From Harry Houdini to Theodor Herzl, Hungary’s Jewish community has made a lasting impact on the world. After years of oppression, Hungarian Jewish life is experiencing a powerful comeback, and JDC is proud to support its resurgence.

For more than 1,000 years, Budapest has been a dynamic center for Jewish life across Europe and beyond. By the late 19th century, Hungary boasted more than 900,000 Jews, with 125 synagogues in Budapest alone, and nearly a quarter of the city’s population identifying as Jewish. Before World War II, Jews comprised more than 25% of Hungary’s legal, medical, and intellectual professions.

The Holocaust devastated Hungarian Jews and threatened to destroy their long history. More than 600,000 Hungarian Jews were murdered in the Holocaust, with over 70% killed at Auschwitz. What shreds of Jewish life that could be salvaged went underground when the Communists seized power.

Jewish life was repressed for more than 50 years. Today, Jewish life has made a comeback. And for decades, JDC has been working alongside Budapest’s Jewish community to strengthen Jewish life, serve its most vulnerable members, and cultivate the next generation of Jewish leaders.

Their future is limitless, and we’re proud to play a key role in cultivating it.

**JDC in Hungary: A Snapshot**

**DEVELOPING TOMORROW’S JEWISH LEADERS**

Through its inclusion of Hungarian participants in leadership training initiatives, such as the Buncher Community Leadership Program, Leatid, Yesod, and more, JDC equips local Jewish leaders and professionals with the tools to address their community’s needs. During these events and trainings, Hungarian participants have the chance to meet and collaborate with their peers from the rest of Jewish Europe and across the world. JDC also supports the Tarbut Fellowship, a two-year fellowship that aims to inspire and empower young Jewish leaders from diverse professional backgrounds in Hungary and Poland.

Two young boys eating bread in a JDC-supported canteen, 1946.
And for those with an entrepreneurial spirit, JDC’s Mozaik Hub cultivates a network of Hungarian Jewish Community NGOs, increasing the capacity of new and existing initiatives and encouraging a sense of leadership and creative thinking in the Jewish community. Hub members have access to seminars, mentorship, and a network of young Jewish professionals working to address Hungary’s most pressing social challenges. As of August 2020, Mozaik had provided more than 2,400 hours of mentoring and consultancy and empowered more than 250 Jewish community professionals.

**CULTIVATING A JEWISH FUTURE**

At the center of Budapest’s Jewish life is the JDC-supported Bálint Ház Jewish Community Center (JCC), an exciting source of Jewish culture and education that attracts over 2,500 people per month. The JCC serves every sector of the Jewish community and offers a rich array of cultural and educational programs. It also organizes Judafest, a festival that brings Jewish art and culture to the streets of the Hungarian capital, as well as an annual Jewish and Israeli film festival.

**SZARVAS**

Hungary is home to Szarvas — the JDC-Ronald S. Lauder Foundation International Jewish summer camp— and is a gateway to Jewish life for many young people across the world. Each summer, more than 1,500 youth from over 20 countries gather in rural Hungary, where they dance, sing, play sports, and immerse themselves in a fun and caring Jewish environment. Many campers become madrichim (counselors) and go on to strengthen Jewish life in their own home communities.

In response to the crisis in Ukraine, JDC organized a special **Winter Camp at Szarvas**, which provides warm and safe respite to Ukrainian Jews who have been braving daily and widespread outages of power, heat, and internet. Over six 12-day sessions from January through April 2023, at the newly renovated JDC-Lauder international summer camp in rural Hungary, Ukrainian participants enjoy the winterized Szarvas facility while engaging in programs to heal body and soul.

**AID TO VULNERABLE JEWS**

More than 30% of Jews in Hungary live in poverty, and the country still has thousands of Holocaust survivors who depend on shrinking social welfare services. Working with the Hungarian Jewish Social Support Foundation (HJSSF), JDC support makes available a wide range of life-saving assistance to Hungary’s most vulnerable Jews. JDC also launched the Jaffe Jewish Family Service (JFS), which provides mentoring, counseling, emergency assistance, and scholarships to at-risk youth in Budapest to more than 300 vulnerable children and families.

---

JDC in Hungary: Images Across Time