

Wolfgang Schellenbacher

# From Exclusion, Deprivation, and Persecution to Suicide

## Analysing Data on the Suicides of Jews in Vienna 1938–1945

### Abstract

Between 1938 and 1945, at least 1,100 Jews in Vienna died by suicide in the face of exclusion, deprivation, and persecution. This article examines data on suicides in Vienna put together for a symposium and commemoration ceremony, drawing from the databases of the Documentation Centre of Austrian Resistance. Suicides peaked after the “Anschluss” of Austria in March 1938, but also increased during the November pogrom and at times when people feared losing their housing. While research had already suggested a connection between the mass transports from Vienna between autumn 1941 and autumn 1942, the data allows for an in depth-analysis into the correlation between transports and suicides and can demonstrate this on the level of individual transports leaving Vienna. Additionally, the article looks into the average age, the types of suicides, and demographic aspects, such as differences according to gender.

*[...] I would have loved to see you again, look into your faithful, beautiful eyes, kiss you deeply, and then say goodbye. Unfortunately, it can't be, I'm doomed to leave the world like this, it's terrible, bitter and sad.<sup>1</sup>*

This excerpt from a farewell letter from 1942 exemplifies the fate of at least 1,100 Jews<sup>2</sup> in Vienna from 1938 to 1945 who died by suicide<sup>3</sup> in the face of exclusion, deprivation and persecution, and who were not able to say farewell to their loved ones. The seventy-year-old former trade unionist, Julius Feldbauer, died by suicide on 14 July 1942. Born in Vienna, he worked in a trade union until 1938, was a co-founder of the Central Association of Commercial Employees and a functionary of the insurance fund for commercial employees. For these activities, he was awarded the title of “Kommerzialrat” in 1933. He had married Aloisia Endlweber, a Catholic almost twenty-four years younger than him. Fearing that his wife would lose their shared apartment at Blindengasse 46, and after being tormented at the collection camp (Sammellager) in Malzgasse prior his deportation, he died by suicide, by an

1 Farewell letter from Julius Feldbauer to Aloisia Feldbauer, 13 July 1942, Wiener Stadt- und Landesarchiv (WStLA), M. Abt. 208, A 36 Opferfürsorgeakten – Entschädigungen (E), Aloisia Feldbauer.

2 DÖW Database of Victims.

3 The article refers to “died by suicide” or “ended their lives” for fatal suicidal behaviour and “attempted suicide” for non-fatal suicidal behaviour as suggested by academic literature over the last years. Quantitative data on descriptors pertaining to fatal suicidal behaviour selected from people who were affected by suicide showed that the terms “died by suicide” and “ended their life” were considered most acceptable. See Prianka Padmanathan et al., “Language use and suicide: An online cross-sectional survey,” *PLoS ONE* 14, no. 6 (2019): <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0217473>.

overdose of sleeping pills<sup>4</sup> in the apartment assigned to him at Fugbachgasse 3 in Vienna's Leopoldstadt district. He left behind his wife who survived the war and was buried in the same grave as him in 1979, and his sister Therese Hosner, who was deported to the Theresienstadt (Terezín) Ghetto in October 1942, where she died in January 1943.

The fate of Julius Feldbauer and his suicide are typical of many of the suicides of Viennese Jews between 1938 and 1945. As data from the databases of the Documentation Centre of Austrian Resistance (DÖW) on suicides in Vienna show, next to the impact of the "Anschluss", the fear of deportation and the loss of housing – especially for those living in "mixed marriages", like Julius Feldbauer – were key factors impacting the suicide rate amongst the Jewish population between 1938 and 1945. Additionally, suicides by poisoning and overdoses were, together with those by domestic gas poisoning, the most common types of suicides in Vienna.

This article gives an insight into this data and what can be deduced about suicides following the "Anschluss" and during the period of mass deportations from Vienna. The data described in this paper was collected by the DÖW over the last decades in different databases. For a symposium and commemoration ceremony focussing on suicides by Jews in Vienna between 1938 and 1945,<sup>5</sup> data on suicides was merged from the DÖW databases and put together by the author. The quantitative data makes it possible to examine links with the "Anschluss" or mass deportation. It also allows gender-specific analyses of suicides and of the most common types of suicides. The data is supplemented by short biographies of Jews who died of suicide.

### Data on the Suicides of Jews in Vienna from the Victim Databases of the DÖW

Suicide as a part of the Holocaust is still largely unresearched due to a lack of data for most areas of the German Reich. Nevertheless, suicide as part of the Holocaust in Vienna was already noted in articles by Jonny Moser as early as in the 1970s.<sup>6</sup> Moser also offered the first data on suicides in Vienna in his publication on the demographic data of the Jewish population in Austria between 1938 and 1945.<sup>7</sup> Hannes Leidinger gave a comprehensive overview of the suicides of Jews in Vienna in his extended analysis on the subject in Austria from the mid-nineteenth century to the Second Republic of Austria. With his statistical evaluation of the so called "Friedhofskartei" (cemetery index) of the Jewish Community in Vienna, which also contains information on suicides, he offered new and valuable insights into the topic.<sup>8</sup>

4 For academic reasons, as well as for working with quantitative data on suicides in Vienna between 1938 and 1945, this article states the names of those who died by suicide due to exclusion, robbery, and persecution by the Nazis. The exact acts of suicides often available in the data will not be mentioned; the article rather refers to types of suicides, like through sleeping pills, domestic gas poisoning, and hanging.

5 The symposium and commemoration ceremony "Erzwungener Freitod Selbstmorde von Wiener Jüdinnen und Juden während der Shoah," held on 8 November 2021, was organised by the Vienna Wiesenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies, the DÖW, and Misrachi Austria.

6 See especially Jonny Moser, "Das Schicksal der Wiener Juden in den März- und Apriltagen," in *Wiener Geschichtsblätter* 1978, no. 2, ed. Verein für Geschichte der Stadt Wien (Vienna: Verein für Geschichte der Stadt Wien, 1978), 172–182.

7 Jonny Moser, *Demographie der jüdischen Bevölkerung Österreichs 1938–1945* [=Schriftenreihe des Dokumentationsarchivs des österreichischen Widerstandes zur Geschichte der NS-Gewaltverbrechen, vol. 5] (Vienna: DÖW, 1999), 22.

8 Hannes Leidinger, *Die Bedeutung der Selbstausschöpfung. Aspekte der Suizidproblematik in Österreich von der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts bis zur Zweiten Republik* (Innsbruck/Vienna/Bozen: Studienverlag, 2012).

By combining this previous work with the extensive dataset on the suicides of Jews in Vienna between 1938 and 1945, as drawn from the databases of the DÖW, a further in-depth analysis is possible. This information was collected by the DÖW over the last three decades: during a conversation with the then Austrian Chancellor Franz Vranitzky in 1987, Yitzhak Arad, the head of Yad Vashem, suggested the creation of a memorial book for Austrian Jews murdered or perished during the Nazi regime.<sup>9</sup> The DÖW began to collect data on Austrian victims of the Shoah in the early 1990s. From the very beginning, the DÖW used very broad criteria to determine who would be considered as an Austrian victim of the Shoah, with a view to being as inclusive as possible. Criteria were established that included people who were citizens of the Republic of Austria before 1938 or born on the territory of today's Austria, those who were entitled to reside there, and those who had lived in Austria for a period of ten years. According to these criteria, approximately 66,500 Austrian Jews were murdered in the Shoah. More than 64,500 names have been identified so far. A large number of these – around 48,000 people – were deported directly from Vienna to the ghettos, concentration and extermination camps. Therefore, the evaluation of different versions of the deportation lists from Vienna formed the starting point of this research and the foundation of the victim database. These were supplemented by the so-called JOINT file, a means by which Jewish victims were recorded after 1945, and with the information published in the *Völkischer Beobachter* under the title “Einziehungserkenntnis, gemäß § 1 der Verordnung über die Einziehung volks- und staatsfeindlichen Vermögens im Lande Österreich” (Confiscation notice, in accordance with §1 of the ordinance on the confiscation of property hostile to the people and the state in Austria), which published lists of names that could be used for comparison.<sup>10</sup> Over the decades, this basic data has been supplemented by dozens of other sources from Austria and beyond. Furthermore, information from post-war sources, such as victim welfare applications or search lists, was added. In total, several dozen larger databases were created and the information they contain was linked. The DÖW also sought contact with survivors and relatives of Shoah victims. As far back as the mid-1990s, many of them responded to a call from the DÖW, submitting 1,840 questionnaires along with documents and letters on more than 2,000 Austrian Shoah victims. Only this painstaking work has made it possible to publish the names and fates of the murdered Austrian Jews via the online database of the DÖW.

Faced with their creeping disenfranchisement, expropriation, and persecution, thousands of Austrian Jews fled Austria to other European countries after Austria's “Anschluss” to Nazi Germany. Due to the initial military advances of the German Wehrmacht, many of these refugees found themselves quickly in the sphere of power of the German Reich or its allies again, and they were transported from there to the ghettos, concentration and extermination camps. To also be able to identify and include the names of these Austrian victims, published information from these countries was processed and data was compared with international partner institutions. However, the work also shows the gaps in the research: materials on Austrians transported from Hungary or Southeast Europe are still not known to the same extent as those on Central and Western Europe.

9 Brigitte Bailer and Gerhard Ungar, „Die namentliche Erfassung der österreichischen Holocaustopfer,“ *Opferschicksale. Widerstand und Verfolgung im Nationalsozialismus. 50 Jahre Dokumentationsarchiv des österreichischen Widerstandes* [= *Jahrbuch* 2013], ed. Dokumentationsarchiv des österreichischen Widerstandes (Vienna: DÖW, 2013), 63–73, here 63.

10 *Ibid.*, 65 f.

Next to a broad set of criteria regarding who was counted as an *Austrian* victim, the definition of who counted as a *victim* was set broadly as well. From the outset of its work collecting the names of victims, the DÖW made the decision to include Austrians who died by suicide in the face of exclusion, robbery, and persecution between the “Anschluss” and the liberation as victims of the Holocaust, unlike Jews who died of natural causes in Vienna after 1938. This included those who died by suicide in territories under the control of the German Reich and its allied states. The names of these victims of the Holocaust therefore also appear online in the database of victims of the DÖW<sup>11</sup> and were included in the “Memorial to the Jewish Children, Women and Men of Austria Who Were Murdered in the Shoah” (Shoah Memorial Wall) that was unveiled in Vienna in 2021. However, the DÖW decided in the early 2000s not to make the information about the specific cause of death being suicide publicly available. To identify these victims, data from the so called “Sterbebücher” (death books) and the cemetery index of the Jewish Community in Vienna was included in the databases of victims. They hold information on the causes of death of the deceased members of the Jewish Community in Vienna. They also offer valuable information on the types of suicide. Information from the deportation index of the Jewish Community also gave insight into the connection between suicides and summons to transports. Collections from outside the Jewish Community add not only important information on Jews by faith who died by suicide, but also on Austrians who died by suicide and were considered Jewish according to the Nuremberg Laws and persecuted as Jews by the Nazi regime. Additional information on suicides was found in the victim welfare files (*Opferfürsorgeakten*), archival documents, DÖW questionnaires, as well as in academic literature.

When creating the database of suicides of persecuted Jews in Vienna, cases of children under sixteen years old declared as suicide or family suicide were excluded by the author. In combining the different victim databases, 1,088 cases of suicides of Jews matching the location and timeframe in question could be identified. In most cases, this data includes information about the date of death, types of suicides, gender, and the last-known addresses of each person. In many cases, the link to the DÖW’s other databases of victims makes available additional information on marital status, relatives, home addresses, professions, the “Aryanization” of property and summons to transports. However, a statistical analysis of social class was not possible using this data. While it is possible in individual cases to gain an insight into a person’s personal situation before their suicide, the relatively little biographical information in the mass data is insufficient to make valid general statements on the motives behind the suicides.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, the data can show correlations between increases in the rate of suicide cases and that might indicate motivation.

### The “Anschluss”, its Aftermath and the Effect on the Suicide Rate

The “Anschluss” of Austria in March 1938 was rapidly followed by the first pogroms and arrests of Jews which changed the living conditions of the Jewish population in Vienna dramatically. This led to a sharp increase in suicides amongst the Jewish population: 290 Viennese Jews died by suicide between 13 March and the end of

<sup>11</sup> Online Database of victims of the DÖW, accessed: 2 April 2022, <https://www.doew.at/personensuche>.

<sup>12</sup> For indications of social classes of Jewish suicides in Germany after 1933 see Konrad Kwiet and Helmut Eschwege, *Selbstbehauptung und Widerstand. Deutsche Juden im Kampf um Existenz und Menschenwürde 1933–1945* (Hamburg: Christians, 1984), 211.

June 1938 alone.<sup>13</sup> Pogrom-like excesses started as early as on the evening of 12 March 1938. This included instances of public humiliation, like the forced cleaning of streets, sidewalks, or walls with mops and toothbrushes, known as “Reibpartien”, as well as physical attacks and sexual violence against Jewish women.<sup>14</sup> Leo Lauterbach was in Vienna in April 1938 as the director of the Organisation Department of the World Zionist Organisation, and he reported on the impact of the humiliating Reibpartien carried out by non-Jewish crowds of people against the Jews: “It robbed the Jews of any sense of personal security and their belief in the humanity of their neighbour. It revealed to them that they lived not only in a fool’s paradise, but in a veritable hell.”<sup>15</sup> The mass arrests of Jews also began immediately after the “Anschluss”. In addition to prominent Jews and officials of the Jewish community (IKG), Jews of foreign nationality or without citizenship – above all the so-called “Ostjuden” – were among the first targets of violence.

Jewish-owned shops and offices were vandalised with anti-Semitic slogans and marked as Jewish.<sup>16</sup> Often the owners or their children were forced to deface their own shops and to hold up signs in front of them. A large part of the population was either passively approving or tolerant of the humiliations.<sup>17</sup> This economic ruin and humiliation saw a high number of shop owners dying by suicide in the days and weeks after the “Anschluss”. The sixty-two-year-old widower Max Kohut died by suicide by hanging on 17 March 1938. Born in 1875 in Lettnitz (Letničie) in today’s Slovakia, the master shoemaker founded the Max Kohut shoe factory in Vienna in 1902, which employed around sixty people in 1938 and produced children’s, women’s, and men’s shoes and was housed in a building at Pelzgasse 20 in Vienna’s 15<sup>th</sup> District.<sup>18</sup> Kohut left behind his sons Hans and Ernst, both of whom survived in exile. Additionally, the “Anschluss” was followed by the gradual exclusion, disenfranchisement, and expropriation of Austrian Jews. In the months that followed, a series of discriminatory ordinances came into force that served to push Jews out of all areas of public life. For example, the ordinances banned Jewish children from public schools, prohibited Jews from entering parks, theatres, cinemas, concerts and exhibitions, and required that Jews’ passports be stamped with an identifying red letter “J”. Additionally, a large number of Austrian Jews lost their jobs due to occupational bans from certain professions and the boycott of Jewish businesses.<sup>19</sup> Jewish children were no longer allowed to attend public schools, movable and immovable

13 Data on suicides collected from the DÖW’s database of victims.

14 For further information on the rituals of humiliations in Vienna after the Anschluss, see Dieter Hecht, “Demütigungsrituale – Alltagsszenen nach dem „Anschluss“ in Wien,” in „Anschluss“, ed. Werner Welzig (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2010), 39–71.

15 Leo Lauterbach, The Jewish Situation in Austria. Report submitted to the Executive of the Zionist Organization, 29 April 1938, quoted from: Herbert Rosenkranz, *Verfolgung und Selbstbehauptung. Die Juden in Österreich 1938–1945* (Vienna/Munich: Herold, 1978), 43.

16 Wolfgang Häusler, „Das Jahr 1938 und die österreichischen Juden,“ in „Anschluss“ 1938. Eine Dokumentation, ed. Dokumentationsarchiv des österreichischen Widerstandes (Vienna: DÖW 1988), 85–92, here 87.

17 Gerhard Botz, “Judenhutz’ und ‘Reichskristallnacht’ im historischen Kontext,” in *Der Pogrom 1938*, ed. Kurt Schmidt, Robert Streibel (Vienna: Picus, 1990), 9–24, here 18.

18 Ulrike Felber et al., *Ökonomie der Arisierung. Teil 2: Wirtschaftssektoren, Branchen, Falldarstellungen* [=Clemens Jabloner and Brigitte Bailer-Galanda et al., ed., *Veröffentlichungen der Österreichischen Historikerkommission. Vermögensentzug während der NS-Zeit sowie Rückstellungen und Entschädigungen seit 1945 in Österreich*, 10/2] (Vienna/Munich: Oldenbourg, 2004), 111.

19 For an overview of the laws and decrees aimed at the exclusion of Jews from professional life, see Alexander Meistrick et al., *Berufsschädigungen in der nationalsozialistischen Neuordnung der Arbeit. Vom österreichischen Berufsleben 1934 zum völkischen Schaffen 1938–1940* [=Clemens Jabloner and Brigitte Bailer-Galanda et al., ed., *Veröffentlichungen der Österreichischen Historikerkommission. Vermögensentzug während der NS-Zeit sowie Rückstellungen und Entschädigungen seit 1945 in Österreich*, 16] (Vienna/Munich: Oldenbourg, 2004), 125 f.

property became subject to “Aryanisation,” and marriages between “Aryans” and Jews were forbidden. Historians and journalists who also witnessed this period describe the manner with which people began to talk about the suicides of friends or their own thoughts of suicide as the most harrowing issue of these weeks.<sup>20</sup> George E.R. Gedye wrote already in 1939:

Much more terrible was the acceptance of suicide as a perfectly normal and natural incident by every Jewish household. It is quite impossible to convey to anyone outside Austria in how matter-of-fact a way the Jews of Austria today refer to this way out of their agony. When I say one’s Jewish friends spoke to one of their intention to commit suicide with no more emotion than they had formally talked of making an hour’s journey by train, I cannot expect to be believed. Nevertheless, the facts must be recorded.<sup>21</sup>

The data on suicides in Vienna confirms the correlation between the gradual exclusion from all areas of public life and society, the rituals of humiliation in their hometown, and economic decline, and the highest suicide rate among the Viennese Jews for the whole period in question.

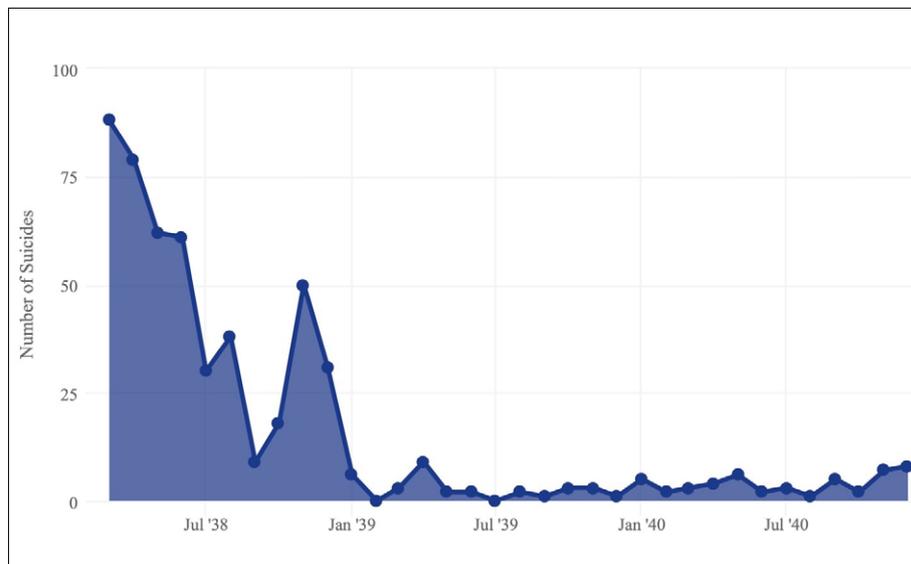


Fig. 1: The “Anschluss” and suicides: the number of suicides by Jews in Vienna between March 1938 and December 1940.

This increase in the suicide rate is also evident when comparing the Jewish population and Jewish deaths in Vienna: at the time of the “Anschluss” of Austria to Nazi Germany in March 1938, approximately 185,000 Viennese were defined as Jews according to the “Nuremberg Laws”, which was the majority of the 206,000 Jews living on the territory of what had been Austria. Until September 1939, between 130,000 and 135,000 Austrian Jews were expelled or managed to flee. However, between 1938 and 1940, the annual number of deaths of any kind amongst the Jewish population of Vienna seems to have remained relatively constant, at around three thousand per

20 See Jonny Moser, “Das Schicksal der Wiener Juden in den März- und Apriltagen,” in *Wiener Geschichtsblätter* 1978, no. 2, ed. Verein für Geschichte der Stadt Wien (Vienna: Verein für Geschichte der Stadt Wien, 1978), 172–182, here 176.

21 George E. R. Gedye, *Fallen Bastions* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1939), 305.

year (3,012 in 1938,<sup>22</sup> 2,836 in 1939,<sup>23</sup> and 2,901 in 1940<sup>24</sup>). Jonny Moser, however, points out that, given the rapid decline in Vienna's Jewish population between 1938 and 1940 as people fled abroad, these numbers actually represent a much-increased suicide rate among the Jewish population. The suicide rate amongst the Jewish population of Vienna was four times higher after the „Anschluss“ in 1938 than in the previous year.<sup>25</sup> Hannes Leidinger's research also confirmed this trend: the proportion of Jews among the registered suicides was 10 per cent in March 1937, increasing to 42 per cent in March 1938 and 52 per cent in April 1938.<sup>26</sup> The graph on suicides (see figure 1) shows clearly that the number of cases – after peaking in the months following the Anschluss and after the November Pogrom – decreased significantly only at the end of 1938 and the beginning of 1939, showing no significant rise until the beginning of 1941.

As mentioned above, many of the identified cases followed job losses and professional exclusion and economic ruin caused by the boycott of Jewish businesses, which happened in the months after the Anschluss as well as during 1939. This is also shown in the case of Heinrich Ahl: the forty-one-year-old pharmacist died by suicide on 16 May 1938 by phenobarbital poisoning after his pharmacy „zum Schwan“ at Schottenring 14 was „aryanised“. He was the second-generation pharmacist in his family, and he took over the business in 1932 from his father after having worked there since 1924. He left behind his wife Ernestine and his daughter Gerda, who survived in exile.

The data on suicides compiled for the 2021 workshop lists 462 Jews who died by suicide in 1938. At the time of death, they were on average fifty-six years old, reflecting the age group that was hit hardest by exclusion and persecution.

## Loss of Homes and the November Pogrom

The pogroms after the „Anschluss“ led to the first expropriations of flats. From the beginning, the loss of their homes also played an important role amongst the motives for suicide among the Jews during the Nazi persecution. Margit Czernetz, a Socialist activist born in 1910 in Vienna, worked as a seamstress and later as a nurse. She worked in the Rothschild Hospital until she was forced to leave Austria for being Jewish in October 1938. In an interview with the DÖW, in which she described the high numbers of Jews who decided to end their lives in the days following the „Anschluss“ in 1938 and died in the hospital, she also pointed out this correlation to the loss of flats: „Of course, only Jews were admitted to the Rothschild hospital after the ‚Anschluss‘, and the night when Hitler came was horrific. Because we took in a lot of people who had attempted suicide. They were still alive, but most of them died afterwards. They were all Jews who couldn't understand that they were being removed from their homes overnight.“<sup>27</sup> In summer of 1938, Jewish tenants were evicted from

22 34<sup>th</sup> Weekly Report of the Jewish Community in Vienna, 3 January 1939 [34. Wochenbericht der IKG Wien vom 3. January 1939]; the death book of the Jewish Community in Vienna 1938 [Totenbuch der IKG Wien 1938] mentions for the same period of time 3,069 deceased. Cited from: Moser, *Demographie*, 21.

23 1<sup>st</sup> Weekly Report of the Jewish Community in Vienna, 2 January 1940, at the same time annual report 1939 [1. Wochenbericht der IKG Wien vom 2. January 1940, zugleich Jahresbericht 1939]. Benjamin Murrelstein writes in his „Report of the Jewish Community“ 1940 [Original in English] of 3,000 deceased Jews for 1939. Cited from: Moser, *Demographie*, 21.

24 Statistical monthly report of the Jewish Community in Vienna, January 1941 [Statistischer Monatsbericht der IKG Wien, Jänner 1941]. DÖW 22344.

25 Moser, *Demographie*, 22.

26 Leidinger, *Selbstausslöschung*, 249.

27 Interview with Margit Czernetz at the DÖW (Collection Erzählte Geschichte), transcript no. 9, 1983.

flats in municipal and welfare housing projects in Vienna.<sup>28</sup> The Viennese Municipal Department of Housing (*Wohnungsamt*) also urged 13,600 “Aryan” landlords to terminate the leases of their Jewish tenants,<sup>29</sup> meaning that more and more Jews were evicted and forced from their homes. Jews were relocated to shared houses and apartments of mostly lower quality, such as smaller accommodations along the Danube Canal. These large-scale forced relocations led to the development of the so-called “Jewish houses” or “Jewish apartments”. While several documents indicate a connection between the loss of flats with suicides, the data available is not able to prove this as a motive, as the data rarely includes information on evictions. The data does, however, show that the number of suicides was especially high in times of mass evictions. In July and August 1938, when the rental agreements for Jews were cancelled in municipal and welfare housing projects in Vienna, a total of sixty-eight Jews died by suicide, significantly higher than the combined figure of twenty-seven deaths by suicide that was recorded for September and October 1938.<sup>30</sup> Cases of suicide in which the person was in fear of losing their home continued until the end of the mass deportations in autumn 1942. For example, on 30 December 1938, the forty-six-year-old Stefanie Würagner and her seventy-year-old mother Rosa Reich died of suicide in their flat in Dorfstraße 45 (which has since 1967 been called “Mautner-Markhof-Gasse”). The room was filled with domestic gas when their brother/son Richard Reich found them in the evening. The motive to end their lives was the legal termination of the rental agreement for their home.<sup>31</sup>

Another crucial date for Vienna’s Jews that is reflected in the suicide rate was the November Pogrom in 1938. The violent pogrom against the Jewish population lasted for several days. Jewish shops and homes were looted and more than 6,500 Jews were arrested. Almost 4,000 of them were sent to the concentration camp in Dachau.<sup>32</sup>

Following a slow fall in the number of cases of suicide after the Anschluss, the numbers again peaked after the November Pogrom, with fifty documented cases in November and thirty-one cases in December 1938. The numbers show that these mostly male cases were, at fifty-nine years old, an average of three years older than the average for 1938. This might also indicate a fear that elderly men had of imprisonment and transportation to Dachau. On 11 November 1938, sixty-two-year-old Samuel Lampl died by suicide by hanging.<sup>33</sup> Lampl was born in Šitbořice in Moravia and later studied medicine. While serving in the Austro-Hungarian Army during the First World War, he rose through the ranks as a military physician.<sup>34</sup> He worked as a doctor in Vienna until 1938, and he lived together with his wife Marie in Hasnerstraße 6 in the Ottakring district. According to his wife, his fear of detention caused him to end his life during the November Pogrom.<sup>35</sup>

28 For further information, see Herbert Exenberger, Johann Koss, and Brigitta Ungar-Klein, *Kündigungsgrund Nichtarier. Die Vertreibung jüdischer Mieter aus den Wiener Gemeindebauten in den Jahren 1938–1939* (Vienna: Picus, 1996).

29 Gerhard Botz, *Wohnungspolitik und Judendeportation* (Vienna Salzburg: Geyer, 1975), 78.

30 Data collected on suicides from the DÖW’s database of victims.

31 Report of the Police President in Vienna (Polizeipräsident in Wien) to the State Secretary of Public Security and High SS and police leader (Staatssekretär für das Sicherheitswesen und Höheren SS- und Polizeiführer) Dr. Kaltenbrunner, 31 December 1938. DÖW 21.830/27.

32 Gerhard Ungar, „Die Konzentrationslager,” in *Opferschicksale. Widerstand und Verfolgung im Nationalsozialismus. 50 Jahre Dokumentationsarchiv des österreichischen Widerstandes*, ed. Dokumentationsarchiv des österreichischen Widerstandes [=Jahrbuch 2013] (Vienna: DÖW, 2013), 191–210, here 199.

33 Report from police on patrol on preventing individual actions by the police headquarters (Berichte vom Streifendienst zur Verhütung von Einzelaktionen des Polizeipräsidiiums) from 2 August 1938 to 31 January 1939, DÖW 9539; data collected on suicides from the database of victims of the DÖW.

34 Lokales und Provinzielles, Mährisches Tagblatt, 16 August 1915, no. 185, vol 37, 4.

35 WStLA, M. Abt. 208, A 36 Opferfürsorgeakten – Entschädigungen (E), Samuel Lampl.

## Mass Deportation

In June 1942, Julie Löwenbach, a sixty-eight-year-old widow, died by suicide by phenobarbital poisoning. Born Julie Adler in Vienna in 1873, she married the manufacturer Siegfried Löwenbach in 1893, with whom she had two children. After the death of her husband in 1934, she lived on her own at Laudongasse 11. During the time of the forced resettlement of Vienna's Jewish population, she was moved into a so-called "Judenhaus" with group apartments at Obere Donaustrasse 43. In May 1942, the deportation of Jews from Vienna was accelerated. Five thousand Austrian Jews were transported from Vienna in May and a further six thousand in June 1942. Fearing imminent deportation, Julie Löwenbach ended her life on 1 June 1942. She left a son, Siegfried Löwenbach, who survived in exile in the United States, and a daughter, Margarethe Neuern, who was murdered in Auschwitz.<sup>36</sup> As in the case of Julie Löwenbach, from 1941 onwards, the fear of deportation and receiving a summons to the transports predominated as a motive for suicide, as seen in other areas of the German Reich.<sup>37</sup> For Vienna, Moser indicated increasing numbers of suicides after the beginning of the mass deportations.<sup>38</sup> Leidinger was able to confirm this trend with data from the cemetery index of the Jewish Community in Vienna. In this data set, of all the Jews who died by suicide between 1940 and 1945, seventy-two per cent died between October 1941 and September 1942.<sup>39</sup> The data from the DÖW database not only confirms that the summons to a transport had a strong impact on the suicide rate, but it also proves this by showing statistical peaks in suicides at the time of transports leaving from Vienna. The data shows that suicides between 1941 and 1945 peaked in October 1941 when the mass deportation from Vienna started with four thousand Jews being sent to the Litzmannstadt (Łódź) Ghetto. After an initial decline in December 1941, when only one transport with one thousand people left Vienna for Riga, the numbers rose again in January 1942, when two thousand Jews were sent to Riga. After a further decline in the number of suicides in February and March 1942, when only one transport left Vienna, the numbers rose again from April onwards, when two thousand people were sent to Izbica and Włodawa, and they peaked again in the summer of 1942, when sixteen thousand Jews were transported from Vienna between June and August. The connection between the transports as a motive for suicide can therefore, for the first time, be clearly shown from the data. Additionally, the data demonstrate that this could already be seen in the case of the early transports that left Vienna in 1941.

Mass deportations began earlier in Vienna than in other parts of the German Reich. In trying to meet the Viennese Nazi party's request to clear out Jewish flats, the "Reichsstatthalter" of Vienna, Baldur von Schirach, initiated the deportation programme in February and March 1941. Five transports, each with approximately one thousand Jews, left from Vienna to the Radom and Lublin districts in the General Government. The Jews were ghettoised in the towns of Opole, Kielce, Modliborzycze, Lagów, und Opatów. After five transports, the preparation for the attack on the Soviet Union took precedence over the deportation programme aimed at making Vienna "free of Jews" and was paused until autumn 1941.

<sup>36</sup> DÖW Database of victims.

<sup>37</sup> Christine Hartig, "Conversations about taking our own lives – oh, a poor expression for a forced deed in hopeless circumstances! Suicide among German Jews 1933–1943" in Leo Baeck *Year Book* 52 (2007), 247–265, here 249; Kwiet and Eschwege, *Selbstbehauptung*, 199.

<sup>38</sup> Moser, *Demographie*, 22.

<sup>39</sup> Leidinger, *Selbstauslöschung*, 249.

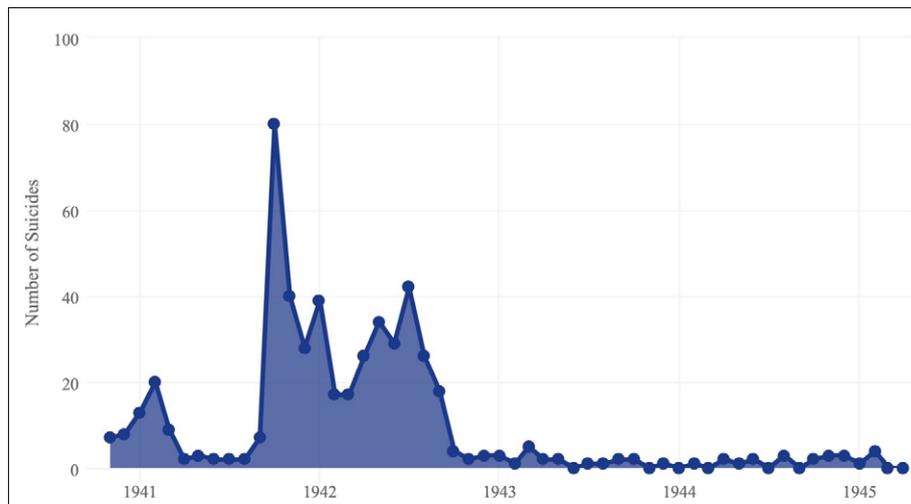


Fig. 2: Mass deportations from Vienna and suicides: numbers of suicides of Jews in Vienna between November 1940 and April 1945

With transports leaving Vienna in October 1941 for the Litzmannstadt Ghetto and the Minsk and Riga ghettos in the so-called “Reichskommissariat Ostland”, mass deportations from Vienna were resumed. In the course of 1942, further transports went to the ghettos in Izbica and Wlodawa in the Lublin District, to the Maly Trostinec extermination site, and to the Theresienstadt Ghetto. The graph on suicides and mass deportations (figure 2) shows clearly the connection between these different waves of transports and the number of deaths by suicide. By the time the mass transports from Vienna ended in October 1942, more than 48,000 people had been deported from Vienna. Only approximately eight thousand Jews, most of them living in so-called “mixed marriages” with an “Aryan” partner, remained in Vienna. This number was reduced further still by a series of smaller and individual transports until 1945. The data on suicides collected from the DÖW’s databases of victims also shows that smaller peaks coincide with these smaller and individual transports leaving Austria after October 1942, supporting the conclusion of the significance of the transports for the suicides of Jews in Vienna between 1941 and 1945.

### Gender Analysis of Jewish Cases of Suicides

In March 1942, sixty-six-year-old Elsa Lion and her seventy-five-year-old husband died by suicide from an overdose of sleeping pills.<sup>40</sup> Born Elsa Kornblüh in Vienna in 1876, she married Ernst Lion, a merchant from Prague, in Vienna in 1897. Fearing deportation, the couple ended their lives in their house at Koschatgasse 110 in Vienna’s Döbling district on 16 March 1942. They left one son, Fritz/Fred, who survived in exile in the United States.<sup>41</sup> The fate of Elsa and Ernst Lion is an example of the increase in the occurrence of double suicides among couples after 1941. This correlation between mass deportation and double suicides is also reflected in the example of the sixty-one-year-old Wilhelm Czezowiczka. He died together with his wife Therese on 8 January 1942 by overdosing on sleeping pills. The merchant and civil engineer for construction, who was born in Říkovice in Moravia, was a divorcee

40 DÖW Database of victims; Friedhofskartei der IKG Wien.

41 WStLA, M. Abt. 208, A 36 Opferfürsorgeakten – Entschädigungen (E), Lion Fred.

when he married Therese Klein. Fearing imminent deportation, the couple ended their lives in their apartment at Schulerstrasse 20 in Vienna.<sup>42</sup> The databases of victims also include many cases of suicides by couples in “mixed marriages” (*Misch-ehen*) at the time of the mass transports – as was the case for Julius Feldbauer, whose farewell letter introduced this article.

The mass fleeing of Jews prior to the outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939 left a gender imbalance. By September 1940, only 36 per cent of the Jewish Community members in Vienna were men.<sup>43</sup> Mirroring this, 64.48 per cent of the more than 48,000 Austrian Jews transported from Vienna between 1941 and 1945 were women.<sup>44</sup> This is also reflected in the number of suicides by women during the mass deportation: in the summer of 1942, sixty-nine-year-old Rika Kraus died by suicide by domestic gas poisoning. Born as Rika Wellner in 1872 in Bielsko-Biala, she married Moritz Kraus and moved to Vienna. In 1896 their son Ignaz was born. Her husband had already passed away by 1938 and she lived together with her son, a divorced bank clerk, in Wurmsergasse 45. After the “Anschluss”, they tried to leave the country, but without success.<sup>45</sup> Rika Kraus was forced to leave her home and was allocated a room in Praterstraße 50.<sup>46</sup> On 22 August 1942, fearing imminent deportation, Rika Kraus decided to end her life. That same month, a series of transports carrying five thousand Jews left Vienna for the Theresienstadt Ghetto and for Maly Trostinec. Her son Ignaz Kraus was transported from Vienna to Theresienstadt in October 1942 and murdered in Auschwitz in the autumn of 1944.<sup>47</sup> Female suicides in Austria represented around a quarter of all cases of suicide in 1900 – a proportion that can also be seen in the statistics for suicides in recent years.<sup>48</sup>

Between the 1920s and 1940s, cases of female suicides saw a massive increase in Austria. For the total population, Hannes Leidinger highlighted this and analysed the increase of female suicides with a view to a higher proportion of women of the total population and the impact urban centres had on the suicide rates in Central Europe – especially in Austria – during the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>49</sup> Between 1941 and 1945 especially, the percentage of female suicides in Vienna peaked at 56 per cent.<sup>50</sup> This is also seen in the proportion of women showing suicidal behaviour in the Theresienstadt Ghetto: the official statistics for Theresienstadt indicate 430 suicide attempts for the period from 24 November 1941 to 31 December 1943; 252 suicide attempts ended fatally. The average age of those who died by suicide was 62.6 years. Of all deaths by suicide in the Theresienstadt Ghetto, 59 per cent were female. Although the proportion of women was also higher in the ghetto, Loevith<sup>51</sup>

42 DÖW Database of victims; WStLA, M. Abt. 208, A 36 Opferfürsorgeakten – Entschädigungen (E), Klein Adolf.

43 The statistical monthly report of the Jewish Community in Vienna from September 1940 states that out of 47,292 members, 16,871 were male and 30,421 were female. Statistischer Monatsbericht der IKG Wien, September 1940, DÖW 22.344.

44 Analysis of the DÖW database of victims.

45 DÖW Database of victims; Emigration Questionnaire (Auswanderungsfragebogen) no. 36835 from Ignaz und Rika Kraus. Archive of the Jewish Community of Vienna, A/W 2589.

46 DÖW Database of victims; Hauslisten der IKG Wien von 1942. DÖW 51.090.

47 DÖW Database of victims.

48 Nestor Kapusta, *Aktuelle Daten und Fakten zur Zahl der Suizide in Österreich* (Vienna: Medical University of Vienna, 2011), accessed: 2 April 2022. [http://www.meduniwien.ac.at/suiciderecherche/statistik\\_suizide\\_oessterreich.pdf](http://www.meduniwien.ac.at/suiciderecherche/statistik_suizide_oessterreich.pdf).

49 Leidinger, *Selbstausslösung*, 237.

50 Österreichisches Statistisches Zentralamt, ed., *Selbstmordhandlungen. Beiträge zur österreichischen Statistik*, 62 (Vienna, 1961), 25.

51 Rudolf Loevith, Suicides in Theresienstadt. In the period from 24 November 1941 to 31 December 1943 [Selbstmorde in Theresienstadt. In der Zeit vom 24. November 1941 bis 31. Dezember 1943.], *Yad Vashem O.64/51*.

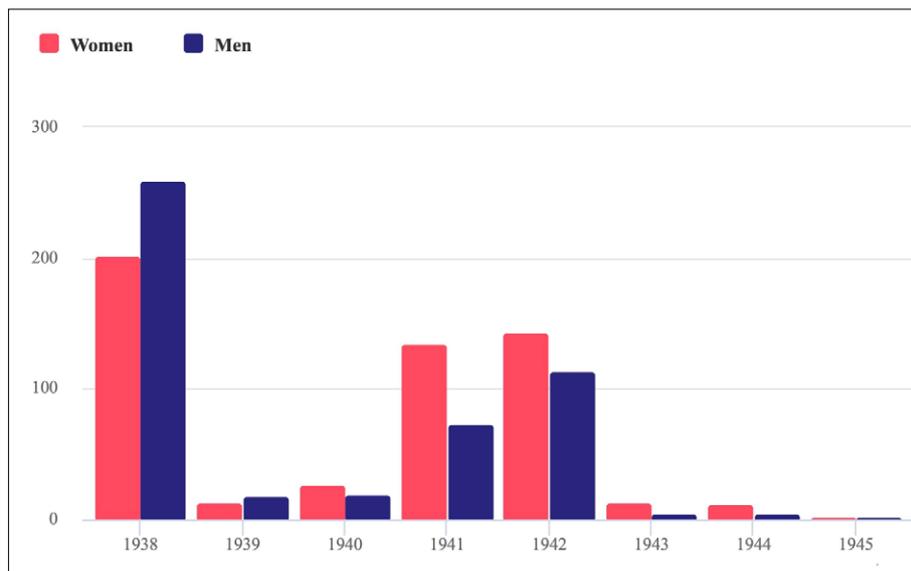


Fig. 3: Distribution of suicides among Jews according to gender in Vienna between 1938 and 1945

was able to show that this could not explain the discrepancy, especially when the low number of suicides by women before the First World War is taken into account.

A spatial analysis of the mapped last-known addresses of Viennese Jews who died by suicide indicated a higher concentration of female suicides in the area along the Danube Canal, where Jews were relocated to after 1938. This led to the hypothesis that women, on average, showed suicidal behaviour at a later point in time than men. An analysis of the data over time according to gender confirmed this [figure 3]. An explanation might be found in the statistics on suicides in the Theresienstadt Ghetto. In his statistics, Karl Loewith also emphasised the summons to a transport as a motive for suicide: “On average, there are 1.9 attempts on a ‘transport day’ and 0.4 attempts on all the other days. The number of suicide attempts would be almost five times as high on ‘transport days’ than on other days.” Loewith also pointed out that, as a motivation for suicidal behaviour, the fear of deportation was more common among women than men.<sup>52</sup>

The data on suicide from the DÖW database of victims includes 260 male and 202 female cases of suicide in 1938. This statistical overhang of men dying by suicide reverses in 1940, when for the first time the collected data indicates that more women died by suicide. In 1941, the female proportion peaks, when 64.9 per cent of the 208 recorded cases of suicide within the Jewish population were women.

Despite the later change in gender distribution amongst the Jewish population, the higher number of suicides of men in 1938 also points to the fact that men were more often affected by occupational bans and the loss of their jobs as well as the economic ruin that followed the boycott of Jewish businesses and anti-Jewish laws and decrees. As in Theresienstadt, women seem to have been more affected by the summons to the transports, which began in 1941.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

## Types of suicide

The data collected on suicides indicates specific types of suicide for 945 people. According to the data, the most common types of suicide within the Jewish population of Vienna between 1938 and 1945 were domestic gas poisoning and poisoning/overdoses.

Suicides by domestic gas poisoning represent 35.45 per cent of the total cases. One of these 335 cases was Siegmund Gross. The jeweller was born in Komádi in Hungary and lived on Schönbrunner Strasse 85 in Vienna. After receiving a summons from the city's Gestapo, the forty-nine-year-old died by suicide on 26 July 1938 by gas poisoning. He left behind a daughter from his first marriage and a wife who was considered "Aryan".

Cases of poisoning or overdose were identified in 35.35 per cent of all cases of suicide. One of these 334 cases was Dr. Albert Seligmann. The eighty-three-year-old former lawyer died by suicide by poisoning with veronal on 14 July 1942, shortly before he was due to be deported. He died in the Rothschild Hospital. The former court lawyer left behind a wife who was considered "Aryan".

13.76 per cent of the suicides were by hanging. One of these 130 cases was Gottfried Friedmann. The forty-seven-year-old furniture dealer died on 11 May 1938 in his apartment at Sebastian-Brunner-Gasse 13 in Vienna's Hietzing district. Gottfried Friedmann was single.

Examples of "*Sturz in die Tiefe*" (falling from a height) could be identified in 9.74 per cent of the cases. One of these 92 cases was Malwine Baderle. Shortly after being assigned to a transport on 10 February 1942, the sixty-three-year-old Malwine Baderle died by suicide.

Self-inflicted gunshots, with only twenty-four cases (or 2.54 per cent), and drowning, with twenty cases (2.12 per cent), were hardly relevant in comparison to the main cases. The low number of firearm deaths is also a result of the decree from November 1938, which forbade Jews from possessing weapons or ammunition and carried a punishment of up to five years imprisonment.<sup>53</sup> Of the few cases recorded, most happened prior to the decree, as was the case of Rudolf Theodor Schorstein. The sixty-three-year-old businessman died from a self-inflicted gunshot wound on 1 April 1938. He left behind his wife Wilma, who was later deported from Amsterdam – where she had fled to from Vienna – and murdered in 1945, and his daughter, who

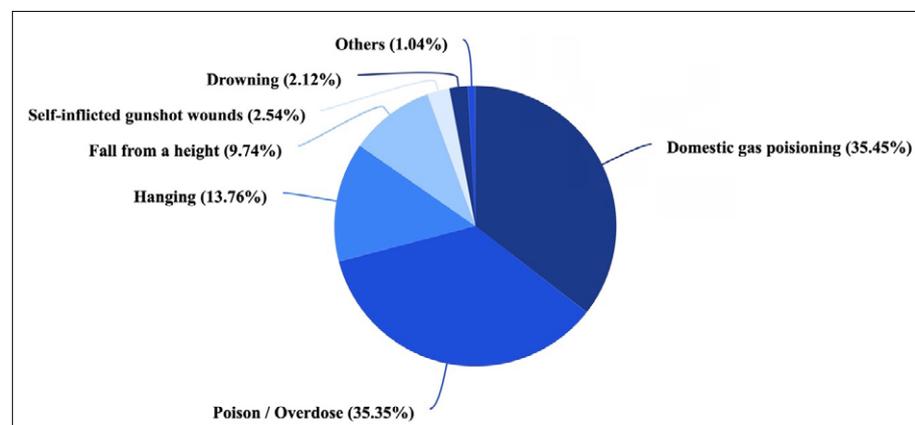


Fig. 4: Types of suicide, Jews in Vienna 1938–1945.

<sup>53</sup> Gesetzblatt 1938, St. 164, Nr. 577. Kundmachung des Reichsstatthalters in Österreich, wodurch die Verordnung gegen den Waffenbesitz der Juden vom 11. November 1938 bekanntgemacht wird.

survived the war. The data shows ten additional individual cases of cutting wounds, acid, and throwing oneself in front of a train.

While women appear to be overrepresented in cases of domestic gas poisoning (59.58 per cent) and poisoning/overdosing (58.85 per cent), this can be explained by the larger number of women dying by suicide. However, this does not always account for the discrepancy: 65.2 per cent of the cases of suicide by falling from a height were female, while only a third of the cases of suicide by hanging or drowning were female. For suicide by gunshot, only one of the twenty-four identified cases was female.

## Conclusion

Despite several references to death by suicide within the Jewish population during the Nazi regime, the topic remains largely unresearched. The databases of victims of the DÖW and the data on suicide collected for the symposium and commemoration ceremony “Erzwungener Freitod. Selbstmorde von Wiener Jüdinnen und Juden während der Shoah” held on 8 November 2021 initiated a more in-depth analysis. The data includes the names and fates of 1088 people in Vienna who died by suicide between 1938 and 1945.

The cases in the database range from a sixteen-year-old young man to an eighty-nine-year-old women, but the average age of those included was relatively high at 60.19 years. The data also offers an overview on the types of suicides and demographic aspects, such as differences according to gender. Additionally, it does not only show that the numbers of suicides peaked after the “Anschluss”, but also an increase during the November Pogrom. While research had already suggested a connection between the transports from Vienna between autumn 1941 and autumn 1942, the data allows – for the first time – an in depth-analysis of the correlation between transports and suicides, and it demonstrates this on the level of individual transports leaving Vienna, starting in February 1941.

While the average age for men (60.18 years) and women (60.20 years) is almost identical, the data shows significant differences based on gender: more women (52.2 per cent) died by suicide than men (47.8 per cent). This reflects the higher number of women left in Vienna after the mass fleeing and expulsions; it additionally suggests that a fear of the transports was a motivating factor for more women. A spatial analysis of the last addresses of those dying by suicide, showing more incidences in the areas in which Jews were forced to relocate after the Anschluss, supports this theory.

For many victims who died by suicide, a combination of the increasing exclusion, deprivation, and persecution they were subjected to led to their decision to end their lives. In his suicide notice that prefaces the article, Julius Feldbauer describes the exclusion and the torment of a first detention in a collection camp, together with the fear that his wife who was seen as “Aryan” would lose their flat, as motives for his suicide. His farewell letter also clearly shows how Jews dying by suicide between 1938 and 1945 in the face of deprivation and persecution were victims of the Holocaust and should therefore be subject to further research within Holocaust studies: “This time has made me at least 20 years older, I am a shadow of who I was before. Completely broken in body and soul, I am a ruin. You would be horrified if you saw me the way I look.”<sup>54</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Farewell letter from Julius Feldbauer to Aloisia Feldbauer, 13 July 1942. WStLA, M. Abt. 208, A 36 Opferfürsorgeakten – Entschädigungen (E), Aloisia Feldbauer.

**Wolfgang Schellenbacher** is a historian at the Documentation Centre of the Austrian Resistance (DÖW) in Vienna where he is project leader of the digital archive project Memento Vienna and responsible for the victim databases. Since 2011 he has been working on the EU-funded international research project European Holocaust Research Infrastructure (EHRI) – from 2011 until 2019 at the Jewish Museum in Prague and since 2019 at the Vienna Wiesenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies. His research topics and publications to date have focused on the Holocaust in Austria, digital archiving and online editions, the Terezín (Theresienstadt) Ghetto, and Austrians in exile in Czechoslovakia.

Email: [wolfgang.schellenbacher@doew.at](mailto:wolfgang.schellenbacher@doew.at) or [wolfgang.schellenbacher@vwi.ac.at](mailto:wolfgang.schellenbacher@vwi.ac.at)

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