1

The low value of the German mark is well illustrated by a photograph of two children standing next to a tower built with 100,000 marks, but worth only one dollar.

Source: Bettmann/Getty Images

AFTER THE GREAT WAR
A NEW EUROPE 1918–1923

Germany 1922–23

2

In the period of hyperinflation in Germany, banknotes were so worthless that people began to use them as fuel for heating or wallpaper, and children could play with them in various ways. In the photo below a girl and a boy in 1922 are making cut-outs from banknotes.

Source: Albert Harlingue/Roger Viollet/Getty Images

AFTER THE GREAT WAR
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Poland and Germany 1923

During periods of inflation and hyperinflation, wages and pensions were a key problem, as they were difficult to adjust to rising prices. A system of wage indexation was developed, but in 1923 it ceased to fulfil its role. The prices of goods, including basic necessities, such as bread, milk and butter, rose daily and cost-of-living allowances did not compensate for the losses incurred as a result of inflation. Those who received their pensions or wages in advance – once a month or once a week – suffered the most.

Example

In Warsaw in June 1923, a brewery craftsman's daily wage (48,105 Polish marks) covered the average daily cost of living for a family of four, but in December this amount was not enough to buy a kilogram of potatoes, which cost 63,000 Polish marks. This led to drastic cuts in household budgets, including food, and growing social frustration.

Germany 1922–23

4

Erich Maria Remarque's novel The Black Obelisk, written in the 1920s, perfectly describes daily life and the atmosphere during the period of hyperinflation in Germany. Based on the following section of the novel, answer the following question:

- How did hyperinflation affect family life and childhood?
- What emotions were triggered by economic problems?

I come to Grossestrasse. A protest parade is slowly pushing its way toward me from the market place. […] It is a procession of war maimed, protesting against their inadequate pensions. […] The man on the little wagon has a stick with a sign on it thrust into his jacket. The inscription reads: 'My Month's Pension Is Worth One Gold Mark.' Between two other carts flutters a white banner: 'Our Children Have No Milk, No Meat, No Butter. Is This What We Fought For?'

These are the saddest victims of the inflation. Their pensions are so worthless practically nothing can be done with them. From time to time the government grants them an increase—much too late, for on the day the increase is granted, it is already far too low. The dollar has gone wild; it no longer leaps by thousands and ten thousands, but by hundreds of thousands daily. Day before yesterday it stood at 1,200,000, yesterday at 1,400,000. Tomorrow it is expected to reach two million—and by the end of the month ten. Workmen are given their pay twice a day now—in the morning and in the afternoon, with a recess of a half-hour each time so that they can rush out and buy things—for if they waited a few hours the value of their money would drop so far that their children would not get half enough food to feel satisfied. Satisfied—not nourished. Satisfied with anything that can be stuffed into their stomachs, not with what the body needs.

Source: Erich Maria Remarque, The Black Obelisk, trans. Denver Lindlay, Random House, New York, 2013

Poland 1923

The difficult economic situation forced children to take up jobs. The collection Pamiętniki robotników warszawskich [Memoirs of Warsaw workers] includes Stanisław Kalinowski's recollections of the beginnings of his working life:

In 1923, I passed to the fifth grade (around 11 years old – author's note), but I had to interrupt my education and go to work because my father became unemployed at that time. Initially, I worked in a furniture warehouse for several months, and in December of that year, I got a job on the Warsaw tram system, where I initially worked in the management as a messenger.

Source: Extract from S. Kalinowski, 'The "Soldier of Freedom" to Warsaw', in Pamiętniki robotników warszawskich [Memoirs of Warsaw workers], ed. F. Jakubczak, Warsaw, 1976, p. 17.

Poland 1923

The growing number of banknotes in circulation caused calculation problems. Tedious mathematical operations were a necessity, and the time and energy spent on them added to the cost of hyperinflation. Handling large sums of money also caused anxiety and cases of mental disorder.

Zdzisław Kaliciński retained an image of his father in the early 1920s from his childhood:

My father left for work every morning with his briefcase. As I remember, he always came back in the evening. He ate his dinner, which Grandmother Sabina placed in front of him on an oval table, then pushed the plates aside, moved the lamp with a green glass shade closer and spread out piles of paper money on the table. He would take a piece of paper and a pencil, divide the banknotes into piles, count them, write them down and add them up. There were thousands, sometimes millions of marks. They must have been of little value, since he earned more and more of those millions every month, and he was only a collector at the so-called Health Insurance Fund.

Zdzisław Kaliciński, O Starówce, Pradze i ciepokach [On the Old Town, Praga district and their workers], Warsaw, 1978, p. 28.

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