



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization



International Tracing Service
Inscribed on the International Register in 2013
Memory of the World

ITS

International Tracing Service
Service International de Recherches
Internationaler Suchdienst

Non-Stop Processing of Inquiries

Persecution, incarceration and the exploitation through forced labor: for the millions of victims of the Nazi-Regime, many of whom had lost everything, proving they had suffered from these crimes was not a simple task. To have even the remote chance of receiving a pension or a single restitution/compensation payment, their path of persecution had to be documented. Certain compensation programs had specific time period limitations; thus, the number of inquiries to the International Tracing Service (ITS) during such time periods was very high.

The Post- War Years

In May 1949 the Allied Forces in the Western Occupation Zones decided how the victims of Nazi persecution were to be recompensed for the damage done to their lives, their freedom, their bodies and their health. The essential elements of this decision were incorporated into the Federal Law on Compensation of Victims of National Socialist Persecution, enacted in 1956. At first only a few of the applications from the victims of Nazism had any chance of success. Such was the case that, according to this law, non-German Jewish Holocaust survivors were excluded from receiving compensation. Other victims groups such as Sinti and Roma, communists or homosexuals were not granted recognition in the 50's and 60's.

With these first compensation payments the inquiries sent to the ITS from former victims of Nazi persecution, their lawyers and institutions skyrocketed. In the late 50's about 80-90 percent of the approximately 200,000 inquiries per year were in connection with certification necessary to receive pension payments. During the same span of time the Jewish Claims Conference managed to enforce compensation claims. Due to political pressure, five major companies paid out compensation to some of their Jewish concentration camp forced laborers. In addition to this, there was a special fund for victims of medical experimentation and also severe case funds from the UNHCR for stateless victims of Nazi persecution. These, too, led to inquiries being sent to the ITS.

Inquiries from Eastern Europe and East-Central Europe

From the 1980's on the so-called "forgotten victims" gained public attention. Resulting from a newly awoken public interest, discussions were initiated on which victims groups had the right to compensation. In Eastern Europe and East-Central Europe this discussion found a lot of resonance following the relinquishment of power in the late 80's by the communist rulers in Europe. Former victims of forced labor, who had been silent for years due to their being stigmatized as traitors, spoke out for the first time in the hundreds of thousands as victims of Nazi persecution. They formed large organizations, mostly in East-Central Europe, and demanded financial compensation from Germany. Based on voluntary agreements in 1990 with Poland, Russia, Ukraine and White Russia, those former victims of Nazi persecution living in those countries could apply for compensation for the first time. As a result of this, the ITS received hundreds of thousands of letters with requests for certification of forced labor.

The Restitution Funds of the EVZ Foundation

This wave of inquiries was surpassed only a few years later – with the creation of the Foundation “Erinnerung ,Verantwortung und Zukunft” (“Memory, Responsibility and Future”) on 12 August 2000. The foundation was supported by the German Federal Government and an association of German businesses. A fund amounting to 10 billion D-Mark was created to provide financial compensation to deported forced laborers of the Nazi Regime. More than 1.6 million survivors received one-time payments, the amount of which depended on the country of origin and the severity of the labor camp conditions. Victims groups such as child prisoners and forced laborers who had worked on farms were also compensated out of this fund. Besides the hundreds of thousands of single requests, the ITS also received more than 770,000 inquiries in a very short period of time by way of a list procedure especially created by the partner organization of the EVZ foundation, which had the responsibility of carrying out the compensation payments. These requests were processed at high-speed, yet the number of unanswered inquiries at the ITS had climbed to 450,000 by 2001.