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The Kindertransport from Vienna: the children who came and those left behind

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The history of the Kindertransport has been centred on the children who came rather than on how children and their parents experienced the intense persecution in their countries of origin, and then how it came about that of the children registered only a small proportion were admitted to the UK. That focus on successful departures sidesteps the key issue of why many children could not come, the processes of selection, and how the Jewish welfare organizations under Nazi rule interacted with those in London. Although the papers of the Reichsvertretung der Deutschen Juden (Reich Board of Deputies of the German Jews) on the Kindertransport are deemed destroyed, there are extensive papers on sending unaccompanied children from the Jugendfürsorge-Abteilung (Child Welfare Department) of the Israelitische Kultusgemeinde (IKG, the Jewish Community) in Vienna. These papers provide details of children registered with the IKG, raising questions as to how it came about that an unknown proportion of children registered with the IKG managed to arrive in the UK. As a memorandum noted, there were in pre-Anschluss Vienna 6,900 Jewish children up to 6 years old, 7,600 between 6 and 14 years, and 4,500 children between 14 and 16 years.¹

Two offices, two priorities

The Vienna IKG welfare office was administered with great energy by Rosa (Rosl) Rachel Schwarz, while being confronted by the devastation

1 Altersgliederung der jüdischen Jugendlichen (Table of the Age Structure of Jewish Youths), n.d., A/W 1958, Archive of the Israelitische Kultusgemeinde Vienna (IKG), which holds microfilms of the original documents now in the Central Archives of the History of the Jewish People, Jerusalem (CAHJP). See in general Gerda Hofreiter, *Allein in die Fremde: Kindertransporte von Österreich nach Frankreich, Grossbritannien und in die USA 1938–1941* (Innsbruck: Studienverlag, 2010); Ilana Fritz Offenberger, *The Jews of Nazi Vienna, 1938–1945: Rescue and Destruction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017); Jennifer Craig-Norton, *The Kindertransport: Contesting Memory* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2019).

of intense Nazi persecution of Austria's Jews.² Schwarz worked closely with other child rescue organizations in Vienna, notably the Quakers and for "non-Aryan" Catholics, and catered for a spectrum of those with Jewish beliefs from the liberal to the orthodox. For the IKG was deemed the sole coordinating agency for Vienna and former Austria. The IKG welfare office interacted with the Movement for the Care of Children from Germany, later called simply the Refugee Children's Movement (RCM), which took the coordinating role on the UK side. The idea was that the RCM in London would coordinate child migration with the offices in Vienna and Berlin (and soon Prague). The RCM would itself act as the sole agency empowered to issue pass cards for the majority of children who did not have passports, regulate numbers of transports, and liaise with the many local refugee committees in the UK. The extensive documents on the Vienna IKG provide a hitherto underused source concerning the selection of children and organizational procedures. Materials include transport lists, arrangements for the children's departure and for during the journey, accompanying persons, passport and visa issues, and the placing of children. The Vienna documentation shows how the RCM organized procedures as regards other key organizations, such as the Quakers and local refugee committees across the UK, and shows the determining role of the RCM in regulating the frequency and size of transports.

As early as June and July 1938 a scheme for *Auswanderung von Jugendlichen* (Emigration of Minors) operated as a collaboration between the IKG and several host countries including the UK, facilitated by the German Jewish Aid Committee at Woburn House, London. By the summer of 1938 there were 546 older children with fully prepared dossiers compiled with parental support for sending children to a host family in the UK. These youths had a social work report from the IKG and parental consent for their departure. For example, Rachel Stein wanted to bring her child to England. With the child's father in prison, she and her child Kurt were deemed priority cases.³ The problem by October 1938 was that more than 500 children were registered for unaccompanied migration but only 29 had managed to be admitted to the UK. Come December 1938, on the London side a new organization was set up for the large-scale transports of unaccompanied children, whereas on the Vienna side there was continuity and organizational preparedness with a large number of

2 Rosa Rachel Schwarz, *Zwei Jahre Fürsorge der Kultusgemeinde Wien unter Hitler* (Tel Aviv: 14 May 1944).

3 CAHJP, microfilm frame 546 for German Jewish Aid Committee, 28 Sept. 1938, 956.

children processed for departure.⁴ Under conditions of ever intensifying persecution, the Vienna office showed great efficiency and sensitivity. At times the administration from London appears to have been heavy-handed in imposing exclusions and restrictions in reaction to a shortage of placements and funds for financial guarantees.

The IKG social workers registered a pattern of families under extreme pressures of persecution leading to rapid destitution. Some children were found to be in chronic poverty and some had been deserted by fathers whose location was registered as unknown. The vast majority of social work reports document the forced termination of employment and businesses so that, economically, parents were unable to fulfil their role of providing for their children. Letters from parents convey information in a tone of desperation for their children whose circumstances of persecution have resulted in impoverishment and no prospects in Vienna. These communications express the psychological impact of the parents recognizing that the economic and psychological pressures meant that their providing role was no longer viable. Persecution meant desperation in the face of a realization of economic and existential annihilation. The repercussions for children were hunger and cold. Giving up one's child or children when free migration was not possible for the family unit appeared to be the only viable solution which parents could accept as providing their child with immediate relief and prospects of a future. The social work reports referred time and time again to the *triste Verhältnisse* ("sad conditions") of families, which were unsustainable in Vienna and more widely in annexed Austria in the ever tightening grip of Nazi persecution and terror. Invariably, the social work report provided a succinct and positive portrayal of the child, who often had to help with household and other tasks. At times the child found parents were sick and depressed, and had to shoulder many tasks to maintain an ever more meagre household economy. Ever more families were dependent on meals and welfare subsidies from the IKG.

An initially large transport of 400 children on 10 December 1938 was followed by three sizable transports on 17, 18, 20 and 21 December for Britain, as well as 59 children for the Netherlands, 7 for Belgium and 6 for France.⁵ The pre-existing list of 500 children for travel provided a basis

4 Judith Tydor Baumel-Schwartz, *Never Look Back: The Jewish Refugee Children in Great Britain, 1938–1945* (West Lafayette, ID: Purdue University Press, 2012), 55–7.

5 CAHJP, "Aufstellung über alle von der Kultusgemeinde abgefertigte Kindertransporte in der Zeit vom 10.12.1938 bis 22.8.1939" (List of all the Kindertransportes dispatched by the IKG from 10 Dec. 1938 to 22 Aug. 1939). This document exists in multiple files.

for this rapid departure. By 3 January 1939 there were 1,000 registrations and these rapidly increased.⁶ Despite rising and urgent demand, the size of transports diminished in the following months, while administrative requirements increased. As the London RCM office took shape in December 1938, it imposed a range of new procedures.

The London-based organizers under Lola Hahn-Warburg (1901–1989) required certificates of good physical and mental health, educational attainment, and – something desired but not imposed – of a child's social worth. Hahn-Warburg saw the issue as if being worthy of a place on a Kindertransport was equivalent to emigration to Palestine, where physically and mentally high-quality youths were required.⁷ Children deemed to be of higher value should be prioritized. An undertaking to the Home Office was referred to, although there is no evidence that superior health and intelligence was a government stipulation, only that they were criteria of the Movement. Hahn-Warburg required a school report and a medical assessment, and if these were not satisfactory she and her assistant Grete Exiner declined the child as unsuitable. Even for the first rapidly organized transport on 10 December 1938 the medicals were held two days before departure at the IKG office.⁸

Suitable photographs were deemed essential: the RCM wanted four passport-style photographs, banning family and personal photographs. Photographs were essential because potential guarantors often picked a prospective child from their photograph. They were also a means of checking for visible disabilities. The RCM issued pass cards in place of visas for the UK, thereby exercising a high level of control. A few children had their own passports and if they had a guarantor they could be placed on the next available transport, although these transports were diminishing in frequency (the case of Erika Gutman/n shows well how a guaranteed child with a passport could be inserted at short notice⁹). The RCM responded to the accusation that it prioritized the children from rich families by explaining that when a child was guaranteed, their transport became a priority, as opposed to unguaranteed children.¹⁰ Otherwise the criteria were not directly challenged, although the IKG did nominate children with mild handicaps.

Having a guarantor meant priority. The sum of £50 had to be paid by

6 IKG, A/W 1970.

7 Hahn-Warburg to Dr Engel, 30 Dec. 1938, A/W 1970.

8 Arrangements for transport of 10 Dec. 1938, Englandtransport, A/W 1980.

9 See text and n. 23 below.

10 German Department, RCM, to Katharina Jaul, 7 Feb. 1939, A/W 1971/2.

each guarantor. Guarantors emerged vicariously. Some local associations demanded certain types of children. Hampstead Garden Suburb requested orphans and the Manchester hostel expressed a preference for non-orthodox Jewish boys aged between eight and twelve years.

The IKG facilitated direct contact between guarantors and parents of children they were due to take in. There was frustration over why a place on a transport was not awarded more promptly – Hampstead Garden Suburb pointed out the risk that a guarantor might become disillusioned and withdraw. Parents were at times bewildered as to why their child was still waiting, and guarantors and local refugee organizations expressed frustration that selected children were not dispatched more rapidly. The impression given is that the Movement office was over-burdened and overwhelmed by the sheer scale of the operation in dealing with transports from annexed Vienna, Berlin, Prague, and Poland, as well as myriad UK organizations, and desperate parents or indeed actual children. The tone could be sharp and irritated in response to the desperate cases brought to the Movement's attention, with incomprehension even over why an orderly and patient queue of children for transfer was not being formed.¹¹ Time was not of the essence in what was in effect a time window when the rescue of thousands of children was possible. Parents could not understand why transport was not more rapidly actioned. Kurt Kreisel-Kielstock was registered with the IKG on 24 November 1938. The Leeds Jewish Refugee Committee found Kurt a home and this was communicated on 24 December 1938. But on 5 February 1939 Kurt was still in Vienna.¹²

The RCM wished to scrutinize the financial guarantees to ensure that the child was of sufficient quality. Hahn-Warburg had definite ideas as to the type of child to be prioritized. Kitty Milch was cited on 1 May 1939 as an ideal type, "an intelligent looking and not particularly Jewish young woman".¹³ The situation was rendered more complicated when a guarantee was withdrawn, leaving the prospective child stranded. On the Vienna side the waiting meant that sometimes parents lost patience and managed to depart with their child for remote locations such as Shanghai or South America.

In London, the Movement regulated days of departure and places allocated on each transport. The Vienna IKG encountered criticism

¹¹ For an expression of impatient irritation see G. Exiner on behalf of Hahn-Warburg to the IKG, 24 Dec. 1938, A/W 1971/9.

¹² A/W 1971/2

¹³ A/W 1971.

that it was dispatching children without passcards. Exiner and Hahn-Warburg became intensely critical of the IKG, Exiner complaining, for example, on 14 February 1939 that prospective Kinder generally lacked health certificates, characterizations of them, and details of their fathers' nationality. Yet from the Vienna side, the IKG appears to have been scrupulously efficient and oriented to persons who were under severe and ultimately deadly persecution. The problem was that children might move and parents might change their minds. So it might happen that the size of the transport was too small, with more children with guaranteed places awaiting them in the UK than had places to travel.

While the RCM favoured high-quality children, defined by good health, morals, and intelligence, the IKG was faced with increasing social misery and economic pressures. The Nazi authorities banned Jews from receiving social welfare benefits or pensions.¹⁴ There were dismissals from state and public appointments, and the enforced closing down of Jewish businesses. A parent (usually the father) held under arrest, generally in a concentration camp, was a spur for urgent action. Then the RCM responded promptly, requesting a report in such cases.¹⁵ The result was that families became dependent on welfare and collective feeding provided by the IKG, which itself was economically hard-pressed. Vienna's Jews and persons classified by the Nazis as Jewish were undergoing twin processes of persecution and pauperization, which impacted heavily on children. Therefore, the IKG favoured emigration of children from economically and politically hard-pressed households. Here a contrast emerged between the IKG and the RCM in terms of the type of child to be selected for transport to the UK.

The first large-scale and rapidly improvised migration of 400 children (whose parents had already given permission for them to leave at short notice) from Vienna to London was initiated by Geertruida Wijsmuller-Meijer from the Netherlands. She had interceded with Adolf Eichmann, who allowed the transport at short notice. The transport was facilitated by the IKG having a list of children registered with them since early summer 1938. The problem remained one of compliance with procedures imposed by the RCM. On 21 December, 26 children were dispatched from Vienna without pass cards. This was much to the annoyance of the London office, which became determined to impose orderly procedures on the IKG (in

14 Wolf Gruner, *Öffentliche Wohlfahrt und Judenverfolgung: Wechselwirkungen lokaler und zentraler Politik im NS-Staat (1933–1942)* (Public Welfare and the Persecution of Jews: Local vs. Centralized Policy-Making in the Nazi State) (Munich: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2002).

15 Hahn-Warburg to Rosa Schwarz, 9 Jan. 1939, regarding Paul Kornitzer, A/W 1971/2.

fact, the emigration department of the orthodox Jewish political grouping Agudas Jisroel was responsible). Thanks to intervention by the Cologne Jewish Child Welfare group, these children were able to travel on.¹⁶ Thereafter transports became progressively smaller, reaching low points on 25 April with a single transport of 124 children and on 13 May 1939 with one transport from Vienna of 84 children.¹⁷ The question arises of whether Hahn-Warburg had decided to prioritize transports from other locations, notably Prague.

The RCM decided on additional administrative requirements. Vienna had conducted social work assessments on families: were two parents present and, if not, why not, and how was the child being cared for? The additional requirements were a copy of a school certificate and a medical certificate that the child was in good health, both physically and psychologically.

London also changed criteria as to who was eligible, effectively excluding older youths. Hahn-Warburg stated on 22 December 1938 that she would accept children aged 2 years and above. She reduced the upper age in February 1939 twice from 18 years old down to 16, so that birth had to be after 1 March 1923. The older children had to re-apply to a different department at Bloomsbury House, the London headquarters of several refugee assistance organizations, and so those aged 16 to 18 were subject to a new set of administrative criteria and further misery in Vienna. This reduction in age meant that Alice Grunwald, for example, who was guaranteed by Marcus Scheffer in Glasgow, could not come on a children's transport.¹⁸ The youths up to age 18 were referred to the Trainee Department at Bloomsbury House.¹⁹

The period after Kristallnacht saw diverse schemes to bring persecuted Jews to the UK. Older children, especially males aged 15 to 17, were considered for a training scheme for potential agricultural workers in Palestine for multiple communities.²⁰ The medical certificate had to state whether the youth was suitable for agricultural training.²¹ Thus for the urgent case of Hans Koenig, Exiner referred his application to the

16 Bericht: Betrifft 26 fehlende Permits, Vienna, 1 Jan. 1939, A/W 1971/2.

17 CAHJP, "Aufstellung".

18 German Department, RCM, to Schwarz, 27 Feb. 1939, A/W 1971/2.

19 Exiner to Schwarz, 21 Feb. 1939; 3 and 7 March 39; for small children, 7 March 1939, *ibid.*

20 RCM to Schwarz, 25 Jan. 1939, *ibid.*

21 See e.g. recommendation of Eugen Diamant, A/W1971/2.

Trainee Department under Mr Davison. Girls were to be notified to Phyllis Fellner, who was in charge of the Girl Trainee Department. On 21 June 1939 the RCM suggested that papers be routinely sent to them for screening so that they could assess the youths' fitness for agricultural training. This situation might be seen as creating additional opportunities but in practice the administration appears to have been compartmentalized and bureaucratic.

Nursing was viewed as a career for older girls. Here, a training place had to be found in order to take advantage of a concessionary scheme offered by the Ministry of Labour. In the event, several hundred young women were registered with 317 from Austria out of 754 refugees entering UK nursing identified to date.²² Apprenticeships are sometimes mentioned by potential guarantors but there was no special scheme for funding university places. This was a matter for local refugee committees. One Kindertransportee, Erika Gutman (sometimes Gutmann) from Vienna, refused to accept nurse training at Great Ormond Street Hospital because she wanted to study at university, even though that would necessitate passing school certificate examinations. In the event, the dispute caused her to leave the family which had selected her when she was still in Vienna.²³

Parents had the option of requiring that a child be placed with a Jewish family in the UK. This was always respected on both the Vienna and UK sides. An instance arose in Leeds when the child objected to non-Jewish practices although the parents did not. "Non-Aryan" Christians comprised a category which always enjoyed parity of treatment and here the IKG collaborated well with Quakers and other organizations, as they jointly focused on the priority of organizing departure. Parents signed a declaration allowing or rejecting placement with a non-Jewish family. The orthodox Jews in the UK provided fewer placements than would have been needed. One problem emerging early on was that parents might allow their daughter to be placed with a Christian family in Leeds but the daughter wanted a Jewish family. On 3 June 1939 Exiner asked whether Erika Mann, who was orthodox, could go to a non-Jewish family but her mother was determined to send her daughter only to Palestine.²⁴

22 Paul Weindling, "Refugee Nurses in Great Britain, 1933–1945: From Place of Safety to a New Homeland", in *Russian and Soviet Healthcare from an International Perspective*, ed. Susan Grant (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 243–54.

23 Erika Gutman/n, personal information. World Jewish Relief has not located Gutman/n's record, even though the dispute meant relocating a Kindertransportee.

24 Exiner to IKG, 3 June 1939, A/W 1971/5.

Vienna maintained its aim of facilitating emigration of children from severely deprived social backgrounds. A solution was a list of unguaranteed children whom the IKG hoped could be prioritized. But funds for the unguaranteed became ever more restricted and the backlog of children requiring a place became ever longer.

Statistics of the Vienna transports

There was a steady decrease in children permitted on transports from Austria and the low point in April and May 1939 with a single transport in each of these two months requires explanation. The RCM was receiving Jewish children deported into Poland, and Czechoslovak Jewish children. These were two emergency groups. London had to receive transports from multiple locations, so a transport from Berlin and one from Vienna could not arrive on the same day. Still this does not fully explain the severe reduction of Vienna transports.

Each Vienna child received an identification number – one can see these prominently on Kindertransport photographs and they are also given on many documents – so it is clear that some 8500 children were registered with the IKG. Thus the numbers arriving in London, as shown in Table 1, can be set against the numbers who remained in Vienna.

The table indicates that transports varied in size and could be as low as 35, which was the number in the final 22 August 1939 transport. The statistics maintained by the IKG show that more boys than girls arrived and that older boys were in the majority. While older girls were also a significantly larger number in every birth year, their number was fewer than boys, as shown in Table 2.

The Movement for the Care of Children from Germany required intelligent, healthy children, with positive moral qualities. Hahn-Warburg regulated the size and dates of transports, prioritizing guarantors and issuing pass cards. The IKG stated that they had 10,000 children requiring travel. The first transport of 400 children for the UK and 59 for the Netherlands, on 10 December 1938, was an all-time high that was never surpassed. When it arrived in London, some of the children had no permits, after which Hahn-Warburg set about imposing tough policies of selection and compliance, although the IKG office meticulously adhered to all regulations. By 24 December, Exiner and Hahn-Warburg felt inundated with requests for guarantees by desperate Vienna parents, and the tone of

TABLE 1 Numbers of Vienna Kindertransportees to “England” on each transport

| Month | | Totals |
|-----------|--------------------|--------|
| Dec. 1938 | 400/132/68/134/117 | 851 |
| Jan. 1939 | 83/112 | 195 |
| Feb | 107 | 107 |
| March | 140/118 | 258 |
| April | 124 | 124 |
| May | 84 | 84 |
| June | 78/69/85 | 232 |
| July | 102/102/38/49 | 291 |
| Aug. | 70/49/41/35 | 195 |
| TOTAL | | 2337 |

TABLE 2 Numbers by age of boys and girls arriving

| Year of Birth | Boys | Girls |
|---------------|------|-------|
| 1922 | 317 | 263 |
| 1923 | 211 | 135 |
| 1924 | 187 | 155 |
| 1925 | 177 | 136 |
| 1926 | 168 | 117 |
| 1927 | 148 | 95 |
| 1928 | 101 | 82 |
| 1929 | 23 | 68 |
| 1930 | 79 | 64 |
| 1931 | 94 | 50 |
| 1932 | 69 | 41 |
| 1933 | 60 | 35 |
| 1934 | 44 | 24 |
| 1935 | 43 | 17 |
| 1936 | 31 | 18 |
| 1937 | 18 | 13 |
| 1938 | 17 | 17 |
| TOTAL | 1787 | 1330* |

* There are more children overall in the age table than in the chronological table because children also went to other locations, notably the Netherlands.

their communications with the IKG conveyed irritation.²⁵ Hahn-Warburg imposed additional requirements: 1. no mentally or physically disabled children; 2. medical and school certificates; 3. social work home visit report (carried out in any case by the IKG) to provide details of parents' nationality; 4. declaration if a non-Jewish home acceptable. This imposed a rigorous set of administrative requirements on the diminishing numbers of children permitted to travel.

The Vienna IKG administration: the pressure of circumstances

The IKG Welfare Department dealt with the RCM and vetted individual cases. The destitution of Vienna's Jews meant increasing numbers of children were dependent on IKG meals and welfare. There was also the problem of the fragmentation of families. Some had stateless parents, who were deported to Poland or under impending threat of deportation, or had a father in a concentration camp. Most migration schemes to the UK were just for the person with the labour permit (although the concession to Jewish physicians and dental surgeons did allow immediate family dependants). A mother with a domestic permit to the UK would be unable to bring her child. Thus Rosa Feinegrünzweig was in England on a domestic permit but her daughter was still in Austria. Some cases were especially urgent. There was a prospective release of one Narzissenfeld, a father of three, from a concentration camp to Kitchener Camp in Kent (set up by the Central British Fund for German Jewry). The family was stateless and the mother hoped for a domestic permit but needed the children to be placed. Vienna sent photographs again to show they were especially well behaved and well brought up children ("nette und wohlerzogene Kinder"). In other cases, parents obtained permits for Palestine but the permits did not cover all their children.

One solution was to identify cases of high priority (*besonders dringend*) in the hope that transports of unguaranteed children might be possible. In London, however, the RCM cut down on unguaranteed places and on transports from Vienna as a whole. The IKG dealt with parents' petitioning for places. It conducted an efficient correspondence with the RCM to obtain and then to issue the crucial pass cards. The IKG made meticulous transport arrangements. It filled the number of available places, organized accompanying persons (*Begleitpersonen*), and arranged food and tea water for each transport. Departures generally went from the Westbahnhof but

25 G. Exiner to IKG, 24 Dec. 1938, A/W 1971/9; Exiner to IKG, 26 Jan. 1930, A/W 1969/2.

the very first was from Hütteldorf-Hacking.²⁶ When the RCM suggested departure on a ship from Hamburg, the costs and timings were looked into but declared to be too expensive and logistically too complicated. Departure was at night with only one parent or carer permitted, and luggage specifications arranged for customs inspection. The IKG finalized lists, removing those children suffering from infections, chronic illness, and nervousness. Within such constraints the IKG was effective and efficient. Postal communications and railway arrangements always functioned efficiently.

The surviving extensive documentation gives details of numerous cases. Hilda Rerucha pleaded for a place on a transport for her daughter Elfriede.²⁷ Her husband Fritz was in Buchenwald and Hilda was stateless and subject to expulsion to Poland. She was already in the UK on a domestic permit. In the event, Elfriede survived wartime deportation to Riga but this was a rare case of survival. Ruth Klara Besner/ Bezner (born on 13 January 1925) was similarly separated from her parents, with her father in Riga but her mother in England. The IKG drew attention to her plight and characterized her as a “nice, clean girl” (“Nettes, reines Mädel”).²⁸ Getzel Kipper was concerned about his children Rubin and Eduard because he was being forced to leave for Poland, itself a perilous matter as Poland (along with other countries such as Romania) denied a right of return.

Those offering hospitality frequently wrote inquiring why a child had not yet arrived: thus Mrs Miller wrote on 30 December 1938 asking why Mia Lacks was not yet with her in Manchester.²⁹ Others wrote when a post in domestic service had been found for the parent and to arrange – somehow – to bring the child over. Hilde Kary had a fourteen-year-old son and had obtained a post.³⁰ Hilde Kohn had the offer of a post in Sussex but what about her children Lilly and Georg?³¹

Guarantors similarly wrote perplexed why a child had not yet been dispatched. The prospective host for Sonia Igura wrote asking for her to come on the next transport. S. Ehrengott wrote on 10 January 1939 that he had filled out forms “months ago” for the children Anni and Erich

26 “Englandtransport”, A/W 1980.

27 Hilde Rerucha to RCM, n.d.; social work report on the Rerucha family, A/W 1971/3.

28 RCM to IKG, 2 Aug. 1939 concerning Ruth Besner/ Bezner; IKG to RCM, 25 Aug. 1939, A/W 1971/21.

29 Mrs Miller to RCM, 30 Dec. 1938, A/W, 1971/2.

30 Exiner to Schwarz, 24 Dec. 1938, *ibid.*

31 Hilde Kohn to IKG?, n.d., *ibid.*

Kirschenbaum.³² The co-ordinating Committee for Refugees' Domestic Bureau requested that the daughter of Dora Lipper-Hausmann could somehow be brought over since her mother had a visa.³³ Laura Losinger, a domestic in the UK, pleaded for her daughter in Vienna to be sent over. More happily, on 6 July 1939 Paul Weiser received a pass card to travel at the same time as his parents with permits from the Domestic Bureau on Transport 212.³⁴

A single mother, Toni Wallach, born in 1915, hoped somehow to reach Australia with little Elfriede Wallach, born on 7 April 1938; they had been deserted by the father. Both Elfriede (at sixteen months old) and Toni were murdered at Minsk, having been deported from Vienna on 28 February 1941.³⁵

Cyril Feilich's mother, Natalie, wrote on 18 July 1939 that she had prepared all the necessary papers. They were living in a room at the Hotel National at Taborstrasse 18 (itself subject to confiscation by the Gestapo) but had a guarantor in Amsterdam. Cyril was to be imprisoned in Mauthausen concentration camp.³⁶

Medical certificates and school reports

As noted earlier, Lola Hahn-Warburg was interested not just in the medical status of a child but also in the child's moral qualifications.³⁷ Here the Vienna social work reports were less critical than required, seeking positive attributes. The medical certificates took various formats. The simplest was a parent certifying that the child was not suffering from a mental illness, infectious disease, nor was a bed-wetter. Some certificates were provided by the so-called Heilbehandler (Treater of the Sick) Dr. Heinrich Moser – one Leo Topper received such a certificate – and by the Medical Adviser to the British Consulate. Another certificate came from the Jewish community hospital in Vienna: this stated, as early as 5 September 1938, that a hip patient needed additional post-operative care. Later, self-certification by parents was deemed acceptable. Dagobert Klein

32 S. Ehrengott to RCM, 10 Jan. 1939, *ibid.*

33 Domestic Bureau to Schwarz, 30 Dec. 1938, *ibid.*

34 A/W 1971/1.

35 F. Reiter, paediatrician, to RCM, 27 Feb. 1939, A/W 1969/2.

36 Peter and Klara Breitenfeld at Taborstrasse 18, A/W 1971/7; A/W 1971/2 for Diamant and Feilich; Feilich prisoner card, n.d., International Tracing Service Archive, Bad Arolsen, Germany.

37 Hahn-Warburg to Dr. Engel, 30 Dec. 1938, A/W 1970.

was rejected on 18 January 1939 as unsuitable because he was diabetic.³⁸ Exiner asked on 16 March 1939 whether Kurt and Karl Kramer were mentally healthy.³⁹ Those deemed to have physical defects faced rejection by the RCM: the mother of a blind child, Jenta Feuer, aged 8, wrote to Dr Löwenherz of the IKG on 15 August 1939, but he was flatly turned down by the RCM. Jenta was killed on 15 August 1942 at Maly Trostinec.

The London Movement insisted repeatedly and unrelentingly that only physically and mentally healthy were allowed because of the assurances given to government officials in the UK. Exiner wrote to Schwarz on 2 January 1939 how the Movement had promised the Home Office to take only 100% physically and mentally fit. Hahn-Warburg also insisted that “We have given the Home Office an undertaking that the Movement will only bring children who are 100% mentally and physically fit. This applies also to guaranteed children”. Exiner wrote on 10 March 1939: “We cannot bring mentally retarded children under any circumstances to England, even when they attend a normal school”.⁴⁰ It meant that firm arrangements were placed in jeopardy. Indeed, there was a succession of declined and excluded children, including Hilda Loebl aged 15 and her sister Rosi aged 8, and Manfred Frisch, Isaac Habermann, Ernst Nadel, and Eduard Friedl as mentally backward. Georg Lipschitz was pronounced “geistig minderwertig” (mentally inferior) and the RCM returned his papers in August 1939.⁴¹

Hans Lang, born 24 August 1932, was a half-orphan. He was reported by the Jewish Boys Orphanage to be very well-behaved and tranquil (“sehr brav und ruhig”) but very slightly mentally backward (“jedoch in seiner geistigen Entwicklung etwas zurückgeblieben”). He was similarly rejected.⁴² Gerda Kral was judged on 22 August 1939 to be “nicht ganz vollwertig” (not quite fully fit), although her speech incapacity derived from having contracted diphtheria. Exiner sent her papers back because the RCM, as she stated again, could only accept 100% mentally normal children.⁴³ Gerda was deported to Riga on 6 February 1942.

A more fortunate case was that of Hilde Goliath. Her guarantor (Mrs Hough) contacted the British Consulate in Vienna on 18 April 1939 to

38 Exiner to IKG, 18 Jan. 1939, A/W 1971/2.

39 Exiner to IKG, 16 March 1939, A/W 1971/5.

40 Exiner and Hahn-Warburg to IKG, 2 Jan., 27 Feb., and 10 March 1939, A/W 1971/2.

41 A/W 1971/17.

42 For Hans Lang see IKG records, microfilm 0884.0126.

43 Exiner to Schwarz, 22 Aug. 1939, A/W 1971/19.

bring her over. Hilde's mother had a breakdown and committed suicide two days later. Hilde's father had been in a concentration camp since 10 November 1938. The Movement objected that Hilde's mother suffering from a high degree of nervous illness ("schwer nervenleidend") excluded Hilde's coming to the UK. The IKG office in Vienna presented the case as one of "cold and starvation", as well as persecution. When the RCM asked whether the child was mentally normal, the IKG responded that "the child is wholly normal" ("das Kind ist vollkommen normal"), based on her school record.⁴⁴

A similar case was that of Herta Baumfeld (born 26 April 1926), whose father was in "protective custody" (often a euphemism for a concentration camp) and mother in a psychiatric institution. Herta was living with her infirm grandmother. The Vienna IKG office wrote on Herta's behalf on 11 July 1939.⁴⁵ Herta was killed at Maly Trostinec on 18 September 1942.

By way of contrast, there was a demand for healthy young children for adoption, such as from the Hampstead Garden Suburb Care Committee for Refugee Children. This committee had become impatient when on 3 April 1939 it wrote on behalf of prospective foster parents of twelve children that it was "tired of waiting". Similarly, the Brighton and Hove Refugee Council wrote to the IKG on 17 May 1939 concerning Erich Kraft on behalf of his prospective guarantor.⁴⁶

Children's efforts

Otto Hutter recollected:

Out of breath, I joined a short queue of accompanied children. One by one we were interviewed. Regardless of my having presented myself without a parent, I was enrolled because – as I learned much later – boys nearly 15 years old were given priority lest they be soon sent to forced labour camps. After being photographed and undergoing a medical examination, I was issued with documents for my parents to sign and with a list of clothing to pack into the small case each child was allowed to take out of the country. Most importantly, I was issued with an identification number printed on a card to be worn around the neck when joining the transport due to leave in less than a week's time. My number was 359. Just 360 children were enrolled that day. So I had made it just in the nick of time.⁴⁷

44 IKG to RCM, A/W 1971/1.

45 IKG to RCM, 11 July 1939, *ibid.*

46 Hampstead Garden Suburb Care Committee for Refugee Children, 3 April; Brighton and Hove Refugee Council, 17 May 1939, both A/W 1971/5.

47 Otto Hutter, Ms. autobiography "Escape from Vienna", personal communication; see

This was an early and successful example of self-enrolment.

Carl Steiner aged 12 wrote on 1 July 1939 to “My Lord” Baldwin as a key figure in instigating the Kindertransport, stating that “there will be no future for me”.⁴⁸ Carl’s fate is unclear. Liselotte Fuchs, born 29 November 1924, wrote to the London Committee on 10 August 1939 for help.⁴⁹ She was deported on 29 November 1941 to Kielce. Edith Riss, aged 11, wrote to the London Movement for assistance: “I promise to be very industrious and obedient”.⁵⁰ She was killed at Maly Trostinec on 18 September 1942.

Eva Renee Seinfeld wrote to the similarly aged Princess Elizabeth of England on 17 March 1939:

May it please your Royal Highness to grant my request in assisting my great despair and to make it possible to come over to England. . . . my father is seventy years old and suffers from violent heart disease, my mother had a millinery shop and was obliged to give it up. . . .

I am 14 years old of a quiet and modest kind, of a good and severe education and it will be my greatest endeavour to be worthy of your noble and kind protection.

Your Royal Highness’ most humble and dutiful servant
Eva Renee Seinfeld⁵¹

Eva’s date of deportation from Vienna was 14 June 1942. She died at Sobibor extermination camp. All these letters came to the RCM and were sent back to Vienna, to the IKG for their routine evaluation of the family’s circumstances.⁵²

Conclusion

In July and August 1939, the regulating procedures showed no sign of any impending emergency. Children increasingly wrote pleading their case, as parents suffered from sickness, depression, and debility under persecution. For those registering in July and August, there was no realistic chance of a place on a transport. Yet until 3 September the IKG administration still ran, as if hoping that children would still be allowed to pass despite the hostilities. From October 1939 deportations

also Association of Jewish Refugees, Refugee Voices, <https://www.ajrrefugeevoices.org.uk/RefugeeVoices/Otto-Hutter> (accessed 10 Dec. 2019).

48 Carl Steiner to Lord Baldwin, 7 July 1939, A/W 1971/21.

49 Liselotte Fuchs to London Committee, 12 Aug. 1939, A/W 1974/1.

50 Edith Riss to British Movement, 5 July 1939, A/W 1971/3.

51 Eva Seinfeld to Princess Elizabeth of England, 17 March 1939, A/W 1971/16.

52 53 A/W 1971/5.

to German-occupied Poland began and soon the children would be on a transport east to a death location. Emil Lauber had a medical certificate issued on 30 August 1939 but by 20 October he was deported to the Nisko Jewish reservation, which was a threshold to death.⁵³ A protracted correspondence concerning the guarantee for Ilse Huppert came to nothing, and soon her fate too was sealed, with deportation to Nisko on 20 October 1939, although she survived for longer than her parents, at least reaching Mauthausen in 1944.⁵⁴ For the children of Vienna and former Austria, the Kindertransport represented a final expression of hope, although for many this was tragically not to be realized.

53 Emil Lauber, medical certificate issued by Dr. Siegfried Hauslich, 30 Aug. 1939, A/W 1971/1.

54 A/W 1971/2; the RCM questioned Ilse Huppert's guarantee on 7 Feb. 1939 and her parents replied on 1 July 1939.