

Hungarian Labor Service System

(*Munkaszolgálat*), system of labor service in Hungary. In March 1939, a law was passed in Hungary requiring the draft of Jews aged 20--48 into labor service units. After the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, the service began to grow. By 1942, 100,000 men had served in these units.

The units were run by Hungarian army officers. The Jews worked mainly at construction, mining, and building military fortifications. At the front lines, they built tank traps and trenches, cleared minefields, and fixed roads. Originally, these laborers were to be paid the same amount as regular Hungarian soldiers, and receive the same uniforms and rations. However, many of their officers and guards were extremely antisemitic. As time went on, some Jews were deprived of their army boots and uniforms or never received them at all. At the front the officers and guards often stole the Jews' pitiful food rations, forced them to live outside, and subjected them to degradations. Thousands of laborers died from abuse, malnourishment, cold, and disease. Retreating from Bor in Yugoslavia, labor servicemen were massacred and in Doroshich hundreds were burned alive by their Hungarian guards.

After Germany occupied Hungary in March 1944, the labor service, somewhat ironically, became a haven for thousands of Jews who otherwise would have been deported to extermination camps.