

## **Archival access and the IHRA's Guidelines for Identifying Relevant Documentation for Holocaust Research, Education and Remembrance**

### **Messaging to initiate and support discussions on advancing access**

**Message 1: Ensuring full and open access to Holocaust-related materials is not a niche issue – it is essential to fostering open and democratic societies that deal openly and accurately with the past.**

- The Nazis and their collaborators not only murdered Jews, Roma, political enemies and others; they did so with the intention of erasing all traces of their existence.
- Each document pertaining to life before during, and after the Holocaust is therefore extremely valuable.
- More than 75 years after the end of the Second World War, it remains difficult to locate and gain access to documentation related to the Holocaust.
- Common obstacles include:
  - Vague definitions of Holocaust-related archival material
  - Restrictive protocols for accessing materials
  - Data protection and privacy regulations applied too stringently
  - Materials are not accessible online
  - Catalogues are only available in the local language
- Open access means researchers and the public can find and use Holocaust-related documentation for commemoration, education and research purposes.
- Researchers are not just scholars and students, but include the broad range of educators, journalists, genealogists, jurists and members of the public who use and access the material record of the Holocaust to understand the past and the present.
- Open access does not precede privacy regulations, but rather encourages archives to implement these prudently where Holocaust documentation is concerned.

**Message 2: The IHRA has led international efforts to open up access to archives.**

- As the GDPR regulations reached their final stages in the European Union, the IHRA identified that these privacy regulations would unintentionally restrict access to Holocaust documentation.
- The IHRA intervened and added Recital 158, a directive that protects access by giving exceptional status to Holocaust-related documentation.
- However, it soon became clear that Recital 158 was not sufficient. Not only are recitals not automatically implemented into national legislation, Recital 158 did not provide specific enough guidance on which material could be considered Holocaust-related and be granted the exemption. As a result, many collections remain closed and inaccessible.
- The IHRA's Member Countries “share a commitment to throw light on the still obscured shadows of the Holocaust” and have committed to taking “all necessary steps to facilitate the opening of archives in order to ensure that all documents bearing on the Holocaust are available to researchers.”
- In 2021 the IHRA adopted *Guidelines for Identifying Relevant Documentation for Holocaust Research, Education and Remembrance*.

**Message 3: The IHRA's *Guidelines for Identifying Relevant Documentation for Holocaust Research, Education and Remembrance* are a practical tool that help encourage full and open access to Holocaust collections.**

- The IHRA's *Guidelines* address a critical obstacle to access: the lack of a unified way to identify Holocaust-related materials.
- This tool was developed by IHRA experts, together with heads of individual archives – those who know their collections better than anyone else – and leaders of national and international archival system networks.
- Currently, each archive and each state can adopt its own approach to determining access to this documentation.
- Often, a narrow, technical approach is taken when identifying these materials. Sometimes, only documents from 1933–1945 held in European archives are considered Holocaust-related. Even when material fits these criteria, it can be inaccessible.
- Narrow definitions can lead to researchers and other users being wrongfully denied access to material that might throw light on still obscured shadows of the Holocaust.
- The *Guidelines* empower researchers, archivists and civil society to identify Holocaust-related documentation using a broad approach that is open-ended and always evolving.