

Educational problems of deported Polish children (1941–1946)

Summary

Four massive deportations of the Polish citizens from territory occupied by the Red Army to distant parts of the USSR (1940-1941) abruptly discontinued the educational process of many children. In the locations of their forced deportation, where they were exposed to dramatically difficult living conditions, only some children received access to education, but this was exclusively in Russian. When diplomatic relations between the USSR and Poland were resumed in July 30, 1940, a chance appeared to change this situation: the Polish Embassy attempted to organize education for the deported children in Polish. However, the Polish efforts did not bring the expected results. Problems appeared with obtaining adequate buildings, equipment, qualified educators, teaching programs, handbooks and writing materials, among others. The improvised education for the deported children concentrated on teaching them basic reading, writing and simple arithmetic. With increasing tension in Polish-Soviet relations, which were finally severed (April 25, 1943), even these schools were eventually taken over by the Soviets. Yet, the foundation established by both the Union of the Polish Patriots in the USSR and the Committee for the Polish Children, which operated within the Ministry of Russian Federal Education (June 30, 1943), granted a solid organizational basis for the education of the deported Polish children. Educational plans and programs appeared. In addition, funds allocated by the Soviet authorities, helped with the preparation of educational programs and the publication of handbooks. Consequently, a significant number of the deported Polish children were not only saved from illiteracy, but were also able to preserve a strong sense of Polish identity.

Keywords: Poland/USSR; World War II, education of Polish children deported to the USSR.