

Kielce

City in southeast Poland and site of a post-war pogrom that triggered the exodus of many Jews from Poland.

Kielce was occupied by German troops just days after World War II broke out. The Germans immediately began persecuting the city's Jews, who numbered some 24,000. A ghetto was set up in April 1941, and the able-bodied Jewish men were made to do forced labor. The Nazis began liquidating the Kielce Ghetto on August 20, 1942. Sick Jews and orphans were executed, while all but 2,000 of the city's Jews were deported to Treblinka. The remaining 2,000 were sent to forced labor camps; in August 1944 the surviving prisoners were sent to Buchenwald or Auschwitz.

The Soviet army liberated Kielce in January 1945; at that point, only two Jews were left in the city. Over the next 18 months, about 150 Jews gathered in the city's former Jewish community building. Despite all that had happened, an accusation of blood libel was made against the Jews. On July 4, 1946 an angry mob attacked the Jewish group, massacring 42 Jews and wounding about 50. When order was finally restored, seven of the main rioters were executed. The Kielce program is considered a catalyst for the flight of many Holocaust survivors from Poland.