

SOCIAL SCIENCES

THE REPATRIATION OF *DPS* THROUGH THE ACTIVITIES
OF INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS (1946–1951)**Olena Naumenko**Postgraduate Student, Ivan Franko National University of Lviv, Ukraine
e-mail: naumenko95naumenko@icloud.com, orcid.org/0000-0002-8433-4088**Summary**

This article considers and characterizes the activities of international institutions during the process of the repatriation of displaced persons (hereinafter – *DPS*) after World War II. The intransigence and uncompromising views of the former Allies, including organizations such as the United Nations, the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, and the International Refugee Organization, who had taken on a coordinating role in the repatriation issue and whose policies were clearly in place, are indicated in the table of contents. Also, the peculiarities of their activities and their scale and significance are highlighted, with an emphasis placed on the main contradictory points encountered in their work. These consisted of different views and approaches to the repatriation issue on the one hand by Western countries, and on the other, by the USSR. These, and their achievements and failures, show the position of, in particular, each of the “Big Three” states, and the influence they had on making a decision in the framework of international cooperation. It should be noted that the above-mentioned international organizations managed to organize and ensure the return of tens of thousands of *DPS* to their homeland, provide an opportunity for those who did not seek asylum in other European countries, and did everything possible to create a full postwar life for these citizens.

Keywords: World War II, refugees, USSR, Western countries, confrontation, UN.*DOI:* <https://doi.org/10.23856/3873>**1. Introduction**

The problem posed by *DPS* and refugees is quite an important one in today's world. In particular, this applies to some Middle Eastern countries (Iran, Syria, Israel), which are local centers of conflict. This study is relevant as through the isolation and detailed analysis of activities, including the analysis of the activities of the international organizations that worked on the repatriation process after World War II, as well as the examination of historical experience, there is a possibility to find a legitimate solution to such problems in the XXI century. The novelty of this article is in the analysis of different approaches to repatriation and the characterization of the activities of postwar international institutions on this issue. The purpose and objectives of the study are to characterize and analyze the decisions made on determining the mechanism used for the repatriation of citizens from *DPS* camps; to highlight and explain

the main contradictions from the Allies on this issue; and to research the role of international institutions in the affairs of *DPs* and refugees. This article is written using the methodological principles of historicism, objectivism, synthesis as well as the use of scientific material. Historical-chronological and historical-comparative methods were also used, which allows for a full representation of the information.

2. The UN's activities in the organization of repatriation: the main stages and contradictions

After the end of the World War II, a large number of foreign citizens stayed in Germany for a long time, having either voluntarily left their place of residence or having been forcibly deported. It should be noted that during 1945–1946 a significant part of these *DPs* managed to return to their homeland within the framework of the Yalta agreements and negotiations in Halle (Germany), while their fellow countrymen remained in *DPs* camps in the American, British and French occupied zones waiting for their fate to be decided. That is why the Allies were faced with the task of developing a single international mechanism for the repatriation of displaced citizens under the control of international institutions, including the United Nations (*Arzamaskin, 2015: 10*).

An important task, and at the same time a serious problem, facing the UN was the need to define the concepts of “refugees” and “displaced persons,” as the fate of thousands of people who remained outside of their country of origin largely depended on finding the correct solution to this political problem. This issue was to be discussed at the first session of the UN General Assembly, which took place in February 1946. According to the views expressed by the Soviet delegation at a meeting of the committee on social, humanitarian and cultural affairs, refugees should be recognized as those who were forced to leave Germany or Germany's allied countries due to persecution for various reasons, whilst *DPs* included all citizens that were forcibly deported from the occupied countries (*UN official website, 1946*).

It is worth noting that in accordance with the Statute of the International Organization for Refugees, a resolution was adopted at the UN General Meeting in May 1946, which clearly delineated the status of *DPs*, refugees and war criminals. Following the meeting, the resolution was considered by the newly formed Economic and Social Committee, which finally agreed that no refugees or *DPs* would be forcibly repatriated and that they would be able to emigrate to the West. This condition became the basis for the adoption of the Resolution on Refugees and Displaced Persons (June 1946) (*UN official website, 1946*). The document stated the need to establish the Special Committee on Refugees and Displaced Persons, which was finally formed on February 16, 1946. The committee, which reported directly to the UN General Assembly, was responsible for preparing an administrative budget that would be divided equally among its members. The committee was composed of representatives of delegations from countries such as the United States, Great Britain, France, Canada, the USSR, China, Poland, the Netherlands, Brazil and Lebanon (*UN official website, 1946*).

However, during the meeting and the long debate between the Allied delegations, certain contradictions immediately arose in the interpretation of the repatriation process itself: whilst the Soviet Union emphasized the need for the full repatriation of all Soviet citizens, Western countries had a slightly different position. In particular, the US delegates, referring to the decisions of the Yalta agreements, noted that compulsory repatriation should primarily be subject to persons who were considered citizens of the USSR as of September 1, 1939, and had been taken prisoner in German uniforms or had fought on the side of the Red Army until June 22, 1941 (*UN official website, 1946*).

In contrast, the draft resolution on repatriation prepared by the Soviet delegation was based on the following basic statements and requirements: UN members are obliged to assist, in every possible way, in the return of refugees as soon as possible; those refugees who do not wish to return to their former place of residence should receive assistance in settling into a new domicile only with the consent of the government of the country of which they are nationals; refugee camps are not to allow any propaganda against the UN or its individual members, nor against repatriation; to primarily include in the staff of refugee camps representatives of those states whose citizens are refugees; to assist interested countries in carrying out joint repatriation activities; and not to consider as refugees those who are deemed traitors and war criminals, these being persons who have tarnished themselves by cooperating with the occupiers; traitors and war criminals should not enjoy UN patronage and should be convicted of crimes against their own countries (*UN official website, 1946*).

Thus, already during the UN General Assembly's first session, two different approaches to addressing the issue of refugees and *DPs* had been clearly identified. Whilst the Soviet Union argued that the repatriation process was incomplete and insisted on the return of all citizens without exception, the representatives of the United States and Great Britain worked based on ending the repatriation process. According to the Western powers, only those citizens remaining in the West, who didn't consider it possible to return home for either political or other reasons should, in their view, automatically move from the category of "displaced persons" to the category of "refugees" (*UN official website, 1946*). As a result of the debate and vote on February 12, 1946, the position proposed by the representatives of Western countries was officially recorded. The resolution read, *inter alia*, as follows: "...[those] against return to their countries of origin may not be forcibly returned" (*UN official website, 1946*).

Debates on the issues discussed at the first session of the UN General Assembly continued at the meetings held by the Committee on Refugees and Displaced Persons. Their first meeting took place in London on April 8, 1946. Again, the main issue on the agenda was the discussion of the concepts of "refugees" and "displaced persons" (*UN official website, 1946*). The Soviet delegation continued with their controversial argument for the complete repatriation of all Soviet citizens, based on the views formed before leaving for London. Obviously, the intent behind this approach was to legally obtain the return of citizens from Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Belarus and the western regions of Ukraine who had been displaced. Simultaneously, the delegations from both the United Kingdom and the United States continued to argue that all *DPs* had already returned to their home countries and that the rest should be classified as refugees (*UN official website, 1946*). According to the Western delegates, the main task concerning refugees should be to secure their full accommodation, and political and legal protection.

It should be noted that the Soviet side still sought to implement the decisions it had made at the first session of the UN General Assembly. Already at the committee's first meeting, which began on November 6, 1946, the demands of the Soviet delegation were expressed by the Permanent Representative of the USSR to the UN, Andriy Vyshinsky. He sharply criticized the draft statute of the committee, in particular the provision of mandatory assistance to come from other countries to the International Organization for the Resettlement of Refugees. Dissatisfaction was also heightened by the desire expressed by some states to provide assistance to all refugees, among whom were many traitors and war criminals (*Arzamaskin, 2015: 33–34*). On the recognition of the right of *DPs* to choose their place of permanent residence, A. Vyshinsky insisted that international organizations, namely the Committee on Refugees and Displaced Persons, should not provide any assistance and support to those deemed war criminals and traitors. Furthermore, he demanded that people who tarnished themselves by cooperating

with the occupiers should not be considered refugees and should not enjoy UN protection (*Arzamaskin, 2015: 34*).

A. Vyshinsky's speech provoked considerable discussion. The head of the American delegation, Eleanor Roosevelt, defending her official Western position, said: "None of us will object to the return of those who have been active against their countries nor to having them punished. However, there are other people who fought against the enemy and do not want to return to their homeland because they disagree with the government in power" (*Arzamaskin, 2015: 35*). Regarding other demands made by the Soviet delegation, E. Roosevelt stated that the proposals from the USSR's delegation violated freedom of speech, and restricted human rights and freedoms. She also called on all delegations to withdraw their proposals and join the American position. As before, almost all the demands made by the Soviet delegation, with the exception of the requirement not to extend the assistance of the international organization to traitors and war criminals, were rejected. This gave grounds for the Soviet side, in accordance with the decisions taken by the UN General Assembly on February 12 and December 15, 1946, to later accuse Western countries of disrupting the repatriation process (*Arzamaskin, 2015: 35–36*).

The position of the Soviet delegation on refugees and *DPs*, once again detailed in the speech of the USSR's Permanent Representative to the UN Andriy Gromyko at the final plenary session of the General Assembly in December 1946, failed again to significantly affect the decisions of Western delegations (*Arzamaskin, 2015: 48*). The uncompromising stances taken on this issue by the former Allies, first of all by the USSR, then by the USA and then by Great Britain, did not allow for the achievement of any real results in its resolution.

3. The UNRRA's politics as a specialized organization on repatriation

It is obvious that in the international arena it was not only the UN that dealt with the issue of repatriation. During World War II in particular, Western countries decided to create a more relevant organization, known as the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA). The UNRRA was an international organization created by the states of the anti-Hitler coalition on November 9, 1943 in Washington to help war-torn countries. It also had a fairly wide range of other functions that worked toward arranging a well-developed postwar life for the citizens of these countries. It is worth noting that although this organization included 44 countries, the American delegation was dominant. Its main purpose was to "plan, coordinate and implement measures to assist victims of war in any territory under UN control through the supply of food, fuel, clothing, shelter and other essentials, medical and other necessary services." The UNRRA had its own staff of civil servants (about 12,000 individuals) and funding from member countries of approximately \$3.7 billion, of which the United States contributed \$2.7 billion, Great Britain contributed \$625 million and Canada contributed \$139 million (*Reinisch, 2011*).

Throughout its existence, the UNRRA worked closely with dozens of charitable organizations, often sending staff to help carry out specific tasks. In just four years, the organization distributed about \$4 billion, as well as goods, food, medicine and other equipment; this organization played a major role in the repatriation of *DPs* between 1945–1946 (*Reinisch, 2011*). Subsequently, the bigger part of its functions were transferred to several newly established UN agencies, including the International Organization for Refugees and Displaced Persons (1946) and the World Health Organization (1948). The UNRRA operated mainly in *DPs* camps in Germany, namely in those parts of it that were occupied by the Western Allies, and it contributed in every way to the repatriation of the population that had been forcibly deported during the war (*Reinisch, 2008*).

The UNNRA was headquartered in Washington, D.C., and its main unit was the European Regional Office, which had an extensive system of offices based in London. In addition to being under the direct control of the UN, it was subordinate to the Supreme Headquarters of the Allied Expeditionary Forces (SHAEF) and was led by three Americans during its four years of activity. Its first general director was Herbert Lehmann (January 1, 1944 to March 31, 1946), a former governor of New York (*Reinisch, 2011*). He was succeeded by his successor, Fiorello La Guardia (April 1 – December 31, 1946), a former mayor of New York whose relatives had been prisoners in German concentration camps. The third director was Major General Lowell Ward Rooks (from January 1, 1947 to September 30, 1947), who served until the last days of the UNNRA (*Reinisch, 2011*).

According to the official position of the UNNRA, the category of *DPs* in need of repatriation included civilians who, depending on the circumstances of the war, found themselves outside of their home country and were willing to either return to its borders or find a new homeland, but in no case could do one or the other without help. Thus, the following categories of *DPs* were recognized: citizens of the USSR as of September 1, 1939; former civilian prisoners; citizens of the United States and Great Britain; persons of unknown citizenship; persons whose nationality has not been clarified due to territorial changes; persons politically or religiously persecuted; citizens of neutral states (*Reinisch, 2017*).

Appropriate repatriation cases and records of *DPs* in the camps were set up at the headquarters of the SHAEF. In the American occupation zone, the department for *DPs* at SHAEF was headed by General Stanley Mickelson, and in the British zone, the government's plenipotentiary for the matter was Marshal Sholto Douglas, commander-in-chief of the occupying forces (*Reinisch, 2017*). By 1947, the UNRRRA operated nearly 800 *DPs* camps that were home to about 7 million people. Forty-four participating countries had contributed to the organization's funding and staffing, in particular the Americans with significant US government assistance (*Reinisch, 2011*). The largest recipients of financial assistance from the UNRRRA up until 1947 were: China – \$518 million dollars; Poland – \$478 million; Italy – \$418 million; Yugoslavia – \$416 million; Greece – \$347 million; Czechoslovakia – \$261 million; and Austria – \$136 million. Some academic assessments indicate that the UNRRRA was imperfect in its operations and inefficient due to poor internal planning, sometimes acute shortages of supplies of basic necessities, and sometimes incompetent staff (*Reinisch, 2011*). However, it must be emphasized that in the postwar period this organization was able to provide for all the necessary *DPs* and refugees and in fact, its actions prepared the ground for the further repatriation of citizens.

4. The final stage of repatriation: the activities of the IRO as a successor to the UNNRA

Beginning in 1946, Western countries, realizing that the UNNRA had an extremely wide range of activities, began to consider creating a more specialized organization to ensure the continuation of repatriation. This led to the creation, during the New York session of the UN General Assembly, of the International Organization for Refugees and Displaced Persons which was then abbreviated to the International Refugee Organization (IRO). It is worth noting that during the first year the IRO worked in parallel with the UNNRA, thus gradually taking over some of its functions. The IRO's constitution was adopted on December 15, 1946 by the UN General Assembly and served as a basis for all key decisions as well as defining the scope of the organization.

Due to differences between the West and the USSR, which was not a member of the organization for political reasons, the IRO operated only in areas controlled by the Western

occupation forces. The supreme governing body of the IRO was the General Council. In the period between its meetings, the direct management was carried out by representatives of the Executive Committee. In many European countries, there were both temporary IRO missions as well as an extensive network of committees dealing with specific issues (*Hitchcock, 2009: 222*). Running in parallel, there was a special Advisory Committee under the auspices of the IRO, which consisted of various auxiliary voluntary organizations. Compared to the UNRRA, the IRO had significant advantages in its activities: it addressed a wider range of issues related to repatriation, it had significant material resources, a large administrative staff and more than 50 special periodicals (*Hitchcock, 2009: 225*).

The IRO was primarily concerned with a large number of people who, for various reasons, found themselves outside their countries of origin or last place of residence. The IRO provided them with guardianship and assistance for: repatriation to their homeland, emigration and resettlement of families and individuals, and mass resettlement. It is obvious that the main direction of the activity was toward repatriation. It should be noted that by the UN General Assembly's decision in early 1949 the IRO was liquidated because it fulfilled its direct task of completing its repatriation mission, but on December 3, 1949 a new resolution was adopted to extend the IRO until January 1, 1951 (*Constitution of the IRO, 1946*). The same resolution provided for the creation of a new structural unit within the UN on January 1, 1951 – the High Commission for Refugees, which had identical functions and is still in operation today (*Constitution of the IRO, 1946*).

Local IRO headquarters in the western areas of Germany relied on the relevant district offices in their work on *DPs*. Structurally, these headquarters consisted of a directorate, an administrative and political department that received and registered *DPs* from the camps and filtered them, a statistics department in charge of these individuals, an emigration department, a food and supply department, a labor department, and a transport department. Furthermore, each department had their own corresponding smaller subdivisions (*Constitution of the IRO, 1946*).

The activities of this organization legally ended on December 31, 1951. On January 4, 1952, at a press conference in Munich, the last head of the IRO, Thomas Johnson, stated: "The IRO has not completely solved the repatriation problem. The main reason for the liquidation of the IRO is the lack of material resources, because long before this date, all the money available to it has already been spent" (*Hitchcock, 2009: 222*). Following the termination of the IRO's powers by a joint decision taken by the Western Allies, the issue of the political "custody" of those *DPs* remaining in West Germany and Austria was delegated to the UN High Commissioner for Displaced Persons, Gotthard van Goyven, who was appointed to this post by a corresponding decision.

Note that during the entire period of the IRO's existence, from July 1, 1947 to December 31, 1951, a total of 712,511 people were repatriated from the Western occupation zones. These included 63.2% from the American occupation zones, 31.5% from the English and 5.3% from the French. Among the *DPs* there were about 200 thousand Soviet citizens who for one reason or another did not want to return to the USSR (*Epstein, 1973: 125*).

5. Conclusions

The issue regarding the repatriation of *DPs* arose at the end of World War II. It was then that the Allied governments clearly set themselves the task, from a legal point of view, of organizing and ensuring the integrity of the repatriation process at an international level. However, due to numerous contradictions in domestic laws, each of the Allies developed their

own views regarding both *DPs* and repatriation in general: the Soviet government insisted on a coercive approach to its implementation, while Western countries advocated a more humane policy based on either the desire or unwillingness of the person to be returned.

Through the course of the joint Allied agreements, in the way of international conferences and meetings, as well as decisions made by the UN General Assembly, a single mechanism for the repatriation of citizens was initially developed. However, their own uncompromising and to some extent intransigent views did not allow the governments of the USA, the USSR and the UK to complete the mission, and instead only deepened their differences. Given the tense relations between the former allies, all power and responsibility for the repatriation of *DPs* and refugees was transferred to international organizations under the auspices of the UN. These were The UNNRA and its successor, the IRO, who would be able to complete the job with significant resources and authority. It should be noted that during their work, these international institutions managed to ensure the return of tens of thousands of citizens to their homeland, provide an opportunity for those who did not seek asylum in other countries, and help people to gradually return to a full life.

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