

## Supporting Holocaust survivors

Between 1933 and 1945, millions of Europeans suffered from Nazi crimes and the Holocaust. Today, the remaining survivors often live in difficult social conditions.

### The number of victims and the social conditions of survivors today

The scope of the definition of Holocaust victims is still debated among scholars and NGOs. The [Holocaust](#) 'was the systematic, bureaucratic, state-sponsored persecution and murder of approximately six million Jews by the Nazi regime and its collaborators'. Between 1933 and 1945, other groups were also targeted by the Nazi regime and its allies, among them Roma, disabled and Slavic people, as well as homosexuals, and members of religious and political groups. Dependent on the definition, as well as various methodological and archival issues, the total number of victims of the Holocaust is difficult to assess: the Nazis and their allies kept no central records of their crimes. Even today, the Israeli Holocaust memorial of Yad Vashem conducts extensive research to find the [names](#) of more than 1 million Jewish victims.

Today, it is even more difficult to assess the number of survivors still alive, given the various definitions of Holocaust or Nazi persecution survivors. The [Jewish Claim conference](#) has estimated that around 400 000 Jewish victims are still [alive](#). [Most](#) of the survivors live in the United States, Russia and Israel. Forty per cent of them live under the poverty line in their respective countries, because they are mainly women and have smaller pensions, often due to working part-time, sometimes because of medical conditions. They also often face loneliness, due to their whole families having been murdered, and sometimes could not have children as a result of torture or medical experiments they underwent in Nazi camps.

During its 2009 EU Council Presidency, the Czech Republic organised the Prague Holocaust Era Assets Conference in Prague and Terezin. In the [Terezin Declaration](#), 46 countries pledged to assist all victims of Nazi persecutions in their specific social and medical needs, and to help them retrieve their lost property.

### Assistance to survivors of the Holocaust

Across the world, states and NGOs provide assistance to the victims of the Holocaust, either through their general welfare systems or through specific programmes. A 2015 [survey](#) of the Terezin Declaration signatories shows that, among the 30 countries which gave formal answers, about 15 had special programmes for victims of Nazi persecutions.

The Conference on Jewish Material Claims against Germany ([Claims conference](#)), created in 1951, is the main compensation mechanism for Jewish victims. Through negotiations with the German government, it provides financial, social and medical support to survivors. Since the first agreement in 1952, it has distributed US\$70 billion to more than 800 000 Jewish victims of the Holocaust. The Claims conference negotiated for years with the Austrian government, culminating in a US\$500 million [agreement](#) in 2001.

In recent years, Roma victims of the Holocaust have also started to receive recognition and compensation from Germany and German foundations in countries such as the [Czech Republic](#), [Romania](#) and Moldova.

### Assistance to victims of Nazi persecution

A number of EU Member States also provide compensation and support for non-Jewish victims of Nazi persecution. Germany and Poland are two of them.

#### *Germany*

Compensation for victims and restitutions [started](#) just after the war, under the supervision of the occupying powers. In the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), it was complemented in 1953 and 1956 by new provisions on one-off payments, pensions and medical support. It covered Nazi victims, but was not

extended to victims in the communist countries of the Warsaw Pact. Between 1953 and 1987, Germany recognised more than 2 million victims, granting them compensation and support. From 1959 to 1964, the FRG signed a number of agreements with partners in western Europe to compensate their citizens victim of Nazi persecutions, for a total of €496.46 million. Following German reunification, Germany signed a number of agreements with countries in central and eastern Europe, in particular Poland (€255.64 million), Belarus, Ukraine and Russia (€0.51 billion) and the Baltic States (€1.02 million). In 2015, Germany also decided to support former Soviet prisoners of wars in Nazi prisons, with a one-off payment.

#### *Poland*

The Polish [Office for War Veterans and Victims of Oppression](#) awards 'victim of oppression' status to persons who suffered ethnic and racial persecutions by the Nazi regime of 1939-1945 and were confined in Nazi prisons, concentration and extermination camps, or ghettos, as well as to children taken away from their parents for the purposes of extermination. The [current law](#) adopted in August 2017 is a consolidated version of the 1991 law which in turn succeeded the original 1946 law on the status of and privileges for 1939-1945 war veterans.

Under its provisions, war veterans and victims of Nazi and communist oppression receive additional holidays, a monthly pecuniary allowance, reductions in city transport and domestic rail fares, and priority access to welfare services and homes for the elderly. [Widows and widowers](#) of deceased veterans and victims are granted some financial support too. Until now, the benefits have been granted to 60 000 survivors of Nazi persecutions such as imprisonment in Nazi camps, ghettos or prisons, including 2 500 persons living abroad. [Since April 2015, victims living abroad](#) who had Polish citizenship at the time of the oppression perpetrated on Polish territory can receive benefit payments, such as a monthly allowance of about €100, and Poland also covers the transfer fees, which was not the case before then.

### EU action in combatting anti-Semitism and xenophobia

The EU promotes awareness-raising actions about [Holocaust remembrance](#) through its [Europe for Citizens](#) funding programme (European remembrance) and [research on Holocaust](#) through the Horizon 2020 research funding programme. In December 2015, the European Commission appointed a Coordinator on Combating Anti-Semitism. The EU Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) published a [handbook](#) for teachers highlighting links between Holocaust education and human rights. In 2018, FRA published the results of its [second survey on discrimination](#) and anti-Semitism, showing growing insecurity of Jews living in the [EU](#).

EU funding also supports the [Memorial and Museum at Auschwitz-Birkenau](#), a former German Nazi concentration and extermination camp. The EU funds help finance various infrastructure projects such as the adaptation of the Old Theatre building for the International Centre for Education about Auschwitz, [digitisation of the museum archives](#) and conservation of [certain barracks](#).

Starting in March 2018, an EU-funded project aims at mapping [1 500 Jewish cemeteries](#), situated mostly in central and eastern Europe where Jewish communities were annihilated in the Holocaust, and thus help preserve Jewish burial places in other areas.

The **European Parliament** has adopted several resolutions on Holocaust remembrance and the rise of anti-Semitism. Its March 2018 [resolution](#) on the situation of fundamental rights in the EU in 2016 encouraged the Commission to provide sufficient human resources to promote Holocaust remembrance and raise awareness of the Roma Holocaust. Its January 2019 [resolution](#) on the situation in 2017 expresses concerns at the rise of anti-Semitism in the context of a growing number and radicalisation of racists and xenophobes, stressing that racism and xenophobia are not opinions but crimes. Its June 2017 [resolution](#) on combating anti-Semitism called on the Member States to adopt and apply the working definition of anti-Semitism employed by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, in order to identify and prosecute anti-Semitic attacks more efficiently and effectively. An October 2018 [resolution](#) on the rise of neo-fascist violence in Europe draws attention to the rise of violence against Jews, and calls on Member States to counter Holocaust denial and trivialisation, and mainstream the issue in education.

In November 2018, the EU became a permanent international partner of the [International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance](#) (AIH). In December 2018, the Council adopted a [declaration](#) on the fight against anti-Semitism, and a common security approach to better protect Jewish communities in Europe.

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