

Australia, Jewish Refugees in

After the Nazis rose to power in 1933, Australia was considered to be an appropriate safe haven for Jewish refugees trying to escape persecution in Europe. However, Australia had an immigration policy that was designed to keep out immigrants of non-British origin. Only "aliens" who had 500 pounds sterling for landing money or relatives of aliens already living in Australia were allowed to enter the country.

In 1937 the Australian government showed an interest in Jewish refugees, and encouraged the establishment of the Australian Jewish Welfare Society to organize aid for Jewish refugees. Nonetheless, at the Evian Conference in June 1938, Australia's delegate refused to increase the country's immigration quotas. Five months later, the *Kristallnacht* pogroms broke out all over Germany. The horrors of that one night of destruction convinced the Australian government to change its policy. It announced that over the next three years, it would accept 15,000 Jewish refugees. By the outbreak of World War II in September 1939, more than 7,000 Jewish refugees had arrived in Australia.

In December 1942 the Allies, including Australia, issued a joint announcement about their recognition of the massacre of the Jews in Poland. Soon, the United Jewish Emergency Committee was instituted in Sydney, while the United Jewish Overseas Relief Fund was founded in Melbourne. In 1943 all the Jewish communities in Australia presented a joint resolution to Prime Minister John Curtin, asking him to support Jewish immigration to both Australia and Palestine and to take part in any international relief effort for the survivors of Nazi horrors. However, the government responded negatively to these requests; most people were not aware of the true extent of Nazi atrocities, and thus were not empathetic to the cause. The lack of understanding in Australia is reflected in the label given to Jewish refugees from Europe: "enemy aliens." Some refugees were interned at camps. Even the Jewish community treated the refugees coldly; they encouraged the refugees to keep as low a profile as possible.

Altogether, 8,200 Jewish refugees reached Australia between 1933 and 1945; eventually, their status was changed to "friendly aliens."